



WATERPORT HERITAGE RESERVE – A HISTORY PERSPECTIVE

THE BEGINNINGS OF PORT ELLIOT

In 1849 a Commission of Inquiry considered the issue of a port for the Murray River trade, investigating whether to construct a railway or a canal to a port in Encounter Bay as against work on the Murray Mouth. This Commission settled on a railway, and on a port in Horseshoe Bay under Freeman Nob. This was nearer than Victor Harbor and this together with the colony's still strained economy, was probably the motivation behind the decision. Time would show falseness of the reasoning.

Work commenced on the railway between Goolwa and Port Elliot in 1851, and large store sheds were built at each end of the line. Stables were also built for the horses which were to be the motive power on the line. The first cargo was moved along the line in December 1853 and the railway was completed on 18 May 1854.

PORT ELLIOT TOWN

The Government town of Port Elliot was surveyed in 1852, when the first public works, and the first hotel [now "Arnella"] were constructed. The hotel builder, old Thomas Dodd, in 1850 the only settler near Freeman Knob, started construction in that year well in advance of the port's development.

Port Elliot was declared a township in 1854. In its early years, much of the town's private settlement was located North of the later railway, in Dodd's Extension and Waterport, which was surveyed in 1856, while its public buildings and structures were concentrated in Port Elliot proper, towards Freeman Knob. At Waterport, several houses may actually predate the port. There were later established brickworks, a school, a store and cemetery, as well as the Police horse stables.

Port Elliot's major development was concentrated into the few years it survived as a port. Ships began to call regularly from 1852, with the largest number, some 85, calling in 1855. In that year work had finished on the breakwater, but soon after heavy seas dislodged the blocks and further undermined the ports reputation with the wrecking of 4 ships in 1856. As a result Victor Harbor was chosen to replace Port Elliot as the sea outlet for the Murray and took with it the trade and the dramatic development.

THE WELLS AT WATERPORT

The Government Works to establish the port included Australia's first reticulated water supply, from wells at Waterport (about 1 km north of the bay) to a tank above the jetty which provided fresh water for ships as well as for the town. In 1864 after a number of disastrous shipping losses in Horseshoe Bay the railway was extended to Victor Harbor which provided safer access for ships. Port Elliot's role as a port ended, with the bay and jetty being left to the fishermen and beachgoers.

Today's heritage listed well is the remains of the gravity fed water system which was completed in 1853 to provide a supply of water to shipping and local residents at Port Elliot.

Water for the Port and the town – the start

In July 1852 The Colonial Architect William Hays reported that three springs with excellent quality water were located about one mile from the Port Elliot harbour. The site of the springs was sufficiently elevated, at 61 feet [18.5m] above the level of the jetty, to supply water to the jetty and town by means of gravitation.

Hays reported that: *'The execution of works for the conveyance of this water to the town and harbour was therefore determined on, for the double purpose of supplying the shipping and the inhabitants.'*

Work had commenced on constructing a four inch galvanized iron pipe from the springs to a tank near Horseshoe Bay. Water was taken to the jetty from the tank by a 2 inch [5cm] cast iron pipe. At the jetty a hose and valve were used to supply water to ship's tenders which carried casks for the purpose and were able to come alongside the jetty. A pump was placed at the tank from which the residents of Port Elliot were able to draw their supply.

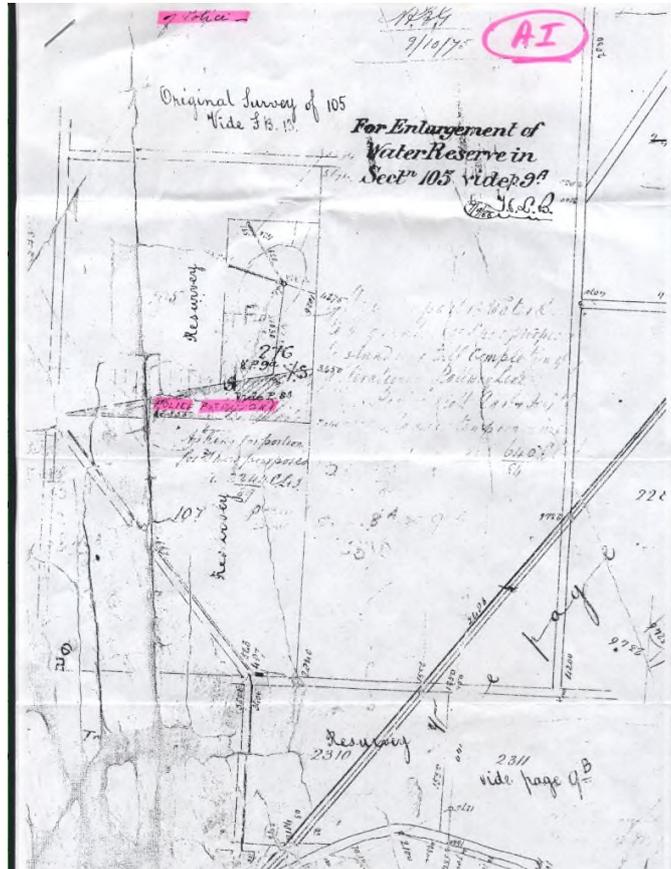
Three wells were sunk near the springs to catch the water and channel it into the pipeline. The wells with a diameter of about five feet [1.5m] and a depth of about 8 feet [2.5m] were lined with dry brickwork. The wells were connected by covered brick channels whose purpose was to prevent the brackish surface water from entering the system. The system was used until Port Elliot was connected to the South Coast water supply system in about 1914.

From the wells the water had to be conveyed to the jetty area, a distance of about a mile [1.6km] in which the ground level dipped about 20 feet [6m]. Hays described the work undertaken in some detail: *'The water is conducted from the springs by a 4 inch pipe. Cast iron piping not being procurable in the colony at a less price than 40 shillings per cwt., the necessary economy precluded its use, accordingly galvanized tinned iron was used. To compensate as much as possible for the want of durability in this material when laid underground, the pipe was carefully bedded throughout in fine concrete of a thickness of 4 inches all round it. Thus, should the pipe ultimately corrode away, a clear and indestructible channel would remain in the hardened concrete, the pressure from the head of water not being too great for this material to stand.'*

The pipes carried the water to a tank sunk in the ground 'at the corner of the Government Reserve, and immediately adjoining the township'. This was located on the high ground overlooking Horseshoe Bay, on the same level as the wells about 1 mile [1.6km] away. The tank, measuring 24 feet long, 8 feet wide and 8 feet deep [7.5m x 2.5m x 2.5m] was lined with brickwork. The bottom and sides were 9 inches [22cm] thick and two cross walls supported the sides. As the tank was built in sandy soil, clay was used to line the outside of the tank to ensure that it remained watertight. The roof of the tank covered with timber planks and soil. *'By this means the water is preserved at an agreeable temperature in all seasons.'*

A self-acting sluice will be attached to the four inch pipe, leading into the tank, which will keep it always full. This sluice, also, will be capable of adjustment; by which the flow of water can be regulated as desired – either stopped entirely, or suffered to run constantly as fast as yielded by the source. An overflow pipe will be connected with the tank, leading into an open trough, for the use of cattle employed

on the tram road. By this means, also, a supply can be granted to the inhabitants of the township and neighbourhood, under such regulations as it shall be thought proper to provide. The tank being kept at all times full, an ample supply will always be in readiness for vessels.



Original Plan for Section 276

It is not known if the tank still exists, but it would have been located in the area now occupied by the Soldiers Memorial Gardens.

The works were completed by the end of 1853.

The cost of the works was estimated at £1,085 for the water supply plus £400 for the purchase of the necessary land.

Notes from old plans held by Old Systems Section, Land Services Group, Dept. of Admin Services SA. They detail the purchase of Section 276 as a portion of the original Section 105 at the area now known as Waterport.

Plan in the Hundred of Goolwa for Section 105:

For Sec. 276 vide L & S 9042/27

"Portion of this section containing 26 Acres, 0 Rods 20 Perches was purchased by the Gov't. for the Port Elliot Waterworks for £1,175.12.6 @ £45 per acre as per Conveyance to Boyle Travers Finniss the Colonial Secretary on behalf of the Gov't. dated 25.10.1855 and registered No 284 Book 92 in the General Registry Office. Also Audit Office Schedule 824 of 1855875/19 S.G.O.

Hays waterworks required little maintenance apart from that on the pump at the tank and provided a reliable supply of water until the 1870's. In the summer of 1872-3 the supply pipes eventually corroded and became blocked, causing the supply to fail and 'much inconvenience to the townspeople'. Repairs were made in the middle of 1873 only after petitions from the locals. The works continued to supply the town until Port Elliot was connected to the main south coast water supply in the early 20 century.

The Wells Today.....

Only one well now remains on the site in original condition^[7], with one other well still existing but rebuilt as a garden feature, whilst the third well has been filled in and built over. The remains of the channels adjacent to this well were located during restoration work.



The original southeastern well undergoing restoration by the Friends of Waterport Heritage Reserve.

This site represents the first relatively large scale hydraulic engineering project in South Australia. The gravity fed system was an integral part of the development of Port Elliot as the sea port for the Murray River trade. The completion of this project before the reticulated supply for Adelaide [completed in 1860 after much debate and procrastination] reflects the importance placed on the town and the use of the Murray as an interstate trade route.

THE OLD POLICE STABLES - WATERPORT

The old Police Stables once located on the Public Road reserve^[1] [Kurramin Court^[1]] in the southwest corner of Section 276 were built in the then “Government Paddock”^[2] sometime after 1853, but before the survey of the area known as the Township of Waterport, which took place in 1856^[1].

Following the establishment of Port Elliot as a township in 1852, a basic stable building adjacent to the Police Station in Young Street was built circa 1852/53, presumably to house those horses needed immediately for work. The Government Gazette of the 1st of March 1855^[3] called for tenders to complete the stable at the Port Elliot Police Station, presumably a more permanent building. The Gazette of the 4th of February 1858^[4] called tenders for a new stable to be erected in conjunction with alterations to the Police Station. During this time the Police Paddock^[5] continued in use as the repository for police horses being rested from duty.

On the 25th of October 1855, the SA Government purchased a portion of Section 105 which contained the recently completed Port Elliot Waterworks^[6]. The land purchased was defined as Section 276, and contained three wells which supplied fresh water to ships and the fledgling township. The Police Stables and Police Paddock became incorporated into the Government Reserve at this juncture. Reference 5 subsequently refers to Section 276 as a ‘Water Reserve’.

An annotation on Reference 5 notes that in 1884 a portion of the Reserve was temporarily granted to the Southern Agricultural & Horticultural Society for use as a “*Show Res.*” or “*Show Gd.*”, which did not however include the Police Stables, based on the plan boundaries. It is most likely that this was the period when Police use of the Paddock declined or perhaps even ceased. A further annotation on Reference 6 states as follows: “*Portion shaded placed under control of the Southern Agricultural & Horticultural Society by permit vide C.L.I. 2244/89 4³/₄ acres. See Page 9^A.*” Reference 5 also notes the date for this transfer as 29th August 1889.

A subsequent annotation on Reference 6 states “*Land for Show purposes has never been used vide S.G’s Minute 14/6/28 in L&S 9042/27*”.

At the turn of the century section 276 was under lease for grazing^[6] with Mr. W. J. Dodd, and others noted as lessees.



The Old Police Stables before and after restoration.

Both the remaining water supply well and the Stables have been restored by The Friends, with the Stables formally re-opened during 2006, and the well restoration completed in 2008.

[1] Plan N^o: 30/1856 - *Plan of the Township of Waterport* - registered 19th January 1856.

[2] Tolley, J. C. 1968, *South Coast Story: A History of Goolwa, Port Elliot, Middleton and the Murray Mouth*, D. C. of Port Elliot & Goolwa.

[3] SA Government Gazette 1st March 1855 Page 190.

[4] SA Government Gazette 4th February 1858 Page 100.

[5] LTO Plan assoc. with Reference [6] – refers to "Police Paddock".

[6] Reference to '*General Registry Office Book 92 N^o: 284*' & '*Audit office Schedule 824 Of 1855*' – defined on Page 9^A plan pertaining to the H^d of Goolwa – Old Systems Section, Land Services Group, Dept. of Admin. & Information Services SA.

[7] State Heritage Register 14th September 2000 – File N^o: 18210.