

A Gentleman and a Rascal



Autobiography
by
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CHAPTER 19

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Front Cover: I wish to thank artist Laura Cole for her kind permission to use the second painting from the triptych **Kimberley Grasses**.

Disclaimer: Every effort has been made to contact the people mentioned in this book, we apologise if any omissions have been made.

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CHAPTER 19

Western Livestock

When I returned to Perth from Toodyay I joined Elders in the livestock department and was later appointed as their Chief Branch Inspector. I did not like that job, because I had to go away to the country a lot and it went against my nature to continuously reprimand people and to occasionally dispense with their services. The climax came when I was requested by the Branch and Agency Manager to sack the young stockman at Moora on my next visit. When I asked for what reason, I was told he turned up late and was in ditty clothes when he and the new General Manager visited there the previous week. He also showed me a letter where his landlord had written to the firm wanting the company to pay the six weeks rent which the young man was behind, and he had heard that he also owed money to the local storekeeper.

On my next visit to Moora I had arranged for the Moora manager and the young stockman to see me at 10am in the morning, on my usual trip up the Midland line and down the Wongan Hills line. I arrived at Moora on time, met the Manager and told him of my instructions and asked where the young man concerned was. The Manager said if he had been asked by the management, why the boy was late and in sheep handling clothes he could have explained, because he had sent him out to a property to assist in the loading of two semi-loads of suckers, about five hundred lambs which were sent to Midland sale yards that day for Elders to auction.

The young man appeared about ten minutes later and I asked him why was he late again to meet me. He said, "My apologies sir but I have just brought my wife out of hospital after a phone call saying that she was ready to come home". I said I was sorry to hear about her being unwell and in hospital and he beamed with a large smile on his face and said that there was nothing wrong with her but she had given birth to their second child and it was boy, which they both wanted.

How could anyone with a heart at all tell the lad he was to be sacked. I asked him about his debts and he gave me an outline of what he owed. I knew the R & I Bank manager in Moora very well, so I took the lad around to the bank and arranged a loan to clear all his debts on the understanding his salary would be paid directly to the bank and he could draw a reasonable weekly amount to live on. I thought I had done a good job, both for the Company and the youth. I had experienced trying to live on the meagre salary all stock firms paid their representatives.

Next week back in the office I always wrote a report to management of my trip and made no mention of the youth at Moora. I was soon called in by the General Manager and asked if I had dispensed with the boy's services. I replied no and explained all to him thinking again what a good arrangement I had made for the good of the Company and the individual concerned. I was told, "Buzzard if you are not prepared to carry out my orders, I will soon find someone to take your place that will" My reply was "Well you had better find that chap now, as I have had a gut full of you and your Company policies".

This bloke had been a Brigadier in the Army and thought he was still there. Elders lost dozens of their best men because of the management at that time having had no experience of living and working in the country. Again I had run into some shiny bum managers.

I must say that Elders trained their staff to be excellent examples and what a young man should be, prior to shiny bums from Adelaide coming over and taking charge. I can recall having in my charge at Midland an excellent sample of our youth, who all left the Company and work for themselves. Barty Court who is now farming at Walebing, Angus Horwood from Geraldton, Jock Spencer a Dandaragan farmer and Richard Cleaver. There were many others who left the firm to go on the buying side of the trade buying livestock for local butchers and export.

John Hogue and his wife Judith were good friends. I spent a lot of time with John when he was a young livestock representative for Elders at Carnarvon. At one time Elders appointed me as their buyer for export live sheep to Singapore and occasionally we sent a shipment of about two thousand, six hundred sheep on the Matsuka, a ship which was chartered by Elders. They would send the ship to Carnarvon when it was required. We could only put two thousand, six hundred sheep on the ship and we had thousands of good heavy wethers to pick from in the Gascoyne. Some of them carried fairly large horns as it is difficult for a pastoralist to muster them all at one time, to castrate the ram lambs.



**"John Hogue; Elders, Carnarvon and wether with the broken leg.
It weighed 93lbs dressed."**

Some were up to six months old before they were tailed and had their stones removed. One of the excellent consignments, a sheep caught its foot in the mile-and-a-half jetty along which we had to drive the sheep to get to the boat. We could not send any sheep away with lameness or diseases because they were checked out by an Agricultural Inspector as they boarded. That one sheep broke its leg, so we had it killed and dressed by the local butcher Arnold Gibson. It was ninety three pounds in weight dressed. I have a photograph of it hanging on the scales.

John left Elders and joined Western Livestock the week we commenced in business. He was appointed manager in Kelleberrin and then sent up to Geraldton to be in charge of the branch there. He passed away a couple of years ago in the first year of his retirement.

At that time, Jack Lee became very unhappy about the way Elders was being run by the administrative staff, who were sent from headquarters in Adelaide with their new ideas on doing business. When the staff and clients became a number only, the goodwill and loyalty to the firm dissipated and it became a very unhappy place to work. Jack was another great friend whom I knew in Goldsborough Mort before the war. In 1948, when he changed to Elders he was at Northam Branch and later he was Livestock Department Manager. It was he who persuaded me to leave Elders and go into business together with John Bartle and Phil Strickland. We joined together until Jack retired in the late 1960's. He went to live in Mandurah. He had a stroke soon after moving there and he left a widow, Audrey and two grown up children in Perth. Audrey still lives in Mandurah but the only connection I have with her is a card at Christmas. Her friends keep me up to date on her activities. Jack was awarded the OBE for service to the livestock industry in WA.

Jack and I joined forces with Phil Strickland who had a small stock business named Strickland Taylor and Co, which sold livestock out of the Midland Saleyards. When John Bartle joined us we formed a company called Western Livestock and took over from Strickland. On the Board of

Directors was Len James from Weston James, a well known accountancy firm in Perth, Jack Lee, Sir Eric Sandover, Dick Lewis, a Kojonup grazier who also won a DFC in the RAAF, Arthur Nichols an ex RAAF war time pilot, Bob Baxter, a Cunderdin farmer and grazier, John Bartle and myself. I did not know John until we started Western Livestock in the 1960's. He had financed Strickland and Taylor, the business we had bought. He decided to join us and became quite a big shareholder and later our Chairman of Directors. Bart had an illustrious career in the RAAF as a fighter pilot in the Middle East and he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for successfully strafing, bombing and sinking ships in Italian ports. After a long spell in the Middle East he was sent to RAAF headquarters in Melbourne. He did not like being at Airboard, but like the rest of us he had no choice. Relief came for him when the war ended and he was sent as the RAAF representative to accept the surrender of the Japanese bases in North Borneo and Sarawak. While he was there he came across a timber mill which was owned by an Englishman who had been able to escape from Borneo before the Japanese took over. The Englishman, had come back at the first opportunity to see how his mill was going. He found it in workable condition and was able to get it started again with the available native labour. Before the war Bart had worked in timber mills and his father was the manager of the Millar's Timber Co mill at Waroona for some years.

My Melbourne grandmother was a Miss Millar and she used to accompany her father to inspect their numerous mills in WA, on their way to England to sell the timber. In those days, most world trade centred round London. She remembered Bart's father quite well and said that he was one of their oldest and most trustworthy managers in the west. The Englishman invited Bart to go back to Borneo as soon as he was discharged and go into partnership with him, because he was getting to the age where he wanted to go back to England to retire. In future, he wanted to come out to Borneo now and again to see how things were going. Bart accepted his offer and joined him after discharge from the RAAF. Then after a few years he bought out the Englishman. Within ten years he had built the business up to a very profitable one. He was offered

a large amount of money from a Dutch company and found the offer too good to miss. That is why when he returned to Australia he had a large sum of money to invest in Western Livestock. He did not actively work for us for a few years because he had bought a timber mill near Jardee, a few miles out of Manjimup. My son Brian worked with him until he was called up for National Service.

Bart had a lovely home, Pasadeena in Kalamunda. He bought a thirty three foot caravan to live in at his mill. I spent several nights there when I went down to see Brian. I came to know and respect him a lot and we became firm friends. Bart sold the mill and came back to Perth. He often took his youngest son Barrie-John, myself and my two youngest boys to the Waroona Weir where we always caught a lot of marron. Bart loved fast cars and sometimes he must have thought that he was still flying fighter planes. One day we drove with him down to the cattle sales at Boyanup in his new Jaguar. Brian Derry a famous auctioneer was with us. He was sitting in the back and must have observed that we were going at a hell of a speed. He started to reminisce about the old cars he drove when he was with Dalgety. One of them was a silver anniversary model Buick. He called out to us in the front, "As hard as I tried I could never get one hundred miles an hour out of it." Bart calmly asked him if he had ever experienced one hundred miles an hour in any car, his reply was no. "Well" said Bart, "You are doing one hundred and twenty three miles an hour now." I was sitting in the front and I could not see the speedometer so I nearly had a heart attack when he said that. Brian's only remark was, "Well something new happens every day." I can assure you that we arrived at the cattle sale well before it commenced.

When Bart retired he and his wife Barbara took the caravan for a trip around Australia. After going up the coast to Carnarvon, Broome, Kununurra, Darwin and north Queensland they came to Noosa Heads. They loved the place so much they stayed there for good and that was about fifteen years ago. In September, 1996, my family and I spent a week at a reunion of the Catalina Club on the Gold Coast. Barbara brought Bart down to see us and we had a lovely day reminiscing.



Brian and John Bartle.

Eddie Vickers was another character I had a lot to do with. He commenced as manager of the livestock department of Western Livestock. We spent many a day together travelling over most of Western Australia including the north west. Eddie was also a first class auctioneer and was very witty. On one occasion we were selling a lot of cattle at Midland for a farmer at Waroona whose son advised us that his dad had been taken to hospital the day before. The sale was a bit dull and Eddie did not think that the values that he was getting, were good enough. During a lull in the sale Eddie announced to all the butchers who were bidding, that the owner had been taken to hospital with a broken leg the day before and that when he got the price of his cattle that night, he would probably die of a broken heart. That caused a bit of humour to the buyers and it was noticeable from then on that they bid a bit higher for the bloke's cattle.

One day whilst travelling through the pastoral country with Eddie Vickers. We happened to be at Carnegie Station overnight and quite early in the day a Aboriginal welfare officer called there and he had with him two Aboriginals who were the last two to be brought in out of the desert

where they had been living on birds, lizards, goannas, seeds of the shrubs and camped at the waterholes.

The female in the photo was Margot (our name for her). She was with her husband. They didn't have any clothes on them except some sort of a bush over their private parts. They were very shy, but after being given a cup of tea and some nice biscuits by Roy Linke, the part owner and manager, they became quite friendly. We always carried a few Western Livestock Tee shirts with us as gifts to our clients, Eddie suggested we give them one each. The Native Welfare Officer showed them how to put them on. They were really delighted and posed for photographs. They were taken to the Wiluna Native Settlement and unfortunately the man died shortly after but she was still going when I last heard about her.

Robin Campbell was also a stalwart in our company after we took over Dalgety and Co in WA. Robyn was their wool manager and he came in to assist Des Sheedy who was our wool manager. It was not long before he was appointed in charge of our branch department which was composed of forty to fifty staff reps in the country and about one hundred agents. When Elders bought us out he refused to work for them and found a good part time job in Wesfarmers and privately handled wool on his own for a select number of his old Dalgety and Western Livestock clients.



"Margot" wearing Western Livestock top.

Jim Boyd was another good friend of mine who lived near me in Kintail Road. He was a manual arts teacher in various schools around the metropolitan area. His father also had a house in Applecross. The family owned Taincrow and Tuckenarra stations just out of Cue and they also had a farm at Bindoon, which his brother managed. When Jim Boyd Senior came to Perth to semi retire they put a manager onto their stations. I became rather close to them when they transferred all of their business from Dalgety to Western Livestock. He was also a regular at the Raffles.

He was eighteen stone and heavily built and I was no match for him. I had to leave for home much earlier than he did.

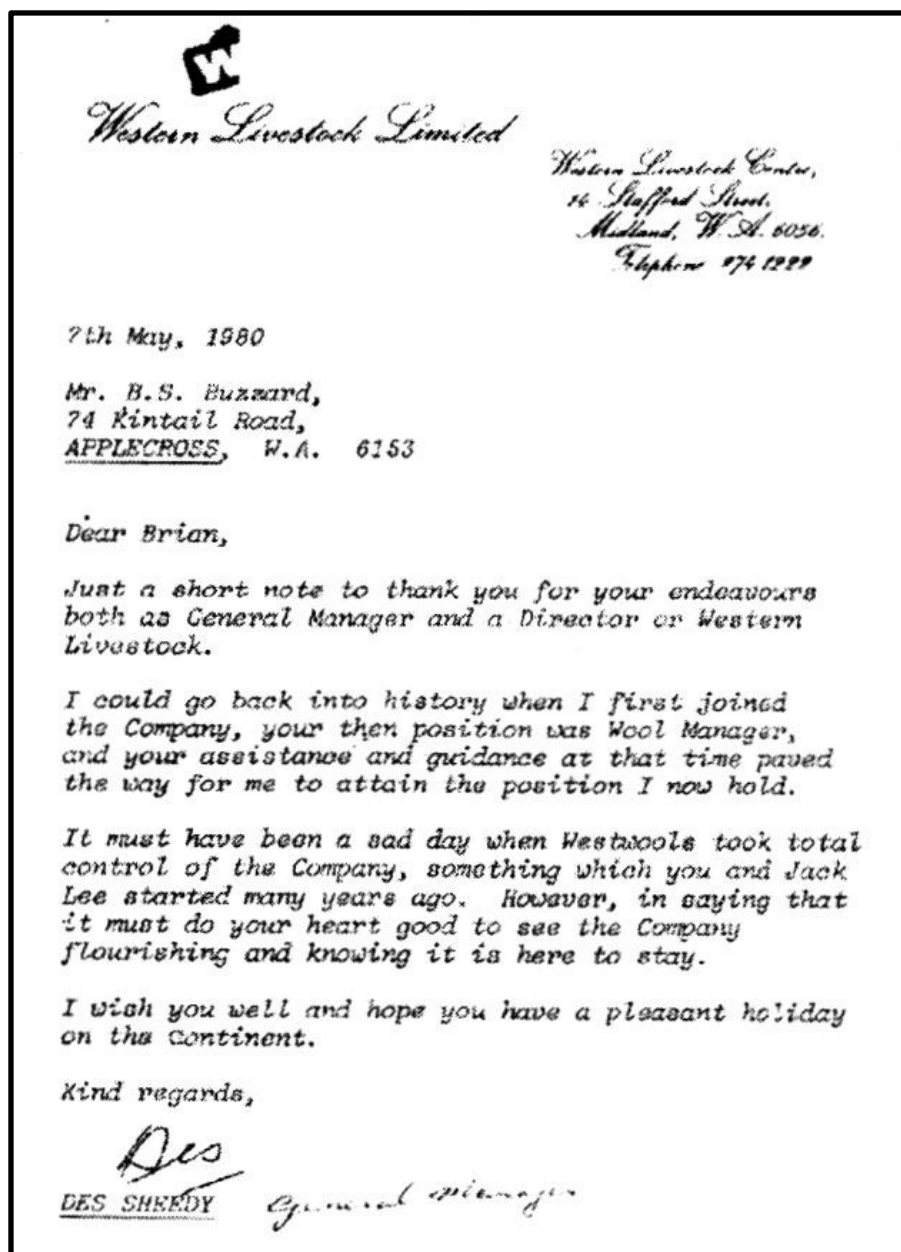
Other friends from the Western Livestock days who helped to make my life the way it has been are; Graham Densley, who is manager of Cargills Livestock at Geraldton, an American company which has been in the wool business in WA for many years. It opened a livestock and general farmers supplies section a few years ago.

Colin Campbell, who lives semi-retired in Bunbury and Bob Bratten from Gin Gin and Lake King, still keep in contact with me. When they are in Perth they all stay at the Raffles Motel and have done so for thirty years since the time they were all employed by Western Livestock.

Jim West who I first met in Ballidu where he farmed and was a shearer in the late 1930's. He purchased a block of virgin land and had the job of fencing and clearing it. He also built a shed and lived in one end while his machinery, hay and vehicles took up the rest. He went shearing for a good part of the year to get the finance to develop his block. He was a "gun" shearer and could shear up to two hundred sheep in a day. He earned good money which he put back into his farm. He sold out and came to Perth at the end of the 1950's and purchased a share of the Raffles Hotel with Maurie Kidson and Abe Saffron. He did a lot of the manual renovation work of the whole hotel and supervised the erection of the Motel himself. He was known to have a light shandy on a hot day after work and I used to join him. We are still in contact with each other now and again. He is a bloke I can rely on to give me help if I need money or any other assistance.

Reg Harrington and Toby Watson from Bolgart were very good clients and friends, also Joe Langford who came to Toodyay from Bencubbin. I sold Joe a good property and he appreciated it. When he returned to Perth, I sold the property to Allan Heath from South Australia and he and his family became great friends.

Western Livestock grew at a great rate, expanding into wool and merchandise departments. We had some financial difficulties because we expanded too quickly and got mixed up in a disastrous financial arrangement with Westos, who caused a lot of trouble and they eventually went bankrupt. We decided to join Westwools on an exchange-of-shares basis.



A farewell letter from Western Livestock.

That happened a few months after I had retired as general manager, but I stayed on as a director. Eventually, Westwools sold the company to Elder

Smith. I was fortunate as I had retained all of my shares in Western Livestock and I made quite a lot of money from the sale.

Elders paid a hell of a price and only bought our company to take over and incorporate us into theirs with the excellent staff we had chosen and trained to work for us. At that time we had three hundred and fifty employees and approximately ninety agents in the country areas.

I have some very thoughtful ex-employees who visit me every now and then and letters from Len James who was our Chairman of Directors when I retired and Des Sheedy who took my place as General Manager. Des now has his own business, Premier Wools. During those twenty years I gained a wealth of knowledge about both the pastoral and agricultural areas of WA. I travelled by air and by car all over the state from Kununurra, through Kalgoorlie to Esperance and all points west. We had our good times and our hard times. During the hard times it sorted out the men who you knew had the guts and determination to weather the storms. The weak links dropped off along the wayside.

I have some very pleasant memories of the twenty years I spent in Western Livestock. Every two years we have a reunion at the Raffles Hotel. I have managed to attend them all so far and hope to get to the next one in October 1997.