

The Adelaide Fish Market 1870-1930

One of them is a plain fish, and no doubt, marketable

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An important supply of much needed food for the infant colony of South Australia was provided by the fishers, whose exploits and those of the oyster catchers were frequently reported in the Adelaide newspapers: the *Register* and the *Adelaide Observer*. At first whaling and to a lesser extent fishing were dominated by the South Australian Company, but within a few years that company had moved off the water to concentrate on land development. This left the infant fishing industry fragmented and it remained that way for some forty years with no organised central market.¹

Two separate groups operated from earliest days: local people who netted from the shore, and individuals or a couple of mates or brothers who fished from small sailing boats. Soon they were joined by a third group, who sailed the cutters around the Gulf of St Vincent, Investigator Strait and Backstairs Passage for a week or so at a time, until the well in the boat was full or all their food had run out. All were at the mercy of the sea and the wind.²

Once the uncertainties and dangers of catching the fish were over the problems did not end. Whether they had made a good or poor haul or hooked a few or many whiting or snapper they still had to sell the catch. Some loaded it onto a horse and cart and took it to Adelaide; others hawked it door-to-door around their local community. Sometimes the woman of the house would do this, sometimes a child or sometimes the man who had probably just spent many hours catching the fish. They used a hand barrow or a horse and cart and, when money was scarce, received very little for their efforts.

When more fish were caught than could be sold or used immediately the surplus was often smoked for later use. The Rumbelow family at Yilki smoked fish in commercial quantities. They took it to Adelaide by horse and trolley, changing horses at Willunga.³ Often it was glut or famine, with every boat making a good catch at the same time. Prices would then plummet and still there would be more fish than could be sold or smoked and so, with no ice or other means of keeping the fish fresh, the surplus would be buried. Fish were thought to be good compost for the soil.

As jetties were built at the beach settlements near Adelaide, such as Glenelg, Semaphore and Grange, the fishers would tie up to these and sell their catches from their boats, or from seaside hotels or from the ferry steps at Port Adelaide. Selling directly to the public by one means or another, or to fish shops or hawkers, remained their only outlets. By the 1870s much of the catch was being sent to Adelaide for sale, but a major problem remained, as a reference from that year makes clear. In relation to Glenelg it said,

The principal occupation followed by the working part of the population is that of fishing. A large number of boats go out daily, when the weather permits, and their produce is mostly sent to Adelaide for sale, but the absence of a good fish market there prevents the disposal if it at so great an advantage as would otherwise be the case'.⁴

The writer was right, whether he meant that the market would be an advantage to the people or to the fishers. Both would benefit eventually when such a market was established.

Two things were needed to enable fresh fish to reach the citizens of Adelaide: a daily fish market and a means of conveying the fish to market so that it arrived in a wholesome condition. The first was being discussed in 1872 by the Adelaide City Council; the second would not be recognised as a major factor until the market was established. One suggestion at the City Council meetings was that 'the sheds at the Sheep and Cattle Yards might be made available free of charge, for fishermen to dispose of their stock to retail dealers'.⁵ 'I observe,' said Town Clerk Thomas Worsnop on 30 July 1872, 'that a market for this article is now in embryo near the Market yards'.

However, it was towards the main Adelaide Central Market in Grote Street, controlled by the Council, that the fish auctioneers began gravitating in the late 1870s and early 1880s. The first was the Cowrie Fishing Company (later the SA Fishing Company), which leased store number nine and began auctioning fish, in among all the other produce, on 4 March 1879. Others auctioneers came and went fairly quickly, including Charles J Duke, who set up business in shop number thirty.⁶ When he ceased operations little more than a year later that shop was taken over by I Wiseman and Company, who continued to operate as fish auctioneers within the Central Market, albeit in a fairly small way, until 1905, when they moved to premises just outside the market building.

By the early 1880s City Councillors were taking an increasing interest in establishing a separate fish market and in controlling the fish sales then taking place in the Central Market. Edwin Smith, elected Mayor in 1882, echoed the report of a decade earlier when he said:

For the want of a proper place to receive regular supplies and distribute the same to the public, this valuable staple of food is very scarce indeed on the tables of the citizens of Adelaide.⁷

His successor, William Bunday, elected Mayor in 1883, also wanted to see a central fish market established in Adelaide. He had the satisfaction of reporting in 1884 that 'a commencement has been made to provide shelter for buyers and sellers of fish, by the erection of a suitable shed'.⁸ This was a wooden building being erected within the Adelaide Central Market in Grote Street on Town Acre 333.

There was disagreement as to who should be the Council's fish inspector, responsible for inspecting the incoming fish to ensure that it was fit for human consumption. Meter and Gas Inspector, Charles Fuller, had been proposed in 1881 as fish inspector 'in addition to his other duties' but it was another of William Shakespeare's colleagues, Sanitary Inspector William Furze, who was appointed. When an attempt was made in Council in 1884 to reverse this, Mayor

Bundey ruled the motion out of order. Inspector Furze's salary was set at £25 per annum for these additional duties, payable monthly. The Council's Fish Inspector also had to enforce the colony's legal minimum weights (later lengths) for prescribed species of fish, after these regulations were introduced in 1888.⁹ Elsewhere, these limits were policed by the inspectors and assistant inspectors of fisheries employed under the colony's Fisheries and Oyster Fisheries Acts.

Charles Fuller, the unsuccessful aspirant for the job of Council's fish inspector, continued to take an interest in the fish market. He wrote to the City Council's Markets and Torrens Lake Committee wanting to know if 'it was the immediate intention of the Council to build a Fish Market and if so expressing his willingness to lease such premises'. The Committee when reporting to Council on 17 June 1884 said that, as they were not in a position to give a 'decided' answer, they had 'withheld consideration of the matter'.

The wooden shed that was indeed being built to shelter those buying and selling fish, had a flagged floor, water was laid on and it was lit by gas lights. This shed was 'specially set apart as a fish market on 20 December 1884'.¹⁰ Another shed was begun even before completion of the first. This one was 'for the purpose of yarding the carts loaded with fish prior to the fish sales'. This building also had a flagstone floor, water laid on and proper drainage. It was, however, decided that gas lights should be the responsibility of the tenant. This proved to be I Wiseman & Company, whose offer of sixteen shillings per week rent was accepted in December 1884.¹¹

Within the main shed fish were bought and sold and licensed hawkers operated. One such, John Lock, was reported by the Fish Inspector as he 'had exposed for sale in the Central Market a quantity of fish which was not fit for human consumption'. This was referred to Inspector William Shakespeare 'to take immediate action',¹² although the Public Health Committee may have been confusing the officer responsible for weights and measures (William Shakespeare) with the one responsible for health.

With a fish market established in Adelaide, one of the fishing industry's two major requirements had been met. The other – getting the fish to market and to the buyers in a wholesome condition – depended on the availability of ice or refrigeration, as well as prompt and reliable transport, whether by rail or ship.

During the second half of the nineteenth century steamers began to trade around the Gulf of St Vincent and Spencer Gulf and to the South East and West Coast of the State, taking the place of the small sailtraders. They called at many of the local ports served by simple jetties, such as Stansbury, Tumby Bay, Arno Bay and Beachport. The fishers took advantage of the regular sailing times to send their catches back to Adelaide, and, whenever possible, these were carefully iced for the voyage. However, the fishers and consumers alike soon realised that cool chambers or refrigeration were desirable if the catches were to reach the market in good condition.

Railways also spread out in response to the growth of the colony's economy. In the 1850s railways were built from Adelaide to Port Adelaide and Gawler; in the late 1860s to Kapunda, Kadina and Wallaroo; and in the 1870s to Burra Burra, Morgan and the South East of the colony. By rail the fish could reach the

Adelaide Fish Market the same day or the day after it was caught, if schedules, ice and the weather were favorable.

The fishers contributed to this need for speed as the fish were sold whole, not gutted, except for Murray cod, and later, snapper and barracouta. This also helped account for the popularity of whiting and snapper. These varieties caught on lines and kept alive in the well of the boat until port was reached, were emptied of the food that they had eaten and so, whiting in particular, the fishers believed, would keep two or three days longer after being taken from the well than fish that had been sent straight to market. The fishers also believed that as whiting are selective feeders their flesh did not decompose as quickly as that of other fish.

It was the fish arriving by rail, mainly from the River Murray and Lakes Alexandrine and Albert, which were most frequently condemned. Writing his last report as mayor, William Bunday said in 1886: 'I advise the Council [to] communicate with the Government requesting them to provide refrigerated cars on the railway so that so large a proportion of this most valuable class of food may arrive in sound condition.'¹³ This was to prove an unfulfilled dream until the twentieth century.

Meanwhile, the simple facilities at the Corporation's Central Market were extended. These developments would eventually include much improved storage facilities. In the process, however, the Council drifted into a series of arrangements which increasingly attracted criticism for their monopolistic tendencies. In this, small producers were represented as suffering at the hands of a cosy arrangement between the Council and one major operator. In 1886 this was still a problem of the future, as the shed accommodation was then being increased to provide standing room for more dealers. A tender was accepted for the extension of sheds A and B at a cost of £189, and when completed extra gas lamps were fitted to light the extensions.¹⁴

Some fish auctioneers retained their shops and stores in the Central Market proper despite work to extend the sheds. The SA Fishing Company (previously The Cowrie Fishing Company), which had been the first to set up as fish auctioneers, retained store number nine until November 1885, when they surrendered their lease with rent outstanding. On 18 July 1885 Edwin Daw leased premises within the market,¹⁵ although he probably had other premises before that as he dated his operations from 1880. Within three years, Daw was to dominate the operation of wholesale fish selling in Adelaide and to attract frequent criticism in the process. Another business that commenced at this time was Edwin Boord and Company, who asked permission to auction fish and game from premises that they had leased in Currie Street. This was denied them but they were encouraged to take premises within the Central Market.

Even more space was needed in the market almost as soon as the two sheds were extended. In the words of the incoming mayor, Edwin T Smith (1886):

This market has proved so great a success that it has been found desirable to prepare for the erection of a new building at a cost of £1,000 to give accommodation for the sale of fish, hares, rabbits and other game.

The direction to the City Surveyor was 'to prepare plans and

specifications ... providing for double the present accommodation.¹⁶ However, the erection of this new fish market was held over until the 1887-8 financial year, when, with funds available, tenders were called and N.W. Trudgen was the successful tenderer.

Draft regulations 'for the conduct and control of the market' were drawn up by the council's Markets and Torrens Lake Committee and submitted to Council by the Town Clerk on 9 April 1888. These were adopted fifteen days later. They concerned such matters as the upkeep of the premises, cleanliness and the manner in which the Corporation could resume possession during the term of the lease. One section, which apparently was immediately forgotten by everyone concerned, directed the lessee 'to allow the use of portions of the said premises by other auctioneers for the sale by public auction of suchlike produce as in hereinbefore enumerated', being fish, poultry, wild fowl, rabbits, hares and dairy produce.

The new fish market building measured eighty feet by thirty-five feet with a twenty foot ceiling. It had a light iron roof, and matchboard under the rafters to keep it cool. Louvres above the roof ridge provided ventilation and light came from skylights that were positioned on the southern side 'to avoid the direct sunlight as much as possible'. The floor was paved throughout.¹⁷ The new building stood in approximately the centre of Town Acre 334, facing west, and cost the council £949 8s 5d.¹⁸ On 18 June 1888 the Town Clerk was directed to take the necessary steps to have 'the extension to the Market sheds and the Fish Market' proclaimed and to appear in the *Government Gazette*.¹⁹ The fish market was leased to Edwin Daw (who was the only person to tender) for seven years, at £100 per annum for the first four years and £150 per annum thereafter. We can only surmise that none of the other auctioneers could afford to tender. Whether or not they realized that they would henceforward be shut out of the fish market we do not know, but £100 would have been a very large sum to find for the first year's rent.

Although the market was functioning well, there was difficulty in getting it approved by the colonial government. Petitions were sent on 26 June and 26 July 1888 requesting the governor 'to proclaim the Fish Market erected on Acre 334, and the new portion of the market sheds, erected on Acre 333, as markets'. Mayor James Shaw, writing in 1889, noted that a request had been received from the 'present government' for fresh petitions 'pursuant to Section 49 of The Markets Clauses Act, 1870-71'. The market and sheds were duly authorised under the Act on 23 October 1889. 'The time for the holding of the said Markets', James Shaw went on to say, 'shall be daily from four o'clock in the morning until eleven o'clock at night – Sundays, Christmas Day and Good Friday excepted'.

The lessee, Edwin Daw, had been a butcher at Mount Barker and then at Edithburgh, before becoming involved in selling fish. His descendants say that the Edithburgh fishermen asked him to handle their fish. He seems to have had an enthusiastic supporter in Fish Inspector Furze. The latter wrote in his report for the year ending October 1888:

The Fish Market was well supplied during the year, and a large and increasing business has been, and is being done ... The New Fish and Game Market, lately

erected at the Market, is a very great improvement on the old Fish Market under Shed B.²⁰

For the next decade Fish Inspector Furze continued to report in glowing terms on the success of the market and the good management by Edwin Daw. His own duties did not appear to be onerous. In correspondence in 1895 the Corporation said that Inspector Furze as an officer of the Corporation and an Assistant Inspector of Fisheries under the colony's Fisheries Acts was present at all sales of fish at the Central Market.

Although he keeps no record of the fish sold he condemns fish unfit for human consumption, seizes any below weight or measurement (the fish is forwarded to the Destitute Asylum) and reports every fortnight to the Town Clerk ... He has no printed instructions. He makes no inspections of retail shops. Would inspect basket hawkers if he has any suspicion that they were hawking ... fish below size.²¹

The main means, at that time, of keeping fish fresh was ice. Sensibly enough Edwin Daw operated an ice-making works as an adjunct to his fish marketing. It was located in Port Adelaide and supplied ice to shipping and to hotels as well as to the fish market and fishers. The business also supplied distilled water to ships. Daw quickly recognised the advantages of refrigeration, which was developed in the 1880s, and so wrote to the council in 1894 saying that he needed to know if his lease, due for renewal in June 1898, would be renewed because of 'having important undertakings in contemplation in connection with the proper working of my business, notably a refrigerator'.²²

In March 1894 a deputation to the City Council, comprising R S Guthrie MLC and several fishers, requested that 'when the present lease of the fish market expired no future lease should be granted to any one man'. Edwin Daw was present at this meeting. The Mayor replied that the Council was 'fully alive to the importance of the matter' but could do nothing until the lease expired when it would consider the deputation's request.²³ At a meeting of the Markets Committee the following month a petition was received from thirty-three Goolwa fishermen asking 'that better facilities for the sale of fish be granted'. They received a similar reply as that given to the deputation. All of the information on Daw's application for the renewal of his lease was sent to Guthrie and D L Charleston, the two MLCs who had taken the matter up, but they failed to keep an appointment with the Markets Committee and 'no communication being received from them' Edwin Daw's lease was renewed 'with permission to erect a refrigerator'.²⁴

The Council and its officers always disputed that they bolstered a monopoly. As they said, anyone could set up in opposition and, at various times, other people did operate as fish and game auctioneers within the Central Market or nearby, but only I Wiseman and Company appears to have lasted for more than a year or two. Of course, the Council and its officers were ignoring the advantages that Daw possessed over potential rivals, and also the size of the investment required to establish an alternative market. As we shall see, when such an alternative did loom, they were quick to defend their own investment and hence their favoured

wholesaler, although for a short time it did appear that some changes might be made.

With Daw's lease renewed, a refrigeration plant was duly installed by engineers Davey Jones and Edwin Daw's son, Compson (known as 'Comp'). Ice was then made at the Fish Market as well as at Port Adelaide, as it was in increasing demand in the colony, even if rather expensive. In time the whole of Daw's ice-making plant was consolidated in a building next door to the Fish Market.

In 1896 Inspector Furze wrote: 'The lessee has constructed, with the consent of the Council, an additional refrigerating chamber, which has proved a great convenience'.²⁵ The following year the refrigeration plant was still exercising Inspector Furze's mind while he continued to express his admiration:

The Lessee (Mr E. Daw) finds that the extensive refrigerating chambers which he has had constructed can hardly cope with the demand upon their space, and he has applied to the Council for an additional piece of ground on which to extend the works. The market has been admirably managed and no complaints have been received.²⁶

In 1898 Furze was able to report that

The Lessee of the Fish Market has erected another of Crossley's "Otto" Gas Engines of 4-horsepower nominal, capable of being worked up to 11-horsepower indicated, on land leased from the Corporation, to assist the other and larger one located there, and adjoining, viz., of 7-horsepower nominal, capable of being worked up to 14-horsepower if necessary.

The larger engine was found to be not powerful enough to answer the dual purposes of cooling the chambers and making ice, hence the erection of the other engine, with latest improvements, which is capable of turning out 2 tons of ice in 24 hours, and in conjunction with the larger one, 5 tons in the 24 hours.

I understand that ice is supplied to the dealers and ice cream vendors at the rate of 1s for a 24 or 25 lbs. slab, and even less than that when contracted for.

For some considerable time past the Refrigerating Chambers at the Fish Market have been a great boon to butchers, poulterers, fish dealers, and dairy produce merchants.²⁷

Inspector Furze then went on to describe the workings of the Fish Market:

Not only are fish, game, and other provisions sold there, but there are cleaning troughs provided, whereby dealers gut and clean their fish, game, &c., and deposit their offal in a receptacle kept there for that purpose. Kerosine is poured over the fish, &c. condemned, and the whole is carted away out of the City every morning by a person with whom Mr Daw, the lessee, has a contract.

Inspector Furze included details in his yearly reports of the weight of fish, game and so on that he condemned. In 1887-88 this had included some twelve-and-a-half tons of fish but when this reached seventeen-and a-half tons ten years later there was an outcry. He tried to explain that this had been caused mainly because the Victorian government proclaimed a closed season for River Murray fish in that colony

and consequently fish from all parts of the River Murray found its way into Adelaide, in such quantities as to literally glut the market, and much of it was unsaleable at any price. Some fish arrived in bad condition due to the time it was in transit.²⁸

At the time of writing his report the closed season was over and the situation reversed. Much of the catch was then being sent to Melbourne, which, he said, caused 'a dearth' in Adelaide.

There has also been a great falling off in the deep sea, or salt water fishing lately, on account of the stormy weather and severe gales experienced by the fishermen.²⁹

Despite these explanations we hear no more of Inspector Furze after he completed this report for, as he said, 'the fish duties were taken out of my hands and handed over to my successor, Mr George Stevens'.³⁰

It was the fishers who were most concerned about the quantity of fish condemned, as they feared for their livelihood. It was precarious enough at the best of times, with fluctuating prices, transportation problems and the idiosyncrasies of the weather, plus the increasing pressure on the fish stocks, as more and more people turned to fishing in the depression of the 1890s. This increased effort, and the resulting larger catches, led to a need for more space at the fish market, the size of which this time (1899-1900) almost doubled. 'The total cost of the work was £801 9s 2d', said Mayor Arthur W Ware (elected 1898),

and the dimensions of the building are 40 ft. x 75 ft., built of brick with cement floors, and fitted up with benches and conveniences... The erection of the new building will supply a want that has been felt for some time, as the old building was inadequate for the growing business, especially in refrigerating and cool storage space.³¹

With this new market came a new lease for Edwin Daw. As the mayor went on to say, '[He] has taken the Market on a lease for fourteen years at an annual rental of £250, paying all water and sewer rates'. Daw also undertook to carry on in the same business, in the same premises, for the whole of the fourteen years. Matters at that time were, as Town Clerk T George Ellery said, quiescent.³²

Matters did not remain quiescent for long. By 1906 questions were being asked in the House of Assembly about an alleged monopoly of the wholesale fish trade at the Corporation Fish Market. Town Clerk Ellery replied in the press:

The suggestion that the council has a monopoly is altogether wide of the mark, as the council has nothing whatever to do with the matter. The fish market in the Central Market is corporation property, and as such is leased to Mr E Daw, but further than that the council has no interest in the industry, pecuniary or otherwise.³³

Despite this disclaimer some ocean fishers as well as River Murray and Lakes fishers remained dissatisfied with the way in which the fish was marketed in Adelaide and were successful in having the 1907 Royal Commission Upon the Charges Against Produce Merchants extended to include the Fish Market.³⁴ Their three main

complaints were that the fish market operated as a virtual monopoly, that too often their fish were condemned or the amount deducted for shrinkage during transit was too great, and that Daw favoured the saltwater fishers, as he owned some of the fishing cutters.

Daw readily admitted to the Commissioners that he owned five of the fishing boats but, as he said, 'forty auctioneers would not make any difference to the supply'. The river and lakes fishers, however, believed that competition at the market would make a difference to the returns to them. They were adamant that they received fairer treatment at the Melbourne market, where stands were let to as many auctioneers as wished to take them. Much less of their fish was condemned there as unfit for human consumption.

In evidence, the Melbourne Corporation Market Inspector, S McKee, said that only a small percentage of South Australian fish needed to be condemned upon arrival in Melbourne. 'As a rule the fish is very carefully packed, and when it is well covered with ice none of it goes bad, provided it is good before it leaves.' Iced fish, it seems, reached Melbourne in much better condition than Adelaide. Perhaps the availability of ice had something to do with it. Some saltwater fishers gave contrary evidence to the Royal Commission, saying that they had always been treated fairly by Edwin Daw.

After considering all the evidence, the commissioners said:

[We] have now come to the conclusion that the system in vogue in Melbourne of letting stands in the market to as many auctioneers as care to apply for them is much preferred to that followed in Adelaide where a wholesale monopoly practically exists.³⁵

They recommended that 'the Adelaide corporation be respectfully invited to encourage competition in the auctioning of fish in the City Market'. However, nothing could be done immediately, the City Council believed. Any changes to the market would have to be considered by the Council that was in power when Daw's lease expired on 30 July 1914. Nevertheless, as we shall see, the Council was forced to reconsider this decision within three years because of changes taking place in Light Square.

In July 1910 Town Clerk Ellery reported that the Labor state government intended setting up a fish market in Light Square, having bought the premises of the Adelaide Ice and Cold Storage Company. The government made no secret of its desire to develop this facility to assist the less well-off producers of meat, fish, poultry, eggs and fruit to sell their goods at reasonable prices and gain a fair deal themselves. One of their stated aims was to place the marketing of fish on a sound basis. Another, with which South Australians of today can identify, was to help the average householder cope with high temperatures in summer. This would be through the manufacture and sale of ice 'at a price which would render [it] a necessity ... instead of a luxury'.³⁶

This move by the Labor government, following so close upon the heels of the Royal Commission, brought the Fish Market onto centre stage at Council meetings. As Mayor Lewis Cohen (elected 1909) said, 'Members of this Council cannot have too much information in regard to the conduct of the Fish Market and

the fishing industry generally'. The Town Clerk was directed to make contact with the Government Produce Department to find out their plans and also to prepare a synopsis of the evidence given at the Royal Commission.³⁷ Plainly, the Council was conscious that their valuable investment was at risk. George Ellery prepared a comprehensive synopsis of the evidence, details of his correspondence with the Government Produce Export Department, and his recommendation that the Council negotiate with Edwin Daw to try to terminate his lease and throw the Fish Market open to a number of auctioneers, 'working it on the same lines as the Sheep and Cattle Markets'.³⁸ After they were informed that the Minister of Agriculture had agreed to take no action in regard to setting up a fish market in Light Square pending the outcome, the Council agreed that negotiations along the lines suggested by Ellery should begin.

After some correspondence, the Town Clerk and two City Councillors met with Daw in February 1911. Daw said that he was prepared to dispose of his lease (which still had more than three years to run) plus his machinery, plant and fixtures for £8,000. The City Accountant, H P Beaver, was given the job of looking into the finances of the business to see if this was a fair sum. He reported that he had had quite a lot of difficulty due to 'the lack of an adequate system of book-keeping, and, in some respects, of proper financial control'. Despite this, he had gained an impression that the business was very profitable. It was, he said, divided into three parts: the sale of fish on commission (managed almost entirely by A E Waterman), the sale of fish caught by Edwin Daw's own boats, and the sale of ice together with cold storage fees. The commission on sales was ten per cent, with the fishers paying for transport as far as the Adelaide Railway Station.³⁹

When pressed for further details of the gross takings by the three sections of his business over the previous three years, Daw wrote, 'I have come to the conclusion that it is impossible to give more information'. Despite this, the City Accountant worked out that the business brought in at least £1,000 per year, probably twice that. In June 1911 the councillors involved in the negotiations recommended that the Council take over the fish market for a purchase price of £7,500, conditional on the government agreeing not to set up a fish market in Light Square in competition. The government did not agree to this proposal and at a special meeting of the City Council the following month the motion to adopt the report and borrow £10,000 for this purpose was lost by twelve votes to three. It was resolved to take no further action. So the main fish market remained in the hands of one man. Although the Light Square premises created some competition for the storage and sale of fish (among other produce) it did not make the hoped for inroads into the sales at Grote Street.

While the state government, Adelaide City Council and Edwin Daw negotiated, the fishing industry continued to operate vigorously in South Australian waters. There were then about thirty-four cutters fishing the Gulf of St Vincent, Backstairs Passage and Investigator Strait and, occasionally, into lower Spencer Gulf. Based at Glenelg, where a breakwater was completed in 1911, they off-loaded their catches directly onto railway trucks on the jetty. From there the fish and rock lobsters were taken to the Adelaide Railway Station where those destined for the Adelaide market were loaded onto horse-drawn trolleys. These trolleys were

owned by Daw, whose son, Howard, met the trains to get the fish to market as quickly as possible. Those destined for the Melbourne market were re-iced by agents before being placed on the Melbourne Express. About this time the South Australian Railways began running insulated brake vans on some lines to carry fish. These had a hatch in the roof through which ice could be tipped. Steamships were also improving. Any new ones coming into service on the West Coast and Spencer Gulf runs were fitted with coldrooms and in the case of the *S S Wookata*, with a refrigeration chamber.

For many fishers then, the second requirement of a viable fishing industry – that there be a means of conveying fish to market in a wholesome condition – had been met. For some areas, though, this was not so, as ice works were not set up in some country areas until the 1920s or 1930s or, in the case of Kangaroo Island, not until the 1940s. Nor was there cold storage on board the steamers *Karatta* and *Warrawee* that served the island. Of the *Karatta* one fisher reported, 'Very often the fish are used as a race or a blockade. I have seen boxes of fish used to separate pigs from sheep.'⁴⁰ There were also problems when the fishers ordered ice from Adelaide by telegram as they had to judge in advance when they would need it. Sometimes it would not arrive until well after they had caught the fish and packed it ready for market using their old standby, wet seaweed.

The Adelaide Fish Market remained in the hands of the Daw family throughout the whole of the period we are considering. Although Edwin Daw died on 12 May 1917 the trustees of his estate sought an extension of two years to the lease, which was next due to expire in 1921.⁴¹ This was agreed to by the City Council at an increased rental, as it had had to defer its own plans for building on the site due to high building costs. In 1920, in response to these development plans the Daw family acquired land not far from the old market, to build a private fish market. This extended from Mill Street through to Coglein Street. The Council approved the plans that same year but residents in the area protested. The Council then proposed building another council fish market in the Adelaide parklands but the state government did not agree to the encroachment into the parklands, and would not, therefore, bring in the necessary amendment to the Corporation's Act. The firm of Edwin Daw Trustees then went ahead and built its own fish market in Coglein Street. In the adjacent parking area they developed a bore for artesian water. Across the lane were offices, an engine room, a crayfish (rock lobster) cooking room, a store, a boxmaking room and toilets, as well as a room that was rented out, firstly to the Okay Cafe and then to the Cocking brothers, Basil and Malcolm (Mac). (Since then, the name 'Cocking' has become synonymous with fish wholesaling in South Australia.) In the fish market proper there was a trough the length of one wall where buyers could gut their fish and a large refrigeration plant took up one corner of the building. The first auction in these new premises took place in May 1922 with A E Waterman as auctioneer and Howard Daw as his deputy.

The Council accepted £50 from E Daw Trustees instead of enforcing the covenant to repair clause in the lease when it took over the former fish market premises in December 1922. It planned to complete the original design of the Central Market by building thirty-two shops on the site of the fish market and taking

in the north-eastern block which was at that time being used for sideshows. As the *Advertiser* said: 'This will considerably extend the present City Arcade and the appearance of the City Market'.⁴² The old fish market was demolished in 1923.

The firm of Edwin Daw Trustees weathered another Royal Commission in the 1930s, this one devoted entirely to the fishing industry. At the end, these commissioners found: 'that the business was being carried on in an honest and reputable manner' although the fact that the manager of the trust estate of E Daw owned a large retail fish business which bought all its supplies from the Central [Fish] Market appeared to the Commission 'to create a position which called for the closest examination'. This was particularly so when viewed in conjunction with a statement volunteered by the market auctioneer, A E Waterman, that when supplies of fish in the market were so great as to eliminate competition among the buyers he fixed the price.⁴³ So once again nothing was done to change their system of marketing fish in Adelaide. The dominance of the Daw family business remained, as it had since Edwin Daw first leased the (then) new Adelaide City Council Fish Market premises in 1888.

For this reason, the story of wholesale fish marketing in Adelaide is not a happy one. In the early days when the wooden shed was built 'to provide shelter for buyers and sellers of fish' it had seemed as though the market would operate along similar lines to the sheep and cattle market, with any number of auctioneers competing for business. And, in fact, the fish market did operate in that way, but only for a brief four years. Then, with the erection of a more substantial building, the City Council decided to lease the whole market to one person and so a virtual monopoly was created. This would certainly have meant less work for the Council but, in a democracy, it was a mistake. Such an action left the Council open to accusations of bolstering a monopoly, especially by the new Labor Party, ever alert to the failures of capitalism, and anxious to promote the interests of ordinary working people. As we have seen, this accusation was justifiable and, sadly, Council's support for a monopoly extended to approving the building of a privately-owned fish market, once they had other uses for their own fish market site. The Daw family was thus able to retain control of fish marketing in Adelaide, and this was to continue for another thirty-two years.

To complete the saga of the fish market I include the following information, although it falls outside the time span (1870-1930) when William Shakespeare was an inspector on the staff of the City Corporation.

Only after The South Australian Fishermen's Co-operative Limited (formed at the end of World War II) grew strong enough to compete, setting up its own cold store in Adelaide, was the Daw family's control of the fish market overturned. SAFCOL acquired the premises in 1954.⁴⁴

¹ Evelyn Wallace-Carter, *For They Were Fisher: The history of the fishing industry in South Australia* Adelaide, March 1987, 9

² Wallace-Carter 889

³ Wallace-Carter 26

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- ⁴ Ian Mudie, *Glenelg Sketch Book* Adelaide 1974, 52
- ⁵ Town Clerk's Report to Council, 30 July 1872 ACA
- ⁶ Royal Commission Upon Charges Against Produce Merchants Report 1907 No 20 SAPP
- ⁷ Mayor's Report 1881-82 ACA
- ⁸ Mayor's Report 1883-84
- ⁹ The first Act to protect fish, as distinct from oysters, in South Australian waters was the Fisheries Act of 1878 'for the protection and preservation of fish'. Under this Act legal minimum weights were proclaimed by the governor on 12 Dec 1888. These included Murray cod - 30 ounces; snapper (spelt schnapper) – 16 ounces; and whiting – 5 ounces. Act No 13 of 1869-70, an Act to provide for the Improvement of the River Torrens, gave control of fisheries in that river to the Corporation of Adelaide and banned all netting in the Torrens. Act No 38 of 1876, the Criminal Law Consolidation Act, included a clause (109) that provided for a penalty of up to four years gaol for damage to fish ponds, mill ponds, reservoirs or pools.
- ¹⁰ Mayor's Report 1884-85
- ¹¹ Council Minutes 18 Aug, 2 Sept, 18 Dec 1884 ACA
- ¹² Council Minutes 8 June 1888
- ¹³ Mayor's Report 1885-86
- ¹⁴ Mayor's Report 1885-86
- ¹⁵ Particulars re City Council's Fish Market and the Fishing Industry Generally, T Geo Ellery 27 Aug 1910 ACA
- ¹⁶ Mayor's Report 1886-87
- ¹⁷ Correspondence from City Surveyor, J H Langdon, to Mayor, Adelaide 29 Aug 1887
- ¹⁸ The building was at the eastern end of the Central Market in Grote Street, not far from Victoria Square
- ¹⁹ Council Minutes 18 June 1888
- ²⁰ Mayor's Report 1887-88
- ²¹ Original correspondence between Thomas Stephens, Chief Inspector of Fisheries, and Corporation of Adelaide, 1895 GRG81 SRSA
- ²² Particulars re City Council's Fish Market and Fishing Industry Generally, T Geo Ellery 1910, 6
- ²³ Ellery's report to Council 1910
- ²⁴ Ellery's report to Council 1910
- ²⁵ Mayor's Report 1895-96
- ²⁶ Mayor's Report 1896-97
- ²⁷ Mayor's Report 1897-98
- ²⁸ Mayor's Report 1897-98
- ²⁹ Special Report No 2949 1898
- ³⁰ Mayor's Report 1898-99
- ³¹ Mayor's Report 1899-1900
- ³² Ellery's report to Council 1910
- ³³ Ellery's report to Council 1910
- ³⁴ Produce Merchants, Royal Commission 1907
- ³⁵ Report under the Fisheries Act 1909-10 SAPP No 98 of 1910
- ³⁶ Select Committee of the Legislative Council on the Government Cold Storage and Iceworks and Export Depot, *Progress Reports*, SAPP Nos 81 & 82 of 1911-12
- ³⁷ Ellery's report to Council 1910
- ³⁸ Ellery's report to Council 1910
- ³⁹ The Fish Market - Negotiations with Lessee and Report to Sub-Committee, T Geo Ellery, 1911, ACA
- ⁴⁰ Wallace-Carter 13, 21 & 147
- ⁴¹ Town Clerk's Dept (C15) Reference material collected by H Suckling (Deputy Town Clerk - 1973) (S-) Accession 29, Item 15/47 ACA
- ⁴² *Advertiser* Sept 1922
- ⁴³ Royal Commission on the Fishing Industry *Final Report* SAPP 1935 No 20A
- ⁴⁴ Wallace-Carter 228.