



Plundering WA history

FROM Fremantle to Middle Island with an itinerary of other long-lost stopovers on the way, the route travelled by author Elaine Forrestal in the name of literature echoes that of Western Australia's first pirate and namesake of Forrestal's new book, *Black Jack Anderson*.

It was while researching a children's book at the maritime museum in Fremantle that Forrestal first learned of Anderson's existence after overhearing a snippet of video dialogue talking about the villainous – and at the time, mysterious – figure.

"I pricked up my ears and thought I'm a West Australian, I didn't know we had pirates – I was amazed," Forrestal said.

"They didn't say much about him, just his name and that he had a base on Middle Island in the 1820s and '30s."

While feeding these initial clues into the internet led to nowt but casino games and Scandinavians searching for long-lost family, a subsequent visit to the Battye Library unearthed five articles, the oldest being a piece published in the *Perth Gazette* in 1846.

Forrestal had at last found her map to buried historical 'treasure' and embarked on a quest that would take the better part of two years to

complete as she unearthed the story behind the state's first scoundrel of the sea.

Slowly, she pieced together the story of a foul-tempered African-American who boarded a whaling ship in New Bedford harbour in Massachusetts for a voyage that would conclude two years later at a new settlement at King George Sound.

The ship pulled into port in dire need of repair, there were few whales in the ship's hold and worst of all, the sailors had run out of alcohol, so not surprisingly, the crew's first port of call was the trading post which doubled as the pub.

For Anderson, that evening's drinking would be his last as a free man: following the death of a sealer who was drinking at the pub, Anderson fled the scene by single-handedly sailing a boat designed for four that would eventually become the pirate's one-boat armada.

While history cannot be certain whether Anderson was directly responsible for the death of the sealer, Forrestal is certain that life on the high seas plundering and looting suited the sailor-turned-outlaw-overnight just fine.

"Anderson was a very violent and ruthless pirate who had no other means of supporting himself apart from raiding ships that came

through the Recherche Archipelago," Forrestal said.

"All the ships coming from England and Europe had to come across the Roaring Forties and were sitting ducks for Anderson when they pulled into a bay for the night."

Soon, the legend of the hulking man armed with a short temper, twin pistols in his belt and skilfully wielded knife grew and spread through the region, only to be swallowed up by the neglect of time – before being revisited, retrieved and retold by Forrestal for a new generation of West Australians.

Although Forrestal regards her piece as a biographical fiction and freely admits to having to "re-imagine" some of the missing elements, her tale remains true to the facts as she shines the light on a very neglected period of West Australian history.

"Immediately when I found those five references in the Battye Library, I thought, this is a real story, this is a story that will rival the *Batavia* story," she enthused.

"I set out to tell an exciting story and I think the fact that it's based on truth just adds to the excitement."

■ ***Black Jack Anderson* (RRP \$19.95) is out now, published by Penguin.**



Elaine Forrestal with her book about a pirate of the WA coast, *Black Jack Anderson*.

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