

HONOURING THE BRAVE

Benjamin Germein at "Admella" Wreck

On the rugged cliff of Cape Northumberland, which commands a view of the coast line as far as the Victorian border to the South-East and Cape Banks in the opposite direction, a memorial has been erected by the District Council of Port MacDonnell as a tribute to the late Benjamin Germein, the first lighthouse keeper. A concrete seat built among the ruins of the old lighthouse with a brass plate attached should remain for generations as a reminder of a man who displayed many acts of bravery at early day wrecks, including the "Admella" and the "John Ormerod."

Cr. I. E. Feast, Jun., called on Mr. E. J. Locke, of Mt. Gambier, to unveil the memorial. It was fitting that he should do this, as he was probably the oldest resident of the South-East. He had lived at Port MacDonnell, and was personally acquainted with Benjamin Germein.

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S.A., said Ben Germein was in or about 1826 and belonged to a family of Plymouth fishermen. He became a master mariner, and, according to the late A. T. Saunders, traded in various vessels on the Australian coast and to and from Mauritius. Among his vessels were the "Emma Sherratt," the Government schooner "Yafala," the "Corio," and the "Meander." For a time he was Harbour Master at Port MacDonnell, and was then appointed keeper of the lighthouse at Cape Northumberland. It was while holding this office that he behaved with such courage in rescuing some of the survivors of the wrecked steamer "Admella" in 1859. The following extract from the report of the Commission of Enquiry on the "Admella" will indicate what he did:—

! "Where all vied with each other in performing acts of gallantry, it appears almost invidious to distinguish individuals; but we cannot refrain from adverting to the conduct of Mr. Benjamin Germein, the head keeper of the MacDonnell lighthouse, and his crew. These gallant men, having procured a boat that had been washed ashore from the "Admella" and having patched her up with canvas, soap, etc., made three attempts to leave the beach, and on each occasion they were swamped, regaining the shore with great

regaining the shore with great difficulty; but on the fourth attempt they were the first to succeed in making fast to the wreck, and the first to rescue any of the survivors."

In this episode Germein was in charge of the boat, and for his services he was awarded the gold medal of the Royal Humane Society, as well as silver medals specially struck by the Governments of South Australia and Victoria.

In October, 1861, the brig "John Ormerod" capsized in a gale off the Cape Northumberland lighthouse, and six of those on board were drowned. In the morning Ben Germein put off from the shore in a very indifferent boat and rescued the survivors from the overturned vessel. While doing so he had the misfortune to have several fingers crushed, and these had afterwards to be amputated.

Germein left the lighthouse service to become a pilot, for he had an almost unrivalled knowledge of the South Australian coast. In his later years he became noticeably eccentric, making protracted voyages by himself in little boats among the islands of Spencer Gulf, and he committed suicide by drowning in the tidal waters of the Port Adelaide River in July, 1893. He was then 67 years of age.

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MR. LOCKE LOOKS BACK

Mr. Locke said he came to Port MacDonnell with his parents in 1861 as a lad of 7 years of age. He could vividly remember Benjamin Germein coming to the jetty, which was then under construction, and calling for four volunteers to assist him in going out to the wreck of the "John Ormerod." They found four survivors strapped to the deck; all were unconscious. They were lowered into the boat and brought ashore. His mother attended them, and when one man eventually spoke he told them he thought there may be another man still on board. Germein again called for volunteers to go back to the wreck and the body of the man was discovered in the ship. An inquest was held and the verdict was "Found drowned." The un-

fortunate man was buried in the old Port MacDonnell Cemetery now under the sand hills. His (Mr. Locke's father) was keeping the hotel on the foreshore at that time, and his mother nursed the men back to life.

Mr. Locke removed the Union Jack from the tablet, and said he hoped it would remain as a tribute to a brave man for all time.

THE LIFE OF BEN GERMEIN

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Mr. C. Elliott Perryman, giving a resume of the life of Benjamin Germein, said:—

“The need for a light arose because of the great loss of shipping and valuable lives and cargoes upon this wild coast, especially within the radius of a score of miles from Cape Northumberland.

“In September, 1851, the barque ‘Marie’ from Antwerp was lost on the extreme tip of Cape Bridgewater. This was a terrible tragedy of the sea and there were no survivors. She carried among her passengers the Belgian Consul and his staff bound for Sydney, as well as a number of S.A. colonists who joined the vessel at Port Adelaide. She was discovered six weeks after the mishap, battered and broken upon the rocks, with her fittings and cargo strewn for miles along the long reaches of Discovery Bay.

“This wreck started an inter-colonial controversy which was indirectly the cause of the erection of a light 7 years later on Capt Northumberland.

“The ‘Marie’s’ wreck was followed a year later, in 1852, by the loss of the ‘Jane Lovet;’ in 1853 by the ‘Witness;’ 1854, ‘Nene Valley;’ 1855, ‘Iron Age;’ 1856 ‘The Sarwin.’ The loss of all these vessels in the immediate vicinity

vessels in the immediate vicinity of Capt Northumberland added to the public demand that something should be done for the placing of a light upon stormy Cape Northumberland.

"This was acceded to by the Governments of Victoria and S.A. and subsidised by them for the safeguarding of shipping, and the new light was ready for operation on the night of the 1st January, 1859. Late in December, 1858, Capt. Ben Germein and his assistant, John Dugwell, arrived and *took over the duties ascribed to them.*

"It was a full time job for this intrepid, courageous man, and *apart from his duty as a warden of the light, he found time to sail his small boat around the treacherous cape on days when it was fine enough to sound the eastern end of the Bay for the safe passage of incoming vessels.*

"In an old log book of the first years of the Cape Northumberland lighthouse are the following records:—

June 24th, 1859—Sounding and examining for anchorage.

July 9th, 1859—No breakers to be seen near proposed anchorage.

Jan. 6th, 1860—Employed laying down buoys for 'Yatala.'

Jan. 30th, 1860—Piloted lighthouse tender to anchorage. Capt. Douglas and self sounding for anchorage

anchorage.

March 24th, 1860—S.S. Havilah arrived and landed 9 passengers.

April 29th—'Bandicoot' arrived and will call regularly.

"Just six entries, but they saw a job started and completed; and it speaks of a job well done."

A vote of thanks to Mr. Locke was moved by Mr. John Fletcher and seconded by Cr. Feast.