

Snippets from the Newspapers in the 1840's and the stories behind them

Part 1. The Ups and Downs of Boating by Wendy Simes

A single handed Voyage in a Small Craft

On the departure of the steamer Juno, for Port Phillip, on the 18th ultimo, a well known waterman of this port, named George Mulhall, was hired by one of the passengers to proceed in the vessel with his skiff as far as the Moruya River, for the purpose of landing him there; his intention being to return again to Sydney by the Shamrock. On the morning of the 27th, there being no appearance of the Shamrock, it was concluded she must have passed during the night. Accordingly the passenger immediately started for Sydney overland, and Mulhall, being well acquainted with the coast, quitted the Moruya at the same time in his skiff, by himself. The same evening he arrived at Batemans Bay, where he stopped for the night; starting early the following morning, he by evening reached Ulladulla; left there on Wednesday morning, and arrived at Shoalhaven the same night. Here he was detained two days, in consequence of heavy gales, but on Saturday morning made another start, and contrived to reach Port Aiken by 9pm; left there early on Sunday morning, and arrived here about Midday, thus accomplishing a distance of 180 miles by sailing and pulling, in an open waterman's boat, which we may remark was built by Howard, and is 21 feet in length.

Sydney Morning Herald, (SMH) 9th December 1848. The event was also reported in the Moreton Bay Courier

The details behind the article

The steamer **Juno** was 175 feet, breadth 24 feet within the paddle boxes, burthen (load that can be carried) nearly seven hundred tons, her engines were two hundred and eighty horse power with the cylinder diameters being four feet. She was owned by Boyd and Co. and was at the time the largest and best fitted steam-boat that had been sent to the Colony. (Details from SMH 30 March 1842.)

The Shipping Gazette of November 25th 1848 gives a listing of the passengers who sailed on the Juno on the 18th November but just which one sailed ashore with the waterman at Broulee is not known.

A Watermen originally was a term for someone who used a small boat to ferry passengers across

rivers and around the harbours in England. It was also used to describe boatmen performing essentially similar duties on coastal waterways in the British colonies. This was especially the case on Sydney Harbour and in the Tasmanian Rivers.

George Mulhall

George Mulhall was a married man in his late thirties with a young family. The Mulhall family were well known waterman operating from Circular Quay. His brothers Thomas and Patrick were also waterman. They were all born in the colony, their parents Patrick Mulhall and Rachael Griffiths having arrived as convicts in 1806 and 1805 respectively.

In the early 1840's George was acting as pilot at Brisbane Water. He is recorded as petitioning the Legislative Council when he heard the Government was going to do away with the office. (Sydney Morning Herald, 13th September 1844)

During the rest of the 1840's, the 1850's and 1860's George was working as a waterman at Circular Quay. The brothers were not however just rowing people around the harbour, they were regularly competing in Regattas. There were pulling races specifically for licensed watermen at every Australia Day Regatta. In 1845 the winning prize was £5, with this figure having risen to £10 by January 1849. In the 1849 race George came second in a boat called Sarah Jane, so he had obviously recovered well from his adventures in the South. It may not have been the same boat he took to Broulee as they often had their special racing boats as well as their working boats. Apart from the Australia Day Regatta, regattas were also held at Balmain and the North Shore. The brothers were also successful competitors in Sydney Yacht Club races, where George was the helmsman on board the Pearl.

(Regatta races were reported each January in the SMH in the first issue after the 26th January)

After a regatta it was quite usual to find an advertisement in the SMH with the loser issuing a challenge to the winner to a return match race.

In January 1848 the following advertisement was placed.

I George Mulhall, winner of the last prize, having been fouled several times by Brennan, am now open to row any man in Sydney for any Sum. George Mulhall
Circular Wharf.

There would also have been quite a bit of spectator betting on all these races.

George was also involved in searching for survivors from the wreck of the Dunbar in 1857. He was reported to be sailing his boat close to the cliffs looking for any survivors.

George later went on to become the first lighthouse keeper at Barrenjoey Lighthouse. He died at age 71 in 1885. (Note: His date of birth varies according to which particular record is consulted)



The inscription on his headstone reads;_

All ye that come my grave to see,
Prepare in time to follow me,
Repent at once without delay,
For I in haste was called away.

Port Aiken mentioned in the article was the then name for Port Hacking. It was named after James Aiken, a seaman on The Supply, who was attributed with the discovery of the harbour.

The boat builder **Howard** mentioned is presumed to be William Howard, boat builder of Balmain.

Three New Boats from Moruya

Moruya was not without its own successful boat builder in the 1840's, with Christopher Brown being well established on the Moruya River. The Sydney Morning Herald reported shipping movements in detail and recorded the arrival of two new boats built by Christopher in 1846 and 1847.

Christopher had married in 1846 to Mary McLean the third daughter of Allen and Janet McLean. The McLean's and the Brown's had land on the

Southern shore of the Moruya River near to the entrance, from where they established successful boat building businesses.

A new Schooner

A new Schooner called the Heroine arrived yesterday from the Moruya River, with 36 tons potatoes, 4 tons bark, and 6 cwt. old copper on board. The Heroine seems to be very substantially built, and will carry a large cargo for her size, she is also reported to sail fast, and draws but little water when loaded. She was built at the Moruya by Mr. Christopher Brown for the present owner, Mr. James Millie; her dimensions are, 43 feet keel, 16 feet 2 inches beam, 7 feet of hold, and 53 feet overall. We believe she is intended for the cedar trade.

Sydney Morning Herald, 10th June 1846.

New Schooner

A fine new schooner called the Thetis, arrived yesterday morning from the Moruya River, having been built there by Christopher Brown, for Mr Rayner of Hunter Street. She is about 127 tons builder's measurement, and her dimensions are 60 feet keel, 20 feet 4 inches beam, 9 feet 10 inches depth of hold, and 75 feet overall, being coppered and copper fastened. Her sailing qualities are said to be very good, and we doubt not she will rank high in the number of our colonial traders.

Sydney Morning Herald 7th October 1847

The Fate of Christopher Brown's Schooners

The Melbourne Argus of the 10th of December 1847 reported that the Thetis was to be a regular trader between Sydney and Melbourne. Her cabins, which have been tastefully fitted by Messrs Simpson and Mackenney, have been arranged so as to accommodate with comfort eight passengers.

The Thetis had been built for Mr Rayner of Hunter Street, the same Mr Rayner I believe whose daughter Jane, married Henry Clarke of Bergalia and younger daughter Caroline married William Collett of Moruya.

The Thetis was reported wrecked with the loss of 4 lives in the Sydney Morning Herald of 7th June 1848. She was wrecked on the 26th of May off Port Lonsdale, at the entrance to Port Phillip Heads. The remaining 20 passengers and crew were saved. The survivors were able to get ashore by climbing along the mast which was lying across the reef. The value of the schooner was estimated at £1500 and it was uninsured.

The Sydney Morning Herald of the 8th of October 1850 reported the loss of the Heroine at the Richmond River on the 28th of September. The Heroine, the Bramble (also a Moruya built boat) and the Lucy Ann, all schooners “were lost in what was described by many old traders as the most fearful squall they had ever had to contend with. On the shore it tore up large trees and cleared everything before it.” The lost vessels were reported as fully prepared for the gale but the storm burst on them with such fury it threw them clean over. The Heroine and the Bramble were both owned by Mr James Millie, who was the master of the Bramble at the time, he and 5 seamen lost their lives in the storm. The Heroine’s master, 4 seamen and 1 passenger also lost their lives.

New Vessel.

A fine schooner called the Swift, of forty-nine tons builders’ measurement, arrived in harbour on Wednesday last from the Moruya River, having been built there by Mr Robert Gee; her dimensions are 49 feet keel, 55 feet overall, 17 feet beam, and 17 feet depth of hold. She appears to be a substantial built vessel, and is said to sail remarkably well.

Sydney Morning Herald, 25th August 1848.

The Fate of the Swift

Robert Gee and David Warden had purchased land in Ulladulla and set up a boat building business. However in 1846 this partnership was dissolved. The dissolution was advertised in the SMH on the 13th June 1846.

The Swift was only to survive 9 months. The SMH of the 23rd May 1849 reported she was totally wrecked after capsizing in a squall on the 6th May, about 12 nautical miles north of Cape Byron. She drifted ashore in a few hours on the beach a little to the northward of the Brunswick River. There were only two survivors, passengers Robert Gee and James Brown. They were in the cabin when the boat capsized. When Captain Beneaud of the Midas found the wreck 2 days later he heard James Brown inside and cut a hole in the bottom of the vessel to allow the men to escape. Robert Gee was still a part owner of the vessel, but the vessel unfortunately was uninsured.

Robert Gee died on the 20th August 1854. The administration of Robert’s affairs was granted to his major creditor Henry Clarke. Robert had shares in two other larger ships which were auctioned by Mort & Co. on the 11th October 1854.

The SMH of 18 March 1847 in its listing of Vessels belonging to the Port of Sydney lists two

other boats built at Moruya River. The Jean Ann of 16 tons, built in 1834 and owned by S. Brown and the Rambler, 36 tons, built 1846, owned by S. Barr. This was Sam Barr who is described by Alexander Weatherhead on page 7 of the June Journal.

The Rambler disappeared on the 20th July 1847 while on a run from Sydney to Twofold Bay.

A cutter the Thomas and Harriet of forty tons was reported being expressly built for the settlers of the Moruya River in SMH 18 September 1843. No builder was stated.

Tragic Boating Accident

Broulee

A melancholy accident was reported here last night. So far as I have been able to ascertain, the following are the particulars: A boat’s crew, consisting of five persons, three men and two boys, all immigrants who arrived within the last three years, started from this harbour yesterday morning (Nov, 18th) in a whale boat, the property of Captain Oldrey, R.N., which was lent by that gentleman, for the purpose of conveying some wheat from the Moruya River to Broulee. It is supposed that on their return the boat got swamped, and was dashed to pieces on the bar, at the mouth of the Moruya, and that all the unfortunate individuals perished. The body of one of the boys was found by a black near to the bar, much eaten by the sharks. Fragments of the boat and four hats belonging to the men have also been found. Captain Oldrey, and the Constable stationed here, have proceeded to the spot to endeavour to find and inter the bodies.

Sydney Morning Herald, 28th November 1842.



A Whale boat on exhibition at Eden Killer Whale Museum.

To date we have not found any record of just who these 5 people were. If any of our readers have come across any further details we would love to hear the story.

The wreck of the Rover also occurred in the 1840’s and was reported in the Sydney Morning Herald. This has been well documented in H.J. Gibney’s book *Eurobodalla*, and in the September 1997 issue of our Journal.