

The McCredie Quarry

By Shirley Jurmann

In 1882 it was decided to go ahead with the second stage of the GPO in Sydney to Pitt Street. It was to be done under the close direction of James Barnet the Colonial Architect who had designed the first stage. The firm of McCredie Brothers, architects, engineers and builders, was engaged for the project. The firm was run by Arthur Latimer McCredie and his half brother George McCredie. They were the sons of Thomas McCredie, Arthur with his first wife Mary Anne Latimer and George with his second wife Jessie Smeals. Thomas had also been a builder.

The colonnade of the original part of the building had pillars of Moruya granite and the pillars in the second stage would need to match. The McCredie brothers purchased 3 acres of the Ziegler quarry at Pompey Point from which to obtain their granite. This was on the northern bank of the river and would later be the site of the Dorman, Long and Company quarry which would provide granite for the pylons of the Harbour Bridge. The development of the McCredie quarry involved considerable expenditure of money and labour as some of the blocks weighed as much as sixteen tons and a tramway had to be constructed to the river bank from which they could be shipped to Sydney. Because of the shallow depth of the water over the bar at the entrance of the Moruya River only vessels of light draught could come up the river. When the huge pieces of granite were positioned in the hold it was impossible to move them until they reached Sydney where they could be slung out by crane.

After the completion of the second stage of the GPO the McCredie Bros took on the construction of the pedestal of the Queen Victoria pedestal. The granite came from their Moruya quarry and was in five pieces. It had taken three days to get one piece weighing 13 tons onto a ship in Moruya. Three of these pieces were polished at their yards at Pyrmont. The other two were fine axed. The weight of the pedestal was nearly 30 tons and was 16 feet high with a diameter of 7 feet 4 inches. It was the largest base for a statue ever turned and polished in Australia. A special polishing lathe had to be erected as the one they had was not big enough.

Moruya granite pedestals had a habit of sitting vacant for long periods of time. On 28th January 1888 the "Adelaide Observer" had an account of the history of the statue of Queen Victoria. A statue of Queen Victoria by Mr Marshall Wood had been erected at the Garden Palace. It was in bronze and of a most imposing character and regarded as one of the best specimens of artistic work that had reached the colony. However it stood directly under the dome of the building and the position was most unsatisfactory mainly due to the bad light. It was decided to move it to High Street in a position between St James' Church and the Hyde Park Barracks. On 2nd August 1881 The Prince of Wales in the presence of his brother Prince George laid the foundation stone for the pedestal, which was designed by Mr James Barnett, Colonial Artist. The pedestal of polished Moruya granite, was erected, but before the statue could be moved, there was a disastrous fire at the Garden Palace on 22nd September 1882. The statue was totally destroyed. The pedestal remained unoccupied for nearly six years. In 1883, 3000 pounds was set aside for a replacement statue but the Government could not find a satisfactory colonial artist. Finally an agreement was entered into with Mr J.E. Boehm in London on 22nd October

1885 by which he was to complete a statue and deliver it on board ship for 3000 pounds. This took two years. The empty pedestal became very familiar to the public as many public meetings had been held around it. The statue finally arrived. It was of bronze which was cast hollow and in order to give the statue the necessary weight and stability the interior was filled with concrete. The statue was firmly fixed to the pedestal by means of granite plinths passing from the pedestal to the interior of the statue. It was regarded as being a most satisfactory statue of the Queen. It was unveiled in January 1888.



Queen Victoria statue, Moruya granite base

The McCredie Bros. also constructed the Chief Secretary's building in Macquarie Street using their Moruya granite for the columns at the main entrance and twenty five granite columns on the upper floor. The Burns Philp building in Bridge Street, Sydney was also built by the McCredie Bros. Co. and used Moruya granite. The façade of the Burns Philp building is three storeys high, constructed with Waverley sandstone and twenty Moruya granite columns on the ground floor.

References:

Moruya and District Historical Society's display at the Moruya museum.

NSW BDMs

"Adelaide Observer" 28th January 1888