



# FOPIA Newsletter

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## Past Voices from the "*Platypus*"

Since 1926, the rusting hulk of the dredge "*Platypus*" has been a well-known landmark for boaties frequenting the waters surrounding Peel Island. But not for much longer.....



All that remains of the "*Platypus*" today - Photo courtesy of Peter Ludlow

The "*Platypus*" was sunk on Thursday, 21 October, 1926 and, with time and tide about to claim its final vestiges, it seems appropriate to revisit some of its history, both as a dredge and as a breakwater.

**On Tuesday, 26 October, 1926, the *Daily Mail* reported :**

THE "*PLATYPUS*"  
MAIDEN VOYAGE  
ADVENTURES RECALLED

Mr. A. Lores of Kennedy Terrace, Red Hill, on seeing in The Daily Mail the photograph of the dredge "*Platypus*" on her way to be sunk, forwarded an interesting description of the voyage of the dredge to Brisbane.

He writes:- I am sorry the "*Platypus*" has gone to her last resting place. If I had known I would have sought a last sail on her, for I loved the old boat. I am glad that she has been doing good service to the State. However, old boats must give way; a new "*Platypus*" is coming.

## THE CREW DESERTED

I was one of the crew that brought her here. She left Glasgow with a full crew signed on at one shilling a month. Outside, she met with bad weather and the crew became frightened. The boat turned back and ran into Waterford, Ireland. There the crew deserted. Then a second crew signed on in Glasgow. I shipped as steward. We were sent to Waterford, went on board, hove anchor and went to sea. We had great fun at sea: all boats passing us hoisted their flags, thinking we were a man-of-war, but were disgusted when they found we were only a dredge.

In the Bay of Biscay we had a bad time. A sailor of many years, I did not think we would get through. The boat was leaking all over; the water was coming into our bunks through the deck. After passing out of the bay, the first morning we sighted the "*Duke of Buccleuch*", a passenger steamer, between two rocks in distress. We made for her; when we got near we saw some steamers going to her aid and so we went on our course.

## STOWAWAYS ON BOARD

We called at Gibraltar, had a good time, and then experienced fine weather. Port Said was our next port of call. We had a bad time through the Suez Canal; the boat did not steer well. Only one man, a German sailor, could steer her and he was at the wheel all the time. We had fine weather to Colombo and, when we left there, two days out, six stowaways came on deck in the morning. They had been in the bunkers two days and nights. The captain told them he would deliver them to the first man-o-war he met. However, he changed his mind. They were put on half rations and had to carry coals from forward to the bunkers all day. When we reached Brisbane we let go the anchor at the Customs House and the stowaways got away. The crew were paid off and I got work next day.



*"Platypus I" and Stone Jetty 1956-7 - Photo courtesy of Barbara Walker*

**On Thursday, 21 October, 1926, the *Daily Mail* reported :**

END OF "*PLATYPUS*"  
DREDGE TO BE SUNK  
PEEL ISLAND BREAKWATER

Today, after 42 years service in dredging various harbours and tidal rivers in Queensland, the dredge "*Platypus*" is to be sunk off Peel Island to make a breakwater at the lazaret station. The old vessel, assisted by the dredge "*Casuarina*", was taken down the river yesterday morning and, at a suitable state of the tide today, will be sunk. Mr. E. A. Cullen, engineer for Harbours and Rivers, intends being present.

The "*Platypus*" was built in 1883 by Messrs. Simons and Co. of Glasgow for the Queensland Government at a cost of £33,850 and arrived in Brisbane on June 28, 1884. She is a self-contained dredge, carrying 800 tons. Her speed is 7½ knots. Built of iron, she has twin screws and a length of 189 feet, with a breadth of 38 feet 7 inches and a depth of 14 feet 2 inches.

The "*Platypus*" did useful work in dredging at Cairns, Townsville, Normanton, Thursday Island and Cooktown. She was engaged in the Brisbane River for many years carrying out notable work in deepening the river and in cutting away Kangaroo and Gardens Points. Prior to being taken to Peel Island, the "*Platypus*" was dry docked and stripped. The old dredge is to be replaced by "*Platypus II*", which is now under construction. The new dredge will be 200 feet long, 40 feet wide and 16 feet deep. She will have a hopper capacity of 800 tons and the draft, fully loaded, will be 13 feet. She will steam at nine knots, fully loaded. The "*Platypus II*" is a stern well bucket hopper dredge of seagoing type, classed 300 AJ, at Lloyd's.



The "*Platypus*" deck in the 1950's - Photo courtesy of Ray Cowie

**In Peter Ludlow's book, "*Peel Island Paradise or Prison*", a Lazaret Patient at Peel Island from 1943-1954 known as "Jim" (initials B.W.), provided the following stories :**

For the men patients, fishing was a major pastime. Some had boats that they moored just below the men's compound. Several patients constructed a jetty there, using Ti-Tree posts cut from the surrounding bush. Favourite fishing spots included the coral reef just off the lazaret and the reefs around the hulk of the dredge, "*Platypus*", at the stone jetty. At times the patients would moor their boats alongside the "*Platypus*" and sleep the night on her decks ready for an early start to the next day's fishing. Schnapper were in abundance then, as well as Parrot fish, the largest of which was some 10 lb. There was also reputed to be a 500 lb. Groper living in the vicinity of the "*Platypus*", a rumour that was to persist for the next half century. Red and Yellow Sweetlip, Cod, Sole, Taylor and Flathead were also caught in abundance.

Sharks, too, were very common around Peel. Not only were they present in great numbers, but their size was also enormous - Junta King, onetime launch master of the "*Karboora*" saw two 20 foot White Pointers intertwined in their mating ritual on the surface of the water between Peel Island and Dunwich.

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