**Essays on Mount Crosby - Holts Hill Carpenters**

After 1909, the Metropolitan Water Supply and Sewerage Board took over from the Brisbane Board of Waterworks (1864-1909). In so doing, they became the owner of Mount Crosby and all it promised. It was more than a name change; the new board had all of its old water supply responsibilities and the new duty to sewer the city. To meet the challenge, which the numerous bodies then responsible for the sanitation of the city had found too onerous, the new board collected its powers, and a new president, and set earnestly about the huge task.

It wasn't an easy time to start sewering the capital. Obviously, it was well overdue and much of the city was already heavily built up; five separate councils still governed the city with inconsistency, and no-one had yet agreed how to deal with the sewage. And there was another problem, which the board had not contemplated when agreeing to its ambitious capital works program for water and sewerage improvements. The period after the First World War saw the emergence of industrial awards that increased labour costs for contractors to the board. Some contractors failed when forced to pay reasonable wages, and others found themselves the subject of strikes that caused overruns on projects. Their collapse was a big problem for the board.

Mount Crosby had been a unionised workplace for years, which is not surprising when one considers that the pumping station and the labour movement emerged together in the early 1890s, and on the day that the memorial stone (now lost) was placed at the foot of the partially completed pumping station, a surprising amount of political vitriol was directed at the emerging labour movement. In subsequent decades *The Worker* was as popular as any magazine in Mount Crosby houses, and the withdrawal of labour was seen as a legitimate (and often the only) bargaining chip available to workers seeking to improve conditions.

At Mount Crosby, where the board had critical works planned for the post-war period, it wasn't long before a strike took place that worried the promises they had made. At Holts Hill the carpenters understood their new award to mean that, being country workers, they were entitled to "suitable sleeping accommodation or 15/ a week in lieu of it". The board opposed it because, with more than fifty men living in tents at Holts Hill, they stood to pay thousands of extra pounds. To settle the question, a test case was built around the employment conditions of carpenter Con Frost and it went to court under the government's Industrial Arbitration Act.

Details of the strike were interesting news for the public, who equated the board's ability to break the strike (and subsequent others) with their ability to supply clean water to the city. They need not have worried because, when the case was decided, the rough sleeping carpenters received a sign of what their future held; they were not awarded anything.

Col Hester