

SUWARROW ISLAND

Department of Pacific History,
7th May, 1964.

Mr Gordon Russell,
C/o New Zealand Meteorological Service,
Box 722, WELLINGTON, New Zealand.

Dear Gordon,

I have been meaning to write to you for ages past to ask how you are getting on these days and whether you have given up the island history game for good. Yesterday my conscience was particularly worrying me because I was making a plea for University funds to provide grants for non-academics who have been bitten by the history bug so that they can come and work up some piece of research and writing in peace and quiet. And I mentioned your name as a case in point, with Eric Ramsden and Langdon of the PIM.

At least I hope that your transfer to New Zealand has enabled you to eradicate your eosinophilia, for I imagine that it took much energy out of you. I wouldn't mind living in Wellington myself, bar the vile climate, for it must be nice to be near the Turnbull.

Things are hotting up here at the moment. We start the Journal of Pacific History next year, to give all the scattered devotees throughout the world a publication outlet and a focal centre for news and views. And we have a Pacific history series of book-length studies in the offing also. What about an article for the Journal on Sterndale and his pals?

I have come back from a year in England and America, cataloguing manuscript material on the Pacific Islands and now we have bought a house in Canberra, to settle down for good.

I'm afraid that I never succeeded in locating the information you were after about H.M.S. Reindeer and the British whaler Rifleman, though I kept my eyes open in the U.K. and the Mitchell. The Admiralty searcher at the Public Record Office, Mrs Heaketh-Williams, looked at the captains' letters and her report was as follows:-

Adm. 1/6059 1868 - Commander Edward NARES. Pacific Station.
HMS REINDEER No letters under Captain Nares.

The captains' log has not come to light either as yet, but we have a new searcher in London, Mrs G.K. Roth, and if you are still interested I'll ask her to have a look. The Admiralty records are unbelievably complicated, largely because they are not divided up into areas.

As for the Rifleman, I went to all parts of England and Scotland recording the British whaling logs and Journals (they were pitifully few), and the Rifleman was not among them. I'm afraid that we must write the MS off as definitely lost. There was another Rifleman, a schooner in the Fiji labour trade, and we have a good deal on her, but that's not much use to you I guess.

Such a pity poor Dick Gilson died suddenly from a heart attack in Los Angeles (just a year ago now); he was one of the best and had forgotten more history than any of the rest of us ever knew. His wife Miriam is living in Wellington now; and I think teaching.

Let me know if I can be of any help at any time, now that I am back again in practice - there are so few of us in the history business that I should hate to see one moving out.

Yours,

Lee M.

Rarotonga,
10/8/61

Dear Harry,

If your reply of 29/12/60 was somewhat taddy, so is this. It was also pleasant reading and I was delighted to learn that I had at last made a useful contribution to your data and in some part repayed your kindness in Canberra. Mostly it is all take on my side and I get quite a lift when I can make an offering.

You express the hope that I am not succumbing to the lotus. How is one to know in lotus country? What is clear is that I have succumbed to one of the hazards of lotus eating, a mosquito borne complaint with the high sounding name of eosinophilia. I was advised five years ago that I was in a 'tropical condition' and in spite of local medical efforts I have been unable to get ahead of it. Now it has been decided that I am unfit for further tropical service and in October we return to New Zealand for good, to Wellington of all places, at least until further notice. The prospect was not stimulating at first but we are now quite reconciled to the idea, for it is essential that I become something of a man again and it is also high time that we acquired a home in New Zealand. Until we do my address will be - from November - c/o N.Z. Meteorological Service Box 722, W/ton. And if you pass that way we will expect to be informed.

What effect this will have on my literary aspirations I cannot say but as output has been at a low ebb here for

in atoll passages such as the eastern passages on Suwarrow and Penrhyn that are open to oceanic ripples from Chilean sources but this should be localised and limited as with man-made moles, as access to the lagoon dissipated this energy laterally -- the bottling-up process in reverse. Atolls certainly look vulnerable and their nakedness worried me for a long time until I was satisfied that the destructive powers of these fast moving ripples only took charge where they found a bottleneck ~~with~~ right ahead with no outlet, as are to be found in the Hawaiiis and ~~Y~~ elsewhere, and, in miniature form, the two little pocket harbours of Avarua and Avatiu, Rarotonga, where I have witnessed the potential of three to date.

The following notes made on your behalf are sure to be known to you but here they are:

HMS Warspite, Palmerston Is., 1871:

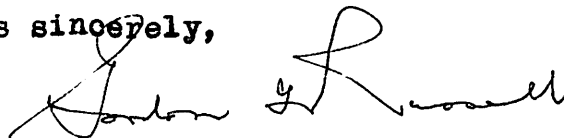
The Marsters story was presented with great abandon by one Burnaby Conrad in a February issue of 'True' magazine, year unknown. While he twists the truth to suit his purpose it would seem that he had access to some interesting records and one intrigues me. He claims that HMS Warspite visited Palmerston in 1871 and refers to laudable reports from officers in the shore party and their comments on ... a lively clan of 23 people, 19 of them children... This sounds authentic and no doubt the C.O. would report to the Admiralty on this visit. Can we locate it? He also refers to the odd invasion of would-be settlers, including one of 12 men and 8 women, British, in the schooner 'Island Clipper', 1888, whom Marsters repulses with a show of force.

S.R. Maxwell & Co.- Paid the Pal(er)merston rent, £25, for the year 1906.

James Morrison & Co.- Original indenture with Queen Victoria, Suwarrow.

Now it is your turn to be tardy! Best wishes to you and yours.

Yours sincerely,



Department of Pacific History,
29th December, 1960.

Dear Gordon,

The year is nearly through and I have been spending the Christmas season trying to catch up with my arrears of correspondence - with some success, I may add - and behold I have come to your letter of the 17th April, which I am sorry and ashamed to see I have never answered.

The reason for this omission is not my usual facility for procrastination but the fact that it contains several queries which can only be answered as a result of research in the Mitchell; and try as I do I have never managed to get down to that haven of peace for more than a day or two at a time, which is too short.

But I hope to have at least a fortnight at the end of this month in Sydney and will do my best to find out the gon on the visit of H.M.S. Endeavour to the Cook Islands in 1860; the voyage of the whaler Hifloman; and Sterndale's letters in the Sydney Empire.

Meanwhile I am most grateful to you for all the material you have provided on Suvarrow; it is really quite a gold-mine. Some day you or I (preferably you) will have to fit in all the bits and pieces and write a coherent account of the doings of Evans, Sterndale and Company and the beginnings of the British guano trade in the Central Pacific (Malden, Starbuck, Caroline and Suvarrow).

Cocubes and Daldy, of Auckland, come into the picture, as do Grice and Sumner of Melbourne, and everything leads up to John T. Arundel, in the early 70s. What a fascinating study it would make.

I hear of you from Ron every now and again and trust that you are keeping to the grindstone and not succumbing to the lotus; even if it means moving to civilization you must produce your story of Masters, Palmerston and the Cooks in the earlier.

With our best wishes for a prolific 1961,

-Yours,

J.L.M.

Wellington,
17/4/60

Dear Harry,

I find myself in a bleak Wellington over Easter with all research channels closed, and, as you will gather from the enclosed assortment, a shortage of typing paper.

The enclosures cover material that I gathered from the National Archives, thanks to guidance from Dick Gilson and yourself, and which I believe and hope is new to you both. Dick will receive from me a copy of the same enclosures.

Weighed down as I know you are I still cannot refrain from adding another straw or two, to wit:

- 1/ In the enclosed data on the Suwarrow issue between Evans and Sterndale I am intrigued by the reference to Capt. Nares of H.M.S. Reindeer and his report of 1868, which 'related to many other islands besides Suwarrow'. Maybe he visited Palmerston. What are the chances of access to this Admiralty report?
- 2/ As indicated in Note 4 in the enclosed material I am hoping you can suggest a source for detail on logs and voyages of the British whaler 'Rifleman'.

... 2 ... 29
My time in Wellington has been too short and involved to do much more than gaze in wonder at the resources of Turnbull and the National Archives but with every assistance from Mr. Standish and staff I secured the cream of what I particularly sought and no doubt as much as I will be able to do justice to.

I have unearthed considerable material on Sterndale's background. In the eyes of the missionaries he was a scoundrel of the first water and I draw your attention to a source that may or may not have been followed up:

In a report to the L.M.S. directors (Microfilm 7, South Sea Journals, Turnbull) Rev. T.C. Vivian writes ... 'one of whom is the famous Mr. Sterndale who corresponds with the editor of the Sydney 'Empire' and writes so many bitter things against the missionaries. He signs himself 'A Master Mariner' and his articles appear very often.' Regret I did not note date of above letter but know it was in the 1871-72 period.

I have wondered since leaving Canberra whether you succumbed to that sleek limousine and are now acquiring added mana with each outing. You were very good to me and I am very grateful. I depart Auckland 20th per Maui Pomare for good old Rarotonga, bless your heart!

Yours sincerely,

James D. Russell

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SUWARROW -- STERNDALE -- EVANS AFFAIR

The following nine items are to be found in the order below in Volume 1, Series G 2, Confidential Despatches to the Governor, National Archives, Wellington.

(1) C.O. to Governor, 21/1/1878:

Refers to correspondence with F.O. on representations made to British Embassy at Washington by agents of H.B. Sterndale, protesting against alleged intention of N.Z. Parliament to place Suwarrow Island under control of Government of Colony. Signed Carnarvon Secretary of State for Colonies. Essence of this correspondence as below:

(2) F.O. to C.O., 14/11/77:

Refers to despatch from H.M. Charge d'Affaires at Washington on the subject of Suwarrow. Signed Tanderden.

(3) H.M. C.d'A. (F. Plunkett) to Earl of Derby, 30/10/77:

Refers to letter to Sir Edward Thornton (Frisco) from Messrs Rice and ~~Swales~~ Swales of San Francisco protesting as above, because party claiming to be lawful proprietor of Island is domiciled in United States. Says he has asked H.M. Consul San Francisco to enquire confidentially into status of Rice and Swales and report, etc.

(4) Rice and Swales to Sir Edw. Thornton, 'Frisco, 15/10/77:

Refers to extract from a N.Z. journal stating that 15/8/77 a Mr. Reynolds 'gave notice of motion to ask the Government to place Suwarrow Island under control of Colonial Government', adding that party claiming island is domiciled in U.S., resident of State of California, and has appointed them agents and attorneys to act.. etc, and they protest against such disposal without his knowledge or consent, the more especially'as it is known to us that the motion of Mr. Reynolds has not been suggested by any exigency of Colonial policy, but has been advanced in the interest of private individuals engaged in commercial transactions..... (Extract of newspaper item recording Mr. Reynolds notice of motion follows).

(5) F.O. to C.O., 12/5/77:

Refers to despatch from Plunkett, as above, to be considered and returned.

(6) Plunkett to Earl of Derby, 17/11/77:

Further to his (3) above, encloses copy of dispatch from H.M. Consul, 'Frisco, on status of Rice and Swales.

(7) H.M. Consul, 'Frisco to Plunkett, Washington, 6/11/77:

.....Messrs Rice and Swales recently established this city as Real Estate agents... act as agent for Sterndale 'who arrived here from N.Z. few months ago very sick'.... Has been informed Sterndale sent to Suwarrow about three years ago by Henderson & MacFarlane of Auckland as their agent to collect Pearl Shells and Beche-de-Mer and that he subsequently claimed to be owner of the island....'I have no doubt there is trouble between Sterndale and H. & F. and that latter are trying to get assistance from the N.Z. Govt. to enable them to protect their interests.' Signed Booker.

(8) C.O. to F.O., 21/12/77:

Acknowledges above enclosures and states 'Earl of Derby be advised no information this Department to show any desire on part of N.Z. Govt, to place Suwarrow under control of Colony... and in view geographical position of Suwarrow Lord Carnarvon would not be prepared to consent to such a course, His Lordship does not think that any notice need be taken of Messrs Rice and Swales letter.' Then refers to - and enclose copy of - memorandum respecting Suwarrow Island drawn up earlier relative to Syerndale, etc. Copy of this memorandum follows:

MEMORANDUM ON SUWARROW HELD BY C.O., UNDATED

On 15th August, 1864, Mr. John C. Daggett of 83 Collins Street West Melbourne applied for a lease or license of Suwarrow Island for the purpose of obtaining therefrom guano and other Manure and of working the Coral reef. Mr. Daggetts application was submitted to this office by the Governor of New South Wales, and the Admiralty and Foreign Office having been consulted and stated that they were unaware of any Foreign claim on this Island or of any other objection to the issue of the usual lease, a license was in April 1865 executed by the Emigration Commissioners in his favour and Mr. Daggett being resident in Melbourne this was sent to the Governor of Victoria.

Mr. Daggett appears to have been absent from the Colony when the license arrived and the Governor subsequently ascertained that he was an American subject and submitted that the license issued in his favour should be revoked and that another license should be granted to Mr. J. Lavington Evans of Melbourne, a subsequent applicant for Suwarrow Island. The Governor's recommendation was adopted and a license for seven years of Suwarrow Island in Mr. Evans favor was executed by the Emigration Commissioners on 24th September, 1866.

The license was sent to the Governor of Victoria on 5th December 1866 and he was told to call on Mr. Evans to execute both parts of the license.... This the Governor did on the 24th December and the returned licenses ~~now~~ bear no trace of their ever having been executed by Mr. Daggett.

Nothing further appears to have been heard of Suwarrow Island until October 1868, when the Admiralty forwarded a report by Commander Nares of the 'Reindeer' dated July 17, from which it appears that Captain Nares had obtained information from Captain Sterndale, agent for the Pacific Islands Trading Company that he and a party of 18 natives had been landed on the Island by Mr. Evans in October 1867 with a supply of provisions for about four months; that Mr. Evans went away in his schooner and sold her at one of the other islands, saying that he had left his agent with a years provisions on Suwarrow Island. Captain Sterndale further stated that he left the island in April 1868, heaving been for two months without any provisions, and having

suffered very much in consequence. He further stated that during the seven months the island was worked 7 tons of Beche-de-Mer and 6 tons of pearl shell were collected.

Captain Nares report related to many other islands besides Suwarrow and disclosed such an unsatisfactory state of things generally that it was decided to cancel the leases of the various islands outright, and to call for prompt payment of rents and royalties due in respect of all other islands, on pain of forfeiture of the licenses granted.

The Governor of Victoria was accordingly instructed on 18th February 1869 to call upon Mr. Evans for a statement of his exports from Suwarrow Island and for payment of any royalty due under pain of forfeiture The charge of abandonment preferred against Mr. Evans appears however to have been lost sight of.

Subsequently however, in April 1869, the Admiralty forwarded to this office an affidavit made by Captain Sterndale before the British Consul at Tahiti on the 10th August 1868, setting forth at length his complaint of having been abandoned on Suwarrow Island by Mr. Evans and the circumstances in which he had been ~~abandoned~~ rescued by Captain W.H. Hayes of the brig 'Rona'.

This affidavit was forwarded to the Governor of Victoria on the 7th of May 1869, and he was instructed to give Mr. Evans the opportunity of replying to the accusations brought against him by Mr. Sterndale. On the 7th of June 1869 the Governor of Victoria forwarded Mr. Evans explanation of his omission to furnish a statement of his exports from Suwarrow Island and ~~his~~ to pay royalty thereon. The explanation was to the effect that the delay in the matter was owing to Captain Sterndale's misconduct, who having been left in charge at Suwarrow Island with stores sufficient for himself and party for eight months had, in collusion with Captain Hayes, carried off all the Beche-de-Mer and Pearl shell that had been collected and had sent them to Tahiti where they were sold, and had himself deserted the Island and sent the natives home.

Mr. Evans further stated that the reason he had sold his vessel was that she had been condemned as unseaworthy and that he had made arrangements with the owners of a vessel at the

Navigators Islands to visit Suwarrow and that she started on that mission in March 1868 and only ~~xxx~~ did not visit Suwarrow Island because intelligence of Captain Sterndale's abandonment of it was received at a neighbouring island. Mr. Evans added that he was on the point of proceeding to Tahiti and promised a further communication on his return.

As Mr. Evans statement was directly opposed to Captain Sterndale's statement, it was decided to await his reply to the further statement (affidavit) of Captain Sterndale before taking any action with the view of revoking the license of Suwarrow Island. On the 11th October 1869 the Governor of Victoria forwarded Mr. Evans reply to Captain Sterndale's affidavit and it is in effect a distinct contradiction of the charges brought forward by Captain Sterndale.

Mr. Evans enclosed a statement of the provisions left on the island and a declaration from three persons who accompanied him on the expedition to Suwarrow Island that they were sufficient for six months supply for those left on the island. Mr. Evans concluded by stating that he had no doubt that Captain Sterndale got up his story to hide his own and the notorious Captain Hayes' speculations, they having stripped the island of all the materials landed there for working it.

The Governor when forwarding this report pointed out that unless Mr. Evans or Captain Sterndale should take legal proceedings in the matter there was no means of testing the truth of their respective stories, and that he did not see what further steps could be taken in the matter.

This view of the matter was concurred in here and merely an acknowledgment sent in reply to the Governor's despatch. Captain Hayes character does not seem in those days to have been so well known as it afterwards became. The fact that Mr. Evan's licence of Suwarrow Island was still in existence appears to have been lost sight of, and I cannot find that it was ever revoked, or that Mr. Evans ever paid any royalties in respect of it. The license has however at any rate expired (1873) having been only for 7 years from 24 September 1866.///

THE SUWARROW MURDERS

Copies of two letters by Williams, British Consul, Apia, embraced in F.O. 58/59 microfilms, National Archives, Wellington.

British Consulate,
Navigators' Islands,
14 December 1858.
No. 1

L.F. Seutes Esq.,
H.I.M. Consul,
Sydney

Sir,

I am under the painful necessity of informing you of the murder of three persons, a Frenchman, an Englishman and an American, on Suwarrow Island, by some Penrhyn Islanders.

Captain Sustenance, Master and owner of the schooner 'Dart', placed the Penrhyn Islanders on Suwarrow under the management of an Englishman, for the purpose of diving for pearl-shell, but since the murder of these men the islanders have been taken back to their own island; on his arrival at Suwarrow, he found an American and some Manihikians who had been drifted there some time before.

After the lapse of a few months a Frenchman, Jules Tirel by name, was taken there by a captain Martin of the schooner 'Tickler' (American). He had been but a few days on the island when he, together with the other two white men, were seized by the natives, tied hand and feet, and carried out to the lagoon, and there drowned.

From the evidence I have obtained I gather that the natives had been much abused and illtreated by the Englishman, which caused a disturbance between the whites and the natives, the latter ~~numbering~~ numbering so many more than the former, overpowered them, when they deliberately launched the boat and conveyed them to the lagoon where they were all drowned.

In the evidence given I find that Jules Tirel is acquitted of any bad conduct towards the natives, the alleged cause of his being drowned with his comrades is that he joined

against the natives in the disturbance. I consider that it will be necessary however that a further investigation should be made into this matter so that the facts of the case may be brought to light, and the offenders to justice.

The evidences I have been able to collect are on file in this Consulate, if you should at any time require a copy of them, I shall be most happy to furnish you with one.

Signed: John C. Williams.

(Same address and date)
No. 2

Captain Loring,
Senior Officer,
Australian Station,
Sydney

Sir,

I am under the painful necessity...etc (same opening paragraph as above), then:

The Island of Suwarrow is ^{un}inhabited but my informant Captain Sustenance, master and owner of the schooner 'Dart', some time ago placed there some Penrhyn Islanders and an Englishman named Joseph Bird for the purpose of diving for pearlshells.

When he landed them he found another party there, consisting of an American by the name of Thomas Charlton, who had been drifted there with some Manihikians, this party he also engaged to dive for him.

In the course of a few months a Frenchman was taken there by the schooner Tickler, and about ten days after his arrival he together with the othertwo met their death in the following manner.

I gather from the evidence given by two of the accomplices, who are on board of the 'Dart' and have turned Queen's Evidence, that the Penrhyn Islanders were very much abused and illtreated by Joseph Bird; he took their wives for himself,

....3....

used threatening language to the people and last of all charge them with having stolen for their own use his coconuts. He then called his two comrades to assist him in demanding satisfaction for the theft.

The natives not being able any longer to put up with his conduct and tyranny, commenced to defend themselves from an attack that was made upon them by the whites. The result was that the natives being so many in comparison, overpowered the three men, tied their hands and feet, carried them out to the lagoon in a boat and threw them overboard, when all were drowned.

Thomas Charlton, the American, and Jules Tirel, the Frenchman, are not so much to blame as the Englishman; for it appears to me by the evidence I can glean that Joseph Bird goaded the natives to this act, which they have done in self defence, preservation and protection. But the Frenchman was least of all to blame if indeed any blame can be attached to him. We must however remember that when natives are once roused there is no curbing the impetuosity of their tempers.

Although it appears to me from the evidence that the Englishman was very provoking and had by his manner urged the natives to commit this foul deed, yet I consider it will be necessary to make a thorough investigation into this affair before the whole facts of the case can be brought to light or the offenders to justice. The evidence of these two men and other evidence collected by Captain Sustenance are now on file in this Consulate.

Signed: John C. Williams

Note 1: I was unable to locate any further correspondence on this subject, inwards or outwards, in the Apia Consulate material, National Archives, *but pressed for time as I was, the search was a cursory one.*

Note 2: I have traced Capt. Sustenance as an old-timer in the South Seas. In the Tahiti shipping records he appears as mate of sch. 'Favourite' in 1850, master of 'Cheerful', 1851, master of sch. Emily 1853. He seems to have skippered for Hort for some years.

Note 3: You may recollect that I drew your attention one day at the Mitchell Library to the fact that

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Consul Miller prepared a report on this affair at Tahiti as late as 1869 (p. 27, Vol 6, Tahiti British Consulate Papers, Mitchell). It is clear that this matter was raised by H.B. Sterndale, then in Tahiti recovering from his Suwarrow escapades with Henderson & Macfarlane, and who wrote on the subject to Miller, his letter being recorded in the above volume. At the time I drew your attention to the following extract from Miller's report:

'It is stated that....Capt. Sustenance took two or three of the Islanders who had come with him to the Navigators, and were said to be concerned in the murder, on to Sydney, NSW, where the circumstances were it appears brought to the notice of the authorities and were besides reported and discussed by the newspapers.'

* Note that Consul Miller states that below mentioned was conveyed to from Suwarrow by Capt. Sustenance in vessel 'Stephane', probably - I call - in 1857.

Assuming the above to be correct, it seems that a search of the Sydney newspapers for that period is in order. I am not really concerned myself as I have sufficient on this score for my purposes and merely refer you to this item in the interests of posterity or for whomsoever we labour. In the Apia shipping register for 1858 (Series 6j, National Archives) the sch. 'Dart' is entered as arriving from Sydney March 18, departing Apr. 2 on trading voyage, then returning from Islands Sept 10, departing 28th on trading voyage. The search would therefore need to embrace shipping arrivals at Sydney from, say, mid-October, for, possibly, some months.*

Note 4: Turning to Palmerston affairs I have traced three Palmerston personalities in the Tahiti shipping registers: Juan Fernandez and Jeffery Strickland in 1852, John Sweet in 1863; no trace of William Marsters. You may recollect that Marsters is recorded as claiming that he deserted from the whaler Rifleman at Tahiti. The only references to this whaler in the Tahiti records are for the years 1843 and 1845. I am quite prepared to believe that Marsters appeared as early as that and floated around the South Seas for many years, with, some say, a gold rush thrown in 1849. I would like further proof however and wonder if you can suggest a source for a check on the logs and/or voyages of whaler (British) 'Rifleman'.

Note 5: A well written account of the Suwarrow murders by H.B. Sterndale, under the heading 'A lone hand', appeared in the N.Z. Herald, March 1877; also in N.Z. Monthly Review, 1870, copy at Mitchell Library.