May 2015 Newsletter

Where is Timber Construction Headed

Image courtesy of Dennis Clark Photography 0408 459 242

A few weeks ago, a chapter I wrote on timber construction was sent off to the editors of the French publication, *Le Memento du Forestier*. This chapter was initially intended to be in three parts. The first dealt with construction using timber with minimal processing such as natural rounds. And what do you think of this heritage listed bridge built from natural rounds in 1885 at Coominya, not far from home? The piles are very impressive. How things have changed from then to now. Last month I complained that I had trouble purchasing 2 girders at 8 m for a footbridge.

The second part of the chapter looked at construction using semi processed (i.e. sawn) timber. The final part was to cover construction using modern highly processed timber and this was to be covered by my friends in the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. The editors in France decided

to drop the third section! The reasoning was that timber technology is changing so radically that whatever is written will be relatively quickly out of date. I think they are right.

Those who think timber is yesterday's material should look closely and the radical advances that are being made. Many have not progressed in their thinking about timber beyond the "old rattler" country road bridges.

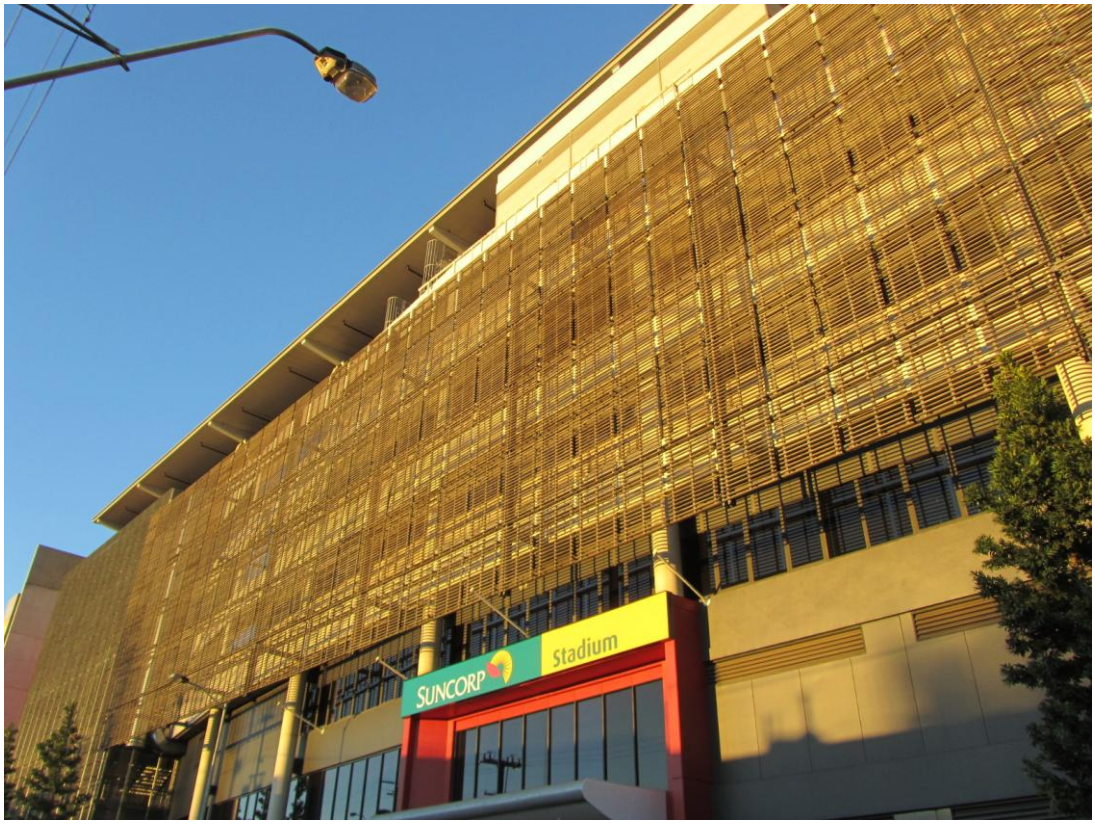
Wisdom of High Design Loads

This Anzac Day I was reminded of the wisdom of the high design loads for footbridges and other structures. In Gatton we have the normal march down the main street and then we all head off to the Weeping Mothers Memorial (not the traditional lighthorseman) for the ceremony. This involves crossing the railway line over the heritage design footbridge. It would not be possible to load the bridge any more than it is for a short time every Anzac Day, then it goes back to having virtually no one on it for the rest of the year.

The problem with most footbridges is that purchasers, who often are not qualified to assess the suitability of the product offered, look at price only and the fact that the bridge seldom will have anyone on them. But then one day someone organises a fun run across it and for a short time it is fully loaded. You cannot tell in advance which bridge needs the high loads and which one does not so you make them all capable of withstanding the unusual event.

Still we see footbridges being offered with a 3 kPA loading and the load factor not being published. If this happens to you show the salesman the door immediately. We are so used to structures being safe that we forget that they can and do fail like the one above where the deck dropped into the creek.

I need Help With Architectural Battens



I have been asked to develop a CPD session on architectural battens. Simple enough I thought until I looked into it. I need help from my readers. I need images, accounts of where they have worked and very importantly, where they have not worked and why. I need to learn what insights you have. Image courtesy of Architectus.