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

Henry Patrick Lee
University of Wollongong
NOTE

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PART II

THE RAILWAY, 1872-1881

POLITICS, n. A strife of interests masquerading as a contest of principles. The conduct of public affairs for private advantage.

CHAPTER 6

A BOLD FRONT:

THE ORIGINS OF THE ILLAWARRA RAILWAY, 1872-1875

For most of 1872 Wollongong’s businessmen were unable to suggest any practical proposal for the revival of their policy for economic change. They remained helpless before the depression that had struck both the nascent coal trade and the price of butter. By 1872 Newcastle’s dominance of the Australian coal trade was undiminished. In the ten years before the opening of Wollongong Harbour, 1858-1867, the Wollongong mines accounted for an annual average of 10.4 per cent. of New South Wales’ coal production; in the following five years, 1868-1872, that share rose only marginally, to 11.2 per cent. The respective figures for the Newcastle mines were 89.3 per cent. and 88.3 per cent., with the mines of the Lithgow and Berrima districts picking up the crumbs.¹

The Harbour offered little to mining investors. It comprised ‘a pretty lighthouse’ atop a breakwater, a pilot station, an outer and an inner harbour, a line of iron capped wooden railway-leading to three coal staiths, and a steamer’s wharf and sheds belonging to the Illawarra Steam Navigation Company. The outer basin was only 350 feet long by 150 feet wide; Belmore Basin was not much larger: 440 feet by 150 feet. The average depth at low water, in the outer basin, was 14 feet, and that under the coal staiths a constant 18 feet. Wharf accommodation totalled about 1700 feet,² sufficient for a maximum of 15 vessels.³ Entering the port required some skill. As one steamer passenger of the 1870s recalled vividly, over 80 years later: ‘I shall never forget the experience of the little boat yawling and lurching into the narrow entrance to the tiny tank called Wollongong Harbour’.⁴ This was not a complex capable of playing a role in foreign and intercolonial trade, which explained the lack of opposition from the Newcastle coal proprietors to public expenditure on the little port.

¹ Calculated from figures in Statistical Register of New South Wales, 1860-1872.
² Sydney Morning Herald, 9 September 1873.
³ C.W. Gardiner-Garden, Port of Wollongong. 3rd edition. Illawarra Historical Society: Wollongong 1975, p.34.
Its restricted size meant that coal still had to be transhipped at Sydney. This added to costs and caused some deterioration in the quality of the coal. One estimate put the cost of the deterioration alone at two shillings a ton,\(^5\) equivalent to 24.4 \textit{per cent}. of the pit top value of a ton of Osborne Wallsend coal.\(^6\) In addition, Wollongong Harbour could not offer safe anchorage in all weathers. One gale tore the barque \textit{Queen Emma} from its moorings in Belmore Basin, damaging both vessel and wharf; the concrete casing of the breakwater was also damaged and three of its 25 ton concrete blocks were washed into the sea.\(^7\)

Yet, it was only in the development of coal mining that observers like Alfred McFarland saw any hope for the business houses of the Wollongong district. McFarland offered no suggestions, but did state that local businessmen would have to look beyond the ‘quay’ at Wollongong and the jetty at Bulli:

\begin{quote}
the entire coal trade of Illawarra is not one tenth of what it ought to be, or would be, if properly pushed—especially to the South. From Melbourne to Wollongong is only about half the distance from Melbourne to Newcastle; and the Illawarra coal is fully equal, if not superior to that of Newcastle.\(^8\)
\end{quote}

The last point was becoming incontestable, as Wollongong coal began to find favour around the globe. Royal Navy tests had shown Osborne Wallsend and Mount Pleasant coal to possess ‘an excellent character for steaming purposes’.\(^9\) Commodore J.G. Goodenough, commander of the Royal Navy’s Australian Station, visited the Wollongong district in the early 1870s to assess the coal for naval purposes. He thought little of Wollongong Harbour,\(^10\) but was impressed with the coal. He informed the Lords of the Admiralty that it was ‘the best for our use in time of peace . . . it lasts a long time and keeps steam well’; Newcastle coal, on the other hand, ‘burns away rather fast’. Goodenough recommended the stockpiling of two thirds Wollongong and one third Newcastle coal ‘at large Stations, in China and Japan, all

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{\textit{Sydney Morning Herald}, 22 March 1875. Letter from John Biggar.}
\footnote{Calculated from figures in \textit{Annual Report of the Department of Mines, New South Wales}, 1875.}
\footnote{A. McFarland, \textit{Illawarra and Monaro: Districts of New South Wales. In Two Parts.} William Maddock: n.p.p. 1872, p.60. See also pp.56 & 61.}
\footnote{\textit{Sydney Morning Herald}, 11 September 1873.}
\footnote{V.H. Goodenough (Ed.), \textit{Journal of Commodore Goodenough, R.N., C.B., C.M.G., During His Last Command as Senior Officer on the Australian Station, 1873-1875.} 2nd edition. Henry S. King & Co.: London 1876, p.252, and \textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 8 December 1874.}
\end{footnotes}
Wollongong in small stations'. By the mid 1870s, only Wollongong coal was used on the Australian Station.

Osborne Wallsend and Mount Pleasant coal was winning favour in major Asian markets. In September 1873 it was 'in command of the [Shanghai] market, being the favourite at 10s. per ton advance on any other, Australian or English'. At the same time, the Bulli Company was winning contracts for ocean steamers, and for specialist markets, supplying 800 tons a month to the Rolling Mill Company of San Francisco for smelting and blacksmithing.

Preferred by the world’s greatest maritime power and sought by American capitalists, Wollongong coal appeared to have an unlimited future. In addition, the Wollongong seams were more easily worked than those of Newcastle, giving the southern mines a cost advantage. Commodore Goodenough observed that: ‘the mining is as easy as possible. The miner . . . merely undercutts the coal with a pick, and the latter falls of itself’. A Sydney Morning Herald reporter who visited the district’s mines in September 1873 stated that:

One great vantage point possessed by the Illawarra coal mines is the simple easy method by which they may be worked. Any common labourer, possessed of strength, may in a few weeks mine as well as the eldest or more experienced miner.

This relative ease of working was reflected in the piece rates paid to miners and hence in the price of the coal. At Newcastle the general hewing rate in late 1873 was 53 pence a ton, compared with 33 pence for Osborne Wallsend miners and 35 pence at Bulli.

A further advantage was that the Bulli seam outcropped on the Illawarra escarpment, allowing the mines to use to ‘such good account the incline power’ to get their coal to Wollongong Harbour or the jetty at Bulli:

This hill [Mount Keira] of 800 yards steep as it is, proves a boon instead of a trouble, for by the power of the descending wagons, not only are the

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11 Commodore J.G. Goodenough to Admiral Ryder, Sydney, 30 October 1874. Australian Coal for the Navy. An Abstract of the Reports received from various Ships on the China and Australian Stations, in regard to the Quality of Australian Coal. Mitchell Library A495.
12 Illawarra Mercury, 8 December 1874.
13 Sydney Morning Herald, 11 September 1873.
14 ibid., 13 September 1873.
16 Sydney Morning Herald, 11 September 1873.
18 Sydney Morning Herald, 11 September 1873 & 13 September 1873. This slightly exaggerates the hewing rate: Osborne Wallsend miners were paid 16.5 pence for an 11 hundredweight skip and Bulli miners 17.5 pence. These figures were doubled to obtain the 'per ton' rate.
empty wagons pulled up, but the full skips are also dragged from the centre of the mountain... By this arrangement there is a very considerable saving effected in horses and drivers, and... all this is done by most simple machinery.  

This natural advantage over the high cost, deep shaft methods necessary in the flatter Newcastle district, translated into a price advantage. Goodenough quoted to the Admiralty in 1874 a price of 16 shillings a ton for Newcastle coal, compared with 12.5 shillings a ton for Wollongong coal.  

Thus, Wollongong possessed a commodity capable of securing a niche in Australian and overseas markets. However, even after 1868, the arrangements for getting it to market left largely untouched the problem of double handling. The resolution of this problem would be the greatest encouragement that could be offered to potential investors.  

One option was further public funds for the improvement of Wollongong Harbour. That was not a hopeful avenue. The direct beneficiaries of the Harbour scheme had been the Osborne Wallsend and Mount Pleasant mines, which retained their common marketing arrangement as the 'Wollongong Collieries' for the remainder of the 1870s. Local business houses had benefited a little from the wages paid to the men employed on the Harbour works, and a slightly expanded coal trade, but they got nothing like the largesse they had expected. The public purse, however, had been plundered to satisfy these interests. By the end of 1872, the businessmen and mine owners had caused the government to raise £45,828 in loans and to outlay £15,029 in interest to improve Wollongong Harbour, for a return in tonnage dues of £1669, a mere 2.7 per cent. of total outlays. Nonetheless, despite a public subsidy of £59,188 for a scheme originally costed at £26,892, Wollongong's businessmen were stuck with a third-rate port and no credit with the Ministry or the Parliament.  

By late September 1872, however, several factors had renewed the businessmen's hope that one day they would be surrounded by suburbs, factories and mines, rather than farmsteads, dairies and furrows. These were: growth in the New South Wales coal trade, and

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19 ibid., 11 September 1873.  
20 Commodore J.G, Goodenough to Admiral Ryder, op.cit.  
21 Sand's Sydney and Suburban Directory  for 1879, p.648, notified the separation of the 'Wollongong Collieries'.  
the acquiring of coal lands in and around the district by wealthy and influential men, bringing
the prospect of new mines.

Underlying these developments was a revival of economic activity in the Australian
Colonies. Between 1865 and 1871, inclusive, the real gross domestic product of the Colonial
economies grew at an average annual rate of 3.9 per cent. A rise of 10.7 per cent. in 1871/72
began a period of sustained growth, as the population increases of the goldrush years at last
began to stimulate demand.\(^\text{23}\) With minor interruptions, these conditions persisted until the
financial and industrial collapse of the 1890s. Consequently, the outlook for coal, as a basic
energy source, was bright.\(^\text{24}\)

The effect on the New South Wales coal trade was immediate. John Mackenzie, the
government Examiner of Coal Fields, reported that in 1872 the trade occupied ‘a very
prosperous and satisfactory position’. Demand, he said, was increasing, an additional impetus
being provided by the high price of British coal in world markets.\(^\text{25}\) In 1872 New South Wales
coal production topped one million tons for the first time, rising by 12.6 per cent. against the
previous year’s figure, the increase for the Wollongong mines being 17 per cent.\(^\text{26}\) The Bulli
Coal Company announced a healthy net profit of £3223 for the six months to 31 December
1872.\(^\text{27}\)

Such developments, Mackenzie observed, were ‘inducing people to take up coal land in
many new, and in most cases promising localities’.\(^\text{28}\) So much so that, in June 1873, the
Reverend William Clarke, the Colony’s leading geologist, cautioned against ‘these mineral
epidemics’:

A few weeks ago I had the opportunity of witnessing a state of great activity
in the city of Newcastle, and also a proportionate activity in the Illawarra
district. There is . . . a kind of coal-fever breeding among speculators . . .\(^\text{29}\)
A few of Wollongong's entrepreneurs seized the moment. In September 1872 a prospectus was issued by the Sun Kerosene Shale and Oil Company, Wollongong, the aim being to raise a share capital of £25,000 for the acquiring of the Pioneer Kerosene Works. Two of the four provisional directors were Thomas Hale, failed coal proprietor of Bellambi, and John Stewart, former Member for Illawarra and since 1871 Member for Kiama. Their proposal came to nothing, but it was a sign that Wollongong's businessmen were regaining their old confidence.

Of greater moment was John Mackenzie's statement that:

very large areas of coal-bearing land between Port Hacking and the Shoalhaven River have been taken up and secured for the purpose of forming Companies to work the seams of coal existing thereunder ...

Some of the Colony's wealthiest and most influential men were beginning to see some potential for profit in the Wollongong coal seams. By November 1872 some 3000 acres of mineral land had been selected in the Stanwell Park-Port Hacking area, which included part of the northern end of the district. John Robertson, Premier for a second time, between October 1868 and January 1870, and then Colonial Secretary from December 1870 until May 1872 in the Martin Ministry, was the principal selector. At Coalcliff, John Hargrave, the former Member for East Camden and Illawarra in 1859, and since 1865 a Judge of the Supreme Court of New South Wales, bought 1365 acres of coal land during 1872. These adjoined the 'extensive mineral leases' of Alexander Stuart, a Sydney merchant. In October 1872, Stuart leased 480 acres of mineral land; in 1872 and 1873 he selected 2780 acres, which he converted to mineral conditional purchases in 1874. Stuart was a partner in the large merchant firm of Robert Towns and Company, with which he was 'engaged largely in commercial pursuits

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32 Illawarra Mercury, 8 November 1872.
34 Coal Fields and Kerosene Shale Mines, op.cit.
36 ibid., 26 May 1876.
connected with the pastoral and agricultural affairs of the Colony’. In 1874 he would be appointed a director of the Bank of New South Wales.

Hargrave and Stuart had coal sections taken on their properties by the Coal Fields Branch of the Department of Lands, and there was the prospect of a breakwater and dock being constructed at Coalcliff inlet, to allow steamers to take coal to Sydney and Melbourne. In addition, Robert Owen, another former Wollongong district Member, retired District Court Judge, and a Member of the Legislative Council since 1868, had notified the Department of his intention to open a mine on his property at Broker’s Nose, south of Bulli.

These were promising signs but they did not offer a solution to the problem of double handling, and thus the prospect of the Wollongong trade rivalling that of Newcastle remained remote. The catalyst was a statement in August 1872 by the Premier, Henry Parkes, on his Government’s railway policy, in which he intimated that the needs of the ‘extreme coast districts of the country’ would not be neglected. In relation to Sydney, Wollongong hardly met this description, but for the town’s businessmen Parkes’ remark became the germ of a solution to the problem of how to revive their coal policy: a railway linking Wollongong with the great metropolis of Sydney and its deepwater harbour.

The railway was a fine idea. It would eliminate double handling of Wollongong coal, allowing it to be shipped direct to intercolonial and overseas ports from one of the world’s finest harbours. However, the railway’s promoters faced the same question as had the Garretts and their associates, who had pushed the Harbour scheme in 1858: who was going to pay for it? Railways were not cheap. To the end of 1872, the New South Wales government had spent £6,398,727 on the construction of 398 miles of railway, or £16,077.2 a mile. Thus, a Sydney-Wollongong railway would cost the best part of £1 million.
In 1872 the government was an unlikely candidate. Between 1868 and 1872, inclusive, the Parliament approved the raising of £250,753 in loans for harbours and river navigation. Wollongong was allocated £3300 (1.3 per cent): £3000 in 1868 for a lighthouse, and £300 in 1871 for its completion. The Newcastle district received £83,862 (33.4 per cent.), and Sydney £61,500 (24.5 per cent.) In the same period, the Wollongong district received a total of £150 for harbour development from the Consolidated Revenue Fund—for mooring chains at Shellharbour, a small fishing and dairying village at the southern end of the district. Stripped of their special relationship with the Ministry, enjoyed under Cowper and Robertson between 1858 and 1864, and briefly in 1866 with James Byrnes as Minister for Public Works, Wollongong’s businessmen had watched their Harbour and their coal policy treated in terms commensurate with their political and economic importance.

However, the railway scheme was a sign that Wollongong’s businessmen, buoyed by the return of better times, were becoming bold again. The railway embodied a serious threat to the Newcastle mines, and the bigger the share of the Colony’s coal trade it captured, the richer the takings for the district’s business houses. It unshackled local imaginations from the gloom of the recession years. Within ‘a very short time’ of the opening of a Sydney-Wollongong line, announced the Mercury in September 1872, ‘the coal trade would inevitably increase . . . to, we will say, at least five times its present dimensions’. On 1872 figures, this would have pushed Wollongong’s coal production to almost 620,000 tons a year, a figure not reached until 1888, at the height of the boom. It was all pure speculation. The question still pressed: who was going to pay for it?

Parkes’ Bathurst speech suggested the government. The Mercury seized on his reference to the ‘coast districts’ to make a special claim for Wollongong:

the valuable and exhaustless coal seams of Illawarra demand the attention of the Government as much, if not more, than other articles of commerce available on the Coast districts of the Colony.

On the ground that the expansion of coal production in Wollongong, consequent upon the opening of the railway, would benefit the Colony as well as the district, the work, asserted the

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43 Illawarra Mercury, 10 September 1872.
44 Calculated from figures in Statistical Register of New South Wales, 1872.
45 Illawarra Mercury, 3 September 1872.
*Mercury*, ought to be a ‘public’ one. Knowing that opposition would be organised in the Parliament by Newcastle interests, the paper suggested that the railway might commence even further south, allowing the agricultural and dairy produce of the Kiama and Shoalhaven districts to be hauled to Sydney.\(^{46}\) This ploy of widening the appeal of the railway to other electorates would be fully exploited as the campaign developed. Nevertheless, it remained an attempt by a group of provincial businessmen to persuade others to build them a railway as a means of attracting mining investment to their district.

Initially, though, the *Mercury*’s proprietors were so taken with the new scheme that they were prepared to recommend to their fellow businessmen that they think seriously about experimenting with private enterprise: ‘Should the Government decline to take action in the matter, those immediately interested in the same might go a step further, and take it up and construct the requisite line as a private enterprise’.\(^{47}\) The Ministry maintained a steady silence, prompting the *Mercury* to advocate that Wollongong’s businessmen look only to the private sector for the infrastructure which they hoped would bring economic change to their district:

> let it be understood that we are now referring to a cheaply constructed line of railway, and not such as have been adopted at immense cost by the Government. In order to have the work carried out to the best advantage in every respect, such a line would have to be constructed by private enterprise and it is in that light that we now view it.\(^{48}\)

This discovery of the virtues of private enterprise sprang less from inner conviction than from the knowledge that at least one wealthy and influential Sydney investor was taking an interest in the railway idea. Just as circumstances had suggested in 1858 that ‘public’ money should be obtained for Wollongong Harbour, so now in 1872 they dictated that ‘private’ money had to be obtained from Sydney’s capitalists for the ‘Metropolitan and Illawarra Railway Company’, or by whatever name it might be designated.\(^{49}\)

The link with Sydney capital was formed by John Biggar, who had served his political apprenticeship under the Garretts, taking command of the Wollongong Harbour scheme after the latter had quit the district. In late 1872 he recast the Garretts’ coal policy and rescued it from oblivion. His strenuous campaigning for what came to be known as the Illawarra

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\(^{46}\) *ibid.*

\(^{47}\) *ibid.*

\(^{48}\) *ibid.*, 10 September 1872.

\(^{49}\) *ibid.*
Railway, earned him, on his death in 1890, the title of ‘the grand old patriotic public servant’.

It also culminated in praise for his clarity of vision and purity of purpose, the effusiveness of which has never been matched by that for any other public figure in the district:

by the death of Mr. JOHN BIGGAR the most conspicuous and most powerful giant that has ever appeared in the public ranks of Illawarra has fallen. For upwards of thirty years his name has been a household word in this district; and in connection with all great public movements during that time he bore more than an ordinary share of whatever had to be done. No matter of any great consequence was carried on without Mr. JOHN BIGGAR being at the head and front to forward it. And no man ever worked more disinterestedly. Mercenary considerations had no influence with him. Whatever he supported or opposed was every done on principle. Anything of an opposite character was absolutely loathsome to his nature . . . He was not one of the common herd who never shoulder the public yoke excepting for purposes of personal gain or honor. Whatever he did for the public—and in a local sense no man in the colony ever did more—was done as a labor of love pure and simple.50

This was heartfelt. It was also nonsense. Like the businessmen and capitalists for whom he acted as both figurehead and agent, his every move in relation to the Illawarra Railway was calculated to maximise his returns in cash.

While labouring for the public interest, Biggar had been busy on his own behalf. Beginning as a draper, he had set up as an auctioneer in 1859. From 1860 he was the Wollongong agent for the steamer Rapid, which carried people and produce between Sydney and Wollongong twice a week.51 By 1872 he was managing properties for James Osborne, a proprietor of the Osborne Wallsend mine.52 He was also active in the dairy industry, as Secretary of the Central Illawarra Butter Company, formed in 1870 to export butter to Britain.53 Mining had also attracted his attention, and he sank several small shafts in the West Dapto area, the coal being used at the nearby Brownsville flour mill.54

Biggar, however, had larger plans, both for Wollongong and himself. To realise them, though, he had to overcome the lack of capital in Wollongong. This had caused the Garretts and their associates to lurch from one fiasco to another as they tried to start their own gas and mining companies. In Wollongong terms, John Biggar was a successful businessman, but he

50 ibid., 1 July 1890.
51 Illawarra Mercury, 8 June 1860.
52 ibid., 19 January & 19 March 1872.
54 Illawarra Mercury, 29 August 1924. (‘Reminiscences of Illawarra from the Diary of a Pioneer.’)
was no capitalist; he did not even own coal lands of any extent in the district. So how did he propose to do it?

He began to outline publicly his coal policy in September 1872, when he disclosed that he had written to a 'gentleman in Sydney' about the proposal for a railway linking the Wollongong, Kiama and Shoalhaven districts to Sydney. The gentleman, who wished to remain anonymous, was described by Biggar as 'one of the principal public men of the colony, both as regards mind and means'.55 This was no exaggeration, for he was Thomas Holt, a Member of the Legislative Council and one of the Colony's leading capitalists, with interests in pastoral, banking, insurance and railway companies, to name a few. So lucrative were these, that Holt had retired from active business in 1854, at the age of 43.56

A 'colonial millionaire',57 Holt attended closely to public matters, while making the occasional commercial foray. He sat in the Legislative Assembly in 1856/57 and again between 1861 and 1864, holding office as Colonial Treasurer in 1856. His interest in Biggar’s railway lay in two properties, which stood to increase in value should the scheme succeed. These were located at Kiama,58 south of Wollongong, and between the George's and Port Hacking Rivers, north of the Wollongong district. The development of the latter, known as the Sutherland Estate, had been occupying Holt’s energies for some time. He had acquired the whole of the 12,000 acre property in 1861, but attempts to settle it with tenant farmers, sheep and cattle had all failed, as had a stint at oyster farming.59

Thus, Biggar’s scheme, which would take the railway through the Sutherland Estate, won Holt’s approval. As a private concern, it had the potential to return a profit on the movement of coal and agricultural produce from the southern districts to an increasingly populous Sydney market.60 It also opened up for Holt the possibility that it might carry Sutherland Estate coal into Sydney and on to overseas markets. By 1872 it was generally

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55 Quoted in ibid., 17 September 1872.
57 ibid.
58 Martin & Wardle, op.cit.
60 Between the censuses of 1861 and 1871, Sydney's population increased by 43.6 per cent., rising from 95,789 to 137,622 persons. See G.J.R. Linge, Industrial Awakening: A Geography of Australian Manufacturing 1788 to 1890. Australian National University Press: Canberra 1979, p.383.
accepted though not yet proven, that the Wollongong and Newcastle coal measures were part of one huge basin that passed beneath the Sydney region.\textsuperscript{61} Holt was aware of this theory, and when purchasing the Estate had taken out a mining licence for the whole area.\textsuperscript{62} Thus, in his reply to Biggar, Holt enthused about the reports of geologists who had informed him that ‘the principal part of the country between Port Hacking and Shoalhaven is almost one enormous coal field’, which could support a lucrative trade to the East Indies, China and California.\textsuperscript{63}

To take advantage of the opportunities offered by this coalfield, Holt stated, it would be ‘as absurd as it is impossible’ to rely upon the ‘paltry Wollongong harbor, or the dangerous open roadstead at Bulli’. It had to be a railway. With demand and the price of coal rising, Biggar was urged to act: ‘If we wish to ride upon the line within two years, we must set about it earnestly and energetically.'\textsuperscript{64} Holt advised the establishment of a provisional committee, to advertise the scheme and employ professional surveyors; the initial funds were to be raised through ‘promoters shares’, ranging in price from £1 to £50. Holt offered to take a £50 share should the project proceed.\textsuperscript{65}

Encouraged, Biggar put together a draft prospectus for the ‘Wollongong and South Coast Railway. (Landowners’ Direct Line) Liability Limited’.\textsuperscript{66} A ‘Promoters’ Company’ was to raise a capital of £3000 in £1 shares, to hire an engineer to survey the line and make an estimate of its cost, and for the drafting of a private Bill of incorporation. These accomplished, the Company’s nominal capital was to be increased, with every £1 promoters share entitling the holder to a £2 fully paid share.

It was incontestable, asserted Biggar, that the railway would return handsome dividends. The agricultural or ‘ordinary traffic’ alone, he said, would ensure that. However, it

\textsuperscript{61} See T.W.E. David & E.F. Pittman, ‘Notes on the Cremorne Bore’. \textit{Journal of the Royal Society of New South Wales}, 27, 1893, pp.443-65. David, Professor of Geology at Sydney University, and Pittman, Government Geologist, noted that bores had been sunk in the vicinity of Sydney since 1878, and throughout the 1880s; however, it was not until bores were put down at Cremorne in 1893 that David and Pittman could say that, ‘the exact relation between the Newcastle and Illawarra Coal-fields ... [had] been at last practically solved’. (p.443).

\textsuperscript{62} Neve, \textit{op.cit.}, p.16.

\textsuperscript{63} Quoted in \textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 17 September 1872. Emphasis in original.

\textsuperscript{64} Quoted in \textit{ibid}. Emphasis in original.

\textsuperscript{65} \textit{ibid}.

\textsuperscript{66} A copy of the ‘Draft Prospectus. Wollongong and South Coast Railway (Landowners’ Direct Line) Liability Limited’, is in the Papers of C.W. Darley 1865-93. Mitchell Library A3144, pp.42-3. The prospectus stated that full details could be had from John Biggar, to whom ‘all communications are requested to be addressed’.\textsuperscript{66}
was under the heading of 'Coal and other Mineral Traffic' that his prospectus blossomed. The railway was to unlock the mineral wealth of south east New South Wales and channel it to Sydney and thence the world. Thus, Wollongong coal and kerosene shale were linked to the 'now developing' gold mines and recently discovered deposits of tin, copper and other metal ores lying in the gullies of the Upper Shoalhaven: 'the whole Southern districts lying between Araluen, Braidwood, and the sea coast, would find this Railway their natural route to Sydney and Port Jackson'.

These claims rested upon geological surveys rather than any rush of capital into the development of those resources. Like the prospectus' claim that the pressure for a Sydney-Wollongong railway had come from the landowners and residents of the Wollongong district, who had 'long complained' at its absence, they were specious. It was part of the game that Wollongong's businessmen had been playing since 1858 of creating public expectations and then generating demands for the schemes in which they were interested. Biggar's case centred less on the interests of Shoalhaven farmers than on the enhancement of his own commercial interests in Wollongong, which rested upon his hopes for the entry of that district's coal directly into Australian and overseas markets.

The railway was to start at the Sydney end with a 'Metropolitan Terminal Station' at the north west end of Botany Bay. From here the line was to proceed south to the George's River on the south west side of the Bay. A girder bridge or steam ferry would take the trains across the River, from where the line would follow the Old South Coast Road along the Illawarra Range, which it would descend by 'very gentle, easy gradients' to a station on the main Wollongong road at Woonona and thence to Wollongong itself.67 The length of this first stage was 48 miles; after Wollongong, the line was to follow the coast road to Kiama and on to the Shoalhaven district, adding another 65 miles.

As the prospectus noted, at the Sydney end the obvious course for the railway's planners was to connect it with the government's Great Southern Railway at Newtown, which terminated at Sydney's Darling Harbour. However, Biggar and his associates were intent on keeping their money spinner in private hands. Thus, stated the prospectus:

67 The descent was to begin after the line had traversed Madden's Plains, a distance of eight miles, with a drop of 1000 feet and an average gradient of 1 in 42.
in a future session a vigorous effort will be made to obtain Parliamentary authority to lay a parallel line of railway from the Newtown Station to the now scarcely used Government Shipping Wharf at Pyrmont, with a Sydney Station in Parramatta Street.

Until then the Company proposed to construct a branch line to a jetty inside the south head of Botany Bay, straight through Holt’s Sutherland Estate. Ultimately, the Company hoped to have a line and, for an annual payment to the government, harbour facilities that would allow ‘all the [Wollongong] collieries to ship their coals direct from the pit’s mouth into the holds of vessels in Port Jackson’, to be exported direct to ‘foreign customers throughout the East Indies, China, California and [the] American Coast, the Pacific, and the whole Southern hemisphere’.

The surveyor’s job was offered to Cecil Darley, a Newcastle engineer. Biggar wrote to him on 3 March 1873, requesting ‘competent engineering advice as to cost, best route and necessary survey to properly lay the matter before the public as a joint Stock Company’. He asked Darley to make the estimate under three heads: Sydney Harbour to George’s River, George’s River to Wollongong, and Wollongong to Shoalhaven. There was no doubt, however, that Biggar’s priority was Wollongong coal rather than the produce of the Shoalhaven. He stressed to Darley that:

The development of our coal-field, so easily worked, would be the main source of revenue for the undertaking. The principal object to have in view, is that the Coal should be taken from the mouth of the mine in the railway track, and (without change or shifting) shot into the ship’s hold in Port Jackson, in some part of the port where there would be at least thirty (30) feet of water for shipping to load in.

Darley declined the invitation. The reason is unknown, but it proved decisive. The private enterprise phase of the Illawarra railway was over. Despite the backing of Thomas Holt and a board of provisional directors ‘well known to the public and the Illawarra districts’, Biggar was left with a paper railway.

Even though domestic and international demand for coal was rising, the coal policy of Wollongong’s businessmen was again in tatters. Silence consumed the scheme for almost 12 months, until its rest was disturbed by the Mercury in August 1873:

70 ‘Draft Prospectus. Wollongong and South Coast Railway’, op.cit.
The project has been discussed privately and in print, but no committee has been constituted to thoroughly initiate the matter, and not a shilling of capital has been subscribed for the purpose of having a survey made of the intended line by a competent authority.\textsuperscript{71}

This renewed interest was solidly based, for Wollongong's businessmen were beginning to enjoy a new advantage in their quest to transform their district's economy: a growing and genuine interest in the coal and other resources of the region on the part of Sydney's capitalists and politicians. The powerful coalition that would give substance to the dream of a handful of provincial speculators was beginning to coalesce, and it was of the view that the government should pay for the Illawarra Railway.

Campbell and Hart's \textit{Illawarra Mercury} had a new, almost shameless, boldness about it. In September 1872 they had penned a hymn to private enterprise, arguing against the inefficiency of government, as evidenced by their Harbour. Twelve months later, however, they were unequivocally of the belief that: 'We see no reason why the proposed Metropolitan and Illawarra Railway should not be constructed by the Government'. The vaults of private capital had remained shut, their owners presumably doubtful about the returns from such a costly project. Therefore, the doors of public capital would have to be forced. Government was now good. Its 'principal object ... is to enable individuals ... to procure and maintain for themselves and fellow citizens those benefits and conveniences which are not obtainable by individual actions'. This collectivist philosophy was, in the \textit{Mercury}'s view, particularly suited to railway projects. In fact, where railways were concerned, argued Campbell and Hart, private enterprise was a positive evil:

\begin{quote}
There are ... insuperable objections to allowing so important an enterprise to be carried out by a private company, no matter how high might be the standing, reputation, and character of its promoters. Private companies work their lines solely to make the highest profit, utterly regardless of the comfort or convenience of their customers.
\end{quote}

In any event, it continued, 'it is only to be expected' that the rapacity and/or inefficiency of a private company would finally compel the government to acquire the Metropolitan and Illawarra Railway, for the public good: 'Would it not, then, be more sensible and businesslike that the Government should make it, rather than allow it to be made by private enterprise[?]\textsuperscript{72} This did

\textsuperscript{71} \textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 22 November 1872.
\textsuperscript{72} \textit{ibid.}, 12 September 1873.
not, of course, apply to mining or other sectors of the economy; only the unwillingness of owners of private capital to pay had led to the demand that the cost of the railway be socialised.

The first public indication that a new and vigorous push would be given to the Illawarra Railway scheme came on 6 August 1873, when James Manning addressed the Royal Society of New South Wales on 'Our Coal and Our Coal Ports'. The Manning family had a clear interest in the project. Along with his brothers Edye and William, James owned or had a share in pastoral properties throughout the south coast of the Colony; William owned 50 town allotments in Kiama, and some 1000 acres of land elsewhere in the region;\(^{73}\) James, until the late 1860s had been the manager/proprietor of the defunct Bellambi Coal Company which had taken over Hale's mine.\(^{74}\) Manning's paper outlined a plan for the systematic development of the coal resources of the entire Colony, with 'the all important consideration of Port Jackson, as being the means at command for increasing our coal export to a practically unlimited extent'.\(^{75}\) He emphasised the benefits to Sydney if it would link the Newcastle, Wollongong and Lithgow coalfields to its Harbour by rail. Sydney, he said, would have for use and export:

- best house coal from the *North*, best steaming coal from the *South*, excellent and condensed steaming coal from Bowenfels, bright house and gas coal from Wallerawang, and the finest oil shales in the World from the *West*.\(^{76}\)

Manning's immediate concern, however, was the Wollongong coalfield. Its seams, he stated, had barely been touched, and its shipping facilities were poor. In addition, geological surveys had found coal seams up to 12 feet thick in Kangaroo Valley, some 40 miles south of Wollongong; a railway pushed all the way to the Shoalhaven, Manning asserted, was the only way to make these of use to the Colony.

Commercial interests in Sydney were to benefit. If Sydney could offer ships calling there a return cargo of finest southern steaming coal, then more ships would call. As it was, he claimed, Sydney offered little to British and other vessels in the way of return cargoes; having

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74 *Sands' Sydney Directory* for 1866, p.404, ... for 1867, p.447 and ... for 1868, p.417.
76 *ibid.*, p.116.
deposited their goods and immigrants, they generally left in ballast, for Newcastle or ports in Asia where they could load commodities making for a profitable round trip.\textsuperscript{77} According to Manning, the Illawarra Railway would also stimulate population growth and economic activity in Sydney, particularly in its southern suburbs. He had in mind the ‘manufacturing demands’ of such a population, and prophesied the opening there of iron and smelting works, their raw materials supplied by the southern districts.\textsuperscript{78} Manning suggested that the railway, a ‘national’ work that should be constructed by the government, should terminate at the ‘expansive and deep waters’ of Sydney Harbour, at North Balmain, directly opposite Cockatoo Island.

The \textit{Illawarra Mercury} raised the standard at the Wollongong end. The realisation of Manning’s vision, it said, would see ‘the present trade of Illawarra . . . enlarged . . . a hundred fold’. The district would experience a ‘vast increase of population’, and even an agricultural renaissance. Not only would Wollongong become a major force in Australian and foreign coal markets; it would be the ‘fruit, vegetable, and flower garden of the metropolis’.\textsuperscript{79} John Biggar shouldered the organisation of the campaign in the southern districts. In early September he placed advertisements in the \textit{Mercury} and in the Kiama and Shoalhaven papers, calling a public meeting\textsuperscript{80} to consider how ‘to facilitate the shipment of coal and other produce from the district to foreign places’.\textsuperscript{81}

The meeting, held in Wollongong on 16 September, belonged to Biggar. He opened it by proposing that the Mayor of Central Illawarra, W. Thompson take the chair, and read letters of support from Robert Haworth, John Stewart and others. Biggar’s was the keynote speech, and the map displayed at the meeting, showing the ‘approximate’ route of the railway from North Balmain to the Shoalhaven River, had been drafted by his son, John.

Biggar proffered both economic and moral reasons for the construction of the Illawarra Railway. Materially, it would benefit the districts through which it passed, as well as the Colony, by increasing the general level of commercial activity. In doing so, it would lift the people of Wollongong and the south coast out of their condition of rural idiocy:

\textsuperscript{78} Manning, \textit{op.cit.}, p.117.
\textsuperscript{79} \textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 15 August 1873.
\textsuperscript{80} \textit{ibid.}, 19 September 1873.
\textsuperscript{81} \textit{ibid.}, 5 September 1873.
Railways had a moral, as well as material effect. People who were in the habit of working with bullocks became like bullocks in their movements, while persons who had to do with railways embibed [sic.] the railway’s spirit.\textsuperscript{82}

John Biggar was a locomotive. He had ‘gone into the matter’, and had no misgivings that even in its first year the railway would return a ‘handsome sum’. He estimated that it would carry 300,000 tons of Wollongong coal to Sydney for export, creating revenue for the government of about £52,000. After that first year, Biggar trumpeted, ‘there was no telling at what a rapid rate the traffic along the line would increase’. Hence, he assured his listeners:

With such a case in their hands, the people of Illawarra could go to the Government with a bold front, and ask them to construct a railway to this district.\textsuperscript{83}

Biggar the ambitious local businessman was possessed by the railway spirit and the speculator’s vision that the boom years had rekindled. The 300,000 tons of coal that he saw being hauled out of Wollongong represented a 118.9\textit{per cent.} increase on district production in 1873\textsuperscript{84}—an unprecedented rate of growth, far in excess of the pull exerted by the market even in boom times. Nonetheless, he believed his case sound enough for him to ask the meeting to commence a campaign to have the Illawarra Railway constructed at public expense, for the benefit of ‘the agricultural interests and coal mining industry of the Illawarra district’.\textsuperscript{85}

Biggar’s comments were endorsed by speakers representing the commercial and farming interests of the district. He could also count on the support of Wollongong’s working class to assist the development of mining and industrial capitalism in the district. On this question their interests were identical. Henry Whitton addressed the meeting ‘on behalf of the working men of the district’. Unsatisfactory export facilities, he said, had caused stockpiling of coal, which created periodic unemployment for the mineworkers. The more mining companies, the better—there would be more opportunities for employment and the increased competition among employers would raise wages. Thus, Whitton concluded:

\begin{quote}
\textit{it therefore became the duty of working men to assist in the movement to obtain a railway between here and Sydney harbor, where a constant demand would exist for our mineral and other products.}\textsuperscript{86}
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{82} Quoted in \textit{ibid.}, 19 September 1873. \\
\textsuperscript{83} Quoted in \textit{ibid}. \\
\textsuperscript{84} Calculated from figures in \textit{Statistical Register of New South Wales}, 1873. \\
\textsuperscript{85} Quoted in \textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 19 September 1873. \\
\textsuperscript{86} Quoted in \textit{ibid}. 
\end{flushright}
Such consensus assured the passage of Biggar’s motion, without dissent. His public duty done, he sought obscurity. Enough, he said, to have got the campaign started:

He had no desire to have anything to do with the movement any further than to start it, as had been done; but he was ready and willing to assist forward in his spare time all movements tending to benefit . . . the district of Illawarra . . . [and] the whole colony.87

Fortuitously, he had sufficient spare time to accept appointment not only to an unwieldy 61 member committee charged with carrying out the decisions of the meeting, but to the position of committee secretary.88

The Metropolitan and Illawarra Railway Committee lost no time. At its second meeting, on 26 September, the Committee restructured itself, largely to ensure that those south of the Wollongong district felt themselves to be more than a mere appendage to the effort by Wollongong’s businessmen to enlarge the existing coal trade. A few speakers at the first meeting had pointed to the unworkable nature of such a large committee comprising people from all over the region, particularly if its meetings were to be held in Wollongong. This view was endorsed by the Mercury,89 and the meeting adopted a two tier structure, but it remained dominated by Wollongong interests.

At the head of the revamped organisation stood a seven member Executive Committee with power to ‘prepare all business for Committee and other meetings’. Beneath this were 10 Local Committees, centred on the towns and villages through which the railway would pass. These were to act as focal points for public agitation on the railway question; they were to provide the Executive with regular reports and to:

acquire and diffuse information respecting the proposed railway; to collect subscriptions when needed; to hold meetings to procure signatures to memorials or petitions; and to do all things necessary in their respective localities to promote the railway movement . . . .90

Together, the Local Committees comprised the General Committee.

Wollongong commercial interests dominated the Executive Committee. The Chairman was Percy Owen, a Wollongong solicitor, and son of Robert Owen; John Biggar was the Secretary; W. Thompson, the Mayor of Central Illawarra, a municipality within the district,

87 Quoted in ibid.
88 ibid.
89 ibid.
90 Committee resolution, quoted in ibid., 30 September 1873.
filled the position of Treasurer, and the four Members were Joseph Wilshire, owner of a
Wollongong blacksmithing establishment, Francis Woodward, a local solicitor, Archibald
Campbell, proprietor of the Mercury, and John Payne, proprietor of a blacksmithing and
wheelwrights establishment. Five of the 10 Local Committees were in the Wollongong
district: Bulli, Wollongong, Dapto, Albion Park and Shellharbour. Four were located within
the Kiama district: Kiama, Jamberoo, Gerringong and Broughton Creek. The tenth
represented the Shoalhaven district. Of the 144 General Committee members, 94 (65.2 per
cent.) were from the Wollongong district; 40 (27.8 per cent.) were from the Kiama district, and
10 (6.9 per cent.) came from Shoalhaven. The work of restructuring completed and adopted, the 26 September meeting of the
General Committee, attended by about 15 people from the Wollongong district, resolved
unanimously ‘That the Government be memorialised to make the railway’. A draft memorial,
prepared by John Biggar, for presentation to the Minister for Public Works, was referred to a
meeting of the Executive Committee, which met on the following day.

The essence of the nine point memorial was that ‘one of the most populous [regions] in
the colony’ was being denied the right to develop its ‘large area of very fertile land, and seams
of coal and other minerals’, owing to ‘the want of speedy and cheap communication with the
metropolis’. The harbour improvements already carried out at public expense at Wollongong,
Kiama and other places along the south coast were noted, but dismissed as unequal to the great
task at hand. The emphasis, though, was on Wollongong coal, and this time Biggar really let
his imagination fly. Now he ‘confidently expected that in a short time the export of
[Wollongong] coal from Sydney harbour would be at the rate of no less than 1,000,000 tons
per year’, or a 630 per cent. increase on production in 1873. The government could not refuse
to build the Railway: ‘it is certain to pay all working expenses and a fair interest on its cost . . .
and not be a burden on the public revenue’. Everyone would benefit. Apart from raising an
‘immense revenue’ from coal, the railway ‘would also serve a large and paying suburban traffic

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91 ibid. (Members' names); other details from ibid., 13 & 20 June 1923 ('Reminiscences of Illawarra'),
92 Calculated from lists in Illawarra Mercury, 30 September 1873.
93 ibid.
in the neighbourhood of Sydney' as well as opening up 'the vast area of fertile land along its route to Shoalhaven, which would also help to increase the earnings of the line'.

Biggar's draft went to the Local Committees, for 'consideration, amendment, and report', following which the memorial would be adopted at a meeting of the General Committee. So compelling did the Executive believe its case to be, that it wanted the scheme 'brought before the Government as speedily as possible, especially while Parliament is in Session, and before the Estimates have been prepared'. Optimism was escorted by action. The Executive had appointed a Sydney Committee of five, including John Stewart, Member for Kiama, Thomas Hale, and John Graham, proprietor of the American Creek kerosene works, to smooth the way for the presentation of the memorial to the Government.

The memorial was adopted by mid October and was now addressed to the head of the Government instead of the Minister for Public Works. The deputation to the Premier was planned with care. It was not considered wise to confront him with a group of self interested local businessmen and farmers; the scope of the self interest represented had to be wider. Hence, in addition to two representatives from each Local Committee, Biggar had the General Committee include Robert Owen, Sir William Manning and Thomas Holt, all Members of the Legislative Council and, of course, directly interested in the railway. The three local Members of the Legislative Assembly were also to be present: William Forster (Illawarra), John Stewart (Kiama) and James Warden (Shoalhaven), as well as a group of interested Sydney investors: George Allen (Member for the Glebe, near the proposed Balmain terminus, Chairman of the Bulli Coal Company and director of several others), Thomas Mort (major shareholder in the extensive Mort's Dock and Engineering Company of Balmain), James Manning, Alexander Stuart, Thomas Hale and John Watt (former Member of the Legislative Council, pastoralist, and director of a number of Sydney companies).

Premier Parkes met the deputation without delay. On 31 October, Sir William Manning tendered him the memorial, signed by over 2000 'proprietors of land and residents of the

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94 Memorial, quoted in ibid.
95 ibid.
97 Illawarra Mercury, 14 October 1873. Other details from Connelly, op.cit.
district of Illawarra',\(^98\) requesting the government to build a railway from Sydney to the Shoalhaven. Parkes' Minister for Public Works, John Sutherland, was also present, as were a number of others who had attached themselves to the deputation: John Lucas (Member for Canterbury, a southern Sydney suburb, and Wollongong coal land owner), Edward Greville (Member for Braidwood, a gold mining area about 60 miles south west of the Shoalhaven River) and John Booth (Member for West Sydney, with shipbuilding and sawmill interests in Balmain). The remainder of the deputation consisted of representatives of the Local Committees, including, from the Wollongong district, John Biggar, Archibald Campbell, Francis MacCabe and Henry Osborne junior.\(^99\)

Sir William's case was principally that continuing economic buoyancy had stimulated the development of the agricultural, pastoral and mineral resources of the Wollongong, Kiama and Shoalhaven districts. The harbours at those places, he told Parkes, could not cope with even the existing level of trade. This was particularly the case with coal, 'which seemed to be the principal and good ground why a railway was desirable . . .—(hear, hear)'. All of Sydney would benefit, he continued. An assured and cheap supply of coal would ensure that 'our metropolis would have greater advantages as a commercial emporium than all the other colonies of the [Australian] group. (Hear, hear.)' This was a central argument. It was not enough to ask the Ministry to take to Parliament a scheme designed to enrich provincial businessmen and farmers, and a small group of Sydney capitalists, at public expense. The potential benefits had to be seen to be more widely spread, thus building a coalition capable of getting the scheme through the Parliament. The composition of the deputation itself indicated that this was beginning to happen.

Thus, Manning offered to the Premier and his Minister the expansion of Sydney's manufacturing industries through the availability of cheaper coal, plus cheaper agricultural and pastoral products to fill the stomachs of a growing metropolitan population. The appropriate Sydney terminus, Manning informed Parkes, was at North Balmain, opposite Cockatoo Island. Here, he said, the loading of very large quantities of coal would not interfere with general

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\(^{98}\) Memorial, quoted in *Illawarra Mercury*, 14 October 1873.

\(^{99}\) Members of deputation from *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 November 1873. Other details from Connolly, *op.cit.*
shipping; Circular Quay and Darling Harbour, which had been mentioned as terminuses, were not to be considered for that reason.  

Thomas Mort agreed. His engineering company had secured a contract from the government to build locomotives at its Balmain works. As one of Sydney’s big manufacturers, his appeal blended self interest, a concern for ‘the prosperity of the city’ and the better defence of that prosperity against foreign aggression:

The price of coal had a most material bearing upon all manufacturing industries, and they knew that well . . . They knew also, that in this city a very large advance had taken place in many things in consequence of the advance in the price of coal. He might mention that an instance occurred recently in reference to the purchase of a quantity of drain pipes. He found that the price had increased no less than 25 per cent., and the reason given was, that the price of coal had advanced so much that the manufacturer had to increase the price of his wares. He knew that in the case of his large docking establishment this was a very serious item . . . It had an important bearing on the industries of Sydney, which must be fostered, and if they wanted to introduce the sinews of war, they must adopt the best means of bringing coal to the metropolis, at the cheapest rate it could be brought. He believed it could not be brought at a cheaper rate than by railway.

Thomas Holt, who hoped that his Sutherland Estate would yet yield coal, was similarly direct. The entire Port Hacking-Shoalhaven region, he claimed, was ‘an inexhaustible coal-field’, and on that basis alone a railway was justified: ‘Agricultural and dairy produce were all very well . . . but the coal-fields . . . were the great desideratum’.

In reply Parkes was cautious but sympathetic. He asked Samuel Charles, a Kiama dairy farmer and quarry owner who had been involved in the export of coal to the United States in 1849, whether it was true that the coal seams extended as far south as the Shoalhaven. Charles confirmed that they did; he had, with the late Dr. A.M. Thomson, Reader in Geology at Sydney University, examined the mountains around Jamberoo and found workable seams.

The Premier made no commitment to the railway, but as the memorial appeared to represent the wishes of the people of the southern districts, and ‘on account of the large body of gentlemen which it evidently represented’, he felt that the proposal was ‘deserving of every

100 Manning’s remarks quoted in Sydney Morning Herald, 1 November 1873.
101 Barnard, op.cit., p.123.
102 Quoted in Sydney Morning Herald, 1 November 1873.
103 Quoted in ibid.
104 Connolly, op.cit., and Morrison, op.cit. (‘Appendix: Biographical Sketches’— Sydney).
consideration'. The 'Illawarra districts,' he agreed, 'were, in comparison with other parts of the colony, very prosperous, and they were rich to that extent that they would bear comparison with any other part of the colony'. Further, he had no doubt about the positive consequences of the railway for both the southern districts and Sydney.

Nonetheless, he reminded his petitioners, Parliament was the key, and it was assailed daily with requests from equally eminent deputations to support public works proposals all over the Colony: 'The Government could not overwhelm itself with public works all at once'. Parkes' concluding remarks, though, gave Biggar and the deputation he had assembled what they wanted:

he thought he might, on behalf of his colleagues say this—that the Government would comply so far with the wishes of the memorialists as to cause the necessary examination of the country and the necessary surveys to be made. (Hear, hear.) They could not for a moment deny the importance of the district, and he did not desire, even if he were able to do so, to controvert the arguments that had been used... If the Government could see their way clear to enter upon the work, if they felt themselves justified in entering upon a work of this magnitude, nothing would delight them more than to afford these additional facilities for the development of the rich mineral wealth of the district, the increase of the population, and its general prosperity.106

Wollongong's businessmen were delighted. Although the Premier had made no promises about taking their railway to the Parliament, he had committed his Ministry to a trial survey of the proposed route. The Illawarra Railway was on the political agenda. The point was to keep it there, firm the Ministry's resolve and have it placed on the Loan Estimates. The Mercury, while jubilant, remained realistic. It urged the Local Committees to remain active, and gave most credit for the outcome to 'the many and influential residents of Sydney who joined the deputation'.107 It was the latter who counted, for once the Ministry asked Parliament to approve public funding of the railway there was sure to be countervailing pressure from the powerful Newcastle coal interests who would portray it as a public extravagance.

The early indications, though, were good. The Sydney Morning Herald echoed Parkes' cautious approval, but found the 'increasing interest' in the Illawarra Railway 'an agreeable fact'. While noting that the influence of the Newcastle proprietors would ensure 'a useful check to any hasty conclusions' by the Parliament, the Herald nevertheless looked to:

106 Quoted in Sydney Morning Herald, 1 November 1873.
107 Illawarra Mercury, 7 November 1873.
the advantages which are so obvious in the establishment of coal mining not far from the metropolis, and of an immediate discharge of coal into the vessels which are to convey it away ... The crowded harbour of Newcastle which has been fatal to so many ships and men will be relieved, the miners will be established in other centres, and thus the evil of a vast and unmanageable population will be averted. The peril of ceaseless strikes will be diminished ... 

In terms of developing the Colony’s coal resources, continued the Herald, ‘It is a great blunder to suppose that we have reached a maximum ... and ... a future generation will laugh at the idea of preventing abundance by monopoly’.

The Premier’s promise to authorise a trial survey of the line was fulfilled speedily. So much so that the Government pre-empted the Member for Illawarra, William Forster, who had intimated in early October that he would move in the House that the government should survey a number of railway routes for the future development of the colony. Before Forster could so move, however, the Parkes Government made available a surveyor, R.D. Stephens, from the Railways Branch of the Department of Public Works, to accompany James Manning on a preliminary exploration of the Illawarra route. Manning and Stephens began their work at the Sydney end, commencing on 18 November from the North Balmain terminus, in the company of Thomas Mort.

The team arrived in Wollongong before the end of the month, and Manning spoke ‘very encouragingly’ of the route they had traversed. Here, Manning and Stephens parted company; the surveyor was to continue to the Shoalhaven, alone. On 9 December, Forster took up with the Parliament the matter of official trial surveys. John Sutherland, the Minister for Public Works, informed Forster that a survey of the Sydney-Wollongong line was ‘in hand’; indeed, the Minister observed that:

he should be glad if it were found that he could construct a line to develop the rich coal, iron, and other mineral deposits of that part of the colony.

Forster’s motion was an intelligent ploy. His list of 11 proposals for trial surveys, throughout the Colony, included one for Newcastle as well as for Shoalhaven to Sydney.

108 Sydney Morning Herald. 15 December 1873.
109 Illawarra Mercury. 15 December 1873.
110 Manning, ‘Our Coal and Coal Ports’, op.cit., pp.125-34 (paper presented to Royal Society, 10 December 1873), and Sydney Morning Herald. 11 December 1873.
111 Illawarra Mercury, 28 November 1873.
112 Quoted in Sydney Morning Herald, 10 December 1873.
There was some debate but it centred on the general principle of whether such projects should be funded from the public purse. The question was put and passed without incident.\(^{113}\) The momentum in favour of the Illawarra Railway continued with the announcement, in January 1874, by surveyor Stephens that a detailed survey of the line would be available before the end of the year.\(^{114}\)

The crowning step in the Ministry's conversion to the Illawarra Railway was made by the Premier during a visit to Wollongong on 20 February 1874. Parkes, who had opposed the 1860 vote for Wollongong Harbour and who had shown no interest at all in the railway scheme when first announced in September 1872, had quite fallen in love with the district and the railway:

To his mind it appeared most desirable that this beautiful and rich district, with its great mineral resources, should be connected with the metropolis by a line of railway. They must bear in mind, however, that it would require time to ascertain the necessary facts regarding the practicability of making such a line, but it was quite evident that the formation of such railway would only be a matter of time, and they should bear in mind that such an admission on the part of a Minister of the Crown was saying a great deal.\(^{115}\)

Indeed it was, and events moved quickly.

In May the government reserved 23 square miles of Crown Land in the Port Hacking-Bulgo area, for railway purposes.\(^{116}\) By late June, John Whitton, the Engineer-in-Chief for Railways, reported that about 24 miles of the Illawarra line had been surveyed. The surveyor, however, had not found the going quite as easy as had the optimistic Manning, the former's progress impeded by the winter weather and the 'difficult nature of the country'.\(^{117}\) By the end of September, only another six miles had been added to the plan.\(^{118}\)

The political landscape was proving gentler. By any reckoning, the Illawarra Railway should have foundered. Parkes had been no friend to Wollongong, and Ministries were constantly besieged by eminent deputations. He was under no obligation to order a trial survey


\(^{114}\) Illawarra Mercury, 2 January 1874.

\(^{115}\) Quoted in ibid., 24 February 1874.


\(^{117}\) Railways. (Trial Surveys). In Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly, Session 1873-4, Vol.3.

of the Illawarra line, and could easily have stalled the scheme. However, by the time that the
deputation of 31 October 1873 arrived at his office, Parkes' Ministry was not a disinterested
body. It too had been infected with the speculative fever engendered by the boom of the early
1870s.

Since September 1873, Parkes and his Minister for Public Works, John Sutherland,
had been selecting mineral land at Jamberoo, to the south of the Wollongong district. On 29
September, they took up 1260 acres and on 3 October a further 980 acres; on 4 November,
only days after receiving the Illawarra Railway deputation, they selected 360 acres, completing
their holdings on 5 December with a parcel of 1160 acres, bringing the total to 3760 at an
annual rental to the Crown of five shillings an acre.119

From mid 1874, Parkes and Sutherland took a close interest in the development of their
property, which actually totalled 4168 acres (3760 acres of mineral leases and 408 acres of
mineral conditional purchases). The two Ministers had the government Examiner of Coal
Fields, John Mackenzie, assess its commercial potential. With the permission of the Minister
for Mines, Mackenzie made two inspections, on 24 August 1874 and on 11 January 1875. He
was enthusiastic. In his final report he told the Premier and the Minister for Public Works that:

I consider you are in possession of a valuable mineral property, containing
very thick and extensive seams of coal, suitable for all the different purposes
of commerce, lying very flat, with excellent roofs and floors, and which can
be easily and cheaply worked and drained by adits driven into the hill-side.

Mackenzie noted that there were also deposits of iron ore and limestone in the area, making it a
potential site for a smelting works.

As to the shipping of the coal, and perhaps iron, Mackenzie offered two options: the
small port at Kiama, about eight miles north east of the property, or the untouched Jervis Bay,
about 20 miles to the south. With an anchorage of over 30 square miles, he said, Jervis Bay
was 'acknowledged to be one of the safest, most commodious and accessible harbours of
refuge in the world'. As compared with Newcastle, it would cut 320 miles from the round trip
to Melbourne.120 Mackenzie left the choice to Parkes and Sutherland. If the Illawarra Railway

went to the Shoalhaven River, they had the option of building short private lines from their mine to either Kiama Harbour, or to the Illawarra Railway which would take their coal to Sydney Harbour. Alternatively, they could run a private line to Jervis Bay, from the Railway’s southern terminus at the Shoalhaven River, a distance of 12 miles. The last would involve greater expense in laying the line and on dock works at the Bay, but the boom in the coal trade might well bring them partners with the necessary capital. It was a pleasant quandary.

The Illawarra Railway had several friends who were former or current members of Parkes’ Ministry. William Piddington, Colonial Treasurer from May to December 1872, was a partner with George Allen, Minister for Justice and Public Instruction from December 1873, in the North Bulli Coal Company. Together with John Hay, the President of the Legislative Council, company director and pastoralist, they had been attempting since 1869 to lay hold of land in the northern Wollongong district which had been reserved for water catchment, to add to their existing holdings. They reopened the case in July 1873, as the coal boom and the campaign for the Illawarra Railway were both taking off.

From early 1874, Allen and Hay were involved with Jacob Montefiore in another partnership to commence mining in the northern part of the district. Montefiore was a personal friend of the Premier, and one of the biggest capitalists in the Colony, with interests in almost every available field of investment. Allen had taken a particular interest in the Wollongong coalfield, apart from his chairmanship of the board of the Bulli Coal Company. By August 1874, he was active at the southern end of the district, where he had bought a large share in John Graham’s Pioneer Kerosene Works. As Graham put it, the idea was to ‘form a Coal Company upon a substantial basis’. Also involved was Ebenezer Vickery, another Sydney capitalist with interests as wide as those of Montefiore. Obviously, George Allen did not fear the arrival of new competitors for Bulli in the Wollongong coal trade, particularly if he owned them.

121 Connolly, op.cit.  
123 ibid., p.5.  
124 Connolly, op.cit.  
125 Illawarra Mercury, 18 August 1874.  
126 Connolly, op.cit.
In the midst of this activity, the railway survey team inched its way toward Wollongong. At the same time, the Colony moved closer to the general election due at the end of 1874. This offered Wollongong’s businessmen an opportunity to cement their new relationship with the Ministry. Faction politics remained an uncertain business. Parkes could count on only 21 of the 72 Members of the Legislative Assembly as constant supporters\(^{127}\) his Government losing about 20 per cent. of divisions in the House during its time in office.\(^ {128}\) Any new supporters emerging from the general election would be welcome.

By now, of course, Wollongong’s businessmen had a particular interest in the return of the Parkes Ministry. The Illawarra Railway was the all consuming issue in local politics, and anything that local businessmen could contribute to a Parkes victory in the coming election would not retard the continued good fortune of their railway plans. Of course, Henry Parkes himself was not averse to buying a little political support.

Wollongong’s businessmen played the first card. On 20 October 1874, a meeting of the Railway General Committee, attended by representatives from the Wollongong district only, adopted a memorial asking the Ministry to place on the next Estimates a sum for the Balmain-Wollongong section of the line. This was pre-emptive to say the least. The survey had, as the memorial itself pointed out, only just reached ‘the outcrop of the Illawarra coal-field’. However, there was an election in the air. The memorial was to be signed by all members of the Local Committees and taken to Parkes by a deputation led by Robert Owen, Thomas Holt, the three southern district Members, Henry Clarke (Member for the far south coast seat of Eden), and representatives of the Local Committees.\(^ {129}\) Although the memorial asked only for the Wollongong section of the line, it was important to retain the involvement and support of the other districts and their Members for the Parliamentary battle that lay ahead. As the *Illawarra Mercury* had encouragingly pointed out:


\(^{129}\) *Illawarra Mercury,* 23 October 1874.
There can be little doubt . . . that several other mines will be opened throughout this and the Kiama and Shoalhaven end of the district as soon as it will be possible to push the railway along in that direction.\textsuperscript{130}

The deputation, comprising 'about thirty gentlemen engaged in commercial and other important undertakings in Sydney and the coast districts',\textsuperscript{131} saw the Premier on 6 November. James Warden, Member for Shoalhaven, urged him to take the Illawarra Railway beyond the Shoalhaven district, to Jervis Bay, thus linking the mineral and agricultural resources of the southern districts with 'two great ports of shipment'.\textsuperscript{132} Parkes seems to have already considered this option. On 13 November he would select, after auction, 45 acres of mineral land at Jervis Bay; three days later he added another 151 acres.\textsuperscript{133}

Despite his clear identity of interest with the deputation, Parkes' response was reserved. This was not unreasonable. His Cabinet was finalising the 1875 Estimates, to be presented to the House within weeks. Even in nineteenth century New South Wales politics there were limits on how far private business could be seen to overlap with public duty. No decision, he stated, had yet been taken as to the precise route that the line should follow. In addition, said Parkes, there were 'collateral questions' and 'preliminary considerations' to be taken into account before any Estimate for the work could be settled upon.\textsuperscript{134}

Hence, when the Loan Estimates were tabled on 19 November, the Illawarra Railway was not among them. However, although not ready for inclusion in the final Estimates, a draft estimate for £300,000 signed by the Treasurer, George Lloyd, had been prepared.\textsuperscript{135} There seemed, therefore, little doubt that the line's promoters would, see their proposal placed before the Parliament.

Whether the Parkes Ministry would introduce and defend the item in the House remained to be seen. On 28 November the seventh Parliament was dissolved, and the Illawarra

\textsuperscript{130} ibid., 13 October 1874.
\textsuperscript{131} Empire, 7 November 1874.
\textsuperscript{132} Quoted in ibid.
\textsuperscript{133} Lands Taken Up By Ministers of the Crown. (Particulars of.), p.1. In Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly, Session 1875-6, Vol.3.
\textsuperscript{134} Empire, 7 November 1874.
\textsuperscript{135} Lloyd did not mention the railway in his Financial Statement. See 'The Financial Statement of the Honorable George Alfred Lloyd, made 19th November, 1874'. In The Financial Statements of the Colonial Treasurers of New South Wales, From the introduction of Responsible Government, on the 24th November, 1855, to the close of the Parliamentary Session of 1891-92, on 1st April, 1892. Vol.1. Government Printer: Sydney 1892, pp.291-303. The draft estimate was mentioned by the Premier, John Robertson. See 'The Financial Statement of the Honorable John Robertson, Colonial Secretary, acting for the Colonial Treasurer, made 8th December, 1875'. In ibid., p.237.
Railway was subsumed within the ensuing general election. For John Biggar and his associates, of course, it was the issue. They had made clear their desire that 'the snort of the 'iron horse' shall be heard from Sydney to Shoalhaven'. Biggar threw himself into the election, on behalf of the Parkes Ministry, which he believed to be the Railway's best guarantee. He was recruited by Parkes himself, anxious to secure the return of Members who would support him in the House. Despite his clear interest in the Railway, Parkes wanted a political favour from Wollongong's businessmen—the removal of William Forster as the Member for Illawarra. Parkes' chosen agent for this purpose was John Biggar.

Forster, Premier in 1859/60, when he had reduced the vote for Wollongong Harbour, had been the district's Member since the general election of February 1872. Since then he had been official Leader of the Opposition and for a time was the contender who might have beaten Parkes for the Premiership. He had replaced James Osborne in the Illawarra seat, Osborne having invited him to contest it. Like the Osbornes, Forster was a conservative and a squatter, with runs throughout eastern Australia. The recession of the late 1860s and early 1870s had sapped the economic expectations and political will of Wollongong's businessmen, allowing Osborne and then Forster, whose campaign was organised by Osborne, to defeat local business candidates.

By December 1874, conditions had changed. The boom in the New South Wales coal trade was continuing unabated, the Examiner of Coal Fields reporting that it 'has never been in such a prosperous condition as it is at the present time'. Consequently, Wollongong's businessmen had recovered their sense of purpose, throwing themselves into the railway campaign and attracting support from government and capital in Sydney.

Local disquiet about Forster was evident in February 1874, when Premier Parkes visited Wollongong to all but promise the Illawarra Railway. Forster was not invited to the

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136 Illawarra Mercury, 13 October 1874.
137 Loveday & Martin, op.cit., p.54.
138 Illawarra Mercury, 9 December 1872.
139 Connolly, op.cit.
140 Illawarra Mercury, 16 February 1872. Forster's campaign speech.
141 In December 1869, James Osborne defeated Andrew Lysaght, a local publican, by 575 votes to 396: Illawarra Mercury, 17 December 1869. In 1872 Forster collected 363 votes to 328 for John Brown, a Wollongong builder, joiner, undertaker, etc. (ibid., 2 January 1872), and 203 for Andrew Lysaght: ibid., 1 March 1872.
function given in the Premier's honour,\textsuperscript{143} and George Hewlett criticised him for being 'always in opposition to Mr. Parkes' Government'.\textsuperscript{144} By early December, the \textit{Illawarra Mercury} had decided that Forster must go. He had proved himself an effective debater and an able local Member, except on 'one all-important matter':

the projected Metropolitan and Illawarra Railway. From the commencement of that movement to the present, Mr FORSTER gave it little or no support in any way—a fact which could not be other than detrimental to the project, and would continue to be so long as Mr FORSTER might occupy the position of member for Illawarra, and act, or rather refrain from acting, in the matter as he had done ... we cannot but remember that he expressed himself somewhat averse to railways being constructed at public expense when he first addressed the electors here ... we have come to the conclusion that it is desirable ... that Mr FORSTER's connection with this district as her representative should cease.\textsuperscript{145}

Forster had co-operated with the railway movement. His crime was to be politically opposed to a Premier who had all but promised to meet its demands.

Parkes saw an opportunity and wrote to John Biggar, requesting his assistance in returning a politically friendly candidate for Illawarra.\textsuperscript{146} Biggar seized the chance to cement the relationship he was being offered by the Premier. He informed Parkes that Samuel Gray would be a suitable candidate to represent their mutual interests. Gray was in tune with Parkes' liberal attitudes and policies on matters such as education, and was an enthusiastic supporter of the Illawarra Railway.\textsuperscript{147} He had every reason to be. In the 1850s he had settled in Kiama, as a farmer and grazier, from where he 'invested largely' in mineral and freehold properties in New South Wales and Queensland.\textsuperscript{148} He had entered politics in 1859 as the Member for Kiama, holding the seat until his resignation in April 1864.

Biggar told Parkes that he had had several 'private interviews' with Gray, who had proved amenable to their common object. Consequently, Gray would be 'invited' to stand for Illawarra. Biggar had no doubt that his man would win. Gray, he said, 'will combine the leading members of the Railway, School League, & Orange bodies in the Electorate as his

\textsuperscript{143} \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}, 24 February 1874.
\textsuperscript{144} Quoted in \textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 24 February 1874.
\textsuperscript{145} \textit{ibid.}, 8 December 1874.
\textsuperscript{146} John Biggar to Henry Parkes, 4 December 1874. Sir Henry Parkes Correspondence, Vol.4. Mitchell Library A874: 'Yours of yesterday is received in the spirit of confidence intimated and you are right in supposing I am friendly to your Government'.
\textsuperscript{147} \textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 4 & 8 December 1874.
strong supporters and his return is nearly sure’. Forster, he asserted, ‘has dropped out of every ones [sic.] thoughts in our Electorate’. Biggar felt so secure that he cautioned Parkes not to renege on their understanding. On 15 December he told the Premier that Gray would give ‘effective support while you keep to the policy that the public have a good right to look for from you’, and, more pointedly, one week later: ‘I consider that Gray will give you effective support—it will be your own fault if he does not’.

While oiling the political machinery that would consolidate his relationship with leading figures in Sydney, Biggar had not forgotten what it was all for. In November 1874 he secured a 50 acre mineral selection in the Parish of Kembla, at the southern end of the Wollongong coalfield.

On 28 December 1874, Samuel Gray won Illawarra, by 504 votes to 384, defeating a local publican, Andrew Lysaght. On one level it was to no avail. Parkes lost the election. On another, it did not matter. The coal rush of the early 1870s had ensured that both major factions in Colonial politics contained Members friendly to the Metropolitan and Illawarra Railway.

The new Premier, John Robertson, was a partner with Alexander Stuart in coal properties on the northern edge of the Wollongong district, having selected 1100 acres at Port Hacking in December 1873. Stuart had been elected to the seat of East Sydney, and in February 1876 would enter the Ministry as Colonial Treasurer. John Lucas, the Minister for Mines, seems to have had an interest in the Wollongong coalfield, other than Ministerial. Within the Parliament itself, there were Members who would see that the Illawarra Railway would stay on the agenda. For instance, George Lloyd, Member for The Bogan and Treasurer

149 John Biggar to Henry Parkes, op.cit.
150 ibid., 15 December 1874.
151 ibid., 22 December 1874.
152 Illawarra Mercury, 1 December 1874.
153 ibid., 29 December 1874.
155 Annual Report of the Department of Mines, New South Wales, 1875, p.122; among mineral and fossil specimens donated to the Department ‘from private sources’ were some ‘Lower Marine Coal Measures Fossils from Wollongong’, donated by John Lucas, Minister for Mines.
in the 1870-1872 Martin Ministry, held mineral leases of 2120 acres in the Illawarra region, acquired in August 1873.156

The railway survey team finally arrived in Wollongong in early February 1875,157 a week or so before John Robertson was sworn in as Premier. The cost of the first stage of the line, Balmain to Wollongong, was estimated by the surveyor at £628,000—£14,000 a mile for 47 miles of railway.158 The railway's supporters now had to get the Ministry to place this amount on the Loan Estimates.

In March the Railway General Committee adopted a memorial urging the Premier to 'at once' place the scheme before Parliament and to push the trial survey on to the Shoalhaven.159 On 12 March Robertson and his Minister for Public Works, John Lackey, met 'a large and influential deputation' which included Thomas Holt, Robert Owen, Alexander Stuart, Thomas Mort and John Biggar. It reflected a growing circle of support, evidenced by the presence of the Mayor of Sydney; John Davies, Member for East Sydney; Richard Hill, Member for Canterbury; Stephen Goold, Member for Mudgee, and the Reverend Dr. John Lang,160 a veteran of Colonial politics who had taken a leading role in many public issues.

Biggar took Robertson and Lackey through the points in the memorial, a recycled version of that prepared for Parkes. The only new perspective was provided by John Watt, prominent Sydney businessman and Member of the Legislative Council, who believed that the Illawarra Railway 'was essential to the welfare and safety of the inhabitants of the city'. He cited the most recent set of vital statistics, upon reading which:

He had been struck with horror to find that . . . Sydney was a more unhealthy city than any in the crowded area of the United Kingdom . . . The proportion of deaths in Sydney was 29 to the thousand; the mean proportion of the British towns was 22 to the thousand. It was perfectly scandalous . . .

Greater availability of fresh milk from the southern districts and increased settlement there, possible only with the railway, were the solutions, claimed Watt.

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157 Illawarra Mercury, 9 December 1875.
159 Illawarra Mercury, 5 March 1875.
160 Sydney Morning Herald, 13 March 1875.
Robertson and Lackey needed little convincing. Lackey concluded the interview by expressing his ‘hope that the Government would see their way clear to place a sum of money on the Estimates for the construction of the line’.\(^{161}\) This was a positive response but it was not definite. The Government was stalling until surveys of two other routes were completed. These would have connected Wollongong with the Great Southern line at Liverpool, 16 miles west of Sydney, or at Campbelltown, 30 miles south west of Sydney. Begun in April/May 1875 and completed in October, they remained paper plans, apparently owing to the very rough country and consequent high cost of construction.\(^{162}\) These surveys had been forced from the Government by commercial interests in those centres, which also wished to benefit from the expansion that would occur in the Wollongong coal trade if it was linked to Sydney by rail. The *Illawarra Mercury* would have none of them, and demanded that the Ministry act on the original scheme. If not, its proprietors threatened darkly, Robertson would have to ‘submit to the consequence—loss of office’.\(^{163}\) These were confident men.

Parliament went into recess on 11 August, during which the Railway Committee pressed the Government for a firm answer on the Estimates. Lackey met another deputation on 8 October, and was presented with yet another memorial. The usual crowd of familiar faces was present. Sydney’s Mayor, Benjamin Palmer, was again in attendance, accompanied by the Mayor of Newtown, one of the suburbs through which the railway would pass. As evidence of the increasing concern with Sydney’s public health, the City Building Surveyor and the Inspector of Nuisances added their weight to the deputation. Other new faces were Charles Campbell, a Member of the Legislative Council; John Macintosh, Member for East Sydney and owner of a large ironmongers store and warehouses in the city, and Angus Cameron, Member for West Sydney and Parliamentary representative of the New South Wales Trades and Labour Council.\(^{164}\) The Minister made no promises, but did give the deputation a personal commitment that he would argue their case in Cabinet:

> He believed, in common with the deputation, that the growing importance of the district of Illawarra rendered the construction of a railway necessary; and

\(^{161}\) Quoted in *ibid*.

\(^{162}\) The surveyors’ reports are in *Railway Trial Surveys. (Minutes, Reports, etc.)*, pp.39-42. In *Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly, Session 1875-6, Vol.4*.

\(^{163}\) *Illawarra Mercury*, 5 April 1875.

\(^{164}\) Biographical details from Connolly, *op.cit*.
he would take every means to secure the concurrence of his colleagues, and of the Parliament, to the construction of the line. (Cheers.) He did not think there would be any difficulty in getting the consent of his colleagues...

The campaign for the Illawarra Railway was progressing steadily. It was attracting allies at every turn. Indeed, it had gripped the attention of the vice regal representative himself. On 5 October 1875, the Governor of New South Wales, Sir Hercules Robinson, arrived in Wollongong with his family, for a stay of a few days. Ostensibly, they were there to pay a ‘private visit’ on Francis MacCabe and Henry Osborne junior.  

In fact, the Governor was in Wollongong as the agent of a group of Sydney investors and politicians who planned to open a coal mine in the district. His visit coincided with efforts by Henry Osborne’s sons to develop the 2432 acres of coal lands north of Wollongong left to them in his will. Unfortunately, the will restricted the heirs to offering leases of only 21 years. To investors making substantial outlays on buildings and machinery, 21 year leases were not attractive. Thus, the Osbomes had, since September 1874, been trying to alter the terms of the will, to extend the leasehold term to 60 years.

The syndicate of which the Governor was a part, intended to raise £12,500 in 25 shares of £500 each, to start the undertaking. On 14 October, a meeting of members of ‘the Association’ was held in the office of John Frazer, a Member of the Legislative Council, mining investor, company director and pastoralist. There, Sir Saul Samuel, Representative of the Government in the Legislative Council, Vice President of the Executive Council, Postmaster General, mining investor, company director and pastoralist, ‘read a paper which he had received from Sir Hercules Robinson, embodying the result of his observations during his recent trip to Illawarra’. Sir Hercules advised his colleagues to obtain the services of a mining expert to ‘visit and report on the property’ before making a decision. The meeting then turned to the matter of who could be approached ‘to fill up the number of members of the Association’. Of the 25 shares available, 19 had been taken up:

165 Quoted in Sydney Morning Herald, 9 October 1875.
166 Illawarra Mercury, 5 October 1875.
167 Calculated from Schedule to An Act to enable the Trustees of the will of Henry Osborne deceased to grant building and mining leases for ninety-nine years. 45 Vic.Private Act.
168 Illawarra Mercury, 11 September 1874.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shareholders</th>
<th>Shares</th>
<th>Value</th>
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<tr>
<td>'The proprietors' (presumably the five Osbornes)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>£2500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sir Hercules Robinson</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>£2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sir Saul Samuel</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>£1000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leopold de Salis</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>£1000</td>
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<td>James White</td>
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<td>Randolph Want</td>
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<td>£1000</td>
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<td>John Frazer</td>
<td>2</td>
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De Salis and White were Legislative Councillors, and Want was a former Council Member, and a solicitor and company director. Frazer believed that Edward Cox, a Member of the Council, pastoralist and stud farmer, and H.H. Dangar of the Dangar mining-pastoral empire in New South Wales, might be persuaded to take four of the remaining shares. Also mentioned in connection with the scheme were Henry Parkes and John Sutherland. Parkes himself had been briefed on the matter by Sir Hercules, on the morning of 14 October.169

The proposed mining company did not eventuate, owing to the leasehold restrictions imposed by Henry Osborne's will, which were not altered until 1881.170 However, as of late 1875, the Governor of New South Wales and an assortment of politicians and businessmen believed that that obstacle might be overcome, and had an interest in the Sydney-Wollongong railway. Given, then, that the Premier, John Robertson, was also a holder of coal lands to the north of Wollongong, it was not altogether surprising that in the Loan Estimates tabled in the Assembly on 1 December 1875, there should appear the sum of £740,000 for 49 miles of railway to link Sydney and Wollongong.

In all, the Government proposed to raise £3,300,000 in loans for public works; £2,909,000 was earmarked for railways, over a quarter of which was for the Sydney-

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169 This account of 'the Association' is based on John Frazer to Henry Parkes, 14 October 1875. Sir Henry Parkes Correspondence, Vol.52. Mitchell Library A922. Biographical details from Connolly, *op.cit.*

Wollongong line. The Premier delivered his Ministry's Financial Statement to the House on 8 December. Coming to the £740,000 for the railway to Wollongong, he observed that it was 'a very large sum'. Nonetheless, said Robertson, 'I think we can defend it', to which George Dibbs, Member for West Sydney and a Newcastle businessman, retorted, 'You will make a job!'

Although the vote on the Estimates would not be taken until later in the session, the reaction to the Illawarra Railway was beginning to gather force. In early December, John Biggar was combating allegations in the Sydney press, from Newcastle, that the railway would never repay the public debt incurred for it, and the contradictory argument that Wollongong's businessmen were seeking the ruin of the Newcastle coal trade. In Wollongong, of course, there was undisguised delight that the Wollongong section of the Illawarra Railway was on the Estimates, and now had only to go through the seeming formality of a Parliamentary vote. The scheme, said the Illawarra Mercury, 'is likely to become an accomplished fact'. With both major faction leaders, Parkes and Robertson, and some of their colleagues having a personal interest in the matter, there seemed little cause for concern about the bleatings from Newcastle. The Mercury dismissed the anti Illawarra Railway campaign as the 'ire of monopolists' and 'sordid selfishness'; it warned the 'Newcastle special pleaders' that they would enjoy no success, 'however determined may be their resistance or selfish their objects'.

The opposition that threatened the march of the Illawarra Railway movement came from a totally unexpected quarter—Henry Parkes. On 22 December 1875 Robertson moved that the House go into Committee of Ways and Means to debate the details of the Government's financial proposals. Parkes rose immediately to move as an amendment that the House 'specially disapproves' of the items for the extension of the Great Southern Railway from Junee to the Murrumbidgee River at Narrandera (£384,000) and of the Sydney-Wollongong

172 Connolly, op.cit.
174 Biggar's letter of 4 December, in Sydney Morning Herald, 7 December 1875.
175 Illawarra Mercury, 10 December 1875.
176 Ibid.
The two railways, Parkes believed, would overburden an already too large public debt. On the Sydney-Wollongong proposal, he stated that:

after the most mature consideration he could give that project, he could hardly find language sufficiently strong to express his dissent.  

Although he still considered the Wollongong district to be one of great beauty, he now believed that it was:

never likely to be inhabited by a population much thicker than the one at present settled there. The mineral wealth of the district was pretty well confined to coal and some iron ore, and there were available means for the development of these mines, and for the shipment of coal or iron without constructing a railway to bring it to Port Jackson. (Hear, hear.) There was a port at Wollongong, and a port at Kiama, on both of which the country had expended very large sums of money . . . and it was known that the Bulli Company managed to ship all the coal they raised . . . without any complaint on their part regarding the roadstead adjacent to their mines.  

The Illawarra Railway, Parkes told the House, was 'an unnecessary and wasteful expenditure', and it was his 'duty' to the Colony to oppose it.

Robertson was stunned. As he reminded the House, Parkes in Government had done all in his power to have the line built, and had been complimentary in the extreme about the beauty and the economic potential of the Wollongong district:

Let any one [sic.] read the hon. member's speech to the deputation [of 31 October 1874] — read his description of the magnificence of that part of the country, of the industry of the people, the intelligence of the men, and the beauty of the women. (Laughter.)

Wollongong's businessmen were appalled by Parkes' apostasy. The Mercury registered their outrage:

Never during the whole of his tortuous political career has Mr. PARKES displayed the cloven hoof so unmistakably as on the present occasion in connection with the Metropolitan and Illawarra Railway. His conduct with regard to that project . . . will not only out Judas Judas, but out Parkes Parkes. And this, be it remembered, is saying a great deal, as [it] is notoriously well known that many of the previous public acts of that gentleman have been such as to be difficult indeed to be surpassed even by himself as regarded their vile and traitorous tergiversation.

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177 Sydney Morning Herald, 23 December 1875.
178 Quoted in ibid.
179 Quoted in ibid.
180 ibid.
181 Quoted in ibid.
182 Illawarra Mercury, 28 December 1875.
All they could do was fume. The fate of the Sydney-Wollongong railway rested with the 72 Members of the Legislative Assembly who, following the adjournment of the debate on Parkes' amendment, dispersed for the Christmas holiday. The future of the Illawarra Railway was shaky. Parkes had demolished the bi-partisan support enjoyed by the project, and the task now for Wollongong's businessmen and their allies in Sydney and elsewhere, was to shore up public and Parliamentary support for their railway. Perhaps when that support was tested in the Assembly in 1876, Parkes would explain his conduct, which threatened to destroy, yet again, the plans of Wollongong's businessmen for the economic transformation of their district.