

# WEST COAST COAL SHIPPING

The Buller and Greymouth Coalfields were the most important coal-mining areas producing 60% of New Zealand's coal production to 1925 - 80,000,000 tons of high grade bituminous coal. The output of the mines was shipped across the wharves at the Ports of Westport and Greymouth, mostly in the ships of the Union Steam Ship Company, to other ports where it powered developing industry, fuelled steamships and railway locomotives and heated homes.

|              |                            |     |
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### Forerunners:

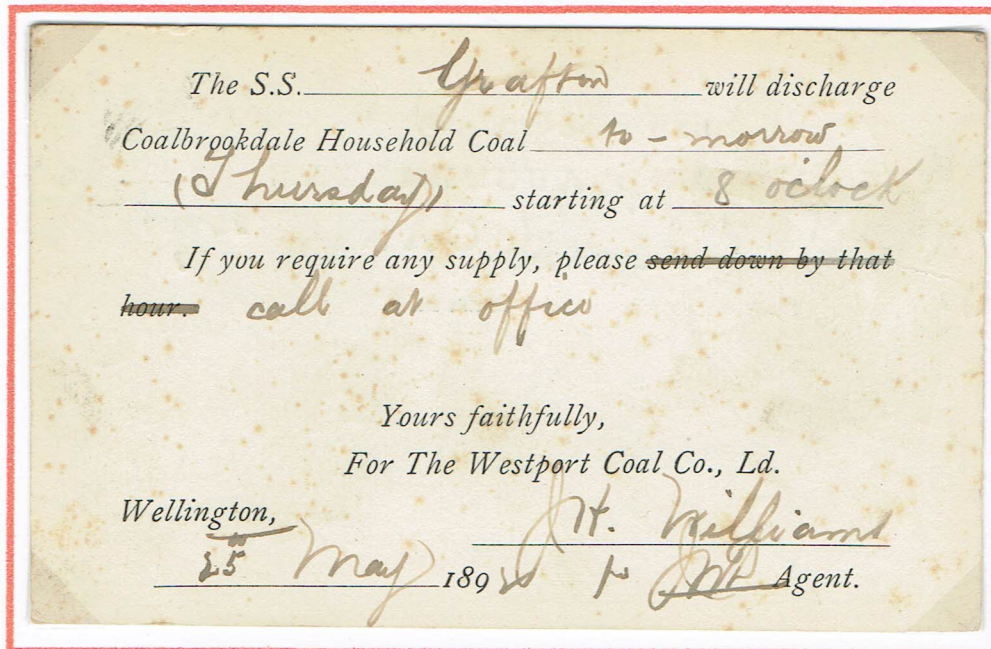
The story of Coal Shipping from the West Coast starts long before picture postcards are able to illustrate the process and problems.

### 1890 Maritime Strike "Great Coal Strike"

Between August and November 1890, the workers in coal mines and on the wharves on the Coast were on strike. This was called by the Maritime Council in a dispute over labour with the Union Steamship Company which had a virtual monopoly on coal shipping as well as ownership in some of the mines. The outcome was a Government victory with the Union being humiliated by the use of 'free labour' and 'special constables' to replaced the striking workers.



**Coal Advice Post Cards** - these were used by Coal Companies and shipping agents

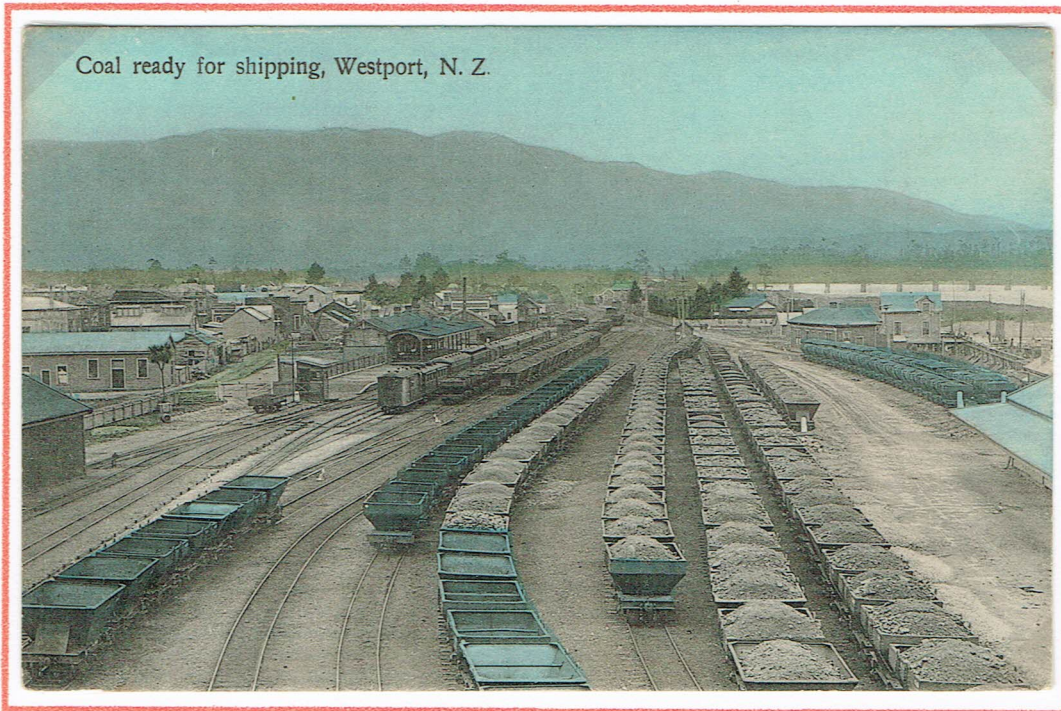


**1d Blue Post Card cancelled Wellington 25 MY 92**

**Coalbrookdale Household Coal** from **Westport Coal Company** mines above **Denniston**, down the **Denniston Incline**, then by rail to **Westport Wharf** and loaded on the Union Steam Ship Company's **SS Grafton**, a 548 ton collier, to Wellington Wharves for discharge.

## Westport Coal Port

Virtually the total production from the Buller Coalfield - over 30,000,000 tons, representing about one third of NZ coal production, was sent via the Government Railway to Westport wharves where it was loaded on colliers of the Union Steamship Company. The peak loading at Westport was 718,419 tons in 1908.



Coal ready for  
shipping, Westport,  
N.Z.

Phototyped in Saxony

Divided back

No photographer or  
Publisher

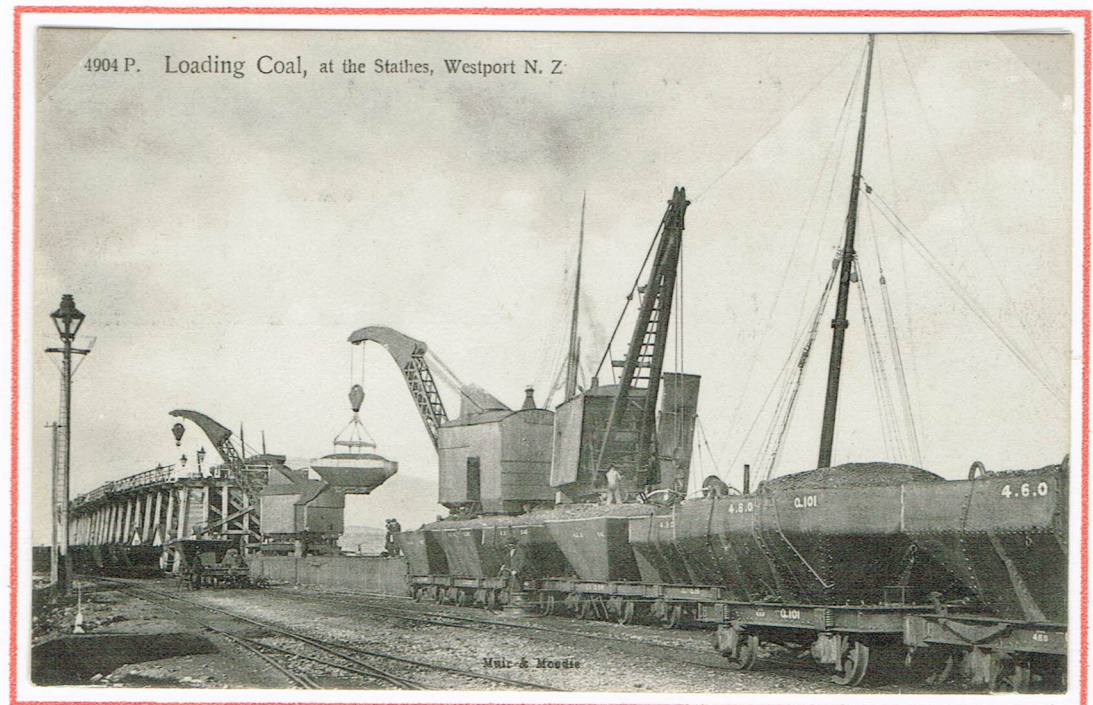
With the railway capable of carrying 30,000 tons of Coal a week, the marshalling yards at the Westport wharves were large.

Loading Coal, at  
the Staithes,  
Westport N.Z.  
4904P

Made in Germany

Divided back

Issued by **Muir &  
Moodie** Dunedin  
N Z from their  
Copyright Series of  
Views



The Coal Staithes were an elevated platform where the coal wagons were shunted up, the bottom doors opened, with the coal going down a chute into the collier's hold. A dirty, dusty business.

Steam cranes [powered by coal] were introduced from 1902 and increased the efficiency of loading.

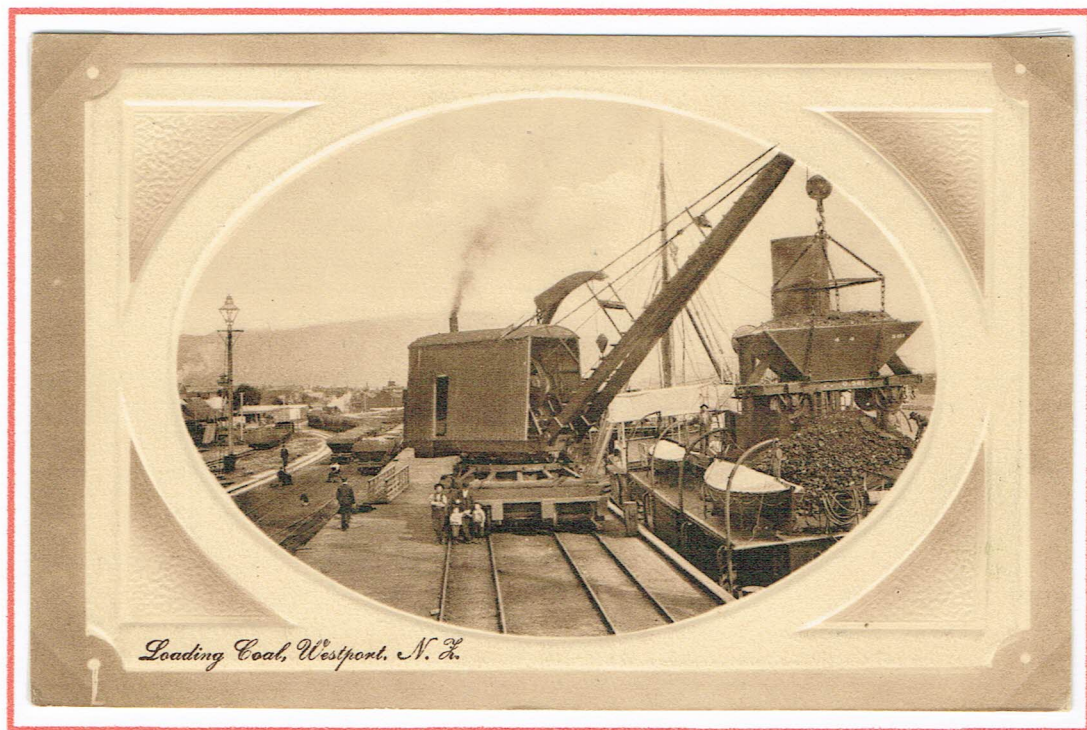
The cranes lifted the whole "L Class" railway wagon [hopper & bogies] from the track, over the hold where the bottom doors were opened and coal released. The reduced height of fall lessened the break down of coal size and reduced the dense packing that caused difficulties in emptying the holds at destination.

**Loading Coal,  
Westport, N.Z.**

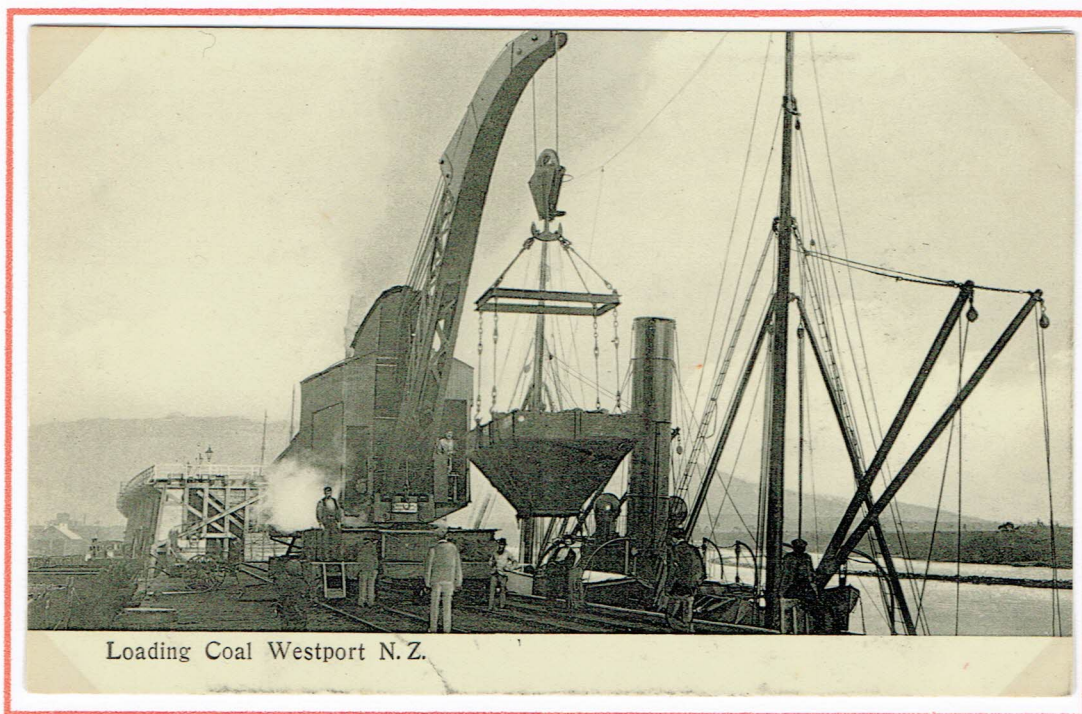
Divided back

**M H Palmer Series.**  
Printed in Saxony  
No. 1501

**Steam crane and  
"L Class" wagon**



The introduction of "Q" Class" railway wagons where the hopper could be manually detached from the bogies further improved productivity as the bogies remained on the railway track.



**Loading Coal,  
Westport, N.Z.**

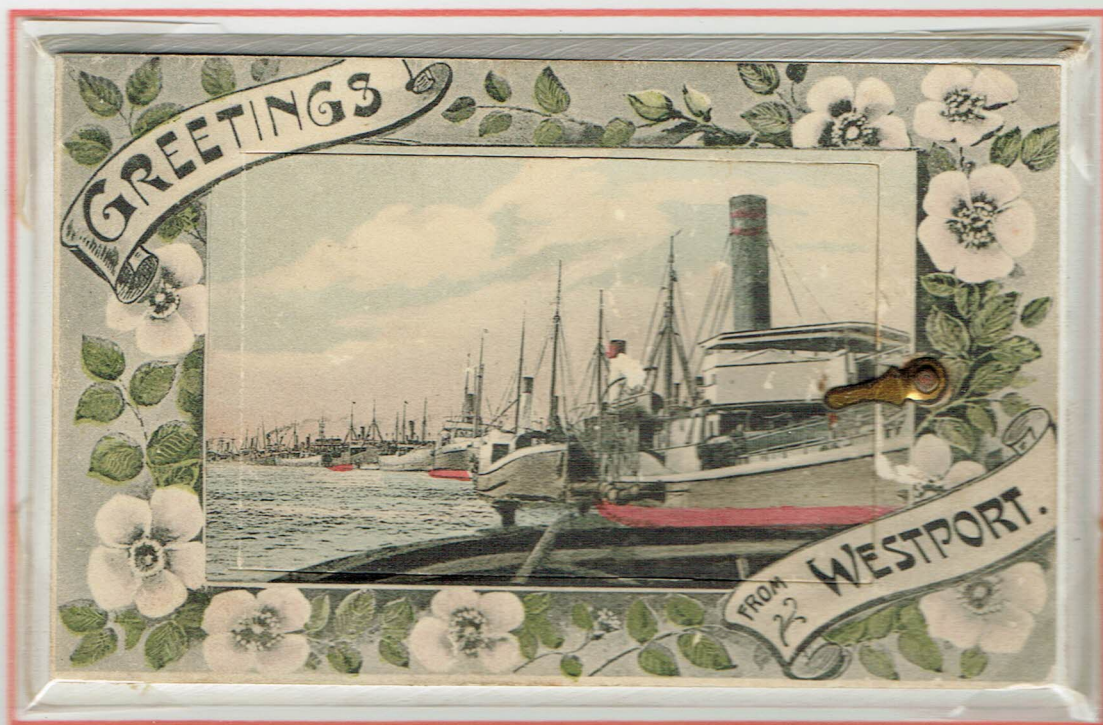
Divided back

Printed in Saxony

Issued by  
**G Parkhouse**

**Steam crane and  
"Q Class" wagon**

Greetings from WESTPORT Pictorial Post Card Album of Westport. Phototyped in Saxony, undivided back  
 Pullout of 12 views. No photographer or publisher detailed but views identical to postcards issued by  
 G. Parkhouse, Westport.



Photograph dated October 1917 taken from the stern of tug "Mama" with Westport Harbour Board's suction dredge "Rubi Seddon" in the foreground

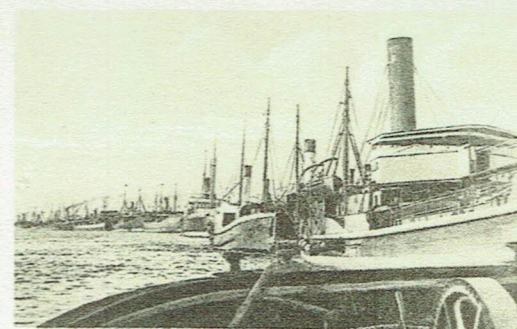
Loading Coal, Westport, N.Z. Coal Loading, Westport, N.Z. A Busy day in Westport, N.Z.



Loading Coal, Westport, N. Z.



Coal loading, Westport, N. Z.

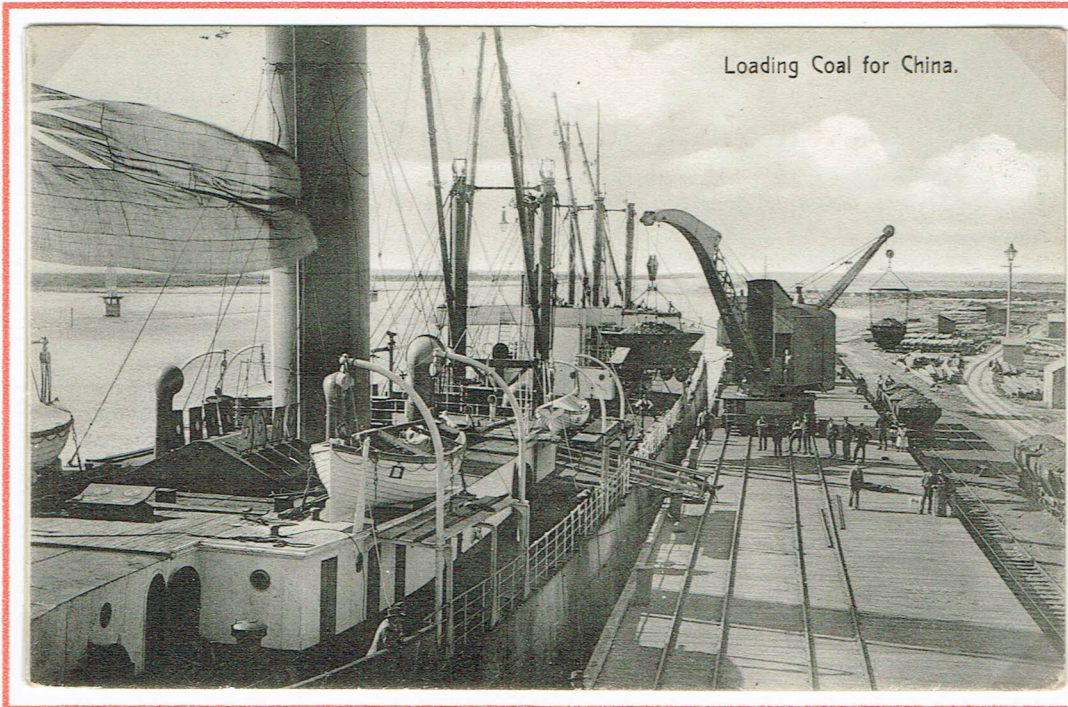


A busy day in Westport, N. Z.

Other Views:

- Fern Arch Buller Road
- Incline Denniston Colliery
- Buller Gorge, Westport N.Z.
- Lighthouse Cape Foulwind N.Z.
- Punts, Buller Road, Westport N.Z.
- Buller Road, Westport N.Z.
- Inangahua Bridge, Buller Gorge N.Z.
- Tramline - Millerton Colliery, N.Z.
- Hawks Crag, Buller River

Most coal loaded at Greymouth was shipped by coastal colliers around New Zealand but some was exported



**Loading Coal, for  
China**

Divided back

**J H Greenwood,  
Westport N.Z.  
Printed in Germany**

Westport 3 MR 10  
Message "**Loading  
coal at Crane wharf,  
Westport.**"

<sup>1</sup>The "*Mercedes*" loading coal for China - for the **British Admiralty Coaling Station in Hong Kong**. She departed **July 17, 1902** with **3866 tons of coal plus 500 tons of bunkers**. The lower end of the wharf was still under construction and building materials are seen lying beside the railway to the eastern breakwater at the right.



**Shipping Coal,  
Westport, N.Z.**

Divided back  
Phototyped in Saxony

**Issued by  
G Parkhouse,  
Westport**

**Identical images with different titles, from unrecorded photographer, on postcards issued by different Westport stationers - G Parkhouse and J H Greenwood**

**Steam cranes loading colliers - foreground loading "L Class" wagon, background loading "Q Class" wagon**

<sup>1</sup> Westport - Struggle for Survival, Bruce Macdonald Page 54

The majority of Buller coal was loaded onto the colliers of the Union Steamship Company at Westport



Shipping at Wharves  
Loading Coal,  
Westport N.Z.  
4886 P

Divided back  
Printed in Saxony

Muir & Moodie New  
West Coast Series

Issued by Muir &  
Moodie Dunedin N Z  
from their Copyright  
Series of Views

The collier being loaded has the flag of the Union Steamship Company at the stern



"Westport F.G.R 6510"  
Real Photograph Frederick George Radcliffe

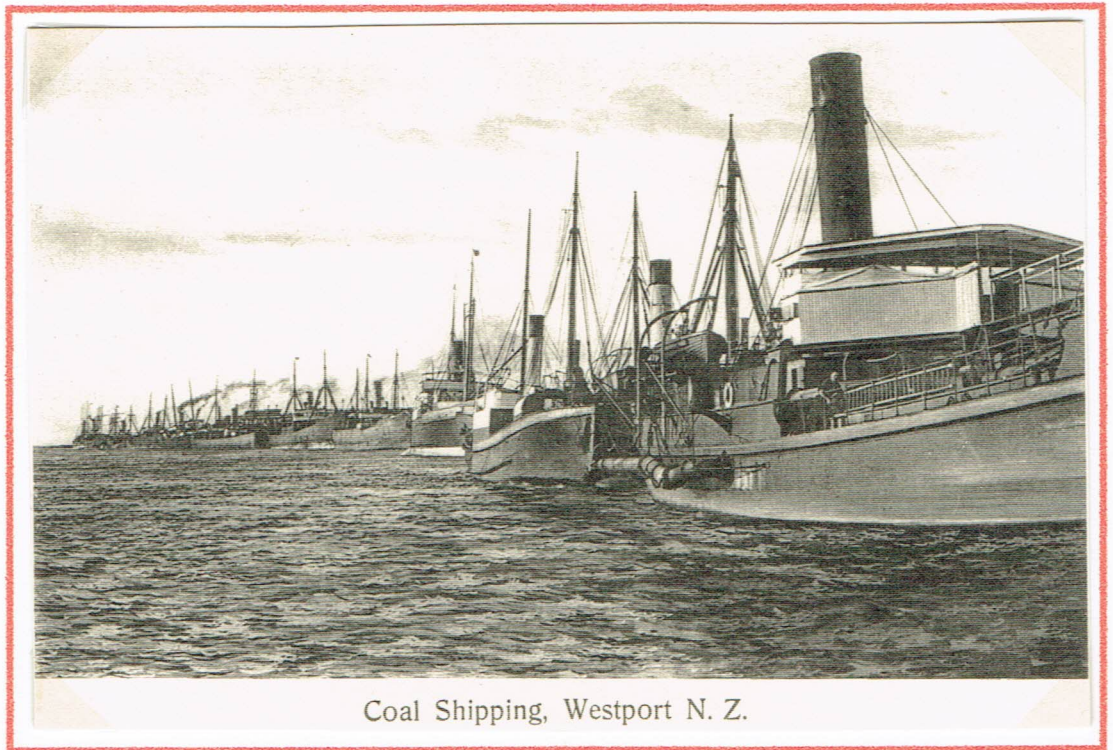
The steam cranes were set on two sets of railway tracks and were moved by shunting locomotives

Considering that the average collier carried only a few hundred tons of coal and the mine outputs averaging over 20,000 tons weekly, the Westport wharves and the Port were always busy.

**Coal Shipping,  
Westport N.Z.**

Issued by  
**G Parkhouse,**  
Westport.

Photographer not  
detailed.



Coal Shipping, Westport N. Z.

Because coal-mining was of such importance to the West Coast, related views are included in postcard folders and postcard pullouts.



Westport Harbour.

**Westport Harbour** [showing the Steam crane and colliers] from the postcard booklet "24 beautiful views of Westland" This has glassine interleaving but has no publisher or photographer attributions. Each card is divided back and has "Phototyped in Saxony" where the postage stamp would be placed. The views are very similar to other postcards issued by **G Parkhouse** and can be attributed with some confidence.

## Greymouth Coal Port

Almost the total coal production from the coal mines in the Greymouth Coalfield [Brunnerton, Blackball and Runanga areas] of over 32,000,000 tons, was railed to the Greymouth wharves and loaded on coastal colliers. The peak coal production was in 1908 with 335,151 tons produced and the peak loading at Greymouth was also 1908 - 324,641 tons.

All the coal for the Greymouth Port came over the Gorge Railway Bridge over the Grey River.

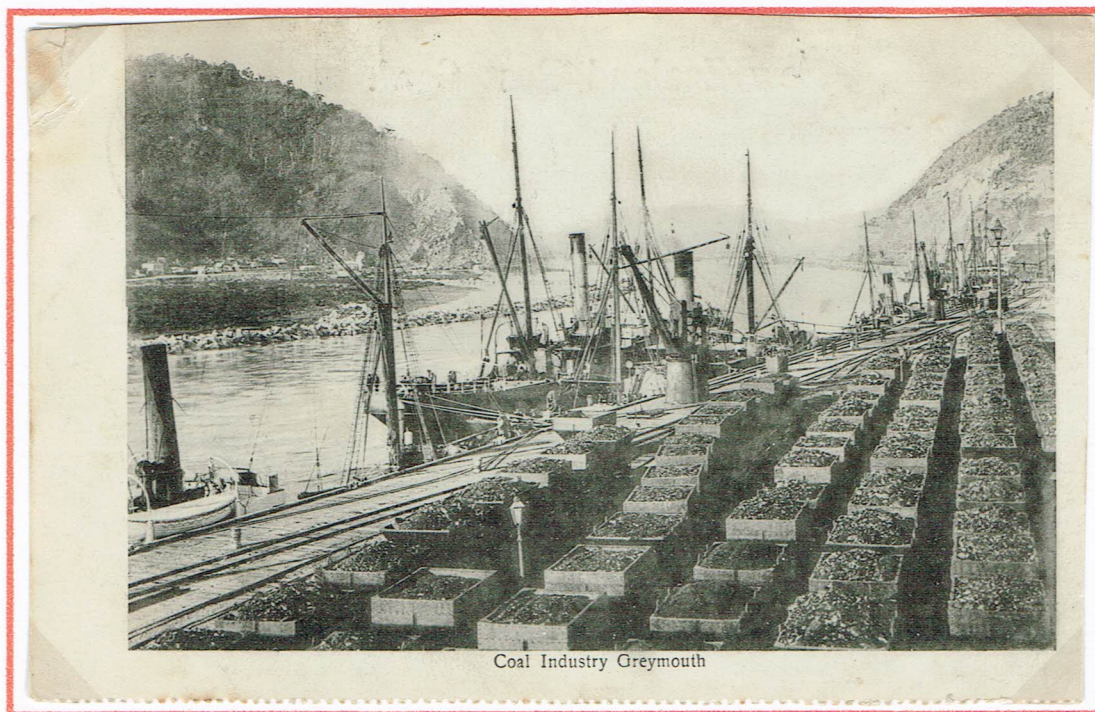


Greymouth

Real Photo  
? D S Jolly Dunedin

Used Dunedin  
FE 4 1913

*"I received your letter  
& will do up some  
photos with the next  
batch I am doing. I  
have printed some  
p.cards of West Coast  
views also one or two  
of my taking. I will  
post one now & again  
to you.  
Dave J"*



Coal Industry Greymouth

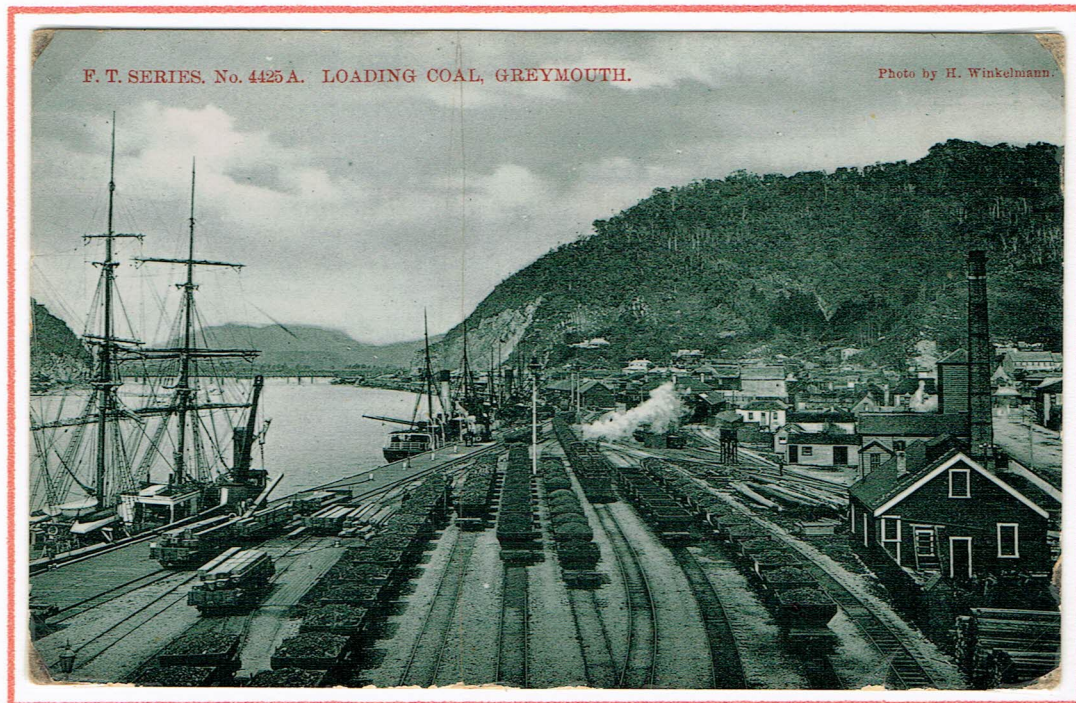
**Coal Industry Greymouth.** Issued by A E Kilgour, Greymouth - The up to date Bookseller & Stationer. From booklet of Greymouth views [miscut] Used Greymouth 26 OC 08. Message *"This is how they load the boats"*



The extensive marshalling yards on the Greymouth Wharf were at the south end of Mawhera Quay where the actual loading took place.

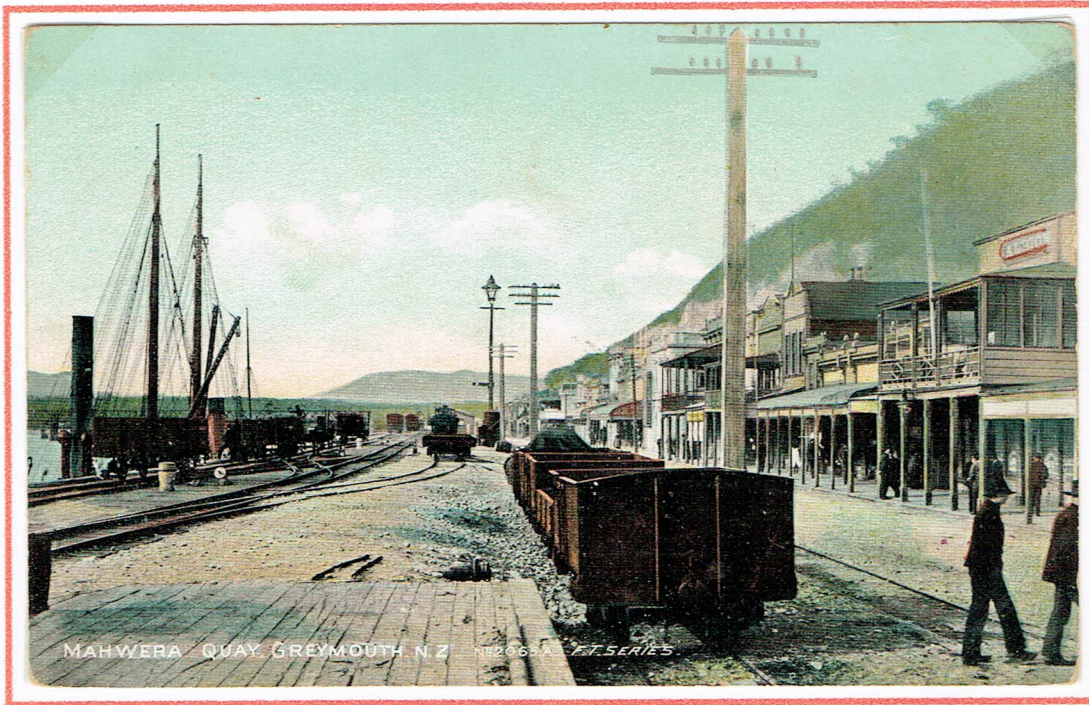


1332 Greymouth Coal & Goods Wharves E.T. [Ernest de Tournett] Real Photo  
*"You will remember this place I am sure, I wish I was waiting on the wharf for you... Poor little Bobbie is in the Grey River."* Obviously the Grey River was dangerous not just for shipping.



F.T Series No. 4425 A. Loading Coal Greymouth. Real Photo by H Winkelmann. Used JA 17 1908  
F.T. Fergusson Taylor [Christchurch]. Henry Winklemann [Auckland]

Mawhera Quay was the loading wharf on the Grey River and the Main street of Greymouth



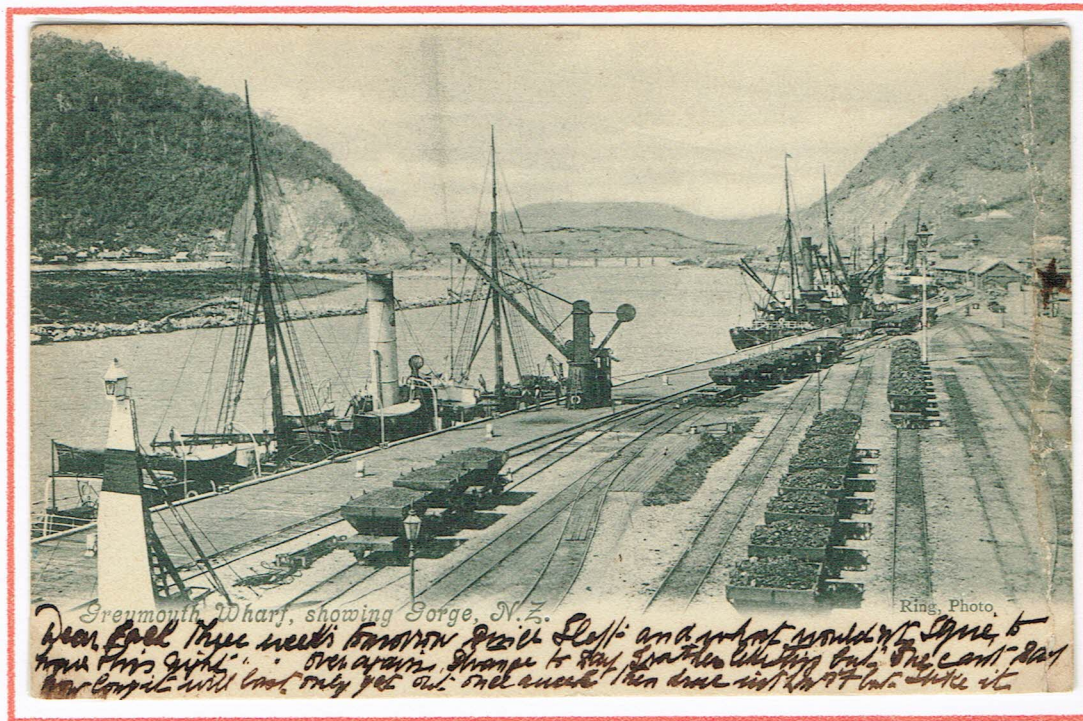
Mawhera Quay  
Greymouth N Z

No. 2065A F.T.  
Series [also on the  
back in red]

Divided back

Written 30.1.1907  
from Brunnerton  
[coal mining] to  
Gundagai Australia

The Wharves at Greymouth loaded coal by steam crane but, unlike the Westport Wharf, the cranes were fixed and not on rails so the colliers had to be positioned for loading.



Greymouth Wharf, showing Gorge NZ. Ring photo. Undivided back. Bilingual Post Card - Carte Postale  
James Ring an active Greymouth photographer

The "Gorge" was New Zealand's first Industrial Complex and was based around coal mining at Brunnerton with brick works and coke ovens

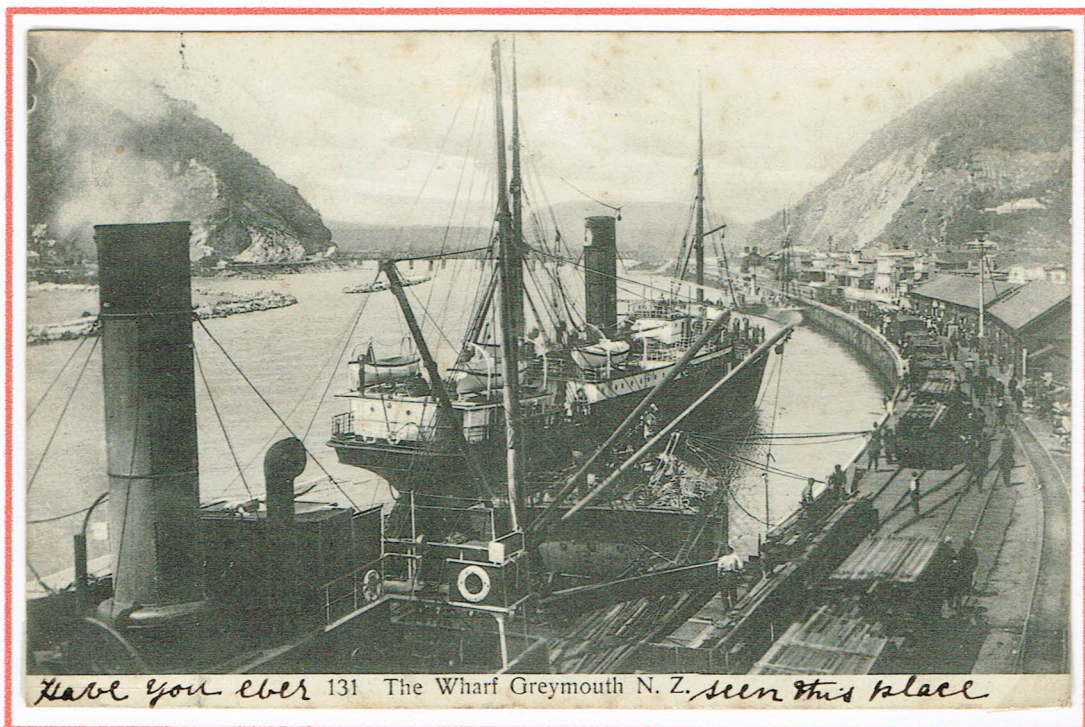
The coal trains crossed the railway bridge over the Grey River and travelled down Mawhera Quay to the marshalling yards past the Railway Station.

131 The Wharf  
Greymouth N.Z.

Divided back

Used Greymouth  
28 MY 07

J Ring  
Photographer



Timber was the other major export across the Greymouth Wharf. Coastal ships often carried mixed cargo of coal in the hold and timber on the deck



Real Photo Postcard annotated on back "*Shipping at the Wharves at Greymouth*" -  
no photographer or publisher details.  
View of Mawhera Quay, railway and shipping looking south.

Because of the importance to the West Coast, the Coal Industry was featured in Greetings Postcards



**Pull-out Post Card**

**"Greetings from Greymouth" with 10 small views including 2 of Coal shipping.**

Budget card design J printed in Saxony

Photographs not attributed but probably **James Ring** photographs

**Greetings From Greymouth**

Photographs by **Mascotte**.

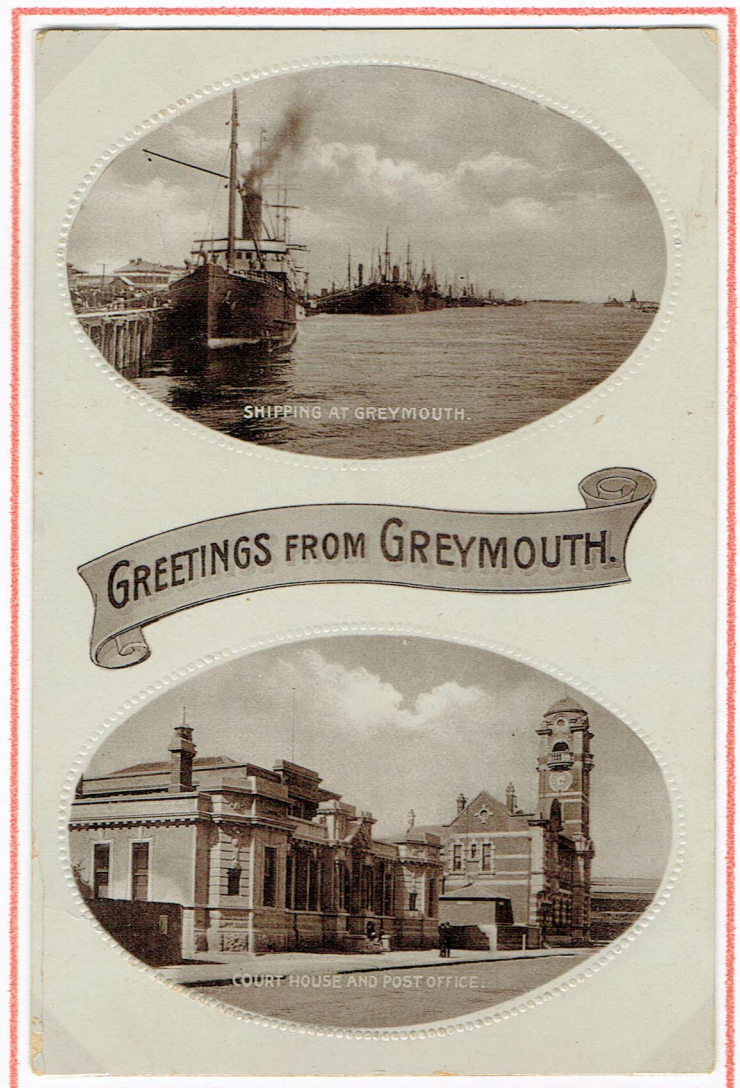
Issued by **Messrs S Mills & Son**.

Divided back, printed in Saxony

The **Mascotte Photographic Studios** in Greymouth, was managed by **Bertha Johnston** and associated with **James Ring**



**Views Enlarged**



The New Zealand Government, passed Legislation in 1901 creating State Coal which opened mines in both Buller and Greymouth coalfields. Shipping Offices were set up at both Greymouth and Westport wharves.



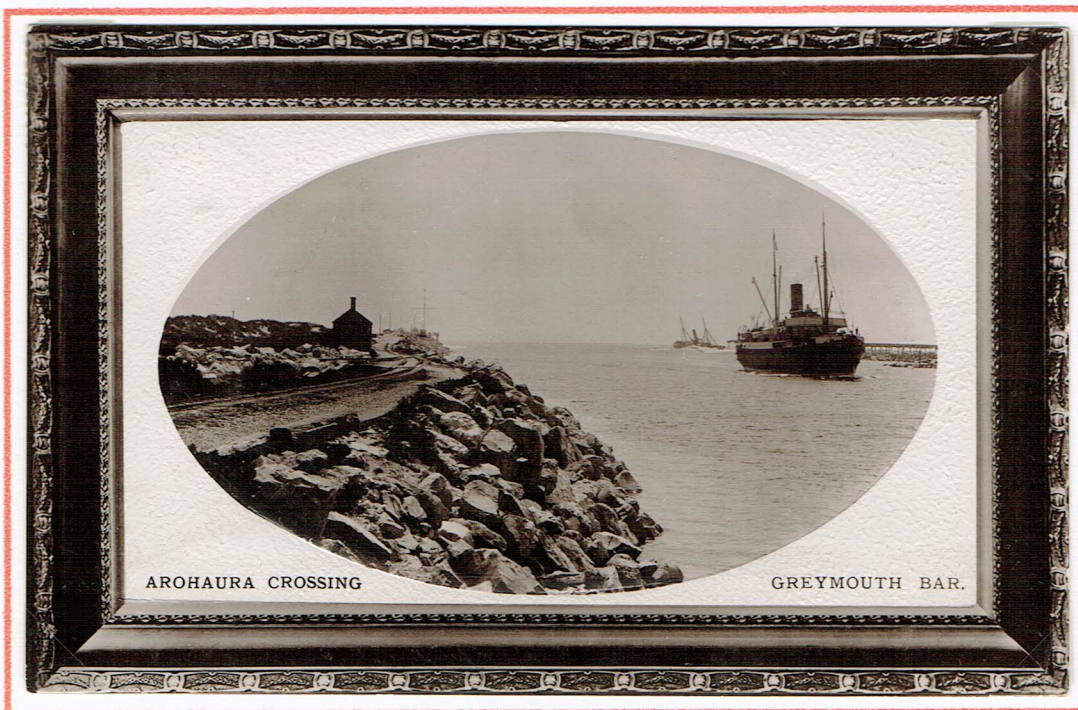
Real Photo - undivided back featuring State Coal Shipping Office. No photographer or publisher.

Mailed from Greymouth 1 MY 1908 locally to Kumara.

Message "*Kotuku*" due here about Friday and loads again for *Onehunga 1.5.09*"

The "*Kotuku*" was a Union Steamship Company vessel of 1052 tons and 662 tons nett. It ran aground near the entrance of Greymouth Harbour on the North Tiphead May 16, 1912 with a cargo of coal and timber and became a total wreck.

The Grey River bar was a dangerous crossing especially in heavy seas with many ships grounding on it and many being totally wrecked.



Arohaura Crossing  
Greymouth Bar

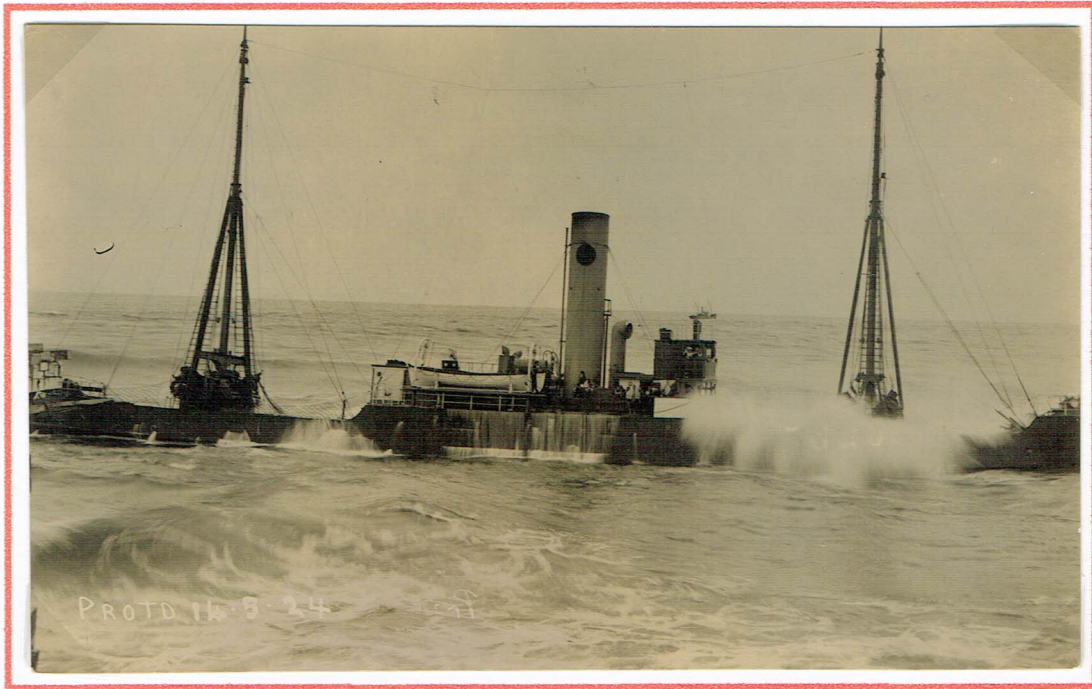
Universal Post Card  
Co. Dunedin

Used Greymouth  
26 FE 12

Message: "*Saw a steamer coming up like this this morning.*"

The "*Arahura*" was a coastal vessel carrying cargo and passengers.

## Wreck of "Ngahere" Grey River Bar 1924



PROTD 14 5 24 - L A Inkster Greymouth - photographer and photographic dealer  
Wreck of Blackball Coal Company's "Ngahere"

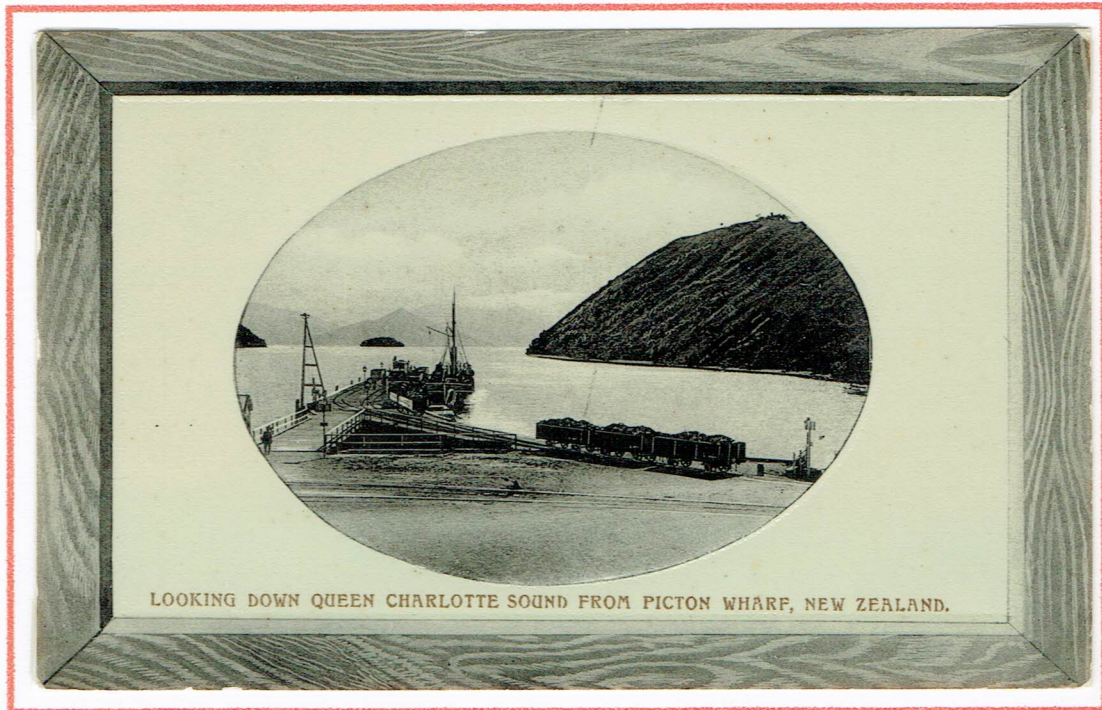
Recovered from Wreck SS "Ngahere" cachet on recovered mail at Greymouth - 4 covers known  
Kotuku 10 MY 24; Greymouth 10 MY 24.



<sup>1</sup>The steamer "Ngahere" was outward bound from Greymouth with a full cargo of coal and timber for Wellington grounded at 3pm May 12, 1924 when stuck by unusual "tempestuous swell" and was stranded amongst the remains of the steamer "Perth" a casualty of two and half years earlier. The 23 crew were all rescued but the ship was a total loss. The "Ngahere" was a steel screw steamer of 1090 tons built in 1908 for the Blackball Coal Company. The reference, New Zealand Shipwrecks, states that the vessel was trading under the Union Steamship Company when she was lost

<sup>1</sup> New Zealand Shipwrecks 1795-1982, C W N Ingram. Page 344-345

Coal from the West Coast was shipped in Colliers to Ports around New Zealand. It was unloaded by coal-powered steam shovels into railway wagons or sometimes into moored ships used as coal hulks for storage.



Three Wagons of Coal on Picton Wharf "The W & B Series" Printed in England



Wanganui A1799  
Protected 20.4.11  
Aldersley

Aldersley Series  
[D J Aldersley  
Wellington]

Real Photograph

Detail shows a coal barge advertising  
"Use Coalbrookdale  
Coal"



The dangers of distributing West Coast coal around New Zealand were not limited to the bar at the mouth of the Grey and Buller Rivers, the entrances to other ports on the western coasts also could be difficult to cross.



SS "Charles  
Edward" wrecked at  
Castlecliff Wanganui.

Real Photograph.

No details.

Note ship name  
incorrect!

<sup>1</sup>The "*Charles Edwin*" was carrying 200 tons of coal from Greymouth when she struck an 'object' on the bar at the mouth of the Wanganui River December 15, 1908 and became stranded. Much gear was removed but she became a total wreck December 17, 1908.

**The Slow Decline:** The completion of the Otira Tunnel in 1923 completed the railway link and enabled coal from the West Coast Coalfields direct to the deep water port of Lyttelton where it was stockpiled for distribution around NZ and for export. The volume of coal shipped from Westport and Greymouth slowly declined over the next decades.

Real Photograph

Kodak Austral

The South Portal of  
the Otira Tunnel 1923

