

EPG Joseph Adlam

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EARLY GERALDTON. FARMING AT GREENOUGH.

Octogenarian's Reminiscences. Eighty years ago a convict ship, the Clara, brought to Western Australia a British soldier, his wife, four sons and a daughter. The daughter died last year at 92 years of age and on Monday, one of the sons, Mr. Joseph Adlam, who is 83, told the story of his early years at the Greenough, Geraldton and the Murchison goldfields. Mr. Adlam has worked for years in various parts of the country at his trade as a carpenter, and is now settled in Perth. The news that Greenough is planning to hold a centenary celebration in the near future interested Mr. Adlam greatly. "I do not know when the district was first settled," he said, "but my father arrived there in 1858 or 1859, about 15 months after we arrived from England on the Clara. I was born at Lewes, in Surrey, in 1855. My father, being a soldier, was moved from place to place so that his children were born in different towns, one at Dublin, one at Bolton, another at Dart moor, and another at Karachi, India. He came here as a guard over convicts, but before long obtained a grant of between 200 and 300 acres of land at the Greenough, and took the family up there to live. The district had then been settled for some years, but I do not know how long. Some of the first settlers on the Greenough were the Criddles, the Hunts and the Desmonds. I do not think any of them are living in the Greenough district now, but some of the Criddles live at Dongarra." Mr. Adlam said that his father retained his rank as a corporal and was in charge of the pensioners who lived in the Greenough district, being responsible for paying them and supervising the regular parades, which were held to keep up the discipline of the force of pensioners. Those were the days of primitive farming, for Mr. Adlam senior was by then primarily a farmer and only incidentally a soldier. Wheat was harvested by sickle and threshed with a flail. From the first young Joseph had no faith in farming as a source of livelihood for himself. Perhaps the fact that he

experienced the plague of rust which ruined the crops of the Greenough flats in 1868 prejudiced him against going on the land. A Plague of Red Rust. "I was carrying shingles for my brother, who was working on a building, when I first saw the rust," Mr. Adlam continued. "I was a lad of about 13 years and when climbing the ladder I saw a brown patch in what we knew as Grey's field. When I asked my brother what the patch was he called to J. S. Maley, who was standing at the foot of the ladder, to come up and see. Maley, who had just returned from South Australia where the red rust was already known, recognised the plague and explained, even at that early stage, that it was a kind of insect which settled as fine as dust on the wheat and ruined it. From that patch the rust spread right through the district, and a small quantity of poor flour for their own use was all that many farmers could get from their whole crop. Maitland Brown was resident magistrate at Geraldton at the time, and when the Government agreed to supply seed wheat at 7/6 a bushel he set the farmers to work bushing the sandhills in Geraldton to enable them to pay for seed. In those days drift sand was so bad in Geraldton that when you went to bed at night you needed to leave a shovel inside to clear sand away from the door next morning. Bushing proved a fairly effective manner of coping with the drift. Unfortunately, however, the seed wheat at 7/6 a bushel produced crops worth only 3/ a bushel." As one of his brothers and a brother-in-law were carpenters, and he himself had shown a decided liking for the work, Joseph decided to become a carpenter's apprentice at Geraldton. He began with Mr. W. Trigg, starting without wages and working up to 16/- a week in his fifth year. After he had served his time he went on contract work at 8/- a day for a ten-hour day. About then the railway to Northampton was built, the first Government line in the State, and after he had been contracting for some time Mr. Adlam was able to improve his position by becoming a railway carpenter at 8/ a day for an eight-hour day. He worked for the railways for 11 years then went to the Murchison goldfields as a carpenter for a mining company at £4/10/00 a week, considered a very good wage for a tradesman in those days. Later he was able to command £5 a week. In 1903 he came to

Perth to work on a big racecourse carpentry job and since then, with Perth as his family headquarters, he has worked about the country at his trade. Northampton Mining Boom. "Geraldton was a thriving place in the days of the Northampton mining boom," continued Mr. Adlam. "I have seen as many as 30 and 40 teams come into Geraldton at one time from the mines with lead and copper ore. Soon after the railway was built the mining activity declined a bit, but apart from a temporary lull the town did not experience a serious setback, as wheat, wool and sandalwood provided a thriving trade, and later the gold rush to the Murchison meant good business for Geraldton. At first lighters had to be used to load the ships in the harbour. Later the jetty, which had been started by prisoners, was finished by contract and the Georgette, the Otway and other vessels of 500 and 600 tons were able to load alongside." Mr. Adlam laughed when it was suggested that life must have been dull in country towns before the days of motor cars, cinemas, and broadcasting. "We used to have high old times in the little Rechabite Hall," he declared emphatically. "We had a social assembly every week and once a month we would dance all night, not finish up at 12 o'clock or 2 o'clock as they do now. We danced right through until it was light. Great fun used to result from visits to outlying places, like the Greenough. Return visits were also made, and the enjoyment was very keen. On Sundays we often used to go for fishing trips into Grey's Bay. On one occasion I remember, the first early morning fisherman to cross the sandhills nearly fell over with astonishment when he saw 13 whales washed up on the beach. An early arrival branded the valuable creatures and a company was formed to extract the blubber but, unfortunately for the speculators there were no boilers or other implements to treat the carcasses, so that the opportunity was lost. One of the whales was loose in the bay and the skipper of a schooner lowered a ship's boat and gave chase, grounding the huge creature half way between the jetty and Point Moore Lighthouse." Mr. Adlam's other reminiscences included the story of a schoolmate who was murdered, the departure of John and Alex Forrest on their great overland trip from Geraldton, travelling by coach to the northern goldfields and humorous asides on the characters who helped to brighten life for Geraldtonians in the days before the twentieth century dawned.