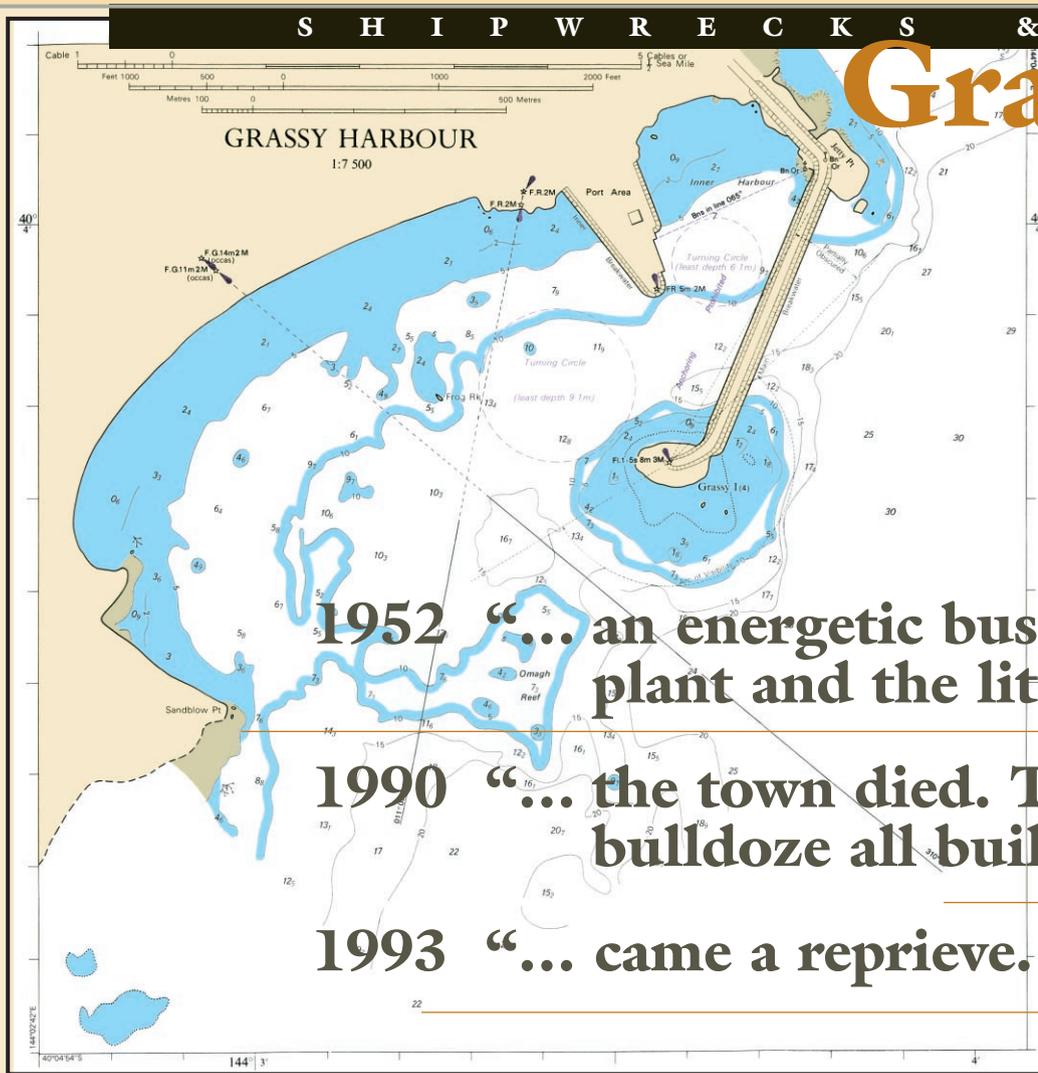


Grassy Harbour 1972



1952 “... an energetic bustle of construction in the plant and the little township of Grassy.”

RICHARD HOOPER *The King Island Story*

1990 “... the town died. There was a proposal to bulldoze all buildings into the open cut.”

JEAN EDGECOMBE *Discovering King Island*

1993 “... came a reprieve.”

The township of Grassy owes its origins solely to the mining of scheelite. It has proved to be a volatile industry, with Grassy's fortunes following a similar boom and bust pattern. Mining started in the early 1900s, and after a decline in the 20s, increased dramatically in the 40s, when a diamond drilling campaign revealed “millions of tons of low-grade ore, and with it the need for an expanded plant at the mine.” A new open cut mine was developed,

along with treatment facilities at Grassy. There was a decline in mining, and hence in Grassy's prosperity, after World War Two. But the pendulum swung back in the late 50s, by which time the population of Grassy had quadrupled to 750. The harbour you can see in front of you is a legacy of mining too. During the next period of prosperity in the 70s, it was developed as a joint exercise between the mine owners, the

Marine Board of King Island (now the King Island Ports Corporation), and the Tasmanian government. Naturally enough, the breakwater was built using massive quantities of rock overburden from the mine. Purpose-built for modern shipping needs, the Grassy roll-on-roll-off port facility is equipped with cranes and a stern-loading ship ramp. It can handle containerised shipping, and most importantly, it is an all-weather port, forming

part of a triangular service with Melbourne and Devonport. The usefulness of Grassy harbour has outlived the mining industry. The mine may have closed, but the harbour continues to serve the needs of all King Islanders. Ships bring in the necessities of life—groceries and fuel—and agricultural needs such as fertilisers and stock feed. Exports include the products for which King Island is famous: livestock, beef, cheese and wool.

The pioneer and the prospector

Pioneer Michael Parer and prospector Tom Farrell are responsible for the origins of Grassy. Curious as to the identity of a strange rock found in the area, they sent off specimens to the Mines Department in Hobart.

In due course the answer came back: it was scheelite. The deposit here on King Island is part of a segmented ring of tungsten-producing deposits around the Pacific rim. There are other deposits in China, Korea, USA, Mexico, Bolivia and Argentina.

Officially known as calcium tungstate, scheelite is used to toughen steel. In today's industries it plays a key part in the manufacture of high-speed tools, rock drills, engine and turbine parts and spacecraft.

But in 1904, the Mines Department did not place such a high value on the find, advising that it was “not greatly in demand”. Undeterred, Parer started to work the deposit. Let's hope that he was able to hold on until the days of high demand and “fabulous profits” in the 1950s.

The construction of Grassy harbour proceeding in 1970. King Island Scheelite supplied 2.22 million tons of rock to create the breakwater.
—REV. ROBERT LOVELL



Soldiers of fortune

Grassy's prosperity has ebbed and flowed with that of the world market price for its scheelite.

And that price depends largely on war. Because it is used extensively in heavy weaponry such as shells, tanks and aircraft, tungsten ore is in great demand whenever war breaks out.

World War One... World War Two... the beginning of the Cold War in the 1950s... the Vietnam War starting in the mid-60s... these were boom times for Grassy.

Between wars, times were tough. In recent years, the world market has been flooded with supplies of tungsten ore from China, and mining on King Island has become uneconomic. The mine has been closed since 1990.

