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### **The 'coal papers' of the Australian Agricultural Company**

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#### **Introduction**

In earlier issues we have published articles on the Australian Agricultural Company's records in a general way and included mention of them in the general survey of records relating to the pastoral industry.

This article is intended as a brief survey of what are known within the Archives of Business & Labour as the 'coal papers'.

#### **The Australian Agricultural Company and coal mining**

The Australian Agricultural Company was actively involved in the mining, carriage and sale of coal at Newcastle for 85 years (from 1831 to 1916). The company's original pits, A, B, C and F were on the ridge south of Newcastle, on the eastern edge of the company's 2,000 acre estate. In 1848 a borehole (D Pit) was sunk on the western side of the estate and Pits E, No 1 (or 'the Duffer'), No 2 and the Hamilton Pit (on the company's southwestern border) followed. The village which grew up around E Pit and No 2 was first known as 'Pit Town' and later 'Hamilton', named after the company's Governor in London, Edward William Terrick Hamilton.

In 1888, the 'New Winning' or 'Sea Pit' was sunk on the ridge above Newcastle (using the D Pit shaft for ventilation). Much of the coal from this pit was mined under the South Pacific Ocean. By the turn of the nineteenth century, it was clear that the company's Newcastle coalfield was almost worked out (the Sea Pit was stopped in 1916). In 1901 the company purchased the Hebblewhite Estate near Cessnock in the Lower

Hunter. The Hebburn Mine started working in 1903 under AA Co. management. In 1914 Hebburn Ltd was formed and purchased the colliery and the AA Co.'s share in the Aberdare Railway. The AA Co. retained a shareholding in Hebburn Ltd until 1949.

The 'coal papers' comprise the items in Deposit 1: Australian Agricultural Company Office, Australian office, at location 1/52 to 1/112, and 1/456 (16 shelf metres). The term 'coal papers' is misleading since most of the records were created and kept as part of the general administration of the company's Australian business in its Newcastle office and were only grouped together later.

While we would like to recreate the original order destroyed by our predecessors this is no longer possible and, over the years, many researchers have used the records in their present arrangement. Consequently, users must remain alert to the necessity of recreating context when using the 'coal papers'. In addition, the intending researcher should always bear in mind that the 'coal papers' do not contain the whole story and that the despatches to and from the Court of Directors in London in particular (e.g. Series 78/1) contain additional information.

## Records

The 'coal papers' may be categorised as follows:

### **Managers' reports**

Colliery Managers' monthly reports (copies) to the General Superintendent, 1862-1915 (1/86, 15 press copy volumes). These reports, or summaries of them, were generally enclosed in the despatches to the Directors in London.

### **Correspondence, mainly to and from the General Superintendent (the General Manager in Australia)**

Extracts from despatches and copies of letters 1853-1861. This group was probably put together to assist the attempts of the company, from 1853, to reorganise and modernise the administration and working of the mines (1/52-1/55)

### **Colliery correspondence; Letters received by the General Superintendent, the Secretary and the Accountant, Newcastle, re colliery matters and the coal trade, 1830-1931**

These consist of 94 bundles of letters, mainly from 1856-1930, with some from 1830-1844. These bundles are listed to document level to 1870 (1/57, 4 shelf metres). It is important to notice, as mentioned above, that most of these letters were part of the series of general correspondence located at 1/49.

## **Other collections of letters received**

### **including:**

- Press copies of Colliery Managers' out letters 1858-1874 (1/106, 2 volumes);
- Robert Whytte (Colliery Manager) to Arthur Hodgson (General Superintendent) 1856-1860 (1/58);
  - J.B. Winship (Colliery Manager) to Edward Merewether and Jesse Gregson (General Superintendents) 1861-1876 (1/59);
  - William Turnbull (Colliery Manager) to Jesse Gregson (General Superintendent), 1876-1884 (1/60);
  - A.D. Moore (Agent, San Francisco) to Jesse Gregson re coal business, 1877-1881 (1/66) ;
  - Henry Moore (Agent, Sydney) to the General Superintendent and other officers 1861-1888 (1/67, 3 files);
  - Coal customers letters re coal business and copies of replies, 1903-1915 (1/68, 23 files); and
  - Miscellaneous letters and drafts of letters relating to the coal trade, written by J. Ridley (Sydney Agent), M.F. Brownrigg and Arthur Hodgson (General Superintendents) 1853-1860 (1/56).

## **Details of coal raised, sold and shipped, and colliery costs**

- Details of coals raised and sold 1853-1916 (1/84, 1/103, 1/109-111); and
- Colliery memoranda, agreements and other papers relating to the coal business 1842-1915 (1/61, 16 files).

## **Shipping papers**

### **including:**

- Letters, invoices, crew lists etc, 1891-1914 (1/69, 11 files);
- Ledgers, cash books and invoice books , 1878-1915 with gaps (1/70-1/73, 1/75-77);
  - Shipping diaries 1880-1912 (1/79, 18 volumes);
  - News clippings relating mainly to the coal trade 1875-1880 (1/83);
  - Records relating to colliery working costs 1873-1917 (1/96-98, 1/104);
  - Records relating to colliery stores 1875-1922 (1/87-89);
  - Technical coal papers, 1868-1904 (1/65, 8 files); and
  - Printed material relating to mining, collected by the AA Co. 1860-1902.

## **Records relating to wages and working costs**

### **including:**

- Colliery pay sheets 1870-1913 (1/456). These fortnightly pay sheets list all the colliers and other employees at each pit, showing (in the case of colliers) the amount of coal raised, wages due, deductions etc;
- Wages and working costs 1892-1920 (1/96-1/99); and
- Colliery labour papers, 1858-1917 (1/62, 18 files).

## **Land**

Coal estate papers (ie the purchase of coal bearing land for mining) 1864, 1888-1901 (1/81, 4 files).

Deposit 1 also includes extensive records concerning the subdivision and sale of the land 'surface' at Newcastle.

## **The Vend**

The 'Vend' was an association of companies, including the AA Co., whose object was to control the quantity of coal raised and marketed, and therefore its price. The AA Co. had a managerial role in the Vend and these records are virtually the only remnant of its operations.

## **Records held by the Archive**

### **including:**

- Colliery Vend Papers 1872-1913 (1/63, 8 files). The papers consist mainly of minutes of the Northern Coal Sales Association, Associated Northern Collieries, the Northern Coal Owners Mutual Protective Society, and quarterly returns of trade;
- Associated Northern Collieries Vend sales book 1879-1880 (1/85); and
- Coal company reports (received by the AA Co. from other coal companies) 1876-1909 (1/80, 6 files, see also 27/1).

In summary, the records of the Australian Agricultural Company relating to coal are a resource which no one interested in the coal industry, the development of Newcastle, overseas trade, industrial relations, or industrial combination can afford to ignore.