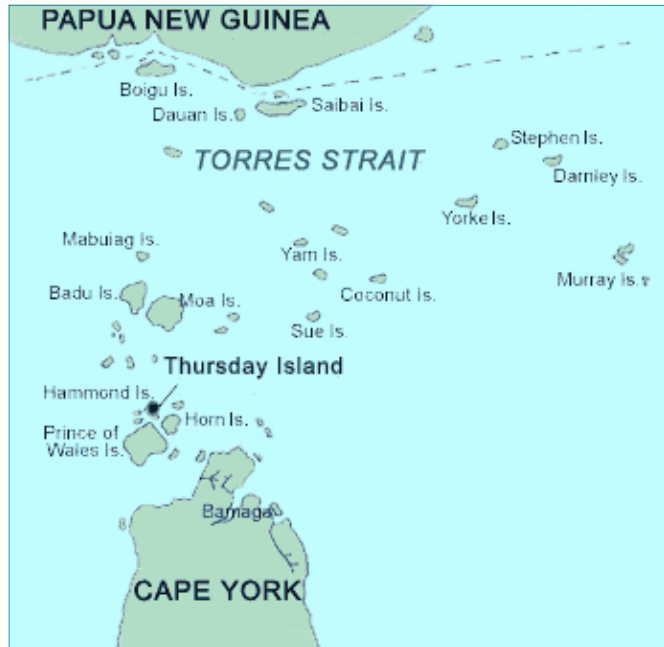


ACTIVITY: Free diving
CASE: GSAF ND.0004
DATE: Before 1903
LOCATION: West Australian coast

ENVIRONMENT: Pearling began in Western Australia in the 1850s at Shark Bay, where natural pearls were found in the *Pinctada albina* oyster. When the larger *P. maxima* oyster, which produced superb pearls (called South Sea pearls) and top quality mother of pearl (MOP) shell, was discovered in areas north of Nickol Bay, the industry spread along the north west coast during the 1880s. By 1910, nearly 400 luggers and more than 3500 people were fishing for shell in waters around Broome, then the biggest pearling centre in the world.



NAME: Ahmun
DESCRIPTION: He was an old Malay diver.

NARRATIVE: Henry Taunton, an early Cossack pearler, was paddling backwards and foreards over a rich patch of shell. Ahmun lingered a few seconds after the others a few seconds to arrange his chew of betel nut, and was the last to enter the water. Then he slipped from the gunwale and disappeared under water.

“Few seconds had passed before he returned to the surface,” said Taunton in his book *Australind*, “his eyeballs almost starting from their sockets, his features distorted with fear and agony as he called: ‘Oh Tuan, iu bezar!’ [Oh master, a great shark!], and then he swam frantically towards the dinghy, which was distant about ten yards. When he came to the surface I had noticed what appeared to my inexperience eyes as some peculiar brown halo which surrounded him in the clear green water. But as he began to swim a broad brown trail was left behind him. Then only did I realize that it was the poor fellow’s life blood which was discolouring the water.”

“A few sturdy strokes and he grasped the gunwale of the boat,” continues Taunton, “and his poor head sank down as he repeated in feeble and heartrending tones, ‘A Tuan, oh Tuan, iu bezar s’keli! [Ah master, oh master, a very great shark!]. I grasped him by the arm and called the other divers to assist me. When we had lifted him into the boat a frightful sight met my view, a sight which is as fresh in my memory now, as I write, as if it were only yesterday that I witnessed the tragedy. . .”

INJURY: Fatal. “Half of the man’s body had been torn from him. The shark’s teeth had grazed and torn open the pericardium without having touched the heart itself.”

SPECIES INVOLVED: Not identified, but it was said to be “a large shark”.

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SOURCES: Henry Taunton (1903) *Australind, Wanderings in Western Australia and the Malay East*. London: Edward Arnold, 248 pp; Norman Bartlett, pages 233 & 234.

