

## THE MOSS VALE - UNANDERRA RAIL LINK

In the year of BHP's celebration of its first 100 years of history, it is only fitting that we should remember one of the great achievements connected with the beginnings of steel making at Port Kembla - Charles Hoskins' contribution to the building of the Moss Vale-Unanderra railway line.

History tells us that but for the Hoskins Iron & Steel Co Limited, construction of this rail link would not have happened. There had been many attempts from the Moss Vale end to secure such a railway, even as far back as the turn of the century, but all attempts from that end had failed.

However, the coming of the Hoskins Kembla works in the twenties threw a fresh aspect on this very worthwhile venture. As early as 1922 Hoskins had in mind to shift the works from Lithgow to Port Kembla, to set up plant on the seaboard so as to minimise transport costs to a seaport and to tap the vast limestone deposits of the southern tablelands. The rail link was thus an essential part of the enterprise.

Charles Hoskins was a great driving force behind the scheme, pointing out to the Government the great benefits that would come from such a venture, not only as a means of hauling limestone to Port Kembla but also from the shorter rail haulage to southern ports and states

for iron and steel, as well as superphosphate to Victoria and southern New South Wales.

Hoskins, in pursuing this scheme with great vigour, entered into an agreement with the N.S.W. Government to transport 100,000 tons of material over the line in its first year of operation, with a penalty of £25,000 if he failed to do so.

In June 1924 legislation was enacted for the building of the line and on 25th June 1925, the Premier Sir George Fuller turned the first sod for its construction. So after some fifty years of meetings and deputations the line was finally opened at Unanderra on 20th August 1932 by the Premier, Sir Bertram Stevens.

The inaugural train from Moss Vale consisted of 12 carriages, flag be-decked and crowded to the limit, for its first journey to Unanderra. One of its passengers was Sir George Fuller, the former Premier, who had officially started the line. Following the arrival of the train from Moss Vale, a large banquet was held for the official party at the Central Illawarra Council Chambers.

By 1932-33 the depression years were here and steel sales were low, so Hoskins failed to reach his guaranteed freight tonnage and had to pay the £25,000 penalty to the Government.

However, this railway line has continued to contribute to the prosperity of the Illawarra region. The Maldon-Dombarton rail link to connect to this line is going to bring more wealth in coal exports from the Burragorang Valley and, possibly within the next ten years, from other mines beyond the escarpment. Further economic activity will be generated by the proposed grain terminal at Port Kembla which will be of benefit to grain growers in southern New South Wales. Wool could also be shipped through Port Kembla from the southern tablelands.

So some of the early pioneers who laboured so hard for his important rail link have laboured not in vain, but for the great prosperity of Illawarra and for generations to come.

Jack Maynes

# THE MOSS VALE—UNANDERRA RAIL LINK.

by

Jack Maynes

From December 1985 Bulletin.

After the story of the early steel industry in Illawarra it is appropriate to reprint an article from an earlier Bulletin regarding the influence by the Hoskins to request a railway line from Moss Vale to Unanderra. The following is the background of how that line came into existence. (Ed.)

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