Early Briquette Production in Victoria

The idea of briquetting coal is not a new one, although the manufacture and use of briquettes in Victoria only dates from early this century. In 1891, Government Analyst Mr J. Cosmo Newbery was sent to Germany with a quantity of Morwell brown coal and this was made into briquettes. Experts there indicated that the Victorian coal, once converted to briquettes, produced a product superior to German briquettes.

In 1901, the Victorian Government Geologist, Mr James Stirling visited Germany and returned with many technical details, particularly concerning briquetting. However little was done to exploit Victoria's vast brown coal reserve on a systematic basis and briquetting technology lay dormant.

During 1913 the Geological Survey of Victoria was involved in testing two briquette machines; one producing large briquettes and the other producing smaller ovoid shapes. The main aim was to determine whether slack coal (coal dust) from the State Coal Mine at Wonthaggi could be successfully converted to briquettes and then used for firing steam locomotives. Mr Bayly and Mr Hyman Herman (staunch advocate for brown coal exploitation and later Engineer-in-Chief of Brown Coal Briquetting and Research at the State Electricity Commission) concluded that the experiments were not only successful, but that briquettes could be used in homes and factories as well as locomotives and marine applications.

At Yallourn, the earliest briquettes were made in December 1924 at the 'A' factory. Commercial production began in 1925 and subsequently two further factories were built on the site. However with the development of Morwell, the Yallourn factories closed down and today only a few concrete pads mark the site.
Briquette machine testing by the Geological Survey of Victoria
(source: Bayly, 1913)

Brown coal reserves existed elsewhere in the state and on the Gippsland coast, south east of Yallourn and Morwell, the Gelliondale field supported a small briquette factory. Fortunately much of the equipment still remains in situ and a fascinating interpretive investigation can be made.

The Gelliondale Brown Coal Company was launched in 1930 by Mr James Knox of Leongatha. By 1935 the company had successfully developed the seam and was producing briquettes for sale in Gippsland and Melbourne metropolitan areas. Mr Knox, as managing director of the company, successfully introduced the practice of marketing briquettes in paper packs for domestic usage and sold large quantities through Myers and Coles stores in Melbourne.

With the commencement of the Second World War in 1939 however, the Manpower Committee withdrew most of the labour force from Gelliondale and directed it to munition factories in the city. The company carried on in a reduced capacity until its closure in 1950.

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REFERENCES


Part of the briquetting machinery remaining at Gelliondale, 1981