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Chapter 7

Port Facilities: Lifeline to the town.

Cooktown had its genesis as a port town. Its position was determined by the proximity of the Endeavour River to the Palmer River gold field, making it the closest viable point of supply for that field. Cooktown's growth to prominence as one of the premier towns in Queensland during the period 1874 to 1884 was matched by the growth of the port. By 1884 it was one of the leading harbours in the colony. In addition to the export of its principal staple gold, Cooktown also exported tin, timber, beche-de-mer, pearl-shell and sandalwood.

Despite its auspicious beginning, Cooktown stagnated following the fall in gold production on the Palmer River. The port retained significance for some time as a transshipment point for trade to and from New Guinea, and to ports in the Gulf of Carpentaria and the Northern Territory. For many years after gold production fell Cooktown continued to export various products, but the volume of trade was insufficient to prevent the decline of the town and its port facilities. From its position as the central port for Far North Queensland, it gradually became less relevant, and was finally eclipsed by Cairns.

Since Cooktown was established, its residents and supporters consistently praised the superiority of the harbour. In a typical statement, in 1875 the Sydney Morning Herald described the harbour

at Cooktown as a "fine natural harbour".⁵³¹ Others however saw something different. Baden-Powell found it "a bad harbour – very – being merely the mouth of a small river".⁵³² In reality the port was probably little better or worse than the majority of other ports on the Queensland coast.⁵³³

Although Cooktown's supporters were vehement in their defence of the harbour, it had serious restrictions. Until a turning basin was dredged, large ships were unable to turn in the harbour, and had to be warped out stern first with the aid of three warping buoys.⁵³⁴ Nevertheless, Cooktown still managed to surpass Townsville in port trade between 1874 and 1878.⁵³⁵ Considering the importance of the port to the town's early growth, it is not surprising that residents and local authorities alike saw the maintenance and improvement of the harbour and its facilities as crucial to the survival to the area.

Despite the rhetoric of the period promoting the extension of European settlement, the actions of the Colonial Government appear to have been motivated principally by economics. As long as the returns from the Palmer gold field contributed significantly to the revenue of the Colony through imposts and rentals, the Government continued to invest in Cooktown's infrastructure. However, when gold production declined, the Government was less willing to maintain the level of

⁵³¹ Fitzgerald, *From The Dreaming To 1915*, p. 167. "With one of the finest harbours on the east coast, it is the key to the Torres Strait route and New Guinea". Edward Palmer, 1903. *Early Days in North Queensland*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, p. 156.

⁵³² Baden-Powell described the port thus: "The so-called Endeavour River is rather an arm of the sea than a river". B.F.S. Baden-Powell, 1892. *In Savage Isles And Settled Lands*, Richard Bentley And Son, London, p. 124. *Illustrated Sydney News And New South Wales Agriculturalist & Grazier*, 28 February 1874.

⁵³³ For instance Lewis stated that "the inlet which served Cooktown as a port was fairly satisfactory". Glen Lewis, 1973. *A History Of The Ports Of Queensland: a study on economic nationalism*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, p. 60.

⁵³⁴ 1986. *Harbours & Marine: port & harbour development in Queensland from 1824 to 1985*. Department Of Harbours & Marine – Queensland, Brisbane, p. 158.

expenditure on the harbour facilities, just as it had for roads. However, the local population did not accept the decline in Government financial support without a fight. Since the town's establishment as a port, the population constantly applied pressure on the authorities to dredge the harbour and its entrance, and to improve shipping services and port buildings.

Government control.

It is obvious that the Colonial Government had high expectations of the Palmer gold field. This was made apparent when, only six months after Cooktown had been established, the Australian Steam Navigation Company was awarded a contract to carry mail from Brisbane to the Endeavour River. The Company contracted for a service twice every twenty-eight days, calling at Flat-Top Island, Bowen, Townsville, Cardwell, and Cooktown and return.⁵³⁶ The subsidised shipping would also allow the Palmer gold to be exported to southern ports and overseas. Cooktown was soon declared a Port of Call, to allow customs duty to be collected on all imports.

The development of Cooktown as a port of entry and a transshipment port for international and interstate trade required significant infrastructure in wharves and storage sheds. Local timber was also exploited, and land had to be made available for logs awaiting export. The original wharves soon proved inadequate. In 1881 No.1 wharf was extended to one hundred feet long, and built a further twelve feet into the harbour, at a cost of £2,673.⁵³⁷ When questioned about the work, the Premier bragged that the Government had spent over £5,000 on repairs and extensions to date on the wharves at Cooktown. He also

⁵³⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵³⁶ *Q.V.P.*, 1874, Vol. 2, pp. 408-409.

⁵³⁷ *Harbours & Marine*, p. 236.

promised that the harbour would be cleaned out and deepened when a suitable dredge became available.⁵³⁸

The port infrastructure and associated personnel at Cooktown were initially supplied and controlled by the Colonial Government, but the wharves were leased out to private operators soon after they were built. Early rentals were high, reflecting the significant trade through the port. For instance, in 1874 No.2 wharf was leased for £617 per annum, and No.3 wharf brought an annual rent of £620.⁵³⁹ The wharves proved a profitable arrangement for the Government, as by 1876 it had received almost £3,000 in lease fees. The Colonial Government also levied Customs duty, and this added another £114,500 to the Treasury in the same period.⁵⁴⁰ Cooktown's importance is demonstrated by the amount of Customs revenue it generated. In 1877, over £70,000 was paid in duty at Cooktown, compared with £65,000 for Rockhampton and £29,000 for Maryborough. However, after the gold trade declined the high levels of trade did not last, and this was reflected in the lower rents paid for the wharves. In 1878 the lease for No.3 wharf was sold for £75, reflecting a significant fall in the value of imports and exports from previous years. There was no improvement at the auction of the wharf leases for 1879, when the same amount of rental was offered for this lease. The annual rent offered for Nos.1 and 2 wharves at the same auction also represented a large decline.⁵⁴¹

Transfer of wharves to Council.

⁵³⁸ Q.V.P. 1881, Vol. 1, p. 63.

⁵³⁹ Cooktown Courier, 22 August, 1874. The rentals paid would seem in retrospect excessive. Cooktown serviced 55 ships in 1874 with a gross tonnage of 23,500 tons. Q.V.P. 1876. Vol. 2, p. 239. In 1875 the turnover of the port was 107 vessels with a total of 69,911 tons. Ibid., p. 566.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 37.

⁵⁴¹ Cooktown Courier, 18 October, 1879.

Though the Government received considerable financial returns from the Palmer field, Cooktown residents complained that little of this revenue was spent locally. In 1877 the Municipal Council asked the Colonial Government to transfer the wharves to its control so that the local population could get more benefit from the trade through the port. The plan had total support from the local population, but the Colonial Secretary refused the request.⁵⁴² The Council was not deterred, and made another unsuccessful attempt to get control of the wharves in 1879.⁵⁴³ However, Treasury did an about-face in 1881, and offered the wharves to the Council for £7,500, with repayment over twenty-one years at an interest rate of 7.5%. The sale was conditional on an agreement that Council would not alienate the wharves or adjoining lands.

The Council thought the price was excessive, as the Premier had boasted the Government had made £4,000 profit on the wharves to date. To make matters worse, he had stated publicly that no private individual would pay more than £4,000 for the lot. Given the circumstances, the Council voted to offer £3,000.⁵⁴⁴ The counter offer was partially successful, as Treasury agreed to reduce the purchase price from £7,200 to £5,821. The Council still regarded this amount as higher than warranted, but agreed to accept the terms. The actual operation of the wharves would remain under private control, with leases being auctioned under the same conditions as previously. Council members regarded the purchase of the wharves as “a permanent and remunerative investment”.⁵⁴⁵ It is difficult to understand how they could make such a statement, as by this time the total annual

⁵⁴² *Ibid.*, 21 November 1877.

⁵⁴³ *Ibid.*, 26 April 1879.

⁵⁴⁴ Meeting of Municipal Council, reported in *Cooktown Courier*, 14 September 1881.

⁵⁴⁵ Cooktown Municipal Council Minutes. Reported in *Cooktown Courier*, 5 November 1881.

rental had dropped to only £225. In contrast, the interest on repayment of the loan to purchase the wharves would have been at least £400 per year.

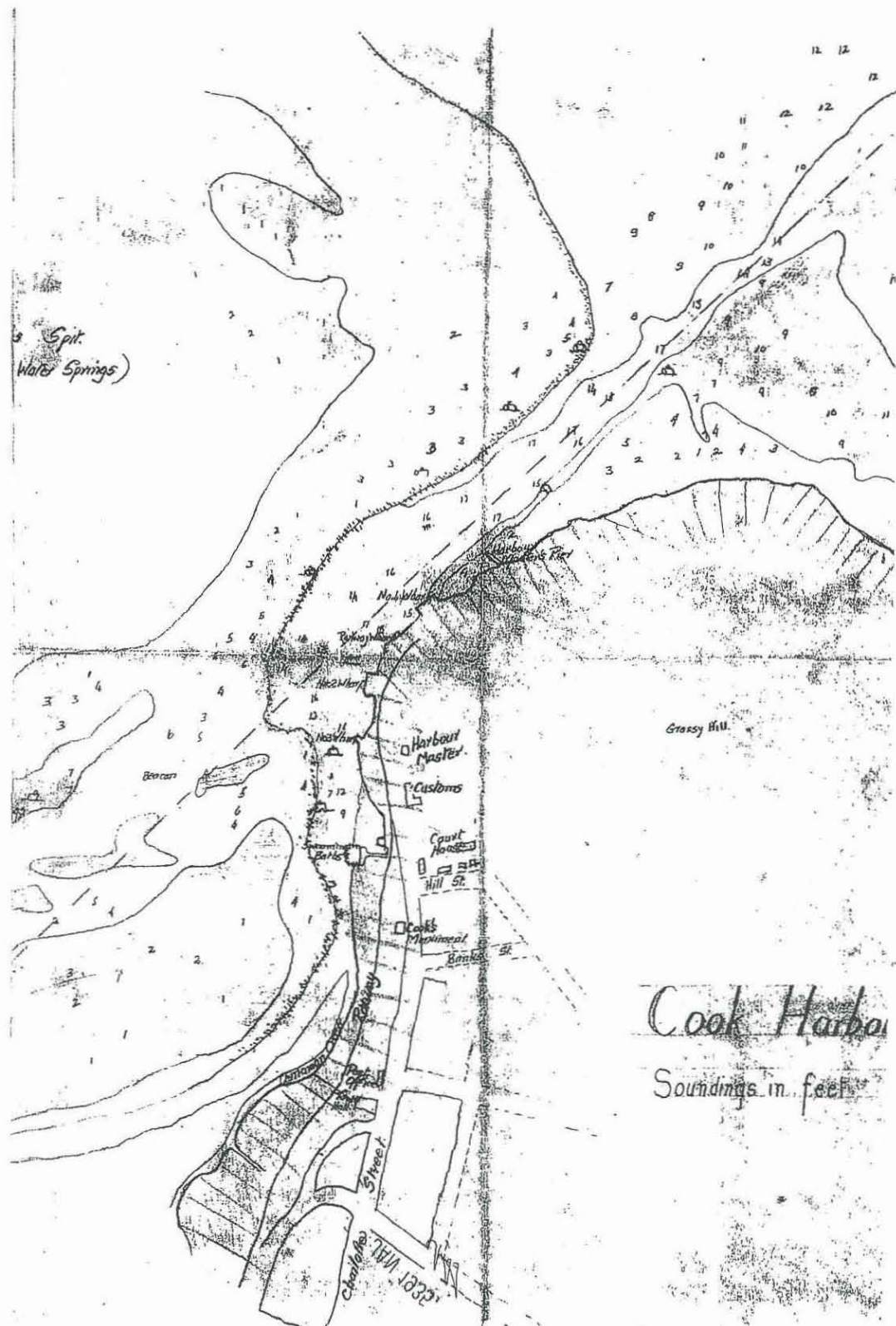
The most benign description of the Government's action in selling the wharf to the Council would be "questionable". In addition to the various fees and customs duties collected at Cooktown between 1873 and 1881, the wharves had generated rentals of £6,859, while construction and maintenance costs came to only £4,981.⁵⁴⁶ The Government had earned a considerable return on its investment. Nevertheless, the politicians had no hesitation in placing an excessive purchase price on the wharves, despite being aware of the fall in trade through the port. The Government exacerbated the Council's financial situation by financing the loan for the sale over twenty-one years. The Council was thus committed to repayments on an asset that was already falling in its income-generating capability.

Keeping the harbour open.

After the Council purchased the wharf infrastructure, it was responsible for keeping the harbour open and efficient. Its main problem was getting funds for harbour improvements, especially dredging, as the Government was not generous in approving loans or grants. For instance, immediately after the wharves changed hands, the Government refused to release funds already voted for improvements, even though only £1,000 of the £10,000 allocated for dredging and repairs in 1879 had been spent. This placed Cooktown in further jeopardy, as the harbour was in urgent need of dredging.⁵⁴⁷ Council also asked for £500 from the loan to construct a road from No. 1 wharf

⁵⁴⁶ Q.V.P. 1881, Vol. I, p. 63.

⁵⁴⁷ Town Clerk, Municipal Council Chambers, Cooktown, to The Honourable, The Colonial Treasurer, Brisbane, 11 March 1883, TRE/A26 Nos. 37-2991 (755), Q.S.A.



Plan of Cooktown harbour and facilities, c. 1890. (Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown)

around the point towards Finch Bay to give better access to the wharves, and to provide jobs for unemployed men in the area.⁵⁴⁸ The road to Finch Bay was never built, and even now it extends only a short distance past the wharf.

In addition to the financial problems facing the Council from decreased trade through the port, natural disasters took a toll on the harbour. The town suffered from a storm in early 1884 that almost decimated the shipping in the harbour. Three schooners were washed out to sea, and three were cast ashore. Although some vessels survived with only superficial damage, many were sunk, including the Customs boat and the Pilot cutter.⁵⁴⁹ The extreme rainfall caused flooding in the Endeavour River, and silted up the harbour. Despite continued requests for the Government to send the dredge, nothing had been done by the end of the year. Trade suffered badly, as no vessel of over ten feet draft could berth, except at very high tide, and sailing was often delayed. For instance, delays ranged from ten hours for the *Maranoa* to sixteen hours for the much larger *Qunaing*.⁵⁵⁰ The Government's own officers confirmed the complaints, with the Engineer for Harbours reporting that the bar was now only eight feet at low water, three feet less than before the storm.⁵⁵¹ He recommended dredging the channel to fourteen feet deep at low water, and widening it to 200 feet between

⁵⁴⁸ Town Clerk, Municipal Council Chambers, Cooktown, to The Honourable, The Colonial Treasurer, Brisbane, 24 March 1883, TRE/A26 Nos. 37-2991 (756), Q.S.A.

⁵⁴⁹ Telegram from B. Fahey, Cooktown, to Under Secretary of Treasury, Brisbane, 21 February 1884, TRE/A27 Nos. 73-1501 (691), Q.S.A.

⁵⁵⁰ Edward D'Arcey, Mayor, Municipal Council Chambers, Cooktown, to The Honourable, The Colonial Secretary, Brisbane, 25 July 1884, TRE/A28 Nos. 1511-3434 (2523), Q.S.A.

⁵⁵¹ Memorandum from Harbours and Rivers Department, Brisbane, to The Honourable, The Colonial Treasurer, 12 July 1884, TRE/A28 Nos. 1511-3434 (2280), Q.S.A.

No.1 wharf and the sea. The job was estimated to take sixteen to eighteen weeks.⁵⁵²

The Government acknowledged the need for the harbour to be cleaned out, but was slow to respond. The fall in gold exports made Cooktown less important to the Colony's finances, and the Government gave priority to the harbours at Townsville and Cairns, which were growing at Cooktown's expense. The Mayor was told that Townsville had priority for the dredge. The channel there was so shallow that freight currently had to be lightered from the roadstead to the wharf. However, he was given a promise that the dredge *Platypus* would be sent to Cooktown after it had completed the channel at Townsville.⁵⁵³

Despite the alleged "superiority" of Cooktown harbour over other Queensland ports, it needed regular dredging. Although the harbour was cleaned out after the 1884 cyclone, the Government was asked again in 1889 to send the *Platypus* to Cooktown as soon as possible. The local press joined the fray, with the editor of the Cooktown Courier claiming that "we have all the natural resources so much desired by the Townsville people but unfortunately we do not have the ear of the Government".⁵⁵⁴ The *Platypus* was being refitted, but instead of being sent to Cooktown after the refit as requested, it returned to Cairns. This only served to reinforce the view in Cooktown that there was a deliberate attempt to hold the town back. The Cooktown Courier stormed that "Macrossan [the Queensland Premier] is with Townsville as his interests lie there. If Cooktown goes ahead it will be at the

⁵⁵² Memorandum from Engineer, Harbours and Rivers Department, Brisbane, to The Honourable, The Colonial Treasurer, Brisbane, 7 July 1884, TRE/A28 Nos. 1511-3434 (2337). Q.S.A.

⁵⁵³ E.B. Cullen, Under Secretary, The Treasury, Queensland, Brisbane, to The Worshipful, The Mayor, Cooktown, 16 April 1884, TRE/A28 Nos. 1511-3434 (1571), Q.S.A.

⁵⁵⁴ Cooktown Courier, 10 December 1889

expense of Townsville which couldn't compete if all were fairly treated".⁵⁵⁵

In response to pressure from Cooktown, the Government continued to maintain the viability of the harbour, despite the decline in trade through the port. Extensive dredging works were carried out during 1890-1891, when 136,540 cubic yards of material were removed at a cost of £6,856. This brought the total expenditure on dredging at Cooktown for the period 1879-1891 to £15,483.⁵⁵⁶ It is perhaps ironic that the Government was willing to spend such a considerable sum on the maintenance of a harbour in serious decline, when the same Government was unwilling to be generous when it sold the port facilities to the Council.

As the economy of the area declined, the people of Cooktown learned that Governments are driven by economics rather than by sentiment. However, it also became clear that intelligent political lobbying could circumvent even economic imperatives. In 1899 the Council again asked the Government to improve the harbour facilities. The Marine Department thought that the improvements the Council wanted were excessive, given the amount of trade through the port. Cooktown harbour dues for 1895-96 were £399 and had risen the next year to £476. However, dues had declined again in 1897-98 to £410, and the future held no prospects of a dramatic increase. In contrast to Cooktown, Cairns harbour dues had increased from £1,266 in 1896 to £1,556 in 1898.⁵⁵⁷ Department engineers estimated that removing stone and silt from the Cooktown harbour to provide an extended

⁵⁵⁵ Macrossan was the Premier of Queensland at the time. *Cooktown Courier*, 21 January 1890.

⁵⁵⁶ *Harbours & Marine*, p. 238.

⁵⁵⁷ J. Hamilton M.L.A., Brisbane, to Cooktown Municipal Council, Cooktown, 3 July 1899. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

swinging basin would cost at least £8,500. They thought such an outlay was not justified, especially as it was unlikely that China steamers would be able to access the port even after the proposed dredging.⁵⁵⁸ Clearly, unless it could be convinced otherwise, the Government would offer assistance only if an economic return was likely.

The local Member, Hamilton, thought a compromise was possible if the Council modified its request. He pointed out that Cooktown had a credit balance on the wharves of £1,329 which, with its endowment of £1,599, gave the Council £2,928 available for improvements.⁵⁵⁹ Following further pressure from the locals and their Member, the Government finally relented, and the dredge *Platypus* was sent to Cooktown to deepen the channel to fifteen feet, and the swinging basin to eighteen.⁵⁶⁰ Once again Cooktown had demonstrated that perseverance can sometimes win out over economics.

The period immediately following the end of the Second World War saw Cooktown at its lowest ebb. The population had dropped to around four hundred, and the town's economy was severely depressed. The decline resulted in widespread apathy among members of the Council and the general population. This was illustrated in 1946 when the Council failed to cooperate with the Department of Harbours and Marine when it offered to dredge the harbour. In order to help prepare a budget for the operation, the Council was asked to advise on the availability of water and coal for the dredge. The dredge would need a supply of 5,000 gallons of water suitable for boilers each week, as well

⁵⁵⁸ Marine Department, Brisbane, to J. Hamilton, M.L.A., 24 June 1899. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown. In Cooktown's heyday it was the first port of call for ships from the Orient.

⁵⁵⁹ J. Hamilton M.L.A., Brisbane, to Cooktown Municipal Council, Cooktown, 3 July 1899. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁵⁶⁰ *Harbours & Marine*, pp. 302-304.

as forty tons of coal.⁵⁶¹ Despite the Council's constant requests for the harbour to be dredged, it told the Department that there was no reticulated water supply, but that "It may be possible to make arrangements with a carrier to deliver 5,000 gallons of water per week". The request for information on coal supplies bought the terse reply that "There is no coal supply at Cooktown".⁵⁶² One would have expected a more positive response to a service so desperately needed.

By April 1947 no decision had been made to dredge the harbour, but the Council's lassitude changed when it learned that a mining company was investigating the economics of shipping manganese ore from Cooktown to Cairns for export.⁵⁶³ The prospect of an increase in trade through the port galvanised the Council into action, and it asked the Government about its plans for dredging the harbour.⁵⁶⁴ As a result, the Port Douglas Harbour Master travelled to Cooktown to report on the state of the harbour.⁵⁶⁵ He found that only two ships, the *Merinda* and the *Wandana*, used the harbour regularly. Given the lack of trade, the Department decided that there was no necessity to dredge the harbour, particularly as the manganese venture never eventuated.⁵⁶⁶

The "Catch 22" effects of decline on a small town are illustrated by Cooktown's experience with efforts to introduce a new ship to the run.

⁵⁶¹ Chief Administration Officer And Secretary, Department of Harbours & Marine, Brisbane, to The Shire Clerk, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown, 10 December 1946. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁵⁶² Shire Clerk, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown, to Secretary, Department of Harbours & Marine, Brisbane, 20 December 1946. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁵⁶³ M.I. Lissauer, Melbourne, to Mr. George L. Bott, Cooktown, 17 April 1947. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁵⁶⁴ Shire Clerk, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown, to The Secretary, Department of Harbours & marine, Brisbane, 1 May 1947. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁵⁶⁵ Treasurer, The Treasury, to The Honourable H.H. Collins, M.L.A., Minister for Agriculture and Stock, Brisbane, 8 July 1947. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁵⁶⁶ H.H. Collins, Department Of Agriculture And Stock, Brisbane, to Shire Clerk, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown, 20 October 1947. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

John Burke Limited, a shipping company servicing the area, proposed to place its new ship *Elsanna* on the Cooktown run in 1948. The *Elsanna* was larger than other ships on the run, and the Council believed it would bring more tourists to Cooktown. The State Government was trying to encourage tourism, and offered a subsidy of 50% on funding for jetties used principally for tourism, and the roads that serviced them. The Council hoped the new "tourist" ship would make it eligible.⁵⁶⁷ However, the larger ship couldn't enter the harbour unless it was dredged, as soundings taken by the shipping company found that the turning basin had insufficient room.⁵⁶⁸ John Burke asked the Progress Association to support an appeal to the Department of Harbours and Marine to dredge the harbour.⁵⁶⁹ The Council also gave its support, and asked the Cairns Harbour Board to hire the dredge *Trinity Bay* for the job, but nothing could be done without the consent of the Department of Harbours and Marine.⁵⁷⁰

The matter was still under consideration when a cyclone damaged the harbour in February 1949, making the dredging even more urgent. The Chief Engineer of the Department of Harbours and Marine inspected the harbour and found the depth of the entrance to the channel was only six feet, compared with over nine feet prior to the cyclone. He promised to dredge the harbour to thirteen feet when plant was available. The delay was not welcome, but the Council was mollified

⁵⁶⁷ V.J. Battersby, for Under Secretary, The treasury, Brisbane, to The Shire Clerk, Shire of Cook, Cooktown, 13 April 1948. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁵⁶⁸ Managing Director, John Burke Limited, Cairns, to Secretary, Marine Board, Brisbane, 12 July 1948. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁵⁶⁹ Managing Director, John Burke Limited, South Brisbane, to Secretary, Cooktown Progress Association, Cooktown, 12 July 1948. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁵⁷⁰ J. Wyer, Secretary, The Cairns Harbour Board, Cairns, to the Shire Clerk, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown, 21 September 1948. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

somewhat when he also recommended that the damaged wharf should be replaced with a new jetty equipped with a ten-ton crane.⁵⁷¹

The Treasurer arranged for John Burke's ship *Algana*, which could negotiate the harbour at Cooktown, to carry 300 tons of coal for the dredge, as well as heavy machinery for J.M. Johnston's sawmill, and mining machinery for tin mines in the Annan River tin fields.⁵⁷² Although the dredge *Trinity Bay* cleared and deepened the harbour to a suitable depth, John Burke still refused to send the *Elsanna* to Cooktown. The Council demanded that John Burke's subsidy be reduced, as its contract stipulated that the *Elsanna* service Cooktown. Treasury rejected the argument, maintaining that John Burke had honoured its contract by substituting another vessel. However as a sop to the Council, it promised that a larger dredge would be sent when one became available.⁵⁷³ The Government honoured the commitment, and arranged for the Cairns Harbour Board to dredge the harbour to eleven feet during September and October.⁵⁷⁴

The recurring theme of dredging the harbour at Cooktown is still important with the local population. In response to significant public pressure, the State Government recently spent \$180,000 restoring the swinging basin and channel after it was silted in 1997 by Cyclone Justin.⁵⁷⁵

⁵⁷¹ H.H. Collins, Office of The Minister, Department Of Agriculture And Stock, Brisbane, to Shire Clerk, Cooktown, 12 July 1949. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁵⁷² The Treasury, Brisbane, to The Honourable H.H. Collins, M.L.A., Brisbane, 28 July 1949. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁵⁷³ V.C. Gair, Treasurer, Brisbane, to The Honourable H.H. Collins, M.L.A., Minister for Agriculture and Stock, Brisbane, 7 June 1950. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁵⁷⁴ V.C. Gair, Treasurer, Brisbane, to C.F. Wordsworth, M.L.A., Parliament House, Brisbane, 7 July 1950. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁵⁷⁵ Cooktown Local News, 22 July 1999.

The problem in keeping the harbour safe and efficient was not confined to dredging. In 1903 the Council had to remove stones from the water near the wharf. These stones had been used as ships ballast, and were discharged when cargo was loaded. They hindered seamen bringing mooring lines ashore by dinghy, especially at night. This put the ships in danger, as the speed and direction of docking vessels was controlled only by mooring lines, and they had to be secured to the bollards quickly.⁵⁷⁶ The Council faced a similar problem in 1911, when the Harbour Master suggested that Council take legal action against offending masters. He thought the Council's best solution was to provide a suitable area near the wharf where ballast could be discharged.⁵⁷⁷ However, the Council wasn't interested. The plan would require funds for a discharge area for the stone, and further costs in disposing of it later. Cooktown had plenty of native stone readily available, and imported ballast would have no market. The straitened finances of the Council often hindered it from providing an adequate facility or service for the town.

The railway wharf.

The Council saw the construction of the Cooktown to Laura railway line as an opportunity to recover some of the debts it incurred when it bought the wharf facilities from the Government. All materials used on the project were to be imported by sea, and would attract wharfage fees. This soon caused problems when Bashford & Co., the contractor for the first section of the railway line, complained to the Government

⁵⁷⁶ Master, SS *Wodonga* to The Harbour Master, Cooktown, 16 October 1903. P. Osterlund, Acting Harbour Master, Cooktown to The Municipal Council, Cooktown, 21 October 1903. Transcripts in Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁵⁷⁷ The Harbour Master, Cooktown to The Town Clerk, Cooktown, 17 February 1911. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown. Anxiety about the presence of ballast centred only on the risk to shipping. The possibility of contamination of the harbour flora and fauna from the introduction of exotic species was obviously not an issue at the time.

that the wharfage on construction materials was exorbitant. They argued that as the railway was a Government project, all materials should be exempt under the agreement between the Government and the Council when the latter purchased the wharves.⁵⁷⁸ However, the Government had neglected to insert an exclusion clause, and the Colonial Treasurer conceded that wharfage applied to all freight.⁵⁷⁹

The situation came to a head when the ship *Cambrian Princess* delivered a load of rails to Cooktown, and was detained when the owners refused to pay wharfage dues.⁵⁸⁰ When the matter was referred to the Colonial Treasurer, he advised the Engineer in charge of the railway project to negotiate an acceptable rate for wharfage. He recommended that if negotiation failed, the Government should erect another wharf on Crown Land to service the railway.⁵⁸¹ The Council was understandably concerned that the Government should interfere in a commercial transaction. It argued that its interests would be injured by a forced reduction in fees, as it relied on wharfage to repay the Government loan for the purchase of the wharves. The Council was even more alarmed by the suggestion that the Government erect another wharf, as that would deprive it of revenue and interfere with the approaches to the existing wharves. The argument was ignored. Treasury said that any inconvenience to the Council would be offset by the Government's offer to sell the new wharf to the Council at cost after the railway was completed. He advised the Government to ignore the

⁵⁷⁸ Electric Telegraph from Bashford & Co, Cooktown, to Colonial Treasurer, 10 June 1884, TRE A/27 Nos. 73-1501 (594), Q.S.A.

⁵⁷⁹ Telegram from Colonial Treasurer, Brisbane, to H.B. Warren, District Engineer, Cooktown, 9 April 1884, TRE A/27 84/1206, Q.S.A.

⁵⁸⁰ Telegram from H.B. Warren, District Engineer, Cooktown, to Colonial Treasurer, Brisbane, 8 April 1884, TRE A/27 84/1206, Q.S.A.

⁵⁸¹ *Ibid.* This information was written over the telegram as a comment note.

Council's obstructionism and proceed with the construction of the wharf without further negotiation.⁵⁸²

No agreement could be reached between the parties, and the Railway Department paid for the construction of a new wharf between Nos. 1 and 2 wharves to allow direct loading to and from trains.⁵⁸³ After the completion of the railway line to Laura, the Government kept its promise and sold the railway wharf to the Council. Both parties agreed to a valuation of £3,094/9/9, with repayment over twenty-one years at £241/6/8 per year. The Government had learned its lesson from the incident, and this time it insisted on the perpetual right to convey all Government property and Railway material across the wharf free of charge.⁵⁸⁴

The Council expected to get a return on its investment from the delivery of heavy machinery to exploit underground gold reserves at Maytown, but this never eventuated. Despite the belief that it would help reverse the decline in Cooktown's economy, the wharf-railway connection served only to place a greater financial burden on the local population. Eventually all other wharves were demolished, and only the railway wharf remained.

Alternative Exports.

⁵⁸² Information written in column of letter book, 4 June 1884. Responding to letter 1820 from Mayor of Cooktown re Railway wharf. Treasury Department: Register of letters received 27 July 1883-3 July 1884, p. 181, TRE/B15, Q.S.A.

⁵⁸³ Harbours & Marine, p. 238.

⁵⁸⁴ Cooktown Courier, 28 February 1887.

As the Palmer gold declined the port turned to alternative exports, and facilities were extended as required to meet the changing needs of the trade.⁵⁸⁵

As discussed in chapter four, marine products also contributed significantly to Cooktown's exports. While many of the boats working the fishery were registered at Thursday Island, at its peak Cooktown was home port to twenty-seven vessels.⁵⁸⁶ The trade was not without its worries, and the locals were quick to react to any perceived threat. For instance, in 1889 pearlers and beche-de-mer fishermen saw the introduction of Home Trade Certificates for port users as a possible threat to local port trade. They feared that they would have to apply for the certificates to enter the port at Cooktown, but a deputation was assured by Captain G. Heath, the Commander of Ports and Harbours, that they were free to operate from Cooktown provided they carried no passengers.⁵⁸⁷

The wharves at Cooktown were again used for importing and exporting marine products in 1952, when Coral Sea Industries began handling pearl-shell and other shell products. Although no shell was retrieved locally, Cooktown became the depot for product from many parts of the Coral Sea, particularly Torres Strait and the Solomon Islands.

The wharves were again used to handle marine products in the 1970s, when a number of prawn trawlers used Cooktown as a base. At times up to twenty-five vessels used the port. Although the Council received little benefit, the commercial sector profited from sales of fuel, stores and alcohol.

⁵⁸⁵ For instance the Bond Store was extended to double the accommodation in 1877. *Q.V.P.* 1878, Vol. 2, p. 513.

⁵⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 231. R. Sumner, 1981. "A Noisome Business-The Trepang Trade And Queensland", *Journal of Australian Studies*, November, p. 65.

Live cattle exports.

Cooktown was not content to rely on its traditional exports. The Council tried to encourage additional trade through the port in 1888 by waiving wharfage fees on live cattle, and decided upon a trial period of one year.⁵⁸⁸ Graziers failed to support the project, and only 159 head of cattle were exported.⁵⁸⁹ However, some members of the community continued to promote the idea. News that cattle had been shipped from Fremantle in Western Australia to Singapore in 1889 prompted the Cooktown Courier to urge local producers to ship from "our Northern Territory", as the market for cattle in the East was unlimited.⁵⁹⁰ His plea fell on deaf ears, but in 1894 the Council was again asked to consider waiving wharfage on cattle exports. The Mayor was in favour of the scheme, and told Council members that although the previous experiment had not been encouraging, even fewer cattle had been exported each year since the wharfage charges had been reinstated. Since then, only 207 cattle had been exported by ship, with only £25/17/6 paid to Council in wharfage charges. It was obvious that there was a lack of interest in live cattle exports by boat, and the Council refused to alter its rates.⁵⁹¹

Cooktown did not give up on the idea, and it was kept alive by mirages such as the 1914 incident involving Denham Bros. Denham Bros, Stock and Station Agents from Rockhampton, began to investigate the availability of facilities, and the probable cost of shipping stock from

⁵⁸⁷ Cooktown Courier, 3 September 1889.

⁵⁸⁸ Cooktown Town Council Minutes, 15 November 1894.

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid., 13 December 1894.

⁵⁹⁰ Cooktown Courier, 22 October 1889.

⁵⁹¹ Cooktown Town Council Minutes, 13 December 1894.

Cooktown.⁵⁹² The Council grabbed at the opportunity. Provided it was given a guarantee that sufficient cattle would be shipped, it was willing to construct loading facilities at the wharf, with holding yards for 700 cattle close by.⁵⁹³ An agent of the firm met with the Council and "some of our leading townsmen", and appeared satisfied that the port was well suited to his purposes.⁵⁹⁴ However, Denham warned the Council that the shipment of cattle was contingent on the purchase of the cattle from a property situated 300 miles north of Cooktown.⁵⁹⁵

In reality, the principal involved, A. McCamley, was not considering the purchase of cattle alone, but fully stocked properties. He eventually purchased two properties, *Merluna* and *York Downs*. He told the Council that if he could get favourable freight rates he would ship 2,500 head through Cooktown immediately, and bring 1,000 head of breeding stock from Gladstone. However, McCamley regarded the current rate of £2/10/0 per head for shipments over 550 head as "absolutely prohibitive", and went to Brisbane to negotiate with A.U.S.N. Co. for a better deal.⁵⁹⁶ His mission failed, and the plan for live exports was abandoned.

The idea of live exports emerged again in 1922 when the Council was told of a proposal to export fat bullocks from Cooktown to Thursday Island by the *Kallatina*. However, this plan also failed to get off the

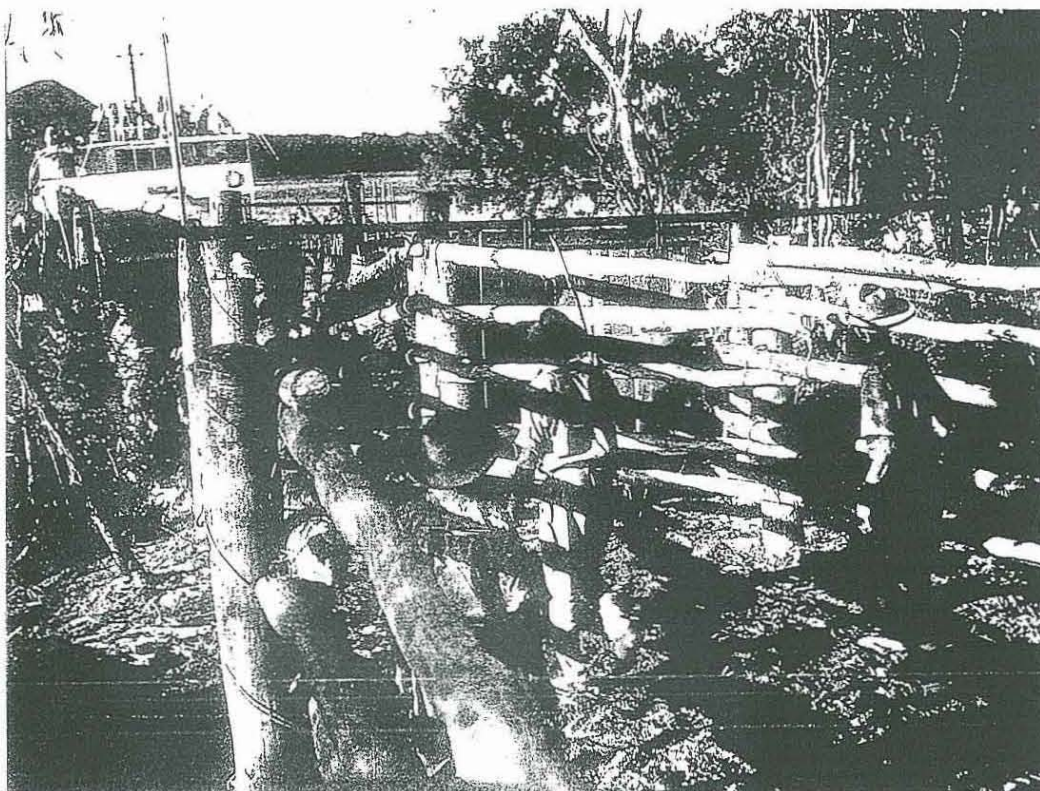
⁵⁹² Denham Bros.(Rockhampton) Ltd., Rockhampton to The Town Clerk, Council Chambers, Cooktown, 22 January 1914. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁵⁹³ Charles Patching, Town Clerk, The Town Council of Cooktown, to Messrs Denham Bros, Rockhampton, 14 January 1914. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁵⁹⁴ Charles Patching, Town Clerk, The Town Council of Cooktown, Cooktown, to Messrs Denham Bros, Rockhampton, 28 January 1914. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁵⁹⁵ Denham Bros, Rockhampton to The Town Clerk, Council Chambers, Cooktown, 28 January 1914. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁵⁹⁶ Henry J. Denham, Great Northern Hotel, Cooktown, to The Mayor & Town Councillors, Cooktown, 20 March 1914. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.



Loading cattle on barge Wewak in Cooktown harbour, c. 1952. (Cairns Port Authority).

ground.⁵⁹⁷ In 1923, a proposition by Messrs O'Beirne Bros and S. Byrnes of Cooktown to export cattle from Cooktown to New Guinea met with a similar fate.⁵⁹⁸ Cooktown's only success, although limited, was achieved in the 1950s. Marine Contracting, a Cairns firm, carried cattle for the Cairns Meat Export Company from Cooktown to its Queerah meatworks in the barge *Wewak*. Unfortunately, this project did not contribute to the wharf's economy, as the cattle were loaded onto the barge from a landing in the mangroves. The service was short lived, and had little impact on Cooktown's economy or the port's infrastructure.

The failure of agricultural exports.

Hopes of stimulating the economy of the Cooktown area by the exploitation of the farming lands in the district were further diminished by the lack of competition in the transport industry. With shipping the only method of sending produce to southern markets, the monopoly position of the A.U.S.N. Company in interstate and coastal trade was seen as being particularly detrimental to the growth of agriculture in North Queensland.

From the first European occupation of the area, farmers had demonstrated its potential as a supplier of fruit and other agricultural products, but the high costs of transporting the produce to markets threatened their viability. For instance, growers were paid one shilling (1/-) per bunch for bananas in Melbourne, which only covered shipping cost. They were also liable for Victorian customs duty of four pence (4d) per bunch. Despite the high cost of freight, shippers carried no

⁵⁹⁷ Charles Patching, Town Clerk, Cooktown, to The Town Clerk, Thursday Island, 31 March 1922. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁵⁹⁸ Geo. Schipke, Acting Town Clerk, Cooktown, to Mr. F. O'Beirne, Laura, 31 May 1923. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

responsibility for the fruit, which was often stolen or damaged in transit.⁵⁹⁹ Although it was supportive of the farmers, the Municipal Council was restricted in the type of assistance it could provide. Eventually it reduced the wharfage on bananas to one penny (1d) per bunch.⁶⁰⁰ Unfortunately, this level of assistance was not sufficient to make the trade viable, and agricultural produce, the single most promising renewable source of freight through the port at the time, proved unprofitable as an export product.

Timber.

Timber was one of the original exports from Cooktown, with red cedar logs being sent south for milling, and considerable funds were spent providing storage and loading facilities to accommodate this trade.⁶⁰¹ Trade declined after the turn of the century, but was revived in 1934, when Cairns sawmillers J.M. Johnston started a mill at Shipton's Flat, on the Annan River tin fields. The timber was shipped from Cooktown, and provided a boost to wharf revenue. For instance, over one third of wharfage revenue the following year came from timber.⁶⁰² Johnston later started another mill at Bloomfield River, and this timber was also ferried to Cooktown for transshipment. In 1941 Johnston expected to carry at least 100,000 super feet of timber by the launches *Bloomfield* and *Breasthook* to Cooktown for transshipment.⁶⁰³ The Council's vulnerability to commercial pressure was shown when Johnston asked for a reduction in charges to bring them in line with the Cairns Harbour Board, which levied six pence per hundred super feet of timber

⁵⁹⁹ Q.V.P. 1889, Vol. 4, pp. 74-75.

⁶⁰⁰ Cooktown Municipal Council Minutes, 19 September 1886.

⁶⁰¹ A total of 93 timber licenses were issued in 1888. This fell to 54 licenses in 1889. *Cooktown Courier*, 10 January 1890.

⁶⁰² Chairman's Report on the Financial Statement for the year 1934. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁶⁰³ J.M. Johnston to The Shire Clerk, Cooktown Shire Council, Cooktown, 28 May 1941. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

transhipped at the wharf.⁶⁰⁴ Despite its poor financial situation, the Council was forced to accede.

During the Second World War, timber sales soared to meet defence requirements, with regular monthly shipments from Cooktown to Sydney. The Council borrowed funds for wharf improvements to handle the increase. However, the entire timber industry in the district was placed in jeopardy by wartime restrictions on fuel. While the supply of logs at the mill site at Shipton's Flat was sufficient to service the trade, transporting the sawn timber from the mill to the wharf was threatened by fuel shortages.⁶⁰⁵ The trucks travelled almost fifty miles over rough terrain, and fuel consumption was high. In an effort to keep the trade going, the Council asked the Government to allocate more fuel during the dry season when cartage was possible, the excess to be credited against the wet season when road travel was impossible.⁶⁰⁶ Support came from both Federal and State Members of Parliament, and the Liquid Fuel Control Board was instructed to provide sufficient fuel for the timber to be carted.⁶⁰⁷ Despite the threat to fuel supplies, timber exports continued through the port, with over six million super feet of sawn timber exported between 1934 and 1944. One third was shipped between 1940 and 1945.⁶⁰⁸ Unfortunately, timber exports ceased temporarily in 1945 when the Shipton's Flat sawmill was sold.⁶⁰⁹

⁶⁰⁴ The Secretary, Cairns Harbour Board, Cairns, to The Shire Clerk, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown, 2 June 1941. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

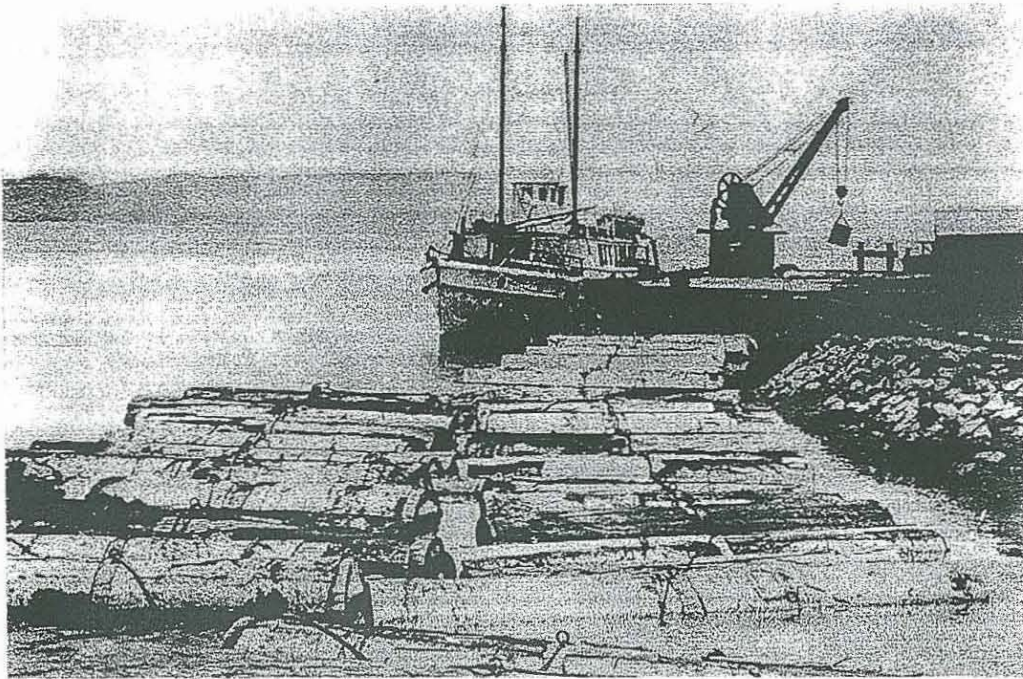
⁶⁰⁵ The Shipton's Flat mill was about twenty miles from Cooktown, and the road was particularly rough.

⁶⁰⁶ Shire Clerk, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown, to H.H. Collins, M.L.A., Parliament House, Brisbane, 11 August 1941. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

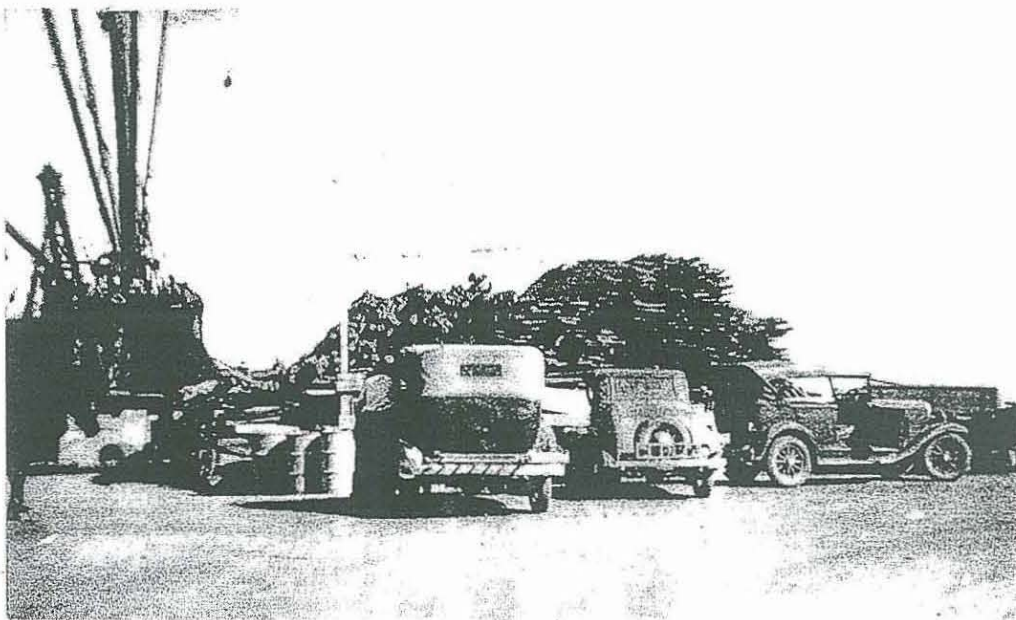
⁶⁰⁷ H.H. Collins M.L.A., to Cook Shire Council, 15 August 1941. J.F. Riordan, M.H.R. to Cook Shire Council, 20 August 1941. Cook Shire Council Minutes, 5 September 1941.

⁶⁰⁸ Shire Clerk, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown, to Messrs J.M. Johnston, Stratford Sawmills, Cairns, 15 February 1945. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

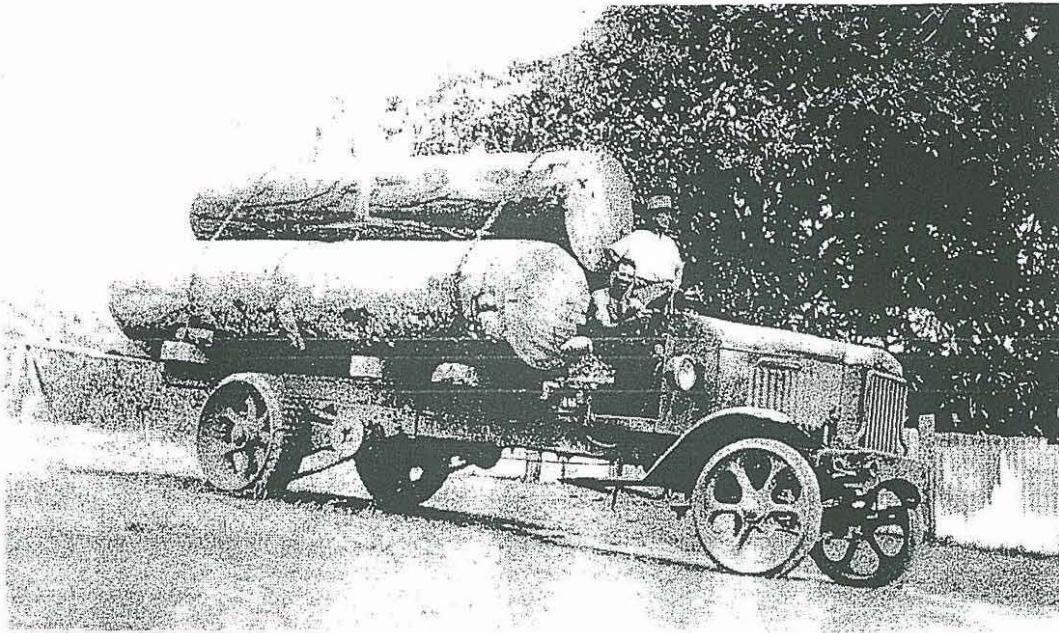
⁶⁰⁹ Shire Clerk, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown, to Secretary, Forestry Department, Brisbane, 20 June 1945. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.



Logs waiting for export, Cooktown wharf, c. 1940s. (Cairns Historical Society).



Milled timber waiting for export, c. 1940s. (Myrtle Jenkin).



Timber truck with load of logs, c. 1940s. (Myrtle Jenkin).

Eventually the sawmill was removed to Cooktown, thus allowing the resumption of timber exports from the port. In 1950 the remaining reserves available in the Bloomfield-Annan area were estimated by forestry officers at 250,000,000 super feet.⁶¹⁰ However, timber exports from Cooktown ceased when the sawmill closed in 1962. The mill was purchased by Rankine Bros in 1969, but the high cost of transporting timber to the market prevented a return to production.⁶¹¹

Naval presence.

The Council proved that it would take advantage of any situation to promote its port facilities and generate revenue. While Cooktown was used principally as a commercial port, it gained some trade in supplying naval ships of various nations. For instance the German naval warship *Albatross* took on coal at the Cooktown depot in 1879.⁶¹² The Council tried to take advantage of this situation and asked the Royal Navy to establish a naval base in the town.⁶¹³ As it did later with defence roads, the Council based its request for a naval presence on the area's strategic position as gateway to the north. It believed that the presence of an armed fleet would validate claims that Cooktown was of great strategic importance, and would recognise the harbour's importance. The idea was rejected, but the Council was undeterred. In 1885 it offered to provide an area for a coaling depot for the Royal Navy on condition that it would be used on a permanent basis.⁶¹⁴ The depot was established, and supplied coal for British naval ships until 1891, when

⁶¹⁰ Minister for Lands and Irrigation, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, to C.F. Wordsworth, M.L.A., Cairns, 6 June 1950. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁶¹¹ Trevor Rankine, Pers. comm, 12 July 1998.

⁶¹² *Cooktown Courier*, 10 December 1879.

⁶¹³ The Council moved to "entice" Admiral Tryon to establish a naval base in Cooktown. Cooktown Municipal Council Minutes, 29 May 1884.

⁶¹⁴ Cooktown Municipal Council Minutes, 6 May 1885. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

the Admiralty, on the advice of its Australian Admiral, moved the coaling station to Cairns.⁶¹⁵

A further attempt was made in 1923 to have a naval base established at Cooktown. The Cooktown Progress Association told the Prime Minister's Department that Cooktown offered "exceptional advantages" as a base for warships, and a depot for naval stores. The Secretary of the Association was not a man to let the truth interfere with a good request. He said that the harbour could hold the whole fleet with space to spare, and that more room could be provided by blocking the mouth of the river and cutting a new mouth about four miles to the north.⁶¹⁶ Despite the alleged advantages of the proposal, the Department of Defence said that it had no intention of establishing a naval base in the area.⁶¹⁷ Cooktown did not get a naval base, but was frequently visited by ships of the Royal Navy. The visits were usually marked by sporting contests between the crew of the various ships and local residents.⁶¹⁸ Even now the navy visits Cooktown each June for the re-enactment of the landing of Cook's *Endeavour* in 1770.⁶¹⁹

Burns Philp.

The port received a much needed boost in 1887 when the trading company Burns Philp established a branch in Cooktown.⁶²⁰ With

⁶¹⁵ *Endeavour Times*, 10 June 1891.

⁶¹⁶ G. Schipke, Secretary, Cooktown & District Progress Association, Cooktown, to The Chief Secretary, Prime Minister's Department, Melbourne, 14 August 1923, A457 1405/3, Australian Archives.

⁶¹⁷ Department of Defence, Melbourne, to Geo. Schipke, Secretary, Cooktown & District Progress Association, Cooktown, 10 September 1923, A457 1405/3, Australian Archives.

⁶¹⁸ For instance the local press mentions the crew of the *H.M.S. Boomerang* playing sports against a local team. *Cooktown Courier*, 26 May 1893.

⁶¹⁹ The navy sends a patrol boat to Cooktown for the Queen's Birthday celebrations each June. Members of the crew participate in the celebrations and often play sport with local clubs.

⁶²⁰ Buckley and Klugman, *The History of Burns Philp*, p. 31.

interests spread across the South Pacific, the company had strongholds in all the major North Queensland ports. Its interests were diversified, allowing it to remain a commercial force in the town long after more specialised businesses folded. The company initially purchased a wooden steamer to carry cargo between Townsville and Cooktown, but this vessel, the *Banshee*, foundered on its first voyage, with the loss of twenty lives.⁶²¹ In spite of the loss, Burns Philp extended its trade in 1888 with a monthly mail service between Cooktown and Samarai. Advertisements in the local papers informed the public that Burns Philp offered "regular communications with Dinner Island, Sudest and St Aignans by the schooner *Wanganui*, and with Port Moresby and Yule Island by the schooner *Lucy and Adelaide*". The company continued to expand its trading fleet, and increased its shore-based facilities at Cooktown to handle the growth. Its warehouses offered a full range of general merchandise, made "liberal advances" on a variety of goods placed with the company for sale in London, and offered Newcastle coal for sale.⁶²²

In 1890 Burns Philp expanded its operations when it purchased the premises and merchandise of the Cooktown merchants Thomas and Madden. This move gave Burns Philp control of the biggest emporium and store in Cooktown, and made available the significant trading contacts of the other company. The following year Burns Philp was servicing various mission stations in conjunction with its Cooktown to Papua-New Guinea shipping run.⁶²³ This move was fortunate for Cooktown, as there was a general slump in trade through the port during 1889. Customs revenue for Cooktown for October fell to £3,110,

⁶²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁶²² *Cooktown Courier*, 1 November 1889.

⁶²³ *Ibid.*, p. 54. *All About Burns, Philp & Company, Limited, Their Shipping Agencies, Branches And Steamers*, John Andrew & Co., Sydney, 1903.

a loss of £1,434 on the previous October.⁶²⁴ For many years Burns Philp maintained Cooktown as the centre of its North Queensland trading enterprise, and was instrumental in helping counter the town's decline.

In 1919 Burns Philp downgraded its presence in the town after its store was destroyed by fire. From being a central port of operations for Burns Philp, Cooktown was now reduced to a depot attached to the Cairns branch.⁶²⁵ This move was a direct result of the constant fall in trade through Cooktown. An example of the extent of the decline is the decimation of the fishing industry. In its heyday, Burns Philp had provided finance and credit to the operators of many vessels harvesting beche-de-mer and pearl-shell. By 1904 the returns from marine products had declined to such an extent that many operators couldn't even pay Burns Philp for their supplies.⁶²⁶

Parochial rivalry.

A significant factor in Queensland colonial life was the parochial rivalry evident between the supporters of the various ports. The economic struggle for survival was reflected in the rhetoric. The newspaper proprietors of the period lost no opportunity to denigrate the ports and facilities of "rival" towns. For instance, in September 1889 the Cooktown Courier reported on an article in the Cairns Chronicle critical of Cooktown's harbour. The Chronicle stated that two ships, the *Maranoa* and the *Bulimba*, had grounded at Cooktown in the same week. The editor of the Courier retaliated with a scathing attack on the harbour at Cairns. He said that it was so inferior that even if it had a

⁶²⁴ Cooktown Courier, 1 November 1889.

⁶²⁵ K. Buckley & K. Klugman, 1983. The Australian Presence In The Pacific: Burns Philp 1914-1946. George Allen & Unwin, North Sydney, p. 71.

⁶²⁶ Buckley and Klugman, The History Of Burns Philp, p. 130.

dredge working there permanently, the *Bulimba* could not access the wharf. The editor of the *Chronicle* was told that "ridiculing our harbour will never make a harbour at Cairns".⁶²⁷ However, the reality was that Cairns was already well on its way to replacing Cooktown as the premier port north of Townsville.

The editors of the various newspapers were not alone in promoting internecine rivalry. The Cooktown Chamber of Commerce also engaged in parochial rivalry in an effort to secure more Government funding for the area. When Hamilton, the local member of parliament, advised the Chamber that the Government had made no allocation in the 1890 budget for harbour works at Cooktown, the members of the Chamber accused the Government of trying to channel all inland trade through Townsville.⁶²⁸ The rhetoric reached absurd heights at times. A public meeting called to agitate for increased funding for Cooktown was told that "Cooktown is the mother of Cairns and Port Douglas and should have always a slice until her wants are supplied".⁶²⁹

Council's loss of bargaining power.

The decline of trade and economic activity placed Cooktown in a weak bargaining position with the principal shipping company operating from the port. The Council's vulnerability to commercial blackmail was demonstrated when the A.U.S.N. Co. Ltd. ceased using Cooktown as a transshipping port for Gulf cargo in 1894. Later that year A.U.S.N. told the Council that it would consider reinstating Cooktown as a transshipment port if wharfage fees were waived. The local wharf labourers were used as pawns. The Company pointed out that for the twelve months to August 1894 it had paid £3,555 for labour at

⁶²⁷ *Cooktown Courier*, 17 September 1889.

⁶²⁸ *Ibid.*, 18 October 1889.

⁶²⁹ *Ibid.*, 22 October 1889.

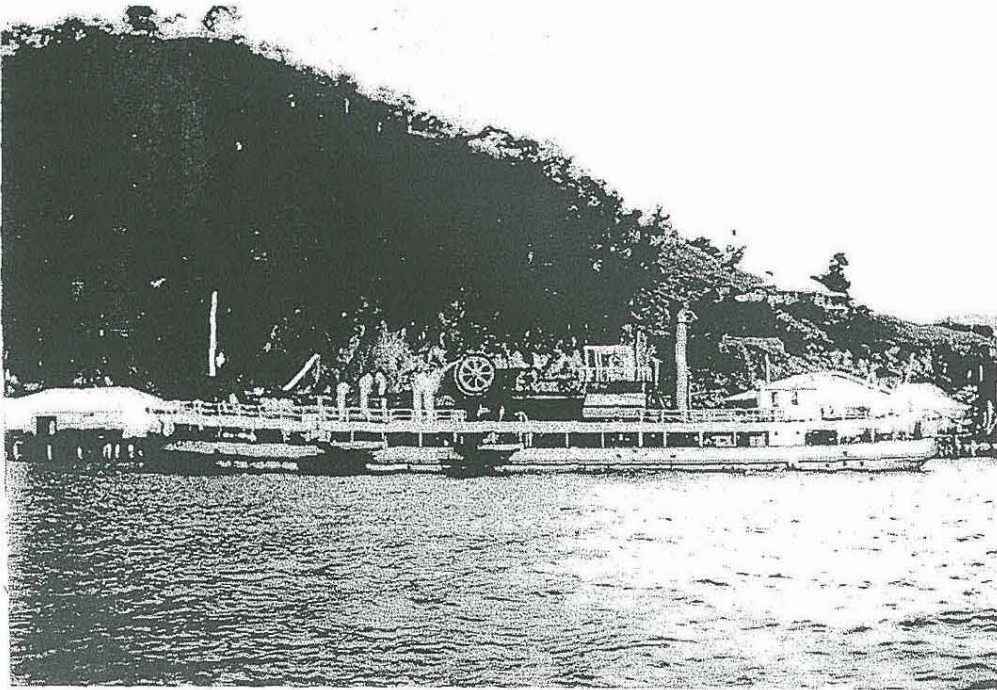
Cooktown port, but in the six months since it ceased transshipping there, labour payments had dropped to only £540. It argued that while the town would sacrifice some revenue if wharfage fees were waived, Cooktown would nevertheless profit from the increase in wages and sales of ships' stores. If no agreement could be reached with the Council, the Company intended making Townsville its transshipment port.⁶³⁰ The threat worked, and the Council had to reduce its charges drastically to retain the trade. The concessions were substantial and ongoing, with the Company forcing the Council to accept further cuts to its revenue. For instance, the Council's charges were reduced again from two shillings (2/-) per ton of cargo in 1897 to one shilling (1/-) in 1899. It was also forced to remove charges on coal transferred from vessel to vessel in port, and on the loading of ships' stores and water. Crane hire for loading and unloading vessels was also reduced dramatically.⁶³¹ It appears that "Company welfare", or to be more realistic, outright blackmail, is not a new phenomenon.

The Council was so intent on stimulating trade it was willing to consider a proposal that would circumvent its own monopoly on the wharf facilities. In 1899 a company planning a new mining operation made a tentative proposal to build a private wharf. It said the lower handling fees would help make the new project viable.⁶³² Despite its reliance on wharfage fees, the Council agreed, provided the Company only handled its own goods. However, the project failed to eventuate.

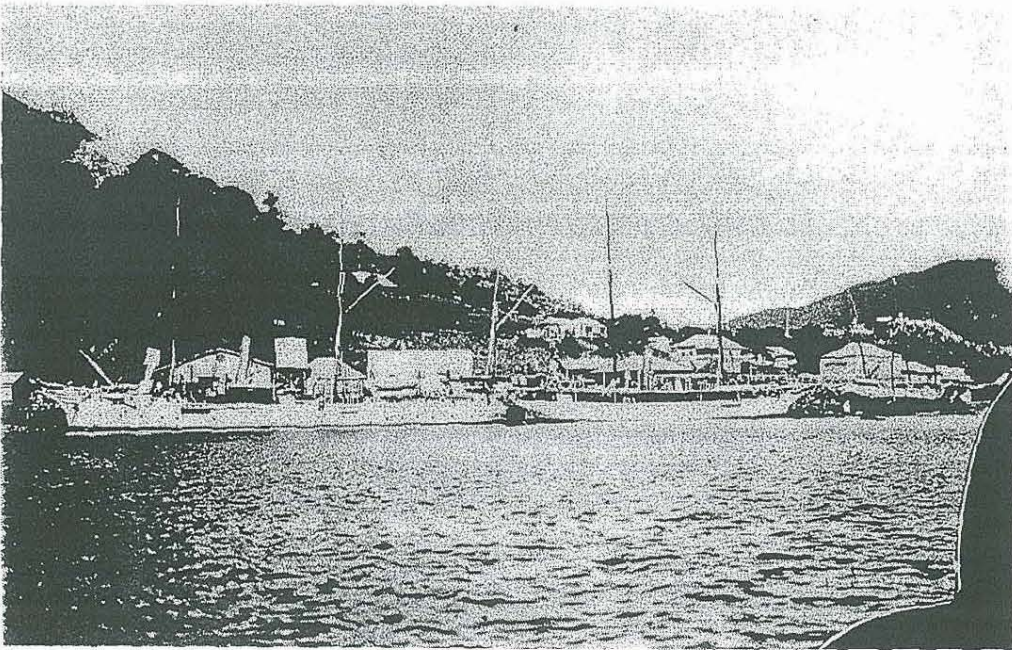
⁶³⁰ Australasian United Steam Navigation Co. Ltd. to The Mayor & Aldermen of Cooktown, 14 November 1894. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁶³¹ List of Concessions to A.U.S.N. Co. 1897-1899. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁶³² M.R. Lancaster to The Mayor and Council, Cooktown, 10 November 1899. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.



Dredge *Platypus*, Cooktown, c. 1900s. (Cairns Historical Society).



Shipping in Cooktown harbour, c. 1890s. (Cairns Historical Society).

The Council faced another example of commercial "blackmail" in 1902, when Fitzgerald Bros Circus asked it to reduce wharfage charges. Fitzgeralds claimed that the Cooktown wharfage fee of £1 per cage was the highest rate in Australia. At that rate they could not afford to take all their animals to Cooktown, and had been criticised because Cooktown residents saw a smaller version of their show.⁶³³ This type of commercial pressure is indicative of the problem faced by a town in decline. If the Council refused the request, it could be seen to be depriving the local population, and especially "the little kiddies", of a popular type of entertainment. The falling wharf revenue made the Council vulnerable to this type of threat, and if it resisted, it faced the possibility of losing trade through the port. On the other hand, by accepting lower fees it would have insufficient funds to maintain the infrastructure.

As the town declined, the Council became more vulnerable to threats to its port trade from customers wishing to limit their expenses. However its response was often governed by the legislation under which local authorities worked. This situation was illustrated in 1909 when timber millers from the Bloomfield area threatened to tranship in the roadstead rather than pay what they termed "excessive" wharfage and handling charges at Cooktown. The Council's rates were one shilling (1/-) per ton wharfage plus 6 pence (6d) per 100 super feet transshipment costs. The millers said they would take future timber shipments direct to Cairns if the charges weren't lowered, as there were no charges levied there. Rather than lose the trade altogether the Council asked the Government if it could remit some of the fees to the millers.⁶³⁴ The Crown Solicitor said that a local authority had only the power invested

⁶³³ Fitzgerald Bros to Municipal Council, Cooktown, 4 July 1902. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁶³⁴ The Town Clerk, Town Council of Cooktown, to H.A. Douglas, M.L.A., Parliament House, Brisbane, 19 February 1909, COL/021, Q.S.A.

in it by the Statutes, and therefore the Council had no power to discriminate in particular cases.⁶³⁵ It had to offer the same rate to all customers.

Council incompetence.

Despite Cooktown's complaints of Government neglect, some of the problems could be sheeted home to the Council, which was frequently criticised by Government departments for its sloppy handling of wharf finances. For instance in 1900 the Treasurer refused a Council request for £700 to repair the wharves because it had had used wharf revenue for road works instead of reserving it for maintenance.⁶³⁶ The Council was again criticised in 1911 by the Auditor General for its lack of accountability in collecting and recording wharfage dues. He suggested the Council introduce an efficient check system to account for all cargo and fees.⁶³⁷ Some improvements were made, but by 1921 the Council was up to its old tricks again. The Audit Inspector's report for that year complained that wharfage fees were used as a mainstay of Council finances, with most of the year's fees of £575 being spent on roads and other works. He said that all wharfage fees should be kept for wharf maintenance, less 10% to cover clerical fees.⁶³⁸

The repeated complaints from the Auditor finally resulted in the introduction of a new system of accounting at the wharves that allowed a systematic check on all transactions through the port. In 1934 the Chairman could report an increase in wharf revenue for the two

⁶³⁵ The Crown Solicitor, Department of Justice, to The Under Secretary, Department of Justice, 4 March 1909, COL/021, Q.S.A.

⁶³⁶ J. Hamilton to The Town Clerk, Cooktown, 13 November 1900. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁶³⁷ Auditor General to The Mayor, Cooktown, 12 July 1911. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁶³⁸ Chairman's Report on the Financial Statement for the year 1921, Cooktown Town Council. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

previous years, from £228 in 1932, to £413 in 1934.⁶³⁹ The trend continued in 1935, when revenue rose to £474.⁶⁴⁰ However, despite this type of short term revival, wharf revenue continued its general decline after gold exports ceased. When shipping was diverted from smaller coastal runs for military purposes during the First World War, the town suffered further. Cooktown's wharfage receipts for 1919, inclusive of wharfage rents, amounted to only £497.⁶⁴¹

Closure of customs service.

Trade through the port of Cooktown declined until it was not tenable to retain it as a customs port. In 1917 the Federal Government closed the Customs Branch, despite efforts by the Premier to have the decision reversed. He stressed that the closure would be a severe blow to Cooktown, and would reflect badly on both the State and Commonwealth Governments.⁶⁴²

In an effort to retain at least some customs presence in the town, a suggestion was made to combine the positions of State Harbour Master, Pilot and Customs officer. The move was supported and Thomas Robertson was appointed to the position. His duties included reporting on any foreign vessels entering or "hovering around" the port, and looking for illegal immigrants or contraband goods.⁶⁴³ For these onerous duties, Robertson was paid £20 per year.⁶⁴⁴ The position of

⁶³⁹ Chairman's Report on the Financial Statement for the year 1934, Cooktown Town Council. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁶⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 1935.

⁶⁴¹ The Town Clerk, Cooktown Town Council, to His Worship The Mayor And Aldermen Of The Town Council Of Cooktown, 8 April 1920. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁶⁴² T.J. Ryan M.L.A., to The Mayor, Cooktown Town Council, 17 February 1917.

⁶⁴³ Memorandum from O.S. Maddocks, Collector of Customs, Queensland, to The Comptroller-General, 28 February 1917, J1779 QS1962/26, Australian Archives.

⁶⁴⁴ O.S. Maddocks, Collector of Customs, to The Portmaster, Marine Department, Brisbane, 6 June 1917, J1779 QS1962/26, Australian Archives.

acting Customs Officer declined in importance to such an extent that remuneration fell to £10 per year in 1923, when the Assistant Lightkeeper at Grassy Hill was appointed to the position. However, the Government questioned the advisability of maintaining the position when the lighthouse was automated in 1927⁶⁴⁵ Cooktown's final link with shipping Customs was severed in 1919, when the Commonwealth Surveyor-General told the Council that the lease of the Customs shed at No. 3 wharf in Cooktown would be terminated from 31 January 1919.⁶⁴⁶

The demise of Cooktown as a port of importance was confirmed in 1930, when the Commonwealth Government offered the Customs site and buildings to the State Government. The Commonwealth said that if the offer was not accepted, the property would be offered for public purchase.⁶⁴⁷ However, the State Government had reduced the number of its employees in Cooktown and had no need for the property.⁶⁴⁸

Meteorological service.

In 1930 the threat to the North Queensland coast from cyclones led Cooktown residents to ask the Government to establish a meteorological station in the town to assist the shipping industry. They cited the town's position on the Torres Strait shipping route as an important factor in its favour. The Council pointed out that in addition to

⁶⁴⁵ Comptroller-General, Department of Customs And Trade, Melbourne, To The Collector of Customs, Queensland, 18 December 1926, J1779 QS1962/26, Australian Archives.

⁶⁴⁶ Commonwealth Surveyor-General, Melbourne, to The Town Clerk, Cooktown, 4 January 1919. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown. Cooktown retained the services of a Customs Agent in the late 1930s when aeroplanes on the New Guinea run landed.

⁶⁴⁷ John Beasley, for Prime Minister, Canberra, to The Honourable, The Premier of Queensland, 10 April 1930, A458, A1356/15, Australian Archives.

⁶⁴⁸ A.E. Moore, Premier of Queensland, to The Right Honourable, The Prime Minister of the Commonwealth, 21 June 1930. A458/1. A1356/15.

being situated within a cyclone-prone area between Cairns and Thursday Island, the reefs in the vicinity of Cooktown were close to the coast, making the area very dangerous to shipping in bad weather. Another factor in Cooktown's favour was the presence of a radio-telegraphy station in the town, enabling constant contact with the outside world, and with ships at sea.⁶⁴⁹ As was often the case in matters affecting the whole area, Cooktown sought, and received, the support of other northern Councils.⁶⁵⁰ The local post office subsequently became the meteorological reporting station in the area, and maintained the service until the 1980s, when it was relocated to the Cooktown aerodrome.

Cooktown's reaction to the decline.

As trade declined, the Council was placed in a dilemma in maintaining the wharves. As the timber wharves aged they fell further into disrepair, but there was less income to effect repairs. Locals claimed that the port was losing trade because of the poor condition of the wharves, and the editor of the Cooktown Courier called for new wharves to be built of stone. He said that as well as relieving unemployment in Cooktown, the project would "make the accommodation for shipping at Cooktown equally superior [sic] to that at other ports in Queensland, as the harbour is already superior to all others in the colony".⁶⁵¹ The Government obviously felt that stone wharves would do nothing to boost trade through Cooktown, and ignored the suggestion. Its reluctance to inject more funds into the area is understandable. Customs revenue for December 1890 amounted to only £2,228. This

⁶⁴⁹ Town Clerk, Cooktown to Commonwealth Meteorological Bureau, Melbourne, 17 March 1914. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁶⁵⁰ Town Clerk, Cooktown to The Clerk, Johnston Shire Council, Innisfail, 11 March 1914. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁶⁵¹ Cooktown Courier, 26 November 1889.

compared with £37,953 for the same period in 1889 and £43,295 in 1888.⁶⁵²

The "stone wharves" saga was revisited in 1951, but this time the Council wanted concrete wharves built. As before, the argument was that the continual need to repair the timber wharves was an unnecessary imposition on Council finances. With this in mind, when Treasury announced in 1951 that a new wharf and shed was to be provided, the Council asked for the wharf to be constructed of concrete. As with the stone wharves, Treasury considered that the extra expense of a concrete wharf could not be justified. The Department of Harbours and Marine had considered providing a reinforced concrete decking, but rejected the idea because it believed Cooktown would be better served if the local sawmill supplied timber for decking. Obviously the use of local timber was a boost to the town's economy, as the wharf and shed cost £10,250 to construct.⁶⁵³ Despite the wharves being repaired several times since then, the decking is still timber. However, the piles have been replaced with concrete.

As trade declined, Cooktown was threatened with the withdrawal of mail services. In many cases the town's reaction resulted in a victory over change. For instance, without consultation the Government moved in 1900 to exclude Cooktown from the new Gulf of Carpentaria mail contract. A significant number of local citizens protested, and the Council enlisted the support of various organisations, including the Commercial Travellers' Association. Sea transport provided the only means at that time for commercial travellers to service customers in remote coastal areas, and the omission of any town meant a loss of trade. However, the Association proved a fickle supporter, and

⁶⁵² *Cooktown Courier*, 3 January 1890.

⁶⁵³ V.C. Gair, Treasurer, Brisbane, to C.F. Wordsworth, M.L.A., Parliament House, Brisbane, 4 January 1951. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

withdrew its support after the Postal Department said that all steamers would call at Cooktown to take on a Pilot.⁶⁵⁴ Despite this "sell out", Cooktown's tenacity was rewarded when the A.U.S.N. Company agreed to reinstate the town on the Gulf Mail Service.⁶⁵⁵

Cooktown faced a similar situation in 1910 when the Postmaster General changed the Australian terminus for the Papua mail service from Cooktown to Cairns. The Chamber of Commerce lodged a protest, claiming that Cooktown was the better port of call, and that it was vital for local traders to have direct communication with Papua.⁶⁵⁶ Although the Postmaster would not reinstate Cooktown as the mail centre, he assured the Chamber that Cooktown would be a port of call on both the outward and inward voyages of the *SS Matunga*.⁶⁵⁷

The port continued to decline, but it was not because the locals "threw in the towel". In their desperation to attract more trade, they made some futile requests. For instance, in 1923 the Ratepayers Association asked for Cooktown to be made a "Port of Entry". Obviously its members were hoping this would attract overseas vessels to call.⁶⁵⁸ The Government said that while Cooktown had been declared a "first port of entry" under quarantine regulations to cater for vessels on the New Guinea route, this had become redundant when the port was closed as a Customs Port in 1917. As Cooktown had no foreign vessels calling at the port, there was no advantage in being classified a

⁶⁵⁴ Commercial Traveller's [sic] Association of Queensland to The Mayor, Cooktown, 1 February 1900. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁶⁵⁵ Superintendent of Post & Telegraph Department to The Mayor, Cooktown, 14 May 1900. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁶⁵⁶ Cooktown Chamber of Commerce, Cooktown, to The Honourable, The Postmaster General, Melbourne, 28 June 1910, A63 A10/7940, Australian Archives.

⁶⁵⁷ Atlee Hunt, Secretary, External Affairs, Melbourne, to The Secretary, Cooktown Chamber of Commerce, Cooktown, 12 December 1910, A63 A10/7940, Australian Archives.

⁶⁵⁸ G. Schipke, Cooktown Ratepayers Association, to W. Bamford, M.H.R., Parliament House, Melbourne, 29 August 1923, A457 AH 501/5, Australian Archives.

"port of entry".⁶⁵⁹ The Government's view was justified, as by 1928 only three coastal vessels were servicing Cooktown on a regular basis. These were the *Kallatia* from Brisbane, the *Cawnbar* from Sydney, and the *Merinda*, which was owned by Hales Magnetic Island Ltd.⁶⁶⁰

Cooktown's reaction to reduced services was varied, and even led the Council to consider purchasing its own boat. After the Second World War the shipping service to Cooktown became less frequent, and eventually only one boat called weekly. The Council saw the reduced service as a deterrent to trade, and pushed for a service that would be available not only to Cooktown, but settlements further north. It said such a Peninsula service would increase trade, and would also allow better access to medical aid for many more people. As no private operator could be induced to offer an improved service, the Council asked the Local Authorities Association if it could legally own and operate a launch service.⁶⁶¹ The Association said that the Act provided for a Council to offer public transportation and act in the interests of its constituents.⁶⁶² However, the project was dropped when the Treasurer advised Council that it had no power to buy and operate a launch, and a loan could not be considered.⁶⁶³

Second World War.

⁶⁵⁹ Director-General, Department of Health, to The Secretary, Prime Minister's Department, Melbourne, 28 September 1923, A457 AH501/5, Australian Archives.

⁶⁶⁰ Douglas Smith, Acting Officer of Customs, Cooktown, to The Collector of Customs, Brisbane, 8 March 1928, J1779 QS1962/26, Australian Archives.

⁶⁶¹ Shire Clerk, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown, to S.G. King, The Local Authorities Association of Australia, Brisbane, 16 September 1947. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁶⁶² Secretary, The Local Authorities Association of Queensland, Brisbane, to The Clerk, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown, 24 September 1947. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁶⁶³ Treasurer, The Treasury, Brisbane, to The Shire Clerk, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown, 19 September 1947. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

Cooktown wharf revenue was boosted by the presence of defence personnel in the area during the Second World War. In the absence of road access to the town, most of their requirements were delivered by sea. Initially the Australian Military Forces disputed the Council's right to levy wharfage fees on defence goods passing over the wharf.⁶⁶⁴ However, they found that although the Council could not charge the State Government wharfage fees, no such concession applied to the Commonwealth. The Council said it could not deviate from this policy as it had interest and redemption payments to meet on the facility.⁶⁶⁵ The trade proved lucrative for the Council. Complete documentation is not available, but Council records show that over a two month period in early 1944 the wharfage fees paid by the United States Water Division alone amounted to £916.⁶⁶⁶ Much of the cargo carried in this period was in the form of fuel being delivered in drums, and the return of empty drums.⁶⁶⁷ It is possible that the period 1942-1944 was one of the few times when the wharves produced a profit for the Council

Tourism.

The wharves played an important part in the early tourist industry in Cooktown. After the Second World War the town was serviced weekly by a launch owned by Hayles Magnetic Island Ltd, which maintained

⁶⁶⁴ District Finance Officer, District Accounts Office, Australian Military Forces, Brisbane, to Secretary, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown, 19 April 1944. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁶⁶⁵ Shire Clerk, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown, to District Finance Officer, District Accounts Office, Brisbane, 27 April 1944. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown. The Defence Department valued the four wharves for war damage compensation purposes at £3,750.

⁶⁶⁶ Headquarters, Base Area Command Two, Base Section Two, U.S.A.S.O.S., Water Transport Division, A.P.O. 704., Subject: Wharfage Dues, 13 April 1944. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁶⁶⁷ Wharfage Account, Cook Shire Council, to United States Army, Cairns, 2 February 1944. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown. Fees on full drums were 4/- per 40 cubic feet, while empty drums were charged at 2/- per 40 cubic feet.

the run until July 1975.⁶⁶⁸ The boat carried supplies for Cooktown and its hinterland, and provided the principal mode of transport for locals. As mentioned in chapter six, after the Second World War, Hayles' launches became increasingly important to the tourist industry.⁶⁶⁹ This service, which had delivered passengers and supplies to Cooktown and district for fifty-two years, was finally made redundant by the construction and upgrading of the Mulligan Highway. Tourism increased significantly in Cooktown during the boom of the 1980s, and, as noted in Chapter six, this led to the introduction of the fast catamaran service in 1986. The *Sundancer* took only about three hours to complete the trip between Cairns and Cooktown, and carried forty-five passengers.⁶⁷⁰ *Sundancer* was soon unable to cater for the increased trade, and in 1987 it was replaced by the *Quicksilver*, a much larger vessel that carried 150 passengers.⁶⁷¹ This service ceased in 1990, but Cooktown still has visits from sea-going tourists. Two small tourist boats call each week, and ships like the *Viking Princess* visit periodically. The town benefits from this trade, but as the larger ships stand offshore and deliver passengers by tender, the wharf facilities lie unused for many of these visits.

Conclusion.

Cooktown's decline as a port was inevitable, given its location and the lack of resources capable of replacing gold as an export. Following the decline of the Palmer River gold field, the best hope of providing the economic stimulus necessary to make the wharves at Cooktown viable was the discovery and exploitation of viable coal deposits in the district.

⁶⁶⁸ Hugh Lunn, "Things are crook in Cooktown", *The Australian*, 6 October 1975, p. 7.

⁶⁶⁹ The boat carried up to sixty passengers, many of them tourists. Ernie Kerr, interview.

⁶⁷⁰ *Far North Weekly*, 15 August 1986, p. 6.

⁶⁷¹ *Travel and Tourism*, June 1988, p. 5.

The failure to do this ensured the economic decline of the railway and the wharf, both of which were predicted to profit from the "black gold".

While secondary staples like tin, timber, and agricultural products were exported from Cooktown, none of these products was capable of providing an alternative to the primary staple gold. Over a long period tin mining generated considerable wealth, but the absence of significant ore bodies prevented large mining projects. Small-scale mining provided work for many individuals, but did not constitute an export industry capable of sustaining the wharf infrastructure. Similarly, although the timber industry exported through the port for many years, it failed to generate enough wealth to guarantee its survival. For some time it was hoped that agriculture would provide the stimulus to save Cooktown's position as an important port. However, while the district proved capable of producing a range of agricultural products, the lack of economic transport proved an insurmountable obstacle to success.

Although it could be argued that the decline of the port could not be avoided, there is little doubt that the actions of the Government exacerbated the town's problems. The Colonial Government's action in charging an excessive price for the wharf infrastructure placed an unrealistic economic burden on the Council, and hastened the decline of the town. While the members of the Council were willing participants in the purchase of the wharves, this in no way abrogated the Government from moral responsibility. The wharves were falling in profitability, and were in need of maintenance. The Government had already recouped the cost of construction plus a substantial profit. Despite this, it nevertheless sold them to the Council of a town already in the early stages of decline. The repayment of this debt, and the ongoing maintenance costs of the timber wharves, hindered the

Council's efforts to take full advantage of the export industries that replaced gold.

In addition to having offered the Council such a "poisoned chalice", Government action prevented the Council from taking advantage of the one project that could have helped pay off the debt. Its decision to build a new wharf for the railway project robbed the Council of wharfage fees on the materials used to build the line. Although the Government subsequently sold the wharf to the Council at a reasonable price, this merely placed a further burden of debt repayment and maintenance on the Council. Any increased trade generated by the railway could have been accommodated by connecting the line to one of the existing wharves.

At least three theoretical models have relevance to Cooktown's experience with its port facility. Undoubtedly it is a good example of Christaller's Central Place Theory. For the first ten years of its existence, it was the central port in Far North Queensland, but the absence of a viable alternative to the primary export, gold, saw Cooktown decline until it was eclipsed by Cairns. The decline of the Palmer River gold deposits saw a drastic reduction in the population of the hinterland, and a consequent decline in trade through the port. Gradually most of the commercial and public organisations with a significant presence in Cooktown shifted to Cairns, which became the central port north of Townsville.

Staple Theory is also highly relevant to Cooktown, as the port was established to support the staple gold. The failure of secondary staples such as coal, timber, agriculture, fishing or tin mining to successfully replace gold as a generator of wealth for the district ensured the economic decline of the port. In the absence of a sufficiently productive

hinterland to generate exports, the associated railway infrastructure failed to halt the decline of the port. Ironically, while the construction of a rail system between Cairns and its hinterland helped that port to expand rapidly, Cooktown's railway served only to add one extra wharf, with its associated maintenance costs, to a port already in decline.

Myrdal's theory also has relevance in understanding the inability to halt the decline of Cooktown as a port. The sale of the wharves to the local authority placed the Council in the position where it was forced to maintain the infrastructure with an ever diminishing income. The absence of a viable return from the wharves prevented the Council from maintaining them in a state fit to attract new business, or even to retain existing customers. Government funded maintenance diminished as trade declined, throwing a greater burden on the Council. In the absence of a significant intervention by Government, an action that could not be justified on economic grounds, the decline of the port structure at Cooktown continued. Cooktown's experience with its wharf infrastructure questions Myrdal's theory that a decline can be reversed only by a new source of economic stimulation, or by outside intervention. In this case, Government intervention in the form of the construction of the Cooktown railway provided a temporary stimulus to the local economy. However, the building of another wharf placed a further economic burden on a Council with a declining revenue base. Instead of stimulating the economy of the town, it inevitably aggravated the town's decline.

Given the absence of a viable remunerative alternative to the gold trade, the decline of Cooktown as a port was inevitable. Despite this, the residents of Cooktown continued to have faith in the importance of their port complex, and maintained pressure on the Government to fund improvements to the harbour and its facilities.

Cooktown Shipping Interchange					
Year	Vessels	Tons	Crew	Imports	Exports
1875				219 324	664 466
1876	120	79 707	6 098	214 371	691 272
1877	121	73 115	5 164	228 196	641 327
1878	139	77 636	5 140	132 915	456 965
1879	128	84 829	5 808	124 085	344 135
1880	144	89 046	5 790	134 945	290 390
1881	151	109 671	6 718	124 616	232 083
1882	150	123 461	6 631	122 798	211 728
1883	198	163 730	8 646	102 961	134 680
1884	254	213 753	12 067	117 876	96 864
1885	200	172 685	9 393	96 034	86 873
1886	202	172 182	9 213	99 676	85 548
1887	212	203 160	10 280	105 029	125 312
1888	208	189 348	9 274	151 795	176 093
1889	229	226 337	10 383	127 145	147 264
1890	180	208 182	8 957	73 811	109 236
1891	189	237 373	9 625	65 340	133 711
1892	152	181 887	7 261	56 923	108 868
1893	142	167 993	6 933	49 612	113 894
1894	145	177 332	7 324	39 073	80 945
1895	152	183 688	7 327	50 487	73 593
1896	157	187 311	7 799	63 973	91 865
1897	170	193 921	7 023	65 814	83 248
1898	139	150 945	6 501	53 648	85 534
1899	144	156 447	6 663	62 083	94 076
1900	135	135 179	5 424	41 114	95 220
1901	137	153 782	6 205	44 448	100 491
1902	135	158 813	6 575	59 821	92 788
1903	128	161 933	6 024	73 697	118 608
1904				65 889	
1905				62 041	106 504
1906				41 411	88 046
1907				36 879	73 261
1908				27 187	60 194
1909				32 777	54 218
1910				14 264	14 170
1911				4 116	3 810
1912				4 847	5 576
1913				3 731	8 037
1914				2 783	2 750
1915				6 433	6 356
1916				3 596	4 728
1917				1 997	984
Closed as a Customs Port 28.2.1917					

Cooktown shipping interchange 1875-1917. (Statistics of Queensland).