Grisly secret of cattlemen who kept ‘40 pairs of ears’ as trophies in outback horror house

Behind the legend of two pioneers are the dark stories of their house which held human ears and skulls as souvenirs. WARNING: Graphic

Lilydale station, Carl Creek, 65km south of Lawn Hill.*Source:Supplied*

WARNING: Sensitive and graphic content

The house where 40 pairs of human ears were nailed up around the walls still stands up in the Gulf country, in a remote part of the outback most Australians have never seen.

The grand old homestead is above a bend of a river which cuts deep gorges through the vast tract of woodland and savanna bordering the Gulf of Carpentaria.

It is called Lawn Hill station, and it lies smack bang in Waanyi country, the tribal territory of an indigenous gulf people who occupied around 25,000 square kilometres of land between northwestern Queensland and the eastern Northern Territory.

More recently, Lawn Hill was known as the location of the world’s biggest zinc mine, Century, once owned by Rio Tinto.

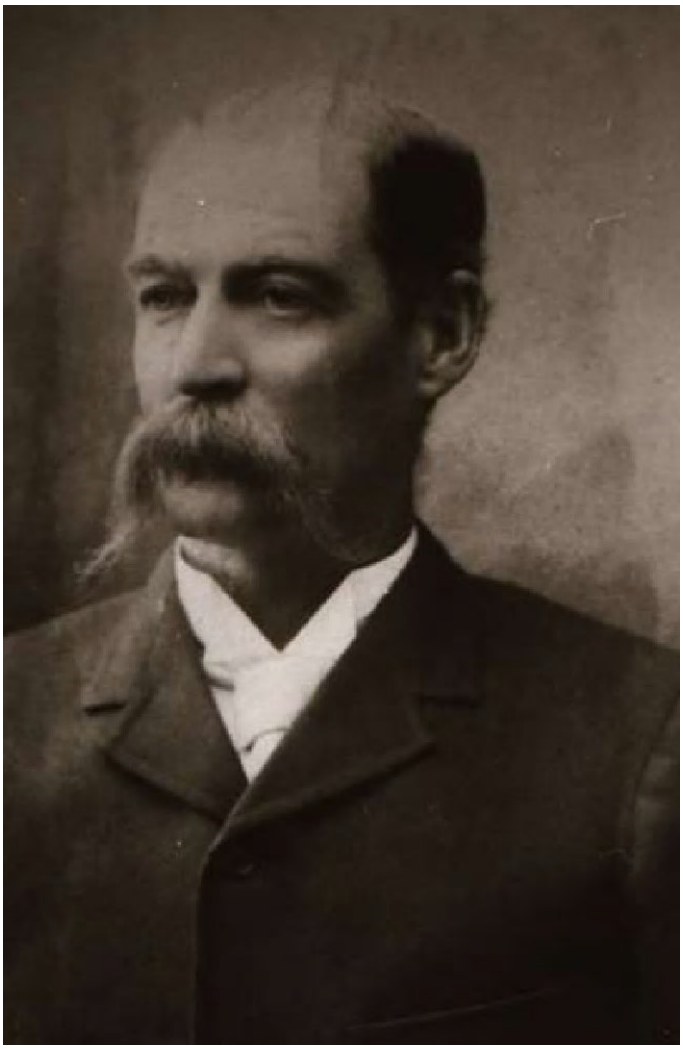
But back in the 1880s it was the site of atrocities against the Waanyi, the molesting of their children, the raping of their women, the shooting of their men, and the taking of their body parts as trophies.

The two men linked to the trophy ears — the owner of Lawn Hill, Frank Hann, and his station manager, Jack Watson, are both recorded as having cut off the heads of Aborigines and presented them as souvenirs or bounty.

These atrocities were committed when Watson had moved on from Lawn Hill to the Northern Territory and Hann had migrated to Western Australia.

Lawn Hill homestead where owner Frank Hann and manager Jack Watson had 40 pairs of Aborigines ears nailed to the wall as trophies.*Source:Supplied*

Lawn Hill in the Gulf country as seen from the air today, more than a century after its dark past in Australian history.*Source:Supplied*



Jack Watson.*Source:Supplied*

The 40 pairs of ears nailed on Lawn Hill's walls were the ears of Waanyi people.

But that infamy would have been regarded just as a tale handed down by the Waanyi to the current generation, if not for the diary entries of a young white woman.

And but for the almost accidental discovery of the diary of Emily Caroline Creaghe, lying unpublished on a shelf, the story may never have been told.

Then a 22-year-old newlywed, Creaghe had only been living in Australia for seven years after emigrating from England when she wrote her diary.

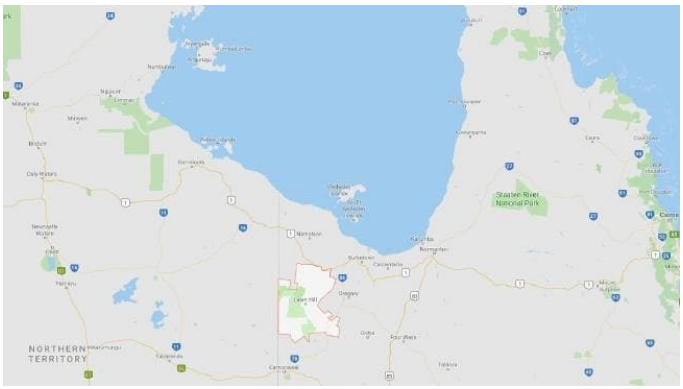
She preceded by more than two decades her more famous successor Jeanne Gunn, author of the celebrated book turned movie, *We of The Never Never*.

Creaghe is now credited as the first white female to explore remote Australia, not only braving the frontiers of an otherwise all-male domain, but recording it all in searing detail.

Her recollections of relations between white and Aboriginal Australians touch on degradation, abuse and the probable murder of colonial era Aborigines.

But Creaghe's handwritten diary might still be just another unpublished manuscript on the shelves of the Mitchell Library in Sydney had Adelaide historian Peter Monteath not happened upon it.

Flinders University professor of history, Monteath was researching Australian explorers when he came across Creaghe's diary, donated to the library by her descendants.



Lawn Hill station in the Gulf of Carpentaria in northwestern Queensland.*Source:Supplied*

Emily Caroline Creaghe was Australia's first white female to explore the outback and record the fact Lawn Hill had trophy ears taken by Jack Watson and Frank Hann.*Source:Supplied*

First published in 2004, *The Diary of Emily Caroline Creaghe* is now throwing light on the violence perpetrated against indigenous people by two men — Jack Watson and Frank Hann — once hailed as heroes and pioneers of early Australia.

These are the two men directly connected with the house at Lawn Hill, known to some as “Lorne Hill”, on whose walls, as recorded by Creaghe, the ears were nailed.

In early 1883, “Carrie” as Creaghe was known, was staying at the Shadforth family’s Lilydale station at Carl Creek in the Gulf.

In December, 1882 she had set sail from Sydney with her husband, Irish-born station manager Harry Alington Creaghe for Thursday Island.

There they met up with explorer Ernest Favenc to embark on a tour of the Gulf country, from Normanton in Queensland, to Port Darwin in the Northern Territory.

The trip was bankrolled by a newspaper in Queensland, which was competing with South Australia, to open up the hitherto unexplored land of the Northern Territory for development.

When Favenc’s wife Elizabeth became ill and returned home, Creaghe became the sole female on the trip.

Mrs Creaghe did the whole trip on horseback, riding sidesaddle across thousands of kilometres.

Peter Monteath said Creaghe was intrepid, courageous and tougher than her husband Harry, who self-medicated against going “troppo” in the sweltering wilderness with laudanum [opium] on the journey.

Lawn Hill Gorge in Boodjamulla National Park in which lies the infamous Lawn Hill station. Picture: Reichlyn Aguilar.*Source:Supplied*

Creaghe was staying at Carl Creek, above, in the Gulf.*Source:Supplied*

Riversleigh south of where the ears were nailed to the wall.*Source:Supplied*

While Favenc accompanied his pregnant wife back to Sydney, Creaghe — who would also become pregnant on the journey — spent three months waiting at Lilydale, 65km south of Lawn Hill.

Lilydale is now better known as Riversleigh, the world heritage fossil deposit dating back 25 million years and described by David Attenborough as the among the top four most important in the world.

In 1883, the conditions were atrocious, with the heat and the lack of facilities.

Creaghe wrote that Mr and Mrs Shadforth lived there “with their ten children in four rooms but no ceilings”.

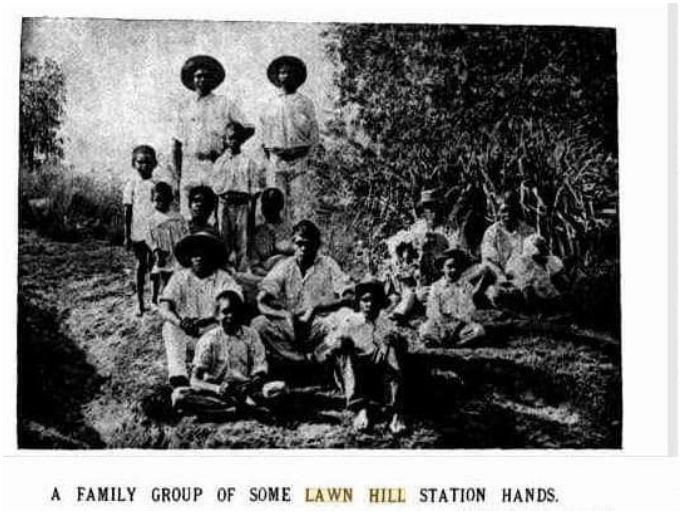
On Thursday, March 8, 1883, Creaghe wrote in her diary:

“We slept again outside, but even then it was too hot to sleep. Mr Bob Shadforth went up to ‘Lorne hill’ Mr Jack Watson’s and Mr Frank Hann’s station about 40 miles away.

“Very hot. No rain. Mr Watson has 40 pairs of blacks’ ears nailed around the walls collected during raiding parties after the loss of many cattle speared by the blacks.”

Creaghe wrote daily in her diary.

A few days later she wrote, “The blacks are particularly aggressive in this district.”



A group of Aboriginal people on Lawn Hill station in the early 1900s.*Source:Supplied*

On March 20, she wrote:

“The rainy season seems to have set in, in real good earnest; it has been raining heavily nearly all day. Mr Shadforth & Ernest Shadforth came home, but had to leave the dray at Gregory Downs as the roads were too heavy & the rivers too high. They brought a new black gin with them; she cannot speak a word of English. Mr Shadforth put a rope around the gin’s neck & dragged her along on foot, he was riding. This seems to be the usual method.

And on the following day, Creaghe entered:

“No rain this morning, but dull & cloudy. Rained all the afternoon in showers. The new gin, whom they call Bella, is chained up to a tree a few yards from the house, she is not to be loosed until they think she is tamed. Madame Topsey, an old gin got a threshing.”

Thereafter, Carrie Creagh’s diary entries refer to the flies as “something dreadful”, a plague of beetles, the alligators, the heat, the wet and the terrible food.

Powell Creek telegraph station, where Carrie Creaghe and husband Harry stopped with explorer Ernest Favenc in May 1883.*Source:News Limited*

Ernest Favenc led the expedition that Caroline Creaghe made history by being the first white woman to explore the outback.*Source:Supplied*

On 10 April: “Mr Crawford’s remains were found, killed by the blacks. Mr Lamond has gone out to get hold of the wretches and give them their desserts.”

On April 14, Ernest Favenc rejoined the Creaghes with overland telegraph officer, and assistant, Lindsay Crawford, and the party forged on into territory unexplored by Europeans.

Carrie Creaghe’s diary reflects the paranoia.

Her entry of April 15 notes that all party members carried revolvers and the gentlemen had rifles slung on their saddles.

On Monday, April 23, Creaghe wrote, “We are now on what is called the ‘Table-land’, a flat piece of country on the top of a very high mountain.

“We are now in unexplored country where no white man has been before, so it is uncertain when we may see water again.”

They reached Daly Waters in the Northern Territory on July 15 and Port Darwin on August 14, 1883.

Back at Lawn Hill station, the two men named by Creaghe as the owners of the house where the 40 pairs of ears were nailed — Jack Watson and Frank Hann — were forging reputations as so-called legends in the wild Australian north.

Riversleigh World Heritage Fossil site in the Gulf Country, Queensland, where Caroline Creaghe stayed with the Shadforths in 1883.*Source:Supplied*

The house actually belonged to Frank Hann, who would later be lauded as a pastoralist and explorer, but who in reality had a dark and disturbing history with indigenous Australians.

Jack Watson was the manager of Lawn Hill, possibly in partnership with Hann.

But he too would later be celebrated as “the king of the Gulf” even if it was coupled with an uneasy acknowledgment of his reputation for violent and sadistic treatment of Aboriginals.

Waanyi indigenous community leader Alec Doomadgee said the stories told to him by his late grandfather Stanley Doomadgee point to Hann being “a total monster”.

Stanley, a Ganaglidda and Garawa tribal man, worked most of his life as a ringer in Waanyi country and “told many stories of Frank Hann’s brutality”.

Alec Doomadgee also heard stories about Hann from his Waanyi stepfather Don George and his brother, Tommy George.

The oral history from Alec’s family about Hann and others includes tales, of rape, child molestation, murder and revenge.

Historian Peter Monteath puts the conflict between whites and blacks in the historical context as the competition for resources as Europeans forged into Aboriginal lands, driving cattle across the Territory and settling.

He said the late 1800s and early 1900s in far Northern Australia were “very tense and troubled times in the northern frontier” when explorers and pioneers “travelled in a state of paranoia”.

But at Lawn Hill came together two men who shared an attitude to Aboriginals of ruthless brutality.

Pioneers at Lawn Hill homestead during its silver mining days.*Source:Supplied*

And at that isolated location, even now a nine-hour journey northwest from Mount Isa along sealed and unsealed roads, they got away with it.

Jack Watson was a private schoolboy from Melbourne who would become known in Queensland as “Mad Jack” and “Long Jack”, because unlike the diminutive Frank Hann he was six-foot-one (186cm).

He is remembered as “splendid athlete and boxer … and a terror on the blacks”.

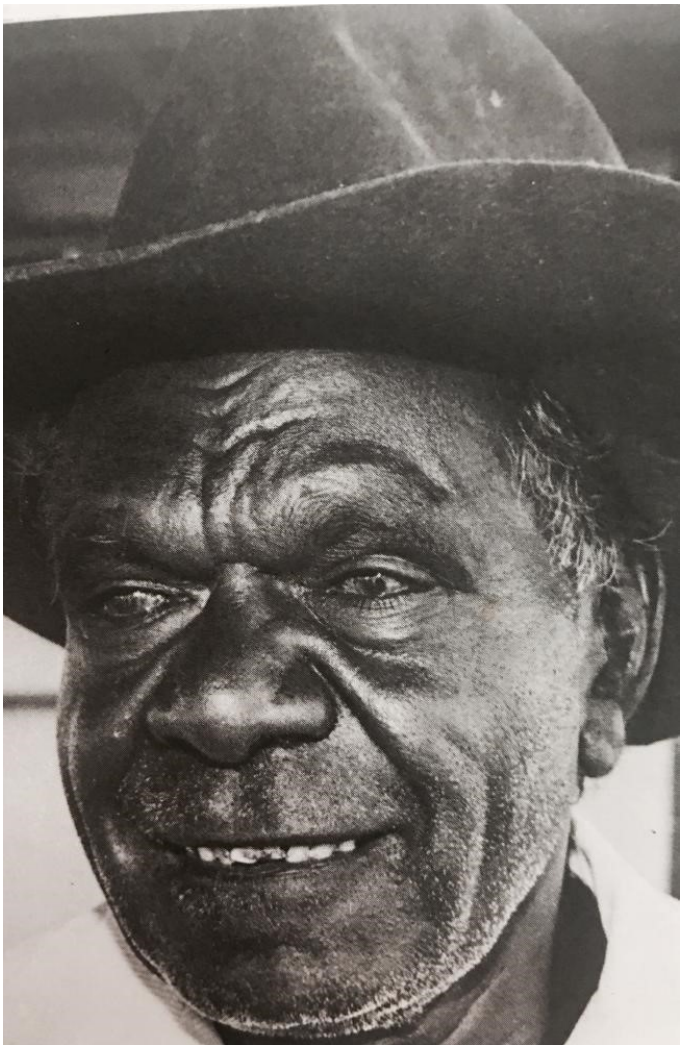
He also became known as “The Gulf King” or “The Gulf Hero”, the latter perhaps sarcastically applied by those who thought he was genuinely mad, or a terrible show-off.

It was a trait which would finish him off at the age of just 44.

He was the eldest of nine sons born to a prominent Victorian family whose patriarch was

George Watson, master of the Melbourne Hunt Club and the Starter at Flemington Racecourse.

As well as Emily Caroline Creaghe’s diary reference to the ears Watson had nailed to Lawn Hill’s walls, accounts of Watson’s exploits are recorded in newspapers and in books about the Territory.



Stanley Doomadgee, Ganaglidda and Garawa tribal man, was a great orator and told many stories of Frank Hann’s brutality. Picture: John Ande.*Source:Supplied*

His wild exploits some people thought verged on madness.

Before he went to Northern Australia, he was known for his mad stunts.

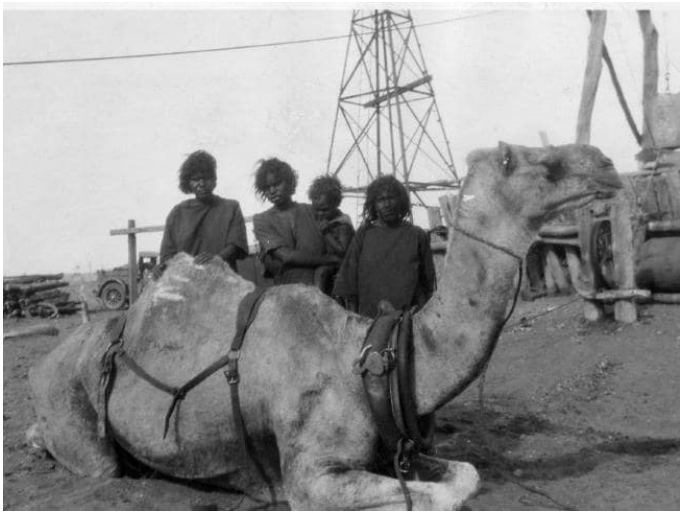
These included standing on his head on the edge of the cliff above The Gap at Watsons Bay to show off to fellow picnickers.

Watson was known for being a “flash” or eccentric dresser. Even up in the Gulf country, he was known to sport a pair of Mexican spurs and a football jersey.

After travelling the world, he ended up in the Gulf, managing Lawn Hill station in 1883 before he moved on to the Northern Territory to manage properties in Arnhem Land.

In 1895, he moved to Victoria River Downs — the station later acquired by legendary cattleman Sidney Kidman — where he was involved in the slaughter of tribes people, exhibiting extreme sadism.

Auvergne homestead in the Northern Territory was managed by Jack Watson in the late 1800s and bought by Kerry Packer in 1992.*Source:Supplied*



Aboriginal women at Umbiarra Well in the Northern Territory in the 1930s.*Source:News Corp Australia*

Watson was known for his stern disapproval of white men who kept Aboriginal women with them on a station and meted out punishment to those who flouted his ban.

One story described Watson punishing an Aboriginal man, possibly for stealing, by impaling both palms on a sapling sharpened to a point at the top.

Ernestine Hill wrote of Watson's "efficiency" of dealing with wild Aboriginals.

"There is a story," she wrote, "I do not like to believe it true.

"That hearing of a Burketown station pestered by cattle-killers, he promised to set the matter right.

"Riding back in a week he threw eleven skulls on the table with a jaunty 'There you are! No more trouble out there!'."

Another story about Watson and the skulls of Aboriginals was revealed in a letter written by a Northern Territory policeman, W. H. Willshire.

Recorded in the Victoria River District Doomsday Book, the letter was written in response to an inquiry about the fate of an Aboriginal man named Pompey.

Willshire wrote, "I have the honour to state that three natives by that name came to their death in my time in the far north".

One was rounded up and shot dead for cattle stealing, and another was shot “by native police” for “killing a little civilised blackboy belonging to James Woodforde”.

The third was a “civilised blackboy” who ran away from Victoria River Downs with firearms in February 1895 with another boy, Jimmy, “and joined wild natives 4 miles from my hut”.

Willshire writes that the “wild” natives killed the civilised boys.

Outback author Ernestine Hill told a story about John Watson collecting the skulls of eleven Aboriginal men after a dispute over stolen cattle.*Source:Supplied*

“Some months after when the bodies of Pompey and Jimmy had sufficiently

dried I went out and brought both their sculls [sic] in and buried them in my garden ... [as] John Watson manager for Goldsborough Mort & Co, stated that he wanted Pompeys scull [sic] for a spittoon”.

Willshire later criticised Watson’s management of the station, claiming, “Watson has such a bad name amongst blacks that they are frightened to remain, nearly every white man has left, and there will not be a single person left”.

Watson’s management of Victoria River Downs was perhaps affected by his genuine madness.

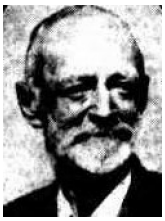
His exploits of derring do continued, Gordon Buchanan wrote, diving into the crocodile-infested Victoria River to retrieve a lost hat, shooting at jam tins balanced on a stockboy’s head.

Returning to Lawn Hill from after delivering a mob of cattle to the McArthur River (550 km away over the border in the Northern Territory), Watson heard about a troublesome group of Aborigines who had speared four horses.

Watson spent two weeks tracking and hunting down the “black”, shooting them until all were dead.

In May 1895, after a group of Aboriginals attacked teamsters James Mulligan and George Ligar who were bringing in supply stores, Watson reportedly led a revenge mission on which 60 black men were shot dead.

Frank Hann died blind and poor.*Source:Supplied*



Hann roamed the outback for yaers with his ‘blackboy’, Talbot.*Source:Supplied*

On April 1, 1896, while swimming stock across the Katherine River, Watson told George Ligar he would swim across to the town side, refusing Ligar’s offer of a lift in his boat.

At a spot where crocodiles frequented, Watson jumped in.

He was a good swimmer and the river was not running very high at the time, but Ligar noticed Watson was struggling and turned the boat to go and fetch him.

But when Ligar looked back around, Watson had disappeared from sight.

His drowning was ascribed to cramp, alligators or being hit by driftwood.

A tombstone and railing was erected to mark his last resting place and an obituary in the Northern Territory Times managed to gloss over Watson’s worst atrocities.

“In matters of honour he was as straight as a gun-barrel,” it began, saying “Watson had a great deal of the daredevil in him.

“Many who knew his peculiarities looked upon him as foolhardy ... he had 'brushes’ innumerable with marauding natives.

“But so far as we know never got a scratch himself, while the natives more than once received terribly severe lessons.

“The punishment in one case at least being tended to in a manner that was much talked

of in the Gulf country.

“His ideas of revenge for murders or station depredations committed by the blacks were scarcely orthodox, but they were generally up to requirements.

Aerial of Victoria River Downs cattle station, managed by Jack Watson, bought by Sidney Kidman and later owned by the Holmes a Court family. Picture" Marie Nirme.*Source:News Corp Australia*

"He claimed to be a fatalist and like all others of that faith he believed that when his time had come he would be 'rubbed out' but not before."

Two months after Watson's death, his old friend Frank Hann would pass through one of the Northern Territory stations Watson had managed.

It was June, 1896, and Hann was leaving Lawn Hill for good to make a new life in Western Australia.

He left behind him a fearsome reputation.

Hann had arrived aged six from England to Victoria in 1851.

By 1862, with his brother William, he was driving his first mob of cattle to the Condamine, in Queensland's western downs region, around 350km west of Brisbane.

They established two stations in the Burden River area near Townsville and around this time Hann met explorer Ernest Favenc.

Gold was discovered on one, but the brothers dissolved their partnership and Hann went to Lawn Hill, where he would ultimately fail as a cattle producer.

Hann was described as "small and slight of stature" and in several accounts described different young Aboriginal companions as his "splendid black boy".

He sunk an experimental mine shaft on Lawn Hill, and lead and silver were later extracted, but by this time Hann had left.

In 1879 he carried out exploratory work, driving bullock to Darwin.
he is credited with being the first white man to take stock from the Gulf to the Northern Territory, opening up stock routes and pastoral leases.

Long since grown over with bark, trees in the King Leopold Ranges are carved with his intitals "FH" and dates from the late 19th century.

Hann scratched his initials on trees throughout the outback including this one at Wiluna which has the names of Hann and 'his blackboy Talbot' inscribed.*Source:Supplied*

Waanyi traditional owners Barry Dick and Henry Aplin at Lawn Hill which is still part owned by a mining company. Picture: Brian Cassey.*Source:News Corp Australia*

Hann's attitude to Aborigines may have been influenced by occasions on which he was attacked.

In 1876 at Battle Creek, southwest of Cairns., he narrowly escaped injury when the sleeve of his coat was speared as his gold escort from the Palmer goldfield was attacked.

While at Lawn Hill, Hann was shot by the Aboriginal bushranger Joe Flick, after Flick broke out of Normanton jail.

Flick was the son of a Waanyi mother and a white man who worked for Hann, and had been trained to ride horses and shot guns as a boy.

He became an outlaw and was locked up in Normanton jail (400km from Lawn Hill), from which he escaped in 1889.

Flick made his way to Turnoff Lagoon, 80km north of Lawn Hill where Senior Constable Alfred Wavell manned a police station in the company of a black tracker.

Flick stole two police horses from the station, which was on the end of Hann's vast property, and took off.

Constable Wavell and two troopers set off in pursuit and tracked him to about 12km from Lawn Hill homestead, whereupon Flick rode into the river and escaped their gunshot.

The next morning, Constable Wavell and the troopers visited Hann at Lawn Hill homestead for breakfast.

Later, while Hann went about his business chasing down "blacks who had been killing a lot of cattle", an Aboriginal woman on the station alerted Wavell to the fact that Flick was in a paddock trying to catch a horse.

EXPLORING THE INTERIOR.

MR. HANN'S EXPEDITION.

ATTACKS BY NATIVES.

AN INTERESTING NARRATIVE.

Mount Morgan, April 8.

Mr. Frank H. Hann, who visited Mount Morgans yesterday to see a few friends, gave a representative of the "West Australian" the following particulars concerning his last exploring journey in the nulga.

"From instructions received from the Minister for Lands and the Surveyor-General to ascertain the northern boundary of the limestone country at Fraser Downs, I left my camp, about eight miles from Laverton, and after travelling for several days I saw fires at a distance. About 250 miles from Laverton I noticed that these fires were coming for our fires. As I had been burning spinifex along our track up to this time, I asked Talbot (my splendid black boy) if he had fired the grass. On receiving an answer in the negative, I said: 'The blacks are handy, and will be up to-night.' We went on that day to a camp I call Point Lilian. Just after nightfall I noticed that the spinifex fire was again quite close to us, and said to Talbot: 'Here are the blacks; they will be up in the morning.' Just before daylight I noticed their fires again spring up, and then walked towards them without fire-arms. On seeing me they moved away, each carrying a firestick. I made signs

Hann's letter about collecting Aboriginal trophy heads.*Source:Supplied*

HEAD HUNTER HANN

"EXPLAINS" THE NIGGER SHOOTING

And Sending a Head to Brockman

Regrets he did not get the Four Heads,

But hopes to secure them later.

Head-hunter Hann weighs in with what he calls an explanation of his reported interview with a "West Australian" representative at Mount Morgans. There isn't any explanation in it. Of course, the published account of the

The paper reacts dubbing Frank 'head hunter Hann'.*Source:Supplied*

Wavell and the troopers galloped over, peppered Flick with bullets, forcing the bushranger to steal 200 cartridges from a store building near the homestead and barricade himself in.

Wavell called on him to surrender and approached the store, whereupon Flick shot him through the heart.

Having returned upon the scene, Hann called out to Flick to surrender.

Flick yelled out, "Is that you Mr Hann? I'm not coming out but you can come up."

Told he had done a terrible thing, Flick replied, "If I had not shot the sergeant he would have shot me. I suppose I'll swing for this".

Hann walked round to the door of the building and opened it.

Flick fired, shooting Hann in the chest, but the bullet passed through Hann's shoulder blades.

Hanns ordered a "general fusillade" on the building and Hann sent in "a blackboy named Nym — a splendid black boy ... to track Flick".

They found Flick washing his wounds in the river. Flick fired at Nym, wounding him, and Hann reported that Nym "died in my arms and I sobbed like a child".

Waanyi woman, Nancy Gregory and friends camped at Lawn Hill National Park Land Rights site in 1994.*Source:Supplied*

The grave of Nym, Hann's 'splendid black boy' killed at Lawn Hill Station causing Hann to 'sob like a child'. Picture: Fiona Harding.*Source:News Corp Australia*

Hann was to travel widely throughout Western Australia, and between 1893 and 1906 he and Talbot travelled alone throughout remote Australia.

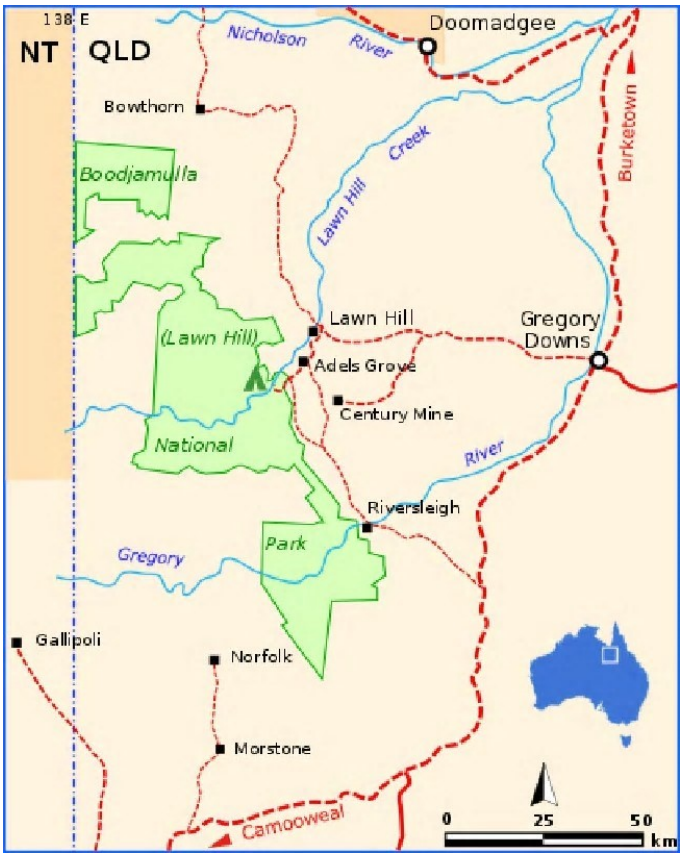
In April 1909, Perth's Western Mail newspaper published a letter written by Hann about one of his expeditions with the titles "Attacks by Natives. An Interesting Narrative".

Hann had just visited Mt Morgans, near Laverton 900km west of Perth, where gold was discovered in 1896.

Hann was working for the Minister for Lands and Surveyor General exploring the mulga country when he observed grass fires.

"I asked Talbot (my splendid black boy) if he had fired the grass," Hann writes.

"On receiving an answer in the negative, I said: 'the blacks are handy and will be up all night'.



Map showing Riversleigh, formerly Lilydale, and Lawn Hill stations in the Gulf.*Source:Supplied*

“We went on that day to a camp I call Point Lilian.

“Just after nightfall I noticed that the spinifex fire was again quite close to us and said to Talbot: ‘here are the blacks; they will be up in the morning’.”

The next morning, Hann asks “the smartest one” in sign language a question and then offers them a meal before making the “smart one” to haul water for Hann’s camels and horses.

He ties “a large piece of turkey-red” [red dyed cloth] “around the smart fellow’s body and a white handkerchief around his neck”.

Hann then takes off with Talbot, and around 3km from their camp turns around and sees the boy he has tied up in red cloth about to throw a spear at him.

Hann ducks, the spear grazes his back, and he takes a shot at the boy and hears “a yell”.

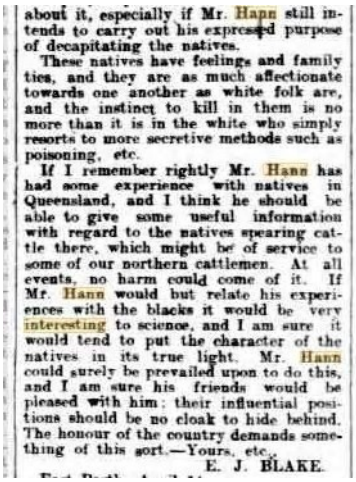
The other three boys point spears at him, one misses him with a woomera.

Hann then writes “had I shot the black with the red band I would have cut his head off and sent the skull to Mr F, Brockman, of Perth, who asked me to send one, as a friend of his in London wanted one.

“I was very sorry I could not send him the four, but later on I got him a splendid one.

“We seemed to have struck a bad lot of black on the journey.”

Hann’s letter spark a storm of protest, outraged letters and an editorial the next week dubbing him “Head Hunter Hann”



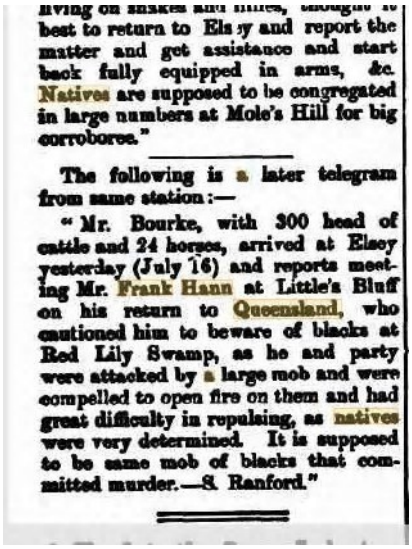
about it, especially if Mr. Hann still intends to carry out his expressed purpose of decapitating the natives.

These natives have feelings and family ties, and they are as much affectionate towards one another as white folk are, and the instinct to kill in them is no more than it is in the white who simply resorts to more secretive methods such as poisoning, etc.

If I remember rightly Mr. Hann has had some experience with natives in Queensland, and I think he should be able to give some useful information with regard to the natives spearing cattle there, which might be of service to some of our northern cattlemen. At all events, no harm could come of it. If Mr. Hann would but relate his experiences with the blacks it would be very interesting to science, and I am sure it would tend to put the character of the natives in its true light. Mr. Hann could surely be prevailed upon to do this, and I am sure his friends would be pleased with him; their influential positions should be no cloak to hide behind. The honour of the country demands something of this sort.—Yours, etc.,

E. J. BLAKE.

An angry letter about Hann's sadistic bent.*Source:Supplied*



best to return to Elsey and report the matter and get assistance and start back fully equipped in arms, &c. Natives are supposed to be congregated in large numbers at Mole's Hill for big corroboree."

The following is a later telegram from same station:—

"Mr. Bourke, with 300 head of cattle and 24 horses, arrived at Elsey yesterday (July 16) and reports meeting Mr. Frank Hann at Little's Bluff on his return to Queensland, who cautioned him to beware of blacks at Red Lily Swamp, as he and party were attacked by a large mob and were compelled to open fire on them and had great difficulty in repulsing, as natives were very determined. It is supposed to be same mob of blacks that committed murder.—S. Ranford."

Frank Hann claims 'natives are murderers'.*Source:Supplied*

The subheadings included “he wanted a head for Mr Brockman”, “who desired it sent to London” and “After N*ggers for their skulls”, the “N” word being not infrequently used at the time.

The article describes Hann’s "An Interesting Narrative” as “it is interesting right enough.

“It’s more than that; it’s sensational ... in parts horrifying.

“It ... sheds some light on the much discussed question as to how n*ggers are treated ... in that God-forsaken region.

“Evidently they are classed with kangaroos.”

The article goes on to say, “this paper once met a man who told it that some years ago he and others often went out ... ‘n*gger-shooting’ ... simply for sport.

“A man who so glibly talks of procuring specimen heads is very evidently one to be classed with those who look upon the South Australian aboriginal as a species of useless game to be shot down at sight as one would shoot a kangaroo.”

The article does then state shooting an Aboriginal “in self-defence” may be permitted, but questions whether it is “allowable to remove the head or any other portions of the body for distribution among the slayer’s friends”.

Waanyi traditional owner Henry Aplin above the old Century zinc mine at Lawn Hill in the Gulf. Picture: Brian Cassey.*Source:News Corp Australia*

The article then queries the integrity of Frank Hann as a witness at the royal commission into the Canning exploration party.

In 1906, at the behest of the WA Government, Albert Canning surveyed a 1850km stock route which linked wells through the western deserts for the purpose of improving beef market supply for graziers.

Some Aborigines co-operated with Canning, others were neck-chained and subjected to a torture which involved feeding them salt in the hot sun to force them to lead the party to water sources.

A royal commission in 1908 called Frank Hann, and WA"s inaugural premier, Sir John Forrest (great uncle of mining billionaire Andrew "Twiggy" Forrest", among dozens of witnesses.

The Western Mail article questions Hann's testimony that "the blacks were invariably well treated and that as a matter of fact, every consideration compatible with keeping them in order was extended to them by the bushmen".

Another response to Hann's letter about shooting and decapitating Aboriginals was a mocking poem which begins, "My name's Frank Hann, I kill all I can"
Penned by someone who gives themselves the moniker "Dryblower", it continues, "I always try, when my victims die, to carefully save the skull".

Despite this public pillory, Hann still didn't get it.

He wrote a letter of complaint about the criticism, and said that Sir John Forrest had "sent me a nice letter on my narrow escape from death".

The family settled at Westernport (Victoria), where Frank grew to a young man's estate, and by 1862 was prepared to launch out for himself.

Accompanied by his brother, William, he engaged in droving in Queensland, where they established Maryvale Station near the Burdekin River, and later acquired Lolworth Station on the Cape River. The discovery of gold there enhanced the value of their property immensely. When the brothers dissolved partnership Frank took up Lawn Hill Station, but the cattle tick, low prices, and bank failures forced him out of business. It was then, in 1881, that, by reason of his unrivalled knowledge of western Queensland, he was chosen by Sir Thomas McIlwraith, the then Premier of Queensland, to pilot the transcontinental railway survey party, under the direction of Major-General the Hon. William Fielding, from Charleville to the Gulf of Carpentaria. This he did, leading the party safely to

Frank Hann.

So Hann ultimately turned his back on the Grace's Knob venture, and taking with him his favorite blackbay, Talbot, he made his way to the southern goldfields.

A dream of Frank's later life was the opening up of stock routes from the Kimberley and Carpentaria regions to the goldfields in Western Australia. The first of those dreams materialised when the Canning Stock Route was opened from Hall's Creek to Wiluna, practically along the route taken by D. W. Carnegie's expedition in 1896. The Western Australian Government had a line of wells sunk across the desert under the supervision of Surveyor Canning, and that stock route is still open, but not much used. Frank's other dream—that of a stock route from Laverton, via Alice Springs, to the Georgina River—is still in the lap of the gods.

Talbot.

For a number of years Frank made his headquarters at Laverton, and

Talbot (right) features in Frank Hann; s obituary which notes the storeyed explorer died blind, poor but with Talbot with him to the end.*Source:Supplied*

PIONEER EXPLORER.

The late Frank Hann, and his native boy, Talbot, who traversed the Liveacy Range in 1906.

Frank Hann and his 'splendid black boy', Talbot, dressed in gentlemen's clothes in 1906.*Source:Supplied*

Frank Hann would continue to live in Western Australia until his death in 1921, on which glowing obituaries were written just as they had been for Jack Watson, but with no mention of brutality to Aboriginal people.

Different obituaries noted that a fall from his horse had ended Hann's exploring activities and his eyesight had failed.

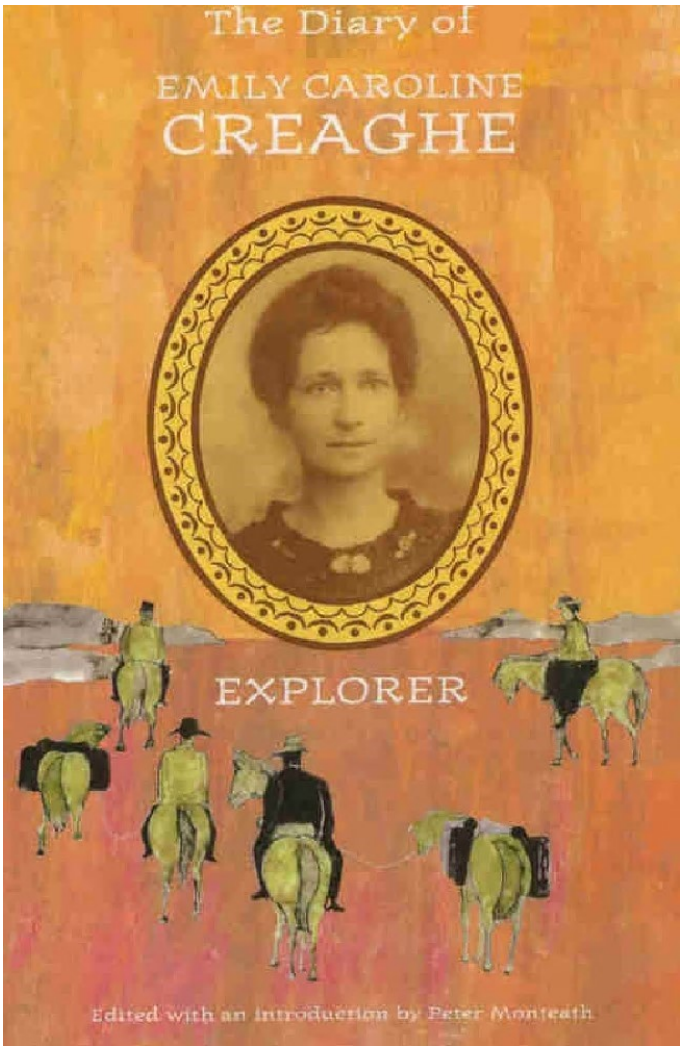
"His was a pathetic ending. He died in straitened circumstances in his 74th year — a blind and broken man, still faithfully served by his blackboy Talbot, himself grown grey in the service of his master."

Alec Doomadgee plans to tell a dramatised version of the story of Frank Hann at Lawn Hill at a Gulf Country Festival and rodeo the Waanyi Prescribed Bodies Corporate (PBC) chairman Alec Doomadgee is holding this August in Burketown.

Lawn Hill Riversleigh Pastoral Holding Company is now partly owned (49 per cent) by mining company New Century Resources and (51 per cent) by its traditional owners, Waanyi Advancement Limited.

Last year Mr Doomadgee led a gathering to reclaim Lawn Hill, leading a convoy of Waanyi to the homestead where he retold the story about the 40 pairs of Waanyi ears on its walls.

The original house lies on 539,000 hectares and is a potent reminder of the grisly past for Waanyi at Lawn Hill.



The Diary of Emily Caroline Creaghe lay unpublished on a shelf when historian Peter Monteath found it and the young explorer's revelations became known to the world.*Source:Supplied*

After Emily Caroline Creaghe and husband Harry left the expedition to the Northern Territory, they returned to Queensland to live in Rockhampton.

Harry Creaghe was accidentally killed, aged 38, in Rockhampton in 1887 while Carrie was pregnant with their third son.

In 1889 she married station manager Joseph Barnett and had six more children.

Carrie Barnett died in 1944 in Royal North Shore Hospital and in 2004 an edited version of her diary was published by Adelaide history professor Peter Monteath.