

HISTORIC MINING TOWN CELEBRATES ITS PIONEERS.

On the 17 May 2008, Helensburgh a small country town in New South Wales acknowledged its mining heritage by the unveiling of a statue of a miner. Helensburgh is situated between Sydney and Wollongong high up on the Illawarra Escarpment. The Helensburgh mine, one of the earlier and longest still operating mines in the Illawarra, was founded in 1884 by Charles Harper when he discovered coal at a depth of 847 feet, after a failed attempt in 1883.

In the summer of 1884 directors of South Cumberland Coal Mining Company who owned the land on a 99 year lease visited Helensburgh, then known as Camp Creek. Title of the company was changed from South Cumberland to Metropolitan Coal Mining Company and is still know by that name to-day. Sir Robert Wisdom on November 1st turned the first sod of earth which saw coal mining operations commenced at Camp Creek with the sinking of a 16 foot diameter shaft.

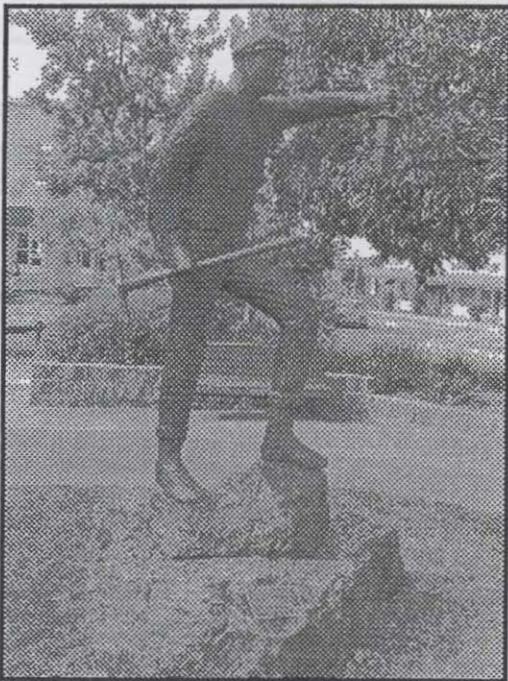
In 1888 Charles Harper, the first mine manager, was accidentally killed on 4 August while supervising a new steam boiler at the mine. Mr Cook became the new mine manager and held this position till 1890, when mine production in 1889 was 4,220 tons with a workforce of 45, and in the same year after trials of a new engine to haul the coal 1100 feet to the surface, production increased to 14,571 tons with a workforce of 123.

Metropolitan coal was considered to be one of the "best steaming coals in the country". This was proven when tests were conducted in April 1890 when loco No. 104 made a run from Sydney to Kiama, resulting in Metropolitan Colliery coal being "first rate steam coal for locomotives and ships", thus receiving a tender to supply coal in 1890 till 1897.

During the period of 1884 to 1900 Metropolitan Colliery employed up to 400 people, but it was not without its disasters and quite a few men lost their lives in the early days. The Helensburgh Historical Society is interested in any families that had relatives working at the Metropolitan Mine in this early period, as a lot of miners from this time moved around the State to the various mining operations. From 1900 to 2008

Metropolitan Colliery has had many owners and to-date it is recognized as the oldest and longest operating coal mine in Australia.

The historic unveiling of this statue gives the people of Helensburgh a feeling of strong comradeship and a sense of community pride with their mining heritage. Many of the early mining pioneers stayed and raised their families in the district and credit should be given to these folks for the development of Helensburgh. To commemorate this occasion the Helensburgh Historical



Miner's statue at Helensburgh

Society has launched a new website www.historichelensburgh.org.au and if you would like further information our email address is info@historichelensburgh.org.au.

Jenny Donohoe,

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