

An edited section of an interview with Ameer Dost conducted by Michael Adams
Five Volumes
Oral History Programme,
J. S. Battye Library of West Australian History.
Tapes and transcript held by State Library of Western Australia.
Tape of full interview is on line.

Ameer: My sister married Tom Mathieson, a Norwegian or Swede, I'm not sure. He finished up contracting all around, fencing and all that business, and up north, based at Meekatharra and then as a miner in Norseman. Got blinded when hi boring a face out at OK Mine. Lillian just died [Before 1980].

Q: And Ada?

Ameer: Ada married a post office bloke that used to run around in the vans, called Freddie Mitchell. They lived in Victoria Park, in Shepperton Road. My other sister, jean married Herbert Bolitho, he's dead, but she is still Mrs. Bolitho. And they finished up in the saw mills. He was a mill man, in Manjimup. And Vi married Tom Potter who was a very brainy man, a refrigeration mechanic and also superintendent of the Robbs Jetty refrigeration. He recently died. They lived in Money Road, Melville, got a lovely home thee. Ada is the only one who can speak Hindustani. She used to cater fro all the Indians when they come across here, the hobnobs, from India. And they used to grab Ada and she could converse with them in Hindustani, and she was a lovely cook too with it, you know, curry and rice. What the Indians eat.

The reason my father, Dost Mahomet, left Coolgardie was because of the animosity and maliciousness between my father and my uncles [Grigo brothers] because they didn't want to consent to the marriage, although my grandmother consented, but the men didn't. So that's the reason why my father took my mother across the saddle and away he went up to Broome and back to Port Hedland, to get away from them, and then bring all the camels up there and everything, ordered them p there and then they must have come up and followed them up there. Yes, yes, he set the Grigo family up, thinking it would make them sweet, you know. He tried to help them so that he could be good with them, and no trouble. Finally he went back to Port Hedland, and then they came up there too. And he set my auntie up, Agnes, in the pub, Poondina, and make her happy, and they come up and he set one up into a bakery. He gave one five hundred sovereigns, and then the other one in the electrical business in Hedland. And then Dost asked the brothers to keep away from his home and let them live a decent life. But they used to come home to my mother's place drunk, and of course my father never drank or smoked, neither did my mother. Dost would see the Grigo boys there and say, "Listen I don't want you to come here again. I've come here all this way out of your road and here you are now, interfering with my marriage. If you ever come here again, look out!"

So anyway, of course six weeks later they came again and they were both drunk, so he tore into them and of course he didn't know how to fight, he could wrestle. And he threw one through the door and broke one's arm and then he threw the other one through the door from behind him.

Q: Whose arm did he break?

Ameer: He broke Harry's arm. He broke his arm. And then in the early hours of the morning they came back and hit [Dost] across the head with a three by two jarrah piece of wood.

Q: Hang on, was it the same night?

Ameer: Yes, he went over and told his men that he'd had a big troubles here and he had a fight and that he would have to let his camels go. They let him have them, and go back to India and take his family over to India, and finish with Australia forever. But as I say, that night, they came, Harry and Billy came [in] the early hours of the morning about three o'clock in the morning and hit my father across the head wit a [piece of] three by two jarrah. And that's where he was murdered. [see State Library file 4837/1913 entitled "Murder of Dost Mahomet", includes dispersal of the children to orphanages and disposal of estate. Also paper cuttings in library file PR3565].

And the Grigo boys finished up they done six weeks gaol [remand?] and got out of it.

Q: What did Dr Browne tell you about it?

Ameer: Oh, I talked to Dr Browne about the murder and he said it was a terrific, disgraceful business what they done to him. And he said, "I held your father's tongue out," he says, "for a long time, I don't know how he lived as long as he did, because his brains were protruding through his skull." And to finish up my mother had to try and help her brothers from being hung or long term gaol. And they got to my mother, my uncles Billy and Harry Grigo, They said, "Look Annie, for God's sake help us out of here, because we're in bog trouble now. What about you saying that he grabbed your brothers by the throat and the other one got a lump of wood and hit him across the head to relax his hold and make it look like it was a manslaughter job." And this was what was put over in the court and they earned six weeks gaol and got out of it. But the Indians knew different and ...

Q: Because he'd been over to them?

Ameer: Yes he'd been over to them and told them see. They blamed my mother for this and my mother got the blame for this and they eventually kidded my mother over to India and murdered her there. And two of them came over from Australia to India because my eldest sister Lil saw them come in with the knives.

Dad's murder was about 1909 [7 April 1909]. He was buried I believe in Port Hedland. And at the time then, of course, my mother's eldest son was in India. And she decided after some time to go back to India and bring her son back to Australia, and also settle up for some of my father's property. However, my uncles [the Grigo brothers] tried to persuade her not to go, because they reckoned it would finish up with murder.

Q: Why did they think she'd get murdered?

Ameer: Because they must have known, you know, that there was something funny going on. They must have had an idea that she blamed her [Annie]. The Indians are an eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth you know, it's in their tradition isn't it? So naturally they would think that they would murder her for this because she got her brothers out of gaol, or being hung. So the Indians would know, what went on. And so naturally they would seek revenge. Also two government officials said, "Don't go," and they tried to stop her.

Q: But Annie had her eldest son in India [Karachi].

A: But she wanted to go and bring him [Mustafar] back. They said, "Don't go." [The government] would get her son back over here without her going. And of course anyway finally she was determined to go and bring her son back. And Harry and Billy [Grigo] wanted to put a .32 Colt revolver in her hand. They said, "Take this Annie and put it under your pillow, because you'll need it." And after they tried to persuade her, but "No, no," she said, "I'm going now and I'll come straight back."

And that's when she took us family to India and they murdered her there. Yes, as soon as my father ... after my father's murder, the other Indians on the camp, they grabbed all the camels. And my father's brand was DM, on the camel's brands and they put a bar in the D and made it BM. They said they would confuse everybody and [wouldn't] know whose camels they belonged to. They changed the blooming initials, that's come back to me too, and changed the name to B instead of Dost [D] it was altered by putting a bar in there. So no one could make out who was who, and how many camels he had or how many he didn't. And they took them over them. They grabbed the camels and used them themselves you know, and reaped the profits themselves. My mother never got any of that, no, no.

Q: What sort of estate did your father leave.

Ameer: Oh, I couldn't tell you that, only the station he had, that's all, I couldn't say how much. But all I know is that people robbed us of all, everything we had here. And my Auntie Agnes was the chief one and Billy Grigo and Harry. It was them three robbed us of everything, what we had here [in Australia].

Q: About how long after Dost's death was it that your mother went to India [Karachi].

Ameer: as far as I can remember, it was round about, within twelve months after the murder. And I remember going over to India and riding on a rickshaw too, I remember that part of it.

Q: Where was that?

Ameer: Ceylon. Yes, I remember that one. The bells were ringing so much on the horse's head and going along with all this noise on his head, frightened hell out of me! My mother grabbed hold of me and she said, "Don't worry," you know, that it was quite alright.

The whole family went. My four sisters went too. And then we got to India [Karachi]. And over there they made a fuss of my mother, they put her on a white horse and made a big long procession with palms and that on the ground, where the horse walked over. Well, I don't remember this but my sister told me, Lil, [Lillian] who was my eldest sister. She remembered everything. And then we went out to the castle, out from Karachi in a place called New Khumbarwara, which is over twenty miles out from Karachi.

Q: How long did you live there?

Ameer: Oh, I remember having lots of rice you know, and curry and rice, yes. And I used to walk out with my sisters and get mangatels [a small fruit, green like a fig with a pinkish kernel]. We used to go out and get mangatels, my sisters and I, she took me out she knew all about them, and we used to hop into these food stalls, but anyway a terrible lot of rice and curry.

Q: What sort of reception did you get? You said it was very good for your mother, but did your father's brothers look after you properly in this castle?

Ameer: I remember the servants there, with us, all the time, used to escort me wherever we went around, you know, specially me. And as a matter of fact in the finish I had a photograph with my servants alongside of me. And my sister's got one of those photos.

Q: Now what did your mother [Annie Dost] hope to achieve when she was in India?

Ameer: Well what she wanted really her main object was to get settled up with some money, because you know, she and my father had a lot of property in Karachi. And she wanted to settle up with a bit of money. And also the main thing was to bring my brother back, her son back, and finished up getting murdered instead.

Q: How long were they over there?

Ameer: Well I think we were there about eighteen months...

Q: What happened during that period?

Ameer: Well, I'll tell you what, my mother had a lovely watchdog, And it was the night before the murder, these two Indians they must have been from here, anyway two Indians came, from Australia I believe, borrowed the dog to [help] catching some animal or something. And took the dog away because they knew he'd bark see. And it was the following night (my sister told me all this), and the following night they murdered my mother.

They were Indians from up north here, where my father [Dost Mahomet] used to work, you know. They used to work for my father.

Q: So these were your father's servants?

Ameer: Yes, the servants, yes. They worked for my father, yes. It was a long time ago. But I know they escorted me always, everywhere I went they went with me.

Q: Now why did they murder your mother?

Ameer: Well they [Grigo brothers] murdered my mother because Dost Mahomet's family blamed her for my father's murder. Because they knew there was something wrong in the statements she gave. Because my father, after the fight in the first place, he went across to the camp, I mean over to the camp where the Indians [cameleers] were working for him. And he told that he'd had a big fight and broke my uncle's arm and then came back. And that night they [Grigo brothers] murdered my father with a lump of wood. But my mother [Annie] turned round in the court then and said that they were fighting on the floor [newspaper reports say Annie did not give evidence at the trial]. You know it's all too obvious that there was some concoction. And my mother had decided ... they got to my my mother, my uncles did, her brothers, and told her to put up this concoction to get them out of being hung. So

then my mother gave it over that my father [Dost] grabbed one of my uncles [Billy Grigo] by the throat and the other [Harry Grigo] hit him across the head to relax his hold, and then he smashed his skull.

Q: why did they [the assassins] wait so long? Annie had been in India a long time.

Ameer: You know, I think she went more or less to try to square up the property. And another thing, I've heard some talk from my sister, they were holding my brother back there, her son. They wouldn't let him come over, you know. They didn't want him to come back, because he was born there of course and they held him back too, see, all the time. He wouldn't come over you know. They got round him too, to hold her back too, you see, that was the plan.

As far as I remember, it was quite good, my recollections of it, while I was there. I was happy, and I had plenty to eat. And I was well attended to and I always had nice clothes. Plenty of servants around me. There was a fellow dressed in white and a red cummerbund around the middle. Yes and they had little red thing on their heads. Wherever I went they went with me, that was strange, they were with me all the time. Not so much with my sisters but me.

Q: Going back to your father's death, did you have any sort of shock at the time?

Ameer: I was too young exactly [when Dost died]... My sister would remember everything. Not so much me, that was no shock to me, but the other one was, and I remember that. It was awful, because I remember kneeling alongside my mother, trying to wake her up see. A hell of a difference, yes. I tell you I was given such a shock for years after by it. Oh. It give me a hell of a shock after, I tell you, I thought they were going to kill me, you know.

Q: Did your mother have any sort of protection or anything?

Ameer: The only protection she had was that man and his wife.

Q: Who was that?

Ameer: Mr Lintle and Mrs Lintle. They camped about half a mile away from us. White family. And I think if I remember he was a sergeant, Sergeant Lintle. He was camped about half a mile away from where Mother was in the castle.

Q: Army Sergeant or what?

Ameer: Yes Army Sergeant., British, not coloured people. They would be there to protect my mother in her stay in India. Because the government thought she was going int for a trap, but besides my uncles, besides her brothers, they really thought that she was going in for some trouble. She used to grizzle to him, go to him, and talk, you know.

Q: And this was at New Khumbarwara?

Ameer: Yes, New Khumbarwara. He came there many times, and his wife too. To see if everything was alright there, and this is how he caught us. If he hadn't come there we wouldn't have been alive now, we'd have been taken away. Mr Lintle came the next morning and there he saw mother and took us away. He's the man that saved us.

She had some feeling that there was something going to happen to her, you know. She tried to get away on the quiet. It was arranged between Lintle and her to get away. Of course something leaked out that she was leaving. And they got her before the day she left, and Lintle came across to see what was wrong, why she didn't call him.

Q: The following morning? Can you tell me what happened that night?

Ameer: I don't remember part of it, but my sister knows all about it and my brother told me more of the detail. He said they came to the window first with the revolvers, to shoot my mother through the window, and they saw Jean, my youngest sister, Violet laying on [my mother's] arm. They said, "Don't shoot because you might miss and hit the baby, and we'll go round the other way."

So they didn't shoot the revolver. They came around with a Gurkha knife and my sister saw them and she screamed, she remembered them from...

Q: This was Vi was it?

Ameer: No, no, Vi was laying on her arm, but Lil -- Lil was the eldest. She saw them come in and she remembered them from Australia.

Q: Really?

Ameer: Yes, oh yes. Pity that Lil isn't alive. And she saw them from Australia. And they went straight away and put the light switch out and came across, and she screamed because she saw the knives in the hand, they had a big knife in their hand. And two came in. And then they went across to my mother and then Lil heard my mother scream for the first hit, must have stabbed her in the dark.. And the next then of course there was a hell of a commotion on, and you know, sunk on the floor, where they dragged her out on the floor. And then my mother bit one bloke on the finger and took half the finger off. With his finger in it she knew that she was going to die, I suppose, and tense, excited and also get up, you know. That's something she knew when was going to get done in, she must have got a few stabs and she grabbed him and bit this fellow on the index finger. Anyway, as I say, they dragged her on the floor there and that's where I saw her in the morning when I woke up.

Q: But what happened to Vi and your other sister?

Ameer: that's what I was saying. Vi was still laying on the bed and mother was on the floor, and Vi was bleeding through the head, her head was all cut open, right through the head with a knife, they stabbed her through the head. And then of course Lintle went stone mad, and rushed across and got her into Karachi Hospital straight away and we all went too.

Q: Did you see your mother that morning?

Ameer: Yes I saw my mother, yes. All the hands cut off. I woke up and I saw my mother on the floor with blood all over the floor, which I remember just like it was yesterday. And this is the shock I got, see, when I saw this. And I then knew that Mum was gone, blood everywhere and cuts to the throat, and all her throat was cut and all stabs all over her chest. And her hand was on her breast and all the fingers were missing and right down through the breast like that, deep into her breast. And I could see the blood all coming down. It's so bad that I just can't relate it, it was pretty crook. And I knew Mum was gone. There was a bloody pool of blood everywhere on the floor, and also her throat was cut, through the throat. Her hand was cut right across the knuckles. And it was deep, all through here, the bone was laying open, one big bloody long cut. Gee, they must have cut with a vengeance. It was deep you know, right into the breast, yes.

Q: And did they steal anything?

Ameer: Oh yes, the beautiful rings my father put on her. That's what they were after. They was trying to get the rings off her, because she put them on when she was young and they were valuable rings. I believe one was, according to Vi and my sister Lil, one was, my uncles said, one ring was worth two thousand quid. Yes one beautiful diamond, you could see it glistening anywhere, specially when she was on the racecourse or anything, they reckon you could see it from a mile away, you know the glistening or it. One big beautiful Indian diamond, yes, and all, not only one, but plenty of them. And they couldn't pull them so they just bang, cut them off, took the lot. Bloody mongrels! That's the shock I got, because I always used to see my Mum with these rings on when she walked around. A hell of a lot... they just clustered them on. My father paid plenty for them.

Q: So Lintle came over in the morning?

Ameer: And then he saw us like that ... I didn't see him do anything with my mother, he took us off quick, and then he found my younger sister. He bound her head up, he cut across the sheets, and I remember him putting something round her head, I suppose that was a bandage and oh God, he went stone mad, he was in a terrific state himself. And next thing he carried us like, carried Vi in his arms. He only lived a little way away, and took Vi and all of us went with him. I mean Ada and Jean and myself, Lil, and he took Vi in his arms. I didn't see no more of my mother then. So then we went in to Karachi then and from there we went into hospital. And that's were I was telling you there we had to stop there till a court case come about. We were there for some time, we were near a month there, in Hospital, in Karachi. It was a hell of a big place. And the first time I walked around, these Indian police were with me, everywhere I walked, because the word had come through that they were going to kidnap me. They didn't want to do any harm to me, you know, they would have just got me away from

coming back to Australia. This is when the court case happened and also my sister had to wait for court case. And then she's recognised the men when they put them all in a line and she picked the two out. She said, "I know them from Australia."

Lal Mahomet was one. I don't know the other man's name. My sister did know. Lal Mahomet was one.

Q: Did they get hung or did they get off?

Ameer: Yes they got hung, yes, they got hung. They hung them, yes. Well that's the one they caught with the finger bitten that's how they knew. He confessed he was on his own, but my sister said there was two and she remembered them being in Australia. Mongrels! Couldn't find the rings, Must have sold the rings.

Q: So that must have been a terrifying period for a young child.

Ameer: Oh Jesus it was terrible, oh Jesus. I never forgot that for ages, I tell you. I can't forget it now even. Just like, even now I can just see my mother on the floor now. Terrible. It came as such a shock to me. that I thought that, you know, that I thought that everyone I saw was going to kill me. That's how much of a shock it gave me. You wouldn't believe that such a shock would give it to you like that, but it did. Everywhere I went, in the police station I'd run in for help. I said, "Quick, quick, the Indians are out there, they're going to kill me." The sergeant said, "Oh, don't worry, what's wrong?" and I told him, "Oh," he says, "they won't kill you."

By gee, I tell you.

Q: Where was that?

Ameer: In Carnarvon. Years later. There was about twenty or thirty of them sitting outside a settler's joint, all with turbans on. They had came teams there. God damn, when I saw this I ran into the police station. They would have grabbed me and killed me. Yes, oh frightened the hell out of me, dinkum. I was really shook up.

Anyway, back in Karachi, we had to wait to come back to Australia. Trying to get me to stop there and bring my sisters back. They wanted me to stop there you see. This is when all the money was paid over to Dickie Haynes.

Q: that would have been a bit later wouldn't it?

Ameer: Yes, we never left Karachi Hospital until we came over from there on the boat. And we were escorted there on the boat with a heap of soldiers too, to come, bring us over, Yes, we had soldiers all round us, jundiwallahs. I remember being surrounded when we were on our walks, just had to have them on the boat as well, they surrounded me just the same, about three or four of them, you know, all there, the same as on in India in the hospital.

Jundiwallahs, the dark police they were. They went back to India, after. And when we lobbed here we were taken to the Children's Court, 32 Trafalgar Road, to sign up and go to the orphanage. The girls went to the Girls' Orphanage and I went to the Swan Orphanage, thrown in there. My grandmother [Maren Grigo] put up a hell of a protest about it to my uncles, to try and get me out of there, all of us. "No, no, no," they said, "we can't look after them. They'll be better off in the orphanage." They were bad people to us, you know, the bloody Grigos. This is the fellow who killed by father - Billy and bloody Harry, bloody mongrels.

[Interview continues]