

*The Dickabram Bridge
Remembers*



1886 - 2011

*I am the Bridge,
The Dickabram Bridge,
Proudly spanning the Mary River,
Providing a vital link,
Between east and west,
For 125 years.*

*With ageing comes remembering
one's past.
I am ageing now - I am 125 years old!
So I have been remembering
my past -
I am an original Dickabram
survivor
So I have much remembering
to share!*



*The Dickabram Bridge Remembers
Has been written by Shirley Lipsett-Adams
Shirley is the great granddaughter of one of the district's original selectors
Who themselves saw the bridge built from conception to completion
And the affection for the structure and the gratitude for its existence
have been handed down through the generations.*

The Beginning Years

In the latter half of the 1800's,
 before I was,
The first settlers came,
Clearing the virgin scrub,
Building their slab huts
 with shingle roofs,
Working the rich soil with hoes,
Planting their crops -
Potatoes, maize, pumpkins -
Establishing their lives,
Raising their families.

But the Mary River was a barrier
To these settlers struggling to get
produce to market.
To overcome the Mary's varied moods,
A bridge was needed,
A sturdy bridge,
A high level bridge
A rail/road bridge,
to cater for the new railway line
Being built to Kilkivan.

I was to be this bridge!

Horses did not like me!
They snorted, they reared,
Their hooves slipping on my decking!
But men were ever the masters
Using their sharp spurs
To force their horses to cross me!

I sometimes saw younger riders
Race approaching trains across me
When their parents weren't nearby!

I was an unpopular challenge
To the drovers bringing mobs of cattle
to cross me.
With much loud whip cracking
And much louder swearing
They urged the terrified beasts
To take that first step on to my
decking.
How I dreaded these encounters.

Over the years, small, barefooted
children
Dodged the gaps in my decking
Fearful lest they'd slip through
Into the water so far, far below!
Of course, none ever did!

Meanwhile, the Mary was always there
Following her own wilful agenda -
She swept away low level bridges -

I was high level!
We certainly clashed in 1893!
She rose to 72 feet above her normal
height!
What a disaster for the river farmers!
Cattle, horses were swept away
By the raging, swirling water.
Their bodies crashed against my decking,
Now well awash, trapping fish there.
What a smelly, muddy mess
Once the water fell!
But I stood firm -
I had defied the Mary!
She was not amused!
So we have remained non-friends
Since that flood in 1893!

Ever resilient, the Mary River farmers
Rebuilt their ruined farms,
Salvaging what they could,
Clearing debris, rebuilding fences.

A symbol of survival,
I was still there,
Providing that ever so vital link.

Sometimes I could hear the local
children
Laughing and shouting at the school
nearby -
They were the future farmers
of the district.

What a contrast of disasters
for the farmers!

First the flood of '93!

Then a crippling drought in 1902!

The whole area around me
was desolate -

No grass, no crops, cattle starving,
dying of hunger.

I watched skin-and-bone beasts
Stagger down to drink at the Mary
near me;

But, too weak to go back up
the steep bank,

Many fell and died at the water's edge

Even the Mary was suffering,

The water level dropping to a mere
trickle in places.

What a pitiless time!

At least the crows and eagle hawks
grew fat!

Steady, soaking rains returned, the
district flourishing again.

Crops grew profusely -

Once more the trains were carrying
loads of produce across me!

I felt happy for the Mary River
farmers!

The Glorious Years

During the Beginning Years,
Through the good times,
Through the harsh times,
I served the district well -
Yet, ever so slowly,
The Glorious Years were evolving!

The Glorious Years were heady times,
The district abuzz with people
and progress.

I continued to prove my worth
With a daily succession of steam trains,
Laden with all types of produce,
Puffing their way across me.
I remember them all so well -

K8 - 1.00am	—————>	To Kingaroy
K10 - 6.30am		
K7 - 6.30pm	—————>	From Kingaroy
K9 - 9.30pm		

Two railmotors, the Peanut (Kingaroy)
and the smaller Proston,
Carried passengers on alternate days
To and from Maryborough and Gympie.
The railmotors were very busy,
Rattling across me, with children
leaning out the windows
To catch a glimpse of the Mary!

There were the “specials” as well -
Smelly cattle trains,
Well notified “poison” trains!
A loud whistle warned the gate-keepers -
“Train coming! Don’t open the gates!”
Sparks flew everywhere
As the fireman shovelled coal
 into the furnace.
(I watched those sparks carefully -
I didn’t want to get burnt down!)
A trail of dark smoke often lingered
After the toiling engine passed.

I could see Dickabram Siding
 just along the line from me;
I could not see Dickabram Cemetery
 up on the hill;
But we were original Dickabram
 survivors,
Together we were perpetuating the name,
 Dickabram!
What a contrast!
I, a massive, high level bridge,
 spanning the Mary River;
Dickabram Siding, a humble railway
 shed,
Standing alone by the line!
Dickabram Cemetery, a block of land,
 up on the hill,
Often invaded by bladey grass!

However, like me, both provided a vital
service!

Dickabram Cemetery, up on the hill,
became a final resting place
For those “whose worldly tasks were done,”
For those who wished to remain forever
at Dickabram!

Dickabram Siding dispatched so much
produce
With trains stopping there regularly;
Wagons were often shunted off with
heavy items
For the settlers to the east;
Sometimes there was timber for my upkeep!
Sometimes there was ballast for the line.

The railway line was well maintained -
Condemned sleepers were replaced,
Ballast was spread to keep the lines clear.
Such hard, such hot work!
Canvas water bags kept the workers’
drinking water cool.

The ganger rode his trike daily,
Checking his length of line carefully,
No motors in those early days,
Only man-power,
With four men needed to propel
their pumper
Along the line across me.

These strong, sun-scorched railway men,
They were my friends.

I too was well maintained
during these years -
A Bridge Maintenance Gang came
through the year

To keep me safe.

A Painting Gang came every three years
To keep me spruce.

I was so proud of my red arches
and black pylons,
I enjoyed these visits from the
maintenance men!

Dairying became a major industry
in the district;

Cream was sent by rail motor
from Dickabram Siding.

The Calibar guernsey cows grazed near me
on the river bank,

Often lingering in my shade on hot days.

Young calves and pigs were loaded
weekly at Miva

Into special, double compartment wagons
- pigs in one, calves in the other.

I can still hear the calves, newly
separated from their mothers,

Bawling loudly as K7 crossed me!

Trains, cars, trucks now
crossed me regularly -
I was still providing that vital link
from east to west.

New players arrived in the skies above me -
The Phantom Jets shared their barrel
rolls with me!

The F1 11s roared across the district
Using me as a target, day and night,
Sending panic through the placid
dairy cows.

The Mary continued her non-friendly agenda
To get rid of me!



I always shivered and swayed a bit
As I felt the water
Creep ever higher up the flood gauge
On one of my pylons
Would the water rise above
the 72 feet level of '93?
Debris would pile up against me,
Tempting the foolish to walk on it.
The flood of '55 was a worry.
Haystacks came down the river
Disintegrating on hitting me,
Sending their rat, snake, mouse
passengers
Flying in all directions.

Suddenly 1986 arrived!
My century of being had passed
so quickly -
Where had all the years gone?
Centenary celebrations were carefully
planned.
A brief history of the district was
prepared -
My photo was on the front cover!
On the day, so much happened -
So much attention - I certainly
enjoyed every moment!
Spooked scouts recounted their
ghostly encounters
Of the evening before -

I knew what really happened!!
Ploughs, spring carts, buggies,
All horse drawn, were there on the day,
Highlighting life in earlier years.
I remembered them well!
Many people came to re-visit their
 Bridge memories.
So much laughter, so much yarn telling!
Rowdy raft races stirred the drowsy Mary
As the motley crews struggled to keep
 their crafts afloat
While trying to turn the other “blokes”
 upside down!
For me this was a rewarding day of recognition
But, sadly, Dickabram Siding was
 no longer there
To share the celebrations.
I still wonder if many people visited
Dickabram Cemetery up on the hill
 that day.
Now only the Cemetery and I remained
As original Dickabram survivors -
We were the ones perpetuating the name,
 Dickabram.

Yet, even then, the Glorious Years
 were faltering -
Changing Years were creeping in,
Uninvited, inevitable, often unnoticed,
 yet not always unlamented!

The Changing Years

These times of change were certainly
not easy.

No longer happy to stay on the farm,
Young people were drifting away,
Enticed by the greener pastures
of a wider world.

Their ageing parents were unable
to manage -

What should be done with the family
farm?

Difficult decisions had to be made.

I felt the waves of restlessness, of
sadness around me!

The dairy cows were sold,
Beef cattle appeared
Buildings -
Dairies, pig sties, barns, haysheds -
Fell into disrepair
Becoming abandoned shells,
Relics of an earlier time,
Sad reminders of loving families
Who had once lived their lives there,
Now gone forever.

Almost forgotten, neglected and rather dowdy,
My pylons and arches re-painted silver,
Now faded to a shabby grey -
I miss my smart red arches and black pylons!

In '99 the wrath of the Mary
Battered me to my foundations -
My framework shuddered and shook.
I trembled in fear - the locals were worried too!

Yet I still remained there,
Spanning the Mary River,
Providing a still vital link
Between east and west.
And the ever moody Mary continued
To follow her own agenda!

The Now Year - 2011

Now 2011 has arrived!
I was opened in 1886;
Time to celebrate my 125th birthday!
I'm ageing, but I enjoy remembering.

An ever dwindling few can recall
The buzz of the Glorious Years.
I feel a very special bond with
these
Whose childhood I once shared!

The pain of the Changing Years
is ongoing.
So much has changed -
No more trains cross me;
The rail link to the west has closed;
The railway trikes, the pumpers, the canvas
water bags have gone;
Dickabram Siding is no longer there;
The gate-house and gates have gone;
The F1 11s no longer target me;
Even road traffic is limited to a
certain weight -
I'm ageing, you see!

However,
In recognition of my age
And my value to the district,
I have been

HERITAGE LISTED!

I feel a bit honoured
But I have served the district well,
Providing a vital link from
east to west
By spanning the Mary River
For 125 years!

But how I do miss the hustle
and bustle of
previous years!

Over the years I have given
shelter to so many:
To the Bunji - Bunji
Whose tribal land I stand on;
To the swagmen who, homeless
and hungry,
Roamed in search of work in
the Depression;
To the so easily spooked scouts
Who camped near me and my
ghost!
To the Calibar guernseys grazing
in my shade.

My arches have been a safe haven
To possums and owls during the day,
To magpies at night.
These arches have even tempted
some to walk over them.
My decking has even dared bungee
jumpers to take the plunge.

The Mary has continued
Her "get-rid-of-that-bridge" agenda.
She still produces floods.
How I miss the flood gauge
long gone from my pylon!
Even the debris has changed -
No more haystacks, just hay bales
wrapped in green plastic.

These days much of the rubbish left
on trees is green plastic -
I much preferred the haystacks
and their passengers!

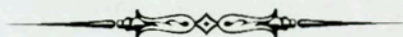
During my 125 years of being,
So many things have come, have gone;
Yet so many things still remain
the same.

In the Mary below me
The gentle Ceratodus still sigh
Their gulps of air
As they always have;
The Turtles still sleep on logs
in the sun
Slipping silently away;
The silver Mullet still leap, inexplicably
out of the water;
The elusive Cod still lurk in deep river
holes;
The shy Platypus still play close
to the river bank;
The black Ducks still quack on the river;
A large Pelican, an elegant black Swan
still visit occasionally;
The raucous Channel Billed Cuckoos
still return in spring
sending fear through the nesting Crows,
Returning in summer to collect their
crow-reared offspring!

True survivors, the Scrub Turkeys, are
returning to reclaim their patch!
As a meal favoured by early
settlers,
The “Scrubbies” disappeared for many
years.
The Kookaburras still laugh from
their gum tree
At sunrise and sunset!
The Flying Foxes still squabble noisily
In the fig trees nearby,
The Curlews still call eerily
from the river flats;
The Dingoes still howl mournfully
from the distant bush;
On winter mornings the river flats
still turn white with frost;
On autumn mornings I am still
shrouded by thick mist
Lingering along the river;
On dark nights the stars still “cover”
the sky across me;
On bright moonlight nights the soft light
still enhances my massive frame;
The wind still sighs through
the river she-oaks;
The Mary still flows steadily
beneath me.
These are the things that have
always been -
I am not alone!

I still stand, firm and steadfast,
A fitting tribute to those
Who constructed me
125 years ago.
To them I owe my longevity,
To them I dedicate my
HERITAGE LISTING!

As original Dickabram survivors,
The Dickabram Cemetery up on the
hill
And I, the Dickabram Bridge,
spanning the Mary River,
We proudly continue to perpetuate
that rather special name,
DICKABRAM



*I am the Bridge,
The Dickabram Bridge,
Proudly spanning the Mary River,
Providing a vital link,
Between east and west!*

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The Dickabram Bridge remembers
ACCN: 30125329
BRN: 147892



1956 Flood