

Introduction by Mary Mennis

I am the third daughter of Sir John and Lady Rene Eccles. I was born in Sydney in 1938.

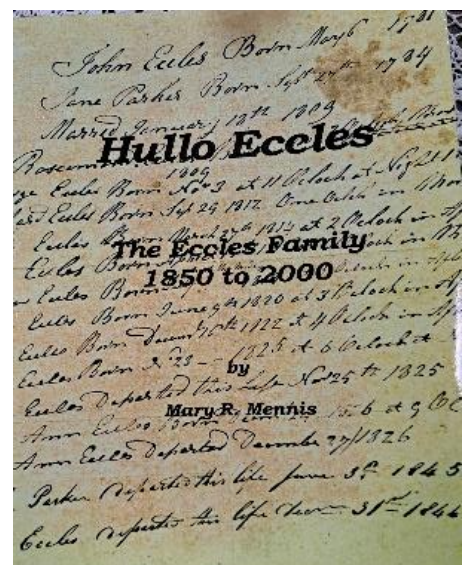
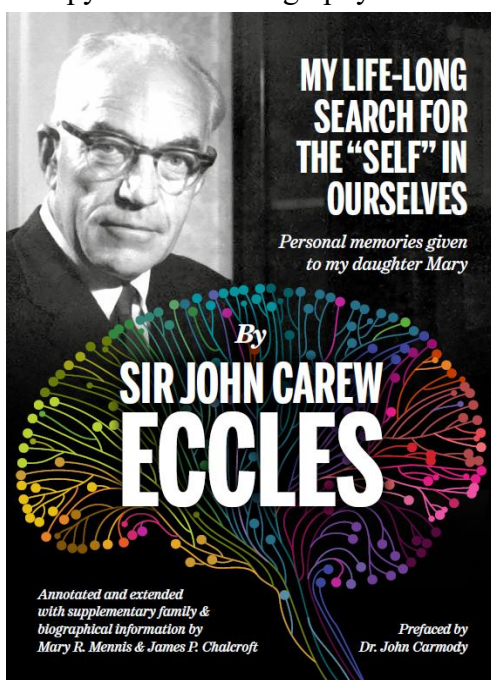
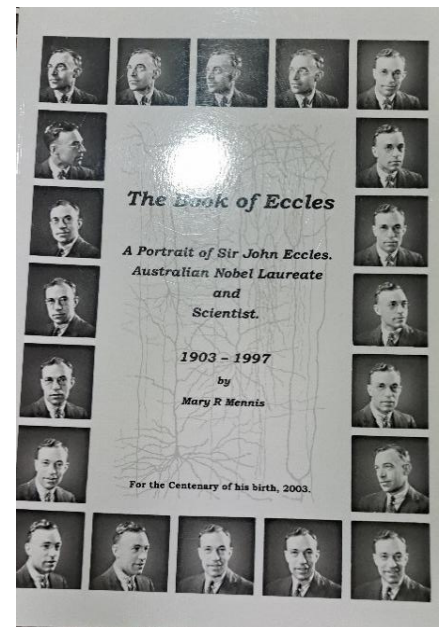
My parents had nine children pictured here in January 1964 at my wedding. It was the last photograph of the family all together. From left Dad, Mum Rose, Peter, Alice William, Mary, John, Judith Frances and Richard.



Our father was a neuro-physiologist and worked in Oxford, Sydney, Dunedin and the ANU in Canberra. This meant the family lived in a variety of places. As a child I remember seeing a beautiful Pacific canoe in the Otago Museum in Dunedin, and was fascinated by its intricate design and carved hull. This instilled in me a love of canoes. Years later when I lived in Papua New Guinea, I studied the large canoes and even wrote a manual about a triple-deck one with a small shelter and a large sail.

After I returned from PNG in 1982, I studied the Eccles family history and wrote *Hullo Eccles* about the Eccles family and *Book of Eccles* about my father's life. . Recently James Chalcroft and I published my father's autobiography, *MyLife -Long Search For The "Self" In Ourselves*.

I had visited my father in Switzerland in 1991 and he gave me a copy of his autobiography then. At last it is published. The cover is pictured here is by Christian Scudamore.



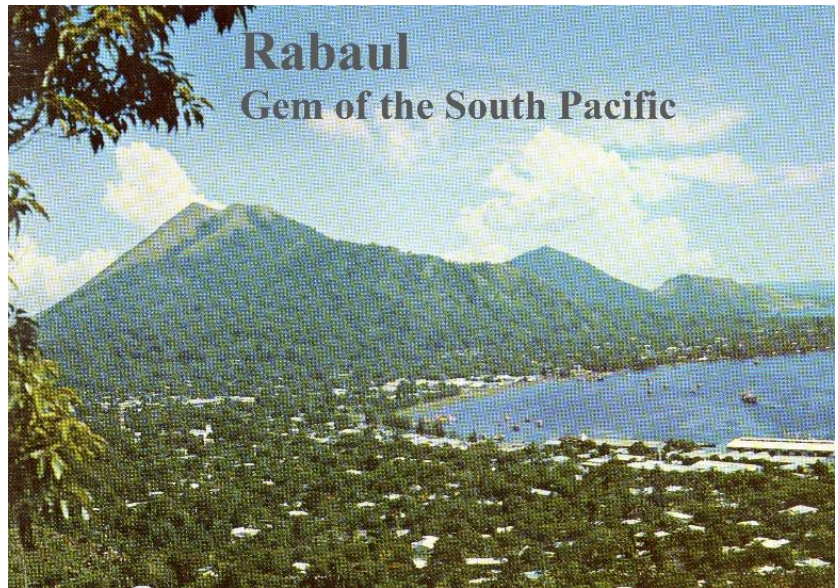
Rabaul 1962 - 1971

After graduating from Melbourne University in 1960, I gained a cadetship to study for a Dip Ed with the Papua New Guinea Education Department. After qualifying, I was posted to Rabaul in January 1962.

While teaching at Matupit Island each morning, a government driver would drive the teachers out from Rabaul over the causeway in clear view of the looming Tavurvur volcano. Matupit was a small island where the first missionaries of the Sacred Heart arrived in 1882, only 80 years previously. There was a monument down near the beach to mark this occasion.

Fr Franke, the then Parish Priest, introduced me to Paulina Ia Dok, his oldest parishioner. Paulina was born in the 1880s and remembered some of the earliest missionaries, including Bishop Couppé and Fr Navarre. As a young girl, Paulina had been offered in marriage to an older man. When she refused to co-operate, her father was angry as he had received a lot of shell money for her. Paulina escaped from Matupit one night by paddling her canoe across the harbour to Vunapope where Bishop Couppé hid her in the convent. Paulina wanted to marry Stephen To Paivu, the catechist on Matupit. Bishop Couppé persuaded her father to accept this. They married and had many children including To Keta who helped Blessed Peter To Rot in the many interrogations he endured during the war. I was fascinated by Paulina's many stories and so began my lifelong practice of collecting stories in Papua New Guinea. I wrote three books about this time

1. *They came to Matupit* about the first missionaries
2. *Time of the Taubar* about peace being achieved between two warring tribes
3. *The Tolai Myths of Origin* with two other people.





In 1964, I married Brian Mennis, a surveyor and our first child John Bernard was named after Fr Bernard Franke, the Parish Priest of Rabaul and Matupit. Overall, we had four children John, Paul, Gregory and Joanna. They were all born in Papua New Guinea. Brian, a surveyor was posted to Rabaul, Mt Hagen, Madang and Port Moresby over the years and we left Papua New Guinea in 1982.

When John Bernard was learning to walk in 1965, I was asked to tutor a young Tolai man, Benedict To Varpin who was hoping to join the seminary. He needed basic knowledge of Latin, which I had majored in at university. So I taught him once a week for a year. I thought young Benedict would make a good priest. I was proven correct when he became a priest and then the Bishop of Bereina and lastly was consecrated Archbishop of Madang. My book *Tubuan and Tabernacle* is about both Archbishop Benedict and Fr Franke. The title itself

is symbolic of what Benedict tried to achieve. For decades the German missionaries had banned the Tubuan saying it was evil and connected to sorcery. Archbishop Benedict and his friend Archbishop To Paivu, both Tolai men, argued that the *Tubuan* was not evil but was an important part of their culture.

They succeeded in reversing the ban on it and now the Tubuans can be seen everywhere in Rabaul. It is part of the inculturation encouraged by Pope St John Paul II. Interestingly enough, Archbishop To Paivu was named after the catechist, To Paivu, Ia Dok's husband. This is not to say that the German missionaries were not interested in the culture of the people. Unlike the Methodists, the Catholic missions allowed dancing at the village feasts. Three of the missionaries, collected the traditional myths before they were lost.



While living in Rabaul I helped to edit and publish the Tolai Myths of Origin with Brenda Skinner of the United Church and Fr Janssen MSC. . Some of these myths echo stories in Genesis.

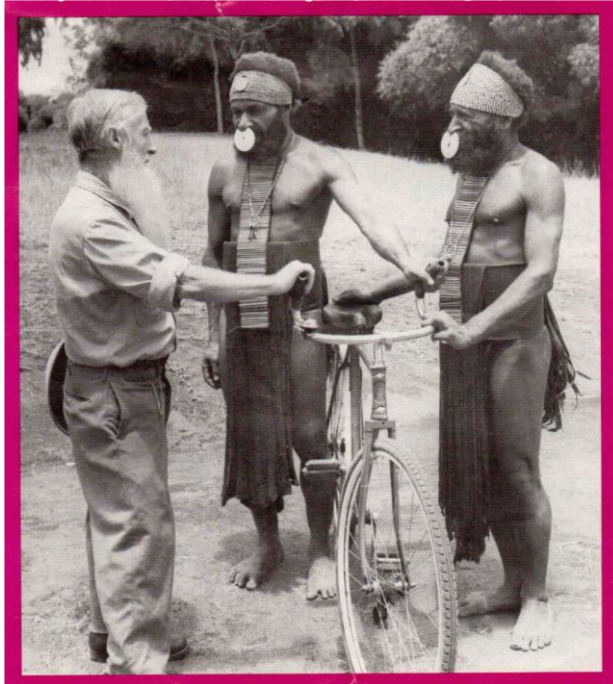
Right Bishop Benedict and some tubuans

*Photo of shell money
(Photo Brian Mennis)*



In Rabaul our small family experienced many things about the local customs of the Tolai people including their use of shell money as a viable currency.

Mt Hagen 1971, for six months



After nine years in Rabaul, Brian and I and our children spent six months in Mt Hagen. While there I had another baby, Gregory. I also met the famous Fr William Ross who was the first missionary to the Western Highlands. In 1934, he travelled for forty days from the Bogadjim on the north coast to Mt Hagen over the mountains with a group of other missionaries and mission helpers. No-one had written his story, so I offered to record his memories on a tape recorder.

Photo Fr Ross, Ninji Kama and Wamp Wan in 1935. Chief Wamp and Chief Ninji Kama

He agreed to this so long as he didn't have to do any work. My friend, Marj Jamieson, the wife of the Lutheran pastor, Rev Bob

Jamieson, drove Fr Ross and me out to Danny Leahy's plantation, and we had a lovely time poring over his photographs and reminiscing about the old days. Dan and Mick Leahy discovered the Highland people in 1933, the year before Fr Ross went there. I also interviewed Chief Wamp Wan who had met Fr Ross in 1934. He and his people were amazed at seeing white men for the first time. When the first plane flew in, they thought it was a large foreign bird.

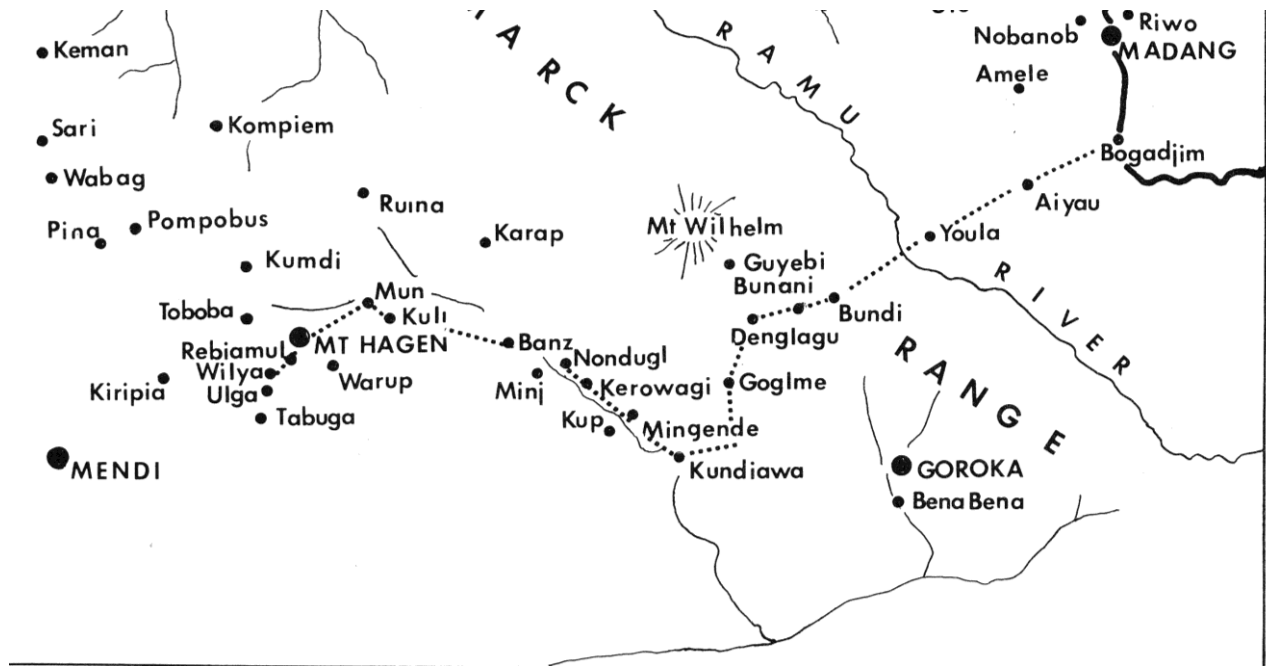
I took this photo of Wamp Wan when I met him in his village outside Mt Hagen. It was a wonderful day to hear his stories. He met the Queen and also the Pope and told him how good Fr Ross was to his people. On their part Wamp Wan and Ninji Kama helped Fr Ross in those early years.

Some of Fr Ross's workers, particularly Peter Manui, remembered the forty-day trek they took over the mountains, including the day of the week, where they stayed the night and what they ate. From this I was able to make a map of the trek.

In 2014 I was delighted when the Rempi people near Madang and Rebiamul people of Mt Hagen decided



to follow this map as a pilgrimage route. Up to 500 people traversed part of the route, arriving at Rebiamul in time for Easter.



**Madang and Highland areas of Papua New Guinea.
Showing the route taken by Fr Ross in his 1934 trek into the Highlands.**

Books on the Hagen People

1. *Hagen Saga*, the Story of Fr Ross
2. *Rempi to Rebiamul Catholic Missions* from Madang to Mt Hagen
3. *My Hagen People* from Fr Ross's articles

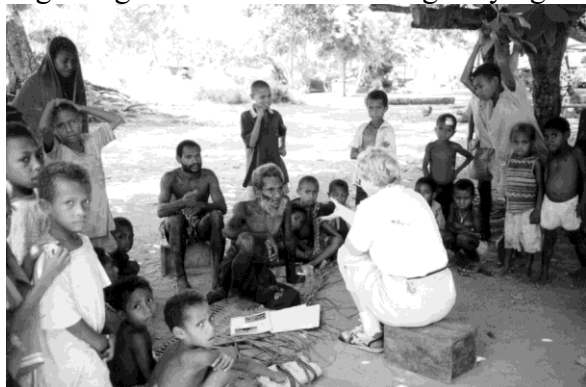
[Photograph 2014. The Hagem People welcome the pilgrims arriving at the Mt Hagen Mission in time for Easter. (Photograph Paul Petrus.)



Madang 1971 – 1979

When Brian became the Regional Surveyor of the north coast, our family lived in Madang for eight years in the 1970s. One day I was out driving along a bush road. I saw a sign saying **POTS FOR SALE** so I drove into the village. It was Bilbil Village and that was the first time I visited there. It led to years of close contact with this village for the next many years. During this time, I was interested in the culture of the Bel people in many villages along the coast. I made over 100 tapes of their oral traditions in *tok pisin*.

Interviewing an old headman in Bongu Village.



In the 1970s the Bilbil women cooked meals in traditional earthenware pots which were once trade items along the coast, but they were gradually replaced with trade store pots which lasted longer and were easier to clean.

The pots were once of paramount importance as they were the currency of the day for buying food, ornaments, weapons and tools in trade exchanges with people who did not have pots. The canoes each had a pot cage to carry 100 pots as well as a shelter and one or two mat sails and they were the highest technical knowledge of the village people.



Right: Cooking with pots in the 1970's (Brian Mennis)

Left Yeyeg; the last of the pot-makers in Yabob village. (Photo Mary Mennis).



Right: My friend Maia Awak made a model of a lalong canoe which was used as a guide when building the full-scale canoe in 1978.



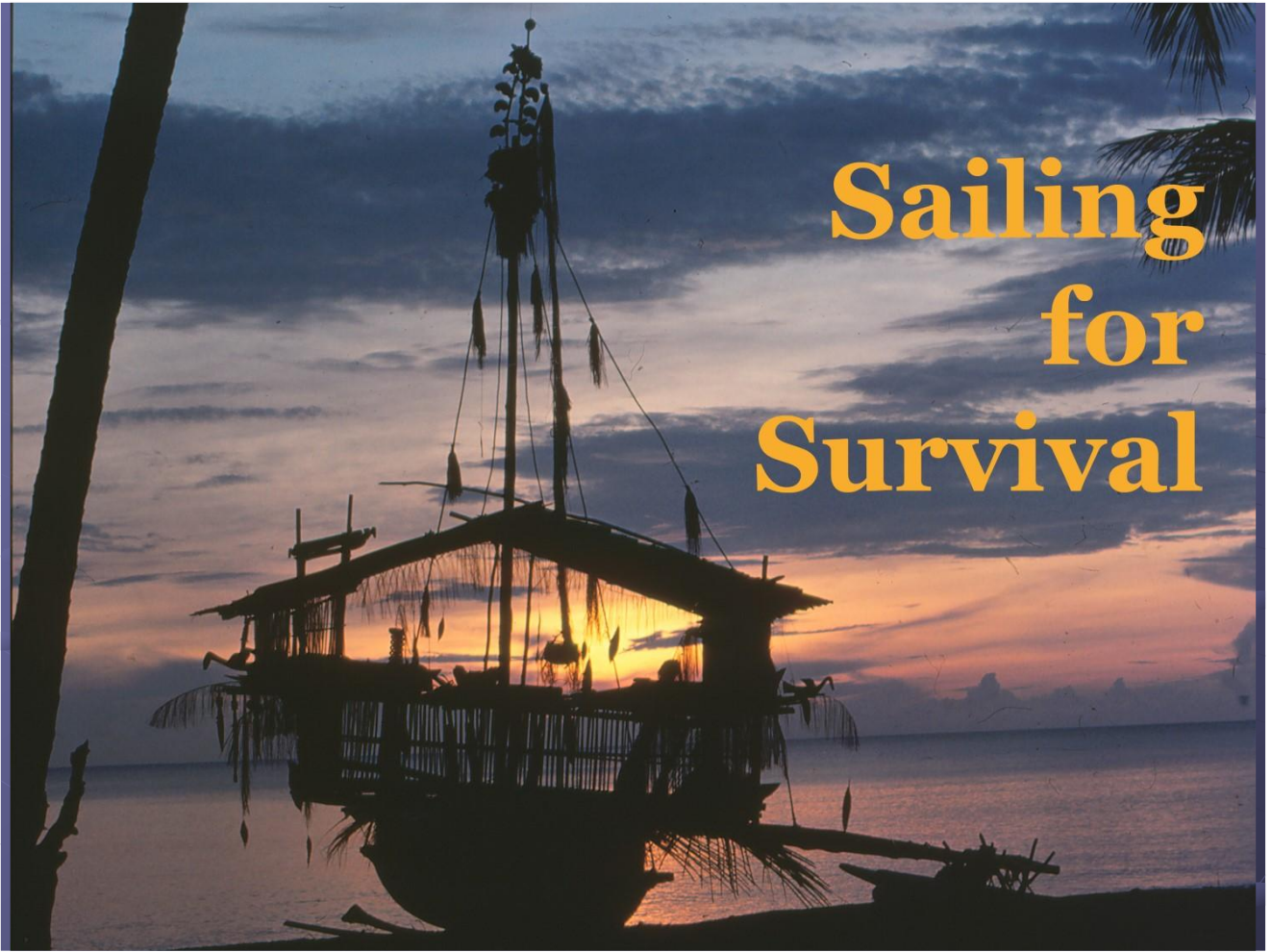
It happened that in 1977 I asked the Bilbil men how long since they had built a large trading canoe like the ones described by Miklouho Maclay in 1871. They told me that the last canoes had been bombed by the Japanese in the war. I encouraged the five last canoe builders to build another Lalong canoe in 1978 and I recorded the process in a manual. I went out to the bush with a truck full of men to gather the material and I watched and photographed the progress each week in the village. In the end I wrote a manual called *Mariners of Madang* which was published by the University of Queensland. There was a great celebration when it was completed. And later the canoe was sailed to Madang, the first trading canoe for forty years. Saving this knowledge has enabled the next generation to build a larger two mast palangut canoe in 2008. There was an even larger celebration for the launch and the Governor General Paulias Matane attended.

The five canoe builders: Maia Awak on the left and Damun, Gab, Derr and Pall.



Mariners of Madang
and
Austronesian Canoes of
Astrolabe Bay
Mary R Mennis

Sailing for Survival



Return to Madang in 1994



When our family left PNG in 1982, I became a teacher again. In 1994 during four months sabbatical leave, I returned to Madang and stayed at the Catholic Mission Centre. Archbishop Benedict took me everywhere: up to Bundi in the mountains by a small plane; up the Ramu River by canoe; and to Bogia on the north coast and other inland villages. It was an eye opener to see the church in action. Bishop Benedict

organised singing groups to dance into the church when administering confirmation and the people came from everywhere attracted by the colourful celebrations.

Meeting some of the next generation in 1994 in Bilbil Village. above My old friends Pall Tagari was still alive He recognised me but that was all. I was glad I had recorded his memories in the 1970's before they were lost.

During these months in Madang I continued working on two books.

. 1. *A Potted History of Madang*

2 *Tubuan and Tabernacle.*



Archaeological dig in Madang 2014

In June 2014 I returned to Madang to help a team of archaeologists from around the world. Professor Glenn Summerhayes and Dylan Gaffney of Otago University, Teppsey Beni of the University of Papua New Guinea, Herman Mandui of the National Museum, Affrica Cook from Oxford University, Judith Field from NSW University and myself from Brisbane.



I had discovered shards of pottery in the 1970s and Glenn Summerhayes organised a dig on the island. It was my job to act as a liase with the village people whom I had known for decades. I also contacted my friend Sir Peter Barter of the Madang Hotel and he organised accommodation for us at his house.

Evidence of the pottery made in the past was found in the low cliff-wall alongside the beach where pottery sherds stick out of the cliff-wall testimony of a long-standing occupation of the island which has been deserted for 100 years. At the time I first saw it, It looked like a possibility for future archaeological research.



These were the Bilbil men who helped the Archaeologist in June 2014. They are the sons of the five original canoe builders I worked with in 1978.

This is the palangud canoe which was built in 2008. It was larger and had two sails. There was a great celebration with the Governor General Paulias Matane participating.

I was pleased to have written the manual of building these canoes in 1978 to help preserve the knowledge of building these wonderful trading vessels.

Photo below of this canoe sailing.

The map showing the Madang Coast where the people used to trade their pots. Below: palangud sailing in Madang Harbour 2008



Below: The Balangud canoe in Madang built by the Bel men. Note the single hull and the outrigger to support the Pot-cage.

Also, the shelter and the two masts to carry the large mat sails.



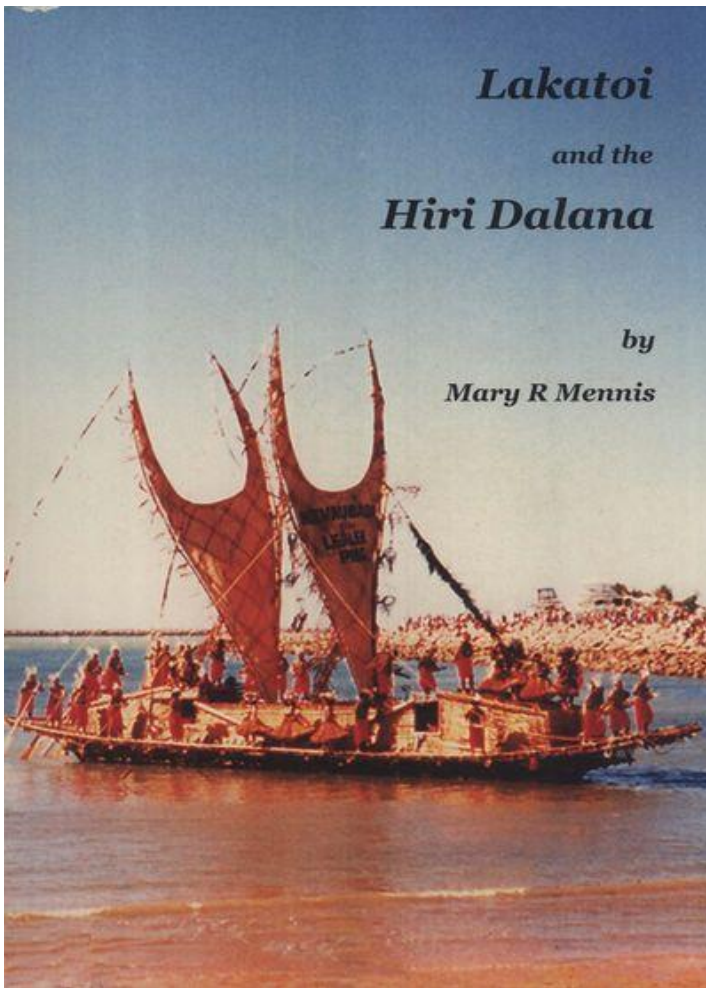
The Lakatoi of the Motu People of Port Moresby

In 1995 I studied the *lakatoi* canoes being built on Magnetic Island near Townsville to mark fifty years since the end of World War II. I was one of ten students from James Cook University. The Townsville Strand on 13 August 1995 was one of the highlights of the celebrations. While the *lakatoi* were in the final stages of completion, I was one of a team of ten students from James Cook University who spent ten days in Nelly Bay, on Magnetic Island, viewing the construction and interviewing the builders. Through our interviews, we obtained information about the *lakatoi*: the materials used; the historical background to the *hiri* trading voyages; the associated myths and folklore, and many of the rituals and dances associated with those voyages.

Some of the Motu men had been on *hiri* voyages in the 1930s and 1950s and were able to give detailed accounts of their experiences of that time. They had been only young boys

helping their fathers sail the *lakatoi* to the Gulf, but they had great recall of their experiences. Our time spent in Nelly Bay may have been the last chance to collect these stories as many of the older men have now passed on. One of the main informants was Mataio Taboro of Pari Village, who had worked for seventeen years with the Port Moresby City Council, rising to be the Deputy Mayor.

Afterwards, I wrote a book *Lakatoi and the Hiri Dalana* as a result of my research. Later I wrote another book comparing the culture of the Bel people with that of the Motu people. These people have a common ancestry on Watom Island with the Lapita pottery. This book is called *Sailing for Survival* and has been much studied by different researchers.



Arriving at the strand in Townsville. photograph Mary Mennis 1995

The Motu and the Bel people both belong to Austronesian language groups but had no contact with each other for thousands of years as they lived on opposite sides of Papua New Guinea, separated by high mountain ranges and hundreds of kilometres of twisting coast.

On the north coast, the Bel group traded pots for food and artefacts while on the south coast, the Motu people traded their pots for sago and artefacts. However, they had an amazing array of similarities in their culture and in their response to the environment which can probably be traced back to common origins in the Bismarck.

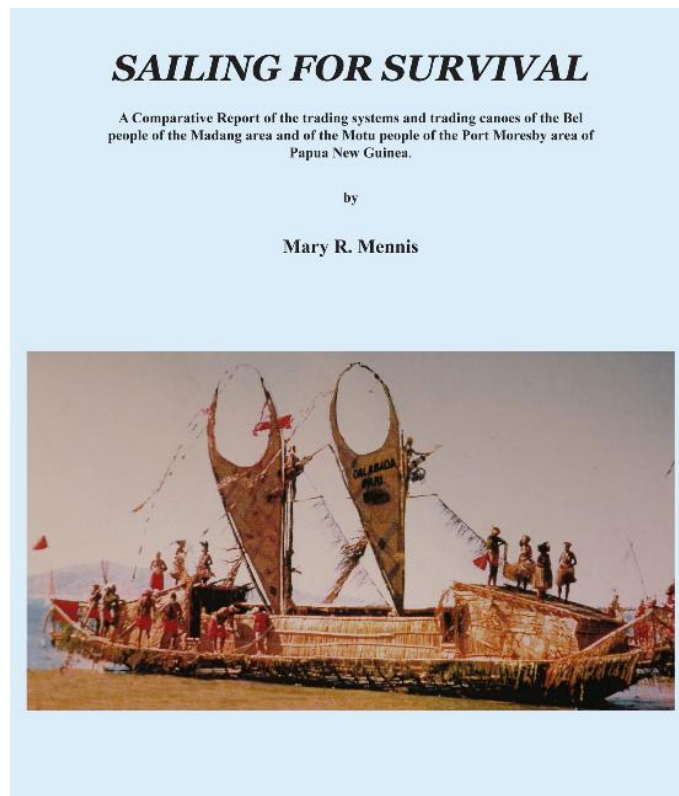
As mentioned already, *Sailing for Survival* is a comparative study of the trading systems of two groups of people: the Bel people of Bilbil/ Yabob villages on the North Coast, near Madang and the Motu people on the South Coast, near Port Moresby.

This book points out similarities and differences in the two cultures. The difference is in their shape of their canoes the *lalong* and the *lakatoi*. The different shapes were developed because form follows function. The *lakatoi* were wide and composed of many hulls joined together to withstand the rough seas on the trips to the Gulf. The *lalong* had only one hull to support the pot-cage. Despite this there were many similarities in their culture and their response to the environment: they had similar myths of the first pots and rituals to protect their large trading canoes which they sailed to other villages to trade their pots for food and other necessities. When both of these groups arrived centuries ago, the best places were already occupied and so they were forced to make pots and go sailing for survival.

In 2008 I received an MBE from the Papua New Guinea government for my work with the Bel people of Madang. I was very honoured to receive this award.

It was a great occasion. A few recipients went to London to receive their award from the Queen, but I opted to stay in Papua New Guinea for the celebration as that was where my heart was.

I was an oral historian, collecting history about the local village people, studying their cultures and writing



many books. My interest in history resulted in two master's degrees in history and social science.

Photograph: Governor General of PNG Sir Paulias Matani and Mary Mennis 2008.

The Madang Museum – a flagged history



In 2015, I returned to Madang to organise the town Museum. It had been riddled with white ants and sir Peter Barter fixed this problem and bought eight booths. I had a team of helpers and fixed each booth with a flag of the main political influence in a chronological order. Beginning with the

Russian Miklouho Maclay on the first booth followed by the German flag and information about their time; then the Australian time 1914 -1940 followed by the Japanese occupation during the war; afterwards the Australians returned and governed until Independence in 1975. In 1975, Papua New Guinea gained Independence and the flag of the new country with its golden bird of paradise and the stars was raised in all cities and towns in the country, replacing the Australian flag. Lastly the Madang Province gained its own flag with its red, yellow and black stripes to represent the national flag; the memorial lighthouse surrounded by coconut palm branches for agriculture and a slit drum for tradition. The six white stars represent the six districts of Bogia, Madang, Middle Ramu, Rai Coast, Sumka and Usino/Bundi. The

Museum has displays of artefacts from those six districts including wooden ladder steps, slit drums, canoe models, canoe prows, grass skirts, pots and wooden



plates of all shapes and sizes. and then The Province of Madang had its own flag as well as the PNG one. That is the flag shown in this photo of the *balangud* canoe sailing in 2008. In April 2015, the Museum at the Madang Visitors and Cultural Bureau in Modilon Road was awash with colourful flags with matching information about the nation involved in Madang's history.

Joanne Arek and Jane Naso, on staff, were enthusiastic with the project as were the three workmen Yowa Noido, Samson Seme and Baahame York. Nor can I forget the assistance of two volunteers, Wasagne Gamo from Ethiopia and Linda Nicholls of the Divine Word University. My husband,



Brian, also assisted for a week with scanning and printing of photographs. The members of staff of the Madang Resort including Sir Peter Barter were very helpful with transport, photocopying and printing. I thank them all. Additional thanks must be given to Sir Peter for paying for the new booths and his on-going interest in the museum.

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The title of my book: A flagged History of Madang seen here the palangud canoe sailing



Sir

Michael Somare launched the book *the Flagged History of Madang* July 2018.

His speech at the launch was recorded in the National Times on 20 July 2018. *The Flagged History of Madang*. was published by Sir Peter Barter, for APEC visitors. This book follows

the history of the province through the flags of the various countries that influenced its development. Five thousand copies were printed for use in schools in Madang.



Photograph; Sir Michael Somare, the manager of Kristen Press and Mary Mennis in Madang

Mary R. Mennis is the author of *The Flagged History of Madang, 1871-2018*. Grand Chief Sir Michael Somare, the first Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea, praised the book for its role in educating young people.

Sir Michael launched the book about Madang, since the visit by the famous Russian Miklouho Maclay in 1871. His name is still used to describe the Rai

Coast, arrived at Gorendu on September 20, 1871. His work made him a household name in Russia.

Sir Michael said:

“Little attention is being given to Papua New Guinea’s heritage and history. Important events have taken place in PNG’s history. The book *‘The Flagged History of Madang,’* is written by Mary Mennis. PNG remains a model to other developing countries that have emerged from the virtual stone age to what we are today. It is often said that unless we know where we come from, we cannot plan to know where we are going. The book spells out more than 149 years’ history and it would play a great role in educating young people. Thank you, Mary, for writing the *Flagged History of Madang*. I hope this encourages all other provinces to document their history. Thank you, Sir Peter Barter and the Melanesian Foundation, for funding and publishing this book, which I understand is available for K20 per copy.

Last year I had the opportunity to meet the grandnephew, of Miklouho Maclay. He was made welcome by thousands of people from the Rai Coast. He is represented by the Russian flag. Next came the German Government who in a large way colonized New Guinea due to the reputation left by Maclay. It was during this time that agriculture was developed. Cotton, copra plantations and later cocoa were developed and even today they play the backbone of the economy not only in Madang but throughout PNG. Following World War 1,

the British came and under the League of Nations administered by the Australian government which at the time was a colony of Great Britain.

At the outbreak of WW2, New Guinea was invaded by the Japanese Government after which, the Angau was established, and Australia became more interested in PNG which ultimately led to independence in 1975.”

Sir Michael Somare said “I am proud to say I was a part of this history being the founding Prime Minister of this country, I am also proud that this book by Mary Mennis is being launched in the Sana Room, called after my father who lived a great part of his life through the historical events written about in this book.”

Born in 1936 in Rabaul, Somare was still a child when he moved with his family back to his father’s ancestral home of Karau village in [East Sepik](#). It was the province he identified with throughout his life, and from where he would draw his political power base for all of his nearly five decade career in public life. His earliest education was in a Japanese-run primary school during the second world war, where he learned to read, write and count in Japanese. He would later graduate from Sogeri High School, becoming a teacher, then radio broadcaster, before helping found the Pangu party in 1967. The next year, he contested elections for PNG’s new house of assembly and became chief minister. He served four terms as prime minister, from 1975 to 1980, from 1982 to 1985, and 2002 to 2010. He was critically unwell – in intensive care outside PNG – for much of his disputed final term in office in 2011.

Sir Michael Somare died in February 2021 at 84 years of age.

The Babau if Rabaul

In 2019, I returned to Rabaul to study the Babau fish-traps. I wrote a book about them using photographs and articles by my husband Brian as a basis for my He had taken many photographs of the whole process during a visit there in 1979. when the bamboo fish-traps were still being used in the traditional style. I was able to interview some of the men who once made the traps but were now too old. The younger generation used modern materials instead. After I had written the book, I returned the following year with my brother, John Eccles to launch it. On these two occasions I was helped by Tio Wawaga of Raluana Village.

My brother John and I both enjoyed this immensely.

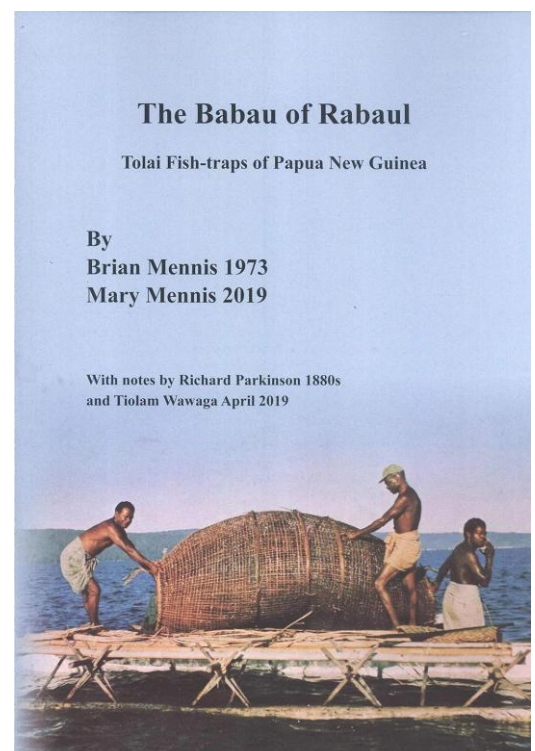


Photo by Brian Mennis

The Babau of Rabaul describes the large fish-traps made of bamboo strips. The men now make them with modern materials, whereas their forefathers relied on bush materials to make them. This book



studies the changes that took place over the years and the political events that influence these changes.

The babau style of fishing is a precursor of the FAD systems used commercially throughout the world to catch the pelagic fish that live at least two kilometres offshore. In Hawaii the



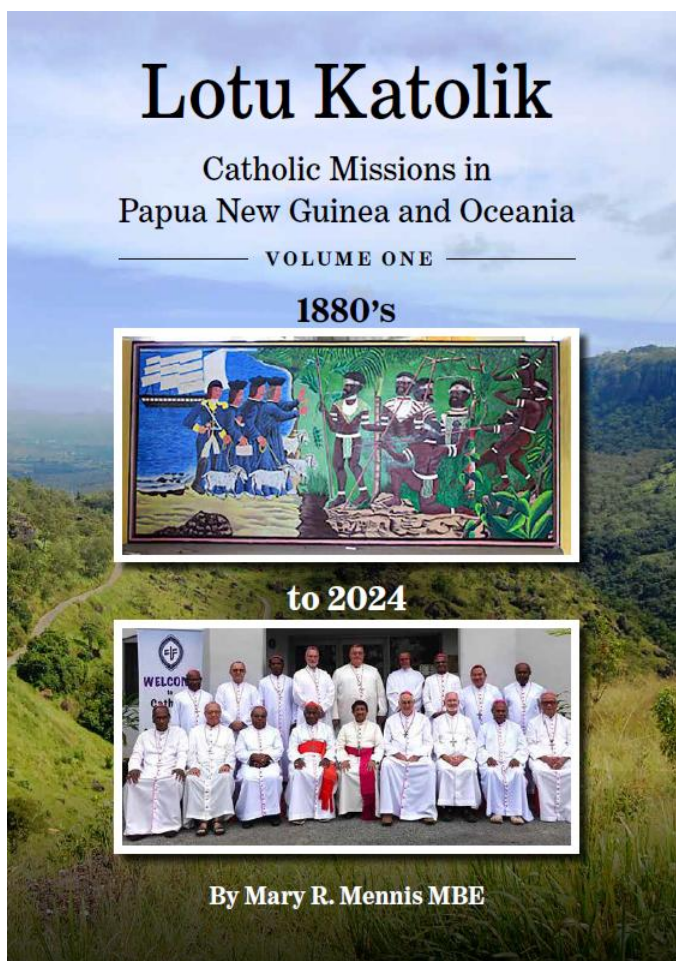
system of using anchored buoys to attract fish is used in game fishing. The Tolai men of Rabaul use anchored buoys but also attach a large vup fish trap from the buoy unlike the system used in Hawaii. The bamboo vup is intricately made from bamboo strips. Small fish hide in the net and the larger fish follow them in and are caught in the circular chamber. These days new materials like fish nets replace the bamboo slats on the vup in villages like Karavia.

A textbook for the seminarians in CTI

Bomana Port Moresby

In 2019 I was invited to teach a history course at the Catholic Theological Institute CTI in Port Moresby. After I accepted the invitation and spent time preparing the notes, Covid struck, and I was unable to go. Instead, I decided to write a textbook for the students covering the topics. I spent many years in Papua New Guinea interviewing people and collecting stories and used these as a basis.

During a recent visit to PNG, I met Cardinal Sir John Ribat in Port Moresby. He is a cousin of Archbishop Benedict's and belongs to Volavalo Village in Rabaul. It was their ancestors who tried to attack the early Missionaries in the 1880s as depicted on the top painting on the cover of this book. The missionaries sang the Te Deum while standing on the beach, facing the hostile village men. At the sound of the beautiful singing, the angry chiefs changed their minds and welcomed them into the village. Volavolo became the first mission centre in the Rabaul area. Now one of their descendants is the Cardinal of Papua New Guinea and holds the very highest position in the church and another was Benedict to Varpin, Archbishop of Madang. In July 2022,



My brother, Dr John Eccles and I spent a wonderful week with the seminarians at the Catholic Theological Institute in Bomana and I was delighted to attend classes with the students of Melanesian Church History.

Their lecturer, Fr Peter Silong was using the rough draft of this book as their textbook. While there we met the Principal, Fr Martin Wallace and the Rector, Fr Jacek Tendej and had interesting meetings and dinners with them. We also caught up with the now former Dean, Brandon Zimmerman and his wife Rebecca, the Librarian who helped me along the way. In August 2022, Fr Tomas Ravaioli of the Liturgical Catechetical Institute (LCI) in Goroka contacted me about publishing this book and I thank him also for his interest. Dr. Will Britt,

Present Dean, is also giving sound advice on the manuscript. Just recently my friend, Trudy Graham of the Women Writers Group in Brisbane has been

2024, was the 90th anniversary since Fr Willie Ross's expedition over the other missionaries and 70 carriers took forty days to climb over the Bismarck mountains all the way to Mt Hagen. The Rempi to Rebiamul pilgrimage began on 22nd February 2024 when the patrol party left Rempi near Madang and they will visit all the mission stations on the way to Rebiamul, with celebrations on every stop marked on the map I made in 1971 along the route. There were no Catholics in those days of course but now there are over 300,000 Catholics in the space of 90 years.



2020 Seminarians of the Catholic Theological Institute, Bomana.

Fr Paul Steffen, professor at the Vatican University said about this book: Lotu Katolik

Basically, the book is a textbook for a Course of the Catholic Theological Institute at Bomana, Port Moresby on Melanesian church history, but beyond this purpose, the book is also of importance for all kinds of people of Papua New Guinea and especially for the members of the Catholic Church. It is easy to read. It is the first popular written book on the history of the Catholic Church in Papua New Guinea and therefore fills an existing gap in the historiography of Papua New Guinea. It is desirable that many Papua New Guineans come to know and appreciate it and thereby increase their knowledge of the history of the Catholic Church in Papua New Guinea. (Fr. Paul B. Steffen, SVD. Prof. of Mission Studies, Pontifical Urbaniana University in Rome).

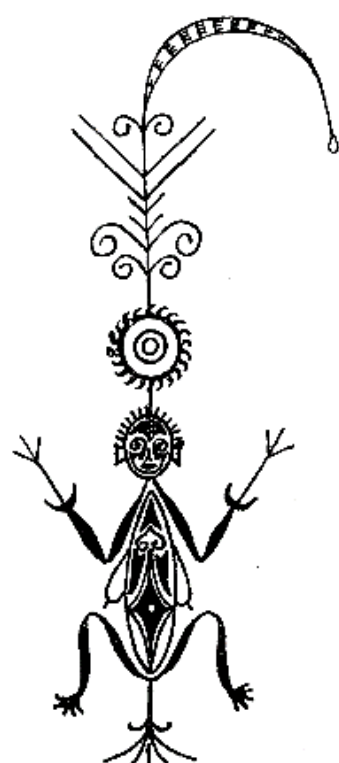


Fig. 4



Fig. 5

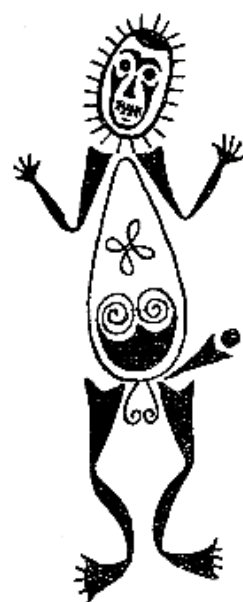


Fig. 6