

1986/07. The New Town coalfield

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Abstract

The New Town coalfield was situated on the foothills of Mt Wellington in the Hobart suburb of New Town. Coal was mined for domestic purposes from a number of collieries last century. The coal was of poor quality and the seams very thin. The coal is of Triassic age. The coalfield is of no economic importance but is of some historic interest due to the early mining activity.

LOCATION AND ACCESS

Thureau (1883) described the coalfield as being located "on the north-eastern slopes of spurs or foothills descending from Mt Wellington".

This area is currently a residential district (New Town) of Hobart. All adits and shafts are now inaccessible.

GENERAL GEOLOGY

The area of the New Town coalfield has been mapped by Banks et al. (1965) and Leaman (1976) as part of much larger mapping projects. The lithic sandstone sequence in which the coal seams occur is confined to a small downthrown fault block, bounded on the east and west by faulted contacts with dolerite, and to the south and north by intrusive dolerite bodies. The coal seams occur in the lithic sandstone sequence, which forms the youngest part of the Upper Parmeener Super-Group, and are of Late Triassic age.

PREVIOUS MINING HISTORY

Coal was discovered in the New Town area in 1827 (*Hobart Town Gazette*, 12 May 1827). A second seam was discovered in 1829 (*Hobart Town Courier*, 9 March 1829). No prospecting work followed these initial discoveries and the field lay abandoned for some years. A shaft was sunk (unsuccessfully) for coal at the Cascades in 1849 (*Colonial Times*, 6 March 1829).

In 1851 the New Town coalfield was rediscovered by Z. Williams (Booth, 1962) who later figured prominently in the development of the Mersey coalfield.

In August 1851 the first coal from the area was on sale, being from the Davey mine owned by a Mr Luckman (*Hobart Town Courier*, 9 August, 1851), followed by coal from William's Triumph mine two months later (Booth, 1962). In 1852 Williams was in partnership with R. Collins and the pair were accused of mining outside the boundaries of their lease to take coal from underneath the Queens Orphan School. They obtained permission to take this coal on payment of a royalty (Booth, 1962).

In 1852 Williams sold his interest in his Triumph mine to Collins (Booth, 1962) and moved to work in the Mersey coalfield, where after being involved in mining for a time became the publican at Ballahoo Creek, near Tarleton (Ramsay, 1958). Collins accused the owners of the neighbouring Davey mine of taking some of his coal and a government surveyor was sent to settle the issue. After Collins' death his widow sold the mine to Thomas Holden (Booth, 1962).

A shaft was sunk at the Cascades in 1865 by a Mr Newman on the property of a Mr Delgraves. The shaft was sunk from the floor of a disused quarry and apart from a few coalified plant fragments no coal was found (Wintle, 1865).

Two German miners, W. Zschachner and W. Glischki applied for a lease near the Queens Orphan School in 1872, as did Ebenezer Sims and James Stuart. Zschachner later opened a mine at Adventure Bay. Interest in the field dwindled and by 1876 only two leases were held in the area (Booth, 1962), although interest must have been renewed by 1883, when Thureau inspected a number of collieries working in the area. Thureau recorded that three mines were in operation at the time of his visit. Mr Tim Meredith's mine was worked by means of a horse whim and a shaft 60 m deep, employing five men and a whim boy; the Enterprise Coal Mining Company's mine consisted of a shaft 33 m deep from which coal was raised after being hewn from a seam 660 mm thick. Steam winding equipment was used at this mine. Ebenezer Sims' coal mine consisted of one shaft, which intersected two seams. From the upper seam, which was 760 mm thick, sixteen tons were raised per week by five miners. The Rosetta and Jarvis mines are mentioned by Thureau (1883), who stated that they were abandoned. During the 1880's a small mine was run by Dr Benjafield in the vicinity of Benjafield Terrace. Miners were brought out from Wales to operate the mine, but the venture was not a success.

A shaft was sunk in 1886 at Old Beach, just north of Mt Direction. A coal seam 600 mm thick was intersected. Johnston (1888) recorded a variety of Triassic plant fossils from shale overlying the seam.

Leases were re-marked over parts of the New Town coalfield in the 1890's. Coal was mined from the old Enterprise mine during 1910 (330 tonnes), 1911 (30 tonnes) and 1912 (25 tonnes). All previously held leases over the New Town coalfield have now expired.

COAL QUALITY

Two analyses are available from this coalfield. Both Thureau (1883) and Krause (1884) stated that the coal was of poor quality. The coal is described in Hills et al. (1922) as being "... a shaly, fissile, anthracitic variety altered by the metamorphic effects of the diabase intrusive" and was used solely as a domestic fuel. Krause (1884) described the 'coal' at New Town as follows: "... no seam of coal has been discovered at New Town. The material raised and sold as such is a carbonaceous shale".

	1	2
Moisture (%)	3.7	8.6
Ash (%)	29.3	16.8
Volatiles (%)	13.9	15.6
Fixed carbon (%)	53.1	59.0

1. sample of coal from one of the New Town collieries (Johnston, 1888).
2. sample of coal from Brock's shaft, Old Beach (Johnston, 1888).

RECENT ACTIVITY

Since the closure of the mines worked briefly last century, there has been no further mining activity in the field apart from one episode of mining at the Enterprise colliery from 1910-1912. No leases are held in the area and no further interest has been shown in the coalfield.

FUTURE POTENTIAL

The area of the New Town coalfield is now a residential district and as such is exempt from the provisions of the Mining Act 1929. The coalfield is of no economic importance.

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Figure 1. Map of New Town area, showing locations of known coal shafts.

