

# Information Sheet No. 11



City of  
Greater Geraldton  
Regional Library



## Heritage Services

## Geraldton Regional Library

### CHARLES EDWARD BROADHURST - Entrepreneur

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<b>1826, Apr 26</b>	<b>Born in Manchester, England.</b>
<b>1843</b>	<b>Migrated to Victoria, Australia.</b>
<b>1865</b>	<b>Sailed to settle in Nickol Bay, Western Australia.</b>
<b>1866</b>	<b>Bought land in Roebourne. Appointed Justice of the Peace and Resident Magistrate.</b>
<b>1871</b>	<b>Bought Xantho, expanded pearling operation to Shark Bay, Bannangarra &amp; Port Hedland.</b>
<b>1874</b>	<b>Appointed to the Legislative Council as Member for the North.</b>
<b>1883</b>	<b>Began mining guano at the Houtman Abrolhos Islands.</b>
<b>1895</b>	<b>Returned to settle in Bournemouth, England.</b>
<b>1905</b>	<b>Died in England.</b>

Born in Manchester, England, on 26 April 1826, Charles Broadhurst's innovative, although often unsuccessful, speculations and enterprises provided an impetus for more practical men to profit from the pastoral, pearling and guano industries, all of which were vital to the economic success of Western Australia.

Charles migrated to Australia in 1843 to join his brother farming in Victoria. In 1860, he married 21-year-old Eliza Howes. Charles then headed west with his growing family in 1865, to work as a Manager for the Melbourne-based Denison Plains Pastoral Company. Despite the rapid failure of this venture, Charles and his family decided to remain in the North-West. Inspired by the sporadic attempts of others to recover pearl shell at Nickol Bay, Charles acquired a boat and began pearling towards the end of 1867. Charles helped to pioneer the use of diving apparatus in the Australian pearling industry but this proved to be an idea ahead of its time.



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Charles Edward Broadhurst, c1860s. Photo courtesy of Geraldton Regional Library, P 43.

In December 1882, Charles visited the Houtman Abrolhos intending to establish a fishing station for his Mandurah canning activities. This visit enabled him to observe the birds' movements and led to his discovery of guano beds of a size previously unknown. Undeterred by the large expenditures required to set up a mining operation at the Abrolhos, he went ahead and applied to the Government for the sole rights to the deposit. Trials of the guano conducted at Guildford proved it worked well as fertiliser and Broadhurst decided to push ahead with the venture, albeit in a small way due to lack of finance. By December 1883 Broadhurst was settled at the Abrolhos and by January of 1884, he and his employees had loaded three 60-ton vessels with guano. By July of the same year he had a residence, storeroom and accommodation for his agent and seven Chinese labourers on Rat Island. This enterprise, in partnership with

John Bateman and William MacNeil, struggled with many difficulties during its early years. In 1886 Charles turned 60 and he brought his son, Florance Constantine Broadhurst, into the partnership, relinquishing his own management role. Florance's mercantile education, clear-sighted methods and organising power turned the tide of fortune and the business flourished.

While digging for guano the Chinese workers turned up artefacts such as bottles and tobacco boxes with Dutch inscriptions, beads and trinkets. Intrigued by these, and believing them to be relics of the Batavia, Florance wrote to Holland and obtained a copy of an ancient book, *Ongelukige Voyagie van't Schip Batavia*, a contemporary account of the Batavia tragedy. Excited by the history at their feet, the Broadhurst family had the account published in the Western Mail newspaper, thus bringing the Batavia story to modern day notice - although the relics were in fact from the ship *Zeewyk*.

Charles Broadhurst retired from Broadhurst, MacNeil and Company in 1890, aged sixty-four. Charles and Eliza retired to England in 1895, settling in Boumemouth. Eliza died in 1899 and Charles died six years later in 1905 at the age of seventy-nine.

## References

Text taken from **Geraldton: 150 Years, 150 Lives**, Local Studies Department, Geraldton Regional Library, 2001, p. 24.

Copies are available from the Library, 37 Marine Terrace, Geraldton (PO Box 101, Geraldton 6531) for \$27.50 (plus \$6.50 postage and handling).