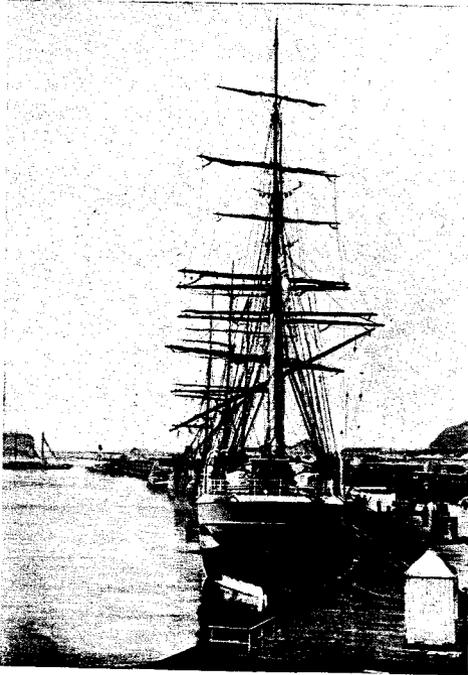


great acquisition to this settlement. The short time I remained at this river we had rain, which prevented my doing so much as I otherwise should.

"J. SHORTLAND."

These two short excerpts give in condensed form the account of the birth of a great commercial and industrial centre, and if the spirit of the hardy young lieutenant of the "Reliance" could now revisit the scene what a marvellous change he would behold in the Newcastle of to-day, contrasted with the sylvan solitudes and panorama of almost untrodden bush lands which met his gaze as he steered his whaleboat



At Newcastle Wharf.

past the "Nob" on that day of early Australian spring 109 years ago!

COAL PRODUCTION.

The fact that Newcastle owes its present position as a prosperous city and port mainly, if not entirely, to the rich carboniferous measures that underlie both should be an all-sufficing reason for allotting to coal pride of place in an article of this nature. As will have been seen in the extract from Collins' history, Mr. Shortland was quick to detect the existence of this

mineral in considerable quantities when he landed at the port, and evidence of the light in which he viewed the place is afforded by the names given by him (at the first) to the waterway—"Coal River"—and of "Coal Island" to the "Nob" islet (now known as "Nobbys") at the mouth of the harbour. The christening of the "Coal River" as Hunter's or Hunter River as a tribute of respect to his former captain, and then Governor, was evidently an afterthought. The mineral riches disclosed to the keen eyes of Shortland were made little use of until several years later, and the first vessel to carry away a small cargo of the coal to Sydney was the brig "Anna Josepha." It was apparently the intention of Governor Hunter to send Lieutenant Shortland on a surveying tour along the northern coast with instructions to pay special attention to the Coal or Hunter River; but this was abandoned, and nothing of moment occurred until 1801, when, in June of that year, Governor King instructed Lieutenant Grant, R.N., to fit up the brig "Lady Nelson," 60 tons, for a surveying cruise, and proceed to survey the Hunter and its tributaries.

Accompanying Grant in the "Lady Nelson" were Lieutenant-Colonel Paterson, Ensign Barrallier, Surgeon Harris, six soldiers, a miner named Platt, two surveyors, a pilot named Reid (who was previously master of the schooner "Martha," and while trading in this vessel mistook the entrance to Lake Macquarie for that of Newcastle, a blunder that is still commemorated by the name "Reid's Mistake," borne by a point at the Lake Macquarie Heads), and an aboriginal native named Bungarey. Leaving Port Jackson on 10th June, the "Lady Nelson," accompanied by the colonial schooner "Francis," took four days on the trip; and when the little expedition arrived off the port the two vessels, owing to the wind failing, had to be towed in by their boats, and anchor was dropped under the lee of the "Nob," or "Coal Island," until the following day, when they were towed up the harbour and made fast to a tree on the bank near a sawpit, which was dug by the crew of the brig "Anna Josepha," the pioneer of traders to Newcastle. The leaders of the party carried out their instructions faithfully, and after a stay of six weeks—during which the harbour and river were thoroughly surveyed, and, in addition, a long journey was made up the latter to where Singleton now stands, and the subsequently named Paterson and Williams Rivers, tributaries of the Hunter, were explored for a considerable distance—the "Lady Nelson" returned to Port Jackson. While these surveying operations were proceeding the schooner "Francis" loaded a cargo of the coal, which outcropped in abundance along the foreshores of the harbour on the south side; and on reaching Port Jackson it was sold and transhipped to a vessel engaged in the Indian trade. Prior to this, as some accounts show, but as others would indicate just about the same time or later, the brig "Anna Josepha" brought a cargo of the mineral to Sydney, which being sold into a vessel bound for Capetown realised the substantial price of £6 per ton on delivery there. The credit for inaugurating Newcastle's present extensive oversea coal trade may therefore be divided

between these two vessels—the schooner "Francis" and the brig "Anna Josepha." Shortland's report upon the existence of good coal had, however, not been entirely ignored, though the information might have been used to better advantage.

From about the end of 1797 small quantities of the coal were carried away to Port Jackson in craft of various sizes. The first serious conflict with the blacks took place in connection with the visit of a couple of these miniature colliers towards the end of 1799. The crews, while at work digging and transferring the coal to the boats, were attacked by the aborigines, who succeeded in capturing one of them—that is to say, the boat and the men belonging to it. The other escaped, and on its arrival in Sydney the occurrence was reported to Governor Hunter, who sent a party under Mr. A. Hacking to succour the men and recover the boat. Hacking found the latter minus its sails and contents, but failed to see any trace of the crew. Meeting a large body of armed natives he questioned them, and being dissatisfied with their statement that the men had gone to Sydney, he, after using threats without avail, attacked them, and a fight ensued, wherein several of the natives were wounded. Mr. Hacking then returned to Port Jackson in the belief that the sailors had been killed, but this was not so, for the aborigines were proved to have spoken truthfully, and the missing men soon put in an appearance at Port Jackson, having journeyed overland.

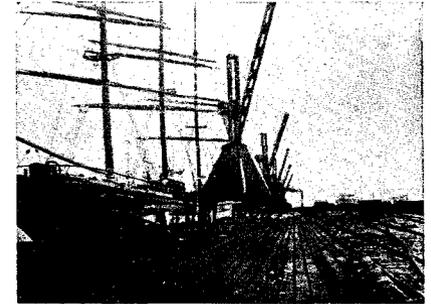
During these last three years of the eighteenth, and the first few years of the nineteenth, century no attempt to regularly mine the coal was made; and the most rough and ready means only were used to secure cargoes for the small coasters that called at intervals to take not only coal, but cedar also, which grew somewhat abundantly along the banks of the upper part of the river.

The first measure towards establishing a settlement at the port and working the coal with local prison labour was taken by Governor King, acting on the advice of Lieutenant-Colonel Paterson, who, upon the return of the surveying party in the "Lady Nelson," of which he was a prominent member, took pains to impress upon the Governor the great importance of the northern port and the advisability of turning to good account the mineral riches abounding there. A party of five soldiers and twelve convicts, under the command of a corporal named Wixtead, was sent up to the Hunter River, and the camp was pitched under the hill upon Fort Scratchley now stands, then called Colliers' Point. The prisoners were at once set to work to get out the coal, and although the methods and appliances employed were of the most primitive kind, they appear to have had no difficulty in maintaining a fair output. The coal was got from seams under the hill, and was what would now be termed a good second-class article.

After remaining in charge for about two months Corporal Wixtead was relieved by Assistant-Surgeon Mason, a man of no little energy, who was appointed the first regular superintendent of the settlement. Of the twelve prisoners sent to the Hunter three were practical miners, and these were assisted by six others,

who acted as do the wheelers and other workmen of the present day, in bringing the mineral to the surface and conveying it to the point of loading. The remaining three of the gang were the cooks and camp-minders of the party.

When Dr. Mason assumed duty the output of coal was three tons per day, but he procured some improved appliances from headquarters and soon showed a better result. Among the stores sent to him at his request were a number of wheelbarrows, in which the coal was conveyed from the mine over planks laid on the sand, to the place of storage on the beach in the harbour. In a letter dated November 21st, 1801, addressed to Governor King, Dr. Mason wrote:—"I have 3,200 baskets of coal at hand, or 190 tons, if the baskets weigh one hundredweight each. With three miners and three carriers or wheelers I can raise 180 baskets, or nine tons, per day. One mine is 34 yards underground, one 31 yards, and another 10 yards. I can set nine miners to work immediately, and, with one drawer for each, can raise 160 tons per week. The stratum of coal we are now working is



Newcastle Cranes.

three feet thick, out of which there is 14 inches of clay and other rubbish, so we have but 22 inches of neat coal; over this there is a stratum of 18 inches of good coal. In Freshwater Bay I can open a mine where there is a stratum of three feet of neat coal underneath the above two strata, where the coals are of superior quality. I can open mines to set 20 men to work in Freshwater Bay, and if there are not miners in the country, then many ruffians may be made good miners and a wharf run out to reduce labour, so that the schooner may be laden in 12 hours."

The pious suggestion of the worthy doctor for converting a number of the "ruffians" into good practical miners, with liberal help, no doubt from "the cat" appears to have been disregarded; for no great advance was achieved in respect to the quantity of coal produced for several years afterwards. The mining was in the hands of the Government, and private individuals were debarred from procuring coal with their own or with hired labour, unless that of the convicts; but, before this latter labour could be engaged, the employers were compelled to provide