

# 4

## The Melanesian Mission, 1877–1909

The heathen are always threatening us; they come with their bows and arrows again and again, and say they will kill us all and bury the school, but it is mostly words; they say they want three lives, Johnson's, mine, and John's (these are the three teachers). We do not go to meet them with arms, Mr. Comins has told us to seek peace with them, so we give them food and goods, and we try not to get angry with them.

—Luke Masuraa, Aulu, 1896<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

Christianity, labour and government are three of the major influences that shaped modern Malaita before the 1940s. The fourth is an ability to be practical and incorporate change. There is nothing unique in the combination of the first three elements, which were major causes of change in many Pacific Islands societies. Yet virtually no other island experienced the same intensity of labour recruiting or had the strong link with Christian missions in Queensland. As we have seen, many early Malaitan Christians adopted their new spiritual beliefs while working on overseas plantations and attending denominational missions, the strongest links being with the QKM-SSEM and the Anglicans. This chapter further develops themes raised in the last, with a concentration

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1 Quoted in the Ballarat *Churchman* and reproduced in *OPMM*, Mar 1896, 200.

on the Anglican's Melanesian Mission. David Lawrence, writing about the BSIP's first resident commissioner, Charles Woodford, provides a neat summary of the interactions between the different European groups and local people:

Missionaries saw themselves as pursuing a political agenda that filled the gap between fervent British colonialism and neutrality. The local people, however, saw the missionaries, the traders, the labour recruiters and later the government officials as representing one group: foreigners with power, technology and unlimited resources. Missionaries certainly saw themselves as a social and moral group much superior to traders and labour recruiters.<sup>2</sup>

The previous two chapters discussed changes that occurred through labour migration. These were considerable and involved all communities. Between 1870 and the early 1940s, Malaitans entered into 50,000 indenture contracts. Youths and men became used to wage labour away from home, and when they returned they disrupted established social orders in their small-scale societies. They brought with them new languages, Christianity, new material possessions, and invisible baggage in the form of exposure to new diseases. Pijin English became the new *lingua franca* of Solomon Islands, and limited literacy was also introduced. Wage labour, Christianity and Pijin English (and to a lesser extent Pijin Fijian) had already altered Malaitan society long before the new BSIP government was proclaimed in 1893. One thread that holds Chapter 4 through Chapter 6 together is influences from outside Malaita, since early Christianity was largely spread and sustained by Malaitans and other Pacific Islanders who had been converted in Queensland, Fiji and Norfolk Island. The second thread is the flexibility of Malaitan ancestral religion, which was arguably more pragmatic and less dogmatic than Christianity, and its ability to continue alongside the new religion.

The main sources drawn upon in the next few chapters are the published records of the Christian missions, particularly the Melanesian Mission and the QKM-SSEM, supplemented by government documents. The documentary evidence is both magnificently detailed and frustrating. As with any source from a century ago, there are gaps that make it hard to follow events and statistics, and one must be careful not to absorb dated interpretations that are now invalid. Most missionaries and government

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<sup>2</sup> Lawrence 2014, 145–46.

officers held strongly Eurocentric views that shaped their descriptions of what they saw. Their explanations of what they were trying to do often appear foolish to us today, and they were certainly overconfident regarding their ability to socially engineer Malaitan societies.

Several techniques have been used to re-create the scenes of more than a century ago. First, the chapters were written keeping an eye on estimating the extent of mission contact with Malaitans, both while they worked overseas as labourers and as they lived on Malaita before 1910. Chapter 3 provided a wider history of Christian missions in Queensland and Fiji, and these missions were crucial to the changes that took place on Malaita. The present chapter and the two that follow chart the development of early Christian settlements on Malaita. This is accomplished by building information about the beginnings of the main mission bases and by following the voyages of mission ships. Ships—the various iterations of the *Southern Cross* and the *Evangel*, smaller vessels such as the cutter *Daphne* and whaleboats—were the lifelines of the Christian communities. As they circled the island, their crews and passengers observed change and development. Though they were always limited to the coast and often misunderstood what they saw, their reports are valuable nonetheless. With the benefit of hindsight, we can use the descriptions to help us piece together the lives and customs of Malaitans at that time. Missionaries began to provide detailed accounts of Malaita two decades before the protectorate established its headquarters at 'Aoke. We owe much of our early knowledge to missionary linguists such as Walter G. Ivens, who provided the first substantial word-window into coastal Malaitan society in the 1890s. Ian Hogbin, the first anthropologist to spend time on the island, did not arrive until 1933, by which time Malaita had already undergone 60 years of substantial change.

The following chapters show the extent that Malaita had already altered before government officers arrived and the complexity of the cultures that were slowly drawn into the British protectorate. Life on Malaita, particularly around the coast, emerges through these explorations of Christianity: the tensions between the inland-dwelling majority and the coastal, initially lagoon-dwelling minority, the extent of violence as a social mechanism and the nature of gender and spatial relationships. The history of Malaita as preserved in mission records is quite different from that found in early government archives. Just as missionaries had their own agendas, so too did government officers, who always lamented their lack of resources and relied on the police force and weapons to

achieve their objectives. As is clear in Luke Masuraa's comment at the beginning of this chapter, missionaries were armed mainly with their faith in their Lord. That said, they were also helped by an ample supply of European goods, a small fleet of coastal boats and the support of existing Malaitan Christians.

Rapid changes occurred during the final three decades of the nineteenth century, not the least of which was the introduction of new diseases. Evidence is presented in later chapters of the epidemics that devastated population levels on some other Pacific Islands and also on Malaita.<sup>3</sup> The size of Malaita's population in the 1890s and 1900s is unknown: estimates put the number at between 50,000 and 100,000, with the truth probably closer to 50,000, since there may have been a significant decline in the second half of the nineteenth century. Calculations based on the analysis in Chapter 2 through Chapter 6 suggest that by 1910 around 4,000 to 5,000 baptised Christians and several hundred confirmed Christians lived on Malaita. Many of them spoke Pijin English, learnt on Queensland, Fijian and Samoan plantations and farms; an unknown number could read and write. The level of early literacy was far higher than the government ever gave credit for, and a few individuals, such as Timothy George Mahratta, later of Maasina Rule fame, had been educated in Queensland primary schools.<sup>4</sup>

Drawing on the mission literature helps to restore agency to Malaitans and creates a less European missionary-centred picture than do the mission texts. It also allows us to see how power and agency was refocused on Malaita before formal government arrived, first by the labour trade and then by the Christian missions. This new, 1890s–1900s focus was concentrated on Sa`a, Walade, Fauaabu, Fiu, Bitā`ama, Malu`u, Ngorefou, `Ataa, Kwai-Ngongosila, Onepusu and Baunani, and not on `Aoke, the new government headquarters from 1909 (see Map 12 in this chapter, Map 13 in Chapter 6, and Map 14 in Chapter 7). Once the Marist Catholics arrived in the early 1910s, the European presence expanded to include Tarapaina in Maramasike Passage, Rohinari in `Are`are Lagoon and Buma further north. Previous to the missionary incursion, the Malaitan focus had been on language areas and foundational shrines of ancestors, which were mainly inland. The new European bases were concentrated

3 For instance, we know that 25–30 per cent of all the Melanesians who laboured in Queensland died there and never returned home. Moore 2015b.

4 Moore 2013c entry.

around the coast in the north, south and the west, although gaps were filled by many smaller Christian schools established along the Kwaio, `Are`are and Small Malaita coasts. Many coastal areas had no residents before this, which made the Christian settlements all the more striking.

Only two other Solomon Islands had significant Christian populations in 1909. The population of the Gela Islands was around 5,000, and by 1894 the Melanesian Mission had baptised some 3,000, a number that increased during the 1900s, leading to claims that Gela was the protectorate's largest Christian community. Isabel Island's population in the 1890s was estimated at just 4,000, of whom roughly one-quarter had been baptised by 1900, extended to most of the population by 1910. At the end of the century's first decade, then, more Christians lived on Malaita than in the Gela Islands or on Isabel.<sup>5</sup>

Christianity was established on Malaita through formal mission stations and schools started by mainstream denominations, and informally by Christian converts who had worked overseas. Significant numbers of indentured labourers became Christians, then returned and built their own small schools. Anglican Bishop Cecil Wilson described these schools as 'beacons all along the shores'.<sup>6</sup> Supplementing the more formal mission bases, the 'light' that spread from these indigenous beginnings was the ongoing, major force behind early Christianity in the islands. For congregation sizes I have not relied on the claims of missionaries, which are often inflated, and I have limited my counts to people who were baptised or confirmed as full members of their churches. Thus it is likely that the statistics I present significantly undercount those who, in some way, became followers of the various denominations.

Just how many Christians there were on Malaita before the Second World War has been a contentious issue. Some sources suggest that by 1930 almost half the population was Christian,<sup>7</sup> while others, referencing protectorate officers, give this same proportion after the war.<sup>8</sup> An increase of 15,000

5 Hilliard 1978, 115; White 1991, 105; Jackson 1975.

6 Wilson 1932, 207.

7 Bennett 1993, 145, quoting Hogbin 1939, 173 and Hilliard 1978, 274–75.

8 The 1945 Malaita annual report records that there were 42,000 people on Malaita and that half of them were Christian. Conversion had slowed during the war years, although it sped up in the 1950s. BSIP 27/VI/10, 'Malaita District Annual Report, 1945', 11; Akin 2013a, 402 n 94. Hugh Laracy (1976, 126) suggests that the majority were SSEM (9,000), followed by Anglicans (5,000) and Catholics (4,000), with fewer than 1,000 SDAs. This is not half of 42,000 but both official and mission statistics are notoriously rubbery, particularly in their estimates for inland settlements.

or 16,000 since 1909 (300 per cent) seems large, but is much slower than on neighbouring islands. The impetus from missions in Queensland and Fijian was not continued on the BSIP plantations, and we also need to take deaths into account given that the average life expectancy was probably less than 50 years and the overseas Christian component on Malaita was ageing. Alan Tippett makes the point that what occurred was what he called ‘modified paganism’, with the Christians and ancestral worshipers partly observing each other’s ‘rules’ and coexisting. Some missionaries attempted to ensure total separation. This seldom occurred, although it may have been more successful when a European missionary resided in the vicinity. No generalisation is possible: the SSEM forbade its followers from observing birth and menstrual rules, which made SSEM villages unsafe for non-Christians. Nevertheless, the lack of progress of conversion is surprising and raises larger questions regarding the many other early estimates of Christian conversion in the Pacific. Also, Christian Malaitans obviously swapped denominations with great ease, and conversion to Christianity from the ancestral belief systems did not mean abandoning the power of ancestors. Non-Christians could see that Christians maintained parts of their old belief systems, and yet they could also break their pacts with ancestors and violate taboos without the usual dire consequences. Perhaps we will never know the answer, but given that officials could not accurately estimate the overall population, why should we trust their estimates of Christian numbers? We certainly cannot trust the missions, which all exaggerated their levels of success.

How much did the early Christians really understand their choice to take on a new religion? Was their conversion more opportunistic than sincere, and how did they combine Christianity with ancestral beliefs? Ben Burt’s *Tradition and Christianity* provides the best answer: it was a totally syncretic process.<sup>9</sup> The argument presented in *Making Mala* is that Christianity had more influence on Malaita between the 1890s and 1930s than is often presumed. Even so, adaptation to foreign cultures and understandings of the strengths and weaknesses of European and other mission workers was only slowly and partially adopted by Malaitans. The discrete cultural expectations on both sides go to the heart of differences in attitudes and behaviours.

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9 Also see Guo 2009, and Keesing 1967.

Concepts of religion, at both philosophical and practical levels, are at the core of these epistemological adaptations and changes. Missionaries usually presented Christianity as an opposing force to Malaitan religion, ignoring, or often just failing to understand, points of similarity and not comprehending that altering religious beliefs meant total societal change. Malaitans, despite variations in different regions of the island, already had one central all-embracing religion based on veneration of ancestors and other spirits, interlinked with languages, philosophy and other aspects of culture. By way of comparison, when the hold of medieval Catholicism began to break down in Europe, the process was accompanied by an alternative—Protestantism, a variation on the same religious tradition—and by new philosophical, scientific and authority structures that eventually challenged and then displaced religion as society's *raison d'être*. European states became more secular and increasingly controlled the lives of their people. On Malaita, the secular state cannot be said to have been even minimally 'in control' until the late 1920s or even the early 1930s. This meant that there were several prior decades when the Christian missions were the dominant foreign influences, and they continued to operate fairly autonomously right into the 1930s. Second, because of the centrality of religion to Malaitan culture, the transfer to Christianity often appeared to be deep, meaningful and immediate. It was deliberately presented this way by the missionaries, ever-conscious of the propaganda value of success stories for their overseas audiences and fundraising.

Much of what was accepted as quick conversion by foreign missionaries was initially fairly shallow adoption of an introduced alien cultural form. This is not to say it was merely a veneer, but the process of incorporating Christianity into existing religious systems was never fast. Some Malaitans converted to flee from angry ancestors. Others appreciated medical assistance given by missionaries, which was enough to win them over to Christianity for practical rather than spiritual reasons. Solomon Islanders readily accepted the theatrical aspects of the new religion and the material benefits adherence to it brought. Church rituals such as baptism and holy sacraments, hymns and prayers, processions and vestments were all interesting markers of the new religion and of the strange behaviour of foreigners. Francis Bugotu from Tasimboko Village on Guadalcanal was one of the first Solomon Islanders to intellectualise the place of Christianity in Solomon Islands society. In his 1968 Waigani Seminar paper, he said that the shift from indigenous religions to Christianity was easy because of the level of transfer was only at 'the conditional "faith and belief" level,

not necessarily for its intellectual or common-sense content'.<sup>10</sup> Bugotu touched on the theatre and the illogic of the new religion, based as it was on concepts that were alien and could not be justified in terms of the needs of Solomon Islanders:

Otherwise, we would want to know, or would want to know more clearly the meaning of the genuflecting, prostrating and crossing oneself in church. We would want to know the meaning of hymns and psalms instead of merely getting emotionally involved in their beauty or rhythm and tunes. We would question the use of foreign languages in our prayers. We would question why we shouldn't eat meat on Fridays; why we shouldn't eat pork and crab for example, when pigs and crabs provide the only source of meat-protein in certain areas. We would question the demand by some Churches that women wear European-style dresses reaching below the knees, in this hot climate, and when money is so scarce, they are not allowed to wear simple skirts and expose their breasts. This is unhealthy for the Church and for our women. Ironically, the purpose of such measures is to encourage health habits. Instead of the required healthy standards, however, our women folk would end up with more skin diseases such as Bakua, that apparently were never present in a pure island society. As for modesty, it is one thing that the Western culture cannot teach my culture, however scantily dressed we may appear to be.<sup>11</sup>

The introduction of Christianity was both theological and practical. Missionaries were also traders, and they often gave generous gifts to likely adherents. They traded for local produce and for control of land on which to build mission stations; in the case of the SSEM, the related Malayta Company acquired large parcels of agricultural land around Baunani. Eventually, missions were appreciated for the peace, tranquillity and love that came with true Christianity, in stark contrast to the sometimes brutal pre-Christian and pre-government society. In 1990, John Barker argued correctly:

Through schooling and the application of imported practical arts, missionaries began to familiarize islanders with the orientations and organization of the hegemonic colonial system the Europeans were then building. And, through the provision of the Bible and church liturgies and traditions, they introduced islanders to a language within which Christians could speak about their enlarged social and spiritual community.<sup>12</sup>

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10 Bugotu 1968, 550.

11 *Ibid.*

12 Barker 1990, 16.



Even so, Malaitans seldom thought of the new religion as totally superior and worthy to replace deeply understood traditional belief systems. Deep and true conversion could take a generation or more, not just years, and aspects of ancestral beliefs survive so strongly today, even among Christians, that in many areas they continue to impede modern economic development and still govern clan discourse and activities. Malaitans still sometimes swap back and forth between, or combine, Christianity and non-Christian belief systems, much to the consternation of churches. Christians have joined the Bahá'í Faith and several thousand Malaitans, particularly men, have left their churches for newly introduced Islam in recent decades, although few fully follow Islamic beliefs and their wives usually remain Christian. They too manage an amalgam of beliefs.<sup>13</sup>

For many Malaitans in the 1890s and 1900s, the missions were a main site of interaction with Europeans, along with labour recruitment for overseas plantations. The Christian missions never claimed to assert control over Malaita in the way that the government did, although they were just as potent a force for change as were the labour trade and the protectorate government. Two more missions arrived after the government base was established at `Aoke: the Catholics in 1910 and the Seventh-day Adventists in 1924. I have woven assessments of these newer Christian missions into the later chapters, which focus on the government sphere, for the reason that the 'package' of new influences became more homogenous after 1909.

Ben Burt's analysis of the feminine nature of Malaitan Christianity is worthy of note and will be picked up again later in the book. In brief, Burt suggests that, in Kwara`ae, Christianity was incorporated similarly to a new traditional cult. Christianity was a new potent spirit and accepting the new religion did not negate the power of the *akalo*; indeed, the two religions operated side-by-side, a common pattern throughout Pacific Christianity.

In treating conversion to Christianity as a change of allegiance, the substitution of new spiritual relationships for old, Kwara`ae have inevitably brought the theology of the old religion into the new.<sup>14</sup>

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13 Moore 2007.

14 Burt 1994, 255.

Did European missionaries realise that there were similarities between Christianity and indigenous religious beliefs? As Burt suggests, God the father, with his power mediated by his son who acts through the Holy Spirit, must have brought a sense of *déjà vu* to Malaitans who sacrificed to their ancestors.<sup>15</sup>

## The Melanesian Mission

The Melanesian Mission had a monopoly over proselytising in Solomon Islands until the late 1890s, when they began to face competition from the Catholics, Methodists and QKM. The Anglicans were overstretched, although this eased a little when they established a local headquarters on Gela in 1895. Written almost 50 years ago, Alan Tippett's *Solomon Islands Christianity* still provides an interesting analysis of the shortcomings of the Melanesian Mission. He suggests four major failings: lack of direct identification because 'God's gentlemen' stayed off the front line of the 'battle'; remote control, through training mission workers on Norfolk Island, robbed the mission of continuity; the system was culturally defective because it extracted youths from their own societies and trained them on Norfolk, but then expected them to be able to convert their own people when they returned; and the approach implied an expectation of slow growth, which is what occurred.<sup>16</sup> The Melanesian Mission never developed a systematic missionary philosophy, but did establish a distinctive intellectual tradition based on an understanding of Melanesia through several key members of the mission. The mission always used the English word 'God' and did not try to translate it into local languages:

At the centre of the teaching of the Anglican missionaries was the idea of God the Creator, 'the Eternal and Universal Father'. This God was an all-powerful spirit. He was present everywhere and made everything in the world, and He was greater than the creator gods and culture heroes who were common in traditional Melanesian religions.<sup>17</sup>

David Hilliard, this quotation's author, describes the Melanesian Mission theological foundations that were laid by bishops George Selwyn and John Patteson between the 1850s and the early 1870s, and then reinforced particularly by three scholarly priests: Robert H. Codrington, Walter G.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Tippett 1967, 39–42.

<sup>17</sup> Hilliard 2005, 202. This 1866 quotation is from Bishop Patteson.

Ivens (who served on Small Malaita, 1895–1909) and Charles E. Fox (who served on neighbouring Makira from the 1900s and was remarkable for his longevity). All three published their linguistic, anthropological and historical research and were respected far beyond their church.<sup>18</sup> All European members of the Melanesian Mission studied their works, as well as writings by their colleague Arthur Hopkins, who worked in northern Malaita from 1902 to 1914. Anglican staff absorbed the general principles, either while at the headquarters on Norfolk Island or at the larger schools and theological institutes such as Maka or Siota within the Solomons. As the Melanesian Mission matured, scholars developed supporting materials for new staff to use. One manual was *Melanesia To-Day: A Study Circle Book*, compiled by Hopkins in 1927, which explained all facets of mission work.<sup>19</sup> Liberal Anglo-Catholicism pervaded the Melanesian Mission. Selwyn began an offshore ‘native agency’ policy that slowly created an indigenous ministry by lifting Islanders out of localities and taking them for extended periods to schools first in Auckland (until 1867) and then on Norfolk Island (until 1919). Patteson believed that sincere adoption of Christianity should have a social expression in all human activities, and that Christianity could be adapted to the circumstances of adherents. As Hilliard notes, Patteson thought that missionaries should ‘distinguish between the “fundamentals” of Christian doctrine and practice—“all men receive that”—and secondary matters reflecting a particular cultural context, which should be adapted to the circumstances of their hearers ...’<sup>20</sup>

Codrington, the greatest of the Melanesian Mission’s ethnographers, joined its ranks in 1863, was head of the mission for several years (1871–77) and served as headmaster of St Barnabas College on Norfolk Island until 1887. His influence was profound and he believed that elements present in Melanesian religions made it relatively easy to prepare the way for Christianity, utilising beliefs in greater agency beyond humans, and prayers. Like other areas of Melanesia, Malaitan religion is theistic—based on belief in superior spiritual beings of some kind—and Malaitans have complex dogmas, places of worship and rituals. Missionaries were able to utilise Malaitans’ sense of the limitations of human powers in relation to greater powers that were not controllable but could be beseeched on behalf of the living. There was an existing

18 Moore 2013c entries for all three.

19 Hopkins 1927.

20 Hilliard 2005, 199.

Malaitan sense of limitation of human power in relation to a greater power 'above'. But Malaitans had no belief in a single God—a supreme creator. The Malaitan religious system is integrated into all aspects of life and is acephalous—it has no head or centralised authority. There are myriad variations, with different taboos laid down by different ancestors.<sup>21</sup>

Malaitan religious beliefs did incorporate concepts such as *mamana* or *nanama* (sacred power, known elsewhere in the Pacific as *mana*) and *abu* (forbidden, known elsewhere as *tabu*), as well as prayer and sacrifice to ancestral spirits both to placate them and ensure their support for prosperity. One question in missionary minds, once they discovered the importance of ancestral spirits on Malaita, was whether Malaitans worshiped ancestors or just venerated them? That is, did Malaitans worship idols, or were the shrines simply places to respect and venerate ancestors, really no different from Christian churches and cemeteries? Did Malaitans regard ancestors as gods, which Christianity would have to displace from supremacy, or could a singular God concept be added while maintaining deference to the dead?

Codrington's main contribution to anthropology was developing an understanding of *mana* as an invisible power that can act for good or evil and can reside in individuals or a community. He wrote that the effect of *mana* lay in the efficacy of people's prayers, offerings and rituals used to acquire it. He never explored how far Christianity was accepted as a new source of *mana*, nor the relationship between Christianity and the new material possessions that usually came with adoption of the faith. Allan Davidson supports Darrell Whiteman's suggestion that Western observers probably exaggerated the centrality of *mana* to Pacific cosmology and theology, although there is no denying its importance.<sup>22</sup>

Some modern anthropologists have been critical of aspects of Codrington's interpretation. Ben Burt suggests that Kwara'ae ancestral ghosts do not just have power, they are *mamana*. Kwara'ae translate *mamana* as 'true'. Burt comments that *mamana* is best regarded as 'an idiom for describing the action of this power which represents it less in terms of the goals and objectives which it serves ... than the relationship through which it is brought into effect'.<sup>23</sup> Despite its possible shortcomings, Codrington's

21 I am indebted to David Akin for explaining this issue.

22 Davidson 2003; Whiteman 1983.

23 Burt 1994, 55.

work on *mana* allowed Western missionaries to comprehend a higher intent amongst their congregations and to acknowledge an indigenous level of philosophy and understanding beyond earlier analyses of Melanesian belief systems, including those of Malaitans.

Missionary scholars such as Codrington and Ivens also tried to explain another basic concept, *tabu*, which they glossed as meaning ‘forbidden’, usually an expression of an opposition between spiritual powers between men and women, expressed through religious sanctions. The term also governs the relationship between humans and the spirit world as a single social system, and extends to political power and law (*taki*). Burt suggests that ‘sacrosanct’ is the best translation of the Malaitan *abu*, and that the meaning does not always have to relate to religion. Roger Keesing felt that Burt’s informants had been overly influenced by Christianity, which had altered the meaning, though Keesing often depicted the mountain Kwaio as unchanging and somehow ‘purer’ than other Malaitans, when they too had been influenced by change. All of this points to the amount of change that has occurred over the last century, but nonetheless shows that missionaries were struggling to understand Malaitan cosmology, albeit for the purpose of religious conversion.<sup>24</sup>

Codrington also stressed the existing power of prayer. Prayer was nothing new to Malaitans. Prayers took particular forms, and at higher levels they were the province of *fataabu* (priests) and fixed in their recitation of ancestral names. Priests were usually the last to convert and often remained deliberately antagonistic to Christianity, which they saw as harmful, as undermining the powers of the spirits, and as a threat to their own personal power in their communities. There are early examples of Malaitan ancestral priests becoming leaders of Christian communities. For example, two Kwaio ancestral priests who worked in Queensland, Sam Farulate and Diakafu, returned home and introduced Christianity and schools in the 1900s. A later example shows that such conversions could be dangerous and cause mental problems. The British documented a classic case concerning my adopted father, Ishmael Itea in Fataleka in the late 1940s, who left the SSEM to be *fataabu* of his Rakwane descent group and ensure that sacrifices did not lapse. The British interpreted his distress at the time as mental instability, whereas his family’s testimony is that he was

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24 Burt 1988; 1990; 1994, 64–66; Keesing 1984; 1990b.

undergoing a traumatic experience by changing one religion for another.<sup>25</sup> This must have been a common occurrence in earlier conversions. Anyone could communicate with ancestors at a more quotidian level, including women and children, and this provided a broader foundation for grafting on Christian wording into prayers.

Codrington believed that Melanesians shared a universal sense of moral values of right and wrong, and a belief in an afterlife, which could be incorporated into the idea of judgement.<sup>26</sup> The Melanesian Mission was fairly flexible in its syncretism: they allowed separation of sexes during worship and maintained a respect for gender taboos, although people were encouraged to migrate from their inland hamlets to big coastal villages, and nuclear family concepts were advocated. The mission's priests prayed for the success of traditional activities in the same ways that *fataabu* did. Ivens, who knew Small Malaita well in the 1890s, was willing to bless porpoise drives and canoe houses and created new prayers to replace the ancestral versions, although he was generally condescending about Melanesians' thought processes and did not display the respect that Codrington did. Charles Fox, the greatest outsider/insider of them all, respected Solomon Islands religions. He spent an incredible 1902 to 1973 as a member of the Diocese of Melanesia, 11 of these years (1933–44) as a member of an indigenous religious order, the Melanesian Brotherhood (Ira Retatasiu).<sup>27</sup> Fox was enormously respected by other members of the mission for his intellect and writings. He was never based on Malaita, although he often visited there and spent many years on neighbouring Makira.<sup>28</sup> He seems to have achieved an immersion in and understanding of Pacific Islander cultures that can only be achieved after several decades. As with Codrington and Ivens, some of his understanding was gained through access to students on Norfolk Island, including some from Malaita. South Malaitans also had kinship links with Makira and often visited there.

25 BSIP 10/1/34/9 W.J. Marquand tour report, 21 Feb 1948; DC Michael James Forster report on Fataleka, Baegu, Kwara'ae, Aug 1948, with cover letter from J.D.A. Germond to D. Trench, 5 Sept 1948; 4/SF108, DC Forster tour reports, Dec 1948, Lau, Fataleka. Later, Itea closed the ancestral altar and returned to Christianity, this time to Seventh-day Adventism.

26 Hilliard 2005, 207–08.

27 Moore 2013c entry. Ivens' attitudes changed considerably over the years, and by the time he returned to Malaita to carry out research in the 1920s he showed more respect for Malaitans and their ways.

28 *Ibid.*

## A Black Net with White Corks

The Melanesian Mission used a conversion concept initiated by Bishop George Selwyn: they persuaded adolescent males and some young women (most often wives) to leave their islands to be trained at mission schools, initially in New Zealand and then on Norfolk Island. Selwyn wanted to create a black net (the Islander teachers) supported by white corks (European mission staff), spread throughout the Pacific Islands. The edges of this net extended to the missions in Queensland and Fiji, which were incorporated into Anglican outreach and were in part subsidised by the Melanesian Mission during the 1890s.<sup>29</sup> Teaching combined evangelism, education and industrial skills, with the aim of returning young men to their villages to establish their own schools. This became a rite of passage, much like enlistment in the indentured labour trade, in which youths combined adventure with social betterment on their return home, alongside the added spiritual element. After two years, the students were returned to their homes for six months, and for their return trip to school they were allowed to bring the women to whom they were betrothed and to undergo baptism. If all went well, students remained for around eight years before returning home to plant Anglicanism in their own districts, assisted by visiting or resident European clergy. Tippet's criticism is correct: if there had been more direct involvement of resident European missionaries, the conversion process would have been quicker.

Although its clergy were dubbed 'God's gentlemen' because of their upper- or middle-class British origins, Melanesian Mission policy was that the students should never be asked to perform tasks that the European staff did not do also. While it was appreciated that the bishop and senior staff had other important tasks to perform, they, too, did their share of menial chores, which was intended to develop a spirit of equality.

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<sup>29</sup> 'Report of the Melanesian Mission', *SCL*, Dec 1896, 11; 'The Melanesian Mission in Queensland', *SCL*, Mar 1897, 8.



Figure 4.1: St Andrew's College, Kohimarama, Auckland, New Zealand. A small number of Malaitan students were there between 1862 and 1867.

Source: Courtesy of John Kinder Theological Library.

Bishop Patteson, consecrated as the foundational Anglican bishop of Melanesia in 1861, made his first visit to Malaita at Olaha on Small Malaita as a priest in 1856, although he made little contact with the people. In 1862, Patteson 'picked up two [Malaitan] lads out of a party of 36 in a grand war-canoe', although nothing more is known of them.<sup>30</sup> A year later, on another visit, Patteson is supposed to have persuaded a Malaitan bigman to accompany him to the Melanesian Mission's headquarters at St Andrew's College in Kohimarama, New Zealand.<sup>31</sup> The first converts for whom we have names were Joseph Wate`ae`pule (or Wate), Warehou and Sapibuana, all from Small Malaita, who joined Patteson in mid-1866 in similar circumstances and became part of Anglican history on Malaita.<sup>32</sup> During the Melanesian Mission's first 30 years on Malaita it concentrated its initial efforts on Small Malaita, and onwards from the 1900s in the north at Fiu on the west coast and Ngorefou in Lau Lagoon in the northeast. Outlying schools were established, first around Sa`a and then similarly around the other two centres, until schools were scattered along most of the coast. The *Southern Cross* (a series of ships used the name)<sup>33</sup>

30 'Solomon Island Sketches—Introductory', *SCL*, 14 May 1898, 6.

31 *Mission Life* 1869, 161, 170, records this visit. Also see H. Wallace Mort, letter to *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 Sept 1900.

32 Fox 1958, 167.

33 Moore 2013c entry.



plied back and forth between Norfolk Island and all of the islands in the mission's net, visiting Malaita on average twice a year. The rest of the sea transport was provided by whaleboats with sails, which as often as not had to be rowed when winds were low or blew from contrary directions. The Melanesian Mission regarded Malaita as 'their island' and grumbled when the QKM and the Catholics began missionary work there as well. While Malu`u, Kwai and Ngongosila and Onepusu eventually became important QKM-SSEM centres, during the late 1890s and early 1900s the Melanesian Mission kept a watching brief over activities at these centres as well, even though Christians based there were trained by the QKM in Queensland. As Bishop Wilson arrogantly explained in 1906:

Teachers in these schools were not taught in the Church Missions in Queensland, and we cannot complain if they have returned to a form of Christianity which more resembles that of their fathers in Christ than ours does.<sup>34</sup>

Between 1877 and 1909, the Melanesian Mission opened 20 bases on Malaita. Nine were on Small Malaita: at Sa`a, Walade, Alu, Pwaloto, Roas, Pou, Palasu`u, Puluvalu and Rokera (Ariel Harbour). Another six operated in northwest Malaita: at Fiu, Foate, Kwarea (Fauaabu in Coleridge Bay), Laulana, Bita`ama and on Maana`oba. There were also three in northeast Malaita, at `Ataa, Ngorefou and Fouia, and one in central east Malaita at Uru.

The missions obviously had a different purpose than the traders, but there were also similarities. As noted in Chapter 2, Malaita had no resident traders to match those already established in other areas of the Solomons. Missions gave away trade goods, or swapped them for services and favours, a form of exchange that would have been recognised by Malaitans. Missions also established small trade stores. The Melanesian Mission's recruiting process had similarities with labour recruiting. For instance, an axe, three boxes of fish hooks, 30 sticks of tobacco and 12 clay pipes was the necessary price to achieve the release of Kwaifunu from Small Malaita in 1900 to join St Barnabas College on Norfolk Island.<sup>35</sup> Participation in the labour trade generated similar beach bonus gifts. Walter Ivens described the method in the same year when six youths left Malaita for Norfolk Island:

34 Wilson, 'The Bishop's Visitation, 1905', *SCL*, Mar 1906, 5.

35 'The First Voyage', *SCL*, Jan 1901, 109–10.

None seemed to have the slightest difficulty in leaving their homes, and none of them, as far as I could see, said 'good-bye', or anything like it. Their fathers or their chiefs seemed quite pleased to have an axe in exchange for them. They had no luggage whatever. If they had beads round their necks, such valuables were not allowed to leave the island, the string being untied and appropriated by the boy's father or friends. They came naked enough into their new world, but they had great expectations and were happy in them.<sup>36</sup>



Figure 4.2: The Melanesian Mission school at Uru, east Malaita, 1906.

Source: Beattie Collection, 516.

<sup>36</sup> *SCL*, Aug 1900, 41.

The *Southern Cross Log* is full of similar accounts in which boys and youths appear to be given casually to the mission to take to Norfolk Island. The same removal of all ornaments occurred when recruits joined the labour trade. The reason for this is unclear. Most Malaitan ornaments are secular not religious. It may be that the ornaments belonged to their descent groups, not to them personally, and that to take them to a faraway workplace meant they might never be seen again. Europeans at the time noticed the practice and presumed that this temporarily freed them from their religious beliefs, or at least from observing taboos.

Not all became Christians. Some returned home after the two years away (similar to the length of labour contracts), sometimes staying for just a short while before taking the next opportunity to leave again, either on a labour trade schooner or a mission ship. Others seem to have enjoyed their adventure, but then blended back into village life. This method of Christian conversion and training was often a slow process. It took many years to establish a foothold on any island, although in the long run it created a stable indigenous clergy and lay community. The Melanesian Mission was funded by donations gathered in New Zealand, Australia and Britain. In the 1890s, the mission began an ‘adopt an island’, and ‘adopt a scholar’ plan, not unlike the ‘adopt an African orphan’ schemes that operate today. Quaintly, the designated ‘chief’ of Malaita in 1898 was Mrs Harris of Winton, in Bournemouth, England.<sup>37</sup>

The Anglican *modus operandi* closely resembled that of the QKM-SSEM: both missions radiated out from three major nodes to smaller stations. Both relied on using former labourers who had become Christian in Queensland and Fiji. While some Melanesian Mission leaders, like Joseph Wate at Sa`a, did not have plantation origins, they too relied on ex-labourers for extending Christian outreach.

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37 ‘List of “Islands” and their “Chiefs”’, *SCL*, 15 June 1898, 31.



Map 12: Early Melanesian Mission bases, 1877–1909.

Source: Courtesy of Vincent Verheyen.

## Sa`a and Small Malaita

Joseph Wate`ae`pule (or Wate), born on Small Malaita around 1854, was the first Christian leader on Malaita. He was ‘recruited’ by Bishop Patteson from his village on Small Malaita in 1866 to be educated in New Zealand, where he befriended Rev. Joseph Atkin, who became his godfather. Able to return home briefly in 1870, Wate was on the *Southern Cross* when Patteson was killed in 1871 at Nukapu, an atoll in the Reef Islands.<sup>38</sup>

When Bishop George Selwyn visited Malaita in 1857 he was met by a group of 100 Malaitan men. On his next voyage he touched at Oloha on the south coast and persuaded a local man to come back with him to New Zealand. This was a disaster since the man became disturbed; he had to be tied up for the safety of everyone on board and returned quickly to his home.<sup>39</sup> In 1876, Rev. John Still spent a week on Malaita, and Bishop John Selwyn spent time there in 1878, presumably both based at Sa`a.<sup>40</sup> In 1877, Wate and his wife were returned to Sa`a to begin Malaita’s first Christian mission. Wate’s early years were full of difficulty. His Christian wife died and he took a non-Christian wife, Waikeni, which caused him to be placed under mission discipline, unable to continue to operate the school. In 1881, Rev. Robert Codrington paid Wate a short visit, after which there was no further contact from the mission until 1883 when Wate visited Ulawa. In 1884, he was restored to Christianity by Rev. Richard Comins and began the school again. The school, ritually cursed by Doraweewee, a local leader, struggled on for another two years. Then Wate went back to Norfolk Island, and from there to the Melanesian Mission’s base on Ulawa until Doraweewee died in 1890. He did travel back to Malaita during this time; we know he accompanied HMS *Raven* to Maana`oba Island off the northeast coast in 1889 to investigate disturbances related to the labour trade.<sup>41</sup> During his final days, Doraweewee softened his opposition and requested Wate to return to Sa`a, which he did, but Wate faced further trouble when a party of

38 The standard interpretation is that Patteson’s killing was retaliation for the alleged kidnapping of five Nukapu men by labour traders. However, the most recent interpretation by Kolshus and Hovghaugen 2010 argues that the Melanesian Mission by demanding that men leave to attend their school on Norfolk Island was straining the limited human resources on the atoll.

39 Montgomery 1896, 177.

40 Mort to editor, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 Sept 1900.

41 Capt. G.W. Hand, HMS *Royalist* to CC, RNAS, 6 July 1889, ‘Australia Station, New Guinea and Solomon Islands’, 1889, 6, original copy in author’s possession.

Malaitan men from Maramasike Passage killed Uki Island trader Fred Howard in 1893. Britain sent HMS *Royalist* to punish the murderers, and Andrew Dora, Stephen Tara and others from the Sa`a mission helped them. The Malaitan perpetrators of Howard's death retaliated by attacking the school.<sup>42</sup> For several years, Wate and other Christians remained targets for *ramo* assassins.

Comins was worried and conscious that nearby villages could muster 150 to 200 Snider rifles to make an attack. Sensibly, he provided a dozen old rifles and ammunition for the use of mission staff.<sup>43</sup> Then he went to befriend Faka`ia, a powerful young bigman at nearby Walade, whose sister had been away on Norfolk Island for the previous two-and-a-half years and was engaged to Luke Masuraa, Wate's assistant. Faka`ia, although he initially refused to join the mission and would not help it in its early years, was a key person in negotiations to quiet the threats. After Faka`ia made a trip to Norfolk Island, he became more interested and by mid-1896 was under religious instruction. Baptised in 1902, he became a strong supporter, which provided the Anglicans with an entrée to Walade and also Lau Lagoon.<sup>44</sup> When Bishop Cecil Wilson visited Sa`a in late 1894, 120 men, women and children were at the school. The *Southern Cross* picked up two new students at Roas and at Port Adam teachers Oiu and Samo were making good progress, although there was no school building. That year, the Melanesian Mission claimed 78 baptised and five confirmed Christians on Malaita, along with another 240 under instruction by 16 teachers at three schools.<sup>45</sup> By the time Wilson ordained Wate as a deacon in 1897, eight schools had been established in his neighbourhood and 49 people had been baptised during the previous year. Johnson Telegsem from Mota Lava Island in the Banks Group was the teacher at Port Adam. Wate returned to Norfolk Island in 1902 to prepare for his ordination as a priest and to receive treatment for a long-standing cancer on his jaw. He died back at Sa`a in 1904.<sup>46</sup>

42 Wate to J.S. Bishop, 17 Oct 1893, *OPMM*, Mar 1894, 56.

43 Wilson, 5 Sept 1896, *OPMM*, Christmas 1896, 237; Ivens, 'Ulawa and Mala', *SCL*, 16 Jan 1899, 31; *OPMM*, Mar 1894, 49.

44 The Ballarat *Churchman*, reproduced in *OPMM*, Mar 1896, 200. Also see Ivens, 'Ulawa and Mala', *SCL*, Mar 1902, 44.

45 Wilson, 'Island Voyage, 1894, First Part: The Bishop's Report', *OPMM*, Aug 1895, 132, 134.

46 Fox 1958, 167–68; 'The First Voyage, 1897', *SCL*, July 1897, 3.



**Figure 4.3: Clement Marau and Joseph Wate'ae'pule in about 1890.**

Both were taken to Norfolk Island for training in the 1860s. Marau, from Merelava Island in the Banks Group, began work on Ulawa in 1877, at the same time as Wate'ae'pule returned to Sa'a. They were good friends and colleagues.

Source: British Museum, neg. AN00566781002.

New Zealander Walter Ivens was the first Melanesian Mission clergyman to spend a lengthy period on Malaita. He could never have succeeded without the groundwork laid by Wate and other former students of St Barnabas College and teachers trained in Queensland and Fiji. Ivens was the priest in charge of Ulawa and Small Malaita from 1895 to 1909. He translated the New Testament into the Lau, Sa`a and Ulawa languages, and later wrote two famous books, one about the people of Small Malaita and the other about lagoon-dwellers, mainly those of Lau.<sup>47</sup> On 3 August 1896, when he established his base at Sa`a, Ivens was the only European resident on Malaita. His first Sa`a home was a screened-off corner of a men's sacred house. These early missionaries were hardy and capable of feats of endurance. For example, when the *Southern Cross* reached Ulawa in late 1896, Ivens was on Small Malaita; he received a message and set out immediately at night with his staff to row to Ulawa, over 50 kilometres away. During his Ulawa-Small Malaita years he shuttled back and forth, relying on Wate to run the Sa`a mission, which he visited regularly. Nevertheless, despite their early start, the Anglicans made less progress on Malaita than might have been expected.

Sa`a was an excellent regional base because it allowed easy support from the Anglican missions on Ulawa and Makira, and linked to the `Are`are people who lived in the southern part of the main island and along both sides of Maramasike Passage. As well, the Lau of the northeast made regular voyages to visit their kin at Walade, further north on the east coast of Small Malaita.<sup>48</sup> The Lau language was used at Walade and the mission soon realised that Walade was the backdoor entry point to Lau Lagoon, with supportive links to Kwai and Ngongosila on the east Kwara`ae coast, where people spoke Guala`ala`a, which was also widely employed as a trade language.

Six weeks after he arrived, Ivens wrote a report on his Small Malaita district. There were six schools, he said, the most northerly at Kwore in the hills a few kilometres north of Port Adam, the home village of Leo and Farapo, and Lizzie Siakulu (also called Liakulu) from Walade. Siakulu was married to Johnson Telegsem from Mota Lava Island, who was in charge of establishing a school at Roas where there was a commodious bay.

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47 Ivens, 1927; 1930.

48 Ivens, 'Ulawa and Mala', *SCL*, 16 Jan 1899, 31.



Ivens used interpreters and tried to learn local languages. He planned to spend six months at Roas since he found the passage at Sa`a difficult to enter when the winds were high.<sup>49</sup>

A year after Ivens began working on Malaita the Anglicans claimed to have achieved 300 baptisms and 20 confirmations, with 450 more under instruction. Ivens and Wate were being assisted by 20 teachers at six villages.<sup>50</sup> In 1899, they supplied the following statistics: baptisms (5); marriages (2); celebrations of Holy Communion (3); number of Christians (316); number of confirmed Christians (22); number of teachers (28); under instruction (718); schools (9).<sup>51</sup> The Sa`a mission spread first via a series of schools along the east coast. There was no early church building at Sa`a because the people lived in scattered hamlets, although in 1904 there were 200 Christians there.<sup>52</sup> Some ex-Queensland men were among the teachers sent to Pwalato, to upper and lower Roas and to Pou, up in the hills. Another school had begun on the west coast, the first on that side of Small Malaita, north of Cape Zélée near Palasu`u.<sup>53</sup> The wide spread of the Sa`a mission schools was considered an advantage. Wate was forced to move from Sa`a to Roas for a time because one local bigman was antagonistic, then Wate found himself supported by another bigman who moved his bush village down to the new mission base to protect it. In late 1899 the *Southern Cross* made a visit to drop off Johnson Telegsem, who was returning to Roas with his wife Lizzie Siakulu and their boy Stephen, and they found the whole village was about to convert. The people were awaiting the return of Ivens, when it was expected that 80 people would be baptised. James Iumane, trained at Norfolk Island, was the teacher in charge of Pwalato, where other baptismal candidates were under instruction. Ivens noted that because he could not have personal knowledge of all of the candidates he had to trust the decisions of his teachers and Wate.<sup>54</sup>

49 Ivens to E.S. Buchanan, 28 Sept 1896, *OPMM*, Mar 1897, 279.

50 Wilson, 5 Sept 1896, *OPMM*, Christmas 1896, 237; *SCL*, Dec 1896, Supplement; 'The First Voyage, 1897', *SCL*, July 1897, 3–4; Statistics of the Diocese of Melanesia for the Year 1897', *SCL*, 15 June 1898, 9.

51 Ivens, 'Ulawa and Mala', *SCL*, Jan 1899, 30–32.

52 Ivens, 'Ulawa and Mala', *SCL*, Apr 1904, 19.

53 Ivens, 'Ulawa and Mala', *SCL*, Jan 1899, 30–32.

54 Wilson, 'The Second Island Voyage, 1899', *SCL*, 15 Jan 1900, 9; 'Solomon Islands', *SCL*, 15 Feb 1900, 27; 'An Open-air Baptism in Mala', *SCL*, 15 May 1900, 9–10.

Progress on Small Malaita was steady. The policy was to radiate out from Sa`a, confining the mission to the island, although the Walade links with Lau were also fostered. Ivens was away for 15 months in 1899–1900. On his return, he set to with new energy: there were 310 baptisms in 1900 alone, and even some of the old *ramo*, such as Kwaihaodowala, had begun to attend the schools. Progress was being made in inland areas, where there were new schools. Tehena, whose sister was married to Joe Wate, had come down with his family to Sa`a school for a year and then gone back to his inland village high on a mountain spine above the Waloaa River. Ivens visited Tehena's small school there, returning with a boy to take to Norfolk Island for education. By 1902, 650 baptisms had been held on Small Malaita.<sup>55</sup>

Ivens was away in England for 12 months beginning in late 1903.<sup>56</sup> In 1904, a new school was begun at Pululahu on the west coast, and in that year the Sa`a mission decided to try to raise more funds by planting coconut groves at every village school. Coconut palms already grew in small numbers around the coast. Professional photographer John W. Beattie, from Tasmania, who travelled to Malaita on the *Southern Cross* in October 1906, and to whom we owe the best early images from the island, recorded that at Roas Bay and Port Adam the shores were 'fringed very largely with coconut palms'.<sup>57</sup>

In 1905, Bishop Wilson spent some time in charge of the Ulawa and Small Malaita missions while Ivens was on leave. The bishop had to minister to 200 villagers at Sa`a, contend with the usual run of disturbances and balance new customs with old. Trouble occurred after an important leader died and received a Christian burial. His Maramasike Passage kin were enraged, saying that he had been buried 'like a dog' rather than by the traditional method of placing his body in 'some elevated position, on a tree or poles, with all the dead man's shell rings and valuables hung around him'.<sup>58</sup> They destroyed Sa`a's gardens and killed pigs, and threatened to take a human life. Outside of Sa`a, the main mission centre

55 'The First Voyage, 1900', *SCL*, Jan 1901, 108; Ivens, 'Ulawa and Mala', *SCL*, June 1901, 54; Ivens, 'Inland in Mala', *SCL*, July 1901, 73–74; *SCL*, Apr 1902, 2; Ivens, 'A Bush School', *SCL*, Dec 1902, 81–85; Awdry 1902, 98.

56 'Norfolk Island Notes', *SCL*, Dec 1904, 1.

57 Beattie 1906, 23–24; Ivens 1930, 21; 'Ulawa and Mala', *SCL*, Apr 1904, 18.

58 Wilson, 'N. E. Mala', *SCL*, Apr 1906, 37; for images of this mortuary practice, see Coppet and Zemp 1978, 28–30.

was at Roas Bay, 18 kilometres away, where there were five schools, and more were being established in inland areas. The inland leader Horou requested a school, as did Sueka, from the small artificial islet of Malete.

By 1907, Small Malaita's mission bases had expanded considerably. More permanent churches were being built, many from coral rock, and schools had been established in the hills at Naoniola, at Tawaniahia in Ariel Harbour in the west, and at Walade. Eighty people were attending the Naoniola school, 40 of them already baptised. At Tawaniahia, 60 attended prayers and 20 were ready for baptism. Although Ivens said the Walade people had a bad name for causing disturbances, they had now become Christians. The Tawaniahia people were part of the `Are`are language group, providing the mission with an entrée into the southern section of the main island and to Maramasike Passage. Their conversion, Ivens hoped, would allow expansion of Anglican activities as far north as Onepusu in the west (by then an SSEM outpost) and `Oloburi (Double Bay) in the east. The Melanesian Mission was aware that the SSEM was also moving into Small Malaita; in December 1907 they had landed two teachers at Pau, with others already at Su`upaina, close to the Melanesian Mission school at Puriniola on the west coast.<sup>59</sup>

Ivens was replaced in 1910 by Walter H. Sage until 1913.<sup>60</sup> Sage left most of the Ulawa work to Solomon Islands teachers Martin Marau and Paul Marita<sup>61</sup> and concentrated his efforts on Small Malaita. The foundations laid by Wate and Ivens bore fruit for the Anglicans. As also occurred in north Malaita, several early mission leaders in the south became clergy. Joe Leo and James Upwe were ordained as priests in 1924, although Leo died soon after. Upwe had been a deacon since 1921 and after Rev. Andrew Thompson (who replaced Sage) left he was able to take over the Small Malaitan ministry. Even while suffering from elephantiasis, he carried on his work until his death in 1934. Two priests in the 1930s also extended the work of the church. Willie Wate, son of Joe Wate, was

59 Ivens, 'South-East Mala', *SCL*, Apr 1908, Supplement, 58b-c.

60 Charles Sage, brother of Walter, helped establish the mission in north Malaita in 1907, but was drowned in 1913, at which time Walter left for missionary work in India.

61 Martin Marau was the son of Clement Marau, an early Anglican mission teacher from Melav in the Banks Group and Susie from Ulawa. He was educated at Melanesian Mission's St Barnabas College on Norfolk Island, ordained a deacon in 1920 and a priest in 1924. In 1918 he was put in charge of the Ulawa mission, a position he maintained for the next 24 years. In his youth he was a great teacher, but always in the shadow of his father. His wife Lucy died in 1936, and soon after he suffered declining health, gradually going blind. He died in 1942. Paul Marita was the first Christian on Ulawa. Ordained in 1921, he was trained at Norfolk Island and Siota, Gela, and was in charge of the Makira church in the 1920s. He died at Pawa in 1931. Fox 1958, 161, 166.

ordained in 1934 and John Maesiola was ordained the next year and eventually replaced Upwe. Willie Maruraa, first a Melanesian Brother and then from 1942 a priest, became the most influential representative of the Melanesian Mission in southern Malaita during the 1940s and 1950s.<sup>62</sup>

The southern end of Big Malaita, and Small Malaita, never carried as heavy a population as the central and northern areas where two-thirds of the people lived. Despite these early advances on Small Malaita, the Melanesian Mission was much slower to establish itself in the central and northern areas, where they relied for initial progress on the help of labourers returning from Queensland and Fiji, and were spurred on by the ever-growing QKM-SSEM presence.

## Fiu and Northwest Malaita

Fiu, in west Kwara`ae north of `Aoke, was the first Anglican base in north Malaita, and today it is the site of Christ the King Cathedral. Fiu began in much humbler circumstances as a market place. The Anglicans chose this established meeting place as a mission base because it allowed them access to inland and coastal villages along the northwest coast. Anglican progress on the west coast had been slow until late in the 1890s. In 1885, Rev. Alfred Penny had induced Langasia from Alite Island in the Langalanga Lagoon to go to Norfolk Island for training. He spent two years there but, as was the practice, he was not baptised. Langasia returned home in 1902. When missionaries later inquired about him they were told, 'Too much book kill him'.<sup>63</sup> For the next 16 years, although a stream of likely lads left Small Malaita, no more students left Malaita's west coast. When Charles Woodford arrived at Fiu in June 1896 it was 'only a large river mouth with a beach where the saltwater people assemble every six days to hold market with bushmen'.<sup>64</sup> He recognised it, along with `Aoke, as a regular meeting place.

Malaitans returning home from Queensland and Fiji often joined the schools or attempted to begin their own, and they constantly asked the Melanesian Mission to open more.<sup>65</sup> Bishop Wilson credited the opening of north Malaita to the arrival of Anglican Malaitans from Fiji,

62 Fox 1958, 170.

63 Comins, 'The Vaukolo of 1902', *SCL*, Oct 1902, 60.

64 Woodford 1896, 16, 17 July.

65 'The First Voyage, 1897', *SCL*, July 1897, 4.

who provided the necessary Christian nucleus. The first 16 Christians at Fiu arrived in 1898 on the Fijian recruiting vessel *Rotuma*. Some had been confirmed while in Fiji.<sup>66</sup> Late the next year Bishop Wilson arrived on the *Southern Cross*, and reported that the group were well settled in a clean, neat village where they grew sugarcane and other plants they had brought from Fiji.

Some fifteen or more natives dressed in Fiji style, had returned from the labour-field and settled here. The chief was one of them. They were all Christians trained by Mr. Jones, one of the English clergy until lately in Fiji. They were building a church, and they intended, when it was done, to lay out a cricket ground. The only thing they asked for or seemed to want was a cricket-ball, and they wanted that badly.<sup>67</sup>

In 1899, the Melanesian Mission sent Arthur Aka`ako, supported by two Mota Lava Island teachers from the New Hebrides, Joe Gilvete and Barnabas Serbas, to help the ex-Fiji Christians to open a school at Fiu.<sup>68</sup> The next year, when Ivens made his first trip around Malaita in a whaleboat, he found the ex-Fiji men attempting to convert some of the inland villagers. In 1901, two of these men were sent to Norfolk Island for training.<sup>69</sup>

Although Ivens wanted to install a European priest in the community, in 1902 he found a layman instead. Thomas A. Williams lasted a year, living in a small local-style house until he was evacuated ill from fever, his place in the history of Malaita secure because he walked from Fiu across Malaita to visit the `Ataa Christian community, the first European to cross the island.<sup>70</sup> Once Rev. Arthur Hopkins established his base at Ngorefou in Lau Lagoon on the opposite side of the island in 1902, he was able also to supervise the Fiu mission, visiting regularly, often when he was on his way to Siota or Tulagi. By 1903, the Anglicans claimed there were 100 Christians at Fiu and that Pijin English was in widespread use. The main teacher was Charles Turu, a former Fiji labourer who had trained at Norfolk Island. He was assisted by Gilvete and Serbas, whom Hopkins later replaced with two men from Gela.<sup>71</sup>

66 SCL, July 1900, 26.

67 Wilson, 'The Second Island Voyage, 1899', SCL, 15 Nov 1899, 5.

68 'Solomon Islands', SCL, 15 Feb 1900, 27; Ivens, 'Ulawa and Mala', SCL, 15 Jan 1899, 32.

69 Ivens, 'Kalilana Mala (The Rounding of Mala)', SCL, 14 July 1900, 26; Ivens, 'Mala and Ulawa', SCL, Feb 1901, 137; Ivens, 'Ulawa and Mala', SCL, June 1901, 55.

70 Fox, 1954–56, 10.

71 Hopkins, 'District of N. Mala', SCL, Apr 1904, 26; Sinker 1900, 27; Wilson 1915, 52.

From Fiu, the Melanesian Mission made forays south to Langalanga Lagoon. At Kwarea, a Fiu man was trying to begin a school, and when Hopkins visited `Aoke in 1903 he found that Buai, a local bigman who earlier had been against all mission settlements in his area, had mellowed and promised to abandon his opposition. There was a substantial population on `Aoke Island and on the coast nearby, which Hopkins hoped might one day become a mission base. At Laulana, further south in the lagoon, two Fiu Christians were clearing land for a school. Hopkins arranged for support to be sent from Fiu in the form of Joe Noranga. In the far south he met Billy, an important bigman who had been to Queensland and whom Hopkins described as 'a gentleman of very shady repute'.<sup>72</sup>



Figure 4.4: The new church built at Fiu, 1904.

The zig-zag patterned gable is typical of a traditional men's sacred house. Fiu was one of the most successful Christian settlements on Malaita.

Source: Beattie 1906, 549, courtesy of the British Museum.

In 1904, a church had been built and services were being held in the Kwara`ae language. Fiu had now become a centre of refuge for local women and children and for returned labourers. But the close connections

<sup>72</sup> Hopkins, 'District of N. Mala', *SCL*, Apr 1904, 26.

with the surrounding people also caused problems and inland people had been harassing the station for months. The troubles began after one man attending a school took an inland woman as his wife without paying bridewealth. Her family arrived seeking compensation and caused friction by seizing far more than their due. Then a boy who had been given to the mission for education died, and his descent group demand a death in compensation. The result was that in September Arthur Aka`ako was killed while fishing and James Ivo narrowly escaped, badly wounded. A dozen men from a neighbouring village had come up to the pair in a friendly manner, sharing food, and suddenly shot both men several times. Hopkins was sent for from Ngorefou and by chance the *Southern Cross* arrived soon after and took the witnesses across to Tulagi to report the attack to Woodford, who agreed to supply a Fiu man whom he knew with a rifle and authority as a quasi-policeman. Fiu mission had no firearms, which created difficulties when they were faced by belligerent bush people carrying Snider rifles. However, some of the local men made it their business to protect the mission.<sup>73</sup>

When Florence Young from the QKM visited the Fiu mission in 1904, she counted 32 children in the Sunday school and a large congregation at the service, which was conducted in Kwara`ae, Pijin Fijian and the Gela language, with translations. She was met by George Maitafu (whom she knew from Knockroe plantation in the Isis district, inland from Bundaberg), Thomas Osiskalo (recently returned from Queensland with Maitafu on *Sydney Belle*), Charley Grae, Arthur Aka`ako and others who had become Christians in Queensland. Grae had spent two years at school at Norfolk Island, from where he was sent to Fiu to assist Aka`ako. Young reported that the two Gela men took all of the services. In 1907, when the SSEM's new ship the *Evangel* called at Fiu, the visitors reported only 15 Christians, although this may indicate rivalry more than accuracy.<sup>74</sup>

At Fiu in 1907 there were 28 adult baptisms and eight weddings, and plans were underway to move the settlement across the river to a healthier area. The surrounding bush people were still causing problems: they pilfered from gardens, stole pigs and threatened to raid and kill selected targets. Hopkins had been in Queensland recruiting men to settle at Fiu. He arrived back with 20 men and the promise that Charles Sage (brother of Small Malaita missionary Walter Sage) from the Selwyn

73 *Ibid.*; 'The Log of the Second Voyage, 1904', *SCL*, Mar 1905, 8.

74 Young diary, 11 Apr 1904, *NIV*, 1902–03, 6; Deck diary, *NIV*, 1906–07, 22.

Mission at Mackay would join them to begin a new school on the coast near `Aoke Island at the north of Langalanga Lagoon.<sup>75</sup> Hopkins had toured Queensland's sugar coast, with scant success, he said, due to the wide spread of Malaitans in the colony. In his travels he discovered that the Pioneer Valley at Mackay had the highest proportion of Malaitans, whereas at Geraldton (Innisfail) most the Anglicans were from the Banks and Torres groups and Omba Island. New Hebrideans were the dominant group at Bundaberg, along with men from Gela.<sup>76</sup> Hopkins had hoped to bring more Mackay Malaitans back with him, but at the last minute many of them decided to stay in Queensland.<sup>77</sup> He regarded his trip as a failure and lamented that he had not gone six months or a year earlier, when all of the Malaitans at the Selwyn Mission might have moved *en masse*. Those that did come were ill-prepared. Far from ideal colonists and often difficult, they brought no tools, had few possessions, and lamented that the amenities of Queensland were unavailable on Malaita.<sup>78</sup> Twelve 'returns' refused to enter the church and preferred to meet separately for hymn-singing and extemporary prayer. They were used to services in Pijin English and obviously felt themselves to be above attending services conducted in the Kwara`ae or Gela languages. Yet Hopkins's trip did have some success since it brought Charles Sage to Malaita in June, the perfect candidate for the post. He had worked previously for the Anglican New Guinea Mission (1898–1904) before his stint at Mackay's Selwyn Mission.<sup>79</sup>

Fiu's first 'daughter' schools were at Kwarea and Laulana, and then another was founded at Foate. Others followed at Gwau`ulu, Manofiu and Airo. Kwarea was on the border between northern Kwara`ae and Fataleka languages areas, in the centre of a large population. Beginning in 1903, Billy Inimanu from Fiu lived there for 18 months trying to form a school. He closed his first school and had to shelter with Konai, a local bigman, when a friend was murdered and his own life was threatened. For safety, life was lived behind stockades. Both Inimanu and his friend had been trained at Mary Robinson's Selwyn Mission at Mackay. In August 1904, Konai went to Fiu to arrange for another school to begin, and was offered

75 Hopkins, 'North Mala District', *SCL*, Apr 1907, 160.

76 Hopkins, 'A Letter from Queensland', *SCL*, Mar 1907, 114; Cecil Wilson, 'General Report of the Melanesian Mission for 1907', *SCL*, Apr 1908, Supplement, 8.

77 Wilson, 'General Report of the Melanesian Mission for 1907', *SCL*, Apr 1908, Supplement, 33; Langmore 1989, 129, 299, 300.

78 Hopkins, 'North Mala', *SCL*, Apr 1908, Supplement, 33.

79 *Ibid.*



land. The next year, once more it was former Selwyn Mission students who took up the challenge when Joseph Baramula and Joe Minata accepted the difficult post. The area had a large population and there was considerable unrest, which enabled the school to become a place of refuge.

They cannot work their gardens, and sleep at night packed together in one small enclosure. The last attack was in October [1905]: the bush men tried to get to them from the sea with ladders; fired into a house full of people, but hit nobody. A man from Qaqae [Kwakwai] rushed out alone, threw down the ladders, and shot three men in the water ...<sup>80</sup>

In 1907, the Kwarea mission moved to nearby Maanaere. Baramula, ‘a big, cheery fellow’,<sup>81</sup> was doing well because he led by persuasion rather than scolding, the latter being a common fault among mission teachers. He had also ensured his future by becoming betrothed to a daughter of Konai, although she died soon after. When Ellen Wilson visited with her husband on the *Southern Cross* a year or so later, a fine church was under construction, with a plaited, zig-zag patterned gable typical of Malaitan men’s houses. Fifty candidates were ready for baptism.<sup>82</sup> Further north, another school opened at Airo, near Bitā`ama—an out-movement from a failed Bitā`ama school.

When Hopkins returned from Queensland, he was dismayed to learn that a party of 14, led by Tom Basitaloa, had left Fiu to begin a school at Bitā`ama at the top of northwest Malaita. They were quickly repulsed from this stronghold of ancestral religion because it was thought that their presence would interfere with the annual porpoise drives.<sup>83</sup> Basitaloa, who hoped that an important local man was about to return from Queensland to support his school, had built a house and planted extensive gardens.<sup>84</sup> The bush people plundered these and threatened the new Christian outpost. Some of the colonists scattered, others moved a few kilometres further north and Basitaloa was soon left with only one assistant. Another expansion, to Kwailabesi, a few kilometres from Fiu, also proved calamitous when inland people burnt down their houses. The group scattered to

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80 Hopkins, ‘North Mala Report, 1905’, *SCL*, May 1906, 9.

81 *Ibid.*

82 Wilson 1915, 53.

83 Several decades later, Bishop Leonard Alafurai, himself from Lau Lagoon, harnessed Christian power when he blessed the special stones and the canoes used for the drive. *BSIP News Sheet*, 31 Aug 1968.

84 Hopkins, ‘North Mala District’, *SCL*, Apr 1907, 159; Hopkins, ‘North Mala’, *SCL*, Apr 1908, Supplement, 37.

Kwarea and back to their kin groups. The Melanesian Mission also came into direct confrontation with the SSEM, which had a school nearby, enabling them to block the Anglican advance. The other new site was at Dala, north of Fiu (later an agricultural station) and run by Sage. Despite the inauspicious beginnings, within a few years permanent Melanesian Mission schools had been started at Bita`ama and on Maana`oba Island, both well inside territory that the SSEM had claimed as their own.

At Laulana in 1904, two Fiu Christians had begun a school on their own land, with six students.<sup>85</sup> Always feeble, the school collapsed the next year and the remnant moved to Fiu. After failing at Kwarea, Billy Inimanu began a new school at Foate, 8 kilometres from Fiu. Progress was slow since he lacked the support of a trained teacher.<sup>86</sup> Nothing much changed there over several years until, in 1908, the SSEM claimed success at Laulana through three teachers moved in from Malu`u.<sup>87</sup>

## Lau Lagoon and Northeast Malaita

When Walter Ivens visited Lau Lagoon in 1900 he described the villages built on the artificial islands and the process of island-building. Coral rock was taken out to shallow areas of the lagoon on bamboo rafts, which were capsised, until a platform was constructed above high water level, then big logs were placed as supports on the outside, soil was brought in and houses built. Sulufou, the largest artificial island, had a population of 300–400 living on about half an acre (0.2 hectare). Except for the very smallest islets, which were usually occupied only by leading men, the islands were divided into three zones: areas for single men that included the sacred house; areas for families; and small isolation areas for women during menstruation and birth, usually built on small adjacent islets. Larger islands had two or three shade trees and 20 or 30 coconut palms. The smallest islets contained only a few palms and two or three houses. People raised log defences around islets to protect themselves from raids by the surrounding coastal people. The refuse from the houses slowly filled the gaps between the rocks, firming the structure. Fishing was the main

85 Hopkins, 'District of North Mala', *SCL*, Apr 1905, 28; Hopkins, 'Round Mala', *SCL*, Dec 1905, 3.

86 Hopkins, 'North Mala District', *SCL*, Apr 1907, 159.

87 Young, 'An Itinerary of a Journey Round Malaita', *NIV*, 1907–08, 17.

occupation, and nets were prized possessions protected and augmented by magic spells. Fish were also bartered to inland people. Ivens described a market scene:

The people are fishermen, and though they have gardens up on the hills, yet they live mostly by netting fish inside the reefs and by bartering the fish for yams and taro with the bush people. Regular market days are held—one market that I saw was well worth seeing. Four canoes containing forty women and two men came with loads of fish. As they came ashore, the bush women flocked out, carrying yams, taro, and areca nuts, to barter for the cooked fish. There must have been nearly three hundred women and only about ten men.<sup>88</sup>

In 1894, Bishop Wilson tried to establish a mission base in Lau Lagoon and sought the support of Kwaisulia, the most powerful bigman in the lagoon (described in Chapter 2). The wily passage master said that he would wait until a European missionary was available. He said the same thing that year to Peter Abu`ofa, who had wanted to begin a QKM base in Lau Lagoon (see Chapter 5).<sup>89</sup> Five years later, Bishop Wilson described a scene in Lau Lagoon:

In the front hall, as it were, of each house, was a pen of pigs; beyond them was the family. A crowd followed us. Every man I met said he was a chief, and wanted presents of hooks, etc. They took me all over their island, showing me the net-work of stone walls, which would be useful in case of attack; the men's quarter; the women's lying-in island, at a little distance off; the canoe-building shed, and everything else. We made friends, and came away as we had arrived, amidst the yells of the women. This strange little island was swept a year ago by a 'tidal-wave', which washed it clean, the people having previously escaped to the mainland.<sup>90</sup>

There were a few ex-Fiji Christians living at Ferasubua, and Ramofolo, the chief at Fuaga, was loud in his demands for a teacher. Ivens promised to do what he could, thinking to get a Norfolk Island-trained man from Port Adam or Sa`a.<sup>91</sup> In the late 1890s and early 1900s, several youths left Lau Lagoon to train on Norfolk Island: one left Uguka in 1898 and returned in 1900, and the same year Aniuli and Iroi left Fuaga, and Burinali left from Ferasubua.<sup>92</sup>

88 Ivens, 'A Visit to Mwala Paine', *SCL*, Dec 1902, 78–79.

89 Moore 2013a.

90 Wilson, 'The Second Island Voyage, 1899', *SCL*, 15 Nov 1899, 7.

91 Ivens, 'Kalilana Mala (The Rounding of Mala)', *SCL*, 15 June 1900, 20.

92 *SCL*, Aug 1900, 40–41.

The Anglicans were aware that the Walade people of east Small Malaita were one key to their future success in the northeastern lagoon. Walter Ivens wrote in 1901:

The Port Adam [Walade] people occupy a very important position, since they really are natives of Surauna [Suraina], one of the little 'made-up' islets inside the reef at `Ataa, and the conversion of the two villages will have a salutary effect on the Apai Haha people—i.e., Westerners—who are constantly making visits to Port Adam in canoes.<sup>93</sup>

The Walade people still took their primary sacrifices back to the customary priests at `Ataa in the south of Lau Lagoon, which meant regular canoe traffic up and down the east coast.<sup>94</sup>

The first Anglican progress in Lau came at `Ataa Cove, where there were several fortified artificial islands: Waimasi, Suraina, Farere, Talioto, Lolowai and Bio. Suraina was the biggest at about half an acre (0.2 hectare) in extent with 250 inhabitants under chief Erringa.<sup>95</sup> When 15 of the ex-Fiji men from the *Rotuma* landed at `Ataa in 1898 (others having landed at Fiu), Kwaisulia came south and confiscated most of their belongings and threw their books and writing materials into the sea. His spurious reason was that they had not brought a letter of recommendation with them from any established mission. However, Rev. Comins knew this was Kwaisulia's common practice and had warned them to leave their books with him at the Siota mission at Gela.<sup>96</sup> One of them, James Dausuke, had been a student on Norfolk Island. He settled at Mangonia near `Ataa, where his chief, Ramofolo, allowed him to begin two schools. Another two former labourers, Frank Tamaia and Levi Lanaa, succeeded in establishing a short-lived school on the shore of `Ataa Cove, despite initial opposition from their chief and Kwaisulia. A year or so later, Tamaia was shot accidentally and suffered a lingering death. Lanaa decamped to the bush for safety. When Ivens visited Dausuke in 1901 he, rather unfairly, expressed disappointment that the teacher was not spending much time at his school.<sup>97</sup>

93 Ivens, 'Mala and Ulawa', *SCL*, Feb 1901, 136.

94 Wilson, 'S. E. Mala', *SCL*, Apr 1906, 37.

95 'The First Voyage', *SCL*, Jan 1901, 109.

96 'Peter Otoa', *SCL*, Oct 1895, 8–11; 'The Second Island Voyage, 1898: Return Journey', *SCL*, 15 Nov 1898, 3; *SCL*, 15 Dec 1898, 1; Comins, 'Siota', *SCL*, 16 Jan 1899, 5; Ivens, 'Ulawa and Mala', *SCL*, 16 Jan 1899, 32; Ivens, 'Kalilana Mala (The Rounding of Mala)', *SCL*, 14 Apr 1900, 1.

97 Wilson, 'The Second Island Voyage, 1899', *SCL*, 15 Nov 1899, 5; Ivens, 'Kalilana Mala (The Rounding of Mala)', *SCL*, 14 July 1900, 25.

In 1901, once Australia declared its intention to return home all Islander labourers, Woodford applied pressure to the Melanesian Mission to create a permanent base in north Malaita. While in Sydney, Woodford made his intentions clear:

If the Melanesian Mission is not immediately prepared to put an experienced white man in charge of this part of Mala, I beg that you will inform me by first opportunity, because, in case of your refusal, the Wesleyan Mission will, I know, be prepared at once to undertake the duty.<sup>98</sup>

The Melanesian Mission knew that Abu`ofa's QKM base at Malu`u was growing in strength, and now faced the threat of the entry of the Wesleyan Methodist Mission, which was looking for a base in Solomon Islands. The answer came in 1902 when the Melanesian Mission sent Rev. Arthur Hopkins from Norfolk Island to Ngorefou. Hopkins secured a stronghold for the Anglicans in Lau, where he remained until 1914. Arguably, he became more powerful there than any influence from the government based in `Aoke. Hopkins's arrival deflected the Methodists to New Georgia, but did not slow the QKM. Thirty-three years old, Hopkins arrived in April on the *Southern Cross*, which anchored at `Ataa. Kai, a friendly local leader whose son had just returned from Norfolk Island, came aboard for the trip up to Ferasubua and then Ngorefou. They learnt that Amasia (mentioned in Chapter 2 as kidnapped in the 1870s) had begun a mission at Ngongosila Island, but then shifted to Lau where he was killed. Initially, Hopkins settled in Amasia's house at Ngorefou on the mainland near Ferasubua, welcomed by 10 returned labourers from Fiji and others from Queensland.<sup>99</sup> Soon after arrival, Hopkins and Ivens went to visit Kwaisulia at `Adagege. Hopkins, unable to comprehend Kwaisulia's place in Lau society, was condescending:

We went to see one old humbug and ruffian named Qaisulia. He is a clever old rogue, who has made himself feared all round. In reality he has no more authority than any other chief; he owns just his own little island, but he had gained a great name, and poses as a 'King'. We were ushered into his canoe-house, and were bidden to wait ... He appeared clad in a helmet, trousers, shirt (inside out), and a dirty blazer. Some labour-trade captain had given him these clothes.<sup>100</sup>

98 'Prospects', *SCL*, Apr 1902, 10.

99 Comins, 'First Voyage, 1902', *SCL*, Aug 1902, 33; Burt 2002.

100 Ivens, 'A Visit to Mwala Paine', *SCL*, Dec 1902, 79; Corris 1973a.

A few years later photographer John Beattie described `Adagege:

This island is about a ¼ acre in size, and has a population of 150 more or less. It is just crammed full of houses and people, reeking with smoke, pigs, dogs and filth. The alleys, were, as can be imagined, narrow, and few. Canoes seemed to be stuck all over the place.<sup>101</sup>



Figure 4.5: A food storage house at `Adagege Island, Kwaisulia's stronghold in Lau Lagoon, 1906.

Source: Beattie 1906, 530.

Although relations with Kwaisulia were difficult, he was generally supportive and in 1903 used his powerful oratory to help Hopkins crush a resurgence of fighting among the Ferasubua people.<sup>102</sup> The missionaries formed better opinions of some of the other Lau bigmen:

The Ferasubua chiefs constantly visited us, and kindly, courteous gentlemen they were! Their clothing was of the scantiest description. One old chap wore only a big straw hat, and a string of human teeth (his ancestors') round his neck. But I shall never forget their grace and courtesy of manner.<sup>103</sup>

101 Beattie 1906, 43.

102 Hopkins, 'District of N. Mala', *SCL*, Apr 1904, 27–28.

103 Ivens, 'A Visit to Mwala Paine', *SCL*, Dec 1902, 80.

A frail, thin man, weakened by illness in childhood, Hopkins weighed only 43 kilograms.<sup>104</sup> He had amazing stamina though, and exhibited bravery when faced with Malaitan aggression and knavery against the mission, which Malaitans interpreted as Christian spiritual power. Hopkins's first house was built up on logs with a stepladder that could be pulled up after him, for safety. In the early years, any mission settlement on Malaita was in danger and armed guards were necessary even to bathe in a nearby stream. Initially, Hopkins was guarded day and night and never allowed to walk about alone. He described the demeanour of the Lau people during his first year:

The general atmosphere was unpleasantly excited and disturbed. There were rumours of attacks and some real attempts were made. A war party of the men succeeded in getting into the village at dusk, with the hope of picking someone off, but a strong party came up from the friendly island of Fera Subua and overawed them ...<sup>105</sup>

Later in 1902, Woodford ordered Hopkins to evacuate to Siota because a British Navy ship was due to punish previous attacks on labour trade vessels. The naval visit took so long to eventuate that Hopkins went back to Norfolk Island until April 1903. The people built a school house in expectation of his return.<sup>106</sup>

Progress was quicker once a permanent presence was established. The *Southern Cross* delivered assistants for Hopkins: Johnson and Lizzie Telegsem transferred from Small Malaita. Johnson Tome and James Ivo from Gela, and Brian Mentela from Makira, were posted there direct from Norfolk Island.<sup>107</sup> The Anglican base in Lau was able to be extended in 1904 when Jack Taloifulia (Kwaisulia's cousin mentioned in Chapter 2) returned from Queensland and established a school at Fouia. Taloifulia was literate, fluent in Pijin English and well versed in Christianity.<sup>108</sup>

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104 Fox 1958, 171.

105 *Ibid.*, 172.

106 Hopkins, 'N. W. Mala', *SCL*, Mar 1903, 1.

107 Hopkins, 'District of N. Mala', *SCL*, Apr 1903, 25.

108 This may be Tallasfeelar, baptised on 31 July 1898, who gave his parents as Sissea and Kokobay. Anglican 'Baptismal Register', Mackay; Fox 1958, 172; 'The Log of the Second Voyage, 1904', *SCL*, Mar 1905, 8.



Figure 4.6: Rev. Arthur Hopkins's mission house at Ngorefou, Lau Lagoon, 1906.

Source: Beattie Collection, 520.



Figures 4.7–8: Outside and inside the mission palisade at Ngorefou, 1906.

Source: Beattie Collection, 518 and 519.

In October 1903, Lau Lagoon was disturbed by the threat of attack from inland descent groups. A murder had occurred and the victim's family wanted a death in revenge, to save face and mollify ancestors.

The bush people got up two or three war parties who sat in the bush hard by watching for a chance to snatch a life, or make an attack. However we had good information from our watchers of their movements, nor were they



themselves backward in sending threatening messages and guard was kept up day and night ... Meantime the Fera saboa people were busy building a stockade of tree-trunks right around our village, a long and laborious job.<sup>109</sup>

Marauding parties were seen regularly on the outskirts of Ngorefou, and often a counter group from Ferasubua had to be sent for to keep them away. Visits from naval vessels, such as HMS *Pylades* in June 1904, also quieted the situation in Lau.<sup>110</sup> Even when peace was restored, there was still the possibility of lone assassins. The inland groups seldom attacked in large parties, choosing instead to infiltrate, posing as friends.

While historians a century later must be wary of missionary exaggerations and their desire to depict non-Christians as deficient and barbaric, Hopkins's detailed reports allow us some insight into daily life in Lau Lagoon in the 1900s. There was an amazing amalgam of influences. After church on Sundays, a game of cricket was held on the pitch just outside of the mission stockade. Then, after dark, the Ferasubians used the area for dances and singing, mainly of Fijian songs, with the singers decked out in greenery and feathers, the necessary light provided from torches set in bamboo.

Indigenous activities continued, such as a feast arranged by Ramofolo of Fuaga, where it was rumoured that a bush boy had been captured to be killed. Hopkins set out to investigate but was assured by Kailafa, a bigman from Ferasubua, that nothing would happen since he had forbidden the killing.

This practice of boy-snatching or attempted boy-snatching, has been terribly prevalent lately. Qaisalea [Kwaisulia], the man of most influence in these parts, has taken a prominent part in it. Two months ago he went to Foeda and got a boy there, handed him to the Funafou people for ten pigs and much native money, to be done to death with arrows by the Funafou boys. This was to 'make square' between these two islets and end a long standing quarrel and was followed by a great exchange of presents and making of peace. Qaisalea is accused of having two more transactions of the same kind in hand. One I heard of at Taga on my way to Malu. I turned back with a very frightened and sulky boat's-crew to enquire. Qaisalea we found quietly at his village and not as they said on his way south to Qai [Kwai] with the boy. He admitted buying a boy from near Malu, but only he decided to keep him to work for him and

109 Hopkins, 'Some Experiences on a New Station in the Solomons', *SCL*, June 1904, 6.

110 Hopkins, 'District of North Mala', *SCL*, Apr 1905, 23.

live at Adegege. His son Jackson told me exactly the same story. I doubt them, but I could only warn him that I should report the matter to the authorities, and that it would be a very serious matter for him if he was lying.<sup>111</sup>

During 1904, six new Lau schools were begun and existing schools increased their attendance numbers.<sup>112</sup> Hopkins also regularly visited Malu`u, Fiu and Langalanga Lagoon. In September 1905, he circumnavigated Malaita in a whaleboat for the first time—over 320 kilometres—visiting the new QKM head station established at Onepusu on the Kwaio west coast.<sup>113</sup> The next year, Hopkins reported matter-of-factly that the QKM had now taken over at Malu`u and Bina. The Melanesian Mission had three new schools on the east coast: at Uru in east Kwaio, at Foate, with another being developed at Vuru. Uru had 11 students in 1906, but lacked a dynamic teacher. One of the other schools was at Taba near Malu`u, where five men were continuing to clear land.

Beattie described Ferasubua as like ‘a dirty, smellsome Scotch fishing village’ squeezed onto a small island with ‘narrow streets, the hordes of children, pigs and dogs, and the women—shouting just like a Bedlam ... They are fisherfolk one can see and smell’.<sup>114</sup> However, the proximity of Ferasubua had kept the mission safe in its initial years, although it also meant that the lures were close and strong when it came to non-Christian feasts and dances.

Conditions at Ngorefou had improved to the extent that the stockade had been allowed to decay, but in October 1906 Beattie found it restored and the settlement in ‘practically a state of war’, since two men had just been shot by bushmen:

The whole place is surrounded by a huge palisade of strong logs, stuck into the ground with a doorway just wide enough to allow one to squeeze through, and standing by it was a determined looking old man carrying a rifle, wearing a cartridge pouch.<sup>115</sup>

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111 Hopkins, ‘Some Experiences on a New Station in the Solomons’, *SCL*, June 1904, 7–8; see also Hopkins, ‘District of North Mala’, *SCL*, Apr 1905, 24.

112 Hopkins, ‘District of North Mala’, *SCL*, Apr 1905, 22.

113 Hopkins, ‘Round Mala’, *SCL*, Nov 1905, 10–11; *SCL*, Dec 1905, 2.

114 Beattie 1906, 26.

115 *Ibid.*

In February 1907, the Ngorefou school house was dumped off its piles by a cyclone and had to be rebuilt. The primitive protectorate justice system failed in the same month when the three convicted murderers of Amasia and Arthur Aka`ako managed to escape from Gizo in a stolen boat, equipped with rifles and ammunition. They returned to terrorise Lau Lagoon. In August, when HMS *Torch* anchored overnight at `Ataa, the local people thought the ship had come to seek out the escaped prisoners, but in fact the crew knew nothing of their presence. The escapees killed the son of Ramofolo, a bigman at Fuaga, which Europeans interpreted as because of the *Torch* visit. Not long after this, Kwaliasi, a bushman, after friendly bartering over a belt, shot dead Gela man James Ivo at point-blank range. The reason seems to have been that Kwaliasi's wife had cursed at him that morning, which Hopkins thought had caused him to take his revenge on the innocent man. This was enough to ensure that the stockade was repaired and Ngorefou returned to siege conditions. Hopkins sailed to Tulagi to report the murders to Woodford, who came himself and appointed Kwaisulia as a temporary policeman to try to keep order.<sup>116</sup>

Hopkins viewed the `Ataa people as the most obstreperous in the lagoon. He recounted how `Ataa men had tried to use a big war canoe to intercept his whaleboat on the way back from Uru in March. Although warned that there might be an attack, he still travelled unarmed. In the end there was no confrontation, which Hopkins interpreted as his calling their bluff. Of course, there may have been other reasons involved.

When HMS *Cambrian* bombarded the artificial islands and the mainland at `Ataa in July 1907, the people had been expecting the visit. The ship's commander warned the people to go to the mainland before he shelled three of the islands, breaking down walls and destroying coconut palms, and then turned his guns on the shore villages. The people were more impressed by the noise than the damage, although one child was accidentally killed when a piece of shell burst in a village.<sup>117</sup>

Ngorefou progressed, slowly drawing converts from the surrounding inland areas and further along the coast. This brought its own problems since Ferasubuan were feuding with inland neighbours. Several incidents occurred, such as when John Daomai from Ferasubua took a pot-shot at the bushman Silo while he visited the mission. Hopkins went to Ferasubua, confronted Daomai and demanded 10 strings of shell wealth

116 Hopkins, 'North Mala District', *SCL*, Apr 1907, 158.

117 *NIV*, 1906–07, 19–20; Hopkins, 'North Mala', *SCL*, Apr 1908, Supplement, 34.

as a guarantee of good behaviour. When Hopkins left for Queensland he had been expected to return with a man-of-war, and when he did not harassment increased. The visits by HMS *Cambridge*, and HMS *Torch* to Fiu in September, when another bombardment took place, suppressed violence around Malaita's north until late in the year.<sup>118</sup> The problems with incursions by inland descent groups continued. In 1910, a group of 20 hid near Ngorefou, sending two men into the mission to reconnoitre, hoping to kill someone. Lainan, a bushman friend of the mission realised what was happening and threatened them with repercussions unless they withdrew.<sup>119</sup>

Jack Taloifulia's school at Fouia had a dozen students.<sup>120</sup> Kwaisulia on nearby `Adagege continually undermined Taloifulia. There had been trouble over some of his students who joined Sulufou people in raids, which had led to the killing of a child. Progress was slow as Taloifulia negotiated his relationship with his non-Christian kinfolk, and his assistant Joe Ongamon was unwell. Another Christian, James Damiki, was also living at Fouia, but because of his non-Christian wife and the liability of a diseased arm he was of little use to Taloifulia. When Damiki's wife was murdered some kilometres inland he insisted on walking there armed only with a spade to bury her mutilated body.<sup>121</sup>

The most southerly outreach from the Lau Lagoon Anglicans was into Kwaio on the central east coast. Uru, an artificial island in the Kwaio harbour of the same name, was the most isolated of Malaita's early Melanesian Mission outposts. One of the early Christians there was Isaac Lau`a, who had been kidnapped along with his brother and taken to Fiji in the early 1870s, probably by the *Nukulau* in 1871. He returned to open a school in 1905. During their Fiji years both had become Christians and married Fijian women. Isaac had arrived back at Ngorefou and set out in a canoe for Uru, capsised, was robbed, returned to Ngorefou and tried again. His brother joined him but the Uru people killed the brother and both of their wives in retaliation for an old wrong. Isaac fled back to Ngorefou, but returned to Uru in 1905. He was illiterate, and after clearing land for a school on the mainland opposite Uru Island he asked for teachers. Hopkins visited Uru in March and the Melanesian Mission

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118 *Ibid.*, 36.

119 Hopkins, 'Diary of the Rev. A. I. Hopkins', *SCL*, Nov 1910, 89–90.

120 Tippet 1967, 163–70.

121 Hopkins, 'North Mala Report, 1905', *SCL*, May 1906, 7; Hopkins, 'North Mala District', *SCL*, Apr 1907, 158–59; Hopkins, 'North Mala', *SCL*, Apr 1908, Supplement, 37.

provided teachers late in 1905. There had been minimal progress and when Isaac died soon after most of the families withdrew, which left the teachers Raymond Kelen and his wife with little to do. In May 1905, Hopkins visited again and removed Kelen and his family, thereby abandoning Uru to the SSEM. Hopkins subsequently concentrated on setting up schools along the east coast in southern Kwaio and `Are`are.<sup>122</sup>

## Norfolk Island Christians

The number of Melanesian Mission converts on Malaita before formal government reached the island is difficult to calculate. Until there is further research into Anglican records, the exact number of Malaitans trained at Norfolk Island remains unknown. The Anglican mission base shifted from Kohimarama, Auckland, to Norfolk Island in 1867. As early as 1871, there were seven males and one female from Malaita there,<sup>123</sup> and over the four decades before 1909, an average of 20 to 30 Malaitans were based there at any one time. Several hundred Malaitans must have passed through the Norfolk Island college during these decades.

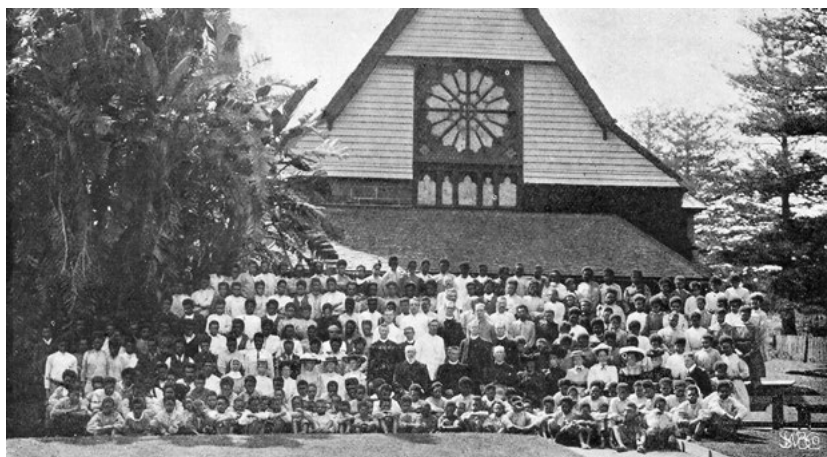


Figure 4.9: St Barnabas College staff and students, Norfolk Island, 1906.

Source: Beattie Collection, 209.

122 In 1906, Beattie described the 1870s incident. As with the history concerning Alfred Amasia from Ngongosila Island, this probably also relates to the 1871 voyages of the *Nukulau* and the *Peri*. Lau`a claimed to have spent 21 years in prison after the event, which is unlikely. Beattie 1906, 4; Hopkins, 'North Mala', *SCL*, Apr 1908, Supplement, 35; Hopkins, 'Round Mala', *SCL*, Nov 1905, 11; Wilson, 'The Bishop's Visitation, 1905', *SCL*, Jan 1906, 11; Burt 2002.

123 Brooke 1872, 223.



Figure 4.10: Interior of the St Barnabas College dining room, Norfolk Island.

Source: Beattie Collection, 221.

Although the majority were male, young Malaitans of both sexes trained at Norfolk Island, with more emphasis given to training women onwards from the 1900s.<sup>124</sup> Some of them have already been mentioned. Amina Laki from Sa`a was the first Malaitan woman confirmed, in 1880 in the newly opened Bishop Patteson Memorial Chapel. She returned to Ulawa where she had a married sister, uncertain of her welcome at Sa`a while bigman Wariehu, who had placed a curse on her when she left, remained powerful. Never strong, she was shunned and died prematurely.<sup>125</sup> Another Small Malaita woman, Lizzie Siakulu, referred to earlier, left Walade with her brother Joseph Leo. At Norfolk in 1895 she was betrothed to Johnson Telegsem, who had been teaching at Port Adam when he met Siakulu. It was a modern marriage in that no bridewealth changed hands. Circumstances altered when bigman Faka`ia forbade the match and after threats from Faka`ia a school at Siakulu's village was evacuated. Eventually the situation improved and the marriage took place.<sup>126</sup> Another Walade

124 'A New Year's Letter from the Bishop of Melanesia', *SCL*, Jan 1901, 98.

125 'Amina Kali, the Mala Christian Maiden', *SCL*, 15 Apr 1899, 4–6.

126 Extract from the Ballarat *Churchman*, *OPMM*, Mar 1896, 200–01.

woman, Alice Alite, was also based on Norfolk Island before returning to help the school at Port Adam, where she married, also with no bridewealth payment, to Luke Masuraa. Lizzie Siakulu had been orphaned at a young age, it was said due to sorcery. She described Alice Alite's mother as a 'very good and very beautiful' woman who cared for many widows and orphans and the sick. Although she sent her children to the mission she never attended herself, and she gave Alice to Luke as a wife without asking for bridewealth.<sup>127</sup> In partnership with her husband, Lizzie was credited with keeping the Port Adam school operating. Following the sexist traditions of the time, mission records are inclined to give sole credit to male teachers and missionaries, when a closer reading of the sources suggests that women were also influential.

## Conclusion

This chapter has woven a web of Christian people and places on Malaita in the 1890s and 1900s. The Melanesian Mission, which had Malaita to itself until the 1900s, failed to capitalise on the monopoly. I agree with Tippet's assessment:

In the years of harvesting the Anglicans never could provide a pastorate to keep pace with the evangelical spearhead. They demanded high standards and experience from a Melanesian before ordaining him to the priesthood and were unable to supply an adequate number of European priests.<sup>128</sup>

Their only substantial indigenous advance was when the Melanesian Brotherhood was established in 1925.<sup>129</sup>

I have concentrated on thick description to show the impressive depth of contact. This is not a picture of the 'heathen' Malaita that is usually depicted in histories. In 1905, the Melanesian Mission claimed that out of the presumed 50,000 inhabitants of Malaita there were 1,791 school students attending 23 village and mission schools, and there had been 1,300 baptisms.<sup>130</sup> The exact number of baptisms in 1909 when the Aoko government base was established is unknown, but given the

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127 Quotation from 'Women's Work in the Melanesian Mission', *OPMM*, Mar 1896, 203; 'Peter Otoa', *SCL*, Oct 1895, 9.

128 Tippet 1967, 46.

129 Moore 2013c entry.

130 *SCL*, Apr 1904, 5; Wilson, 'Annual Report of the Melanesian Mission for 1905', *SCL*, Apr 1906, 9.

speed of progress once the Malaitans returned from Queensland, the total number must have been well in excess of 2,000. This, combined with the estimate of around 2,700 Malaitan baptisms while overseas, gives us a total of 4,700, before even considering the QKM-SSEM work on Malaita onwards from 1894. There were always ‘backsliders’ who did not retain their Christian beliefs, and with an average age of death at around 50 years, not all survived. Nevertheless, the number of Christians is considerable.

Solomon Islanders must have been puzzled by the relationship between the mission stations and the government, with the latter operating from Tulagi and claiming rights to control the entire geographic universe of the average Solomon Islander, and also based at `Aoke from 1909. Tulagi was far away and the `Aoke settlement was small. The QKM headquarters at Onepusu and the Malayta Company plantation at Baunani (onwards from 1908) were much more impressive and better equipped with marine transport. The main early foreign presence on Malaita was at the various mission bases and at Baunani. Many of the European missionaries behaved imperiously, and their mission stations were alternative power bases to that of the government. The government introduced new laws, and was willing to adopt and adapt some but certainly not all customary laws. During the first half of the twentieth century, the missions clashed with the British administration in two main practical areas—marriage and morality. They also created education and health systems, for which the government was thankful. From a Malaitan viewpoint, the Christian missions were much more involved with their day-to-day lives than was the early government. It must have appeared to Malaitans that the main government activities were policing and, starting in the 1920s, collecting taxes.

The next chapter extends the web of Christian people and places, tracing the early years of the QKM-SSEM, which developed a Christian network separate from that of the Anglicans. Whether Malaitans understood that the QKM-SSEM was different and separate is a matter for conjecture. However, the inescapable conclusion is that there was a strong Christian presence around coastal Malaita before the government arrived in 1909. The puzzle is, given this early Christian presence, why was Malaita still only half Christian in the 1930s and 1940s, by which time Gela, Isabel and parts of the Western Solomons had made a total conversion?



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