

PUCKEY'S FABLED SALT WORKS

(John M. Bayley recalls)

"One most interesting venture quite near our home at Bourke St, was a plant just north of Stuart Park, and fronting North Wollongong beach, for the extraction of salt from sea water.

At that time the little Towradgi lagoon only opened to the sea intermittently, and a windmill and pumps drew sea water from the surf and supplied it to a series of rattan screens, deployed northerly.

The screens were some three metres high and perhaps twenty metres long. There seemed to have been six or eight rows of them.

Although the plant was unfenced, and untended, the rattan screens seemed to be in good condition, and the five centimetre gal pipe from the sea only slightly rusty.

At this stage, I would be interested to know whether the project ever produced the quantities of salt envisaged by its makers. Perhaps you have done a research on it? I have no recollection of it in later years."

(This recollection comes from a letter in the IHS archives received on the 20/2/80. An attached note indicates Mr Bayley was born in 1904).

"Dr. Mary Puckey, in a letter to the Wollongong Reference Library in 1967, stated that soon after her father, Courtenay Puckey, started business as a chemist in Crown Street in the 1890's he commenced salt-making at North Beach.

He had a tea tree framework 30 feet high erected, to the top of which he pumped sea water, which was then allowed to slowly percolate through to large wooden tanks, and finally dried by heat from a furnace.

He later bought 44.5 acres of land across Fairy Creek from Stuart Park, with 3/4 mile ocean and creek frontage. As far as Dr. Puckey could remember this was in 1905. Here he set up his framework with a windmill to pump the sea water, and with the help of one labourer experimented there for years. Dr. Puckey did not say how successful the experiments were and I have found very little elsewhere about the salt-making, so presumably little came of it.

"The first plant he set up appears to have been at the south end of North Beach, close to the spot where the Mt. Pleasant tramway went through a cutting in the cliff. There are old photographs showing works here, with a statement that they were Mr. Puckey's salt works."

[From a photocopy of a letter in the IHS archives which appears to be in the handwriting of Margaret McDonald]

(Any readers aware of more detailed information or description would be welcome to share their knowledge).