



# Kimberley Society

## Book Note

***Pearling Days: The pearling voyage of the Sarah to the North West and Kimberley in 1880 and 1881, with an appendix on the death of W.H. Lowe during an expedition N.E. of the Gascoyne in late 1881, by John Brockman. Hesperian Press, Carlisle (WA), 2010, 81 pages, A4 format, ISBN 978-0-85905-488-1, RRP \$30.***

This publication will be popular with historians, history enthusiasts, maritime archaeologists, naturalists, and many others who relish the chance to read a good, firsthand account of our history. It presents John Brockman's 1912 reminiscences, which H.G. Stirling, writing under the pseudonym 'Hughkalypus', edited in an abridged form for publication in the *Western Mail* (a Perth newspaper) in 1918. The original manuscript is handwritten and comprises 388 pages. It is held by the J.S. Battye Library of West Australian History (in Perth) and has long been accessible there on microfilm (Accession 462A). The *Western Mail* is available on microfilm too.

Back in the early 1980s, I felt very privileged when Sister Mary Albertus Bain allowed me to spend a day reading and taking notes from a photocopy of the original reminiscences obtained while she was doing the research for her book *Full Fathom Five*. Other Kimberley Society members who have pored over long documents on microfilm will know why I valued that opportunity so highly. To now have ongoing access to the reminiscences in a nicely presented book is even better, especially with the microfilm copy remaining available if one wants to go back to the full text.

Mike McCarthy of the Maritime Museum shares my enthusiasm for this source. In his foreword to the book he writes: "I was unable to stop reading John Brockman's wonderful story (to the detriment of other pressing works here in the Museum)". He also captures its essence where he writes:

Putting aside Brockman's vivid depictions of still-remote north-west and Kimberley places; of ship handling and celestial navigation; of social interactions between European, Aborigine and 'Malay'; of epic salvage and diving methods ..., armed conflict, turtle catching, and a horrifying and fatal crocodile attack while pearling; or of his cutter spinning uncontrollably in a Kimberley tidal rip, Brockman's story is also an inspiration for those who simply admire a 'can do' spirit in any guise.

Readers of the book enjoy several advantages not available to those who go to the microfilm versions. First, our fellow Kimberley Society member Peter J Bridge has lightly edited the *Western Mail* material so that the reminiscences again form a single narrative. He has also added appendices and an index. The five items in the appendices come from various Western Australian newspapers of 1881 and 1882. The first two complement the reminiscences by providing contemporary details of a cyclone that struck the pearling fleet and coastal sheep stations in January 1881. The next two relate to the *Sarah* and the stations, while the final one is Brockman's account of the death of W.H. Lowe (mentioned in the book's subtitle).

Another advantage of the book is the contribution made by Tony Larard, a sailor and pearling lugger enthusiast who, among his other achievements, restored the Broome vessel *Intombi* (now used for cruises) to her former glory in 1979. He has drawn on his knowledge of the north-west and Kimberley coast to identify and comment on places to which Brockman referred ambiguously or with too little detail for an uninformed reader to identify them.

Enough said. This is definitely a book to enjoy.

*Cathie Clement*