

Copies only : Original documents held in the Archives Office of Tasmania
 Access: Open for research

JAMES (PHILOSOPHER) SMITH

James Smith (1827-1897) was born in George Town, son of John and Mary Ann (Grant) Smith. His father was shot when he was aged 5 and he was taken under the guardianship of John Guilan, a Launceston merchant and mill owner. After working in the mill, and then exploring the country west of the Tamar and prospecting for gold in Victoria, James Smith settled on land at the River Forth, and planted orchards. He discovered silver ore on Mt. Claud near Sheffield and, in December 1871, tin at Mount Bischoff and began mining in 1872 and in 1873 the Mt. Bischoff Tin Mining Company was formed.. He then then returned to farming at "Westwood", Forth, and extended his property but continued to take an interest in mining and prospecting, having a laboratory built at his his home. He also took part in public affairs. He married Mary Jane (Pleas) in 1874 and had 6 children. He was widely known by the nickname "Philosopher" but the origin is not known. He read a lot and was a strict Christian and member of the Congegational Church, resigning from the Town Hall Committee over a proposal that a museum should be open on Sundays.

His son, Ronald Edgar, sorted and transcribed his father's papers (now in the Archives Office of Tasmania) and also those of Gustav Weindorfer (now in the Mitchell Library, Sydney).

S.5/1 Copy of diary of James Smith 1878 - 1898

Typed copy of transcript made by Ronald E. Smith.

This is a very detailed diary, noting daily work on the farm, seeds received and planted, stock sold or bought, orchard apples and other fruit, water wheel, water and drainage, trial of triangular troughs, seed drill, mowing machine. He tried a salt solution to treat the destructive parasite dodder on lucerne. As well as sheep, feed crops and orchard fruit, he tried angora goats. James Smith also noted daily payments made or received, letters sent, visits and visitors, including neighbours, E. N. C. Braddon and family, John Henry, Rev. Fairey, Col. Crawford and many others, and he even noted books or periodicals and other items borrowed or lent. His regular attendance at chapel on Sundays, usually the Congregational Chapel but sometimes the Independent or Wesleyan Methodist Churches or

occasionally the Church of England, was recorded with the name of the preacher.

Prospecting trips and visits to mines are frequently mentioned and he had a laboratory built at his home. Other miners and prospectors visited to consult him, including Capt. L. Herbert Noyes of Mt. Bischoff, James Hancock and another James Smith from the Barrington Copper Mine.

James Smith took part in local activities and politics, including the School Board and the North West Railway League. He resigned from the Town Hall Committee over a proposal to establish a museum and open it on Sundays. He liberated salmon trout fry in the Forth and other rivers between 1887 and 1890. He "counselled Braddon not to be too extreme in advocating reform of the Legislative Council" (Dec. 1880).

There are occasional references to his wife and family: his wife was "delivered of a daughter about noon" on 23 September 1878, his wife and the children drove to Leven beach, the boys helped with farm work and in February 1891 Mrs Smith and her daughters went to a demonstration at the Town Hall on fixing photographs on glass by a Mrs Abrams.

(ts. carbon copy, bound, 238 pp. original in A.O.T.)

- 3 Insurance on "Westwood" 14 Dec. 1876
Insurance policy on "Westwood", Forth, with Mutual Fire Insurance Company.
(parchment)
- 4 North Bischoff Valley Tin Shares 7 May 1878
Scrip certificate of J. Smith's five shares.
- 5 Letters received (neg.film) 1875-94
Letters to James Smith from E.N.C. Braddon (82 letters) and John Henry (72 letters)
(35 mm film negative only, originals in the Archives Office of Tasmania)