

THE PORT KEMBLA HARBOUR 1897

(A Bill for the Construction of a Deep Water Harbour at Port Kembla)

Wednesday Night, 6th October, 1898 was probably the precise moment Wollongong became destined to be changed from a cluster of rural and coal-mining villages into a fully industrialised community.

This Bill, when it was eventually pushed through against considerable opposition from Newcastle MPS and others who could see how scandalously public money was being used to finance private profit, was the essential pre-condition for the twentieth century

industrial base of Wollongong.

And as Henry Lee points out in what I consider the best chapter in the recently published *A History of Wollongong* (WCC/WUP, 1997, p. 52) the decision to construct a “large safe and well equipped harbour...was already shifting the local economy onto an urban-industrial footing.”

The *Mercury* (and its then editor, the MP Archibald Campbell) knew what he was on about and dutifully listed in his paper's report of the Bill's introduction into Parliament all the good guys who voted in favour (Campbell and Nicholson among them) and all the Satanists who voted against.

As Henry Lee so acidly remarks: “The town's businessmen no longer controlled or needed to control the district's destiny. Their contribution had been, through their committees and newspapers to fashion a population that equated progress with mines and smokestacks and prosperity with giving the district over to a single industry or even a single company.” (p.52)

Joseph Davis