THE DISCOVERY OF THE RELICS OF H.M. COLONIAL BRIG LADY NELSON AND THE SCHOONER STEDCOMBE

peter spillett
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I DEDICATE THIS WORK TO THE MEMORY OF CAPTAIN SAMUEL JOHNS; MATE BASTELL AND THE CREWS OF THE "LADY NELSON" AND "THE STEDCOMBE" WHO LOST THEIR LIVES IN THE SERVICE OF THE GARRISON AT FORT DUNDAS, MELVILLE ISLAND IN 1825.
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INTRODUCTION

Whilst researching the early history of the Northern Territory and particularly that of Fort Dundas on Melville Island and Fort Wellington at Raffles Bay; the first two British settlements in North Australia, I came across a number of questions still waiting to be answered.

As I progressed I was consumed with a desire to try and find the answers to two questions more demanding than the rest:

The fate of two vessels that had left Fort Dundas within a week of each other in February of 1825 and never seen again. One was the Colonial Brig “Lady Nelson” which was attached to Fort Dundas as a supply ship, and the other the East India Trade Committee’s schooner “Stedcombe”, which was intended to trade with the Indonesian Islands and establish an entrepot at the settlement.

From the records that I have uncovered it was reported that the “Lady Nelson” had been taken by pirates at the Island of Babar and the crew murdered and the “Stedcombe” taken by pirates at the Island of Jamdena (or Timor Laut) in the Tanimbar group, and the crew murdered with the exception of two cabin boys; one of whom was rescued many years later.

Both islands are inaccessible except by sea and that in itself posed a problem, as in this quarter of the Indonesian Archipelago there are no regular shipping services other than inter-island boats served from Ambon. Historically, access by boat has always been difficult except at the change of monsoon and even then dubious. (Recently a weekly flight from Ambon to Saumlaki was introduced).

A number of yachts, sailing out of the Darwin Sailing Club, particularly at the time of the annual Darwin to Ambon Yacht Race, visit some of the islands in the Moluccas and other groups of the Archipelago. I thought this might be my best chance, as to mount an expedition to visit both islands would be beyond my resources. I then sought to crew one of the boats in the 1981 Yacht Race with the intention of combining my researches on the return journey to Darwin.

Bill Jelley and his wife Jean own “La Baleine”, and run a charter business around the Northern Territory coast in the dry season and out from Ambon in the wet season. I approached Bill to crew with him in the Ambon Race and we came to an understanding about visiting the islands on our return journey.

In the following pages I have attempted to provide such documentary evidence as I have located over the years, relating to the loss of the two vessels and their crews, in chronological order so as to tell their own story. In addition, I have recounted my own story from the notes taken on my journeys, supplemented with photographs and the oral testimony of the island people who are traditionally related to the events that took place so long ago.

I have not attempted to include the history of the “Lady Nelson” as it is already well told and unfortunately there is little enough to tell of the “Stedcombe”.

I have used the old spelling of place names that were used in the original documents but the present day Bahasa Indonesia spelling elsewhere.

While it is almost impossible to prove that the relics found, are without doubt those remaining from the two vessels, the strong circumstantial evidence uncovered tends to my theory that they are so.

Nevertheless, there are still a number of questions still unanswered and I hope that one day they also will be answered either by me, or some other person.
THE SETTLEMENT OF NORTH AUSTRALIA

In mid 1823 a trader William Barns, who had spent four years trading between the Moluccas and New South Wales, suggested to the British Colonial Office that a British settlement on the north coast of New Holland should be established; preferably in the Gulf of Carpentaria. Along the entire length of the East Indian Archipelago there were but two major European settlements; the British settlement of Singapore at the western end and Dutch Batavia in the middle. Barns suggested that a settlement situated close to the fishing grounds frequented by the Macassan trepang fishermen, could control the trade of the southern Archipelago, especially the Moluccas islands and, because of it’s situation on the New Holland mainland, it would not conflict with the new Treaty in force, and the high import tariff on British goods would be avoided.

Barns enlisted the aid of the East India Trade Committee who, after discussions with Captain Phillip Parker King, suggested to the Colonial Secretary a site at Port Essington on the Coburg Peninsula. They pursued their suggestion with the idea that the settlement ought as well to be a military station, which would provide security for the British possessions and traders in the area. It would also provide a resort for re-victualing the ever increasing number of ships sailing from England and India to New South Wales and New Zealand through the Torres Straits.

The imaginative proposal was referred to the Admiralty who wholeheartedly concurred with the establishment of a new settlement, if only for the reason of anticipating any moves the Dutch might make to establish themselves on the north coast. British claim to the north coast of New Holland would be made doubly sure by the occupancy, and ships trading in the area would be secure from island pirates.

The Government agreed to the proposal with the result that in January 1824 the warship HMS ‘‘Tamar’’, under the command of Captain J.J.G. Bremer, R.N. was despatched to north Australia to select a suitable site for the settlement.

The ‘‘Tamar’’ was accompanied by a trading vessel, the ‘‘Countess of Harcourt’’, and the Colonial Brig ‘‘Lady Nelson’’, to be used for communications and trading with the islands. Bremer’s instructions were to take possession of the north coast between the western coast of Bathurst Island and the eastern side of the Coburg Peninsula and, if possible, form settlements at Port Essington and Melville Island.

On arrival in Sydney, Bremer found that only enough troops could be spared for the formation of one settlement. Arriving at Port Essington in September, and failing to find water after a three day search, he decided to set up an establishment on Melville Island.

On 26 September 1824 Captain Bremer took possession of the north coast of New Holland and after three days chose a site for the settlement, later to be called Fort Dundas, after the First Lord of the Admiralty.

Bremer reported to Earl Bathurst that ‘‘The labour of everyone in the expedition was given so cheerfully that, on the 21 October having completed one bastion and the sea face of the fort, I had the satisfaction of hoisting His Majesty’s Colours on FORT DUNDAS (so named in honour of the Noble Lord at the head of the Admiralty) under a Royal Salute from two 9 Pounder Guns, and one 12 Pounder Carraonade, which were already mounted’’.

‘‘Fort Dundas, which is now completed with the exception of the ditch, is built of timber of great hardness and solidity (some of the trees being two feet ten inches in diameter and of immense weight) in layers five feet thick, the ditch, ten feet deep and fifteen feet wide, the height of the work inside being six feet. On it are mounted two 9 Pounder guns and four 18 Pounder Carronades with a 12 Pounder Carronade to shift on occasion, and which will answer for the ‘‘Lady Nelson’’ Colonial vessel if it should be necessary to detach her on service’’. (1)

On November 1824 HMS ‘‘Tamar’’ accompanied by the ‘‘Countess of Harcourt’’ sailed from Melville Island leaving Captain Maurice Barlow of the 3rd Regiment of Foot in charge of the garrison and the ‘‘Lady Nelson’’ as the infant settlement’s sole means of communication and supply.

With the onset of the ‘‘wet’’ season and the north-west monsoon, when sailing to Timor would mean a long and hard haul, it was considered highly desirable to seek sources of livestock and food supplies to support the future needs of the settlement.
The Commissary Clerk, George Miller, wrote to Secretary to the Treasury, George Harrison, "Deputy Commissary General Wemyss expresses an opinion that fresh provisions may be obtained from the Island of Timor, and I believe it is the intention of the Officer in Command when a fit opportunity arrives, to dispatch the "Lady Nelson" to ascertain the state of the market there, and, if arrangements can be made to this effect, I shall proceed there for this purpose. It was the intention of the Commandant to have supplied the men with Kangaroo, if these animals had been found on the Island, but none of them have been seen; however, fish have been caught in great plenty, and the prisoners have once received them in lieu of meat ration".(2)

In early December 1824, the 61 ton brig, under the command of Captain Samuel Johns, sailed for Timor and informed the authorities in Kupang of the establishment of Fort Dundas and immediately opened negotiations for the supply of livestock and fresh produce. Although the distance from Kupang to Melville Island is only 400 miles, the return journey of the "Lady Nelson" took fourteen days, due to the adverse winds experienced, and arrived at Fort Dundas on 2 January 1825. Miller who sailed in her, reported that "Buffalo, pigs and sheep can be procured there in any quantity, and at a moderate price". (3)

During January an outbreak of the dreaded scurvy was reported amongst the prisoners, and, in an attempt to combat it, peas were substituted for some of the salt meat in their rations. But the disease increased and spread amongst the soldiers. The Commandant, the Medical Officer and the Commissary Clerk determined on a change of diet to include preserved meat in lieu of salt meat and vegetables where possible. Miller reported to Barlow, "To discontinue the use of salt provisions and to substitute in their place a daily issue of fresh meat and vegetables is what Dr. Turner recommends to prevent the increase of the disease of scurvy. But it is at present impossible to procure the latter article, and the unsuccessful issue of the first voyage of His Majesty's Colonial Brig to Timor, and the length of time she has now been away on a second, promise at present only a precarious supply of fresh meat". (4)

The "Lady Nelson" returned after five weeks with the miserable cargo of "thirty pigs, small, lean and unfit for immediate use".

As a result of the poor outcome of the second voyage the Master of the "Lady Nelson" was again directed to "Go to the islands to purchase whatever stock he could get, he having stated that sheep, goats and buffalo were easier procurable there than pigs, and to return as soon as possible".

On 19 February 1825, the "Lady Nelson" sailed from Fort Dundas — for much needed fresh provisions, and due back, according to Johns, within three weeks.

Towards the end of December 1824, the Schooner "Stedcombe" 128 tons, owned by Palmer, Wilson & Co., arrived at Fort Dundas. The master was William Barns, the original proponent of the idea for settling north Australia. The East India Trade Committee, acting under the spur of Lord Bathurst to provide some inducement to Barns to proceed to the new settlement, submitted the suggestion to the merchants represented by the Committee who advised Under Secretary Wilmot Horton that "Several of them have united in the purchase of a vessel (the Stedcombe Schooner) which they are sending out with cargo under the superintendence of Captain Barns, for the purpose of opening a trade with the natives of the north coast of New Holland, and with other people frequenting that coast or about the situation of the proposed settlement". (5)

As the "Lady Nelson" was too small to supply the settlement with fresh provisions Captain Barlow made an agreement with Barns for the landing of live buffalo at $25 a head landed within five weeks.

Barns who had been provided with a piece of ground on which to build a house and a store for his trade goods was busily employed supervising the work and so despatched the "Stedcombe" on 23 February 1825 (6) under the command of Mr. Bastell, the First Mate. The health of the settlement continued to deteriorate and on 31 March the preserved provisions being nearly exhausted, the garrison was placed on a reduced ration of salt meat.
View of Fort Dundas from Garden Point with the "Lady Nelson" at anchor, 1824. (Original in the Mitchell Library.)
THE LOSS OF THE LADY NELSON AND THE STEDCOMBE

On 19 May, Barlow had cause to write to Major Ovens in Sydney, "I made an agreement with Mr. Barns to give twenty five dollars for each buffalo he landed weighing 250 lb; his schooner left the Cove four days after John’s departure in charge of his Chief Mate; neither have returned since: I fear they either have been wrecked or fallen into the hands of Malay pirates. Had they both returned with the stock I sent for, and if Mr Barns would have engaged to send his schooner a second time on the same terms, I intended to despatch the "Lady Nelson" to Sydney before the north-west monsoon had broken up, forwarding an account of our doings here and a request that you would represent to His Excellency the little service that brig was to the settlement in procuring stock, and urging the necessity of a vessel being stationed here of a sufficient tonnage for that purpose". (7)

The struggling settlement had, over the next few months, a few fleeting visits by passing vessels, one of which, the Sloop HMS "Staney" which arrived in June, reported on the missing vessels ‘That they had not since been heard of, supposed to be wrecked or taken by the Malay pirates of Flores, Ombay, etc.”. After leaving Melville Island the "Staney" paid a visit to Kupang, Timor and there, ‘By the Governor, we learned that the two vessels that were missing from Melville Island had not arrived there, and he supposed they must have been taken by the pirate prowls of some of the isles to the north of Timor, as a great number had settled there lately. He had to send to Batavia for a vessel to be sent against them’. (8)

By August, there had still been no news of the two overdue vessels and on the 27th the Commandant, Maurice Barlow, wrote to Major John Ovens, ‘We had had no visit from the Malays. I think it would be otherwise but for the loss of the "Lady Nelson" and "Stedcombe"; at least I conclude they are wrecked, as I have had no account of them since they sailed last February; a vessel like the "Amity" would be of great use to this settlement’. (9)

Writing to John Begbie, Secretary of the East India Trade Committee in London, on the same day, William Barns wrote, ‘I will now as briefly as possible put you in possession of the capabilities of this miserable hole... We are too far to the west — and off the trepang ground altogether, and it is my firm opinion that if we stay here until the day of resurrection it will be a place of no consequence to the commercial world. I am sorry to say that the schooner's loss can no longer be in doubt also that of the "Lady Nelson", Colonial vessel. The schooner that I sent to the neighbouring islands to trade and bring back a return cargo of bullocks on the account of government which she ought to have completed at the greatest length of time in five weeks; she has been gone more than fifteen which has left me in an awkward predicament and the Colony is in great distress for fresh provisions”. (10)

Whilst the settlers at Fort Dundas were agonising over the fate of the two vessels and their crews and unbeknown to them, a corner of the veil that shrouded the mystery, was gradually being lifted by Lieutenant Dirk Kolf, Commander of the Dutch Brig of War, "Dourga".

Kolf was sent from Ambon to visit all of the islands lying between Timor and New Guinea for the purpose, as stated in the Commander's instructions, “of enquiring as to what remains of the forts erected by the (Dutch) East India Company on the islands, especially those of the Arru, Tenimber and Kessa, and to kindle and renew friendly relations with the natives, and to invite them to visit Banda for the purpose of trading”. (11) Kolf sailed from Ambon 26 May 1825 and arrived in Dilli, Timor on 2nd June. The "Dourga" visited the islands of Weta, Kissa and Letti before sailing to Banda by way of Moa, Roma, Dammah, Lakor and Luan. The ship departed Banda 28 July and reached the village of Tepa, on the north west coast of the island of Babar on 4 August 1825.

After holding discussions with the head men of Tepa, Kolf sought information about “an English vessel that had been cut off by the natives of Baba”, of which he had heard during the earlier part of his voyage. “It was not without the greatest difficulty that I succeeded in gaining some of the particulars concerning it from a few of the natives. It appeared that some months previous to my visit, an English trading brig, manned with ten European seamen, which had been bartering muskets and ammunition for tortoiseshell and cattle among the islands to the eastward of Timor, anchored off Aloeter, the capital of the tribe inhabiting the east side of Baba, and the commander, supposing the people to be as trustworthy as those of the other islands, sent half his crew ashore in the boat to obtain water, at a time when a large number of natives were on board the brig carrying on a
trade. While the boat was away, the natives, for some unknown reason, attacked the commander and the four remaining seamen, and, although armed only with their knives, succeeded in killing them, which fate also befell the boat’s crew on their return on board. The brig was then run on shore, plundered and burnt. The greater part of her cargo, consisting of arms, tortoiseshell and cattle, together with her sails and rigging, which had been divided among the captors, were still in their possession”.

Kolff endeavoured to get the men of Tepa to visit the village of Aloetor and, under the promise of gifts and forgiveness for the crime, bring back one of the headmen. He was unsuccessful. “To my great regret, therefore, I was unable to do anything in the affair; for there was no path by which I could reach Aloetor overland, and it would have been unadvisable, at this period of the year, to have proceeded there with the brig, while the length of the distance, and the insufficiency of their force in case of disturbance, prevented our sending the boats”.

(12)

The “Dourga” stayed eleven days at Babar Island before sailing to the Kai and Aru Islands where she spent some time at Dobo and Wokam before proceeding to the Tanimbar Islands. On 8 September, she anchored off the village of Watidal on the west coast of Larat, and, on making enquiries concerning the trading vessels that visited there, Kolff learned that, “During the previous year a vessel under the English flag had arrived at the east end of Timor-laut, the master of which sent his boat on shore to purchase provisions, giving out that he had been necessitated to visit the place from a great mortality and sickness having occurred among his crew. In how far this was the case, I will leave to the judgement of those who are aware of the artifices of the English, in order to carry on a smuggling trade in these parts, and above all, to import prohibited goods, such as gunpowder and ammunition. Thus was the brig, in name (dakleijen), loaded only with roofing slates and iron, but in fact, she had a large number of muskets, swords and other weapons on board. The Captain agreed with the natives to give weapons in exchange for stock, and went on shore with half his crew, which consisted of ten Europeans. In the meantime the natives considered this to be a fine opportunity to overpower those who remained on board, and gain possession of the vessel. They, therefore, boarded her unexpectedly in great numbers and murdered the people in her, while at the same time those on shore were made away with, with the exception of two boys, who owed their preservation to the interposition of the women. After this crime had been committed, they hauled the brig on shore, stripped her of all they could carry away, and burned her. The plundered goods were shared among the inhabitants, and part of them sold to the traders who visited them, the remainder being kept, and now, perhaps, serving as finery for the inhabitants of the east coast of Timor-laut. One of the village chiefs stated to me on this occasion, that he had himself seen the chain cable of the brig hanging around the village, and that two carronades which had belonged to her lay there on the ground, the natives not having yet mustered sufficient courage to fire them off”.

(13)

Kolff continued, “I used my utmost endeavours to induce some of the natives to visit Timor-laut, in order to apprise the natives of my arrival, and, if possible, to free the two English youths who had been saved from the brig, the loss of which I have previously mentioned, but without success. It appeared that they were at war with the people of Timor-laut, and considered their force too small to afford hope of success, this reason appeared to me so conclusive, that I would not urge them further. To proceed directly thither in person would not only be acting against my instructions, but the smallness of the force at my disposal rendered such a proceeding very unadvisable. Neither could the boats attached to the brig, be of the least service in such an expedition.”

(14)

After discussion with the head men from Larat the “Dourga” sailed to the island of Vordate around the west coast of Timor-laut to Sera and then north towards Banda, where she arrived 3rd October 1825, without acquiring any further information on the two captive English boys.

Another five months were to pass at the settlement of Fort Dundas without a visit from the Macassan trepangers which promoted Captain Barlow to comment:

“The object for which this settlement was established, ‘to carry on a trade with the Malays’, has not hitherto answered the purpose intended; I attribute this in some measure to the loss of the Colonial Brig “Lady Nelson” and the schooner ‘Stedcombe’; since their departure we have had no means of communicating with them, and in all probability they are ignorant that a British settlement is fixed on this part of the coast. They did not come here in the last north-west monsoon for the purpose of fishing, neither have they appeared during the present wet season. Since our arrival, I have not seen any ‘trepang’ which is the object of their visits to these shores. I think Port Essington is the place where they find that article in the greatest abundance”.

(15)
Meanwhile, in England, John Begbie, Secretary to the East India Trade Committee wrote to Under Secretary, Robert Hay, at the Colonial Office, regarding the state of the infant colony and questioned the suitability of Melville Island as a place for making contact with the Malays. "I am directed by the merchants who took the liberty of suggesting to Lord Bathurst about two years since the eligibility of forming a settlement on the north west coast of New Holland to lay before you for the information of his Lordship, the accounts lately received by them from Melville Island, dated August last through Captain Stewart, master of the merchant ship, "Lallah Rook". It is stated that the settlement was then without any protection whatever, which is in fact essentially necessary in that part of the world, so much infested with pirates, until the settlers are more firmly established than can be expected at so early a period of establishment. The Naval protection is not only requisite for the safety of the settlement itself but also to afford security to any merchant vessels which may endeavour to open a trade with the neighbouring coast and islands.

In confirmation of this opinion, I am desired to mention that the brig "Stedcombe" sent out by the merchants, shortly after the sailing of HM Ship "Tamar" for the express object of opening the trade has, there is great reason to apprehend, fallen into the hands of the pirates for want of that protection, and they regret to state, that the report from Batavia, mentions that all the crew, with the exception of two boys, were put to death; it is also represented that the settlement at Melville Island has been ill chosen, and it is not likely to answer the object for which it was formed, from the frequent shifting of the shoals and the difficulty of the navigation at the entrance of the port, also its distance up the strait, being thereby entirely detached from the Malay fishing ground situated to the eastward of Melville Island, and in the Gulph of Carpentaria. The Merchants are aware of the difficulty experienced by Captain Bremer in finding water upon the immediate spot pointed out in Lord Bathurst's instructions (Port Essington) at the same time they think it probable that if a little more time had been given to the examination of the coast to the eastward, a settlement might have been formed in that direction, near the west point of the Gulph". (16)

Begbie went on to point out that if the government intended sending out a vessel to Melville Island then it should touch at Timor and take fresh provisions to the destitute garrison.

On the other side of the world, Kolff continued with his survey of the islands that skirted the Banda sea and sailed eastwards towards the south-west coast of Papua until he reached False Cape on 1 May 1826. From there he followed the coast around to the north west until he reached Kayumrah Bay where he steered south-west between the Kai and the Aru islands until he reached Vordate Island and anchored near Sebeano village on 26 May.

After discussions with the head men, the people promised Kolff that they would redeem the two English captives, but Kolff was dubious of their chances. "It appeared to me to be impossible for the people of Vordate to perform the promise they had made me, of redeeming the two English youths who were held in captivity by the inhabitants of Laoera on the east coast of Timor-laut, since they were not in the habit of holding communications with them. They assured me, however, that they had been to Laoera and had found that the inhabitants would not give up their captives unless an extravagant ransom were paid for them, as they wished them to marry them to their daughters; that their descendants might boast of having European blood in their veins as well as the people of Vordate, Larrat and Serra, these people holding themselves as being in some manner connected with Europeans, from their forefathers having been distinguished as "Anak Compania" or Children of the Company. The Orang Kaya, who was the only chief that visited Timor-laut during this year, informed me that he had seen the youths and had offered a considerable ransom for them without success.

"During the westerly monsoon, or the period of the changes, Laoura may be visited with facility; but at the present time, when the sea breaks against the shore in a terrible manner, such an expedition was not to be thought of for a moment". (17)

But Kolff had no more success with his enquiries on the fate of the two boys and from Vordate he sailed to Sera on the west coast of Timor-laut, north towards Banda eventually reaching Ambon on 26 June 1826.

In Sydney, Governor Ralph Darling was agitated at a recent letter received from Lord Bathurst, Secretary for the Colonies, and appeared more concerned with what Bathurst had to say than with the plight of the settlers at Fort Dundas. In a memorandum to Secretary Alexander McLeay, dated 15 April 1826, he wrote, "Lord Bathurst appears anxious respecting the state of Melville Island. I must see whether their wants have been supplied or if they are in need of further assistance. The "Larne" and "Prince Regent" will both touch there and afford a good opportunity of forwarding
supplies; they sail this day week the 22nd. It will certainly be advisable to send them a vessel as the "Lady Nelson" has no doubt been lost or taken by the Malays. Bring in Mr. Nicholson on this that arrangements may be made to this effect — and ascertain which of our vessels will answer best.

"As this is of importance, pray let other immediate matters give place to it, and I shall be glad to write to Lord Bathurst on the subject". (18)

Three weeks later Darling replied to Bathurst, "Your dispatch of 9 September last, No 20, having led me to suppose your Lordship may be under some anxiety as to the state of Melville Island, I lose no time in informing your Lordship that the "Philip Dundas" was despatched hence by Sir Thomas Brisbane, the end of November last, with supplies of every description for the use of that settlement. The last account received from thence, are of a private nature and dated in the month of August, at which time the settlement appeared to have been doing well. Being led to believe that the brig "Lady Nelson", belonging to this government which was attached to that command, has been lost or captured by the Malays, not having been heard of since she was sent to Java, the beginning of last year, I have prepared the cutter "Mermaid" which will be immediately despatched in order to being stationed at that settlement". (19)

On 8 August 1826 Captain W.S. Deloitte of the ship "Faith" arrived in Sydney from London and brought news of the "Lady Nelson". He reported that her hull, with her name painted on her stern, was still to be seen at Babar Island. (20)

Richard Nugent Everard, Ensign, of the 3rd Regiment of Foot, wrote to his sister on 24 September 1826 and addressed his letter, Melville Island (alias "Hell upon Earth"). I have at length to announce to you, my dearest Fanny, the joyful news of a vessel having arrived here a day or two ago from Sydney to take us down there once more, and to be relieved from this delectable place, which I can assure you I shall leave with a very light heart, and that I hailed the arrival of the relief with cheers nine times nine.

"There is neither honour or glory to be obtained by remaining here, save that of being Commandant, and, what is more, no information whatever as to the interior, has been obtained (being deprived of the means, and besides the heat of the climate would not admit of it’s being done to any great extent), excepting that it appears (as far as has been penetrated), and that not more than half a dozen miles, to be intersected by swamps and lagoons". "With regard to the "Lady Nelson", it was only in April 1825 that we were enabled to get any provisions, as I mentioned to you in my last that we feared that the Colonial brig that was sent to Tymor for stock had been cut off by the Malay pirates, and we have every reason now to suppose that she has been, as we never had any account of her since. One cannot venture far out into the bush to shoot by way of recreation (and lately not out of sight of the settlement) with safety, for fear of being surprised by the natives, they having speared not fewer than nine men, one of whom died of his wounds and another lost the sight of an eye. The clearing gangs are obliged to go out to work armed with firelocks". (21)

On 19 September 1826 the Colonial Schooner "Isabella" arrived from Sydney with relief for the weary garrison. A detachment of 43 rank and file of the 57th Regiment of Foot under the command of Major John Cambell together with Lieutenant William Bate comprised the relieving force. Campbell reported favourably on how he found the settlement and the people in his letter to Secretary, McLeay. "This settlement appears to me to be in a much more forward state than I expected to have found it; and, from the appearance of both the military and the prisoners and the statement of the medical gentleman, Mr. Turner, I must conclude it is by no means an unhealthy situation."

Campbell reported the arrival on the 20 September, of the Colonial cutter "Mermaid", Captain Samuel Dowsett, Master, from Kupang with a cargo of buffalo. Dowsett provided the settlement with the first news that it had received regarding the disappearance of the "Stedcombe": "Monsieur Bechade, a French merchant, residing at Coepang, told him that a small vessel from Melville Island had been taken by the Malays near the island of Tinember or Tinaniver, about six months back; that the crew excepting one small boy had been massacred; that this boy had been afterwards ransomed by the Dutch government for two muskets and was carried to Batavia. This information came to Coepang by a Dutch ship of war which touched there; and Mr. Bechade had learned the same account at Java. The schooner had a boy on board when she sailed from this and the "Lady Nelson" had none". (22)

As a result of the non-arrival of the Macassan trepangers to Melville Island and following the representations of the powerful East India Trade Committee, the Secretary for the Colonies, Lord Bathurst, agreed to the establishment of a second settlement to the east of Melville Island "with a view to ascertain how far it may be practicable to form an establishment which may offer those advantages to a trader in which Melville Island is said to be deficient". (23)
On 18 June 1827 Captain James Stirling of HMS "Success" entered Raffles Bay, on the Coburg Peninsula and established the second settlement in north Australia. He named the new enterprise "Fort Wellington" after the hero of Waterloo.

The following day Captain Henry Smyth, of the 39th Regiment of Foot, in charge of a detachment of thirty-one rank and file and Lieutenant George Sleeman, assumed the command of the Fort.

The new post was more favourably situated than Fort Dundas, being open to the sea breezes and, more importantly, on the direct route of the Macassan trepangers who sailed through the Bowen Straits between Croker Island and Raffles Bay on their way to the Gulf of Carpentaria.

The prospects of the settlement looked bright, but within the first year, nearly everyone was affected by sickness. The Commandant was prejudiced against the settlement from the outset, mainly from what he had heard in Sydney, of Fort Dundas. He sent reports to Sydney that were so adverse they caused the abandonment of the second attempt. Smyth obtained his recall to Sydney on the grounds of ill health a little over twelve months from the time of his arrival at Raffles Bay, and reported that the site of Fort Wellington was unhealthy, the Aborigines troublesome and there was little likelihood of commerce because the expected arrival of the Macassan trepangers had not eventuated.

Smyth's successor, Captain Collet Barker, arrived at the Fort in September 1828, and proved to be an entirely different personality, greatly concerned for the welfare of his men and objects of the settlement. He went to great lengths to regain the confidence and trust of the Aborigines, which he did with such success that the good effects were still to be felt many years later. The health of the garrison improved and they succeeded in growing produce for the use of the garrison.

The Macassans visited Raffles Bay in great numbers the next season and were well received by Barker, who assured them that if they would settle at Raffles Bay, he would guarantee them protection in their operations. They promised to return the following year and establish themselves at Raffles Bay, bringing with them items for barter.

In March 1829 Fort Wellington gained the stores, plants and live animals from Fort Dundas when it was abandoned, the men returning to Sydney. Barker delayed reconstructing the fortifications and buildings in masonry for he expected to receive instructions before very long to proceed to Port Essington and re-establish the fort there. When the instructions did come in June, they were to the effect that the settlement was to be completely abandoned. Captain Smyth's unfavourable and biased reports on the prospects of Fort Wellington were such that the Colonial Secretary, backed by adverse reports from Governor Darling and the Admiralty, had no alternative but to give the necessary orders for its abandonment.

Captain Barker was dismayed at the order, especially as the settlement was prospering and all that was expected of it was about to come to fruition. He seriously considered disregarding the instruction, but to everyone's disappointment he carried out his orders and the settlement was abandoned on 31 August 1829. With the abandonment went any attempt at locating the wrecks of the two ill-fated vessels or rescuing any of the possible survivors from that quarter.

It was another five years before any further light was thrown on the disappearance of the "Stedcombe" and then under circumstances equally as tragic. On 3 December 1835 the Dutch brig "Patriot", Captain T. Clunies, sailed into Batavia harbour with five survivors of the "Charles Eaton" which had been wrecked on Detached Reef in the Torres Straits on 15 August 1834.

"The ship struck on the reef so violently, that both keel and rudder were instantly knocked off and carried away, and the Captain declared the vessel to be totally lost; at the same time giving orders to get the boats ready and furnished with provisions, in order to endeavour to reach the island of Timor". All but one of the ships boats were lost and into this five men managed to scramble. One sailor drowned, while the rest of the crew and passengers were left aboard the wrecked ship.

Two rafts were made to carry the rest of the survivors but all were killed by the islanders except for two boys, John Ireland and William D'Oyly, who were rescued by Captain Lewis in the "Isabella" 18 June 1836.

The five seamen in the cutter steered a westerly course and after about fifteen days reached Timor-laut and went ashore at the village of Ollil. They were attacked by the villagers but through the intercession of two chiefs, named Pabok and Lomba, their lives were spared.
The "Lady Nelson" in the River Thames, 1800.
"During their abode in this island they learnt that in one of the neighbouring settlements called Laouran, at that period at war with the one in which they lived, there was another European, formerly belonging to an English brig, that had been wrecked seven years ago, and of whose crew he, and a boy since dead, had alone been spared by their savage captors. "The natives gave them to understand that he had adopted the habit of the blacks, was quite reconciled, and did not wish to leave the island". (24)

The five survivors from the "Charles Eaton" had an enforced stay of fifteen months before being permitted to sail in a visiting trading prahu to Ambon where they boarded the "Patriot" for Batavia.

In the same year that the "Charles Eaton" was wrecked George Windsor Earl, a great traveller in the islands, a linguist and an author of a number of books on the Indian Archipelago, was visiting Singapore, when he was approached by several Chinese merchants to undertake the management of an expedition to the north coast of Australia for the purpose of collecting trepang and tortoiseshell. He declined the offer as he felt no lasting benefit could be derived, except from a permanent settlement under the protection of the Imperial Government. In 1836 after returning to England, he wrote to the Colonial Office asking if it was proposed to re-establish a settlement on the north coast and informed them of the Chinese merchants' proposals. They replied in the negative.

Not to be deterred he again wrote to the Colonial secretary outlining his plan for a new enterprise. He maintained that the withdrawal of the earlier settlements had been premature because of biased opinions which had since been proved wrong. Earl enlisted the aid of John Barrow, Second Under Secretary to the Admiralty, who had served overseas for many years and had a sound knowledge of foreign affairs; he was also greatly interested in Australia and was favourably inclined to the renewed proposal.
HISTORICAL EVIDENCE

Barrow together with Captain Beaufort, Hydrographer at the Admiralty, sent a memorandum to the Colonial Secretary, Lord Glenelg, pressing for the creation of a new settlement.

The decision was finally influenced by the fear that now the northern coast was no longer occupied, any foreign power, especially the Dutch, could set up another Singapore and menace the other British Colonies to the south. French interest in the Pacific had also given rise to a fear that they too might look for a site on the coast on which to establish themselves.

It was finally resolved that a further attempt at settlement should be made, but it was to be purely naval in character, formed so as to be a nucleus for a more permanent settlement.

The new establishment would serve as a revictualling port for vessels sailing between England and India and New South Wales and New Zealand and be a haven for shipwrecked mariners. A detachment of Royal Marines would comprise the new garrison and a man-of-war would be made available for its defence.

On the morning of 17 September 1838 HMS "Alligator" under the command of Sir Gordon Bremer, the founder of Fort Dundas, HMS "Britomart", under Lieutenant Owen Stanley, and the transport vessel "Orontes", Captain Short, sailed for north Australia arriving in Port Essington on 26 October. The private trader "Essington" under Captain Thomas Watson, which had left earlier with stores for the new settlement, was waiting to meet them.

The new garrison comprised thirty five rank and file of the Royal Marines under the command of Captain John McArthur, one lieutenant and a surgeon and seven civilians.

Whilst preparations were being made for the fortification of Victoria, as the new settlement was named, Bremer decided to make contact with the neighbouring islands with a view to obtaining fresh supplies from them. He hired the Schooner "Essington" to bring back buffaloes, pigs and any other livestock or fresh produce that would be of use to the settlement. He also ordered George Earl, who had accompanied the expedition as linguist and was familiar with the culture of the island people, to sail with the "Essington" and obtain the supplies required.

It would also give him the opportunity of assessing the potential for trade and collect information which might prove useful to future colonists, in the event of the settlement being thrown open to private enterprise.

On the morning of the 1 November 1838, the Schooner "Essington" sailed from Port Essington for Kissa and islands to the north of Timor. There Earl had discussions with the Dutch missionary and the island headmen regarding trade potential and was agreeably surprised to find that the island was used as an entrepot for the islands to the east not only as an outlet for their own produce but as an emporium where European goods might be purchased. It was here that Earl obtained information relating to the capture of the missing "Lady Nelson" and "Stedcombe". He wrote "The presence of so many strangers at Kissa enabled me to prosecute enquiries concerning the capture of the "Lady Nelson" and the "Stedcombe" and in several cases my information was derived from parties who had been personally engaged in these nefarious transactions. Not the slightest offence had been committed by the crews of either vessel.

The capture of the "Lady Nelson" had been the result of a deliberate conspiracy on the part of the natives of Baba who had first met with her at Letti, and succeeded in drawing her on from island to island by promises of providing her with supplies of stock, and had at length consummated their purpose at their own remote abode.

That of the "Stedcombe" had been unpremeditated, but the impunity that had attended the capture of the "Lady Nelson" had led to the attempt. One of the survivors, who was known to the natives by the name of 'Joe' was still residing among them at Laoura, but was reported to be in a very bad state of health. (25)

From Kissa the "Essington" sailed for the islands of Letti and Moa and it was whilst Earl was on the south side of Moa that he heard some disturbing news, that "induced me to hasten on board the schooner, which I expected to meet at Mowai, about fifteen miles from the spot where I then was. I was accompanied by Mr. Dommers, the missionary of Moa, who purposed taking this opportunity of inspecting the Christian School there. The schooner had gone on to
the neighbouring island of Lakor, and we arrived on board at dusk in the evening, just in time to prevent a massacre of the crew by the people of Baba, who had followed the vessel from Kissa and the east end of Timor with several large prahus, which Mr. Watson had imprudently permitted to anchor within half a cable’s length of his vessel". After this narrow escape the vessel returned to Kissa picked up a cargo of buffaloes, pigs, sheep, poultry and fresh produce and returned to Port Essington, arriving there 15 December 1838. (26) The "Essington" did not remain long at Victoria as it became necessary for her to again proceed to the islands for further supplies.

Having completed unloading it's cargo of stores for the settlement the 451 ton Barque "Orontes" which had accompanied the expedition made preparations to set sail for India. Two days after the arrival of the "Essington" she weighed anchor, left the safety of the inner harbour and sailed away to disaster. The following morning news was received at the settlement that the "Orontes" had, on leaving the entrance to the harbour, struck with considerable force a hitherto unknown reef about three miles north of the entrance, knocking a gaping hole in her bows. She had cleared the reef, but filled so rapidly that it was necessary to drive her ashore under Vashon Head before she finally sank. (27)

Captain Short, his wife Caroline and the crew of twenty eight men and boys gained the shore in safety. The vessel was abandoned. The addition to the number of people at the settlement by this tragedy imposed an additional burden and it therefore became necessary to again despatch the "Essington" to the islands for supplies and ponies required by the officers. On 9 February 1839 the "Essington" sailed for Dili and Kupang taking with her Captain Short, his wife and five of the crew of the "Orontes". "Being anxious to obtain a personal knowledge of the interesting islands to the northwards" the Commandant, Captain Sir Gordon Bremer, set sail in HMS "Britomart" on 13 February* (28) taking with him Earl as interpreter and John Armstrong the botanist. Strong north-west winds and squalls prevented the "Britomart" from reaching the island of Kissa until the 26th when the wind became southerly and the weather fine. The ship reached Timor a short while afterwards and spent five days at anchor at the Portuguese settlement of Dili. After holding discussions with the Governor, Colonel Cabrera, and making enquiries into trade prospects, Bremer sailed for Kissa and Moa before returning to Port Essington arriving at Victoria 11 March. (29)

*Earl gives 15 February 1839
On the 19th the schooner “Essington” returned from Kupang with further news of the loss of the “Stedcombe” which Watson had obtained from Captain Volstrong, the Master of a Dutch schooner. "Volstrong was trading among the Arru Islands and Timor-laut in February 1838, and on the south side of the latter island, at a native settlement, he saw a European, who stated himself to be an Englishman cut off in the schooner “Statescombe” or “Stedcombe”. The man said that two Dutch men-of-war had called, but would not hear anything he had to say. Mr. Volstrung was afraid to interfere in consequence of having a native crew, but he saw several articles apparently belonging to some vessel that had been either cast away or cut off.” (30)

Bremer was outraged when he heard of the story from Captain Watson. "If this account be true the conduct of the officers of the Dutch brigs was most inhuman. A consideration of the circumstances induced me to dispatch the “Britomart” immediately; and in her I sent Lieutenant Kuper, the Senior Lieutenant. My instructions to him and to Lieutenant Stanley, her Commander, are to proceed to Luora, on the south-east side of Timor-laut, for the purpose of ascertaining the nature of the coast, and the possibility of getting close in with men-of-war (the charts lay down an extensive Bank). The natives are stated to be warlike and numerous, and I therefore advised great caution, in as much as any unsuccessful hostile movement would probably cost the poor Englishman his life. Should any favourable opportunity of recovering him present itself, they will of course avail themselves of it, and I have left much to the judgement and discretion of the Lieutenants — on that of Mr. Kuper I can with confidence rely. If the “Britomart” fails I will try myself the moment I can quit this. I will put them to right in the “Alligator” if necessary". (31)

The “Britomart” sailed from Port Essington 18 March 1839 and reached Timor-laut 21 March where they were met by two large prahus, full of men, which came alongside the stern and made fast. A little, thin, shrivelled old man scrambled on board and presented Lieutenant Stanley with a neat little basket containing some papers which he seemed very anxious should be read. The papers turned out to be the pencilled rough journal of the proceedings of the men who left the ill-fated “Charles Eaton” in one of her cutters and in which they reached the village of Oilieliet. After Stanley had read the papers Lieutenant Kuper copied the contents, as the old man would not give or sell them to him. Stanley wrote, “As soon as I had read the papers contained in the basket, I endeavoured by the help of the Malay
dictionary, to gain some more information from the old man, and after some time succeeded in making out that he was the chief Lomba, mentioned by the seamen in the narrative. From our ignorance of the language I was unable to gain any information of the European boy, said to be still on the island”. (32)

A safe anchorage was found and the "Britomart" anchored in 11 fathoms, sand and coral three quarters of a mile from shore. At the request of Lomba, Stanley went ashore to the village of Oliliel where he was civilly greeted by the Orang Kaya and the delighted residents. Soon afterwards Pabok, the other chief came to talk to Stanley who questioned him — "I tried in vain to get more information from him about the European boy and on pressing him to come down to the boat to receive a present, he made signs he was too old to do so." Commander Kuper wrote, "Having understood from the natives, that Luora or Laouran as they called it, the inhabitants of which were hostile both to themselves and the English, was in a bay about two miles to the northward, and having purchased everything of any value from them, we weighed at 9.00 am and ran along the coast under easy sail. We observed, on passing, two villages, situated on the top of a steep hill exactly similar to Oliliel, and equally impregnable from the sea side, but as the coral reef appeared to run right across the bay, over which they are built, we did not think it right to venture too close in shore, particularly as it was evident from the appearance of shoal water, and the position of the fort that no ship could approach near enough to do any execution with her guns". (33)

Meanwhile at Port Essington, Captain Watson was making preparations for his next visit to the islands to purchase sandalwood and tortoiseshell before caling at Kupang and his long haul around the west and south coast to Sydney. The "Essington" left Victoria 27 March* and sailed northwards to the Tanimbar Islands and there at daylight on 31 March 1839 Timor-laut was sighted to the westward, about twenty miles distant. Under full sail the "Essington" approached, with the intention of inducing some chiefs on board to trade, and then to secure one as a hostage until the white man was restored. As they neared the island three canoes under sail came to them under Dutch colours. They were asked if there was a white man on shore. They replied, in the Malay, "Adda satu ourang Egris" (there is one Englishman) at Louron, a village close by. More canoes then came alongside, one of which contained an 'ourang kaire' (a chief). He was able to speak a little English, and he was very urgent that the vessel should run in and anchor; but now was the opportunity for Watson to carry out his design”.

*SMH of 17/7/39 says 29 March 1839
THE RESCUE OF JOSEPH FORBES

"At this time a second 'ourang Kaire' came on board and immediately pulled from his bosom a small basket containing papers, which were found to be loose scraps written evidently by some of the crew of the "Charles Eaton", and who had by some means found their way to this island. Besides these scraps, the basket contained a letter written by Lieutenant Kuper, of HMS "Alligator", but who had charge of the "Britomart" in lieu of Lieutenant Stanley, who was left sick at Port Essington and stating that he had called there on the 23rd instant had perused the scraps and taken copies". (34)

"As night was now drawing in, Captain Watson dismissed all the canoes and natives except the chief detained as a hostage. He promised the chief a quantity of trade if the white man was brought on board; but before the natives had been allowed on board some of the crew had been sent into the foretop with muskets and ammunition, and hidden in a top-gallant studding-sail, from which they would have a good command of the deck in case of emergency. The vessel's brass guns were all loaded with grape and canister, and likewise hidden by tarpaulins, so that the apparently unprepared condition of the schooner gave the chief every confidence that she would prove an easy capture, although he had not induced him to anchor. Watson, however, courteously invited his distinguished guest to be seated on the skylight while he made an exhibit of his various items of trade. The seat which the chief had been invited to occupy was convenient to a ring-bolt in the deck. After the boy in the cabin had sent up some knives, tomahawks and beads, Watson called to him to hand up a pair of polished handcuffs hanging in the cabin. This was described as a handsome ankle ornament, and placing one on his own ankle, Watson dangled it to show it's beauty, which the chief much admired. It was then presented to him by placing one on the chief's ankle and the other adroitly locked to the ring-bolt.

"Now", said Watson, "You are my prisoner, and if the man is not brought off I will hang you".

"So directing the men in the top to uncover and show their teeth, the tarpaulins were thrown off the guns, and the prisoner suddenly realised his position; but he at first said the man was away some distance..."

"Well, if you cannot bring him tonight I will stand in in the morning, and they can fetch him then; but if he is not brought off up you go", and by way of explanation a whip was rove at the yard-arm and placed around his neck, while the other end was manned by the crew on deck, to show possible result. Canoes were dismissed to the shore while the vessel stood off under easy sail for the night and, standing in next morning with the hostage chief standing on a grating platform projecting from the rigging outside the vessel, and the rope from the yard-arm round his neck".

Several canoes made for the vessel, and Watson assured the chief that he could lick all of them if they attempted to attack him, and he would hang whether or not; 'So desire them to go back and bring the man off in one canoe'.

"This was acceded to, and an object different from the natives was brought on board — decrepit and wretched to the last degree, incapable for some time of making himself understood in his own language. The chief, however, was then released, and several articles of trade presented to him, and some to the others in the canoe". (35)

"The appearance of this Englishman at the time we received him on board was in the highest degree remarkable, and such as was calculated to draw forth the strongest sympathies from the bosom of any human being whose composition was not entirely void of compassionate feelings. He appeared to be about twenty-six years of age, of a remarkably fair complexion, notwithstanding the effects of a tropical climate; there was also a delicacy of frame about him seldom met with in a male of his years. His hair, which was of a lightish yellow colour, had been allowed to grow long, and was triced up after the native custom with a comb made of bamboo. It's length was from eighteen to twenty inches, and its texture very much resembled fine silk in its raw state. His only garments were a sort of waistcoat without sleeves, and a blue and white dungaree girdle round his loins. There was a peculiar vacancy in his countenance which I am at a loss to describe, unless I compare it to the appearance of many deaf and dumb people, beside which there was a marked expression of agony in his face, which, no doubt, from long suffering had become
habitual. His body was much emaciated and covered with scars, the indisputable evidence of the savage torture he had endured; and at this time his legs were studded with foul ulcers, and the sinews about the knee-joints were so much contracted as to prevent him extending his legs, and consequently rendering him unable to walk. His ears had been perforated after the custom of the natives, and the hole in the lobe of each is large enough to admit of his wearing a piece of bamboo of at least an inch in diameter; he did wear such when brought off. Nor does the catalogue of this poor fellow’s misfortunes end here, for he was found to have been injured in the genitals, and, on being questioned, he said that it was caused by the bite of a wild pig. As might be expected, he had almost forgotten his native language; he could however, with some difficulty, make himself intelligible, and gave the following account”:

“His name was Joseph Forbes, and he belonged to the schooner “Statescombe” which had gone from Melville Island to Timor-laut to procure livestock; the Captain (Barnes) had remained at Melville Island, and had sent Mr. Bastell (mate) in charge of the schooner. The vessel being moored off the village Louron, Mr. Bastell and the crew proceeded on shore, leaving on board the steward, a boy named John Edwards, and himself (Forbes) in charge of the ship; and from some cause or other when they were on shore the natives murdered them all. As Mr. Bastell and crew did not return, Forbes took the glass and saw the bodies stretched on the beach, the heads being severed from each. He then states that a canoe was coming towards the schooner, and expecting that the natives would deal with them as they had with their shipmates, he proposed to the steward and John Edwards to arm themselves with muskets and to fire in case the canoe attempted to board, but the steward paid no attention. Forbes next proposed, as he and Edwards knew the compass, and the steward knew a little of navigation, they should punch the bolt out of the cable and liberate the schooner and stand out to sea. This was agreed to, and they were carrying it into effect when the canoes came alongside and the natives, (among whom was the ourang kaire who had been our prisoner) boarded the vessel, and seizing an axe cut off the steward’s head. The boys betook themselves to the rigging, and were only induced to come down by repeated promises that they should not be injured. The natives then commenced to plunder the vessel of her stores, removing them together with the boys to the shore, after which they set fire to the schooner. From this time the two boys were kept as ordinary slaves until about four years ago, when John Edwards died”. (36)

“Forbes attributes his forgetfulness of his native language to the death of his companion. How far he is correct as to time of Edward’s death I cannot say, but I may observe that his idea of time appears very erroneous, for he says he has only been ten years on the island, whereas the “Statescombe” was cut off in 1823 (?) The treatment he received seems to have been barbarous, for one of the common modes of punishment whenever he had incurred displeasure was taking hot embers and placing them on some part of his body until it was severely burnt. When questioned as to the way in which the different ourang kaires behaved to him, his general answer is “Teeda bargoo”, meaning “No good”. There are one or two, however, to whom he applied the character of “Bargoose”, or “Good”, among whom he remembers the ourang kaire who showed me the papers and letter, and Forbes says that it was through that person that he was set at liberty.

“Speaking of the ourang kaire of Louron he says, ‘Louron cuts me down to the ground’, which I construe to mean that he frequently flogged him and knocked him down. He also says that he used to bind him hand and foot whenever a vessel hove in sight, and keep him bound as long as the vessel remained. We asked him what he thought when he first saw the schooner with British colours? His reply was simple but expressive — ‘Joe see schooner, Joe no eat, Joe’s belly full’, implying that the sight of the schooner destroyed his appetite”.

“Some of the crew of the “Charles Eaton” had been to Timor Laut, and when about to leave had wished to take Forbes with them, but the ourang kaire would not allow them, and that it would not have been permitted with us had they not feared we should kill our prisoner”.

“A Chinaman who had been trading there expressed a wish to purchase him, offering several gown pieces as the price, but it was refused. He relates, also, that two Dutch men-of-war had been there, but would have nothing to do with him”.

The “Britomart” sailed from Oliliet for the Aru Islands on 22 March and on the 25th anchored off the village of Dobbo. Here Stanley surveyed the harbour and procured supplies for the vessel. From there the “Britomart” sailed for the Kai Islands some sixty miles to the west and then returned to the Tanimbars arriving at Vordate 7 April. Here the weather was too unsettled to remain and so she made sail for Oliliet which she had quit on 22 March.

At 10.00 am on 11 April the “Britomart” was off Laoura, but finding the swell, caused by strong breezes, was breaking too heavily on the
reef skirting the bay for a boat to land, she stood on for Oliliit, and on rounding the point fired a gun and hove to. Two canoes left the beach and from the number of European goods decorating them it was soon realized that a vessel had visited the place since the “Britomart’s” last visit. The chief who had come with the canoes was invited on board by Kuper and, “He showed us two papers from Mr. Watson, the master of the schooner “Essington” who had touched here two days after us; the one dated the 31 March stating his intention to cruise around the island in search of the survivors, if any, of the “Stedcombe” schooner, said to have been cut off by the natives at or near Laoura, and the other dated 1 April, saying that he had succeeded through the intervention of the chiefs in recovering from Laoura an English lad of about seventeen who had been taken in the “Stedcombe”. Mr. Watson describes him as having almost entirely forgotten English, and that by his own account he had been kindly treated by the natives for some years” (37)

The “Britomart” was obliged to stand off and on, as there is no anchorage off Oliliit during the south-east monsoon, but two boats were sent in to obtain supplies. They were well received by the inhabitants but few supplies were obtainable. “Britomart” eventually left the Tanimbars and returned home to Port Essington where she arrived 15 April 1839.

During the voyage back to Sydney, which because of the south-east monsoon the “Essington” had to travel via Timor and the west and south coasts of Australia, Forbes recovered his language, and grieved that he possessed nothing worthy of Captain Watson’s acceptance to mark his unbounded gratitude, ‘Unless’, as he apologetically expressed himself, ‘You will accept this lock of hair, which he had cut off after about fifteen year’s growth.”

The “Essington” made a brief stay at Port Adelaide, arriving there 18 June, where Watson made contact with the editor of the “South Australian” and recounted to him the story of Joe Forbes and his rescue. The “South Australian” reported that. “It now appears by Forbes’ account that he was captured by the treachery of these savages, while the Captain was endeavouring to trade with them, and that all hands were murdered, excepting himself and a cabin boy, who he states died about three years since. During the time of his captivity Forbes suffered the severest torture, they cut open his ears and hung weights to them until the holes were so enlarged that a man’s hand might be thrust through. They also burned his arm and body in several places, and otherwise injured him in such a manner that the poor fellow is quite a spectacle. He states that they kept him at hard work during the whole of his captivity, and whenever a vessel hove in sight they conveyed him into the woods, and left him there until the vessel again left.

Captain Watson states that he learns there were two or three other white men on the island of Baba, who were part of the crew of the “Lord Nelson”, which was captured about twenty years ago by the savages; and he expresses his determination to get them away if he possibly can, when he returns”. (38)

On 18 July 1839 the “Essington” arrived at Sydney and “from his shattered condition of health Forbes was sent to the Sydney Hospital where he remained many months”.

On the same day, HMS “Alligator” sailed into port with survivors of the ill-fated “Orontes”. A week later, Sir Gordon Bremer wrote to Thomas Watson, “I have to thank you for your journal and shall have great pleasure in causing it to be copied and transmitted to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty. It shall be accompanied by an expression of my admiration for your zeal and active humanity in the search for the supposed survivors of the “Charles Eaton”, and your successful efforts in redeeming from a horrible captivity the young man Forbes, formerly belonging to the “Stedcombe”. I feel sure that her Majesty’s Government will cause a suitable expression of their thanks to be conveyed to you”.

Quoting from Lieutenant Kuper’s journal, the Sydney Morning Herald reported on the capture of Joe Forbes, “The vessel arrived at Timor-Laut in the night time, and, on the following morning the captain and boat’s crew went ashore to trade; Forbes, another boy named Edwards, and the steward were left on board. In the course of the day, about the usual dinner hour, Forbes being desirous of ascertaining if the captain was returning on board, took the glass to ‘look out’, when, to his horror, he saw the savages, dealing death around them. The captain and boat’s crew were all murdered. Naturally apprehensive that the next act of the savages would be to gain possession of the vessel the boys slipped the cable, designing to get under way, but the assailants were active in their work. They came off in their canoes, boarded and took possession of the vessel. The steward had his brains knocked out by one of the savages, and his body was then thrown overboard. The boys ran up the rigging in the hope of finding safety there, but it was in vain.
The savages tried to pursue them, but not being able to climb such an ascent, they compelled the boys to come down by discharging several arrows at them. The poor fellows were then dragged on shore, where the first object that met their view were the bodies of their murdered commander and shipmates, the heads having being severed and arrayed on the beach. Over the bodies the savages compelled them to walk; and one upon which Forbes stepped, he recognised to be that of his own brother, who was one of the crew. Subsequently the bodies were thrown into the sea; but the heads were strung together and hung upon a tree round which they danced for several hours, day and night for some days. When the heads became particularly offensive they were taken down and ranged along the beach, where they were afterwards buried, unknown to the savages by Forbes. The ship was plundered of everything worth taking, and then hauled on the beach and burned. The boy Edwards survived seven years among the savages. After his death his remains were placed in a basket and hung from a tree. They were interred by his associate in calamity.”

"The savages employed them in planting coconuts and tobacco, and in fishing. Fish and yams constituted their chief articles of food. Forbes had been seventeen years upon the island when he was taken off by Captain Watson. After he had acquired the language of the savages, and could, therefore understand their bidding and do it readily, he was treated something better than before; but, generally speaking, his treatment was cruel to an extent — he was treated as a slave. The savages bored his ears, and made him wear ornaments of such weight, as to constitute positive torture from the constant strain upon the ears. They filed his teeth down to the gums — they burnt his arm and tattooed part of his person. He was carefully removed from all chance of observation whenever a vessel arrived, and strictly guarded until she had sailed away. About four years ago, two vessels touched in at the island, the commanders of which, having heard something of the facts we have stated, offered a ransom for the young man, but it was finally refused". (39)

A few weeks after the arrival of the "Essington" in Sydney, Thomas Watson wrote to the London "Times" regarding the capture and rescue of Forbes and sought news of his family or friends.

"Sir, having heard of your humane, charitable and literal feelings for the poor and needy when in distress, I beg you will be pleased to give publicity in your valuable paper to this letter, for the benefit of a poor captive, who wishes to know if he has any friend or relations living, and that they may know that he is living after 16 years captivity and

Joseph Forbes at the time of his rescue in April, 1839.
slavery. The schooner "Stedcourt" Barnes Master, which left London in 1823 or 1824, was trading among the islands in the Arafura Sea when it was cut off by the natives at the Island of Timor-laut, and all hands murdered with the exception of a boy of the name of Joseph Forbes who has been in captivity ever since and most barbarously treated by them, until released by me, after very great difficulty, and at the expense of purchasing him out of their hands — I having a vessel well manned (six) and armed, or I could not have succeeded, as they are a very treacherous set of people, and very ferocious. He is now in the hospital at Sydney, New South Wales, where every care and attention is paid him, and he is recovering very fast. He had quite forgotten his own language, but he is regaining it rapidly. I suppose you have heard or seen the particulars in some of the Sydney papers; if you have not, I shall feel much pleasure in sending you a copy of my journals. He states his name to be Joseph Forbes, native of Deptford in Kent". (40)

Twelve months later Forbes "returned home to England in a ship belonging to Mr. Brookes, who eventually brought him as an object for charity to the Mansion House before Alderman Pirie, who, after hearing his tale remarked, "It is a singular fact that I, who am thus addressed on this occasion, was the very person who sold the schooner just before she went upon her fatal voyage. I am much gratified at being present when such an application is made. It will give me sincere pleasure to receive subscriptions for the benefit of the sufferer, and I shall commence myself with five pounds". The seaman returned thanks in a voice that 'piped and whistled in the sound'. (41)

On 4 May 1841 William Dobson, of the Committee of Lloyd's advised Watson, "I am directed to acquaint you, that they have unanimously resolved, in token of their estimation of the humanity shown by you on the occasion, to recommend the subscribers, at the next general meeting, to vote you the honorary Silver Medal of that Establishment in order to mark the sense entertained of your kind and generous conduct".

Joe Forbes returned as a seaman to Australia and was trading between Melbourne and Sydney from 1854 to 1857, in which latter year he saw an advertisement for a shipkeeper to the Seamen's Bethel in Hobson's Bay. He lived off Stevedore Street, Williamstown. (42)

He called at the home of Commander Crawford Pasco, R.N., Superintendent of Water Police at Williamstown, Victoria, for an interview for the appointment. Crawford was a midshipman on board "Britomart", stationed at Port Essington at the time of Watson's rescue of Forbes, and on the voyage at the unsuccessful attempt by Owen Stanley.

On entering Pasco's house, a gong hanging in the hall caught his attention. "Oh, sir, I see you have a gong there."

"Yes", replied Pasco, "Have you seen much of them in your time?"

"Ah, yes, I used to hear them when I was in captivity at the islands".

"What" exclaimed Pasco, "Do you mean to tell me that you are Joe Forbes?"

"Yes, sir, how did you know me?" Whatever answer Pasco gave him it resulted in Forbes being appointed to Shipkeeper for the Revd. Kerr Johnstone on board the Bethel "Emily".

"After the erection of wharf accommodation at Sandridge and Williamstown the "Emily" was dispensed with, and Joe's occupation gone; so, like Peter and John, Joe made up his mind to go fishing, which he continued for many years until incapacitated, when the benevolent people of Williamstown tended to his wants until, one day in 1877, he was found dead in his bed, at the age of seventy-one. (43)*

In 1876, when spending an evening with Captain Watson at Randwick, Pasco inquired whether Watson knew what had become of Forbes. Watson replied that he was still at Williamstown, but unable to work, yet the kindness of his neighbours provided all his needs. Watson then produced Forbes lock of hair, and said, "Well Pasco, my sandglass is nearly run out and I do not think that anyone will value this as much as you will, so please accept it".

* Williamstown Death Certificate shows 16 August, 1876 — Age 73 or 74.
VOYAGE TO AMBON AND THE MOLUCCAS

At 10.00 am on the morning of Saturday 15 August 1981, we set sail under the starter’s gun in the race for Ambon organised by the Darwin Sailing Club as part of it’s annual activities.

Nine vessels entered the race but soon after the start they were spread across the Darwin harbour and out through the heads. A bright sunny day, blue seas and the green of the vegetation made it a heady day with the wind from the south-east pushing us along at seven knots.

I had arranged to crew with Bill Jelley, owner/skipper of “La Baleine” for the race to Ambon and then sail at our own pace to Banda and the Tanimbar Islands to try and locate any relics or stories relating to the “Stedcombe” and its ill-fated crew and then west to Pulau Babar to locate the village of Aluta and the remains, if any, of the “Lady Nelson”. We expected to be away about three weeks.

That evening we tacked off Cape Fourcroy but by early morning the sea became calm and the wind dropped. By midday there was a very heavy south-easterly swell accompanied by fresh winds but as the day wore on the wind dropped and the boat made little headway.

On the following Monday the inactivity caused by the lack of wind and the heavy swell had everyone on edge and impatient at the lack of progress. With a speed averaging 3 to 4 knots there appeared little chance of getting in to Ambon ahead of the rest of the yachts and in addition there appeared to be insufficient fuel to power the generator for an extended period which would mean no fresh food when she gave out.

A decision was made to change to the engine to get us out of the doldrums; it would not win us the race but it should get us there in time for the celebrations! The seas continued heavy with only a slight breeze but by early hours of the 18th we passed the mountainous south-east shore of the island of Sermata, brilliantly lit by the moon. Soon after we altered course north, north west for the island of Damar some sixty miles away keeping the island of Babar on our starboard beam but out of sight.

From Damar we headed north for the island of Ambon motoring under ideal conditions but embarrassing from our original intention of arriving under sail. Ambon heads were passed in the early hours of 20 August and eventually “La Baleine” was brought to and anchored off Hallong, north of Ambon City at 4.15 am. We stayed in Ambon for the reunion, prizegiving and reception on 22 August, and much as I would have liked to have stayed longer in Ambon, which is everything which has been written about it, we had to move on. An extensive harbour almost the length of the island, surrounded by high, verdant mountains partially hidden under cloud, and the all-pervasive smell of cloves and spices for which the island is noted. The people, happy, friendly and helpful were a delight to meet and in the short time that I remained in Ambon I was able to see a few old friends from earlier visits and make new acquaintances.

Whenever I had the opportunity I would discuss my quest for information on the wrecks of the “Lady Nelson” and the “Stedcombe” with whoever I thought might be able to help me. One such man, Boet Nanlohey, well known in the tourist industry in Ambon suggested I see a man who worked in the Bapparda Maluku, or the Moluccan Tourist Commission who came from the Tanimbar Islands.

I was fortunate, George Kdise came to see me at the Moutiara Hotel, and we sat in the cool of the verandah and talked of Joe Forbes.

George told me that he came from the village of Otimmer on the west coast of Yamdena, the main island of the Tanimbar group. His father’s name is Saul Kdise and his grandfather’s name, Karel Kdise.

Karel Kdise had not always been known by that name. He was born at the village of Makatian on the west coast in 1860, Bareti Lempeteman, but in 1904 he was given the christian name of Karel Kdise Fabeat. When I showed George Kdise the contemporary sketch of Joe Forbes he examined it and exclaimed that his grandfather had worn the same style of loin-cloth and ear-rings, as that shown in the sketch, in 1970. His grandfather had lived in the village of Lauran, the same village in which Joe Forbes had been kept a prisoner, and had died in August 1980 at the great age of 120 years.

George could recall the story of the capture of Joe Forbes, told to him by his grandfather; not a lot, but enough to provide oral testimony from the other participants in the tragedy.
"In 1822, or whereabouts, a ship landed at Lauran and the captain and all of the crew, except two boys about 17 years old and the Austrian cook, went ashore. The cook and all the crew were killed, but the two boys, John Edwards and Joseph Forbes, were thrown into the sea to drown, but as they could swim they swam to the shore and because they were white they were seen and captured. The ship was destroyed (turned into stone).

The boys attended meetings to learn Adat (the culture of the people) and escaped twice, but were brought back. In 1839 when the expedition came, Forbes went back to Australia. John Edwards died there, but was married; maybe he had children. He was separated from Forbes and did not see him again". (44)

George Kdise said that Macassar traders had visited the Tanimbar Islands in 1838 or 1835 and they reported to Dutch or English traders at Macassar that they had seen the boys.

As part of his work Kdise has to travel around the Moluccas and he would be visiting Saumlaki, the capital of Yamdena, in October and would talk to the Bapak Raja of Lauran, some seven miles from Saumlaki. A few days later when I saw Kdise again he brought with him a letter of introduction to the Bapak Raja and included in it all the questions that I wanted answering, such as did Joe Forbes marry, what happened to John Edwards?

We talked some more about Forbes but George said he did not know who protected him but he would have been a slave to start with, doing all of the chores including chopping and washing sago. He did not finish up a slave, as the drawing showed him with traditional hairstyle, ear-rings, arm and leg rings and necklace, as a free man.

George could give me no information concerning the "Lady Nelson" or the fate of Captain Johns and his crew.

Two days later we sailed further east along the south coast of Seram and anchored off the village of Rumakai at first light. There, as we had become accustomed to finding, was the open sandy area that leads up the beach to the Christian church, which took pride of place, surrounded by the neat houses of the kampung.

Two men paddled out to greet us in the frail Kolek-Koleks, dug-out canoes with bamboo outriggers. They were welcomed aboard and we chatted quietly and happily in the cool of the early morning, with just a few roosters disturbing the rest of the inhabitants.

Korin Salavanay, was a school teacher, and from my usual questioning I found out that he had been teaching on the Island of Babar from 1975 to 1980. I took out my map of Babar and he recognised all of the villages named as he had, in the course of his stay, had to visit them on his round of duty. But when I asked him where the village I was looking for was, he was quite adamant that Aloetor, Aluta, Alutor or which ever way it might be spelt, did not exist on Babar. I recounted the story of the "Lady Nelson" and showed him an illustration of the ship, but he confessed that he had not heard of any legends relating to it.

I must admit I was rather devastated to think that the village did not exist, until I recalled that it was over 155 years since the tragedy and quite possibly the village had disappeared, if it had ever existed. Even Amos Helwend, an Australian/Indonesian in Darwin who originally came from Babar had never heard of it. He thought it might have been located on the neighbouring island of Wetan.

Although disappointed with the lack of information, our stay was made worthwhile by Korin taking the boat's crew on a walk through the most beautiful country in the foothills of southern Seram. A walk up a shallow river bed through jungle of Jackfruit trees, Sagu and Banyan trees, ferns and Casava until we reached an icy cold waterfall and pool.

From Rumakai we sailed to Saparua to the south of Seram and paid a short visit to the historic Fortress of Dursteede which had been recently restored and through the old village, to get some supplies. Our next move was to Nusalaut a small island close by to Saparua where a quick visit was made to the hot springs, before commencing our journey to the Banda Islands.

We left Nusalaut at 22.00 hours and once out to sea a swell came up from the north-east and increased in strength until it was impossible to stand upright, and those who were free to, went to their bunks and
tied up the lee sheet to prevent them falling out, while the others got knocked about unmercifully.

As daylight came, the seas started to ease until we came within sight of the Banda group of islands. We passed the barren and forbidding rock of Suanggi and in the distance the conical peak of Gunung Api, the fire mountain, Pulau Ai and Banda Besar.

We passed through the very narrow channel between Gunung Api and Bandaneira island and came to off the town of Bandaneira and anchored, with a rope to the nearest tree. No wonder the Dutch thought so much of these islands. Apart from the wealth that was to be found in the natural products of nutmeg, mace and cloves the compact group of islands are volcanic and although not active, clouds of steam still hover around the crater of Gunung Api. Picturesque little villages nestle into the folds of the hills and coves.

We spent three very relaxing days, exploring the islands and the Forts of Nassau and Belgica, Jan Pieterszoon Coen's house and the old Dutch Church. A walk down the main street conjured up the past glories of the Dutch period with the magnificent houses and public buildings. In the late afternoon of 1 September, we set out on the last leg of our journey to the Tanimbar Islands some 260 miles to the south-south east, where I looked forward to handing my letter of introduction to the Bapak Raja of Lauran and so, hopefully, learn more about the "Stedcombe" and her crew. But it was not to be.

We left the comparative calm of Banda but once out of the lee, the full force of the south-east winds and seas smashed against the boat's port bow forcing her to heel over.

The boat was powered by a Mercedes Benz engine but by 23.00 hours she had broken a valve and had to be closed down. Against such winds and seas, the skipper had a hard task and, to make matters worse, at 1.00 am the automatic pilot broke down and steering had to be done manually. The seas got rougher and everything that was not lashed or stored away became dangerous missiles below decks. Anyone not required on deck tied themselves into their bunks and those on deck were lashed to the boat by safety harness.

The log broke, so speed and distance was not readily available and the dinghy parted company never to be seen again.

This was sailing in the true meaning of the word and Bill Jelley, the skipper, demonstrated all the years of experience and skills of his training in this utterly demanding situation.
Dawn was never looked for more eagerly than then and when it arrived it was grey and miserable and reflected in the faces of the crew. It was not possible to sit or stand without being thrown across the cabin and no-one was allowed out of the cockpit without a safety harness.

The violence of the seas and wind continued for the best part of thirty-six hours, until the morning of the 3rd September, when the seas moderated and it became possible to move around and take note of our bearings. Repeated radio calls to Darwin remained unanswered. The sky cleared enough during the day to enable a sighting to be made and from the observation it appeared we were some 25 miles west of our intended course. At 16.00 hours, dead ahead, there appeared through the mist the grey cone of the volcanic Island of Nila. We had been blown too far west off our course for Yamdena and with no chance of making it with the winds as they were.

We looked forward to anchoring under Nila for the night to give us a chance to refresh ourselves and gain some respite before our try for Babar the following day. However, there was a great black cloud hovering over the peak of the island with all the indications of a squall building up. Before long the squall made straight for us and with it increased activity on board to haul in the main and change course to run before it. Squall activity continued into the night and early morning when at about 5.00 am the wind dropped suddenly and the sea grew calmer allowing everyone to attend to their immediate needs.

The skipper endeavoured to maintain the south-southeast course but it was hopeless. By midday we estimated our position as twenty-five miles west of Tepa, the capital of Pulau Babar, which I so badly wanted to visit to ascertain the fate of the "Lady Nelson"; but it was not to be.

Because of the set of the wind and tide and the state of the crew and vessel it was agreed it would be a long and tiring haul to reach the south-east coast of the island, and we should abandon any further attempt to get there. The island of Sermata not being too far distant it was agreed to make for the north side and hopefully anchor and rest up for the night. However, it was later found that there was no safe anchorage at all except during the change of the monsoon, and then only to local and experienced sailors. By the time that we reached Sermata the seas and wind had moderated but because there was no anchorage, a decision was made to head home for Darwin, some 280 miles away.

As we changed direction and the evening wore on, the seas continued to moderate but the heavy rolling from the south-east continued to make life a misery. By the following afternoon the winds had eased and the swell lessened which enabled the skipper to perform some sleight of hand with the engine to get her working gently on three cylinders.

Once the boat reached the shelter of Bathurst Island the seas became calm and the winds dropped and from there on in to Darwin, which we reached at noon on the 7th September, it was quiet motoring. An eventful journey but not exactly as I had planned. Such are the problems of historical research.
THE SECOND ATTEMPT

It was very disappointing being denied the chance of visiting the islands I had set my heart on, but I was determined to make a second attempt, particularly as the information that I had been given by George Kdiwe was sufficiently encouraging.

Bill Jelley, has been chartering "La Baleine" for cruises around the Indonesian islands for some time and usually spends the dry season around the Northern Territory coast and sails for Ambon at the beginning of the wet. He usually bases the boat at Waai at the eastern end of the island and takes tourists for cruises through the islands during the months of November to March. After some horse trading Bill agreed to take me with him on his next voyage to Ambon in November, but this time we would sail first to the Tanimbars and then on to Babar before proceeding to Ambon.

In the early hours of the 3rd November 1981, "La Baleine" motored gently down the harbour and set course for Cape Fourcroy, Bathurst Island to the north west.

The sky was full of cloud as a prelude to the wet season build-up and storms could be seen as the lightning flickered in and out. As Fourcroy came abeam we changed course to north-east for the island of Selaru and then Yamdena. As we left the land behind so we left the cloud and before long were experiencing ideal sailing conditions. By the late afternoon the wind had dropped and the sea became as smooth as glass. The motor was switched on to give us way and before long a Booby overtook us, then circled and alighted on the pulpit and stayed with us all through the night.

The next day was just as still, without the motor we would have been becalmed. No cloud to be seen except on the horizon to the north, where we expected the islands to be; the heat was intense but below decks it was intolerable. Every now and then the sails would be raised and lowered to catch every breeze, and by early morning of the 5 November, we found ourselves running up the east coast of Yamdena, a check of the chart found we were abeam the small bay in

Map of the Islands of Eastern Indonesia
which Lauran nestles. We were fortunate. Unlike the time when Kolff was here in the "Dourga" the sea was comparatively calm due to the change of monsoon. We sailed some two miles off the coast to keep clear of the great rocks both charted and uncharted but sufficiently close to see the high ridge of hills and the village nestling at the foot close to the waters edge. We passed the village of Olilit Lamah and changed course to follow the coastline southwards until we reached Asutubun turning west into Saumlaki Bay and tied up at the jetty at 7.30 am.

No sooner had we arrived than dozens of children came running down the jetty to stare at us and laugh and chatter. Shortly after, two men in uniform came aboard to check our papers — Jakobus Koisin, a policeman and Yoo Naflakia, the Kesjahbanda or harbourmaster, of Saumlaki. After all the formalities were over we were invited to the harbourmaster's office as soon as we had been to see the Chief of Police and the Customs Officer.

At the end of the stone jetty there is an open square with an independence memorial in the middle. From here we went up the hill to the Police Barracks but the chief was out of town until the afternoon. We then went to the Harbourmaster's office and spoke to him about the reason for our visit. I asked him if he could tell me something of the village of Aluta on the south-east coast of Babar but he was unable to help. We went back to the boat and obtained our Customs and Immigration clearances, and were now free to visit the town. Saumlaki is not large but it has a long wide main street running the length of it with many two storey houses and shops. There are a number of buses, that make regular journeys to the outlying villages, bicycles and a few private vehicles. It was interesting to note that in one part of the street white trepang or beche-de-mer was laid out to dry. There is still a large and profitable market in this delicacy which is sold in Surabaya. Most of the buildings are built of timber with timber shingles but others have atap roofs. Some of them had the appearance of great age. The day was spent in shopping for supplies and generally making enquiries but it was too hot and humid to stay out for long. A further attempt was made to see the Chief of Police and the Camat or Administrator but without success.

We had invited the Harbourmaster and the policeman and their wives to dinner on board and a pleasant evening was enjoyed. In the course of the conversation I found out that the policeman's wife Meri Koisin came from the village of Olilit Baru and knew the Bapak Raja and his family as also she knew the Bapak Raja of Lauran. They both lived in
the same road in Saumlaki! She agreed to take me to see them both the following morning.

I awoke early and went on deck. It was cool with a light fresh wind. The town was waking up but already there were children and fishermen on the wharf. The sun was coming up over the hills at the back of Saumlaki and little pockets of mist were joined by Kampung fires to give the place a placid and peaceful air. Mrs. Jean Jelley was with me and at the end of the jetty we were met by the Harbormaster, his wife and Meri the wife of the policeman who was to be our guide. We walked through the town and up the hil behind the Christian mission to Jalan Ollilit where the Bapak Raja of Lauran lived. We entered a very neat and tidy house and were introduced to the Ibu and her children and we sat and talked until the Bapak Raja arrived. A young man, very pleasant and a teacher at the high school, hence the reason for his living in Saumlaki and not his own village. After the normal pleasantries were concluded I explained the purpose of my visit and sought his permission to go to his village and make further enquiries regarding the "Stedcombe" and the two survivors, which he readily gave. His name is Norbert Bwariat. I gave him the letter of introduction which had been given to me by George Kdise and he read this with interest. He knew the story of Joe Forbes but was unclear about whether he had left any issue. When I showed him the contemporary sketch of Forbes he described the body ornaments, hair style and dress as being 'Adat' or customary and not that of a slave. He said that his uncle, Daniel Taboriat, would know the 'ceritera' or story.

Lauran is 7 miles by road from Saumlaki and the Bapak Raja suggested we go by small bus which could be hired.

Earlier I had suggested to my guide that if it was possible I would like to visit the village of Ollilit which had received a great deal of mention in earlier records but unbeknown to me, Meri had arranged for me to meet the Bapak Raja of Ollilit, who also was a teacher and lived in the same road; in fact a few houses away from Norbert Bwariat.

I said my farewells to him and was taken by Meri to Ollilit's house. Marcianus Fanumbi was an older man, but just as charming and friendly as Lauran, and we were introduced to his wife and children.
Map of southern part of Yamdena, Tanimbar Islands.
THE DISCOVERY OF THE RELICS AND TRADITIONAL STORIES

I showed a copy of an illustration of Ollili, drawn by Owen Stanley on his visit in HMS "Britomart" in March 1839, to Marcianus who expressed great interest. He explained to me that the original village of Ollili on the coast had been destroyed many years ago but now there were two villages; Ollili Baru, where he now lives and Ollili Lamah near where the original village used to be. We said our farewells and returned to Saumlaki where we hired a bus to take us to Lauran, including Norbert Bwariat who had joined us. We travelled over a reasonable road through great stands of Jack Fruit and Sagu trees; Lontor and Coconut palms and along winding rises through the hills until we came to the summit where we had a beautiful view of the village of Lauran laying below us in the corner of a bay. We were driven through the village which was clean and very well kept until we arrived at the house of the Orang Kaya, the father of Norbert Bwariat. Chairs were brought out from the house into the shade of a great Jackfruit tree where we sat and were given refreshments.

We were introduced to Norbert's father, John and his mother, and to his uncle Daniel Taborat, who was the holder of the traditional stories.

I explained my reason for the visit and they listened attentively and were most interested in the drawing of Joe Forbes.

I asked the question, "Was Joe Forbes married, did he have any children?". "No, he did not marry or have any children, he was a sick man".

From the picture it seemed that Forbes' clothing and adornment was 'Adat' or customary and that he was a free man. Daniel was not clear where Joseph went when he left but he thought it was a Portuguese boat that had taken him away. As for John Edwards, yes Daniel knew all about him. He had in fact married an island girl, but not at Lauran; he possibly lived at a kampong nearby. Forbes could not speak English, why? Edwards was kept separately. John Edwards married Ampokyanan and they had one son Mparunaman. He married and had a son and a daughter and each of them had children and grandchildren.(45)

While the family tree was being written down for me and being so engrossed I gradually realised that a group of people had been quietly gathering around us and were listening intently to what was being said. To have found out what had happened to John Edwards after all these years was a great reward. But what came next was even more exciting. I was introduced to members of John Edwards family one at a time as they came forward to greet me.

Throughout the afternoon different members came in from the gardens or from fishing to be introduced, and I had pointed out to me some of the more distinctive European features of some of the people who had more aquiline noses, higher foreheads and reddish coloured skins. One man, Jacobus, who was 6'0" tall had a very deep voice.

I took Polaroid photographs of the family and gave them to the older members to keep. Other members were out of the kampong, including Mparunaman, John Edwards' great grandson, but I was to meet him later.

I asked where John Edwards was buried and I was told that he had been buried on the beach, not in the cemetery.

I could not obtain any further information as time was running out and I did not want to unduly annoy these friendly people by importuning. However, I did enquire what relics of the "Stedcombe" were still extant, and I was taken gently by the hand to a house in the village where I was shown the meriam or cannon lying in the sand, where no doubt it had lain for the last 150 years. It was of iron, but as far as I could ascertain, without any markings to indicate its origin.†

I was also told that another gun, smaller and made of bronze, was located at Ollili Lamah, the Rantai or anchor chain was at the Kantor Camat or Administrator's office in Saumlaki, the Jankar or anchor was at Kampung Wowonda and the Tangga or iron steps were in Ollili Lamah.

As it came time for me to leave, the Bapak Raja said how pleased the family were at my coming to tell them something of the story of Edwards and Forbes and happy at being brought together. I was equally happy at being able to tell them what I knew and gratified to have learned more of Edwards and Forbes. We all shook hands and I was invited to come back again.

*See the full family tree in the appendix.
†See details of gun in appendix.
Whilst at Lauran I did have a chance to walk through the kampung down to the beach where I saw the wide shallow bay below the village. It did not take much imagination to picture the "Stedcombe" at anchor and the headless corpses of the crew laid out on the sand all those years ago. It was interesting to note the cows, a gift from Australia, in a compound and the villagers galloping along on very small but fast ponies.

The following morning early I was sitting on deck of the yacht chatting to the fishermen on the wharf when the Harbormaster arrived accompanied by two men. It was Mparunaman the great grandson of John Edwards and his son Atanasus who had made a special trip from Lauran to come and see me. We sat on deck and talked for a while but he could add little to what had already been told. They said farewell and thank you for coming before they left and then presented me with a parting gift. It was a very old, hand-woven sarong in the traditional colours of black and silver. A very handsome gesture.

I was sorry to leave Jamdena so soon as there were many things I wanted to do and questions to ask but our time was limited. Preparations were made to sail and at 13.00 hours we weighed and made for the open sea.

I had discussed with the skipper our intended landfall on the island of Babar, and suggested that visiting the capital, Tepa, to make inquiries regarding Aluta, would be too time consuming, especially if we had to later make our way down to the south-east coast. As so often the unexpected happens; just before we left the jetty a young man was talking to me about our destination and I explained that I could find no indication of the whereabouts of the village I hoped to find and he said that there was a very small village in the south-east which could be what I was looking for but it was named Analutur. Phonetically, the pronunciation of the two words was close enough to give me hope that the spelling of the words had changed over the great distance in time and encouraged me to think that it was the place I was looking for. We made for the coast where we expected it might be located. The journey was uneventful with very little wind and slight seas and by 2.00 am on the morning of 8 November, we sighted the rugged outline of Babar. By 6.30 am we were hove to off a small village with a Christian church prominent in the centre. The island at this point appeared very hilly with occasional peaks up to 700 and 800 feet. The golden sands of the beach stretched into the distance and tall coconut palms lined the narrow tracks that joined the neighbouring villages. Before long the village awoke and we had the usual visitors alongside, paddling their fragile and diminutive kolek-kolek's or outrigger canoes.

Two of the men were invited on board; one was a policeman and the other, Jan Emray, an assistant to the Bapak Raja. On enquiry, he told me that the name of the village was Ahanari. I explained the purpose of my visit and that I was trying to locate the village of Aluta or Analutur at which he replied, "Why yes, Analutur is only about one kilometre to the south". I was amazed at our fortune in getting so close to our target, but I had yet to prove that it was the same place as that recorded in the old documents.

I suggested that I should pay my respects to the Bapak Raja, and so I collected my camera, papers and other necessaries and was paddled ashore in the kolek-kolek by Jan Emray who had elected himself my guide. The rest of the crew followed later.

The kolek-kolek was approximately 6'0" long and 18" wide, with the bamboo outriggers 3'0" on either side. There was quite a swell but I managed to get ashore reasonably dry. I walked up the beach and across the open sand square where I was invited into Jan's house which was made of bamboo walls, slatted windows and atap roof on what appeared to be a tufa floor. The family and children crowded into
Main Street, Saumlaki, capital of Jamdena, Tanimbar Islands, and Bill Jelley.

Trepan or beche-de-mer drying in the main street, Saumlaki.
Kampung Lauran, where John Edwards and Joseph Forbes were held captive. Insert: The Bapak Raja of Kampung Lauran, Norbert Bwariat and his wife.
The cannon from the "Stedcombe" at Kampung Lurain.

The author and the Harbourmaster, Yoos Naikia, inspecting the cannon from the "Stedcombe" at Kampung Lurain.
Willem — G/G/Grandson of John Edwards of the "Stedcombe".

"La Baleine" berthed at Saumlaki.
Mparunaman, Great Grandson of John Edwards of the "Stedcombe" with his son Atanasus.

The Bapak Raja of Kampung Oilit, Marcianus Fanumbi and his wife.
A family group of the direct descendants of John Edwards of the "Stedcombe".

Male direct descendants of John Edwards of the "Stedcombe" — from left to right — Laurensus, Jacobus, Octavianus, Johannes, Octavianus, Josephus.
Map of the Island of Babar showing the villages of Ahanari, Analutur and Tutuwawang.
the small room while I made their acquaintance and made arrangements to see the Bapak Raja. However, after a short wait I was told that he was attending church and would be a while. Jan then said that he would take me to the village of Analutur and introduce me to the Bapak Raja.

We walked along the track through palms, Jackfruit trees and long grass until we came to the little village of Analutur with a population of no more than two hundred. There were black razorback pigs everywhere grunting and squealing and countless chickens scurrying in and out of the houses.

The weather was hot and sultry and there was a big swell on the sea coming in from the south-east; cloud was building up and it had all the portent of a storm. Jan found the Bapak Raja who very courteously invited us into his home and sat us down. After the usual introductions and pleasantries I explained the purpose of my visit; that I was looking for evidence of the "Lady Nelson" and stories relating to the fate of her crew. I gave him a copy of the drawing of the "Lady Nelson" of 1802 and also what information I had from my researches. I held my breath waiting for his reply. Was I on the right track at last? He told me his name was Onaola and yes, he knew of the story of the ship, but he either would not or could not tell me any details of the story. He was a most courteous and friendly person but I gained the impression that the stories were not his to give. He called in the Bapak Tua, the old man, named Oraile, but he said there were no stories of the ship at Analutur, and that I should go to the next village about six kilometres away where the Bapak Raja, Erupley, would possibly tell me the stories and show me the meriam or cannon! I was excited when I heard the word cannon, as it now appeared that I was hot on the scent.

The Bapak Raja offered to go ahead and talk to the Bapak Raja of Tutuwawang as the village was called and suggested that I meet him there at five in the evening. As it would have been a walk of upwards of fourteen kilometres by the time I had left the boat, and I needed to inform the skipper of my intentions, I decided to walk back to Ahanari and get the boat to take me to Tutuwawang. However, before I set off back to the boat, the Bapak Raja invited me to the service at the old church where he should be, but for my appearance. I went with him and sat through the sermon and then met the congregation afterwards. Back in the Bapak Raja’s house I was interested to see a very large long bow and arrows standing in a corner and when I showed an interest in them Onaola’s son gave me a demonstration.

The arrow had a very large stone head to it, more like a spear head, used mainly for hunting pig.

On the way back, the on-shore breeze stiffened, and although it cooled the air it was nevertheless ominous. One of Jan’s sons climbed a palm tree and cut me a coconut to drink which was most refreshing. Jan and his son Denny escorted me back to the boat and, on explaining to Bill Jelley that I wanted to visit Tutuwawang further south, he looked at the sky and made a grimace. He did not like the look of the sky or the sea which was getting rougher by the minute. Nevertheless, he agreed to go and after a short rest and a meal we set sail, leaving most of the crew ashore at Ahanari.

We arrived off Tutuwawang about 5.30 pm but the wind was driving to the shore and the rollers were breaking heavily on the beach. Bill was not happy. The boat was pitching and tossing at the anchor and the little kolek-kolek that was sent out to pick me up had difficulty in getting close. It came around the stern but because of the outriggers it had difficulty in tying up and with the swell the boat would rise up and the outrigger would slip away from under it.

I got ready to climb down to the frail craft, with my camera around my neck, but, just as I was about to step down the boat gave a great lurch and I went straight down, feet first into the foaming sea and the next thing I was struggling for air under the hull of the yacht. I had difficulty in swimming out, but eventually managed to grab hold of the ladder at the stern and hang on, while the sea and the boat were doing their utmost to shake me off. I reached the deck rather amazed to find that my glasses were still hooked around my ears and apart from the shock, little the worse for the ducking. My camera was useless, so I discarded it and Bill loaned me his underwater camera, meanwhile urging me to get on and do what I had come for as he was keen to get out of the bad anchorage.

I finally made it into the very narrow kolek-kolek and the islander who came to fetch me, stayed in the water and swam the boat ashore while I paddled. It was a hairy experience, as the rollers were breaking over us as we got closer to the shore. I managed to march up the beach to the open space in front of the village where I was met by Onaola, the Bapak Raja of Analutur, who immediately took me to meet the Bapak Raja of the village. I was shown into a bamboo and atap house and introduced to Erupley. I mustered all the dignity I could, which wasn’t much considering I was dripping like a drowned rat and shivering from my immersion.

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I was shown into a small dark room and sat down while I again explained my mission in the hope that at long last it was ended. It was. Erupley knew the story but said it would be better if I talked to the Orang Tua, the old man, who knew it best. My good guide Jan was still with me and must have come ashore in another kolek-kolek. We were taken to another house and introduced to Brony Erbabley where we both sat down at a little table while I made my enquiries. By this time the sun had almost set and with the cloud cover it was getting difficult to see. The small room was crowded with people leaning forward to catch what we were saying — and others crowded the door and window. I enquired about the cannon that I had been told earlier was here and I was led into the yard surrounding the house where the gun lay. It was not a cannon but a carronade. It had all been worthwhile. Four feet long, and a stubby breach with a very wide bore for its size. And there was the broad arrow and the marking 6-1-7; nothing else. I had plenty of volunteers but it required four men to turn it over while I inspected it for other marks.

Not being used to an underwater camera I switched to flash but nothing happened — tried again, still no flash — this was retribution for being smug about my previous good fortune! I took another in the hope that it might yet produce something.

I went inside again and listened to the old man’s stories which I had difficulty in following. I had some paper but it was wet and so I was provided with a page from a notebook and took a few notes.
The Protestant Church at Kampung Analutur.
The author going ashore at Babar Island in a local kolek-kolek.

The son of the Bapak Raja of Kampung Analutur, demonstrating traditional bow and arrow.
Then I heard the boat's strident klaxon calling me back but I had not finished my enquiries. Brony Erbably said he would write the story for me but I should go and visit a house near the beach. He started to dictate to a young man whilst Onaola took me to see the house, made of timber and atap, and which was large and spacious. I was told that this was the house where the crew stayed but I could get no further information about what happened to the crew. I took a couple of photographs and then I noticed that there was a light flickering, indicating that the flash was working. I walked back to where the carronade lay and took another picture, but that was the end. I had run out of film.

By this time Bill was urgently sounding the recall klaxon to get me back on board but being so engrossed I had forgotten time and the weather, which was now closing in and raining.

I hastened back to the Orang Tua's house and he handed me the story he had dictated. I tried to read it, but it was too dark. I suggested that one or more might have survived, that they had married; had children, but Onaola replied "No" to each question.

I now had to run for it, and so said my farewells and thanks to those who had been so patient with me and helpful in supplying the story. With heart in mouth I climbed on board the kolek-kolek and was pushed along by two swimmers through the mounting swell and crashing waves until I managed to scramble aboard the yacht. Bill was fuming with impatience as he was keen to get under way. The winds were causing the boat to buck and the anchor was dragging. As soon as my guide, Jan Emray, was on board and I had sent ashore some gifts, we stood off and made our way back to Ahanari to pick up the rest of the crew who were still ashore. When we arrived, the skipper blew the klaxon for the crew to come off, but nothing happened. Again the call, still no response. A searchlight and more calls. We could see the crew huddled on the beach but were making no attempt to get to the boat.

Before long the skipper said he would have to pull away as the anchor was not holding on the sand and he had to be extremely careful of the reef in case the boat was blown on to it. The beach shelved suddenly to a great depth and it was impossible to anchor further out. We spent the rest of the night motoring out to sea and in again, against a strong tide and fierce winds; a problem at the best of times but with a skeleton crew demanding.
By dawn the wind had eased sufficiently for the boat to get in reasonably close to the beach and the skipper blew the klaxon to recall the crew. Before long the kolek-koleks came out with the crew looking none the worse for their enforced stay. With barely time to say farewell to the people of Ahanari, the skipper immediately made for the open sea before the wind could change its mind. It was impossible to tell whether the south-easters might not continue for days at a time so it was as well to be sure.

The crew who had been ashore explained that they had tried to get on board but none of the islanders were prepared to risk the lives of their passengers or the boats in getting back through the heavy sea. One of the crew tried to swim back to the boat, but was unsuccessful.

From Babar we sailed slightly west of north until we passed the island of Nila where the winds veered around to north east, the seas still heavy. We then set course north for Banda across the unpredictable Banda Sea experiencing a mixture of squalls, heavy rain and following swell. We arrived at Bandaneira at 10.30 on the night of 10 November, after negotiating the narrow channel between the island and the volcano, Gunung Api.
We rested up and renewed acquaintances over the next few days before continuing our journey to Ambon where we arrived at 9.00 am Saturday 14 November.

I was due to fly back to Darwin by Air North with some of the crew on 18 November and so decided to take things easy in the city and moved into a hotel for the next four days. However, fate again took a hand and we were stranded for a further nine days when we were told that the clearances for the aircraft to land had not come through from Jakarta. We tried to be patient and the skipper of “La Baleine” did his best to entertain us and took us to Seram, where I managed to get Coral poisoning in my leg and had to sit with it up for a week.

We eventually flew out from Ambon arriving in Darwin the afternoon of 26 November 1981. In all, my researches had taken me some two thousand miles over six and a half weeks.

The story told to me by Brony Erbably, that disastrous Sunday on Babar Island, freely translated, is as follows:

“Whilst the ship rode at anchor, a woman relieved herself (on the beach). The crew abused her. She called to her countrymen to come and kill those on board. Whereupon the ship was pushed ashore. The person who was the leader at that time was Moses Erbably”. (46)

And so after 150 years the other side of the story has been told leaving more questions to be answered, hopefully by others.
SHIP'S SPECIFICATIONS

"LADY NELSON"

Built: Deptford, England - 1799
Tonnage: 61 tons
Length: 52' 6"
Beam: 17' 6"
Armament: 6 guns as Armed Tender; 1 12pdr.
          Carronade as Supply vessel
Crew: 10 — Henry Hamilton; John Jeur; John Pawsey
       (No others named)
Commander: Captain Samuel Johns
Royal Navy: H.M. Armed Tender
Colonial Service: Colonial Brig

"STEDCOMBE"

Built: Bridport, England - 1818
Tonnage: 128 tons
Length: 67' 0"
Beam: 20' 3"
Armament: Not listed
Crew: 15 — Joseph Forbes; John Edwards; - Forbes; -
       - Bastin (No others named)
Commander: Captain William Barns
Owner: Palmer, Wilson & Co. (East India Trade Committee)
Refs: Hardy's Register of Ships; Lloyds Register of Shipping. Lyme Regis
       (Philpot) Museum.
SPECIFICATION OF GUNS FOUND AT LAURAN, TANIMBAR SELATAN, AND TUTUWAWANG, PULAU BABAR

TUTUWAWANG

Caronade believed to be from the "Lady Nelson"
Length: 48” approximately
Bore: 6”
Muzzle: 8”
Markings: 6-1-7 Broad Arrow
Breeching Loop
Elevating Screw Box
Dispart Sight-Midlength reinforcing ring
Caronade Loop — underneath, mid-length
Material: Iron
Decoration on the muzzle and breech reinforcing rings.

LAURAN

Cannon believed to be from the "Stedcombe"
Length: 49” (excluding pommel)
Bore: 3½”
Markings: Nil
Circumference: 28 3/4” (at touchhole)
Material: Iron
Trunnions: Low
JOHN EDWARDS' (OF THE "STEDCOMBE") DESCENDANTS
FROM THE TIME OF HIS SOJOURN AT TIMOR LAUT,
(JAMDENA, TANIMBARS) UNTIL 1981

JOHN EDWARDS = AMPOKYENAN
c1825

(m) MPARUNAMAN = ?

(f) AMPOKYENAN

(m) LOBIAT MANDRIKAMAN

(m) FOUT ALUBWAMAN (m) MPARUNAMAN* (f) AMPOKYENAN

(m) JACOBUS * (24) (m) EDWARDUS

(m) JOHANNES * (48)

(m) AGUST MANDRIKAMAN (m) LAURENSUS * (22) (m) ATANASUS * (22) (m) LAN ANDRITYOMAN

(m) SERAN WANDRANAMAN (m) SAKMAS ARATWAMAN (f) AMPOKYENAN

Octavianus Willem
* (44) *

Otto Octavianus
* (24)

*Alive and seen by author November 1981

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STORY OF THE "LADY NELSON"
AT BABAR BY BRONY ERBABLEY
8 NOVEMBER 1981 *

"Sejarah — Sementara kapal berlabuh perempuan ada buang air, orang kapal maki, perempuan panggil di negri, laki laki datang bunu isi kepal, lantas kapal di tolak ke daratan".


"History — While the ship anchored, a woman was relieving herself. The crew of the ship abused her, the woman called people from the town, men came, killed the crew of the ship, and then the ship was pushed on shore".

The person who was the leader at the time was 1. Moses Erbabley Tutuwawang, 17/10/81 - writing, signed by Brony Erbabley.

*Translated by Mr. Din Siregar, Darwin
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34. An Account of the Rescue of Joe Forbes, Pasco, Page 65. As above.

35. As above, page 66.

36. Extract from Thomas Watson’s Journal as recorded in Pasco above, Page 68.

37. A.L. Kuper, as above.

38. South Australian, 26 June 1839.

39. A.L. Kuper, as above.

40. London Times, 21 April 1840.

41. Pasco, as above. Page 71.

42. Williamstown Electoral Roll for 1856/57.

43. Pasco, as above. Page 71.


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Lyons Cottage,  
Esplanade,  
Darwin, N.T.

Patron  
Sir William Forster

President  
Mr. P.G. Spillett, A.M. F.R.G.S.

Vice-President  
Dr. D. Carment.

Secretary  

Treasurer  
Mr. B.C. Lovell

Council  
Mr. K. Dupe  
Miss E. Kettle, M.B.E  
Mr. W. Pedersen  
Mrs. H.E. Wallis

General Meetings of the Society are held every last Wednesday in the month at 8 p.m.

Council Meetings are held every second Wednesday in the month at 5 p.m.

Access to Society Rooms and use of collections by appointment with the Secretary.