NOTICE OF ORDINARY MEETING

The second general meeting of the Society for 1977 will be held in the Museum Education Building, North Terrace, Adelaide at

8.00 pm Monday 25 April, 1977

AGENDA

1. Apologies.

2. Minutes of general meeting held Monday 28 March, 1977 to be confirmed.
   A copy of these minutes is attached.

3. New members.
   The following new members have been elected to the Society.

   Mr. Barry Craig, 77 Marion Road, Payneham
   Mrs. Angela Calder, 183 Wattle Street, Malvern
   Miss Julia Burnett, 51 Finniss Street, North Adelaide

   The following papers and journals from other Societies and Organizations will be tabled.

   Conservation Council of S.A. Newsletter Vol. 4 No. 9
   Anthropological Society of N.S.W. 49th Annual Report
   Anthropological Society of W.A. News Vol. 14 No. 2

5. Speaker
   Dr. Robjohns will give an address to the Society entitled,
   "EARLY CHINA"

6. May Meeting
   The May meeting will be held on Monday 23 May, 1977.
Address given to the Society by Mr. John Dymock at the General Meeting held on Monday 28 March, 1977.

"THE FIRST WHITEMEN"

Narrated by:- Alice Gilbert, sometimes known as MOOLOO DAY GNATHI which translated means - MEATWORKS LAGOON GIRL.

Translated by:- John Dymock

Burketown

N.W. Qld. April, 1972

"Them 'Old People' told me this when I was a young girl, - and sometimes we used to camp at MITIYI LANDA the Lagoon near the old Compound. We were YOORKOOLTA, MINKIN and GNORBURINJI people camping at that place together.

They told me that the first Whitemen came from the Sea in a big Boat, into the mouth of the Albert River - GUMBOOMUNDA a long long time ago.

Them MINKIN people saw that Boat coming and them Whitemen on that Boat. They thought them men were some sort of Devil or Ghost. Them Whitemen only had Bows and Arrows that time! That Boat and them Whitemen kept coming on up that River, so them MINKIN (people) went and got their Spears made of Wood and Stone and Shell. That Boat and them White Devils were still coming - so them MINKIN Men all hid in the Mangroves where the River is very narrow, they hid on both sides. As that Boat came into that narrow place, them MINKIN threw their Spears, and them Whitemen fired their Bows and Arrows into the air at them Mangroves where them Men were hiding. Them 'Old People' told me that the sky was really thick with Spears and Arrows flying at each other, that sky looked like the 'biggest mob of grasshoppers' flying at each other through the Air! Then people had another big fight in another narrow place, and that Boat looked just like a Porcupine with all them Spears sticking in it! Them Whitemen had had enough now, they had had Enough!

They cleared out down that River - and out into the Sea, - they thought that rough Sea more better than up that River where them MINKIN lived!

But, them Whitemen didn't forget them MINKIN and the 'big hiding' they got. They went over the Sea to 'another country' and they made a camp there for a 'long long time'.

They thought, and they thought, how could they beat them MINKIN. They thought and they thought some more, - then they got clever and 'Invented Guns'! But, them Guns wouldn't work! - they had to have lead to make them work! They went into the Hills and dug for lead. Now them Guns worked! - they couldn't use them Guns without that stuff!

The Whitemen came back up that River after a long long time, but now they had Guns - and they taught them MINKIN a Big Lesson! Them Whitemen are still here today, they didn't go away!
They're going up past GUNGA NGOODUNDA (New Punjab Station Waterhole) and up that Archie Creek (DALDARNYA) to them Hills around JEERINGNELLEE (Lilydale Spring). They've been up there looking around in them Rocks, - they've found Lead there, and they're digging it up!

Them Guns don't work without Lead, - and those Whitemen have gone to get that Lead - so that they can kill all us Poor Blackfellows!

That's all I know about them First Whitemen, - that's what them 'Old People' told me when I was a Girl, they didn't tell me anymore."

!!!!!!!!

This remarkable Story reflects (amongst many other things) a most moving lament of a Dying Tribe, their Spirit clearly broken. The MINKIN were a small tribe who lived principally between the tidal reaches of the GUNALUNDA or Nicholson River in the West and the tidal reaches of the Leichhardt River in the East. Between these two large rivers which at their Mouths are only 13 miles apart flows yet a third River call GUMBOOMUNDA (possibly also known as DOONMUNYA) which consequent to its recorded discovery by John Lort Stokes, R.N. the Commander of H.M.S. Beagle, on the night of an eclipse of the Moon 1st. August, 1841, it was patriotically named by him - 'The Albert River', in honour of Queen Victoria's husband, Prince Albert, the Prince Consort. Captain Stokes and a party of his men ascended this River in an open boat without any open contact with the local inhabitants, although no doubt the frequent firing of their guns at 'Wood Ducks, Alligators, Quail, Pigeons, and Emu', must have drawn unseen attention by the latter. On reaching the tidal limits, Stokes made the important discovery of a fine perennial stream of fresh water running into the River from the Southwards across a vast Plain of waving grasslands stretching to the horizon.

Subsequently, when the Journals of his explorations along the Northern coastlines of Australia were published in London in 1846 (by the Publishing House Boon) under the title 'The Voyages of the Beagle', Stokes was inspired to name the region 'The Plains of Promise'. Stokes' Journal and his romantic and visionary style of writing inspired others to consider the potentials of Northern Australia, and was (along with the earlier Hydrographic Survey of Flinders) the principal cause in setting the framework towards British Colonial Expansion and settlement in this region.

The MINKIN consequently became the first tribe in the Gulf of Carpentaria to face the trauma and impact of (more or less) sustained culture contact with 19th Century Europeans coming into the area. The first settlement of Whitemen was established right in the heart of their small territory by one of several fresh water Lily Lagoons, called MUNCOO BYEE or (MUNGOOBINE) in 1965.

The new settlement was name Burketown in honour of Robert O'Hara Burke, leader of the ill fated Burke & Wills Expedition, who reached the tidal waters of the Bynoe River in 1861.

The enigmatic question remains, - who were these Whitemen with Bows and Arrows? In the absence of actual historical literature recording such an event, (and I have found no direct evidence as yet) at this stage, one can do no more than to offer interesting yet inclusive conjectures or hypotheses. For example,
could these Whitemen with Bows and Arrows have been a Pre-European (i.e. 1844) visitation to the shores of the Southern Gulf of Carpentaria by either Yellow or Brown skinned Asians to the North?

Tantalising Proto-Historic evidence as evinced in Professor Mulvaney's informative book 'Prehistory of Australia', indicates this as a distinct possibility. Mention is made of the exploratory voyages of the Chinese (Ming Dynasty) Admiral the Eumuch Ch'eng Ho, of whom it is suggested may have reached Northern Australia in the year 1432 believing it in fact to be the South Pole! Such an historical and geographical affirmation on the part of the Ming Chroniclers may be less erroneous than is generally supposed, when viewed in the light of the then current Chinese concepts of Geography and Sea Navigation.

By the 10th Century A.D. the Islamic world was flourishing and Arabic seamen were trading with the ports of Southern China. It is possible that lode-stone navigation was introduced to China about this time. The Chinese may have had the equally valid view that a lode-stone rather than being attracted to the North Pole, was in fact 'distracted' from the South Pole, and was therefore the magnetic point of navigational reference. So that seemingly their junks not being able to proceed further south, they may have regarded the northern shores of Australia as the 'Ultimate South'. Apart from the exploratory and trading voyages of the Chinese, there is also said to exist a Japanese account of a voyage to Australia. In this document dated to 1626 in Japan - there is an account that tells of a Japanese Pirate and adventurere, one Yamada Nagamasu and his voyage to 'Seiyo' - The Great South Land - sometimes called the Land of Ogi. In this voyage (south of the islands of Indonesia) Yamada Nagamasu describes the geographical outline of this land as 'The Wedge' and 'The Fan' - they supposedly being the features of the Gulf of Carpentaria and Cape York Peninsular.

A third and more tangible probability is the consideration of visitation by Maccassan Trepangers who seasonally came to the shores of Northern Australia from the Sulawesi Islands (Celebes) during the Northern Monsoon in search of Beche de Mer or Sea Slugs, returning to their islands when the Southern Winds prevail. Although it is not known at what date the Maccassans had first ventured into the waters of the Gulf, one may reasonably assume that they were there at some undetermined date - post 1700. Alfred Searcy, an interesting if somewhat officious collector of Customs for the Northern Territory of S.A during the 1880's describes where the Maccassans had their seasonal camps along the coast of Arnhem Land, and into the Gulf, and gives Maccassan names for geographical locations. For example, MUNGOOLA - Caledon Bay, CHURAPEE - Blue Mud Bay, Dylonpo - a camp on Groote Eylandt, WAKEA - Mouth of the Roper River and DEENA SEEDA - a camp facing the straights between Centre Island and Venderlin Island in the Sir Edward Pellew Group.

He states that this is as far as the Maccassans go into the southern part of the Gulf. On this point, and at that date, he may have been correct, yet at an earlier date evidence proves that they had certainly, if sporadically, visited the islands of the South Wellesly Group some 200 miles to the S.E. near the head of the Gulf of Carpentaria. In 1801 for example, a Maccassan Prau owned by the Rajah of Boni in the Sulawesi Islands was engaged in Beche de Mer fishing in the vicinity of Bentinck and Sweers Island, and was shipwrecked off Inspection Hill on the latter mentioned island. Part of this shipwreck was in fact sighted in the following year when Matthew Flinders R.N. The Commander of H.M.S. Investigator, landed on this island. Amongst other
things he noticed broken pottery and trees that had been cut down with iron axes. One wonders if and how the crew of this vessel escaped as scanty historical evidence suggests that they were reunited with their countrymen. (For anyone interested, The Anthropological Society of Queensland, of which I am a member, published in its June 1973 Newsletter an interim report by myself to the Society giving some geographical and historical outlines of Sweers and its neighbouring islands.)

In the context of culture contact the Maccassans have some pride of place in defined Proto Historical relationships with the Aboriginal inhabitants of the Gulf of Carpentaria. Some of the cultural innovations introduced to the western side of the Gulf, and certainly as far S.E. as the Robinson River, prior to White settlement, includes the Dugout Canoe, - although a distinct difference in Watercraft is clearly seen towards the head of the Gulf. The LARDILZ tribe of Mornington Island and the KIARDILT tribe of Bentinck and Sweers Islands were seen only to use the WALPA, a crude triangular floating platform or raft made of dried Mangrove Wood. This suggests that the contact between the Maccassans and the Aboriginal inhabitants of the Wellesley Islands was sporadic, and only nominally felt.

Tamarind trees are important indicators of Maccassan visitation to our Northern Coastsites, and offer themselves as Botanical Markers for locating the camp sites of these adventurous Asian Seafarers. In this respect a more detailed investigation of the region should be encouraged.

As a suggestion, a closer inspection of Fowler Island, by a qualified Archaeologist may well be in order. The distinguished explorer William Landsborough whilst inspecting the suitability of Sweers Island as a port of entry to the southern Gulf (establishing the township of Carnarvon) visited Fowler Island in May, 1866 and made note of the big shady Tamarind Tree growing there. Captain Pennefather makes mention of the same tree in 1880, and in 1972 I saw the same tree, whilst sailing by. Fowler Island is about 1½ miles long and is situated near the S.E. corner of Bentinck Island. Its position may well have afforded a suitable location for a camp, both from a defensive point of view as well as being suitably adjacent to the extensive reefs and shoal water habitat of the much prized Trengon. Unfortunately for this Historian, but perhaps most fortunate for the trees themselves, the trunk has a pithy formation and therefore having no rings it cannot be dated by the process of Dendrochronology.

Other cultural innovations or items of trade would have included tobacco, smoking pipes, pieces of iron, cloth, pieces of glass, rice and no doubt occasionally the native people were given a 'spiritual for taste' of the 'Cult of Bacchus' as the Maccassans also brought alcohol with them. 'Dutch Arrack' traded from Dutch merchants of the Netherlands East Indies.

A fourth possibility also presents itself. Could the Whitemen with Bows and Arrows have been White Papuans - the lighter skinned people of Southern and Eastern Papua? They would most certainly use Bows and Arrows, and also have substantial watercraft capable of withstanding a Monsoonal wind-blow journey either by design or misadventure into the geographical cul de sac that the Gulf waters present. To lend a possible note of credibility one need only mention that coastal seafarers of the Tanimbar and Aru Islands are occasionally stormblown during the northern Monsoon and reach our northern coastline by misadventure. Whilst on the subject of Melanesian contact, Alice Gilbert who
was a member of the coastal YOOKKOUTA tribe in the vicinity of GABOOLA or Bayley Point, narrated another legend that I have written down, it begins like this:- At the end of the Sea to the north, way beyond Mornington Island is another Island called MAWRAH and Two Black Devils with heads like a monkey lived there. They were brothers and they were so black they couldn't be blacker. They also had a huge Dog. Alice goes on to say how they came to her country etc. and that they used to eat people. This is a very tenuous story perhaps on which to claim Melanesian visitation. But, Alice, if she was describing 'literally' what the Old People told her of their oral traditions, would perhaps use the word 'Monkey'. This, however, need not necessarily mean the Monkey as one would expect to see up in a tree or in the zoo. Monkey or MUNGI was the colloquial Aboriginal Pidgin English for Sheep, and was used as such last century by all the Aboriginal tribes of north and western Queensland, whose land was occupied by the Whites' Wallaby or MUNGI. The name was said to have been derived from a tribe living on the Belyando River who used such a word to describe a Wallaby, and the catchy word soon came to describe the Whites' sheep, as the White frontier extended northwards and westwards. This also was the case with other species, according to where they were first encountered.

The 'Giant Perch' of the Fitzroy River, and Dawson River, when first caught by the White settlers of the 1850's were told by the local tribespeople that its 'Proper Name' was BARRAMUNGI. As such words were adopted and became general language when met with elsewhere as the frontier lands of the Whites extended.

As well my Barramundi Fishing friends know, the word BARRAMUNGI so very often regarded as being synonymous with the waters of the Gulf of Carpentaria, has its 'own name', according to the local tribal languages of the area i.e. NOOLOOMIRI GARAWA tribe. Often fish have individual names according to their growth size etc.

Example: WIREE GAJEE GAJEE - Huge (Boss) catfish
MALALAWIREE - Medium size catfish
BOONGYIREE - Small catfish

Scattered across the maps of north and western Queensland an echo of the past can still be seen, where only cattle walk today. The Monkey Creeks, as on the Cloncurry River at WURUNG Station, and Monkey waterholes, as on the Flinders River at Donors Hill Station, along with names like Woolshed waterhole, Leichhardt River, on what is now Wernadinga Station and the Washpool Waterhole on the Landsborough River provide a memory that flocks of sheep preceded herds of cattle, as invaders of the grasslands.

Hence, Alice Gilbert's legend of 'Two Black Devils with heads like Monkey' suggest in my opinion, keen observation on the part of the Aborigines as to the nature of the Black Devil's Hair. The hair of Melanesian people is so very often described as being 'Wooly'.

The fifth and final possibility which I wish to outline, is the consideration of an event where Bows and Arrows may well have been used in the general area of the Albert River, within the historic period of its history. This concerns the introduction of the people from the South Sea Islands, more familiarly known as Kanakas. Initially, these people were introduced as a means of very cheap labour for developing sugar plantations and other agricultural undertakings along the tropical east coast of Queensland. This trade
in human cargoes commenced about the year 1865, and involved the recruitment (very often by such dubious means as kidnapping and blatant false representation) of Melanesian and Polynesian men from the island groups adjacent to and extending eastwards of New Guinea i.e. The Solomon Islands, the New Hebrides, the Banks and Cook Island group etc., and were principal target areas for the 'Blackbirders' and recruiting vessels plying the trade for the Queensland plantations. One may well wonder what the islanders' feelings must have been when initially believing that they were going on a sea voyage and returning to their islands in 'Three Moons' after an often hellish voyage down in a crowded hold, they eventually found themselves in a strange land working for three wet seasons! By 1868, the high cost of employing white shepherds and general hands, with wages often as high as two pounds per week as against about five pounds per year for Kanaka labour, and at a time of increasing economic depression, soon had a number of enterprising Gulf Pastoralists petitioning for a boatload of Kanakas for their sheep stations. In answer to such earnest petitioning the hopes of the pastoralists were soon to be fulfilled.

On the 16th September, 1868, the Sydney trading vessel 'The Spunkie' after a lengthy cruise in the South Seas, hove into view off Carnarvon and dropped her anchors in the Investigator Roads, the channel between Sweers and Bentinck Islands. Carnarvon township on Sweers Island was the customs post and principal port of entry for vessels trading to the Gulf River settlements of Burketown, Leichhardt River, and the newly formed Norman Town. On board the 'Spunkie' were what was described as a cargo of Polynesian labourers, another account calls them Papuan Negroes, while a third account regards them as Sandwich Islanders.

It's quite possible that they were recruited from disparate areas. However, historical evidence points towards them having been recruited from the Banks Island group. A number of the Islanders were parcellled out amongst the mainland stations, whilst the remainder, about 20-28, were employed on Sweers Island by the local settlers and loading and unloading goods that were to be traded to and from the mainland ports and wharfs.

It was generally stated that the Islanders had been kidnapped or otherwise to be returned in Three Moons to their islands. On the night of 13th December 1868, all the Kanakas on Sweers Island to the number of 20-28 escaped during the night in an unattended whale boat taking with them everything useful that they could lay their hands on, including, axes, tomahawks, buckets, tin pint pots, tin plates, saucepans, a large quantity of flour and other provisions, and last but not least an empty beer barrel full of fresh water. Next day the revenue cutter and another vessel went in search of the boat but after three days gave up the search and returned to Sweers Island. It was a week or two later that a vessel, the steamer 'Pioneer' in charge of Captain Swan sighted the whale boat and "... when at a distance of about 10 miles from the Albert River, he at once steered for the whaler, and to the delight of the runaways took them all on board, and took the whale boat in tow. The islanders when questioned informed him that they had landed on the mainland between the Albert and Leichhardt Rivers and they had the misfortune to meet with a large mob of blacks. The savages made a furious attack on the Kanakas and wounded several of them. This had the effect of making them decide to return to Sweers Island. Needless to say, they were glad to get back to their employment and never again attempted to get away in the same manner again."
Bows and Arrows are not specifically mentioned, yet it seems feasible enough to me that an organised party of islanders, used to tribal conflicts in their own islands, would consider a means of defence, and of hunting, a first consideration?

It seems unlikely however, that suitable timber would be found to use the Bow principle to good effect. Yet, as with the devastating effect of the gun when used either in defence or attack, the tactical deployment and weapons of a strange people has in all ages attracted much attention and interest and therefore would leave a deep impression, if not in the bodies, then most certainly in the minds and memories of the MINKIN.

End of Part One.

Dedicated to the memory of the principal Story Teller: Alice Gilbert, and the Minkin and people of Burketown.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

PART ONE

1. The Late Alice Gilbert (Story Teller) YOOKKOOLTA tribe
2. Dr. Campbell McKnight Regarding advice on the Maccassans
3. Professor J. Mulvaney for reference from 'The Prehistory of Australia'

Other References:
4. The Files of the Brisbane Courier 1865-1935
5. The Files of the Queenslander 1866-1933

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6. John Dymock Restricted files
   A.I.A.S. Canberra

(As an amateur and unassisted student, I reserve the rights of publication)