



# Kimberley Society

## Book Note

***God before Gugerri : Luggers, trucks & water bores & other Kimberley stories* by Michael Gugerri. Hesperian Press, 2014. Soft Cover, A4, 226 pages, illustrated, ISBN 978-0-85905-567-3, RRP \$45.00.**

This long awaited volume offers great stories about the region and its people. Beginning with Leo Gugerri's arrival in Broome in 1922, and taking in the life of Doug Blythe (1911–2000), the stories end with the death of Billy King in 2001.

Leo died at Glenroy Station in 1982 aged 82, and, because he told many interesting stories over the years, his son Michael decided to record some of those and some of his own. The result is an unvarnished account of ordinary but interesting lives spent mostly in the Kimberley. Stations, animals, machinery, and motor vehicles feature in many of the stories, which range from a death-defying ride on a mule at Noora Noora out-camp to mysterious lights in the night sky out of Derby.

The detail in the stories, which are accompanied by more than 170 photographs, is excellent. Page 140, for instance, shows what must be one of the world's most unusual donkey carts. Fred Russ senior showed that photo to Michael after a Gibb River Station "smoko" and then told him about its ingenious construction.

Because the space available for this note prevents any comprehensive description of the book's contents, the following cryptic list of Leo's and Michael's whereabouts and activities will have to suffice. All the dates are approximate. The stories unfold more or less chronologically, with Michael's reminiscences of his childhood and later times interspersed with his father's activities.

The coverage of Leo's life includes: 1900–22 (Western Australia, birth, schooling, and working on a Murchison station); 1922–27 (Broome, pearling); 1927–32 (Derby & environs, carrying); 1933 (Fitzroy River, Noora Noora out-camp, station work); 1934–44 (Anna Plains Station, windmill man & mechanic); 1944–47 (Broome & beyond, trucking); 1947–50 (Broome, establishing and running a garage); 1950–51 (Luluigui Station, windmill man & mechanic); 1952–54 (Liveringa Station, windmill man & mechanic); 1955 onward (Quanbun and other stations, water boring).

The coverage of Michael's life includes: 1939–54 (Anna Plains, Broome, & Hale School in Perth); 1955 (working with Leo); 1956–61 (Cockatoo Island & Port Kembla, apprenticeship as a fitter and turner); 1961 onward (Derby & beyond, carrying, other carriers, a dangerous crossing of Cone Bay, and more).

In *God before Gugerri*, as is often the case in reminiscences, the names of people who are not central to the stories are sometimes misspelt. Some, e.g. McLarty and Skipworth, are correct in the index but wrong in the text. Others, e.g. Beharell, are misspelt in both places. This is a small point but one that needs to be noted by anyone using the book for research. And there will be plenty who do that. The index contains only the names of people. Readers interested in specific places will find it helpful to peruse the two-page 'Contents' and the four-page 'List of illustrations'.

While finding the stories about Leo's life and Michael's younger days interesting, it was the ones about Michael's carrying in the 'underworld'—the country beyond the King Leopold Range—that got my full attention. With little having been written elsewhere about the early years of such stations as Theda and Doongan, those stories help to fill in some of the gaps in Kimberley history.

*Cathie Clement*