

EARLY RECORDS OF THE WARRNAMBOOL HARBOUR

From the Royal Commission in 1923

In early days of navigation, the requirements of the Port were served by a more or less sheltered Anchorage for vessels of light draught. Even then, as the later records confirm, it was perceived that nature was slowly but persistently reclaiming from the sea, that portion of Lady Bay protected by reef, to an extent which caused concern to engineering minds.

Mr. John Barron, Engineer of the Portland district when reporting in 1853 on his survey of Lady Bay (the first to be undertaken) and the practicability of improving the anchorage ground to afford better security to shipping, stated that "One of the most important features connected with Lady Bay is the undoubted fact that it is gradually filling up with sand." In confirmation of this, I may mention that material has accumulated at the Jetty since its construction in 1850 about 60 feet forward. This deposit is apparently increasing steadily. The sand at the terminus of the Jetty embracing the space between the rocks is known to fluctuate according to the prevailing winds and swell. During the work at the Jetty, the depth of water has been noticed by the Foreman to vary as much as 12 feet in two days. I consider the extraordinary fluctuation of the sand a most material point in considering any improvement to be made in this part of the Bay.

In 1857, Mr. James Liddell, reported that the depth at the inner moorings had decreased with eight days to 6 feet in places.

In 1858, Mr. Barrow drew attention to the fact that sand was accumulating in the West of the Bay.

In 1865, Mr. W. W. Wardell, the Inspector General of Public Works, pointed to the ravages caused by sand drifts which were occurring along the coast, whereby land of excellent quality was being destroyed in immense quantities.

Previous to the construction of the breakwater, when vessels used the jetties, since demolished, traders found that in summer time, with prevailing Easterly winds, the depth increased, but on the return of winter with higher tides and Westerly winds, the sand was scoured away and the deeper water restored, showing that the sand displacements were entirely due to seasonal sea and wave action and not to any prevailing littoral currents; from this it is assumed by Mr. T. H. Smith, Marine Surveyor, that since the construction of the Breakwater, the effect of Westerly winds to convey sand Eastward into the deeper water of the harbour has been neutralized by the covering protection afforded by the Breakwater and the outlying islands and reefs, with the result that the drift of sand from Eastward, predominates.

Records dated 1874, show that only depths of 10 - 11 feet existed about 150 yds. southward from the outer end of the tramway jetty, where originally there had been 13 - 14 feet of water. So apparently at that time, siltration was making itself evident in that corner of the Bay, doubtless due to the reef of rocks between the breakwater Rock and the shore at the South-West corner of the harbour, forming an obstruction to the free play of sea scour through the passage now occupied by the viaduct and to the reef, also acting as a groin to hold up sand travelling into the harbour from the North-Eastward.

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Historical Extracts

- 1850 Jetty (known as Thornton's Jetty) to project 600 feet from the shore in the Southern corner commenced into 9 feet of water. In 1854, it was reported to be in a dangerous unfinished condition.
- 1865 Mr. Waddell reported the only practical method was to increase jetty accommodation.
- 1867 Mr. Morraty, Engineer - in Chief for Harbours and Rivers N.S.W., reported on the means to improvement of Harbour. Local opinion was divided between two schemes; opening the Merri mouth and construction of Breakwater.
- 1869 Competitive plans were invited.
- 1872 Sir John Coodes recommendation for a Breakwater of at least 1800 feet was reduced in an amended plan for a Breakwater wharf of 600 feet was opposed on cost (£110,000.) and increased jetty accommodation was recommended.
- 1874 The Francis Government agreed to £10,000 placed on the estimates with other sum; within a financial year all the Breakwater was completed.
- However, the first years grant was expended constructing a second jetty, known as Tramway Jetty, extending 750 feet into 13 - 15 feet of water, 350 yards northward of the first Jetty. Also money was expended experimenting with concrete block for the construction of the proposed Breakwater.
- 1875 There were conflicting political intrigues and Sir John
to
1879 Coode submitted a plan for an 1800 ft. Breakwater, afterward reduced to 600 feet and adopted.

In conclusion, after the long sustained agitation for substantial harbour improvements, Warrnambool today is worse off. The white man's efforts at providing port facilities have proved nothing better than a successful land reclamation scheme and may be regarded as a deplorable engineering tragedy of the first magnitude for which the Warrnambool residents cannot be blamed.

The plans of the various schemes are shown and aerial photograph and early photos show the progress of siltration.

Schemes

Captain Menzies - Lake Pertobe inland (first suggested by Mr. John Barron) Dock scheme and Eastern wall in the fifties.

Howard R. Lawson scheme - Parallel basin to Breakwater.

A. C. MacKenzie Scheme

Mr. Kermodes Scheme - major portion of Mr. De Burgh's Plan re Eastern wall 2400 ft. extending to 30 ft. of water and jetty 400 ft. long and 100 wide, 4 sheds and rail connections at estimated cost of £255,000.

T. H. Smith Scheme - using existing Assets, form a basin and kept free by dredging at estimate of £312,000.

Notes taken from the Middle Island Light House Journal

1859	Aug.	31st	Robert Deverill landed on Middle Island and took charge of the Light House on Aug. 31st 1859.
	Sept.	1st	At 5.33 he exhibited the light for the first time. He told Assistant Alexander he had been accustomed to Light-Ships and was not familiar to Dioptic lamps.
	Sept.	2nd	At 11.30 P.M. I turned the damper of the Lamp the rong way causing some soot to fall on the wick and called Alexander to ^{turn} burn the light. (25 minutes elapsed) Reported the axident next day to the Harbour Master that Assistant Alexander is very unwilling to inform me of anything connected with the working of the Light. He putting every impediment in my way.
	Sept.	3rd	At 9.30 I turned the damper the rongway causing the cylinder to fill with smoke, called Alexander to burn the light (12 minutes delay)
	Sept.	4th	Similar impediment.
	Sept.	14th	Relieved Alexander at 10 P.M., I found the dampers upside down or the contrarily way to what we had been working it, to confound me.
	Sept.	23rd	Contractors commenced the fence in the rear of the dwellings, Light house and store room.
1860	Mar.	7th	John Alexander removed to Lighthouse on shore.
1861	July	1st	John Alexander removed from beech Light House to Middle Island. Alfred Goff removed from middle Light in place of Assistant John Alexander.
	Aug.	1st	Alexander admitted breaking light and suspended.

	Aug.	19th	John Alexander dismissed from the Service. George Swanston appointed assistant light keeper.
1862	Jan.	2nd	Removed flagstaff from beach to Middle Island
1863	Mar.	3rd	White paint brush missing (relate episode) store locked.
	April	13th	Painting of door and signal balls episode. Swanston's wife went to him roaring in a most shameful manner, calling me a wretch. I went into the Light house and shut the door.
1864	June	24th	Workmen employed to paint the Lighthouse.
	Aug.	1st	Assistant Swanston removed. Andrew Farmcombe appointed

Notes from Harbour Master Frank Helpmann Log Book Letters

1861. Dec 30. "Wicks for beach light very much desired.

Recent Merri floods have choked up the passage to the middle island and has much increased the beach.

1862. Jan 31st. Old flagstaff rotten - new one ordered from the forest at 10d. per foot

May 11th. John Ferrier the coxswain has been using threatening language to my two men John Carey and Robert Hutton. both urshed protection for their family's sake.

May 14th. John Ferrier suspended pending inquiry.

May 20th. The old jetty broken down.

June 23rd. In reply to your telegram re Buoy Boat.

" 26th. Harbour master F. Helpmann or son Phillip never appointed as agent for the steamers.

1863. July 16th. Necessary to place about 60 tons of blue stone ballast alongside Iron lighthouse at the middle island.

Aug. 8th. Reference to old stores of the Port, Frank Helpmann reported none except pieces of ^{buoy} chain, in old boats - there were two but lost when the old jetty was carried away.

Aug. 21st. F. Helpmann requests diving suit with instructions

Oct. 18th Tank on middle island stopped leaking

1864. Mar. 7th. Sailing directions to Warrnambool.

Working the land.

In the offing two hills - one elongated

"Warrnambool Hill" N.E. $\frac{1}{2}$ N and a conceal hill

"Tower Hill" bearing N.N.W. from the anchorage form good guides.

On the Middle island there is a lighthouse elevated 76 feet above the water showing at night a bright light and visible 10 miles N $\frac{1}{2}$ E from extreme of island reefs is a beach lighthouse elevated 45 feet showing a bright red light visible 4 miles outside the reef and which cuts off one cable length East of the reef and visible $\frac{1}{2}$ mile east.

Land marks.

Two obelisks in a line N $\frac{1}{2}$ E with the beach light form leading marks in the daytime for crossing the 5 fathom Bank when it breaks.

Working in

In fine weather a vessel may safely work in over the bank preserving a distance of $\frac{1}{2}$ mile from the Hopkins reef and island reef anchorage not desirable to come in at night

Cliff coast to 6 miles.

No known dangers within 1 mile of shore ^{pain from}

otway to Belfast (A Fairy)

1865. Feb.12th. Yesterday John Ferrier was not sober.

He is an excellent boatman and has been in the service about nine years.

He has faithfully promised to abstain and I believe he has a very large family of young children. I trust under these circumstances you will be lenient with him F.H.

Feb.21st. Frank Helpmann 50 years of age and none of his men over 45 years.

Mar. John Ferrier drunk and suspended.

Nov.27th. Sand has encroached on fence in front of Beach Lighthouse to the level of the lower part of the windows of the quarters.

Later noted that worms had got into the house.

Painting by Villiers

J.J. Villiers was actor, painter and decorator and possessed of natural genius.

NOTE

The pedestal on which the present light stands has a brass plate with Chance Bro. 1858 near Birmingham and the new light is dated 1870 by same firm Chance glass makers near Birmingham.

- 1871 Jan. 19th Timber for temporary lighthouse landed.
 Feb. 1st Chief Harbour Master landed.
 Mr. Senior brought over the temporary Lantern.
 Feb. 2nd Temporary light lit up at Sandown.
 Mar. 9th Workmen commenced to knock down and removed
 the stores.
 April 20th Contractors commenced pulling down the quarters.
 May 1st Removed light house apparatus, all stores to
 Warrnambool.
 Abandoned the Island.
 Nov. 20th Clock in Lighthouse stoped at 1.30 A.M. - out
 of order, sent to be repaired.
 Nov. 22nd Iron tanks full - Contractor commenced underground
 tank.
 (1864) (1859)
 1872 Farcombe and Deverill, Assistant lightkeeper for several years
 at least up to 15th May, 1872.

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- Road Committee - ultimately became new Road Board.
 First job - Cutting to Jetty - prior to this,
 only way to bay was a sidling South of present
 Light House.
 Manifold and Bostock of the Merri Street mills cut
 stone free to widen the cutting, but when they
 had cut what they wanted, they stopped - Hence
 the "jutting out" formation still existing.
- 1868 Lord John Manners Sutton (afterwards Viscount Canterbury)
 visited Warrnambool in private capacity.
- 1876 Sir George Bowen made unofficial visit, arrived by Steamer,
 present at opening of grandstand at Warrnambool Race Course
 and paid an official visit the following month.
- 1884 Sir Henry Lock and Lady Lock came overland and visited Koroit
 and the grand scenery of Tower Hill was seen.