

## **Disaster at the Australian Agricultural Company's Mine, Hamilton NSW, 1889**

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**O**n 22 June 1889 eleven miners perished as the result of a serious roof fall at the Australian Agricultural Company's pit at the Glebe, near Hamilton in the Newcastle coalfield, northern New South Wales. Most of the deceased were buried and entombed under a mass of stone and debris. At the time, it was one of the most serious mining accidents in the region. One newspaper carried the following sensational headlines:

**THE CATASTROPHE AT THE GLEBE  
GREAT FALL IN THE AA COMPANY'S  
HAMILTON PIT  
EIGHTEEN MEN ENTOMBED, ELEVEN STILL  
IN CONSTERNATION AND DISTRESS<sup>1</sup>**

### **Historical Background**

By the middle of the nineteenth century the Australian Agricultural Company (AACo) had become a major force in the Australian coal and pastoral industries and in the settlement and development of both the Hunter River and Port Stephens districts of New South Wales. Under the terms of the Royal Charter by which it was founded by a statute of the British Parliament, the company was given the right to possess and sell land in New South Wales.<sup>2</sup> It developed a 'large grazing enterprise' with sheep stations located principally around Port Stephens and Gloucester, extending from the Karuah River Valley to the Manning River district in New South Wales. The company's major shareholders resided in London. Jesse Gregson was the local company superintendent and William Turnbull was manager of the Hamilton mine.<sup>3</sup>

The AACo was established in London in 1824 with a capital of one million pounds sterling and received a land grant of one million acres of crown land. Its activities came to monopolise both agriculture and coal mining in early colonial New South Wales. As the colonial government was unable to mine coal effectively, the Government gave the company land grants in Newcastle and transferred its coalmine to AACo in December 1829, for the purpose of mining and trading coal there. The company was also granted various privileges including the use of convict labour and a 31-year monopoly of the local coal trade. This position lasted until 1847 when following agitation and legal proceedings, its monopoly was terminated. The company also possessed wharfage rights including the use of private chutes through which loaded trucks discharged their contents into the holds of waiting ships. It also owned the neighbouring older No 2 Borehole mine, 900 yards<sup>4</sup> from Hamilton. A large heading known as the air drive and several circular passages linked the two mines underground. The Hamilton pit was essentially an extension of the old No 2 Borehole mine. Locally it

was often referred to as the New Borehole or alternatively as the Glebe mine. Its official title was the Hamilton mine.<sup>5</sup>



The company's mine in the suburb of Hamilton was located 2 miles from Newcastle and 50 yards from the Glebe road hill in the municipality of Merewether. It possessed 2,700 acres of freehold and leasehold land and was considered to be one of the largest mines in the Newcastle district. The mine was formally opened on 10 December 1831. Having been worked for 'a very long time' from several different shafts, much of the ground had been extended, and by 1889 some of the underground workings were exhausted. Nevertheless, it was estimated that the Borehole seam mined by the company, contained a high proportion of the best coal mining land in the district. At the time of the accident it employed 789 men and boys, with 633 underground and 156 on the surface. It produced 1,600 tons of round and small coal per day. Workings at the Hamilton mine were carried out at 180 to 200 feet below the surface. The main approach to the workings was by a main horse road, four yards wide. It proceeded firstly in a south-westerly direction and continued in the shape of a cross-cut towards the west. At the western end of the cross-cut there were headings on either side, being Hayes' and Murphy's on the right, and Burt's and Martin's on the left.<sup>6</sup>

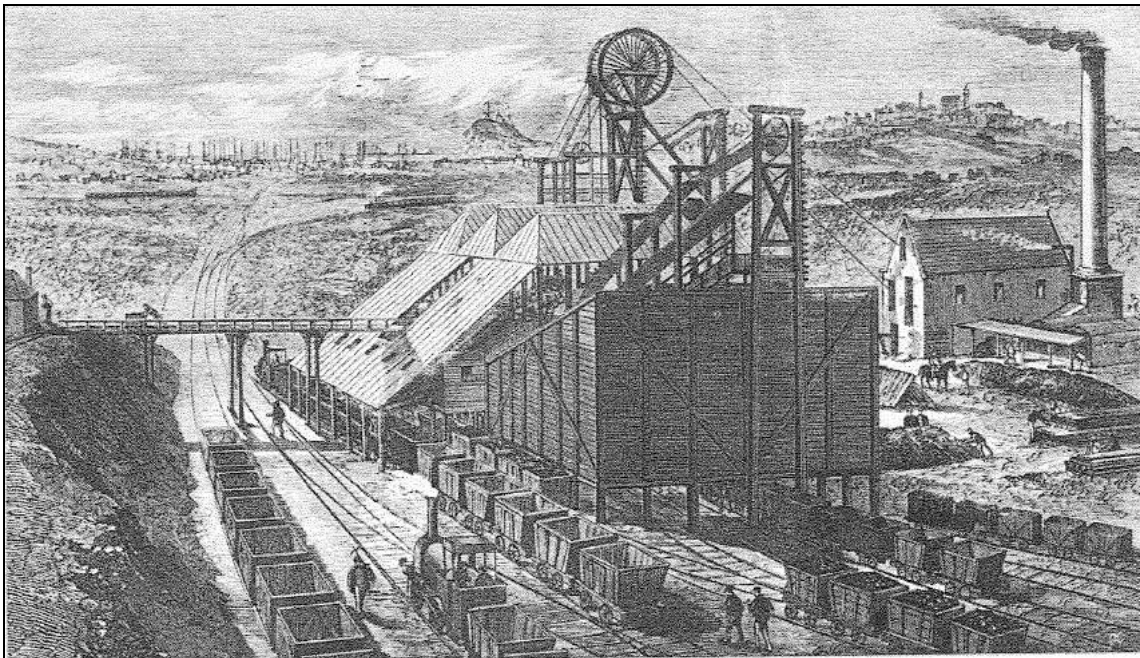
### **The fall**

According to early press reports, the men had descended the mine at 6.30am on Saturday 22 June 1889 to work in headings at the cross-cut about one mile from the mouth of the pit. Some were also working in the tunnel known as the Gallery. The workings in question had become 'exhausted' and were being abandoned, and at the time of the roof collapse between 40 and 50 men were working in this part of the mine, engaged in removing coal pillars and old timbers, as well as pulling-up tram rails. Some had already moved their tools and transferred them to fresh places as a result of the quarterly caving. Others, including Overman Hodson, Beaumont, Meadows and Grant, were involved in moving the Tangye pump to a more appropriate position. For two days, according to some of the miners, they had been aware of 'ominous sounds' including the 'creaking' of weakened, overhanging supports. Several men became apprehensive and left the workings with a few going to have their breakfast.<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, the majority remained, having listened to the advice of 'older hands', who counselled them that there was no immediate danger. Within minutes of 9.00am, according to local sources, there was a 'deafening roar likened to a 'mighty earthquake' and 'equivalent to a subterranean cannonade', and the roof collapsed. Before the collapse, Deputy Overman, Anthony Turnbull, had warned the men in the cross-cut of the possibility of danger. After the first fall he and eight others climbed over fallen rock and debris and eventually escaped via the main road. One of them (Robert Thompson) sustained serious injury, as the result of falling rock. Some hours elapsed

before other men escaped. They experienced difficult conditions climbing over rocks and timber through unused headings and bords with their lights extinguished due to a rush of air. Rumours circulated on the surface that 70 men were trapped. This early estimate was reduced to 40. A roll call resulted in 18 men failing to respond. Later it was officially announced that 11 were missing, with the belief that they were 'entombed'.<sup>8</sup>

**Figure 1:** *The Australian Agricultural Company's mine, Newcastle, 1873.*



Source: Wood Engraving by Samuel Calvert, State library of Victoria.

### **Rescue and recovery efforts**

Rescue teams of volunteers were soon mobilised and were initially engaged in 'timbering-up' the roof of the cross-cut until driven-back several times by falling rock. As rock continued to fall from the roof, any real advancement made by the teams was nullified. The first body recovered by the rescue teams was that of Herbert Pettit on 2 July. He had been crushed by the fall and died of his injuries. On the same day a pit pony known as 'Sharpo' was found alive, having survived on dripping water, and was taken to the underground stalls, but he died shortly after.<sup>9</sup> Also on the 2 July, the mine management and mine inspectors decided to temporarily abandon their recovery efforts because of the imminent danger. Letters to the local press expressed concern over the delay in reaching the entombed miners, a reflection of community feeling that searching should continue.<sup>10</sup>

Optimistically believing the 11 missing men would be found alive, some press reports regularly referred to the men as being 'entombed'. The use of the term gave the impression that they had a good chance to survive. Some miners from the 'old country' referred to the miraculous rescue in 1877 of men in a Pontypridd mine in South Wales, UK, who had survived an entombment of ten days. Nevertheless by 23 June, the outcome became less hopeful of anyone being found alive.<sup>11</sup>

### **Timeline of recovery of the deceased**

Government-organised rescue parties were formed from local volunteers and on 6 July their efforts were aborted again due to the dangerous conditions. Resuming their task on 2 August, the body of John Peate Jnr. (who had been working with his father) was discovered together along with that of Thomas Banfield. They were found between 2 skips covered by coal and rock. Peate's cousin later identified the younger Peate 'by his boots'. On 11 August, John Peate Snr and Daniel Masson were both discovered deceased, as was Jabez Roberts on 25 August. The remains of George Beaumont, Alexander Grant, James Hodson and John Meadows were finally found on 3 September. It appeared that the injured Hodson lay in an isolated position, separated from his mates. He had tunnelled a distance of 44 yards through the debris before he died. According to one report, Hodson had arranged his clothes neatly with his trousers placed under his back to relieve the pain he suffered as the result of falling debris. Rescuers discovered that the group had worn a definite track on the ground through pacing the floor. The body of David Proctor was the last to be recovered on 8 September.<sup>12</sup> The final toll listed the deceased as:

Charles Banfield (18years), wheeler, single.

George Beaumont (50), shiftman, married.

Alexander Grant (30), wheeler, single.

James Hodson (54), overman, married.

Daniel Masson (27), shiftman, married.

John Meadows (32), shiftman, single.

John Peate Snr. (50), shiftman, married.

John Peate Jnr. (20) miner, single.

Herbert Pettit (26) shiftman, single.

David Proctor (45) miner, married.

Jabez Roberts (70), miner, married.\*<sup>13</sup>

Twenty-four children (under 14 years of age) were left fatherless, while the Peates were father and son.

### **First Inquest**

The Coroner's inquest, into the death of Herbert Pettit (before a jury of 12) opened on 9 July with the formal identification of his body. Chaired by the City Coroner George C. Martin, it took evidence from 24 witnesses (including several survivors) in seven meetings between 9 and 26 July. They included William Galloway, Robert McDougall and David Moore. All described the ordeal they had endured including being covered by coal and rock for five-and-a-half hours before escaping and being rescued. They were all critical of Overman, Sharp.<sup>14</sup>

Galloway, in oral evidence, told the inquiry that he and his work mates informed Sharp of the possible danger stating that 'the place is coming in, Jimmy'. According to Galloway, Sharp is alleged to have responded with 'let it come, I can't help it! In later testimony on 25 July, after being recalled, Sharp denied such a comment. Five other survivors concurred with Galloway's statement concerning Sharp's reluctance to call the

men out from the possible danger.<sup>15</sup>

In addition to outlining his experience of several mining falls, John Dixon, Inspector of Collieries, Northern District, presented evidence of a technical nature. He claimed that work practices in the Hamilton mine were good and that from his last inspection it appeared that there were adequate means of escape in event of danger. Coroner Martin asked Dixon, whether given the loud noises coming from the roof, he would have 'called the men out'? Objecting to the question Dixon replied that his answer would be contained in his report to the Minister for Mines. He added that only the Minister had the right to ask me such a question. Dixon explained that he held 'arduous duties' as there were up to 60 mines operating in the Northern District. Additionally he advocated the extension of his powers. During the inquest there appeared to be a certain amount of friction between Dixon and the inquest chairman.<sup>16</sup>

Hamilton mine manager William Turnbull informed the inquiry that he had 14 years mining experience in the United Kingdom. He explained that as he was not in the mine on the day of the disaster, he was unable to give his opinion on whether the men should have been withdrawn. Overman, James Sharp, recalled before the inquest, gave details of the deceased indicating that all places in the mine had been inspected for safety that fatal morning. Some press comments were of the opinion that Sharp had expected a fall but that it would not be of any great magnitude.<sup>17</sup>

On the 26 July the jury verdict of the first inquest was delivered as follows:

We find that Herbert Pettit was found dead in the Hamilton Pit owned by the Australian Agricultural Company, at the Glebe ... on the 2nd day of July. We further find that his death was caused by a fall of stone and coal in the pit, which occurred on 22 June 1889. The fall entirely covered Pettit whilst he was at his duties ... and though great exertions were made by Edward Blackburn to rescue Pettit, they were without avail and Blackburn had to leave Pettit to preserve his own life. For this action of Blackburn the jury desires to record the highest praise and commendation.<sup>18</sup>

The jury added a rider:

This terrible accident was caused by the weakness of the pillars. We recommend the inclusion of a clause in the Mining Bill setting out the specific dimensions for pillars and bords. We also recommend the appointment of more Government inspectors with greater powers. We consider that Mr. James Sharp, the overman, neglected his duty in not calling out the men when it was reported to him that the pit was 'working' so badly.<sup>19</sup>

The coroner Martin saw fit to rebuke Dixon for refusing to answer certain questions and stated that the inspector had been fortunate to escape being committed for contempt of court.<sup>20</sup>

### **Resumption of mining activity and second inquest**

Limited mining operations resumed at the mine at the Church-heading portion, situated one quarter-of-a-mile from the bottom of the pit, on 7 September 1889. After caviling for places, 12 pairs of men started work with instructions that they were not to enter the

section of the mine affected by the fall.<sup>21</sup>

The inquest on James Hodson and the other deceased, held at the Glebe Hotel, Glebe, opened before the District Coroner George C. Martin on 3 September and extended until 4 October when the jury verdict was handed down. It met on eight occasions. Mr H.J. Brown represented the AA company, Mr. James Curley, the Miners' Association, and Mr Sparkes and John Dixon, Mines Inspector of the Northern district, represented the Government. The coroner explained that a second inquest was necessary, noting that from the position of the bodies of Hodson and the others it was recognised that 'these poor men showed that although sealed to a terrible fate made a long and gallant fight for life'. He inferred that, given their ordeals, they (and their families) deserved another inquiry.<sup>22</sup>

Some of the testimony duplicated that presented at the first inquest. The rescue party described how they had found Hodson's body in Murphy's heading. The evidence of Henry Bell, George Embleton, Daniel Regan, Bernard Roarty and that of William Wilson was all critical of Sharp's behavior at the onset of the roof fall. Wilson claimed that Sharp on leaving their section of the mine told the men that the 'place is on the creep' and 'from that inference we knew there was danger'. One of the survivors, Regan (wheeler) gave a detailed description of the state of affairs at 7.20am before the major fall occurred. He outlined how he called Hodson to assist him to pull out some skips. Hearing the roof 'bump' he admitted that he was 'frightened' and 'wanted someone with him'. After the skips were hauled out Hodson went away. The witness then claimed that at 8.30am he saw a group including Beaumont, Grant and Meadows in Murphy's heading engaged in pulling up rails. Regan, in response to a question from the coroner, responded by confirming that the 'men must have heard the pillars near them working heavily'. It was revealed at the inquiry that during the retrieval of Beaumont's remains rescuers found a scratched message on his 'tucker tin' that read; **John Meadows - 30years - Seven days starvation.**<sup>23</sup> Later, some of his mates verified it was Meadows' writing. As part of the jury's inquiry, members accompanied by senior mine officials visited part of the mine on 18 September.<sup>24</sup> The verdict of the second coroner's inquest was handed down on 4 October 1889. It stated:

We find that the body of James Hodson was found in Murphy's heading in the Hamilton pit ... on 3 September 1889. Death was caused by starvation; that the death was caused by the culpable neglect of the overman, James Sharp and his deputy James Hodson. We wish to add that the overman and deputy displayed a want of judgment in not withdrawing the men, and also consider that the collapse of the cross-cut occurred through the exceptional crush of the roof from the want of larger pillars. We also consider that the best means were not adopted by the management to rescue the entombed, and the management is also blamable in not inviting and consulting other mining experts and that sufficient energy was not displayed in getting into Murphy's heading.<sup>25</sup>

#### **Local Miners reaction to Mr Croudace's remarks**

Following the verdict of the second inquest, a large meeting of AACo miners was convened on 8 October 1889 at the Williams' Hotel, Hamilton. It was particularly

focused on the statement made by Mr. Croudace (manager of Lambton colliery) at the inquest. He had stated that ‘the entombed men could have been reached by ridding over the fall’. The meeting passed a resolution affirming that the mine manager, Mr Turnbull, and the rescue parties adopted the best methods possible, and that their conduct was exemplary. It was agreed collectively by the meeting that driving and tunneling through the falls had been a safer and better method of reaching the men than attempting to ‘climb over the fall’. It appeared that at this time a certain *animus* existed between manager Turnbull and Croudace. Some press comment indicated that Croudace in particular was annoyed that Turnbull had not consulted him and other mining experts in the district.

Some correspondents to the local press expressed their concern about the length of time it took to reach the entombed men. Other letters from people who appreciated the dangers involved, supported the actions of the rescue teams.<sup>26</sup>

### **Financial relief for victim’s families**

Four days after the disaster (26 June), a meeting was convened at the Mechanics Institute, Merewether, with the purpose of attempting to relieve the stress of those affected by the tragedy. The Governor of New South Wales, Lord Carrington, attended, as did local members of Parliament, ministers of the Crown, union officials and local dignitaries. The Governor, who had visited grieving families, offered his sympathies to those present. Local member, James Fletcher, proposed that ‘substantial provision ought to be made available for the widows and children of the victims of such a disaster’ and proposed the creation of a permanent relief scheme. He stated that ‘if the breadwinner was ever taken, such a fund would provide a feeling of security’. Minister for Mines Sydney Smith supported the sentiment<sup>27</sup> and the proposal foreshadowed the eventual passage of the New South Wales Miners’ Accident Relief Act 1900. It made provision for financial relief to the dependents of those killed in mining accidents and to those injured accidentally, with funding being provided by contributions from companies, the state and individual miners.<sup>28</sup>

The process of deciding whether victim’s families should have some form of financial relief from the AA company was both protracted and controversial. After a period of almost nine months had elapsed, an agreement was finally reached between the company and the victim’s widows after the local miners’ association had rejected the company’s original offer. In announcing the final agreement, company superintendent Jesse Gregson confirmed that the company recognised no legal responsibility for the accident and the deaths of the 11 miners. Until a consensus was reached the issue of relief proved contentious.<sup>29</sup>

Since the 22 June disaster the families affected had depended on relief from the miner’s associations and from public subscriptions dispensed by the local relief committee. The delay in reaching a final agreement was due to the fact that the miners’ association maintained that allowances should be paid from the date of the disaster. The company on the other hand insisted that such a decision should rest entirely with them, but eventually agreed to pay the allowances as set out by the miners’ association. However, the company insisted on the right to invest the money (in certain

circumstances) for the benefit of the children concerned.<sup>30</sup>

There were certain problems for example, Mrs Grant was not recognised by the company as having any claim to an allowance. For some years she had been parted from her husband and lived in Scotland and apparently was not dependent on him. It was finally agreed that every widow was to receive 15 shillings a week and 5 shillings per week extra for every child under 15 years, subject to certain conditions. This was dependent on whether the widow remained unmarried. The company reserved the right, if they thought fit, to withhold any part of the allowance and to purchase food or clothes for a family. The widow of deputy Hodson, on account of his senior position, was to be afforded an extra 5 shillings a week. John Ford, severely injured and traumatised by the fall, was granted an 'extended allowance' due to his permanent incapacity. This also applied to the special case of Mrs Peate who had lost both her husband and son. As it was nine months before the relief was approved and distributed, the delay caused a great deal of community anguish, with many being of the opinion that the company's management was slow to respond to the financial needs of victim's families.<sup>31</sup>

### **Inaction of authorities following second inquest verdict**

Three months after the verdict in the second inquest had been handed down, there was concern shown in the local press that no action had been taken by the law authorities on the alleged culpable negligence of Sharp. One editorial stressed that there was no attempt to apportion blame for the deaths on those naturally responsible. It argued forcefully that:

The earth did not open up and swallow these eleven men. It was clearly demonstrated that before the accident, the men informed Sharp that the pit was unsafe. Instead of withdrawing the men from the impending danger, he gave instructions that the rails, a pump and skips should be taken out of that dangerous place.<sup>32</sup>

The editorial added that 'it would appear that he showed more concern for the safety of the plant than for the men'. As another editorial highlighted, 'Sharp left the place of danger and went to the surface'. It also criticised the inaction of the Attorney General in not bringing a case of manslaughter against Sharp. After the second inquest there was a general feeling in the community that no one in the company had taken responsibility for the death of the 11 miners. In essence no one was held accountable for such a dreadful occurrence<sup>33</sup>

### **Ford v Australian Agricultural Company, 1890**

One of the most seriously injured survivors of the disaster was Francis Ford, an employee of the company and an Adamstown resident. In the Maitland Circuit Court on 6 October 1890, he attempted to sue the AACo for £1,000 compensation, as a result of injuries sustained in the disaster. Representatives of the Miners' Association and Ford's workmates supported him in court. Medical opinion submitted by Doctors Smith and McDougall indicated that Ford had seriously injured his spinal cord as a result of the accident. Consequently he was incapacitated, his prognosis was not good and he was



unable to work. Hugh Walker, another AACo employee, claimed that some days before the disaster he heard a 'crush'. Next morning he had informed Sharp that the place 'was working' and that he wanted new timber. In response, Sharp replied, 'I think the roof is going to fall in', and it was also alleged that Sharp had said, 'some of you are afraid of your shadows'.<sup>34</sup>

Mining experts called by the company included William Pendleton (manager Burwood colliery) and Alexander Ross (Jnr manager Wallsend Colliery). Both corroborated earlier statements that 'such accidents were rare in the colonies' and that 'the fall or heave in the Hamilton pit was unprecedented'.<sup>35</sup>

Mr. Edmunds, acting for Ford alleged that Overman, James Sharp (in charge of the workings), was so negligent that Ford was put and kept to work in a dangerous place where the roof, sides and floor of the mine collapsed severely crushing and wounding him and rendering him permanently incapacitated. Edmunds enunciated a key issue in the case, maintaining that: 'It was not alleged that there was negligence in not anticipating the fall, but there was negligence in not calling the men out'.<sup>36</sup>

A jury of four found in favour of Ford and the judgment was made against the company for the sum of £400 pounds.<sup>37</sup>

### **Major Issues**

A major issue in the disaster was the failure of the management or those acting for the management (especially Overman James Sharp and Deputy Overman James Hodson-deceased) to withdraw the men, given the evident signs of impending danger prior to the first major fall. It was pointed out that Deputy Overman Anthony Turnbull had anticipated the danger and acting on his own initiative had led eight men to safety. He did not wait for instructions from either Hodson or Sharp. James Sharp gave orders to the men to take up the rails and remove plant in anticipation of the 'creep' without giving any orders for the men to withdraw from the mine.<sup>38</sup>

It was perhaps obvious that Sharp did not foresee the magnitude of the situation. In his defense, testimony presented by local mine managers maintained that 'such falls were rare in the colonies'. Others claimed that in spite of the early 'noises and bumps' the accident could not have been anticipated'.

Another issue raised at one of the inquests was that Hodson and older miners, wishing to complete their tasks, had intimidated some of the younger men who had wanted to withdraw from danger.<sup>39</sup> In addition there was concern at the limited response to rescue or recover the entombed men, this being countered by the argument that rescue attempts had been thwarted by the dangerous conditions that posed considerable risk for the teams of volunteers. As previously noted, when these operations had been temporarily suspended for two weeks, the decision had provoked critical comments in the editorial and correspondence columns of the district newspaper over 'valuable time being lost'. Attention was drawn to instances (in both Newcastle, NSW, and in the United Kingdom) where trapped miners had been located alive after long periods of entombment. One mine manager, writing under a pseudonym, declared that the 'action of AACo officials in not continuing with the rescue work' was 'an exhibition of want of British pluck'. Another contributor to the press maintained that 'under similar

circumstances one miner trapped for a long period survived on eating three rats that he had caught! The argument persuaded District union officials to urge local members of Parliament to lobby Mines Minister Smith to in future, speed-up recovery operations.<sup>40</sup>

Some district managers and mining experts complained that the Hamilton management had not consulted sufficiently with them on the best methods of reaching and freeing the men, or had not sought their advice. The Northern coalfield, in particular the Newcastle and Maitland districts, boasted an 'embarrassment of riches' in terms of mining expertise, as the area was home to approximately 60 coalmines. A conference of mining experts to consider the best course to pursue was proposed by one correspondent. There were also accusations of 'conservatism' levelled at the methods adopted by the Hamilton management. Some local miners favoured 'driving' from the neighbouring Glebe (Borehole) No. 2 pit to reach the miners, as one explained: '... the boundary between the two pits is, comparatively speaking, no thicker than a sheet of paper'.<sup>41</sup>

### **Proposed Coal Mines Regulation Bill**

At the time of the disaster the New South Wales Parliament was considering a new Coal Mines Regulation Bill. The dangers of coalmining had acquired greater prominence on account of the high rates of fatalities as evidenced by the Lithgow Valley Colliery disaster of 1886, where eight miners had died in 2 separate accidents, and at Bulli in 1887 where there had been 81 fatalities. For several years it proved difficult for Parliament to achieve a consensus on a proposed bill in the light of the existence of competing vested interests.<sup>42</sup> The 1889 bill and other versions met with a number of political hurdles, especially the inclusion of the controversial 'Eight Hour Day' provision for miners. In the absence of political agreement, Mines' Minister, Sydney Smith, announced on 30 August 1889 that he would seek the authority of Parliament to amend the existing Coal Mines Act to grant him power to appoint additional mines inspectors. As far as mining reform went, it was only a purely an '*ad hoc*' measure.<sup>43</sup>

### **Remembering Hamilton**

For many decades after the 1889 disaster, articles and letters appeared in the local press memorialising the pit tragedy. Newspaper staff penned some, while others were letters to the editor from both relatives of victims and from survivors. The fateful event also features on the specially erected Jim Comerford Memorial Wall, Aberdare, New South Wales, along with the inscribed names of the 11 victims (and many others). It is a permanent reminder and memorial of the disaster and of the inherent dangers of coal mining.<sup>44</sup> Finally, as one editorial described the disaster: 'The catastrophe at Hamilton colliery is remembered as one of the greatest mine disasters in the Northern coalfield'.<sup>45</sup>

The Hamilton mine was closed in 1901. Therefore with the eventual closure in 1916 of the company's last remaining colliery, the Sea Pit in Newcastle, the AACo left the coal trade after 85 years.<sup>46</sup>

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**Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> *The Argus* (Melbourne, hereafter *Argus*), 24 June 1889; *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 24 June 1889.

<sup>2</sup> P. Pemberton, 'The Australian Agricultural Company: Pioneers of Wealth', *Australian Heritage*, Autumn 2009, p. 56.

<sup>3</sup> J. Gregson, *The Australian Agricultural Company 1824-1875*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1907, pp. 48-63; Pemberton, 'The Australian Agricultural Company: Pioneers of Wealth', pp. 56-61.

<sup>4</sup> Units used in this paper: 1 (long) ton = 1.01605 tonnes; 1 foot = 0.3048 m; 1 yard = 0.9144; 1 mile = 1.609 km; 1 acre = 0.4047 hectare.

<sup>5</sup> *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 2 November 1898, p. 24; *Maitland Mercury*, 25 June 1889. The Australian Agricultural Company owned and worked a number of collieries in the Newcastle district. According to *Wikipedia* they were: 'A' Pit, Cooks Hill (1831-1862), 'B' Pit, Cooks Hill (1837-1862), 'C' Pit, Cooks Hill (1843-1862), 'D' Pit, Hamilton (1848-1901), 'E' Pit, Hamilton (1854-1863), 'F' Pit, Cooks Hill (1855-1864), Borehole No. 1 Pit, Hamilton (1857-1901), Borehole No 2 Pit, Hamilton (1861-1901), 'H' Pit (also known as Hamilton or Glebe) Pit, (1871-1889) and Sea Coal Pit (later known as New Winning Colliery, Cooks Hill - 1886-1916). It is acknowledged by *Wikipedia* that this list may not be complete. 'List of AACo collieries in Newcastle NSW'. <http://en.wikipedia.org/collieries/Newcastle>, accessed 11 February 2014.

<sup>6</sup> *Argus*, 24 June 1889; *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 28 June 1889, pp. 17, 31; J. Dixon, *History of Merewether*, 1935, reprinted by the Newcastle Family History Society, Lambton, NSW, 2006, pp. 90-92. The Hamilton mine was named after Edward Terrick Hamilton the first governor of the company.

<sup>7</sup> *Maitland Mercury*, 27 June 1889; *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 24 June 1889.

<sup>8</sup> *Argus*, 24 June 1889; *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 29 June 1889 pp. 17-32. The eight miners who escaped, led by deputy overman Anthony Turnbull were; Edward Blackburn, James Blakemore, George Dudley, David Regan, Barney Roarty, Richard Ryan and William Wilson. Later, another group escaped including Frank Ford and Robert Thompson, see, *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 29 June 1889.

<sup>9</sup> Sharpo became something of a local celebrity and was stuffed and then exhibited in various locations in the city of Newcastle.

<sup>10</sup> *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 9 and 11 July 1889.

<sup>11</sup> *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 July 1889.

<sup>12</sup> *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 3 and 4 July 1889, 4 September 1889; *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 July 1889.

<sup>13</sup> *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 29 June 1889 refers to the victim as Robertson and not Roberts: 'On 18 November 1891 Robert Beaumont (a wheeler) sustained a fatal accident at the Hamilton pit when he was run over by a train on the surface. He was the son of George Beaumont killed in the 1889 disaster, *Maitland Mercury*, 19 November 1891.

<sup>14</sup> *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 10 July 1889.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 25 July 1889.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 18 July 1889.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 24 July 1889.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 August 1889.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 18 September 1889.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 September 1889.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 19 September 1889.

<sup>25</sup> *Evening News* (Sydney), 5 October 1889; *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 12 October 1889.

<sup>26</sup> *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 30 September and 9 October 1889; *Freeman's Journal*, 12 October 1889.

<sup>27</sup> *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 4 and 27 July 1889.

<sup>28</sup> C. Beauchamp, 'Beyond Philanthropy: New South Wales Miners' Accident Relief Act 1900', *Journal of Australasian Mining History*, vol. 7, September 2009, pp. 117-137.

<sup>29</sup> *Maitland Mercury*, 7 November 1889, 7 January and 10 July 1890.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 January 1890.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 20 March 1890.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 30 December 1889

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 25 September 1890, and 7 and 8 October 1890.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 October 1890.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 8 October 1890.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 30 October 1890.

<sup>38</sup> *Argus*, 24 June 1889.

<sup>39</sup> *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 8 September 1889.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 9 July 1889.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 8 July and 8 September 1889.

<sup>42</sup> The two disasters were 1886, at Lithgow Valley Colliery involving 8 fatalities (in 2 separate accidents); and in 1887 at the Bulli mine where there were 81 deaths.

<sup>43</sup> *Newcastle Morning Herald* 30 July 1889; 1 August 1889.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 26 December 1916, 20 October 1921, 27 December 1931. 'Jim Comerford Memorial Wall, Aberdare, NSW'. <http://www.coalandcommunity.com/glebe-mine-disaster>

<sup>45</sup> *Newcastle Morning Herald* (Saturday Magazine), 26 December 1916.

<sup>46</sup> Pemberton, 'The Australian Agricultural Company: Pioneers of Wealth', pp. 60-61.