



# Kimberley Society

## Book Note

*Travels and Adventures of Ben Bridge Throughout Western Australia and Northern Territory* by Ben Bridge. [Hesperian Press](#), Carlisle (WA), 2012. Soft Cover, A4, 94 pages, illustrated, ISBN 978-0-85905-540-6, RRP \$30.00.

Born in New South Wales in 1860, Ben Bridge was one of Australia's great buckjump riders. He was also a fugitive who evaded the police for seven years. The travels and adventures he recalls in this unusual book relate mostly to his time on the run. They end, before he was recaptured, with the words 'To be continued'.

Only the second half of the book deals with the Kimberley. But readers interested primarily in that region will relate to the author having been the great uncle of the late Ernie Bridge, the first Aboriginal person appointed as a cabinet minister in Australia. Ben Bridge's adventures in the Kimberley included contact with Ernie's grandfather, Joseph Payne Bridge, who had a hotel at Wyndham and then a small cattle station on country between Wyndham and Halls Creek.

In the first part of the book, and in biographical material at the end, we learn of a tough childhood that had its share of adventures. Ben's father Joseph was one of seven brothers born to transported convict parents and placed in an orphanage after their parents reoffended. Whether it was due to such connections that Ben had early contact with bushrangers is unknown but he tells of that contact in his first chapter ('Notorious Acquaintances'). The next chapter, titled 'In the clutches of the police', tells how Ben went astray trying to make easy money with a mate and then having repeated brushes with the law. He adopted the alias John McDonald but that was not enough to keep him out of gaol. The chapter ends with his escape from Murrurundi Gaol, NSW, in March 1892.

From that point on, *Travels and Adventures of Ben Bridge* tells of his life on the run, another arrest, his escape from the Burketown lockup in far north Queensland in September 1892, and his gradual movement westward.

While the earlier chapters mention his marriage and time spent with his wife and children, all opportunity for further such contact ended with the Burketown escape. Instead, Ben had to settle for occasional contact with his brother Joe, sister-in-law Deborah, and their family. As is well known, Joe and Deborah had travelled from Normanton to the Kimberley by wagon in 1895, with their 10-year-old daughter Mabel doing an adult's share of the work. Ben's book tells how fraught any personal contact was, and how police patrols limited the extent to which he could obtain work on stations. It also tells of interaction with Aboriginal people – some of it to their disadvantage – and with station owners and workers, who were usually supportive. The owner of Rosewood Station – Tom Kilfoyle (named as Guilfoil in the book) – proved to be a good friend.

Little has been done about the erroneous spelling of placenames and personal names in the book but the correct spelling of most of them can be guessed. A correction on page 80 is of interest in that it points to Ben Bridge having met Frank Hann when that now well known character was heading for the Kimberley.

The original publication from which Hesperian Press generated this book was badly typeset and very hard to obtain, even in the form of pale photocopies. It is good to see it in print again, and it should prove popular with readers of bush history.

*Cathie Clement*