

THE PITTWATER AND HAWKESBURY RIVER FERRY SERVICES OF THE PORT JACKSON AND MANLY STEAMSHIP CO. LTD. 1942-1974

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The Broken Bay estuary to the north of Sydney, has, until quite recent times, been a wild and virtually uninhabited area. Extensive shipping activity had, nevertheless, taken place since the early years of European settlement, largely to service the rich farmlands of the Hawkesbury valley to the west.

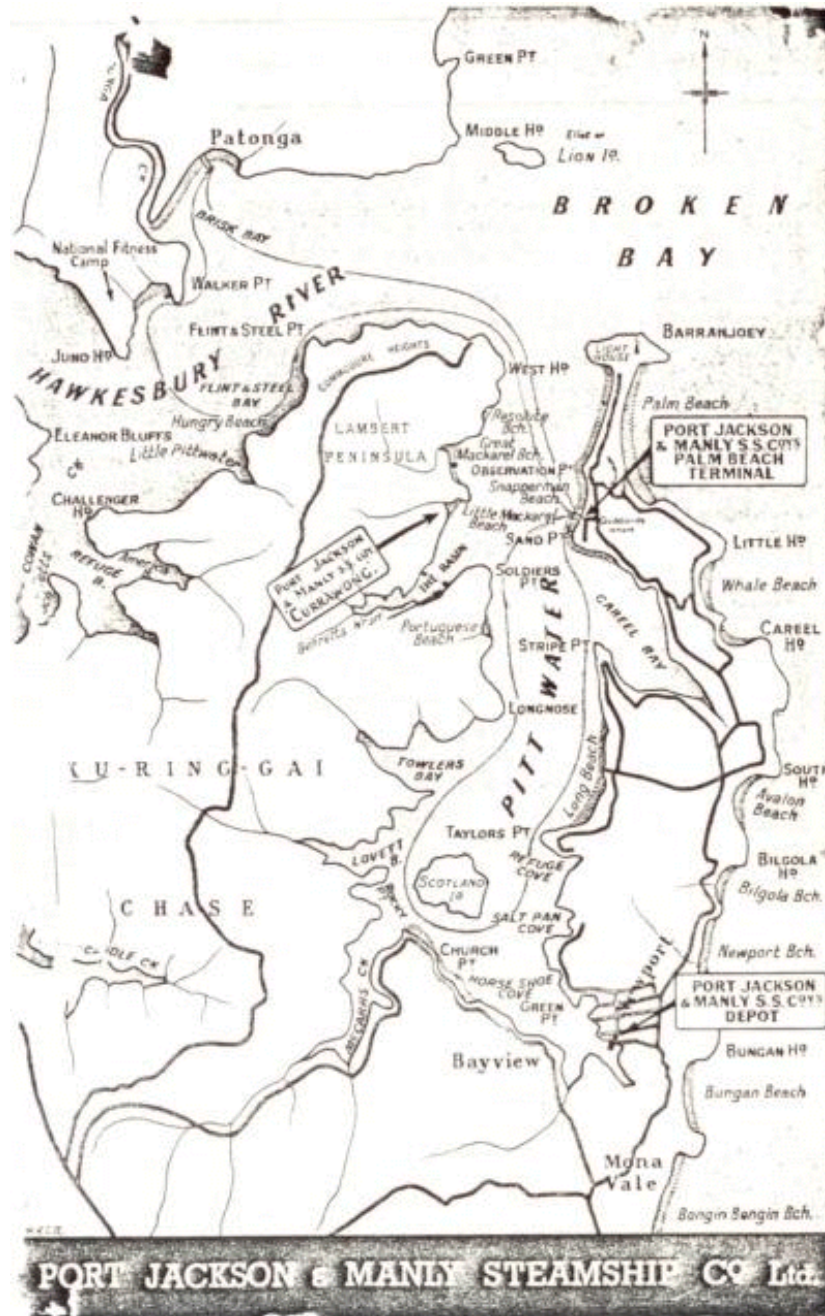
However, the advent of ferry services, as in Sydney, was related to the spread of urban settlement. The isolation and topography of the area inhibited such settlement effectively until after 1945. It was the Port Jackson and Manly Steamship Co. Ltd., operators of Sydney's famous Manly ferry, which largely pioneered and promoted urban development in the Pittwater-Broken Bay-lower Hawkesbury River district. As with the early history of the Manly ferry service, this development began as 'weekend tourism' and became more permanent settlement, though with tourism of continuing importance.

The earliest urban development occurred in the Palm Beach peninsula (adjacent to Pittwater) during the 1920s-1930s and was a natural consequence of the spread of settlement northwards from Manly. Bus services developed to link the peninsula with Manly Wharf (via the tram to Narrabeen) and by 1938 Government buses were running from Palm Beach direct to Sydney.

As early as 1933, the Port Jackson Co acquired water-front land and a wharf at Newport in anticipation of an extension of excursion traffic to the Pittwater area. By the 1940s the company was actively seeking to diversify its business interests, and in 1942 it purchased as a going concern the Palm Beach business of W.J.Goddard & Sons, including general stores, marine and ferry services.

With this purchase came the small motor launch FALCON (later ELVINA), built by Goddard prior to 1928. (Details of this and subsequent vessels operated by the Port Jackson Company are given in the vessel list following this article).

Ferry services prior to 1942 appear to have been very rudimentary, undertaking little more than tourist and school trips around the Pittwater shores, in addition to providing a link between Pittwater and Hawkesbury River railway station at Brooklyn. During 1943-4 the Port Jackson Co. purchased the 'Currawong' estate, including guest houses, at Little Mackerel Beach (on the western shore of Pittwater) and the Narrabeen Ice Works (to ensure in those pioneering days, an adequate supply of ice). The company's stores at Newport and Palm Beach became known as the 'P.J.' stores.



Pittwater and Broken Bay, with Port Jackson Co. properties. From *Cast Off and Explore the Hawkesbury River* (PJ & MS Co. Ltd. pamphlet, c1946. PJ & MS Co. Ltd. records.)

When the end of the war came in 1945 the company lost no time in expanding the ferry business. Construction of two more passenger launches was commenced at the company's Kurraba Point (Sydney) works, these being CURRAWONG and RAMBLER. CURRAWONG was completed in October 1945 and RAMBLER early in 1946. In addition, the launch SEEKA (built as a private yacht in 1940 but taken over for naval patrol duties in northern Australia) was purchased from the Royal Australian Navy in November 1945.

At the beginning of 1946, the company commenced a service from Church Point, at the southern end of Pittwater, to Scotland Island and bays on the western shore. In May 1946, SEEKA commenced a Sunday and holiday excursion service to Patonga on the northern shore of Broken Bay. By 1947, SEEKA was also conducting tourist trips from Bobbin Head (on Cowan Creek) and Brooklyn (on the Hawkesbury River). These services were co-ordinated with tourist buses and trains and became so popular that the company constructed a new vessel at Kurraba Point for these services - the WEST HEAD, completed in October 1947.

By 1948 business was booming, both from tourism and from settlement on isolated Pittwater shores. In December 1948, the Port Jackson Co. acquired the business of Hawkesbury River Tourist Services Pty Ltd. which included services from Brooklyn to Berowra, Bobbin Head and Patonga, and two launches, one being the HAWKESBURY, built in 1940 as a bomb scow and rebuilt as a passenger launch in 1945. It is unclear, but possible, that the other vessel acquired was the veteran SWANHILDA of 1912. Also acquired about this time was the launch PATONGA (ex 'Lily Brayton').

By 1950, the Port Jackson Co had run into serious difficulties on another front. Patronage was declining on the Manly service and an expensive reconstruction of S.S. BARRENJOEY as a diesel-electric vessel was underway. The company was in serious financial straits and was obliged to dispose of some of its assets. A number of land-holdings were sold, including the 'Currawong' estate (to the NSW Labour Council), and some of the Palm Beach retail businesses which had lost profitability due to rising costs.

The most significant disposal, however, was of its Pittwater ferry services - those operating from Palm Beach to the western shore and those operating from Church Point. The Sydney Register of British Ships shows CURRAWONG and SWANHILDA as being sold to E.H. Caldwell of Church Point in December 1951. It is likely that FALCON was sold to the same operator at the same time.

In this leaner state, the Port Jackson Co. continued to operate at a comfortable level of profitability. CURRAWONG and SWANHILDA returned to the company in 1952 when the Port Jackson Co. foreclosed on its mortgage to Caldwell. The SWANHILDA was sold circa 1953.

In 1956 SEEKA (by then SEEKA STAR) was sold to N.D. Hegarty and Sons Pty. Ltd. for their North Sydney service. CURRAWONG and RAMBLER (then CURRAWONG STAR and RAMBLER STAR) were sold in 1958 and 1959 respectively to S.O. Rosan for operation on Lake Eildon, Victoria, and PATONGA was sold to Noumea in 1963.

Further property rationalisation occurred up to 1960 as the ice works were closed (victims of the spread of refrigeration) and the business of Palm Beach Marine Service Pty. Ltd. was acquired. This latter acquisition allowed the company to consolidate its boat repair business on Pittwater and to dispose of further land.

In 1966, expansion occurred again when the Port Jackson Co acquired the Brooklyn-Dangar Island service and, with it, the launch KILCARE STAR (built as REGENT BIRD for Brisbane Water services in 1919). The vessel was renamed BARRENJOEY.

In 1969 a subsidiary company, Palm Beach and Bobbin Head Ferries Pty. Ltd., was formed to manage the Pittwater-Hawkesbury services. In these final years the company's scheduled services connected Brooklyn with Dangar Island, Wobby Beach, the National Fitness Camp, and Patonga. Most of these areas had, by now, a significant residential population, as do the isolated Pittwater areas opened up by the Port Jackson Co. and now served by other operators. The company also maintained a link with Pittwater by operating a daily service from Palm Beach to Patonga and Bobbin Head.

An interesting sidelight to these operations by the Port Jackson Co. is that it also operated its Manly steamer SOUTH STEYNE between Sydney and Cowan Creek (Cottage Point) on Sunday excursions between 1953 and 1973. However no landfalls were made in Hawkesbury waters.

In 1972, the Port Jackson Co. was taken over by Brambles Industries Ltd. and the new principals took steps to dispose of all ferry operations.

The subsidiary, Palm Beach and Bobbin Head Ferries Pty. Ltd., and the vessels WEST HEAD and HAWKESBURY were sold to G.T. & S.G. Davey late in 1974. The BARRENJOEY was sold privately at the same time.

Since 1974 the ownership and vessel dispositions have changed dramatically for Hawkesbury-Pittwater ferry services. The pioneering work of the Port Jackson Co. is reflected in the considerable residential and recreational use of the area's waterways, islands, and bays. However, the level of personal wealth inevitably associated with these developments, and manifested in high private boat ownership, has meant that ferries are not quite the lifeline they were in earlier days.



MV *West Head* (built by PJ & MS Co. Ltd. at Kurraba Point works in 1947).
Buster Browne image, reproduced in R.D.Fildes, *The Ships that Serve Australia & New Zealand*
Vol. 1. Sydney, Searail, 1975.

VESSEL LIST

FALCON, later ELVINA

In fleet: 1942-1951

Built 1928 by W.J. Goddard, Palm Beach, N.S.W.

Motor launch. 4 gt. 25' length. 30 passengers. Owners: A. Sutton (Brooklyn, N.S.W.); sold to W. Goddard and Sons 1942; sold to PJ & MS Co. Ltd. 1942; sold to Church Point Ferry Service Pty. Ltd. 12/1951 (renamed).

SEEKA, later SEEKA STAR

In fleet: 1945-1956

Official number: 196387 (SR 24/1953)

Built 1940 by J. Hayes, Careening Cove (North Sydney), N.S.W.

Motor launch. Wood (carvel) build. 3 watertight bulkheads. 42.67 gt, 29.02 nt, 22.43 udt. 47.6' x 14.0' x 7.31' • 2 x 4 stroke single-acting, 5 cylinder Gardner diesel engines (1939). Twin screws. Cyls. 4.25" x 6". 9.03 N H P. 9 knots. 92 passengers. Originally named ROVER by PJ & MS Co. Built as Hordern family yacht; served with R.A.N. Auxiliary Patrol, World War Two; to PJ & MS Co. Ltd. for Brooklyn-Patonga service 11/1945 (renamed 1953); sold to N.D. Hegarty and Son Pty. Ltd. (Sydney-North Sydney service) 16/11/1956 (mortgaged to PJ & MS Co. Ltd. to secure £4,000 at 5 3/4% interest. 16/11/1956-13/7/1960); Sold to Stannard Bros. Pty. Ltd. 5/1978.

CURRAWONG, later CURRAWONG STAR

In fleet: 1945-1951, 1952-1958

Official number: 191341 (SR 14/1951)

Built 1945 by The Port Jackson and Manly Steamship Co. Ltd., Neutral Bay, N.S.W.

Motor launch. Wood (carvel) build. 1 non-watertight bulkhead. 16.84 gt, 15.21 nt, 10.64 udt. 34.5' x 12.5' x 4.9'. 4 stroke 4 cylinder Ruston and Hornsby diesel engine. Single screw. Cyls 4.5" x 5.5". 4.05 NHP. 9 knots. (Renamed 1951). Sold to E.H. Caldwell (Church Point, N.S.W.) 4/12/1951 (mortgaged to PJ & MS Co. Ltd. to secure £2,833/7/- at 4 1/2% interest, 4/12/1951-10/12/1952); sold to PJ & MS Co. Ltd. 19/12/1952; sold to S.O. Rosan (Eildon, Vic.) 9/7/1958; later sold to Fiji.

RAMBLER, later RAMBLER STAR

In fleet: 1946-1959

Official number: 196386 (SR 23/1953)

Built 1946 by The Port Jackson and Manly Steamship Co. Ltd., Neutral Bay, NSW.

Motor launch. Wood (carvel) build. 2 bulkheads. 28.70 gt, 27.62 nt, 15.40 udt. 36.3' x 12.35' x 3.2'. 4 stroke single-acting 4 cylinder Ruston and Hornsby diesel engine. Single screw. Cyls. 4.5" x 5.5". 4.05 NHP. 8 knots. (Renamed 1953.) Sold to S.O. Rosan (Eildon, Vic.) 13/4/1959; later sold to Fiji.

WEST HEAD

In fleet: 1947-1974

Official number: 191365 (SR 13/1953)

Built 1947 by The Port Jackson and Manly Steamship Co. Ltd., Neutral Bay, N.S.W.

Motor launch. Wood (carvel) build. 4 non-watertight bulkheads. 37.20 gt, 16.74 nt, 37.20 udt. 53.3' x 16.7' x 6.45'. 4 stroke single-acting 6 cylinder Thornycroft diesel engine (1945). Single screw. Cyls. 4.75" x 6.5". 6.77 NHP. 9 knots. 180 passengers. Sold to Palm Beach and Bobbin Head Ferries Pty. Ltd. 28/8/1970; sold to PJ & MS Co. Ltd. 10/7/1974; sold to G.T. and S.G. Davey (Wyoming, N.S.W.) 29/11/1974 (mortgaged to PJ & MS Co. Ltd. to secure \$15,000 and interest, 29/11/1974-29/5/1975). Presently located in Melbourne, Victoria.

HAWKESBURY, later MELISSA

In fleet: 1948-1974

Official number: 179737 (SR 1/1948)

Built 1940 (as an R.A.A.F. bomb scow).

Rebuilt 1945 by Slazengers (Australia) Pty. Ltd., Putney, N.S.W.

Motor launch. Wood (carvel) build. 4 bulkheads. 34.31 gt. 22.38 nt, 33.99 udt. 51.8' x 16.3' x 4.5'. 2 x 4 cylinder Southern Cross diesel engines (1946). Twin screws. Cyls. 3.5" x 4.5". 84 BHP. 9 knots. 150 passengers. Owners 1948: A.B. Lubeck; Hawkesbury River Tourist Services Pty. Ltd. Sold to PJ & MS Co. Ltd. 16/12/1948; Sold to Palm Beach and Bobbin Head Ferries Pty. Ltd. 28/8/1970; sold to PJ & MS Co. Ltd. 10/7/1974; sold to G.T. and S.G. Davey (Wyoming, N.S.W.) 29/11/1974 (mortgaged to PJ & MS Co. Ltd. to secure \$15,000 and interest, 29/11/1974-29/5/1975); sold to P. Verrels (Palm Beach Ferry Service) 1980 (renamed).

SWANHILDA (ENA)

In fleet: ?1948-1951, 1952-?1953

Official number: 191340 (SR 15/1951)

Built ?1912 by C.E. Dunn, Berry's Bay (North Sydney), N.S.W.

Motor launch (open). Wood (carvel) build. 2 non-watertight bulkheads. 12.15 gt, 9.28 nt, 12.15 udt. 43.75' x 12.3' x 4.5'. 4 stroke 4 cylinder Southern Cross diesel engine (1947). Single screw. Cyls. 4.5" x 5.5". 4.05 NHP. 9~ knots. 69 passengers. Built for D. Lyons, The Spit; tug on Port Jackson to 1935; sold to G. Windybanks, Hawkesbury River (Patonga service); boom defence tug, Pittwater, World War Two; Patonga service after war; sold to PJ & MS Co. Ltd. for Basin service c1948; sold to E.H. Caldwell Church Point, N.S.W.) 4/12/1951 (mortgaged to PJ & MS Co. Ltd. to secure £1,888/18/- at 4 1/2% interest, 4/12/1951 - (no information in Register after 1951); sold to PJ & MS Co. Ltd. 1952; sold to Emery c1953; sold to C. Buel c1961; sold to D. Mackay c1964 (Basin service); sold for private use 1972.

PATONGA (ex LILY BRAYTON)

In fleet: ?1950-1963

Built ?1910.

Motor launch. Bought from Messenger, Sydney; sold to Noumea 1963.

BARRENJOEY (ex KILCARE STAR, ex REGENT BIRD)

In fleet: 1966-1974

Official number: 179745 (SR 13/1948 - closed 23/5/1962)

Built 1919 by Gordon E. Beattie, Palermo (Woy Woy), N.S.W.

Motor launch. Wood (carvel) build. 2 bulkheads. 16.38 gt, 11.14 nt, 16.38 udt. 44.4' x 12.4' x

4.4'. 4 cylinder Southern Cross diesel engine (1945). Single screw. Cyls. 4.5" x 5.5". 42 BHP.

8 1/4 knots. 85 passengers. Built for Brisbane Water Services, as REGENT BIRD (later renamed KILCARE STAR); sold to PJ & MS Co. Ltd. (renamed BARRENJOEY) with Brooklyn-Dangar Island service 1966; sold for private use 1974.

**PORT JACKSON AND MANLY
STEAMSHIP CO. LTD.**

The Company takes this opportunity of bringing to your notice its activities and expansion in the Hawkesbury River and Pittwater area.

This includes regular Ferry Services for Tourists and residents from Palm Beach and Church Point.

The Time Table printed below will acquaint you with the services in operation at present.

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**HAWKESBURY RIVER FERRY SERVICES
TIME TABLES**

PALM BEACH — THE BASIN — CURRAWONG — MACKEREL BEACH.
Leaves PALM BEACH (Goddard's Wharf):
Mon. to Thurs. 10.45 a.m.; 2.45 p.m.
Friday — 10.15 a.m.; 2.45 p.m.; 1.40 p.m.
Saturday — 9.15 a.m.; 10.45 a.m.; 2.15 p.m.; 4 p.m.
Sun. & Holidays 10 a.m.; 11 a.m.; 12 noon; 2.30, 3.30, & 4.30 p.m.
(Special Trips by Arrangement)

**NEWPORT — CHURCH POINT — McCARR'S CREEK — OLIVIA BAY
LOVETT'S BAY — SCOTLAND ISLAND — TOWER BAY.**
Leaves NEWPORT DAILY at 8 a.m., calling as required and arriving at CHURCH POINT about 8.30 a.m.

Leaves CHURCH POINT:
Mon. to Thurs. 10.5 a.m.; 2.45 p.m.
Friday — 10.5 a.m.; 2.45 p.m.; 7.30 p.m.
Saturday — 9.15 a.m.; 10.15 a.m.; 2.15 p.m.; 3.30 a.m.
Sun. & Holidays 11.15 a.m.; 11.45 a.m.; 2.45 p.m.; 4.30 p.m.; 6.30 p.m.
(Special Trips by Arrangement)

PALM BEACH — BOBBIN HEAD — HAWKESBURY RIVER ETC.
Leaves PALM BEACH (Goddard's Wharf):
Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Sunday, 9.15 a.m.
(Arriving back at Palm Beach at approximately 2.15 p.m.)

PALM BEACH — PATONGA.

Leaves PALM BEACH (Goddard's Wharf):
Tuesday, Thursday and Friday — 9.15 a.m.
Sunday — 9.15 a.m.; 2.45 p.m.
Holidays — — — — — 1.45 p.m.

Leaves PATONGA:
Tuesday, Thursday and Friday — 1.45 p.m.
Sunday and holidays — — — — — 4.25 p.m.

Motor Yachts now operating the above services —
"SIEGA", "RAMBLER", "CURRAWONG" and "FALCON".

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For further information, please contact — The Manager,
Marine Dept., Port Jackson Steam, Palm Beach—Phone: Palm Beach 4.

(PJ & MS Co. Ltd. Hawkesbury services timetable, 1947. PJ & MS Co. Ltd. records.)

REFERENCES

Information for this article has come from the Sydney Register of British Ships and the records of the Port Jackson and Manly Steamship Co. Ltd., notably Annual Reports and Minutes of General meetings. This information was brought together in the author's MA (Hons) thesis *The Manly Ferry* (University of Sydney, 1984). Additional information has come from *The Hawkesbury River Valley Environmental Study*, NSW Minister for Environmental Control, 1973; R.D.Fildes, *The Ships that Serve Australia & New Zealand* Vol. 1. Sydney, Seairail, 1975; notes by Capt. Ron Hart in *Australasian Shipping Record* v.12, No.1, p.18; and the late Mr. George Marshall, formerly Traffic Manager of the Port Jackson and Manly Steamship Co. Ltd. who started his career with W.J. Goddard and came to the Port Jackson Company with the business acquisition.

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