

The Surveyor - Planner or Peg Basher?

AN AUSTRALIAN REFLECTS ON CHANGING RURAL SURVEYS

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Surveying in Queensland owes most of its stature to the respect and charisma evolved from the early explorers, military officers and landed ship's captains and navigators. In a romantic era when it was every man's ambition to be the person or leader responsible for discovering new rivers, mountains, grazing pastures or farming land, only those with adequate financial resources and social acceptance were generally considered eligible to attempt exploratory expeditions of any dimension.

It has been recorded that Major Mitchell, John Oxley and Matthew Flinders were each apprehensive that they might die before achieving fame. This characteristic was not peculiar only to them; it was also manifested in those men who followed the explorers and squatted on the newly discovered grazing land. In the squatter's case the fame was more tangible and in the form of family estate and financial reward when the property claimed was developed successfully.

Major Mitchell, although apparently an aloof man, involved himself in the small details of his expeditions. He ensured that his base camps were properly organised even to the establishment of a very comprehensive vegetable garden.

While Major Mitchell was obviously the leader, he nevertheless shared the same physical involvements as his humblest expedition hand; when his horse tired he walked; when his horse threw a shoe, he was capable of reshoeing it if necessary; when water was short, he too was rationed. The early Queensland surveyors demonstrated these same characteristics. They shared the same camp and the same hardships, but there was never any doubt about their position in the hierarchy of employer-employee relationship.

Most of the early surveyors were from the more privileged social classes, but in a society where exploration was encouraged, it was axiomatic that this entailed a certain amount of physical discomfort away from centres of civilisation.

With exploration being necessary to discover if areas inland from the coastal strip were capable of being developed as financial hinterlands and the tragedies

of Edmund Kennedy, Burke and Wills and the mystery of Leichhardt fanning public interest, the Government sent surveyors to mark out Runs so that squatters could be charged dues for those areas already occupied, and defined areas to be allocated to additional lessees.

Since the surveyor was involved in the "frontier" development, and associated with the graziers and farmers and pioneer banking interests he stood "four square" with those who referred to him as a "man's man". His opinion was invited and respected, for apart from his capacity to successfully carry out the physical requirements of his occupation, he was an educated person in a time when most others had little or limited normal education. Even after compulsory education was introduced into Queensland this respect for the Queensland Surveyor was apparent in country areas and extended into the 1930's.

Surveyors occupying a defined "practice" area usually absorb the local idiosyncrasies, are aware of the accepted "norms" and seldom offend against the proper expectations of them, whereas those surveyors who have roving practices have on occasions caused some expensive inconveniences by drawing the lowest wires, instead of the top one, from fences to use as tow wires, to pull out bogged vehicles, thereby allowing calves and lambs to become separated from their mothers. Numerous examples could be given to show how the later surveyors have lost ground for the integrity of the surveying profession and caused unnecessary expense to their clients, especially in the rural sector.

The current trend that surveyors should divorce themselves entirely from "peg bashing" presents some interesting points, especially when the profession is legally responsible for this function only. It may well be in the best interests of the profession that some surveyors never "peg bash" again, indeed it may have been better if some had never driven their first one.

The present expression that professional surveyors are only those involving themselves in management, research, teaching or administration, implies that physically oriented surveyors are less than professional. This implication, if accepted, may have a far reaching effect in the rural sector. Already the surveyor is not as highly respected there as earlier surveyors, and if the surveyor is replaced by a technician, (which is currently being supported by some) this will remove the surveyor even further from his client.

Surely the client is entitled to have his survey carried out by the person to whom his money is paid. Alternatively unless the employed surveyor is seen to be physically involving himself in the survey the client must assume that he is being charged a professional fee for a survey carried out by a person who is not receiving the professional fee from the employed surveyor.

The technician may benefit from the system, if it becomes acceptable. He will be seen to be the person charged with the function of surveying the boundaries and will be seen by the client to be the one deserving of respect if the survey is satisfactory, and if he honours the accepted code of not causing the client any wasteful or careless expense in damaged stock or property.

With the surveyor remotely located and the technician now being the person dealing with the public, it must be only a step then for the technician, with the support of the client, to demand that since he is the physical surveyor he be the one to be registered in the public interest. It may well be that this will be in the best public interest.

It is acknowledged that surveying must maintain comparable education with the other professions but is it necessary for every surveyor to be a specialist in every other profession (e.g., town-planning) and forego the function which is the only legal one he is registered to perform?

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