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Wollaston, Tullie Cornthwaite (1863–1931)

by Bernard O'Neil

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Tullie Cornthwaite Wollaston (1863-1931), opal dealer, was born on 17 May 1863 at Port Lincoln, South Australia, fourth child of George Gledstanes Wollaston, sheep farmer, and his wife Mary Glover, née MacGowan, both English born, and grandson of Archdeacon Wollaston. Registered at birth as Henry Herbert, next year he was baptized Tullie Cornthwaite; he was always known by that name. He grew up on his father's station at Lake Hamilton where he acquired a lifelong appreciation of the land and its flora and fauna. After boarding at the Collegiate School of St Peter, Adelaide, where he proved a capable athlete, in 1881 he entered the public service. On 30 December 1886 in the Glenelg Congregational Church he married Emma Sarah Manthorpe; they were to have eleven children. Resigning from the Survey Office, he worked as a private surveyor and draughtsman before becoming involved in mining and marketing sapphires and the gems found by David Lindsay.

During 1888 Wollaston learned of an opal discovery in the Kyabra Hills, Queensland. Backed by Adelaide investors, on 21 November he set out by rail with the surveyor Herbert Buttfield; from the State's north, they used camels to cross harsh terrain. They arrived early next year, inspected the opal strike, bought specimens and obtained leases. Wollaston then sailed for London only to find that dealers were suspicious of the superior Australian stone. Having sold a little which was worked by lapidarists and sent to the United States of America, he came back to Adelaide and formed a partnership with the solicitor David Morton Tweedie. Late in 1889 Wollaston examined opal specimens sent to him from White Cliffs, near Wilcannia, New South Wales. Visiting the new find, he met Edmund Francis Murphy who subsequently became his agent. Wollaston sold White Cliffs opal to European and American buyers in London; in 1897-99 he annually spent about £50,000 buying stones for sale abroad. His generous valuations caused Tweedie to break their partnership.

In 1905 Murphy began buying for him on the field at Lightning Ridge, New South Wales. Taking specimens of the 'black opal' to the world market in 1906-08, Wollaston again encountered scepticism; by 1911 he had more than he could sell. He was next engaged in an unsuccessful pearling venture off Broome, Western Australia. When opal was found early in 1915 at Stuart Range (later Coober Pedy), South Australia, Wollaston bought the first parcel; he took specimens to America in 1916 and sold a significant quantity to a firm in Paris in 1919. In the mid-1920s he backed efforts to develop the Uley graphite and limestone deposits near Port Lincoln. As a director of Graphite Ltd, he visited London in December 1929, but failed to attract interest in the company's mine which closed after his return in 1930.

From 1881 Wollaston had transacted numerous land deals in Adelaide and on Eyre Peninsula. He bought land in 1904 at Bridgewater in the Adelaide Hills where he established Raywood, planting many exotic and native trees and shrubs, and propagating the popular claret ash; nearby, about 1925, he also set up Ray Nursery to encourage the planting of native flora. Raywood was later sold to (Sir) Alexander Downer and named Arbury Park; in 1965 it was transferred to the State government and again called Raywood. Wollaston's love of Australia's natural beauty shone through his publications, *The Spirit of the Child* (1914) and *Our Wattles* (1916). To accompany his display of opals at the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley, London, he wrote the semi-autobiographical *Opal: The Gem of the Never-Never* (1924).

Slim and dapper in appearance, Wollaston was a cultured, humane and religious man who loved children. He was hardy and resourceful in outback travel and 'fair and square' in business. Survived by his wife, three sons and six daughters, he died of cancer on 17 July 1931 at his Lower Mitcham home and was buried in St



Tullie Cornthwaite Wollaston (1863-1931), by unknown photographer, c1920

State Library of South Australia, SLSA: B 16758

Jude's Anglican churchyard, Brighton, Adelaide. His estate was sworn for probate at £17,719.

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