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## **‘Wild Australia’: performers, productions and politics**

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# A Man of the ‘Wild’ Queensland Frontier: King Gida of the Kaurareg

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This biographical study concerns a Kaurareg man named Gida (c.1849–1899), who resided on Muralag (Prince of Wales Island), in Torres Strait in the late nineteenth century. It is part of a larger research project on the so-called ‘Meston’s Wild Australia’ or ‘Wild Australia Show’ of 1892–93 which was conceived by Queensland entrepreneur Archibald Meston. Meston conscripted a travelling troupe of Aboriginal people from the Queensland frontier whom he presented to the public as ‘wild’ but ‘magnificent’ both physically and in relation to particular skilled customs, yet doomed to extinction, being in the ‘dying days of their race’. The tour climax was planned to be their appearance at the Chicago World Fair in late 1893, but the troupe were left stranded by Meston in Melbourne.

The aim here is to provide a longitudinal and culturally informed account of Gida’s life, with understanding of a range of critical life events, in addition to those that projected him into the Wild Australia Show and allowed him to return triumphant from the tour. Gida became renowned as a leader being referred to as both a ‘King’ and by the ignominious name of ‘Tarbucket’, titles reflecting the ethnocentric colonial construction of the ‘other’ as both a romanticised primitive, partly of the ‘wild’, yet simultaneously a faithful servant of the state, shaped as such by the emerging Aboriginal policies.

Gida and his co-performers were conscripted from Kiwain village on Muralag. Gida had fled here as a young man after another village had been attacked and ‘razed’ in c.1870 by a punitive expedition led by Frank Jardine of Somerset settlement on Cape York, in which a significant number of his tribespeople were slaughtered for allegedly head-hunting the crew of a wrecked ship. An analysis of this phase of history more readily explains the personal and socio-economic impacts on Gida and the Kaurareg people, before tracing the later fate of Gida and the ongoing inter-generational trauma of his descendants as acknowledgement by their contemporary leader.

□ Kaurareg, Torres Strait, Australian Aboriginal studies, Aboriginal biography, frontier contact history, Indigenous performance, nineteenth century Queensland history, Gida, Archibald Meston.

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This biographical study concerns a man named Gida (born c.1849), who resided on Prince of Wales Island (traditionally known as Muralag) in the Torres Strait of Queensland in the late nineteenth century. It is part of a much larger research project on the so-called 'Meston's Wild Australia' or 'Wild Australia Show' (WAS) of 1892–93 which was conceived by the eccentric Queensland entrepreneur Archibald Meston. With the assistance of his contracted stage manager, a stock and station agent named Brabazon Harry Purcell, Meston proposed to take a troupe of Aboriginal people from the Queensland frontier and whom he presented, from his ethnocentric colonialist perspective, as being 'wild' but 'magnificent' both physically and in relation to particular skilled customs, although nonetheless doomed to extinction as a result of the popular racial (albeit incorrect) theories of the era. The troupe were to be a demonstration to the world of who these people were, and why Meston believed they were in the 'dying days of their race', with the climax of the tour to be their performance as a Queensland 'exhibit' at the Chicago World Fair in late 1893.

Of the 27 performers who volunteered to take the tour of '24 moons' without pay, five were of the Kaurareg nation who traditionally occupied the islands north of Cape York (i.e. the northern tip of Cape York Peninsula). As well as their leader Gida, there was his young wife Kemaliya, his adopted son Kawara, and two male warriors, Dugum and Bula. Insufficiency of space negates profiling these last two individuals in this paper, and in any case, comparatively little data are available on them; nor do we have space to provide a detailed description of the tour – these topics are addressed in other published and yet-to-be-published writings of ours (Memmott et al. 2021; Aird et al. 2015; McKay and Memmott 2016; Nugent 2018).

Our aim here is to provide a more longitudinal account of Gida's life, with understandings of a range of critical life events, in addition to those that projected him into the Wild Australia Show and allowed him to return triumphant from the tour. Gida became known as a leader, a spokesman, a pearler, a seaman, a linguist, a performer, and a

'mamoose'<sup>1</sup> and was referred to as both a 'King' and by the ignominious name of 'Tarbucket', titles that reflected the ethnocentric colonial construction of the 'other' as both a romanticised 'primitive', partly of the 'wild'<sup>2</sup>, yet simultaneously a faithful subject and servant of the state to be shaped as such by the emerging Aboriginal policies.

Gida's triumph was a shared one as a result of the troupe's professional capacity during 1893 to unify as a team in the face of their unexpected stranding, left penniless and sleeping in stables in Melbourne by Meston. They nevertheless went on to strengthen their role as ambassadors for their people as Australia's first trans-tribal Aboriginal performance group while they worked their way over months, to find their way back homeward. Of significance in our analysis are the local understandings of the colonial impacts on Indigenous peoples under the emerging regime of the Queensland State Government apparatus in its first 40 years as a separate British colony (1859–1899) and through its early years as a state under Federation (from 1901). This is the era of the first Aboriginal Protection Act 1897 which was ironically drafted partly by Meston and operationalised in his reinvented role as one of the first two Aboriginal Protectors in Queensland, despite the shame and ridicule he suffered in the media from the earlier cancellation of the tour and the subsequent bitter public wrangles with his business partners and manager.

The Kaurareg group of five performers in the 'Wild Australia Show' were conscripted from a village community which we have identified as Kiwain, on the north-east side of Muralag in view of Waibene (Thursday Island). Gida (born c.1849) had moved here as a young man after his people's village, according to Kaurareg oral history account<sup>3</sup>, on the south-east side of the island, had been attacked and 'razed' by a punitive expedition led by Police Magistrate Frank Jardine of the Somerset colonial settlement at Cape York (c.1870), in which a significant number of his relatives were slaughtered for allegedly head-hunting the crew of the wrecked vessel *Sperwer*. The paper commences with an analysis of this phase of history to more readily understand the personal and socio-

economic impacts on Gida and the Kaurareg society, before tracing the later fate of Gida and the inter-generational trauma of his descendants. This close analysis of historical events may cause the reader to challenge ‘who was really wild’ in this account.

This paper aims to make a methodological contribution to the challenge of reconstructing the biographies of particular Indigenous individuals of the nineteenth century from limited biographical data, albeit amply supplemented with historical and anthropological techniques of analysis to understand contextual circumstances. Of further significance in our paper, is the local ‘truth-telling’ of Kaurareg culture and history on behalf of the contemporary Kaurareg descendants who have been fighting for the restoration of their rights including over their land and seas, and the adaptive shaping of their identity in the modern world. We acknowledge and are indebted to those Kaurareg leaders who have provided us with encouragement and support in our reconstruction of this unique biographical history<sup>4</sup>.

## TRADITIONAL KAURAREG SOCIETY

Muralag or Prince of Wales Island was traditionally occupied by the Kaurareg people, also recorded as ‘Kauragal’, ‘Kawalgal’, ‘Kowieragas’; their wider country including all of the island cluster to the immediate north of Cape York including Tuined (Possession Island), Palilug (Goode Island), Ngurupai (Horn Island), Gialug (Friday Island), Kiriri (Hammond Island), Waibene (Thursday Island), Maurura (Wednesday Island), and Zuna (Entrance Island). They were sometimes termed ‘Wera Kauwagal’ meaning ‘Island Aborigines’ by other Torres Strait Islanders, and were closely related to the adjacent mainland Aborigines on the tip of Cape York, the Gudang, by intermarriage and regular interaction due to having a vital linking position in the trading network across the Strait between New Guinea and Cape York (Haddon 1890, 1904b; Lawrence 1994; (McCarthy 1939; see figure 1). The Kaurareg not only traded and inter-married with the Gudang but according to Southon et al. (1998, p.221) had shared turtle-hunting areas with them around the islands south of Muralag.

Muralag itself was the largest island in the Torres Strait, over 200km<sup>2</sup> and almost 20 kms x 13 kms, with rocky ridges, green valleys and flats, with permanent water in several places. The best estimate of the mid-nineteenth century Kaurareg population was 50 to 100 people, mostly on Muralag (Mullins 1992). A favourite Kaurareg camp was at the mouth of North West Creek. Another popular Kaurareg camping site on Muralag with permanent water and swamps was located a couple of hundred metres from Tarilag (Packer Island, near what is now Port Lihou). Local foods on Muralag included fish, crayfish, shellfish, seabirds, flying fox, mangrove fruits, goannas, turkey, roots, honey and wild fruits; however coconuts had to be imported (McNiven and Hitchcock 2004; Singe, 1979, pp.178–186).

There was a significant women’s sacred site on Muralag, a healing waterhole or ‘pond’, a site which the Kaurareg today identify as associated with the favourite wife of the ancestral hero Waubin wives. This site is at times also said to be a ‘Dugong Story’ place but the association with Waubin’s wife is more primary according to our Kaurareg colleague Milton Savage. Milton also emphasizes the cultural importance and status of the Kaurareg *kwod* or men’s ground on the east end of Muralag which served as a site for governance, initiation, education, a place of social learning, a ‘Kaurareg university’. Young initiates learnt magic (*puwi*) and were introduced to Kaurareg cosmology (pers.comm. Milton Savage, 6–7 February 2020).

During most of the nineteenth century, the Kaurareg were a vital link in the cross-Strait trade route (Lawrence 1994). Their principal exports to the north were dugong harpoons (*wap*), arm guards (*kadig*), scrap metal such as rods, flat sheet, nails etc which were obtained from shipwrecks on reefs in Kaurareg waters, as well as a range of marine products (turtle shell, shell armlets, necklaces, pendants) sought on the Gulf of Papuan coast, and spears and woomeras, these last two being imported from their Gudang neighbours on the Cape York coast. From New Guinea the Kaurareg imported bows, reed arrows, cassowary and bird of paradise feathers, and drums and most importantly dugout

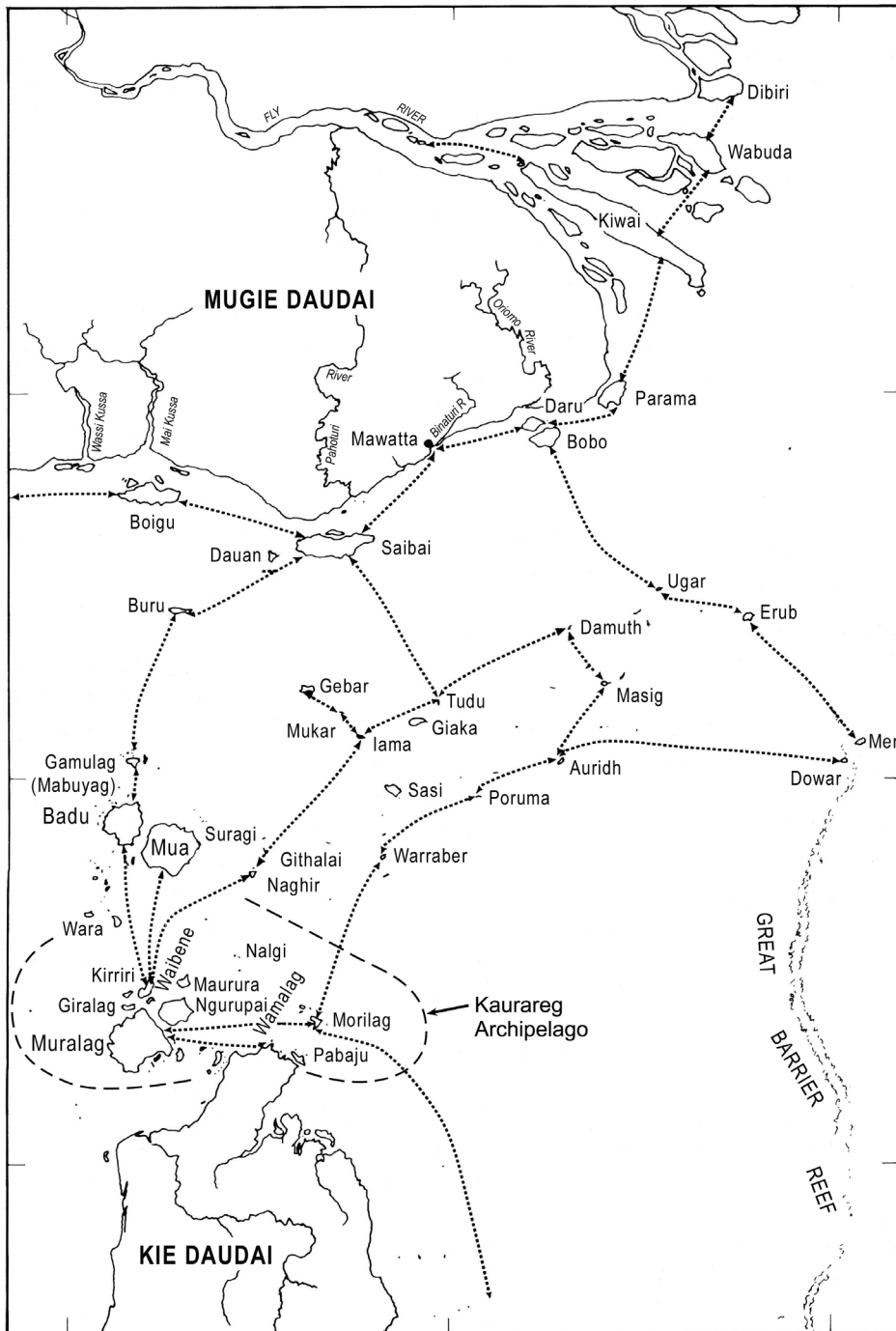


FIG. 1. The Torres Strait trade routes showing the pivotal role of the Kaurareg in the network between Kei Daudai (Cape York) and Mugie Daudai (New Guinea). (Source: Map adapted from Moore, 1979, p.302; island spellings follow McNiven 2015 with additional input by Dr Garrick Hitchcock (pers.comm. 11 March 2021).)

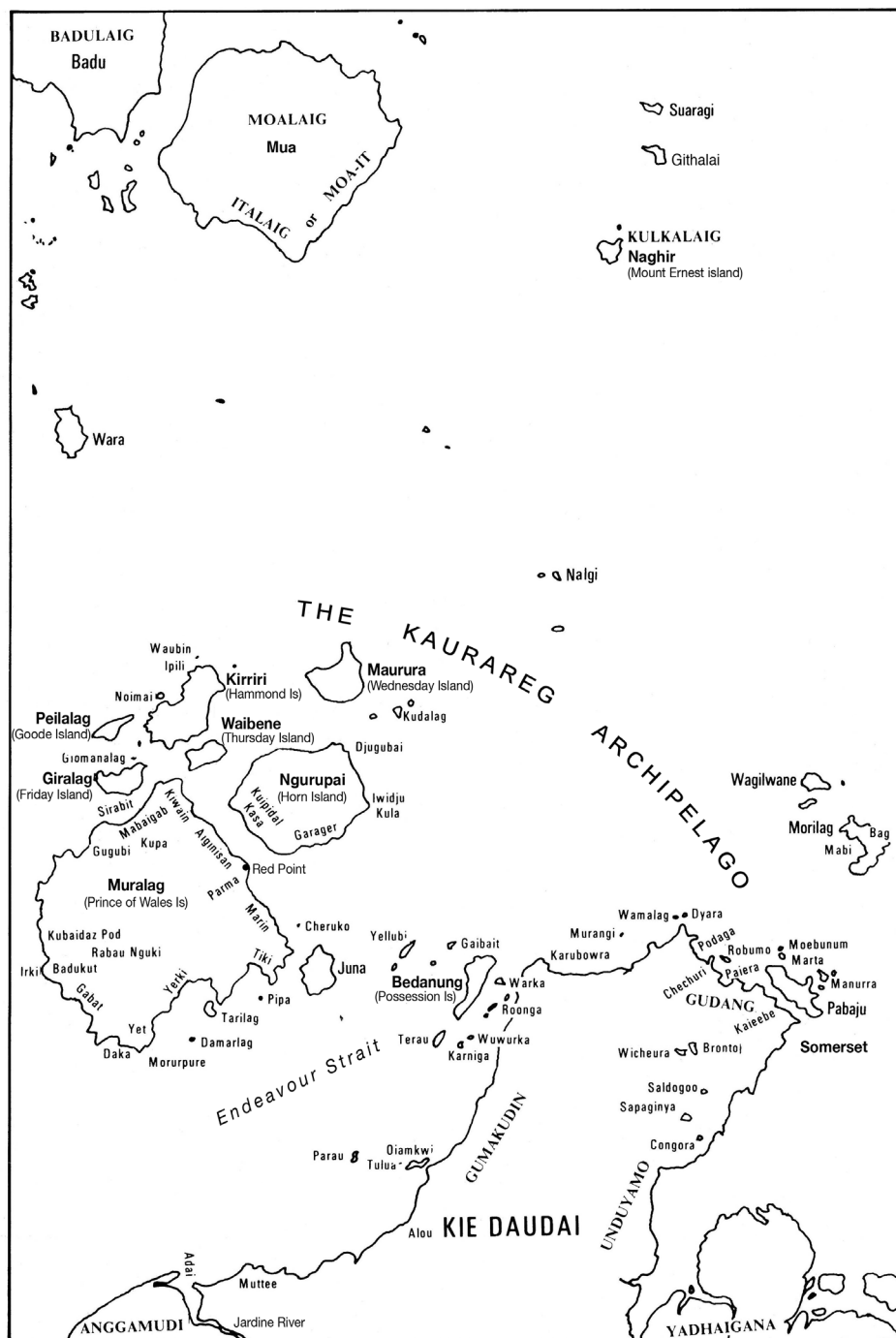


FIG. 2. The Kaurareg archipelago of islands off the tip of Cape York in northern Queensland with traditional names. Note the large island Muralag is also known as Prince of Wales Island. (Source: Adapted from Moore, 1979, p.302; island spellings follow McNiven 2015 with additional input by Dr Garrick Hitchcock (pers .comm. 11 March 2021).)

outrigger canoes via Islander communities to the north. An order for a canoe from Muralag had to be verbally sent via Mua (also known as Moa or Banks Island) their traditional allies, Badu, Mabuig, Saibai, thence east along the Papuan coast from village to village to those at the Fly River delta (e.g. Wabuda and Dibiri) where the source of suitable logs was located. Each intermediary might require a fee, and at Saibai embellishments were added such as outriggers, a gunwhale and figurehead. Haddon describes the payment system for canoes as occurring in instalments over three years, commenting on the remarkable regional commercial morality underpinning the reliable success of such long-term transactions (Haddon 1890, p. 641, 1904b, pp. 294–297; McNiven 2015). The capacity for status

in the Indigenous trade region seems to underlie the Kaurareg enthusiasm for looting shipwrecks for scrap iron as well as other exotic artefacts during the early and mid-nineteenth century, which in turn contributed to their ill-repute and perceived threat amongst European voyagers, traders and colonists.

According to Southon, based on research he did with Horn Island consultants in 1994–95, the Kaurareg archipelago was divided between a number of clans and each clan had a headman or chief, in colonial times called a *mamus* (or 'mamoose'). However there was also an overarching headman who had a level of governance over the Kaurareg fishery known as Waubinin Malu, the 'Sea of Waubin' (the ancestral hero) (Southon et al. 1998, pp. 221–222).

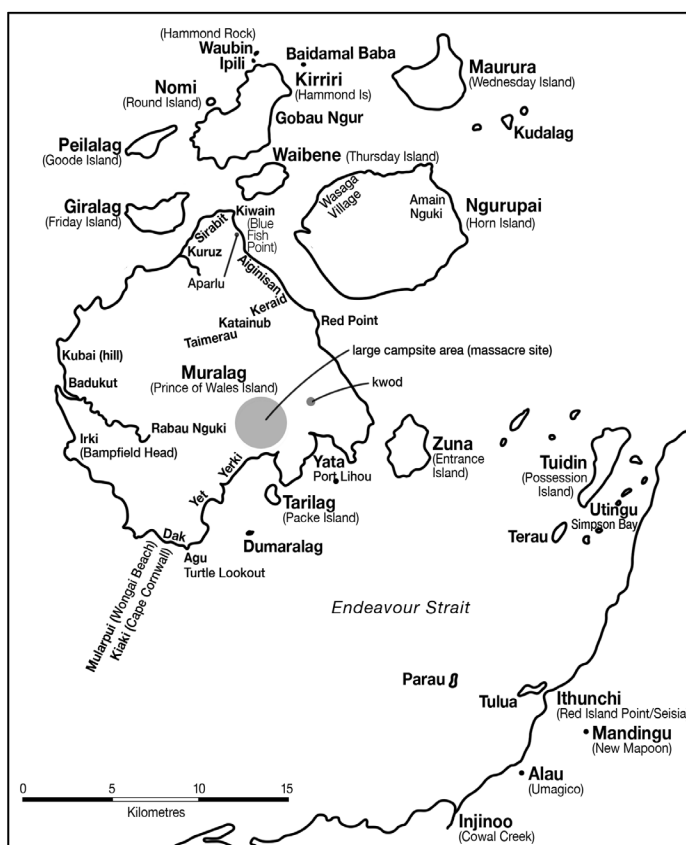


FIG. 3. Kaurareg geography of Muralag (Prince of Wales Island) and surrounds (reconstruction by Sharp (1992: Map 4), adapted by Aboriginal Environments Research Centre, University of Queensland; island spellings follow McNiven 2015 with additional input by Dr Garrick Hitchcock (pers. comm. 11 March 2021).)



## MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY CONTACT HISTORY OF KAURAREG AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SOMERSET

One of the first well-documented foreign contacts with the Kaurareg was that of a young 16-year old woman, Barbara Thompson, who was a survivor of the shipwrecked cutter *America* in December 1844, and was adopted by a Muralag leader named Pacquey<sup>5</sup> (or 'Peaqui'), and then became a (classificatory) sibling with Boroto. She was rescued by the crew of HMS *Rattlesnake* in October 1849 (Moore 1979, pp.5–9). Barbara Thompson left valuable ethnographic accounts of the Kaurareg; for example, the Kaurareg laws regulating ownership of every part of Muralag (Moore 1979, p.262).

In 1857, the ship *Sapphire* was wrecked on the Great Barrier Reef and the crew escaped north in small boats, but one boat-load of people was killed by Islanders (Singe 1979, p.182). Another historian Mullins thinks that it was the Kulkalgal of Naghir (Mt Ernest Island) who attacked the crew (Mullins 1995, p.17), an event which was to influence the shaping of the role of the first settlement in the region. However, according to a knowledgeable newspaper correspondent, Chas. Edwards (1870), the captain and 17 of the crew of the *Sapphire* were killed by Prince of Wales Islanders. This incident generated an adverse view of all of the Aboriginal people of Cape York and Torres Strait by colonial authorities (Mullins 1995, p.31).

The establishment of the settlement of Somerset at Cape York was initiated by the newly-formed Queensland Government in 1862 and came to fruition in 1864 (Bowen 1862; Laurie 1991). It was originally planned as a ship coaling and stores depot and the base for 'British colonisation' ('Northern Settlements'. 1864. *The Brisbane Courier*, 16 April, p. 6.) as well as in 1887 becoming the northern link of a telegraph line from Brisbane. John Jardine was placed in charge and appointed Police Magistrate and Commissioner of Crown Lands (Bowen 1864). His instructions included 'treating the Aborigines with kindness

and humanity' (Bowen 1864). Official dispatches from Somerset during 1865–1867 clearly indicate that Jardine had identified the different tribal groups in the region, in particular the Gudang around Somerset in the Cape York region, and the Kaurareg ('Kororega', 'Kororigas') on the adjacent off-shore islands including Muralag. From 1864 he was requesting detachments of Native Police<sup>6</sup> ([Lamb] 1864; Jardine 1865a; Pascoe 1965; Simpson 1866). By 1868, his son Frank Jardine became the Police Magistrate at Somerset after the family had established a cattle station at nearby Newcastle Bay (Jardine 1865b), but the cattle were reported as being 'interfered with' by local Aboriginal people (Jardine 1865c).

Contemporaneous dispatches in the mid-1860s mention shipwrecked passengers in Melanesia being eaten and the perceived threat of cannibalism was clearly a vivid fear for new settlers in this region (Bowen 1865; Bowen 1866; Queensland Parliament 1867, p.1107). Somerset was thus also seen to have a role as a vital rescue base for such shipwrecked persons.

During 1866, an official debate had developed in the Queensland Government as to the appropriate defence force for Somerset, namely whether to have Marines or the Native Police (Queensland Parliament 1867, pp.1107–1112), and requests increasingly called for the latter (Simpson 1866; Colonial Secretary's Executive Council 1867) to be conscripted, but from no group in local proximity, i.e. from southern regions (Queensland Parliament 1867, p.1110). There was a counter warning that a loss of control of Native Police was likely in such an isolated place resulting in mutiny, desertion and an 'internecine war with neighbouring aborigines' (Queensland Parliament 1867, p.1111). In January 1868, Sub-Inspector Uhr had become Inspector of Police at Somerset (Uhr 1868), and Frank Jardine was Clerk of Petty Sessions, Police Magistrate and an Inspector (Queensland Parliament 1870, pp.13–14, 17). Native Police are known to have been dispatched there in that year for patrols and protection of cattle (Colonial Secretary 1869).

In mid-1869, Frank Jardine took extended leave and was replaced as Police Magistrate and in five other official roles at Somerset by Henry Chester, coming from his role as Land Agent at Gympie (Chester 1969b; Carroll 1969, p. 35). Jardine chose to remain at Somerset and was reappointed in the Queensland Government in late 1870 (Prideaux, 1988, p. 184).<sup>7</sup>

## THE SPERWER INCIDENT AND THE KAURAREG

A fatal pivotal event for the Kaurareg occurred in April 1869, when Captain J. Gascoigne and his crew of the cutter *Sperwer*, aka *Speerweer*, were all executed at Muralag by what seems to have been a mixed group of Torres Strait Islanders (Jardine 1869a, 1869b; Chester 1869a; 'Country News, by Mail. Somerset, Cape York. The Massacre at Prince of Wales Island. The Wreck of the Tynemoth. The Booby Island Robberies. Difficulties with the Blacks.' 1869. *The Queenslander* 6 November, p.10.). This execution of Captain and crew was followed by a retaliatory massacre of many Kaurareg on Muralag as well as the execution of several Kulkalgal from the Central Torres Strait.

In November 1868, the cutter "*Sperwer*" left Melbourne, under the command of Captain James Gascoigne, bound for Batavia via Torres Straits. The crew was said to consist of two white men and five Malays. In about April [1869], the Captain and crew were murdered by islanders of the Prince of Wales group, and the cutter was burnt to the copper. (Carroll 1969, p. 40)<sup>8</sup>

The precise identity of the crew is confused in early reports. In 1868, during the *Sperwer's* previous leg of its journey it reportedly had a crew of two British men and eight 'Lascars,' – this term referring to sailors generally from India or South-east Asia ('A Dreary Voyage from Sourabaya' 1868. *South Australian Advertiser*, 14 July, p. 2.). A commentator Edwards (1870) said they were Javanese.

In studying this event which allegedly involved Gida as youth<sup>9</sup>, we found numerous partial accounts and

confusing, sometimes contradicting information requiring critical historical analysis. We have selected what seem to be the most reliable primary sources from Thatcher, Edwards, Jardine and Chester to compare to later accounts by Archibald Meston, the architect of the 'Wild Australia Show.' Previous important analyses of this event (Carroll 1969; McNiven 2018; Mullins 1995; Sharp 1992) do not appear to have uncovered, or even covered, all of those accounts, so we reproduce them in reasonable detail, in chronological order of appearance by way of a sub-analysis within the Gida narrative.

The reader should also be alerted as to the differing cultural and moral values held between Torres Strait peoples and the colonists. The majority of historical reports have been from the perspective of the colonists who frame the actions of the Islanders as 'savagery' and 'cannibalism'. Anthropological archaeologist Ian McNiven however has attempted to construct relevant aspects of the Islanders' underlying value system. McNiven describes a range of threatening behaviours that strangers could unintentionally manifest in spiritually charged cultural landscapes and seascapes of the Strait (McNiven 2018). The island geography included such dangerous places as the creation sites of ancestral beings (e.g. Waubin), increase ritual sites, animal bone storage sites and men's ritual lodge centres (Kwod) (McIntyre-Tamwoy 2011; Sharp 1992, pp.105–108). Ritual violence was directed onto strangers to remove their spiritual threat to local traditional owners, particularly when they were present in the littoral and near-shore zone.

When such constellations of actions by Europeans were perceived and interpreted by certain individuals as a spiritual threat to the safety of their person or their community, the appropriate response could be death and even mutilation.

While Europeans mostly essentialized these brutal actions as typical of 'savages', Torres Strait Islanders saw their actions as appropriate to either neutralizing the spiritual danger and potential destructive

power of spirits of the dead, intruders, and castaways (for example, hand removals) and/or enhancing spiritual power and status (for example, head removals). (McNiven 2018, p. 251)

This interpretation was supported by the contemporary leader of the Kaurareg, Milton Savage (pers. comm. 6 February 2020) who has confirmed the ritual nature of these deaths, and is of the view that cannibalism (consumption of human flesh as food) did not occur as a practice in the Torres Strait, but only on the New Guinea mainland in the vicinity of the Fly River. Let us turn to how the colonists recorded these practices.

### JOURNALIST RAYMOND THATCHER'S ACCOUNT OF THE SPERWER INCIDENT

Raymond Thatcher was a journalist who was living in Roebourne in the north-west of Australia during 1869. Thatcher wrote in late October 1869 of the discovery of the massacre by the crew of the *Melanie* and of the first retaliatory attack led by Frank Jardine:

Both the Sydney vessels of course came round via Torres Straits, while the *Melanie* was lying in Somerset (Cape York), Captain McEnroe [sic, McAusland] went over to Prince of Wales' Island, some 40 miles distant, to trade for tortoise-shell, the natives in the canoes who boarded the vessel said they had none with them, but plenty at camp, and evinced great unwilling to take the party to where it was, the captain insisted, and on arriving at the camp he found several articles of clothing, pieces of sails, rigging, &c., that convinced him that some vessel had been wrecked or taken, he immediately seized some of the natives, and they then told him that some men of another tribe had taken a vessel some days before, killed the crew, and scuttled and burnt her. He returned to Cape York and told Mr. Frank Jardine, the police magistrate [sic, had stood down

two months previously], what he had seen and that gentleman being a Queensland magistrate, and consequently not hampered by any absurd aboriginal protection instructions, immediately organized a party of mainland natives (Zardigans) and assisted by some Tanna men [South Sea Islanders from the island of Tanna, now part of Vanuatu] from the *Melanie* went over to the island, crept on the dastardly wretches at daylight, and 'dispersed' the men of the tribe, justly avenging a most brutal and unprovoked outrage. At the camp they found amongst other plunder, the log-book of the ill-fated vessel with entries up to the day of the massacre, she proved to be the *Spurwar* of Batavia, a cutter of 16 tons burthen [ship tonnage], commanded by Captain Gascoyne. ... (Thatcher 1869)

By October 1869, the schooner *Melanie* had sailed west to the Roebourne area for pearl-fishing (Thatcher 1869), which is when Thatcher was presumably able to hear the story of the *Sperwer*, possibly from the captain or the crew. The term 'dispersal' was used in official and media writings of the colonial times to mean both 'chased away' and massacred. Did this occur at this Kaurareg camp or village? Note the suggestion that the culprits were not in fact Kaurareg, but from another tribe.

### JARDINE'S INITIAL TRUNCATED ACCOUNT

In early November, Frank Jardine wrote to *The Brisbane Courier* about the *Sperwer* massacre and recounted that upon hearing rumours, he requested the loan of two vessels from Captain McAusland of the schooner *Melanie*. He said they went to Prince of Wales Island to investigate with four native troopers. Jardine further stated:

... the story the natives tell is: that the *Sperwer* was anchored off Wednesday Spit, trading with the blacks for pearl and tortoiseshell, and that her crew were murdered in two parties at a given signal; one

party on board the vessel, consisting of the captain, his son, cook, and two seamen; the other on shore, while employed cutting wood. The captain's wife I can hear nothing certain of, but believe she is still alive amongst the natives of Badu. (Jardine 1869b)

We note that there is no other account that proves the captain's boy was on board the *Sperwer* (this assertion is later dispelled). Jardine found a variety of ship's gear and crew's possessions including clothes, in a camp; with 'natives dressed in shirts and trousers' (Jardine 1869b). One may well ask whether the other tribe may have been from Badu? Jardine then stated:

The bodies of the murdered men have been put up into trees, near Red Point [north-east side of Muralag]; but as the heads and all the clothing have been taken off, they cannot be recognised. The cutter has been run ashore and burned at the same place, and I hear that there is still a large quantity of property lying close to her, but as it would be unsafe to divide our small number into three parties (viz. – one at Somerset, a boat guard, and one to search inland) I am unable to search for it. (Jardine 1869b)

Note that Jardine makes no mention in this newspaper article of taking revenge or killing any Kaurareg despite Thatcher's assertion that he did.<sup>10</sup> 'Jardine took his leave of absence before any further enquiries could be made, so the next visit was left to Chester' (Carroll 1969, p. 40).

## THE INCIDENT ACCORDING TO CHAS EDWARDS

In January 1870, Mr Chas [Charles] Edwards wrote to a Perth newspaper 'Inquirer and Commercial News' (5 January 1870) to give further details about the incident. He writes as if he was present on the *Melanie* with Jardine. He reported that the *Melanie* sailed in search of 'pearlshell', from Somerset in June 1869 with Jardine on board. He said that they found the Prince of Wales Islanders 'took unusually shy'.

They traded for tortoise shell, but it was indicated there was more shell stored in the camp. The Captain and Jardine headed for the camp against the wishes of the Prince of Wales Islanders. In the camp they found a ship's gear and the logbook of the *Sperwer*. The tribespeople stated that the vessel had sunk (Edwards 1870, p. 3). Note that the *Melanie* was a three-masted schooner belonging to R. Towns & Co. (Towns founded Townsville), and its Captain Edward was engaged in the late 1860s in bêche-de-mer fishing in the Torres Strait; it was fitted like a whaler with three smaller boats for onshore diving and fishing (Thatcher 1869).

Unable to find any trace of the wreck, Jardine returned to Somerset to prepare a party to search Prince of Wales Island. Jardine summoned Native Police troopers and natives of a 'neighbouring tribe'. They returned to find that the old camp was deserted, but they found a newly occupied camp after two days and 'rushed' it, resulting in a 'skirmish' (Edwards 1870, p. 3).

Some members of the Kaurareg were related to the mainland natives accompanying Jardine and therefore were protected by them during the attack. According to these men, a total of 16 crew members of the *Sperwer* had been killed (Edwards 1870, p. 3). Chas Edwards says their account of the killing of the crew, the driving of the ship on shore and the burning of it, corresponded with Mr Chester's account published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on December 3rd. Edwards said that nearly all of the crewmen killed on shore were 'Javanese' (Edwards 1870, p. 3). Curiously, Edwards gave no frank account of Jardine's party killing any of the Kaurareg, only mentioning 'a skirmish'. We also note a conflict between accounts as to the number of *Sperwer* crew killed, either seven (Carroll 1969, p. 40) or 16 (Edwards 1870, p. 3). This later archival analyst, J.M. Carroll (1969), had access to corroborating archival correspondence which is no longer accessible to scholars being mysteriously missing from the Queensland State Archives.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore the size of the crew on the *Sperwer*'s previous journey was only ten ('A Dreary Voyage...' 1868), so it would seem that the Edwards report was an over-estimate.

## POLICE MAGISTRATE HENRY CHESTER'S ACCOUNT

Henry Chester who was at the time the resident Police Magistrate at the settlement of Somerset, carried out an investigation after Jardine's initial retaliatory visit. *The Queenslander* published on 6 November 1869 contained an extract from Chester's letter to the Queensland Government dated August 10, 1869. Acting upon information from 'Cockyruggas' and 'Godang' [Gudang] tribes, Chester searched for the wreck of the *Sperwer* in the vessel *Georgina Godfrey*. With two native troopers and nine members of the 'Cockyrugga' and 'Godang' tribes, they found the burnt remains of the vessel on rocks near the shore, along with the remains of two white men with skulls and arms removed 'probably been devoured by the natives'. Chester burnt the remains; the rest of the crew 'appeared to be killed in the vessel, and thrown overboard' ('Somerset, Cape York. The Massacre at Prince of Wales Island. The Wreck of the Tynemouth. The Booby Island Robberies. Difficulties with the Blacks.' 1869. *Sydney Morning Herald* 6 November, p.10).<sup>12</sup> Carroll later wrote that the 'master of the schooner "*Georgina Godfrey*", Captain Godfrey, placed his vessel at Chester's disposal'. Chester had left for Prince of Wales Island on 2 August 1869. Chester's crew buried the remains of the white men (Chester 1869a).

Much later, in April 1870, Chester, is reported as taking a boat called the *Blanche* with a contingent of Native Police, Gudang men and 'bluejackets' to the north of Horn Island to investigate further, and that they then executed three Kulgalgal culprits from the Central Torres Strait island of Nahgi [Naghir] (these men had been visiting the Kaurareg islands) (Chester 1870b). This incident was analysed and described by the archivist, J.M. Carroll (1969) who had better access to correspondence than us, as follows:

After the arrival of H.M.S. 'Blanche' at Somerset on 4 April 1870, Chester joined Captain Montgomerie for a cruise to the home of the Korraregas. Eleven natives and eight troopers also accompanied the

ship's company. On reaching the area, a cutter manned by 25 'bluejackets' and 19 natives was sent to communicate with the Korraregas. 'Blanche' anchored in Wednesday Spit. Scouts on Wednesday Island brought news that there were 4 canoes on the beach, and several men from the ship landed. With Chester leading one group, and Lieutenant Markham the other, they surrounded the natives on the beach, disarmed them and stood guard. A search of the huts produced a great deal of ship's gear, after which the camp was set on fire and all but two of the canoes destroyed. The natives were of the Kolkaleega [Kulgalgal] tribe of Mount Ernest, said by the Gudangs to be a party to the massacre. Three of the principals identified by the Gudangs, were handed over to Chester, and shot by the troopers. (Chester to Colonial Secretary, 14 April 1870. In-letter no. 1655 of 1870) (Carroll 1969, p.41)

After executing the three Kulgalgal, Chester's efforts of investigation were redirected into the fate of Mrs Gascoyne and her son (Chester 1870a):

Following continued reports that Captain Gascoigne's wife and son were living with the Korraregas of Prince of Wales Island, Chester manned and armed a boat and set out for Albany Island early in December 1870 [sic, 1869], when it was reported that a group of them had landed there, hoping to discover news of Mrs Gascoigne and the son. Chester managed to capture the head man, 'Teapot' and kept him in irons in the gaol, using him to induce the others of his tribe to surrender their hostages. He had to be released after twelve days as there was no sign of Mrs Gascoigne or the child. 'Teapot', the chief of the Korraregs, was said to have planned the '*Sperwer*' massacre and had considerable influence over the Banks and Mulgrave Islanders. (Based on Chester 1870a in Carroll 1969, pp.40-41)

Access to QSA correspondence has verified further this last account, viz that Chester persuaded Teapot, the head man of the 'Korraragas' [Kaurareg], and his son to come to his quarters in a ploy to arrest them. The son escaped but Teapot was held to ransom for the safe return of Mrs Gascoyne and her son. After 12 days, Chester determined that Mrs Gascoyne and her son were not with the 'Korraragas' as they would have surrendered them in return for their headman (Chester 1870a). As it turned out Mrs Gascoigne was not on the voyage, despite the speculation that she was, but

... was living in Melbourne in December 1870 when the Chief Secretary of Victoria wrote to the Colonial Secretary, Queensland, asking for particulars of the death of Captain Gascoigne in order that Mrs Gascoigne could prove the will.' (Chief Secretary, Victoria, to Colonial Secretary, 9 December 1870. In-letter no. 524 of 1871) (Carroll 1969, p.41)

Note that two reports (Jardine 1869a and Chester 1896a) are missing at QSA (believed stolen<sup>13</sup>) although some later correspondence about the massacre is in bundle COL/A153 (Odgers 1871). Chester was to later write about the impact of the retaliatory measures; presumably both Jardine's and his own retaliatory measures:

Since the *Sperwer* affair the Prince of Wales islanders have not visited Somerset in their canoes as was their custom previously; but the natives of the mainland have kept them well informed of all that has transpired and have acted as agents in disposing of their tortoise shell &c. I had, however little difficulty in making friends with them on first going there in June last [1870], and have since had from ten to fifteen employed in diving for pearl shell; but with very indifferent success. During this time I have camped for days together at the very spot where the cutter was burnt, and with the men who took part in the massacre of her crew, yet thanks to the terror inspired by the Police stationed at Somerset... I was under no apprehension of sharing their fate. (Chester in Carroll 1969, p.41)

Chester further wrote later of another one of his voyages in either late 1870 or 1871:

My next visit was to Mulgrave island, called Badoo [Badu] by the natives. For many years the Badooleega, who are very numerous, have borne the worst reputation for treachery and cruelty, and the evil influence exercised by the white man Wini who lived with them for years, but who has died since the settlement at Cape York was founded [sic], still continues to bear fruit. A long series of massacres of defenseless people perpetrated with absolute impunity has accustomed these miserable savages to regard Europeans as an easy prey, and until last year they have congregated every S.E season at the Prince of Wales group in readiness to take advantage of any disaster that might occur to shipping. It was these people who instigated the "*Sperwer*" massacre in 1869 and of the three tribes who took part in that tragedy they are the only one that has escaped all punishment. (Chester in Carroll 1969, p.40)

The 'three tribes', then, to which Chester alluded, were the 'Badooleega' [Badulgal] of Badu or Mulgrave Island, the 'Kolkuleega' [Kulkalgal] of Naghir or Mt Ernest Island, and the Kaurareg of Prince of Wales Island.

## FURTHER EVIDENCE

An oblique reference to the severity of the revenge on the Kaurareg is contained in the writing of a visiting missionary, Rev William Gill (1876, p.200) who visited Muralag on 17 October 1872.

We passed the rock where Gascoigne's vessel was dragged ashore, and all, save one woman [sic], were speared to death. When we saw on Muralug the scene of the more than ample revenge exacted by the whites, we wished the Gospel had been introduced earlier to these dark places of the earth.



There is also later reference to skulls remaining long after a massacre at Dugong Hole on Muralag “where that mob from Somerset... shot up the niggers years ago” asserted by a white guide from Thursday Island in the mid-twentieth Century (Barrett 1954, p. 5; also see Sharp 1992, pp. 22–23). A grazing lease existed over the island at that time.

The historian Nonie Sharp had access to a manuscript from Jardine’s son on the incident, and quotes:

Bootles Jardine, Frank’s son recounted to [P.] Pinney his father’s recollection: ‘The village was in a bit of valley, high at one end. The kanakas [South Sea crew of the *Melanie*] burned it all out, once they got going nobody could stop them. They had rifles and no one [among the Kaurareg] was prepared. It was too sudden. There was a terrible killing... No one knows how many were killed... I know my father shot one of the kanakas. He was trying to stop the killing. The village killing, when they all attacked, when the kanakas ran amok... He never like to talk about that day. Not to me. But people talked.’ (Sharp 1992, pp. 70–71)

## A LATER CHESTER ACCOUNT

In 1953, a much later newspaper account emerged, allegedly from Lieutenant H.M. Chester, said to have been based on his memoirs:

“When Chester was at Somerset in 1869 he got news of the massacre of the crew of the *Sperwer* off Prince of Wales Island, and unaware that a punitive expedition under Frank Jardine had already made a big cleaning-up, arranged with the captain of H.M.S. *Blanche* to capture the natives responsible. Prince of Wales Island they found deserted, but at Wednesday Island, some miles distant, came on a company of Mt. Ernest natives with their canoes. Search of the camp revealed some of the looted cutter’s sails and stores. A drumhead court-

martial was held on the spot, three of the leading men were found guilty and shot. “In my report to the Colonial Secretary,” says Chester, “I departed from the stereotyped style adopted in those days by the officers of the Native Police, who invariably reported that they had ‘*dispersed the blacks*.’ I said that ‘these men, having been handed over to me by Lieutenant Markham, were shot by the troopers.’ This, I believe, is the only instance on record in Queensland of so many native being captured alive, and in which the reasons for the actions taken were fully explained to them.” During 1918 I met some of the old natives who remembered the *Sperwer* incident; but they were emphatic that the wrong men had been shot, alleging that the first punitive party had got the ringleaders. They explained the stuff from the cutter as having been obtained by barter. One old fellow, whose father was one of the trio shot, graphically portrayed the incident from his memories as a lad. Cape York natives used to relate tribal experiences of “dispersals,” but those were at other hands. Chester was not an advocate of the “shoot-‘em-without-mercy” policy. (‘Aboriginalities’. 1953. *The Bulletin* 8 April, p. 12)

We note that Jardine’s expedition was described as a ‘punitive’ one, resulting in a ‘big cleaning up!’ This implies a massacre of the Kaurareg in the media jargon of the times.

## ARCHIBALD MESTON’S ACCOUNT

Over 50 years after the *Sperwer* event, towards the end of his life, Archibald Meston (1922, 1923) was to write two probably exaggerated and flamboyant accounts of Jardine’s reprisal on the Kaurareg; a portion of his knowledge he claimed to have been gleaned from King Gida during the ‘Wild Australia Show’ tour in 1892–93.

The narrative is more or less confused, but it is fairly certain that about 40 Dutchmen [sic; in his later 1923 account, Meston

says 22 Dutchmen<sup>14</sup>] reached the shore, were surrounded by a mob of blacks and either killed at once or tied up for future banquets. The Corrareegas [Kaurareg], like all the Straits Islands, were big, powerful men, who had a liberal diet of unlimited fish, crabs, oysters, dugong, and turtle. All the Dutchmen became the victims of a cannibal feast. Those left alive were the horrified spectators of their comrades being killed and roasted in the stone ovens, and eaten amidst great rejoicing; while the flags and bunting and ropes from the wrecked vessel were stretched from tree to tree, waving in the breeze, to give a picturesque effect to the scene. Stalwart savages strolled proudly round or danced in the Dutch uniforms, amid the hilarious amusement of the audience. The fatness or leanness of the Dutchmen was liberally discussed, and comparisons made between their condition and that of dugong. A full account of the whole affair was given to me in after years by Corrareega men who were present. The last chief of the Corrareegas, Giddah, and his wife, Camaleea, were brought to Sydney on a visit by me in 1892. Giddah dined on roast Dutchmen at that cannibal feast. He was a big, powerful man, over 6ft., and weighing 17st. (Meston 1922)

Here we see Meston sensationalising at his worst. According to the available historical data, the crew are reported variously to have been either Malays or Javanese or 'Lascars' (a generic term for sailors from South-east Asia or India). They were certainly not Dutch. The conservative estimate of those executed was seven (including the captain and cook). Chester reported the crew to have been killed and most likely been thrown overboard, not roasted and consumed. The bodies of the two European men were placed in trees after their heads and arms were cut off. As analysed previously by McNiven, hand and head removal was a ritualistic procedure, not a culinary one. And the implication that Gida's stature was

linked to his consumption of human flesh is irresponsible and slanderous given the service Gida gave to Meston's venture.

In his 1923 account, Meston states the *Sperwer* was a Dutch man-o-war but it was in fact a cutter. Meston goes on:-

A strong party of armed men, including whites, Polynesians, and mainland aboriginals, under the expert leadership of Frank Jardine, the explorer of 1864, assembled on the coast of Moorlag [Muralag], in the night, and marched stealthily on the feasting Corrareegas, who were dining on the last Dutchmen, and holding high revelry in honour of the occasion. The Corrareegas had no friends, and they had an evil reputation in all directions. The mainland blacks had many old accounts to settle, and the Polynesians and Malays among Jardine's party were merely actuated by the love of slaughter. (Meston 1922)

We note that according to Thatcher, Jardine had Tanna Islanders with him during his first visit. The reference to 'Polynesians' rather than 'Melanesians' is probably due to a lack of descriptive precision by Meston. In the following year, Meston published another account:

Jardine, who told me the whole story, brought his men in round them in a semi-circle, between the cannibals and the hills, the sea being in front, and, at a given signal, about 20 breech-loaders opened fire, and the Polynesians and aboriginals rushed in among the terrified cannibals with tomahawks and cutlasses. There was a wild scene in that midnight on Moorlag.... (Meston 1923)

And when morning dawned, there were dead Corrareegas on the beach, in the long grass, and far away among the trees; dead men, women, and children, for the aboriginals and Polynesians spared



nobody, and the heavy islanders, slow on land, had no chance of running away from the swift-footed aboriginals. When Jardine was asked by me how many were killed, he merely smiled, and suggested we have a drink! (Meston 1923)

But one man who was present told me there were over a hundred men killed in that deadly combat, apart from women and children. Some got away to the hills, and others escaped by swimming out to sea and reaching Horn Island. Old King Gida was a youth at the time, and in 1893 gave me a graphic account of that terrible night... Frank Jardine was not a man to do that sort of work in halves, and it was sharp, summary, and conclusive. (Meston 1923)

Given Meston's tendencies for exaggeration, distortion and embellishment, we have to seriously question how accurate his account was, some 50 years later, taking into account the other historical data. However it seems clear that Jardine and his men did kill a significant group of Kaurareg and the remainder were dispersed away from this village site. According to Chester's later report, the retaliatory attack by Jardine and his Native Police had traumatized the remaining Kaurareg on Muralag.

Kaurareg leader Milton Savage has described a large camp on Prince of Wales Island named 'Adai', aka 'Thaimerau Karai' (a village campsite) in a gully between two hills near Port Lihou Channel; "Our people survived in other campsites all around the island, but this one, the large campsite, was totally massacred." Milton Savage has a plan for an archaeologist to search for the massacre site and excavate it; and then to have a commemoration ceremony (pers. comm. Milton Savage, 6 August 2015). According to historian Nonie Sharp (1992, p.109) observations occurred from 1870 to 1890, of re-established Kaurareg camps at Port Lihou (Yata) as well as at Blue Fish Point (Kiwain) facing Thursday Island.

## THE MOUNTING ARGUMENTS TO SHIFT THE ADMINISTRATIVE CENTRE FROM SOMERSET TO THURSDAY ISLAND

Difficulties were occurring with maintaining the Native Police force at Somerset during the early 1870s. By 1870 there were eight Aboriginal troopers at Somerset but desertions with arms and shooting of a comrade were reported as occurring (Chester 1870c). Replacement troopers arrived later in 1870 ('Somerset Records' JOL, MLC 1791-18/3). Frank Jardine was re-appointed in control of the settlement in August 1870 (Jardine 1870).<sup>15</sup> In 1871 further desertions and stealing of arms and the death of Native Police Troopers occur (Jardine 1871; 'The Settlement at Cape York', 1871. *The Queenslander* 20 May, p.10). Frank Jardine was clearly firm in his values and propensity about taking Aboriginal lives. In early 1871, six Native Police deserted Somerset taking guns, ammunition, tomahawks, cash and tobacco. Jardine reports four were shot and two captured (Jardine 1871). Some Native Police attempted to travel by canoe back to Maryborough (possibly Kabi Kabi) ('Current News', 1871. *The Queenslander* 3 June, p.2.). Later in 1871, *The Queenslander* published a report by a Captain Sykes, concerning an emaciated escaped Native Policeman, fleeing from Somerset, who was rescued by Sykes from a canoe off Howe Island. He said two other escapee Native Police who had accompanied him, had died. The Native Policeman was from Maryborough and trying to reach his country, so presumably was a Kabi Kabi. Describing him as 'a smart boy', Captain Sykes took him in his schooner to Townsville where "he bolted into the bush" ('Current News', 1871. *The Queenslander*, 3 June, p. 2).

In the same report, Jardine (1871) makes it clear that he had a collaborative relationship with Chester. He commends Chester for making first contact with the Goemulgal of Mabuiag (Jervis Island) in the Western Torres Strait, emphasizing their close links with Saibai (Talbot Island) and the prospects of trade with the New Guinea coast.

As indicated previously, Henry Chester was making 'incursions' into the Kaurareg islands in early 1871

(Chester 1871). Official reports from the early 1870s are regularly commenting on the developing pearl shell industry (Jardine 1872) and the use of local Indigenous people from both the mainland and the islands as pearl divers (Beddome 1873). Awareness was growing that the capitalist success of pearling and the functioning of Somerset were not well synchronized. Chester wrote to the Queensland Government in August 1871, pointing out that although some seven “vessels employing about thirty large boats are... engaged in this profitable pursuit...”, the industry was entirely monopolized by pearl fishers from New South Wales, implying Queensland was not benefitting as a colony from this resource (cited in Carroll 1969, p.37). (As previously indicated another large pearling boat was also coming from Western Australia.)

In 1872, Frank Jardine surveyed the Prince of Wales group for a site for a new administrative settlement; he reported the Kaurareg passively resisted the formation of such by exerting “every ruse and means in their power to prevent the discovery [of fresh water]” (Jardine to Colonial Secretary, 25 October 1872, Somerset Letterbook 1872–1877 in Mullins 1995, p.170). By 1874, official correspondence was discussing a proposal to move the administrative centre of Somerset to an alternate island in the Strait (Aplin 1874; Dalrymple 1874). In 1874, GE Dalrymple, the newly-appointed Police Magistrate at Somerset, suggested a move to Prince of Wales Island (Aplin 1874; Dalrymple 1874). In mid-1874, the Native Police contingent at Somerset was said to be inefficient and under-strength and those Police in residence wished to be relieved of their duty (Dalrymple 1874). In July 1876, all the Somerset Native Police Troopers were to eventually desert taking their [presumably local] wives with them (Chester 1876).

However in August 1875, Somerset despatches also record the devastating measles epidemic spreading on Cape York Peninsula and Prince of Wales Island resulting in “numerous deaths” (Aplin 1875). This epidemic spread throughout the Torres Strait reducing the population of some islands by half. The Kaurareg population, already severely depleted by Jardine’s massacre, were further decimated by disease.

## **ESTABLISHMENT OF THE PEARLING INDUSTRY WITH THURSDAY ISLAND AS ADMINISTRATIVE CENTRE**

By the 1870s, the informal pearling and trepanning industry throughout the Torres Strait was having an adverse impact on island populations (Beckett 1987, p.33; Ganter 1994; McPhee 2004, p.365). By the early 1880s, 102 fishing boats were operating in the Strait, serviced by about 800 men of whom about a quarter were Indigenous, and a station with four boats had been established in Kaurareg country on Muralug or Prince of Wales Island (Mullins 1995, p.169; Prideaux 1988, p.168; Singe 1979, p.160). The Rev William Gill reported in October 1871, that “one side” of Muralag was occupied by “the pearl divers, whose store-ships were then lying at anchor”. One of them was employing a presumably Kaurareg man named Joe who the missionaries secured as an interpreter to accompany them to Mua (or Banks) Island (Gill 1876, p.200).

The Executive Council of the Queensland Government approved the move of the northern administration centre from Somerset to Waibene or Thursday Island in May 1875 (Colonial Secretary’s Executive Council 1875). The Queensland Government then authorised Henry Chester who was Resident Magistrate of Somerset, to establish the new settlement at Thursday Island as a port for the export of pearl-shell and other resources found in Torres Strait (‘Jubilee of Thursday Island – 1877–1927’. 1927. *Sydney Mail*, 12 October, pp.4–15). This was achieved administratively through a series of official appointments for Chester. In July 1877, he was appointed the sub-collector of Customs and Harbour Master at Thursday Island to take effect from the date of removal of the government settlement from Somerset. Simultaneously, he was appointed as Police Magistrate at Thursday Island (with Charles Beddome, being appointed to replace him as Police Magistrate at Somerset) (‘Latest Official Notifications’. 1877. *The Telegraph*, 21 July, p. 2). In October 1877, Henry Chester was appointed as Shipping Inspector at Thursday Island. (‘Latest Official Notifications’. 1877. *The Telegraph*, 20 October, p. 3). The economic and administrative reasons for the establishment of

Thursday Island were described 50 years later in a jubilee exposition on the town, as follows:

It is known that the vessels engaged in pearl-shelling in the early days made this harbour, then officially known as Port Kennedy, a place of shelter and refuge; and it is most probably that this fact led the Queensland Government to make the change to Thursday Island from Somerset, to secure closer administration and control over those engaged in the industry, for coloured men were being employed in greater numbers, and there was a tendency to subvert good order when they were so far distant from administrative centres... But the change of administration to Thursday Island left Somerset eventually abandoned, and to-day there is but one habitation there. ('Jubilee of Thursday Island – 1877-1927'. 1927, *Sydney Mail*, 12 October, pp. 14-15)

Between 1872 and 1879 all of the islands in Torres Strait became the property of the Crown (Queensland Government 1872, 1879a,b) and leases had to be sought for use of the land. Henry Chester was also made the Commissioner for Crown Lands but he continued to recognize the land rights of Islanders informally. Chester leased the southern end of Keriri (Hammond Island) to pearl sheller Walter Powell, but Powell left in 1882; he also leased 25 acres on Peilagal (Goode Is) to pearl sheller Joseph Tucker (Mullins 1995, p.168). Both of these islands belonged traditionally to the Kaurareg. According to a report by Chester in 1882, Tucker's pearling station lease on Goode Island was not due to expire until February 1888 (Chester 1882).

In July 1879, Henry Chester, as Police Magistrate on Thursday Island, advised that an Aboriginal man from Prince of Wales Island, who was given three months imprisonment for deserting from his hired service, escaped from custody but was recaptured by his own tribe (Chester 1879). Despatches from Thursday Island through the early 1880s remain largely by H.M. Chester, and include various incidence of conflicts and killings in the region. One of November 1881, reports that 29 Prince of Wales Islanders had deserted their employment with

Joseph Tucker, apparently because they refused to dive in a place where a countryman had been taken by a shark (Chester 1881). It is clear then that the Kaurareg men (and presumably Gida) were becoming absorbed into the emerging pearling industry.

Frank Jardine was still at Somerset and writing official despatches, but in 1881 he mentions Native Police visiting from Thursday Island under Sub Inspector Armit, so presumably the Native Police base has also shifted (Jardine 1881). By the mid-1880s the Kaurareg had become partially dispossessed. Tucker's Pearling Station was still at Goode Island. In 1886 three areas on Muralag were leased to Robert Williams. But other apparently illegal pearling stations were on Wai Wai (Honeymoon Island), Roko [Qld Pearl Shelling Co.], Giralag (Friday Island) [Albert Collins] and Muralag [John Cussen] (Mullins, 1995, p. 169, 170). It appears that in the period from 1879, Kaurareg men were formally organized into labour pools to service pearling enterprises which operated from leases on many of their island. Prior to this, in the 1870s, it seems the Kaurareg had more of a trading relation with pearlers. Gida grew up in this industry and it is presumed from his role as a deck crewman, he received the nickname 'Tarbucket'.

## **GIDA AND THE CAMBRIDGE ANTHROPOLOGICAL EXPEDITION**

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, the English anthropologist Alfred C. Haddon (1901b, pp.59, 62; 1904, pp.80–81) led his Cambridge University expeditions to the Torres Strait. Haddon described Gida (using his pseudonym, 'Tarbucket') as a 'chief' and a 'Mamus' ['Mamoose'] of Muralag and a pearling lugger worker. Haddon recorded significant Kaurareg sacred histories from Gida including that of the Kaurareg ancestor Kwoiam and his epic travel to Mabuig in the western Torres Strait along with the various sacred sites he created (Moore 1979, pp.286–287). Gida was clearly an authority in Kaurareg 'Law' (religious doctrine).

Haddon had first visited Muralag towards the end of 1888 and described aspects of village life; for example, a family sitting on mats around a fire

within a yard enclosure in the evening outside of their house, playing a Malay card game with the male head smoking from a bamboo pipe. This was in a village directly opposite Thursday Island according to his description, presumably Kiwain (Blue Fish Point). Haddon photographed a village headman, identified as Mamoose Jack. He also photographed Gida with his family (figure 4). Haddon also described some dances performed for him for which some old men had travelled 13 miles [20.8kms] to perform, presumably from another village (possibly Yata (Port Lihou) if they travelled via the coast). He described a 'war dance' which he said 40 years previously would have been performed to commemorate "some deed of valour or treachery". Other secular dances he termed "festive dances" or "kap" of which at least eight were performed (Haddon 1901a, p.186). Sharp (1992, p.109) has since identified these two villages as Kiwain (Blue Fish Point) and Yata (Point Lihou) respectively.

In studying adoption in the Torres Strait during 1898, another Cambridge Expedition team member, W.H.R. Rivers (in Haddon 1904, p.152) compiled a list of Muralug persons who were adopted into another totem. These include the adoption by Gida who was himself Kursi or Hammerhead Shark totem (Zyœra [now Sphyra] genus), of his son 'Kaur' [our Kawara] of Omai or Dingo totem (Canis dingo) [Rivers' spellings]. Rivers (in Haddon 1904, p.147) also reported 'King Tarbucket' of Muralug to say: 'Tati [father<sup>16</sup>] take thing, me growl; apu [mother] take thing, me growl; wadwam [waduwan is mother's brother or father's brother] take thing, me no speak; ngaibat [father's father's] take thing, me no speak'. Clearly Gida was explaining appropriate and inappropriate behaviours according to Kaurareg kinship and sharing principles. Rivers also (in Haddon 1901b, p.62) mentioned a drawing made for him in 1898 by 'King Tarbucket'.

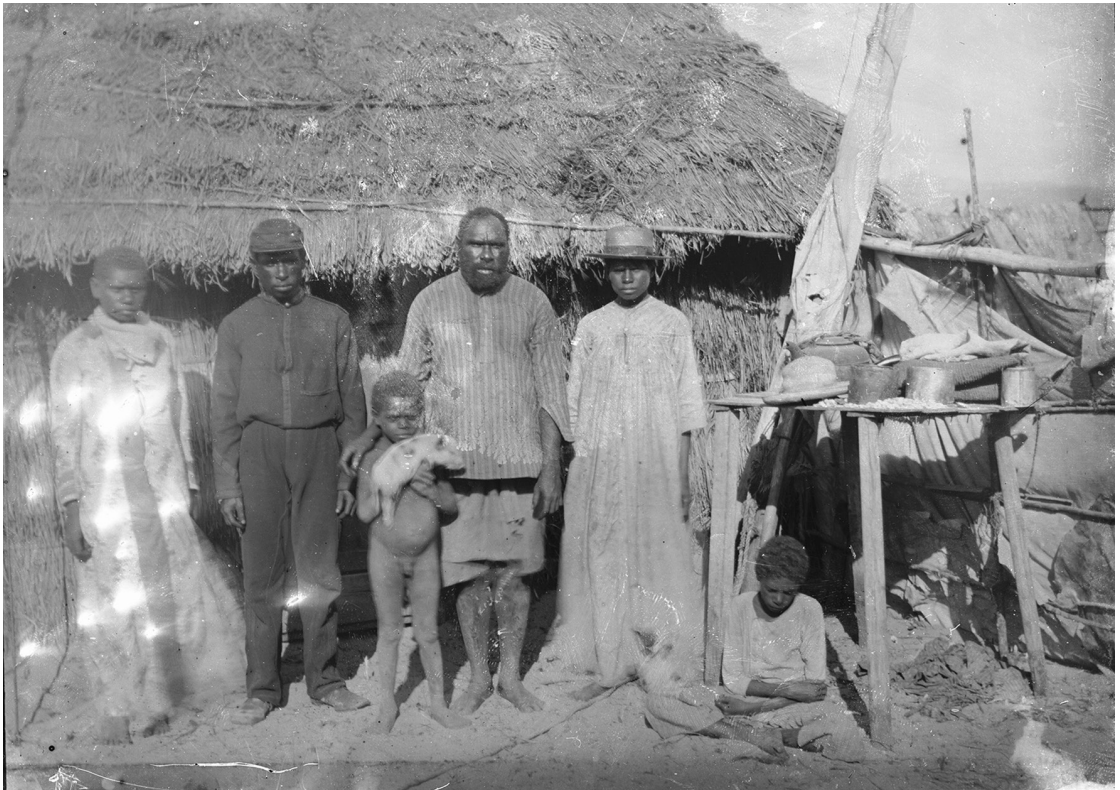


FIG. 4. Gida in centre (with beard) and his family, taken on Muralag four years prior to his departure on The Wild Australia tour. [Photo taken by Haddon in September 1888, Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge University N.22768.ACH2.]



## ORIGIN OF GIDA'S STATUS AS MAMOOSE AND KING

Some 20 years after Gida witnessed the retaliation over the *Sperwer* incident, and as a grown man and young leader, it would seem he inherited the role of mamoose from the predecessor Jack. The 'Mamoose' system had started on Mer (Murray Island in eastern Torres Strait) in mid-1878 and involved elevating one clan or family head to that of island head to resolve disputes and deal with wrong-doers employing customary albeit adapted principles, as instigated by Chester and the missionary Rev. Samuel McFarlane (Shnukal 2015, pp.58–59).<sup>17</sup> Linguist Anna Shnukal further explains how the term 'mamoose' was accidentally derived by Chester to mean 'island chief' and then traces how John Douglas, once he became Government Resident at Thursday Island in May 1885, applied this governance appointment principle throughout the Torres Strait and into New Guinea during his time.

To understand the origin of Gida's second title, that of 'King', a significant clue is to be found in a lengthy article in *The Queenslander* newspaper of 4 April 1891. It draws on a series of official despatches in the Torres Strait particularly between the Hon. John Douglas, Government Resident at Thursday Island and Acting Sub-Inspector Savage, about the development of methods of communication and local governance amongst tribal groups on the most northerly part of Cape York between the end of October 1890 and late February or early March 1891. Sub-Inspector Savage reported on a resolved method which involved (i) having a meeting of tribespeople, using Aboriginal interpreters to explain the government's peaceful intentions and its preferred sedenterized living policy (in bark cottages); then (ii) persuading an identified suitable clan head commonly referred to locally as a 'Mamoose', to accompany the party back to Thursday Island for further policy briefing, instruction and familiarisation; and then (iii), conferring the title of 'King' on that individual to provide an appropriate status. This process had been carried out successfully on the Cape, respectively

for the Jardine River and the Batavia River<sup>18</sup> (Seven Rivers) bands, who were occupying their base camps ('General News. Attempts to Civilise the Blacks', 1891. *The Queenslander* 4 April, p.656). We presume this process soon followed for Gida of the Prince of Wales Island Kaurareg, for by the time he left the Torres Strait in August 1891 to join the Wild Australia Show, he was already conferred as 'King' Gida. We hypothesize that he was taken to the newly formed administrative centre of Thursday Island to be trained as a government liaison person for Muralag, including for his village of Kiwain, and bestowed with the status-forming title of 'King Gida'. Here he came to meet and be befriended by the senior-most public servant, John Douglas.

John Douglas had held the position of Government Resident at Thursday Island since April 1885 (QGG, 1885, Vol. 86, No.66, p. 1250). A good-quality portrait of him appears to have been taken there in August 1885 by the Melbourne photographer John Lindt who was travelling to New Guinea as part of an

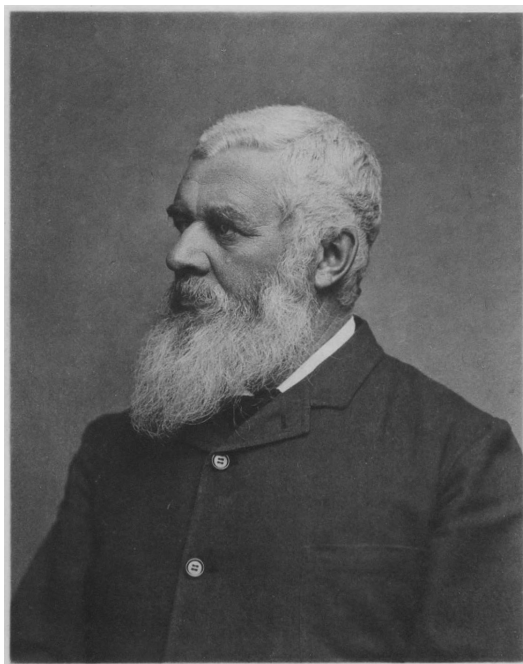


FIG.5. Portrait of John Douglas by photographer Lindt in 1885, most probably taken at Thursday Island when Lindt was en route to New Guinea. Source Lindt 1887: Plate XLVIII(a).

expedition along the Papuan Coast (Lindt 1887). Lindt was in fact to photograph the Wild Australia troupe in Melbourne in early 1893. We can only surmise as to whether he met Gida whilst passing through Thursday Island in the company of Douglas.

In 1892, Douglas was to take a central role in selecting and briefing the five Kaurareg who were to participate in Meston's Wild Australia Show. This he presumably did in consultation with Gida who was to be the leader for the Prince of Wales Islander contingent. Douglas and Meston were old acquaintances having had overlapping terms in the Queensland Parliament. (Douglas was the Colonial Secretary from 1877 to 1879; Meston was the member for Rosewood from 1878 to 1882.) Purcell was furnished with a letter of introduction to Douglas by Meston, when he travelled north to conscript troupe members in August 1892.

### **THE PRESENTATION OF GIDA AND HIS FAMILY IN PUBLIC BY MESTON AND PURCELL IN 1892–93**

As mentioned earlier, Gida was accompanied on the Wild Australia Show by the younger warriors, Dugum and Bula, as well as his wife Kemaliya and adopted son Kawara. They were picked up by the tour manager Harry Brabazon Purcell who was travelling through by steamship from the southern Gulf of Carpentaria where he had enlisted 16 other performers. The selection of the Kaurareg participants was arranged by Douglas and Gida, but the whole arrangement was based on prior correspondence between Meston and Douglas. Upon arrival in Brisbane in September 1892, the Kaurareg and Gulf groups joined a Wakaya group enlisted from the Northern Territory, and were then later joined by a Kabi Kabi member from the Mary River. They formed a rehearsal camp at the St. Lucia pocket of the river in an old sugar mill surrounded by a mix of farms and bushland. During their rehearsal period it is believed they were photographed by a Brisbane commercial photographer, Will Stark (see Figure 6). After rehearsing for some ten weeks, they opened with their first performance at Her Majesty's Theatre in Brisbane on 5 December 1892.

Although the Wild Australia performance evolved somewhat over time, there was a recurring set of events as per the advertising and journalistic accounts, albeit divided into two programs, one for indoor venues and one for outdoors. Common elements of all performances included corroboree performances of at least eight dances, fire-making, duelling with fighting sticks and stone knives, and always with a finale being an historical tableau of a frontier conflict. This last piece of theatre usually involved a group of the tribesmen stalking a lone white man encamped in the bush and spearing him to death, followed by their pursuit and killing by one or two Native Police. Indoor performances were dominated by more speeches and commentary from either Meston or Purcell elaborating on particular customs, providing their views on the so-called 'Dying Race' and 'Doomed Race' theories of the time and inviting questions from the audience. Meston was known to demonstrate the use of the rainforest timber sword and enjoyed competitive duelling with the troupe members.

The outdoor performances featured returning-boomerang and spear-throwing demonstrations as well as duelling by throwing these weapons at one another in turn. Whilst for nocturnal performances, these projectiles had firesticks attached to them to provide a pyrotechnic effect above the audience. Outdoor venues were prepared at times to enable demonstrations of pole climbing, diving and tracking. Whereas some of the dances involved all of the men from multiple tribal backgrounds performing in choreographed unison (pan-tribal), some dances featured just the men from one group illustrating their particular cultural dancing style. This was the case for the Kaurareg who performed firstly a dance by Dugum and Bula wearing *dheri* (a traditional feather headdress, described by the media as "a compromise between a bishop's mitre, an admiral's cocked hat, and the chapeau of the French fishwife") with Gida drumming and singing accompanied by wife and son (see figures 7 & 8); and then a mask dance, the elaborate mask (see figure 9) being worn by Dugum, and although described by one journalist as having an "alligator



FIG. 6. Photo of the Wild Australia troupe taken during the Queensland Press Club Picnic, Chelmer Reach, Brisbane River, 12 November 1892; Gida is on the far left. Photo believed to be by Will Stark; Courtesy Michael Graham-Stewart.



FIG. 7. King Gida with his wife Kemaliya of the Kaurareg people of Prince of Wales Island, taken in Melbourne during the Wild Australia Show tour. Photo: J.W.Lindt, 1893; © The Trustees of the British Museum. Oc,A8.24.

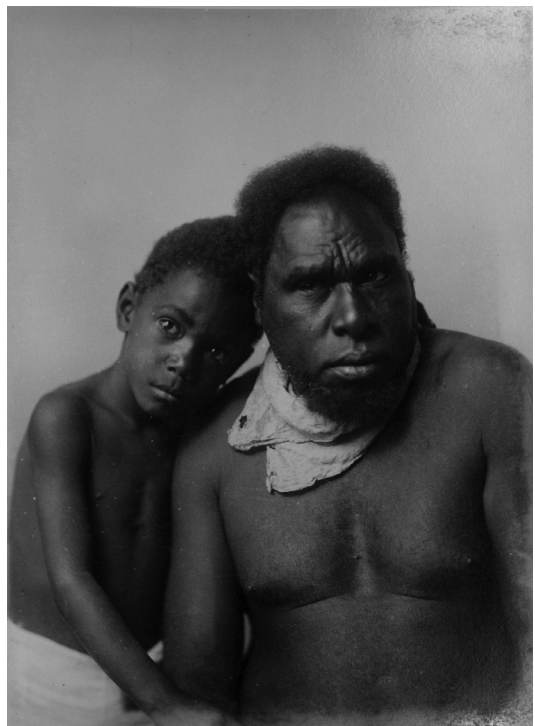


FIG. 8. King Gida with his adopted son Kawara. Photo: J.W.Lindt taken in Melbourne 1893; © The Trustees of the British Museum. Oc,A8.25.



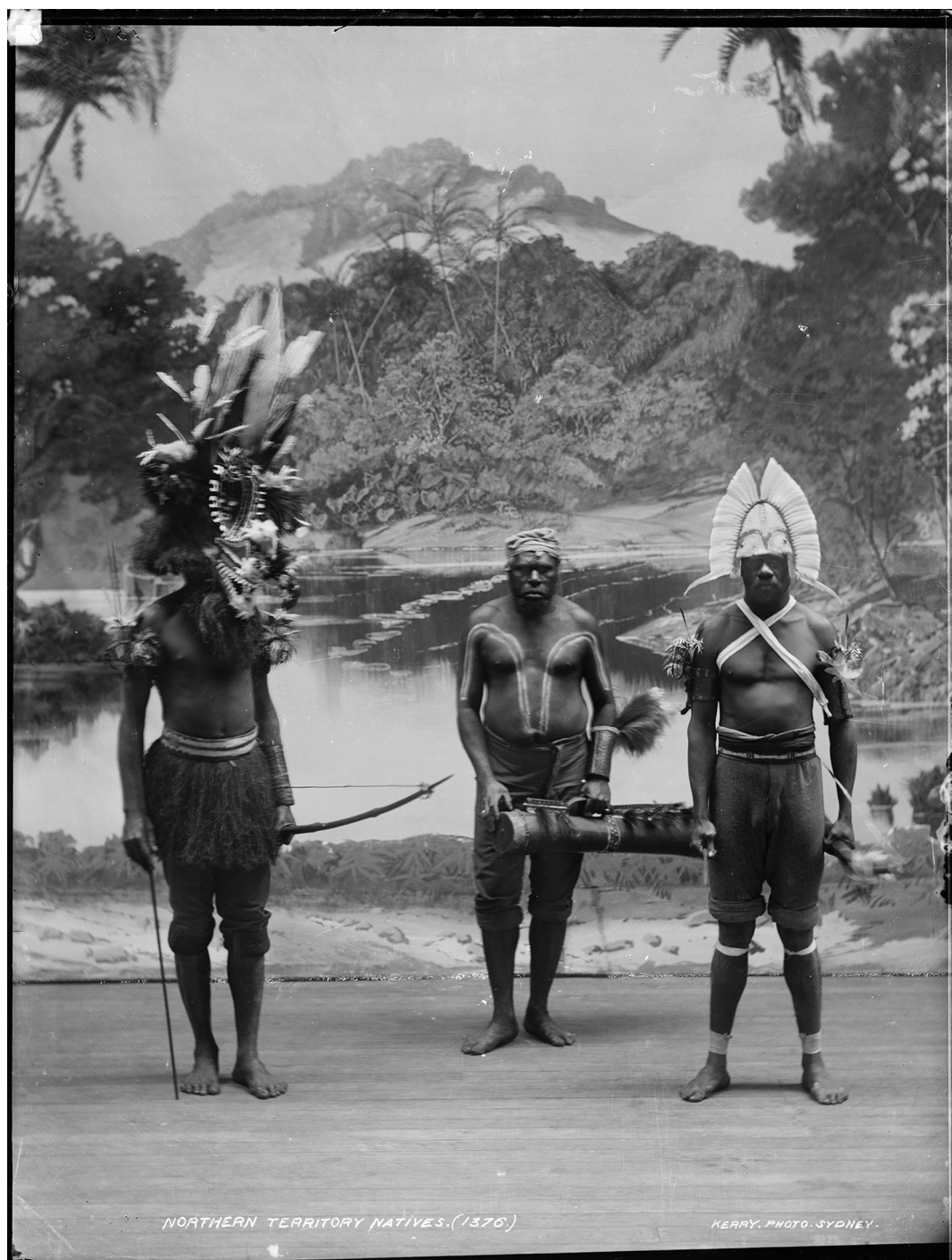


FIG. 9. Dugum (left) in mask, Gida with drum and Bula (right) at Her Majesty's Theatre in Sydney. Photo by Charles Kerry in Tyrrell Collection, Powerhouse Museum, accession number: PHM 75.518.1376 (AS/PHM4).



snout” was according to our Kaurareg consultants a Dingo mask (*khraa*). The Kaurareg also provided demonstrations of target shooting using imported New Guinea bows and arrows.

After numerous performances in Brisbane, mostly at the Exhibition Ground and Her Majesty’s Theatre (aka The Opera House), the group travelled by steamer to Sydney where they opened on Boxing Day (26 December 1892) at The Bondi Aquarium at Tamarama Beach and also later appeared at Her Majesty’s Theatre. Whilst in Sydney, they were photographed by the fashionable portraitist, Charles Kerry (see figure 9). From Sydney, the troupe travelled to Melbourne to open at the Royal Exhibition Building for National Foundation Day on 26 January 1893.

In January 1893, after the Wild Australia troupe had completed their performances in Brisbane, Meston informed the press that the ‘three men from the Prince of Wales Island, including the chief form the ethnological link between the Australians and the Papuans having the characteristics of both races, even to using the same weapons’ (‘Wild Australia’. 1893. *The Queenslander*. 22 July, p.180). This is a superficial ethnographic assessment based on only a few material culture traits. In a much later piece of journalistic writing, Meston compounded his poorly-informed inferior analysis:

Thursday Island lies cosily sheltered by a circle of islands, Prince of Wales facing it on the westward [sic, south]. This island was inhabited by a formidable tribe of bloodthirsty cannibal savages [sic], who were clearly defined Papuans [sic], quite distinct in physique, language, habits, and weapons from the Australian aboriginals, though McGillivray regarded them as a tribe of Papuanised Australians, who actually form a connecting link between Australians and Papuans, and traded between New Guinea on the one hand and Cape York on the other. They used the bow and arrow of New Guinea, and the woomera and woomera spear of Cape York. Their

language was distinctly Papuan, though Latham regarded it as Australia. The natives called themselves “Corrareegas” [Kaurareg], and the island was “Mooralug” [Muralag], the east island being “Nahrupye [Nurupai]”. (Meston 1923)

Today the Kaurareg identify and view themselves as Aboriginal people, not Torres Strait Islanders, but Meston is correct in identifying their link in the traditional trading chain. Genealogical research indicates they intermarried with the Western and Central Torres Strait Island groups as well as the northernmost Cape York Aboriginal groups.

Between performances in Melbourne during early 1893, Harry Brabazon Purcell gave a lecture to the Royal Geographical Society and was reported as describing King Gida and his family as follows:

....the king of Prince of Wales Island, his wife, and adopted son, an intelligent looking little fellow of five or six. The lecturer said that many people had asked him for this child, but he had promised the old king that he would not part him from the boy. His word would not be broken... The circumstances that led to the adoption of the boy by the king was as follows:- It is customary among the blacks that when twins are born the weakest should be exposed on a river bank or sea-shore, and left to be eaten by crocodiles or drowned. This boy had been rescued by the king from this perilous position, adopted, and reared. (Purcell 1894, p.20–21)

We note that much later, the well-known anthropologist Norman Tindale (1974, p.175) described the Kaurareg of the Prince of Wales Island and the other south-western islands of the Torres Strait (including Hammond and Thursday) as “a blended group of Australian and Torres Strait Island people speaking an Australian language”, in his attempt to reconcile the group’s Aboriginal identity with the large corpus of customs held in common with the other Torres Strait Islander groups.

In his notebook kept during the Tour, Meston (n.d.) identified the Kaurareg group as 'Eea' (from Prince of Wales Island) which is a nomenclature unfamiliar to the current authors. (However the term may have some validity possibly because it is also used by a Sydney journalist although he could have obtained it from Meston ('Meston's Wild Aboriginals', 1893. *The Sydney Mail*, 21 January, pp. 134–135, 141)). Analysis of the Wild Australia Show photo captions and other sources provides the following biographical profiles of Gida and his immediate family members who accompanied him.<sup>19</sup>

Gida (spelt in the captions as 'Geedah', 'Gidda') is identified as a 'King' from Prince of Wales Island or Muralag (as correctly noted in a photographic caption by Lindt). Unlike all of the other male members of the troupe, he had an ample girth and was without scarifications. He was also identified in the media and by others as 'Tarbucket'. In his notebook, Meston (n.d.) recorded Gida as 'Gidda' and 'Missgidda', but gave no English name. One Sydney journalist described Gida as "a fine powerful man, weighing about 15 st. [stone], a true gentleman of nature" ('Meston's Wild Aboriginals', 1893. *The Sydney Mail*, 21 January, pp. 134–135, 141). Gida's physique was also described by a Melbourne journalist, who speculated on the Kaurareg King meeting the British Queen, once the Wild Australia Show had progressed on its overseas tour.

The king of Prince of Wales Island, who is shortly to have audience of Queen Victoria, is stated to be a fine specimen of humanity, and, though rather advanced in years, can pull a bow with the strongest warrior in the tribe. ('Australian National Fete'. 1893. *The Leader*, 21 January, p. 42.)

Given the likelihood of Gida's past labour participation and leadership in the multi-cultural pearling industry, we surmise it is he to whom Purcell is referring in the following quote during the latter's lecture with lantern slides to the Royal Geographical Society in Sydney during June 1893:

The next portrait shown, Mr. Purcell said, was that of a man who was a most extraordinary linguist,

his acquirements consisting of Bengalee, the Singapore and Manila, native languages, beside fluency in numbers of dialects of his Australian fellow-countrymen. ('Our Australian Blacks'. 1893. *Australian Star*, 1 July, p. 8.)

Of the 117 individual portrait photographs and the 43 group shots taken of the troupe which one of our research team (Michael Aird) has collected and analysed, Gida is only occasionally seen with paint-up, unlike all of the other male performers, and is often holding one or other of two Kaurareg drums. We surmise that his role was as Kaurareg songman and troupe drummer. His wife and son do not appear in any performance shots and we conclude they accompanied Gida but not as active performers (according to the data we have collected so far).

Gida's wife was named Kemaliya (rendered in the captions as 'Camaleea' and 'Domali'), who was also from Muralag, but is captured in only one joint photographic portrait by Lindt (her head on Gida's shoulder), in which she wears a dress and although Gida has a bared torso, he wears a cloth neck scarf. This is one of only two portraits taken of the members of the troupe depicting a male-female couple. (The other one is of the Wakaya couple Kudajarnd and Langinkab.) A journalist described her as a "good-looking, graceful woman, with all the instincts of a lady" ('Meston's Wild Aboriginals'. 1893. *The Sydney Mail*, 21 January, pp. 134–135, 141). In his notebook, Meston (n.d.) gave Kemaliya as 'Camilay', 'Camulla' and 'Camaleea' with English name 'Queen', which was probably a title she adopted being the wife of the (so-called) King Gida. A Sydney journalist also gave 'Cammaleea' which he may have obtained from Meston.

Gida and Kemaliya were accompanied on the Wild Australia tour by their son, Kawara (spelt in the caption as 'Cowra'). On the tour, Kawara was a five- or six-year-old boy who appeared in only one Lindt photograph with his father Gida. His given age implies he was born in c1885. A Sydney journalist reported Kawara to be an adopted son to Gida and Kamaliya ('Meston's Wild Aboriginals', 1893). In his notebook, Meston (n.d.) gives the child Kawara as



FIG. 10. A newspaper illustration of King Gida, wife Kemaliya and adopted son Kawara at a performance in Sydney. *Sydney Mail*, 21 January 1893.

'Cowaro', being from the island of Mua. This location of origin verifies that he was an adopted son to Gida. Customary adoption practices were quite prolific and complex in the Torres Strait (Ban 1993, 1994). Meston gives no English name for Kawara. This is the same son as given by anthropologist Rivers as 'Kaur' of Dingo (Omai) totem (see previously).

## **THE KAURAREG STRANDED IN MELBOURNE**

After performing in Brisbane and Sydney, the Wild Australia troupe began their performances in Melbourne, but one contracting agency (the Australian Natives Association) disputed the terms of their contract and refused to pay a substantial fee for the troupe's performance. Meston realizing his venture was in dire economic jeopardy, withdrew as entrepreneur, abandoning the troupe and handing over ownership of the tour to Brabazon Purcell, who needless to say, had no financial capacity. The troupe had a difficult time surviving in Melbourne for some four months, before securing a passage to Sydney in late May 1893, to perform in a play titled "It is never too late to mend" at Her Majesty's Theatre (aka The Opera House). While Meston descended dishonourably and shamelessly into legal wrangles with Purcell, trying to secure the artefacts for sale and profit and deflecting blame to anyone but himself, Gida as one of the troupe leaders held the troupe honourably together and continued public performances, lectures and press interviews with Purcell.

On 12 May 1893, John Douglas, the Government Resident at Thursday Island, wrote to the Colonial Secretary in Brisbane, on "demand of the Aboriginal Natives of Prince of Wales Island" saying that "It has come to the knowledge of the relatives of these people that the whole project has broken down, and that their friends are now involuntarily detained in Victoria without the means of returning home ... I have been asked by them to obtain such information as is available respecting this matter, and to send money to obtain the return of their relatives to Thursday Island" (Douglas, 1893). John

Douglas had not only formed a friendship with Gida by this time (see later), but had a firm respect to lead him to take this action for the wellbeing of the Kaurareg performers.

A later piece of evidence suggests Meston may in some way have cheated Gida and his Kaurareg companions who went on the tour. A letter from J.T. Embley in Coen to the Commissioner of Police (dated 3 August 1897) complains about Meston trading the weapons of Aboriginal men from the Moreton Telegraph Station on Cape York for meat, which he failed to give them. Embley suggests that "when men like Meston come amongst the blacks they do a great deal of harm by taking their weapons and giving little or nothing in exchange". Embley then criticises Meston for promising Tarbucket, the Mamoose of Prince of Wales Island, the payment of money in return for him going on the Wild Australia tour, which he alleges the Mamoose never received, as well as several other local examples of Meston not honouring his promises to local Aboriginal people. He also comments "I presume there is no likelihood of Meston being in any way appointed to control the natives here. If there is, I am afraid it would be a great mistake" (pers. comm. Anna Shnukal to Jonathan Richards, 3 April 2018; Embley 1897). Embley was no doubt disappointed when Meston was appointed Southern Protector of Aboriginals under the Aboriginal Protection and Sale of Opium Act 1897.

## **DID THE ANTHROPOLOGIST ALFRED HOWITT MEET THE KAURAREG PERFORMERS IN MELBOURNE?**

There is a strong possibility that the Kaurareg performers, whilst in Melbourne during 1893, attracted the interest of the early ethnographer Alfred Howitt (1830–1908). Howitt had arrived in Australia in 1852 and became famous for his successful search for the lost Burke and Wills expedition (rescuing the survivor John King). He later settled in Gippsland and at the end of his life published his extensive ethnography on "The Native Tribes of South-East Australia" (Horton 1994,

pp. 482–83). There is no evidence that he visited the Torres Strait in his life, yet in the first chapter of his book, writing about the origins of Aboriginal people, he said:<sup>20</sup>

Some further light is afforded by a statement made by a man from Prince of Wales Island whom I once met. It was, that his tribesmen are accustomed to migrate periodically in their sea-going canoes, according to the prevalent winds, either southwards along the coast of Queensland, or northwards to the further islands of Torres Strait, or even to the mainland of New Guinea. (Howitt 1904, p.11)

Could Howitt's Prince of Wales Islander informant have been King Gida whom he met in Melbourne? Howitt goes on to say:

The Kaurarega of Prince of Wales Island are usually considered to be Papuans, with a strong Australian mixture, which, judging from the example I saw, would be very marked. This mixture is easily to be understood when one considers the annual voyages by these people down the Cape York coast on the one side and across Torres Strait to the other, and that on these voyages, according to my native informant, they obtain wives from the Australian mainland and the New Guinea Islands. (Howitt 1904, pp.11–12)

Then in a later passage Howitt states:

I was much struck, when comparing some men from Prince of Wales Island with other men from the Cloncurry River, on the mainland, by the marked Papuan character of the former, and the marked Australian character of the latter. The intermixture through friendly intercourse between the Kaurarega of Prince of Wales Island and the Gudang of Cape York is well known. (Howitt 1904, p.29)

Where or when else in his life in southern Australia would Howitt have seen a Prince of Wales Islander

juxtaposed with an Aboriginal person from the Cloncurry River? Surely it is not a coincidence that the Wild Australia Show was the origin of this encounter with the two individuals being the Kaurareg leader Gida and the Kalkadungu performer, Yangala.

Confirmation of this likelihood comes from the contents of a friendly letter from Meston (1893) to Howitt dated 23 April 1893, in which Meston maligns Purcell and surmises that Howitt must have heard Purcell's talk to the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia (Victoria Branch) when the troupe arrived in Melbourne in January of that year. Meston accuses Purcell of fabricating and/or plagiarizing the ethnographic content of his presentation and implies that Howitt would have realized as such (perhaps a subtle form of flattery towards Howitt to keep him in good favour and on his (Meston's) side in his publicly aired dispute with Purcell over the abandonment of the troupe and ownership of the artefact collection that was assembled for the tour).

## RETURN OF THE KAURAREG PERFORMERS TO THE TORRES STRAIT

The Wild Australia Show troupe were eventually provided with 'deck passages' on the S.S. *Wodonga* to Brisbane. They left Sydney on 13th July and arrived 14th July 1893. The travel expenses were invoiced to the Queensland Colonial Secretary's Office by the NSW Chief Secretary's Office (Dibbs 1893). Purcell accompanied the troupe back to Brisbane to his credit ('Wild Australia' Aborigines in Queensland - A dying race. 1893 [Interview with A Meston on the Wild Australia Show], *The Queenslander*, 14 January, pp.82-83). Purcell clarified that only one of the troupe remained behind, implying that 26 of the 27 members travelled:

The Prince of Wales Islander remaining in Sydney asked me specially to be allowed to remain, he speaks good English and is engaged by a gentleman who is very kind to him and his wage is 5 [shillings] per week and board. (Purcell 1893)



On 22 July 1893, a Brisbane journalist wrote in *The Queenslander* newspaper that the Aboriginal troupe were resuming their voyage to their “homes in the North” leaving on the steamer *Wodonga* and to be landed, at either Cooktown, Thursday Island or Normanton, where the police would take charge of them and “see that they reach their own tribes” (‘Wild Australia’, 1893. *The Queenslander*, 22 July, p.180). Another journalist reported on this return journey as follows:

By the steamer *Wodonga*, which resumed her voyage northwards on Saturday, the aborigines composing the “Wild Australia” troupe were returned to their homes. A Prince of Wales Islander is the only member of the troupe left behind; he is at present in Sydney. The blacks will be taken charge of by the police on arrival at their various destinations... Two men, one woman, and a boy [note only four, not five] land at Thursday Island. These are Prince of Wales Islanders, one of them being the “king,” whose massive proportions will be remembered by persons who were present at the first appearance of the troupe at the Opera House... The whole party are in good health. During their temporary stay in Brisbane they were accommodated at the Immigration Barracks, Kangaroo Point. (“Wild Australia” Show, Arrest of B.H. Purcell’. 1893. *The Week*, 21 July, p. 19.)

A Police telegram confirmed that four Prince of Wales Islanders (two men, one woman, one boy) returned to Thursday Island where Sub Inspector Charles Savage was instructed to send them on to their home village or camp (Finucane 1893). We assume that it was either Dugum or Bulla who had stayed behind in Sydney and after saving some wages decided to return home. A telegram was sent from the Roma Street Police Station in Brisbane to the Queensland Police Commissioner’s Office on 26 July 1893 advising that “The Aboriginal Black Boy” was sent by Howard Smith’s Steamship *Peregrine* on 25 July to arrive Townsville on 28 July, thence to be

transferred on to the S.S. *Aramac* for Thursday Island (Higgins 1893). This presumably was the absent member of the troupe. It seems he had been in Sydney some 11 or 12 days before he too returned. We do not know why he remained but we assume had found some sort of friendship with a Sydney resident with whom the troupe had interacted and who offered to host him and later arrange to send him on.

A short time later, the Government Resident at Thursday Island, John Douglas was to write:

On the Prince of Wales Group the number of natives is gradually diminishing; they will soon die out altogether. The civilization of Thursday Island kills them off by its contact; meanwhile Misgidda, commonly known as “Tarbucket,” presides over about sixty natives, the remnant of a once powerful and numerous tribe. Misgidda and his wife, together with Doogoom and Bulla, joined the troupe of aboriginals who were taken to Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne by Messrs. Purcell and Meston. They returned to Thursday Island after their adventurous tour, and are now living at Prince of Wales Island none the worse, to all appearance, for their southern experiences. (Report of the Government Resident at Thursday Island for 1892–3 Q.V.P., 1894)

It would appear that John Douglas, like Meston, was a proponent of the popular Dying Race theory.

## THE LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY KAURAREG HISTORY

According to John Douglas, the Government Resident at Thursday Island, the Wild Australia Show performers had returned to a village on Prince of Wales Island. However there is evidence that they also had a village on Hammond Island at this time. It is probable that Gida and others moved seasonally by outrigger canoes between several village sites depending on food and water resources as well as labour and trade determinants.

The Prince of Wales group had become the centre of the new pearl-shelling population in the mid-1880s. Henry Chester (1882) reserved half of Keriri (Hammond Island) for the exclusive use of the Kaurareg. From here, the Kaurareg were employed in the pearling industry with individuals working at Wai Wea (Honeymoon Island) and Roko for Parbury and Lamb, and later for Joseph Tucker at Peilalag (Goode Island). But Mullins states the impacts of alcohol and venereal disease caused them to transform to “Islander fringe dwellers” (Mullins 1995, p.170).

In 1892, Charles Savage, one of the policeman on Thursday Island wrote that: “Tarbucket is recognised chief of Hammond Island” (Court of Petty Sessions, Thursday Island 1892). It would appear the Kaurareg had established a residential village at Hammond Island [Kirriri] then, although there was no compulsion in that move and Tarbucket may not have gone over with others, or alternatively moved between Muralag and Kirriri. The Kaurareg used to travel by canoe around their territories which included all those islands in the group surrounding Thursday Island (pers. comm. Anna Shnukal to Jonathan Richards, 3 April 2018). However it seems by 1900, the survivors and descendants of the Kaurareg had all come to live at Kirriri (Singe 1979, p.184).

Sometime in the mid or late 1890s, Gida made a re-connection with a Sydney-based performer with whom he had established a professional relation in the Wild Australia Show. In a 1932 newspaper article titled ‘An Old Actress. Bright Memories’, *Blanche* Lewis recalled her theatrical role in the 1893 play in Sydney in which the Wild Australia Show troupe performed. The article reported:

With a smile, I recall a humorous incident of my career: it was while playing in ‘Never Too Late To Mend’ at a Sydney theatre that our manager, George Rignold, engaged a troupe of Queensland aborigines. Albert Norman, my late husband, became very friendly with their chief King Tarbucket. Then the troupe returned to Queensland

and we lost sight of them. Many months later we played with our own company in Thursday Island, and King Tarbucket upon hearing of our presence, sent an offering of numerous green coconuts where he explained with pride were for ‘his friend, Albert Norman and his lubra’. (E. H. 1932)

This confirms that Gida was an ambassador for the troupe who was able to forge relationships of friendship and support independently of Meston and Purcell. (Perhaps it was also Rignold and his wife *Blanche* who had hosted the Kaurareg performer, either Dugum or Bula, who had remained behind in Sydney for 12 days or so.)

When Gida returned from the Wild Australia Show, his government allegiance and leadership role became strengthened, and he was eventually given a cutter to transport village supplies by the Thursday Island Administrator John Douglas. The evidence indicates that Douglas and Gida had in fact developed a strong friendship. Gida was a popular figure who also inherited Douglas’s cast-off clothing and enjoyed dressing up and miming Douglas’s mannerisms. Evidence for the above comes to light in June 1897, upon the occasion of the Diamond Jubilee celebrations at Thursday Island:

For Tuesday evening [22 June 1897], the Government Resident has arranged for a display of bonfires and fireworks, and a corroboree will form part of the entertainment provided by the natives. ‘The aborigines will have their headquarters near the Government boatshed, and the corroboree, it is understood, is being rehearsed under the able direction of King Tarbucket. (‘Local News.’ 1897. *Torres Straits Pilot and New Guinea Gazette*, 19 June)

John Douglas wrote from Thursday Island on 25 June 1897 to his son Edward on the celebrations for Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee, her 60th anniversary on the throne:

A huge pyre about 25 feet high was built.  
... You can imagine what a grand blaze it

made. We lighted it from the top. It was answered at once with responding fires from the battery and from Milman Hill. Then Hammond took it up, followed by Prince of Wales Island and Friday Island. It was quite something as the fires were sped from Island to Island. Then the [mainlanders'] corroboree began... [Tarbucket] and his tribe, on the other hand, gave us the Island corroboree. They had expended a vast amount of trouble on their decorations and it was a most interesting and striking event. They had a tent to change in and when they issued forth in their full panoply they created quite a sensation. They were rather too far from the bonfire, so it was necessary to show them off to greater perfection by the application of blue, red and green lights. The crowd pressed in too closely on them and it fell to me to clear a passage and space for them, which I did ... there were shouts of applause when I headed the corroboree, and led the dancers on in their comical contortions.... The fireworks and the corroboree lasted for nearly two hours and the gun was fired at 10 o'clock... Everybody then quietly dispersed and in another hour there was hardly a soul to be seen. (Douglas 1897)

The 'Torres Straits Pilot and New Guinea Gazette' reported the Jubilee celebration as follows:

...a programme of athletics, with the corroboree and display of fireworks, bonfires, etc. in the evening. 'the corroborees by both King Tarbucket's Prince of Wales Island men and the Binghis from Red Island all brought over by Mr Douglas's direction.

Red Island Point is on the west side of the top of Cape York, corresponding to where the community of Seisia is now located. The term 'Binghi' means 'brother' and is a borrowing from NSW coastal language groups, to simple mean

'Aboriginal people'. Milton Savage (pers. comm. Thursday Is., 28 November 2018) stated the Binghi in northern Cape York refers to the 'Oiyamkwi' which encompasses all of the far northern cultural groups which he elicited as Gudang, Gurmagurding [or Gumakudin] (west), Undiyama (central) and Yadaiganha (east, south of Jacky Jacky Creek). The Angkamudi [or Ankamuti] were further south from this last group according to Milton, on Seven Rivers. The Gazette goes on to describe further:

The corroborees drew great numbers of people; to describe the various antics of the aboriginal natives in their evolutions is a difficult one. The fantastic headgear, shields, etc. of the islanders and their contortionate exercises, were wonderful and amusing, yet withal there was a sense of veneration observed by the onlookers for the gyrations of the performers. The tomtoms aided the women folk and singers in their incantations the dance music which again inspirited the dances, their wonderfully light, springy step bearing witness. The Binghis also carried on their curious dance with zest, but their clothing was scantier than that of the islanders - if, indeed, the covering of the loins could be called clothing - and a great number of people congregated around them, drawn by the peculiar sharp, screechy sounds they utter as part of the corroboree. All the natives were rendered happy and contented by plenty to eat and drink. (Local News.' 1897b. Torres Straits Pilot and New Guinea Gazette, 26 June; pers. comm. Anna Shnukal to Jonathon Richards 3 April 2018)

We speculate that Gida would have been one of the lead songmen and drummers. There are three historic photographs that were probably taken at this Jubilee event. One is of blanket distribution, one of the corroboree performers and one of Gida's canoe and beach camp (see figures 11–13). Gida's close relation with John Douglas was further elaborated upon by a journalist in September 1899:



This extraordinary place [Thursday Island] is ruled over by the Hon. John Douglas, the Resident and Administrator, who was in the New South Wales Parliament before separation, and has been Queensland Premier and Minister for Lands. The affairs of the township are managed by a divisional board, part of the machinery of Queensland local government, and so, as regards the township, Mr. Douglas is a constitutional sovereign. The military garrison is provided for by the three principal colonies – New South Wales, Victoria, and Queensland – and over military works a good deal of Queensland money has been spent, and so in his relations to the military Mr. Douglas may be considered as the representative of a higher power. But over the shifting colored population and the aboriginal population, his moral authority, if not his statutory power, is unbounded. On Thursday Island he sits on the bench and administers justice tempered by mercy, and outside the Thursday Island limits he periodically, or when occasion arises,

travels by schooner or steamer and settles matters of high policy, even being able, if need be, to, like a modern Warren Hastings, “depose legitimate princes”. But his sway is milder than that of his celebrated prototype: he rules by suasion and example as much as by anything else, and has imbued with respect surrounding potentates, such as the Mamoose (king) of Prince of Wales’s Island and the Mamoose of Mabuac [Mabuiag] – the island blacks, unlike their kinsmen of the greater part of the mainland, have hereditary rulers. Prince of Wales’s Island is about one and a half – or it may be two miles from Thursday Island; there is a boat house and one white family on it, and a few cattle are run upon it occasionally. There also his Majesty King Tarbucket, who owns a cutter, the gift of his indulgent suzerains of Queensland exercises a paternal sway over seventy or eighty blacks, and in regard to the neighboring ruler of Thursday Island, indulges in that imitation which is the sincerest flattery. Tarbucket, possibly

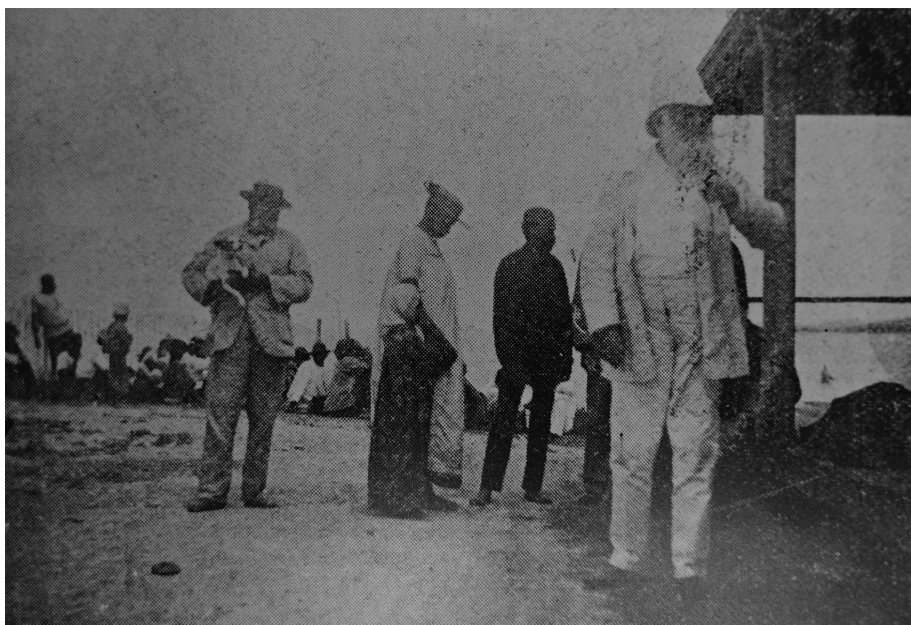


FIG. 11. Photo provenanced as “Tarbucket and His Favourite Fox-Terrier, Blanket Distribution on Thursday Island, 1899”; Gida is on the left and John Douglas on the right. (Courtesy State Library of Queensland, 78600 (Di-906.97)).



FIG. 12. Photo provenanced as “King Tarbucket’s Warriors in Corroboree Dress, Thursday Island, 1899.” (Courtesy State Library of Queensland, 78602 (Di-906.88)).



FIG. 13. Photo provenanced as “King Tarbucket’s Camp and War Canoe, Thursday Island, 1899.” (Courtesy State Library of Queensland, 78601 (Di-906.95)).



in consideration of good behaviour and unshaken allegiance, is the occasional recipient of some of the Hon. John Douglas's left-off clothing, and when he proudly dons these upon State occasions, he endeavors to imitate the dignified walk and attitude of his respected patron. Some say he even attempts to copy his model's method of speech, but surely those who have put such rumors abroad are enemies of the state. ('White and Brown. Where they Meet. Men of Many Colors'. 1899. *Evening News* (Sydney), 9 September, p.1)

This observation indicates something of the friendly and informal relation between Gida and John Douglas, as well as Gida's skills as a performer and mime artist. It also gives an indication of the diminished Kaurareg population.

## GIDA'S CONVERSION TO CHRISTIANITY PRIOR TO HIS DEATH

There is evidence that the Kaurareg, from an early time in the colonisation history, were open to acculturating Christianity and accompanying European skills and knowledge, for in May 1867 (two years before the *Sperwer* massacre), a group visited the first mission school established at Somerset with a request to establish a similar school back to Muralag (Bayton 1969, p.17). But it was not until the latter years of his life, that we find Gida was responding to 'the Coming of the Light' religious movement in the Torres Strait which had been initiated by the London Missionary Society (LMS), a Congregationalist mission active throughout the Strait since 1871. The process of this engagement reveals something of his alliances in the western island communities of the Strait.

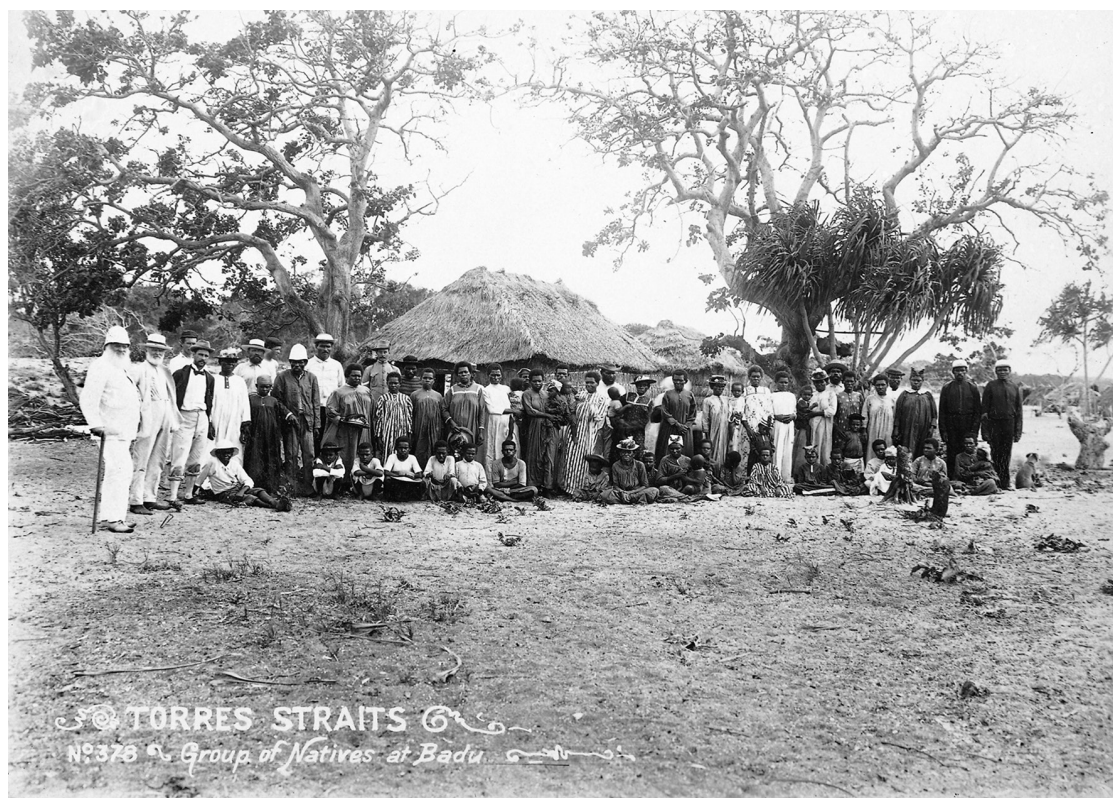


FIG. 14. Group of Islanders at Badu ((Mulgrave Island) 1898. Gida is in the centre, wearing a hat. John Douglas is on the far left. (Source: Queensland State Archives Item ID 1109843).

In her writing on the contact history of Mua Island, Anna Shnukal (2008, p.71) reported that after a new LMS Church was dedicated at Mabuiag on 16 October 1897, two days later Rev Chalmers baptised a large group there, including 'the chief of Muralag (Prince of Wales Island), his family and "two of his people"'. This chief had been requesting a teacher for his people (implying a missionary teacher) for a 'long time'. The chiefs of Mabuiag, Badu and Mua and others had a meeting and lobbied Chalmers hard to commit funds ('no good leave Prince of Wales all dark, no got lamp', clearly referring to the need for 'the coming of the light' to Muralag). Shnukal adds that nothing came of this request and some years after, the Kaurareg were moved to Kirriri then to Mua. Shnukal obviously attempted to hypothesise who this Kaurareg chief was, for she includes an endnote (2008, p.316, End Note 35), and says it may have been Gida aka Misgidda, King Tarbucket.

In a 'Report on New Guinea 1896', Rev. James Chalmers wrote on this matter:

I have had a beseeching appeal for a teacher from the natives of Prince of Wales. When in Thursday Island in ?January, Tarbucket, the chief, and several of his men, came to me, and begged hard that I should think of them, and that if I gave them a teacher, they would build his house, and all settle down in one place, attend all services, and their children would all be sent to school. There are about / 52 80 of them altogether, and many of them go to Mabuiag, and have tasted of the Word of Life there. The chief of Mabuiag has also been pleading for them. I feel greatly sorry for them, but what can I do? (Chalmers 1896, p.51 in pers. comm. Anna Shnukal to Jonathan Richards, 3 April 2018)

This passage does suggest that Gida was still based at Muralag in 1896. Gida passed away in late 1899. John Douglas wrote:

Since I came down [i.e. to Brisbane, c. December 1899] I have heard of the death of their chief, who was familiarly known as Tarbucket. He was a very portly man, and sometimes used

to inherit my garments, when I had done with them, and the consequence was that there were people who rather confused his identity with mine. This was a source of amusement to some of the inhabitants, but when they saw his visage, I hope they saw the distinction between us. (Douglas 1900, p.31; pers. comm. Anna Shnukal to Jonathan Richards, 3 April 2018)

At the turn of the century, the Kaurareg population was barely 100 people (Douglas 1899–1900, p.31, cited in Sharpe 1992, p.109).

## THE REMOVAL OF THE KAURAREG FROM THEIR HOMELANDS AND EXILE TO MUA

By the end of 1920, the impact of contagious diseases such as influenza had reduced the Kaurareg population to under 70 (Sharp 1992, p.109). In 1921, the Kaurareg were moved from Kirriri supposedly for their own protection, to the new settlement of Poid which was adjacent to another occupied village called Adam on Mua (Banks) Island. The residents at Adam were indigenous Mualgal with an exogamous marriage tradition shared with the Kaurareg (Sharp 1992, p.110). The two proximate villages gradually became identified as one large village particularly after some inter-marriages, and so eventually one name 'Poid' was then applied to the larger complex, the name 'Adam' being dropped (Ash et al. 2021, p.68 Shnukal 2008, p.80; Sharp 1992, p.199). The Kaurareg land at Kirriri was later handed to the Catholic Church by the Queensland Government to form the Sacred Heart Mission but it was not intended for the Kaurareg (Sharp 1992, p.115).

In 1922, the whole Kaurareg community was shifted at gunpoint to Poid on the northwest side of Moa Island. As the Papuan Industries' vessel Goodwill took them away they wept as they sang the song 'Kirriri'. For Kirriri had become home supporting a way of life in which birthplace and daily life of fishing and gardening and burial place were woven together. (Sharp 1992, p.110)

The forced migration of the Kaurareg from Kirriri to Mua was planned by order of the Queensland Aboriginal Protector Bleakley in 1921. Grass houses with mangrove wood floors were built for them. When the new settlers arrived in 1922 taken at gunpoint, a local teenager who assisted in the preparations later recalled “They’re weeping all the time...The Government wouldn’t let them go back and visit [their homeland] ...” (Shnukal 2008, p.79). Sharp’s analysis of the reasons for this removal are based on the policy of minimizing contamination, corruption and degradation through interaction with the mixed-race Thursday Island populations through stricter segregation which she says was tightened as a policy after WWI (1992, p.110). Of significance for our analysis is that it is a continuation of Meston’s original ‘Dying Race’ argument that he put forward in his 1895 pamphlet and subsequently his official report (1896) which were key foundations for the Aboriginals Protection and Sale of Opium Act 1897.

In February 1922, it was reported by the Local Protector (R.Y.Holmes) that there were three Kaurareg leaders causing initial oppositional dissent to the removal to Mua and it was recommended they be removed to avoid trouble. It was said the most vocal was ‘Kaur Agai’, but he backed down a few days later according to a dispatch and Shnukal hypothesises it may have been threat of being sent to Palm Island (Shnukal, 2008, p.79). According to baptism data, ‘Kaur Agai’ was born in 1888 (Shnukal, 2008, p.97). We hypothesise that this was Gida’s adopted son whom we have identified as Kawara, spelt in an 1893 photo caption as ‘Cowra’ and by Meston as ‘Cowaro’. A white person with an untrained ear hearing ‘Cowra’ is clearly similar to hearing the name as ‘Kaura’. If born in 1888, he would have been five in 1893. Our newspaper sources in southern capitals reported him as both five and six years old during the Wild Australia tour. In an endnote, Shnukal, independently from us, concluded that she suspected this person, whom she identifies as ‘Kaur Agai’ or ‘Kaitip Kaur’, was “the son of Misgida or King Tarbucket, recognised as leader of the Kaurareg from Muralag” (Shnukal, 2008, p.193, End Note 64). Shnukal later states (2008, p.176) in her lengthy article that ‘Kaur Agai,

said to be the last Muralag-born (Prince of Wales) Islander, passed away on 15 December 1962<sup>21</sup>. We concur with Shnukal’s conclusion.

The ethnomusicologist Wolfgang Laade, in his introduction to his catalogue of field tape recordings made in the Torres Strait Islands during 1963–1965, wrote:

A mere four or five years before I arrived in the Torres Straits, a few more people would have had an excellent knowledge of their own history and traditions. Some of them were in fact the last representatives of the former population of the respective islands. For instance, Kaur, the last native of the Prince of Wales Island, died in 1962 (Laade, n.d.; pers. comm. Anna Shnukal to Jonathan Richards, 3 April 2018.)

Given Kawara’s birth in c.1885, this implies he lived to an age of c.77 years. In another endnote Shnukal (2008, p.319, End Note 122) reports that ‘Kaur Agai’ had a wife Leah Charlie, previously married to Waina; she was the daughter of Charlie Moa and Memeru Alala. And in another endnote (2008, p.328, End Note 337), she states that ‘Kaur Agai’ had a brother, Genamai Geia, born in c.1889 [presumably on Muralag], died 1955, and buried at Kubin on Mua. At this point in our research we did not know whether Genamai was a biological or classificatory brother to Kaur/Kawara, nor whether he regarded Gida as his social father, but given Islander kinship rules it was probable. Genamai had been residing for a long time on Palm Island [presumably removed there] and was given permission by the Kubin Council to return to Mua in c.1949. At the time, he was widowed and returned with eleven people consisting of three sons and their families. Shnukal adds (2008, pp.204–205) that the “Geia family, with its dual Torres Strait and Palm Island heritage through the marriage of Genamai Geia to Elizabeth Kyle, remains prominent in Palm Island affairs to this day”.

Sharp (1992) and Shnukal (2008) have documented in detail the life of the Kaurareg on Mua, the later removal to Kubin village there, and the struggle for political autonomy and identity maintenance with country, kin and culture. Finally in 1946 after

World War Two, some Kaurerag moved back to Nurapai (Horn Island) and defiantly remained there to rebuild a community on homeland, which was named Wasaga Village. In the late 1970s, relations were still maintained by the Kubin and Ngurupai Kaurerag people with relatives at Cowal Creek and Bamaga on Cape York. (Mullins 1995, p.170; Singe 1979, pp.184,185).

## LINKING TO THE CONTEMPORARY DESCENDANTS OF KING GIDA

In 1938, the anthropologist Norman Tindale of the South Australian Museum visited Palm Island penal community as part of his national research survey of recording genealogical and physical anthropological data on Australian Aboriginal people. His genealogical sheet 218 (of 7 November 1938) records a subject 'Genamia Gia' (person no 1191) of Torres Strait Island whose first deceased wife was Lizzie [Elizabeth Kyle] and second contemporaneous wife was Nancy Gia. Genamia's children are given as Albert, Ezram, Malcolm and Thomas. Tindale gives his birthdate as 1898 but we note that Shnukal gives it as 1888 (2008, p.328, End Note 337).

A second sheet no 241 (10 November 1938) also recorded from Genamia Gia, is from 'Kailaig' or 'Moa Island' and that his older siblings are Napatali, Kawur and Ropia (males) and younger sibs are Abi (male), Janet, Lily and Flora. Genamia's father is given as 'Gia', 'full blood' of Mua Island and his mother as Mary, 'full blood' of Badu Island.

We can conclude that Kawara and Genamia were either biological brothers (the latter of whom was then fostered by Gida), or classificatory (social) brothers from different fathers based on Kawara's adoption by Gida and Genamia's biological descent from Gida. In 2018 we hypothesized that Tindale's 'Gia' was the same person as our Gida and his 'Kawur' was the same person as our Kawara of the Wild Australia Show. Given understandings of Tindale's spelling orthography, his 'Gia' would be pronounced 'Giya' in more contemporary orthographies. We surmised that in the process

of inter-generational name recording in the State Protection administration, the name Gida has been recorded as 'Gia' and its pronunciation has shifted to 'Gaya', as in 'fire'. Then the spelling had shifted again to 'Geia' amongst the contemporary descendants. We were to be proved wrong on this hypothesis.

Our first contact with this family was with the musician-singer, Joseph (or Joe) Geia who put us into contact with his wider family and who now recognise the adoptive genealogical links of Kawara to King Gida. A large descent group from Genamia Geia still reside on Palm Island, including a number of notable community leaders, councillors and elders. Joseph Geia and his siblings pronounce their father's father's name as 'Genami.' [perhaps this is an abbreviated form of 'Genamia']. Joseph's father was Albert ('Albie') Geia who is remembered in Aboriginal history as a revered leader of the Palm Island strike against the Queensland Government and the conditions of 'the Act' in 1957 (Watson 2010, p.109).

Joseph Geia then linked us to his daughter Jessica Lloyd, a popular musical performer and creative producer, but also the family researcher for the Geia family. After sharing our research with her, she visited Kubin township on Mua to confer with related community Elders, and was able to clarify the upper genealogy of Kawara and Genamia. They were indeed biological twin brothers, their father being 'Gia' (Gaya), and father's father 'Gara', Mamoose of Mua. Jessica has come to the view that Gara was the 'old king' referred to by Purcell whilst on tour, who gave Kawara (aka Kaur, Kawr) to Gida who was a recognised Kaurareg leader. Elders at Kubin told her "it was customary to trade sons between Mamoose for commodity" (Jessica Lloyd, pers. comm. 22 August 2019).

According to Joseph Geia and Jessica Lloyd, Genamia had been sent to Hull River Mission (now Mission Beach near Tully) which was then destroyed by cyclone in 1918. He was sent with the other inmates to establish Palm Island settlement. Genamia married Elizabeth Kyle on Palm Island. He joined the army during WWII in the 1940s and worked in an American Army base at Wallaby Point



on the northern end of Palm Island, and guided large ships through channels and reefs. His skills were based on his experience from pearl diving in the Torres Strait. After the war, he wanted to go back to Mua, but decided to marry Elizabeth and stay with her family on Palm Island. “Grandad Genamia used to make them Island dance for when tourists, to see.... local Aboriginal people at Palm took up Island dance then” (pers. comm. J. Geia, 16 November 2018; J. Lloyd 5 July 2019).

## CONCLUSION

In reconstructing and interpreting something of the life story of Gida, the reader will note that we have had to analytically move between a mix of abstruse historical texts, anthropological arguments, genealogical and archaeological data, interviews and maps, as well as an assembly of historical photos compiled by our visual anthropologist Michael Aird for the wider Wild Australia Show project. In late 2018, the authors brought a travelling museum exhibition of images of the Wild Australia Show to Gab Titui Cultural Centre on Thursday Island, which drew largely on the portrait photographs taken during the tour by Will Stark, Charles Kerry, John Lindt, and Henry King. What was unexpectedly overwhelming at the splendid opening was the powerful catalytic impact of political liberation, whereby a forum was created for emotionally airing discussion on the traumatic Kaurareg history and the need for healing and reconciliation. In his opening speech, Kaurareg leader Milton Savage (29 November 2018) orated:

Thonar Tidaizing Zapul. Things happen for a reason – we come to be at the right place at the right time for a reason.... Why are we here? We must stand up and accept the truth. The truth can set you on fire. This Wild Australia Show tells us of intergenerational trauma. It has an effect for Kaurareg people today. Our ancestors... they were massacred in Gida’s time... remaining ones had to be removed at gunpoint and restricted from practising culture and language. This had psychological and emotional effects passed down to us

today. Kaurareg was kept hidden since the time of administration on Waiben [Thursday Island]. Exposing Kaurareg history is not a bad, but a good thing. It will set everyone free from the injustice of colonization. My actions set a precedent. I can’t keep bearing the pain. There has to be healing at Waiben [Thursday Island], as the administration centre where this history all happened. We have to speak! This has a very big effect on us! .... Sometimes things they happen for a reason. Do we continue putting up with the degrading and patronizing of our position here at Waiben? Or do we seek that goal of *Ailan Pasin*. If the intergenerational trauma, the psychological pain if we can fix it, then a future light for everyone!

Gida had become the leader of his people for some decades in the late nineteenth century, bringing them through the most brutal period of intergenerational trauma, marked by violence, disease and decimation. Removal from country was to follow.

Although the history of the *Sperwer* chain of events of 1869 has been historically shrouded in mystery, contradiction and confusion for 150 years, objectivity being further masked by missing archival documents<sup>22</sup>, our careful review with expanded data sets of the different accounts, clearly confirms the views of earlier scholars, namely that there was indeed a subsequent massacre of many innocent Kaurareg people by Frank Jardine’s ruthless raid from the Somerset outpost. Despite Meston’s upbeat sensationalized accounts, Gida as a child must have been greatly traumatized by this event. The role of the Somerset Native Police was undoubtedly in his memory when Meston required the Wild Australia Show to re-enact Native Police conflicts on stage in 1892–93. Gida’s people were further decimated in the 1870s and 80s by the diseases and epidemics introduced by the mixed ethnic immigrant pearlers in his country for whom the remaining able-bodied Kaurareg became the labour pool, increasingly administered and sententized in their villages by the Government Administration of the Torres Strait (centred at nearby Thursday Island from 1877). It is

within this labour pool of boatmen and divers that we surmise Gida learnt multi-lingual skills in a range of South-East Asian languages.

Gida enters the written record from 1888 upon the interest in his knowledge by the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition (Haddon and Rivers), identifying him as a communicable consultant on Kaurareg law, sacred history, totems and kinship. At this time, he was already a recognised leader or chief ('Mamoose') of the Kaurareg and a decade later his status was recognised formally by being given the title of 'King Gida' by the Government Resident, John Douglas.

Gida was one of the troupe leaders of the Wild Australia Show whose authority and integrity held the troupe together after Meston's unethical abandonment of them in Melbourne, continuing the tour and forging good relations, so much so that he earned the respect of the public and the press. Gida was more than a match for Meston. On the other hand Meston, in his 'Wild Australia Show' press statements, hypothesized his crude ethnographic understanding of the Kaurareg as cannibalistic Papuans, albeit sharing many cultural traits with the Torres Strait Islanders and mainland Aboriginal groups. This proposition was refined by the anthropologist Alfred Howitt whom we conclude met the Kaurareg performers in Melbourne. These views were an ominous vanguard of the twentieth century local politics whereby the Kaurareg were to be treated as a suppressed and inferior group (an 'other') in the Torres Strait Island social hierarchy (lower than both Asians and Torres Strait Islanders)<sup>23</sup>, and the only Islander tribal group to suffer being all removed from their islands.

However John Douglas was to humanely befriend Gida in his later years up until the latter's death in 1899, by which time he had converted to Christianity. Douglas saw Gida as a civic leader in the very ethnically mixed Torres Strait society, for Douglas had given Gida a cutter to service his village(s) and conscripted his dancing group to celebrate the Queen Victoria Jubilee. But he also regarded Gida as an amusing colleague who mimed

him in good humour and with whom he could join in corroborees. Gida's death spared him the trauma of his people's forced removal from their land to Mua, but his classificatory sons were to endure this next phase of inter-generational trauma of the Kaurareg, viz. Kawara (aka Kaur, Kawur), and Genamia Gia. The next generation of Kaurareg descendants were to make the return to homeland on Ngurupai (Horn Island) in defiance of the State Government and attempt to re-establish links to their land and activate their identity as the Kaurareg.

In considering the trauma and devastation of the Kaurareg, we posit that Gida, as a visionary leader, made a strategic decision to give his people hope by forging an alliance with Administrator John Douglas and seeking adaptive ways for economic viability (including cultural performances) without sacrificing cultural identity, a radical life course strategy, albeit one catalysed by devastating frontier impacts. This Indigenous path of survival in the face of frontier violence has recently been theorized for other indigenous peoples who underwent similar traumatic colonial legacies (Broome 2018; Lear 2006). We trust that this biographical analysis has made a contribution to understanding the role, psychology and actions of individual Indigenous leaders of the nineteenth century, caught within the confrontations and conundrums of frontier culture clash.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## ENDNOTES

1. A 'mamoose' was a recognized ceremonial and law authority within the cultural groups of the Torres Strait who was given the title 'mamoose' by early colonial administrators to create the role of government agents.
2. He was also given the name 'Misgida' which our Kaurareg consultant Milton Savage, views as a derogatory or accidental misinterpretation of his name as 'Mosquito' and which stuck as a nickname.
3. pers. comm. Milton Savage and Seriat Young, Kaurareg Aboriginal Corporation.
4. In particular, we are appreciative of support and research input from Milton Savage and Seriat Young, as well as to a wider group of Kaurareg Elders and leaders who participated in a half-day history and truth-telling workshop at Thursday Island on 29 November 2018, co-facilitated by Milton Savage and Meriam Elder Charles Passi.
5. Packe Island, close to Muralag, may have been named after Pacquey.
6. The Native Police was an armed force of Aboriginal troopers led by European officers whose function was to crush Aboriginal resistance (Richards 2008).
7. Carroll appears to have erred on this point when she says Jardine was not reappointed until 1875 (1969, p.35). According to Prideaux (1988, pp.185–186), Jardine served as Police Magistrate (PM) from 1870–1873, succeeded by Beddome, Dalrymple, Alpin, and then Chester in 1875.
8. One of our anonymous reviewers confirmed Carroll's description of the crew stating "This reviewer has seen, in Melbourne, original documents associated with the Captain's and (Welsh) First Mate's wills, which shows that Carroll was correct, the crew consisted of 3 Europeans (Captain, First and Second Mates) and 5 Javanese".
9. Archibald Meston was later to report that Gida was a youth at the time of the *Sperwer* saga in 1869. Gida died thirty years later, in 1899 as a mature man. In our view Gida must have been in 'late youth-hood', perhaps as old as 20 years in 1869.
10. 'The *Brisbane Courier*' also printed that its editor was informed by a Mr JT Cockerill of Fortitude Valley that her son was always treated kindly of the Prince of Wales tribe, but they have a peculiar tradition, the 'corroboree' which may be misconstrued as an aggression, though it is a greeting. Cockerill thinks the crew of the *Sperwer* thought it was an attack, reacting in a way that caused the Prince of Wales Islanders to retaliate. ('The Massacre at Prince of Wales Island'. 1869. *The Brisbane Courier* 9 November, p. 3)
11. Note QSA Items 6913, 846864, and 846883; QSA Item 846883, 1869/4015 are identified at QSA as 'Gall estrays,' meaning they were borrowed by the senior public servant William Gall in the early decades of the twentieth century and never returned, but later retrieved from his possessions after his death. However, there are other documents missing from the QSA identified by one of us (J.R.) which we suspect were also removed by Gall but not retrieved. These include the missing diaries and papers of Frank Jardine which were also mentioned by Nonie Sharp (1992, p. 70).
12. Note this was reproduced in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 8 November 1869, p. 2, and in *The Brisbane Courier* of 9 November 1869, p. 3.
13. See Richards (2019) on the QSA's 'Gall Estrays' for an explanation.
14. Meston gets both the number killed and their identity clearly wrong.
15. Jardine served as Police Magistrate during 1870–1873, and was succeeded by Beddome, Dalrymple, Alpin, and then Chester in 1875 according to Prideaux (1988, pp.185–186).
16. Kinship terminology identified by Milton Savage, 28 November 2018, Thursday Island.
17. Milton Savage (Pers. Comm. 6 February 2020) has commented that men such as Jardine and Chester established the 'Mamoose' system by selecting existing leaders as government agents. These men were already in traditional governance roles in their own right, practising ritual, sorcery and punishments which enabled them to control their own people.
18. Since re-named the Wenlock River. Mapoon community at the river mouth.
19. It is probable that Dugum and Bula were related to Gida, at least in a classificatory way, but we have no kinship evidence to elucidate this aspect.
20. I am indebted to colleague Dr Ray Wood for bringing my attention to these passages of Howitt's.
21. It is not clear what Shnukal's source was here. However according to Qld BDM records (which are not always correct) the date was 15 December 1963. (Refer# 1963/C/6175 'Kaiu Agai'). We are indebted to our anonymous reviewer for pointing this out to us.
22. For discussion on the 'Gall Estrays' from the Queensland State Archive, see Richards 2019.
23. Pers. comm. Charles Passi and Milton Savage, 29 November 2018.

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