Abu`ofa and the Exodus from Queensland, 1894–1908

They were so difficult to reach. They were fierce and warlike people … of strong character … Although nominally under the Melanesian Mission, no missionary had succeeded in obtaining a foothold on the main island of Malaita. Hundreds of these men have been won for Christ in Queensland & are staunch & splendid Christians, & whereas in the early days it was a triumph to get one Malaita man to School, now we have many hundreds in our classes & for years they have besought us to send missionaries to their Island.

—Florence Young, Queensland Kanaka Mission, October 1903

The Anglican Melanesian Mission had two early rivals on Malaita, the QKM, which became the SSEM in the 1907, and the Marist Catholics after 1910. Seventh-day Adventism was a relatively latecomer in 1924. The literature from the various missions often gives the appearance that each operated alone. Even though all denominational missions underplayed connections with each other (largely for consumption by fund donors), the reality was that each knew exactly what the other mission was doing and where they had their bases. They were rivals, greedy for Malaitan souls, but on the ground they often cooperated when it came to sharing transport or maintaining health. What is difficult to work out is what Malaitans thought of it all, and how they distinguished between the quite different Christian messages of the different denominations.

1 Florence Young, private note, Oct 1903, NIV, 1902–03; Young 1925, 43.
Peter Abu`ofa and the QKM at Malu`u

The origins of the QKM were outlined in Chapter 3. The tradition of the modern SSEC is that the QKM began operations in Solomon Islands in 1894 at Malu`u, north Malaita, and that this should be viewed as a ‘church planting’—the SSEC’s beginning. In fact, it was 1895, after a faltering beginning in 1894, and we need to debate the intentions of the QKM and Peter Abu`ofa. Many QKM converts returned to the Solomons during the 1890s and 1900s, among them Abu`ofa, from Gwai`au Village in the mountains of To`aba`ita, situated between Talafaina (Fo`odo) and Malu`u. One of seven children, Abu`ofa had enlisted to work on plantations around Bundaberg. He was baptised there on 28 August 1892.

Two years later, in April, he and two other men, Robert and Daniel, also known as Try (Tri) and Kobey (Kobi), left Queensland to establish a QKM school on Malaita. This fits with a general QKM desire to evangelise in Melanesia, although at that time Florence Young, the founder, was recuperating from a mental breakdown and the QKM was struggling to maintain even its outreach in the Bundaberg area. By comparison, the Melanesian Mission was training teachers at Norfolk Island with the express purpose of creating Christian enclaves in the islands and was busy trying to link the Queensland Anglican missions into the island network. Abu`ofa’s efforts were not formally connected to the QKM, although the mission, particularly through Rev. Arthur Eustace, gave him full support. Abu`ofa was loyal to the QKM and used their activities and materials as his model. He succeeded in beginning a major indigenous church, although he could easily have failed. The details of his return to Malaita remain because of two protracted legal trials—known as the William Manson case—that ensued after Abu`ofa reported a labour trade captain for kidnapping. The voluminous proceedings of the investigation and subsequent trials were published daily in the Brisbane Courier between 18 October 1894 (the date the William Manson returned to Brisbane) and the final verdicts on 29 March 1895. Comments on the trial continued to be published until June. The evidence includes substantial testimony recorded from Abu`ofa, Kobey and many others who had been aboard the ship, as the multiple charges were played out in the two courts.

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2 Moore 2013c entry.
3 NIV, 1907–08, 10.
4 QSA CT/CC116.
Figure 5.1: Peter Abu’ofa in middle age.
Source: Deck Collection, Black and White Photographs, 135dw.
The case is remarkable. Peter Abu’ofa was the first and only Pacific Islander directly to challenge the legality of the Queensland labour trade, generating protracted court cases that involved the governor and the attorney-general. Malaitan cultures were assertive and adaptable, but Abu’ofa was notable as the first Malaitan leader to assert himself in a modern way, not surpassed until the Maasina Rule movement’s actions decades later. As we will see in Chapter 9, Abu’ofa also stood up for himself against the protectorate administration in the 1900s and 1910s. Although he probably had the backing of the QKM during the 1894–95 trials, to confront Europeans despite his vulnerable position aboard the William Manson off the coast of Malaita took great strength of character and presumably Christian belief.

Abu’ofa had worked in Queensland for six years. Try, from Iwi Harbour, had been there for eight: at Mackay for three years, Rockhampton for two one-year contracts and Bundaberg for three years, where he came into contact with the QKM.5 Kobey, too, had spent eight years in Queensland, and all three spoke good Pijin English. The Bundaberg Mail recorded that the trio, known by their Christian names, Peter, Robert and Daniel, were returning to Malaita on the barque William Manson, owned by William Vos and Edward Elsworth, with Vos as captain and G.T. Olver as government agent. The ship left Brisbane on 27 April with 181 male, and 10 female returning labourers, and four children. The ship arrived back in Brisbane with 86 male and seven female indentured labourers.6 At 366 tons, it was the largest vessel in the labour trade, three times as big as the smallest schooners operating in 1894. The ship had been built in Aberdeen in 1872. Based around Australia since 1875, the William Manson sailed regularly in the China tea trade, and undertook occasional voyages to Japan and Mauritius.7 She was purchased by Vos and Elsworth and refitted in Sydney for the labour trade in 1893; descriptions show the renovations to have been technically advanced and expensive.8 The steerage (the cargo hold) was well equipped with bunks, similar to those on the European immigrant ships. Vos had an Edison phonograph on board that could record voices: on the ship’s first labour trade voyage he used it to

5 ‘Serious Charges against Recruiting Vessel’, BC, 28 Nov 1894.
7 For instance, see the voyages mentioned in BC, 8 Oct 1879, 4; Mercury (Hobart), 25 Oct 1879, 2; Argus, 4 Jan 1882, 7 and 30 Mar 1891, 4.
8 Sydney Morning Herald, 10 Aug 1893; BC, 22 Nov 1893.
make recordings of Mackay Islanders to replay to their families in the islands, and in the islands to carry messages back to Queensland. He also took photographs and presented Magic Lantern shows. There was a large clock with moving figures, which would have fascinated the Islanders, and a steam cutter for ship-to-shore work. The *William Manson* was by far the best equipped vessel in the fleet and Vos's use of technology to attract recruits was unique.

The voyage was eventful. It was the *William Manson*’s second voyage in the labour trade, and Vos as part-owner had a large financial interest in the trip. During the voyage, Abu’ofa and his two companions complained about the food and protested to Vos after he slapped a woman. Vos counteraccused Abu’ofa of sleeping in the married couples’ quarters (when he had no wife) and there is a suggestion that Vos threatened to put Abu’ofa into irons for his effrontery. At Lau Lagoon, Malaita,

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10 ‘Supreme Court’, *BC*, 13 Mar 1895, 2–3; Alfred Dowsett evidence, ‘Supreme Court’, *BC*, 22 Mar 1895, 7.
Vos offered Kwaisulia, the major passage master, a small boat and a box of goods in return for 10 recruits. However, aware that Abu’ofa and his companions wanted to begin missionary work in the lagoon, Kwaisulia refused permission for them to land, and according to their own accounts they were forced to rererecruit by Vos. Several other labour recruits were also taken against their wills, coerced by Kwaisulia, and there were other problems on the voyage involving nonindentured females on board. The voyage’s irregularities were the most extreme since the mid-1880s and never equalled again.

Abu’ofa testified that at Urasi he took a box of his school materials ashore and then returned to the ship, by which time Vos had realised that Kwaisulia would never let the three missionaries land, and insisted that they rererecruit without returning to shore. According to Vos, Kwaisulia said:

I don't want those—black missionaries here. By-and-by they will be bigger than I am … I am Quisoolia, and I am boss here.11

Vos told the court that Kwaisulia was willing to allow the missionaries to land, but denied them permission to begin a school, and that after hearing this Abu’ofa had decided to return to Queensland. Joseph Keld, the second mate, who claimed to have overheard Abu’ofa’s conversation with Vos, said that after being rejected by Kwaisulia, Abu’ofa decided that they would ‘return to Queensland and work for three years more, and would then return with a white missionary’.12

Once it was clear that he would not be allowed to land, Abu’ofa wrote a letter to Rev. Eustace, to be taken back on a nearby labour vessel, the Roderick Dhu, which reached Bundaberg on 22 September. Eustace contacted Immigration Agent John O’Neil Brenan in Brisbane.13 The letter accused Vos of kidnapping and ensured that Brenan was waiting to board the ship when it docked. Abu’ofa repeated his allegations to Brenan, leading to charges of kidnapping under the Pacific Island Labourers Act 1880. Vos, Olver, the mate, the recruiter and three seamen were arrested on 17 November 1894 and charged with kidnapping. Two protracted legal trials ensued, the first in the Court of Petty Sessions of the City Police

12 ‘Supreme Court’, BC, 19 Mar 1895, 2.
Court in front of Magistrate Philip Pinnock from 19 November until 28 December 1894, and the second in the Supreme Court from 11–23 March 1895 in front of Judge George Harding. The case was dismissed, even though the judge said in his summation that at least two of the recruits, Erringa and Sooquow, had been kidnapped. Despite the irregularities, the jury decided that the evidence was not substantial enough to carry convictions. There is an indication that the jury may have thought the charges were ‘trumped-up’ by the principal witnesses for the prosecution, including Abu`ofa. The Queensland Government made its opinion on the guilt of the accused parties clear when it banned all of the crew from further participation in the labour trade. The William Manson never again sailed to the islands.

The press followed the trials in great detail and the general public must have read the daily newspaper reports rather like a serial story published over several months. Not only was it the first and only time that a Pacific Islander used the full legal system to challenge the legality of the Queensland labour trade, but the Supreme Court case involved Governor Sir Henry Norman, who supplied a brief on the legal jurisdiction of Malaita, after suggestions were made at the trial that it might be within the area annexed by Germany, or that British law did not extend there. The attorney-general was also called to give an opinion. Their advice was that under the Imperial 1872 and 1875 Acts, although Orders-in-Council did not endow the monarch with the right of sovereignty, there was a right to create a protected area, and after 1893 Malaita was under Britain control. Judge Harding also ruled that the 1875 revision of the Pacific Islanders Protection Act 1872 was sufficient authority for the trials.

The 10 men at the centre of the kidnapping allegations, including Abu`ofa, Try and Kobey, were returned to Malaita on the Para, chartered by the Queensland Government. Each was equipped with a liberal allowance of manufactured items at the expense of the owners of the William Manson.

14 QSA SCT/CC116.
15 QSA COL A.795, In-letter 4471, IA to Permanent Under-Secretary, 16 Apr 1895.
19 Ibid.
20 QSA COL A.795, In-letter 447, IA to Permanent Under-Secretary, 16 Apr 1895; ‘Queensland’, Argus, 4 Apr 1895, 5.
The *Para*, also a large ship at 252 tons, had J.C. O’Brien as captain and John Mackay as government agent. The voyage departed Brisbane on 14 August with 116 male and five female returning labourers.\(^{21}\)

The standard SSEC version of the Abu`ofa story is that he and his companions’ initial plan was to establish a base at Urasi in Lau Lagoon, but when landed they faced fierce opposition from Kwaisulia. Vos then tried to persuade them to reenlist for another contract in Queensland.\(^{22}\) Kwaisulia was undoubtedly just as unfriendly to their endeavours on the voyage of the *Para* as on the *William Manson* voyage. They were received unwillingly and told to sleep beneath the houses with the pigs. Death threats followed, and Abu`ofa thought it wiser to accompany Lau canoes to the beach market at Malu`u on the north coast near the lands of his own inland descent group. He settled at Malu`u, and during the first four years there Abu`ofa made little progress, suffered regular bouts of malaria and survived several attempts on his life.\(^{23}\)

Presumably this version of events is true, although the voyages of the *William Manson* and the *Para* have been collapsed into a single voyage in folk memory, and Abu`ofa’s efforts to invoke the full wrath of legal system on suspect behaviour on board a recruiting vessel have been forgotten. Exactly what motivated Abu`ofa will always be conjecture. He understood Pijin English but had only a rudimentary grasp of English; he could not have comprehended the complexities of the laws involved. Presumably, the QKM staff had schooled him in the rights of recruits, and his Christian faith gave him the tenacity to proceed. Eustace may have told him to report any irregularities he observed. His use of another ship—the *Roderick Dhu*—to carry his complaint back to Queensland was a masterstroke.

Abu`ofa eventually succeeded at Malu`u. He built a school on the pattern of the QKM school at Kalkie, Bundaberg, where he had been baptised, and local people were impressed when his garden was the only one to flourish during a drought. Abu`ofa sent many messages back to the QKM via labour trade ships requesting further help. Eustace considered joining a group of Christian Malaitans returning from Bundaberg in 1896.


\(^{22}\) *Ibid*.

\(^{23}\) *NIV*, 1908–09, 18.
but his doctor dissuaded him from undertaking the trip.24 S.M. Smith, government agent on the Roderick Dhu, carried one of Abu`ofa’s messages back and in 1899 took several Christian Malaitans to Malu`u. Although not included in the QKM ministry list,25 in February 1900 the South African evangelist Charles B. Pillans, who had worked for the QKM in its Sydney office and at Bundaberg, accompanied Smith back to Malu`u on Sydney Belle. The ship circled Malaita (see Map 10, Chapter 2), dropped off returning labourers and recruited 17 more. It landed Pillans at Malu`u on 25 March.26 The SSEC story is that he arrived totally unexpected, but Smith’s diary entry contradicts this:

Mr Pillans was expected, welcomed, and a house built for him so he is all right I am happy to say so and a load is off my mind.27

A few days after his arrival, Pillans wrote back to QKM staff and described the scene. Peter Abu`ofa lived with his wife and young daughter Ruby in a well-established hilltop house, with large gardens and plentiful fruit trees, on a stream about a kilometre inland. He taught from a school next to his house and preached at the local market every three days when the inland people came down to barter with coastal residents. Pillans reported that Didi and Loisa had established a new base several kilometres away. Busy planting gardens and building a house at the new site, they still lived close to the Abu`ofa family. Also nearby was Pillans’s house, made from round logs with a thatched roof. The church was there also, with a graveyard next to it. When the Melanesian Mission’s Southern Cross visited Malu`u a few months later, Pillans was sick with fever and short of food. The Anglicans evacuated him to their headquarters at Siota for a month’s rest to restore his health. Pillans had written to Richard Ruddell, then based with the QKM in Bundaberg, asking that he join him. Ruddell set out with Thomas Nguna, a New Hebridean, but by the time they arrived, Pillans, back at Malu`u, had died from fever and Ruddell decided it wiser that they join the Anglicans at Siota for a few months. The intrepid pair visited Malu`u for a week in December 1900 in a whaleboat borrowed from the Melanesian Mission. First they went to Pillans’s grave, then to

25 The Queensland Kanaka Mission Baptismal Register, 1902–05, contains a short history of the dates of arrival of European staff, 1903–11. PMB 1201, Reel 1, ‘South Sea Evangelical Mission, formerly Queensland Kanaka Mission, Register of Baptisms’.
27 Smith 1900, diary from the Sydney Belle, 25 Mar.
the little church with its walls hung with the same texts and hymn sheets used in Bundaberg. Friday was market day and Abu’ofa preached to the assembled crowd. Sunday was a full day of church activities, beginning at 8:00 am. Ruddell and Nguna left for Fiu, the Melanesian Mission station on the northwest coast, and then sailed back to Siota and eventually returned to Australia. Two years later, Ruddell became a full-time staff member of the QKM and he eventually spent many years on Malaita.28

In 1902, two more Europeans tried to settle at Malu’u. Frederick Schwieger and Joseph Watkinson had studied at Martin’s Missionary Training Home in Sydney and then sought missionary work in Noumea. When there were no openings they went to Port Vila, New Hebrides, where they earned enough money to buy a small boat to sail to Malaita, intending to join Abu’ofa at Malu’u. On 26 January 1903, Schwieger, suffering from malaria, met the same fate as Pillans.29 Resident Commissioner Woodford removed Watkinson and forbade any more European missionaries to settle on Malaita unless they were part of an established church.30 Other QKM converts at Malu’u also died of malaria and other fevers. Two Malaitan assistants, Fred and Zaccheus from the Geraldton branch of the QKM, both succumbed to fever on the same day that February. When Florence Young first visited Malu’u in 1904, the graveyard, overgrown with crotons, held several recent graves.31

When Anglican missionaries Hopkins and Ivens visited the Malu’u station late in 1902, Abu’ofa had four helpers, 100 followers at Malu’u and another 30 in a nearby village. The Anglicans aspired to include Malu’u in their mission outreach, and a year later Hopkins spent a month there helping Abu’ofa and provided copies of his Lau language prayer book, which met with little welcome given the difference in languages. Abu’ofa’s mission is included in Southern Cross Log reports as if it was the beginnings of an Anglican settlement. Anthropologist Ian Hogbin, resident in the north in 1933, wrote that in the 1900s the Melanesian Mission settled two indigenous teachers on the other side of Malu’u harbour from the QKM mission at Irombule, although within a few

28 Young 1925, 140–41.
29 BSIP AR, 1902–03, 6.
30 Ibid., 141.
31 Pillans to F. Fricke, 27 Mar 1900, NIV, 1899–1900, 10–11; NIV, 1900–01, 11; ‘Diary of Florence Young’, 11 Apr 1904, NIV, 1902–03, 6.
years they were withdrawn and the area surrendered to the SEM. Descriptions of Abu’ofa’s services suggest an average congregation of 100 to 160 out of a flock approaching 200. Preaching in a mixture of the To’aba’ita language and Pijin English, he had no formal training as a mission worker and used his own methods. Hopkins observed:

Peter reads aloud the hymn, the first verse at any rate, the rest repeat after him. A long word Peter discreetly jumps boldly over, others he takes gallant shots at, but you can generally tell what hymn he is aiming at. Then they sing; the well-disposed stand, the idle lounge, but if the tune is familiar, the hymn goes with great force and vigour, though of the meaning of the words the mass of the congregation can have no idea.

By 1905 Malu’u had four branch schools in the surrounding area, all run by ex-Queensland Christians: at Sototi, Tekinana and Manofiu, all inland, and at Gamour further along the coast. Accompanied by Rev. Percy T. Williams, who had spent from 1895 to 1898 in Queensland working as an Anglican missionary with the Islanders, Hopkins had earlier trekked inland about 16 kilometres to Manofiu Village, where John and Dick, two returned Queensland labourers, had established a school under the aegis of Abu’ofa at Malu’u. They found a crude school building and several houses, with 49 students, who faced antagonism from the surrounding non-Christians. About 10 of the inhabitants had been in Queensland.

We were taken first to their ‘gamal’ [village central area], which was surrounded by an enormous stockade of amazing strength. It was made of two circles of big tree trunks, 10 to 15 feet in height, about 3 feet apart. The space between the trunks was filled in with logs, stones and earth, etc., jammed into a solid mass; the whole great wall thus formed was thickly overgrown with vegetation. Here they had lived in safety till the early storms blew over.

The stockade was entered through a small, well-barricaded archway. Opposition from the surrounding people had declined after a few years and the stockade was no longer so crucial to their survival. They were contemplating shifting to the coast and had started clearing a site about 16 kilometres from Malu’u.

The existence of the British protectorate, with a small physical presence onwards from 1896, was beginning to have an effect. Several murders occurred around Malu’u in 1904, and that September Woodford arrived on his 33-ton ketch-rigged Lahloo to arrest one of the culprits, who was taken to Tulagi, tried, and served a one-year prison sentence.37

Abu’ofa tried hard to get his own immediate family to become Christians. He won over his parents and brothers Tommy, Aufi, Maito and one other, but failed to convert his brothers Gosila or Raatalo, who fiercely resisted to the extent that they killed Charlie Loisa at Malu’u in 1907. However, in 1909, a dispute arose between Gosila and Raatalo when some relatives who had sought refuge in the village were betrayed and one was killed. Abu’ofa went to see if he could help, and Gosila, angry with Raatalo, finally agreed to move to Malu’u and brought his family and several others with him. Christians took Gosila’s decision to join Abu’ofa as a sign that the old ways were fading. The QKM interpretation was that the remaining ancestor-worshipers felt that the arriving Christians were destroying the spiritual power of their ancestors.38

Labour trade ships regularly brought letters back to Queensland from other ex-QKM converts who were working to establish mission bases in their own areas of Malaita:

Not only in Maluu, but in other parts of Malayta, Christian Boys from Queensland are building schools, and bravely preaching Christ to the heathen. Their appeals to us for help have been most pathetic, and during the past year we have been constrained to undertake work in the islands as well as in Queensland.39

Florence Young Reconnoitres Malaita, 1904

At Bundaberg, Florence Young was conscious that all of the Christians in the islands needed support, and aware after the Commonwealth passed the 1901 Acts that established the White Australia Policy, the Islanders’ days in Australia were numbered. She had received entreaties from Peter Abu’ofa for the QKM to follow him to Malaita, but felt inadequate for the task. She would also have known of the deaths of Pillans, Schwieger,

39 NIV, 1903–04, 7.
Fred and Zaccheus at Malu’u. By the 1900s, there had been European missionaries in several of the New Hebridean and Solomon Islands for decades. Young maintained a correspondence with the Rev. John G. Paton, one of the leading Presbyterian missionaries connected to the New Hebrides, who was by then based in Australia. She had suggested to Paton that the Presbyterians extend their mission work into the Solomons, but Paton responded that his mission was already fully committed. Approaches were also supposedly made to the Anglican Church Missionary Society, which gave a similar response.\textsuperscript{40} After Schwieger died at Malu’u, QKM missionaries Mr and Mrs O.C. Thomas from Geraldton offered to replace him. Mr Thomas reached the Solomons alone, but fell ill and never reached Malaita. With knowledge of what was happening at Malu’u, knowing that the Presbyterians were unable to begin work on Malaita, and not satisfied to leave evangelism to the ‘Catholic’ Anglicans, Florence Young, after a great deal of prayer, decided to embrace the challenge of moving the QKM’s sphere of operation to the Solomons.\textsuperscript{41}

Ever determined and never short of finances or faith, on 26 March 1904 Florence Young arrived on Burns Philp & Co.’s SS Moresby at Gavutu opposite Tulagi. Not a woman to travel light, on this first trip she brought with her a prefabricated house, the Daphne (a 12-ton lugger) and supplies for six months. She was accompanied by several missionaries. One was O.C. Thomas, who had survived his earlier Solomons adventure and returned to the QKM’s Geraldton branch. Another was George Caulfeild, son of Henry St George Caulfeild, Queensland’s government inspector of Pacific Islands labour (1887–1906) at Bundaberg, who had a reputation for supporting Islanders when their employers tried to shortcut the indenture system. Also in the party were A. Hedley Abbott, a carpenter and missionary candidate from Ballarat, Victoria, Miss L. Ruddell, presumably a relative and possibly a daughter of the Ruddell couple, and Miss C.S. Dring. Margaret Fricke, whose sister Alice Henry had worked with Florence in China, accompanied her to the Solomons as a companion. The mother of five children, she was married to Frederick Fricke, a Ballarat stock-and-station agent who moved with his family to Bundaberg in 1886

\textsuperscript{40} It is unclear why the Church Missionary Society was approached in relation to territory within the Anglican Diocese of Melanesia. Perhaps it was because, as an evangelical movement, its beliefs were more in line with QKM’s. Griffiths 1977, 34.

\textsuperscript{41} QKM, Solomon Island Branch, address by W.H. Dibley, Honorary Secretary and Treasurer, Sydney, 1 Feb 1904, \textit{NIV}, 1902–03. Dates of QKM-SSEM events in PMB 1201, Reel 1, ‘Solomons Baptismal Register’, 1902–05.
as a self-funded member of the QKM staff. At Tulagi, Woodford had gone cold on the idea of allowing the QKM party to travel to Malaita, although he had previously given Young permission when she met him in Sydney. Florence could be formidable, and that the expedition was well-equipped alleviated some of Woodford’s fears. One can only imagine the conversation that took place up in the residency—no other woman had ever arrived in Solomon Islands with such determination, and eventually he yielded to her insistence.

Figure 5.3: The final decision to close the Queensland Kanaka Mission and reestablish it as the South Sea Evangelical Mission was made at this religious convention at Katoomba, New South Wales, in 1904. Source: Deck Collection, Black and White Photographs, unnumbered.

The missionaries on board the Daphne arrived at Langalanga Lagoon on 7 April. They visited ‘Aoke Island, hosted by George and ‘Big Charlie’, whom they knew from Queensland.

Our little vessel is thronged with natives, all clamouring for ‘toback’ [tobacco]. Clothing is conspicuous by its absence, with the exception of one Boy from Tulagi. We look in vain for signs of civilization. Some of these men have been in Queensland for years, but—there are no Christians amongst them.

42 NIV, 1903–04, 8–9; Penington 2010, 6.
43 Young 1925, 146.
44 Ibid., 147.
A local bigman offered to sell the QKM land opposite on the mainland, although he showed no interest in Christianity and suggested that they would be better served converting the inland people. Leaving Langalanga, they sailed north to Rarata Islet, where Henry Rambootan (from the Melanesian Mission’s Fiu mission) had established a small school at Laulana on the mainland opposite. The next stop was Fiu, where they took part in the Melanesian Mission’s Sunday service, then on Monday sailed for north Malaita. As the lugger approached Basakana Strait, the QKM party was passed by a large canoe containing 18 men, all wearing European clothes. They were bound for Koa Bay, carrying rations for the teachers there, an outstation of the Malu’u mission. They reached Malu’u on the afternoon of 12 April, and Peter Abu’ofa, quiet and unassuming, was obviously delighted.
The party remained at Malu’u for eight days before returning to Gavutu. Their original intention was to travel to Cape Astrolabe at Malaita’s northwest tip, where Christian converts from Queensland had established a base, and then down the east coast to Sinalagu in Kwaio, where men in Queensland had told them there was an excellent harbour, but bad weather and constant fevers prevented the expedition going any further.45 On the way back to Tulagi the Daphne was becalmed near Basakana

Island, which allowed the visitors to call in at Fo`odo on the northwest coast, where Abu’ofa and his Malu’u adherents had been visiting for some years, and to Bena Islet. Both places were judged unsuitable for a permanent base, although nearby Bita’ama was thought to be a possibility. The party, stricken with fevers, only just managed to get back to Gavutu. When Young and Fricke returned to Sydney, Thomas had to go with them to recuperate. Caulfeild and Abbott returned to Malaita to try to found a base at Bita’ama, where the leaders were willing to negotiate the sale of land. Florence Young lost 12 kilograms in weight during the 10-week trip.46

The QKM purchased land in various auspicious coastal areas. Just after Christmas 1904, the mission paid money for land at Irobule on a ridge in Malu’u Harbour. Work commenced on clearing the land and by early February the two-room prefabricated house with a corrugated iron roof had been erected on the edge of the cliff. Both local people and the Melanesian Mission’s missionaries were reluctant to accept the QKM presence, though for different reasons. Rev. Hopkins was unimpressed, and complained that since ‘they belong to no denomination it seems a grievous pity they should come to ground already occupied by the [Anglican] Church’.47 Malu’u villagers who had allowed Abu’ofa’s presence were now wary about Europeans settling on their land. In May 1905, the mission was visited by a large party from inland descent groups who inspected everything thoroughly. Their leader, Toibeu, showed interest in attending the school, at which his people scoffed, telling him it was ‘school all same women’.48

Converts had a variety of problems: Boudoko, an elderly Malu’u bigman with two wives, had begun to convert in 1903, but was faced with how to choose one wife if he was baptised. Menace was always near. Early in January 1905, a local man attending the mission was shot dead by a bush man who accused him of sorcery, and on several occasions the mission store was broken into.49

When the Daphne returned to Malu’u in late February, Abbott and Caulfeild battled against squalls for four days to sail down the east coast to visit ‘Aioo Island, near the border of the modern Kwaio and ‘Are’are language districts. That April, Caulfeild returned to Sydney for the annual QKM conference at Katoomba in the Blue Mountains, replaced in May by

46  QKM, 1903–04, NIV, 1903–04, 5–10; Young 1925, 155.
48  NIV, 1903–04, 9.
49  NIV, 1904–05, 5–8.
a rejuvenated Joseph Watkinson who had first ventured to the Solomons in 1902 when Woodford ordered him to leave until there was a larger group of missionaries. Abbott remained at his post and on 27 May left again for ‘Aioo on the Daphne. The winds were so strong that they gave up at Maana’oba and instead circumnavigated Malaita via the west coast, stopping at Fiu, Kwai, Su’u, Onepusu, Aineo and Waidala before passing through Maramasike Passage and then north to ‘Aioo. The ‘Aioo land was purchased on 7 June and the next day they set off north. The return trip to Malu‘u took only one day, which gives readers some idea of the strength of the winds that often rake along the east coast.\[^{50}\] The rough weather prevented their visiting one isolated Christian, Sam Pilate at Uru.\[^{51}\] Meanwhile, Watkinson was busy at Bita’ama and Fo’odo. A school house had already been constructed by Jonah Tonabasia at Bena, 3 kilometres from Bita’ama, and Arfiliu and others had given the mission land at Fo’odo, where a house was being built. They preached to a large group of people from the inland while on the beach at Fo’odo, and at nearby coastal Walow Village they visited Herafoon, an old chief whose brother Heelacoon had converted at Malu‘u.\[^{52}\] Since there was no consultation with the government, their land purchases were all provisional.

The Exodus from Queensland to Malaita, 1901–08

Florence Young had reacted to two Australian 1901 parliamentary acts—the *Immigration Restriction Act* and the *Pacific Island Labourers Act*—that together ensured the end of the labour trade and the eventual deportation of the majority of the Islanders. There were then around 9,500 Pacific Islanders in Queensland, but much of the desired decline was achieved by attrition when contracts were not renewed. The intention was to taper back immigration during 1902 and 1903 and to halt it entirely after 31 March 1904, with the deportation of as many Islanders as possible when the last of the three-year contracts expired by the close of 1906 or early in 1907. In the end, the process took until 1908. After a royal commission, 2,500 Islanders remained in Australia, some 1,000 of them illegally. In March 1904, Woodford estimated that there were 6,000

\[^{50}\] Ibid., 8–9.
\[^{52}\] NIV, 1904–05, 10.
Solomon Islanders still in Australia, around 3,600 of them Malaitans. By late in 1905 there were 5,380 still to leave. There was a temporary reprieve in 1907 for 427 of Queensland’s Islanders, about half of them Malaitans, who were rehired by Colonial Sugar Refining Company to work on its Fiji plantations. This transfer would have increased the number of Christian Solomon Islands labourers in Fiji.53

Woodford attempted to supervise the return process, and in 1901 made representations to the governor of Queensland to introduce more stringent searches of labour vessels leaving the colony. Starting in 1898, all labour ships from overseas had to call first at Tulagi, and a special officer was appointed to supervise the emigration starting early in 1905. This enabled medical checks, gave returning Islanders a chance to decide their final destination, and enabled a check on illegal shipments of arms and ammunition. Woodford believed that ‘not a single labour vessel leaves Queensland without a quantity of arms, ammunition, and dynamite concealed on board’.54 Some returnees preferred to land at mission stations rather than at their home passages, or to take work on the new plantations within the protectorate. Woodford encouraged denominations to establish more outstations to accommodate the Christian converts. The Melanesian Mission and the QKM, already established on Malaita, responded to his plea. The Anglicans, with their island network already in place, wound back their Queensland missions in 1906. The QKM also closed its Queensland operation, in late 1906, shifting its headquarters from Bundaberg to Onepusu on Malaita’s west coast.55 Malaitans continued to be indentured to work in Fiji until 1911, the last contracts there ending in 1914. During the early 1910s, the return of Fiji labourers followed much the same pattern seen at the close of the Queensland labour trade, although with smaller numbers, as the returns established new Christian settlements around the coast.

Once the end of the Queensland labour trade was announced there was a last flurry of recruiting, at a rate of almost 1,000 a year during the 1900s. This late Malaitan rush to Queensland secured their place as the dominant

54 BSIP AR, 1902–03, 15. In September 1903, Woodford took the extreme measure of suspending the labour trade in the protectorate, aware that the captains and government agents were flouting his wishes. High Commissioner Sir Henry Jackson visited on HMS Pylades from 19–21 October, and as a result Queensland passed new regulations to allow Woodford’s authority to override the government agents. BSIP AR, 1903–05, 27; Corris 1972; Moore 2000.
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group there in the trade’s final years. Some of these men had already been to Queensland and Fiji and were now making a second or third tour, and there were Christians amongst them. The number of labour vessels visiting the protectorate increased, with some ships making three trips in a year. There was still some violence, including attacks on recruiting vessels, and occasional calamities, such as when the Sybil II was lost in April 1902. The ship left the Solomons but never reached Queensland, and 100 people perished. The wreck is suspected to have occurred on Indispensable Reef near Rennell and Bellona islands.  

In 1905, Woodford was expecting 4,500 to 5,000 Solomon Islanders to be deported from Australia after 1 January 1907, with perhaps 500 remaining as long-term immigrants, including several legally married to white or Aboriginal women. When the Australian Government partly relented in 1906 and allowed large numbers to remain, the main exemption category was long-term residence, which did not apply to the 1900s recruits. Furthermore, some of the long-term Malaitan residents chose to return home. In 1909, once the situation stabilised, Woodford reported that around 1,000 Solomon Islanders had returned home between 1901 and 1904, and 3,438 between 1905 and 1908.

In 1906, the regular stream of returns became a human flood. Queensland mission classes continued up until the end of 1906 with a last run of students. Florence Young said that many Islanders between the end of their contracts and their repatriation ‘were almost desperate for extra teaching’ and would stay at the schools all day, keeping teachers busy. Then, while waiting in Bundaberg to go home, they were ‘unsettled and distressed’. Many left through Brisbane, where Mrs L.D. Eustace (ex-QKM and wife of Alfred E. Eustace) from the Brisbane City Mission held twice-daily classes at Yungaba, the Immigration Depot at Kangaroo Point, for as many as 300 to 400 Islanders over the 12 months while the deportation was at its peak.

57 BSIP AR, 1903–04; 1904–05, 24.
58 PMB 1290, Woodford Papers, Reel 4, Bundle 23, 8/17, BSIP Statistics to 31 Mar 1909.
60 Young 1925, 183.
Eleven Malaitans were interviewed by the 1906 Queensland Royal Commission into Sugar Industry Labour. On average they had lived in Queensland for 11.9 years: Maluni and Harry Delamo had each been in the colony for 22 years. Maluni was interviewed at Bundaberg, where he had travelled from Mackay. He had a Malaitan wife and three surviving children (the fourth had recently died). He had not been home since he arrived in 1884 and was not Christian. Maluni was bitter about the money he had been forced to spend for transport to get to Bundaberg.\(^62\) The other long-stayer was Harry Delamo from Cairns, who had also arrived in 1884. He had been back to Malaita once many years before and then reenlisted. Delamo had an Aboriginal wife but no children and did not want to be deported; he was worried that his wife would be killed on Malaita. Keeserere, also from Cairns and also married to an Aboriginal woman, had been in Queensland for 13 years; he likewise feared for her life if she returned with him to Malaita.\(^63\) Quiramoo (Kwairamo) from Fiu in west Kwara’ae had spent five years in Queensland, gone home for a year, and then returned for another five years. He had finished work, had spent all of his money on food, and was unwilling to go home without a box of goods. Another, Tommy, had only been in Queensland

\(^{62}\) *Royal Commission into Sugar Industry Labour* (Queensland), 1906, 60–61.

for three-and-a-half years, although he had also worked in Fiji. He spoke good Pijin English but had gambled all of his money away. He was willing to leave if he was provided with a box of goods.64

The main point that emerged from these interviews was that these men had been forced to pay their own maintenance once their contracts had ended, and also their passages on ships to the collection points (Brisbane, Bundaberg and Cairns) where the return to the islands was organised. The passage alone was as much as £10, usually close to their entire savings. They had no money left to buy goods to fill a box to take home and were unwilling to leave without this cargo. The Pacific Islanders’ Fund contained the deposited return fares for all Islanders, but only £5 per individual, and current employers had no obligation to pay the difference. Each Islander had supposedly been informed of this by the inspector or magistrate when he or she had signed their first indenture contract. While legal, that could have been 20 years earlier and they may not have understood the English used.65 The other element that emerged was the risk to spouses who were not from the labourer’s island. Under the more lenient changes later in 1906, those with more than 20 years residence or with wives not from their own island were allowed to remain in Australia.

The trips back from Australia were similar to the hundreds of other voyages in the labour trade, although after early 1904 it meant a one-way passage on large steamers, and being closely examined for contraband guns, cartridges and explosives. The returnees and their belongings were searched before they left Queensland, several times while at sea and once more at Tulagi. Even so, arms managed to get through; cartridges were sewn into petticoats and guns were hidden in chimneys, air vents and pump wells. In March 1903, when the Ivanhoe became stranded in the Solomons, police helping to discharge ballast were alarmed when they discovered dynamite cartridges already fitted with fuses and detonators among the stone ballast under the women’s quarters.66 Jack McLaren was working on one of the returning ships in the 1900s:

> Any roll of cloth was liable to contain a short-barrelled Martini-Henry in its centre. Umbrellas hid dismantled shotguns in their folds. A woman who walked with a certain queer stiffness was found to have a Snider rifle strapped to her leg beneath her dress. A man carried an antiquated

64 Ibid., 315.
65 QSA, PRE/84, IA to UC, CSD, 12 Feb 1906.
66 BSIP AR, 1902–03, 15.
revolver slung under his armpit, beneath his shirt, and in a pair of boots he never wore were cardboard boxes of cartridges to fit it. In hollowed interiors of caddies of tobacco we found modern .303 ammunition, and powder flasks and bags of bullets for old-fashioned muzzle-loaders. In the timber of the forepeak and in spare cable in the chain locker were half a dozen new Winchesters, and jambed [sic] in about the cargo of the hold we found some more.67

The Malaitans, in particular, pleaded to be able to keep their weapons, offering bribes of all sorts, from goods, to alcohol to sex with young women on board. The crews recognised the sense of their arguments and entreaties—that they faced real danger on their return—but had no choice other than to search for and confiscate all contraband. After being checked at Tulagi, the ships sailed for Malaita and the other islands. Each steamer carried hundreds of Islanders away from Queensland. The lessening numbers in each district led to the closing before Easter 1907 of all of the missions to Islanders.

Islanders had few alternatives regarding deportation. As mentioned, 427 men managed to transfer to Fiji, and between 1895 and 1906, 16 men from the Selwyn Mission at Mackay, along with eight from Bundaberg, went to New Guinea to join the Anglican Mission there.68 Another option was for those who returned to Malaita to settle at mission schools and offer themselves as teachers. Woodford had arranged for returning Malaitans to go directly to mission settlements if they wished. This gave Christians a better chance to maintain their new beliefs. It also strengthened the main mission bases and provided a trained group of teachers to place on new outstations.

There was a sense of sad closure in Queensland, while immense new opportunities were opening in the islands. Presbyterians from Queensland were able to make links with the church’s missions in the New Hebrides. The Churches of Christ mission had tried to widen their operations to the New Hebrides early in the 1900s, but only succeeded later. The QKM established three major mission stations on Malaita: the headquarters at Onepusu, the north coast branch at Malu’u, and the east coast branch

67 McLaren 1923, 160.
at Kwai-Ngongosila. O.H. Abbott skippered the *Daphne*, and there were 13 outstations staffed by Solomon Islanders and a few New Hebrideans.\(^69\)

For the QKM, the refocus away from Queensland also brought a change in name, to the South Sea Evangelical Mission.\(^70\)

The Melanesian Mission was strongest on Small Malaita, and had established other major stations in Lau Lagoon and at Fiu on the northwest coast. Anglican missionaries Charles Fox and Walter Ivens described the scene in 1906 and 1907:

> Everywhere in that year were seen Melanesian men and women in European clothes, men with thick black boots, black hats and blue serge clothes, speaking pidgin English, asking what price white men had given for native land, so much a foot in Queensland, most of them very indignant that they had been turned out of Australia. Most of them, if they were Christians, were accustomed to prayers in English and did not want them in island languages … For a time the *kanakas* were very important people in the islands to which they returned.\(^71\)

Sewing-machines and gramophones might have been bought up cheaply a week or two after the returns had landed. In some cases sewing-machines were actually abandoned on the beach, for no one cared to carry them slung on a pole into the interior over razor-backed ridges and up the bed of swollen mountain torrents. Brown boots and bowler hats and starched shirts and collars and ties were seen adorning the persons of all and sundry in the neighbourhood when the trade boxes of the returns had been opened.\(^72\)

Rather like the goods sold by Chinese stores in modern Solomon Islands, known for their cheapness rather than their quality, many returning Islanders had made dubious purchases. Jack McLaren described them:

> dressed in cheap finery and loaded with 20-pound caddies of tobacco and boxes filled with flimsy cloth, bead necklaces, reels of imitation silk, coloured paper, and other rubbish on which they had squandered their savings in Chinese stores.\(^73\)

\(^69\) ‘San Christoval’, *NIV*, 1906–07, 34–35.
\(^70\) ‘List of Stations and Workers in Malaita’, *NIV*, 1905–06; *NIV*, 1906–07, 11.
\(^71\) Fox 1958, 44.
\(^72\) Ivens 1918, 232.
\(^73\) McLaren 1923, 158.
Anglican missionary Hopkins, stationed in northeast Malaita, could see the good and the bad in the exodus:

On the one hand, to these men is due the starting of new schools, and in doing this they have to face the resentment of their heathen neighbours and the jealousy of local chiefs at the formation of new villages outside their control. Or, if they go back to their own villages, the distribution of the contents of their boxes, often done by force, is a fruitful cause of quarrels. Then there are the worthless ones who are ‘wanted’ for old offences, or who return only more able for mischief than before … No doubt it will be easier to judge when they have all returned. The next two years will be anxious ones.  

Figure 5.7: Malaitans on the beach just after returned labourers have been landed with their boxes of trade goods, northwest Malaita, 1907. Similar scenes occurred thousands of times between the 1870s and the 1930s.

Source: British Museum, Photograph by George Rose, Rose Stereographs, neg. 1257, in Thomas Edge-Partington Collection.

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74 Hopkins quoted in *BSIP AR*, 1903–05, 25.
McLaren, who had worked as an overseer in Queensland’s sugar industry before moving to Solomon Islands, also noted the splendid physiques of the returning males, built up with ‘regular food and regular hours’. They were obvious in comparison with Malaitan men who had not travelled away, even when they had in other ways blended back into the crowd. Their Pijin English was quite sophisticated but peppered with swear words.

The return of such large numbers of people brought advantages and disadvantages to Malaita. There must have been an increase in diseases; although the Queensland men had developed immunities, they would have passed various ailments onto their families at home. Even a common cold could be lethal to those without immunity. Most of the returning men and women brought possessions with them that circulated in the economy, which caused an overabundance of foreign goods for a few years. They returned with so much cash that one of the main exports from the protectorate in 1908–09 was gold coins worth £2,500. The many Christians among them founded and taught in mission schools. Another downside was that there were linguistic confrontations between the Queensland-trained Pijin English speakers, the speakers of Pijin Fijian and the Norfolk Island-trained Mota- and English-speakers. As Hopkins delicately put it: ‘Their attitude if not unfriendly is critical’. The men returned with large boxes of manufactured goods, which were usually distributed among their relatives, often a little unwillingly, and this sparked quarrels. Those who had left to escape the repercussions of some offence returned to find that Malaitan memories are very long and compensation was demanded or murders occurred. There were also a good number of colonial sophisticates (much like Malaitans today returning from Honiara or overseas) who showed off of their ‘superior’ ways and annoyed those with established authority. Bishop Wilson welcomed the end of the Queensland trade, which he claimed had been responsible for much of the unrest on Malaita.

75 McLaren 1923, 158.
76 Bennett 1987, 118.
78 Ibid., 22.
Great numbers of ‘boys’ died in Queensland, and the life of a white recruiting agent was often taken as a forfeit. After that no one could go near the place where the murder had been done. Besides which these ships shed tobacco plentifully, and many of them bullets too. There was little or no chance for a mission ship when the counter attractions of the labour-vessels were ever at hand. People who doubt my theory will find it hard to account for the fact that as soon as the ‘labour trade’ has been ended, every village on the coast is asking for schools.79

What the bishop failed to acknowledge was that the task of the missions was made much easier by the returning labourers. Many of them were Christians, they assisted the missions to purchase land and added their voices to the need to establish schools. The missions may genuinely have feared that disturbances would follow the return of the Queensland recruits, but the spate of murders that some Europeans had predicted did not occur.

Contrary to oral testimony from Australian South Sea Islanders today that the ‘returns’ were literally dropped off anywhere and died on foreign beaches, they were landed at the exact passages they requested. If they were in any way uncertain of their safety, the ships had to take them back to Tulagi or to mission stations. The same thing occurred in the New Hebrides.

There were three categories of returning Malaitans: active Christians, adherents to the ancestral religion who had fully resisted mission influences while in Queensland, and the much larger group who slid in between. All arrived decked out in the latest Queensland fashions. A day later, the missionaries reported, they were indistinguishable from their kin, except that they were more worldly wise. This was wishful thinking: it was an instance where ‘clothes don’t make the man’. Those who followed their ancestors tried to blend back into their families. The Christians tried to live near a school and many encouraged their families to come down to the missions, while often those same kin urged them to return to their ancestors. Both groups were hugely changed by their plantation experiences and were at the forefront of negotiations with the colonial government in the proceeding decades.

Figure 5.8: A scene of labourers returning to east Kwaio, probably at the site of the present-day SSEC Gounaabusu Village at the southern end of Sinalagu Harbour.

The man wading ashore has his belongings slung over his shoulder in a classic long Kwaio wa’i bag, its top edge decorated with white sona beads made from cone shell. He is unlikely to have been a returning labourer, and probably walked out to the boat that brought others home.

Source: NIV, 1914, 39; Young 1925, facing 46; Deck Collection Colour Slides 42b; bag description and site identification, David Akin, 3 Dec 2015.

As the Queensland exodus continued, it caused accommodation problems at the SSEM stations and trauma for Queensland-born children who were ‘very frightened of the unclothed crowds’. The Malekula arrived at Onepusu on Friday 12 July carrying 22 adults and 13 children, including some families from the Young family plantation of Fairymead. They were billeted around in the mission house and with Christian families. At the same time, Onepusu took in three refugees from Uru, a young woman, her husband and his father. The couple’s teenage daughter had been murdered and the rest of the family had been promised the same fate. They escaped on a ship to Tulagi, before ending up at Onepusu.

80 Deck diary, NIV, 1906–07, 16.
81 Ibid.
Sometimes the mere presence of the returning labourers opened up old feuds. A large proportion of them had maintained their ancestral religious affiliations and were quickly absorbed back into family feuds, while others boasted, swaggered and otherwise caused trouble by lording it over their ‘country cousins’. It has been suggested that the returned labourers were responsible for selling a good deal of land to the missions, often unbeknownst to the other customary owners.82 Many of the Christians were easily absorbed into the Malaita missions, but even they had trouble since they had learnt about Christianity through English or Pijin English and remained aloof from instruction in local languages.83 There was also a number who stayed for only a short time, choosing to extend their wage-labouring experience in Fiji, Samoa or on the plantations that were beginning in the protectorate.84

A similar process occurred after Fiji was closed to recruiting from Solomon Islands in 1911 and people were returned from there in 1914, although their numbers were smaller. That period is described in Chapter 7.

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82 Bennett 1987, 118.
83 Ivens 1918, 232.
84 Ivens, ‘South-East Mala’, SCL, Apr 1908, Supplement, 58c.
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