

Final Attempt to Train the Moruya River

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Recently, the Society was asked by the Public Works Department to prepare a paper on the heritage significance of the Moruya quarry and its nearby wharf. Apparently there is a possibility of money being found to repair the wharf and perhaps upgrade the area. The quarry's main claim to fame is the role it played in the building of the Sydney Harbour Bridge. The museum holds copious documents for that period. However, for the next significant use of the quarry, in the immediate post war years, there was virtually nothing on the files. Between 1947 and 1954, up to 70 people were employed and over 100,000 tonnes of granite was used to refurbish and extend the training walls and breakwaters of the Moruya River mouth. The following is an edited extract of the Society's paper.

Shipping in the War Years and Immediate Post War Period.

Following the outbreak of war, ships of the Illawarra and South Coast Steam Navigation Company which had served the coastal trade were taken over by the Navy and used as minesweepers. Coastal trading virtually ceased. River dredging is reported as continuing, to the tune of 11,000 pounds a year average throughout the war,⁽¹⁾ when the river had to be kept open for essential traffic, and to service a boat building industry which grew up in Moruya, near the present swimming pool.

When the ships of the ISCSNC were returned to the company after the war, it proved impossible to reopen a profitable service. By 1951, sailings from Moruya were down to one per week,⁽²⁾ and in 1952, despite moves by the NSW Government to shore up coastal traffic, the company was wound up. Some ships continued to pick up sleepers from Moruya town wharf, but essentially the river's years as a commercial highway ended.

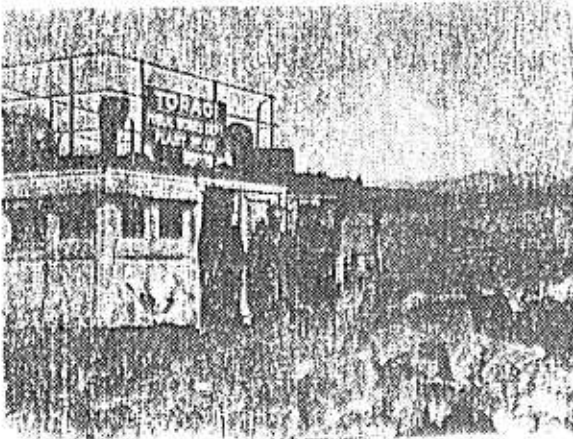
Quarry Reopened for Major Work Despite the fall off in coastal traffic, work on the river walls continued. In 1945, the State Government allocated 108,000 pounds for work on the training walls.⁽³⁾

Mr Pat Dallas of Moruya recalls that his father, William Charles Dallas was transferred from Coffs Harbour as the PWD quarryman and manager from 1947 to 1952. The engineer in charge was Mr Wal Dunphy. The quarry was again manned by a multi cultural workforce, as reported in February, 1949:

Twenty five immigrants under the government's Displaced Persons scheme started work at Garlandtown a week or so ago and the Public Works engineer (Mr WG Dunphy) has nothing but unqualified praise for them. Of an average age of 26 or 27 they are of good physique, a high standard of intelligence, and with better than average education. They are Poles, Slavs and Czechs. Their trades and professions are almost as numerous as they are. Included in the party are a radio actor, an announcer, two ex university students, and a solicitor. There are several mechanics and a locksmith. When they arrived in Garlandtown they had been in Australia just five weeks. They can talk English sufficiently well to make themselves understood and they seem to understand clearly what is said to them.⁽¹⁾

This labour force, together with Australian families, was housed in the former RAAF camp barracks at Garlandtown.⁽⁴⁾ An average of 70 people was employed.

Mr Ron Colquhoun and Mr and Mrs Brian Clifford of Moruya recall the methods of work. There was a tramline running from the quarry to the north sea wall, along which shuttled two steam locomotives, with side or end tip trucks.



The Toragi - photograph courtesy of Mr and Mrs Brian Clifford.

Unlike the Dormon Long quarrying, where the aim was always to cut out large blocks, the blasting methods now aimed at fracturing the rock into manageable pieces. Even so, rocks of some tonnes weight were handled by the crane which had been shipped in from Coffs Harbour. Rock for the south wall was loaded onto barges at the wharf and towed across river by the the tug *Toragi* where another tramline and light deisel locomotive with tipper trucks serviced work on the southern training walls.⁽⁵⁾

Engineer's Report. In November, 1950, Mr Wal Dunphy, engineer in charge, gave an optimistic assessment of progress. At that stage, he said, almost 100,000 tons of granite had been used on breakwaters and training walls since April 1947. As a result, the shipping channel was now 20 feet deep at low tide and much wider. The dredge *Lantona*, which had previously worked the Moruya River for at least six months each year had not been needed to dredge the bar for eighteen months. The northern breakwater, having been extended 200 feet, was now being tipped into 30 feet of water, and still had 300 feet to go; the southern breakwater had 350 feet to go, and a further 200 feet of training wall was needed, over the next two years. An ideal swimming pool had been created on the north side. Mr Dunphy went on:

The creation of training walls and breakwaters has now been turned into an exact science. Where formerly there was guesswork to a large extent, nowadays exact scale models of the river to be worked on are built. Water is turned into the model, very fine sand is placed in appropriate spots and apparatus creates the action of tide, wind and wave on a small scale. Designing engineers then experiment with these models over a course of months. They place moveable breakwaters in suitable places and note the reaction, particularly of the sand. The breakwaters and training walls are moved around the model until the exact spot where maximum results can be achieved is found. The system has been perfected since the Moruya project was started.⁽⁶⁾

Stranding of the *Bergalia* Mr Dunphy was too optimistic. On Thursday March 1st, 1951, the 550 ton *Bergalia* went aground on her regular weekly run to Moruya, and stayed aground until the following Sunday morning. Her skipper, Captain S. Miles claimed that in the week since his last visit, as a result of southerlies and flood water, the channel had narrowed by several hundred feet "It is expected that the dredge *Latona*, which has not worked on the bar of the river for a year, will shortly be on the job again."⁽⁷⁾

Funds run out The project ran out of funds and closed abruptly in July 1952. Some of the men heard of the closure on the radio, to find it confirmed on reporting to work the following day.⁽⁴⁾ 46 men lost their jobs, of whom eleven were living in Garlandtown houses. They were given a week's notice to quit, though this was later modified by the Minister for Public Works, Mr Renshaw.⁽⁸⁾

In early 1954, work was started again, with approximately twenty people employed, mainly to work on the southern breakwater.⁽⁴⁾ In July, 1954, PWD placed an advertisement for the purchase and removal of:

various camp buildings, second hand rails, sleepers, hardwood scantling, galvanised iron sheets, mild steel tanks, and plywood barges located at Moruya river entrance.⁽⁹⁾

The Examiner Sums Up The following week, the *Moruya Examiner's* one armed owner and editor, J.J.Stewart wrote a typically acerbic summary under the heading 'PWD Moruya Job Closes. Marks End of a Period.'

PWD operations at the quarry came to a halt last Friday when twelve out of the remaining eighteen men were dismissed; Mr Fitzpatrick, engineer in charge, left for Newcastle and the Bergalia steamed out with the two locomotives and other plant en route for Port Kembla and Coffs Harbour. Some of the buildings at Garlandtown have been sold and tenders for the purchase for removal for the others were called by advertisement last week.

This brings to a close a scheme to make Moruya River a dredge free port by a system of training walls and breakwaters at a cost that is variously estimated between 200,000 and 300,000 pounds. Many locals claim the money was wasted and that the Moruya River and bar are in a worse condition than they were before the scheme was started. The engineers in charge each in turn - Mr Wal Dunphy, Mr Pennington, Mr Palmer and now Mr Fitzpatrick are all adamant that bar readings show the system of breakwaters and walls has made a great difference. Mr Palmer, however, rather confused the issue when he was here by claiming that the main reason for the work was flood prevention. In any case, the argument is rather academic these days when the only vessel that ever puts into Moruya is the occasional timber ship.

Operations started in April, 1947 and at its heyday the project employed 70 men, approximately 30 of them New Australians. These New Australians came and went, for most of them at any time stayed on sufferance only until their time was worked out, when they hot footed it for the city and a job in a textile mill or something similar. A few however enjoyed the open air life and did not wish for anything else and only left when the job suddenly closed down in the middle of 1952 during the recession.

The money that the 70 men and their families spent in Moruya during the heyday of the scheme made a great difference to the economic outlook of the Moruya store keepers. Saturday mornings Vulcan Street was thronged with shoppers.⁽¹⁰⁾

Some conclusions For many decades, the quarry was at the centre of attempts to train the Moruya River so that its mouth would be navigable by coastal steamers of several hundred registered tons. Despite the efforts and calculations of many engineers, the quarrying and the use of many thousands of tons of granite, the river, the sea and the sand always won. Now, of course, the requirement for an all weather safe river entrance is gone, except for recreational small boats. Nevertheless, the Moruya river works were and remain of great value to the community. Historically, they are an excellent example of attempts to solve the problem of shifting sand bars at river entrances which bedevilled coastal shipping up and down the NSW East Coast throughout the decades which relied on that shipping for basic trade.

REFERENCES

- (1) *Moruya Examiner*, 11 February 1949.
- (2) *Moruya Examiner*, I.S.C.S.N.C. Advertisement 7 December 1951
- (3) Bayley, William A. Behind Broulee; 1973
- (4) Conversations with Mr and Mrs Doug Walden, Ikuna Street, Broulee, April, 1994. Mr Walden was the blacksmith on the Project from 1951.
- (5) Conversations with Ron Colquhoun, retired PWD timekeeper, and Mr and Mrs Brian Clifford, retired PWD workers, April 94
- (6) *Moruya Examiner*, 17 November 1950
- (7) *Moruya Examiner*, 9 March 1951
- (8) *Moruya Examiner*, 25 July 1952
- (9) *Moruya Examiner*, 16 July 1954
- (10) *Moruya Examiner*, 23 July 1954