Malaitan Christians Overseas, 1880s–1910s

It is easy to understand why labourers in Queensland should have become Christians. They were cut off from all home influences, separated from their relatives, and in some cases entirely alone, and it was only natural that in such circumstances they listened to the urgings of the only Europeans who appeared to take an active interest in their welfare—perhaps the only Europeans who went out of their way to be kind. Christianity, moreover, was a religion of the white men who in all material achievements were so superior to their own people.

—Ian Hogbin, Experiments in Civilization (1939)\(^1\)

The previous chapter discussed changes that occurred through labour migration: these were considerable and involved all communities, even those isolated in the central mountains. Men in particular became used to wage labour away from home. This altered the established social order when they returned to their small-scale societies. They brought back new material possessions in heavily laden trade boxes, but also carried invisible baggage from their exposure to European diseases and colonial society. One of the major underpinnings was Christianity, conversion to which became integral to methods of control used in the colonies where they laboured and also to British political control in the British Solomon Islands Protectorate. Those who worked in Queensland also returned with Pijin English, the new *lingua franca* of Solomon Islands. Wage labour, Christianity and Pijin English

\(^1\) Hogbin 1939, 179.
(and to a lesser extent Pijin Fijian) altered Malaitan society long before the new government of the BSIP was proclaimed in 1893 and an administrative base was established at `Aoke in 1909. As this chapter explains, around 2,000 Malaitans living on Malaita in 1909 had become Christians while overseas. As outlined in this and the following chapters, if we tally also those who became Christians on Malaita, there were at least 4,000 to 5,000 Christians on Malaita that year, many of whom had achieved basic literacy. Although Malaita is usually depicted as a non-Christian island in the 1900s, this was far from true, and the Christian presence greatly affected how change occurred in the century’s first half.

Malaitan communities usually did not welcome early Christian missions or returning Malaitan Christians. Leaders soon recognised that the new spiritual regime would undermine the indigenous religion and could displease their ancestral spirits, which would in turn disrupt social equilibrium and incite ancestral retribution. Early Christians often built stockades for protection and when times were tense armed guards were needed to safeguard church services and even ordinary activities. Nonetheless, Christianity began to be established on Malaita onwards from the 1870s, starting on Small Malaita. This chapter examines the outreach of Christian missions in colonies in which Melanesians worked as indentured labour, the precursor for the establishment of Christianity on Malaita before the government arrived. The major overseas Christian training ground was in Queensland.

**Malaitans and Christianity in Queensland**

Pacific Islander labour migrants first entered New South Wales in 1847 and Queensland in 1860, although the regular flow of labour to Queensland did not begin until 1863. While there were Christians amongst the early labourers, particularly those from the Loyalty Islands and the New Hebrides, there was no attempt to establish organised missions until the 1880s. Once they began, those most active with Islanders were run by the QKM and the Anglicans—the Church of England—with lesser operations mounted by the Presbyterians, Churches of Christ, Lutherans, the Salvation Army, Baptists and the Brisbane City Mission. Despite its Pacific presence, the Catholic Church never competed for Melanesian souls in Queensland.

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2 Siegel 1982.
3 Moore 2015c.
Map 11: Sugarcane growing areas in Queensland and New South Wales.

Source: Peter Griggs, first published by Peter Lang AG in 2011, reprinted by permission.
Studies of Christian missions in the Pacific have usually been based within indigenous communities, not on plantations overseas. The plantation context is very different: the people are outside their usual cultural environment and primarily engaged in wage labour. However, using the Islander labourers on Queensland and Fiji plantations and farms as the base for Christian Pacific networks was highly successful and served to transfer Christianity back into the islands. The first Queensland Christian outreach to the Islanders was through the Anglican Selwyn Mission at Mackay in 1882. The Young family’s mission at Bundaberg, also started in 1882, formalised as the Queensland Kanaka Mission in 1886. Both of these missions developed strong connections with the Solomons and particularly with Malaita. Estimates from the early 1890s suggest that by then around 75 per cent of the Islanders in Queensland had some degree of contact with Christian missions, and 10 years on the extent of contact was even higher. These male (and some female) labourers were transported to Queensland at their employers’ expense and thus provided a cheap way to access potential converts. They were separated from their extended kin, usually for the first time, in a strict work environment and initially many were bewildered by the experience, leaving them more open to ministrations and friendship from the missionaries.

As Ian Hogbin says in this chapter’s epigraph, the missionaries were probably the first Europeans who treated the Islanders with kindness. The missions provided an educational venue on evenings and weekends that reduced the chance of the Islanders getting involved in less wholesome activities. Beginning in the 1880s, Queensland-based missions began to teach literacy through the Bible, provided a path to Christian conversion, and encouraged abstinence from alcohol. In its first issue in June 1895 the Anglican mission journal, the Southern Cross Log, reported on their Queensland success:

Some boys walk six and seven miles to school after the day’s work is finished. Night after night, Mrs. Robinson’s school at Mackay is crowded with a class of 100 boys. At Bundaberg, the Rev. E. Clayton has a small system of schools and on the Herbert River the Rev. F. Pratt has been teaching the boys around him. There are schools also belonging to the Presbyterians in the Mackay district, and to Mrs. and Miss Young at Bundaberg.

5 Corris 1973b, 96.  
7 This refers to Ellen Young, the wife of Horace Young, and Florence Young. SCL, June 1895, 12.
Although many Malaitan labourers remained resolute worshipers of their ancestral spirits, the Malaitan converts were among the most fervent of those baptised and took easily to the new cultural milieu. Malaitans also taught in evening and Sunday schools. When the labour trade ended in 1906, the largest Malaitan community in Queensland was in the Pioneer Valley at Mackay, with other substantial groups around Bundaberg and Maryborough and a scattering up and down the coast. The Bundaberg-Isis district rivalled Mackay in the numbers of Malaitans there, with close to equal numbers in the early 1900s.

Table 2: Estimate of major Pacific Islander populations in Queensland, 1891 and 1901.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>1891</th>
<th>1901</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Torres Strait</td>
<td>219?</td>
<td>672</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cairns and Mossman</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnstone River (Innisfail)</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>530</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herbert River (Ingham)</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>1,233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burdekin (Ayr &amp; Homehill)</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bowen &amp; Proserpine</td>
<td>624</td>
<td>298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mackay</td>
<td>2,277</td>
<td>1,475</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rockhampton</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>150?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bundaberg</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>1,912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isis</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryborough</td>
<td>170?</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brisbane &amp; Logan</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>266?</td>
<td>367?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>8,802</td>
<td>9,537</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is difficult to estimate from the census districts, because boundaries changed between the two census years. The question marks indicate a degree of uncertainty. Bishop Cecil Wilson gave the following estimate in 1895, presumably based on figures provided by Church sources: Brisbane 1,000, Bundaberg 2,500, Isis 800, Rockhampton 70, Mackay 2,240, Burdekin River 500, Herbert River 800 and Johnstone River 800. OPMM, Nov 1895, 155. The Wilson figures differ from my calculations.

Source: Based on the author’s files and accumulated personal knowledge, and Census of Queensland 1891, 459; QVP 1892, 3, 1391; 1901, 2, 956.

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8 Wetherell 1977, 100.
One interesting feature of the census records (used in Table 2) is the large number of minors among the Islander population. The legal adult age began at 21 years, and many labour recruits were only youths, but the statistics also included large numbers of children born in Australia. Almost all of the children were Christians and some returned home in the 1900s, such as Timothy George Mahratta. What follows outlines the involvement of the major denominational missions to Islanders in Queensland (including Torres Strait) and northern New South Wales. Along the way, I will pay particular attention to calculating how many Malaitans became Christian.

Queensland Kanaka Mission

The QKM developed into the largest Christian mission to Islanders in Queensland, eclipsing its major competitor, the Church of England. The QKM became the SSEM in 1907, and today its successor church, the SSEC, is the third-largest Christian denomination in Solomon Islands and the largest on Malaita. The QKM was founded by New Zealand-born 28-year-old Florence S.H. Young on her brothers’ Fairymead sugar plantation near Bundaberg in 1886. The Young family, from England via India and New Zealand, arrived in Bundaberg in 1880. From a wealthy family, they were steeped in the beliefs of the Open Plymouth Brethren and influenced by the English Keswick Convention. Florence’s father, Henry Young, was born in Machilipatnam in India in 1803 and worked for the East India Company, becoming the youngest judge in India. He retired and moved to Invercargill, New Zealand, where he began a farm. His wife Catherine died in 1875, the farm was not a success and a few years later Henry moved his family to Bundaberg to a new sugar plantation. Florence settled at Fairymead plantation in 1882 and became interested in spreading the Christian message to the Islanders. Her family offered

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9 Moore 2013c entry.
10 Henry Cathcart Arthur Young (known as Arthur) and Horace Edward Broughton Young purchased Fairymead’s 5 square miles (12,950 hectares) on river flats on 23 March 1880. They had previously had a sheep property in New Zealand, which had been devastated by a rabbit plague, and were looking for new challenges. Their brother Charles Earnest (known as Ernest) also joined the partnership. Braga 2005; Griffin 1990; Young 1925.
11 The Plymouth Brethren, formed in Ireland and England in the late 1820s, rejected hierarchical church government, special priestly orders and rituals beyond those of the Bible, and close involvement with the state. They called each other ‘brother’ (hence Brethren). The English Keswick Convention was an interdenominational evangelical group founded in England in 1875 with Anglican and Baptist roots.
12 Hamlin with Little 2001, 11–12.
her the use of an old house, a ‘deserted tumble-down old building with its shingle roof, the first dwelling on Fairymead, built long before it became a sugar plantation’. As she recounted:

There were the ten stalwart men from the New Hebrides … and little La-as-si, who formed my first class … I knew nothing then of missionary work, but the Master had said, ‘Preach the Gospel to every creature’, and these people had never heard the good news.\(^{13}\)

By 1885 the classes were attracting 80 Islanders on Sundays with 40 every evening. The QKM was formally constituted in 1886 as a nondenominational evangelical mission based on the models of the China Inland Mission and the Livingstone Inland Mission. The pattern in these missions was to have a founder or a small nucleus of founders and a focus on a particular region of the world where the pagan inhabitants were beyond existing missionary activities. Theologically, they maintained an uncompromising evangelical stance with doctrines centred on a literal interpretation of scripture, and were organised by a voluntary union of lay members of various denominations who agreed to come together for the specific purpose. These missions were dependent on gifts from individual sympathisers and usually did not appeal directly for funds, believing that God would provide, often based on Christ’s teachings on Providence in St Matthew’s sixth chapter.\(^{14}\) The QKM-SSEM was dogmatic and uncompromising. Based on SEMM sources, Hilliard describes the mission’s theology:

Missionary candidates were required to give assurance of ‘soundness in the faith’, especially with regard to those doctrines assailed by ‘modernism’: the divine inspiration and supreme authority of the whole canonical Scriptures, the Trinity, the moral depravity of man, Substitutionary Atonement, Justification by Faith, the resurrection of the body, the everlasting life of the saved and the eternal punishment of the lost.\(^{15}\)

The mission’s governing structure was congregational, its leadership constituted in elected elders. There was no clergy, although in the early decades the real authority resided with the European missionaries. The Christian message centred on personal salvation as a gift from God through faith in Jesus Christ. There were only two ordinances to observe:

\(^{13}\) Young 1925, 178.  
\(^{14}\) Hilliard 1969, 42–43.  
\(^{15}\) \textit{Ibid.}, 59.
full immersion adult baptism and Holy Communion. Confessions were in front of an entire congregation and the words of the Bible were the final arbiter and authority.

Initially, Young relied on help from her sister-in-law Ellen Young, and she was encouraged long-distance by Mrs Ben Dowling, who had been a missionary in India. Once the QKM was formalised in 1886, Florence Young became superintendent, supported by the Young, Deck and Grant
families, and assisted by Mr C.F. Johnston, who had previously worked on the Lower Congo as part of the Livingstone Inland Mission. The QKM stress was on salvation before education or civilisation. Their outreach was well received by the Islanders, and since it was the first Bundaberg mission, the other planters also supported the development. In January 1887, Florence and her brother Ernest wrote to the Bundaberg district plantation owners asking for classroom space and assistance to get their Islander employees to attend evening and Sunday classes. Florence Young was in England and India during 1888–89 and spent six years between 1891 and 1900 as a missionary in China, and she suffered a nervous breakdown due to the tensions there. She finally returned to Bundaberg after the Boxer Rebellion and swung her full energies over to the QKM. Later, between 1904 and 1926, she devoted herself to the SSEM, making lengthy annual visits to Solomon Islands from her bases in Sydney and Katoomba. During her absences in the 1890s, the QKM was run by Rev. Alfred E. Eustace and his wife L.D. Eustace, who joined the mission from Victoria, Rev. James Coles, Mr and Mrs C.F. Johnston, Mr and Mrs McKenzie, assisted by Florence Buchanan and Ellen Young. The QKM message was spread by open-air hymn singing, long prayer sessions and mass baptisms in local rivers.

The mission attracted large numbers of adherents, with 2,461 Islanders baptised in Queensland between 1886 and 1906. During 1900–01, 4,776 classes were held, and efforts were increased as the final deportation loomed. In 1906, 589 Malaitans were amongst a total of 734 Solomon Islanders baptised. Overall, Malaitans made up 23 per cent of the QKM converts.

One Malaitan, Martin Supone, who had arrived in Queensland in 1885, was amongst the initial eight male baptisms in April 1886. Progress with Malaitans was slower than one might assume, given that the QKM eventually shifted to Malaita and became the SSEM. Of the 322 Islanders baptised between 1886 and 1889, only four were Malaitans. During 1892, 1,620 Islanders, more than half the district’s Islander

16 Young 1925, 133.
17 Letter by H.E.B. Young and E.S.H. Young, Jan 1887, in Griffiths 1977, 19–20.
18 NIV, 1906–07, 8. The breakdown of converts is Malaita 589, Guadalcanal 104, Makira 16, Gela 12, Savo 3, Ulawa 3 and Isabel 2.
19 PMB 1201, Reel 1, ‘South Sea Evangelical Mission, formerly Queensland Kanaka Mission, Register of Baptisms’. The name is spelt ‘Suepone’ in the baptismal register and ‘Soeypona’ in the government records.
population, attended Sunday schools around Bundaberg. A single feast at Bundaberg in 1890 attracted 1,000 participants. Dr Harry Guinness of the Livingstone Inland Mission in the Congo observed one session of baptisms at Bundaberg in October 1901:

On Sunday morning, in sight of a very large gathering that crowded the river bank, the shore, and one of the wharves of the Burnett River, these thirty-seven coloured Christians were buried with Jesus, by baptism into death, that ‘Like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father’, even so they also ‘should walk in newness of life’. The service was simple and beautiful, and the reverence of these men was most impressive. With clasped hands they entered the river, one by one, and were immersed in its flowing tide by Mr. Fricke. With hands still clasped, and lost in prayer, not seeing any of the crowd around them they slowly came out of the water, having received the new name by which henceforth they will be known.20

By 1904, the QKM had 1,881 baptised converts. Seventeen paid European missionaries and 101 unpaid Islander teachers worked in 11 different centres, along the Queensland coast as far north as Mossman and into the Tweed district in northern New South Wales.21 Activities intensified during the years leading up to the forced deportation of the Islanders that began in 1906: two more European missionaries joined the QKM staff and another 603 Islanders were baptised. Fourteen thousand classes were held during 1906, attended by 6,000 to 7,000 Islanders. The QKM grew to operate from 13 centres: the headquarters were always in Bundaberg, where there were 2,000 to 3,000 Islanders, with five local regions (Fairymead, North Bundaberg, Bingera, Kalkie and Avondale), and branches nearby in the Hapsberg area (Isis) and at Gin Gin. The QKM then spread to Ayr, Ingham, Geraldton (Innisfail after 1910), Cairns and Mossman, and to Cudgen in New South Wales. This 1900s expansion eclipsed the more steady progress by the Anglicans.

There were around 900 Islanders in the Isis-Gin Gin district inland from Bundaberg, mainly around present-day Childers. This QKM branch took root in the early 1900s, with Mr and Mrs Douglas and Mr Lancaster living in the mission house on Hapsberg plantation.22 When Florence Young visited Hapsberg in 1905 she was impressed by the fervour of the

20 Young 1925, 133.
21 Kerr 1993, 57–58.
new adherents. Prayer was central to the message. Long periods were spent in direct communication with the Holy Spirit and some Islanders prayed on their knees for hours. Young’s believed the fervour was being driven by divine intervention:

It was Sunday evening; a full and happy day had been spent in the mission hall. In the evening the workers went to different classes, and now we stood at the door of a large grass house … Within, a bright light lit the faces of twenty-five men, gathered for the evening meeting. Mats on the earthen floor, and a neat cloth and a bunch of flowers on the table gave an air of comfort; but these were hardly noticed, for a strange sense of the presence of the Holy Spirit laid hold of us. As we entered the room we were conscious of an atmosphere literally charged with divine power.23

There can be no doubt that the Christian message was strong and well received. Young mentions six Malaitans from Bingera plantation who were going home to their island:

Only one thing I take with me to my country—Jesus! I know Jesus died for me. My country, heathen country—When we go speak to them, they mock us, but praise God, we take Jesus there …24

Another Malaitan, on the Herbert River in 1905, was probably typical. He had accepted Christianity a year earlier and was full of praise, but said, ‘I cannot read much, but Jesus He been light His fire in my heart …’25 However, there were always other Malaitans, like those at Fairymead plantation in 1906, who taunted their Christian kin and called on rain to wash out rejoicing after a baptism.26

In 1899, John Southey and Frederick Fricke visited north Queensland and realised that there was scope for expansion there. They installed Charlie Tarasol-Aurora (from Pentecost Island) at Port Douglas (near Mossman), Jack Aoba (from Aoba Island) at Nelson (near Cairns) and Thomas Tavangtang-Sandwich (from Efate Island) on the Johnstone River (Geraldton). Both Tarasol-Aurora and Tavangtang-Sandwich later became teachers on Malaita. In mid-1900, Fricke went north again to take F.J. Purdy to Nelson and Mr and Mrs O.C. Thomas (from Western Australia)

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23 Ibid., 161.
24 Ibid., 162.
25 Ibid., 165.
26 Ibid., 177.
to Innisfail.\(^{27}\) In 1901, Norman Lumsden took over from Tarasol-Aurora at Mossman, replaced the next year by Richard Ruddell and his wife, while Lumsden moved to the Herbert River (Ingham and Halifax). In 1902, Mr Rendall began work at Ayr in the Burdekin district.\(^{28}\) Florence Young toured the northern missions in 1905. At Green Hill outside Cairns she and her niece Catherine Deck visited a Chinese-owned plantation (presumably Hap Wah)\(^{29}\) where 42 Islanders were in classes. At Geraldton she went out to Macknade plantation to visit 80 Islanders at the QKM’s mission there. At Mackay, Young visited Rev. McIntyre’s Presbyterian Mission, which had been operating for 17 years, although she makes no mention of contact with Mary Robinson’s Anglican Selwyn Mission a few kilometres away.\(^{30}\)

Between 1898 and early 1904, some 3,500 Malaitans arrived in Queensland (38 per cent of the total who enlisted, 1871–1904), almost 1,000 a year between 1900 and 1903. It was during this period that the QKM and the other missions made their major progress with Malaitans.\(^{31}\)

Beginning in 1903, Florence’s brother Ernest and his wife Margaret began an annual ‘Convention for the Deepening of the Spiritual Life’ at their holiday home at Katoomba in the Blue Mountains west of Sydney. The next year Florence took eight Islanders to the convention. Photographs show them in the midst of a large gathering of fashionably dressed Europeans, the cream of Sydney’s evangelical elite. Florence was determined to put into practice the motto Ernest and Margaret had borrowed from the English Keswick Convention, ‘All One in Christ Jesus’.\(^{32}\) During the 1904 convention a decision was made to form a Solomon Islands branch of the QKM, with a separate council based in Sydney and Melbourne. Florence decided to lead the first official QKM expedition to Solomon Islands in the mid-year, despite fears that the environment was too severe for a middle-aged, upper middle-class European woman.\(^{33}\)

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27 Presumably this was Thomas Tavangtang-Sandwich, who later moved to Malaita. \textit{Ibid.}, 127. Purdy later joined the Churches of Christ and became a missionary and trader in the New Hebrides. Crocombe 1987, 291.
28 Young 1925, 135–38.
29 Bottoms 2015, 84, 85, 86.
30 Young 1925, 164–65.
32 Braga 2003, 46, 110.
33 Young 1925, 142–43.
The Anglicans and the Melanesian Mission

The Church of England began the first formal mission to Islanders in Queensland and slowly developed links with the Melanesian Mission (the Diocese of Melanesia), but even so they never achieved the success of the QKM. One reason may have been the church’s unwieldy structure. By 1900, there were four Church of England dioceses in Queensland, each controlling its own mission activities. Not until 1894 did the Melanesian Mission begin to work cooperatively with them to develop missions along the same lines as their St Barnabas College on Norfolk Island. Queensland’s Anglican dioceses evolved in a convoluted way as the colony grew. The Brisbane area was included in the Newcastle diocese after 1847 (when the area was still part of New South Wales), while the Sydney diocese still controlled the more northerly areas of what became Queensland in 1859. Once the new colony was formed, Brisbane became a separate diocese reaching north to the 21st parallel south (including the area that in 1860 became Mackay). The first Islanders arrived in Torres Strait in 1860, around Brisbane in 1863, and at Mackay in 1867. The first Malaitans reached Queensland at Mackay in October 1871.34

Brisbane was an early major Pacific port and the Melanesian Mission always had contacts with the Brisbane diocese. The Melanesian Mission was interested in establishing links with the Queensland plantations as an extension of the net cast first from New Zealand and then Norfolk Island. Queensland, however, had its own Anglican ecclesiastical organisations separate from the Diocese of Melanesia. Several heads of the Melanesian Mission are known to have visited Queensland. Bishop John Coleridge Patteson preached in Brisbane in 1864 and returned the next year to consider Curtis Island, off the coast near Gladstone, as a replacement headquarters for St Andrew’s at Kohimarama, Auckland.35 In 1872, Rev. Robert Codrington from the Melanesian Mission’s St Barnabas College on Norfolk Island (and temporary head of the Melanesian Mission after Bishop Patteson was murdered) visited Queensland, and spoke with Islanders in Maryborough. Bishop Edward Tufnell in Brisbane promised to try to get the priest at Mackay to begin a mission to the Islanders, although the challenge was not taken up for another six years, by which time Mackay was in a different diocese. Tufnell’s successor,

34 Moore 1985, 26.
35 Moreton Bay Courier, 9 Apr 1864; Ross 1983, 41.
Bishop Mathew Hale, said that he felt frustrated by the colonists’ prejudice against any attempts to spread Christianity to non-Europeans, whether Aborigines, Asians or Pacific Islanders.36 The next substantial Melanesian Mission link came two decades later, in 1895, when Bishop Cecil Wilson toured coastal Queensland trying to foster connections with the Queensland dioceses. While he was in the colony several Islanders asked his permission for them to join St Barnabas College.37

In 1878, a North Queensland diocese was formed, cut loose from Sydney, with a new boundary between the Brisbane and North Queensland dioceses at the 22nd parallel south (roughly at Broadsound), which placed Mackay into the northern diocese. The next change came in 1892, when Rockhampton diocese was excised from the north of the Brisbane diocese, leaving the boundary between the two at just north of Bundaberg. In that same year the Australian Board of Missions took responsibility for British New Guinea. The last of the colonial changes came in 1900 when the Carpentaria diocese was formed, cutting through Queensland’s east coast just above Cairns (placing Mossman’s sugarcane fields into the new diocese) and including Cape York and Torres Strait, the Gulf of Carpentaria and all of the Northern Territory. These divisions are important because the Church of England missions to the Islanders were usually diocesan initiatives.

The earliest and always the most substantial Anglican mission to the Islanders was begun at Mackay by Mary Goodwin Robinson in 1882. This may have been an initiative of the newly installed Bishop George H. Stanton in Townsville, or it may have been an independent move by Rev. Albert Maclaren. Maclaren was priest at Mackay from 1878 until 1891, the same years that Stanton was bishop, after which he left to found the Anglican mission in British New Guinea.38 When he arrived in the sugar town Maclaren faced opposition from some of his parishioners, with attitudes that were probably typical in other cane-growing districts.

The white people are against me doing anything in the way of teaching them [the Islanders], their argument being that they pay me not to look after the souls of black but of white people.39

36 Information provided by Alan Davidson at St John’s Theological College, Auckland/University of Auckland, from letters held in the Rhodes House Library, 11 May 2006.
38 Wetherell 1977; Diocese of Brisbane 1872, 10.
39 Moore 1985, 310.
Given the racist nature of Queensland colonial society, this attitude changed very little over the decades. Late in 1906, one of Malaita’s earliest Anglican missionaries, Arthur Hopkins, found much the same attitude:

In some places it was lamentable to see how Church people themselves hindered the work. They turn a cold shoulder on boys coming to the Holy Communion, and grudge the use of Sunday Schools for classes. The battle that S. Paul had to fight against race-prejudice is not even fully won.\(^{40}\)

However, Maclaren was able to interest two prominent parishioners in beginning mission schools. Mary Robinson, the wife of a plantation manager, began the Selwyn Mission at Te Kowai plantation in 1882, followed soon after by a smaller venture undertaken by Elizabeth Watt Martin, the wife of a pastoralist at Mandurama on the north side of the Pioneer River. Initially, Robinson conducted the classes in her home, and then shifted to land donated by Meadowlands plantation closer to Mackay, before moving the base to Marian further down the Pioneer Valley when her husband became mill manager there in the early 1890s. One 1896 report describes the unusual degree of access that she allowed the Islanders to her home:

Before school begins they wander into her private house, of which they have the run, and sit about in her parlour as if it was their own. She has always allowed this, and says they have never abused the privilege on any occasion. Few ladies would have the power and influence necessary for the allowing of such liberties. She is not only pastor and instructor, but doctor and sick nurse to the boys, and her house is their hospital. While there, we saw one of her patients, a sick boy about 18, lying in a little room adjoining her house.\(^{41}\)

When Rev. A. Brittain visited the Selwyn Mission’s Marian base on behalf of the Melanesian Mission in 1894, he described the mission as ‘worked on a system of her own, and gradually evolved’ and ‘undoubtedly the best school in Queensland’.\(^{42}\) Mrs Robinson gave instruction in Pijin English, which she found a better medium than English, and worked ‘single-handed, and without any intermission as a rule even for an evening from year to year, and without any fund from which to supply the ordinary school materials’.\(^{43}\) She taught reading, writing and arithmetic and prepared

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43 Ibid. Also see M.G. Robinson to A. Brittain, 16 Aug 1894, *OPMM*, Christmas 1894, 100–01.
men for baptism and confirmation. Men walked 9 or 20 kilometres every evening to school, in some cases foregoing their evening meal, and even in the cold of July, 70 to 80 attended. The only island group Brittain mentions were the Malaitans:

The Malayta men have generally an unenviable reputation, and yet they show themselves very willing recipients of Christianity and all civilizing influences when properly brought to bear upon them.\footnote{Report of Rev. A. Brittain, \textit{OPMM}, Christmas 1894, 99.}

After her husband died in the mid-1890s, the mission shifted back to Meadowlands, where she continued to operate under reduced circumstances. In 1903, Robinson finally left the district to retire to Adelaide and then to England, replaced by Charles Sage, who had previously worked in the New Guinea Anglican Mission. Robinson’s Melanesian assistants, supervised by Sage, were able to carry on the mission’s work after she left, based at Meadowlands and Te Kowai, and then at St Marys Church at Pioneer on the north side of the river on land donated by the Coakley family.

\textbf{Figure 3.2}: Students at Mary Robinson’s Anglican Selwyn Mission when it operated from Marian in the Pioneer Valley west of Mackay. The photograph dates from the 1890s when William Wawn visited.

Labour trade captain William Wawn visited the Selwyn Mission in the early 1890s at about the same time as Rev. Brittain did. He found over 80 pupils and described a ‘fine commodious school-house with excellent fittings, prettily decorated walls, and a harmonium’. Another visitor in 1896 described Robinson hard at work, teaching children in the mornings and men and women after they finished work at night. In her quest for converts, Robinson also visited the hospitals on plantations, the government hospital at Mackay, sick Islanders working for farmers and the jail. Between 9:30 and 11:30 am she held a school for Islander children, then arranged materials for the adult evening school before visiting the sick, some of whom she took into her home to nurse. On Saturdays and Sundays the school was a centre for Islanders who came from as far away as 30 kilometres to attend. Sunday service began at 10:00 am, followed by a class for confirmation candidates, then lunch. Baptism candidates were taught at 2:00 pm, followed by Sunday school at 3:00 pm. Sunday evenings were reserved ‘for going after the wild Malayta, and recruiting them for School’.45

The Selwyn Mission also established branches on plantations and farms throughout the valley: at Te Kowai, Palms, Marian, Nindaroo, Meadowlands, Pioneer, Mandurama and The Leap.46 Both the Selwyn Mission at Mackay and Florence Young’s QKM managed to interest large numbers of Malaitans, but there was always antagonism from those who still followed their ancestral religion. For instance, three Malaitans baptised by Rev. W.A. Turner at Mackay in September 1896 faced ostracism from other Malaitans, and one found himself locked out of the house he shared. Many others were under instruction and Robinson had high hopes in training teachers to go back in the islands.47 Her best Malaitan pupil, Jack Taloifulia from Sulufou Island in Lau Lagoon, became the first indigenous Anglican priest on Malaita.48

In 1905, the main Selwyn Mission school was furnished with desks, and every night between 7:30 and 9:30 pm Islander men could be seen bent over their copy books, reading aloud, or leaning scripture.

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The children of the District have their teaching in the mornings. Every Sunday there is a grand assembly from all parts of the District: some arrive on horseback, some on bicycles, some driving the wife and children in a sulky. Long before the time of the service the brown faces may be seen everywhere, and the service itself is hearty and reverent. Once a month those who are communicants tramp into Mackay for the 8 a.m. celebration, a few of them going in the night before: there are about 60 on the communicants’ roll. Besides the main school there are small branch schools at plantations too far out for the ‘boys’ to reach the Selwyn Mission, and these are conducted by Islanders under Mr. Sage’s supervision.49

Figure 3.3: Many mission photographs are of groups of men, though women and children also attended services and classes. This group is at the Selwyn Mission in 1905.
Source: SCL, 9 May 1905.

We have details of the Islander baptisms. The first at Selwyn Mission, in 1885, included one Solomon Islander. The first identifiable Malaitan baptism was of Benjamin Torkon in October 1890. Joseph Baramula, after 1905 one of the teachers at Fiu, Malaita, was another of Robinson’s early students. Remaining records do not show enough detail of island

origins to be certain about the extent of Malaitan baptisms, although, just as occurred with the QKM, we can presume that Malaitans dominated the 1900s.\textsuperscript{50} My 1970s computer sorting of these records included adults and children and indicated 512 Malaitan Anglican baptisms at Mackay between 1890 and 1906.\textsuperscript{51}

Figure 3.4: The congregation at St Marys Church at Pioneer, outside Mackay, in the early 1900s.

The man seated in the centre front is probably Malaitan Alex Sayven, a lay preacher from 1905 to 1913. Most of the congregation was from Malaita or Guadalcanal.

Source: State Library of Queensland, neg. 24462.

The labourers lived mainly in the North Queensland and Brisbane dioceses. Although some of the early arrivals worked in the pastoral and maritime industries, most worked in the coastal cane fields. The other cane-growing areas in the North Queensland Diocese were on the Burdekin River at the twin towns of Ayr and Homehill, at Ingham and Geraldton, around Cairns, and at Proserpine and Mossman. Rev. Francis Drinkall Pritt ministered to the Islanders, based in the

\textsuperscript{50} Anglican Church of Australia, Holy Trinity Church, Mackay, Baptism Registers.

\textsuperscript{51} This quantitative research was carried out for my PhD thesis (1981a), which was published as Kanaka in 1985. The printouts are available at James Cook University and the Mackay City Council Library.
north Rockhampton parish from 1889 until 1894. He transferred to the Herbert River at Ingham from 1895 to 1898, termed ‘missionary to alien races’, and operated what predominantly was a mission to Islanders.52 Pritt’s replacement, Rev. F.V. Drake, showed little interest and during his years Ingham district Islanders were left to organise their own services. They built a thatched-roof church at Cordelia Mount, where an Islander held a service every Sunday, and at nearby Halifax there was a church on Anderson’s farm where Islanders held regular services. At Geraldton on the Johnstone River was a thatched-roof church run by Motlav Islanders and visited every Sunday by Rev. C. Warren Tomkins. By 1901, there were around 500 Islanders in the Cairns district, but no formal Anglican presence, although one Anglican Islander, Billy Mallicolo, joined his church’s mission to Aborigines at Mt Bellenden Ker in 1892.53 The only early 1890s mission in the Cairns district seems to have been Presbyterian, through a teacher and a church for Islanders at Mulgrave.54

Figure 3.5: One of the Islanders’ grass-roofed churches in north Queensland, possibly the one at Cordelia Mount.
Source: Clive Moore Collection.

53 ‘Bellenden Ker Missionaries’, BC, 20 May 1892.
Mossman mill, a farmers’ cooperative begun in the mid-1890s, housed the most northerly mainland mission in the new Diocese of Carpentaria. A large group of ‘old chum’ Anglican Islanders transferred from Bundaberg to Mossman in the mid-1890s, spreading the denomination further north, and many Islanders, including Malaitans, lived within the diocese in Torres Strait. Torres Strait came under the London Missionary Society from the 1870s until 1914, when the area became an Anglican preserve. There were also Malaitan families living in pastoral districts, such as the Kulijeri (Reid) family at Charters Towers, although they were isolated and blended into Aboriginal communities.55

The Brisbane diocese stretched north to Bundaberg, and included three major ports through which Islanders entered Queensland: Brisbane, Maryborough and Bundaberg. There were substantial numbers of Islanders around Brisbane, most of them long-term residents of the colony. Brisbane and the neighbouring Logan, Caboolture and Redlands districts had an Islander population right from the 1860s.56 ‘The Anglicans initiated outreach to Islanders around Brisbane in 1886.57 More ‘time-expired’ (multiple-contract) Islanders began to drift south from Bundaberg and Maryborough, particularly during the economic recession in the early 1890s, gravitating to Brisbane and Tweed Heads over the border in New South Wales. In 1892, Canon John Stone-Wigg began classes for them at St John’s Pro-Cathedral, and a house (‘Roslyn’) in South Brisbane was acquired as a base for Anglican Islanders in the city. About the same time, Archdeacon Arthur Rivers was given oversight of all missionary activities in the Brisbane Diocese. Early in 1897, J.D. Anderson, who was reading for holy orders and was attached to the Cathedral parish, took over leadership of work with local Islanders.58 About 20 attended the cathedral on Sundays and had a clubroom in a street close by where they met every night, with formal classes on Tuesdays, Saturdays and Sundays run by Mrs Birkbeck, Mr Gardiner, Archdeacon David and Rev. C.A. Hutchinson.59

56 Moore 2015c.
59 Percy T. Williams, ‘Notes from Queensland’, OPMM, Mar 1897, 270–72.
The Melanesian Mission sent Rev. A. Brittain to Queensland in August 1894 to reconnoitre the scene, in expectation that he would start missionary work there. He was well received by the bishop of North Queensland, who wanted to bolster the work already underway at Mackay and advocated that outreach begin at Cairns, the Johnstone and Herbert rivers, and around Ayr and Homehill on the Burdekin River. Good responses were also received from the bishops of Brisbane and Rockhampton. At the time, the plan was for Brittain to begin Melanesian Mission work at Bundaberg, although this never eventuated. Bishop Cecil Wilson of the Diocese of Melanesia, aware that the Colonial Sugar Refining Company and some planters had promised financial support, kept faith with them by visiting Queensland in mid-1895. In Brisbane, he visited two Malaitans about to be hanged for the murder of a European at Bundaberg. One, Maraskima, had been in Queensland for six years but did not understand English. The other, Miori, had been in the colony a similar length of time and had three months of schooling, although his Pijin English was poor. Six Malaitans had been charged and four pardoned. The executions were difficult to explain to the other Malaitans, particularly since Wilson felt that the clemency given to four was incomprehensible to their ideas of guilt and justice.

While in Brisbane, Wilson held discussions with Premier Hugh Nelson, Colonial Secretary Horace Tozer and other government officials before proceeding north to Bundaberg, Rockhampton, Mackay and Townsville. He counselled the government against closing Malaita to recruiting, one possible solution for dealing with the many years of violence against recruiters. Wilson stressed to his Brisbane listeners that Christianity was the only good thing that the labour trade had brought to Malaita and to cut access would be a retrograde step. He had been told that there were 1,200 Malaitans in Queensland and that only 2,000 of the Islander population of 8,700 Islanders in Queensland were receiving religious instruction. Wilson advocated establishing small training colleges, the graduates of which would then be available to staff mission schools in Queensland and at St Barnabas College on Norfolk Island.

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60 Brittain felt no particular call to the ministry there and was already well-established in the New Hebrides. Reports by Bishop Wilson, 6 Sept 1894, and by Rev. A. Brittain, *OPMM*, Christmas 1894, 95–100; Wilson, 17 June 1895, *OPMM*, Nov 1895, 154–55.
62 Wilson, 20 May 1895, *OPMM*, Aug 1895, 123.
63 Compared to census figures this calculation is too high. Census of Queensland, 1891, 459, *QVP* 1892, 3, 1391; 1901, 2, 956.
At this stage, of the 400 indigenous teachers in the Melanesian Mission’s network, only two were ex-Queensland labourers.\(^{64}\) One college site was identified on Mon Repos plantation and a mission church site was suggested for The Grange, both near Bundaberg. Wilson also announced plans for colleges (equivalent to St Barnabas College) at the Burdekin and Mackay districts. The concept was for the Queensland Anglican missions to become self-supporting branches of the Melanesian Mission, although nothing further eventuated.\(^{65}\) The expense would have been great, and the Presbyterians broke the Anglican monopoly in the Mackay district when they established a mission at Walkerston in 1886. Then the Queensland Government agreed to subsidise payment of staff at mission schools in the colony, using the Pacific Islanders’ Fund, which took away some of the urgency.\(^{66}\)

The trip was also part-motivated by rumours that 200 Queensland Malaitans were about to accompany a lay missionary back to Malaita to form a Christian colony.\(^{67}\) Wilson raised a storm in the media over some of his comments. He was alarmist and ignored the work of other denominations. The bishop was put in his place by representatives of the Presbyterian Church and QKM.\(^{68}\)

Details remain of Wilson’s time in Bundaberg, where he visited several plantations, including Fairymead, the QKM headquarters. The bishop was accompanied by Rev. Percy T. Williams, who returned in November 1896 to take charge of the Anglican Bundaberg mission as the first full-time ‘organising priest in charge of Melanesians’ in Queensland, under the auspices of the bishop of Brisbane. His charge was renamed as the ‘Melanesian Mission in Queensland’. A Bundaberg Kanaka Mission to South Sea Islanders Committee already existed, although it was not responsible to the Diocesan Board of Missions.\(^{69}\) Between 1892 and his death in December 1895, J.E. Clayton, a deacon, operated a small mission school for Islanders at Bundaberg, his £200 stipend raised locally. After his death, his wife and daughter and Mr Thornburn took over

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\(^{64}\) ‘Bishop Wilson on the Labour Trade’, \(BC\), 23 Apr 1895.
\(^{65}\) ‘Church of England Kanaka Mission’, \(BC\), 5 Dec 1896.
\(^{66}\) Wilson to Bishop J.R. Selwyn, 5 Feb 1896, \(OPMM\), Aug 1896, 207–08; \(Church Chronicle\), May 1895, 3; and June 1895, 11–13; Wetherell 1977, 101–02; Wilson, \(OPMM\), Aug 1895, 122; Moore 2015a.
\(^{67}\) Brittain, quoted in \(OPMM\), Christmas 1894, 97–100.
\(^{68}\) Alex O. Smith, letter to the editor, \(BC\), 24 Apr 1895; ‘Kanaka Missions. The Work in Queensland. Reply to the Bishop of Melanesia. A Voice from Bundaberg’, \(BC\), 16 May 1895.
\(^{69}\) Brittain, \(OPMM\), Christmas 1894, 97–100.
until Williams arrived.70 New Zealand-born and Cambridge University-educated, Williams set to work in the Bundaberg and Isis districts. His count of the Islander population, which differs slightly from that of Bishop Wilson, is probably more accurate. The number of Islanders around Bundaberg never outnumbered those in the Mackay district, although Bundaberg and Isis combined was similar in size. Williams said there were slightly less than 2,000 Islanders at Bundaberg and another 1,000 working in the Isis. His figures suggest that there were 540 Guadalcanal and Malaita labourers in the Bundaberg district and a further 410 in the Isis district from the same islands. Calculated on the overall numbers from each island that worked in Queensland (9,186 Malaitans and 4,188 from Guadalcanal),71 there must have been at least 500 Malaitans in the area.

The planters were behind with their pledges, which Williams had to extract to pay wage arrears owed to Mrs Clayton. When he first preached, Williams’s Islander congregation numbered 87. Reports from 1896–97 suggest that 20 Islander men took Holy Communion in Williams’s Anglican church at Bundaberg and 160 came to Matins. About 90 men, predominantly from Gela and led by John Lamosi who had been a pupil at Norfolk Island, attended Christmas services in a church hall that year. Between services they amused themselves with games of cricket and football, and at the end of the day prayers were said in Mota (the Anglican *lingua franca*) and the Gela language. School classes were held every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday with an average of 37 Islanders in attendance, with another 24 attending evening classes on plantations.72

Williams wrote most unflatteringly about the mission room:

> It is simply an old disused barn, attached to a stable and cowshed. It is low and narrow, with an iron roof, and absolutely devoid of paint. There are no windows, merely holes cut in the walls. It is rotten in places, letting in wind, rain, and sun. There are planks for seats, and when there are, say 150 boys in there on a hot Sunday morning, one melts and needs something very good to smell.73

Around Bundaberg he was assisted by Rev. William Morris and Miss Brands. Williams regularly visited plantations and farms around Bundaberg to conduct school classes and raised £100 to pay for a resident

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70 ‘Notes’, *SCL*, July 1897, 4.
73 Williams, ‘Notes from Queensland’, *OPMM*, Mar 1897, 270–72.
teacher at nearby Childers in the Isis district, £50 of it provided by the Colonial Sugar Refining Company, proprietors of the large plantation mill there, and with extensive commercial interests in Fiji and other Queensland and New South Wales mills and refineries. There was no church building for the Isis Islanders and funds were harder to raise there because the sugarcane came mainly from small-scale farmers rather than the large plantations that dominated around Bundaberg. Williams took the train to the Isis every Monday and remained there until Wednesday. When he was unable to make the trip, local clergyman Rev. Ashburner took the service. Around 30 Islanders came to the services and another 40 attended the school.74

Williams left in 1897 and reappeared in the Diocese of Melanesia in 1900, based on Guadalcanal from 1902 to 1905.75 He was replaced in Bundaberg by the aforementioned J.D. Anderson and in the Isis by G.E. Layton. European missionaries took the weekend services and Islander teachers ran classes during the week on various plantations. In 1899, an observer on one Bundaberg plantation noted that 75 Islanders attended the afternoon Sunday school. Moody and Sankey’s hymns were sung perfectly to tune and lessons and preaching were in Pijin English.76

The educational, pastoral and religious programs at Bundaberg continued. During 1903, classes were attended by 3,075 Islanders and 891 Chinese (cumulatively, not individuals). Miss McIntyre, who had begun to teach the Islanders in the mid-1890s, held five classes each week, three for Islanders only and two for Islanders and Chinese, assisted by the rector, Rev. R.S. Hay. About 80 Islanders regularly attended church services, of whom 26 had been baptised and 18 were confirmed by the bishop of Rockhampton. The Islanders attended the early service at the parish church and they also had their own church on the north side of the river that operated in much the same way as the Selwyn Mission.77

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76 ‘Melanesia in Queensland’, SCL, 15 Sept 1899, 4.
77 ‘Mission Notes’, SCL, July 1904, 7.
The Brisbane Diocese seems to have made little progress at Maryborough, another major cane-growing area, although as early as 1871 there were Christian Islanders there from Lifou, one of the Loyalty Islands. In 1876, attempts were made to establish an Anglican Maryborough mission, and several Islanders contributed to a fund to build the parish church in the late 1870s. Richard Eva, rural dean at Maryborough from the early 1880s into the 1890s, is said to have made attempts to minister to the Islanders, although nothing further is known. The report notes that these Islanders were colonists, not circular migrants. In 1890, the Lutheran Church started a Sunday school, with good results, and six years later a similar Anglican mission presence began when ailing Mrs Clayton shifted from Bundaberg to Maryborough.

The diocese to the north was based at Rockhampton, the only Queensland district that retains a substantial Anglican Islander population today and one that provided pastoral and sugarcane occupations. The new diocese was created in 1892. In 1889, while the region was still part of the Brisbane Diocese, Francis Drinkall Pritt became the new minister in north Rockhampton. He had previously visited the islands and observed Melanesian Mission activities and was keen to begin work with the Islanders both in north Rockhampton and at Yeppoon on the coast. When Pritt arrived, there were 200 Islanders in his parish, 78 at Yeppoon sugar plantation and the remainder scattered about. Rockhampton Islanders were mainly from the New Hebrides and the Loyalty Islands and had arrived to work in the pastoral industry in the 1860s and 1870s. By 1889, many of them were long-term immigrants with certificates of exemption from the labour restrictions that controlled Islanders who arrived after 1879. As mentioned earlier, in 1894 Pritt transferred to the Herbert River district (Ingham) and was replaced by Canon Alfred H. Julius, who stayed until 1904 and also fostered the Islanders within his congregation.

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78 Kerr 1987, 68–69.
79 Rev. C. Christenson, letter to the editor, BC, 6 Apr 1892.
81 There were very few, if any Malaitans at Rockhampton during the nineteenth century. Moore 1985, 311; Gistitin 1989; 1995; Kerr 1993, 58; 1996, 43–46.
82 He may have been related to Rev. Lonsdale Pritt, who served with the Melanesian Mission from 1861–67 in New Zealand.
83 Julius had links to the Melanesian Mission through his cousin Ellen Julius (daughter of the bishop of Christchurch, New Zealand), who in 1899 married Bishop of Melanesia Cecil Wilson.
Up until 1897, most of the costs of running the Queensland missions were met by plantation owners and the Islanders themselves, plus small subsidies from the Melanesian Mission. In 1894, Mary Robinson at Mackay received £50 annually, half each from the Melanesian Mission and the Diocese of North Queensland, and the Melanesian Mission was considering paying Rev. Pritt at Bundaberg. Robinson received £70 from Melanesian Mission funds during 1895, with another £50 raised locally, intended to cover her keep and all of the school’s expenses. By 1896, however, the bishop had defaulted due to a shortage of funds and was ‘anxious to incur the responsibility no longer’. Widowed Mary Robinson could not support herself and her daughter on the money while also paying all expenses, and she contemplated closing the Selwyn Mission. A ‘Robinson Fund’ was established with £109 collected up until 1897 to subsidise her work.

Anglican and Presbyterian parishioners also supported the various missions by subsidising missionary salaries. Plantation owners and farmers appreciated the quieting effect Christianity had on their often volatile workforce, although they were not keen on Islanders regularly attending evening classes since that left them tired at work the next day.

The Queensland Government had £30,000 in its Pacific Islanders’ Fund, made up of the compulsory return fares, unclaimed wages from Islanders who had died, and savings from Islanders who had deposited money in the government Savings Bank and subsequently died. The government agreed to Wilson’s proposal that interest from this fund be used to subsidise mission schools for Islanders in Queensland; in the 1880s, the interest had been used to subsidise Kanaka hospitals. After his 1895 visit, Bishop Wilson announced ambitious plans to take Clayton at Bundaberg on to his staff (his £200 per annum salary guaranteed by the local congregation), to pay Pritt (then on the Hebert River) £100 a year to work with Mrs Robinson at Mackay (with another £100 and a house guaranteed by local planters). The final part of the deal was to pay Robinson £150 per annum, and to replace Pritt with a part-time appointment paid £50 a year to work with Islanders at the Herbert River. Although Bishop Wilson’s grand plan never eventuated, in 1897 the Queensland Government approved

84 Wilson to J.R. Selwyn, 6 Sept 1894, OPMM, Christmas 1894, 95–97.
85 Robinson to J.R. Selwyn, 26 Oct 1896, OPMM, Dec 1896, 28.
86 ‘Robinson Fund’, OPMM, Christmas 1897, 326.
87 Moore 2015b.
88 Wilson, OPMM, Aug 1895, 122; Saunders 1976.
£600 per year in subsidies from its Pacific Islanders’ Fund (which must have been more than just the interest). That year the Bundaberg and Isis branches of the Melanesian Mission benefited to the extent of £97 10s, enabling the employment of J.D. Anderson. Similar sums were doled out to the Selwyn Mission at Mackay (which, like Bundaberg, also received £70 directly from the Melanesian Mission, subject to its reporting to the North Queensland Board of Missions) and to the QKM and the Churches of Christ Isis mission.89 The Queensland Islanders also supported the Melanesian Mission: in 1900 Islanders at the Selwyn Mission at Mackay donated £21 17s to the New Ship Fund (to replace the Melanesian Mission’s *Southern Cross*), the equivalent of a year’s pay for an experienced labourer.90

Although it is impossible to untangle Malaitans from this larger picture, in the 1890s and 1900s they were the majority Islander group in Queensland and the Queensland missions fed into the Melanesian Mission on Malaita.

**Other Christian Missions**

Another substantial but lesser mission to the Islanders was established by the Churches of Christ, which developed out of Presbyterianism in the United States early in the nineteenth century as a restoration of New Testament Christianity. The Churches of Christ was made up of autonomous nondenominational congregational church organisations that advocated a return to Christ’s teachings as described in the Bible, as well as youth or adult baptism, which suited the conversion of Islanders. In 1892, it began a mission in the Isis, inland from Bundaberg, and in 1895 expanded to cover Knockroe, Doolbi and Gregory near Goodwood. John Thompson was in charge of what was called the Kanaka Mission, inspired by the work of the QKM. From 1893 he received a wage from the church’s Foreign Mission Committee, which also paid to have a mission house and chapel constructed. He managed to convert around 200 Islanders and had a Melanesian assistant named Tabimancon. In 1903, Thompson tried to establish a mission in the New Hebrides but returned home after several months, sick with malaria, to continue his work in the Isis.91

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89 ‘Notes’, *SCL*, July 1897, 4.
90 *SCL*, Oct 1900, 1.
A Churches of Christ mission was established at Maryborough, although this may not have been the first Islander mission there, since an early history of Maryborough describes another established by Rev. C. Christenson. The Churches of Christ mission first met in the Protestant Hall and held a special baptismal service for Islanders on 5 July 1896. The hall was filled with Islanders and F.W. Turley conducted the service. Charley Erromango is the only Islander attendee named in the account.92

Christian outreach at Mackay, already home to the Anglican’s Selwyn Mission, was joined by the Presbyterians in 1888. Their ministers began to visit Mackay in 1872 and a Kirk Session was formed there in 1876. The Presbyterian mission began at Walkerston, a planation dormitory town just outside Mackay, run between 1888 and 1907 by a full-time missionary, Rev. J. McLean McIntyre. Two-thirds of the indentured Islanders who came to work in Queensland were from the New Hebrides, a Presbyterian mission enclave of longer standing than the Solomons’ missions. (The Melanesian Mission, the London Missionary Society and the Catholics also operated in the New Hebrides.) Depending on which island they came from, some of the labourers from the New Hebrides were already Christian or had some earlier contact with missions. Twenty years before the Walkerston Mission was established, the Presbyterian General Assembly had instructed its Committee on Foreign Missions to raise funds for a mission to the Islanders in Queensland, although nothing eventuated. The Walkerston Mission was the only one the Presbyterians ever developed in Queensland.

92 Loyau 1897, 316.
Rev. McIntyre was supported by two leading Presbyterians: Elizabeth Donaldson from 1890 to 1896 at Sandiford near Oakenden and then later at Homebush, and Frank J. Stevens at Cotton Vale near Homebush.93 The Islanders contributed funds to the mission, and in 1894 paid £70 to have a new mission hall built at Sandiford.94 The initial activities were on the south side of the Pioneer River, but spread to the north side in 1895 when John Walker was given oversight of that area, based at Miclere until 1903.95 The main mission hall, erected at Walkerston in 1895, was badly damaged in a cyclone early the next year, and its Islander parishioners donated £33 to restore it.96 In 1899, Alfred E. Eustace, who had worked with the QKM while Florence Young was in China, transferred to work with McIntyre at Walkerston and then moved to the Presbyterian mission in the Lower Burdekin.97 Eustace was back at Walkerston in 1900–01 while McIntyre took six months leave due to ill health. The mission operated quite separately from the main Kirk Session, and when it closed at the end of 1906 the remaining Presbyterian Islanders were not welcome among the European congregation. The Walkerston Kirk’s main concern

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94 *BC*, 7 Dec 1894, 4.
96 Bardon 1949, 47; *MM*, 31 Oct 1895.
97 *BC*, 13 Sept 1899, 6.
3. MALAITAN CHRISTIANS OVERSEAS, 1880s–1910s

was that they were losing an excellent tenant (McIntyre) from the manse. The Islanders continued to meet in the mission hall into the 1910s, although they received communion separately.\(^9^8\)

One Presbyterian development was ‘Tea Meetings’ attended annually by up to 500 Islanders at the Walkerston mission hall at Christmas. This was a Christian revival meeting augmented by food and foot races. Aside from the obvious Christian intent of the mission work, the Presbyterians encouraged the Islanders to sign pledges to abstain from alcohol. By 1892, 1,800 Islanders in the district had donned the Presbyterian blue ribbon of the total abstainer. In the early twentieth century, ‘Tea Meetings’ were also an Anglican event.\(^9^9\) The other Presbyterian outreach to the Islanders was much smaller, at Mulgrave near Cairns and in the Tweed district in northern New South Wales.\(^1^0^0\)

The Baptists established some outreach to Islanders around Brisbane in 1896.\(^1^0^1\) The other 1890s Christian denomination working with Islanders was the Salvation Army, which spread its teachings into the Maroochy district north of Brisbane. Sergeant John Potts settled on Buderim Mountain and by 1893 had begun to convert Islanders working for nearby farmers. Assisting him was an early Islander convert, Sergeant Bob Libe from Maré, one of the Loyalty Islands, who was married to a European woman. The Buderim meetings were held on Sunday afternoons and Monday evenings, with a ‘Bible school’ on Wednesday evenings attended by around 20 Islanders from near Woombye, the rail siding for Buderim’s farms. Three Islanders living with Aboriginal women were married by Brigadier Charles H. Jeffries and Major Graham in August 1895, and eight more couples were married before the century’s end. By 1896, the mainly Islander congregation at Buderim was flourishing, and in the late 1890s a school house for the Islanders was built at Buderim near Potts’s house, with a salary for Potts partly provided out of the government’s Pacific Islanders’ Fund. In 1896, a group of Buderim Islanders took part in a Salvation Army meeting at Gympie and others travelled to Brisbane to

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98 Moore 1985, 312–15; Uniting Church in Australia, ‘Minute Book’, of the Kirk Session, Presbyterian Church, Walkerston, 14 Mar 1907, and ‘Report for 1916’. There are no extant baptismal records until 1898 and no Islander baptisms are mentioned until 1911. The Presbyterian records from 1911 to 1939 contain Islander baptisms but the emphasis is on those of New Hebridean descent. Walkerston Baptismal Records, 1889–1939.
101 BC, 12 Oct 1896.
meet Commandant Herbert Booth and his wife Cornelie. The same year saw the first of what became an annual holiday encampment at Maroochy Heads, with some 200 people taking part. Initially established for the Islanders living around Buderim, this Christian camp became so popular that by the 1910s over 1,000 Salvationists were attending. This was the beginning of tourism at Maroochy. After Libe died in 1897, the Islander group remained with the Salvation Army. In the 1900s, 34 Islander and Aboriginal couples and their children were part of the Salvationist group at Buderim.102

**New South Wales**

An area of Islander settlement that is often forgotten is northern New South Wales. There were about 200 Islanders there in 1897. Some had fled from Queensland in the late 1880s to live under a more benign regime, and others drifted south to try to cope with the 1890s depression years. They grew cane, which they sold to the Colonial Sugar Refining Company’s mills, and worked on the district’s sugarcane and banana farms.103 Exempt from Queensland regulations (but not from the Commonwealth’s 1901 deportation order), most of them were from the New Hebrides and lived around Cudgen and Tumbulgum.104 The Islanders built two small Anglican churches: St John’s at Cudgen, where Jonah Woqas from Mota Island and Ravu from the Gela Islands conducted services for a few dozen Islanders, and St Barnabas at Tumbulgum, where John Tala from Mota and Jimmy from another New Hebridean island were the preachers. Rev. Frederick C.T. Reynolds, the Anglican priest at Murwillumbah, and the local Presbyterian minister, visited both groups regularly. The QKM also established a base at Cudgen. Malaitans, though, were never a substantial part of this southern Islander community.105


103 Smith 1991.

104 The area was within the Anglican Diocese of Grafton and Armidale. Faith Bandler, of Tanna Island and Anglo-Indian ancestry, is the best known of Islander descendants from this region. She wrote several books based on her father’s life at Mackay and Tumbulgum. Bandler 1977; 1984; Bandler and Fox 1980; see also Lake 2002.

Torres Strait

Although peripheral to this account, for the sake of completeness I need to mention Pacific Islander immigrants in the Torres Strait Islands, between Australia’s Cape York and the New Guinea mainland, within Queensland territorial waters. Pacific Islanders first arrived to work in Torres Strait maritime industries in 1860. They were mainly from the Loyalty Islands and the southern New Hebrides, but also included some Solomon Islanders. By 1870 around 150 were working on seven vessels, and two years later, after the discovery of commercial quantities of pearlshell, there were 500. The London Missionary Society set up in Torres Strait in 1871, as a stepping-stone to evangelising on the New Guinea mainland. They relied on Pacific Islander mission workers, mainly Loyalty Islanders and Samoans. By the 1880s there was what historian Steve Mullins called a Pacific Islander ascendancy. The Anglican Diocese of Carpentaria included Torres Strait, and when the London Missionary Society withdrew in 1914 the Anglicans took over, establishing St Paul’s Mission on Mua Island, which became home to many Torres Strait Islanders of Pacific Islander descent. There were Malaitans in Torres Strait, but none ever returned to their home island.106

Malaitans and Christianity in Fiji

There has been little research into missionary outreach to Islanders on Fiji plantations. Malaitans were just as important to the Fijian labour force as they were in Queensland. Fiji Government records show 2,727 Malaitans indentured there between 1870 and 1887 and another 2,422 between 1888 and 1911, with the latter years more likely to be the peak conversion period.107 Several hundred Malaitans must have had significant levels of contact with Christianity while in Fiji, and the fragments of information available suggest that there were significant attempts to reach out to the Islander labourers there. For instance, Malaitan Peter Otoa, kidnapped by the *Sea Breeze* and taken to Fiji in 1880, reported that he joined his friends at mission classes run by Rev. J. Francis Jones and Mr Horne in Suva in the mid-1880s. Otoa told of other classes run by Rev. William

106 Mullins 1995, 70; 1990; David, Manas and Quinnell 2008.
107 Siegel 1985.
Floyd at Levuka, and recounted a time when 400 Islanders attended the Suva Anglican church. The local European congregation objected to them taking up so many seats and, ashamed, they left.\textsuperscript{108}

Floyd, a high church Irishman, arrived from Melbourne in 1870 at age 32. He became Fiji’s first Anglican clergyman and vicar of rumbustious Levuka, although his appointment was irregular and he was isolated from episcopal support for many years, and later placed under the supervision of the bishop of London.\textsuperscript{109} Anglicanism in Fiji had a peculiar status: it was not within the jurisdiction of any established regional diocese, which precluded any equivalent Anglican mission development such as had occurred within the Diocese of Melanesia or the four Queensland dioceses. As we have seen for Queensland, the Anglican diocese divisions were always an impediment. During the 1870s, Floyd became interested in the labourers from the Solomons and New Hebrides. He was assisted for three years by Edward Wogale, sent by the Melanesian Mission from Mota Island in 1875. In 1880, Bishop of Melanesia John Selwyn visited for three weeks to conduct baptisms and an ordination. Selwyn encouraged work among the immigrant Islanders and stationed Rev. A. Poole at Rewa, although he decided it was impractical to place teachers on the Fiji plantations. However, land was purchased at Onivero, where some of the Islanders settled and built a crude church, followed by a second more substantial building nearby—the Church of the Epiphany.\textsuperscript{110} Soon after, they were also given land for a school.

In 1884, the capital was moved to Suva, where Holy Trinity Church was constructed, and Fiji Anglicanism received an endowment of land at Natoavatu and Savusavu, the intention being to fund the appointment of a bishop of Fiji.\textsuperscript{111} Rev. Jones, who arrived in 1886, supervised the building of a church for the Islanders at Suva, and in 1890 managed to collect £382, including £252 provided by Islanders themselves. Construction of St John the Baptist Church (called the ‘Polynesian church’) took place over 1892–94. It was opened by the Melanesian Mission’s Rev. R.B. Comins,

\begin{footnotes}{
108 ‘Melanesians in Queensland and Fiji’, \textit{SCL}, 15 Feb 1900, 8; Anglican Church of the Province of Melanesia 1894, 30; ‘The First Voyage’, \textit{SCL}, Jan 1901, 110.
109 Floyd was appointed through the Bishop of Melbourne and Metropolitan of Victoria Charles Perry, with lukewarm support from the Bishop of Melanesia. Perry clearly exceeded his authority, which he based only on Victoria being the major sponsor of Fiji colonisation. Bishop Patteson signed the licence. Whonsbon-Aston 1964, 31–32, 41, 43–45.
110 Hilliard 1978, 106.
111 Whonsbon-Aston 1964, 48–51.
}
assisted by Luke Masuraa, in front of an Islander congregation of 460 (out of a total Melanesian labour force in the area of around 2,000). Comins gave his address in English and the Malaitan languages used at Walade and Sa’a, as well as a little Mota for the sake of the Banks Islanders present. Malaitans from four or five different language areas attended.112

Four years after Floyd shifted to Suva, the Lambeth Conference suggested that Fiji be attached to the New Zealand diocese, but the congregation rejected the proposal. Floyd retired in 1898, replaced by Rev. Horace Packe, who continued to run the mission to Islanders in Suva. Eventually, Fiji was incorporated into the Diocese of Polynesia, which included the previously unattached Diocese of Hawaii, created after the American annexation of the Hawaiian Islands. Thomas Clayton Twitchell became the first bishop of Polynesia in 1908. Discontent over the failure to recognise Fiji as an independent diocese led to Floyd’s return that year as archdeacon of Fiji, where he died in October 1909.113

Fijian Christian’s attitudes to foreign labourers varied, but some offered encouragement. Though there were sometimes open conflicts between Fijians and Malaitans in particular, Solomon Islanders generally felt comfortable amongst Fijians and learnt a pidgin version of the Fijian language. This pidgin was still used by many Malaitans after they returned to the Solomons,114 and some of them also adopted aspects of a Fijian lifestyle.

112 Commis, OPMM, Aug 1894, 69.
113 ‘Melanesians in Queensland and Fiji’, SCL, 15 Feb 1900, 8; Anglican Church of the Province of Melanesia 1894, 30; ‘The First Voyage’, SCZ, Jan 1901, 110; Whonsbon-Aston 1964, 52–63.
114 Siegel 1982.
Figure 3.8: This photograph is thought to be of the Methodist mission to Islanders in Fiji.

The house front is ornamented in a style used in central Malaita. Many Solomon Islanders returning from Fiji were said to have been introduced to Christianity by the ‘Wesleyans’.

Source: British Museum OcA2–21.
Comins received permission from Governor Sir John Thurston to take six of the men from Fiji to school at Norfolk Island for two years. All were Malaitans, two each from Alite Harbour and Fiu, Su‘u and Maana‘oba, and the coast near Cape Arascides in east Fataleka. All six were already confirmed and literate. Three of these men were amongst 30 Christians, several of them already confirmed, landed at ‘Ataa and Fiu in September 1898 from the Fiji schooner Rotuma. In 1902, Rev. Packe reported that he had eight Islander teachers operating evening and Sunday schools. St John the Baptist Church was free of debt and had just been repainted outside and refurbished inside. Thirty of the Islander congregation were confirmed. Also in Fiji were a few Malaitans schooled there by the Wesleyans and Catholics: Rev. Packe was at pains to stress the spirit of cooperation between the Anglicans and Methodists. One of these Wesleyan adherents, Amasia, returned home in the late 1890s after almost 30 years away and started schools on Ngongosila and then in Lau Lagoon. Bennett mentions Catholic converts from Fiji who helped the church purchase land at Bina Harbour, and Lange refers to Venasio, a Malaitan converted to Catholicism while working in Fiji.

During the 1900s, three large colonies of around 100 former Fiji men returned to Malaita to settle at Fiu on the northwest coast, Ferasubua in Lau Lagoon, and Pululahu in the west of Small Malaita. Other such groups settled around Malaita alongside the dominant communities of former Queensland labourers, although often they chose to be separate since their lingua franca was usually Pijin Fijian rather than Pijin English. The Pululahu community was quite typical of other early Christian settlements on Malaita. Seventeen former Fiji labourers, two with wives, arrived in 1903, led by William Maetabu from north Malaita, who had trained for two years on Norfolk Island. Many of this group had attended mission classes in Fiji during the 1890s. Another Fiji return had preceded them by a year and they used his large house as their first base. Rehe, the Pululahu chief, was married to a Sa‘a woman, and supported the Melanesian Mission, largely because his son Lilimae had visited Ulawa on the Southern Cross. Rehe died soon after the group arrived, almost

115 One of the six died in mysterious circumstances on 25 May 1895. Comins, 15 June 1894, OPMM, Aug 1894, 70 Palmer, OPMM, Nov 1895, 179.
118 Ivens, ‘Ulawa and Mala’, SCL, Apr 1904, 18; ‘Ulawa and Mala’, SCL, Mar 1902, 45; and ‘Kalilana Mala (The Rounding of Mala)’, SCL, June 1900, 19–20; Bennett 1987, 145; Lange 2005, 289.
ending the whole endeavour because they were blamed for his death. The group had to stay secure until another man was killed in retaliation, and in the intervening months their taro gardens died. Reduced to eating sago (emergency food on Malaita), one of their number rerecruited and another left to join his ancestor-worshiping family. Lilimae continued to support the school and eventually the situation improved.\textsuperscript{119} The Melanesian Mission established a school there in 1904, its first on the lee side of Small Malaita. Rev. Ivens noted that they ‘can all read English well, and some twelve of them are confirmed’.\textsuperscript{120} The community was given permission to build a village on the coast and two boys were allowed to leave for study on Norfolk Island.\textsuperscript{121}

The reports suggest that Fijian-trained Christians, although fewer in number than those from Queensland, were influential in the decade before the protectorate government reached Malaitan shores. They all spoke Pijin Fijian as their lingua franca, although they seem to have also learnt English in their schools in Fiji.\textsuperscript{122}

Malaitans Baptised Overseas before 1910

The over 9,000 Malaitan labour recruits to Queensland made up a large proportion of the Christian converts, particularly late in the labour trade. Exact statistics on Malaitan Christians in Queensland have been preserved in QKM records throughout the colony/state, and from Mackay, where the Anglican and Presbyterian missions baptised around 1,000 Melanesians over the 20 years before deportations began in the mid-1900s. All three missions combined teaching the rudiments of Christianity, literacy and temperance, and were responsible for producing some well-educated Christian Melanesians, many of them Malaitans. There were 512 Selwyn Mission Anglican baptisms of Malaitans between 1890 and 1906, and, based on their proportion in the local Islander population, Malaitans probably made up reasonable numbers of the Presbyterian converts, although Mackay district Solomon Islanders seem always to have preferred the Selwyn Mission.\textsuperscript{123} Allowing for deaths and single-contract labourers

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{119} ‘In Afflictions’, \textit{SCL}, May 1904, 18–19.
\item \textsuperscript{120} ‘The First Voyage, 1900’, \textit{SCL}, Jan 1910, 111.
\item \textsuperscript{121} Ivens, ‘Ulama and S.E. Mala’, \textit{SCL}, Apr 1905, 21.
\item \textsuperscript{122} \textit{SCL}, Feb 1901, 137; J.R. Selwyn, \textit{OPMM}, Dec 1894, 102.
\item \textsuperscript{123} Moore 1985, 312–15.
\end{itemize}
returning home after three years, these statistics suggests that at least 600 Christian Malaitans lived in the Mackay district in the early 1900s, and most of them had returned home by 1908.\textsuperscript{124}

Table 3: Malaitans baptised overseas before 1910.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Malaitan contracts in Queensland, 1871–1906</th>
<th>9,298</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anglican Selwyn Mission, Mackay, 1890–1906</td>
<td>512</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Anglican Missions (Cairns, Mossman, Cudgen)</td>
<td>100?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presbyterian Mission, Mackay</td>
<td>100?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Presbyterian Missions (Mulgrave, Tweed)</td>
<td>50?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queensland Kanaka Mission, 1886–1906</td>
<td>589</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Churches of Christ, 1892–1906</td>
<td>100?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brisbane Baptist City Tabernacle</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brisbane City Mission</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queensland Total Baptisms</td>
<td>1,451?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Malaitan contracts in Fiji, 1870–1914</th>
<th>5,149</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fiji Total Baptisms</td>
<td>800?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Caledonia and Samoa Total Baptisms</td>
<td>30?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaitans on Norfolk Island Total Baptisms</td>
<td>500?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL BAPTISMS</td>
<td>2,781?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There were another 589 Malaitan baptisms (23 per cent) amongst a total 2,484 QKM Queensland baptisms. The QKM claimed particular success among Malaitans, which was the main reason that the mission established its new SSEM headquarters on their island. However, the QKM attracted very few Malaitan students during the 1880s, the main progress being achieved in the 1890s and 1900s at a rate far beyond Malaitans’ prominence in Queensland.

Bishop Wilson estimated that there were 1,200 Malaitans in Queensland in 1894,\textsuperscript{125} and we know that Malaitans made up around 25 per cent of the total number of Islanders in Queensland and northern New South Wales during the final decade of the labour trade. If we add the QKM and Selwyn Mission Malaitan baptism statistics (1,101) to estimates from smaller Anglican and other denominational missions, the total must have exceeded 1,400. Although some would already have returned home, or died, there were at least 1,000 baptised Christian Malaitans in Queensland.

\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., 306–09.
\textsuperscript{125} Wilson, OPM, Nov 1895, 153.
in the 1900s and many of them had also been confirmed as full members of their churches. Most probably as many as 2,700 Malaitans returned home during the deportation years (1901–08), when Malaita had a total population of around 50,000. The majority had been exposed to some Christian teaching: let us presume 1,450, the conservative calculation in Table 3. Five thousand Malaitans also recruited to Fiji, almost 1,600 of them between 1900 and 1911; at least half of this late batch must have been exposed to Christian teaching. There were also a number of Solomon Islanders (including Malaitans) among the 10,000 Melanesians who worked in German Samoa. A lesser number (hundreds) laboured in New Caledonia. It is clear from numerous references to Malaitans able to speak Pijin English from Samoa, and Pijin Fijian, that some of the Christians on the island had worked in these Pacific plantation areas. We also need to add in some hundreds of Malaitans who became Christians at St Barnabas College on Norfolk Island. It is reasonable to estimate that around 2,700 Malaitans living on Malaita in 1909 had become Christians while overseas. This estimate, alongside the conversions on Malaita, suggests that there were thousands of practising Christians on Malaita and many of them had achieved basic literacy. The conclusion (outlined in chapters 4 through 6) is that there cannot have been less than 4,000 to 5,000 Christians on Malaita in 1909. These numbers were substantial, and the difference from better known Christian islands such as Isabel and the Gela Group is that Malaitan converts remained a minority in the much larger population.

The most famous example is Timothy George Mahratta, who was born in the Burnett district near Bundaberg in 1892, and died on Malaita in 1969. His father, Tolimcan (Thomas), was recruited from Langalanga Lagoon by the Fearless to work in the sugar industry in the mid-1880s, served three years in Queensland and returned to Malaita on the same vessel. The woman to whom he was betrothed had married another man and he rerecruited for Queensland, where he married Makeni (Maggie) from Small Malaita. Tolimcan became a teacher for the QKM and Timothy was encouraged to gain a European education. As the family moved about for seasonal labour and mission work, he attended three government primary schools around Bundaberg and three in the nearby Isis district.
Although eligible to stay in Australia, Toлимкэ, who by the early 1900s had a small cane farm near Bundaberg where he ran a few head of stock and employed several of his countrymen, chose to return home with his family in 1906 or 1907. The couple became SSEM missionaries on Small Malaita, and Timothy attended the SSEM school at Onepusu on the west coast. He left the school after six months because his Queensland level of literacy and numeracy meant he was expected to be a teacher rather than a student. He was the best European-educated Malaitan of his day, and went on to become a government headman in the 1920s (and again briefly in 1944) and Small Malaita’s ‘head chief’ during the Maasina Rule movement from 1945 until his arrest and imprisonment in 1947.129

The Malaitan Christian Experience Overseas

Modern Malaita, particularly in Kwaio and to a lesser extent elsewhere, still contains pockets of people who remain steadfast adherents to their ancestral religions. In Queensland and Fiji this was presumably the situation for the majority, with the first Christian conversions occurring in the late 1880s. There has been no previous detailed research completed into Christianity on overseas plantations. The main surviving records are QKM and Anglican baptism registers, newsletters and correspondence. Conversion to Christianity began a decade earlier on Queensland and Fiji plantations than it did on Malaita and the two sources fed in together back on Malaita. We know that Christians often asked to be landed at mission stations in the Solomons rather than on their own islands or the districts from which they enlisted. As will become clear in subsequent chapters, overseas-trained Malaitans and mission workers from other islands in Melanesia were at the core of the missionary endeavour on Malaita.

Peter Corris, who conducted interviews in the late 1960s with some of the last surviving Queensland and Fiji labourers, both on Malaita and in Queensland, concluded that ‘traditional religious practices and customary observances seem, nevertheless, to have fallen temporarily into abeyance’ and that there was no evidence ‘of sorcery and other forms of magic being practiced among the Melanesians in Queensland’.130 Corris attributed this to the absence of the priests and sorcerers and the inhibitions caused by

130 Corris 1970, 63.
living in a Western society. He was told that ‘Queensland was a white man’s country … and the spirits weren’t there’. However, oral testimony gathered in Queensland in the 1970s by me and Patricia Mercer, from the first Australian-born generation of Islanders, showed clearly that important religious beliefs were transferred to Queensland.

In his 2013 book on Maasina Rule, David Akin provides a neat summary of the ways in which Malaitans maintained or discarded religious practices while overseas. As discussed in the conclusion to Chapter 2, Malaitans on recruiting ships and abroad were able to negotiate with their ancestors for new ground rules for acceptable behaviour.

Although there is no doubting that Christian conversions occurred, just as on Malaita, some of the Queensland and Fiji Malaitan participation in Christian rituals and social events must have been similar to spectators at a theatre. These were nontthreatening breaks from the daily grind of working on plantations and farms—odd behaviour to be discussed late at night around fires. We can only guess at how they reacted to some situations, for instance Mary Robinson’s invitations into her parlour at Mackay. And there are some strange anomalies in the records that leave us wondering. When John Kwailiu Abelfai Fatnowna died in March 1906, his Christian funeral procession was the largest ever seen for an Islander in the Mackay district and he was buried in the Anglican section of the Mackay cemetery. There was even a hearse and European attendants, unheard of for an early Islander funeral. Oral testimony from his family leaves no doubt that Kwailiu (as he is known) was an important Malaitan leader in the district and that he never became Christian. It appears that his family adopted the trappings of a Christian funeral, creating an impressive display that straddled Malaitan and Christian ways of dealing with death. Kwailiu was an in-between man who exemplifies the nature of Islander Christianity in Queensland and Fiji in the 1900s. There must have been many like him who straddled the customary and Christian worlds, in external colonies and back on Malaita, the subject of the next chapter.

131 Ibid., 63.
133 Akin 2013a, 22–24.
134 Moore 2013c entry; 1981b; Mackay Regional Council, Mackay Cemetery Trust Register of Burials, Grave 2917, burial on 26 Mar 1906; MM, 28 Mar 1906.
Figure 3.9: Kwailiu Fatnowna and his wife Orrani and family at Mackay in 1906, not long before his death.
Source: Clive Moore Collection.
This text is taken from *Making Mala: Malaita in Solomon Islands, 1870s–1930s*, by Clive Moore, published 2017 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.