

Charles Broadhurst and the Smart Street Fish Cannery

What is generally known as Smart's Fish Cannery began life in 1878 as a new business started by Charles Broadhurst. It was not until 1897, after many years lying derelict, that R. and W. Smart reopened the factory and led it to greater success than its original owner.

But who was Charles Broadhurst, the undoubted and often overlooked pioneer of the Mandurah canning industry?

Broadhurst, born in 1826, was of Lancashire Cotton manufacturing stock in an echo of Thomas Peel's origins and with a similar reason for settling in Australia. The ability to turn money made from the cotton industry in to land.

Broadhurst arrived in Victoria in 1843 to become a squatter. It seems that here at least, he did well for himself, and by the 1860s the promise of the Denison Plains Co. called, one of the early groups to attempt to plant settlers and graziers in the north-west of WA. And like Peel's plans in Mandurah, the Denison Plains Co's scheme fell apart under Broadhurst's management.

Like so many entrepreneurs of the time, he then moved into the new, booming pearling industry at Nikol Bay in 1870, after a time spent managing local cattle stations. And yet, controversy still dogged him. Accused of underpaying and mistreating his 'Malay' pearl divers, he was found guilty but later acquitted on appeal. During this time, looking to expand his business, he purchased in 1872 what would be the first steam ship operating on the WA coast, the *SS Xantho*. Barely six months after its purchase, the *Xantho* sank causing Broadhurst great financial loss. The recovered and restored engine of *Xantho* can be seen on display at the Shipwreck Gallery of the WA Maritime Museum.

The fate of the *Xantho* makes an interesting study which can give us an insight into the mind and methods of a man with Broadhurst's ambitions and reputation. The vessel Broadhurst bought to operate in remote waters, far from modern repair facilities was launched in 1848 as a paddle steamer. The ship was purchased by a scrap metal merchant and refitted with a new, experimental steam engine. Strangely, the propeller which was selected for the rebuilt ship was incorrect for the engine. This meant, effectively, that the drive train had to be run permanently in reverse. The vibration that this created caused the old hull to literally shake itself to pieces before it sank off Port Gregory.



Charles Broadhurst and the Smart Street Fish Cannery cont'd

One has to doubt the business acumen of a man who would invest in such an ageing, poorly rebuilt vessel. It was the financial loss resulting from the *Xantho* sinking which in all probability forced Broadhurst to sell his interest in the Mandurah Fish Canning and Preserving Works to a Mr Forbes, the Smart Brother's immediate predecessor in running the factory. All reports indicate that it was Forbes and the Smarts who turned the factory from a marginal enterprise into a fully functioning business.

Broadhurst next tried his hand at Guano mining on the Abrolhos Islands, an enterprise which only took off under his son's control after his own retirement in 1890.

Charles Broadhurst: An entrepreneur, like Peel, with visions for Mandurah which others were left to fulfil.

