

wci/6/33

22nd December, 1953

Dear Miss Broadhead,

You set me a bit of a poser in your letter of the 11th December but I think that one can safely say, on the authority of Captain Edmund Fanning's "Voyages and Discoveries in the South Seas", Salem, 1924, that Captain George Barrett of the U.S. whaling vessel "Independence" was the discoverer of Nukulalae.

As to the date, I suggest 1821, and this time I would refer to the "New York Times" for the 3rd March, 1938, where it is stated that:-

"In the Ellice Group, Mitchell Island and Rocky Island were discovered in 1821 by a Captain George Barrett".

Fanning records that Captain Plasket was in command of the "Independence" (a whaler out of Nantucket) in 1826-28 and I consider that we can at least be sure that the discovery was prior to then: 1821 seems quite probable.

Nukulalae has been called at various times:-

- (i) Ellice Island (not Ellice's Group, which was Funafuti);
- (ii) Mitchell's Group;
- (iii) Nicholas Group; and
- (iv) Plasket's Island.

No doubt these alternative names record those of various captains who fancied themselves to have been the first discoverer. As regards Plasket, it is worth noting that the island was listed in Reynolds, J.N. "A Report ... in relation to islands, reefs, and shoals in the Pacific Ocean, etc.", 23rd Congress, 2nd Session, House Document 105, 1835, under the name of Mitchell's Group and Plasket's Island, and as having been discovered before 1828.

Miss Margaret H. Broadhead,
Reference Librarian,
The Alexander Turnbull Library,
WELLINGTON, C.1, New Zealand.

Curiously enough S. Whittemore Boggs' "American Contributions to Geographical Knowledge of the Central Pacific" (Geographical Review, Vol. XXVIII, No. 2, April, 1938) does not show *Nukulaelae* as an American discovery (see Fig. 2 on p.179). I just can't understand this unless Captain Barrett was not, in fact, an American subject: there are other cases of islands being discovered by British captains of American whalers.

I have followed faithfully your admonition not to do any special research on this matter and have confined myself to looking up such records as I happened to have in my home on a Sunday afternoon. I have not been able to check the reference to Fanning, however, as I cannot find a copy of the book anywhere in the house.

Please let me know if you succeed in finding out any more information than I have. I admire your faith in the British Admiralty: they wrote to me recently to enquire why the *Ellice Islands* were so called!

One further digression. If you can ever trace why the Gilbert Islands (or part of them) were formerly known as the *Kingsmill's* - who called them that and after whom - I shall praise your name all my life. It seems a simple thing, but *Ida Leeson* and I have been trying to get a lead for ages and quite without success.

Let me know if there is ever anything else I can do to help.

Yours sincerely,



H.E. Maude.

P.S. On the subject of Captain George Barrett the Mitchell Library have given us the following reference:-

Whaling Master. American Guide Series. Compiled by the Federal Writers Project of the Work and Progress Administration of Massachusetts. New Bedford, Old Dartmouth Historical Society, 1938.

This directory of American whaling masters mentions Captain Barrett as having been in charge of the "*Independence*" in 1819.

