

... Australia's pearling pioneers ...



Working Side by Side

Lyndon Brown and Tom Wiggan captured in a rare photo (above) of the very early days at Cygnet Bay. They are striving to retrieve a basket of shell from the shallow reefs, pushing themselves and their humble work dinghy to the limits.

When the cultured-pearling industry barely existed and there seemed little to gain but nothing to lose, this photo captured the spirit of the people who worked side by side to create an entirely new Australian industry.

Lifelong relationships forged whilst livelihoods are created.

The Brown family have always worked and lived with Aboriginal people of the Kimberley Coast, in particular the Bardi and Jawi people. Perhaps the strongest of these multi-generational family relationships has been between the Browns and the Wiggans, spanning the entire seventy years. Some of the Elders' names are legendary in the Cygnet Bay story. David Wiggan was the first Bardi man to work with Dean Brown, whom he met in Broome and persuaded to explore even further north. Tom Wiggan mastered every facet of the pearling industry whilst working with the Browns, and many of the companies that later entered the industry sought him out for his expertise. Tom is just one of many Aboriginal men responsible for pioneering the cultured pearling industry with pearling expertise, maritime skills and a profound understanding of the Kimberley environment.

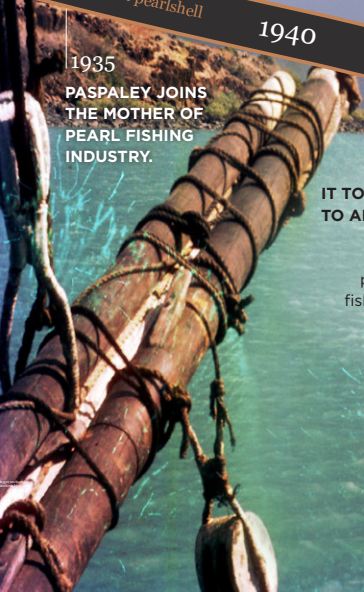


Jedda4 - Shell diving

**1946
THE BROWN FAMILY ENTERS
THE PEARLSHELL INDUSTRY.**

Dean Brown purchases a lugger and sails to the Kimberley coast.

- Pinetada maxima pearlshell



**1935
PASPALEY JOINS
THE MOTHER OF
PEARL FISHING
INDUSTRY.**

1940

**IT TOOK THE COLLAPSE OF AN INDUSTRY
TO ALLOW THE BIRTH OF THE BEAUTIFUL
AUSTRALIAN CULTURED PEARL.**

The 1922 Pearling Act is repealed after plastics devastated the mother of pearl fishing industry, making it legal to culture pearls in WA.

1949

1950

1956

AUSTRALIA'S FIRST PEARL FARM.

A joint American-Australian company, Pearls Proprietary Ltd, was set up to start cultured pearling at Kuri Bay, 420 km north of Broome. The company was majority-owned by Otto Gerdaud Company (New York), with smaller stakeholders Male and Co, and Brown and Dureau Ltd.

The company formed a joint venture with Japanese pearling experts, who oversaw all farming operations. The Male family, based in Broome and still living here, fished the oysters.

Steeped in Broome history, the Males were the first Australians in cultured-pearl farming via this enterprise, exiting the industry in the 90's.

