D 7636(L) Reminiscences of John Gilbert Partridge
Port Augusta 1915–1922

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Chapter 1
Introduction to Port Augusta

In the succeeding turmoil, we tried to carry on the business which was bleeding to death. Contracts and appointments were cancelled, real estate business came to a standstill and other business was suspended. By the year end it was apparent it would not support two.

About a year earlier, Mrs. Sid Wills, wife of an old friend of mine, had come into the office in tears saying Sid, whose lungs had been badly affected, had been discharged as incurable from a consumptive home with the recommendation that he go north into a dry climate where he was to live in the open and where, she said, he would probably die under a mulga bush.

Poor Mrs. Wills! She was in great distress, but was courageous and loyal. She was taking Sid to Port Augusta where they would live in a tent on a rush diet.

Afterwards I learned that this is what she did, nursing her sick husband gradually back to health. He was a keen fisherman, and when his strength began to return he went out with local fishermen soaking all day in the sun. Later, when strong enough, he bought a small boat on which he practically lived the simple life. Obviously his trouble had been arrested.

It was not long before he felt the urge to go into business. He set up an office as a General Agent and went to live in a fine, nine-roomed stone house called “Biddicote” which his mother had bought with 30 acres on a headland overlooking the hospital, a mile and a half south of the town. There their children joined them and they all spent many pleasant years.

Notwithstanding the war, Port Augusta was very active because the East-West Railway was being built, 1,050 miles from Port Augusta to Kalgoorlie. Sid Wells wrote suggesting an amalgamation of our two businesses as “Wills, Partridge & Twiss”, with Wills and me running the northern end and Twiss the city, and so it was arranged.

Our furniture was stored, the nice little house let at 15/- a week to a man who let the garden go to pot and quickly ran into arrears with the rent which was never paid, so it was sold at a considerable loss. Nell and Miles were taken in by Mr. And Mrs, Gill, Billy took over the office, the Harrows gave us a send-off saying nice things, the farewells were said, and in January, 1915, with precious little money, I caught the weekly steamer “Kooringa” for the northern town of Port Augusta, 250 miles away from everything I loved.

Before leaving I had gone out to say good-bye to Mother and Father, feeling much depressed, for they were getting old. Good old stout-hearted, affectionate Mother had more courage than I. She had pointed out that I was young, had a dear wife and son and good health, and that the war could not last forever. Mrs. Gill wept, but Nell held herself together trying not to add to the misery of parting. Young Miles showed every sign of developing into a Prime Minister. We said good-bye in the quiet garden and Nell waved to me from the gate, I knew she had her bad moments then.

From Sydney to Perth across 2,000 miles of Australia which I afterwards travelled, Port Augusta holds pride of place as the ugliest spot. At the head of Spender’s Gulf, which

narrows down at the town to about the width of Sydney Harbour at Miller's Point, and finally peters out in swamps seven miles further up at Yorkey's Crossing, the town stands beside mud flats at low tide, with the wharf standing high, for there is a 14 foot rise and fall.

The Flinders Range, about 14 miles distant, rises to 3,000 feet behind the town, which is dominated by the stark Devil's Peak.

The daily train to Adelaide winds up through the Pichi Richi Pass over spidery viaducts to Quorn, while further south, Horrocks Pass gives access by road to Wilmington (Beautiful Valley). The three towns form an equilateral triangle, 25 miles distant from each other. Across the Gulf on the west side is a low bastion of flat-topped hills through which there is a pass to Iron Knob 45 miles away.

Those are the immediate surroundings of the sprawling, untidy town with its main Commercial Road and side streets.

When I first saw it, the buildings, some of stone but mostly wooden, all looked as if they badly needed a coat of paint. The town hall, however, was quite an impressive two-storey stone building, good enough for a town of three times the size, with a clock tower without any clock. Beside it was the Institute, a respectable building, while on the other side it adjoined a handsome Court House. Opposite, was the three-story stone Flinders Hotel occupying a corner, quite a place, for it was the leading licensed house of seven that served a population of 1,500.

On the south side in Conwaytown, the Federal Government had established its running sheds and car building ships, for the railway carriages for the transcontinental railway, now well on its way, were built locally.

North of the town was the huge engine roundhouse with turntable so beautifully balanced that a boy could swing it to synchronise the tracks which radiated to carry 100-ton engines into their bays.

Immediately outside the town on the land side were sandhills, the sports ground, the wilderness of a cemetery with its crazy tomb-stones, broken down fences and straying goats.

My heart sank, and, had I known it then, this was to be my home for eight years!

Despite the ugly picture it made, Port Augusta was an important town, the metropolis of the north. It is the most inland port in Australia, serving a vast hinterland; it is an important railway junction; the northern division of the Police Department is centred there with its fine Court House, Resident Magistrate, Inspector, Sergeant-Clerk, mounted troopers, foot police and black trackers; it has a hospital and a Catholic Catherdral too, bless you, but no bishop at that time for Father O'Rourke, a senior priest, held sway.

Sid Wills met me at the wharf and took me to his hospitable home, where I stayed for several days before settling at the Pastoral Hotel. My old friend, Mrs. Wills, always known as Mummy Wills, welcomed me as generously as a long-lost brother.

We got straight to work the following morning when Wills drove down in his old landau-type buggy with two seats facing each other and black pony, Tommy. As Wills was lame, the low-slung outfit suited him. It was known to everybody, and Tommy, jogging along sedately, knew exactly where to stop at the pepper tree outside the office, and, on the way home in the evenings, would, without any guidance, trot across to the horse trough and hitching post

outside the Pastoral Hotel for the “one for the road”. It was said that Tommy would automatically pull up at any pub on the route, but would disregard the churches.

I was taken the rounds of the stores, banks and other places of business to meet the citizens, after which we settled down to work.

In contrast to the city slump, business was very active for the influx of Commonwealth Railway men engaged in building the railway, brought business.

Wills was the local agent for George Wills & Co., Merchants, who supplied him with carbide in drums about the size of 40-gallon petrol drums. He supplied this for the town’s street lighting as well as for the adjoining municipalities of Davenport, separated by a street only, and Port Augusta West, separated only by the narrow gulf. Absurdly enough, these three townships whose combined populations totalled no more than 3,000 people had their separate Mayors, Councillors, Clerks, Engineers, Labourers and Health Officers, the latter position being filled by the one and only resident doctor who was also the Medical Officer of the Hospital.

Quite a large proportion of houses and offices too were lit by the carbide gas which gives a beautiful white light. In fact, it was the town’s standard lighting system for which Wills had a virtual monopoly.

He was also agent for George Carswell’s ketch “Harold”, a craft which looked and sailed like a yacht, with a cargo-carrying capacity of 200 tons. It took George about three weeks to make the round trip. He never drank at sea, though was seldom fully sober ashore, but he was a grand character, a typical old sea-dog built on sturdy lines with a strong face deeply creased, short square teeth, rheumy eyes and a jaw like a bulldog.

On tying up the “Harold” at the wharf, George would come rolling down the street, shouting greetings, to the office of “my Agents” where he would lodge his manifest, tell the latest yarn, and make off for Barney Fitzsimmons’ Wharf Hotel, the nearest to the “Harold’s” berth.

A periodical job was to get him aboard to cast off on his outward voyage. While ashore he would not do a hand’s turn. “Whet the hell do you think I keep agents for?” It was our job to get him back-loading to the city, and we were always glad to get him afloat for he would come into the office, full of joviality and rum, wasting our time, but we liked the old man for he was loyal to “my Agents” and would not handle an ounce of cargo other than through us.

Wills’ star patron at that time was Hubert Clive Daniel, an energetic speculator with wide vision who had acquired, at ridiculously low values, a big proportion of the vacant lands round the town. These he had surveyed, subdivided into allotments and provided with surveyor’s certificate that every block was high and dry, for some earlier subdivisions by unscrupulous parties had sold as building sites land that was in or encroached upon by salt lakes.

Daniel stepped in when the East–West Railway was decided upon, well ahead of the slow-moving locals. He got out pamphlets in colour showing Port Augusta with skyscrapers, a port full of shipping with railways radiating in all directions, maps of the district, plans of the subdivisions. His contracts provided for small deposits of, say, £5 for a £50 allotment, the balance payable in small monthly instalments with no interest charges, and a free title to the widow without further payment if a married man died during the currency of the contract.

He could well afford these terms, for some of the land he bought in big areas at as low as £1 an acre which, after providing roads, he cut up into four blocks to the acre and sold at prices

up to £50 each. In my first week we sold over 100 allotments, 30 in one day. I was interviewing customers and writing out receipts for deposits during the day, so had to go back after tea to clean up the contracts, when I sold three more allotments. This frenzied pace did not, of course, keep up, but sales on Daniel's account were frequent.

He was generous in his treatment of us, allowing us better than Chamber of Commerce commission rates, and giving us a free hand to compromise of deposits, though not on sale prices, unless several allotments were involved. His rule was to let no enquirer go. "If he can't pay a £5 deposit, take £1,but sign him up. If he forfeits, I get the land back."

I never knew him to beak faith and saw him do lots of generous things, for he was a born gambler. He always carried large sums of money for in making a deal he said the cash was hard to refuse.

One day in Barney Fitzsimmons' pub he offered a watch to young Jim Fitzsimmons for £3, which was about its value. Jim didn't want it. Daniel then offered to toss whether Jim would give him 30/- or £3. Nothing doing. Finally he offered to toss whether or not Jim got it for nothing. Jim won and the watch was handed over.

Daniel was a driving devil too. He expected his agents to earn their salt. One morning he got me out before dawn to have look at some land he had under offer. He walked all over it, pacing the boundaries, identifying the survey pegs, studying how it would cut up. Before breakfast it was all worked out with another subdivision for us to sell. Before we had the plans, however, or the selling prices, he had sold half the estate himself in Melbourne where he lives. He made frequent visits to the Port, put the necessary pep into us, and, fortunately, returned home, to fire telegrams at us.

Chapter 2
Becoming Accepted

The partnership of Wills, Partridge & Twiss was soon dissolved, for there was little to hold it together. For a short time I worked for Wills and then started on my own account. There was no split in our personal relations, for we occupied adjoining office rooms with the dividing door unlocked. If he were out, I would answer his 'phone, take messages, and he would do the same for me.

There was a fair division of the business, Sid retaining his Government appointment for wheat handling, the "Harold" agency, the management of his mother's interests and other items peculiarly his own, I the auctioneering, accountancy, and valuing, while in real estate we co-operated and shared. It was an association that worked well right through.

The Pastoral Hotel was filled with bachelors from the Government works, banks and other business places. Mrs. Ellen Luke, the proprietress, mothered us. She had been licensee for 25 years, was much respected and had an enviable record with the Licensing Court, Police and public.

Nell and I corresponded regularly, both of us were eagerly looking forward to her joining me after the second baby's birth which was due in August. She was going to a maternity home at Kent Town for the event, where Nurse Abbott, a great friend, was to attend her.

In the meantime, a jarrah weatherboard house of five rooms was being built for us by Tommy Totman, the local builder, on an allotment of land from the subdivision of Biddicott Estate which Wills had arranged for his mother. It was on the highest point, overlooking the Gulf and town, quite close to the Wills' home.

It was grand to be together again in our own home. The second boy, Dennis de Montfort, was born 16 months after Miles who soon acquired a proprietary interest in him.

A Mr. And Mrs. Norman Jones built and occupied a cottage on the adjoining block and turned out to be exceedingly nice neighbours, while it was a great comfort to have the Wills family so near, a great convenience, too, for transport, with Tommy doing duty.

Our house, which was built on a sand hill, had lofty, well-proportioned rooms lined with beaverboard, picture and chair rails, and painted with a flat finish in pastel tints. The ceilings were of Wunderlich patterned sheet metal also painted. Wide verandahs with protective rails on front and side with two 1,000-gallon rainwater tanks completed what was a nice little home. It was surrounded by close split paling fences at the sides and back to prevent sand drift, with a cyclone fence and gate in front.

Port Augusta is extremely hot with an annual rainfall averaging eight inches. The service water was hard needing a softener, so every home was provided with as many tanks as could be filled from roof catchments. After every occasional shower, Nell would report how many rungs in depth of water were in our tanks. The level gradually crept up until a heavy shower filled both tanks to overflowing. Thereafter, with care, we were never without precious rainwater, though young Miles was prevented just in time one day from draining a tank.

A paved path to the front gate, a patch of lawn, a wormwood hedge which, because of its intense bitterness, even goats won't touch, combined to give the place a homelike appearance.

One of the last things I did before going north was to secure a licence to conduct auction sales and give valuations. Why the Auctioneer's Licence included that of a Valuer I never knew. The annual fee was £15.

Wills told everybody that I was an auctioneer, but did not say I had never conducted a sale. Nor had I attended more than one or two auction sales in my life or studied the auctioneers' methods, though I knew they were supposed to be funny fellows.

There was a good opening at the Port for one of the stores stocked furniture and, as there was a moving population of Commonwealth Railway officials constantly going backwards and forwards from Melbourne, they almost always wanted to buy or sell house furnishings.

The first sale was of mixed furniture and sundries comprising 320 lots, held in an iron shed with the temperature at 110 degrees, but this did not deter the locals from attending, for they were used to the fierce heat. They rolled up by the score and gave me quite a reception when I stood on the box to read the conditions of sale – "The highest bidder shall be the buyer, etc…"

Wills was the clerk with a three-ply board clamped to which was the list of goods, with lot numbers, sale prices, buyers' names and a sheaf of invoices, plus a money bag like a bus conductor's, with £25 worth of change. I was at first in trouble in forgetting who was the last bidder, the amount of the last bid, but soon gained confidence for I had a strong voice and could talk rapidly, two essentials.

I was in such a fluster that there was no thought of removing my coat, though everybody else had, and the sweat simply poured off. Suddenly, there was a tinkling noise, and on looking down I saw some good Samaritan holding a pint of shandy under my nose, with ice floating

in it. Never was drink more welcome. There were shouts of “Good luck, boss. Get stuck into it, mister,” for they were a genial mob.

The bidding was keen after the first few lots had been offered; the prices were good and very few items were passed in, there being no reserves. We got through the lot by dark, with total proceeds about £450, on which commission was, by arrangement, 10% in this case, the fixed rate being 5%. A mighty hard day’s work, but profitable and splendid experience.

These mixed sales became regular events averaging about one a fortnight, with odd horse sales, a regular monthly stock sale at Stirling North and an annual land sale at the Institute in Race Week.

For the women of the town the sales became meeting places for gossip. One day I overheard, during a lull, a lady shout, “I can’t hear you with that damned auctioneer kicking up such a row.”

Knowing the unsavoury reputation of auctioneers as a class, I made certain fixed rules that were seldom departed from:-

1. Never allow a bidder to follow his own bid.
2. Never re-open the bidding after the fall of the hammer.
3. Never run the bidding myself except when there was a reserve, and then only up to the reserve.
4. Never allow any dispute to go unsettled.
5. Never misdescribe an article by concealing its faults.
6. Never sharpen my wits at the expense of a bidder except as a retort.
7. Never neglect to announce the conditions of sale.
8. Never allow the buyers to take charge or in any way to dictate the conduct of the sale.
9. Never depart from business-like methods and avoid levity.
10. Never buy anything myself without announcing that it was my own bid.

In the main these rules were strictly observed. On occasions Rule 3 would not be, when an absurdly low bid on an unreserved item justified an advance, but this was seldom resorted to.

There were four other auctioneers in the town including Elder Smith & Co. and Dalgety & Co., both of which companies confined themselves almost entirely to stock or clearing sales and did not concern themselves with general sales, so I soon obtained a virtual monopoly by securing the confidence of the people and sicking strictly to business.

Moreover, I was a good auctioneer, this being the only job I ever undertook in which I excelled.

Auctioneers are not the only people who prey on others. There were plenty of attempts to take advantage of an unsuspecting mallet wielder but my good rules kept me out of trouble. There was much variety in the work, many amusing incidents, plenty of hard work and generally fair profits.

Small sales authorised by the Government such as selling a few head of impounded stock, or the trifling effects of a deceased bushman, had to be undertaken, for some of the biggest

offerings were timber and iron from dismantled wheat stacks owned by the State Wheat Board.

Shortly after we had settled, Wills and I were elected Councillors of the Davenport Municipality, with Bob Mullins as Mayor.

Bob was a first-class chairman who handled the business at the monthly meetings with despatch, so the work was not exacting but gave us experience in municipal work. After serving for one year, Wills was nominated as Councillor for the central and business town of Port Augusta, but I did not seek re-election.

In country towns one is hardly accepted as a resident under 20 years. For business reasons it was important that we become known, so the more we thrust ourselves before the people the better.

After Wills had served a year on the Central Council he was going up for re-election and suggested I should nominate as Mayor, who in Port Augusta, was elected by the ratepayers direct and not by the Councillors from their own ranks. Knowing the traditional qualification for citizenship I scoffed at the idea, but Wills persisted, saying the people had had enough of the present elderly Mayor who was re-nominating. They wanted a younger man, new blood.

I felt nervous about it, for I lacked experience, the war was on, I detested speechmaking, there were many reasons to make me hesitate, but it tickled my vanity. Anyhow there was precious little chance of my being elected, so I let myself be talked into it.

The first Saturday in November was election day in municipalities and district councils throughout the State. As the time approached I began to funk, hoping old Mr. Roberts would get in. Polling ceased at eight o'clock, and by nine o'clock the result would be known. By that hour, my craven fears had me in a dither. A 'phone call from the Town Clerk, who was returning officer, told me that I had been elected and would I come across to the Town Hall for the declaration of the poll. Oh hell! I was for it, but it had to be faced.

A couple of hundred people had jammed into the Council Chamber where Jim Holdsworth, the Town Clerk, announced the results. Sid had got in as Councillor, and I, heaven help me, was now Mayor, Chief Magistrate of the town and Boss Cocky.

In a panic I responded to congratulations and got away as quickly as possible to tell Nell she was the Mayoress. She giggled, said, "You'll do all right, Johnny," and we slept on it.

Chapter 3
Mayor of the Town

Sid Wills, having previously served on the Council, was able to give me considerable help. He told me that the previous Mayor had been a weak chairman, allowing far too much latitude, disregarding the rules of debate and allowing the Town Clerk to enter the debates. Lack of order in the proceedings had meant that meetings, held fort-nightly, had ended at very late hours.

I had a talk with James Holdsworth, Town Clerk, who had had very long service and was an acknowledged authority on municipal maters. He was much older than I, a good speaker with plenty of confidence, almost a hectoring manner, but he had loads of experience and was a particularly good minute writer.

He gave me a copy of the standing orders which are the rules by which the meetings are to be conducted.

With all his bombast, he was a good fellow, a most valuable servant. To avoid having to rebuke him in Council, I told him that I understood he had a habit of interjecting at debates and even speaking on motions. These I asked him to refrain from doing. He replied that he had had to do so in the past by reason of the weak chairman, but that he would be glad to have a chairman who would make this unnecessary.

To make the position clear, I told him that while I was chairman, I intended to conduct the meetings in a strictly regular way and would allow nobody to usurp the chairman's duties or powers. He assured me he was very glad to hear it, but I was not so sure.

He promised me full support, gave some sound advice which he tendered in a good spirit as an old hand to a new chum and which I accepted gratefully for he meant well.

Bob Mullins lent me a copy of the standing orders of the House of Commons, so, armed with this and a full understanding of the Council's own rules, I felt I was armed for the fray. And fray it was at the first meeting of the Council!

The Council Chamber at the Port Augusta Town Hall is a gracious room, lofty and spacious, with a long table centred and surrounded by comfortable armchairs for the members, the Mayor slightly raised, at the head and Town Clerk at his left. At one side was a platform with seating for ratepayers who may attend.

I felt a bit nervous, but was gaining confidence with a determination to rule, knowing that any weakness would be fatal and difficult to rectify. Every ruling had to be just, without excesses of authority and always with courtesy.

Of all those present I, with one exception, was the youngest.

The Town Clerk, as the permanent officer, announced the new Council, we took our seats, the last minutes of the outgoing Council were read and confirmed by the in-coming members and the decks cleared for action.

Then came the Mayor's address. I voiced the usual platitudes about our duty to ratepayers, how we should work as a team, and how the rules of debate would be strictly enforced with members given every opportunity to express themselves. Two subjects I expressly asked them not to introduce into Council discussion, politics or religion, and finally the hope was expressed that we would work amicably together foe the good of the town. Hear hear! Hear hear!

To my disappointment I found that the Chairman had no deliberate vote, but only a casting vote when there was an equality of votes. I could speak on a motion but not vote on it.

At the first meeting, which was held on a very hot night, one or two Councillors started to remove their coats, when I stopped them saying that we had to act with decorum as ratepayers were entitled to attend Council meetings as onlookers. Immediately following that I had to prevent them from smoking for the same reason.

Then to make matters worse there were several other corrections. One Councillor had been speaking several minutes when I had to ask him for his proposition, explaining that a proposition should be first put, then followed by his supporting remarks, otherwise he might talk for half an hour with no proposal at all.

Later, a motion was proposed, seconded and discussed, then before it was put to vote the proposer wanted to speak on it again. Disallowed. Then some conversations across the table had to be stopped. In each case I tried to act without giving offence and explained my reasons.

Then came the last straw when Jim Holdsworth, the Clerk, during a debate on business before the meeting, jumped up from his chair murmuring, "With Your Worship's permission…", and started to speak on the motion. This angered me, for it was to prevent just such a happening that I had spoken to him earlier; so I had to shout him down and order him to take his seat, which he did with a poor grace.

So then I stood and took some time in explaining that I did not wish to throw my weight about or gag anybody, but did want to give Councillors the utmost freedom within proper limits. They had a right to speak. We wanted to hear them. All I asked was that they should speak at the right time. If we observed a few simple rules the business would be disposed of in an orderly and brief manner. But the Town Clerk's breach was a definite infringement. He was not entitled to discuss the business unless invited to do so through the Chair. If any Councillor wanted an opinion from the Town Clerk who was a man of wide experience, he had but to ask for it through the Chair. We should take advantage of his knowledge, but it was not for him to decide when he was to speak. His job was to keep the minutes and speak when asked on matters for decision by the Council.

I explained that to save the Town Clerk and the Meeting the embarrassment of such a show-down as we had just had, I had taken this very matter up with him, but he, evidently meant to challenge my authority. I intended to give every Councillor my support and expected every one of them in turn to give me theirs. This cleared the air.

When the Council meeting ended, the same personnel sat, constituting the Board of Health, with the Mayor as Chairman, the Town Clerk as Secretary, Councillor Dr. Pellew as Health Officer. The meeting was held in private with ratepayers not admitted. They could, I announced, fling their coats, collars and ties off if they wished and smoke like chimneys. This relaxed the tension somewhat.

After such a stormy meeting, I was glad to get home, but Wills told me long afterwards that there was a street corner discussion at the close of the meeting. Some of them were not looking forward with much pleasure to future meetings, saying the new mayor was a thorough stinker, but one or two of the old re-elected members thought there might be an improvement on long drawn out meetings. Anyway, they would give me a fair trial.

It would have been foolish to antagonise the boys by being over-strict or to discourage them in any way, but if the meetings were to be orderly in future, any corrective measures must be applied right at the start. I had been told about an earlier mayor, a dominating, impatient lawyer who ruled so strictly, shouting at members for any irregularity, without explanation, that some of the more timid Councillors refrained from speaking, so that their usefulness was entirely lost. This, of course, I must avoid.

When a special meeting was held for the appointment of Committees, I planned some diplomatic moves of low cunning, saying nothing about them. From time immemorial it had been the custom for the Mayor, ex officio, to act as Chairman on all Committees. When the appointments came up for discussion I suggested that for the Finance Committee, Councillor Harden, a hard-headed sound business man and proprietor of a well-run business, should be appointed Chairman and that I would be willing and happy to sit under him.

There was no reason why the Mayor, despite precedent, should hog all the “chairs”. Likewise for Public Works Committee I suggested that Councillor Sharam, a keen shrewd storekeeper, would make an excellent Chairman. These appointments were made and created a good impression. Further, on my suggestion, the Town Clerk’s salary was given a boost.

In country towns, the professional types, doctor, parson, lawyer, and banker, are held in great respect amongst the lowly, sometimes disproportionately to their worth. Dr. Pellew was on the Council, often being referred to by members as :Doctor Pellew: until I asked them to refer to him in Council as Councillor Pellew.

One night he took his seat obviously tired out. I felt sorry for him, but was amazed when he spread his arms out on the table, resting his head on them. I waited a few moments and then said, maybe a bit pompously, “If any member is so exhausted by his efforts during the day that he cannot sit up at Council meeting, we will accept an apology for his absence.”

The poor doctor shot up as if stung, with “I beg your pardon, Mr. Mayor, I beg your pardon,” but neither he nor any other member ever lounged again at a meeting.

After that the meetings were conducted in an orderly way, there was no slumming, everybody had his say without hindrance, and we were out of the chamber usually before 10 o’clock with few carry-overs.

Jim Holdsworth was a tower of strength, with a positive genius for minute writing. Sometimes I have watched him making the briefest of notes in his draft minute book decorated with quaint designs and figures, but at the next meeting his minutes would be a model, complete in every detail without being fulsome, and written in plain, well-chosen words. On one occasion his record of the previous long drawn out meeting took pages of his book and 15 or 20 minutes to read, but it was so well-expressed that it drew a round of applause.

I had two terms as Mayor, being unopposed on the second occasion , and a deputation headed by Dr. Pellew asked me to stand for a third term, but I declined with thanks. The mayoral allowance was £50, not nearly enough to cover expenses, and the work took up too much time which meant neglect of business.

Having once obtained the confidence of the Councillors, I received from them the utmost loyalty, and, after the initial brushes, the work was most interesting and relations pleasant.

Apart from Council work, the duties of a town mayor are most exacting. He is expected to be on all committees, to open all kinds of functions, to chair public meetings, to meet distinguished visitors, to sit on the Bench, to head deputations, to act as Coroner, to figure on all subscription lists. There is no end to the demands made upon him, precious few of which I refused or escaped.

The first public meeting packed the Town Hall to hear addresses from two Federal Ministers, our own member Alex. Pointon, who was Postmaster-General, and our neighbour from Quorn, Mr. Foster, Minister for Railways. I prepared a speech, but forgot most of it and had to go it alone, so I learned to confine myself to introducing the speakers, preserving order and moving a vote of thanks at all subsequent appearances of which there were many.

At half-time intervals, there was often an appeal from the platform for funds for the Red Cross, the Trench Comforts Fund, the new wing for the hospital etc., in which the generous contributors were named and others blackmailed, “Did you say ten shillings, sir, or ten

guineas?" Australia Day during the war never passed without our little town contributing £1,000 or more, but outback Oodnaddatta, with a population of less than 200, beat us, as they did when we were set a target of £10,000 for the second war loan and subscribed £30,000. We were rewarded with a flag with three stars to be flown from the Town Hall. The flag on Oodnadatta's mulga tree must have been liberally sprinkled with stars.

Some famous people called on us when passing through, including Edward, Prince of Wales, now Duke of Windsor. In the mining town of Tarcoola, the Prince received a unique address written on the tanned side of an albino dingo skin – one he treasured above many on parchment enclosed in elaborate caskets.

His Royal Highness travelled across from Kalgoorlie in a beautifully panelled special railway coach, which afterwards became one of the sights of the town, sometimes housing the Commissioner of Railways on his frequent visits. A lady visitor inspecting the carriage one day found an empty cigarette tin which was said to have been used by the Prince and which she eagerly seized upon as a souvenir. No doubt it had been cast aside by Bill the carriage cleaner, but nonetheless would look impressive, mounted and inscribed on her boudoir mantel.

General Pau, the famous one-armed French General with his trade promotion party, trooped through the Institute, where the ladies had taken days preparing exhibits of wool, metals, timbers and other products of the north all done up in dainty ribbons with cards in English and French.

A party of American astronomers from one of the big observatories came to Port Augusta on their way to Central Australia where they could best observe a forthcoming eclipse, with little likelihood of its being obscured by cloud. Mr. Wilson, the leader, (*I think Wilson was the name*) was a genial card who called on me and agreed at once to a suggestion that he should give a few of us a talk on astronomy at the hotel where he was staying for a night or so.

To my questioning, he said he liked beer and plenty of it, smoked a pipe, was easy to entertain and enjoyed a yarn. He proved a most interesting man who could talk on his subject right down to our level, so we kept him out of bed until midnight munching sandwiches and apples and talking. He was good fun, too.

Some good theatrical and concert parties gave entertainments in our fine hall which always surprised them. Dolly Castles was quite impressed, and Peter Dawson broke his journey to Perth.

Wills and I with two others guaranteed a fifty pound house to his advance agent, so Peter gave two concerts on successive nights, the second one being request numbers. He had enlisted for the war, was a good Australian and popular singer, so our local male-voice choir serenaded him on the wide balcony of the Flinders Hotel, all 40 of them in evening dress. I introduced Peter to the Leader, Jim Wilkinson, and to the company collectively. As the item was addressed to him he sat quietly for a few moments, then started to fidget for it was familiar to him, and then he jumped up and joined in. He was genuinely delighted at the compliment and gave of his best at the concerts which yielded £125.

He told me that just before the war he had signed a contract with an American Gramophone Company for £100,000, but that the war had cancelled it.

Apparently mayoralties of country towns are natural stepping stones to Parliament, or at least a qualification, for I had a call one day from Tom Lyons, a Union delegate, asking me if I

would stand for Stuart in the State House of Assembly on a labour ticket. To this day I do not know why he approached me, for at all political meetings I had always been careful not to take sides or express any opinion, it being my job as Chairman to be impartial.

Ted Harvey, the sitting labour member was a good man, temperate in his views. He spent a lot of time in his electorate, but was evidently not rabid enough to suit Tom's Union. For a good many years, when the underdog had had to work for long hours under poor conditions, and for little pay, I had voted labour, especially when men of the type of Tom Price and Crawford Vaughan were in power, but the militant, unreasonable mob at Port Augusta had sickened me.

I wrote to Bill Twiss telling him I was switching to the Nationals, receiving from him a letter which crossed mine and which said that he too was no longer to be dominated by the horny-handed.

I told Tom Lyons I could not afford to accept the pay of a M.L.A. which was [less] than £234 a year, but he assured me that if I got in I need not worry about the money. It was clear he meant there were ways of getting money other than by honest means.

Later, I was invited to contest Alex Pointon's seat for the Grey electorate in the Federal House. He was a Cabinet Minister holding the Postmaster-General's portfolio and a tough man to unseat, but the salary for a back-bencher was £600 per annum.

In earlier days, Mr. Pointon had been a shearers' delegate when Uncle Tom was managing Yardea Station. Though never a brilliant man, he was a straightshooter and popular in the district.

He called to ask if I were opposing him, saying if so he would make it a hard, clean fight, but if beaten, he would take it with good grace.

Politics, either State or Federal, had no attraction for me, for I was unfit for the job with little knowledge, no very decided opinions, I was a poor debater and could not think on my feet. On familiar business or Council matters I could be glib enough to pass muster, but had no desire to become one of the party voting machine.

Amongst personal friends who later attained Parliamentary honours, were a one-time salesman (and a poor one) who worked for Patrtridge & W.N. Twiss, a Kookaburra member who did not even star as such, and a publican who followed me as Mayor of Port Augusta, none of whom raised their voices in debate and served only as party hacks.

Chapter 4
Courtroom Experiences

As Port Augusta had a Courthouse, Resident Magistrate and a large police force with all facilities for dealing with cases, there was considerable activity in law circles. Mr. W. J. Hinde, the Police Magistrate, though centred at Port Augusta, served a big district and was frequently away on circuit, leaving much of the local work to the Justices of the Peace who could handle minor cases.

The Mayor, by virtue of his office, was senior among the Justices of the Peace, and, unfortunately, I was the nearest to the Court House and less fettered than the others, most of whom were in employment. So, as I was more readily available, Sergeant Gibbons took full advantage of the fact. Moreover, he knew that the jobs I had held in Law offices gave me a little better knowledge of Court procedure and evidence than the others.

The Sergeant was a fine man, very tolerant and kindly. He did what he could to discipline drunks rather than arrest them. I've known him to grab a tipsy man in the street, shaking him, railing at him and finally escorting him round to the town park where, with a boot in the pants, he would make him lie under a tree to sleep it off.

If he could not avoid gaoling and charging a man, he would defend him. "Just a poor, decent lout with a bit of drink in him, to be sure, but a good hardworking man when sober and not an ounce of harm in him."

When asked by the Court if there were any previous convictions, he would make light of them, saying "Nothing of any importance, just a trifling offence": and sometimes the old devil would lie blatantly by saying there had been none, even when the man charged was an old customer. He would turn a blind eye, too, on after-hours trading and betting, but, despite his leniency, he was a good policeman and did not condone serious offences.

There was little crime or real lawlessness in the town, but for drunkenness it took the bun, there being more convictions in our Court than in the city of Adelaide. The contributing factors to this state of affairs were of course the intensely hot climate and the great number of wharf labourers and railway navvies in the town.

Jack Redwood was a 'regular'. Poor old Jack was not a resident, but cook on a station outback. He was a V.C. from the bombardment of Alexandria and a remittance man who spent his vacations in annual beanos in town which he could never get past, becoming a nuisance until his cheque cut out.

Mr. Hinde, who was not as softhearted as some of us, told Jack once that if he came before him again, he would give him a stretch at Greenbush, the local prison. Jack protested that he would be a good boy, but before dark he was in again..

He did not know that Mr. Hinde had been called away on circuit so was very depressed the following morning when facing the Court with Mr. Hinde's threat of gaol hanging over him. He was in the dock when the Magistrate's door opened and instead of Mr. Hinde, his old friend Mr. Giles, a kindly soul, took his seat on the dais.

Jack was so surprised and delighted at the absence of his archenemy that he jumped up and down waving his hand to the Bench and shouting, "You'll do me, sonny, you'll do me!" Mr. Giles smiled, "What's the trouble, Jack? Drunk again, I suppose," and let him off with the minimum fine.

Jack Redwood came before me several times. On one of his annual pilgrimages he came to town with over £100 in his Savings Bank Book, but was such a pest about the place that I sent him to gaol for 14 days, more for his own good than anything else. When he came out spruce and sober, he had several more days of his leave unspent and nearly £70 in his bank book which I impounded, though I had no authority to do so but Jack did not know that.

For the rest of his leave I eked out small sums to keep the old chap going without letting him drink too much, generously gave him a few pounds of his own money when he left, and mailed his passbook to the Station Manager to give him. It still had a good balance in it.

Bush justice can be strangely administered at times by Justices of the Peace, and Port Augusta was no exception. One hot holiday when Nell was away in Adelaide for a brief change, I was all alone in my glory on our sandhill where the heat was blazing down. A 'phone call came from Sgt. Gibbons asking, with many apologies, if I would go down to the

Court to deal with two drunks who had sweated in the cells all night and whom he wanted to get away on the tea-and-sugar train, as the provision train was called. The men were workmen from the 400-mile peg on the East-West Railway and risked losing their jobs if they did not catch the evening train.

I asked why he picked me, the place was lousy with J.P.'s., the day was a holiday, I was not going, that's all about it. He'd been trying for hours (like hell he had) to dig up a Justice. The Postmaster could not come, the Doctor was out of town, others were down the Gulf fishing. I was his last hope and, the usual story, they were two decent chaps with no previous convictions, but he could not release them until they were charged, so he supposed the poor saintly fellows would have to spend another hot night in the cells and probably lose their jobs. "Now don't be hard, Your Worship."

What an old blarney he was! By this time I had made up my mind to go, but was not going to make it easy for him. The men should not get drunk, let them sweat etc. etc. Suddenly I had an idea. Why not send the men up to the house? I put this to him, he went and consulted his book of rules and came back to the 'phone to say he would send them up in the police buggy in half an hour.

Presently, with Mick Fox, a mounted trooper, driving, they arrived. The two prisoners, with shy grins on their faces, were clean, decent-looking chaps who explained they had just had one over the limit when some officious john had run them in.

Mick mumbled some thing about converting the verandah into a Court for the time being within the meaning of the Act, and formally charged them with being drunk and disorderly in the streets of Port Augusta and all the rest of the mumbo jumbo, in true policeman form, and gave a wink when he said they had not been previously convicted of any similar, or indeed, of any offence. The usual five shillings' fine or seven days' imprisonment was recorded in Mick's charge book, signed by the "beak" and the money collected.

Having reconverted the Court into a verandah, we went out to the kitchen where there was a good supply of Cooper's beer in the ice chest, some cold cooked lamb chops and plenty of bread, so we set to to entertain my criminal guests. One for the road and away they went at a reckless pace down the track.

Another irregular case was when an East-West railwayman was fined five shillings in the Court for drunkenness. He asked for time in which to pay, and when asked how much time he wanted for a whole five shillings, he said just long enough for him to go round to the boarding house to get the money.

I asked Bill Baddams, a foot constable who was in Court to escort the man. After signing the charge book and having a few words with Sgt. Gibbons, I left the Court to find Bill Baddams with the prisoner waiting outside. Bill brought him over and told me the man had no money. "Why did he say he had it at the boarding house?' I asked. "Well," said Bill, "you had him on a spot and he had to say something."

The navvy then spoke up and asked me if I would lend him the amount of the fine, which seemed pretty rich, but after a few minutes' talk, I handed it over with all sorts of threats as to dire penalties if he did not return the loan after the next pay day. He was full of promises and gratitude and went off to catch the "tea-and-sugar". Not to be outdone by me, the man in the Police Station set him up with enough for a feed or two. The loan was returned to me by the Paymaster a fortnight later.

Cudda Grantham was a big, rough workman, one of a family of men who worked round the wharves and for the Council. I was selling by auction one day at a boarding house where most of the items were spread in the backyard; Gudda came in, half-tight and boisterous, bidding for lots in jocular vein with no intention of buying them. There were a lot of people there, and after a while Bill Baddams hunted Cudda away.

About an hour later, I was selling inside, when Cudda came blundering in, noisy and well-primed by this time. I did not wait, but ordered him out straightaway before he could do any damage. Baddams took him away, but I did not know until the next day that he had put him in the cooler, and thought he had just driven him off.

The following morning the Sergeant rang to ask if I could go across to the Station to deal with four drunks who had been locked up the night before. He said it would not take a minute as they could be dealt with under one charge as it was for the same offence in each case.

He had them lined up ready for the axe, but to my surprise there was Cudda amongst them, so I asked that he be charged separately. The other three men brought 5/- each on the one charge, and Cudda 10/- on a single charge.

Later I was passing the Wharf Hotel which was a pick-up point for wharf labourers, and noticed a group of men with Cudda telling the others with some pride of his adventures. He tackled me at once to know why he had received a heavier fine than the other three drunks as they were all charged with the same offence. I said, “for making a damned pest of yourself at my sale yesterday. Perhaps that will teach you to keep away when you’re drunk.” He treated it as a huge joke, roaring with laughter, and did not show a scrap of resentment.

Proof of this was shown not long afterwards when the men were loading salt, for which I was agent, into a steamer. It was approaching 10 p.m. when wages doubled and there were only another 10 tons on the wharf. I looked down the hatch into No. 2 hold where six men were working, spreading the salt. I called out asking if they would try to finish loading the salt before 10 o’clock. My victim, Cudda, was in the gang. He looked up and bawled to his mates, “It’s the b----y old Mayor! He’s not a bad old b------! Yes, we’ll put it on for you!”

I scooted up the street, got a big pack of sandwiches and a dozen of beer and lowered them in a bag down the hold where we had our supper together in great good humour. The gang worked seven or eight minutes’ overtime for which they could have claimed a full quarter at double rates, so I saved quite a bit by their good nature. Make a demand on wharfies and they’ll have their pound of flesh, but a request is a different matter.

The next day I met Woodroffe, the local manager of the Adelaide Steamship Co., whose vessel carried the salt. He sternly told me that it was forbidden to take drink on to the ships, and what had I been doing in No. 2 hold guzzling with notorious criminals? It turned out that in the gang were Bush Thompson who escaped hanging in Victoria on a murder charge for lack of evidence, and Miles Flynn who served a long term in connection with the Broken Hill Block 14 robbery. Both were good workmen, living quiet lives, with their past sins forgotten.

Chapter 5
Coroner’s Duties

Justices of the Peace are really honorary magistrates, receiving no pay for their services, though they may be held responsible for mistakes. Once I committed a man to gaol for 20 days when my jurisdiction was limited to 10 days. Calmly the Sergeant of Police, who was the prosecutor, told me of it afterwards, and earned my abuse for not protecting me from what might have been a costly error had the prisoner known of it.

Justices of the Peace in South Australia were entitled but not required to charge 2/6 for witnessing Statutory Declarations or administering Oaths, but were responsible for lodging returns and fees with the Government, so, rather than do this, no charge was made.

The only job for which Justices of the Peace could claim a one guinea fee was that of Coroner, a duty I avoided after one experience when a demented station maid committed suicide by throwing herself from the West Side Jetty on a dark, squally night.

I had to view the poor girl's body in the morgue, take a lot of evidence and give a verdict of suicide whilst of unsound mind, with an order for burial.

A certificate of death is essentially a doctor's function, but our medico was away for a few days so, with a shade temperature of over 100 degrees and ice not available, I took a chance, and was criticised for it when the doctor returned. We had quite a go-in about it.

Doctor: "How did you know the girl was insane?"

Me: "From the sworn testimony of credible witnesses including that of the station owner and his wife who brought the girl in from 70 miles out. There was the strongest evidence from a number of witnesses, all consistent and none uncorroborated."

Doctor: "It was dangerous to bring in a verdict of insanity; she may have been insured where suicide invalidated the life policy."

Me: "Well, that would be just too bad, but would not, if known, have influenced the verdict."

Doctor: "How did you know she was dead?"

Me: "No pulse, rigidity, pallor, awful stench. It did not take a doctor to tell that she was dead. And if doctors would only stick around instead of going away, laymen wouldn't have to give certificates of death."

No mention of the North would be complete without reference to a real personality, one Tick Kelly, mounted trooper, whose head-quarters were at Port Augusta, though his beat had the largest spread in Australia if not in the world.

Tick was a handsome, broad-shouldered man with a strong face and heavy black moustache, quiet and softly spoken. His territory covered many thousands of square miles of the inland; he patrolled along a length of the Government vermin fence, he knew the Innamincka and Birdsville tracks as we knew Commercial Road, he visited the most remote interior holdings and blacks' camps, he was familiar with drought conditions and had seen the flooded Cooper's Creek 30 miles wide.

In tracking and bush lore he was second only to the blacks who reverenced him as their witch doctor. To them he was the all-powerful "Govmint man", while the station people welcomed his rare visits as a real occasion.

Tick slept under the stars for nine months of the year travelling with a black boy as his only companion, both mounted on horses or camels with a third pack animal. Most white men could not have lived under the conditions which to him were normal.

He bristled with authorities, was registrar of this, inspector of that. Always he carried a "police positive" colt revolver with a .44 "Winchester" repeating carbine, more for destroying injured animals or pot-hunting than for protection.

In his pack, too, was a medical guide, a few well-chosen medical supplies, even lancet and forceps for he did a bit of bush surgery on his rounds. I never saw him in uniform, though no doubt he had one in mothballs at the Police Station.

I always thought it a pity that he was married, for he saw little of his wife who was barmaid at the Selborne Hotel in Pirie Street, Adelaide. She, too, was quiet in her speech and dress, an attractive, ladylike woman. About the only communications from him seemed to be messages delivered by friends. Whenever Wills or Abbott of the "Port Augusta Despatch" went to the city, they always primed themselves with the latest news from the Police Station of Tick, and called on his wife, while her letters chased him all over the wilderness.

Tick had three weeks' leave and came to town, but found his wife was away visiting her mother in New Zealand, so he did not go further south. It was unfortunate that they were both on leave at the same time but unaware, through bad staff work, of each other's movements. Tick was very disappointed and hung round the town disconsolately, drinking too much beer, wasting his leave.

For want of something better to do, he would sit in my office for an hour or two at a time, smoking and saying little while I went on with my work. For all his quiet ways, he was popular at the Station and I liked him a lot.

He overstayed his leave by more than a week, was drinking steadily, though never drunk, and becoming depressed. I tried to get him to go back to his work as I knew Inspector Davis was due shortly and would not be pleased to find him loafing about the place. I also told the men at the Police Station that Tick was on the verge of D.T.'s and they ought to get him away, for he might be disrated for overstaying his leave if Davis found him in the town.

At last he came in to say good-bye, telling me he and the "boy" would go out that afternoon to the 12-mile hut and push off out-back in the morning. The 12-mile hut was on the west side where there was a tank, mill and yard, with a stock of tinned provisions and blankets in the unlocked hut for the benefit of bush travellers, a sort of jumping-off point for the bush. Thefts from the open hut had never been known, though it was used by Afghans and derelict bushmen.

Knowing Tick's state of raw nerves, I began to worry about him, so went over to the Station urging them to send a man out to the hut, taking a flask of brandy to taper off his drinking, for he was in low spirits. They laughed, saying, "Fancy trying to nursegirl Tick Kelly, the finest bushman in the North!"

At nine o'clock the following morning, the black boy came galloping to tell that poor old Tick in a fit of despondency had blown his brains out.. I was asked to act as Coroner, but could not bear the thought of seeing my old friend Tick with half is face blown away, so passed the job on to Jim Holdsworth who had a stronger stomach than I.

On another occasion, too, I came in contact with a tragedy which might have been averted. A man named Stacy came in from the East-West Railway line and called on me. Though I did not know him, his brother Mick was an old friend, so I tried to be pleasant.

Presently, Dr. Pellew came in, so I introduced them and in no time it was "Doc" this and "Doc" that as if he had known the doctor for years.

Then, when Wills joined us, my new friend suggested a game of bridge after tea. Wills agreed readily and the Doctor rather reluctantly, but I refused as I wanted to have an evening at home and was a rotten player anyway, so the game was off.

That night Stacy, at a loose end, found his way into the Terminus Hotel, a house with an evil reputation. He finished up by getting very drunk, wandered to his boarding house after midnight and fell off the balcony on to the pavement, bursting his bladder. He was taken to the hospital where he was able to give his dying depositions, but he died shortly afterwards.

The following day the Doctor came storming in to my office, much upset, saying I should report the hotelkeeper to the Chief Secretary. The Terminus, he said, was a real blood house. Its chief business was in after-hours trading, when drunks were rolled over and robbed, brawls were frequent and he knew of more than one death having occurred there through misadventure caused by drugs.

He further added that Stacy had undoubtedly been affected by drugs of which he reeked and which probably contributed to his death.

I assured him that if he would give me a certificate to this effect I would send in a report which, in any event, would largely depend on his evidence. After thinking it over, he concluded, however, that we had better not say anything about it.

Chapter 6
The George Snell Murder

In the administration of justice, trial by jury is a controversial subject, not only in judicial and legal circles, but amongst the laity as well. Any good and true man or woman may be called upon to serve as a juror, unless excused from duty by the presiding Judge for reasons acceptable to him.

In a murder case at Port Augusta before the Chief Justice, Sir George Murray, I obtained exemption from jury duty because I did not believe in capital punishment. The Court official first said that the Judge might not excuse me for this reason, but on my assurance that if a verdict of guilty could result in a death sentence followed by a hanging, I would not agree to such a verdict which could not then be unanimous, he then struck my name off the list.

I am convinced that hanging is a relic of savagery. No person acting under any authority in a spirit of revenge or as a deterrent to others may take human life. To do so is to reduce that person to the level of the murderer. They have both taken life, one for the reasons for which he is condemned, the other in cold blood.

No man on earth knows to what he is committing another when he kills him. He cannot give him back his life, therefore he is not entitled to take it.

The trial presided over by the Chief Justice was for the murder of George Snell, a young cattleman in the far north west of South Australia, whose body had been carried by camel over 30 miles of rough stony country to a lonely spot there it was burnt. Black trackers did a wonderful job in tracing the camel over the entire distance, and their evidence, combined with that of Dr. Angas Johnson, a bone specialist who proved bones found in the ashes of the fire to be those of a human being, were vital factors in bringing in the verdict of guilt.

The Crown Prosecutor, Howard Shierlaw, was a close friend of Billy Twiss and well-known to me, while the defending lawyer was Bill Owen. A great deal of evidence was taken from a

party of bushmen brought down for the trial which lasted several days and which created tremendous interest.

Owen told me that Shierlaw's handling of the case was masterly and that he, in defence, do what he would, was unable to shake the all-important evidence of the black trackers.

The Chief Justice pronounced sentence of death which was later commuted to life imprisonment.

Dr. Angas Johnson who knew Nell's father intimately paid me a courtesy call. During the trial the lawyers engaged on the case were staying at the Flinders Hotel. They were good friends and spent much of their time together, though their rivalry in Court by no means indicated friendliness.

They derived considerable amusement from a permanent resident of the hotel in the person of Kruger, an elderly sulphur-crested white cockatoo, a well-known identity who spent most of his time on a metal T-shaped stand to which he was chained. He did not have the wits to compress the claws of his foot and withdraw them through the ring, a trick I tried to teach him, but he was given a good bit of freedom.

He was as quiet as a pet lamb, never having been known to attack anybody. He would laboriously climb up anybody's sleeve, perch on a shoulder, nibble at an ear and in a harsh whisper confidentially use the foulest language which some shameless person had taught him. His vocabulary was limited and only varied when startled, wherupon his crest would rise and a few extra blasphmies be added in a high screech. The lawyers when passing never failed to produce the best results by waving their hats at him.

When the Flinders Hotel changed hands, Jim Kirkham of the Port Augusta Hotel acquired Kruger. Many offers to buy him had been made, but all were refused.

The second mate of a Commonwealth wheat ship in Port spent a lot of time in Kirkham's hotel and tried hard to buy Kruger, being so persistent that Jim, who was a one-time professional wrestler, became impatient and put the sailor out, none too gently.

Woodroffe and I were at the wharf to see the ship sail. The Master was at the bridge rail talking to us when down came the Sergeant of Police with two men and a tracker calling to the Master not to cast off. The ship was held for an hour while a search was made for Kruger who had been stolen from the hotel, and it was suspected the second mate had taken him. He was not found, however, and it was feared that he may have been thrown into a furnace when it became known that a search was on.

As the ship had to top up her cargo at Wallaroo, 100 miles south, where she was to lay for two days, Jim Kirkham arranged for a plain clothes constable to stay around for any sign of Kruger whose screeching might be heard if he were aboard. All to no avail. But two days after boat sailed, Kirkham received a letter from a crew member saying Kruger was on the ship, alive and well.

Kirkham was much incensed, and got in tough with the Prime Minister's Department which cabled London to investigate the matter on the ship's arrival.

Sure enough Kruger was found and returned by the next Commonwealth ship for Australia. The second mate nearly lost his job over the abduction and the much-travelled Kruger resumed his old perch.

The local newspaper in reporting the matter stated that while in London Kruger was housed with a tough docker who developed melancholia through being unable to match Kruger's language. Later, he was housed with a hard-swearing golfer. Even he could not stand the competition, especially when his wife threatened to leave him.

The morning following the George Snell murder trial, I had occasion to see the 6.20 train off to Adelaide, and there on the platform was the condemned man in custody saying good-bye and trying to comfort his 16-year-old son, George, who had been a witness for the defence. It disturbed me terribly to see that poor weeping boy farewelling his father under sentence of death. He was hundreds of miles away from his home, in a strange place with no friends.

I went to the Police Station and saw Trooper Mick Fox and asked him if anything could be done for the boy. Mick explained that the party of bushmen who had come down for the case were close friends of the murdered man, George Snell, who had been very popular amongst them. They were very bitter towards the condemned man and suspected his son, George, of being implicated in the crime.

Together we went to the Globe Hotel where the men were staring while awaiting the next train to Oodnadatta. They were all in a parlour having a round of drinks, a pretty silent crew. Their leader and spokesman was a broad-shouldered, bandy-legged man named Jack Wilson to whom Fox spoke asking him if his party would take young George back with them, and do what they could for him.

Wilson looked pretty grim. He did not speak for some minutes, sipped his beer and gazed up at the ceiling while there was perfect silence in the room. Then he spoke, slowly choosing his words in what amounted to a judgement:

"Yes, Mick, we'll take George back with us and give him a start. If he makes good he has nothing to fear, but if he's a chip off the old block and gets up to any monkey tricks, it will be the last of him. If George gets topped off, the blacks won't track his killer as easily as they tracked his father."

Mick told me afterwards that he had been much afraid that the men would have nothing to do with George. Now that they had agreed to help him they would be as good as their word and he would be all right, just so long as he behaved himself. What Jack Wilson said went for all of them.

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As a class, the bush people are of fine mettle. Whether they take to the bush instinctively or acquire their characteristics through their environment is hard to say. They would not go bush if they hadn't guts, nor would they stay there unless they were fitted to do so.

This is not to disparage or claim superiority over dwellers in closely settled areas, for human nature is much the same throughout the continent. But the big distances of the outback, the isolation of the settlers have developed in them a spirit of hospitality so generous as to have become legendary. They have not the distractions or attractions of city life, while opportunities to fraternise are so limited that when offered they dearly love to share their goods and preside as hosts even if only over a billy of tea on the track.

While in the North I learned of many acts of generosity by bushmen in helping a lame dog over a stile. A notable instance was told me in the Race Week of 1920 when a Mr. Archer came from 200 miles west of Oodnadatta to attend the annual Stockowners' Meeting.

His story was that as a youth his doctor in Adelaide had advised him to go north because of lung trouble which, though not advanced, could become dangerous unless he lived in a dry atmosphere. He secured a job as storekeeper on the station property of a Pastoral Company in the far north and held this post for several years on a wage of 25/- a week and keep until the company abandoned the property and he was to return to the city. This was the last thing he wanted to do, as he liked life and had fully recovered his health.

On the day that Archer was sitting on a bench in front of the Oodnadatta pub awaiting the next bi-weekly train south, disconsolate and full of regrets at his enforced return, he was joined by an elderly bearded bushman named Anderson. After a few opening remarks on the weather, the talk turned to Archer's problem. He hated leaving the bush but had neither a job nor the money to establish himself. After asking some probing questions, Andy gave the matter some thought.

"If you want to stay here," he said, "why the hell do you leave God's own country? You say you've saved £550, which is little enough for a start, but why don't you put in for one of those Western Pastoral Blocks the Government is throwing open for selection by ballot with preference for applicants who don't own or lease other property? It's good sheep country, well bushed with some permanent waterings, but otherwise unimproved. Give it a go, lad. I'll give you a hand and so will others."

Archer, in sheer desperation, gave it a go, and in due course was lucky in securing a block of 1,000 square miles, one of the best in the ballot at a nominal rent. After a hurried inspection to identify boundaries and select a homestead site, he returned to Oodnadatta where he spent his entire capital in buying a secondhand waggon, four light draught horses, a saddle hack, and, after loading the waggon with stores, implements, building materials and a 400-gallon tank, he set off with the saddle horse at the waggontail and a kelpie dog trotting underneath, to establish a home 200 miles west.

The homestead site was on rising ground, lightly timbered, near a permanent watering, and here he unloaded, turned his hobbled horses adrift and considered his position. He was alone in a vast country with no sign of human life in any direction; the utter solitude was depressing. His heart sank at the loneliness of the prospect, but he took comfort from the fact that he was now a squatter in his own right, his few possessions paid for. How to fence and stock his immense holding was in the lap of the gods.

Two days later, a horseman rode up and, after casual greetings and a pannikin of tea, said he had, at a hint from Andy, come a distance of 50 miles to lend a hand. For a fortnight they toiled at felling trees, shaping the timbers for a two-roomed slab hut and yards. Then his "neighbour" saddled up, tolled his swag, said "So long" with a friendly grin and rode off over the horizon.

Others followed, one after the other. Quiet, hardworking men, good mates with little to say for themselves. At the end of three months, the hut was built, with a wide front verandah, iron roof and tank on stand. The yards were strong and well built, the water hole cleaned out and deepened, with trough and hand pump installed. None of his helpers would accept payment and every one of them left behind an implement, one an axe, another an adze, a cross-cut saw, a crowbar, saying they could not be bothered taking them away.

Then one hot dry day towards the end of summer, Archer saw a cloud of dust in the south getting nearer and nearer until he could hear the bleating of sheep and dogs barking. He rode out to meet Andy and his offsider droving a mob of 600 broken-mouthed ewes (yoes, Andy called them).

This was Andy's contribution, the initial stocking of "Yudnamulka", payment for which was to be half the first year's lambing.

That had all happened 10 years earlier. Archer related that just before leaving Oodnadatta for Port Augusta he had been offered £17,000 cash for "Yudnamulka" on a walk-in-walk-out basis.

Another instance of broadminded bushman's sympathy for a down and out character resulted from a visit to the Greenbush Gaol outside Port Augusta. There I was approached by a tall, good-looking young Englishman who was serving an 18 months' sentence for forgery. He was an Oxford graduate with a B.A. degree, and prior to the war had been employed as a clerk on the Dartmoor Prison staff. A head injury in the war required trepanning, and though he admitted guilt he attributed his lapse to the war injury.

He sought a reduction of his sentence, but as he had already served over six months and would earn one-third remission for good behaviour, his term would be up or nearly so by the time a petition to the Governor could be presented.

So nothing was done regarding his sentence, but that good fellow, Jack McTaggart of "Nonning" station, on hearing all the facts, promptly agreed to give the prisoner a job as bookkeeper or storeman on the station immediately he was released.

Chapter 7
Home and Leisure Time

Though my business and official duties kept me going at top pressure with plenty of interesting variety, Nell was having rather a dull time of it. The boys and housework took up much of her time and she had not many close friends in the town, while the heat was intolerable.

Her duties as Mayoress were not exacting. Those which she undertook in opening bazaars, church and charitable functions were of no particular interest, though she carried them out very efficiently. It was amazing to see with what aplomb she stood up in the Town Hall at her first appearance, made a brief, well-worded speech and declared the function opened.

She was roped in on several committees, which brought her in touch with many pleasant ladies. Mrs. Young, widow of Tom Young of Young & Gordon's store, the main business of the town, was a very charming old lady with two exceedingly nice daughters neither of whom was married. Her late husband had been a school mate of my Father's at John L. Young's school in Adelaide.

Nell's most intimate friend was Mummy Wills, almost our nearest neighbour, while Mrs. Truss and Mrs. Jones were also Biddicott Estate householders whom she liked. But with the more distant towns-people there was not quite the open house familiarity she had been used to in Adelaide, — not that there was any unfriendliness, but that the friendships had hardly yet ripened to informality.

Of course we had my Uncle Jos. Partridge out at Stirling North, but he was five miles distant (with his family well scattered except for his eldest son, Frank, who carried on business as a storekeeper in the Port, but we saw little of him.

Then on 7th February, 1918, our third son, Roderic Flinders, came to light. Rod was born at home on a day of blistering heat, with a strong north wind filling the house with sand. At nine o'clock that night it was 106 degrees in Nell's bedroom, with the poor girl gasping for breath.

For hours I sat beside her with a fan and ice packs, really scared, for the air was stifling. Having been born under those conditions, Rod should have been a salamander. Maybe that is why he has always been sensitive to cold weather.

There was a small section of sandy beach opposite Biddicott, a very precious patch in the long stretch of mud and mangrove, where the youngsters could play and where, weather permitting, we often joined the Wills family.

There were occasional picnic excursions, too, to the foot of Mount Brown, which was a relief from the everlasting sand, but for real, startling beauty we had to rely on the gorgeous sunsets reflected in the waters of the Gulf. We had a grandstand view of these from our verandah.

As we were so near the water and mangrove swamps, sandflies were a real pest, raising lumps on the tender hides on any newborn infants, though they soon became inocculated, apparently with no danger of infection. For their size, about that of a grain of pepper, sandflies have a large percentage of sting — it must be around the 1,000% mark.

Uncle Jos, a tall, gaunt, bearded man, was a strange mixture of kindliness to those he liked and fierce aggression. He was a first-class hater, unforgiving to his enemies. He took a great fancy to Miles, taking him out to his old house and big garden at Stirling North where they were great chums.

On the first morning after his return from a visit to Adelaide, Miles was up early, dressed himself and walked the five miles to greet his beloved Uncle Jos who, after questioning him, hurriedly harnessed Rex and came pounding in to return him and relieve our anxiety.

Miles was a tough, self-reliant little boy. His mother used to call him the mallee root, since his flesh was so firm. He was a tease, tormenting Dennis to a frenzy of rage. One day Nell caught him in the act of hitting Den, so she pounced, slapping him hard and saying he was bigger than little Den and was a bully for hitting somebody smaller than himself. Miles bawled lustily, more from the fact of his beloved Mum having slapped him than from hurt, and as he sobbed, he got out a bit of sound reasoning, “You’re a l-lot big-bigger bully than I am.” Nell had just handed out to him what she accused him of doing, so there was no denying his logic. She looked at me and said remorsefully “I’ll never hit him again,” and she never did.

The longer we stayed in the north, the more I liked it despite its disadvantages. People are peculiarly adaptable, they become quite enthusiastic in praise of the most ghastly conditions.

At the different camps along the line to Kalgoorlie, small settlements were formed away out on the Nullarbor Plain as flat as a pancake where a bush three or four feet high was quite a feature of the landscape. There was scarcely any animal or bird life, and stunted saltbush was the only growth with nothing to relieve the vast distance and unbroken horizon. An utterly Godforsaken prospect, yet they liked it! Some people are easy to please.

I once asked a well-known pilot, Capt. Brierley, why he described Forest as the finest landing ground in the world. His answer, with a grin, was that it had a 300-mile runway.

The big pastoral holdings in the Gawler Ranges were a different proposition. There the country was undulating, with big plain stretches timbered with myall, she-oak, buck bush and bluebush, all grand stock feed in favourable seasons, and capable of carrying 15 merino sheep to the square mile if not eaten out by overstocking.

These lands needed careful nursing, for the treacherous droughts periodically reduced them to desert conditions with heavy stock losses. As they were outside the Artesian Basin, water was a problem, supplied mainly from deep wells and surface dams, for the rainfall was but six to eight inches per annum and evaporation eight feet per annum.

There were some fine homesteads on the runs, all of which were leasehold and many grand men among the holders. Owner-managers and properties included the Hawkers of "Carriewerloo" and "Parralana", the Mortlocks of "Yudnapinna", the Halls of "Caroona" on which the Iron Knob deposits of the B.H.P. were situated, the Brennans of "Siam", the Ives brothers of "Oakden Hills", the McTaggarts of "Nonning", the McBrides of "Yardea" and "Thurga", Mackay of "Coralbinniee", Norman Richardson of "Bon Bon", Prim White of "Coondambo", Tennant of "Hummocky Hill", Bob Young of "Mundallio" on the east side, and Harry Bouley of "Kolendo". There was nothing of the rustic or yokel about these bush-men, most of them were well-educated, some up to University standard, but all were chock full of hospitality.

Through being Secretary of the Northern Branch of the Stockowners' Association, I got to know a lot of the squatters, for the members spread from the western Australian to the Queensland borders. The annual meeting was held at Port Augusta during Race Week.

The areas held were very big, some of the holdings being 3,000 square miles. McTaggart of "Nonning" (1,000 square miles) had 56 dams on his property with 400 miles of telephone wires, his garage housed seven cars, and 100 men were employed. The homestead formed quite a collection of buildings, a broad stone house of a dozen rooms, verandahs, a billiard room, men's quarters, store, blacksmith's shop, saddlery, sheds and yards, and also a fine playing field with chains round the boundary and a pavilion, for Jack was an enthusiastic cricketer.

At shearing time one year he telephoned me and issued a challenge for a game. He told us to bring a pretty good team as one or two of his shearers were regular players. We took four car loads on the Saturday afternoon, making good time over the 90 miles of hard bush track, and were entertained at a slap-up dinner and all accommodated comfortably. We had included in our team a visiting commercial traveller, a cricketer of some note and also a good billiards player, so great things were expected of him.

After dinner, all adjourned to the billiard room to see our champion visitor show the rustics how townies played the game.

The station put Jack McTaggart up to defend "Nonning's" honour. Our men played a lot of fancy shots, most of which failed, while canny old Jack plugged away avoiding difficult shots but making sure of the plain ones. It looked like a cart-horse matching a thoroughbred, but Jack ran out an easy winner.

I made a point of taking a look at the gong that woke us for an early breakfast on the Sunday morning. It was a huge casting suspended by wire from a rafter of the front verandah. Struck by a thick solid copper bar it gave out a deep boom that, in still weather, could be heard for miles.

With a break of two hours for another hot spread, we played cricket all day, determined to wipe out the billiards defeat. Our star performer made a really excellent blob, we played in picnic spirit and got picnic results, totalling something like 170 runs which the station team knocked off with three wickets to spare. Harry Bouley from "Kolendo" battered our bowling, while Jack McTaggart played cricket just as he played billiards, by waiting for the loose balls, blocking the good ones and carrying his bat for second top score.

After another generous meal, there was much speechmaking, banter and challenges. Mac was a good sheep man, a hard-headed Scot, a grand character, and the most generous contributor to all appeals for money.

A diversion occurred when the famous fliers, Ray Parer and McIntosh, came to town. McIntosh arrived first, and I spent a most interesting evening with him. He told me of their nine-month's flight from England in an ancient bomber, each armed with £20 for the journey, (the first flight since the flight by Ross and Keith Smith) and a letter from the British Government offering a reward of £50 for their return to a British post if they were forced down in hostile country. "That's the value they placed on us." said Mac.

When the journey was half over, an accounting showed that Parer had no money left, but Mac, being a Scot, had most of his £20.

He told of how, when still out of sight of land, their petrol gauge showed they were out of juice, and, while circling Port Darwin, their engine started to cough, but they landed safely with only about a pint in the tank.

Mc Intosh went on to Perth by motor cycle and was killed in an accident shortly afterwards.

Ray Parer sent us a telegram from Glenelg asking us to select a landing ground for him. Wills and I knew exactly nothing about aviation, but we set off by car to look around for a flat open space, finally choosing a dry salt pan on the west side where he landed, but from which he had great difficulty in escaping. He had to pump out most of his petrol, lighten the plane in every way possible and wait for a roaring northerly wind into which he took off with some saltbush trailing.

He did some barnstorming from a paddock he selected for himself, taking Nell and Miles up for a trip over the Gulf and Flinders Range.

The day he arrived he brought a letter from the Mayor of Glenelg and a morning newspaper which reached us a 10 a.m. instead of the usual time of 9 p.m. by train. In flights at two guineas a pop, Ray took about £200 from the town and went on his way to Perth.

Race Week was the big social and sporting event of the year. Two days' racing, with the Tennant Cup of £200 on the first day, the Mortlock Handicap of £150 on the second day, a pigeon-shooting match, the Race Ball and Masonic Ball in the Town Hall were the principal events of the week. The dressing, supper and band at the balls were equal to those of big city dances.

Every hotel, and boarding house was crammed full, with people sleeping on billiard tables, balconies or wherever there was room for a stretcher or blanket roll. Station men in for the annual meeting of the Stockowners' Association, bushmen from the bush, railway men from the East-West line, blacks and Afghans — all were there, not forgetting the bookmakers and spielers from the city. One publican declared that race week takings equalled three months' normal business, for the police relaxed and permitted after-hours' trading, often right through the night, with free spending and little change given.

Sometimes the barmen would be so busy that, with all tills full, they would sweep the money off the bar counters on to the floor, to be gathered in shovels and counted as opportunity offered.

My annual land sale in the Institute was never very successful, for people were too busy amusing themselves to be bothered with buying property.

The races, held on Tuesday and Thursday, were well conducted on a good course with stands, totalisator, bookies and big fields.

In the late afternoon of Monday of one race week I called at Barney Fitzsimmons' hotel to bring his books up to date before the rush, but was interrupted to take a hand at cribbage with a local and a couple of strangers. This was a bit tame, so a light game of poker was introduced. Presently I was dealt a hand including four Kings, one that could only be beaten by four aces or a routine flush, so up went the betting until suddenly I realised I was the sucker — and paid to see four aces.

On the Wednesday I was called to sit on the Bench with the Police Magistrate to hear a charge laid against a man who was arrested on Tuesday's race day for operating the three card trick. There in the dock was my friend who had relieved me of a fiver at poker!

Mr. Hinde whispered to me suggesting a fine of a tenner, but I persuaded him to pop him in the lock-up for the remainder of the week so that he could not carry on his nefarious trade, and this was agreed to.

Chapter 8
Business Life

In a town the size of Port Augusta, an accountant relying on professional work for a living would starve. I received a fair share of what jobs were available, but the work was not of a very interesting nature, consisting mostly in keeping hotel accounts and preparing Income Tax Returns.

Once a week I called on seven hotels, entering up their cash books, keeping bar and house takings divided, taking stock annually and preparing Taxation Returns. Twice I spent week-ends at Quorn installing systems, and once an all-night job at Iron Knob getting a tax return completed came my way.

On this latter occasion, the hotelkeeper, a lady, 'phoned and asked me to go. Her return was overdue, she did not care if it cost her 50 guineas, but it must be posted the next day. Nell had Miles and Den ready to accompany me at 4 p.m. I had ordered the barge to take us across the Gulf with the car for 5 p.m., and after picking up the boys with their overcoats and rugs (for it was keen, cold weather), Ted Messenger drove us the 45 miles to Iron Knob. After tea, the little boys were tucked away comfortably in bed, and the landlady and I got to work on her accounts.

As the records were well-kept, it was just a matter of getting everything lined up and the forms filled in, but there was sufficient work involved to keep us at it until 5 a.m. Then we got the boys up from their warm beds, had breakfast and reached home in time to get me to the office on time at nine o'clock. Not a bad night's work — without losing a moment of office time, I collected a 20 guinea cheque to boot!

I remember a rather remarkable coincidence relating to a tax matter. A client named Matthew P.Fitzgerald had me prepare his income tax return and pay his tax. Matt was a good solid type. He was moderately well off, having a little property and owning two waggons with four-horse teams which brought in £80 a fortnight for each team on a contract for railway work.

Down from the line on a brief visit to town, he came into the office and showed me a summons he had received for income tax not paid, at the same time producing his receipt for the tax I had paid for him. Obviously there was a mistake somewhere, so I called on Bill Truss, the Paymaster.

After searching the records, he explained that all workmen on the line were allotted a distinguishing number. To avoid an ever-increasing total, if a man dropped out of service, his abandoned number would be allotted to a newcomer.

By the strangest chance, when Matt was enrolled, he was given a blank number previously held by a man of exactly the same name who had since left the district, which meant that there were two Matthew P. Fitzgeralds with the same number on the record of employees.

The explanation sounded so improbable that the Sergeant of Police took a lot of Convincing that he had served the wrong Fitzgerald, but a letter from Truss put the matter right.

The only really interesting accountancy job of any importance that cropped up was when Bert Young, Manager of Young & Gordon's store, asked me to prepare matters for converting the business into Company form.

It was a family affair and a big business. Some preliminary work had been done in the preparation of the Memorandum and Articles of Association by Adelaide lawyers, but no accounting. As the business had been wholly owned by Mr. Tom Young before his death, I asked for a copy of his will, which contained an extraordinary anomaly. It had been prepared by a local solicitor, and in an early paragraph provision was made for the widow, Mrs. Isobel Young, to receive a life interest in the entire estate, but towards the end of the long document it stated that the store, by far the largest asset, was to be sold within three years of the testator' death, the proceeds to be apportioned between the widow and children.

Obviously a Court's ruling on the interpretation of the will would have to be sought, or else agreement reached among the beneficiaries who, fortunately, were all alive, as unanimity amongst them was desirable and probably essential.

The matter was refereed to may old boss, Mr. Bakewell, and the latter course agreed upon and carried out.

A review of the Memorandum and Articles disclosed that Bert Young, the eldest son and manager of the business, was to be Governing Director. But it was a rigidly fixed appointment, with no provision for getting rid of him under any circumstances, not even if he turned rogue or lunatic. This and other legal matters were at last straightened out, the closing and opening entries all worked out like a charm and the changeover effected.

The whole investigation took considerable time, but it put me up somewhat in Bert Young's estimation, for a prophet hath no honour in his own country, nor yet an accountant in his own town.

The auctioneering part of the business was spasmodic, from an unaccountable blank of nearly three months on one occasion to a hectic seven sales in 10 days.

Though always interesting, the general mixed sales of furniture and sundries did not have much variety. One sale for Frank Hogan, a storekeeper whose business was later taken over by my cousin Frank Partridge, was of damaged stock resulting from a fire in his bulk store. A large proportion of tinned and packaged goods was quite undamaged, though stained externally by fire, smoke or water.

In this sale speed meant everything, so speedy it was. There was plenty of help. The men handed up the articles on to a big case in front of the auctioneer, a mixed assortment of goods, say, four tins of fruit, two of jam, two bars of sunlight soap, a packet of flour, a 6-lb. bag of sugar. How much the lot? Everything was done quickly. I would call the articles as each lot was made up, and for the first few lots received ridiculously low bids, for at the first sign of a dwelling in the bidding down would come the hammer and up would come the next lot which might, in the hurry, bring a higher price though of less value. And so it continued, giving nobody time to calculate the values of the lots.

Everything went off like hot cakes in record time. Hogan said afterwards that the sale realised better than wholesale prices.

Nottingham lace merchants gave me several sales of curtains, towels etc. which, though not popular with the drapers in the town, would have been disposed of at private showings in the Institute had I not sold them. There was no credit given; take your goods and pay your money was the order of the day.

To give me an idea of values, the traders would call out a lot number which, when doubled, represented the approximate value in shillings of the article being offered. If they thought a pair of curtains should bring, for example, two guineas, they would call lot number 19 or 20 or 21, when displaying it. This was a great help to me for I did not have a clue as to the values. Every sale on these lines was very successful, bringing fair prices with a good volume in total.

The stock sales held monthly at the Stirling North railway yards never reached big yardings. Had they done so, Dalgety's and Elder Smith & Co. would have run me off. The buyers at these sales knew far more of the values, condition and weights than I, for they were butchers of farmers.

Quite often, the bulk of the sales would be made by private treaty after offerings had failed to reach reserves at auction. Once I thought a sale had been a complete flop, for not one lot had sold under the hammer, but a clearance was made afterwards. Experienced livestock salesmen say that keen buyers are sometimes reluctant to compete at auction and afterwards pay more than passed-in values.

When Dennis was a nice, round-faced, chubby little chap of about four, he came with me to Stirling North on sale day, taking in everything that was going on. A large white pig worth about £8 was offered, with no bids. The men were amused to hear Den pipe, "Two bob, Dad!" It was the only bid and he reproached me afterwards for not letting him have the pig, saying he had the money for it in his money box.

Twice I held sales at Quorn, much to the annoyance of the local auctioneers, but the only time a sale took me further afield was when Mr. Arthur Marmaduke Hardy, Solicitor of the Port, asked me to sell 15 camels at Maree (late Hergott Springs) by auction to settle a legal dispute between two Afghans. A fee of 10% on the proceeds with a minimum of £21 was agreed upon, plus all expenses.

The two-day rail trip by slow train was made in frightful heat with willy-willies dancing over the northern plains, but it was interesting new country to me.

Maree needs little to describe it: a small bush town on a vast plain, the southern terminal of the Birdsville track to South-West Queensland, its one claim to fame being its artesian bore, the deepest (5,500 feet) in Australia. Even this was not very spectacular, a 2½ inch pipe

sticking four feet above ground, bent over at the top in a U shape with a full flow of warm highly mineralised water pouring steadily into a drain that ran for 15 miles.

On reaching the pub, I asked the barman for a pint of beer off the ice. He said it was off the ice all right, 500 miles off, the only cooling element being a wrapping of hessian round the keg, kept wet from a small dripping tap on top, which, however, served the purpose.

The sale was to be held in the railway yards at 10 o'clock, at which time Mr. Hardy and I went across to greet a crowd of two turbaned Afghans, a railway porter and a dog. "Don't worry," said Mr. Hardy, "they'll turn up in their own good time," for I was used to crowds of several hundreds of people swarming round me. They came along in ones and twos until by 11 o'clock maybe 50 or 60 had turned up, all standing in a semi-circle 15 yards away.

Fifteen camels were yarded, nine broken-in bulls and six unbroken, with a reserve of £15 a head. Mr. Hardy read the conditions of sale and I offered the 15 bulls in one line at so much per head. An Afghan called out a bid of £9, £6 below the reserve, so I rattled along taking imaginary bids of £10. "Going at £10, £10, £10, then £11, £11, and any advance on £11, thank you £11. 10. 0", but not a solitary bid beyond the opening one.

We then offered the nine broken bulls, separately, then the unbroken ones, but the sale was lifeless. Mr. Hardy called them round us for a pow-wow, and one 'Ghan protested loudly, "No good, my country-man he bid £9, Mr. Auctioneer, he bid £10, he bid £11. No good, no good!"

The devil of it was that they had only one way of bidding, and that was calling it, whereas I was used to taking bids in all manner of ways, a wink, a nod, a flick of a finger, so my running the bidding was obvious. I felt naked. Mr. Hardy knew the Afghans' methods well and knew that they loved bargaining. In the end all the camels were sold for £13 a head.

Maree was the headquarters for camels in Australia. Abdul Kadab owned 600, Assim Khan 400, and there were several lesser herds. They were used mainly on the long Queensland treks, strings of them head to tail carrying loads of 4 cwt. each, though a big bull can, for a short haul, carry up to half a ton.

They are surly, smelly brutes, unresponsive to kindness, though not forgetful of ill-treatment. As Rudyard Kipling had it, "an' when you save his bloomin' life, he chews your bloomin' arm."

When required to, and trained for it, camels can do without water for long spells, but will drink as often as horses when water is plentiful. Overlanding with camels is very hard work, for they must be unloaded at night and re-loaded in the morning. At the command "Ushtish", they flop down on their knees, then on to the hard brisket and finally sink in an untidy heap, groaning in protest. A sharp whistle gets them up, also very much under protest.

Like elephants, camels are long-lived, an estimated 70 or 80 years. Assim Khan told me of a cow camel of unknown age which Sir Thomas Elder had imported from Arabia for "Beltana" station 35 years ago. She was still there looking no older.

Late on the afternoon of the sale, I went for a walk to "Ghantown" where the Afghans congregated, separated from the whites' section by the railway. There was nobody about, but I was conscious of being peeped at from behind blinds. On arriving back at the pub at dusk, the barman told me that Ghantown was unhealthy for whites after dark as they were a terribly suspicious mob. One or two loiterers had been shot at, so it was generally regarded as being out of bounds.

A nice old fellow named Tom Kain, riding ganger from William Creek to Farina on the railway, was waiting for me at the pub. He explained that he had recently retired, his wife had gone on to Adelaide and he was left to follow after selling their house and furniture. Would I sell his furniture by auction? To do so only allowed one intervening day in which to let the people know and to prepare for the sale, but he said if notices were put up at the pub and the post office everybody within 50 miles would, by "mulga wire" know all about it. As there had not been an auction of furniture in the town for 20 years, the people would roll up.

We were stuck there until the bi-weekly train left, so found this a good and profitable way of filling in the time. Up went the notices printed with a blunt stick on butter paper, Tom and I listed the furniture and sundries, which were of surprisingly good quality, and we were all set. He fixed reserves on three articles only, a piano £80, a really beautiful extension dining table of cedar £30, and a showy double bed £15.

Where the people came from was a mystery, but there was a good crowd, and I had learned the lesson of not running the bidding. Not a single article was left unsold, those with reserves being offered at the reserve price to the highest bidder who in every case took them, and Tom received at least £100 more than he expected.

On the way home, Mr. Hardy regaled me with a tragedy-romance story of the Afghan community of Maree. Young Sheer Khan, a junior camel-train man, was courting the charming daughter of an elderly and very mercenary couple. The parents made a pretty substantial charge for their daughter, Sheer Khan being stung for £150 which he did not possess, so he paid a deposit of £100, and set off north to earn the balance of £50 purchase money.

Before he left, the betrothal feast was celebrated, and at this feast an old gravy-eyed 'Ghan named Moosha cast envious eyes on the bride-elect. After the feast, with Sheer Khan out of the way, he bought her for £200 from the treacherous parents, taking delivery of his goods while poor Sheer Khan was battling with his camels in Queensland. But it was not long before Sheer Khan learned what had happened.

With murder in his heart, he abandoned his outfit, made his way down the *[Tanamicka]* Creek to Farina, 36 miles south of Maree, and jumped the rattler, hiding under a tarpaulin on the north bound train which reaches Maree at 9 p.m. There he hid in the dark railway yards waiting for his revenge.

The arrival of the train is quite an event and all the 'Ghans *[flock]* across through the railway yards for the distribution of mail at the Post Office.

A shot rang out. Moosha was found badly wounded and was hurried down to the Port Augusta hospital where he finally recovered.

Directly after the shooting, Sheer Khan made his way back over the 36 miles to Farina walking along the railway sleepers in such good time that he arrived before daybreak. Friends hid him there until, in disguise, he joined a camel train back to Queensland.

But despite all his care, on his long walk along the railway track, the police black trackers were able to trace him. He was arrested in Queensland, brought to trial and served seven long years in the Port Augusta gaol.

For weeks after Moosha returned, his life was made unpleasant by rifle shots fired through his hut in the dead of night by Sheer Khan's sympathetic countrymen.

Chapter 9
Wartime Activities and Labour Troubles

The war raged on, bringing the eternal round of activity in raising money for one purpose or another.

Australia Day was the main effort of the year, with processions, queen competitions and raffles. Wills and I gave an allotment of land to be disposed of by art union. As these were illegal, I wrote to the Attorney-General for a special dispensation and received an official reply signed by my Kookaburra friend, James Howard Vaughan, who was then in office, to the effect that as it was against the law he could not possibly grant permission etc. But down in the corner in pencil was a note "Dear Gil, Go your hardest, Jim." So we went our illegal hardest, and a nurse from the hospital won the land.

In the evening of one Australia Day I went to the Flinders Hotel on the usual cadging mission. Quite an assembly of well-off countrymen were in the lounge, including one millionaire, Jack Mortlock of "Yudnapinna."

The pickings looked good, so I took out my pad and pencil and started on the begging rounds for the hospital wing. Jack McTaggart never failed me, and he started the list with a tenner. Mortlock was noted as a mean man, so Clive Daniel in mischievous mood announced that he would contribute twice as much as Mr. Mortlock. Even under this goad, Mortlock donated one guinea only, so Daniel was not taking much risk.

When the hospital extension was finally completed, the Hon. Archie Peake, the Premier, came up to Port Augusta to declare it open.

There was quite a respectable number of local enlistments for the war, and it was not long before public welcomes were being extended to returning warriors. But when the Prime Minister's referendum on compulsory service was coming up and I had to chair a rash of meetings and rallies to support it, I fully expected to be chipped for not volunteering. However there was never a word said. They must have realised that with a wife and three small children and a one-man business, it could hardly be expected. To leave Nell to live on a private's pay just to satisfy my pride was not to be thought of.

One of the members of our Austral cricket club was a nice little fellow named Harry Brides who was also a champion gunshot, using the nom-de-plume "Amberite" for which he received £200 a year from the explosive maker. He had in open competition beaten the famous McIntosh, reputedly the best shot in Australia, who had won the Monte Carlo Cup against all-comers.

At the post office one night he received an envelope containing a white feather, nothing else, which he showed me. So far as I knew, he was eligible for war service, but his reason for not enlisting was his own affair which he did not discuss with me. He did, however, say that he had received other gibes.

Though apparently unconcerned, these must have prayed on his mind, for, a few weeks later, he committed suicide in Adelaide by shooting himself.

The compulsory medical examinations shortly before the referendum were hotly resented and practically decided the issue. For one whole day Dr. Pellew examined and reported on the eligibles and ineligibles alike.

A ship was in port loading at two hatches with five-men gangs. As each man went up to the Town Hall to be examined, the other four men of the crew sat down, yarning and smoking, for it was against Union rules to work a hatch with less than five men. The absentee would take his time, have a drink or two, exchange experiences with his pals and dawdle so successfully that the ship was delayed a day in clearing the port.

The doctor told of one man who professed deafness, making him repeat his questions, cupping one ear and otherwise putting on an act. As he went out the doctor said in a low voice, "Shut the door after you." The man turned briskly to do so and was promptly hauled back and passed as fit.

Port Augusta's shameful vote on the referendum was four to one for "No".

Our labour population of wharfies and railway workers was pretty militant. There were frequent strikes and disputes, in some of which I found myself involved.

The salt I shipped to Melbourne was scraped from a lake at Woocalla 70 miles out along the East-West line, the railway men discharging from trucks on to the wharf, which was Commonwealth owned, and the wharfies loading it on to the ships.

The wharf labourers refused to load any more salt unless they off-loaded from trucks. In vain I argued, even threatening to rail the salt to Melbourne — but they called my bluff, for the salt would not stand the extra cost of railing.

More than 2,000 men struck on the East-West line for more pay and better conditions. After two weeks of idleness, the Commissioner threatened that only one more train would be sent out to bring the men and their families in, leaving those who remained behind to starve in the wilderness. That, of course, was a bit of bluff, but the next rain off the line was over half a mile long, swarming with men, women and children, piles of furniture and belongings, even fowl coops with live birds, but still the strike persisted.

A Council meeting was interrupted one night by the Secretary of the Carpenters' Union when 50 members were holding a meeting in a Town Hall room. He asked if I would mediate in the dispute with the Chief Engineer who was staying in the Flinders Hotel. This was arranged, and after meeting the men who listed their grievances, I went over to the hotel and saw the engineer. He had just returned from a tour of the line, and I put the men's claims as best I could.

Mr. Henderson said he was sympathetic towards their claims for better conditions which from his own observations he knew to be appalling and needful of correction. But on the wages claim he stood fast. The men were paid under an unexpired award. Rather than give way to them, the line would close down indefinitely.

Back I went to the Town Hall where the carpenters were waiting to receive the news. I strongly recommended that they hold a secret ballot to decide whether or not they should return to work. Then the storm broke. The diehards yelled, "You mind your own bloody business. We didn't ask you for your opinion" – for secret ballot was a sore point with them.

Jack Hall, the Secretary, was an old Adelaide friend of mine. As he showed me out he said he was in favour of secret ballots, but to admit it would be more than his job was worth. Anyhow, a few days later, a secret ballot was taken and the men decided by a large majority to return to work.

Trouble occurred at Iron Knob too, when the Engineers persuaded the management to introduce a system of piecework in cases where the work could be measured, as for instance in drilling.

The rates fixed were generous, the drills were going like the hammers of hell, the men were happy in earning big money and the engineers delighted with results. But the Unions worked against that they considered an evil principle until finally the old system of pay was restored.

The arrival of the daily train from Adelaide at Port Augusta was an event that brought the people out to collect mail at the Post Office. Here they would queue up at about 9.30 p.m. calling their names as they reached the delivery window. One night two locals, Tom Kittel and Tom Black were immediately in front of me. The way their names were given in quick succession caused a laugh, T. Kittel", says the first Tom. "Black T.", follows the second Tom with a chuckle.

Joe Beck, the Postmaster, was very popular, not only in the town, but along the East-West line.

As the Post Office acted as agent for the Commonwealth Bank until a branch bank was established, Joe made a practice of accompanying the Railway Paymaster, Bill Truss, on his fortnightly excursions to pay the men along the line.

Joe would do his utmost to persuade the men to lodge part of their pay with him as Banker instead of wasting it at the two-up schools at every camp. He also conducted post office work and never refused in a private capacity to carry messages for the men or render them service.

He would be seen sitting under a mulga bush with papers all around him held down against any breeze by stones or lumps of camel dung, issuing money orders, postal notes, taking savings bank deposits, while he berated the men and joked with them.

A navvy would drop a couple of pound notes, saying, "Hey Joe, send us along a pair of No. 10 boots from Young & Gordon's, will you?" "Keep the change lad". Joe never slipped a cog, the men always got their boots by the next "tea-and-sugar", together with docket and correct change.

He was a quick, accurate worker, liked and trusted by the men for whom he saved big sums of money by means of the banking facilities which he urged and bullied them into using.

One day the pay van pulled up at a camp where there was a big two-up school in full swing. Truss was paying out, while Beck was grabbing what he could for his bank and doing his post office work, when "Clarence the Sport", cook and notorious gambler, left the ring and thrust a fat, untidy bundle of notes at Joe to bank. "How much is there, Clarence?" Joe asked him. "I dunno, about a hundred I think." Joe asked him to keep it until he and Truss returned from a pumping station where some men had to be paid. "I mightn't have it when you get back" said Clarence. "Well, more fool you if you haven't," retorted Joe. In less than an hour when they returned to the railway, Clarence was flat broke.

A queer character, that same man Clarence. I had heard, but never forgotten his real name, but he was always called "Clarence the Sport", an inveterate two-upper at which he was phenomenally lucky. Luck it was put down to, for he was never detected in any trickery, but every year in October he would come down to the Port bulging with money, on his way over to see the Melbourne Cup, an annual pilgrimage.

On his return, he would hang about spending lavishly until his money was all gone and himself in debt on borrowings, then back to his cooking and gambling for another year.

On his next trip down, his first job was to pay his debts, offering absurd sums for interest. Twice I lent him money, and was repaid a year later.

Chapter 10
Civic Projects

There was never a dull moment in the town of Port Augusta. It had its characters. The locals all knew each other, but there was a big influx of Commonwealth railway men and, since plenty of travellers and visitors passed through, being on a main trunk line, it was not quite as rusticated as many larger places.

Mr. Morris G. Bell, the Commissioner of Commonwealth Railways, was a frequent visitor. His principal engineers, George Hobler, Capt. Saunders, George Gahan and Mr. Ewing, were residents, with a host of other lesser lights.

The Commonwealth properties were all exempt from town rates, which, to us, did not seem proper as the occupants made full use of the town's facilities and services. They fronted our streets and their heavy vehicles traversed our roads, so why should they not be ratable?

We decided to have a go at them, and to this end organised a dinner at the Great Northern Hotel to fire our shots rather than meet them in the cold atmosphere of the Council Chamber. Mr. Foster, the Minister of Railways, was the main target, though our old friend Alex. Pointon, the Postmaster-General, and Senator Pierce, were the other Government guests.

It was most likely that the Government would submit to its properties' being rated, so we concentrated on a grant to help the town finances. Our case was a good one, well prepared, and the Mayor was selected to present it.

Mrs. Oswald, the hostess, put on a dinner that would have done credit to London's Savoy, and the Ministers gave close attention to the representations made, which were more in the nature of an appeal than a demand and which they would place before Cabinet.

My speech was the longest by far that I have ever made, lasting 40 minutes, followed by brief supporting speeches from Councillors and the Town Clerk. In replying, both Ministers complimented the Council on the way its case had been presented and made the most flattering remarks on the excellence of the dinner, so we had Mrs. Oswald in for a glass of wine with us.

The main point must not be forgotten — the Commonwealth came through with an annual grant of £250.

Two other matters in which I took part for the benefit of the town were the recovery of part of the parklands which had been alienated to the Crown, and, after the war ended, the collection of moneys for a War Memorial.

Years before, a former Council, lacking in vision, had …… part of the parklands to the State Government on the grounds that the area retained was more then enough and that the surplus …….. could not be properly looked after.

We applied for its return, but were told that this could only be done if a poll of ratepayers requested it. This involved quite a lot of legal work and organising with a long delay, but the poll was heavily in its favour and the parks were restored.

More committees and begging collected quite a substantial sum for the War Memorial which I was anxious should take the form of an avenue of trees bordering the road to the hospital. Soil and water samples, with weather statistics, were sent to the Conservator of Forests for his recommendation on the selection of suitable trees. His reply brought a wealth of information with full details to support his choice.

One Councillor in opposing the avenue remarked that the birds would soil the trees with their droppings. He favoured a monolith as being more permanent and dignified. The final choice, quite a good one, was a band rotunda in the town square.

Ineffectual efforts were made to have the bar at the harbour's entrance blasted away to admit the passage of ships which had to await high tide. The harbour came under the State Marine Department, while the Commonwealth owned the wharf and collected all wharfage fees. We were shuttlecocked between the two Governments and never got anywhere.

Another abortive attempt was when we joined the people of Kimba on the Eyre Peninsula in a petition to the Government to extend the railway (from Yorketown to Kimba) through Iron Knob to Port Augusta, this giving rail connection with Adelaide when stormy weather isolated the Peninsula by sea. Incidentally the railway would benefit the Port.

A car load of us went down to Kimba to formulate joint plans and were met by a committee of vital young pioneer farmers who were clearing the heavy mallee to build homes and plant wheat. They prided themselves on having good class cars in the community (of the Buick and Dodge variety) and would give each owner a "Hoy" as he drove up in one to the little assembly hall, but a Ford owner would be greeted with groans and hoots for spoiling their average.

Their President and I were nominated to present the petition from the floor of the House, but this was not allowed as all petitions to Parliament had to be presented by a member. Ours is safely mouldering in a pigeonhole, for nothing ever came of it.

Though I was usually busy, it was not always matters of great moment that demanded attention. One day I was walking along Commercial Road spacing my strides to avoid treading on the joints in the footpath. It meant two short strides and a long one with occasional variations to cope with slabs of substandard width. Ahead I noticed an overgrown fox terrier dog, too big to be pure bred, apparently in truculent mood, though there were no other dogs about. He was strutting around snarling and bristling, so I stopped to see what had upset him.

In front of Billy Symons' drapery was a long full-length advertising mirror in which Towser had seen his reflection. He resented the intrusion and rushed over to do battle, but the other bloke had the same idea which made him stop and back away. At every sign of retreat he plucked up courage to have another go, but his opposite number always called his bluff.

It was as funny as a circus. He would march around stiff-legged, full of threats, irrigate a couple of posts and come back to try his luck again, always with the same result. I stood at the kerb pretending I was waiting for somebody, not missing a move and even encouraging him with a hiss or "sool him boy" but unluckily a smaller dog, more his mark, came along for attention and spoiled the show. This episode shows that even giant intellects stoop at times to the merest trifles for diversion!

Chapter 11
Ship Chandling and Hotel Broking

Two lines of business which I had never previously undertaken helped to keep the pot boiling, ship chandling and hotel broking.

Wills was the Government representative for wheat handling, his job being to see that the wheat was of the required standard and to supervise loadings. There was no local chandler, Goode & Co. of Port Pirie securing the business through their agents, Young & Gordon, who worked on a 5% commission basis.

I had no money to keep a stock of burlap for lining the holds of the wheat-carrying vessels, so telephoned to a merchant in the city who, after checking my references, gave me an ample line of credit for purchases of burlap or any other commodities required.

Port Augusta, in addition to Port Adelaide, Port Pirie and a South-Eastern port, was a wheat terminal during the war where vast accumulations of wheat were stacked for shipment abroad. Ships arrived at irregular intervals from British, American, French and Italian ports for cargoes which usually took two weeks to load, during which time I would provision the ship's crew, line the holds with burlap spread over 3" x 2" scantlings of hardwood, (for bagged wheat may not come into contact with iron decking or even the iron stanchions in the 'tween decks,) and deal with the first officer for such pickings as cordage, canvas, paint etc.

For provisions, the Chief Steward would buy, for engineroom supplies the Chief Engineer, but always for burlap and dunnage the Master himself would negotiate.

There was keen competition to meet, chandlers coming from Port Pirie, Wallaroo and even as far afield as Port Adelaide, but Masters prefer to give their chandling to the ports from which they obtain their loadings, and, as I was the only local chandler, it gave me an advantage, besides which I had the support of the Ship's Agent and did not hesitate to make full use of the Mayoral office.

Even than there was often a race between chandlers to be first aboard. On several occasions I took a fast launch down the Gulf to meet incoming steamers, clambering up their sides on a rope ladder while the boat was under way, and invading the Captain's holy of holies, the bridge, to secure the business before he berthed, when the visiting chandlers would swarm aboard.

Sometimes it was exciting, but the only wheat carrier I missed was one that was under contract with a Port Adelaide firm of chandlers.

I never quite reconciled myself to one feature of chandling, and that was the payment of gratuities. Never before in business had I taken or given a bribe, but it soon became apparent that the age-old custom of paying for your business in shipping, if not actually approved, was condoned and winked at by ship owners and charterers.

My first ship was a crack Liverpool-Calcutta vessel. I hardly liked to broach the subject to the braided skipper, but he did not leave me in any doubt as to its propriety and did the broaching himself. He told me 5% of the chandler's bill was usual and quite satisfactory. I noticed with some comfort afterwards that the Manager of the Stevedoring Company handed back to him a solid bundle of notes when settling. Of course, justifying yourself for doing something because the other fellow does it might not always apply. He might commit murder.

Purchase of meat, bread and greengroceries were divided among the local shops, turn and turn about. On leaving, the ships filled their freezers with fresh "sea stock" for the home trip, so, to the townspeople, visiting wheat ships were as welcome as the flowers in May. Officers and crews would be entertained in private homes and farewelled with tears by the girls. Often we were told that sailors have a far better time in small ports than they do in big cities.

There were some fine fellows on the ships that came to our Port. The Captain of the only American ship I chandled was a big, busky fellow like a second-row rugby forward, quite a young man. He never dressed in uniform and was very free with his fists. One night when I was in his cabin he called to his first officer named Fitz who was passing and asked him what he was doing ashore earlier without leave. Fitz's explanation did not satisfy him, so he knocked him down.

Some of the other fellows told me that though the "old man" was rough, he was never reported for hitting his officers and would take it if they could give it. If trouble arose with the owners he stuck to them through thick and thin.

On the first day of their visit the officers questioned me about the size of some of our "ranches", and my answers must have surprised them for I caught them winking at each other in obvious disbelief. John Collins, the manager of "Cariewerloo" was shearing 40,000 sheep at the time, so, at his invitation, I took a car load from the ship to visit the 3,000 square mile property. After we got back they were not so sceptical of areas quoted.

They were good fellows, too, for when three days out at sea, after leaving us, they bespoke by wireless an incoming vessel telling them to give their chandling to me.

Another Captain with whom I became friendly was a great lover of timbers. When shown the Prince of Wales' railway carriage with its beautiful panel carvings, he wanted to get some to take home. It was Australian oak (stringybark) and he was surprised when told the 10,000 super.feet of dunnage put aboard his ship was the same timber.

When this Captain was leaving, his pilot ran him aground on a mudbank at Curlew Island seven miles bellow the town, where he stuck for a week. Lighters were sent down to lighten the ship, a tug from Port Adelaide at a cost of £5 an hour failed to get him off, but a southerly buster finally cleared him. Twelve miles further down he anchored to have a diver examine the ship's plates but there was no damage.

A year later, he took loading at Port Pirie and hired a car and came the 60 miles to have a yarn with me. He told me that the stranding on Curlew Island had cost his owners £10,000.

Nell and the boys were staying in a rented furnished cottage at Aldgate in the Adelaide Hills for a few weeks to escape the fierce heat when one ship came in, the "Baron Polworth" with Captain McDonald and his wife aboard. They wanted to see Adelaide and went down in a hire car. I 'phoned Nell, arranging for her to meet Captain and Mrs. McDonald, entertain them for lunch at the Southern Cross Hotel and drive them round the Adelaide Hills in the afternoon. This they did, and had afternoon tea with Nell at Aldgate, one of the real beauty spots, much to their enjoyment.

An interesting visiting skipper was Captain Tacina, an Italian who entertained quite lavishly aboard his 10,000-ton ship.

Dinner at night occupied at least three hours, from cognac in wicker-covered bottles with shallow trays of sardines and olives floating in oil, through the main course of spaghetti,

which seemed to be the staff of life and which they consumed in vast quantities washed down with copious draughts of a light red wine of about half the alcoholic strength of our claret, to the sweet with black coffee, nuts and cigars. After this the table would be lined with glass jugs of their beloved red wine of which they had thousands of gallons aboard.

The stewards kept all glasses filled, Captain Tacina rapped for attention and encouraged all hands to join him in singing which he led with his tremendous bass voice. This programme was followed every night of their stay in port, always with a sprinkling of visitors. They ate and drank surprising quantities with never a sign of drunkenness, were popular with the locals and loaded their ship rapidly.

In contrast to the Iralian ship came a British one, the master being a typical sea dog who, during the war, was decorated by the King for being the first British armed merchantman to beak our from a blockaded South American Port in defiance of the waiting German submarines which he evaded.

As the ship came up the harbour a yellow flag was flying which may have indicated sickness aboard, where I did not wish to be quarantined, so when boarding her from a launch I asked the sailor who came down the gangway, which had been lowered, if there was any sickness aboard. He concluded I was the doctor, for whom the yellow flag was a signal, and escorted me to the top deck just beneath the bridge, but I was so anxious to get the Captain's ear that I followed the sailor to the bridge, for we were nearing the wharf where the other chandlers were waiting.

To invade, uninvited, the sanctity of the bridge of a British ship, was sacrilege, but the skipper, being an understanding chap, put it down to my ignorance, so before we tied up all misunderstandings were ironed out and he gave me the business.

Compared with the glamour of shipping, hotel broking was almost sordid. Wills and I, representing the ingoing and outgoing publicans, put through several changeovers together, while on other occasions, by arrangement, I handled the business for both sides.

It is a tedious business, listing and valuing stock in trade, furniture and furnishings right down to the last detail, particularly if it has to be done in business hours when the stock is moving. To avoid this most of the work was done after hours.

For one rushed job at Quorn I travelled by a motor quad on the railway line, a nerve-wracking experience. My seat was a square flat piece of wood without sides and with nothing to hang on to except the driver immediately in front, so it felt like being perched on top of a pole, especially when going over high spidery viaducts at a good speed in the Pichi Richi Pass where, though we had a clear line, disturbing thoughts of meeting an unscheduled train were no comfort. Practically all the weight was over the right-hand rail with an out-rigger extending to the left-hand rail. More than once, on traversing a right-hand curve, the wheel of the outrigger lifted, which gave me the willies, though the driver was quite unconcerned.

We worked all night, the proprietress and I. It was a Friday and she a Catholic, so had gone meatless all day, but on the stroke of midnight she called a halt and produced cold turkey and ham with all the trimmings. We sat down and reduced the stock of beer by a couple of bottles.

Bob Thompson was the Mayor of Quorn, seeming to have taken root in this office, for he had served for seventeen consecutive years. The town was a credit to him. He was a good man, but the people were tired of him. He was elected unopposed year after year, and declared that if ever he were opposed he would withdraw his nomination.

Such was the position on the approach of the annual elections when a group of Quorn-ites invited me to stand for Mayor. I pointed out that one such appointment held was one too many. I was not even a resident of their town, it was an insult to their ratepayers to invite an outsider, in fact the whole plot was preposterous, though flattering. So they departed, and Bob was elected for another term.

Wills, when told of it, roared with delight saying I should put a price on my services and make it a profession. He said that in the earlier days of the town, John Nixon Conway, after whom Conwaytown was named, had nominated as Mayor for bothe Port Augusta and Port Augusta West concurrently. In both towns he tied with his opponent. In both towns the casting votes of the Town Clerks who were the returning officers put him out.

Chapter 12
"Getting-Rich-Quick" Schemes

The allure of getting rich quickly tempted me into a few ventures.

The first was to utilise the 14-foot rise and fall of tide at Port Augusta for generating power. In this Frank Hodgson, a local baker and I obtained a report from a hydraulic engineer who, after spreading himself for pages of a report, finished by saying that no use had yet been made of the tide at Bristol in England where the rise and fall was 50 feet.

Frank and I joined forces too when a man named Bill brought to us a specimen of grey rock which he said abounded in countless millions of tons near Kychering, 287 miles west on the East-West Railway. An analysis by the School of Mines in Adelaide proved our specimen to be very rich in copper so Frank and I got some gear together and set out to locate the deposit.

Bill was to have come with us but backed out at the last moment having just got a job he could not forfeit, but he furnished a sketch of the exact spot indicated.

We spent two weeks searching in the deadly monotonous country round Kychering where the only relief from plain mulga scrub with soft, powdery soil underfoot was an occasional outcrop of hungry sandstone, nothing like the specimen.

A spring of fresh water near the camp attracted a few rabbits but every night the mournful howling of dingoes would be heard. After satisfying ourselves we had been hoaxed, we tried baiting the dingoes with cyanide poison, but, though the baits were taken, the dogs carried them too far before they had effect. We then sent to town for double-ended dog traps with better luck.

On the way home, we were first farewelled by the entire population of Kychering, being the operating porter, his wife and a dog. Then we put in a day at the small gold mining town of Tarcoola where the annual bush race meeting was being held, and so on to Port Augusta where we were looking for Bill's scalp.

He turned out to be a man of sub-normal intelligence who loved to make sensational statements, and who, having attracted our interest, did not like to admit that he was romancing. After a lot of badgering, he admitted that the copper specimen had come from an established mine at Wallaroo.

A third fortune-hunting venture looked as if it was a winner. Mr.Ewing, academically the most highly qualified engineer on the trans-continental railway, was a particularly nice, quiet man

and a clever chap. Mrs. Ewing and Nell were good frends too. Ewing's father was Mr. Justice Ewing of Tasmania, while his brother was a Perth Solicitor, so Ewing was a man of some standing.

My means of an experimental plant provided by the Railway Department he had produced at low cost from Collie brown coal in West Australia a hard-pressed briquette of 1,300 B.T.U.'s. (British Thermal Units) and steaming qualities equal to the best Welsh or Newcastle coal, whereas Collie coal in its natural state was not suited to locomotives as it had too great an ash content, low steaming qualities, and spouted showers of sparks from the smoke stack.

In all known processes for making briquettes from brown coal, in which the Germans were the most successful, pitch had to be added as a binder, but Mr. Ewing's patented process, not only required no binder, but extracted pitch as a valuable by-product. His briquettes did not dissolve if soaked in water, nor did they smash if thrown against a brick wall.

George Gahan, the district mechanical superintendent of Railways, ran an East-West express train on Ewing's briquettes over 60 miles at high speed with results equal to those given by the best Newcastle coal.

The vast field of brown coal at Leigh Creek was in quality similar to that of Collie coal with an identical ash content, as was shown in samples I had taken. This was confirmed by official records supplied by the Department of Mines.

Distant from Port Augusta only 100 miles, the Leigh Creek deposits had a great advantage in railing or shipping over Newcastle coal. From tests made, Mr. Ewing stated his process could be applied to Leigh Creek coal equally as well as to Collie coal, while he estimated that the cost of importing and briquetting Leigh Creek Coal at Port Augusta would be materially less than the landed cost of Newcastle coal.

He gave me an option for two years over the South Australian rights for his process, his interest to be one-quarter of the shares in any company formed, while Sir John Bice, Chief Secretary, promised me sole rights over the whole of the Leigh Creek deposits for a consideration of threepence per ton royalty.

To make a thorough test in bulk of the Leigh Creek coal would, it was estimated, cost no more than £300, so I prepared a prospectus whereby a syndicate would form with 20 £25 shares, of which Mr. Ewing would, as Patentee, hold five shares, I as promoter, two shares, the remaining 13 shares providing a working capital of £360. Ewing thought there would be difficulty in placing the shares, but the list was complete in half a day, several subscribers offering to take more than one share to which they were limited. All documents were completed the money deposited in a trust account and the stage set for a coup.

During these preparations, Mr. Ewing had resigned from the Railways, accepting an appointment with the Collie Coal Company on a retainer fee of £1,000, a handsome salary with a promised trip to America to purchase machinery for £30,000.

Just before leaving for Perth, Mr. Ewing made a suggestion that though there was no foreseeable reason why the briquetting of Collie coal should not prove entirely successful, prudence prompted him to advise the Syndicate to delay any further action until the Collie company had proved a commercial success in quantity. Though ultra-cautious, the advice was sound. He extended the option for a further year, I returned all subscriptions with the assurance that subscribers' interests would be preserved. The Western Australian venture did not succeed, though for what reason I never learned. I was out of the State when the option expired.

Before outbreak of war, the biggest supplies of manganese ore came from the Caucasian mountains, but afterwards England secured the bulk of her supplies from India, and America from Brazil. Values soared, so great importance was attached to the discovery of big deposits of this metal near Woocalla seventy miles north west of Port Augusta, where a local greengrocer named McGregor seecured 28 40-acre leases of beds of metallic and chemical ore covered by a shallow overburden of soil, easy of access and rich in assay.

The B.H.P. Company was buying the metallic ore for use in steel making, the diamond Dry Cell Co. was using the chemical ore for batteries, so a limited market had been established and the quality proven.

I secured an option to buy for £10,000 the whole of McGregor's interests, put in a tremendous amount of hard work in securing the interest of American, English and Japanese buyers, and had plans for a branch line from Woocalla to the field with handling facilities at Port Augusta.

A geological report boomed the field to the skies; a research made at the Sydney Public Library showed, by comparison with the principal known deposits of the world, that for purity, accessibility, market facilities and quantities, the Woocalla field was a bonanza with a half million pound Company in prospect.

The end of the war brought the end of our hopes. We were back to thinking in pennies instead of millions of pounds.

Chapter 13
Farewell to Port Augusta

Amongst the men of Port Augusta, navvies and businessmen alike, the chief diversion was drinking. There was a branch brewery there, the wine and spirit travellers thrived and seven hotels made a living.

There were some shocking instances of good citizens, men of character who had fought the good fight, mastered their weakness by giving up drinking habits. One was a professional man, another a highly respected lay reader, and other lesser lights, who returned to the old enemy after years of abstinence when advancing years robbed them of their mental vigour. They lost their places in the community, their property, their self-respect. It wrecked their family lives, for it takes the strongest of characters to resist the fatal disease of addiction to drink.

In the town, besides quenching intolerable thirsts, besides the regular spots, every mortal event, births, deaths, marriages, to celebrate happy occasions, to drown sorrows, all were occasions for drinking.

My own was a case of careless drinking, for I had no particular liking for alcohol under any label, even a distaste for it at times. But I found that I was acquiring loose habits, spending more than I could afford. Much business was done over bar counters, while Nell had just cause to reproach me for missing meals or arriving late for them, stinking of liquor, and. I am ashamed to admit, under the influence.

There were so many of my activities, to in which she could not share, the heat distressed her, the boys were growing up where there was no high school. All these combined to create dissatisfaction, a growing dislike for the place.

Eighteen months before we left the town, I put in the plug, turned total abstainer for the remainder of our stay, much to Nell's satisfaction. My friends told me I would lose business. Quite the reverse. I gave more attention to it with a clearer mind, and woke in the mornings with a clean tongue. Moreover, I had more time with Nell and the boys in a happy home.

With the completion of the East-West line, hundreds of men with their families left for pastures new. The end of the war brought *finis* [?] to the wheat terminal and ship chandling, there were no immediate construction jobs in sight, business was languishing.

My sister, Georgie, had come to stay with us on a visit, during which she amused herself by clerking my sales. I can see her now, brushing the flies away, the perspiration dripping from her nose, shouting to me to "hold on, you dolt' if I was going too fast, pencilling away for dear life and yet finding time to joke with the buyers.

She was there too when our son, Brian Gaahel [?] was born on 23rd March 1921, at a nursing home in Port Augusta West.

The end of railway construction work brought a slackening of turnover in Commonwealth personnel with a consequent loss of furniture sales. Daniel had run out of land subdivisions, so the decline in business became marked.

Nell and I discussed prospects, which were not good. She was anxious to get away, for Port Augusta was essentially a man's town. I liked the people and the work, besides which I had just been offered a most attractive agency by a very big city merchant firm. But if Nell was not happy, I could not be either.

So with precious little money and a load of debt we decided to break away. Nell suggested Sydney, so Sydney it was.

The ladies of the town gave Nell an afternoon send-off where all manner of nice things were said and a presentation made, while the townspeople did the same for me in the Town Hall.

What pleased me most was that the town band came up on to the platform, surrounded me and addressed a farewell selection to me personally.

Another rather pathetic tribute was when the poor little brass band from Tarcoola, 250 miles away, with only eight members, serenaded us at dawn on the lawn in front of our house.

Shortly before leaving Port Augusta, word came from Adelaide that Father had broken his thigh in a bad fall. His condition gradually worsened until he lapsed into a coma. It was a melancholy trip down to see our dear old Dad who roused enough to recognise me just before he died.

His doctor who examined him shortly before his accident said that he had never seen a man in better physical and mental condition at 80 years, and that but for the fall he should have reached a very great age. Father himself would have had no wish to linger on, for he had no fear of death, nor should he, for he had led a blameless life, leaving affectionate memories of him with all of us.

Until I should get settled in Sydney, it was arranged for Nell and the boys to stay with Mr. and Mrs. Gill at Glen Osmond. She set off with Rod and Brian by train, while Miles and Dennis accompanied me on the steamer.

After casting off, I looked back at the familiar scene, the people waving from the wharf, the town hall tower above the other buildings, and the last visible object, the high water tank on the west side.

Slowly we steamed down the Gulf for the last time, past Hospital Hill where, on the peak of Biddicott Estate, Wills' big house stood, the flag flying from the high flagpole in front, the children and Mummy Wills waving from the front verandah. The whistle tooted, and Wills dipped his flag in salute. I felt sad and deflated, but the boys, bless them, were racing round the deck in high spirits.

GOOD-BYE PORT AUGUSTA