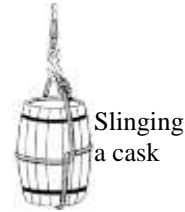


Sketch of a ketch rig

“Moses Fletcher” The Life of a Coastal Trader

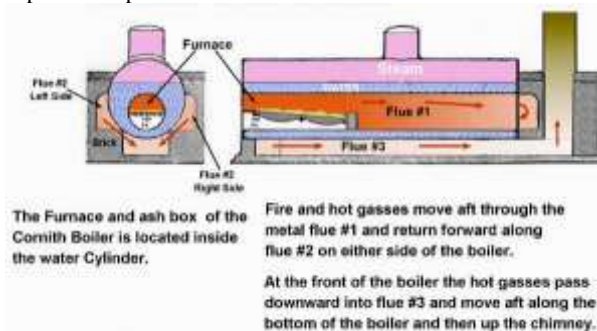
Wendy Simes

Slinging
a cask

It is hard to imagine today that the ketch “Moses Fletcher” was built on Tuross Lake for the coastal shipping trade. The thought of a 67 feet ketch (or 68 ft depending on which source you read)¹ with an 18 feet beam sailing her way in and out of the Tuross River, would be a sight I am sure we would all love to see. Today it is difficult to launch a small 14 ft fishing boat into the lake.

The “Moses Fletcher” was built next to the Tuross sawmill which was located on the south side of the Lake east of what is now “Smarts Bridge” at Turlinjah. This steam mill was operated by Goodin and Hicks and had been operating about 6 years at the time of the launch of the ketch. It continued in operation until August 1881 when the 16 hp Cornish boiler boiler blew up, completely wrecking the engine and the shed. Young Thomas Goodin died in the blast with Thomas Martin, George Goodin (Thomas’s father), and Arthur Marshall also injured. James Goodin, his older brother, escaped with only minor injuries.²

Cross section of a Cornish Boiler from <http://www.spiraxsarco.com/>



Tuross sawmill c. 1990



Back in 1872 however all was well at the mill and Captain Moses Fletcher was happily building a new boat for the mill owners. Apart from having successfully built the “Hope” at Moruya, Captain Fletcher had been involved in boat building on the Great Lakes in America. There he built hookers, which were specifically designed to carry timber on the Great Lakes.³

The “Moses Fletcher” was built solidly of hardwood timbers and planking with kauri decks, she was a shallow draught design but had a good carrying capacity. She was 42 tons on the register with a 70 ton burthen. (Burthen refers to the carrying capacity of the ship). As it is today, the part of the Lake where she was built was shallow water over mud flats. To launch her it was reported “a miniature ships canal had to be dug for nearly two chains (44.23 meters) and a basin twice the vessel’s length dug for her to drop into. At 10 pm at high tide on the 2nd October 1872, amidst loud cheering, she was christened by Mr W. E. Mort and successfully launched. She spent the next few weeks having her spars and rigging fitted before she was ready to start her career as a coastal trader.

In the 1874 Register of Australian and New Zealand Shipping her captain is listed as W. Knox – this was William Knox of Coila.

For the next 19 years we can follow the sailings of the vessel through the shipping arrivals and departures reported in the Sydney Morning Herald. She basically went back and forward from Tuross or Moruya to Sydney over these years with occasional forays as far as Newcastle. She carried a variety of cargo apart from timber. In December 1872 she left the Tuross River with 302 bags of bark, 2860 foot of hardwood, 11 bags of oats and 26 cheeses. In 1873 and 1874 she also had amongst her cargo tonnages of Granite from the Moruya River. The 28th January 1873 saw her deliver 65 tons of granite and 78 cheeses to Sydney. The 29th April was a more mixed load consisting of 40 tons of granite, 133 bags of maize, 48 lb of oats, 12 bags of wheat, 11 hides, 318 cheeses and 5 kegs of butter.

¹ SMH 8 Oct. 1872 p.2 and Empire 8 Oct. 1872 p. 3

² Australian Town and Country Journal 13 Aug. 1881 p. 12 and Moruya Pioneer Directory by Kate Boyce.

³ Empire 8 Oct. 1872. p.3.

Timber and agricultural products continued to be her main cargo throughout her working life. Frequently the loads were so diverse they were simply reported as sundries. A load in February 1877 included 25 bags of oysters which I hope made a quick trip to Sydney. One more unusual cargo was in August 1881 when she carried 900 baskets of shell from Moruya.

Like most coastal shipping the "Moses Fletcher" had her share of difficult times at sea.

In November 1873 she was involved in a collision on the Moruya River.⁴ As she was about to leave her mooring, the steamer "Kiama" entered the river after being signaled to enter by the Pilot. The incoming tide caused the stern of the steamer to lurch a little towards the "Moses Fletcher" which at the same time was caught by a puff of wind which drove her towards the steamer. In the collision that followed the "Moses Fletcher" lost her jibboom and a plank in her bulwarks was partially torn away. Repairs took 5 days. The "Kiama" however was only slightly damaged when the anchor at the bow of the "Moses Fletcher" made a hole in her plate at cabin level.

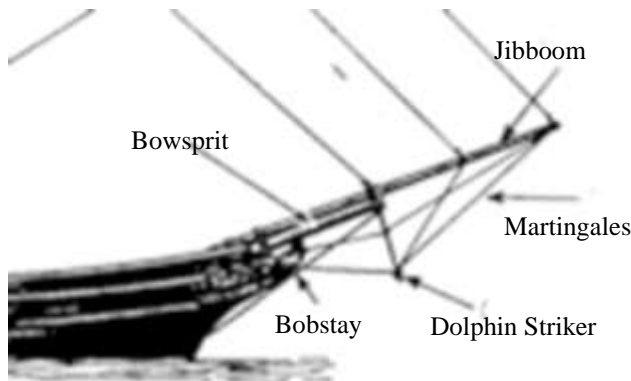


Diagram showing position of the Jibboom⁵

In July 1881 loaded with timber and attempting to cross the Tuross bar, the wind failed and she was driven ashore. She was forced to stay in the breakers all night. She was got off safely the next day but had lost her anchors, chains, boat and rudder. She was repaired and later warped⁶ over the bar.

During a storm in April 1886 she was sheltering behind Schnapper Island with waves breaking over her, much to the concern of those on shore. In the same storm the schooner "Enterprise" was hanging on 3 anchors at the mouth of the Cullendulla Creek

and the schooner "Agnes" was on the sandbank in Cullendulla Creek.⁷

Schnapper Island, Batemans Bay



February 1887 saw the disaster of one of the crew members being washed overboard. His widow Mrs Davis applied for relief from the National Shipwreck Relief Society (now known as the Royal Humane Society) and was granted £25 which was forwarded to the Police Magistrate at Moruya.⁸

Then on 30th June 1891 came the final disaster. She was crossing the Moruya bar fully laden with timber with a favourable wind from the west-north-west when the wind died, she lost steering way and went onto the bar. Christian Langker, the master of the vessel, was exonerated from any blame. He and his crew James Martin, Alfred Goertz and John Jacobson all escaped without injury.⁹ The master Christian Langker is reported to have been a Danish sailor from Schleswig-Holstein who had jumped ship in Sydney and made a life in the shipping industry in NSW. In 1882 he had married Elizabeth Rebecca Zeigler of the well known Moruya Zeigler family. Their youngest son Eric Zeigler Langker was to become a well known artist who was knighted for his services to the Arts.¹⁰

At the time of the disaster the "Moses Fletcher" was owned by William Emmott. She had been purchased by him in 1875 or 1876 as he is listed as the owner in the Register of Australian New Zealand Shipping for those years.

And so after 19 years of hard work sailing up and down the south coast, after an inspection of the wreck and the salvage of the cargo she was sold at public auction for £6 10/- to Patrick Mylott.



⁴ SMH 11 Nov 1873

⁵ Manual of Seamanship. Vol. 1, 1951. London, HMSO.

⁶ Warping means she was pulled out with ropes. These ropes can be attached to the shore or to anchors taken further out to sea.

⁷ SMH 16 Apr 1886

⁸ SMH 6 May 1887

⁹ SMH 14 Jul. 1891

¹⁰ Design and Art Australia online.