

FROM THE NEWSPAPERS

1922

GENERAL JOHN MONASH

A VISION OF YALLOURN

The following news article summarised a speech that General John Monash made to members of the press on a tour of the works area of Yallourn in 1922. The report was published in the 'Morwell Advertiser' in November of that year.

In his remarks that day (more than ninety years ago), General Monash outlined his vision for Yallourn including coalmining, electricity generation, briquette production, housing and services for the workers their families.

It is a most significant news extract in the history of Yallourn as it placed on public record the ambitious objectives of the project. With the benefit of hindsight, it is clear for all to see how well General Monash's ideas and hopes came to fruition.

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Pressmen Visit Yallourn

GENERAL MONASH'S REMARKS

INTERESTING ADDRESS.

The members of the Victorian Provincial Press were the guests of the State Government on Friday, when they were taken by special train to Yallourn in order that they might judge for themselves of the merits of the case for and against the electricity scheme.

They were received by the Chairman of the Electricity Commissioners (General Monash), also Messrs Kernot and Harper (engineers) and Bridge (superintendent).

General Monash explained from three large maps what it is proposed to do at Yallourn, the following being the gist of his remarks

COAL AND WATER

General Monash commenced his remarks by pointing out that the conditions at Yallourn were almost unique for the establishment of cheap power. From almost halfway between Moe and Morwell to the New South Wales border there existed millions of brown coal.

On the Western side of that line none had been found. Wherever there was coal at no greater depth than 100 feet the most payable way to get at it was by means of an open cut, rather than by mining. That was the reason for the quarrying methods adopted at Yallourn.

It has been discovered that in an area of 30 square miles the coal was less than 100 feet from the surface. There was a small open cut area at Traralgon, and a large one of 30 square miles at Welshpool. At this latter place, however, there were no transport facilities.

FUTURE OF WELSHPOOL.

He looked forward to the time when big ships drawing 24 to 26 feet would be able to call and load at Corner Inlet, and Welshpool would be the capital of a great industrial area.

SUITABILITY OF YALLOURN.

In one particular part the coal, which was 25 to 60 feet below the surface, varied in thickness from 200 feet to 600 feet. As the ground rose the coal got thicker, thereby compensating for the extra cost in removing the overburden.

It was essential for a scheme like the electricity proposal that there should be a good supply of water to hand. The presence of an important river like the Latrobe, and the splendid thickness of coal, showed the Commissioners that Yallourn was an ideal place for the powerhouse. The machinery must be 70,000 horsepower, and there was enough water for 200,000. There was sufficient coal in one square mile to supply three times the present needs of Victoria for 150 years.

Considering that coal could under the present system could be gained so cheaply as from 2/6 to 3/- per ton, it was mighty difficult for water power to

compete with it. It was essential that a beginning should be made somewhere, and the Yallourn site was unrivalled for the purpose.

DIVERTING MAIN LINE.

It was proposed to divert the Gippsland railway and thereby avoid the Haunted Hills, and alter the grade on the line from 1 in 50 to 1 in 100. This would tap Yallourn, and make it a station on the main line.

THE FLOOD BOOGEY.

There had never been any danger of floods in the past, and the small quantity of water found in the present out showed there was as no chance of the river breaking through.

TRANSMISSION OF CURRENT.

Towers for the transmission of the current to the metropolis were already in course of construction. A lot of nonsense had been talked about the danger of electricity breaking loose and devastating the countryside, but they were following a well-established practice. In America they carried the electricity 296 miles.

COST OF ALTERATION.

While it might cost something to alter the system in use in certain country towns to that installed by the Commissioners, it was nothing compared with the cost which suburbs south of the Yarra would have to bear, owing to the mono-phase electric system being unsuitable for industrial purposes. To transmit direct current from Yallourn to Melbourne would mean a loss of 50 per cent., while there would only be a loss of 5 or 6 per cent on the indirect.

COUNTRY TOWNS' CONSUMPTION.

It was an eye-opener to the questioners when General Monash said that although every machine at Yallourn except the steam shovel was driven by electricity, the engines at the temporary power-house only required to be of 1000 kilowatts capacity, yet this would suffice to supply electricity to the whole of the towns in the Western district.

It was therefore seen that the revenue to be derived from country towns was very small. He, however, held the belief that the only reason there are so few rural industries is the lack of power, and the mere fact that owners of

factories can't get electricity at the same price as the metropolitan firms, will not deter them from starting industries, once they are assured of the power being made available.

BRIQUETTING WORKS.

The General explained that Germany was manufacturing *80?? (Footnote:1) tons of briquettes per annum but that an experimental factory was being established at Yallourn under the direction of German experts, and that it would be capable of turning out 35 tons per day and ultimately 100 *(Footnote:2) The cost for heating purposes would probably run into 20/- per ton, and it would contain four times as much heat as could be obtained from firewood.

THE GARDEN TOWN.

There is no private ownership of land at Yallourn, ownership being vested by the Government in the Commissioners. Provision has been made by the designers of the town for a very much larger population than exists there today. The designers have followed the modern principles advocated by 'town-planners,' and have delighted Sir James Barrett, who takes a keen interest in the subject, by seeing that there will be a garden township in which slums will be unknown, and where every house holder will have half an acre of land in addition to the house where he resides.

It is, of course, to be understood that the houses or land will always belong to the Commissioners, who for a moderate rental of 18/6 per week will provide a comfortable and commodious*(Footnote: 3) house valued at £400 to £500.

In addition, to the sports reserve for the adults, there will be a children's playground. Instead of the main road for traffic going through the middle of the town it will go to the side, and thus avoid cutting up the roads.

Those having business in the town will have another good road provided. Five splendid sites have been provided for the various churches, and each domination will bear the capital cost of erection, but the ownership will remain with the Commissioners.

The hospital will be situated on a hill about a quarter of a mile outside the town. This will be erected by the Commissioners. A unique and yet eminently practical scheme is to be followed by the builders of Yallourn in that they intend leaving intact the existing large clump of bush country between the

workmen's homes and the coalfield, so that when they are at home they will be able to see their work, and when they are at work they will not be able to see their homes!

Although General Monash points out that there was nothing but bush eighteen months ago where the works now stand, he also stresses the point that in no case were trees destroyed where they could be saved, and that steps were being taken to plant a splendid nursery of four acres, which would prove a great asset in more ways than one.

SYSTEM OF OWNERSHIP

In conclusion, the General is most enthusiastic as regards the system of ownership. He believes that the fact that private ownership is not allowed will prevent land-jobbing by speculators who would quickly raise the rent and bring about slum areas.

No tenant will be allowed to occupy a house unless he is either an employee or an attendant of an employee, or who is approved for the service of the Commissioners in other ways. It is hoped to have a combined medical and dental clinic established.

WHAT HAS BEEN DONE

There may exist in the minds of the sceptical some doubt as to whether these ideals are ever likely to be achieved. All we can say to such is that they would be well advised to take a trip and see for themselves.

They would notice that there are already in existence two very sanitary and up to date messes for the men. One is called the Western and the other the Eastern.

The men have been provided with bunks for sleeping accommodation, only a few tents being in use, and for the accommodation they pay 6?? a week. They have also a splendid billiard saloon, and plenty of sewerage sanitary accommodation and bath rooms. The co-operative store made a profit of £1100 in 12 months on a turnover of £20,000* (Footnote: 4) and only charged Melbourne wholesale prices. These facts speak for themselves, and make it fairly certain that the Commissioners will make good in establishing a splendid industry for Gippsland and an ideal home for the employees.

THE END

FOOTNOTES.

1, 2, 3 & 4... The figures are very difficult to decipher at these points in the original article and are open to conjecture.

5. Work began on the Open Cut in 1920.

6. General Monash was appointed General Manager (later to be known as Chairman) of the State Electricity Commission of Victoria on January 1st 1921.

7. General Monash was knighted in 1918 and he died in 1931 at the age of 66 years.

8. For those people wishing to read more about Sir John Monash and his life as an engineer, soldier and administrator, the '**Australian Biographical Dictionary**' Volume 10: MUP (1986) is an excellent starting point. The **ABD** (as it is known) can be found at:
<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/monash-sir-john-7618>.

9. It is anticipated that a newspaper article regarding the funeral of Sir John Monash will be published at a later date on the Virtual Yallourn website.

The above article from the 'Morwell Advertiser' has been faithfully reproduced. The only amendments to the original copy are the font style, font size and spacing so as to enhance the article for purposes of posting on the Virtual Yallourn website.