

Studwell – Lieut James Bower Killed January 1880 (source Attrill)

January 1880

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Lt Col John Bower

Died Oct 10th 1910
Aged 101

Mary Bower

Died 14-1-1901
Aged 74

Sr Graham John Bower KCMG

Born 1-6-1848
Died 2-8-1933

Mary Laidley Bower

Born 17-6-1860
Died 18-4-1947

HMS Excellent

Whale Island
Gurney School

Home Office

Not in my Neighbourhood Week

Sandfly Passage, Nggela, Incident, 1880

Details

In October 1880, HMS Sandfly had anchored at Guadalcanal when its commander Lieutenant Bower came across to Nggela in a small boat and camped at Mandoliana. Vuria, son of Kalekona, a bigman from Gaeta, observed them, as did Holabosa (Holambooa). They were joined by Tavu, Utumate and Puko, and together they organised an attack. The naval party was unprepared and three sailors were beheaded with long-handled axes. One of party, named Savage, escaped and swam sixteen kilometres to Honggo where Pitia, a returned labourer, saved him and took him to Tambukoro for protection. Bower, who had been sketching at the time of the attack, ran into the forest and hid in a hollow tree, but was found and killed.

The Sandfly searched for the missing party and found Savage, and then returned to Sydney to report the incident. The navy sent HMS Emerald to punish the offenders, and many houses were burned. When the news reached England, public opinion demanded further action and HMS Cormorant and two smaller ships were despatched under Captain Bryce. The Australia Station virtually declared war on Nggela and blockaded the area. Bishop John Selwyn (q.v.), who was on Nggela at the time, aided by Charles Sapibuana (q.v.), persuaded Kalekona to give up the four murderers and his own son, with the promise that there would be no further reprisals. Holabosa was shot at Mandoliana in the presence of a large group of local people, Tavu and Vuria were shot on another island, and Utumate was executed on Nggela. Vuria, who had given evidence against the others, was returned to his father, and Puko escaped and hid at Mboli for almost twenty years. (Fox 1958, 33-34)

Everything we know about this enigmatic rodent we owe to a murder. In 1880 Lieutenant Bower of HMS *Sandfly* was cruising the Solomon Islands, searching for miscreants on a lawless frontier. Bower had a magnificent physique and a reputation as a first-class front-row forward in the intensely physical game of rugby. Reckless, arrogant and racist, just before his death he was seen swinging a native club vigorously above his head and shouting, 'I say, you fellows, just think of an Englishman among a crowd of these Johnnies armed with one of these.'¹²

Bower was caught, literally, with his pants down—killed while bathing on Ugi Island. His head was added to the islanders' trophy collection. HMS *Cormorant* was dispatched to avenge his death, and the Australian Museum's taxidermist Alexander Morton managed to find a bunk on the vessel. We can only imagine the conditions

On 24 January, 1880, HM Schooner Sandfly was commanded by Lieutenant James St. Clair Bower. The only other officer was Sub Lieutenant Edward Eden (later Admiral) Bradford.

In October Lieutenant Bower and a surveying party of six men went to Mandilana Island in the Solomon Islands, leaving Sandfly under Bradford's charge anchored off the far end of nearby Florida Island. Chief Kalikaona of Florida Island had stated that he would not eat until skulls had been presented him in the traditional manner. Two of his chiefs, Utomati and Voreea, obliged and sent a boy to investigate Bower's party and ascertain whether they were armed and vigilant. The boy visited the party, sold them fruit and reported that the British sailors had left their rifles and ammunition in their boat and were busy surveying.

Bower had searched the immediate vicinity upon landing at Mandilana Island, and was under the impression that the area was clear. He then allowed five of his ratings to bathe in the sea while he and Able Seaman Savage went to examine the beach. The bathers were then attacked by the natives and overwhelmed — one seaman named Venton knocking out two assailants before being killed. Seamen Carn, O'Neill, Paterson and Buckle were also murdered, and then decapitated. The native party then hauled the boat up from the water's edge in the knowledge that whoever was left would not be able to drag it back to the sea. Bower and Savage hid in the bush, having witnessed the massacre but being unable to intervene.

During the night Savage swam to Florida Island in an attempt to reach Sandfly, and eventually reached her five days later with the help of friendly natives. Bower hid in a tree, but next morning was spotted and shot dead by Utomati with one of the rifles taken from the dead sailors.

Bradford had meanwhile waited in vain for the return of Bower and his party and the next day searched the area to discover Bower's remains. His head had been removed and his arms and legs - along with those of his dead men - were cut off and lined up on the beach.

Edward Eden Bradford joined the Royal Navy as a cadet in 1872,[1] serving on the modern ironclad battleships Hercules, Monarch, and Sultan in the Channel Fleet.[2] He was promoted to Midshipman in 1876, and served aboard the screw-frigate Doris, the screw-corvette Danae and the iron screw-frigate Raleigh.[1] It was during this time that he passed his lieutenant's exam on 14 November 1878.[3]

Bradford was then appointed sub-lieutenant on the survey schooner Sandfly. [1] In October 1880, whilst surveying ashore in the Solomon Islands, the Sandfly's commanding officer, Lieutenant Bower, and five crewmen were murdered by the natives. Bradford took charge of the Sandfly, recovered the bodies of his shipmates, and punished the natives by burning their village. This earned him a special promotion to Lieutenant in December 1880.[4][5]

James St. Clair Bower in the Scotland, Select Births and Baptisms, 1564-1950

Name:	James St. Clair Bower
Gender:	Male
Birth Date:	13 Mar 1853
Birth Place:	Saint Cuthberts, Edinburgh, Midlothian, Scotland
Baptism Place:	Saint Cuthberts, Edinburgh, Midlothian, Scotland
Father:	James Paterson Bower
Mother:	Barbara Hickson
FHL Film Number:	1066762
Reference ID:	2:18M4KN5

Source Information

Ancestry.com. *Scotland, Select Births and Baptisms, 1564-1950* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2014.

Original data: *Scotland, Births and Baptisms, 1564-1950*. Salt Lake City, Utah: FamilySearch, 2013.

Description

This collection includes birth and baptism records from Scotland. [Learn more...](#)

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