

engine, in the operation of traffic over the Joadja Valley low level system, working between the sidings at the bankfoot of the Main haulage-way and the company's works.

DEVELOPMENTS AT JOADJA VALLEY OIL-WORKS

In the eighteen-eighties great developments were affected under the managerial guidance of Mr. Fell and the need for additional capital arose. In February, 1891 the company was reconstituted, and the assets of the old company, then in liquidation, were sold and transferred to the new company on the usual terms that the share-holders should receive the same number of shares in the new concern, which carried on the business under the old name. An Act, known as the "JOADJA CREEK RAILWAY TRANSFER ACT", was passed by Parliament during October 1890, placing the Joadja - Mittagong Railway under the control of the new company.

Operations continued to prosper until about 1893, when much of the local market was lost through the inroads of a cut-throat competition introduced by American oil distribution concerns. These overseas companies imported vast quantities of cheap American kerosene and supplied the gas companies with an oil giving a greater volume of gas and a much better illuminating value, thus eliminating, to a certain extent, the need for locally produced shale.

It should be mentioned that peak production of shale at Joadja was reached in 1890 when 29.133 tons formed the years output. However, this total, as a result of falling local demand, coupled with the appalling depression brought about by the crippling Bank crisis of 1893, dropped to 4.023 tons during the year 1894. The fortunes of the company were also beset by constantly recurring industrial troubles of a serious nature. One former miner stated that the strikes were designedly created by agent provocateurs carefully planted in the work force by outside interests. Be this as it may the condition of the Joadja oil industry reached a very low ebb and was a sad blow to the national economy. In order to compete with the unrestricted importations the Australian Kerosene, Oil and Mineral Company sought other and richer sources of shale supply and opened up mines at Genowlan (near Capertee) and at Katoomba. The erection of a modern oil refinery at Sandown was also undertaken. As production, however, proved

unprofitable and the company's railway, with the greatly decreased amount of traffic, became an economic burden. The line, as a going concern, was offered for sale to the Government in 1898 but the proposal was wisely refused. Traffic over the Joadja Railway temporarily ceased during April 1900 but the line was re-opened when work at the mines was resumed in 1901 and continued intermittently until a "blow beneath the belt" to the Australian oil industry in general was delivered by the then newly constituted Federal Government. One of their acts was to remove the import duty of four-pence per gallon on kerosene, thus effectually killing an important Australian industry for the benefit of foreign oil companies.

On October 3rd, 1903 the company decided to close the Joadja works for an indefinite period, but in 1904 further attention was given to the mining of coal at Joadja Creek, the financial results again proved discouraging. In 1905 a disastrous bush-fire swept through the area, destroying parts of the township which were never rebuilt. The works were no longer an economic proposition, and after serious deliberation, the directors decided to cease operations and arrange for the company to wind up its affairs and go into voluntary liquidation.

For several years prior to the final closing down of the activities of the Joadja Oil Works there was a general movement of miners and plant operators to leave their pretty village and seek employment elsewhere. Gradually the township became derelict and its weed-choked streets and empty windowless cottages looked very forlorn. Some family groups demolished their homes and carted the materials to Bowral and other nearby places for re-erection. The company also sold the equipment recovered from their shale adits, skipways, retorts, refinery, and buildings etc, and about 1908 proceeded with the demolition of the railway between Joadja and Mittagong. The 40 lb rails were stacked at the Mittagong sidings and, in January 1912, sold to Messrs Cameron and Sutherland. Several residents of the Joadja Valley remained to cultivate the long established fruit orchards and market gardens, selling their produce at Berrima, Bowral, and Mittagong. These people maintained the forty horse-power winding engine and its steam boiler unit, together with the main haulage way and several wagons, in order to bring their produce out of the valley. The haulage installation was mainly intact at 1934 but by 1939 the rails of the inclined way had been removed.

Opposite: A view of the Joadja oilworks showing the route of the railway through the works site and the bridge over the river.
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