

The Sovereign Hill Battery

Sovereign Hill operates a ten-head wooden-framed battery as part of the mining exhibit at the outdoor museum in Ballarat. The most likely source for the battery was the Mount Wills South tin mine in Gippsland.

Machinery for the Mount Wills South mine was ordered from the Salisbury Foundry in Tasmania specifically to the design of that used by the Mount Bischoff Company (the Salisbury Foundry being the sole manufacturer of this design of plant in Tasmania).¹ By early April 1891 all of the equipment had arrived in Victoria, but was facing difficult roads on its journey to the mine.² Water was turned onto the large overshot waterwheel on 13 May 1892, and the battery of ten heads was christened 'The Glen' in the presence of 200 guests. The estimated yield of metallic tin was expected to be in the region of 5%; rich enough to pay handsomely. When tested, samples of the oxide yielded as high as 70% metallic tin, valuing each ton of oxide at £68.³

Despite the initial optimism, the tin 'bubble' was short-lived. In late 1892, five heads of the battery were converted to crush gold-bearing ores for local mines, while the other five crushed tin ore.⁴ Gold was again on the ascendency, and this change of focus resulted in an upswing in the fortunes of the Company.⁵ The Company purchased a second-hand portable engine in Omeo and began to split its battery into two halves.⁶ In mid-1898, a Mr. Williams purchased the plant of the Mount Wills South Tin Mining Company and set about modernising it to treat battery sands by chlorination and cyanide.⁷

We do not know what happened next to the battery of the Mount Wills South Tin Mining Company. However, it is possible that, with one owner, the two halves of the battery may have been reunited. It is not too hard to believe that such an item of plant could have ended up with Miller's Machinery in Melbourne and eventually made its way to Sovereign Hill. The battery is essentially as received apart from new stays at the rear. A new cam shaft was also put in for stampers six to ten when the original one broke and was unable to be satisfactorily repaired.

References

¹ *Gippsland Times*, Monday 16 May 1892, page 3; *The Argus*, Tuesday 17 May 1892, page 7; *Bairnsdale Advertiser and Omeo and Tambo Chronicle*, Saturday 14 May 1892, page 2; Tuesday 17 May 1892, page 3; Saturday 21 May 1892, page 4.

² *Bairnsdale Advertiser and Tambo and Omeo Chronicle*, Saturday 24 January 1891, page 2; Thursday, Tuesday 3 March 1891, page 3, 16 April 1891, page 2; *The Argus*, Saturday 22 November 1890, page 5.

³ *Bairnsdale Advertiser and Omeo and Tambo Chronicle*, Tuesday 16 August 1892, page 3; Tuesday 30 August 1892, page 4; *The Argus*, Friday 12 August 1892, page 5.

⁴ *Bairnsdale Advertiser and Omeo and Tambo Chronicle*, Tuesday 1 November 1892, page 2; Tuesday 15 November 1892, page 2; Tuesday 22 August 1893, page 2.

⁵ *Bairnsdale Advertiser and Omeo and Tambo Chronicle*, Saturday 11 May 1895, page 2.

⁶ *Victorian Government Gazette*, Gazette 120, Friday, 18 October 1895, page 3595; *Bairnsdale Advertiser and Omeo and Tambo Chronicle*, Tuesday 2 April 1895, page 2; Tuesday 15 October 1895, page 2.

⁷ *The Argus*, Thursday 16 June 1898, page 7.