

Review

Death and disease at Somerset, the North Queensland Government Headquarters at the top of Cape York 1864-1877

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Abstract

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Somerset homestead, a remote station established by John Jardine in 1864 at the top of Cape York as the local government headquarters, in the hope that it would equal Singapore as a travel hub and business centre, is now a historical ruin. Initial constructions included a hospital amongst other essential buildings, though no trace of the hospital remains. The medical visitor today surveying the ruins and graves feels an aura of past grandeur, and wonders about the past activities in the hospital. Administrative funding priorities delayed the initial construction, but the departure of the only doctor appointed to the settlement left the police magistrate with health problems beyond his competence. The history of this establishment and the medical problems of the area are reviewed.

Keywords: Cape York, Dr T.J. Haran, Frank Jardine, John Jardine, Somerset Hospital

INTRODUCTION

European exploration of Australia (figure 1) between 1845 and 1865 annexed an area the size of Western Europe. Inevitably support and civilisation were often a thousand kilometres or more distant and supply lines stretched to the limit. A government centre at the tip of Cape York in Queensland was deemed essential to support passing ships in need of assistance and to prevent any encroachment in the area by the French who had annexed Pacific Islands including New Caledonia (now Vanuatu) not too far away. Somerset homestead, a remote station established by John Jardine in 1864 at the top of Cape York to serve this purpose is now a historical ruin. Initial constructions included a hospital amongst other essential buildings. The history of this establishment and the medical problems of the area are reviewed.

Geography and early history

Cape York Peninsula named by Lieutenant James Cook

on 21 August 1770 in honour of the late Prince Edward, Duke of York, brother of King George III, is a large remote peninsula located in far North Queensland, Australia, a predominantly unspoiled wilderness recognized for its global environmental significance. The west coast borders the Gulf of Carpentaria and the east coast borders the Coral Sea. The widest point at the base of the peninsula is 430 km from the Bloomfield River in the southeast, across to the Aboriginal community of Kowanyama on the west coast. The tip of Cape York is just over 800kms from Cooktown on the Endeavour River to the South. A central mountain range rises to 800 metres. (Figure 1)

The climate on Cape York Peninsula is tropical and monsoonal, with a mean annual temperature of twenty-seven degrees centigrade and annually over 2,000 millimetres of rain falls, predominantly during the monsoon season between November and April. For example thirty centimetres of rain was recorded to have fallen in six hours in February 1903. (Morning Post 1903). Summer rains fill huge meandering rivers and the flood



Figure 1. Australia, top of Cape York arrowed

plains.

By the 1840s the concept of a settlement on Cape York had appeared advantageous to the government of Great Britain and New South Wales. The Albany Passage just South East of the tip of the cape was surveyed in October 1848 by Captain Owen Stanley aboard H.M.S. Rattlesnake. (Lawrie, 1991).

In 1848 Edmund Kennedy led the first European overland expedition of Cape York. Of the thirteen men who set out, ten died of fever or starvation, or were speared by hostile aborigines including Kennedy who died of spear wounds almost within sight of his destination in December 1848. Violent tribal warfare, massacres of shipwrecked castaways and cannibalism were common features of the area. (Liddell, 1996).

The French occupation of New Caledonia less than 1500 nautical miles away in 1854 generated anxiety in the Admiralty increasing the need for a military outpost at Cape York or Albany Island. In the same year, shipping underwriters in Melbourne noted the loss of seventy ships and 150 lives in a short period and supported the idea of a pilot station. Finally the wreck of an English merchant vessel, *The Sapphire*, on the Great Barrier Reef on the 23 September 1859 while sailing from Gladstone to India with only eleven surviving the seas and the native tribes, precipitated demands from the Brisbane populous

and newspapers for a new settlement (Lawrie, 1991).

A permanent settlement was proposed by the Governor, Sir George Bowen two years after his arrival in Queensland in a despatch to the Duke of Newcastle on 9th December, 1861.

'In a naval and military point of view a post at or near Cape York would be most valuable, and its importance is daily increasing with the augmentation of the commerce passing by this route, especially since the establishment of a French Colony and naval station at New Caledonia' (Lawrie, 1991).

Bowen's naval experience was very brief and included sixteen days on *HMS Victory*; he had spent much more time as an administrator and rector. It was proposed originally in 1861, that the site should be chosen by the Governor and the officer commanding the Australian Royal Naval Station that the Queensland Government should have sole control and that marines from the Australian station should provide protection (Lawrie, 1991).

In addition to being a trading hub for the Torres Straits and the North Pacific, Bowen visualised that the base could afford relief to shipwrecked crews, and act as a



Figure 2. Top of Cape York showing Somerset, Albany Island opposite, and Thursday Island

coaling station. (Austin, 1949). It was proposed that a naval vessel should sail between Brisbane and Cape York to convey mail and supplies at least three times yearly for the first three years, that the Queensland Government would supply £5,000 for the cost of buildings and that the settlement would initially be protected by a detachment of twenty marines (Lawrie, 1991).

Sir George Bowen viewed the Albany Channel aboard H.M.S. Pioneer in September 1862. A maximum depth of twelve fathoms in the deepest part of the 600 yard wide channel was noted, with available fresh water on both the island and adjacent mainland. A plentiful supply of timber was noted and the soil was perceived to be suitable for crops and grazing. Bowen initially selected Albany Island, as the best spot for the formation of the station but after further consideration the settlement was established on the mainland immediately opposite to Port Albany on a bluff named Somerset Point (Figure 2). The Queensland Government contributed £5,000 and the Imperial Government £7,000.

When Bowen stopped in Rockhampton on his return journey, he met John Jardine, a former captain in the first Regiment of Royal Dragoons and then Police Magistrate at Rockhampton, who he appointed as Police Magistrate and Commissioner of Crown Lands in Cape York (The North Australian, 1864).

Jardine was born in Spedlins Castle in Scotland on 5 March 1807, the fourth son of Alexander Jardine, 6th Baronet of Applegirth, and his wife Jane Dorcas, a descendent of the Earls of Panmure. He arrived in Sydney on 3 January 1840 with his wife, Elizabeth Jane. His early attempts at running sheep and cattle stations ended in insolvency, but over the ensuing years he became a captain in the Queensland Rifle Brigade, a Justice of the Peace and Police Magistrate.

Tenders for the prefabrication of government buildings designed appropriately for Europeans in a tropical climate to be ready for erection at Somerset, Port Albany were

invited, and plans and specifications were made available in the Colonial Architect's office. (The Courier, 1863).

White man Dreaming, the initial settlement under John Jardine

The initial party including magistrate John Jardine, Surgeon Superintendent Dr Hannan and twenty two marines under Lt Pascoe, was transported to Cape York aboard two ships. (The North Australian October, 1864). Midshipman J Burgess, one of the ship's officers, reported that the paddle-wheel sloop, H.M.S. Salamander under the command of John Carnegie, arrived at Albany Pass on the 29 July, 1864 (The Queenslander October, 1901).

The Golden Eagle arrived in the Albany passage in the afternoon of 1 August, and the personnel, animals and equipment were unloaded over the next few days, while the marines were also busy felling trees and clearing land.

John Jardine wrote to Lt Pascoe on 8 August stating early planning objectives, including ensuring the health and safety of the Marines. Jardine outlined working hours, planned divine service on Sunday, which he expected would be attended by all unless prevented by sickness or other sufficient reasons, and the appointment of one man as gardener, and another as carter of dray horses. (Jardine Letters, Fryer Library)

Jardine's descriptive letter written on 6 September to be conveyed back to the Colonial Secretary in Brisbane aboard the Salamander, which sailed for the return voyage the following day, commenced the four generation love affair of the Jardine family for the area:-

'It appears to me that the site of Somerset has been happily chosen as some of the best land is to be found in its neighbourhood. As a town site I think it good the

features are well marked and commanding the assets have gradual slopes the lines have good curves and the whole is highly picturesque (Jardine Letters, Fryer Library).

This letter outlined John Jardine's priorities. He described the sites for the first building, which in order of preference were the Marine Barracks and associated structures, then the Police Magistrate's building, i.e. his personal accommodation. Jardine noted that:-

'The carpenter sent with Mr Halpin unfortunately cut his legs so badly as to unfit him for work for some time to come, and I have sent him by this steamer to Brisbane that he may obtain the benefits of medical advice and treatment at the Brisbane Hospital.' (Jardine Letters, Fryer Library).

Next construction was a tramway from the beach, followed by accommodation for the officer of Marines, Lt Pascoe, and the surgeon's quarters for Dr Hannan. Then Jardine planned a Customs House, and proposed a small jetty for which he requested funding and two quarries. The provision of an adequate postal service next attracted his attention. He recorded Dr Hannan's absence to collect his family and that the assistant surgeon of the Salamander performed his duties during that period. (Jardine Letters, Fryer Library).

While the Brisbane press (The North Australian October 1864) thought a hospital was on the agenda, stating *'The initial party set to work assembling and erecting the previously partially prefabricated Government house, hospital, post office and residential quarters.'* Jardine clearly had not prioritised the hospital as the doctor would have preferred to judge by his letter stating:-

'Dr Harran has applied to me on the subject of the hospital its conduct and support. I could only tell him that a building was to be erected for that purpose, and which I understood was to be for the use of the marines and that there were as yet no funds available for the support of an Hospital here as in the more settled districts of the Colony. I have advised him to put his wishes in writing and forward me his letter' (Jardine Letters, Fryer Library).

Jardine employed the standard administrative tactics to deal with requests for important medical facilities - there is no funding and put your request in writing, though Jardine had requested subsidies for his priorities. Jardine perceived Somerset as a benign healthy environment and therefore may not have seen the hospital as a priority. He noted a plentiful supply of water, but predominantly bloodwood and Grevillia trees producing poor timber. He thought it a poor environment for sheep, but expected cattle and horses to thrive. He saw an

abundance of fish in the sea, but also an abundance of crocodiles in the river. He wrote:-

'Of the agreeableness and salubrity of the climate of Somerset I cannot speak too favourably.....no serious indisposition has occurred among the European residents...as far as can be judged, there is no local malady.... There has been no symptom of fever or ague... Somerset will be eagerly sought by invalids from the East, as an excellent and accessible sanatorium.'(Jardine R Geog Socm, J, 1866).

John Jardine's two eldest sons, Frank and Alex, then aged 22 and 20, drove cattle from Rockhampton to Somerset in an extraordinary epic journey defying repeated hostile indigenous attacks and the wet season to commence a cattle property at Somerset. (The Northern Miner, 1911).

Government and press initially appeared extremely confident about the settlement's future, with suggestions that it could become a travel and commerce centre to rival Singapore. An optimistic newspaper editorial considered this event required attention as a potentially epic development in the history of Queensland for *'if Somerset advances in the same way as the other settlements on the North Eastern Australia it can be entertained that it will be a place of primary importance in these latitudes'*. (The North Australian October 1864). Another article advised a trip to the *'extremely promising township, of Somerset was available aboard the schooner Melanie'*. (The Brisbane Courier, January 1865). When allotments in the 'town' of Somerset were offered for sale in Brisbane, they were all sold at an average of £40 each. (Rockhampton Bulletin, 1865).

Spanish silver and gold was found at the Portland Shoals in the Murray Island group by one of John Jardine's beche-de-mer fishing boat. It was believed to be a wreck of a Spanish bullion ship heading for Manila, an anonymous memorial to the courageous sailors who opened up the oceans centuries ago. Jardine made the silver into a dinner set used as part of his lavish and legendary hospitality for passing travellers.(The Brisbane Courier, 1895).

After nine months at Somerset, Jardine took special leave in Brisbane from May to October 1865, then spent a month back at Somerset to make a final report. He observed that *'the Hospital standing on the highest part of Somerset Point forms a most prominent object, and is seen from a long distance at sea.'*(Lawrie, 1991). He thought the settlement appeared cheerful, praised all those who had worked there, recorded all the buildings, and noted the conveniences and water tanks, concluding that they were *'in every way admirably suited for the purposes for which they are intended'*. (Lawrie, 1991). By December he was back in his former position in Rockhampton.

Frank Lascelles Jardine

Frank, born in 1841, the eldest child of John took over officially as Police Superintendent of Somerset in 1868, though he had been resident there for the previous two years. The marines and Dr Hannan had already departed, leaving the settlement to deal with medical issues as well as possible, and there are references to this deficiency in Frank Jardine's letters to the Colonial Secretary. (Letters, Jardine and Chester 1868 – 1877. Queensland State Archives (QSA)).

Jardine sent quarterly reports noting the absence of births, deaths and marriages almost every quarter, punctuated only by infrequent death, usually from trauma.

Frank Jardine reported on 1 October 1868 that several of the constables had been ill with generalised itching, but no pain. He suspected this was caused by the consumption of some of the animal food when the small meat ratio had been eaten. In 1870 he reported that white ants have damaged and destroyed to a very considerable extent all portions of the various buildings built of soft wood and that most of the buildings have not had a coat of paint for more than three years.

He signed death certificates including those of Rasmur Mikklsen, ship's cook on 2 November 1874, and Ah Soy from injuries at sea on board a P O steamer on 22 December 1874. He reported with sorrow in 1 July 1875 *'that sickness still continues amongst the native police, three of them being unfit for duty. Constable Blackadder is also quite unable to do any work whatever, and will I think be compelled to leave'*. Jardine thought that there were indications of softening of the brain similar to the symptoms Dr James described during W.W. Leay's New Guinea Expedition. Jardine wrote

The season is very unfavourable for the recovery of invalids as the rains still continue with intervals of calm sunny weather... little improvement can be expected in the health of the men till the present rain is succeeded by dry weather'. (Letters, Jardine and Chester 1868 – 1877. QSA).

Jardine again reported a serious febrile illness on 1 January 1879.

'The season is causing a great deal of sickness in the settlement. Water Police Const Smith is seriously ill with a sort of low fever, until the last few days I did not expect him to live. He has now taken a change for the better, when the mail steamer arrives, if she has a doctor on board, I shall consult with him on the advisability of sending him to Brisbane.'

A perception developed, unlike John Jardine's early claims, that *'Somerset was most unhealthy and that the inhabitants during certain portions of the year are obliged*

to live on Albany Island'.(Letters, Jardine and Chester 1868 – 1877. QSA).

Other illnesses were mentioned in his letters.

'Three of the native police are likewise on the sick list but not with any severe ailment.....Coxswain Powell is suffering from the effects of heatstroke which he received about a fortnight ago whilst out on patrol. He is slowly but steadily recovering..... Death of Thomas McNab a professional diver reported. His air tube burst at 7 fathoms, he was dead when hauled up, with blood oozing from mouth lips and ears. His head was swollen making it difficult to remove helmet.'(Letters, Jardine and Chester 1868 – 1877. QSA).

His desire for medical assistance is revealed in another letter.

'There is no doubt that cases of individual illness (by no means confined to fever and ague) are much prolonged for the want of medical advice, a want the more felt now that there are eleven white women and twelve children in and about the settlement.' (Letters, Jardine and Chester 1868 – 1877. QSA).

A less tangible source of gold than the Spanish Bullion was revealed one day when an old fossicker holding a bag with some small lumps of gold staggered into Somerset dying. He drew a map for Frank Jardine revealing the site of his claim near the Batavia River before he passed away. Unfortunately Jardine concealed this in a book in his library, and two months later before he had checked the site; his library was consumed by fire. The site remains lost to this day, another example of white man dreaming. (Townsville Daily Bulletin, 1930).

Frank Jardine's observational skills and knowledge of biology were recognised when he noted that the local species of barramundi did not appear identical to the true barramundi, *Osteoglossum Leichhardt*. A sample sent to the Commissioner of Fisheries, Mr. W Saville-Kent, F.R.S., was confirmed to represent a distinct and different species. (Morning Bulletin, 1891).

Dr Timotheus J. Haran

James Hannan, the initial and only full time doctor appointed to Somerset was born in Dublin on 28 September 1828, and qualified MRCS in 1849. He migrated to Australia from Plymouth aboard the 'Navarino' arriving in Adelaide on 25 September 1851. He also served as assistant surgeon to the 49th regiment and died in Simla, India on 12 June 1880. (Hannan Australian Medical Pioneers Index).

Hannan added his letter of 6 September 1864 to Jardine's in a doctor's script which was less legible than

the magistrate's. He wrote that he considered that a hospital was indispensable for the comfort of the Marines, that treating sick men in the barracks was disagreeable to the healthy and sick alike. Hannan considered the need to treat contagious diseases in isolation, and the possible medical needs of refugees and the indigenous population. He recommended a hospital of twelve beds, with a wide veranda for extra beds if required, plus equipment, furniture and an attendant to maintain the establishment. The issue of funding he wrote optimistically would 'require the best consideration of the Colonial Government.' (Hannan Letter, 1864).

Like the government and newspapers, Dr Hannan gave glowing reports of the new settlement. He praised the environment claiming the breeze enabled working parties to work even through the midday heat, and that the few cases of illness were unrelated to the climate demonstrating that Europeans could work in tropical Australia. Hannan also noted an abundant supply of fresh water with four nearby lagoons. (The North Australian October, 1864).

Hannan had a brief absence going to collect his wife and daughter and bring them back to Somerset. Sadly both his daughter and a subsequent child died at Somerset. During this period, Dr Richard Cannon, assistant surgeon on the Salamander was locum surgeon. Jardine, ever the optimist, thought this preferable that Hannan should be away now rather than 'when the settlement has attained a more advanced stage' (Letters, Jardine and Chester 1868 – 1877. QSA).

Hannan was reported again, this time in the wet summer season, as stating that workmen were able to labour outside providing they rested between the hours of twelve and two, and that no serious diseases had occurred among the settlers. Hannan attributed the absence of tropical infectious diseases in Somerset to be due to the local geology, as decomposing vegetation and mangrove swamps were absent, the porous soil absorbed that the heaviest fall of rain rapidly and the refreshing prevalent south-east trade-wind improved general health. (The Brisbane Courier, 13 February 1865).

The Courier considered the smooth progress of Somerset to be an 'agreeable surprise', and expressed the hope that 'such steady advancement as we have seen in the past will be its lot until it attains the wealthy and important position which it is destined to occupy at no distant period'. (The Brisbane Courier, 13 February, 1865). Hannan was reportedly given two heads as a trophy from the tribal wars between the Gudang and the Yadagana. (Liddell, 1996).

The detachment of Marines were withdrawn from Somerset aboard the Salamander possibly on her final visit to Somerset on 1 August 1867, or a month or two earlier, and Dr Hannan left with them as part of the Royal Naval military establishment leaving Somerset with no resident doctor ever again (A Royal Marine 2010).

Dr Channon

Richard Channon qualified LRCS Ireland in 1861, was in Australia by 1862 and is registered in Victoria in 1863. He was assistant surgeon to Dr Alexander Rattray, MD, on H.M.S. Salamander in 1865. He gave a presentation in Valparaiso in 1885 about his time in Somerset as locum for Hannan (Cannon, 1885). He writes with a rollicking lyrical style comparing his voyage to Jason and the Argonauts. Most of his presentation is anthropological observations of the indigenous culture, including their bush remedies, and the episodic attacks made on the settlement rather than clinical details. He describes the accompanying marines as '*specimens of the invertebrate class who have failed in life and as dilapidated individuals as could be gleaned from English barracks*'. He commends the '*wise Admiralty for providing the thickest clothing*'. Channon describes his position as sawbones, and describes Jardine as

'A thin, lathy Scotchman, craft and knowing in all the customs and manners of the blacks, with the eye of a hawk and nerves of steel, the very man for a bush fight or a foray, a worthy descendent of the border raiders of Scotland.'

Channon's cases included an indigenous lady with a back wound exposing a length of muscle caused by her partner's axe, and a child for whom he prescribed cod liver oil and hartshorn lineament, only to find the cod liver oil was rubbed on the skin and the hartshorn ingested.

He also had to care for two of the marines, severely wounded when a group of Aborigines attacked the camp while the marines were erecting the marine barracks, on 13 September 1864. Prior to the attack, Jardine ordered the flogging of an aboriginal man on suspicion of stealing an axe, an act which terminated the previous friendly relationship with the indigenous tribes.

John Jardine sent details of the event to the Colonial Secretary on 2 December 1864, via the schooner Bluebell which arrived on 2 December. He noted that 'the aggressors were repelled and 'met with severe and just punishment.'

One of the marines, Corporal David Dent was wounded in the left shoulder with a barbed spear which Assistant Surgeon Cannon could only partially remove as it broke off in the wound, leaving three sting ray barbs which only came out spontaneously after several months as the barbs prevented extraction. He recovered to serve another twelve years, being discharged after twenty-one years' service.

The other wounded soldier, Private John Saich was wounded both in the right upper arm with a four-pointed spear, and in the chest with a single pointed spear which was reported to have penetrated the lung. Channon was able to staunch the bleeding and extract the spears, but the chest wound became infected. According to Pascoe's

account, *'this man's life was despaired of, he has been hovering between life and death since, is still unable to rise from his bed, and in all probability will never be fit for duty again.* 'Although transferred for treatment to the Sydney Military Hospital aboard the Salamander on 16 January 1865, Saich later died on 21 April 1865 (Lawrie 1991, Cannon 1885).

Pascoe also wrote privately and disapprovingly of Jardine to Colonel G.C. Langley, Deputy Adjutant General, Royal Marines, in England, *'...the aboriginal natives, with whom we had previously been on most friendly terms, attacked the camp, the immediate cause of which was the injudicious conduct of one of the Civil residents, in chastising one of their number, on the suspicion of his having stolen an axe.'*

Channon noted alcohol, smallpox and measles among the indigenous people as a *'blessing of civilisation'*, and that on one occasion while performing a post mortem on a *'kanaka'* his colleagues perceived the body was being cut up for eating and fled back to their boat (Cannon, 1885).

Dr Rattray

Although not a resident doctor at Somerset, Alexander Rattray, MD, was ship's surgeon on the Salamander and visited often. Rattray Island in the Northern group of the Whitsunday Islands is named after him. (The Capricornian, 1926).

Dr Rattray presented a paper on the Physical Geography, Climate and Capabilities of Somerset and Cape York Peninsula, Australia to the Royal Historical Society in 1868. (Rattray, 1868).

Heath and medical aspects were mentioned in only general terms briefly in his presentation. He believed details of the climate were medically important, especially for naval surgeons, and perceived the climate of Somerset as salubrious thanks to the sea breezes. Rattray considered it a healthier place than Burketown which had recently experienced fifty deaths in a population of 200 from what Rattray described as *'Gulf Fever, a species of bilious remittent'*. Today that term is believed to represent relapsing malaria, typhoid or hepatitis. He noted that the population after the withdrawal of the marines was only sixteen, and that the tidal flow in Albany Pass made it an unsafe anchorage.

He believed the rainy season might predispose to malaria, though he had not seen any cases, and that the high midday summer temperature with a salted meat diet five days a week would *'predispose to slight phlegm's and other forms of cutaneous irritation, as would happen under the same circumstance anywhere, even in extra-tropical countries'*. He also noted the need for rest in summer between 1200 and 1400 hours, and the general good health of the residents of Somerset. Rattray noted a few cases of mild diarrhoea, not requiring sick leave

perhaps *'caused by bilious derangement, produced by great heat occurred'*. (The Darling Downs Gazette and General Advertiser, 1865). He did however believe that prolonged exposure to a tropical climate was undesirable for Europeans who thrived best above 40°N and 30° S.

The Hospital

The building was prefabricated in Brisbane, but its assembly was not a priority for John Jardine. No details of its inpatients, diseases, treatments or problems are available. It had a resident doctor for a maximum of three years, from the date of assembly until Dr. Hannan left in August 1867. In John Jardine's final report (Lawrie 1991) of the settlement he noted that *'The hospital standing on the highest part of Somerset point forms a most prominent object, and is seen from a long distance at sea'* (Figure 3 and 4).

Within another two years the timber had been destroyed by white ants, rendering the place unusable, though it was not finally pulled down and the material recycled till 1873. Henry Chester was appointed Police Magistrate at Somerset between 1869 and 1871 while Jardine was absent. On arrival he commenced a review of the establishment, and reported on the state of the hospital as follows.

'The hospital is almost destroyed by white ants and will probably fall down ere long. Nearly all the windows are broken. I would recommend that it be pulled down and the material used to repair the other buildings. The surgeon's house is occupied by one of the married constables' (Letters, Jardine and Chester 1868 – 1877. QSA).

In the absence of a doctor and a functioning hospital, Chester requested

'A ships medicine chest, calculated for say thirty people and fitted with special reference to the diseases incidental to a tropical climate would be very useful, for the medicines here are deteriorated by age..... Among articles not usually included in a ships' chest, I would beg a supply of sulphate of zinc (for blight) tincture of rhubarb and senna (for children) strong liquid ammonia and powdered ipecac.'(Letters, Jardine and Chester 1868 – 1877. QSA).

Beddome, the police magistrate noted on 22 November 1873, that Mr. Jardine has commenced to pull down the hospital to prevent it coming down, stating *'I have nearly completed the demolition, the iron I have stowed in one of the cottages, the good timber I have stacked in a heap'*. (Letters, Jardine and Chester 1868 – 1877. QSA).



Figure 3. The settlement at Somerset c1869. The largest building on the far headland is the marine barracks, and the hospital is the building nearest to the sea



Figure 4. Somerset Hospital c 1868

Local diseases

In this settlement of largely unregulated entrepreneurial opportunities, illness was not always as first apparent. Frank Jardine reported that a vessel flying the 'yellow jack' to keep other vessels clear and claiming to have an outbreak of cholera on board was actually anchored on a rich patch of pearl shell (Mullins, 1995).

Quarantine

The Brisbane Courier considered that the Central Board

of Health may not be fulfilling its duties to protect the community from disease, and that Somerset would be an ideal location for a quarantine station to prevent the import of contagious and infectious diseases, and the ensuing panic. The editorial thought all vessels coming from China or Singapore should be compelled to stop for inspection by the resident health officer. (The Brisbane Courier, 1877).

Trauma

Violent injury and sudden death were never far below the

surface in an environment where power struggles between mainland and island tribal groupings predate the arrival of Europeans, and the indigenous people fought valiantly but in vain to retain their land from the Europeans. (Bottoms, 2013).

Attacks by local indigenous men against the settlement occurred. For example the previously mentioned attack on two marines working near the settlement with John Saich sustaining an ultimately fatal spear wound. (Cannon, 1885).

Frank Jardine's letters also recorded that Charles Thorngren, the writer of an enclosed letter had been killed by the natives on New Guinea on the 23 August when his boat was attacked by natives near Yule Island. Jardine also noted the death of Dr James, and that two of the crew were treated for spear wounds, but had no further details available (Letters, Jardine and Chester 1868 – 1877. QSA).

Accidents are inevitable in societies with a gun culture. Walter Hagen, a twenty-three year old Irishman working on the telegraph line near Somerset, when practising with his rifle, died instantly with a head wound when his gun discharged unexpectedly. John Douglas, coroner on Thursday Island went to Somerset to hold an enquiry. (The Queenslander, 1886).

Another violent death occurred in Albany pass in 1887. Four natives aboard a pearling cutter suddenly attacked the other occupants of the boat, Nicholas Minister, the master and owner, George Mungea, a native diver and his wife, and a Malay. Mungea was literally hacked to death by their long knives, sustaining severe fatal thoracic injuries, but Minister, though receiving severe injuries for which he went to Cooktown for treatment, managed to fight his assailants off. They swam ashore and disappeared in the bush. An inquiry was held into the circumstances attended by the Government Resident and the Harbour Master from Thursday Island. (The Queenslander, 1887).

Trauma was not only anthropomorphic. In September 1911, two members of the garrison, Charles McKenzie and Gunner Smith decided to walk the few kilometres from the Lockerbie cattle station to Somerset. Mackenzie became sick, so Smith walked on alone to fetch help arriving at Somerset the following evening having been lost for a while. A search party found only McKenzie's handkerchief near a lagoon infested by salt water crocodiles. He was presumed to have been taken by 'alligators' as the article erroneously described the local crocodiles. (Cairns Post, 1911).

Malaria

Liddell noted two deaths from malaria amongst the Torres Strait island community at Duan, between February and April 1872. (Liddell, 1996).

Measles

A febrile illness broke out in Cape York and the local islands in 1875. Mortalities of fifty percent or higher were reported in various communities, on the Prince of Wales Island, fifteen of the Kaurega tribe died each week, the surviving members of the Gudang tribe around Somerset nearly all died leaving three old men, 40,000 Islanders died at Fiji alone (Lawrie 1991), and pearl fishing was suspended. Dr James aboard the *Chevert* diagnosed this epidemic as measles. (Liddell 1996, The Brisbane Courier March, 1875).

Smallpox

Smallpox was probably introduced into the area by passing mariners. John Knox found pock marked inhabitants along the coast of Papua, according to the natives it had been caught from a passing ship, and they did not want Knox's crew sleeping ashore. (The Queenslander, 1871).

Fevers

Five resident of Burketown were brought to Somerset to recover from a fever, but all died and are buried there. (Lawrie, 1991). The French transport, L'Allierie lost over 80 men on voyage with a fever, and the wife of the commandant of New Caledonia died within sight of Somerset and is also buried there. (The Queenslander, 1936).

Conditions on board

Not all agreed with Hannan. Ships' surgeons observed that visits to Cape York had adverse effects on their crews. John Carnegie, captain of the Salamander, for example after frequent visits over one year suffered ill health, and was replaced by Commander George Nares on 11 July 1865. He did not have another command till taking over the Dart on 26 October 1868 (<http://www.pdavis>).

H.M.S. Salamander as already noted, was a paddle steamer. The boilers were kept alight from 2.00 am to 5.00 pm adding to the debilitating effect of the tropical climate. Longer voyages lead to salted meat and reduced fresh vegetable, though the effect of substituting lime juice for rum may have been beneficial if not congenial. (Liddell, 1996).

Optimal therapy was not always available at sea. When the crew of the Franz arrived at Somerset after six months at sea, crew members complained that the captain, Redlich and the mate, Baumgarten, swore at them, hit them, provided insufficient rations, and refused

medication for the sick (The Brisbane Courier, 1873).

Captain Bremer of the schooner 'Caroline' became ill at sea after departing from the Albert River on 16 November 1866. The ship put in to Somerset on 17 December for medications. No other details are available and it is uncertain whether a doctor was available. Unfortunately these appeared ineffective for he died soon after putting in to Cardwell on 4 January 1867. (Townsville Daily Bulletin, 1951).

Transfer of Government to Thursday Island, One man left dreaming

The disadvantages of Somerset were apparent to the discerning observer soon after the initial settlement, though the Jardine family struggled on four generations. A more sanguine voice questioned the unbroken flow of praise coming from John Jardine, Dr Harran and Government sources (The North Australian 1865), and wondered what details were omitted from published reports, when others noted that the embryonic settlement had few jobs, unsuitable land for cultivation, an aggressive native population, armies of mosquitoes, few minerals and a harbour poorly placed to attract passing ships. The tidal flow through Albany passage was sufficient to make it an unsuitable anchorage. (The Brisbane Courier June, 1875).

In spite of the Jardines' epic drive to establish a cattle station, shipments out of Albany Pass would only be possible if a long jetty was constructed to provide sufficient depth of water for transport ships. Ultimately a marine surveyor recommended shipments could be made from the Batavia River, 100 miles to the South where only a short jetty would provide a depth of six or seven fathoms at low tide. (The Brisbane Courier, 1895).

A visitor also viewed the harbour with disfavour as a dangerous anchorage where boats could not get within fifty or sixty yards of the landing place at low tide to deliver letters and goods, and considered there was little point in going ashore after seeing the settlement once. (The Brisbane Courier, 1867).

Within three years there were rumours of the abandonment of Somerset. An editorial considered this would waste the £600 annual costs, that costs could be reduced by removing most of the soldiers guarding the town, and that the Admiralty still perceived the harbour as important having invested £3000 in moorings. The paper still saw a role for a valuable establishment with a small staff, particularly if the telegraph line went through Somerset. (The Queenslander, 1867).

Although many survivors of shipwrecks found sanctuary at Somerset, the anchorage only had space for three ships at the same time and white ants were destroying the buildings. (Liddell, 1996). Of these cogent observations, perhaps the lack of a deep-water anchorage played the largest part in the government

headquarters being subsequently moved to Thursday Island in September 1877 as a more strategic site and a larger anchorage. (The Queenslander 1867, Rockhampton Bulletin, 1875). Somerset would never be as important again.

Medical isolation

Letters from the administrator of Somerset in subsequent years often mentioned medical issues. The fall of the hospital, requests for medications, suggestions of the benefits of having a doctor, plus a list of death, diseases and transfers to Royal Brisbane Hospital for treatment featured in communications to the end of the century.

Saudade, lost dreams

Reports detailed below from newspapers over later years comment mainly on the tranquil beauty of Somerset, but also the final chapters of the saga.

Some travellers remained entranced by the beautiful view of the Albany passage and the tranquil bay from the settlement, by the police magistrate's house, and the extent of the settlement with still sixteen buildings in use in 1882 mainly by those engaged in the pearl-shell business (The Queenslander, 1882). Another passing ship's passenger in 1906 commented on the beauty of Albany Pass and the residency with its surrounding foliage. (The Queenslander, 1906). Two years later another visitor enjoyed the beautiful location and enjoyed the legendary Jardine hospitality for two days. Notable features were the variety of fruit, the turkeys, pigeons and wild pigs, the bathing beach, a sail around the bay with one of Frank's sons and a musical evening in the residency. (Chronicle and North Coast Advertiser, 1908).

Frank Jardine was reported to be dangerously ill in 1905 necessitating an immediate visit from Dr White of Thursday Island (The Queenslander, 1905). However in November 1917, the Queenslander noted the Frank Jardine still resided in the Residency at Somerset, and described him as '*a wonderful and remarkable man, the hero of many adventures, an amazing specimen of strong and vigorous manhood, defiant of the supposed severe and trying climate of the far North*'. The paper implied that he was widely known and loved, though the indigenous community had a much less affectionate viewpoint (The Queenslander, 1917).

By 1927 in a scene now of quiet solitude, the old residency was deserted and the other buildings had disappeared under the vegetation. Only the graves of Frank and Sana Jardine, D'Oyle Applin a subsequent magistrate there, and two of the members of the Kennedy expedition remain as nostalgic reminders of the kind hospitality and convivial music evenings enjoyed in the past (Morning Bulletin, 1927).

The following year the Queenslander still visualised success again for Somerset as a revitalised coconut plantation assisted by the cheap labour available, in preference to other sites in Cape York (The Queenslander, 1928). The Government resumed land purchased in the Somerset area in 1941. A parliamentary statement revealed in 1941, that the cost of compensation to date was £16,471. Somerset was finally handed over to the department of native affairs by Mr H S Vidgen, a grandson of John Jardine, after being owned by the Jardine family for three quarters of a century. (Morning Bulletin, 1948).

Obituaries

John Jardine died suddenly of suspected heart disease in Rockhampton in 1874 aged 66 (The Rockhampton Bulletin, 1874).

Frank L. Jardine lived in the Old Residency at Somerset up to his 80th year till his death on Tuesday 18 March 1919. His homestead, thickly festooned with creepers, and surrounded by several acres of mango trees, was by then the only remnant of the town of Somerset (Brisbane Courier, 1919).

George Elphinstone Dalrymple, previously appointed as Commissioner for Kennedy in 1860 and officer-in-charge of Port Denison in 1861, was appointed Somerset Government Resident for six weeks in 1874, but had a relapse of an illness contracted while leading a previous North-eastern exploring expedition, necessitating a return to Brisbane on the steamship Legislator. The Gazette implied he was a popular and effective administrator and expressed regrets that he appeared to have some severe febrile potentially prolonged illness, an accurate prognosis as he returned to England where he died in 1876 having never really regained good health (Downs Gazette and General Advertiser, 1874). Like John Jardine, he was born in Scotland, and the two met previously when Dalrymple assaulted Jardine over a scandal involving a friend's wife when Jardine was Police Magistrate in Rockhampton!

Henry Chester, was noted to be seriously ill in the Mater Hospital early in 1914, and his death, aged eighty, occurred a few months later (Cairns Post, 1914).

Quartermaster-sergeant Bertie Bootle Jardine of the 11th Light Horse in the AIF, the younger son of Frank Jardine was reported in 1915 (Morning Bulletin, 1915)

to have died of wounds, but subsequently was reported in his service record (<https://www.aif.adfa>) as returning safely after four years of war service in Gallipoli and France, and subsequently served as a diver in the US Navy in World War II.

CONCLUSION

The establishment of Somerset was based on the need

to provide sanctuary for ships in distress around the northern end of the barrier reef, and to repel any French involvement in the area. The location was in an appropriate area, but it was selected by a military man, when a naval eye would have rapidly rejected Albany Pass as an unsuitable anchorage that could never have been another Singapore, because of its narrow shallow waters and rapid tidal flow.

John Jardine was a competent experienced choice as first Police Magistrate and Commissioner of Lands. He initially established reasonable relationships with most of the local indigenous people, and was an expert shot when required to defend himself and the settlement. His role was made difficult by the lack of clarity of the hierarchy in Somerset, where both Pascoe and Jardine believed they had the senior role, and Pascoe had no experience of the country and its indigenous people. However the Jardine involvement in Somerset was courageous, ambitious, romantic but ultimately unrealistic - more *'white man dreaming'*. From a medical perspective it was another remote isolated Queensland site with specific requirements that would never be met, a hospital that would never be sustained, and inadequate medical or nursing staffing to care for the tiny community.

A visit today evokes dreams of yesterday's hopes and echoes of past hospitality amongst the ruins at beautiful Somerset Bay.

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