

“BY SAVAGE HANDS HIS STEPS WERE STAYED!”<sup>1</sup>  
LIFE AND DEATH ON THE PERCY ISLES, 1854

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In October 1854, the ketch *Vision* arrived at Middle Percy Island off Mackay on the central Queensland coast. The botanist Walter Hill, naturalist Frederick Strange and crew members went ashore. Hill went off with three Aboriginal people while the crew stayed behind with six others. When Hill returned, he found the crew except Dalaipi (an Aboriginal crew member) dead. Nine Aboriginal people were later captured and sent to Sydney to be tried for the killings. They appeared before the Water Police Court in Sydney before the court ordered they be sent back to the Percy Isles, though they appear not to have made it beyond Port Curtis. The death of Strange was widely reported in newspapers across Australia and was portrayed as a clash between the “heroic explorer and scientist” and the “untutored savage”. The events on the Percy Isles and further contacts on islands off the coast of central Queensland occurred from a time of limited hostile contact through a period of growing shipping movement, to a time of more substantial and lethal contact involving the Native Police. Contact events on the central Queensland coast reviewed here provide insights into reasons for initial limited hostilities on the offshore islands prior to increasing hostile and lethal conflict on mainland coastal and inland frontiers.

Keywords: Queensland, Percy Isles, Indigenous-European Contact, Frederick Strange

<sup>1</sup> *The title is from a poem by “G.F.A.” in The Sydney Morning Herald, 4 August 1855, p. 5, titled LINES TO THE MEMORY OF THE LATE FREDE. STRANGE. (WHO WAS MURDERED BY THE NATIVES OF PERCY ISLAND.). The theme of the poem and many of the newspapers of the time contrast the “noble man of science” with the “untutored savage”. “G.F.A.” is George French Angas, natural history artist and Colonial Museum (now the Australian Museum) Secretary.*

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### INTRODUCTION

Maritime frontiers are places where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples had early and often peaceful or neutral short-term encounters with seafaring outsiders, while coastal land frontiers are areas where outsiders arrived from the sea and/or land establishing permanent settlements along the coast and hinterland, resulting in increasing hostilities (McNiven, 2001). Contact events that occurred on islands of the central Queensland coast provide important examples of the processes involved, commencing with fleeting coastal European visits, progressing through more regular contact, and ending with permanent mainland settlement on adjacent mainlands. Tracing the development of these events through contemporary newspaper reports and other sources provides a picture of how amicable coastal contact developed prior to more lethal coastal and mainland conflict. The events that occurred on the

islands of the central Queensland coast developed before the commencement of warfare on the mainland pastoral frontier, and prior to the full impact of the activities of the Native Police.

Prior to Aboriginal–European contact on the Percy Isles in 1854, *The Moreton Bay Courier* (Anon, 1854a, p. 2) reported that the residents of Brisbane considered Aboriginal people of the central Queensland coast and surrounding islands to be “savages”. They had developed an “evil reputation” (Daly, 1887, p. 31), and Delamothe (1969, p. 6) could recall no other region of the continent where numbers of Europeans killed or wounded exceeded the number of Aboriginal casualties, though as argued below this appears to be overstated. Earlier significant attacks on Europeans had occurred in the Torres Strait on the *Charles Eaton* in 1834 (McCalman, 2013, p. 79; Ørsted-Jensen, 2011, Appendix A, p. 208), around Brisbane from first settlement in 1824 (Connors, 2015, p. 58), and at the southern

end of the Great Barrier Reef following the wreck of the *Stirling Castle* in 1836. The story of Eliza Fraser led colonists to see Aboriginal people as “violent, animalistic and sexually predatory”, even though much of Fraser’s story was discredited (McCalman, 2013, p. 64). Behrendt (2016, p. 54) notes that stories of “native barbarity” associated with Eliza Fraser were embellished to justify violence and dominance, and to gain support for plans to eradicate, subdue, tame, contain and control Aboriginal people. Significantly, *The Moreton Bay Courier* (Anon, 1854a, p. 2) also referred to events on the Percy Isles as murders carried out “by natives of an island near New Caledonia”, suggesting that perhaps the coast and islands of Queensland were perceived as coterminous with those of the Pacific, all of which were inhabited by “savages”. This view is shared with McCalman, who argues there was a popular fascination with “the sexual perversity, violence and cannibalism of South Seas natives” (McCalman, 2013, p. 67). Thus, the reputation of the Aboriginal people of the central Queensland coast may have become enmeshed without justification in this broader geographical perspective. Nevertheless, conflicts did occur within the area as Aboriginal groups began to resist the invaders, and these conflicts are investigated here to determine what causative factors were involved.

Since 1978, I have undertaken archaeological investigations on islands off the central Queensland coast (e.g. Rowland, 2008), though detailed documentary evidence of the violence and degradation to which the indigenous Keppel Islanders (Woppaburra) were subjected also became a significant focus of study. When Keith Windschuttle (2002) downplayed the role of frontier violence in Australian history, the responses from scholars and the media were numerous and wide-ranging (e.g. Attwood, 2005; Clark, 2002; Macintyre & Clark, 2003; Manne, 2003; Ørsted-Jensen, 2011). Many researchers focused on definitions and numbers of people killed, but I cautioned that what happened to the Woppaburra demonstrated that it was important to be aware of the complex human tragedy behind definitions and body counts, and that it was important to report local and regional events as individual narratives since they highlighted a level of suffering not always disclosed by broader debates (Rowland, 2004a). Aboriginal people were shot but also suffered from the impact of introduced diseases, were poisoned, sexually abused, kidnapped and used as forced labour, imprisoned and hanged, introduced to alcohol and tobacco, and dislocated from their lands and resources (Bottoms, 2013; Campbell, 2002; Evans et al., 1975;

Reynolds, 2013). But Aboriginal and European people acted in very individualised ways in local and regional areas. In 1982, my archaeological focus shifted to the Percy and Whitsunday Islands (Rowland, 1984, 1986). At the time, I briefly reviewed contacts between Europeans and Aboriginal people on the islands, but access to information was limited. Now, with online access to a greater range of documents, it is possible to focus in more detail on contact events on the maritime frontier in the vicinity of the Percy and Whitsunday Islands. Again, while body counts are noted, the focus is on the human tragedies suffered on both sides of the frontier.

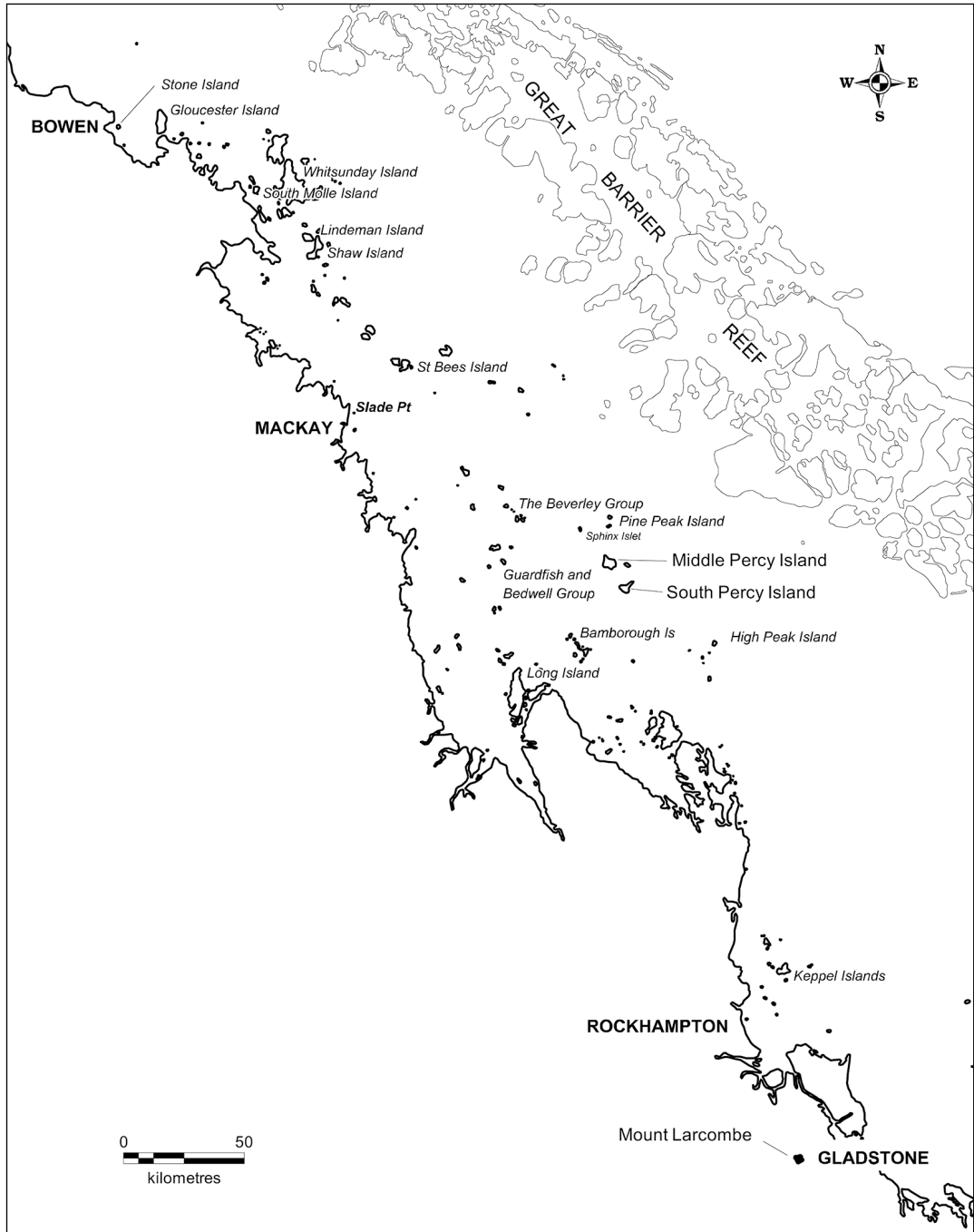
This paper complements one by Comben (2017) previously published in the *Proceedings*, but adds to and extends the scope of that paper. Comben (2017, p. 75) focused on developing a biography of Strange from disparate sources and previously conflicting information, and concludes that while Strange did not have the professional background of naturalists of that era, he succeeded, prior to his death, in becoming a “fine naturalist and Australian pioneer”. Comben also outlines the events leading to Strange’s death on Percy Island in 1854. In this paper I do not discuss Strange or his abilities as a naturalist, which is well covered by Comben. Rather, I outline the events that occurred on Percy Island in greater detail and discuss other cases of contact and conflict on the central Queensland coast prior to European mainland settlement. Contact events are often cited in full to maintain integrity of the narratives. It is apparent that initial conflicts along the maritime frontier may have been limited and fatalities few, a situation which changed dramatically following mainland settlement.

#### THE PERCY AND WHITSUNDAY ISLANDS

The Percy Isles comprise two major islands and nine smaller ones covering a total area of about 43 km<sup>2</sup>, stretching 180 km along the coast between 20° and 21.5° south latitude. They are the most distant group of islands off Australia’s east coast. From Middle Percy Island it is about 125 km north-west to Mackay, 85 km to the nearest point on the mainland, and 40 km to the Guardfish and Bedwell Group of islands directly to the east. The Percy Isles are in fact closer to the outer fringes of the Great Barrier Reef (about 50 km) than to the mainland. The Whitsunday Islands comprise over 70 islands ranging in size from less than 1 hectare to over 10,000 hectares. They extend north to south over 200 km and are closer to the mainland than the Percy Isles (Barker, 2004, p. 1; Border, 1999,

pp. 129–130) (Figure 1). Given the limited watercraft technology available in the area and the distances involved, it is somewhat surprising that many of the islands were visited or occupied (Rowland, 1984).

FIGURE 1. Islands and coast of central Queensland; places mentioned in the text.



### EARLY EUROPEAN COASTAL CONTACT

The first documented 'discovery' of the Australian mainland by Europeans occurred at Cape York in 1606, which also marked the first recorded instance of Indigenous–European conflict when a crew member from the Dutch vessel *Duyfken* was fatally speared near the Wenlock River (Mulvaney, 1989, p. 8; Sutton, 2008). Following this initial contact, Lieutenant James Cook took possession of the east coast of Australia in 1770, and several explorers later observed people on the offshore islands and adjacent mainland of central Queensland; however, initial contacts were transitory and recorded details are few (Bowen & Bowen, 2002, p. 39; Pearson, 2005, pp. 15–28). Contact may have been friendly or cautious, with limited competition for land or resources.

In June 1770, Cook passed by the Percy Isles, noting them as “an indistinct landmass” (Beaglehole, 1955, p. 333). In 1802, Matthew Flinders named the Percy Isles, and while he spent about six weeks in the area, he had few contacts with Aboriginal people (Flinders, 1814, pp. 56–95). In 1812, the *Cyclops* took the inner route through the Great Barrier Reef, but no record or charts of the voyage exist (Pearson, 2005, p. 95). In 1815, Charles Jeffreys on the *Kangaroo* charted the inner route but bypassed the islands. By this time the whale and seal trades were both flourishing, while merchant ships and transports were going to India from Port Jackson (Bowen & Bowen, 2002, pp. 78–80). Phillip Parker King's survey of the coast was initiated due to the increasing number of vessels using the inner-coastal route. In June 1819, King anchored the *Mermaid* at West Bay on Middle Percy Island and commented that “Tracks of natives, but not of recent date were noticed” (King, 1827, p. 184). King returned to the Percy Isles in June 1821 but made no mention of Aboriginal inhabitants, and he moved rapidly through the reef noting “native fires” on a number of the Whitsunday Islands (King, 1827, p. 8). Following the mapping of the coast by King, four more hydrographic surveys were undertaken. The first, in June 1841 on the *Beagle* commanded by John Lort Stokes, passed by the Percy Isles but made no detailed observations (Stokes, 1846, pp. 327–328). The *Fly*, supported by the *Bramble*, spent eight months surveying the Reef. In February 1843, the *Fly* sailed through the Percy Isles, but no observations were made of Aboriginal inhabitants on either the Percy or Whitsunday Islands (Bowen & Bowen, 2002, p. 89; Jukes, 1847, Vol. 2, p. 264). In 1847, the brig *Phantom* passed by the Percy Isles where native fires were seen, and later Shaw

Island where numerous fires were also noted (Anon, 1846, p. 4). In December 1847, the *Rattlesnake*, under the command of Captain Owen Stanley, anchored off Middle Percy Island, and MacGillivray, the naturalist, noted the presence of fire-places but none were recent. Significantly, it was reported that:

... the bush was thoughtlessly set on fire by some of our people, and continued burning for several days, until nearly the whole island had been passed over; the long grass and dead trees blazing very fiercely under the influence of a high wind (MacGillivray, 1852, p. 60).

In April 1849, the *Freak*, commanded by T. Beckford Simpson, and the *Harbinger* anchored in the lee of Middle Percy Island, where they found two men named Clarke and Davis on the island. The men claimed to be shipwrecked from the schooner *Bona Vista* on a *beche-le-mer* voyage to Torres Strait. However, conflicting statements given by the men led Simpson and Carron to suspect that they were escaped prisoners from either Hobart Town or Launceston. Simpson and Carron were correct in this assessment. The four men were John Hill, John King, Rees Griffiths and Matthew Clarke, who had escaped from Tasmania in the *Psyche*, a small yacht owned by the Bishop of Tasmania (Anon, 1949a, p. 3).

Clarke later claimed that the *Bona Vista* left Port Nicholson in New Zealand in February, became stuck on a reef and was holed. A raft was made of the vessel's spars and they landed on a number of islands before arriving on Middle Percy Island, where they claimed to have been for about three weeks and “have had nothing to eat during that time but small oysters and winkles”. One of their companions died and was buried on one of the islands (Carron, 1849, pp. 102–103). John Davis claimed that on the islands nearer the mainland [probably the Beverley Group] they had “a side-out with the natives” (Carron, 1849, p. 104). In 1852, the *Herald* undertook a new survey within the area and, in 1859, sailed on a second survey lasting six months, in which a visit was made to the Percy Isles to replenish water supplies. Unfortunately, very little was published concerning these voyages (Bowen & Bowen, 2002, pp. 105–106).

In sum, despite conflict occurring as early as 1606 on Cape York, and significant and ongoing conflict at Moreton Bay from 1824, little conflict appears to have occurred on islands of the central Queensland coast until the arrival of the *Vision* in 1854. Some explorers passed rapidly through the area (e.g. Cook),

though others (e.g. Flinders) spent nearly six weeks in the region but made little contact with Aboriginal people (or at least little was reported), though evidence of their presence was commonly observed. The inhabitants of the islands may have hidden from the explorers as they did on the Keppel Islands, with women in particular being shielded from Europeans (Rowland, 2004a, p. 12). It is also likely that not all islands were occupied on a permanent basis, lessening the chance of contact. Lesser-known explorers were in the area from at least 1797, and by 1802 whalers, sealers and other traders were taking the inner route through the Great Barrier Reef. By the time King had completed his surveys of the coast in 1822, at least 11 ships had been lost in reef waters, and in the ensuing decades up to 1861, some 148 further losses were officially recorded between Moreton Bay and Torres Strait (Bowen & Bowen, 2002, p. 86). The impact of surviving crews on the inhabitants of the coast and islands may have been significant but will probably remain unknown. The number of survivors of shipwrecks and runaway convicts was significant; only some of them made their way back to established European settlements on the mainland. The seeds of potential conflict at this early stage are not clear. Middle Percy Island was identified as an important source of potable water, which might therefore have been a source of competition. In 1847, Middle Percy Island was set alight by MacGillivray's crew, which would have reduced the island's resources and caused great offence to the islanders. Finally, in 1849, the convicts Clarke and Davis subsisted in the area for as long as three weeks, and at least one of their group died and was buried on Middle Percy Island. They also had a "side-out" with a group on one of the islands. The perspectives of neither the European nor Aboriginal participants in these early engagements can be abstracted from the available sources.

#### THE VISIT OF THE *VISION* TO THE PERCY ISLES IN 1854

The visit of the *Vision* to the Percy Isles in 1854 is the first contact event in the area where there are detailed records, and these events are reviewed in detail here as they give an insight into the causes of conflict. My original summaries of European exploration and contact throughout the islands of central Queensland were limited to brief reviews as background to archaeological investigations (Rowland, 1984, 1986). Access to online newspapers now provides a broader perspective on European–Aboriginal contact in the area

(in particular Trove online at <http://trove.nla.gov.au/>). Contemporary newspaper reports often provide more comprehensive coverage than official archive papers, and I have used them extensively. Ørsted-Jensen (2011) has undertaken a comprehensive search of newspapers and government sources relating to contact events in Queensland. In relation to the attack on the *Vision*, however, Ørsted-Jensen provides only three references and a very brief account, but as demonstrated below, considerably more information is available.

Frederick Strange purchased the *Vision* for the purpose of collecting specimens of natural history and left Brisbane on 12 September 1854, returning on 14 November after an attack on her passengers and "murder of some of them by natives of an island near New Caledonia" (my emphasis) (Anon, 1854a, p. 2). The captain was George Elphinstone Maitland, and the crew consisted of William Spurling, mate; William Vann, able seaman; Jeffrey Gray, ordinary seaman; and Andrew Gittings, cook and steward. The passengers were naturalist Frederick Strange and his assistant Richard Spinks; Walter Hill, botanist; and Deliape, an Aboriginal man whom they took on board at Moreton Island (see Comben, 2017, for a biography of Strange). Walter Hill was born on 31 December 1819, at Scotsdyke, Dumfriesshire, Scotland. He and his wife arrived in Sydney in 1852. He was chosen as first superintendent of the Botanic Gardens in Brisbane in 1855. When Queensland became a separate colony in 1859, he was appointed colonial botanist. He retired in 1881 and died in 1904 (McKinnon, 2013). There are different versions of the spelling of Deliape in newspaper accounts. He is "Dalaipi" referred to favourably by Thomas Petrie (see Petrie, 1904 [1980], Chapter 21). I use Petrie's spelling except where quoting directly. *The Moreton Bay Courier* notes that on return, Deliape left the vessel at Moreton Bay to re-join his tribe (Anon, 1854a, p. 2). His role as an intermediary in events on the Percy Isles remains obscure (Kennedy, 2013, Chapter 6).

On 14 October 1854 the *Vision* anchored at Percy Island, and on the following morning Strange, Spinks, Spurling, Gittings and Dalaipi landed on Middle Percy Island and went inland in search of water. On returning, they made contact with nine Aboriginal people and gave them fishhooks and tobacco. Another group of about 12 Aboriginal people was seen in the hills. Hill then went off to explore the "mountains". On returning, he observed:

... a body among the mangroves, and on examination, he found it was Spurling. He was quite dead:

having received a cut on the left side of his neck, from which much blood had issued, as well as from the nostrils:— he was naked; his clothes and boots having been taken away. He thought the wound might have been inflicted by a boomerang. ... Deliape came to him in a state of great excitement, and in answer to a question respecting Mr. Strange, said one of the natives had speared him in the thigh, and he (Mr. S), as soon as he had extracted the spear, shot one of the blackfellows, the natives then closed upon them, and commenced wadding Spinks and Gittings, and threw a spear at him (Deliape), but he ran away and escaped. They got aboard, but saw nothing more of the rest of the party. They did not land to search for those who were missing, because they had not sufficient strength—two of their crew having been seized with the measles [*sic*], and Deliape would not go ashore again. There was therefore only himself (witness) [Hill] and the captain. They fired several volleys of musketry next day, but it was not answered. On the 16th May [*sic*], weighed anchor and beat about the Island; on the 25th they observed a large fire. They arrived at Moreton Bay on the 13th November ... He [Hill] identified two of the prisoners, as having been among those who were left with Spurling when he had charge of the boat (Anon, 1854a, p. 2; Anon, 1855a, p. 4).

FIGURE 2. Walter Hill. Courtesy State Library of Queensland and John Oxley Library.

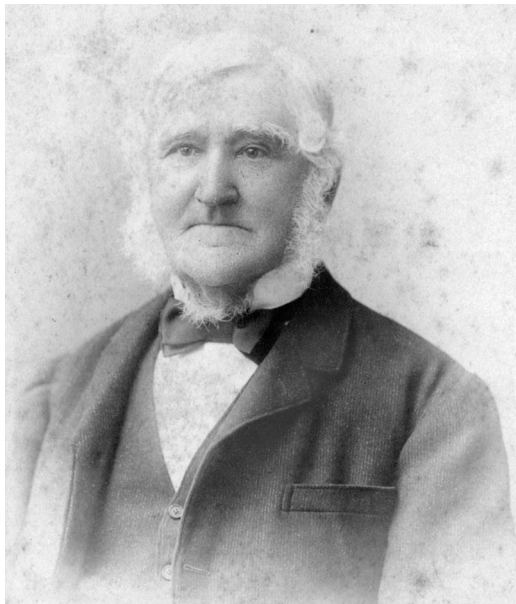
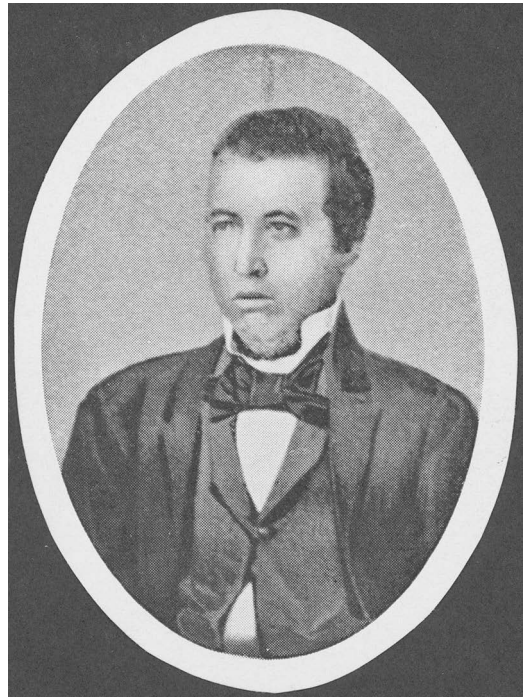


FIGURE 3. Frederick Strange. Papers of Gregory M. Mathews 1900–1949. Courtesy National Library of Australia.



In response to Hill's evidence, the *Courier* noted:

Notwithstanding that the very worst may be conjectured from the foregoing narrative, still it is to be hoped, that the search will not thus be given up, while there is the remotest chance of some of the missing men being alive. It is impossible to re read this account without a feeling of disgust for the pusillanimity of those who refused, although no doubt having the means of fully arming themselves, to go on shore and resume the search on the morning after the supposed murder (Anon, 1854a, p. 2).

The search for possible survivors became a political issue, entangled with attempts to rescue survivors from the wreck of another ship, the *Ningpo* at Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands, and with conditions and the rule of law at Moreton Bay. Consideration of resources for rescues over such a large area of north Queensland and areas of the Pacific led to calls for a steamer to be based at Moreton Bay or Port Curtis, along with a coal depot to facilitate search and rescue from those locations (Anon, 1854b, p. 5).

A number of references were also made to the savagery of Aboriginal people on this part of the coast.

The Sydney correspondent of *The Argus*, for example, noted:

I have little hope for poor Mr. Strange, for the Percy Islanders are of the same race as the people of North-eastern Australia, perhaps the most degraded set of savages on the face of the earth, who have no other tomb for the dead, in any case, but the stomachs of the living (Anon, 1855b, p. 4).

Evidence that the Aboriginal people of north-eastern Australia (or indeed Australia in general) indulged in cannibalism as implied by *The Argus* is rare if not non-existent, but was exaggerated in order to subdue Aboriginal people (Behrendt, 2016, Chapter 6).

On 29 December 1854, the government despatched the *Torch* with large quantities of trade, to induce the islanders to release Strange and his party if still alive (Anon, 1854c, p. 4).

A substantial account of what happened to Frederick Strange and his party, and the subsequent capture of those allegedly responsible, is contained in a report of 12 March 1855 by the captain of *HMS Torch*, William Chimmo. Chimmo reached Middle Percy Island on 29 January and immediately sent an armed party, under Francis Hixson, Acting Second Master, to search the island. His instructions to Hixson included: “... you will avoid as much as possible any unfriendly act, but treat them in the kindest manner” (Chimmo, 1855). The party returned to the *Torch* at sunset without success. At daylight, eight Aboriginal people appeared on the beach, armed with spears, waddies and boomerangs. Chimmo then issued orders to Hixson that: “Not one word is to be mentioned as to the real object of our visit, our only hope of recovering the dead bodies of our countrymen, being *stratagem*” (Chimmo, 1855, p. 15). The islanders were given pipes, tobacco, fishhooks and other presents, but when Chimmo proceeded up the creek to the scene of the murders, they disappeared. In the evening, Chimmo sent an armed party to search a few bark huts in the interior, but they returned without success. On 31 January, Chimmo sent a crew to search the mangrove swamp. At sunset the party returned, having found among the mangroves, half buried in the mud, the remains of Spurling. The bodies of Strange, Spinks and Gittings were not recovered, as they had apparently been thrown into the sea. John D. Macdonald, Assistant Surgeon, provided a detailed report on Spurling’s remains, from which Chimmo concluded that his death “must have been

an awful one, as his skull shews, lower jaw broken on one side, right side of skull entirely smashed, left leg altogether gone”. A canoe was seen with a paddle in it, and this was seized and destroyed (Chimmo, 1855, p. 15). Chimmo noted: “I could not leave this horde of murderers without an attempt to capture them, and bring them to justice.” He therefore ordered Hixson and 25 armed men to carry out a search of the island. These orders included ominously: “If they run away, they must take the consequences.” There is some ambiguity in the instructions, since Chimmo also advised that: “Endeavour to perform this service without firing a musket (it will redound much more to our credit if we do so), and only use your arms in your own defence” (Chimmo, 1855, p. 16).

Subsequently, Hixson landed with the 22 men but succeeded in capturing only nine individuals (two men, three women, and four children), while three men escaped. Two men were later seen on the beach, but they also escaped. Four canoes were destroyed. Hixson sent the prisoners to the *Torch* while he and the crew went in search of the other men, but again without success. The men made a number of attempts to escape. On 5 February, Chimmo landed 33 armed men on the island. The party later returned, having scoured the island without locating any inhabitants. Chimmo found satisfaction in knowing that there was not a living person on the island and that:

... this will be the last endeavour *by us* to rid this island of one of the most treacherous bands of murderers that could possibly disgrace the face of the earth. It is therefore sincerely to be hoped that not *one* will be left to retaliate this their retribution on any persons, who may hereafter visit this island (Chimmo, 1855, pp. 16–17).

Chimmo arrived at Port Curtis on 7 February, where he thought it important to make an impressive ceremony of interring the remains of Spurling in the Christian burial ground. Captain M. C. O’Connell, the Government Resident at Port Curtis, noted:

I shall be glad on this melancholy occasion to afford all the assistance it is in my power to give, to make impressive a ceremonial which may lead even the untutored savage to comprehend the vastness and energy of the protective power which watches over Her Majesty’s subjects (Chimmo, 1855, p. 19).

However, the outcome was contrary to expectations. It appears that Aboriginal people from around

Gladstone were aware of the Percy Islanders being captured, and a large and angry gathering was apparently about to descend on Gladstone to carry out revenge – the rumoured attack raising hysteria amongst the residents of Gladstone (McDonald, 1988, p. 22).

#### THE PERCY ISLANDERS IN SYDNEY

In Sydney, the Percy Islanders appeared before the Water Police Court on a number of occasions. An initial account from *The Sydney Morning Herald* states:

... six aborigines were placed in the dock upon suspicion of murdering Mr. Strange and others at the Percy Islands. They were accompanied by four children, apparently from two to four years of age. The Court House was cleared, and the uncivilized ladies and gentlemen were introduced – the legs of the men being fastened together with a rope. When they were shown into the dock the females walked into one corner, and the men to the other. The rope was then slackened, and one of the lords of the creation immediately seated himself comfortably in the corner to finish picking meat off a bone of large dimensions which he was assiduously gnawing with great satisfaction when he came into court. He was, however, evidently deeply interested in the proceedings, for he rose as soon as the case was proceeded with. The adults of both sexes had each been supplied with an apron, which they wore in a very careless manner. The children, however, were totally devoid of clothing. Three of them had their legs twined very affectionately round the necks of their mamas, who enabled them to preserve their seats by taking hold of their feet; the fourth, a young lady of about four summers, amused herself by standing on her toes, and peeping over the Dock at their worships, or stooping and peering through the bores at the visitors. Their knowledge of English was very limited, being confined to “Cockatoo,” “Woolloomooloo,” &c. One of them can say “kill white feller” very plainly, and another gives his name as Captain Moriarty (Anon, 1855c, p. 4; Hixson had reported that nine individuals were captured, whereas ten are reported in Sydney).

On their second appearance:

The men smiled as they were placed at the bar, but maintained throughout the proceedings the utmost quietude, cowering together in one corner, their

features bearing the appearance of dulness [*sic*] and inexpressiveness characteristic of the savage.

The black, Deliap, said he did not know what the cause of the blacks commencing the outrage was, but he thought *it was something about water* (my emphasis) (Anon, 1855d, p. 4).

The islanders again appeared before the Water Police Court on 3 April 1855, where Hixson indicated he had destroyed three canoes and had taken a number of clubs, boomerangs and a tomahawk off the island (Anon, 1855, p. 8). The prisoners were brought before the Water Police Court finally on 10 April 1855, where it was noted they had been “remanded so frequently” that:

They were discharged, and sent to gaol; there to be well fed and well clothed until opportunity offered of forwarding them to Port Curtis; from thence they are to be sent to the island from whence they were taken (Anon, 1855f, p. 5).

We cannot know what the Percy Islanders thought of their appearance in Sydney, but given the starkness of the Water Police Court, we can assume they would have found the experience alien and daunting (Figure 4).

The Percy Islanders were not sent to Brisbane and hanged (contra CHAH, 2017). Limited archival documentation indicates that at least one child died in Sydney, and others were refusing food and becoming sick. The survivors were taken by the steamer *William Miskin* to Gladstone (Comben, 2017, p. 73). In a single newspaper reference post-dating the appearance of the Percy Islanders in Sydney by 40 years, it is noted:

On the arrival of the vessel at Gladstone, the aborigines being apparently uncertain of their fate, jumped overboard during the night and made their escape. They were, however, destined to meet a worse fate. Falling in with a number of other blacks in the vicinity of Mount Larcombe, they were promptly murdered (“Variorum”, 1898, pp. 17–22).

The events that occurred on the Percy Isles were widely reported in newspapers across Australia. A poem was written in honour of Strange (see above title of this paper), and for some time after, people recalled the events that occurred on the Percy Isles. For example, F. T. Huckell on the Australian Exploring Expedition to North Queensland in 1856 wrote: “... we passed close to Percy Island, where Mr. Strange



and some of his party were murdered” (Anon, 1856, p. 4).

In sum, the attack on the *Vision* was the first known lethal attack on Europeans on islands of the central Queensland coast. Later, Walter Hill indicated that access to water triggered the conflict, and this was confirmed by Dalaipi. When Frederick Strange was speared, he was able to remove the spear and shoot one of the islanders. This action subsequently triggered the death of Strange, Shinks, Spurling and Gittings. No further mention is made of Vann (able seaman) or Gray (ordinary seaman). Coote (2014, p. 84) suggests the deaths were “a judicial spearing gone wrong”, but what this means exactly is unclear. Strange had previous experience in collecting around Bribie Island and had a conflict with Dundalli, but the nature of this conflict is unknown and it is impossible to tell what impact this might have had on Strange’s attitude to Aboriginal people on the Percy Isles (Connors, 2015, p. 154).

When the Percy Islanders appeared before the Water Police Court in Sydney, they were portrayed as “savages”, but somewhat ambiguously as harmless, perhaps childlike, and there is a prurient interest

in their demeanour and nakedness. The events that occurred on the Percy Isles created great interest throughout the colony and were widely reported. Significantly, the theme of the poem by “G.F.A.” in *The Sydney Morning Herald* of Saturday 4 April 1855 highlighted the thinking of many colonists of the day that events on the Percy Isles were a battle between the “heroic men of science” and the “untutored native savage”. In the colonial process, the obtaining of scientific knowledge added to colonial power. Exploration and scientific surveys were viewed as patriotic and heroic due to the dangers of a hostile and remote environment, though the explorers and naturalists themselves often came to rely on Aboriginal populations for guidance through the country (Noonan, 2016; see also Coote, 2014; Reynolds, 1980; Meston, 1895, p. 128; 1921, p. 12). Passage through unfamiliar societies and politics was made less fraught and less subject to failure as a result of assistance from Indigenous agents (Kennedy, 2013, p. 2), but sadly their voices are rarely heard or have been frequently overlooked.

In a biography of Frederick Strange, it was claimed that the Percy Islanders were tried in Sydney, “found

FIGURE 4: Water Police Court, Phillip Street, Sydney 1870. Courtesy State Library of New South Wales.



guilty and the 6 aborigines were returned to Brisbane, Moreton Bay NSW (Qld) where they were hanged” (CHAH, 2017). The author claims the original source for this information as Meston. However, there is no evidence for the hangings occurring in Brisbane in Meston’s *Geographic History of Queensland*, nor in a briefer account by Meston in *The Sydney Morning Herald* (Meston, 1895, 1921). The Percy Islanders were not hanged in Brisbane. In the two decades prior to the establishment of Queensland, there were 10 legal executions in Brisbane which did not include individuals from the Percy Isles (Connors, 1992, pp. 48–57). The account by “Variorum” in *The Capricornian* of 2 April 1898 suggests they jumped overboard at Gladstone and were subsequently murdered by Aboriginal people from Mount Larcombe. However, no other records could be located to support this claim and it is possible, given the nature of events in the area, that something more sinister may have occurred. Conflict was beginning to increase throughout the area, and it is possible that white retribution was visited on the prisoners (Comben, 2017, p. 74).

#### OTHER COASTAL CONTACTS AND CONFLICTS ALONG THE CENTRAL QUEENSLAND COAST

Following the attack on the *Vision* in 1854, a number of other contacts occurred on islands of the central Queensland coast. Records relating to these events are less complete and often contradictory. Nevertheless, they do reveal a growing resistance by Aboriginal people along the coast and some of the reasons that sparked the resistance.

The first event involved the *Santa Barbara*, which sailed north in September 1859 under the command of Captain Henry Sinclair, with passengers Ben Poole and James Gordon who wrote an account of what transpired (Breslin, 1992, p. 49; Gordon, 1934?; Kenna, 1921, p. 11). On 18 September they reached Middle Percy Island where “The captain set fire to the grass, and in the evening there was a splendid sight, the whole island being in a blaze.” On the 22nd and 23rd they went ashore and shot black-and-white cockatoos. No mention is made of Aboriginal inhabitants. On 13 October they reached Gloucester Island and had friendly contact with the islanders. However, on 14 October a canoe came out from the island and “The captain ... wished to shoot the blacks while in the water, but I [Gordon] persuaded him not to do so.” On 16 October they sailed back to the Cumberland Islands in search of water. The captain and Gordon went ashore to fell a pine to make a new bowsprit and were meet by three islanders.

They were initially friendly, and the captain went off with them. However, later he was seen running down a hill pursued by the islanders hurling stones after him. Poole and Gordon fired on the islanders, who bolted into the scrub. The captain was bleeding and “much hurt”. Gordon noted: “We all felt indignant at these treacherous scoundrels, and would have liked to shoot every one of them, but they had bolted into the scrub” (Gordon, 1934?, p. 5). Sinclair later died in Cleveland Bay on 17 March. There is no evidence to support the claim by Haebich that “an unknown number of Aboriginal men were shot and possibly killed” on this occasion (Haebich, 2008). Breslin (1992, p. 43) notes that in 1860 Dalrymple and Smith of the *Spitfire* also distorted the level of hostility in the area, based on the attack on the *Santa Barbara*.

In 1860, four people from the *Caroline* were allegedly killed at Homestead Bay on St Bees Island. In this case: “In a short space of time they had been pinned and butchered savagely, under the horrified gaze of their shipmates, back on board” (Winsor, 1982, p. 12). These events cannot be verified in any other source and are not mentioned by Ørsted-Jensen (2011). It is also alleged that the *Dundas* sheltered in the bay six months later and that Aboriginal people boarded her at night and killed all but the captain, who managed to get the ketch back to Bowen (McIvor, 1878). The attacks on the *Dundas* and *Caroline* lack verification, and unless more details come to light, they remain unsubstantiated (Blackwood, 1997, pp. 22–23).

The ketch *Ellida* left Bowen on 25 August 1861. On board were master Thomas McEwen, seamen Nicholas Millar and Patrick Savage, and passengers Henry Irving, Lowe and Byerley. On 27 August they were in the lee of an island in the Shaw Group when a canoe came out from one of the islands; its Aboriginal crew were encouraged to come on board and were given fishhooks and biscuits. They then returned to shore where there was a considerable number of their group. They returned with three more canoes, each carrying two people bringing presents of fish and spearheads; they were very friendly and unarmed. Millar got into one of their canoes, landed on the island and cut a spar for the squaresail. The Aboriginal people brought him back with a supply of firewood for the boat. He then proposed to Irving to go ashore to gather oysters, and he and Savage went ashore in the canoes. On landing, they were received in a friendly manner. However, later those Aboriginal people with Irving tried to get his carbine away from him. In the following attack, Irving and Millar were killed and their bodies were

seen on shore, where the natives were “mangling and ill-using them”. The *Ellida* retreated to Whitsunday Island, where there was a camp of Native Police. It was proposed to try to rescue the bodies, but the idea was abandoned in view of the large numbers of Aboriginal people (Anon, 1861a, p. 2). As soon as information was received at Bowen of the murder of Irving and Millar, the Commissioner of Lands, George Dalrymple, proceeded with the *Santa Barbara* and his own boat to the islands. Accompanied by Lieutenant Williams and a party of Native Police, they “made descents on the savages encamped there”. But the Aboriginal people managed to escape to inaccessible parts of the island. The remains of Irving and Millar were located and interred, and “the blacks’ camp was spoiled, and their canoes destroyed or taken away” (Anon, 1861b, p. 2). Loos reports the 1861 death of Irving and Millar as the first on the sea frontier, but this overlooks the 1854 events on the Percy Isles (Loos, 1982, pp. 124, 194).

On 30 May 1862, the cutter *Presto*, commanded by Captain William Hart, anchored between Shoal Point and Cape Hillsborough where he had sighted some Aboriginal people. Two passengers, Roberts and Sommerville, accompanied the captain ashore. Hart was unarmed for fear of causing alarm. He gave bread and tobacco to the four Aboriginal people whom they met, and made signs that they were looking for a cattle station. The four Aboriginal people made signs for Hart and his men to follow them. However, Roberts insisted on going alone. Another 12 Aboriginal people then arrived with nullah nullahs. Two more crew from the *Presto* landed and by displaying guns managed to subdue the Aboriginal people’s hostile approach. Hart and the crew searched the nearby scrub but found no sign of Roberts. The next morning they sailed for Rockhampton to report the disappearance of Roberts to John Jardine, the local Police Magistrate (Kerr, 1980, p. 37; Loos, 1982, p. 194; Queensland State Archives, 1862). This event is not mentioned by Ørsted-Jensen (2011).

The schooner *Nightingale* left Sydney on 21 January 1864 for Bowen. On 8 February 1864 it became stuck in a cyclone and beached on Long Island. The crew made a boat out of planks and on 22 February headed north. They suffered many hardships and were attacked by Aboriginal people from Lindeman Island but were picked up by the *Three Friends* of Bowen. It is claimed that the captain of the *Nightingale*, Quinn, later died at Bowen (Anon, 1864, p. 4). Confusion surrounds this event, since Breslin (1992, p. 78) claims that the crew of the *Nightingale* fell in with a group of

Aboriginal people who “harboured them”, and Ørsted-Jensen (2011, Appendix A) notes that the Master (unnamed) of the *Nightingale* was murdered at the mouth of the Burdekin River.

The *Louisa Maria* beached on Whitsunday Island on 16 August 1878 to clean her bottom. On board were the captain, McIvor; John Johnson of Brisbane; John Morrison, the cook; and Andrew Walker, a carpenter. Relations with the island Aborigines were initially friendly, but subsequently Morrison was thrown overboard and McIvor was speared. Aboriginal people were seen passing the sails of the *Louisa Maria* into their canoes and, soon after, the vessel was seen burning. Morrison was not located, and the survivors headed first for Bowen but later for Mackay. They were picked up by the *Riser* and went back to the island, and at daylight found that only the topmast and mainmast of the *Louisa Maria* survived. Aboriginal people were seen walking along the beach, and McIvor and three men went ashore. The Aboriginal people ran behind rocks and into the scrub, and began throwing stones and making fun of the men. Three shots were fired at them but without effect. Seeing nothing further could be done, they left for Bowen (Anon, 1878a, p. 3; Loos, 1982, p. 222; McIvor, 1878, p. 2; Ørsted-Jensen, 2011, p. 238). The Bowen correspondent of *The Brisbane Courier* noted:

It is said that the authorities will send a body of black troopers to the island to disperse the savages in the orthodox Queensland native police fashion. Most of the blacks engaged in this diabolical act can be identified. If caught, it might have a wholesome effect to hang them, and compel as many natives as could be brought together to look on (Anon, 1878b, p. 5).

George Nowlan led a detachment of Native Police to the Whitsunday Islands, where the troopers spent a week executing “reprisals”, and it is stated that the islanders were “permanently ‘dispersed’, and that they will trouble calling vessels no more” (Anon, 1878c, p. 6). The local historian Blackwood notes that despite diligent searching at the State Archives, an official report on the matter could not be found (Blackwood, 1997, p. 23). Nevertheless, Richards concludes from what is known of frontier euphemisms like ‘permanent dispersal’, it is reasonable to suggest the killing of many innocent people took place (Richards, 2008, p. 147). This is supported by Coppinger’s account of his visit to the lighthouse on Dent Island in 1881. He was told by the lighthouse people that following

the attack, the Queensland Government had made an example of the attackers by letting loose a party of black police, “who, with their rifles, had made fearful havoc among the comparatively unarmed natives” (Coppinger, 1883, pp. 185–186).

Ørsted-Jensen reports that a European (unnamed) was killed by Aboriginal people in the Cumberland Islands in 1880, and also the death of Henry Greenlaw and the mate, George Jones, of the *Beryl* near Barrow Point at Knight Island in 1893 (Ørsted-Jensen, 2011, pp. 239, 248). McNiven and colleagues refer to a police inspector and black trackers “dispersing” Aboriginal people on Collins Island in Shoalwater Bay in the early 1870s in retribution for the murder of a local Chinese *beche-de-mer* operator (McNiven et al., 2014).

In sum, it is claimed that the Aboriginal people of the Whitsunday Island Group had an “evil reputation”, but this appears to be inflated. For example, there is no evidence for cannibalism as implied by *The Argus*, and cannibalism was rare if non-existent, but exaggerated in order to subdue Aboriginal people (Behrendt, 2016, Chapter 6). From the time of Cook’s passage through the islands in 1770, until 1861, relations were largely amicable (Barker, 2004, p. 26). Significant attacks on shipping began after 1861 with the establishment of Bowen. Breslin notes that in establishing Bowen, George Dalrymple had no intentions of establishing good relationships with Aboriginal people (Breslin, 1992, p. 56). Attacks on European ships after the establishment of Bowen brought harsh retaliation from the Native Police (Coppinger, 1883, pp. 183–193; Rhodes, 1937, p. 100), though substantive records are difficult to locate (Blackwood, 1997, pp. 22–23).

Following the attack on the *Vision* at Percy Island in 1854 when four European men were killed, the *Santa Barbara* was attacked in 1859, resulting in the death of Captain Sinclair. There are then unsubstantiated accounts for the deaths of four European men: two from the *Ellida* in 1861 at Lindeman Island, one that may also have occurred on the *Nightingale* in 1864, and one that occurred on the *Louisa Maria* in 1878. Mr Roberts from the *Presto* disappeared in 1862. Therefore, between 1854 and 1878 there were no more than 11 (and maybe as few as six) European deaths resulting from conflicts on the islands. The number of Aboriginal deaths is largely unknown but was likely high.

#### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

From the late 1960s, Australian historians began to investigate the impact of colonisation and dispossession on Indigenous Australians and on Indigenous

resistance to the impacts (Reynolds, 1982; Reynolds & Loos, 1976). Interpretations led to the so-called ‘Black Armband’ or ‘White Blindfold’ versions of the past and ultimately to the so-called ‘history wars’ (Attwood, 2005; Evans, 2010; Macintyre & Clark, 2003). It is now recognised that a more nuanced approach is required, where complexity and contradiction are critical (Clark, 2002).

To suggest that British colonies in Australia were civilised societies governed by morality and laws that forbade the killing of the innocent, as proposed by Windschuttle, is seriously flawed (Windschuttle, 2002). Apart from direct killing, the colonists caused resource disturbance and depletion, and introduced diseases which took a heavy toll on Aboriginal populations across Australia (Campbell, 2002). Equally, to idealise the Aboriginal past as a time of peace and harmony does no justice to the evidence and no service to historical truth (Behrendt, 2016, Chapter 7; Rowland, 2004b; Sutton, 2009). But the impact of Europeans on Aboriginal people was disproportionately higher on all measures. While Reynolds and Loos, for example, could account for 800 to 850 deaths of Europeans in the 50 years it took for the colonial settlement of Queensland, they estimate that retaliation by settlers was in the order of at least ten to one. (Reynolds & Loos, 1976, p. 214). Ørsted-Jensen (2011, Appendix A, p. 251) has estimated that perhaps 121 Europeans met their death at the hands of Aboriginal people on the east coast and Gulf coast of Queensland (and another 186 in Torres Strait). From the initial small-scale skirmishes on the coast, there are now revised estimates of 25,000–30,000 Aboriginal and 2500–3000 European deaths (Reynolds, 2013, p. 245), and more recent estimates of an Aboriginal death toll in excess of 60,000 for Queensland (Evans & Ørsted-Jensen, 2014). Prior to permanent European settlement on the mainland, the number of deaths on the islands of central Queensland were relatively small, though suffering on both sides of the frontier was significant.

European and Aboriginal people met in such a wide variety of circumstances that it may be difficult to reduce the diversity of contacts to simple generalised patterns of behaviour (Reynolds, 1982, p. 20). But some general patterns can be recognised. Mulvaney, for example, notes that every instance of contact took place on Aboriginal land, but that few of the newcomers acknowledged this reality (Mulvaney, 1989, p. 1). But first encounters cannot be seen purely in territorial terms. They may instead be seen as encounters with relatives who had gone to the spirit world and

returned. These were a malevolent and “tricky” group to flee from or attack (Sutton, 2008, p. 54). The rules governing relationships in Aboriginal society were also highly structured, placing strict obligations both on the hosts and the visitors. A mutual ignorance of behavioural rules and individual roles produced many conflicts. Europeans, for example, were unaware of the Aboriginal concept of ‘balanced reciprocity’ and pressed goods on Aboriginal people without understanding what this meant (Breslin, 1992, p. 29). Most Europeans did not seem to realise they also breached Aboriginal law by fishing and gathering in Aboriginal territory without permission (Breslin, 1992, p. 32).

Elkin (1951) has argued that, from 1788, a general picture from across Australia was of Aboriginal people as shy and harmless. They did not rebuff newcomers, who were seen to be temporary sojourners. However, when it became obvious that the newcomers were to remain and that their numbers were increasing, clashes over resources became commonplace and Aboriginal people began to offer overt and determined resistance. In most areas prior to permanent European settlement, Aboriginal people were given an accurate preview through their own networks of what European civilisation had to offer, which included disruption, denigration and disrespect (Breslin, 1992, p. 29; Reynolds, 1982, p. 15).

The sea may be perceived as an unwelcome wilderness, while the land is an area of safety; or alternatively, it might be seen as entirely familiar and unthreatening (Mack, 2011, p. 74). It is likely that Aboriginal people of the Queensland coast found the islands and the sea largely unthreatening, while the early explorers may have been less confident of their surroundings. Europeans who landed from ships were usually in quite small parties. They could obtain water and other resources. Aboriginal people could gain access to the white man’s goods without the disadvantages of permanent European settlement (Reynolds, 1982, pp. 174–175). But this should not obscure the significance of Aboriginal resistance to seafaring Europeans (Reynolds, 1982, pp. 181–182). Reynolds notes that shipping through the Whitsunday passage was particularly vulnerable to attacks although, as I have shown, evidence for this prior to the establishment of Bowen in 1861 has been exaggerated. Nevertheless, the *beche-de-mer* industry is thought to have exploited coastal Aboriginal people as early as the 1840s, and by the 1870s the kidnapping of Aboriginal people along the coast and adjacent islands was common practice (Donovan, 2002, p. 81; Loos, 1982, pp. 122–123, 141). While

most islands visited by early explorers on the central Queensland coast revealed evidence of Aboriginal presence, actual sightings were fewer and large gatherings not common. Prior to about 1859, the intermittent contact between explorers, Royal Navy hydrographers, traders, castaways and Aboriginal Australians was one devoid of any desire to possess and subdue Aboriginal lands. The relationship was therefore an essentially friendly one, and the Aboriginal inhabitants may have generally accepted brief visitations by Europeans who then subsequently moved on (Breslin, 1992, pp. 1, 15).

From 1859 on, however, the white invasion began (Breslin, 1992, p. 1). Gladstone was established with the arrival of a contingent of Native Police in 1854 (Loos, 1993). Dalrymple began establishing the first permanent settlement at Bowen in April 1861, and mainland conflict commenced on a much greater scale (McDonald, 1988, p. 16). Europeans were now taking up large tracts of land for pastoral uses and stocking them with cattle and sheep, commandeering waterholes and preventing clans from using them (Bottoms, 2013, p. 18). It has long been recognised that frontier conflict was a form of warfare (Flanagan, 1888; Reynolds, 2013, p. 130), and Reynolds has recently made it abundantly clear this was the case in Queensland. For many years the Queensland Government funded and administered a force that shot Aboriginal people in large numbers (Reynolds, 2013, p. 153).

As McNiven (2001) has pointed out, research on maritime frontiers has been limited. But they were dynamic and changed in nature through time. They have the potential to vary enormously in detail. A diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups met with a diversity of outsiders from varied cultural backgrounds with different outlooks and intentions (McNiven, 2001, p. 178). It is impossible to generalise what the range of European views might have been, but the sad, chillingly brutal honesty and fatalistic views of “Rusticus” were probably all too common:

As to their being hostile, we need not be surprised, as they consider us invaders, which, in fact, we are; but we are placed in this predicament, – we must either retire from the place and leave a smiling country in the hands of a few cannibals, or we must protect our lives in such a manner as to convince the savage that he is powerless to cope with the white man’s arms, and teach him that his only hope of safety lies in submission. The former alternative I don’t think any sane man would think of adopting (Anon, 1861, p. 2).

There was arguably an official ‘conspiracy of silence’ in respect to violence on the frontier, but “there was also a considerable stream of minority reportage, in the colonial press, in official documentation, in private or public letters, in dairies, pioneer memories and confessionals” of what was a bloody struggle (Evans in Bottoms, 2013, pp. xvii–xiv). Nowhere is this more clearly demonstrated than in Queensland (e.g. Breslin, 1992; Donovan, 2002; Evans, 2010; Ørsted-Jensen, 2011; Reynolds, 2013; Richards, 2008). Barker (2007) has argued that the nature of Australian frontier conflict was such that there is little probability of massacre events being manifested in the archaeological record, but Litster & Wallis (2011) indicate that violence was ubiquitous on the Australian frontier and offer a range of evidence that might be indicative of such sites. Thus, both the historical and archaeological record should continue to provide evidence of contact and conflict.

The evidence of conflict on the Percy Isles and other islands of the central Queensland coast again draws attention to the debate over numbers and terminology. While numbers and terminology matter historically, we should not lose sight of the complex range of suffering experienced by both Aboriginal people and Europeans on both sides of the frontier(s) (Rowland, 2004a).

In an otherwise insightful account of Australian exploration, Kennedy (2013, p. 91) notes:

Australian explorers also ran the risk of attack

by indigenous peoples, and a few of them were killed. But most Aborigines either fled at first sight of explorers or found them keen sources of interest. Some sought trade and offered assistance, while those who did seek to harm these strange interlopers used such simple weapons that the wounds they inflicted rarely proved fatal. More members of expeditions probably were injured or killed as a result of the accidental discharge of their guns, falls from horse, and other mundane misfortunes than because of the murderous designs of hostile natives.

Kennedy is wrong on most counts. Aboriginal people were not murderous by intent. They were not “untutored savages”, nor were they “noble savages” (Rowland, 2004b). They were people who defended themselves, their families, communities and cultures. They rarely fled but, for a host of reasons, defended themselves and their territories. Europeans were killed by Aboriginal people, but far greater numbers of Aboriginal people were killed in return. Human suffering occurred on both sides. Stories of frontier contact are available from an abundance of sources (Bottoms, 2013, p. 207; Reynolds, 1982, p. 201; 2013, p.31). Detailed presentation of local and regional conflicts as undertaken here and elsewhere (Rowland, 2004a) tell powerful stories of contact and conflict, otherwise often overwhelmed by collective statistics and broad generalisations. Sadly, however, Aboriginal voices all too often remain silent.

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