



## WEDGE ISLAND – AN UNEXPECTED HISTORY



Gambier's<sup>a</sup> Isles



Wedge I.

Peaked rocks



*G B Keywood - Sept 2025*



Illustration by Liz Coole for 'Somers of Darkness'

Family



POONA



Brian Foster - Poona

Us & Them



Brian Foster - Poona



Brian Foster - Poona

Three Lakes Conundrum



SAPOL Historical Society



Coles Point - background information



### Summary of the Research Author & the Text

While I was in Grade 4 at Gepps Cross Primary School it was identified that I really enjoyed History, Geography & English. I also had a passion for 2 areas of South Australia.

- The Copper Triangle - My Cornish Heritage and
- The West Coast - At Coffin Bay at age 6 months

With the onset of MND, I had decided that the Research Discussion Paper (RDP) on the Old Coast Road that was completed in August 2025 was going to be my last; BUT.....

There is a certain magic about islands. The islands of St Peter & St Francis (SA) inspired Jonathan Swift when he invented "Lilliput" (Gulliver's Travels). Alexander Selkirk's adventure inspired Daniel Defoe. Thanks to books like Robinson Crusoe there is an allure to being stranded on your own fantasy Island & being keen to explore what it has to offer. During a 1984 Christmas at Streaky Bay my youngest daughter Megan & I waded out to explore her island of "Naboombu" & we still have the shell found during our adventure to remember it.

I was going to write up a simple piece on an amazing tale from Wedge Island that really took me by surprise. There was a hint given to me about finding some of the many pieces to the Wedge Island puzzle. I found that what Joe Walsh sung about in "Country Fair" was essentially correct - a much bigger yarn.

Found an old puzzle someone had quit  
Tried a few pieces & hoped that they fit  
But they're going together so slowly  
It may take me forever to know  
If it's only a puzzle

Parts of the puzzle will never be found  
And even though pieces are gone  
It's a county fair picture  
Part of me's there  
Some of the pieces are still at the fair  
And it may be forever

My sincere thanks for all their encouragement go to: -

- Brian Foster (Poona)
- Steve Reynolds  
Marine Life Society of SA  
SA Archaeological Society
- Michael Leech (Tuna) - the Wedge Island Hint
- JRK - Happy Birthday (forever & always) - Midnight Man

Bottom left = Coles Point - Completed early 2025 & then on the right, my final RDP.

August 2025; photograph below courtesy of M Leech. **96K** September 2025



Genesis in the Copper Hills



Liz Coole Cornish Bard



Sailing close to the wind



Greg Drew Cornish Bard



First Impressions



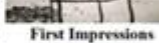
Chris Manfe PLHG



How Elliston got its name



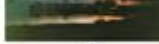
May 2023



The Old Coast Road



The Old Coast Road



The Old Coast Road



The Old Coast Road



The Old Coast Road



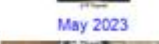
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The Old Coast Road

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Front cover design by GBK & illustrations by  
Wikipedia., Matthew Flinders & J R Keywood



## Finding a start date



Wedge Island is centrally situated at the Southern End of Spencer's Gulf, close enough for Yorke's Peninsula to claim its history, but owing to a strong maritime connection with Port Lincoln, I mentally place it as one of Eyre Peninsula's natural wonders.

Wedge Island was sighted & appropriately named by Matthew Flinders in February 1802. In my previous Research Discussion Papers 1, I have written an account of a theory of why my hero Matthew Flinders had a "momentary lapse of reason" whilst at Coffin Bay; only doing a running survey outside of Point Long-nose & leaving the Cartographer's Dream Estuary (& water) alone. On the map it just became a vague shape, but Port Lincoln is clearly defined.

With the aid of that mistake, I will start this story off by stating that I reckon that the start date of sealers first landing on the "Wedge" beach was between 1805 & 1810. It was to become considered as one of the "Bass Strait Islands" by the Sealing Fraternity, who were always on the look-out for information regarding new sites. The seamen from the *Investigator* probably had some free pub time when they arrived back in Port Jackson & the sealers took it from there.



## Whalers & Sealers

In early 1803, Captain Isaac Pendleton, *Union* from Connecticut was sealing at King George Sound, when he met Captain Nicholas Baudin, who recommended Kangaroo Island as a place where there were plenty of seals to be had. So comfortable were the sealers in their new environment that between April & August 1803, the ship's carpenter built the 35 ton schooner *Independence* at what is now referred to as American River on Kangaroo Island.

Information regarding the movements of sealers and whalers is somewhat vague during the period up to 1836, as the authorities in Sydney regarded the "Bass Strait Islands" as extending beyond Kangaroo Island west to the Recherche Archipelago.



The exploration & mapping of the inner bays of Coffin Bay would have been a cartographer's dream. It should be noted that the shape & size of Port Lincoln stands out, Coffin Bay is a vague representation.



Location of SA Sealing & Whaling Stations  
(Phillip A Clarke 1994)



Old fire place at Whalers Bay on Thistle Island  
1907 (SLSA)

According to Phillip Clarke, by 1806 to 1809, the sealers were also familiar with Harvey's Return on the Kangaroo Island's North Coast.

The *Endeavour* of Sydney (Henry Kable, jr) under the command of Richard Siddons left Port Jackson at the end of September 1809 & was noted to be at Kangaroo Island & that "she was designed to proceed further on the west coast for the discovery of new sealing grounds; those already known being overrun with formidable gangs."

The *Endeavour* of Sydney returned with "about 4000 skins and two tons of oil."

2



The Sydney Gazette wrote on the 14<sup>th</sup> April 1810 of the discovery of a fine, new harbour:

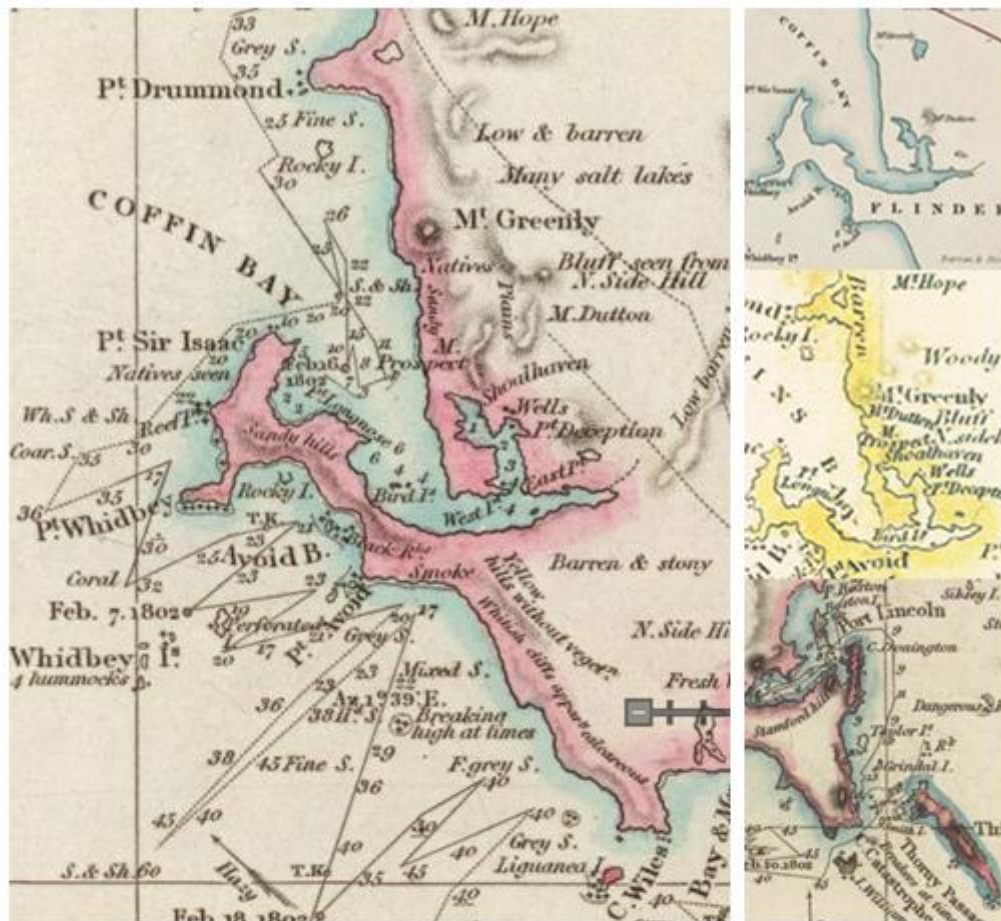
"Information has been received of a fine harbour equal to that of Port Jackson recently discovered by the *Endeavour's* people about 70 miles North West of Kangaroo Island on the Western Coast of New Holland; the natives thereabouts appearing to be rather numerous, and very timid, none ever approaching the Europeans. Emus & Kangaroos abundant; the country thickly wooded, and the head of the harbour constantly watered by a large run not less than 6 feet in depth which appears to derive its source from a neighbouring marsh. The discovery was made in consequence of the people being obliged to leave the islands on which they are stationed, to procure water from the main; and unexpectedly falling within headlands, they entered and proceeded a distance of about fifteen miles up before they found the inner harbour or cove above described."

3



5





A rough version of Coffin Bay 1844 (John Arrowsmith) – note the "run" out the back (Minniribbie-Merintha Creeks)



Windmill in the swamp near the Minniribbie & Merintha Creeks at Kelliedie Bay, from the Coffin Bay Road. Mt Dutton in the RHS distance – January 1987 (GBK)

Mr J S Cumpston 2 places the discovery location as Port Lincoln, but as a researcher, I share the view of J D Somerville that there is a strong chance it is Coffin Bay & the inner harbour spoken about is the head of Kelliedie Bay with its marshes and the outlet of Minniribbie & Merintha Creeks. It just needed a strong rainfall event & a king tide, something that I suspect the Henty family also experienced in 1839, much to their embarrassment. Certainly, if correct, then Coffin's Bay was now a known base, having an anchorage at Point Sir Isaac & a reliable source of water for the Bass Strait Island sealers & later whalers.

## Pastoral Pioneers

### James Sinclair of Greenpatch



The author's (GBK) interpretation of the Sinclair Family Journey to EP (from Nairne) from year 1847 1

James Sinclair initially attempted to set up a run at Yelery, near to Whaler's Wells out on the Coffin Bay Peninsula. For several years the family shepherded the sheep into different parts of the country but the condition of the sheep deteriorated & they lost nearly half of their original flock from "coast" disease. It would have been a heartbreaking experience after the long & plucky trip across the top of the gulf from Nairne. The run was abandoned & the flock moved across to Mount Dutton for a time, whilst the Sinclair Family lived in tents.

By accident, they had landed in a healthy spot & from first principles, James Sinclair noted the improvement in the condition of the flock. Credit has been given him for discovering that the remedy for "coasty" was to remove the sheep from pure limestone country near the sea to ironstone tracts of land further inland. Coast Disease is now known to be caused by a cobalt & copper deficiency.

The Sinclair Family went on & held land out at Uley (Yeley) as well as at Green-patch & the practice of rotating sheep from limestone country by the sea, to the ironstone tracts further inland continued right up until the 1920's, when James' great grandson, Stuart Sinclair still spent some of his time focussed on the continual shifting of sheep.

The point of this story is that the Sinclair Family did not live on an island, so the transportation of the (rotating) sheep herds never rose as an issue.

1, 4



Lonely Wedge Island – Harbour facilities at Wedge Island are nil. Horses for shipment must be swum out to the ketch & the pigs & sheep are rowed out in the dinghy. Photo – Pigs being loaded into the small boat for transport to the cutter lying beyond the reef – Photo Cork

5

7



### Daw Brothers at Wedge Island

A book published by the Australian Heritage Commission states that "the first recorded lessees were NJ & JH Daw, who held the Pastoral Lease from 1858 to 1871. 5 A mistake has occurred here, probably because the recorded data written in the old ledgers was illegible. Research now shows that the two leaseholders were Joseph & John Wickham Daw.

#### **CLEARED OUT COASTWISE**

Thursday 28th July - The cutter Henry & Mary, 25 tons, Martin master, for Wedge Island. Passengers Messrs Daws. Cargo - 30 geese, 40 goats, 3 pigs, 10 sheep, Daws

Register 29th July 1859

Clearly, one of the first things the Daw Brothers did then they arrived on Wedge Island; was to clear some land for cropping & sell the timber off to get some available cash.

#### **ARRIVED (COASTINGS)**

Sunday 25th September - Alexander, schooner, 36 tons, J Reid, master from Wedge Island and Kangaroo Island. Cargo - 20 tons timber, 1 bdl. Sheepskins, Goodlar

Chronicle 1st October 1859

By the end of October 1859, it was time to commit to building some infrastructure on the island.

#### **CLEARED OUT COASTWISE**

Same day - Omeo, schooner, 40 tons, Laws on, master for Wedge Island, G W Brown, agent. Passenger - Mr Daw. Cargo - 8 cows, 1 bull, 2 bullocks, 100 sheep, 1 dray, 20 boards, 100 palings, 20 pigs, sundries

Chronicle 22nd October 1859

By about 1860, they had established a picturesque homestead & garden

5



1859 – Homestead on Wedge Island, built by the first settlers, John & Joseph Daw. The caption "Home sweet home, there is no place like home" appears on the drawing in the right hand corner (SLSA)

At this time, the *Advertiser*, speaking about Wedge Island, noted that the "island, situate at the entrance of Spencer's Gulf, is at last occupied & now has 500 sheep placed thereon. The situation of this island is exposed, but has a good supply of water; also in some places, a rich soil & covered in patches by a short scrub. The person who has taken it from the Government is a Mr Daws, who resides there, together with his family. The occupant has a quantity of land under cultivation & a fair crop of barley".

7

8



In January 1862, after the inauguration of A H Gouge's Wallaroo Railway, Governor R G & Lady MacDonnell boarded the SS *Lubra* (Captain Ward) for the trip back to Port Adelaide. On the 5<sup>th</sup> of January at 8 am, the *Lubra* was off Wedge Island, where they "laid to" for a short period to pick up a passenger, a Captain Harris, who had just piloted a ship from Port Augusta to Wedge Island. The "Special Reporter" ascertained from him that "the Messrs Daw; two brothers, who have purchased (leased) the island, were living on it with their wives. These four are its only inhabitants. Its extent is about 3,000 acres. A plentiful supply of fresh water has been obtained & a considerable extent of land brought under cultivation. The stock consists principally of sheep & those are thriving well".

8, 9



SS *Lubra* (SLSA)

The Australian Heritage Commission text (5) on Wedge Island went on to say that "though details of the farming operation on this early property are unknown, it is likely that if sheep were grazed (there); their diet would have lacked copper & cobalt. Affected animals were said to go 'silly' & would only recover with a spell of grazing on inland pastures. Transport difficulties obviously prevented such (rotational) treatment on the islands, so (back then) sheep grazing generally failed". It continued by stating that some sheep on Wedge Island that had gone 'silly' with the 'Coast Disease' usually ended up falling off the cliffs & were replaced by cattle or horses more tolerant of the 'coasty' conditions". 5 I think the Wedge Island flock were in trouble.

**ARRIVED COASTWISE**  
FRIDAY 14TH NOVEMBER  
MARY STEWART, schooner, 65 tons, J Wright master,  
from Port Augusta & Wedge Island, 3.5 tons Copper Ore,  
Wirrawilla Mining Comp, 400 sheep, J Daw, Sundry pigs  
Register 15th November 1862

#### Witnesses at a Court Case

Before R W Hawkes SM, B Douglas & Captain Hart JP was the case for a maritime unlawful dismissal case of CAPTAIN WRIGHT (plaintiff) versus LE MESSURIER (agent of the schooner *Mary Stewart*) I can say that the verdict was for the plaintiff being wrongfully dismissed & awarded damages of 50 pounds but it is the opinions (under oath) on the condition of the Wedge Island sheep that is most interesting.

By the way, the definition of a "ship's husband" is an agent on land representing the owners of the shipping vessels who attends to its provisioning, repairing & general management.

9

At the commencement of the case, Council called on Joseph Daw, who stated that he chartered the *Mary Stewart* to bring sheep from Wedge Island under a written agreement made 20<sup>th</sup> October last. Those which arrived & landed at Port Adelaide were in a miserable condition. He attributed the death of so many to mismanagement. They were not diseased. William Amos, clerk to Messrs Robin & Le Messurier, deposed that Mr Le Messurier was appointed ship's husband to the *Mary Stewart* ie not the Captain.

10



Unloading sheep at Wedge Island (SLSA)

In the witness box, Captain Wright stated that he was receiving 12 pounds per month as master of the *Mary Stewart* & had been out of work since. No cause at any time was assigned to his dismissal. Mr Le Messurier had told him that Mr Daw had knocked some money off the agreement because some sheep had died that had been brought from Wedge Island & that Mr Daw had said it was his (witness's) fault.

Mr Dempster stated that he thought "the sheep died from disease or weakness. Some died before they were put on board."

Bernard Skipper, seaman, deposed that he had been on the *Mary Stewart* with Captain Wright. He was at Wedge Island when they shipped some sheep. They were in a poor state & some of them died in the boat. However, the sheep were really not too much trouble until the last day, which was very rough & all hands were up all night tending to the sheep.



The Stormbird Deck – plenty of room to pen the sheep (SLSA)

John Wickham Daw said that he had shipped some sheep from Wedge Island by the *Mary Stewart*. He believed the contract was in writing. He wished the plaintiff (Captain Wright) to put up pens on deck for the sheep. John Daw reckoned the captain said that he could not work the

10



vessel with pens on the deck; but in reality the organization of how the sheep's pens was going to be set up on deck, was up to the ship's husband.



Sheep on Doug North's boat ready to leave for Flinders' Island (Cheryl North)

They lost about 200 sheep on the voyage but Daw felt that they would not have lost so many if there had been pens on the deck. He said that when the vessel was put about, they were obliged to drive the sheep to the weather side as the Captain had said that he had not enough ballast in the holds. He admitted that the weather was rough & then John Daw had to answer some very difficult, close to home questions with

- They assisted in shipping the sheep from the beach
- The transfer boat was leaky & they had some difficulty with the surf
- The sheep were not diseased & knew of no poisonous herb on the island
- The sheep were not falling down from weakness & disease.

The Daw Brothers got their deduction from their freight charges but they were now also fully aware that farming on an island, particularly back in this time, had quite a few draw-backs. They clearly extended their lease on Wedge Island & left the seals to fend for themselves.

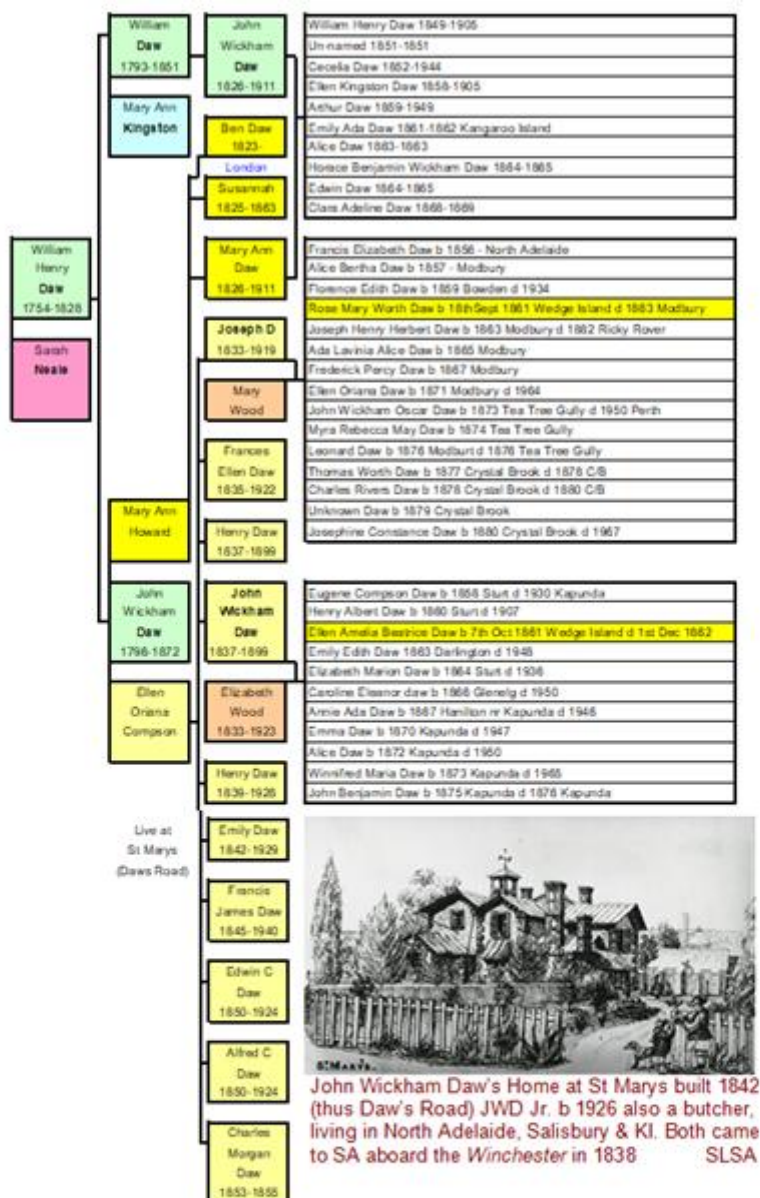
The Chronicle of the 20<sup>th</sup> August 1864 wrote that "we understand that the crew of the *Freebridge* when off Wedge Island secured a beautiful seal. It was seen swimming on the water near the vessel & a running bowline was passed over the side, the animal secured & hauled on deck. It is now in Port Adelaide where it may be seen by the curious in these matters. The master of the schooner intends, we believe, either to present it to the Botanical Gardens in town or to give it to Captain Begg to take to England. It would be a great addition.....so splendid a specimen.....& one on this coast so exceedingly rare."



Seal at Wedge Island (SLSA)

**SALE OF PASTORAL LEASE OF  
WASTE LANDS.**  
**THURSDAY, MARCH 7, 1867.**  
Crown Lands and Immigration Office,  
Adelaide, January 23, 1867.  
**NOTICE** is hereby given that the following  
Leases of Waste Lands of the Crown, of which  
a plan may be seen at the Surveyor-General's  
Office, will be offered for sale at public auction  
immediately after the Land Sale to be held at  
that office on Thursday, March 7, 1867 (the  
first year's rent to be paid at the fall of the  
hammer):—  
**Lot 237. Wedge and Gambier Islands (Wedge  
Island formerly held under Lease 701); upset  
price per annum, £5; area in square miles, six;  
term of lease, fourteen years.**  
**W. MILNE,**  
Commissioner of Crown Lands and  
Immigration.

Kapunda Herald & Northern Intelligencer 1<sup>st</sup> Feb 1867







### Paradise lost

In October 1871, a memorial to the "Legislature" was collecting the signatures of all the Ship's Masters plying their trade to Port Wallaroo; setting forth that 2 light-houses were very much required; at Cape De Coedoc, on the SW Corner of Kangaroo Island & the other on the now vacant Wedge Island, for guidance regarding numerous reefs & low islands. 13 A subsequent Marine Board Report recommended the erection of 3 new lighthouses at Wedge Island, Comy Point (Yorke Peninsula) & a third one at Rivoli Bay.

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Seals on Wedge Island



Wedge Island Seal 1940 (SLSA)

The isolation of Wedge Island did not faze the Sealers still plying their trade. According to the *Wallaroo Times* a couple of sealers were doing the Alexander Selkirk thing & luckily on the 6<sup>th</sup> November 1872; the *Lubra* rescued 2 men & a boy from a rock near Wedge Island. The boy had been left to mind the boat, which had brought them from the larger island. They had killed 18 to 20 seals when a roller capsized the boat, tipped the boy over into the water & the drawback took the boat & painter (rope) out to sea. They were stranded for 6 days on the rock, without food & water, totally exposed to all weathers.

The *SS Kangaroo* passed them, but the smoke the sealers desperately created failed to grab their attention & there was nobody residing on the island. Luckily, the crew of the *Lubra* (Captain McCloy) was attracted & went in & performed their maritime duty, as it was noted that the sealers could not have held out much longer.

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### Ben Germein – hero of the "Admella"

In April 1874, the *Andreas Wilhelmina* was in Port Pirie being laden for her trip to England & desired a Pilot to take her down to the bottom of the gulf. At the time, no man was better suited than Ben Germein & he journeyed up to take up his role in seafaring matters, taking charge of the ship until the "Wedge" was reached & having a fair wind with open water he elected to land. It was noted that "the island is of some extent & has at former times been peopled, but failed to afford sufficient (means) to keep the inhabitants (comfortable), consequently it has been left to the goats & geese."



Wedge Island



Ben Germein (SLSA)

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The master of the ship did not like leaving the Pilot in such an isolated position, but there was no choice & according to the pilot's routine, coasters would bear down on the "Wedge" should smoke be seen on the shore; so Ben Germein had little apprehension. The ship hove to & the "Grand Old Foreigner" fitted out the departing pilot with sufficient provisions including water & a bottle of brandy.

The Pilot was now alone on the island & the ship went on her charted course. Germein lit a fire & for refreshments & made himself a "billy" of tea. He then proceeded to inspect the island; find a place to sleep & then laid himself down, well satisfied that "no person could hear him snore." The next morning the fire was replenished to keep up the smoke & to "diversify the monotony" of all this time waiting; with his fishing tackle Ben Germein caught himself a handsome feed. After 30 hours of playing "Robinson Crusoe", the adventure was over when the *SS Lubra* saw the pre-arranged signal & sent a boat ashore to pick him up.

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Christmas 1891 at Coffin Bay Homestead (Skull Hut) – from left William Stirling (poss), John Henry Haigh, William Frederick "Bill" Haigh & William Tennant Mortlock. John Haigh born 1856 at Warrow. (Neville Parker)

However, by March 1876 something was going on at the "Wedge". Things were on the move. A party of "gentlemen had landed on Wedge Island & two of the party discovered tracks which they followed along the sandy beach which ended, with a pair of shoes & socks".

Going along a little way further on down the beach they found a "large biscuit tin containing a portion of damper, potatoes, sugar, tea & matches", all very dry, so quite recent. On a second visit to the island whilst doing a bit of seal hunting the party saw a dog, a black looking large collie, on the spot where the shoes had been noticed previously. Several attempts to catch the dog failed, causing him to dart into the scrub, but on one occasion, when they whistled from the yacht, the collie tried to reach their craft. Their conclusion was that those with business on the island had lost their pet & that the dog was patiently waiting for them to return.

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#### William Haigh

According to Jack Casanova, John Henry Haigh held the Thistle Island lease until 1876. In the years 1875 to 1879 his brother William Haigh shared an interest in Thistle Island & he also owned Wedge Island & Spilsby & "all the islands" which seemed to indicate the remainder of the Sir Joseph Banks Group (under the Reevesby Island title) which excluded Sibsey & Spilsby. 12 When it came to the pursuit of his success, William Haigh was a very busy man. He owned:

- The cutter "*Albatross*" – Master Alfred Glansford (Wedge Is & Sir Joseph Banks Group) 18
- Founded the Penguin Guano Company.

14



Sailing around the Spencer Gulf Islands could be a tricky business & Wedge Island was one such location to keep mariners on their toes. In May 1877, the *Governor Musgrave* was hard at work doing the rounds of the SA Coastline & on the 10<sup>th</sup> May she was away with members of the Quarantine Commission looking over the site of Black Point.

On the Friday she was anchored at Harvey's Return, on Kangaroo Island where stores for the Lighthouse Keepers was discharged. The *Governor Musgrave* then proceeded to Wedge Island, but on reaching the anchorage it was found that there was too much sea on, to allow the party to land & the vessel was kept on a course for Moonta.

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The *Governor Musgrave* was a SA Government Service Vessel Top at the Althorpes, Left Unloading spars from the wreck of the *Norma* Right Unloading a horse into a dinghy for Neptune Island Lighthouse (SLSA)

From that *Governor Musgrave* trip, a rumour of the possibility that the proposed Quarantine Station could possibly be built at Black Point (on Yorke's Peninsula) sent shock waves through that district & a public meeting at Stansbury on the 9<sup>th</sup> June 1877 was all about memorials strongly condemning the proposal & for a deputation to go across to Adelaide to see the Chief Secretary. A certain Mr J Hickman suggested Wedge Island as the most suitable place. 20

#### KINGSCOTE

Sailed 3rd August. Amelia, schooner for Wedge Island

Express & Telegraph 4th August 1877

It is unknown who was managing Wedge Island at this busy time for Mr William Haigh but he must have been aware that a lease renewal of some sorts was just around the corner.

#### KINGSCOTE

##### SAILED

14th - AMELIA, schooner for Wedge Island

14th - THREE SISTERS for Port Adelaide via Hog Bay

Evening Journal 15th August 1877

#### KINGSCOTE

##### ARRIVAL

19th - AMELIA, schooner from Wedge Island

Register 21st August 1877

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On SATURDAY, June 15, at 12 o'clock.  
 AT WHITE'S ARBITRATION ROOMS.  
 WITHOUT RESERVE.

**W** GORDON & CO. are instructed by the present proprietors, being about to leave the colony, to sell, without reserve—

The **LEASE** of **WEDGE ISLAND**, having about 15 years to run, at an annual rental of £30 per annum, with all Improvements, Implements, and Stock thereon, consisting of Store Hut, Well, Fencing, Growing Crop, and farming Implements, 4 medium Draught Horses, 12 head Cattle, viz., 1 Durham Bull, 7 Cows, and 4 Steers, 140 Pigs and 2 Boars, by imported stock, 1 large Boat, with sails and everything complete.

The Port Lincoln steamers pass to and from Adelaide weekly, affording means of easy communication.

Terms and full particulars at time of Sale.  
 163 6

Register 13<sup>th</sup> June 1878



Old House – Wedge Island (SLSA)

### Penguin Guano Company

By the early 1880's high hopes were held for the pastoral & agricultural success of the island. Mr William Charles Golley was now managing the property for William Haigh, who also held the Sir Joseph Banks Group & owned the Tiatukia Estate back on Eyre Peninsula. By the time Mr J O'Connor visited Wedge Island in 1887, he noted that Mr & Mrs Golley had been living there for many years, rearing a family of two boys & a girl.

21



L – Royal Shepherd on the Birkenhead Slip (1860's) R – Evening Journal 25<sup>th</sup> September 1882 (SLSA)

**SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 24.**  
**ROYAL SHEPHERD**, steamer, 227 tons, G. Campbell, master, from Wallaroo, via Arno Bay, Port Lincoln, and Wedge Island. John Turnbull, agent. Passengers—Messrs. Smyth, A. Anderson, T. A. Terber, C. Garrod, R. P. Young, N. Blackmore, J. Miller, Misses Lavinson, Spicer, Jackson, and Mrs. Golley and child, in the first cabin. and 8 in the second do. Cargo—2 bags sealskins, 16 bales sheepskins, 24 hides, 2 horses, 1 trap, empties and sundries.

Jack O'Connor noted, that back then, it was used mainly for horse breeding & the raising of pigs. He added "at the age of 14, I started in the employ of the late Mr Haigh & continued in his service for 7 years. During these years I made many trips to Wedge Island & the Banks Group, our mode of transport being the yacht *Albatross*."

21

In 1883, Wedge Island was surveyed for closer settlement containing 9 sections of 80 to 100 ha by the Government Surveyor, Arthur Chamberlain. Though most of these sections were originally taken up by Thomas Cowan, a farmer from Islington; by 1884 the island has back in the hands of John & William Haigh.

A Guano Lease was also issued to William Haigh from 1883, for the taking of guano from coast reserves on all the local islands, including Wedge. His operation, called the Penguin Guano Company mined the material & was probably used on his Wedge Island Property to ensure soil improvement in the cleared areas.

The Haigh Family held Wedge until 1909, when the estate went into the hands of executors. As part of a completion of the Right to Purchase Leases issued earlier for the land, the island was made freehold in 1912, indicating its viability for pastoral use compared with some of the other islands which have remained under leasehold tenure.

6



According to Alwyn Scruby, at one early point in their lives, his Grandfather Henry & his father William both worked on Flinders Island, getting guano from the caves to sell for fertilizer; back in the days before the introduction of superphosphate.

William, when only in his very early teens, spent 18 months on the island without ever leaving it. The guano was bagged up in readiness for shipping out by cutter or ketch, but if the weather took a turn for the worse & the boat was unable to be placed at a safe anchorage; then all the bags had to be emptied otherwise the guano would rot them out before they could book a future time to ship them out.

22



William Haigh (SLSA)



In 1883 Wedge Island was surveyed for closer settlement

Alwyn said that "Arthur Leech did more in the guano line than what his father & grandfather had done", at times being part of the A W Sandford & Company. William Scruby also worked for a time with W F "Bill" Haigh, who apart from operating Tiatucka Station (just by Boston House going north to North Shields) also owned all the islands in those heady days, including Spilsby & Wedge. When William went sailing with Haigh in the cutter *Albatross* (40 footer) at the tender age of 16 years (about 1889) he reckoned that was when "the saltwater got into my bones".

William had a contract with Mr Haigh to cut 40 tons of hay on Wedge Island. The chaff cutting was done with a horse works similar to the one in the Koppio Museum. It was while he was finishing that job off, that his father Henry told him that they could buy Spilsby Island from "Bill" Haigh. They started cutting down scrub to clear the land & then commenced shifting thousands of tons of stone left which was piled up in heaps as "big as houses".

But Spilsby Island had something that the "Wedge" did not – snakes. There were thousands of vicious Black Tiger Snakes on the island. The Scrubys took over some goannas to Spilsby & the snake problem disappeared after a few years.

22

"Bill" Haigh made full use of the *Albatross* as a pleasure craft, a challenge racer, guano or stock carrier or any other useful occupation he could think of whilst on the water. His biographer, Stuart Wylie Baillie tells of "Haigh sailing in the blackest night to be near the guano workings at first daylight & of the owner's uncanny ability to bring his cutter past reef & rock & spits safely"

Crewmen on these trips often included the Cooper Brothers of Mount Gawler & Fred Danzic. 12



William & Lydia Scruby with their family Left – William, Edna, Alwyn, Joan, Myra, Lydia, Jack & Marjorie

#### The wreck of the Ariel

On the 14<sup>th</sup> May 1898 the ketch *Ariel* (16 tons, Captain J Cowen master) dragged her anchors, struck on a rocky ledge & lost her rudder. Subsequently she drifted onto the sandy beach & was hauled further ashore, causing the vessel to become a total wreck. According to Captain Cowan the ketch had lay at anchor to the north of Wedge Island, awaiting the opportunity to load guano for Port Adelaide.

The incident was attributed to the sea around Wedge rising suddenly. Captain Cowan stated that it freshened so quickly that the crew has no chance of getting under away. John Littlely, an AB who acted as mate reckoned that there was not the slightest chance of getting the vessel underway once she had anchored. Everything, in his opinion, was done to save the vessel. 23



SLSA

ABC





Steve Savy

## The Glen Park

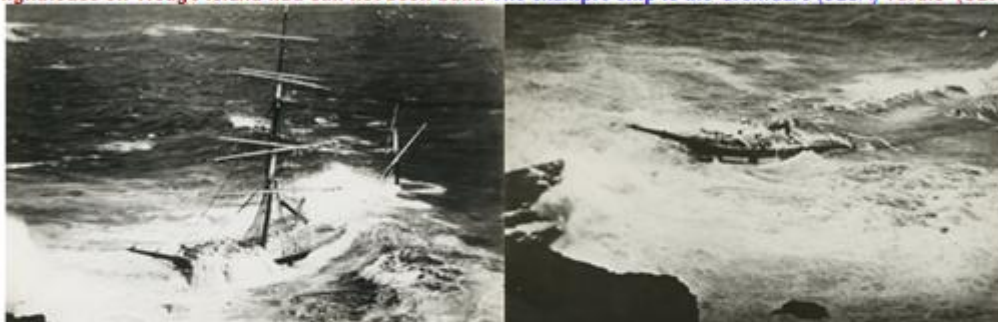
On the 1<sup>st</sup> February 1901, a Port Victoria Telegram stated that 26 ship wrecked sailors had arrived there that night, having been picked up by the barque *Elda* & brought ashore. They reported that the ship *Glen Park*, laden with wheat from Port Pirie, was wrecked off Wedge Island about 8 o'clock that morning. All the crew were saved.

The *Glen Park*, 1,790 tons under H Griffiths, master, sailed from Port Pirie on the 28<sup>th</sup> January bound for Guam, laden with 28,868 bags of wheat on account of the Farmer's Union. 24

The following illustration is the author's visual take on what happened on the fateful day:



The *Glen Park* was beating slowly southwards in southerly winds, hence having to continually tack through out the night of the 31<sup>st</sup> January 1901 & as early morning came there was a light mist obscuring visibility. At 5 am with no warning, the vessel struck Nor' Nor' East Rock near Wedge Island. The crew abandoned ship. Within a day, the *Glen Park* had slipped off the rocky ledge into 12 metres of water. The lighthouse on Wedge Island had still not been built. The example ship is the *Cromdale* (SLSA) *Tardis* (GBK)



George Lawrie was 8 years old when the *Glen Park* was wrecked off Wedge Island in 1901. He stated that "when the boat broke up, a lot of it floated (NW) to the Bolingbroke Shore, so on the week ends we'd go along the beach looking for what ever we could find. What we really wanted was a dinghy".

Then one Saturday, coming along round a bend in the shore line, George & his brother Gavin noticed a white object in the distance & getting a closer view, looked like a dead person. It was the figurehead of the *Glen Park*. After running 7 or 8 miles to get home, they thought their father might be cross with them but instead he hitched up the team of horses to the wagon to bring the figurehead home. 25



Family outing at Salt Creek (1912), the George Lawrie model ships evidence of his passion 25

They had to cut a track through the scrub for the horses & wagon and it was night time when they got "as near as we could". The next morning the figurehead was dragged over the sand hills & loaded into the wagon.

"I was very proud of that figurehead" George said. However, when ever George's father visited Tumby Bay for supplies, Caleb Provis pestered him about the figurehead, so in the end, George's "old man" gave in & told him that he could have it. It remained in Tumby Bay until Caleb died & then it was discovered that CP had left the figurehead to the Mortlock Family! 25



The figurehead of the *Glen Park* outside Mortlock's Coffin Bay Homestead (SLSA)

### WC Golley & Sons

The next owner of Wedge Island was the ex manager, William Charles Golley, who purchased it in 1915 & at that point in time, still had the involvement of his two sons William John & Andrew Golley. The Golley family also held the guano leases right into the 1920's. 6



### William John Golley

After an accidental catch up in 1937, William Golley was asked about the life he once had living on Wedge Island. At the time he was employed as a crew member on the *Warrawee*. William recalled that when he was 6 weeks old he was taken to Wedge Island, where the comforts were few & luxuries certainly unknown & he stayed there until he was 37 (1918). His brother Andrew, who was now living near Victor Harbour, was actually there more than 50 years.

One of the advantages of a life in such isolation is that strong bodies are built. William Golley was now 55 years old & he could lift heavy cargo as well as men many years younger. He had all his teeth & had only ever made 2 visits to the dentist. In those early days, William, his brother Andrew & their sister Maud did not know the taste of sweets.

William Golley said that a fine type of horse was bred on Wedge Island. But the sheep breeding was not at all profitable way back then due to the loss from "coast" disease. Fruit trees were a failure because the salt laden wind coming off the sea was burning the leaves but the grape vines flourished. Of course, fish were plentiful; all you had to do was put down a net & soon there was as many in it as you could eat.

Plus there were the goats. Mr Golley could not understand the objection to eating goat's meat. He said it tasted just like mutton. Many wandering visitors to the island were surprised when told at the end of their meal that it was not sheep they had partaken of, but goat. 26

**GOLLEY—LITTLELY.**—On the 23rd January, at St. Bede's Church, Semaphore, by Dean Young, William John, eldest son of Mr. William Golley, of North Shields, late of Wedge Island, to Nellie Gladys, only daughter of Captain J. Littlely, of Birkenhead, Port Adelaide.

*Express & Telegraph* 20th February 1918

**GOLLEY (nee Gladys Littleby).**—On the 1st April, at Victoria-road, Birkenhead, to Mr. and Mrs. Will Golley, of Wedge Island—a son (James William).

*Chronicle* 12th April 1919

Wedge became well known for breeding horses to be sold to the Indian Army Remount trade. The most common type of horse was a cross between a Clydesdale & a Pony and horses were still kept commercially on the island until the mid 1930's. There were many reminders still on the island - buggies, carts, blacksmith equipment (ex smithy) & horse yards. Even after the sheep finally replaced the horses, 20 or so farm horses were still being used right up until the fairly recent years; for rounding up the stock & for carting hay.

With the added bonus use of locally available guano, barley was also commercially grown on Wedge, with about a third of the island being arable. The grain was bagged & shipped for sale & the hay cut for stock feed. The barley was winnowed, bagged, transported on a horse drawn dray then hauled on large slides down the northern cliff face to the beach. The substantial shed that was built in the 1890's near the site of the more recent (1940) jetty, initially became a storage shed for grain & the hay; then later on doubled up as the Shearing Shed. 6



Photo is from

[realestate.com.au](http://realestate.com.au)



Mina Letitia Golley 66

**Auctions.**

THIS DAY (Friday), November 18, at 2 o'clock,  
JOHN BULL BAZAAR,  
**150 HORSES AND PONIES. 150**  
**BARKER BROTHERS**  
will sell by auction—  
For Mr. W. Golley, Wedge Island—  
11 SHAPELY PONIES, from 11 to 14.2, about  
3 years; direct from Wedge Island.  
For Messrs. T. Reed & Co., Clare—  
54 FIRST-CLASS HORSES and PONIES, broken  
and unbroken, including some tip-top  
Delivery Sorts.  
This consignment is in excellent condition, and  
right ages.

Advertiser 18th November 1904



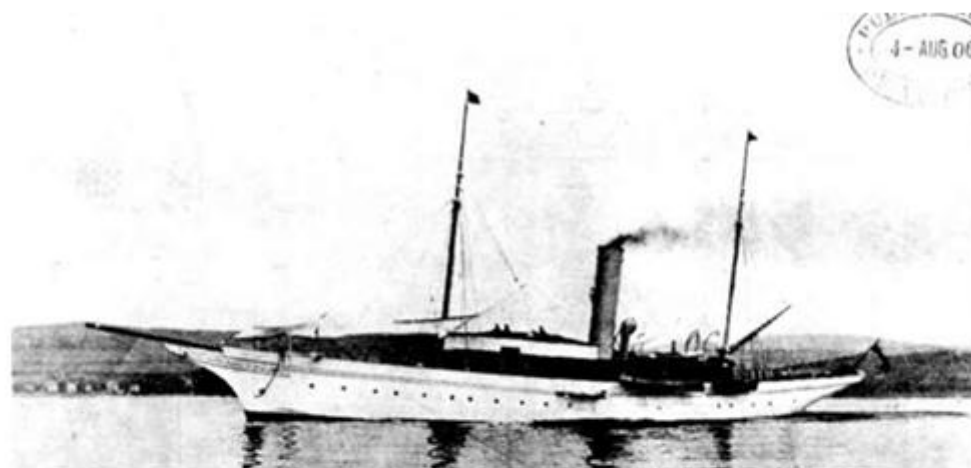
Andrew Golley 44

#### Maud Baillie (nee Golley)

From Herbert L Rymill:- "I have read with much interest the paragraphs you have published concerning the excellent wood carving done at Wedge Island by Miss Golley, now Mrs Stuart Baillie.

In 1907, I was one of "Squire" Dutton's guests on a cruise of the SS *Adele*. Our first port of call was Wedge Island. We went ashore to shoot quail. Sir George Le Hunte, the Governor, was one of the party.

After getting a good bag, we called into the homestead & it was then that Sir George saw the wonderful carvings done by Miss Golley with a pocket knife." NB - not quite correct - see page 23 27

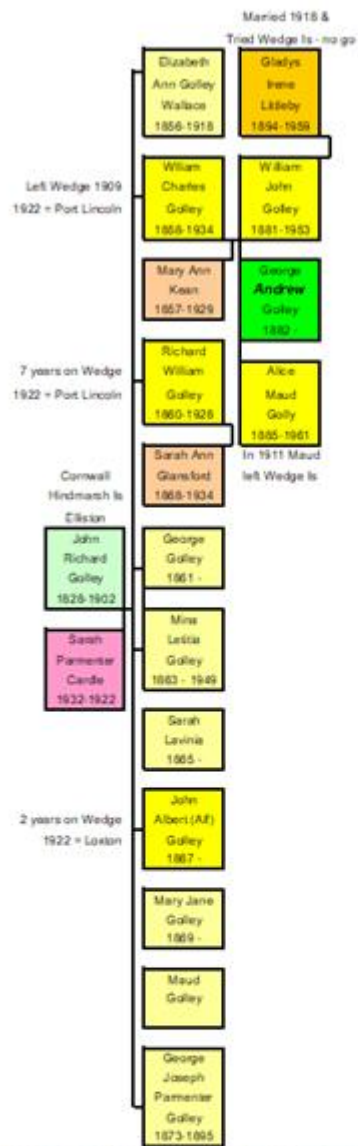


Mr Henry Dutton's (Kapunda SA) new steam yacht *Adele* 28

Maud Golley was self taught & worked under extremely difficult conditions. Despite having no formal training Maud designed & constructed her own furniture, using wooden pegs instead of nails & screws and carved extremely detailed & elaborate designs with basic tools. She used black-wood & other timbers, including wood washed ashore from shipwrecks.

Maud Golley exhibited two pieces of furniture in the ground breaking Australian Exhibition of Women's Work held in Melbourne in 1907. She also exhibited in the Adelaide iteration of the exhibition, at which she was awarded a special prize. She moved to the mainland in 1911, living at North Shields. She married in 1922 & her days as a wood carver ended. 29





Conservator Justin Gare spent a year restoring the Glass Cabinet (Art Gallery of South Australia)



Maud Baillie (nee Golley)  
(Photo Betty Lakin Collection)





Walter Howchin, a University of Adelaide Lecturer in Geology & Palaeontology examining Rocks on Wedge Island on the 17<sup>th</sup> January 1907. A likely spot for guano supplies (SLSA)



Horse Breaking – Wedge Island (SLSA)

TO-MORROW (Friday), January 3, at 2 o'clock.

JOHN BULL BAZAAR.

51 HORSES AND PONIES. 51

**BARKER BROTHERS**

will sell by auction—

For Mr. J. Watson, Port Victor—

4 SHAPELY LIGHT HORSES and PONIES, including Pair Chestnuts, quiet for lady.

For Messrs. W. C. Golley & Sons, Wedge Island—

6 EXTRA SHAPELY PONIES and Light Horses.

From McLaren Vale—

Horse, Rosa Buggy, and Harness.

From Yorke Peninsula—

1 TRUCK LIGHT HARNESS HORSES, in good condition.

For various owners—

30 Heavy and Light Horses, broken and un-

broken.

Express & Telegraph 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1908



A seal on Dangerous Reef

30



## BRANDS ACTS, Nos. 152 OF 1879, 267 OF 1882, AND 477 OF 1890.—MARCH QUARTER, 1909.

THE following statement of all Horse and Cattle and Sheep brands registered, cancelled, and transferred, and all distinctive brands and marks transferred under Brands Acts, Nos. 152 of 1879, 267 of 1882, and 477 of 1890, for the quarter ending March 31st, 1909, and the names and addresses of their respective owners, is published in the forms of Schedule L, for general information.

Stockowners whose names, addresses, or brands may be incorrectly stated are requested to notify the registrar, and in all such notifications the registered brand of the owner, and the number of the certificate of registration, must be given.

R. J. NEEDHAM, Registrar of Brands.

## HORSE AND CATTLE BRANDS REGISTERED.

Brands Registered	No. of Certificate.	FORMER BRANDS.		PROPRIETORS.		
		Horses.	Cattle.	Name.	Run where Brand is to be used.	Nearest Post Town to Run.
245	17516	—	—	Geo. Chas. Foulis ..	Macumba Station	Isle of Godnadatta
246	17543	—	—	C. L. Franklin ..	Northern Territory ..	Wyndham, W.A.
247	17665	—	—	W. C. Golbey & Sons	—	Wedge Island
248	17578	—	—	G. E. A. Key ..	—	Parina
249	17560	—	—	John Nicholas Pedler	Hundred Wallaroo ..	Kadina

According to Jack Casanova: "When the whalers departed, their try pots were often abandoned on site & later taken by settlers for use in horse & cattle troughs, storage bins etc. Some may have journeyed far inland, when, in hard times, sheep or cattle were boiled down for the pitiful value of their tallow or hides. No better or bigger boiler was to hand except the square 400 gallon tanks. The 2 pots on Wedge Island, perhaps near their original site, were used to water the famous ponies with the "Seven O" Brand & after horse breeding faded, hundreds of goats (that were destroying the island) before "coast disease" was understood, or tourist toured, became boiled pig food in the early 1950's. Island incomes were dearly earned."

Top photo - Victor Harbour (E F Chivers). Middle - Flour Cask Bay (KI). Lower - Kingscote 1969 2 & Right - Fishery Bay 1980 (from Untitled - Enviro Data)





Ketch Seafflower, Captain James Littlely (SLSA)



Seals on Dangerous Reef (SLSA)



Dangerous Reef (SLSA & Tony Zintz)

The population of South Australia was starting to mature. In January 1909, Captain James Littlely was accused by 3 men, technically employed under contract by him, to gather guano & of being abandoned by him, at, of all places, Dangerous Reef - a tough gig. The headlines read:

**LEFT ON DANGEROUS REEF**  
**Three Men & a Dog**  
**Living on shellfish**

31 Naturally a Court Case was well & truly in the wind (Appendix).

This text started with the sealers & 110 years later they were still getting a mention. In August 1918, the *Observer* noted that a "Mr S H Sheridan, of Glenelg, in a letter to the *Register* stated that in the last six months he had killed 1,439 seals on islands in the Spencer's Gulf. A controversy is now proceeding on the subject of preventing the slaughter of these innocent animals."

32



Andrew Golley

During the Christmas Holidays of 1924, Mr A G Rymill took "his handsome motor boat" on a voyage to Wedge Island & provided a lively description of that "lonely outpost" thus:

- "25<sup>th</sup> December (Christmas Day – Walked onto the wreck of the *Ethel* & found her to be an old British Ship, with London painted on her stern. Hull is still intact & we climbed up onto her rails to have a look inside her, but it was like looking into a grave & we did not stay long. Saw many tracks of penguins. Cliff scenery very fine & rugged.
- 26<sup>th</sup> December (Boxing Day – Fine weather; the wind veered from north to west & then around to the south. This is exactly the right condition for a trip to Wedge Island, which could be seen, distant 17.5 miles bearing west by north. Under way at 7.10 am & bore up to the Wedge....a good run across & brought up in the road stead on the north side of the island at 9.45 am, in 3 fathoms of water, on sand."

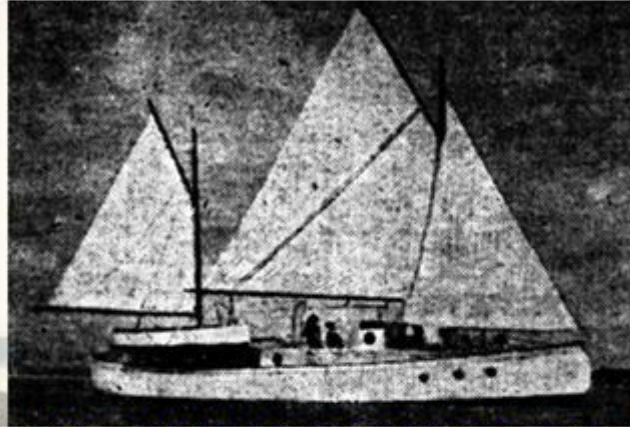
26



"Wedge Island is well worth a visit, both for its scenery, bird life, fishing & inhabitants, the latter including only one of the human species, the rest being made up of horses, pigs, goats & dogs. The human inhabitant is Andrew Golley, to whom the island belongs & who has led a **Crusoe like** existence on it for the greater part of his life, breeding horses & pigs and growing barley. When one sees the wonderful way in which Mr Golley supports himself, farms, fishes, builds boats & bakes bread, one cannot but admire his courage and ingenuity & feel that the mainland cannot afford to lose the services of such a valuable man."



**The Ethel (SLSA)**



**The Avocet – A G Rymill (Commodore SA Royal yacht Squadron)**

33

Wedge Island is about 3 miles long, rather tapering in shape, hence the name & stands nearly 700 ft above the sea at the highest point of the cliffs. Around it are some smaller islands & some dangerous reefs. Here they saw many varieties of birds – Quail, Curlew, Osprey, Gannet, Penguin, Arctic Skua, Molly-hawk, Redbill, Stormy Petrel & Pacific Gulls..... About noon they ran across to North Island, about 2 miles distant, where they caught a number of fine Whiting, some of which measured 23 inches "nose to tail".

33



**Wedge Island – view from the south (lighthouse end) end** (realeastete.com.au)

The "mate" went exploring on this own & "did" the island in regular American Tourist Fashion, but had time to admire the magnificent panorama from the top of the cliff to the south east. Kangaroo Island could clearly be seen stretching away to Cape Borda.....while to the west Thistle Island.....Cape Catastrophe.....Far beneath one's feet, the sea broke on granite rocks & round the two small cone-shaped islets known as the Haycocks, a popular resting place for the Seals & the Sea Lion

33

27

### The Ketch Ariel Missing

The *Register* on Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1928, announced that the Master of the streamer *Iron Chief*, had seen a spar standing out of the water near Althorpe Island which caused alarm, in view of the non arrival of the *Ariel*, a ketch due in Port Lincoln about last Wednesday. The tug *Conquerer* was dispatched on Saturday to make a thorough search of the coast from Royston Head to Cape Spencer – not a slightest trace of any wreckage was found, so Captain Bird was ordered to go to Wedge Island & make a search of the small islands.

He was hopeful, that if disaster had overtaken the overdue ketch, the crew might have been able to get away to Wedge Island.

"The missing ketch was the *Ariel* which is about 40 tons register & her owner is William Thomas Herbert Tapley and the agents Messrs W Tulloch & Co. She left Port Adelaide on the 23<sup>rd</sup> March bound for North Shields, near Port Lincoln with 800 bags of coke & about 10 tons of superphosphate & a cultivator for Thistle Island, of which the Tapley Family had a lease."



Captain T H Tapley 34



The Ketch Ariel (Michael Leech)



Mr J Wall 35

Those believed to have left Port Adelaide on the missing ketch were:-

- Captain T H Tapley – owner Port Adelaide
- Mr Duncan McPherson – seaman, Port Adelaide
- John Maloney – boy, Woodville
- Mr John Wall – Farmer, Kyancutta

Mr Wall, who was about 60 years of age, had until 3 months previous, lived with his son & stepson farming at Kyancutta. For the last 3 months he had been working on Thistle Island. 35

Captain Thomas Herbert Tapley was the second son of Mr Thomas Richard Tapley. He had for many years carried on all the boating needed for transportation of stock to & from Thistle Island. Mr T R Tapley, with several others, had Thistle island surveyed about 1880 & members of the family had lived there ever since. About 20 years ago, T R Tapley & Sons became the sole lessees. 34

On the 5<sup>th</sup> April 1928, a life buoy was found washed up at Kangaroo Reef (Boston Island) & there was wreckage at Thistle Island. On the 14<sup>th</sup> April, a Mr Norris picked up some fittings comprising hatches, scuttle, skylight & a case of petrol on a beach South of Cape Donnington. A fisherman brought in a case of Lubricating Oil addressed to "W A Dorward of North Shields". This was part of the cargo from the missing ketch. 36



SL SA



## A DELIGHTFUL OUTING FOR THIS AFTERNOON.

IF YOU CONTEMPLATE THE PURCHASE OF A SITE IN THE  
HILLS FOR A SUMMER HOME OR WEEK-END COTTAGE, YOU  
WILL BE WELL ADVISED TO MAKE A THOROUGH INSPECTION  
OF THE MODEL MOUNTAIN SUBDIVISION OF

### "SUNNYSRING GLEN" . . . . . BRIDGEWATER.

Illustrated Circulars, containing plans, photos and full details as to Railway Service, Free  
Fences, and the unlimited future possibilities of our Hills, may be obtained locally at the Post-  
Office, at Mr. A. H. Ridd's Corner Store, by the Station, and at Mr. H. R. Littlely's, the But-  
cher's, or on application at the Offices of the Auctioneers.

### WILKINSON, SANDO & WYLES, LIMITED.

Advertisement of an auction in 1926 – under directions of T C Wollaston 40

#### H R Littlely leases Wedge Island 1929-1932

After tending to the wants of Wedge Island alone since 1918, Andrew Golley needed a new type of business strategy & he placed the working farm out for rent. Mr H R Littlely expressed an interest in trying the island lifestyle & with the "valuable grazing property" paperwork successfully negotiated, the Aldgate local butcher sold his property to Mr P G Theodore. 37 In late February 1929, on the eve of their departure for Wedge Island, the local Aldgate Community gave Mr & Mrs Hilton Richard Littlely & Son a farewell presentation gathering. 38



Wedge Island Roads (ABC)

So Mr & Mrs Littlely & son Mervyn took over farming on Wedge Island & their daughter Vera & son in law (Hartley R Moulds) decided to go over & reside with them. Mr Moulds estimated that Wedge Island is about 3,000 acres in size, 2,000 of which can be farmed & the remaining 1,000 acres is adjacent to the lighthouse (*established 1911*), which is all Government property.

For years horses have been bred on the island as re-mounts for the military in India & though "little cultivating had been done on Wedge island (*recently*), the new arrivals will grow barley & perhaps wheat. The average rainfall exceeds 20 inches."

Mr Moulds noted that there were thousands of goats on the island, which had been allowed to run wild & that Angora Goats would probably need to be introduced to improve the quality of the breed. Things clearly had been let go. There were also hundreds of pigs running wild & the turkeys, introduced years ago were plentiful but wild pigs were known to destroy young turkeys & their eggs. They were looking forward to settling into their island home, had a wireless set to "to keep them in touch with civilization" & noted, that at that time, the only vessel coming to Wedge was the "light-boat", which came to tend the light-house every three months. 39



(SLSA)



(S A White)



Photograph of the four masted barque *Viking* taken in 1931 by Captain W F Lee, master of the Adelaide Steamship Company motor ship *Minnipa*, whilst off Wedge Island on the West Coast. The *Viking*, wheat laden, is racing the four masted barque *Hergozin Cecillie* to Europe 41





## Life in the fast lane

The Littlelys leased Wedge Island from Andrew Golley for 3.5 years & were horse & pig raising there. Apparently, they decided to leave this isolated spot because the 120 mile mode of sea transportation to Port Adelaide was too expensive. Furthermore, they felt like they did not even have a decent harbour for their ketch. When a raging storm blew up, they had to put their ketch out to sea & stay in it, picking up what ever shelter they could find.

42



Wild Goats on Wedge Island (SLSA)

Wedge Island Blacksmith's Shop (SLSA)

Andrew Golley loved the isolation, but the times were changing, even for an isolated spot like Wedge Island.

In May 1932 a representative from *The Mail* Newspaper wrote that "it was decided during the cruise on the *Gertrude*, that with the prevailing winds, it would be dangerous to anchor that night off Kangaroo Island, so Captain Sheridan decided to make for Wedge Island, about 4 hours steam. We anchored there at 10 pm in some smooth water."

In the morning Captain Sheridan & the Reporter went ashore & they got to meet "an interesting person" – Mr Andrew Golley. As they were walking across the plain towards his home they saw him galloping towards them on a staunch brown mare. As he dismounted they noticed that he was bare footed. Smiling at his visitors, Andrew Golley explained that "I have only ever worn boots only a few times in my life. I always walk about the place like this & I should say that by now, my feet are as tough as..."



Left -The *Gertrude* (Capt Sheridan), *Maris Stella* & *Magic* meet at the South Neptunes. Right - Andrew Golley, the hermit of Wedge Island is nearest the camera in this group

43

Andrew Golley was then about 40 years of age & he told them that he had lived on the island for most of his life. The reporter asked him about ever feeling bored or lonely. Andrew commented that: "I've got too much work to do to be lonely. I have 1,000 goats, 100 horses, 100 pigs & 200 head of poultry to keep me occupied. Then there is the ploughing to be done, crops to be reaped & a 100 other jobs to attend to. I work from dawn to dark & go to bed early". Clearly the solution to cure "coastal disease" must have still been in the pipeline because the reporter noted that Mr Golley was still breeding goats on Wedge, because the sheep do not respond well in limestone rich environments. <sup>43</sup>

Around the same time as this cruise, the *News* chimed in with a bit of history regarding "SA's Robinson Crusoe". "Mr Golley has not always lived alone on the island. His father who is more than 80 years of age; settled there half a century ago & reared his family there. Until a short time ago, another family, the Littlely's famed here also, but left for another part of the state. Mr Golley Senior & other members of his family are all living in other parts of the state now" <sup>44</sup>



# **MAROONED ON LONELY ISLAND**

## **Woodville Man Rescued By Lighthouse Ship**

### **SMOKED TEA LEAVES**

<sup>46</sup>

In 1934, Andrew Golley would have quite within his rights to ask – how much time does it take to purchase a horse? A Mr G M Neilson went ashore from a fishing cutter at Wedge Island (to buy horses) expecting to be picked up within a day or two & ended up staying on the isolated island for a month. He did not take a razor with him, he had no change of clothes & sadly, for a smoker, only a limited quantity of tobacco.

As day after day passed without any sign of a rescue craft; he became restless & getting desperate, he would pace along the tall cliffs down the southern end, gazing out to sea with hope ebbing as the days mounted. Once, he saw a ship far out, so he lit a fire on the beach to attract attention but the ship sailed on. As the strain grew on Mr Neilson so did the experiences:

- "I would sit in the doorway of Andrew Golley's Homestead (Hermit owner of Wedge Island)....an effort to forget....But my eyes would wander back to the sea & remain there for hours"
- His face became matted with a black beard, his hair grew long & his clothes in tatters
- The tobacco ran out & to allay the "craving for nicotine", he tried tea leaves which rendered him sick & he then went without a smoke for more than 2 weeks.
- During his stay on Wedge, he learnt to live on tender goat's meat

<sup>45</sup>



**Unloading a horse at Wedge Island (SLSA)**

On the 21<sup>st</sup> February he was finally rescued by lighthouse steamer *Cape York*. Mr Neilson was taking no chances & was waiting on the beach when the motor boat came ashore with some gas cylinders. It was assumed that Andrew Golley was happy to have some company for he fed & housed him during his lengthy stay <sup>46</sup>

<sup>46</sup>



### Jennifer's Log 1935

The log of the *Jennifer* of 1935 (written by Alf Scammell) gives a further glimpse into the world of Andrew Golley, still living out there on the isolated off-shore Wedge Island. The party of men on board were "Doc" Powell, Les Sawyer, Alf Scammell & Charlie Green; who regularly chartered the 48 foot cutter *Jennifer* skippered by Jack Green for their holiday.

- Dangerous Reef was visited on the 4<sup>th</sup> February 1935 and Mr Scammell spoke with enthusiasm about the seals & he expressed the hope that, due to reports that the seals were being shot by vandals (sealers), a law should be created to protect them.
- After a brief visit to Port Lincoln, the *Jennifer* arrived at Thistle Is. where 2 families fam.



**L Jennifer skipper poses with a dangerous Reef Seal R The Jennifer party eating oysters on deck 1938 47**

- The cutter then sailed to Wedge Island. "Early on, after tea, Les Charlie & I went ashore on Wedge to meet Mr Golley, now known by many as South Australia's Robinson Crusoe" Mr Scammell wrote.
- He lived alone on Wedge & had about 100 mares, 800 goats, some turkeys & pigs and a few fowl. In the log there was a reference to "the man's faithful dog" plus Andrew Golly outlined the fact that he was paid 15 pound per annum to tend the island's lighthouse.



**The Jennifer anchored off Wedge Island 47**



**The cliff-tops of Wedge Island (SLSA)**



Showing the northern tip & West Bay on Wedge Island (realestate.com)

Wedge Island

6

#### Mortlock's *Martindale* Visit January 1936

After towing Lewis Tapley & his Cutter to Thistle Island, the line was dropped leaving Mr Tapley astern & the *Martindale* headed smartly for Wedge Island, where Andrew Golley (still) lived alone. Mr Mortlock & some members of the party went ashore & Mr Golley later came back with them and they all had a cosy chat.

He told the group that he only gets his mail once every 4 months, when the steamer *Cape York* does the round of inspecting all the lighthouses. Wedge Island was a noted place for quail but Mr Golley told the interested listeners that he had never seen them as so scarce as there were in the last year.

"When Mr Rymill was here a few years ago", he said, "it was a wonderful sight to see 200 to 300 quail in front of you, like a cloud". Mr Golley reckons there are 400 to 500 goats & more than a hundred horses; light & medium draughts & some heavy ponies still on Wedge". 48



Left - The *Martindale* Right - Mr A G Rymill at the wheel of the *Avocet* for the 1916 trip to Wedge (SLSA)



ABC

34





WW2 at Mindil Beach – Darwin (GBK)

## Fire & Brimstone

In March 1937, the Gawler *Bunyip* broke the news that two locals named Hubert & Gwen Winkel had accepted a job managing Wedge Island for a Mr Don Cooper, who had many diversified interests & was described as a "pioneering & enterprising person". It also added that 300 people had applied for the chance to experience a solitary life even though no attempt was made by Cooper to paint the job as "glamorous".

It noted that the island had been held by the Golley Family for many years; the main industry (back then) being horse breeding. Within the last year the island had changed hands. A contract was signed ensuring fishing cutters were to call monthly delivering supplies & at times, to take the drafted horses off to be sold. There was no jetty on Wedge Island at this point in time & the *Bunyip* recalled the story of "a race being built out into the sea, the animals driven down it into the water & they swim out (shepherded) to the ketch where the horses are then boarded by slings". Like any concerned father, Mr Winkel Senior took the journey over, for support as the new manager prepared to take over & accepted that (for him), the trip was a "novel holiday". 49

## Life on Wedge (1937)

Mr E F Winkel Snr. told a *Bunyip* Reporter, that his son Hubert had quickly got a taste of the rough conditions that the local Wedge Islanders, had historically, always had to endure. Hubert, with his assistant Les Rau left for Wedge Island on the 9<sup>th</sup> February on the steamer *Cape York*. The sea was initially too rough for landing so they remained on board the steamer whilst it beat up & down the gulf tending to a number of the other isolated lighthouses.

When the steamer was finally able to approach Wedge, the crew dumped all the landing goods on the shore & left the pair of Winkel & Rau "monarchs of all they surveyed". The pair of them had to get all the goods & chattels up the beach (quickly) out of the reach of the next high tide. This was no mean feat, because the cargo included 150 heavy gum posts, fencing wire, loads of sundry farming items, household goods & general luggage.

Working very hard & wringing with perspiration late into the day, Hubert caught a chill & was so bad that for a time he could not move – there was no GP & Hubert wondered what was next. 50



The homestead on Wedge Island and the dry out front.

(SLSA)

By the time his wife & father arrived in the cutter *Endeavour* (master Frank Lockwood) he was still recovering & "promised soon to be his usual self". The *Endeavour* was a strongly built cutter but despite signing up for regular trips to Wedge, Lockwood would not land or stay at the island unless the wind was favourable.

There is an almost continuous ocean swell, the island is one of the windiest places known, the shore is constantly awash & there are very few places where it is possible for a boat to land. The surroundings are full of reefs & where there are no reefs, the cliffs rise up so steeply that no one could even get up them. In some places the cliffs rise hundreds of feet. 50

Although there is this huge perpendicular height, one of the sights was to see the goats, of which there was about a 1,000 on the island, slowly but surely climbing their way up all the little but dangerous tracks.

When Gwen Winkel & the children arrived, there was a heavy swell but no storm. The landing boat tossed up & down but at last they were successful got ashore. The luggage etc, had to be lifted up by crane onto the level ground above & then loaded onto a dray, to be conveyed up to their new place of residence. All the passengers walked as "Dolan", the horse had quite enough to do pulling the load through the loose sand. At the house, after being greeted by "Peter" the dog; Hubert Winkel & Les Rau described the day as having "just a nice wind". 50



Wedge Island front beach – homestead in the foreground. Taken from the *Cape Adieu* 1979 (Michael Leech)

The island's owner Don Cooper had given instructions for his employees to kill & skin about 25 goats a week. Mr Rau had apparently become quite an expert at the game of shooting wild goats, as they now had become very gun shy & it was making it harder for the 3 sheep dogs to round the herd up. After Mr Winkel Snr. had spent three days observing all the happenings on the island, the *Endeavour* called back at Wedge Island, having on board a cow for domestic use by its inhabitants. Naturally, the beast had to swim to the shore. Mr Winkel went on board & sailed for home via Cape Borda on Kangaroo Island. 50

20th October 1937 - Cutter Albatross lost at Wedge Island

#### How to approach Wedge Island

The cutter carrying Mr Frank Cork dropped anchor off Wedge Island in mid January 1938. He noted that "from the rolling deck, we watched the line of curling surf, where the water was breaking on a submerged reef that forms a barrier to the calmer water inside, making entrance with large craft impossible. In the reef's entire length, there is only one 10 foot opening. Later in the ship's small boat we nosed in towards that narrow opening; the engine slowed its beat as we went through, then it pulsed again into noisy life & we hurried on".

"It is possible, with a calm sea & a high tide running to come in over the reef but this is a dangerous business" recalled Frank Cork & he then noted the following facts:

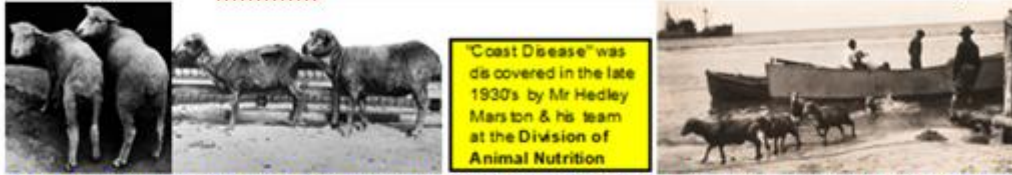
- Sometimes, when the weather conditions are bad, a trip can take 2 weeks or more. The cutter must remain weatherbound in a sheltered bay until the wind abates sufficiently
- At this time sheep (Cross-bred Leicesters 6) & horses were being tended to
- There was barley to be sown on the highland; you bake your own bread & grow veggies
- There are hundred of goats roaming the cliffs; some years ago there were more than 2,000 of every size & colour – gradually being culled back to 500....there is a steady demand for their hides & they are good eating....more wary now....refuge on the face of the cliff that towers 680 feet above the sea on the south side of the island. 51
- The hides sold for 3/- each & funded the construction of a considerable amount of fencing 6



### The Don Cooper Influence

Don Cooper, who was only 28 years old, & had only been farming on Wedge for only 3 years when he brought over his first consignment of sheep from his property for sale at the Gepps Cross Abbatoirs. It was August 1939 & he was making a success of the venture. He said: "We have a 20" rainfall & feed grows in abundance. The property is watered by wells & if I were to stock up to capacity, the country would carry 3,000 sheep".

"When I went over there, 'coasty disease' & ataxia were prevalent in the (potential) flocks. This was because the Copper Treatment for Ataxia & the Cobalt Treatment for Coasty Disease was not then widely practised. *(There was a simple reason – editor)* However, these are now being recognised as the proper methods of treatment" 52 The Wedge Island flock were the first sold at the Gepps Cross Abbatoirs that had been successfully treated with this new technology 6



Cobalt deficient plus Sheep suffering Coast Disease (CSIRO). Sinclair, Daw & Golley would be thrilled (SLSA)

"I started off by giving the sheep & lambs cobalt & found that they did well. I now gave the sheep an equal dose of cobalt & 45 milligrams of Sulphate of Copper every month. Last year, when I found any lambs that did not respond well to the treatment, I gave them 20 times as much as ordinarily. They immediately showed the benefit of the extra dose & were soon back on the usual treatment.

We find that the Wimmera Rye Grass does well over there, but up to the present, the medics (or clovers), except burr clover, have not successfully grown. One great advantage we have over the pastoralists on the mainland is that we are practically free of all pests" said Mr Cooper. 52



Les Rau at Wedge Island

(SLSA)

Shipping horses from Wedge.

By a Correspondent.

53

"Before the closing of the Indian Market, Wedge Island was famed for its army remounts. Today (1940) the animals bred there are of a heavier type – strong, hardy horses, entirely suited to the conditions of the country districts in this state. The shipping of these animals from the island to the mainland is a colourful occupation & forms a highlight in the lonely lives of the men who live there.

On one occasion, I was to sail over to load a cargo of 26 horses onto a small ketch & the prospect gave me no anticipatory thrill. The weather looked threatening & the horses, yarded near the beach were wet with the thin rain that fell incessantly. The sea was leaden, the sky was grey & ominous & there was no horizon. Two hundred yards out, the anchored ketch seemed suspended in a vast void."

"We were already wet when we led the 1<sup>st</sup> horse onto the beach & attempted to coax it through the line of surf that breaks onto the beach. No army mule has ever been so stubborn. It kicked & plunged into the shallows & by the time we had it in the comparative ease of deep water, our shins were minus patches of skin & our toes were bruised & sore. Finally, with my companion holding the horse's head clear of the water, I pulled the dinghy slowly along the rope that stretched out through the mist to the ketch (page 32). When we came alongside, a sling was lowered, passed around the frightened animal (page 15) & it was hauled aloft & lowered into the hold."



The mosquito fleet ketch *Stormbird* (SLSA)

"Disgruntled, with the cold wind biting at our bones, we rowed back to the beach & took in hand an unruly mare. She gave us more trouble than all the others together – *she* bucked & *she* plunged, even in *the* deep water & as a finale, crashed from the sling into the dinghy, half swamping it before she kicked her way out. We bailed frantically & only by frenzied efforts kept the boat afloat."



Don Cooper on Wedge Island (SLSA)

"In retrospect, some of the incidents *were* anything but funny at the time, *now* seem rather amusing. One of the horses broke away & showed a surprising turn of speed along the beach, with me hanging *on* grimly to the end of the long rope halter. As our speed increased, my strides lengthened & my feet hit the sand with a most paralysing force. I stood the strain as long as possible, but eventually my foot hit some object & I made a peculiar landing on my chin & my chest.

The speed carried my feet up over my head & somersaulted me into a ludicrous sitting position. From the tracks I left, one would think that a single furrow plough had been dragged *many* yards along the beach & it took me quite a while to get the sand from my eyes & mouth. By then, the horse had galloped out of sight & it took us almost 2 hours to yard it.

By dark, all the horses were in the hold, comfortable enough (?) but we were bruised & sore and shivering with the cold. To make matters worse, the wind had swung to another quarter, whipping the sea *into very* angry waves & we decided to stay aboard that night, ready to leave *the anchorage at Wedge Island* at any moment."

53



### Ominous signs

Something was in the wind that the general population of South Australia was unaware about. In 1940, a jetty was constructed by the RAAF on the very isolated Wedge Island 54  
On the 7<sup>th</sup> December 1940, the 11,000 ton British freighter *Hertford* was steaming 25 miles off South Neptune Island, when a German Mine blew her starboard side open. The ship rolled violently first to port then starboard before struggling upright again. The sea rushed into the 50 x 26 foot gash. The mine had struck the ship abaft of the bulk-head of #1 & #2 55



*Hertford* (State Library of NSW)



The distressed freighter *Hertford* (SLSA) R Aerial view *Hertford* showing damaged Starboard (Aust. War Memorial)  
The mine which blasted the *Hertford* was one in a field laid by the German raider *Pinguin*. This was the 4<sup>th</sup> mine "casualty" off the Australian Coast in a month. After she was hit the *Hertford* refused to sink & while 3 of her life boats landed safely at South Neptune, Captain J C Tuckett & his boat crew monitored the boat & reboarded her at daylight. The *Hertford* reached Port Lincoln on the 9<sup>th</sup> December with her bow almost awash & her stern pointing skyward. 55



Wedge Island – no jetty (SLSA)

Wedge Island Jetty post 1940 (ABC)

On the 14<sup>th</sup> June 1941, a Robe fisherman was making his way home from setting his crayfish pots when about 4 miles NW of Robe, he saw an unusual floating object – circling it to confirm it was a mine, Roy McInnes sailed to Robe to inform the authorities. Constable Huxley organised a flotilla of fishing boats to return to the site & deal with it.

On reaching the mine, the fishermen lassooed it from a range of about 4 feet & then it was towed at the end of 300 yards of line to Long Beach, where it was moored to trees awaiting the arrival of the bomb squad. The following day it was determined that it was a German Naval Mine, in full working order.

A few days after this first mine was discovered, another was washed up on Wedge Island. A week later another was found 27 miles from Kingston. Then tragedy struck. On the 14<sup>th</sup> July 1941, while examining a mine at Beachport, two naval ratings were killed. They were Able Seaman Todd (SA) & Able Seaman Dunswan (NSW).<sup>56</sup> World War Two had come to South Australia.



Left = The mine sighted near Robe 4<sup>th</sup> June 1941 Top = photos taken on the 28<sup>th</sup> & 29<sup>th</sup> July of another German Mine discovered near Robe – explosives being burnt safely after removal & Below = Mr Dawson with the Naval Bomb Squad – Messrs Hussey, Wilson & Ellis

56



#### The Wedge Island Farm has to be run

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1940, Donald Cooper married Laurel Dalziel of Winkie in the Berri Methodist Church.<sup>57</sup> Despite the war & extra activity going on at Wedge Island, it was Cooper's chance to keep up appearances. Despite a jetty being built on his island, he was in Port Lincoln in January 1941 talking about his farm. He stated that it had been an ideal season on the Wedge over the last year. There was an abundance of feed & the sheep were in splendid condition. Wedge Island Farm was working 2,300 acres & it was also carrying 2,000 sheep.

There was feed for more sheep but Donald Cooper was against stocking to full capacity. As noted previously, before the discovery of the cause of "Coast Disease", sheep could not thrive & survive on the island, but since Copper & Cobalt had been used, the flock was doing well. Mr Cooper said that Quail, which are usually numerous, were scarce on the Wedge that year.<sup>58</sup>

Maybe, it was Donald Cooper's way of dampening the hopes of South Australia's Wealthy Elite from forming any ideas of cruising in the gulf – hunting, shooting (quail) & fishing & being nosey.

40





General Farming Scene on Wedge Island



Don Cooper on Wedge (SLSA)

The activities of the German's in sinking local Allied Shipping was a real cause for concern & the entry into the war of Japan in 1941 heightened the tensions. According to Mr Leo Carr "Whyalla was an Amament Base, where they were making bombs – a very important part of the war effort" & it really needed some protection. The strategic location of Wedge Island between Thistle Island & Kangaroo Island; made the construction of a Radar Base there ideal for scanning all shipping movements in the gulf.

The Radar Station on Wedge Island was approved in May of 1942 & the cost of installing the system & accommodation for about 43 personnel was estimated to be around \$30,000. 59



Harold Lightburn & Don Cooper



Laura Cooper



Don Cooper with Les & Edna Rau (SLSA)



Ida, Laura & Marjorie Cooper on Wedge



Additions to the old homestead on Wedge

(SLSA)



## Wedge Island War Mission

The radar station on Wedge Island was to be located at the summit end of the island next to the lighthouse. After the construction phase was over, the "Seven Radar" facility contained:

- The Radar Control Tower (called Doover) – installation of the "system"
- Storeroom & Administration
- Sleeping, Mess, Ablutions & Latrine Areas
- A jetty (constructed previously) & road improvements

From the outside, the buildings & sheds that were in reality, a Top Level War Station were disguised to resemble a farm settlement. The Doover was a steel framed building, supplied by the NSW Railways & placed under a concrete shell. It looked convincingly like a rock except for the giant revolving square aerial which protruded skywards.

59



1944 sketch - the Cape Jervis Radar Station (Max Ragless). It was functioning at the same time as Wedge. It was disguised as a ruined building to Camouflage the facility (Aust. War Memorial)

## #7 RAAF Radar Station

Seven Radar Wedge Island was a band of RAAF men, who played an important (top secret) role in protecting the South Australian coastline during a critical time in Australia's war effort. Two people who served in the unit were:

- Leo Carr, of Cummins, who served on Wedge Island from May – November 1943. He said "our role was to cover the area, using radar to monitor all the shipping activity or aircraft". He remembered the Navy ordering the shutdown of the lighthouse on several occasions but was not told the reasons for the blackouts.

He said that much of the work was top secret & even on route to Wedge Island (after training) he was not told of his mission until he arrived in Port Lincoln on the *Minnipa*.



Wedge Island is located in a strategic spot



Minnipa

(SLSA)

42



"It was the very early days of radar at that time & the "Wedge" was one of the first radar stations in the Southern Hemisphere" recalled Leo Carr.

Morrie Fenton, another Wedge Island RAAF Serviceman, remembered arriving in Boston Bay after a rough trip in the *Minnipa*. He said that all the "Air Force Boys" stayed at the Great Northern Hotel. The news was soon around Port Lincoln Town that a large group of RAAF personnel were staying at Gynell's Great Northern Pub. They all stayed in one dormitory & played some billiards while they waited for their boat to take them to Wedge. A few beers in the front bar may have loosened a few tongues....but "we" were not there, to know if secrets fell.



**Top** – The cutter *Tempest* at Wedge Island Jetty, c 1944 - bringing some Supplies from Port Lincoln – M Fenton photo (Australian War memorial)



**Right** – Fishing Cutter *Florence* at Port Lincoln 1976 (Gifford Chapman)

The men were transported to the island by Ray Welfare's Cutter *Florence* & Charlie Peterson's *Tempest*. It was a trip that became almost legendary among the Radar Men of World War 2. The 50<sup>th</sup> Reunion Paperwork suggests that not one of the 100 RAAF men posted to this isolated island, could boast at having made the voyage from Port Lincoln to the Wedge, without being sea sick.

59



**Men's Sleeping Hut at #7 Wedge Island RAAF Radar Station c 1940 (M Fenton)** (Aust. War Memorial)

Mr Carr was a 'sparky' at the base & also worked as a telephonist in Morse code. There were 4 telephonists on the island, who worked alternating shifts to keep the station operational 24 hours a day. They had about a 150 to 200 mile range depending on the weather. In down time a lot of the men used to kick a footy around, play cricket & also to do a spot of fishing.

59

The goats were almost eradicated during this time because the RAAF Personal used them as target practice & the last of the goats were removed in 1976.

6

43

Given its isolated location, the Wedge Island Station actually maintained two guard posts, each equipped with Bren Guns. Problems were experienced with an inadequate water supply, radio communications with Adelaide & getting the timely supply of spare parts for the radar set. In January 1944, the Wedge Island Station had its establishment reduced to 31 personnel & the #7 Radar Station was finally disbanded on the 15<sup>th</sup> September 1944.

During the war years Don Cooper's then hard working manager, Les Rau enlisted for service & Don was left to run the place single handed. It took him 3 months to blade shear the sheep. In those days the cutter *Stormbird*, master Arnold Mittner (Page 38) called for the Wedge Island Sheep & Wool Clip & it was a sight to see 15 or so lambs packed in a dinghy sitting on their tails. The horses swum to the boat & were winched aboard



Mr Dick Mann, part of the personnel #7 RAAF Radar Station on Wedge Is. Taken by M Fenton C 1944 (Australian War Memorial)



Pilot Glen Sturges of Port Lincoln Flying Club explores a Machine Gun Bunker's escape hole at the Wedge Radar Site Lightened by Steve Reynolds 61



Pilot Officer Measday, Commander of #7 RAAF Radar Station on Wedge Is. & taken by M Fenton outside the offices C 1944 (Australian War Memorial)

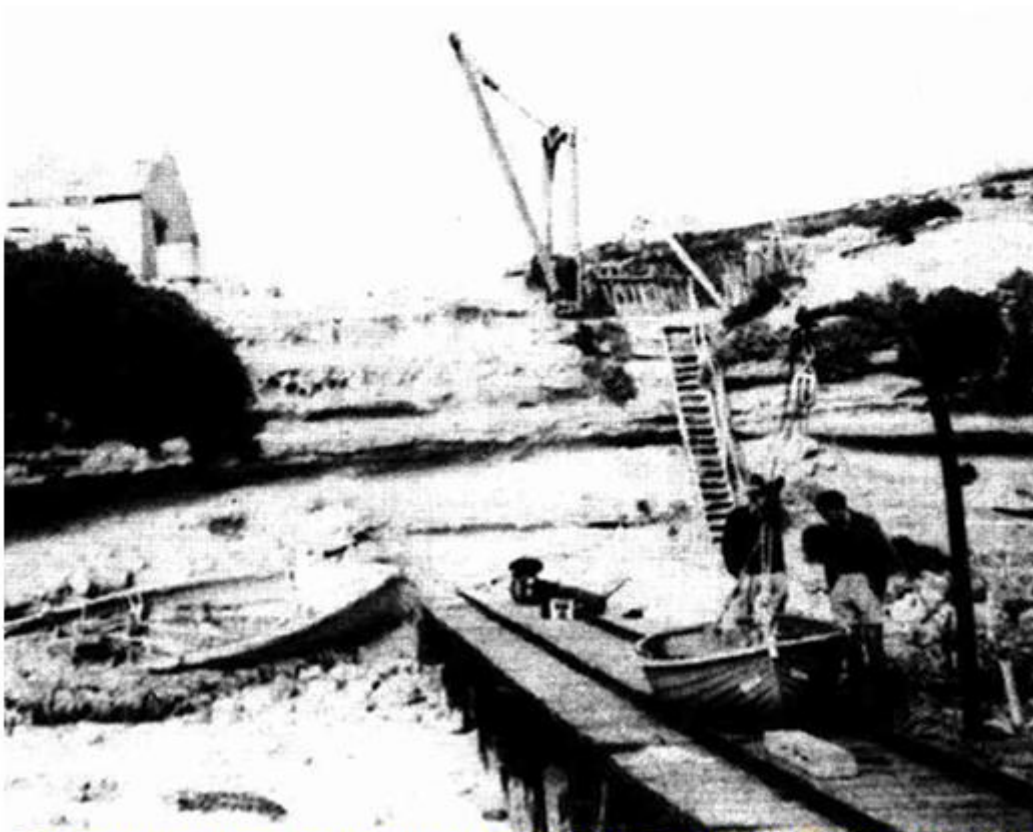


Wedge Island Jetty - 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2002 (sa/SA/Wedge Island)





Jetty, Shearing Shed, Main Beach & Wedge Island Homestead (Centre) (realestate.com.au)



Photograph of the Wedge Island Jetty, Winch & Grain-Hay Store cum Shearing Shed up on the cliff. The RAAF Powerboat (on the left) was destroyed during a violent storm in 1945 after the station was actually officially closed & only a few men were left on Wedge Island manning the radar station

59



#7 Radar Group on Wedge monitored sea & air traffic on SA Coasts from March 1933 (Lightened by SR) 59

There are few reminders of the war years remaining on Wedge Island today & the weather has taken its toll on what few remains are left of the original buildings. The Doover was removed at the end of the war but visitors to the island are able to observe the concrete foundations & stairs from those old buildings. At the very tip of the island, near the lighthouse, a machine gun bunker can be found, complete with an escape tunnel.

61



Part of Wedge Island viewed from the sea – 1907

(SLSA)



ABC





## Rocky Mountain Way

Wedge Island is a small isolated outcrop of rock strategically placed in the middle of Spencer's Gulf. It was predicted by a local professional fisherman & acting on his hints, it has been clearly demonstrated to this author that it abounds in a myriad of historical tales. In 1945, the war was over & it was time to "just move on" but there are still a couple of stories left in the bag to help close out this text.

### A yarn from Les Thomas

Matthew Flinders was born on the 16<sup>th</sup> of March 1774, in the market town of Donnington, Lincolnshire. In 1789 (aged 14-15) he felt ready to enter the Royal Navy and served under Admiral Pasley, Captain Bligh (*Providence*) & saw action at the Battle of Brest in April 1794. Late in his life he informed the editor of the Naval Chronicle that he had been "induced to go to sea against the wishes of his family from reading *Robinson Crusoe*." 63

In the November of 1943, Les Thomas (aged 14) joined the ketch *Lurline*, owned & skippered by his great unde, Alf (Buggsy) Littley. Alf Littley was then 73 years old & with eager young Les "passing down" the bags of grain, Alf would lump & load the ketch by himself. Captain Littley was unable to read or write & Les Thomas would often read the newspapers to him. 62



Left Les Thomas 62 Right The ketch *Hawthorn* – 67' long, width 19', draught 7' - 43 tons (R Parsons)

In 1945, Les Thomas switched to the *Hawthorn*, which still carried top sails. It was his job to furl them, a task which meant working with both hands whilst hanging on grimly by the feet. The old sailor's motto of "when aloft, one hand for the ship & the other for yourself" did not apply to the *Hawthorn*. Whilst aboard the *Hawthorn*, Les Thomas regularly visited Thistle & Wedge Islands to load sheep or horses.

The sheep were manhandled into the workboat, rowed out to the anchored ketch & lifted aboard with "snotters" around their necks. Les Thomas said that this method of transfer did not hurt the animals & caused less bruising than other systems of loading. 62

As noted previously, horses were swum out to the vessel, where a bridle would be passed under them to facilitate lifting them from the water into the hold. Delivering horses to the island required the animals to be lifted out from the hold, swung outwards & lowered over the sea.

When the horse was just above the surface, the bridle release pin would be knocked out, then dropping the horse into the water. 62



Left = Ida, Don & Dora Cooper on Wedge Right = Ida Cooper - Kunkar Limestone riddled ground (SLSA)

Invariably, the horse would swim once around the ketch before heading into shore. Les Thomas reckoned "they all did it & I have no idea why". The worst job on these occasions fell to the island owner, who had to go down into the hold with the horses, then try & catch each agitated animal & without getting kicked by it, or any of the others, fit the bridle on selected horse. 62  
In 1952, the island was purchased by Norm Crowden & though he continued to run sheep, he also developed the 2 homesteads into tourist accommodation, each capable of accommodating six people. In 1987, Wedge Island was purchased by the Venture Corporation & 3 holiday home subdivisions (with a total of 114 allotments) were negotiated with the State Government. 6



(Michael Leech)

#### The wreck of the *Saori* (1975)

On the 1<sup>st</sup> June 1975, Owner/Skipper John Steele, his brother Stuart Steele, Graham Johnson & passenger Thomas Moffat, set out aboard the *Saori* for a planned shark fishing trip near the Gambier Islands. They first stopped off to fish for bait off the 180 metre high cliffs at Wedge Island, drifting & occasionally using the motor to keep clear of the cliffs. Finally, as they prepared to put out to sea, a fuel line broke causing engine failure. The crew deployed their anchors but they failed to hold & the big swells quickly drove the 66 foot *Saori* towards the cliffs. The 4 men escaped the hapless vessel in the dinghy & rowed seaward as the *Saori* was driven against the cliff. Striking the rocks stern first, a big swell then lifted the ketch up onto a flat ledge roughly above a normal high tide mark, where it remained, leaning against the cliff. 64



The 4 men rowed some 5 kilometres around to Homestead Beach & reached the shore safely, despite the fact that their dinghy was swamped in the surf. They spent the night in a unoccupied homestead & eventually were flown from the island the following day. Several attempts to refloat the vessel failed, although much of its fittings & equipment was salvaged. 64



Saori at Port Adelaide – 1963 (Gifford) 64



Saori stranded at Wedge Island – 1975 (Moody) 64



The Tumby Bay Correspondent reads the Saori name on the stern section found at Tumby Bay. Reported broken up 65



Saori at Wedge Island – 1982 (Moody) 64



Wedge Island  
2025

ABC Eyre Peninsula  
(Jodie Hamilton)



ABC

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44	News	30 <sup>th</sup> May 1932
45	The Mail	24 <sup>th</sup> February 1934
46	Advertiser	22 <sup>nd</sup> February 1934
47	Port Lincoln Times (‘Jennifer’s Log’)	19 <sup>th</sup> June 1981
48	Advertiser	21 <sup>st</sup> January 1936
49	Bunyip	5 <sup>th</sup> March 1937
50	Bunyip	26 <sup>th</sup> March 1937
51	Chronicle	13 <sup>th</sup> January 1938
52	The Mail	19 <sup>th</sup> August 1939
53	Chronicle	29 <sup>th</sup> May 1940
54	Port Lincoln Times (Wedge Island bear Released today)	25 October 1988
55	Port Lincoln Times	13 <sup>th</sup> May 1971
56	South East Kingston Leader (‘Mines off the coast’)	11 <sup>th</sup> September 1969
57	Murray Pioneer & Australian River Record	4 <sup>th</sup> July 1940
58	Port Lincoln Times	23 <sup>rd</sup> January 1941
59	Port Lincoln Times (‘Wedge Island War Mission’)	4 <sup>th</sup> March 1993
60	SA Aviation Museum Article (Peter Ingman – History Group)	October 2020
61	Port Lincoln Times	5 <sup>th</sup> May 1998
62	Port Lincoln Times (The career of Les Thomas)	12 <sup>th</sup> August 1981
63	The Voyage of the Investigator.	K A Austin
64	Heritage South Australia	FACEBOOK Post
65	Port Lincoln Times	4 <sup>th</sup> October 2024
66	‘Family Search’	13 <sup>th</sup> May 1986 Online Ancestry Site



## Appendix



Gepps Cross Primary School Logo  
"Tommy" – representing hard work

### WEDGE ISLAND – AN UNEXPECTED HISTORY



Dangerous Reef

(SLSA)

## MORE SMALL WORLD STORIES

My problem is that "You can check out anytime you like but you cannot ever leave" E.P. (Hotel California)

Here a couple of extra interesting bits that never made it into the main frame.

Victor Harbour Times 21<sup>st</sup> June 1979  
**Obituary of H J Sheridan**

Mr HJ Sheridan died on the 27<sup>th</sup> May 1979 in his home at Hindmarsh Tiers. Henry James was the son of Captain John Sheridan & was born in Port Augusta in 1883. His father at that time was dredging the top end of Spencer Gulf to enable larger ships to service the port. His school days were spent in Port Lincoln & Wedge Island where the family raised barley & raised pigs.

At the age of 13, Henry Sheridan worked at Conrad's Preserving Works at 1/- per week wages whilst the family lived in Glanville.

**So  $1883 + 5 = 1888$  & must have ended by age 13, so  $1883 + 13 = 1896$ .** Conclusion is that the Sheridan Family must have worked for "Bill" Haigh between the years 1888 – 1896

Register 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1900  
**The sinking of the Vale**

The small party of men comprising the four crew of the top sail 76 foot schooner *Vale* had an exciting experience after the ship foundered off the inhospitable shores of Kangaroo Island. Under the charge of Captain C Anderson, the *Vale* left Scele Bay on Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1900 with 700 bags of wheat bound for Port Adelaide & experienced light winds until 8 pm on the Sunday night whilst off Liguanea Island just off Cape Wiles (& Cape Camot).

On the Monday Morning whilst sighting Cape Border ahead, the wind freshened up from the SW & started to blow pretty hard. The pumps were activated at 4 am & then again at 6 am but at 7.30 am, the vessel began to labour & the main sail was lowered.



Mina Letitia Golley Collection 66



Scele Bay Wheat Sheds 1926 (SLSA)



Scele Bay Jetty 1926 (SLSA)



SS Conqueror 1926 (SLSA)



Cape Camot & Liguanea Island

(SA Tourism Commission)



The cook went down to get some wood & found that water was rising in the bilge & within a foot of the cabin floor.

- Three pumps were in constant operation & the crew was also bailing out water – no effect
- 60 bags of wheat were thrown overboard
- This was of no avail – poor weather – impossible to keep leaky boat afloat

At this point in time the Vale was now "running before the wind" with the intention of making Wedge Island for the sole purpose of beaching the vessel. It became apparent that the Vale would not reach Wedge. Crew abandoned ship on the third attempt as dinghy was swamped twice. They left with clothes, blankets & with a very meagre supply of provisions.

Vale sank 15 minutes after the crew had abandoned her, stern first at around 9.15 am. All four of the crew reached Wedge Island around 4 pm after a very rough passage. They stayed on Wedge Island until Thursday Morning while Mr Golley "kindly attended to" the shipwrecked crew's needs.

While attempting to head for Edithburgh, the coasting steamer Argyle came along side, picked the crew up & brought them safely to Port Adelaide.

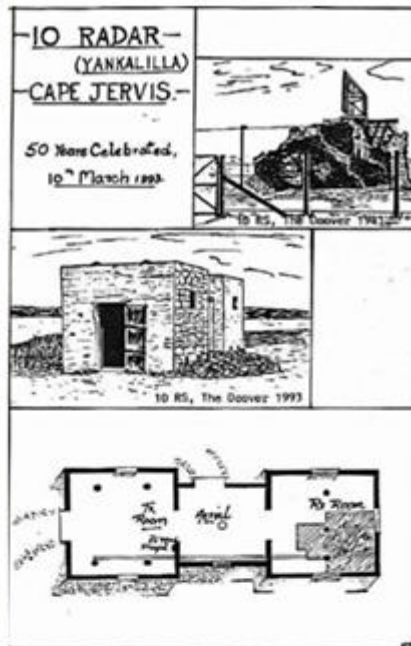
#### #10 Radar Tower (Cape Jervis)



The RAAF #10 Radar Station at Cape Jervis is a rare surviving example of the discreet measures taken by the Government for the defending of Australia's shores in World War Two.

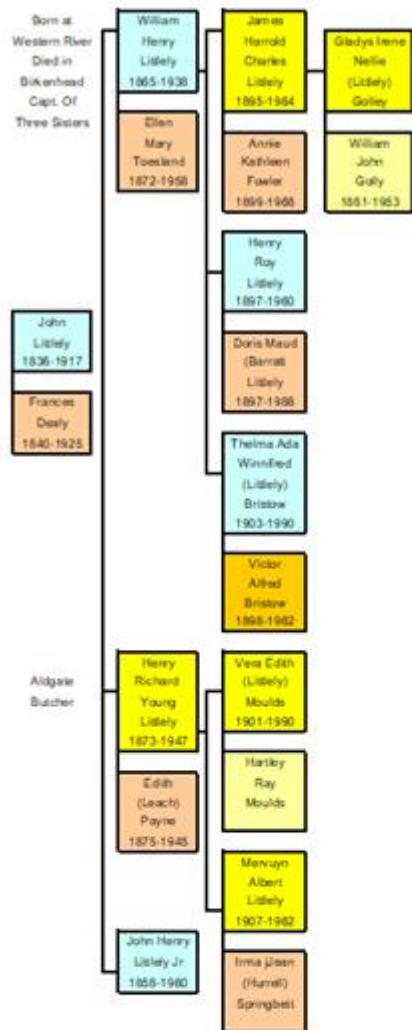
It was one of two wartime RAAF Radar Station Sites in South Australia, the other of course being Wedge Island; which received the "Australian Light Weight Air Warning System" LWAW installed near the lighthouse

Reference Sources – The Yankalilla & District Historical Society & 60



Top Sail ketches

SLSA



#### Colour Codes



These two colour codes indicate some involvement in the Wedge Island Story



Schooner Vale, Sydney 1880's (SLSA)



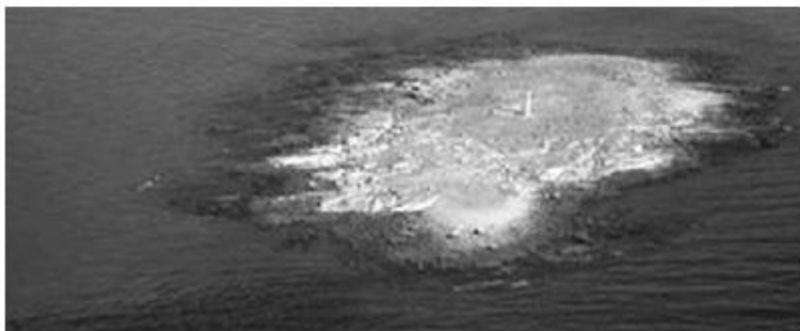
#### Guano – Small World Stuff

Ever since I have known her, my spiritual wife Janie has maintained (correctly) that regardless of where your travels take you in life, we actually find that we move in small circles & so, once again it has come to pass as I researched into the conditions endured by the Guano Gatherers on Eyre Peninsula. This yarn is headlined by a name already familiar to scholars:

- Captain James Littlely, whose Uncle was actually
- H R Littlely farmed on Wedge Island & then his
- Daughter Gladys married William Golley



Boats attempting to land on Dangerous Reef 30



Aerial view of Dangerous Reef (Rob Harcourt)



## Left on Dangerous Reef

On the 9<sup>th</sup> January 1909, the Adelaide *Observer* Newspaper printed an article that would have put the wind up of the reputation of Captain James Littlely, of the *Seaflower*. It alleged that "The steamer *Investigator* which arrived in Port Adelaide from Port Lincoln; had on board three young men who were taken off Dangerous Reef in a state of semi-starvation."

### LEFT ON DANGEROUS REEF Three Men & a Dog Living on shellfish



SLSA

The gutsy trio, dearly in desperate need of employment were T Dawson, C McGuinness & J Woolman. They had been left there by the ketch *Seaflower* some weeks previously to gather guano & according to their statement, the Master of the ketch (Captain Littlely) did not carry out his arrangement to visit the reef periodically & supply them with provisions.

"The supply of flour gave out two days before Christmas & up until the time they were picked up by the *Investigator* the trio had lived on shellfish & Rock Cod..... water supply.....4 gallons"



Dangerous Reef

(SLSA)

### John Woolman's Story

The trio was interviewed by the *Register* Newspaper & Woolman acted as the spokesperson regarding the experience that he & his guano gathering comrades had just endured:

"We went to dangerous Reef, at the southern end of Spencer's Gulf, on 11<sup>th</sup> November, under engagement with Captain Littlely to collect guano. The reef is situated nearly 14.5 miles from the south point of Thistle Island.....and is composed of 4 large rocks above water, the largest – on which we landed being not more than 200 yards wide.

Our arrangement with Captain Littlely was that the ketch *Sunflower* should bring provisions on each trip to & from Port Lincoln. The *Seaflower* called on the 2<sup>nd</sup> December with flour, plenty of tea & Sugar and potatoes & a galvanised tank of water. That was the last we saw of the ketch.

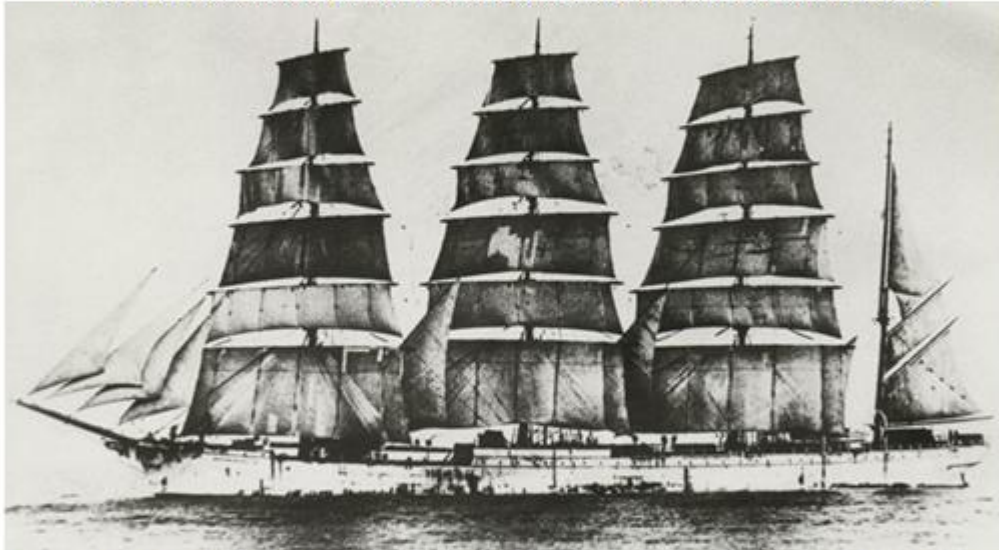
Two days before Christmas (24<sup>th</sup>) we had run out of flour & on the 26<sup>th</sup> December we signalled the *Rupara*, bound from Port Lincoln to Port Adelaide. In answer a boat was put off & we ascertained that the *Seaflower* was at Port Lincoln & we decided to wait for her. The week passed without any sign of her, so on the Saturday last (2<sup>nd</sup> January), we signalled to the *Investigator* and was taken on board".



Dangerous Reef

(SLSA)

- **How did you fare during the week?** – “Well we lived, or rather, existed, on limpets & some Rock Cod caught off the rocks”
- **Ever hungry?** – “Well, would you like to live (*only*) on shellfish? Of course, it kept us going; but our main concern was the water. I can tell you that we had to go slowly & its diminished supply was the chief reason for signalling the *Investigator*....”
- **How did you manage about fire?** – “We had one box of matches during the last fortnight & you bet, we made the most of them. We lighted the fire every morning & kept it going as best we could. At the end we were obliged to tear down our shanty & use the wood for our fire.
- **And the weather?** – “Fortunately it was fine & (*luckily*) at no time were we in danger on that score, though in heavy westerly blows the sea breaks over the reef. But, the seals, which abound, became rather too familiar. They would not tackle us, though one big fellow got to our dog & bit him rather badly.
- **Are you going back?** – “Yes, certainly, as soon as we can get there. We had gathered about 140 tons of guano & (*we*) have to finish our contract. We cannot afford to lose about 40 pounds apiece. I expect Captain Littlely will be surprised to find us gone when he returns. We left him a notice, nailed to our shanty (*remains*), informing him that we were starving & we had gone to Port Adelaide, so he will soon get over the shock.”



The windjammer *Herzogin Cecilie* passing the steamer *Minnipa* & taken by the camera of Captain W F Lee whilst just off Wedge Island in 1931. (A SLISA Copy of the picture published in the News 10<sup>th</sup> March 1931)

#### Captain Littlely's Explanation

Captain Littlely, master of the ketch *Seaflower* was in damage control. According to the *Register* of 15<sup>th</sup> January 1909, the Captain had called at the Register Offices, Port Adelaide on the day previously to offer his explanation concerning the 3 men who were left by him on Dangerous Reef. He said”

- On the 11<sup>th</sup> November (1908) I landed on Dangerous Reef with 3 men – Charles McGuiness, P Woolman & T Dawson – under contract to raise guano. The island is right in the track of vessels passing to & from Port Lincoln. (*Hmm, smells like “arse” covering- Ed*) The men took with them one 200 gallon tank of fresh water, 0.5 ton of wood, 2 bags of Flour (each 50lb), 1 cwt Potatoes, 0.25 cwt Carrots, 1 cwt Corn Beef, 4lb Tea, 5 lb Coffee, 6 tins jam, 6lb butter, 6 dozen boxes of matches & a good supply of small stores.
- On the 21<sup>st</sup> November, I called there again to see if they were all well.



- On 23<sup>rd</sup> November on my way from Port Lincoln to Adelaide, I passed the island on my way from **Wedge Island** to Port Lincoln & they reported themselves all well.
  - On the 29<sup>th</sup> November, on my way from Port Lincoln to Adelaide, I landed one live sheep, 0.5 ton wood, fresh bread & other small articles of stores.
  - On the 7<sup>th</sup> December, when proceeding from Port Adelaide to Port Lincoln, I left one 200 gallon tank of water, 0.5 cwt Potatoes, 0.25 cwt Onions & fresh Bread.
  - On the 15<sup>th</sup> December, the ketch called again & landed one live sheep & I received an order for 3 tins of Jam, 3 dozen matches & 4 lb Butter. This, with the supply in hand, the men considered would last them until I returned from Port Lincoln. On my way to Port Adelaide, after receiving this, I gave the men to understand that I would return on the 26<sup>th</sup> December.
  - On the 23<sup>rd</sup> December, the ketch left Port Adelaide with a cargo for different ports on the west side of Spencer's Gulf. On the 25<sup>th</sup> December at 11.00 am I landed at **Wedge Is.** & left for Dangerous Reef at 2 pm. The weather being rather boisterous and unfavourable for the reef, I sought shelter in **Whaler's Bay, Thistle Island** to await the next morning.
  - On the 26<sup>th</sup> December, at 4 am, I again set sail for Dangerous Reef, the wind being due east & fresh. On arrival at 8.30 am, there was no sign of human life & unable to bring the vessel to an anchor, I sent 2 of the crew to see if anything was wrong. One went to the hut, while the other remained by the boat.
- On their return to the ship they reported that there was no one on the island. The man who visited the hut stated that the door was fastened on the outside & he also looked in (?) and called & getting no reply left.

When I received their report, I directed my course to Port Lincoln, thinking the men had gone there to spend their "holidays". On arrival in Port Lincoln, I made enquiries but was informed that they had not been seen in that port. I therefore informed the police & the harbour master (W B White). I (then) concluded that the men must have gone to Port Adelaide in the ketch Napperby & so went about my usual work. (Heh, not my problem, Ed)



The SA built ketch *Napperby* (SLSA)



RMS *Rupara* at Port Lincoln 1907 (SLSA)

- On the 2<sup>nd</sup> January (1909) after returning to Port Lincoln, I learned from the Chef mate of the steamer *Rupara*, that the men hailed her on the evening of the 26<sup>th</sup> December but when asked by the mate if they needed anything, they replied in the negative & stated they had enough supplies to last for another day & would wait until the *Seaflower* came for them.
- On receiving the mate's report on the 2<sup>nd</sup> January, I set sail for the "Reef", in boisterous weather, accompanied by a low barometer. On reaching Cape Donnington, I found it necessary to wait until daylight & let the worst of the weather blow over.
- On the 3<sup>rd</sup> January, we reached Dangerous Reef & found the place just as my men had reported it to me (Is Littlely talking about the dodgy effort to search on the 26<sup>th</sup> December – Ed). On examination, I discovered a notice nailed up in the "hut" to say that the men had gone to Port Adelaide. The hut was quite intact (?) & pieces of wood were lying about the place. On this occasion I landed 200 gallons of fresh water, 1cwt Corn Beef with several other articles of food. (But the horses had really bolted – Ed). There were plenty of seals on the reef & they were perfectly harmless if not molested.

The Guano Gatherers Woolman, Dawson & McGuiness confirmed the statement of Captain Littlely, except as regard to the visit of the boat & 2 men onto Dangerous Reef on the 26<sup>th</sup> December. Of this (so called) action they were quite unaware of but, as Mr P Woolman pointed out, they can recall the day because this "was the date of the visit by the steamer *Rupara*."



Dangerous Reef c1933

(SLSA)

## WEDGE ISLAND SHOOTING CHARGE

### GRAZIER AQUITTED

Verdicts of "not guilty" on both counts were returned by the jury in the Adelaide Criminal last week in favour of Donald Farrow Cooper, 31, grazier, of Wedge Island, who had pleaded "not guilty" to charges that at the island on the 2nd October 1942, he shot at Frederick George Sawford with intent to do him a grievous body harm and that he had assaulted Sawford.

West Coast Sentinel 11th December 1942



BBC

Wikipedia

### The Dangerous Reef Case

The *Express & Telegraph* Newspaper of 31<sup>st</sup> May 1909, reported a case in the Port Adelaide Local Court where Thomas James Dawson, John Woolman & Charles McGuiness, labourers, of Port Adelaide sued James Littlely of Birkenhead for 90 pounds damages.

It was alleged that the defendant agreed with the plaintiffs that they should:

- Dig & screen all the guano on Dangerous Reef at 6/- a ton for the screened stuff & 4/- a ton for the (pre) screenings; to be paid by the defendant to the plaintiffs
- That the defendant should supply the plaintiffs with sufficient water, bags, tools & other necessities, during such time as they should remain upon the said reef for the purpose already outlines at his own cost & expense &
- (He) should deliver to the plaintiffs proper food & provisions from time to time, as required by them; they paying the same on the final settlement out of the moneys due to them by the defendant in respect of the contract.
- They alleged that the defendant did not supply them with sufficient bags, as agreed
- From the 24<sup>th</sup> December 1908 until 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1909, (Littlely) neglected to provide them with food & provisions; whereby they were compelled to quit the reef & incurred expenses & suffered great losses in consequence
- The defendant had neglected & refused to furnish the plaintiffs with proper accounts relating to the premises & to pay them any money in respect thereof.



Dangerous Reef

(SLSA)

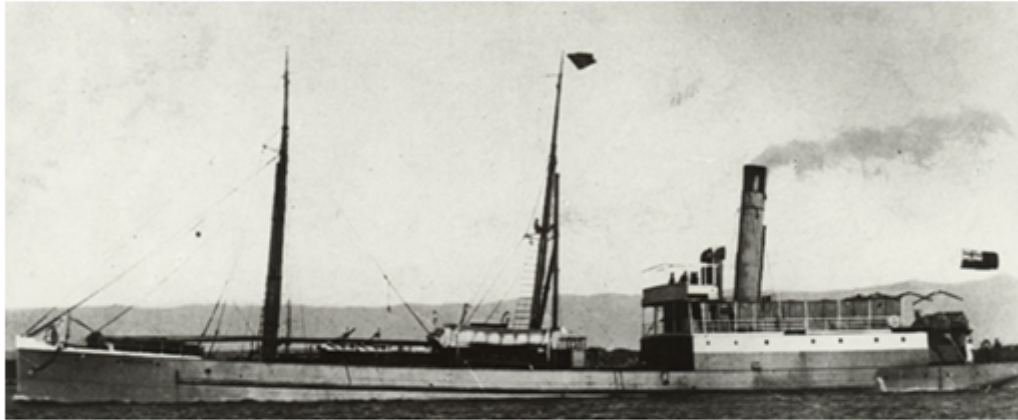


The plaintiff Dawson said that he; in company with the 2 other plaintiffs left Port Adelaide on the 10<sup>th</sup> November for Dangerous Reef under contract to Captain Littlely. They arrived there the following day. The terms of the contract were made by McGuiness with Captain Littlely. On the 12<sup>th</sup> December, the defendant told them he would most likely return to the reef on the 24<sup>th</sup> December.

The three of them had asked the defendant to bring them a supply of bags in which to store the guano but the defendant FAILED to do so. By the 12<sup>th</sup> December, they had raised 150 tons of guano, which was put into heaps.

The wind blew much of the screened stuff into the sea. This would have been prevented had they had the bags in which to store it. The *Seaflower* did not return to the "Reef" on the 24<sup>th</sup> December. Their stock of provisions by then consisted of tea, coffee & sugar and about 2lb of flour.

On the 26<sup>th</sup> December, they hailed the *Rupara* & from what they had been informed, they decided to wait on the reef in the hope of the ketch arriving (logical Ed), the *Rupara* having reported that the *Seaflower* was in Port Lincoln. (And you cannot be in two places at once – ED). So they subsisted on the "Reef" until the 2<sup>nd</sup> January on limpets & a few fish. On that date, they hailed the steamer *Investigator* & were taken off the reef and brought to Port Adelaide.



*SS Investigator* (SLSA)

Now for the argy bargy

Mr S H Skipper appeared for the plaintiffs & Mr R Cruickshank appeared for the defendant, who pleaded not guilty & that (as far as he was concerned) he had satisfied & discharged the plaintiff's claim (if any) by payment of wages & passage money and that the same was accepted by the plaintiffs in satisfaction & discharge of the said claim.

He counter claimed 14 pounds 2/-, the balance of money payable by the plaintiffs to him for goods sold & delivered and for monies paid by him at their request and for moneys received by them for the use of defendant. He alleged that the plaintiffs so negligently & unskilfully screened portion of the guano that it had to be re-screened and he, thereby, was put to loss & expense. (Clearly this is just BS OR Littlely just does not know how subtle & timely the handling of guano really is)

About a fortnight after their arrival in Port Adelaide, Captain Littlely saw them & complained about their conduct. The witness (Dawson) & Woolman each received 5 pound & McGuiness 6 pound for the work they had performed. The witness Woolman & another mate subsequently went back to Dangerous Reef and remained there until March.

The guano had flattened out & blown amongst the rocks. They bagged up 81 tons of screened guano & 30 tons of unscreened guano. About 30 tons had been blown away. The witness received 6 pounds 3/6d for 94 days labour. Under cross examination, he admitted that the receipt of one pound, he had overlooked.



**Dangerous Reef**

(SLSA)

#### Conclusion

The *Express & Telegraph* of the 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1909 reported that the "Dangerous Reef Case" which the plaintiffs alleged a breach of contract over work they had done for Littlely, in connection to collecting guano out on Dangerous Reef. The bench noted that:

- It was unfortunate that the evidence of McGuiness was not available to settle the doubt concerning the arrangement as to the supply of bags
- On the *Seaflower's* visit to the island on the 26<sup>th</sup> December a proper search for the plaintiffs should have been made on the island.
- The plaintiffs were entitled to something for the "privations" they suffered whilst on the island.
- Verdict for the plaintiffs for 15 pound (5 pound each) &.....
- For the defendant with his counter claim for 2 pounds 15/11d against McGuiness & 1 pound 9 shillings against Woolman for money overdrawn.



**Dangerous Reef**

ANDREW FOX / RODNEY FOX GWM/ AU  
(Andrew Fox & F/B Rodney Fox Great White Shark Expeditions)