



Paddy Hannan from Quin: Pioneer of the Golden Mile

by Michael Mac Mahon



A miner panning for gold in Western Australia – 'the daily lottery of sluicing gravel and finding wealth'.



he Golden Mile is a strip of country about two miles long between the towns of Kalgoorlie and Boulder in Western Australia. Its size in

relation to the rest of Australia would be like comparing a grain of sand with a football field. Yet, the wealth that has come from the shafts and tunnels that honeycomb the Mile, has changed the political and economic face of Australia. Down below, within an area of one square mile, has been gouged a warren of wealth, which, in the first seventy five years of production, earned the State an estimated 1100 million dollars.

Today the Golden Mile is straddled by the twin towns of Kalgoorlie and Boulder, which between them have a population of about 20,000 persons. Kalgoorlie is a thriving city, being the terminus of the Perth-Kalgoorlie Railway, 380 miles from Perth, and the western terminal of the Commonwealth Railway, linking Western and Southern Australia. It was for many years the hub of a great goldmining industry, and it has recently become the administrative centre of the mining of a new treasure – nickel. In addition, Kalgoorlie has a great tourist potential, mainly associated with the goldmining industry, both past and present.

And yet, less than a hundred years ago, this industrial city which has delivered gold worth upwards of a thousand million dollars was 'virgin dirt', an inhospitable, waterless semi-desert, inhabited by a few Aborigine sandgroppers.

The magic word which transformed the landscape was *gold*, and the man with the Midas touch was a small, slight, bearded man from Quin, Co. Clare, Patrick Hannan. On 15th June, 1893, he and his fellow Irishmen, Thomas Flanagan and Daniel O'Shea found the first nugget on the north end of Mount Charlotte, about thirty miles east of Coolgardie, and exposed to the world the richest square mile of rock ever known. Within three days of the find being reported, there were nearly 750 men on the fields. Excellent results were obtained, and Kalgoorlie (or Hannans, as it was known at first) became a



world-wide name, and its riches attracted men from all walks of life.

*The pulse of commerce throbs to-day,
Along a broad and busy street,
Where once the yellow ounces lay,
Beneath the blacks' unheeded feet.
The merchant in his office schemes,
Where Hannan lifted virgin dirt;
The locomotive roars and screams,
Where untrud bush the diggings girt;
A transformation unforeshadowed
By all those men who searched for
gold.*

Patrick Hannan, or 'Paddy' as he was usually known to his prospecting friends, was born at Ballyroughan, about 4 miles south-east of Quin in 1843. The Hannan homestead is now reduced to rubble and only a tiny fragment of wall remains, incorporated in a field fence on Mrs. Helen Armstrong's farm, on a slope overlooking Rathluby Lake. Bridget Fox, who worked for many years in the Armstrong home, and who died in the thirties, at the age of 103, remembered the Hannan home, and often recalled young Paddy's favourite pastime of playing ball against the gable of the house. Little of the family history is known, but, viewed against the turmoil of the post-Famine years, this is not surprising. It is known, however, that Paddy Hannan emigrated to Australia in 1863. He was then aged twenty, and was only one of the thousands who were arriving in that country at that time from everywhere, attracted by the 1850-1870 gold rushes. After working for some years around the various gold-diggings of Ballarat and Bendigo, Hannan went mining in New Zealand for six years. He returned to Australia to prospect in New South Wales, Queensland, Tasmania and South Australia. In 1889 he came to Western Australia, and was a pioneer of the Parkers Range and Southern Cross rushes. A few miles out of Southern Cross is a shaft known as Paddy Hannan's Shaft.

Conditions in the settlements of Western Australia were primitive and difficult in a land where cars and smooth roads were forty years away. The first arrivals lived in tents, or merely spread their swag on the ground. Hard on their heels came camel teams, horse-drawn wagons with water, food, clothing, boots, cases of whiskey, timber for dryblowers ... 'trees and scrub vanished and the place was transformed into one long dust-heap'. Soon there were shacks made from hessian hung from poles, canvas, beaten out kerosene tins, anything. Dust from the teamsters and from the diggings was everywhere. Fresh food was non-existent, and they lived on tea, canned meat and 'camp-fire bread' made from flour, water and baking powder. The early towns had no sanitation; flies were abundant and water very scarce. Over 1,000 men buried in

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Kalgoorlie cemetery were under 26 years, and few people lived beyond 40. These conditions did not improve until 1903, when a pipeline brought abundant water to the goldfields. Life was strenuous, hard and lonely in a land which had only 'heat, dust, flies and gold'.

For the prospector, life in Western Australia was particularly rough. The absence of water was the fatal draw-

back, and was responsible, in numerous instances, for terrible deaths in the bush from thirst. All the more reason, therefore, that we must admire the courage of those who ventured on what was as likely as not to prove a 'will o' the wisp' expedition, with only frustration and misery at the end of the trail.

On 7th June, 1893 Hannan and his two mates, Flanagan and O'Shea, had set out from Coolgardie following a



rumour about gold at an indefinite place 'somewhere to the east'. The country was dry and cold, and there was a lack of fresh drinking water. On 15th June they were forced to stop at a place now known as Mount Charlotte in order to search for one of their horses which had strayed away from the team. While searching for the animal, the first piece of gold was found. What happened next is recorded in the Occurrence Book at Coolgardie Police Station under the date, 17th June, 1893:

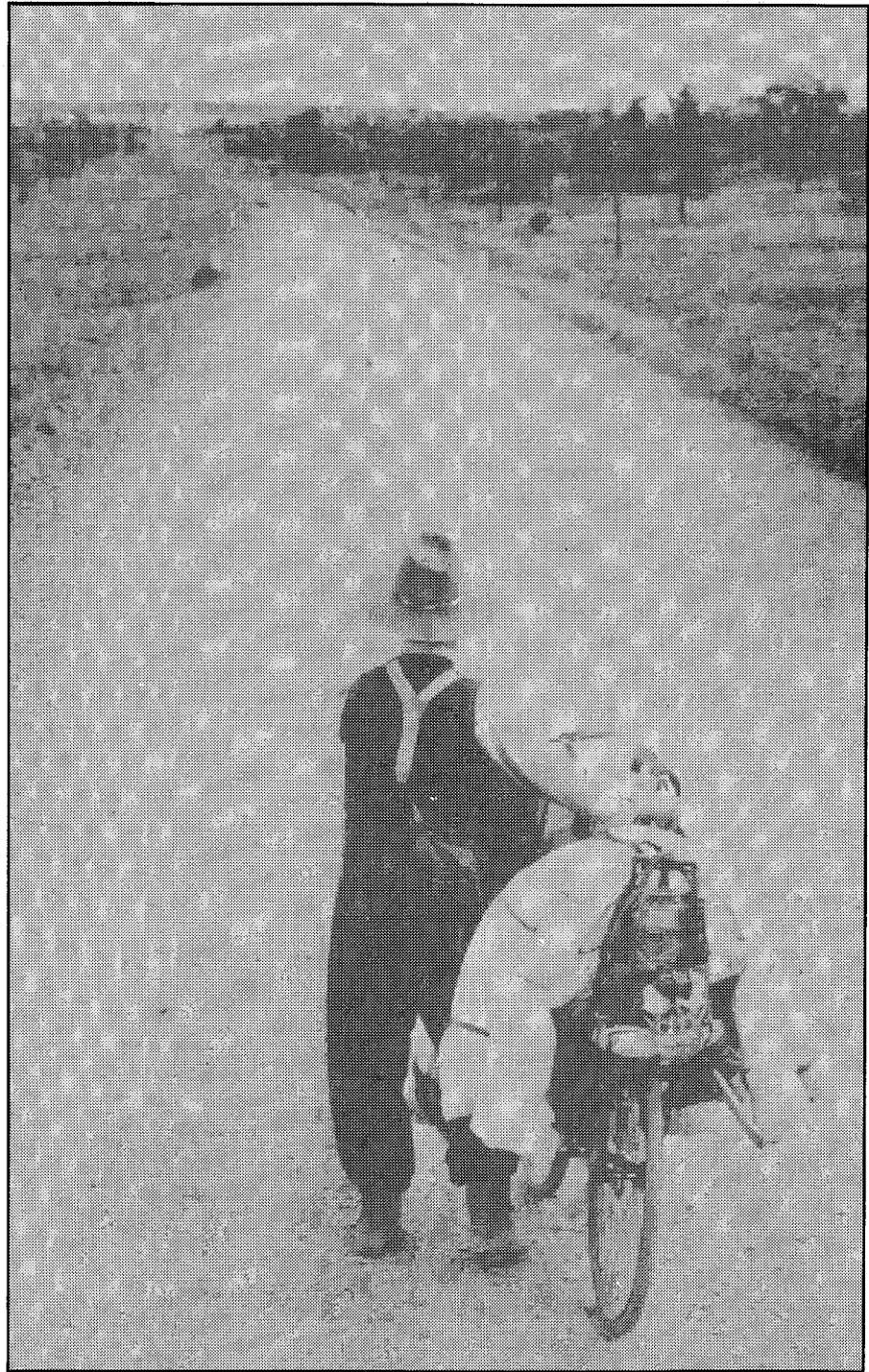
At 7 p.m. Patrick Hannan reported at the station that he and Thomas Flanagan had discovered payable alluvial gold on the 15th. inst. about thirty miles east north east of Coolgardie and unearthed 100 oz. in two days. Hannan states there is no water on the field.

Constable McLeod, who took the report, was unaware that his brief entry would change the course of Western Australia's history.

The gold rush that followed Hannan's find was the greatest in the history of the country. Men came on foot, on horseback, on camels, by coach or car, all lured by the hope of instant wealth. And so the towns of Kalgoorlie and Boulder were born. Hundreds of men began working claims in the area, which was then known as Hannan's Find. By 1895 the mines that constitute the Golden Mile had begun to reveal their riches, and a great promotion boom started in London. Hundreds of mining companies were floated to speculate on the rich reefs. The mining and investment boom reached its climax in the wild years between 1897 and 1903. In 1896 a railway line from Kalgoorlie to Perth was opened, thus connecting the capital of Perth with the 'City of Gold'. In 1903 a pipeline brought water 350 miles from a reservoir near Perth. The pipeline worked miracles. Not only did it bring water to the parched towns of the goldfields, it also nurtured the wheatbelt towns along its route.

Neither Paddy Hannan nor his friends made very much out of the find, and Paddy left Kalgoorlie in January, 1894, his intention being, in his own words, to enjoy a holiday, as he had then been in the goldfields for some years. He stated that he was not in the best of health, and had not seen the sea since 1889.

In July, 1897, Paddy Hannan came back as a visitor to Kalgoorlie. He was soon recognised and treated as a very important person. He was entertained officially by the Mayor and afterwards driven in a coach drawn by five horses for a tree-planting ceremony, at the spot where he had camped in June, 1893, and where he had found his first gold. The *Kalgoorlie Miner* reported that, on his return to town, Hannan was



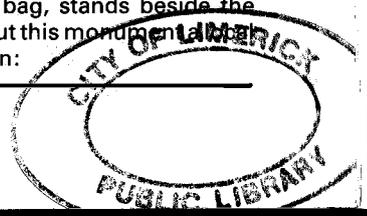
Swagman on the road to Wilcannia, New South Wales.

accorded a welcome at Hannan's Club, and elected an honorary member.

After some years in Western Australia, Paddy retired to Victoria, and lived with two nieces at 6 Fallon Street, in the Melbourne suburb of Brunswick. Some few years ago, a plaque to his memory was put on the house by the local council, in co-operation with the Royal Historical Society of Victoria. Even though Hannan was the discoverer of a goldfield that has yielded over a thousand million dollars worth of gold, it was necessary for the State to grant him a pension of 150 dollars

per annum to sustain him in later years. He died on the 14th November, 1925, at the age of 82, and was buried in Melbourne's general cemetery. In recent years the grave has been restored by the Chamber of Mines in Western Australia.

But Kalgoorlie has gone to greater lengths to honour the memory of its distinguished founder. A magnificent bronze statue of Hannan, incorporating a drinking fountain in the shape of a miner's water bag, stands beside the town hall. About this monument the poet has written:





Today there are younger strong hands at the reins,
 But the gallant old prospector always remains:
 He's there in the sunset, the trees and the dust,
 His spirit is ours: his land is our trust.

Yes! Old Paddy Hannan in sunshine or rain,
 Dwells in the street which carries his name,
 His majesty watches, out there, all alone,
 'The King of Kalgoorlie' on his street-corner throne.

The street which carries his name is Kalgoorlie's main street, and in any of the local bars there a visitor today can purchase a pint of Hannan lager. The Hannan Hotel and the old Hannan Railway Station are other important landmarks.

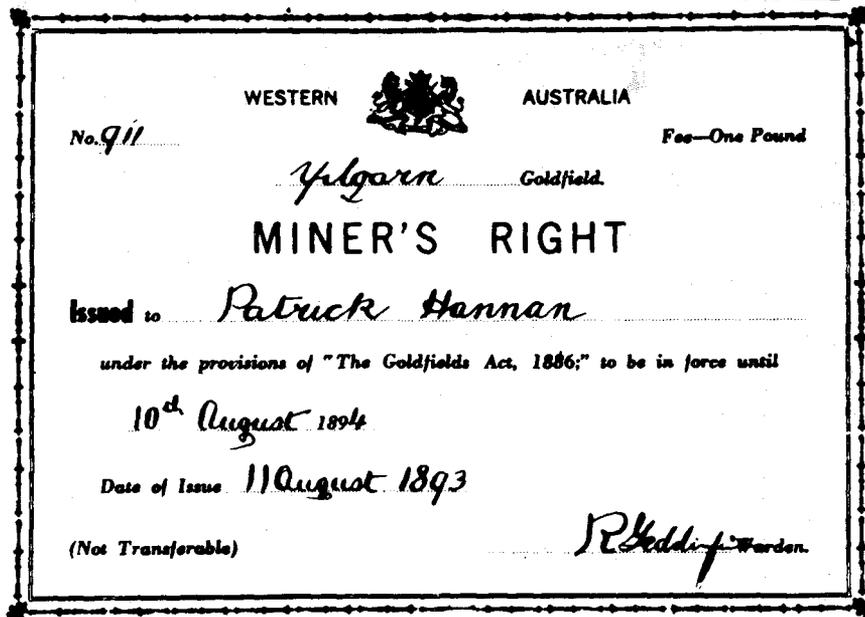
What sort of man was Hannan? A reporter of the *Kalgoorlie Miner*, who interviewed Paddy in 1897, described him as 'very pleasant and genial, as his nationality could not well prevent him from being, while in appearance a ruddy complexion betokens a healthy and vigorous outdoor life. Concerning himself he is not disposed to be very communicative'.

Hannan never became a rich man and seemed to prefer the adventure of prospecting to any wealth which it might bring. It is perhaps typical of the man that his first gold was given to Mrs. Clara Paton who had befriended him on one occasion when he was ill, and Mrs. Paton wore the little nugget with some pride. On Hannan's achievements, the *Kalgoorlie Miner* in its edition of August 4, 1897, commented:

It has not been the rare good fortune of many men to be the first to pitch their camp in the midst of a wilderness of a particularly uninviting character and on a spot destined in a few brief years to be the site of a populous and flourishing town. Less often has it been the lot of anyone to discover a source of hidden wealth in an unexploited country, thus opening up a rich, vast and hitherto unfruitful tract of country ... To still fewer men is it given to have their names permanently associated with a rich and important district and to have been the first to discover the fountain of its greatness.

Paddy Hannan, from Ballyroughan, was one of those few, and for this Australia has placed his name on permanent record.

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Paddy Hannan's mining permit.



The monument to Patrick Hannan in Kalgoorlie's main street. The miner's bag functions as a drinking fountain.