

2.0 HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

This history has been prepared from available sources which include archival material relating to the Wallarah Coal Company, official documents, relevant secondary sources and newspapers.

The availability of documentary evidence for the Wallarah Coal Company period allows a comprehensive understanding of development and mining activity at Catherine Hill Bay until 1956 when the colliery was sold to J & A Brown Abermain Seaham. However, records from that Company are not available and this has limited the depth of historical understanding and assessment for the post-1956 period. Therefore, while engineering knowledge allows an understanding of many of the surviving elements in terms of their technological role, placing them within the history of the site has often been problematic.

The history of the coalmines at Catherine Hill Bay and the township of that name are closely intertwined. The town exists because of the mines. In order to provide the reader with a clear understanding of this relationship, the history has been written within a chronological rather than thematic framework. However, the relationship of the site to historical themes is addressed in the Comparative Analysis of the CMP (Section 4).

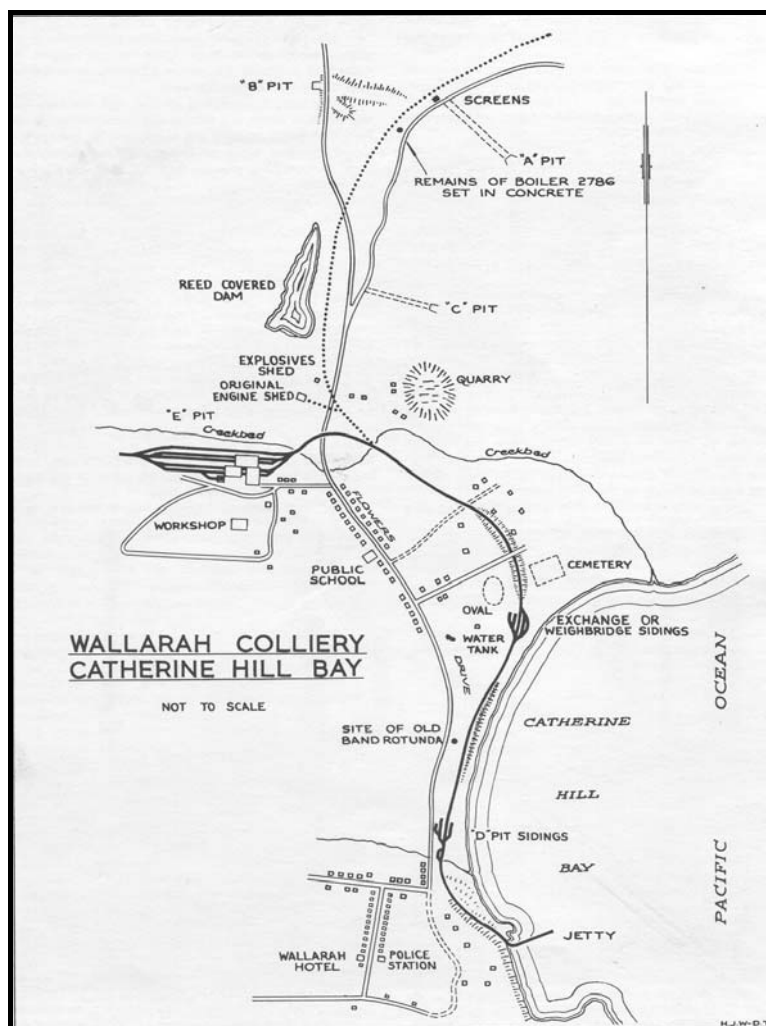


Plate 1: Plan of Wallarah Colliery site, c.1970. (H.J. Wright, The Wallarah Colliery Railway, Catherine Hill Bay, in Australian Railway historical Society Bulletin, February 1973, p.30)

PRE-EUROPEAN SETTLEMENT IN THE STUDY AREA

Before the arrival of European settlers, the Lake Macquarie area was inhabited by Aboriginal people of the Awabakal clan. While information specific to Aboriginal occupation of the Catherine Hill Bay area is limited, its abundant supplies of fish, birds and fauna would have been a great attraction to the various groups which lived around the Lake. It is also likely that they came into contact with the Rev. Lancelot Threlkeld, who established a mission in 1825 on the eastern shores of Lake Macquarie. Success of the mission was limited, and in 1828 the London Missionary Society withdrew financial support. Undeterred, Threlkeld obtained a land grant in the area now known as Toronto and, with the support of a Government salary, continued his work with the Aboriginal people of the area until 1841 when declining numbers led to closure of the mission. By 1900, all forms of tribal life had disappeared from the Lake Macquarie area and only a handful of Aboriginal people remained, often living on the outskirts of European settlement.¹

EARLY COALMINING IN THE NEWCASTLE AREA

The establishment of European settlement in the Hunter region is directly linked to the presence of coal in the area. The first recorded discovery of coal by Europeans in Australia was made just south of Newcastle in 1791 by a party of escaping convicts led by William and Mary Bryant. Coal was also found in “a bay near Port Stephens” by fishermen in 1796, but although Governor Hunter forwarded samples to England he was disinclined to treat the find seriously because he believed that “the fellows [were] so full of trick and deception”.² However, following the discovery of coal at the mouth of the Hunter River in September 1797 by Lieutenant John Shortland R.N., small craft began visiting the area to collect coal for export to India. During this early period, coal was gathered from the ground or broken from the cliffs with a pickaxe.

Official interest in the area intensified following the arrival of Governor King in NSW in 1800. Anxious to develop the colony’s coal deposits, he ordered Lieutenant James Grant, commander of the *Lady Nelson*, to visit Hunter’s River in June 1801 with a small party to survey the river, assess the coal deposits and determine “the most eligible place ... to form a settlement”.³ Within a month, a small settlement had been established and the Governor had issued a General Order declaring the Hunter River coal to be the exclusive property of the Crown. However, problems with discipline in the settlement had led to its abandonment by December 1801.⁴

In March 1804, the penal settlement at Newcastle was re-established to provide a place of secondary punishment for convicts who had offended in the colony. The first to be sent to the settlement were a number of rebellious Irish convicts, some of whom were put to work mining coal in the area of Colliers Point. Additional mines were subsequently developed in the area, but coalmining in Newcastle during this period has been described as “small scale and primitive”, with outputs ranging from 150 tons in 1805 to a peak of 3,915 tons in 1820.⁵

Following closure of the penal settlement in 1821, it was planned to lease the mines to private interests but the

government's mining activities in Newcastle continued until 1828. At that time, an Agreement made with the Colonial Office gave the Australian Agricultural Company (A.A. Company) a virtual monopoly of the coal industry in NSW for the next 31 years, in return for supplying the Government's coal requirements at prime cost, and those of the public at a reasonable price.⁶ The A.A. Company was granted 2,000 acres of land in the Newcastle area with the right to mine for coal.

A successful challenge to the A.A. Company's monopolistic status in 1847 cleared the way for other mining companies to establish collieries in the Newcastle area. The coal industry rapidly expanded, and small villages sprang up near the various mines, while other villages in the area were established as inner-city residential areas. This pattern of settlement resulted in a ring of eleven isolated, politically independent municipalities, with a high degree of home ownership, around the original area of settlement.⁷ Further inland, Although the villages of Merewether and Stockton initially remained in the hands of the Merewether family, this land was released for sale in the early years of the 20th Century. As settlement expanded, the municipalities merged in both the physical and political sense. In 1938, the eleven local government areas amalgamated to become the City of Greater Newcastle, with the early villages retaining their names but becoming suburbs of Newcastle.

Coal was also mined at Minmi, on the western boundary of the Newcastle City area. Residential development in this area contrasted to that in the mining areas closer to Newcastle, as the township was established on land which remained in the possession of the mining company, J & A Brown.

At Minmi, Land was let to miners on conditional leases of 21 years by the Company, while houses built on the land remained in the possession of those who constructed them. Tenancy could be terminated but the residence could only be disposed of to another employee of the Company. If such a purchaser could not be found, the owner could remove any improvements he had made to his allotment. This situation continued in the "old town" at Minmi until the late 1970s when a "Deed of Compromise" was entered into by the Company and the residents and by 1980, all had title to their land.⁸

DISCOVERY OF THE WALLARAH SEAM

Early coalmining centred around the easily accessible Newcastle coalfields, but coal deposits had also been noted in the lower Hunter Valley in the 1840s by the Anglican clergyman and geologist, Rev. William Branthwaite Clarke. Clarke had also measured a coal seam in an area south of Newcastle, now known as Catherine Hill Bay. Known as the Wallarah seam, it became a scene of mining activity in the mid-1870s.⁹

The Wallarah seam is the top seam of the upper coal measures of the Lake Macquarie and Newcastle districts, lying 746 ft. above the Victoria Tunnel seam. The Victoria Tunnel Seam and the much deeper Borehole Seam were the most productive in the district.

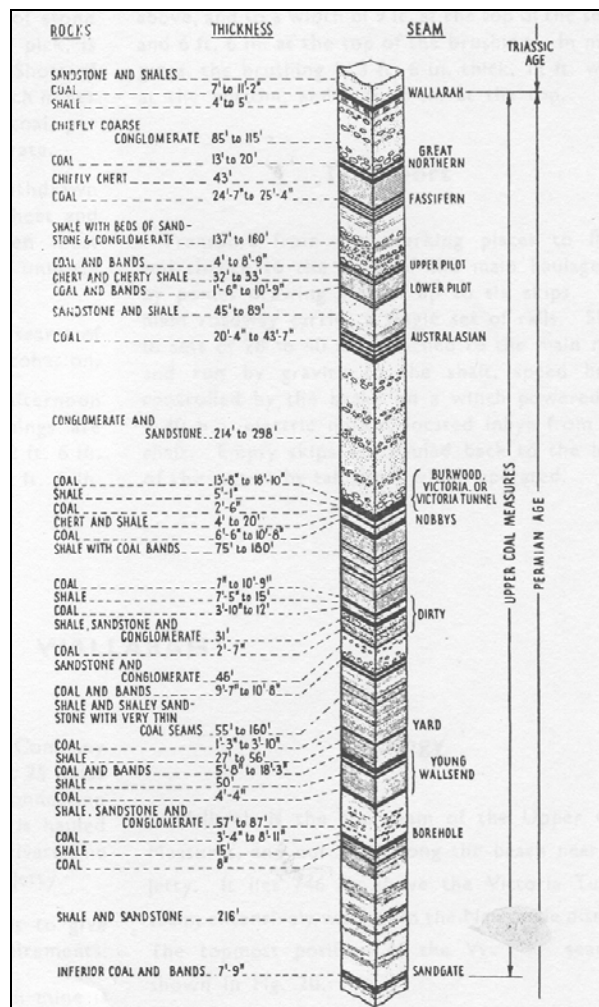


Plate 2: Generalised section of the Upper Coal Measures at Lake Macquarie showing various seams. (H. Elford and M. McKeown, *Coal Mining in Australia*, 1947)

In 1947 the Wallarah seam was described as having a thickness of between 11ft. and 14ft., of which 7ft. to 9ft. was mined. Bands of shale provided a good roof and floor in the mine. Conditions were very uniform with no faults or dykes and few rolls and there was no gas in the mine. The coal was hard, free from pyrite and broke well, rendering it highly suitable for raising steam.¹⁰

The Wallarah seam revealed evidence of the area's pre-historic life in 1979 when a fitter and part-time university student, T. Cowling, discovered fossil footprints in the roof of the mine. After inspection by Professors Konrad Moelle of Newcastle University and paleontologist Greg Dean-Jones, the tracks were identified as those of an amphibian known as "Labyrinthodont". While it was the first recorded occurrence of such fossils in the district's collieries, similar tracks had been found on two occasions in the roof strata of the Bulli Seam of the NSW south coast.

After being displayed in Newcastle University's Geology Department, the fossils were forwarded to the Australian Museum for permanent display with acknowledgement to Wallarah Colliery.¹¹

Interest in exploiting the Wallarah seam can be traced to 1865 when Jacob Montefiore and Thomas Hale took out a mining lease on 265 acres (Lot 20), completing purchase of the allotment ten years later. At the same time, Robert

Saddington and Charles Parbury acquired a total of 635 acres in the area (Lots 17, 18 and 19) All portions were in the Parish of Wallarah.¹² It is known that Hale had previous mining experience, having established a mine at Bellambi in 1859 but it is not known whether any of the other members of the group had prior involvement in the mining industry.



Plate 3: Dinosaur footprints found during mining operations at Wallarah Colliery.

(V & A Brown, Coal & Allied Archive, University of Newcastle. Photo: Brian Andrews)

1867: THE WRECK OF THE CATHERINE HILL

Known by the local Aboriginal people as "Toolouweraraba", Catherine Hill Bay acquired its European name following the wreck the *Catherine Hill* on 21 June 1867.¹³ Built in the previous year for Thomas Hill of Market Street, Sydney by George Greentree at Wisemans Ferry, the *Catherine Hill* was a wooden, 2 masted topsail schooner of 65 tons, measuring 74.0 ft. x 17.2 ft. x 7.5 ft.¹⁴ news of the wreck reached Sydney via Captain Adams, of the steamer *Coonanbara*, which was sailing from Newcastle to Sydney. He reported that he had:

... observed a schooner ashore, about three miles north of Bird Island Point. She is standing broadside on to the beach and perfectly upright, with her masts and yards all standing. She appears to be about 80 tons burthen, and is painted either black or a dark green, with a white streak. The yards and mastheads were

*white, and the mainmast had more take than the foremast ... There was some person standing on the beach, but as there was no signal made Captain Adams did not decree it prudent to go too near, as the sea was breaking heavily. The schooner was lying inside the outer beach, and the crew could easily walk to Lake Macquarie.*¹⁵

Details of the disaster were published a few days later, following the arrival in Newcastle of Captain Crawley, master of the *Catherine Hill*. With the owner, Thomas Hill, on board, the vessel had left Richmond River the previous Monday in "dark and gloomy" weather with "light variable winds and heavy rain", and headed towards Newcastle. According to Captain Crawley,

*On Wednesday it blew a heavy gale from N.E. to E., with heavy squalls, thunder and lightning; the ship was hove-to under single-reefed fore trysail, there being a high confused sea at the time; ship labouring heavily, and shipping a great quantity of water. On Friday morning made the land on the lee bow, close in shore, between two reefs of rocks; tried to make sail on ship to get her off shore, but the attempt was unsuccessful. Kept her away for [sic] the beach, and, while doing so, shipped a heavy sea, which took overboard the mate and cook, who were never seen afterwards. All the other hands reached the shore in safety; stayed on shore all night and next day without clothing or food, when a settler came and made a fire and provided us with provisions. The vessel is bilged, tide ebbing and flowing in her on to the beach. The cargo consists of cedar and pine. There are no hopes of getting the vessel off, and the crew are engaged in stripping vessel and saving all they can of the wreck.*¹⁶

1873: THE NEW WALLSEND COAL MINING COMPANY

Establishment

Early in 1873, exploratory work at Catherine Hill Bay was carried out by Mr. Pembledon, who then suggested the floating of a company to exploit the coal resources of the area.¹⁷ Little more is known of Pembledon, but it was Thomas Hale who promoted the Catherine Hill Bay coal, displaying samples in his Sydney office in mid-1874.

Hale became Managing Director and his partner, Jacob Montefiore, became Chairman of the Board of Directors of the new concern, to be known as New Wallsend Coal Mining Company.

In July 1873, the directors reported that under the supervision of manager Anders de Flon, a seam was being worked close to the water's edge at the south end of the bay and a pile jetty was under construction, running "right into the face of the workings". Transport of coal to the Sydney market by sea was crucial for the success of the new venture as previous attempts to mine coal in the Lake Macquarie area had failed because of difficulties in moving cargoes through the channel at the lake's entrance.¹⁸

The Jetty

The directors were slightly premature in their claim that a jetty was "under construction" in mid-July, as work on the structure did not commence until 4 August. In the following December, it was announced that 500ft. of the jetty had been built and the first coal would be shipped within fourteen days. However, before being used for its intended purpose the new jetty provided a landing site for company officials and owners of "coal lands adjoining". After coming ashore, the party witnessed a ceremony in which the Union Jack was hoisted on the flagstaff for the first time.

The jetty was reported to be "a very substantial structure", built on piles which had been "drawn a distance of seven miles":

At the shipping end it is more than 20 feet above high water, with a double line of iron rails laid down for the coal trucks, which run out of the mine on to the jetty, where they are tipped into a long iron shoot, hanging over the vessel's hold.¹⁹

The first shipment of coal from the New Wallsend Coal Mine was loaded from the jetty into the steamer *Tasmania* on 23 December 1873.²⁰

Despite the company's assertions that the jetty was "very substantial", it was described by a journalist in 1876 as being:

merely a make shift, being a rough structure, tumbled together with apparently no other intention than getting a few hundred tons of coal shipped to Sydney as quickly as possible after the opening of the mine. We observed that many of the piles were "tea tree", not very stout; and what was worse, they were piped, and not being sheathed to protect them from cobra, they must soon rot. Indeed, I observed that new piles had been introduced, and that the jetty, on the side where the steamer loads, had sunk a foot or more, causing the structure to be lopsided, and therefore dangerous. Altogether it is too narrow, and we were not astonished at being told that the company had lost two horses by falling over into the sea".²¹

It remained standing until the mid 1880s when it was burnt down.²² However, given the jetty's poor condition in 1876, there were probably only remnants left to burn.

1873: Mining Operations Begin

The mine worked a 14 foot seam which, in December 1873, extended 150ft. in a southerly direction with bords to the east and south-east.²³ By June 1874 it was producing about 300 tons per week and provided employment for 45 miners and about twenty wheelers and labourers. Two tunnels were driven into the face of the cliff, one containing two 20 horse power engines and Cornish flue boilers, one for draining the mine and one for haulage purposes.²⁴ By 1875 between 60 and 70 miners were employed, producing from 800 to 1,000 tons of coal weekly, and the town possessed

"indications of advancing civilisation".²⁵

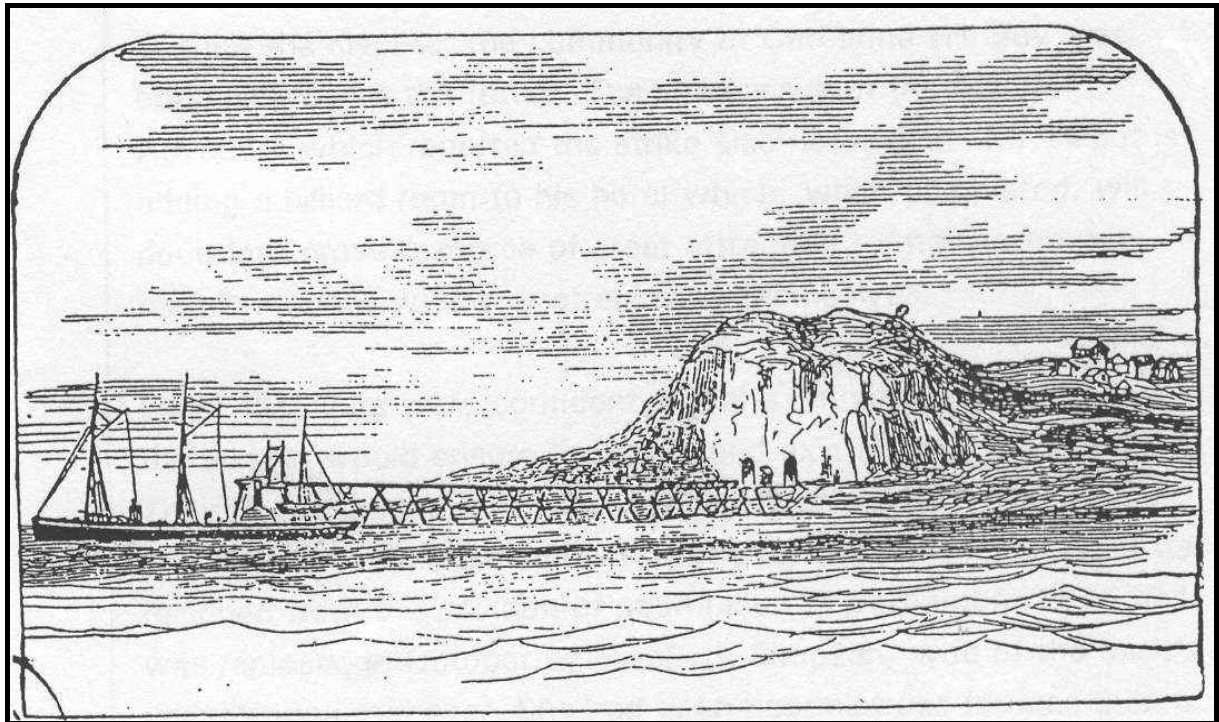


Plate 4: New Wallsend Coal Company mine and jetty
(Sydney Mail, 17 July 1875)

1875: THE TOWNSHIP OF COWPER

Within a few months of establishing the mine, a house had been built for the manager and a number of "good weather-board shingled cottages" had been completed for the workmen, with several more under construction.²⁶ By June 1874 there were about twenty small, substantially built houses of uniform design and several tents in the village, with a butchers shop and store.²⁷

A visitor to the home of the manager, Anders de Flon, wrote that the house was "situated on a hill and commands an excellent view of the ocean, the pit works, and the surrounding hills which are, for the most part, very barren looking".²⁸

In February 1875 the New Wallsend Coal Mining Company subdivided part of its land to create the Township of Cowper, probably in an attempt to raise much-needed capital. It is probable that the town was named for Sir Charles Cowper, former Premier of NSW while some of the streets were named for directors and shareholders of the company (Frazer, Hale, Montefiore and Lindsley). Usher Street may have been named for mining engineer John Usher, Keene Street for geologist, William Keene, Morrice Street for pastoralist and former MLA John Morrice, and Clarke Street for the Rev.W.B. Clarke.²⁹

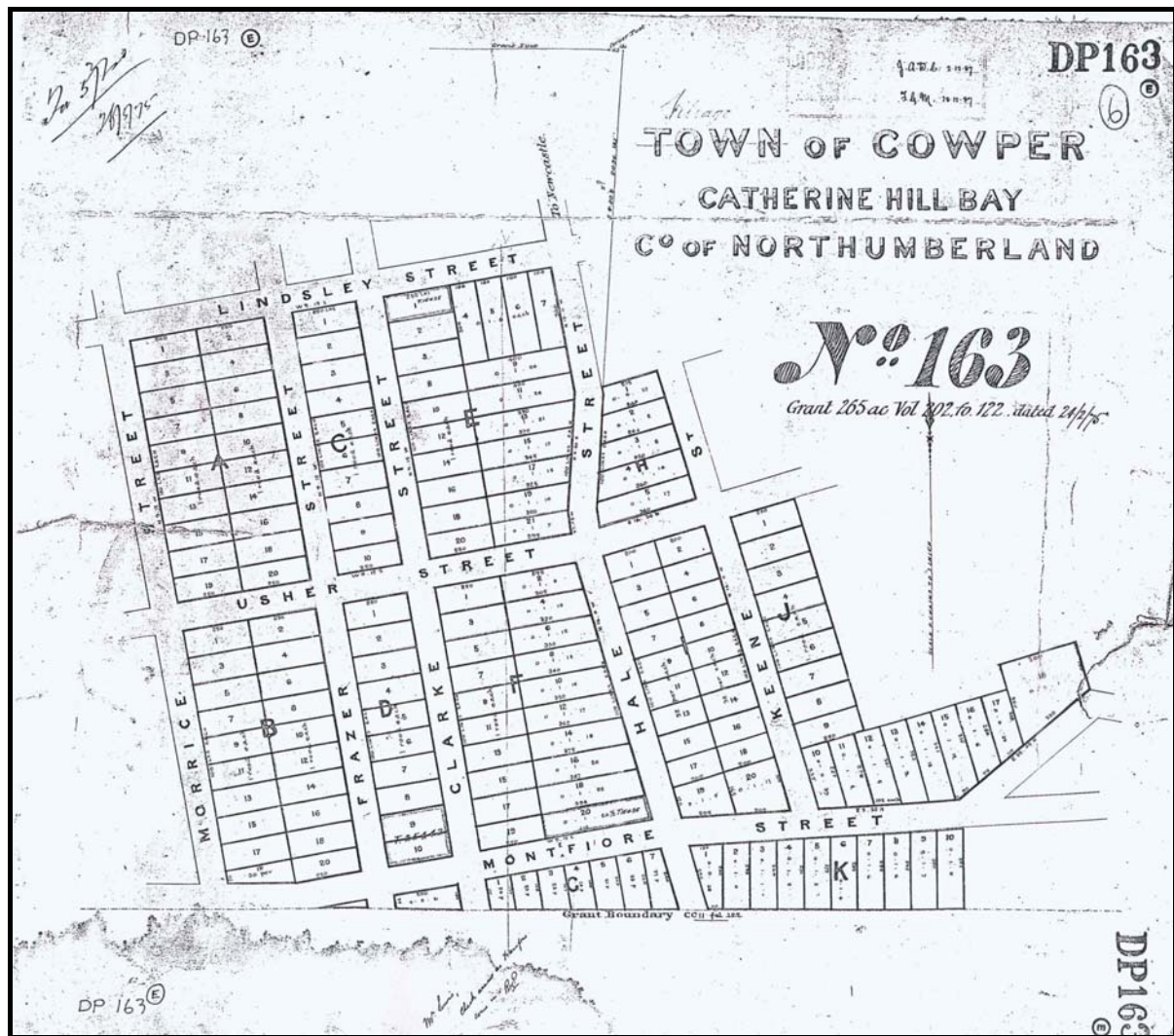


Plate 5: Plan of the Township of Cowper
(NSW Dept. of Land & Property Information)

Newcastle auctioneer J.C. Bonarius offered sixty seven allotments for sale in June 1875 but only a few were sold to speculative buyers.³⁰ Although the town appeared to be progressing, with several "comfortable residences" under construction as well as a new hotel, the cost of food and other provisions was high, prompting one resident to complain: "We are paying fearful prices for all articles of consumption ... for small potatoes, not much larger than marbles".³¹ A further deterrent to potential purchasers was the inaccessibility of the area. As the company's vessel was not licensed to carry passengers and land access was primitive, the usual method of reaching Catherine Hill Bay was to take a ferry down the lake to Reeces' wharf, then travel three miles overland to the town.³²

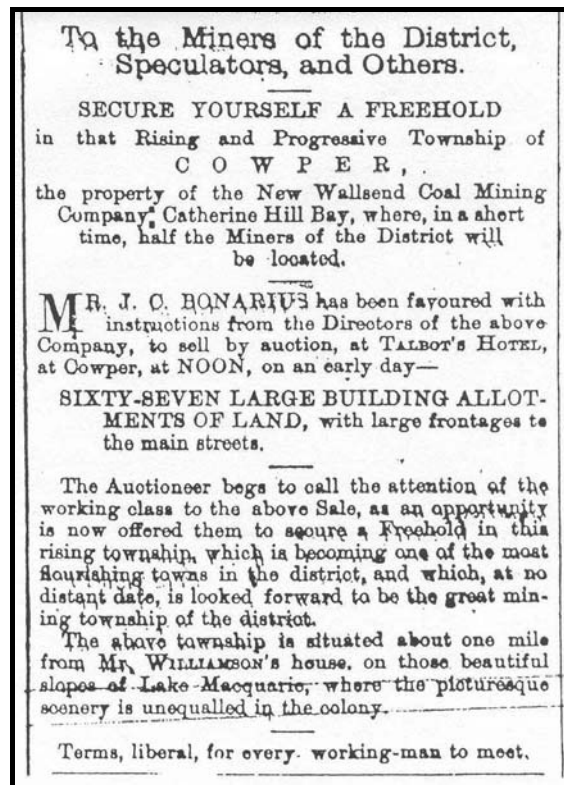


Plate 6: Advertisement for sale of building allotments in Cowper.

(Newcastle Chronicle 19 June 1875)

1875: DECLINE

A severe blow to the company occurred in July 1875 with the loss of its steamer the *Susannah Cuthbert*, en route to Sydney with a full cargo of coal.³³ Production at the mine began to slacken off and in September the miners faced a reduction in wages. According to the *Miners Advocate*, the directors "could not possibly have expected the men to accept it, and to our mind it looks like a quiet way of shutting up the colliery for a time."³⁴

In February 1876, rumours began to spread that the pit was about to be closed. DeFlon announced that less than a dozen men would be employed until the company enlarged the jetty and made enough skips to hold 200 tons of coal so that vessels could be loaded more economically.³⁵

A visitor to Catherine Hill Bay noted the problems faced by the mining company, which could not load coal in the bay in unfavourable weather. As the company had no means of stowing any more than a few tons of coal, the mine lay idle until weather conditions improved. "This drawback", declared the reporter, "coupled with the want of energy and pluck on the part of the shareholders, has kept the mine laying idle for some months, and as a necessary consequence has rendered the place almost too poor for any man to live in."³⁶

The downturn in mining activity impacted on the community, by then "a scattered settlement, containing thirty or forty habitations amongst which there are two hotels" and a store with attached post office, but efforts by the residents to

persuade the government to establish a school had been unsuccessful. In the absence of a reading room or other place of amusement, it was suggested at the time that the two hotels must have been well patronised by the unemployed miners. In the opinion of a visitor to the town,

That supposition....would appear to be verified by the fact that there is a policeman stationed here. Fancy a place like this, situated on the coast so many miles from the centres of population, and numbering only a few scores of souls, having a "limb of the law" all to themselves, while the Wallsend, after which this place is named, with some seven thousand souls, has only one constable.³⁷

With few traces of the early settlement remaining, the site remained deserted until 1888 when interest was revived in the area's coal resources.

1876: CLOSURE

In March 1876 it was announced that the New Wallsend Coal Mining Company had been established with insufficient capital, and was unable to continue working the mine. Operations were suspended and the company wound up, but it was twelve months before Anders deFlon and the few remaining maintenance workers left Catherine Hill Bay for the South Coast area to work at Little Bulli mine.³⁸³⁹

The opening of a new colliery and sawmill at Lake Macquarie in October 1879 by Messrs. Lamb, Knox and Parbury effectively brought the settlement at Catherine Hill Bay to an end. The entry for Catherine Hill Bay in the *Newcastle Directory* 1880/1 described the town's decline, with a hint of sadness at the lost potential of the site.

It has all collapsed now, Messrs. Lamb, Knox and Parbury having purchased the plant, stock, and houses have re-erected most of the latter on their estate at Lake Macquarie entrance. Business people, houses, and all have disappeared to pastures new, and a place which should have been a flourishing little township, is now a thing of the past⁴⁰.



Plate 7: Sealed New Wallsend Coal mining Company Tunnels (E. Tonks, 16/6/1990)

1888-1957: THE WALLARAH COAL CO. LTD

The late 1880s were profitable years for the Australian mining industry, particularly in Newcastle where coal owners were reaping the benefits of a Vend which set a minimum price with members free to sell at a higher price.⁴¹ Investors were attracted to the industry, drawing comment from the *Newcastle Morning Herald* in 1889:

*There is at present a greater amount of capital being expended in opening out new mines than there has ever been before in the history of the district. Within 20 miles of the port there are 18 companies opening out new collieries, the expenditure in many instances exceeding £50,000 before even a ton of coal is obtained. In every case the necessary capital has been obtained outside the district, the majority of the companies having been floated in Melbourne and London.*⁴²

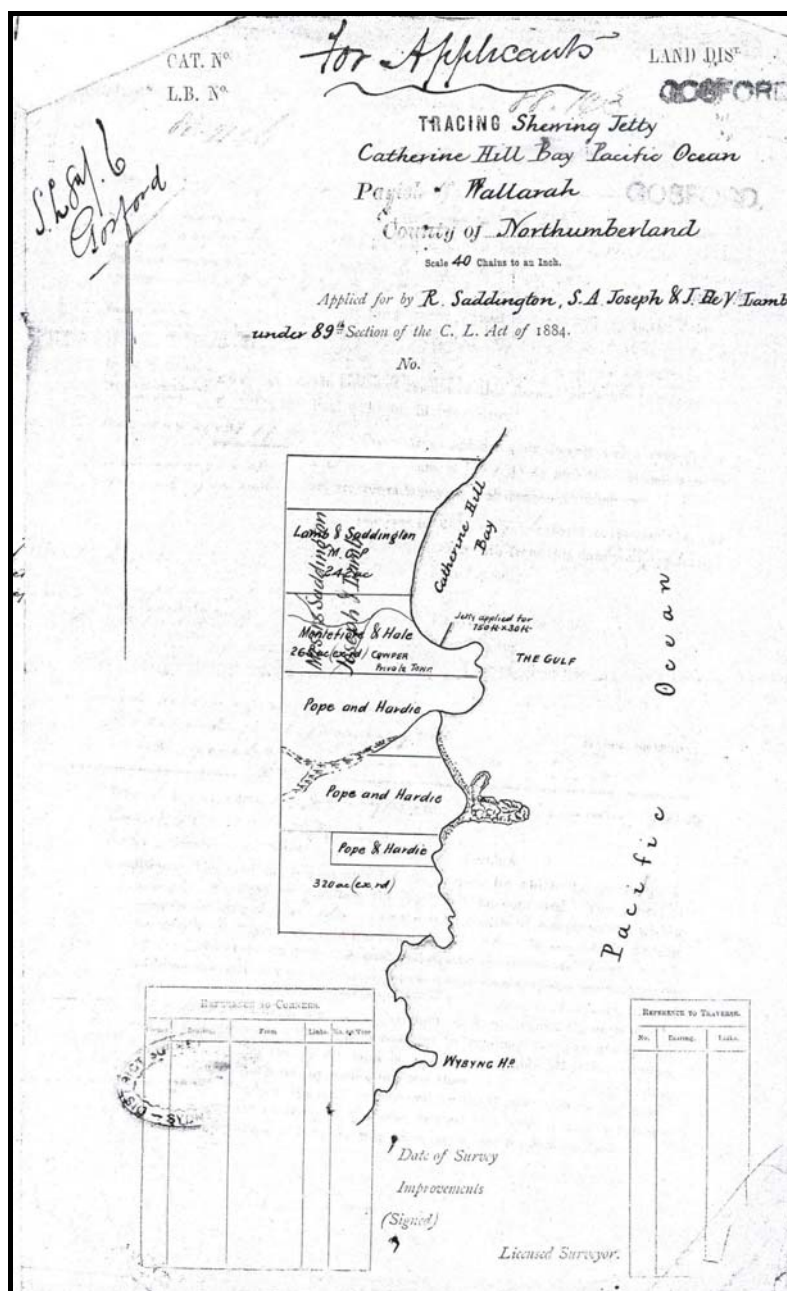


Plate 8: Plan of Catherine Hill Bay showing landholders and site of jetty, 1888 (J & A Brown-Coal & Allied Archives, A7662(ii) University of Newcastle)

Among those companies was the Wallarah Coal Company, formed in London in September 1888 with a capital of £100,000.⁴³ The Board of Directors included Charles Parbury, Director of the Union Bank of Australia, who had been a director of the company which established a coalmine at Lake Macquarie in 1879. A Local Board, based in Sydney comprised the Hon. Samuel A. Joseph, John De Villiers Lamb and Robert Saddington. Joseph had been a shareholder and director of the New Wallsend Coal Company, and Lamb and Saddington had been partners with Parbury in the Lake Macquarie mining venture.⁴⁴

After receiving a favourable report from an independent expert, Thomas Parton, the Wallarah Coal Company purchased 1200 acres at Catherine Hill Bay which had been offered for sale by Messrs. Parbury, Saddington and Lamb. The land comprised Lots 16, 17, 18, 19 and 20 of Wallarah Parish, bounded on the west by Lake Macquarie and on the east by a three mile ocean frontage.

Parton was a mining engineer, a Fellow of the Geological Society and a past president of the South Staffordshire and East Worcester Mining Institute. He saw great potential in the Catherine Hill Bay site in terms of coal production and also spoke highly of the "vast supplies of mining timber available on the estate". Parton was also attracted to the site by its sheltered bay which would favour the construction of a jetty, thereby allowing coal to be exported by sea.



Plate 9: Thomas Parton and family at Catherine Hill Bay
(Lake Macquarie Library Collection)

Thomas Parton was appointed as the first Manager of the Wallarah Colliery in London on 28 September 1888. By the end of November he had arrived at Catherine Hill Bay, charged with the task of establishing the mine and associated jetty, railway line and village.⁴⁵

1888-1890: ESTABLISHMENT OF THE COLLIERY

Parton's first task was the selection of a site for the colliery. He decided to tunnel in on the No.1 or upper seam, at a point about 2½ miles north-east of the bay on a hill some 250ft. above sea level. Having made this decision, plans could be made for the construction of a railway line to carry coal to the jetty where it would be loaded onto ships for transport to various destinations.⁴⁶ Another early project was the erection of a sawmill to provide timber for railway sleepers, buildings and pit props, using timber on the estate.⁴⁷

The Jetty

Crucial to the success of the Wallarah venture was a jetty, for the initial setting up of the mine and associated facilities and then for the transport of coal. With this in mind, the London investors secured a special lease "for the purpose of a jetty on piles" in June 1888.⁴⁸ As soon as the company was formed in the following September, a tender from "Atlas" Co. was accepted for shoots at the jetty⁴⁹ and authority was cabled from London for the commencement of the jetty construction, at a site near that of the earlier structure built by the New Wallsend Company.⁵⁰



Plate 10: Catherine Hill Bay Jetty early twentieth century.

(E. Tonks)

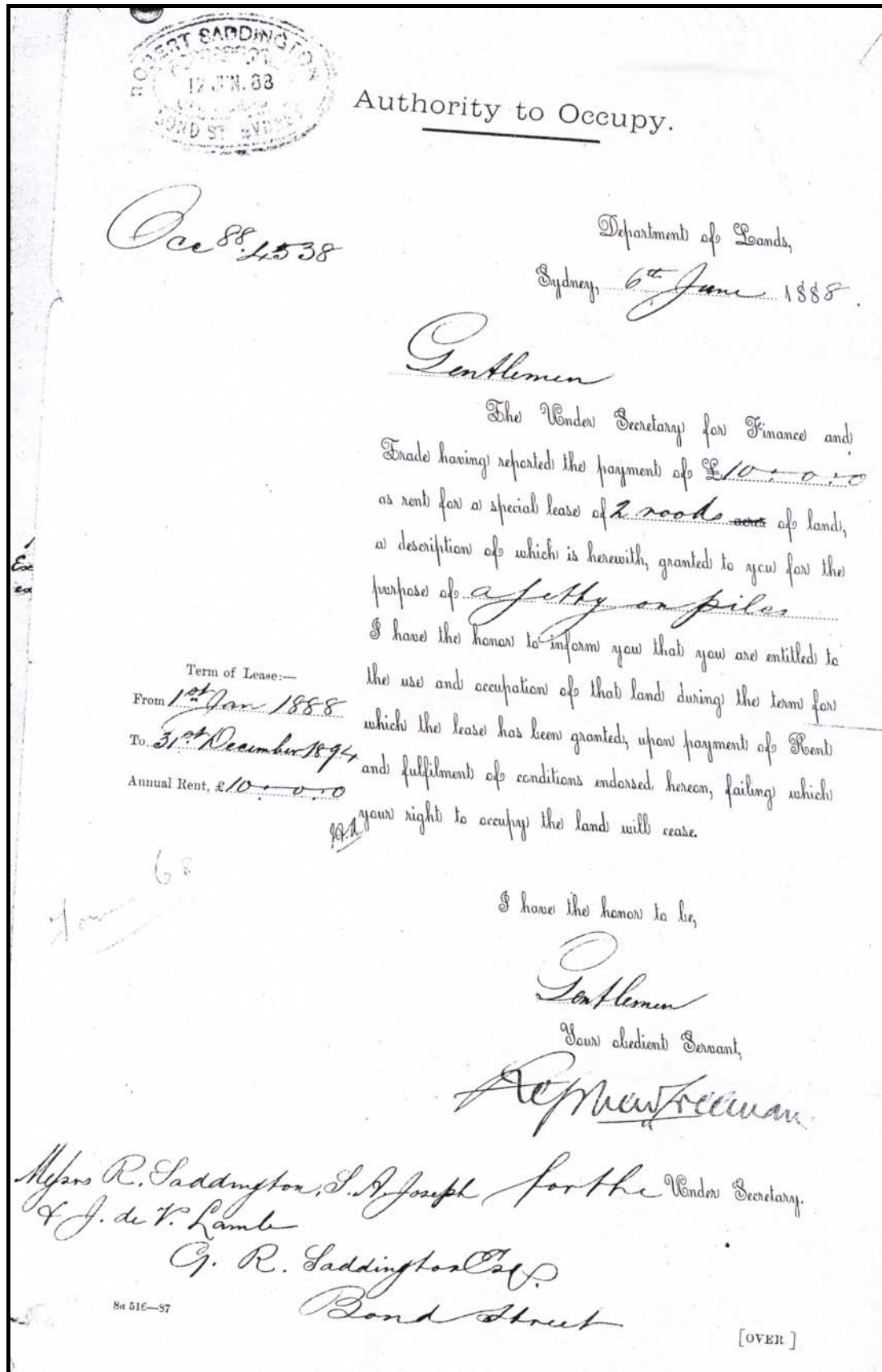


Plate 11: "Lease for a "Jetty on Piles" at Catherine Hill Bay.
(J & A Brown-Coal & Allied Archives, A7662 (ii) University of Newcastle)

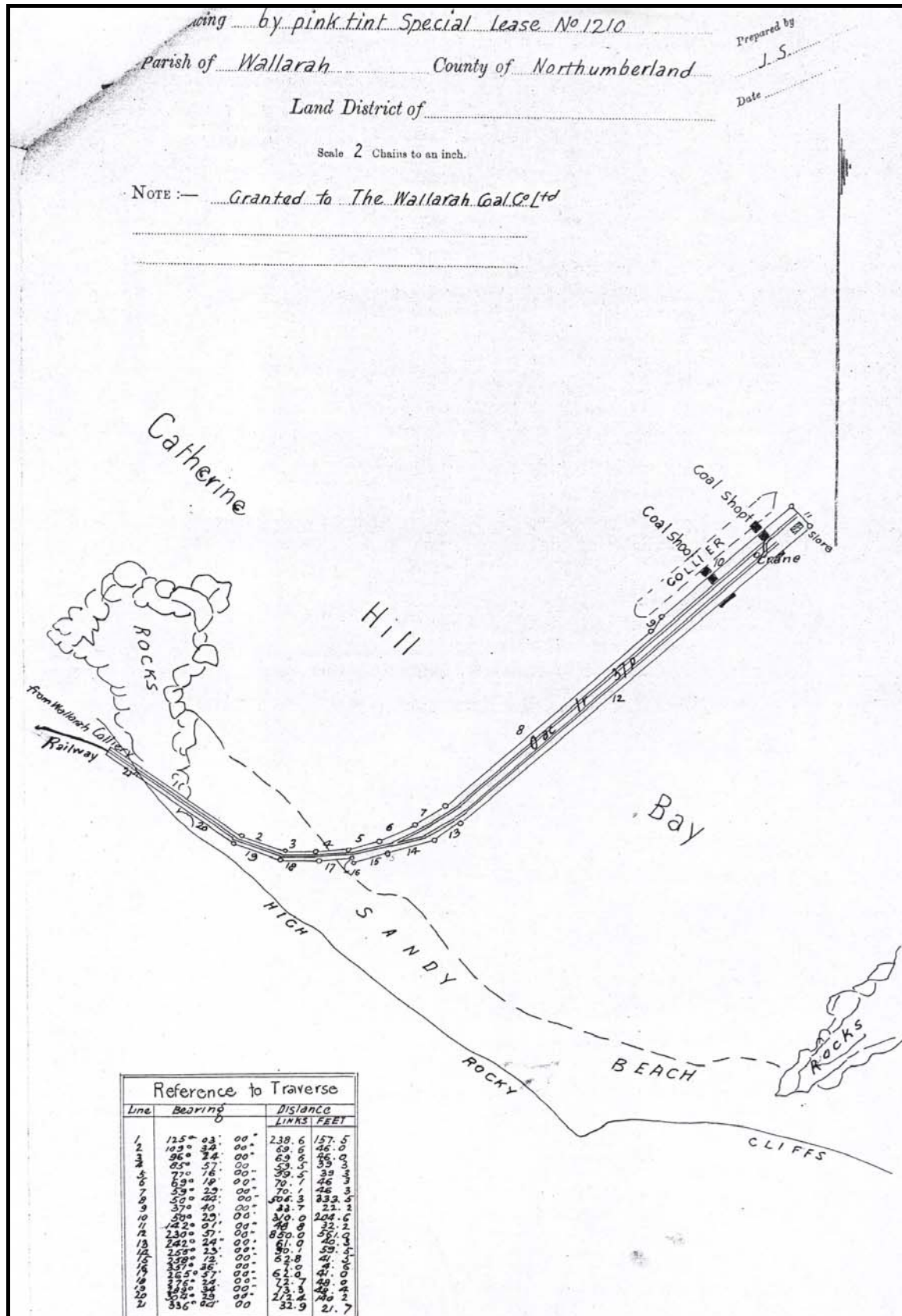


Plate 12: Plan of Jetty at Catherine Hill Bay, 1888

(J & A Brown-Coal & Allied Archives, A7662 (ii) University of Newcastle)

While the location for the jetty was selected because it was the most protected part of the bay, it was nevertheless an exposed and difficult construction site:

As the bottom was nothing but rock, every pile used had to be fitted with an iron bolt at the end, which was drilled into the rock by divers. At the present time this wharf runs out for a distance of 1,020 ft. and some 40ft. yet remains to be accomplished. In appearance, it is much like any other substantial wharf, except its great height, the planking being 30ft. above high water mark, so as to enable vessels of 3,000 tons to coal at the shoots. It is fitted with two shoots which can be adjusted to suit the state of the tide or the size of the ship, and it is estimated that 1,000 tons of coal can be shipped in eight hours. On arriving over the receiver of the shoots, the bottoms of the railway wagons are opened and the coal rushes into the hold of the vessel, and as there is a double line of rails the full trucks keep on one set while the empties are taken away on the other.

To protect the structures during heavy easterly gales four large iron cylinders are to be sunk at the end, while near the shoots are two fenders connected with separate piles, so that the rolling of a vessel will not damage the main piles.

The depth of water at the shoots is from 25ft. to 35ft. at low water, and as this amount exists for nearly 600ft. there is ample room for the largest steamer. During the recent heavy south easterly weather the sea was breaking clean over the end of the wharf, but not the slightest damage was done. Mr. Parton considers that when completed it will be equal to the best shipping jetties on the south coast.⁵¹

Hopper wagons were drawn along the jetty to the shoots by an endless rope of flexible galvanised iron which passed over a vertical sheave at the shore end, and two horizontal sheaves at the ocean end. The rope was driven by a two-drum winch, powered by steam from a vertical boiler. Wagons were weighed on a Pooley weighbridge near the jetty before being discharged into the ship's hold.⁵²

The Railway

Construction of the railway line was apparently uneventful, but transporting the locomotives and railway stock posed significant problems. Two locomotives had been ordered from Fowler & Co., Leeds but as the only land access to Catherine Hill Bay was a bridle track from Swansea, Parton found it necessary to bring the locos to Sydney in pieces, then ship them to Catherine Hill Bay for assembly at the mine. As there was a gradual incline toward the wharf, the locos were "unusually large".



Plate 13: Loading coal from Wallarah Jetty, 1894
(Dept. of Mines / E.Tonks)

A similar procedure was adopted for the 100 hopper-shaped wagons which were shipped from England in pieces and assembled at the site. Made with opening bottoms for loading the coal into vessels at the jetty, they were described as being "exceptionally large, holding 12 tons of coal without being heavily topped". When fifty additional wagons were landed at the site in January 1894, they were assembled in machine shops which were also equipped to carry out a variety of repairs to ironwork.⁵³

By January 1890 the railway had been completed and was described as "one of the best laid lines in the northern district, the rails being of steel, weighing 70lb. to the yard, while it is well ballasted and secured".⁵⁴

The Town

Accommodation for those working at the new colliery was provided by the Company, which retained ownership of the land and buildings. Parton chose to establish the town on the same site as the former "Cowper" township, with his home in the same position as deFlon's, overlooking the village and the bay. The well-known Newcastle architectural firm, Bennet & Yeomans, was engaged to design the house, and they called for tenders for its construction in April 1889.⁵⁵ The new manager's house was described as "one of the finest in the district", with well laid out grounds⁵⁶. Built of weatherboard on brick foundations and with an iron roof, the home had 9 rooms and offices plus garages and stables.⁵⁷ The manager's office was reported in 1897 to be located "just below his residence".⁵⁸



Plate 14: Manager's House, 1894
(Lake Macquarie City Library Collection)

In his report to the English Company in October 1889, Thomas Parton wrote that:

*The Township has grown into respectable proportions. We have fourteen cottages occupied and others in progress. A Church will be erected by the "Church of England" party in the course of a month, and one also by the "Methodist" party. Talbot has built a large store and also a large Hotel is built on the other portion of his property. So altogether we are developing from bush life to a more civilised one.*⁵⁹

Three years later, demand for the company's coal was increasing and Parton found it necessary "to expend a considerable sum upon enlarging the Township".⁶⁰ He asked the directors to approve the purchase of lining timber and Baltic pine, to be used in the construction of "a few more cottages for the married men".⁶¹

Production Commences

According to a local newspaper report, "there were not wanting people who prophesied that nothing but speedy failure awaited the company which was rash enough to attempt to ship coal from [Catherine Hill Bay]" ⁶² The critics were

proved wrong, and the first cargo of 600 tons was shipped from the Wallarah mine at the end of January 1890. Before long, the directors were able to report a steady stream of sales on the local market, which they believed was "worth a lot more than the risky foreign trade."⁶³

A tunnel 10ft. by 12ft. had been commenced in August 1889, following the arrival of miners from England. Two miners from the Newcastle district were also engaged to work with the imported miners, who were under contract to the company for two years.⁶⁴ At the beginning of 1890, 120 men and youths were employed, about half of them being miners who worked eight hours a day for a daily wage of ten shillings. They had formed a miner's lodge, and under the rules of the association were bound not to hew a ton of coal under the usual district price of 4s 2d per ton.⁶⁵

By February 1890 the mine extended 300yds into the outcrop in a westerly direction. The seam was described as being "a somewhat peculiar one, being 8ft. in thickness, with no band or parting of any kind, and owing to its peculiar formation it is very easy to hew". Above the seam was a small band and then another 2 ft. of coal, but it was not intended to work the latter portion.

According to an article published in the *Newcastle Morning Herald*, Parton's approach to mining the seam was unconventional by local standards:

The mode adopted in opening the colliery is somewhat different from the course generally obtaining in this district, the intention of the manager being to drive right to the end of the coal, and then take it back. It will be a modification of the long wall system, and the advantages claimed are many, the principal one being that there is comparatively no waste.

*The present tunnel will serve for some three hundred acres of land, the seam as it were cropping out on either side of the hill, and the headings will be driven right through before the body of coal is touched. When this portion of the estate is worked out another adit may be driven into a second hill in an easterly direction, and as the railway runs between the two it will not need to be shifted.*⁶⁶

This method did not require the costly and powerful machines which were generally found at the large shafts in the district. Consequently, the only machinery at the mine in 1894, apart from the two locomotives, was a small haulage engine near the screens which also drove the sawmill.⁶⁷ The economies arising from Parton's method were a considerable factor in the mine's ability to weather a period of stagnation in the mining industry in the early 1890s. Wallarah, together with the Pacific mine at Teralba, were the only two mines in the area which continued to flourish during that period.⁶⁸

Coal obtained from the Wallarah mine was of inferior quality in comparison to that in the Borehole and Greta seams for gas making purposes, but was of equal quality for steaming purposes. Wallarah coal was relatively hard, giving only

12½% of small coal to the ton. It was streaked with bright bituminous mineral which was believed to cause the coal to light quickly, burn without clinker and keep its heat.⁶⁹

1890-1900: EXPANSION

Early in 1894, Thomas Parton left for England on a six month holiday, after supervising the opening of a second tunnel at "B" Pit on the second hill. The coal at this site was found to be harder and of superior quality to that first mined. Loaded skips from both mines found their way by gravitation to a screening shed which was erected over the railway, midway between the two tunnels. The weight of the skips descending from the tunnel's mouth to the loading platform pulled the empties up the hill. After screening the coal was loaded onto wagons which were then hauled down a gentle incline to a loading platform at the wharf.

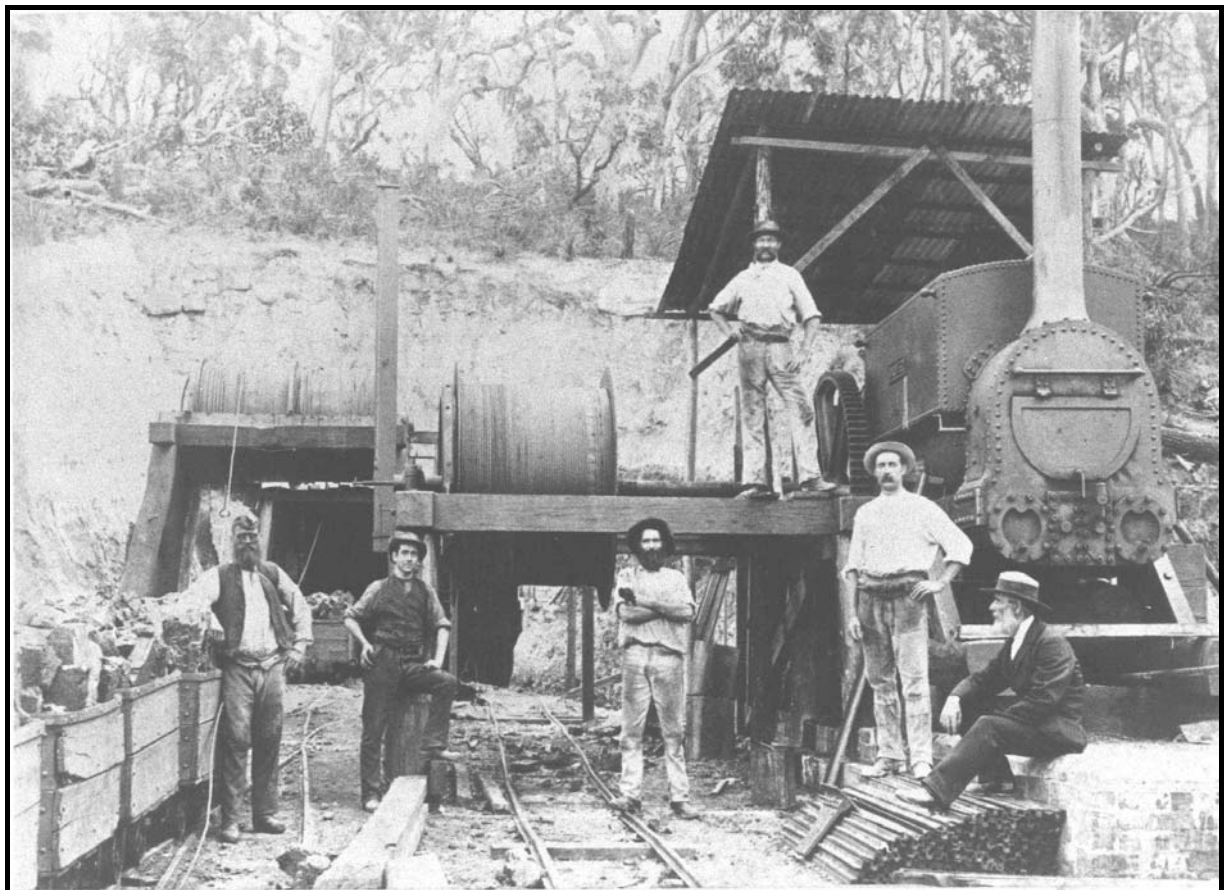


Plate 15: Workers at the entry to "B" Pit, 1894 (E. Tonks Collection)

Parton's return to Catherine Hill Bay in August 1894 was marked by a public reception, chaired by the Undermanager Joseph Sperring and attended by about 250 people. An illuminated address was presented to Parton, highlighting his outstanding managerial abilities. "Beautifully mounted and framed, and printed on satin", the address read:

On behalf of the officials and workmen of the Wallarah Colliery and residents of Catherine Hill Bay, we desire to tender you our hearty congratulations on your safe return home and to duty. We trust that your visit to

loved ones in England has proved one of unalloyed pleasure and happiness, and that you are mentally and physically benefited thereby. We embrace this opportunity to express in a practical form our appreciation of your high Christian character, the consistency of which has very materially conduced to the moral well being of this community.

In your capacity of general manager of the Wallarah Company's mine, you have evidenced skill, tact, and enterprise; for we are assured that the works of the company in their incipient state, must have been beset by difficulties which are now overcome; and we rejoice with you in the measure of success attained. We also trust that the present amicable relations existing between yourself and the employees, which have been fostered by your courtesy and consideration, may long continue, and that the future may hold for you greater success than you have already achieved

As a further measure of the high regard in which Parton was held, the group presented him with "a splendid silver-mounted morocco writing case and desk."⁷⁰ Parton was succeeded by William Scobie in 1898.⁷¹



Plate 16: Incline from "B" Pit, 1894 (E. Tonks Collection)

- ¹ J. Turner and G. Blyton, *The Aborigines of Lake Macquarie: a brief history*, Lake Macquarie Council, 1995.
- ² Governor John Hunter to Sir Joseph Banks, cited in John Cobley, *Sydney Cove 1795-1800*, Angus & Robertson, 1986, p.69
- ³ King to Grant, 9 June 1801. F.M. Blayden, *Historical Records of New South Wales, Vol.4, 1800-1802*, Facsimile reprint, Mona Vale, 1979, pp.390-391
- ⁴ J.W. Turner, *Coal Mining in Newcastle 1801-1900*, Newcastle History Monograph No.9, Newcastle 1982, p.16
- ⁵ *ibid.*
- ⁶ P. Pemberton, *Pure Merinos and Others: the Shipping Lists of the Australian Agricultural Company*, Canberra, 1986, p.8
- ⁷ J. Docherty, *Newcastle: The Making of an Australian City*, Sydney, 1983, p.20.
- ⁸ Newcastle & District Historical Society Inc., *Minmi: The Place of the Giant Lily*, Newcastle, c.1991, p.83.
- ⁹ M. Martin, "Catherine Hill Bay: a development history", April 1996, p.3.
- ¹⁰ H. Elford and M. McKeown, *Coal Mining in Australia*, Melbourne, 1947, pp.130-1.
- ¹¹ Manager Wallarah Colliery to Supt. of Collieries, Newcastle, 11 July 1979. J & A Brown-Coal & Allied Archive, A7677 (vii), University of Newcastle Archives.
- ¹² L. Nilsen (ed), "Catherine Hill Bay", *Lake Macquarie: Past and Present*, Lake Macquarie, 1985, p.29.
- ¹³ K. Clouten, *Reids Mistake*, Lake Macquarie, 1967 p.192
- ¹⁴ J. Purtell *The Mosquito Fleet: Hawkesbury River Trade and Traders 1794-1994*, Berowra Heights, 1995, p.188.
- ¹⁵ *Sydney Morning Herald*, (SMH) 26 June 1867.
- ¹⁶ *SMH*, 28 June 1867.
- ¹⁷ *Miners Advocate (MA)*, 10 June 1874.
- ¹⁸ *SMH*, 17 July 1873.
- ¹⁹ *MA*, 20 December 1873.
- ²⁰ *MA*, 27 December 1873
- ²¹ *MA*, 26 February 1876.
- ²² M. Martin, "Catherine Hill Bay: a Development History", April 1996 p.12.
- ²³ *MA*, 20 December 1873.
- ²⁴ M. Martin, "Catherine Hill Bay: a Development History, p.5.
- ²⁵ *Sydney Mail*, 17 July 1875.
- ²⁶ *MA*, 20 December 1873.
- ²⁷ *MA*, 10 June 1874.
- ²⁸ *MA*, 10 June 1874.
- ²⁹ M. Martin, "Catherine Hill Bay: a Development History", p.4.
- ³⁰ *ibid.*
- ³¹ K. Clouten, *Reids Mistake*, p.195.
- ³² K. Clouten, *Reids Mistake*, p.178 and *Miners Advocate* 19 June 1875.
- ³³ *MA*, 10 July 1875.
- ³⁴ *MA*, 18 September 1875.
- ³⁵ *MA*, 19 February 1875.
- ³⁶ *MA*, 26 February 1876.
- ³⁷ *MA*, 26 February 1876
- ³⁸ *MA*, 4 March 1876
- ³⁹ *NMH*, 6 April 1877.
- ⁴⁰ W.H. Shaw, *The Newcastle Directory*, 1880/81, Facsimile Reprint, Sydney, 1978, p.58
- ⁴¹ J.W. Turner, *Coal Mining in Newcastle 1801-1900*, Newcastle City Council, 1982, p.100.
- ⁴² cited in *ibid.*, p.108.
- ⁴³ *ibid.*
- ⁴⁴ M. Martin, "Catherine Hill Bay: a development history", **1996**, p.12.
- ⁴⁵ *NMH* 14 October 1890
- ⁴⁶ *NMH* 7 February 1890
- ⁴⁷ *NMH* 8 February 1890
- ⁴⁸ J & A Brown – Coal & Allied Archives, A7662 (ii), University of Newcastle Archives.
- ⁴⁹ Wallarah Coal Company, Sydney Minutes, 3 September 1889. ML MSS:3876/1.
- ⁵⁰ *NMH* 7 February 1890
- ⁵¹ *NMH* 8 February 1890

- ⁵² F. Danvers Power, *Coalfields and Collieries of Australia*, Melbourne, 1912, p.257
- ⁵³ *NMH* 23 January 1894
- ⁵⁴ *NMH* 8 February 1890
- ⁵⁵ J.L. Guy, "A History of Newcastle Architecture from 1950 to 1901", unpublished thesis, Newcastle College, University of Newcastle, 1962. p.42.
- ⁵⁶ *NMH* 23/1/1894
- ⁵⁷ "Valuation of Colliery Plant, equipment, etc.," Wallarah Colliery, 1921, J. & A Brown Records, A7662 (vi) University of Newcastle Archives.
- ⁵⁸ cited in M. Martin, p.25.
- ⁵⁹ Notes on the history of the Wallarah Coal Company by Mr. Shaw, Company Secretary, ML. MSS 3876/1
- ⁶⁰ *ibid.*
- ⁶¹ Wallarah Coal Company Limited Records, Sydney Minutes 27 April 1892. ML MSS 3876/12
- ⁶² *NMH* 23 January 1894.
- ⁶³ Wallarah Coal Company Limited Records, Sydney Minutes 24 August 1890. ML MSS 3876/12
- ⁶⁴ Notes on the history of the Wallarah Coal Company by Mr. Shaw, Company Secretary. ML.MSS 3876/12
- ⁶⁵ *NMH* 7 February 1890
- ⁶⁶ *NMH* 7 February 1890
- ⁶⁷ *NMH* 20 January 1894.
- ⁶⁸ *NMH* 20 January 1894.
- ⁶⁹ *NMH* 7 February 1890.
- ⁷⁰ *NMH* 8 September 1894.
- ⁷¹ Notes on the history of the Wallarah Coal Company by Mr. Shaw, Company Secretary ML.MSS3876/1