

Miners in rush for goldfields jewellery

Peter Fish

Record gold bullion prices seem to be a thing of the past, but gold jewellery – and especially Australian goldfields jewellery – always has the power to surprise.

Leonard Joel's head of jewellery, John D'Agata, figured he might get a healthy price for a nice goldfields item offered at the long-established Melbourne firm's sale on March 24.

It was a brooch featuring a goldminer's windlass and bucket, flanked by a pick and shovel, set on a baton and surmounted by an arch bearing the prominent wording, Coolgardie, all contained in an original fitted box.

D'Agata said it attracted enthusiastic bidding from the room and from some five or six phone bidders. There were also absentee offers including internet bidders interested in just this one lot.

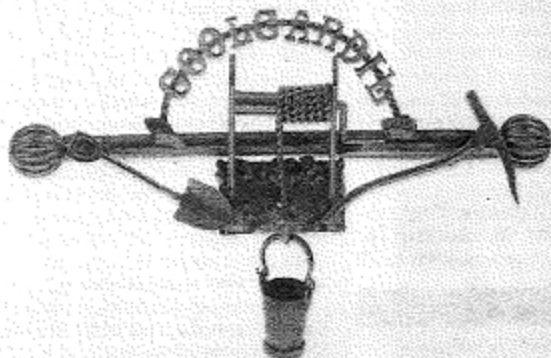
The hammer price was \$14,000, some 14 times the lower estimate, or \$17,080 including buyer's premium. Mr D'Agata said that with several bidders actually in the mining business, "the mining boom is not over".

Back in the 1890s, Coolgardie, in the WA goldfields, was boom-town central, the third-largest city in Australia and home to some 700 mining companies registered on the London Stock Exchange, and many of these elaborate brooches were commissioned as keepsakes by newly rich diggers.

Few of the makers can be identified, although this one was attributed to Joseph Pearl.

Mr D'Agata said that just a few months earlier a goldfields brooch fetched \$3000 on an estimate of just a few hundred. He believes WA miners are once again celebrating the grand old days with expensive mementos.

But perhaps the \$17,000 price should not have come as a big surprise. Just a few months earlier, at Bonhams in Sydney in November, a goldfields brooch circa 1855 depicting a miner with shovel and pan brought \$21,960 including premium, while a 1900 miner's brooch by Louis Boxhorn of Perth, with windlass and bucket and bearing the wording Westralia, sold for \$20,740. Both realised more than seven times the lower estimate.



Power to surprise: The brooch, featuring a goldminer's windlass and bucket, flanked by a pick and shovel, set on a baton and surmounted by the Coolgardie arch, sold for \$14,000.