



Kimberley Society

Book Note

***Kimberley Days and Yesterdays : 45 years in the Great Nor-West of Western Australia* by Charles Edward Flinders as told to J.F. Christie. Hesperian Press, Carlisle, WA, 2016. Soft cover, 122 pages, A4, illustrated. ISBN 978-0-85905-064-5, RRP \$30.**

In Wyndham in 1934, J.F. Christie wrote: "There are very few of the old-timers who retain such vivid memories of the early days of the Nor-west of Western Australia as Charles Edward Flinders." While Christie might have come to journalism late in life, he knew a good story when he encountered one. Sitting in Flinders' home town, he had enough for a book.

In a Publisher's Note at the front of *Kimberley Days and Yesterdays*, Peter J Bridge tells of tracking down this manuscript after reading, in a 1934 letter (then 50 years old), that Angus & Robertson had rejected it because its theme was similar to the book *Cossack Gold*. Hesperian reprinted *Cossack Gold* in 1984 and intended to publish Flinders' manuscript in the annotated form adopted for such works as Lamond's *Tales of the Overland*. Research and editing began but the breadth and nature of the stories defied all efforts to provide comprehensive annotation. Since then, the publication of other people's reminiscences and the advent of [Trove](#) have reduced the need for such editorial intervention. Readers will, however, need to verify any information they wish to use from Flinders' writing because, like many people recalling events from past decades, his memory was far from infallible.

To round out the Christie manuscript, Hesperian Press added seven chapters to the front of the book. That material came from manuscripts, articles and documents held by the Flinders family and the J.S. Battye Library of West Australian History. The first addition is titled 'Fleeing London' and there Flinders introduces himself as the great nephew of the navigator Matthew Flinders. Then, describing his voyage to Australia with his 17-year-old younger brother Bill in our summer of 1886/1887, he wrote:

On board I met Sir Malcolm Fraser, Colonial Secretary for Western Australia, ... and I chummed up with William Lambden Owen, a young engineer who, like myself, was setting out on a great adventure. In fact, he was my cabin mate.

Owen would later write *Cossack Gold*, which Flinders considered 'well worth reading'. The two men started work in the Cossack and Roebourne area in 1887, and Flinders then moved to the Kimberley. His early jobs tended to be short lived because, in his twenties, he wanted 'something with at least a bit of excitement in it'. He saw and heard plenty as a police constable (1887), court orderly, landing waiter, West Kimberley Road Board secretary, auctioneer, mail contractor (1894–95), Halls Creek publican, Wyndham storekeeper (1905 onward), and Road Board chairman (1928–34). He knew pastoralists, pearlmen and policemen, and he had firsthand experience of Jandamarra (Pigeon) and other Aboriginal people clashing with settlers and the police in the West Kimberley in the late 1880s and early 1890s.

Flinders' rambling but interesting flow of stories about his life is interspersed with anecdotes about history, other people and their experiences. The places he discusses include Broome, Cossack, Derby, Halls Creek, Port Hedland, Roebourne and Wyndham as well as various stations and mines outside those towns. His friend Michael Patrick Durack, in a foreword to the Christie manuscript, wrote: 'I have heard the stories and incidents recorded in these pages and am delighted to find how accurately they have been memorised and faithfully set forth.'

Cathie Clement