

Shoring the Mines from the South: a Kangaroo Island export

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TYPICAL SOUTH COAST SCENERY, KANGAROO ISLAND.

The man standing in the centre of this scene indicates the size of the gum trees (*Chronicle*, 5 October 1907, p.31).

Kangaroo Island grew tall eucalypts wide of girth and suitable for railway sleepers (which were produced especially from the 1850s).¹ My main subject, the Yorkshire-born sheep farmer, John Hirst, believed the woodlands around the Ravine des Casoars were

¹ See 'Kangaroo Island. Dr Cherry on the Ironstone Country', *Advertiser*, 25 September 1909, p.6.

ripe for picking for the railways.² Further south, the Stun'sail-boom River valley grew gums up to 14 feet in diameter and 130 feet high. The blue gum (the South Australian) especially was used for timber and earth bridges—a variant method of the ore mines' stye or stull—and eucalyptus trunks were used for fashioning threshing rollers, for logging scrub, and big timber was gathered for the peninsular mines, sometimes 'clear of bark', mainly from the north-west coast.³ For Islanders, diversification through shipping timber to the mines from the 1870s onwards was a most-times sound, if difficult and laborious, economic arrangement. John Hirst half-yearly received his 'Mother's Draft'—not a tried-and-true medicament, but an annuity of £50.⁴ Hirst's usual wool cheque in later years was some £66, and payments for his timber loads, although more frequent, each netted much the same amount when freight was paid; for example, some £87 paid by the Mines for timber attracted £46 for freight paid by Hirst.



Sugar gums on the way to the Ravine des Casoars, west coast of Kangaroo Island. About 1948 (Courtesy of Jonathon Hancock).

² Acknowledgements and thanks to Judy and Rodney Bell, Jean Nunn, Liz Smart, Land Titles Office, Adelaide, SA Department for Environment and Heritage, State Library of South Australia (SLSA), State Records of South Australia (SRSA), and Graham and Prue Trethewey.

³ Over some time, loads of Oregon logs came to the peninsular mines from America's west coast as deck timber, but offers to Moonta Mines of local mainland 'Iron Bark wood' were often declined on cost.

⁴ Received until her death in January 1899 and thereafter in differing amounts from Hirst's family in England.



Bridge over the Stun'sail-boom River at Karatta homestead in 1906.

[Image: Wallaroo Mine. c. 1910. From H.K. Bailey, *The Wallaroo Mine Kadina, South Australia [1860-1923]*, National Trust of SA, 1985, p.89].



The start of a settler's 'corduroy' road over a stream, south-west Kangaroo Island (Courtesy of Joy Wheaton).



Completed road. About 1947 (Courtesy of Joy Wheaton)



John Hirst (1836-1915) died at Snug Cove on 21 August 1915 aged 79. Hirst's grave is at Snug Cove.

[Image: map of north-west Kangaroo Island coast].

The main timber-getting was along the north-west coastal area, west from the De Mole River to Snug Cove, across to King George's Beach, Stoke's Bay, and Emu Bay. Like that of other suppliers, Arthur Daw's 'habitual' practice was to ship a 'considerable amount' of firewood and 'heavy timber for Moonta Mines' from the beaches most convenient for coastal traders.⁵

⁵ By the turn of the century, the Kingscote Harbor Master, district councillors, and Marine Board, bemoaned the reduced revenue from berthing or tonnage dues when suppliers loaded wood and yacca 'gum' from beaches only a short distance from the Kingscote jetty ('Tolls on goods shipped within 7 miles of jetty', GRG 51/17/72, 1900, SRSA).



A. DAW, J.P.

Stock and Clearing Sales conducted throughout the Island. General Sales held at the Saleyards Kingscote Monthly.

FOR SALE— Farms of various areas (improved and unimproved) also TOWN-SHIP ALLOTMENTS in Choice Positions.

Established 1894.

ARTHUR DAW

AUCTIONEER & VALUATOR

Land, Stock, Shipping, and General Commission Agent

Dawdney Street, Kingscote, Kangaroo Island.



Mr. A. Daw's Residence at Kingscote.

South Australia's mines had contributed to the perpetual 'reaping and never sowing' that contributed to the State's 'timber famine'⁶ which, by the 1870s, became 'the great timber question'⁷ to be remediated by Acts of parliament for 'systematic forest culture'.⁸ By 1875 the country around Moonta Mines had been cleared 'for about twelve miles' of mostly scrub timber for fuel, and the Mines paid as much as 30/- per ton for 'large mallee for underground purposes'.⁹

In July 1878, the Moonta Mines proprietors sought to know the cost of a visit to Kangaroo Island to enquire about timber. Recognising later, in April 1880, that a government land survey was about to be made of the area where supplies had been obtained over the previous year or so—mainly, I think, at Emu Bay—they wished the Surveyor-General (George Goyder) to 'omit to survey the land', and if this request was unsuccessful, to ask him if anything could be done towards buying it, and if nothing, that the proprietors' ketch, *Crest of the Wave*, be 'dispatched at once with two extra horses and two men to cut and cart to the beach as much timber as possible during the next two months.' Was this Burnham Wood come to High Dunsinane? The directors were determined to influence Goyder on his return to Adelaide, meantime, before negotiation, sending the ketch on the morrow,¹⁰ with what appears indecorous haste.

⁶ 'Forest Culture', *Chronicle*, 22 July 1871, 11e.

⁷ 'Rural Industries and Forest Culture', *Chronicle*, 8 February 1873, p.11d. And see 'Forest Culture', *Observer*, 11 January 1879, p.9f. From the 1870s, a warning that State timber supplies needed to 'endure beyond [their current] pole and firewood stage' (*Register*, 1903) was considered more vehemently. The *Act to Encourage the Planting of Trees* (the *Forest Trees Act*) of 1873, incorporated with the *Forest Board Act* of 1875, and the *Woods and Forests Act* of 1882 that repealed the *Forest Trees Act*, as well as its 1883 Regulations, sought improvements.

⁸ 'Rural Industry and Forest Culture', *Register*, 6 December 1873, p.4d.

⁹ Henry R. Hancock was questioned by the Commission at Moonta on 31 March 1875. He said that some 1,600 tons of rich ore and sometimes large quantities of inferior ore were sent away each month ('Report of Commission appointed to inquire into the subject of Railway Construction ...', *SAPP*, vol. 2, 1875, pp.111-112). Around this time, the mines consumed over 10,000 tons of firewood annually.

¹⁰ Moonta Mines Proprietors [MMP] minutes, 19 April 1880 (BRG 40/3/9, SLSA). Mandie Robinson wrote that Hancock 'made his delayed visit to Kangaroo Island', finding the timber 'better than expected' (Mandie Robinson, *Cap'n 'Ancock. Ruler of Australia's Little Cornwall*, Adelaide, Rigby, p.103). It is unclear if 1875 was the year of his journey.

In June 1881, William Holford Hamilton, who held a pastoral lease at Western River, claimed compensation from the Mines for a mare, quote, 'killed by the horses in charge of the Company's Woodcutters at Emu Bay.'¹¹ The men had been employed there by the Mines certainly since May 1879.

In June 1883 the proprietors proposed advertising in the Adelaide daily papers, inviting a supply of 'Kangaroo Island Gum Logs', 9 feet to 15 feet long and 6 inches to 18 inches in diameter to be delivered on Moonta Bay jetty. The quantity would keep 'one vessel fully employed for twelve months'.¹² Seven years before this, in autumn 1876, Captain Hancock inspected timber for 'Saw Mill purposes' at the Rapid Bay-Myponga area. If on his search southwards to Kangaroo Island Hancock met John Hirst one would expect the event to be recorded in Hirst's journal.

Perhaps Hancock initiated business with the Bells, or Turners (of Smith's Bay), perhaps as well as with the Hamiltons, all one-time timber suppliers. Hirst began *his* 35-year timber-supplying to the Moonta, Paramatta, and Wallaroo mines in January 1879, engaging *Annie Taylor* to carry posts. Arriving in February with home supplies, it loaded Hirst's timber over five days, and carried it at 6 pence a post to the Moonta Mines.¹³ *Napperby, Storm Bird, Grace Darling, Eliza, Mimosa, Free Selector, Capella, Sir Wilfred Lawson*, the schooners *Ariel* and *Beatrice*—and more—transported thousands of tons of timber from Kangaroo Island.

I assume that Hirst intended Elizabeth Wooldridge, who he married in December 1864, to live with him on Eyre Peninsula. Hirst wrote to her from Reid's Station, Gawler Ranges, in October 1864, wondering if she will 'ever bear this hard life of ours til we are well off to make it comfortable and luxurious'.¹⁴ Hirst spent several years developing pastoral country south-west of the Gawler Ranges on Eyre Peninsula with his brother, Alfred, and future brother-in-law, Andrew Morris Wooldridge. It may be that the arrangement whereby Hirst (in 1872, the year he began his Snug Cove journal entries, which he kept to February 1914),¹⁵ and Elizabeth's brother, Andrew Wooldridge, leased the land on the Island (Wooldridge from 1878), assuaged the discomforts of the early months of this marriage (possibly spent at Willianippie Station or on the Paney Run).¹⁶

¹¹ MMP, minutes, meeting of 27 June 1881 (BRG 40/3/9, SLSA). W.H. Hamilton senior built his 'homestead above the landing place at Emu Bay' (Jean Nunn, *This Southern Land*, 1989, p.116).

¹² MMP, minutes, meeting of 4 June 1883, p.232 (BRG 40/3/10, SLSA). A cut out letterpress proof of the advertisement is attached to the Minutes.

¹³ Hirst journal, p.59. Hirst sent a telegram on 25 February to Henry Hancock reporting his 'receipt of letter' (Journal, p.60).

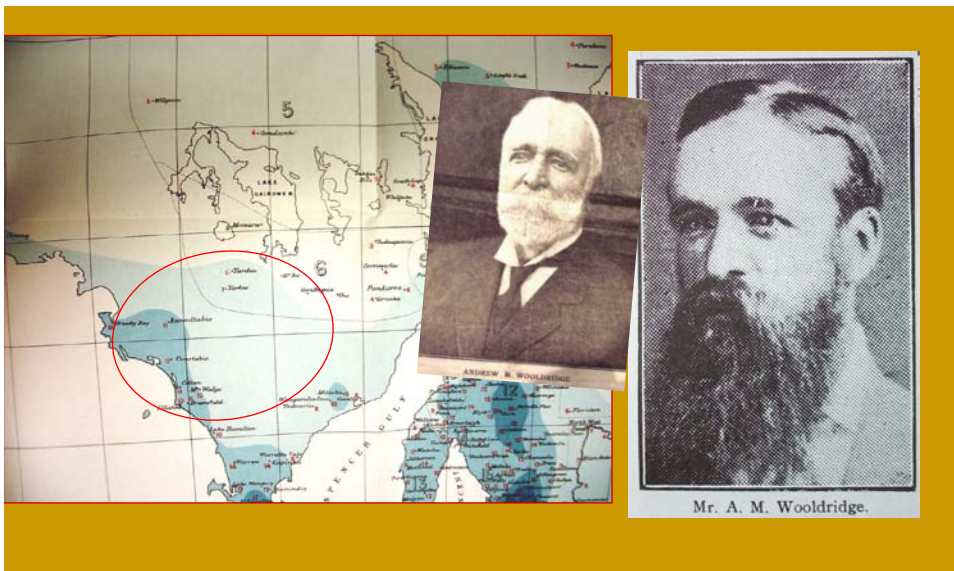
¹⁴ Letter held by Rodney Bell, Kangaroo Island.

¹⁵ Hirst's journal begins with entries for 1864 and 1865 for Parla and Paney (to p. 40). The following pages were written at Snug Cove (to p. 554). In 1869 Hirst paid £15 to renew the preferential pastoral claim on Kangaroo Island (51, 52, and 53 of 1868) that he held perhaps earlier than 1868 (GRG 35/2/167, 1869, SRSA). Lease no. 2801, application 52 of 93 m² (or 91 m²), was gazetted on 10 September 1879 and was due to expire on 30 June 1899. The lease was 'signed to Elder Smith & Co. and 2358/99' (GRG 35/2/4074, 1899, SRSA). Hirst is said to have taken 'up in partnership with Andrew Wooldridge 9,000 acres' at Snug Cove' in 1872' ('Haven of Memories on Rugged Island Coast', *Chronicle*, 18 Nov 1937, p.51).

¹⁶ H.C. Hawson bought Willianippie Station in late 1868.



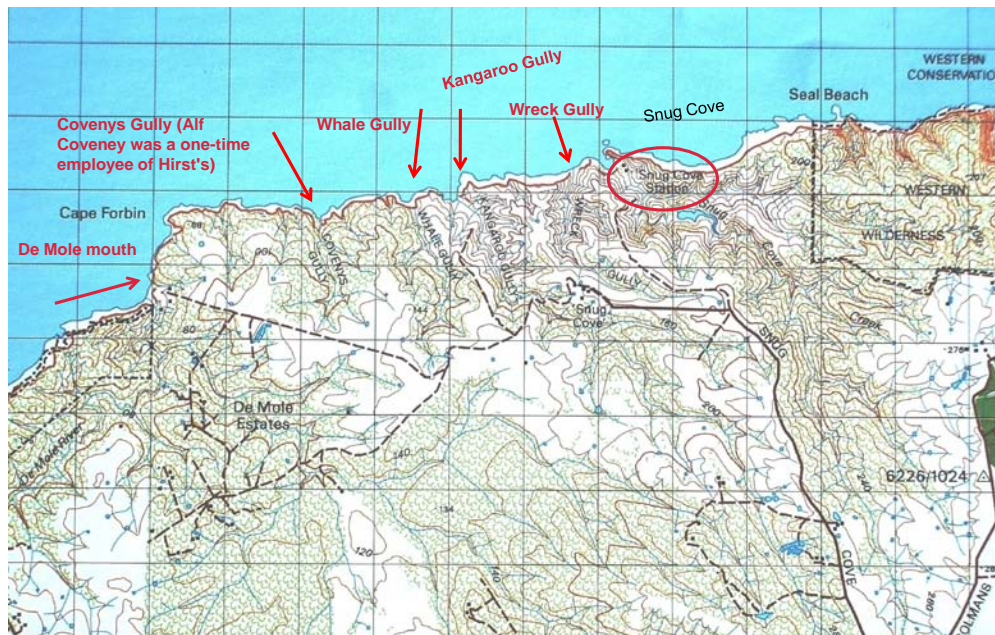
John and Elizabeth Hirst (From Jean Nunn, *This Southern Land*, 1989, p.146)



Andrew Wooldridge (1841-1925).¹⁷

¹⁷ Images from 'Pastoral Pioneers. CLVI.-Andrew Morrison Wooldridge', *Adelaide Stock and Station Journal*, 17 February 1926, p.4, and Norman A. Richardson, *Pioneers of the North-West of South Australia 1856 to 1914*, 1925, p.49. See 'North and North-west of Port Augusta. Stations and their owners', *Observer*, 2 Feb 1924, p.49.

John Hirst's timber-getting pitch, including shipping places, spread across these north coast gullies:



The De Mole River, Coveny's [*sic*] Gully (Alf Coveney was a one-time employee of Hirst), Whale Gully, Kangaroo Gully, and Wreck Gully (Map 73, *Part Region 1, CFS Map book, Kangaroo Island*, 1 December 2002, Government of South Australia).

[Images of the Hirsts' home, Snug Cove, taken some 75 years after John Hirst's death (Courtesy of the Heritage Branch, SA Department for Environment and Heritage)].

In April 1909 at Kingscote, Hirst told the Royal Commission on a Kangaroo Island railway—one Commissioner was the former Moonta miner, John Verran—'I send a great quantity of timber to the Moonta Mines sometimes [from] a shipping place right at my front door, although it can be difficult to get a vessel in.'¹⁸ This certainly stated the conditions plainly.

¹⁸ *SAPP*, no. 26, 1911-12, p.15. Hirst told the Royal Commissioners that the De Mole River valley and within the Ravine des Casoars is good land, 'splendid for cultivation' and with plenty of timber for railway sleepers, 'one belt . . . [of which] would find the sleepers for half the line.' The railway line would have run due west, probably from the port at Kingscote, for fifty to sixty miles towards Cape Borda.

but in safe weather small craft can sail right in and lie up alongside a mass of broken rock on the edge of the sandy beach. Here in years gone by anchored the Governor Musgrave and many another craft now broken up and forgotten. At the entrance to the Cove a huge rock stands out of the sea, having on one side the features in profile of a man's face looking sideways to the open sea.

All along the ravine, known as Saug Cove Creek, which ends at the Cove, the hills rise abruptly for hundreds of feet. For some distance back to where the scrub encroaches these hills are well covered with grass. There are many sheoaks and a few other green trees about, but the burnt trunks of many old gum trees stand stark against the sky, showing that the country was once well timbered. A little way up the gully



Snug Cove.—(Above) The rock-housed haven. (Left) The old homestead.

structures and lotions labelled and filed into separate compartments.

Some few years after the death of John Hirst in 1914, about 2500 acres of the holding immediately adjacent to the Cove were purchased by Edward Burgess, of Cypriot River, who continues to run sheep on the property. Sailing boats on occasions come into the Cove to load wool or gum, or to find shelter, but to improve the means of communication Mr. Burgess has recently constructed a new road up the hillside, which road in about one mile rises nearly 500 feet. From this point, with wonderful views of coastal scenery, the road continues to rise for about another 200 feet to the top of the hill, from where a reasonably

Snug Cove bay and the former Hirst homestead ('Haven of Memories on Rugged Island Coast', *Chronicle*, 18 November 1937, p.51).

In August 1878 Henry Hancock had advised the Moonta Mines proprietors to buy the ketch *Strathmore* (if it could be 'got cheap' (it was offered at £1000), and later in that year

[Image: *Strathmore*, painted white, was photographed in 1879 at Port Adelaide. Edwardes Collection, Courtesy of the SLSA: PRG 1371/38/45)]

he advised buying the *Maldon Lewis* (£400), a vessel with a 'large [suitable] hatchway',¹⁹ both decisions deferred by the cautious directors, but the ketch *Crest of the Wave*, offered at £650, was bought. However, as vessels in heavy weather were wont to do at the Island, *Crest of the Wave* 'parted her moorings' at Smith's Bay in May 1880, becoming a 'total wreck.' Soon after, although *Crest* was not abandoned, Captain Hancock suggested that tenders be called for carrying the mines' timber.

Nonetheless, Richard Honey's ketch *Mimosa* was bought in November 1883, the same year when Henry Hancock suggested getting information about building a ketch-type vessel. Neither endeavour was fated for success. *Mimosa* was wrecked some five months later at Stoke's Bay. The proprietors appear never to have risked commissioning the building of a vessel.

[Image: letterhead of R. Honey, Lion Timber Yards and Steam Saw Mills, Commercial Road and Lipson Street, Port Adelaide]

Meanwhile, Moonta Mines sought timber elsewhere, particularly from the Wirrabarra Forest Reserve. Not until November 1884 did *Lillie Hawkins* remove the 300 tons of timber (or 50 mature bull elephants—my way of visualising the tonnage—they come in at

¹⁹ On 31 January 1899 Hirst noted in his journal the Wallaroo and Moonta Mining Company account for logs sent from Stokes Bay on *Maldon Lewis*. Hirst had become very aggravated by the *Maldon Lewis* standing out all day, even though forced by the weather.

6 tonnes a piece) from Stoke's Bay left when *Mimosa* was stranded there.²⁰ Ominously, thereafter, the Moonta Mines underwriters declared that 'it would be impossible to effect insurance for Stoke's Bay or Western River except ... as would practically amount to a heavy extra cost on the timber.'²¹

Re-insurance of part of the risk was difficult, therefore the insurers were unable to quote for Kangaroo Island.²² Even so, in January 1885 the schooner *Falcon* was inspected at Melbourne as a possible replacement vessel.



Captain Patrick Weir's photograph of Western River cove ('The Christmas Chronicle', *Advertiser*, 14 December 1912, p.11).

Then, in March 1885 Hancock returned to the Mines' earlier purpose for the Island, proposing that land there should be applied for as a government reserve for timber purposes. A Mines' monopoly seems implicit.

And so again to Hirst . . .

Over two days in early June 1879, Hirst was cobbling, his workman Tom was sewing his opossum rug, others, Jim and Dick,²³ were making shingles and wallaby snares then digging in the garden, while still others were out fencing. And Hirst received Roach Brothers' memo for Moonta timber requirements:²⁴

²⁰ Freight to Moonta Bay was to be paid at 17/- per ton.

²¹ MMP, minutes, meeting of 24 November 1884, p.423.

²² MMP, minutes, meeting of 1 December 1884.

²³ Soon after Dick (?Stephens), the 'black fellow' from Streaky Bay, arrived at Snug Cove, he sawed shingles, and was supplied with blankets by Hirst, a practice that Hirst was familiar with in issuing government stores while a pastoralist on Eyre Peninsula.

²⁴ Most likely Paul Roach, mine captain, Wallaroo, and/or W.H. Roach, mine captain, Wallaroo Mines, and/or Captain Henry Roach of Moonta Mines. Roach Brothers butchers (Jacob and Peter) had a shop in George Street, Moonta. Jacob died in 1894 at 57 years, having been a Moonta resident for 30 years; his wife, Mrs M.P. Roach, then conducted the business for some years. One of her daughters, who predeceased her mother, married Henry Lipson Hancock (*Observer*, 2 August 1919, p.22b).

A handwritten note on aged, yellowed paper. The text is written in cursive and reads: 'Loggins in garden. Memo from Roach Bros - Moonta. 5 in small end. 6ft long. 10pc 10 to 12 in thick - 7ft 6 in long Rads 12 to 13ft. 4 in small end.' The note is underlined at the bottom.

From Hirst's journal, 11-12 June 1879 (Courtesy of Rodney Bell).

Hirst's journal eventually referred to the dimensions of orders as 'the usual Moonta timber'. During the following February Hirst was cutting, splitting, dragging, hauling, and loading—his 'doing' words; in March and April he was in Wreck Gully splitting and in early May he continued to split about 2500 logs and prepare 1500 round logs. By now he needed an order large enough to engage a vessel for 3 to 4 trips to the peninsula.²⁵

By the 1890s Hirst was in full production. He spent one week in 1893 tracking across the north coast seeking bullocks to hire, and eventually got a team for 10/- a week. He went to Adelaide in January 1896, enjoying the New Year's Day regatta on the Port River and afterwards the cricket match at Adelaide between South Australia and New South Wales, perhaps a relaxed four-day prelude to loading 256 logs or 90 tons in January, 230 logs in February and, over mid to late March, a further 250 logs, sent off with Captain Tassie. In April 1896, Captain Hancock ordered 200-300 tons of timber: in July Hirst began 'to fatten spotted sow' ... possibly a sacrificial thanksgiving? ... certainly for sustenance come September when several tons of logs were cut. Hirst was on the mainland in October arranging with the flour millers John Darling & Sons for their lighter, the steamer *Jessie Darling*, to carry timber for Moonta at 9/6 a ton.²⁶

[Image: *Jessie Darling*, c.1910. Courtesy of the SLSA: B 26914].

The *Jessie Darling* arrived on 10 December, the skipper grumbling that 'the Cove was not a fitting place for a steamer to come to',²⁷ and he steamed off to the Althorpes, then on to Marion Bay, and returned, after being ordered back by John Darling, eight days later to load about 660 logs, or 190 tons—thus illustrating one type of difficulty for timber suppliers. In autumn the following year *Jessie Darling* was exemplary, loading posts from Kangaroo Beach, Wreck Gully, as well as Snug Cove.²⁸

On 13 May 1897 Trooper Shegog delivered a summons to Hirst for £296.14.5 that included law expenses, from the Darlings—certainly a set-back, whatever had happened.²⁹

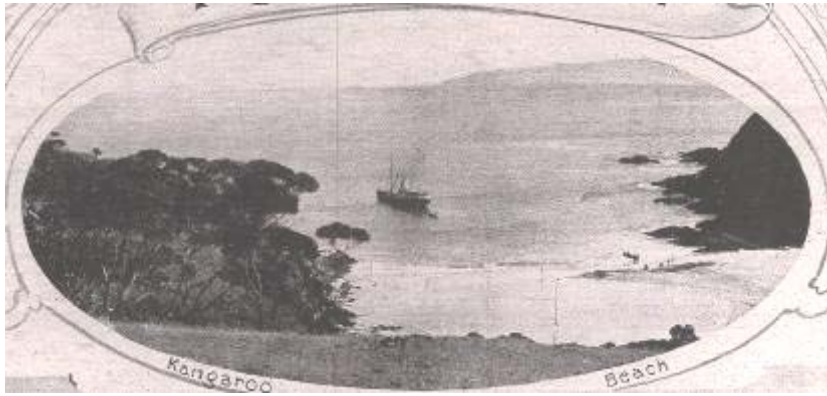
²⁵ Journal, 29 June and 15 July 1879, pp.66-69.

²⁶ Hirst returned on the *Warooka* via Edithburgh to Queenscliffe.

²⁷ Journal, p.344.

²⁸ In August 1897, Hirst 'caught the Moonta vessel' (probably *Jessie Darling*, which often collected passengers for Moonta and beyond from Western River), and returned two weeks later to Snug Cove, presumably spending most if not all his time away arranging timber supplies for the mines.

²⁹ Mounted Constable William Shegog was stationed at Queenscliffe from March 1895 to March 1900.



Captain Patrick Weir's photograph of Kangaroo Beach ('The Christmas Chronicle', *Advertiser*, 14 December 1912, p.11).

In February 1899, Hirst was at Adelaide, having 'great difficulty procuring a vessel', only on 1 April securing John Clark & Company's SS *Beagle* to take 500 tons of timber to Moonta. Hirst saw *Beagle* arrive at Western River and the following day he went there, finding *Beagle* had departed because of a dragging anchor. Hirst wrote to Clark & Company saying he shall hold them responsible for his 'loss of timber.' A week later Hirst still awaited another steamer—not necessarily a Clark vessel—perhaps hoping for one he could 'smoke in' on the off chance

The Moonta Mines evolution from boat ownership to direct engagement of a vessel to seeking supply tenders was a history of battle with the sea. And by December 1899, Hirst's need for a reliable vessel pressed.³⁰ The 28-year old Benjamin Filmer (1871-1956), a farmer of Glenelg, and related to the Kangaroo Island Bell family, told Hirst he had an offer of a suitable vessel for £700—'think must see if it can be managed' Hirst wrote. This was the 16-year old wooden ketch *Oscar Robinson*, for which Hirst went to Adelaide.

In January 1900, four days after it had been a very disagreeable 104⁰ F in the shade at Snug Cove, Hirst left at 3 a.m. from Cape Borda on the *Governor Musgrave*, the life-line government steam ship which frequently moored at or off Snug Cove to unload cargo and embark passengers.



³⁰ Journal, 3-5 Aug 1899, p.383.

Musgrave sailed to the Althorpe Islands, continuing on to Corny Point, where the party camped overnight, reaching Wallaroo on the second day out, and next day Hirst caught the first train to Adelaide, where he was 'trying about vessel' from 9th to 13th. Banks—no go. 'Rymill [possibly Henry or Frank Rymill] promised £320',³¹ and Alfred Le Messurier 'consented provided we got a Captain', Hirst recorded.

Hirst engaged one—and signed the articles to secure part-ownership (22/64ths) with Ben Filmer. In early March, Hirst again went to 'town' on *Governor Musgrave*, landing at Wallaroo (*Musgrave* often coaled there), where he stayed at Mrs Burton's.



Bushmen's Parade at the corner of Grenfell and King William Streets (left) and in Victoria Square (*Observer*, 17 March 1900).

At Adelaide he saw the 'Bushmen's Parade' and finally inspected *Oscar* at the Port, thinking 'she will do.' Five days on the steamer *James Comrie* returned him home.

[Image: The Rev. Tom Ward. *Loading Wool Hog Bay K.I.* (Courtesy of the SLSA: PRG 741)]

In Tom Ward's 1896 painting of *James Comrie* at Hog Bay, a surreal Cyclops ventilator oversees the approaching wool bale cargo. Hirst's seems a marathon ... almost a quarter of a year to effect a good business investment.

[Image: *Oscar Robinson* grounded after a collision in 1907 (Courtesy of the SLSA: B 33395)]

Over five days in late March 1900, Hirst loaded 128 logs for the mainland mines, the first timber sent by *Oscar*.

³¹ Frank Rymill and with his brother Henry arrived in South Australia from London in 1855 (See Frank Rymill's obituary in the *Observer*, 29 May 1915).

Not much later, as providence had it, in 'dull and hazy' weather,³² *Oscar* grounded on Cape Elizabeth reef when taking timber out from Kangaroo Island—'most unfortunate. They will be done',³³ wrote Hirst, and hastened—so far as was possible—to Adelaide a week later on the *James Comrie*.



Cape Elizabeth is on the central-west coast of Yorke Peninsula.

Oscar's bottom on the port side was badly 'chafed and bruised amidships': *Oscar* was slipped for repair at Port Adelaide,³⁴ but afterwards took six days to return to the Island due to 'dead head wind', for most of the days was 'hammering at it all day', and was in sight of Snug Cove for one full day before being able to come in. Going out could be as frustrated by the weather as coming in, and staying frequently as troublesome.

Conditions were often kind, but in April 1896 Hirst was cutting, dragging, and 'jinking' logs onto Kangaroo Beach when the weather delivered a 'heavy blow. Expect logs gone', he lamented. A fortnight's storm washed some logs up the creek, the rest out to sea. '180 logs left' Hirst added to his journal after visiting the scene.³⁵

³² "'Oscar Robinson" Master—Grounding', GRG 51/17/467, 1900, SRSA. *Oscar* came to grief on 31 March 1900 some 1½ miles off the Cape. *Oscar's* Master reported that when the wind was south-east and a 'Very low water tide ebbing', *Oscar Robinson* grounded on the reef at 7.30 p.m., and was 'Floated off ... at 11.30 p.m. To avoid a dangerous channel and extensive rocky patches and shoals, seamen were advised to approach Wallaroo eight miles west of the Cape.

³³ Journal, 3 April 1900, p.392.1900.

³⁴ *Oscar* required two-thirds of a new keel and of a false keel, some planking repairs, new copper lining, and a new rudder pintle, and puttying and painting completed her overhaul ("Oscar Robinson" Master—Grounding', GRG 51/17/467, 1900, SRSA).

³⁵ Journal, 25 September 1901, p.335. Hirst had a small and a large jinker on which to bring logs close to the beach where they were rolled down to be loaded on the vessel.

'Well you see she wouldn't stay and had not room to wear and so she went ashore', said Miss Reeves, an Island colonist, in the 1850s of a ship wrecked out from Kingscote.³⁶ Hirst hoped not to repeat the 'mishap of such a serious nature' that befell *Oscar* on the reef, but in January 1902 *Oscar couldn't* stay. While the ketch was moored in Snug Cove waiting to load then go to Western River, about 192 logs were dragged to the beach. *Oscar* had returned from Port Wallaroo, to where once loaded again it was bound. But a very heavy westerly gale blew up; a 'terrific sea [was] running in'..... 'a cyclone of wind [so] that no man could stand on the deck without holding on' came in at 11 a.m.—a 'NW typhoon'—the 'men on shore in the gully could barely stand against it'. While many large trees were uprooted, *Oscar* battled with the storm for six hours So, Hirst wrote,

poor old Oscar came ashore, ... unfortunately the chain came off the rock holding one of the stern moorings & then she had to go—the storm was the heaviest I have ever seen, more like a blizzard or tornado it is most grievous to see her lying there
 . . . I feel as if I had all the pluck knocked out of me.³⁷

[Image from "'Oscar Robinson" ashore Snug Cove', GRG 51/17/76, 1902, SRSA]

At such times, Hirst took to 'mooning about and breaking down stink bush' or 'fiddling about' or 'knocking about' (his other term for putting in fences), or even, 'poking about', which might mean fencing at the De Mole farm, west of Snug Cove, and setting wallaby



Mouth of the De Mole River, 12 kilometres west of Snug Cove. The river was named on the survey by Captain Bloomfield Douglas, Naval Officer and Harbor Master, in November 1857.³⁸ (GoogleEarth, 2004-2006)

snares on the coast.³⁹ His 'mooning' was scarcely unproductive, and his labour was sometimes viewed with humour, as in December 1890, when Hirst was 'hauling [logs] worse luck'; and over the days following, 'worsen', finally 'worst' luck.

³⁶ Said to George De Mole when he was surveying in the late 1850s (George de Mole, 'Being an autobiography up to the time of settling in Australia', D7671[L], SLISA, p.36). To 'wear' is to bring the vessel's stern to windward, being the opposite of to tack.

³⁷ Journal, p.420. Two days later the storm abated, and Captain Stevens and crew left with the ship's compass for Adelaide in *Oscar's* boat.

³⁸ 'Survey of Kangaroo Island and Backstairs Passage', *SAPP*, no. 134, vol. 2, 1858.

After two weeks' 'humbugging' with the insurers at Adelaide,⁴⁰ Hirst returned with stores and tackling and started work 'patching' *Oscar's* holes; all hands got *Oscar* hauled into the middle of the Cove and away for Port Adelaide on 2 March.

In conclusion

Hirst 'slowed' slightly from 1900, when he was 64: he contracted further timber cutters, and ran a partnership account in logs and skins—two 'porcupines' (echidnas) were once sent to Adelaide for trial.⁴¹

In early 1901 Hirst employed the brothers Percy and George May of Rocky River Station to cut 500 to 600 tons of 'mining timber' for 1/- a ton, and to 'find themselves ...'.⁴² In late 1901 Mr Hancock asked when Hirst could send a load, 'no restriction on quantity', the first to be sent to Wallaroo.⁴³ In December *Oscar* left Snug Cove with 500 logs for the Moonta Mines. However, Hirst soon sought out Charles H. Johnson to agree to take on 1/3 share of *Oscar*;⁴⁴ and, some acrimony arose—'Had a few unpleasant words with Ben Bell', Hirst wrote in July 1901,

about his wanting to engage another vessel and cut us out—he also accused me of arranging with Hancock without forsooth my consulting him, and also that I had tried underhandedly to get Ted Hall to cut timber which is all bosh.⁴⁵

³⁹ George de Mole (1833-1918) had served on the *Bosphorous* out from England with Captain Bloomfield Douglas. His mother and her children came to Adelaide to settle, arriving in February 1856. When Captain Douglas became Naval Officer and Harbor Master for South Australia, he heard that de Mole was in Adelaide and offered him a job in his office, later one as an assistant on marine surveys of the South Australian coast. De Mole accompanied him on the vessel *Yatala* in 1857 and worked on the construction of charts and in taking the Captain's observations on the survey from Point Fowler to the west of Kangaroo Island. A longer survey, of three months, was of the whole Kangaroo Island coastline and the surrounding islets, for which de Mole drew the final charts (*SAPP*, no. 134, vol. 2, 1858). De Mole began to survey a road from Snug Cove to Cape Borda to enable lighthouse contractors to transport stores. Evidently when an 'impassable creek' was reached (?De Mole River), Harvey's Return was settled on as a more convenient landing place (George de Mole, 'Being an autobiography up to the time of settling in Australia', D7671[L], SLSA, pp.36, 38).

⁴⁰ *Oscar* was valued at £800 and insured for £500. Hirst probably accepted the £350 offered him by the insurers.

⁴¹ Two such arrangements were for a half share in skins and logs with John Thomas at De Mole Farm, and for logs and rails with Harold Lykke.

⁴² For a week in April 1901 Hirst was at Moonta via Wallaroo, probably with this shipment. Hirst's ketch accidentally damaged itself (and the Edithburgh jetty) in June 1901. The salt trade over Edithburgh jetty increased from 1899, when £395 was gained by the government through dues, to 1901 when £697 was earned (Marine Board, GRG 51/17/892, 1901, SRSA). *Oscar* might well have been caught in the fray of berthing activity.

⁴³ Journal, p.414.

⁴⁴ *Oscar Robinson* was stranded (inconsequentially) on Wardang Island in 1903 while carrying limestone flux to the Port Pirie smelters, and was 'run down in Port River' in September 1907: *Oscar* collided with the steamer *Everton Grange* and sank in the channel ('The Sunken Oscar Robinson', *Advertiser*, 2 September 1907, p.11); but *Oscar* 'died' only in 1940, years after last serving Hirst and the mines. J.C. Johnson was master of the ketch *Ariel* in the early 1900s; the relationship of these Johnsons is not yet known to the author.

⁴⁵ Journal, 19 July 1901, p. 412. Hirst's underlining.



Headquarters of the fauna and flora reserve, formerly Charles May's Rocky River Station homestead. About 1928. Photograph by Rowland Hill (Courtesy of Jean Nunn)

The ketch "Oscar Robinson"
 (P. JOHNSON, Master).
 Will trade regularly to Kangaroo Island
 ports. Freights as per usual. ✱
 CAPT. JOHNSON thanks shippers for
 past patronage and hopes for a con-
 tinuance of their trade.
 Full particulars from
 STRAWBRIDGE & CO.,
 Agent

(From *Kangaroo Island Courier*, 9 July 1910)

In late 1903, movement at Kingscote jetty was 'brisk', its approaches 'lumbered up with heavy logs',⁴⁶ with 13,000 tons of eucalyptus posts contracted for the Moonta Mines as well as thousands of tons of mallee firewood. Maybe it was the quality of such timber as well as of Hirst's that Lipson Hancock complained of to Hirst in March 1906. Nonetheless, Hirst continued to ship loads averaging 58 tons to the peninsula depending on the labour available to him and the kindness or otherwise of the seas.⁴⁷

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⁴⁶ 'Shipping Logs from Kangaroo Island', *Advertiser*, 10 December 1903, p.6.

⁴⁷ For example, in January and March 1904 Hirst sent five shipments of logs to Wallaroo, averaging 65 tons per shipment. In January, February and March 1905 he sent four shipments averaging 51 tons per load.