

### 3. Trading for cannibals

Boyd engaged Edward Kirsopp for the first recruiting voyage. A retired naval officer, Kirsopp had spent five years as a squatter before being borne down by the enormous rate of wages demanded by shepherds. Boyd instructed Kirsopp 'to visit as many islands as possible, not only with a view to ascertain those people most fitted to the wants of the colonists, but also the number likely to be procured'. Kirsopp's letter to Boyd in April 1847, published a few days later in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, is the only surviving record of the *Velocity*'s first recruiting voyage.

Boyd instructed Kirsopp to recruit 50 islanders as an 'experiment'. His reception at a Melanesian islands was uncertain but the risk was diminished where sandalwood traders had established contacts with the natives. Kirsopp followed in the wake of sandalwood traders to exploit their contacts with the natives on small islands. For six weeks the *Velocity* cruised among the islands of the southern New Hebrides and the Loyalty Islands off the east coast of Noumea. Kirsopp avoided islands where the natives were reputed to be savage and treacherous, notably Mare and Eromanga. When he landed on one island, which he did not name, he learned that 16 'enemies' had been killed and feasted on a few days earlier, with 'the remains of this disgusting banquet strewed in every direction'.

Kirsopp recruited 26 men on Tana in the New Hebrides with help from Dicky Tana, a native of the island who had spent some years in Sydney. Captain Paddon, a sandalwood trader with a depot on a small island of the coast of Aneityum, was friendly but Kirsopp engaged only 16 men here. Twenty-three came on board at Lifu in the Loyalty Islands, led by Etoisi, brother of the chief. Kirsopp described the voyage as a success, reporting to Boyd that more natives had 'volunteered' than the *Velocity* could carry. At some islands the crew had difficulty removing the natives swarming over the ship. When the ship had sailed, several natives were found hiding in the cabin and top sails and under boat covers. Kirsopp attributed the unwillingness of natives on some islands to come to Sydney to their chiefs ordering them to stay at home to wage war against neighbouring tribes. After

a voyage of 69 days, the *Velocity* reached East Boyd on 9 April with 65 male Kanakas. Etoisi and two other Lifuans were taken to Sydney to be inspected by the public. The rest were sent to Boyd's runs in the Maneroo and Murrumbidgee squatting districts.<sup>1</sup>

The success of the voyage led Boyd and Kirsopp to overestimate the population of the sandalwood islands and the willingness of their natives to come to New South Wales. Boyd chartered the *Portenia*, a 222-ton brig from Lewis Leon to join the *Velocity* for another recruiting expedition. Her captain, George Lancaster, had served on Boyd's coastal ships but apparently had no trading experience in the Pacific Islands. Kirsopp commanded the expedition. William Mackenzie, a personal friend of Boyd, said he went on the voyage 'for my pleasure and as a matter of curiosity to see the Islands'. Mr Brown and Mr Blamey joined the *Velocity* as sightseeing passengers but nothing is known about them. Henry Walpole joined the *Portenia* to learn navigation. The three Lifuans recruited on the *Velocity*'s first voyage and sent Sydney were to be taken home to explain the attractions of 'Sydney' to fellow tribesman.<sup>2</sup> Boyd's two ships sailed from Sydney on 13 May 1847 to bring down 300 hundred native labourers from the South Seas.<sup>3</sup>

First landfall was Lifu in the Loyalty Islands, a plateau of petrified coral rising 300 feet above the sea, thickly wooded with patches of fertile soil but no running water. The native population numbered about 3000 divided between two constantly warring tribes practicing cannibalism on their slain enemies. One visitor described the Lifuans as 'daubed from head to foot in lime, the most ghastly group I ever saw'. Another recorded that they were in 'lowest state of barbarism . . . utterly devoid of any idea of decency'.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Kirsopp to Boyd, 14 April 1847, *SMH*, 22 April 1847.

<sup>2</sup> *PPH*, 20 May 1847.

<sup>3</sup> *Australian*, 11 May 1847. *SMH*, 14 May 1847. *SGSGTL*, 15 May 1847. Boyd, election advertisement, *SMH*, 17 August 1847. Walpole's statement, 18 October 1847; Mackenzie's statement, 12 November 1847, CO 201/386, 277; 283.

<sup>4</sup> Shineberg, *Trading Voyages of Andrew Cheyne*, 102-6. Murray, *Missions in Western Polynesia*, 326. Erskine, *Journal of a Cruise*, 365.

The *Velocity* anchored in a wide bay on Lifu's western shore on 25 May. The slower *Portenia* arrived two days later.

Natives of Lifu came on board the *Portenia* in numbers to inspect the ship and eat biscuits. Gollender, who had worked on a sandalwood ship and spoke a few words of English, was the only one who stayed on board. After three weeks, the *Portenia* began a cruise around Lifu, picking up seven natives and Charles George Bridget, a beachcomber known as Cannibal Charley. He told Lancaster he would get no more recruits on Lifu because all the men were needed for a war between the tribes. Lancaster asked him if the Lifuans on board were willing to go to Sydney. Cannibal Charley said they were. The *Portenia* then sailed for the Isle of Pines.<sup>5</sup>

The *Velocity*, after a few days anchored off Lifu, sailed to Tana, a mountainous and fertile island with an active volcano at its centre in the southern New Hebrides. Tana had native population of 10 000 divided in several warring tribes ruled by weak chiefs, with each tribe speaking a different dialect. The natives living near Port Resolution had frequent contacts with European traders and had acquired a reputation as willing and steady workers on sandalwood ships.<sup>6</sup> Kirsopp found no recruits on Tana, perhaps because he had no interpreter. On sailing to Aneityum, the most southern island in the New Hebrides, he engaged 16 men. Captain Paddon, who had a sandalwood station on a small islet off the coast of Aneityum, may have interpreted for Kirsopp. The *Velocity* returned to Lifu on 20 June, transferred the 16 men to the *Portenia*, and then sailed for Uvea, the most northern of the Loyalty Islands.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Lancaster's statement, 14, 15 October 1847, CO 201/386, 270-1. Shineberg, *Trading Voyages of Andrew Cheyne*, 108, 120. Erskine, *Journal of a Cruise*, 369, 372. Turner, *Nineteen Years in Polynesia*, 396-7. Murray, *Missions in Western Polynesia*, 327-8.

<sup>6</sup> Cheyne, *Description of the Islands of the Western Pacific*, 32-6. Turner, *Nineteen Years in Polynesia*, 76-82.

<sup>7</sup> Lancaster's statement, 14, 15 October 1847; Walpole's statement, 16 October 1847; Mackenzie's statement, 12 November 1847, CO 201/386, 271-2; 277; 283.

Uvea consists of a series of petrified coral outcrops linked by broken reefs to form a lagoon thirty miles across. Two warring tribes, each of about a thousand natives, inhabited the fertile strip of land three miles wide on the western side of the island. Andrew Cheyne described the Uveans as ‘the best I have yet met with among the dark coloured races’. He explained that they were restrained from the thieving and treachery typical of savage peoples because, ‘being complete slaves to the will of their King, they have no means of displaying their evil propensities’. Kirsopp persuaded the chief, Hwengi, to send around 40 of his subjects, led by his eldest son Joqueah (Jowki), on board the *Velocity*. Cheyne five years earlier had described Joqueah, then aged 16, as ‘tall and well made, with a very intelligent expression of countenance, and much less savage in appearance than the Natives generally’. Hwengi apparently believed that his tribesmen would visit Sydney and return home with gifts of muskets, powder and axes. Kirsopp made no attempt to attempt to recruit from the other tribe on Uvea described by Cheyne as a ‘republic’ led by the warrior Nicolo.<sup>8</sup>

The *Velocity* and the *Portenia* made a rendezvous at the Isle of Pines, at the southern tip of New Caledonia, on 30 June. The *Avenger*, one of Captain Paddon’s sandalwood ships, was anchored off the island. Captain Lewis appears to have interpreted during the *Velocity*’s two-day stay, apparently convincing Kirsopp that conditions were not favourable for labour recruiting. The history of European contacts with the Isle of Pines suggests that Lewis would not have been enthusiastic about persuading its autocratic chief to provide recruits. The natives, having never worked for Europeans on their island or elsewhere, had no idea of the duties and the rewards of contract labour. Kirsopp might

<sup>8</sup> Lancaster’s statement, 14, 15 October 1847, CO 201/386, 270-4. Natsum’s statement, 16 February 1848, CO 201/59, 137-9. Shineberg, *Trading Voyages of Andrew Cheyne*, 111-3, 127-8. Turner, *Nineteen Years in Polynesia*, 379.

have won the chief's approval with gifts but his ships carried nothing the chief wanted.<sup>9</sup>

Seven weeks out from Sydney, Kirsopp was well short of his target of 300 native labourers. After calling at five sandalwood islands, just 54 men had been recruited. A passenger on the *Velocity*—not named but described as an old school chum of Boyd—later testified that recruiting 'had not succeeded to the extent expected, internal warfare and other circumstances having made the consignment of these savages less in favour than had been counted on'. He had 'very sanguine expectations' that the cute, merry and tractable fellows on the *Velocity* would make good shepherds if treated kindly but he doubted whether they could be recruited in sufficient numbers and at a low enough cost to meet the demand for shepherds in New South Wales.<sup>10</sup>

Kirsopp decided at the beginning of July to extend the search for labour farther afield. Both ships set a course for Rotuma, a fertile volcanic island six miles long by three miles wide, 800 miles north-east of the Isle of Pines. The *Velocity* arrived 12 days later. Most of the 3000 inhabitants of Rotuma in 1847 were of Tongan and Samoan descent, retaining their Polynesian language and culture.<sup>11</sup> Around 30 escaped convicts or deserters from ships had been living on Rotuma as beachcombers since the 1830s. They had incited the natives to terrorise visiting merchant for supplies but most were soon killed by brawling with each other or succumbed to ardent spirits.<sup>12</sup>

Mariners described Rotuma as one of the most hospitable and cosmopolitan islands in the Pacific and one of the safest for Europeans. Rotuma supplied passing ships with

<sup>9</sup> Lancaster's statement, 14, 15 October 1847, CO 201/386, 272. Shineberg, *Trading Voyages of Andrew Cheyne*, 45-8. Erskine, *Journal of a Cruise*, 389-94.

<sup>10</sup> PPG, 25 September 1847. SMH, 6 October 1847.

<sup>11</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition*, V, 104. Eason, *Short History of Rotuma*, 29-35. Maude, *Of Islands and Men*, 121-3. British Admiralty, *Pacific Islands*, III; *Western Pacific*, 266-75.

<sup>12</sup> Williams' evidence, 29 July 1836, qs 5578-82, SC Aborigines (British Settlements), 1836. Walgrave to Owen, 27 May 1830, HRA 1/XVI, 49. Maude, *Of Islands and Men*, 144.

yams, coconuts, bananas, sugar cane, breadfruit, fowls and water in exchange for *tombooa*, tortoise shells, glass beads, knives and axes. Young Rotuman men descended from Polynesian seafarers were keen to sign on as deckhands on whaling ships in the central Pacific.<sup>13</sup> Rotuma, at the intersection of Melanesia, Polynesia and Micronesia, was an ideal base for recruiting voyages eastwards to the Friendly Islands (Tonga) and the Navigator Islands (Samoa), or northwards among the little known Kingsmill Islands.

The *Velocity* and *Portenia* lay at anchor off Rotuma for four days, making no secret of their intentions. The local pilot, an Englishman, logged them as 'Trading for Cannibals'. William Mackenzie stayed with Charles Howard, a beachcomber who had lived on Rotuma for 16 years, bought land, and had acquired a native wife and a large family. Mackenzie paid a courtesy call at the Roman Catholic mission. Rotuman chiefs gave a banquet for Joqueah and the Uveans.<sup>14</sup> Kirsopp engaged only four men, all plucked from the sea as the ships were departing. Two had served on whaling ships and spoke some English.<sup>15</sup> The failure to find more recruits could not be attributed to warfare, autocratic chiefs or lack of interpreters. While no explanation was given, missionaries and beachcombers may have warned the Rotumans off.<sup>16</sup>

In a voyage lasting nearly a month, the *Velocity* and the *Portenia* sailed a circuitous course a few degrees south of the equator, calling on six of the 20 scattered Kingsmill Islands. Kirsopp did not explain why he chose these small, remote and almost uncharted atolls consisting of low coral reefs with enclosing lagoons rather than the more populous

<sup>13</sup> Dillon, *Narrative and Successful Result of a Voyage in the South Seas*, II, 93-106. Jarman, *Journal of a Voyage to the South Seas in the Japan*, 177-87. Wilkes, *Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition*, III, 24-4.

<sup>14</sup> Mackenzie's statement, 22 June 1848, CO 201/412, 33.

<sup>15</sup> Lancaster's statement, 14, 15 October 1847, CO 201/386, 272-3.

<sup>16</sup> Extract Bishop Selwyn's log, Tucker, *Memoir of the Life and Episcopate of George Augustus Selwyn, D. D.*, I, 257-8.

and better known islands of Polynesia. The Kingsmill Islands offered little to traders and beachcombers. The only ships known to have visited them before 1847, apart from occasional explorers and merchant ships plying between Sydney and China, were bound for the 'on-the-line' whaling grounds of the central Pacific.<sup>17</sup>

Charles Wilkes had explored, charted and described 15 of the Kingsmill Islands in 1841 for the United States Navy. The published charts of these islands, he observed, were 'so inaccurate, as to be a cause of danger rather than safety'. Despite limited natural vegetation and no running water, the Kingsmill Islands were densely populated. The Ellice Islands south of the equator were inhabited by Polynesian stock. The Gilbert Islands to the north had been colonised by Micronesian seafarers from the north-west. Explorers and seafarers described the natives of the Kingsmill Islands as friendly and eager for trade, were impressed with their physical bearing and skill in building ocean-going canoes, and did not regard them as cannibals.<sup>18</sup>

Kirsopp's first call was at Depeyster's Island (Nukufetau) in the Ellice Islands. During a two-day stay the chief gave a banquet for the crews and Kanakas on board and traded a few pigs for tomahawks. No recruits came forward. Kirsopp then sailed 400 miles north to Hope Island (Avorae) in the Gilbert Islands.<sup>19</sup> Four natives volunteered to go to Sydney but changed their mind when the ships reached Byron's Island (Nikunau) and were put ashore. Kirsopp engaged one native at Byron's Island but, when off Peru Island (Beru), he hailed some canoes that had come out to meet the ships. He jumped into the sea but the canoes refused to pick him. Kirsopp put the *Velocity* about, plucked him from the water,

<sup>17</sup> Coulter, *Adventures on the East Coast of South America*, I, 235-7. Maude, *Of Islands and Men*, 96-126. Morison, 'Historical notes on the Gilbert and Marshall Islands', 96-114. [British Admiralty], *Pacific Islands*; III, *Western Pacific*, 302-3, 313-4, 316-8.

<sup>18</sup> Mackenzie's evidence, 12 November 1847, CO 201/386, 285. Wilkes, *Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition*, V, 68, 80-106. Hale, *United States Exploring Expedition*, V, 74-5. Woodford, 'The Gilbert Islands', 325-50.

<sup>19</sup> Lancaster's statement, 14, 15 October 1847, CO 201/386, 273.

and put him ashore on the island. Several natives of Peru Island interested in going to Sydney were shown their quarters on the ship but the rude and intimidating conduct of the Uveans, with whom they were to share a mess, frightened them away.<sup>20</sup>

Rotch's Island (Tamana), three miles long and less than a mile wide, is one of the smallest of the Gilbert Islands, with an encircling reef offering no protected anchorage. Wilkes did not visit the island in 1841 because he was not sure of its position. When the *Japan*, a whaling ship, visited the island in 1832, the captain described the natives as friendly but remarkable chiefly for the large holes stretched through their ears. They came on board from their canoes, traded coconuts for fish hooks, and gave an exhibition of dancing for the crews.<sup>21</sup> Seventeen Rotch's Islanders agreed to go to Sydney but how they were recruited was not recorded. The four Rotumans on board may have been able to translate the Polynesian dialect of the Ellice Islands but not the Micronesian language of the Gilbert Islands. Henry Walpole later testified that no one on either ship was able to communicate with the natives of Rotch's Island.

Kirsopp set a course south for Rotuma through the Ellice Islands. On reaching Eig Island (Nui) five days later, Lancaster led a party ashore but 'found the natives there never saw white people before and we did not think they would suit us'. Captain Eig on the Dutch sloop *Pollux* had landed on Eig Island in 1825, trading handkerchiefs and old bottles for coconuts. No European had landed on the island since. After an unsuccessful search for the 'phantom' Achilles Island, Kirsopp's ships anchored off Rotuma on 14 August for water and provisions. Kirsopp intended to send the *Portenia* directly to Sydney with the men already recruited while the *Velocity* would sail west to the New Hebrides and Loyalty Islands. He offered to take Joqueah back to Uvea if he wished to return.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Mackenzie's statement, 28 June 1848, CO 201/412, 36.

<sup>21</sup> Jarman, *Journal of a Voyage to the South Seas in the Japan*, 166. Hale, *United States Exploring Expedition*, V, 91. Maude, *Of Islands and Men*, 112, 123-4.



Kirsopp went ashore with Mackenzie, a Rotuman named George picked up on the first visit to Rotuma, and several Kingsmill Islanders wishing to see the island. George led Kirsopp to the hut of a chief called Koonah (Konon, Konow) to barter for provisions. When they returned to the beach that evening, Joqueah explained, that a number of the Uveans had been invited to feast with Rotuman chiefs. The following morning, all the Uveans still on the *Portenia* jumped off the boat and swam ashore. Lancaster came on board the *Velocity* to explain how they had been trapped by the Rotuman chiefs. Kirsopp spent several days searching for them without success. He told Mackenzie that Koonah had plotted with another chief, Barramish, to hold the Uveans in an inaccessible part of Rotuma.<sup>23</sup>

At dawn on 20 August the *Velocity* sailed for Koonah's Bay. Kirsopp, the second mate Rhodes, and two seamen, Moore and Abraham, went ashore. Five other seamen armed with muskets stayed on the beach guarding the long-boat. Kirsopp attempted to negotiate the return of the Uveans with Koonah. When he failed, he sent Rhodes back to the beach for two pistols and a double-barrelled fowling piece. Rhodes gave one pistol to Kirsopp and kept the other pistol and the fowling piece. Kirsopp ordered Moore and Abrahams to seize Koonah with the intention of holding him hostage for the release of the Uveans. When Mushevek, another chief, took hold of Kirsopp, he threatened to shoot him unless they left. Rhodes levelled a pistol at Koonah but one of the Rotumans took hold of him. When four Rotumans seized Kirsopp and threw him to the ground, one slashing his arm with a large French cooking knife, Kirsopp shot Mushevek dead with his pistol. Rhodes had the double-barrelled fowling piece knocked from his hands. He attempted to shoot Koonah with a pistol but it did not fire. Outnumbered by about 40 Rotumans, some

<sup>22</sup> Lancaster's statement, 14, 15 October 1847, 273-4. Walpole's statement, 16 October 1847, CO 201/386, 279. Mackenzie's statement, 22 June 1848, CO 201412, 36-7. Maude, *Of Islands and Men*, 119-20.

<sup>23</sup> Mackenzie's evidence, 22 June 1848, CO 201/412, 38-42.

carrying muskets, Kirsopp ordered his men back to the beach. A Rotuman called Kounman ran to the water's edge with the fowling piece taken from Rhodes for a shot at the departing long-boat. Kirsopp fired a musket at him but missed, whereupon Kounman fired and killed Rhodes. The long-boat reached the *Velocity* without further casualties. Both ships sailed from Rotuma the same day.<sup>24</sup>

The *Velocity* reached Aneityum on 25 August to find *La Brillante*, a French corvette that had been cruising in the south-west Pacific for several months, anchored off the island. Kirsopp told her captain that the *Portenia* had sailed for Sydney with 140 natives, and that he intended proceeding to Tana and the Solomon Islands within the week. Crewmen on the *Velocity* told French officers about the dispute with the natives on Rotuma and the exchange of shots resulting in several men killed or wounded.<sup>25</sup> Leaving Aneityum, the *Velocity* sailed for Tana where 18 men were recruited. Kirsopp rendezvoused with the *Portenia* off Lifu on 6 September. After transferring 18 men from Tana to the *Portenia*, Kirsopp sailed for Sandwich Island (Efate) to investigate reports that the *British Sovereign* had been wrecked off the coast in April and most of her crew eaten by the natives.

The *Portenia*, after recruiting 17 more Lifuans, including four women and two boys, sailed for Sydney. During the voyage, a native of Rotch's Island jumped off the ship, clutching part of a wine cask to keep himself afloat. Lancaster decided not to lower a boat to pick him up because of the high winds and heavy seas. Walpole later testified that the man was about 50 and appeared to be insane.<sup>26</sup> The *Portenia* reached Sydney on 24

<sup>24</sup> Konon's statement, 15 February 1848, CO 209/59, 131-3. Kirsopp's statement, 23 June 1848; Moore's statement 23 June 1848, CO 201/412. Konon's statement, 15 February 1848, CO 209/59. 'Aboriginal slavery in the South Seas', *Colonial Intelligencer and Aborigines Friend*, VII-VIII, 115-20.

<sup>25</sup> *Australian*, 14 September 1847. *Shipping Gazette*, 18 September 1847.

<sup>26</sup> Lancaster's statement, 14, 15 October 1847; Walpole's evidence, 16 October 1847, CO 201/386, 278; 274.

September with 70 Kanakas. Lancaster listed their origins as 18 from Tana, 10 from Anatum (Aneityum), 17 from Rotch's Island, and 25 from Lifu. The *Velocity* arrived on 19 October with 54 males and three females. Kirsopp did not disclose the islands where these Kanakas had been recruited. His course after leaving Lifu cannot be traced. The two ships spent a total of 295 days to recruit a total 127 Kanakas.<sup>27</sup>

Kirsopp and Lancaster managed the three recruiting voyages creditably. Navigating vast expanses of unchartered ocean and calling at islands surrounded by hidden coral reefs and without safe anchorages demanded a high standard of seamanship. Recruiting Melanesians, many known to be hostile to Europeans, to work as indentured servants in New South Wales was fraught with difficulties. The only casualties arising from the recruiting voyages were the death of Mushevek and Rhodes killed, and the wounding of Kirsopp, in the 'affray' on Rotuma. At a time when cramped quarters, poor food and contaminated water could cause high mortality among crew and passengers, no deaths from disease were reported. The only recruit lost at sea was the 'insane' Rotch's Islander who jumped off the *Portenia*. The rest of the Kanakas appeared to be in good health when they landed at Boyd Town or Sydney.

Recruits were given a woollen shirt and pair of trousers when they came on board, both as protection against the cooler climate in New South Wales and to prevent offence to colonial modesty. Shirts were popular with the Islanders but they found trousers too cumbersome, especially when swimming, and soon discarded them. Most of the Islanders slept on the sails in the hold but were allowed to sleep on deck if the weather permitted. The four women recruited on Lifu came on board the *Portenia* naked; whether they were issued with clothes was not disclosed. Two wives of male recruits slept with their

<sup>27</sup> Lancaster's statement, 14, 15 October 1847, CO 201/386, 274. *Australian*, 14, 28 September, 19 October 1847. *SGSGTL*, 18 September, 23 October 1847. *SMH*, 25 September, 20 October 1847, 11 March 1848. *Gleaner*, 2 October 1847.

husbands in the hold. The other two, the unmarried daughters of a chief, shared the main cabin with Lancaster, Walpole, the mate and steward. Lancaster was adamant that he did not allow his crew to 'interfere' with the women.<sup>28</sup> Kirsopp did not say where the three women on the *Velocity* slept.

The Kanakas were fed at sunrise and sunset on biscuit, maize meal and molasses. Kirsopp claimed that many of the Islanders had been rescued from starvation. Natsum complained of not being given enough to eat during the voyage. As the two ships carried more than 30 tons of provisions on the second expedition, the fault may have lain more with the quality than the quantity of the rations. After their customary diet of fresh fish, fowl, fruit and vegetables, the Kanakas may have found a sailor's fare of hard biscuit and maize meal unappetising and indigestible. The Kanakas spent their days at sea learning to work the ship or lounging on the deck. At night they danced on deck and went ashore when the ships were at anchor.<sup>29</sup>

Preventing violence between the European crew and the Kanakas, and among those from different islands, was a constant concern for Kirsopp and Lancaster. Natsum 'complained of being beaten and knocked about by the crew' and was told 'they were being taken to Sydney to work and they would not return to their native country'. Kirsopp claimed that the Rotumans, not the crew, told the Uveans 'many untruths about their treatment in Sydney'. Maintaining order among recruits from different islands appears to have more of a problem than protecting them from the crew. When the *Velocity* reached Boyd Town after its first voyage, Kirsopp explained to Brierly that 'he had some difficulty in keeping the men from different islands from fighting'. Selecting small groups from

<sup>28</sup> Lancaster's statement, 14, 15 October 1847; Walpole's statement, 16 October 1847, CO 201/386; 270-1, 275; 278.

<sup>29</sup> *SGSGTL*, 15 May 1847. Lancaster's statement, 14, 15 October 1847; Kirsopp's statement, 20 October 184; Mackenzie's statement, 12 November 1847, CO 201/386, 271; 382; 283. Natsum's statement, 16 February 1848, CO 209/59, 139.

different islands—Tana, Aneityum and Lifu—may have offered some protection against a mutiny but jealousy and hostility between different groups had a dampening effect on recruiting. When the Uveans objected to sharing their quarters with strangers, they were transferred to the *Portenia* to mollify the new recruits taken on board the *Velocity*.<sup>30</sup>

Soon after coming on board the Kanakas were given a printed indenture form to ‘sign’. The terms therein bound them to serve Benjamin Boyd of Sydney as a seaman, whaler, shepherd or labourer for a term of five years at wages of £1 6s per annum (6d a week), together with a weekly ration of meat and flour, and a yearly issue of two pairs of trousers, two shirts, one Kilmarnock cap and one blanket. The women signed indentures to work as domestic servants. While the indentures were in English, an interpreter explained the terms to the recruits in their native language. Each recruit then marked the indenture form. The interpreter and a witness attested that the indenture had been explained to each recruit and he or she had understood it. Mackenzie said that the indentures were usually signed after the ship put to sea and often without an interpreter present. Neither he nor Walpole, who filled in the indenture forms, was able to say how the terms were explained or if the recruits understood anything of what they were told. Lancaster was prepared to accept the success of the interpreters in explaining the indentures on faith even though he thought the men of Tana so stupid they could not understand anything. Natsum denied ever seeing a contract but suggested that Joqueah may have made an agreement on behalf of all the Uveans.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Entry 9 April 1847, Brierly, Diary at Twofold Bay, Brierly Papers, A540, ML. Natsum’s statement, 16 February 1848, CO 209/59, 138-9. Mackenzie’s statement, 22 June 1848, CO 201/412, 36-7.

<sup>31</sup> Lancaster’s statement, 14, 15 October 1847; Walpole’s statement, 16 October 1847; Kirsopp’s statement, 20 October 1847; Mackenzie’s statement, 12 November 1847, CO 201/386. 272, 275-6; 277-80; 281-3; 283-4. Natsum’s statement, 16 October 1848, CO 209/59, 138-9.

So great was the variety of dialects in Melanesia, John Inglis wrote in 1854, ‘that the Western Pacific might with propriety be called *Polyglottia* or the *Polygot Islands*’.<sup>32</sup> Not only would a different interpreter required for each island and sometimes each tribe, indentures could not be translated into the pre-literate languages of the recruits. Apart from a handful of Polynesians educated by missionaries, few South Sea Islanders could speak let alone read English in 1847. None of the passengers or crew on the *Velocity* or *Portenia* spoke any of the native languages of the South Seas.<sup>33</sup> Kirsopp made little attempt to find interpreters. Even if he had found anyone, they could not have explained the contracts in such a way as to bridge the gap between the primitive economies of the Pacific Islands and the complexities of contract labour in a British colony. Most of the interpreters used in the sandalwood trade were European beachcombers or traders, together with a number of Islanders who had picked up a few words of English while working on ships.

Kirsopp hired Cannibal Charley for £20 to interpret ‘fairly and honestly’ on the second expedition. He came aboard the *Portenia* for a few hours on 27 June but was not mentioned again. Kirsopp gave the impression that he stayed on board during the whole voyage and remained in Sydney but, when the attorney general wished to question him, the police could not find him. Cannibal Charley’s fluency in Melanesian languages might not have extended much beyond Lifu, while his first allegiance—as Cheyne and Turner had discovered—was to his adopted tribe.<sup>34</sup> Even beachcombers on placid Rotuma were reluctant to risk their often precarious relationship with the natives by colluding in

<sup>32</sup> Inglis, ‘Report on a missionary tour in the New Hebrides’, 64-5.

<sup>33</sup> Lancaster’s statement, 14, 15 October 1847; Walpole statement, 16 October 1847, CO 201/386.

<sup>34</sup> Kirsopp’s statement, 20 October 1847; Attorney general to colonial secretary, 25 November 1847, CO 201/386, 282-3; 269. Turner, *Nineteen Years in Polynesia*, 379. Shineberg, *Trading Voyages of Andrew Cheyne*, 120.

sending them to a strange land where they would face an uncertain future for several years. Lancaster testified that 'Patten' (Captain Paddon) interpreted for Kirsopp on Aneityum but whether he assisted in recruiting the 26 men engaged on that island is not known. No recruits came forward at the Isle of Pines despite the willingness of Captain Lewis to interpret.<sup>35</sup>

In the absence of knowledgeable or cooperative Europeans, traders, missionaries or beachcombers, Kirsopp relied on Islanders who claimed some knowledge of English. Dicky Tana, who had lived in Sydney for several years, was fairly fluent. For the rest, their grasp of English would have been as limited as their knowledge of New South Wales. As none of the native interpreters could read English, one of the crew or passengers on the ships read the contract to them and they in turn attempted to explain its meaning to the recruits. The three Lifuans recruited on the *Velocity's* first voyage who were taken back on the second voyage to promote the attractions of 'Sydney' could not have learned much English during their short stay.<sup>36</sup> All three appear to have left the *Velocity* when it returned to Lifu. Gollender had acquired a few words of English working on sandalwood ships but the attorney general did not record an interview with him, possibly because he could make himself understood. Joqueah spoke enough English to be able to negotiate with Kirsopp but, with little knowledge of a labour contract under English law, he would not have been able to explain the indentures to his tribesmen. Two of the Rotumans, who had learned some English working on whaling ships, would have been able to interpret the Polynesian dialect spoken in the southern Kingsmill Islands but no recruits were found here. Recruits from Rotch's Island who spoke a Micronesian dialect remained

<sup>35</sup> Lancaster's statement, 14, 15 October 1847, CO 201/386, 271-2.

<sup>36</sup> *PPH*, 20 May 1847.

incommunicado throughout the voyage.<sup>37</sup>

Even if interpreters for all the dialects spoken on the islands visited had been found, they could not have explained the indentures in sufficient detail to overcome the cultural and economic gap the Pacific Islands and New South Wales. Natives on islands visited by Boyd's ships had worked as deckhands for sandalwood traders. However, shepherding in an unknown country under contracts in English specifying long terms of service and payment in cash was beyond their comprehension and experience.

Kirsopp and Lancaster attempted to demonstrate the duties and rewards of working in New South Wales. Lancaster explained 'that they would have to work, minding Cattle or Sheep for 60 Moons. They have no Cattle or Sheep of their own—but three of the Natives were up at Sydney and went back and from them they learned what Sheep and Cattle were'. The *Velocity* carried a sheep for the Islanders to inspect. Crewmen on the ships also acted out a pantomime of digging and planting to convey the idea of work.<sup>38</sup> As few South Sea Islanders had any idea of money as a medium of exchange, wages of £1 6s a year stipulated in the indentures meant nothing to them. 'I could not explain anything about money to them', Lancaster testified, 'but I told them they would have muskets and powder, Shirts and Trousers, and plenty to eat'. Walpole pointed out that Pacific Islanders might not know about money but they understood and muskets and tomahawks. Recruits were given shirts, trousers, sleeping mats and the occasional plug of tobacco. Except for casks of tobacco, the ships did not carry the iron bars, tools, cloth and other goods commonly traded for sandalwood. Lancaster and Kirsopp promised the chiefs muskets

<sup>37</sup> Kirsopp's statement, 20 October 1847; Mackenzie's statement, 12 November 1847, CO 201/386, 271-2, 275-6; 277-8; 281-3; 283-4. Natsum's statement, 16 February 1848, CO 209/59, 138-9.

<sup>38</sup> Lancaster's statement, 14, 15 October 1847; Walpole's statement, 16 October 1847; Kirsopp's statement, 20 October 1847; Mackenzie's statement, 12 November 1847, CO 201/386, 275-6; 277-8; 281; 283-4



and axes if they allowed their men to visit Sydney.<sup>39</sup>

Overall, 44 Kanakas were recruited at Tana, 32 from Aneityum, 40 from Lifu, 17 from Rotch's Island and four from Rotuma. Of the 40 Uveans who deserted at Rotuma, 33 were taken back to Uvea by the *Arche d'Alliance*, leaving eight, including Natsum, on Rotuma. The origins of the 55 of the Kanakas landed in Sydney in September and October cannot be accounted for. The total cost of the three recruiting voyages, never disclosed, was much higher than the £5 a head anticipated by Boyd in October 1846.<sup>40</sup> Early in the *Velocity's* second voyage an unnamed passenger on the commented on the unexpectedly high cost of recruiting native labour: 'if we allow £10 a day for each of our heavily crewed ships (and not too much), those we have now on board cost already about £20 per head; a sum which will militate seriously against their cheapness'.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, at £10 a day, the total cost of the three voyages would have been £3600, an average of £19 for each Islander recruited, almost as much as the cost of a passage for an assisted emigrant from the United Kingdom.<sup>42</sup> Even at half this cost, the venture would not have been viable. The heavy expenses of the three recruiting voyages, added to the losses on the uninsured *British Sovereign*, contributed to Boyd's failure to establish a commercial empire in the Pacific.

<sup>39</sup> Lancaster's statement, 14, 15 October 1847; Walpole's statement, 16 October 1847; Kirsopp's statement, 20 October 1847; CO 201/386, 276; 277-8; 281-2. *SGSGTL*, 6 February, 15 May 1847.

<sup>40</sup> Boyd's evidence, 19 October 1846, q 13, SC renewal of transportation 1846.

<sup>41</sup> *PPG*, 25 September 1847.

<sup>42</sup> *Argus*, 7 December 1847.