



Mandurah Ferry Service and First Traffic Bridge

Connecting Mandurah and Halls Head

In 1843 a ferry service was established by Sarah Littleton who ran it in conjunction with the Marine Hotel. She relinquished both these enterprises to Thomas Watson. The ferry itself was owned by Thomas Peel. The establishment of a ferry service led to the opening up of a road to the south of Mandurah.

In 1844 the Suttons took over the ferry service and by 1846 they were running both the ferry and an Inn on the western side. In 1847 the ferry sank, and was raised by John Sutton with help from local soldiers. It was swamped or sunk several times in subsequent years.

In 1852 the government bought the ferry from Thomas Peel for £41, and from that time the Govt. entered into various arrangements with John Sutton, who in 1853 received 10,000 acres plus a publican's licence in exchange for running the ferry service for free. By the late 1850s the ferry was in disrepair.

In 1861 Jean Spratt, wife of Constable Spratt, was appointed ferry operator. In 1878 the ferry was pulled up on the river bank awaiting repairs. These repairs did not appear to happen and the ferry service was abandoned. At this time what service there was to provide a crossing for travellers using the old coast road appears to have completely failed. People no longer came down the coastal route preferring to use the inland path through Pinjarra.



museum without walls

MANDURAH COMMUNITY MUSEUM

Mandurah Ferry Service and First Traffic Bridge cont'd

From 1878 until the building of Mandurah's first bridge across the estuary it appears that Mandurah itself was the end of the line. It is probable that a few people did use the coastal road, but there was no method of moving coaches or significant numbers of people from one side of the estuary to the other.

1894 Bridge

After many years of unsatisfactory transport, a tender was called in December 1893 to build the first bridge over the estuary. The successful tenderer was Matthew Price, who agreed to complete the work for £1792/3/10. Price had much experience in bridge building and other contract service having worked for the Railway Branch of the Public Works Dept. in New Zealand. On his arrival in WA he supervised the construction of the telegraph line between Albany and Eucla. He also constructed the Dongara Bridge, added 1,000 feet to the existing Fremantle Jetty, built Robb's Jetty, and the mile long jetty at Carnarvon among others.

The bridge was to be 12 feet wide by 600 feet long, built of jarrah and karri. The 70 bridge piles were cut from bush at Pinjarra. The sawn decking timbers came from Port's Sawmills at Collie and were unloaded at Mandurah by the ship *Duchess of Kent*. Matthew Price, his foreman Mr. R. Irwin, and their men built the bridge in a remarkable time of six weeks. The bridge was open by mid May 1894.

Two major modifications were made to the bridge in 1897-98 to cater for the growth of the town and the increase in tourism that was also being experienced. A row of piles from the middle of the bridge was removed to enable larger vessels to pass through. At about the same time, the Mandurah Progress Association with support from the Perth and Fremantle angling clubs lobbied the colonial government to construct a fishing stage under the eastern end of the bridge. This was completed at a cost of £65.

Matthew Price's construction was built well to last, and this it did for 59 years, weathering many storms and floods. The heavy floods of 1945, as well as being rammed by a drifting boat caused significant damage to the old structure. Added to this, the ravages caused by both toredo ship worms and white ants were beginning to make the structure unsound. Further floods in 1952 and increasing traffic flows on the old coast road marked the bridge's death knell.



Mandurah Ferry Service and First Traffic Bridge cont'd

1953 Bridge

Planning for a replacement bridge had commenced soon after the end of World War Two by the State government under the then Premier Sir Ross McLarty. The new bridge would have to be capable of handling the increased traffic flows expected after the improvement of Mandurah Road. Sir Ross, whose electorate encompassed Mandurah made transport infrastructure one of his government's main priorities.

The design of the new structure focused on avoiding the possibility of toredo worm damage that had sealed its predecessor's fate. To this end, the piles were to be made entirely from reinforced concrete. As an economy measure, the remainder of the bridge structure was to be of jarrah, with the exception of the two navigation spans which utilised rolled steel joists to support the timber decking above. The concrete component of the construction amounted to 21 'bays' with 25 ft. between each pile.

Demountable Bailey Bridge sections were used during construction. This was a new technique for the time developed from transportable bridges used in World War Two. This method enabled the construction of the gantry over the pile casting yard, and the outriggers which carried the pile frames out over the water to be mounted in their final positions. A 5 ton winch, also mounted on the outriggers, was used to drive the piles into the estuary bed. The wooden components of the bridge amounted to 4,800 linear feet of round logs and 310 tons of sawn jarrah.

Once construction was completed, the old bridge was demolished with, gelignite being used to destroy any remaining piles. Construction began in 1950, and lasted until early 1953.

In January 1953, Sir Ross McLarty along with senior officers of the Main Roads Department met with the Mandurah Roads Board to discuss the construction of fishing stages below the new bridge. The \$2,300 cost of the stages would necessitate the raising of a loan, so a public meeting of ratepayers was held on February 5 in the Hotham Valley Hall. After receiving a favorable reception at the meeting, the matter of the loan was put to a referendum on February 7. After receiving approval of the ratepayers at the referendum the stages were constructed, and continue to be a well used feature of the bridge.

With the defeat of Sir Ross McLarty's Liberal government in the election of February 14 1953, the honour of officially opening the bridge fell to the new Minister for Works, Mr. John Trezise Tonkin on April 17 1953.