

2. In darkest Melanesia

Captain James Cook in 1774 charted the Pacific archipelago discovered by Quiros in 1606, naming it the New Hebrides. His journal noted that European voyages to the western Pacific since Quiros had been ‘attended by lamentable affrays with the natives’, the purpose of which to assert the irresistible power of white men’s arms by striking terror into the hearts of savages. When Cook sent a watering party ashore on Eromanga, a thousand natives with slings, bows and arrows were waiting on each side of the beach with a clear intention of attacking of them. Sailors shot four natives dead on the beach and one sailor was killed when the natives retaliated. Grapeshot from swivelling cannonades on Cook’s ships drove the natives off the beach. Atrocities committed by European seamen were said to have been perpetrated by the natives. Cook concluded that many atrocities were provoked by the aggression of white seamen and suggested a more enlightened policy towards the natives for future mariners among the Pacific Islands.¹

Sydney became the main trading port in the South Seas early in the nineteenth century. Captain J. E. Erskine, a naval officer, described its commerce as confined to an ‘almost piratical trade’.² British and American ships hunted whales and in the southern ocean and seals in Bass Strait and along the coast of New Zealand. Traders imported pork from Tahiti and flax and spars from New Zealand, tortoise and pearl shells and *bêche-de-mer* (trepan) from the Tuamotus, and traded for sandalwood among the islands of Fiji, the Marquesas and New Hebrides.

Governor Phillip’s commission gave him jurisdiction over ‘the islands adjacent in the Pacific Ocean within the latitudes aforesaid’—10° 37’ south to 43° 39’ south—with no

¹— ~~Cook, *Journals*, II, 460–526. Forster, *Voyage Round the World*, II, 299–300.~~

² Erskine, *Journal of a Cruise among the Islands of the Western Pacific*, 1.

limit for an eastern boundary.³ The extent of the governor's authority to preserve order in 'the adjacent islands' in the Pacific was never made clear. Early governors issued orders prohibiting British ships from recruiting South Sea Islanders as deckhands. Any person 'not a natural born subject of His Majesty' could not reside or settle in New South Wales without official permission. 'Foreigners' were to be discouraged from going ashore at Port Jackson, officials argued, because they might become a nuisance and a burden on the government. Deserters from ships were to be gaoled and deported at the owner's expense.⁴

Whalers, sealers and traders began hiring young Tahitians and Maoris as deckhands from early in the nineteenth century. Crews consisted of men of all nations and tongues: Pacific Islanders, Lascars, 'China men, manilla men and mongrel Portugues', and Bengali or Serang stewards.⁵ Tahitian deckhands were often paid off in Sydney or jumped ship. Two burgled several houses in 1804 for clothes and bedding, hiding their plunder in the house of the unnamed trader in which they were living. A hat and gown stolen from of William Blackmore's house led to their detection and arrest. The Sydney magistrates sentenced them to a term on a chain gang at Castle Hill but they were deported a few weeks later on one of Simeon Lord's trading ships. The *Sydney Gazette* commented on how extraordinary it was that, during two years among Europeans, they had attained only an 'imperfect share of broken *English*' but had become 'perfectly accomplished in the science of *leger de main*'.⁶

³ Phillip's Instructions, 25 April 1787, *HRA* I/1, 1.

⁴ Government notice, 4 July 1801, S2988, SARNSW. General orders, *SG*, 26 May 1805. Government order, 12 July 1806, 4/1720, SARNSW. General orders, 5 April 1807, *SG*, 5 April 1807.

⁵ Davis, *History of the Tahitian Mission*, 108. Bayly, *Sea-Life Sixty Years Ago*, 75. Shineberg, *Trading Voyages of Andre Cheyne*, 224.

⁶ *SG*, 6, 13, 27 July, 3 August, 18 October 1806.

The visit by a Maori chief to Sydney in 1805 suggested the idea of importing New Zealanders to overcome the shortage of convict labour. The governor, who had recently refused John Macarthur's request for 20 convicts to cull excess bulls from his herds, thought Maoris might become useful as herdsmen and shepherds. The chief warned the governor against engaging vicious lower class Emokis, who had come to the colony on whaling ships, suggesting that the more industrious and tractable 'middling order of people' would be more suitable. Nothing came of the proposal, largely because ships could not found to bring the Maoris to Sydney.⁷ Marsden brought three Maori chiefs with their retinues to Sydney in 1814 to visit workshops and farms. In the 1820s Marsden housed Maoris learning to weave, make rope, blacksmithing and farming in his 'seminary' at Parramatta. Four Maoris attend the Native Institution at Black Town in 1827.⁸

When three Tahitians joined the *Trial* in 1811. Captain Fodger, a sandalwood trader, promised their chief they would be returned at the end of the round voyage. On landing in Sydney in January 1812, they absconded from Simeon Lord's employment, complaining they had not been paid and were otherwise ill-used. Lord placed a notice in the *Sydney Gazette* stating that they had been persuaded to leave the ship by designing persons, and any person assisting or concealing them would be prosecuted. The missionaries William Shelley, Henry Nott and William Crook claimed that Lord was treating them as slaves and gave them refuge. Lord wrote to the colonial secretary explaining that the magistrates had ordered the absconding Tahitians to be brought back to him in accordance with port regulations requiring natives at loose in Sydney to be maintained at the expense of the ship owner until they could be returned to their islands at his expense. Lord replied that Captain Fodger had brought them to Sydney without his knowledge or consent. He replied

⁷ King to Cooke, 31 December 1805; King to Camden, 15 March 1806. *HRA*, 1/IV, 631-2; 648-50.

⁸ SG, 14 March 1815. Berry's evidence, 26 July 1837, SC immigration 1837. Gunson, *Australian Reminiscences & papers of L. E. Threlkeld*, II, 324. Yarwood, *Samuel Marsden*, 63, 168, 216.

that he had offered them passages home but Shelley, who spoke their language, persuaded them to stay. Lord agreed to pay their passages back to Tahiti if the regulations required him to do so, otherwise the missionaries should pay the costs 'as I consider it a most wonton attack on my Character'.⁹

The colonial secretary informed Isaac Nichols in December 1813 that four Tahitians brought to Sydney had complained of being carried off against their wishes and abused and ill-treated on the *Endeavour's* voyage to Sydney. They asked to be returned to Tahiti on a vessel belonging to Mr Blaxcell. The colonial secretary ordered them to be discharged from the *Endeavour* and paid wages due to them.¹⁰ Not all Tahitians reaching Sydney were deported. The *Governor Macquarie* brought a Tahitian to Sydney in 1815 to assist Crook in translating religious tracts into the Tahitian language so he could assist in improving his countrymen.¹¹

James O'Connell came to Sydney in 1818 as a cabin boy on a convict transport bringing females to Botany Bay. Two years later he signed on as a deckhand for the *Cape Packet*, a whaler based at Port Macquarie. Seven of the sixteen-man crew were Kanakas, the Hawaiian word for man. Kanakas made up nearly half the crews on British and American whalers in the 1820s.¹²

Evangelical settlers in 1813 formed the New South Wales Society for Affording Protection to the Natives of the South Sea Islands, and Promoting their Civilisation. The society's mission was to protect Pacific Islanders stranded in Sydney from shipowners, and to give them instruction in Christianity and teach them a simple trade. None should

⁹ SG, 4 January 1812. Colonial secretary to Lord, 24 April 1813, 4/3491, 436-7, SARNSW. Lord to colonial secretary, 26 April 1813, 1728, 45, SARNSW.

¹⁰ Colonial secretary to Nichols, 9 December 1813. 4/3491, SARNSW.

¹¹ SG, 4 March 1815.

¹² O'Connell, *Residence of Eleven Years in New Holland and the Caroline Islands*, 75-9.

be allowed to reside with anyone in Sydney without the consent of the society's committee. Seamen committing atrocities against natives of the South Seas were to be prosecuted but the society soon discovered that Sydney's magistrates had no jurisdiction in the Pacific Islands. The society collapsed after Samuel Marsden resigned following the treasurer's refusal to reimburse him for costs in sheltering some Maoris in Sydney.¹³

The society drew Governor Macquarie's attention to the dismal state of affairs in the South Seas. He issued proclamation issued in December 1813 tightening regulations for traders in the South Seas: ships departing from colonial ports were to post of bond of £1000 to ensure good behaviour by crews towards the natives. William Henry, a missionary on Tahiti, was appointed as a magistrate to prosecute cases of 'Wanton insults' by British seamen against native women and ships 'plundering' Tahiti. The proclamation proved difficult to police. Collecting evidence and finding and bringing witnesses to court was onerous, especially as the secretary of state in London would go no further than offering Macquarie legal advice in individual cases.¹⁴

An Act of Parliament in 1817 permitted offences committed by British subjects on the high seas were to be tried by virtue of the King's Commission in any of His Majesty's islands, colonies or plantations. Governors of New South Wales were relieved, to some extent, of the onerous responsibility of policing the South Pacific. For fifty years law and order in the Pacific was enforced according to the imperial government's policy of 'minimum intervention'. The imperial government instructed colonial officials and naval officers to avoid entanglements in native politics, missionary and trading interests, and great power rivalries.¹⁵

¹³ Pamphlet, 20 December 1818, A857, ML. SG, 18. 25 December 1813, 1, 22 January 1814. Marsden's evidence, 27 December 1820; Eagar's evidence, 28 January 1821, Bigge's Report, BT, box 8, 3474-77; 3502-04, ML.

¹⁴ Proclamation, SG, 4 December 1813. Macquarie to Bathurst, 17 January 1814; Bathurst to Macquarie, 12 July 1815, HRA I/8, 96-100; 622-4.

¹⁵ [GB] 46 Geo. 3 c. 54. Ward, *British Policy in the South Pacific*, 40-1.

The East Indian division of the Royal Navy was responsible for law and order in the Pacific as far as 150° west longitude. Before the 1840s naval ships seldom made voyages to New Hebrides and Loyalty Islands. Apart from occasional items in the *Nautical Magazine*, reports of cruises through the Melanesian islands by the HMS *Conway*, HMS *North Star* and HMS *Dido* were not made public. Reports reaching London of clashes between crews on British trading ships and savage tribes led to the annexation and 'pacification' of New Zealand in 1840. The Admiralty then appointed a naval officer to command an Australian station 'for a regular periodical inspection of all the islands of consequence within the limits of his command' lying between 10° and 49° south latitude and the Antarctic Circle to 75° east longitude.¹⁶

Sandalwood offered island traders their best prospect for earning Spanish dollars to pay for tea, rum, tobacco and sugar from India and China. Traders bartered sandalwood for whales' teeth (*tombooa*), ivory rings, fish-hooks, razors, chisels, tobacco, cloth, beads, scissors, axes, knives and small pieces of flat iron used as adzes. The Chinese used sandalwood to make joss sticks, ornaments, boxes and fans, and sandalwood oil as a base for cosmetics, medicines and perfumes. Sandalwood from the heart of the tree near the root could fetch as much as £65 a ton but prices at Canton fluctuated with supply.¹⁷

Alexander Berry sailed for New Zealand and Fiji on the *City of Edinburgh* in 1809 with a crew that included three New Zealanders, two Tahitians and a Fijian. He spent three months at the Bay of Islands in New Zealand for leaks in the hull to be repaired, during which the crew beat off an attack by 'Savages and Cannibals' in a fleet of war canoes. Berry reached the Fijian island of Opuna (Taveuni) in July. On going ashore, Berry and

¹⁶ Ross, *New Zealand Aspirations on the Pacific in the Nineteenth Century*, 23-6.

¹⁷ Hainsworth, 'In search of a staple: the Sydney sandalwood trade 1804-09', 1-20. Ritchie, *Evidence of the Bigge Reports*, I, 109-10. Shineberg, *They Came for Sandalwood*, 1-8.

eight of his crew were captured by the natives and held for a few days until Berry paid the chief a ransom of three *tombooa*. The natives preferred human flesh to pork, Berry explained, and only fear of revenge stopped them from eating him. The *City of Edinburgh* then sailed for Sandalwood Bay on the east coast of Vanua Levu Berry found a community of European beachcombers and several ships trading for sandalwood at anchor. All that Berry could buy were some dried, decayed limbs of old trees cut down some years before. He had more success on a small island twenty miles south of Viti Levu until disputes between the natives and the crew made trading too risky. The natives of a coastal village on the south coast of Viti Levu told him there was plenty of sandalwood in the mountains. A chief agreed to cut it for *tombooa* and iron tools. When Berry returned a few days later, only a ton of good sandalwood had been cut. He set out to visit the mountains but, after eight miles, his guide would not go on. 'I now saw that the country was so desolate, and so thinly peopled that it would be impossible for them to bring me sandalwood in any quantity, even if it abounded in the mountains', Berry recorded. The *City of Edinburgh* returned to New Zealand with 50 tons of sandalwood, loaded up with spars, and sailed for Cape Town. The ship lost its main mast in a storm off South America. After repairs at Callao, she went down in a storm. The crew made it to a South American port in the ship's boat. Berry reached London late in 1812 after further adventures.¹⁸

Peter Dillon, born in Martinique in 1788, served in the Royal Navy until at the age of twenty and then joined the *General Wellesley* as a seaman for a voyage to Vanna Levu, the centre of the Fijian sandalwood trade. Chiefs organised parties to cut sandalwood to exchange for European goods and to enlist the support of armed European seamen in their wars with other tribes. Dillon spent four months befriending the natives and learning their language while he collected 150 tons of sandalwood that was sent to

¹⁸ Voyage in *the City of Edinburgh*, 1808-10; Berry to James Berrie [his father], 17 July 1809, BP 315/52, item 3, 5-16, 45-8. ML. Berry, *Reminiscences of Alexander Berry*, 30-170. Derrick, *A History of Fiji*, I, 39-44, 64.

Sydney on the *Perseverance*.

Dillon was third mate on the *Hunter* for a second voyage to Fiji in 1813. When the ship anchored in a bay off Vanna Levu, the Wailea chief asked Captain Robson to join him in an attack another tribe further along the coast, promising him a load of sandalwood within two months of victory. Three of the ship's boats, manned by 20 'musketeers' with a canon, killed 11 natives took eight hostages, and drove the rest into the mangrove swamps. The bodies of those killed were baked with taro in an oven. The Wailea chief then reneged on his bargain by claiming there no more sandalwood to cut. Robson's canons sank ten canoes and killed one native as a warning, whereupon the chief called on his allies along the coast for help. In the ensuing affray, Dillon, Burchett and Wilson retreated to a volcanic outcrop—later known as Dillon's Rock—to make a last stand. A native priest negotiated a ceasefire: the natives would release the hostages for a chest of ironware, and Dillon with his two comrades would lay down their weapons. Dillon held a gun to the priest's head, marched him down to the beach, released him at the water's edge, and waded out under a shower of arrows to a waiting boat. With the *Elizabeth's* officers all dead, Dillon took command of the ship for a voyage to Sydney. The *Hunter* sailed for Canton to sell the sandalwood.¹⁹

When war broke out between Britain and the United States in 1812, the Royal Navy blockaded New England ports and Canton to keep the Yankee clippers out of the sandalwood trade for the duration. Reports of sandalwood on the Marquesas reached Sydney in 1814. Over the next five years six ships from Sydney made fourteen voyages to the Marquesas, taking about a quarter of the sandalwood exported during this period.²⁰

Dillion bought the *Calder* at Calcutta in 1822 to bring rum, brandy, clothes and cloth to Hobart and Sydney. On a voyage from South America in 1824, the *Calder* visited Tahiti

¹⁹ Davidson, *Peter Dillon of Vanikoro*, 13-18, 29-40, 312-15 (a map of Dillon's Rock).

²⁰ Denning, *Islands and Beaches*, 115-20, 296-7.

and Tonga and then went to Fiji for sandalwood. With none available, Dillon sailed for the New Hebrides with a mixed crew of Europeans and Polynesians. After consulting Cook's journal, he anchored at Port Resolution on Tana which, he surmised, had not been visited by Europeans since 1774. The natives were friendly and fascinated by European clothes and implements. One threatened to kill the ship's Chinese cook if he did not hand over his shirt, whereupon Dillon fired into a small crowd of onlookers, wounding one of them. Later a friendly native showed Dillon a piece of sandalwood wrapped around his arm, telling him it had come from Eromanga where sandalwood was abundant.

The *Calder* anchored in the bay on the coast of Eromanga where Cook had fought off the menacing natives in 1774. A shore party armed with axes and muskets found a mature sandalwood tree close the beach and returned to the *Calder* with 'a substantial quantity of sandalwood'. A watering party coming ashore later in the day was attacked by natives with spears and arrows, forcing them to return to the *Calder*. Dillon left Eromanga the following day to cruise along the east coast of New Caledonia and then sailed for New Zealand. He never returned to Eromanga.²¹

Samuel Henry, son of William sent to Tahiti by the London Missionary Society in 1797, brought natives from Tonga in 1824 to grow sugar on Tahiti. When the venture failed he turned to the sandalwood trade. On Dillon's advice Samuel Henry went to Eromanga in 1829, leaving a small gang of Tongans on the beach to build a stockade for protection against the belligerent natives. He returned in 1830 with 95 Tongans to cut, carry and load the sandalwood, followed by 500 Polynesians but 200 men from Rotuma and 13 Hawaiian women never went ashore. Polynesian gangs cut around four tons of sandalwood a day in the forested hills and narrow gullies of Eromanga and carried the logs several miles to the stockade to be loaded onto ships anchored out in the bay. A handful of Eromangans who helped the Polynesians to carry the sandalwood to the beach

²¹ Davidson, *Peter Dillon of Vanikoro*, 90-101, 172-87.

were given iron hoops and entertained at a feast on a shark at the stockade. Faced with the implacable hostility of these ‘ferocious, treacherous and fanatic cannibals’, and many deaths among the Polynesians from fever, Henry abandoned the sandalwood trade.

Sandalwood traders complained that high port charges and wages for seamen and shipwrights, competition from Hawaiian sandalwood, and unpredictable prices at Canton were undermining the profitability of the island trade.²² Low prices at Canton during the 1830s did not justify the risks and costs of trading for sandalwood in the New Hebrides. The sandalwood trade was suspended altogether with the outbreak of the Opium War in 1839 and did not resume until 1841.²³

Andrew Cheyne made four voyages to Melanesia in the 1840s. He joined the *Orwell* as supercargo in August 1841 for a voyage to the Isle of Pines at the southern end of New Caledonia for sandalwood. Toruru, chief of the only tribe on the island, sold sandalwood to traders for cloth which he stored in great chests for burning at his funeral. Polynesian missionary teachers assisted Cheyne with bartering beads and iron hoop for enough sandalwood to fill the ship’s hold. On returning to Sydney, Cheyne complained about being cheated by the ‘rogue’ merchants who bought the sandalwood.²⁴

Cheyne captained the *Bull* for his second voyage to the New Hebrides from July to October 1842. Finding no sandalwood near Victoria Harbour on the Isle of Pines, he sailed to the north coast where his crew cut sandalwood for the natives to carry to the beach. Toruru expelled sandalwood traders in 1842 after disputes over trade and outbreaks of disease he attributed to evil spirits invoked by European gods. ‘No one can

²² SG, 17 February 1810. William Campbell to Macquarie, 20 January 1814, 4/1730, 364, SARNSW. Macquarie to Bathurst, 15 May 1817, HRA 1/IX, 410. Ritchie, *Evidence of the Bigge Reports*, II, 25-6, 207. Shineberg, *They Came for Sandalwood*, 3-9, 16-28.

²³ Bennett, ‘Account of the islands of Erromanga and Tanna’, 119-26. Steel, *New Hebrides and Christian Missions*, 96. Shineberg, *They Came for Sandalwood*, 16-27.

²⁴ Shineberg, *The Trading Voyages of Andrew Cheyne*, 8.

visit this island', Cheyne noted on departing the Isle of Pines, 'without feeling deep regret that so lovely a spot on God's creation should be inhabited by such a race of depraved wretches'.²⁵

When the *Bull* anchored off Uvea, the chief and his son Jowki (Joqueah), then aged about sixteen with a 'very intelligent expression', came on board see over the ship. While Cheyne was below deck, one of the crew threw a chip of wood at Jowki. The chief cuffed the sailor for his insolence, whereupon he picked up an axe. Cheyne came on deck just in time to prevent bloodshed, or even a massacre.²⁶ Cheyne was always alert to a surprise attack, especially at night. He promoted goodwill with the natives by occasionally allowing them to swarm over the ship. On one occasion, after two hours of fruitless bargaining, Cheyne ordered his crew to drive the natives off the ship with fixed bayonets. Canoes manned by armed natives were allowed to approach the *Bull* under cannonades loaded with grape shot one at a time to trade for sandalwood. When Cheyne went ashore he was met by hundreds of natives offering sandalwood for cotton shawls, bars of iron, beads, nails and pocket knives.²⁷

A few days before leaving Uvea Cheyne was introduced to a beachcomber known as Cannibal Charlie. Beachcombers brought European 'culture' to Polynesia but tales of cannibals roasting and eating the bodies of enemies slain in battle and unwelcome visitors had discouraged escaped convicts and shipwrecked sailors from seeking refuge on Melanesian islands. Leonard Shaw recorded his sufferings after being shipwrecked off Massacre Island (Kilinailu/Tauu) off the coast of Bougainville in the Solomon Islands. He survived by forging knives for the natives from iron taken from his wrecked ship.²⁸

²⁵ Shineberg, *Trading Voyages of Andrew Cheyne*, 151-2.

²⁶ Shineberg, *Trading Voyages of Andrew Cheyne*, 110-11.

²⁷ Shineberg, *Trading Voyages of Andrew Cheyne*, 94, 96-7, 113,

²⁸ Morrell, *A Narrative of Four Voyages to the South Seas*. 441-8. Maude, 'Beachcombers and castaways', 145-6. Ralston, *Grass Huts and Warehouses*, 21, 31.

Charles George Bridget, nicknamed Cannibal Charlie, was born to a middle class family in Bristol. He served as a midshipman with the East India Company until, at the age of fifteen in 1842, he deserted to join a sandalwood trader. Bulak, an ageing chief on Lifu, took a fancy to Cannibal Charlie, declaring him a tribal 'ornament'. Missionaries and traders pleaded with Bridget to return to civilisation but without success.²⁹ Cheyne took Cannibal Charley to Lifu to interpret in bargaining with the chief for sandalwood. When Cheyne heard rumours that he was organising a plot to kill the crew and seize the *Bull* he had nothing more to do with him. Cannibal Charley then left Uvea with party of natives who had been visiting Lifu.³⁰

Cheyne's third voyage was to the Caroline Islands and Palu for *bêche-de-mer* on the *Naiad*. His fourth voyage was to Loyalty Islands for sandalwood. At Uvea he took on Jowki, now a young chief, on board and sailed to the New Hebrides for sandalwood and *bêche-de-mer*. Cheyne abandoned the *Naiad* off the coast of Aneityum after an earthquake opened its leaking timbers. Cheyne bought land at Port Resolution on Tana in 1846 as a sandalwood depot for trading with Uvea and Efate. Cheyne returned Scotland after his father died, married, and came back to the South Seas in search of *bêche-de-mer*. He was murdered on Palau in 1866 when he intervened in a quarrel between two native chiefs.³¹

James Paddon organised an expedition at Auckland to collect sandalwood in the New Hebrides in 1843. Several retired government officials, 30 sawyers and wood cutters, 16 Chinese and six Maoris signed on. When the *Brigand* anchored off Mare in the Loyalty Islands, the natives attacked a shore party, killing 17 men, forcing Paddon to withdraw to Inyeuc. The natives, believing that the islet was haunted by evil spirits, sold it to Paddon

²⁹ Shineberg, *The Trading Voyages of Andrew Cheyne*, 120. Turner, *Nineteen Years in Polynesia*, 396-7. Murray, *Missions in Western Polynesia*, 327-8. McFarlane, *The Story of the Lifu Mission*, 28,

³⁰ Shineberg, *The Trading Voyages of Andrew Cheyne*, 108n, 113-4. 119-22.

³¹ Shineberg, *The Trading Voyages of Andrew Cheyne*, 8, 15-16.

for an axe, a rug and a string of beads. Henry recruited Polynesians to cut sandalwood for up to two a year, keeping them isolated and loyal on Inyeuc by feeding and protecting them with firearms, and paying them with iron bars, axes, knives, cloth and tobacco.³²

Robert Towns was born in modest circumstances in the north of England in 1794. He went to sea at an early age. With profits from the Levant trade he bought his first ship in 1838 to make annual voyages to Sydney with cargo and bounty emigrants. Towns married Sophia, Wentworth's half-sister, in 1833. Robert Brooks, a City of London merchant, appointed Towns to command the new *Royal Saxon* in 1838. When Ranulph Dacre, Brooks' agent in Sydney, went bankrupt, he appointed Towns to take his place and clean up the financial chaos. Towns at the age of fifty and his family came to live permanently in Sydney in 1844.

Towns bought the ageing *Elizabeth* in 1843 for £230 to enter the sandalwood trade. A voyage to Eromanga yielded a 100 tons of sandalwood which was sold at Canton for £50 a ton. For the return voyage, sugar was loaded at Manila for sale in Sydney. A profit of £5000 laid the foundations of Town's commercial empire. He bought a wharf and warehouse at Millers Point. Towns put six more ships into the sandalwood trade from 1845 to 1848. The *Elizabeth* made five more voyages before being wrecked off Eromanga in 1848. All but four of the 29 members of the crew went down with the ship. When the four survivors struggled ashore, they were killed and devoured by the natives. J. C. Lewis established a depot for Towns on the Isle of Pines in 1848, recruiting natives from other islands to cut and load sandalwood, paying them with ironware, tobacco and cloth.³³

Boyd's only trading venture in the South Seas was to send the *British Sovereign* to the New Hebrides for sandalwood. Towns complained to one of his captains that Boyd, 'such

³² Shineberg, *They Came for Sandalwood*, 152-4.

³³ Docker, *Blackbirders*, 8-9. Broeze, 'Australia, Asia and the Pacific: the maritime world of Robert Towns 1843-1873', 221-38.

was his disposition', was putting all of his ships into the sandalwood trade to drive him out.³⁴ Captain Jones sailed from Sydney on 6 January 1847 with a cargo of tea, coffee, sugar, soap, candles, brandy and drapery for Boyd's employees at Boydtown and on his Maneroo squatting runs. Captain Jones set a course for Port Nicholson in New Zealand with cattle, and finally for Tana to recruit 20 men to cut sandalwood on Eromanga and Efate in the Loyalty Islands. The *British Sovereign* was wrecked off Efate on 22 April 1847. The captain, his crew and passengers reached the shore in the ship's boat. The natives seemed friendly at first but they killed and ate all of the survivors except one European seaman who was saved by the intervention of two Samoan missionary teachers, a six-year-old boy and three the Uveans. One of the Uveans fled into the bush and later swam out to a ship anchored off the island to tell a gruesome tale to the outside world.³⁵

Sandalwood ships were usually small, old, leaky and not fitted for most cargoes or passengers. Crews were a mixture of South Sea Islanders and hardened white sailors picked up in waterfront bars at Sydney and other Pacific ports. White seamen were described as 'among the greatest ruffians alive' who regarded the Melanesians as brutish savages, treating them with hostility and contempt. Most were paid at a fixed price of around £12 a ton for the sandalwood they collected. Masters of sandalwood ships, a naval officer remarked, were mostly of 'inferior character, generally drunkards, and not infrequently of the worst possible moral habits'. 'Soakers' who stayed drunk for days on end risked running their ship aground. Tensions among mixed-race crews could lead to murders, desertions and mutinies.³⁶

³⁴ Towns to Embleton, 17 August 1847, TP 307/113. 125.

³⁵ *Australian*, 7, 14 September 1847. *SGSGTL*, 9 January 1847. *SMH*, 7 January, 17 August 1847. Towns to Tinley, 15 January 1847, TP 3017/112, 482. Erskine, *Journal of a Cruise*, 328-9, 379-97. Shineberg, *They Came for Sandalwood*, 73, 247-9.

³⁶ Scarr, 'Recruits and Recruiters', 233-4.

Profits from sandalwood trading could be astounding but the risks were high. Crews on ships wrecked on hidden reefs who were able to the shore were often ambushed and killed by the natives. Ship's boats landing on beaches to take on water and provisions could also be attacked by the natives. Six sandalwood ships were wrecked off the New Hebrides and Loyalty Islands from 1841 to 1848. Natives attacked 28 ships at anchor or their boats coming ashore, killing and eating many of the crew and passengers. Seventy-six Europeans and an estimated 150 natives were killed in 'affrays' in Melanesia from 1841 to 1848.³⁷ Not all the massacres were initiated by the natives. The captain of a sandalwood ship recorded that sailors on two British ships shot 20 natives on Efate in 1842 because they were not welcomed to come ashore for sandalwood.³⁸

Sydney newspapers seldom reported these 'incidents' in their shipping news column. The sandalwood trade was conducted in secret to avoid competition and to conceal that traders were in 'no way behind the blacks in cruelty and treachery'. With the exception of cannibalism, Erskine explained, sandalwood traders practiced 'all the vices we generally ascribe to savages'.³⁹ The New South Wales government did not have the authority, resources or interest to stop barbarous natives and brutal sailors slaughtering each other on small Melanesian islands.

British missionaries, encouraged by their success in Christianising and Civilising the Polynesians on Tahiti, Tonga, Samoa, Rarotonga and New Zealand, turned to the New Hebrides and Loyalty Islands in the late 1830s. John Williams, sent by the London Missionary Society sent to the South Seas to at the age of 20, served as a missionary on Tahiti and Rarotonga for two decades. Williams wrote to the directors of the society in

³⁷ Shineberg, *They Came for Sandalwood*, 177-89. 219-49.

³⁸ Steel, *New Hebrides and Christian Missions*, 26.

³⁹ Erskine. *Journal of a Cruise*, 15.

London in 1824 expressing his wish to visit the New Hebrides but they declined. When Williams came to England on leave in 1836 and 1837, he gave evidence to the committee on Aborigines in British settlements and wrote a book on his experiences in the South Seas. With money from the sales of the book and public lectures, Williams bought the *Camden* for the London Missionary Society. Williams contrasted the progress of the Christianised islands of eastern Polynesia with the barbarism of the western Pacific untouched by Christianity. He warned that the natives of the New Hebrides were 'very wild and savage, and it is dangerous to have any intercourse with them'. He warned of the dangers of having any intercourse with the natives of Melanesia that 'constitute a branch of the guilty family of Adam' Even so, they 'present a powerful claim upon the Christians of England for that Gospel which has, under God, conveyed to the other race the blessings of civilisation, and the light of immortality'.⁴⁰

Williams, determined to bring the Gospel to Melanesia, engaged 10 Samoan teachers to work in the New Hebrides. The *Camden* put three Samoan teachers ashore at Port Resolution at Tana in November 1839. Next day Williams sailed to Eromanga. 'I am all anxiety', he wrote in his last letter, 'but desire, prudence and faithfulness in the management of the attempt to impart the gospel to these benighted people, and leave the event with God'. As Williams and Harris came ashore at Dillon's Bay on Eromanga, two chiefs, Kowiowi and Oviello, clubbed them to death and later ate them.⁴¹ HMS *Favourite* went to Eromanga in 1840 to recover their remains. Captain Croker bought a pile of 'trophy' bones from the natives to take to Samoa for burial in a solemn ceremony.⁴²

⁴⁰ Williams' evidence, 29 July 1836, q 5609, SC Aborigines (British settlements). Williams, *Narrative of Missionary Enterprises in the South Sea Islands*, 503-13.

⁴¹ Gunson, 'John Williams and his ship', 76-7, 88, 92-3. Steel, *New Hebrides and Christian Missions*, 34-5, 208-9.

⁴² Steel, *New Hebrides and the Christian Missions*, 209.

Missionary efforts to bring Christianity and Civilization to Melanesia were hampered by small tribes ruled by weak chiefs, the variety of spoken dialects, endemic warfare between tribes, the savagery of the natives, and epidemics of European diseases. The natives lived 'in dread of the evil eye, witchcraft and disease makers', attributing epidemics of influenza, dysentery, malaria and measles to malevolent spirits invoked by missionaries to punish them for refusing to accept the word of the Christian god.⁴³

Three Samoan teachers left at Port Resolution on Tana in 1839 were joined by the missionaries George Turner and Henry Nisbet in June 1842. The teachers complained to them of their sufferings at the hands of hostile natives. Turner and Nisbet spent seven months trying to 'conciliate' the natives who believed they had summoned forth sorcerers to spread epidemics resulting in many deaths. Turner and Nisbet, with the three Samoan missionary teachers, fled Tana early in 1843 and were not replaced until 1847.⁴⁴

The *Camden* put two Samoan teachers ashore on Eromanga in May 1840. When the *Camden* returned in April 1841, the crew had difficulty finding the teachers and, when they did, the teachers complained that the natives had treated them badly. However, one native fed and cared for the destitute teachers for six months while they were suffering from malaria before being rescued. No more Samoan teachers were sent to Eromanga until 1848. Two native teachers landed on Aneityum in 1841. One died and the other returned to Samoa. Two more teachers landed in 1845 to join the three teachers who had fled from Tana in 1843. They asked to be removed from Aneityum but missionaries persuaded them to stay. The London Missionary Society then abandoned its mission to the New Hebrides.⁴⁵

⁴³ Murray, *Missions in Western Polynesia*, 5, 12-13, 18-24, 29-35, 134-5, 137-8, 141-5, 376. Turner, *Nineteen Years in Western Polynesia*, 76-8, 82-3. Steel, *New Hebrides and Christian Missions*, 162. Shineberg, *They Came for Sandalwood*, 41-2, 45, 115, 128, 175, 202.

⁴⁴ Murray, *Missions in Western Polynesia*, 141-5.

⁴⁵ Murray, *Missions in Western Polynesia*, 25-7, 29-32. Steel, *New Hebrides and Christian Missions*, 35-6, 96.

Pao, a young Rarotongan, was the first missionary teacher on Lifu. After several voyages on a whaler, he was put ashore on Mare in 1842, and then went to Lifu where the chief Bulah appointed him as an *enemus*, a special friend. Pao interpreted for the Tongan teachers in their meetings with Bulah. When he went blind, his subjects believed that Pao's sorcerers had placed a curse on him. The natives were considering killing Pao but he escaped in time to Mare with the Tongans. Natives on Lifu blamed an epidemic in 1846 on missionary teachers. A visiting chief from the Isle of Pines advised the new chief on Lifu to spare the teachers. He explained how 'we on our island foolishly killed our teachers, thinking it would remove the disease; but after their death their god punished us, and disease and death raged among us more than ever'.⁴⁶

The French Catholic Church established the Vicariate of Eastern Oceania in 1833. Missionaries were sent from New Zealand to the small islands of Wallis and Futuna. Some missionaries sent to the New Hebrides were killed in 1843 by natives believing that malevolent Christian sorcerers had invoked a malaria epidemic. The *Societies de L'Oceanie*, founded in 1845, bought the *Arche d'Alliance* to bring Marist Fathers to Melanesia. French missions were not established on Mare until 1854 or Lifu until 1859.⁴⁷ When the first Protestant missionary teachers, natives of Mare, landed Uvea in 1859 they discovered a French Catholic mission on the other side of the island.⁴⁸

Colonists in New South Wales took little interest in the barbarous Melanesian islands until the Sydney press reported that a 'dirty race of savages' and 'ferocious cannibals' had killed and eaten Williams when he attempted to establish a mission on Eromanga.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ M'Farlane, *Story of the Lifuan Mission*, 25-35.

⁴⁷ Laracy, *Marists and Melanesians*, 12-14. Howe, *Loyalty Islands*, 12.

⁴⁸ Turner, *Nineteen Years in Polynesia*, 353, 457.

⁴⁹ *Australian*, 3 December 1839. *SM*, 4 December 1839. *SH*, 9 December 1839.

William's martyrdom inspired other missionaries to bring the light of the Gospel to these 'regions of barbarism almost entirely unmitigated by the elements of *civilisation*'. Native teachers brought to the New Hebrides and Loyalty Islands early in the 1840s were soon killed or expelled.⁵⁰

Labour shortages in New South Wales during the late 1830s prompted traders and settlers to look more closely to the South Seas to for labour. Alexander Berry told a committee in 1837 that a New Zealander employed on his Shoalhaven estate for two years was 'a useful and obedient servant, ready to work in any way required'.⁵¹ The *Sydney Monitor* in May 1838 drew attention to New Zealanders working in stores and mills around Sydney. One Maori was worth a dozen coolies, and could be imported for up to £3 a head. Once 'civilised' by employment in the colony, they could be sent back to their islands as missionary teachers. Dr Lang described the helmsman on a ship taking to him to England as 'a poor New Zealander, whose forefathers from time immemorial had been anthropophagi, or eaters of men'.⁵² The *Sydney Herald* reported that the South Seas Islanders working on ships and labourers on wharves were known for their sobriety and the care they took of sheep. Captain Duke was said to have sent to New Zealand for ten single and ten married Maoris to find out if they could be taught shepherding.⁵³

⁵⁰ Murray, *Missions in Western Polynesia*, 11-13, 29-35, 137-145, 183-88, 302-3, 325-30, 353-5. Turner, *Nineteen Years in Polynesia*, 28-35. Morrell, *Britain in the Pacific Islands*, 89-94. Shineberg, *They Came for Sandalwood*, 175-6.

⁵¹ Berry's evidence, 28 July 1837, SC immigration 1837. List of people on Shoalhaven, 1846, BP 315/74, ML

⁵² Lang, *Historical and Statistical Account of New South Wales* (1837), I, 385-7.

⁵³ SG, 9 May 1838. SH, 3 May, 7 June, 25 July, 24 October, 30 November 1838. SM, 11 February 1839. A subscriber', SH, 11 July 1841.