

Damien Murphy, The cabin man on Pymont Bridge, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 November 2014

For four decades, Josip Culig opened the city's bridges.



Former Pymont Bridge cabin operator Joe Culig enjoyed his job in the operation room on Pymont Bridge.
Photo: James Brickwood

The old Glebe Island Bridge, The Spit Bridge and Pymont Bridge all moved at his command.

Mr Culig came to Australia from the then Yugoslavia in 1969 and started on the bridge eight years later on a mate's recommendation. Like everyone before or since, Mr Culig learned on the job.

Working in the middle of Cockle Bay was his favourite. "Pymont Bridge gets under your skin," Mr Culig said. "I love it – everybody loved the job and everybody was committed. It was almost like a family."

Perched above the bridge path, the control cabin has six old tram-like controls - "handles" to apply power and "keys" to open and close the span.



Preparing to open the Pymont Bridge swing gate in 1902



Pymont Bridge Control House in 1902

It was not unusual to open the bridge 50 times over a 24-hour shift.

"Nights were lonely back then. Nobody went out. You saw drunks, working women, their pimps... the worst part was being abused by people held up when the gates closed. As a public servant I could only thank them for their frank opinions," Mr Culig said.

Mr Culig retired in 2006 but he was back at his old workplace to inspect a \$165,000 restoration carried out by the Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority.

It takes about a minute to swing to 83 degrees and since completion in 1902, it has opened more than 600,000 times as millions of feet, hooves and wheels lined up while sailing ships, coastal steamers, Manly ferries and yachts slid in and out of Cockle Bay.

The bridge closed for seven years from 1981 with development of Darling Harbour but now some 5 million people and thousands of bikes cross annually.

These days the bridge opens for boat shows and the occasional super yacht - most are bigger than the old coastal steamers.

The control cabin was moved for the monorail track but has been put back to the original spot for the renovation.