

Royal Western Australian Historical Society's
Annual Pioneers Memorial Service
on Sunday 31st May 1998 at St Bartholomews Chapel, East Perth Cemeteries,

Citation by Lyn Coy

Thomas and Catherine Davis with their two small children, John aged three, and Charlotte aged two years, and with them their nephew John Davis aged thirteen, arrived in the Swan River Colony in the barque *Parmelia* with Captain James Stirling on 31st May 1829.

Captain Stirling anxious to make land took the helm on sighting the coast and promptly hit the Sandbanks now called *Parmelia* Banks just off the coast. The next eighteen hours the ship was thumped and bumped and the men in their wisdom decided they would have to lighten the load.

Of course the most logical thing for those naval men to do was to offload the 28 women and children of the workmen on the *Parmelia*. With the stores, over the side onto the jolly boats in the midst of a raging storm went those poor unsuspecting souls.

They were rowed to nearby Carnac Island and dumped on the beach with no shelter, no food but salt beef and biscuits and they had 'one mug and one knife' to share among nearly thirty people.

The weather was appalling, they were marooned on the Island for five days and nights until the weather changed and they could be rescued.

I don't know if any of you have been to Carnac Island, but I did the trip a few years ago because I wanted to see what the Island was like, because my GGGGG grandmother was one of the twenty eight stuck on that island with her two small children.

And believe me it is no tropical paradise. Carnac Island lies around 10km south- west of Fremantle, rising between its better known and larger neighbours, Garden and Rottnest Islands. Several thousand years ago, all three were joined to the mainland when sea levels were significantly lower. Nyoongar people knew this island as Ngooloomayup which means 'place of little brother'. Rottnest Island was the big brother.

Carnac Island is now a class A nature reserve. James Stirling changed the name to Pulo Carnac after John Rivett Carnac who was a second lieutenant of his ship *HMS Success*. *Pulo* is Malay for Island. The Pulo was dropped and it became Carnac Island. In the early days it was used as a penal settlement for indigenous Australians.

It has very stunted growth, and on the beach sits great wallowing sea lions that looked very menacing to me, and behind the small sand dunes it is infested with tiger snakes.

There is no permanent fresh water on the island – the island is a paradise for the sea lions. And did you know that the sea lions on Carnac Island are all male?

This breed of sea lion is the rarest in the world, and the only one found solely in Australia. There are several thousand of them and they are now given special protection by WA's Wildlife Conservation Act. These sea lions off WA exhibit an unusual breeding pattern. Breeding takes place on offshore islands about 200 kilometres north of Perth for four to five months every 17.5 months. After the breeding season is over, the males migrate south to Carnac Island and other islands off the Perth metropolitan coast, probably to relieve feeding pressure from the females and young pups. Australian sea lions are the only seals or sea lions with a 17.5 month breeding

cycle. This could be because in the waters where they live, there is no appreciative difference between food availability in winter and summer. Instead, mothers feed their pups over a longer period of time, which is an advantage in an environment low in food resources. But the male sea lions on Carnac are large wild animals that are often aggressive if they feel threatened. There are strict guidelines for visitors on Carnac; you are not allowed to approach them at any close distance.

The tiger snakes found on Carnac Island are one of the world's most deadly snakes and pose a potential risk to visitors landing on the Island. The snakes consume the seagull chicks, mice and lizards and are an important predator to the frog eating seagulls on the mainland. There are no frogs on Carnac. Many of the adult snakes on Carnac have lost one or both eyes. This is the result of damage caused by silver gulls protecting their young by foraging snakes. Some of the fattest, healthiest snakes on the island are totally blind. There are a couple of stories of how the snakes got there but the most logical conclusion is that the snakes were marooned there after the connection to Garden Island (where the snakes are also found) sank under the sea thousands of years ago, but there is also a story that a snake charmer called Rocky Vane rowed them to the island after his wife Dorothy was bitten and died in 1928 from tiger snake bite. He was ordered to get rid of the snakes because the government, after several cases of deaths from tiger snakes, restricted snake shows - so the story goes that Rocky decided to get in a rowboat and take them to Carnac Island.

Great story – but he may have got the snakes from there in the first place...

It is no wonder with all this stress of being marooned on the Island with those great wallowing sea lions and those deadly snakes, my poor ancestral grandmother took to drinking rum. In the following year, she was fined for brawling in the street with her husband and it is recorded that she hit him over the head with a bottle and it was most likely a rum bottle and probably the reason she hit him on the head was that she was really annoyed that it had run dry.

One has to keep ones spirits up.....

And who could really blame her for her actions? – that damn ancestral grandfather of mine had carted her half way round the world, watched while she was lowered over the side of the ship in the midst of a howling storm, left her stuck on a snake infested island with great menacing sea lions and with two kids for five days and nights with twenty six other miserable women and children and she was supposed to be in good spirits? She was '*Not Happy Jar*'. And therein started my first known line of 'Grumpy Old Women' in the Swan River Colony.

Sadly Catherine died eight years later and her husband was left with two small children. Catherine Davis was buried in East Perth Cemetery 21 August 1836.

Thomas Davis later remarried Martha Withnell who was probably also a grumpy, grouchy old woman because she had been widowed in the Colony in 1841 – and she had four kids to bring up on her own for another five years until she married my great grandfather Thomas Davis.

Thomas's daughter Charlotte Davis married at the age of 18years to John Herbert and he ran the 'Royal Oak Inn' at West Toodyay and hubbie John Herbert, took an extreme liking to the product he was selling. The spirits got the better of him and he was sent to the 'lunatic asylum' to dry out. That is where you got sent to in those days, for all sorts of reasons, and not just because you had lost your mind. But I guess he had the DT's and that was good enough reason for anybody.

Charlotte had to manage the hotel without him and then she was fined 'five shillings' for running the Inn without a license as women were not permitted to hold a licence at that time. She was left doing all the hard work, with a pub to run, four kids to raise, whilst hubby was drying out in the lunatic asylum. So GGGG grandmother daughter of cranky, grumpy Mother who had been 'put over the side' with women and kids and stuck on an Island for five days and nights was also '*Not Happy Jan*'. There followed the second succession of Grumpy Old Woman' in the Swan River Colony.

You will be pleased to know that after Charlotte died my GGGG Grandfather reformed and became a foundation member of the Temperance Society of Oddfellows in Toodyay and became a tee-totaller. A bit late for Charlotte but at least there was some hope for family sobriety.

And so now another descendant Grumpy Old Woman of Charlotte Davis lives in Charlotte's Vineyard – I have Charlotte on the brain. If I had known years ago, what I know now – my daughter would have been called Charlotte, my dogs would have been called Carnac, but at least I do live in the right place – the Swan Valley – I have inherited the family genes – there is nothing like a fine wine produced in the Valley and I can truthfully can say 'I live, work and play' in Ellenbrook – just like the LWP slogan and letter that called me here years ago ...

Lyn Coy – Convenor, Swan River Pioneers 1829-1838



Opening Day of Charlotte's Vineyard – 19 February 2004 *Photo by Lyn Coy*