The discovery of gold had a profound effect on the population of Orange. In 1851 the total population was 28, ten years later it had reached 581 and by 1871 1,456 people were recorded as residents. This figure almost double in the follow decade to 2,701 by 1881.

While not all the gold seekers settled in the region the discovery of gold was the making of many towns and continues to support local communities through tourism. The tools of prospecting were simple and relied on gold being a heavier material than water or sand. The process of using a pan or cradle involves movement that encourages the gold to sink and separate from other materials. Picks and shovels were part of the basic prospecting tool kit allowing the hopeful gold seeker to dig up treasure not found on the surface.

Mr E.H. Hargraves, Feb 12th 1851, returning the salute of the gold miners 5th of the ensuing May, painted by T.T. Balcombe June 1851, Image Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, ML 532
Edward Hargraves sailed for California in 1849. Returning to Sydney in 1851, he made his way to the Wellington district and enlisted the help of local John Lister as a guide. They found five specks of gold in Lewis Ponds Creek, in February 1851. In the next weeks Lister and Hargraves travelled the area with limited success. To continue his search he was joined by William and James Tom, who like Lister acted as guides.

After showing the Toms and Lister how to make and use a gold cradle he left and they began working along Lewis Pond and Summer Hill creeks. Hargraves travelled to Sydney to negotiate with the Colonial Secretary regarding his reward for finding gold (he regarded the small amount found at Lewis Pond in February 1851 to be enough to indicate large amounts of gold in the area). By April 1851 William Tom and James Lister found nuggets totalling four ounces as well as a two ounce nugget William Tom noticed in a rock crevice. Hargraves purchased these nuggets and sent some by mail to the Colonial Secretary. Announcing that it was he who had discovered payable gold in the district. Hargraves began a publicity campaign, generating much discussion. He named the region and naming the part of the creek which yielded gold the FitzRoy Bar after the Governor and the area Ophir, after the biblical city of gold.

Hargraves was rewarded by the government with £10,000, an annual pension of £250 and was given the position of Commissioner of Crown Lands for the gold districts. By May 1851 over 300 diggers were at Ophir and the first gold rush had begun.

William Tom and John Lister claimed that they not Hargraves should have been named the discoverers of payable gold. Tom and Lister claimed that while Hargraves had taught them the art of washing gold with the pan and cradle he had abandoned the quest before the payable gold was found.

In the follow fifty years two select committees were formed to resolve the issue. The first in 1853, noted that Tom and Lister played a part but Hargraves was still seen as the main instigator of the discovery. The second Select Committee in 1890 listed Tom and Lister as first discoverers of payable gold.

Recommended reading for teachers: Who discovered the first payable gold in Australia?, Royal Australian Historical Society, 1947, see additional resources.
• 12th February 1851 - Hargraves and Lister located a few specks of gold at Lewis Ponds Creek.
• March 1851 - William Tom, James Tom and John Lister find payable gold.
• 1853 - First Select Committee – noted that Tom and Lister played a part but Hargraves was still seen as the main instigator of the discovery.
• 1870s - Establishment of the Mines Department, systematic recording of mining claims began
• 1890 - Second Select Committee 1890 – listed Tom and Lister as first discoverers of gold

Gold seekers arriving at Bathurst on their way to Ophir, George Angas French, 1851
Image courtesy of the State Library of New South Wales, a1837007
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source material</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>In the Classroom</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="Image" alt="Glass plate negative showing &quot;Ophir Bluff, Where Gold was First found in Australia&quot;, Kerry and Co., 1879-1917" /></td>
<td>Glass plate negative showing &quot;Ophir Bluff, Where Gold was First found in Australia&quot;, Kerry and Co., 1879-1917  Image courtesy of the Powerhouse Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, 85/1284-76</td>
<td>Examine the image and the image below against images of Ophir bluff today. What is the different? What is the same?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| ![Sketch of the gold diggings at Ophir, New South Wales, Thomas Belcombe, 1851](Image) | Sketch of the gold diggings at Ophir, New South Wales, Thomas Belcombe, 1851  Image courtesy of the National Library of Australia, nla.obj-139546162 | Using these images and the resources provided by the State Library NSW examine the living conditions of miners during the gold rush. Ask the question: Was the gold really worth the harsh lifestyle?  
Resources:  
<table>
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<tr>
<td>My Dear Sir</td>
<td>Letter from Edward Hargraves, 16th February 1851 to Mr William Northwood, Sydney</td>
<td>Class discussion: Who found the first payable gold? Using the story of the Toms, Lister and Hargraves and the source material here ask the class to debate who should have got the credit for the discovery of payable gold in Australia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In my last (letter)…you were informed I was about to proceed into the wilderness on my mission. The following day I did so and be it remembered on the memorable day 12th day of February in the year of our Lord – 1851 I did ... discover “Gold” ... I knew I was in gold country 70 miles before I made this discovery ... My opinion is that the Gold Mines of New South Wales are more extensive than those of California. Yours very truly E.H.Hargraves</td>
<td>Transcript: W. B. Clarke - Papers and notebooks, 1827-1951 - Letters to William Northwood, 11 Feb and 16th Feb, 1851 by Edward Hammond Hargraves, Manuscript ML MSS 139/55, State Library NSW</td>
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<td>The following evidence... (about) the first gold discovery in Australia was prepared by us [William Tom] in 1876.... It was prepared to read to a committee of the New South Wales Parliament but having tried...for 20 years to obtain a hearing ...we now adopt the Press (newspaper) in order that the public...(are made aware of the) error in supposing Mr. Hargraves to be the sole discoverer of the first payable gold... (all he did was introduce) the tin-dish system (panning)... (this letter) show(s) ... the reader the unfair, wily, and deep-designing character of Mr. Hargraves...</td>
<td>Paper by William Tom on the discovery of gold, 22nd July 1884 Transcript: William Tom, Papers on the discovery of gold, 1876-1884, Manuscript ML MSS 1149, State Library NSW</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Gold washing cradle, designed by William Tom Jr and Edward Hargraves, made by William Tom, Ophir goldfields, Australia, 1851, Powerhouse Museum H8859</td>
<td>This cradle can be used as evidence for the debate above</td>
</tr>
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<td>Gold washing pan, on loan from Phil Stevenson</td>
<td>Using a gold pan is a simple process of placing soil in the pan and washing in water in a circular motion to allow the gold to separate from the heavier materials.</td>
<td>Borrow a pan from the Visitor Information Centre (<a href="http://www.visitorange.com.au/contact-us">http://www.visitorange.com.au/contact-us</a>) and try out panning with your class. Can use gold painted rocks as examples. Fill a large bucket or plastic pool with water, soil/dirt and the painted rocks. Use the pan in a circular motion to separate the gold from the water and dirt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summerhill ledger book, on loan from Orange and District Historical Society</td>
<td>James Dalton was born at Duntryleague, County Limerick, Ireland in c. 1834 and immigrated to Australia in 1849 aged 15. His father, also James, had been transported to New South Wales for seven years, arriving as a convict on Christmas Eve 1835. James Junior joined his father at Summer Hill, east of Orange, where they ran a store, located on the road to the Ophir goldfields.</td>
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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES


• A History of Australia’s First Gold Field, Ophir NSW, by Robert Bartlett, available to purchase from Visitor Information Centre, Orange or borrow from Orange City Library


Resources
This section contains all source material and activity resources.

All photos, images and maps can only be used for educational purposes. Please contact Orange Regional Museum if you have any questions.
E: museum@orange.nsw.gov.au  P: 02 6393 8444
THE DISCOVERY OF GOLD

SOURCE MATERIAL

Glass plate negative showing "Ophir Bluff, Where Gold was First found in Australia", Kerry and Co., 1879-1917.
Image courtesy of the Powerhouse Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, 85/1204-76.
Sketch of the gold diggings at Ophir, New South Wales, Thomas Belcombe, 1851. Image courtesy of the National Library of Australia, nla.obj-139546162
Gold seekers arriving at Bathurst on their way to Ophir, George Angas French, 1851. Image courtesy of the State Library of New South Wales, a1837007
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William Tom Jr.
Gold washing cradle, designed by William Tom Jr and Edward Hargraves, made by William Tom, Ophir goldfields, Australia, 1851, Powerhouse Museum

Summerhill ledger book, on loan from Orange and District Historical Society

ORANGE REGIONAL MUSEUM