

KING ISLAND HISTORY.

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TALES OF SHIPWRECK.

By George R. Leggett, B.A.

A KING ISLAND resident recently lent me the manuscript of the recollections of W. Hickmott, who lived on the island for many years, and I made a copy of most of this interesting record. Hickmott writes:—

In November, 1866, I was in the service of the Hobart Marine Board at Cape Wickham lighthouse. One morning in that year, about 9 a.m., I met nine strangers approaching the lighthouse on foot, armed with guns, powder flasks, shot belts, &c. This was of course a most unusual sight, and I guessed at once that there had been a wreck. After the usual salutations it transpired that they formed a succour party despatched by the captain of the *Netherby*, which had been wrecked with 500 souls on board, all of whom, happily, reached the shore. Mr. Parry, the second officer, was in charge, the remainder being volunteers. The letter he carried read as follows: "Send help and succour to 500 shipwrecked people from the ship *Netherby*. Owen Owens, Master." Now, neither the master nor anyone else had any idea what land they were upon, as owing to the thick weather previous to striking no observations could be taken. She was bound for Brisbane.

BOUND FOR BRISBANE.

The succour party arrived weak, hungry, and footsore, after taking five days to reach Cape Wickham from the spot where Mr. Ball's Netherby House stands to-day. Needless to say their appetites were soon appeased, and then earnest consideration was given to the general relief required. The weather was beautifully fine, so it was decided to equip the lighthouse whale-boat with provisions, water, compass, and everything needful, and she set off with Mr. Parry in charge, and with four of the strongest of the party as crew. By sundown they were 20 miles on their journey. The same evening a boat in charge of Captain Owens of the wrecked ship reached Cape Wickham. As five days had elapsed since the succour party had left camp, he had become anxious about their safety, fearing that they had fallen in with some hostile natives of the island. So, coasting along, he made Cape Wickham. Great was his joy when he heard full particulars, especially when he saw prospects of feeding his big crowd.

The Netherby was a Blackball Liner, and they were not proverbial for providing too much or too dainty fare for their patrons. She was, besides, 120 days out from home, so things were only middling in the commissariat line, the allowance to each person being one pannikin of flour and one packet of cocoa per day. And this was from the cargo.

The fair wind that enabled Captain Owens to reach Cape Wickham was dead against his returning, and he was very anxious to communicate with the doctor

anxious to communicate with the doctor in charge, to order a more liberal allowance of rations, for many of the people were very weak. So it was decided that I should start off right away with a letter to the above effect. At 10.45 p.m. that night—one of the darkest I think that I ever remember—I left Wickham, blundered about the bush after leaving the beach at Yellow Rock, and at 2 p.m. next afternoon, placed the letter in the hands of the doctor. There were no roads then, and below the land now owned by Mr. W. E. Bowling I had never been.* I will now venture to give an account of my arrival on the scene of the wreck. At this time, the teatree scrub grew right down to high-water mark, so that any of the castaways venturing from the camp hugged the beaches.*

It was not possible to obtain from the succour party any idea of the whereabouts of the disaster. When I reached Waterwitch Point, I sighted Fitzmaurice Bluff, and calculated whether I could reach that far by nightfall. Near Currie Harbour, I met a very heavy hailstorm, and so chose the opportunity to have some refreshment, and the inevitable smoke under the lee of a rock. Presently two young men approached me, eyed me all over in doubt as to whether I was one of their party transformed by change of clothing. At last it dawned on them that I was a stranger, and when we began to converse I soon learnt to my satisfaction that the wreck was near. Proceeding towards it we were joined by parties of four or five, then tens and twelves, and even twenties, all of them

and twelves, and even twenties, all of them anxious to know where I came from, what land they were on, what had become of Mr. Parry and the succour party, and of the Captain's boat. When we sighted the actual camp they commenced hurrahing and shouting, and this soon brought out of the various tents and brush wigwams the entire complement of men, women, and children, and they all joined in the clamour. They rang the ship's bell, and questions were asked over and over again. At last the doctor asked me to stand on a cask while he interrogated me, and my replies were made in a voice loud enough to be heard by all. The ship's bell had been set up ashore, and was used for calling the company together when rations were to be served out, and such like. A council was then held, and in view of the

that all the single men should make the trip to Cape Wickham. A list of 117 names was called, and I guaranteed to lead them safely to Cape Wickham in two days if they walked fairly well. Two days' rations were then served out, but most of them proceeded to cook and eat them at once, as one and all were complaining of hunger. Next morning at daylight, away we went, old and young, one or two lame, swags tied up in bundles, some with heavier ones than they could manage for a long distance, others with scarcely anything.

Our progress was slow, there being no road, not even a track, and the party soon began to tail off, and on looking back at Porky Beach it resembled a huge snake—most of the men walking behind each

—most of the men walking behind each other.

By dint of great exertions, with numerous spells, our camp at night was made upon the beach at Pass River. As we had seen a fair number of snakes during the day's march a number of the party managed to get on the top of the hills, as a kind of refuge from snakes. The night passed for the most part without any refreshing sleep. Swags were opened out and many articles were discarded to lighten the load for the second day's march. Indeed, the lightening of swags commenced very shortly after our departure from the wreck. At daylight, off we went again on our long, weary journey. Towards noon continuous inquiries were made of me: "How far are we off now?" I coaxed them along with assurances that we were not quite there. About 3 p.m. we topped the range in "Gentleman's Park, from whence Cape Wickham could be seen in the distance, about 12 miles off. But it looked like 20 through the haze, and it was then that they thoroughly realised the exhilarating influence of a long tramp with a fairly heavy swag after a not too sumptuous repast. However we reached Yellow Rock, where I had promised them two hours' rest on account of high tide. While enjoying their siesta the superintendent of Wickham arrived on the scene with a large sack of cabin biscuits. For by the aid of a powerful telescope he had seen the snake-like procession crossing the range. This welcome addition to the commissariat was served out, and later on another start was made from Yellow Rock to Cape Wickham, all the party being refreshed and in better spirits.

But it had been a long weary tramp for new chums, and consequently the tailing off during the last ten miles was very pronounced. With about 20 of the strongest I reached the lighthouse about 8 p.m. Little

I reached the lighthouse about 8 p.m. Little groups of six or eight continued to arrive till well towards daylight of the following morning. Next forenoon a muster was held, and names were called. Each man answered, and expressed himself thankful at being in a place where "tucker" was assured.

The second mate, Mr. Parry, in the whaleboat, made a landing near Barwon Heads, where the party fell in with a shepherd on Mr. Roadknight's property. At first he took them to be bushrangers and he made off as fast as he could go, but on assuring himself of his mistake he led them to the homestead. The manager rode into Geelong, which was the nearest telegraph station, and word was flashed to Melbourne.

As it was Sunday half the crews of the vessels were on leave, but the Government steamers *Pharos* and *Victoria* were victualled at once, and men secured to complete the crews, and the vessels put to sea at once. The *Pharos* went round the north end, while the *Victoria* went round the south end. The former vessel passed the walking party as she hastened south.

This is practically the whole of Hickmott's description of the facts. The speed with which the Ministry acted in despatching the relief vessels was due to the fact that on the occasion of the wreck of the steamer *Admella*, near Cape Northumberland, a short time previously, the Ministry had been severely censured for its delay in sending help. On that occasion the loss of life was very heavy, and those who were saved owed their deliverance to the Henty Bros., of Portland, who despatched their own steamer when the Government refused to act. The two steamers arrived about the same time, and succeeded in "boating off" about 200 of the passengers. It then came on to blow, so they left for Melbourne with these, and returned later and took

with these, and returned later and took away the remainder. The wreck was sold in Melbourne, and Messrs. Boyd, Currie, and Donaldson purchased it. Captain Richard Leggett, my father, was engaged to salvage the cargo, and the second mate (Mr. Parry) and one seaman of the Netherby remained and made several journeys with Captain Leggett. A baby was born shortly after the Netherby struck, and that baby, in the person of Mrs. Cannell, now resides in Melbourne. Mr. G. L. Massingham, of Preston (V.), was an apprentice on board the Netherby, and he has in his possession a copy of the "Netherby Gazette," a paper printed on the vessel.

In 1871 the ship Loch Leven, outward bound for England with a cargo of wool, tallow, hides, and preserved meats from Geelong, ran on to the island near the lighthouse. She had been seen about 15 miles off the land on the previous evening, but in the night the weather became thick and foggy. At daylight next morning she was seen ashore with all sail set, and she made a beautiful picture. The crew got ashore safely but, as the captain wished to procure his papers an attempt was made to board the vessel in the lighthouse boat—the one that had carried Mr. Parry and crew safely to Victoria. Unfortunately, after launching the boat an attempt was made to reach the vessel, but a heavy sea broke into her and completely filled and capsized her.

Three men clung to the boat, and four swam ashore, but Captain Branscombe, of the Loch Leven, was drowned. Captain Gowan, of the schooner *Helen*, took word to Melbourne, and two steamers under the pilotage of Captain Thomas Leggett, the *Coorong* and the *Taratua*, arrived within a few days, and a great quantity of the cargo was salvaged. After about three weeks of this work the wreck was sold, and the steamer *Empress*, from Geelong, continued the salvage work.

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The year 1874 was especially disastrous

to Australia, and of five vessels which left together four were dismantled, namely, Loch Ard, the John Kerr, the Cambridgeshire, and Dallam Tower; while the British Admiral was totally wrecked on King Island, with the loss of 79 lives. My father states that he was on board the Loch Ard inspecting the damage done to her when the nine survivors arrived from King Island. The Loch Ard had been signalled as passing Cape Otway under jury rig—three straight spars set up with yards aloft—and the tug boats were out looking for her half way down to the Otway. But in the night she passed them, and brought up to two anchors on a lee shore off the back beach at Sorrento. From there she was towed into Melbourne and refitted.

On the night on which the British Admiral was wrecked the wind and sea were terrific. The vessel struck at 2.30 in the morning on a reef about two miles south of Currie Harbour. She remained on the reef for a short time, and then slid off into deep water. One boat got away, carrying ten persons. But near the mouth of Currie Harbour the boat capsized, and four were drowned, including the chief officer, whose body was recovered. The six who escaped were cared for by the hunters, and later three more survivors arrived. They had clung to a spar, and had been washed ashore in Fitzmaurice Bay. A small vessel named the Kangaroo was lying under New Year's Island, and the attention of her master was attracted by fires which were lit on the beach, and he took the nine survivors to Melbourne.

The beach was strewn with the bodies of men and women, and the hunters had the sad task of burying them. The cargo salvaged was very valuable, and for many

the sad task of burying them. The cargo salvaged was very valuable, and for more than a year salvage work was carried on at the wreck by means of lighters, which were towed out from Currie Harbour when the weather was favourable. The headstone mentioned by me, a picture of which appeared in "The Australasian" of November 12, 1927, was sent from Melbourne, and for many years marked the scene opposite the wreck on Admiral Beach.

While operations to recover the cargo from the British Admiral were going on, another fine ship, the Blencathra, on her maiden voyage, ran ashore at Currie Harbour. The crew and officers were taken off by Mr. Alec Ross, who was in charge of the diving operations, and next day the diving gang set to work to dismantle the ship and to send sails and valuables ashore, and for this they received salvage money.

The captain and crew of the Blencathra were taken to Melbourne by one of the vessels which was running the salvaged cargo from the British Admiral.

The wreck was bought by L. Stevenson and Sons, and they proceeded to salvage her. Among cargo salvaged were about 800 cases of whisky, which were placed on the rocks, and a watchman, with firearms, set over them. Notwithstanding this watch, about 75 cases "evaporated" in the night. The vessel lasted for many months, and hopes were expressed that she could be floated. This was attempted, use being made of clay and green hides placed over the holes, but in the end she had to be abandoned.

*The statement that there were no roads then is hardly correct, for a track had been cut by my father and his brother from Yellow Rock to the Arrow Beach. Along this road they had carted the cargo and gear salvaged from the wreck of the Arrow, and it was then loaded into their vessel at Yellow Rock. I am told that a hill round which they cut the track still bears the name of Leggett's Hill. They used a horse and linker for

which they cut the track still bears the name of Leggett's Hill. They used a horse and jinker for this work, and they had just loaded the last load and had sailed for Melbourne on the Thursday preceding the Saturday night on which the Netherby was wrecked.