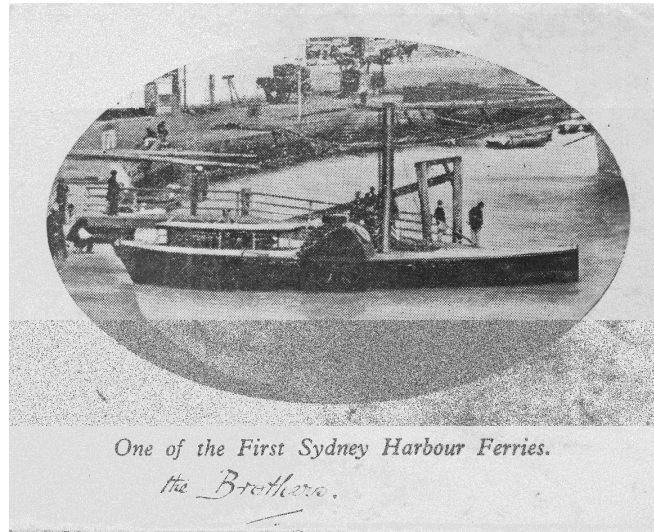


## Brief history of the Manly Ferries

A ferry service to Manly commenced as far back as 1830 with Barney Kearns operating an on-demand transfer by sailing boat between Balmoral and Manly.

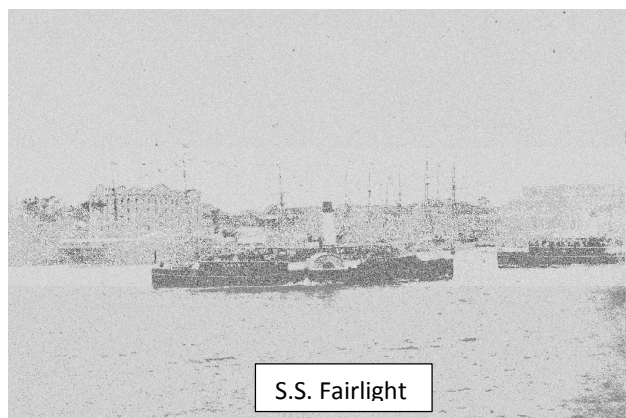
However, the type of operation that we know today, with ferries running between Circular Quay and Manly at scheduled times and for posted fares, began in earnest in 1853 when Henry Gilbert Smith built the Pier Hotel and a ferry wharf, positioned where the Hotel Manly and ferry wharf are today. His purpose was to encourage land purchasers and day trippers to his newly laid out village of Brighton. As well as building the fixed infrastructure he chartered *The Brothers* – a wooden paddle steamer of 23 tons – to run a reliable service.



Both the village and the ferry service prospered and by the late 1850s about half a dozen vessels operated on the route.

In 1865 the Brighton and Manly Steam Ferry Company was formed. It operated a service with a purpose built double-ended steel paddle steamer of 63 tons, the *Phantom*. Its funnel was painted white, with a black top, and both this colour scheme and the double ended design were to become synonymous with the Manly ferries.

In 1877 the Brighton and Manly Steam Ferry Company was reorganised as the Port Jackson Steam Boat Company. It commissioned a purpose-built vessel from Scotland, the steam paddle steamer the *Fairlight*. It had a top speed of 12 knots and made its way to Australia under its own steam in just three months, starting on the Manly run in 1879. Its overall appearance and layout would tend to set the template for future ferries.



In spite of the popularity of the *Fairlight* with passengers, the Port Jackson Steam Boat Company got into financial difficulties and in 1881 was replaced by the Port Jackson Steamship Company Ltd. (PJSCL) which took over the bankrupt company's six ferries and tugs. To encourage people to take up land in Manly the new company auctioned property that it owned in the area, with the bonus of a five-year ferry pass to those who built a home.

Patronage increased and with it the ambitions of the PJSCL. In the late 1890s they increased passenger fares by 50% to 1/6d return. There was an outcry and the fares were reverted to 1/- but two years later the company put them back up to 1/6. This triggered the formation, in early 1893, of a rival company, the Manly Co-Operative Steam Ferry Company Ltd., with fares of just 6d. By December of that year the PJSCL had had to drop its fares to the same level.

A war now raged between the two rival companies and passenger numbers grew massively. The number of daily return trips had to be increased from 15 to 24, with passenger numbers of the order of 50,000 being transported each month. As well as cheap fares passengers enjoyed cheap food, the soothing sounds of orchestras and, on the *Brighton*, access to a wine bar complete with an aviary of canaries to give a choral backdrop.

In November 1895 the PJSCL dropped the fare even further, to 3d return, and its rival matched it immediately. The influx of day trippers to Manly continued to increase, leading some locals to observe that "they were not the most select of Sydney's youths and maidens".

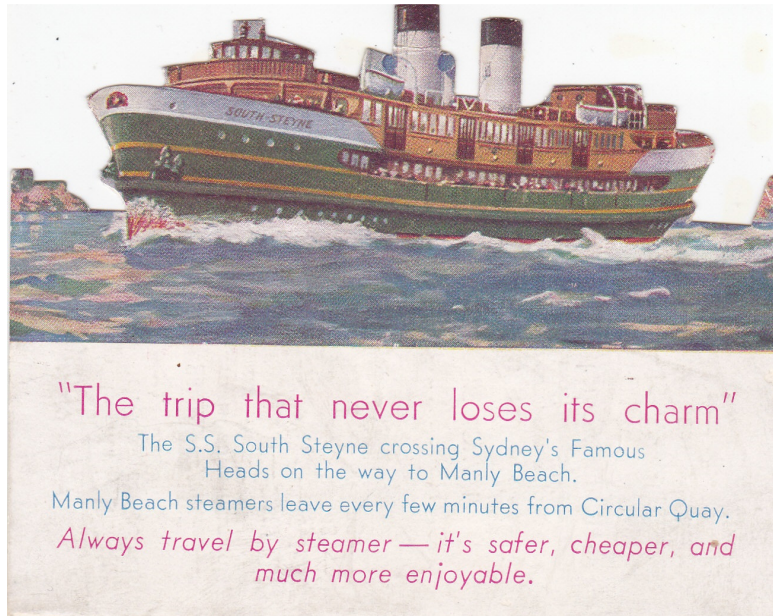
But something had to give and it was the Co-operative Company. On 15 May 1896 it agreed to amalgamate with its rival and the Port Jackson Co-Operative Steamship Company Ltd. was formed. Passenger fares stabilized at 6d return but services further improved. New vessels were commissioned and potential travellers now had 34 return journeys a day to choose from. Travel time had reduced from the earlier one hour to 30 minutes.

History was to repeat however and the merged company failed in 1907, leading to the formation of the Port Jackson and Manly Steamship Company Ltd., which was to run the service for the next 70 or so years.

For its first 50 years, starting in 1853, the ferry service to Manly was used mainly by day trippers and holiday makers. Huge crowds flocked to Manly on public holidays and at weekends. However with the introduction in 1903 of a limited tram network radiating out from the Manly Wharf, residential settlement was encouraged and commuters began to be a market on weekdays. The tram network expanded rapidly up the Peninsula, reaching Narrabeen by 1913. Feeder bus services were also introduced. Resident numbers increased enormously and by 1950, commuter traffic began to rival holiday traffic on the ferries. Fortunately for the operators there was not a clash – commuters travelled mainly on weekdays and day trippers on weekends.

For many years it was a very profitable operation. To further encourage patronage the Port Jackson and Manly Steamship Company Ltd. built a large enclosed harbor pool on the western side of the passenger wharf and a mini Luna Park on the old cargo wharf to its east, with a modest aquarium located between the two wharves.

To service the demand, in the period from 1910 to 1952 a total of eight ferries were either purpose built or modernised. The flagship was the *South Steyne*. Built in Scotland in 1938 it steamed out to Sydney in just 64 days. It was 1,203 tons and could carry 1,781 passengers.



However the onset of World War 2 saw a reduction in patronage and this continued into the immediate post-war years as money was tight. Fares were increased to try to meet costs but this was counter-productive. In 1964 control of the company changed at Board level and the new directors had little interest in the ferries, being more focused on other interests of the company. They saw the future of commuting being in much higher speed, lower capacity vessels and introduced hydrofoils to run a parallel service to the ferries. Nevertheless things improved through the 1960s as commuter numbers increased and day trippers made something of a return.

In late 1971 this situation attracted what was ultimately a successful takeover bid by Brambles Industries Limited. However the new owners had even less interest in the ferry service, having been attracted by other operations of the company which included the servicing of off shore oil drilling rigs.

At the time of the takeover there were four ferries in operation – *South Steyne*, *North Head*, *Bellubera* and *Baragoola*. In 1973 the *Baragoola* was withdrawn and in early 1974 Brambles announced that the *Bellubra* was also to go. This caused public outrage and a Save the Manly Ferries campaign was mounted, with petitions containing tens of thousands of signatures being delivered to state parliament. Brambles response was to indicate that they would consider a State Government takeover bid.

After various twists and turns, with Brambles claiming that they would stop the ferry service by November, the State Government announced that it would take it over. However they would operate only two ferries – *North Head* and *Baragoola* – supported by the inner harbor ferry *Lady Wakehurst*.

In 1976 the government announced that it was to build three new ferries - the so-called Freshwater class. The first, the *Freshwater*, was not commenced until December 1980 and it was eventually commissioned two years later. It was followed by the *Queenscliff* and, after a gap, the *Narrabeen* in 1984. The style of these three ferries was in the tradition of the old ferries and proved quite popular with passengers. They are still in service today.