

First published in 1986 by the Fraser Island Defenders Organisation to mark the Sesqui-Centenary of the rescue of Eliza Fraser and the death of her husband after whom Fraser Island is named.

Eliza Fraser's Troubled TIMES

John Sinclair attempts to report the saga of the events involving Eliza Fraser following the wreck of the "Stirling Castle" as contemporary journalists may have described them.

ANOTHER REEF WRECK WRITE-OFF

Great Barrier Reef: All attempts to save the 500 ton brig *Stirling Castle* which ran aground on an uncharted coral reef in the early on the morning of 22nd May, 1836 failed.

The crew abandoned the vessel after an unsuccessful 10 hour salvage effort, beginning at 5.00 a.m., failed and the ship began breaking up. Captain James Fraser said that the ship was a write off.

All 18 people aboard including the captain's pregnant wife, Mrs Eliza Fraser, managed to launch a long-boat and the ship's pinnace. After some initial confusion they headed for the nearest European settlement, Moreton Bay. One of the lifeboats was unseaworthy because the ship's carpenter was working on it and had pulled it apart the day before the ship ran aground.

The *Stirling Castle* joins a long list of victims of the Great Barrier Reef, which includes the ships, *Endeavour*, *Porpoise* and *Pandora*.

Marine authorities have been unable to locate the site of the wreck because of the confused reports on its position at the time of going aground.

One report said that the coral reef was "200 miles south of Thursday Island" but another report said that the wreck occurred in the Swain Reefs about 1000 km south of there.

The *Stirling Castle* under the command of Captain James Fraser, was returning to London in ballast via Sydney to Singapore via Torres Straits after delivering its cargo to Van Diemen's Land.

The *Stirling Castle* is the second ship under the 54-year-old Captain Fraser's command to be wrecked in the Coral Sea during in six years. The brigantine, *Comet*, was wrecked in Torres Strait in 1830.

Captain Fraser, who was known to have been in poor health and suffering from an ulcer at the time of the latter incident angrily denied that this shipwreck was due to poor seamanship or a weak command.



SURVIVORS' MARATHON ROW

Six-week ordeal lost at sea in leaky boat

Orchid Beach: A six week ordeal at sea for twelve survivors of the *Stirling Castle* ended on 26th June when they landed their leaky lifeboat near Waddy Point today.

The crew said that they had run out of food and freshwater and because they were too weak to continue rowing the lifeboat, they had been forced to head for land

While Captain Fraser said that he would try to repair the lifeboat others said that they would rather walk to the Moreton Bay Settlement because the lifeboat was totally unsafe and unseaworthy.

They said that they had been betrayed by the men who had manned the *Stirling Castle's* other lifeboat which was more seaworthy. The other party had been towing them but failed to return for them after taking off on an excursion to obtain water and it was feared that they headed for Brisbane without them.

The crew said that they didn't know where they had been during the six weeks since their ship was wrecked but they knew that they had to head south to reach any European settlement.

BABY DIED AT BIRTH

Coral Sea, 26th May, 1836: A baby born to Mrs Eliza Fraser in a lifeboat in the Coral Sea shared with eleven men survived only a few seconds before drowning.

The premature birth occurred after Mrs Fraser collapsed into the scuppers. This resulted in the baby being born underwater. It drowned soon after birth.

Mrs Fraser's premature labour is thought to have been brought on by the strenuous work she had undertaken during the ordeal that she and the others aboard had been through during the last three days since the *Stirling Castle* ran aground on a reef and had to be abandoned.

A crewmember said that Mrs Fraser had tried to undertake her husband's share of the work in the leaky long boat which was opening at the seams and had to be bailed out continuously. Captain James Fraser, who was suffering from an acute ulcer, was too ill to move at all.

The dead baby was wrapped in a shirt by Chief Officer, Charles Brown, and consigned to the sea for burial. It was the 37-year-old Mrs Fraser's fourth child. The other children, sister, Jane (15), and brothers, James (11) and David (6) who were in the care of a minister at the Fraser's home at Stromness, Scotland.

Crewman Criticizes Captain & Wife

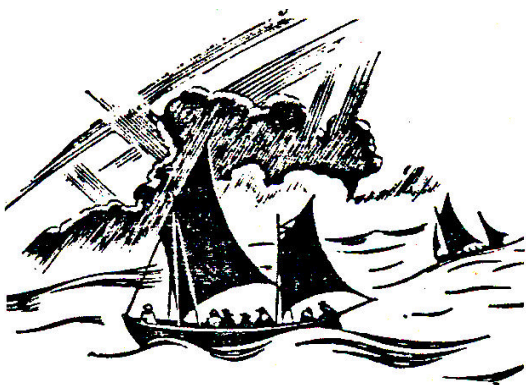
One of the surviving *Stirling Castle* crew members, Harry Youlden, was very critical of Mrs. Fraser who accused him of “stealing drinking water” during the ordeal.

He said, “*The Captain’s wife was a vixen and a terrible liar and the most artful and profane woman that ever lived, coming very near to my idea of the Devil.*”

Youlden was also critical of safety arrangements aboard the *Stirling Castle* and said that the Captain had not maintained emergency provisions in the lifeboats and had not ensured that the lifeboats were seaworthy at all times.

“*We had to supply the missing planks and broken keel of one of the lifeboats before we could put to sea; that took ten hours and then we had to have two men bailing continuously to keep afloat,*” he said.

They had also run into a gale and for seven days they had been “*buffeted by waves and without a morsel of food.*” He said that he had to threaten to throw Captain Fraser overboard to force him to put the boat to shore.



LOST AND AFRAID

Harry Youlden said that prior to coming ashore on Fraser Island they had kept to sea because they feared attacks by blacks and in one place had been threatened.

The crew said that they had run out of food and fresh water and had been forced to head for land because of the state of the lifeboat, and because they were no longer capable of rowing it.

While Captain Fraser said that he would try to repair the lifeboat, others said that they would rather walk to the Moreton Bay Settlement because the lifeboat was totally unsafe and unseaworthy.

During the ordeal when they are believed to have been to Repulse Bay and the Cumberland Islands they claim that they were attacked by blacks. They had only been able to land on shallow very sharp coral reefs.

All survivors said that they were anxious to obtain food and then get back to civilization although they were unsure of how they should proceed.

The survivors claimed that they had been betrayed by the men who had manned the *Stirling Castle*’s other lifeboat that was more seaworthy. The other party had been towing them but failed to return for them after taking off on an excursion to obtain water. They were suspected of making off for Brisbane without the other boat in tow. Since they didn’t arrive in Brisbane it was presumed lost with all on board.

NOTE: The other *Stirling Castle* survivors in the pinnace landed on a beach south of Moreton Bay and then continued to walk south. All but one of the men perished continuing to walk south.

Marooned mariners met by marauding blacks

Woman claims she was blacks’ slave
Great Sandy Island July 1836: Fraser Island
Aborigines surrounded the remaining six
exhausted sunburnt mariners from the *Stirling*
Castle stripped them of their clothing and
forced them into slavery.

The only woman in the party, Mrs. Eliza Fraser, said that the party had been forced to land their leaky lifeboat on 26th June near Waddy Point and to seek food and water but when they approached the Aborigines, who greeted them with loud “*Coo-ee*”, the mariners were relieved of all removable clothing in the first rush.



This had been followed by a three-day stand-off before the Aborigines returned to trade fish for clothing over the next week. Mrs. Fraser said that the trading continued until 11th July, during which time attempts to repair the lifeboat proved fruitless and strong southerly winds prevented the party rowing south.

She said that half of their party had mutinied and walked off leaving her husband, Captain James Fraser, four other survivors and herself on the beach without enough manpower to get the boat off.

She said, “*The poor diet, our weakened condition and the urgency of getting medical help for my husband forced us to try to walk to Brisbane under the cover of darkness but we were overtaken by blacks.*”

“*We were stripped perfectly naked and forced to follow the natives to their camp where we were now portioned off to different masters, who employed us in carrying wood, water and bark, and treated us with the greatest cruelty.*”

“*With the exception of a small portion of fish which we but very seldom got, all we had to survive upon was a kind of fern root which we were obliged to procure ourselves in the swamps,*” she said.

She said that the Aboriginal treatment of her- amounted to slavery.

“*During the whole of my detention among the natives, I was treated with the greatest cruelty, being obliged to fetch wood and water for them and constantly beaten when incapable of carrying the heavy loads they put upon me; exposed during the night to the inclemency of the weather, being hardly ever allowed to enter their huts even during the heaviest rain,*” she claimed.

Wife watches as husband slain

Mrs. Eliza Fraser has described how she saw her 57 year old husband killed by Aborigines on Great Sandy Island.

In an exclusive interview with the "Times" she said, "*In consequence of these hardships my husband soon became so much weakened as to be totally incapable of doing the work that was required of him, and being on one occasion unable through debility to carry a large log of wood, one of the natives threw a spear which entered his shoulder a little below the blade bone. Of this wound he never recovered and soon after was seized with a spitting of blood.*

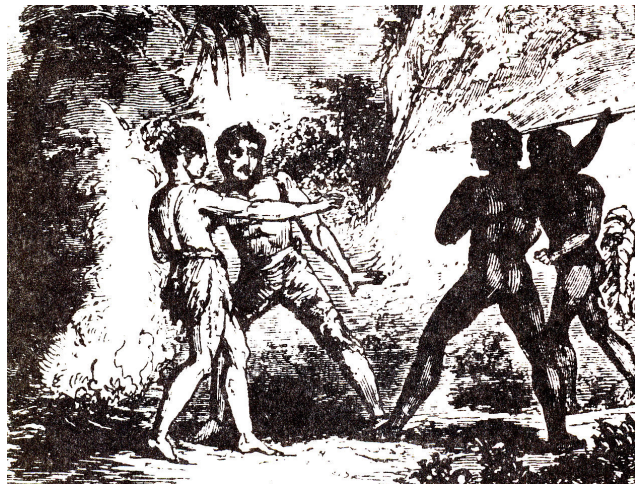
"He gradually pined away until his death took place eight or nine days afterwards. During this time he was laying on the ground incapable of moving. I was always prevented from approaching him or rendering any assistance. When he died they dragged him away by the legs and buried him."



Mrs. Fraser told another media outlet that after she was separated from him she saw he husband for the first time after four days when he was dragging a tree and was greatly fatigued.

She said that when she tried to inquire how it was that he dared not look at her, an Aboriginal saw them together and speared him right through the body and he was a corpse in an instant.

Mrs. Fraser said that she then ran to her husband, cried out, "*Jesus of Nazereth, I can endure this no longer,*" and pulled the spear out of his body but his breath was gone forever.



In another interview she said that her husband was speared while she hid behind a tree because he could not haul a log. She said that the spear emerged several inches through her husband's chest and when she went forward and pulled the spear from his body he had said, "*Eliza, I am gone forever!*" and as the blood spouted from his mouth he died.



Another survivor of the *Stirling Castle*, Harry Youlden differed from Mrs Fraser's accounts of events and said that Captain Fraser and the chief mate had both "*perished from starvation*".

NOTE: It is the inconsistencies between these four versions that have caste doubts on Eliza Fraser's credibility.

Stirling Castle survivors reach Brisbane

Brisbane, 10th August, 1836: Ten weeks after the brig *Stirling Castle* was wrecked on the Great Barrier Reef three of its mariners arrived in Brisbane describing their horrific ordeal at sea and living with blacks.

Two of the men, Robert Darge and Joseph Corralis, reached Lieutenant Charles Otter's shooting party which had been on Bribie Island for two days ago to alert the Brisbane authorities of the fate of their mates.

Another survivor, Harry Youlden was too weak to walk any further and was recovered living with blacks 25 miles away, and brought to Brisbane suffering from starvation and exposure and had to be hospitalised but doctors reported tonight that he was in a satisfactory condition

Lt. Otter who was hunting game, abandoned his hunt to return to Brisbane to assist the men.

Reports of other survivors of the *Stirling Castle* further north were also brought to Brisbane yesterday by seven Aborigines, who advised convict constable, John Graham that some of the crew have died but others including Mrs. Eliza Fraser, the wife of the ship's captain, are still alive in the bush over a hundred miles north. John Graham had lived with these blacks for several years.

First Hand Accounts

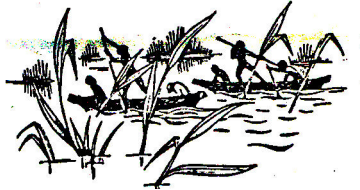
One Survivor, Robert Darge said that the group had been treated considerably by Aborigines.

He said, *"They are not a cruel people. Some hated white men but that was based on soldiers who had wounded them. One man had lost his leg.*

"They would do anything to obtain moco or steel axes or fishing hooks which they called gilla gilla."

He said that they had had six weeks at sea in a leaky boat, including a week of gales before they landed near Waddy Point to renew water and provisions and to try to repair the boat.

They had been unable to put to sea again because of the condition of the lifeboat and the weather and they walked to Brisbane ahead of the others because Captain Fraser was very sick and unable to keep up with them.



Fatal Island Crossing

In an exclusive interview with the "Times" from his hospital bed, Harry Youlden described crossing Great Sandy Strait where two of the crew are reported to have drowned.

"We came to what seemed a river two miles wide, but which was actually an arm of the sea separating us from the main land for we were upon an island."

"We stayed here for some days and were joined by the long boat party, who had experienced no better treatment than ourselves from the savages. (presumably Mrs. Fraser)."

"We grew impatient to pursue our journey. Two of the men attempted to swim across mainland, and were drowned. Soon after, the steward crossed with the native at whose hut he was staying, and three others and myself went over with my own particular host in his canoe."

"This canoe was made of the bark to the of a tree, softened by stream, and tied up at the ends. It was twenty feet long long. Sticks, placed athwart from gunwale to gunwale, kept it and spread. It looked frail, but carried five of us very safely."



Rescue Party Being Organized

Captain Foster Fyans, said in Brisbane tonight that he was arranging for a search party from Brisbane to rescue Mrs. Fraser and any other survivors of the *Stirling Castle*. He said that Lt Otter and John Graham, who knew the area and the Aborigines well had volunteered to head a search party

Damsel in distress rescued by convicts

Daring rescue by white blackfellow

Brisbane 21st August, 1836: Four more survivors of the brig *Stirling Castle* including Mrs Eliza Fraser returned to Brisbane yesterday after being rescued from the Aborigines

The rescue of Mrs. Fraser, John Baxter, Robert Dayman and Bob Carey who were all found living with Aborigines in the Great Sandy Region was undertaken by a party led by Lt. Otter and a convict John Graham.

After arriving at the Noosa River on 14th August Graham had soon located and rescued Dayman and located 17 year old Carey who were living on the western side of Lake Cooroibah.

Graham who lived with the Aborigines in the Great Sandy Region for six years before returning to Brisbane voluntarily in 1833 and Lt Otter walked 40 miles along Teewah Beach to find clues to Mrs. Fraser's whereabouts.

Graham said that he was told that Mrs. Fraser, "the She Ghost", was at the "Wa-Wa" (Place of Crows) corroboree ground at Elanda Point on the shores Lake Cootharaba and that Lt Baxter was on Tome, (Southern end of Fraser Island).

After making a daring solo rescue of Baxter from Fraser Island in a commandeered and less-than- seaworthy canoe and against the tide, Graham reached Lt. Otter at "Gullirae" (Double Island Point) and then set off to walk 30 miles down Teewah Beach across the swamps to the edges of Cootharaba Lake to reach Wa-Wa without rest.

Mr. Graham said that a big corroboree was underway when he had saved Mrs. Fraser from an Aboriginal named Mothervane, who was claiming Mrs. Fraser as a prize exhibit at the corroboree.

Graham said that he used the Aboriginal belief in reincarnation to help persuade the 400-strong tribe and the reluctant Mothervane to release Mrs. Fraser and that she was the ghost of his former Aboriginal wife. They then allowed him to convey her by canoe across the lake.

Aborigines escorted Mrs. Fraser across the foredunes where she had to wait until she could cover her naked, emaciated body with suitable clothing, obtained from Lt. Otter.





Mrs. Fraser, Baxter, Dayman and Carey spent 53 days at the hands of the Aborigines who had supplied them with the only food that they had during the period.

Five men from the *Stirling Castle* who landed near Orchid Beach are still missing, believed dead. They are Captain James Fraser, Chief Officer Brown and Michael Denny were reported killed by the Aborigines while Michael Doyle and William Elliot are believed to have drowned.

Bracefell in Mrs Fraser rescue

Brisbane, 1942: Explorer Henry Stuart Russell who returned to Brisbane with William Bracefell from Wide Bay yesterday claimed that former convict and bunda, should be given credit for helping to rescue Mrs. Fraser six years ago.

He said that too much credit had been given to John Graham for his part in the rescue when the most dangerous part was undertaken by Bracefell.

Mr. Russell who has just returned from Great Sandy Island, which he has renamed Fraser's Island, after Captain James Fraser who died there, claims that Bracefell who was living with the Aborigines in the area at that time, led Mrs. Fraser to a place where she could be rescued by Graham.

Mr Russell said that Graham had obviously maximised his own role in order to obtain a pardon but he had also elicited Bracefell's aid with the prospect of getting him a pardon

By stealth Bracefell got Mrs. Fraser away from the hostile blacks at the Tin Can Bay bora-ring and led her by a devious route on a long nocturnal walk to Lake Cootharaba where he sought out kinsmen of Graham, for further assistance.

All went according to Graham's carefully conceived plan with Graham's "relatives" performing well at the lakeside to assist them.

Bracefell said that it would have been impossible to rescue Mrs. Fraser from Tin Can Bay due to the hostility of the natives.

When Bracefell had sought her assurance that she would report favourably on him, she renounced him, saying that she would complain on him, he had felt compelled to return to his tribe for his own safety.

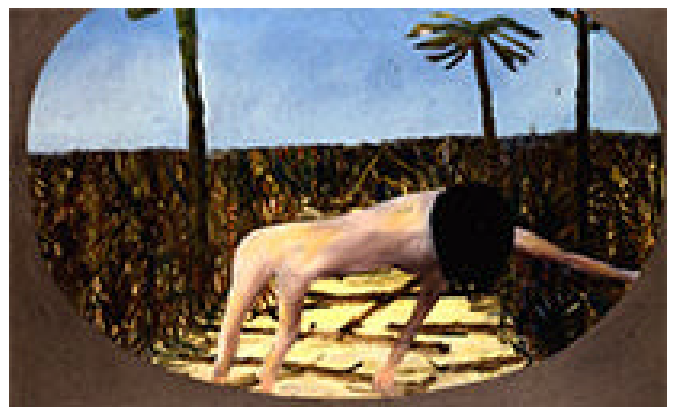


Eliza's Story Inspires Artists

The story of Eliza Fraser has inspired many artists. It began with the English artist John Curtis who produced a lot of woodcuts to illustrate his book, "*John Graham, Convict*".

In the latter half of the twentieth Century that the drama inspired many artists including Sidney Nolan who produced two great series of paintings two of which were used on book covers and which are reproduced here. Nolan's painting above appears on the cover of Nobel's Laurette's novel, "*A Fringe of Leaves*" which provides a fictional account of the story of Eliza Fraser. Nolan's painting below illustrated the Michael Alexander's historical account, "*Mrs. Fraser on the Fatal Shore*". It inspired but artist Fiona Foley to also undertake a series of paintings at the turn of the century and others.

The Eliza Fraser story has inspired an opera which although never completed was transformed into a symphony, by Peter Sculthorpe and even a Noh Dram. It has been the subject for a feature film by Tim Burstall (influenced more by the movie "*Tom Jones*") and a documentary, "*Island of Lies*". Eliza Fraser's story continues to fascinate and challenge visual, musical dramatic and literary artists in almost 200 years onwards. It continues to inspire all forms of the arts.



NOTE: During the year following her rescue Eliza Fraser had become a super star with people clamouring to hear her story. She had remarried in Sydney before returning to London where here new husband, another sea-captain and a distant cousin of James Fraser but much younger became her manager. After several testimonial appearances Eliza Frazer travelled around the country where people could pay to hear her stories. Posters advertising her personal appearances demonised the Aborigines and told of inhuman cruelty to attract larger audiences.

THE
SHIPWRECK OF. MRS. FRAZER,

AND

LOSS OF THE STIRLING CASTLE

ON A CORAL REEF IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC OCEAN

CONTAINING THE ACCOUNT OF THE

HITHERTO UNHEARD OF SUFFERINGS AND HARDSHIPS OF THE CREW,

WHO EXISTED SEVEN DAYS WITHOUT FOOD OR WATER

THE DREADFUL

SUFFERINGS OF MRS. FRAZER,

WHO, WITH HER HUSBAND, AND THE SURVIVORS OF THE ILL-FATED CREW, ARE

CAPTURED BY THE SAVAGES OF NEW HOLLAND,

AND BY THEM STRIPPED ENTIRELY NAKED, AND DRIVEN INTO THE BUSH

THEIR DREADFUL SLAVERY, CRUEL TOIL, AND EXCRUCITATING TORTURES INFLICTED ON THEM.

THE HORRID DEATH OF MR. BROWN,

WHO WAS ROASTED ALIVE OVER A SLOW FIRE KINDLED BENEATH HIS FEET;

MEETING OF MR. AND MRS. FRAZER, AND

INHUMAN MURDER OF CAPTAIN FRAZER

IN THE PRESENCE OF HIS WIFE.

BARBAROUS TREATMENT OF MRS. FRAZER, WHO IS TORTURED, SPEARED AND WOUNDED BY THE SAVAGES.

THE FORTUNATE ESCAPE OF ONE OF THE CREW,

TO MORETON BAY, A NEIGHBOURING SETTLEMENT,

BY WHOSE INSTRUMENTALITY, THROUGH THE INGENUITY OF A CONVICT, NAMED GRAHAM, THE SURVIVORS OBTAINED THEIR

DELIVERANCE FROM THE SAVAGES.

THEIR SUBSEQUENT ARRIVAL IN ENGLAND, AND APPEARANCE BEFORE THE LORD MAYOR OF LONDON.

INTERSPERSED WITH THE

SUFFERINGS OF ROBERT DARG, ONE OF THE CREW.

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Mrs. Fraser draws record audiences

Shipwrecked survivor becomes attraction

London, October, 1837: Eliza Fraser continues to draw record crowds to hear her stories of her experiences at the hands of the Aborigines.

One critic said that the true circumstances of her experiences appears to becoming more confused and obscured and they conflicted strongly with the stories of the other survivors because *"Mrs. Fraser does not appear to let the truth stand between herself and a good yarn."*

Mrs Fraser has helped raise a virtual fortune of over \$1000 due to her celebrity status since she returned to England. This is in addition to this over \$800 had been raised for her benefit before she left Sydney and other generosity she received in Australia.

Mrs Fraser has angrily denied that her marriage another sea captain, Alexander Greene, in Sydney on 22nd February, this year was being kept secret for any ulterior motive.

She said that although Captain Greene was 20 years younger than her former husband and more her own age he had been most kind to her and had provided her with great comfort after her ordeal.

Mrs. Fraser- Greene has toured extensively cashing in on her ordeal following an itinerary organized by her manager husband.

Mrs. Fraser said that although she was earning a good living back in Britain endlessly telling the story of her ordeal which tugged on the public heart strings, she will now try to see her children in Stromness, where they had been destitute until their guardians received \$964 from the Lord Mayor of London's subscription for their mother.



Captain and Mrs. Greene and her three children moved to Auckland, New Zealand, where Captain Greene lost some of his wife's money which he had invested in an unsuccessful venture. Eliza Greene was killed in a carriage accident in Melbourne, in 1858, aged 59.