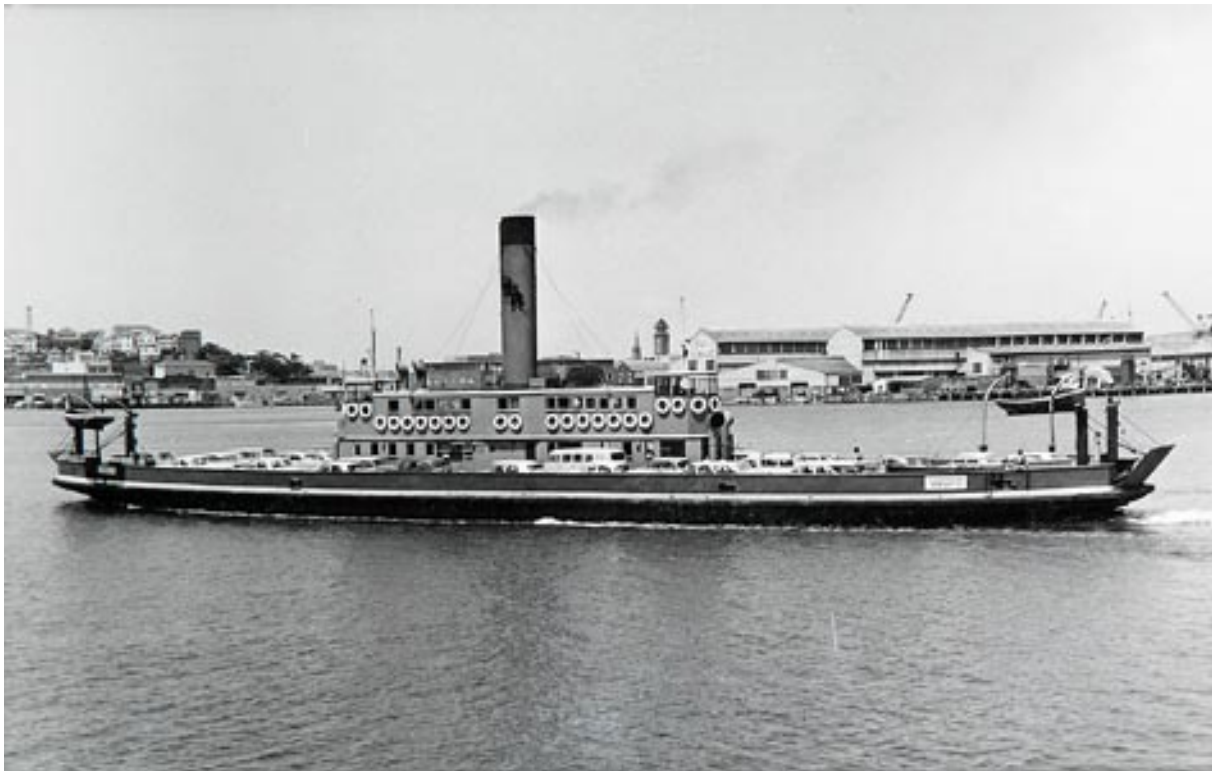


CHAPTER FIVE: **THE KOONDLOO**

The DMR did another traffic survey in 1948 which showed, only two years after the addition of the Lurgurena to the run, that the Lurgurena and the Kooroongaba together could not meet the peak demands that were being placed on the crossing. (Sound familiar?). Clearly a larger vessel was required, and in 1950 the RTA bought the Koondooloo which, after being converted back from a floating repair ship during the war to a vehicular ferry, commenced service on the Newcastle run in 1952.



SS Koondooloo on Newcastle Harbour after re-conversion from its wartime guise

Yet again, there are discrepancies in the data for the vessel. She was, like all the others, steel hulled and screw propelled, this time 526 gross register (or 524). She was 191ft 7in long, and had a beam of 35ft 8in (or 35ft 7in depending on who you choose to believe). Her draught, similarly, has been given as 11ft 6in (Main Roads, Sept 1972) or 14.8ft (Stockton Historical Society Newsletter 1997), which is a fairly large discrepancy, so the latter figure is probably the vessel's depth MLD. She was powered by a 114hp triple expansion steam engine developing 1150 indicated hp, and the steam was supplied by two gunboat-type boilers with a working pressure of 180lb psi. She could carry 263 passengers and 42 vehicles, and had a top speed of 13 knots.

The Koondooloo was a bit bigger than the Lurgurena, and she'd had a varied past by the time she reached Newcastle. She was built by Hawthorns and Co Ltd, of Leith, Scotland and was launched in 1924. She sailed out to Sydney under her own steam with a crew of fifteen, arriving for service on the Sydney Harbour crossing

Form No. 19 (3.70)

Signal Letters (if any)

Transcript of Register for Transmission to Registrar-General of Shipping and Seamen

Official Number		Name of Ship		No., Year and Port of Registry				
151994		"Koondooloo"		20 in 1937 Sydney, New South Wales				
No., Year and Port of previous Registry (if any) Re-registered. Formerly No. 17 in 1924 Sydney, N.S.W.								
Whether British or Foreign Built	Whether a Sailing, Steam or Motor Ship, if Steam or Motor, how propelled	Where Built	When Built	Name and Address of Builders				
British	Steamship Single Screw	Leith	1924	Hawthorns & Coy. Ltd., Leith.				
Number of Decks	One	Length from fore part of stem, to the aft side of the head of the stern post		191	Tonns			
Number of Masts	None	Main breadth to outside of plating		35	7			
Rigged	Not	Depth in hold from tonnage deck to ceiling amidships		13	1			
Stem	Double-ended Vertical	Depth in hold from upper deck to ceiling amidships, in the case of three decks and upwards		—	—			
		Depth from top of deck at side amidships to bottom of keel		14	8.5			
Stern		Round of beam		—	7.5			
Build	Clincher	Length of engine room, if any		78	—			
Framework and description of vessel	See Over							
Number of Bulwarks	Five							
PARTICULARS OF PROPELLING ENGINES, ETC. (If any), as supplied by Builders, Owners, or Engine Makers								
No. of Engines	Description of Engines	Whether British or Foreign built	When made	Name and address of makers	Indicating Engines No. and Diameter of Cylinders in each set	Stroke Length of Stroke	Power No. of Cylinders in each set	N.H.P. I.H.P. Estimated Horse Power of Ship
One	See Over	Engine	Engine	Engine	Three	—	—	114
		and	and	and				940
		and	and	and				1100
See Over	Number Two Loaded Pressure 180 lbs	British	1924	Hawthorns & Coy. Ltd., Leith.	16 1/2" 26" 43"	24"		13 1/2 Knots
PARTICULARS OF TONNAGE								
GROSS TONNAGE			No. of Tons	DEDUCTIONS ALLOWED		No. of Tons		
Under Tonnage Deck	517.84	On account of space required for propelling power Under Sec. 79 of the Merchant Shipping Act, 1894, on account of space provided by way of crew accommodation, as follows:—		289.07		
Space or spaces between Decks	.. .. .	.. .. .		(Number of staterooms or apartments for whom accommodation is certified)		
Turret or Trunk	.. .. .	.. .. .		Other deductions under Section 79 of the Merchant Shipping Act, 1894, and Section 54 of the Merchant Shipping Act, 1906, as follows:—		
Forecastle	.. .. .	.. .. .				
Bridge	.. .. .	.. .. .				
POOP	.. .. .	.. .. .				
Break	.. .. .	.. .. .				
Side Houses	.. .. .	.. .. .				
Deck Houses	.. .. .	.. .. .				
Chart House	.. .. .	.. .. .				
Spaces for Machinery, and light, and air under Section 78 (2) of the Merchant Shipping Act, 1894	.. .. .	.. .. .	7.74			
Excess of Hatchways	.. .. .	.. .. .				
		Cubic Metres						
Gross Tonnage	.. .. .	1487.39	525.58				
Deductions, as per contra	.. .. .	818.07	289.07				
Register Tonnage	.. .. .	669.32	236.51				
NOTE.—1. The tonnage of the engine room spaces below the upper deck is 191.40 tons, and the tonnage of the total spaces framed in above the upper deck for propelling machinery and for light and air is 7.74 tons.								
NOTE.—2. The undermentioned spaces above the upper deck are not included in the cubical contents forming the ship's register tonnage:								
Whealhouses (2)	.. .. .	.. .. .	11.87 Tons			
W.C. & Washplaces (2)	.. .. .	.. .. .	40.32 "			
Deck shelter for passengers	.. .. .	.. .. .	428.53 "			
NOTE.—3. The location and tonnage of the boatwain store rooms are as follows:—								
Name of Master								
Certificate of Service/Competency No.								
Names, Residence, and Description of the Owners, and Number of Sixty-fourth Shares held by each owner								
Harbour Land and Transport Company Pty. Limited having its principal place of business at No. 8 Jetty, Circular Quay, Sydney in the State of New South Wales. Sixty-four Shares.								
Dated 21st July, 1937								
M. L. L. Registrar.								

NOTE.—Registrars in the Colonies are requested to distinguish the Managing Owner by placing the letters "M.O." against his name.

N.B.—To be sent in an envelope addressed to the Registrar-General of Shipping and Seamen, Leith Street, Glasgow, C200R.

C. 345A Instructions to Registrars of British Ships, para. 37.

The Koondooloo's 1937 Registration Certificate

Declaration of Ownership on behalf of a Body Corporate.

Official No.	Name of Ship.	No., Date, and Port of Registry.	
151994 ✓	"KOONDOLOO"	20 in 1937 Sydney, New South Wales.	
Whether a Sailing, Steam or Motor Ship.		Horse-power of Engines (if any).	
Steam Ship		H.P.	114
		L.H.P.	940
		I.H.P.	1100
		Feet.	Tenths.
Length from fore part of stem, under the bowsprit , to the aft side of the head of the stern post		191	7
Main breadth to outside of plank		35	7
Depth from top of deck at side amidships to bottom of keel		14	8.5
NUMBER OF TONS.			
Gross	525.58	Registered	236.51

and as described in more detail in the Certificate of the Surveyor and the Register Book.

I, the undersigned REGINALD SYDNEY JOHNSTON
of 309 Castlereagh Street, Sydney ^{State} in the County of New South Wales
(a) Secretary of The Commissioner for Main Roads ~~Company, Limited~~
declare as follows —
The said Commissioner for Main Roads
The said Company was incorporated by virtue of an Act of the Legislature of New South
Wales No. 21 of 1932 entitled "The Transport (Division of Functions) Act, 1932,
on the 29th day of December 1932, and is subject to the laws of
the State of New South Wales
The said Company has its principal place of business at 309 Castlereagh Street, Sydney
where all the important business of the Company is, in fact, controlled and managed at meetings of Directors
or Managers of the Company.

The above general description of the Ship is correct. The Commissioner for Main Roads
is entitled to be registered as owner of 64 shares in the said Ship. To the best of my knowledge
and belief, no person or body of persons other than such persons or bodies of persons as are by the Merchant
Shipping Act, 1894, qualified to be Owners of British Ships is entitled, as Owner, to any interest whatever,
either legal or beneficial, in the said Ship. And I make this solemn Declaration conscientiously believing the
same to be true.
Made and Subscribed the 16th day
of January 1931, by the above-
named REGINALD SYDNEY JOHNSTON
in the presence of
at 309 Castlereagh Street,
Sydney.

(a) Insert office of person making declaration, Secretary or otherwise.
* Here insert such of the descriptions as are applicable —
"An Act of Parliament of the United Kingdom (cite the year of the reign in which the Act was passed, its chapter and title)."
(or)
"A Charter granted by His Majesty and dated the _____ day of _____ 19____"
(or)
"An Act or Ordinance of the Legislature of _____ (cite the year in which the Act or Ordinance
was passed, its chapter and title)."
(or)
"the Companies Acts 1908 and 1913. (If incorporated before the commencement of the Act of 1908, the Act mentioned in the
Certificate of Incorporation should be stated)."
† "The _____ (or as the case may be). In the case of a Company incorporated by virtue of the Companies Act, insert also
and its registered office as at _____
‡ Declarations must be made before a Registrar, a Justice of the Peace, a Commissioner for Oaths within the meaning
of the Commissioners for Oaths Acts, 1889 and 1891.
The qualification of the person taking the de _____
of attestation are to be added to his signature.

The Koondooloo's Declaration of Ownership by the DMR, 1931, when she was bought for the Stockton/Newcastle run

in July 1924. Her sister vessels the Kalang and the Kara Kara came out to join her two years later. All three, along with the Kooroongaba, stayed in service on Sydney Harbour until the Harbour Bridge was opened in 1932.



DMR Pic

The Koondooloo newly-arrived in Sydney Harbour in 1924



Harbour traffic during the construction of the Sydney Harbour Bridge

But the trip out from Scotland was not without incident. I came across a letter in the Port Macquarie News of Jan 13 1972 that had been prompted by the stranding of the car ferries on the beach at Trial Bay at the time (see Chapter 9). In this letter, Mr C.J. Holmes describes the Koondooloo's trip out to Australia:

“...she was fitted out with temporary deck cabins (there was no room below decks) and a crew of thirteen. My brother Doric Holmes was invited to navigate it on its long journey to Sydney, and took command at the princely salary of \$44 per month and all found. The “all found” soon made itself apparent for there was very little freeboard, and the Bay of Biscay swept the decks clean of food and fuel.

By cautious seamanship the voyage continued through the Suez and across the Indian Ocean. Singapore seemed almost home, but heavy seas broke the front rudder away from its locking device. Running repairs were necessary in order to make headway, and these were carried out with further heavy seas breaking over the bow.

The Barrier Reef, (despite the absence of charts at that time) offered some respite, but running out of coal, the crew landed on what is now one of the popular holiday resorts, and cut timber to keep the boilers going. Eventually Koondooloo steamed into Sydney harbour, to the noisy reception of sirens from anchored ships, 84 days after leaving Leith, --. “the first ferry of its kind to make such an epic journey”.

The opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge left Sydney Ferries Pty Ltd with a whole fleet of vehicular ferries on their hands. Most of them were used to ferry cargo around the harbour, but the Harbour Bridge had cut back the demand for this sort of thing as well. The problem of what to do with them was solved, in a way, by the outbreak of war, which saw most of them pressed into war service.

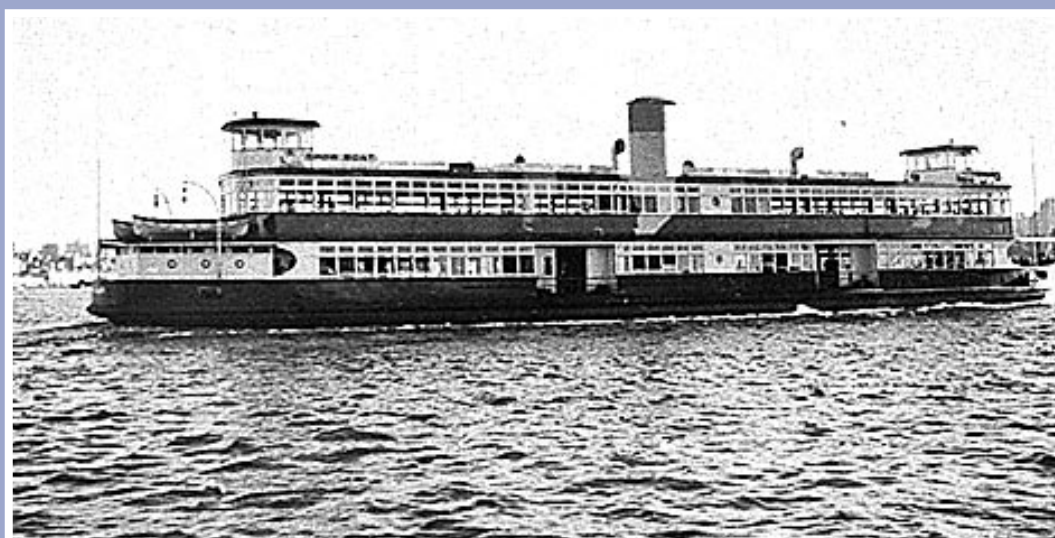
For five years after the Sydney Harbour Bridge opened the Koondooloo was used as a cargo vessel, like the others that had become redundant, and in 1937 (some say



The Koondooloo as a single-decker showboat. The outside decks were always popular.

1936) she was converted to become the first Sydney Showboat. Later an extra deck was added, which enabled her to carry 1702 passengers, and in that configuration she became a very popular tourist attraction on Sydney Harbour until soon after WWII broke out. Her initial success was such that another car ferry rendered obsolete by the Harbour Bridge, the Kalang, was similarly converted to a Showboat a year later and operated in tandem with the Koondooloo on the Harbour (see chapter 6). Many tourists visited Sydney for the sesquicentenary celebrations in 1938, and the showboats were so popular that they were kept on the go, mostly chockers, day and night for almost a month.

And all this success came about despite the fact that neither showboat served alcohol, though of course the ubiquitous and capacious 'Gladstone bags' of the day enabled grog to be smuggled aboard without too much trouble. The Gaming Minister of the time considered adding wet bars to the vessels, but nothing came of it, and by and large the police turned a blind eye to the practice of smuggling booze aboard.

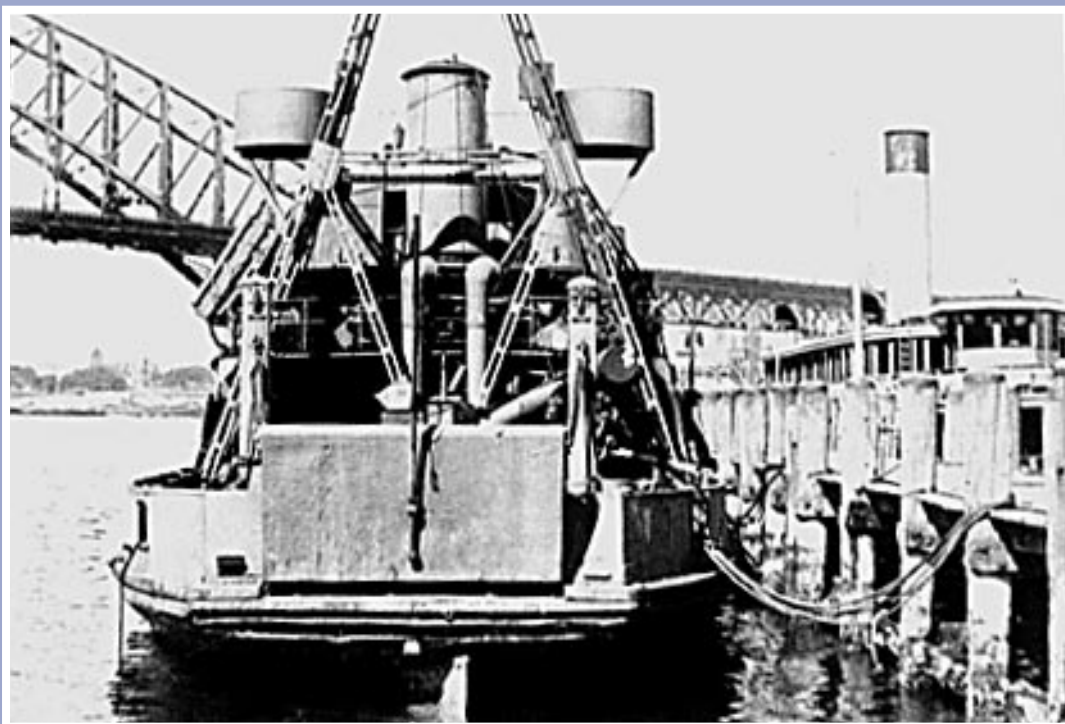


The Koondooloo's two incarnations as a showboat: as a single decker (top) and as she looked in 1940 with the second deck added (bottom).

In 1942, the Koondooloo was requisitioned by the Army, along with her sister vessels the Kalang and the Kara Kara, and saw service in the Pacific war zone as a self-powered barge at Port Moresby and New Britain. The Navy fitted out the vessel (renamed No S.181) for the small ships section of the Army. To maximise her usefulness to the army she was converted to a single-ended vessel, the bows at the forward end having been built up to make her suitable for work in the open sea, outside the shelter of Sydney Harbour. She was used to transport Army vehicles and equipment in the Pacific war zone and sailed unescorted to Port Moresby and New Britain to take up her various wartime duties. She sailed back under her own steam from the Admiralty Islands in 1945 after the War had ended in the Pacific, and in 1946 she was returned to her owners, Sydney Harbour Ferries, where she remained until her purchase for the Stockton/Newcastle run was made in December 1950.

When she steamed into Newcastle in 1950 the Koondooloo was still fitted out for war service. She was taken to the State Dockyard and after an extensive conversion that took the best part of two years she was converted to the familiar 'flat iron' shape of a vehicular ferry. In this form she carried 42 vehicles and 283 passengers. (Main Roads of September 1953 gives a 57 car capacity). During this re-fit, the original steam steering mechanism was updated with a Donkin hydraulic steering system, and the superstructure was considerably extended.

The Koondooloo joined the Lurgurena in 1952 on the run to and from Stockton and the Koorongaba became the relief ferry. And that was the way things stayed until the end of the Stockton/Newcastle punt service when the Stockton Bridge was opened in late 1971.



G. Andrews Pic

The Koondooloo rebirthed as a self-powered barge, ready for war service

During the years from 1950 to 1971, the Koondooloo and the Lurgurena operated on a quarter-hour service – initially from 6:45am to 6:30pm, then in later years this was extended to 11:45pm. From 11:45pm to 2:15am one ferry operated a half-hour service, and then crossed hourly until 6:45am, when the two-ferry service cut in again.

Together the two big ferries moved a helluva lot of traffic. In 1947 it was calculated that the two vessels doing the run then (The Koroongaba and the Lurgurena) chalked up a combined average of 645 trips each week and carried 6,777 vehicles. By 1961 (with the Lurgurena and the Koondooloo doing the run) these weekly figures had risen to about 1,100 trips (4,400 per month), 24,000 vehicles (96,000 per month), and 6,250 pedestrians (25,000 per month). In 1970, the annual average daily traffic volume was 4,000 vehicles. And despite the best efforts of the DMR, long queues at peak times were still the order of the day. No wonder everyone was hanging out for the Stockton Bridge to open!

Koondooloo is said to be an aboriginal word for “emu”.



DMR Pic

The Koondooloo approaches the dock at Stockton

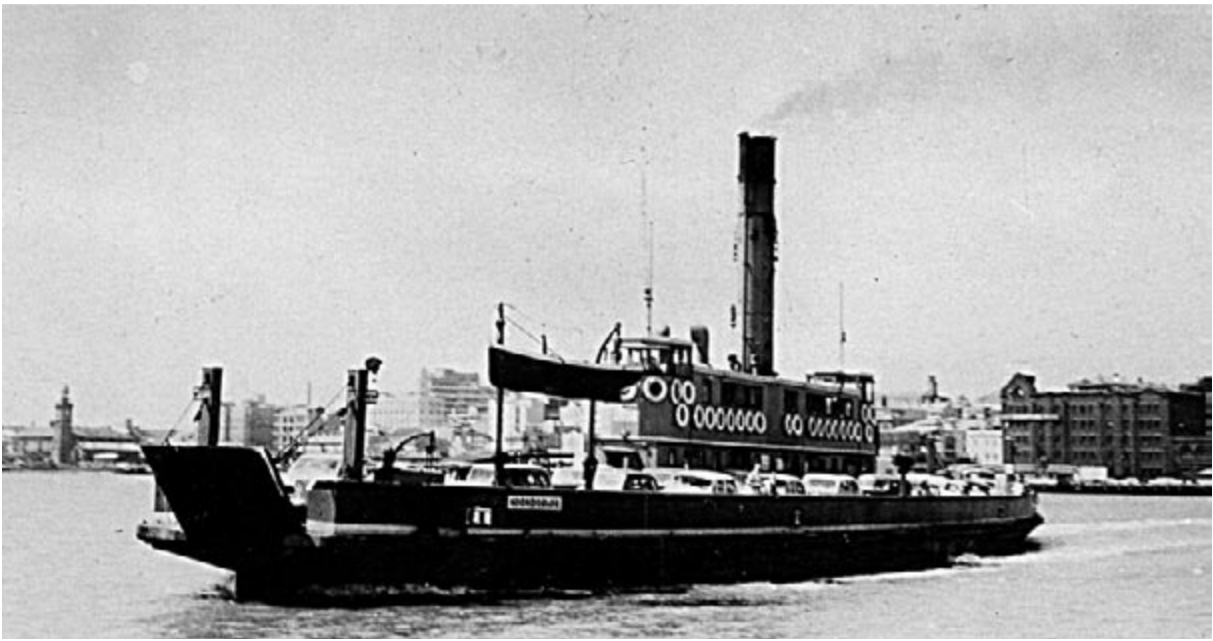


Koondooloo leaving Jeffrey St Ramp , 1925



On Middle Harbour as a single-decked Show Boat

Pics on pp47 & 48 courtesy Graeme Andrews



On Newcastle Harbour in 1956



On board, and heading for Newcastle in 1970