

## **Sophia Jane**

by Carol Herben

The wooden schooner rigged paddle steamer **Sophia Jane** (256 tons gross) was built in 1826 by Barnes and Miller at Rothertithe on the Thames River.

Her master Captain Edward Biddulph who had served in the Royal Navy during the Napoleonic War was the part owner of the steamer **Sophia Jane**. He sailed the **Sophia Jane** from England to Australia as a schooner with her paddle wheel strapped to the main deck and after their arrival on 14 May 1831 she was refitted and reconverted to steam and underwent trials on Sydney Harbour.

In 1831 the coal mines of Newcastle NSW were transferred from the Government, with convict labour, to The Australian Agricultural Co. Under the new owners the company advertised the coal for sale at the pit mouth at 8 shillings per ton. This saw the steamer make her maiden voyage to Morpeth on 19 June, 1831 when she transported the first load of purchased coal.

In 1832 a new boiler was imported from England and installed. One of the earliest steamer to visit and trade between Illawarra and Sydney the **Sophia Jane** has been recorded as being the vessel that, along with general cargo, the residents in Illawarra depended on as a mail service.

A collision took place at sea with the Tamar on 12 January 1835 after the **Sophia Jane's** tiller ropes parted. The vessel's registration was transferred from London to Sydney and in 1840 the **Sophia Jane** and the Tamar were purchased by the General Steam Navigation Co. In April 1844 the steamer struck a reef near Wollongong and she only traded for a further year as the vessel sustained serious damage from this unfortunate mishap.

In all **Sophia Jane** brought the era of communications between Illawarra and the rest of the world including transporting supplies and produce from the farmers and traders of Illawarra to Sydney.