The development of coal trade in the Wollongong district of New South Wales, with particular reference to government and business, 1849-1889

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NOTE

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PART I

THE HARBOUR, 1849-1871

Greed only uses expectation to arrive at despair.

CHAPTER 1

THE GOVERNMENT IS BOUND:
WOLLONGONG HARBOUR AND THE GENESIS
OF THE COAL TRADE, 1849-1860

From the beginning, the pace of exploitation of the coal seams of the Wollongong district was conditioned by nature and politics. The first Europeans to discover coal in the district were the survivors of a shipwreck, who were making their way back to Sydney. That was in 1797, but the first mine on the Wollongong coalfield was not opened for another half a century, in 1849.

In August 1797 Governor John Hunter, having despatched George Bass to verify reports of coal in the district, was compelled to abandon any notion of mining it to supply the needs of the Sydney penal settlement. Although Bass had located a seven feet thick seam and obtained a sample, he also found that access to the seam was 'rather difficult'.1 The locality, about 30 miles south of Sydney and later known as Coalcliff, was where the Illawarra escarpment met the ocean at the northern end of the Wollongong district. Consequently, Hunter, while noting that the coal 'is very good', was forced to conclude that it was:

difficult to attain, being a strata or vein of an immense steep cliff, near the sea, extending eight or nine miles along the coast southward, nor unless we can find some little harbour near, can we hope to derive any great advantage from it.2

Instead, Sydney would be supplied from the Hunter River, 100 miles to the north, where 'on its south shore and near the water a considerable quantity of coal was discovered' in 1796.3

Settled as Newcastle, this would become the centre of the Colony’s coal industry. While the


search for coal nearer to Sydney was undertaken by the government, the lack of a natural harbour had caused the Wollongong district to be abandoned in favour of the northern coal seams.

If nature had set its face against the early development of a coal trade in Wollongong, so too did the arrangement between the Australian Agricultural Company and the British government. This Company, formed in England in 1824 with a grant of one million acres of Crown Land in northern New South Wales, was guaranteed a monopoly over coal production in the Colony. That right was enforced to quash an attempt to mine coal near Bulli, south of Coalcliff, in 1840. Undertaken by the Australian Mining Company, formed in 1840 more or less as a subsidiary of the General Steam Navigation Company, this venture involved Robert Westmacott, a Wollongong landowner and shipowner, and several Sydney investors, notably Alexander Spark and James Manning whose family would feature from time to time in the development of the southern coal trade. Their effort was futile, strangled at birth by the Australian Agricultural Company's assertion of its legal monopoly.

That monopoly was withdrawn in 1848, and in the following year the Wollongong district's first mine was opened. The proprietor was James Shoobert, a sea captain who had traded regularly to Wollongong. In 1828 he had located coal at Bulli and took several bags of the mineral to Sydney, with the intention of making it a regular trade. However, as he said later, the 'objectionable monopoly' of the Australian Agricultural Company had prevented it. He finally settled in the district as a dairy farmer, purchasing an estate at Mount Keira, a few miles west of the town. One of 'the aristocracy of ... early dairying' in Wollongong, the
abolition of monopoly in the Colony's coal trade permitted him to turn additional profits from the coal seams on his property. Great things were expected of this new venture, for the town of Wollongong and its district had been ravaged by the Colony wide depression of the early and mid 1840s.

The 1833 census of the Colony had not included Wollongong in its list of 'Principal Towns', the smallest containing 90 persons. In 1834 Wollongong was officially proclaimed a town, as New South Wales' wool export trade with England continued the period of great expansion that had commenced in the 1820s. By 1840 Wollongong was a 'thriving village ... well situated on the sea-coast'. In the small bay, 'little more than an open road-stead', just north of the town a convict iron gang had cut a small basin from the rock, sufficient to accommodate the little sailing craft that carried agricultural and dairy produce to Sydney. At the 1841 census the district held 4044 persons, 831 of whom lived in the town. However, by 1843 the economic boom had faltered and Wollongong began to feel the pinch. The local Police Magistrate recorded that there was 'very little demand for labour of any description in this District ... in consequence of the depression of the times'. Consequently, the 1846 census recorded only 515 persons in the town (down 38 per cent. on the 1841 figure).

The once prosperous town fell into ruin. In February 1849 Lieutenant-Colonel Godfrey Mundy of the British Army visited the district and observed that, 'There is a painful appearance of by-gone better days about Wollongong and its neighbourhood.' In the town itself, he

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10 'Abstract of the number of Inhabitants in the Colony of New South Wales, according to a Census taken the 2nd of September, 1833, under an Act of the Governor and Council, 4th William IV, No.2, Passed 9th July, 1833'. In New South Wales Government Gazette, No.96, 1 January 1834, p.5.
15 'New South Wales—Census of the Year 1841'. In Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Council, Session 1841.
17 'New South Wales Census—1846'. In Supplement to the New South Wales Government Gazette, No.92, 4 November 1846.
said, 'One-fifth of the buildings are tumbling down or tenantless', an impression confirmed by another English visitor, John Henderson, who noted at about the same time that:

the great depression which has occurred in the colony, has affected Woolongong [sic.] to such an extent that it is almost deserted, two-thirds of the houses being uninhabited, and the streets being green with grass.20

The unemployed, Mundy found, had simply packed up and moved 'elsewhere' in search of paid work.21 Thus, the 1851 census recorded only 3099 persons in the Wollongong district, down 23.4 per cent on the 1841 pre-depression figure of 4044; in Wollongong there were only 501 inhabitants.22

Therefore, when James Shoobert announced in 1849 that he was entering the coal trade, the hint of a new industry became a matter for public jubilation, and an affirmation that British enterprise had not died at the perimeter of the Empire. When the first coal was brought from Mount Keira to the little basin at Wollongong, to be put on board the steamer William the Fourth, it was accompanied by a long procession:

Band of music in front; horseman with Union Jack; miners with British Ensign; pedestrians followed—a goodly number; then the coal carts, each drawn by two horses—the leading cart having the emphatic words 'Advance Illawarra' tastefully painted in conspicuous letters, erected in its front, upon long poles.23

At the banquet which crowned the public celebration, Edye Manning, owner of the William the Fourth, said that he would now consider laying on a 'more powerful and suitable steamer' for the Wollongong-Sydney run. Shoobert's coal, at a price less than half that prevailing in Sydney for Newcastle coal, was expected to allow Manning to reduce his freight and passenger charges.24 Hence, the development of Shoobert's mine and with it lower export costs for the produce of local farms, seemed to offer a path to prosperity replacing that closed by the depression of the 1840s.

19 ibid., p.42.
21 Mundy, op.cit., p.43.
22 Calculated from 'New South Wales—Census of the Year 1841', op.cit., and 'New South Wales Census—1851', In Supplement to the New South Wales Government Gazette, No.128, 7 November 1851.
23 Sydney Morning Herald, 10 September 1849.
24 ibid.
It did not. Although by 1855 Shoobert was being described by the *Sydney Morning Herald* as ‘a gentleman of very considerable property and influence’, this rested on his dairying, not his mining interests. By 1852 his coal was being used ‘extensively’ by leading manufacturers and millers in Sydney, from whom he received ‘a fair remunerating price’. However, even in that year output was only 900 tons, falling to 431 in 1853, and recovering to 700 in 1854 before slumping, finally, to 74 tons in 1855. Thus, while total New South Wales coal production increased by 103.4 per cent., from 67,404 to 137,076 tons between 1852 and 1855, inclusive, Shoobert’s mine could manage only a decline in output of 91.8 per cent. This was not the stuff of regional economic transformation.

Exactly why Wollongong’s first mine failed is not certain. However, it was clear that Shoobert did not put much capital into it. A *Sydney Morning Herald* reporter stated in 1855 that, ‘There is no pit, properly so called, but a mere tunnel cut into the hill side’. This was the ‘new shaft’, which lay alongside an older, abandoned 100 yard tunnel; the new tunnel was not so far advanced. There was one skip, a line of wooden rails leading into the tunnel and only one miner, who piled the coal at the entrance from where it was taken into Wollongong on carts. To these inefficiencies was added Wollongong’s harbour. John Henderson did not think it a real harbour, with vessels still being ‘obliged to lie in the open roadstead’; the Reverend John Dunmore Lang considered it ‘an indifferent harbour’, and Lieutenant-Colonel Mundy dismissed it as a ‘boat harbour . . . little more’. Certainly, it was incapable of servicing a coal export trade of any great extent.

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25 *ibid.*, 27 September 1855.  
27 Mossman & Banister, *op.cit.*, p.271. Mossman and Banister visited Wollongong at about this time.  
28 Colonial Secretary of N.S.W. Returns of the Colony. Mitchell Library. The returns show the mine to have operated in 1849, 1850 and 1851. However, output was listed as ‘No Return’.  
30 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 September 1855.  
31 *Illustrated Sydney News*, 14 April 1855.  
32 Henderson, *loc.cit.*  
33 Lang, *loc.cit.*  
34 Mundy, *op.cit.*, p.38.
The harbour was, however, well adapted to cater for the 'several small vessels [that] trade constantly from thence to Sydney and back, carrying supplies and produce'. That trade, in agricultural and, principally, dairy produce, was the district's claim to prominence in the Colony's economy, and by the early 1850s it was beginning to recover from the worst effects of the depression. Samuel Mossman and Thomas Banister observed that the town of Wollongong was again assuming an air of 'commercial importance', its population moving toward 600 as the district's butter once more commanded a 'preference-price' in Sydney. To sustain that trade, said the two visitors, the district's little harbour 'will do very well for the present'.

And there, it seemed, Wollongong was destined to stay, for in January 1856 James Shoobert put his 'Mount Keira and Albert Coal Mines' on the market. The auctioneer entrusted with the property felt that 'abundant returns' could be wrested from it, but not, apparently, by small time proprietors like Shoobert. Rather, he hoped it might fall into 'the hands of a small company or capitalist, who would pay attention to the trade'. Otherwise, the place would remain, as Samuel Sidney had characterised it a few years earlier, 'a favourite resort for invalids... a celebrated show-garden... environed by rocks and tropical vegetation, peopled with bright-coloured birds'.

Shoobert's failure as a coal proprietor aside, Wollongong was emerging from the depression as a consequence of the gold rushes in Victoria and New South Wales. When Mundy visited Wollongong in 1849 he noted that its farmers were experiencing severe problems of overproduction. By 1856 these problems had vanished, as the rapidly expanding populations of the eastern Colonies pushed up demand for the basic foodstuffs that districts like Wollongong could supply.

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37 Mossman & Banister, *op.cit.*, p.278.
38 *Illawarra Mercury*, 28 January 1856 (advertisement).
40 Mundy, *loc.cit.*
However, by 1856 it was also clear that, as gold production declined and the Colonial economies began to regain some equilibrium, the Wollongong district had probably gone about as far along the path of rural recovery as the gold rushes were going to take it. The population of the district in 1841 had been 4044; in 1856 it was 4506 (up 11.4 per cent.). In 1841 the town held 831 inhabitants, and in 1856, 864 (up 4 per cent.). Over the same period the New South Wales population had increased by 98.5 per cent., from 145,303 persons to 288,361.\(^{41}\) Wollongong had recovered, but was not growing to any extent. The booming gold economy had been kind to the district, but not generous. If its inhabitants wanted economic growth they would have to look to pursuits other than agriculture and dairying.

Shoobert’s mine had made no impact on the pattern of local economic activity. At the 1856 census only one of the 4506 persons living in the district listed their occupation as coal miner.\(^{42}\) The town remained a rural service centre (see Table following) and, with the Mount Keira mine up for sale, the shopkeepers, tradesmen and farmers of Wollongong awaited the small company or capitalist that would begin to turn a profit from the district’s coal seams and deliver to them the wages of a new workforce.

They got a capitalist—Henry Osborne. Osborne had lived in the district for over 25 years before acquiring Shoobert’s coal lands. His great wealth and desire for profit, combined with the demand for coal created by the gold rushes, were the catalysts that began to transform the ideas of Wollongong’s businessmen about the nature of the local economy and about the financial returns that they could expect from it. After 1856 Wollongong would never be the same, as its business leaders sought to transform the district from a rural to a mining and urban-industrial one. In the process they remoulded the minds and expectations of its inhabitants as to what constituted the good life, and the role that ought to be played by individuals, commercial interests and government in attaining it.

Henry Osborne arrived in New South Wales from Ireland in May 1829, having sold his County Tyrone farm for £3000, which he converted into its value in Irish linen and sold at a

\(^{41}\) ‘New South Wales—Census of the Year 1841, \textit{op.cit.}, and ‘New South Wales Census—1856’. In \textit{Supplement to the New South Wales Government Gazette, No.47, 28 March 1857.}

\(^{42}\) ‘New South Wales Census—1856’, \textit{op.cit.}
### OCCUPATIONS IN THE WOLLONGONG DISTRICT, 1856

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<tr>
<th>Occupational Category</th>
<th>Town of Wollongong</th>
<th>Rest of Wollongong District</th>
<th>Total Wollongong District</th>
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<td>%</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
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**Notes**

1. Figures are for the Wollongong Police District.
2. Occupational categories are those of the census.

**SOURCE:** 'New South Wales Census - 1856.' In Supplement to the New South Wales Government Gazette, No.47, 28 March 1857.
'fine profit' on his arrival in Sydney.\textsuperscript{43} He came to New South Wales to do well, and he did. His life was dedicated to the acquisition of wealth and influence.

Osborne's path from Ireland to New South Wales was smoothed by two of his brothers who had migrated to the Colony and settled in the Wollongong district.\textsuperscript{44} His start in the pastoral industry, the basis of his great wealth, was given to him by the government of New South Wales:

In those days, as is well known, it was the policy of the Government to encourage emigrants with capital by free grants of land. On making the usual application, Mr. Osborne received a grant to the extent of 2560 acres, which forms the beautiful estate now embellished with his family seat, and known as Marshall Mount.\textsuperscript{45}

Marshall Mount, 12 miles south of Wollongong, formed part of the finest dairy farming country to be found in the region. His 'right' to about 30 convict labourers with his grant,\textsuperscript{46} ensured that he turned the land to good account. He received further official encouragement when, soon after the 'first donation',\textsuperscript{47} he was given another 2560 acre grant at Marshall Mount. By the 1830s Osborne was able to add to his family seat the purchase of 500 acres.\textsuperscript{48}

Marshall Mount prospered to the extent that, in December 1839, Henry Osborne 'determined upon forcing his way overland, to find a market for his surplus stock in the young colony of South Australia'.\textsuperscript{49} The 700 mile journey over 'all but unknown country',\textsuperscript{50} took four months. As one of the first of the 'Overlanders', however, he was 'urged on by the hope of profit',\textsuperscript{51} for in 1839 'stock of every kind fetched an extremely high price in the new colony; the supply being scanty, and the demand great.'\textsuperscript{52} Osborne's journey would prove significant for the direction of economic activity in the Wollongong district after 1856.

\textsuperscript{43} P.J.B. Osborne, \textit{Some Family History}. (Address delivered to the Canberra Historical Society, 15 April 1958).
\textsuperscript{45} Empire, 11 April 1856 ('THE NEW PARLIAMENT. NO.11—HENRY OSBORNE').
\textsuperscript{46} Osborne, \textit{loc.cit.}
\textsuperscript{47} Empire, 11 April 1856.
\textsuperscript{48} Osborne, \textit{loc.cit.}
\textsuperscript{49} Empire, 11 April 1856.
\textsuperscript{51} G. Grey, \textit{Journals of Two Expeditions of Discovery in North-West and Western Australia, during the Years 1837, 38, and 39 etc}. 2 Vols. T. & W. Boone: London 1841. Quoted by Ward & Robertson, \textit{op.cit.}, p.317. Grey was appointed Governor of South Australia in 1841.
\textsuperscript{52} Byrne, \textit{loc.cit.}
The route across New South Wales to Adelaide took the overlanders along the Murrumbidgee River, until it reached the Murray and then down the latter until it entered South Australia. The rich pastures of southern New South Wales did not escape the eye of Henry Osborne and, soon after his journey to Adelaide, he began to acquire immense tracts of land between the Murrumbidgee and Murray Rivers. It was as the owner of these ‘very large squating concerns beyond the settled districts’ that Osborne laid the foundation of his wealth. As with Marshall Mount, the opportunity to acquire these squating runs arose from the encouragement given to men of his class by the New South Wales government.

For ease of administration, successive New South Wales Governors had attempted to restrict settlement to the nineteen counties which formed part of the east coast and inland of the Colony. Stockowners, however, defied official policy and took their flocks and herds north, south and west of the limits of location. The squatters were trespassers on Crown Land but ‘their trespass simply had to be allowed.’ Henry Osborne joined their ranks just as official recognition was being given to this trespass. The Crown Lands Occupation Act of 1836 allowed ‘persons of good repute’, for an annual fee of £10, to depasture their stock on as much land as they could obtain. A subsequent Order in Council of 1847 gave squatters the right to a 14 year lease on the land they occupied, with an option for purchase at any time during the term of the lease. Between 1820 and 1850, 73 million acres of Crown Land were leased to less than 2000 squatters—an average leasehold of 36,500 acres. By 1854 Henry Osborne held 261,000 acres for the ‘insignificant’ sum of £168 a year, making him the third largest squatter in New South Wales. Earlier, in 1847, he had taken up a run of 315,000 acres near Narranderra on the Murrumbidgee.

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53 idem.
54 Australian Dictionary of Biography, loc.cit.
55 Empire, 11 April 1856.
59 Illawarra Mercury, 7 January 1858.
Depression and drought in the first half of the 1840s meant lean years for the Murrumbidgee squatters. However, those 'more astute and affluent' squatters who survived stood to make fortunes after the discovery of gold in the neighbouring Colony of Victoria in 1851. Victoria's population soared from 97,489 persons in 1851 to 283,942 in 1854. By the end of April 1854, 66,697 persons (almost 25 per cent. of the population) had settled on the goldfields. Their demand for meat led to a sharp rise in its price, and sheep owners turned their attention from wool for export to mutton for domestic consumption as the Victorian goldfields 'made pastoral properties on the Murrumbidgee boom.' Consequently, by April 1856 Henry Osborne was being reckoned 'among the wealthiest of our country gentlemen.'

Some of Osborne's wealth was diverted to the purchase of coal lands in the Wollongong district, starting with James Shoobert's Mount Keira property in 1856. These purchases increased Osborne's already considerable influence within the district. Since 1851 he had represented its electors in the Legislative Council and, with the coming of responsible government in 1856, was elected to represent them in the new Legislative Assembly. His influence rested on his land holdings in the district, increased by the purchase of large acreages of dairy country to the north and south of Marshall Mount, and upon his policy of tenanting them by bringing from Ireland 'the families and friends of most of those who were in his employment.' Thus, Henry Osborne was placed at 'the head of a numerous and respectable tenantry in his own country.'

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61 Langford-Smith, *op.cit.*, p.106.
63 *Census of Victoria, 1854*, p.15. Quoted by C.M.H. Clark (Ed.), *Select Documents in Australian History 1851-1900.* Angus & Robertson: Sydney 1971, p.79.
65 Gormley, *loc.cit.*
66 *Empire,* 11 April 1856.
68 Martin & Wardle, *op.cit.*
70 *Empire,* 11 April 1856.
The wealth and influence which Osborne enjoyed by 1856, and which placed him in the top rank of Colonial society, did not, however, represent the attainment of the material success to which he aspired. In the words of his obituary, he was a man of ‘British enterprise, energy, and daring’, constantly seeking to increase his wealth. The coal seams of Wollongong provided such an opening for the investment of the surplus capital which he had gained from the Victorian gold boom. In taking this step, though, the squatter-politician was not acting as a newcomer to the New South Wales coal trade.

Among his holdings Osborne counted 2777 acres within the Newcastle coalfield, 100 miles north of Sydney. Of this, 1407 acres were located near Maitland, 15 miles north west of Newcastle itself. Here, the working of the ‘Osbome Pit’ at Four Mile Creek had been leased to a partnership headed by William Robson. Robson, a qualified mining engineer, had come to Australia from England in 1841 under engagement to the Australian Agricultural Company for a term of seven years at its Newcastle mine. By the time his agreement with the Company expired, Robson and his partners had accumulated enough capital to work the small mine on Henry Osborne’s Maitland property.

When Osborne purchased the Mount Keira property he asked Robson to examine it for a better quality seam of coal than that which Shoobert had mined, on the understanding that, if successful, he would be offered a lease to work it. Robson duly located such a seam, the working of which was leased to Robson and Company for a period of 10 years from 4 December 1856, with a one shilling a ton royalty accruing to Henry Osborne. After four months of developmental work, Robson was ready to put a sample of his coal to the test.

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71 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 March 1859.
72 Calculated from list of land transactions in *Report from the Select Committee on the Osborne’s Leasing Bill; together with the Proceedings of the Committee and Minutes of Evidence*, p.4. In *Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly*, Session 1881, Vol.5.
73 *idem*. See also *Village Reserve at East Maitland* in *Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Council*, Session 1855, Vol.2.
76 *Illawarra Mercury*, 12 December 1871. Letter from M.E. Robson (William Robson’s son) to the Editor, 9 December 1871.
77 *ibid.*, 5 December 1871. Letter from Francis MacCabe to the Editor, 1 December 1871. MacCabe was Henry Osborne’s son in law, having married his eldest daughter (*ibid.*, 24 October 1924). In 1881
On 16 April 1857 Robson took 3.5 tons of coal to Wollongong Harbour, where it was loaded onto the coastal steamer *Illawarra*. Shortly after dawn the *Illawarra* sailed from the Harbour, her boilers powered by the first load of coal taken from 'The Osborne Wallsend Mines'. The short voyage, undertaken to test the steam generating qualities of Wollongong coal, was completed 'most satisfactorily', the coal producing an 'abundance of steam and to spare'. This success persuaded the Kiama Steam Navigation Company (owner of the *Illawarra*) to enter into a contract to use Osborne Wallsend coal in its steamers. At the Company's quarterly meeting on 19 May 1857, the directors reported that the coal had effected 'considerable savings' in their operations.

Though the worth of Osborne Wallsend coal had been amply demonstrated, a larger market than the small coastal steamers of the Kiama Steam Navigation Company was required to make the fortune of Robson and Company and to ensure Henry Osborne a profitable return on his investment. What, then, had attracted them to the prospect of mining in a district which had just seen its only coal proprietor go to the wall? The answer lay just over 400 miles south of Wollongong, in the booming port city of Melbourne.

During the 1850s, as the colonial powers of Europe maintained and expanded their possessions in the eastern hemisphere, coal from the Newcastle coalfield was despatched to ports throughout the Australian Colonies, south east Asia and the Indian and Pacific Oceans. The port of destination which overshadowed all others, however, was Melbourne. In 1857 68.5 *per cent.* of all exports of New South Wales (Newcastle) coal went there, representing 31.3 *per cent.* of all coal produced in the Colony in that year. The dominance of the Melbourne market was a direct result of the Victorian gold rushes, which had transformed the pattern of social and economic life in New South Wales' southern neighbour.

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MacCabe stated that he had had 'the general management of the Osborne Estates ... for over twenty years': *Report from the Select Committee on the Osborne's Leasing Bill*, op.cit., p.8.

78 *Illawarra Mercury*, 20 April 1856.

79 Strictly speaking, at the time of the test voyage the *Illawarra* belonged to the *Illawarra* and Shoalhaven Steam Navigation Company, which was in the process of being absorbed by the Kiama Steam Navigation ('Extended') Company.


81 Calculated from figures in *Statistics of New South Wales, from 1848 to 1857*. This (1857) was the first year in which official figures appeared on the amount of coal exported to individual destinations.
While the discovery of gold in New South Wales and Victoria in 1851 almost trebled the population of the Australian Colonies in the ensuing decade,\textsuperscript{82} it was Victoria which contained the more extensive gold deposits, and there the rushes formed a 'cataclysmic chapter'\textsuperscript{83} in the Colony's history. A flood of gold seekers and immigrants increased the Victorian population more than fivefold between 1851 and 1861, whereas in New South Wales the population did not quite double over the same period.\textsuperscript{84} By 1853 Victoria was the most populous of the Australian Colonies, having overhauled the foundation Colony of New South Wales; not until 1892 would New South Wales regain its premier position.\textsuperscript{85} The effect of the Victorian gold discoveries on the New South Wales coal export trade was profound. From the 1850s more New South Wales coal was shipped to Melbourne than to any other port.\textsuperscript{86}

The rapid growth of the Victorian population during the 1850s provided some stimulus for the local manufacture of a wide range of daily necessities, and increasing use was made of steam power.\textsuperscript{87} Manufacturing, though, remained a 'backward sector' of the Victorian economy at this time, 'supplying a small domestic market with relatively simple products.'\textsuperscript{88} The real boost to New South Wales coal exports came from the fact that the captains of ships which brought tens of thousands of gold seekers and immigrants from around the world to Melbourne, required return cargoes to ensure a profitable round trip. As a recently settled European outpost, with no large scale manufacturing base, Australia had a 'traditional

\textsuperscript{82} \textit{Demography, loc.cit.} The estimated population of the Australian Colonies at 31 December 1851 was 437,665. By 31 December 1861 this had risen to 1,168,149.

\textsuperscript{83} Crawford, \textit{op.cit.}, p.104.

\textsuperscript{84} \textit{Demography, loc.cit.} The estimated population of Victoria at 31 December 1851 was 97,489. By 31 December 1861 this had risen to 539,764. The corresponding figures for New South Wales were 197,265 and 357,362.

\textsuperscript{85} ibid., pp.154-5.

\textsuperscript{86} See coal export figures in \textit{Statistics of New South Wales, from 1848 to 1857, 1849 to 1858, 1850 to 1859, and Statistical Register of New South Wales, 1860-1889.}

\textsuperscript{87} G.J.R. Linge, \textit{Industrial Awakening: A Geography of Australian Manufacturing 1788 to 1890.} Australian National University Press: Canberra 1979, pp.186 & 189-190. Coal was discovered in Victoria in 1825, but until 1889 production was minimal: \textit{Commonwealth of Australia Year Book, No.3, 1910}, p.515.

\textsuperscript{88} Jackson, \textit{op.cit.}, p.115. Note, however, the comments of the General Court of Proprietors of the Australian Agricultural Company in January 1858. They foresaw an increase in the consumption of New South Wales coal because of the rapid increase of the population of the Australian Colonies; this, they stated, would increase the number of towns and the use of gas therein, as well as encouraging the development of local manufacturing: \textit{Thirty-fourth Annual Report}. London 1858, p.9. In \textit{A.A. Company's Reports 1858-76}. Mitchell Library 630.6/A.
scarcity of such cargoes. New South Wales coal filled the void, and the coal trade of that Colony came to depend heavily upon the Melbourne market. Melbourne served as a coaling station for ocean going steamers, and as a centre for the re-export of New South Wales coal to service the needs of other outposts of European empire in the eastern hemisphere.

William Robson was optimistic about the quality of Osborne Wallsend coal to capture a share of this market. In February 1858 he told the annual dinner of the Illawarra Agricultural Society that his Company was working mines at both Maitland and Mount Keira and that in his opinion coal from the latter was easily the best in the Colony for steaming purposes. Ten tons of Mount Keira coal, he claimed, would produce the same power as 15 tons from the Newcastle field: 'This would be of immense importance to those large ocean steamers, for they would not have to call into so many places on their trips out or home for the purpose of providing coal.'

Robson's intention was not, however, merely to lecture on the wondrous qualities of Osborne Wallsend coal. Rather, the Agricultural Society provided the perfect forum in which to parade before the leading men of the district the material benefits which they could expect from a thriving export trade in Wollongong coal. In return, Robson expected their support to overcome the one obstacle which could prevent the establishment of such a trade—the unsuitability of Wollongong Harbour.

Robson emphasised that the 'great support' of the New South Wales coal trade was Melbourne. Therefore, he stated, as Wollongong was closer to Melbourne than Newcastle, then Wollongong (or more to the point, the Osborne Wallsend mine) might 'abstract' the trade

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89 G. Blainey, The Tyranny of Distance: How Distance Shaped Australia's History. Sun Books: Melbourne 1966, p.205. Blainey comments that 'Australian coal was thus in a position to compete as an export just when the age of steam was reaching that part of the globe.'

90 William Robson, quoted in the Illawarra Mercury, 8 February 1858. See also the (London) Times, 26 October 1861: English steamship companies stockpiled English coal at coaling stations throughout the Indian and Pacific Oceans. This was an expensive practice, and only the financial assistance of the British government kept the companies operating at a profit. Stockpiling was, in part, the outcome of a 'prejudice' against 'colonial' manufactures, as well as an ignorance of the New South Wales coal trade at this time. Indeed, the coalfields of New South Wales rated only passing mention by the Times, while it waxed lyrical over the probable benefit to steamship companies from reports of workable seams of coal in Tasmania! Tasmania did not produce coal in any commercial quantity until 1875, and then only 7719 tons: S.H. Cox, 'The Development of Mining in Australasia.' (See 'III.—Table of Outputs of Coal and Shale Raised in Different Colonies.') In Report of the First Meeting of the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science. (Sydney 1888). Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science: Sydney 1889. The high cost of transporting their fuel half way round the world, though, was forcing the English steamship companies to look seriously at the use of Australian coal. The Australian Agricultural Company's annual report for 1858 noted that the English companies were 'anxious' to avoid the stockpiling of English coal at distant ports: A.A. Company's Reports, 1858-76, loc.cit.
from Newcastle: ‘All that was wanted, then, was the harbor’.91 The local gentry needed little prompting on matters affecting their pecuniary interests, and Captain F. Hart rose to propose ‘Prosperity to the Coal Mines of Illawarra’. A coal trade, said Hart, would ensure the prosperity of the town, the district, and the Colony itself—if a ‘good harbor’ was made available. On the question of who ought to provide Wollongong with improvements to its Harbour, Hart was unequivocal: to get that the people of the district ‘must stir up the Parliament’.92

In another time and place such a blunt call to arms might have failed to evoke a response. By early 1858, however, Wollongong’s businessmen were primed to act on anything that touched their hopes for material progress. Throughout the 1850s businessmen in other towns in New South Wales and Victoria prospered, simply because they were lucky enough to be located near deposits of gold. In 1856, when the Victorian gold rushes were at their height,93 the businessmen of Wollongong witnessed the demise of James Shoobert’s Albert Coal Mines. In New South Wales and Victoria, people from all walks of life had abandoned their posts to participate in the lottery of the gold rushes: ‘Farm workers and town workers surged to the fields, public administrators and police absconded and shipmasters had great difficulty in holding their crews.’94 The stable and respectable leading citizens of Wollongong, however, were neither lucky nor adventurous, and seemed destined to be spectators only of Australia’s new found prosperity. The contrast between regions in the new gold economy could be stark. To contemporaries, 1850s Victoria was a treasure trove, and its capital an El Dorado: ‘the wonderful golden harvest, the vast influx of people, and the . . . unapproachable prosperity of Melbourne.’95 On the other hand, a Sydney journalist who had

91 William Robson, quoted in the Illawarra Mercury, 8 February 1858. Newcastle to Melbourne by sea is approximately 700 miles; Wollongong to Melbourne takes approximately 125 miles from this distance.
92 Quoted in ibid. Hart owned the ‘Woodstock Mills’ at Dapto, south of Wollongong, which produced timber (see ibid., 21 January 1856 & 15 March 1858). He was also, from 1 January 1858, shipping agent for the Kiama Steam Navigation Company—the major carrier of the region’s agricultural produce to Sydney (see ibid., 28 December 1857 & 4 February 1858).
93 The production and the value of the gold raised in Victoria both peaked in 1856 (3,053,744 ounces, valued at £12,214,976). See ‘Statistical Summary of Victoria from 1836 to 1909 Inclusive’ (Folding Sheet No.1), in Victorian Year Book, 1909-10.
visited Wollongong in late 1855, wrote on a return visit some 12 months later that, 'A walk round Wollongong is by no means a formidable undertaking, and of improvements I saw none. Even the court-house is in the same rascally broken-down condition.'

For most of the 1850s the townspeople of Wollongong had no answer to such unflattering comparisons. When, however, a capitalist of the standing of Henry Osborne and a mining engineer of the calibre of William Robson demonstrated the excellence of Wollongong coal, and proposed a scheme for its large scale export, the effect on local businessmen was galvanic.

John and Thomas Garrett typified the little entrepreneurs of Wollongong who, in the second half of the nineteenth century, placed themselves in the front line of the fight to have the New South Wales government provide the conditions they thought necessary for the establishment of a coal export trade. John Garrett came from Sydney to Wollongong in about 1839 to take up a contract for the plumbing and glazing of a stone church in the town. He brought with him his son Thomas, and decided to settle in Wollongong. He established a painting business, the conduct of which he handed over to another son in 1856. In 1855 Thomas, partnered by F. Cahill started the Illawarra Mercury. Cahill left the partnership after a few months and his place was taken by John Garrett. By the late 1850s, then, the Garretts had experienced the depression of the early 1840s which drove many settlers out of Wollongong, the gold boom of the 1850s, and the false dawn of district prosperity promised by Shoobert's Albert Coal Mines between 1849 and 1855.

Therefore, after the first successful trial of Osborne Wallsend coal the Mercury cried, 'ADVANCE ILLAWARRA', and proclaimed that:

The victory is won! and Illawarra is in possession of an article of domestic use and export not second in importance to the richest gold-field in the country, or indeed, in the world.
The Garretts, however, were not content with claiming for their district a place, with the goldfields regions, at the forefront of Colonial economic development. They gloated over ‘their’ coal, for they possessed a mineral which promoted a more stable and superior set of social values than did gold. This placed Wollongong ahead of the gold regions:

for gold mining disturb[s] the social relations of life—creates unhealthy speculation, and is uncertain and exhaustible. Our black diamonds will promote commerce and add to our social industry.¹⁰¹

The promotion of commerce was their aim. It would drive them to pester successive New South Wales Governments to finance the infrastructure which they believed would establish a coal trade in their district. Wollongong’s business leaders had decided that the Osborne Wallsend mine was to be the first of many, and the construction of a harbour suitable for the export of large quantities of coal was intended to provide a magnet to attract other investors of the substance of Henry Osborne. As the Garretts remarked in August 1858, the district’s coal resources were massive and:

The only drawbacks to their being worked are want of capital, want of roads, and harbor accommodation. If the last obstacle was removed, the other two would speedily vanish.¹⁰²

The relationship between a coal trade in Wollongong and prosperity for local businessmen was simple. The opening of mines along the Illawarra escarpment automatically entailed the presence of mineworkers and their families, and every business in the district stood to benefit: more copies of the Illawarra Mercury would be sold, auctioneers and estate agents would be required to subdivide and sell land for homes, shopkeepers would sell more of the daily necessities of life, hotel owners would sell more drink, and the skills of local artisans would be required for everything ranging from the construction of new homes to supplying equipment for the new mines:

the whole back range being one mass of coal, we know not the day when others [mines] may be opened, attracting population and wealth additional to these districts.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ ibid. This view of the coal trade appears to have been shared, at least in part, by official circles. In stating that the ‘Wollongong Mines’ had produced 6200 tons of coal in 1857, the Registrar General for New South Wales, Christopher Rolleston, went on to say that ‘the progress of our coal mining operations and of our export trade in coal, is thus shown to be highly satisfactory, and affords reasonable grounds of confidence—that when our Gold Fields are exhausted, we have a rich inheritance only waiting for development.’ Statistics of New South Wales, from 1849 to 1858, p.6.
¹⁰² Illawarra Mercury, 5 August 1858.
¹⁰³ ibid.
Only the unsuitability of Wollongong Harbour for the export of coal seemed to obstruct this vision. As Robert Owen, Member of the Legislative Assembly for the district in 1858-59, later told a public meeting:

when they considered the number of persons who would be employed, the wages that would be paid, and the consequent advantages that would be derived by shopkeepers, they would have forcibly before them the losses they were likely to sustain unless the Harbor is immediately completed.\(^{104}\)

Owen’s grand vision of the value to the district and the Colony of the creation of a Wollongong coal trade was succinctly stated: ‘with more money in our pockets, the enjoyments of life would also be increased.’\(^{105}\)

For this to occur, the government had to be persuaded of the just nature of the claim of Wollongong’s businessmen upon the public purse. That took just over two years and resulted in the inclusion of £26,892 in the Public Loans Act of 1860, to provide a coal port for Wollongong. The nature of the coming contest between the government and the businessmen of Wollongong was foreshadowed by John and Thomas Garrett as early as October 1857 when, in an editorial celebrating the third anniversary of the Illawarra Mercury, they stated that:

Another source of illimitable prosperity has been struck upon and opened out recently. We allude to the Osborne Wallsend Coal Mines. To encourage and aid, in our sphere, by every legitimate means, the development of this prolific source of commerce and wealth is, and will be [\(\ldots\)]. our duty.\(^{106}\)

The Osborne Wallsend mine had transformed the consciousness of Wollongong’s businessmen about the place of their Harbour in the local economy. Until that mine opened, complaints about the Harbour were few and of a minor nature. Indeed, before William Robson took his first coal from Mount Keira, the most serious criticism related to a paucity of mooring chains, which prevented steamers from sheltering there during storms. The Garretts expressed the ‘hope’ that the government would take seriously the ‘importance’ of Wollongong as ‘one of the harbors of refuge’ along the south coast of New South Wales.\(^{107}\) By late 1857 the steady,

\(^{104}\) Quoted in ibid., 3 November 1863.

\(^{105}\) Quoted in ibid.

\(^{106}\) ibid., 5 October 1857. More bluntly, the Garretts pledged themselves to ‘endeavour to promote, by every means in our power, the progress of every industrial enterprise.’

\(^{107}\) ibid., 13 April 1857.
though modest, export of Osborne Wallsend coal through the Harbour\textsuperscript{108} gave local businessmen cause to take a new view of its function.

From being an object of intermittent concern and irritation, the state of Wollongong Harbour was made a dominant and enduring issue in Wollongong politics. The occasion selected for this transition was the general election of January-February 1858. At the nomination for the seat of East Camden, Robert Owen, a Wollongong solicitor,\textsuperscript{109} received an enthusiastic response when he declared that:

The smallness of Wollongong Harbor was now stifling their commerce, which was daily growing larger and of more importance, and they could not accommodate the number of shipping [sic.] required to convey away the exports. (Hear, hear.)\textsuperscript{110}

Owen's speech raised for the first time the question of the Harbour as a matter of public policy. It marked the point at which the town's leading businessmen began to redefine 'Wollongong', by moving themselves and the district's economy away from a dependence on agriculture and dairying. They had decided to link their future, and thus the district's, to the establishment of an export trade in coal. Owen's remarks were amplified by William Robson's speech to the Illawarra Agricultural Society in February 1858, the next step being to convince the government of New South Wales to include Wollongong Harbour (and, therefore, the Wollongong coal trade) on its agenda. That seemed unlikely, but the inherent weakness of the system of government in mid nineteenth century New South Wales gave the arguments of Wollongong's business leaders a potency they would not otherwise have possessed.

The first Legislative Assembly of New South Wales, elected in March and April of 1856 after the British Parliament had approved a Constitution for the Colony, was eventful. The Assembly was empowered to sit for five years between general elections, but the combination of faction politics, based on a few powerful leaders, and minority governments ensured that the first Parliament struggled through from its opening on 22 May 1856 until its dissolution on 19 December 1857. In that time the Assembly was in session for about 14

\textsuperscript{108} ibid., 5 October 1857: the export of coal through the Harbour for the year ended 30 September 1857 was 1566 tons at 25 shillings a ton (this represents at most a five month period, as the mine had only produced its first coal in April 1857).

\textsuperscript{109} See 'Municipal Institutions. Wollongong Petition.' In Supplement to the New South Wales Government Gazette, No.189, 19 November 1858, p.1962.

\textsuperscript{110} Quoted in Illawarra Mercury, 21 January 1858.
months, and the Government changed hands on four occasions. In September 1857 Charles Cowper took his moderate liberal faction into office for the second time, after the Parker Ministry was defeated by the casting vote of the Speaker on a contentious electoral Bill. Cowper’s term was cut short when the ‘decidedly liberal’ wing of his faction, under John Robertson, attacked the Ministry’s land policy. Unable to retain power with the votes of his own supporters and those of ‘independents and sympathetic but unsteady members’, Cowper obtained a dissolution. Concerned that dissension within liberal ranks would lead to decimation at the polls, Cowper and Robertson coalesced and the liberals went to the people on the electoral issue.

At the general election of January-February 1858 the leading businessmen of Wollongong gave themselves to the liberal cause. They did so, in the first instance, because they felt themselves to be part of the liberal-radical movement of which Cowper and Robertson were the acknowledged leaders. This movement had arisen from the opposition of an alliance of ‘petty traders and artisans’ to the attempt by the British government, urged on by the squatters who wanted a reliable source of cheap labour, to renew the transportation of convicts to the Colony in the late 1840s. The fight against rich and powerful conservative interests in the early 1850s over the shape of the Constitution for responsible government consolidated the alliance. By the general election of 1858 the membership of the movement was characterised by:

a common identity as ‘little men’ excluded from wealth and power by selfish interests within the established elite. The term ‘little men’ included the unskilled as well as the skilled, but the more active radicals were usually at least artisans, if not small employers or self-employed. Most were men of ambition thwarted by meagre fortunes, men encouraged by small successes to fight the ‘monopolists’ who denied them more. They belonged neither to the struggling mass at the bottom of society nor to the charmed circle at the top. Their class consciousness fleetingly encompassed the very poor.

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113 idem.
114 A. Powell, Patrician Democrat: The Political Life of Charles Cowper 1843-1870. Melbourne University Press: Carlton, Victoria 1977, p.84. Robertson accepted Cowper’s offer of the portfolio of Lands and Public Works, which resulted in ‘one of the warmest and most enduring of political friendships.’
115 idem.
fellow victims of 'monopoly', but it seldom expressed their outlook. Rather, it embodied the concerns of a people of a 'middling' sort—inhabitants of the uneasy borderlands separating the unskilled from the pastoral kings and the great bourgeoisie.\(^{117}\)

The social composition and attitudes of those who fought to win Wollongong for the liberal cause in January 1858 conformed to this description.

The seat of East Camden stretched along the New South Wales south coast for a distance of over 30 miles, from the Wollongong district at the northern extreme to the Shoalhaven district in the south, and returned two Members to the Legislative Assembly. The districts around the towns of Wollongong and Kiama, about 17 miles south of Wollongong on the coast, contained most of the electors. At the first general election, in 1856, the seat returned John Marks, a Kiama farmer,\(^{118}\) and Henry Osborne, the wealthy pastoralist and coal proprietor of Marshall Mount. From that time the Garretts had used their newspaper to attack Osborne. They declared bluntly, 'We are known to be politically opposed to Mr. Osborne.'\(^{119}\)

As one of the 'pastoral kings' they claimed that his huge holdings of land for an 'insignificant' annual rental were depriving others of a chance to achieve economic independence.\(^{120}\) Further, the honest toil of the 'little man' on his smallholding was found by the Garretts to be more socially useful and virtuous than the ability of the privileged few like Osborne to lock up the land:

> We always regard the small farmer as of more real value to the community than the large one. He and his family are the really industrious and productive, that must ever constitute the moral sinew of a country.\(^{121}\)

For the Garretts, Osborne's duty to his constituents after the dissolution of the first Parliament was clear:

> The electors of East Camden are agriculturalists to a man, Mr. OSBORNE is a 'squatter to the back-bone and spinal marrow,' as Mr. DUFFY would say . . . Let the squatter, seek the favor of the squatters of Murrumbidgee, or remain out of the Assembly.\(^{122}\)


\(^{118}\) Martin Wardle, _op.cit._

\(^{119}\) _Illawarra Mercury_, 3 March 1856.

\(^{120}\) _ibid._, 7 January 1858.

\(^{121}\) _ibid._, 5 October 1857.

John Marks, on the other hand, was welcome to remain. As he stated at an election meeting in January 1858: ‘He had been Mr. Osborne’s most active opponent at previous elections, he had voted, almost invariably in opposition to him in the Assembly.’\footnote{123} The return of John Marks at the top of the poll in the subsequent election\footnote{124} was, therefore, the Garretts proclaimed, ‘an affixture of the stamp of approval on the broad, enlightened, and liberal principles he not only professes, but has endeavoured to carry out.’\footnote{125}

The problem, of course, was how to unseat Osborne and replace him with a Member who would support Cowper and Robertson in the Assembly. For this purpose a request, signed by 146 persons, including the Wollongong district’s leading business and tradesmen, was addressed to local solicitor Robert Owen, inviting him to contest East Camden in the liberal interest (see Table following).

Henry Osborne had topped the poll in 1856,\footnote{126} but in 1858 he faced for the first time a well organised and influential liberal opposition within his own electorate. This group had open access to the Wollongong district’s only newspaper, and launched a series of calumnious attacks on Osborne. He was accused of letting his extensive Illawarra lands ‘at £2 and £3 an acre . . . whilst he is occupying land at the rate of NINE ACRES FOR A PENNY, on the banks of a navigable river.’\footnote{127} His time in Parliament, it was claimed, he used to represent himself by having his family and other ‘Parasites’ appointed to the local magistracy;\footnote{128} this prompted a solemn warning to the electors of East Camden:

\begin{quote}
IF YOU would not see this large and powerful County made a Close Borough of, under the unscrupulous and degrading influence of One Family, NOW IS THE TIME! Two Liberal and Independent Candidates are in the field. Support them and scatter to the winds the Family Compact formed to enslave and degrade you.\footnote{129}
\end{quote}

Osborne, it was said, would stop at nothing to achieve his fell purpose—even to the point of enlisting the Chinese to undermine the liberal cause:

A New Description of Voter.

\begin{footnotes}
123 Quoted in Illawarra Mercury, 14 January 1858.
124 Election results in \textit{ibid.}, 28 January 1858. Polling day was 22 January 1858.
125 \textit{ibid.}, 25 January 1858.
126 Election results in \textit{ibid.}, 7 April 1856. Polling day was 31 March 1856.
127 \textit{ibid.}, 14 January 1858.
128 \textit{ibid.}, 4 January 1858.
129 \textit{ibid.}, 14 January 1858. Emphasis in original.
\end{footnotes}
OCCUPATIONS OF THOSE REQUESTING ROBERT OWEN
TO STAND AS A LIBERAL FOR EAST CAMDEN
AT THE GENERAL ELECTION OF 1858

Tradesmen/Working Proprietors (20: 30.3 per cent.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Count</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baker</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blacksmith</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bootmaker/Shoemaker</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carpenter</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confectioner</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joiner</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baker</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blacksmith</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bootmaker/Shoemaker</td>
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<td>Carpenter</td>
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<td>Confectioner</td>
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<tr>
<td>Joiner</td>
<td>1</td>
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</table>

Business Proprietors/Contractors (18: 27.3 per cent.)

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<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
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<td>Builder</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coach Proprietor</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contractor</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
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<td>Innkeeper</td>
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<td>Auctioneer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Solicitor</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Builder</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach Proprietor</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contractor</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innkeeper</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Architect</td>
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<tr>
<td>Auctioneer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Solicitor</td>
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Professional Services (6: 9.1 per cent.)

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<tbody>
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<td>Architect</td>
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<tr>
<td>Auctioneer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Solicitor</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carman</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carter</td>
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<tr>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Freeholder</td>
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</table>

Other (22: 33.3 per cent.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other occupations listed were shared by 60 persons).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes
1. East Camden returned two Members to the legislative Assembly, and encompassed the towns of Wollongong and Kiama. The liberals ran a candidate from each centre: Robert Owen, Wollongong, and John Marks, Kiama. Those persons whose occupations are listed in the Table resided in the Wollongong district.

2. Some of the signatories had more than one occupation (the 66 occupations listed were shared by 60 persons).

Sources
A total of 146 persons signed the request to Owen, which was published in the Illawarra Mercury, 4 & 7 January 1858. The occupations of 60 of these were identified from: Supplement to the New South Wales Government Gazette, No.189, 19 November 1858, pp.1961-2 (petition seeking the establishment of Wollongong as a municipality), and advertisements and miscellaneous reports in the Mercury, December 1857 to May 1858.
ELECTORS AND BRITONS.—Will you degrade yourselves by voting for a man who has insulted you by qualifying his Chinamen for the purpose of securing his return? No! Then vote against OSBORNE to a man, and leave CHI JOHN AND TOMMY GAN, leaseholders, of Marshall Mount, to plump for their owner alone.¹³⁰

These vigorous attacks were complemented by a swing against conservative candidates¹³¹ and on 22 January 1858 the electors of East Camden voted Henry Osborne into third place on the poll¹³² and out of the Legislative Assembly. The Garretts savoured their triumph, describing Osborne as 'A man of immense influence but of no senatorial ability.'¹³³

With the return of Marks and Owen the liberals had made a clean sweep in East Camden, and a firm political relationship was thus created with the Cowper-Robertson Ministry in Sydney. That relationship was furthered with the establishment of the Illawarra Liberal Political Association, one of only five set up in New South Wales country centres 'to bring together the liberals . . . for electoral and parliamentary purposes on a wide range of questions.'¹³⁴ That they were all established after the general election¹³⁵ suggests their major function was long term—to provide an electoral base for the return of liberal Governments. This was one of the Illawarra Association's major objects; its 10 point Prospectus committed it to the promotion of 'Liberalism' through advocacy of the Cowper-Robertson Ministry's policies on great national issues such as land and electoral reform.¹³⁶

The Illawarra Liberal Political Association merely formalised the relationship which already existed between Wollongong and the Cowper Ministry. The Association was formed on 15 February 1858, after a public meeting considered and adopted a Prospectus drafted by a Provisional Committee which first met on 1 February.¹³⁷ The founders of the Illawarra Association were, almost to a man, those who had unseated Henry Osborne in the general election (see Table following).

¹³⁰ ibid., Emphasis in original.
¹³¹ Loveday & Martin, op.cit., p.29: 15 conservatives from the first Assembly sought re-election in 1858; only 8 were successful. In contrast, only 1 of 23 liberals seeking re-election was defeated.
¹³² Illawarra Mercury, 28 January 1858.
¹³³ ibid., 25 January 1858.
¹³⁴ Loveday & Martin, op.cit., pp.180-1 (n.34). Liberal Political Associations were also established in Bathurst, Goulburn, Maitland and Mudgee.
¹³⁵ Idem. Polling in the general election commenced on 12 January and ended on 12 February 1858 (Calculated from The New South Wales Parliamentary Record, op.cit., pp.20-112 ('Alphabetical Roll of Members of the Legislative Assembly of New South Wales').
¹³⁶ Prospectus in Illawarra Mercury, 11 February 1858.
¹³⁷ ibid., 11 & 18 February 1858.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Office in Illawarra Liberal Political Association</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>On Election Committee of or Signed Petition Supporting Robert Owen at General Election</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>President</td>
<td>Thomas Hale</td>
<td>Mine Owner</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
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<td>Thomas Garrett</td>
<td>Newspaper Proprietor</td>
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<td>Robert Hayles</td>
<td>Spirit Merchant</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Edward Jeykell</td>
<td>Farmer &amp; Contractor</td>
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Sources

The executive and General Committee of the Illawarra Liberal Political Association were appointed at meetings in February and April 1858 (see Illawarra Mercury, 18 February & 12 April 1858). The Association was centred on Wollongong and its immediate district, and claimed over 80 members there by April 1858 (ibid., 12 April 1858). Election advertisements in the Mercury for January 1858 provided lists of Robert Owen's supporters. Occupations taken from Supplement to the New South Wales Government Gazette, No.189, 19 November 1858, pp.1961-2 (petition seeking the establishment of Wollongong as a municipality), and advertisements and miscellaneous reports in the Mercury, December 1857 to May 1858.
As Secretary of the Illawarra Liberal Political Association and co-proprietor of the *Illawarra Mercury*, Thomas Garrett dominated Wollongong politics in the late 1850s—he was Cowper’s man in Wollongong. Thomas’ father and business partner, John, was Secretary of both Robert Owen’s election committee and of the Provisional Committee which formed the Illawarra Liberal Political Association. John Garrett’s influence increased when he became a Member of the Legislative Assembly for the south coast seat of Shoalhaven in June 1859. The Garretts belonged to the ‘middling class’, men of small means who, unaided by wealth and privilege, were striving to improve their social position. In 1872, as a Member of the Legislative Assembly for his father’s old seat, Thomas reflected upon his years with the *Illawarra Mercury*; country newspapers, he said:

were generally established by a couple of working men with small capital, one of whom might be able to write a little . . . They were not enterprises which were undertaken by capitalists.

The President of the Association, Thomas Hale, was living proof to the Garretts of the vitality and value of the principle of ‘competitive individualism’ so dear to nineteenth century liberals. Originally the owner of a watchmaking business in Sydney, Hale accumulated sufficient capital to enable him to open, in November 1857, the Wollongong district’s second coal mine, at Bellambi, about five miles north of Wollongong. Hale augmented his capital with the sale of two parcels of land which he owned in the district. The first involved the purchase and sale of 250 acres in 1853. The second sale was of a 48 acre Crown Land grant made to Hale in 1855 and sold to Henry Osborne barely three months before the opening of the Bellambi Mine.

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138 ibid., 11 January 1858.
139 ibid., 18 February 1858.
143 Report from the Select Committee on the Osborne’s Leasing Bill, *loc.cit*. This land, after passing through several hands, was finally purchased by Henry Osborne in February 1859.
144 *idem*. 
The working of the Bellambi property was leased to a partnership, McMullen and Company, which paid Hale a one shilling a ton royalty on the coal. This was akin to the agreement between Henry Osbome and Robson and Company. Unlike Osborne, however, Hale, though he had no previous experience in the trade, exercised a strong control over the mining and marketing of his coal; after all, besides his mine Osborne had extensive pastoral interests, whereas Hale had put everything he had into his mine. The agreement with McMullen and Company required them to sell the coal back to Hale. In June 1858 Hale had a 500 feet long jetty (the longest in the Colony) constructed for coal loading. By the end of that year, at his own expense, after his own design and under his personal supervision, Hale built a three mile wooden tramway for the transport of his coal by horse power from the mine to the jetty. There the coal was loaded onto boats owned by Hale. Within a few years Hale's aggressive marketing saw the Bellambi mine producing more coal than Osborne Wallsend. Thomas Hale was a 'little man' par excellence.

The other prominent member of the Illawarra Liberal Political Association was John Biggar, elected as one of its two Vice Presidents in April 1858. Biggar passionately believed that his and society's interests were 'served best by allowing every individual to maximise his own wealth in his own way.' Biggar owned a drapery store in Wollongong. In February 1859 he set up as an auctioneer, his first sale being his entire stock of drapery. He expressed the hope that the people of the district would support his new business as well as they had the old; in return, he believed that they would benefit from his knowledge and experience in 'general merchandise (acquired at home and in the colonies).'

145 *Illawarra Mercury*, 16 November 1857.
147 *Bayley*, op.cit., p.22.
148 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 December 1860. Hale's tramway was discussed at the 19 December 1860 meeting of the Philosophical Society of New South Wales.
149 *Illawarra Mercury*, 8 February & 26 April 1858, and *Bayley*, op.cit., pp.22-3. In early 1858 Hale purchased the schooner Nightingale which carried over 50 tons of coal on the Bellambi to Sydney run. In April of that year he purchased the barque Victoria Packet which took 300 tons of coal to Melbourne and Adelaide. Other ships added to his fleet were: Prospector (February 1859, 76 tons of coal), Warlock (December 1859) and Sacramento (March 1860).
150 *Illawarra Mercury*, 12 April 1858.
151 *Ward*, op.cit., p.84.
152 *Illawarra Mercury*, 10 February 1859.
greatest efforts on behalf of the Wollongong coal trade, and himself, were to come in the 1870s when he campaigned unceasingly for a rail link between Wollongong and Sydney. It was accurately recalled of him in 1924 that:

It is very questionable if there has been any man in all the years of Wollongong's history that has left a greater mark than John Biggar... he was always in the front of progress... Every deputation which went to Sydney had him on its list.\(^{153}\)

The verdict on the Liberal Political Associations has been that they quickly petered out and 'came to nothing'.\(^{154}\) Not so the Illawarra Association, which was still in full vigour in February 1859 when it held its first (though apparently last) annual general meeting and claimed over 100 members in the Wollongong district.\(^{155}\) More importantly, the leaders of this Association were able to compel the Cowper-Robertson Ministry to support public funding of improvements to Wollongong Harbour for the coal trade. In playing this vital role the men of 1858 could claim to have commenced the process by which the economy and society of their region was transformed from a rural to a mining and ultimately urban-industrial one.

Their political strength rested on two factors. First, the inability of Cowper and Robertson to break through the faction system of Parliamentary politics which chronically produced minority Governments. Second, the ability of Wollongong's liberals to deliver their electorate to the Cowper-Robertson Ministry. While these conditions held simultaneously, the Cowper-Robertson Ministry was at a disadvantage in its relationship with the liberal businessmen of Wollongong.

The liberal triumph in East Camden was not matched by the performance of the Cowper Ministry. The Ministry survived the election of 1858, but it did so in a Parliament as potentially unstable as the one which preceded it. Of the 53 Members of the Colony's first Legislative Assembly, only 36 found their way into the second. From this number Cowper could count on the support of 22 liberals as against eight conservatives and six independents. Seventeen new Members 'whose allegiances were uncertain'\(^{156}\) made their appearance in the Assembly.

Though Cowper had to form a minority Government, the Wollongong liberals could fairly

\(^{153}\) ibid., 29 August 1924 ("Reminiscences of Illawarra. From the Diary of a Pioneer.")

\(^{154}\) Loveday & Martin, op.cit., p.99.

\(^{155}\) Illawarra Mercury, 28 February 1859.

\(^{156}\) Loveday & Martin, op.cit., p.29.
claim to have done their duty by returning Marks and Owen, both staunch liberals. Cowper and Robertson were in their debt. Even had Cowper and Robertson been able to govern in their own right, a political debt would have been created; that they were forced into minority Government only intensified it.

The weakness of the Cowper Ministry was not especially desired by its Wollongong supporters. Their commitment to the great liberal reforms promised by Cowper and Robertson was testimony to that. Rather, the position of the Ministry was one of those happy circumstances which allowed them to pursue public funds for Wollongong Harbour with some chance of success. The Illawarra Liberal Political Association was the means by which that campaign was carried on.

The motives of the Association’s founders were twofold. First, they were concerned to ensure the return of a liberal Government. Second, and of equal importance, they wished to create for themselves the means for pressing on that Government the great object of Wollongong’s business leaders—the reconstruction of Wollongong Harbour for the export of coal. Point IV of the Association’s Prospectus established as one of its objects:

To be prepared to take action in effecting local improvements, to endeavour to procure the removal of local grievances, and to use every legitimate effort to obtain for this district its fair share of the general revenue for the purpose of being expended in the formation of those public works so long and so urgently required.157

This dual character was nicely summed up by Thomas Garrett in his report to the February 1859 annual general meeting, where he outlined the circumstances which had led to its formation 12 months earlier. He noted first the political nature of the organisation, stating that ‘the originators of this association . . . were convinced of the necessity of an organisation which would give consistency and activity to the popular will’ on the ‘vital’ issues of electoral reform and the land question. These, he claimed, were sufficient to ‘stimulate the projectors of this association to instant and vigorous action.’158 Garrett, however, stressed that, ‘independent of these, and other questions of a general character, there were several of a local nature, of scarcely less importance.’ The dominant local question was the condition of Wollongong Harbour:

157 Quoted in Illawarra Mercury, 11 February 1858.
158 Quoted in ibid., 28 February 1858.
The harbor of Wollongong had long been found much too circumscribed for the trade of the district, even in agricultural produce. The Mount Keira coal mines had then been but recently opened, and threatened to still further display the inefficiency of the harbor, to the grievous injury of the community... unless the harbor was enlarged and rendered more secure, the district must recede instead of advance. It was also felt that the people of the district had a right to demand that this work should be undertaken at the cost of the country. To make this want known, and to secure its satisfaction, was laid down as one of the principal local tasks of the proposed association.\(^{159}\)

The reference to agricultural produce was a gloss. Had Thomas been so strongly dismayed by the export capabilities of the Harbour before Osborne and Robson opened up the prospect of a new trade for Wollongong, then his newspaper was unaccountably silent on the matter. The imaginations of Garrett and his colleagues had been fired by the commercial potential of a coal export trade.

With the Illawarra Liberal Political Association and electoral success behind them, Wollongong's business leaders had the means and the determination with which to press their case. As John Garrett noted in February 1858:

> The formation of this Association will assist materially in the removal of the many local grievances which want of unity and apathy have allowed to accumulate around this community.\(^{160}\)

That unity, given the Parliamentary environment in which the Cowper Ministry grappled with the great issues of land and electoral reform while constantly battling to survive, gave Wollongong's men of 1858 an advantage they were not slow to exploit.

On 9 April 1858 John Biggar chaired a meeting of the Illawarra Liberal Political Association, at which he presented a draft petition addressed to the Executive Council, 'praying that enquiry be at once instituted as to the enlargement of the Harbor of Wollongong.' Those present resolved that a public meeting be called to consider the adoption of the petition.\(^{161}\)

Held in early May, under the auspices of the Association, that meeting formed the Wollongong Harbour Committee. The new body was composed of members and non members of the

\(^{159}\) Quoted in *ibid.*

\(^{160}\) Quoted in *ibid.*, 11 February 1858.

\(^{161}\) *ibid.*, 12 April 1858.
Association, its object being to finalise the form of the petition and to pursue the Harbour question with the Government.

The Committee's case was based upon two assertions. First, that the Harbour was far too small to accommodate even the existing level of imports and exports of general merchandise and farm produce, which was claimed to be running at £200,000 a year and increasing. Second, that vessels drawing over six feet of water and carrying cargoes of more than 60 to 80 tons could not, 'without the greatest risk', use the Harbour. This claim led to the central assertion of the petition—that the condition of the Harbour was obstructing the development of a limitless and profitable coal trade:

Owing to the smallness of the harbor and the rolling of the sea therein, which frequently precludes the possibility of loading the vessels, only about twelve thousand tons per annum of this valuable coal can at present, and with difficulty, be exported. But, with increased port accommodation and security, the export of coal could be increased to almost any amount required, the seams being the largest yet discovered in Australia.

The only accurate observations in the petition related to the unsafe nature of the Harbour in heavy seas, the small carrying capacity of the vessels using it, and the quantity of coal exported through it. However, the heart of the petition comprised specious arguments about the volume and value of rural and general produce leaving and entering the port, upon greatly exaggerated and speculative claims as to the importance of the Wollongong coal measures, and upon the supposed willingness of capitalists to invest in their exploitation.

The Harbour Committee's claim that in 1858 Wollongong Harbour was being stretched beyond its capacity was a fiction. Its purpose was to lend weight to the otherwise slight case for asking the Parliament to authorise the expenditure of public funds for the enlargement of the Harbour. John Garrett, speaking in the Assembly on the Public Loans Bill in 1860, gave it the lie when he declared that:

The amount of the staple produce of the district—consisting chiefly of dairy product—was about £120,000 a year. The present accommodation of the

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162 ibid., 6 May 1858. This conformed to point IV of the Association's Prospectus, which urged action on 'urgently required' public works: 'in carrying out this portion of its object the Association will gladly accept the co-operation of others besides its own members.' Quoted in ibid., 11 February 1858.

163 Wollongong Harbour Committee's petition in ibid., 13 May 1858.

164 Shipping notices in ibid. for this period bear out the observation as to the carrying capacity of the coastal vessels using the Harbour. For the six months to 30 June 1858, 6479 tons of coal were mined in Wollongong: 6000 tons went to Sydney for re-export and industrial use (that is, an annual rate of 12,000 tons), the rest being used by steamers and for local consumption. See ibid., 8 July 1858.
harbour might be sufficient for the conveyance of that produce provided there was no other trade at the port. If there were the proper facilities for shipping ... the export of coal might be a thousand tons a week. These facts would, he thought, carry conviction to the minds of hon. members that the Illawarra district had a claim to additional shipping accommodation.\(^{165}\)

Even as late as 1863 Robert Owen was able to inform a public meeting in Wollongong that:

> If they looked merely at the dairy producing capabilities of the district it is probable that the present harbor would have been sufficient for many years to come; but when they looked at their coal-fields they found their trade stifled by the inadequate harbor.\(^{166}\)

As to the value of the produce which passed through the Harbour there was some confusion among Wollongong’s businessmen. In October 1856 the *Illawarra Mercury* quoted a figure of £18,000 as the value of the September quarter exports from Wollongong,\(^{167}\) giving an estimated annual figure of £72,000. By May 1858 the Harbour Committee stated the figure as £200,000 a year.\(^{168}\) In May 1860 John Garrett cited £120,000 to the New South Wales Parliament. There is no contemporary evidence to support these claims of very large shifts in the value of Wollongong’s export trade between 1856 and 1858 (a 177.7 per cent. increase) and between 1858 and 1860 (a 40 per cent. decrease). They could not have it both ways. Either the Harbour was able to handle a growing trade in rural produce or, in the face of an apparent decline in that trade, there was no pressing need to apply public money to its enlargement. In any event, neither the Parliament nor the Ministry even had they been disposed to, could easily make an independent check of the export figures presented by the Harbour Committee. When, as late as 1881, the Minister for Public Works was asked to table a return showing the quantity of produce, exclusive of coal, shipped from Newcastle, Wollongong and Kiama to Sydney, he was compelled to say that, ‘The records of this traffic are not kept by Government.’ The best he could do was to provide some estimates procured from ‘produce agents and other sources of information’.\(^{169}\)

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165 Quoted in *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 May 1860. This report erroneously recorded Garrett as having stated that the value of dairy exports was £12,000; other newspaper reports recorded a figure of £120,000.
166 Quoted in *Illawarra Mercury*, 3 November 1863.
167 ibid., 6 October 1856.
168 Although the Committee’s petition referred to exports and imports of produce and general merchandise respectively, the shipping notices for this period in *ibid.* indicate that vessels came to Wollongong to load rather than to deliver.
169 *New South Wales Parliamentary Debates* (First Series), Session 1880-1, Vol.1, p.1095. The government’s annual *Statistical Register* did not supply this information at any time before this date.
The Harbour Committee asserted that the district's coal seams were the 'largest yet discovered in Australia,' and that an enlarged Harbour would allow coal exports to be 'increased to almost any amount required.' The former claim, given contemporary knowledge about the coal resources of New South Wales, was at best incapable of proof. Until the creation of the Department of Mines in 1874, 'knowledge of the geology of the coal measures as a whole, and of specific areas, grew haphazardly.' The work of private geologists from the 1830s, notably that of the Reverend William Clarke, on the extent of the measures was inconclusive. The Colony's first Examiner of Coal Fields, William Keene, appointed in December 1854, confined much of his work to the developing Newcastle coalfield. In fact, Keene's experience led him to comment that:

I have examined seams more than 700 miles to [the] north of Newcastle belonging to the same deposits that we are now working in the Hunter [i.e. Newcastle] ... and we may, without boasting, claim to rank with the most extensive coalfields in the world.

The Committee's second claim was so obvious as to be hardly worth making. It did, however, reveal the speculative nature of the campaign to make Wollongong Harbour the centre of a coal export trade. Between 1858 and 1860, inclusive, the business leaders of Wollongong produced no evidence to suggest an imminent and enormous demand for coal which required the urgent unlocking of the Wollongong seams. The demand created by the gold rushes had its limits; in 1855 the Colony's largest producer of coal, the Australian Agricultural Company at Newcastle, welcomed a strike by its miners because of a glut in the Australian market. In 1858 Wollongong accounted for only 7.5 per cent. of all coal produced in New South Wales; in 1859 and 1860 this share rose to eight per cent. and 8.9 per cent., respectively.

172 Branagan, op.cit., pp.70-2.
173 Quoted by H.W.H.H., 'Our Northern Coal-fields.' Sydney Quarterly Magazine, September 1889, p.256. The date and source of Keene's comment is not given, though Keene died in 1872 (Branagan, op.cit., p.72).
175 Calculated from figures in Statistics of New South Wales, from 1849 to 1858 & 1850 to 1858 and Statistical Register of New South Wales, 1860.
The predominance of Newcastle was a result of nature’s provision of a relatively good natural harbour. Any chance of Wollongong challenging Newcastle rested in an artificial harbour, to offset the capriciousness of nature. To this extent even the opening of the Osborne Wallsend mine in 1857 was a speculation, relying for success on the improvement of Wollongong Harbour. Few others were prepared to risk their capital on the basis of that hope. Hale’s mine was too far from Wollongong to make use of the Harbour, depending instead upon a jetty in the open sea. Further, the Harbour Committee produced no evidence of any substantial investor willing to invest in the Wollongong coalfield even if Parliamentary sanction was given to the improvement of the Harbour. After the Osborne Wallsend and Bellambi mines commenced operations, only one new mine opened in the district before 1861. This small mine, which opened in August 1858 and was worked by its two lessees, produced only 200 tons of coal in 1858, 1033 tons in the following year, and closed in 1860. The faith of Wollongong’s businessmen in their town’s golden future, once the Harbour was improved, was no more than a leap in the dark. Yet they were about to prove that faith and a politically indebted Ministry could make harbours.

In July 1858 Robert Owen accompanied the deputation which presented the Wollongong Harbour Committee’s petition to John Robertson, the Minister for Lands and Public Works. Without demur Robertson assured the deputation that the prayer of their petition would receive the Ministry’s favourable consideration. The Minister’s ready compliance was understandable for, as expected, the Cowper Ministry was finding the 1858 Session of the second Parliament a difficult one to control.

What coherence the faction system of Parliamentary politics possessed came from the existence of solid groups of Members, with more or less common interests, around which the leaders built their majorities, and the test of a faction leader’s ability was his success in ‘piecing together and maintaining the majorities on which his power depended.’

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176 This point is treated in detail in Chapter 2.
177 Illawarra Mercury, 5 August 1858. The lessees were Robert Taylor and Christopher Walker. See Chapter 3.
178 Illawarra Mercury, 22 July 1858.
179 Loveday & Martin, op.cit., p.149.
Cowper Ministry of 1858 has been described as a 'faction with accretions.'\(^{181}\) That is, it was based upon the solid faction built around Charles Cowper and John Robertson, and depended for its existence upon the votes of other individual Members, rather than upon a firm alliance or coalition with other faction leaders. The skills essential for holding a minority Government together in such circumstances earned Cowper the contemporary epithet of 'Slippery Charlie.'\(^{182}\)

However, even Cowper's undoubted bargaining skills could not conceal the problems his Ministry faced in trying to survive the real test of Parliamentary strength—the division. During Cowper's Premiership of September 1857 to October 1859, his Government lost one quarter of all divisions in the Assembly, demonstrating that 'no premier or minister could afford to ignore . . . members of the House, many of whom had short and obscure terms.'\(^{183}\) Little wonder that Cowper later recalled his attempts to steer his electoral Bill through the 1858 Session (23 March to 26 November) as 'torture.'\(^{184}\) Even though there was little likelihood of Robert Owen or John Marks voting against Cowper on major liberal policies, their support for the embattled Ministry did not endanger the satisfaction of the demands of their electorate.

In October 1858 the Ministry instructed Edward Moriarty, the Superintendent for Improvement of the Navigation of the River Hunter, in the Harbours and River Navigation division of the Department of Lands and Public Works,\(^{185}\) to survey Wollongong Harbour and prepare a report containing recommendations for its improvement.\(^{186}\) Moriarty, therefore, was of the greatest importance to Wollongong's businessmen. His report would provide not only the basis of the Ministry's case in arguing for Parliamentary approval for the expenditure of public money on Wollongong Harbour, it would also contain the specifications of the new Harbour which, the businessmen hoped, would attract mining capital to the district.

Moriarty was already familiar with the relationship between the Cowper Ministry and Wollongong. In February 1858 the Illawarra Liberal Political Association, as its first claim

\(^{182}\) Powell, *op.cit.*, p.77.
\(^{184}\) Quoted in *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 December 1860; quoted by Powell, *op.cit.*, p.86.
\(^{185}\) *Statistical Register of New South Wales*, 1860.
\(^{186}\) *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 October 1860.
upon the Cowper Ministry, requested a water works for Wollongong on the ground that the district's population was ‘greatly on the increase’ from the working of its two coal mines, at Mount Keira and Bellambi. Moriarty was ordered to report on this claim and, in recommending an expenditure of £4956, he expressed the Ministry’s commitment to full support for the speculative views of Wollongong’s businessmen about the local coal trade. In his report he stated that the works he envisaged were in excess of existing requirements, giving as his reason that:

in a young country such as this, we should look to the probable future rather than to present requirements; and Wollongong possesses natural advantages in the extent and value of its adjacent coal fields and agricultural lands, equalled by few other towns in this Colony with which I am acquainted, and which must lead to its rapid advancement in wealth, population, and importance.

Moriarty’s sympathy with the Ministry and Wollongong’s businessmen was sustained with his promotion, within a week of being ordered to survey Wollongong Harbour, to the position of Engineer-in-Chief for Harbours and River Navigation at a salary of £1100 a year (£400 above his previous salary).

Wollongong Harbour in 1858 consisted of a small basin, 300 feet long by 150 feet wide, and a pier which gave little protection from heavy seas. Work on excavating the basin out of solid rock on the more sheltered western side of the headland had commenced with convict labour in December 1837 and took seven years and £3500 to complete. Its exposed nature made it unsafe, even unusable, under certain conditions. As Moriarty noted:

although partially protected on the south and south-east sides by the headland and pier . . . when gales of wind set in from these quarters the heavy seas which run round the headland sweep with such force on to the adjoining reefs as to produce considerable agitation in the waters of the Basin, rendering it at such times quite unsafe for vessels of even the smallest

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187 Illawarra Mercury, 25 February 1858.
188 A petition, dated 9 March 1858, from 292 ‘Landowners, Householders, and Residents in and of the Town of Wollongong,’ requesting a water works was forwarded to the government by Thomas Garrett, who signed himself as Secretary to the movement. Petition printed in Supply of Water to Wollongong. (Report of Mr. Surveyor Shone.), p.4. In Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly, Session 1858, Vol.3.
190 His promotion was granted on 9 October 1858: New South Wales Government Gazette, No.158, 12 October 1858, p.1643.
class to lie therein, and on these occasions the trade of the Port is almost entirely interrupted.\textsuperscript{192}

The mitigation of the effects of these conditions upon shipping, and the provision of facilities to cope with the alleged enormous increase in the trade of the district were the two problems for which Moriarty had to find solutions.

Moriarty classified the trade of the Harbour under two heads: the ‘agricultural, pastoral, and passenger’ and the ‘mineral trade’. For the accommodation of the former he would have nothing to do with the claim that it had grown to such an extent that the Harbour could not cater for it. The steamers which carried this trade, Moriarty stated, required but:

\begin{itemize}
  \item a small extent of wharf or quay ... \end{itemize}

To this end he proposed three procedures: the extension of the existing pier by 55 feet, ‘which will take it into 13 feet [of] water, forming a projection … in order to check the in run of the waves along its face’; the deepening of the Harbour entrance to a depth of 10 feet at low water (the existing depth was five-and-a-half feet), and the construction of a breakwater, using the stone removed to deepen the entrance. None of these improvements was designed to accommodate a rapidly increasing ‘agricultural, pastoral, and passenger trade.’ Indeed, Moriarty stated that: ‘these works would ... be sufficient for the trade carried on by steam, at both present and prospective.’\textsuperscript{194} A different standard was to be applied to the coal trade.

Moriarty would have seen the small ketches and schooners, such as the \textit{Carnation}, the \textit{Terrara}, the \textit{Unity} and the \textit{Numba} which, two or three times a week, loaded small cargoes of Osborne Wallsend coal for shipment to Sydney.\textsuperscript{195} For the present, he wrote, a ‘more extended wharf frontage’ was all that was required for the carrying on of this trade. He added, however, that ‘I have been informed, and believe, that the Wollongong coal is peculiarly well adapted for steaming purposes, and that a large export trade may be anticipated.’\textsuperscript{196} Like the

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textit{Carnation} (53 tons),
  \item \textit{Liberty} (not given),
  \item \textit{Mimosa} (not given),
  \item \textit{Nowra} (55 tons),
  \item \textit{Numba} (53 tons),
  \item \textit{Rose} (55 tons) and \textit{William IV} (not given).
\end{itemize}

\textit{Illawarra Mercury.}

\textsuperscript{192} \textit{Wollongong Harbour. (Report of Engineer-in-Chief of Harbours Upon.), p.1. In Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly, Session 1858-9, Vol.2.}

\textsuperscript{193} \textit{ibid.}, p.2.

\textsuperscript{194} \textit{ibid.}

\textsuperscript{195} In the six months to 30 June 1859, for example, 58 shipments of coal were made from Wollongong Harbour—an average of only 2.4 a week. The vessels involved, and their usual cargo, during that period, were as follows: \textit{Carnation} (53 tons), \textit{Liberty} (not given), \textit{Mimosa} (not given), \textit{Nowra} (55 tons), \textit{Numba} (53 tons), \textit{Rose} (55 tons) and \textit{William IV} (not given). Calculated from shipping notices in \textit{Illawarra Mercury.}

\textsuperscript{196} \textit{Wollongong Harbour, loc.cit.}
Harbour Committee before him, Moriarty was unable to provide any evidence of how this 'anticipated' trade was to come about. But then, in the preparation of his report, he had had the 'advantage ... of ... discussing those various local circumstances which it is so necessary carefully to attend to, in order to form sound opinions on those subjects.'

On the basis of those discussions about the local coal trade Moriarty stated that, 'I have made provision for far greater accommodation than is now wanted'. He proposed the excavation, from solid rock, of a new 'Inner Harbour' north of and opening into the existing Harbour. This new Harbour, to measure 300 feet long by 100 feet wide and 10 feet deep, was designed specifically for 'the proper accommodation of the coal trade.' However, Moriarty stressed that these measurements 'need not be arbitrarily adhered to, but might be modified or extended to answer any reasonable demands the increase of trade should be found to require.' A more open ended recommendation could not have been written by Thomas Garrett himself.

Moriarty's survey completed, Wollongong's businessmen returned their attention to the Cowper Ministry. So anxious were they to have their new Harbour that, before Moriarty's report was tabled in the Assembly, Robert Owen asked the Minister for Lands and Public Works if the Government intended to introduce a supplementary Estimate in the current session for the public works at Wollongong. John Robertson replied that while this would not be possible during the existing Parliament, the Government would be prepared with such an Estimate on the meeting of the new Parliament; this Estimate, he said, would provide for the works 'in a manner suitable to their great importance.'

Before then, however, a general election had to take place. At the end of 1858 the Cowper Ministry had secured the passage of its electoral Bill, the Act requiring the dissolution of the Assembly by 12 April 1859 to enable a general election to be held, using the new electoral boundaries and procedures. Moriarty's report on Wollongong Harbour, recommending an expenditure of £26,892, was tabled in the Assembly by John Robertson on

197 ibid., p.3.
198 ibid., p.2.
199 ibid..
200 Quoted in Sydney Morning Herald, 29 January 1859.
201 The Electoral Act of 1858. 22 Vic. No.20. Section 88.
16 February 1859.\textsuperscript{202} The new Harbour was but a general election away. Before and during that election, Wollongong’s business leaders performed a personal and political favour for Charles Cowper which, on the return of his Ministry, ensured that he would pursue the matter of public funds for the improvement of Wollongong Harbour.

On 1 March 1859 Robert Owen was appointed by Cowper to the District Court. Owen resigned his seat on 3 March,\textsuperscript{203} creating a vacancy in East Camden. The appointment stirred a major political row as Cowper’s opponents secured a select committee to investigate the charge that he had bought Owen’s support for the Ministry’s decision to create a new portfolio by splitting the Department of Lands and Public Works.\textsuperscript{204} It was a measure of the desperation of Cowper’s enemies in the Assembly. Owen did not have to be bought. As Richard Jones, Treasurer in Cowper’s 1857 Ministry, noted, ‘Mr. Owen, from the time he entered Parliament, had been a friendly and consistent supporter of the Government, though occasionally opposing them on particular measures.’\textsuperscript{205} John and Thomas Garrett were less guarded. The Cowper Government, they said, had ‘deprived themselves of a vote on all occasions [of] emergency.’\textsuperscript{206} In any case, with the Ministry having publicly committed itself to the improvement of Wollongong Harbour, it was hardly likely that Owen would have jeopardised it by opposing such an important Government measure as the distribution of portfolios.

Owen had in fact been elevated to the Bench to make room for a Cowper protegé—John Hargrave. A barrister, Hargrave had struck up a ‘firm friendship’ with Cowper through a family connection with the New South Wales Crown Solicitor, and ‘Cowper’s patronage was to achieve for Hargrave what his indifferent performance as a legal practitioner could never have achieved on grounds of merit.’\textsuperscript{207} In the face of heavy opposition from both press and Parliament, Hargrave was appointed to the District Court on 20 January 1859; a month later,

\textsuperscript{202} Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly, Session 1858-9, Vol.1, p.141.
\textsuperscript{203} The New South Wales Parliamentary Record, op.cit., p.86.
\textsuperscript{204} See Sydney Morning Herald, 4 March 1859. The results of the committee’s investigation were contained in Report from the Select Committee on Vacant Seat Question of Privilege together with the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence, and Appendix. In Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly, Session 1858-9, Vol.1. Although the Committee reported that Cowper’s conduct in this affair ‘cannot be too strongly condemned’ (p.10 of Report), Cowper marshalled enough support to negative the motion for the adoption of the Report (see Sydney Morning Herald, 30 March & 6 April 1859).
\textsuperscript{205} Quoted in Sydney Morning Herald, 30 March 1859.
\textsuperscript{206} Illawarra Mercury, 3 March 1859.
Cowper deepened the controversy by appointing Hargrave as his Ministry's Solicitor General.\textsuperscript{208} Robert Owen took Hargrave's place on the Bench, and Hargrave offered himself as a candidate for the vacant, and safe, liberal seat of East Camden.

Wollongong's liberal businessmen moved quickly and an election committee, with John Biggar as Secretary, launched a vigorous campaign for the return of John Hargrave.\textsuperscript{209} The opportunity that had been presented was made clear by the Garretts; the Cowper Ministry, they stated, had not only acknowledged Wollongong's claim for a new Harbour but had:

pledged itself to perform these works, and this promise will be none the less certain of fulfilment if a member of the Government should, at this juncture, be chosen as one of the representatives of these districts.\textsuperscript{210}

Nonetheless, Hargrave was put on notice that his tenure as Member for the district would be conditional upon his delivering to Wollongong's businessmen the public capital needed for the Harbour. These were men with a mission, and they would not carry the wounded. In nominating Hargrave for East Camden, Thomas Hale referred to Moriarty's report and warned the candidate that:

if he did not perform his promises, and if he did not make the Government go on as quickly as possible with these important district works, the details of which had been arranged, he would not do for them. (Hear, hear.)\textsuperscript{211}

The 21 March 1859 by election was no contest, Hargrave receiving a huge mandate. With Henry Osborne near death at his Marshall Mount home\textsuperscript{212} all effective opposition to the liberals in East Camden was stilled, and Hargrave annihilated his lone opponent by 638 votes to two.\textsuperscript{213}
At the general election of June-July 1859, Hargrave nominated for the new Assembly seat of Illawarra. Thomas Garrett and John Biggar acted as joint Secretaries for his election committee. This time the opposition was a little stronger with the late Henry Osborne’s son in law, Francis MacCabe, securing 386 votes to Hargrave’s 629. The Harbour issue had proved decisive. MacCabe himself demonstrated the strong influence which Thomas Garrett and his colleagues exercised over the electors of Illawarra when he complained at an election meeting that:

the fear... seemed to be entertained that, if the Cowper Cabinet was upset, then the harbor would not be improved. He said, if once the quality of the coal was proved to be of such a superior character as had been stated, then the enlargement of Wollongong Harbor would become a national necessity, and would be effected by whatever Ministry was in power.

If MacCabe believed this he was badly out of touch with the realities of political life in Sydney. As the coming months, years and decades would prove, the expenditure of public money on Wollongong Harbour had less to do with the quality of the local coal or of the arguments used to justify its development than with the composition and hold on power of the Ministry.

After the general election the Cowper Ministry retained the confidence of the House, and duly placed the sum of £26,892 for ‘Improvements to Wollongong Harbour’ in its Loan Estimates for 1860. In justifying this ‘large’ sum to the Parliament, the Treasurer, Elias Weekes, made no direct reference to a ‘mineral trade’. Rather, he announced the Government’s new found concern for the welfare of a class of its citizens who had yet to receive those benefits which only the state could provide:

I think the time has arrived when persons residing on the coast should have some fair share of the public money. As they are called on to contribute their quota to railways, which they never see, and from which they derive no immediate benefit, I think it only fair they have these same sums from the

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214 The seat of Illawarra centred on Wollongong, with the northern boundary, 12 miles away at Coalcliff, and the southern boundary about 10 miles away at the Macquarie Rivulet. The Electoral Act of 1858, op.cit., Schedule A (part 25).

215 Illawarra Mercury, 16 May 1859.

216 ibid., 16 June 1859. Polling day was 15 June.

217 Quoted in ibid., 16 May 1859.

public funds for carrying out works which are so much required by them.219

With no opposition being voiced against this argument it seemed that Wollongong’s new coal port was won.

However, on 26 October 1859 the Cowper Ministry fell after its education Bill was overwhelmingly defeated in the Assembly.220 Despite the new electoral Act, which favoured the return of liberal candidates, Cowper had been returned in July 1859 at the head of yet another minority Government in an Assembly increased from 53 to 72 Members, almost 60 per cent, of whom were newcomers.221

The new Ministry, headed by William Forster, quickly exposed the political nature of Cowper’s decision to give Wollongong a coal port. On 7 December 1859 revised Estimates of expenditure for 1860 were tabled in the Assembly. The sum for Wollongong Harbour had been reduced to £10,000.222 In his report Moriarty had suggested that the first works to be undertaken ought to be the deepening of the entrance to the existing Harbour and the extension of the existing pier, at an estimated cost of £7695; then the new inner basin and breakwater (£19,197), designed to cater for the coal trade, could be constructed.223 The Cowper Ministry had voted the whole £26,892 at once, to enable the carrying out of all the recommended improvements. The Forster Ministry, however, used Moriarty’s order of priority to reduce the vote so that only the first part of the project, which sought to provide a little extra accommodation and safety for the existing trade of the Harbour, would be completed.

Wollongong’s businessmen were aghast. John Garrett, now also Mayor of Wollongong, convened indignation meetings and arranged for petitions to be presented to the Assembly and the Governor, requesting them to force the Ministry to restore the Estimate to the full £26,892.224 Speeches at these meetings stressed the dire consequences of the new

221 Loveday & Martin, Parliament, Factions and Parties, op.cit., p.29.
223 Wollongong Harbour, op.cit., pp.3-4.
224 Illawarra Mercury, 3, 6 & 10 January 1860.
Ministry’s decision for the expansion of the coal trade. They also revealed the specious and political nature of the arguments which had led to the Cowper Ministry’s inclusion of a coal port for Wollongong in the Estimates. At a large public meeting in Wollongong on 11 January 1860 John Garrett accused the Forster Ministry of having acted from political spite. The Loan Estimate for the Harbour was, he stated, the only such item reduced by Forster of those prepared by the previous Ministry: ‘It was scarcely likely that the reductions he had alluded to were the result of deliberate calculation and thought—but quite the contrary.’225 At the same meeting Thomas Garrett even attacked the report of the Engineer-in-Chief for Harbours, which had allowed Forster the opportunity, on defensible grounds, to alter the priorities of the Cowper Ministry:

the Inner Basin and Outer Breakwater—which was intended for the accommodation of the Coal trade—should be undertaken first, because the present accommodation was fully equal to the requirements of the passenger and produce trades, whilst it was totally inadequate for the coal trade.226

Garrett’s views on the coal trade were as speculative as ever. Only Osborne Wallsend coal was being moved through the Harbour, with no immediate prospect of other companies being formed to use the new coal port.227 Though Robson and Company were constructing a tramway from Mount Keira to the Harbour, to enable an increase in exports,228 this merely reflected Robson’s commitment to cash in on the lucrative Melbourne market, which he had been unable to do from the small mine he had operated at Maitland.

225 Quoted in ibid., 13 January 1860.
226 Quoted in ibid.
227 Thomas Garrett did state that: ‘there were parties at Bulli waiting to see the course adopted by the Government and the Assembly in the improvement of Wollongong Harbour, before they decided upon one of two schemes they had before them for developing their coal mines—and one of these schemes was to construct a railway from Bulli to Wollongong. This work would not be undertaken unless the whole sum were voted.’ Quoted in ibid. Garrett was referring to the efforts of Dr. Bartholomew O’Brien (a Sydney medical practitioner) and James and William Somerville (Bulli farmers), who owned properties at Bulli, seven miles north of Wollongong, to open a mine there. Eventually, in late 1861, they managed to interest some wealthy Sydney investors in the venture and formed the Bulli Coal Mining Company, which ultimately became one of the Colony’s major coal producers. This Company, however, shipped its coal from a jetty in the open sea at Bulli.

228 See Chapter 2. In a speech to the 1859 annual dinner of the Illawarra Agricultural Society, Robson maintained this, as he had at the same function in 1858, as his Company’s top priority. He gave as his reason for supporting a new coal port the fact that his Company would be able to ‘export direct to Melbourne’ rather than shipping its coal in small coastal vessels to Sydney, from where it would be re-exported, thus increasing costs because of double handling. Illawarra Mercury, 14 February 1859.
Inside the Parliament, Samuel Gordon, who had replaced Hargrave as the Member for Illawarra,229 tried to have the Assembly request the Governor to compel the Ministry to table all documents and plans related to the improvement of Wollongong Harbour, as well as an explanation for the decrease in the sum previously voted for the works. The Minister for Lands, John Black, replied brusquely that ‘£10,000 was as much as the House would vote for expenditure in one year.’230 Nonetheless, the House agreed to Gordon’s request. Gordon waited until 7 February for a response, when he asked if the Government intended to make good the shortfall in funding by introducing a supplementary Estimate. Black’s reply seemed to indicate that he had moderated his previous opinion. Moriarty, he said, had advised the Government that the contract for the Harbour would be most economically let for all of the proposed works. Black attempted to defuse the issue, informing Gordon that Moriarty’s advice would receive the ‘serious consideration’ of the Ministry in the preparation of additional Estimates. He declined, however, to table the new plans of the Harbour works. Gordon reacted angrily, taking a point of privilege and referring to the House’s endorsement of his motion of December 1859. This brought the intervention of Premier Forster, who could no longer contain his impatience with the demands of an electorate which had steadfastly supported Charles Cowper:

However jealous the hon. member might be of his point of privilege, he was quite willing to waive it if it appeared the support of a constituency could be bribed by a certain sum for a local improvement being placed on the Estimates.231

As far as Forster was concerned, the matter was now at an end. Black grudgingly tabled the plans for Wollongong Harbour,232 but there was to be no increase on the £10,000 already voted.

229 Gordon was a Sydney wine and spirit merchant with farming and winegrowing interests. Martin & Wardle, op.cit. Gordon was supported in Illawarra by the Illawarra Mercury and the same people (for instance, John Garrett, John Biggar and R.T. Hayles, Treasurer of the defunct Illawarra Liberal Political Association) who had ensured the return of liberal candidates at previous elections. See Illawarra Mercury, 27 October 1859 (election advertisement). John Hargrave had resigned the Illawarra seat on 26 October to take a place in the Legislative Council, where he became the Representative of the Government. See E. Grainger, Hargrave and Son: A Biography of John Fletcher Hargrave and His Son Lawrence Hargrave, University of Queensland Press: St Lucia, Queensland 1978, p.16 (‘Such swift elevation was unheard of.’)

230 Quoted in Sydney Morning Herald, 14 December 1859.

231 Quoted in ibid., 8 February 1860.

232 ibid.
However, though reduced, after almost two years at the helm, to being spectators of the political process, Wollongong’s businessmen were not in a hopeless situation. In his attack on Gordon, Forster had struck out not at the purely speculative nature of the coal policy that Gordon’s backers had thrust upon the Cowper Ministry, but at the political relationship which existed between Wollongong and the Cowper-Robertson faction. Forster, like Cowper, had nothing resembling a national policy for the development of the Colony’s mineral resources (though John Robertson had made some interesting but abortive moves in this direction in late 1858).233 This policy vacuum allowed Wollongong’s businessmen to retain their coal policy, unchallenged by the keepers of the public purse in Sydney. In addition, Forster, like Cowper, worked in an uncertain Parliamentary environment, where the rise and fall of Ministries might depend upon the shifting loyalties of a few Members. The right to dispense patronage was one of the few inducements possessed by Ministries with which they might keep their factions intact or with which they could court the support of more independent Members,234 and its frequent use in such circumstances made the search for political advantage in the House of paramount importance. Time was short and the desire lacking to examine in detail the myriad of parochial demands made upon the public monies of the Colony.

Hence, when the Forster Ministry’s brief period in office ended in March 1860 with the loss of a vote of confidence,235 it was, for the businessmen of Wollongong, as if that Ministry had never existed. John Robertson became Premier on 9 March 1860 (with Cowper as his

233 On 23 August 1858, Michael Fitzpatrick, Under Secretary of the Department of Lands and Public Works, wrote to the eminent geologist, the Reverend William Clarke, stating that the Minister (John Robertson) ‘has it in contemplation to frame some new regulations, having for their object the better development of our mineral resources.’ Robertson proposed a Board, headed by Clarke, with William Keene (the Examiner of Coal Fields) and the Deputy Surveyor General, ‘having for its object the suggestion of such a code of regulations as may under the present circumstances of this Colony facilitate the working of coal-bearing and mineral lands, other than auriferous lands.’ On 18 September Fitzpatrick wrote to Clarke informing him that office accommodation had been arranged for the Board, and intimating the wide ranging and innovative approach the Minister expected the Board to adopt: ‘I am instructed to add, that it is not desired to confine your suggestions to what is practicable under the present state of the law; on the contrary, Mr. Secretary Robertson is anxious rather to ascertain what regulations the Board may consider likely to develop [sic] the mineral resources of the country, without regard to the now state of the law’. Progress Report from the Select Committee on the Claims of the Reverend W.B. Clarke; together with the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence, and Appendix, p.47 (Separate Appendix, parts ‘N’ & ‘O’). In Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly, Session 1861, Vol.2. There is no evidence that either the Board or its ‘Code of Regulations’ saw the light of day.

234 P. Loveday, ‘Patronage and Politics in New South Wales, 1856-1870.’ Public Administration, 18(4), 1959, p.342: ‘a leader could also appeal to ambition, political conviction, or to personal friendship . . . but when he did so it often had to be supplemented by patronage.’

235 McMinn, op.cit., p.247.
Colonial Secretary), and on 8 May his Ministry tabled a supplementary Estimate of £16,892 to be added to the £10,000 already voted for Wollongong Harbour. The total of £26,892 was incorporated in the Public Loans Bill of 1860, and debated in the House on 17 May. James Martin, Attorney General in the first two Cowper Ministries but who had become a bitter opponent of Cowper's after the latter had asked for his resignation from that post in late 1858, moved the omission of the Wollongong Harbour item. Martin said that he would not speak to his motion, 'as hon. members must have pretty well have made up their minds upon the subject.' The subsequent debate confirmed that the Forster Ministry's only achievement had been to raise questions in the minds of some Members about the political relationship between Robertson and the Illawarra electorate. Hard questions about the future role of the Wollongong coalfield within the New South Wales economy did not arise. Alexander Campbell thought that 'the personal influence of members had a great deal to do with the framing of these estimates', and Henry Parkes revived memories of John Hargrave when he claimed that:

The vote had come before the House under suspicious circumstances. They knew that this particular constituency had afforded the Government an opportunity to get one of its members a seat.

In reply, Robertson's Minister for Public Works, William Arnold, stated that the Ministry was acting solely on the sound opinion of Moriarty that the expenditure of only £10,000 on the Harbour works was 'not advisable' if the contract was to be let economically. The Forster Ministry had, of course, received the same advice and had given it 'serious consideration'. The Robertson Ministry, enjoying a different relationship with the electorate, had given £16,892.


238 Quoted in Sydney Morning Herald, 18 May 1860.

239 Quoted in Empire, 18 May 1860.

240 Quoted in ibid. The Sydney Morning Herald of the same date reported Parkes as having referred in this remark to the more general political relationship existing between Illawarra and the Ministry: 'the amounts had appeared on the estimates under circumstances of considerable suspicion. He alluded, of course, to the peculiar identity of these particular districts with the Government who framed the estimates.'

241 Quoted in Empire, 18 May 1860.
The Assembly negatived Martin’s motion by 32 votes to 10,242 and Wollongong’s businessmen had won their prize.

Before 1857 the Wollongong district’s place in the New South Wales economy rested upon its importance as a supplier of agricultural and dairy produce to Sydney. In the first anniversary issue of the Illawarra Mercury, John and Thomas Garrett had stated emphatically that, ‘By the plough and the produce of the dairy we prosper.’243 However, after the opening of the Osborne Wallsend mine in April 1857, and particularly after William Robson’s speech to the Illawarra Agricultural Society in February 1858, it was difficult to read the Garretts’ newspaper and think of the local economy other than in terms of coal.

The passage of the Public Loans Bill of 1860 was the successful culmination of this first phase of the effort to change the direction of economic activity in Wollongong, and encouraged the Garretts to give full rein to their cargo cult policy. In an editorial of celebration on the passing of the Bill, they asserted that, ‘Now . . . there is every temptation to draw population and capital this way, and that not simply from other parts of the colony but from abroad.’244 Yet, even though the construction of the new port depended totally upon the political and financial support that they had wrung from the Cowper and Robertson Ministries, government received no plaudits. Rather, the Garretts had come to believe that they had acted only to ensure that their district received the natural justice due to it:

Government has no more right to sell a defective article than a private salesman has. Government is bound to take care that every township and every farm which it lays out for sale, shall have roads and other advantages essential to make the land of use to the purchasers. To do otherwise would be simply dishonest.245

Like a newspaper, government was nothing more than a means to an end.

Thomas Garrett had claimed at the annual general meeting of the Illawarra Liberal Political Association in February 1859 that the organisation had committed the government to the development of the Wollongong coalfield:

The most important result of the movement in connection with Wollongong Harbour, is, that the Government have been induced to acknowledge the

243 Illawarra Mercury, 6 October 1856.
244 ibid., 22 May 1860.
245 ibid.
soundness of the claim set forward by the [Harbour] committee's deputation for the performance of the work at the cost of the general revenue.\textsuperscript{246}

With the passing of the Public Loans Bill this claim was justified. However, as the Forster experience had proved, it was valid only while a Cowper-Robertson Ministry held office. That this condition held until the end of 1863 was the sole guarantee that construction of the new inner basin would proceed to a point where future Governments might be committed to its completion and, perhaps, extension.

Even so, the construction of the new Harbour was one thing. Whether capitalists would invest in Wollongong because of it was another. The owners of private wealth were not subject to the same pressures as those who kept watch over the public resources of the Colony. The former could not be forced to invest in Wollongong; nor was there any reason why they should comply with the policy laid down by the Garretts and their business associates.

\textsuperscript{246} Quoted in \textit{ibid.}, 28 February 1859.