

The history of exploitation of the Tootgarook Swamp

Old maps suggests that the first attempts to improve drainage around the swamp occurred around 1878 when the first drain was dug. At this time the natural Swamp outlet ran along the existing Drainage Reserve between Flamingo Road and The Broadway and crossed Nepean Hwy, near the existing Rosebud hospital.

In the early years of this century proposals were put forward to drain the Swamp and use its rich soils for productive purposes. In December 1911. Johnstone & Tate Civil Engineers produced a report on the feasibility benefits and costs of such works. They considered that the natural outlet which was 1' below high tide levels was wide enough to carry all waters from the land. They noted that the bed was made of shingles and was resistant to scouring. Soon afterwards the Boneo Swamp Syndicate was formed to widen and deepen the drain. Later still branch drains were dug

RECLAMATION OF LARGE SWAMP (from The Melbourne Argus, Thursday 22 July 1937)

With the object of making available for settlement the area of 1,200 acres covered by the Tootgarook swamp, a mile and a half from Rosebud, a deputation from the Flinders Shire Council yesterday requested the Minister for Public Works (Mr. Goudie) to provide £750 from unemployment relief funds for the regrading of the Boneo drain. The council, it was stated, was willing to contribute £250, and it was claimed that the soil, if properly drained and sweetened for a few years, would be equal to the best in Victoria. Mr. Goudie said that if the residents were willing to form a drainage trust to ensure the proper maintenance of the drain he would inquire into the practicability of effectively draining the swamp.

Obviously these works were not entirely successful and land owners to the west of Boneo Road were still concerned about flooding of their pastures and market gardens. In May 1953 they agreed to contribute towards the cost of draining the Boneo Swamp. This work was done with a drag line and Council agreed to take responsibility for the drain downstream of Eastbourne Rd. The works commenced in June 1953 and were finished by 1954.

Again this work did not give total relief] probably due to blocking of the channel by emergent aquatic vegetation. Reports at the time noted the growth of "weeds" in the creek including Cumbungi, Phragmites and Watercress. In Sept 1958 Council requested the SR&WSC to drain the swamp by cleaning and widening Boneo drain up to Browns Rd. It is unclear as to the extent of work at this time but the next clean out was in 1964. The drain was 8 feet wide at this time.

In March 1960 Council provided money for reconstruction of the ocean outlet structure.

The construction of the wastewater outfall pipeline from the south Eastern Purification Plant to Gunnamatta in 1978 provided the next opportunity for major cleanout of the drain. This was done to help with de-watering of the pipeline route which virtually bisected the Chinamans Creek Catchment.

In November 1978, J. Fitzgerald, the then Flinders Shire Engineer produced estimates for flood alleviation of rural properties. The estimates included investigation (\$30,000), construction of a levee (\$100,000), regrading and reshaping of Chinamans Creek (\$300,000). Total Costs were estimated at \$620,000. These works were not carried out.

Problems in the creek persisted and the Shire files contain frequent examples of complaints about the creek "being choked with rubbish of all kinds and being a health hazard", "blackberry infestation of creek", "stagnant water, smells, mosquitoes", "unreasonable fire risk and abounding in weeds and snakes", and so on. The Willows Caravan Park in particular was affected by flooding and stagnant creek water and many of the streets in the vicinity of the creek were subject to frequent flooding.

There were also frequent complaints regarding flooding and poor water quality around the old course of the creek, especially at the time of construction of the sewer mains in 1991.

The summer of 1992/93 saw a flood of complaints from local residents about beach pollution from Chinamans Ck., water weed, colour, stench from decaying vegetation, high levels of E. coli, and invariably flash flooding.

Many complaints were also received by council regarding flooding and poor drainage in upstream areas and especially regarding flooding of Browns Rd. In February 1993 Council, considered a report recommending selective clearing, and investigation of piping the creek.

In November 1993 Mr. S.P.Goh was contracted to undertake a floodplain study. This was completed in July 1994 and recommended:

- A retarding basin in the swamp with an embankment at Elizabeth Ave.
- Enlargement of the Creek into the Bay.
- Construction of an impervious (clay lined) channel from Browns Rd through the swamp

It was calculated that these measures would reduce floodable properties from 90 to about five.

Subsequent council investigations led in 1995 to a council proposal for "maintenance and upgrade works of Chinamans Creek between Point Nepean Road and Eastbourne Road involving concrete lining, channel widening and removal of some vegetation".

Not surprisingly there was considerable opposition to this proposal, chiefly on environmental grounds. There was considerable criticism of a concrete channel downstream of Eastbourne Rd, because of its effect on the natural values of the creek. Protest meetings were held in June 1995.

Consequently the Council announced that a multi-disciplinary study and overall plan of the catchment would be undertaken. In the interim, a waterway management consultant, N.M. Craigie, was asked to review Goh's recommendations. In November 1995 N.M. Craigie advised that enlargement of the waterway would not have major benefits unless flows were reduced or culvert areas increased, i.e. culverts formed main controls to flows. He considered that it would be beneficial to enhance flood storage.

NEW FERTILISER INDUSTRY. (from The Melbourne Argus, Friday 14 March 1924)

With the object of producing an ammonium phosphate fertiliser from the humic soil in the district, the Ammonium Phosphate Fertiliser Company Pty. Ltd. is erecting a plant on the Tootgarook Swamp situated between Rye and Rosebud, on the Mornington Peninsula. Mr. Harry Pease, of Ashmore, Benson, Pease and Co. Stockton-on-Tees, England arrived on the steamer Sophocles on Tuesday to supervise the erection and working of the plant. It is stated that the new fertiliser will contain ammonia, phosphates and if desired, potash, all of which ingredients can be varied to suit any farming conditions. Special features of the fertiliser, say those concerned, are its high solubility, the bulk material with which the fertilising ingredients are mixed will be of an organic nature like guano, to a large extent resembling natural manure, thereby improving the texture of the soil. The development of the proposition is largely the result of experiments carried out by Mr. W. C. Robertson, assistant chemist, Department of Agriculture, Melbourne. An experimental plant at Stockton-on-Tees, England has demonstrated that the fertiliser can be produced on a commercial

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