



# THE PICK OF THE GREAT NORTH ROAD

## Pick Vol 7

### SUMMARY

#### **7.0 Report on 1827 Ferry Crossing and bottom end of Finch's Track (E.A. Roberts)**

This article discusses the research conducted to find where the original Ferry crossing exists at Wisemans Ferry, which was said to be at the base of Finchs line of track. The article reveals what the research found and includes pictures taken at the site.

#### **7.1 Wisemans Ferry and the Ferry at Wisemans Ferry (E.A. Roberts)**

This article explains the history of Wisemans Ferry in becoming a link in the route from Sydney to Newcastle. It discusses some of the key people, such as Solomon Wiseman, who oversaw the Ferry in its early days. It also highlights some of the dangers and accidents associated with the Ferry at that time. It is a detailed article that provides great insight into the history of the oldest continuing ferry service in NSW.

#### **7.2 Local business man and Ferry Contractor David Cross (E.A. Roberts)**

This article is about David Cross, who was the lessee of the ferry at Wisemans Ferry on and off for ten to fifteen years between 1837 and 1855. Cross was a local entrepreneur who purchased a mill, and received a licence for the Queen Victoria Inn at Wisemans Ferry. In 1846 he was described as a butcher, and faced accusations of butchering John Fergusons beast. He later faced tragedy when his son drowned off Pittwater.

#### **7.3 Wisemans Ferry ferry at a Glance – Some builders, new ferries and major repairs, ferry men and workers**

This is extracted from newspapers via NLA newspaper searches searching Wisemans Ferry and punt

#### **7.4 Bedlam Ferry (E. A. Roberts)**

Bedlam Ferry was an additional ferry that crossed the Parramatta River from Abbotsford Pont to Bedlam Point. It commenced in 1832 and was operated until it was superseded by the Gladesville Bridge in 1881. This article describes the setting, operations and use of the Bedlam Ferry.

#### **7.5 Wisemans Ferry Public Wharf (E.A. Roberts)**

There is little research regarding the Public Wharf at Wiseman Ferry, but it is known that one existed there in 1867 called the Oaktree Wharf, but was destroyed by a flood that same year. In 1886 a petition was sent to government requesting a public ferry for Wisemans Ferry. This was granted but the constructed wharf soon collapsed. The article also discusses maintenance works as recent as 2010.

### **7.6 Shepherds Gully Road (E.A. Roberts)**

This article details the history of the Shepherds Gully Road, which provided the main road access to Sydney for residents of the MacDonal Valley before the building of Settlers Road. In 1991 an archaeological survey of the roads in Shepherds Gully was conducted.

### **7.7 MacDonal River Ferries Book's and Whalan's (E.A. Roberts)**

This article discusses the Ferry most commonly referred to as Book's Ferry that crossed the MacDonal, and Whalan's Ferry, a few hundred metres upstream. It provides a background and history to these ferries, as well as some of the accidents and damages faced.

### **7.8 Matt Jurd's Memories of Books Ferry (Lois Casserly)**

This article briefly describes the memories of Matt Jurd, born 1918, who lived at Stenbecks Inn which had Book's Ferry at the northern end.

### **7.9 Wisemans Ferry & Webbs Creek Recollections (Jim Doyle)**

This article recounts some incidents witnessed by the author at Webb Creek/Wisemans Ferry. These include accidents that occurred with the ferry and even a plane crash.

### **7.10 McFarland's Grave – A Maroota Mystery Solved? (Diane Papandrea)**

This article provides an overview of new research findings, based on newspaper reports from The Sydney Morning Herald and The Maitland Mercury, regarding the road side grave in Maroota.





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### Report on 1827 Ferry Crossing and bottom end of Finch's Track E.A.Roberts

*This research was supported by a 2008 Heritage Grant Award from the Royal Australia Historical Society.*

It was known that Wiseman's Ferry had operated since 1827, but had not moved to its present site till until the commencement of the road up Devines Hill in 1829. Finding where the first Ferry crossed and what if any remains existed was the main object of this research. People had spoken of seeing remains of the ferry landing places but they had not been recorded. For search purposes it was assumed that the initial crossing of the ferry was somewhere at the base of Finches line on the northern side and contained on the southern side by Wiseman's land.

The written records were researched at the State Archives, Google Earth was examined as were old maps and at the lowest possible tide a small aluminium run about and operator was hired to slowly cruise from the present ferry to the first creek where the original Singletons Mill was on the southern side and from *Rosevale* camping site on the northern side back to the ferry crossing. From the map work it was suspected if anything was to be found it would be found at the narrowest point of the river.

On the southern side the bank is rich river flats that fall steeply into the river, registering three and a half meters depth quite close (six to ten meters) to the shore.

Approximately where expected at about the narrowest point in the river three stone plies were observed running into the river. As these were at the edge of a large alluvial plain it is considered these were the remains of a man made feature. The river bank was searched as far as the creek, and other than a small concrete slipway no other features were found.

We then crossed the river to *Rosevale*, a very noticeable feature on the northern river bank and worked our way back towards the narrowest part of the river and then the current ferry crossing. Moving upstream from the *Rosevale* "beach" the river bank has been repaired recently with large (up to about 2 meters) pieces of stone to prevent washouts. The stones are backed with black woven plastic fabric. These repairs are visible from the other side of the river and feature on Google earth maps.



*Remains of original 1826 ferry wharf on northern side of river at base of Finch's Line.*

At the edge of the flat alluvial plain that is *Rosevale* and neighbours, there is evidence in the river bank of what appears to be the remains of wooden jetties that probably relate to river trading and farming from the early 20th century.

Upstream of the alluvial flat where the cliff comes close to the river edge was found a rock covered with wide Aboriginal grinding grooves. This rock could not be found when searching from the land.



*Rock covered in Aboriginal grinding grooves  
Photo E A Roberts*

Just upstream from this, where the road was very close to the water, was found what is believed to be the ferry crossing. It contained several dressed sandstone blocks.





*Shaped dressed stones in ferry crossing*

A few meters upstream of this the river bank is severely washed out. When measured from the land, it is calculated that the back of the undercut is only about five meters from the edge of the road. The top is six meters. This was the only noticeably bad wash-in along this section and the council have been notified and has had it examined by a geotechnical engineer.

The river trip occurred in summer, one late Sunday evening to catch the lowest possible tide in daylight hours. Tide times at Wisemans Ferry are four and a half hours behind Fort Dennison. The tide was forecast to be the lowest or close to the lowest for the year. We returned two days later to investigate from the land. As the day was forecast to be a hot day, we went early in the morning without checking the tide time to find the tide was very high. Having found the washed in area easily from the road side we found the top of the wharf behind a growth of Lantana, but as only one or two stones were visible we went to investigate how it, connected with Finch's track.



*Wharf timber with scarf cut in near front end Photo E. A. Roberts*

At the first downstream creek crossing we headed up the hill through the bush where we located the structure known as the powder magazine. This structure has been recorded a number of times but as far can be found in a brief literature search, no-one, has looked holistically at the land between the road, the cliff line and the two creeks that is the structure in its setting.





The structure known as a powder magazine is set close to the upstream creek on high sloping ground. The end of Finch's track crosses the downstream creek. Uphill and to the downstream side of the structure is a stone wall that runs up to the cliff line. Just beyond the base of this stone fence is the remains of a post, set in the ground and surrounded with stones. Below this and to the downstream side of the structure the hillside has been cut away. From the evidence found of 1926 and 1927 beer bottles it is suspected this soil removal was associated with the building of the road below.

In the downstream side of the cut out areas there appears what may be the end of Finch's Line. It can be definitely picked out only a short distance further downstream where it crosses the next creek as it is supported by walling. This section is upstream of where the public track connects with Finch's Line and may not be recorded in official recordings of the Track. Initial research on the date on building the road long the river's edge shows it was constructed sometime between 1927 and 1929. HEC Robinsons Ltd. NSW Motorist Road Guide published 1927 does not show any road along the river edge and shows the main road to Gosford going via 10 Mile Hollow. The Parish Map for Spencer dated 5 December 1928 shows a road along the rivers edge. The date was confirmed in Peter Beale's book *The Road by the River*.



*Powder Magazine with Ralph Hawkins standing in hollow in hillside Photo E A Roberts*

Now the structure known as the powder magazine has been viewed another use for it comes to mind but it needs to be researched as does its potential use as a powder magazine. Built cut into the hillside it could have formed a cool room for storing meat. The convicts building Finch's Line had to camp somewhere. This site needs to be located or postulated.

After the tide had recessed somewhat, we returned to the Wharf site to verify that what we had found on land was what we had observed from the water at low tide. A log with a sawn scarf cut in it was seen projecting from the river bank at right angles to the bank and parallel to the pile of rocks. Fong Chong later went to Morpeth to investigate the old wharves there. The original wharves are of a similar date. At Morpeth at Queens Wharf he observed similar but larger timbers projecting from the river bank at right angles to the bank.





*Fong Loon Chong on Wall at end of Finch's Track*

The stone ferry wharf remains can be found on the northern side of the river approximately midway between Telephone Poles WF12 and WF13 before the NPWS signs for entry into Finch's Track when travelling from the current ferry. We cleared a track through the Lantana so it is easy to walk to the top of the bank above the stone work, this track will need to be re-cleared and poisoned to keep the lantana at bay if there is to be public access to and interpretation of the site from the land.

This research is ongoing and this is an initial report of what has been done so far.

I would like to acknowledge the assistance received from Lachlan Roberts, Ralph Hawkins, Fong Loon Chong; Cynthia Hunter and Greg Powell.





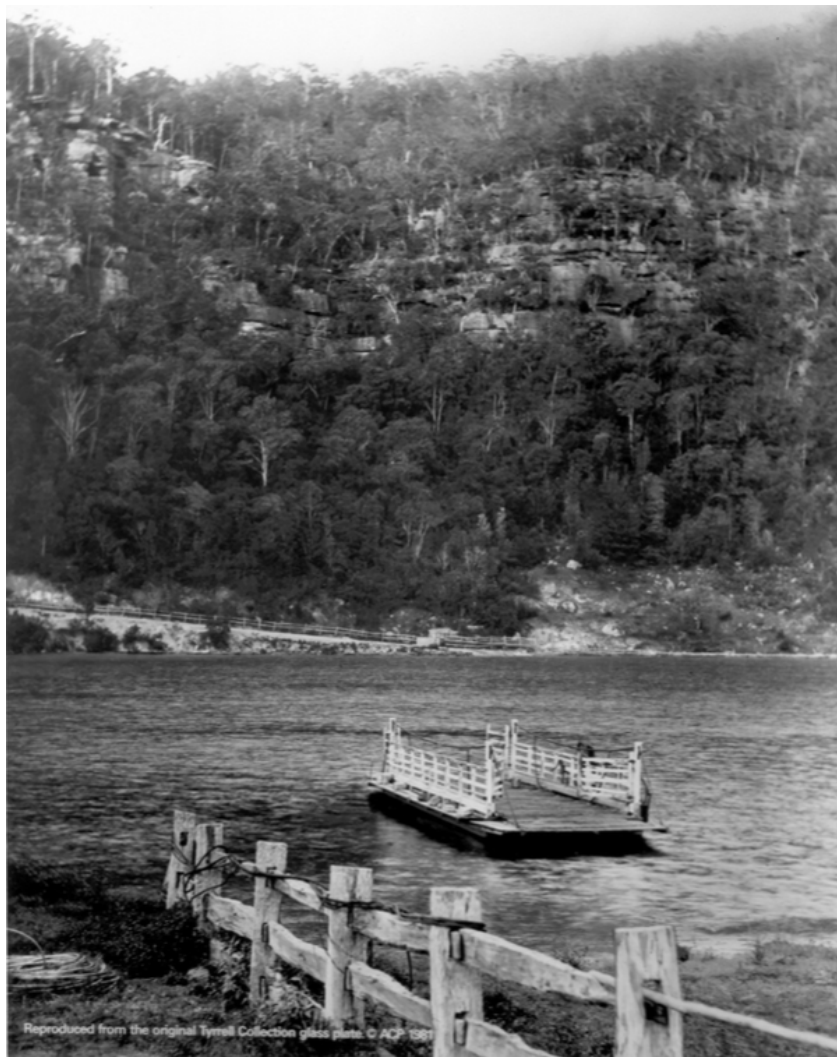
# THE PICK OF THE GREAT NORTH ROAD

## Pick Vol 7. 1

Wiseman's Ferry and the Ferry at Wisemans Ferry

E.A.Roberts

*This research was supported by a 2008 Heritage Grant Award from the Royal Australia Historical Society*



*Hand punt which operated at Wisemans Ferry from 1884 to 1927  
Photo Hornsby Shire Library*



The Ferry at Wisemans Ferry is the longest continuing operating ferry in Australia. It formally commenced operation in 1827 and is still continuing today. From 1826 when it was first recorded to early 1884 the ferry was operated by rowing across the river and three boats were kept, a large rowing boat for foot passengers and for towing the large punt and a house punt that was propelled by a sweep. In 1884 a cable ferry with hand operation winding gear was installed and used for all passengers, human and animals, a trip took twenty minutes. In 1929 the hand winding gear was replaced with mechanical winding gear. Today, although much improved and larger the ferry is still a cable ferry with mechanical winding gear.

The newly arrived, surveyor and Oxford mathematician, Heneage Finch was sent in 1825 to find and survey a route to connect Sydney with Newcastle and the Upper Hunter, a route shorter than Howe's route from Windsor. (1) He had completed his task by September. In this job Finch was accompanied by Richard Wiseman. Finch's route passed through Solomon Wiseman's Land opposite the junction of the 1st Branch (the Macdonald River) and the Hawkesbury River. Wiseman senior, forever the entrepreneur saw his chance to make money from this.

When Archdeacon Scott was touring his parishioners along the Hawkesbury River he stopped at Wisemans at about this time where the ex bargeman and colonial boat owner Wiseman discussed the need for a ferry as part of the road, soliciting Archdeacon Scott's assistance in getting support from the government in the form of a long lease. In 1829 Wiseman was to claim Governor Brisbane had promised him a lease for twenty one years in the presence of John Oxley deceased and Archdeacon Scott. When applied to Scott's memory of events differed. Whilst Scott supported Wiseman's claim that he was supported by Governor Brisbane in building a punt he said he was there in about September 1825 when Solomon Wiseman proposed building a punt but needed government encouragement. Scott recalled he presumed to recommend Wiseman to Governor Brisbane, but could not recall how many years were mentioned. When Dumaresq accompanied by Mr Oxley inspected the road in September 1826 he reported that Wiseman already had a punt operating here that was capable of carrying thirty head of cattle. Later Wiseman was to claim this punt cost £180/-/- to build. It was another year before Wiseman was to apply to the governor for a lease, the length of time to be what the governor thought was suitable recompense for establishing the Ferry. He was offered a seven year lease on condition he abided by any conditions the Legislative Council was to set and that he was to carry government horses and goods for free.

Wiseman had picked a narrow point in the river on Caswell's land (2) and from the archaeological remains built a stone and timber wharf on the northern side where the river bank falls away steeply. Most of the remaining stone is covered at high tide. There is a brief description of the Ferry in William Dumaresq's September 1826 Report to Governor Darling describing the line of the road from Parramatta to the Hawkesbury River

*...from the foot of this hill about a mile the Road will be carried along the banks of the River, to the Punt at Mr Wiseman's where the stream is 1200 Yards broad - on crossing it the Road again follows the Bank of the River about 1/2 a Mile - then about two Miles along the edge of a Lagoon, when winding to the left up a ravine the ascent is pretty gradual...*

Dumaresq describes the road on the northern side going up Roses Run but Mitchell's 1829 map of the *Passage of the River at Wisemans Ferry* shows Finches Line where it currently is and marks the



first ferry crossing where we found it. (3) On the southern side there are some stones where they would be expected for the other side of the ferry.

There is no description of the punt other than it cost £180/-/- and was capable of carrying thirty head of cattle, so it was probably similar to its replacement that was seventeen by thirty five foot (5.018 x10.066 meters) in size. The first punt was built without a copper bottom as Wiseman claimed the worms eat it within four years of being built. (4) This punt would have also been towed the fifteen by five foot (4.57x1.52meters) ferry boat or rowing dingy.

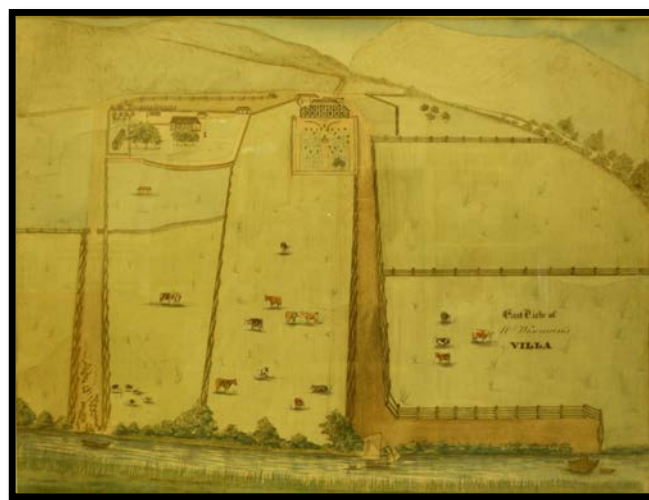
In late August 1827 a correspondent signing himself XYZ now believed to be William John (William) Dumaresq wrote of the ferry at Wisemans:

*The punt carries you across from Wiseman's to Hugh Dogherty's which offers a very eligible situation for a town on the northern bank...*

The land granted to Hugh Dogherty was a triangular river frontage block just east of where the ferry landed on the northern bank. (5)

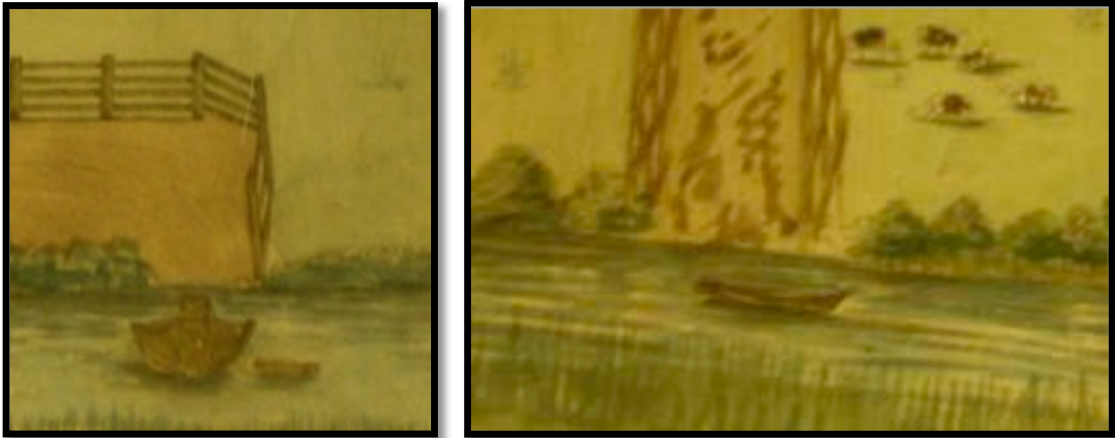
In January 1829 Sir Thomas Mitchell decided that at least two miles could be saved by altering the ascent from Wisemans Ferry on the northern side of the river. The nearly completed ascent via Finches Line was scrapped and a new ascent via Devines Hill was commenced. This involved moving the Ferry, as on the northern side there was no connection along the river edge between the 1827 ferry crossing and the base of the new descent. This section of road along the rivers edge was not constructed till the late 1920s despite being surveyed in 1887. (6)

There is one painting from which it appears Wiseman was operating the ferry at both crossings for part of the time from 1829 to 1832 (7). Paying customers on horse back would have needed to cross at the base of Finches Line and proceed via that way to Ten Mile Hollow and on via Simpsons Track to the Central Coast or north to Wollombi. Whilst the road was not complete or open to wheeled traffic it was trafficable by horse back or persons on foot.



*Mr Wisemans Villa, showing the ferries at both crossings. National Trust collection.*





*Enlargement of cattle punt and row boat and enlargement of horse boat above*

It is during this time that Wiseman became unsatisfied with his contracts, both for feeding the convicts and for operating the ferry. In September 1829 Wiseman applied to have his seven year lease extended to twenty one years, sighting his great expenses. He said the first punt had been eaten by worms and he had built a bigger punt, he had also built a horse punt and had still to build yards for cattle crossing. In November he received his answer, a refusal, he wrote again in January and was again refused.(8) From then on it appears he determined to make life difficult for the government officials he was supposed to carry free of charge. He often kept government officers who would have crossed at the new line of road waiting. He insisted on charging Government officials who were on foot even when they were on government duty. When Heneage Finch, then the assistant surveyor in-charge of works in the Wollombi, sent an assistant overseer and twelve men with two handcarts to collect supplies, the ferry punt was on the northern side of the river so the men and their hand carts got on board and crossed over. On arriving on the southern side Wiseman abused the ferry man for allowing the men to cross and told the assistant overseer John Scott he had to get back as best he could as he was not being ferried back. It appears the handcarts were the problem as Scott's complaint went on to outline that twelve men could not carry the goods to be collected it would have taken thirty six men. The lieutenant in charge of the military guarding the Iron Gang on Devines Hill, R. Graham, wrote to the Brigadier Major Colonel Snodgrass complaining Wiseman would not let him cross and would not deliver the ration to the troops.

The crunch came when the ferryman at 10pm in the middle of summer refused to cross the Magistrate who was coming to Wisemans Ferry to hear court cases the next day. When the ferry man finally ferried the Magistrate across, he was arrested and brought before the court. He claimed he was ordered by Wiseman not to ferry the Magistrate across. He was supported in his claims by Wiseman's watchman, who had taken Wiseman's order to the ferryman. When asked to appear before the court Wiseman then refused. (9)Percy Simpson the other Magistrate wrote to Governor Darling who wrote back to both parties. Informing Wiseman the ferry had to be available at all times and he had to carry men on government business for free whether on foot or on horseback. He could charge them if they were not on government business (10). After this the complaints ceased but Wiseman brooded over the ferry.



In March 1832 Governor Bourke issued regulations for regulating Toll booths and Ferries. April 1832 just as the work was drawing to a close and the road was to open to wheeled traffic, using the excuse of the new regulation, Wiseman again wrote to the Colonial Secretary, outlining how the Ferry was costing him money. He had spent £492/-/ establishing the Ferry and he did not consider the 10/- per week on average he was receiving from paying passengers, to be an adequate return on his investment(11).

This the government had been waiting for and offered to release Wiseman from his contract and buy the Ferry boats provided an agreeable valuation could be reached. John Nicholson the Master Attendant of the Dockyard and the colonial born Mr Daniel Egan the Master boat builder, sailed round to Wisemans Ferry to inspect and value Wiseman's ferry boats. It is from this valuation that we know what the ferry service was comprised of a large seventeen by thirty five foot (5.018 x10.066 meters) punt capable of carrying thirty beasts. It appears this was towed by the foot passenger row boat, which was fifteen by five foot and rowed by one or two men probably depending upon the load. There was also a horse boat ten by seventeen foot (5.018 x 3.05 meters) for the conveyance of men of horse back. Daniel Egan stated the boats were partly worn, and thus the value was \$267/-/-. It is assumed that the punt was towed as Daniel Egan very carefully listed everything relating to the ferries including a very short length of chain. There was no mention of a chain or rope that was capable of stretching across the river. The government offered to pay Wiseman the valuation reached by Daniel Egan and Wiseman accepted on the 2 June 1832 on the proviso he could keep the ferrymen as they were his assigned convicts. (12) The work on the Road was completed on the 9 May 1832 and the convicts departed to work on the road over the Blue Mountains. With the road now open, traffic would have been expected to peak as people tried the new road, but the wealthy citizens who would have been expected to ride their blood horses or drive their carriages from the Hunter to Sydney when they wished to attend to business, had another also new quicker form of transport the steam ship *Sophie Jane* to be quickly joined by the *William IV* (13).

The first person to take up the ferry lease after Solomon Wiseman was James Henery a Publican of York Street Sydney who employed Mathew McInroy to run the ferry. New rope was needed to operate the flaps of the punt but the government supplied light chain as it was cheaper but it would not run thorough the pulleys so in the end rope had to be supplied. It must have appeared Henery was making money from the Ferry as in January 1833 Wiseman tendered for the ferry with Thomas Crawford his new son-in-law in-charge. (14) Wiseman only held the lease for 12 months with James Bardsley bidding £105/-/ for the lease from January to December 1834. After what appear to be a number of short term leases with the lessees either loosing money or not making what they considered a reasonable return a local David Cross took the lease of the ferry in December 1837 for 1838-1840. His farm with views to parts to the Great North Road was positioned on the end of the point round which Settlers Road now runs. With several young children who could be sent to play in view of the road he was ideally situated to keep tabs on who and what was crossing at the ferry. David Cross appears to have been the lessee most years for about the next 20 years.

When Wiseman relinquished the ferry contract in 1832 it was recognized that a hut was needed for the ferry keeper. Orders were issued that a road party was to be diverted to work on this but the order was issued six weeks after they had all left Lower Portland Head (15).

As Wiseman owned the land on the southern side the hut had to be built on crown land on the northern side, the wide road reserve along the river front had not yet been gazetted. On the northern side there





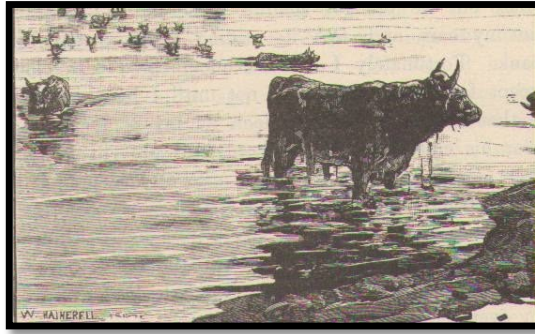
was very little land between the river and the cliff face on which a hut could be built, it appears Hale who had the contract to supply the road gangs in 1832 may have built a bark hut in the only position possible and this hut may have been used for the ferrymen from 1832 onward. The gangs had moved out before the ferry was transferred. By the time David Cross had the lease of the ferry he was induced to build a house for the ferry man. He actually built two buildings a weather board cottage for the ferry man and a stone building to be used as an inn. When he gave up his lessee he was obliged to vacate the house for his successor without receiving any compensation for building the house. Consequently in 1856 he petitioned the government for compensation.(16)

The timber boats needed constant repair and replacement. After the repairs ordered by Daniel Eagan when the government purchased the ferries in 1832, money was next allocated for their repair in 1834 when tenders were called for repairs to the horse, boat and punt. In 1841 when the upset price for leasing the ferry was reduced to £70 and there were no tenders, so the government assigned two newly arrived young men to keep the punt. Observers stated they were not skilled punt men and by November the main punt was aground, leaking and all but useless. Government expenditure of £15/-/- was allocated to be spent on replacing the ferry boat. By the end of November 1841 the punt was again advertised for tender. In 1848 again there were tenders for repairing the punts and three years later it was reported that due to carelessness the punt sank, this was one year Cross did not operate the ferry(17).

In 1854 it was mentioned in the Legislative Council that the punt was again out of action. The Legislative Assembly in 1858 voted funds for the maintenance of the punt that four years later was described as a decked long boat and dangerous for carrying stock as it was of an unsuitable design. The complaints were heard and in August the old punt was advertised for sale. With three boats operating it is difficult to keep track of which is referred to. In 1864 the Legislative Assembly voted to spend up to £200/-/- on a new punt for Wisemans Ferry and the contract was awarded to George Greentree in August that year. Then in 1871 the licensee advertised a new punt capable of carrying 500 head of sheep or a big dray was now operating at Wisemans Ferry(18).

A nameless special reporter writing in Sydney Morning Herald in 1873 about a trip from Scone to Sydney via Wisemans Ferry said there were few travellers on the road other than drovers. In 1884 the newspaper reported that Preston had paid £230 for the privilege of operating the ferry. Either this was a typographical error or Preston thought there was a large increase in Ferry traffic. In 1886 Willow's tender of £125 was accepted. From 1885 to 1894 the Sydney Morning Herald carried an item called Pastoral Intelligence that reported on stock movements and the numbers of stock crossing at Wisemans Ferry which showed considerable numbers of stock crossed at the ferry. Whilst cattle were often swum, horses and sheep were crossed by the Ferry. The swimming cattle were guided and a fee of 3d per head was charged. (19)





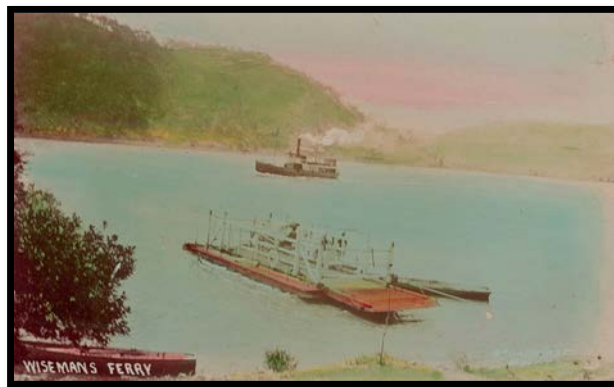
*Cattle swimming River Picturesque Australasia*

Numerous accidents happened with the ferry. In 1868 it was recorded that the lessee of the punt George Black had courageously rescued a man knocked overboard from the ferry.

*A dray, with a team of bullocks had been placed on board, when part way over, the bullocks moved too near the end of the punt; the owner, endeavouring to move them back, was rushed and knocked overboard. the unfortunate man could not swim; and the wind being fresh and the stream strong, he was swept down rapidly, when Mr Black bravely plunged in to his assistance, and with much difficulty, seized him by the back of his neck and got him to land in an insensible state (20).*

In April 1877 the Punt with a load of 24 horses overturned, the punt man George (surname not stated) was killed by the petrified horses that were all drowned.

*As the punt was leaving with a load of horses the steamer "Telegraph" was coming up the River. Mr Black of the hotel who was on the punt signalled not to blow his whistle, this was observed and the punt proceeded, but about half way across the horses took fright at the puffing of the engine and after rushing about all crowded to one side which together with the heavy chain and receding tide caused the punt to dip and tip over, the Puntman George and Mr Black were caught by the falling punt. Black managed to extract himself with difficulties and swim ashore, the owners (Coffill's) lad was on the other side and managed to jump clear and swim ashore. 100 horse going from Sydney to Queensland, owner Coffill (21).*



*Hand Punt with horse and carriage and passing steamer*



It was part of the regulations for the Hawkesbury shipping that they sounded their whistle on approaching the ferry/bend in the river. When this accident was discussed in the Legislative Assembly it was revealed that this was not the only time the punt had been upset in the past few years when valuable stock were being ferried across. Sir John Lackey, Secretary for Public Works when replying to William Long the member for Central Cumberland stated

*On one occasion an hon. member of that House had a number of valuable bulls crowding in that punt, the punt turned over, and the bulls were drowned, and he believed*

This occasion does not appear to have been written up in the Sydney Morning Herald and as Sir John Lackey was a well known pastoralist it could have been his bulls he was referring to (23) Sir John went on to state George Black the licensee of the Punt had been badly injured and had come to Sydney to seek treatment. The next mention in the Sydney papers of George Black was his death notice nearly 3 years later.

*Black, January 16 at his residence, Wiseman's Ferry, Mr George P Black, after a long and painful illness, which he bore patiently, supposed to have been caused by injuries received by the upsetting of Wiseman s Ferry punt, very much respected and deeply regretted by a large circle of friends. He left a wife and eight children to mourn their loss(24).*

The Ferry was a dangerous place to work and frequent accidents occurred. In 1885 George Reynolds listed as the father of the lessee was drowned when he was minding the ferry and slipped when getting from the rowboat into the punt, hitting his head and knocking himself unconscious and drowning, the person waiting for the punt being on horseback and unable to swim. George Reynolds connection to the ferry lessee is not immediately apparent. When the tenders were let in January 1884 a Mr Preston was awarded the tender. In May closing 3 June tenders were called for the construction of a hand geared punt, this contract was let to G. Brooks who appears to have completed the new ferry by October. In January in answering a question in parliament as to why the 1886 tender for Wisemans Ferry were not let to highest bidder it was stated the present lessee (ie1885) was William Willow and the tender was let to Thomas Willow as he would attend to the ferry himself and thus give more satisfaction than an employee of a city businessman. There is no record of a marriage between a Reynolds and Preston, Willow/Wilbow or Brooks (25).

*SMH 26 May 1883 We stayed a day at Mr. Thomas Preston's, who keeps an accommodation house. We spent the day very pleasantly, fishing in the Hawkesbury River. I observed the hotel and garden have been put through a thorough repair; its ruinous walls rebuilt, and all now in excellent order. The hotel is now kept by a Mr. Everingham*



Preston's years lease of the ferry was not incident free, he was the first to have the new hand geared ferry. In October the horse dealers of Sydney Bulger Bouffier and Samuel Stephenson were bringing a mob of about fifty three horses from Maitland to Sydney. On arrival at the Ferry, Stephenson proposed swimming about twelve of the horses and ferrying the rest in three lots, paying 6d head for the ferry trip. Preston proposed taking them in two lots on the new ferry and twenty horses were loaded on the ferry. This was found to be overcrowded and an attempt was made to remove five but the horses were restive and began to plunge about causing the punt to swing, they then broke the side rails and fell into deep water, all except one made it to the shore. The owners of the horses sued the ferryman for £100 for "*losses sustained through the defendant's negligence in connection with the transport of the said horses across the Hawkesbury River by means of his punt.*" After much deliberation and sympathy for the plaintiffs with the loss of their valuable horse the judge found for the defendant, saying the plaintiffs were negligent in allowing more than fifteen horse to be loaded in the first place and for not having someone on board the punt to keep the horses quiet. Also the defendant was a common carrier and the lessee of a new type of government owned punt so could not know how many horses it would take (26). This, and the high price he paid for the Ferry lease was too much for Preston, he did not apply for a second lease of the Ferry.



The new hand geared ferry was operated by a winding winch and two cables, one to pull the punt through the water, the other to guide it across the river. It was the same system that is still used today. The installation of cables changed the dynamics at Wisemans Ferry as the ferry wharf could no longer be used by other shipping. Because of this in 1886 the local residents petitioned for a public wharf at Wisemans Ferry(27).

With the installation of the cable ferry floods became an even bigger problem. Whilst it is dangerous to row across a flooded river if there is floating debris or a strong current it is not impossible if necessary. But once the cable ferry was installed it could not operate when the river was flooded. There are numerous reports of the ferry being taken off the wire cable and tied up for the duration of the flood. It has also broken away a number of times. One of the first reports was in July 1900 when the ferry broke loose and drifted down to Mangrove Creek.(28)

The most dramatic ferry breakaway occurred at Easter 1978. The water rose so quickly at Wisemans Ferry that the council workers were unable to get the ferries off their cables and secure them to their flood posts. Four car ferries were swept down the Hawkesbury River, initially by freak incidents lashed together, one sunk, another broke away and was eventually secured. The remaining two tied end to end with a mass of flood debris entangled with them continued down the river propelled by the





flood waters at a rapid rate and were virtually unstoppable. The floating island of ferries and flood debris was finally stopped one on Peat Island and the second 50 meters short of hitting the expressway bridge pylons at Brooklyn. A full account of this incident is recorded in Bill Bottomley's monograph *when the ferries got away*. The ferries involved were the two Wisemans Ferries (the main ferry and the relief ferry), the Webb Creek ferry and a smaller wooden ferry from up the river that was being slipped in the mouth of the Macdonald River (29).

Wisemans Ferry is not the only ferry over the Hawkesbury River. Before it was in operation Howe had a ferry at Windsor, which connected Pitt Town and Wilberforce that ran from the bottom of Ferry Road in Pitt Town. There were ferries at Sackville Reach and Lower Portland, at the mouth of the Colo River, and across the Macdonald River at the foot of Shepherds Gully called Books Ferry and/or Whalan's Punt at one time, further down the river from Kangaroo Point to Mooney Mooney George Peat once operated a ferry. There may have been more but these are the ones that are known. In 1927 the ones known to be operating were Sackville Reach, Lower Portland, Wisemans, and Books with Peats Ferry commencing again in 1930. (30) Until the 1930s all these ferries were built of wood and had to be regularly slipped to remove the growth accumulated on the bottom of the ferry especially if not copper sheathed and to generally repair them. Contracts for some of these repairs can be found in the tender documents. It appears that from the late 19th century there was a ferry slipway just inside the mouth of the Macdonald River on the point of what was David Cross's land where the wooden ferry that floated away in 1978 has been slipped. In the early days of its existence this slipway enterprise employed a blacksmith, a carpenter and one or two hands. Although not mentioned it probably also serviced the Mosquito fleet, the fleet of small shallow draft vessels that had for many years been the life blood of the small farmers settled on isolated pockets of rich river flats with only water access (31).

The hand operated ferry at Wisemans Ferry took approximately 20 minutes to cross in each direction, which meant if the ferry had to cross to collect a vehicle the crossing took 40 minutes or more. As motor vehicles became more popular it became increasingly clear that the ferry at Wisemans Ferry ferryman. One car arrived at 1.30 pm to find he was eighth in the queue and had to wait until 4.30pm to cross by which time there were 30 cars behind him. (32)

The living and working conditions of the punt man were described in a letter to editor of the Sydney Morning Herald by A.C Pemberton a retired police (33). The punt man was on call 24 hours per day seven days per week. He had been unable to return home, only three or four miles from the ferry, in eight months. He had to sleep in his cloths and his family had to visit him at work, on top of this the punt had not been docked for three years so the exhausted punt man was pulling a punt coated with a heavy weed growth. The Ferryman in 1926 was James Stane an orchardist. He was paid under contract 10 shillings per day for working the Ferry, this was less than the then basic wage(34). Pemberton's letter was successful in having the punt slipped and cleaned(35). What Pemberton did not have to point out to his readers was *Eight Hours Act 1916* created a standard 48 hour working week and this was reduced to 44 hours per week in 1926. Also cars with headlights allowed the hither too unknown excitement of night travel previously governed by the moon and clear nights. This meant the ferry man was frequently on call without a replacement 24 hours a day.

From the early 1920s the local population and the NRMA were calling for the replacement of the hand operated punt. It was suggested what was needed was a steam punt. In July 1926 tenders were advertised for the construction of all timber or timber with a steel frame 8 vehicle punt, with an oil



driven 22 BHP engine. The tenders must have been much more costly than had been anticipated as the eventual punt that was ordered to be constructed in November 1926 was a 6 vehicle ferry. With, it was reported by Trevor Brown, a Fresco Standard twin cylinder petrol engine installed (36). The new punt was to cost £2750 of which the Main Roads Board was prepared to pay half and lend the councils concerned the remainder at 5% interest. The name of the winning tender is not recorded. With everyone working towards an Easter Monday 1927 deadline of having the new punt in operation tenders for a Punt man for one year were called in early March closing 13<sup>th</sup> March. Potential contractors were offered two options,

*... to provide all labour, fuel, oil, etc, and keep punt in repair, collecting and retaining tolls under the ticket system, butts of tickets to be preserved for Council's inspection to state sum he will pay for the right for the year, payable by monthly instalments in advance or*

*...to provide all labour for working the Ferry and collecting toll, under the ticket system on behalf of the Council.*

But the new power ferry did not begin operation till Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> July 1927. The first person to cross on the new powered ferry was Mr H A Rose of Cooperook. He was returning from Sydney with a new Chrysler car. He received ticket Number 1 and spoke highly of the courtesy of the Ferry master Mr Garland. Rose reported the ferry carried 8 cars and crossed in two and a half minutes compared to twenty taken by the hand punt(37). As the first car on the ferry he may not have counted how many other cars there were.

It would appear the Contractor opted for the option of working on behalf of Council for a known income. Although the engine installed in the new ferry was reputed to have a new engine from shortly after it was installed there were complaints that the ferry broke down. It soon became evident there were problems and by September 1928 it was reported to be worn out by the new contractor Mr Davis. Whilst by the late 1920s steam engine operation would have been familiar to most boat and ferry operators, the newer petrol motors may not have been. Whatever the reason from as early as August 1927 the new punt was breaking down. In September 1928 the firm who had supplied the punt informed the Council that the engine could be returned to good working order if worn parts costing £103 were replaced. It was eventually decided to cut their losses with this engine and replace it with another. Whilst that engine was being ordered there was a temporary replacement (38).

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*The ARGUS Newspaper Wednesday June 1 1927*

The ferry men that followed James Stane refused to work as hard as he did. In September 1927 the ferryman asked unsuccessfully for the Council to supply him with a revolver to protect himself and the council's money from the men employed building the new road along the waters edge to Gunderman and Spencer but he may have had an another motive, as in late 1927 there were a number

of complaints that the ferry master would not answer calls from the other side of the River during the night and cars had to wait several hours.

The ferry man who took the contract in early 1928 soon resigned as he contended that the contract price *'for the running of the Wisemans Ferry punt was insufficient for the reason that at busy times he has to engage an assistant'* the punt contractor has forwarded his resignation to Colo Council(39).

The additional wording added to the next contract advertisements was the Councils response and may also provide a clue as to the problems with the original engine. The contractor was *to be of sober habits, to state age, qualifications and experience to provide all labour and find two sureties in the sum of £200*. The Council in a time of very high unemployment with the engine debacle behind them had returned to the bond system and the tolls of the previous century (40).

The NRMA was a new organization and keen to show what it could do for its members. The ferry at Wisemans Ferry was an easy target to the extent the Council requested complaints were passed to them and not the NRMA. Some of the complaints may have been justified. One day when the punt was broken down and the ferry man had gone into Windsor for parts he left a local with a launch to tow the punt. The launch was to charge the usual 1/-. But it appears some locals decided to work a scam on non-locals and get more funds from the car drivers asking for 5/- to use the launch (41).

Ferry tolls have always been controversial, in the nineteenth century they were used as a way of employing a ferryman where it was not possible to build a bridge with the then readily available technology. The ferryman paid for the lease of the ferry boat/s and the privilege of collecting the tolls and kept the tolls collected. So far research has not shown when this practice ceased. Whilst more time spent with the right documents would probably reveal the date it appears the collection of tolls at Wisemans Ferry ceased towards the end of the eighteenth century or possibly after 1906. But with the installation of a power ferry at Wisemans Ferry tolls were reintroduced. The newly established NRMA who had been agitating for a better ferry service at Wisemans Ferry discussed the reintroduction of ferry charges when the new ferry was operational. The charges were to be motor cars 1/-, motor lorries and motor buses 2/-, motor cycles 6d, four wheeled vehicles with one horse 6d; each additional horse 3d, four-wheeled heavy-wagons 2/-, and 3d extra for additional horse or bullock, horses and cattle ridden or driven 3d each, sheep, pigs or other small animals driven 1d each; foot passenger and bicycles will be carried free. Five months later it was announced there would be a toll of 6d per person for all pedestrians using the ferry between the hours of 10pm and 3am, at this time hotels shut at 6pm (42).

In the difficult days of the Depression the people willing to operate the ferry preferred the surety of a wage rather than risk relying on ever decreasing traffic for ferry tolls. In September 1930 the Pacific Highway was opened with two large ferries at Brooklyn or Peats Ferry each capable of carrying thirty cars. This severely affected the traffic that crossed at Wisemans Ferry except for night traffic when Peats Ferry did not operate. For traffic travelling to Gosford or further north the crossing at Peats Ferry was a saving of some sixty miles. This effectively removed all the through and tourist traffic. Monthly toll revenue immediately fell from around £170 per month to £33/16/- and kept dropping to under what the ferry contractor was being paid. This was a severe problem for the four councils that had responsibility for maintaining the ferry, Hornsby, Baulkham Hills, Colo and Erina. By November 1931 returns had dropped to £20/- a month and the ferry was running at a £500 per year loss. There was talk of removing the power ferry and returning to the old hand operated ferry (had it been kept





as a relief ferry), this the Main Roads Board refused to allow. They also refused to accept responsibility for the operations of the ferry. In 1931 in order to make up some of the deficit on the ferry Hornsby Council suggested charging pedestrians 3d each to cross and tolls on vehicles be increased. The Wisemans Ferry Progress Association complained about the toll system claiming children and others going to the post office for mail were compelled to pay 3d each way (43).

Although to date no record had been found of when the Main Roads Department took over the cost of operating Wisemans Ferry it appears that after the enactment of the Ministry of Transport Act in March 1932 some funding may have been available as reports of the loss the ferry was making and the cost to the four Councils ceased after February 1932 and in August 1932 Councillor Bailey of Colo Shire Council was complaining that with the loss of tourist traffic it was unfair that the burden of maintaining the power punt fell on the local primary producers. Although the newspapers reported in September 1933 that the Main Roads Department had taken over the ferry, this was refuted the next day saying the Councils had asked but had been refused. When the current arrangement came into operation is buried in RTA files. Currently the ferry is RTA property operated under contract and maintained and serviced by the RTA. In 1934 the combined Councils had asked the Main Roads Department for an exemption of ferry fees for all their residents. This the Main Roads Department refused but did agree to a concession for constant users. The Councils then took pre-emptive action and abolished fees. This forced the government's hand and Wisemans Ferry was removed from list of places where fees could be collected. Ferry fees at Wisemans Ferry were finally officially abolished from July 1935(44).

The modern, power operated, cable ferries were no longer subject to capsizing but accidents still happened and as a modern user of the ferry it is difficult to imagine how some of them happened. In 1935 a truck fell into the river, a newspaper described the accident as *when the punt stopped at the northern side, Trevena, who was driving, started the engine, and ran the front wheels of the lorry onto the sloping approaches, but the lorry plunged into the river*. All survived and eventually, after several attempts and a leaking divers suit, the truck was found and salvaged.

The six vehicle ferry was replaced by an eight vehicle ferry or started as a eight vehicle ferry depending which report you read and in 1964 the 16 car ferry from Ballina replaced the 8 car ferry and in 1966 ferry No 8, the steel hulled ferry originally built in 1926 for the Clarence River at Maclean, was brought to Wisemans ferry to replace the 16 car ferry and Ferry No 55 the eight vehicle capacity ferry became the relief ferry. The first power operated ferry was a wooden six vehicle capacity ferry.



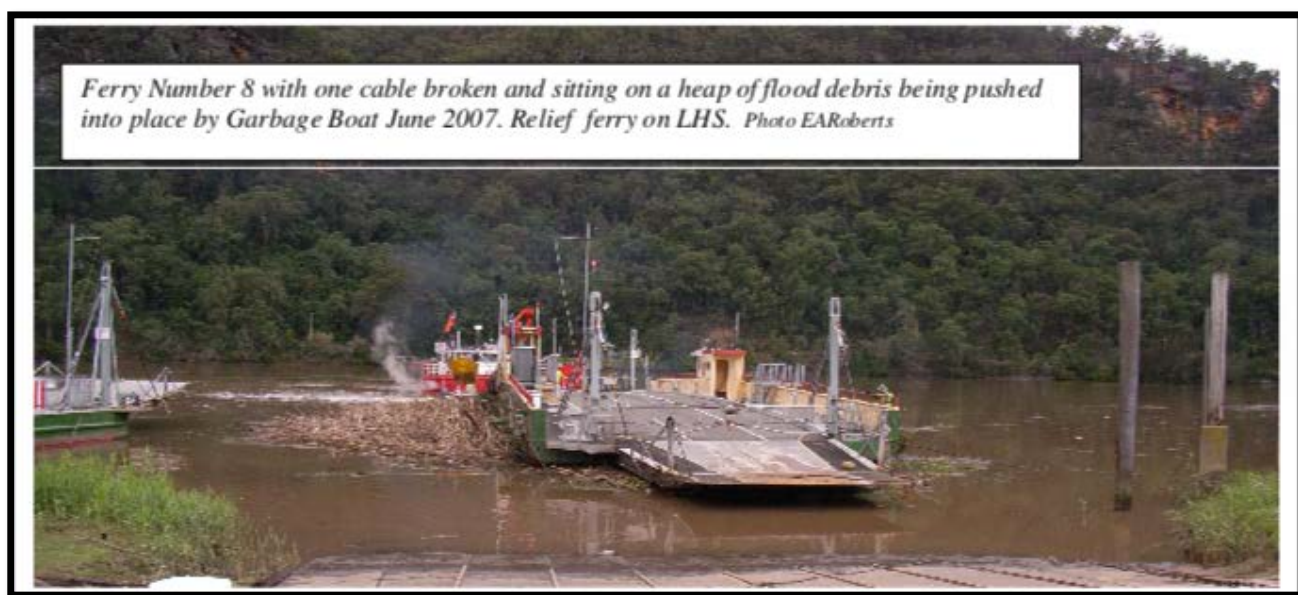


Ferry No 8 the twenty four vehicle ferry was a steel ferry of riveted hull construction and was probably one of the oldest riveted steel hulled vessels outside a museum still in service in NSW. Although it appeared in excellent condition when it was removed from service there was substantial pitted corrosion internally and many of the seams had been welded to ensure water tightness.

Ferry No. 8 was 38.5 meters long, 10.10 meters wide and 1.84 meters in depth. A four cylinder Perkins diesel was used to drive an outboard system with two driving wheels on the opposite side from the engine bay. This ferry like all the cable ferries at Wisemans Ferry was a two cable ferry, one cable for driving and one for guiding. When Ferry No. 8 was retired from the RTA fleet it was 82 years old having been at Wisemans for 42 years. For the last 31 years of its life it was maintained by the RTA shipwright John Clifford (45).

On the 10 of March 2008 Ferry No 8 was taken out of service and replaced with a brand new ferry. The occasion was marked in State Parliament by a “Dorothy Dix” question to Eric Roozendaal the then Minister for Transport allowing him to eulogize about the long service given to the traveling public by Ferry No 8 (46).

The ferry at Wisemans Ferry is the oldest continuing operating ferry service in NSW and has been a landmark feature for travel in NSW for nearly two hundred years. It is one of only ten ferries remaining in NSW, where once ferries were the main means of crossing large rivers. Its mode of operation on two cables has been the same for over one hundred and twenty five years although the means of propulsion and capacity have kept pace with the times.



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# THE PICK OF THE GREAT NORTH ROAD

## Pick Vol 7.2

**Official Documents published by Government during the past Week, and copied verbatim from the Government Gazette**

### PROCLAMATION,

By His Excellency Major-General RICHARD BOURKE, commanding His Majesty's Forces, Captain-General and Governor-in-Chief of the Territory of New South Wales, and Vice-Admiral of the same, &c. &c. &c.

WHEREAS by an Act of the Governor of New South Wales, with the advice of the Legislative Council, passed in the present year of his Majesty's reign, entitled " An Act for repealing so much of an Act, entitled ' An Act to continue, until further provision shall be made, certain duties, tolls, rates, fees, and other sums of money imposed by the Governors of New South Wales, and for other purposes as relates to the levying of tolls in New South Wales, and for raising a fund towards making, repairing, and upholding public roads, bridges, and ferries, and for regulating the collection of tolls thereon:"-It is amongst other things enacted, that it shall and may be lawful for the Governor of the said Colony for the time- being, by any Proclamation or Proclamations under his hand, from time to time to appoint places, at which tolls shall be collected, and to cause the same to be collected upon any line of road, which has been or shall be wholly or partly made, and which is repaired at the public expense; add to cause toll to be collected at any bridge built, purchased or repaired at the public expense; and any ferry, constructed or upheld at the same; and to cause such gates, bars, chains, rails and fences, to be built and set up. as shall be deemed necessary for preventing passengers, beasts, and carriages from passing, unless there shall be then paid such toll as shall be due or demandable under the authority of the said recited Act: Now I Governor aforesaid, in pursuance of the authority vested in me by the said recited law or ordinance, do, by this my Proclamation, appoint the following places at which toll gates and ferries shall be established, and at which tolls shall be collected, to the amount and under the regulations, restrictions, and provisions of the said recited ordinance ; that is to say, There shall be a toll gate

1. Near Sydney. At the western extremity of George street, with a bar on the old Botany Bay road, beyond the tollgate; and another upon the continuation of Elizabeth-street, near Cleveland House.

2. Near Beckett's Bridge, on the road between Sydney and Parramatta; and also on the road between Parramatta and Liverpool. 3. Near Bowler's Bridge, on the road between Sydney and Liverpool.

4. At Broken-back Bridge, on the road between Parramatta and Windsor.



5. At Howe's Bridge, near Windsor; and

6. Near Pitt-row, Parramatta, on the Western Road to Emu Ferry.

And there shall be a ferry Over the Parramatta River, at Bedlam Point, Over the river Nepean, at Emu Plains; and Over the river Hawkesbury at Wiseman's. Of which several toll gates and ferries all persons concerned, are hereby required to take due notice, according to the provisions of the said recited law or ordinance. Given under my Hand and Seal at Government House, Sydney, this twentieth day of March, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and thirty-two.

RICHARD BOURKE.

By His Excellency's Command,

ALEXANDER M'LEAY.

GOD SAVE THE KING

Sydney Gazetteer 2 April 1832





# THE PICK OF THE GREAT NORTH ROAD

## Pick Vol 7.3

**The Sydney Morning Herald**  
Saturday 26 June 1909, page 16A

PUNT ACCIDENT WISEMAN'S FERRY, Friday.

On Wednesday, as a covered-in cart travelling to Maitland was getting on the punt at the crossing of the MacDonalld between Wiseman's Ferry and St. Albans, the tide at the time being very low, the punt flew back, letting the horse and cart into the water. The horse was drowned. The cart was recovered.



# THE PICK OF THE GREAT NORTH ROAD

## Pick Vol 7.4

### Local business man and Ferry Contractor David Cross

E A Roberts



*Remains of David Cross's stone  
Inn above the Ferry landing.  
Mitchell Library NSW*

Colonial born David Cross was the lessee of the ferry at Wisemans Ferry on and off for ten to fifteen years between 1837 and 1855. When David was first successful in tendering for the ferry lease he was thirty eight years old and had been married for eleven years. Seven of his thirteen children had been born and the eighth on the way. He held a grant of land at the junction of the Macdonald and Hawkesbury rivers and purchased additional land closer to the ferry crossing.

Cross appeared to have taken over from Wiseman as the local business entrepreneur as in February 1842 he purchased and established a horse mill for milling grain. At the time there were two tide mills further down the river at Laughtondale and across the river at Mill Creek, but they had both been advertised for sale in 1841. One was purchased by Hughes and Hoskins, a Sydney based milling firm which intended devoting the watermill to its own requirements. That same year David Cross also received the license for the Queen Victoria Inn at Wisemans Ferry.

There is a two storey stone building on the land that was David Cross' and the photo above taken just above the ferry shows the remains of a stone building on crown land. In 1856 David Cross presented a petition to the Legislative Assembly in which the newspaper reported he stated:

*that he became the lessee of "Wiseman's Ferry, in 1841, and remained so for many years, that there was no residence for the lessee, at that time, except a small bark hut, he therefore built a weather-boarded house, when Mr. Donaldson, a magistrate for the Brisbane Water district, in which the punt- house is situated, promised that if he [Mr Cross] would build a substantial stone house, he would grant him a publican's general license, as such accommodation was much wanted on the direct line of road, there being none within twenty five miles on either side of the said punt, that he accordingly erected a substantial stone house, at an outlay to Himself of £400, that after incurring this expense, the punt was ,in 1846 or 1847, leased to another party, and both houses taken possession of by the Government, without any remuneration being made to him, although applied for, that neither of the houses are occupied by the lessee as a punt-house, one of them being unoccupied and in a dilapidated state, the other (the stone house) being let by the lessee for a general store He therefore prayed the House to take into consideration the premises, and should it be deemed expedient, that he might be heard at the bar of the House, either in person or by counsel.*

It appears from the petition and photo that the houses taken possession of would have been the stone house built as the inn and the weatherboard punt accommodation both near the base of the Devines Hill, structures built on government land. The building now known as Victories Inn also named Queen Victoria Inn, was probably the Cross' family home. The building that is now the Wiseman's hotel was then the Wisemans family home and the inn that Wiseman had been operating was in a building closer to the ferry.

With a farm to run it is unlikely that, other than possibly occasionally, David Cross operated the ferry himself. In the 1828 census he had two assigned convicts and one ex convict employee. In 1842 when his eldest son John was 18 or 19 the ferry lease was in his name. With the ferry, the inn and the flour mill as well as the farm David would have needed lots of labour.

In 1846 the year David Cross did not have the ferry lease he was described as a butcher and late Inn Keeper. It was his position as a butcher that caused trouble. In June 1846 John Ferguson of Mangrove Creek accused David Cross of butchering one of his beasts. David Cross claimed it was a heifer given to his son on the birth of his child. The beast in question was a whitish poll heifer with a lump in the centre of its forehead. This is and has always been a feature of some poll cattle. The hair had grown over the brand and to be able to read the brand properly the chief constable had to shave that area of the skin. David's son who had butchered the beast had cut out part of the brand as one of the men on the farm needed some green hide and as the brand was the least valuable bit of the hide that bit was cut off the skin. The farm worker had cut up part of the bit of green hide to use and left the rest sitting on a stool in his hut where the dogs got to it before he could use the rest. John Jeffries the person who had given the Cross family the beast and John Ferguson had very similar brands. Cross's beast had been branded 11 months earlier and Ferguson had only branded his beast two months before. With both sides Swearing the beast was theirs the case went to the Criminal Court before the Chief Justice and a jury. Numerous people attested to David Cross's honesty, after deliberating for many hours the jury could not reach a verdict so were "*discharged without verdict, upon the understanding that the case would not again be presented.*" (47)

David survived this and the 1840s crash but by the late 1850s things began turning sour for him. In 1859 whilst sailing to Sydney with a load of corn, his son John drowned off Pittwater leaving a wife





and young children. In March the following year David Cross advertised he would not be responsible for his wife's debts. Two years later he advertised he had lost two promissory notes each valued at £50. The next year, 1863, the sheriff advertised

*unless the writs of ti fa in the above oases be previously satisfied, the SHERIFF will cause to be sold by public auction. All the right, title, and interest, other than the equity of redemption, of the above named defendant David Cross, of, In, and to all that piece or parcel of land, in the colony of New South Wales, containing by admeasurements fifty acre, be the same more or less, situated in the county of Cook, on the Hawkesbury River.*

From 1863 to 1865 David again was the ferry lessee. He died in 1869 aged 70 years having seen and contributed to the development of the Hawkesbury, especially the lower Hawkesbury Macdonald Valley area.

**References:**

47. *Sydney Morning Herald 13 Oct 1846; Brisbane Waters Bench book 1846 pages 121 to 132*

**Horse mill**

[http://members.westnet.com.au/caladenia/horse\\_mills\\_in\\_australia.html](http://members.westnet.com.au/caladenia/horse_mills_in_australia.html)

**Inn Licence**

[http://www.huntermvalleygenealogy.com/forum/vie\\_wtopic.php?f=3&t=988](http://www.huntermvalleygenealogy.com/forum/vie_wtopic.php?f=3&t=988).

**Inn**

[http://www.australishotels.com/images/forgotten\\_valley\\_drive.pdf](http://www.australishotels.com/images/forgotten_valley_drive.pdf) <http://www.saintalbans.org.au/moreinfo.html>

[Landusers.tpg.com.au/bbolitho/no%207.rtf](http://landusers.tpg.com.au/bbolitho/no%207.rtf) –

1843 Brisbane Water list of Electors

Petition: *The Sydney Morning Herald* Thursday 20 November 1856

9 Dec 1856 Select committee appointed to look into matter. Wife's debts *Sydney Morning*

*Herald* May 1860

Sheriffs advertisement: *Sydney Morning Herald* 12 May 1863

*Sydney Morning Herald* 25 April 1863 NSW BDM



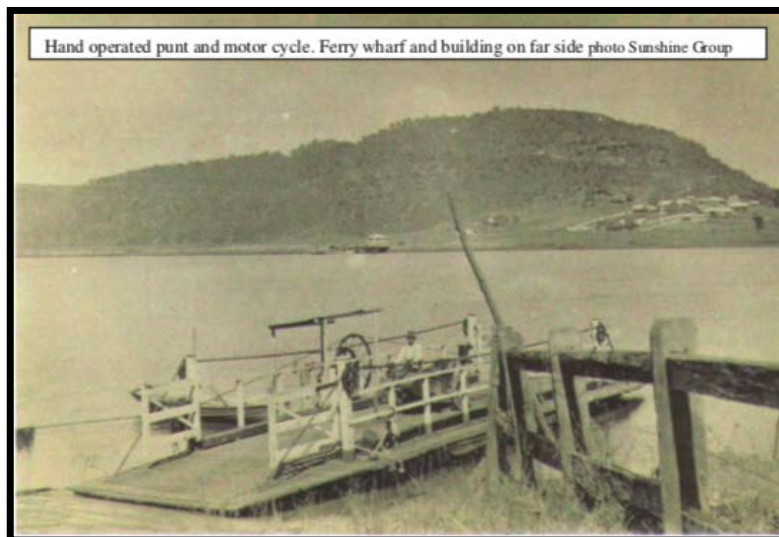


# THE PICK OF THE GREAT NORTH ROAD

## Pick Vol 7.5

### Wisemans Ferry Ferry at a Glance

**Some builders, new ferries and major repairs, ferry men and workers**



1826 Solomon Wiseman established punt

1827 Wiseman gets government lease

1832 Ferry Regulations introduced

Wisemans gives up ferry first lessee James Henery of Sydney employs Mathew Mc Inroy.

1833 Wisemans tenders with James Crawford in charge.

1834 Repairs to Horse boat and Punt, James Bardsley lessee

1837 expenses paid For a Boat, and repairs to the Punt, £26/2/6

David Cross Lessee

1839 New punt and repairs to boat

1841 government runs ferry with two convicts

1842 David and John Cross lessee

1851 Punt sunk

1854 Punt out of operation

1855 Davis Cross lessee

1857 floods

1858 funds for maintenance

1862 Punt unsuitable only a decked long Boat David Cross lessee Butler buys old ferry from

government

- 1868 Lessee George Black
- 1869 John Cross drowns at Pittwater
- 1863 David Cross lessee
- 1864 George Greentree contract to construct new punt. David Cross lessee
- 1865 David Cross lessee
- 1866 John Black lessee
- 1871 new punt operating G P Black lessee
- 1873 Telegraph Mast 90 ft high
- 1875 punt large and unwieldy one sweep oar.
- 1877 punt capsized, ferry man and 24 horses drown.
- 1881 Duke of Manchester visited Wisemans Ferry
- 1884 Hand wound Punt installed Thomas Preston lessee.
- 1885 Thomas Willow working/leasing punt
  - George Reynolds of Mangrove Creek drowns.
  - Robert Dawson working ferry.
- 1886 William Willow gets ferry lease
- 1887 AH Black lessee
- 1888 Punt capsize?
- 1889 flood, ferry broke away
- 1890 floods ferry off wire
- 1900 Punt broke away
- 1910 punt accident
- 1926 James Stane ferryman
- 1927 New motorised wooden hulled 6 car ferry starts.
  - Ferry master Garland
  - Tolls reintroduced
- 1928 Ferry master Davis Ferry engine worn out
- 1929 new engine installed
- 1931 tolls increased Wisemans Ferry Wharf repaired
- 1935 tolls abolished
- 19?? 8 car ferry replaces 6 car wooden ferry
- 1964 16 car ferry from Ballina replaced 8 car ferry
- 1966 24 Car ferry, Ferry number 8, steel hulled built for McLeay in 1926 replaced the 16 car ferry.
- 1977-2008 John Clifford, RTA shipwright in charge of maintenance.
- 2008 new ferry replaced Ferry No 8.

The above has all been extracted from newspapers via NLA newspaper searches searching Wisemans Ferry and punt





# THE PICK OF THE GREAT NORTH ROAD

## Pick Vol 7.6

### Bedlam Ferry. E A Roberts



*Bedlam Ferry wharf and ferry mans hut in distance on LHS  
National Library Australia F. C. Terry*

As initially planned the Great North Road was to have only one ferry crossing, at Wiseman Ferry. After Major Thomas Mitchell arrived he decided there would be a second ferry crossing, across the Parramatta River thus cutting off the long loop through Parramatta and shortening the trip from Sydney by an estimated four miles as well as straightening the road. The additional ferry was Bedlam Ferry that crossed the Parramatta River from what became known as Abbotsford Point across to Bedlam Point, a distance estimated to be two hundred and twenty yards (approximately two hundred meters).

Prior to the establishment of Bedlam Ferry the local residents had been agitating for a ferry crossing. They got a ferry crossing but not where they wanted it but where Mitchell decided it would be most effective for his road.

Bedlam Ferry commenced operating in 1832 and was superseded by the original Gladesville Bridge in 1881. Remains of the ferry wharf can be found at Bedlam Point. On the Abbotsford Point side there



has been a lot changes and building and rebuilding of different structures that appear to have obliterated any evidence of the original ferry crossing. On the cliff face opposite the current ferry wharf where the Great North Road according to early maps, and the current road, curved round the rocky headland there is a small patch of pick marking that appears to have originated from the Great North Road.

As Bedlam Point is one of the narrow points in the Parramatta River, Bedlam Point was not only the crossing place for the ferry but for underwater cables and overhead electricity cables. An 1886 Higgenbottom plan of Gladesville Hospital, at Ryde Library shows there were two wharves at Bedlam Point. At very low tide it is possible to see what appears to be the remains of the second wharf.

Bedlam Point of 1832 was a completely different place to Bedlam Point of today. On the southern side of the river where there is now Abbotsford and Five Dock was the 1500 acres grant of Dr John Harris, granted in 1806 and called in the newspaper in the early 1830s “Harris’s run” and described by Mitchell as “*lying in a desert state* “. (48) It appears that any fencing was in a very dilapidated state as when cattle that balked at being loaded onto the ferry and had “broke away” were advertised for some time later they were looked for any where between the ferry and Cooks River.(49) Another cow that strayed from the ferry was looked for between the ferry and Long Bottom.(50) The uninhabited nature of the area was also referred to in Rev James Hassall memories *In Old Australia* of a trip from Parramatta to Sydney as child in 1828.(51) This was to change after 1836 when Harris sold his property to Samuel Lyons who subdivided it and offered it for sale in 1837 in lots ranging from two to sixty acres. (52) On the northern side the land below the Bedlam signal station, on high land above the Bedlam Point was vacant crown land. With the Lunatic Asylum not established till 1838 the area was very isolated. Further inland there were isolated farm dwellings. It was reported in 1838 that ‘*the neighbourhood of Bedlam Point has long been notorious for sly grog selling*’ with two persons named Johnson and Morris arrested in 1838 and Baisley who lived in the Ferry house was arrested for selling a bottle of rum to an assigned servant assigned to the Lunatic Asylum in 1846.(53)



The punt for this ferry crossing was built in the Government dockyards *of sufficient size and strength to carry Ten or Twelve Tons Weight*. There was also to be *one small boat with oars 14 Feet long built strong for the purpose of crossing foot passengers*. As the Deputy Commissary General was unable to supply hard wood for sheathing the punt, it was proposed to copper the bottom *with patent Felt underneath*.(54)



The punt was cable operated and commenced operation after 26 March 1832 when the Collector of Internal Revenue (William Macpherson) wrote to the Colonial Secretary Alexander McLean requesting he *direct the Master Attendant to send up to Bedlam Point, the Punt and Small Boat designed for that Ferry; along with a chain or small cable, to stretch across the River to work the Punt by; and all such other ropes and requisites as may be necessary; together with oars for the Small-boat and a rope to secure it by.* (55)



W. S. Campbell who as a boy lived at the Lunatic Asylum where his father was the director from 1848 to 1868 recalled

*Some two hundred yards or so from the Asylum buildings, a ferry plied across the Parramatta River, which was known as “Bedlam Ferry” and which connected the ends of the Great North Road. Here the river is 220 yards across. A lessee of the ferry resided in a small brick cottage in the Village of Tarban Creek. He was generally known as Bateman but, I believe he was related to John Batman of Port Phillip fame. My father always called him Batman. His cottage stood at the corner of the Great North Road and a narrow lane, which, is shown in official published maps as “Bateman’s Lane”. The ferryman’s or puntman’s cottage, a small, two roomed, rough cast and lath building, stood on an elevated position on a rock overlooking the river and the punt landing places. It formed a conspicuous object and, may be seen in a lithograph of Bedlam Ferry by Terry, the artist, at the Mitchell Library. The puntman or substitute lived in this cottage in the roughest possible manner, taking his sleep whenever he could, day or night, for he was often engaged both day and night, hauling the heavy punt or pulling a boat across the river. At one time a heavy chain was used to move the punt with. It was passed over a large wheel, but being too cumbersome, a rope was substituted. This passed between wooden rollers, but even then the work was very heavy for one man. However the passengers invariably assisted in the hauling. Sometimes the rope was cut by a steamer or a large sailing boat causing great delays and much strong language and worry until the ends could be fished up and spliced.*(56)





*Extract of FC Terry's lithograph of the Lunatic Asylum showing ferry mans hut*

An occasion when the chain broke was recorded in The Sydney Morning Herald in 1848, then it was reported it was only about *nine months since, what was termed a new and substantial chain [was] supplied to the ferry*. After the chain broke the punt drifted helplessly for some time, despite the exertions of the passengers and punt man, till the current brought them ashore at the old Longbottom Wharf.<sup>(57)</sup>

Buried in a strange piece of nineteenth century prose about manners and whether it was rude to hold something a woman was about to step onto, was the information that the top row of stones on one of the Bedlam wharves was loose and the stones were prone to roll when stepped on. As the stones were dry laid they must have been of very soft sandstone that fretted away from wave action. As both sides were referred to as Bedlam Ferry it is not known which jetty and whether they were refaced and re-laid or replaced.

Unlike the ferry at Wisemans Ferry the Bedlam Ferry lessees changed regularly with few holding the lease for two years in a row or for a second year till 1852 when the lease went to tender for 5 years. The upset or reserve price for the annual ferry rental fee was £25 the same as for Wisemans Ferry but the pattern of leasing was very different. It would appear that there was always competition for the ferry given that the leasing fee was generally always more than the upset price. But the profit made was not so much that any one appeared to fight too hard to retain the lease, and the lease changed every year or so and only one person is recorded as retuning for a second go at leasing the ferry. One year the highest price bid was £180 when it was expected there would be a lot of new development, the next year the winning bid was back to £80. In December 1839 the Newspaper reported that Michael D'Arcy the publican of the Red House had paid £435 for the Bedlam Ferry this amount has to be a misprint, in previous years the auctions bought £50 for 1837; £30 for 1838; £20 subject to governors consent (as below the upset price) for 1839; and £25 for 1841.<sup>58</sup> But in the mid 1850s there were long periods when there was no record of who was the successful tenderer for the ferry and this is when Batman/Bateman may have been the lessee.

Like Wisemans Ferry there were numerous incidents related to the ferry. In 1834 its isolation lead to a passenger being robbed after leaving the ferry by convicts that had absconded from a road party. Despite the subdivision of the Harris estate in 1838 the area was still isolated in 1842 when bushrangers attacked the Red House Inn during the night. Another, more local, robbery occurred in 1845. John Odgen a labourer of Field of Mars was followed by Charles Whittaker a labourer of



Bedlam Point when he left James Bibb's Public House at the Bedlam Ferry. Whittaker attacked Odgen robbing him of five shilling and leaving Odgen wounded and bleeding. Whittaker claimed it was a drunken spree and he was very sorry. He had reason to be even more sorry after he was sentenced, his drunken spree cost him 15 years transportation.(59)

Bedlam Ferry had its share of accidents that were reported in the newspaper. In the accident that effected the operation of the ferry the most, the ferry sank and was out of operations for some months in 1867. This dramatic event was only briefly reported in the Sydney Morning Herald and repeated in a briefer form in the Maitland Mercury. The Herald stated:

*Sinking of the Bedlam Punt ~ About 4pm on Friday evening the Bedlam Punt was taking a load of bricks to the Lunatic Asylum, Tarban Creek when the person in charge discovered it was leaking to a considerable extent, and refused to proceed and by his advice those onboard pulled back, with the hopes of getting to shallow water, but in spite of all their efforts to keep her free she went down end first. Great praise is due to those in charge for the manner in which they saved lives of horses and men.*

The Maitland Mercury account was much briefer:

*The lessee with no punt could only advertise that the Punt was unavailable till further notice.(60)*

Other recorded accidents involved horses backing themselves off the punt, one occurred in 1834 and another in 1845. In the second incident, although no one was hurt, as it involved some of societies notables, Richard Underwood, his wife and married sister, a coachman and a carriage horse, it was described in full, with the cause been given as the obstinacy of the punt man. The punt man who had to answer all calls, day and night, and get by with sleeping whenever he could and was probably subject to permanent sleep deprivation especially after a series of moonlight nights with the inn on one side of the river and most of the residents on the other.

W. S. Campbell recalled that ..

*'At times, generally twice a week, there was a considerable amount of traffic across the river, in the early mornings and late at nights, when numbers of orchardists from far and wide drove their loaded fruit carts to the Sydney Markets in George Street. The noise of their 'coo-ees' for the puntman often kept me awake for hours.'* (61)

For a short time in 1872 for reasons not yet unearthed it appears the Bedlam Ferry was moved to Kissing Point as the newly formed Ryde Council held a public meeting to discuss whether they should move the Ferry back to Bedlam Point, the first meeting had such a poor attendance it was postponed till a moonlit night when sufficient people could attend, at this postponed meeting it appears they voted to move the ferry back to Bedlam Point.

With the opening of the Gladesville Bridge in 1881 there was no need for a ferry from Abbotsford to Bedlam Point but as Bedlam Point remained the narrowest crossing point across the lower Parramatta River the point continued in use for a number of years. Mrs Mary Barton sold part of her land to the





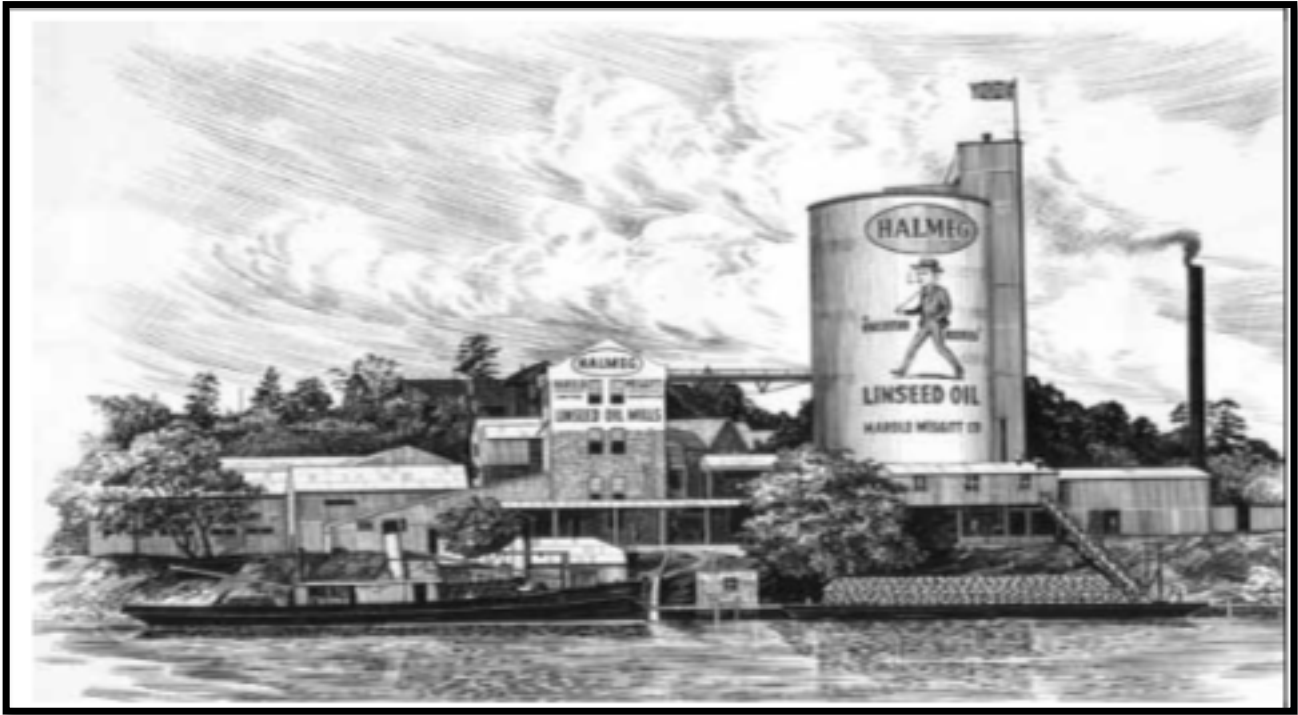
*The Bedlam punt, while taking a load of bricks to the Tarban Creek Asylum on Friday, sank. The lives of the men and horses were saved.*

Parramatta Steam Ship company for a wharf on condition it was sold back to her if it was no longer necessary. In 1914 two large steel towers were designed one for either side of the Parramatta River to carry the 33,000 volt electricity supply across the Parramatta River from the Pymont Power station to help supply the North Shore. The tender to construct these towers was let in June 1915 with a 26 week completion time. The cost was £9300 for the 172 foot (51.6 meters) high towers. After crossing the Parramatta River the high voltage power lines went from Bedlam Point to Cammaray for distribution. These towers operated for about fifteen years when the power crossing was converted to cables in the early 1930s.<sup>62</sup> From 1923 to 1974 Harold Meggett operated Halmeg a Linseed oil extraction plant on the shores of Looking Glass Bay on the land that had been Mary Barton's. With Halmegs on one side and Gladesville Hospital on the other for a while Bedlam Point was virtually a piece of waste land and used as a local dump. It appears when the 1830s Female Asylum was pulled down the rubble was dumped at the end of Bedlam Point. With the closure of Halmeg and the land being acquired by Ryde City Council for a recreation area, Bedlam Point was once again returned to public use.

In June 2010 Ryde City Council diverted the storm water that had been flowing down the road from the Hunters Hill side into a pipe to exit into the harbour near the present ferry wharf. When excavating the pipeline the surface of the original Great North Road was evident under the bitumen, The present ferry wharf was constructed post 1974, probably in a similar position to where the Parramatta Steam Ship wharf has been.<sup>(63)</sup>

With the storm water diverted it is hoped to be able to manage the rampant vegetation on Bedlam Point so that the evidence of the past uses of Bedlam Point can be permanently revealed .





[http://huntershilltrust.org.au/wp-content/pdf/journal/hht\\_journal\\_april\\_2009.pdf](http://huntershilltrust.org.au/wp-content/pdf/journal/hht_journal_april_2009.pdf): Personal observations of Ralph Hawkins and Elizabeth Roberts: Work done late June 2010 with archaeologist Dominic Steel present.





# THE PICK OF THE GREAT NORTH ROAD

## Pick Vol 7.4

### Wisemans Ferry Public Wharf E. A. Roberts

Wisemans Ferry Public Wharf has not been fully researched. It is known there was a public wharf there in 1867 called the Oaktree Wharf that was destroyed by the large flood of that year. This wharf stood at the end of the road that led from Wisemans to the river, much in the same position as the current public wharf. This was the eastern end of the road reserve river front lands. It appears the western end of the road reserve is about where the current ferry wharf is. As cattle were swum over the river there needed to be a fair area there they could come ashore and walk out of the river onto the river bank.

In 1886, two years after the installation of the cable ferry, the local telegraph station master John Marx wrote a lengthy petition asking the government to provide the residents of Wisemans Ferry with a public wharf like those being erected at Colo and Sackville Reach. The petition was signed by the locals, the directors of the Hawkesbury Steamship Company and residents from further up the river who transhipped goods to larger boats at Wisemans. Marx explained that there was now a weekly tourist steamer from Sydney to Sackville that called briefly at Wisemans and how difficult it was to get people ashore. It was not possible to use the ferry wharf as the steel ropes were in the way.

The outside of the petition is covered with various comments mostly to do with getting an external opinion from a surveyor. Finally the Country Roads surveyor was able to inspect the site and supported the remarks in the petition stating:

*That the Upper Hawkesbury and McDonald River fruit and grain trades meet at this spot and transhipment takes place to a great extent. Both these trades are large. As Wisemans Ferry is the landing place, and resort of the inhabitants of the river, and tourists, a wharf is necessary.*

He went on to say how on his visits to Wisemans Ferry he had *witnessed the inconvenience passengers and shippers* were put to unloading and loading via a small boat (64).

Also attached to the petition was a memo dated 19 September 1887 saying Mr Stevenson MPhD called urging the need for tenders *being invited as soon as possible*. Also attached was a Minute Paper requesting Mr Josephson the Engineer in Chief in the Harbours and Rivers Department to visit Wisemans Ferry taking the parish map with him to ensure the public wharf was built on public land. Josephson replied he had visited Wisemans ferry and surveyed the site which was the same as where a stone wharf was in 1867 that was carried away in the large flood. *The stones which formed the wharf are still there and covered over with sand from 1 to 6 ½ ft in depth*. The height of the wharf

at high tide was to be about the same as the wharf at Sackville Reach and there were to be steps that could enable steamers to be loaded and unloaded at low tide. He also said *steamers when loaded draw about 8ft of water*. Also the requested shed could be built on the wharf. The piles could be driven as no rock would be encountered. Tenders were finally called in early January 1888 (65).

With a new wharf in place, special one day excursion trips from Sydney to Wisemans Ferry and back were organized.(66)

In September 1899 about 11am the residents of Lower Portland Head heard a great rumbling like a large section of cliff face giving way. On investigation it was found that the wharf had given way and had sunk and the shed containing eight bags of sugar was in the water, the sugar was rescued, although it had got wet. It was found two of the “piles” had been eaten through by the “cobblers” (67) The next month public works department let tenders to reconstruct the wharf. Seven tenders were received.(68)

In the flood of May 1913 the shed on Wisemans Ferry Wharf was under water. The ferries could not operate and the steamer had to seek shelter elsewhere and 1000s of jam melons floated down the river.

With the advent of Shire Councils in 1906 the Department of Public Works shed many of its responsibilities to the newly formed local government areas. Thus when tenders were called for the repair of the wharf in 1931 it was Hornsby Shire Council that was calling the tenders. From then on the records go quiet. Pre the 1970s it does not appear that any records re the wharf have survived and the post 1970s files are sparse in references to Wisemans Ferry Wharf. There was one 1978 map relating to Berowra that showed a proposed concrete boat ramp at Wisemans near the wharf (69). In December 2007 the NSW Maritime authority identified that there were some repairs and safety issues that needed to be attended to at Wisemans Ferry Wharf. Also additional handrails and toe-rails were necessary. The repairs were carried out in the 2007/08 Maintenance Program while the additional handrails had to wait till the 2008/09 financial year to be installed but it appeared they were not installed till June 2010.

July 2010 saw further work being carried out. Building an additional 16 meters of double dry-mix bag wall, connecting to the existing wall and running parallel to the boat ramp. As well attaching to the wharf a tide monitoring system that monitors the time difference between Wisemans Ferry and Little Patonga (70).

Over its lifetime with a number of constructions the wharf whilst remaining in the same place has changed from a busy working wharf, part and parcel of the river transport to a recreational wharf.







*Wisemans Ferry Wharf with debris from June 2007 flood still evident against the piers.  
Photo EARoberts*

Cobblers probably one of the sixty five species of Toledo worms, a common marine bivalves that can severely damage wooden structures, including ship hulls and wharves. Its anterior end is covered by a shell; the rest is a tubelike structure, sometimes up to 6 ft (1.8 m) long. File like ridges on its white shell cut into wood at 8-12 rasping motions a minute. It secretes line to line its burrow, and its tubelike portion extends back to the burrow opening. It ingests food particles and oxygen from the water. Some wood is also ingested as food.

- 59 State Records: 5893 letter 86/11894 attached to 86/10798 petition re Wisemans Ferry wharf. No.5483
- 65 State Records Minute paper 87/15952; Dept and public works Harbours and Rivers Branch 87/5143 minute 5143 Harbours and Rivers Branch; Memo 6494 all attached to Petition No. 5483; 86/10798
- 66 Sydney Morning Herald 25 December 1888
- 67 Sydney Morning Herald 20 September 1899;
- 68 Sydney Morning Herald 24 October 1899
- 69 Hornsby Shire Council files RV 0131 part 2 June 1978.
- 70 Hornsby Council Documents \D00858360 Public Ferry Wharf Safety Wisemans Ferry.doc:  
<http://www.icsm.gov.au/SP9/links/ewsoperation.pdf>





# THE PICK OF THE GREAT NORTH ROAD

## Pick Vol 7.8

### Shepherds Gully Road. E A Roberts



Shepherds Gully Road provided the main road access to Sydney for residents of the Macdonald Valley before the building of Settlers Road. It ran up the gully behind Sternbeck's grant to meet with the Great North Road at the top of the hill.

The road on the southern side of the gully is known as Sternbecks and that on the northern side as Shepherds Gully. There is evidence of three roads up this gully; Shepherds Gully and two versions of the lower section of Sternbecks. Although so far no evidence had been found it is believed this road or bridle track dates from the time of building the Great North road. Although it was believed one was old and modified and the other newer little else was known about them.

In March 1842 a long piece in the Sydney Morning Herald from a correspondent at the Macdonald revealed the Government surveyor (Mr Butler) had surveyed an authorized parish road to follow much the same line as Settlers Road from Green's Farm (to the ferry at St Patrick's Inn where it crossed the Macdonald River and followed the other side to Bullocks Wharf (St Albans) Because there was a mountain track up Sternbecks Gully many of the locals were determined to ignore the authorized parish road and stick to the old road. They had just upgraded the latter by cutting and levelling and constructing water courses that would protect the 'Macadamised portion'. Despite this the author, in favour of the surveyed parish road, called the steep ascent of Sternbecks gully a '*merebridleroad*'.

An 1858 map of Postal Towns, Stations and Roads in NSW prepared for the Post Office Department shows a road down Shepherds Gully. (72) By 1869 this road via Shepherds Gully was recognized as a

class 5 subordinate road under the control of the Roads Department and funds were allocated for its maintenance. The allocation was reported annually for the next ten years.

In 1883, forty years after Butler's survey, interested residents petition for a road along the banks of the Macdonald River between Wisemans Ferry and Shepherds Gully. Shepherds Gully was still the part of the main northern road via St Albans in 1929 when two young men were killed when the brakes failed on the truck in which they were travelling.

H.C Robinson's 1927 NSW Motoring Guide shows it as being two miles from the Great North Road intersection to the Ferry (Books) Whilst it described the route to Gosford via Ten Mile Hollow as going over some very rough country it just stated '*the northern road breaks off to the left and goes down to another small punt across the Macdonald River*'.

According to an unnamed correspondent to the Maitland Mercury who had grown up in the Macdonald valley then moved to Wyong and revisited in 1883, Shepherds Gully was so named as Sternbeck had driven some sheep down the Gully before the road was built some fifty year back. It appears Sternbeck was resident there in 1828, despite Metcalf's name being on the grant when surveyed in 1831.

With the passing of the Local Government Act in 1906 the greater part of the work of the Roads and Bridges Branch of the Department of Public Works was passed over to the local government authorities. In 1928 the road proclaimed Main Road 181. This name applied to the whole route along Old Northern Road over the Ferry up Devines Hill down through Shepherds Gully to St Albans and on to Mt Manning and thence to Wollombi. (73)

In 1991 The NPW S employed Jillian Comber and Adrienne Powell to conduct an archaeological survey of the roads in Shepherds Gully.

<sup>68</sup> Greens Farm was Owen Devines land. His widow who inherited the land, married in 1831 Thomas Green who was working the land in 1828.

<sup>72</sup> Department of Main Roads NSW. *The Roadmakers*. 1976 page 37.

<sup>73</sup> Department of Main Roads NSW. *The Roadmakers*. 1976 p112





# THE PICK OF THE GREAT NORTH ROAD

## Pick Vol 7.9

### MacDonald River Ferries Book's and Whalan's E A Roberts



*Books Ferry showing St Josephs in background. Courtesy of Lois Casserly and the Wisemans Ferry Sunshine Group Inc.*

The ferry at the base of Shepherds Gully Road linked the original MacDonald Valley (or First Branch) residents with the Great North Road and its communication linkages. With most of the early MacDonald (or First Branch) settlers choosing land on the western bank of river, the land communication (road, track, bridle path) ran along that side of the river. With the land communication with Sydney and Windsor being built on the eastern side there was need for connection between the two. This was provided by Shepherd Gully Road and a ferry crossing at the base of the road known



at times as Book's Ferry. It is not known when this ferry commenced, but it probably dates from the same time as Shepherds Gully/ Sternbecks track (about 1829/30)

The general means of communication in the MacDonald valley was by boat but not everyone in the Valley would have had a boat. Indeed boats were not always the most suitable form of transport especially for mobs of sheep or cattle or if people wished to go beyond the edges of the Hawkesbury River or travel quickly to Windsor. So far very little has been found about the early ferry which crossed the MacDonald River at the base of the track down from the Great North Road other than the fact it was privately operated.

The Ferry most commonly referred to as Book's Ferry crossed the MacDonald just beyond the northern end of Sternbeck or Mercalf's grant. Whalan's Ferry according to one map, operated a few hundred meters further upstream. Whether there was the one crossing place with different names, or two different crossings, or the crossing place moved according to the operator, or was dictated by changes in the shape of the river bank after floods, is so far unknown. Both ferries/punts landed on the western side in the 60 acres granted to T. Devine.

The first reference to the ferry's existence was in 1841 when it was reported that John Watson of St Patrick's Inn had '*a commodious punt established on the MacDonald*', maps show John Watson had the deed to land where Book's Ferry crossed. In March 1842 a correspondent to the Sydney Morning Herald was expounding on the need for a parish road round the water from Wiseman's Ferry to the ferry established at St Patrick's Inn. Both newspaper accounts in the 1840s refer to work that was done in late 1841. The unnamed 'they' had

*'been at considerable expense in cutting and levelling, and the descent is consequence rendered less dangerous, as the ascent is proportionally less irksome; the watercourses which have been constructed will serve likewise to secure the Macadamised portion against the mountain torrent – for a while but its steepness, as well as Zigzag direction will always render it standing subservient to frequent repairs. It is in fact a mere bridle road.'* (74)

As it was a private ferry the newspapers are quiet until 1869 when in a list of funds allocated for the maintenance of subordinate roads is the following '*11miles road from Wiseman's Ferry via Shepherd's Gully and Whalan's Punt to St Alban's, £77;*' A similar advertisement was lodged the following year with the additional information that the road was a class 5 road.

By August 1880 it appears the road had changed status as the ferry had become a government ferry. The government was calling for tenders to run Book's ferry for 18 months to be auctioned at Windsor court house. In 1885 the government paid for the construction of a new hand punt, with the tender of Sylvester Putter accepted. The next year with a new punt J.J.W alter (Walker) was the successful bidder that won the auction for the rights to run the ferry. It appears he owned land near the Ferry.

The ferry had its share of accidents and drownings. In June 1909

*a covered - in cart travelling to Maitland was getting on the punt at the crossing of the MacDonald between Wiseman's Ferry and St. Albans, the tide at the time being very low, the punt flew back, letting the horse and cart into the water. The horse was drowned. The cart was recovered.*(75)



And in September the following year

*FOUND DROWNED. WISEMAN'S FERRY. Tuesday. A man above 30 years of age, whose identity is at present unknown, and who for the last week has been working the punt at Central MacDonald, was discovered on Sunday morning, lying in about eight feet of water, near the landing, At the inquiry held by Mr. H. A. Wilson. J.P., a finding of accidental death was returned.*(76)

The ferry was also affected by floods, the worst of the early floods being in 1889 when the water was 6 feet (nearly two metres) higher than the 1867 flood. This left the punt, high and dry, on a neighbourhood farm. In 1913 again the punt was washed downstream and again left lying on dry land about 200 meters from the crossing.

According to the N.R.M.A. on Easter Monday 1929 a record number of nearly 1000 cars crossed the Hawkesbury via Wisemans Ferry Punt. Many of these vehicles had also crossed *the one-vehicle punt on the McDonald River, also on the Great Northern-road, about three miles from Wiseman's Ferry, ...the long queue of cars... had a weary wait before being taken across by hand-power* to say nothing of how exhausted the punt man must have been.

In 1928 an exhibition and sale of A. Henry Fullwood's watercolour paintings was held in Sydney. Amongst the paintings was one titled *Book's Ferry, MacDonald River*; that was described as having a *gracefully delicate sweep of line*. Fullwood, a professional artist had been a newspaper illustrator, a war artist and an associate of the Heidelberg school. It appears that if the painting still exists it is in private hands.(77)

The last tender for Book's Ferry was in 1944 when the tender was let for three years. In February 1947, five months before the ferry contract was to expire a tender was called for 12 x 50ft Turpentine piles to be delivered on site to Book's Ferry. It would appear these were for an ill-fated bridge.

There were severe floods in 1949 and again in late July 1952. The 1952 floods destroyed miles of road and changed the shape and course of the river in parts. They left the residents above St Albans isolated for about six weeks and dumped tons of sand on river flats and in the river bed.

On an early map of the MacDonald Valley surveyor James Meehan marked the water as brackish just below Book's ferry and not fresh for another couple of bends up the river. This indicates the water at Wisemans Ferry was salty. On some maps Whalan's Ferry was marked a couple of hundred metres upstream from where Books Ferry was marked on others.

<sup>74</sup> Sydney Morning Herald 24 Nov 1841; 3 March 1842.

<sup>75</sup> SMH 26 June 1909 76

<sup>77</sup> Sydney Morning Herald 11 Oct 1928; Australian Dictionary of Biography volume 8; Fullwood Albert Henry (1863-1930)





# THE PICK OF THE GREAT NORTH ROAD

Pick Vol 7.10

**Mr Thomas Best's Letter  
Bird in the Hand**

## **To Travellers in General.**

MR. THOMAS BEST, begs leave to notify to Gentlemen and Travellers, travelling the North Line of Road to Wiseman's Ferry, that, on his returning thanks for their former patronage to him, as Proprietor of the Bird in Hand, that by being disappointed by the Government, after going to an enormous expense, on improvements in accommodation. &c, that he has given up his License for the ensuing year, and intends in future to make the Bird in Hand his private Homestead.  
Dural, 6th July, 1833.

SYDNEY GAZETTE 13 July 1833



# THE PICK OF THE GREAT NORTH ROAD

## Pick Vol 7.11

### 7.11 Matt Jurd's Memories of Books Ferry Lois Casserly

Matt Jurd, born Arthur Oswald Jurd in 1918, was working as a share farmer on Tom Jeannie Musson's Dairy on Sternbeck's grant when he married Verna Bailey in 1946. At the time he was living in the old stone house then known as Sternbecks Inn later to become Butlers Inn and now Primrose Hill. Book's Ferry was at the northern end of this property. In 1949 the Army built a Bailey Bridge across the river near the Book's Ferry. Tom Mussen and Matt Jurd did a de Groote and were first across the bridge on horseback and then Matt was the last across the bridge in his old Nash car before the bridge was washed away by the 1949 flood. Tom and Jeannie Mussen's house near the river was also washed away but it didn't too far, it got stuck on high ground and was later pulled to its new location near the road.

One of Matt's numerous jobs was as a labourer and powder monkey with the Colo Shire Council and after spending a day working for the Council he and his pals worked to make a road from Wisemans Ferry to Wrights Creek and then Matt and Graham Price widened the road from W rights Creek to St Albans now known as Settlers road. Matt also cut the road from Webbs Creek past Del Rio to Leetsvale where the stuck a wall of rock and tried to drill through it without success. A 14 foot drill still remains in that rock today opposite Walkers Beach.



*John Thompson's produce truck and social function "taxi" on Wisemans Ferry power punt late 1930s, many couples met this way. Photo Sunshine Group*





# THE PICK OF THE GREAT NORTH ROAD

## Pick Vol 7.12

### Wisemans Ferry & Webbs Creek Recollections Jim Doyle

I thought you might be interested in these few incidents I witnessed in the early days of Webb Creek/Wiseman's Ferry operations (1940-50s). In those days my brothers and I lived next door at Webb Creek and used to drive the ferry. To start the engine was a task on it's own. You had to crank the engine over by the fly wheel with a small wooden handle. If you didn't get it right it would kick back and could easily have broken your hand or arm.

In the summer we would attach a rope to the the back end of the ferry and we would hang on to it and get towed across from one side of the river to the other. Great fun but pretty dangerous considering that we couldn't swim to save ourselves. There was a large bell on the opposite bank for people to ring when they wanted to cross, especially at night. In those days the ferry would only make 6-8 crossings a day and from memory only carried 4 or 6 cars.

On one occasion there was an accident at the Wiseman's Ferry ramp where a truck with an aircraft frame on the back pushed the ferry out and ended up in the river. Another time my brothers, some other kids and I witnessed a small plane land in the paddock next to the ferry (where the golf course is now). We watched it as it took off and seemed to have trouble gaining height. Next minute it was coming down, heading straight for and crashing into the fuel shed which was filled full of 44 gallon drums of fuel. It exploded on impact and the sheer force of the explosion sent debris well into the sky above. We all had to run and get behind trees near the riverbank so as not to get hit with the flying debris.

Another time I was down in our orchard with Dad when we heard some commotion coming from the Webb's Creek Ferry ramp on our side. Dad ran over and discovered the local beekeeper (who had a wooden leg) had somehow gone into the river in his truck. Dad helped to save him. Sometime later a local farmer and his wife also went into the river at that ramp in their ute and had to be rescued.

One time my brother Barry who was then probably about 14 years old, made what I think was probably the most dangerous river crossing of all time. A huge storm hit as he was on his way across and brought with it immediate extremely heavy rain and cyclonic winds. I called mum to come and see. We couldn't see much through the rain but I remember just being able to see the shape of the ferry and it was rolling from side to side and getting tossed about in the huge waves that had come up almost instantly. Barry told us later that he just opened the throttle and held on for dear life.

One day I was out on our verandah and the ferry was about mid-stream. I noticed a Halvorsen Cruiser heading downstream and straight for the ferry. Sure enough they came together and the Halvorsen demolished the engine room of the ferry which was made of timber and corrugated iron. Lucky the ferry driver at the time was not in there! The Halvorsen ended up with a badly damaged bow but obviously it could have been a lot worse.

I remember that the telephone linesmen (called the PNG back then) used to like to play two up while on the ferry going from one side of the river to the other and that one Saturday night after the local monthly dance at the old memorial hall at Wiseman's Ferry, my mate Neil Andrews and I went onto the Webb's Creek Ferry to go and see some of our friends off from the McDonald and St Albans area. The ferry had left shore when another car arrived at the ramp to cross so the ferry driver stopped and turned to go back and pick them up. All of a sudden by the light at the front of the ferry I saw the shore fast approaching. I called for the ferry driver to stop but the ferry wasn't slowing or stopping. I raced into the engine room and pulled the throttle back but it was too late. The ferry went right up onto the ramp and was stuck there. We tried everything we could think of to get it off but couldn't. The ferry had to stay on the ramp until the next incoming tide in the morning. The locals were great and put all the people who were trying to cross up for the night. We found out later that the driver had had a few too many that night.





# THE PICK OF THE GREAT NORTH ROAD

## Pick Vol 7.13

### McFarland's Grave - A Maroota Mystery Solved ?

An overview of new research findings, based on newspaper reports from *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Maitland Mercury* Diane Papandrea



*Photo Papandrea collection*

Having resided in the Hills District since the age of ten and with an interest in both family and local history, I have known of the existence of this road-side grave for some time. Whenever passing this grave, located beside the Old Northern Road near Maroota Public School, I often wondered about the story of the occupant. Who was McFarland and how did he come to be buried here ? Over time many theories and local stories have emerged about McFarland, but despite previous research undertaken by others no conclusive evidence about this person appears to have been found. McFarland remained elusive and his story seemed destined to remain a mystery.

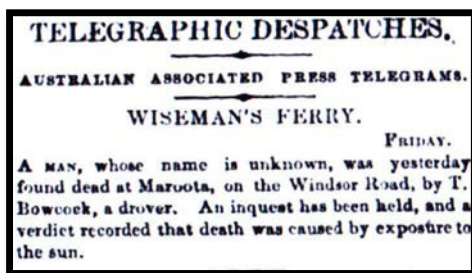
In an article published in the Hills News on the 29th August 2000, several people from the local area were asked about their knowledge of this grave. Various stories were put forward about McFarland – that he was a ticket-of-leave man, or a possible relative of the Minchinbury brothers, or perhaps a swagman passing through the then unsettled district – but nobody really seemed to know who he was or how he died.

For many years the grave was said to have been over-grown with wild bush flowers and creepers and marked with a rustic cross. Ruby Ramm, a long-time Maroota identity, also confirmed a story about a wooden cross, saying that it was, “rescued from a tangle of bushes by the RTA when they did up the road a few years back.” As Col Allison, the writer, reflected in the above- mentioned article, “in a curious way, despite his unknown antecedents, McFarland lives on, 129 years since he died in mysterious circumstances”.

In March 2007, the National Library of Australia launched an ambitious project to digitise a range of historic Australian newspapers as part of the Australian Newspapers Digitisation Program. This service would eventually allow free public access to scanned images of these state newspapers via the internet. In July 2008, the Historic Australian Newspapers website was released to the public and for the first time ever one was able to browse these newspapers on-line, instead of having to manually trawl through a microfilm at the library. More than thirty-five newspaper titles have been made available to date, including The Sydney Gazette (1803-1842) – the first Australian newspaper published in Sydney - The Maitland Mercury and Hunter River General Advertiser (1843-1893) and The Sydney Morning Herald (1842-1954).

On the 5th of January 1864, a brief account of a journey on horse-back from Windsor to Wiseman's Ferry was published in the Sydney Morning Herald. The route taken by the party, via McGrath's Hill and the Cattai Road, eventually became the preferred road for travellers making their way from Sydney to Wiseman's Ferry. The alternate route, along the Old Northern Road via Dural, had quickly declined in popularity and over time much of the road north of Glenorie to the junction with Wiseman's Ferry Road fell into disrepair. As the party crossed the valley at Little Cattai Creek and continued on through the Maroota Forest, "the wild and sterile character of the country increased at each mile; we were following the back-bone of a range which was perceptively rising in elevation, and the gullies consequently sinking the deeper, while the cliffs scowled in black savageness all around". After reaching the junction where Wiseman's Ferry Road meets the Old Northern Road, "at five miles from Wiseman's occurred a good patch of country, with a few acres cleared and enclosed, and a nice stone house built on it, although falling into ruins like the wooden out-houses".

Newspapers of the day can often be a fascinating source of information and a few lines published in The Sydney Morning Herald 20 January 1872 about an unknown man found dead at Maroota initially caught my eye.



When reviewing some photos of the McFarland grave-site, which had been taken in the late 1990's, it was clear that the burial date on his grave was 19.1.1871. If the above newspaper report was correct and the despatch from Wiseman's Ferry was written on the Friday, then the body of this man was found on Thursday 18th January 1872.

A week later, another report was published in The Sydney Morning Herald which provided some additional information about the Coroner's Inquest that was held on the body before Mr. J.B. Johnston and a jury. If the newspaper report was correct, then the inquest was held on Friday 19th January 1872.





**WINDSOR.**

[FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT.]

**CORONER'S INQUEST.**—On Friday last, an inquest was held at Maroota, before Mr. J. B. Johnston and a jury, on the body of a man unknown, who was found dead in the bush, on the previous day, by a drover named Boccock. Boccock, it appears, was riding from Windsor to Wiseman's Ferry, when his dogs turned off the road into the bush, and he followed them; he discovered, a short distance from the road, the dead body; he did not know the deceased, nor any thing about him. The deceased appeared to have been dead some days; he had in his pocket several pawn-tickets, numbered 7210, 148, 7587, and 240. The jury found that there was no evidence to show how deceased came by his death, but were of opinion that it was caused by exposure to the sun.

*The Sydney Morning Herald, Friday 26th January 1872,*

As it was summer-time and the body appeared to have been dead for some days it is likely that the burial took place fairly quickly after the inquest. It is not known if the body was removed elsewhere for the inquest to take place, as they often were; or if the inquest was held at the place where the body was found. Given the area was still somewhat isolated in the 1870's it was probably the latter.

After reading this second report it seemed like an uncanny coincidence that an unknown man had been found dead on the side of the road at Maroota almost a year to the day as the date on McFarland's grave. Could the year of death on the grave be an error ?

As there were no additional details found about the incident in subsequent issues of The Sydney Morning Herald, a search of the NLA's Historic Australian Newspapers website led to another newspaper report, this time published in the Maitland Mercury and Hunter River General Advertiser. According to the NLA website, The Maitland Mercury is Australia's oldest regional newspaper. It was originally a weekly newspaper and the first issue was published on the 7th of January 1843. This newspaper often contained abridged versions of the news from Sydney papers, along with various other reports from regional correspondents.

It was the details in this third report that provided the first clue as to the possible identity of McFarland.

**SUDDEN DEATH IN THE BUSH NEAR WISEMAN'S FERRY.**—On the 18th ultimo it was reported to the police that the body of a man had been found lying in the bush at Maroota, of which the following was the description given:—In height he was about five feet eight inches, his build was stout, his hair black, and his clothing consisted in a black cloth coat and trousers, he had on blucher boots, and a drab Californian hat. At the inquest there were produced certain pawn-tickets for goods pledged in different names and at different times, with Mr. Bonarius, of Newcastle, but nothing to lead to identification. From inquiries made at Newcastle, subsequent to the holding of the inquest, there would appear to be but little doubt that the unfortunate deceased was a compositor of the name of Thomas McFarlane, who was lately employed on this journal and also on the *Pilot*, but was discharged from both on account of intemperate habits. The verdict was an open one, no evidence having been adduced to show how the deceased came by his death, but the jury were of opinion that it had arisen from exposure to the sun.

THE CO-OPERATIVE STEAM-ENGINE COMPANY.



*News item from The Maitland Mercury and Hunter River General Advertiser, Saturday 3rd February 1872, page 3*

As the surname was so similar the next question was obvious. Was McFarland really Thomas McFarlane, a former newspaper compositor from Newcastle? While the newspaper reports were a solid lead, a second reference source would be needed to help confirm these reports. A search of the NSW Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages Historical Indexes for a Thomas, who died in 1872, confirmed the death of a Thomas McFarlane, age unknown, had been registered in the Windsor District in 1872. The Windsor District was certainly the right area, but was this the Maroota man?

When the death certificate arrived and the details matched those of the newspaper reports, it was felt that some of the legend surrounding this man could finally be put to rest. In summary, the death certificate indicates that a male, whose name was originally recorded as unknown, of an unknown age, died of exposure at Maroota, date unknown, in 1872. In the Name/Occupation column, unknown has been crossed out and a notation made. In the far left column the notation indicates that for name "unknown" read Thomas McFarlane, Compositor. The informant on the certificate was James Bligh Johnston, Coroner, of Windsor, who had conducted the inquest. Other persons of interest who are mentioned on the certificate are Gregory Fuller, who buried the body at Maroota on 19th January 1872 and the two witnesses, John James Fitzpatrick and William Henry Goodman.

It is hoped that, at some stage, a new plaque may be able to be placed at this road-side grave, so that Thomas McFarlane, Compositor, who was buried there on 19th January 1872, is given an identity. After more than one hundred and thirty eight years, it's been a long time coming. Further research in the future may yet reveal more about this man.

*Below Extract from amended death certificate*

Date and place of death	Name and occupation	Sex and age	Cause of Death Duration of last illness; medical attendant; when he last saw deceased	Name and occupation of father Name and maiden surname of mother	Informant
<p>1872 Windsor 19th Jan 1872</p>	<p>Thomas McFarlane Compositor Maroota</p>	<p>Male age unknown</p>	<p>(1) Exposure (2) _____ (3) _____ (4) _____</p>	<p>(1) _____ (2) _____ (3) _____</p>	<p>Certified by James Bligh Johnston Coroner Windsor 18 January 1872</p>

