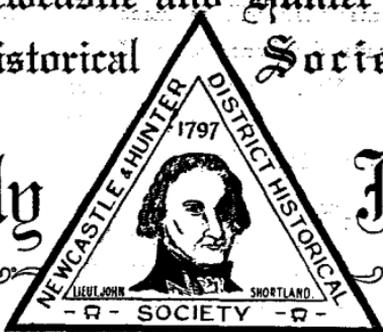


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The Ebenezer Coal Works

BY THE LATE JONATHAN DIXON.

A GRANT of land, having an area of 1280 acres, was promised to the Reverend L. E. Threlkeld by the Governor of New South Wales. This promise was made in the year 1829, and it was stipulated that there would be no reservation of the coal rights included in the deed.

Quite often, with respect to lands granted prior to the year 1829 the deeds were not issued for from ten to twelve years after the granting.

In the year 1830, the Australian Agricultural Company was given a monopoly for the working of all coal for a term of thirty-one years, and in the case of all grants after that year they were subject to the reservation of all coal under the land so granted.

When Mr. Threlkeld received his documents he noted that the Crown had made a reservation of the coal rights, and he at once took the matter up with the authorities in a letter dated 19th December, 1840, reminding them of the promise made in 1829 that there would be no reservation.

To his letter he received this reply:

Colonial Secretary's Office,
Sydney, 9th February, 1841.

Reverend Sir,

In reference to your letter of 19th December last, representing that the reservation of coal has been made in the grant of your 1280 acres of land at Lake Macquarie, which was authorised for you so far back as November, 1829, I have the honor to inform you that this reservation was inserted in error, and an

amendment to that effect will be made on the Deed of Grant.

I have the honor to be Reverend Sir,

Your most obedient servant,

(Sgd.) E. DEAS THOMSON.

The Reverend L. E. Threlkeld.

When Sir George Gipps, the Governor of New South Wales, decided in favour of Threlkeld that the grant should take effect without reservation of the coal, from the year 1829, he was at the same time informed by the Colonial Secretary that he could not be allowed the use of any miners through the Government agency as the Government was bound in good faith to let the Australian Agricultural Company have all available miners.

In the year 1841, Threlkeld opened his mine, which he named Ebenezer Coal Works.

This was at Skye Point, better known as Coal Point, near Toronto, Lake Macquarie, facing into Kilaben Bay.

A shaft was sunk on the hillside, and when sinking had been carried down to about water level, a seam of coal was intersected.

In the shaft the seam proved to be five feet six inches thick, and a tunnel was driven in on the seam, level with the waters of the Lake. At no great distance in the tunnel the seam thickened to six feet six inches, being in two parts, the upper two feet six inches, and the lower four feet, being separated by a band of clay one inch thick.

The mine was worked without machinery and the skips were run on wooden rails.

The mine plan shows the strata sunk through, the seam of coal, and a fanciful picture of the tunnel in which there are two skips being taken to a schooner in the Lake, just opposite the tunnel.

Threlkeld had great trouble to secure the necessary labour to work his mine as, owing to the monopoly held by the Australian Agricultural Company, the pledge of the Crown to give them all available miners prevented him from securing any.

However, some miners who had been formerly employed by the Company, had left owing to some disagreement, and had secured work at a factory in Sydney. These men were secured by Threlkeld on the recommendation of the factory manager.

This was in November, 1841, and he at once informed the Company of his intention to employ them. It was not until June 28, 1842, that word was sent to Threlkeld by Captain King, Commissioner of the Australian Agricultural Company, stating that he would be subject to prosecution if the men were kept on.

Rather than risk a prosecution, he dismissed the men, and made a statement that he believed the Australian Agricultural Co. had done this to try and prevent the working of the mine, as he was sending coal to the Sydney market in competition with the trade of the Company.

Ebenezer coal was much sought after for use on steamers, and was also used a lot on open fires, or parlour fires as the old documents of that day called them.

Owing to its non-caking quality it was of no value as a smith's coal. The coal was of such a nature that it burnt away to a fine powder, and did not clinker on the bars.

Owing to the shallowness of the waters of the Lake, which prohibited vessels drawing more than about four feet six inches from entering, the coal was taken down the Lake in flat-bottomed punts carrying about ten tons each, to a depot which was situated inside the bar, near the Lake Heads, and from there it was transhipped into schooners, to be taken to Sydney. This continued for some time until new vessels of light draught were secured, and these were able to go right up to the mine.

Owing to financial difficulties in 1844 the estate was put in trust for the benefit of creditors, and in December of that year the whole of the property owned by Threlkeld was sold by the Trustees at public auction to the Mortgagee, including the farms, on which improvements had been made in buildings, etc. to the amount of £1132, together with five acres of land at the Lake Heads, implements of husbandry, carpenters', smiths', and shipwrights' tools, farm horses, cows and bullocks. Also three horses, two cows, one cart, one gig, etc. in Sydney; likewise two schooners, 50 tons each, one schooner 16 tons, one barge 30 tons, two 10 ton boats, besides other articles all in one lump, for the sum of £3450.

At this time the approximate value of the Ebenezer Estate, with its 1280 acres under which was a proved seam of coal, was £34,416.

Thus the mine and other property came into the possession of Mr. Ralph Mayer Robey, and how the mine was later worked under lease by Mr. Henry Rawles Whittell, and still later by the South Hetton Company, does not concern this paper on the activities of the Reverend L. E. Threlkeld in the coal industry at Lake Macquarie.

A Relic of '38

By W. J. GOULD.

WHEN the walls of the old Bank of New South Wales, in Watt Street, were being demolished on October the 14th, 1870, a workman found a small lead case embedded in the plaster of the wall. It contained a half sheet of note paper in excellent condition, upon which was written the following:

Newcastle, July 10th, 1838.—This is to inform those who found this that the house was plastered by Thomas Simpson, from Leith, in Scotland.

This is awful time with battle between the free and convicts. The latter is losing the power, they are going down like chaff before the free men, and it is right that they should, for when I came here in 1831 there was little else but convicts.

Remember me when this you see (apparently a Masonic Emblem).

THOMAS SIMPSON