

The Old School Report

May 2021

www.merimulahistoricalsociety.org.au

Forthcoming events

The next meeting of the South East History Group (Incorporated) will be held at the Candelo Showground on Saturday May 15th at 10 am.

The next meeting of the MIHS will be held in the William Dawes room at the Merimbula RSL Club at 2 pm on May 30th when Ellen Mundy will speak about the history of the Djirringanj and Ngarigu people of the BVSC area.

The Merimbula Festival will take place at the Old School Museum from 10am to 2 pm on Saturday August 14th and from 10 am to 2 pm Saturday August 28th. Yarn Bombing will take place around Merimbula from August 14th to August 29th.

Munn's Maizena

I found this very interesting article about the Maizena factory on Trove from the Sydney Morning Herald, May 25th, 1868 (<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/13166710>).

“Maizena Works Merimbula.

Mr. MATTHEW A. MUNN -- the original projector of the Melbourne Maizena Works -- has commenced the manufacture of maizena at Merimbula, New South Wales, supported by Mr. T. S. Mort and Sir W. M. Manning, whose extensive interests in the neighbouring districts, added to their desire to utilize the products and develop the industry of the colony, have led them to assist Mr. Munn in this important colonial undertaking.

Merimbula is situated in the county of Auckland, near Twofold Bay, twenty miles from the beautiful district of Bega, where on the rich flats and low undulating hills the very finest maize or Indian corn is grown.

The mill is a substantial stone building, three stories in height, having a frontage to Beach-street of 125 feet ; the machinery is on the most approved plan, and the process is protected by "letters patent."

In a published statistical account of New South Wales for 1867, the wonder is expressed that no manufactory for maizena had been yet established, and we feel great pleasure in now having to record that this has been successfully accomplished. The site of the manufactory appears to be well chosen, a large supply of the best water being essential to the various processes. Water is conducted from the Merimbula River, 400 feet, in pipes to a well; it is there pumped up 60 feet to a large reservoir on a hill lying between the river and the Works. From the reservoir the water is conducted in pipes by its own gravitation to the various parts of the Works. As the process requires very pure water, a filtering apparatus is fixed next the reservoir through which the necessary quantity percolates. At the well a 12-horse power vertical engine pumps the water and drives the necessary machinery for sawing wood to make boxes, &c. The machinery at the mill is driven by a 20-horse power beam-engine, which is, however, capable of working up to 35-horse power.

Adjoining that part of the buildings which constitutes the mill, and in the basement story, is the vat room, which is 72 feet in length by 48 inches in width. In this are eight vats, 10 feet in diameter by 5½ feet high. The maize is first steeped for twenty-four hours in one of the vats in water kept hot by the exhaust steam from the engine; it is then broken up and ground between a pair of French burr stones (the ordinary kind used in flour mills), water, however, flowing over the maize during the process of grinding. It then passes through a silk sieve on to depositing "runs" or boxes, which extend the whole length of the building, and which are connected with a series of bins or boxes.

The bran or refuse finds its way into a box provided for it. The residue or maizena is next placed in the large vats above referred to, where it is thoroughly purified by admixture with and agitation in water. The gear by which this purification is effected is not unlike a steam puddling machine.

The manufacture of maizena does not so speedily end: it is put into perforated boxes, passed through a sieve, and then transferred to a drying room. The drying room is, as its name indicates, a remarkably warm region, where desiccation proceeds with great rapidity. The stoves are heated with brick flues. The temperature of the room is generally about 120° Fahrenheit, but the heat may be raised as high as 170°.

After the maizena has been dried, it is taken to an adjoining room and placed in a pulverising machine, where it is again ground, and from which it passes into a fine silk-dressing machine, there being 170 threads to the square inch. The maizena being thus made, it is taken to the packing room, where a number of girls make up the parcels of a colour by which the proprietor desires to distinguish his product from the imported article. The whole of the machinery and general arrangements appear to be very complete. Wherever manual labour could be dispensed with and machinery employed, the latter has been introduced, even in the packing room there is a simple mechanical contrivance to aid the girls in packing up. Nothing will be wasted at the works; the motto appears to be "Utilise everything."

The works are capable of producing from seven to eight tons of maizena per week, which implies a consumption of no less than about 800 bushels of the best maize. At present, however, the proprietor is only using one of the three pairs of stones in the mill".

The article goes on to extol the benefits of maizena, without providing any evidence for these claims.

Building Through Adversity

At our February meeting this year, Neil gave a very interesting talk about Albert Wood Aspinall, the builder of the Green Cape Lighthouse. With Neil's permission, for the benefit of those who missed the February meeting, I am presenting a condensed version of his talk.

Albert Wood Aspinall was born in Yorkshire in 1839, the son of John Aspinall, an inn-keeper of Southeram, Yorkshire. In 1856, John, his wife Sarah and their seven children, including Albert, sailed from England as assisted migrants, arriving in Sydney in March 1857. Albert, seventeen, was shown on the passenger list as a bricklayer. It is likely that he worked for his father initially before establishing his own business as a bricklayer and builder in Sydney and later (1865) in Maitland. Albert married Mary Jane Bennet in 1864 and the couple had 13 children between 1865 and 1884, five of whom died in infancy.

In 1870, Albert declared himself insolvent but in 1876, he moved his family to Liverpool and spent some years working on projects in the Sydney area. In December 1880, his tenders of £12,936 to construct the Green Cape Lighthouse was accepted. A further tender of £357 to construct a jetty and storehouse at Bittangabee Bay and a tram-line from there to Green Cape was accepted also.

Green Cape was notorious amongst seamen and shipowners as eight vessels had been lost in the area between 1862 and 1878. The decision to build a lighthouse was taken in 1879. The original plan had been to build in stone but the stone at the cape itself was deemed unsuitable and it was decided to build in concrete. The lighthouse tower was to be octagonal on a square base topped by a bluestone gallery. At a height of 68 feet, the lighthouse would be the tallest mass concrete structure in NSW.

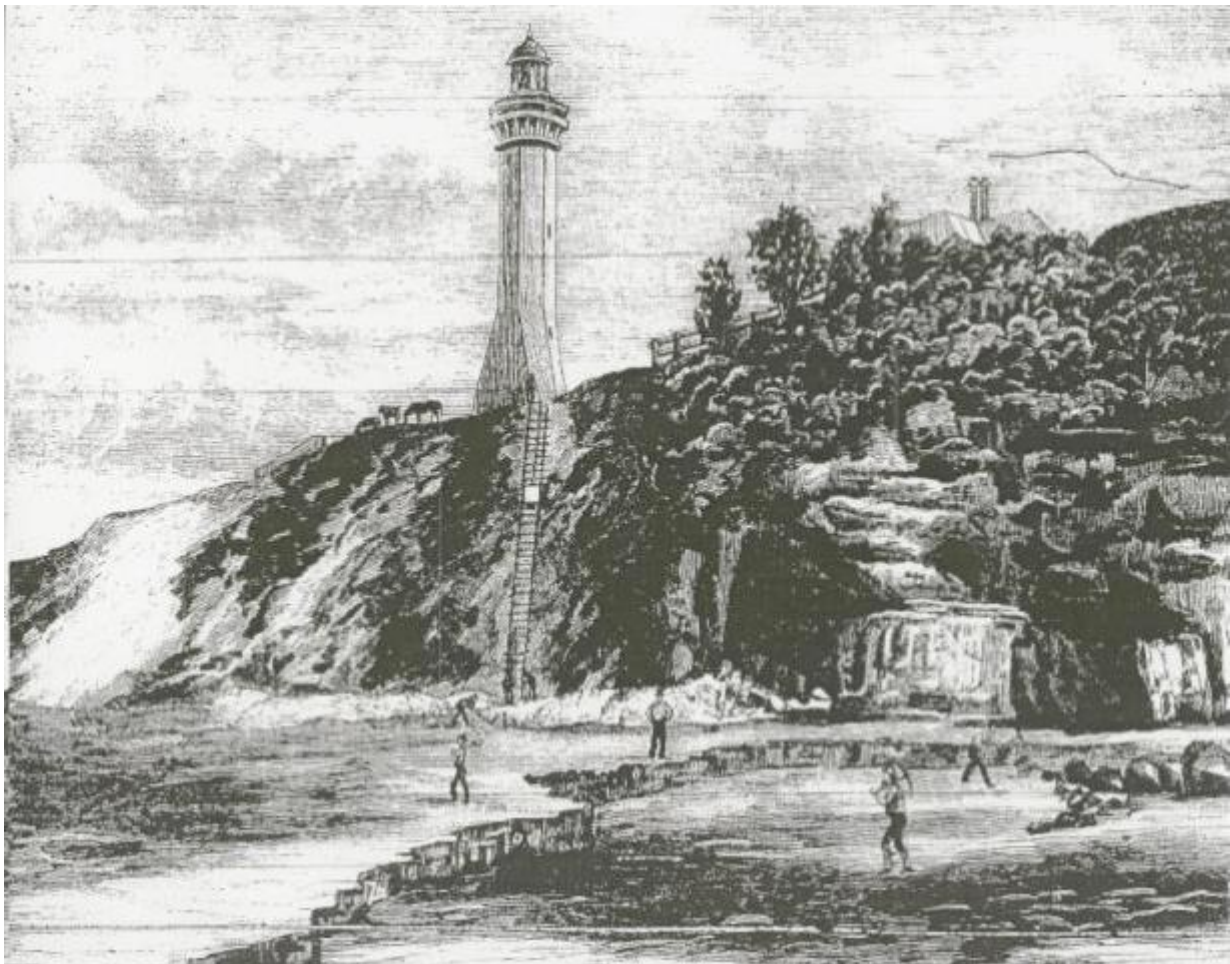
The only access to the construction site was by sea and the nearest safe anchorage was at Bittangabee, a small inlet some seven kilometres away navigable only by shallow draft vessels. Supplies and materials were shipped to Eden by steamer then brought to Bittangabee in a small ketch owned by Aspinall. Adverse weather and low tides caused many delays in the transportation of the materials.

Aspinall commenced work early in 1881 by constructing a wooden jetty on concrete piers at Bittangabee. A wooden, horse-drawn tramway was built and then Aspinall turned to the clearing of the site at Green Cape and the construction of the workmen's camp and the various offices and workshops needed.

Life at the work-site was arduous and uncomfortable. The site was bleak, often swept by gales and work was often held up by adverse weather.

Aspinall began excavations with the expectation, based on geologists' give reports, of finding bedrock at nine feet. Unfortunately, the reports were inaccurate and 20 feet of clay had to be removed before a firm rock foundation was reached. The excavation took several months and added greatly to the expense of the project. Drifting sand frequently covered the tram-way often to depths of several feet.

Rock, to make aggregate to be mixed with cement, was blasted from the rock platform at the base of cape but then had to be hauled up a tram-line with 40 degree incline. The rock then had to be broken up to make the aggregate. Portland cement was shipped from England, to be combined with lime, local sand, aggregate and water to make the concrete. 180,000 sandstock bricks for the construction of cement-lined underground water tanks, houses, stables and Telegraph building were made at Boydtown and shipped to the site.



Scene in the Vicinity of Green Cape NSW showing lighthouse recently erected.
Town and Country Journal 26 May 1883 Trove

Construction progressed steadily and by May 1882, the tower was within 20 feet of the required height. In July, Aspinall advertised in the local press for plasterers, cement workers and masons needed for the final phases of construction. However, in 1883, Aspinall had run out of money and was forced to surrender his estate to his creditors, who took over the contract but retained him as supervisor.

The lighthouse was opened on October 29th 1883. The total cost was £19,000.8.9 and the light was lit for the first time on November 1st 1883.

Aspinall's fortunes varied over the next few years. In 1888, he built a new Post and Telegraph office in Eden and in 1892 carried out renovations to the New Brighton Hotel at Brighton-le-Sands, Sydney. The refurbished hotel opened in 1893 as Scots College. In 1902, he reported payable gold along the road from Pipeclay Creek to Lochiel and staked a claim but nothing seems to have come of this venture.

On December 16th 1903, Aspinall's headless body was discovered outside his hut at Thompson's Point Eden. The subsequent inquest found that he had committed suicide by placing a stick of gelignite in his mouth while suffering from mental depression. So died Albert Wood Aspinall, builder of the Green Cape Lighthouse. He was 63.



Grave in Eden Cemetery
www.findagrave.com