THE MCKENZIE MASSACRE ON BENTINCK ISLAND

Roma Kelly and Nicholas Evans

The Kaiadilt people traditionally lived in the South Wellesley Islands in the Southern Gulf of Carpentaria (see Map). They were extremely isolated and had little or no contact with other Aboriginal groups. Most now live on Mornington Island (traditionally Lardil territory), although attempts to return to the South Wellesleys are now being made.

The Wellesley Islands, Southern Gulf of Carpentaria

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The Kaiadilt were afforded their first glimpses of Europeans relatively early, in 1802, when Mathew Flinders met six of them on Allen Island. But they did not emerge fully from their isolation until 1948, when the entire tribe was moved to Mornington Island Mission at Gununa. This made them the last group of coastal Aborigines to come into regular contact with Europeans.

In the intervening period there were various attempts at contact by Government officials, missionaries and would-be settlers. During the 1860s a settlement, Carnarvon, was established on Sweers Island. For the few years of its occupation the Kaiadilt largely avoided Sweers, although there were some clashes with Europeans there.¹ Other Europeans to visit Bentinck Island, such as the explorers Captain Stokes (1841) and Captain Pennefather (1880), were carefully avoided, but observed from cover. Dr W.E. Roth, Northern Protector of Aborigines (who visited Bentinck Island in 1901), and his successors Howard (1910) and Bleakley (around 1917) managed only fleeting contacts.

The massacre recounted below occurred around 1918, in conjunction with the only European attempt to occupy Bentinck Island itself. The Kaiadilt tradition does not identify the murderer, and no contemporary record of the massacre exists. Safely beyond the reach of a law that was in any case indifferent to the taking of Aboriginal lives, the murderer's untrammelled excesses went untried and unpunished. The European party almost certainly included one McKenzie, remembered by the wife of an early Mornington Missionary as 'a physically big man, an elderly rugged individual' (Tindale 1962a:266). He had obtained a Government lease to occupy Sweers Island and part of Bentinck Island. Arriving in 1911 'with some sheep and an Aboriginal woman, probably a mainlander from Burketown way' (Memmott 1982:33), he built a hut near the mouth of the Kurumbali estuary on Bentinck Island.

During his short time on Bentinck Island, McKenzie systematically tried to eliminate the Kaiadilt, riding across the island on horseback, and shooting down everyone but the girls he intended to rape. Tindale, who has compiled a detailed genealogy from oral sources, estimates that eleven people were killed (1962b:305) — about 10% of the Kaiadilt population.

Later he moved to Sweers Island where he ran sheep and goats and established a kiln supplying lime around the Southern Gulf. For a time he employed two Mornington Islanders but 'they soon became disenchanted by the continual diet of goats' heads and livers' (Memmott 1982:34) and flagged down a boat to Mornington Island. McKenzie then obtained other mainland Aborigines as helpers, and a European partner named Nelson. But it is unclear who was with him on Bentinck Island at the time of the massacre.

Roma Kelly, who tells this story, was born about 1917 and heard about McKenzie from her own parents. Her Kaiadilt names are *Dibirdibi* 'rock cod' and *Mambunkingathi* 'born at Mambunki'.²

1 These few paragraphs cannot do justice to the colourful history of the South Wellesleys. Other accounts are in Tindale 1962a and Dymock 1973 but the most thorough is Memmott 1982.

2 A practical phonemic orthography is employed. The digraphs *th* and *nh* represent laminodental stops and nasals respectively; *rd* and *rn* retroflexes, *j* and *ny* palatals, *r* a retroflex continuant like *r* in American English (written *rl* before other retroflexes), and *rr* an apico-alveolar trill. Vowel length is shown by double letters. There is no voicing contrast, but some stop phonemes are written voiced and others unvoiced, depending on their average phonetic values.

The following abbreviations are used in glosses: ABLative, ACTual (past or present), ALLative, APPRehensive, ASSOCIative, CONSequential, CounTeRFaCTual, DeTransitive (passive or reflexive),

Roma Kelly (photo by Penny Johnson)

(Footnote 2 continued)

DUAL, FACTitive, FUTure, INclusive, INCHOative, INTENSifier, INSTRumental, LOCative, Nominalizer, NOMinative, OBJECT, PLUral, PRECONdition, PRIOR OBJECT (e.g. OBJECT of a PRECONdition clause), PRIVative, PROPrietary, UTILitive, Verbal Dative, Verbal Intransitive ALLative, Verbal PURPositive. See Evans 1985 for a description of the grammar.

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- 1 *rukuthi mutha-ya dangka-ya mala-maru-th*
place name many-OBJ person-OBJ sea-V.D-ACT
dathina-wala dog
that-LOT(NOM)
- 2 *dog durrwaa-j, dangka-wala jarri-j*
dog chase-ACT person-LOT(NOM) run away-ACT
- 3 *yuuma-tha mutha-a dangka-a people,*
drown-ACT many-NOM person-NOM
kunawun
child(NOM)
- 4 *yuuma-th, dathin-ki thungal-i warna-j,*
drown-ACT that-OBJ thing-OBJ dislike-ACT
dathin-kuru bala-a-nyarr
that-PROP shoot-DT-APPR
- 5 *dathin-ki dalurudaluru³ warna-j, bayi-wuru*
that-OBJ gun dislike-ACT fight-PROP
jardi-ya warna-j,
mob-NOM dislike-ACT
- 6 *yuuma-th. jangka-a dumu-y, jangka-a*
drown-ACT some-NOM hill-LOC some-NOM
walmathi, jangka-a yuuma-th.
high up some-NOM drown-ACT
- 7 *kunawuna-nurru-da bardak, marl-da*
child-ASSOC-STILL belly(NOM) child-ASSOC
kunawuna-nurru, yuuma-th.
child-ASSOC drown-ACT.
- 8 *kunawuna-wuru bardak, marl-da*
child-PROP belly(NOM) hand-NOM
kunawuna-nurru yuuma-th
child-ASSOC drown-ACT

1 At Rukuthi those dogs forced many (Kaiadilt) people into the sea.

2 The dogs chased (them), many people ran away.

3 Lots of people drowned, and children.

4 (They) drowned, (they) didn't like that thing, might get shot by it,

5 didn't like that gun, didn't like that warlike mob (i.e. McKenzie and his gang), and

6 drowned. Some went to the sandhills, some went high up, some drowned.

7 (Women) drowned with children still in their bellies, or leading them by the hand.

8 With children in their bellies and at their hands they drowned.

³ *Dal.uru.daluru.* though a native Kayardilt word analysable as [thundercrack- PROP-REDUP] is always indeclinable.

<p>9 <i>wulthunga-tha biya-j, mala-ya wiriku-j,</i>
 turn over-ACT swim-ACT sea-LOC dive-ACT

 <i>yarki wiriku-j</i>
 underneath dive-ACT</p> | <p>9 They swam along turning over, dived into the sea, dived under the sea.</p> |
| <p>10 <i>warra-thi-da kurirr-wa-tha yuuma-th</i>
 far-REMOTE-same dead-INCH-ACT drown-ACT</p> | <p>10 Far out to sea they drowned and died.</p> |
| <p>11 <i>kurirra dathin-ij-i dii-ja</i>
 dead(NOM) there-REMOTE-LOC sit-ACT

 <i>mala-y kunawuna-nurru</i>
 sea-LOC child-ASSOC</p> | <p>11 They sank dead with their children there way out at sea.</p> |
| <p>12 <i>jangka-a dumu-y, thungkuwa-ya</i>
 some-NOM sandhill-LOC mangrove-LOC

 <i>barri-j, katharratharr-i</i>
 crawl-ACT estuary-LOC</p> | <p>12 Some (stayed) on the crests (of the sand hills), (some) crawled round among the mangroves, in the estuaries.</p> |
| <p>13 <i>katharratharr-i kuujuu-j, yuuma-tha</i>
 estuary-LOC swim-ACT drown-ACT

 <i>thungkuwa-y</i>
 mangrove-LOC</p> | <p>13 (They) swam about in the estuaries, and drowned among the mangroves.</p> |
| <p>14 <i>jaa-j, jaa-ja thungkuwa-y,</i>
 enter-ACT enter-ACT mangrove-LOC</p> | <p>14 (They) went into the mangrove swamps.</p> |
| <p>15 <i>dathin-ki thungal-i warna-j, dathin-ki</i>
 that-OBJ thing-OBJ dislike-ACT that-OBJ

 <i>thungal-i dalurudaluru</i>
 thing-OBJ gun</p> | <p>15 They didn't like that thing, that gun thing.</p> |
| <p>16 <i>dathin-ki thungal-i, wuran-kinaba</i>
 that-OBJ thing-OBJ food-PRIOR OBJ

 <i>diya-jarrba wungi-yarrb,</i>
 eat-PRECOND steal-PRECOND</p> | <p>16 That thing, after (they) had eaten and stolen food.</p> |
| <p>17 <i>ngamathu-walada⁴ wungi-j, buluka</i>
 mother-LOT(NOM) steal-ACT bullock

 <i>ngamathu-wala.</i>
 mother-LOT(NOM)</p> | <p>17 (They) stole bullocks, the things that are like many mothers.</p> |

⁴ The neologism *ngamathuwala* does not mean 'many breasts', as one might expect – this would be *munirrwala*. Rather, the rationale seems to be that a cow supplies as much milk as many mothers.

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<p>18 <i>bala-a-j, jul-bala-a-ja</i>
shoot-DT-ACT INTENS-shoot-DT-ACT
<i>durrwa-yii-j, jinka-a-j</i>
chase-DT-ACT follow-DT-ACT</p>	<p>18 (They) were shot at, chased
and constantly shot at,
followed,</p>
<p>19 <i>marndi-i-j, maku-uru marndi-i-j</i>
rob-DT-ACT woman-PROP rob-DT-ACT</p>	<p>19 robbed, robbed of their
women.</p>
<p>20 <i>marngan-da kunawuna thaari-j,</i>
nubile-NOM child(NOM) take back-ACT
<i>marngan-da kunawuna kurrka-a-j</i>
nubile-NOM child(NOM) take-DT-ACT</p>	<p>20 (McKenzie's men) took the
nubile girls back (to their
camp), the nubile girls were
taken (sexually).</p>
<p>21 <i>jangka-wu maku-ru marndi-i-j,</i>
some-PROP woman-PROP rob-DT-ACT
<i>jangka-wu kunawuna-wu marndi-i-j,</i>
some-PROP child-PROP rob-DT-ACT
<i>bandarr-u</i>
half-PROP</p>	<p>21 (They) were robbed of some
of their women, robbed of
some of their children, of
half (their children).</p>
<p>22 <i>kurrka-a-j, marngan-da kunawuna</i>
take-DT-ACT nubile-NOM child(NOM)
<i>kurrka-a-j</i>
take-DT-ACT</p>	<p>22 (They) were seized, the
nubile girls were seized.</p>
<p>23 <i>marngan-da kunawuna rar-ung-ku⁵</i>
nubile-NOM child(NOM) south-ALL-PROP
<i>thaari-j</i>
take back-ACT</p>	<p>23 (They) took the nubile girls
back towards the south.</p>
<p>24 <i>rar-ung-ka kurrka-a-j</i>
south-ALL-NOM take-DT-ACT</p>	<p>24 (The girls) were taken south-
ward.</p>
<p>25 <i>marngan-ki kunawuna-ya thaari-ja</i>
nubile-OBJ child-OBJ take back-ACT
<i>rar-ung-k</i>
south-ALL-NOM</p>	<p>25 (They) took the nubile girls
back to the south.</p>

⁵ McKenzie had a camp at Kurumbali, on the south side of Bentinck Island. One listener remarked here 'just takem one night altogether, bringim back then might be three day altogether. Lot of woman bin find a child, *jangkaa kandukandu, jangkaa ngumu* [some red (half-caste), some black].'

- 26 *jangka-a yuuma-th, jangka-a*
some-NOM drown-ACT some-NOM
thungkuwa-y, jangka-a jinka-ri
mangrove-LOC some-NOM swamp-ALL
- 26 Some (Kaiadilt) drowned,
some (hid) in the man-
groves, some (were)
scattered about in the
swamp.
- 27 *thungkuwa-ya barri-j wirdi-ja*
mangrove-LOC crawl-ACT stay-ACT
dakarldi-n-da dakarldii-j
hide-N-NOM hide-ACT
- 27 (Some) crawled about in the
mangroves, kept themselves
hidden away.
- 28 *kaba-a-nangku jangka-a*
find-DT-NEGFUT some-NOM
- 28 Some couldn't be found.
- 29 *alright jangka-a yuuma-th, jangka-a*
some-NOM drown-ACT some-NOM
mala-yiwa-tha katharr-iwa-th,
sea-V.I.ALL-ACT estuary-V.I.ALL-ACT
kunawuna-nurru
child-ASSOC(NOM)
- 29 Yes, some drowned, some
went into the sea, some went
into the estuaries with their
children.
- 30 *jangka-a bala-a-j, walmathi*
some-NOM shoot-DT-ACT high up
dumu-y,
sandhill-LOC
- 30 Some were shot high up on
the sandhills,
- 31 *Kunawuna-nurru bala-a-j, jangka-a*
child-ASSOC(NOM) shoot-DT-ACT some-NOM
bardaka-y,
belly-LOC
- 31 shot with their babies. Some
were (still) in (their) bellies,
- 32 *jangka-a kinyin-d,⁶ rajurri-n-d,*
some-NOM form-NOM walk about-N-NOM
bala-a-j
shoot-DT-ACT
- 32 some already having human
form, toddlers, were shot.
- 33 *tharda-jillarri-ya dangka-a, bala-tha*
shoulder-hurt-LOC man-NOM shoot-ACT
wurdiyala-j
travel about-ACT
- 33 (That) man's shoulder must
have got sore, (he) travelled
about shooting,

6 The noun *kinyinda* means 'visible, extended form' and is appropriate here for a child that has emerged from the invisibility of the womb.

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34	<i>dangka-birrkalii-n-marri,</i>
person-feel sorry for-N-PRIV	<i>warirr</i>
nothing	34	incapable of feeling sorry,
nothing.
35	<i>mankin-da dangka-a,</i>
stranger-NOM person-NOM	<i>warra-waan-d,</i>
far-ORIG-NOM	35	(They were) strangers, looked
like they came from a long
way away,
	<i>maraka warra-wan-da</i>
CTRFCT stranger-NOM	<i>dangka-a</i>
person-NOM		
36	<i>maraka mankin-da</i>
CTRFCT stranger-NOM	<i>dangka-a</i>
man-NOM	36	looked like strangers.
37	<i>dathin-kuru dulk-uru</i>
that-PROP(NOM) country-PROP	<i>jardi,</i>
mob(NOM)	37	The mob who owned that
country,
38	<i>dul-marra-ya dangka-y,</i>
country-UTIL-OBJ person-OBJ		38	the <i>dulmarra dangkaa</i> (cus-
todians)
39	<i>dulk-uru-ya dangka-ya</i>
country-PROP-OBJ person-OBJ	<i>barrwaa-j</i>
block off-ACT	39	(they) blocked off the
owners from (their own)
country.
	<i>dulk-i</i>
country-OBJ			
40	<i>maraka bi-l-wan-ji</i>
CTRFCT 3-PLU-POSS-OBJ	<i>dulk-i</i>
country-OBJ	40	(You would have thought it
was) their country.
41	<i>warra-ja dulk-i</i>
go-ACT country-LOC	<i>wirdi-n-barrwaa-j,</i>
stay-N-block off-ACT	41	(The Kaiadilt) went about
barred from their own
country, unable to go out in
the open,
	<i>kalarr-barrwaa-j,</i>
open-block off-ACT			
42	<i>mala-maru-tha bala-tha</i>
sea-V.D-ACT shoot-ACT	<i>kurulu-th, kurilu-th,</i>
kill-ACT kill-ACT	42	(McKenzie's mob) shot them
out into the sea, and killed,
killed.
43	<i>ngamathu jarri-j,</i>
mother(NOM) run away-ACT	<i>kanthathu</i>
father(NOM)	43	Mothers ran away, fathers
ran away,
	<i>jarri-j,</i>
run away-ACT			
44	<i>ngamathu jarri-ja</i>
mother(NOM) run away-ACT		44	mothers ran away, grand-
mothers ran away,
	<i>ngarriju</i>
father's mother(NOM)	<i>jarri-j,</i>
run away-ACT		

45	<i>jangka-a yuuma-th, jangka-a kurirr,</i>
some-NOM drown-ACT some-NOM dead(NOM)	45	some drowned, some were dead.
46	<i>kirthan-da wuran-ki diya-j,</i>
surreptitiously-NOM food-OBJ eat-ACT
<i>buluku-ya diya-j,</i>
bullock-OBJ eat-ACT	46	Behind his back (the Kaiadilt) ate (his) food, ate (his) bullocks,
47	<i>wungi-ja diya-j, bala-a-ja wirdi...,</i>
steal-ACT eat-ACT shoot-DT-ACT stay...,	47	stole and ate (them), they kept getting shot,
48	<i>bi-l-da bala-a-n-janii-j</i>
3-PLU-NOM shoot-DT-N-VPURP-ACT	48	they were asking to get shot,
49	<i>bala-a-ju bakii-ju</i>
shoot-DT-FUT altogether-FUT	49	they would all get shot.
50	<i>jangka-a bala-a-j, jangka-a wirdi-ja</i>
some-NOM shoot-DT-ACT some-NOM stay-ACT
<i>birjin-d</i>
alive-NOM	50	Some were shot, some stayed alive. ⁷

⁷ The translation is by Nicholas Evans, incorporating comments by the late Darwin Moodoonuthi.

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