

## Albert Sykes' observations of changes on the Fitzroy, 1915

Captain Albert E. Sykes was Harbour Master for the Port of Rockhampton from 1880 until his retirement in 1907, although he first visited Rockhampton as a hopeful prospector in the abortive Canoona gold-rush of 1859.<sup>1</sup> With his intimate knowledge of the Fitzroy and Keppel Bay, he thereafter became a periodic correspondent to *The Morning Bulletin* on matters marine, under the appropriate pen-name of S.E.A. In his 1915 series 'Minor Waterways of Central Queensland - Lore of the River Fitzroy', he wrote of changes on the river reflected upon as he travelled downstream:

In the first place, where the lower wharves now stand there was in 1858, the year of the Canoona rush, a fringe of mangroves 100ft deep with a gap cut through them to enable the barque William Buchanan...to discharge her passengers and cargo...Now here's Devil's Elbow, and through the dense timber which clothed it many years ago the Council cut a narrow defile in order that a vessel going down might, through the cutting, see another coming up the river and avoid collision...We are now crossing over from the quarry and, in what is now a steep bank, is the mouth of Prawn Creek...We are now passing over Archer's Crossing, now carrying 16ft at low water, but where, as legend says, the Gracemere Archers in 1855 used to cross their cattle, the river being then fordable at this place. ...Brown's Crossing. Now, instead of crossing the river at right angles to Brown's Island, as in former days, we follow the southern bank, passing in deep water over what was dry and vegetated and named Ram Sand, but which was cut through by the bucket dredge Saurian...Next we pass the northern end of Central island and the old-time boat channel...there are now mangrove trees, 6in. in diameter growing...Pirate Point...looking to the opposite side of the river at the extensive sand and much formation, one can hardly realise that a few years back it was the deep-water anchorage for all the larger sailing vessels of the Scottish and other lines until they were lightened of their cargo...<sup>2</sup>

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### References:

1. L. McDonald, *Rockhampton: A History of City and District*, St Lucia, 1981, p. 84.
2. *MB*, 27 March 1915.