**Essays on Mount Crosby - Ash Bank Explosion**

The riverside near today's weir is different to its shape of yesteryear. Back then, there was a gentle slope away from the water on the western side, not the steep embankment created in 1927 when flood waters tore around the end of the weir and required an extension of the weir and a high retaining wall.

On the eastern side, behind the pumping station, the land fell sharply to a little creek (Stewarts Creek) that ran beneath the roadway and for a short part parallel to the river before emptying into it about 200 metres downstream from the weir. It's not there today because the rock wall is holding back thousands of tons of ash and coal waste dumped out back of the pumping station during the days of steam (1892-1948). Every day for 56 years, hot ash and coal waste, amounting to about 20% of all the coal burnt, was raked and shovelled from the boiler furnaces and tipped, somewhat carelessly, over the bank until a mountain of a thing had grown out over the little creek and pressed against the river. Underneath, insulated by more of itself, the coal waste glowed hot as it drew in air from the outside and made heat that couldn't escape through the cool and benign looking ash on the outside.

By 1950, almost everyone had forgotten the old ash heap was alive, and took it to be just an everyday reminder of the effort that went into steaming. But the old ash heap was waiting to play its trick; waiting for the right conditions; and they arrived in 1950 when the river rose in one of its periodic larger floods and tore away at the foot of the ash heap and exposed the still hot cinders to its cold waters, which immediately became steam and expanded with the violence of a long explosion. That spectacular event carried an inconvenient amount of ash up and onto the pumping station and the houses of the Works Hill - and became known as "the explosion".

The lengthy duration of the explosion enabled a lot of people to get its photograph, and wherever a title is written on such a photo, you can be sure it says "the explosion". Good enough for us; let's keep calling it that.

Col Hester