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ArticleAn Unusual Migrant by A. van Gent

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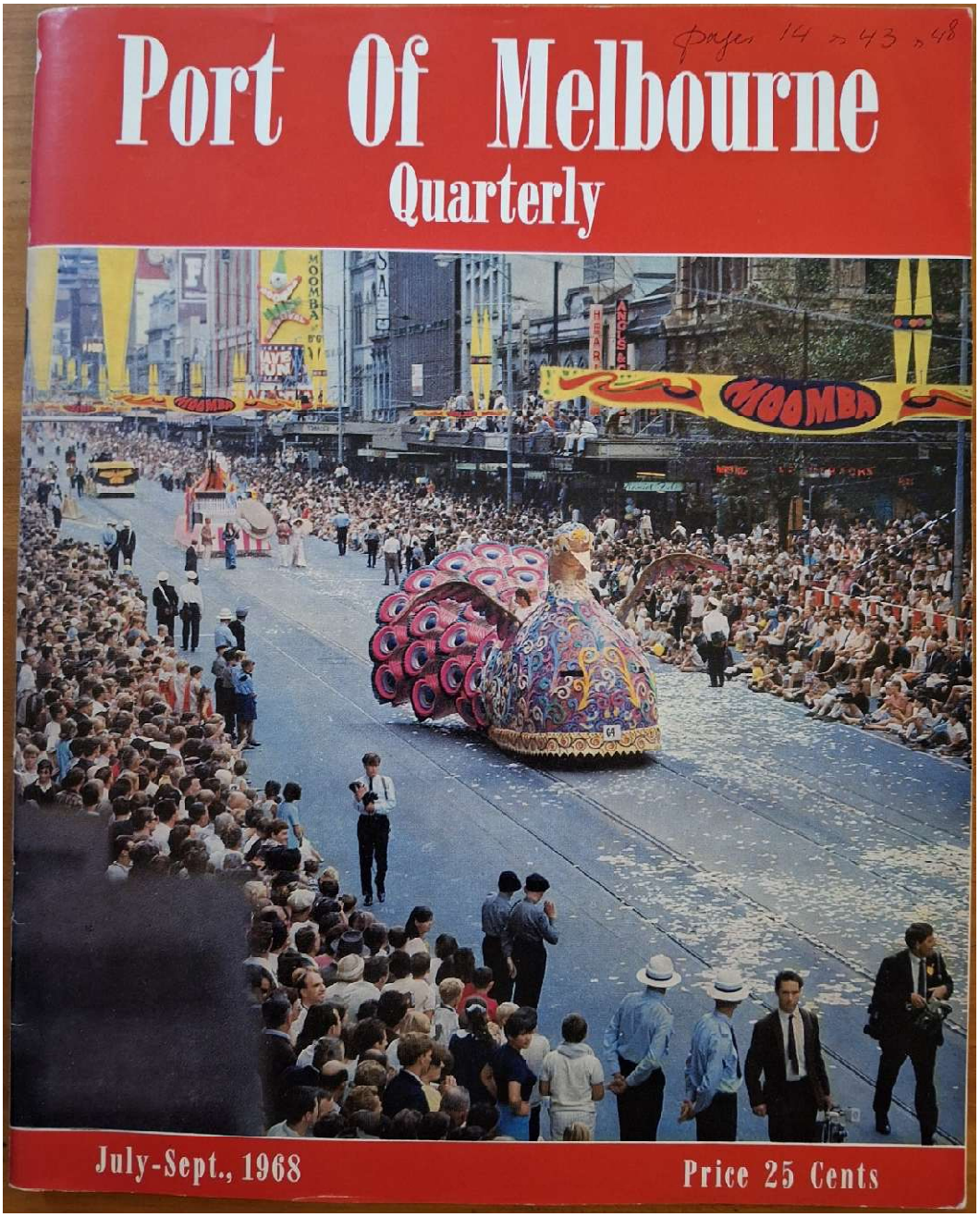

An Unusual Migrant by A. van Gent

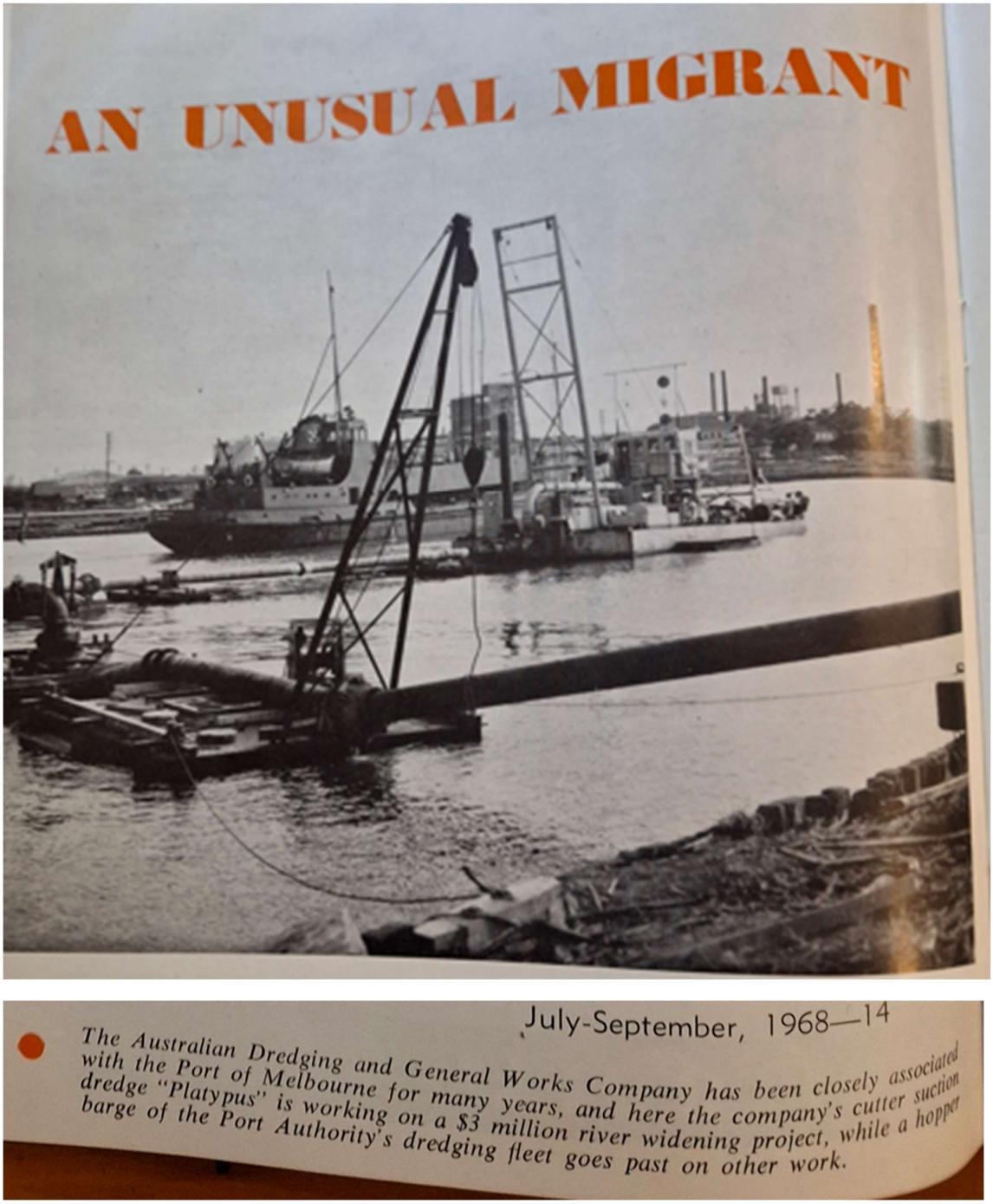

Image: "Platypus" cutter suction dredge at work [$3mill river widening project],

The key to Australia's present-day prosperity can be largely attributed to its migrants who have come from the far corners of the earth for a variety of reasons, but in the main because of the opportunities for a better way of life.

While migration is usually associated with people, one unusual migrant who came to Australia 18 years ago was sponsored by the Port of Melbourne.

It was in 1950 that two Dutch dredging companies were awarded a $3 million dredging contract in the port for the job. The two Dutch companies ***Adriaan Volker N.V.*** and ***Van Hattum and Blankevoort NV*** formed a jointly owned local subsidiary. **The Australian Dredging and General Works Company** which remained to prosper in Australia.



Above: One of the biggest dredging projects in the Port with which The Australian Dredging Company has been associated is the construction of Swanson Dock, the new container ship and cargo complex of Melbourne.

Today Australian Dredging is one of the nation's three biggest dredging companies which is engaged in major development projects around the continent's 12,000 miles of coastline and has continued to be closely associated with projects in the Port of Melbourne.

For its first job back in 1950, the firm brought out from Holland Dutch engineers, a labour force, as well as specialised vessels and equipment, to form the nucleus for the project. The original intention of the parent companies was to complete the contract in Melbourne and return home. However, it was quickly realised that there was a

tremendous potential for specialised dredging and reclamation works throughout Australia, and the company remained in operation.

The evolution of super tankers, containerisation, the findings of mineral deposits, gas and oil, and the subsequent exports of ores, ingots and pellets called for existing ports and channels to be deepened and widened and new ports opened, and it is not surprising that where dredging is called for, that Dutch interests should be involved.

The Dutch have a great reputation as dredging contractors and civil engineers in general, based on their experience with more than half of their country situated below sea level. The constant fight for survival against the water and the need to find a place for an ever-growing population of 13 million in an area half the size of Tasmania gave them the skill and made them build the necessary machinery.



Above: An aerial view of the main river navigation channel which is being widened by the company

Once the skill and the plant were there, they were called upon to solve similar problems in the neighbouring countries. This development continued and eventually they took their dredges to most parts of the world. Dutch sea-going tugs towed the dredges to their overseas destinations, and their reputation grew in the same proportions.

In Australia in the last three years alone, large dredging projects have been carried out in the ports of Dampier, Port Hedland, Fremantle in Western Australia, Whyalla in South Australia, Melbourne, Geelong and Western Port in Victoria, Sydney, Newcastle in New South Wales and Gladstone and Weipa in Queensland.

This trend is still continuing at present, and most Port Authorities have further extension programmes on the drawing board.

These activities have placed a heavy demand on dredging contractors in Australia and abroad, and the major dredging companies incorporated in Australia and now working with Australian built plant are:

Australian Dredging & General Works Pty. Ltd. of Melbourne; (subsidiary of Dutch & British Group Companies).

Dredging Industries, Pty. Ltd. of Sydney; (subsidiary of Dillingham Corp. Aust. Pty. Ltd. which in turn is a subsidiary of Dillingham Corp. U.S.A.).

Westminster Dredging Australia Pty. Ltd. of Sydney; (subsidiary of Dutch/British Bos & Kalis/Westminster Group of Companies).

The common practice for Port Authorities and other principals is to invite tenders for major dredging contracts on a worldwide basis so that the Australian companies, apart from being in fierce competition with each other, also have to compete with contractors from abroad. Competition with overseas contracting companies is particularly fierce when the local companies have to resort to hired equipment from overseas affiliations. This is necessary when the volume of work exceeds the local capacity available or if certain specialised plant is called for. Consequently, some large projects have been or are being executed by companies other than the three major Australian firms.

In the last few years, the Australian Government has granted considerable subsidies on the construction of vessels of over 200 tons in an effort to support the local shipbuilding industries, and the policy has been taken a step further to also provide protection for the local dredging companies.

For its first job in Australia, representatives from the parent companies, which are now shareholders in **Australian Dredging and General Works Pty. Ltd**., visited Australia in 1949 to make preliminary investigation for the tender. As a result of this investigation, a tender was submitted in which it was stated that, if the bid was successful, a company would be formed in which Adriaan Volker N.V., Van Hattum & Blankevoort N.V., both Dutch

based and The Dredging & Construction Co. Ltd. U.K. [and Harbour & General Works, UK][1] would participate.

Following the acceptance of the tender, **Australian Dredging & General Works Pty. Ltd. was formed in February 1950**, and a stipulation of the contract was that all labour was to come from overseas, as there were no personnel available in Australia. The Australian and Dutch Governments assisted with the Immigration formalities and the Company paid the one-way fare. The personnel signed a contract, whereby they agreed to work for the Company for the duration of the dredging contract. In this way, some 150 migrants including wives and children, were brought to Australia. The work commenced in September 1950 and was completed two years later.

Before the first Melbourne contract was completed the Company was successful with two other tenders, and it was this additional work which led to the decision for the Company to remain in Australia.

<u>The projects were:-</u>

Port extension in Albany W.A., let by the Public Works Department and comprising the dredging and pumping ashore of 1.4 million cubic yards of spoil.

Deepening of the approach channels and berths in the Port of Geelong to 32 ft LW. This work was followed by a second contract with the Geelong Harbor Trust Commissioners further deepening of the channels 17 miles to 36 ft LW, allowing large tankers to reach the Shell Refinery at Corio.

The two contracts involved the removal of approximately 13 million cubic yards of silt and clay, and the work was completed in 1957.

<u>Other major contracts executed by the company were:-</u>

1953-55-**Botany Bay N.S.W**. Australian Oil Refineries Dredging for Caltex Refinery. 2.5 million c.yds.

1957-60-**Port Phillip Bay Vic**. Contracts for Commonwealth Dept. of Works and Victorian Public Works Dept. (in connection with explosives berth) and Geelong Harbor Trust (general port expansion). 1.0 million c.yds.

1958-59-**Bluff N.Z.** Bluff Harbour Board. Port expansion. 0.3. million c.yds.

1961-65--**Geelong, Vic.**, Geelong Harbor Trust. Widening of channels for tankers. 2.5 million c.yds.

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[1] Added by Hans, in pencil on the side; Also the two British companies were subsidiaries of the two Dutch companies. These UK companies had a small shareholding in the Australian Company & are often not mentioned when talking about the make-up of the company

1964-**Westernport Vic**. B.P. Westernport. Channel and swinging basin for B.P. Ref. 0.5 million c.yds.

1966-67--**Geelong. Vic**., Geelong Harbor Trust. Widening of approach channels. 2.5 million c.yds.

1967-68-**Gladstone, Old**., Gladstone Harbour Board. Deepening channels for coal export. 0.5 million c.yds.



Although a wholly owned Dutch subsidiary, the company is building more and more units of its dredging fleet in Australia, and here on the banks of the River Yarra in the Port of Melbourne, one of two new dumb hopper barges is nearing completion.

In May this year the Melbourne Harbor Trust Commissioners awarded a contract for the widening of the River Yarra and the construction of an oil dock at Newport to Australian Dredging & General Works Pty. Ltd.

The contract valued at approx. $1.78 million, due for completion by the end of this year, is of particular interest, as it comprises the three different dredging techniques known to-day in the one project. Total value of the plant engaged in the Port of Melbourne project is $3 million, half of which has been constructed in Australia and all vessels are manned with Australian crews.

In addition to the last Melbourne contract, the Company is at present engaged on the following major projects:-

New Plymouth N.Z. Taranaki Harbours Board. General port expansion. 1.0 million c.yds.

Newcastle N.S.W. Public Works Department. Dredging for ore berths. 0.5 million c.yds.

Newcastle N.S.W. Public Works Department. Dredging for channels to ore berths. 1.5 million c.yds.

Since its formation, the Company has dredged more than 30 million cubic yards which is equivalent to making a hole in the ground one mile square and 30 feet deep.

The history of the Company is interesting, because in character, it is now different from what it was at the time of its formation.

When formed, it was intended to only execute the first Melbourne contract, although the Articles of Association provided for a much wider scope. The task of the local management then was to complete the project in an efficient manner and to keep an eye open for possible other projects. When other contracts were won, these were executed in the same manner with equipment hired from overseas and with a great number of overseas personnel.

This trend continued until some four years ago, when directors and shareholders felt that there was a stable market for a permanent dredging company in Australia.

This led to a number of important decisions and changes and included:-

Appointment of Australians to the local Board of Directors, which now consists of four.

A policy for all new plant to be built in Australia.

To bring vessels under the Australian flag and to man these vessels with all Australian crew.

To recruit and train Australians for various staff functions.

To widen the scope of the company by enabling it to compete with other contractors for projects out-side Australia.

As a result of these changes, the task of the management is now far more complex. In addition to the normal control of projects under execution, it comprises the planning, financing and supervision for an extensive plant building programme and the study and preparation of tenders for a market, covering Australia, New Zealand, Indonesia and the Pacific Islands.



The hopper suction dredge "Geopotes V", bought overseas in 1966 to work for the company in projects around the Australian coast, is seen here in Port Phillip Bay with the city and suburbs of Melbourne in the background.

In June 1966, Sir John P. Williams was the first Australian to accept a position on the Board of Directors. Sir John has been Chairman of the Australian Coastal Shipping Commission for many years, is a Director of Fleetways Ltd., The United Salvage Pty. Ltd. and several other companies and has a wide experience in the shipping world.

A second appointment was that of Mr. J. B. Hawthorn, chartered accountant, and partner in the accountants firm Kent Brierley and Barraclough, Melbourne. Mr. Hawthorn is also a director of William Crosby (Holdings) Ltd. and for many years has held important overseas posts in the Jardine Matheson Group of Companies.

Two other directors of Dutch origin but resident in Australia and managing the company as Joint Managing Directors are **Mr. H. Ferwerda**, M.I.E. Aust., and **Mr. J. C. Kraaijeveld**.

Mr. Ferwerda is a graduate in civil engineering of Delft University in Holland and was 25 years in the employ of Van Hattum & Blankevoort N.V., one of the Parent Companies. After working on several projects in Holland and Ireland, he came to Australia in 1950 as Manager of Australian Dredging & General Works Pty. Ltd. He became a director of this company in 1962.

In February 1964, when the plans for the further development of Australian Dredging & General Works Pty. Ltd. began to take shape, Mr. Kraaijeveld came to Australia in the position of Joint Managing Director, to assist Mr. Ferwerda in the big task that lay ahead. Mr. Kraaijeveld has been employed by "Adriaan Volker" N.V. since 1928. During those 40 years he has been in charge of dredging projects all over the world, including the construction of defence works in Tunis, Bizerta and other North African ports, prior and during the second World War.

From 1946 to 1964, he was in charge of all the maintenance dredging in the Port of Rotterdam. Some 50% of the fleet of bucket dredges and reclamation suction dredges owned by "Adriaan Volker" N.V. is constantly engaged on this project, as the Rotterdam Port Authority has no dredges of its own and lets all maintenance work by tender to private contractors.

Australian Dredging & General Works is registered in all Australian States and in New Zealand, and nominal and paid up capital of the Company is $200,000, held as follows:-

"Adriaan Volker" N.V. Rotterdam, Holland $98,500; Van Hattum & Blankevoort N.V. Beverwijk, Holland $90,000; Harbour & General Works Ltd. Weybridge, England $10,000 and Dredging & Construction Co. Ltd. King's Lynn, England $1,500.

Since the decision was made to build plants in Australia, the two Dutch parent Companies have provided long term loans to their Australian subsidiary. At present total shareholders' funds, comprising paid up capital, long term loans, balances in current account and undistributed profits stand at $3 million.

The Dutch companies are two of the major dredging contractors in Holland. "Adriaan Volker" N.V. has a fleet of 5 trailing hopper suction dredges, 9 bucket dredges, 6 cutter suction dredges, 9 suction/reclamation dredges, 2 self propelled hoppers, 81 barges ranging in hopper capacity from 270 to 1200 cubic yards and a number of tugs, launches and other work vessels. The fleet of Van Hattum & Blankevoort N.V. consists of 1 trailing hopper suction dredge, 10 bucket dredges, 10 cutter suction dredges 6 suction/reclamation dredges, 6 self propelled hoppers, 31 barges varying from 270 to 830 cubic yards and a number of auxiliary vessels.

Both companies have executed numerous projects in Holland and also worked in most European countries including the Suez Canal, North Africa, and Nigeria, and its best known project is Europoort near Rotterdam, which provides berths to accommodate the biggest tankers in the world. This project was almost entirely carried out by "Adriaan Volker" N.V. using some of the largest and most modern dredging equipment specially built for this contract.



The Australian Dredging company has also carried out several major projects in the Port of Geelong, which, 45 miles south-west of Melbourne, is Victoria's main bulk wheat export terminal. Here a dredge is seen at work near the wheat wharf and silos.

As far as equipment is concerned, the **Australian Company** last year embarked on a building programme for new vessels totalling $5 million and under this programme, the following **plant was built in Australia**:--

(a) The cutter suction dredge "Crocodile" with floating pipeline and shoreline, specially designed for removal of hard material and reclamation in adjacent areas. This vessel was first engaged on a contract for the B.H.P. Co. Ltd. at Newcastle.

(b) Two Dumb Hopper Barges for transport and disposal of dredged spoil which were built in the Port of Melbourne and both barges are currently engaged on the River Yarra widening Project.

(c) One launch, specially designed for hydrographic survey work and fast transport of personnel. It is fitted out with the most modern echo sounding equipment, and is currently engaged on a contract in Newcastle, Board for the Maritime Services of N.S.W.

(d) Two launches for use as work boats. One is engaged in Newcastle, the other on the Melbourne project, A large bucket dredge is also under Newcastle, N.S.W. and, due to be construction at the State Dock Yard, completed in the second half of next year, has been

specially designed for the removal of very hard materials, such as rock and limestone. These materials are frequently encountered in Australian and New Zealand Ports.

During the last few years, the company has also specialised in underwater soil investigation.

Special drill barges were constructed so that soil samples can be obtained from underwater, while the barges can also be used for the drilling and blasting of rock on the seabed. Three large overburden drill rigs with compressors were recently bought for this purpose, and an expert brought out from overseas to acquaint Australians with the latest techniques in drilling and use of explosives.

This has given the company a new sphere of activity in the process of overcoming the problems connected with the deepening of ports and water ways.

Although the Company still employs some Dutchmen in key positions, the aim of the Company is to train Australians for these positions.

With companies such as the Australian Dredging & General Works. which have the know-how, skill and equipment, and can draw on overseas personnel and plant resources, if needed, it is evident that Australia has the potential in dredging to meet the challenge for the future.

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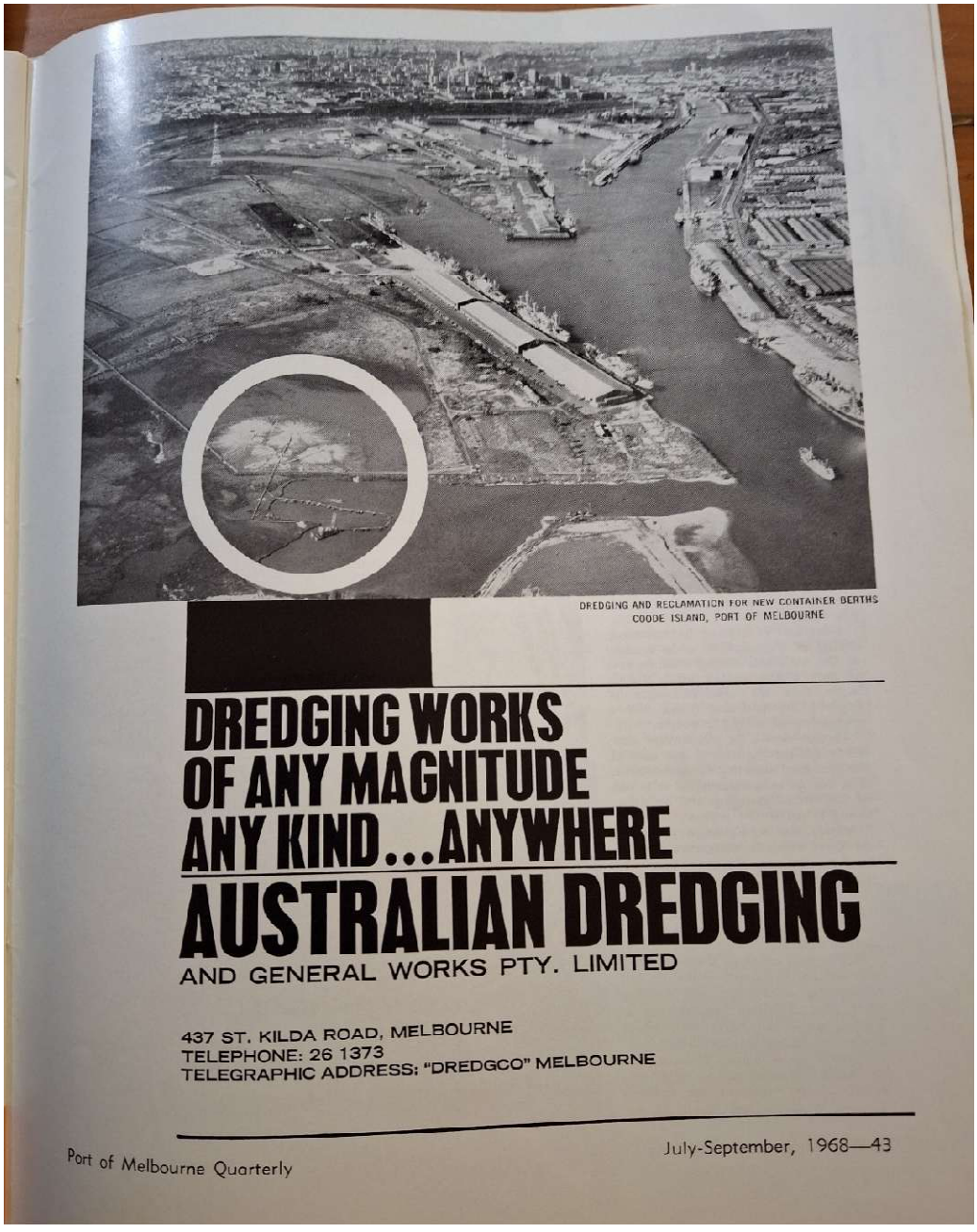

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