



Verbatim transcript of an interview with

ROBERT LINDSAY

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The start of the Yanchep saga was in 1924. I was enrolled at the Royal Military College, Sandhurst for a two year course and my mother and sisters, Joyce and Rosemary went on a world tour. With no aeroplanes only ship and train this was scheduled to take two years. At the conclusion of this tour my elder sister was to make her debut in London. While in Western Australia a relation took them out to Yanchep Beach. My mother who had a great pioneering spirit fell in love with it. The land was originally given to the Midland Railway as a grant for building the railway to Geraldton. My mother bought from Lake Pipidiny to just about what is now Sun City, this of course included the 40 acre reserve at the beach. In extent it was about 14.5 miles from north to south, seven miles across at the south end and two and a half at the north end, in all about 23,000 acres, too big to be a farm and not big enough for a station so Yanchep Estate came into being.

In the Australian summer of 1926 the start of building the house saw my mother and sisters camped in tents while the house was erected. The design was simple, in the centre two equally sized rooms, one the dining room and the other the drawing room and they lead out of each other. On the seaside there were four bedrooms alternately eight foot by ten and ten foot by ten and this was repeated on the inland side with the exception of the last two on the dining room end, the large room in the corner was the kitchen and the smaller one next to it the storeroom.

As the track out from Perth was a rather fearsome undertaking it had to be kept very complete. Perhaps here the road should be mentioned. Although my first leave to get there was in 1927 as far as I recollect just on from the North Perth Hotel the track started and as far as Tuart Hill it was good. Either planks to fit the wheels of a car or cart and then slices of tree trunks sunk into the sand in the same way as the planks from then on it was sand, sand and for variety sand again. The 37 miles had been known to take as much as ten and a half hours with a truck loaded with household stores, petrol and wire and other fencing or windmill needs.

To return to the house as with the exception of my mother's bedroom all the others had two beds, at weekends anyway there were always about 11 persons in residence. The house was situated just north of the reserve in a small hollow which had the benefit of a shallow well with wonderful water obtainable by a donkey-tail pump. When I took up permanent residence in 1937 I put tanks in the hill and a mule and we had running water.

At the start basic furnishing apart from beds was made out of petrol boxes and petrol tins. There were two four gallon tins of petrol in each wooden case and with the side of a tin cut out and replaced in the box without its top you had readymade drawers, even with a handle where the petrol tins could have been lifted before they were converted. The boxes could be

added to each other upright or sideways and so you had a variety of shapes of furniture. Later on gradually dressing tables, wardrobes and other furnishings were gradually introduced.

Stables for horses, the house cow and also men's quarters was an important factor. To help building these there was a four masted schooner on the beach about two and a half miles from the house but not where Wreck Point is on the map. The story as I heard it was that this American schooner had a onetime German captain and had been loading pit props at Fremantle, these were to be used in the trenches in Flanders which was too much for the latent nationalism of the Captain so the story was that on leaving Fremantle he gave the crew rum and when they were fuddled locked them all below decks and singlehanded steered the ship through the reefs and beached her. Tugs could not get her afloat again anyway the men's rooms had brass portholes for windows and if not too shaky a residence the cow and horse stalls were solid enough made from best Origan pine.

I should say here that the architect, builder and inspiration of all that was to come was Mr Bob Spiers of Wanneroo who was to be my mother's faithful right-hand from 1926 to her memorial service at St Georges Cathedral in 1960 where he shed a tear. He had his faults as we all have, but he was part of the life at Yanchep and also later at Jurien Bay.

My first leave was Christmas 1927. I had saved up and with taking the train overland to Toulon, an Orient liner to Fremantle and the same in reverse, I found that I had two months at sea but the most important thing was that there was one full month in the west. I repeated this every two years until 1937. I worked like a navvy under Mr Spiers, fencing in limestone, digging wells, buying cattle up to 100 miles inland and driving them back. Of course there were happy times in Perth where although we were looked on as eccentrics we had many friends. During the summertime and holidays there used to be a constant stream of pilgrims from the camping ground. They came chiefly to get water which they had run out of but sometimes to buy tea or other things which they had also miscalculated the amount to bring so 1927 just over the camping ground boundary my mother bought a hostel come store. It had a central hall and eight rooms around the sides. It was almost at the top of the cliffs and a little ravine lead up to it. During the building it got too sandy for vehicles to get up to nearly all the materials had to be man handled for the final bit. I was the lucky one to be at the bottom of the boxed-in well when we struck water. I called it a hostel come store but it was really neither and could better be called a convenience to campers. The rooms only had a dressing table and two stretchers and blankets. Those that didn't like sleeping under the stars or tents could have a lock-up home from home. There were no meals attached so it was still camping. The store part was just commodities that people could run out of, fishing

tackle, note paper and other items, some of course were food. Sometimes it was leased by people who wanted to holiday and do something at the same time and others it was run by paid personnel. It failed in the long run after many years of being a help to campers, the main reason being that it was too costly repairing the doors and the windows broken into for free lodging when unattended and also broke in to the more solidly built storeroom. Finally, I think it was taken over by the Cray fishermen when they came and used the reef locked bay as a safe harbour for their boats.

In 1927 it was a special year because there used to be an Anzani car that came to be beach reserve frequently. We used to tease my younger sister, Rosemary about this as her beau in London had one. I don't know whether it was this or that she was not suited to Australia but the following summer she married him and retired to Somerset where she made his house really charming.

My mother, Mary Janet, was the eldest daughter of Sir William Clark of Rupertswood, Australia's first Baronet. Her mother was his second wife, the first, after giving him two sons and two daughters, was killed in a horse-trap accident. The wheel hit a boulder and she was thrown out. Today it is generally a fast car and a tree or telegraph pole.

The second Mrs Clark at that time was, believe it or not, born Miss Snodgrass and she had nine more children. Two of the sons became members of the Victorian Legislative Assembly and three sons went to the Royal Military College, Sandhurst, England. Two became cavalry officers in the English army and one went to the Indian cavalry. They all served some periods in their father's private battery of horse artillery at Rupertswood, Victoria. One of these knew my father at Sandhurst and when my father was aid-de-camp to the Viceroy of India and he and his sister, my mother, visited daily for the Jubilee Durbar of Queen Victoria and introduced the couple who were eventually to marry. Of my mother's sisters, one married a grazier and the other a Melbourne businessman but my mother was always the lively one persuading her brothers to take her to, in those days, outlandish spots, Vesuvius, yes as far as I know my mother went up several times but in the funicular railway. However, in the old days with steam in its early days, to go to Europe you had to be away for a year to make it worthwhile, so travel and a small family was the rule, with a large family it was no travel or some of your children arrived overseas, well my mother was one of these and her mother felt that she was about to arrive when she was halfway up Vesuvius and so she had to return hurriedly to Naples where my mother was born.

I think it was in 1927 that the late Duke of Gloucester came out in HMS Coventry and stayed at Gloucester Lodge. He was upset because his valet called in late, his excuse being that he was unable to get the chip heater to give a warm bath, however, the Duke himself

immediately took over and made his own bath. Later in the morning he and his party went for a kangaroo hunt on Yanchep Estate. Two men with a large kangaroo in a sack struggled to keep it quiet in the thicket until the royal party came along when they released it, a good hunt was then completed. That night there was a dance given in the Cabaret Cave and the parents of Perth were very angry as only girls from Perth were asked and no men were asked as the Royal Navy supplied all the partners. These were the days of chaperones or at least one's own menfolk to protect you.

Mr Shapcott started making Yanchep what it is when he took over and the first improvement was a strip road which subsequently was widened two feet on one side and then at a later date on the other. This shortened the journey to Yanchep Beach by about four hours and the only real hazard was what was called the hairpin bend, a very sandy hill which was always being churned up by city drivers going out to the beach. The Yanchep Inn made a very nice and comfortable weekend out of Perth and many great parties were held there. It also made life very much more lively for us who lived out there permanently.

My fourth visit was in 1937, I had just been promoted captain and I thought the war would start about August 1938 so I retired onto reserve and I would have only lost one, or at the most, two places in seniority when I rejoined. However, this was not to be as Mr Horbilisha? was Minister for the Army and was asked to do something about officers' pay which was dismally low, £237 per annum for a lieutenant, so to rectify it instead of putting the rates up, he said everyone would become a captain after eight years and a major after sixteen, so as I had fourteen years service and two in the reserve nearly every officer who joined after me went up to being a captain over my head. This probably saved my life. Anyhow the point of my retiring was because I loved my time in Australia and the West, hard work but also play but I wanted to know if my feelings would be the same if I was not on leave, they were and I knew if I survived I would be back. So much so that on my arrival in England I booked passage number 17 on the Orient for after the war and number 39 on the P&O. I did not think at the time that there would be no liners only troop ships.

During my two years I dug more wells and put up windmills and troughs and did many miles of sub-divisional fencing and then the war came. I went to fight and my mother stayed on in spite of the difficulties of transport. Then the army took over and forced my mother to leave her home which she loved. Yanchep Estate was a lovely rural ground with its hills and wooded areas, however, the sea was a boundary on one side and the boundary on the east was supposed to be a neutral country and out of bounds, however, to gain the advantage trucked vehicles entered the neutral country and in doing so took all my wire from the fences with them, then of course jarrah fence posts split nicely for boiling billies of tea and camp

fires so when I returned I had no fences. My mother had already moved back after the war and I got repatriated in February 1946. I was lucky enough to get a war surplus three-tonner and started fencing again, posts and wires were difficult but everyone had the same problems.

In November 1946 I got engaged and although my wife wanted to live in Western Australia her father insisted upon Victoria and gave us a farm. I came over about four times a year and my mother stayed on but Mr Browne of Browne's Dairies of North Perth leased Yanchep for spelling his cows.

My mother, in her eighties, was a constant worry. She eventually consented to move to Perth and concentrate on her town interests. A Sydney consortium, The Widgee Pastoral Company eventually bought Yanchep. My mother died in Perth in 1960 aged 84. She got a scratch on her leg at Jurien Bay where she had a house after Yanchep was sold, she got blood poisoning and went to hospital in Perth. However, her frail body could not contend with it and she passed away peacefully while my sister Joyce and I were taking a spell off duty for lunch. After a memorial service at St George's Cathedral my mother was buried at Arlington Churchyard in Berkshire, England. There are three graves in a row; Robert Lindsay, Lord Wantage VC, Scots' Guards; Major the Honourable Robert Lindsay, Royal Scots' Greys; and my mother; and a third one is reserved for Robert Lindsay, Grenadier Guards, in fact me, who will be I hope buried in Victoria.

My mother loved the peace and quiet of Yanchep, the miles of rolling hills and white sand, the fresh air and the sound of waves lapping on the beaches. The urban development which has gone on since I hope that some of these attributes will remain for the many hundreds who will be living there in the future.

My other sister, Joyce married a Martin Lindsay who was at Military College with me. He was a soldier, polar explorer, crossed Africa on foot and during the war he started the parachute regiment. As an author he wrote successful books on all his exploits and they were translated into many languages. He stood for parliament when Churchill fell after the war, won his seat and remained in parliament for twenty-five years when he retired and was made a baronet. For eight years my sister had been coming to Yanchep with my mother, she has two boys and a girl and nine grandchildren. My other sister Rosemary died in England four years after my mother, she had a son and a daughter and two grandchildren.

My mother also pioneered Jurien Bay, she wanted to put it on the map as she thought it would be an excellent haven for enemy vessels to shelter in should there ever be a war. This also called for great endurance and driving skill as after Dandaragan there were miles

of white powdered chalky sand and limestone outcrops to be negotiated. The last bit was the worst but it went straight to the beach. There was a pier that had been used to load ships in the past but a receding sea had left it about a mile inland and each new shoreline left another sand hill to negotiate before one got to the beach. My mother had a wonderful memory and countless stories of her youth which you could never persuade her to write down. People used to come out from Perth to do business and after lunch afternoon tea and possibly supper return to Perth without concluding it, this would be because they were so enthralled by her stories. One of which was when she and her brother went on a walking tour in Spain and they were somewhere on the coast and they found some smugglers caves and naturally being inquisitive they started looking into them. They were then surprised by the smugglers and she and her brother had to run for it.

My father came out to be married on his father's yacht, the Valhalla. His father was going to Fiji to see an eclipse of Venus which could only be seen from Fiji as he was a great astrologer. Having got married at Melbourne Cathedral they decided for their honeymoon that they would go to Japan and cross to Russia and go home on the Tran Siberian Railway. This was a little bit awkward because my father was a soldier and the Russia/Japanese war was going on at this time. They were continually being shunted into sidings while troop planes passed from east to west. They repeated tried to leave my father behind which naturally agitated my mother very considerably. However, on the train there was a Russian Prince Sheremetev who became friendly with my mother and both he and my mother played piquet which is a French card game for two. Prince Sheremetev said that they should play over the journey for some trophy and my mother thought that this wasn't too hot and so she suggested that they play for spoon. She was just going to give him quite possibly one of the train spoons. However, luckily she won at the end of the trip and she was presented with her spoon which was a very large silver spoon encrusted with semi-precious stones, she wondered what would have happened if she had presented him with a less valuable spoon. However, he was a great help in helping them across through the difficulties and showing everybody that my father wasn't a spy and afterwards possibly through this my father became the English... to the .

My father was the third son of the Earl of Crawford and Balcarres and of course as such he bore the honorary title of Honourable which his wife shared with him.

While in England my mother owned two houses knocked into one in Charles Street off Berkley Square. One was Lord Revelstoke's house and the other was Lord Dartmouth's and in 1932 that was sold to the English Speaking Union who now have it as their headquarters/clubhouse. After that our furniture was stored and brought out every season

when she was back in England and leased a house. It was eventually divided into three; each of my sisters getting one third and my third was unfortunately burnt while in store during the blitz of London. However, a bulldozer years after the war ended was bulldozing the site and he turned up a round plate and he scratched the middle of it and found her name in it and then he found another. There were two silver trays which had been given to her by Officers during the war as a memorial to my father. Out of her own pocket she rang a hospital for badly wounded Officers and these two were given to her by certain members and signed as a thank you present for making them whole again.

In answer to your last question, as far as I know there were never any aborigines on Yanchep and none passed through.

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