

# NORTH TO MATSUMAE

AUSTRALIAN WHALERS TO JAPAN

Noreen Jones



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Dedicated to the memory of Anthony,  
the boy who made paper cranes,  
the man who swam with the whales.



## Author's Note

After my first visit to Japan in 1990, it seemed a good idea to try to learn something of the language—at least enough conversation to be able to travel there again independently, to ask directions, and express polite phrases. The language teacher, a Japanese national, mentioned to the class that she had read about a crew from an Australian whaling ship that had been shipwrecked in Japan around the middle of the nineteenth century. She said that, although the country was closed off from the rest of the world at the time, the seamen had been transported from Hokkaido to Nagasaki, where they were permitted to leave and return to Australia. I became curious about the incident, but my basic Japanese conversation did not extend to reading about it in the small Japanese book the teacher lent me.

A couple of years later, when I was planning a visit to Hokkaido, I read a few lines in Humphrey McQueen's *Tokyo World*, which told of another whaler from Australia that visited the same region. McQueen referred to an 'Australian museum' there. The Hokkaido visit in 1993 was an opportunity not only to see the museum, but also, perhaps, the chance to discover more about the two events.

Although that visit enabled me to learn much more about early Japanese–Australian contacts, the difficulties of distance, language and income halted further investigation for almost ten years. A writing residency awarded by Asialink provided the opportunity to revisit Hokkaido in 2003. Initially I intended only to explore the maritime history of the events. Quickly I found that I faced a dilemma. Whenever I was asked about the project, I realised that to mention the two words 'Japan' and 'whaling' in

the same sentence brought forth a strong reaction and commentary based on the modern debate about whaling, even though I was writing about Australian whalers and events that occurred more than 150 years ago.

I knew the depth of feeling that the subject could evoke from my years of personal convictions based on conservation ideals and emotional reactions to the killing of whales. However, it seemed fair to give some balance to the picture by learning about the whaling methods, beliefs, and customs of the Japanese fishermen that were apparently unknown to the Australian whaling ships' crews. This included challenging my own beliefs and convictions, which was not an easy task.

Within the pages of extensive navigational notes, calculations and weather conditions of the lengthy journal of Captain Bourn Russell is an adventure tale. That narrative, which has been adapted from the microfilm copy of the journal, records a significant historical event: the first known contact between people from Australia and Japan. The captain's account is largely unpunctuated, as can be seen in the direct quotations from his thoughts and opinions. I have attempted to retain some of the language of the period in the description of the journey and events. In cases where his names of location differ from the modern, both versions are given. It has not been possible to authenticate every personal name and title of islander people used by the captain.

Although the ship's journal is a valuable means of discerning the attitude of the captain, and the personal, physical, and administrative challenges he faced, it has been necessary to include a considerable amount of background material from other sources to broaden the perspective of the narrative.

I have added historical background of some of the places visited by the ships' crews and the people they met, particularly the Ainu people of Japan. Where possible, I have also included other versions of the stories, such as the Japanese account of the conflict that occurred. Little has been published previously about the early part of the journey through the South Pacific islands, a journey that influenced one captain's decision to continue to Japan. The dramatic events that occurred during the return journey have also never been previously related. The experiences of the crew of the second ship were told originally in contemporary newspaper reports in Australia, and have been expanded by locating and exploring official Dutch and Japanese records.

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

In order to provide cohesion for this narrative of two separate journeys to Japan, they are described within the broader perspective of intercultural exchange, the conflicts that emerge between people of different historical backgrounds, and the debate about whaling that currently exists between Australia and Japan.

*Noreen Jones*

*September 2006*



## Preface

On the pinboard behind my computer, directly within my line of sight, is a snapshot of the ruins of the building in Hiroshima that stood below the epicentre of the explosion of the atomic bomb dropped on the city in 1945. Daylight shows through the empty shell and the spaces that held the windows. The solid outline of a modern building can be seen behind the framework of the domed portico roof. The remains of the building symbolise the horror of that terrible day, a reminder of the devastation of war. Pinned alongside the photo is a child's effort at origami: a tattered paper crane, the symbol of hope, which can be seen in multicoloured thousands in the grounds of the Peace Park near the ruined building. The cranes are still being folded and sent to the Peace Park by children from all over the world, in an innocent expectation that somehow their contributions will stop human conflicts.

The day the bomb exploded and killed more than 140,000 people<sup>1</sup> I was 13 years old, and had been wishing for six long years of my childhood that nations would stop fighting each other. But I lived in relative safety in another hemisphere, and the fallout of the dropping of two big bombs in Japan was beyond my comprehension and imagination, other than that it signalled at last that the war would soon be over. Within weeks, I joined my friends and family to dance in the main street of our town and hold their hands to make large circles around the light pole in the street's intersection in celebration of the so-called peace. The killing did not cease. Though the war zones and combatants have changed, 60 years have passed, and the world's children still wonder at their helplessness to stop the cruelty and slaughter that results from disputes between nations, religions and ethnic groups.

Before the war, my childish knowledge of Japanese people was based on picture books depicting petite women dressed in exotic kimonos and wooden sandals, holding floral sunshades above perfectly coiffured black hair. The buildings in the background had strangely shaped roofs, and were surrounded by beautiful gardens. Living in a hot, red, dusty goldfields town in Australia, the pictures held an unending fascination for me. Soon, however, the illustrations changed. Newspapers and posters showed bespectacled, buckteethed Japanese men in army uniforms wielding long swords above their heads. Some held up limp babies in the other hand. All the pictures had messages about the dire consequences of being overheard revealing any knowledge of troop movements or military installations, in case the enemy was listening. The suspicion towards anyone resembling an Asian, which had been held by generations of the Australian civilian population and condoned by the laws of the nation, swelled to open hatred and fear of the Japanese. When reports of wartime atrocities from returning troops were repeated, newspapers read, and newsreel films shown, the hatred consumed some Australians with a malignancy which would never be healed. In some families, the condition was handed down to children and grandchildren; yet for others, time was the remedy, and they learned to forgive.

While Australian families welcomed home fathers, sons and brothers from South Pacific war zones and set about resettling in towns and on farms, the Japanese people and their children who had survived the allied bombing were starving. Cities were flattened, or, in the case of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, were blasted into oblivion, small rural farmers struggled to supply rice, and conquering troops took up residence as an occupying force. General Douglas MacArthur, the Supreme Commander of the Allied forces in Japan, was given the task of guiding the rebuilding of the country and tackling the job of halting the mass starvation. Traditionally the Japanese are a fish-eating people, and the topography of the mountainous country does not support the enlargement of animal farms to provide sufficient food. One solution to feeding the population lay in the re-establishment of fishing for whales. The industry, which had virtually ceased during the fighting, had been carried out in a sustainable manner by Japanese for thousands of years, and provided the raw material for numerous other uses besides food. MacArthur authorised the expansion of whaling into the Antarctic Ocean to feed the people.<sup>2</sup>

Following the war years, Australia also resumed whaling, which had flourished from her shores since the time of European settlement, though for a different purpose. With abundant agricultural production, there was no need to consider the animals as a source of food; the principal commodity obtained was whale oil. Thus for the next 30 years, while the two countries recovered from the effects of the war, there was little thought given by the general Australian population to Japanese domestic affairs. By the 1970s another generation had been born and grown into adulthood, Japan had undergone an economic recovery that was viewed with awe and envy by other nations, and Australia had finally divested itself of its notorious racist immigration policy and accepted Asian and coloured migrants. In many countries in the world, including Australia and Japan, there was increased interest in and concern about environmental conservation, including the issue of overfishing of some species of whales.

In 1982, when the International Whaling Commission introduced the moratorium on commercial whaling of certain species under its jurisdiction, the nations that had hunted the animals for oil had already found cheaper replacements from petroleum products. Other countries, where people had a long history of using whale meat as food, restricted their consumption, and Japan, as a member of the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling, was permitted to conduct whaling for scientific research.<sup>3</sup> The conditions of the permits direct that whales taken should, where practicable, be processed. The last whaling station to cease operations in Australia in 1978 was at Albany on Western Australia's south coast. When I took my Japanese friend Harumi to see the Albany whaling station, which had been transformed to a prizewinning tourist attraction after its closure, I imagined I was doing my bit for conservation by showing her the museum display. I thought the graphic pictures and conservation ideals displayed there might influence her to realise the error of the ways of her countrymen in continuing to hunt for whales after Australia had ceased. She told me that, when she had been a small child, her grandmother had fed her whale meat. At the time, the revelation repelled me, but without the food source Harumi and many others could have starved.

Although several countries, including Norway, Denmark, the USA, and Russia, carry out limited commercial or Aboriginal subsistence

whaling, as do others who are not members of the International Whaling Commission,<sup>4</sup> it is Japan's special permit that has stirred the most resentment in the Australian population. Whether because of a resurfacing of old antagonism from the war years, an ignorance of the cultural and historical background, or a reliance on emotive, one-sided information, it seems that few Australians are prepared to listen to any debate that states an alternative point of view on whaling. There seems to be no wish to consider any explanations of the reasons for that view. In November 2004, a spate of newspaper headlines,<sup>5</sup> editorials, and letters to editors in Australia focused on Japan and its whaling policy, with little attempt at balanced opinion. The subject emerged again in January 2005, with, for instance, predictions of 'international disagreement with Japan'<sup>6</sup> and a newspaper editorial that commenced its column by stating 'There is no room for debate on Japanese whaling'.<sup>7</sup> If that attitude is extended to larger serious international differences, it is little wonder that conflicts emerge. In December 2005 and January 2006 the media frenzy continued, with photographs and film of bloodied whales shown almost daily in Australian newspapers and on television.

Whaling remains a topic of dispute between Australia and Japan, so it is intriguing to discover that the first ever contact between people from both countries occurred in 1831, when the men of the whaling ship *Lady Rowena* from Sydney set foot on Japanese soil. This contact resulted in a mini war, after which both sides believed they were victorious. The ship's journal of the *Lady Rowena* survived, though historians did not discover its existence until the mid 1970s, almost 150 years after the fateful journey. The journal describes much more than the conflict with Japanese. It provides an insight into the personal conflicts of the captain during his attempt to communicate with and to understand people in several countries with cultures different from his own.

Less than twenty years later, a second whaling crew, on the *Eamont* from Hobart, spent several months in captivity in Japan. In this case, the ship's journal was never found. Unlike the earlier captain, the master of the *Eamont*, when he returned to Australia, had no hesitation in relating an account of his adventures to the newspapers of the day. Dutch archives and Japanese sources also record and confirm the captain's story and the crew's experience in Japan. The men of both ships also had close

encounters with the Ainu people, the indigenous population of Northern Japan, for whom the hunting of marine animals was one of survival.

The stories of the *Lady Rowena* and the *Eamont* not only describe the nineteenth-century whaling industry, but also describe attempts of communication between people of different cultures and their dissimilar history with regard to whales. Relationships between Australia and Japan have undergone a remarkable change since the dark days of World War II, but the dispute on whaling has continued for more than 30 years.

We tend to look for explanations and make judgements based on our own values and culture, without the realisation that a history different from one's own leads us to arrives at a different position. It is easy to claim cross-cultural understanding by observing human characteristics common to all people, and state that 'they are just like us', but it is by learning and becoming informed about the differences in attitudes, customs, and religions of other cultures that we achieve the beginnings of true understanding. For many people in the world, particularly in developed countries and those with leaders who wield enormous power, becoming informed of the other has never been as easy, yet misunderstandings based on value judgements continue to lead to armed conflict.



## Acknowledgements

I offer my gratitude and appreciation to Asialink, an organisation promoting cross-cultural understanding through the arts. A writing residency in Japan in 2002 awarded by Asialink, with support from ArtsWA, enabled me to discover answers to questions about the first Australia–Japan contacts that have puzzled me for more than ten years. Harumi Takechi, Sachiko Kubota, and Shigenobu Sugito have helped me to find Japanese records and assisted with translation. Shigeeko Misaki, whose work with the International Whaling Commission has given her an extensive knowledge of Japanese whaling, has been unstinting in providing information. Jan Krikken of the National Museum of Natural History in the Netherlands generously gave his time to translate Dutch records, and books were kindly provided by Dr Mathi Forrer, Curator of Japanese Arts, National Museum of Ethnology, Netherlands. D. C. S. Sissons (dec.), the doyen of the study of Australian–Japanese relationships, has kindly sent me unpublished works and encouragement. T. R. Watson provided details of the family history of Bourn Russell, while Masahiro Nomoto, Curator of the Ainu Museum in Hokkaido, has added a personal touch to the history of his people. The staff of Akkeshi town shared the excitement of new discoveries with me, and, as guides to significant locations, offered encouragement and practical help. My thanks to UWA Press and editor Bruce Gillespie for the valuable gift of unrestricted freedom of expression within the pages of this book.

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The long journey north to Matsumae could not have been travelled without the help of these people and many others, in particular my own family, who have constantly given encouragement and support to the project.

*Noreen Jones*



## Introduction

Within a few years of the discovery of the rich whaling grounds between Hawaii and Japan by the Americans and British in 1820, hundreds of whaling ships were operating in Japanese waters, almost 300 from the United States alone. Western industrialisation increased the demand for oil as a lubricant, as well as for other uses, such as lighting, and after years of exploitation, the industry extended from the northern waters of the Atlantic Sea to the southern Pacific Ocean. The colonisation of Australia and establishment of ports in New South Wales and Tasmania gave whaling ships from Europe and North America a base for their activities, without having to transport their oil over the long return journey to their home ports. In Australia, the whale oil could be transferred to ships carrying cargo to Europe or sold for use in the growing colonies, allowing the whalers a fast return to their hunting grounds. Moreover, as the whalers pushed further into unknown and under-explored seas, the charts of eighteenth-century European explorers of the south Pacific region gave them more recent guides than had been available to the earlier Spanish and Portuguese. Despite the absence of open ports in Japan and the growing reputation of an unwelcome reception, whalers continued to sail to the lucrative and reliable 'Japan grounds'.

It was inevitable that some ships, far from their home ports in Britain, Europe, America, and the colonies in Australia, would not return. Typhoons, sea ice, storms, and dense fogs were but a few of the hazards that confronted the whalers on the Japan grounds. Absent for years at a time, ships needed to find berths to replenish stocks of water and fresh food and to restock with fuel for the fires on the ships' decks

to extract the whale oil. Captains needed to find safe harbours to land, using charts that were not always reliable, to careen their ships and carry out repairs and maintenance. In the mid nineteenth century, when the number of foreign whalers reached its peak, there were recurring incidents of mariners becoming marooned in Japan. Some incidents were the result of shipwrecks; a few were the result of sailors' desertions of their ships, to take their chance in an unknown country to escape the harsh treatment dealt out by ship's officers after long periods at sea in hazardous conditions. The crews were mostly hardened seamen from many countries of the world, while those recruited from Australian colonies were just as likely to include ex-convicts or, in some cases, escapees from their penal existence.

With the single exception of Nagasaki on the southern island of Kyushu, where limited trading was permitted with the Dutch and Chinese, Japan was closed to the entry of foreigners for over 200 years. The period of isolation from the rest of the world began in 1638, when Portuguese Christian missionaries and their converts were perceived by the rulers to be a threat, and believed to be the cause of civil unrest. When foreign whaling ships arrived off the coast of Japan in ever-increasing numbers, they were viewed with suspicion, and lookouts and military outposts were established along the coastline. If ships attempted to land, the lookouts notified the authorities, who ordered action to be taken to repel the intruders. The whalers were also suspected of making charts of the region, and existing maps were carefully protected from falling into their possession. Few of the castaways and runaways from the whaling ships survived to describe their experience, for the punishment when they were captured was imprisonment and execution.

Whereas the foreign whalers carried out their activities in the nineteenth century from ocean-going sailing vessels, the Japanese fishermen hunted whales in a manner that had differed little in hundreds of years. The fishermen did not engage in deep-sea whaling, but maintained centuries-old bay and coastal methods. The policy of isolation prevented Japanese citizens from leaving the country, and small fishing boats were modified to restrict their ability to sail into open sea. The activities of the Western whalers near Japan coincided with a drastic reduction in the number of whales taken by the Japanese in their nets. The whales were being killed

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before reaching the sheltered coastal waters within reach of the small Japanese boats.

During their early expeditions, the American whaling fleet made use of ports in China, Taiwan, and Okinawa to replenish their stores, but, as their activities expanded, the powerful whaling industry pressed for action to be taken to force Japan to open its ports for their use. The treatment of captured seamen had been eased somewhat before Commodore Perry of the United States Navy arrived in Japan. His visit and demands, made under the threat of invasion, culminated in the eventual opening of Japanese ports and the subsequent change in the course of Japan's history.



PART I

THE VOYAGE OF THE *LADY ROWENA*



# I

## Port Jackson to Lauchlan Islands

At daylight on Tuesday, 2 November 1830, a gun was fired from the *Lady Rowena* preparatory to sailing from Port Jackson in the colony of New South Wales, but as both the wind and tide were in, the order to weigh anchor was not given until 10 a.m.<sup>1</sup> Aboard the ship, two boys were about to begin an education and an adventure that would exceed any that most young men would ever experience in a lifetime. During the following twenty months, they would endure the extreme conditions of spectacular sub-Arctic places of ice and snow, and see the power of typhoons, earthquakes and volcanoes. The boys would receive instruction in the sciences of climate, geography, botany and navigation, while they carried out hard physical work and suffered the privations and dangers of life on board a sailing ship. They would discover the beauty of tropical Pacific islands, and be among the first Europeans to see them. They would be hosted by kings and chiefs, and learn about the people of newly visited places, how they worshipped and lived, what they wore and ate, and how to communicate with speakers of unwritten languages. They would witness scenes of massacre and warfare and the decline and death of shipmates. Their ship would venture to the secluded country of Japan, where they and the crew would be the first people to sail from Australia and walk on that mysterious unknown land.

They would also learn how to hunt and kill the prized sperm whale, for the journey on which the ship embarked had a twofold purpose, exploration and whaling.

The boys were half brothers, and their teacher and father, Bourn Russell, was commander and owner of the *Lady Rowena*. William Watson,

aged fifteen, the older of the two, was one of the four youthful apprentices aboard. He had been named William Bourn Russell Watson, the Watson being his mother's family name, as she was not married to his father. The other boy, Bourn Russell (the third), was eleven years of age, and the third child of Captain Russell and his wife Jane Mackreth.<sup>2</sup> At the time of the ship's departure from Australia, the captain's wife and their two other children were still in England, but they would arrive in Sydney before the ship returned from its voyage. Bourn Russell accepted his responsibility to William Watson by employing him as an apprentice to enable him to follow his family's seafaring tradition, but it was many years before he officially acknowledged his own paternity to the boy. The detailed and descriptive account of the journey to Japan that the captain recorded in the ship's journal made little direct reference to his sons, though he often remarked on the activities of the boys in a general manner, likely to have included the other young apprentices on board.

Russell's father, Bourn Russell (the first), who had also been a sea captain, was shot on board his own vessel when his son was six years of age, but relatives ensured that the lad received a good education. He followed his father's career at sea when he was apprenticed in the coal trade at the age of 15. Young Russell was working off the coasts of Portugal, Spain, and the Mediterranean on a transport trader as second officer when he was forced to serve for Britain in the war with France. He was soon promoted to a master mate, and passed master. At the age of 21, Bourn Russell inherited his father's estate, including a house in which three generations of his family had been born and lived, and which he eventually sold to purchase a share ownership of the *Lady Rowena*, built in 1815.<sup>3</sup>

Captain Russell had been at sea for sixteen years, and had sailed over many trading routes of the world when in 1826 he commanded his ship from Cork in Ireland to carry 100 female convicts to Sydney in the colony of New South Wales.<sup>4</sup> He made two further voyages to the colonies, carrying cargo, livestock, and passengers from London to Sydney, Launceston and Hobart, and during that period had ample opportunity to be attracted to the prospect of the profits to be gained by whaling. When he departed from London again in April 1830, on a voyage carrying cargo with twenty-three passengers and twenty-nine crew, including his two sons,<sup>5</sup> he had already planned to base his future activities in Australia.

By the time Russell decided to transfer his interests from carrying cargo and passengers to hunting whales, the industry had extended from the northern waters of the Atlantic Sea to the southern Pacific Ocean.

Russell seems to have had no previous personal experience of hunting whales, but he was determined to learn the trade, and his lack of skill was balanced by his expertise in navigation and the experience gained during previous journeys through south Pacific islands. He was attracted to the opportunity for proper exploration of the islands and the recording of accurate coordinates of their positions. He was excited by the prospect of new discoveries, and had a keen interest in the lives of people who inhabited them. Perhaps he also saw exploration as a practical method of educating his sons and enabling them to learn the lucrative trade of whaling while seeing exotic places. The combination of whaling with his desire to explore would, he hoped, not only pay for the exploration, but also give him a considerable profit from the sale of fine sperm whale oil. Though preparation for the voyage must have involved a great deal of expense in refitting the *Lady Rowena* and the purchase of equipment and tools for the trade, he had confidence in the performance of his ship and in his own ability to succeed.

Russell was an experienced, firm, but fair commander of a vessel that provided relatively comfortable accommodation and facilities for his crew. The men and boys who sailed with him on the last voyage from London included the first mate John Philpin and the second and third officers.<sup>6</sup> No less than ten men joined the ship in Sydney, and Dr Brown replaced the previous medico James Douglas. The ship's company included a carpenter, a cook, two coopers, a sailmaker, an armourer, a steward, a boatswain, four apprentices, and experienced whalers and sealers among the ordinary seamen. After the journey from London, the *Lady Rowena* anchored off Fort Macquarie in September.<sup>7</sup> Within two months the cargo had been delivered, the ship prepared for whaling, extra crew engaged, and plans made for Russell's wife and their other children to travel to Sydney during the coming year.

Soon after the ship's departure from Port Jackson, a school of small 'black fish' or short-finned pilot whales was sighted, and though this was not the favoured species, four whaling boats were lowered, and three of the fish taken in order to gain experience with the equipment and provide

oil for the ship's lighting. This exercise also gave Russell an opportunity to dissect one of the small whales and learn something of its physiology during the process of 'cutting in', before the 'trying out', or rendering of the blubber, took place. The black fish was fastened alongside the ship, and work commenced, cutting and mincing the blubber to put into cauldrons over a fire on the deck. All the crew had the opportunity to practise their skills, and Russell collected a considerable amount of information, to ensure the efficiency of the pots in the heating process.

On the Sunday after departure, the captain conducted a prayer meeting with the boys and the crew. Prayers, or 'church', was part of Russell's regular routine on the Sabbath, as well as the killing of a pig to distribute fresh 'mess' to the men. The expedition carried a sow on board, which was almost due to pig. When she gave birth to eight piglets a few days later, they lived only a couple of days, as the sow had no milk. Also early in the voyage, the second officer, John Cooper, carelessly allowed a cask of pitch to fall into the after hold, where it landed on a cask of stout. The damage to the cask below caused the loss of about a third of its contents. Because there were no bottles to store the remainder, the stout would probably all be spoiled. Further carelessness caused the potatoes to rot. The captain discovered water had been leaking through the deck on them, and though this was known by some of the crew, the leak had not been reported. Even at this early stage of the voyage, Russell bemoaned the men's negligence even in matters concerning themselves, and he became increasingly dissatisfied with his men as they showed their inability to reach the standard of efficiency he expected of them.

The crew saw their first sperm whale late one afternoon a week after their departure, but when the whaleboats were lowered, a thick fog soon engulfed them. The boats could not be seen from the ship, and, fearing the crews would not find their way back, Russell fired a musket and made other loud noises to guide them back. No sooner were the boats hauled up and secured in the dark than the crew were deluged with torrents of rain, accompanied by the onset of thunder and lightning. The whale had gone down, and did not surface again. The first opportunity to make landfall came after about two weeks, when they neared a small island surrounded by a coral reef. Russell decided that, if it appeared possible to land a boat, he would try it. His youngest son and the doctor accompanied

the party ashore, and though they steered towards part of the reef on which the waves seemed to break the least, one of the boats was almost swamped by the surf. The island consisted entirely of broken coral and shells. Driftwood and pieces of bamboo littered the beach on one side of the island, and tufts of purslain, a species of portulaca commonly known as pig weed, grew there. Russell planted a few pumpkin seeds under a patch of the purslain, though he had little expectation they would grow; and he regretted not having a coconut to plant. The small island was not marked on his chart so he considered it a new discovery, and named it Russell's Island and Reef.<sup>8</sup>

The ship continued through the Coral Sea until more islands were seen. The land was part of a group known as Lauchlan's Islands in the Louisiade Archipelago;<sup>9</sup> Russell wanted to find out if it were inhabited. While the captain stayed on the ship to observe through his telescope, a boat was lowered, with a crew including Dr Brown and Mister Philpin the first mate. They carried three muskets between them. About five or six natives on the beach appeared to be gathering to view the ship. One of them faced the water's edge swinging in his hand something that looked like a bag or a mat. As Russell watched, their numbers increased to about forty. When the ship's boat rounded a point and came into view of the people on the shore, a canoe was launched. It had a crew of nine men, pulling rapidly towards the boat while the others ran along the beach. The whaleboat was pulling over a shallow reef as it steered towards the beach, where it made a good landing. The people in the canoe approached it from behind, landing about forty yards from them. Their movement was so fast that Russell believed it looked hostile, so immediately he lowered another boat, armed with six muskets and bayonets and plenty of ammunition, but also carrying some items for trade.

Before the second boat reached the beach, Russell was relieved to see interaction between the men in the first boat and the natives, who now seemed friendly enough. While the men were occupied cutting up coconuts that had been thrown to them, the first mate foolishly climbed out of the boat, coaxed towards a hut on the shore. Behind the hut, hidden from the mate's view, stood a man balancing a spear, preparing to throw it as soon as the mate approached. The crew on the second boat could see what was about to happen, so they shouted loudly. When the

native knew he had been spotted, he threw down the spear. Later he tied a piece of white string to the end, as though to indicate he had meant no harm. The mate later reported that near the hut he had seen several women, who had immediately run away when they saw him. Russell was uncertain if the sight of the women had been the reason for the mate's approach, or indeed, if the man with the spear had been guarding them.

Only two older men, about sixty or seventy years of age, were among the male population. Russell noted they were long-legged people of a dark copper colour. Each man wore a piece of mat made from leaves of a tree, the mat being carefully passed between the legs, pulled tight in front and behind, then tied with a string around the waist. The boys all wore the same mat, and the women wore a white feather covering. From this, Russell conjectured that their 'habits are decent'. The people hung ornaments of tortoiseshell on their ears, and others had holes bored through them, in which were fixed various shaped pieces of pearl oyster shell. One who appeared to be a chief had bangles of what seemed to be leather around his arm and legs, just above the ankles. They were slightly tattooed, and one person was smeared with charcoal. Some wore a small beard, and their teeth were stained black from chewing betel nut, giving them the appearance of Malays. The man who had attempted to throw a spear had the cartilage of his nose bored, with a piece of tortoiseshell passed through it, and except for him, the people seemed to be friendly.

The islanders possessed many stone adzes, axes and spears, and a weapon that consisted of a large stone with a piece of string passed through a hole in its centre. They carried net bags, the cord made of white inner bark that was dyed to form a pattern in the netting, and at each bottom corner of the bags and in the middle hung an ornament made of shells and feathers. The people also made mats of soft leaves sewn together. Their houses were constructed in a triangular shape, covered with plaited leaves and with an opening at both ends. One house was seen in each bay of the island. No kinds of domestic animals or birds were observed, and the only cultivation was a small plantation of coconut trees in rich soil. The islanders were not anxious to trade, but reluctantly climbed some coconut trees and threw the nuts on to the boats in exchange for iron hoop. The islanders appeared familiar with iron hoops, which were carried on the whaling ships for the construction of the hundreds of casks used to hold

the whale oil. For islanders using stone tools and hunting with arrows tipped with shell, the introduction of iron by traders was very quickly appreciated. When the boats shoved off just before dark, Russell was sorry to hear a musket shot fired, even though it was fired into the air. It was too dark to see what effect it had on the people, but the doctor told him he thought they knew the use of muskets, judging from their reactions when they saw them in the boats.

Bourn Russell considered the ability to communicate and establish good relationships with islanders was essential for the survival of his crew. He also knew from his years at sea that the presence of women on the islands could result in trouble with the islander men, or worse, the desertion of seamen from the ships. He attempted to forestall such events by usually accompanying the men ashore himself, as he had little confidence in his mate's ability to manage landing parties. The journeys of whaling ships could last for years, and if the scourge of scurvy and the possible resulting death of seamen were to be avoided, it was essential to trade with the people to obtain fresh fruits and vegetables. At the same time, it was also necessary to be prepared for attack from them. In some places, earlier explorers had massacred natives with their superior weapons, introduced disease, and abused the women. Some crews in the whaling industry were still committing atrocities, and the islanders either attempted to fight back or mistrusted the whalers and fled.

The ship continued north on about the same longitude without any sighting of whales. Four days later, at the entrance of St George's Channel, the lookout could see immense high mountains showing their summits above the clouds. This was supposed to be the eastern end of New Britain.<sup>10</sup> It was said that the natives of the region were a 'murderous set', so each man in the crew was prepared with a musket and bayonet, but only the officers were supplied with ammunition. This move was evidently designed to prevent the crew from firing carelessly. A canoe, seen to be leaving the cape, arrived alongside the ship an hour later. The six men in the canoe were completely naked, five being of a light copper colour and one nearly black and with a differently formed head from the others. All of them had long woolly, curly hair, three were black haired, and three of a red colour, resulting from a mixture of earth and coconut oil. The appearance of their hair reminded Russell of a councillor's wig. He

thought their manner of trading was fair, but they were suspicious, always wishing to receive their payment before giving their goods, of which they had a great variety. The crew bought yams, plantains, coconuts, taro, maize, mangoes, ginger and a type of cucumber, as well as a few artifacts. Russell thought these natives 'civil'. After the trading was completed, they came on board ship, where they saw a great deal to interest them, particularly cloths and red handkerchiefs. Before leaving the ship, they marked Russell's face down the middle and sides with red ochre.

More trading took place the following day. Many kinds of edible roots, large eggs from domestic fowls, and tame pigs, no longer than guinea pigs, were purchased. The crew also bought small types of ripe melons, tasting like cucumbers, turmeric root and sugar cane. The natives appeared to have plenty of tortoiseshell, all the fish hooks being made of it, and Russell was able to buy some of the unworked shell. Sailors in the South Pacific valued tortoiseshell highly, as it had a ready resale market when they returned to port. Russell was also interested in the craftsmanship of the artifacts and novelty of the curios. He was attracted to the bangles worn round the legs and arms of these people, some made of plaited grass and some of shell or ivory. It took him some persuasion to obtain samples of the latter, as the people appeared to be afraid of the consequences on shore if they should sell them. About fifty-five to sixty islanders visited the ship again the next day, giving Russell another opportunity to examine them. He concluded that the people who visited the ship had little importance in their community, but they all tried to persuade the crew to go ashore. Some had their hair coloured white as well as red; others the natural colour of black. They had various hues of skin colour, and did not all have the same physiognomy, so Russell judged them to be of a mixed race. One canoe held about fifteen people of middling stature, but some of them so small that he supposed them to be boys until they came near and he saw they were adult men. All were naked, and had no hesitation in coming on board the ship, for it was evidently not the first they had seen. Iron was the principal thing they desired for trade, as well as fish hooks and needles.

Around midnight, while the ship was offshore with calm weather and a smooth sea, the trembling of the ship woke Russell. Nothing could be seen, and he was concerned at first that the ship had passed over a coral

reef or collided with something submerged. Others on board who had experienced similar movement knew it to be the effects of an earthquake at sea. From their position they had views of New Britain, New Ireland, and other islands to the north of the ship, and as they cruised through the waters Russell noted the places that showed signs of habitation. He was particular in his assessment of opportunities not only for trade, but also the likelihood of good water supplies and safe access for boats to go ashore. Because of the lack of activity through no significant sighting of whales, he wrote up a glossary of the meanings of the words of the languages spoken by the natives of the islands, and continued with this practice throughout the remainder of the journey. He also gave detailed descriptions of the hazards, in the form of reefs, shoals, and currents, when approaching the land, and continually made note of and corrected errors in existing charts of the region. If the islands or reefs were unmarked or unnamed, he named them to assist other navigators in following his recommendations. He also assessed the potential of places for cultivation, described the geographical features, and illustrated them with drawings.

The *Lady Rowena* had been at sea for four weeks with no whales when Russell began to doubt the quality of these grounds. Perhaps the expedition had arrived too early in the season, but if so, the season must be a short one in that area.