

BELLAMBI JETTIES

Recent articles in our Bulletin mentioned the existence of a second Jetty at Bellambi. At our Illawarra Museum in Market Street we have on display the Bellambi Light which was said to be situated between the two jetties to guide ships at night. The

museum has a photograph of the light in situ, with the most easterly and longest-lasting jetty in the background, but we have searched without success for a photograph showing both jetties, or better still, a photo showing the light as well as the two jetties. About the only visual evidence of two jetties is in Fullwood's painting "Illawarra from The Bulli Pass (1892)", depicted in our Bulletin in December 1997, but that was before the erection of the light in 1913.

Now one of the sleuths mentioned in that article has come up with this extract from our own Bulletin of June 1960, contributed by the late Bill Bayley, under the heading BELLAMBI AS A COAL PORT. Just in case anyone is still wondering if there ever was a second jetty, this is now reproduced in full:-

"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 [1] 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 [2]. The contractor, Robert Longmore, was the first to use turpentine timber, which proved to be 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 Mr 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 pounds 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 pounds 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 of the 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 trading with her forty-five ton cargo and returning in those early days with 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 the 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 the 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 HMS MIRANDA, 15 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 captains. In October [1859] the EXCELSIOR barque, of 276 tons, was wrecked on the reef by a sudden change of wind while leaving the harbour. In January, 1860, followed the 120 ton brigantine OCEAN QUEEN, built in

1885 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 the Sydney lighthouse or heads in a storm in June 1864 and was wrecked on Bellambi beach."

POSTSCRIPT

[1]. BELLAMBI JETTY

Thomas Hale, ex-Sydney watchmaker, opened the Bellambi mine above Woonona in 1858. Due largely to shipwrecks and a depressed coal market, the mine closed in 1864, Hale having lost the greater part of his fortune. "The Woonona colliery remained unworked for 25 years during which the tramway and jetty rotted away and returned to nature." [Bayley, 17] Hence the dotted lines for Hale's jetty on Eardley's diagram, which readers may remember was reproduced in our May/June issue of this year's Bulletin.

When the Bellambi Coal Company reopened the Woonona mine in 1889 a new jetty was erected to the north of the South Bulli jetty. This new jetty lasted only until 1898 when the "Amy" storm washed away the outer half, whereupon arrangements were made with the South Bulli Coal Company to use their jetty. The remaining portion of the Bellambi jetty was used as a shunting neck for Bellambi trains to link up with the South Bulli jetty. The Bellambi jetty was never rebuilt. [Eardley 47; Bayley 55]

[2]. TAYLOR & WALKER'S JETTY (South Bulli)

Taylor and Walker's first mining venture, begun north of Woonona in 1858, failed when it struck a fault and so was abandoned. They then opened another mine in 1861 on the slope above F P MacCabe's home, "Russell Vale." The general depression in the mining industry caused this also to close in 1864. In 1889 it was revived by the South Bulli Coal Company which rebuilt the jetty at a cost of ten thousand pounds, only to see it washed away in June of that year by a huge storm. It was promptly rebuilt a second time. Extended in 1901, it stood until 1955. [Bayley 55]

As indicated above, after 1898 the South Bulli jetty handled Woonona's coal as

well as its own.

3. THE TWO MINES COMBINE

“Woonona and South Bulli collieries were subsequently operated as one mine by the Bellambi Coal Company and connected underground, South Bulli having been purchased in 1901 from Ebenezer Vickery.” [Bayley 10]

4. BELLAMBI LIGHT

As the light was not erected until 1913 it appears that by then there was only one jetty, so we can stop looking for that elusive photograph!

References: Bayley, W A: Black Diamonds, 4th Ed, Illawarra Historical Society, 1989.

Eardley, G: Transporting the Black Diamond, Traction Publications, 1988.