

# SOUTH HEDLAND

Historical Notes Issue No. Two

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The oldest history of South Hedland can be seen in it's signature (and rapidly disappearing) *pundul* trees.



Pundul are remnants of Gondwanaland forests, from before the ice ages, more than 2 million years ago. They are related to mahogany in the Americas and in Africa and they sit on dunes and ridges including the one running through South Hedland.

In aboriginal mythology the *pundul* were the source of *maparn*, or special powers.

The country is *warrarn*, the vast spinifex and wattle plains of the coastal Pilbara, scattered with Coolibah trees. and lines of river-gums.

South Hedland may have been hunting grounds for the Kariyarra people, but in this country they generally made camp along the coast, and seafood was on the menu. Middens and rock art remain to this day along the coast to the north.



**"Me and my brothers all got maparn, but I had mine taken off me by the old fella when I was little. We all got our maparn from the Pundul tree, straight from that tree ... The doctor, a white man, was tellin' me we pretty smart. We can fix the people. I tell him you whitefellas are clever but he tell me that blackfella really smart too, with our maparn."**

**- Mr Peter Coppin in Kangkushot**



The Goldsworthy Railway runs through Pippingarra Station



Boodarie Station ca. 40s?

In the dry season the Kariyarra people would travel inland, up the Yule and the Turner Rivers.

### The Pastoralists.

The first building in the area was recorded in 1880. Settlement had gradually spread from the De Grey (1863) and Pardoo (1869). In 1872 the town of Condon was gazetted, and five years later the Telegraph was built to Roebourne. The Boodarie Post & Telegraph Station was built for the new Port Hedland in 1892. It burned down in 1897 and was moved to Redbank.

The Boodarie pastoral lease, around 600,000 acres, was first taken by Fred Arunder and Charlie Upton in the 1880s. There was a homestead at Boodarie in 1880 - the existing homestead was built in 1910. A natural landing, and later a constructed one, were used to transport wool to Condon and later to Port Hedland.

### The First Boom

The discovery of gold in Marble Bar, and economic recession in the south, led to a population influx into the area. The station changed ownership first to John and Frederick Wedge, and then to the Richardsons. The Richardsons had moved up the coast with the Edgars and Grants from Pyramid Hill, and they are one of two families whose name is writ large in the history of what is now South Hedland, for most of the 20th century.

In 1896 the town of Port Hedland was gazetted, and by the turn of the century, there were a thousand people in the district.

### The 20th Century

In 1901, the year of Federation, John Richardson and the Hardie brothers became partners at Boodarie. The Hardie brothers had followed their

**In 1878 aboriginal people lost the right to hunt on pastoral stations, which they only regained with the reestablishment of Native Title in 1993.**

**In 1888 the Pilbara Goldfield was declared, 5 years before Coolgardie. In the same year aboriginal people lost the right to hold a miners licence.**

**By 1901 there were more than 1000 people in Port Hedland and its surrounding stations, but 5 times more in Marble Bar.**





Boodarie Homestead

Jack Dhu, Turner R.  
Pump-house, 1959

uncle (Mr. Anderson) to the De Grey in the 1890s to look for work. In 1903 the Boodarie lease, 242,800 acres, was divided into Boodarie, Pippingarra, Indee and Wallareenya Stations. The boundary between Boodarie and Pippingarra ran through the grounds of Hedland Senior High School.

The Hardies stayed at Boodarie for all of the 20th century. In 1974 Mr John Richardson sold Pippingarra Station to the Federal Government, and it was vested in the Aboriginal Lands Trust, which had just been established by the Whitlam Government.

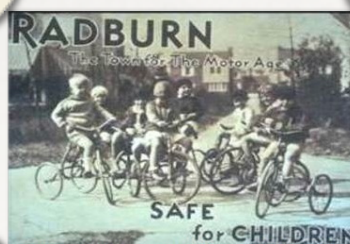
An oral history of Pippingarra recording Arnold Carter and Roger Richardson is here:  
[http://mpegmedia.abc.net.au/local/northwestwa/201209/r1009230\\_11346053.mp3](http://mpegmedia.abc.net.au/local/northwestwa/201209/r1009230_11346053.mp3)

### The New World

After the First World War, the United States started to suburbanise and industrialise - the car quickly became king.

Radburn, New Jersey, 12 miles west of New York City, was built in 1928 by a real estate developer, Alexander Bing, as the "Town for the Motor Age." The architects were Clarence Stein and Henry Wright.

The Radburn plan separated pedestrian and motor traffic, by doing away with the 'grid' and replacing it with the 'superblock' - a large block of land surrounded by main roads, with separate pedestrian and motor transport networks.



**"When white settlers moved into the Pilbara ... aboriginal people found ... their sacred areas and increase sites were desecrated or were fenced off; access to hunting and fishing grounds were no longer assured, and food plants were cleared or eaten out by the introduction of sheep, cattle and horses. Not only was their food supply threatened, but also the whole fabric of their life ... "the blame must be shared equally by people in all walks of life over at least three generations. - Jenny Hardie, Nor-westers of the Pilbara Breed.**



**Radburn, c.a. 1930, New Jersey**



**South Hedland 'Cluster'**

The design was effective, and cheaper to build because of the smaller road area. A study in 1970 found that almost half of shopping trips were made by foot or bike, compared to 9% in a conventional suburb.

But this was a far cry from the isolated dusty town that Lionel & Audrey Allan when they moved to Port Hedland in 1953. The pumping station at the nearby Turner River had been constructed in 1950, but South Hedland was little more than a track, corrugated so badly it shattered a wood-spoked wheel, according to a memoir of the Allans.

## The Sixties

In 1960 the Commonwealth lifted an export embargo on iron ore, and in 1962 an export license was granted to Consolidated Goldfields

of Sydney, and Cyprus Mines and Utah Development from California.

The Goldsworthy Joint Venture railed iron ore from Mt Goldsworthy to Finucane Island in December 1965, and 7 months later 24,200 tonnes left Port Hedland on the Harvey S. Mudd.

The Goldsworthy Railway was built along the eastern edge of what is now South Hedland, and opened in May, 1966.

The first iron ore boom had started, and so did planning for new towns at Newman, and at Boodarie Station, the closest high ground to Port Hedland.

## South Hedland

In 1966 the Outline Structure Plan for South Hedland was adopted.

2,500 hectares of the Boodarie lease was excised, and the Shire

**"We did our best to follow Aristotle's recommendation that a city should be built to give its inhabitants security and happiness."**

**- Clarence Stein, one of the Architects of Radburn.**





**The four cells of the first nuclei, from left clockwise: Lawson, Walnut Grove, Shellborough, Cassia, and original town centre.**

Council resolved to establish the town in November, 1968.

The Shire deliberated on the name of the new town, first recommending 'Turner' after the surveyor J Turner, after whom the Turner River was named, but later permitting public submissions, including:

- ~ Courtland;
- ~ Progress;
- ~ Richardson;
- ~ Viscount;
- ~ Murrumbidgee;
- ~ Hedland.

The Shire chose 'Hedland' which was rejected by the North West Planning and Co-ordination Committee, as 'too indistinctive.' They then suggested South Hedland, which was approved in 1969 and the town was gazetted in 1973.

The State Housing Commission was responsible for its construction, and selected Dr A. Comar & Assoc. of Hay Street, Perth as town planners.

Dr Alcibiade Comar and his wife Matilde, a sculptor and art teacher, had both studied in Venice, and were part of the great postwar migration,

His plan was based on Radburn, with houses facing inwards to footpaths, that would give safe, walkable access to the schools and shops.

The plan was for a town of 40,000 by 1980 (the population of the Town of Port Hedland in 2013 was about 20,000).

Uniquely, four cells ('superblocks'), each containing four nuclei, surrounded a central CBD.



**Original plan for four cells and 16 nuclei.**

The first nuclei of the first cell, was Lawson - only one cell was ever built. Lawson and Shellborough, closest to Port Hedland, and Walnut Grove and Cassia completed the cell. Two cells were planned south of the first, and another towards South West Creek.

Lawson was designed for 208 lots, 1500 people, a primary school ('PS' on the plan above), and shops ('DS' - Fallerney's Supermarket). The first land was released in September of 1969 - single family allotments were \$3,000.

In the same year Goldsworthy, a town of 1500 people had opened, with the first air-conditioned primary school in W.A.

Building began in South Hedland in 1970: water and sewage works, sealed and (some) kerbed roads, power



**Brian Foster, friend Ray, and dog Bundy.**



**Alcibiade Comar**

lines, drainage, footways and lighting were built.

The Post-Master General's office was South's first building - it opened in 1970. A population of 250,000 was predicted at a meeting at Gratwick Hall.

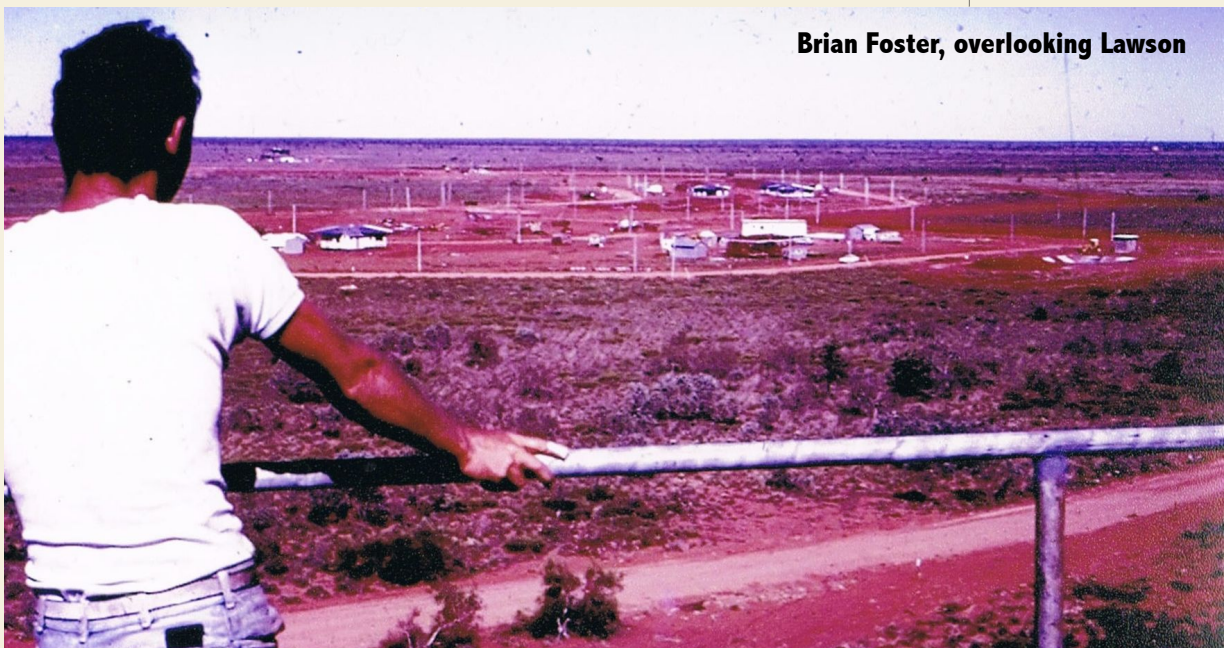
South Hedland High School opened in 1971 and in 1972 a hostel opened, named Hardie. Until then, high school students had had to study in Geraldton.

By 1972 there were 250 houses in the new Town and the South Hedland caravan park (now the Hamilton Hotel) had opened between the oval and a proposed ring road - a part of North Circular Rd (the Northern Radial) that was never built. (Murdoch Drive was originally planned as the Eastern Radial).

South Hedland Primary School opened on July 21st (and the

"When we arrived, the contractor had his large van with a tin shed nearby where a shower rose was installed. Cold water! We used to drive about a kilometre from our little 12 foot van down to the shower at night ... most workers came out from Port Hedland."

- Nancy Foster



**Brian Foster, overlooking Lawson**



P&C held a celebratory ball at the Civic Centre the following night).

Work began on what was then the tallest residential building between Perth and Darwin, the Mt Newman Mining's Single Men's Quarters. Of the 'highrise', Larry Graham said (3) "we had dinners in each others' units, played cricket on the lawn, and had big barbeques that everyone attended."

Work started on the second nucleus, Walnut Grove and by 1974 the first two nuclei were complete.

There were churches at the end of each nucleus: the Baptist in #4, the Mosque in #3 Shellborough, the Seventh Day Adventists in #2, and the Salvation Army in #1 .

### **A Bold Experiment**

Mr Comar visited the town in 1974 with his plans under fire. Mr Ron Britten, the Shire's Building Surveyor, said that it was a 'tragedy of design' that wouldn't have been approved by the Town Planning Board. (The Town Planning Board's powers had been transferred to the

North-West Planning & Coordinating Authority).

The main bones of contention were the 'back to front' houses, the inefficient layout, and that the building designs offered little relief from the heat.

A review of the plan in 1974, found that, while Corboys Place in Nucleus 1 was only 400 metres away from Bottlebrush Crescent in Nucleus 4, a vehicle journey between the two would be about and a half kilometres. It would be fair to say that South Hedland's residents haven't stopped complaining about the design since, though there have been many improvements in the road network over the years.

The Housing Commission's Planning Section took over the design of South Hedland.

Significant redesign of the first cell focused on linking the first (Lawson and Shellborough) and second (Cassia and Walnut Grove) pairs of nuclei. This was achieved with a circuitous link between Kennedy St in Lawson and



**Pedlar St, and Roberts Rd, Lawson, 1969**



**South Hedland, 1978**



**The Post-Master General's Office (after 1975 Telecom Australia)**



**South Hedland Pool, 1972**

Wattle Rd in Cassia (which is also now called Kennedy St).

The town centre area was re-designed, with an 'inner ring road' (Forrest Circle) surrounding it although again it was never completed. Detailed designs were prepared which included all of the amenities of a modern city, including a museum and art gallery, theatre, church, hotels, cinema and an indoor sports centre. Only the northeast quadrant was completed according to this plan: Government offices in Brand St, the Tavern, Service Station and Shopping Centre, the PMG and the Police Station and Courthouse. The original Police Station was demolished in 2009 and replaced with a new building in 2011, which quickly closed after an outbreak of legionnaires disease hit the north west.

The water tower was completed in 1975 and the second shopping centre opened in 1977, the first 'modern' shopping centre in regional W.A. About the same time the State Government offices were built, originally planned to house the Departments of Lands, Public Works, Community Welfare, Agriculture, Mines, Industrial Development and Labour, as well as the Agricultural Protection Board and the State Housing Commission. Only Housing and Community Welfare remain, others relocating to Karratha or Perth.

A new mosque was built in South Hedland in 1977, having previously met at the Baler primary school. Much of the funding for the construction was raised by the Muslim Ladies Association, which remains a South Hedland institution

"The sore thumb of the State Housing commission in the North-West - South Hedland - is likely to start throbbing again when the commission conducts a two-day housing seminar in Port Hedland on Saturday and Sunday"

- 13th February, 1974, the West Australian.



to this day. Many local Muslims were tradesmen, who built the facility over two years.

In 1979 the new Commonwealth Government offices opened, housing the Departments of Social Security, Education and Youth Affairs, Aboriginal Affairs and the Member for Kalgoorlie, Mr Mick Cotter.

The pastoral lease for Boodarie was acquired by BHP Direct Reduced Iron in 1995. The following year, Australia's largest industrial construction project, and the grandest attempt to add value to the resources of the North, began.

Construction of the Hot Briquetted Iron plant was marked by length delays and, \$2.3 billion later, was eventually opened on 21st July, 1999.

Boomtimes returned to Port Hedland, with a 50% increase in population between 1996 and 1998. The Justice Centre opened in 1998, and The Lodge in 1999. Despite

falling construction workforces, accommodation remained at a crisis point, and the Black Rock Caravan Park was approved in the same year.

In 1999 the cattleyards were upgraded as live exports soared from about 2400 in 1994, to over 30,000 by 2000. In the same year, the Commonwealth Bank closed in South, leaving the town without full service banking.

Safety and technical problems continued to plague the HBI plant, and in 2000 BHP wrote off the entire value of the plant. In 2011 the plant was demolished.

But the HBI boom hardly had a chance to bust. The growth of the new East Asian economic superpower, China, fuelled another iron ore boom from about 2004, leaving a monumental impact on South Hedland and the Pilbara. and be-



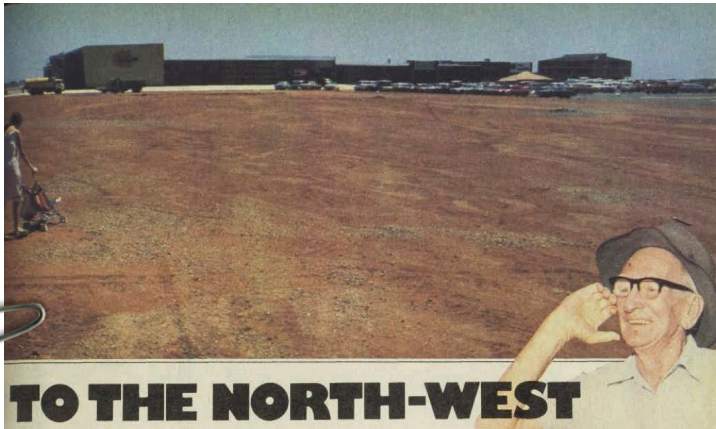
**South Hedland Mosque, 1977**



**Hot Briquetted Iron Plant, 1998**



**Demolition of the HBI commenced 2011**



**The Shopping Centre opened in 1977.**



**Port Hedland Drive-In Cinema, 1975.**

ginning another recreation of South Hedland, for the 21st Century. Despite the lessons of the HBI boom, this new boom saw a housing crisis that caused massive social dislocation in the Town, and was exacerbated by the seeming inability of the State Government to release new land. The belated and piecemeal approach to development of the town stood in stark contrast to the comprehensive, coordinated, and large-scale development

of South Hedland and other Pilbara towns in the late 1960s.

But substantial improvements were eventually made to the town's land and housing supply, and its infrastructure. As the frenetic pace of development eases, the future of the town as a booming Pilbara city, or a return to its more languid, and family-friendly days, remains to be written. No doubt, South Hedland will continue to be a town like no other in Australia.

