

THE MARITIME STRIKE OF 1890

During this major industrial dispute, the Illawarra miners were the last group of strikers to go back to work. Newcastle miners went back to work in early November 1890 but the Illawarra miners held out until January 1891.

The Sydney Morning Herald Friday 7 November 1890

“Mr. Henry Pringle, manager of Southern Coal Company, made a very liberal offer to his Corrimal men to resume work. This was to hold good for a

month, at the expiration of which time, failing an amicable settlement of the existing trouble being arrived at, he was willing to give a month's notice. The offer was regarded by the bulk of his men as a very fair and liberal one, but they were unable to accept it on their own responsibility. Mr. Pringle attended the miners' meeting at which this offer was made, when one prominent man deliberately expressed his opinion that his company was paid by the association to make liberal offers, so that its employees would return to work and thus cause a split in the unionist ranks. Mr. Pringle subsequently received a copy of a resolution passed at the last delegate meeting to the effect that the tempting offer made by certain coal-owners was pre-arranged by the owners, with the object of creating a split in the unionists' ranks, and Mr. Pringle feeling grossly insulted has consequently determined to hold no further negotiations with the union, nor continue to exhibit any sympathy therewith. He had previously treated the men most kindly, and assisted to relieve distress in their families.

The Sydney Morning Herald Tuesday 25 March 1890

Several members of the Illawarra Mining Engineers' Institute visited the Southern Coal Company's jetty on Saturday on the invitation of the manager, Mr. Pringle. On the journey to the jetty the party inspected the coke works, which are adjacent to the Illawarra Railway and connected with the jetty by the company's own line. There is great demand for coke, the output not being equal to the demand. Broken Hill takes the larger portion, and a considerable quantity is sent to Sunny Corner. At present about 20 ovens are in constant use, and owing to the demand about 10 more ovens are being built. At present the slack for coke-making is principally supplied from South Bulli, and the company lately purchased a mine at Corrimal.

Having inspected the coke works, the party proceeded to the jetty, about five miles distant. Those who had not seen the jetty previously were impressed with the vigour displayed by the company in constructing such a structure for shipping coal, the appliances for which are of the most approved character. The Beeswing at the time was taking in 1600 tons of coal for Melbourne. The cargo was put on board without a hitch and much faster than it could be trimmed.

The depth of water alongside the jetty is sufficient to enable the largest ocean steamer to load. The Coromandel is placed to load next week, to be followed by the Gulf of Martaban. From present appearances the Southern company will create trade for ocean-going steamers, causing a new departure in the Illawarra coal trade.

POSTSCRIPT

Arthur Henry Pringle died in 1939 in England. His wife Maud MACCABE lived to be almost 96 years of age and died in 1966.

It is highly unlikely that a previously unknown an album of “family photographs” of Illawarra from the 1880s and 1890s will ever surface again.

At the auction the Mitchell Library was conscientiously bidding to acquire this impossibly rare collection of photographs for the State of NSW.

Bidding started at \$2000 and the Library bid as high as \$4200. The album finally sold for in excess of \$6000 (plus 15% buyers premium).

Fortunately, a good few of the images contained therein are already in Illawarra collections. And there are also sufficiently good variants of many images that, while not exactly the same as those from the album, depict similar locations in the period 1900-1910.

What was very special to me about the album were the three early images of Corrimal mine and the tents surrounding it. These were the photos that were probably most significant in terms of adding to our knowledge of Illawarra's early mining history. They may actually have been taken by the MacCabe family as early as 1883 because that appears to be the date Corrimal mine may have properly got started – though even that date is not at all certain I suspect.

There was also this fabulous image of a grand – but still pretty ramshackle and rough shod – home at Mount Kembla. In my view it is that it is an absolute classic. The finest late 19th century photo of an Illawarra house I reckon. The roofline is to die for. It's up there with Hoddle's 1830s watercolour of Henry Osborne's "Pumpkin Cottage".