

The Lady Bushranger Update

Twelve years have now passed since the publication of my book, "The Lady Bushranger", and it is timely that I keep informed the many people, who have become interested in the unique Australian woman, Elizabeth Jessie Hickman.

My readers may remember that towards the end of my book, I commented to the effect that I knew there was more information yet to be disclosed. Not wishing to be unkind, what I did not write was that I also knew when dealing with such a subject that there had been many cover-ups both by Jessie herself and those near to her. She lived in an era where topics like divorce, cattle duffing, bushranging and certainly murder were all swept well under the carpet or clouded in a veil of misinformation. This situation carried on well after her death with some persons anxious to keep the past well hidden.

One such example is of my being told a different version of the murder story of Jessie killing her 'husband', with a broken leg of a chair. My account came directly from Jessie's own lips, as told by her to the late Noel Tindale. It should also be remembered that I was writing about a lady with numerous aliases and who, by necessity, had to cover her own tracks to avoid capture and internment by policemen like Smithy, who were forever right behind her.

As extra details are being added to the chronicle of Jessie Hickman's life it is timely to mention and thank the many people who contributed so much to my original quest to document such an interesting Australian character. Any subsequent additional information should not detract from the sincerity of those who supplied me with my material.

For my initial research I am grateful for the stories told about Jessie to me by a number of individuals initially Ian Buckley, who thought her story such a colourful and interesting tale that they did not want to see it lost to posterity. My interviewing and documenting their accounts proved very timely as many of these people are no longer with us.

In particular I extended my appreciation to some of nature's gentlemen, especially Bremmer Morrison, Tom Eames and Noel Tindale plus a number of others like them. They were people of genuine integrity and I would hate to think the stories they gave to me could be tarnished in any way by the extra information and corrections to the tale of Jessie's life I am aware of that have come to light since the printing of my book.

It took me four long years of hard work and research to uncover much of Jessie's unique history. Invaluable background of the wild country in which Jessie lived came from people like the Kerney family, Bryan, Edna and Bruce, who guided me and my husband, Jim, with tours to Gowrie Hut, the Livery Stable Cave and even Jessie's own lair high in the mountains. Others like Bill Staff contributed relevant facts about the early police force and its lovable blacktracker Jimmy McDonald.

I am also thankful to Elsie Ritchie with her 'magnetised fingers', who found many vital newspaper articles and helped interview so many old circus characters which provided me with information for that part of the narrative. My search also involved much corresponding with numerous letters and telephone calls plus making audio tapes of interviews with those who knew Jessie and of her fascinating escapades.

Wonderful help came from many bush men and women even a smithy, Norm Howe, with his Aladdin's cave, actually a blacksmith's workshop with his precise miniature replicas of his tools of trade, who added to the story. Photographs were obtained from many sources however Evan Hunt and his mother, Dorothy, deserve a special mention.

I can't pass over those former circus folk, who were all in their nineties; they remembered Jessie and gave me their stories of 'The Golden Years of Circus'. In particular the late Madge Seymour, who together with her sister, spent a whole day with me relating tales of her time in that vocation.

Closer to home, my father Gordon Studdy, my husband's father, Bill Clift, and his brother, Joe Clift, all had been acquainted with Jessie in her circus years. This knowledge gave me a special insight into her character, plus her amazing ability with horses and dogs, her skill with guns and her proficiency to balance high up on a wire. Such early training and natural aptitudes helped her immensely in her future life in the rugged Wollemi Mountains.

Through my investigations I found many others keen to see Jessie's spectacular life in print. In the forefront of these came the Kandos Museum, particularly Marie Ford and Peggy Butler, who as well as assisting in my research followed up by providing a pertinent venue for the launching of my book by Alan Davies of the State Library of NSW.

Looking back perhaps the most important sources of all were those people, who actually knew her. They passed on to me a strong understanding of her personality and revealed her unique character. I tried hard to capture this spirit in my narrative and hopefully succeeded. Jennifer Gherardi of Jag Films in W.A., who currently has the motion picture rights option on my book, commented to me that "there was a film of kindness over my book". This was a feeling I tried very hard to achieve when writing the story.

Perhaps the most ironical fact of all in ascertaining the 'truth' for an historical subject is that once a book is published it triggers memories and often a veritable floodgate of new and at times contradictory information. This opens many new doors but sometimes muddies the narrative. Oh if I could have had this data when I started my initial enquiries concerning Jessie's life, but then many of those in the know seemed to have sealed lips. Often it was not until after the death of someone close to her that some of these people felt free to talk to me about her.

One lead, which I have since shared with a number of people with a very strong interest in the Lady Bushranger, is the possibility that she could also have been involved in another murder. Due to my now failed eyesight and prior to that, other intervening projects, I have not followed up this information but I am sure those I have given this clue to will.

Now with readily available internet access to data such as official records of wills, births, deaths and marriages, etc the task of searching for those items is made much easier. Caution still must be exercised especially when a piece of evidence is missing. Just because an official record cannot be found does not in itself make it an absolute fact that a certain event did not occur. For instance it has been aired that Jessie and Martini may not have been married, but because no wedding certificate has been found does not necessary mean they still could not have been wed.

Itinerant preachers, who frequently conducted such services, were notorious for poor bookkeeping and losing their records by misadventure. Even repositories of official files have been known for misplacing such items. For those who have worked in any administrative capacity would know of many personal examples.

Possibly the most important result from the publicity surrounding my book came after NBN Television's program "The Secrets of The Wollemi " in which Jenny Frank from Rylstone spoke enthusiastically about my book on the Lady Bushranger. This prompted a fine old saddler, John Rayner, to telephone me, saying "I know about the missing Hickman baby." He spoke with the ring of truth and we subsequently held several lengthy conversations. John revealed to me that his mother's sister had actually adopted the baby.

Four years on John Rayner paid a visit to a lady named Di Moore and told her about her ancestry. It turned out that Di was actually a granddaughter of Elizabeth Jessie Hickman. This led to Di, her husband, Garry, and their loveable dog coming to stay with my husband and myself for several days.

Naturally Di took a great interest in all my research on her famous grandmother and I willingly shared freely with her all my years of investigations and accumulations, which included numerous newspaper cuttings, tapes, posters, contacts and so on. I understand that Di has uncovered more of her grandmother's life and is currently finalising production of a book on Jessie. No doubt it will clarify and fill in a number of blanks about the Lady Bushranger and I wish her good luck with the venture.

Finally I will be forever grateful to people like my publisher Peter Bridge of Hesperian Press and Jennifer Gherardi, who have shown commercial faith in the subject of our country's past. They love our Australian history and wish to preserve it.

Patricia Studdy-Clift
31 October 2008

An Historical Who Dun It ...

Detecting the Hidden Adventures of an Australian Lady Bushranger -Elizabeth Jessie Hickman (1890-1940)

The year of 1996 saw the shroud of secrecy removed from the late Elizabeth Jessie Hickman's life with her adventurous escapades revealed publicly for the first time. It came through the launch of my book, *The Lady Bushranger*, at the charming Kandos Museum north-west of Sydney, by Alan Davies, the Curator of Photographs at the NSW State Library.

The unveiling followed four years of bulldogged research. It all started with a touch of serendipity as a hint of almost lost bush folklore came to my attention. Ian Buckley, the Head Teacher at Tumbulgum School on the Tweed River in northern NSW, invited me to talk to his starry eyed school children, where a spoonful of fun helped the history go down. Afterwards Ian reeled me in, hook, line and sinker with this revelation ... that as a child he lived in the rugged mountain Wollemi Wilderness, in a part of the Hunter Region. On the land right next door to his family farm lay a cave. Apparently several decades before this cave was the haunt of a wild and very secretive lady namely Lizzie Hickman. In such a remote inaccessible location Ian felt sure evidence of her presence would still be there. I also gained the impression that this mysterious female was not only a fugitive from justice, but also a bushranger! This begged the question "*Were these the fantasies of a country boy with a fertile mind filled with tales of Ned Kelly or Ben Hall or was there something far more substantial in them?*"

Having in the past written a number of books, all with a focus on chronicling relatively unknown elements on Australia's past, now my curiosity was thoroughly aroused. It wasn't at all easy going at first when trying to ascertain the facts of this story. When I telephoned someone reputed to know about Elizabeth Jessie's incredible adventures, as soon as I asked "*Please can you give me any information on Mrs Hickman, the Lady Bushranger, known as Lizzie and as Jessie to her family and who lived in the Kandos/Rylstone area*" usually I would hear a shocked gasp and followed by the 'phone being abruptly slammed down in my ear.

My publisher of Hesperian Press in Perth offered this explanation "*If there's such a cover up you may find she's well connected*". What I did discover later was that Jessie's brother, Ken Hunt, was a close friend of a young Ben Chifley (later to become a Prime Minister of Australia). Ben apparently was a frequent visitor to the Hunt family home for they too were staunch Labor Party supporters.

In my opinion this was one fact that could give credence to the comment on Jessie being 'well connected'. It seemed that only after the death of 'Snowy' Hunt, Jessie's nephew, who had spent eight years of his young life with his Aunty Jessie, did the story finally start to be released. Suddenly people felt free to speak to me about this shadowy illusive lady whose obscure history seemed to be a mixture of truth, bush stories and legend with details gradually emerging as Jessie's life became a real 'who dun it' with myself as the principal detective.

Sleuthing in the Mitchell Library and seeping in history at the State Archives, then located at the birthplace of our land, the Rocks in Sydney, my husband Jim and I found the *Mudgee Guardian's* reporting of Jessie's Rylstone and Mudgee criminal trials. Delving further into the actual trials the judges and jury men were revealed. With a farming husband and a home near the Queensland border to care for, although fascinated by the research, we had however to return to work.

It was then that I recruited the services of Elsie Ritchie, a Sydney historian, whose 'magnetised' fingers found others of Jessie's trials reported in the *Parramatta Argos*, when she was using her grandmother's name of McIntyre. Not at all easy when your subject states "*What's in a name? Any old name will do*". Elsie then found Jessie's own letters to *Stageland* magazine, where this clever lady worked the papers for free publicity for Martini's Circus and Buckjump Show. The Rylstone Police Charge Book shown to me proved to be the key to unlocking Jessie's past for it contained some of her innumerable aliases.

On further trips I ventured backwards and forwards to those southern mountains where I taped interviews with fine old bushmen and women as well as spending fascinating long days in the company of veteran circus performers. These tapes became a real treasure trove of personal relationships with those who actually knew the bushranging lady herself. Deep down I knew of the urgency of collecting this oral history before it was too late. How blessed I was to catch those memories for those folk as they no longer with us.

The generosity of the Kerney family enabled me and my sister-in-law Leonie Studdy to see for ourselves exactly where Jessie had roamed. I seriously wondered at time if following Jessie's trail was worth it, especially when a gun toting man barred our way, levelled his gun at us and muttered "*Death means nothing to me*".

Before taking me to the rugged mountain tracks once again my husband Jim looked fondly at his new four-wheel drive vehicle and questioned "*What's the track like?*", then on the 'road' to gasp in horror as we gnashed over large stones and small 'gibbers'; shunted backwards and forwards to inch our way around the hairpin bends which skirted dangerous deep drops down to billyo below. It was daunting too when the chain saw had to be brought out several times to remove limbs and small trees that had fallen over our route.

Eventually arriving in the vicinity of cave then came the physical climb up almost perpendicular rocks clawing our way up the steep cliff to Jessie's mountain lair with much wiping of the 'blood, sweat and tears' from my anxious brow, until finally I made it. There among Jessie's few surviving possessions I really felt Jessie's spirit around me. That feeling also returned when I later stood at her forlorn pauper's grave in Sandgate cemetery outside Newcastle.

Through my determined research I learned to love this attractive, charismatic lady, whose deep compassion for the underdog, contrasted sharply with her flaring temper. Memories of her revealed a mixed personality and illustrating an extreme example of this one old bushie remembered by "*Jessie loved a fight better than a feed, she would put up her 'dooks' and could go six rounds with a goanna without getting a scratch*".

Now after all this effort don't tell me I've seemed to have done it all for nix. It was disheartening not only to find some of my work on the net but without what I consider is the correct acknowledgement to the source of that research. I may no longer be able to see due to advanced macular degeneration, but I do have a large and extended family with excellent eyesight! Their sharp eyes have discovered what seems to me to be nit picking criticism designed to discredit my hard work. Oh what the heck! I mustn't take it all too seriously - life's too short, especially when you will be eighty four next birthday.

Although it is good to see significant items come to hand, some of which are contradictory to my former information yet as the song says "*Wouldn't it be lovely*". Yes

wouldn't it, if amongst what is fast becoming a mountain of criticism, I could find a few words of thanks.

On the plus side, there are those who knew Jessie's story and who for years have been watching and hoping that one day her tale will take its rightful place among other renowned females throughout the world - such as the famous American Annie Oakley. One could feel their support as I was escorted around Lady Bushranger Country by the Kerney family and helped by members of the Kandos Museum on my frequent visits there. How wonderful to receive photos, letters and so on from the Hunt family. All thrilled when at last my book, *The Lady Bushranger*, came out and none more delighted than Tracker Jimmy McDonald's family.

When, a couple of years after, NBN Television screened a documentary titled *The Secrets of the Wollemi* it included a mention of my book and also of Jessie's missing son. This prompted a dear old saddler, who had seen the program, to contact me and relate that he knew the details of the missing son and even the name of his adoptive family. The saddler's words held a strong ring of truth as he certainly appeared to be well conversant with the facts. He mulled over his knowledge for several years before finally taking my book with him and astounding a descendant of the Lady Bushranger with who her adopted father's biological parents really were i.e. Elizabeth Jessie Hickman and Ben Hickman. Ben like some World War 1 ex-servicemen had self-assumed post-war the higher rank of a Major.

These were some of the events that occurred after the publication of my book. I knew that it was an impossible dream that you will get all the truth first up, perhaps never fully, when you are dealing with a felon and one is always faced with the dilemmas of: Is the information fully correct, do I publish with the what I have or keep waiting, possibly in vain, for any blanks to be filled? In the end the best way is to place your research before the public and hopefully more will be revealed.

Looking back the chronicling of history is not an easy task; nor one for the faint hearted or easily distracted. One needs time, perseverance and what many people do not realise ... finances to see your venture through to fruition. Research costs in terms of travelling, accommodation, document fees and communication expenses. Then when hopefully you have gathered enough material together for a book, then there is the need to get it published either by yourself or a firm specialising in that genre. If you are fortunate your returns may cover your costs, if not then they are part of those expenses incurred in any hobby.

Yes Australia is a lucky country for our history, to loosely quote Mark Twain ... "*It reads like a bunch of fascinating lies, but most of it is true*". Much of this amazing past is now available to diligent historians who love to dig and delve among the years following those first ships that sailed into Sydney Cove in 1788.

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New Material Added 2011

The Lady Bushranger Story Continues

Since the official launch of my book, *The Lady Bushranger*, in 1996, I have been very privileged to have many people contact me with additional information and clarifications in regard to the life, times and personality of Elizabeth Jessie Hickman, the subject of my book.

For the interest of any person, who has been following her story, I am including a number of these details and tales below. Some I have mentioned as background information while others I have written as if to be included in my existing book.

Also questions often arise from some of her exploits so in some cases I have sought to discuss these incidents.

It is my intent, health permitting, that I can produce an update of my book and I am currently proceeding towards that aim. Its current working title is *The Lady Bushranger Revisited*.

Those wonderful people, who have supplied me with the stories below, will be acknowledged, where possible or desired, in the revised story.

Pat Studdy-Clift
27 April 2011

The Crazy Captive

This story is important as it gives an insight into Elizabeth Jessie Hickman's complex personality. My source of Jessie's wild behaviour came from a person, whose family lived close to the Rylstone Gaol. I was told how Jessie's screaming for hour after interminable hour, day and night – nearly drove her mother mad. This story would not have been possible without Colin McPherson's kind permission to use the information contained in the book, *The McPherson Family*, written by Colin's late wife, Elaine McPherson. I acknowledge the copyright now held by Colin McPherson.

I have added further depth to the story by taking information from my book, *The Lady Bushranger*. This information was originally given to me by the late historian, Bill Staff.

The narrative continues ...

The dark night of her soul came to the fore in Elizabeth Jessie Hickman's life – when she was gaoled at the Rylstone Police Station. Just like Jimmy Governor (whose story was made into the film "The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith") when both Jimmy and Mrs Hickman had a hysterical fear of being placed behind bars. They both reacted like crazed birds, which accidentally fly into a room and can find no way out. Poor woman – after she was gaoled, she became completely irrational. Almost self-destructing as she screeched and screamed, even throwing herself against the rock solid walls. All in a vain attempt to be free – but there was no way out.

Elizabeth Jessie tore at her clothing until there was nothing left but a heap of shredded rags.

Imagine Sergeant Buckley's shock horror when he opened the cell door to advise Mrs Hickman she had to appear before the magistrate on that very day. There in the middle of the cell stood a deranged and dishevelled Elizabeth Jessie – stark naked! I venture to suggest that in all his long years of police work – never before had Sergeant Buckley faced such a situation. It was thought by some, that this could have been another of Elizabeth Jessie's ploys to avoid having to front up to the magistrate.

This scenario presented the Sergeant with a real dilemma, which he solved by rushing around to Mrs McPherson's home nearby. After some initial embarrassment he

asked could Mrs McPherson please give him some clothing suitable to cover Mrs Hickman's nudity.

Sensing an emergency and ever helpful, Mrs McPherson scrounged around and hastily found the necessary items.

With Jessie's dignity restored, things settled down in the Rylstone Gaol. A little later in the day, Elizabeth Jessie's mother, Susannah Hunt, arrived with some beautiful clothing, all hand made by herself. So with that attire the Lady Bushranger was able to stand before the magistrate tastefully dressed and better able to defend her case.

Stories like these beg the question ... "What do we think of Elizabeth Jessie Hickman today?"

To me, she was brilliant, with the genius that teetered on the edge of mental illness. There was more than one personality inside that trim athletic body, and the evidence I have received points to one of these personalities being a charismatic, but wild woman, who stands alone in the annals of our Australian history.

A Woman's Touch

This one comes from another kind chap and I feel it fits into the book after Andy and Jessie put the bed in the cave, possibly on page 26, paragraph 2 ending "*and promised to help*".

The narrative continues ...

Where ever Jessie went, whether in her hut, her cave or a garden, she left that special quality known as a woman's touch. That was why when she looked at the sheer climb to her cave, she knew that she could make it easier to scramble over those last steep rocks. As she gazed, Jessie remembered her days in the circus when rope ladders were regularly used to reach the high wire or trapeze. She'd watched many such a ladder being made and resolved to make one herself just as soon as she found some rope. After a hunt around Jessie did find a good supply of suitable rope and secretly set about fashioning such a ladder.

By the time Andy next came to visit her in her cave she had secured her newly made ladder around a couple of round boulders that were part of the entrance to the cave. She then surprised Andy by throwing it down for him to take the easy way up.

Andy's expression was a mixture of surprise and delight. "Where the thunder did you learn t' make one of those things?" he questioned. Andy had another look at the ladder. "It would be easier said than done t' make one of them".

"Not so hard", Jessie explained, "I've seen plenty of those made in my time".

"Where?" immediately Andy wanted to know more.

Jessie still felt a measure of mistrust where Andy was concerned, so with "Never you mind", she blocked any further questioning.

Not put off, Andy let his admiration show, "There's a bit of smart thinking there. Not bad, not bad at all" and grudgingly "That is, for a woman".

Jessie looked around; she had her bed, her larder, a beautiful teapot and eating irons. Now she'd added a ladder that could be pulled up out of sight. She agreed, "Yes, you are right Andy, in fact it's not bad, it's pretty darned good".

I Don't Need Help

This story comes from family descendant of a person involved in the story. In a further update to the tale I'd originally written that a Ford car owned by Mr Simpson was used when actually a Chevrolet, with plenty of clearance, provided the vehicular transportation to take Jessie Hickman to hospital.

The narrative continues ...

Snowy told him "Aunty Jessie's real sick, she's had a bad horse accident and she's been lying in the mud in a paddock all night. She can't move and can hardly breathe. Still she managed to whisper that I wasn't to go asking for help. "Leave me here; let me die where I am".

The boy was plainly distraught. "Please Mr Simpson, help us", he implored and Mr Simpson being a kindly fellow was the man to help. "Poor creature, she doesn't deserve a fate like this" he thought even though his Chev car was his pride and joy and the track up the hill to Jessie's was no more than a sulky track, but he knew he had good clearance and assured the boy, "It's alright lad, I'll get the car through to near where she's lying. Don't worry boy, I'll help". Then he placed his arm on the boy's shoulder to steady him down.

Mr Simpson never went anywhere without his Stetson hat, long sleeved shirt, coat and tie. He hurried into the house to grab his clothes while Snowy waited miserably by the car. As he left he told Mrs Simpson, "Expect me when you see me, I'm off to help Jessie Hickman and young Snowy. Never have I seen a bond so strong between two people as those two. It is my honest opinion that they must be mother and son. Well whoever they are, they need some help right now".

The rest of this incident is in the book, second last paragraph on page 219.

The same source told me that Jessie drove a big four-wheeled buggy with two beautiful horses to pull it. It was covered so nobody could see what was inside. The person also remembered family reminiscences of two policemen from Denman who told a relation that they were on their way to take Jessie in. That relation was pleased to say she had beaten them and they returned empty handed as he knew they would.

(This must have been during the time Jessie was on the run, just before she returned to the buckjump show). Further family tales told of Jessie always having beautiful horses, which were wonderfully trained animals. As a youngster the source's father bought that person a grey horse belonging to Jessie on which that person would win all the gymkhana or camp drafting events around. The grey's name was Satin.

Another of Jessie's 'Lame Ducks'

The more stories that come in about Elizabeth Jessie Hickman, the more clearly she emerges as a caring person. Although she was not above taking a pot shot at you if you were in her way, merely to frighten you. Yet this same lady was always ready to help any 'lame duck' that she found along her way.

A lady, whose family lived not far from Jessie Hickman, told me this story

She still remembers the day when Mrs Hickman drove her sulky into their yard. Tucked up in the sulky Jessie had a pretty little three legged Persian kitten. This cute little animal took my correspondent's eye. Jessie watched her patting the kitten "You like my little 'Perjin' kitten don't you?" she asked the child, who answered convincingly, "I do".

After a few more pleasantries with the family, an ostensible reformed Jessie drove away. To their surprise the family soon found that the kitten had been left behind.

I queried her, "Do you think Jessie was trying to find a good home for her moggie?" she thought, "Either that or she wanted to be rid of it".

I decided there were plenty of other ways to get rid of the kitten, like a dong on the head. To me it was just one more instance of Jessie's unbridled love of animals, especially those who could not take care of themselves. I remembered that part of her code was always to help anyone or anything in need.

Bush Tucker

This story was given to me by a tall unknown man at the book launch and I am sorry I missed his name.

I don't know who was in charge of the sheep, so after talking to Dick Evans of 'Dabee' who said there were some Chinese shepherds on his property, I went that way presuming some Chinese would have stayed from the gold-rush days at nearby Sofala and other goldfields. This tale could follow on page 55, paragraph 6, ending with "as the Professor" was Jessie's answer.

The narrative continues ...

During the early twenties, Jessie was still the shadowy, elusive woman on Nullo Mountain, whose fleeting appearances only aroused more curiosity amongst the locals. By now Snowy had moved in with his Aunt Jessie, who quickly began to weave her charismatic spell upon the lad. A relationship was fast developing; strong enough to last a lifetime, yet there were never any sexual overtones in Jessie's association with either Snowy or any of her young bucks. Merely a nurturing love on her part and unadulterated admiration from Snowy and his pals as they watched Jessie's outstanding ability with bushcraft, mountaineering, animals and as a performer telling stories and doing tricks.

Snowy was to watch one of these tricks as he and his Aunt were returning from a visit to town early one summer morning, when curiously they poked around 'Dabee' Station well before the heat of another searing day sent the mercury soaring. From a distance they had already admired the grandeur of the sandstone homestead. Remembering it was one of the last staging posts on the old Cobb and Co run; Snowy questioned why old Fitzgerald – the original owner – saw fit to build a tailing shed with an igloo type of roof.

They then found some old buildings from the convict village days, which still stood as stark reminders from our penal past. As the two peered into a dim old hut, they found, as usual, the walls were covered with newspapers – yet these were different, for they were old Chinese newspapers. When Jessie peered at the lettering she laughed, "Double Dutch to me".

Then she noticed something glittering on the wall near the door. She looked closer and found a rack, which held a collection of small cast iron sheep bells; little bells only three inches high and about three by two inches wide. A little round tongue hung silently inside. Always one to take anything that Jessie thought the other could spare, she stuffed a crumpled piece of paper inside one bell to silence it, then pocketed the bell, remarking, "I remember now, there's an old Chinese shepherd who lives here. Obviously he's on the road, camping out under a tent fly slung over a pole between two forky sticks, battling both the summer storms and the heat". Yet she still envied him his tucker. "At least he'd have a bit of mutton to munch on and an endless supply of potatoes and onion. Lucky old codger, I'm heartily sick of wallaby and wombat". Turning to Snowy she spoke quickly, "must keep moving son before the full heat of the day hits us", and she hurried out to where the horses were tied up.

As Jessie and Snowy rode on towards the Nullo Mountain they came upon the old Chinese shepherd's makeshift yards. He'd used four forked sticks as his corner posts, then slung a couple of saplings between these to keep his little mob of sheep safe from the dingoes during the night.

"The Chinaman won't be far away for sheep only eat out the grass for three miles on either side of their yards and that gives them an easy day's grazing before returning to their camp" observes Jessie. Just then a young merino wether poked its snowy face out from beneath a hollowed out canopy of rock, where it was seeking protection from the burning sun. Jessie's mind was fast at work; she even had a funny smile on her face.

"Watch me get us a feed of mutton" and she winked at Snowy as she spoke. Always a quiet lad Snowy didn't say much but he knew his Aunt was hatching yet another plot. The two of them came upon a mob of about thirty sheep scattered over the hillside, with little tinkling bells around the necks of three of their leaders. They noticed an old Chinese shepherd dressed in an Australian battered felt hat, a grey flannel Jackie Howe singlet and a pair of worn 'seven seven' trousers. Yet he still remained unmistakably Chinese as he moved and spoke to his dog.

"Now there's a clever Kelpie" Jessie pointed at the short haired black and tan dog with two soft cream spots above a pair of intelligent eyes, "for he speaks Chinese!" She chuckled as the old man issued a sing song order in his native tongue. The dog responded quickly to his master's command coming immediately to heel. Where upon the old fellow took off his battered hat, revealing a skimpy pigtail above a wrinkled yellow face. He then grabbed his water bottle and proceeded to pour some water into the upturned hat, encouraging the dog to slake its thirst. The shepherd's kindness also encouraged Jessie with her plan.

"Do you understand English?" she asked. He nodded, then Jessie challenged the man. "If I can pick up that sheep over there, without first getting down from my horse, will you let me keep it?" Intrigued again the shepherd nodded; still it was obvious by the set of his mouth and the sideways glance of his disbelieving eyes, that he didn't think much of her chances.

Very quickly and very quietly Jessie moved her horse, *Gang-Gang*, up behind the sheep, kicked her right foot out of the stirrup iron and before the animal knew what was happening, she had placed that foot between its hind legs, momentarily immobilising it by lifting its back legs off the ground. She leant over, grabbed the sheep's wool above its shoulders and lifted it to rest uneasily on the front of her saddle. Now the old man's face spread out in a generous smile of admiration at the ingenuity and strength of this amazing woman.

"May I keep it?" questioned Jessie. Obviously the old fellow thought Jessie had earned her sheep, but he merely nodded once more. That night Snowy ate enough mutton and damper to make a pig of himself and around the hills yet another story was added to the legend of the woman, who was to become known as "The Lady Bushranger".

Footnotes:

1. Tailing shed. Dick Evans told me that there is still a tailing shed left and it is on the Olinda (Nulla Mountain) Road, just up from the 'Dabee' homestead. It is octagonal in shape with a conical roof and the adjoining yards all were connected to it. There used to be another identical one to the south of here and within sight of the Glen Alice Road, however it has since disappeared, although the stone flagging is still there. These were presumed to be very old.
2. Seven, seven trousers were made from very strong thread, usually woven into a light grey merging into a black worsted material. Perhaps the weave or the warp was made up of only seven by seven stitches, as it was an extremely coarse cloth.

Ghostly Encounters

The following narrative came to me via a person with a close family attachment to the story. It fits into the book on page 57, paragraph 7, ending "clean way to Queensland".

The narrative continues ...

Jimmy Mack, the half-aboriginal tracker, was another person visibly affected by the tragic fire on the mountain. He loved children and couldn't bear to think of the ghastly end experienced by those innocent children and their long suffering mother. As a tracker he'd drawn his own conclusions about these deaths, although the bones

had been scattered by wild pigs scavenging. Jimmy was still sure the father's body was not amongst the others in the rubble and ashes. He also said a person or persons unknown had nailed up the doors and windows. Possibly some part of the home had escaped the fire, yet the police decided the evidence was inconclusive, but to Jimmy's keen eyes it was a clear case of murder and that's what many others felt, so now there was a great fear on the mountain, even the terror of further reprisals or vendettas. It seemed it was all tied up with the prison if their crimes were discovered.

A very emotional tracker rode back into his home yard on his big chestnut, half Arab, half draught horse and the only one in the police yard capable of carrying him – for Jimmy was an enormous man – all of six feet tall, weighing twenty one stone and with a belly to match. As he removed his white pith helmet he looked long at those much loved kiddies and sent a meaningful glance towards his white wife. Normally he loved to joke with and about them. As most were white, but others dark his standard comment was, "Some were born during the day and others at night". However on this day, Jimmy was in no mood for jokes. He cuddled each and every one before he told his family of those other children's terrible fate. They gathered under a tree with the warm sunlight filtering through as he spoke to his listening family.

Jimmy, like most indigenous people, was highly aware of the spirit world, especially when the spirits were released from their bodies by tragedy. His own fear of the supernatural spread as he told them "I was left alone all night to mind that evil place. I made a fire to keep away the animals, for a few head of cattle had been milling around, kicking the dust and pawing the ground attracted by the stench of death. The wild pigs too had been scavenging and you could hear dingoes on the prowl, not far away looking for a feed".

Jimmy gathered a couple of his children closer, the whites of their eyes were showing. "I was frozen stiff with cold and fear, and he shivered at the memory. It was horrible, although it was winter, during the day the smell brought out a few blowies. That night, the moon was slipping in and out of the clouds sending strange lights among the flickering shadows from the fire. I tell you all, I heard ghostly wailing, or was it the wind? The sound too like clanking chains being scraped over the rubble". By then Jimmy's fear had completely transferred to his wide-eyed kiddies ... you could hear a pin drop. Obviously affected too by the tragic events, yet always a practical woman, Mrs Mack took one look at her spooked children and their over-tired, stricken father and she broke the spell with an authoritative voice, saying "Time for tea".

What's in a Name?

Another bushman gave me this dingo story, which was confirmed by one of the local people. It fits into the story on page 168 between the last paragraph and the first paragraph on page 169.

The narrative continues ...

People on the mountains didn't know Jessie's background; they had no idea that before coming to the Nullo she had done time. They believed she was invincible and far too clever to ever be caught. In fact they had begun to idolise her because of her incredible feats of moving cattle through places they thought were impenetrable. They also saw Jessie as an underdog, who taunted authority and loved it every time she managed to escape the clutches of the law. Stories were told and stretched to enhance this image. So Jessie wasn't all that surprised when Andy came to visit one day with a smirk on his face. Obviously something had tickled his fancy.

"What's the joke?" she asked, and he replied, "I ran into Arthur King in my travels, 'E was tellin' me about a pure bred dingo in the mountains, which is so cunning, destructive and impossible to capture that it's been given the name of guess who?"

"Houdini?" Jessie suggested.

"Naw, it's a female".

"Well then, Lady McBeth?" Andy screwed up his face and shook his head "Yer not even warm, try nearer to 'ome". He was enjoying himself and Jessie was begging to see the light.

"You don't mean to say they've named it after me?"

"Yair, spot on, they've called it Mother 'ickman".

Although Jessie wouldn't admit it, secretly she was flattered. As usual all she said was "Well what's in a name? I've had babies named after me, but I must say it's the first time for a blooming dingo!"

Then they both sat back and roared with laughter.

The Lost Children

To be placed before chapter 4, after page 17 and before page 28.

Two young nippers, dressed in the bare necessities, with no luxuries such as shoes were busily trapping rabbits on the sharp, stony mountain. They were simply looking for a feed for themselves and their dogs and hopefully a few spare coins from the sale of the rabbit skins. With the enthusiasm of youth, Snowy (Ken Hunt) and his friend Percy Bayliss ventured further than usual, until they found to their horror, they were hopelessly lost. It was growing dark and bitterly cold and they were miserably hungry. Tears welled up in their eyes for they were only little fellows. Suddenly they sighted a shadowy spectre on horseback coming towards them. Terrified, they clung together.

"Don't be afraid", soothed a warm, female voice. "I can get you home, you're only light. One of you hop up here in front of the saddle, while the other boy can go behind me".

Reassured the two small mites did as they were told and enjoyed a rocking horse canter all the way to the fence surrounding Ken and Florence Hunt's home.

Those grateful parents sang out Jessie's praises to their mates as Jessie's support gang grew.

The Globe Hideout

The following story in *The Lady Bushranger* is placed on page 164, towards the end of the page where it says "It was a very hard life for Jessie when she was on the run".

The narrative continues ...

By now Jessie was desperate, still just ahead of Smithy and Ingram hot on her tail. She had become cornered in the town of Rylstone. Then she found herself close to the Globe Hotel, a known watering hole for some of her gang. She had already bushed Gang-Gang, feeling less conspicuous on foot. Faint and almost hysterical from lack of food and sleep, she spied a friendly face nearby. "Please quickly," she gasped "Where can I hide?"

The next moment Jessie found herself bundled along with the beer kegs down into the hotel cellar. Not a moment too soon, she was under the very feet of the police. Sergeant Smith set about thoroughly interrogating the drinkers and the publican emphasising, "We know Mrs Hickman is in this area, have any of you seen her?" Not one person reported a sighting as they all stood on top of Jessie, hidden below in the cellar.

None too convinced Smithy posted Lt. Ingram on guard duty. The police were vigilant, making sure some of their spies were among those imbibing.

The next big problem was how to get food and clothing to the starving fugitive. Then they spotted the children running around the pub. No one was watching them!

Those young ones who idolised Jessie remembering the time when they too were cold and hungry and Jessie had come to their rescue. No one suspected them. Food could be concealed on their bodies. As one at a time they played this dangerous game of hide and seek.

In this way Jessie made friends with those kiddies, friendships which would last a lifetime. They grew old treasuring secret memories of keeping Jessie company while listening to her stories down in that dark, cold cellar.

Finally the heat died down and Jessie was able to slip back to the protection of the bush.

Who Needs Friends

Below is another story that has come in just after the book was published.

At the launch of my *The Lady Bushranger* book, when so many people gave me their memories of Jessie, I can't remember the name of one old fellow or his friend, who I will call Fred. This elderly gentleman gave me the following ...

He said he had a friend (Fred), who was trapping rabbits in an extensive warren on the mountain. Fred was high up on a ridge hidden by a big boulder. Jessie was part way down this hill behind a clump of she-oaks. Still further down Andy was framed against the skyline.

All of a sudden a loud gunshot echoed around the valley. Fred looked down to see Jessie lowering her rifle. Below Andy hit the dirt clutching one of his legs.

Some time later Fred ran into Andy in Rylstone. He was limping badly and using a stick to propel himself along.

"What ever happened to you?" he asked, in a casual way.

"I had a bad fall on the mountain" Andy replied. Obviously there was no way Andy would admit what really happened on the day when his leg was injured.

For some time stories had been circulating about the fact that it was Andy who dobbed Jessie in to the police. It was generally believed this was Jessie's revenge.

Shortly after Andy left for Tenterfield with young Molly.

Who can tell if this was the reason Andy went away as it is just too involved and much too long ago for us to know the real reason behind his move away from Thalgoona.

Jessie Hickman Cave

Just after I launched my book, I received a wonderful letter from a chap telling me of his trip to Jessie's cave back in 1953. It freezes in time a moment in a boy's life of adventure and excitement on sighting a piece of Australian history that few people had been privileged to view. Having made the not insignificant effort to visit it, I too have been touched by its atmosphere.

I enclose parts of his letter below ...

I would have visited Jessie Hickman Cave near Thalgoona in 1953.

There was a walk from the house yard at '*Thalgoona*' past where the seat from the burnt sulky was placed and the old house, which would have been occupied by Andy Black.

The first part of the walk was through the tussock strewn paddock to a small creek which exited the property into the State forest.

The first part of the forest was pretty open at that time, but got denser with some low growth as one got closer to the Cave. I climbed the face of the approach to the Cave enough to look into the Cave, but did not go right up to the level of the Cave.

The Cave was in fact a considerable overhang in the rock face and probably hardly was deep enough to really be considered a Cave.

To the centre rear at that stage was the wooden frame of a bed base which still contained the wire support mattress. The other outstanding feature was a blue tea pot which was to the "left" of the bed.

Others in the group, including my father, said that there were paper clippings in the cracks in the wall of the Cave and from my memory quoted from some of them. I can only assume this was from reading from them. They were purported to contain the details of Jessie Hickman's escapades.

There were some other items of chattels, such as limited cutlery at the very back on the floor.

The view looking up the farm from the Cave was to the top entry gate to the farm one half mile away. This was the only reasonable access to the area and gave Jessie Hickman a good view of anyone approaching and was said to be part of her success at eluding capture. The opposite direction led quickly into virtually inaccessible country with which she was said to be extremely familiar and at great advantage compared to any pursuers.

Signed: D R Buckley

Self Promotion

As part of getting more details on Benjamin Hickman my son, Tony, undertook a search of the World War 1 service records looking up his details. In the database he discovered that after joining the Australian Imperial Force in mid 1915 as a private and during his time overseas on the Western Front he rose in rank to that of a Lieutenant.

He never achieved the level of a Major as mentioned in my book so he may well have indulged in a little self promotion after he was demobbed. Though not common, the practice did occur from time to time and certainly there are numerous examples in history where this has happened.

On the positive side in May 1917, although he suffered a mild gunshot wound to chest and right arm after some convalescence he returned to his unit in France.

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