

# John Darling Colliery

1925 ~ 1987



*Mr. John Darling,  
Chairman of Directors from 1907 to 1914*



*View to the south-east showing stables in the foreground—January 1960*

The closing of John Darling Colliery marks the end of an era which has seen firsts in both the company history and the coal industry itself. Not only was this colliery the first developed from greenfields by the BHP, the first to introduce longwall mining to the northern region and the first to introduce shaft freezing technology to the Australian coal industry, but it was a colliery which has seen the early introduction of many technological changes, often proving a testing ground for other B.H.P. collieries. Established in Belmont, N.S.W., the

colliery was responsible for the real growth and development of the early 1900's fishing village. For many years the mine remained as the major industry in the Belmont area providing employment for up to 748 workers. Now after a 60 year life which has seen as many as 3,400 employees sign on its books and more than 26 million tonnes of coal extracted the mine is no longer viable. To mark this occasion this booklet has been prepared to ensure that, although closing, its contribution to the economic growth of an area and an industry will not be forgotten.

View to the south-east - September 1987.



# Colliery History and Development

In 1914, The Broken Hill Proprietary Company Limited began operations at Newcastle Steelworks and from 1914 to the late twenties the necessary coal was bought from sources outside the Company.

However, in 1920, the Company Directors realised that to meet the needs of the expanding Steel Industry, the Company would have to begin its own coalmining operations.

An exhaustive geological survey was made and a drilling programme was started in the Redhead-Belmont area.

As a result of this activity, work began at the John Darling Colliery site in 1925.

The colliery was the first owned by BHP and was named after a Company director, a member of a family that has continued association with the Company.

The copy of the original advice from the Board in the form of a letter dated November, 1924, has been included below.

The shafts reached the Victoria Tunnel Seam in June, 1927, at a depth of 198m. The seam was 3m thick, of which about 1.8m was considered as being workable.

The Borehole Seam was struck in October, 1927, at a depth of 268m with a thickness of about 2.4m and a workable section of 1.7m.

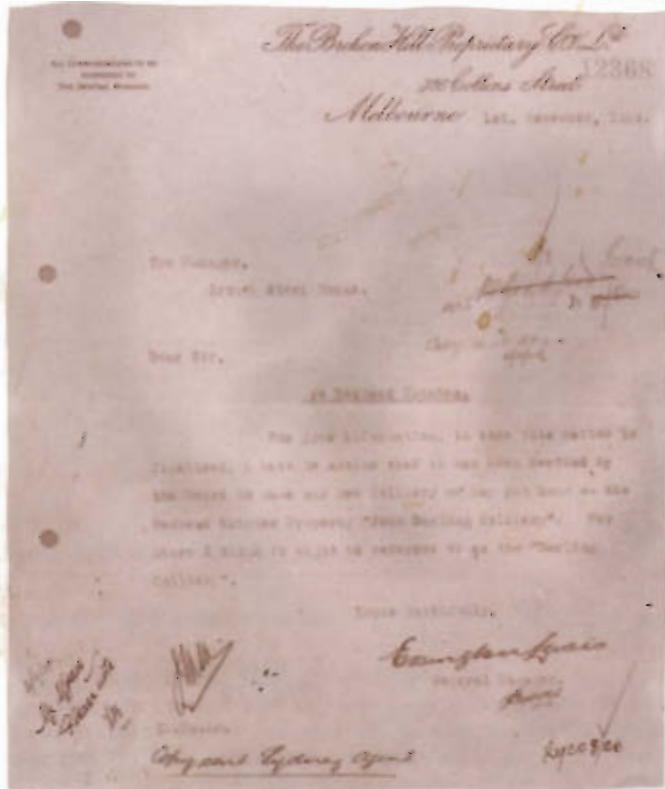
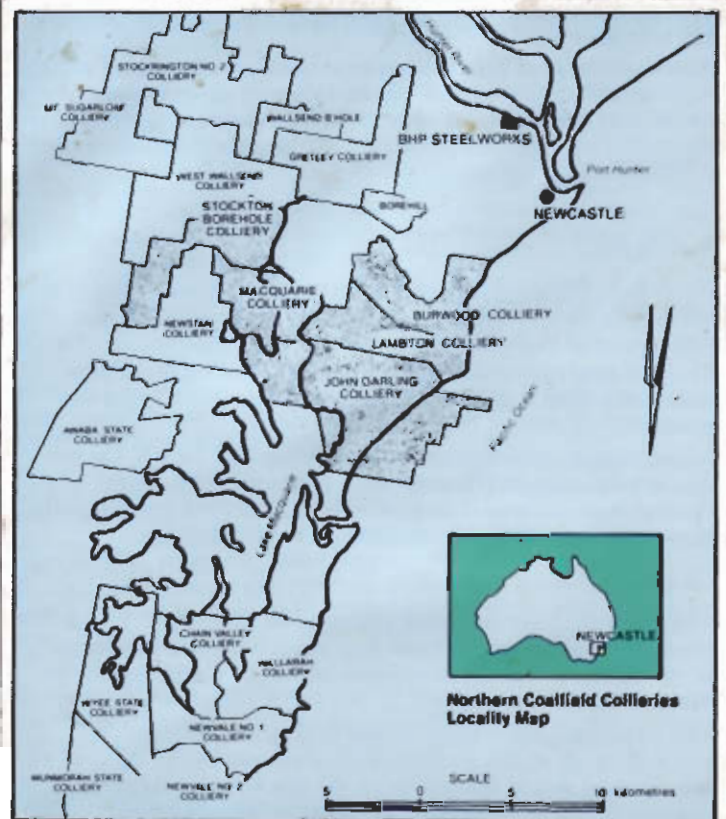
In all, nine seams were encountered with a total thickness of 40m. However, the Victoria Tunnel and the Borehole Seams are the only seams that have been worked.

The cross measure drift which was completed in November, 1964, and assumed the role of supply, coal and personnel haulage that the two shafts once played. The drift is 873m in length; 117m of the drift lies below the floor of the Borehole Seam, so that coal can be hauled from the bottom of a bin excavated in the floor of the seam.

The final stage of colliery development was conducted from February 1981 to September 1983 during which a 295m deep 5.8m diameter concrete lined No.4 Shaft was sunk. This shaft was required to provide adequate ventilation for the longwall workings within the mine. The sinking method was a first for the Australian coal industry as it necessitated the shaft being sunk in Belmont Lagoon through free running sand.

The sand was frozen by means of refrigerated calcium chloride brine pumped into 32 pipes surrounding the proposed shaft wall. The frozen sand was then excavated, concrete lined and the freezing solution removed.

Northern Coalfield Collieries - locality map.



The drilling programme indicated that the best site for the Colliery was in the North Belmont area and about 4455 hectares (11,000 acres) of the lease were acquired.

From 1925, two shafts 6.7m in diameter and concrete lined throughout were sunk. These two shafts passed through a variety of sedimentary strata varying from soft coal and shale to a very hard conglomerate, which in one bed was 46m thick.

Although the two shafts are now all but out of use their large steel head frames have been a most impressive sight dominating the overall view of the minesite.

## Contract Mining

Until 1938, John Darling was worked by contract miners, who hand-shovelled coal into one-ton capacity skips which were hauled by horses underground.

The skips were wound to the surface and the coal was weighed because the miners were paid on a tonnage basis.

Miners worked in pairs and the coal was drilled using hand-operated drills. Explosives were packed into the holes and the coal was blasted out.

The hand-boring was a most laborious task and in 1947 the introduction of electrically operated drills was seen as the greatest break-through in the early hand-mining days at John Darling.

The contract miners were able to produce about 9 to 10 tons of coal a day a man and the best daily production achieved during contract mining was 3100 tons.

## Mechanisation

The output from the contract miners had definite limitations and from 1938 the mine was progressively mechanised.

American-type cutting machines were introduced to undercut the coal instead of hand-holing.

After cutting, the coal was shot down and loaded away by loading machines. The coal was taken away in 5-ton capacity skips hauled by battery locos.

A report written by a colliery cadet at John Darling describes how coal was produced in the Victoria Tunnel Seam in 1951.

He said: "There are five units, each of 20 men, equipped with one L-400 Loader, one L-29 cutter and two 10-ton battery locos for haulage. The crew consists of 5 Loader Crew, 4 Haulage Men, 4 Cutting and Boring Crew, 4 Clean-Up Gang and 4 Extra Shiftmen."

Before 1954, all the machines at John Darling operated on railway tracks, but in the mid-1950s machines similar to those used today were introduced with Caterpillar Tracks.

## Shortwall

Shortwall continuous mining was introduced at John Darling in 1969.

For more than 12 months considerable success was achieved with up to 180 shuttle cars of coal being produced in one shift. The average production on the first shortwall block was 116 cars or 540 tons a shift.

However, the need for excellent roof conditions became evident when on the third shortwall block, four roof supports were buried and abandoned. Shortwall was discontinued soon after because of roof control problems and the greatly escalating cost of efficient roof supports.

## Longwall

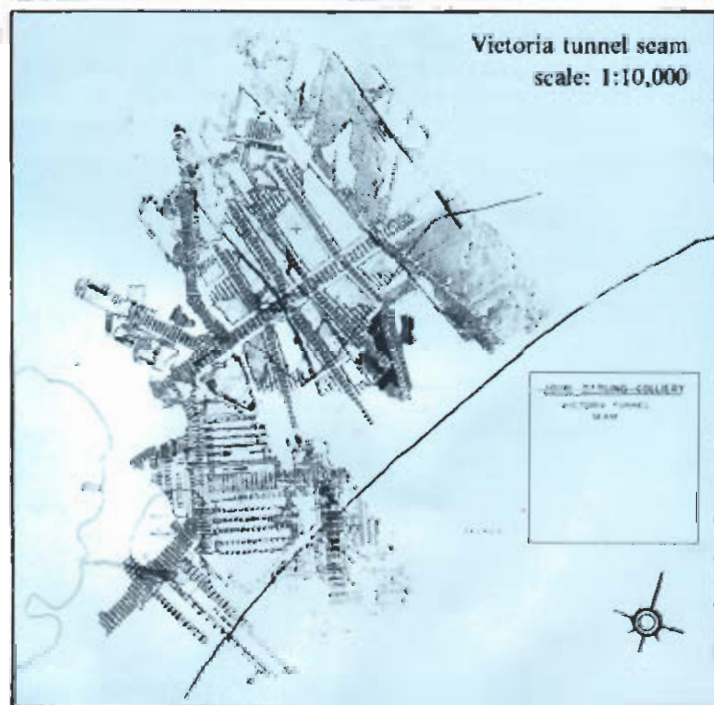
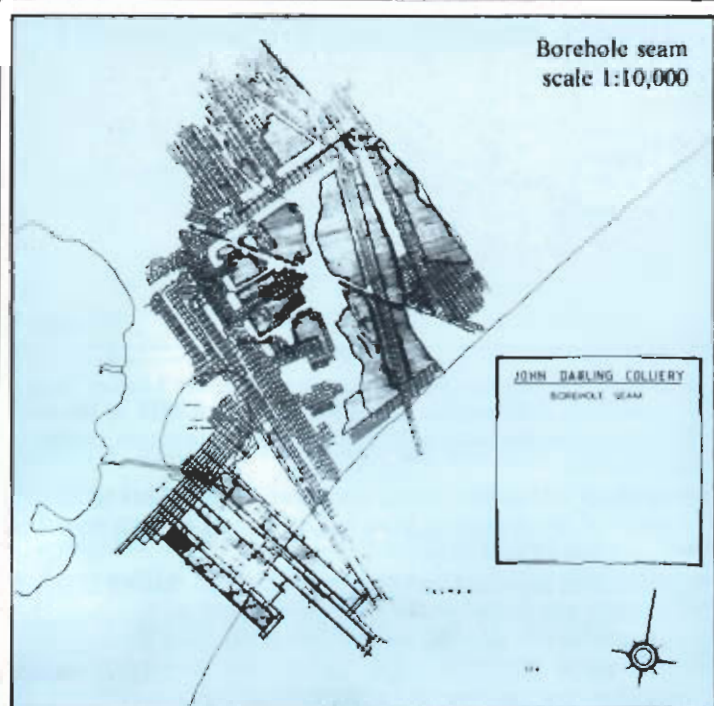
On July 5, 1982, John Darling entered a new and innovative era when the first longwall face in the northern coalfields was commissioned in the Borehole Seam.

The first longwall in the Borehole Seam worked a block 70m wide and 1400m long, from which 370,000 tonnes of coal was produced.

All production records were broken during this period. On one day in particular, 9677 tonnes were produced, 7806 tonnes of this coming from the wall. More recently in May 1987 the longwall production records stand as:-  
daily - 10,445 tonnes;  
weekly - 34,912 tonnes;  
monthly - 121,283 tonnes.

The longwall, however, faced problems on completion of the first block. As a result of problems with ventilation and development in the Borehole Seam, the longwall had to be transferred to the Victoria Tunnel Seam.

This next small block (84m by 480m) was not suitable for longwalling. A severe problem with lumps caused by the cleat of the coal and weight thrown on to the block from a nearby



shortwall goaf, resulted in production averaging only 700 tonnes a shift for the life of the block.

John Darling's third longwall in the Victoria Tunnel Seam was 126m wide and 1160m long and was initially very successful averaging 1100 tonnes a shift. However, overall results were severely affected when a major water flow problem occurred as a result of the goaf cracking into an unknown aquifer above the seam.

However, by this time a severe economic blow had been dealt to the colliery and subsequent exploratory work was not to improve the position.

Longwall 4, 121m wide x 1250m long, was relocated back into the Borehole Seam in response to a change in market demand. After the first months of successful operation, this longwall experienced a series of major falls across the face due to the extremely difficult mining conditions over the outbye half of the longwall block. Based on this experience, production from the next Longwall 5 was limited to the better conditions of the inbye 900m of the 104m wide x 1500m long block.

In-seam longhole drilling was undertaken to attempt to clearly

define the areas of future extraction. This programme produced proof of geological features which significantly affected the planning for future longwalls. Longwall 6 was then abandoned, and subsequently Longwall 7, 130m wide x 1100m long was to be the final longwall block.

When the results of the drilling programme were considered together with poorer areas of coal to the south, the high operating costs of the old mine, the 'known' and 'unknown' geological unconformities which lay ahead, coupled with depressed market trends and prices, the continued viability of the mine was unattractive and could no longer be justified. A positive aspect related to the closure of John Darling Colliery is that all employees will be relocated to other Group operations in the region.

## John Darling Colliery Managers

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1978 - 1980	Tim Hedley
1980 - 1983	Bruce McKensy
1983 - 1985	Dennis Ashbridge
1985 - 1987	Greg Mattila

## John Darling Colliery — An Autobiography

### Acknowledgement

This poem was written by Hilary Fallins, Chief Surveyor at the BHP collieries from 1940 to 1978. His father, John Fallins, 1888 to 1970, was the first manager at John Darling Colliery and later, Superintendent of BHP collieries. John Fallins Senior, 1852-1931, came from Scotland and worked as a deputy at Burwood Colliery indicating a long association of the Fallins clan with the local coal industry.

### John Darling Colliery

I am a mine a Colliery real. My name is John Darling. This is unusual but it is true. My parent BHP surely famous will be the other to date New Realhead Estate.

Their marriage in twenty four followed many bores before, his January twenty-five, officials and plans and my conception at hand. Movements on surface, humans about, diggings and ramblings, stone trees all thrown out.

The pain of blasting my initial hurt, men in buckets down they go. Oilskins to secure then bodies will not wet, yes water now they will endure for soon I'll show them all my ore.

Must they dig so deep whilst punching ever keep? But now "a seam" they cry as BHP delights, although before my bores do show no great quality but height.

Poppet heads, yes two, I wonder what they do. Wheels large and small upon the heads so tall. Winches winches full of steam, ropes ropes full of hopes. Iron and wood they pile on me, while strange buildings all around and residence I see. Do I behold the official place where manager will rest when future days will prove the test?

Is that a chimney stack, no two, but I'm afraid 'til steel not back. Wheels and skips to dump the waste. Things like rods to move by steam so that the buckets may lift my stone. More men to sink the shafts by now but down from mother grass and with my several seams and much more water they will concrete all around to secure it deep and sound. Railway lines they do now place as swamp land changes with the pace. Soon will go the old wood hut, the office it would be, and in its place I now can see a fine majestic palm tree.

By now two brick buildings stand an office and a list and place, a long strike yes, ten months no less will surely stop their huling me. But alas the Victoria seam what glee, my parents coal they soon will see.

More and more the steam does rise as Borehole seam sure gives surprise. My pangs of birth do closer come day by day as does the sun. By now more noise and pain as steel replaces wood on frame, these two will truly make a show as

through the years ropes and cages to and fro. And in twenty eight, cages men and wagons all will surely bring my coal my all, to help the town by coke and steel to come of age. I feel

This is my birth, I give the coal a Colliery real. Through the years excitement grows as buildings rise and coal does flow, trains daily in and out full of coal I now feel stout. Water from the swamp its Jewells they say by long pipeline to the boilers pray, steam through great tunnels waits to show that coal up shafts will pass, one down east Victoria first next the up east Borehole last. Down east two skips up east three — will this be the death of me?

Cages not for coal alone but men and horses daily down, says the onsetter "but twenty men must use this cage or I'll not send". Horses some day see fit to fight then fall from cage, whilst men thereafter all in a rage. Skips with coal two lifts to the minute, men and horses work to their limit. Come Christmas time the horses tired so off to the country, walk not ride.

This is my life excitement and strike, headings and boards, cut throughs and crosscuts, these are the terms to add to my life of giving and serving day and night. District names they give me now, one east one west and all the rest

There is tragedy now as somehow my coal has buried the brow of that father of three working by hand and knee. Oh how I grieve for the family of him who loved me dearly as his breadwin. But all this will be repeated I fear, as I through the years may blunder and err by falling my coal unwittingly say, or by him who fails his safety first. And alas one Easter eve an mesh of water I did not perceive, worry grieve for manager sure, men and pumps brought to the fore. This I hope will not be the end but suddenly, yes I feel pressure does ease and soon I recover free as the breeze.

By thirty nine I am well of age, a gem to behold a gleaming mine of colours bold. My parent BHP will not produce the Christmas greetings card of peace and goodwill with my picture, a wonder still.

Gleaming headframes red I see, wheels of white chimneys black with blue, trimmings on buildings too. Remember my great palm in the middle of the greens in front of the office for all it seems, and the beautiful gums overhanging that wheel, do they really need a spare, huge as it lay in that recess where flowers gay, orange and red, do splay their colours about their heads.

This must be my finest hour with seven hundred and twenty men and seventy horses then, they win my coal they share my soul for today is my maker's day. The trees and swamps of yesterday do now give forth the greatest glow, as coal I'm called come forth to show.

But have I forgotten the stay-in strikes and the men so cold all huddled around the down east bold? Whilst police above fifteen strong guard my top all hours long. Now war does come and I must produce although they strike and suddenly it seems to all my parent deems to call a halt to costs and worries many, so men in hundreds moving out with anger strike for three months stout.

If mechanised they say will bring more coal and pay their way. Within me now electric loxos tram-like all and many skips much larger tall, machines they dig my coal and place it into skips they haul, endless ropes no more I feel, all

my earlier arteries closed and sealed. But on my surface do I see poppies and potatoes for the war appeal.

It is with less men the loaders dump my precious cargo into cars they call these moving things that roll by cable throwing out, so that they will come back and haul.

The props that keep me firm they now sometimes replace with bolts. This first hurts but now I feel the pain no more as science and beams to the fore. Strikes and tragedies grow less as safety and logic progress.

No war and my swampy head grows less and less as stone and refuse spread. They call it Burma Road they made across my swamp, to ease the travel for men from Belmont come. By now they cut my coal beneath the sea but deep and soon below the houses neat and all the sandhills oh so high the rattle lays them low, whilst sand they use upon my rails to ease the loco's flow.

These men they call geologists they say my coal not fit to sell, but mother BHP does feel I should have better grade if change of direction tells. So though it hurts, my previous plan will change and under township Belmont yes, what will the future say?

By fifty nine some great new scheme by sixty one surveyor shows that near the stables the drift will go. What a great idea for me, another to give my coal by belt of rubber. This sure will take some years to do with all connections very true. So now they say my shafts will be for air and stand by free, and soon another hole they make in Belmont three.

Less and less my men in numbers come, no more by Burma Road they ride their bikes and weary homeward plod, but away to bowls and fishing perhaps, as how their hours lull.

My coal they win by skill and washed on top it will then train to Steelworks in huge trucks. Engineers in all their spheres see clear to leave me overnight and live in places near and far, but always I will have some manager close, in case my heart or lungs do burst from my oversight or thirst.

My body now in seventy eight is stretching far and wide, did I ever think those people would in Belmont North decide to sit on top of what I thought my best? But now they know it's settled down 'cause many years have been, since men and locos worked by shift to take from me my only rest.

Indecisions, hesitations, changes made, fortunes no and coal so so, but yes they spend and make the longwall plan, perhaps this is the final go! First success and bonus great whilst men the low money make. Down in Belmont Lagoon they now have placed another hole I feel, so that the air will keep my smals clean and men the happier be.

Is that the township there, a school and houses more, well true they mine and feel secure. But wait, do I hear the rumblings of despair? Some men they leave and costs do rise, those that have the say decide that J.D. won't survive. Through the media and the hunchrooms I can hear that coal, my coal, they do not like.

Though tomos by millions seams by many spread o'er hectares wide, will they now have the gall to see me fall? My best I've given, coal dust, coal gas, no failure by my men has caused a tragedy of kinds that marked the end of other mines.

By now great sadness falls on me, my parents don't care much. On my surface I have found my original character lost. I pain when I think of the days gone by when they would come to

see my coal and all I am, my beauty then on top and wonders underground.

Perhaps the greatest men have gone, those who saw my coal and beauty. Now are those that see and work by science and their duty.

I know I did have ash and stone and things they did not want. These were my Maker's tools, the trees, the swamp. Someday it may come to pass my qualities they will find and won't surpass. By now, and yes they say I am to cease my coal give days. To my loaders, managers, my devoted roll of men, all the horses yesterday.

I will pray you'll all remember days then and now when bumps and knocks and falls I gave, these were my aches and pains, hoping you would suffer not and always safe should be.

Like you my men I shall not die. Retire I will and await the day when someone will say "there's coal there still". Memories will abound in you and me, future generations will live to tell the stories of men gone by, mining the coal, my heart, my soul, of JOHN DARLING: still

## Notes on Poem

The land and the coal beneath the area known as Belmont North generally east of the Pacific Highway and south to Belmont Cemetery was originally owned by New Redhead Estate and Coal Company Limited.

In 1924 an agreement between BHP and New Redhead Estate allowed the BHP to occupy land for the Colliery and to mine the coal on a royalty basis.

The original four colliery residences were built between 1925 and 1927.

Originally a set of boilers with one steel chimney supplied the steam for the winding engines and power house. Later a second set of boilers and another chimney were installed. The colliery then supplied power to Lambton and Burwood collieries for many years.

The shafts were 6.7 metres (22 feet) in diameter, 274 metres (900 feet) deep with the Victoria Tunnel Seam at 198m (650') and the Borehole Seam at 268m (880').

In the vicinity of the Australasian Seam a lot of water was encountered.

The ten months strike was a sinkers' strike.

The original wooden headframes were soon replaced by steel.

Jewells Swamp about 1.6 kilometres away was the main water supply for the boilers for many years.

The cages in the upcast shaft were larger than those in the downcast. Thirty men or three horses were hauled in the upcast and twenty men or two horses in the downcast. The downcast shaft was used for Victoria Tunnel Seam coal and the upcast together with all the air proof doors catered for Borehole Seam coal.

The normal excitement generated at the end of each shift caused men quite often to rush towards the cage and try to push their way in.

The onsetter would insist that they all leave the cage and then enter in orderly fashion so that the correct number would ride.

Sometimes the refusal to leave the cage could be as long as twenty minutes.

Horses were always taken down and returned to the surface each day. Occasionally horses in the cage became disturbed and pushed off the cage doors, and fell to the bottom of the shaft. The men would have the unhappy task of cleaning up.

At John Darling compass points were always used to signify the various working districts, ie; One North East, Two South East etc.

In the late 1930s the colliery was certainly a showpiece.

Not only were the buildings and headframes in top condition but the gardens were always blooming with the flowers of the season and lawns neatly kept.

A huge palm tree stood in the middle of the garden area in front of the office.

A spare winding wheel, 5.5 metres in diameter was kept in a horizontal concrete lined recess in the garden area. The wheels in the upcast shaft headframe came originally from Balmain Colliery.

An extraordinary sight was the daily haul of the horses out of the mine. As they left the cage at the surface they would, together with all their harness, enter towards the stables, enter the end door and continue along the corridor until the correct stall was entered. Never a mistake was made.

Horses were then hosed down and a hearty meal taken.

At Christmas time horses were all sent to a local country paddock for the holidays.

No feed was given to horses underground although that extra sandwich was always appreciated.

The 1930s saw the advent of the stay-in strikes.

The men would refuse to come out of the mine but to be near fresh air they would tend to stay in the vicinity of the downcast shaft, where the cold air was entering the mine.

The wives would attempt to get food into the mine but this was never allowed.

Police were on location on some of these occasions to hold back the crowds trying to enter the property and generally to protect the area.

On one occasion the police occupied the bath house as their sleeping quarters.

In October 1940 the management decided to mechanise the Victoria Tunnel Seam.

Approximately four-hundred men were cavilled out although all were placed in other BHP industries. A three month strike resulted.

Eventually Jeffrey mining equipment was installed, later followed by Goodman trolley wire locomotives for main line haulage.

Later years saw shuttle cars and Joy equipment.

During the 39-45 war lawns were dug up and potatoes and poppies planted. On pay Fridays one would see a queue of men to buy the produce the proceeds going to the war effort comforts fund.

Very high sandhills formed the eastern boundary of the area until rutile mining leveled them to their present height.

The first coal was mined at midnight 14th November 1927.

## *Pictorial History*

### *1. Colliery Development*



Top: 1925 - Pit top of No.2 shaft  
Bottom left: 1925: Sinking shaft No.2  
Bottom right: 1926.

Left: 1927 - Steel headframe erected over the original wooden headframe over No.1 shaft.

Top right: Circa 1928 - View to the south-east featuring No.1 shaft headframe and steam engine house.

Centre right: 1933 - View to the east.

Bottom: 1949 - Aerial view looking south-west. Note the rail loop and coal loading facilities to the east of the shafts.







Top: 1953 - View to the north-east showing the power station below No.2 shaft and the early office buildings.

Centre: 1962 - Looking directly south, featuring the coal skip loading system and workshops. Note the airlock on No.2 U/C shaft and the horse in the foreground.

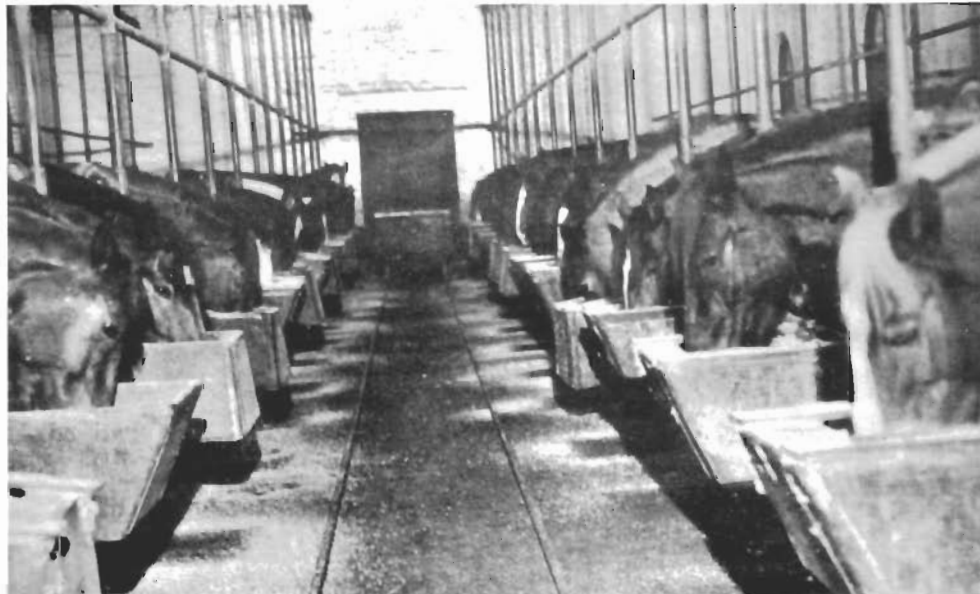
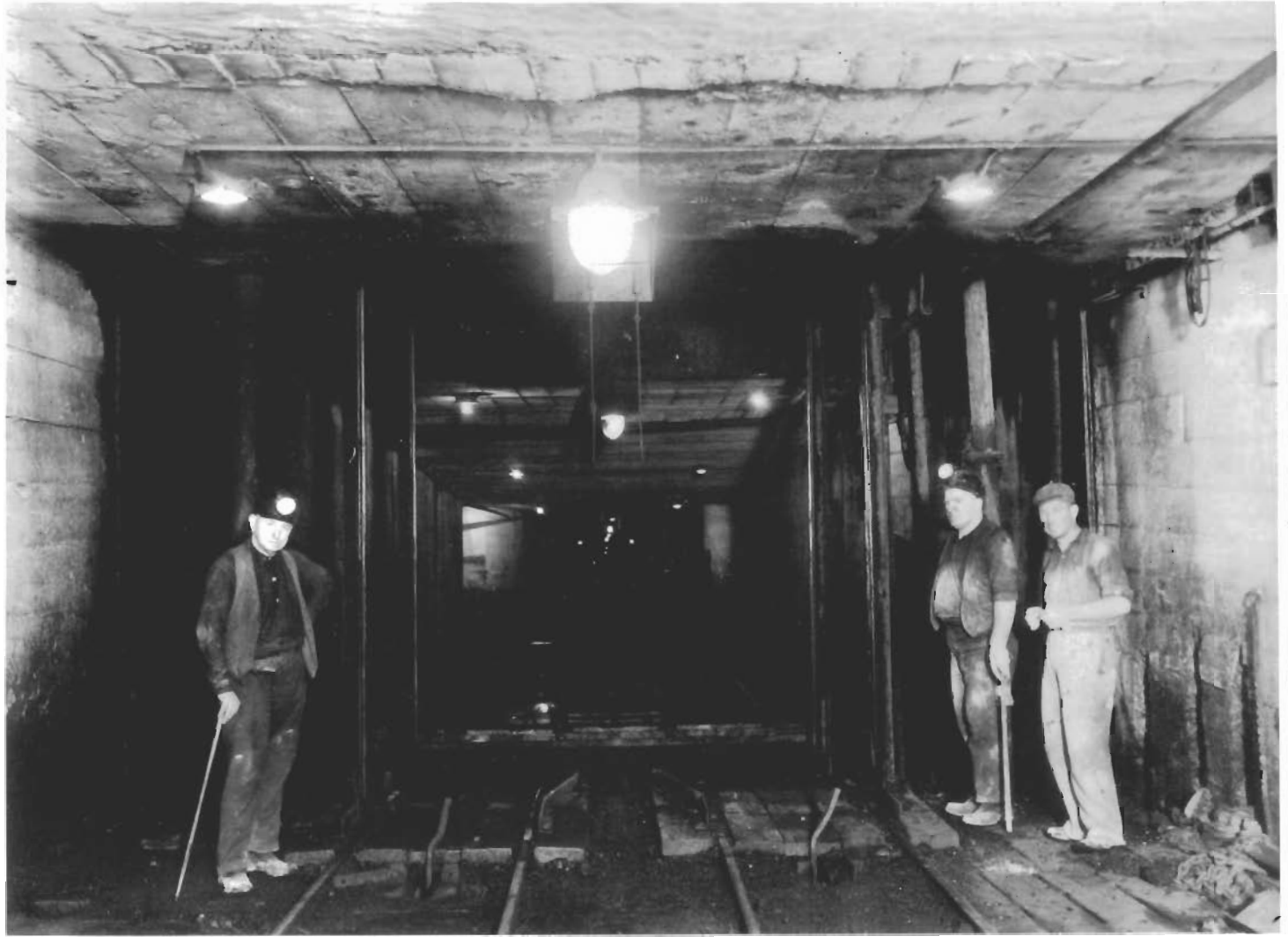
Bottom: 1967 - Aerial view from the west. Compare the surface coal handling facilities with those of the pre-drift period.



Top: 1969 - Looking south at storage bin and headframes with bulk store in foreground.  
Bottom left: 1980 - Surface layout.



## 2. General Interest



Top: 1938 - Men standing at the bottom of No.1 shaft.

Left: Horses in surface stable before mechanisation, during the 1940's.



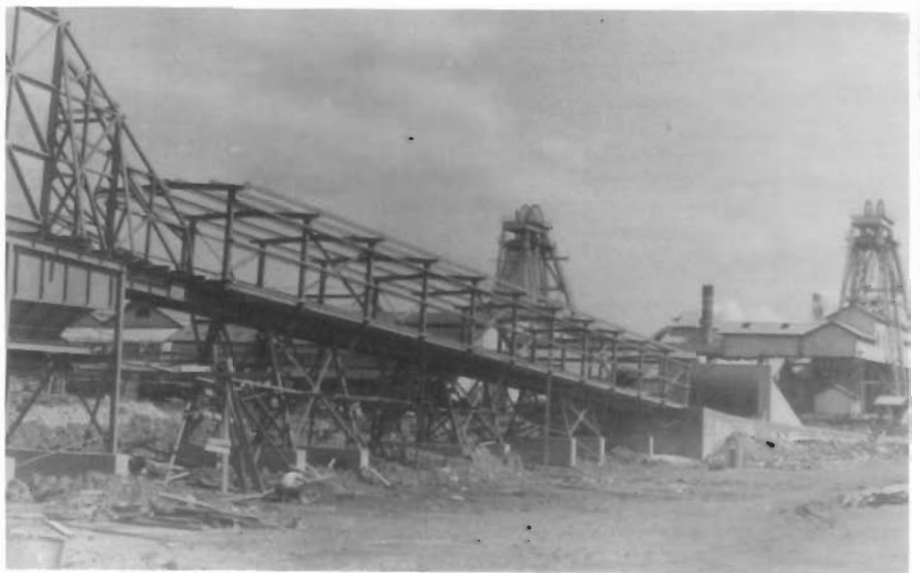
Top left: Circa 1928 - Construction of No.2 shaft headframe. Note the rigging techniques.

Top right: 1961 - First section of drift portal floor.

Centre: 1962 - Gantry structure at drift portal.

Bottom left: 1961 - Excavation for drift portal structure.

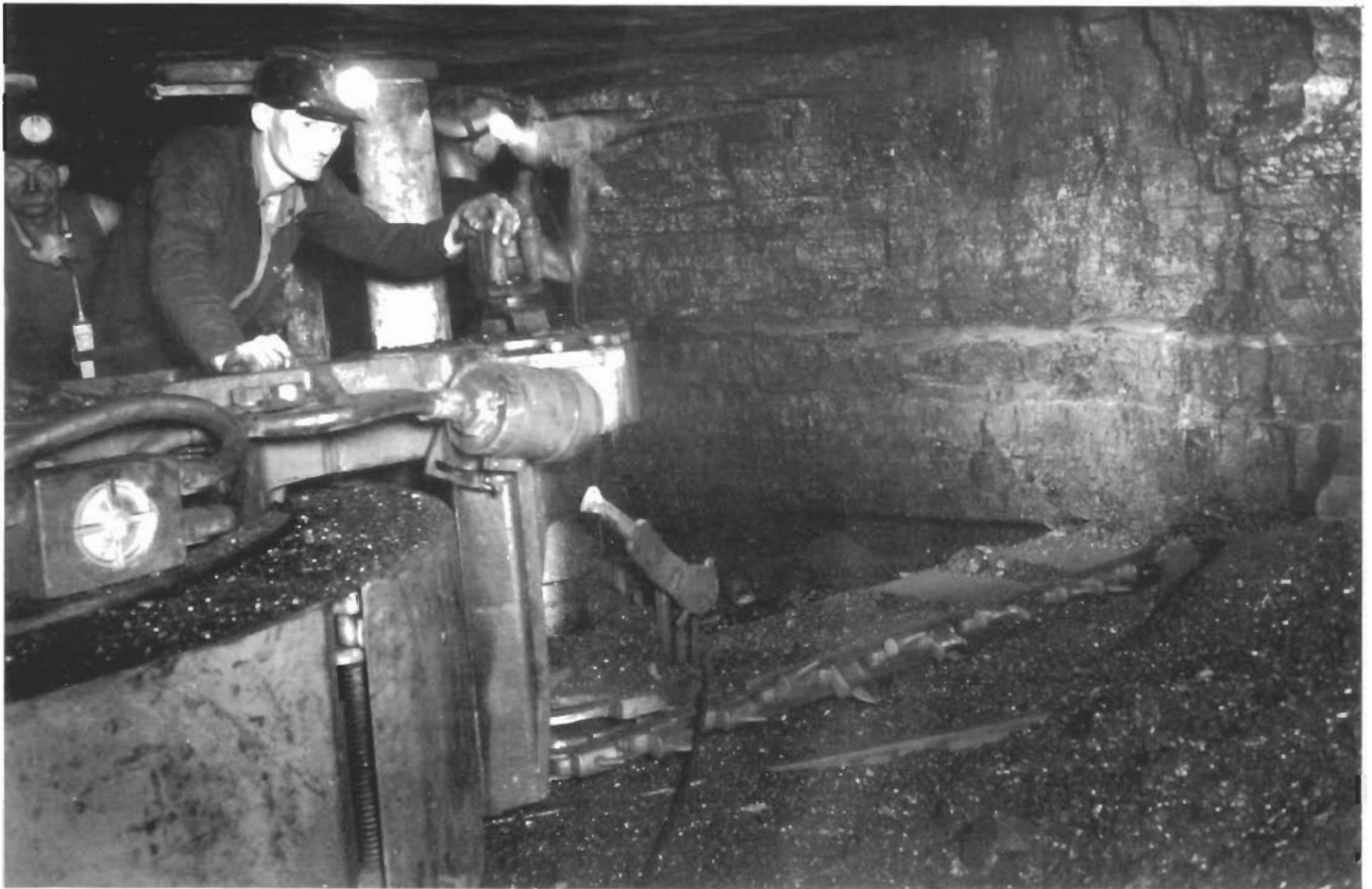
Bottom right: 1981 - Initial excavation of No.4 shaft showing shaft freezing pipework.

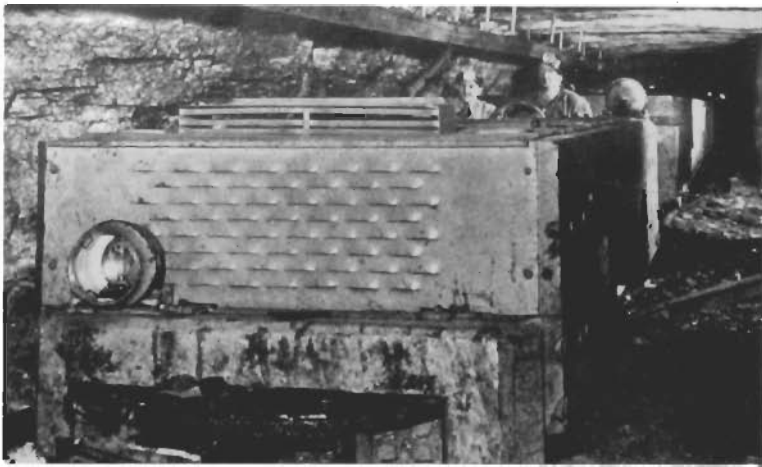


### 3. Mining Technology



Left:  
Jeffrey 400L  
Bottom:  
Jeffrey 29L





Left: Goodman 20 tonne trolley wire loco - Victoria Tunnel Seam.  
Centre left: Continuous miner with mounted roof bolting.  
Centre right: Joy ICM Continuous miner.  
Bottom: Continuous miner working on a shortwall face.





Longwall operation at John Darling Colliery.



BHP Macquarie Collieries  
P.O. Box 171  
Belmont 2280  
Telephone: (049) 45 0488



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*This is my birth, I give the coal a Colliery real Through the years excitement grows as buildings rise and coal does flow, trains daily in and out full of coal I now feel stout. Water from the swamp its Jewells they say by long pipeline to the boilers pray steam through great tunnels wafts to show that coal up shafts will pass, one downcast Victoria first next the upcast Borehole last. Downcast two skips upcast three — will this be the death of me?*

*Cages not for coal alone but men and horses daily down, says the onsetter "but twenty men must use this cage or I'll not send" Horses some day see fit to fight then fall from cage, whilst men thereafter all in a rage. Skips with coal two lifts to the minute, men and horses work to their limit. Come Christmas time the horses tired so off to the country, walk not ride.*

*This is my life excitement and strike headings and bords, cut throughs and crosscuts, these are the terms to add to my life of giving and serving day and night. District names they give me now, one east one west and all the rest.*

*There is tragedy now as somehow my coal has buried the brow of that father of three working by hand and knee. Oh how I grieve for the family of him who loved me dearly as his breadwin. But all this will be repeated I fear, as I through the years may blunder and err by falling my coal unwittingly say, or by him who fails his safety first. And alas one Easter eve an inrush of water I did not perceive, worry galore for manager sure, men and pumps brought to the fore. This I hope will not be the end but suddenly yes I feel pressure does ease and soon I recover free as the breeze.*

*By thirty nine I am well of age, a gem to behold a gleaming mine of colours bold. My parent BHP will not produce the Christmas greetings card of peace and goodwill with my picture, a wonder still.*

*Gleaming headframes red I see, wheels of white chimneys black with blue, trimmings on buildings too. Remember my great palm in the middle of the greens in front of the office for all it seems, and the beautiful gums overhanging that wheel, do they really need a spare, huge as it lay in that recess where flowers gay, orange and red, do splay their colours about their heads.*

*This must be my finest hour with seven hundred and twenty men and seventy horses then, they win my coal they share my soul for today is my maker's day. The trees and swamps of yesteryear do now give forth the greatest glow, as coal I'm called come forth to show.*

*But have I forgotten the stay-in strikes and the men so cold all huddled around the downcast bold? Whilst police above fifteen strong guard my top all hours long. Now war does come and I must produce although they strike and suddenly it seems to all my parent deems to call a halt to costs and worries many, so men in hundreds moving out with anger strike for three months stout.*

*If mechanised they say will bring more coal and pay their way. Within me now electric locos train-like all and many skips much larger tall, machines they dig my coal and place it into skips they haul, endless ropes no more I feel, all*