

EVIDENCE OF BENJAMIN GRAINGER,¹ SUPERINTENDENT OF COAL MINES
23 JANUARY, 1820.

1. How long have you been employed in superintending the coal mine at Hunter's River?

Seven years and upwards.

2. Did you acquire your knowledge of mining in England?

I did, in Staffordshire.

3. Did you sink the colliery at Hunter's River?

I did about two years and a half ago.

4. Where did you get coals before and how?

Down by the sea shore at the bottom of the cliff, by a drift made at the level of the shore, where the seam of coal appeared at the day, [i.e., when the coal seam was exposed].²

5. Is it the same seam that you are now working?

It is.

6. What is the depth of the seam?

Three foot and an inch, [hence the name, Yard Seam].

7. What is the depth of the present shaft?

Thirty seven yards.

8. Is there much water in it?

There is, but we make a dam for it, and bucket the water into the drift [mine workings] by which it is carried to the sea.

9. Is it the same seam of coal that appears on the coast?
It is.
10. Which way does it dip?
Southwest from the coast and about half a mile to the southward it appears at its old level.
11. Which way are you now working the seam?
About west in the direction of the church.
12. Do you prop up the roof as you proceed?
We do at certain distances.
13. What quantity of coal do you raise in a day?
We raise twenty tons when all hands, viz., 27 men, are employed.³
14. How much is each hewer required to do?
Each hewer gets two ton and a half.
15. Can they finish their task before evening?
They can by working hard finish it at noon and formerly they used to go home after that but for the last three or four months they remain at the pit's mouth with nothing to do.
16. Why are they not allowed to go home after they have finished their work?
For fear of plundering the houses of those who are at work.
17. The miners are allowed an extra ration?
Eight of them are who are hewers [i.e., those who

remove the coal from the seam].

18. Do you think that their healths suffer by coal mining?

I think they do on account of the wet and remaining in their wet clothes after they come up from the pit. They suffer also from want of a change of clothes.

19. How far have you worked from the bottom of the pit?

About a hundred yards in a south west direction.

20. The coals are brought in barrows to the bottom of the shaft?

They are.

21. What is the height of the drift?

Four foot and a half.

22. Is the air very confined below?

Very much unless a south wind blows. I have tried a fire at the bottom of the shaft, but it is worse.

23. Could you increase the quantity of coals that you now raise?

I could by increasing the number of men and making another shaft.

24. Where would you sink it?

At the back of the church hill where there would not be so much water, nor would the pit be so deep.⁴

25. Have you ever tried with a boring rod?

Never, we have never had one.⁵

26. Do you think that there is coal on the other neighbouring parts of the coast?

I think there is all round the coast and I have, in digging wells at Sydney, found layers of coal about forty or fifty feet down, which makes me think it is a better quality of coal than hereabout.

27. Do you think that by sinking you could procure more water than you have at present in the settlement at Hunter's River?

I think water would be found if the wells were made deeper.

28. Do you remember the time when the colonial vessels used to frequent the settlement?

Yes I do.

29. What do you think is the reason for their not coming so often now?

I think the difficulty they find in loading the vessels, formerly the miners used to assist in loading the vessels and obtained some little pay for it. Now that has ceased, although the vessels are loaded by the Town Gang, not near so many come now as formerly.⁶ A charge is made now of 2s. 6d. per ton for the loading.

30. Have you ever observed any other mineral in the workings of the colliery at Port Hunter?

Nothing but coal and iron stone.

31. Are you acquainted with the nature and value of iron stone?

I am.

32. Do you think that the iron stone that you have found here is as good as that which you remember to have seen in Staffordshire?

As good or better.

33. Are the vessels as well and as quickly loaded with coals now as they used to be?

Full as quick, if not quicker.

Benjamin Grainger's mark X.

REFERENCES

1. Bonwick transcripts, Box 1, pp. 496-500.
Benjamin Grainger, a miner from Sedgely, was sentenced at Staffordshire Assizes in July 1807 to transportation for life. He arrived in the Colony in the Anne in 1810 and was sent to Newcastle because he was a miner and not because of any offence. His work was quickly recognised by Commandant Purcell and he was paid a salary as superintendent of the coal mine from April 1813. He retained this post until his resignation because of ill health on 1 October, 1822. Macquarie had promised him a farm and he applied for land in October 1822, became a settler at Wallis' Plains and was living there in 1826. (Census of 1818; List of landholders no.5; Morisset to Goulburn, 1 October, 1822, N.S.W. Colonial Secretary, Records, In-letters.)
2. This was the principal source of Newcastle coal until the middle of the 19th Century.
3. These would include eight miners as well as carters, overseers, water bailers, etc..
4. Where the Australian Agricultural Company opened its first pit in 1831. (J.W. Turner, 'The entry of the Australian Agricultural Company into coal mining in N.S.W., 1825-1831', J.R.A.H.S., vol.58, 1972, pp.242-3, and D.F. Branagan, 'Geology and coal mining in the Hunter Valley, 1791-1861', p.36.)

5. Boring apparatus had been imported in 1798, was used in the search for coal on George's River in 1801 and was probably in use in Newcastle in the same year. Another set had been sent to Newcastle in late 1819, (Return of stores, etc., supplied the Settlement of Newcastle from His Majesty's Lumber Yard, Sydney, from 1st July, 1819, to 30th June, 1820).
6. The reduction in the number of colonial vessels calling at Newcastle occurred in 1818. Wallis' order disallowing the loading of private vessels by their own crews was dated 3 January, 1818. From that time coal was placed on board vessels for twelve shillings per ton; it had previously been available to those who undertook their own loading at ten shillings per ton. (Order No. 2, 3 January, 1818, N.S.W. Colonial Secretary, Records, In-letters.)