

Hermit of the Cumberland Goldfield

George Ernest Locke 1860-1941

George Locke was a gold miner on the Yarra Track partnering with William Chester in his Golden Bower Mine in 1896. George had been in the area for sometime whilst William had grown up with his mother and stepfather at the Cumberland Goldfield and would have absorbed much about gold mining. After schooling in Healesville William returned and with George Locke discovered a second reef, the ~~Golden~~^{Secret} Bower, north of the original Golden Bower reef. They set-up a new company to acquire the rights and title to the old lease.

Bendigo Advertiser, 24 May 1898

A RICH DISCOVERY. Our Melbourne correspondent writes :—Two prospectors and miners named-- Wm. Chester and George Locke called on the Minister of Mines yesterday and showed him a nice cake of gold weighing 122oz., the result of a recent crushing from six tons of stone from a reef which they found on the Yarra track, 70 miles from Melbourne and about 15 miles from Marysville. They had been induced to start a claim three months ago by the rich specimens in the locality. They had gone to a depth of 36ft. and the reef was from 3in. to 9in. thick and looks promising. A lease is being issued to Messrs. Chester and Locke, and several parties are in the locality. The discovery is one of the results of the track cutting, which the Minister says will be continued.

With this announcement there was a small rush to the area which was briefly known as Chesterville before returning to the Cumberland.

George Ernest Locke (1860, Emerald Hill-1941, Marysville) was born into a forward thinking family. Along with his three brothers he was educated in a private school. As a young man he went prospecting and settled on the Cumberland Goldfield where he finally had some success when he and William Chester found the golden Secret vein on the Cumberland Goldfield in 1896.

George lived on in the area in his log cabin at the Cumberland reserve, mining and splitting timber. On one of his visits in the 1930s Jackie Lewis, the bushman planted a blue spruce, *Picea sitchensis exotic*, by Locke's hut. In 2022 it is a huge tree somewhat damaged by severe wind storms in the last 5 years.

He was known to be a character and in the late 1920s when the Governor of Victoria, Baron Somers visited George showed him the Big Tree. The Governor remarked, "Magnificent! I wonder how long it's been here." George's reply. "Buggered if I know Mr Somers. It was already here when I came along."

George was a loner, but wise with his money. 'He didn't have a bank account in Marysville where the locals could find out about his financial status.'¹ George's bank was the ES&A at Fitzroy. When he died



in 1941 he had £360 in his account. He had never married but had family in Melbourne and is buried at Box Hill Cemetery. His brother John Edward Locke and his wife Annie Caroline Locke were added to the grave in the 1950s.

The Age, 23 May 1941

Obituary - "The Hermit of Cumberland Valley"

The death is announced of Mr George Locke, known to many thousands of tourists as "the Hermit of Cumberland Valley". He lived in a humpy near the famous plantation (sic) of mountain ash, which is believed to contain the tallest hardwood trees in the world. Mr Locke would not leave Cumberland, even during the bushfires of two years ago, and had not been in Marysville for over 14 years. A keen prospector at the Cumberland Valley until his health began to fail a few years ago he was in the earlier years actively interested in the Golden Secret mine at Cumberland and the Wolfram Mine near Marysville. Aged 81 years, he was the lone inhabitant of Cumberland Valley, and spent his last days in a Forest Commissions patrol hut, which was built next to his old humpy when it started to fall to pieces.

Endnote:

¹ The nearest banks would have been in Healesville with possible sub-branch, through the Post Office in Marysville.