

John Young



John Young, who took out a seven year lease on the Louttit Quarry at Moruya in 1868, had a very varied and interesting life. Among other things, he was an Australian bowler, bowls administrator, builder, employers' organiser, free trade politician, land speculator, local government councillor, local government head, protectionist politician, quarry operator, marble and granite supplier for many important buildings and monuments around Sydney.

Born at Foot's Cray, Kent, England in 1827, the son of John Young, builder, he was associated with the building trade from boyhood and was articled to Garland and Christopher, architects and surveyors and attended lectures at King's College, London. He gained architectural and engineering experience in London and Yorkshire. At 18 years of age he was foreman, cashier and draftsman to Messrs. J. and J. Sykes, contractors. He later went into business for himself. He built many churches, villas and mansions in various parts of England. In 1851 he was superintendent and draftsman for the Crystal Palace under Sir Joseph Paxton.

In 1853 he married Eleanor Southernwood and they eventually had two sons and two daughters.

In 1855 he and his wife migrated to Victoria. Here he constructed many metropolitan churches, the interior of the Bourke Street Synagogue and the Ballarat gaol and powder magazine among other buildings. He also erected buildings in Tasmania and New Zealand.

In 1866 he moved to Sydney. Here he gained contracts for many substantial works including the base of the Captain Cook Statue in Hyde Park, the pillars of the new GPO, sections of St Mary's Cathedral, the Department of Lands building, the old Redfern railway terminus, the Exhibition Building in Prince Alfred Park and the Garden Palace for the Sydney International Exhibition 1879; commercial buildings such as Farmer and Co.'s store, Dalton's Building and the head office of the Australian Joint Stock Bank; engineering works, such as Fig Tree Bridge; and houses such as "The Abbey" and the "Witches Houses" in Johnston Street Annandale. He became known for his sound work, usually completed ahead of schedule. He adopted the latest technological innovations from overseas such as the overhead travelling crane, the use of arc-lights for night shifts, and reinforced concrete and invented an improved form of scaffolding.

He invested in quarries in Melbourne and Sydney but of most interest to Moruya is his involvement in the Louttit Quarry. In 1868 he took out a seven year lease on this granite quarry from the Louttit brothers after he obtained a contract in 1866 for work on the new GPO. He was responsible for carpenters, joiners, slaters, plumbers, painters, glaziers, masons and bricklayers. He began transporting huge granite pieces from this quarry to Sydney. The pillars were imported in one piece and polished in Sydney. Another huge piece was imported for the base of the Captain Cook Statue in Hyde Park. Much smaller stone was also sent to Sydney for various works.

He was an early advocate for the eight-hour day and respected his workman. However agitation for higher pay and strikes sometimes made meeting deadlines difficult.

John Young stood unsuccessfully for parliament several times between 1873 and 1894. He was at first a supporter of free trade but later became a strong protectionist. He was a councillor on the Sydney Municipal Council from 1876 to 1887. He was Mayor in 1886. He bought land at Annandale as a real estate speculator in 1877 and was responsible for a lot of its development. He was an alderman on the Leichhardt Borough Council from 1879 and was Mayor of that Council in 1879 and again 1884-85. He toured Europe and Asia, returning in 1891 and supported the separation of Annandale Borough Council and was the foundation Mayor from 1894 until 1896. He was a member of the Royal Society of New South Wales from 1879, a commissioner for the exhibitions in Sydney (1879), Melbourne (1880) and Amsterdam (1883), the Colonial and Indian Exhibition, London (1886) and the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago (1893), a member of the Board of Technical Education in 1883-89 and sat on the commission into charges against Edward Eddy, chief commissioner of railways.

In Annandale Young lived at his home called "Kentville". It had been owned by Robert Johnston, son of George Johnston who built it. George had arrived with the First Fleet. Young carried out extensive extensions. He cultivated a fine garden with a bowling green and facilities for archery, billiards and skittles. Bowling matches were played here against Victorian teams, the first in 1880. He was foundation president of the New South Wales Bowling Association in 1880-1907. He led an Australian Bowling team to Britain in 1901. He insisted on gentlemanly conduct in bowling activities. In the 1880s he was also president of the Annandale Skittle Club. Behind "Kentville" he built "The Abbey".

In 1887 he bought a property near Cumnock called "Burrawong". Three of his children settled here. The property was developed and a fruit cannery established.

In 1891 Young wrote a letter to the editor of the "Australian Star" extolling the virtues of colonial marble and granite. It appeared in that newspaper on 8th September of that year. Mr Hoyle, M.L.A. for Redfern, had moved and had carried in the House of Assembly that all marble used for public works should be the product of the colony. In part Young said:

"As I am the only person who erected expensive and costly machinery in Sydney for converting marble from the block, quarried the material in this country, and worked it up and polished it for chimney pieces, bases, caps and columns, marble pavements and for other constructive purposes, and opened out the Moruya granite quarries and also quarried, worked and polished all the granite for the first portion of the Post Office building, the pedestal of Captain Cook's statue, Hyde Park, and many other works I think that probably my experience in reference to those matters may be worth considering by those who desire to promote the industries in which these materials are necessary. In order to get to an understanding of the business it is desirable to relate the particulars connected with some of the works that have already been executed in marble and granite."

About sixteen years earlier he had tendered for, and eventually got, the contract for the marble floor of the University Hall using colonial marble. Some time afterwards he obtained the contract for the chimney pieces, pavements and other things for the Chief Secretary's Office in Bridge Street to be executed in NSW marble. At the same time, he had carried out other granite and marble work. In 1887 he got the contract for the first portion of the Lands Office. About 1889 tenders

were called for the finishing trades. Colonial marble was specified but Mr Young was not asked for a price. He did not think it would have paid any contractor to put up machinery for that purpose only. Young called on the Colonial Architect and told him that if the stock patterns of Belgium were to be used, he could not compete as they were turned out by the thousand, all of them alike. Young then came to the conclusion that it was useless to endeavour to establish a colonial marble industry. He sold off all his machinery. He lost nearly 10,000 pounds in trying to establish an industry suitable to this country. Under a moderate protective duty, there could have been a thriving industry, giving employment to many marble masons, quarrymen and others, and revenue to the State. He went on to describe the qualities and advantages of using colonial marble but it was not worth the while for contractors to set up machinery for just one job.

Young was a large framed man with a goatee beard. He was very hospitable and courteous, with great ability, energy and practical experience. His first wife died and in 1886 he married divorcee Elizabeth Susan Ovenden nee Russell. He died aged 80 from cancer at his home "Kentville" in

1907 and is buried in the Waverley Cemetery.

Left: Johnston Street houses



Entry in "Australian Dictionary of Biography"

References:

Obituary, *Sydney Morning Herald* 1st March 1907