


For his indiscretion, Minchin was one of the founders of the Wagga Free Punt Association. The group collected enough money from local residents to allow them to open a free punt on the river not far from the bridge.

Operating during 1871 to 1872, the punt, which was received enthusiastically by locals, was doomed to fail as the company was given exclusive rights on the river for two miles either side of the bridge by the Act of 1861.

After the demise of the free punt both local newspapers advocated for the reduction or removal of the tolls. Eventually the company even offered to sell Company Bridge to the Wagga Borough Council for fifteen thousand pounds, however the council was not in a position to accept the offer. Gradually pressure mounted on the government to purchase the bridge, and in 1884, after the company’s 21-year franchise had expired, the government purchased the bridge for 80,000 pounds.

The tolls ceased at noon on February 26, 1884, and a public holiday was immediately declared as local residents celebrated with a procession down Fitzmaurice Street, over the bridge and around North Wagga.

Not surprisingly the amount of traffic on the bridge increased dramatically after the tolls were abolished.

This led to increased deterioration of the bridge, and by the early 1900s the bridge was in a poor state and in danger of collapse due to decaying timbers. The importance of the bridge was stressed to the government.

It was not only the bridge over the Murumbidgee for one hundred kilometres in one direction and eighty kilometres to the other. The appeal of the local member of parliament, Mr James Gormly, was successful and in 1892 it was decided that the bridge should be replaced with a new one.

Consequently, on November 11, 1896 Hampden Bridge was officially opened. Construction cost just in excess of 11,800 pounds. Somewhat surprisingly Company Bridge was demolished almost immediately and with it went 38 years of service to the Wagga community.