

"Deadwood Dick"

A Famous Cornishman

By Fred Bullock

On the 20th of August, 1847, at Ruthros (known locally as Ruthers) in the Parish of St Columb Major, was born a boy who later in life became a very noted character.

This was Richard Bullock, known the world over as "Deadwood Dick". Brought up in a humble home at Ruthros, a village of some 20 houses only, he moved at an early stage with his Parents to Retew not far away, in the Parish of St Enoher.

His father, John Bullock, I believe came originally from Devonshire. He married Elizabeth Liddicoat. The family Bible shows that they had eight children: Jane, who became Skews by marriage; Elizabeth, who married Jack Kessel; Thomas, later known to everyone as "Uncle Tom," who married Kate Boundy; John who married a Rowe; Richard "Deadwood Dick" who married Susie Poad; William, who married Annie Staple; Albert who married Kate Thomas of St Stephens and Fanny, who died when she was three years old. Their father, Captain John Bullock, as he was locally known, became the manager of a clay work at Retew belonging to the firm of Messrs. Robert Dunn & Co., of St. Austell, and most of his Sons including William, my father worked at one time or another under him. They were big-limbed, strong men, and in the daily routine had many opportunities of showing their strength. The clay in those days was carried by horse-wagons to Grampound Road G.W.R. Station, about 6 miles from Retew. There was then no universal education, and I have heard my father say that he learnt to write his own name with a small piece of clay on the tail of a wagon, whilst carrying the clay to Grampound Road.

The Gun and Sporting held a front-rank place in the lives of all the young men of this family, they were without exception excellent shots, and missed no opportunity of a day's sport. They were all very mechanically minded too, which perhaps helped to make them so successful in shooting. This ability still runs in the family, by the marksman a Bullock, a Skews, a Kessel, a Liddicoat, or even a Crowle (an offshoot of the Liddicoats). I remember how on many occasions my father would be "lost", and if the question came, "Where's Cap'n Bill?" it was generally safe to answer, "Gone off with the gun".

The family were all ardent Free Methodists and worshipped at the Queens United Methodist Free Church, now known as Immanuel Church, which is in the St Columb and Padstow Circuit. Richard Bullock was for years a valued member of the choir there. It is remembered that at one early morning Christmas-Day Service he had to take a prominent part in singing "Unto us a Child is

born", which caused some amusement since his own only child, Maurice, had been born not many days before.

Pigeon-Shooting had a fascination for Dick Bullock, as he was then always called, and he invariably took first prize. I am indebted to my friend Mr A J Hocking of Fraddon for the following:

"Dick Bullock as a young man was my father's great friend and shooting partner, and whenever I think of him, I call to mind stories I have often heard regarding their shooting. When Dick was 18 years of age and my father, Ned Hocking, was 16, they decided to compete in their first pigeon-shooting match, to be held at St Stephen –in- Brannel Feast Week. On their way to St Stephen Churchtown, going through Meledor, Dick announced to a roadman working there that they were going to bring back first and second prizes, a feat which they actually accomplished! Many times, too, I have heard the tale of Dick Bullock marking-in four partridges, in what was later known as Daniel Crowle's Moor. When his dog flushed the birds, two taking to the right and two to the left, with his double-barrelled gun he shot the four of them, two with each shot – partly luck, of course.

Dick went to America soon after his son Maurice was born, and when later he received a letter from his friend Ned Hocking informing him that Mrs Hocking had given birth to a daughter, Dick sent his congratulations and jocularly added, "I suppose you will soon be putting your girl and my son to spark (go courting) now?"

Dick when he went to America was probably about 25 or 26 years old. He worked in the mines there for about ten years, but I well remember when a lad my father receiving letters from him later which contained news-cuttings from the American papers recounting some of his exploits as "Deadwood Dick". These letters were very terse, and while he might let himself go a little on the subject of guns and sporting dogs he had little to say of himself or his doings as reported in the cuttings, beyond that he was well.

A book recently written by a well-known author and lecturer, Mr Escott North – The Saga of the Cowboy – devotes a page or two to "Deadeyed Dirk," and a Western Morning News review of this led to some interesting correspondence about him. The Bodmin Guardian, in 1921 following his death, also told the main facts of his life, including his Cornish origins. It was not until he was 35 that Richard Bullock began to get famous. While then working in the Black Hills, South Dakota, as a miner, he became so exasperated at hearing how regularly the stage-coaches took their hard-won gold to the settlements were held up and robbed, that he gave up mining, buckled on his six-shooter, and volunteered himself as a bullion-guard for the Homestake Mine, then owned by Senator George Hearst, who was the father of the famed newspaper proprietor.

His best-known feat in this capacity was shooting "Lame Johnny," a road-bandit with a terrible record. Bullock was guarding the Deadwood stage, on its trip over the old Cheyenne route when, just as it turned on to Hurricane Flats, "Lame Johnny" confidently stepped out to hold it up. In a flash the very surprised outlaw was dropped in his tracks by Dick, and after it was made quite certain that he would hold up no more coaches the stage went safely on. It was this and perhaps

other such quick-shooting deeds on the Deadwood stage that gained him the name of Deadwood Dick."

Secured long after by Col. W F Cody for his "Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show," The "Deadwood Coach" itself largely partook in Dick's fame and thrilled thousands in the realistic encounters with redskins in war-paint and feathers and road-agents armed to the teeth as staged in a great travelling hippodrome. Mr Escott in a letter to Old Cornwall suggests that the old stage-coach may still exist at Golden Gate Park, San Francisco, where he was told, after "Buffalo Bill's" show had ceased to tour Europe and America it found a more restful place of exhibition.

After leaving the employ of the Homestake Mine "Deadwood Dick" continued to wage war with his unerring six-shooter upon the "bad men" of the Wild West, and a series of stories has been written about him, true or well-invented, until his name, sometimes varied to "One-eyed Dick" or "Dead-eye Dick," has become almost proverbial, for marvellous shooting and coolness in dangerous situations. No doubt he did much to bring respect for the law into places where it was lightly held. With him as Homestake bullion-guards were two Los Angeles men; Herbert B Eakin and W R Dickinson, and it was beside these two old companions of former days that he spent the last quiet years of his life. He died at Thorncroft Sanatorium, Glendale, California, in 1921, aged 73.

His only son, Mr. Maurice Bullock, now also dead, for many years lived at Bodieve, near Wadebridge. His parents, John and Elizabeth Bullock, were both buried at St Enoder, where the headstone bearing their names can be seen on the right as one enters the church