

Gerringong Co-operative Navigational Company - 1870s

In August 1869 Captain Alexander Buchanan decided to relocate his 20 ton coastal sailing ship, the AGENORIA, from Gerringong and operate it solely from Wollongong whilst leaving his second vessel, the WILLIAM & ANN, to continue working the Gerringong trade.¹

Immediately the AGENORIA was relocated, the Illawarra Steam Navigation Company seized its opportunity to venture down to Gerringong by trialling one of its steamers, the PERSEVERANCE.

Although the trial was less than impressive, [the steamer embarrassingly was so underpowered that it had to hoist its sails to make headway against a stiff north-easterly when leaving Boat Harbour]² the I.S.N.C. advertised three weeks later, that:

*'The Steam Tender PERSEVERANCE will leave Gerringong every TUESDAY at 9.a.m. And the Shoalhaven steamer will also call every THURSDAY about 9 a.m. Freights at Kiama rates. Mr. A. Campbell Agent-Gerringong.'*³

This new service had little success however, as many farmers in outlying areas found it almost impossible to deliver their produce to Boat Harbour in time for the steamer's 9 a.m. departure.

December 1869 saw the AGENORIA again join the WILLIAM & ANN back at Gerringong⁴ and both vessels continued to trade there until March 1870 when '*a season of unprecedented wet and stormy weather rendered it impossible for any sailing vessel to make regular trips between Gerringong and Sydney*'.

Once again '*The Illawarra Steam Navigation Company*' stepped in and '*whether from a desire to accommodate the Gerringong shippers or to run off the two sailing vessels, decided to provide a produce pick-up van [drawn by two horses] from Kiama to Gerringong and the Foxground under the management of Mr. Bullen.*'⁵

The outlying farmers '*gladly availed themselves of the van service and completely forgot about poor Buchanan who now saw his freight being taken by van to Kiama by those who had promised to support him through thick and thin*'.⁶

Totally flabbergasted by what was taking place, Captain Buchanan decided to 'pull the plug' and withdrew the AGENORIA immediately and then later the WILLIAM & ANN, from the South Coast coastal trade.⁷

In June 1870, he advertised the AGENORIA for sale.⁸

In order to have some certainty of shipping the local produce to Sydney, a public meeting was then called to discuss a proposal for the formation of a Gerringong Co-operative Navigational Company, along similar lines to that which had already been set up by the farmers of Shellharbour.

In July 1870, local dairymen and store-keepers crowded the Lanterrick Hotel to discuss the local proposal..⁹

Robert Miller Jnr. J.P. [Sandy Wha farmer] was voted to chair the meeting.

Enthusiastic speeches were presented by James Perkins [store-keeper] and Stephen Major, [a

recently arrived resident - Postmaster & store-keeper] and all present were unanimous about forging ahead.

However, after an active canvas, not more than 247 shares at £1 each were taken up, of which S. Major purchased 100.¹⁰

Following the meeting, the G.C.N.C. was never the less formed.

Amongst its Directors were E. Robson, Chairman [Rose Valley farmer], James Perkins, Secretary, Stephen Major and Robert Miller Jnr.

As insufficient funds had been raised to purchase a **steam** vessel, *'the [20 ton sailing vessel] AGENORIA, which has already been two years in the trade while the property of Mr. Buchanan, has been purchased from Buchanan and was expected to make her first trip on Tuesday, 13 August'*¹¹ with a Captain Fell as its new master.¹²

In the meantime, the Company Directors poured all available resources into getting Boat Harbour operational.

James Perkins had a flagstaff erected on the Cemetery hill where a flag could be hoisted to notify local farmers and residents whenever the AGENORIA arrived.¹³ [Other flagstaffs were located at the homes of Bailey and Devery to notify the farmers of Toolijooa and Foxground.]¹⁴

A Company office was set up in the cargo storage shed at Boat Harbour and tenders were called for a person to act as agent. [Stephen Nutter – Caledonian Wharf, King St. Sydney and Mr. James Perkins at Gerringong on £1 per week was accepted].

A call was also put out for parties willing to assist in unloading and loading vessels when in port.¹⁵ [As there was no Jetty at the time, produce still had to be carried out to the vessel through the swirling water or else rowed out].

The Company's first weekly consignment aboard its own ship, AGENORIA, consisted of 60 kegs of butter, 50 hides, 4 bales of bacon and 20 bales of skins. It left Gerringong on 14th August 1870 and arrived in Sydney 15th August.¹⁶

Initially, the greatest drawback for the Company was the scarcity of produce, as at that time of year, (August) farm and dairy produce was at its lowest.¹⁷



Gerringong Co-operative Navigation
Company.

THE shareholders in the above company are requested to attend a special meeting to be holden in the company's store, Boat Harbour, on SATURDAY, the 8th instant, at 7 o'clock p.m.
Business important. Shareholders attend.

M. E. ROBSON,
Chairman.

However as spring arrived, it soon became apparent that one vessel would find it extremely difficult coping with the increased volume of produce.

In the next eight months the AGENORIA made more than 20 trips to Sydney carrying 1636 kegs of butter, 391 pigs, 70 calves, 54 coops of poultry, 129 cases of eggs, 535 bundles of hides and skins, 2500ft of timber, 92 sides of bacon and 5 bags of grass seed.¹⁸

On 24 April 1871, there was great jubilation throughout the District when Governor Somerset Richard, Earl of Belmore, issued a Government Proclamation declaring:

*'that the Gerringong Ward of the said Municipality of Kiama shall be and that the same hereby is separated from the said Municipality, and is also hereby divided into and constituted two separate and distinct Municipalities, under the names and styles of the "Municipal District of Gerringong" and the "Municipal District of Broughton's Vale".*¹⁹

Following polling on 2nd June, the nine newly elected Gerringong aldermen met on the 4th and elected Alderman Robson to be Gerringong's first Mayor.²⁰ Council Meetings were held in a building adjoining the Lanterrick Hotel.²¹ [Site today: Jock's Bakery & Cafe].

Just when everything appeared to be running smoothly shipping-wise; disaster struck.

On the 25 April, 1871, The Illawarra Mercury and later The Kiama Independent and Shoalhaven Advertiser on 27 April, 1871, reported that:

'the AGENORIA was on the rocks at Blackhead...she came down (from Sydney) with a fresh north-easter, and was... unable to make her usual moorings in the harbour, (Gerringong) so that Captain Fell thought it best to go onto Black Head and remain there for the night... early in the morning, when in the act of weighing anchor and setting sail to come round to Gerringong, a gust of wind came up from the south and drove her onto the rocks in spite of all the efforts to prevent it.'

Scores of people rushed to help remove her 14 tons of cargo to dry land.

Kedges were then placed in various positions and at high tide she was refloated and despatched 'in ballast' directly to Sydney for all necessary repairs.²²

During the four weeks it took for the repairs to be carried out, Kiama's I.S.N.C.s horse-drawn van picked up produce from around the district for shipment from their wharf at Kiama Harbour.

Once repaired, the AGENORIA came back into service still under the command of Captain Fell. As patronage was extremely poor, Captain Fell was sacked and replaced by Captain Harris.

This change of Masters however made no difference as the damage had already been done.

The volume of produce delivered for shipment by the AGENORIA never recovered to what it was prior to the accident.²³

PUBLIC NOTICE.

THE undersigned begs to inform the inhabitants of Gerringong, Foxground, and Broughton Village that he has commenced the business of

CARRIER OF PRODUCE, &c.,
between the above-named places and Kiama.

The team will be at the School-house, Foxground, every MONDAY and FRIDAY, at twelve o'clock noon, and at Tate's, Broughton Village, about two o'clock same days.

Having taken a storeroom from Mr. Joseph Perkins, of Gerringong, produce intended to be taken to Kiama can be left there, and will be promptly attended to.

Small kegs butter from Broughton Village and Foxground, 9d., and large ditto, 1s. each; and from Gerringong 3d. a keg less.

All other produce proportionately cheap.
The greatest care taken, and empties returned punctually free of charge.

JAMES SHARMAN.

In June 1872, to make things worse, a second horse-drawn van, independently operated by James Sharman, *'begs to inform the inhabitants of Gerringong, Foxground and Broughton Village that he has commenced the business of CARRIER OF PRODUCE, &c., between the above-named places and Kiama.'*

Unlike the I.S.N.C.s van however, a fee was charged for Sharman's service but he did have one advantage over the I.S.N.C.s van, by providing a delivery and pick-up service from local business stores.²⁴

In July 1872, Gerringong was devastated when a stump-fire lit by the Nelson boys in Willow Vale, flared out of control.

Roaring across the dense scrub in an easterly direction, it soon had Gerringong at its mercy. With no town water available, the courageous residents were powerless to stop its fury and in next to no time, the fire had devoured houses, shops, the Church of England Church and School as well as the Lanterrick Hotel and the Council building.²⁵

Following the fire, in which all Council's documents perished, Council used the office of the G.C.N.C. at Boat Harbour to conduct its meetings.²⁶

The Government appointed the Company Chairman and Mayor, E. Robson as pilot for Boat Harbour.²⁷

February 1873 saw the beginning of the end for G.C.N.Cs. venture into shipping when the Parramatta River steamer ALCHYMIST arrived to take produce to Sydney.²⁸

A meeting on the 8th March for all shareholders in the G.C.N.C. was called for at the company's store at Boat Harbour²⁹ where it was explained that the freights of the AGENORIA were not covering its cost and the company was now £120 in debt.

It was unanimously agreed that Mr. Robson should travel to Sydney to sell the vessel, which he did so successfully and all debts were wiped.³⁰

Throughout the next three years various vessels such as the THISTLE³¹ arrived at Boat Harbour on an ad hoc basis but there was little for them to carry, as the bulk of the district's produce was by now either being transported to Kiama Harbour free of charge by the I.S.N.Cs. van or by James Sharman's privately run van.

1. Sydney Morning Herald – Coastal Shipping 28 August, 1869.
2. Kiama Independent 31 August, 1869
3. Kiama Independent, 23 September, 1869
4. Kiama Independent, 25 November, 1869
5. Kiama Independent, Editorial Correspondence – S. Major - 14 November, 1872
6. Kiama Independent, Editorial Correspondence – S. Major - 14 November, 1872
7. Sydney Morning Herald, *Coastal Shipping Feb.-July 1870*
8. Sydney Morning Herald. 4 June, 1870
9. *Australian Town & Country* 23 July, 1870
10. Kiama Independent Editorial Correspondence – S. Major - 14 November, 1872
11. Kiama Independent, 11 August, 1870
12. Kiama Independent, 18 August, 1870
13. Miller, Ken. *Gerringong Shipping and Shipwrecks 1820 -1893*
14. Emery, Clive - *Mystique & Relevance of Boat Harbour 2000*
15. Kiama Independent, 18 August, 1870
16. Sydney Morning Herald, 16 August, 1870
17. Kiama Independent, 11 August, 1870
18. Sydney Morning Herald, 16 August, 1870 – 18 April, 1871
19. *Supplement to the N.S.W. Government Gazette* 24 April, 1871 No.91 p. 957
20. Kiama Independent, 8 June, 1871
21. Kiama Independent, 29 June, 1871
22. Kiama Independent, 22 May, 1871
23. Kiama Independent, 26 August, 1871

24. Sydney Morning Herald, 4 July, 1872
25. Kiama Independent, 20 June, 1872
26. Kiama Independent, 29 August, 1872
27. Kiama Independent, 14 November, 1872
28. Sydney Morning Herald, 10 February, 1873
29. Kiama Independent, 6 March, 1873
30. Kiama Independent, 13 & 27 March, 1873
31. Sydney Morning Herald *Coastal Shipping* 14 May, - 18 June, 1873

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