

Pre 1600s:

The use of Sweers Island by the Kaiadilt (Bentinck Islanders) is well documented.¹ As Tindale suggested, historical evidence indicates some occupation of Bentinck, Allens and Sweers Island with primary use focused on Bentinck Island. The nomadic trips to Allens and Sweers Islands were largely dependent on whim, freshwater supply and specific hunting and gathering expeditions; all largely controlled by weather. The Kaiadilt people were basically gatherers of sea food, and the wave platform areas and associated shorelands were probably utilised on Sweers Island. Women gathered 'tjilangind' (small rock oysters), 'kulpanda' (*Arca* mud cockles) and crabs during low tide periods, while the men explored the wider littoral areas spearing fish, turtle, sharks and dugong. On the other hand, the Aboriginal fish-traps on Sweers Island² suggest a more sedentary use of the Island in the recent past.

The Aboriginal terms describing these places indicate that Bentinck Island was the "land of all" (Dulkawalnged) while Allens, Horseshoe and Sweers Islands were "men absent lands" (Dangkawaridulk). These primary indicators, plus observations during visits by Flinders and Stokes and other visitors to the area including anthropologists Roth, Beazley and, more recently, Tindale, indicate that prehistoric use was sporadic and ecologically insignificant.

1580-1650:

This was the earliest period of exploration in northern Australia and Indonesian waters by Dutch explorers associated with the Dutch East India Company.

1606:

The first written record of exploration in the Gulf of Carpentaria by Willem Jansz date from this time. In March and April, he sailed down the west coast of Cape York, landing at Albatross Bay and then continued as far as 14°S (Cape Keer-Weer) in the DUYFKEN. Jansz's report was not encouraging.³

1623:

Jan Carstensz in command of Dutch East India Company's vessels PERA and

¹ Tindale, N.B., 1962a. Geographical knowledge of the Kaiadilt people of Bentinck Island, Queensland. *Records of South Aust. Museum, Adelaide* **14**:252-296; Tindale, N.B., 1962b. Some population changes among the Kaiadilt people of Bentinck Island, Queensland. *Records of South Aust. Museum, Adelaide* **14**:297-336.

² Saenger, P. and M.S. Hopkins, 1975. Observations on the mangroves of the south-eastern Gulf of Carpentaria, Australia. *First Intern. Symp. Biology & Management of Mangroves*, University of Florida, p. 133

³ Whitehouse (1977) *Jl. Royal Hist. Soc. Qd.* 10:114-134 at p. 125

ARNHEM, took ships' boats into the mouth of the Staaten River on 25 April. Carstensz named the Gulf of Carpentaria after Pieter de Carpentier, Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies from 1622-28. Carstensz was to investigate the possibility of trade with the natives and inquire for gold metals and find Torres Strait. However, he failed to find Torres Strait and saw only 'naked savages' and a few rivers.⁴

1644:

The first European likely to have seen Sweers Island in June or July 1644 was Abel Janzoon Tasman. He had been sent by the Dutch Governor-General to determine whether a strait existed between New Guinea and the 'Southland' (Australia) as shown on Franco-Portuguese maps.⁵ Tasman failed to find Torres Strait, probably because he sailed too far offshore⁶ and he did not recognise that Sweers Island was an island rather than a promontory. The dissatisfaction with Tasman's voyage is best reflected in that a further exploratory expedition was sent to the area with almost identical orders in 1756.⁷ Although rebuked by the directors of the Dutch East India Company for unremunerative exploration - "Why bother about barren and remote countries inhabited by wild and unprofitable savages?"⁸ - Tasman's rank of commander was confirmed and, in November 1644, he was appointed to the Council of Justice in Batavia.⁹ Tasman retired from the Company in 1651, becoming a wealthy merchant until his death in 1659.¹⁰

The composite map of this journey is in the Mitchell Library and places a headland and a supposed river entrance ("The Maet Suyker") in the vicinity of what are now called the South Wellesley Islands; it seems clear that Tasman, who did not name the Island,¹¹ thought it part of a large promontory.

Pre 1800's:

Sporadic visits to the northern Australian coastline Maccassarese-Buginese fishermen lost and/or seeking trepang and other marine biota did occur,

4 Whitehouse (1977) p. 125

5 Whitehouse (1977) p. 125

6 Robert, W.C.H., 1973. *The Dutch Explorations, 1605-1756 of Australia*. Philo Press, Amsterdam, p. 37

7 Robert (1973) p. 45

8 Cilento and Lack, 19XX. *Triumph in the Tropics*, Xxxxx, Xxxxx, p. 17

9 Sharpe, A. p. 334

10 Feeken, E.H.J. and G.E.E. Feeken, 1970. *The discovery and exploration of Australia*. Nelson, Melbourne.

11 During his 1642 voyage around Tasmania, Tasman did name an island group in Tasmania as 'Sweers Eylanden' after Salomon Sweers, one of the Councillors, who had authorised his expedition. Similarly, in 1644 Tasman named what is probably now the Nicholson River as 'Sweers' River.

although rarely were the Wellesley Islands included in these visits.¹²

Some evidence of these visits, however, is attributed to the tamarind trees (*Tamarindus indicus*) found on Fowler Island¹³ and to trees cut with axes, teak remains of worked timbers, earthenware jugs and skeletons reported during Flinders' visit to the island in 1802.¹⁴

1756:

Two ships, the RIJDER and BUIJS, under the command of Jean Etienne Gonzal were dispatched by the Dutch East India Company to "... survey the coasts of the Gulf of Carpentaria, the north coast of Arnhem Land and to sail westwards ..." ¹⁵ These ships were separated by storms and failed to carry out their orders so that virtually no useful information resulted.

1802:

Nov. 16 - On his last voyage in the INVESTIGATOR, Matthew Flinders sighted Sweers Island while exploring the Gulf's southern coastline. He deduced that the opening west of the prominent height of land (Inspection Hill) was the river entrance suggested on earlier Dutch charts ('Maets Suyker's River'). According to Robert Brown,¹⁶ the botanist aboard the INVESTIGATOR, "... in the evening anchored under a low Island about a mile from the shore & abreast of the only rising ground on the Island".

Nov. 17 - Flinders anchored the INVESTIGATOR approximately two miles due south of Sweers Island in 4.5 fathoms. Taking a boat ashore he climbed Inspection Hill, describing it as "... a mass of calcareous rock, whose surface was cut and honey-combed"¹⁷.

"A native was seen on the beach near us but on the boat's approaching the shore he disappeared. We ranged this island till 4.00pm when we returned on board with a tolerable harvest. This island appears very recently formed, chiefly of coral sand and ironstone and a mixture of sandstone and ironstone. There is no luxuriant vegetation or soil capable of producing such on the

¹² Macknight, C.C., 1976. 'The voyages to Marege: Macassan trepangers in northern Australia' MUP, pp. 175.

¹³ As suggested, for example, in Captain Pennefather's report in 1880.

¹⁴ Narratives and diaries of Matthew Flinders, Robert Brown and Peter Goode - see details below.

¹⁵ Robert (1973) p. 45

¹⁶ Robert Brown's journal as transcribed from a microfilm copy held by the National Herbarium in Canberra.

¹⁷ Flinders, M., 1814. *A voyage to Terra Australis, undertaken for the purpose of completing the discovery of that vast country and prosecuted in the years 1801, 1802 and 1803.* G. and W. Nicol, London, 2 vols., pp. 137-8

island. However, there is considerable variety of vegetables."¹⁸

Although the area had been called Maet Suyker's River on earlier Dutch charts, Flinders renamed the island "Sweers Island" after Salomon Sweers,¹⁹ one of the Councillors of Batavia who had authorised Tasman's journey of 1644. He also named Inspection Hill from "... its obvious nature as a vantage point".

Nov. 18 - "Early two boats went to draw the seine in a bay between this and another large island. Mr. Allen and I were landed on the large island where we saw eleven natives who fled from us. Here we found stumps of several casuarine trees which had been neat cut with sharp edged tools ... returned on board about 3.00pm with fishing party which had been tolerable successful and had fish served out to the crew."²⁰

Nov. 19 & 20 - The INVESTIGATOR sailed west below Bentinck Island and north-west towards Allens Island. Boat parties went ashore for botanical observations on Allen and Horseshoe Islands. Flinders' party met Aborigines on Horseshoe Island, exchanging caps, a hatchet and an adze for spears and woomeras. Flinders made detailed observations as to the height, hair style, and physical features of the Aborigines and the construction styles of their rafts, nets, beds and implements.

Flinders named Bentinck Island after Lord William Bentinck, former Governor of Madras; Allens Island "after the practical miner of the expedition" and Horseshoe Island "from its form".

Nov. 21 - The INVESTIGATOR made its way back to the anchorage between Bentinck and Sweers Islands in order to facilitate further repairs (caulking). Flinders was quite impressed with this anchorage off "the west sandy point of Sweers Island". He wrote "though it may not be called a port, (the anchorage) is yet almost equally well sheltered, and I named it Investigator's Road".

Nov. 22 - The crew began repairs on the INVESTIGATOR while Flinders took boat parties to Sweers Island to take fixes from Inspection Hill and dig out a native well on the beach not far from Inscription Point "... near to where human bones were found."²¹ Other boat crews were employed fishing and exploring, finding the small freshwater lake on the south shore of Bentinck Island. "During the crisis, the scientists had been busy on Bentinck's and Sweers' Islands. They had found several new plants, noted the dominance of

¹⁸ Edwards, P.I. (ed.), 1981. The journal of Peter Goode, gardener, on Matthew Flinders' voyage to Terra Australis 1801-1803. *Bulletin of the British Museum Natural History Series* 9:1-213 at p. 101.

¹⁹ Berg Hogenhoff, C., 2006. *Sweers Islands unveiled: Details from Abel Tasman and Matthew Flinders' explorations of Australia*. Hogenhoff Forlag, Oslo.

²⁰ Edwards, 1981. op. cit. at pp. 101.

²¹ Edwards, 1981. op. cit. at pp. 102.

eucalyptus, dwarf casuarinas, and pandanus in the tropical vegetation, and observed many birds, including bustards, pelicans, gulls, 'sea-pies', 'ox-birds', and sand-larks."²²

"During our stay at this anchorage I went several times on the Islands & scarce ever without finding additional plants so that before we left it I had made out a Florule comprehending 190 species of perfect plants The rise of the spring tides was found to be about 11 or 12 feet & a circumstance very remarkable was that while we remained the low of floods was commenced in the morning continued for 12 hours & the ebb during an equal time in the night. During our stay the ship was supplied with fish & the Island where we watered a Bustard was shot perhaps not essentially different from Charadrius, it weighed 12 $\frac{1}{2}$ lb & the flesh was well tasted that of the legs was much whiter than the breast ..."²³

Collections of geological specimens were also made by Robert Brown and these were later described by A.W. Fitton in 1827 as an appendix²⁴ to Captain Phillip Parker King's account of the voyages of the MERMAID and BATHURST. Fitton records that "In Sweers Island a hill of about fifty or sixty feet in height was covered with a sandy calcareous stone, having the appearance of concretions rising irregularly about a foot above the general surface, without any distinct ramifications. The specimens from this place have evidently the structure of stalactites, which seem to have been formed in sand ..."²⁵ In addition, "... the shore, in various parts of the Island, was found to consist of red ferruginous matter, (bog-iron-ore?) sometimes unmixed, but not infrequently mingled with a sandy calcareous stone; and in some places rounded portions of the ferruginous matter were enveloped in a calcareous cement."²⁶

Nov. 23 - A camp was established on Sweers Island under the control of Lt. Fowler. This group supplied fish and freshwater to the INVESTIGATOR. Flinders received reports of extensive repairs required due to rotting timbers.

Nov. 24 - Peter Goode, the ship's gardener "... landed with Mr Brown on the spot where we had landed on the 17 and crossed the island to the watering place and collected a few things. We found some large roots like potatoes probably the roots of *Convolvulus longiflorus* laying by the fireplace of natives and in the holes dug among the sand near trees where the convolvulus grows

²² Austin, K.A., 1974. *The voyage of the INVESTIGATOR*. Seal Books, p. 164

²³ Robert Brown's journal

²⁴ Fitton, W.H. (1827) 'An account of some geological specimens, collected by Captain P.P. King, in his survey of the coasts of Australia, and by Robert Brown, Esq., on the shores of the Gulf of Carpentaria, during the voyage of Captain Flinders.' Appendix C in P.P. King 'Narrative' pp. 566-630.

²⁵ Fitton p. 570-571

²⁶ Fitton p. 609

...²⁷

Nov. 25 - "Employed preserving former collections and all hands watering ship. In afternoon went ashore and strolled to the NE point of the island where I fell in with a large marsh and plenty of freshwater and collected several new plants ... This day Mr Bawer shot a large bustard."²⁸

Nov. 26 - Flinders decided to complete the survey of the Gulf, hoping to be able to return to Sydney via the west and south coast in the winter or retreat to the East Indies if required.

Nov. 27 - While repairs and watering of the INVESTIGATOR were nearly completed, Peter Goode, the gardener "... went ashore in the morning with Mr Brown and walked towards the northeast point of the island and collected several new plants."²⁹

Nov. 28 - Watering and repairs were completed and "... took some wood on board, struck tents, hoisted in boats and made everything ready for sea."³⁰

Nov. 29 & 30 - Flinders tried to sail out of Investigator Road against south easterly winds but experienced difficulty getting around Locust Rock so he anchored south of Sweers Island. During this anchorage, Flinders wrote an extensive summary of the fortnight spent in the vicinity of Sweers and Bentinck Islands: "The stone most commonly seen on the shore is an iron-ore, in some places so strongly impregnated that I conceive it would be a great acquisition to a colony fixed on the neighbourhood. Above this is a concreted mass of coral, shells, coral sand and grains of iron ore ... The soil, even in the best parts, is far behind fertility; but the small trees and bushes which grow there, and the grass in some of the less covered places, save the larger islands from the reproach of being absolutely sterile. The principal woods are *Eucalyptus* and *Casuarina*, of a size too small in general, to be fit for other purposes than the fire; the *Pandanus* grows almost everywhere, but most abundantly in the sandy parts; and the botanists made out a long list of plants, several of which were quite new to them." For example, Ferdinand Bauer prepared a beautiful illustration of *Eucalyptus pruinosa*, described from Sweers Island by Robert Brown, and Peter Goode commented that "on these islands we made a tolerable harvest of plants -- this island contained near 200 species many of which were new."

Flinders reported that turtles abounded around the island and "... indians were repeatedly seen but they always avoided us and sometimes disappeared in a manner which seemed extraordinary. It is probable that they hid themselves

²⁷ Edwards, 1981. op. cit. at pp. 102-103.

²⁸ Edwards, 1981. op. cit. at pp. 103.

²⁹ Edwards, 1981. op. cit. at pp. 103.

³⁰ Edwards, 1981. op. cit. at pp. 103.

in caves dug in the ground, for we discovered in one instance a large hole containing two compartments, so to call them, in each of which a man might lie down. Fireplaces under the shade of the trees with dried grass spread around were often met with and these I apprehended to be their fine-weather and the caves their foul-weather residences."

Flinders also introduced a mystery surrounding the island: "On Sweers Island seven human skulls and many bones were found lying together near three extinguished fires, and a square piece of timber, seven feet long which was of teak wood, and according to the judgement of the carpenter had been a quarter deck carling of a ship, was thrown up on a western beach. On Bentinck Island, I saw the stumps of at least twenty trees which had been felled with an axe or some sharp instrument of iron, and not far from the same place were scattered the remains of a broken earthen jar. Putting these circumstances together it seemed probable that some ship from the East Indies had been wrecked here two or three years back and part of the crew had been killed by the indians and that others had gone away, perhaps to the mainland upon rafts constructed upon the manner of the natives."

Dec. 1 - The INVESTIGATOR sailed south from Sweers Island to an anchorage south-west of Sydney Island on the south side of Mornington Island.

1841:

July 7 & 8 - Sweers Island and the Albert-Flinders Rivers region of the Gulf coastline were visited by Stokes in the famous BEAGLE on her third voyage in Australian waters. Stokes, who had been mate during the BEAGLE's world voyage with Charles Darwin in 1831-36, was charting the shores of Australia not investigated by Flinders or King.

The BEAGLE sailed into Investigator Road from the Cape Van Diemens area. Twelve Aboriginals were observed "... under Mount Inspection, a hill 105 feet high, and a most remarkable feature hereabouts, on the S.E. extreme of Sweers Island"³¹ but Stokes was unable to make contact with them on landing.

"Sweers Island appeared to be very woody, and bounded by low dark cliffs on the north-east side. We found a long extent of foul ground, with a dry reef near its outer end, extending off two miles in a S. 33°E. direction from the S.E. extreme ... A party was immediately dispatched in search of the INVESTIGATOR's well."³² Stokes also recorded a cloud of locusts which enveloped Sweers but which later moved to Bentinck Island.

Fowler Island was named after Flinders' lieutenant and "... the

³¹ Stokes, J.L., 1846. *Discoveries in Australia, with an account of the coasts and rivers explored in the years 1837-1843*. T. & W. Boone, London. 2 vols., p. 268

³² Stokes p. 269

INVESTIGATOR's old well was discovered half a mile eastwards of the point to which I gave the name of Point Inscription³³ from a very interesting discovery we made of the name of Flinders' ship cut on a tree near the well and still perfectly legible although nearly forty years old ... On the opposite side of the trunk the BEAGLE's name and the date of our visit were cut".³⁴ In his log, Stokes summarised his feeling on finding this reminder of Flinders: "It was thus our good fortune to find at last some traces of the INVESTIGATOR's voyage, which at once invested the place with all the charms of association, and gave it an interest in our eyes that words can ill express ... I forthwith determined accordingly that the first river we discovered in the Gulf should be named the Flinders ..."³⁵

This tree (*Celtis paniculata*) was photographed in 1871 by Captain Sweet of the GULNARE while enroute from Adelaide for cable laying at Port Darwin. After being blown down during a cyclone 5 March 1887,³⁶ the tree stump was procured by the Queensland Museum via Captain J.W. Jones, "the Gulf Pilot, and forwarded to the Portmaster at Brisbane as Government property".³⁷ The tree arrived at the Museum on 13/2/1889, officially "donated by the Port Office" via Captain Heath and has been on display since 1964. It is now located in the Surveying Museum of the SunMap Centre in Brisbane.³⁸

Inscriptions visible³⁹ in 1887 include the following:

Lowy 1781 - Palmer⁴⁰ suggested that this was the name of Abel Tasman's ship; however, the three ships under Tasman's command however were the LIMMEN, ZEEMEEUW and the BRACQ. Perhaps it is the name and year of birth of Sherrard Philip Lound, midshipman, who Flinders described as "... a fine lad, but he does not grow.."⁴¹

INVESTIGATOR 1802 - Flinders' ship; inscribed by Flinder's crew

INVESTIGATOR - Lowermost inscription made by Thomas Baines of the NAE in November 1856. The photograph of the tree in the Queensland Museum shown in Austin (1974)⁴² shows both inscriptions.

33 Flinder's 'Investigators Road'

34 Stokes pp. 270-271

35 Stokes p. 271

36 The Queenslander, 9 March 1889 at p. 451

37 Knight (1898) p. 7

38 Saenger, P. and B.J. Stubbs, 1994. The investigator tree, Sweers Island: a natural historic monument. *Proc. R. Soc. Qd.* **104**:67-78.

39 According to Queensland Museum; on the other hand, Reed, A.W., 1973. *Place Names of Australia.* at p. 204 suggests under the entry for Sweers Island that "The 'Investigator Tree' on this island was one of the most famous trees in Australia. Dutch and Chinese navigators had left inscriptions on it at various times."

40 Palmer, E., 1903. *Early days in North Queensland.* Angus & Robertson, Sydney, p. 26

41 Austin (1974) p. 50

42 facing p. 129

Robert Devine⁴³ - Palmer⁴⁴ and Reed⁴⁵ erroneously suggested that this was the first lieutenant of the INVESTIGATOR; however, during the Gulf survey, Lt. Robert Fowler filled this position and no Robert Devine was aboard.⁴⁶ In any case, it refers to Captain Devine of the MESSENGER and was inscribed on 20 Nov. 1856.

BEAGLE 1841 - Stokes' ship

Chimmo - Lt. W. Chimmo who, with the TORCH, tried to contact Gregory's expedition on July 31, 1856

N.A.E. Nov. 20th 1856 - Member of North Australian Expedition aboard MESSENGER; most probably inscribed by Thomas Baines

Karl Teats 1856 - Possibly a crew member of MESSENGER or TORCH

The Expedition 1861 - Burke & Wills Search Expedition

J. Martin 1861 - Possibly "Mr. Martin (son of the owner of the FIREFLY)"⁴⁷

L.H.S. 1861 - Possibly Scott, Chief Officer on FIREFLY

Austin 1861 - ?

W. Landsborough 1866 - Police Magistrate based in Burketown from May 1866.

A.H.T. 1866 - ?

D. Clouston 1866 - ?

W.J. Hay - ?

W.C.A. Miles - Possibly the MLA for Maranoa 1864-1873⁴⁸ who would have known Landsborough who, in turn, had served as an MLC from December 1862 to May 1865.

⁴³ According to the Queenslander of 9 March 1889 and Knight, J.J. (1895) 'In the early days - History and incident of Pioneer Queensland' Sapsford & Co., Brisbane, p. 7, this inscription read 'T. Devine'.

⁴⁴ Palmer (1983) p. 26

⁴⁵ Reed (1973) p. 204

⁴⁶ Historical Records of Australia, Vol. XX, pp.386-389

⁴⁷ Kirby (1868) p.14

⁴⁸ Waterson, D.B., 1972. *A biographical register of the Queensland Parliament. 1860-1929.* ANU Press, Cambridge, at p. 127

W.S. Howell - Possibly a misreading for W. Shewell, stockman with the NAE who was aboard MESSENGER.

W. Solby - Possibly a misreading for W. Selby, stockman with the NAE who was aboard MESSENGER.

According to B.J. Gulliver⁴⁹ the following were legible in 1867:

Flinders

INVESTIGATOR 1802

BEAGLE 1841

NAE, Nov 20, 1856

The Expedition, 1861

Karl Teats 1856

W. Landsborough 1866

L.H*S 1861**

W. Solby (with two triangles)

W.J. Hay

W.C.A. Miles

W.S. Howell

A.H.T. 1866

D.C. Clouston 1866

J. Martin 1861

A. Austin 1861

According to Palmer the following inscriptions were also present:

1798 - This date seems to be associated with 'some Chinese characters'

Stokes - Captain Stokes of the BEAGLE

Norman - Captain Norman of the VICTORIA.

Whether Palmer actually saw the tree is not known; however the inscriptions of 'Stokes' and 'Norman' are not mentioned by anyone else, nor are they still visible on the tree. The Chinese characters are more puzzling and have led to various suggestions of early Chinese navigators in this region. However, it seems likely that the 'Chinese' characters (if they existed at all⁵⁰) are one of the Macassan scripts used by the early trepangers. Presumably Palmer's claim is the basis for those of 'G.P.'⁵¹ and Reed⁵², although 'G.P.' claims that "Flinders found evidence of the visit of Chinese to Sweer's Island. He found a tree on

⁴⁹ The Queenslander, 16 November, 1889 at p. 927

⁵⁰ Stubbs, B.J. and P. Saenger, 1996. The Investigator tree: eighteenth century inscriptions, or twentieth century misinterpretations? *R. Hist. Soc. Qd. J.* **16**:93-107.

⁵¹ G.P., 1946. 'Historic Island of the Gulf' Cummin & Campbell's Monthly Magazine (September 1946) pp. 7 and 41.

⁵² Reed, A.W., 1973. Place Names of Australia. Reed, Sydney, at p. 204

which were carved some Chinese characters, and the date, 1798 Flinders carved the date and name of his ship on the same gnarled old tree on which he found the Chinese characters."⁵³ However, no mention of Chinese or Macassan characters, nor of a 1798 date, is made in Flinders' account of the visit to the Island.

Walter E. Roth, the Northern Protector of Aborigines, makes the following observations⁵⁴ regarding the remains of the tree during his visit to Sweers Island in 1901. "... the limb bearing the actual inscription was removed some years back ... What remains of this very interesting historical landmark has been mutilated by subsequent visitors, and of the fence which once surrounded it, only a corner post now remains. So as to identify it for the future, I purposely took note of the more legible incisions. On the eastern aspect of the butt appears EXPEDITION and 1861, while above it is J. SWAN: along the western side is to be seen P. W. ARMSTRONG Dec 1885: upon the main branch is BN written within a square border."

Stokes described finding a new water supply closer to Point Inscription: "Being desirous of ascertaining if now, in the dry season, water could be obtained in other parts of the island, I ordered a well to be dug on the extreme of Point Inscription, a more convenient spot for watering a ship, and at a depth of 25 feet met excellent water, pouring through a rock of concreted sand, pebbles, and shells.

Our success may be attributed, as Flinders says, to the clayey consistence of the stratum immediately under the sand, and to the gravelly rock upon which the stratum rests; the one preventing the evaporation of the rains, and the other obstructing their further infiltration.

This was a very important discovery, as Investigator Road is the only anchorage for vessels of all sizes at the head of the Gulf in either monsoon, and possesses an equal supply of wood, fish, and birds, with turtles close at hand on Bountiful Islands. Moreover, should an expedition be formed for the purpose of exploring the interior from the head of the Gulf, it is, as Flinders remarks, "particularly well adapted for a ship during the absence of the travellers." In addition to this, it is a point at which an expedition would first arrive to arrange plans for the future; and lastly, I should observe that in case of our being fortunate enough to find rivers or fertile country on the southern shores of the Gulf, we at once saw that we might look forward to the time when Investigator Road should be the port from which all the produce of the neighbouring parts of the continent must be shipped, and when it should bear on its shores the habitations of civilized man, and the heaven-ward pointing spires of the Christian Church On duly weighing these considerations in

⁵³ G.P., 1946. at p. 7

⁵⁴ Roth, W.E. (1901) 'Report on a visit to some of the Wellesley Islands.' Handwritten report dated Burketown 6.7.01 and submitted to Home Secretary's Office 25 Jul 1901, pp. 14 + map

my mind I determined to make an accurate survey of this anchorage, including Sweers and the eastern portion of Bentinck Island; and to dispatch two boats to examine the group of islands to the north-west, and the main land from thence to abreast of the south-west end of Bentinck Island. On the morning of the 9th, accordingly, Messr. Forsyth and Parker proceeded with the whale boats on this service."⁵⁵

Stokes also reported that "... near Point Inscription, I found a native skull on the shore ... they must have been exposed some time, as they were very nearly destroyed by the action of air. How they could have come in this situation was a mystery, as there was nothing indicating a place of burial."⁵⁶

From Mount Inspection, "... the north-eastern end of the Island, also, could be seen, fronted with rocky ledges extending three quarters of a mile off. This hill is a mass of calcareous rock, similar to the high parts of Bountiful Island, with the same honeycombed surface, as if it had been exposed to the action of the sea. In other parts of the island there is a great quantity of ironstone; and the cliffs on the eastern side are mixed with this and pipe-clay; on the northern extreme are some lakes and swamps.

The soil is chiefly a mixture of sand and decomposed vegetable matter; but it cannot boast of fertility. The wood on the island, which consisted for the most part of gums, wattles, a few acacias, palms, and, near the beach, a straggling casuarina or two, bespoke this by its stunted appearance; but as cotton grows well at Port Essington, there can be little doubt that it will thrive here. Several of the bustards spoken of by Flinders, were noticed; but too wary to be killed. They were as large as those seen in the neighbourhood of Port Phillip, but much browner. The other birds, most common, will be found in an extract from the game book, given in a future page. We saw no animals, except some large iguanas."⁵⁷

The extract from the game book⁵⁸ gives the following details: "Sweers Island (July), 151 quails, 87 doves, 20 pigeons, 3 pheasants, 8 white and 2 black cockatoos, 5 spur-wing plovers"

July 9 - 13

Forsyth and Parker charted much of the Wellesley Island Group and nearby shoreline, landing at Bayley Point, Point Barker, Allens and Forsyth Islands from the ship's boats.

July 14-24

⁵⁵ Stokes pp. 271-272

⁵⁶ Stokes p. 273

⁵⁷ Stokes p. 274

⁵⁸ given as a footnote on p. 330 of Stokes

BEAGLE took soundings and recorded data between Sweers Island and the Gulf coast, departing Sweers Island on 21 July.

July 29

Stokes fulfilled his undertaking to name a river after Flinders while in an inlet where he "... was delighted to find our progress rendered hazardous by sunken trees". This river he named the Flinders.

Aug. 2-6

Stokes discovered another river further east. He travelled up this stream about 50 miles searching for fresh water, calling this river the Albert, after the Queen's consort. He also named the nearby alluvial lands the "plains of promise" after a day's land exploration on August 4 at the terminus of his boats progress upriver.

Aug. 7-18

Numerous other inlets and bays along the coastline were charted prior to sailing for Port Essington.

1855:

May 12 - The North Australia Expedition under A.C. Gregory departed Brisbane for the Victoria River in the schooner TOM TOUGH (Captain Gourlay) and barque MONARCH. The MONARCH was holed near Melville Island and after delivering supplies, sailed for Singapore. The TOM TOUGH, in turn, was holed in the Victoria River.

1856:

June - In Sydney, there had been apprehension concerning the safety of the NAE and the British Government had dispatched Lieutenant W. Chimmo, R.N., to Sydney whence he was "... sent to render assistance to the above expedition by his Excellency, the Governor General of New South Wales".⁵⁹ The paddle steamer TORCH (owned by Mr. Watson) was chartered, loaded with 130 tons of coal and Lt. Chimmo sailed north from Newcastle on 24 June to gain news of the explorers.

Meanwhile, Gregory and a small party had left overland on June 21, 1856, arriving at the Albert River on 30 August.

⁵⁹ Chimmo, W., 1857. Voyage of H.M.S.V. Torch. Reprinted from the Nautical Magazine, London 1857. p. 15; see also Chimmo, W., 1856. Account of the search for the North Australian Exploring Expedition under Mr. A.C. Gregory. Proc. R. Geogr. Soc. London, Vol. 1. [ML 910.6 R]

July - After makeshift repairs to the TOM TOUGH, the schooner departed for Coepang, Timor on 17 July 1856. As more intricate repairs were required, the TOM TOUGH departed for Sourabaja on August 9. At Sourabaja, the TOM TOUGH's mast was found to be fractured and as the time required to repair this was too long, Thomas Baines, the artist and storekeeper for Gregory's party, discharged the TOM TOUGH and hired the brigantine MESSENGER, a slower but more robust vessel under the command of Captain Devine. Thus, the MESSENGER was dispatched to fill the role previously allotted to the TOM TOUGH.

July 30 - The TORCH arrived off Sweers Island in the evening, and immediately a party is sent ashore to find water. "On landing we found that natives had preceded us, their tracks were plainly visible, and they had left a bundle of wood for fire or signals on the spit; they had taken a canoe with them into the wood, and had evidently come from Bentinck Island. It was too dark even to find the well, so I had to return on board ..."60

July 31 - Before dawn "... all hands were on shore looking for water. About a mile East of our anchorage we found what remained of the INVESTIGATOR's well, completely blocked up, to be distinguished only by a slight undulation in the ground: traces of natives were seen under almost every tree. Sticks for erecting tents or huts were lying about, tied up with grass-cord, and bundles of sticks ready for burning. It was not long before we all assembled beneath THE TREE⁶¹ (Chimmo's emphasis), which still plainly bore the inscriptions of the 'INVESTIGATOR and BEAGLE;' the former fifty-four years since, the latter fifteen: and here we indulged in a glass of the 'Queen's own,' The TORCH's name was not added,⁶² for if all did the same the original would soon be obliterated, which I hold to be next to sacrilegious, considering that the original and originator stand alone as long as wind and weather permit ... The remains of the BEAGLE's well was found, but full of earth, stones, and wood ... Our hearts sunk within us as we gazed on this piece of destruction, and also at the prospect of finding no water. However ... tools were brought from the ship ... and every one went to work to clear the well. By noon this was done, and the water was dripping into it through a rock of concreted lime, sand, shells, and pebbles ... By afternoon we had completed water (although somewhat brackish) to about five tons; and in return deposited pumpkin seeds and Indian corn round the well, where the soil was rich; cut our vessel's name on a log of wood across the well, and bade it adieu ..."63

On returning to the anchorage from the assembly underneath the INVESTIGATOR tree, a "... piece of a lower deck mess plate, (China,) as well

60 Chimmo (1857) p. 18

61 A small sketch of the tree is provided by Chimmo at p. 19

62 although the name 'Chimmo' was apparently inscribed

63 Chimmo (1857) pp. 19-20

as a metal inkstand of European manufacture with the lid gone ..." were found and Chimmo puzzled over how these remains came to be there. On the western side of the Island, the remains of a Malay proa with beams of teak were found at high water mark. "We concluded she had been cast away during the N.W. monsoon; her beam was 17 feet; length could not be ascertained."⁶⁴

Aug. 1 - The TORCH departed Sweers Island and headed for the Albert River mouth "watched by the natives who were on Bentinck Island, gazing at us with astonishment to see a vessel move through the water by 'smoke.' To this we attributed their shyness."⁶⁵

Aug. 2 - When he entered the Albert River Chimmo sent two boat crews upstream to the rendezvous, and for a whole evening they amused themselves inscribing names on trees. Chimmo said that they also hung from trees bottles containing notes for Gregory. "Lieutenant Chimmo then sailed to the Victoria River, and at the base camp he found in an oven a note from Thomas Baines informing the finder that Gregory had left for the Albert."⁶⁶

Aug. 31 - On approaching the Albert River, Gregory's party found a number of marked trees "consisting of several names of seamen, who appeared to have formed the crew of a boat sent up the river by H.M. steamer TORCH"⁶⁷ four weeks earlier. Gregory concluded that the visit of the TORCH had no connection with his expedition.

Sept. 3 - When the TOM TOUGH failed to rendezvous with them at the Albert River, Gregory left instructions for the schooner, departing overland for Brisbane.

Oct. 23 - MESSENGER's longboat was launched in order to expedite the trip to the Albert River. The MESSENGER, in contrary winds, was achieving less than a knot,⁶⁸ and Baines felt that with the long delay, Gregory and his party might start for Brisbane with insufficient supplies. The longboat was manned by Messrs. Baines, Phipps and Graham.⁶⁹

Nov. 10 - The brigantine MESSENGER anchored off Sweers Island about 11

⁶⁴ Chimmo (1857) pp. 19-20

⁶⁵ Chimmo (1857) p. 20

⁶⁶ Connell, G., 1980. *The Mystery of Ludwig Leichhardt*. Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, at pp. 32-33

⁶⁷ Gregory, A.C., 1884. *Journals of Australian Exploration*. James C. Beal, Brisbane, at p. 172

⁶⁸ Braddon, R., 1986. *Thomas Baines and the North Australian Expedition*. Collins, Sydney, at p. 117

⁶⁹ Braddon, R. (1986) p. 117

pm.⁷⁰

Nov. 11 - "The boat ashore this morning before breakfast & got a letter from Commander Chimmo in command of the New South Wales War Steamer the TORCH found it a few feet from the BEAGLES Well. There appears to be plenty of water in the well ... water is not fit to drink, as it is ctd. Salt and bitter as well ... but we must have water from somewhere we take them aboard and then sail for the Albert."⁷¹ The MESSENGER, reached the Albert River and the crew found the letters left by Gregory, advising that the expedition had left overland.

Nov. 17 - Baines finally arrived off the Albert River with the longboat to find that the MESSENGER had arrived before him. After consultation with Captain Devine and against Gregory's instructions, it was decided that the MESSENGER would return to Brisbane via Timor and the west coast. But first, the water supply on the brigantine needed to be replenished and consequently the MESSENGER sailed for Sweers Island.

Nov. 18 - "... anchored off Sweers Island ... about 10 am. Expedition men all ordered where to dig out Flinders Well that we do and get good water aboard at night."⁷² Thomas Baines had "organised a party that took every available beaker and bucket to a well on Sweers Island, filled them with fresh water, and brought them back in the longboat to MESSENGER, where Devine supervised the replenishing of her empty casks",⁷³ an operation that took two days.

Nov. 19 - "During the day nearly all the men had carved their names on some smaller trunks of the INVESTIGATOR'S tree and one invading the main stem had made some unintelligible cuts two or three of which came across the name of the INVESTIGATOR. I gave orders that this relic of the Adventurous old Navigator should be respected and as it was now barely legible I cut the word afresh just below it. The Captain cut his own and vessels name and I carved the Expedition Mark and date."⁷⁴

Braddon⁷⁵ showed the Thomas Baines sketch of the inscribed tree with the following legend: 'A tree near Flinder's Well on Sweers Island with the names of INVESTIGATOR and BEAGLE carved on it. The uppermost is the original name carved by Flinder's crew. The lower and more distinct was cut by Baines to mark the spot visited by the old navigator when his own might be effaced.'

⁷⁰ Dawson, W., Memorandum of events on the North Australian Expedition under the command of Augustus C. Gregory. ML FM4/3096.

⁷¹ Dawson ML FM4/3096

⁷² Dawson ML FM4/3096

⁷³ Braddon, R. (1986) p. 136

⁷⁴ Baines, Thomas - Journal 1856-7 - 5 vols. ML FM4/1373

⁷⁵ Braddon, p. 138

Nov. 20 - Inscription left on Sweers Island tree by MESSENGER crew members: 'N.A.E. 20th Nov. 1856'. Also inscribed was 'Karl Teats 1856'.

Nov. 23 - "... land on the shore three quarters of a mile north of them [the wells] under a Cliff which seemd to be composed of a material similar to pipe clay with reddish veins. Captain Devine and I walked some miles to the North passing over plains with silverleafed iron bark, Eucalyptus and a long but shallow gully filled with green grass moist soil and clumps of pandanus but we could find no water though we saw several cockatoos. We returned along the beach ... We picked up a plank carved with rosettes and other devices ... Also the bowsprit of a Chinese junk, a square balk 6 inches thick with carved work on its lower side and ornamental cap. We kept the long boat going between the vessel and the shore with heavy loads of wood all day."⁷⁶

"One of our largest water casks being gnawed through by rats, 400 gallons of water were lost. This rendered it necessary to shoot the horses and throw them overboard. They could not have been landed at the Albert ... and on Sweers there was no surface water for them to drink. Beside this, as there were no mares, no good purpose could have been answered. I had a pair of goats which I intended to leave, but the female unfortunately died. I planted cocoa-nuts in a variety of places on Sweers Island."⁷⁷ Whether the lone surviving goat was actually left on the island is not clear from this account.

1861:

Aug. 24 - Leaving Melbourne on August 4, the Victorian Colonial Warship VICTORIA and the FIREFLY (188 tons built in 1843) departed Brisbane for the Gulf of Carpentaria, carrying the William Landsborough search party⁷⁸ for the overdue Burke and Wills Expedition and to convey supplies for the search party led by Frederick Walker which was leaving overland from Rockhampton on the 25th August 1861.

Sept. 27 - The VICTORIA and FIREFLY anchored off Bountiful Island to catch turtle to make up for the provisions lost when the FIREFLY ran aground in the Sir Charles Hardy's Islands. "Eight were put on board in less than three hours and twelve more were turned over on their backs on shore. That night the grass was set alight to assist in catching turtles. In two days 126 turtles were caught weighing between 150 and 200 lbs."⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Baines Journal - ML FM4/1373

⁷⁷ Baines, T., 1857. Additional notes on the North Australian Expedition under Mr. A.C. Gregory. *Proc. R. Geogr. Soc. London* 2: 3-16. [ML 910.6 R]

⁷⁸ Consisting of W. Landsborough, G. Bourne, H.N. Campbell, W. Allison, W. Gleeson (cook), two native troopers and two aborigines (Charlie, Jemmy, Fisherman and Jacky).

⁷⁹ McInnes, A., 1985. The last Voyages of FIREFLY and Captain Kirby. *R.Hist. Soc. Qd. J.* 12: 264-282.

Sept. 29 - According to Diedrich Henne, Baron von Mueller's 26-year-old botanical assistant attached to the search party, the VICTORIA (Captain W.H. Norman) arrived at Investigator Road with the FIREFLY (Captain T. Kirby) in tow. "Our two transports the NATIVE LASS and the GRATIA with coal etc. had already arrived before us"⁸⁰ In his narrative of the voyage, Captain Kirby referred to the brig GRECIAN and the schooner NATIVE LASS (Master A. Paton) as having been chartered by the Victorian Government to "convey coals and stores for the use of the Government Steamer"⁸¹ In early July, the 105 schooner NATIVE LASS and the 190 ton brig GRATIA had been contracted to carry 300 tons of coal and 30 tons of provisions for the search expeditions.

"A land base for VICTORIA was formed on Sweers Island - a shed for stores and tents for one officer and three men. As coals were landed a party was employed cutting grass for the horses and another employed on building a turtle pond. It consisted of a stone wall 20 feet below low water mark to high water mark; many turtles died before the pond was completed."⁸²

Sep. 30 - "... This morning I accompanied Captain Norman and Dr. Patterson ashore to Sweers Island. On it we found fine young grass not above a few months old ... The island is of sandstone formation and the land is very sandy. The grasses on it are good. It is lightly timbered with the pandanus palm, oak trees (casuarina), stunted white gum, black figs, red plum and other trees. The fruit on the plum and fig trees, especially the former, are very nice ..."⁸³

"Mr. Campbell and self landed on Sweer's Island to cut grass for the horses; took our guns; grass plentiful. Saw many birds - such as bustards, pigeons, quail, pheasants, crows, native companions, etc. No surface water was found, but the dews at night are very heavy, more like rain than dew."⁸⁴

In the afternoon, Landsborough and Captain Norman also inspected the Island. Captain Norman reportedly "... found the old tree with their ship's name cut on it, looking quite healthy".⁸⁵ "MESSENGER is marked on another tree ..."⁸⁶

⁸⁰ Based on a translation of Henne's diary as reported 'Diedrich Henne, Botanical Collector' by W.T. Johnston (1970) in the Bulletins (No. 133 and 134) of the Historical Society, Cairns, North Queensland

⁸¹ Kirby, T., 1862. *Narrative of a voyage from Melbourne to the Gulf of Carpentaria*. Melbourne, at p. 12

⁸² Bourne, G., (Ed.), 1862. *Journal of Landsborough Expedition from Carpentaria, in search of Burke and Wills*, H.T. Dwight, Melbourne [ML 042 P520]

⁸³ W. Landsborough papers [OM 69.030]

⁸⁴ Bourne, op. cit.

⁸⁵ 'Report of Commander Norman of H.M.C.S. VICTORIA: together with a copy of his journal on the late expedition to the Gulf of Carpentaria'. 1862. Parliamentary Papers, Melbourne, p. 14

⁸⁶ W. Landsborough papers [OM 69.030]

Landsborough described Sweers Island as follows: "Bentinck Island is about thirty miles in circumference; Sweer's, only three: both are well grassed and wooded ... In the afternoon Captain Norman and I landed on Sweer's Island to reconnoitre, and more especially to discover the well, sunk there by Flinders. We found the wells, but they were choked with sand. We also came upon a tree on which INVESTIGATOR was carved, and the word was still quite legible, though cut so far back as 1802, probably by the hand of the unfortunate Flinders. Captain Norman determined to repair the wells, and to form near them a depot for his superfluous ship's stores. We then selected a place on the beach within the tidal line, for forming an enclosure for the turtles. Further inland we found the grass of good quality, and fit for cutting, a discovery which pleases us both, as the sheep we had on board could now have the advantage of grazing, and my horses that of fresh fodder, in which we were running short. For all practical purposes, Sweer's was preferable to Bentinck Island: on the simple ground that the latter was inhabited by hostile blacks, while the former is only visited by them at distant intervals. Their means of transit consists, not of canoes, but of rude rafts formed from logs tied together with strings of plaited bark."⁸⁷

Captain Kirby described Sweers Island as follows: "There are no large trees, those we saw being stunted in their growth, and of small size; we saw neither plants nor fruits. The soil is a dark loam of considerable depth, and, except on the beach, there is little or no sand; no animals were seen, but birds of the cockatoo, pheasant, and parrot tribe are abundant. There can be no doubt but that tropical fruits would grow most luxuriantly; and if the Albert River become ere long an important settlement, Sweer's Island must also be a place of much consequence. Fish are to be had in the greatest abundance, more especially codfish, weighing from seven to twenty pounds, and I see no good reason why a fishery of a remunerative character might not be established there. The natives are not numerous; they are mere Australian blacks, and are disposed, so far as I can judge, to be on friendly terms with Europeans. I could not ascertain that they belong to any tribe, neither would they appear to have either king or government. I have crossed the Island and seen most of the natives, and do not believe that they would be any serious obstacle to settlement. There is no appearance of volcanic action, neither would it seem to have ever been subject to earthquakes. It is but twenty miles distant from the mouth of the Albert River, and must ere long become an important place. Parties fit for the business, with moderate capital, who would occupy Sweer's Island would eventually do well."⁸⁸

Oct. 1 - "Landed early on Sweer's Island to shoot. Killed two cockatoos and a red-bill, which we ate for breakfast. No water found ... Saw tree with

⁸⁷ Laurie, J.S. (Editor) 'Landsborough's exploration of Australia from Carpentaria to Melbourne. J. Marshall and F. Laurie, London. pp. 9-10.

⁸⁸ Kirby (1862) pp. 10-11

'INVESTIGATOR, 1802' cut on it, besides other names."⁸⁹

The expedition party to establish a depot on the Albert arrived at the mouth of the river. Landsborough explored the river in the barge from the VICTORIA. On the Albert near the Barkly junction, a tributary approximately twenty six miles upstream, Landsborough and Norman found trees marked by Augustus Gregory in 1856 and by Lieutenant Chimmo of the survey ship TORCH.⁹⁰

Oct. 2 - "... Mr. Campbell and two blacks cutting grass."⁹¹

Oct. 3 - "Self and two black boys cutting grass on shore."⁹²

Oct. 4 - "Went on shore at 6 am to cut grass. 2 pm moved up to where turtle pond is being built. It is a ring, fenced with stone and timber, on the beach, including some water. The turtle are put in, and some of the seaweed on which they feed thrown in to them; they will live a long time in this way."⁹³

"Finished the turtle pond, and landed that were left alive, which occupied nearly the whole day. Fifty-seven is the number out into it, but two died, and two escaped."⁹⁴

Oct. 9 - "... The horses eat with avidity the grass which had been cut for them on Sweers Island. Mr. Bourne and 3 troopers remained ashore where they had been cutting grass."⁹⁵

Oct. 25 - "It has been reported to me that about thirty [blacks] have been seen on this, Sweer's Island, and are at its north end, where a lake has been seen by some of the rambles of the colliers."⁹⁶

Dec. 6 - Walker's relief expedition arrived at the FIREFLY depot. "Walker stayed fourteen days at the Albert River depot enjoying the hospitality and turtle soup of Commander Norman, together with fresh cress, onions, radishes, and sprouts which the Commander had thoughtfully planted on Sweer's Island."⁹⁷

Dec. 9 - "I took Mr. Walker on board, to procure a copy of his journal and a

⁸⁹ Bourne, op. cit.

⁹⁰ Pike (1978) p.91 erroneously refers to Chimmo's ship as the SANDFLY.

⁹¹ Bourne, op. cit.

⁹² Bourne, op. cit.

⁹³ Bourne, op. cit.

⁹⁴ Norman (1862), p. 14

⁹⁵ W. Landsborough papers [OM 69.030]

⁹⁶ 'Report of Commander Norman of H.M.C.S. VICTORIA, p. 17

⁹⁷ Clune, F., 1971. *Dig - The Burke & Wills Saga*, Angus & Robertson, Melbourne, at p. 146

tracing of his route; in the meantime we proceeded to Sweer's Island to obtain from the depot the stores necessary for his further use and returned with Walker to the depot on the 13th of December."⁹⁸

[Norman also maintained at least 7 sheep on Sweers Island - the first agricultural pursuits on the island. In addition, on arriving at Sweers Island, Norman built stone tanks below high water mark for 126 turtles which had been captured on Bountiful Island on arrival. Only 57 turtles survived the trip and tank construction. These early attempts at agriculture and mariculture in addition to the taking of wood for steamers and fires are likely the first European resource utilisation of Sweers Island of any consequence.]

Dec. 19 - "Through careless handling of Flochfeldt's revolver, Law (midshipman) shot himself through the leg. The discharge had gone through the thick flesh and has fortunately not touched any bone. I bound it for him with water bandages. The leg is much swollen."⁹⁹ [Flochfeldt,¹⁰⁰ also a German, was the storekeeper with Walker's party.]

Dec. 25 - Christmas dinner was held aboard the VICTORIA anchored in Investigators Road. Roast mutton and pudding were served together with porter.¹⁰¹

Dec. 26 - "Had this night again heavy thunderstorms and rain. I went out early and had a pretty successful trip. As I came back, a new accident took place. Mr. Frost cleaned our two guns, both of which were well loaded. One of the barrels went off, and the full charge went into his right side, and, if as Doctor Patterson believes, that shot has penetrated into the intestines, he could not be saved ... Captain Norman begged of me to undertake the nursing of Frost."¹⁰²

Dec. 31 - "This morning early about 5 o'clock poor Frost died, at the age of twenty eight years. A young man loved of the Captain and all the sailors. We buried him the same evening some distance from the camp, after the rites of the Church of England."¹⁰³

1862:

Jan. 30 - "I collected lately many seeds. The necessary notes I wrote on the respective tickets. On account of the infernal mosquitoes one cannot get an hour's rest at night. A miserable country here. I compare it with a convict

⁹⁸ Report of Commander Norman of H.M.C.S. VICTORIA, p. 4

⁹⁹ W.T. Johnston (1970)

¹⁰⁰ Clune (1971) p. 130 gives his name as "Horzfeldt, a German" while Norman (1862) p. 22 gives it as "John Horsfeldt, who is afflicted with fistula".

¹⁰¹ W.T. Johnston (1970)

¹⁰² W.T. Johnston (1970)

¹⁰³ W.T. Johnston (1970)

settlement. The VICTORIA takes in coals. Frost's grave is fenced in, and he got a neat grave stone ... A similar inscription has been cut into a tree nearby."¹⁰⁴ A sketch of the grave with its picket fence, drawn by a George Gordon McCrae around 1862 is in the National Library. It is annotated as 'after F.O. Handfield' - the mate of the VICTORIA.

Despite these difficulties, Henne made extensive seed, wood and plant collections on the island¹⁰⁵ and around the Albert River,¹⁰⁶ bringing back six cases of botanical specimens collected on the island to be deposited in the Melbourne herbarium.¹⁰⁷

Feb. 1 - "Since the rain, we have snakes in pretty large numbers, especially the harmless carpet snake: however, also one, I believe venomous species: they are short and plump, about eighteen inches long, and are brown and yellow banded, with blunt tail; also iguanos turn up."¹⁰⁸

Feb. 11 - "I packed my gear and went the following day on board. A dozen men tried to catch the sheep, which were, however, so wild, that only two were got which were shot."¹⁰⁹

Feb. 12 - "At 7am, I started over to Bentinck Island with the Galley's crew, taking with me the FIREFLY's old boat rigged, some tomahawks ..." ¹¹⁰

"Captain Norman made a present today to the natives of Bentinck Island, which was very valuable to them i.e. the FIREFLY with two oars, in gratitude for which these black devils tried to spear him. At two o'clock we left this lonely part of the world, and steered first to Bountiful Island, which we reached at seven in the morning."¹¹¹ This account by Henne is somewhat enigmatic - the 188 ton FIREFLY itself was abandoned in the Albert without ceremony, at a spot clearly shown in Surveyor George Phillips' field notes, and it was the FIREFLY's old boat fully rigged that was given to two male Aborigines.

1865:

June - Burketown became established as a commercial port with the arrival of the 115 ton schooner JACMEL PACKET (Captain Dawes), chartered and loaded by R. Towns & Co. from Sydney. She carried "... a wide assortment of

¹⁰⁴ W.T. Johnston (1970)

¹⁰⁵ Blake, S.T., 1968. A revision of *Melaleuca leucodendron* and its allies. *Contr. Qd. Herb. No. 1*, at p. 37 records *Melaleuca viridiflora* from Sweers Island

¹⁰⁶ Blake (1968) at p. 48 records *Melaleuca argentea* from the Albert River

¹⁰⁷ W.T. Johnston (1970)

¹⁰⁸ W.T. Johnston (1970)

¹⁰⁹ W.T. Johnston (1970)

¹¹⁰ 'Report of Commander Norman of H.M.C.S. VICTORIA, p. 27

¹¹¹ W.T. Johnston (1970)

cargo including pigs, dogs, fowls, houses and stores, drays and rations of rum and other spirits¹¹² to stock the newly established stations (such as Beames Brook and Floraville) in the Gulf country.

Sep. 1 - J.C. White, the police magistrate at Warwick, wrote to the Colonial Secretary,¹¹³ suggesting the establishment of a port on Sweers Island in conjunction with a convict settlement, as such a development " ... will materially tend to advance our progress, by its occupation of the intervening country and the extensions of our Squatters operations. It must not however be forgotten that unless a Port is opened for the reception of Supplies and Shipment of Produce, the newly formed Stations cannot possibly be rendered profitable as Land carriage is totally out of the question, and that fact alone precludes the idea of attempting Sheep Farming to any extent."

Nov. 11 - Ellis Read placed on-going advertisements on the front page of the 'Port Denison Times' to announce that he is establishing large stores at the Albert River.

Dec. 8 - POLICEMAN (Captain Till) departed for the Albert River from Bowen¹¹⁴ returning to Bowen with eight passengers on 8 April 1866.¹¹⁵

1866:

Jan. 22 - The schooner MARGARET-AND-MARY departed Bowen for the Albert River.¹¹⁶ Passengers include Mrs. and Miss Cassady, Mrs. O'Connor, Miss Kelly, Mr. Kelly, and 8 in the steerage.

Feb. - The MARGARET-AND-MARY arrives in the Albert bringing with it an epidemic known as 'Gulf Fever' - now thought to be malignant tertian malaria (*Plasmodium falcipartum*).¹¹⁷ Within a few days virtually the entire crew was dead and in no time, around 100 persons were recorded to have died.¹¹⁸ That the MARGARET-AND-MARY brought 'Gulf Fever' from Java is widely stated (e.g. Pike 1978) although the 'Port Denison Times' of January 17 states that the MARGARET-AND-MARY (Captain Smight) arrived in Bowen from Sydney on January 16 with one passenger - Mrs. Smight. She left "with a full general cargo for the Albert River consigned to Messr. J. O'Connor and Jas.

112 McInnes (1985) p. 279

113 T.C. White to Colonial Secretary: QSA Col/470 2298/1865

114 Port Denison Times, December 9, 1865

115 Port Denison Times, April 11, 1866

116 Port Denison Times, January 24, 1866

117 Fenner, F., 1990. *History of Microbiology in Australia*, Brolga Press, Curtin, ACT. See also Kettle, D.S., 1993. Insect-borne diseases - Australia truly the lucky country. *Proc. R. Soc. Qd.* **103**:17-25.

118 Pike, G., 1978. *Queensland frontier*, Rigby, Brisbane, at p. 174

Sutherland".¹¹⁹

Apr. 22 - Landsborough, as the first Police Magistrate for Burketown, and Lt. Uhr with eight troopers from the Queensland Native Mounted Police arrived in Burketown, having left Rockhampton on 22 December 1865. On arrival, "Mr. Uhr and I visited the township and learned that Mrs. Connor, the wife of one of the principal storekeepers was dead. Sixty people were sick and all who could were leaving the place".¹²⁰

Apr. 26 - ELLESMERE (Captain Lake) departed Bowen with 13 passengers for the Albert, including Ellis Read.¹²¹

Earnest Henry arrived in "Burketown and went to the only hotel, where he found six or seven men, all of whom he knew, amongst them Landsborough, the explorer, who had been appointed Government Resident, Police Magistrate, Collector of Customs, etc. Henry found that there had been a great deal of sickness, and some 25 persons had died within a very short time, and he thought there had never been more than 60 residents. Everyone who had been there any time looked pale and thin."¹²²

Landsborough arranged for the removal of most residents to Sweers Island aboard the MARGARET-AND-MARY. After watching the schooner weigh anchor, he and Earnest Henry departed for Sweers Island in the pilot boat accompanied by George "Phillips (the surveyor), Borthwick (sick) a coxswain, Spillings, a half-caste native of Canada, and a native of the west coast of Africa".¹²³ En route down the Albert River, they camped with J.G. MacDonald,¹²⁴ who was persuaded to accompany them to Sweers Island.

Apr. 28 - The schooner LILLY (Captain Ellis) left Bowen 'for the Albert with 15,000 feet sawn timber'.¹²⁵

¹¹⁹ Others such as Holder Cowl (not dated) have suggested that the ELLESMERE was responsible but this account was written several years after the event. It seems most likely that the crew of the MARGARET-AND-MARY were infected with malaria during a probable stay at Thursday Island enroute to the Albert River.

¹²⁰ W. Landsborough papers [OM 69.030]

¹²¹ Port Denison Times, April 28, 1866

¹²² George Phillips 1935. 'Earnest Henry. The discoverer, and principal prospector of the Cloncurry Mineral District of North-West Queensland.' Journ. Hist. Soc. Qd. 2:97-120 at p. 108.

¹²³ Papers of Earnest Henry held by Royal Historical Society of Queensland at p.154m.

¹²⁴ John Graham MacDonald had left Geelong in 1859 for Queensland to take up land before separation, taking up vast areas around the headwaters of the Einasleigh, Lynd and Burdekin Rivers. In 1863 MacDonald entered into partnership with Robert Towns (forming R. Towns & Co.) and in 1864, he led a small expedition to the Gregory River, then to the Nicholson, taking an areas of about one million acres, which were subsequently divided into stations, the first being Floraville. For details, see MacDonald, J.G., 1865. *Expedition from Port Denison to the Gulf of Carpentaria and Back*. George Slater, Brisbane.

¹²⁵ Port Denison Times, May 2, 1866

Apr. 30 - After an extremely rough passage, during which the surveyor lost all of his equipment, Landsborough's party arrived at Sweers Island "... about the middle of the day, at a spot where Landsborough came round in the VICTORIA ... 5 years previous to this time. There were the remains of an old turtle paddock, and a well with good water in it, though a little brackish. Here we made our camp."¹²⁶ On revisiting the Island after five years, Landsborough wrote "... it is as beautiful an island as I ever visited. It is about 6 miles long and wherever you go you cannot go far without seeing a beautiful beach, which invites a plunge - or a fine site for houses ... The country is high downs and a few fine trees with thick foliage".¹²⁷

Henry described the island as "... in the centre are some nice downs extending to the east side, but at the north and south ends there is a good deal of scrubby country."¹²⁸

May 1 - "... we landed near the northern end of Sweer's Island and walked to the eastern side and found what is put down in the chart as a lake - ascertained that it was a marine plain which would make a good racecourse ... The northern end as well as the southern end of Sweer's Island is rather thickly wooded. In the course of one walk we saw several pigeons, cockatoos and bustards. Although shy Mr. Henry succeeded in shooting some cockatoos and a bustard".¹²⁹

May 2 - "Mr. Henry walked round the southern end of the island. At a bay at the southern base of Mt. Inspection we saw 3 rafts. They were simply bundles of dry saplings ... In our absence 3 blacks paid our camp a visit ... They ran away on seeing Mr. Phillips ..."¹³⁰ Henry described the rafts as "... made of mangrove stems, the thick ends placed at the stern and the thin at the bows, both ends are lashed they are shaped something like a canoe, and the bottom filled with grass, but they must be half full of water when afloat, for there is nothing to prevent it coming in, they are very small and have but one paddle each, also made of mangrove stakes."¹³¹

May 3 - "This morning seven blacks came towards the camp ... On the northern end of the Island we saw some fine big trees near a dry water course. I daresay there is some surface water near there for we saw a great number of birds but I should not think it was permanent, as we saw a well now filled up that had been sunk by the blacks".¹³²

126 Papers of Earnest Henry held by Royal Historical Society of Queensland at p.155n.

127 W. Landsborough typed journal [OM 69.030]

128 Papers of Earnest Henry held by Royal Historical Society of Queensland at p.155n.

129 W. Landsborough typed journal [OM 69.030]

130 W. Landsborough typed journal [OM 69.030]

131 Papers of Earnest Henry held by Royal Historical Society of Queensland at p.156n.

132 W. Landsborough typed journal [OM 69.030]

May 6 - "As the vessel with the sick people had not made its appearance, Landsborough determined to go back to Burketown, L. wanted to leave a camp on Sweers I. and me to stop in charge, but as I was anxious to start back overland he took all hands. Started at daylight, after we had gone some 8 miles we sighted a sail behind us close to Sweers Island, so we returned and found it to be Macdonald's boat with some of his people, and some sick, they had come over thinking we would be out of provisions. They reported the vessel still at Burketown."¹³³

Writing to the Minister for Lands and Works, Landsborough¹³⁴ reported that "I have the honor to state that as Mr. J.G. Macdonald has informed me this evening that he starts tomorrow for Port Denison and has kindly promised to take any letters thither I take the opportunity of writing a few lines to you ... By the same opportunity I send a letter to His Excellency the Governor explaining my reasons for forming a settlement at this place. And as you have no doubt heard how unhealthy the season has been on the mainland I hope you will approve of my having done so ... This place I believe will always be one of the most healthy stations as it gets a fresh seabreeze from whatever direction it blows. But under any circumstances there should be a settlement at this place as there is no place better situated for being the main sea port of Carpentaria ... The Honorable Colonial Secretary kindly promised to send me a house similar with the exception of a few improvements to that which was built for the settlement at Cape York but it has not arrived. I hope however you will send it to me as soon as an opportunity occurs. Also a watchhouse ... I will go as regularly and as often as I can to the main land, At present I have to have an extra man occasionally as I have only the pilot, the coxswain and the constable and two of the native police. These 5 men have had the fever and only one or two of them are fit for a days work. I hope however that you will give me authority to engage additional men ... I have only been a week here and the stores etc have not yet arrived, I expect them by the schooner MARGARET-AND-MARY which has left the township formed by Mr. J.G. Macdonald on the Albert River for this place ..."

May 9 - The POLICEMAN departed Bowen for Cleveland Bay and the Albert with a general cargo.¹³⁵

May 11 - Lieutenant Uhr arranged a small boat, and that evening and sailed for Sweers Island with sick men and women, including 'Messrs Blakeney, Thompson, Ellis, Hardie, Davis, two black Troopers, Mrs. Blakeney and child, and one trooper's wife. Mr. Nestron and I had to manage the working of the boat.'¹³⁶ They arrived at the island the next day and Lieutenant Uhr returned to the Albert on 7 June.

¹³³ Papers of Earnest Henry held by Royal Historical Society of Queensland at p.156r.

¹³⁴ Landsborough to Minister for Lands and Works: QSA Col/A81/1977/1866; see also report of this data in Port Denison Times of 11 August 1866

¹³⁵ Port Denison Times, May 9, 1866

¹³⁶ Uhr ?

May 12 - "In the course of one walk we observed stone enclosures made on the beach where the rocks naturally assisted their formation but yet as the dikes were two feet high and are about a hundred yards in extent they must have been raised with considerable labour and I thought it not unlikely that they were made by a more industrious people than the aborigines generally are. They might have been made by the natives of Timor if they ever come here. These enclosures would always catch some fish and sometimes with a little trouble a great number might be caught in them."¹³⁷

May 16 - CITY OF MELBOURNE (Captain Robinson) departed Bowen for the Albert with a general cargo including "40 doors and 38,200 shingles."¹³⁸

May 26 - The schooner LILLY arrived at the Albert from Bowen and Landsborough purchased 25 sheep which were landed onto Sweers Island on the 30-31 May.¹³⁹

May 29 - Landsborough provided a general report on the Sweers Island settlement to the Colonial Secretary in Brisbane.¹⁴⁰ He reported that "... almost everyone was sick in this region and that I had (a month ago), employed the schooner the MARGARET-AND-MARY that was leaving here for Sydney to transport on her way hither the pilot, the constable and their wives with Government stores to Sweer's Island. Such however, was the sickness on board the schooner that although drawing but six feet of water she has only now succeeded in reaching the landing that is situated six miles from this place. The pilot having remained on board several weeks and finding no probability of shifting and in addition being unable to render any assistance from sickness availed himself ... of the kind offer of Mr Macdonalds boat to transport himself and a number of other sick people to Sweer's Island. I regret to say that some of them were very weak. The pilots wife, Mrs Blakeney had to be carried on shore. Shortly after the arrival of the boat on the island, there was a squally night (a very unusual circumstance I believe for that region) and as it was not sufficiently moored it was driven on shore and received damage amounting to about ten pounds. It is my painful duty to report the death of Mrs Williams the wife of the Constable. She died on board the MARGARET-AND-MARY under very distressing circumstances having none but sick people to attend upon her. Her death struck people more as from her healthy blooming appearance a short time previously she was the last person of whom anyone would entertained any misgivings. She was much respected as she had kindly tended on many sick people. Her husband buried her at this place and is now very sick himself and cannot at present go with me to Sweer's Island.

137 W. Landsborough typed journal [OM 69.030]

138 Port Denison Times, May 16, 1866

139 W. Landsborough typed journal [OM 69.030]

140 QSA Col/A82/2175/1866

From the pilot the coxswain and constable not having sent in their vouchers they have been without pay since leaving Brisbane. I have been unable to assist them in this matter since I came for in the hurry of leaving for Sweer's Island the package of stationery (and other things as well) was put on board the schooner unbroken. The flour that was sent by the schooner the POLICEMAN, for the constabulary and native police force was very much damaged on board. This is very unfortunate especially as the constabulary and native police are compelled to use it.

I believe that I am correct in stating that the whole of the surveyors party, the constabulary and the native police force without exception each have suffered more or less from the new settlement fever or from fever and ague. I however hope that although many of them are incapable for duty that none of them are dangerously ill. Among the residents on the Albert, sickness is still prevalent. Up to the present time as many as 27 cases have terminated fatally, which is calculated by one of the oldest residents to be one in every five! The people are still dying but there is every probability that there will be few fresh cases likely to terminate fatally. It is said that people are not now apt to catch any worse disorder than fever and ague but that I believe even is a horrible complaint more especially when there is no quinine or any other equally potent medicine to stay its progress. One would suppose that the country would be healthy now. The nights are delightfully cool, apparently more so than I have felt them at this season as far south as Rockhampton. The country is very dry, without hardly a wet swamp anywhere and hardly any mosquitoes have been seen for some months. Any residents that have spoken to me on the subject of the settlement of Sweer's Island approve of it as the depot for the supplying of the future townships of the mainland and speak of it as likely to be a great place eventually as it presents the only anchorage for vessel of any size in the Gulf.

I should therefore recommend that a township be at once surveyed there.

The people are also anxious that sites for townships should be fixed on the mainland. This I consider would be premature until Capt. Nares makes a survey of the rivers ... The residents in favour of having a township at this place that they have chosen say it is as healthy as any place within 50 miles on the mainland. I am not prepared to say that such is not the case at present. But I think there can be little doubt that such will not be the case when the country is stocked - which will soon be the case as this is one of the finest pastoral districts in Australia - again much of the sickness has its origin from the people and more generally using food that requires much colder air than we hitherto had and much harder work than we are inclined to take to enable us to digest it.

Until lately fresh meat could seldom be obtained, but I am glad to say that sheep can now be purchased - the price of the sheep like everything else here

is very high. I purchased lately 25 at 18/- a head and they will cost me at least six shillings a head to get them taken at present to Sweer's Island.

Allow me to give you the price asked for certain stores. The most of which I have purchased at the following rates and have been even told that they have been sold to me for a less rate than that charged to the public. Salt beef - 5d a pound, Flour - 6d, Tea - 5/-, Sugar - 9d, Rice - 6d, Shelled peas - 1/-, Dried apple - 1/-, Negrohead Tobacco - 12/-, 2lb tins of carrots - 5/- each, Double width inferior cakes - 3/6 a yard, Blucher boots - 17/6 a pair, Handsaws, inferior - 13/-. Other things not so commonly required at much decrease in rates.

Mr Wentworth Uhr is a very zealous officer and as his pay is very low for this region I have the honour to recommend that he should be promoted. The LILLY a small schooner has arrived, she is a tender of the ELLESMERE. Her Commander expects to meet the ELLESMERE in a few days at Sweer's Island.

I put up a flagstaff on the top of Inspection Hill, which is 105 feet high with the idea that if a vessel came in sight of it the Commander of it would be led to suppose that there was a settlement on the island..."

Jun. 4 - "The ELLESMERE arrived. I was glad that Mr. Reid [Read] liked the Island, and was glad that I had formed a settlement upon it. He said he would have a receiving store erected at this place."¹⁴¹

Jun. 6 - The RESTLESS departed Bowen for the Albert "...nearly empty."¹⁴²

Jun. 8 - "The CITY OF MELBOURNE commenced discharging cargo."¹⁴³

Jul. 11 - First reports of poor health and outbreaks of fever are reported in the 'Port Denison Times' via the POLICEMAN, LILLY and ELLESMERE.

Jul. 14 - The RESTLESS arrived bringing papers and other cargo from Bowen.¹⁴⁴

Jul. 19 - Surveyor Phillips wrote to A.C. Gregory, now the Government Surveyor, from Sweers Island to report that "I have the honor to inform you that I have commenced to cut up a portion of Sweer's Island into town and Suburban Allotments. There is a general opinion here that the land will bring a good price. You will see by my last report of the 11th June that a period of some six weeks has elapsed since I last started to perform my present work - the whole of that time I was laid up with fever - and besides having returned to Burketown to procure a fresh supply of rations, tools tents etc. No earlier

¹⁴¹ W. Landsborough typed journal [OM 69.030]

¹⁴² Port Denison Times, June 6, 1866

¹⁴³ W. Landsborough typed journal [OM 69.030]

¹⁴⁴ W. Landsborough typed journal [OM 69.030]

opportunity of returning offered. As only two of my old hands remained with me, one of whom is now in a very dangerous state, I was obliged to employ two men, one on a/c of his still being very weak consented to work for the wages allowed, the other I was obliged to engage at 35/- per week with rations. This is pretty reasonable - when labouring men are requiring one pound per day for their work."¹⁴⁵

As a result of the outbreak, Sweers Island virtually replaced Burketown as the official government centre with all vessels trading to the Gulf region calling at Carnarvon, which was laid out and surveyed during 19 July to mid-August 1866 by the Engineer in Charge of Surveys, George Phillips. However, Burketown was not entirely deserted as the Port Denison Times (29/8/1866) carried a long report on the Albert, including a race meeting held 24-25 July presided over by William Landsborough, who had returned from Sweers Island on 23 July.

Aug. 8 - Frederick Robert Mueller (alias Walters), a carpenter, died and was buried on Sweers Island of 'Typhus Fever', according to the informant 'T. Blakeney, Custom House Officer, Sweer's Island'.¹⁴⁶ On the death certificates of his two eldest children, his occupation is given as 'surveyor' and 'government surveyor',¹⁴⁷ suggesting he was the assistant to Phillips in laying out Carnarvon.

Aug. 29 - Ellis Read's advertisement for his stores on the front page of the 'Port Denison Times' first stated "Albert River and Sweer's Island".

Sep. 3 - Writing to the Governor this day,¹⁴⁸ Landsborough claimed that "This township on Sweers' Island is fast becoming a place of considerable importance. The harbour is found so convenient that for some time back there has been always a few vessels in it, either discharging cargo, waiting for loading from the mainland, or getting water or ballast ... This place having a good port for loading and discharging cargo, and having, I believe, the best climate in this part of the world, will, I imagine, have a good chance of becoming one of the places of the greatest importance in Australia. Coming down from my high flight of vision allow me to remark that fishing is attended with considerable success. A garden, commenced by Messrs. Ellis Read and Co., promise well. Sheep and other kinds of stock do well. There are no native dogs, and ... the island therefore may become valuable for sheep runs ... I recommended, therefore, Mr. Phillips to survey a township on the land adjoining Investigator Roads. He has done so, and now leaves to survey, at my request, a township on the eastern bank of the Leichhardt River ... In the last few days the schooners CAROLINE and LILLY arrived; the former

¹⁴⁵ Letters by G. Phillips, 11 June 1866 - 2 Oct. 1867. Manuscript collection held by the Royal Historical Society of Queensland.

¹⁴⁶ Death certificate extracted 14 June 1983

¹⁴⁷ Pers. comm. Laurie Gaffney 21/10/91

¹⁴⁸ Port Denison Times, December 1, 1866

from Bowen, the latter from Burke Town ... The LILLY regularly plies between this place and Burke Town. I am glad to say Messrs. Ellis Read and Co. have resolved upon getting a steamer to supersede her."

Sep. 8 - A report from Ellis Read¹⁴⁹ stated that "There has been a Township surveyed on Sweer's Island to be called Stokes Town. This has given great satisfaction, and it is intended to make application to the government to make it a free port. If this be done, from the magnificent commercial site of Sweer's Island, we have no doubt Stokes Town will ere long rival Singapore."

Sep. 20 - On this day,¹⁵⁰ the 'Burke Town Correspondent' reported that "... Good men who are enjoying health here will communicate with their friends in the interior, and thus the truth regarding the Gulf climate will become known. Is it because the first season after a new country has been opened is unhealthy that every succeeding season must follow suit? Should such be the case this township will be deserted as completely as Port Essington was formerly.

The Surveyor has just completed surveying a township on Sweer's Island, and a bonded store, a large receiving store, and several private villas are already in course of erection. That a wealthy and valuable city must before long arise on the island cannot for a moment be doubted by any who have any knowledge of the Gulf country.

We are informed by the best authorities that Investigator's Roads - lying between Sweer's and Bentinck Island - are capable of affording safe anchorage ground for the mercantile marine of the whole world, and Norman, when camped at this island while engaged in the Burke Search Expedition, gives an opinion, which is the more valuable as he resided there during a different monsoon to that experienced by Stokes, yet he coincides in the opinion given both by Stokes and Flinders that the roadstead is capable of affording good holding ground for a large fleet, and is magnificently sheltered from every wind. The island, therefore, being placed in such advantageous proximity must become the entrepôt for the trade and commerce of the whole of Queensland, or rather of the whole of Australia. The scenery is very picturesque, and the heat of the tropical summer, modified by delightful sea breezes, renders it a charming retreat for the invalid. Thus our nabobs, evidently with a dread of the return of grim fever, are preparing snug little nests to which they can fly on the first alarm of his approach."

Nov. - The schooner CAROLINE left Sweers Island for southern ports and was, according to some sources, not seen again.¹⁵¹ However, "the schooner CAROLINE left Burketown on 16 November 1866 with bales of wool, and ...

149 Port Denison Times, September 8, 1866

150 Port Denison Times, October 20, 1866

151 Loney, J., 1983. *Wrecks on the Queensland Coast. Vol. 1 791-1900*, p. 37

did not reach Bowen until the 19th [January 1867], after a voyage of two months around the Gulf".¹⁵²

[During this period, Sweers Island vegetation would have undergone significant changes as all kinds of stock were introduced to the island as well as human habitation and its associated removal of trees for fuel and timber. During 1866, R. Towns sent consignments worth £218/2/9 to Ellis Read, the Sweers Island storekeeper.¹⁵³]

Dec. 7 - George F. Sandrock succeeds William Landsborough as sub-collector of customs.¹⁵⁴

1867:

Jan. 5 - The SALAMANDER left Bowen for the Albert with "Messrs. Ellis, Read, Sandrock and Rawlings".¹⁵⁵

Apr. 2 - "The mail has brought out word of the sale of land on Sweer's Island - the town is to be Carnarvon - the allotments are principally 1/2 acres = upset price £8/- per acre. Sale to be held here on the 2nd April next. I think the land will go cheap - there'll be but little competition for it ... I believe that there is a great future for the town of Carnarvon."¹⁵⁶

Apr. 17 - In an article of this date, 'a voice from Carnarvon' reports that "... the two prisoners who escaped from Sweers Island have been re-captured. The Native Police being the greater part of their time in the bush, we are left without constabulary¹⁵⁷ ... The land sale in Burke Town passed off well; all lots were sold - consisting of 88 allotments, all that were surveyed on the Island. This Island will prove before any distant date a place of great importance; it is the only port where a vessel can get safe anchorage in the Gulf; it affords many benefits to people on the main land, as well as to ships at sea. Any party on the main land feeling unwell has only got to avail himself of a trip to Sweers Island, where he can have his health quickly restored.

Our gardens on the Island give us an over abundant supply of vegetables, and

¹⁵² Pike, p. 201; Port Denison Times 19 January 1867

¹⁵³ ML MSS 1279/12 item 4

¹⁵⁴ From the lists of Queensland Government employees published in the annual 'Blue Books'.

¹⁵⁵ Port Denison Times, January 5, 1867

¹⁵⁶ Letter to Shepherd Smith Esq. dated 20 Feb. 1867 in Burketown. Letters by G. Phillips, 11 June 1866-2 Oct. 1867. Manuscript collection held by the Royal Historical Society of Queensland.

¹⁵⁷ This is a reference to a prisoner named Duffey, who had been sent to Sweers Island where he joined forces with one Williamson, charged with the wilful murder of Charles Molloy. They escaped in a stolen boat in late February, and Lieutenant Uhr gave chase, recapturing both prisoners on 12 March 1867, some 420 miles from Burketown. (Uhr, Xxxx).

we are longing to see the ELLESMERE so that the passengers may get a feed of them - what, I am sure, they have not seen for some time. I have seen a few gardens - but a garden on Sweers Island, formed by two gentlemen, excels anything I have ever seen; out of one small corner we gathered I should say one hundred and ninety mellons, the most of them equal in circumference to a bucket; the reason we gathered so many was, my friends being about to start for the Bynoe, we wanted some to take on the expedition. Bananas and pine apples are not quite so plentiful; the cherry and black currant trees have not done so well as we expected.

Our Custom House officer appears to be beginning to understand his duties a little better; the Custom House is in course of erection. The Commissioner of Crown Lands is busily engaged on the Island erecting a pleasure yacht; he anticipates trading between the neighbouring Islands. Our Police Magistrate is very popular and well liked. Mr. Landsborough has through his energies had the Norman and Bynoe looked into, and we all have much to thank him for; the report of his two children being dead and his wife unwell is false - it has no foundation whatever."¹⁵⁸

Jul. 29 - The CAPTAIN COOK, Captain Brodie, departed Bowen for Sweers Island.¹⁵⁹

The names of many of the families associated with the settlement of Carnarvon are recorded on the 'Plan of Town of Carnarvon and Suburban Allotments - Sweers Island' the coloured original of which is in the Sunmap Cadastral Map Section. This survey map delineates the location of the 'Sweers Island' tree and the grave of Gunner Frost. It also reveals that Donald McLennan, the publican of Carnarvon, whose gravestone dated 4 February 1876, still exists on Sweers Island, was one of the original settlers, having both a town lot and a 3 acre suburban allotment. William Landsborough also owned a suburban block, and a town allotment is under his wife's name.¹⁶⁰

The purchasers of Town allotments were:

F. Adam	P. Armstrong	R. Back
W. Beakem	C. Bradley	F. Braizie
J.B. Brodie	T. Brodie	E. H. Buchanan
J.E. Byrne	G.S. Caird	M.A. Campbell
J. Cassady	G.E. Dalrymple	A.C. Doutty
P. Driscal	E.R. Edkins	H.J. Edkins
R. Ellis	O. Ethridge	J.R. Ferguson
J. Frazer	R. Garrie	C. Garry
J. Hardie	A.S. Holmes	H. Hooley
A. Kirkpatrick	J. Lalor	C.H. Landsborough

¹⁵⁸ Port Denison Times, May 18, 1867

¹⁵⁹ Port Denison Times, August 3, 1867

¹⁶⁰ Landsborough's wife and two children had joined him, and a third child, a daughter named Sweersena, was born on the island

G. Longstaff	A.G. Manson	W.A. McDonald
D. McLennan	H. McRead	G. Mecham
T.E.H. Meier	J. Moore	M. Moloney
R.R. Morissett	R. Morton	G.W. Nathan
C. Palmer	G. Phillips	R. Rannin
E. Read	L. Read	N. Renstrom
A. Rowling	G. Sargeant	J.P. Sharkey
H.A.T. Sharkey	J. Strew	B. Swan
A.B. Thomas	G.A. Tissington	R. Towns
J. Travers	E.K. Uhr	W.D.A. Uhr

The purchasers of Suburban allotments included:

J.A. Bradley	G.S. Caird	M. Campbell
A.C. Doutty	J. Hardie	W. Landsborough
D. McLennan	F.J. McLennan	J. O'Connor
E. Read	N. Renstrom	J. Travers
W.D. Uhr	C. Hutton	M. Wood

Aug. 22 - Captain Francis Cadell of the Screw Steamer EAGLE (200 tons) had been commissioned by the South Australian Government to explore in detail the rivers of the Gulf of Carpentaria and Arnhem Land, and he departed Sydney on April 2, 1867 accompanied by the steam tender FIRE FLY.¹⁶¹ Arriving off Sweers Island on the 22nd August, the Island is described by the EAGLE's carpenter as "... the headquarters of the Gulph Settlements. Mr. Sandrock the Collector of Customs and Mr. Landsburgh the Explorer he is the Police Magistrate for the settlement. We had a visit from some of the people they a bottle or two with them to treat the Ships Crew. They seem a good drinking lot in this part. The Settlers are chiefly from Brisbane, Rockhampton and Port Denison. The people on the Island looked very healthy. It is the watering place for Burke Town. There is some new looking houses. They were mostly sent from Brisbane. It belongs to the Queensland Government and still they want to take from N.S.Wales the Clarence and Richmond Rivers but the Home Government told the Queensland people they had the largest tract of country - next day we sailed for the Albert River"¹⁶²

The brothers T.A. and Benjamin Gulliver, on instructions from Baron F. von Mueller, travelled aboard the EAGLE and collected plants for him around Sweers Island, the Gilbert, Norman and Flinders Rivers in the Gulf of Carpentaria and at Caledon Bay. "Specimens collected on this voyage were sent to von Mueller and cited by George Benthams in his 'Flora Australiensis'. Among the specimens collected on this journey was *Ectrosia gulliveri* named by von Mueller, and the curious 'love grass' *Heterachne gulliveri* named by

¹⁶¹ Like its earlier namesake, the steam tender FIRE FLY sank in the waters of the Gulf of Carpentaria (as a result of a collision with the EAGLE).

¹⁶² Account of a voyage to Adams Bay in SS EAGLE Capt. Cadell by Dugald Robinson, Carpenter. [OM 67.018] at p. 74

Bentham in their honour and now proven to be a fine pasture grass."¹⁶³

Writing to the *Queenslander*,¹⁶⁴ B.J. Gulliver reported that "... during the two days we stayed there I made some botanical excursions on the island, securing, amongst others, a specimen of a rare and peculiar red-flowering lily."

[There is an intriguing announcement in the 'Port Denison Times' of 22/9/1906 that "T.A. Gulliver, Manager Post & Telegraph Office, Townsville" is engaged to Miss A. Allport of Hobart. Same person?]

Also aboard the *EAGLE* was Francis Napier, a pioneer designer of steamships, who was interested in the performance of steamers in coastal exploration. His journal prepared by James R. Napier in 1875, records that on 22 August "Sweer's Island ... is the seaport of Bourke Town ... On the west side of the island is Flinder's Fig-Tree, on which are cut in large letters up the stem, INVESTIGATOR, 1802. Stokes and other explorers who visited the island about twenty years ago have added their names. It appeared to me that these latter names looked as old as those cut by Flinders sixty-four years ago. The tree is about twenty feet high, and not eighteen inches in diameter, and some of the letters are seven or eight inches long, so that it must have grown very little since the beginning of the century. The mornings are sometimes so cold that one morning lately, as Mr. Landsborough informed me, he had drawn water from a creek at a temperature of 46°."¹⁶⁵

While at the Albert River the crew of the *EAGLE* "... met the *PIONEER* from Burke Town bound to Sweers Island. She was manned by South Sea Islanders."¹⁶⁶ Meanwhile, Captain Cadell was comfortably settled into the bar of a hotel to draft his interim report to the South Australian Government.

Aug. 24 - R. Towns & Co. and J.G. MacDonald & Co. first advertised in the 'Port Denison Times' to export wool and other products from Sweers Island direct to Singapore and Mauritius on the *PIONEER*.

Sep. 2 - Returning to Sweers Island on the 1st September, Robinson reported that "... the schooner *CAPTAIN COOK* had arrived from Sydney with general stores" and that they "sailed from Sweers Island about the 2nd of September 1867 for the westward".¹⁶⁷

¹⁶³ Australian Botanists. Manuscript in ANL [ANL -RAS 581.0922 A 938 Vol. 2 - unpag.]

¹⁶⁴ The *Queenslander*, 16 November 1889 at p. 927

¹⁶⁵ Napier, J.R., 1976. *Notes of a Voyage from New South Wales to the North Coast of Australia from the Journal of the late Francis Napier*. James R. Napier, Glasgow, at pp. 63-64.

¹⁶⁶ OM 67.018 p. 76

¹⁶⁷ OM 67.018 p. 80

1868:

Jan. 1 - Henry Baker¹⁶⁸ was appointed as 'tidewaiter and locker' with the customs service, joining a coxwain and 2 boatmen under the sub-collector.

Jan. 20 - H.M. cutter DUKE OF YORK departed Bowen for Sweers Island.¹⁶⁹

Jan. 21 - The CAPTAIN COOK departed Bowen for Sweers Island.¹⁷⁰

Feb. 12 - The ELLESMERE arrived in Bowen from Sweers Island with Mr. and Mrs. Sharkey, Miss Crutch, Messr. Wheelan and Hughes.¹⁷¹ The ELLESMERE had brought a full cargo of wool from the Leichhardt and Norman Rivers. Enroute, it fell into company with the ketch EDITH, also from Sweers Island in the Claremont Group.

Feb. 17 - Surveyor Phillips wrote from Sweers Island to A.C. Gregory, seeking "permission to leave this district and proceed to Brisbane in order to obtain medical advice"¹⁷² for a severe inflammation of his right eye which had been causing problems for nearly a year. Permission was granted and Phillips returned to Brisbane by 4 November 1868. He became well respected in the surveying and engineering professions, and held the Gulf seat of Carpentaria in the Legislative Assembly between 1893 and 1896.¹⁷³

Apr. 27 - "A land sale was held here [Burketown] today, and out of all the lots offered only one-half were purchased, and no more than two of those went over upset price, £3 per acre, and all on that delightful spot Sweer's Island, so this alone will give you an idea of the state of Burke Town."¹⁷⁴

May - Settlers from Sweers Island settled on the site of a new township on the Norman River laid out by William Landsborough and Surveyor George Phillips in January. Early settlers included Dr. Borck, A. McLennan, hotelkeeper; Ellis Read, Peter Armstrong, David Swan, Charles B. Hely and John Edgar Byrne. In a short time, Normanton outgrew Burketown. The Norman River was full of crocodiles and at least one kanaka was taken while unloading one of Town's vessels, the PIONEER, at the river bank.¹⁷⁵

¹⁶⁸ From the lists of Queensland Government employees published in the annual 'Blue Books'.

¹⁶⁹ Port Denison Times, January 25, 1868

¹⁷⁰ Port Denison Times, January 25, 1868

¹⁷¹ Port Denison Times, February 15, 1868

¹⁷² Letters by G. Phillips, 31 Oct. 1867 - 18 Jan. 1869. Manuscript collection held by the Royal Historical Society of Queensland.

¹⁷³ Hutchison, R., 1988. Matthew Flinders. In: *In the steps of our forefathers*, Institution of Surveyors, Brisbane, pp. 49-51.

¹⁷⁴ Port Denison Times, June 20, 1868

¹⁷⁵ Port Denison Times, June 5, 1869

May 2 - Ellis Read's advertisement for his stores on the Albert and Sweers Island appeared for the last time on the front page of the 'Port Denison Times'.

Aug. 12 - J.G. Macdonald, Esq. J.P. arrived in Burketown after his overland trip from Bowen, which formed part of his tour of inspection of their extensive pastoral holdings. He was accompanied by the Hon. John Robertson, M.P. and Mr. Garrett, M.P. They were to visit the towns of Burke, Carnarvon and Norman and at each locality, they were invited to public dinners.

Aug. 15 - After a dinner held at Burketown, chaired by Landsborough, Macdonald sailed for Sweers Island aboard the PIONEER arriving on the island the next day. The PIONEER had been employed ferrying goods between Burketown and Sweers Island since late 1867.

Aug. 16 - The banquet in honour of J.G. Macdonald was held at the Alhambra Hotel. This public dinner "... provided by Mr. Gorry ..." was attended by William Landsborough and G.F. Sandrock, Collector of Customs, together with thirty guests.¹⁷⁶ The dinner, "... which was an extremely good one, and excellently prepared under the superintendence of the hostess, having been disposed of, and the usual loyal toasts done due honour to, the chairman [Landsborough] proposed the health of the guests, dwelling particularly on the advantage the district would reap from their visit, especially that of Mr. Robertson, whose large experience in pastoral matters would give great value to his opinions as to the character and capabilities of the country. He also said that they could not do too much honour to Mr. MacDonald, whose services as an explorer and pioneer squatter had been of inestimable advantage to the settlement of the Carpentaria country.

Mr. Robertson, in responding, said from his examination of the country he felt justified in declaring it 'first-class pastoral'. The great difficulty to contend with was the scarcity and high price of labour. This could, however, be overcome by adopting the paddocking of sheep, which he was so convinced was safely practicable that their firm had decided to adopt it at once. He thought also that labour more suitable to the climate than European would flow into the country from China, and other densely peopled places which were within a short distance of the Gulf, and thus the country would prosper. He had every confidence in the future greatness of the Gulf.

Mr. MacDonald thanked the company for the compliment they had paid him. He was more firmly convinced than ever of the great capabilities of the Gulf country, the only drawback being the high price of labour, which would, however, he thought, be removed by the means alluded to by Mr. Robertson.

¹⁷⁶ G.P., 1954. *Early Settlement in the Gulf Country. Cummins & Campbell's Monthly Magazine (July 1954)* pp. 5, 37 and 39-40.

Mr. Garrett acknowledged the toast as a compliment to him simply as the friend and companion in their trip of Messrs. Robertson and MacDonald. Referring to the remarks as to the scarcity of labour and its cure, he hoped to see the country settled by people of their own nationalities and aspirations. The known mineral wealth of the Gulf would, he predicted, shortly attract a large European population. The progress already made in the settlement of the country was surprising, and unexampled in the colonies.

Mr. Robertson having proposed the health of the chairman, which was suitably acknowledged, the health of Capt. Towns, Mr. Ellis Read, Mr. Sharkey, the Vice-chairman, Capt. Swan (of the PIONEER), and others were drunk, and the proceedings, which were exceedingly pleasant and instructive, concluded."¹⁷⁷

J.G. MacDonald reported to the 'Port Denison Times' that " ... we were delayed upon Sweer's Island waiting the arrival of the brig GOVERNOR, then daily expected from Sydney; on the 20th the brig hove in sight, but when within little over a mile from her destination she struck upon a reef, and up to the time of their leaving had not been got off; the cargo was being discharged; visited the ship and found a number of passengers on board, amongst others Captain Edwards and Lieut. Coward, N M P, with some black troopers and white police. This brig was intended to be made a receiving vessel at Sweer's Island, and such an arrangement would have greatly facilitated trade, but it is doubtful whether the vessel will now answer the purpose after the injury she has received. The GOVERNOR belonged to Messr. Towns and Co., and was uninsured. It is to be hoped this mishap will not prevent them from sending another one in her place. The weather at the Gulf is reported as quite cold. On the homeward journey returned to the Norman on the 25th ..."¹⁷⁸

The GOVERNOR, a vessel of 147 tons and built in 1843, was to be employed at Sweers Island as a store ship for transhipment of wool to vessels bound from Sydney to London.¹⁷⁹

"A sketch of the INVESTIGATOR tree was drawn by S.G. MacDonald on his visit to Sweers Island in 1868. It was still alive and the name 'INVESTIGATOR' and date 1803 were quite legible."¹⁸⁰

Aug. 25 - The CAPTAIN COOK departed Bowen for Sweers Island.¹⁸¹

Sep. 17 - From the records required to be provided under *The Polynesian Labourers Act 1868 (Qld.)*, 150 South Sea Island labourers ('kanakas') were landed on Sweers Island from the 132 ton schooner SPUNKIE (Captain John

¹⁷⁷ Port Denison Times, September 12, 1868

¹⁷⁸ Report by MacDonald in Port Denison Times, September 12, 1868

¹⁷⁹ Loney, J., 1983. *Wrecks on the Queensland Coast. Vol. 1: 1791-1900*, at p. 39

¹⁸⁰ Hutchison (1988) p.50 is almost certainly a misspelling of J.G. Macdonald

¹⁸¹ Port Denison Times, August 29, 1868

Rees; Recruiting Agent H.H. Hunter) on this day.¹⁸² Few remained on the island, with most going to Burketown (E.R. Edkins) and Floraville (J.G. MacDonald) within days of their arrival.

LEICHHARDT shipped wool at Sweers Island.¹⁸³

Oct. - R. Towns & Co. were reported to be establishing regular communications between Sweers Island and Batavia. The barque XULA loaded wool and tallow at Sweers Island direct for London. Captain Till, in the schooner CLARA, loaded wool, tallow, hides and skin.¹⁸⁴

Nov. - Robert Towns purchased land on Sweers Island to establish a permanent warehouse.

Nov. 30 - In a report of this date to the 'Port Denison Times',¹⁸⁵ everything at Sweers Island "... has taken a change for the better. The barque MELANIE has arrived from the Straits, and will start from here about the 5th or 6th of December southward. Captain Edwards and Mr. Landsborough, P.M., will be passengers by her. Their absence will be greatly felt, as both of them have a large interest in the district in general. Our P.M. will be much missed by our neighbours up at Burke Town, there being no J.P. attached to the police district of that place. A case of importance to the public and publicans will be tried at the Police Office, Norman, the next court day. Mr. O'Dowd,¹⁸⁶ who has kept a hotel for some time past, has been summoned for selling grog without a license. It appears that he had applied for a license at Burke Town in September last. It was not granted at the time in consequence of there not being sufficient magistrates; in the mean time the licensing meeting was adjourned to the 30th November, when his license was granted. Why not summons him to appear at Burke Town, which is the nearest Police Office, being only 65 miles from here, instead of putting him to the inconvenience of proceeding to the Norman, which is over 170 miles. Another fact is that Sweer's Island is not included in either of the Police Districts. It is probable that a verdict will be given against him, and perhaps his license taken away. The people here doubt if it is in the power of the magistrates at the Norman to try the case ... A dinner will be given tonight to Mr. W. Landsborough, his friends and enemies at last all joining to testify their respect to him ... The dinner will take place at the Prince of Wales, where the Hon. John Robertson created quite a furore in consequence of catching the blight in looking for the swamp that was supposed to exist ... The dinner came off at eight o'clock. About thirty gentlemen sat down ... After the usual loyal toasts had been

¹⁸² Holthouse, H., 1970. *Cannibal Cargoes*, Seal Books, Brisbane, at p. 41; QSA ref. CPS 14C/15

¹⁸³ Papers of Earnest Henry the explorer [OM 7716]

¹⁸⁴ Port Denison Times, October 10, 1868

¹⁸⁵ Port Denison Times, January 16, 1869

¹⁸⁶ James O'Dowd, born in Ireland about 1841, came to Australia and married Janet Fraser on Sweers Island around this time.

disposed of, Mr. E. R. Edkins, the chairman, proposed the health of the guest of the evening, and commented on the many services rendered to the colony by Mr. Landsborough as an explorer. The health was drunk with great applause. Mr. Landsborough on rising to respond was greeted with cheers. He thanked the company for the kindness they had exhibited towards him during his stay, and said that he would be away for a short time and hoped on his return to find everything prosperous. He dwelt on the pastoral capacities of the district, predicting a brilliant future in store for Carpentaria, and considered the time not distant when we would have a government of our own, and Burke Town, to all appearances, would be the capital, having every facility for a large town, plenty of grass and water, within a few hours sail of Sweer's Island, which was destined by nature to be the emporium of Australia ... We hail with delight the interesting intelligence that has come to hand by the last mail that a steamer is going to be laid on direct from Sydney to the island; also that there is another small steamer to replace the PIONEER. It is rumoured that this town was brought under the notice of Messrs. R. Towns and Co. by Mr. Ellis Read, who is connected with that firm and also has a vast interest amongst us."

By the end of the year, " ... at the township of Carnarvon on Sweers Island ... all had deserted but the Government officials and their families and one Chinaman. Shipowners, skippers and consignees, finding that the retention of the Customs House and other government offices on Sweers Island was an inconvenience to them, hoped that the government would remove those offices."¹⁸⁷ This would seem to be justified when the shipping returns for Sweers Island¹⁸⁸ are considered: arrivals from NSW and South Sea Islands: 8 vessels, 1307 tons with 67 crew-members. Departures: 1 vessel to Great Britain, 526 tons and 17 crew-members; 2 vessels to Java, 332 tons and 15 crew-members; 7 vessels to NSW, 713 tons and 52 crew-members. No details of cargoes are given.

1869:

Feb. 22 - The Chief Inspector of Sheep ((P. R. Nordow) wrote to the Minister for Lands that "... an outlay of £120 for fencing - in addition to wire and a few articles - is asked for in order to make the quarantine available for the reception and dressing of imported sheep... During last year 41 imported sheep were landed at Sweers Island and should scab be introduced there the consequences in such a far off District would be disastrous... From enquiries made at ... Messr. Towns & Co agents here ... I find that the articles required could be landed at Sweers Island for the sum of £85 ... I would therefore suggest that the sum of £200 which has been placed on the Estimates for 1869,

¹⁸⁷ Skinner, L.E. (xxxx) Inquiry into Sweers Island Shootings in 1872. Cairns Historical Society xx:xx-xx. Referenced as "Reports of J.G. Macdonald's visits to the Gulf; 'Port Denison Times' Referred to by Britten in Campfire Tales, North Queensland Register, 1942"

¹⁸⁸ Port Denison Times, May 29, 1869

for repairs to Quarantines, should be devoted to this purpose. As twelve months working of the act has shown that this sum will not be required for the present, in the erection of Quarantine premises at either of the ports of Maryborough, Gladstone or Mackay, whilst the Quarantine sheds at Brisbane, Rockhampton and Bowen are in a fair state of repair."¹⁸⁹

Mar. 4 - "The Secretary for Public Lands recommends that a sum of £200 which had been placed on the Estimates for 1869 for repair for Sheep Quarantine should be devoted for fencing in and furnishing a Quarantine at Sweers Island."¹⁹⁰

May 11 - The MARGARET AND JANE departed Bowen for Sweers Island.¹⁹¹

Oct. 20 - MARGARET AND JANE arrived in Bowen from Sweers Island.¹⁹²

1870:

Jan. 21 - The P.S. PIONEER, an iron paddlesteamer built for Robert Towns at Balmain, Sydney in 1867,¹⁹³ was wrecked on Sweers Island. She was an iron vessel of 65 tons and powered by a 25hp steam engine of which the boilers can still be seen on the beach on the northern side of Inscription Point.

Sep. 23 - The schooner ACTIVE (Captain Delargie) departed Sweers Island after grounding near Locust Rock. Carrying Mr. and Mrs. Edkin and 3 others, it arrived in Bowen on December 17, 1870.¹⁹⁴

Dec. 5 - Robert Towns sells the Royal Hotel at Normanton to John Swan for £500.¹⁹⁵

Dec. 22 - The MARGARET AND JANE departed from Sweers¹⁹⁶ arriving in Bowen early in February. Captain Till reported "... it is hoped that the Government will not much longer keep the Customs House and other Government Offices at Sweer's Island to the great inconvenience of shippers, shipowners and consignees. Sweer's Island is deserted by all but the officials and their families and one Chinaman. Mr. Sandrock has 150 or 200 head of cattle feeding on the island. Towns & Co. cattle are being mustered by Mr. Morrisett for transmission south ..."

¹⁸⁹ Letter to Minister for Lands from the Chief Inspector of Sheep, dated Brisbane 22 February 1869: QSA LAN/A15 1512/1869

¹⁹⁰ Approval note attached to letter to Minister for Lands from the Chief Inspector of Sheep: QSA LAN/A15 1512/1869

¹⁹¹ Port Denison Times, May 15, 1869

¹⁹² Port Denison Times, October 23, 1869

¹⁹³ Loney, J. (1983) at p. 41

¹⁹⁴ Port Denison Times, December 17, 1870

¹⁹⁵ Contract for Sale - ML MSS 1279/12 item 49

¹⁹⁶ Port Denison Times, February 4, 1871

1871:

Mar. 2 - In a report of this date from Normanton,¹⁹⁷ complaints about the customs service on Sweers Island were made. It concluded "... the isolated island might well deserve the appellation of 'Robinson Crusoe's quarters.'"

Mar. 27 - A public meeting was held in Normanton to inform the Colonial Secretary that having the Customs and Pilot department on Sweers Island puts the inhabitants to "... serious inconvenience and loss of time."¹⁹⁸ The customs returns for Sweers Island for the quarter ending March 1871¹⁹⁹ had been £67/7/7.

Sep. 1 - The small schooner COUNTESS OF BELMORE (Captain Sykes) anchored off Sweers Island, enroute from Brisbane to Normanton, to install the new Officer in Charge of the Telegraphic Cable Station at Normanton.²⁰⁰ The island was described as "... a long, low, flat island ... lightly timbered ... The Custom House officer and pilot for the Norman River were stationed there at the time ... A town had been surveyed on Sweer's Island and called Caernarvon, but we found no people there except those connected with the Customs and Pilot Services and their families ... Mr. Sandrock sent off the Custom's boat with a kind invitation to us to go ashore and spend the day ... We went, and had a most delightful time with him and his family. He was monarch of all he surveyed. Practically the island was his little kingdom. Comfortable quarters, cattle, sheep, horses, goats, fowls, etc - also good fishing and boats to sail to the neighbouring islands if he felt disposed to risk a brush with the natives. Few of you can understand how I appreciated the luxury of a nicely furnished room; a well supplied and appointed table; a hearty welcome; pleasant companionship and freedom to roam about after the month's experience I had had on that loathsome schooner. Consider the food and cooking I had to endure - then fancy eating poultry, fresh vegetables just gathered from the garden, delicious home-made bread and scones, fresh milk, butter and eggs, with tea properly made! I remember the joy of it all to this day ... Our pleasant day had to come to an end, but we kept it up as long as we could, and did not go back to the ship until midnight."²⁰¹

Sep. 3 - The COUNTESS OF BELMORE departed Sweers Island around noon with the Pilot in charge, headed for the Norman River.

Oct. - Three watercolour sketches purporting to be of Sweers Island are in the

¹⁹⁷ Port Denison Times, April 22, 1871

¹⁹⁸ Port Denison Times, June 24, 1871

¹⁹⁹ Port Denison Times, May 18, 1872

²⁰⁰ Holder Cowl, T., not dated. *Some of my Experiences during a Voyage to the Gulf of Carpentaria and three years' residence at Normanton in the early Seventies*, Besley & Pike Ltd., Brisbane.

²⁰¹ Holder Cowl, op. cit., p. 17

National Library. They were done by Jan Willem Ploos van Amstel. Only one resembles Sweers Island and it is inscribed on its reverse side: 'Sweers Island 11 Octb. 1871'. The acquisitions book of the National Library has associated with these items an extract as follows: "3338 Sweers Island - 3 Vues dessinees donnant des vues dans cette Île dans la baie de Carpentaria, datant vers 1860, par J.W. Ploos van Amstel consul hollandais a Melbourne a cette date."

"Jonkheer Jan Willem Ploos van Amstel, born at Amsterdam on the 3rd of October 1827, was the consular representative of The Netherlands at Melbourne from 1862 until 1878."²⁰² The CURACAO had arrived in Bowen from Mackay on September 7 and departed for Townsville on September 14, 1871.²⁰³

These watercolours of Sweers Island and other parts around Cape York were done by the consul while visiting the northern Australian ports on a fact-finding voyage aboard the steamship CURACAO (Captain-lieutenant M.W. Bowier) in July to October 1871.²⁰⁴

As a result of that visit during October, Ploos van Amstel wrote²⁰⁵ that only about 20 people were left on the Island as well as the sub-collector of customs and family. Imports to Sweers Island during 1869 comprised £13,838 while exports of wool, tallow and skins were worth about £6,255.

Nov. 29 - J.M. Thompson, the Secretary for Public Lands, provided information to the Colonial Secretary, Mr. A.H. Palmer, in support of an application to the Imperial Government that jurisdiction over offshore islands be vested in the Colonial Government: "The whole of the north east coast is studded with islands some of which are valuable with deposits of Guano, whilst others have recently been found rich in minerals. Several islands also exist in the gulf of which Wellesley, Bentinck and Sweers Island may be mentioned as the most important, Sweers Island appearing from its good harbour and salubrious climate a most eligible place for a settlement. It is the site of a township, and was for a long time the residence of the Government staff of this colony in the gulf ... it will be advantageous that these numerous islands ... should be subject to some authority, more especially the riches which many of them contained, will necessarily attract adventurous and may be a lawless population ... At one time some of the islands in the gulf were licensed as squatting runs. An application is now under consideration to take

²⁰² Letter to author (dated 31st August, 1990) from J.C. van Drecht, Vice-Consul, Consulate General of the Netherlands

²⁰³ Port Denison Times, September 9 & 16, 1871

²⁰⁴ Amstel, J.W. Ploos van, 'Verslag eener reis van den Nederlandschen Consul-Generaal te Melbourne, aan boord van Zr. Ms. stoomship CURACAO, langs de oost-en noordkust van Australie, in Julij October, 1871.'

²⁰⁵ Amstel, J.W. Ploos van, op cit., at p. 46-72

all these islands for Cotton growing."²⁰⁶

1872:

Sweers Island was largely deserted in favour of Normanton, which had been selected as the new centre for government administration. By and large, Carnarvon had ceased to function and only a few families, including the Creffields, "... who keep cattle, goats and sheep on the island ..." remained until 1897.²⁰⁷

Apr. 19 - Bartley Fahey succeeded George Sandrock as sub-collector of customs at Sweers Island.²⁰⁸

May 30 - Her Majesty's letters patent, granting jurisdiction over all islands within sixty miles of the coast of Queensland, came into effect.²⁰⁹

Jul. 9 - The DAY DAWN departed Sweers Island for Bowen with Mr. and Mrs. Sandrock and family aboard. It arrived in Bowen on September 16, 1872²¹⁰ where Mr. Sandrock was to become the new sub-collector at Port Denison for the next few years.

Oct. 25 - An incident took place on the island in which shots were fired at several Bentinck Islanders presumed to be involved in stealing sheep and goats.

Oct. 29 - The COUNTESS OF BELMORE (Captain Robinson) arrived in Bowen from Sweers Island.²¹¹

Nov. 4 - The new sub-collector of customs, Fahey left Sweers Island in the whaleboat ROYAL DUKE to carry out exploratory investigations of the Mitchell River over a two week period. This had been sanctioned by the Queensland Government as it would not entail great expense and take up some of the slack of the government officers during a lull in customs activity.²¹²

1873:

January 25 - Perhaps to emphasise the newly created jurisdictional muscle,

²⁰⁶ Golding, W.R., 1979. *Beyond Horizons*, Brisbane Wholesale Book and Library Suppliers, Brisbane, at pp. 80-82

²⁰⁷ Palmer, p. 165

²⁰⁸ From the lists of Queensland Government employees published in the annual 'Blue Books'.

²⁰⁹ Golding, op. cit. p. 82

²¹⁰ Port Denison Times, September 21, 1872

²¹¹ Port Denison Times, November 2, 1872

²¹² Port Denison Times, December 20, 1873

Aulaire Morisset, the police magistrate for the Norman District, on instructions from the Colonial Secretary, held a magisterial inquiry on Sweers Island into the reported shooting of a number of Bentinck Islanders.²¹³

Depositions of witnesses were taken from John Farrell who was employed in the pilot service; Robert Chrstrison, customs boat coxswain and a resident of the island for the previous four years, and Ah Foo, sometimes called Jimmy.²¹⁴ From these depositions it seemed that on 25 October, these three men together with a McCarthy had seen a group of Aborigines land on Sweers Island, and after a series of confrontations, spears were thrown and shots were fired. The Police Magistrate concluded that it was not shown that any lives were taken and that it appeared that the Aborigines were the aggressors.²¹⁵

1874:

Nov. 19 - John Thomas McManus²¹⁶ succeeded B. Fahey as sub-collector of customs at Sweers Island, although Fahey did not leave the island until 5 January 1875.²¹⁷

1875:

Oct. 23 - On this day, the 'Port Denison Times' carried a report of an abortive voyage to survey the mouth of the Norman River. Lieutenant Connor, R.N. had sailed the LIZZIE JARDINE from Somerset to the Gulf but on arriving "at Sweer's Island, Lieutenant Connor had a severe attack of rheumatic fever which prevented him from carrying out his intention..."²¹⁸

1876:

Feb. 4 - Donald McLennan, the licensed publican on the Island, died of a "liver complaint" and was buried at Carnarvon.

1877:

Oct. 20 - The 'Port Denison Times' reported that the IO has just left Normanton for Sweers Island "... to remove the cattle now on Sweer's Island belonging to the estate of the late Mr. McLennan, to the main land."

Dec. 12 - Despite years of agitation to move the customs house from Sweers Island, William Thornton - the Chief Collector of Customs - wrote to the

²¹³ Skinner, op. cit.

²¹⁴ QSA Col/A182 1873/849

²¹⁵ Skinner, op. cit.

²¹⁶ From the lists of Queensland Government employees published in the annual 'Blue Books'.

²¹⁷ TRE/B9 1874-75 37/1875

²¹⁸ Port Denison Times, October 23, 1875

Colonial Treasurer to suggest that it would be "... impolitic in the extreme to remove the Head Quarters of the Customs from Sweers Island to Normanton ..."²¹⁹ where a branch of the customs had already been established.

1878:

Dec. 30 - W.J. Greenaway²²⁰ was appointed as sub-collector of customs at Sweers Island to replace McManus, who had drowned.²²¹

1880:

Jun. 16 - A report²²² concerning the removal of the customs establishment from Sweers Island to Normanton carries the marginal notes: 'Approved subject to the reduction in boatmen employed - I see the £75 is only for shifting - inquiry should be made to see if it is worth shifting.' 'Removal of customs ... approved ... 31.8.80.' The expenses for the removal of the customs was paid from contingencies.²²³

Sept. 15 - Captain C. Pennefather arrived at Sweers Island from Thursday Island aboard Q.G.S. PEARL to chart the waters around Point Barker. Because he had not been able to procure a sufficient supply of water at Thursday Island, he "filled up at this place, the water being good and plentiful".²²⁴ In the official report presented to both Houses of the Queensland Parliament, Captain Pennefather reported that the Island is "lightly timbered; with soil of loose sandy nature. At the time of our visit it presented a very sterile appearance owing to want of rain and its being overstocked; in fact, it seemed wonderful how the quantity of stock, over 1200 in number (cattle, sheep and goats), managed to exist." He also reported that "there are two cocoa-nut trees on the Island, thriving and doing well, also guavas, dates, tamarinds, etc., - the climate of the place being apparently well suited to the growth of fruits of the kind".

As far as the township was concerned, Pennefather was less enthusiastic, observing that "... the few remaining buildings on the Island are very much affected with white ants, and would hardly pay for removal. The site of the once thriving township of Carnarvon is only to be recognised by the heaps of broken bottles which mark the positions of the various buildings which have

²¹⁹ Letter to Colonial Treasurer from William Thornton, Collector of Customs: QSA TRE/A19 2645/1877

²²⁰ From the lists of Queensland Government employees published in the annual 'Blue Books'.

²²¹ Inquest into death by drowning held at Normanton on 2 December 1878 (JUS/N61 322/1878)

²²² TRE/B 1880-81 1582/1880

²²³ TRE/B 1880-81 48/1881

²²⁴ Pennefather, C., 1880. *Explorations in the Gulf of Carpentaria, and surveys in the vicinity of Point Barker*. Report to the Colonial Secretary dated 28th October 1880. p. 1

now totally disappeared".

More interestingly, Captain Pennefather mentioned the inscribed tree at Point Inscription and was the first of several authors²²⁵ to suggest that the earlier date was of Dutch origin. He reported that "... on an old tree is to be seen the name of H.M.S. INVESTIGATOR, with the date 1802, and a still earlier date, supposed to have been carved by the Dutch."

Sept. 20 - "Having filled up with fuel and water, sailed from Sweer's ..." ²²⁶ to survey the other islands and the adjacent mainland, subsequently arriving at Thursday Island on 25th October.

1891 - W. Saville-Kent visited Sweers Island. In his book on the Great Barrier Reef,²²⁷ he described and showed photographs of specimens of coral rock conglomerate collected from Sweers Island. In addition he reported²²⁸ that "... had space permitted, another highly interesting and instructive photograph would have been reproduced here viz., a view of the low sand cliff immediately facing the beach on Sweer's Island, where the specimens just described were collected ... The aspect of this cliff is very singular ... Some twenty years ago Sweer's Island was visited by a devastating hurricane, which well nigh wrecked the homestead established there, and during it the cliff, ranging from ten to twenty feet in height, was more or less completely submerged ... The action of the latest hurricane, and accompanying inundation ... was to undermine an extensive area of the face of the cliff, to such an extent, that a large portion has fallen down and lies scattered in huge, heaped-up blocks at high-tide level. A little way inland, out of the reach of the sea and spray, the stratum of siliceous sand and ironstone gravel occurs without any admixture of carbonate of lime."

In his later book,²²⁹ Saville-Kent reproduced that photograph with the annotation that "the low sandstone cliff ... had been completely submerged and undermined by the abnormal waves, and was broken up into disrupted fragments that bore a by no means remote resemblance to masses of a Cyclopean growth of the Organ-pipe coral, *Tubipora musica*."

Saville-Kent also reported²³⁰ the presence of pearl-shell in the waters around Sweers Island.

1901:

²²⁵ e.g. Palmer, E., 1983. *Early days in North Queensland*, Xxxxx, Xxxxx.

²²⁶ Pennefather (1880) p. 1

²²⁷ Saville-Kent, W., 1893. *The Great Barrier Reef of Australia: its Products and Potentialities*, John Currey, O'Neil Edition, published in 1972, at p. 54, plate XXXII

²²⁸ Saville-Kent (1893) at pp. 54-55

²²⁹ Saville-Kent, W., 1897. *The Naturalist in Australia*, Chapman and Hall, London, at pp. 250-251

²³⁰ Saville-Kent (1893) at p. 205

With the abandonment of Carnarvon, Sweers Island reverted to Aboriginal use. It seems likely that animals left on the island were killed by the natives.

The first anthropologist to visit the area was Dr. Walter E. Roth, Northern Protector of Aborigines, who was accompanied by native police from the mainland, and J.F. Bailey, Director of the Brisbane Botanic Gardens. Tindale claimed that the visit was not well documented although it was reported that a small plant collection from Bentinck Island and some photographic negatives were in existence. The only negative so far located²³¹ shows a group of eight men in front of a row of dilapidated buildings in the deserted township, and correspondence²³² from the Queensland Herbarium claimed that no records of plant collections from Bentinck Island collected by J.F. Bailey were held there. On the other hand, Blake²³³ cited specimens of *Melaleuca leucodendra* and *M. viridiflora* collected in June 1901 on Bentinck and Sweers Island respectively. Similarly, Barlow²³⁴ recorded *Amyema villiflorum* subsp. *tomentillum* from from Sweers Island based on the type specimen collected by Bailey in June 1901, now housed in the NSW Herbarium. A search of computerised herbarium records in April 1992, indicated that J.F. Bailey collected 56 plant specimens from Sweers Island, 15 from Bentinck, 6 from Bountiful and 5 from Mornington Islands during June 1901.

Roth's report²³⁵ mentioned the inscribed tree as well as that "... a few remains of Landsborough's cottage are still visible. The island itself is at present held under occupation license: it is well watered, carries about 700 sheep and 400 goats, and has a good anchorage."

1902:

Oct. - "SS WATER LILY rescued the crew of the schooner MYSTERY after she was wrecked at Albany Heads in October while bound from Sweers Island to Burketown."²³⁶

1903:

June 11 - Dr. Walter E. Roth, Northern Protector of Aborigines, departed Normanton in the MELBIDIR accompanied by Charles Hedley, Conchologist from the Australian Museum, Sydney, constable Warner and two trackers.²³⁷

²³¹ OM 171838 inscribed 'Sweers Is. 1901'

²³² Letter to author dated 2nd September, 1974

²³³ Blake (1968) at pp. 18 and 37

²³⁴ Barlow, B.A., 1984. Loranthaceae. In: *Flora of Australia*. Vol. 22, pp. 67-130.

²³⁵ Roth (1901)

²³⁶ Loney, J., 1987. *Wrecks on the Queensland Coast, Vol.2: 1901 - 1986*, Xxxx, Xxxxx, at p. 4

²³⁷ Roth, Report to Under Secretary, Department of Public Lands, dated 27 June 1903. QSA A/19898 Z1347 (M1414)

June 13 - Roth's party "... arrived at Sweers Island, anchoring in the Roads, and took in some fresh water." From here, they travelled to various of the islands around Sweers Island. In his report, Roth mentions that "... Mr. Hedley has made an excellent collection of marine zoology, including about 400 species of molluscs: he is of opinion that the Gulf of Carpentaria fauna should be considered an out-lier rather of the Indian than of the Pacific Ocean. The salient characters of the region are the slight development of reef-building corals, and their associated fauna, as compared with the Torres Strait and the East Coast of Queensland. Towards the head of the Gulf, the corals entirely disappear, and the mangrove-swamp fauna is developed in great luxuriance..."²³⁸

"After service around several Australian ports, the old iron paddle steamer FRANCIS CADELL, 140 tons, was abandoned as a derelict in the river near Burketown."²³⁹

1906:

May - Dr. Roth resigned as Northern Protector of Aborigines "... because of ill health."²⁴⁰

1908:

John McKenzie who, in around this time, had apparently obtained an occupation licence over Sweers Island, ran sheep and goats on the island.²⁴¹ Having previously squatted on Bentinck Island, he moved to Sweers Island and to supplement his grazing activities, commenced 'lime-burning' from a kiln²⁴² constructed on the western side of Inspection Hill. Lime was apparently shipped to Normanton and railed to Croydon, where it was used in gold extraction.²⁴³ McKenzie had two Aboriginal helpers from Mornington Island, who soon became disenchanted by the continual diet of goats' heads and livers and returned to Mornington Island.²⁴⁴ McKenzie then obtained

²³⁸ Roth, loc. cit. p. 11

²³⁹ Loney, J. (1987) at p. 5

²⁴⁰ Port Denison Times, May 22, 1906

²⁴¹ Stubbs, B., 2005a. The 'McKenzie massacre' on Bentinck Island: unravelling the myth. *Gulf of Carpentaria Scientific Study Report, The Royal Geographical Society of Queensland, Brisbane, Geography Monograph Series* 10:23-33.

²⁴² Elder, B., 1988. *Blood on the Wattle - Massacres and Maltreatment of Australian Aborigines since 1788*, Child and Associates, Xxxxx at p. 164-167; Stubbs, B., 2005b. Sweers Island lime: an historical-archaeological reconstruction of an early-twentieth century limestone mining and lime-burning operation in the Gulf of Carpentaria. *Gulf of Carpentaria Scientific Study Report, The Royal Geographical Society of Queensland, Brisbane, Geography Monograph Series* 10:351-358.

²⁴³ Stubbs (2005b)

²⁴⁴ Memmot, P., 1982. The South Wellesley Islands and the Kaiadilt. A history and analysis of the land and its people, unpubl. ms at p. 34.

Aboriginal-Malay half-castes as helpers and a white partner named Nelson.²⁴⁵

"The ketch MARK TWAIN sprang a leak and foundered near Speers Island on 27 July."²⁴⁶

1910:

Howard, Northern Protector of Aborigines (and successor to Roth) visited Bentinck Island.

1915:

Mr. J. Bleakley, Chief Protector of Aborigines, visited the Bentinck-Sweers Island area.

1917:

The first missionary, Rev. Robert Hall, came to Mornington Island from Mapoon aboard the mission lugger, MORNING STAR.²⁴⁷ After Rev. Hall was killed, the Police, led by Sergeant Scanlon, formed a search party for the killers. Using the MORNING STAR, they sailed from Burketown for Sweers Island to obtain "... more wood and water ... and the policemen shot some of the goats and sheep left there. We camped there to cook the meat and sailed next day for Dugong River on Mornington Island."²⁴⁸

Bleakley again visited Bentinck Island.

1918:

According to Tindale,²⁴⁹ a Bentinck Islander account recalled a hostile attack by a white party in 1918. Accompanied by dogs and mounted, the party consisted of 'an unidentified white man with helpers' and was reportedly responsible for the deaths of eleven persons. Elsewhere²⁵⁰ Tindale reported the death in c.1918 of 'Ngiltalngati' as a result of being "shot by white man who came in a boat from Sweers Island; ran away to top of sand hills at Berumoi and died". This appears to be supported²⁵¹ by a detailed verbal

²⁴⁵ Kelly and Evans (1985)

²⁴⁶ Loney, J. (1987) at p. 7; however, no island of this name has been located and this is possibly a misspelling of Sweers Island

²⁴⁷ Roughsey, D., 1977. *Moon and Rainbow - The Autobiography of an Aboriginal*. at pp. 28-30

²⁴⁸ Roughsey (1977) at p. 35

²⁴⁹ (1962b) pp. 309-310

²⁵⁰ Tindale (1962b) p. 334

²⁵¹ Kelly, R. and N. Evans, 1985. The McKenzie Massacre on Bentinck Island. *Aboriginal History* 9(1):44-52

account provided by Roma Kelly (Dibirdibi Mambunkingathi) who was born at Mambunki on Bentinck Island in 1917.²⁵² This account indicated that the European party almost certainly included McKenzie, but this remains uncertain.²⁵³

There are numerous folk tales surrounding the killing of the last of McKenzie's goats and a horse.

[Roughsey pp. 97-98: An old Kaiadilt man now living at Mornington told me some stories about his early life on Bentinck and his first sight of white men and their boats. Their first meeting with the white man was when a small guano mine was worked on Sweers Island, just across from Bentinck. A very small town called Carnarvon was built to house the workers. This is how old Thadudgunthee, or Jack as we now call him, remembers those days.

The white men had a big camp on Sweers. One day they came across to Bentinck Island after water. As soon as they came ashore they started shooting at us ... After a few years the white men all got in their boats and left Sweers ... Next morning we went on to the town where we collected many things. We found a few tomahawks and many pieces of steel and nails to make spearheads. While we were looking about for these things we saw strange animals coming down to the well. The animals were white and had two sticks on their heads. We had never seen goats before but we decided to kill and eat them. The well had the only water on the island so we camped there and speared three or four each day until they were all gone.

Long after the Kaiadilt left Sweers, another white man called Mackenzie came to live on the island. He frightened the Bentincks away by shooting at them.]

1922:

John McKenzie's operation on the island ceased, possibly as a result of the closure of the Croydon cyanide works.²⁵⁴

1925-27:

Three efforts were made by officers from the Mornington Island Mission to make contact with the Bentinck Islanders. These attempts were carried out during beche-de-mer operations by Mornington Islanders using Fowler Island as a base. The first really successful contact was in late 1927 when 48 Bentinck Islanders were contacted and photographed in groups with the missionary officers.

1934:

252 Elder (1988) at p. 164

253 Stubbs (2005a)

254 Stubbs (2005b)

The Island was declared a 'reserve for the use of the Aboriginal inhabitants of the State'²⁵⁵

1937:

Bleakley and a party of Government Ministers made another visit to Bentinck Island.

1940:

Eleven Bentinck Islanders were sent to Aurukun Mission after the killing of a Mornington islander, 'Cripple Jack', had occurred on Allen Island. Relationships between the Mornington and Bentinck Islanders had deteriorated since the beche-de-mer operations of the 1925-27 period. These eleven natives were held at Aurukun until 1953 when they were sent to Mornington Island to join the remainder of the Bentinck Islanders.

1942:

Oct. 1 - 'Walkabout' Magazine contained an article by 'E.D.F.' entitled 'An Historic Island' which provided an interesting account of Sweers Island, its history, and that "... to-day, the ruins of the old settlement on Sweer's Island are plainly visible. Frameworks of buildings and a few old rusty tanks and sheets of iron show that the island once supported a considerable population. An old ant-eaten jetty still stands. The land cleared and ploughed by the hardy settlers has almost disappeared in the encroaching bush. Lonely and forgotten are a number of graves on a tree-choked rise overlooking the old town. Most of the inscriptions have been obliterated by weather and time."²⁵⁶

1943:

Oct. - RAAF personnel from the radar station no. 313 (established on Mornington Island in March 1943) visited the island in the mission launch, arriving off Sweers Island ('Milt') about midday. Deciding to go ashore to look at the township of Carnarvon, they were attacked by a group of spearthrowing Kaiadilt. The visitors retreated to the launch and fired several shots, killing 'Kongarangati dawart', a young Bentinck man.²⁵⁷ Some of the warning shots are reported to have hit a Kaiadilt woman in the thigh while she was digging for yams inland.²⁵⁸ The Kaiadilt killed on the beach was buried nearby.

Detailed investigations were conducted by the mission superintendent J.B.

²⁵⁵ Reserve no. 5599, Government Gazette 1934.2.344

²⁵⁶ E.D.F. (1942) An Historic Island. *Walkabout*, October 1st., p.1.

²⁵⁷ Baird, D., 1976. *The Incredible Gulf*. Rigby, Brisbane, at p. 125; Roughsey (1977) p. 109

²⁵⁸ Roughsey (1977) p. 109

McCarthy, the airforce and the Queensland Police, and the facts taken from the various witnesses²⁵⁹ can be summarised as follows:

"... camped ... on... a narrow sand point opposite Raft Point ..."

"... two RAAF men went down along the beach to have a look at a well and a grave ..."

"... started to walk up the beach to where the grave was ..."

"... and I decided to go and have a look at the well and remains of an old building there ... We had walked about fifty yards along the beach..."

"Some men went down the beach and the others up along the beach collecting wood to light a fire for tea. I went over the sandhill, and waited at an old wreck for Mitchener, Jack to come back."

"Mitchener, Jack and myself went along the beach towards the old wreck ... Lewis, Gully and myself walked along the beach in the opposite direction ... to have a look at a well and the remains of a camp."

"Wyllie, Jack and myself went along the beach towards an old wreck, collecting wood ... When I arrived back with the wood, I sat on the beach ... Lewis, Wyllie and Gully walked along the beach in the opposite direction to where we were gathering wood to have a look at a native well."

"The first job to do was to gather wood ... and we brought it back and Jack built a fire ... and Wyllie and I decided to go and have a look at the well and remains of an old building there. We walked about 50 yds along the beach when we heard natives screaming out ..."

"Mitchener, Jack and myself went towards an old wreck gathering fire-wood ... Lewis, Gully and I went to have a look at a well in the opposite direction. When we were about 100 yds along the beach we heard a lot of shouting ..."

"... the body was buried ... on the side of a small hill sloping to the water edge and the body would be about 25' above HWM and about 30 yds from the water edge. Beyond the grave the hill extended another 20 ft or so ..."

1945:

Twenty-five Bentinck Islanders visited Mornington Island for a month in the June-July period.

1946:

'G.P.' writing in 1946, described the township as follows: "Today, the ruins of the old settlement on Sweer's Island are plainly visible. Frameworks of many buildings and rusted tanks and sheets of iron, and an old ant-eaten jetty remain. Lonely and forgotten are a number of graves on a tree-choked rise overlooking the old settlement. Most of the inscriptions have been obliterated by weather and Time. One cannot help wondering what would have been the result of the Sweer's Island settlement had it remained. Would it have

²⁵⁹

Full documentation in Australian Archives A 705/1 item 182/1/349

prospered or would its island seclusion have eventually caused its abandonment?"²⁶⁰

1947:

Aug. - Forty-two Aboriginals were found in very poor condition on Sweers Island. They were taken to the Mornington Island Mission by the Superintendent Rev. J.B. McCarthy. Subsequent examination in December of the natives remaining on Bentinck Island revealed a prevalence of malnutrition and disease (tuberculosis and dysentery).

1948:

February - Cyclone. The mission launch anchored off Sweers Island and found seven men and their wives and families, who were taken aboard and moved to Mornington Island.²⁶¹

1960:

Norman Tindale, with a party containing 20 Kaiadilt people, visited the Bentinck-Sweers Island area. Some archaeological investigations were carried out around Inscription Point and in the coastal area west of Inspection Hill.

1963:

Dec. - Curators of the Australian Museum (Drs. McMichael and Yaldwyn) visited Sweers Island and collected marine intertidal organisms on behalf of the Australian Museum.

1970:

Southers and Dickens purchased freehold property in parts of the old township of Carnarvon and commenced the erection of a tourist facility. Much of the building was undertaken by two young French adventurers.²⁶² Subsequently, the interests were purchased by Broken Hill South, who investigated the Island as a potential shipping point for Lady Annie phosphate rock.

1971:

²⁶⁰ G.P. (1946) 'Historic Island of the Gulf.' Cummins & Campbell's Monthly Magazine (September 1946) pp. 7 and 41. The similarity (plagiarism) between 'G.P.' (1946) and 'E.D.F.' (1942) should be noted.

²⁶¹ Roughsey (1977) p. 115

²⁶² Saenger, P., 2005. Sweers Island: changes over two hundred years since Flinders' visit. *Gulf of Carpentaria Scientific Study Report, The Royal Geographical Society of Queensland, Brisbane, Geography Monograph Series* 10:11-22.

Jan.-Feb. - Mr. John Dymock, an amateur naturalist, visited the Island and prepared a map, listing flora, fauna and sites of historical interest.²⁶³

Mar. - All freehold land within the town of Carnarvon, with the exception of portions 2, 3, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, was resumed by the Crown.²⁶⁴

1973:

Oct. 6 - 12 - Drs. P. Saenger, M.S. Hopkins and C.C. McIvor, aboard the KATOORA, completed a biological survey of the Island and made collections as part of the investigations to assess the environmental impact of the proposed port development by Broken Hill South Pty. Ltd.

1977:

The phosphate shipping project on Sweers Island was finally abandoned because of economic, technical and environmental considerations. The single largest obstacle was the quality of Queensland phosphate, and the huge costs involved in re-equipping the fertilizer manufacturers to be able to handle the Queensland rock. Alternative proposals to use the Duchess deposits and railing to Townsville, a cheaper alternative to the Sweers Island proposal, also failed for the same technical reasons and, despite the parliamentary pleading for government assistance to the Duchess venture by Doug Anthony, the Australian Deputy Prime Minister early in June 1978, mining ceased at the end of the month.

1982:

Dec. 14 - Tenders called for the development of a tourist complex on Sweers Island closed with no responses received. Aboriginal protests against such a development had been made on the grounds that the island was a sacred tribal area but the Lands Minister, Mr. Glasson, said that the lack of interest was due to economic considerations.²⁶⁵ The Minister stressed that the Government would still study any future proposals for a Sweers Island tourist venture.

1988:

May - "A new resort has opened up on Sweers Island in the Wellesley Group and caters for reef and offshore fishing. Although only small scale at this stage, it certainly indicates the trends for the future."²⁶⁶

²⁶³ OM 74.034

²⁶⁴ Government Gazette 1971.1.846-848

²⁶⁵ Courier-Mail 15/12/82

²⁶⁶ Bowtell, B. (1989) 'Liaison Officer's Report - Gulf of Carpentaria' In: the Queensland Sport and Recreational Fishing Council Annual Report 1988-1989 p. 20.

1989:

The boundaries of the Aboriginal Reserve on the Island were redefined to exclude previously surveyed areas of crown land and the airstrip.²⁶⁷ Two sections were established, the northern section comprises 775 ha while the southern section is of 480 ha.

1994:

The Aboriginal Reserves were repealed and a deed of grant in trust was granted to the Kaiadilt Aboriginal Land Trust.

1996:

A native title claim by the Kaiadilt people, as part of four applicant groups, was lodged for the land and water from the high water line on Bentinck and Sweers Islands to 'as far as the eye could see', a non-exclusive claim recognized by the Federal Court to five nautical miles seaward.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁷ Government Gazette 1989.2.2329

²⁶⁸ *The Lardil Peoples v State of Queensland* [2004] FCA 298.