

Wendy Stuart,
Australian History,
Open Foundation Course,
Wednesday Evening Class.

THIRD TERM ASSIGNMENT.

"THE COAL-MINERS OF THE HUNTER VALLEY"

Accompanying this Paper:-

- * A cassette of a recorded interview with
Mr. C. Jones, (Side A.) and
Mr. M. Jurd, (Side B.)
- * A full transcription of the interviews.
- * A summary of each of the interviews.
- * Photos of the Mineworkers' Memorial and Museum at
Freeman's Waterhole.
- * Photos of the new Mining Museum at Teralba and a
newspaper article on same.
- * Permission Sheets signed by M. Jurd and C. Jones.
- * Comments about the production of the tape.

THE COAL-MINERS OF THE HUNTER VALLEY

When Lieutenant Shortland discovered coal at the foot of a cliff on Coal Island (now Nobby's) in 1797 he could have had little perception of just how important coal would become to that locality in the future. Newcastle and the Hunter district became synonymous with coal, and the lives of many of its inhabitants revolved around the coal industry. These coal-mining folk, from the convict miners to the miners of the 1980's, came from varied backgrounds and experienced very different working conditions, but all shared the common role of working in one of the world's dirtiest and most dangerous occupations.

Although the Aborigines had used coal long before white man "discovered" it, and some traders had engaged in disorganised gouging of the coal from the cliffs and exposed reefs by the sea at Newcastle about 1798,⁽¹⁾ the first organised coal miners were some rebellious Irish convicts sent to Newcastle with their guards to begin a permanent settlement.⁽²⁾ They were sent there by Governor King at the beginning of the nineteenth century principally for the exploitation of the coal. They worked under extremely difficult and primitive conditions. Although steam engines had been in use in England for some time, these and other improvements in mining were not available to the Newcastle miners. In the beginning convicts had to struggle with heavy loads of coal over rocks and sandy ground to the loading vessels.³ They had to use buckets to remove water from the shafts. A windlass was employed for conveying men and tools into the pit and raising the coal. Primitive oil lamps and candles lit the workings. Wheelbarrows were used for transporting the coal both underground and above ground. When oxen-hauled carts

1. J.W. Turner, Coal Mining in Newcastle, 1801 - 1900, Newcastle, 1982, p. 14.
2. Ibid. p.16.
3. " pp 16 - 17.

The Coal-miners of the Hunter Valley.

were later used, there was a continuing problem of shortages of oxen and new wheels. Another continuing problem was the lack of skilled miners in the settlement. Even when the convict population exceeded one thousand there were only eight skilled miners amongst them.⁴ Also in continual short supply were basic tools such as spades and shovels. More serious than these insufficiencies though were the lack of vegetables which caused scurvy, and also a lack of medicines.⁵ Throughout Newcastle's period as a penal settlement coal-mining remained small scale and very primitive compared with English standards. By 1827 coal was still being drawn "along wretched wooden rail-roads to the bottom of the shaft, four pumps driven by a wheel and one horse constituted the drainage system, and only one bullock cart was normally used for bringing coal to the wharf."⁶

Because of the chronic shortage of labour for the mines owing to the reluctance of ex-convicts and free men to work in them, an immigration programme was introduced in the late 1830's. The new miners were from the British Isles and proved to be more troublesome than the convicts who, according to Captain King, "were far from satisfactory as employees but they were much more obedient and industrious than the immigrants." Referring to the Welsh he commented that he had "never met a more impertinent set of rogues."⁷ The migrants brought with them a history of militancy where conflict between the British colliery proprietors and the miners was intense. This conflict was continued in their new land, and eventually in 1856 the Newcastle Coal and Copper Company miners formed the first union.⁸ For miners there were many issues on which to fight. Better ventilation was of prime importance to them, but their appeals to the Company were ignored. Their

4. Turner, Coal Mining..... p. 18.
 5. Ibid. p.19.
 6. " p.23.
 7. " p.41
 8. * p.67

The Coal-miners of the Hunter Valley.

arguments, based on the U.K. laws which assured miners of adequate air supply, were not only rejected but the Company dismissed all the committee men of the union and imported non-union labour from Sydney.⁹ The resulting strike brought negotiation. However, the slowness of the government to act on ventilation rules, and also the need to have a mines inspector appointed, were still very pressing concerns of the unions, now several in number.

Improved ventilation eventually evolved although coal mine owner, Alexander Brown, claimed before the 1862 Select Committee on Coalfields' Regulation Bill that, because the miners had had their way, if mines were not well ventilated in future, the miners would strike and, he added "we are completely at the men's mercy"¹⁰. However in reality it was the men who were at the mercy of the mine owners. If the mines were not well ventilated the men could suffer from pneumoconiosis, a serious illness caused by minute dust particles damaging the lungs. Dangerous gas could build up in ill-ventilated mines and cause explosions. This was the cause of the 1887 Bulli mine disaster which claimed eighty one lives,¹¹ and also the 1898 Dudley disaster with the loss of fifteen lives.¹² Other gases could create blackdamp, a very heavy gas which can cause suffocation. In addition to these dangers, lack of good ventilation caused very uncomfortable working conditions as temperatures at the coal face could reach 82° F. without it.¹³ The miners placed a very high priority on good ventilation with excellent foundation. Another high priority on their list of claims was the appointment of mines inspectors, but when this eventuated the inspectors had considerable difficulty in having ^{safety} measures implemented because low coal prices discouraged mine owners from spending money on such procedures.¹⁴ The lack of

9. Turner, Coal Mining p. 67

10. Ibid, p.69.

11. Sydney Morning Herald, 17th July, 1986.

12. Newcastle Morning Herald & Miners' Advocate, 3rd Sept., 1923 ✓

13. Turner, Coal Mining..... p. 81.

14. Ibid. p.73

The Coal-miners of the Hunter Valley.

safety measures was the cause of many deaths and injuries. The nineteenth century miners not only faced danger and unpleasant working conditions, they also had to tolerate the results of over-production which caused prices to fall and consequently lowered their wages. Periods of both over-employment and gross unemployment also adversely affected their income.

The turn into the twentieth century saw very little change in the lives of the Hunter Valley miners. Their unions were still fighting for safer and better working conditions and miners were still mining manually whereas in Britain mechanical coal cutters had been used since 1850 and by 1900 electric coal cutters were used.¹⁵ Coal mining was still a very unhealthy occupation, although in 1918 doctors were telling miners that coal dust was good for them saying, "The practice of constantly getting rid of coal and shale dust may help the lungs in eliminating other kinds of harmful particles"¹⁶ As the century progressed many improvements were implemented: safer and better working conditions, higher wage rates, social security schemes, shorter working hours, workers' compensation, long service leave and paid holidays. However the accidents still continued, one of the worst being an explosion which killed twenty one at Bellbird in 1923.¹⁷ A union leader in 1930 was reported as saying, "If you want to see the real cost of coal, go to the Kurri cemetery."¹⁸ Coal-mining was still a dangerous occupation. Insecurity of work was also a continuing problem. In the 1920's some miners remained unemployed for months when collieries had no orders to fill.¹⁹ The new century has seen no lessening of conflict between miners and owners. Strikes have been a common occurrence in the last few years and lately the striking miners have had very little

15. John Davey, Mining Coal, London, 1976.

16. A.W. Metcalfe, For Freedom and Dignity, Univ. Sydney, 1986.

17. Newcastle Morning Herald & Miners' Advocate, 3/9/23.

18. Metcalfe, For Freedom p. 86.

19. Ibid, p. 285.

The Coal-miners of the Hunter Valley.

support from the media. One editor warned "... that each day they strike is pushing some of them closer to being unemployed. So far that message has not sunk in, despite the fact that the industry has ~~lost~~ lost more than 12% of its workforce in a little over a year." ²⁰.

The future of the Hunter Valley coal-mining industry is certainly very uncertain. Competition from countries whose production costs are lower than ours is becoming stronger. In N.S.W. "production has fallen but labour costs have risen. Some of the production drop was due to strikes but much of it resulted from the closure of unprofitable mines." ²¹. Many Hunter Valley mines are amongst those closed down. In addition to this, it is seen that the only viable mining for the future is long-wall mining - a system which requires more machinery and less manpower. The days when the Hunter Valley labour force was heavily weighted with coal-miners have passed.

20. Newcastle Herald, 18th June, 1988.

21. Sydney Morning Herald, 27th July, 1988.

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Transcription of taped interview with
Mr. Mick Jurd, 20/7/88.

- Q. Mr. Jurd, could you tell us about the origins of the Miners' Museum and the Memorial at Freeman's Waterhole?
- A. Yes, well I retired from Lambton Colliery in 1970 and there were five men killed at the State Mine at Wye about '66 or '67 and three of them came from the Abermain RSL, which they had a meeting up there, the citizens had a meeting at the RSL at Abermain and decided to build a memorial. So I suggested to the Miners' Federation President, Jim Comerford, that we build a memorial for all miners that had been killed, and suggested that we put it in the Oak picnic grounds at Freeman's Waterhole. When I retired about six or eight months after, we commenced the building down there and put in a Lowrey organ, a concert model, which was given to us by the Coal Board. We held after-noon down there and Christmas carols and that sort of thing, and then I decided to build a Museum behind that again, which I did, outlining the history of the industry from the Aborigines and convicts through to the mechanised period. And I played the organ down there for the best part of thirteen or fourteen years every Sunday afternoon and when I retired I decided to build a Retirement Village. So Merv. Hunter got us the land at Teralba where we are now, off the government for \$1 a year, a fifty year lease, and we built seven cottages but we can't build no more now until they make up their minds whether they are going to long-wall mine underneath the area where we are. So while we are waiting we decided to build a museum up here on the history of early mining and the history of Lake Macquarie, which is where we are now, in the hall in the community centre. We are still waiting to know whether they are going to long-wall underneath.
- Q. And you are still building the museum here. When do you expect that to be finished?
- A. The official opening is on September the 25th, a Sunday after-noon. Up to date we are inviting representatives of the Coal Board because they have been very good to us, to the official opening, and we hope to have a good round-up for that day.
- Q. Could you describe for us the different diaramas you have here on the mining industry in particular, and we will go on to the others after.
- A. The models and diarama consisting of the Awabakal legend of coal which was given to me by Mr. Haslam who used to be with the Herald and was an authority on the Awabakal tribe. Their theory was that the earth became darkness, darkness crept over the earth, so to stop the darkness from coming up over the hills and have you, they got them to sew the rocks and the trees over the darkness to hide the darkness, to cover it up. And their theory is that the darkness is in the rocks and the timber turned into coal. They weren't far away. Awaba, Teralba, Kahibah, any name, any

village ending in "ba" is a coal-bearing area, because Nikkin Ba was 'place of coal'.

Q. And in what way did the Aborigines use the coal?

A. Oh, cooking, heating, lighting, the same as anybody else. Wood fires for communication in that area. Remember they have been here for 45 to 50 thousand years, that's a long time and they have had a bit of experience in that time.

Now the next diarama was the convicts' pit at Fort Scratchley. There was an outcrop of coal all around the waterfront there at water's edge. They called it the Yard Seam. It was three foot thick and a ton of rubbish. But they went in on the outcrop and the Schooner 'Francis' used to go between Morpeth - - cedar logs, all Maitland and that area flats and the flats around Maitland was cedar forest, and of course the timber was much in demand in the city. So the 'Francis' used to go to Morpeth and put on six or eight logs for Sydney and on their way back they would call in and get six or eight ton of coal and take it to Sydney. But it was a very bad area because they sent all the Irish rebels here out of the road and nobody liked to stay too long. They got the coal aboard and shot through quick. That's that diarama.

The next one is - they struck a shaft in the Watt Street Mental Hospital grounds where the cricket oval is. They put a shaft down there nine foot wide by 100 feet deep - took them about four years. They got from the pit bottom on a windlass the coal in buckets and they brought it to the surface and they put it in wheelbarrows and took it down to the lumber yards which is now where the Customs House is, and that would be the first industry in Australia. Convicts, leg irons and all that sort of thing, still the Irish rebels. The convict period was a bit of a flop, so the Australian Agricultural Co. was formed in 1828 and they started a pit on the corner of Brown and Church Streets. They used steam haulage for the first time, explosives for the first time, and they put a railway system in, a wooden one, running to the river - a system whereby the full skips running down the inside pulled the empties back up and that was the method of transport. That was taken away in 1831 by the 'Sophia Jane' which was the first steamboat to come to Australia. It beat 'William the Fourth' by two days. Then you've got that model.

Then the next one, we move on to the Rev. Threlkeld at Coal Point near Lake Macquarie. He had a mission station looking after Aborigines. He had one at Belmont and one at Toronto, and he was financed by the British Mission Society to convert the Aborigines to Christianity - they're probably more Christian than the Christians were. It was a bit of a failure so the money was stopped so he opened the coal mine at Kilaben Bay side of Coal Point and worked that for a few years. Then that was taken over by a Mr. Robie. It worked for quite a while but the whole problem was getting it to Sydney. They took it from the pits to Swansea in barges because of the entrance to the Lake was a bar - it was a bit of a problem. Then he reloaded it into ships which took it from Swansea to Sydney. He overcame the problem of getting over the bar that way. I think it was about six and eight pence a ton or something like that that would land them in Sydney. Six miners and six seamen who worked the pit. 1885 was the period of the expansion of the industry around this area. You must realize that the convicts and people coming out here - my great-grandfather, old Daniel Jurd, was a convict - he

stole a side of bacon and he was lumbered out here in 1802. It was the Industrial Revolution in Britain - the steam engine and it worked the looms and the coal mines and people became redundant and there was no work for them and so they would steal to live and got caught up in the system and were sent out here.

Now old John Brown was also a weaver and he got out of work and he was a very militant Trade unionist and his 2 sons, James and Alexander, and they came out from England. I don't know if they were convicts or what, I don't think so, and they got a job at Dr. Mitchell's weaving factory at Stockton. And they worked there for a couple of years and this got mysteriously burnt down, so then they bought a bullock team and they used to work a pit up at Maitland at Four Mile Creek. And that's where J. and A. Brown comes into the picture. James and Alexander were old John's two sons.

Q. They actually managed this pit?

A. Yes, and they also started one at Merewether which was taken over by Dr. Mitchell later on. The co-operative movement in Britain was very strong then. Because they had to find some solution to their unemployment problem so the men who came out here were all co-operative minded and they started co-operative movements out here but the trouble is they got started but didn't have enough capital, and they went broke and other people moved in and took them over. That's what happened at Stockton Borehole and Killingworth and all these pits at Teralba, Pacific, all these out there.

In that model we have the pit workings, the underground workings, the timber going in and the empty skips and the full skips coming out the pit bottom, and the winding engine works and the sand works that give you the ventilation, ventilators, and the shaft works and the bullock team there with a load of timber on for the pits, and a little village around the place. That's that model.

And then we move on to Catherine Hill Bay. That started in 1871 I think it was. It was named New Wallsend. Wallsend was the mine synonymous with miners and this was an entirely new area so they called it New Wallsend. And they were working on outcrops at lake level. They built a jetty. The horses used to come out of the pit onto the jetty and it was reported that some of the horses used to slip off the jetty into the sea. They lost quite a few that way.

Q. What year is this you are speaking about?

A. Oh, 1871. Now 1874 the Collier was named the 'Sussanah Cuthbert' I think it was, and it got wrecked on its way to Sydney and they had no collier and the pit closed down - they had no means of transporting the coal. And then the Wallarah Coal Company opened it up some years later on and then later on they opened up and called the place Catherine Hill Bay.

So then we move onto the next model which we're doing of Lake

Macquarie, the Swansea Boatbuilders, the boats that were built by Mr. Steele,

Then we, I haven't started yet, but I want to do one of the Railway Workshops at Cardiff. And the next one we have is the Rathmines Airbase. A picture of the Base with the Catalina Flying Boats and a history of the boats and the men, photographs of the people and so forth. Then the next one is a model of Lake Macquarie - a picture up on the wall and then a model of Lake Macquarie showing models of the Power Stations and associated coal mines.

Then we move onto Lambton B. Colliery which is the - er - started in 1890 I think it was, by the Scottish Australian Mining Co. It was called Lambton B. because Lambton A. was the pit at Lambton itself so it was Lambton B. at Redhead, and BHP took it over in 1933 and mechanised it - it would be the first fully mechanised pit in Australia, 1933, electric locos, skips and loaders, machines that cut the coal, and load the coal and so forth.

And then we move onto long-wall mining at John Darling - that was started in 1982 I think it was - 84 or 82. That was longwall mining in the Lake Macquarie area. They worked it for quite a while and they struck a fault, and they had to close down and pull out.

But that's the diaramas we have here. We have the convict period, (the mechanised period), the bord and pillar system and then the mechanisation and the long-wall which are the four methods in mining.

Q. Could you speak for just a few minutes on your experience as a coal miner. When did you begin?

A. I've always been a carpenter in the pits and I started at old Bulli in about '40, early forties, I think the war was just started. I put a drift in there and I, the other chap and I, put buildings in, in the workshops and so forth. A stone fell out of the roof and hit me on the foot so I thought I'd give the pits away. So I give them away and then I got the task to do the bath houses at Austimer Collieries. During the war they re-opened up the Austinmer Collieries and I lived there and I worked there for a while. Then I was involved in war work - army huts and that sort of thing. Then I came up from the south coast in 1949 and I got a job in Killingworth. I worked there for about 5 or 6 years. It closed down and then I went back to trade work - power stations and what have you. Then Comerford got me a job at John Darling. I went over there wagon-repairing, and the big steel hoppers came in and I was redundant so they sent me over to Lambton.

Q. So were you actually in the mines or was all the above pit top work, was it?

A. Well fortunately when I went to Lambton the women that lived in the cottages, about four or five cottages there, decided

they hated the condition of the cottages so my first job was to go around all the houses and rebuild the bath houses ...

Q. These were Company houses?

A. Company houses, yes. I fixed cottages I didn't see much of the underground at all.

Q. Well, what do you feel has been the biggest change in the coal mining industry since the days of the convicts?

A. Well, the biggest change at the present time is the period we are living in now. Long-wall mining - Newstan produced in 24 hours 25,000 tons. It's a world record and it's about a 7 foot seam, I'm talking about in Queensland working a six metre seam which is 20 feet - long-wall - in Queensland. You see you've gotta realize that our coal supplies are only about 4% of known reserves in the world. One of the biggest mine reserves is in China. They tell me that one thousand two hundred million people - a quarter of the population in the world. And if they start coal-mining on their conditions and wages well, we may as well shut the door now.

Q. And do you foresee the time when we will have mined all the available coal in Australia?

A. Oh no there's still coal we haven't well, it's only in areas like up the north and a belt round here down to Sydney. And a little bit in Western Australia. But there could be more if you go looking for it - probably would be. You see Australia is the oldest continent in the world.

Q. And do you foresee the time when there won't be any miners working underground at all?

A. Well, that's really where it is now. See in long-wall mining the machine runs itself we have low roof supports that work automatically and they move across, the cutting arm runs backwards and forwards and cuts the coal. I believe in England they watch it through a T.V. screen and if anything goes wrong they just push a button to stop it and go down to have a look.

Q. But at the moment in long-wall mining in Australia the men are still working underground, aren't they?

A. A few, yes, a few.

Q. But they haven't got to that stage?

A. No, but we're not far away. All we want is ..

Q. So the days of the old underground coalminers are numbered?

A. Yes, the old method. According to production figures we have to produce it at a saleable price because the world market demands it. So they've got to use long-wall - they've got to

use continuous production because if they leave it for any length of time the roof stacks up, comes out on the hydraulics and they're very hard to move. Sometimes they can't move them and they and they've got to pull out. So they've got to keep the thing going continuously, otherwise they're in trouble.

Q. So that means changing your hours ...?

A. Changing your hours.

Q. The miners aren't very happy about that?

A. No, they're not very happy about that.

Q. But you see?

A. No, I'm not taking sides in the argument. But ... See you've got to realize the system that we live under, you take a country like China. They're talking about assisting them. I agree with assisting but assisting them to increase their production and technique. Oh, my God, we're cutting our throats, because there's that many of them and they're hard working and intelligent people. It's not only mining, that applies to all industry.

Q. That's true. So that you really feel the writing is on the wall for the mining industry in the Hunter?

A. Well, unless they can get long-wall production. Little pits with the old mechanical methods are finished. Long-wall now To put a long-wall in it costs about 8 or 9 million, and if they get the coal out but when you get the coal out you got to find out what to do with it. Who wants it, that's another problem. So I don't think it's a happy

Q. Is the world demand for coal rising or the opposite?

A. Well, nuclear energy, see coal is energy, it heats your water that makes the steam that turns the wheels around. Alright, they're finding out now that uranium is dangerous. See, you take this one big uranium power station in Britain that they're closing down. There's bits of it will be radioactive now for probably a thousand years. Now if we have a war and the opposition bomb those power stations you're in trouble. It would be just as bad if they dropped a bomb on you. And then of course the wind blows the radioactivity over and pollutes all the earth and they're all and the cattle eat it and die Just a mess.

Q. So, getting back to long-wall mining, they are rather limited in where they can mine this way, aren't they?

A. Yes, well Queensland's got the I think the shift will be to Queensland because they've got the biggest seams up there and because they're different grades of coal and different uses for coal - steaming coal and coke-making coal for steel industries and this sort of thing. Oh, we haven't got a lot of coal - the way people talk you'd think we had all the coal in the world.

- Q. Well, it has been a major industry of the local area?
- A. It was the first industry - the first industry.
- Q. And Newcastle was virtually based on coal?
- A. Based on coal. It was the first industry in Australia and it was based on coal.
- Q. But you feel the time will come when coal and Newcastle aren't necessarily synonymous?
- A. They could harness the wind or sun or something else deriving energy from it. Unless they do we will have to use coal.
- Q. Mr. Jurd, can you recall any interesting incident in the coal-mining industry in Newcastle?
- A. Well, a lot of people don't realize In the early 1900's Newcastle harbour was full of ships taking the Americas' coal, sailing ships, and they used to come out from the Americas with rubble from the San Francisco earthquake in the ships' holds as ballast to Stockton and Wickham and all those places, unload their ballast, then come round and pick up a load of coal and go back to America. So, if you recognise that in Newcastle Harbour there was nothing to have 800 boats at a time anchored in the waterways and these boats used to tip their rubble off and fill up the various spots where the Dockyard and Carrington and all those places are now. So that was San Francisco.
- Right. Thank you, Mr. Jurd.

Transcription of Taped Interview with
Mr. Clyde Jones, 6/7/88.

Q. Mr. Jones, when and where did you begin your work as a miner?

A. In July, 1927. Not as a miner but as a pit top mine hand. What I mean by that is you started on the pit top when I started work and that eventually when you got old enough and a vacancy occurred you went down the mine. In the early stages I started as a boy of 15 and worked as what was called a 'token boy'. Want to hear an explanation of that or not? Well, a token is a piece of marlin cord or string with a leather token on the end with a number on it. And these were fixed to all the miners' skips, as they went fill a skip they would put this token on it and when the skip was filled and taken out of the mine they went over a weigh bridge and all the coal was weighed and the two weighmen at the time when I was there, there was a miners' weighman and a company weighman, and they took all the particulars of that coal as it came out, and I think that the mine in that particular mine that I was in, was 72 pair of men, and they recorded all the weights and then the time of the day they calculated the gross of each pair of miners. And my job was to arrange the tokens on pegs so that they'd get a check on my token against their weights and when it was all finished, I had to take them down to the for next days work. That's what my job consisted of. As I said the two weighmen were there, one was the company weighman and one was a miners' weighman but they were very good men - I really think they'd catch up with a calculator today. And that was what mine consisted of, apart from taking broken drills, bent drills and blunt drills and picks and that to the Blacksmith shop.

And when I got too big for that job, or too ^{old} for that job, they got work down on the chitter picking. And when I got too old for that and they thought I could handle these jobs well, they shifted me to other various grown-up jobs around the mine or the pit top. When I turned 21 then I was cabled out which was because earlier they had cabled out over a hundred men at the time because of the Depression and lack of demand for coal. So I got cabled out but I didn't go back until 1941 to the mines. Then I went down the mines on afternoon shift. I became a, what do you call it, a semi-maintenance worker - swilling coals, pulling rails, carrying pipes, pulling pipes, putting timber in, watering roads, sand-dusting roads and then eventually you graduated to what they call wheeling, that's using horses to wheel your skips in to your miners. When they fill them you take them out and they deliver them onto the ropes, and they haul them up by ropes. And that would be an occupation all day long. Taking empties in, pulling empties out, taking your timber in, the timber necessary for the roof supporting, and then eventually graduated to the coal. It's all over a period of years, as you could probably appreciate, and when I got on to the coal, like it was the thing of winning coal and it was all under the most primitive conditions I would say.

Q. When you say primitive conditions, what year would this be?

The Coal-miners of the Hunter Valley.

Wendy Stuart.

- A. About '44, '45, I think - no, wait a minute I'm behind, about '48 I'd be going on to the coal, at the wheeling - all those conditions were in those times all very primitive. There was no machines.
- Q. And you talked about using pit ponies?
- A. Oh, yes, we used pit ponies. You mostly used two horses, like you have two pair of men, roads normally would be either long or pretty steep and horses, or change the horses during the shift so that, like if you were wheeling, I'm going back over ground again, I shouldn't be doing that should I? And when you were wheeling you would be wheeling, depending on the nature of the mines that you were working with, they would be probably either 22 skips in tops, they'd be pulling 21 in what they call fillers, 20 in pits and if they were baulking there were 14. As I said, that was what the rate was for doing them. And the roads, on the wheeling roads, were paid by contract. You were paid so much by the distance you travelled. Like you might have 100, 250 ~~yard~~ road, well I think only a flat rate. Once you got over 250 yards your rate alters and you were paid on a yardage, and a tonnage basis then. That about explains most of that, I think.
- Q. And where did you start your mining work?
- A. At Bellbird.
- Q. At Bellbird. And you were there for how long?
- A. From 15 until I was 21, 6 years and then I went back about 1940/41 I think was the time.
- Q. And you went from Bellbird to?
- A. No, I stayed at Bellbird until 1950 and then 1950, and the conditions of mining and the conditions of that particular mine was deteriorating and for economical reasons the fellas couldn't work and we got our job at Awaba. They came down there and worked on dog-watch, what they call that, that's night shift. When you are working on dog watch it was what they call general maintenance. They come down with the early primitives in the mechanical things. They had what they call scraper-loaders and there was 8 of those to be shifted every night on the dogwatch shift because they had the 2 shifts going, the day and the afternoon shift. And our job, at those particular times, was to shift the loaders, fill the coal in the places and get them ready for the next day. And I'd have snigged the rails or dragged the rails and dragged the pipes for the pipe-fitters when there was so much water in the place - a lot of water - and we brought or carried or dragged the pipes for the pumpers. That was what the general maintenance on that was about. I'd get things into places.
- Q. Now all through your mining life were you always working shift work?
- A. It came and went. It wasn't all the time. When you worked on the coal it was all mostly day work, well that was a lot of what they call working in specials, they were afternoon shifts. Then

The Coal-miners of the Hunter Valley.

Wendy Stuart.

after I came down here it was dog watch and afternoon shifts. They'd cease the afternoon production and that allowed us to come afternoon shift to do the general maintenance, and that was getting the loaders into position for the next day, getting places ready for them. General maintenance - moving the loaders about into the new place.

Q. Did you find that shift work interfered with family ^{life?} Which shift did you prefer to work?

A. I didn't care much about the shift work because it did interfere with family life. It was a matter of getting meals ready and schooling for the children and it made so many different meal hours but when it came day shift that was all cut out. It interfered so much like you was restricted from what you could and couldn't do in the night. That didn't worry me a lot because I was building a house then.

Q. Mr. Jones, your father was also a miner. Could you tell us about the conditions he worked under; how they differed from yours?

A. Oh, very primitive - all hand mining. All the whole work was done by hand and, as I said before, he used to come home black as soot because there were no bathing facilities. I think the time at the time the working hours were about the same. Like 7 to 3 was the recognised period and they were working in bad air, bad conditions all around, and by hand mining. There was no benefit from any machines at all then, - it was all done the hard way. There was no loaders - it was all done by shovels. As you can possibly understand, it was really hard work.

Q. And five days a week?

A. No, it was five days on one week, and it would be six the next. And well 5½ days. And Saturday, on what they called the black Saturday, you'd work from 7 till one. That was like 5½ days - sort of eleven days

Q. Eleven days fortnightly?

A. Eleven days. Everything was on a fortnightly basis. Your pay and all was assessed.

Q. What about Holidays? Was there such a thing as paid holidays?

A. No. Non-existent. What happened you went and knocked off on Christmas eve. I think you had 10 or 11 days depending on how the days and the dates fell at the time. Easter you had four days off. All that was out of your own pocket. All holidays were taken but they were paid for at your own expense.

Q. When were you paid for holidays? Can you remember the date?

A. Not until the 40's, about 44 or 45 or something. I can't think of the exact time, but something like that. Well into the war years, after the war years, that came in.

The Coal-miners of the Hunter Valley.

Wendy Stuart.

- Q. And what about sick leave? Was there such a thing?
- A. No, it was non-existent. Those things came in - I'm not very good on the dates - we had a strike in 44/45 and those, all those things came in as a result of that.
- Q. Now that you've mentioned strikes, could you tell me, were you always in favour of the decision to strike?
- A. Mostly, yes. If you didn't strike they were pretty adamant that they weren't going to pay you, so you had to strike to make a point of it.
- Q. And, of course, were you paid at all during strikes? Was there a fund from which you could get some money or did a strike mean no pay.
- A. In the main a strike meant no pay. The only time there was any relief was in the Lock-out when you were given so much a fortnight. I can't think of the amount now but so much for single people and so much for marrieds. But that was the only time that I could ever remember getting money out of strikes.
- Q. What do you think about the allegation that management sometimes provoked the miners to strike when they wanted production to slow down?
- A. Oh, that was true, very true. As a point, at Bellbird, if they had an overproduction of coal and most of that was what they call the slack coal, and they pretty often provoked something then because they had too much slack and heat, and they had to wait until they could fix some way of getting rid of it otherwise with production going on all the time, it built up too much and, this goes back a long time, they had what they call a slack box with many hundreds of tons, but when it got stored in the box it eventually caught fire, or combustion took place and it caught fire and well, they'd have to empty all that, and take it up to dump it on the grass. And that happened a number of times because of overproduction. It had nothing to do with the coal. One part of it they had no compunction about blowing the whistle. At Bellbird if the whistle blew by 5 o'clock of the evening you knew that there was no work until such a time as it did blow at five on the evening.
- Q. Now I have heard that the pit whistles really governed the mining townships. In what way was that? How often did they blow?
- A. Well, that was a matter of whether they had too much production or not enough production, that determined it all. And eventually when we got a bit more affluent they bought radios and it was transmitted onto the radio stations, what pits would work tomorrow and what wouldn't work tomorrow. That became - you went and listened at given times for the mining news that was at 6 at that time, I think, or at 9 in the night. And they told you. The whole of the community was dependent on the pit whistle, to know if they worked or they didn't work. Like Bellbird as a point, if you weren't going to work I think I said that, I think that they said that 5 o'clock in the evening

if there was no work tomorrow then the whistle would blow at five, and it would blow again at six o'clock in the morning if there was no work.

Q. I thought that the pit whistles blew at the beginning of shifts as a sort of alarm clock for people or telling them exactly when the shifts were due to start?

A. That was so in some cases. One pit that I live straight across the road from me - I lived straight opposite a lot of people up there - their whistle blew at a quarter to six and that was an indication that there was work and that was what the time was, a quarter to six, so that those that lived out and around in that vicinity had the idea how much time they had to get to go to work. That explains that bit. Some of them used it as an alarm but it mostly signified that there would be or wouldn't be work. But at a Quarter to six, I think from memory, if it didn't blow at quarter to six you knew there would be no work.

Q. And did that happen very often?

A. That was supply and demand when that happened. It depended on whether they had a contract to fill or they had too much coal or not enough coal. Those things were determined by the suppliers and the demand for coal.

Q. So you weren't really employed on a full time basis at all? You were at the mercy of the mine owners really as to how much work you did and also how much pay you received each week?

A. Oh, that is true. All the day work people were paid daily rate. And if you worked seven days you got paid seven days; if you only worked two days you only got two days pay.

Q. That must have been very difficult sometimes?

A. Oh, it was very difficult for one colliery, which goes back a long time, they only worked one day a fortnight and the reason for that was because that pit at the time - - if you only worked one day at the pit they couldn't get the dole as they were still considered as being employed. And that does back a long time.

Q. When you say a long time, about how long ago?

A. Goes back about 30 or 40 years.

Q. Very unfair?

A. Well, it was a hard life in those days. In all of the coal industry. It was a hard life. There was no beg your pardons. No paid holidays, no sick leave, no long service leave.

Q. And no spare money I would think?

A. Very little or none. The only that was in our favour I think in those days was that there were good shop keepers.

Q. This is in Cessnock?

- A. In Cessnock and all over.
- Q. So they would allow you credit?
- A. Yes.
- Q. Now, in Cessnock - do you think it was a different town from what it is today?
- A. Oh, yes.
- Q. In what way?
- A. Well, in those days the whole of the mining fraternity, there was very little or ^{no} bathing facilities. Men got up and went from home in their working clothes and they came home in their working clothes - there was no bathroom, in the main. They got to them later on. The story I remember once hearing was of a lady and a little girl got off the train at Cessnock, and it was just after the bathrooms came in, and they were most vexed because they couldn't see a dirty miner. That was a fact then, and they eventually got them but - they always used to - in the main they went to work in their working clothes and came home the same way. Very dirty. Very hot and very tired.
- Q. Very dirty business, and also, I think, a very dangerous business? Now a friend of a daughter of mine just recently has resigned from his mining job because he had a couple of very close scares with falling rocks, falling roofs, and he was having nightmares quite often and he just had to throw the job in. Now do you think this could be the experiences of a lot of miners, this nightmare of accidents in mines.
- A. I think they would worry and I think it has its repercussions but I don't think, like in the early days, not too many left because there was no other jobs to go to. There was no other work to present yourself for. The mines in the Cessnock field - there's a point I think - ooh, there might have been 15 or 16 mines, I can't think from memory, but there were a lot of mines. That was the only real occupation, like the shopkeepers had a few hands; there might have been a few bus drivers had a few hands, but in the main the main industry was mining and there were falls all the time and a lot of people getting hurt all the time. My old man at the time, - I said there wasn't much about him, - but I can remember them bringing him home in the Company's wagon they had, there was no ambulance, and what they done, they put the stretchers on a couple of powder boxes on the top of this flat topped truck.
- Q. And how had he been injured?
- A. He had been injured in the pit. There had been a fall of coal. So what I done was put him off the truck onto the front verandah and two or three threw him into the bed for the old lady to wash him and put into bed. And that was the extent of the ambulance in his day. I can remember carting him in.
- Q. Was he seriously hurt?

The Coal-miners of the Hunter Valley.

Wendy Stuart.

- A. Well, he wasn't overly seriously hurt but fairly well knocked about at the time - there was no ambulance. It was on the back of this truck. And solid tyres if you please.
- Q. And no compensation of course?
- A. I don't remember when the compensation came in but I don't think they stayed off too long because the compensation wasn't very compensatable. The result is they didn't stay off too long because they didn't pay to be off. I don't know the exact years when compensation came in. I really don't know that.
- Q. Do you feel that there was a feeling that conditions weren't as safe as they could have been and that the mine owners weren't really doing as much as they could to have made it a more safe environment.
- A. I don't think they done as much as they could ventilation-wise. Safety-wise depended a lot on the men themselves. And the result is that some men working the contract system - some men were prone to be a little bit reckless in the way they protected themselves in the mines. There were a lot of falls and they were, as I said, prone to take too many risks for the sake of getting their quantity of coal out.
- Q. Were you and your other mining friends aware of pneumoconiosis, the illness caused by dust particles in the lungs? Did you know many miners who had to retire from the mines because of ill health?
- A. I knew we were aware of that complaint for a long time. But the opportunities to get on to compensation were very limited. A lot of people had to struggle on due to the difficulty of getting compensation recognized by the proper authorities, but you were very aware of it and the subject was pretty close to you at the time, and it was caused by lack of proper ventilation and the conditions in which you worked created that.
- Q. And how do they prevent it these days?
- A. Oh, better ventilation and better attempts at ventilation and a more improved system of ventilation.
- Q. What was the relationship between miners and managers. Do you think it would have been similar to the feelings of a retired manager who said, "In the old days the staff members were reviled in the clubs and pubs; I wouldn't go into a public bar of a pub when I was in Kurri."?
- A. I think that would be very true reflection generally. They mostly kept to themselves in that respect, there was always a difficulty that the miners were always trying to improve his conditions, on the other hand the managers tended to protect or forestall any efforts to improve the miners' conditions. His occupation was mostly to forestall any improvements in conditions, where the miner was generally trying to improve them. So that was more or less a very true reflection, I'd say.
- Q. Can you tell us anything about the Depression? Do you have any memories of it? How do you feel it affected you and people in

Cessnock generally?

- A. It affected a lot of people in various ways. I think some people managed to - I don't know whether you'd say prepared themselves a little bit for these eventualities. Generally speaking they didn't and the result was that those people that were affected mostly were people that were on lower wages and hadn't made any provisions and they were dependant largely on credit from the shop-keepers. It affected everybody, in every way. It affected the store-keepers, the man up in the mine, the manager. It affected everybody because, if there's no money or no coal going out of the district, there's no money coming in either. So that's - very sad and depressing business - the whole of the Depression was - There wasn't much light-heartedness. It was a pretty grim business of trying to make ends meet as it were.
- Q. You mentioned that some people found a bit of an answer to their financial position during the Depression when they wanted to sell their businesses and couldn't find any buyers?
- A. Well, that's so true too. They done that because they couldn't get the buyer because the Depression was on, so they got insurance on it. They fired at the time. This was going back into the 1920's up to the '30's when that happened. There were quite a lot of businesses went that way because the insurance was paying them out - that's what they done. It was a well known fact that that's what happened. If they were running short, they were running out, they would probably have to insure their place and fire it.
- Q. You did mention that there was one business person who fired his place more than once?
- A. Oh, yes. I think it was about three times. It was rather comic. It was a bit of a comedy round the town about this man but he finished up - finished up doing a good job of it. I don't know if he became uninsurable again or not or whether he got up further recourse to insurance at all. That what - that was a fact that that's what he had done.
- Q. And how did you personally cope in the Depression?
- A. Very poorly. It was - if the old lady couldn't have managed to get the credit from the store-keepers, well you just went without.
- Q. Sorry, who's the old lady?
- A. My mother.
- Q. And did you have many brothers and sisters?
- A. Two brothers.
- Q. So you were a reasonably small family?
- A. Reasonably small, yes, but as I said, she, being a good manager

and very generous store-keepers - well, that's what answered that question, because there were no easy, no simple ways about it. It was just a case of if you didn't have good credit you didn't get anything to eat unless you managed to get a scrounging from somewhere. I don't know where that had come from because I was too young to know about that.

Q. And did your brothers go into the mines too?

A. No. When the next fellow to me got old enough he was on the dole and couldn't get a job so he eventually went - what they call the - dole people at the time. They said that they would put them in camps and they done that and he went to Kendall on re-afforestation work and then on to Wauchope where they worked building timber roads for the timber industry. And then the other younger brother, he couldn't get a job up here either so an uncle of mine took him to Sydney with him - eventually when the war broke out he enlisted and went to war. The other fellow - he went to war also but he eventually went to Queensland and he was working on a tobacco plantation until the war broke out and then he enlisted too because these works on the tobacco plantation, as I understand them, they got so much sustenance from the government of Queensland at the time. When the war broke out they cut the sustenance out and they were given no option but to go to war. They weren't very happy about it; they reckoned that the dole wasn't worth fighting for, but that's what they done.

Q. Mr. Jones, how do you see the future of the coal mining industry in the Hunter district?

A. I think it's got to come to an end soon because the supplies, that's been taken out over the years until now must be very limited. They must be reaching the end of their coal supplies in the area. Not today or tomorrow but in the foreseeable future, I would say that most mines will close because the coal supplies ~~must~~ be getting limited.

Right. Thank you, Mr. Jones.

SUMMARY OF RECORDED INTERVIEWS.

SIDE A. - Mr. Clyde Jones.

Mr. Jones is a seventy six year old retired coalminer, the son of a coalminer, who grew up in Cessnock and worked in the mine pits at Bellbird and Awaba.

In the taped interview he describes in detail the work he performed at the Bellbird Colliery pit top as a "token boy" at the age of fifteen in 1927. By the time he was twenty one he had graduated to working down the mine. His job in the mine was mainly as a general maintenance worker, which involved such duties as swilling coals, pulling rails, carrying pipes, pulling pipes, putting timber in, watering roads, sand-dusting roads, and wheeling, that is using horses to wheel skips in and out, and then hauling them up on ropes. He speaks of his work as being performed under very primitive conditions. There was still no mechanised mining at Bellbird in 1948.

Mr. Jones recalls the years when miners worked under much harsher conditions than do miners of today. For many of his working years there were no such benefits as paid holidays or sick leave, satisfactory compensation, or even the guarantee of regular work. The availability of work was regulated by the demand for coal. If overproduction occurred, then their working hours were cut, resulting, of course, in lowered earnings.

The demand for safer and healthier working conditions was often the cause of strikes. Better ventilation was a persistent cry from the miners, but even when improvements were made, these were seldom sufficient to meet the safety level which would satisfy the miners. This contentious issue was one of the main causes of friction between the miners and the managers because, as Mr. Jones states, the miners were always wanting to improve their conditions whereas the managers tended to forestall any such improvements.

Among his memories are the mine whistles with their messages of "No work today" or "Come to work today", and also the more primitive working conditions which his father had to endure. He speaks of the gloomy years of the Depression, when, in desperation some business people fired their properties so that they could receive the insurance. Others survived because of the generosity of the store-keepers in allowing credit.

As regards the future of the coal industry in the Hunter Valley, he foresees that the coal reserves here will come to an end one day. If that day comes it will close the curtain on a very important act in the drama of Newcastle's history.

SUMMARY OF RECORDED INTERVIEWS

SIDE B. - Mr. Mick Jurd.

Mr. Jurd, 78, was associated with the coal-mining industry from 1940, when he began work as a carpenter at Old Bulli, until he retired in 1970, although during that time he did work at building army huts during some of the war years. He worked at various jobs at Austinmer, Killingworth, John Darling and Lambton Collieries. He was instrumental in organising and building the Miners' Memorial Music Shell at Freeman's Waterhole which was opened in 1972, and also the Miners' Museum which was built behind the Music Shell and was opened in 1977. He built the models and diaramas in the Museum which depicted the mining history of Newcastle and operated for fourteen years. During that time he played the organ in the Music Shell each Sunday afternoon.

At present he is completing the models and diaramas at the recently built Westlakes Retired Mineworkers Cultural Centre and Museum at Teralba. He has created a fascinating visual history of the mining industry of Newcastle by fashioning electically controlled miniatures of various mines in operation, which reveal the different working methods used over the years. Buildings, sailing vessels, steam boats, and maps also feature in his diaramas. This Museum is due to be opened in September this year, 1988. It is set on land which has a fifty year lease from the government, to be used as a Miners' Retirement Village. Only seven cottages have been built at this stage and further building has been suspended until a decision has been made on whether long-wall mining will take place underneath the village.

In the taped interview Mr. Jurd describes the diaramas he has made, giving some detailed background into their historical setting, and also briefly recalls his years working at various collieries in the Hunter Valley. He speaks of the changes in mining methods and emphasises the enormous effects which long-wall mining is having on the industry. Small pits with mechanical methods are deemed, he maintains, as long-wall mining is the only viable method now. He refused to be drawn into the debate on altered working hours, the cause of recent strikes, with a firm, "No! I'm not taking sides in the argument."

As Australia has only 4% of the world's known coal reserves, and China has the largest coal reserves, with a quarter of the world's population, Mr. Jurd believes "we might as well close the door now" if China starts mining under its own conditions. He does not see a bright future for the coal industry in the Hunter Valley.

COMMENTS ABOUT THE PRODUCTION OF THE TAPE

It is strongly advised that you follow the transcripts when listening to the tape as the tape quality is not good.

Re. Side B. Mr. Jurd showed strong reluctance to speak at length on the Freeman's Waterhole Mining Museum and Music Shell. I think this subject has some painful memories and, I gather, involves other people and a certain amount of friction. Hence the brief reference to it.

Problems associated with the production of the tape included:-

As the interviewees had previously discussed with me some of the questions likely to be asked in the interview, the interviewees at times did not fully answer a question as "we had already dealt with that."

Because of my hearing disability, I sometimes did not hear the interviewees clearly and therefore failed to follow on with an appropriate question, being somewhat reluctant to pepper the recorded interviews with "I-beg-your-pardons." (I received quite an insight into some of the comments later on when, with help from the family, I compiled the transcripts.)

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1988

I, John give my
permission to Wendy Stuart

to use this interview, or part of this interview, for
research, publication and/or broadcasting (delete one of
these if required) and for copies to be lodged in
the LOCAL HISTORY ARCHIVES,
NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY.

for the use of other bona fide researchers.

Signed John

Date 20-7-88

Interviewer WENDY STUART

UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE

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1988

I, Blyde Jones give my
permission to WENDY STUART

to use this interview, or part of this interview, for
research, publication and/or broadcasting (delete one of
these if required) and for copies to be lodged in
the ARCHIVES OF THE

UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE

for the use of other bona fide researchers.

Signed Blyde Jones

Date 5/8/88

Interviewer Wendy Stuart (WENDY STUART)