

Helena Gibson (1946 -)

Bridge Under Construction, Taren Point

1963

Oil on board

Captain Cook Bridge was opened on 29 May 1965 by the Governor of NSW, Sir Eric Woodward. It was the first component of a planned southern expressway linking Sydney's suburbs to the Illawarra region, thus relieving an extremely congested Tom Uglys Bridge.

Gibson's painting was donated to SSHS by Sutherland Shire Council in 2017.

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Surrounded by waterways and the National Park, the land south of metropolitan Sydney that would become Sutherland Shire, was not easy to access in the 19th century. Unlike the Illawarra district further south it had very little agricultural land and no coal deposits to speak of. In addition, Port Hacking, with its ever-shifting sandbars, was a port in name only.

The extension of the Illawarra Railway Line to Sutherland in 1885 was a boon to the eastern part of the district. And in 1912 Sutherland's first traffic bridge was built over the Woronora at Menai. It served the community until 2001 when a high-level bridge was built over the Woronora River. Farmers in Menai no longer had to ford their cattle across the river. Farmers also relied on the old Lugarno ferry to transport produce to market. This service closed on 12 December 1974. By this time the Alfords Point Bridge further upstream had been opened to traffic in 1973.

In 1910 the punt service across the Georges River between Tom Uglys Point and Horse Rock Point in the south was upgraded to cope with the increasing traffic. However, by the 1920s the volume of traffic was so great that delays of six and seven hours to cross the river were not unusual. Another ferry service was established downstream at Taren Point in 1916 to replace a private service that had operated there. Nevertheless, visiting Cronulla – or anywhere in the Shire – remained a slow business for many years.

The situation was relieved after the Georges River Bridge Act was passed in the NSW parliament in 1923, allowing Sutherland Shire Council to raise an overseas loan to finance bridge construction. The Georges River (Tom Uglys) Bridge was completed in 1929, a toll bridge that brought an ever-increasing flow of motor transport into the Shire, as tourists flocked to Cronulla. In the post-war years, as the population of Sutherland Shire rose dramatically, Tom Uglys Bridge could no longer cope with the worsening traffic.

It was the fulfillment of a dream the Council had since 1912 when the Captain Cook (Taren Point) Bridge opened in 1965, thus taking the pressure off Tom Uglys Bridge. But by 1987 traffic congestion was again so great that the latter was duplicated by the construction of a parallel bridge.

About the artist:

A resident of Cronulla for 17 years, Helena's career in art spans education, commercial work and performance. She now works from a studio in North Eastern Victoria as a painter and puppeteer.

References:

- David Kirkby, *From Sails to Atoms*, Sutherland Shire Council, 1970
- Pauline Curby, *A Pictorial History - Sutherland Shire*, Kingsclear Books, 2004
- Helena Gibson, Email correspondence with Elizabeth Craig, 30 January, 2018