

## TRUE ECHOES: RESEARCHING WAX CYLINDERS RECORDED DURING THE 1898 CAMBRIDGE ANTHROPOLOGICAL EXPEDITION TO THE TORRES STRAIT ISLANDS

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### Abstract

This article describes True Echoes, a three-year project initiated by the British Library to research its Oceanic wax cylinder collections and to reconnect digitised sound recordings with their originating communities.<sup>3</sup> These collections, recorded in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, comprise some of the earliest recordings of Pacific cultures and histories and represent the early use of sound recording for European anthropological research in the region. The recordings were made in Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, New Caledonia, and the Torres Strait Islands of Australia. They, along with the British Library’s wider collection of ethnographic cylinders, were added to UNESCO’s Memory of the World Register in 2011 (UNESCO, no date).

This article concentrates on some of the earliest recordings, 102 wax cylinders of the Alfred Cort Haddon 1898 Expedition (Torres Strait and British New Guinea) Cylinder Collection (C80).<sup>4</sup> The collection also contains 39 cylinders recorded in Papua New Guinea, which will not be discussed here. Research methods involved historical research in partnership with Oceanic cultural institutions and participatory research with community members, which provided local knowledge and new information. The “multi-perspectivist approach” employed by the project team was important for gathering a variety of perspectives on the collections and for revealing “the complex processes involved in their production, collection and interpretation” (Herle, 2003, pp. 204-205).

**Keywords:** Torres Strait Islands; historical sound recordings; wax cylinders; participatory research

### Introduction

True Echoes was a digital reconnection project, aiming to increase the visibility and accessibility of historical audio recordings for the communities from which they originated. The research methodology included historical research and participatory research. Historical research was firstly undertaken in partnership with Oceanic cultural institutions and provided the foundation for the participatory research, which focused on collaboration with originating communities. Researchers from each country worked

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3 True Echoes ran from July 2019 to November 2022 and was funded by the Leverhulme Trust and the UK government’s Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. More information available at <https://www.true-echoes.com/> and <https://www.bl.uk/projects/true-echoes> [Accessed: 4 July 2023].

4 British Library Sound Archive collections have a shelfmark prefixed with ‘C’. The wax cylinder collections researched by the True Echoes project are arranged by recordist or expedition with some collections – such as C80 – having multiple sound recordists.

with local communities to learn more about the cylinder collections and their relevance today, which enabled the project team to gain new understandings of the cylinder recordings and to enhance existing catalogue records through incorporation of local knowledge (Shilton and Srinivasan, 2007, p. 91).

This article highlights two cylinders in particular and how research undertaken by the True Echoes project enabled a greater understanding of their content and contributors: “Story of Amipuru” as told by Waria of Mabuiag (C80/1041) and a funeral song performed by Ulai of Mer (C80/1018).<sup>5</sup>

### Digital reconnection

The World and Traditional Music section of the British Library Sound Archive has been involved in several digital reconnection projects with the aim of improving access to recordings for their originating communities. Improved access increases engagement with collections, particularly for educational purposes and when local cultural institutions already have a strong relationship with originating communities (Clouter, 2018).

Digital reconnection here refers to a two-stage process. Firstly, the British Library deposits a digital copy of a collection in an institution with connections to the originating community. These recordings are used during research to elicit knowledge related to the recordings and their contemporary relevance to communities (Clouter, 2018). Isobel Clouter, True Echoes Principal Investigator, used this framework during a project that provided the Music Museum of Nepal with copies of digitised film footage and sound recordings from the British Library’s Arnold Adriaan Bake Collection (C52) between 2011 and 2017. Following collaborative research between the British Library and the Music Museum of Nepal, the collection documentation was improved based on information provided by the museum, Nepalese and international academics and practitioners, and community members. This project highlighted the importance of collaboration and knowledge exchange between the Library, international cultural institutions and originating communities, and highlighted digital reconnection as a method for increasing accessibility to cultural heritage collections.

For the Torres Strait cylinders, True Echoes worked in partnership with the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS). AIATSIS was founded as the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies (AIAS) and became AIATSIS in 1989 following the passing of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Act.

The digitised cylinder recordings were provided to AIATSIS as MP3 files, along with the metadata for the cylinders as originally described in the Library’s Sound and Moving Image (SAMI) catalogue.<sup>6</sup> Throughout the historical research process, the metadata and documentation for the collection were improved, and updated versions were provided to AIATSIS.

All digitised cylinder recordings are available for listening at the British Library. Recordings were also made available as part of the Collect Britain project in 2004 following per-

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5 Place names are taken from AIATSIS’ Pathways thesaurus. Available at: <https://thesaurus.aiatsis.gov.au> (Accessed: 3 June 2023). Terms typically include both the contemporary, Indigenous place name and the colonial place name; the former is used throughout this article.

6 <http://sami.bl.uk/> (Accessed: 3 July 2023).

mission from the Council of Elders on Mer and Torres Strait Regional Authority (Topp Fargion, 2004a; 2004b). Since 2008, some recordings have been available to stream on the British Library Sounds website.<sup>7</sup> However, the website does not include the entire Torres Strait Islands collection and individuals without internet access are excluded from accessing the website. To address this, True Echoes worked with project partner PARADISEC (Pacific and Regional Archive for Digital Sources in Endangered Cultures) to explore how a Raspberry Pi microcomputer could be used as a local Wi-Fi network to share a catalogue of wax cylinder recordings with originating communities. An offline version of the True Echoes website was also loaded onto tablets as an Android package file and used by local researchers to share wax cylinder recordings and contextual information with local communities. Further information on PARADISEC's work with the Raspberry Pi to facilitate digital reconnection is available on their website (Thieberger, 2018).



Figure 1. The islands of the Torres Strait identified using the local indigenous titles [reference 00-483]. Map reproduced with the permission of CartoGIS Services, Scholarly Information Services, The Australian National University. Available under CC BY-SA 4.0 licence<sup>8</sup>.

7 <https://sounds.bl.uk/> (Accessed: 3 July 2023).

8 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>

### The Cambridge Expedition to the Torres Strait Islands

The 1898 Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to Torres Straits was led by Professor Alfred Cort Haddon, a distinguished natural scientist and ethnologist who was instrumental in establishing anthropology as a discipline at the University of Cambridge. Other expedition members included William Halse Rivers (1864–1922), a physician specialising in experimental psychology and physiology; Charles Seligmann<sup>9</sup> (1873–1940), a pathologist specialising in tropical diseases; Charles S. Myers (1873–1946), a physician who specialised in psychology and music; William McDougall (1871–1938), also a physician; Sidney H. Ray (1858–1939), a linguist, and Anthony Wilkin (1877?–1901), the expedition’s photographer.<sup>10</sup>

Following this expedition, Seligmann and Rivers went on to produce their own anthropological recordings, which can be found in the British Library’s Daniels Ethnographical Expedition to British New Guinea 1904 Cylinder Collection (C62) and W.H.R. Rivers and Arthur M. Hocart 1908, New Georgia group, British Solomon Islands Protectorate Cylinder Collection (C108).

The expedition members met on Waiben (Thursday Island) in April 1898 and arrived on Mer on 6 May. Haddon, Ray, Wilkin and Seligmann left for British New Guinea on 23 May, with all but Seligmann returning to Mer on 20 July. Seligmann did not return to the Torres Strait Islands until 3 October.

Myers and McDougall spent most or all their time on Mer, leaving for Sarawak on 24 August 1898.<sup>11</sup> Haddon, Rivers, Wilkin and Seligmann went to Mabuiag on 3 October with Ray joining them on 19 October. Haddon, Ray and Seligmann visited Saibai and Iama (Yam Island) between 22 October and 15 November but spent only a few days on each of these islands (Philp, 1999, p. 59).

### Motivations for the Expedition

The Torres Strait Islands (see Figure 1) were of particular interest to British researchers of the time due to their location between the “distinctive cultural, geographical and biological zones” of Australia and New Guinea, enabling researchers to develop “European theories in both natural history and ethnology” (Herle and Rouse, 1998, p. 12). Indeed, Haddon had initially trained as a marine zoologist but his first visit to the Torres Strait in 1888 was a “turning point in his life”, reshaping his career and the field of anthropology (National Museum Australia, no date; Quiggin, 1942, p. 81).

Haddon visited Mer, Mabuiag, and Tudu Island (just off Iama), as well as the south coast of British New Guinea (Quiggin, 1942, p. 88). Afterwards, he published anthropological and scientific work (see Haddon, 1890a; 1890b; 1893) and planned an ethnographic monograph. However, Haddon felt “he had only skimmed the surface” and that the 1898 expedition would “verify and supplement the anthropological observations that [he] made in Torres Straits in 1888-89” (Haddon, 1899, p. 413; Quiggin, 1942, p. 88).

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9 Charles Seligmann changed the spelling of his surname to Seligman after 1914 (Myers, 1941). The former spelling is used throughout the present document as it refers to the period before the change of spelling.

10 Anthony Wilkin’s year of birth is not known. Haddon notes that Wilkin was “barely twenty-four years of age” when he died in May 1901 (Haddon, 1901, p. viii).

11 Following the end of the official expedition in November 1898, Haddon, Myers, Ray and McDougall travelled to Sarawak (Haddon, 1935, p. xiii).

Salvage anthropology was also a motivation for the expedition, namely the “self-defined task” to collect and record “traditional cultures [that] were perceived to be declining irreparably” (Geismar, 2014, p. 101). Following Haddon’s 1888 visit, he wrote, “... if I neglected to avail myself of the present opportunity of collecting information on the ethnography of the islanders, it was extremely probable that that knowledge would never be gleaned” (1890b, pp. 297-298).

The western (including Mabuia) and southern Torres Strait Islands groups “were very early exposed to European influence” with Mabuia as the location for “one of the earliest headquarters and stores of a pearlsheller” with a mission opened in 1871 (Laade, 1977, p. 1). In contrast, Mer was chosen as a research location as it was “little touched by colonialism (although many of its residents were Christianised and spoke pidgin English)” and the Meriam people would be more likely to retain their “traditional life-style” (Kuklick, 1998, pp. 161, 170).

### Use of the phonograph

Anthropologist Jesse Walter Fewkes (1850–1930) may have persuaded Haddon to use a phonograph on the 1898 expedition. Fewkes is widely regarded as the first person to make cylinder recordings as part of anthropological research. He wrote to Haddon in March 1890 and described the usefulness of the phonograph to record stories and songs during his research on the Passamaquoddy people in Maine, United States (Clayton, 1996, p. 69).

Use of the phonograph by the Cambridge expedition “may well have been the first British use of the technique” (Ward, 1984, p. 1). The journals and papers of Haddon, Rivers, Seligmann, Myers and Wilkin include references to recording (Clayton, 1996). For example, on 28 July 1898, Myers wrote, “cameras and phonograph apparatus constitute the bulk of our baggage” (1898-1899, p. 92).

Two phonographs were apparently purchased, but records do not agree as to their make. The expedition invoices show that Haddon acquired an Edison Home phonograph and a Bijou Graphophone (John Haddon & Co., 1898). However, the expedition’s outfitter John Haddon & Co. noted on 16 November 1897 that they had forwarded an Edison Home Phonograph to Haddon and that Edisonia Co. was preparing a second for him.

It is unclear what happened to the second Edison Home phonograph or why one of each phonograph was chosen. However, the Bijou Graphophone was a new and improved phonograph developed by Alexander Graham Bell’s Volta Laboratory.<sup>12</sup> The project team also do not know what happened to the phonographs after the expedition. At least one must have been taken to Borneo; there are a number of recordings from that trip in the British Library’s Borneo cylinder collection (C666).

In addition to the phonographs, the expedition also took a cinematograph, which was used on Mer in September 1898 (Griffiths, 2002, pp. 133-134). The existing footage is held at the British Film Institute Archive (identifier 20149) with copies held by AIATSIS (call number CAMBRIDGE\_001) and the National Film and Sound Archive of Australia (title number 8879) (Long & Laughren, 1993).

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12 Further information on the development of the Graphophone can be found here in Wile, R.R. (1990) ‘The Development of Sound Recording at the Volta Laboratory’, *Association for Recorded Sound Collections Journal*, 21(2), pp. 208-225. Available at: <https://www.arsc-audio.org/journals/v21/v21n2p208-225.pdf> (Accessed: 1 May 2024).

### History of the Torres Strait cylinder collection

The wax cylinder collection resulting from the expedition comprises 102 cylinders, of which 95 have been digitised and catalogued. Seven cylinders do not have recording-level metadata; C80/1015, 1044, 1056, 1057, 1106, and 1494 are broken and have not been digitised, and C80/1066 is a blank cylinder.<sup>13</sup> The Torres Strait cylinders have little accompanying documentation aside from inscriptions on cylinder containers and on small paper inserts, where these have been identified. Some previously documented inserts are no longer available.

The Torres Strait cylinders were part of a collection of approximately 2,100 cylinders known as the Sir James Frazer Collection, named for Sir James Frazer (1854–1941), a Glasgow-born social anthropologist, folklorist, and classical scholar. The collection includes cylinders recorded between 1898 and 1914 in Africa, South Asia, Australia and the Pacific.

Expedition member and keen ethnomusicologist Charles S. Myers may have started to “round up” copies of cylinders but by 1907, Frazer “added sound recordings to the other categories of anthropological data which he amassed” (Ward, 1984, p. 2).<sup>14</sup> The collection was at the University of Cambridge’s Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (MAA) for a short time before its transfer to the University’s Psychological Laboratory, which was formally opened in 1913 (University of Cambridge, no date). Myers was the first Director of this Laboratory and Lecturer in Experimental Psychology until 1922, and there is evidence that he possessed the Frazer cylinder collection by 1914 (Ward, 1984, p. 11).<sup>15</sup>

The cylinders were re-identified in the 1950s after being found in a boiler room when the Psychological Laboratory was rebuilt (Ward, 1984, p. 11; Durán, 1985). Oliver Zangwill, Professor of Experimental Psychology at Cambridge, arranged for their transfer to the British Institute of Recorded Sound (BIRS).<sup>16</sup> The BIRS was opened in 1955 and “was able to offer more appropriate long-term housing” for audio-visual materials in the United Kingdom (The British Library Board, 2010, p. 3). The cylinders were in an “extremely delicate condition, damaged by heat” (Gathercole, 1978). Many were broken or had deteriorated before they were deposited at the BIRS (Saul, 1975). The date for the transfer is unclear although documentation suggests 1959 (Topp Fargion, 2009).

13 As well as collection-level records, the British Library’s SAMI catalogue includes separate but linked recording and product records. Recording metadata describes the recording, whereas product metadata describes the sound carrier and any accompanying documentation.

14 Ward did not provide a reference, but this could be from the typescript catalogue “Dr J. G. Frazer’s Library”, held at Trinity College, Cambridge. Available at: <https://archives.trin.cam.ac.uk/index.php/catalogue-of-the-library-of-sir-james-frazer> (Accessed: 3 June 2023).

15 Funding for the Psychological Laboratory was primarily raised by Myers, his relatives and his wife’s family (Mollon, J. (2013) ‘Plum-coloured bricks’: *Opening of the Cambridge Psychological Laboratory on this day in 1913*. Available: <https://www.psychol.cam.ac.uk/archived-news/2013/2013-15-05-centenary> (Accessed: 1 May 2024).

16 The British Institute of Recorded Sound (BIRS) was founded in 1955 and became part of the British Library in 1983. It was renamed as the National Sound Archive (NSA) and is now referred to as Sound and Vision at the British Library.

### Re-identification of the cylinders at the British Library

There is no evidence that anyone worked on the cylinders until the late 1970s. Alice Moyle (1908–2005), Ethnomusicology Research Officer at then-named AIAS, had given a talk at the BIRS in November 1971 on recording Aboriginal music in North Australia and had been in contact with BIRS founder Patrick Saul around this time. He referenced the “C.S. Myers Torres Strait recordings” to Moyle and noted that the BIRS was planning to transfer them to tape (Moyle, 1973).

In 1976 and 1977, Moyle asked whether the cylinders had yet been transferred to tape, suggesting that the work could be done in Australia or by Wilfried Zahn at the German Broadcasting Archive in Frankfurt. In 1978, Jane Forge (Director of the Resource Centre, AIAS) expressed interest in the cylinders but ethnomusicologist Lucy Durán noted that the cylinders were still being traced.<sup>17</sup>

Following retirement from AIAS, Moyle spent a month in England from 23 August 1978 during which she spent two weeks at the BIRS to discuss plans for transferring the Torres Strait cylinders to tape (Moyle, 1978).<sup>18</sup> She completed a “preliminary sort” of the Australian cylinders and later wrote about “scaling ladders and investigating the dusty corners” of the BIRS (Moyle, 1986). BIRS Director-designate Anthony King (1978) stated that Moyle located, sorted and listed the Australian cylinders, and that the BIRS would send free tape copies of the material to AIAS.

In 1982/1983, a further twelve cylinders were identified by Alan Ward (then BIRS Archive Administrator). These included the earliest recordings made in London by Sidney Ray. In 1985, Moyle completed audition sheets of the Torres Strait recordings based on dubbings provided by the BIRS. She matched 25 cylinders to Myers’ writings in the Reports of the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to Torres Straits, specifically volumes IV (1912) and VI (1908) (Moyle, 1985a; 1985b).

### Numbering

The cylinders are categorised according to several systems. Alan Ward assigned C-prefixed collection numbers in 1980 and the cylinders recorded in 1898 were separated according to location. The Torres Strait cylinders were assigned shelfmark C80 and the British New Guinea cylinders were assigned C62 (Topp Fargion, 2020).

Alice Moyle assigned each cylinder an alphanumeric code, prefixed A, B or C, which was written on a small sticker on the cylinder lids (1983, p. 133). Moyle (1984) used “as far as possible, the numbering systems appearing on the cylinders themselves”. The A and B cylinders are stored in “two specially made boxes, twelve compartments to each”, as found by Moyle in 1978 (Moyle, no date, p. 1). Any codes prefixed with “D” were issued after Moyle. These sometimes appear alongside Moyle’s codes, but it is not clear

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17 Durán was appointed to the BIRS in 1975 (Landau, 2011).

18 A digitised note provided by Grace Koch (AIATSIS) shows that Moyle was at the BIRS from 8 to 22 September 1978.

who assigned them. Figure 2 shows the inscription and stickers on the lid for cylinder C80/1041. The “8” sticker corresponds to the reference number C8, which Moyle assigned to this cylinder.



Figure 2. Photograph of the lid of the metal container for cylinder C80/1041. True Echoes, ©2022 British Library Board.

Many individual cylinder boxes have red-ink inscriptions that do not correspond to the order in which recordings were made and were presumed to have been allocated by Frazer and his wife Elizabeth (Lilly); Ward (1985) noted, “the red numbers ... are those applied by Frazer, possibly several years after the collection returned to the UK. Experience with other cylinders marked by Frazer shows that his numbers normally bear no relation whatever to the order in which the material was recorded, and appear to have been applied in a haphazard way.” Preliminary research suggests that they may in fact be attributed to Myers, based on handwriting comparisons, although further research is needed.

A review of the red-ink numbers was conducted in June 2020, comparing the numbering on the Torres Strait cylinders with those on the 1898 and 1904 British New Guinea cylinders. They suggest a single numbering sequence and whoever wrote the labels either did not know the cylinders’ chronology or did not think it was important to reflect the chronology in their numbering. There are many unnumbered Torres Strait cylinders although the reasons for this are unknown.

### Historical research

Historical research on the Torres Strait cylinders began at the British Library in September 2019 with an initial review of existing metadata and an inspection of the cylinders and accompanying documentation. The expedition was well documented: six volumes of the *Reports of the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to Torres Straits* were published between 1901 and 1935. Arts and Crafts (volume IV, 1912) includes transcriptions, notations and analysis of music (Myers, 1912a) and discussion of songs (Haddon, 1912). Myers also wrote about the music of the Torres Strait Islands in other publications (see Myers, 1899; 1912b; 1914). The available inserts and announcements on the recordings helped to provide titles or descriptions, locations, and speakers’ names. Identified terms were cross-referenced against publications and unpublished documentation related to the 1898 expedition.



For example, cylinder C80/1041 included a paper insert with inscription “Amipurungu umaik / Story told by Waria Mabuiag”, which corresponds to the spoken announcement on the recording: “Amipurungu amaik. Story told by Waria. Mabuiag”. A transcription and translation of “The Story of Amipuru” by Waria was identified in Volume III of the Reports (Ray, 1907, pp. 191, 220). A handwritten manuscript of this story by Waria is held at Cambridge University Library as part of the Haddon Papers (MS. Haddon).<sup>19</sup>

Cylinder C80/1018 included an insert with “Ulai Weii B” inscribed on one side and transcription “wau o weluba o leverlever [Lewerlewera] / o mariba / tamera o gulaba tamera / o wei” on the other (see Figure 3). The inscriptions are contemporary to the expedition with the alphanumeric reference added later. This transcription corresponds to Charles S. Myers’ Malu Song II and was apparently sung to “Air II” published in Myers & Haddon (1908, p. 151). Words, notation and analysis for this song were published by Myers (1912a, pp. 244, 247-48, 266) and musical notation is included in Anthony Wilkin’s field notebook as ‘Song K’ (1898, p. 250).

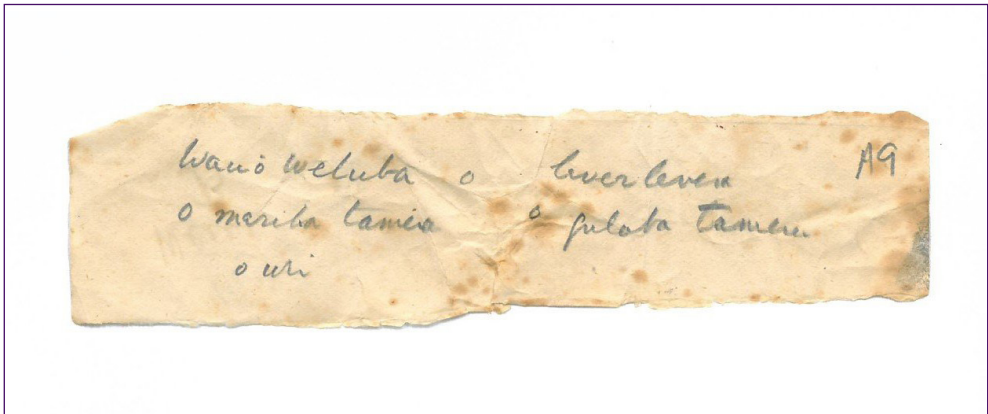


Figure 3. One side of a paper note found with cylinder C80/1018. True Echoes, ©2022 British Library Board.

In March 2020, True Echoes Research Fellows Rebekah Hayes and Vicky Barnecutt visited Cambridge University Library to review the Haddon Papers, including his 1898 journal, field notes and archival materials relating to the expedition. They also include the Charles Myers Papers (MSS.Add.8073-8074), papers of W.H.R. Rivers, and Anthony Wilkin’s 1898 notebook. COVID-19 pandemic restrictions prevented further visits, but successful digitisation requests ensured the project could access, for example, copies of Myers’ 1898 journal at Cambridge University Library and Sidney Ray’s papers at SOAS, University of London. The latter includes copies of Ray’s journal and correspondence from the 1898 expedition (MS 380314). The originals are held in the Michael Somare Library at the University of Papua New Guinea (AL 007).

The British Library Sound Archive holds documentation relating to the management of the Torres Strait cylinders, including their transfer history and information on how the collection has been used over the years at the Library and AIATSIS, including by

19 A digitised version is available online via Trove, Mabuiag - Torres Strait. Waria’s Manuscript. Available at: <http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-1263136977> (Accessed: 20 November 2023).

Torres Strait Islanders. AIATSIS provided digitised copies of sections of the Alice Moyle Collection (MS 3501), including Moyle's notes from visits to the BIRS, audition sheets for the recordings, and her own research using the Reports and other publications. This documentation and Moyle's published work (1983, 1985c, 1987) enabled the project to confirm links between many individual recordings and Myers' transcriptions.

### Updating metadata

Following the review of publications and documentation, the project team worked with AIATSIS to address incorrect or incomplete metadata for the collection. Many fields in the existing catalogue records were empty or contained minimal information, particularly language and genre descriptions. True Echoes addressed this by firstly using historical research to enhance metadata for the cylinders, correcting errors and ensuring that recordings were attributed to both the Torres Strait Islander performers and the sound recordists.

Correct attribution enables greater discoverability for Torres Strait Islander communities, who may wish to identify recordings made by specific individuals, including ancestors. The Cambridge Expedition members often named their consultants, which greatly facilitated correct attribution for individual recordings (see Haddon, 1908). In total, 34 performers/participants were identified, including Torres Strait Islanders from Mer, Mabuiag, Saibai and Iama. Performers also include individuals from other countries who were in the region at the time of the expedition.

Historical research conducted on cylinders C80/1018 and C80/1041 brought further information to light about Ulai of Mer and Waria of Mabuiag. Ulai (pictured in Figure 4) lived in Sebeg and had two children at the time of the expedition (Rivers, 1908a, p.70, Table 4C). Haddon noted that Ulai was "the greatest character of the lot" and was "of considerable use to [the expedition members]" (Haddon, 1901, pp. 31, 72). Ulai discussed and collected rain charms and shared a model of a *doiom*, "a stone effigy of a man that is used in the rain-making ceremony", with Haddon (Myers, 1898-1899, p. 74; Haddon, 1901, p. 33).



Figure 4. Portrait of Ulai wearing a cassowary headdress crowned with white pigeon feathers and a hibiscus attached over the forehead. Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge, N.23297.ACH2.

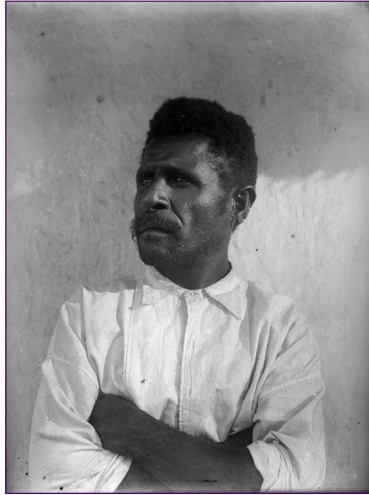


Figure 5. Portrait of Waria, 1898. Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge, N.22990.ACH2.

Waria (of the Dangal, Kodol clan) was the hereditary chief of Mabuia and married to Uruba, with whom he had had six children (Rivers, 1904, Table 1). Waria was also known as Net (pronounced Neth), which was a name given to him by a Samoan friend, or Ned in English (Rivers, 1904, p. 143; Ray, 1907, p. 7). He was a consultant to Haddon and assisted Ray with his study of the language of Mabuia (Haddon, 1901, p. 123). Waria is also possibly the speaker on cylinders C80/1040 and C80/1043, for which there is little information.

Waria worked on a translation of the Gospel of St. Matthew and was “a very accomplished person [...] He was genuinely interested in our work” (Haddon, 1901, p. 123). Haddon further noted, “Our indebtedness to our native helpers is obvious; but to Waria, the chief of Mabuia, we owe much, as, in addition to what he has told us orally, he has sent a large quantity of manuscript, mainly of genealogies and folk-tales, which he has written at his own initiative” (1904, p. 6). Waria also constructed a bamboo platform or *neët* to show the discontinued practice of dugong hunting (Haddon, 1901, pp. 152–53).

Waria’s infant son died while the expedition visited Mabuia, and Waria requested that the group photograph his son so “that he might not forget what he was like”. The group honoured this request (1901, p. 123). By January 1900, Waria was Mamoose of Mabuia (Cowling, 1900).<sup>20</sup> Haddon sent a telescope to Waria as a gift (Cowling, 1901).

The identification of individuals heard on the recordings facilitated AIATSIS’ identification of their descendants, who then contributed to the participatory research of the project, sharing stories about their family members and information about the relevance of recordings for their families and communities today.

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20 The Mamoose was the official government representative of each island.

## Locations and languages

The identification of performers also provided an indication of where cylinders were recorded following cross-referencing of individuals, dates and locations in the Reports and other contemporary accounts. For cylinders C80/1018 and C80/1041, the recording locations were confirmed as Mer and Mabuiaq, respectively. Overall, confirmed recording locations include Mer (Eastern Islands), Mabuiaq (Western Islands), Saibai (Top Western Islands) and Iama (Yam Island, Central Islands), each representing a cluster of islands in the Torres Strait.<sup>21</sup> The recording locations also correspond to different language varieties, including Meriam Mir and Kala Lagaw Ya.

The original metadata for the cylinders lacked accurate information about the languages represented in the cylinder collection. The British Library’s World & Traditional Music section typically uses ISO 639-3 language codes, but older metadata included less specific ISO 639-2 codes, such as *aus* [Australian] or *paa* [Papuan languages], which limit discoverability.<sup>22</sup> Following research on the collection, True Echoes sought to add more specific language codes, such as *ulk* for Meriam Mir.

## Identifying the recordists

Haddon and Myers were the only named contributors for nearly all recordings, with Ray described as the recordist for four recordings made on Saibai Island (C80/1077-1080) and two pre-expedition recordings made in England (C80/1485, 1489). However, Myers’ anthropological work was instead confined to Mer, where he stayed from 10 May to 24 August 1898. On 24 July, Ray heard Myers recording “Murray songs” (Ray, 1898-1899, p. 80) and a few days later on 28 July, Myers recorded a few songs “with great difficulty” (Myers, 1898-1899, p. 104). In fact, Myers wrote that he was indebted to Ray “for phonographic records of the music of Mabuiaq, Yam and Saibai”, revealing that Ray was responsible for more recordings than those made on Saibai (1912a, p. 261).

There are several references to the phonograph and recording in the journals of both Myers and Ray, which further support their involvement in the sound recording process. Furthermore, during his time in the Torres Strait, Ray researched the languages of Mer and Erub, and of Mabuiaq, Tudu, Saibai, and Muralag. His linguistic research is the focus of Volume III of the *Reports* (1907) and it could be the case that Ray used the cylinder recordings as part of this research. For example, Ray worked with Peter (also known as Papi) from Mabuiaq to create a number of recordings, including songs, and named Peter as one of the contributors to Ray’s research on the language of Mabuiaq (Ray, 1898-1899, pp. 89-90; 1907, p. 7). Peter has been identified as a contributor to four existing cylinder recordings, including C80/1069, 1070, 1074 and 1469.

Specifically concerning cylinder C80/1041, Ray mentions his work with Waria in journal entries dated 17, 19 and 20 October 1898, including Waria writing the story of Amipuru on 20 October (1898-1899, pp. 89-90). In contrast, there is no evidence that Haddon was involved in recording sound in the Torres Strait Islands.

21 Community profiles for each of these islands can be found on the website of the Torres Strait Regional Authority. Available at: <https://www.tsra.gov.au/the-torres-strait/community-profiles> (Accessed: 4 July 2023).

22 See the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) guidance for further information on different sets of language codes: <https://www.iso.org/iso-639-language-code> (Accessed: 20 May 2024).

### Content of the cylinder recordings

Analysis, notations and words for the songs recorded by Ray on Mabuiag, Saibai and lama can be found in Myers (1912a, pp. 262–265, 269). Many of the songs recorded by Myers on Mer were categorised into three groups: Malu-Bomai, *keber* and secular songs. The Malu-Bomai (or Malo-Bomai) belief system was the “major religious belief system on Murray Island [Mer] before the London Missionary Society arrived in the Torres Strait in 1871” (Koch, 2013, p. 15). *Keber* songs are associated with the Waier belief system, centred on Waier and Dauar Islands, and are “performed during periods of mourning” (Lawrence, 2004, p. 49).

Haddon was told that the Malu-Bomai ceremonies had not been performed for two decades (Beckett, 1987). Myers also wrote, “[in] securing the records for the phonograph, great care, moreover, was taken to ensure that they were obtained from the older men who were alive in the times when the ceremonies were still being performed” (1912a, p. 239). A Malu-Bomai performance was witnessed by the expedition party on 29 July 1898 at Las, Mer Island, and a dance was performed by Kilarap, Kaige and Gadodo on 6 September and was recorded using the cinematograph (Ray, 1898–1899, pp. 81, 86). Notations for the Malu-Bomai songs are given in Myers & Haddon (1908, pp. 150–152). The songs were numbered by Myers; Songs I–IV A are represented in the cylinder collection.

Song IV was previously unidentified within the collection. A cylinder insert note containing words from this song was identified but erroneously matched to a cylinder from another collection (C86/1010). The note in fact corresponds to C80/446; on the insert note is written ‘Iba abara lewer + zogomer / Enoka’ and C80/446 has ‘Iba abara’ inscribed on the lid. Myers identified ‘Iba Abara’ as a recording from Mer in his correspondence with Erich von Hornbostel; Myers described the recording as ‘[s]acred words softly sung after Funeral Song’ (Myers, 1907).

For the *keber* group, Myers and Haddon provided notations and the words for many of these songs (1908, pp. 152–153; Myers 1912a, p. 268). The cylinder collection includes *keber* songs numbered by Myers as V–VII, X–XIII and XIII A; the recording for song XII has not been identified or is missing. Songs V, VI, VII, X, XI within this group of *keber* songs relate to *zera markai* ceremonies “associated with treatment of (and communication with) the unburied dead” (Wright, van der Kolk and Dauareb community, 2019, p. 121).<sup>23</sup> *Keber* songs of the *zera markai* were witnessed by Myers on 24 May 1898 during celebrations for Queen Victoria’s birthday. Participants included Poi (in the role of *pager*, who “relieved the tension and fear of the people caused by the *keber*”) and Sambo, Dela, Gabi, Boa, Gadodo and Kaiga (Myers, 1898–1899, p. 52; Myers & Haddon, 1908, p. 133).

Included in Myers’ *keber* grouping are songs VIII (C80/1025) and IX (C80/1022), which were connected to the *meket siriam* belief system into which boys were initiated (Rivers, 1908b, p. 175).<sup>24</sup> Women, girls and younger boys were not allowed to be present.

Several secular songs are also represented in the collection, including Songs XIV–XVIII. Notations and words for the songs can be found in Myers (1912a, pp. 246–247, 268). They include *kolap wed* (spinning top songs) identified on cylinders C80/1023, C80/1032 and C80/1107.

<sup>23</sup> Also referred to as *zera markai* or *zera merkai* (Haddon, 1935, p. 119; Philp, 1999).

<sup>24</sup> Further information on the *meket siriam* was recorded by Haddon (1908, pp. 273–74).

There are also songs from other cultures outside of the Torres Strait. These include Samoan (C80/1055, 1488), Rotuman (C680/722, C80/1061) and Japanese songs (C80/1049-1051), as well as songs from Vanuatu and Solomon Islands (C680/1492).

### Identifying sensitive and/or sacred materials

Historical research identified potentially sacred, secret and/or ceremonial materials, including the songs relating to the Malu-Bomai belief system, initiation songs, and keber funeral/death songs. Bomai has remained a sacred name for the people of Mer, and Torres Strait Islanders have previously rejected the inclusion of items associated with “sorcery or death” in an exhibition at MAA (Herle, 2003, p. 199).<sup>25</sup>

Through the participatory research undertaken during the True Echoes project, Torres Strait Islanders shared their knowledge about recordings in the cylinder collection. This knowledge was provided to both the British Library and partner Oceanic institutions to be represented in an appropriate and meaningful way. The enhancement of the Torres Strait cylinders metadata was an iterative process, and a first round of updated metadata was completed following historical research. This version was used by local researchers in the Torres Strait Islands during participatory research and served as the foundation for further amendments based on community knowledge.

### Identification of additional cylinders

Several additional Torres Strait cylinders were identified in other British Library cylinder collections. For example, C80/1469 had previously been catalogued as a British New Guinea cylinder but the accompanying paper note described the performer as Peter of Mabuiag. Three cylinders were identified in collections outside the project’s original remit. These were C80/797 in the Borneo cylinder collection and C80/722 and C80/1008 in the Unidentified Cylinders Collection. C80/471 and C80/479 had been previously catalogued as cylinders recorded by anthropologist Edith Durham; they are duplicates of C80/1482 but were mislabelled as European cylinders. An additional three cylinders may be part of the collection (C680/795, C680/1490 and C680/1496) although lack of documentation and damage to the cylinders prevents confirmation of this.

### Participatory research

Following extensive historical research, Lara McLellan, Assistant Director of International Engagement Strategy and Operations at AIATSIS, and Grace Koch, History Researcher for True Echoes, travelled to the Torres Strait Islands to learn more about the cylinder collections from the descendants of the original performers. McLellan and Koch facilitated connections amongst various departments of AIATSIS, the British Library and Torres Strait organisations and interviewers.

Prior to this field trip, Koch and McLellan circulated documentation related to the project and the cylinder collection with participating Torres Strait Islander organisations including the Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) and Gur A Baradharaw Kod Torres Strait Sea and Land Council (GBK). Meetings were held on Thursday Island with TSRA and GBK staff as well as descendants of people recorded on the cylinders, and Koch and McLellan gave a presentation on the cylinder recordings. Following this, the next steps for engagement were agreed upon.

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<sup>25</sup> *Torres Strait Islanders: An Exhibition to Mark the Centenary of the 1898 Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to the Torres Strait*, July 1998 to July 2000.

Valuable advice on protocols was furnished by Vic McGrath from TSRA and Lui Ned David, Chair of GBK. Ned identified Flora Warrior from Mabuiag as a knowledgeable person who could advise on relevant contacts and on the proper way to proceed. Warrior, a descendant of Waria, emphasised that family members should interview other family members and offered to become one of the interviewers. In turn, she pointed Koch and McLellan to Dr. Vinnitta Mosby, an academic and direct descendant of Jimmy Rice (singer on cylinder C80/1037), who agreed to become the interviewer for some of the descendants from Mer.

Dr. Mosby worked with Koch and McLellan and the British Library to shape the permission form for interviewees to sign and to formulate a set of straightforward questions to ask them. Both interviewers agreed to make video recordings of interviews using either a Samsung tablet provided by the British Library or another device of their choosing. All participants agreed that interviews would be conducted in the language chosen by the interviewee, and that recordings of the interviews would be stored both on the island where they were made and at Gab Titui Culture and Arts Centre, Thursday Island. Copies would also be lodged at the British Library and AIATSIS. Access conditions for both the cylinder recordings at the British Library and the newly recorded interviews would be set by the interviewees according to cultural protocols. Where appropriate, excerpts from these interviews were added to the True Echoes website.

### **Mabuiag responses**

Several of the people who were interviewed gave detailed genealogies showing their connections with their ancestors who were recorded in 1898. All participants stated independently that the recordings were very important to their identity as Torres Strait Islanders and to the continuation of their culture. Flora Warrior quoted her ancestor, Waria, as emphasising the importance of knowing history so that “we keep the fireplace of our ancestors burning”<sup>26</sup> and that Islanders know where they come from. Flora recorded descendants of Gizu, Tom Noboa, Peter Papi, Nomoa and Mariget Sandy as well as Waria.

For the recordings of Waria, Warrior chose to interview four people, including Gordon Waria and Stella Warrior. Both Waria and Warrior are ranking elders of the Pabai clan, and Warrior is a direct descendant of Waria and researcher of his importance in the history of Torres Strait. Warrior requested that Patrick Whop, an important Kala Lagaw Ya elder, also be interviewed because of his detailed knowledge of cultural history and language, even though he traces his descent from Noboa (Nubuwa) and Nomoa.<sup>27</sup> As Whop spoke in the Kalaw Lagaw Ya language, Flora Warrior provided an English translation.

Stella and Flora Warrior emphasised that anyone wanting to know more about specific Torres Strait Islander ancestors should ensure that the proper elder related to that ancestor be contacted directly. In the past, researchers had not always realised how vital this procedure is when undertaking research in the Torres Strait.

### **Iama and Tudu response**

Lui Ned David, direct ancestor of Maino (friend of Haddon and last Mamoose, or chief, of Yam Island), spoke of how Maino was a man very much ahead of his time. Maino gifted several artefacts to Haddon so that people overseas would know something of

26 Transcription from Flora Warrior 1041.mp4, ca. 7 min. 50 sec. Recorded on 15 March 2022.

27 Patrick Whop gave an interview about Noboa on the same day as the Waria interview.

the richness of Torres Strait culture, and that the governance structure of Torres Strait Islander society was as sophisticated and ordered as that of Europe. In the latter part of his interview, he provided specific information about protocols for access to Torres Strait knowledge and artefacts, distinguishing between items that had been gifted by elders and items that had been taken away.

### Mer responses

Dr. Mosby and Flora Warrior were not interviewed but recorded themselves as they spoke about their ancestors. Dr. Mosby spoke of the place of her ancestor, Jimmy Rice, within the structure of Mer society. Additionally, she chose to interview Reverend Ron Day, a senior descendant of Jimmy Day; and Adimabo Noah, the eldest living descendant of Ulai. Adimabo Noah spoke mostly in the Meriam language, and Dr. Mosby provided an English translation.

Unfortunately, the audio quality of the cylinder recordings of Jimmy Day and Jimmy Rice is very poor due to high levels of background noise. However, both Rev. Ron Day and Dr. Mosby provided very informative background information on their ancestors. Noise reduction work will be applied to those cylinders later.

The recordings of Ulai, who sang or spoke on twenty cylinders (including duplicates) were clearer. Copies of eight of his cylinder recordings were sent to Dr. Mosby, who played five of them (C80/1016, 1018, 1020, 1026, and 1032) to Adimabo Noah, a descendant of Ulai, and he identified some of the songs on C80/1032 as tunes from Mer with Kala Lagaw Ya texts. Some of the songs were frightening to him as he believed they might have been used for sorcery. He was able to sing the song on C80/1020 as it had been performed on Mer during Mabo Day celebrations in 2000.<sup>28</sup>

### Conclusion

This paper has given an insight and summary into the research conducted by the True Echoes project into the wax cylinders recorded by the Cambridge Expedition in 1898. The historical research combined True Echoes' original research findings with previous research conducted by individuals including Alice Moyle.

By identifying the content of the cylinder recordings, the project team identified potential culturally sensitive materials and identified more specific recording locations. The identification of locations is especially important as place corresponds to community and family, key factors in who can access and use Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage. Confirming the recording location of the cylinders also provided important clues about languages spoken by recording participants and their ancestors.

Additionally, confirming the identities of performers on the cylinders helped the research team to locate some of their living descendants, who agreed to be interviewed for this project. Through these interviews, the project obtained further information about the recordings as well as their relevance for communities today. True Echoes also consulted directly with Torres Strait Island communities to determine how to share recordings appropriately and to establish enduring connections.

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28 Mabo Day celebrates the day when the High Court of Australia ruled that Torres Strait Islanders and Aboriginal people had rights to land known as native title. Eddie Mabo, a Meriam man, began research into the legal rights of Torres Strait Islanders and was one of the most active claimants in the series of court cases that resulted in the legal concept of native title.



By the end of the project, the metadata for all cylinders within the scope of True Echoes were updated on the British Library's SAMI catalogue. Research findings, digitised cylinder recordings and clips from the participatory research are also available on the True Echoes website. It is hoped that the website will continue to be a resource for originating communities, including Torres Strait Islanders, and will provide greater accessibility and discoverability to these culturally significant sound recordings.

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