

The
History
Of a
Newcastle
Coalminer

By

Cathy Holmes

Aust. History

Tues. 1pm - 3pm

The History of a Newcastle Coalminer

"Cathy Holmes, for Australian History, Interviewing Alan Murnain, on the history of coalmining in Newcastle. 3.8.89. % maurene cres. Charlestown."

Cathy:- "When did you get started in coalmines?"

Alan:- "I started in early 50's as a sixteen year old boy. The mine work was appealing to young fellow's, as the money was attractive, the hours were attractive, but the job was hard."

Cathy:- "Why did you get started in the mine's?"

Alan:- "My family was always a mining family. My grandfather was in the mines in the late 1800's. In 1880's. He owned mines of his own. We, what, they called "rat holes". They used to go and rob coal left from the big collieries. My father was also in the mines, his uncles, my brother. So I knew from a very early age, that I'd be going into the mines, soon as I was old enough. The.."

Cathy:- "What job's have you done?"

Alan:- "Done all job's that in the mine, that a coalminer could do, cause when we first started, it was all contract mining. Coal was won by pick and shovel. It was drawn out to the shaft by the horses and endless ropes. So when I started, I started a job called clipping, and that was clipping ship's onto an endless rope that took them into the miners to be filled. I progressed from clipping to with the horses, that was bringing the coal out to the ropes. I went from there, to the face, where we won coal by pick

Alan cont.: The history of a Newcastle Coalminer and shovel. In 1960 the colliery, was, where I worked south Waratah, turned to mechanical mining where we replaced horses and pick and shovel with Machinery. You had conveyer belts to take the coal out. You had shuttle cars to bring the coal from the face and you had loaders to load the coal. I done the shuttle car driving, I done the loader driving. I done coal cutting, roof bolting and we progressed from there to what they call a "continuous miner". They replaced the cutters, that is they done the cutting and loading themselves, it was a continual process and the machine kept advancing as it cut, you supported the roof and you went off the machine, you bolted off the machine, every, every bit of coal won was done by that machine. I took six men to work this machine, plus the shuttle cars. Where as the loader used to take 27 men. Production more than doubled. So you got to the stage, where you didn't need as didn't need as many men and that was the reason. We had a lot of men put off work. Technology improved, production improved less men required. That Colliery closed down in 1960, it was South Waratah, it had been operating since the 1860's - 1870's was owned by a Scottish Company called the Calladonia Company. When it closed down I got a job in Stockton Borehole owned by the B.H.P. That was the same sort of work, when I first started there, loaders, Continuous miners, shuttle cars and the latter stages when I worked there we went to a new system called Longwall mining, where as the Continuous miner replaced the loader, Long wall mining replaced the continuous miner as far as production bringing coal out it is

Alan cont.: The History of a Newcastle Coalminer.

total extraction of the coal, no coal left behind. Where as the loaders you had a "pillar system" and you leave pillars of coal behind with Longwall mining it is total extraction and it advances, as it advances it, the roof behind falls, there's no timber, there's no roof support other than the shields over the long wall and it is the most modern up to date and best way there is getting coal and probably one of the safest."

Cathy:- "What are the Highs and Low's of mining?"

Alan:- "There's lots of highs. There's comradeship in the mines that you don't seem to get in any other industries or shops. Their always there to help as friends when you need help.

And the low's, is the low's are there's alot of danger attached, there's alot of injuries, there's deaths, it's a hazardest job. We know that when we go into the job. But there is alot of low's but there outweighed by the high's.

I have personally lost one brother in a mining accident. I had another brother completely buried in a fall, for four and a half hours. He will never work underground again. But he is alright as health goes now, other than back troubles. I myself have had numerous injuries.

But, I still, looking back over the 35 years, I've spent underground I do not regret it. It has been a good provider. The miner has come from a backwood, dirty labour, I mean dirty in the sense that coal and dust, grime. To a very highly mechanized man. It is now more the speacially job than a labourer's job. Most

Alan cont:- The History of a Newcastle Coalminer.

of the young men that come into the mines, now are tradesmen of other vocations. There's builders, carpenters, surveyors all come into the mines. Majority would not leave, unless they had to. Like I say there's high's and low's, but I think the high's outweigh the low's."

Cathy:- "Can you remember the daily routines in the mine when you first started?"

Alan:- "The daily routines when I first started, being contract mining was very hectic. The reason being, the quicker you fill your dag, your dag is the number of ships you had to fill, you went home because it was contract work. You had a tonnage or a number of ships to fill and then you went home. So it was always a race to see who got in the cage first because the cage only held a certain amount of men so the first one's down were the first one's down were the first one's in. Goodminers could fill their dag within three to four hours and go home. Other miners took longer. It also depended on the place you got, some places were better than others. Some conditions were better than others. That was the routine, you got down, went down in the cage at seven in the morning went to your various jobs, clipper's went to their jobs. Wheeler's took the horses in. The miners went straight into the face and started. The miners had to do their own coal getting, that they had to bore their own holes, they had to stem their own holes with explosives, they had to fire their own shots, they had to do their own timbering, their own road laying for the ships to come in, there was more than just shovelling coal.

Alan cont. The History of a Newcastle Coalminer

A man off the street couldn't come down and do the job. Because you had to know where to bore the holes, you had to know how much powder to use, you had to make sure that you were protected, above your head all the time. That routine changed when contract mining stopped, because you got your contract mining to daywage mining and there was no dag, there was no quoter, you just mined all day. So it wasn't so hectic because they weren't as keen to get into the face. But then the company come up with a bonus idea and the bonus idea was the more coal you produced the more bonus you got above your wage. So then the work started to speed up. Personally I would never have been in favour of bonuses. Lot of short cuts were taken people weren't as safety conscious because some times safety got in the road of production and there were short cuts taken just to get that extra bonus."

Cathy: - "What benefits did the miners, with their strikes and struggles achieve for Newcastle?"

Alan: - "The strikes and struggles that the miners had, alot was unnecessary, due mainly to the nature of their work, I suppose it was hard, it was tedious the miner was a ruff sort of a person, half of them would rather have a beer than work. But alot of the strikes they took on did benefit all workers. The miners were the first to get holidays, public holidays. They were the first to get annual leave. They were the first to get sick pay, long service leave all these benefits flowed on. They had big long strikes that hurt the community. They weren't

Alan cont.: The History of a Newcastle miner.

real popular. But looking back over the years I'd say that they deserved what they got. They had the "Lockout" in the 1930's which was a very long strike. They also had the 49', the 1949 strike, that was nine weeks. During that strike the Labour government put the troops in, into the mines. But they done that much damage, because they didn't want to go in, they didn't like mines. Anybody who's not born to be a miner, they would not like it see, and they didn't like going down, they done more damage than good. I can always remember, I must have been twelve, thirteen, the soldiers had a machine gun on our corner, cause I lived out back of WalleSEND towards Minmi. I could never understand why. I still can't understand how a Labour government would do that. But I suppose you got to keep your economy going, and. But then their strikes did have alot of benefits, alot of people benefit by it, wasn't real good at the time. There was not much money around and, but I think it's, it's really was a start of the union movement in a big way and I think there would be alot of people worse off, if those strikes and struggles didn't go on, hadn't gone on."

Cathy:- "Could you tell me a bit more of the history of Coal mines in Newcastle?"

Alan:- "The history's, I can tell you, the pits that started my, my grandfather and a Mr Douglas started "stacky no 1" and that's going back in the 1890's. They were

Alan cont:- The History of a Newcastle coalminer also the first people to take pillars. Have I told you that one before?"

Cathy: - "Yes."

Alan:- "I told you that one before. They started stocky pit, they also had pits of their own. There was a lot of pits blown up in the 1890's till the 1920's due to naked light down the pit. That is we used to have, I never, but the miners used to wear a naked light on their hat. There were no safety lights, no battery lights, these used to ignite packets of gas, and nearly every pit, every mine in the Newcastle area at one time or other has had an explosion. One of the worse explosions, probably, was the Killingworth mine. It was a very big explosion. The poppet heads, what we call the poppet heads, they held the cage that went down the shaft. That was full of debraye from down the pit, it was full of skips and rope and parts of the cage. That pit has blown up again, recently again. It blew up in 19 - in the 1930's. But they are back working at it now. It, eh gas was a very big problem in the early times of the mines. It's improved now because of the bigger and better safety conditions we have. The uh Newcastle was pocketed with mines, small mines. Especially during the war, every man dug his own reef down to a coal seam, because the borehole seam is very shallow in areas as low as twelve, fifteen, twenty feet below the surface and the whole of Cardiff here was full of mines during the war.

Alan cont:- A History of a Newcastle coalminer.

During the war there was no slack to be, slack coal to be filled, all coal had to be filled by pitch forks. That's how times changed. All they want now is slack coal and it's, it's a complete different industry now."

Cathy:- "Are you still in the mines, and did you progress to a higher position in the mines?"

Alan:- "I'm not in the mines anymore. I had an accident in January, 89' this year, which forced me to leave. Which is a bit hard to take at the present. As far as progressing, I went from a miner to a deputy. A deputy is what they call a third class ticketed man, there's a manager, his first class, under manager, second class, deputy's third class. The deputy's in charge of the underground working's as far as safety, production and general running of the mine. He looks after panels of men. Some are production panels. Some are what they call out-by crews. He, main aim, his main obligation is safety, safety first then production."

Cathy:- "What did you have to do to become a deputy?"

Alan:- "To become a deputy you have to be in the mines at the face, three, four, five, years. It's changed since I was a deputy, because I became a deputy in 1970, I think it's five years now, you got to be at the face. Then you do a tech. Course, if you pass you can, you use, to be able to do it

Alan cont:- A History of a Newcastle coalminer.
in twelve months, but now it's either two year or three year course, it is a very indept course. You have to know all the mining aspects as far as mechanical, gasses, electrical, mechanically, Mechanical parts. You have to really know all the mining duties, that's got to be done underground otherwise you won't pass."

Cathy:- "How did it feel from becoming a miner to a deputy?"

Alan:- "Certainly very different, it is easier to take orders, than to give orders. I know how people feel when, espeacially, like when your in the army, you know how you felt about your sgt. Majors and anyone that give you an order, you weren't real kind to them. Well it, it was a different, you got a different approach, altogether, you got to chang your attitude, you got to change your thinking, you try to be fair. Because these men, who you now, giving orders to, you work with and. But on the whole men, are, the men are pretty good and your fair with them, they'll, be fair with you. But like I say, it's very different giving orders, to what it is taking orders."

Cathy:- "How did your mates take it, one minute your your their mate, next minute your their boss?"

Alan:- "Some don't change your relationship, don't change, with the majority of men. Some men you can get off side with pretty quickly, because they don't take to one of their friends telling

Alan cont:- A History of a Newcastle Coalminer.

them what to do. But on the whole the majority of men take it, and if your fair to them, they'll be fair to you. It is a good job, it's a very, you got alot of responsibility as a deputy, you are the man who has got to make sure everything's OK. You have government inspectors that make sure you don't do the wrong thing. If anything goes wrong down the pit, if anyone gets hurt, the deputy's got to explain, how it happened and his got to make sure he hasn't done anything that would have caused this accident to happen. It is sometimes stressful, but on the whole it's a pretty good job."

Cathy:- "Ok, thanks for your time, and interview

A History of a Newcastle coalminer

The summary

This interview goes through a small part of a miner's life. From when he started as a sixteen year old boy, through to when he retired due to an accident. (The accident was not work related.)

Alan's family has always been in the mines in Newcastle, since the 1800's with his grandfather, who owned some of his own pits. (Ray-Loles)

Alan has had various jobs in the mine, he started, being a clipper, to working with horses, to being a miner and then becoming a deputy, which is a very important job. He explains briefly what each job consists of, and how technology changed from when the miner did most of the work, through to the most modern machinery today.

Then Alan talked about some of the highs and lows. The comradeship there is in the mines a closeness you wouldn't find in any other job. In the lows there are the dangers and the personal tragedies, Alan lost one of his brothers in a mine accident, the other brother injured in a mine accident never to work underground again. He also has suffered injuries.

Mining changed from contract mining. Contract mining, being, you had a set tonnage to get done each day. The quicker you did it, the quicker you went home. Then they brought in daywage mining. The miners were not impressed with that, so, the company brought in a bonus system, which made things a little dangerous at times.

A History of a Newcastle coalminer

The summary

- ? The miners may have been responsible for the union movement in Newcastle. ^{Mr. Murray} They ~~had~~ ^{stated that there were a lot of} ~~lot~~ ^{some} of strikes. ~~some~~ were unnecessary though some of the strikes ^{paid} ~~paid~~ off and the miners were first to get a lot of things like holiday ^{pay} ~~pay~~, annual leave etc... They had long strikes are in the ^{1930's} ~~1930's~~ called the "Lockout". Then ~~another one~~ ¹⁹⁴⁹ In 1949, in which the Labour government ^{according to Mr. Murray} bought the troops in. They did ~~more~~ ^{much} damage than good. ^{because of their inexperience}
- A lot of the pits blew up between the 1890's till the 1930's ^{mainly} due to the miners wearing naked lights on their hats ^{and} igniting pockets of gas.
- ? During the war Newcastle was pocketed with mines, everyman dug his own reef because the coal seam was shallow in areas.
- Alan enjoyed his years as a coalminer.

On the other hand, the latter method is better if the low-lying
mineral deposits occur and mining operations will be carried
out by the use of the machine a mining machine that will
be used for the rest of the machine. The coal is then moved
back to the surface and loaded into a truck or a portable loader
for transport to the surface. The latter method is better if the
mineral deposits are located in a deep shaft.

These are the

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in the interview

NEW TYPES

The new types of mining are the use of coal and subject to great
pressure from the surrounding material, which tends to fill the
space. The top of the shaft, known as the roof, is supported by
timber and steel props. The latter are placed in the roof and
the shaft is supported by the floor. The latter are placed in the
roof and the shaft is supported by the floor. The latter are placed
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In recent years, the use of coal mining has become more common.
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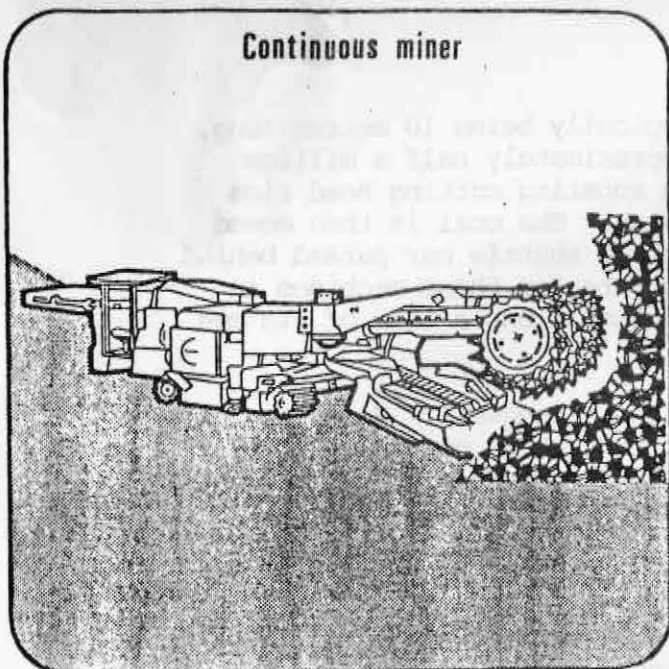
However, the coal can be reduced by using a gas which will
divert some of the pressure from the roof. The latter are placed
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Continuous miner

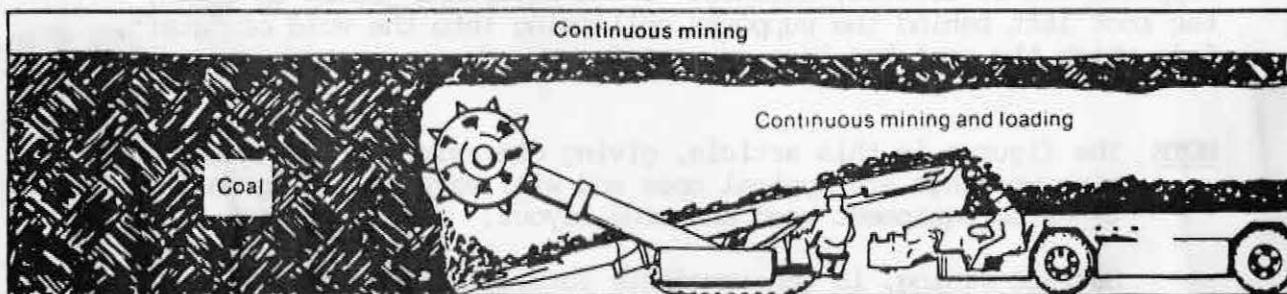


Continuous miner loading shuttle car.

Shuttle car unloading onto conveyor.

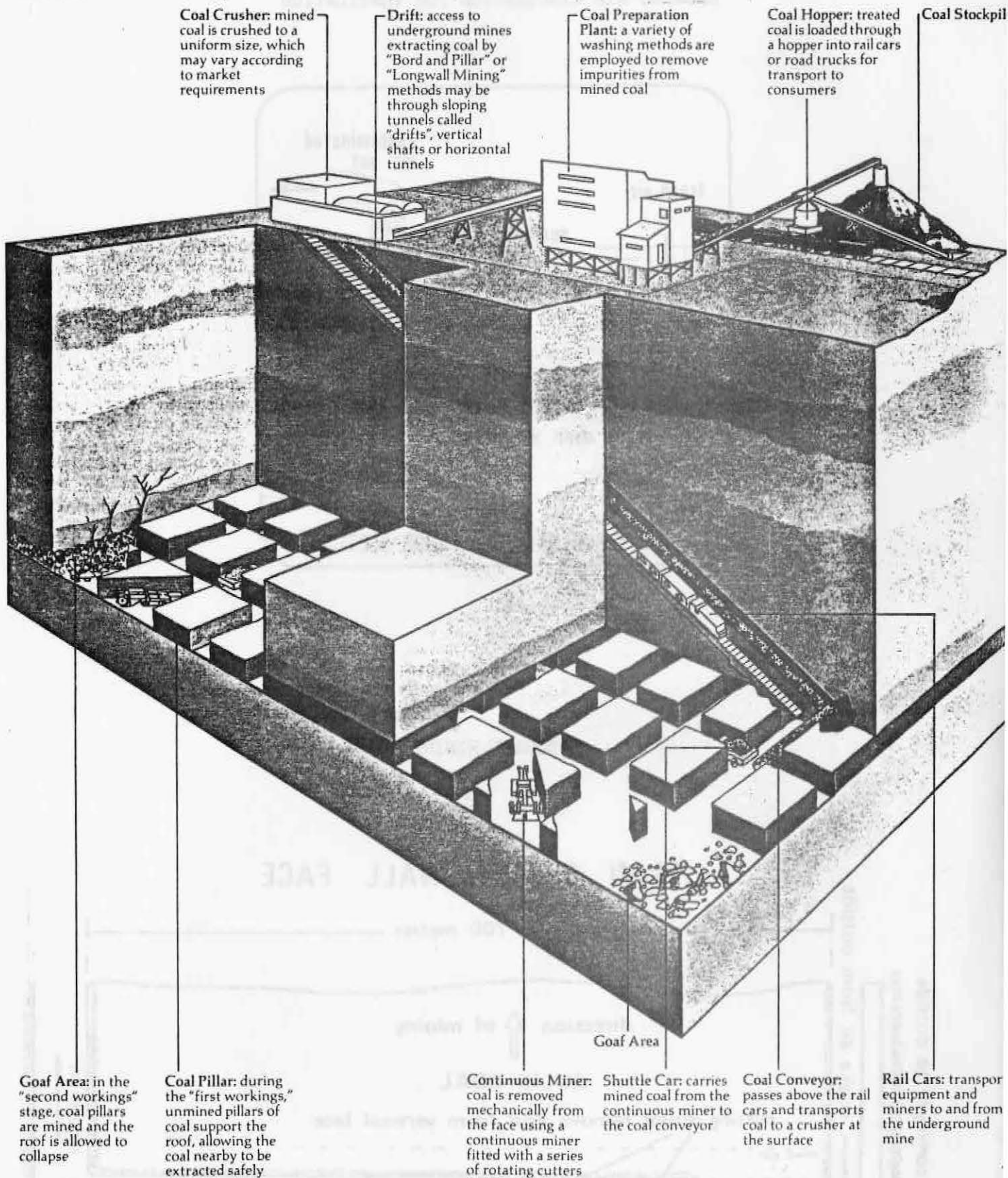


Continuous mining



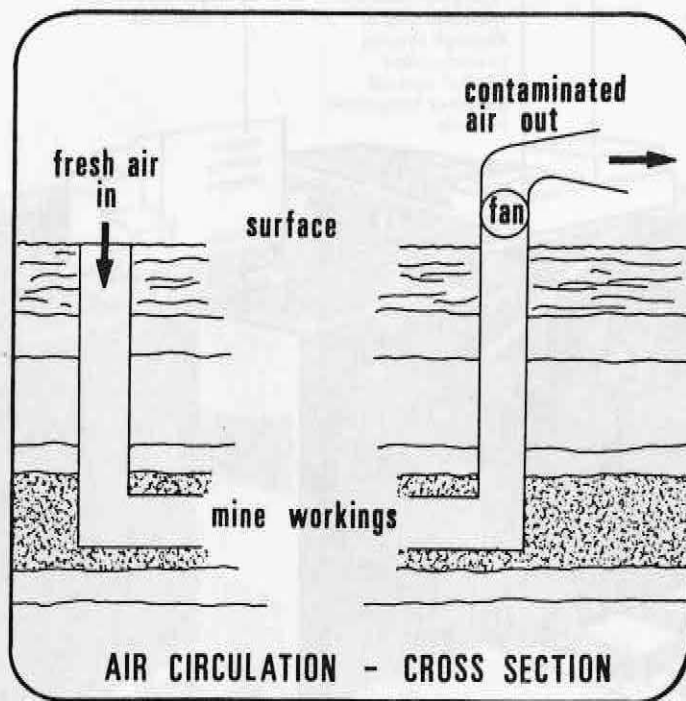
Continuous mining and loading

Bord and Pillar Mining (plan of workings - ventilation not shown)



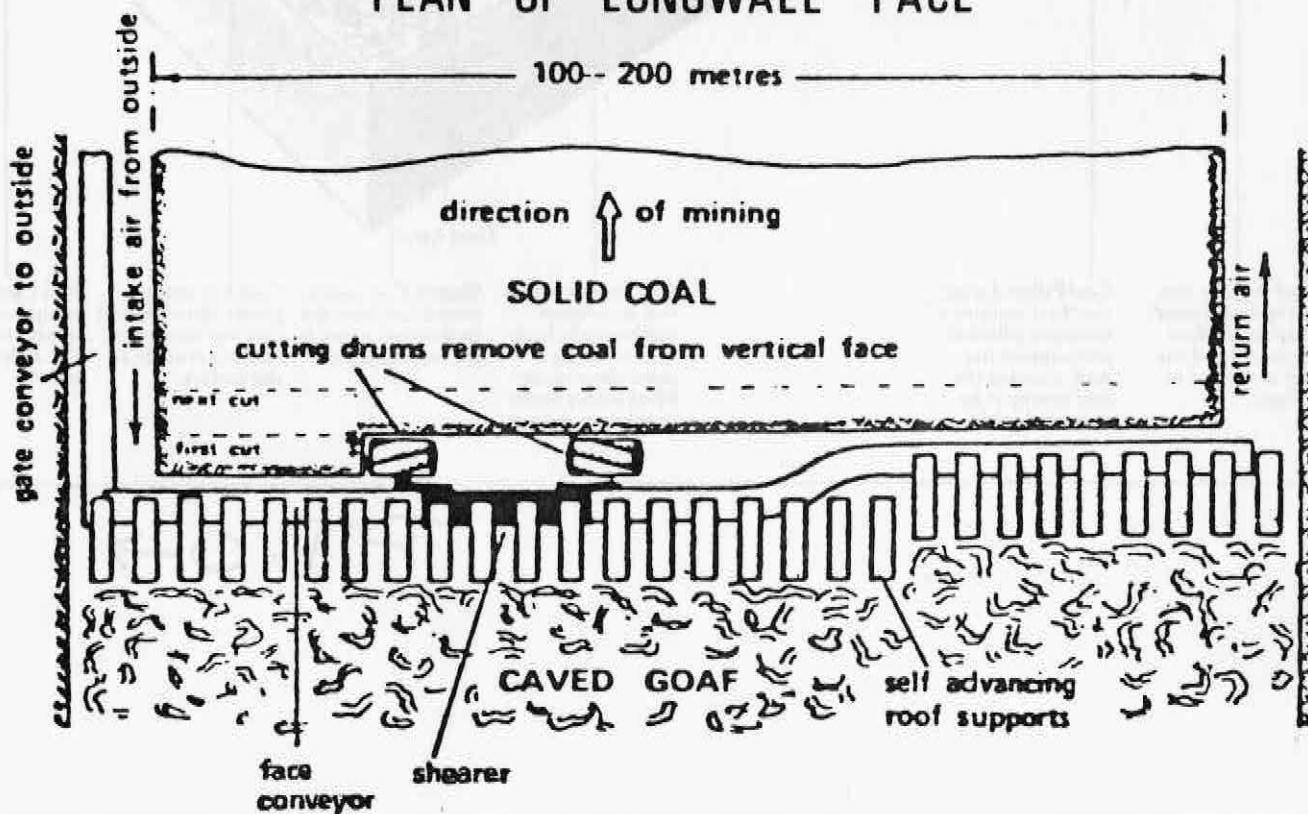
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CROSS SECTION OF UNDERGROUND MINE
SHOWING AIR CIRCULATION FOR VENTILATION



LONGWALL MINING

PLAN OF LONGWALL FACE

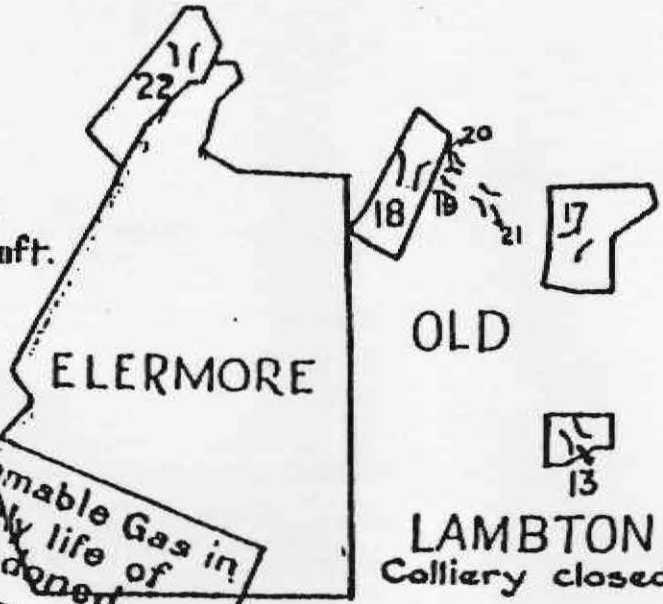


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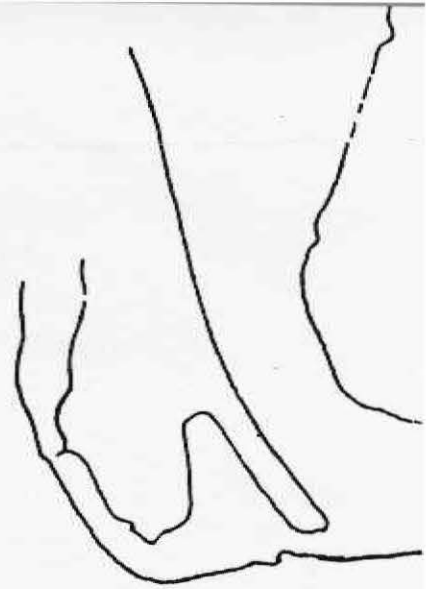
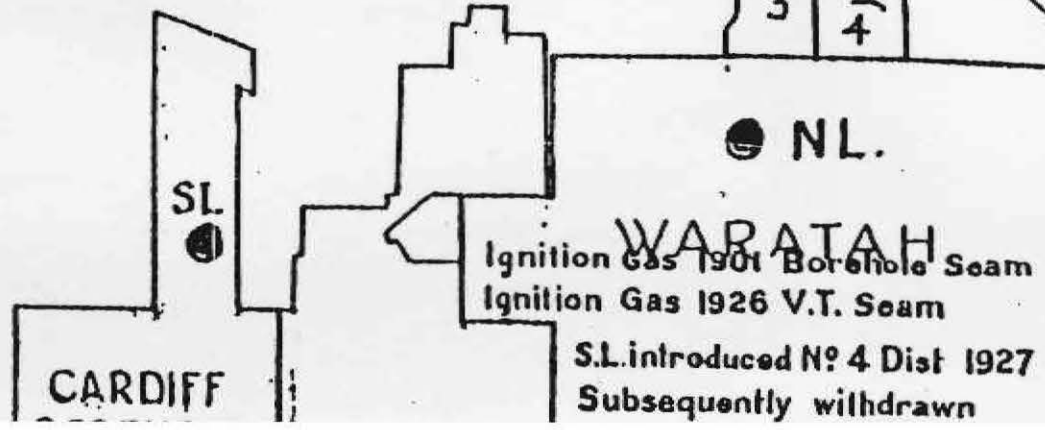
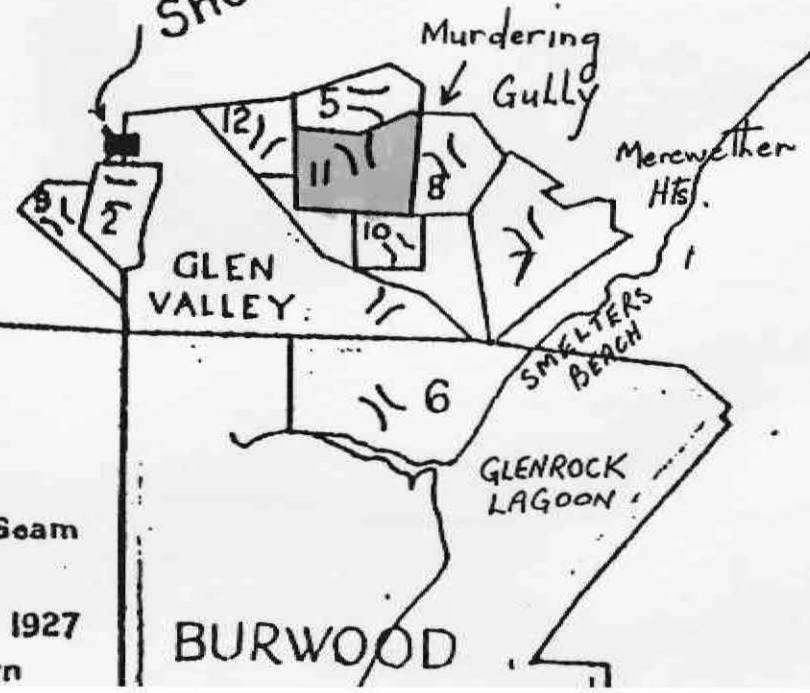
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ALLSEND NL
approx. position of shaft.
Colliery closed.

is & reports of Inflammable Gas in
pillar areas during early life of
this area now abandoned



Ignition Gas 1926
Shortland Colly. V.T. Seam



M.A.C.P.

Colliery closed.
Ignition Gas 1925
V.T. Seam

NEWCASTLE COAL FIELD

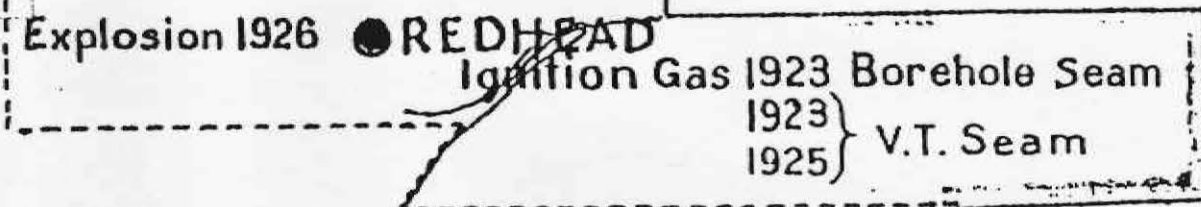
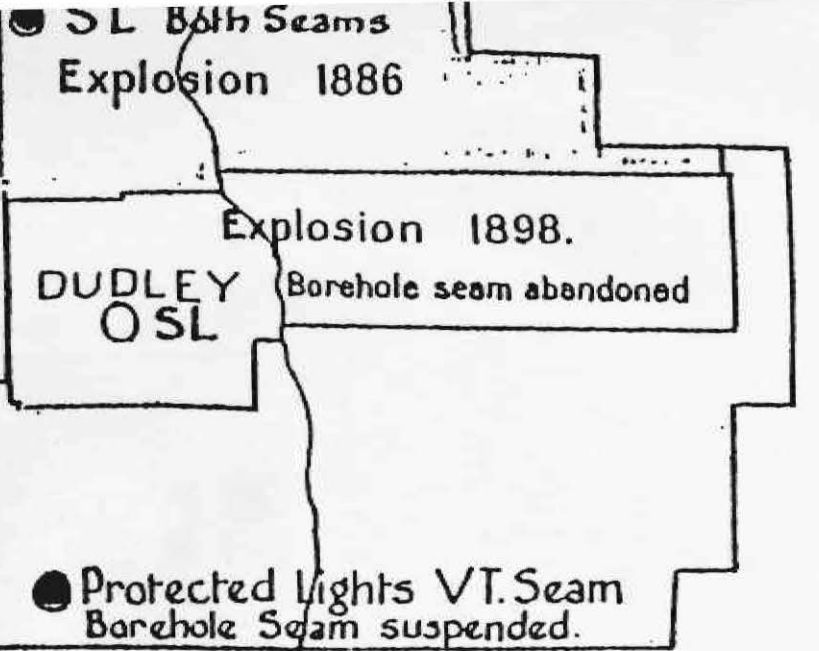
Collieries working the Borehole Seam edged green.
Collieries working the Victoria Tunnel Seam edged blue.

- 1 Blackhill Borehole.
- 2 Buttai Borehole
- 3 Grasstree N°2
- 4 Miller's Borehole N°14.
- 5 Linton Borehole.
- 6 Miller's Borehole N°8
- 7 Do. N°9
- 8 Do. N°10
- 9 Do. N°11
- 10 Do. N°12
- 11 Murnain's N°2
- 12 Rosewood Borehole.
- 13 Newburn Borehole
- 14 Valley Borehole.
- 15 Taylor's Borehole
- 16 Helensvale.
- 17 North Lambton N°6
- 18 Do. N°7
- 19 Do. N°10
- 20 Do. N°12
- 21 Do. N°11
- 22 Edgestrong

- 1 Ayrview
- 2 Belvue
- 3 Crofton
- 4 Fairplay
- 5 Glebe Hill
- 6 Glenrock
- 7 Happy Valley
- 8 Hillside
- 9 Homedale Extended Area
- 10 Ocean View
- 11 Victoria Tunnel
- 12 West Burwood.
- 13 Lambton Central.

LAMBTON

JOHN DARLING



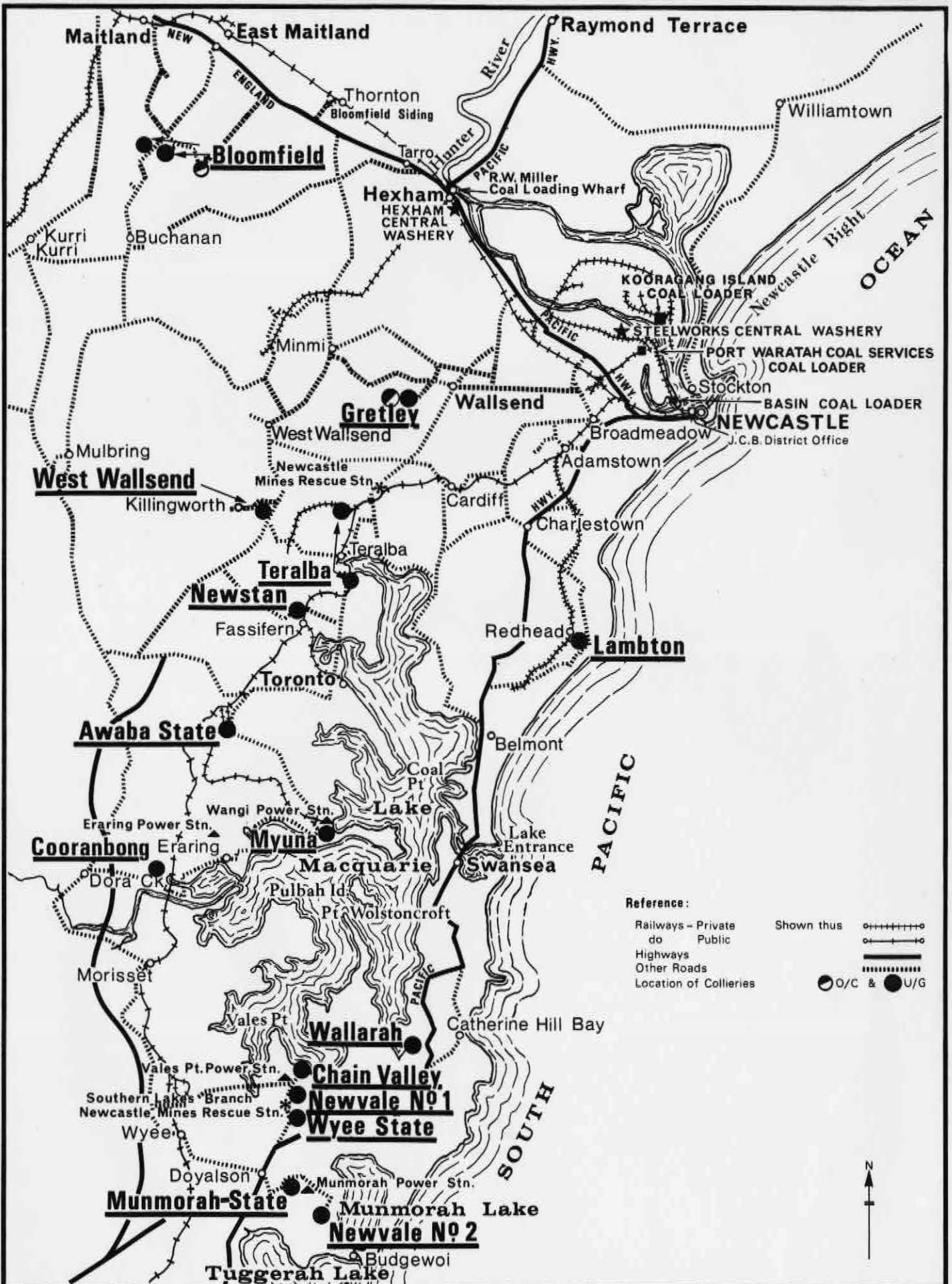
● SL Both Seams.

*Alan
Compliments
JG*

J. GROTHEN P.

A more recent map

NEWCASTLE DISTRICT



Reference:

Railways - Private Shown thus +-----+

 do Public |-----|

Highways —————

Other Roads - - - - -

Location of Collieries ● O/C & ● U/G



**LOCATION OF COLLIERIES
NEW SOUTH WALES**

DRN. FR	DATE 15-4-71	JOINT COAL BOARD
REVN. R	DATE 30-6-88	
APPROVED	DH	PLAN NO DS-197H
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The early

days of

Coalming in

Newcastle

by Cathy Holmes
Aust. Hist.

Tues. 1pm - 3pm

The early days of Coalmining in Newcastle

What is coal?

An Organic rock

A sedimentary rock

A fossil fuel

A complex chemical substance

A storehouse of energy

It is all of these. Its constituents are made up from the elements, carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, nitrogen and sulphur.

The first coal was exported from Newcastle in 1799, two years after the discovery of the Hunter river. It was not until the late 1850s that the coal trade entered a boom period.

From 1855 onwards, other large companies joined the Australian Agricultural company to mine Newcastle's coal. They were the Newcastle Wallsend, the Scottish Australian, the Waratah and the New Lambton.

The years between 1847 and 1867 the industry experienced rapid growth. There were openings of new seams, a new technology in transport. Steam ships were used to export coal overseas. The port of Newcastle became very busy. The increasing coal trade of the early 1850s was accompanied by the first signs of progress in the provision of banks, shipping agencies and coal loading appliances. From Coalmining the establishment of a ring of isolated townships were formed; Merewether (mid-1830s), Hamilton (1849), Wallsend (1859), Lambton (1860), New Lambton (1868) and Adamstown (1870).

The first Newcastle miners mined coal as a punishment; succeeding miners

The early days of coal mining

did it for a living. The convicts had to struggle with heavy loads of coal over rocky and sandy terrain to the bay where vessels were loaded. The handful of skilled miners, who dug for coal, enjoyed special privileges. They were expected to cut two and a half tons a day. They usually completed this earlier than the ten hours of labour. They could then rest. They would receive double food rations.

In 1827 the mines were still primitive compared to English standards. Coal was still being drawn along, wooden rail-roads to the bottom of the shaft. Four pumps were driven by a wheel and one horse constituted the drainage system and that only one bullock cart was normally used for bringing coal to the surface.

There was a large Australian market for Newcastle coal, steam navigation absorbed large amounts also did the gas works. Until 1861 billets of wood were burned by locomotives but supplies were difficult to obtain. A switch to coal was made in 1866. Coal was also used for general industrial purposes and in households.

In May 1860 the industry entered a new phase as colliers brought their various unions into a district organisation. James Fletcher was the first president, James Ray was the first secretary, William Wonder who presided over its second meeting and Thomas Alhwick who was president in 1862. Under their direction the miners' association quickly became a powerful force.

The early days of coalmining in Newcastle

During its first half year the miners' delegates had concerned themselves with wage rates. The union had provided considerable moral and financial support for the strikers who were resisting a reduction in wages and their success strengthened the new organisation.

In the last half of the 1900s several thousand miners and their families left Newcastle to live permanently in the new inland mining towns particularly Cessnock and Kurri Kurri. Local employment in mining declined. In addition Newcastle started to benefit from the growth of the inland mining towns most of whose residents continued to regard Newcastle as their centre of entertainment, pleasure and shopping.

The convicts and free settlers started Newcastle mining, and through the years coalmining has had numerous changes. Today the coalminer is a very highly skilled mechanised man.

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J.C. Docherty

Newcastle 'The making
of a city'

Hale & Iremonger Pty Ltd.
Sydney N.S.W