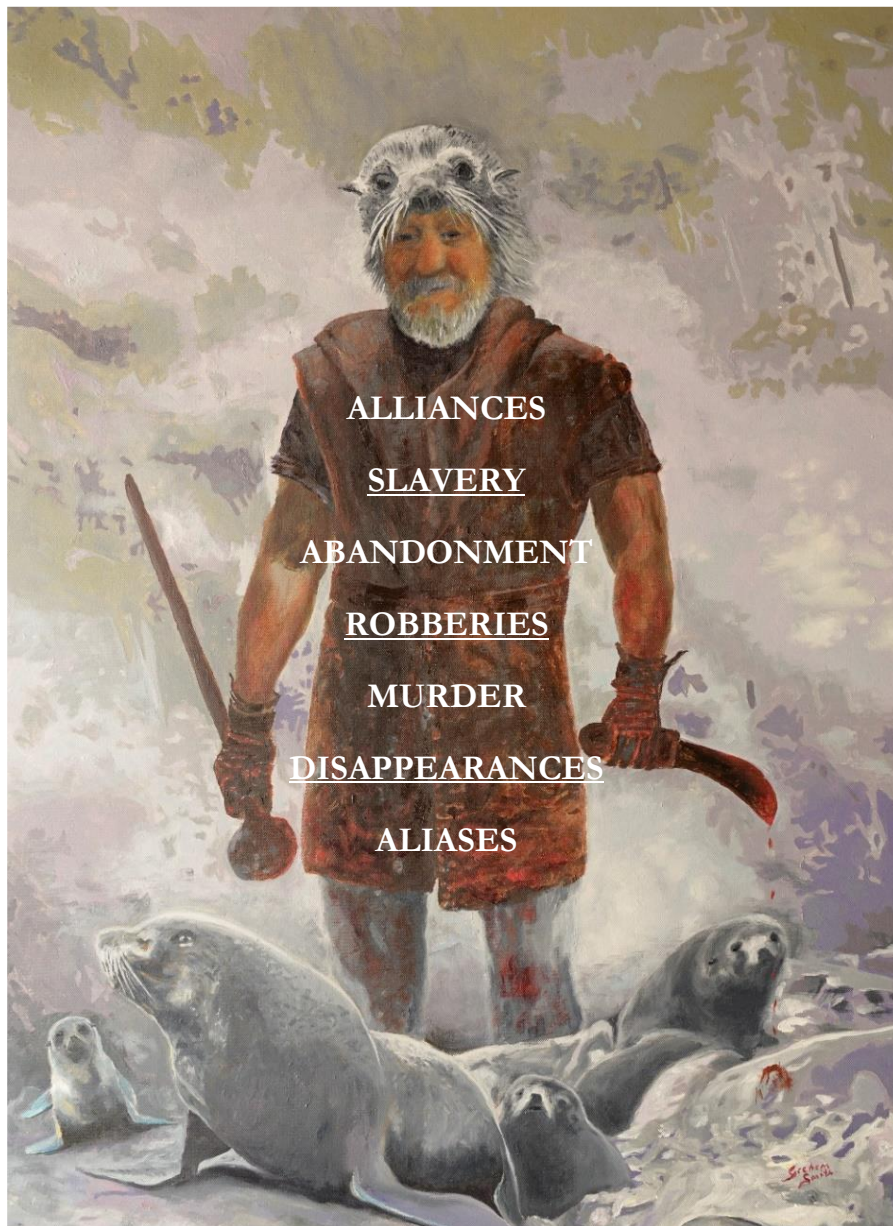




SEALED SOULS



*A Colonial history of sealing and whaling on the southern coasts
of Australasia, 1798 to 1852.*



SEALED SOULS exposes the darker side of the early colonial history of Southern Oceania, spanning half a century from the establishment of the Colony of Sydney in 1788.

It explores and explains **ALLIANCES** formed in desperate times by desperate people, and exposes the cruelty hapless people endured by being in the wrong place at the wrong time, in an era when bondage was just another word for **SLAVERY**.

ABANDONMENT was a common practice inflicted by unscrupulous masters and incompetent operators on these luckless people.

It was a lawless time, with **ROBBERIES** perpetrated at every level of colonial society. **MURDERS** were committed and went unresolved, along with mysterious **DISAPPEARANCES** of people and whole boats.

ALIASES hid peoples' unscrupulous pasts and recent sins, allowing them to avoid repercussions from the Authorities who were governed from the other side of the world.

A must read by anyone who is interested in early colonial maritime history. A colony with a desperate beginning, on a lawless frontier of uncontrolled exploitation and oppressive expansion across the vast continent of AUSTRALIA and beyond.

SEALED SOULS is more than a history of Australia; it delves deeper into the lives of multiple players over many decades that encapsulates this narrative. Studiously researched over 25 years, this story shines a light on what really happened, what life was like for those early pioneers, and why the young colony turned out the way it did.

Every player was in it for themselves; from top bureaucrats to lowly escaped convicts and everyone in between - survival and exploitation was the roguery of the day.

A Bit About the Author



John Robertson. (b. 1960 -) (Author)

John was born in Albany and grew up close to the Princess Royal Yacht Club, where he joined as a junior member sailing Pelicans. As a teenager he moved to Perth, where he completed an apprenticeship in carpentry & joinery in 1979.

In 1982, as a mature aged student, he studied English, English Literature and History to gain his tertiary admittance. He was in the first intake of students who graduated from the Western Australian College of Advanced Education with a Bachelor of Arts (Media) in 1987.

John travelled to England in 1990 where, over the next 18 months, he worked at Nelson's Wharf on the Grand Union Canal building and fitting-out Dutch barges and English narrowboats for the Warwick-based shipwright Gary Ward.

On returning to Western Australia in 1991, he began a building business of his own in the Wheatbelt. John never lost his love for the sea or for boat building, rounding Cape Leeuwin on several occasions, and sailed extensively along the southern and western coasts of Western Australia.

After a trip to Middle Island and the Recherche Archipelago in 1998, John became interested in producing a short documentary about the intrepid sealers and whalers who opened up much of the southern coasts in those early colonial days; however, it became apparent that the early sea-fearing history of this coastline had never been fully documented.

This then led him into a 25-year journey of research and discovery, culminating in the publication of '**Sealed Souls**', a largely forgotten history on the growth of colonial sealing and whaling in Australia, and its consequential impact on the indigenous peoples of Australia, New Zealand and across the broader South Pacific.

Introduction

Bass Strait was the obvious place to go to get away from British authoritarian rule and hide. It was also a place waiting to be exploited, where one could exist and make a living as a free man, your own man ... and with your own laws.

To the exiled and lapsed convict, the penal settlement of Sydney was considered harsh, as was Hobart to the south. Both towns were basically prison camps dealing in the business of hard labor, floggings and meager rations which were the order of the day. This was something many men were not willing to return to.

The distant southern colonies of New Holland offered seamen from around the world the chance to leave their ship either forced or voluntarily, many escaping the *Articles of Agreement* that had held them in bondage to ship and master. To the adventurer seaman and expired convict alike, this was a chance to forge a new life for themselves on the frontiers of British colonialism, free from their past.

No wonder the temptation of island life was enticing; especially if you were an industrious person or one who was of interest to the authorities.

Only a handful of these islands could sustain life from nature's bounty alone.

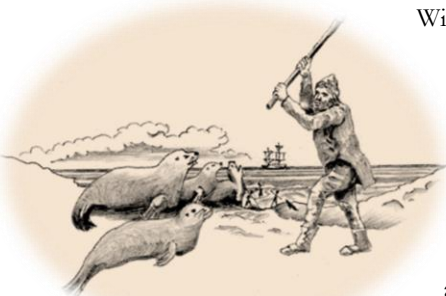
On the islands where sealers established temporary camps or more permanent structures, they adapted by catching native species using techniques

learnt from captured native women as a practical means of survival. There is abundant

evidence suggesting that the original fauna on these islands became partially or totally extinct after the arrival of Europeans in the early eighteenth century.

Most of the islands that the sealers ventured to were mere specks on a map, many unknown and uncharted. Initially, sealing occurred in the islands of Bass Strait and surrounds, before spreading eastward as new sealing grounds were discovered. The larger ones around Bass Strait like Kangaroo, King and Flinders Islands were substantially bigger than the rest; dotted about them were smaller islands and rocks where seals inhabited, well within reach of the sealers' bases on their 'Home Island'.

As seal stocks became more and more depleted, and with fresh rookeries uncovered eastwards to New Zealand and beyond, intrepid sealers and their indomitable crews braved these unexplored waters in their quest for seals.



Within a short period of time, these fisheries too were recklessly harvested and seal numbers decimated, and by the 1820's the sealing trade was in decline. With colonial expansion spreading out from the hubs at Sydney and Hobart, the authorities began moving into the sealers' sphere and the chances of being charged over some past indiscretion or infringement was greatly enhanced; for many, moving westwards was the only option to keep ahead of the authorities and stay free.

Thousands of miles to the west, lying off the southern coast of Australia, more small, remote islands, mostly barren and a long way apart, provided a new untapped seal resource along with obscurity from their past.

Around this time in the west, the settlement at King George Sound was being founded and was only a small military outpost; nevertheless, it established some semblance of law. This left the space between Albany in the west and Bass Strait to the east basically lawless.



Heading into this void and the open frontiers beyond became logical. Not all were escaped convicts, criminals or deserters from ships; many were free men, Ticket of Leavers, with a sprinkling of shipwreck survivors, accomplished tradesmen and businessmen, with almost all being illiterate. Nevertheless, they could handle themselves in the business of trade.

The art of seamanship, along with a good measure of survival instincts, were the basics to sustaining oneself amongst these islands.

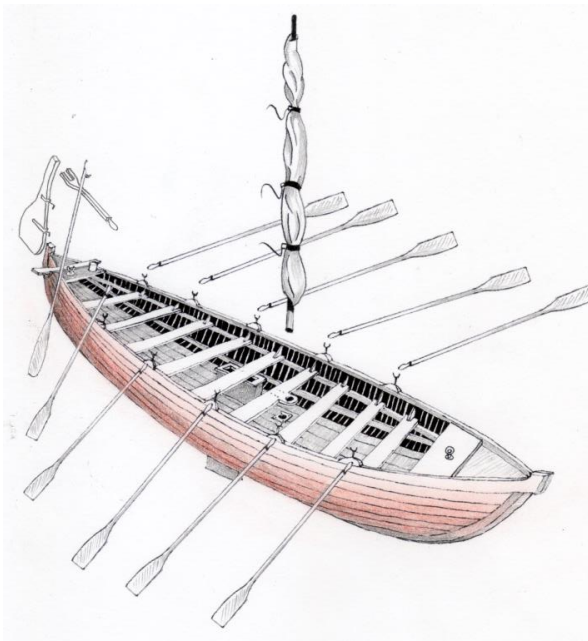
The established practice of leaving teams of men on islands for long periods to harvest seals bred teachers that showed the way for newcomers. This practice had been in use since the seventeenth century. A great many of these men had been abandoned amongst the islands and often marooned for years in the most inhospitable places on the frontier's edge, but most survived and went on with the practice.

But not forever. Competing gangs of sealers moved westward chasing the elusive seal, but then hunted whales too as seal numbers plummeted; before long, there was bound to be a clash over the shrinking resources. This rivalry was quickly followed by the growth of the British authoritarian rule which would soon put the squeeze on hard as it has done previously in the Strait.

Falsifying names and using aliases was rife amongst early pioneers, as were lies about where you came from, who you were working for, the people who you associated with and other fabrications, especially to outsiders and certainly to the law. Every one of them had their treasures and secrets hidden.

In a space of thirty years, every fur seal colony on the south coast of Australia, the islands of New Zealand and rookeries spread throughout the south Pacific had been systematically harvested to the point of near extinction. It did not stop there. Indigenous humans and native island animals met with a similar fate.

In the end, the sealers went the same way.



Sealed Souls - Synopsis of Chapters

“Sealed Souls” is set amongst many stories, but its main telling is that of colonialism.

Ch 1. Bass Strait (46 paginated pages)

This chapter deals with the initial growth of sealing in Australasia and its expansion into Bass Strait, Van Diemen’s Land, Kangaroo Island and New Zealand.



The quest for the wealth obtained from seal skins and oil was the cause of great friction, not only between the colonial gangs but international sealers as well.

As the neighbouring rookeries were cleaned out, the sealers looked further afield to seek out new grounds.



This movement of sealers impacted the native populations of both Australia and New Zealand. These sealers were at the thin edge of the wedge which would rapidly change the culture of these indigenous peoples and pave the way for future European settlements.

Ch 2. How the West was Won! (26 paginated pages)

Two colonial gangs of sealers were found abandoned at King George Sound when the French arrived there in 1826. The Frenchmen considered these expired convicts as dangerous, amoral men.



Several months later, Major Lockyer arrived under orders to claim the western portion of Australia.

Despite knowing these sealers had murdered, abducted and committed other atrocities to the Aboriginal inhabitants before his arrival, Lockyer’s hands were tied as he could not punish them retrospectively.

This chapter deals with the formation of the military settlement at Albany, troubles with the convicts, conciliation with the local Aboriginals and the perplexing question of what to do with the two sealing gangs that were now drawing down on Government stores.

Ch 3. George Meredith Snr (18 paginated pages)

The Merediths were wealthy settlers who migrated to Tasmania and took up land at Swansea. Apart from agricultural pursuits, George Snr was also a businessman involved in the sealing and whaling trades, and built boats to service these trades.

George Jnr was the oldest son of George Meredith and held substantial farming land in his own right at Swansea. After an argument with his father, he made off with his father’s boat, which was later shipwrecked. He then exiled himself on Kangaroo Island with his Aboriginal woman.



George Jnr was implicated as the main organiser in the abduction of Aboriginal women and children from the mainland, who were then sold or traded to sealers and others.

He was later murdered by Aboriginals at Yankalilla in South Australia.

This chapter also covers the rapid growth of the Tasmanian colony and the inevitable impact of settlers’ expansions onto the traditional hunting grounds of the Aboriginal which culminated in the infamous ‘**Black Line**’ campaign.



Ch 4. Black Jack. (34 paginated pages)

This chapter follows the lives of three ‘men of colour’ who lived on the fringes of white society with their Aboriginal women.



It has long been romanticized that Black Jack was a ruthless negro sealer who roamed the southern coastline residing with his Aboriginal women at will amongst the remote islands, from the lawlessness of Bass Strait and Kangaroo Island to the frontiers of Middle Island and westward to Cape Leeuwin.

Evidence shows that Black Jack was more than likely of Indian descent.

This chapter explores the exploits of these three ‘coloured’ individuals and asks the question “were John Antonio, John Baker, and John Anderson one and the same, and when all cast together, did they created the larger-than-life myth that made up the villainous character Black Jack?”

Ch 5. George Augustus Robinson (68 paginated pages)

This chapter deals with the tragic consequences around the demise of the Tasmanian Palawa Aborigines. Following escalating conflicts between the indigenous Aborigines and the usurping white settlers in Tasmania, George Augustus Robinson was employed as the Protector of Aborigines and went on several expeditions (‘friendly missions’) to gather the remnants of the remaining tribes.

Initially they were exiled to Bruny Island, but this first attempt failed. They were then moved to Swan Island, followed by Gun Carriage Island, then to the Lagoons and finally exiled at Wybelenna on Flinders Island where their already decimated numbers quickly declined further, culminating in the loss of an entire distinct native race.



During this time, the heyday of sealing had come to an end. The unemployed sealers had for many years chosen to reside on the uninhabited islands of Bass Strait with their Aboriginal women and children, far from the reaches of British authoritarian rule. But now authority was on their doorstep and Robinson was attempting to take their Aboriginal women away. The older sealers petitioned the Governor, while the younger and more daring ones tried to steer clear of Robinson and his forces.

We meet Robert Gamble, who had been employed as a pilot to navigate Robinson’s boat around the Strait. Gamble had previously been a sealer and his allegiance lay with these men, and he actively worked against Robinson’s cause. Gamble was taken to prison in Hobart for the shooting of an Aboriginal woman at the Kent Group, but was not convicted. Things were getting hot in the Strait and for many of these people, including Gamble, it was well past the time to move. The distant and tiny settlement at King George Sound looked a whole lot safer.



Ch 6. John Williams (112 paginated pages)

John Williams (aka John William Andrews) was the acknowledged leader of the most daring gang of sealers in the Strait. Robinson had sought after Williams and his gang, but they proved too elusive and made their way west to King George Sound.

Williams, Gamble, John Antonio, Black Jack Anderson, John Byrne, Evan Evans, John Morgan and others, along with their Aboriginal women, regrouped at the Sound. Williams had sealed before with many of these men in New Zealand and the sub-Antarctic islands of Campbell and Macquarie. Here in the fledgling, convict-free settlement of Albany, many changed their names and lived without the glaring inquisition found in the eastern colonies. These men began sealing in gangs along



the southern coastline; however, it was not long before friction erupted between these rival gangs and various scores were settled (often, sealers mysteriously failed to return to port again).

Williams and his gang made the transition into whaling. His gang rendered down the discarded remnants of whales left by the large fleets of American and French whalers that worked the southern coastline.



The little seaside town of Albany was rapidly turning into an international port and, as has been evidenced time and again in colonial history, these escalating toeholds onto the mainland brought with them influenza and syphilis that decimated the local Aboriginal populations.

During this time, John Williams prospered and he was now becoming an extremely wealthy man ... but would it continue?

Ch 7. Epilogue (7 paginated pages)

This last section provides an overview of the key issues that led to the colonization of Australia, and examines the early history of the ‘settling’ of Australia and its consequential expansion across New Zealand and the broader South Pacific area, exposing its impact on the endemic peoples and prey animals, and explores the behaviours of our colonial ancestors and asks the question “would we have acted any differently if we were in their circumstances 200 years ago?”.

Appendices (229 paginated pages)

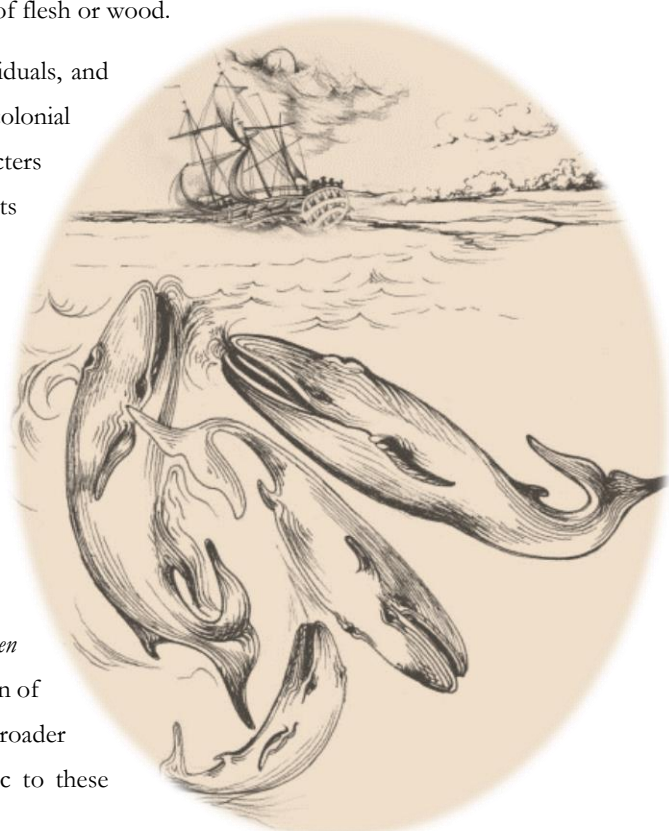
While writing and researching this story, it became apparent that the inclusion of People & Ship Glossaries would be invaluable to enlarge our understanding of the times and the situations these people lived in. When compiling notes on the many hundreds of characters and boats mentioned in the narrative, it became apparent that both man and boat were interwoven by history, and that each had their own unique story to tell, whether of flesh or wood.

The book narrative focuses on just a small number of key individuals, and relates their stories and their place within the history of the early colonial times this book addresses. But there were many other characters referenced within the book who may only have held minor parts within this narrative, but who had engrossing personal stories in their own rights that deserved to be told too.

The decision to invest in these glossaries meant we could expand on and relate a bit more about these peripheral characters, and as such have included the character glossary of around 275 people mentioned in the narrative, followed by the glossary of the 155 ships and boats that likewise have been mentioned in the book.

A further section detailing the various prey that were harvested (*often catastrophically*) during these early colonial days gives some indication of the impact this expansive (re)settlement of Australasia and the broader South Pacific had on the indigenous animals that were endemic to these regions.

Finally, a small Atlas of maps that show in detail those areas visited or colonised by the intrepid characters in the book.





The Skeleton in the Sand

The following sample article is one of hundreds of historical accounts that were uncovered while researching for the book "Sealed Souls".

Whilst this story itself is not covered in any great detail within the book narrative, it and the protagonists involved are touched upon within the book.

Just north west of Cape Knob near Bremer Bay on Western Australia's remote southern coast, amongst a large sand blow-out, lie the bones of an unfortunate crewman who had been marooned near Cape Arid hundreds of miles to the east. For many weeks, he and his two companions had trekked along this barren and desolate coastline, traversing the rugged limestone buttresses, deep bays and windswept sand dunes, starving and thirsty, driven towards the safety of a beckoning Albany until, lost and separated from his beleaguered colleagues, he could persevere no more and met his last.

To piece together what led to this tragic event, we must go back in time to the late 1840's when the little colonial outpost of Albany was but a speck on the map, where only intrepid colonial and international whalers cruised this coastline in search of oil-bearing whales, and at a time when Aboriginals in this part of the country still lived by their traditional ways ... a time well before any white man had considered making his home here on the frontiers at Bremer Bay.

In October 1848, the Western Australian Surveyor General John Septimius Roe, Henry Gregory and Joseph Ridley of the Surveyors Department, a native guide named Bob, along with the privates Lee and Buck of the 96th Regiment and 11 horses, left the south coast at Cape Riche 75 miles north east of Albany to search for mineral and agricultural opportunities that may exist in the south east corner of Western Australia. They traversed as far east as the Russel Range on the edge of the Nullarbor Plain before travelling back inland from the coast. While returning through the Phillips and Fitzgerald Rivers, seams of coal were found.

By New Year's Eve 1848, the group was camped alongside the Bremer River where a good spring of excellent water was found, surrounded by a small patch of rich luxuriant feed for their tired horses (*nowadays, the townsite of Bremer Bay*). Leaving their camp on the Bremer River, they struck a route inland behind Cape Knob until they reached a beaten inland path long used by the natives. Here, Roe made camp and prepared to visit the neighbouring coast; on arriving at the summit of the ridge that separates two beaches (*Reef and Fosters*), Roe observed a small low dry rock about the size of a boat not previously charted (*today this is known as 'Roe Rock'*). Heading westward along a rocky ledge, they then came out onto a beach where the arc of the coast catches the sea breeze and funnels this onto a giant sandy blow-out, sweeping the beach sand along wind tunnels that keep it in constant motion, forever moving back and forth with the ever-prevailing winds of each season.

Roe went on to comment:

While traversing that part of this dreary waste which borders on the sea-coast, we came suddenly upon the skeleton of a human being, reposing upon a broad limestone sheet, about 200 yards behind the beach. Our native immediately explained that they were the remains of one of three seamen, who had quitted a Hobart Town whaler some 18 months ago, in the vicinity of Middle Island, for the purpose of walking into Albany, a distance fully 350 miles at the shortest. Why these men quitted, or were suffered to quit, their ship thus, on so inhospitable a coast, it is unnecessary here to remark on.

The only survivor of the three, who was recently in the employ of Mr. Cheyne at Cape Riche, declared that they were landed with their own consent, supplied by the captain with as much provision as they chose to carry, and with a musket and ammunition; that, after a long ramble, they became much distressed for fresh water, and at length separated to search for it more inland, agreeing to rendezvous at a certain hill, then in sight in advance; but they never did so re-join or see each other, and that he alone survived the fearful journey.

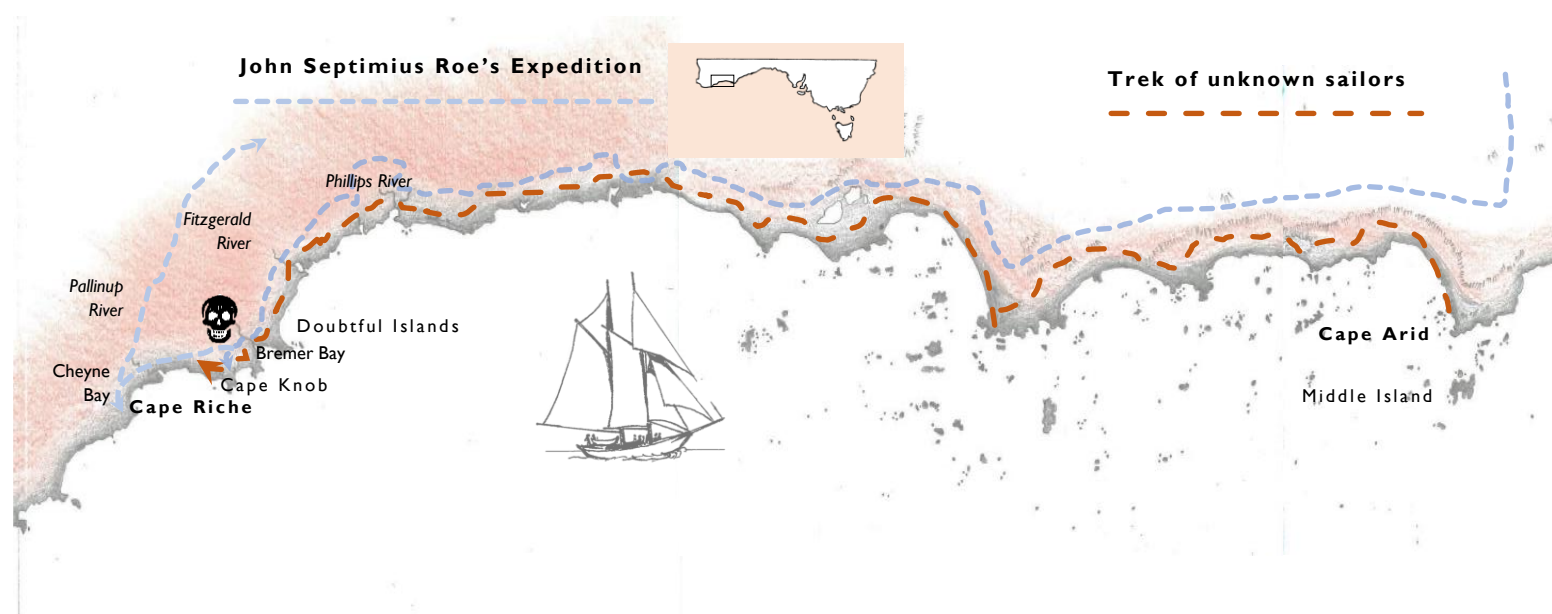
The natives seemed to have been fully aware of the death of the other two, and ascribe it to actual starvation and exhaustion, disclaiming most strongly having used any personal violence, but, on the contrary, having endeavoured to assist the only one of them they saw before his death, who had, however, through fear or distrust, invariably pointed his gun at them when any one ventured to approach him. The unfortunate man now before us was said to be one of them, the other lying somewhere amongst the sand-hills to the east in a spot which our native did not profess to know. He was of rather short stature, had on the remains of a coarse



white shirt, blue serge shirt, and moleskin trousers; one blucher boot, with a foot in it, was detached a few yards, and the other lay near it, showing, with other evidences of severed limbs, that the body had been, after death, attacked by wild dogs. Two of these animals, of large size, were seen near the spot feeding on a piece of whale-flesh, and Mr. Gregory got a long rifle-shot at them, but they succeeded in getting clear off.

Any attempt to describe the features or person of the unfortunate man before us would be perfectly useless, the face and hair having been totally destroyed, leaving the scalp still on the skull, and some parchment-looking skin stretched over the skeleton of the body. After ascertaining that no marks of personal violence appeared on those parts of the head and body capable of showing any, the remains were collected and removed to a neighbouring hollow, where we built over them a pile of limestone rocks 6 feet long and 3 feet in height, with a large slab at the head, and left the poor fellow to repose near the spot where he had so miserably terminated his fatal journey. The heap will, doubtless, soon be covered by a hillock of sand, and become a collection of petrified bones.

The sun being now very low and the dreary 'sand patch' yet to be traversed, we wended our way slowly onwards amongst its living hillocks, remarking on the sad spectacle we had just witnessed, having in all probability been occasioned chiefly by the want of water, which was anywhere to be had in abundance within a stone's throw, by scratching a small hole in the sand. This presence of fresh water in the large sand-drifts of the sea-coast has often been observed by travellers, but never satisfactorily accounted for, nor can I assign for it any cause more rational or probable than its being the drainage of the back country through those caverns and hollow ways which, in limestone countries, so much abound.¹



The majority of colonial and international seamen had little knowledge of the basic survival skills that were common knowledge for the indigenous peoples of the area and, without a compass, their only hope was to keep close to the barren coastline and, with a bit of luck, find enough food in the inter-tidal zones until they could eventually flag down a passing whaler or some other shipping vessel.

But that fate was not to be.

The seaman's final resting place was in sight of Cape Riche and tragically, being oblivious to the fact that fresh water often lay just below his feet, he ultimately fell short of his arduous trek by a paltry 25 miles.

After burying the remains, Roe and his party returned to their camp. Some 86 days after setting-off, the expedition returned to where they had begun, arriving at the little agricultural settlement and trading outpost of Mr George Cheyne's at Cape Riche.

The identity of the skeleton in the sand and that of the other unfortunate seaman who also died nearby at Bremer Bay remain, to this day, unknown.

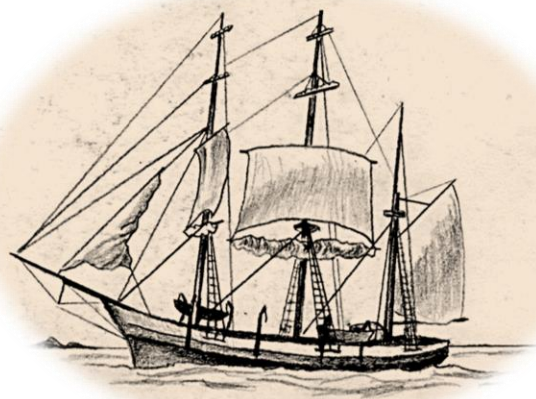
¹ Journal of J.S. Roe. Expedition to the South-East 1848-49.



The Notorious Captain Hudspeth of the Tasmanian Whaler ‘Patriot’

The *Patriot* was a 150-ton Hobart-based whaler under the command of Captain James Hudspeth operating in the waters off the shores of southern Australia from 1843 to 1848. The *Patriot* worked the sperm fishery at Portland Bay and cruised the whaling grounds from the Recherche Archipelago through to Cape Leeuwin at the southwest corner of Australia. At the end of each whaling season, Hudspeth returned to Hobart to sell the oil and bone, and to resupply the *Patriot* for the following year’s whaling season.

It appears Hudspeth was a very threatening and volatile master who had many quarrels with his crew and others during his years in command. For example:



- in March 1845, Hudspeth filed a Police report in Hobart stating that seven crewmen had been convicted for insubordination against him, and all these men were sentenced to the physical punishment of 60 days on the treadmill (*these endless stairs ground grain into flour*).
- in April 1847, while anchored near Middle Island, two of the crew were put ashore by Hudspeth at gunpoint after being forced into signing a document stating that they were leaving the ship voluntarily. A few days later, another seaman deserted from the *Patriot* and all three were now compelled to walk the coastline to Albany, between 350 to 380 miles away to the west.
- later, while on the same cruise, Capt Hudspeth called at Albany and lodged a complaint to the authorities declaring that another three (*separate*) crewmen had attempted to desert by taking the ship’s boat. Caught in the act, and at gunpoint, they were threatened with being shot unless they returned to the ship. All three crewmen were charged with deserting the vessel and sentenced to 10 days hard labour in the Albany gaol.

As can be evidenced, Hudspeth’s behaviour towards his crew appears ruthless and no doubt countless other incidents of tyranny went undocumented ... but were his actions ever justified?

From Western Australia the *Inquirer* 7th June, 1848 reported:

Men Starved to Death in the Bush: A man named James Welch made the station of G. Cheyne, Esq. at Cape Riche a short time since and stated that he with two other men were landed at Cape Arid about 300 miles eastward of Cape Riche from the brig *Patriot*, a whaler of Hobart Town. The master’s name was Hudspeth.

Welch was in a very deplorable condition on his arrival, but the extreme care and kindness bestowed on him at Mr Cheyne’s soon restored him to health and he is now working at Kojonup. When the three men were near Doubtful Island Bay, Welch made his way to the shore for the purpose of procuring shellfish and never saw either of his companions afterwards. Some natives informed Mr Bland (*the Protector of Aborigines*) that the bodies of two white fellows who had been starved to death lay in the bush not far from Doubtful Island Bay.

Our Government has communicated these facts to the authorities at Van Diemen’s Land, who will, we trust, examine into the matter and punish the master most severely, if he really has been guilty of the shocking act of barbarity imputed to him.

The newspaper article relating this grim event spread rapidly throughout the eastern colonies, the public exposure and condemnation of this seemingly senseless action of abandoning his crew on the coast had a mentally damning effect on Captain Hudspeth, who was now lying at anchor in Victoria at the Portland Bay whale fishery.

The *Argus*, 22nd September, 1848 reported:

Melancholy Suicide: the Portland papers received yesterday contain intelligence of the proceedings at the coroner’s inquest held on the body of Captain James Hudspeth ... who committed suicide while labouring under an attack of *delirium tremens* aboard his own vessel on Friday last. The Jury found that “*Deceased caused his own death by the infliction of a mortal wound on his throat while suffering under an attack of nervous irritability, induced by excessive drinking.*”

The negative media reports had troubled Hudspeth and, being on the wrong side of public sentiment, had culminated in his taking his own life. This was even more alarming given the *Hobart Courier*, 22nd July, 1848 had previously come to the defence of Captain Hudspeth by reporting:



Gross Misrepresentation: we are enabled to state with reference to a paragraph which has been circulated by the Swan River journals giving an account of the death by starvation of two seamen who landed at Cape Arid, in which it was stated that Captain Hudspeth of the brig had *Patriot* landed and deserted them, that the statement is directly the reverse of the fact. The three men referred to absconded from that vessel although they had been informed that they were 300 miles from Cape Riche.

When the vessel arrived at the latter place, the captain obtained three warrants for the apprehension of the runaway seamen, and a genuine receipt acknowledging the payment of the necessary fees, signed by a Cape Riche constable, has been submitted for our inspection. With respect to the reported death of two of the runaways, if there is any truth in the statement, notwithstanding the folly evinced by their desertion, their fate is to be commiserated, but it is also due to Captain Hudspeth to record the fact that they themselves are only to blame in the transaction.



Captain James Hudspeth was taken onshore and buried at Portland. It is hard to judge who was really at fault in this deadly saga; Hudspeth had ongoing troubles with his crew over many years and appears to have been a tyrannical master, but on the other hand, ex-convicts such as James Welch were repeat offenders and chose to defy any form of discipline by the ship's master or the military.

Something had to give on the frontiers of colonial Australia and in this case, it was the needless loss of three lives.

James Welch, a hardy survivor

As a young lad, James Welch was prosecuted at Surrey for stealing a ham and was sentenced to 7 days imprisonment and flogged.

At 14, he had his second run-in with the authorities - this time he was tried at the Surrey Quarter Sessions in February 1835, convicted of stealing a gown, and sentenced to the harsher penalty of 7 years transportation. While awaiting transport, he was held in a convict hulk until April 1835. He left London onboard the convict transport *Mangles* which arrived at Van Diemen's Land (*Tasmania*) in August 1835 carrying a total of 310 prisoners.

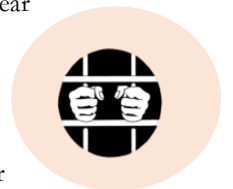
His prisoner identification lists him as short in stature standing only 4' 7" (139cm), and possessing a fresh freckled face, dark brown hair and blue eyes. On the inside of his right arm, he had an anchor tattooed and on the inside of his other arm was a picture of a woman - these were likely prison tattoos obtained during his time spent in penal servitude.

Shortly after Welch's arrival, he was assigned to a recently emancipated convict (*the 'Assignment System' was the practise used in many penal settlements of assigning or allocating free convict labour to the settlers in the colony by the Government. Its aim was to strengthen the emerging economy, while at the same time providing the 'convict class' with reformative employment ... it also shifted responsibility for feeding and the welfare of convicts to the private landholder*).

During his sentence, the young James Welch had a troubled and turbulent time. He misbehaved frequently and was subject to heavy reprimands. These included enduring several floggings, frequent assignments to hard labour work gangs (*often in chains*), bouts of solitary confinement on bread and water, and various other punishments.



By 1842, and being only 21 years of age, the recidivist James Welch had served his seven-year sentence and was granted a Free Certificate. Since being incarcerated at 14, he had been assigned to 6 different landholders and had re-offended 22 times in 7 years.



This was indeed a heavy price to pay for a young boy who stole a lady's frock.

In March 1847, Welch departed Tasmania aboard the brig *Swan* which operated a freight and passenger service between Launceston and Port Phillip. A few months later, he joined the colonial whaler *Patriot*.

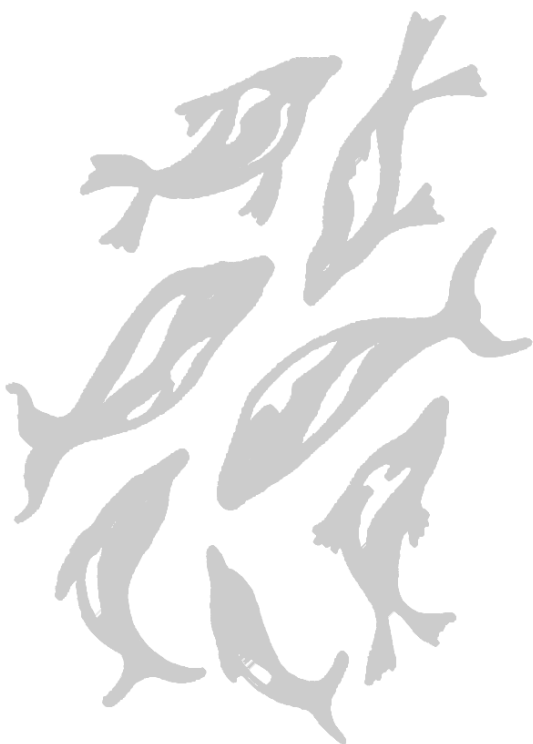
After conflict with the *Patriot's* Captain James Hudspeth, he was set ashore near Middle Island with two other crewmen and began an arduous walk 380 miles to Albany. Welch was the only survivor, eventually making it to Cape Riche where he worked for George Cheyne for a time before seeking employment inland at the recently surveyed farming lands of Kojonup, 100 miles north of Albany.



James Welch later returned to Tasmania, where he passed away unremarked and forgotten at Port Cygnet in 1892; yet another unfortunate example of the many unsung 'Sealed Souls' that were forced to endure a hard life on the frontiers of colonial Australia.

On several occasions, we have sought to locate this 'Skeleton in the Sand' ... the remains are said to lay 332° north of Smooth Rocks, not far from Cape Knob. At present, they lay quietly entombed amongst the shifting sands of time. At some point in the future, these parabolic dunes will once again ebb and flow to expose the gravestones which will recast this forsaken site into the light of day ... but when, we cannot say.

... to be continued.



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