

## "WILLIAM LOWE — SHIPBUILDER"

(Notes on an address to the Society on 1/4/48 by Harold Lowe, Esq., of Camden).

William Lowe was born at Leith, Scotland, on July 20th, 1805, being the second son of William Lowe, described as a Landed Proprietor, and Margaret Steel, his wife, of Stirling. At the age of fourteen he was apprenticed to the trade of shipbuilding at the Royal Dockyard at Deptford on the Thames, after which place he named his property on the Williams River. When nineteen, he was sent to Stettin in Prussia, to supervise the construction of several vessels. He remained there for nearly three years and travelled extensively in the Baltic countries.

Lowe returned to Scotland for a short time during which his father gave him his share of his estate, which amounted to a considerable sum. He then sailed to South America and reached Valparaiso, Chile; from whence he took passage in the ship "Tiger," 328 tons, Captain Richards, for Sydney, arriving on September 23rd, 1828, after a passage of 72 days. When nearing the Australian coast, a heavy gale was encountered and the ship sustained some damage to the spars and rigging. Lowe and James Marshall, his afterwards partner, did such good work in assisting to repair the damage that their passage money was refunded.

The Williams River was chosen for the site of their shipbuilding activities due to the abundance of excellent hardwoods available, iron-bark and flooded gum, and also red cedar and pine softwoods. Lowe purchased from Rev. Father Therry some 20 acres fronting deep water on the Williams and established the yard on a river flat just where a small creek joined the river. The creek was used as a wet dock for vessels under repair.

In 1834 he married Henrietta Blandford, who bore him six children. She died in 1846, aged 29 years. In 1850 he married again, his second wife being Mary Penfold, and they had eight children.

The partnership with Marshall was dissolved in April, 1836, and each carried on shipbuilding separately.

It is by the building of the "William IV" that the name of William Lowe is best recalled. She was not actually the first steamer built in Australia; that honour belongs to the "Surprise," built in Sydney and launched on March 31st, 1831, but did not commence to run until early June of that year. The "Sophia Jane," which arrived in Sydney from London on May 15th, 1831, was the first steamer to run on the N.S.W. coasts. But from an Australian viewpoint most interest centres on the "William IV."

The contract for her building was signed in February, 1831, and she was launched on November 14th the same year. She was launched fully rigged but minus engines which were installed in Sydney on November 24th. The engines were of 40 h.p. constructed by Fawcett and Co., of Liverpool. Her first trial took place late in January, 1832, on the Parramatta and the first outside trial on February 10th. Her dimensions were: length 80ft., beam 15ft. amidships and 13ft. aft., 20ft. over sponsons, height from keel to flush deck 7ft., after cabin height 6ft. 6in., outside planking of flooded gum 1 1/2in., deck planking native pine 2 1/2in. Two masts, schooner rigged.

Her first trip is referred to in the Sydney "Gazette" of February 21st, as follows:—"That beautiful specimen of colonial enterprise, the "William IV," made her maiden trip to the Hunter last week. She left Barker's Wharf at 7.30 p.m., cleared the heads in 44 minutes and made Newcastle at 6 a.m. the following morning." She was advertised to leave Sydney every Monday at 7 p.m. for Newcastle and Green Hills (Morpeth). Fares to Green Hills were 25/- cabin, steerage 15/-; to Newcastle, cabin 20/-, steerage 12/6.

In 1832 she was running to the Hawkesbury, where she went as far as Windsor, then the next year to the Patterson. New boilers were fitted in 1834 and she was advertised for sale. The next year found her in the Port Macquarie trade and she continued that run until 1838. In 1839 she was running to Wollongong, varied with runs to the Hunter, Hawkesbury and Port Macquarie. She was advertised in 1840 to leave Sydney for Wollongong on Mondays and Wednesdays, and for Gosford on Saturdays, so that she was kept very busy. Under various owners, the "Puffing Billy" continued to run until the late 1850's, when she was lengthened and taken to China.

The next vessel built at Deptford was something of a novelty and was rightly called the "Experiment," the method of propulsion being by horses. She was launched in 1832 and was intended for the Parra-

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matta trade. Some difficulty was experienced at first with the horses, but afterwards they made the boat move along at some six miles per hour. The passengers, however, were not in favour of the "horse-power" and she was converted to steam.

In 1846 she was sent to Moreton Bay, and was the first river steamer to ply on the Brisbane.

The schooner, "Earl Grey," was built and launched in 1833 and several vessels were repaired and refitted, among them being the brig "Courier," a well-known colonial trader.

A company, called The Hunter River Packet Association, was formed in 1833 and commissioned Lowe to build a steamer of 250 tons. This vessel, the largest then in the Colonies, was given the name of "Ceres," and was launched in October, 1835. She arrived in Sydney on November 15th to have her engines installed. Her trial trip was made on Sydney Harbour on Sunday, February 21st, 1836, and did her first trip to the Hunter on March 1st. Her dimensions were: length 134ft., beam 38ft., and carried a deadweight of 150 tons on a draft of 7ft. "Ceres" proved to be an excellent and fast sea boat, being reported in June as having taken only 6½ hours from Newcastle Wharf to Sydney Cove. (This is the time taken to-day for the same journey by the steamers of the Newcastle & Hunter River S.S. Co. Ltd.). The vessel had only a very short life unfortunately, as she was wrecked off Bungaree Norah on August 29th, 1836.

Several vessels were built at Deptford between 1836 and 1840 and in the latter year an order was placed by a Port Phillip Company for a passenger steamer to run between Melbourne and Geelong. This was named "Aphrasia," and was 110ft. long, beam 17ft. and measurement 180 tons. The engines were built by George Coke, of Sydney. On a trial trip she ran from Dawes Point to the Heads in 37 minutes. For 26 years she ran in Port Phillip, and was eventually wrecked in New Zealand to whence she had been sent on the discovery of gold in that colony.

Lowe decided to enter the Parramatta River trade and built the steamer "Comet" for that purpose in 1842. Dimensions were: length 99ft., beam 15ft., depth 6ft. 6in. and draft 3ft. 6in. loaded; her engines were of 35 h.p. and were also built by Coke. She was bought by Melbourne owners in 1852 and was sent to New Zealand on the opening of the gold fields in that country but did not reach her destination, being lost at sea.

There is no record of vessels built between 1843 and 1847, but there were probably some small sailing craft launched. In the latter year two 180 ton schooners were built, one named "Rosetta," being lost in the New Hebrides two years later. A brig of 170 tons, the "Enchantress," was built in 1849. The last vessel launched of which there is any record was the large ketch, "Elfin" (1854) which traded off the coast for a number of years.

The Deptford yard was finally closed somewhere about 1860, and Lowe engaged in farming pursuits until his death in May, 1878, at the age of 73.

Lowe was evidently a very competent workman and a clever and original designer and truly a great pioneer shipbuilder.

### ROYAL AUSTRALIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY VISITS ILLAWARRA

On Saturday, April 3rd, 157 members and friends of the Royal Australian Historical Society made an excursion to Illawarra. The party was led by Dr. George Mackaness and Mr. C. Price Conigrave, President and General Secretary, respectively.