

## **VICTOR HARBOR ORAL HISTORY PROJECT, 'Beside the Seaside'**

**Interview with Andrew Jeffery of Victor Harbor in Encounter Bay on October 20<sup>th</sup> 2018.**

**Interviewer: Ruth Gates**

**Andrew, it's a real privilege to interview you today because I know you have a lot of memories to share with us. Perhaps it's wise if we start with your family history in the 1800s.**



**AJ:** Yes, well it goes way back as far as this area is concerned. My great-great-grandparents, George Jeffery and Mary n<sup>èe</sup> Tonkin, originally farmers at Dairy Flat which is now Torrens Vale out of Yankalilla in the 1850s. They then moved to Waitpinga for twelve years to open up some land inherited from Mary's parents John and Prudence Tonkin.

**Who was Mary?**

**AJ:** Mary was the daughter of John and Prudence Tonkin. They were also neighbours of George Jeffery at Dairy Flat. In actual fact it appears as though she was only about fifteen when they married.

**Goodness me! So this is at Waitpinga now?**

**AJ:** They shifted to Waitpinga around about 1860. About 1870 they went north to the Boolcunda area. That's on the Willochra Plain north of Laura. They moved up there with their large family. Their eldest son, George 2<sup>nd</sup>, appears to be the only one who ever came back to Victor. In fact, I don't know for sure, whether he remained here when they went north or if he went north briefly with them and then came back.

**I've got a note here that about 1894, George 2<sup>nd</sup>...**

**AJ:** That's a bit further down.

**A bit further down.**

**AJ:** In 1873 to '74 George 2<sup>nd</sup> was working on ketches out of Port Pirie. By the time he married Ann Windebank in about 1879, in early 1879, he was farming at Boolcunda on the Willochra Plains so he went back up there.

His son, George Frederick Jeffery, known as Fred, was born in December 1879 at Boolcunda.

Drought and hard times forced them to leave so they moved back to the Victor Harbor area, probably the Waitpinga block at approximately 1880.

Then two more children were born there at Waitpinga, Elizabeth and Walter. Shortly after Walter's birth in 1883, their mother Ann died. Then an aside here: Elizabeth had married a chap Matthews and their son became a hero in the second World War. He won the George Cross for work that he did in prison; a Japanese prison.

**In prison! That's something for the family to remember with pride.**

**AJ:** Yes, there's been a lot of research done by his son who I know quite well. Anyway, George 2<sup>nd</sup> married Mary-Ann Ewen in 1885. That was his second wife. When the Lindsay Estate was subdivided he bought the cottage, now number 21 Burke Street, opposite St Augustine's Church there.

### **That's Lindsay Estate?**

**AJ:** Yes, yes Fydell Lindsay was the landholder and subdivider and his (George 2<sup>nd</sup>) grandmother, Prudence Tonkin, that I referred to earlier, she bought what is now number 23. So those two cottages were in the family.

### **That's very interesting isn't it?**

**AJ:** Yeah, yeah. Now fourteen children resulted from this union with Ann so George 2<sup>nd</sup> fathered three by the first marriage and fourteen by the second!

### **I'm not sure if I missed this but did you mention his first wife's name?**

**AJ:** Ann Windebank. No I probably didn't. Windebank's Road in the Happy Valley area is named after her. After her father, I'm sorry. So there's a historical connection in that area.

### **Just to be sure I'm quite clear about this: George Frederick is one of seventeen children?**

**AJ:** George Frederick is the oldest of the seventeen children.

### **He's the oldest of the seventeen children.**

**AJ:** Anyway, getting back to the Victor Harbor scene. Harbor Master by the name of Stephen Hellion was a very ill man so it appears that George 2<sup>nd</sup> was acting as Harbor Master during 1894. I've got a photograph on which he writes his name on the bottom of it as Harbor Master and that was taken in March 1894 but he didn't actually officially become Harbor Master until 1895 after George Hellion died.

### **There's a lot of Georges in this story!**

**AJ:** Oh, sorry! That was my mistake! Stephen Hellion died, my mistake, thank you. I referred to the photograph just now. It's actually a photograph of a rocket crew in action. As I said, it was taken in early 1894. The great thing about it...

### **Excuse me Andrew, what's the rocket crew?**

**AJ:** They used to fire rockets. One reason, some signal rockets but also, when a ship came in, in the early days, they couldn't anchor right up to the jetty so they had to make --- (indistinct) so they would fire a line on to the ship and then attach a bosun's chair to it. I don't know how often that happened...

### **They would fire a line from the land to the ship?**

**AJ:** Or from, say, the Screwpile jetty out onto the ship and then attach a bosun's chair. Anyway this photograph is the rocket crew in action.

### **They'd have to be pretty accurate.**

**AJ:** And the beauty of this though, the photograph's got the names of all the rocket crew members on the bottom of it. That's been useful information for the likes of Anthony Laube when writing history books.

**And where is that photo now?**

**AJ:** I've got what I think is the original but that has been reproduced in two or three books as well.

**So you've got it at home?**

**AJ:** Yep, yep. Another thing that I've also got is copies of about half a dozen references given by several of the ships' captains supporting George's application for the Harbour Master's position. Of course they're very interesting because they give some details of the ships that came in to port in the early 1890s.

**Are we talking George 2<sup>nd</sup> who would be your great-grandfather?**

**AJ:** Yep. I haven't mentioned. They moved out into the Harbour Master's house on the Island when he became Harbour Master in 1895.

**This is Granite Island?**

**AJ:** Yes, yes.

**This is starting to get really interesting isn't it? With him living on Granite Island in 1895, your great-grandfather the Harbour Master slowly becoming the father of seventeen children! Where did he keep them all?**

**AJ:** Well that was the beauty of it! The Harbour Master's cottage wasn't very big but some of the, I understand some of the children in the Flag shed up on the top of the Island and others in the working shed and all over the place. (laughter)

**AJ:** Accommodation was the problem given such a large and increasing family. As I said, the Harbor Master's cottage was pretty small so he applied for and got a position as Harbor Master at Tumby Bay. The Harbor Master's house at Tumby Bay, I've seen it. A bungalow place with plenty of rooms.

**But no houses were built for seventeen children! (laughter) So he left and...**

**AJ:** He went to Tumby Bay in 1909.

**And what happened to the Harbor Master's position?**

**AJ:** George 3<sup>rd</sup> as I called him, George Frederick Jeffery, his oldest son, commonly known as Fred. He took over as Harbor Master and by this time my father was two years of age and Fred, his wife Adelaide and the family, moved out into the Harbor Master's house in, as I said, 1909.

**So your father, born in 1907, moved out with his parents into the Harbor Master's house?**

**AJ:** Yes. I'll talk about that a bit later on, keep things in chronological order.

Now, Fred had sailed the China Seas in Her Majesty's Colonial ship *Protector* when it went to the China Seas during the Boxer Rebellion in 1900. His personal diary now housed in the

Mortlock Library, is the most comprehensive original record of the Boxer Rebellion and I happen to be the copyright owner of that diary but I have copies of the original handwritten diary and also transcripts of it.

**That's fascinating. I imagine you've read them?**

**AJ:** Yes I have and so have a lot of other people. Several books have been written about the *Protector* and they all referred to this diary to get their information.

**Well! I'm glad you've lodged it with the Mortlock to keep it safe and available to others.**

**AJ:** Yeah. And now Fred's most memorable experience as Harbor Master was undoubtedly the wreck of the *Margit* in 1911. I won't go into details except to say that the Captain and the second mate or whatever it is of the *Margit*, disappeared while it was in port at Victor.

**The Captain disappeared?**

**AJ:** The Captain and his second officer disappeared. Subsequently they found the lifeboat that they took off in; they found it washed up on the beach, somewhere here at Victor. It was assumed they had perished.

**And can I just ask you what sort of a ship was the *Margit*?**

**AJ:** A sailing ship. There are photographs of it in several books.

**A three-master?**

**AJ:** Now you're asking?!

**Now I'm asking! Alright.**

**AJ:** I'll be referring to a book in a minute and this detail is certainly written up in that and I think there's not a photograph of the ship there. Anthony Laube's book, *Settlers around the Bay*, I think it's in that one; it's in a couple.

**We've got the ship minus captain and first mate.**

**AJ:** Yep and it was stormy weather and the acting skipper was refused permission by the Harbor Master to leave port because of the stormy conditions. The officer ignored his directions and took off.

**So this is your Fred who's being ignored? Fred the Harbor Master?**

**AJ:** Yep, yep. Anyway they took off and they got wrecked down there, now known as Wreck Crossing, north of Kingston. I understand, I intended going down there, but I understand that at low tide, you can still see bits of the wreck of the *Margit*.

**How fascinating. So were the sailors drowned?**

**AJ:** No they, while the *Lady Daly*, the lifeboat was sailing by sea down, there was an overland party from Kingston and I understand they got to the site of the wreck first but the sailors on the *Margit* all survived.

**That's a good story.**

**AJ:** Anyway a detailed account of this can be found on page 9 of the book, *Brief Encounters of Victor Harbor 1802 - 1882*, a copy of which I'm giving to the Victor Harbor Library.

**That's nice.**

**AJ:** Yeah. There are several details. I told you about the details, some of these details about the Captain, and I think, the first mate, shooting through and being apparently lost.

However there's a very interesting sequel to that. Some time later, Fred and his wife Adelaide, were in Rundle Street.

**Rundle Street, Adelaide?**

**AJ:** Fred was in the shop when Addie spotted the *Margit* Captain on the footpath outside!

**Alive!?**

**AJ:** Alive, yes! When she approached him he bolted for his life and she claims that at the time, it was the biggest mistake she ever made. She should have just hung back until Fred came back. That part of it was told to me by my Aunt Nell, not long before she died. So that sequel was not well known.

**That is not a very good piece of behaviour for a captain. I wonder why he did it?**

**AJ:** I don't know.

**You don't know why he did it. What a story!**

**AJ:** You might be able to call him one of the first boat people – I don't know! (laughter)

My father used to tell me many stories of his life while he was growing up on Granite Island, some of which are on pages 9 & 10 of that book I referred to.

Fred died of pneumonia in the Harbor Master's house on 8<sup>th</sup> July 1922. Actually my aunt gave me the details of his passing on. Apparently they'd been, he had a week's leave, they'd been up in Adelaide and he came back because somebody had to look after the lighthouse and all the rest of it. The rest of the family stayed in Adelaide. Looking after himself he got a bit careless with his hygiene. He apparently kept damp clothes on, contracted pneumonia and that led to his passing. He was only forty two years of age.

**That is a sad story. His sister is your aunt who told you the story?**

**AJ:** His daughter.

**His daughter, yes.**

**AJ:** Nell. The Harbor Master's cap was then handed over to Fred's younger brother Walter who in turn, was accidentally drowned in 1947 when a car in which he was a passenger plunged off the end of the Causeway and into the sea.

I've been given an eye-witness account by a gentleman who still lives in Victor Harbor but frankly I feel it's inappropriate to include those details here.

**I can't twist your arm?**

**AJ:** No, no.

**Would you like to tell me some of your own memories, Andrew?**

**AJ:** Yeah, righto! That was the, Fred's death was the end of, sorry, Walter's death was the end of the Jefferys' reign on Granite Island.

**I wonder how strong are your memories of things you saw as a lad associated with a Harbor Master?**

**AJ:** As a teenager in the late forties and the fifties, Dad used to bring us down to Victor quite a lot. In fact, at times, I can remember as a teenager when he said we'll go down to Victor Harbor.

"Ah, not Victor Harbor again, Dad!" As a teenager I had better things to do up in town. Anyway, I regret the fact that I didn't make the most of all these trips down but I've still got plenty of memories.

**What're your strongest ones?**

**AJ:** Well I can remember visiting the Harbor Master's house on a number of occasions.

**That was still there?**

**AJ:** It was still there but it was deteriorating. It was surrounded by a brush fence which was falling to bits. I can remember meeting Jack Sweeney who was the Harbor Master from 1947 to 1958. He was still living most of the time in the Harbor Master's house.

**Was he necessary as a Harbor Master right through to 1958?**

**AJ:** The Harbor Master's role really finished in the 1920s, I think it was 1921 the last of the overseas ships came in to Victor. The Harbor Master's role was Inspector of Fisheries and to check that the life belts on the Causeway were safe etc. etc. And the fishing boats were doing the right thing. The Harbor Master's role was nowhere near as significant by the forties and fifties as it had been back earlier.

**I understand.**

**AJ:** I've also got vague memories of my uncle, sorry, great-uncle Walter Jeffery but I was only ten when he died in 1947. The Harbor Master's house was actually demolished in 1959.

**What a pity. It could have been still there. It could have become an historical museum**

**AJ:** When they re-developed the Island a few years ago now, on one of the plans they actually had the idea of re-creating the Harbor Master's house. That was sort of low priority and it never got to that. I can take people out and show them exactly where it was. For instance, the asphalt back verandah and laundry floor; you can see little bits of asphalt and I can point out where that is.

**And where actually is it Andrew?**

**AJ:** When you go across the Causeway there's a track that goes up the side of the Island.

## **To the left or the right?**

**AJ:** More or less straight ahead from the end of the Causeway. That track bends, two thirds of the way up it bends to the right, sort of. Near that bend there's a big pine tree (may now be gone) and the gateway into the house, there's a stone there which is actually the gateway, the gate stone as it were, into the house, and that's still there.

## **I'm going to look for that.**

**AJ:** I'll take you out there some time and I'm happy to take anybody out at any time if they contact me. Anyway, as I said it was demolished in 1959, so that was the end of that. So that's probably one of the most significant memories.

A second one, a little beach on the right hand side of the Causeway as it arrives at the Island. That was known unofficially in the early days as Jefferys' Beach.

## **I like that! It was a favourite paddling spot when we were little ones.**

**AJ:** That's where many of the Jeffery children learnt to swim.

## **That's a pretty little spot isn't it?**

**AJ:** Another memory is the bougainvillea, there's a sort of trellis along, it's pretty well broken down now. A trellis with a bougainvillea on it at the end of, in behind the end of the Penguin Centre there on the, shall we say, kiosk end of the quarry. There's a bougainvillea there. My Aunt Nell I talked about earlier on, she could remember being there when that was planted in 1918 or 1919.

## **That same plant is still alive?**

**AJ:** Still alive although it was looking a bit sick last time I went across.

## **That's a hundred years ago!**

**AJ:** Yeah, yeah. It was planted at the same time, they planted a couple of, they planted many things. They planted a couple of acacia trees there. They got chopped down around about the time of the re-development because they regarded them as being an exotic species and not native to the Island.

The bougainvillea remained. I assumed it would remain because the people at the restaurant wanted to use the flowers from time to time for table decorations. It wasn't looking too good last time I went across.

As I was about to say, the gardens in that area were named several years ago, named the Jeffery Gardens, officially. I know the plaque didn't fall off. The plaque anyway is in with the National Trust, National Parks and Wildlife people, but I hope that will be restored because Fred Jeffery was largely responsible for the establishment of those gardens after the First World War.

## **Were they done as a memorial do you know?**

**AJ:** Not as a memorial; just as. I was approached by the Council, during John Crompton's time as Mayor, I was approached, worked out wording to go on that plaque. Then I've got the correspondence from the Council advising me that it was going to be called the Jeffery Gardens and all the rest of it.

**Twenty years ago or so?**

**AJ:** Yep, be all of that.

**About that. That's a good thing to know.**

**AJ:** Another memory I've got is visiting Nature's Eye.

**Oh yes, I remember Nature's Eye.**

**AJ:** Our generation would, it's now inaccessible, I don't know whether it's the aboriginal, the local aboriginal landowners or whether it's pure and simply an Occupational Health and Safety issue but it was a bit hard to get down to. You had to walk across a narrow plank in one place.

**You'd better tell people listening what it was.**

**AJ:** It was a round granite boulder in a pool. When a wave came in, the white wave, white water, surrounded this granite boulder made it look like an eye.

**And the boulder was the pupil?**

**AJ:** Yes.

**We used to scramble down there with no thought for Occ. Health and Safety.**

**AJ:** You know you went for a walk around the Island generally, you looked at Nature's Eye, you looked at Umbrella Rock. Often a few other things.

**The Giant's Chair.**

**AJ:** What's that?

**The Giant's Chair.**

**AJ:** Where was that?

**Near the Umbrella Rock.**

**AJ:** Part of that formation, yes.

**I tried to climb up there last year and I couldn't make it! (chuckles)**

**AJ:** Another memory I've got is visiting the site of the flagpole on top of the Island. This flagpole was erected and they used to put flags, one flag would be to summon the working party from the shore when they could see a ship on the way in. Somebody, the working party had to get out to unload the ship and reload it with produce to go overseas. So there was a flag for that. A flag for different purposes. I think there was one indicating stormy weather and all the rest of it. That flagpole was on the very high point of the Island.

There was, for a while, there was a shed alongside it where they stored the flags etc.

**And the children!**

**AJ:** And the children. (laughter)

Up until a few years ago there was still a couple of big red gum pegs in the ground and they had been two of the four anchor points for the guy-lines for the flagpole. I used to visit those and take people to show them. They disappeared also round about the time of the re-development.

**I've got a job for you!**

**AJ:** What's that?

**Get them put back!**

**AJ:** Can't get the original ones put back. (Laughter)

Anyway.

**Is there something to tell us about gun emplacements?**

**AJ:** Yes well when I was a lad, Dad would take me across to the Island. There were two or three places where there were slabs of concrete and Dad always told me that they were where there were gun emplacements in the First World War. I can not get anybody else to sort of authenticate that. My Dad would know, I would have thought my Dad would know. Other people said, "Oh that was only where the chairlift was in more recent years".

I said, "No, they were there before, at least a couple of them, before the chairlift came into being." So I think Dad might have been right.

**Which side of the Island were they on?**

**AJ:** Up near the top of the Island. Near where the chairlift eventually went, but I can't remember the details of where they were. I just know they were there somewhere.

**They would have been facing out to sea wouldn't they?**

**AJ:** That's right.

**Facing south.**

**AJ:** So they well and truly preceded the chairlift.

**We probably should just briefly mention the chairlift for people who are listening who don't know where it went.**

**AJ:** I don't know much about it. By the time the chairlift was in existence I was living in the Northern Territory. I remember it. I think I rode on it once just for the heck of it. I don't remember – others would know a lot more about it than I would.

**It's not there anymore.**

**AJ:** Oh no it hasn't been for years.

Another memory that I have here is swimming in the Baths on the Victoria Pier. The swimming baths there.

## **What's the Victoria Pier?**

**AJ:** Getting back, when the Causeway was built, first built, it only went part way out to the Island and then a jetty or a pier went off at an angle. That was called Victoria Pier. And at one stage the lifeboat shed was on that Pier but one thing in the fifties when I used to go there was the Swimming Baths. I can tell you here and now those swimming baths wouldn't have survived today once again, Occupational Health and Safety. Jagged bits of metal and splintery wood and all the rest of it but nobody worried about that in those days.

## **No you got yourself a cut and Mum bandaged you up!**

**AJ:** I can remember swimming there but that's just a few of my memories of the Island.

## **That's absolutely fascinating. Perhaps before we finish, I believe you've got some souvenirs and some mementos that you'd like to talk about.**

**AJ:** Yes. I think probably the most significant one is the tape-recording of a talk Dad gave to the National Trust not long before he died. It was, he died in 1987 and it was. He gave this talk and it was in the CWA Hall and the acoustics are pretty rotten but Irma Springbett had the tape. I don't know if she's still got it or if the National Trust has got it.

## **She's still alive isn't she? She's over one hundred.**

**AJ:** She actually wrote the chapter in that book that we were referring to about Granite Island. A lot of the information in that chapter came from Dad, including a couple of errors I might add. (laughter). There is a date but it was actually the notes that Dad took for that talk. After he died I came across them and it sort of triggered my interest in my research.

But several years ago I got a couple of copies taken off that tape. The person doing it was able to improve the, eliminate some of the background noises, so the tape is a little bit better but it's still hard to pick up everything, however, it's an invaluable. My father's memories growing up on Granite Island. Some of which of course are in the book and that sort of thing.

## **What was your father's occupation?**

**AJ:** He was a public servant but he finished up the Auditor-General of South Australia.

## **I'm glad I asked that. You were a teacher weren't you Andrew?**

**AJ:** Yes, yes, yes. I've got it noted here that there is a very close similarity between that talk of Dad's and some of the stuff on pages 8 to 11 of *Brief Encounters in Encounter Bay*. As I said here, as I said just now, it's not surprising that Dad passed on much of his information to Irma when she wrote that chapter in the book.

Dad himself lived on the Island from the age of two until as a fifteen year old he had to move up to Adelaide to further his studies. He was Dux of the Higher Primary School in 1921. That's as far as he could go down here.

The second thing I've got is the Harbor Master's cap badge. Now, in some of the photographs of the crew in the *Margit* saga and other photographs of Fred with his Harbor Master's cap on, well I've actually got the cap badge.

## **That's lovely!**

**AJ:** The cap has deteriorated over the years but the badge has remained in quite good condition.

**That's a treasure.**

**AJ:** Yes it is for sure. Then I have a magnificent oil painting of the *Finland*. The *Finland* visited Victor in about 1911, I've forgotten the date.

**Is that a sailing ship?**

**AJ:** Yes, sailing ship. A cargo ship. The inscription on the back of this oil painting: *From Captain GW Wass to Mr Jeffery with best wishes*. I understand it was a token of appreciation for the help that my grandfather as Harbor Master had given his ship.

The story is that it might even have been painted by the Captain himself or one of the senior Officers.

**That's a good story. How do you spell this Wass word?**

**AJ:** W-a-s-s.

**Wass?**

**AJ:** G-W-W-a-s-s-. He was, you go across to the Island on the horse tram. There's a photograph of a ship tied up at the Screw Pile Jetty in the horse tram, and that's the *Finland*.

There's a connection between that and my painting.

**There's a link there**

**AJ:** When they opened the National Trust Museum a few years back I loaned it to the National Trust for display during the opening ceremony and that's where it will probably finish up when I pass on.

**And the badge? What do you plan for that?**

**AJ:** Oh that will probably have the same fate. If any of my family have a real interest in it, I suppose they will get first claim.

I've referred to this before but another souvenir I've got there is copies of a number of his references given to George 2<sup>nd</sup> from ships' captains when he applied for appointment as Harbor Master in 1895.

I've got a few photographs of Fred Jeffery.

**What did he look like?**

**AJ:** Very upright, good-looking bloke.

**Just like yourself! (laughter)**

**AJ:** -----(indistinct). One of them is a photograph as a young man on the *Protector* in 1900 when it went to the Boxer Rebellion. I've got a large etching which was actually taken from the photo of the *Margit* rescue crew in 1911. The cap badge is prominent on the etching.

I've got a wedding photograph of Fred with Adelaide Paget. People have described them as a very handsome couple – and were they ever! She was a very attractive lass and he was a fine, strapping looking bloke.

Then I've got a photograph of him as Master of the Lodge of Peace in 1921 - 1922. He actually died in office. He died before his Master's year was up. The photo I've got was the one that adorned the Lodge Hall until the Lodge was dissolved a few years back. In actual fact I succeeded him as Master, seventy-six years later. He was the third Master of the Lodge in 1921 - 22 and I was Master seventy-six later.

**You've made your own history Andrew.**

**AJ:** And then, I've got a photograph of George 2<sup>nd</sup> and his son Walter, during Walter's term as Harbor Master. Standing there, holding fishing nets and the last thing I've mentioned here. I've got a set of photographs of a model of a lifeboat, the *Lady Daly*. That was launched at Port Adelaide in November 1867, in the presence of His Royal Highness, Prince Alfred, the Duke of Edinburgh.

Now the same week, as the *Lady Daly* was launched, Prince Alfred laid the foundation stone for the GPO in Adelaide and also the foundation stone of PAC.

**Prince Alfred College.**

**AJ:** Which was named after him. Anyway, they gave him a model of the *Lady Daly* lifeboat and I heard that it was on display in Britain in Liverpool and Heather and I went there. No, it wasn't on display but if they'd known we were coming they could have got it out. It was stored away somewhere and they sent me a whole lot of photographs of this model. And very great details of the structure of the *Lady Daly* lifeboat.

She was the lifeboat from 1869 down here until 1925 when she was replaced by the *Arthur Simpson*.

That's a summary of some of the interesting things that I've got about the history of this place.

**Well, what a marvellous story! Thank you so much Andrew. I'm glad we can share it with many others.**