



HELM



Heritage of East Lake Macquarie

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THE SWANSEA BRIDGES

One of the senior members of our community remembers stories by her Nana, one of the early pioneer settlers, of crossing the channel with horse and buggy after waiting for low tide – not always timely and convenient. The first regular transport service across the channel was a ferry operated by William Boyd for about 15 years. It was a flat bottomed punt, about 6 metres long and 3.5 metres wide; crossing the channel in about the same place as the current bridges, being the narrowest part. The passengers took their possessions and saddles on board, while the horses swam behind. Back then it was much narrower and shallower; and the waters ran more slowly. Patrons on the north side would ring a bell to summon the ferry. On reaching the Swansea side, they could rest and enjoy Boyd's "Pelican Point" Wine Bar and Refreshment Rooms.



William Boyd



The first bridge was constructed in 1881 by Alexander and Robert Amos as a rail bridge to carry stone from their quarry at The Plains (Caves Beach) to build the retaining wall on the northern side of the entrance to Lake Macquarie.

Length of the bridge = 185 metres; the opening span of the



bridge had been used at Black Wattle Bay, Sydney Harbour. The timber came from the western side of the lake – mostly the Wattagan Mountains; hauled by bullocks to a sawmill at Adamstown to be processed; then to the site of the bridge building. Each journey took about 2 weeks. After the completion of the breakwall, Public Works took over the bridge in 1895, removed the railway tracks and opened it to road traffic. Being purpose built for rail it was very narrow – 3.5 metres. It soon needed maintenance for wood rot and by 1908 it was scheduled for replacement. *Train on first Swansea Bridge 1880s; Tipping trucks of stone onto the retaining wall.*



- First bridge 1
- Second bridge 2
- 3rd & 4th bridges 3
- Heart-stoppers 4



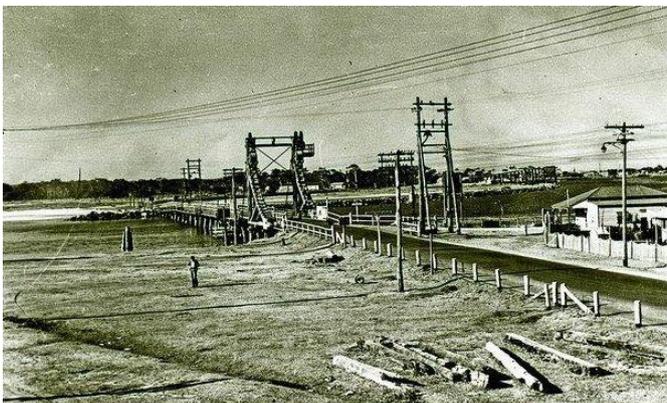
Kindly supporting the community – including Caves Beach Surf Life Saving Club; this edition of HELM newsletter.

4972 1066 - NOW AT SWANSEA!
SWANSEA PLAZA ARCADE
 Near Coles and Blondies.



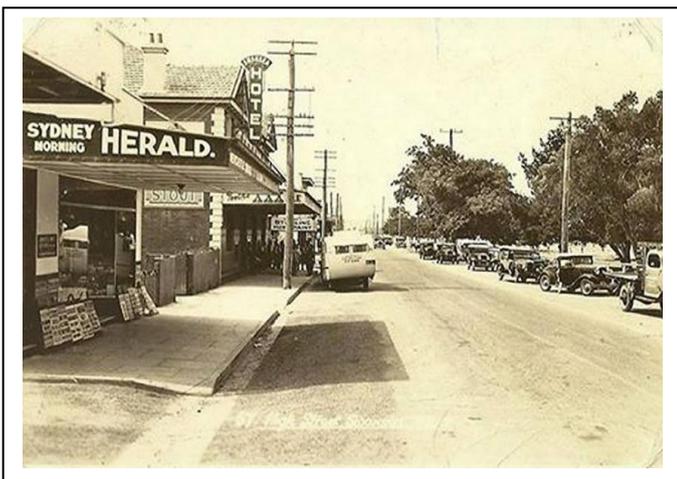
Swansea wharf, built by Amos to unload materials for 1st bridge; Commencement of work on 2nd bridge.

The second bridge was contracted to Peter Callan and Sons of Stockton, costing \$12,360. The single lane, timber beam bridge was opened in November, 1909. The steel girder, bascule opening span sat on ironbark piles reinforced with concrete armor - (Like a drawbridge bridge with counterweights that continuously balance the span so that it can swing upwards to allow boat traffic to pass through.) When the bridge was down the weights were at the top. To lift the bridge, they were rolled down to the bottom of the two inclined rails. The mechanism was operated by an endless chain gear and could be handled by one man. *Source: Building, August 15, 1910.*



The second bridge, 1909, looking north.

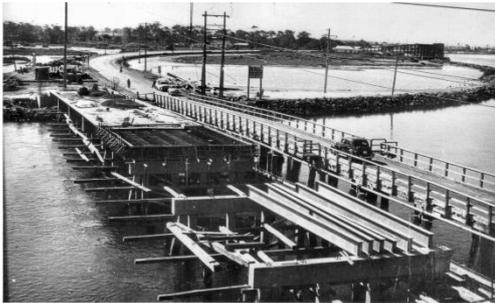
It was about 125metres long; made up of 15 spans. Designed to carry a proposed rail line which sadly did not happen. What did eventuate were massive traffic jams, whenever the bridge was raised, far worse than today. Being single lane complicated matters, as traffic had to wait for the oncoming vehicles to pass from the other side, before they could venture on. Occasionally it came to an impasse – vehicles from both ends meeting in the middle – neither wanting to give way. In such instances, police had to be called and one of the parties had to reverse all the way back, as well as any vehicles that were banked up behind. With an increasing number of incidents and collisions, a temporary solution was arranged to station flagmen at either end to control the ever-increasing volume of traffic.



Until the 4th bridge, Main Rd Swansea consisted of only two lanes of traffic - one heading north, one south, adjacent to the shops; with the much wider park extending across. Widening the bridge was not a practical solution. Some of the pylons were beginning to sink, tipping and leaning the bridge. Traffic had to drive very slowly. A further problem was created by the deck planking having to be regularly repaired and rattling very loudly. It was particularly disturbing in the still of the night for the local residents. It is said that after a while they could tell which direction traffic was heading.



The Newcastle Herald, March 31, 1948, featured an article about the proposed third bridge, to be built west of the existing bridge. To keep the deck level low, a double leaf bascule was designed, placing the counterweights underneath, above water level, with a special locking device to secure the sections when they met. An open grid deck was incorporated as it was lighter and reduced the danger of animals slipping; but needed fine tuning so the horses wouldn't catch their hooves in the deck and pull off their shoes. The Dept. of Main Roads (DMR), called for tenders with the following specs: The new 175 metre bridge was to be built west of the old bridge; made from 12 steel joist spans, with a concrete deck. When opened, the gap was to be nearly 17 metres wide, with unlimited height clearance. The two-lane roadway would have a footway for pedestrians on the eastern side. The supporting piles to be driven down to firm sand and gravel (c.13 metres). Work began in the early 1950s. The main components of the opening span were made in Germany as local companies couldn't guarantee a supply date due to steel shortage. *Source: LMCC; G & N Boyd; FPDC*



The 3rd bridge was opened on 14th December, 1954.

- 1. Construction of 3rd bridge.*
- 2. Celebrating the opening – old uneven bridge on the right.*
- 3. First vehicles to cross bridge, northbound.*



- 4. January 1956 - Two-way traffic and partially demolished 2nd bridge.*

The opening spans of the various bridges became notorious for jamming. Over time many serious incidents were reported.

Bill Vernon of the Caves Beach Progress Association related some of the memorable events. A patron at the Bowling Club suffered a heart attack. The ambulance from Belmont reached the bridge, but was halted on the northern side as the bridge failed to close completely. The patient was carried and passed across the narrow gap in order to be transported to hospital. On some very hot days, the metal spans expanded and were unable to close fully and latch. On such occasions the fire brigade was called to pump water and cool the metal down. Then they would have to drive their truck over it, so the weight would help to push it down to lock. One night while prawning, the lights were red and the bridge began to lift to let a cruiser out to the heads. A car from Sydney roared through the lights at high speed and bounced over the opening bridge – fortunately making it to the other side. One day the bridge operator let 2 boats through, but did not see the third, and began to lower the bridge. This resulted in shouting, tooting and closed circuit tv being installed. *Source: UON library 1989.* As traffic steadily increased, the RTA (Roads and Traffic Authority) commissioned the fourth bridge as part of the Bi-Centennial Road Development program, funded by State and Commonwealth Governments. The boaties lobbied for a high level bridge; but Chamber of Commerce - succeeded in gaining a duplicate low level opening bridge. The older bridge would remain and carry traffic northbound. The 4th bridge made up of 12 pre-stressed concrete spans resting on piles driven up to 35 metres through sand and claystone, would provide two lanes for those travelling south. It was built by Transfield at a cost of \$15.5 million, completed in May 1989. In 2004 and 2006 further work was carried out to secure the bridge foundations from shifting sands – firstly gravel, then railway ballast. Scuba divers have noted that some of the old pylons from the second bridge still remain. Rubble (pipes, reef balls, old machinery) had been scattered by the RTA to replace the reef structure after 2006 works.

COLIN BOND CAR STUNT.



Colin Bond is a legend of Australian motorsport. A favourite at Bathurst Races, Bondy was also a very talented rally driver. "TRAFFIC STOPS FOR A COMMERCIAL BREAK" was the headline in the Newcastle Sun on Wednesday, July 19, 1978. Mandy Oakham reported: "Traffic on the busy Pacific Highway at Swansea took time out for a short commercial break. Cars were banked up on either side of the bridge for several kilometres during the filming of a television commercial sequence. Champion racing driver, Colin Bond acted as stuntman in the sequence; which involved jumping a car over the open bridge while a fishing trawler passed through. Police cars from Swansea, Belmont and Newcastle were used to control the traffic flow. Traffic was delayed for several minutes each time the stunt was performed and the bridge was closed at least three times during the morning... The Swansea bridge will make its national television debut on August 6. The firm hired Swansea fishing boats for the day and erected temporary ramps on the bridge for use in the stunt....." Pictures – David Wicks

The car used was a dark green Ford Escort. The ad was for Firestone tyres, with the theme "Firestone tyres will get you there no matter what". The storyline of the ad was that Bond, dressed in a tuxedo, was the best man getting his passenger, the groom, to his wedding on time. However, great controversy erupted over the bridge closures, not just over the inconvenience to the people of the area, but the fact that if there had been an emergency, speedy access to the other side could not be gained.

Woman Survives After Crashing Off Swansea Bridge. The car's at the bottom of the channel.

On Wednesday evening, 31 May 2017, Triple M, reported that Salt Ash woman, Deb Moroney, had incredibly escaped her sinking Ford Falcon after losing control in the wet and crashing through the northbound, eastern side guard rail. Returning from swimming training at Swansea pool, it was fortunate that her son had decided to return with his father and was not a passenger in her car. Reacting quickly, she managed to undo her seatbelt

and wind down the window as the car plunged over the edge into the 16 metre deep water and swam ashore before the vehicle was inundated with water. She was very lucky to be alive and escape injury. Using two large air bags, police divers re-floated the car, which had drifted east, in a three hour operation on the Friday. Water police then towed the salvaged vehicle to Blacksmiths boat ramp, where it was winched onto shore. "I just did what I had to do" said Deb.



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WE WOULD LOVE TO HEAR YOUR IDEAS FOR MORE HERITAGE STORIES!!!