

## **A Story of Human Endeavour: The Cape Patterson Coal Field, Victoria**

By JIM ENEVER

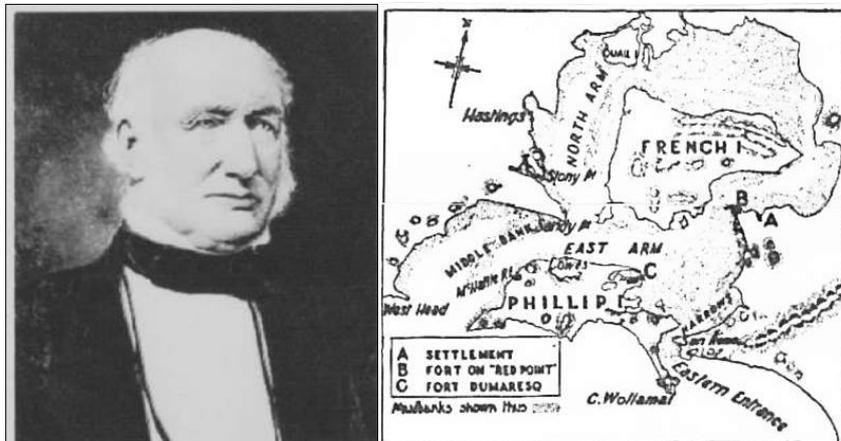
**T**he story of the Cape Patterson Coal Field from initial discovery to final commercial exploitation extends over a period of nearly 40 years from 1826 to 1865. The events that occurred during that period reflect a stubborn commitment to the development of an indigenous supply of coal for what became the infant Colony of Victoria. Throughout the period, the role of Government varied from being actively supportive to essentially neutral. By 1865, the Cape Patterson Coal Field had emerged as the first truly commercial indigenous coal supplier in Victoria, and a precursor to later coal mining operations, culminating in the establishment of the State Mines at Wonthaggi in 1909.

### **Discovery**

It is generally accepted that the first European to sight an outcrop of coal in the territory that was to become the State of Victoria was the well-known explorer, William Hovell (Fig. 1).<sup>1</sup> Hovell conducted exploration of the Bass Coast region during 1826, whilst based at the short-lived convict station at Settlement Point near to the modern town of Corinella, on the eastern shore of Western Port (Fig. 2). Hovell's Journal of his explorations records for 18 December 1826:

At 3 pm proceeded onward and at 5 arrived at what I supposed to be Cape Patterson. About a ¼ mile east of it I was agreeably surprised to find abundance of coal of the best quality. It was lying in three parallel lines in succession for at least one or two miles, about 10 inches thick ... it extended below low water mark on the side of one of the cliffs ... At 6.30 stopped for the night at a small place of fresh water ... a few yards from the beach, put a piece of coal on the fire and find it to burn well, it has a fine glossy and pitchy appearance.<sup>2</sup>

**Figure 1:** *William Hovell.*      **Figure 2:** *The Corinella Settlement.*



Sources: **Figure 1:** *Australian Dictionary of Biography, vol. 1, MUP, 1966. On Web.*  
**Figure 2:** *Argus, 11 December 1926, p. 8.*

Hovell reported to Governor Darling in Sydney that during his explorations he had found ‘at Cape Patterson ... great quantities of very fine coal, a sample of which has been sent to your Excellency’.<sup>3</sup> There is no extant evidence of what might have happened to this sample. The report of the discovery did not elicit any real interest in NSW at the time, given the discoveries of coal that had been made close to Sydney by that stage. It was the coal seams first sighted by Hovell outcropping in the sea cliffs near to Cape Patterson that were eventually to constitute the resource that became known in later years as the ‘Cape Patterson Coal Field’ (Fig. 3).

**Figure 3:** *Cape Patterson Coal Field.*



Source: *Colonial Mining Journal, Railway and Share Gazette*, 6 January 1859.

### The ‘Re-discovery’

Settlement of the Bass Coast region followed shortly after the establishment of Melbourne in 1835. The coal discovery made by Hovell had been lost to history by this time, and the coal seams of Cape Patterson and other localities in the area awaited ‘re-discovery’. When Samuel Anderson (Fig. 4), the first settler in the region, reported to Police Magistrate (Commandant) Lonsdale in Melbourne in June 1838 on coal discoveries made by himself and his partner Robert Massie, Lonsdale took action. In October 1838, Lonsdale reported to the Governor in Sydney that coal had been found in the Western Port region and ‘that it exists from the immediate vicinity of the Bay to a distance of about 12 miles, with every appearance of it turning out well if worked’.<sup>4</sup> Lonsdale followed up with a series of generally encouraging reports based on information he was receiving from Anderson. Despite Lonsdale’s obvious enthusiasm, requests by Anderson and Massie for permission to mine the coal deposits did not get a response at this time. Of concern to Lonsdale was whether commercial exploitation of the newly re-discovered coal resources would be impeded by the monopoly on coal production in NSW granted to the Australian Agricultural Company some years earlier.

This matter was further referred to London for decision, a response confirming the exclusion of the Western Port coal from the AA's Company monopoly finally being received in Melbourne in July 1839.<sup>5</sup>

When Charles La Trobe (Fig. 5) took over as Lieutenant Governor of the Port Phillip Colony in September 1839, he sent Captain Moore (captain of the revenue cutter *Prince George*) and surveyor Robert Hoddle to survey the coal discoveries that Anderson and Massie had made. This expedition set off in December 1839 with instructions to 'direct your attention to the precise situation at which such coal may be found near the surface ... and any other details which your own knowledge and experience would suggest'.<sup>6</sup> The expedition arrived in Western Port after having been to Portland in western Victoria, and proceeded 'in search of the coal strata ... [finding only] a strata of coal about 6 inches thick [on the eastern shore of the Bay near to Phillip Island].<sup>7</sup> The expedition was hindered by the unwillingness of Massie, in Anderson's absence, to communicate any information re the whereabouts of the earlier discoveries when the party visited Anderson's farm on the Bass River. Massie's behavior has been attributed to the lack of a response to Anderson's and Massie's request to Lonsdale for permission to mine the coal.<sup>8</sup> In the face of adverse weather, the expedition did not continue as planned along the Bass Coast to the east of Western Port, instead returning to Melbourne and completing a generally disappointing episode.

**Figure 4:** *Samuel Anderson.*

**Figure 5:** *Charles La Trobe.*



Sources: **Figure 4:** Celebratory medal, Shire of Bass, 1985.

**Figure 5:** *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 2, MUP, 1967. See web site.

After receiving an apology from Anderson for Massie's behavior, La Trobe made a visit in person in August 1840, accompanied by Lonsdale and staff. Guided by Anderson, the party went first to the location on the eastern shore of Western Port where Moore had made his discovery, and then to Cape Patterson where Anderson had re-discovered the outcropping seams first described by Hovell. La Trobe's report on his visit displayed a degree of geological knowledge and insight. He was dismissive of the coal occurrence at the first location, describing 'the veins in this quarter [as being] very thin ... with considerable irregularity to be observed in the inclination of the seams' but

more sanguine regarding Cape Patterson, where ‘the beds here are of greater thickness ... several being two to three feet across and more exposed to view’.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, La Trobe expressed his concern about the lack of any suitable safe harbor in proximity to the coal occurrence at Cape Patterson from where coal could be realistically transported if a mining enterprise were to be developed. At the end of his report, La Trobe included a request of the Governor in Sydney to authorise ‘a qualified person to make a complete examination of that part of the country with a view to [acquiring] data upon which any future arrangements may be made between H M Government and any parties [seeking] to work the coal’.<sup>10</sup>

On return to Melbourne, La Trobe encouraged his friend, H.G. Cameron, to undertake the follow-up survey. Cameron was a civil engineer, an early landholder on Point Nepean (Fig. 3), a limekiln proprietor, and lime merchant in Melbourne,<sup>11</sup> and La Trobe presumably believed that Cameron had enough knowledge of geological issues to be able to carry out the work. Cameron conducted the follow-up survey during October 1840. After examining the coal occurrence previously reported close to the eastern shore of Western Port and assessing this as being unsuitable for working, Cameron proceeded to Cape Patterson, tracing the coal measures along the coast. In his report published in November 1840, Cameron described his visit:

I discovered various straggling open seams (termed the crops) of coal varying in quality and thickness from two inches to four feet, and lying at such an angle [near horizontal] as to be rendered available for mining. Here, as in Western Port, the coal is associated with greystone, sandstone etc. In some, however, of the veins, the coal is of excellent quality, possessing a considerable proportion of bitumen, which would render it especially desirable for the purposes of gas.<sup>12</sup>

Cameron’s report reflected La Trobe’s concerns about the absence of a safe harbor for ships in proximity to Cape Patterson, and further expressed his view that land transport back to Western Port would be challenging. With this in mind, Cameron continued on eastward from Cape Patterson to what later became known as Andersons Inlet (Fig. 3), where he discovered a lagoon that he thought might provide an anchorage from where ships might safely operate. Cameron found a seam of coal about ‘10 inches’ thick in this location, but further detailed investigation of the coal measures between Cape Patterson and Andersons Inlet was curtailed by an incident in which he was accidentally shot in the leg during an attack by wild dogs.<sup>13</sup> Cameron did, however, report that he thought the coal measures in this region to be worthy of future close examination. A follow-up survey of the Andersons Inlet area conducted by assistant surveyor Townsend at La Trobe’s request was generally negative about the existence of additional coal resources in this area, and about the prospects for a workable harbor existing in Andersons Inlet.<sup>14</sup>

### **Getting at the coal**

There is evidence of coal recovered from outcrops along the Bass Coast and in Western Port being used on a small scale throughout the 1840s, and even prior to that. In evidence to a government enquiry conducted in the 1850s, Anderson claimed to have ‘raised it [coal] many years for my forge; in fact, ever since then [1836 or 1837] I have

got tons and tons of it for my station'.<sup>15</sup> In an appendix to the report of the same enquiry, George Ward Cole described his efforts in 1840 to recover 'five tons of excellent coal ... close to the beach in Western Port'.<sup>16</sup> Other accounts describe varying quantities of coal being recovered from along the coast and experimented with for applications including steam raising, gas making and foundry fuel, as well as for domestic use.<sup>17</sup> Woven in with the cottage industry revolving around the recovery of parcels of coal exposed at outcrop, were some more organised attempts made during the 1840s and early 1850s to exploit the Cape Patterson coal.

In early 1841, shortly after Cameron's report became public, a 'Coal Committee' was formed in Melbourne with the purpose of raising funds to support more detailed examination of the Cape Patterson coal seams, with the aim of using the information collected to raise capital in the UK for the establishment of a commercial mining operation.<sup>18</sup> Cameron spoke encouragingly at the inaugural meeting of the Committee in March 1841, and gave his views on what the cost might be to carry out the work. An appeal for subscriptions to an operating fund made at the meeting yielded a pledge for £525, enough, it was thought, to conduct the envisaged program. Cameron was among the subscribers. After false starts and a search for 'some person of practical experience in engineering to undertake the preliminary surveys', William Watson was selected for the task. Watson was variously described at the time as a 'well sinker from Geelong' and a 'practical miner'.<sup>19</sup> In May 1841, the 'mining party', consisting of Watson and four 'assistants', set out for Cape Patterson aboard the cutter *Jane and Emma*.<sup>20</sup> It is not clear exactly what the aim was, but apparently Watson was shown the location of the seam outcrops by Anderson.<sup>21</sup> In July 1841, Watson, accompanied by two others, apparently walked back to Melbourne with samples of what he had found to report to the Coal Committee.<sup>22</sup> In his report, Watson claimed to have discovered coal outcropping 4 miles west of Cape Patterson, at which location he sank a shaft approximately '50 yards' above high water mark. At the time of reporting, the shaft was described as being '55 foot deep', intersecting three coal seams of 'fine quality' coal with a 'total thickness of about 11 feet', including one seam of '5 feet'. Watson also reported that there was a suitable anchorage nearby that could be used to ship out the coal, and that in his time at Cape Patterson he had constructed a store and residence hut.

Excited by the news, the Committee immediately set about planning to form a company to exploit the find, and dispatched a party to bring back a bulk sample of the coal. The party returned to Melbourne with more sobering news. As reported:

The Company have been grossly deceived by the miner Mr Watson as to the existence of coal measures being five feet thick and the position and nature of the coal field. The position of the mine is mis-stated, there is no harbor on the coast near the mine. It is situated at least eighteen miles along from the eastern entrance of Western Port ... It would be absurd, in the current state of the colonial market, to attempt to work this field, dangerous coast and the expense of making a railway from the mine to Western port would be very great.<sup>23</sup>

The news had a dampening effect on this attempt to exploit the Cape Patterson coal discoveries, the Committee's attention turning to other locations along the Bass Coast

and in Western Port.<sup>24</sup> Watson apparently returned to Cape Patterson during September or October 1841, accompanied this time by his wife and son together with his daughter and her husband. According to one source, on this occasion, Watson was in the employ of Samuel Anderson,<sup>25</sup> but it is not clear what type of relationship Watson may have had with Anderson at this time, or to what end. In November 1841, it was reported that the miner's camp at Cape Patterson had been attacked by 'escaped' Tasmanian Aboriginals, the camp being destroyed and looted. During this affray, Watson's son suffered a gunshot wound, and the wives were temporarily abducted. Watson's son then set out in search of two missing whalers from a party that had been camped near the miner's hut, finding the body of one and the mortally wounded second whaler nearby.<sup>26</sup> This tragic event put the final nail in the coffin for this attempt at commercial exploitation.<sup>27</sup>

In the mid 1840s, a prospecting association was formed to further investigate the potential of the Cape Patterson coal seams.<sup>28</sup> Accounts of the formation and activities of the Cape Patterson Coal Proprietary Association are sketchy at best, but according to one source, among the participants were Samuel Anderson and his brother Hugh.<sup>29</sup> On the advice of Anderson, some boring was apparently carried out close to Point Lydia, near to Cape Patterson.<sup>30</sup> Evidence for this activity exists on later maps of the area (see Fig. 9), but at a later time, the usefulness of the information obtained was brought into question.<sup>31</sup> No other extant evidence exists as to any further activity by this association.

In May 1850, a report appeared in the Melbourne press of a public meeting convened with the intent of mounting another investigation of the prospects for developing the Bass Coast coal.<sup>32</sup> This consortium was notable for the involvement of a number of worthies, including the Lord Mayors of Melbourne and Geelong. At the meeting it was revealed that, contrary to previous advice, confirmation had been received that the Government was in a position to grant tenure on Government land for the purpose of raising coal. With this in mind the Government had begun the process of surveying blocks of 'coal bearing ground' along the Coast, with a view to leasing these for extraction of coal, in return for an annual fee.<sup>33</sup>

With the tenure question apparently resolved, an agreement was reached at the meeting to set up a subscription fund to finance activities. A limit was set at £700. The meeting was addressed by Mr Wathen, a mining engineer recently arrived in Melbourne, who, in the face of conflicting information in circulation regarding the coal occurrences on the Bass Coast, took it upon himself to conduct a survey of the coast from Western Port to Andersons Inlet. Wathen's comprehensive report on his efforts, published in early 1850, contained some insightful comments about earlier unsuccessful attempts to exploit the resource, and the most detailed description to date of the geology of the coal measure strata along the coast from Western Port to Andersons Inlet.<sup>34</sup> Wathen set out in his report the course of action he thought should be taken to further investigate the coal measures in a way to minimise risk to commercial developers, and the strategy that might be adopted to best develop the resource.<sup>35</sup> Wathen also looked at the likely size of the market and the cost of the coal landed in Melbourne in comparison to imports from NSW. In his concluding remarks, Wathen made an emotional appeal:

The want of coal in the colony is notorious and urgent. Every succeeding year it must become more so; for while the population is constantly augmenting, the supply of firewood must be always on the decrease. There is every reason for believing that a vast deposit of coal of excellent quality exists within a hundred miles of the capital; and it cannot be imagined that any technical or legal difficulties, such as want of power in the Crown, or defects in acts of Parliament, can long be allowed to fetter the spirit of enterprise, or obstruct an undertaking which must prove not only highly lucrative to the adventurers, but also productive of immense benefit to that colony which has already outstripped every other dependency of the British Crown.<sup>36</sup>

Despite this call to arms, little appears to have been done, and no reports of activity by the consortium appear in the contemporary press throughout 1850 and 1851. A colourful summary of the demise of this attempt at commercial development is given in “Garryowen”:

The exploring party went, and so did the preliminary fund, and, though the former returned, the latter was *mon est*. It all ended in fizzle. No progress report ever turned up, and so far from anything in the shape of a coal deposit being forthcoming, not even a cinder remained as a memento of the expedition.<sup>37</sup>

### **Government incentives**

By 1852, Melbourne was the bustling capital city of a booming, recently independent, Colony of Victoria, and lack of a suitable domestic supply of coal was becoming an issue of growing concern. In the face of the previous failures of private enterprise to fill the gap, the newly formed Legislative Council of Victoria stepped into the picture in an attempt to stimulate action. In September 1852, the Government Gazette carried notice of a reward of £1,000 for ‘any person or persons who should make known the existence of an available Coal Field within this Colony ... within twelve months from this date, [the notification to be] by letter addressed to the Colonial Secretary’.<sup>38</sup> The reward was subject to seven conditions:

1. That the coal be of a useful and marketable quality.
2. That the Coal Field bears every indication of being of a permanent character.
3. That the Coal Seams be of sufficient magnitude to render their working practicable and remunerative.
4. That the Coal Field be in such a situation as to render the transmission of Coal to Melbourne or Geelong sufficiently easy.
5. That the Coal Field be shown to such person or persons as the Lieutenant Governor shall appoint for the purpose of examination and report.
6. That the persons making known a Coal Field of the above character shall claim no other Reward than the sum of money now offered.
7. That the Coal Field shall be upon land unalienated from the Crown.<sup>39</sup>

In November 1853, the newly appointed Government Geological Surveyor, Alfred Selwyn, was dispatched to Cape Patterson to assess the potential for development of the area. Private exploration activity had re-commenced at Cape Patterson by this time in response to the offer of the reward. Selwyn’s report of his visit, made in December 1853, summarised his thoughts on the geology of the carboniferous sequence between



### **In search of the Reward**

In October 1853, Charles Terry, who reported that he was commencing activities at Cape Patterson, made a claim for the Government reward.<sup>42</sup> The claim was based on the supposed revelation of the existence of workable coal at Cape Patterson made known to him by the ‘original discoverers’.<sup>43</sup> After travelling to the area and satisfying himself as to the existence of the coal, Terry commissioned mineral surveyor Robert Polk to travel to Cape Patterson and report on the prospects. Polk’s party arrived at Cape Patterson on 22 October 1853 and set about examining the outcrops that had been previously explored, but his visit to Cape Patterson was brief. By the first week in November he was back in Melbourne, reporting to a public meeting called by Terry and describing the wonderful prospects that lay there, as well as displaying samples of coal that had been obtained.<sup>44</sup> In an atmosphere akin to a Southern Evangelist Meeting, Terry ‘preached’ on the boundless value of the ‘discovery’ to the economic wellbeing of the Colony, and the investment opportunity that it presented.<sup>45</sup> When Wathen, who was in the audience, attempted to talk about his previous work and council caution, he was howled down. Wathen subsequently issued a statement that was reported in the press:

The coal discovery of Mr Terry and Mr Polk is nearly [sic.] the reproduction of facts long before known and publically discussed in this colony. I visited the spot myself in 1850 and on my return published a report on the subject ... The three seams alluded to by Mr Polk are marked down in my map, and described in my report. They are never seen in vertical section, but crop out on the shore ... I estimated the thickness of the largest at 3feet 4 inches ... The real practical question is, what is the superficial area [of an indicated region of coal bearing ground].<sup>46</sup>

Terry was not to be deterred by practical questions of this sort.

Around the time of the public meeting on 5 November, Terry announced that he would be leaving shortly with a party of miners for Cape Patterson to commence operations, and that a limited number of ‘gentlemen’ would have the opportunity to travel with the party to witness for themselves the nature of the discovery.<sup>47</sup> A party of around 30 apparently took up the opportunity and accompanied the ‘Pied Piper’ on his visit.<sup>48</sup> On return of the inspection party to Melbourne in late November, another public meeting was convened to report back on the visit and commence action toward the formation of a company to work the coal.<sup>49</sup> Meanwhile, the mining party that had been left at Cape Patterson was hard at work. By the time of Selwyn’s visit in late November, boring operations had commenced, and a test pit was in the process of being sunk under the supervision of mineral surveyor John Thomas.<sup>50</sup>

According to Terry ‘after the second meeting [late November 1853] he went around to various gentlemen and obtained their consent to act as provisional directors of a company’.<sup>51</sup> A prospectus was prepared and circulated very soon after this, drawing an immediate reaction from at least two of the provisional directors, who quickly advertised their wish to dissociate themselves from the affair.<sup>52</sup> This was not a good portent. Despite this setback, and never apparently passing up an opportunity for self-promotion, Terry transported several large blocks of coal to Melbourne and had them

paraded in a cart along Collins Street with a placard announcing them to be Western Port Coal.<sup>53</sup> In March 1854, a re-vamped prospectus appeared in the Melbourne press under the banner of The Victoria Coal Company, with Terry listed among the promoters.<sup>54</sup> The expressed aim of the venture was ‘for the purpose of working the valuable Seams of Coal, five in number, at Cape Patterson, and for constructing a tramway for the coal to the Shipping Point’.<sup>55</sup> Among the usual glowing descriptions common to such documents, a claim was made that ‘there is a party of Colliers who are engaged sinking a shaft inland; and a second shaft will soon be commenced’.<sup>56</sup> Despite the comment in the prospectus that ‘on completion of the tramway, an ample supply of coal will have been raised for shipment to the market’, descriptions of activities by the Company are noticeably absent. In fact, by this time the provisional directors had disappeared, and work at Cape Paterson had been stopped. The test shaft that it was expected might take two weeks to reach coal had been underway for three months, finally being terminated at around 60 feet without striking coal.<sup>57</sup> Left to his own devices, Terry was on the way to insolvency, having been unable to raise anything like the £5,000 that had apparently been spent.<sup>58</sup> Terry continued to sell phantom shares in the enterprise until his final insolvency. In reports of Terry’s subsequent insolvency hearing, the Commissioner was quoted as saying ‘it was the first time he ever heard of deposits being received on shares before a company was actually formed’.<sup>59</sup>

After the demise of Terry’s efforts, ‘occupancy’ of the land upon which the activities had taken place was left residing with Charles Black, who had been an early participant in Terry’s scheme, and was one of the two provisional directors who had distanced themselves. The section in question was lot XXIX, as shown on Selwyn’s map (Fig. 6), adjacent to the site of earlier exploration activities along the coast.<sup>60</sup> As to how Black ended up in this position is uncertain, but he was soon presiding over the sinking of another, much less publicised shaft on the property. The site of this shaft was somewhat closer to the coast than the shaft sunk by Terry and did intersect coal, the first real indication of the mineral existing inland. Black arranged for specimens of coal from the shaft to be tested for their gas making potential.<sup>61</sup> Black also arranged for samples to be included at the ‘Melbourne Exhibition’ of 1854. This prompted the Governor, Sir Charles Hotham, to proclaim ‘that before many years expired he hoped to see steam engines working on Victorian railways consuming Victorian coal and produced by Victorian capital’.<sup>62</sup>

In November 1854, the Government attempted to address the uncertainties surrounding tenure at Cape Patterson by introducing a system of auctioning of annual licenses to occupy sections of land said to contain coal so as to allow sufficient time for the resource to be proven. The notice of this scheme in the Government Gazette announced that the cost would be ‘an upset price of £10 per section’.<sup>63</sup> A complex arrangement was to be put in place to compensate ‘occupiers’ at the termination of a license for any improvements made to the property. The uncertainties around continuity of tenure with this arrangement were sufficient to deter any further development.

### **The Government steps in**

In December 1856, after two years of apparent inaction at Cape Patterson, the Legislative Council voted that, ‘a Committee be appointed to consider and report upon the best mode of utilising the Coal Fields of this Colony’.<sup>64</sup> Despite the fact that a number of other coal discoveries had been made by this time in other parts of the Colony, the view was ultimately formed that Cape Patterson represented the best potential for development. The Committee took evidence from a number of persons having various forms of commercial interest in the Cape Patterson Coal Field, all of whom felt that the potential of the Field was self-evident, and solicited the best contemporary geological advice available in the Colony at the time, regarding the likely extent and value of the coal resource. Samuel Anderson gave evidence regarding his explorations and discoveries of coal across the region, which pointed to the existence of an extensive coalfield. Most evidence on the matter of the nature of the resource was, however, reserved for the Government Geological Surveyor, Alfred Selwyn (Fig. 7), and the recently appointed professor of natural history at the University of Melbourne and president of the Victorian Government Mining Commission, Frederick McCoy (Fig. 8).

**Figure 7:** *Alfred Selwyn.*



**Figure 8:** *Frederick McCoy.*



Sources: **Figure 7:** *The Early Years*, Earth Resources. See website.

**Figure 8:** *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 5, MUP, 1974. See web site.

These two eminent geologists had somewhat differing views on the potential of the Field and the best methods to further explore the resource, but in the end, the Committee was able to form a consensus view:

Your Committee [has considered two questions during its deliberations];

1. Whether any other Coal Field exists nearer Melbourne, or in a more advantageous position as to shipment [than Cape Patterson].
2. Whether the supply to be afforded by the Cape Patterson Coal Field is sufficient to justify the outlay for construction of a road and jetty [at Western Port].

With regard to the first of these considerations ... the Geological Surveyor and the President of the Mining Board have given evidence that they are now convinced ... that no other Coal Field is known in the Colony presenting such promising indications as that of Cape Patterson.

With reference to the second question, your Committee do not feel justified, awaiting further information, in pronouncing an opinion as to the extent or commercial value of the Cape Patterson Coal Field, but have resolved on recommending that immediate steps be taken to make an effectual examination of that locality, with the object of determining whether the extent and value of the coal deposit is such as to justify a large preliminary expenditure.<sup>65</sup>

With the second issue in mind, the Committee recommended that ‘two borings [be made], one of which should be from the bottom of the existing shaft at Cape Patterson’ that had struck coal in 1854. The Committee also recommended that ‘concurrently with this, a geological survey should be made to test the extent and character of the Coal Field’.

In December 1857, a tender was received to clear out the existing shaft at Cape Patterson and to extend the shaft an additional distance. This work was carried out in early 1858, revealing the existence of at least two substantial coal seams. Selwyn, who inspected the deepened shaft, summarised his findings in a report dated 12 March 1858:

[The contractor] has sunk the shaft ... to a depth of 86 feet, and bored 9 feet further, making a total depth of 95 feet. In this depth he has ... cut two seams of coal of excellent quality.

The first seam is fifty-three feet ... three inches ... from the surface and is three feet nine inches ... thick. This is the inland extension of the “Rock Vein” ... The second seam is sixty-seven feet ... four inches ... from the surface, and is in three bands, containing together about twenty inches ... of available coal. This is the inland extension of the “Queen Vein” which is nearly four feet thick ... where seen outcropping on the beach, but inland this has thinned out and is split up into three thin seams with shale partings.<sup>66</sup>

Another bore funded by the Geological Survey in 1858 some ‘5½ miles north 35° west from Cape Patterson [intersected] at 196 feet from the surface, coal 1 foot 5 inches ... at 204 feet from the surface, coal 1 foot 4 inches’, indicating the potential for a widespread coal field.<sup>67</sup> The results of this effort were sufficiently encouraging for free enterprise to enter the scene again.

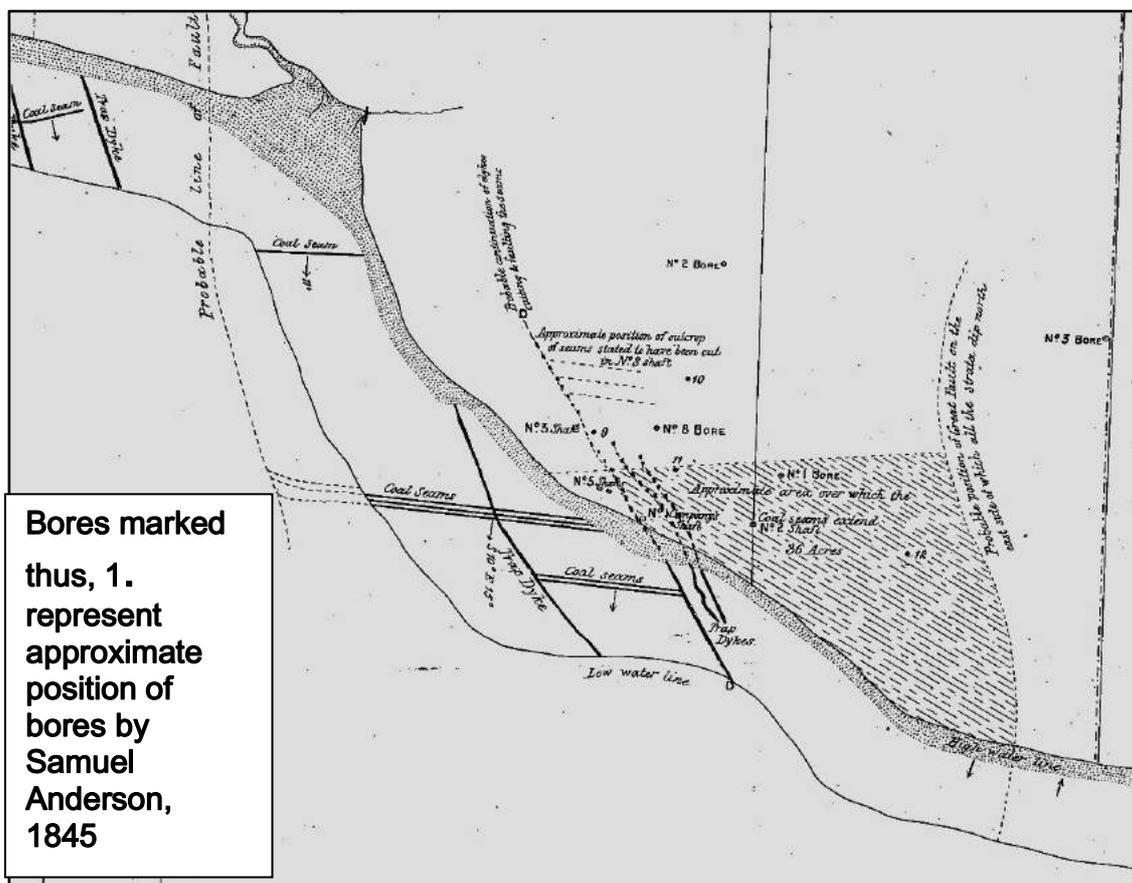
### **Production at last**

In August 1858, an application was made to the ‘Commissioner of Lands and Works’ for a lease over Sections XXIX, XXX and XXXI, as well as small portions of some other Sections, at Cape Patterson (Fig. 6).<sup>68</sup> In the application, an allowance was made for the part of Section XXIX east of Coal Creek only to be included as a fallback position. Thomas Bury made the application on behalf of himself, John Crews, Robert Polk and Richard Davis. In January 1859, a prospectus appeared for the Cape Patterson Coal Mining Company, which claimed to have a lease from the Government to mine for coal over 640 acres, for a period of 14 years.<sup>69</sup> This lease corresponded with the area

applied for by Bury. It eventually transpired that in the process of the lease being formalised, Crews and some of his associates had managed to have the document made in their favour, and had proceeded to float the Cape Patterson Coal Mining Company without the involvement of the others.<sup>70</sup> The ensuing clash between Crews and Bury was played out in the press and at public meetings in Melbourne.<sup>71</sup> Bury claimed that Crews had used his position as a parliamentarian to pervert the lease process. Crews defended his position and strongly denied any misuse of parliamentary influence. The discourse continued for some time, Bury eventually losing out. In the prospectus it was claimed that the parties who had been ‘left out’ had agreed to ‘transfer their interests ... to the Company on equitable terms, taking payment entirely in shares’.<sup>72</sup> Judging by what was happening, it is unlikely that the interaction was equitable.

Meanwhile, operations had got underway on site, with a shaft sunk and two seams of coal having a combined thickness of four feet being exposed by the time the prospectus was advertised. The expressed aim in the prospectus was to construct a tramway from the mine to a safe harbor reportedly surveyed in Andersons Inlet, a distance of 7½ miles. After sinking two shafts on the property, a limited amount of underground development was undertaken, from which about 500 tons of coal was recovered.<sup>73</sup> This was the first significant coal production in Victoria.

**Figure 9:** Plan showing summary of results of survey by Hotson of area worked by the Victoria Coal Company, circa 1860.



Source: Coal Seams Cape Patterson, Geological Survey Office Melbourne, 1867.

The 'new' Victoria Coal Company was 'constituted by a subscription contract in November 1859'.<sup>74</sup> The directors were listed as Henry Levy, Nathaniel Levi, John Quartermain, Samuel House, John McCrae, John Thompson, William Clarke and James Butters, a completely different group than those listed as interested parties in the earlier Victoria Coal Company promoted by Charles Terry. In a report tendered to the directors of the Victoria Coal Company in November 1859, consulting engineer John Hotson set out his plans for further development of the property previously occupied by the Cape Patterson Company, and for further exploration activities.<sup>75</sup> At the time of his investigation, Hotson reported that two shafts had already been sunk, one intersecting coal and one not, and a third shaft was on the way (work undertaken by the Cape Patterson Company). A number of bores recommended by Hotson were completed by May 1860, defining what appeared to be a commercially viable prospect expected to yield around 75,000 tons of large coal, and about 25,000 tons of fine coal over the area of coal occurrence defined on the area (Fig. 9).<sup>76</sup> Hotson's plan for recovery of the coal was to connect two shafts by a development roadway, and then extract the coal by working away from the roadway, and using the 'longwall advancing system', removing the total thickness of coal in one pass.

In July 1862, The Victoria Coal Company was awarded a 640-acre lease for a period of 30 years under the recently introduced mineral lease scheme (Mineral Lease No. 8). The lease included the area previously worked under the Cape Patterson Company (Fig. 10). Activity is recorded against the lease from mid-1862, but must have been taking place from before that date judging by the information contained on the lease plan attached to the application.

A brief description of mining operations undertaken by the Victoria Coal Mining Company was given by mine superintendent (from 1863) Henry Levy in evidence to a Government enquiry into the Cape Patterson Coal Field in 1865, set up to 'examine and report upon the capability of the Cape Patterson Coal Field for supplying the colony...':

We sank two small shafts called No4 and No5 shafts ... [both shafts] were close together [in proximity to No 3 shaft] and one whim worked the two ... We made a road through underground ... [the seam was about] 2 feet of clear coal ... We [worked up dip] to the surface ... and before we could block it up the surface fell right in.<sup>77</sup>

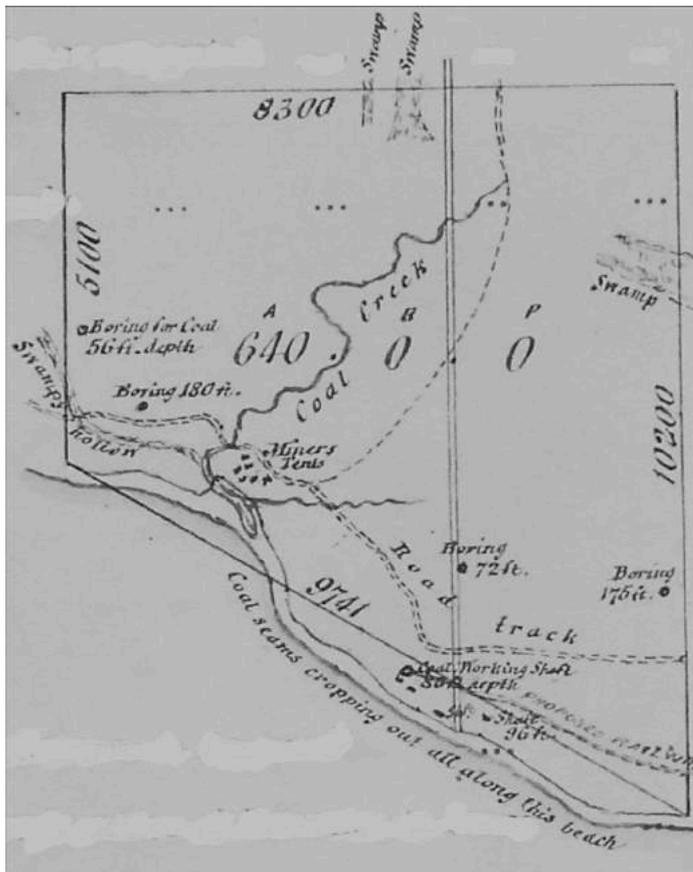
This sketchy account is the extant contemporary record of the first truly commercial coal mining operations in Victoria. Records of the Office of Mines show that a total of 1,933 tons of coal had been recorded as coming from Mineral Lease No. 8 up to May 1865, with royalties of £20.5s.11d being paid.<sup>78</sup> In his evidence, Henry Levy claimed that about 3,000 tons had in fact been mined from a narrow strip adjacent to the coast, but that only about 2,000 tons had been sent to market in Melbourne where it was 'favourably received'.

Although relatively thin seams and frequent dykes/faults were an impediment to the progress of mining activities, it was the problems associated with transport of the coal to market that caused the Company to delay in taking the next step toward full scale production. The plan for a rail connection to Andersons Inlet proposed in the

prospectus for the Cape Patterson Coal Company were soon shelved in favour of a connection to Griffith Point in Western Port, a distance of some sixteen miles. This option became the focus of endless discussion over many years, with differing routes and construction details being considered. In the interim, a scheme for sea transport proposed by John Hotson in his report to the Directors of 1859 had been adopted. The saga around the transport of coal by the Company by ship from Cape Patterson to Melbourne has been described in several articles:

[The coal was despatched] by bullock wagon to the 'Boat Harbour', as it was then known. This is a small cove just over a kilometer east of the Cape which protects it from the west but leaves it very exposed to weather from the south and east. Here the coal was bagged and loaded into whaleboats tied to a jetty built from a rock platform. This was the only means by which the coal could be transported to ships moored offshore.<sup>79</sup>

**Figure 10:** Lease plan accompanying application for Mineral Lease No. 8, 1862.



Source: Register of applications for mineral leases, PROV, VPRS 7843.

Repeated storms required the jetty to be re-built, and damaged the offshore moorings that had been installed by the Government. The Company looked for alternatives:

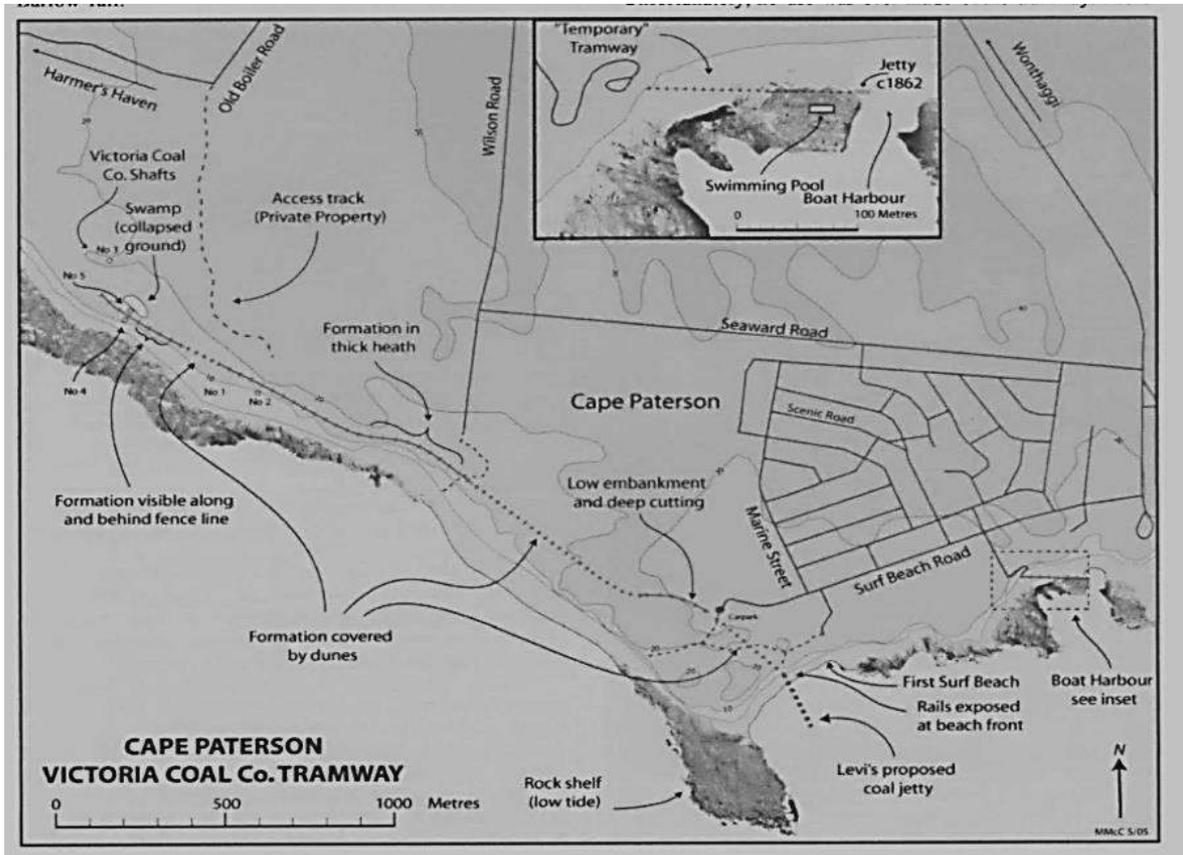
The Company abandoned the boat harbor ... and tried using the jetty at Inverloch [Andersons Inlet] seven kilometers to the east. Although this represented a well protected loading point ..., the sandbar at the entrance to Andersons Inlet ... was an unacceptable hazard ... The Company returned to an earlier plan and chose the Cape itself where a rock platform jutted into Bass Strait and provided some protection from the seas. A jetty constructed from the shore on the east side of the rock platform would service the ships ... a tramway would link it with the mine.<sup>80</sup>

The plans for this were already being formed when the

Company obtained its lease in July 1862 (Fig. 10). In October 1862, the Government agreed to assist the Company after repeated requests from Levi. A cash grant of £1,000 and rail lines from Geelong were lent to the Company, to construct a tramway slightly over one mile in length, from the Company's No 3 shaft to the shore to the immediate

east of the Cape (Fig 11). The proposed pier was never built, and the tramway never used. By the time of the 1865 enquiry, all activities had stopped on the Victoria Coal Company's lease, pending better transport options. At the same time, the coal seams were becoming too thin for economic mining.

**Figure 11:** Summary of Victoria Coal Company's Tramway, circa 1863.



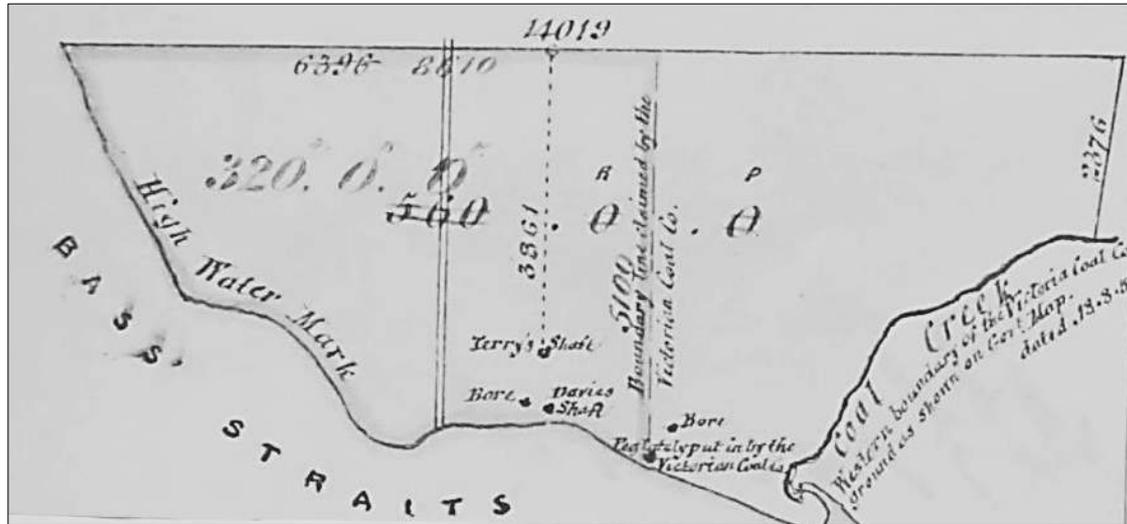
Source: McCarthy, M., 'Cape Coal', in *Light Railways* 197, October 2007.

Around the same time as the Victoria Coal Company was being awarded its lease, another was granted to Thomas Bury for an adjacent area to the west (Mineral Lease No. 7). This lease was apparently originally to be granted for a 560 acre area corresponding to Block XVI and that part of Block XXIX to the west of Coal Creek (Fig.6). When applying for the lease, Bury claimed that the 'lease of these lands was promised to me by the Government more than once, and I have been waiting for a lease since August 13 1858', reflecting his frustrations at the time of the formation of the Cape Patterson Coal Company.<sup>81</sup> Eventually he was granted the 320-acre area shown on the plan accompanying the application for the lease (Fig. 12). This area encompassed the site of the earlier shaft sinking activities, and the original discovery site.

The machinations around the boundaries of Mineral Leases 7 and 8 arose as a result of a dispute between Bury and the Victoria Coal Mining Company over the area lying west of Coal Creek and up to the boundary of Section XXIX, that had originally been asked for by Bury as part of his application of 1858.<sup>82</sup> The Victoria Coal Company objected on several grounds to the issuing of a lease to Bury for this area, and preemptively placed a peg on the boundary where they thought the boundary should be

(Fig. 12). (The Victoria Company had received a recommendation from Hotson to keep an option on this area at the time he was conducting his earlier survey of the region). Not for the first time, Bury was the loser, having the disputed area excised from his application. Reluctantly, Bury focused his interest on the remaining 320-acre lease that he was left with (Fig. 12).

**Figure 12:** Lease plan accompanying application for Mineral Lease No. 7, 1862.



Source: Register of applications for mineral leases, PROV, VPRS 7843.

In evidence to the 1865 enquiry, a miner named Arthur Saunders claimed to have been working for Bury on the property from September 1862, refurbishing and deepening an existing shaft and setting up head gear to prepare for mining activity. Saunders claimed that the work had been stopped by the end of 1862, owing to the inability to acquire an extension to the lease. Bury himself gave evidence to the hearings that it was want of a suitable method for transport of the coal to Western Port that was blocking further action. Although Bury battled on for some time, seeking and receiving some help from Government grants, sinking bores and putting down several shallow shafts, only about 6 to 10 tons of coal was produced up to 1867.<sup>83</sup>

From late 1865 to late 1866, the Victoria Coal Company sank two deep bores on their property without intersecting coal. This endeavour was helped by a Government grant.<sup>84</sup> The demise of activities on the two primary blocks brought to an end the short productive period of the Cape Patterson Coal Field, completing the loop from initial discovery to eventual 'commercial' production.

### **The Reward**

When considering who might get the reward offered in 1852, the Government logically looked to the participants in their part in the discovery and in proving the deposits, and their role in the eventual commercial exploitation of the Cape Patterson coal. The forty years between the first sighting of the outcropping seams by William Hovell in 1826, to the eventual setting up of the first prototype commercial mining operation in Victoria in the 1860s saw a plethora of possible candidates. Among those who might have been

considered were explorers such as Anderson, Cameron, Selwyn and Wathen; shaft sinkers such as Watson, Terry, and Bury; entrepreneurs like those involved in the first two consortiums of the 1840s and in the setting up of the coal companies in the 1850s and 1860s; and any others from a cast of people who recovered coal from or near outcrops for their own purposes. None of these people laid claim to the reward for themselves. The most obvious candidate might have been Samuel Anderson, who was generally considered to be responsible for the re-discovery of the resource and who had exploited the coal in a manner that demonstrated its usefulness, but he did not apply for the reward. Asked later why he did not apply, he commented that he had ‘communicated all the information I had to Mr La Trobe. I spoke about it and wrote about it, and I thought the committee of the association might think I was taking an undue advantage’.<sup>85</sup> What exactly he had in mind is not clear, but whatever his thinking, the reward passed him by. In the event, the case for the reward was to reside with the enigmatic figure of Richard Davis, evidence of whose presence is scattered through the story.

### **Richard Stephen Davis**

Richard Davis who arrived in Melbourne with his family in December 1841,<sup>86</sup> has been described in some articles as a Welsh coal miner, an assertion borne out by the Davis family history, and his evidence to the 1865 enquiry.<sup>87</sup>

In his own account, Davis stated that in 1842, shortly after arriving, he became aware of ‘a report that there was coal [at Cape Patterson]. I went there and took a regular look at every place that I thought might be the likeliest place’.<sup>88</sup> Davis claimed to have found coal on the beach and ‘traced it running inland’.<sup>89</sup> If this date is correct, this must have occurred very shortly after the abortive attempts by the first consortium to exploit the Cape Patterson coal. Curiously, Davis made no comment ever about sighting any evidence of Watson’s shaft or other remains during his time at Cape Patterson, leaving open to speculation the veracity of either Watson’s or Davis’s account.

Davis claimed to have carried a 24 or 25 pound sample of the coal he had found back to Melbourne on his back and taking it to Governor La Trobe. La Trobe would presumably not have been particularly excited, given that he had been to the location himself some time earlier, as had others such as Anderson and Cameron. The recent events of the first consortium would have also been on his mind. At the time of his visit with La Trobe, Davis claimed to have asked La Trobe for some form of tenure for him to be able to work the coal, but was offered only a short term arrangement with conditions unacceptable to him.<sup>90</sup>

Davis was in Melbourne in 1843, as assumed by the birth of a daughter, but apparently left the Colony for South Australia, where the copper mines were opening up, shortly after.<sup>91</sup> He claimed at a later date to have worked at Burra for ten years or so. Davis’s presence in South Australia during this period is supported by the birth of three further children.<sup>92</sup> The only record in the correspondence of the South Australian Mining Association that might be relevant is of a Mr R. Davis who in 1847 contracted

to 'remove dirt on the ore washing floor at 11s a day'.<sup>93</sup> In an account of her recollections published in 1934, Davis's oldest daughter Elizabeth remembers the family being at Apoinga (Tottle's Scrub) south of Burra in the 1840s where, according to her, Davis worked as a copper smelter.<sup>94</sup> Penny and Owens opened their works at Apoinga to smelt the Burra ore in January 1849,<sup>95</sup> and in March that year, the first load of refined copper produced anywhere in Australia was dispatched from Apoinga to Adelaide.<sup>96</sup> In this context, the Davis family claim that 'Richard Davis was the first to smelt copper' has some basis, albeit that smelting activities had gone on in South Australia before that date. The dates for all these sightings of Davis in the record are consistent.

Like a large portion of the mining fraternity in South Australia, Davis apparently made his way back to Victoria during the gold rushes, with family tradition recording a three-month journey by bullock wagon back to Victoria, with an infant in tow. Davis was on the diggings at Forest Creek when he was made aware of the proclamation of the Reward in September 1852.<sup>97</sup> Davis claimed to have sent a letter setting out his case to Surveyor General Clarke shortly after becoming aware of the offer, and within three months of the proclamation of the Reward.<sup>98</sup> The fact that the letter was sent to Clarke rather than to the Colonial Secretary as stipulated, might account for why the letter apparently became lost, and why Davis could never substantiate the existence of this letter, despite apparently visiting Clarke in person to follow up.<sup>99</sup>

Some time in mid-1853, Davis and his partner of the time, John Watkins, apparently approached Terry with information regarding Davis's earlier 'discoveries' at Cape Patterson.<sup>100</sup> Davis and Watkins were drawn into Terry's promotional activities, accompanied Polk on his reconnaissance, spoke at the meeting organised by Terry on 5 November, and were reported to have been in the mining party at Cape Patterson when shaft sinking commenced.<sup>101</sup> After the premature cessation of activities by Terry, Davis entered into an arrangement of some type with Charles Black to sink another shaft on the property now in Black's hands.<sup>102</sup> This shaft, subsequently generally called Davis Shaft, or at a later time Bury's Shaft, intersected a four-foot seam of good quality coal (the Rock Seam) at a depth of around 47 feet,<sup>103</sup> which was the first real evidence of coal existing inland away from the coast. As to whether Davis had any particular input to the locating of this shaft is unknown, but it appears, however, that the location was counter to conventional wisdom as expressed by Anderson and Selwyn.<sup>104</sup> Whether by geological insight or dumb luck, this shaft was to be central to the future of the Field. In March 1854, Black applied on behalf of Davis and Watkins (and then endorsed the application) to get tenure for them to work the find 'in order that they may prove the reality and great importance of their discovery', but could not obtain tenure conditions attractive enough to entice investors.<sup>105</sup>

Davis appears to have remained along the Bass Coast throughout 1855 and 1856.<sup>106</sup> The next we hear of him in the public record is in 1857, when the additional geological work ordered by the Coalfields Committee was being executed. Davis was the successful tenderer for clearing out and deepening the shaft that he had originally put down, the tender being for a sum of £110, an amount considered exceedingly good

value by Selwyn who was assessing the tenders.<sup>107</sup> A notation accompanying the tender had this to say:

Richard Davis makes this offer ... to prove his title to the reward ... The field he discovered for the reward was as available at the time of its discovery as it is now, and had he been paid the amount then, the interest of it would have been by this time almost as much as the principal.<sup>108</sup>

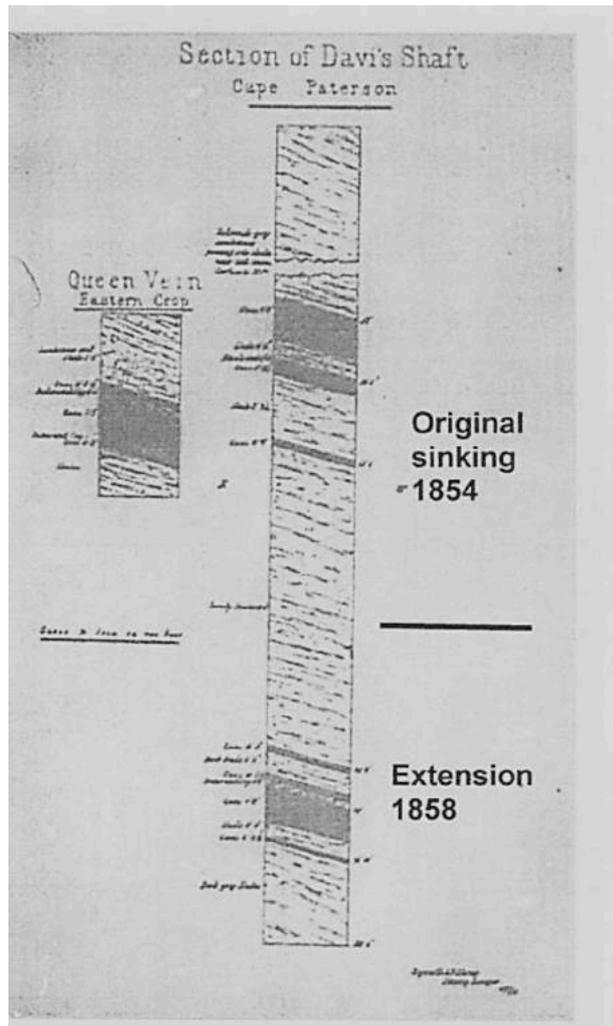
These comments reflect the frustration that Davis was feeling about the repeated obstacles that he felt were being put in his way. When the work was completed in early 1858, an additional seam had been revealed as he had predicted (Fig. 13). There was some dispute as to whether this was the Queen Seam, known to exist from the outcrop exposure, or an altogether different seam. This uncertainty was to lead to the quest for a mysterious 'third seam'. The shaft was further deepened when Bury acquired Mineral Lease No.7 in an attempt to settle this issue. After completing the contract for the shaft work, at considerable extra cost to himself over the contract price, Davis, in partnership, undertook the deep boring at the site selected by Selwyn to the north of Cape Patterson that helped prove the extent of the coal resource.<sup>109</sup>

From March 1858 on, Davis became associated with Thomas Bury who had emerged as his agent. In August 1858, they were applicants for the lease that ultimately ended up with the Cape Patterson Coal Company. Davis subsequently became the mine manager for the Cape Patterson Coal Company, superintending the sinking of the initial shafts and being responsible for the recovery of the first 500 tons of coal. This activity closed the loop for Davis's involvement at Cape Patterson during which he had been 'in the area' around the period of the re-discovery, though not the first or only person to appear in the discovery story. He contributed significantly to the proving of and participation in the eventual first commercial exploitation of the resource. This combination of roles placed Davis in a position from which he could reasonably make a claim for the reward against the criteria originally stipulated in 1852.

When Terry made his claim for the reward in October 1853, it was on behalf of Richard Davis (who was illiterate) and John Watkins, for both of whom he claimed to have consent to represent (Watkins was an associate of Davis with whom he had teamed up with in South Australia. Davis later claimed that Watkins had no right to a share of any reward, as it was Davis alone who had made the early 'discovery'). From January 1854, there was an exchange of correspondence with the Government in an attempt to pursue the claim, this time from Davis and Watkins acting alone. In March 1854, Charles Black wrote a letter of endorsement to support the request for a lease by Davis and Watkins to allow them the opportunity to prove the value of their 'discovery'. This marked a change from a focus on the imagined value of the discovery to an attempt to prove its value. Up to this point, the worth of any claim by Davis, with or without Watkins, could only be based on the imagined value. Predictably, the claims based on the imagined value met with a generally negative response, particularly by Selwyn, along the lines that the worth of the resource had not yet been proved.<sup>110</sup>

By 1857, when Davis was tendering for the work for the Geological Survey to clear out the shaft, Thomas Bury was already acting as his agent. Bury made another

**Figure 13:** *Davis's Reward Shaft*



Source: Geological Survey Progress Report Report No. 3, Victorian Government Printer, 1876.

claim for the reward in February 1859 on behalf of Davis. This claim was also disallowed, primarily on the advice of Selwyn, on the familiar grounds that the worth of the resource had not yet been proved, and on the additional erroneous grounds that Hume and Hovell had been the original discoverers during their 1824/25 explorations of Port Phillip.<sup>111</sup> This reaction had come to typify the way in which Davis's claims were being handled by the authorities. Selwyn's antagonism toward Davis had come to the fore over the years since 1853, culminating in the somewhat petty and vindictive comments in his report on his inspection of the deepened shaft, complaining of Davis's non-compliance on some points of detail in the contract, while conceding that Davis had done a good job overall.<sup>112</sup> Apart from this personal antagonism, Selwyn's ambivalent view of the potential of the Cape Patterson Coal Field appeared to be

colouring his input to the reward assessment process that he was in charge of. In the public eye, Davis was coming to be seen as a David battling against the bureaucratic Goliath. Articles began to appear in the press in support of Davis and dramatising the events around the discovery of coal in Davis's shaft:

Strange to say, all along the government geologists have been opposed to the working of the Cape Patterson coal-fields. Some years since the chief of the department [Selwyn] seems to have staked his professional reputation on the opinion that the croppings on the beach were of seams that lay under the sea, and that coal, if found inland at all, would not be found to extend over an area of more than about 200 acres, and all the operations undertaken by his directions since seem to have been done with a view to support a forgone conclusion rather than to elicit the truth ... Richard Davis alone has sturdily disputed the scientific dictum of government geologists, and with hard-fisted energy labored manfully to establish ... that an abundant and available supply of coal did exist.<sup>113</sup>

In the face of this growing public interest, the Government instituted a Board in 1863 to examine Davis's claim in an impartial way. The Board was generally

sympathetic to Davis's circumstances and the injustice done to him, and eventually came down with the finding that:

Having taken the evidence of Richard Davis and his agent, Mr Thomas Bury, and examined a mass of correspondence, memoranda, and other documents, the Board are unanimously of the opinion that Richard Davis is fully entitled to the said reward of £1,000, together with interest on the same from the second day of March 1854 [the date of a minute by Governor La Trobe's recognising the priority of claim by Davis] as the first and sole discoverer of an available coal-field in Victoria.<sup>114</sup>

The Board was critical of Selwyn for his persistent opposition to the payment of the reward, and dismissive of the significance attached to Hovell's original sighting (and the erroneous involvement of Hume) by Selwyn. The Board was also critical of the fact that no useful arrangement in the way of tenure could be arrived at to facilitate Davis being able to prove the value of his find, and also noted that Davis and Bury were denied an opportunity of making representations to the Coal Field Committee's enquiry of 1856/57.

In the event, Davis was awarded £400 only. In evidence to the *Royal Commission on Coal Mining* conducted by the Victorian Government in 1890, Davis's son, Richard Jun., claimed that Davis had 'only £400 for himself', leaving open to speculation the possibility that the remainder of the reward may have been offset against costs along the way or similar.<sup>115</sup> The resolution of the reward amount remains as another curious episode in the story of Richard Davis.

In 1869, Davis built a home at Griffith Point (sometimes referred to as Davis Point, now San Remo) where for a while he had been involved in attempts to exploit early coal discoveries. He died at San Remo in April 1879 at age 62 after an extended period of invalidism following an accidental fall. In an ironic twist, the JP presiding at the inquiry into Davis's death was Hugh Anderson, who was to go on record to claim that his brother Samuel was the rightful claimant to the reward.<sup>116</sup>

## **Epilogue**

In the years that followed the cessation of commercial activities at Cape Patterson and the settling of the reward, interest was maintained at some level in the Cape Patterson Coal Field. The Geological Survey continued to study the area, despite Selwyn's ongoing negativity, and the Field was retained as an area of concern for the Coal Fields Committee, whilst the Rock and Queen seams remained the thickest seams discovered in Victoria.<sup>117</sup> Several new coal companies came and went without leaving much of a footprint, and leases swapped hands, with Levi ending up having the area covered by Mineral Leases 7 and 8 in his consolidated control.<sup>118</sup> Levi continued to retain these leases and to pursue a quest to keep his dreams of a railway connection to Western Port alive, until his death in 1908.

Coal was found at Kilcunda, midway between Cape Patterson and Griffith Point, in 1865, and the Western Port Coal Company began operations shortly after. The Government announcement in 1870 of another reward of £5,000 for the delivery of

5,000 tons of coal in Melbourne, gave the Western Port Coal Company the incentive to set about constructing a three-foot six-inch gauge tramway from Kilcunda to a deep water port at Griffith Point. This Company eventually delivered around 15,000 tons of coal to Melbourne, at a cost around half that of the Cape Patterson coal which had been delivered by sea.

Over time, other coal deposits in the Bass Coast region were explored and attempts made to exploit them, particularly along the eastern margin of Western Port, an area that became known as the Woolami Coal Field. Apart from Kilcunda, where operations continued into the twentieth century, these activities were either illusory or, at best, transient. Further discoveries were made across Gippsland, culminating in the establishment of a complex of commercial operations in the Korumburra region in the 1890s. When these privately run operations ultimately proved unreliable in the first decade of the twentieth century, the Government set about establishing a State operated mining operation that could guarantee supply. Attention turned to the Powlett Plains region immediately to the north of Cape Patterson, where Davis had put down his deep bore for Selwyn in 1858. In 1909, operations commenced at the State Mines at Wonthaggi, some four miles to the north of Cape Patterson, where Selwyn had long believed that a sustainable coal mining enterprise might be established, rather than at Cape Patterson.

**Acknowledgement.** This paper is based in part on a comprehensive annotated bibliography compiled by Mr Peter Maclelland and Ms Eleanor Ross. The guidance afforded by this bibliography, and the assistance rendered during several conversations with the author, is warmly acknowledged. The help offered by the Wonthaggi Historical Society is also gratefully acknowledged.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Hovell, together with Hamilton Hume, was the first to complete an overland crossing from Sydney to the Port Phillip District during 1824/25. They reported favourably on the potential for settlement of the region where they had arrived, thinking erroneously that this was in the Western Port area. It was to further investigate this potential that Hovell was attached to the settlement party sent to Western Port by the Government in Sydney to forestall any territorial claims that the French might make.

<sup>2</sup> W. Hovell, *Journal on the voyage to and at Western Port, New South Wales*, Hovell papers, Mitchell Library; Note the following conversion rates for units used in this paper: 1 (long) ton = 1.01605 tonnes; 1 pound = 0.4536 kg; 1 inch = 25.4 mm; 1 foot = 0.3048 m; 1 yard = 0.914 m; 1 mile = 1.609 km; 1 acre = 0.405 hectares.

<sup>3</sup> Cited in A. Reeves, 'Industrial men: miners and politics in Wonthaggi 1909-1968', MA thesis, Department of History, La Trobe University, 1977.

<sup>4</sup> Cited in E. Scott, 'Early reports on Gippsland coal deposits', *The Victorian Historical Magazine*, vol. ii, November 1912, p. 111.

<sup>5</sup> Reeves, 'Industrial men: miners and politics in Wonthaggi'.

<sup>6</sup> Cited in Scott, 'Early reports on Gippsland coal deposits', p. 112.

<sup>7</sup> Moore's report to La Trobe cited in T. Horton and K. Morris, *The Andersons of Western Port*, Bass Coast Historical Society, 1983, p. 54.

<sup>8</sup> Horton and Morris, *The Andersons of Western Port*, p. 55.

<sup>9</sup> Cited in Scott, 'Early reports on Gippsland coal deposits', p. 113.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

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- <sup>11</sup> C. Hollinshead, E. Bird, and N. Goss, *Lime Land Leisure: Peninsula History in the Shire of Flinders*, Shire of Flinders, 1982, p. 70.
- <sup>12</sup> *Port Phillip Gazette*, 28 November 1840, p. 3.
- <sup>13</sup> *Port Phillip Patriot and Melbourne Advertiser*, 2 November 1840, p. 2.
- <sup>14</sup> Horton and Morris. *The Andersons of Western Port*, 1983, p. 67.
- <sup>15</sup> *Progress Report from the Select Committee upon Coal Fields to the Legislative Assembly of Victoria*, Government Printer, Melbourne, 1857, p. 7.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>17</sup> For example, *Colonial Mining Journal, Railway and Share Gazette*, 6 January 1859, p. 8, and *Port Phillip Patriot and Morning Advertiser*, 14 January 1847, p. 2.
- <sup>18</sup> *Port Phillip Gazette*, 6 March 1841, p. 3.
- <sup>19</sup> *Adelaide Times*, 25 November 1853, p. 3; E. Finn (Ed.), “Garryowen” *The Chronicles of Early Melbourne 1835 to 1852*, Fergusson and Mitchell, Melbourne, 1888, vol. 2, pp. 554-56.
- <sup>20</sup> *Geelong Advertiser*, 22 May 1841, p. 2; There is conjecture around the exact make-up of the party accompanying Watson, the men involved being variously described as convicts and labourers; *Shipping News, Port Phillip Gazette*, 12 May 1841, p. 2.
- <sup>21</sup> *Southern Australian*, 10 September 1841, p. 3.
- <sup>22</sup> *Australasian Chronicle*, 20 July 1841, p. 2.
- <sup>23</sup> *Southern Australian*, 10 September 1841, p. 3.
- <sup>24</sup> A detailed account of explorations along the coast conducted by Messrs Morris and Kissopp during their trip on behalf of the Coal Committee to Cape Patterson is given in the *Port Phillip Gazette*, 7 August 1841, p. 3.
- <sup>25</sup> Finn, “Garryowen” *The Chronicles of Early Melbourne 1835 to 1852*, vol. 1, pp. 350-351.
- <sup>26</sup> *The Cornwall Chronicle*, 6 November 1841, p. 3.
- <sup>27</sup> An account of the trial of the aboriginals held accountable is given in the *Port Phillip Patriot and Melbourne Advertiser*, 23 December 1841, p. 4. The persons in question were Tasmanian natives brought from Flinders Island by George Augustus Robinson, the well-known protector of aboriginals.
- <sup>28</sup> J. Knight. ‘The Story of Black Coal in Victoria’, *Mining and Geological Journal*, vol. 4, no. 4, 1951.
- <sup>29</sup> J. Sleeman, *The Cape Patterson Coalfield*, Manuscript in possession of Wonthaggi Historical Society, 1969.
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>31</sup> Report by J. Hotson to the Directors of the Victorian Coal Company, reproduced as Appendix A1, *Progress Report from the Select Committee on the Cape Patterson Coal Fields*, Victorian Government Printer, 1865.
- <sup>32</sup> *Melbourne Daily News*, 6 May 1850, p. 2.
- <sup>33</sup> See surveys of Robert Mason, 1850/51, Bass Valley Historical Society.
- <sup>34</sup> G. Wathen, *Proposed coal workings in the Colony of Port Phillip*, printed by Wilson and Johnston, Melbourne, 1850, State Library of Victoria.
- <sup>35</sup> Wathen’s preferred strategy would be to mine the coal either at Griffith Point (Westernport) or at Andersons Inlet where transport problems might be minimised, even though the coal resource was largely undefined at these locations. Alternatively, if mining operations were to take place at Cape Patterson, the anticipated high cost of transport would need to be factored in to the sale price.
- <sup>36</sup> Wathen. *Proposed coal workings in the Colony of Port Phillip*.
- <sup>37</sup> Finn, “Garryowen” *The Chronicles of Early Melbourne 1835 to 1852*, pp. 554-56.
- <sup>38</sup> *Victorian Government Gazette No. 38*, 22 September 1852, p. 996.
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>40</sup> A.R.C. Selwyn, ‘Report on the Carboniferous Strata and Coal Seams situated on the Coast between Western Port Bay and Andersons Inlet, eight miles east of Cape Patterson in Bass’s Strait’, Victorian Parliamentary Papers 1853-54, Victorian Government Printer, 1854.
- <sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>42</sup> Appendix to the report of the ‘Board appointed ... to enquire into the claim by Richard Davis of Cape Patterson, coal miner, to the Reward of £1,000 offered by the Government in the year of 1852, to the Discoverer of an “Available Coal Field”, Victorian Government Printer, 1863.
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>44</sup> *Banner*, 8 November 1853, p. 10.
- <sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>46</sup> *Argus*, 7 November 1853, p. 5; Selwyn’s map of December 1853 (Fig. 6) shows his estimate of the area that he thought might have coal bearing potential. The extent of the minable coal was obviously an issue of concern among knowledgeable people at the time.

<sup>47</sup> *Banner*, 4 November 1853, p. 10.

<sup>48</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 March 1854, p. 2.

<sup>49</sup> *Banner*, 22 November 1853, p. 9.

<sup>50</sup> *Argus*, 2 December 1853, p. 5.

<sup>51</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 March 1854, p. 2.

<sup>52</sup> *Victorian Government Gazette*, December 1853, p. 21.

<sup>53</sup> *Empire*, 6 December 1853, p. 3.

<sup>54</sup> *Banner*, 7 March 1854, p. 13.

<sup>55</sup> Presumably, the 5 seams referred to were the seams identified by Selwyn. Up to the point of Selwyn's report, the number of seams under discussion at any time was a moving feast.

<sup>56</sup> *Banner*, 7 March 1854, p. 13.

<sup>57</sup> 'Minutes of evidence by Phillip Davies, in *Progress Report from the Select Committee on the Cape Patterson Coal Fields*, Victorian Government Printer, 1865, p. 13. In this document the slow progress was attributed partly to the need to forage for food for the mining party.

<sup>58</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 March 1854, p. 2.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Victorian Government Gazette*, November 1854, p. 3094.

<sup>61</sup> *South Australian Register*, 19 September 1854, p. 2.

<sup>62</sup> *Catalogue of the Melbourne Exhibition of 1854*, Item 21, State Library of Victoria; *Illustrated Australian News*, 9 October 1880, p. 179.

<sup>63</sup> *Age*, 22 November 1854, p. 4.

<sup>64</sup> *Progress Report of The Select Committee upon Coalfields*, Victorian Parliamentary Papers 1856-57, Victorian Government Printer, 1857.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> *Report to Legislative Assembly on Borings at Cape Patterson*, Victorian Parliamentary Papers 1857-58, Victorian Government Printer, 1858. In his comments contained in the report, Selwyn reveals his antagonistic views toward the contractor involved, and his repeated tendency to play down the value of the Cape Patterson Coal Field. These attitudes would play out in later years

<sup>67</sup> Minutes of evidence by Alfred Selwyn in the *Progress Report from the Select Committee on the Cape Patterson Coal Fields*, Victorian Government Printer, 1865, p. 1.

<sup>68</sup> *Argus*, 17 January 1859, p. 5.

<sup>69</sup> *Colonial Mining Journal, Railway and Share Gazette*, 6 January 1859, p. 2.

<sup>70</sup> *Argus*, 1 February 1859, p. 4.

<sup>71</sup> For example, *Argus*, 7 February 1859, p. 4.

<sup>72</sup> As outlined in the prospectus of the Cape Patterson Coal Mining Company.

<sup>73</sup> Minutes of evidence by Richard Davis in the *Progress Report from the Select Committee on the Cape Patterson Coal Fields*, Victorian Government Printer, 1865, p. 37.

<sup>74</sup> *Argus*, 22 November 1859, p. 7.

<sup>75</sup> *Progress Report from the Select Committee on the Cape Patterson Coal Fields*, Victorian Government Printer, 1865, Appendix A1.

<sup>76</sup> *Progress Report from the Select Committee on the Cape Patterson Coal Fields*, Victorian Government Printer, 1865, Appendix A2.

<sup>77</sup> Minutes of evidence by Henry Levy in the *Progress Report from the Select Committee on the Cape Patterson Coal Fields*, Victorian Government Printer, 1865, p. 15.

<sup>78</sup> *Progress Report from the Select Committee on the Cape Patterson Coal Fields*, Victorian Government Printer, 1865, Appendix F.

<sup>79</sup> M. McCarthy, 'Cape Coal' in *Light Railways* 197, October 2007.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> Notation on application for Mineral Lease No. 7. PROV, VPRS 7843.

<sup>82</sup> *Argus*, 8 July 1862, p. 5.

<sup>83</sup> 'Report of the Director of the Geological Survey of Victoria to Parliament', Victorian Government Printer, 1868.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> Evidence by Samuel Anderson in the *Progress Report of The Select Committee upon Coalfields*, Victorian Parliamentary Papers 1856-57, Victorian Government Printer, 1857, p. 9.

<sup>86</sup> Extract of register of arrivals in Melbourne aboard Ward Chipman, 16 December 1841, showing arrival of Davis Family, Register of Assisted Immigration to Melbourne, PROV. On line record.

<sup>87</sup> Minutes of evidence by Richard Davis in the *Progress Report from the Select Committee on the Cape Patterson Coal Fields*, Victorian Government Printer, 1865, p. 37.

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<sup>88</sup> Minutes of evidence by Richard Davis in the *Progress Report from the Select Committee on the Cape Patterson Coal Fields*, Victorian Government Printer, 1865, p. 37,

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> The details surrounding the account by Davis of his attempts to secure tenure are discussed at length by Reeves, in 'Industrial men: miners and politics in Wonthaggi'.

<sup>91</sup> Davis family history claiming birth of daughter Sarah in Melbourne in 1843. This birth does not appear to have been registered.

<sup>92</sup> Davis family history claiming birth of daughters Mary, Gimima and Jane in 1847, 1851 and 1852, respectively. The births of Mary and Jane only were apparently registered.

<sup>93</sup> J. Carter, *Burra 1845-51, A Directory of Early Folk*, La Trobe University Vic., Shalimar Press, 1996, p. 35.

<sup>94</sup> *Powlett Express*, 12 January 1934, p. 2.

<sup>95</sup> E.M. Yelland (Ed.), *Colonists, copper and corn in the Colony of South Australia 1850/51*, published by the author, Adelaide, 1973, p. 146.

<sup>96</sup> *South Australian*, 27 March 1849, p. 2.

<sup>97</sup> Evidence by Richard Davis to the 'Board appointed ... to enquire into the claim by Richard Davis of Cape Patterson, coal miner, to the Reward of £1,000 offered by the Government in the year of 1852, to the Discoverer of an "Available Coal Field"', Victorian Government Printer, 1863, p. 1.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> *Banner*, 8 November 1853, p. 10.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*; Minutes of evidence by Phillip Davies in the *Progress Report from the Select Committee on the Cape Patterson Coal Fields*, Victorian Government Printer, 1865, p. 13.

<sup>102</sup> Evidence by Richard Davis to the 'Board appointed... to enquire into the claim by Richard Davis of Cape Patterson', 1863, p. 5.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> Appendix to the report of the 'Board appointed... to enquire into the claim by Richard Davis of Cape Patterson', 1863.

<sup>106</sup> Davis family history claiming birth of daughter Emily at Cape Patterson in 1855. This birth does not appear to have been registered; Record in Victorian Government Gazette of Richard Davis being sued as a partner in Griffiths Point Quarries, 6 February 1856.

<sup>107</sup> Appendix to the report of the 'Board appointed ... to enquire into the claim by Richard Davis of Cape Patterson', 1863.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> Evidence produced at a later enquiry suggests that the shaft-deepening contract cost Davis around £229, or about twice the contracted price. This escalation was claimed by Davis to be the result of events largely outside his control.

<sup>110</sup> The documentation pertaining to the series of claims by Davis and Watkins is contained in the appendices to the report of the 'Board appointed ... to enquire into the claim by Richard Davis of Cape Patterson', 1863.

<sup>111</sup> This was an erroneous proposition, as Hume had never been in the vicinity of the Bass Coast during the 1824/25 expedition, Hovell being the sole discoverer in 1826.

<sup>112</sup> *Report to Legislative Assembly on Borings at Cape Patterson*, Victorian Parliamentary Papers 1857-58, Victorian Government Printer, 1858.

<sup>113</sup> For example, *Colonial Mining Journal, Railway and Share Gazette*, 6 January 1859, p. 8.

<sup>114</sup> Report of the 'Board appointed ... to enquire into the claim by Richard Davis of Cape Patterson', 1863.

<sup>115</sup> Summary of evidence to the *Royal Commission on Coal Mining*, Victorian Government Printer, 1890, p. xxxiv.

<sup>116</sup> Record of inquiry into the death of Richard Stephen Davis, PROV, VPRS 24.

<sup>117</sup> For example, Hodgkinson, Brough Smythe and Couchman, *Coalfields Report, Western Port*, Victorian Government Printer, 1872.

<sup>118</sup> Register of Mineral Leases, PROV, VPRS 7843.