

Grace Bussell—Hero of the West

Grace Bussell (1860–1935) was the daughter of early European settlers on the Margaret River coast of Western Australia where her parents started a cattle farm.

Grace was a keen horserider and this was to play a crucial part in an experience in 1876. On that fateful day, Grace was helping her mother and sisters with Christmas preparations, when their Aboriginal stockman, Sam Isaacs, burst into the house reporting a stricken vessel off a beach. The ship was a few hundred metres from land but huge seas were preventing those on board from getting ashore.

Grace volunteered to return to the bay with Sam to see if they could help. They headed to the coast on their horses. From the cliffs above Caldardup Bay they could see the ship was in trouble. On board the ship were over fifty passengers and crew. They could see people were already scrambling into lifeboats.

After leaving Fremantle the ship started leaking, then the pumps failed. In desperation the captain decided to run the ship aground. The ship then started to break up.

As the pair watched the events unfold, one of the lifeboats made it to shore but another was smashed by the pounding seas and all lives were lost.

Without hesitation Grace and Sam rode their horses down the rocky hill and into the raging surf. They coaxed their horses out towards the stricken vessel. The horses struggled through the waves and eventually got close enough for Grace and Sam to urge the frantic victims to grab hold, as they turned their horses back to shore.

Grace and Sam continued to ride back into the surging ocean until everyone was safely ashore. Some passengers made it to shore on their own but Grace and Sam were responsible for saving many of the fifty survivors.

After the rescue Grace made a dash back to her parents' property and the family hurried to assist the shipwrecked victims. Newspapers called her 'Western Australia's Grace Darling', in honour of another Grace who had rescued people from raging seas off Britain. Grace and Sam were awarded bravery medals.

