

## Sovereign Hill Ruston Proctor engine

The engine powering Sovereign Hill's Cornish beam pump was constructed by the firm of Ruston Proctor at the Sheaf Iron Works, Lincoln, England, and is builder's number 7739. It was despatched to Australia on 25 July 1881. It is a right-hand 14nhp model (35-48ihp @ 80psi) with a bore of 12 inches and a stroke of 24 inches. Steam distribution is via double-D slide valves (with provision for governor-controlled variable expansion gear and a short-stroke feedwater pump). Speed regulation is via a Porter governor.<sup>1</sup>

It was sold to Reid & Perberdy.<sup>2</sup> Perberdy is an unusual name, and it would seem that only one man fits the bill for the period. He was W. K. Perberdy, a well-to-do squatter based in Rockhampton.<sup>3</sup> By 1886 he was chairman of directors of the Central Queensland Meat Export Company.<sup>4</sup> Walter Reid of Rockhampton was a foundation shareholder of the same company.<sup>5</sup>

The Central Queensland Meat Export Company was floated in late 1880 with a capital of £50,000 in 500 shares of £100 each.<sup>6</sup> By the end of February the Lakes Creek meat-preserving and boiling works on the Fitzroy River<sup>7</sup> (three miles from Rockhampton) had been purchased for £12,500 and enquiries made in England for the requisite machinery to provide refrigeration.<sup>8</sup> The Company was profitable and paying dividends when the works were destroyed by fire on 13 September 1883. Happily, none of the engines or boilers were injured. It seemed possible that, by calling up more capital, the works could be rebuilt in six months' time.<sup>9</sup> Advertisements to raise the capital were placed immediately, and small-scale operations were resumed in mid-August 1884.<sup>10</sup>

The Company struggled under the burden of the losses caused by the fire and was placed in liquidation at the end of April 1886.<sup>11</sup> In September 1886 the works was sold to a new syndicate for about half its estimated value.<sup>12</sup> During the following few years the works was gradually enlarged to process further frozen meats for the British Trade.<sup>13</sup> During this period there is no mention of any Ruston Proctor engine, which would have been less than a decade old, and possibly used somewhere like the works' bone mill.

In 1911 the works was converted to electricity as the motive power for 'practically the whole of the works', leading to the 'scrapping' of 'between eight and ten steam engines'. The only steam engines retained were those formerly in the slaughter-house (which was transferred to the fitting shop so as to ensure continuity of energy in case of failure of the main power plant) and the engine in the soap-works, and even the latter was under threat.<sup>14</sup> Since there seems to be no advertising of surplus engines from the meatworks, it seems probable they were sold as a job lot to a dealer. It would therefore seem that 1911 marks the departure of the Ruston Proctor engine to a new home.

Just what that home was is uncertain. Sovereign Hill's information has the engine coming from a machinery dealer in Moama, having previously worked at a sawmill in Armidale, NSW. By 1949 there were still some seventy sawmills operating in the New England District,<sup>15</sup> and research has failed to identify which one of these it might have been.

### References

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<sup>1</sup> *Ruston Proctor catalogue 1898*, pages 6-9 describing a 'B' class engine,

<sup>2</sup> Personal communication from Ruston historian Ray Hooley, 5 December 1983.

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<sup>3</sup> *Gympie Times & Mary River Mining Gazette*, Thursday 22 March 1888, page 2; *The Capricornian*, Saturday 21 April 1888, page 19; *Morning Bulletin* (Rockhampton), Saturday 20 April 1888, page 5.

<sup>4</sup> *The Queenslander*, Saturday 23 June 1886, page 127.

<sup>5</sup> *Morning Bulletin* (Rockhampton), Thursday 2 September 1880; *The Capricornian*, Saturday 5 March 1881.

<sup>6</sup> *Brisbane Courier*, Tuesday 17 August 1880, page 2.

<sup>7</sup> *Morning Bulletin* (Rockhampton), Saturday 28 February 1903, page 6.

<sup>8</sup> *Brisbane Courier*, Saturday 26 February 1881, page 5; Thursday 3 March 1881, page 2.

<sup>9</sup> *Morning Bulletin* (Rockhampton), Friday 14 September 1883, page 2.

<sup>10</sup> *Morning Bulletin* (Rockhampton), Thursday 20 September 1883, page 1; *The Capricornian*, Saturday 19 July 1884, page 1; Saturday 16 August 1884, page 15.

<sup>11</sup> *Morning Bulletin* (Rockhampton), Friday 30 April 1886, pages 4 and 5.

<sup>12</sup> *The Capricornian*, Saturday 4 September 1886, page 4; *Western Champion* (Barcaldine), Tuesday 28 September 1886, page 3.

<sup>13</sup> *Morning Bulletin* (Rockhampton), Friday 22 February 1889; *The Queenslander*, Saturday 6 October 1894, Pages 646 and 647; *Brisbane Courier*, Wednesday 24 July 1895, page 4.

<sup>14</sup> *Morning Bulletin*, (Rockhampton), Tuesday 1 August 1911, page 6.

<sup>15</sup> *The Armidale Express & New England General Advertiser*, Monday 12 September 1949, page 10.