

## BELLAMBI AS A COAL PORT

Coal mining first brought about the growth of Bellambi as a village by the sea with the opening of the mine in 1857. Life there rotated around the harbour and the mine three miles away. The development of the harbour, a crescent-shaped coastal indentation, was pursued actively, favoured as it was with a reef stretching out to the Pacific to afford protection from the south-easterly winds.

At first the coal was taken out to the ships in boats but in June, 1858, the first jetty for coal loading was completed by William Mills. It was probably the longest in the colony, being 500 feet long and ten feet wide, and had twelve feet of water at low tide. Fry built a store and keeper's residence at the jetty and Hale celebrated its opening by giving a dinner to his employees in the store. In 1862 a second jetty was built for shipment of coal by Taylor and Walker. The contractor,

Robert Longmore, was the first to use turpentine timber, which proved resistant to the teredo or cobra grub, after which turpentine was generally used in construction in salt water.

To protect shipping in Bellambi harbour it was proposed in 1859 to erect a breakwater on the reef on which E. O. Moriarty, Government Engineer, landed from a whale boat in calm weather. In 1861 the landowners formed a company to build a breakwater to cost £10,000 and later the same year Alick Osborne, Thomas Hale and Dr. O'Brien presented a petition bearing 500 signatures asking the Government to construct it. A further petition was presented the following year, after which the Government placed £20,000 on the estimates for harbour improvement. The breakwater was not built but the harbour was improved and used for shipping for almost a hundred years.

Shipping was life to Bellambi, which saw a procession of ships float on the waters of the harbour with the passing years: first the sailing ships — schooners and barques — and then the screw steamers, at first assisted by sails, and later steam propelled. Before the jetty had been completed the steamers were attached to the mooring cables and the coal cargo taken out to them in boats. Thomas Hale purchased the brigantine schooner NIGHTINGALE in January, 1858, for the Bellambi-Sydney trade, regularly plying with her fifty-five ton cargo and returning in those early days with other heavy cargo such as bricks. The same year the cutter HELEN plied carrying twenty tons, and the TIGER with 112 tons. In May, Thomas Hale bought the VICTORIA packet which carried 300 tons of coal to Melbourne and Adelaide and was the first large vessel to enter Bellambi harbour and the first vessel to take Bellambi coal elsewhere than Sydney. Hale added the schooner PROSPECTOR, carrying seventy-six tons, to his fleet in February, 1859, and in December, bought from the underwriters the WARLOCK which was aground on the reef, towed it ashore and added it to his fleet as the BELL BIRD. He purchased the SACRAMENTO in March, 1860, and by the end of the year the SOUVENIR, PROSPECTOR, NIGHTINGALE, WARLOCK, SACRAMENTO and COLINA were all noted in harbour at the one time. As the years passed by, ships loaded with coal almost daily, and at times a dozen ships would be seen in harbour together.

In 1862 the CAROLINE left with 300 tons of Bellambi coal for the new Ballarat railway. To the list of ships loading coal at Bellambi was added the SPRAY, HERCULEAN, DUKE OF WELLINGTON, VIBILIA and DRUM OF FIFE. Hale added the BEAUTIFUL STAR to his fleet in September, 1862, and at that time H.M.S. MIRANDA, fifteen guns, 2000 tons, drawing seventeen feet of water, called at Bellambi, loaded 300 tons and sailed for Melbourne.

The WARLOCK was the first of a long list of ships to go aground on the reef. In September, 1859, the HELEN was driven ashore, but was launched again.

Changes in the wind were always feared by the captains. In October, the EXCELSIOR barque, of 276 tons, was wrecked on the reef by a sudden wind change whilst leaving harbour. In January, 1860, followed the 120-ton brigantine OCEAN QUEEN, built in 1846 and uninsured. Then the COLINA was wrecked. A schooner not connected with the coal trade, the REAPER, with 20,000 feet of cedar, sailing from the Tweed to Sydney, failed to find Sydney lighthouse or heads in a storm in June, 1864, and was wrecked on Bellambi beach.

A. P. FLEMING,  
President.  
B4142.

D. B. ELLSON,  
Hon. Secretary,  
57 New Dapto Road,  
Wollongong.