

Royal Western Australian Historical Society's
Annual Pioneers Memorial Service
on Sunday 1 June 2014 at St Bartholomews Chapel, East Perth Cemeteries,

Commemorating Walter Padbury and his wife Charlotte

CHRISTIAN, PIONEER, BENEFACTOR 1817 – 1907

Read by Marie Watts

How Walter's early life evolved.

From a homeless twelve year old, stranded, penniless and in a hostile and primitive environment, following the untimely death of his father Thomas, Walter Padbury became one of Australia's greatest philanthropists and pastoralists.

No individual opened up more land for agriculture and grazing within the colony than Walter, yet in 1830, few children could have had a more difficult start so early in their life.

Born on the 22nd December 1817 at Fawler in Oxfordshire, England, Walter was the second of five children born to Thomas and Ruth Padbury and was baptised on the 11th January 1818 at the nearby St James Church, Stonesfield, a traditionally conservative farming district. With its massive oaken roof frames, this Church of St James the Great, was built early in the 13th century. Great battles disturbed the peace of this ancient and docile region back to the early Anglo-Saxon period of the 6th century AD.

Following the attractive publicity given to the establishment of the "Swan River Settlement in Western Australia" and with Thomas' dream to own 1,000 acres of good-quality freehold land, he became interested in taking up the challenge by sailing to the other side of the little known world in order to make his dream become a reality.

Thomas, with Walter's assistance was commissioned by the newly appointed, Governor James Stirling, to care for his valuable consignment of 20 cattle, 85 merino sheep and one horse. This twenty one week voyage proved to be both an invaluable and unique experience, especially for Walter as these animals required constant attention while at sea and then, they had to be delivered to Freshwater Bay, Peppermint Grove, an area still virtually uninhabited by the earliest settlers. They sailed from England aboard the small barque "PROTECTOR" in October 1829, arriving at Fremantle on the 26th February 1830.

Unlike the glowing publicity in England relating to the new Swan River Settlement, on their arrival, Thomas was confronted with a bare and barren looking landscape. He was unable to survive the primitive conditions and after a bout of pneumonia died in July 1830 only five months after their arrival. Prior to his death the dying father entrusted Walter's welfare to a couple that had sailed out to the new colony with them. The unscrupulous pair, however, quickly squandered Walter's entire inheritance that included his money bag containing a number of valuable gold sovereigns, before abandoning him. Walter became a virtual orphan, 10 thousand miles from his mother and siblings and with no prospect of returning home.

Alone in the Colony

After his father's death, Walter became increasingly concerned that the authorities could institutionalise him because of his age and circumstances. He had to start thinking about his limited options just to survive. Subsequent jobs he tackled included working in the building trade, servant work and as a farmhand, cleaning out stables and pigsties and also as a shepherd erecting wooden fencing and yards.

In mid 1835, while still only a 17 year old Walter gained a more permanent job as a shepherd on a property run by the Burges brothers, initially, on their Upper Swan property, earning £10 per year including bed and "rough keep". He remained with the Burges brothers for seven years during which time they established a large grant of land at York called "Tipperary" – a wheat, sheep, cattle and pig property. He gained invaluable experience with the Burges brothers and among other tasks he became their slaughter man and butcher, an excellent horseman, drover and miller. Whenever possible, he also studied as a scholar from Mrs Tanner – a lady teacher who lived in close proximity.

In 1842 he left the Burges family to work for himself doing contract fencing. Working very long hours he found it difficult to find labour to assist him at the pace and hours he wanted to work at in order to progress more rapidly.

During the 1840's cash remunerations were still unreliable for employees in the colony, he was often compelled to barter his labour for wheat that he soon 'on-sold'. Having terminated his employment with the Burges brothers he was dealing in sheep that he subsequently resold to the early settlers and butchers by driving them in a wide circular-like route bounded by Guildford, Toodyay, Northam, York, Beverley and then back to Guildford. In effect, he became both a dealer and stock agent. These contacts and the experience he gained also proved invaluable in later life.

Along Comes Charlotte Nairn

(reader: Patricia Webb).

In 1843 the Court House, a law court and a school on weekdays, became "Perth Church" on Sundays with Walter attending morning and evening services whenever possible. Built in 1837 the building is still firmly evident today standing next to the Supreme Court building.

Attending one particular evening Church service, Walter was introduced by a friend James Nairn, to his favourite sister Charlotte, who, with parents Billy and Mary Ann Nairn, had arrived in the colony from Scotland in 1829 when Charlotte was only 3 years old.

To Walter, Charlotte was absolutely beautiful. He later described her as having hazel eyes, exquisite skin, a perfect nose and a pert chin. From that point on Charlotte became more important to him than anything else in life. She had similar characteristics to Walter in as much as they were both hard workers, optimistic, planned with precision and determination but most importantly to them, they both possessed a sincere Christian belief.

After a whirlwind courtship, Walter became engaged to be married to Charlotte Nairn with their wedding planned for 23rd of April 1844 when she turned 18 years of age. The Colonial Chaplain the Rev'd J. B. Wittenoom was the officiant.

Billy Nairn was a gifted and hard working craftsman as a blacksmith, whitesmith and locksmith, and Walter bonded immediately with the Nairn family. Billy purchased a block of land in Perth described as 'G7' that had a frontage to St Georges Terrace, King Street and Hay Street and then, gifting it to the young couple as a wedding present. Walter soon purchased the adjoining G6 block to its east, from Henry Strickland, where they established their initial business by reconstructing a small brewery on the site into a butcher shop and merchandise business. He then leased a 500 acre grant from his new neighbour, Henry Trigg, who lived on G5 and G4, that now incorporates the location of Floreat. He subsequently purchased this and additional adjoining freehold land that eventually totalled 1,234 acres.

On this new "Lime Kiln" property Walter established his stock yards and slaughter house. This particular investment subsequently initiated his enormous land tenure and his generous philanthropy favouring a great number of impoverished and needy people throughout the colony.

Emergence of Walter, the Businessman

By early 1844 he was generating an expanded income base, primarily through his livestock activities. They were now living in their new and attractive brick house on G7 that was completed prior to their wedding day. Their spacious new house had four bedrooms that could potentially accommodate a sizeable family but sadly their only child, a daughter, died as an infant shortly after her birth.

In mid 1847 Walter leased 4,000 acres south-east of Toodyay and took out a depasturing licence over 4,000 acres in the Moore River region. Charlotte by this time was often serving unassisted, at their butcher shop, with their combined efforts starting to reap just rewards, especially during the convict era between 1850 and 1868 with approximately 9,500 men being transported to the Colony enabling Walter to secure numerous valuable Government contracts supplying meat to the convicts and their guards. Walter subsequently engaged 69 "Ticket-of-leave" men, guiding most of them to a sound and prosperous future.

In 1849, in company with his wife Charlotte, he returned to England and fulfilled his father's dream by bringing his mother Ruth, and siblings, Caroline, Ruth, Edwin and Mark to W.A.

Towards the end of 1851 Walter leased 30,000 acres in the Champion Bay district (now Geraldton) and in 1855 whilst overlanding stock south from there towards his Moore River property and came across Yathroo Station. He knew his land well and to him this was some of the finest country he had seen. Walter found his way to a small thatched hut where he was greeted by Edward Conlin who had spent a number of years alone on this isolated property. Then, as casually as asking for a drink, Walter asked Conlin if he wanted to sell Yathroo? Conlin responded immediately with a price of £2500. Walter wrote out a cheque on the spot, with the deal, as often was the case in those days, being sealed with a handshake. The deal included 16,000 acres of leasehold land and 10 acres of freehold land around Yatheroo Spring in addition to the cattle and sheep. He contacted eleven year old Edward Roberts, whom he knew wanted a shepherding job, to work on the property, mainly taking care of the livestock until additional experienced employees could be engaged.

Edward Roberts, who live 'next door' to Walter with his parents on the site now accommodating His Majesty's Theatre and, with few belongings slung over his shoulder, walked the 110 mile journey from home to Yathroo Station to take up this new position, with history showing that he also was to become a remarkable pioneer. Walter continued to expand Yathroo Station building a flour mill and expanding the stock levels to become one of the largest herds of beef and dairy cattle in the colony. Edward Roberts later managed the Yathroo property and eventually purchased it from Walter.

Throughout the following years, Walter purchased and or, leased, many additional valuable farming and station properties. Those he actually purchased included "Glentromie" at New Norcia when he outbid his old friend, a very disappointed Bishop Rosendo Salvado from the New Norcia Mission and whose land adjoined "Glentromie".

He bought Yere Yere (north of Yathroo), Koogan (near Moora), Baskerville (Upper Swan), Padbury's Paddocks, that he subsequently bequeathed to the Church of England and where the Swan Orphanages were ultimately constructed. He bought, and or leased vast acreages from Champion Bay, down to the southern ocean, south of Balingup, together with other properties in the southern and eastern agricultural areas including his father's original grant at Dardanup, now called "Padbury Fields", on the outskirts of Bunbury. He purchased a 2,000 acre property on the banks of the Canning River (now Thornlie) where he established the first experimental horticultural farm in the colony, growing a range of vegetables, fruit and vines on a major scale.

It was at his "Koogan" property at Koojan, originally a 60 square mile lease adjoining "Glentromie", that Walter established his nephew, Matthew Thomas Padbury in 1892. Matthew had earlier fulfilled a family tradition by serving in the Queen's own Oxfordshire Hussars in England and on his arrival in W.A. served his farming apprenticeship under Charles Davidson's management at "Glentromie" and then under Edward Roberts at Yathroo. Matthew was later to become a trustee of the Church of England Diocese of Perth from 1925 through to 1951/52.

In 1898 Walter built the Peerless Roller Flour Mill in Guildford that was capable of producing 10 bags of flour an hour with a storage capacity of 25,000 bags of grain. Peerless flour was subsequently exported to many overseas countries especially to South America and Asia. He set up the colony's first tallow factory and then a tannery, producing a range of quality leather and in the far north of the colony Walter pioneered the breeding of cattle and sheep, on his De Grey station. He established Cossack and had his first ship, the cutter "Mystery" built to enable easier communication with this new area of his business. The north-west region soon expanded rapidly, as did his fleet of ships to service them. He later built or hired additional ships to enhance his expanding international trade, particularly to India, Singapore, China, and especially to London.

Public Life and Benefactor

(reader: Marie Watts)

Walter occupied many public posts, representing the Swan electorate in the Legislative Council from 1872 – 1878. He was elected as Perth City Councillor several times, and was President of the Royal Agricultural Society over several years and Guildford's first Mayor. He was a Council Member on several Roads Boards, a Justice of Peace and also finished up a prolific writer, addressing a wide range of subjects including free trade, immigration and education.

His wide range of business interests brought him in close contact with many of our great pioneers including Lord John Forrest, John Septimus Roe, Governor Stirling, George Shenton, Charles Harper, Major-General Sir Talbot Hobbs, Sir Edward Stone and his good friend Bishop Hale and many other distinguished dignitaries, both at home and abroad. Walter was a member of The Church of England, Perth Diocesan Synod and attended sessions between 1874 and 1903.

In 1867, he donated land and capital towards the construction of St. James Church at South Greenough and in 1903 when Walter became aware of the financial difficulties the Church of England faced in seeking to set up the Diocese of Bunbury, he withdrew £3,500 from the bank and delivered it to Bishop Riley's office to enable the new Bunbury Diocese to be established. He followed this up with a further £500 donation. Following the dispersment of Walter's will the Bunbury Diocese also received £10,580 and the Diocese of the North-West an amount of £3,000.

Typical of Walter's concern for others is the story of a widow, anxiously concerned about her home and family after the death of her husband. The man was deeply in debt to Walter and the lady sought out Walter to explain her situation to him. She explained her plight, he listened then said, "Go home young lady, raise your family as best you can, I forgive you all the debt". Through tears of gratitude she tried to find words to thank him, but Walter added, "If God had not helped me, I could not have helped you, thank him".

Walter died on the 17th April 1907, aged 89 years, and was buried in the family vault at the East Perth Cemetery alongside his wife, Charlotte, who passed away in 1895.

Charlotte Padbury contributed to numerous charities that were both private and secret. She was one of the earliest members of the House of Mercy (now known as Ngala) and a foundation member of the Dorcas Society, a prime mission of which was to provide clothing for the poor.

In his will, Walter bequeathed £156,000 to charitable organisations and institutions in need and to the Church of England. The bequest was split three ways, one third to the Trustees of hospitals for the disadvantaged and the asylums, one third to the Trustees of the poor houses in the colony and one third to the Trustees of the Church of England in Western Australia.

In order to appreciate Walter's financial contribution to the Church it might well be compared to the £17,000 cost of St. George's Cathedral that was consecrated in 1888. It is estimated that his financial support to the Church would have been sufficient to have build around 6 cathedrals at that time.

Some of the many charitable organisations and institutions that benefitted considerably from Walter's benevolence included Parkerville Children's Home; the Royal Institute for the Blind; mental health asylums; hospitals; Lady Lawley Cottage; various poor houses; Sunset Men's Home in Dalkeith; Mt Henry Women's Home in Manning; Saint Bartholomew's House; Orphanages, with a number of these bodies being supported for over 100 years from when he died through the "The Padbury Bequest".

This is an "extraordinary achievement" when considering his start in life within the colony as a 12 year old, virtual orphan and penniless.

The extremely valuable G7 block in St. George's Terrace, comprising around 10,000 square feet of land was left to Walter's sister Ruth in his Will, but on her death it was then to go to the Church of England. The Church took over the land in 1912 with the Will further stating that the rents and profits from G7 be directed to the Treasurer of the Vestry or any other managing body of St. George's Cathedral and "that such property shall never be sold".

It is understood the Trustees, in consultation with the Padbury family, sold G7 in 1937 for £35,000 to cope with a period of severe financial stress following the years of the depression and when the Church was experiencing great difficulty to even pay stipends to their inadequately remunerated clergy.

Following his passing away and as a lasting tribute to Walter Padbury, the Synod of the Church of England, Perth, resolved in favour of a proposal from the Padbury Memorial Committee (formed to bring forward suitable recommendations), chaired by Bishop Riley, that a church, already planned for Moora, be build on a somewhat larger scale and that it be regarded as "The Padbury Memorial Church".

The Committee were influenced by the significant contribution Walter had made to the Dandaragan/ Moora area where he had been generally regarded as the patriarch of the settlement in that district, particularly in Dandaragan where he established Yathroo Station that arguably became the showpiece property of the colony during that period, and for some years to come..

St. James Anglican Church, Moora was consecrated in 1911 with an inscription on the foundation stone reading "To the Glory of God and in memory or Walter Padbury who landed in this State in 1830. This stone was laid by the Honourable W.T. Loton J.P."

As a further recognition of Walter's contribution to the Church, a stained glass window in the north transept of St. George's Cathedral was dedicated in his honour on 12th April 1911 in a ceremony conducted by Bishop Riley.

This condensed biographical coverage only provides a brief reflection of Water and Charlotte's contribution to the development and well being of our State. They must surely go down in history as two of our greatest pioneers.

For Walter, it can be said of him that no rich man could have been more modest in his outlook on life and removed from the influence and accolades that success can bring. He truly proved himself to be a sincerely committed steward of the Lord. End

Regarding Walter Padbury's date of birth, recent extensive research has confirmed that the date shown in John Nairn's book mentioned below is the correct date: That is 22nd December 1817. A number of biographies, including those on the internet, show the year as 1820, which is incorrect.

This profile was compiled jointly by Albany Richard Padbury, of "Koojan" Kojonup (from family records) together with research conducted by John Whitton, a member of the Anglican Church Provincial Council of WA and with supporting references from *The Life and Times of Walter Padbury* by John Nairn, who basically authenticated the family records and who was so emphatically and sincerely eulogistic about Walter's dedication and contribution supporting the development of Western Australia during its initial establishment.

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