

February-19



Dear Club Members,

On the 5th February 1869, 150 years ago, the largest ever alluvial gold nugget was found in Moliagul, Victoria, Australia.

It weighed nearly 110 kg, and was so large it had to be broken up before it would fit on the bank scales. The nugget became known as "The Welcome Stranger" and at the time was worth £10,000, the equivalent of US\$3-4 million in today's money. It was found by 2 Cornish miners who had emigrated to Australia as part of the Victorian Gold Rush. John Deason discovered the nugget just a few centimetres below the surface, under a tree, and dug it out with his partner Richard Oates.

John Deason was born on the Isles of Scilly, off the southern tip of Cornwall, in 1829. He was originally a tin dresser, and left to go to Australia in 1853. Throughout the 1840's Cornwall was hit by a potato famine, just as there was in Ireland, and the local mines provided inconsistent employment and poor wages. Up to 5% of the population in the local area had emigrated to Australia by 1849. Assisted passage was available for certain professions, and John Deason and his family had to pay £8 towards their passage. He likely knew Richard Oates before they moved to Australia, but they did not travel out together. Richard Oates was born in 1827, and took passage in 1847, he returned to Cornwall after the discovery of the nugget to marry in 1870, the couple then travelled back to Australia and had a family. Neither seems to have been particularly lucky with money, despite the huge windfall. Deason carried on as a gold miner, before becoming a shop keeper. He lost most of his wealth due to poor investments in the mining industry. Oates was more successful and bought a small amount of land to farm.

The Victorian Gold Rush changed Australia dramatically. In 1851 the population of the area surrounding Melbourne was 77,345, 18% of the population. By 1861 this had increased to 538,628, making up 47% of the country's total population. This rapid growth changed the area dramatically, and led to the nickname "Marvellous Melbourne" because the amount of wealth that had been uncovered was so large. When the alluvial (surface) gold ran out, the prospectors switched to mining. Eventually the costs rose, and the First World War led to the loss of many of the young men who had been working the mines. Many mines closed, but a rise in gold prices, and better technology has meant that it's now profitable to work some mines again.

This colour is similar to the Illuminated Manuscript fibre that was in the club in November 2016, though is subtly different. . . Both take their colour from the magical metal that stays so wonderfully bright and shiny. In the Further Reading links I've included a link to see some medieval manuscripts as a bit of a throw back to that blend.

Happy Spinning

Katie

Further Reading-

Victoria Museum detail on the Welcome Stranger Gold Nugget including photos of a replica-
<https://collections.museumvictoria.com.au/articles/3019>

BBC Article on the gathering of the descendants of the original miners at the site the nugget was discovered-
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cornwall-47041314>

The Victorian Gold Rush
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victorian_gold_rush

Photos of the abandoned mines-
<https://www.goldfieldsguide.com.au/blog/19/abandoned-mines-of-the-victorian-goldfields>

The Welcome Stranger on Wikipedia
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Welcome_Stranger
(scroll down to the links for genealogy pages on Oates and Deacon)

If Illuminated Manuscripts are your thing then I suggest adding some joy to your twitter feed by following @BLMedieval

The British Library has also recently digitised many Medieval Manuscripts-
https://blogs.bl.uk/digitisedmanuscripts/?_ga=2.16983421.514399099.1550595794-21819452.1550595794

Fibre Content- In case your parcel is missing the label
12.5% Mulberry Silk, 25% BFL, 4% Stellina, 58.5% Merino