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DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION  
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WESTERN AUSTRALIA

BUSSELTON OFFICE.

To: Conservator of Forests,  
PERTH.

17/9/1954.

H.O. 285/46

(Mr. Stewart to note, please)

Subject: OLD WONNERUP TUART MILL.

As requested by you, I supply the following notes regarding the above mill.

Writing from memory, I have omitted some details about which I have some doubt and have question marks against others which may be doubted slightly. In either case I can probably secure fuller details if they are required.

Building of the mill.

This was originally entrusted to a Mr. Nielsen, then to a Mr. McInerney, and completed by a Mr. J. Coxon, who managed it for a year or so. Mr. M. Muller was mill clerk and storeman.

Driven by steam, it had a carriage which fed the tuart log to twin saws. Because the tuart logs were big and hard, the feed was very slow, but unfortunately the return of carriage was also very slow.

Friction gear was operated through a "Coxon" cone clutch of compressed paper.

Apart from the twins, there was a No.1 and No.2 bench and a docker, and a small band saw for fine work. There was also a "short-log" bench which was a complete steel unit that should have been of great value as a sleeper mill. It was not used much, largely because mill managers at that time despised short logs.

The mill was erected under the direction of Mr. S.L. Kessell, who was working plans officer. A good deal of marri was used in the construction. This was mostly cut in what was later called Bullock Paddock, but Mr. Kessell did not verify the boundary and a lot of marri was cut on the property of Mr. P.L. Reynolds, and as a result this Department had to pay a very high Royalty for them.

The purpose of the mill was to cut timber for the Railway Department. Most of the forest was mature and over-mature, and it was considered desirable to mill the over-mature trees first in the expectation of obtaining regeneration in the blanks created.

I was transferred to Ludlow on August 4, 1921, just before the mill started and just before Coxon took over. One of my jobs was to be bush boss and I was directed by Mr. Kessell to mark trees to yield 33% of sawn timber based on true volume.

Two fallers were employed, Jim Giblett (afterwards Forester) and "Nugget" Warne (afterwards Overseer). They were classified as Forest Workmen, paid £4.13.0. per week and were to be paid that wage on any class of work.

The mill worked 48 hours in 5½ days per week producing about 25(?) loads of timber, so the fallers had to fell about 75 loads in the round per week, i.e. 2/5 to 2/6 per load. The cost rose later, I understand to 4/6 per ld. with other fallers.



At that time, Banksdale possessed a power drag saw called a "Wade" saw. This was something like a modern New Record drag saw. It was powered by a 2 stroke 4 h.p. engine, and was a nice job, but had no clutch. It was kept in the Office, but used on the landing when visitors were at the mill.

At Wilga, there was another power saw, a "Bagshaw", made in South Australia, which was not in use. Mr. Kessell borrowed this machine and we felled some tuart with it. It was extremely cumbersome and was returned to Wilga mill.

Another American machine a "Vaughan", came on the market and this Department secured one. It was very similar to a "Wade" but had the advantage of a clutch. This was used for much of the tuart cross cutting, and it can be claimed that it was the first power saw to be operated successfully on a commercial basis in Western Australia. Indeed, the agents, Harris Scarfe & Co. arranged with this Department for me to give a demonstration with one. This demonstration took place at Pickering Brook and resulted in the introduction of drag saws to the firewood industry.

#### Log Hauling.

The early log hauling was done by bullock teams. Bullocks are more suitable than horses for hauling heavy loads through sand. A contract was let to Mr. T. Reynolds for hauling between half a mile and two miles; the price being 12/- per load, and was raised later to 14/-. The driver was Ned Riley. There were various contracts at or about this price.

Early in 1922, a "Captain" Rook brought down a crawler tractor for trial on log hauling. He and a partner had secured a schooner in England, loaded it with second hand war material, and brought it to Western Australia for trade purposes. The tractor had been tried out at Carnarvon<sup>on</sup> wool hauling. It was petrol driver and reputed 80 h.p.; it could haul a good load, and brought logs in up to 7½ loads through the tuart sand. However, it was very big compared with modern tractors, and so was clumsy in the bush. The tracks were in bad order and continually coming to grief; other parts also failed. It was a very interesting novelty.

Mr. Coxon strongly recommended purchase. I had kept records and, excluding the cost of parts, showed that the hauling had cost Rook over a pound per load. The tractor was then sold to State Sawmills, but soon thrown on the scrap heap.

This Department had purchased eight North West bullocks at Midland Saleyards late in 1921 and also bought some trained bullocks locally. Steve Thomas was employed as driver and Jack Thomas as swamper. A start was made to train the new wild bullocks, using a pair at a time with the trained team.

At the Christmas break, the North West bullocks were turned into the "Bullock" paddock. After two to three weeks about four died and the remainder were very ricketty. The cost, three months earlier, was £9 each, but with a sudden rise in prices we were able to sell the sick bullocks to a local farmer for £13- each. Carted to good pasture they quickly fattened and he sold them at a profit.

Hauling continued with Departmental bullocks, with changes of drivers - the best being a half caste named Freddy Grange, and costs ranged around the 14/- mark up to two miles hauling.

#### Tree Marking.

After a few months, I was instructed to mark trees to yield 25% recovery, but it was only a matter of weeks before this



was revoked and I then had to mark to obtain 40%. This continued until September 1922, when I was sent to Manjimup in charge of assessment camps.

By September 1922, fencing contracts were completed for the tuart area; the Railway Department's supply of tuart had accumulated, and the mill was about to close down temporarily. District work, generally, almost ceased.

In 1924 it was decided to reopen the mill. "Sharkey" Thomas was put in charge and was succeeded by Drew, and then by Fred Adams. There was then about 500 loads of tuart scantling on hand, very hard to sell.

Assist Forester Trainer looked after the bush work, and built a tramline from Wonnerup through Old 14 and River paddocks, and well into Central paddock. Loaded trucks were hauled to the mill by bullocks (?) on this line.

Trainer was succeeded by A/Forester Watson. Drew complained of the poor quality of logs supplied and, under instructions from Mr. Kessell, made a practice of going to the bush once a week and branding with a reject brand any logs he considered unfit for milling. A/Forester Watson would then cut the reject brand from lost of the logs, and they would be milled and everyone made happy.

Again supplies overtook demand and late in 1927 it was decided to curtail milling, but to endeavour to obtain some timber from logs which were too large in diameter for handling, or too rotten to pay for hauling.

A start was made to split billets from such trees, and because of the grain being so interlocked, grooving with broadaxes was found to be advisable. Forester Hartzler supervised this work for some weeks, and then I returned to Ludlow to take charge on 2/1/1928.

Six men were employed billeting. These included, Len, Laurie and Eddie Warner, Joe Burgess, Beachem, Robinson and H. Froome. They were paid £3- per load for the timber produced from the billets or, in some cases, £5- per week-day work.

Sizes to be produced at the mill were from 5' x 4½ x 4½ to 16'1" x 9½ x 2½, but chiefly 7'1" x 4½ x 7½ to 4½ x 1½.

Piece work billetters, who also carted to the mill, were paid 97/6d. per load.

At this time, Mr. Stan Clarke was stationed at Wonnerup with the title of "Mill Manager". Later when Clarke went to C.S.I.R.O. his place was taken by Mr. Gregson.

I understand that the production of timber from billets paid handsomely. However, there was a trade recession and the Railway Department curtailed purchases, so in 1930 the mill closed again. The financial position was serious, so the mill was dismantled and sold piecemeal by tender in 1937; the tramline had been sold in 1934.

#### Water Supply.

When the mill was being built, Mr. Kessell decided or was advised, that to obtain a sufficient supply of water suitable for the mill boilers, it would be necessary to pump from Abba River.

The nearest worthwhile pool was about a quarter of a mile away in the property of P.L. Reynolds. A two inch pipe was laid



to the pool and water was pumped as required; Reynolds being paid £10 per annum for water rights. A couple of wells were sunk near to the mill cottages, and as the water was rather hard it was used mostly for gardening or bathing.

About ten years later this water had not improved, so I put down bore holes in the locality. Water tests from the wells and the bores showed that the water was not fit for human consumption, or for engine boilers.

I then had samples tested from the pool in Reynolds' property, and the analysis showed this water to be much worse than even the well water. It would have horrified the chemists had they known that we used it in the engine boilers all the time the mill was working.

Areas Milled.

During 1921-22, when the mill just operated, logs were obtained from Bullock paddock, Mill, Lockhart and Old 14 paddocks.

When the mill re-opened in 1924, logs were obtained from Simpson's, Membenup, River, Malling and Buffer paddocks, and some from Central and Horse paddocks. The only paddocks not cut at all were the North and Limekiln paddocks.

(Sgd.) Louis N. Weston.

CHIEF TIMBER INSPECTOR.