

## OF FROGS, GOLD BRACELETS, OPALS, LADIES AND QUEENS

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This bracelet of cast and chased colonial gold and Queensland opal is unique in the corpus of Australian gold jewellery. The cast decoration reflects the colony of Queensland – the coral and sea shells of the Great Barrier Reef, the tree fern and the Queensland Tree Frog. These frogs are a feature of the Barcoo River where the opal miner William Herbert Bond pegged his claim in 1875.

The form of double pinned construction is unusual with the pins pulling out to release each section to facilitate casting. The skills of casting in gold were perfected in the workshops of the Sydney goldsmiths and jewellers Julius Hogarth and Conrad Erichsen and later Christian Qwist, before 1870. The maker of this bracelet was, in all probability, trained in this skill by one of these masters before moving to Queensland to follow the gold rush of the 1870s. It is probable that this bracelet was made in Queensland, possibly by Saber Bros of Rockhampton, who were recorded as polishing opals at this time.

### Opal finds in Australia

The first discovery of common opals in Australia was made near Angaston SA by the German geologist Johannes Menge in 1849, a deposit that was never commercially worked. A study of early accounts suggests that most Australian discoveries were accidental – a horse's hoof kicked up opal-bearing rock, a boundary rider's wife discovered a pretty pebble in a creek bed or the chance finding of opal at Lightning Ridge, uncovered after a flock of sheep was struck by lightning during a rainstorm.

In 1870 the first paying Queensland opal field discovered by the partners Berkelman and Lambert on their large cattle and sheep station at Listowel on the Barcoo River was being worked. This opal find attracted considerable interest in London when shown in the Queensland Annexe to the London International Exhibition of 1873.

*Plates 1 to 4. The design and construction of this extremely rare and highly important seven opal bracelet in colonial gold suggests a date of manufacture after 1880, after four tons of Queensland boulder opal matrix had been delivered to Sydney by Herbert William Bond and before the bank crash of 1890 which severely curtailed activity in the Australian jewellery business.*





From 1875 a new discovery at nearby Cooper's Creek was pegged by a former drover now opal miner, leaseholder and future showman, Herbert William Bond, who exhibited a collection of opals from his Queensland leases at the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition in London. The following year while still in London, Bond floated his finds into a new company, *Opal Mines of Queensland* with issued capital of £100,000. The company was wound up in 1892.

With the demise of Bond the export of new finds, in particular the precious black opal, was promoted in London by the South Australian Tullie Wollaston from 1897 after mining began from White Cliffs NSW in 1890, Opalton Qld in 1896, and Lightning Ridge NSW in 1905.<sup>1</sup>

By 1900 Wollaston had laid the foundations of a profitable market for Australian opal in London and New York with an agency sale of NSW opal through the wholesalers and manufacturing jewellers Hasluck Brothers of 104 Hatton Garden.

### Queensland Gold

The Queensland gold rush of 1858 to Canoona brought some 15,000 men into this then sparsely populated area, finding insufficient gold to meet their expectations. After this so called 'Duffer's Rush', the destitute prospectors were rescued by the colonial governments of Victoria and New South Wales who sent two warships, *HMS Iris* and the *HMS Victoria* to Rockhampton with foot police to prevent further violence from breaking out.

As a result of the parlous state of the economy, on 8 January 1867 the Queensland government offered a reward of £3,000 for the discovery of payable gold. James Nash discovered the Gympie field in November

and within months a rush was underway with 25,000 men in the field. Gympie became the town that saved Queensland from penury and provided the impetus that brought the graziers inland to feed the miners and with them the opal and mineral fossickers (plate 6).

### H W Bond

The history of opal mining in Queensland is one of heartbreak, frustration, determination and at times success against incredible odds. The story is rich in myths and legends regarding Queensland as the birthplace of the Australian opal industry.

Opal was first discovered in 1870 by Berkelman and Lambert on their station Listowel Downs south of Blackall, where they registered Queensland's first opal mining lease on the Barcoo in 1871. Their Barcoo opal finds were shown by Richard Daintree, now Queensland Agent-General, at the third and final

1. E. F. Murphy *They Struck Opal*, the principal opal buyer on these fields for Wollaston describes the discovery and export of the opal.

decennial London International Exhibition, attracting considerable interest when exhibited in the new Queensland Annexe between 14 April and 31 October 1873.<sup>2</sup>

In 1875 important new finds by Herbert William Bond, a drover from Toowoomba, saw him take up three leases: Aladdin, Scotchman and Cunnavalla at Kyabra near Cooper's Creek south of Blackall and nearly 1,000 km west of Brisbane.

A newspaper link connects Berkelman and Lambert with Herbert Bond, who is recorded as passing through Roma in 1880 with four tons of opal bound for Sydney and Melbourne:

'to learn the true value of the find he is said to have discovered out west... The opals referred to have probably been obtained from the well-known opal mine, or its neighbourhood, on Messrs. Berkelman and Lambert's station.'<sup>3</sup>

The results must have been good, as Bond soon sold a half share in his mines to Ebenezer Vickery of Sydney for £4,000.<sup>4</sup>

Vickery (1827–1906) was a leading Sydney businessman with interests in mining, manufacturing, banking, agriculture and property in the city of Sydney. He acquired land in the recently created suburb of Waverley in the Eastern Suburbs and built a new mansion *Edina* on the seven acre site to reflect his wealth and prosperity (plate 7). Like Bond, he was a Methodist and a major benefactor to the Methodist Church in NSW. Self-made and self-contained, he cared little about culture, and would have been a powerful, well connected and demanding partner for Bond with his opal from faroff Queensland (plate 8).<sup>5</sup>

### Opals in jewellery

The first mention of a major Australian jewel using the newly discovered opal is found in a suite of opals exhibited by the leading Melbourne goldsmiths Kilpatrick & Co at the Melbourne International Exhibition held between 1 October 1880 and 30 April 1881:

'Clustered together in the west nave are the exhibits of the Victorian gold and silver smiths, and a very attractive display they make. An inspection of some of their cases will show what is done in the colony in the more elegant and artistic descriptions of work, whilst the contents of others illustrate the kind of articles manufactured for ordinary trade. The greater portion of the exhibits are, moreover, made of Victorian gold or silver, and articles of jewellery, are in many instances set with colonial stones and pearls. In the front rank stands a case of jewellery and precious stones shown by Messrs. Kilpatrick and Co. of Collins-street west, and the elegance and brilliancy of its contents at once arrest attention. There is one set of diamonds, consisting of a pendant or brooch, earrings, and bracelet, mounted so as to imitate the daisy a most exquisite piece of workmanship. *Another suite is set with opals, surrounded by diamonds, and the opal in the pendant is said to be the largest ever mounted in this colony.* [italics added] Then there are a number of diamond bracelets set with single stones, valued from £100 to



Plate 5. Map of opal mining areas in Queensland.

2. Queensland at the International Exhibition, *Queensland Times* 9 Aug 1873 p 4.
3. *Morning Bulletin* 16 Jul 1880.
4. *Toowoomba Chronicle* 12 Mar 1881 p 2.
5. "Ebenezer Vickery", *Australian Dictionary of Biography*.



Plate 6. Richard Daintree (1832–78) photographer, *Gold diggers in Queensland*. A large handcoloured photograph produced in London probably for the 1873 International Exhibition, 39.2 × 60.7 cm. Rex Nan Kivell Collection, National Library of Australia, Canberra. Richard Daintree was the geologist in charge of the Queensland government's Geological Survey, Northern Division when it began in 1868. He was also an important Australian amateur photographer. He left Queensland in 1870 for London when appointed by the Queensland government to set up the colony's contribution to the London Exhibition of Art and Industry of 1871. His ship was wrecked and a number of his photographs and geological specimens destined for the Exhibition were lost.



£260 each, as also gold bracelets made in the prevailing Japanese patterns. Occupying a prominent position in the same section of the court are five cases of exhibits of gold and silver work, shown by Messrs. Edwards and Kaul, of Collins Street. Their largest case, which is hexagonal in form, stands in the centre of the group. The gold they use is, of course, colonial, and their silver is extracted from Victorian gold. They also utilise such products of this and the neighbouring colonies such as the quandong nut, the supple jack bean grown in Queensland, the operculum or cat's-eye, found in Fiji, trigonia and other shells of Tasmania, and seeds, beans, &c, from the Northern Territory.<sup>6</sup>

6. *Australasian* 23 Oct 1880  
p 1.

By 1883 so called “bracelet races” in Queensland were all the rage when held by the racing clubs of Brisbane, Toowoomba, Rockhampton and Charters Towers. It is possible that the bracelet which is the subject of this essay may be a Ladies’ Bracelet prize made and mounted in Queensland, probably Rockhampton, from Rockhampton gold and Barcoo opals as supplied by Bond before he left for London.

Another option and the probable answer is that the bracelet was made for Bond’s wife, who remained in Toowoomba, from the first opals cut and mined in Queensland. With this in mind, the seashell and coral decoration encompass the all-embracing Queensland coral reef, while the tree fern leaf and the tree frog reflect on his life as a boundary rider:

‘When it rains on the Barcoo river, all the frogs come out and dance in the mud, it is an amazing sight.’<sup>7</sup>

7. Information given to me by a former pastoralist who was born and bred on the Barcoo River.

### H W Bond in England

8. *Darling Downs Gazette* 3 Feb 1883.

Bond is recorded as leaving Queensland on “urgent business” on the P&O steamer *Indus* in February 1883.<sup>8</sup> His son was born shortly after in Toowoomba on 25 March and Bond seems to have returned to Queensland within the year. I suggest his “urgent business” was taking raw opal to London at the insistence of his new half-share partner Ebenezer Vickery for cutting, setting and polishing “by London lapidaries”.<sup>9</sup>

9. *Toowoomba Chronicle* 24 Dec 1885 p 8.



He must have returned to Queensland, for he was not present when:

‘At a meeting of the committee of the Colonial and Indian Exhibition on the 21st December [1885], an exhibit of opals, round and cut, of the value of £2,000, was received from Mr. W. Bond, Toowoomba.’<sup>10</sup>

He collected his wife and new born son from Toowoomba and left again in January 1886, arriving back in London soon after the Exhibition opened:<sup>11</sup>

‘Of precious stones the only variety shown from Queensland is the precious opal, of which a case of splendid specimens was exhibited by Mr. H.W. Bond, of Torrington, Toowoomba; many of the examples were of extreme beauty, quite rivalling those from Hungary in their rich play of colour, while the fine ultramarine blue colour, so finely shown in the Queensland specimens, is rare even in Hungary. Some specimens are of the rare kind, known as ‘Harlequin’ opals; many of the stones are cut and polished as gems, and most of these are of high quality and of considerable size. No collection of opals has ever been exhibited in which such a variety of examples were displayed, with the view of showing the mode of occurrence of this unique gem. Many choice cabinet specimens showed the wonderful play of colour so peculiar to this stone. Some of the rough specimens appeared to enclose an apparent kernel of opal in a crust of a highly ferruginous jasper-like matrix; others appeared to indicate a vein of opal of rich colour; while some seemed to have the brilliantly-coloured patches and specks disseminated through the matrix. These specimens are of extreme interest to the mineralogist; the matrix appears to be highly charged with iron oxides, occasionally somewhat earthy, while sometimes it is quite siliceous, capable of taking a fine polish, and breaking with a conchoidal fracture. The locality where this stone is said to be found is near the Barcoo River. Some very choice specimens were mounted as a necklet, each stone being surrounded with diamonds. The specimens showing the finest play of colour appear to be those most recently found.’<sup>12</sup>

An interesting entry of 1886 shows that Bond was not averse to expensive gestures when promoting his cause:

‘Mr Bond has placed at our disposal a truly magnificent and valuable work of art in the form of a necklet of opals and diamonds. This with the sanction of Mr Bond, we have sent to the Executive Commissioner in London with the request that he will arrange for its presentation to H.R.H. the Princess of Wales after the Exhibition.’<sup>13</sup>

*Plate 7 (left). Edina gifted by the Vickery family to the Methodist Church in 1919 as the War Memorial Hospital. Waverley Library Local Studies Collection.*

*Plate 8 (right). Ebenezer Vickery with his wife and family. The ladies are potential owners of a colonial opal bracelet made in Sydney between 1880 and 1881. At the time Bond went, or more probably was sent, to London by Vickery to further their investment. Waverley Library Local Studies Collection.*

10. *Hobart Mercury* 9 Jan 1886 p 1.

11. A frequent traveller between capital cities, Bond is recorded as being on his way to Rockhampton on 24 November 1885 and in the *Brisbane Courier* of 1 December as being on his way back, with no further entries suggesting a departure for England in January 1886 probably with his wife and son.

12. Colonial and Indian Exhibition London, opened 4 May closed 15 October 1886, *Reports on the Colonial Sections of the Exhibition*, edited by H. T. Wood.

13. *Brisbane Courier* 4 Apr 1886 p 2.

14. *South Australian Advertiser* 3 Aug 1886 p 3.

15. *Memoirs of the Queensland Museum Cultural Heritage Series* p 284. Bond and the gold promoters, using their impressive displays at the 1886 London Exhibition, hoodwinked the British into Queensland mining investments.

16. *Australasian* 22 Sep 1888 p 1 and *Morning Bulletin* 6 Aug 1878 p 6: "Under this heading there appeared in our cablegrams about six weeks ago an announcement of the floating of a company in the London market with a capital of £100,000 in £1 shares. From the European Mail of June 24 we take the following paragraph, which fully explains the brief information previously published :-" Mr. George Hopkins, Chairman of the Day Dawn Block and Wyndham Gold Mining Company (Limited), Queensland : Mr. Thomas Archer, C.M.G., late Agent General for Queensland ; Major General Victor Gilbert, C.S. : Mr. N. Story-Maskelyne, M. P. : Mr. Charles Sidey, Director of the Mortgage Company of South Australia (Limited) ; and Mr. Herbert W. Bond, of Torrington, Toowoomba, Queensland, are at the head of a new company called the Opal Mines of Queensland (Limited), which has just been formed here with a capital of £100,000 in £1 shares, to acquire and develop the following properties, which are believed to be the only mines in our Australian colonies where precious opal of any commercial value has been discovered, viz: the Lady Gertrude Mines (three in number), situated: at Keeroongooloo, Cooper's Creek district, South Gregory, Queensland ; La Mascotte Mine, situate 16 miles east of the foregoing, containing about 10 acres ; and the Southern Cross Mine, situate on a branch of the Paroo River, Warrego District, Queensland, also containing about 10 acres.

This necklace at the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition was praised as follows:

'Queensland is not only rich in gold her precious stones are a source of continual wealth. Her display of opals is said to be the finest ever seen in England, their total weight being 4,000 carats. They are exhibited by Mr Herbert William Bond of Torrington Toowoomba, and some of them are made up as articles of jewellery. A necklace shown is exceedingly beautiful and universally admired. A particularly fine specimen is valued at £800 and the total value is said to be £6,000.<sup>14</sup>

Like other Queensland gold diggers<sup>15</sup> Bond used the publicity engendered by the Exhibition to promote his new venture.<sup>16</sup> Described as "the Opal King" in the English publication the *Pall Mall Budget*, reprinted in the *Toowoomba Chronicle* of 1887, he is recorded as floating the Queensland assets into a British public company:

"The other day we printed a ten-line paragraph taken from an American paper concerning some opals which are being extensively manufactured in Mexico. Now, these lines chanced to fall into the hands of his Majesty, the Opal King, who is at present in London. He wished it to be known that his opals could not be imitated. This gentleman—a king can be no more—it was, who discovered the existence of the brilliant jewel in Queensland, and after seven long years of working in the opal country he left the torrid skies of Queensland for the old country. The history of that discovery his Majesty related to me, together with many graphic stories of his adventures, and of these I propose to give a brief epitome. I may mention that the King is also known as Mr H. W. Bond; his palace is at Torrington, Toowoomba; and his visit to England was undertaken partly for financial reasons. He found his territory too extensive to work alone; so he has put the opal country into the market, and floated an Opal Company, with £100,000 capital, just as Mr Allan Quatermain [the protagonist in H. Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines*] would have floated King Solomon's treasure. He himself goes back in a week or two to superintend the working of the mines. I called upon Mr Bond at the Bank of Queensland, in Lombardstreet, and, with Sir Seton Gordon and another gentleman, was taken upstairs to see the opals. After some little delay, a small cardboard cabinet, about eight inches high and as many wide, was brought into the room by two officials, who broke the seal and untied the red tape with which it was bound. Mr Bond then pulled out each of the three drawers, in which were little black paper packages—opals wrapped up like Seidlitz powders! Each of these was opened, and the table was soon covered with a brilliant collection of beautiful stones, each flashing with a thousand prismatic lights. Another and larger parcel was also opened, containing, perhaps, five or six hundred smaller stones; and, as Mr Bond, carefully turning them over in his hand to show their brilliant hues, told me, the contents of the box were worth about £15,000 in the market. They were then carefully put to bed again, sealed up, and taken away to the safes below by their two grim guardians. I am told that hitherto the opal market has been chiefly supplied from the mines of Hungary, which produce the well-known milk-hued gem. The stones which come from South America are milky, but less fiery than their Hungarian rivals. The Queensland opals may beat these out of the market, because of their greater brilliancy, and the presence of a vivid green lustre in the gems from one of the three mines now conducting operations in Queensland. Mr Bond informed me that the opal was vomited out by



geysers in remote epochs, and produced from the cavernous depths of a well-worn black bag a number of specimens of the raw material. Without going into geological details, it may be said that the opal is found enclosed in little round stones, like a kernel in a nut, and also in another formation, which runs in layers. The nut is cracked with a tomahawk, and there is the opal stone. Mr Bond has the tanned face of a man who has been exposed for many years to the burning sun of the tropics; and as for his prospecting adventures, I dare say he could fill a book with them. He first came on the track of opals about seven years ago, when working far away from his own station, 800 miles west of Toowoomba. He was driving cattle to some station near Cooper's Creek, when one night he fell in with a stockman who was looking after a remote part of the run. This man took him aside and told him that he thought he could show him something worth the seeing, and which he was also anxious to have his opinion about. Going to the back of his hut, he removed a mass of rubbish, and produced a dirty beef bag. Opening the mouth and diving down, he brought up about thirty pounds' weight of opal matrix. He had been riding after his cattle one day when his eye was caught by something in the grass which flashed in the sun. Long exposure to heat and rain had caused some of the nodules to split, and exposed the lustrous stone encased within. Mr Bond gave the man a cheque for two or three hundred pounds for the stones and his information and took up the land indicated. The news soon spread. He was pegged out all round, that is, other enterprising gentlemen came up with their picks, shovels, and blankets, and followed his example. But luck favoured Mr Bond; their patches were valueless. The value of a gem depends to a large extent on its rarity, and it would have depreciated the value of the find if similar discoveries had been made. For seven years Mr Bond had been prospecting this patch of country with the utmost care, at a cost of nearly £15,000. ... Mr Bond has three mines, which his men have been working for the last four or five years, and which he visits three times a year, driving a buckboard buggy and three horses, taking down the matrix to Toowoomba, where it is classed and shipped to Europe. All who visited the Colonial and Indian Exhibition last year must have been struck with the fine display of the cut opals and those in the matrix exhibited by Mr Bond. The Queen took especial notice of the exhibit, and greatly admired the hitherto unknown hues of these lovely gems. ... Mr Bond informs us that the offices of the Opal Mines of Queensland, which company was lately floated, will be opened in a fortnight at 2, Waterloo-place, whence we may expect shortly to have issued opals to meet the fast increasing demand, for as a matter of fact, these precious stones, since the Princess of Wales wore them at a recent Drawing Room they have become quite the fashion.<sup>17</sup>

In the ultimate Victorian accolade:

"The Queen received Mr. Herbert Bond, of Toowoomba, at Windsor on 1st December, [1887] and examined his fine collection of Queensland opals, some specimens of which her Majesty accepted.<sup>18</sup> It is seldom (says the *Toowoomba Chronicle*) that intelligence from the fashionable world of London has much interest for the inhabitants of remote Toowoomba, but we have thought that the particulars of Mrs. Herbert Bond's presentation to Her Majesty, at the fourth and last drawing room of the season, at Buckingham Palace, held on Wednesday, the 18th of May, by her Royal Highness the Princess of Wales, by Royal command, are worthy of notice,

The Lady Gertrude Mines are freehold, and are the absolute property of the vendor, Mr. Herbert W. Bond, who originally purchased the same direct from the Government of Queensland, and they will be transferred to the company free from any encumbrance. La Mascotte and the Southern Cross Mine are held by Mr. Bond from the Government of Queensland on twenty-one year leases, with option of renewal from time to time, subject to a rent of 10s. per acre, per annum, and the obligation to employ at least one man for every five acres. In addition to these properties the company will, by the terms of purchase, acquire an amount of precious opal, cut and in the matrix, sufficient to commence operations on a very remunerative scale, and roughly estimated to be worth £30,000. From the brilliant and varied display of colours exhibited by these stones, it is considered by experts that the quality of these Queensland gems entitles them to rank on perfect equality with the Hungarian opals. Besides, a considerable quantity of the matrix in which the opal is formed is beautifully interspersed with opal, and will prove very valuable for inlaying works of art. No value has been attributed in the above purchase to this branch of the industry. As proprietor and vendor of the mines, and as promoter of this company, Mr. Bond is willing to accept as the price of the mines, including all plant, machinery, live and rolling stock, the sum of £30,000, payable as follows:—£15,000, in fully paid-up shares of the company, £27,500, in cash, and £7,500, in debentures, bearing interest at five years in cash or fully paid shares at the option of the company.

17. "The Opal King and his Country", *Flinders Chronicle* 30 Sep 1887 p 3, taken from the *Pall Mall Budget*.

18. *Queenslander* 28 Jan 1888 p 12.

We announced the fact of Mrs. Bond's appearance, some time ago, and the last English mail has brought us the *Court Journal* and the *Queen* containing the details of the presentations. The Royal party consisted of H.R.H. the Princess of Wales and her daughter Maud, who appeared at a drawing room for the first time, the Prince of Wales, in uniform of Colonel-in-Chief of the Life Guards, the Duke of Cambridge, and Prince George of Greece. Altogether, upwards of six hundred ladies went past the Princess of Wales; and their dresses are described as being, in all cases, magnificent, the lace and diamonds unusually so. Mrs. Bond was presented by the Hon. Mrs. Okeover, and her ornaments of Queensland opals and diamonds are specially described. Her costume, which was made by the famous court milliner and dressmaker, Madame Elise, of Regent street, was as follows:- "Train of rich cream brocade, lined with faille, bordered with the same, agraffed with cream ostrich plumes; corsage to correspond, with plaited tulle front, trimmed with opals and feathers; jupe of cream tulle striped satin ribbon over faille, looped with feathers. Headdress, plume and tulle veil; ornaments magnificent Queensland opals and diamonds." The *Queen*, the fashionable London ladies' newspaper, of the 26th of May, contains a full page drawing of three of the ladies who were present at the drawing-room in the dresses worn by them, the first of whom is Mrs. Herbert Bond; but we must leave it to our readers to imagine the handsome appearance presented by a lady dressed as above mentioned, the task of description being somewhat beyond us. The lady whose entry into fashionable life we have just referred to is the wife of Mr. Herbert Bond, of Toowoomba, eldest son of Mr. William Bond, of Torrington.<sup>19</sup>

19. *Queensland Times* 4 Aug 1888  
p 2.

After his audience with the Queen, Bond would not have had time to return to Australia to supervise his opal exhibit at the 1888 Centennial Exhibition in Melbourne. The wording of the Exhibition report suggests the same collection from London was forwarded to Mr St Barbe Moore in Melbourne immediately after the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition closed:

'By far the finest collection of precious stones at present on view in the Exhibition is to be seen in some cases of opals shown by Mr. H. St. Barbe Moore, which are to be found under the dome on the left-hand side near the entrance to the concert-hall. The stones come from the opal mines owned by Mr. Herbert Bond, near Cooper's Creek, in Queensland, and the collection has been pronounced by good judges at home to be the finest assemblage of precious opals ever gathered together. At the present time the opal bids fair to become the most popular and fashionable gem in England. It has always been a favourite with the Queen; and from the time when the Duke of Connaught presented his bride with an engagement ring of opal, the stone began to gain ground in the public estimation, in spite of the superstition which, since Anne of Geierstein was written, has always attached to it, as being an unlucky jewel. Quite recently an exhibition of these opals was given by Mr. Bond in London, and they were also shown to the Princess of Wales at Marlboroughhouse, and to the Queen at Windsor. Some of the gems were accepted by Her Majesty, and have been set in bracelets, and the Princess of Wales gave further impetus to the fashion by wearing a fine set of opals at a recent drawing-room. Hitherto opals have been obtained chiefly from Mexico, where, however, only an inferior kind are found, which wear readily and are spoilt by contact with water, and from Hungary. The Hungarian opal, though in every way a more valuable stone than the Mexican, is lacking in variety; the prevailing colour being of a dull



milky white, which is much less effective for decorative purposes than the brilliant iridescent hues of the Queensland gem. In Mr. St. Barbe Moore's exhibit a great variety of colouring is observable. The gem of the collection is a heart-shaped stone set in diamonds, which is remarkable as being the finest specimen yet discovered of the genuine black opal. A dark colour is often observable in stones which have portions of the matrix mixed up with them. But the black hue thus produced by impurities is quite different from the lustrous colour to be noticed when the stone itself is black. This particular gem shows, besides the black, a very beautiful shade of peacock blue. This colour is also to be seen in a cameo brooch finely carved, in which the various hues of the stone have been cleverly utilised and adapted by the artist to the subject of the design. Another remarkable specimen is a magnificent stone weighing 40 carats, of exquisite colouring, which is well set off by the diamonds with which it is mounted, three opals, with lines of light in them resembling the well-known streaks of a cat's-eye, and a large specimen of "honey" opal, cut in the shape of a hat, are also to be noticed; and two pendants set in diamonds, one remarkable both for the grace of the design and for the beauty of the stones of which it is composed. In this collection every shade of colour of which the opal is capable is to be seen, black, blue, green, white, "tire" and "honey." The gems are in all cases sumptuously mounted, and in this way the most is made of their natural beauties. The exhibit can hardly fail to be of the greatest interest to those who take pleasure in precious stones, and particularly in this, the most beautiful of Australian gems ... The stones now on view at the Exhibition are all a very different kind, and it is satisfactory to know that perhaps the finest opals in the world are now being furnished by Australia.'

"The Intercolonial News Centennial Exhibition Notes" in *The Queenslander* discusses and values this exhibit:

'Visitors to the Centennial Exhibition are being attracted to two exhibits of a superb and costly character which have been placed near the southern entrance of the building, and just under the dome in the main hall. Of these the first that catches the eye is of especial interest to Queensland visitors, as it furnishes proof of the less known sources of mineral wealth which their colony possesses. The case referred to contains a brilliant display of Queensland precious opals. The raw matrix from which these stones were produced was obtained in the neighbourhood of Cooper's Creek. The Opal Mines Company of Queensland, whose offices are in Waterloo-place, London, work the mines in the above named district, the matrix being forwarded to England, and sold to artistes, who work the opals into designs of various kinds. They are set in diamonds of the first water, and in the form of bracelets, pendants, pins, necklaces, are sold at surprisingly high figures. Amongst those exhibited is a necklace of these opals, set in diamonds, valued at £500; a rare black opal, entirely free from matrix, formed as a pendant, £600; a brooch, with pendant, £450; rings, with opals set in diamonds, varying from £9 to £65 each. These Queensland opals are in demand in England, being much in favour with the Queen and the royal family, the Princess of Wales having appeared in a full suite of them at a recent brilliant assemblage. They are likely, it is said, to be adopted as the distinguishing stones in the engagement rings of the branches of the royal family. The valuable opal exhibits in the cases are certified to by Mr. Herbert W. Bond, of the Opal Mines Company, and are in charge of Mr. H. St. Barbe Moore. The total value of those sent to Melbourne

Plate 11. *Queen Alexandra with Colonel Sankey viewing the Queensland gem display in the Australia Pavilion at the Franco-British Exhibition, London, 1908.* In 1874 Robert Sankey obtained a position with the Brisbane branch of the Sydney jewellers Flavelle & Roberts. He later became a partner then the owner of the firm. *The Queenslander* 30 October 1908 p 26.



is about £20,000. It is needless to say they are much admired, the ladies especially clustering around the cases with eagerness and enthusiasm.<sup>20</sup>

As a result of the Australian bank crashes of the early 1890s, Opal Mines of Queensland was soon liquidated.<sup>21</sup> By then Bond had become embroiled in a scam involving a West Australian railway company also founded in London that finally cost him his reputation.

### Queensland opal exhibits in 1908

The Brisbane firm Flavelle, Roberts & Sankey then owned by Colonel Sankey of 103 Queen Street, exhibited Queensland opals in London at the Franco-British Exhibition of 1908, having turned their hand to manufacturing gold jewellery after Australian Federation in 1901.

Sankey records that he spent threequarters of an hour talking to King Edward and Queen Alexandra about Queensland opals at this Exhibition in 1908 (plate 11) and as a result “he was called upon to make four command visits to Buckingham Palace where their Majesties purchased 30 of his precious stones.”<sup>22</sup>

### Queensland opal in bracelets or brooches as race prizes

Contemporary references show that a bracelet was given to the winner of race in which the horses were owned by women yet ridden by men. Most Queensland race meetings from 1883 had such races with a prize bracelet rather than a silver cup valued at between 10 and 30 sovereigns being considered more suited to the lady owner of the winning horse.

Bracelet Races supported by the Queensland Turf Club were first introduced in November 1883:

‘...[the] program of their autumn meeting is now before the public ... the Ladies’ Bracelet has been one of the most interesting and best contested races of the two previous meetings. At the first Ladies’ Bracelet race, in November, 1883, there, were nine starters, which was the same number as in the Publicans’ Purse; and those two races produced the largest fields during the meeting. In May of the present year there were seven starters ...’<sup>23</sup>

A detailed search of Australian newspapers using Trove reveals a number of articles associated with bracelets and racing that incorporate opals. The most relevant is the bracelet with a gifted value of 100 sovereigns in 1886 given by Herbert William Bond,<sup>24</sup> to the Toowoomba Turf Club:

‘Mr H.W. Bond, stating that he regretted that the bracelet valued at 50 guineas which he intended to present the club could not be got ready by the Christmas meeting, but would be ready for the June meeting.’<sup>25</sup>

20. *Queenslander* 6 Oct 1888 p 132.

21. *The Watchmaker and Jeweller, Silversmith and Optician* vol 18 1892 p 36.

22. *Sunday Mail* (Brisbane) 26 Jul 1931 p 2.

23. *Brisbane Courier* 5 Sep 1884 p 2.

24. A flexible bracelet hence not a bangle which would be solid or with one hinge in newly minted gold sovereigns at A\$681 each, would in today’s money have cost Bond A\$60,810.

25. *Toowoomba Chronicle* 13 Oct 1885 p 5.

This suggests that a bracelet intended for a yet unspecified race to be held at Christmas 1885, would be made in London and delivered by Bond on his return from England to be contested in December 1886 at the Corinthian Stakes in Toowoomba:<sup>26</sup>

26. *Toowoomba Chronicle* 17 Jun 1886 p 3.

‘The bracelet, presented by Mr. Herbert W. Bond, son of Mr. William Bond, of Torrington, to the Toowoomba Turf Club, to be run for at the next Christmas races as the “Corinthian Stakes” has been received in Toowoomba and is a most beautiful specimen of the jeweller’s art, having been manufactured at the well-known establishment of Mr. Benson, of the Strand, London. The opal set in the centre is a large and magnificent stone, has been beautifully cut by the lapidary, and is relieved on either side by choice fretwork in gold of exquisite design. The opal came from Mr. Bond’s opal mines at the Barcoo, and is a stone of great value. The bracelet is of solid gold, is of great weight, and was valued in London at 100 guineas. This splendid prize will be worth running for and should command a good field of horses at the Christmas races. On the inner side is the following inscription:– “Corinthian Stakes, presented by Herbert W, Bond, 1886.”’

This description provides us with the name of the London jewellers working for Bond and that the bracelet was originally intended as a prize for the Corinthian Stakes. Bond had the bracelet made up in London by J.W. Benson of Ludgate Hill, a rather strange choice because this firm was noted for its interests in horology rather than jewels. This connection may have been at the insistence of Ebenezer Vickery, his half-share partner the opal having been brought to London to be cut and polished prior to Bond’s almost immediate return to Australia. The remainder was left in preparation for the Bond exhibit at the Colonial and Indian Exhibition of April 1886. The bracelet was not ready for the Corinthian Race of Christmas 1885 with Bond still in London. The inscription was probably removed when presented as the Toowoomba Ladies Bracelet of 1886:

‘Ladies Bracelet Welter Handicap first horse an Opal Bracelet (presented to the club by Mr Herbert Bond) first horse Mrs J Taylors Friction 6yrs 12 st 7 lbs....’<sup>27</sup>

27. *Darling Downs Gazette* 29 Dec 1886.

The Taylor family, headed by the Hon James Taylor (1820–95) sometime politician and president of the Toowoomba Turf Club, was one of the richest men in Queensland. On his death in 1895 he left each of his six children £70,000.

Two further examples of gold and opal jewels:

‘Michael Hughes, a well-known member of Tattersall’s, has had manufactured a most beautiful brooch, which he intends presenting to the Charters Towers Jockey Club to be run for in place of a bracelet, and the club named cannot help being pleased with the gift. The brooch contains a most magnificent opal set in gold, and surrounded with diamonds and pearls, and its value has been estimated at about £50.’<sup>28</sup>

28. *Brisbane Courier* 17 Feb 1888 p 7.

R. H. Bate, jeweller, has just completed to the order of a client at Longreach, a very handsome gold bracelet The bracelet is set with fifteen opals, which were selected by the owner of the trinket. The workmanship is excellent and reflects much credit on Mr. Bate and his staff.<sup>29</sup>

29. *The Capricornian* 2 Nov 1895.



Bate worked for Saber Brothers, the Rockhampton jewellers. Their father Wolf Saber ran the family jewellery business in George Street, Sydney from 1857 and he may therefore provide a possible Sydney manufacturing connection. His two sons Wolf (?) and Louis ran the Rockhampton branch of the firm from the early 1870s; they were badly hit by the crash of 1890 when they had to meet their creditors for over £20,000.

That the Saber Brothers had a workshop cutting and polishing opals is clear by this entry in the *Capricornian*:

‘On the occasion of our visit, we were shown some opals of very beautiful appearance which, we were informed, had come from the neighbourhood of Cooper’s Creek. Some of these had been cut into settings, but there was one noble piece, of unsurpassed beauty, which is valued at about £300. These stones are cut by means of a zinc or sheet iron wheel fixed in the ‘bort’ using diamond dust mixed with fat. They are polished by other means.<sup>30</sup>

30. *The Capricornian Local Industries Christmas supplement, Local industries, jewellery and watchmaking shops*, 19 Dec 1885 p 4. The firm also supplied a bracelet described as... for. Second Horse a Bracelet valued at 10 sovs, presented by Messrs Saber Bros. Daily Northern Argus, 4 Aug 1889 p 2.

31. *Maryborough Chronicle* 14 Dec 1867 p 2.

Two more colonial gold bracelets have been discovered in the course of this investigation that may eventually throw further light on this most interesting matter.

### **The Lady Bowen gold bangle, 1867**

This gold bangle (plate 13) set with emeralds arrived the day after the scheduled presentation of a gift from 120 of the “young Ladies of Queensland” to Diamantina, Lady Bowen in 1867.<sup>31</sup> The bracelet appears to be colonial but the maker is unknown; it may have been made in Brisbane or Sydney.

### **The White Cliffs Opal Ladies Bracelet of 1911, retailed by E. F Murphy**

‘...White Cliffs held its own until the Lightning Ridge black opal field broke out. This was the richest opal field in the world, the beautiful black gem outclassing all other types of opal millions of pounds in cash was paid out by various buyers for these high-grade gems. In 1910 there were about 8000 people on the field. Concerts were held in a hessian hall free, but in time charges were made for entry. The greatest value of opal was found at what was termed the Three Mile field: here a town sprang up ... The annual race meeting was a £200 programme; the first prize was the Lady’s Opal Bracelet of £75. This bracelet could not be bought today under £1000 ... Lightning Ridge today is down to a population of 300, practically all old age pensioners.<sup>32</sup>

32. *Around the Campfire by Sundowner Townsville Daily Bulletin* 12 Feb 1948 p 7.

...It was a gold bracelet set with magnificent Lightning Ridge black opals, judiciously relieved with rubies, intended as the principal prize at the race-meeting which eventuated at Lightning Ridge yesterday ... The setting of this rare bracelet consists probably of the finest black opals to be found in the world to-day, ‘brunettes’ full of fire; the product of Lightning Ridge, and set to their best advantage by an artist. The work was entrusted to and has been well carried out by Mr. E. F. Murphy formerly for 17 years manager of the White Cliffs Opal Mine, and one of the first to recognise the potentialities of Lightning Ridge, who now operates at the Black Opal Store, 89 Market-street, near Hyde Park [Sydney].<sup>33</sup>

33. *Freeman’s Journal* 7 Sep 1911 p 28.



Plate 13. *The Lady Bowen gold bangle, 1867. Photograph courtesy The Queensland Women's Historical Association.*

### T C Wollaston

Wollaston, the major promoter of Australian opals, has an excellent entry in *The Australian Dictionary of Biography*:

‘Tullie Cornthwaite Wollaston (1863- 1931), opal dealer, was born on 17 May 1863 at Port Lincoln, South Australia, fourth child of George Gledstanes Wollaston, sheep farmer, and his wife Mary Glover, née MacGowan, both English born, and grandson of Archdeacon Wollaston. Registered at birth as Henry Herbert, next year he was baptized Tullie Cornthwaite; he was always known by that name. Resigning from the Survey Office, he worked as a private surveyor and draughtsman before becoming involved in mining and marketing sapphires and the gems found by David Lindsay. During 1888 Wollaston learned of an opal discovery in the Kyabra Hills, Queensland. Backed by Adelaide investors, on 21 November he set out by rail with the surveyor Herbert Butterfield; from the State’s north, they used camels to cross harsh terrain. They arrived early next year, inspected the opal strike, bought specimens and obtained leases. Wollaston then sailed for London only to find that dealers were suspicious of the superior Australian stone. Having sold a little which was sent to the United States of America, he came back to Adelaide and formed a partnership with the solicitor David Morton Tweedie. Late in 1889 Wollaston examined opal specimens sent to him from White Cliffs, near Wilcannia, New South Wales. Visiting the new find, he met Edmund Francis Murphy who subsequently became his agent. Wollaston sold White Cliffs opal to European and American buyers in London; in 1897-99 he annually spent about £50,000 buying stones for sale abroad. His generous valuations caused Tweedie to break their partnership. In 1905 Murphy began buying for him on the field at Lightning Ridge, New South Wales. Taking specimens of the ‘black opal’ to the world market in 1906-08, Wollaston again encountered scepticism; by 1911 he had more than he could sell. He was next engaged in an unsuccessful pearling venture off Broome, Western Australia. When opal was found early in 1915 at Stuart Range (later Coober Pedy), South Australia, Wollaston bought the first parcel; he took specimens to America in 1916 and sold a significant

quantity to a firm in Paris in 1919. In the mid-1920s he backed efforts to develop the Uley graphite and limestone deposits near Port Lincoln. As a director of Graphite Ltd, he visited London in December 1929, but failed to attract interest in the company's mine which closed after his return in 1930.'

To accompany his display of opals at the 1924 British Empire Exhibition at Wembley, London, Wollaston wrote the semi-autobiographical book *Opal: The Gem of the Never-Never*:

'Before 1900, rough opal was sent from White Cliffs, the premier NSW opal field, to Germany to be cut and polished. Gradually, professional cutters began appearing on the fields. They rigged up old treadle sewing machines or bicycles, designing innovative cutting/polishing gear. In 1907 at Old Town, on the Wallangulla Opal Fields (later known as the Lightning Ridge Opal Fields), the first recorded cutter was Charles Deane. When the 3-Mile broke out in 1908, cutters worked at Nettleton on 3-Mile Flat. A Mr Lorenz had learned to cut in Germany using horizontal wheels with a hand crank making doublets, jewellery, and he was one of the first to buy opal by the carat.'

In South Australia, opal was found at Angaston in 1849 but was not commercially exploited. The Coober Pedy field was opened up in about 1912 and Andamooka in about 1930, from which the principal opal in the necklace presented to the Queen was sourced and finally Mintabie.

During the depression of the 1930s the industry declined until new finds in 1946 stimulated mining and, since then, there has been a spectacular increase in production.

