The collectors

This paper examines two primary industries: the gathering of pearl shell and the mining of guano. Though they can be categorised as mere collecting activities, their remains and cultural effects are not limited to the regions or shores on which each industry was pursued. It also becomes evident that existing remains cannot be properly understood without mention of the inevitable stages through which each industry progressed, or without an acknowledgment of the broader social and economic context in which each occurred. Further, in examining them from the perspective of one innovative, wide-ranging and very influential European/Australian family, both the effect these industries had on the cultural landscape, and the often-inextricable links between other industries and a number of social undercurrents (some of which are still of great relevance today) become apparent.

Pearls and pearl shell, being noted for their beauty and lustre, are well-set amidst the jewels of both the world's literature and Australian folklore and, as a result, they need little introduction here. Guano, on the other hand, is somewhat of a mystery for it has attracted relatively little attention, being measured by its users, not for its lustre, but on the (often artificially boosted) strength of its agricultural pungency. It is, in fact, a rich organic substance consisting of bird droppings, eggs, nests, feathers, bodies and other noxious substances—suitably fermented by the passing of time into a potent, natural fertiliser. Guano was the first of the highly concentrated manures and it replaced bone for agricultural purposes in Europe. As such, it was a much sought after commodity throughout the world. It was first discovered on Australian shores by John Grace of Queenscliff, near Melbourne. He discovered guano on nearby Flat Island in 1858 and, in beginning its collection and export, altered the appearance and ecosystem of that island and possibly the seas beneath for centuries to come. The substance was later found on many of Australia's offshore islands and the subsequent rush to gather this natural product resulted in some of them being claimed for America. Despite the islands being heavily denuded and their nests destroyed, the birds returned to nest on them in their thousands; even today, guano islands are easy to find, especially if one ventures downwind.

With respect to the physical remains of these two collecting activities, the most obvious and welcome are found in late 19th-century pearling: the 'hard-hat', graceful luggers, Chinatown Broome, the settlement at Thursday Island in Queensland's Torres Strait and the often-striking polyglot population still remain to conjure up entirely false images of what was a harsh and deadly reality. Here cyclones, beri beri and the diver's bends served to produce a short life expectancy and hundreds of grave-sites. A well-known example is the Japanese divers' cemetery in Broome. These remains, however, are images of a much later period in pearling, as the era preceding it was one which produced very few recognisable physical remains and (despite the many deaths) equally few marked graves. It was a time where it was noted, even as it happened, that:

The thirst for shells, for pearls for success, brutalises...the pearling speculator or diver...no day is respected, no dark man's life is valued...but the utmost of diving must be sucked out of them, killing them or not.3

Michael McCarthy

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As a collecting activity, pearling goes back much further in time; pearling in Australia began eons ago with the collecting activities of Australia's indigenous peoples. Characteristically, they took only enough for their ceremonial and limited trading needs, exchanging shell with their neighbours as far inland as the Gibson Desert and then, much later, with the Macassan trepangers who began to frequent our northern shores in the 18th century. Unfortunately, we have learned little about pearling from the Macassan sites and even less about the industry from the Aboriginal 'Dreamings'. The paucity of knowledge is exacerbated because this period was followed by an era where the European pearlers, who began to frequent the waters of Australia's north coast after 1865, were noted (with one exception) for the simplicity of their approach. With a subsequent lack of infrastructure, we gain equally little from the scant material remains at the known early-period pearling camps. Later camps such as Wilyah Miah (Place of the pearl), which was in operation at Shark Bay in the later period (from 1873 to c. 1920), and many others scattered across Australia's north provide far more information, but even there the remains are minimal; unfortunately, Australian white ants are voracious and scarce building materials are often reused. Thus only sherds, some bricks, a few scattered sheets of corrugated iron and the odd wreck on the shoreline remain today as much disturbed and barely recognisable indicators of an extraordinary past.

So, too, with guano collecting. The reduction to bedrock, however, of many of Australia's bird rookeries and offshore islands in order to serve the farms and gardens of Europe is clearly not a natural phenomenon. The occasional length of railway iron, the sherds, odd submerged stone 'jetties' and roofless, stone shelters provide some clue to those without a feel for the natural environment. From an anthropological perspective, we are at a distinct disadvantage, especially from the now almost-irretrievable perspective of the labourers themselves. As a result we depend, far more than we would prefer, on an examination of the lives and activities of European 'users' of the services of Aboriginal and imported 'Malay' and Chinese labourers in these industries to colour the picture. Thus we turn, in this instance, to the Broadhurst family of squatters, pastoralists, pearlers, guano merchants, husbands, wives, teachers, musicians and feminists who operated in Australia from the 1830s to just after the turn of the century. Their activities create a bridge between the early and later periods of guano and pearling and the present, and also help to provide a European social and economic context for the industries. For this reason, the family will be used (within the constraints of this short offering) as a vehicle to explore the two industries and the European social and economic context in which they occurred.

The Broadhurst family

The Broadhurst family were noted Manchester textile merchants. In 1843 Charles was sent to Australia, possibly for the family's good. There he joined his brother Robert, a noted squatter in Kilmore (Victoria) and under Robert's tutelage Charles established himself as a farmer. Charles married the talented musician and Irish immigrant Eliza Howes. Her family of impoverished teachers and successful Victorian road and bridge-building engineers were noted
for their products, especially the bluestone family seat of Talara which still graces Belfast (now Port Fairy) in Victoria.19

As eminent squatters, holding vast areas of land in the Kilmore region north of Melbourne, the Broadhurst/Howes family flourished under Robert. Due to his successful marital and economic union with Eliza Beveridge, a vast pastoral holding was established which was noted, over a century ago, as displaying many of the 'signs of a refined life' – huge acreage, books, servants, substantial buildings and facilities.14 Charles and Eliza also established a property nearby, called 'Weena', which they operated as a horse stud. It sits on land so fine that it was purchased by the late Robert Holmes a Court for similar purposes.

These 'squatters' became concerned at the possibility of losing their vast lands to the land hunger of the growing band of late-1850s Victorian gold-miners and 'selectors'. In response to the threat to their livelihood Robert, Eliza and Charles joined William Harvey's Melbourne-based Camden Harbour Pastoral Association.15 Its physical remains in Western Australia's Kimberley region represent one of the many European attempts (Fort Dundas, Fort Wellington, Broome, Wyndham, Derby, Port Essington, and Darwin) to establish a presence on Australia's northern shores.16 The Broadhursts did not travel with the Association. Under the leadership of Charles, they joined its sister organisation, the Denison Plains Pastoral Company in 1865.17 Through these two vehicles, Harvey had hoped to establish a string of telegraph and pastoral stations from Camden Harbour, through the Denison Plains (near present-day Halls Creek).

Figure 1. Broadhurst Family with their (Malay) servant, c. 1872. The sombre tone is most likely due to the recent loss of a child. The Broadhurst family, until recently, thought the servant was Indian, reflecting attitudes to 'coloured' labour.
and on to Sturt's track rising from Adelaide. This was to become a new gateway into Australia from Singapore into New South Wales and Victoria, through the north of Western Australia, thus obviating the need to traverse the difficult Bass and Torres Straits to access the riches of south-east Australia. The plan failed, leaving Melbourne and Sydney to dominate Australia's intercourse with Europe, India, Singapore and Batavia (Jakarta) from entirely the wrong side of the nation.

The Denison Plains Pastoral Company

When Camden Harbour failed, the Denison Plains Pastoral Company – under Broadhurst – established themselves at Nickol Bay (better known as the Dampier/Cossack region in Western Australia's Pilbara). Here it was apparently not the visits of early American whalers with their Negro crews that set the scene for the extraordinary welcome the local Aboriginal people afforded the Europeans, as once believed, but the 'Dreamings' of the people centering on the Burrup Peninsula in Nickol Bay. This was an area noted for indigenous maritime art and traditions, extolling all that came from the sea. According to one modern-day Aboriginal custodian, the 'Dreamings' were the philosophical bridge that afforded the inter-racial welcome which, from 1862 to 1868, allowed the Europeans an unprecedented opportunity to develop a toehold on adjacent lands as soon as they landed from their ships. What followed was a steady progress of deliberate, often-brutal and sometimes accidental dispossession and maltreatment of the Aboriginal people, which is only now being addressed after nearly a century and a half.

In examining these events, it becomes clearly evident that the Melbourne-based Denison Plains Pastoral Company had an immense effect on the cultural landscape of north-west Australia. After the inevitable collapse of the company, one of the largest formed to settle Western Australia's north, thirteen of the total of nineteen Victorian shareholders who landed there thrived as pastoralists or in the industries that served them (in this instance as hoteliers, blacksmiths and shoemakers). In fact, the Denison Plains people lay considerable claim to some (short-lived) primacy in these respects, especially in the pastoral industry, and in the provision of alcoholic drink, one of the 'key' social engines in Australia's north-west and one of the key negative forces in shaping the layout and appearance of its modern towns. Company people comprised the vast majority of the European women and children in the district for many years; they also built some of the first permanent dwellings at the embryonic township of Roebourne.

Charles, Eliza and their eldest son Florance, also purchased blocks of land in the newly-surveyed town, one which contained so much promise as the centre for colonial administration in the 'North District' of Western Australia. It was an area comprising the modern North-West, Pilbara and Kimberley districts of Western Australia; and was land that, in 1861, contained not one known European inhabitant. If past events are an indication, this historic town – with
its discordant mix of colonial gaol and courthouse in acres of broken glass, soulless modern hotels, peaceful river-gum lined pools, Aboriginal sites and security screening — will provide a litmus for the progress of Black/White reconciliation after the year 2000.19

When the pastoralist Emma Withnell and her husband John moved further out, annoyed at the press of humanity surrounding their station, Eliza Broadhurst arguably became the social focus for the European settlers and administrators at Roebourne. She had brought to the settlement her good graces, her determination, her finery, a noted singing voice and a piano — dragged through the swamps and carted over the plains. Her (unroofed) home at Roebourne actually became the temporary seat of Government for European and then Aboriginal society. There Robert Sholl, the Resident Magistrate, took office after his evacuation of the Camden Harbour settlement, administering the 'North District', officiating in the court, performing ceremonies and presiding in the cemetery when Eliza's floorboards provided the graveyard's first child's coffin.20 A true and much-praised reflection of European society of the time, Sholl also sentenced many (notably Aboriginal men) to years in gaol for petty crimes — setting in train a noted Western Australia predilection for incarceration as a solution to real or imagined ills of society.

Charles, like all other pastoralists in the region, was turning his head towards the pearling industry — his focus interrupted only when a famine and one disastrous shipwreck (which accounted for a full one-third of the European population in the district) saw Eliza and the children leave the north, never to return. For reasons possibly linked to her independent and strong nature, the inequities of Victorian marriage and society and to her constant pregnancies, Eliza gravitated quietly towards the growing women's movement in Europe.21 Understandably so, for it was a time when, amongst those of European stock, men dominated all aspects of life, even the birthing process — the first female contraceptives had only just become available to Australian women over the pharmacist's counter.22 Due to the financial problems and failures that regularly beset her itinerant husband, Eliza was forced to teach, opening day and boarding schools and educating both children and adults in languages, music and the sciences. She was also a major force in music and drama circles in the nascent city of Perth, forming a 'musical union' and drama society. As a mother, educator, school owner and principal, musician, dramatist and feminist, she became a focus for the young female progressives in Perth's society. Her rise was only hindered by her continued pregnancies, the family's constantly impecunious state and her husband's propensity for grand schemes, controversy and consistent failure.23

**Pearling**

In noting the ease with which the welcoming and friendly Aboriginal people at Nickol Bay collected pearl shell in the shallows at low water spring tide, Charles Broadhurst and his Denison Plains Pastoral Company colleagues went
with the Aboriginal people to the shore when tidal conditions and the demands of their sheep stations permitted. Thus they began the European–Australian pearling industry out of Cossack, a full twenty years ahead of its generally-accepted commencement at Broome and Thursday Island, and thousands of years after it was commenced by Aboriginal people.

In mixing their pearling and pastoral pursuits, they introduced technology in the form of the hessian sack to the industry, expanding from the Aboriginal tendency to take only what was needed or what would fit in the hand. The Europeans then introduced the old Denison Plains Company boat which could be towed or rowed through the shallows, providing an even greater carrying capacity: in doing so they began a process that eventually allowed the collection of the shell on the drying reefs to exceed its capacity for regeneration. Many
other boats followed, becoming larger and larger, culminating by the 1870s in two-masted ketches or schooners with up to six attendant dinghies. In the period between January and August 1868, with the drying shell beds becoming rapidly denuded, the Europeans took the then-compliant Aboriginal people (who were excellent swimmers) offshore and taught them to dive. Thus, without mask, fins, snorkel or any other aids, the indigenous people of Australia’s northwest, especially the women, became world-renowned for their shell collecting and diving expertise (see Figure 2).24

Having failed to properly utilise the diving skills of the local Aboriginal people, Charles went south, cap-in-hand, to the government and succeeded in obtaining the services of Rottnest Island Aboriginal convicts for use in the pearling industry. He believed that because their skin was black they could swim as well as their north-west colleagues. However, most did not have a maritime tradition, proving Broadhurst’s somewhat-naïve expectations to be wrong. He went on to prematurely introduce technology to the industry, in the form the ‘Hard Hat’ (or diving apparatus); again he failed, for he had not yet learned the best method to deploy the expensive and labour-intensive apparatus diver, the hoses, pumps and attendant boats. More than once, Broadhurst’s panic-stricken diver—in hard hat, protective suit and heavy lead boots—lay streamed out behind the boat by his air hose, like a ribbon in the wind, as they tackled fierce currents and tides.25 Yet Broadhurst persevered with his (then) unnecessarily-complex technology, failing at every turn; he was a visionary years ahead of his time and (like many such sages) he apparently lacked the common-sense or business acumen required to make the venture a commercial success. He then compounded his problems by introducing to the industry a small—but very expensive—auxiliary steamer, the SS Xanthe.26

There was much learning to be done in these formative years and results were far better using the Aboriginal people diving out of small dinghies with no diving equipment at all. They would descend down to depths of at least 10 metres and there, against all modern expectations and without goggles, they could see and pick up shell. Aided by even the fastest current, they effectively ‘flew’ over the seabed and covered vast areas, sometimes surfacing with more than one ‘pair’ in their hands.27 But it soon became a vile industry, friendly compliance and mutual assistance turning to violence, murder, starvation and the marooning of men and women on offshore islands in (a sometimes unsuccessful) attempt to prevent their escape during the season. There were few dissenters, with Charles Harper, later a founder of Guildford Grammar School (a modern private college and significant Perth architectural development), notable amongst them. He was to have his face ‘re-arranged’ in a bout of ‘fisticuffs’ with the Resident Magistrate’s son for his troubles.28

Thus the excessive demands of the European pastoral and pearling industry on the resources of the coastal Jaburrara, Marthuthunira and Ngarluma peoples, and their Yindjibarndi neighbours inland, put an end to an initial period of peaceful co-existence.29 It was ostensibly replaced with the benign rule of European law
and secretly under the threat and reality of coercion, abduction and "Colt's revolver" as Aboriginal labour became more and more essential for the pursuit of both the pastoral and pearling industries. Aboriginal people were hunted far and wide to serve in the industry, and indentured 'Malay' labour was introduced to augment the failing local labour supply. As indicated earlier, there is little of the pearling industry in this phase that can be readily identified today, though rock carvings on the now-abandoned Inderoona Station, south-east of Cossack, show mounted riders, a man with a gun and a steam-assisted sailing ship, tentatively identified as the pearler Xantho. This renders doubly important the fact that early pearling and the coastal pastoral industry went hand-in-hand; today, with few exceptions, the remains of the coastal pastoral industry provide the only tangible links with pearling in its formative years.

The ruins and working buildings at Mardie Station, on the Nhuwala people's land at the lower reaches of the Fortescue River west of Nickol Bay, are a case in point. Former Denison Plains Company men, Mardie Simpson and Malcolm MacIntosh, established the station. Despite the effect of devastating cyclones, which only the Aboriginal people could predict, the station became established with substantial quarters, outbuildings and infrastructure. After pearling for a number of years, MacIntosh died there in the summer of 1875, his grave once visible near the shearing shed. Simpson also went pearling out of the station, but now the inverted remains of pearling craft in the mangroves offshore are all that is visible of a once-thriving industry, dominated by Europeans and worked by Aborigines. Even these remains are scant, comprising a few ballast stones, fragments of pearl shell, corroded iron work, fastenings and (somewhat evocatively) a bottle base "worked" by long-departed Aboriginal people to provide cutting implements or spear-points. These are a small and insignificant reflection of an industry of great financial and social import for pre-gold-rush Western Australia — at a time when a tonne of shell landed in London was worth more than a mid-level Government servant's annual wage; and when the pastoral industry and, for that matter, the entire colony, depended on the returns from pearling to survive.

The Aboriginal families served Mardie as labourers in the pastoral and pearling pursuits, up to the decline of the pearling industry in the early-20th century. After this they concentrated solely on providing services as musterers, shearsers, outriders, cooks, fencers, domestics and general hands, through many changes of owners after Simpson and MacIntosh. Shelter, food and some clothing; an allowance for their extended families, and what became for many generations traditional 'station life', were their scant reward. In many instances quarters were built for them, albeit spartan and at a discrete distance from the homestead, but they had hunting rights and could roam their land at will.

Citizenship, equal rights and other essential social and financial reforms which occurred in the late-1960s, eventually saw most Aboriginal people leave the stations for the townships and the city. However, their abandoned quarters at Mardie are still visible today. For those who know what these rust-streaked
corrugated iron boxes represent, they are not meagre and insignificant ruins at all. Best viewed from afar, they appear from the air as an evocative, almost Nolanesque, line of abandoned iron huts, with rudely-gaping, empty, black rectangles of former doors and windows. They cast long, dark and distorted angular shadows in the setting sun, across a hot, red plain of sand and rocks. This scene, prescient of the colours of our well-known indigenous (and nationally-recognised) flag, is repeated many times across the north. Thus, the old 'Station', its homestead, shearing sheds, outhouses, windmills, 'native quarters', humpies, fences, landings, its visible European graves (and the now often deliberately-hidden) Aboriginal ones, often represent a hundred years of change to the social and cultural landscape. They represent over a hundred years of European/Aboriginal involvement in the twin coastal pearling and pastoral industries, and this is the context in which the remains need to be viewed.

Broadhurst bought the SS Xanths to Australia in 1872 for use in the pearling trade; he stationed east of Port Hedland at Banningarra Creek on Pardoo Station. There he landed the hundreds of 'Malay' labourers imported for work in the north. In an effort to feed his men and to profit from the dietary requirements of those indentured to work for his rivals, Broadhurst (in another grand scheme) also attempted to establish a coconut plantation. He was somewhat of an enigma, for he maintained a sick bay for the 'Malays', while others - like the infamous Queensland 'blackbirder' Captain Francis Cadell - had them 'sheltered' and starving in mean humpies. Many died, the plantation never flourished and Broadhurst's sick bay was little used except by those with VD, for it all came to naught in November 1872 when the Xanths abruptly sank beneath him. On paper a useful little steamer, in reality an incontinent old refugee from the scrapheap, Xanths succumbed to the elements on the eve of Broadhurst capturing the entire trade in pearls and the cartage of men and material from the northwest to Batavia (Jakarta); his success raised the spectre of a self-governing north-western Australian colony in the minds of Perth-based bureaucrats, fearful of losing revenue vital to the struggling Swan River Settlement. Close to ruin, with large debts, Broadhurst abandoned his base, the embryonic coconut plantation and diving for pearls and then followed Cadell (who was also of Murray River exploration fame) to Shark Bay where pearls could be had without the necessity of diving.

Nothing, bar the wreck of Xanths, has remained unchanged of Broadhurst's premature attempt to introduce technology to the pearling industry years ahead of Broome. There is nothing comparable readily identifiable on the land, a fact rendered the more remarkable as there is no obvious sight of the industry at Banningarra Creek today, even-though it remained a pearling base for nearly fifty years after Broadhurst's time. Ironically, only a rusted-out abandoned truck, and equally degenerated motorcycle, mark the remains of an ill-fated attempt in the 1960s to resurrect the indigenous pearling industry at Banningarra Creek. In this instance the well-known European-activist Don MacLeod took Aboriginal stockmen out on strike at Pardoo (Banningarra) and throughout the
north and effectively took them out of the pastoral industry and off their lands in doing so. 36

Having lost all in the North-West pearling industry, which was noted more for the shells than the pearls contained therein, Broadhurst opened the Shark Bay industry, to which the reverse applied. Here diving was not essential for the efficient recovery of the shell as net-covered dredges were towed behind small sailing craft in order to scoop up the shell. In the early experimental period these ranged from tiny dinghies, through to schooners and even a Chinese junk! The shell was then landed, boiled and stirred for weeks in stinking pogey pots, so that the shell would open and the pearls fall easily from the rotten meat. Streets were lined with the seemingly worthless shell. Broadhurst quickly saw further opportunities and tried to sell the shell in London, with mixed success; he also established one of only two stores in the area at Wilyah Miah.

He achieved a much publicised and quite extraordinary financial success in the Shark Bay industry with a haul of 230 ounces (6.5 kilograms) of pearls in one season, worth nearly £2500; as a result the Governor nominated Broadhurst to the Legislative Council. Eliza’s social standing back in Perth was at its zenith. With a downturn in the industry, and with a somewhat jaundiced view of labourers of all colours, Broadhurst failed to pay the ‘Malays’ in his service and to repatriate those whose time had expired. It became a major scandal, with destitute ‘coloured’ men wandering about all over the region. London could not bear it and the local bureaucrats, who until then had been prepared to ignore the situation, selected both Broadhurst and Cadell as scapegoats. Cadell disappeared: he was eventually murdered by his labourers somewhere at sea. Broadhurst was forced to resign his seat in Parliament — his foray into the Shark Bay pearling industry and into Parliament short-lived, controversial and another of his much publicised failures. 37 Eliza’s chance of taking her ‘rightful place’ as a force in Perth society was ruined; her undeniably important role was continually submerged in the cyclic tides of her husband’s misfortunes. As a result, her place as a possible precursor to the neophyte Karrakatta Club, the first women’s club in Australia, has hitherto gone unrecognised. 38

The Abrolhos Islands Guano Industry

After these scandals Broadhurst established a fish and fruit canning industry at Mandurah, south of Fremantle, in 1877 and in this he was an undoubted success, establishing stone factories, jetties and substantial infrastructure. With a restless creative soul, driven by an almost pathological desire to resurrect his fortune, Eliza’s spirits and the family name, he proceeded back north, interested in the possibility of working the Abrolhos Islands, west of Geraldton. There he had found guano beds of a size previously unknown. In December 1883, at the age of 57, when most modern men are considering their superannuation prospects, he settled at the Abrolhos in order to work the deposits. 39 This was done by simply shoveling the guano through sieves and bagging it; when the deposit had been worked down to bedrock it was even broomed from the rocky crevices.
Although a very simple process, the infrastructure required to handle and ship it was enormous. By July of 1884, Broadhurst had established a residence, storeroom and accommodation for his ‘agent’ and seven ‘Chinamen’ who he had imported for the purpose. He also built a stone landing from which to load the ‘lighters’, used to ship the sacked guano to the much larger vessels waiting off-shore. By the middle of 1886, the firm had succeeded in constructing huts to house 35 men; a stone enclosure to hold 1500 tonnes of guano; tramways totaling around 1400 metres in length, and a stone jetty 77 metres long with a depth of 2 metres of water at its extremity.

Struggling under a characteristic lack of attention to detail and without the necessary business acumen, Charles brought his son Florance, who had a mercantile education, in as partner and soon relinquished control to him. By the end of 1890 a total of around 30,000 tonnes of guano had been shipped out of the islands. One of these was Gun Island, temporary home of the survivors from the Dutch East India Company (VOC) Ship Zeewijk which was wrecked offshore in 1727. Florance Broadhurst collected their historic materials on his guano lease and prepared a catalogue. In utilising his developing riches for philanthropic purposes, he purchased and had translated a copy of Ongelukige Voyagie, the incredible story of the Batavia massacres that took place in 1629. This led the young Henrietta Drake Brockman, his daughter’s playmate, to develop an interest in the VOC which, in turn, led to the discovery of the Batavia itself; this had a well-known effect on the modern-day submerged and terrestrial cultural landscape.

New accommodation and shipping facilities, including wharves and a jetty, were constructed on the Abrolhos Islands, involving a 4000 tonne holding-shed, a
yalah jetty of 100 metres length, 3 kilometres of tramway, houses and offices. The total value of the improvements and plant erected by the firm was in the vicinity of £7500, an immense sum for the time. By 1875, around 46,000 tonnes of guano had been exported by the firm, resulting in a royalty to the government of £16,000; as a reflection of the unstated return to the Broadhurst's themselves this provides some indication of their immense wealth after years of financial difficulty and near social-ruin.£

This hugely successful business, when seeking further rationalisation, was caught up in one of the key social movements in Australia. Europeans, who had previously worked alongside the imported labour, were laid-off and forty 'Malays' were employed in a move that was severely criticised by the local press. The inventive apparently had the desired effect: by 1902, only European labourers were being employed in the Company and the new 'White Australia Policy' was having its desired effect.£ After nearly two decades of collecting (thankfully, from one natural heritage point of view) the Abrolhos Islands guano came to be considered over-priced and of uncertain quality and supply, causing agriculturists to look closely at the prospects of obtaining their supplies elsewhere. The request of Cumming, Smith and Company of Melbourne for governmental support in the establishment of a chemical and artificial manure plant in the State prompted the formation of a Select Committee to enquire into the question of the renewal of the leases to mine the guano. Florance Broadhurst fought strongly against it, but forfeited his lease when it expired in the following year, 1904. Though the lease passed into other hands, eventually the industry died. Today, the islands are regenerating and the crayfishing fraternity uses the old jetties, storehouses and the guano remains to advantage.£

The final chapter...

In 1895, having established the industry and left it in the capable hands of his son, Charles and Eliza Broadhurst left the State to live in Bournemouth, England. They called their home ‘Karrakatta’, a Nyungar Aboriginal term which at the time was thought by some to mean ‘Place of Rest’.£ Eliza Broadhurst died in 1899 at a relatively early age with few personal possessions other than a handful of shares in a gas company; Charles died in 1905. Florance Broadhurst, the guano miner ‘extraordinaire’ and third in our triumvirate, died four years later in 1909, an extremely wealthy man. He was found drowned in his fishing dinghy after spending an afternoon on the Swan River. Apparently, he suffered badly from a fall injury sustained while searching for guano on the islands of the Recherche Archipelago, near Esperance. He was taking opium-based medication for the injury, to which he had possibly become addicted, and his family believe that this led to his untimely demise. In the meantime Florance’s elder brother, a well known London surgeon and violinist, suicided over an ‘affair of the heart’, and their sister Catherine became a suffragette, manacelling herself to railings and requiring force-feeding in London’s Holloway prison.£

In an amazing coincidence, some twenty years ago, well before I joined the WA Museum or my fellow-historians knew much of the events now before the
reader, my young family and I sought refuge at a poorly lit roadside pension in Bournemouth. It was a most-welcome relief, made the more welcome when departing in the morning a sign was seen in the hotel’s driveway, boasting the obviously Western Australian name of ‘Karrakatta’. It was not until the Broadhurst’s Xantho was excavated and research into its economic and social context was completed in 1996 that the link between this ‘place of rest’ and the frenetic and controversial pastoral, pearling and guano industries of Australia was confirmed.

Such are the complexities and broad-reaching ramifications which render the material remains of even the simplest of Australia’s early collecting industries and their effect on its cultural landscapes almost impossible to view with the eye alone.

endnotes

1 The Age, 21/3/1865.
4 ‘Hard Hat’ is a colloquial term used to describe a form of diving apparatus in vogue from the 1850s through to the 1960s. This involved the use of a copper alloy helmet into which air was pumped to the diver from the surface. The diver also usually wore a protective suit, gloves and heavy boots and breastplate. Communications were via the airpipe and a safety line. It was in use across Australia in salvage and in other applications from the 1850s. Though experimented with around 1868 in the pearling industry, it did not come into general use until the 1980s.
5 Inquirer, 28/4/1875.
6 For example see trading patterns in R.A. Berndt & C.H. Berndt, Aborigines of the West. Their past and their present, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, 1979, p. 247.
10 For example see the descriptions of guano sites in M. Stanbury et al., ‘Historic sites of the Easter Group, Houtman Abrolhos, WA’. Report - Department of Maritime Archaeology, WA Maritime Museum, no. 66, 1993
11 ‘Malay’ is a term, variously though incorrectly, used in the 19th century to generally describe those peoples inhabiting the islands to the north of Australia. It encompasses Malaysians, Singaporeans, Timorese, Indonesians and sometimes Filipinos. Often more specific terms were used to indicate the country of origin e.g. ‘Manillamen’, ‘Kupangers’ etc.
16 Diaries of the Resident Magistrate RJ Sholl, RJS QB Sho., Battye Library, State Library of Western Australia.
19 See articles about suffrage, education, medicine, midwifery, the 'Anti-Crinoline League' in *Literary cuttings... from all sources*, a compilation of press cuttings and other written memorabilia by Eliza Broadhurst, held by the Broadhurst family. Copy, Department of Maritime Archaeology, WA Maritime Museum.
21 See McCarthy, 1990, op. cit., for an expansion. Eliza's activities are dealt with throughout the narrative.
22 For a short precis of this development, see M. McCarthy, 'Before Broome', *The Great Circle: Journal of the Australian Association for Maritime History*, vol. 16, no 2, 1994, pp. 76-90.
23 The diver was tethered by the air hose to the attendant boat at a time when the pearlers had yet to master the skills required of moving the boat in a controlled fashion with the tide. This was an art that was apparently not perfected out of Broome until over 20 years later.
24 Broadhurst outlaid £4,500 to purchase and fit out the *Xantho* for pearling, whaling, turtle-shelling and the carriage of passengers and goods on the north west coast. At the time a mid-level government servant (e.g. a headmaster) was earning between £150- £200 per annum.
27 Spelling of these names varies widely. Those presented here are from Horton, op. cit.
31 In February of 1998, Mardie was noted in the Western Australian media for having recorded a temperature of 50° Celsius.
33 The stern of this vessel was examined and excavated in the period 1983-1992, McCarthy, 1996, op. cit.
34 For a useful description of Pardoo and a pastoralists view of this process, the pearling and Don MacLeod see L.A. Schubert, *Wiping out the tracks: an Australian oddyssey*, L. Schubert, Blue Bay, 1994, Ch. 3.
It was founded in 1894 at the suggestion of Dr Emily Ryder, a visiting American physician. She had met a group of 12 local women of the "St George Reading Circle", two of whom – Miss Best and Miss J.A Nisbet – were the heads of a private school for girls. Eliza Broadhurst is not mentioned in any of the literature dealing with the early founding of the Club. She was, however, principal of a school, ran the Musicians Union, and was a noted focus for the younger society women. Examples of the latter appear in the Hillman diaries which were penned in the period 1887-1884. B. Hillman (comp.), The Hillman Diaries: 1877-1884, private publication, Perth, see index under 'Broadhurst'. Her scrapbook indicates that she had a deep interest in women issues. Women's suffrage was high on the agenda of the Karrakatta Club, there being four departments formed: Hygiene, Literary, Artistic, Legal and Educational. The last was formed with a view to obtaining suffrage for women. Cameron, op. cit., p. 6. Miss Nesbit, the Headmistress, proposed the word 'Karrakatta' and she headed the Artistic Department.

He had earlier been granted a monopoly to work the deposits on the basis that the Government granting of a monopoly was seen as a positive step because it encouraged the outlay of capital and would result in industry efficiencies that would see a greater governmental return in the form of royalties.


See Footnote 26 for an indication of the magnitude of this sum.

See cutting on the subject from an unknown newspaper in Literary cuttings... from all sources, a compilation of press cuttings and other written memorabilia by Eliza Broadhurst. Held by the Broadhurst family, copy, Department of Maritime Archaeology, WA Maritime Museum, date circa 1894.

M. Stanbury & R. Brown, 'Report on the 1979 investigations into the nature of human activity and settlement on Pelsaert Island Houtman Abrolhos, Western Australia', unpublished report, Department of Maritime Archaeology, 1979. This is a very important work on the subject of guano mining in Western Australia.

'Karrakatta': there is some disagreement on the meaning of the term. The Board of the Karrakatta Cemetery, which commenced operations in 1899, used the term to mean 'Place of Rest', while the Karrakatta Club which began in 1894 felt that it meant 'Hill of Fire'. Later the Club came to understand that the name was derived from the word 'Garrgagup', an Aboriginal spirit that resided at the foot of Mt Eliza near Perth. C.W.M. Cameron, The History of the Karrakatta Club, (n.d.), p. 6. When the author visited Karrakatta in Bournemouth it was with the understanding of the cemetery usage.

A. Weldon, 'The life and work of C.E. Broadhurst', Typescript, PR 4257, Battye Library, State Library of Western Australia.