

Pioneers of Nor'-West Australia

PASTORAL AND PEARLING

By Lockier Clere Burges Sen.
No. VI.

[These reminiscences of Mr. Burges (who is still living) of his experiences with the natives, and the discovery of the remains of Messrs. Harding, Panter and Goldwyer, who were murdered by blacks, were published in book form several years ago in Geraldton, but as they are of great historical value they deserve much wider publicity than they have yet received. We therefore place the whole story in serial form before our readers.—Ed. "S.T."]

Natives Very Troublesome.

On my return to the stations we were compelled to keep night watch round the sheep yards, as the natives tried to get the sheep out and in fact they came so close to our camp at night that the spears they threw came into the huts between the slabs.

I got a touch of fever and ague from being up so much at nights. Accordingly I went down to the depot camp to get some quinine and have a day or two's spell. Mr. Logue was to get back in my place the day after I got down, but his horse did not come in early enough for him to get there before dark. The next morning a messenger came down with a letter from Perks, saying that the natives had attacked shepherd Bell that morning, and had cut off 500 or 600 of his sheep, and asking that either Mr. Logue or I should go up at once with help, as the natives were about in great numbers. As Mr. Logue was a J.P., I put the matter before him, and he said: "Go and get the police to rescue the sheep and capture the natives who took them away." But if we had to make prisoners of 40 or 50 or more where were we to keep them, and what was I to feed them on, as we had a large party now, comprising 6 pensioners, 2 policemen, and 12 employees of the company.

I picked out the men, or rather the extra men I wanted by "lot." Goodall, one of the pensioners, volunteered to come, so I had to leave Bathgate and take him. He was a real fine old fellow, but very stout, being about 16 stone in weight. He was a good walker, but could not run 50 yards to save his life. We set off about 1 p.m. with the spring cart and riding horses, and on arriving at the station found things rather mixed, and about 300 sheep still missing. I had a long talk with Tovey, Williams and Perks, and learned that the natives were encamped at one of the spare wells, at Tovey's Spring 2½ miles higher up the plains, where I had made huts and sheep yards ready for use. Tovey and I went out after dark and sized up the natives' position, and found that they had a mob of the sheep, if not all of the missing ones, in the sheep yards. There must have been at least 300 natives, and they were having a royal feed, as I could see several carcasses roasting on the fire, and smell the cooking meat.

We decided to make a raid on the encampment at daylight the next morning. Tovey was to lead the foot party of eight men by the path he and I had taken, whilst Williams, Vincent and I, on horse-back, were to locate ourselves out on the plains, close to the sheep yards. Tovey and his men were to make a rush on the camp with the object of frightening the natives off, whilst Williams, Vincent and I were to make a dash for the sheep yards, and hold possession of them at all risks. We also determined to try to arrest about 10 of the ring-leaders, and take them down to the depot camp.

Natives Surprised.

All went well up to daylight, but just as Tovey and his party were getting his men into line to make his rush they were discovered by the natives, who made a savage onslaught on them. Tovey and his men met them with a volley of shot, which had to be repeated before the natives turned towards the sheep yards. My two companions and I made our dash, and got close to the huts, where we were met by another lot of natives. We had a warm five or ten minutes, and then our assailants slewed round and joined the crowd that had attacked Tovey's party. The yells of the natives were awful, and spears, dowarks and clubs were hurled at us. Vincent's mare had her forehead hurt, and fell to the ground as if shot. Williams, Tovey and Scheburt were badly knocked about, and had a few slight spear wounds, whilst Perks was knocked down two or three times. My old mare got a rough hauling, and a spear stuck fast in the knee pad of my saddle.

(*Note: This mare was included among the lot sent down to me at Roebourne twelve months afterwards when the Company broke up the settlement at Roebuck Bay. She was never any good subsequently, except as a brood mare. On her death I had her head skinned, and found her forehead just like a pane of broken glass, all cracked into fissures).

Punched by Black Viragos.

Just as the natives were clearing off Vincent came running up to me, saying; "Oh, look at poor old Goodall, the women are pounding him awful." The position was that when Tovey and his party followed the natives out of their encampment the women threw themselves down in heaps. Goodall being big and fat, could not keep up with the others, and was left about 200 yards behind. Presently the women saw him walking by himself, and plucking up courage, went for him with their "Wannahs" or digging sticks. Goodall, who had insisted upon going out fully accoutred, had on his helmet, bandoleer, belt, etc., and the "black beauties" were all around him giving him fits.

I would not let Jack Vincent go to his assistance, as he might be a little too rough on the women, so rode over myself. I forgot Goodall's great size for the moment and shouted: "What's the matter with you, could you not run away from the women?" He was quite indignant, and replied: "What! Me run away from a woman. No, not I. I fought at Inkerman, Alma and Balaclava. Me run away from a woman. No, Mr. Burges, I am surprised at you."

Although the position was a serious one I could not help having a good laugh at the old chap's way of getting out of the difficulty, so I said: "Come on now, let them alone." "No sir," he replied, "just one more charge with the bayonet and I am with you. "But he was not quick enough, for a smart young woman gave him a real smasher on the top of the helmet which knocked him on his hands and knees. I then got between the women and him, and he did not want to have another charge, but moved off as quickly as he could.

We returned to the party, and by this time the natives had all cleared off, some making for the sea coast sand hills, and others up to the plains. On going to the huts and sheep yards we found about 190 sheep penned in the yards. Scheburt and another man were told off to take them down to Perk's station, whilst I took four men with me to pick up the tracks of the missing sheep. We found that another lot of natives had driven them north to a well (William's Spring) about three miles higher up, and close to Cooper's Spring. As soon as the natives saw us coming they all cleared out along a path, due east, as if making for the Fitzroy River, or some watering place further inland. The natives had regular worn paths from one watering place to another, all along the timber belt on the east side of the racecourse plains. These plains varied from a mile to eight miles wide in places, and were somewhat like the Greenough Flats, or the salt marshes at Port Gregory, near Lynton. We got about 85 sheep alive there, and counted the remains of about 30 more that had been partly roasted and eaten. We drove the live ones to Tovey's Spring, and putting them in the yards, left Tovey, Williams and Vincent in charge, rode down to Perk's camp, and after having supper took rugs and provisions back for the other three men, who remained with the sheep all night. I returned to Perk's camp, and next morning, mustered the sheep, and found there were still 150 missing. Taking the two mounted troopers and Vincent we scoured the country on the lookout for stray

sheep. We found some sheep and lambs dead, the wild dogs having killed some, whilst others had been speared. We succeeded in getting about 20 sheep, which we took back to the camp.

Lost in the Bush.

I had intended returning to the depot camp that night, but when I got to Larner's station I found that old Darby Doyle had been missing since ten o'clock in the morning. He had gone out to cut firewood and had got lost. Fetching the two troopers and a native from Perk's station we commenced a search. A circuit was made round Larner's station. Fires were lighted and guns were fired, but though we kept on the move until midnight, we could not find any trace of him. Leaving the men at Larner's I went down to the head station, and returned early the next morning with the dogs Oryx and Tiger. On reaching Larner's at eight o'clock, I found that the troopers and Black Tommy had picked up the tracks and were following them up. I put the dogs on the track, and in half an hour we picked up the troopers, whilst by noon the dogs found Darby. The poor old chap was quite done up, as he had been hobbling along all night falling over logs and the limbs of trees. He was very thirsty. We mounted him on one of the horses, and go -back as soon as possible to the depot camp, where he could be looked after. When he was able to work again, I put him to gardening to save his life, and also to save the trouble of having to find him when he got lost. This was the fourth time he had got bushed.

A Cool Customer.

Shortly after the foregoing episode, Pensioner Goodall got lost whilst out kangaroo shooting. But he was very sensible about it. He had Oryx with him, and sitting quietly on a log wrote on a slip of paper: "Goodall lost. Come and find him, J. Goodall." After fastening the message to Oryx's collar, he drew out the charge of shot in his gun and fired the squib of powder at the dog, who made straight for the camp. He ran into Tovey's tent and Tovey saw the paper on his collar. After reading the message Tovey mounted his horse, and going back with the dog, within an hour he found Goodall quietly sitting on a log and smoking his pipe. Goodall was one of the coolest characters I ever came across, but a real, brave, excellent man.

Not many days after this, pensioner, Joe Barr, was lost, and was out 16 hours before we found him. I was up at one of the upper stations when he was missed, and had the two dogs with me. The troopers came for me and the dogs. When we found the old man he was very far gone for the want of water. Luckily we had a keg of water and some brandy, and we gave him very small doses of brandy and water to revive him. I sent Vincent for the spring cart, and got Barr into the depot camp during the night.

Arrival of Mr. Nairn.

In August Mr. Charles Nairn, from the De Grey station, came up in a vessel called the Perseverance, and called in to see how we were getting on. He brought us a variety of use-ful things for the station, and also a big supply of provisions. He was on his way up to Camden Harbor. The Government intended breaking up that settlement and removing the resident magistrate (Mr. R. F. Sholl) down to the Nicol Bay, now called the Roebourne District. As the natives had not been troubling us lately, I went up with him, as he told me there were horses, sheep, etc., to be sold, whilst I also wanted to see my old friend, Mr. Sholl, again. We found everything there in a state of chaos, and everybody was anxious to get away from the place, as quickly as possible. We purchased some good rams at a low price, and I also got two mares and other things. We returned to Roebuck Bay in less than ten days, being accompanied by three young men—the late Mr. Alex McRae, Jacob Indorph, and a Mr. Andrews. McRae remained at Roebuck Bay as assistant to Mr. Logue; Indorph stayed at the De Grey station, and Andrews came down with Mr. Nairn and myself to the Roebourne district. I had a ten days' trip round that neighborhood, and visited the "Pyramid Station," where Messrs. Grant, Anderson, Edgar and two Mr. Richardsons had selected some land and settled down. There were also Mr. Charles Broadhurst, Dr. Baynton, and the other members of the Dennison Plains Company, viz., the late Mr. H. W. Venn, Messrs. Fraser, Simpson, MacIntosh, Hicks, Tase and others.

I took a great fancy to a station, which was then owned by that fine old pioneer and gentleman, Mr. John Wellard, of Fremantle, who had a real fine representative in the person of the late Mr. Shakespere Hall, and who kindly piloted me all over the station, and introduced me to Mr. and Mrs. John Withnell, who had also settled in the district. This worthy couple acted the parts of father and mother to all us young fellows in the days of privation and hard struggles that had to be gone through up there afterwards.

Stranded on the Abrolhos.

I went down to Fremantle after a short stay in the Roebourne district, and entered into treaty with Wellard for the purchase of his station, and, after six months of procrastination, I finally purchased it. I had arranged to go overland to the north with the late Mr. E. T. Hooley, and had my sheep ready for a start when I got the letter from Mr. Wellard, saying he would guarantee so many head of sheep, horses and cattle on the station. So I went back to Fremantle, after leaving Mr. Hooley at the big bend of the Murchison River, now called Morrissey's Pool. Later on I booked a passage from Fremantle in that ill-fated vessel, called the "Emma," belonging to the late Mr. Walter Padbury. She was chartered to take up sheep and horses, with the late Mr. Charles Harper in charge for Mr. MacIntosh of Newcastle. We left Fremantle in a bustle, with trusses of hay piled on the main deck—in fact everything was in the wrong place. If rough weather had come on suddenly, we should have been in a fix. To make matters worse a large compass that had belonged to the "Calliance" (wrecked at Camden Harbor) was placed in the "Emma." The "Calliance" was three times the tonnage of the "Emma," so consequently the compass would not work correctly in such a small vessel. The result was that the next night after leaving Fremantle, we found ourselves high and dry on the south end of the Abrolhos. The captain was so upset at finding himself in such a position, when he had considered he was at least 35 miles to the westward, that he practically collapsed. The chief mate would not take charge, as it would be against "seamen's etiquette," and so we were in an awkward fix. At first we thought we were on the rocks or a reef, but fortunately we had struck a coral reef. Mr. H. W. Sholl, of Cottesloe, a young lad then, was going up to Roebourne to join his father, who had been removed from Camden to Cossack, and he can confirm my statement as to the predicament we were in. After a long talk with the mate, who explained matters to me, I had to take charge. We put out anchors and tried to pull the vessel off, but that plan did not succeed. Next we furled all the sails and secured the yards. Making an examination of our surroundings we found there was grass on the island. Accordingly we made a raft, ran all the sheep ashore, landed the horses, trusses of hay, barrels of water, and tons of provisions, and in fact lightened the vessel as much as possible. Then we had another try to pull the vessel off, but it was no good, she had settled down firmly. We had only one boat—such were the conditions in these olden times, that we were allowed to go to sea with only one boat, and that not even a life-boat, but an old tub built of jarrah, which would go down like a stone if she capsized.

(To be continued in Part VII)