

Mellor's Meadowbank Manufacturing Company Tramway

by Jim Longworth and Grant Fleming

Introduction

In the June 1965 edition of the Australian Railway Historical Society's Bulletin, the famous railway historian Mr. C.C. Singleton wrote; Mellor Bros., in September 1892, constructed a standard-gauge horse-operated tramway from their works down Bowden Street to a wharf on the river, for the cartage of coke brought by lighter from the Mortlake gasworks.¹ This short article presents what the above authors know about this enigmatic light railway.

The Sydney-Newcastle Link Railway

The Strathfield to Hornsby section of the NSW government railway's single track Main Northern Line, was constructed by the contractor Amos and Company and opened for traffic on the 17th of September 1886.²

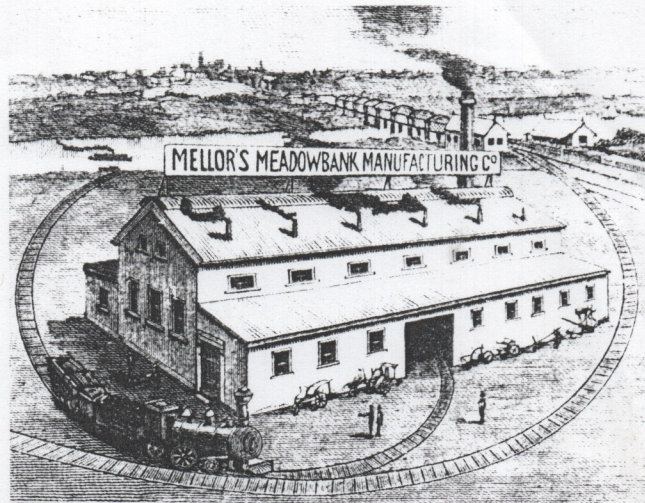
Mellor's Meadowbank Manufacturing Co.

About 1890 one of the Mellor brothers of Adelaide purchased the 100 acre Helenie Estate on the northern bank of the Parramatta River at Meadowbank. Meadowbank was well suited for a manufacturing works, being only nine miles by water from Sydney, eleven miles by rail from the city, and on the main line to the northern regions of the state. Mr. Mellor divided the estate up into lots for both industrial sites and housing allotments. Mellor's were makers of agricultural machinery with six manufacturing plants in South Australia and three in Victoria. A five acre lot north of Barton Street was purchased by Rhodes and Co., who were agents for Simon's roller mill machinery.

In 1892 drought and bank failure crippled the Mellor Brothers' agricultural industries, with their Meadowbank interests passing into the hands of JH. Angus. By 1908 the works comprised a foundry, smiths' shops, timber mill, timber dressing and fashioning rooms, joinery, engineering and fitting department, and paint shop.³ Despite starting as a maker of agricultural machines, the company is probably best known amongst Australian railway enthusiasts for its later manufacture of street tram cars and railway carriages.⁴ Mr. Granville White was the works manager between 1901 and 1910, and it was he who advised the company to undertake the manufacture of tramway rolling stock.⁵ Trading as the "Meadowbank Manufacturing Company", the rolling stock undertaking provided remunerative employment for a large number of men. The carriage building portion of the works was destroyed by fire in the early hours of the 2nd of June 1908,⁶ destroying several government railway carriages and tram cars which were then in the course of completion.

Mellor's Tramway

Work started on the Mellor site with clearing of the land and laying down a railway siding in from the northern end of the Meadowbank railway station, for a length of 11 Chains, at a cost of £1,000. In addition, a "tram-road" was constructed from the works down to the Helenie Wharf at Charity Point on the northern bank of the Parramatta River.



A somewhat fanciful illustration of Mellor's works and tramway. From "Progress, an illustrated journal and magazine", Vol. 1, No. 2.

The tramway was built of steel rails and used steel sleepers, cost about £1,200, and was nearly ready for use by September 1892.⁷

Starting in the grounds of GH. Rhodes and Company, the tramway ran along public road reserves until entering the grounds of the Helenie Estate where it proceeded to the wharf. During the late months of 1892 Ryde Council was endeavoring to connect residents living to the east of the estate with the Meadowbank railway station by a direct straight road, apparently crossing Mellor's tramway on the level. Mellors preferred a more circuitous route for the road that would have deviated around their tramway. However some deft research at the Land Titles Office, revealed that Mellors had by then already parted with their rights to the road reserve.⁸ Council won the debate and the road was named Constitution Road. As noted above Bowden Terrace stopped some distance short of Charity Point. When the government wanted to install a punt service across the river, Charity Point was the logical site for the northern shore station and punt-man's cottage. Mr. Angus (the then owner of the Helenie Estate) offered to sell a suitable strip of land to Council for £125, provided he could reserve the right of the "truck line" along that section of the road reserve to the wharf.⁹

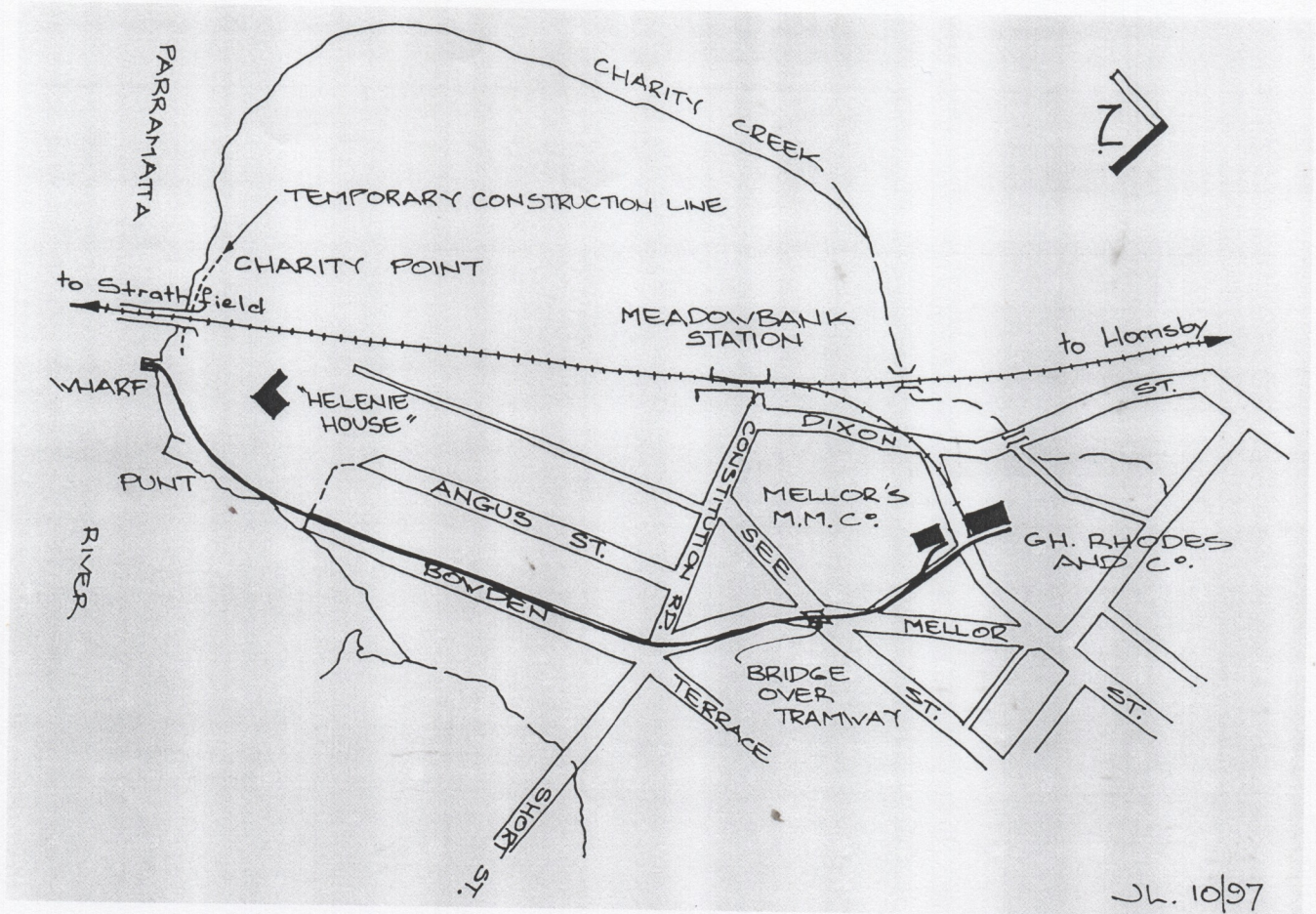
Even though a siding had been laid in from the government railway mainline by September 1892, the siding was not officially opened for business until 22 October 1894.¹⁰ Whether the tramway to the wharf was linked to the extensive network of sidings inside Mellor's works, as conjectured by some researchers¹¹ is not known. However none of the contemporaneous maps which show both the tramway and sidings¹², show them as being joined together.

Between the manufacturing works at Meadowbank station and Bowden Terrace, lies a low ridge roughly along the line of See Street. In order for the tramway to traverse between these two low lying valleys, a deep cutting was cut through the ridge. A bridge was built over the cutting to carry See Street.¹³

The attached map has been prepared from several contemporaneous maps of the 1900 to 1906 era. Some of the streets now have different names.

Locomotive Traction?

A number of short-lived light railways were used during construction of the government railway bridge over the Parramatta River.¹⁴ One illustration published after completion of the construction work,¹⁵ clearly shows a steam locomotive



running on the light railway along the northern bank of the river between the bridge abutment and river bank. The newspaper illustration of 1886 may have been just artistic license. However if a locomotive did operate on the line along the river bank, then the question arises; how was the locomotive transported from the mainline down the steep embankment to the line along the river bank? One possibility may have been that it was hauled overland (by road or along a temporary railway line) along Bowden Terrace. If this is so, then it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that this formation formed at least part of Mr. Mellor's later tramway route.

While the accompanying illustration of the line clearly shows an American outline 2-2-2 steam locomotive with tender¹⁶ on the line, this is assumed to be an artistic embellishment. Possibly the intent was to emphasise the importance of the business establishment which was optimistically looking forward to a growing business. One recent newspaper article referred to a powerful engine shuttling goods to and fro.¹⁷ The statement is assumed to have been based on the illustration which appeared in *Progress*, so is to be regarded as suspect.

In the absence of any known evidence to confirm the use



Two surviving Meadowbank Manufacturing Co. builder's plates, both from NSWGT tramcars. At left is a cast brass plate from a 'J' class tram, at right is an enamel plate from 'P' class No. 1667.

of a locomotive on the tramway, the authors agree with Mr. Singleton's statement of 1965 that the line was horse-worked.

Closure

Apparently the works was one of the many business casualties of the Great Depression, probably closing down some time during the 1930s. Being a manufacturer of timber carriages the company would not have had the machinery or know how to build the newer steel railway carriages.

The points off the government railway main line leading to the works sidings were spiked over "out of use" and secured on 12 October 1936, and the *Merchandise and Livestock Rates Book* posted accordingly.¹⁸ Such a severance indicates that the sidings were no longer in use by the works, which suggests that the works had closed down by then. The siding to the works was abolished on 28 July 1941 and the point lever removed.¹⁹

Extant Remains

All traces of the works of Mellor's Meadowbank Manufacturing Company have been totally obliterated by buildings and landscaping of the Meadowbank Technical and Further Education (TAFE) college. Existence of Mellor's works is marked to-day by a simple sandstone memorial fountain on the corner of See Street and Angus Street. The fountain was originally unveiled on the second of July 1910 in memory of the works manager Mr. Granville White.²⁰ The house standing behind the memorial was originally erected for the works manager Mr. Barton. Traces of the cutting under See Street can be discerned in a small triangular park at the corner of Constitution Road and Bowden Street. The site of Mellor's tramway wharf on Charity Point was approximately where the public ferry wharf is to-day.

Acknowledgements

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Narrow Gauge Saurian

From the collection of Jim Longworth comes this photograph, which is simply recorded as being taken at Geraldton in 1903 and featuring a 14 ft 6 ins dead crocodile.

The Imperial Hotel still stands on the Esplanade at Innisfail (as Geraldton, Queensland was renamed in 1910), although the top storey has been removed and it is now known as Carello's Imperial Tavern.

The crocodile seems to have been placed on a flat truck used around the wharves, goods sheds and sawmills served by the Johnstone River Shire Council's 2 ft gauge Geraldton Tramway. This line ran from the Esplanade at Geraldton to Nerada, 17 miles to the west, with branches to South

Johnstone and Kalbo. The tramway was taken over by the State Government in 1914 and became part of the Queensland Government Railways.

The headquarters of the line moved from the Esplanade to Innisfail Railway Station in 1925 following the opening of the north coast railway. The line to the sawmills on the Esplanade fell out of use in the 1940s. In 1977, the Queensland Government sold the Innisfail Tramway to the South Johnstone and Mourilyan sugar mills.

Large crocodiles still lurk in the stretch of the North Johnstone River opposite the Esplanade, and examples can be seen at a nearby crocodile farm, possibly including the descendants of our recently deceased friend pictured here.

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