

## **MinSoc June 2004**

### **Jim Sharpe – Hill End**

#### **Images of the Hill End gold mining area ca 1870. A selection from the Holtermann collection’.**

Jim Sharpe has spent some time, not to mention expense, in searching through the Mitchell Library slides from the Holtermann collection and having copies made of a number of these.

The history of the Hill End area is the history of the commencement of gold discoveries in Australia starting in 1851 with prospectors finding alluvial gold first in an area which they named Ophir and then along the Turon river. These fields were fairly quickly worked out but in searching for the sources of the gold prospectors found deeper deposits in a number of places but first and notably at Hill End where a number of mines were established. Several other towns based on mining were gradually established in the area but Hill End for a time was the most significant. In it’s hey-day in the 1870s Hill End’s main street was about two kilometers long, lined with shops and business premises and the area boasted a population of 8,000. There were twenty-eight pubs, five banks, two newspapers and a brewery. Originally the only access route to the town was by a single bridle track which in spite of Hill End being relatively close to Bathurst was still effectively a fairly remote place.

In 1872 a hard-rock mining syndicate was formed by B.O.Holtermann and Beyer to work a rich underground lode at Hill End discovering on one occasion a single mass weighing 286 kilograms containing gold worth then about £12,000. This mass together with another 217 tons of ore was sent through the crushers yielding 15,560 ounces of gold which would be worth about \$8 million at today’s prices. This particularly rich ore was apparently averaging about 1500 grams of gold per ton which compared to gold deposits and mines today many of which are dealing with ore containing about 1.5 grams per ton.

Bernhardt Holtermann decided that he should cause a permanent record of Hill End to be created and accordingly employed a professional photographer named Henry Beaufort Merlin. Holtermann’s contract with Merlin was in two parts because after spending some time at Hill End the photographer also later took a large number of views around Sydney thereby providing an excellent photographic record of the 1870s city. The entire collection disappeared for over half a century being re-discovered when it was donated to the Public Library of NSW in 1952.

Jim Sharpe proceeded to work through the slides he had brought to display pointing out the various small town construction methods in use in the 1870s which very largely featured the use of timber, also needed in quantity for the mining activities. The photographer had presumably worked his way along the two-kilometer Hill End main road setting up to take pictures of various buildings, workshops and groups of people, who would have been asked to pause from whatever work they had been doing to be photographed. Most of the images were of people, obviously dressed in the clothing of the period, and usually posing for the camera since in spite of the photographer’s expertise, candid shots, taken quickly at short notice, were not practical at that time.

John Chapman informed the Meeting that mining was possibly starting up again at Hill End because a prospecting company named Hill End Gold had been conducting substantial drilling in the area and was currently looking at opening up a section of a reef which has not been mined before.

[There is an article 'Gold fever returns to Hill End' in the June 27<sup>th</sup> 2004 SUNDAY TELEGRAPH newspaper introducing the prospecting work of the Hill End Gold company and the optimism of its directors, Graham Reveleigh and Philip Bruce. The company is exploring a 20cm-wide seam called 'Star of Peace' at a depth of two hundred meters under an area called Hawkins Hill].