



## Goondi Mill Inquest — 1922

### Introduction

This Note provides a brief glimpse into the life of a tramline worker following WW I, with details supplied by his niece, Pam Liell, of Sydney.

Harold Arthur Embury, then employed as a labourer at the Goondi Mill, died while returning home from helping build part of the mill's 2 foot gauge tramline, likely an extension to the Upper Daradgee line on the left bank of the North Johnstone River.

The inquest materials quoted from below (Document 61316, stamped Government Insurance JW Insurance Commissioner Brisbane 1st Feb 1922. Department of Justice 1 Feb 22 JD (4)) have been slightly edited to correct spelling and improve punctuation.

Goondi Mill closed in 1986, with the cane from the area being transferred to other CSR mills in the area.

### My Uncle Harold Arthur Embury

*Harold worked at the mines in Tasmania. He showed his little sister, my mother Jessie, his cap with its candle. She was nine when Harold died. Her father, William Edward Embury, gave her a Bible in memory of Harold.*

*Harold's stepmother, my grandmother Jean, had a nervous breakdown because of Harold's death and was in hospital. Her youngest child Wilfred (Bill) suffered emotionally from this tragedy and stopped speaking all together. He was six.*

*I think the Harold Emery case shows the spirit of adventure which still exists in young people today - the backpacker life.*

*There is danger, as Harold's tragedy shows. Of course, so many young men had gone to the Great War and Harold being just 18 when the war ended had escaped, only to be killed in Queensland*

Pam Liell, Sydney, 2008



Harold Arthur Embury 1900-1921

### Inquest 16 April 1922 before J J [John Joseph] Moran, Police Magistrate

Sergeant Clines conducted the inquiry.

*John Thomas Morris duly sworn on oath sayeth I am a police constable stationed at Innisfail.*

*At about 8.15 am on the 29th November 1921 Mr Ernest Smith manager of Goondi Sugar Mill telephoned saying that a man named Harold Arthur Embury employed by the mill had not returned home from his work the previous day and that a search party had searched for the missing man and that his footprints had been traced to a spot on the North Branch of the*

*Johnstone River and that a further search had failed to find any tracks.*

*I patrolled to Mr W D Davies's farm Goondi Mill and made a search for the missing man and about 6pm the same day I commenced dragging operations and recovered the body in about 2 feet of water. and about 15 yards from the eastern bank. The body was lying face down and fully clothed. I removed the body to the shore and could see no marks of violence. I searched the body and found a gunmetal watch and silver chain attached to the belt. I had the body*

conveyed to the morgue. On the way to the morgue I had the body identified by John McGregor as that of Harold Arthur Embury.

I was present at the morgue on the morning of the 30/11/21 when Dr Leavy GMO made a post mortem Examination and handed me a certificate as to the cause of death. Copy of Doctor Certificate tendered. Put in and marked Exhibit 1.

Deceased was about 22 years of age a labourer and believed to be a native of Victoria where he has relatives residing at the following address W E Embury father, "Shilvah" 26 McPherson Avenue, Caulfield and a brother named Bert residing at 20 Murdock Street West Brunswick.

Deceased had been employed as a labourer by the CSR Coy at Goondi Mill Innisfail.

### 20th December 1921

Harold had been employed as a labourer at the Goondi Mill at Innisfail since 2 August 1921. With other men he was engaged in the construction of a small 2 foot tramline about three miles from the mill. On the afternoon of the 28th November Harold and the other men of the Gang ceased work at the usual time and started walking towards Goondi Mill.

It was the usual practice for the Gang to cross the north branch of the river in a boat but Harold on several times crossed the river at a place called the Devil's Steps by walking across the rapids. By the time the Gang arrived at the river, Harold, with a man named John McGregor, was walking behind. Harold said to McGregor that he would take a short track home and walked across towards the river which was about 200 yards off. All the Gang crossed the river by boat and on arrival at Goondi Mill Harold had not been home. Harold was not seen after until his body was recovered in the river.

At this particular crossing where Harold had crossed there is a strong running stream of water about 2 to 3 feet deep and a slippery stoney bottom and about 18 yards across. Harold after entering the water apparently got washed off his feet and washed down into a whirlpool and was drowned. Harold was a very poor swimmer.

Amongst his property he had a Commonwealth Bank Book No 1671 Innisfail Branch showing credit balance of 83 Pounds and 7/6d in silver.

The police officer John Thomas Morris made careful enquiries in connection with Harold's death and from the result of his enquiries he was unable to get any information as to any person

who saw Harold enter the water and he was of the opinion that he met his death accidentally whilst crossing the North Branch of the Johnstone River and that no person was to blame.

### 21 December 1921

John McGregor gave evidence that he was a labourer employed by the Colonial Sugar Refining Coy, at Goondi Mill and resided in Gladys Street In Innisfail.

He knew Harold who was also employed as a labourer at the mill. There were about 12 men including Harold and John engaged in the construction of a new 2ft tramline extending up the North Branch of the Johnstone River and about 4 1/2 miles by rail from Goondi Mill.

At about 5pm that day Harold knocked off work with the rest of the gang and they all started to walk back to Goondi Mill. After walking about 1/2 mile we were nearing the Johnstone River where we always crossed in a boat. Harold and John were walking together when about 200 yards from where the boat was tied in the river John said to Harold "Which way do you usually go home." Harold replied "I usually cross at the rapids but the others go across by boat further down. I said to him "Is it deep?" Harold replied "Yes" and putting his hand above his knee said "About up to here. " I said to him "Do you take your boots off?" Harold replied "No, I keep them on because it is too slippery without your boots and it goes pretty fast" Meaning the water. I said to him "I would not cross with you because there is no fun in walking to town in water logged boots so I will go on with the others".

Harold then left and went in the direction of the river which would be about 200 yards away. I did not watch Harold where he went to, I walked on and crossed the river in a boat with the rest of the Gang about 200 yards below the rapids. I came to Innisfail that night and when I returned to work the following morning I was told that Embury had not returned to the Mill from his work the previous evening.

When I was going to work the morning of the 29th November 1921 four of us made a search for Harold at a place on the river and known as the Rapids, and near where I last saw Harold the evening before. I could not see any footprints of him at the water's edge or find any trace of him. We made the search where Harold had told me he intended crossing. At about 10.30pm on the night of the 29th November I was shown the dead

body of a male person and identified it as that of Harold Embury who I last saw alive about 5.10 pm on the 29th November 1921.

Harold was about 21 years of age and a native of Victoria. I knew the deceased for about six months and occasionally worked in the same gang. I never heard him complaining of any illness. I never worked on the new construction previous to the 28th November 1921. Harold when going to work of morning would generally walk ahead and leave the rest of the gang to follow. He was in the habit of crossing the river at the Rapids and would be waiting at his work for the Gang to come along. Harold had stated to the Gang one morning that whilst crossing the river at the Rapids he had been swept off his feet. He was a very quiet inoffensive man and as far as I know had no enemies. I do not know where his relatives reside I have heard him speak of Caulfield Victoria. I do not know if he had made a Will.

I have never crossed the river at The Rapids but I have viewed it from the water's edge. The water is about 3 ft deep in midstream and flows very strong. The river bed is very stoney and the distance across the river at the Rapids would be about 20 yards. About 15 yards below the crossing at the Rapids is a very large deep hole and the water forms a whirlpool with a very strong undertow. I have no reason to believe Harold committed suicide. I have no suspicion that he met with foul play. I am of the opinion that the deceased was washed off his feet and carried into deep water and accidentally drowned. He was on friendly terms with all the men in the Gang.

John McGregor 21st December 1921

## Post Mortem Report

I hereby certify that on the 30th day of November 1921 I made a post mortem examination of the body of a male named Harold Arthur Embury by order of Sergeant Clines. And the cause of death was in my opinion

- 1 Concussion
- 2 Drowning
- 3 Asphyxia

Edward P Leavy FRCSI  
Government Medical Officer

## Harold's Postcard

A postcard sent from Harold to his father William Edward Embury before he went to Innisfail:

Luina Post Office Tasmania. August 1921:

Dear Dad,

I arrived here alright after a good trip across. The water was smooth. The trip from Burnie to Zeehan beats anything on the mainland. The train was just like a boat in a rough sea and some of the chaps were sick. I had a job to get accommodation. All the boarding houses were full. It was about 10.20pm before we got fixed. Hoping everything is alright.

Your affectionate son Harold.

[It needs to be noted that Harold wrote to his father, and did not include a greeting or message to his stepmother Jean who had brought him up since 1906 when he was six years old when his mother Jessie died in Sunbury Lunatic Asylum. Jessie was admitted to the Asylum in October 1905 so Harold and his brother Bert may have been in Jean's care since then, when he was five. Alternatively, he may have been in the care of Jessie's mother, Mrs Gadsby. ]

## Goondi Mill photos/information

Photos and other information about the Goondi Mill, closed since 1986, can likely be found in the CSR Collection of the Butlin Archives at the Australia National University, Canberra.

A small number of photos of Goondi Mill locomotives and rolling stock can be viewed on the CaneSIG web site.



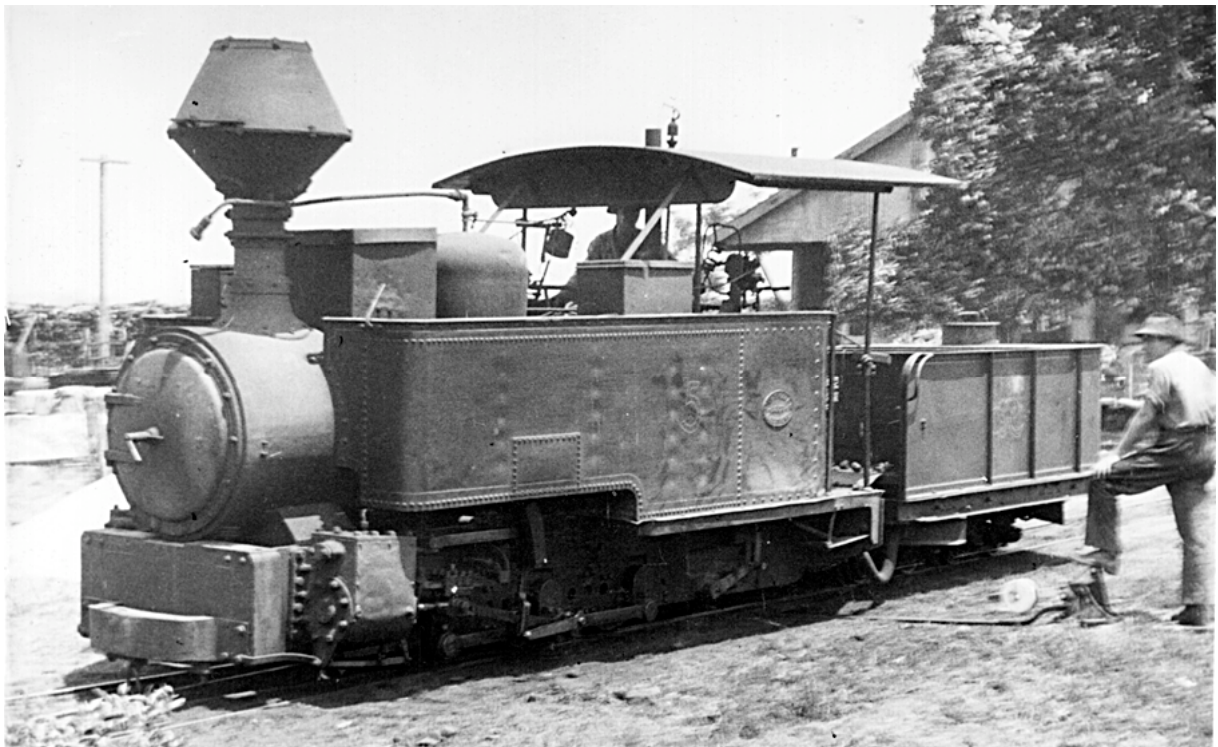
Goondi (CSR) Sugar Mill loco shed with Hudswell Clark #2 and #6, 1955. Ken Rogers photographer, from John Browning Collection.



Goondi Mill loco shed being used as an out-depot of Mourilyan Mill, 3 October 1994. This complex was severely damaged by Cyclone Larry in March 2006 and was subsequently demolished. Greg Stephenson, photographer from the CaneSIG web site.



Hudswell Clark #1099 at Goondi (CSR) Sugar Mill, November 1946. Ken Rogers photographer, from John Browning Collection.



Goondi #5 (John Fowler #12271) at Goondi (CSR) Sugar Mill, November 1946. Ken Rogers photographer, from John Browning Collection.