

LONG/BREAKER/BLEAKER ISLAND

Bleaker Island is in the south east of the Falkland Islands and is approximately 5,155 acres. Included in the group are seven tussac islands: First, Second, Third, Ghost, Sandy Bay, North Point and Halt Island.

Bleaker Island is a long, narrow, low lying island and in early maps was known as Long Island then Breaker Island. The unoccupied Breaker Island was corrupted to Bleaker Island in the 1850s and the name has remained. Bleaker Island was included in the Lafonia holdings of the Falkland Islands Company Ltd. In June 1859 James Lane, the Colonial Manager of the Falkland Islands Co Ltd referred to the island as Bleaker's Island *"If there is time after the "Victoria" returns from D Harbour, I intend sending her to Bleaker's Island with Barrels to shoot Pigs there wild, & salt it on the spot in order to take to Monte Video in August (the 1st) but there may not be time before that date – if not she will do in Septr, as if I am not deceived the Pigs must have increased there.*

July 1859: ". The "Victoria" had instructions after leavg Darwin Hr to go to Bleaker's Isld & kill & barrel Pigs to send to MVo as an experiment & then to go to George's & Speedwell Island & report on the Pigs there. Captn Morrison after killing about a dozen at Bleaker's Isld findg the weather bad, left them on shore & returned straight to Stanley 10 days before he was wanted... One porker was brought from Bleaker's Isld & 2 sucking Pigs. The former was quite free from any fishy or any other bad flavour but without fat"

The pigs had been introduced to the Island by sealers, most likely in the early 19th Century.



Bleaker Island from the air 1986 – photo FIC Collection, JCNA

In 1871 Captain **W R KENNEDY** of HMS *Reindeer* took the Governor and **Frederick E COBB** for a trip around the Falkland Islands. They visited Bleaker Island; the whole of the Island was fringed with tussac and the sole inhabitants were wild pigs. Forty years later Pig Point and the inside of Bleaker Island were strewn with pig bones. [Cobb Notebook]

William FELL applied to the Falkland Islands Co Ltd to lease Bleaker Island and after sanctioning by the Board of Director in London, William, late of Darwin Harbour, was granted a 21 year pastoral lease of Bleaker and Halt Island on 21 September 1880 from 1 June 1879 at £15 for the first seven years, £20 for the next seven years and £25 for the final seven years, payable in advance.

[BUG/REG/3; PG 141]

Circa 1880 an eight-roomed house was built on Bleaker Island and this was still standing in 1906. [FIC/EC/BLE/1#1]

In October 1894 five vaults were uncovered in the south west of the bay opposite the anchorage to the westward of the two Sand Bay Islands. The vaults were about 5 ½ foot long by 1 ½ foot wide and 4 foot deep. About 200 yards inland to the west of the vaults a stone erection for a trypot and some seal bones and a flitching knife were uncovered. [FIM Oct 1894]

William and his wife, Ann, retired to Stanley in 1897 and celebrated their golden wedding anniversary 29 December 1900.

[FI Magazine Feb 1901]



William and Ann FELL – photo © Una Hirst

On Tuesday 22 May 1906 **John FELL** wrote to **W C GIRLING** of the Falkland Islands Co Ltd: "A large barque ran ashore on the south end of Bleaker Island on Sunday night at 7 o'clock. Half of the crew got ashore but the other half is on board yet there is a heavy sea running yet but the weather is moderating. Some of the men is in a bad state. We were out yesterday all day but could not get the men to the settlement. We are going out this morning with the cutter in hopes of getting them down to the settlement 20 men all told. Will you please sir send out for them as soon as you can as I have not much accommodation for them. The name of the ship is the *Cassard* a French vessel from Sydney New South Wales bound to Falmouth for orders. Cargo grain 3000 tons Capt Morne. The French consul paid John £24 for the keep of the crew. [FIC/EC/BLE/1#1]

The French barque *Cassard* under **Captain Le MOINE** was wrecked on Bleaker Island 20 May 1906. The eighteen men were repatriated from Stanley to La Rochelle-Pallice on board the PSNC steamers *Gaelic* and *Oravia*. The total cost of clothing, supplies and fares for the men was £518-4-11. On 29 June 1906 the Falkland Islands Company Limited purchased the wreck of the *Cassard* for £355 and the cargo of wheat for £20. The net proceeds from the sale of the wreck and cargo of the *Cassard* amounted to £347-7-6 and this was paid over to the French Ambassador in London in April 1908. [F35; 30, 102, 234, 258: FIM Jul 1906]

In Adelaide, Australia the Advertiser reported on Friday 8 June 1906: *"WRECKED. ALL HANDS SAFE. VESSEL AND CARGO INSURED. LONDON, June 6. The French barque Cassard, 1,719 tons, which left Sydney for Falmouth on April 13, has been totally wrecked on the Falkland Islands, 310 miles east of the Straits of Magellan, Patagonia. The crew have landed safely at Stanley Harbor, on the East Falkland. The Cassard and her cargo were insured for £60,000. Sydney, June 6. News reached Sydney to-day, announcing the loss of the French barque, Cassard, homeward bound from Sydney. The barque struck on the Falkland Islands. All hands were saved, and have landed on the islands. The Cassard was dispatched from Sydney by W & A McArthur, and the firm this morning received a cablegram confirming the news of the disaster. The barque left Sydney on April 23, having on board 27,002 bags of wheat. The Cassard was a steel barque of 1,719 tons. She was built at St Nazaire in 1899 and was owned by a French company at Nantes."*

In January 1907 **W A HARDING** reported to **Frederick COBB** that they would do better to sell the wheat from the *Cassard* locally provided that it could be stored out of reach of rats and that there were nearly 200 bags on board the *Great Britain* ready for shipment. [FIC/D11; 411, par 2]

On 7 March 1907 **W A HARDING** reported that he had visited the wreck and that the *Cassard* *"has settled right down aft, and her bottom is evidently gone, - the foremast has a decided list outwards, the deck beams are broken in half and the water is always up to within two feet of the deck at the main hatch! In the forward part of the hold one is able to walk on the tween deck beams. Fortunately the bulkhead of the forepeak is intact, and we were able to recover a good deal of valuable gear, such as chains, blocks, ropes and paints, and bring to Stanley. There were only 20 bags of wheat dry, and these are therefore the last of the cargo. We occupied the three days in stripping her of all useful stuff, viz, spare anchors, davits, copper piping, ropes etc, and attempted to raise steam in the donkey boiler to get the ship's chains out of the locker. Unfortunately, however, since we were last at the wreck the seas have broken over her, - the main deck is smashed down four feet on one side, and the iron doors of the boiler house have been burst in by the waves. The donkey pump has rusted to such an extent that it would not feed the boiler, and we had to draw the fires. I decided, therefore, to bring the pump back to Stanley to see whether it could be repaired. I am sending to Monte Video for new valves, which cannot be cast here, and by the time these arrive the pump will be in order. When Captain Thomas was at the wreck the first time he found that the steering gear was broken, and this must have occurred soon after the ship went ashore. In view of the condition of the wreck it is evident that if we are to get anything further out of her we must do quickly, and I decided therefore to let the Samson go out again before the end of the month...I hope, later, to be able to send out a schooner to load up the anchors and chains as well as any other gear from aloft that can be salvaged...The Samson brought to Stanley this trip 20 bags of wheat, a pair of lifeboat davits, 2 good anchors, the donkey pump, boat and sundry planks, chains, paints, ropes, blocks, etc. I doubt if we shall be able to get the boiler, but the donkey pump will come in very well for Goose Green."*

The *Samson* and the large launch from the Naval Works visited the wreck of the *Cassard* on 28 March and loaded up a quantity of wood, oil tanks, etc. The wood was discharged at Darwin.

On the night of 30 April 1907 the foremast of the *Cassard* went over the side and by June 1907 the *Cassard* was practically gone to pieces with only a portion of her bows being left above water. By August 1907 the bow, which had originally headed west, was slewed round to the south east, the jibboom pointing down and there was no prospect of further salvage. [FIC/D11; 465, par 16; 483, par 17; 503, par 14; 511, par 8; 549, par 5]



Bows of the *Cassard* – photo FIC Collection, JCNA

William FELL, age 77 and a sheep farmer, died 2 August 1906. [Obituary FI Magazine Sep 1906] In William's will, dated 7 April 1892, he left his farm on Bleaker Island equally to his wife and three youngest sons, John, William and Duncan; William had predeceased his father having died in Stanley 18 October 1895 from phthisis. [BUG/REG/6; 195; Death registers]

In June 1907 there were two dwelling houses, a wool shed and pens, wool press, cart shed, cow shed, hen house, boiler house, shanty, cutter, dinghy, dip and pens, peat cart, 3,362 sheep, 42 cattle and 4 horses. [FIC/EC/BLE/1#1] **John and Duncan FELL** were offered a lease of Bleaker Island at £70 per annum including Trist Islands by the FIC which John accepted February 1908. [FIC/D11; 584, par 6; 621, par 3]

On 20 July 1910 **John FELL**, his wife Fanny and their three children arrived in Stanley from Bleaker Island and the same year **Arthur Frederick COBB** was granted a 21 year lease of Bleaker Island.



Arthur Cobb on Bleaker Island in a home-made cartlet made mostly from driftwood off the beaches – photo FIC Collection, JCNA

On 19 July 1910 the *Hattie LM*, previously the Chilean schooner *Rapida*, went ashore at Bleaker Island on the reef near Halt Island with outward cargo and passengers. She was got off but was blown on to the reef again and the second time higher up. The *Hattie LM* was reported as being full of water and not much prospect of saving her. On 21 July 1910 **Arthur COBB** and **Duncan SHAW** were alone on Bleaker Island when a crowd from the wrecked *Hattie LM* turned up. **George WATERSON** (who was bound for Bleaker Island), **Tom & Mrs SCOTT**, **Ralph WILLIAMS**, **Mrs & Miss WATTS**, **Joe SCOTT**, **Albert PORTER**, **Tom RICHARDSON**, **Carl** the mate and some of the crew. The next morning they met the Captain and crew coming from the abandoned ship: **Jimmy MUISE** (cook), **Jack TANNER** (passenger) and **Bill WADE** who had slept on board in flooded bunks. [Cobb Notebook; FIC/D12; 18, par 12: Shipping Registers]



**Members Of The Over-Seas Club: George Waterson, England, Handyman; Duncan Shaw, Hebrides, Cutterman; Arthur F Cobb, Falkland Islands, Sheep Farmer; Henry Newing, Falkland Islands, Shepherd. Bleaker Island, Falkland Islands, 1911
– photo Cobb Collection, JCNA**

In 1916 over 80,000 tussac roots were planted in some of the bare paddocks. [FIM Nov 1917]

In 1917 87,600 tussac roots were planted: Triangle 7,000; Hyde Park 29,000; Hunter's Bog 51,600. [Cobb Notebook]



Photographs Cobb Collection, JCNA



***Gleam* in foreground, Stanley Harbour – photo FIC Collection, JCNA**

On 4 November 1921 the *Gleam* was wrecked on the end of the Hattie Reef, the same place as the *Hattie LM*, in thick smoke from camp fires in the Walker Creek Camps. The crew came ashore when things became impossible for them and turned up at BUNDES' house at 4am saying that they were wrecked having been caught on the reef at 10.30pm the previous night. It blew all day until about 5pm when they were able to return and found her well on the reef with about 5 or 6 feet of water in her. After that it blew for about a week and they could not return until Friday 12 November 1921 when they found that her side and everything inside was gone. [Cobb Notebook/letters/FIC Lloyds papers]

In 1922 Arthur COBB named the tussac paddocks as being Hunters Bog, Hyde Park, Green Park, Triangle and Parson Johnsons. [Cobb Notebook]

In 1931 the Falkland Islands Co Ltd resumed possession of the islands.

A new shepherd's house was built in the late 1960s by the FIC. It was framed in Stanley and then shipped to Bleaker Island to be erected. The house had a timber frame covered in sheet steel and two brick chimneys.

In 1974 the Goose Green manager, Brook Hardcastle, decided to move the shepherd's house built in the late 1960s. Ronnie Morrison and Felix Navarro took the house down and it was transported in two trips over four days by the *Penelope* then overland on a truck to Goose Green where it was rebuilt and a conservatory added. The chimneys were not moved. It is known as Bleaker House.



Bleaker Island 1986 – photo FIC Collection, JCNA



Finlay Ferguson on Bleaker Island 1986 – photo FIC Collection, JCNA

In 1999 **Mike** and **Phyll RENDELL** purchased Bleaker Island and operate it as a farm and tourist destination.

SOME BIRTHS, DEATHS AND MARRIAGES ON BLEAKER ISLAND

BIRTHS:

- 1881 Mar 17: **James FELL** born on Bleaker Island to James FELL, shepherd, and Agnes FELL formerly McCALL.
- 1888 May 29: **Ann MYLES** born on Bleaker Island to Thomas W MYLES, sailor, and Elliot MYLES formerly FELL.
- 1890 Dec 05: **Thomas MYLES** born on Bleaker Island to Thomas W MYLES, sailor, and Elliot MYLES formerly FELL.
- 1893 Mar 31: **William Bleaker MYLES** born on Bleaker Island to Thomas MYLES, sailor, and Elliot MYLES formerly FELL.
- 1904 Aug 31: **William James Duncan FELL** born on Bleaker Island to John FELL, manager sheep farm, and Fanny Maria Grant FELL formerly SIMPSON.
- 1917 Jun 28: **Maud Alice Mary MORRISON** born on Bleaker Island to Donald MORRISON, shepherd, and Emily Maud MORRISON formerly BIGGS.
- 1917 Oct 26: **Malvina May BUNDES** born on Bleaker Island to Jeff BUNDES, mariner, and Emily BUNDES formerly ALLAN.

MARRIAGES:

- 1887 Aug 04: **Thomas MYLES**, Irish sailor living in Bleaker Lodge, was married to **Elliot FELL**, living in Bleaker Lodge, at Bleaker Island according to the rites & ceremonies of the Presbyterian Church by Governor's Licence by William Hill Philip Minister. The witnesses were John Fell and Margaret Coutts. Thomas' father was recorded as Thomas Myles, sailor and Elliot's as William FELL, sheep farmer.
- 1910 Jun 01: **Thomas SMITH**, carpenter, was married to **Margaret COUTTS**, Scotch, at Bleaker Cottage, Port Stanley by Robert Johnson, Nonconformist Minister. The witnesses were Duncan Fell and Lizzie Smith. Thomas' father was recorded as James Smith, carpenter and Margaret's as William Coutts, shepherd.

DEATHS:

- 1941 Aug 07: **Anne CLIFTON** died age 58 from chronic myocardial degeneration. No death record but may be buried at Darwin.
- 1958 Jul 23: **Rebecca Sarah Margaret Dickson ROBERTS** died age 77 from cardiac failure. Buried at Darwin.