

## **David Ham MLC 1830-1908 Ballarat Miner, Politician and Sharebroker**

### **Peter Gardner\***

David Ham was born in 1830 at Launcells, Cornwall, near Bude - a short distance from the border with Devon. Unlike most Cornish immigrants to Australia David came from a farming district of the county rather than a mining district. He came to Australia in 1849 and worked in Geelong and then farmed at Indented Head. In July 1851 he joined the gold rush to Buninyong and then followed the rush to Forest Creek (Castlemaine) where the gold was relatively shallow.

In March 1852 David Ham was on a more or less abandoned Ballarat field. In his history *Gold at Ballarat* HJ Stacpoole wrote: "David Ham and his party returned from Forest Creek. After a successful essay at deep digging in the flat below Golden Point they turned their attention to the Canadian Gully. A shaft sunk in deep ground below Hill's claim bottomed on very rich gold, the first clean up including one large nugget". Stacpoole noted that the discovery "of this nugget and the glittering specimens associated with it was the turning point..." in the revival of the Ballarat field, and that "its significance has not been sufficiently stressed by goldfields historians." He concluded that the "gold found by David Ham... was a completely new and infinitely richer deposit..." than the previous shallow workings. David Ham and co had discovered the famous Ballarat deep leads.

Ham is reputed to have bought a butchers shop about 1854 and worked as a saw miller at Carngham before starting up as mining agent at Smythesdale. It would seem that all his activities at this time were in some way connected with the mining boom in Ballarat and Ham almost certainly was a shareholder in a number of mining co-operatives during the 1850s. His timber milling activities were also connected with mining for, as the shafts got deeper, large amounts of sawn slabs were required to line them. From 1861 to 1863 Ham was in New Zealand at the Otago rush with another fellow digger turned capitalist Edward Morey. According to Morey's biographer they were 'moderately successful'.

David Ham was listed as a mine manager, mining agent, speculator, sharebroker and gentleman in the McAdie Index and between 1857 and 1886 was a promoter of, or an initial shareholder in, 175 mining companies. As well he was a director of a number of these companies. In 1881, with 500 shares, he was the third largest shareholder in the Seven Hills Estate Co which collected royalties from a number of producing mines on the Creswick deep leads including the fabulously wealthy Madame Berry GMCo. It is estimated by Withers in his *History of Ballarat* that up to 1887 these mines paid nearly £150,000 in royalties of which Ham's share minus administrative costs was about £7000. The Madame Berry GMCo was still producing, paying royalties and issuing dividends at this date. Eventually it paid nearly a million pounds in royalties and dividends.

In 1886 David Ham was elected to the Legislative Council for Wellington Province. His Otago prospecting mate, Edward Morey, was elected in 1889 when the number of seat holders for the province was expanded from 3 to 4 members. It is of interest that Morey, though extremely wealthy, was illiterate and could only sign his name. Ham and Morey both

served as members for the province until 1904 when the number of multiple members was reduced to 2. It hardly needs to be said that the Legislative Council was at this stage basically a “rich man’s club”. \*\* Ham’s parliamentary career was unexceptional but he took an interest in forestry and wanted timber supplies “properly protected”. During his parliamentary tenure Ham still ran his Mining Agency and worked as a sharebroker.

In 1899 he invested in the Jubilee GCMCo Scarsdale which was promoted and owned by WL Baillieu, brother of his son in law AS Baillieu and was a director of this company at the time of his death. Ham had a family of 6 sons and 3 daughters. Besides his mining ventures he was part owner of Yallock station. He died whilst holidaying at Lathamstowe, Queenscliff on 3 January 1908. At the time of his death besides his voluminous mining interests he was a member of both the Melbourne and Ballarat Stock Exchanges. He left an estate of £30,000.

\* The author is a Gippsland regional historian. Some of his essays – mainly on Gippsland Aborigines and the Melbourne land boom – can be downloaded here

<http://petergardner.info/publications/>

\*\*women, no matter how wealthy, were not given the vote in the Legislative Council until 1908, other property restrictions to the franchise still applied.

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Obituaries at [http://eurekaopedia.org/David\\_Ham](http://eurekaopedia.org/David_Ham)

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