

JOHN ALLAN DOBSON: A TE AROHA MINE MANAGER

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Abstract: *Born in 1830, Dobson was a life-long miner, first in Victoria and then Otago, Coromandel, Te Aroha (notable in the Tui district), and on other Hauraki fields. In 1882 he erected a boarding house in Te Aroha, on temperance principles, but probably his wife did most of the day-to-day management before her premature death after only 12 years of marriage. He was a miner and mine manager in several claims in the Te Aroha district, but after his wife's death and the decline of local mining he worked on several Hauraki fields. After struggling with some of the examinations, he was awarded a certificate as a mine manager.*

Dobson was prominent in both the Coromandel and Te Aroha communities. In the latter, he encouraged the development of the district through being a member of numerous committees, including being chairman of the town board. After retirement, he suffered from miners' complaint, the cause of his death. He was remembered as being a man of great integrity.

HIS LIFE BEFORE SETTLING IN TE AROHA

John Allan Dobson, commonly known as Allan rather than John, was born in Selkirk, Scotland, in November 1830, to George, a 'gentleman' according to his son but in fact a saddler at the time of his birth, and Margaret Allan.¹ An obituary described him as 'one of that hardy band of miners who followed the gold from Victoria to Otago, and then up to the Hauraki fields'. After mining successfully in Victoria, he was 'amongst the pioneers working on the Shotover and the Molyneaux'.² He managed the Bismark Company's mine and battery at Tokatea, Coromandel, from 1871 onwards.³ In 1875 the annual general meeting of the Bismark and French Republic Company passed a unanimous vote of thanks for his 'persevering efficient and faithful' management.⁴ Two years later, a leading Coromandel

¹ Birth Certificate of Margaret Dobson, 28 January 1883, 1883/2246; Death Certificate of John Allan Dobson, 9 February 1905, 1905/728, BDM; Ancestry.co.uk.

² *Auckland Star*, 10 February 1905, p. 4.

³ *Coromandel Mail*, 14 April 1874, p. 3; J.A. Dobson to Minister of Mines, 20 May 1891, Mines Department, MD 1, 91/447, ANZ-W.

⁴ Robert Somerville to J.A. Dobson, 1 November 1875, Mines Department, MD 1. 96/503, ANZ-W; *Auckland Weekly News*, 27 September 1873, p. 4..

resident stated that he deserved ‘great credit’ for his management.⁵ He continued to manage this mine until 1881, when he also managed the Union Beach.⁶ His only investments in Coromandel mining were in two companies in 1872 and one claim three years later.⁷

His prominence resulted in his being elected to the committee of the Tokatea Institute.⁸ In March 1874, he chaired a meeting about obtaining more roads, a tramway, and the telegraph, and he was a member of a deputation that presented these resolutions to the Superintendent of the Auckland Province.⁹ Four years later, he was both its treasurer and one of the two vice-presidents.¹⁰

TEMPERANCE RESTAURANT AND BOARDING HOUSE

In August 1882, Dobson erected a boarding house in Te Aroha’s main street.¹¹ The following year, he advertised himself as the proprietor of the ‘Temperance House and Restaurant’.¹² It was later known as the Waverley Boarding House.¹³ A visitor informed the local newspaper, in 1885, that he was ‘comfortably entertained’ when staying in it.¹⁴ Later that year, Dobson made alterations and additions, moving the original building to a new position.¹⁵ The enlarged building, containing 19 rooms, was described as a

⁵ Letter from Jerome Cadman, *Auckland Weekly News*, 6 October 1877, p. 19.

⁶ J.A. Dobson to Minister of Mines, 20 May 1891, Mines Department, MD 1, 91/447, ANZ-W; *New Zealand Herald*, 19 March 1879, p. 2, 29 April 1879, p. 6; *Coromandel Mail*, 19 March 1881, p. 5, 2 April 1881, p. 5.

⁷ Coromandel Warden’s Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1872-1882, folio 109, ZAAN 14044/1a, ANZ-A; *Auckland Provincial Government Gazette*, 12 April 1872, p. 116, 12 June 1872, p. 173.

⁸ *Auckland Weekly News*, 28 December 1872, p. 17.

⁹ Auckland Provincial Government Papers, Miscellaneous Papers, ACFM 8183, 1381/74, ANZ-A.

¹⁰ *Auckland Weekly News*, 30 November 1878, p. 15.

¹¹ *Thames Star*, 7 August 1882, p. 2.

¹² Advertisement, *Te Aroha News*, 9 June 1883, p. 3.

¹³ *Waikato Times*, 8 July 1890, p. 2.

¹⁴ Letter from John Lamb, *Te Aroha News*, 31 January 1885, p. 7.

¹⁵ *Te Aroha News*, 31 March 1885, p. 7, 11 April 1885, p. 2.

‘fine commodious establishment’.¹⁶ Two years later, after the Southern Cross Comedy Company stayed with Dobson, its director wrote to the newspaper to ‘express my liking for him, his worthy help mate, and the consideration shown my juveniles’.¹⁷

FAMILY LIFE

Dobson described himself in 1883 as a ‘Temperance Hotel keeper’,¹⁸ but as he was also a miner, his ‘help mate’ must have had a significant role in running it, at least while her health was good. In March 1878, when aged 45, he had married Mary Robinson, aged 26.¹⁹ During the 1880s, her brother Thomas worked at Waiorongomai until killed in an accident in 1886.²⁰ They had three children: George, born in February 1879, Allan, born in October 1880, and Margaret, born in January 1883.²¹ Allan was to die, aged 17,²² before his father, but after his mother. She died in December 1889, aged 38, ‘after a painful and protracted illness’, described on her death certificate as phthisis; her final illness lasted eight months.²³ The *Te Aroha News* reported with ‘much regret’ the death of the ‘wife of our respected fellow-townsmen’:

The end came rather unexpectedly at the last. Mrs Dobson has been failing in health for some years past, but so frequently rallied, and at times seemed to so greatly improve in health, that it was only within the past year or so, when consumption had

¹⁶ Te Aroha Town Board, Rate Book 1888, Sections 3, 14 Block V, Matamata-Piako District Council Archives, Te Aroha; *Waikato Times*, 13 January 1891, p. 2.

¹⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 2 July 1887, p. 3.

¹⁸ Birth Certificate of Margaret Dobson, 28 January 1883, 1883.2246, BDM.

¹⁹ Notices of Intentions to Marry 1878, p. 97, Births Deaths and Marriages, BDM 20/23, ANZ-W; Marriage Certificate of John Allan Dobson, 13 March 1878, 1878/165, BDM; *Auckland Weekly News*, 16 March 1878, p. 1.

²⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 29 May 1886, p. 2.

²¹ Birth Certificates of George Dobson, 26 February 1879, 1879/677; Allan Dobson, 6 October 1880, 1880/19774; Margaret Dobson, 28 January 1883, 1883/2246, BDM; *Auckland Weekly News*, 15 March 1879, p. 1, 23 October 1880, p. 1.

²² Death Certificate of Allen Dobson, 28 November 1897, 1897/5403, BDM; Death Notice, *Auckland Weekly News*, 4 December 1897, p. 1.

²³ Death Certificate of Mary Dobson, 17 December 1889, 1889/4472, BDM; *Te Aroha News*, 18 December 1889, p. 2.

unmistakably manifested itself, that her friends entertained any doubts with respect to her ultimate recovery. Latterly, however, she rapidly lost strength, and for the past couple of months had been almost completely confined to her room. She bore her sufferings with great patience, fortitude and cheerfulness to the very last. Her husband and several members of her family were almost constantly with her in her illness, and everything that thoughtfulness and affection could suggest was done for the comfort of the invalid. She leaves a family of three, two boys and a girl, the youngest aged seven years. Great sympathy is very generally felt and expressed for Mr Dobson and family in their bereavement.²⁴

There was a large attendance at her funeral, 'Mr and Mrs Dobson being very highly respected and esteemed'.²⁵

MINING IN THE TE AROHA DISTRICT

Dobson took out his first miner's right for Waiorongomai at the beginning of September 1883.²⁶ The previous month, if not earlier, he was secretary of the Shotover claim.²⁷ Late in October, he became sole owner of the Gladstone No. 1 and No. 2, south of the Werahiko claims.²⁸ Two weeks later, he sought protection for both; they would be forfeited at an unrecorded date.²⁹

In December 1884, Dobson was elected to the committee of the newly formed Te Aroha Mining and Prospecting Association and appointed its secretary.³⁰ Also in that month he became the sole owner of the Silver Crown, in Lipsey's Creek, close to Te Aroha township; it was certified as

²⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 18 December 1889, p. 2.

²⁵ *Te Aroha News*, 21 December 1889, p. 2.

²⁶ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Miner's Right no. 2011, issued 4 September 1883, Miners' Rights Butt Book 1883, BBAV 11533/11, ANZ-A.

²⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 25 August 1883, p. 3.

²⁸ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folios 174, 175, BBAV 11500/9a, ANZ-A.

²⁹ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Applications 1883-1900, 200, 201/1883, BBAV 11505/1a; Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folios 174, 175, BBAV 11500/9a, ANZ-A.

³⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 6 December 1884, p. 2.

abandoned in the following September.³¹ In August 1885 he was granted the Silver Age, also close to Te Aroha, was immediately granted protection for two months, but forfeited it six weeks later.³² Also in August, he was granted the Salisbury and obtained protection for it, but abandoned it within two months.³³ In September, after being granted a water race license at Tui Creek, he successfully objected to a rival being granted one.³⁴ This license was forfeited in 1887 because the race had not been constructed.³⁵

Dobson chaired a public meeting in October 1885 to call the construction of a track to the new Tui find, and was appointed to the committee charged with seeking government assistance.³⁶ The following February, he asked the Ohinemuri County Council to make tracks estimated to cost £145.³⁷ Three months later, he was secretary of the 'Tui Creek Tracks' committee.³⁸ In 1888, he was appointed to a committee that was to ask the council to help build a track there.³⁹

He invested in several Tui claims. In November 1885, he was granted the Gladstone, transferring it to an investor in December 1886.⁴⁰ On the same day in November 1885 he became one of the owners of the Keep it Dark, with three of the 15 shares.⁴¹ In early February 1887 he applied for 30 acres for his Ruakaka Gold and Silver Mining Company, which was

³¹ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 317, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A.

³² Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 326, BBAV 11567/1a; Register of Applications 1883-1900, 28/1885, BBAV 11505/1a, ANZ-A.

³³ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 327, BBAV 11567/1a; Register of Applications 1882-1888, 31/1885, BBAV 11505/1a, ANZ-A.

³⁴ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Applications 1882-1888, 34, 37/1885, BBAV 11505/1a, ANZ-A.

³⁵ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Application for Forfeiture, 6 November 1886, Mining Applications 1886, BBAV 11289/11a, ANZ-A; *Te Aroha News*, 29 January 1887, p. 3.

³⁶ *Te Aroha News*, 24 October 1885, p. 2.

³⁷ *Thames Advertiser*, 4 February 1886, p. 3.

³⁸ *Te Aroha News*, 15 May 1886, p. 7.

³⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 23 May 1888, p. 2.

⁴⁰ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folio 192, BBAV 11500/9a, ANZ-A.

⁴¹ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folio 193, BBAV 11500/9a, ANZ-A.

granted four months later.⁴² Also in February, he sought possession of the Victory and the Nelson, but withdrew his application six days later.⁴³

In March 1888, he sold 72 of the 100 shares in the Ruakaka No. 4 for £35.⁴⁴ He also applied for permission to prospect the Ruakaka for three months with two men, ground which he worked for one only month because ore could not be conveyed to the flat without roads. 'The shareholders are also negotiating with capitalists for means to develop the reefs and to treat the ore which cannot at present be satisfactorily dealt with in this colony'.⁴⁵ He was permitted to work it for two weeks with five men.⁴⁶ He continued to manage the Ruakaka for the rest of the decade.⁴⁷

Although he had left the district almost seven years previously, 'during the temporary absence of the manager' of the Tui Company in April 1897, Dobson, 'well-known and highly respected locally', was placed in charge.⁴⁸ As an example of this respect, in 1885 he was elected to the committee organizing a petition opposing the removal of Harry Kenrick⁴⁹ as warden.⁵⁰ At the end of that year he was appointed one of the four representatives of the district on the committee to establish a school of mines at Thames.⁵¹

MINING AFTER TUI

⁴² Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Applications 1883-1900, folio 5a, application 23, BBAV 11505/1a, ANZ-A.

⁴³ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Plaintiff Book 1880-1898, 1, 2/1887, BBAV 11547/1a, ANZ-A.

⁴⁴ J.A. Dobson to George Robson, 14 March 1888; J.A. Dobson to D.J. Frazer, 14 March 1888; J.A. Dobson to E.W. Hanmer, 29 March 1888, Te Aroha Warden's Court, Certified Instruments 1888, BBAV 11581/9a, ANZ-A.

⁴⁵ J.A. Dobson to Warden, 14 March 1888, Te Aroha Warden's Court, Applications for Protection 1888, BBAV 11289/12a, ANZ-A.

⁴⁶ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Applications 1883-1900, 5/1888, BBAV 11505/1a, ANZ-A.

⁴⁷ *AJHR*, 1889, C-2, p. 102.

⁴⁸ *New Zealand Mining Standard*, 24 April 1897, p. 3.

⁴⁹ See paper on his life.

⁵⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 19 September 1885, p. 2.

⁵¹ *Thames Star*, 8 December 1885, p. 2.

During the 1880s, he also invested in one claim at Waiomu and two at Puriri, and was appointed director of one Thames mining company.⁵² In mid-1890, declining business forced Dobson to leave the Te Aroha district and accept 'the supervision of some mining interests' at Kuaotunu, in particular the Mariposa mine.⁵³ The *Te Aroha News*, which regretted his departure, wrote that he 'always took an active part in promoting the development of the goldfield, and was largely interested in its prosperity',⁵⁴ meaning he had invested his own money in it. In the early 1890s, he managed the Carbine Company's mine at Kuaotunu.⁵⁵ In March 1892 he was elected to a committee to interview the Minister of Mines about local needs.⁵⁶ Also in that month, he told the *Observer* there was 'no truth in the allegation that he warned the men that they must deal at a store run by a local director' of this company.⁵⁷

In late 1895, when managing the Golden Spur at Waitekauri, he was on the committee to establish a local branch of the School of Mines.⁵⁸ In August 1896, he applied for a claim at Wharekawa, near Whangamata, and the following month, when he gave his address as Puriri, applied for the Albion at Tairua.⁵⁹ Around that time, he reported on a Tapu mine.⁶⁰

In 1892, he applied for a mine manager's certificate, and, after presenting details of his work and obtaining a statement from George Wilson, the mining inspector,⁶¹ that he was competent to be in charge of

⁵² Thames Warden's Court, Claims Register 1886-1888, nos. 1507, 1650, BACL 14397/17a; Claims Register 1888-1898, no. 1789, BACL 14397/18a, ANZ-A; *Thames Directory for 1885* (Thames, 1885), p. 127.

⁵³ *Te Aroha News*, 19 June 1890, p. 2; *Waikato Times*, 8 July 1890, p. 2; *Auckland Star*, 10 February 1905, p. 4.

⁵⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 19 June 1890, p. 2.

⁵⁵ J.A. Dobson to Minister of Mines, 20 May 1891, Mines Department, MD 1, 91/447, ANZ-W; Inspector of Mines, Thames, Letterbook 1888-1892, p. 501, YBAZ 1240/1, ANZ-A; *Observer*, 12 March 1892, p. 15.

⁵⁶ *Auckland Weekly News*, 13 March 1892, p. 22.

⁵⁷ 'Obadiah', 'Shares and Mining', *Observer*, 12 March 1892, p. 15.

⁵⁸ *Thames Advertiser*, 28 October 1895, p. 3, 28 November 1895, p. 3.

⁵⁹ *Thames Advertiser*, 17 August 1896, p. 3, 7 September 1896, p. 3.

⁶⁰ *Thames Advertiser*, 28 September 1896, p. 3.

⁶¹ See paper on his life.

underground workings, he was granted a service certificate.⁶² When he again sought a mine manager's certificate in 1895, the Minister of Mines praised his management of 'several mines'; he was described as being 'sober, industrious, and trustworthy to the highest degree'.⁶³ Dobson admitted that, not being competent with a theodolite, he could not do the surveying component of the examinations, but claimed considerable experience surveying mines with compass and dial.⁶⁴ Two months later, when told he had failed the examination for the first class certificate, he agreed that he was 'weak' in a couple of areas.⁶⁵ After passing the examination in January 1898, he received this certificate.⁶⁶

In February 1900, after returning from visiting Cromwell, Dobson provided details of its mines for the *New Zealand Mines Record*; its editor trusted he would 'soon have a more stable position than at Cromwell'.⁶⁷ He did not obtain a manager's 'position', because he was in his seventies and suffering from miners' complaint.⁶⁸ In his last years he worked on Great Barrier Island 'trying to solve the problem of successfully treating the tailings'.⁶⁹

PROMINENT IN TE AROHA

⁶² J.A. Dobson to Board of Examiners, 22 January 1892, enclosing Robert Somerville to J.A. Dobson, 1 November 1875, and declaration of George Wilson, 26 January 1892, Mines Department, MD 1, 96/503, ANZ-W.

⁶³ Declaration of A.J. Cadman (Minister of Mines), 2 December 1895, Mines Department, MD 1, 96/503, ANZ-W.

⁶⁴ J.A. Dobson to Board of Examiners, 23 May 1896, Mines Department, MD 1, 96/503, ANZ-W.

⁶⁵ J.A. Dobson to Board of Examiners, 17 July 1896, Mines Department, MD 1, 96/503, ANZ-W.

⁶⁶ J.A. Dobson to Board of Examiners, 6 December 1897; memorandum by Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 4 April 1898, Mines Department, MD 1, 96/503, ANZ-W; *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 27 April 1898, p. 2.

⁶⁷ Patrick Galvin (Secretary, Mining Bureau) to J.A. Dobson, 27 February 1900, Mining Bureau Letterbook 1897-1900, p. 249, Mines Department, MD 4/48, ANZ-W.

⁶⁸ Death Certificate of John Allan Dobson, 9 February 1905, 1905/728, BDM; *Auckland Star*, 10 February 1905, p. 4.

⁶⁹ *Auckland Star*, 10 February 1905, p. 4.

When Dobson left Te Aroha, he was described as one of its pioneers. Whilst there he had

won the respect and esteem of all classes. He always took an active part in promoting the development of the goldfield, and was largely interested in its prosperity. In connection with the church, public school, public library, and all matters affecting the social welfare of the place and the public good, he has taken an active part.⁷⁰

Both Dobson and his wife were active Anglicans. In November 1886, Mary was in charge of one of the stalls at a bazaar to raise money for the building fund.⁷¹ Two months later, Dobson was appointed to the vestry, being reappointed the following year.⁷² In 1890, he was both re-elected and reappointed its auditor.⁷³ Despite his Anglicanism, in 1889, after the Wesleyans' anniversary soiree, he presided at their meeting, and six months later attended a Presbyterian meeting and was elected to their committee.⁷⁴

In January 1885, he was elected, unopposed, to the school committee.⁷⁵ Six months later, he agreed to be acting secretary; he was unanimously elected secretary the following month.⁷⁶ He was re-elected to the committee in 1886.⁷⁷ After failing to be re-elected in April 1887, six months later he was elected to fill a vacancy.⁷⁸

In 1883, he was a member of the committee forming a public library, became its secretary, and was re-elected as secretary in the following year.⁷⁹ He worked 'most zealously' in establishing it.⁸⁰ After being re-elected in 1885 he retired as secretary, receiving a unanimous vote of thanks.⁸¹ He

⁷⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 19 June 1890, p. 2.

⁷¹ *Te Aroha News*, 13 November 1886, p. 2.

⁷² *Te Aroha News*, 15 January 1887, p. 2, 4 February 1888, p. 2.

⁷³ *Te Aroha News*, 25 January 1890, p. 2.

⁷⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 16 February 1889, p. 2, 3 July 1889, p. 2.

⁷⁵ *Te Aroha News*, 31 January 1885, p. 2.

⁷⁶ *Te Aroha News*, 4 July 1885, p. 2, 8 August 1885, p. 7.

⁷⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 1 May 1886, p. 2.

⁷⁸ *Te Aroha News*, 30 April 1887, p. 2, 23 October 1887, p. 2.

⁷⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 21 July 1883, p. 2, 27 October 1883, p. 2, 2 February 1884, p. 7.

⁸⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 10 November 1883, p. 2.

⁸¹ *Te Aroha News*, 24 January 1885, p. 2.

was once more elected in the following two years.⁸² Related to his enthusiasm for a library was his support for forming a social club and a debating society; he was a member of the latter's committee.⁸³ He was interested in music as well, in 1884 being elected to the committee establishing a choral society.⁸⁴

Whilst at Coromandel, Dobson had been an office bearer in the local Masonic lodge, and at Te Aroha held leadership positions in the lodge throughout the 1880s, including secretary and treasurer.⁸⁵

Unlike the local publicans, Dobson did not play or organize sports, and only once, in 1886, was he on the committee running a race meeting.⁸⁶ Despite owning a temperance boarding house, he was described as holding 'moderate views' when elected, unopposed, to the licensing committee in February 1886.⁸⁷ The following month, he was elected its chairman.⁸⁸ In mid-year, when Emily Jex applied for a license for the Club Hotel,⁸⁹ he 'had very grave doubts whether they ought to license a single woman. He did not consider the calling a proper one for a single woman', and felt it was his 'public duty' to vote against her.⁹⁰ At this annual meeting, he expressed the committee's concern at the 'great laxity' in complying with the law. 'Prohibited persons and children were being supplied with liquor. It was a disgraceful state of affairs'. He opposed his colleagues' decision to extend three licenses to 11 o'clock because 'much harm and misery was occasioned by these late hours'.⁹¹ In the following two years, he seconded nominations of temperance supporters to the committee.⁹²

⁸² *Te Aroha News*, 30 January 1886, p. 2, 29 January 1887, p. 2.

⁸³ *Te Aroha News*, 8 August 1885, p. 7, 15 August 1885, p. 2.

⁸⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 26 January 1884, p. 2.

⁸⁵ *Coromandel Mail*, 14 April 1874, p. 3; *New Zealand Herald*, 20 January 1881, p. 6; *Te Aroha News*, 17 May 1884, p. 7, 18 June 1887, p. 3, 31 December 1887, p. 2, 22 December 1888, p. 2, 25 December 1889, p. 2; *Bond's Waikato, Te Aroha and Rotorua Almanac and Diary for 1892* (Hamilton, 1892), p. 165.

⁸⁶ *Te Aroha News*, 16 January 1886, p. 2.

⁸⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 20 February 1886, p. 2.

⁸⁸ *Te Aroha News*, 6 March 1886, p. 2.

⁸⁹ See section on publicans in paper on the drink problem in the Te Aroha district.

⁹⁰ *Waikato Times*, 8 June 1886, p. 3; Licensing Committee Annual Meeting, *Te Aroha News*, 12 June 1886, p. 2.

⁹¹ Licensing Committee Annual Meeting, *Te Aroha News*, 12 June 1886, p. 2.

⁹² *Te Aroha News*, 26 February 1887, p. 2, 18 February 1888, p. 2.

Dobson was a leading member of the community in several other ways. In 1884, he was a member of a committee seeking government assistance for the district.⁹³ He urged it to hasten the completion of the railway line from Morrinsville.⁹⁴ He was appointed to a committee seeking to make Te Aroha and Waiorongomai into a borough, and was on the committee enlisting support in the latter settlement.⁹⁵ He seconded the nomination of James Mills, the principal proponent of a borough,⁹⁶ to the county council.⁹⁷

In May 1885, at a meeting he moved that funds be raised to assist in making temporary approaches to the new railway bridge so that non-rail traffic could use it.⁹⁸ Two months later he chaired a meeting of residents of Te Aroha Riding opposed to being rated for Thames harbour works and was elected to the Improvement Committee.⁹⁹ He was also elected to the committee organizing a petition opposing the removal of Warden Kenrick.¹⁰⁰ In 1886 he was re-elected to the improvement committee, and became its secretary.¹⁰¹ He was also elected to a committee to devise the boundaries of the proposed borough, and to a committee raising a fund in memory of Kenrick.¹⁰² He wanted a railway to Thames and a road to Tauranga.¹⁰³ In November, he was on a deputation to the Colonial Secretary to discuss the best form of local government.¹⁰⁴ In the following year he attended a meeting about establishing a sanatorium, and was elected to a committee asking the government for an improved form of land tenure.¹⁰⁵

In late 1886, Dobson was elected a trustee of the cemetery, but was immediately replaced by a Catholic representative.¹⁰⁶ Early in 1887, he was

⁹³ *Waikato Times*, 14 August 1884, p. 3.

⁹⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 16 August 1884, p. 2.

⁹⁵ *Te Aroha News*, 25 October 1884, p. 2, 29 November 1884, p. 2.

⁹⁶ See paper on his life.

⁹⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 8 November 1884, p. 2.

⁹⁸ *Waikato Times*, 5 May 1885, p. 3.

⁹⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 18 July 1885, p. 2.

¹⁰⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 19 September 1885, p. 2.

¹⁰¹ *Te Aroha News*, 15 May 1886, p. 2, 22 May 1886, p. 2.

¹⁰² *Waikato Times*, 3 August 1886, p. 2; *Thames Advertiser*, 25 August 1886, p. 2.

¹⁰³ *Te Aroha News*, 24 July 1886, p. 2.

¹⁰⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 20 November 1886, p. 2.

¹⁰⁵ *Te Aroha News*, 20 August 1887, p. 3, 29 October 1887, p. 2.

¹⁰⁶ *Te Aroha News*, 20 November 1886, p. 2.

again appointed a trustee of it and was elected treasurer, a position he held until resigning after leaving the district.¹⁰⁷ Also in 1887, he was appointed a justice of the peace, in which role the *Te Aroha News* was sure he would give ‘general satisfaction’;¹⁰⁸ he would be reappointed as one after moving to Kuaotunu.¹⁰⁹ In 1889, he was appointed to the Te Aroha Public Domain Board, and elected its first treasurer.¹¹⁰

His highest local office was chairman of the town board. In the first election for the board, in March 1887, he received the fourth highest vote, 102, compared to the top score of 151, and was the only successful man who had not stood as a workers’ candidate.¹¹¹ In October he was elected chairman, *pro tem*, and at the end of the year was elected its permanent chairman.¹¹² The following September he failed to be re-elected because, the *Te Aroha News* believed, he now opposed forming a borough: he came bottom of the poll, with 37 votes, the top scorer received 60 more.¹¹³ At his last meeting, another opponent of a borough moved that he be thanked ‘for the able, painstaking, and impartial manner’ in which he had been chairman. The seconder, Thomas Gavin,¹¹⁴ said ‘he always felt it a pleasure to sit at a meeting where Mr Dobson presided’, and the motion was carried unanimously.¹¹⁵ In farewelling him two years later, the *Te Aroha News* described him as a ‘most efficient and impartial’ chairman.¹¹⁶

DEATH, AND REPUTATION

In 1905, at the age of 74, Dobson died of chronic ‘tubercular phthisis’, meaning miners’ complaint. The ‘gradual failure’ in his health had forced

¹⁰⁷ *New Zealand Gazette*, 3 March 1887, p. 303, 20 November 1890, p. 1341; *Te Aroha News*, 26 March 1887, p. 2.

¹⁰⁸ *New Zealand Gazette*, 8 March 1887, p. 321; *Te Aroha News*, 12 March 1887, p. 2.

¹⁰⁹ *New Zealand Gazette*, 2 October 1890, p. 1067.

¹¹⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 28 September 1889, p. 2, 9 October 1889, p. 2.

¹¹¹ *Te Aroha News*, 12 March 1887, p. 3.

¹¹² *Te Aroha News*, 8 October 1887, p. 2, 3 December 1887, p. 2.

¹¹³ *Te Aroha News*, 19 September 1888, pp. 2, 7.

¹¹⁴ See paper on his life.

¹¹⁵ Town Board, *Te Aroha News*, 19 September 1888, p. 2.

¹¹⁶ *Te Aroha News*, 19 June 1890, p. 2.

him to spend his last days in an Auckland nursing home.¹¹⁷ As he left no will, it is not known how large an estate he left, but it must be presumed to have been small.

According to an obituary, he 'bore a well-merited character for integrity, and was recognized as a man who, in mining matters, as well as everything else, could be thoroughly trusted'.¹¹⁸ Many years after his death, he was recalled as being the mining reporter for the *Te Aroha News*: his 'authentic reports were carefully prepared'.¹¹⁹

CONCLUSION

Apart from his temperance boarding house and restaurant at Te Aroha, probably run mostly by his wife, Dobson's life was devoted to mining, an occupation that would give him the disease that would kill him. A reliable mine manager, he was more active than most miners in the wider community, assisting a variety of initiatives to benefit it, and belonging to a number of committees, culminating in being the chairman of the first town board. He was noted for his integrity in an industry not always notable for integrity. It was unlikely that his years of hard work resulted in his achieving more than a modest degree of financial security.

¹¹⁷ Death Certificate of John Allan Dobson, 9 February 1905, 1905/728, BDM; Death Notice, *New Zealand Herald*, 11 February 1905, p. 1; *Auckland Star*, 10 February 1905, p. 4.

¹¹⁸ *Auckland Star*, 10 February 1905, p. 4.

¹¹⁹ Recollections of T.J. Maingay, *Te Aroha News*, 14 April 1930, p. 5.