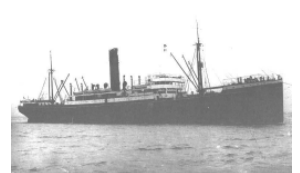




Barrabool

Moruya's Scottish Connection.

Bill Glennie



Pakeha

In this article Bill relates how he became interested in the Moruya Aberdeen connection. He gives us an insight into the research techniques of an historian and illustrates how every little lead must be followed up.

My interest in the history of the Sydney Harbour Bridge dates from 2003. In that year, it was my good fortune to participate in a teacher exchange programme which took me to Cronulla High School in Sutherland Shire. My exchange partner, who arrived in Scotland before I left for Australia, told me that the Year 10 students had to carry out a site study as part of their course, and at Cronulla the subject of that study was the Harbour Bridge.

I was dismayed to find that there was next to nothing in the way of resources suitable for teachers or students, but armed with a second-hand copy of Peter Spearritt's *Sydney Harbour Bridge: a life* and a rather poorly reproduced item from the Department of Main Roads bought at the Pylon Lookout Exhibition shop, I managed to cobble together a few resources for classroom use.

Following my return to Scotland, I took early retirement from my post as Head of History in a Dunfermline high school, and returned to Sydney in October 2004 to escape the Scottish winter. I decided to spend some of my new-found leisure time putting together a package of resources on the Bridge that might be of use in Sydney schools. It was during those many hours in the libraries of Sydney that I first came across references to Moruya, granite and the quarrymen and masons from Aberdeen, my home town.

In 2006 I was given the opportunity to look after three cats

and a house in Caringbah, while the owners, good friends, travelled to the United States. I decided to use the time between cat-feeds to learn more of Moruya's Aberdonians and the part they played in the Bridge project.

Even before I set off for Australia in August I had made progress. I learned, thanks to the internet, that Daniel MacKay, a Year 9 student at the Scots College in Bathurst, had won second prize in a competition organised by the Australian National Trust for a project on his great uncle who had travelled with his family to Moruya in 1926 from Aberdeen. Had someone done all the research before I had even started? By the time I arrived in Sydney, my cat-owning friend in Caringbah had contacted Daniel's school, and there, waiting for me, was a copy of young Daniel's project, telling the story of Peter Geddes. (I would



later learn that Peter, his wife and their infant son, Sandy, left Aberdeen in May 1926, part of the same group that included Ruby Grant, better known in Moruya as Ruby Webberley, author of *Granitetown Memories*.)

There were other developments before I left. I had mentioned to a friend that I thought it might be possible to put together something on the Aberdeen workers to submit to the local Aberdeen newspaper, the *Press and Journal*. He suggested the *Scots Magazine* might be worth approaching, and he also mentioned Dr Marjory Harper of Aberdeen University, an authority on emigrants from the north-east of Scotland. Indeed, in one of her books, I did find a brief reference to masons travelling to New South Wales in 1926, and more importantly, a name – Norah Berry – who had been a mature student at Aberdeen University, and who had discussed with Dr Harper her father's experiences at a granite quarry in New South Wales. Following e-mail contact with Dr Harper, I met up with Norah in her home in Aberdeen. There, too, waiting to meet me was Norah's Aunt Mattie, who had been born in Moruya in 1928. Her father, Alexander Campbell, along with his family, had also travelled on the *Pakeha* from Liverpool, along with the Grants and the Geddeses. In addition, I now had my first photographs, including one taken of the *Pakeha* group at Aberdeen railway station in May 1926 before boarding the train for Liverpool.



Above: The Pakeha group at Aberdeen Joint Station March 1926.

Below: Ruby Grant (Webberley) with young Sandy Geddes on the Pakeha



In the midst of all this, I had made contact via the *Moruya* and District Historical Society with John Sewell, and learned that a daughter of John Gilmore, the quarry manager, was still living in Moruya. The daughter Nell Greig is 93 years old, with a great memory and Scottish accent.

Once in Sydney I was a frequent visitor to the State Library, making myself familiar with items published by the *Moruya* and District Historical Society, in particular the works of Christine Greig (great granddaughter of John Gilmore) and Ruby Webberley, and began to build up a picture of what had gone on down at Moruya.

The Library holds microfilm copy of the *Moruya Examiner*, and a search through editions from late 1924 until the quarry wound up in 1931 was invaluable in building up a picture of life at the quarry and the development of the Granite Town community. The references were at times detailed, for example the reader might be given a full account of a scouts' concert held in the community hall, then, after a few weeks of silence, there might be nothing more than the briefest mention of a gardening competition. Nevertheless, along with the books by Christine Greig, Ruth Webberley and Bob Colefax, the *Examiner* remains one of the most useful printed resources on the quarry I have yet come across.

My Caringbah contact had helped me in other ways, including putting me in touch with Caroline Mackaness and Fabienne Virago at Historic Houses (Sydney).

The *Scots Magazine*, meanwhile, showed immediate interest when I contacted them regarding my quarry research, and gave me a deadline for November. They were especially interested in the prospect of my meeting up with Nell Greig. This, and the knowledge that the Bridge was about to celebrate its 75th birthday in March 2007, made me all the more determined to pursue the project. Plans for the trip south to meet up with John Sewell and Nell Greig were well advanced when I received the sad news of a

family bereavement back in Scotland, and I had to fly home earlier than expected.

I decided I would return to Sydney. After all, how often would the bridge celebrate its 75th birthday? I had been told, too, I would get an invite to the launch night of the *Bridging Sydney* exhibition in December at the Museum of Sydney. And I still had to visit Moruya, and meet Nell.

Back in Scotland, during a visit to Aberdeen to check if there were any items of relevance in the local history section of the City Library, I asked the librarians if they would be interested in putting on some kind of display around the time of the Bridge's birthday celebrations in March 2007, to raise the profile of the Aberdeen workers' contribution to the Bridge's construction. I am grateful indeed that after giving the matter some thought, and at very short notice, the City Library agreed to find the time and space to mount a display, on condition that I came up with the materials.

Before returning to Sydney in November, I had found another mason. This one was different. Angus Cruickshank had worked on the Bridge itself. I managed to track down a step-daughter in Auckland, who, very fortunately, had held onto a couple of interesting items from his time in Sydney: a work tag that he would have used when he took his tools from the workshop at Milsons Point, and a coloured enamel badge that showed he had been one of the Bridge workers who had crossed the Bridge in the opening day procession on March 19, 1932. What made Angus Cruickshank's badge unusual, however, was the misspelling of the word *pageant* as *pagaent*. Following an e-mail to Caroline Mackaness, I learned that one other such badge was known about, and that was held in the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney – but by the time of its production,

Dorman Long had got their spelling right!



Back in Sydney during visits to the State Archives, I found the passenger lists for the *Barrabool* and the *Pakeha*, the two ships which had carried out extra quarrymen and stonemasons in 1926 from London and Liverpool respectively. Now I had names for all the men and their families who had been photographed at Aberdeen railway station in February and May 1926. The State Archives agreed – very generously – to allow Aberdeen City Library to have some wonderful photographs I found of Moruya and of the granite masonry being applied up in Sydney, for use in the forthcoming exhibition.

In December I made it to Moruya. Without realising it, the road I took to enter the town passed through the site where Granite Town had once stood. John Sewell gave me access to the Museum's materials on the quarry, and I spent some hours ploughing through – and photocopying – a wealth of items. Especially interesting were letters sent by relatives asking for information on the quarry since their relatives had worked there. These gave me further leads I would follow up on my return to Scotland.

John had set up a meeting with Nell Greig, and there she was when we went round to her house, with a wealth of letters, press cuttings and photographs for me to browse through. If there was treasure trove of memorabilia, this was it. I spent four wonderful hours listening and learning. I don't know about poor Nell, but I was exhausted at the end, and more determined than ever to stay on the trail of the Aberdonians.

Back in the State Library, shortly before I set off home, I found mention of what turned out to be a very important item. It was a modest album of photographs that had been taken by Stanley Purves, and one of these, dated March 1926, shows clearly an extension being built to the dressing sheds at the Quarry. It began to make sense: it would appear that some time at the end of 1925, Dorman Long realised that current capacity and manpower at the quarry were insufficient to meet the demands for dressed granite up in Sydney, thus explaining the extension to the sheds. And at the same time that the extension was being added, the first of the additional men required to work at the quarry face and in the sheds were already aboard the *Barrabool* en route for New South Wales, with others to follow on the *Pakeha*. Later, too, I found references to Dorman Long acquiring land for a second quarry face.

Several weeks later I received an e-mail from Jennifer Broomhead in the State Library. She had located Alec Purves, Stanley's son, in Tasmania. Now in his book, *Moruya's Golden Years*, Bob Colefax had written that Purves, the Quarry Engineer, was an English character who 'had enjoyed the advantages of an English public school system'. In fact Stanley Stewart Beattie Purves was born in Kirkcaldy in Fife, a twenty minute drive from where I live. The same Stanley had been something of a war hero: he had joined the Royal Flying Corps (later to become the Royal Air Force) during the Great War. His plane had conked out behind enemy lines, and he had been taken prisoner by the Germans, but along with some fellow prisoners-of-war had escaped from Holzminden castle in Germany in 1918. A compass that he had made using some cigarette paper and pins is held in the Australian War Memorial in Canberra. In December 1919

Stanley Purves was awarded the Military Cross. What better preparation for a quarry engineer!

In Scotland, a few more descendants of quarry workers were traced. There had been a letter found at Moruya from one Robert Middleton, sent some years before, but with an Aberdeen address and a phone number. In Aberdeen he was better known as Bob Middleton, and was at one time the Convener of Grampian Regional Council. Sadly Bob died a few years ago, but his widow, Audrey, still lives in the house Bob had named Moruya. Bob's father, John, had been a farm labourer in Scotland, and he and his brother Cosmo had emigrated in late 1925 with the expectation of farming in New South Wales, but had somehow found their way down to the quarry, where John was a crane dogman and Cosmo a quarry labourer.

I made telephone contact with Sally Cains, granddaughter of John Ogg, one the stonemasons who travelled out on the *Barrabool*. She had visited Moruya in 1993 with her father, Albert, who had been five years old when he arrived in Granite Town in 1926. Sally now lives in Bristol. In the museum I found a copy of *Connected to the Bridge*, her story of Albert's childhood in Granite Town.

During the December visit to Sydney, Daniel Mackay, the Bathurst student, accompanied by his grandmother, had travelled to Sydney to meet me. Daniel was delighted to know that I had shown an interest in his school project, and his grandmother brought along with her photographs and details of contacts back in Scotland, one of whom was Peter Geddes's daughter, June. (Peter's first wife died tragically in Moruya in 1927. He remarried back in Scotland.) June and her husband live in Portlethen, just south of Aberdeen, and June has held onto many items relating to her father's

time in Moruya. I learned that young Sandy, frequently mentioned in Ruby Webberley's book, had joined the Royal Navy but died as a result of an accident two years into the Second World War.

Then there was Jack Ross. I found him by pure chance. His father, Kemnay-born John, arrived in Sydney some time in 1925 or 1926, but not on the *Barrabool* or *Pakeha*. He'd been born in 1903 so it's just possible he was one of those quarrymen known to John Gilmore's wife. What was good about this find: Jack had listened closely to his father's stories of the quarry, and even better, John Ross had sent photographs home to his Scottish girlfriend - with notes on the back.



Above: One of the photographs sent to his girlfriend back home. On the back, John wrote: "What do you think of this lot? Don't they look tough? Names left to right: J Lawie, J Ross, J Cregan, R Fraser, C Smith and W Aitken. Cregan is the only Australian. Fraser from Aberdeen. Smith from Dyce. Aitken worked at Kemnay years ago. W Matthew took this one. Quarrymen in the little quarry".



John lodged with the Bill and Mary Jaffrey from Scotland. Many of the Granite Town residents took to gardening, growing crops they would never have been able to grow back home, including tomatoes and passion-fruit.

One relative I still hoped to find was Malcolm Webberley, Ruby's son. I learned that he had been a sound recordist of some note, who had worked with the BBC. I got nowhere. I did, however, manage to locate Ruby's daughter, Gail Cassie, through a series of phone calls and some good fortune, and discovered that she lived in Perth, 25 minutes up the motorway from me. Gail - to my good fortune - has held onto a box full of her mother's memorabilia, including some wonderful photographs and press cuttings, and old letters from the likes of Nell, Bob Colefax and Reg Saunders. The latter was an apprentice mason at Moruya for a short spell. Reg had a unique way with words. There is no other

way to put it. I found in Gail's collection some excellent detailed descriptions of operations in the masons' dressing shed type-written by Reg, and much evidence of his admiration for the Scots he

worked alongside.

The launch night for the exhibition at Aberdeen City Library was set for March 19, 2007, the Bridge's 75th birthday. It was decided to use the name of a poem written by Bob Middleton as a title: *My father built the Sydney Brig*.

In addition to preparing captions for the 55 images to be used in the exhibition, I put together a 'scrapbook' for each worker that I had traced, largely based on photographic material I had obtained from relatives. Preparations were complicated, somewhat, when I was called on to help out in the History department of an Edinburgh school, but despite the pressures, everything was in place ready for the launch, and I owe a big debt of gratitude to the librarians at the

City Library for their efforts and cooperation.

The launch night was well attended and received excellent press coverage. The Chief Executive of the Town Council was there. Alec Robertson, the owner of the only remaining granite mason's yard in Aberdeen, a man very interested in the industry's history, also came along, as did Dr Marjory Harper. Duncan Downie, the local history expert for Kemnay, where many of the quarrymen seem to have had connections, also attended. (Duncan had helped Nell Greig locate her family home on her trip back to Scotland in 1993.) The most important guests, of course, were the relatives: Audrey Middleton, daughter-in-law of John Middleton; Jack Ross, son of John Ross; Mattie Adams, daughter of Alexander Campbell, and her niece, Norah Berry; June Scott, daughter of Peter Geddes; Isobel James, step-daughter of Angus Cruickshank, along with Richard Cruickshank and Philip Skene, his nephews; Gail Cassie, grand-daughter of Alexander Grant, and daughter of Ruby Webberley; Stephen and Lorna Ross, Nell's Scottish relatives. Unfortunately Sally Cains, the granddaughter of John Ogg, was recovering from a brief illness, but I sent her a CD with the exhibition images and text.

I probably knew that the exhibition would not be an end to the Moruya 'project'.

Douglas Paterson, the Chief Executive, approached me on the launch night and suggested the possibility of preparing some classroom resources that might be used in Aberdeen schools. In June, I travelled up to Aberdeen, and trialled some material with Year 8 students at St Machar Academy, where a former pupil of mine is Head of History. I am pleased to say the exercise went well but I have still to decide where this might lead. There might also be the opportunity to provide similar classroom

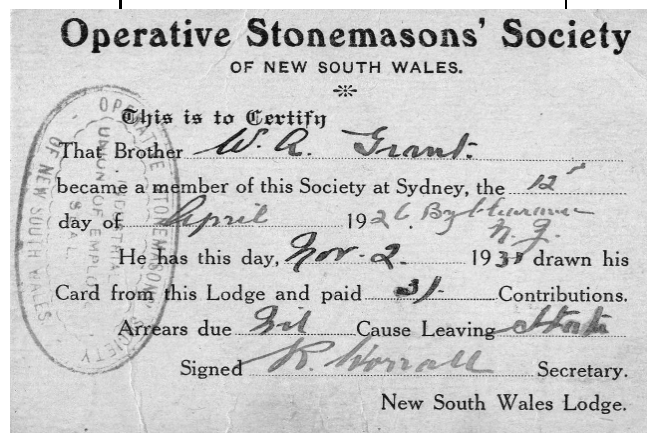
resources that could be used in Moruya to help raise the profile of the quarry and its importance to the town.

The exhibition, which ran a month, resulted in a number of phone calls. Quite a few wanted copies of the various books published by the Moruya and District Historical Society. One lady, who had known Ruby Webberley, wanted to see if I could help her make contact with the Murphy family back in NSW: young Ronald had been a friend of the Grants. One caller put me in touch with Bill Benzie Jr, whose father, Bill Benzie Sr, was one of the masons responsible for the inscription on the Martin Place Cenotaph. Bill Jr lives in Hamilton, New Zealand, has a wonderful memory, and I hope to meet up with him later this year.

Then, within the space of two days, two sisters, independently of each other, both of whom had gone along to the exhibition after its closure – though they still were shown the exhibits – contacted me. They are daughters of Gordon Smith, one of the men who had lived in the bachelors' quarters, of whom Bob Colefax relates an amusing incident, when they got up to high jinks on the trip south to the quarry, having been held in quarantine in Sydney for a few days too many. Gordon, it seems, left the quarry around 1930, joined the Sydney police, to find himself on police duty on the Bridge's opening day in March 1932. Gordon returned to Scotland with his daughters in 1954. A grandson still has the original contract Gordon Smith signed with Dorman Long's representatives in London before he left the UK in 1926.

There is one aspect I would like to learn more of: the circumstances surrounding the recruitment of the additional men in 1926. It does seem that the

Australian federal authorities and the Australian unions had a say in the matter. Ruby Webberley had in her possession a union card which shows that her father, William Grant, joined the Operative Stonemasons' Society of New South Wales before he had left Scotland. There were no adverts in the local Aberdeen press seeking workers for Moruya. Rather, the recruitment may have been done through the local unions. I have traced the records of the Building and Monumental Workers' Association to the Modern Records Office in the University of Warwick in Coventry, and thanks to one of the



archivists there, I know there are materials there of relevance. I still hope to trace the records of another union: the Amalgamated National Union of Quarry Workers and Sett-Makers, described by one Aberdeen authority on union history as *an Aberdeenshire bairn*. Many of these unions merged with others, and there is no guarantee that the larger union held onto the records of the smaller unions.

A key figure in the recruitment of the extra men is Lawrence Ennis. Ennis is very much the unsung hero of the whole Bridge project. Australian writers, perhaps expectedly, tend to focus on John Bradfield, the driving force behind the project. In contrast, Ennis, who was Dorman Long's Director of Construction based in Sydney for seven years, has been neglected, largely because he appears to have

been a modest individual - unlike Bradfield – and also because the Dorman Long records relating to the Bridge's construction have still to surface, if surface they ever will. Writing in 1982, Peter Spearritt lamented the fact that the Dorman Long archive had been *closed to external researchers for some time*. Recently, Corus PLC donated a large number of materials relating to companies that formed part of the former British Steel Corporation to Teeside Archives in Middlesbrough, so large that the Archives have applied for a Heritage Lottery Fund to get everything properly catalogued.

My visit to Teeside Archives was therefore a frustrating experience: what I did find only whetted the appetite, for example a sift through the minutes of the directors of Dorman Long mentioned upwards of eighty reports sent back to the UK from Sydney, no doubt detailing progress, and no doubt in late 1925 alluding to the need for additional capacity at the quarry at Moruya. Dorman Long opened an office in Broadway, London, solely for the purpose of overseeing the Bridge project.

It is quite possible that Ennis kept a diary; perhaps he left behind personal papers. He was greatly honoured in his lifetime: he was awarded the OBE for his work during the Great War, and received the CMG from King George V following the opening of the Harbour Bridge. He was a member of the Institution of Civil Engineers and of the Institution of Mechanical Engineers, both of whom have been helpful in giving me what little information they hold on Ennis. He died in London on May 5, 1938. A requiem mass was held in his honour in Westminster Cathedral, but only a widow survived. Only very recently have I discovered he may have been survived by a brother,

so perhaps out there someone still holds a few vital clues.

New leads still appear that are worthy of follow-up. Gail Cassie had in her mother's collection a photocopy of a letter sent to Reg Saunders from Lurline Apps. Lurline's father was a local Moruya man who had been a driver for Weatherbys who had the mail service from Milton to Moruya, before becoming an engineer at the Quarry. Lurline lives in Yandina, Queensland, where the family moved following the closure of the quarry, and at some point I hope to see the memoir her father wrote and the scrapbook her mother compiled on the progress of the building of the Harbour Bridge. Lurline tells me she has been contacted recently by Betty Knight, who may be a daughter of Harry Knight who was a blacksmith at the quarry. Another Reg Saunders letter, dating from around 1985, gave an address in Vincentia for Alex Simpson, son of the Alex Simpson who is listed as a stonemason from Aberdeen in the Moruya records. I've asked a friend in Worrigea to check that one out. Was this Alex Simpson of Vincentia a relative of the P A Simpson who wrote to the Secretary of the Moruya and District Society from Lakeside Park, Narrabeen, in 1980, lamenting the lack of any kind of remembrance of Moruya's contribution to the Bridge project – a situation surely rectified in recent times by the unveiling of the granite memorial in Moruya and the opening of the John Gilmore Pavilion? The Moruya records also state that the autobiography of William Cochrane, one of the stonemasons who worked on the Sydney Cenotaph, is lodged with the State Library of NSW, but Jennifer Broomhead has been unable to find any trace of it. Now, most recently, I find that back in the late 1970s I worked alongside a teacher whose father, John MacLeod, from the Isle of

Skye in the Western Highlands, had worked as riveter and painter on the Bridge, and was in the employ of Dorman Long until March 18, the day before the Bridge opened.

There are times when I feel I should say to myself, Enough is enough. Not too often, mind you. Susan Bell, Public Services Librarian at Aberdeen City Library, said that there were so many queries about the photographs used in the exhibition that I might consider compiling a book of some kind. Perhaps. I have great admiration for the men and their families who set off on such a long journey. It is the true that there had been a tradition of Aberdeen quarrymen and masons making the annual crossing of the Atlantic in search of work in North America, and some were involved in high profile projects, such as the construction of the Capitol building in Austin, Texas. (My knowledge of that project I owe to Dr Marjory Harper). But none had ventured as far as New South Wales, and none had been *Annie* prepared to take their families with them. *The Press and*



Annie Campbell feeding hens at Granite Town

Journal edition of December 31, 1925, had an article lamenting the depressing state of the granite industry in Aberdeen, so the prospect of a well-paid posting in

Australia had its attractions. Nevertheless it says much for the spirit and the daring of these people that they were prepared to uplift themselves and their families and set off for what must have seemed a remote corner of the world. And it appears that there was no shortage of recruits.



Off for a picnic from Granite Town

I made the point on the launch night of the Aberdeen exhibition that the people of the north-east of Scotland are a modest lot, and *blowing their own trumpet* does not come naturally to them. The men who set off for Moruya were of a generation who, given a job to do, got on with it, and did it well. The granite masonry on the bridge is a worthy testament to their efforts and the efforts of all the other workers at the quarry.

Finally, words which will seem sacrilegious to the good people of Moruya: some comments on the newly opened Harbour Bridge written by prominent British engineers in an engineering journal of 1934. One wrote of the pylons *whether it was advisable to build extraneous structures which in fact had nothing to do with the duty of the bridge.* Another *could not understand why the excellent concrete of the pylons was covered up with cut granite*, while a third wondered why the contractors hadn't imported Indian granite which *might have been obtained in Australia at a reasonable price!*

Now where would that have left Moruya? And what would I have found to take up my interest in my retirement?