

The Quarry Apprentice Part 1

by Bill Glennie

Reg Saunders' stay at Moruya Quarry was brief - barely 2½ years - and it ended abruptly. Over fifty years later, his recollections of that brief stay were recorded on paper and cassette tape as he campaigned manfully to ensure that 'the tremendous effort of unrelenting toil' that produced the granite for the pylons of the Sydney Harbour Bridge was properly recognised. Our knowledge of what transpired at the Quarry is richer as a result of his efforts.

On 28 November 1925 the *Moruya Examiner* carried a brief announcement that Dorman, Long & Co, the British firm contracted to construct the Sydney Harbour Bridge, was 'advertising for a limited number of youths as apprentice stonemasons'.

The announcement was timely. Five weeks earlier, Dorman Long and the Operative Stonemasons' Society of New South Wales had reached an agreement to end the dispute which had held up progress at the Moruya Quarry where the granite for the Bridge's masonry features was to be prepared. The Society dropped its insistence that Quarry masons should be paid an additional 'country allowance' of twenty-one shillings per week. In return the company agreed to pay an increased hourly rate to Moruya masons pending the resolution of the dispute by a conciliation committee in December. The Society now lifted its embargo on men signing on in Sydney to work at the Quarry.

Even with the embargo lifted, there was no flight of masons south to Moruya - only thirty-eight had enrolled by the end of December. Lawrence Ennis, Dorman Long's Director of Construction, estimated that at least six months had been lost in the development of the Quarry as a result of the prolonged negotiations to settle the dispute. He told John Bradfield, the Bridge's Chief Engineer, that he needed 100 masons 'to ensure the delivery of sufficient quantities of dressed granite to meet bridge requirements'.ⁱ

The recruitment of apprentice stonemasons at Moruya would not solve Ennis's problem. He would look to importing skilled masons from Scotland to do that, although the Stonemasons' Society intervened to restrict the number of recruits to thirty, not the sixty he wanted. Nevertheless, the training of local youths would be a long-term investment, increasing the pool of skilled granite-workers to ensure the Quarry's future. For Dorman Long expected Moruya Quarry to have a future beyond the Bridge. That was why the company had rejected the idea of paying a 'country allowance'. Moruya was no country job. It was, argued the company, 'a permanent place of employment'.ⁱⁱ Dorman Long was not alone in thinking this.

During visits to the Quarry, John Bradfield declared that there was granite enough at Moruya for many more bridges and for all of Sydney's building requirements for many centuries. The *Moruya Examiner* eagerly reported his optimism.ⁱⁱⁱ

It was his father's idea that sixteen-year-old Reginald Crapp of Mullenderree, Moruya, should seek an apprenticeship at the Quarry. Years later, in a very honest account of his short period as an apprentice mason, Reg admitted that as a teenager, 'I was not endeared to laborious work. I was more inclined to take a book and lie out under a tree and read the verse or story'.

His father, James Crapp, had found employment in the blacksmiths' shop at the Quarry. His wife had left the family home, he had debts and he had a sixteen year-old son who admitted that as a result of the marital break-up he was 'compelled to live a life of sadness devoid of filial affection, essential to my normal entry into manhood'. In April 1982 he told the *Moruya Examiner* that although his father tried to make life tolerable for him, 'the gnawing hunger for a mother's love caused me to live continually with discomfort'.^{iv} James Crapp might well have hoped that the Quarry would give his son a focus and a future.

Young Reg did not take to granite masonry. He later wrote, 'I had no particular desire to excel as a granite mason. At the end of the second year I began to see my life in the right perspective'. He became disenchanted with the work, citing the absence of extractor fans in the dressing sheds and the 'danger of having your lungs filled with silica' as the main reason for his growing disenchantment. 'This caused me to become very sceptical as to whether I would complete my apprenticeship. I became discontented. I became neglectful'.

His discontent and neglect became obvious to Bill Morrison, the stone-cutting foreman, who one day asked him, 'How much longer do you think we can pay you to be standing here doing nothing?' The response was bold and deliberately provocative: 'Just as long as you can stand it'. Morrison hauled him before John Gilmore, the Quarry Manager, who subjected him to 'a full-blooded attack' - and dismissal. 'You've ruined your career. You will

never be considered in the yards of Sydney', predicted Gilmore. *'Well, Mr Gilmore, that all remains to be seen'* was the response.

'He was a man old enough to be my father, I was a youth of eighteen, but I spoke my mind. I forthwith left the job a crestfallen apprentice. I went up to the camp where my father and I were living and there I considered my lamentable situation'.¹ Reg did not record his father's reaction.

There was surely more behind his rebellious behaviour than the fear of silicosis. He would later write of his *'unhappy lifestyle'* being the main cause of his growing discontent, referring cryptically to *'domestic negation'*. *'I decided to get away to Sydney, into the monumental trade and so finish my time under more favourable conditions'*. His desire to get out of the Quarry may have been influenced as much by discontent with his lot at home as with the nature of the work.

In old age he would look back on the circumstances of his dismissal and regret *'tactics which today I think didn't do me any credit in those days, yet it was my only way out'*. There was no attempt to blame the Quarry management for his dismissal - that he reserved for himself.

His indentures were cancelled. John Gilmore had good reason to tell him he would not be considered in the yards of Sydney. Apprentices could only apply to complete their five year term with another employer if the original employer failed to fulfil his legal obligation. In John Gilmore's eyes, it was Reg, not he, who had not kept his side of the agreement.

There was a happy ending. *'I went to Sydney and after about a six week holiday I started at the trade again out at Alexandria at Acton & Company's yard. I had been there about three or four months and I went to the foreman and I said to him, "Have you got my apprenticeship papers?" "No", he said, "we haven't seen them. We don't know what time you have served at the trade. We have got no proof". I said, "Well there is something wrong here", so I went to the union secretary, Mr Richard Worrall'*.

It was Worrall who located his papers in the Department of Labour and Industry. Reg claimed that Worrall told him, *'Dorman Long are not going to ruin your career. You have served two and a half years, and I'll see that you finish your term of five years'*.

He gave Worrall credit for guiding him into the monumental trade. *'Mr Worrall wrote me a letter of introduction to a master monumental mason, namely David Ross. He is deceased today, but David Ross was manager of Ross and Bowman's Monumental Yard out at Waverley Cemetery. I took this letter up to David Ross and I presented myself and my letter and David Ross didn't hesitate. He said, "Yes, you may finish your time with us. Go out to the yard on Monday morning and introduce yourself to the foreman, my brother". This I did and I finished the remaining two and a half years in Ross and Bowman's yard. I have David Ross' signature on my papers'*.

And that could have been that, with young Reginald Crapp making an unceremonious exit from Moruya Quarry and its history.

Fate intervened 50 years later. By then he was Reginald Saunders, changing his name by deed poll in June 1945 and assuming his mother's surname. While leafing through the pages of the *Daily Mirror* in late 1978, Reg - now living in Thornleigh, Sydney - saw something which caused his hackles to rise: an article on how the appearance of the Harbour Bridge might be improved and beside it an artist's impression of the Bridge with its iconic pylons demolished to road level. The teenage Reg Crapp would have been indifferent to such a drastic proposal, but not the sixty-nine-year-old Reg Saunders. Fired with anger at the artist's disrespect for the craftsmen - so many of them Scots - whose labour and skills had built the pylons, Reg put pen to paper. It was not towards the editor of the *Daily Mirror* that he directed his anger.

'I, who knew full well the Herculean labours of my Scotch fellow masons, wrote to the producer of the ABC Television Weekend Magazine a letter extolling the sterling qualities of the builders of the pylons, and criticism of the artist for such audacity'. The programme producer wrote back suggesting that the Department of Main Roads might be more interested in what he had to say. So Reg, armed with an array of Quarry photographs, probably inherited from his father, and a copy of his criticism of *'the audacious artist'*, set off to meet John Andrew, the Department's Public Relations Officer. *'I was accorded an excellent interview'*, he reported and John Andrew suggested that he write down his memories of the Quarry.

¹ Nothing is known of the nature of the camp. In *Moruya's golden years* (1997) Bob Colefax noted that *'there were quite a few sub-standard dwellings between the village of Granite Town and the Malabar bridge'*. In a letter to the District Postal Inspector in July 1926

seeking the establishment of a sub-post office at Granite Town, John Gilmore wrote of an approximate population of 150 resident at the Quarry, which included those *'camping near the Quarry'*.

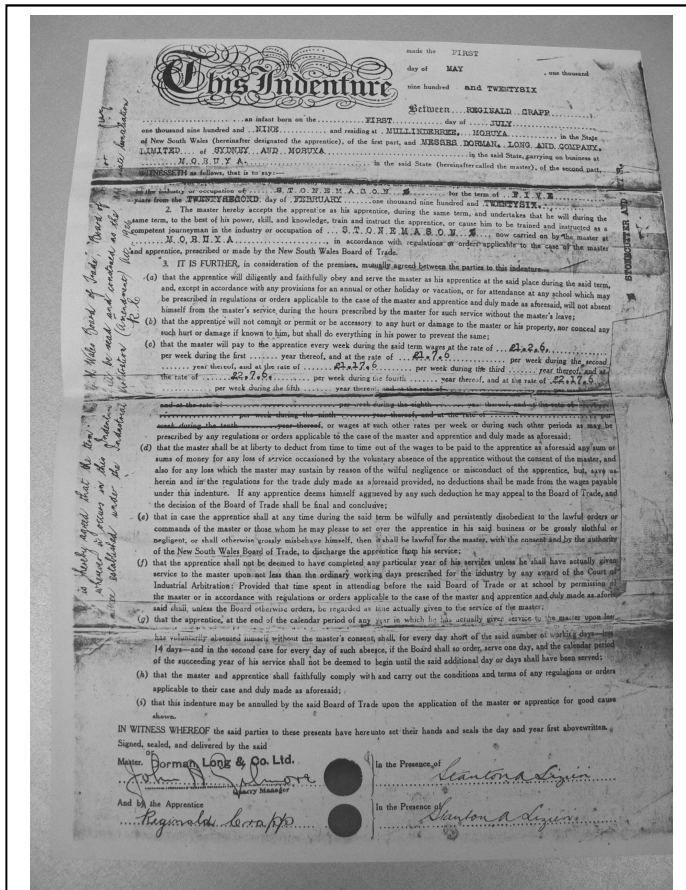
He accepted the challenge. *'I decided to write. Having read omnivorously for fifty years, I felt really full of words, fit to burst. I decided to write an historical narrative'*. He did not find it easy. *'The words struggled out of me like a silver grey possum from its nest in the mighty gum in Moruya's hinterland'*. Learning to type was another challenge, *'a further extenuation'* - but he did it and submitted his completed memoir to John Andrew.

Reg relished his new role as historian of Moruya Quarry and of the men who worked there. *'To my knowledge, nothing has been written on the project'*, he wrote. He was conscious, too, of the awesome responsibility of the task thrust upon him: *'It is an irrefutable fact that destiny has conferred on me the unique honour of writing this treatise'*.

The meeting with John Andrew was opportune. As Public Relations Officer at the Department of Main Roads, Andrew was chairman of the Celebration Committee which was responsible for planning the programme of events to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Harbour Bridge in March 1982. Membership of that committee included representatives from Sydney Council, North Sydney Municipal Council, the Department of Tourism, and three trade unions, all of which represented metalworkers. There was no representation from the Stonemasons' Society and none from Moruya. The emphasis was on steel and Sydney.

But Reg Saunders flew the flag for Moruya. In August 1981, seven months before the Bridge's fiftieth anniversary, he was invited to participate in what he described as *'a prototype for the main assembly of March 1982'*. At a function organised by Sydney City Council, the Department of Main Roads and the Amalgamated Metalworkers' and Shipwrights' Union, the Lord Mayor of Sydney addressed some 400 guests. However, *'not one fellow mason did I contact'*, he regretted.

On the big day itself, before the function to honour the surviving Bridge workers, he busied himself autograph-hunting amongst the dignitaries. He collected the autograph of *'the distinguished Ralph Freeman'*, describing him as *'the colleague of Bradfield'*. In fact he had mistaken the son for his late father, the Ralph Freeman who had carried on a very public spat with John Bradfield in the columns of the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 1929 over which one of them had designed the Harbour Bridge. Colleagues they were not.



ABOVE: Reg took his indenture to show John Andrew at the Department of Main Roads. He later deposited it with the Mitchell Library in Sydney. The document is signed by John Gilmore, the Quarry Manager, on behalf of Dorman, Long & Co, with Stanton Lizieri, then Office Manager, as witness. In April 1982 Reg told the *Moruya Examiner* that when he signed on at the Quarry the weekly wage was 17s 6d. This was the rate for the probationary period when he had up to three months to decide whether to sign on as an apprentice. When he signed the indenture after 10 weeks, he received an extra 5s per week. The first year's wage – he described it as *'a pittance'* – of £1.2s.6d rose to £2.17s.6d in the final and fifth year. *'My dad wouldn't take a penny off me for 2 years'* he wrote, but he contributed to paying off his father's debts. *'I recall the pride I felt as I faced up to the baker, Mr Albert Lynch, and paid a few shillings each Saturday morning'*. Richard Worrall, the Secretary of the Operative Stonemasons' Society of New South Wales, interceded with Dorman, Long & Co in July 1931 to secure an increased wage for the Moruya Quarry apprentices. If Moruya masons benefited from a higher wage than masons elsewhere in New South Wales, then why not the apprentices too? By then Reg was employed by Ross and Bowman Ltd of Sydney with whom he completed his apprenticeship. (Reproduced by kind permission of the State Library of NSW)

So busy was he collecting autographs at the initial gathering in Observatory Park that he was suddenly aware of *'a situation presenting itself wherein Kathleen and I would be stranded, for we had no private transport'*. As he watched the vehicles full of dignitaries silently draw away to cross the Bridge, he admitted *'I was inclined to thumb a lift'*. He was successful. *'Two citizens attached to the civic authority offered my wife and I transport. I solicited their autographs on alighting from the car. They were delighted'*.

After more speeches and the ceremonial unveiling of a commemorative tablet on the North Shore, Reg resumed his autograph-hunting. He introduced himself to Edward Judge, who had travelled from Britain to represent Dorman Long, and he told him of his time at the Quarry. He was *'overjoyed to hear I had worked with James Cruickshank and Jim Kennedy, Bob Slessor, George Allan and George Walton'*. The names of the Scottish masons would have meant nothing to Judge. But the two men had something in common. As young men they had each made a modest contribution to the construction of the Bridge whose birthday they were celebrating. While a student at Cambridge, Edward Judge had found a summer job with Dorman Long's Bridge Department in London in 1928. He enjoyed the experience so much that he joined the company on a permanent basis and returned to the Bridge Department after graduating. Now the former office boy offered the former apprentice mason a lift: *'Mr and Mrs Judge and son graciously invited Kathleen and I to ride in their private car to the luncheon in Blues Park'*.

The function at Blues Point Reserve brought together men and women who had worked on the design and construction of the Harbour Bridge. In the months prior to the reunion, contact had been made with approximately 150 former Bridge workers, and 135 travelled from as far away as Perth, Hobart and Brisbane to attend the luncheon held in the large marquee. *'By the time we arrived the wine and other liquors had been imbibed. This scene was par excellence. The atmosphere was charged with nostalgia'*.

Now Reg discovered that other former Moruya employees had been tracked down. Meeting Bob Colefax, who had been general clerk in the Quarry office, was *'a soul-stirring episode'*. He learned that Colefax had also put pen to paper. In a series of articles for the Moruya Rotary Club Bulletin, *'Down Memory Lane'*, Colefax had written of the many colourful characters he had worked with at the Quarry. After their meeting Reg would write *'Apart from Bob and I, nobody has put pen to paper'*.^v He would shortly find out how wrong he was.

Other Moruya employees he met included Robert Crisp who had been a mason at the Quarry, and Mary and John Kelman and Molly Henderson. Mary, the eldest of the Quarry Manager's eight daughters, had worked in the office until her marriage. Her husband was one of the thirty stonemasons recruited from Aberdeen in 1926. Molly Henderson, now Mrs Molly Cook, had replaced Mary Kelman in the Quarry Office.

Moruya's contribution to the Bridge's construction was further recognised by the presence of a group of students from three Moruya schools, *'resplendent and invigorating among us seniors'*, wrote Reg. They brought a message from the President of Eurobodalla shire and special presentation pieces of granite for some of the distinguished guests.

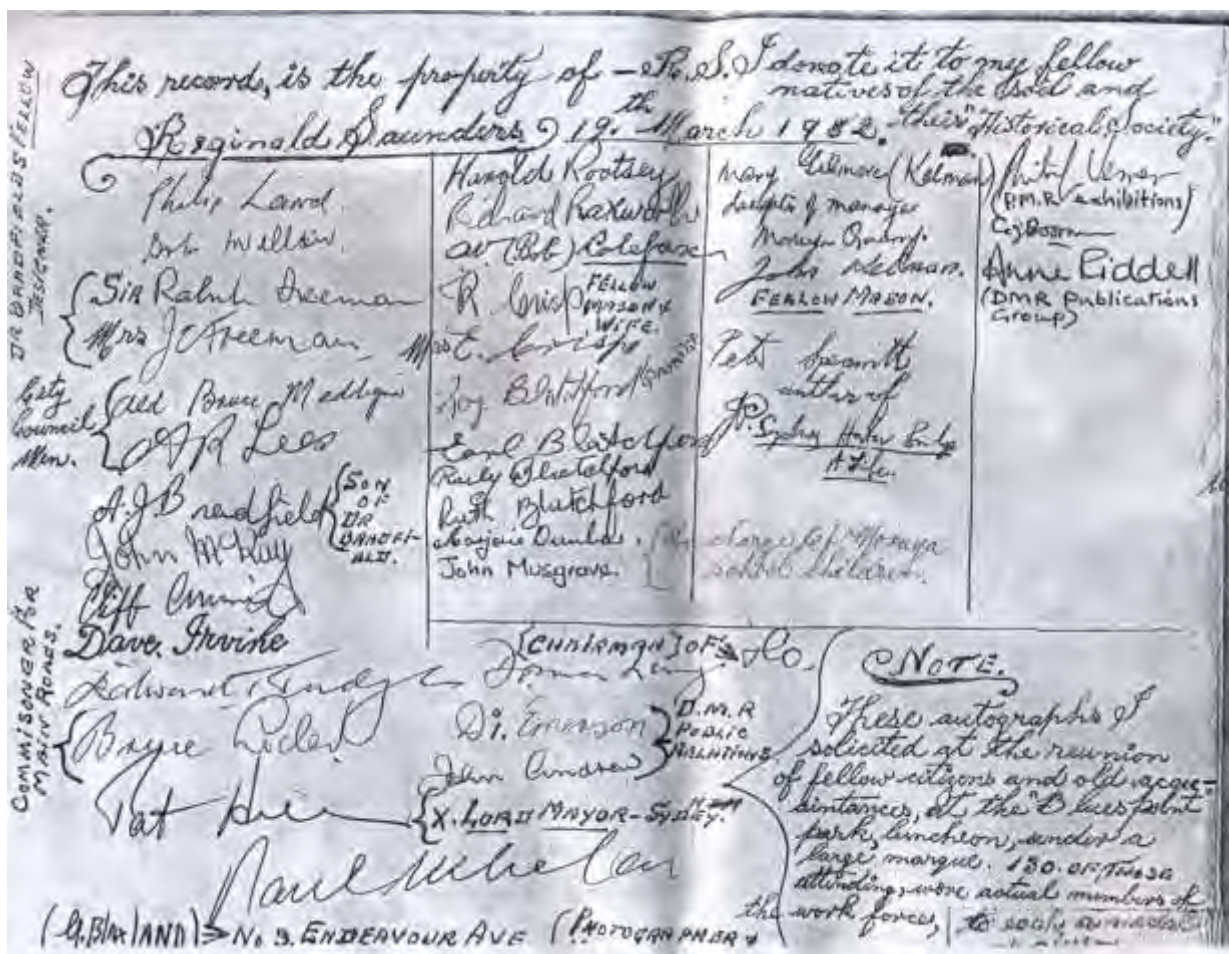
Finally, each of the former Bridge workers received a bronze medal commemorating their contribution to the construction of the Bridge.

There was more recognition of Reg's importance as a historical source that anniversary year. John Andrew commissioned Richard Raxworthy to conduct a series of interviews with over 40 former Bridge employees. Raxworthy, an Englishman by birth, was an enthusiastic recorder of the oral history of Australia's labour movement and was the natural choice to record the experiences of surviving Bridge workers. He appears to have started recording the first of his interviews on cassette tape in 1981, completing them the following year. Only three former Quarry employees were interviewed: Reg Saunders, Bob Colefax and Harry Rootsey. The latter was a Bega man, who had served his apprenticeship in Sydney before heading to the Quarry, arriving after Reg had left. The Raxworthy tapes were lodged with the Mitchell Library in Sydney and have recently been transcribed.

Reg also appeared in print. His memoir was used by John Andrew as the basis for an article in *Main Roads*, his Department's journal: *'Memories of Moruya, as told by Mr Reginald Saunders, who is one of the last surviving granite masons from the Moruya Quarry'*.^{vi} That same edition carried an article *'Granite quarrying at Moruya: The story behind the stonework, based on notes supplied by Mr R Colefax'*. The journal also carried a letter from the daughter of Thomas Butler, a mason whose working life was cut short following a bad accident at the Quarry.

Elsewhere, Reg featured in a pullout supplement, *South East Magazine*, on 22 March 1982, which was published in 14 regional newspapers on the South Coast. On its front page, under the headline *Moruya's link with Harbour Bridge*, were Reg's reminiscences of the Quarry with the promise of more

With good reason Reg could write, '*My stature grew*'.



ABOVE: A remarkable record of a remarkable day. Reg described how as the dignitaries assembled for the opening ceremony in Observatory Park on 19 March 1982 *‘I mingled with them intent on soliciting signatures on a book I carried for that specific purpose, named “Building the Harbour Bridge” by Max Dupain and Howard Tanner’*. The book, a study of Henri Mallard’s photography of the Bridge’s construction, had been published in 1976. *‘I may emphasise in passing I was the only one soliciting autographs’*. Former colleagues from the Quarry appear alongside the likes of Sir Ralph and Lady Freeman, Edward Judge, Alan Bradfield, the authors Richard Raxworthy and Peter Spearritt, the Lord Mayor of Sydney, assorted politicians and public servants. Reg donated this photocopy *‘to my fellow natives of the soil and their Historical Society’*.

(Reg Saunders' quotations are from a variety of sources: a memoir and other papers deposited with the State Library of NSW; a transcript of his interview with Richard Raxworthy, held by the State Library of

-NSW; a transcript of his taped recollection of his participation in the events of 19 March 1982, held by Moruya Museum; correspondence with Ruby Webberley supplied by Gail Cassie, Ruby's daughter.)

ⁱ *Extract from Monthly Progress Report No 12, Lawrence Ennis, December 1925*

ii *Minutes of a Management Committee meeting,*
Operative Stonemasons' Society of New South Wales, 18
July 1925

iii *Moruya Examiner*, 8 March 1924, 8 January 1927

^{iv} *Moruya Examiner*, 28 April 1932

^v *Moruya Examiner*, 28 April 1932

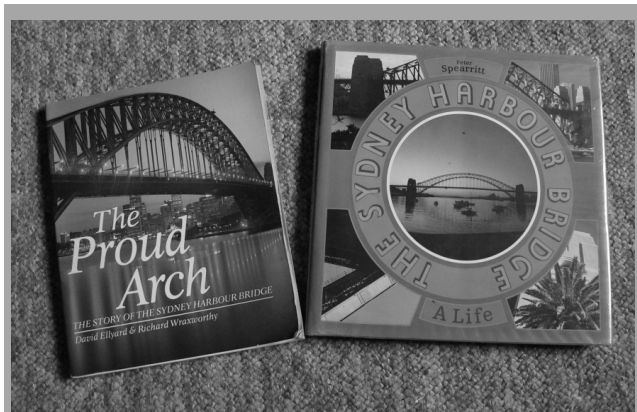
^{vi} *Sydney Harbour Bridge 1932-1982, Main Roads*, June 1982

The Quarry Apprentice Part 2

by Bill Glennie

Had it not been for the literary efforts of Messrs Saunders and Colefax, the contribution of Moruya Quarry to the construction of the Harbour Bridge might have passed unnoticed in 1982. The two books published to coincide with the Bridge's fiftieth anniversary, *The proud arch: The story of the Sydney Harbour Bridge* by David Ellyard and Richard Raxworthy, and *The Sydney Harbour Bridge: A life* by Peter Spearritt, made only the briefest of references to the Quarry. Their neglect inspired Christine Greig later to write a history of what she termed 'the forgotten parts' of the building of the Harbour Bridge.ⁱ

Reg Saunders' recollections of the Quarry are all the more remarkable when we consider his youth – he was sixteen when he enrolled as an apprentice – and the brief time he spent there. Yet he could still tell Richard Raxworthy in 1982, *'Those times are indelibly impressed on my memory'*.



ABOVE: Moruya's contribution to the construction of the Harbour Bridge received scant attention in the two books published to tie in with the fiftieth anniversary of the Bridge's opening. In *The Proud Arch* there was mention in the text of stonemasons coming 'from Aberdeen in Scotland and from Italy' and 'thousands of tonnes of granite mined at Moruya' being brought up the coast in steamers. In a book illustrated with over 120 photographs, there were three of Moruya. In *Sydney Harbour Bridge: A life* there was greater awareness of Moruya's contribution. The author had seen film of the Quarry at work, and included references to Granite Town and the two deaths which occurred at the Quarry. Only the Department of Main Roads in its in-house journal, *Main Roads* did justice to the Quarry, and Reg Saunders deserves much credit for that. There were two aspects of those times that stood out in his memory: the day-to-day operation of the Quarry and an unswerving admiration for the Scots who dominated proceedings there.

From the start the Quarry was a very Scottish affair. Reg signed on more than a year after work began at

the site, yet fifty years on he was able to reel off the names of those Scots who, despite floods, a shortage of skilled labour and teething problems with machinery, established the Quarry.

He remembered the arrival in Moruya of John Gilmore, the Quarry Manager, and the team he assembled around him: *'Long before the sheds were built, and the adjacent village, Granite Town, was built, several masons started and worked on retaining walls in order to facilitate the layout of the plant and quarry lines of demarcation. These men were closely associated with Mr Gilmore when a quarryman in his native Scotland'*.

John Gilmore was a man of considerable experience. He had worked in various locations in Scotland and before the Great War in North America. But Moruya was the biggest challenge of his career. It was only natural that he should want to bring with him his own backroom team.

The most important men he took to Moruya were Archie Davidson as Quarry Foreman and Bill Morrison as Stone-cutting Foreman. Gilmore and Davidson had much in common. They both had their roots in Kemnay in Aberdeenshire, the quarry whose silver-grey stone was favoured for public buildings and monuments. Their fathers had been granite men. They were of similar age, while Morrison was a younger man. It is highly probable that following his appointment in London, Gilmore asked that Davidson and Morrison be his assistants and equally probable that the three knew each other. Archie Davidson travelled to New South Wales on the same ship as the Gilmore family, arriving in Sydney on 1 November 1924. Bill Morrison arrived two days later. The Davidson and the Morrison families would share a house in Moruya. The following week these three were at Moruya meeting with Alfred Martin, Lawrence Ennis's deputy in Sydney, and R H Blake, Dorman Long's Principal Surveyor. They planned the layout of the masons' sheds and engine house; the office; the first of the railways. Machinery including cranes and crushers was ordered. *'No expense was spared'*, John Gilmore wrote later.ⁱⁱ

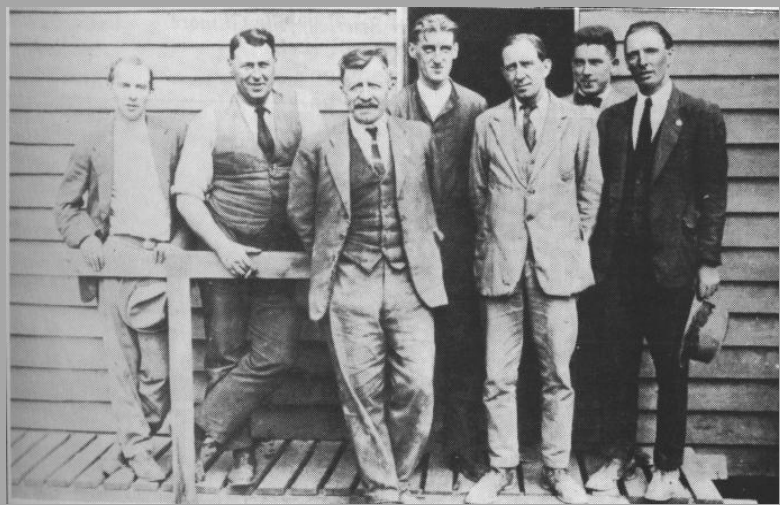
Two more Scottish members of the management team followed soon afterwards. Brown Mackenzie, who would be foreman in the blacksmiths' shop, arrived in Sydney on 24 November, and Ken Mackenzie, in charge of plant maintenance, one month later.

In the close-knit community of the granite quarries and masons' yards of Aberdeenshire the names of those already departed for New South Wales would

William Gerrard, who would be the instructor of Reg and his fellow apprentices, was in Moruya in



Cameron in June. Forbes Allan, a quarryman, joined his brother in August.



December 1924. Tom Pittendreigh, Bill Morrison's

LEFT: Archie Davidson (Quarry Foreman) left, and John Gilmore (Quarry Manager) right, flank Walter Brierley, a crane dogman at the Quarry.

ABOVE RIGHT: At the Quarry Office door, from left to right: Phil Carden (Quarry storekeeper); Ken Mackenzie (Chief Engineer); Archie Davidson; George Rowell (Electrical Engineer); Tom Pittendreigh (Assistant to Bill Morrison); Bob Colefax (General Clerk); Bill Morrison (Stone-cutting Foreman). John Gilmore, Archie Davidson and Bill Morrison, all Scots, were there when the first sod was turned at the Quarry on 18 November 1924. Brown Mackenzie, (Foreman Tool Sharp), not shown in the photograph, arrived one week later. Ken Mackenzie arrived in late December. They, too, were Scots. Reg Saunders harboured no grudge towards those responsible for his downfall - Bill Morrison, who hauled him into the Quarry Office, and John Gilmore, who showed him the door. He was, he admitted, the author of his own downfall. The Quarry management team, meanwhile, had been elevated in his memory to being '*the aristocracy of the labour force*'.

have been known to many. It is even possible that before they left John Gilmore and his two colleagues actively canvassed men who might be interested in following them, because over the next few months a steady trickle of Aberdeenshire men arrived at Moruya. Years later in his written memoir Reg Saunders recalled their names: '*If my memory serves me correctly, Robert Slessor, James Kennedy, George Walton, and Dod Allan were the first of the subsequent 100 masons operative when the plant was in full capacity*'. In his interview with Richard Raxworthy in 1982 he added two more, John Cameron and Jimmy Cruickshank.

His memory served him correctly. Bob Slessor was there from the start in November 1924. It was

George Allan, who arrived in early February 1925, had been taught by Gilmore's wife in Kemnay. He enrolled with the Operative Stonemasons' Society of New South Wales in April 1925, as did two further arrivals from Scotland, James Kennedy and George Walton. James Cruickshank arrived in May, John brother-in-law, arrived to take up his position as Morrison's assistant in June 1925, although there were as yet few masons to supervise. Reg

remembered him as the mason who handed out the designs for the masons to work on. He and John Cameron travelled to New South Wales on the same ship.

It speaks volumes for the quality of these men and their achievement that Reg could recall their names with such ease over fifty years later.

The Scots were even more dominant after the arrival of thirty additional masons from Aberdeen in May and July 1926. By then Reg was a Quarry apprentice. An additional five quarrymen and two tool smiths also arrived from Scotland in 1926 and four more tool smiths in 1927. Many of them brought their families, swelling the Scottish population of Granite Town, the township built by the company to house the workforce. Here and at the Quarry the distinctive dialect of the north-east of Scotland dominated. With good reason Bob Colefax would later write, '*Many locals reckoned, as the Scottish community continued to grow, that an interpreter would have been handy*'.ⁱⁱⁱ

The unhappiness of his apprenticeship was laid to rest as Reg, fifty years on, reviewed his experience at the

Quarry. *'It was the springtide of my life. I had the tenacious Scotsmen and their example to show me how to work'*. Granite men they were, he wrote, with granite constitutions. Typical of such men was George Walton, *'a full-blooded Scotsman who used to play the accordion at the Caledonian dances. George Walton worked just opposite me and I saw Walton had his granite block. It must have been about 8 feet long. The electrical crane driver had lifted it up off the ground. Walton wanted to work on what we call the joints of the stone, which meant he had to put a block under it to stop it from falling over. It was standing up vertically. He picked up a block, and instead of catching hold of the block end for end for safety's sake, he forgot and he put one hand under the block and the other over the block. The dogs holding the block of granite flew out and the stone fell and caught Walton's hand.'*¹ *It crushed his first finger off to the first joint. Now that man, he was about 65, held his hand, and with great fortitude walked about four hundred yards down to the dressing station to have his crushed finger dressed. That convinced me of the fortitude of the Scottish men'*.^{iv}

The Scots dominated the social life of Granite Town. Even before Dorman Long provided the village with its own Recreation Hall they had made their presence felt. A Caledonian Society was formed in Moruya as early as April 1925. Members were to be *'Scotch or of Scotch descent'*.^v There were 45 couples present at the first meeting. Reg remembered how the Scots *'engaged a dance hall in Moruya town, and conducted dances, fast and furious, once a month. It was when in attendance I marvelled at the vigour and fiery characters of the people with whom my lot was cast'*.

It was this social side of Quarry life which made its deepest impact on young Reg and that might well have had something to do with his domestic circumstances. He said as much. *'From 17 years until 19 years and 6 months I became involved with those amiable, tender, sympathetic Scotch folk. I was in dire need of such relationships, for Dad and I lived alone, our family having disintegrated years previously. The example of the communal society of the Caledonians was for me better than precept'*.

And when the focus of Quarry entertainment turned to the new Recreation Hall in September 1927,

replete with *'rosewood floor, the best for dancers'*, the dances were conducted more frequently. *'It was on that floor that I, as a youth of 18, was introduced to social life. As I say, it was the richest experience of my life to mix with these people, to see them dance furiously, and I can emphasise the fact that I have never seen people so fired with enthusiasm on a dance floor as the Scottish people are'*.

Fiery dancing required fiery music. *'For music the melodeon and a fiddler were adequate for these occasions. My! I have never heard since such rippling cadenzas. I play the violin myself, but could never play with the necessary rapidity those Scots tunes that are especially adapted to the dance'*. Years later, he could still remember the dances enjoyed in the Granite Town Hall: the Edinburgh Quadrilles, the Highland Schottische, Strip the Willow, and the Foursome and Eightsome Reels. *'There were other dances I cannot recall from a vista of 55 years, on the crest of which my glorious youthful prime was lifted'*. The Scots may have been *'a dour people, who are very earnest in all their affairs'* but they knew how to enjoy themselves, and Reg's prose, often awkward and stilted, is at its best when recalling those memorable nights on the rosewood floor of the Quarry Hall.

Harry Rootsey, that other Quarry survivor interviewed by Richard Raxworthy, also remembered those nights, one in particular. *'It was a ball of a time there every Friday night. They would get on the grog and this bloke used to make this home brew. I forget what it was, wine or whisky or beer. It was going all right, really good nights, until they raided him. That settled everything. They cut it all out then. About six coppers came out that night'*.^{vi}

When Richard Raxworthy asked Reg if he knew of the still the Scots had at the Quarry, he would have none of it. *'I don't think that is true. I never saw any incidence of alcoholism among the Scottish people in Granite Town. I would give the Scots greater credit by way of conforming to right standards than to even suspect they would participate in such a scheme of things'*.

¹ The grips at the end of the crane's lifting gear



New Zealander Robert Moore visited Moruya in 1929 and took two fine panoramic photographs, one of the Quarry, the other of Granite Town (LEFT). The white Recreation Hall provided by Dorman Long and opened in September 1927 dominates the 70 or so employees' houses. The two original

Bachelors' Quarters lying end to end on the right were built early in 1926. A later third block lying at right angles to them can be seen. The large bin which stored granite aggregate is visible along the river bank. The Recreation Hall became the focal point of social life in the village and was used for dances, concerts, church services, dancing classes, and at least one twenty-first birthday party. (Reproduced by kind permission of the State Library of NSW)

In further defence of the Scots, Reg told Raxworthy of *'one little incident that emphasised the moral rectitude of the Scottish men. There was one young woman who declined to accept the dance from the first man but she got up with the second man, and the MC noticed it and ordered her out of the hall. There you have a perfect example of the moral rectitude of the Scottish character'*.

As he rounded off his eulogy on the Scots, he struggled for words to articulate his admiration for them: *'The details of the heroic Scotch men and women are worthy of note and should be recorded for the annals of time and the satisfaction of posterity'*. When he wrote, *'I would more readily place my trust in a Scot than any other'* he probably meant it.

When Reg began recording his memories on paper, he had assumed that most of those he had worked with at the Quarry were dead. As he contemplated a photograph of the workforce, he wrote, *'The masons are men from middle age to men of advanced life, some in their seventies. Therefore one doesn't need to be a genealogical authority to conclude that all those men in the photos are non-existent'*. Quoting Charles Lamb, he concluded, *'All, all are gone, the old familiar faces'*.

He was still pessimistic when he talked with the *Moruya Examiner* in April 1982. *'All of those men are dead'*. Nor did he hold out much hope for himself. *'I am today 73 years old, one leg in the crematorium, the other on the banana skin'*.

This belief in his uniqueness and his mortality added urgency to his task of memorialising the Quarry:

ⁱ *Not forgotten: Memorials in granite*, Christine Greig, second edition 1998

ⁱⁱ *Address to the Moruya Rotary Club*, John Gilmore, October 1959

ⁱⁱⁱ *Moruya's golden years*, A V (Bob) Colefax, 1997

'Unless I am erroneously taking this mental attitude or stand, I am in the unique situation and have the honour of relating these historical details'.

Of course the celebrations of 19 March 1982 showed him he was not unique. He was not the last of the Moruya masons. John Kelman, Robert Crisp and Harry Rootsey, all former masons, lived on. He was not the Quarry's only historian. Bob Colfax had been working on his memoirs ten years before Reg. His teenage perception that those he had worked with *'were men past their prime'* had been mistaken. Might some of the Scots he so revered be still alive in Aberdeen? In 1983 he embarked on an exercise which would yield a surprising result.

It is unclear how or where Reg met Bobby Watson, a Highland dancer whose reputation extended far beyond his native city of Aberdeen. In Scotland he was a household name through frequent television appearances in programmes such as *The White Heather Club* and *The Kilt is my Delight*. His reputation and expertise extended to expatriate communities in North America and Australasia. In 1982 Watson was in Australia as guest of honour of the Australian Dancing Association which was celebrating its twenty-fifth anniversary. He was the Association's patron. It was then that he met Reg Saunders. Reg, never slow at going forward, introduced himself, and no doubt enlightened Watson of the link between the Quarry where he had worked and Watson's home town. There was an exchange of addresses.

TO BE CONTINUED

^{iv} *Sydney Harbour Bridge builders*, interview conducted by Richard Raxworthy, 1982

^v *Moruya Examiner*, 25 April 1925

^{vi} *Sydney Harbour Bridge builders*, interview conducted by Richard Raxworthy, 1982

The Quarry Apprentice Part 3

by Bill Glennie

The following year Reg wrote to Watson, seeking his help in locating any surviving masons 'who had taught him a lot about working the granite for the Bridge pylons'. Watson enlisted the help of the local newspaper, *The Press and Journal*, which ran a feature, 'Aussies seek help tracing Aberdeen pals', with a photograph of Watson holding a copy of the *South East Magazine* with its headline *MORUYA'S LINK WITH HARBOUR BRIDGE*.

A few days later, a visitor called at Bobby Watson's Dancing School in Aberdeen. She had read the article with interest and wanted to see the photographs which had been sent from Australia. She was Ruby Webberley. As nine year-old Ruby Grant, she had travelled with her family to New South Wales in 1926. Her father, Bill Grant, was one of the thirty masons recruited by Dorman Long from Aberdeen, and Ruby was another for whom 'those times were indelibly impressed' on her memory.

Having obtained Reg's address, she wrote to him. 'The other week I saw an article in our local newspaper of your enquiring through Mr Bobby

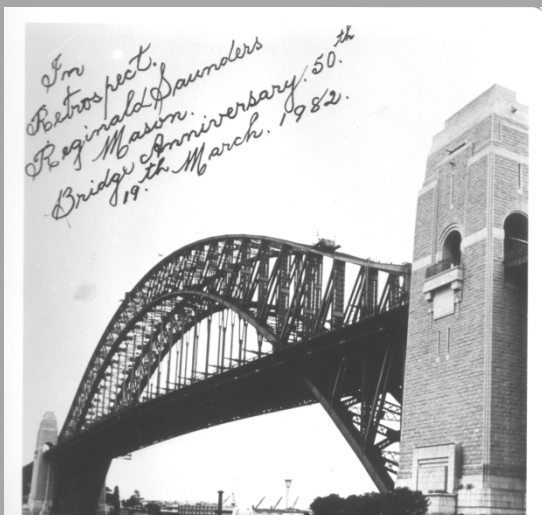
Watson, the Scottish dance teacher, if any of the Aberdeen masons who worked on the granite pillars of the Harbour Bridge were still alive'. Her father had died some twenty years before, she told him, but her mother was still alive. Her father had been one of two Bill Grants at the Quarry. Her father worked in the masons' sheds, the other marked the granite blocks before they were loaded on the boats en route to Sydney. Then came a surprise.

'I have over a period documented my memories of how we left Scotland during the General Strike of 1926. I am fortunate in having photographs with which I could illustrate the story. I have never been able to return to Australia, but I would dearly love to one day'.

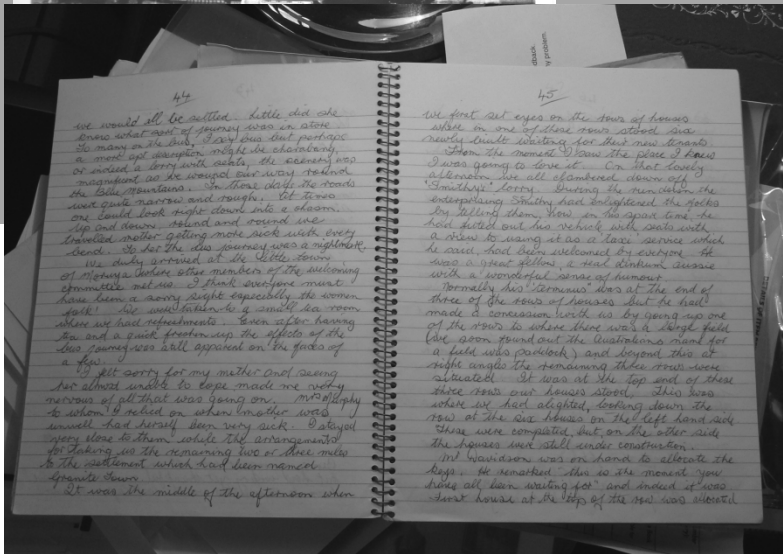
Now Reg learned that Moruya had three historians. In a second letter Ruby sent him a synopsis of her story. Reg was encouraging. 'Please complete your historical narrative. Some day I will read it with relish'.



ABOVE: Nine masons and their families assembled at Aberdeen Joint Station on 25 May 1926 to catch the train for Liverpool where they would board the *Pakeha* for New South Wales. These nine completed the quota of thirty masons allowed to Dorman Long by the Department of Labour and Industry. Ruby Webberley, aged nine, was the only girl in the group, and her two brothers, caps on heads, stand next to her. Ruby is wearing a hat and coat made for the journey by her mother. Her father, Bill Grant, rests his hands on her shoulders. The two officials responsible for the group's travel arrangements stand on the far right. The youngest members of the group were three-month old Duncan Smith in the arms of his father, Robert, and to the right of him, three-year old Sandy Geddes, held by his father, Pat. At the time of writing, Duncan Smith lives on in Sydney, one of the few living links with Moruya Quarry. (Reproduced by kind permission of Norah Berry)



RIGHT: In one of his earliest letters to Ruby Webberley, Reg promised, 'I shall assemble an amazing packet forthwith of Bridge data. Some photos are fit for publicity in any journal of Aberdeen City. The Department of Main Roads reproduced my 50 year-old originals blown up to 8½ x 6½, highly glazed. I shall duplicate copies'. He reserved the best for later. 'In the surface mail to follow will be an enlarged photo of me 8 x 10 with the Bridge in the background. The Department of Main Roads requested me to be so photographed. Even though I blow my own horn, it is a unique bit of photography'. (Reproduced by kind permission of Gail Cassie)



'It was the middle of the afternoon when we first set eyes on the rows of houses where in one of these rows stood six newly built waiting for their new tenants. From the moment I saw the place I knew I was going to love it'. Ruby Webberley's memoir of her experiences in Granite Town remains an important source for historians of the Quarry. Her original manuscript (above) took up four exercise books. The copy she sent to Reg Saunders was painstakingly typed by her husband, Harry, using a basic two-finger technique. Reg deserves credit for ensuring Ruby's *Granitetown memories* reached the wider audience it deserves. (Reproduced by kind permission of Gail Cassie)

In January 1984 he sent off to Aberdeen copies of his annotated photographs, his memoir and a tape of him recounting 'the participation of Mr and Mrs Reginald Saunders in the 50th Anniversary of the Sydney Harbour Bridge'. In the accompanying letter he told her, 'I am to give an address to the Senior Citizen's Club in Hornsby on the Quarry Days and the Bridge affair'. With some pride he added, 'I am 74 years of age, self-educated, widely read, craving for an outlet for expression. I was educated in the University of Hard Nocks (sic)'. He suggested to his fellow author, 'There is a great field open to both of us'.

In September 1984 Ruby sent Reg a copy of her Granite Town memoir. In the accompanying letter she wrote, 'It is almost three years since Harry had it typed, and about the time of the fiftieth anniversary of the Bridge I did think I would like it published. However mother took ill and became more and more dependent on me and I had little time to pursue the project. To be quite honest, Reg,

it is only since I started corresponding with you that my interest has been revived'.

Reg realised the importance of the document he had received from Aberdeen, and took it to the State Library of New South Wales. Shortly afterwards, Jennifer Broomhead, then Acting Field Librarian, wrote to Ruby, 'Recently Mr Reg Saunders of Thornleigh left a copy of your manuscript *'Granitetown Moruya'* (sic) with the Library for examination. With your permission, we would like to make a copy of it for the Mitchell Library. The Mitchell Library specialises in collecting and preserving sources of Australian history so that they can be made available for research use'.

It was barely a year since Ruby had walked round to an address in Fonhill Gardens in Aberdeen to find out more from Bobby Watson of the Australian who wanted to hear of former workmates from Aberdeen. One can only imagine the mixture of surprise and pride she surely felt as she read the request from Australia.

Finding Ruby gave Reg a second wind. More photographs were exchanged and Ruby had plenty of these. Her father had bought a camera before the family set off for New South Wales to record the whole adventure. Ruby sent Reg a photograph of

some Granite Town musicians. He was once more transported to the Quarry Hall: *'I have never listened to better, scintillating, soul-stirring melodies. Theirs was unique music'*, he told her. Stories were exchanged of Arthur Preddy - *'picture proprietor, builder etc, quite a live wire'*; of Christie Johnson who supplied groceries to the Granite Town families; and of *'George Chewying, the Chinese, supplying vegetables. I was his back-store boy'*; of Jock Gilmore, the Quarry Manager's only son: *'With his winning smile and vigour, he was at nineteen years the answer to maidenly prayers'*.



ABOVE: Following his discovery of Ruby Webberley in Aberdeen, Reg Saunders acted as a hub, distributing and receiving letters and photographs. In 1985 Lurline Apps of Yandina, Queensland, contacted him. Lurline had kept in touch with Ruby for over 50 years. It was Ruby who took Lurline to her first day at the Quarry school.

LEFT: Lurline's father, Thomas Herbert Warner, worked in the Quarry engine shed. He helped assemble the Crossley Premier engines. *'I drove those engines while the job lasted. Those engines ran for over 6 years under the most trying conditions, breathing in granite dust all day. I took 14 lb of granite dust from the breathers each week'*.¹

CENTRE & RIGHT: A bundle of fun on the steps of her Granite Town home in 1927, and a bundle of fun in her Yandina home 80 years later: Lurline Apps. In *Granitetown memories* Ruby described how when the two half-arches joined up in Sydney in 1930, each pupil at the Quarry school was presented with a mug depicting the Bridge. Lurline is shown holding her mug. On its base is evidence of the British Empire's decline. Inscribed are the words *'Made in Germany'*. (Left and centre: Reproduced by kind permission of Lurline Apps)

Reg sent a copy of Ruby's memoir to Bob Colefax in Moruya who was soon writing to Ruby and telling her, *'I have a great and abiding nostalgia for those golden years at Moruya Quarry. You are blessed with the unusual gift of conveying a complete message with maximum effectiveness in simple language. I am taking your book down to Nell Greig today. She will be captivated'*. Eight years after that first letter from Bob Colefax to Ruby, Nell Greig, daughter of John Gilmore, made her one and only visit to Scotland since leaving the country in 1924 and met Ruby in Aberdeen.

In that same year, 1993, Ruby gifted her personal copy of *'Granitetown memories'* to the Moruya and

Until his death in 1988 Reg acted as a distribution centre for letters and memories. He told Ruby he had sent copies of her letters to George Allan's widow, Polly, then living in Canberra, and to Alec Simpson's widow, Mary, who lived in Sydney. He himself was contacted by Lurline Apps of Queensland with whom Ruby had corresponded over the decades. Lurline's father, Thomas Warner, was an engineer at the Quarry from the outset and Reg recalled *'He was also a First Aid man'*.

District Historical Society. It was published in 2003, one year after Ruby's death.

It would be easy to pick flaws in Reg's version of Quarry history. It lacks balance. There is no place for negativity in Reg's remembrance of the Quarry, no place for machinery that did not work, no place for inebriation on a Friday night in the Quarry Hall.

For Reg had an agenda. Having been affronted by an artist's total disregard for the skills of the men who had produced the granite pylons, he wanted to set the record straight. It suited his purpose to accentuate the positive. In his Quarry everybody and everything worked well.

His written style is sometimes pompous and laboured. He quotes freely from the likes of Pope, Lamb and Shakespeare, eager to illustrate how widely read he was. Perhaps he tried too hard to emulate them. In 1993 Bob Colefax wrote to Ruby Webberley in praise of her writing: *'To convey one's thoughts with a flowing style through the agency of relatively simple language is an art superior, in my opinion, to the pretentious use of high-faluting wording'*. He might well have had Reg in mind.

But that would be to miss the point. Reg's recollections of the Quarry and the men who worked there are remarkably detailed. Listening to his taped interview with Richard Raxworthy, what is striking is the confidence and authority with which he answered Raxworthy's questions. Raxworthy's interview with Harry Rootsey had been largely taken up with Rootsey's search for work following the Quarry's closure, and in his interview with Bob Colefax he failed to tap into the rich mine of Colefax's memories of Quarry characters. The interview with Reg is the lengthiest of the three. Reg, fortunately, was not given to brevity. Towards the end of the interview he declared, *'All that I am dictating to you now can be read by posterity in my historical narrative which has been accepted by the officers of the State Library'*. But Reg was not dictating, and his description of work at the Quarry was more wide-ranging, detailed and structured than in his memoir. As a result, there is no better account of operations at the Quarry by someone who worked there.

Following his meeting with John Andrew at the Department of Main Roads he became a mini-celebrity of sorts as he strove to promote the role of Moruya in the Bridge's construction. His efforts came too late to secure adequate mention of the Quarry in the Bridge histories published in 1982, but use has since been made of his recollections in publications as diverse as Christine Greig's *Not forgotten: Memorials in granite and Bridging*

Sydney, the latter work published to tie in with the Bridge's seventy-fifth anniversary in 2007.

He was unselfish in promoting the efforts of other chroniclers of the Quarry. He took with him extracts from Bob Colefax's *Down memory lane* to both John Andrew and Richard Raxworthy. *'I would like to mention for the interest of posterity and you, Richard, that Bob Colefax started to write on the Quarry, and he wrote the history of Moruya, including the Quarry. It makes a very, very interesting history'*. And of course Ruby Webberley's valuable memoir of Granite Town might have remained unpublished and unread in Aberdeen but for Reg's initiative in 1983.

As he and his wife were driven in some style across the Harbour Bridge on 19 March 1982, Reg reflected on the *'special and surrounding'* circumstances which had conspired to bring about this unique occasion in his life: *'There we were, creatures of destiny, following in the rear of a motorcade of prestige vehicles carrying distinguished citizens. Two cars ahead of the council vehicle rode two immaculately uniformed mounted policemen. The speed was slow and solemn as a funeral march. I thought, what a golden opportunity to emulate, if possible, a royal salute to the "Proud Arch" in which I had, as a granite mason, participated'*. That participation had been brief, but because of it he had been projected *'in the last decade of life into a place of honour'*. The former Quarry apprentice enjoyed his moment in the spotlight and deserved it.

(Reg Saunders' quotations are from a variety of sources: a memoir and other papers deposited with the State Library of NSW; a transcript of his interview with Richard Raxworthy, held by the State Library of NSW; a transcript of his taped recollection of his participation in the events of 19 March 1982, held by Moruya Museum; correspondence with Ruby Webberley supplied by Gail Cassie, Ruby's daughter.)

ⁱ *Memoir*, Thomas Herbert Warner, 1955