Koburu: William Bell, 1915–27

I wish to point out that murders are of constant occurrence in the Malu`u district and the Government have no right to fetter the actions of the relatives of a murdered man while it persists in going no further than the sea beach and will allow nothing to be done either to punish a murderer or prevent a murder. I certainly will not make myself ridiculous by telling natives that the Government wish to be considered their protector when the Government’s past and present methods assist murderers and blackmailers.

—William Bell, ‘Aoke, 27 November 1915

William Bell

When Roger Keesing and Peter Corris published Lightening Meets the West Wind: The Malaita Massacre (1980), they could not have anticipated the storm it would provoke. The book concerned the massacre in east Kwaio of District Officer William Robert Bell and his tax-collecting party in 1927. While it was a brutal act, it paled in significance when compared with the retaliation by the government. The reaction to the book was complex: indirectly it rekindled long-standing Kwaio outrage and their demands for compensation, and brought into play tensions between Kwaio people and the largely north Malaitan police force of 1927. Keesing, an anthropologist, was not allowed to return to Kwaio for several years and sale of the book was for a time banned in the Solomons.

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1 SINA, BSIP 14/43, A/DO WRB to A/RC, 27 Nov 1915.
2 Akin 1999b. The ban was the doing of the Malaita Province premier, who was a descendant of at least one member of the punitive expedition.
William ‘Will’ Robert Bell was the most significant official to work on Malaita before the Second World War. His name is remembered by Malaitans because of the manner of his death in 1927, his skull smashed with a rifle barrel. However, Bell also did more than any other early officer to introduce government processes on Malaita. His years coincide with several important changes: the introduction of district and village headmen, the diminution of the role of passage masters, the end of the beach bonus and the introduction of a head tax. His *modus operandi* was to outmanoeuvre the powerful Malaita bigmen: Bell took on the *ramo*—warriors and sometimes bounty-hunters—and attempted to subdue them, cutting deeply into old Malaita. More than any other protectorate officer, Bell was responsible for bringing a degree of peace to Malaita. Much of the final ‘making’ of modern Malaita occurred during his years. Although consequences of the vengeful retaliation by the government still reverberate today, Bell’s death caused the government to take a more mature look at its direction in the late 1920s and 1930s. Although the Great Depression years stymied many of these changes, the post-Bell years were part of a different era.

Born in 1876, Bell was educated in state schools in rural Gippsland, Victoria, Australia. In 1899, he enlisted in the 2nd Victorian Mounted Rifles in the Boer War in South Africa. After the war he was working with
his uncles at harvest time when a pitchfork entered his right hand and a doctor had to remove a portion of his palm and some fingers. He was self-conscious of the injury, and in his early years wore a glove and shook hands with his left hand. He chose to go to Fiji where he began work for a trading company as an accountant. In 1904–05, he began to make labour recruiting voyages for the company and then secured an appointment as government agent on the schooner Clansman, which undertook several trips to the Solomons recruiting labour between 1905 and 1911, many of these including Malaita. Two of his shipboard journals have survived, which show him to have been an upholder of regulations. He came to respect the tough and straightforward Malaitans, who were the main labourers recruited. When the Solomons labour trade to Fiji ended in 1911, Bell applied for and received the position of head of the BSIP Department of Labour. Because he was well-known by Malaitans, this caused a few difficulties. Edge-Partington complained:

> There is too much ‘Mr Bell’ over here, what I mean to infer is that a lot of natives think because Mr Bell was Government Agent of the ‘Clansmen’ that he is the Resident Commissioner at Tulagi.

The new 1910 Labour Regulations required detailed supervision of the labour trade at a time when plantations were expanding. Recruitment conditions, rations and treatment of labourers on the plantations needed to be strictly inspected and Bell was just the man to do it. However, Bell had no independent transport and felt that he lacked Resident Commissioner Woodford’s support. He broke ranks and complained straight to the Colonial Office. Although Woodford was exonerated and Bell castigated, it showed the measure of Bell and that Woodford, about to retire, respected him. Bell was unusual in the Solomons: he did not drink alcohol, was a stickler for what was right and was willing to prosecute the big plantation companies if they transgressed regulations. He also championed the rights of Solomon Islanders. Malaitans nicknamed him ‘Koburu’ (the stormy, seasonal northwest winds) since his temper could be sharp and furious. His other nickname was ‘Buster’, a little incongruous for such a tough government officer.

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3 Keesing and Corris 1980, 45–49; Giles 1968, 121.
4 SINA, BSIP 14/41, 1911–13, RM TWE-P to RC CMW, 4 May 1913.
5 Keesing and Corris 1980, 50–53.
When the First World War began some BSIP officers left to join regiments, but Bell was considered medically unfit because of his hand. He was asked to assume the position of DO on Malaita as a replacement for Edge-Partington. C.G. Norris, Ralph B. Hill and Fred Campbell had all acted in the position earlier in 1915. Bell was reluctant to take on Malaita, but accepted the position in an acting capacity for one year as a trial, beginning in November 1915. He was aware of the enormity of the task—as inspector of labour he had been as much in touch with affairs on Malaita as most of the DOs or the police commanders. The chapter begins with a typical quotation from Bell, from a report to his superior, Acting Resident Commissioner Frank Barnett. After taking a trip to north Malaita he pointed out to Barnett that it was unfair for people of an area like the SSEM stronghold at Malu‘u, where killings had largely ceased, to be forbidden to defend themselves against murderous attacks. His advice to the Malu‘u people contravened the advice from Tulagi and gained him a reprimand:

I told them that if the Government were not prepared to protect them that they were justified in taking any necessary steps for the preservation of their own lives. If anyone threatened to kill them and they were sure that the threat was an earnest one, they were entitled to get in first. If a man killed a murderer of his relative I would take no action, but they must only retaliate on the actual active offender. I explained to them that whenever and wherever the Government were able to bring the offender to justice that they would be forbidden to take the law into their own hands.6

Just before he took leave to deal with family issues in Australia between January and May 1916, Bell let off another blast at Barnett, providing an analysis of what was needed to bring Malaita under government control. From 1911 until 1914 there had been two European police officers and at times up to 50 police. Then, with the transfer of police headquarters to Tulagi, the Malaita contingent was cut back to one officer and 20 men. There was no suitable jail: prisoners had to be shackled hand and foot and attached to a post in a leaf-house. Bell wanted an adequate number of police and also sufficient maritime transport—he was unwilling to patrol Malaita from a 6-metre whaleboat. He also wanted freedom to do things his way, knowing that Tulagi and the WPHC did not comprehend Malaita. Bell was clearly on a collision course with the administration and was aiming directly at Barnett.7

6  SINA, BSIP 14/43, A/DO WRB to A/RC FJB, 27 Nov 1915; BSIP 14/10, A/RC FJB to A/DO WRB, 14 Aug 1916.
7  SINA, BSIP 14/44, A/DO WRB to A/RC FJB, 17 Jan 1916.
Almost immediately on his return from leave, Bell again crossed swords with Barnett. As in his earlier relationship with Woodford, his behaviour was insubordinate. When Barnett refused to forward his January report to the high commissioner, Bell sent a copy to be forwarded to Fiji. He then wrote to Barnett withdrawing any interest in a permanent appointment on Malaita. Barnett had instructed Bell not to pursue murderers unless they had been involved in European deaths, contrary to Woodford’s earlier instructions and to British law. As Bell replied: ‘The native looks upon it as a weakness and he is correct’. Barnett believed that killing was endemic on Malaita and involved almost everyone as a way of life, whereas Bell believed that in 90 per cent of the killings the victims were innocent of any crime. Although Bell had a far better understanding of the Malaitan *ramo* system than did Barnett, his insubordination could not be countenanced.

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9 SINA, BSIP 14/44, A/DO WRB to A/RC FJB, 5 Oct 1916.
This was followed in December 1916 by a letter from Bell to the high commissioner, protesting Barnett’s decision effectively to demote him to second-in-charge of the Labour Department and not return him to his substantive position. He also belittled Barnett for his timidity and obstruction:

Under the Mala conditions, I think punitive expeditions for the purpose of punishing natives as a community is as repulsive to the ordinary British mind as is sitting inactive on a Government Station to an ordinary British Officer while innocent men, women and children, are being murdered around him by well known murderers, who in most instances murder for the sake of a reward, and he is being told not to interfere.  

Bell’s pugnacious and fiery nature required that he explain his thinking at length in writing to justify his complaints, providing us with insights into his views. Here we have an aspect of the trope of the aggressive Malaitan, but Bell knew that a weak response is not an option:

The administration of Mala is quite a different problem to that of Ysabel, Ngela, and the like places, where the natives have been under Missionary Influence and Government control for many years. The Mala native is quite a different person. He is the most useful when brought under control and given reasonable treatment, but any show of weakness is fatal to that control. He has more force of character than other natives and dominates them wherever he goes. The lack of cohesion among them makes the Mala problem more simple than it otherwise would be. It is to be hoped that no native will arise with criminal tendencies and sufficient personality to bring about any material cohesion.

Although Barnett sacked Bell, he was reinstated and had to beg forgiveness from his superior. Luckily for Bell, Barnett departed and was replaced by a new resident commissioner, Charles Workman in 1918. By this stage, Bell, though he never learnt any Malaitan language, was considered an ‘expert’ on Malaita and understood the complexities of the island’s cultures better than any other European at the time, expect perhaps Anglican missionaries Ivens and Hopkins. Bell, the severe, spartan bachelor officer, became the master of ‘Aoke, ensconced in the government residency, working hard to outmanoeuvre any Malaitans who opposed his agenda.

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10 SINA, BSIP 14/44, A/DO WRB to HC Sir Ernest Bickham Sweet-Escott, 16 Dec 1916.
11 Ibid.
12 Moore 2013c entry.
Although Bell performed poorly in his promotion exams, Workman valued him highly and had him confirmed as DO in November 1919, commending him for his unswerving honesty. In 1924, he was also confirmed as a deputy commissioner of the WPHC, a venerable and senior position.\footnote{SINA, BSIP 14/15, RC CRMW to DO WRB, 30 Nov 1919.}

Figure 9.3: Three of William Bell’s police.
Source: Courtesy of Roger Keesing.
Bell’s 1915–27 years were spent pacifying Malaita, using the constabulary as his main weapon. His method was to out-bigman the bigmen. He was like a feudal lord controlling a fiefdom, replete with a small army. Eventually, the resident commissioners decided that he was doing an excellent job and left him alone. Bell was unusual amongst the British career public servants in that he was a self-made Australian. He threw himself into the task and was remarkably successful. He continued to have an aggressive relationship with his superiors, who respected him nonetheless. He also had an uneven relationship with the missionaries, whom he admired, although he decried the more self-seeking zealots (particularly in the SSEM) who wanted to destroy Malaitan customs.15

In 1917–18, Malaita provided 1,356 (38 per cent) of the 3,824 labour recruits in the protectorate. The cost of obtaining new recruits had reached the prohibitive price of £18 per head and overall recruiting had slowed, down 10 per cent from the year before. Pacification was slow: 24 murders were reported in the 1917–18 year when Bell arrived, but not one arrest was made.16

Malayta Company

Bell inherited the problems that had plagued the Malayta Company plantations since they began in 1908. Baunani and its outstations had a bad reputation, and the company also continued to negotiate for more land. When Bell took over, conditions at Baunani and Su’u were still tense but settling down. There was continued suspicion that the watchmen were somehow in cahoots with the prowlers since the hundreds of retaliatory shots never found their mark. Bell believed that the locals were disputing the boundaries and objected to further clearing of land.17 As attacks continued on both labourers and livestock, the company tried to capture the offenders and wanted to mount its own punitive expeditions. Bell recommended a more constant police presence and in August 1916 police shot four men at Baunani. Later in the year, Sub-Inspector B. Kirke

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15 Keesing and Corris 1980, 66–80; SINA, BSIP 14/57, DO WRB to A/RC, 30 May 1924.
16 BSIP AR, 1917–18, 2, 3.
17 SINA, BSIP 14/43, A/DO WRB to A/RC FJB, 23 Dec 1915.
camped there with a police party for several weeks, endeavouring to find the cause of the endless troubles the company had with the surrounding descent groups.\textsuperscript{18}

The Malayta Company also had a plantation at Aola on Guadalcanal, and established stronger communications with Aola than with `Aoke. Once Aola became a government station in 1914, Baunani’s labourers were paid off there rather than at Tulagi. The company had an avaricious attitude toward land acquisition, and although its pursuit of land sales and rights-of-way limited the access of the neighbouring descent groups to the coast, this was not the only reason its plantations were attacked. Bell concluded that the Malayta Company treated boundaries in a caviller manner and had tried to assert control over areas they had not purchased. Some of these problems related to different concepts of land alienation. Bell saw the issue clearly:

\begin{quote}
It is also certain that the natives on the small village reserves on the coast never anticipated that they might not be allowed to pass through the land they had sold when they wish to travel to the unalienated land at the back of it. Indeed, under such circumstances the village reserves on the coast would at once become untenable, for the natives must pass over the Company’s land to get to land on which they can cultivate their gardens.\textsuperscript{19}
\end{quote}

Over several years, the Malayta Company was also in conflict with the Catholic mission and the government administration over land at Su’u Harbour on the mid-west coast. Su’u was the safest harbour on that coast and the area was heavily populated. Bell saw through the company’s posturing:

\begin{quote}
It is endeavouring to obtain a monopoly of the Harbour, which is nature’s highway for a large population, so that it can hamper the efforts of labour recruiters and traders and compel the natives to accept its terms in regards to labour and trade.\textsuperscript{20}
\end{quote}

Earlier, for the same reasons, the company had argued that it needed to control Boronaasu’u Harbour in west Kwaio, and they reused the argument at Su’u. Bell thought that the company’s agreements there


\textsuperscript{19} SINA, BSIP 14/45, DO WRB to A/RC FJB, 11 Nov 1917.

\textsuperscript{20} SINA, BSIP 14/47, DO WRB to A/RC CRMW, 6 Oct 1919.
were bogus and ‘only drawn up with the object of bluffing the natives from negotiating with others’. As well, all along its 24-kilometre coastal claim the Malayta Company had failed to make boundaries clear, boxed in coastal villages, and then foolishly expected there to be no conflict over right-of-ways. The Malayta Company also tried to alienate the riverbanks of the Kwaifela, Hulo and Araora rivers, thus blocking the sea corridor of inland people, and was unhappy when Bell insisted on a 241-metre-wide reserve corridor on both banks of all three rivers. Their argument was that they would have to fence land to stop cattle wandering into local gardens, the ‘undeveloped’ land would encourage plant pests that would spread to their land, village pigs would uproot young palms and villager-lit fires could devastate the plantations. Bell forecast the future to the resident commissioner:

The time will come, and very soon, when the Company will object to natives roaming about their plantations. Fires causing serious damage have occurred among the coconuts. I have had to punish several natives for lightening fires in, and on the edge of, the planted area although the fires were only made for cooking purposes …

The full reason for the disturbances did not become clear until 1920. Indigenous activities were clearly being compromised by the Malayta Company’s land grab. What emerged was another aspect that would have maximised tension. Following the style of the SSEM, the Malayta Company was not respecting sacred ancestral shrines. At Boronaasu’u, between Bina Harbour and Kwa’a Cove in west Kwaio, one ancestral shrine excluded from land negotiations was wilfully cleared of all timber. Bell was horrified and showed a good appreciation of the nature of Malaitan religious beliefs:

Such Tabu places exist all over Malaita and are as sacred to the natives as any Christian or other religious place of worship is to the Christian or follower of any other religion. The Malaita native worships the spirit of his dead ancestors who have been great men according to the native ideas. Their sacred place of worship is almost always the place where these men lived or were buried and the people go there to worship their spirits. It is a vital part of their lives. It is very regrettable and reprehensible that such

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21 SINA, BSIP 14/45, DO WRB to A/RC FJB, 27 Dec 1917; BSIP 14/46, DO WRB to A/RC FJB, 14 Jan 1918.
22 SINA, BSIP 18/II/1, ‘Malayta Company Claims’, W.J. McGowan, Secretary, Malaita Company Limited to RC CRMW, 6 Sept 1920, 179–87.
23 SINA, BSIP 14/48, DO WRB to RC CRMW, 19 June 1920.
places throughout the Malayta Company’s plantations have been violated, and I hope that in future special care will be taken that such places are duly respected.  

Bell recommended that a lands commission investigate the situation, which is what came to pass when one operated between 1919 and 1924.

As noted in Chapter 8, in 1913 the Malayta Company purchased 14,820 hectares of Billy Pope’s land at Aola, Guadalcanal, and Talina and Yandina plantations in the Russell Islands, which more than doubled their land holdings in the Solomons.  

In 1918, the name of the Islands Trading Company appears in the records, closely associated with the Malayta Company, with Victor C. Lyndon as manager, purchasing land at Hauhui and Su’u. Having found Malaita too difficult, in 1918 the Malayta Company shifted its focus to the Russell Islands. This extension of their operations caused extra problems when labourers were returned from Yandina to Baunani on the Royal Endeavour without the Baunani manager having any legal responsibility for their upkeep or further transport to their homes, still another 72 kilometres away. Resident Commissioner Charles H.R.M. Workman neatly described the company’s attitudes:

The delay in returning the six men whom you met at Baunani amounts to a scandal, inasmuch as the Malayta Company would appear to have taken over three months to convey them 200 miles.  

In 1918, there were 107 indentured labourers and 38 casual labourers (including women) working for the company. Work hours were the same as in 1915: from 6:00 to 11:00 am and from 1:00 to 5:00 pm Monday through Friday, and 6:00 to 11:00 am on Saturdays. Reading the reports on the company, one gets the distinct impression that the Malayta Company was skirting the stricter regulations by employing casual or contract labour as they deliberately ran down their Malaita operations. Medical supplies were rudimentary, except at Baunani, although small, substandard hospital buildings existed on all the plantations. Blankets and lava-lava (wrap-around cloths as clothing) were of poor quality. Su’u plantation had only one indentured labourer; the other eight were casual employees and exempt from the labour regulations, which benefited the company since conditions were below the specified standard. At Hulo

24 Ibid., 24 Oct 1920.
26 SINA, BSIP 14/46, DO WRB to A/RC FJB, 24 Jan 1918.
plantation 28 indentured labourers lived in local-style leaf houses with
dirt floors and bunks made from split palm trunks. At Manaba plantation
there were 28 indentured labourers and 10 male casual labourers, and
Baunani plantation had 51 indentured labourers, two of whom were
married with small families, and 19 male and 11 female casual labourers.
The manager admitted that the quarters were substandard but pleaded that
shortages of labour and materials were the reason. He said that a hospital
to serve all of the Malayta Company plantations was about to be erected.
Bell commented that the explanation was weak and simply meant that
labourers were deprived of decent accommodation and medical facilities
in order to enable more work to be done on the plantations.27

In the 1970s, Judith Bennett interviewed one man from coastal south
Guadalcanal who had worked at Baunani from about 1915–18.
The coconut palms were young and he worked brushing and catching
copra beetles (Necrobia rufipes). The work hours were as Bell described.
Accommodation was in leaf houses, food was biscuits and tea in the
morning, with meat was issued twice a week and a few fresh vegetables
were provided, although the employees bartered with local villagers for
vegetables and betel nut. If labourers complained, after the inspector had
left their tobacco ration was stopped as punishment.28

The Malayta Company continued to operate its plantations at Su’u,
Baunani, Hulo and Manaba, and while it transferred most of its interests
to the Russell Islands it was associated with the Islands Trading Company,
which held land at Olasuu and Sioru.29 The Malayta Company’s land
came under close scrutiny from the 1919–24 Lands Commission,30
investigated by the its first commissioner, Captain G.G. Alexander, and
his deputy, BSIP’s Chief Surveyor Stanley G.C. Knibbs. The second
commissioner, Judge J. Beaumont Phillips, made some alterations to
Alexander’s judgements since he had left his initial surveys incomplete.
There were 23 land claims, creating a continuous coastal frontage from
Kwa’a to Su’u Harbour and inland a kilometre or so to the foothills.

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27 SINA, BSIP 14/46, ‘Malayta Company Plantation Reports, 19, 23 and 30 Apr 1918’.
28 Bennett 1981b, 52–56.
29 SINA, BSIP 14/47, DO WRB to A/RC CRMW, 4 Jan 1919.
30 The Lands Commission, which operated between 1919 and 1924, is known as the Phillips
Commission. It only investigated 55 claims out of some 300 European titles. Judge Phillips made
it his practice to hold the hearing on the land in question, which revealed numerous discrepancies.
Rather than quelling indigenous discontent, the Lands Commission drew attention to the inequity of
the land alienation. Moore 2013c entry.
Although some of this land had reached a final settlement stage, much of it was still open to negotiations between the claimants, the Malayta Company, and the protectorate administration. Many of the boundaries had not been properly delineated at the time of the initial purchases. The SSEM's Northcote Deck tried to blame this on an unavoidable lack of examination, with hyperbole (his usual style) in regard to cannibalism:

There was no possibility of going and marking the back boundary because the place was not safe, and we had not the gang; also no time; it was dangerous; other natives were cannibalistic and would kill us as readily on the land of others as on their own. The natives told us they owned the land as far back as the mountain range.  

Phillips made thorough reports: some of the land owners accepted compensation, while others wished to retain part of the land but agreed to accept compensation for the remainder of the claims. Still others refused to reach any agreement. For instance, at Hulo, Alex Kwaifiona was indignant at the claims the company had made over his land. Bell said he had reasonable grounds for anger and should not be pressured to dispose of his land.  

Phillips disallowed several claims. Alexander met with the Malayta Company directors in Sydney, who agreed to further negotiations, particularly over garden land and rights-of-way. Mr McGown, the Malayta Company secretary, negotiated further ‘apparently not without difficulty’ over many of the reserves and roadways. The average rate of compensation was 2/- per acre, and Bell ensured that sufficient land was reserved for Malaitan use. One comes away from the record with the distinct impression that the Malayta Company was a greedy commercial concern cloaked in Christian principles.

Bell had a good understanding of Malaitan land tenure systems and inheritance, and used this to safeguard the people when outsiders wanted their land. He knew that Malaitans did not understand the long-term consequences flowing from land alienation. Generally, missions only wanted to control small areas. The Malayta Company was the real problem and its methods and acquisitive tendencies caused instability for

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31 SINA, BSIP 18/II 1, J.N. Deck, evidence to Lands Commission, 22 Jan 1912, 94.
34 SINA, BSIP 14/57, DO WRB to RC RRK, 12 Feb 1924.
all of the years it operated. As late as 1925, the company was still buying land, well after they had transferred their main interests to the Russell Islands.35 The final departure of the company, which never returned after the Second World War, was a blessing for Malaitans because it left their land intact for later generations.

Mala Timber Company at Su`u

There was another commercial venture on Malaita in the 1920s, although it failed to become substantial. Neil MacCrimmon had been manager of the Malayta Company, then set up an independent business.36 The Mala Timber Company, managed by MacCrimmon, commenced logging operations at Su`u in 1924 and may have had links to his old employer. MacCrimmon wanted to build a wharf and sawmill at Su`u and proposed a deal that would have enabled the company to cut timber for 50 years. Bell said the people would not agree and vetoed the idea. The intention was to export timber via the Burns Philp steamers to Australia every six weeks.37 Acquiring timber rights proved elusive because they were no areas of unoccupied land and all land had multiple owners. The Mala Timber Company established trading stores in several places around the island and employed some of the better-educated Malaitans such as Timothy George Mahratta from Small Malaita and Stephen Gori`i from Malu`u. Several of the storekeepers were making over £5 monthly and a few as much as £7 a month.38 In 1926, MacCrimmon once more asked for action on his application for an extra land lease at Su`u, but Bell wisely refused to allow it until the mill was actually in operation.39

Malaitan Labour on other Islands

The peak years for indentured labourers were between 1920 and 1930. New Regulations on labour were passed in 1921 and 1923. In 1922, a Labour Commission was appointed, headed by K.J. Allardyce, with

35  SINA, BSIP 14/58, DO WRB to RC RRK, 'Land at Bubuitoro', 28 May 1925.
36  'The Solomon Islands', Queenslander, 22 Nov 1919, 40.
37  SINA, BSIP 14/57, DO WRB to RC RRK, 12 Feb 1924.
38  SINA, BSIP 14/58, DO WRB to RC RRK, 17 Dec 1925; BSIP 14/59, DO WRB to RS RRK, 'Annual Report, 1925', 20 Jan 1926.
39  SINA, BSIP 14/59, DO WRB to RC RRK, 28 Sept 1926.
a brief to investigate beach payments. A 1923 Regulation forbade payment of passage masters and beach bonuses, but up to one-quarter of the total wage for a two-year contract could be supplied in advance.\(^{40}\) Indentured labourers should all have been over 16 years of age, although there is evidence that some were as young as 11, and that employers were violating the regulations in other ways. When one boy of 13 (recruited at age 11) was due to return home, rather than being sent back within the regulation 21 days with his transit accommodation paid, he received no proper rations, had to spend his savings to purchase food, and then paid his own passage home since the employer was so slow in making arrangements. He thus arrived home with no recompense for his two years of work. His age was not unusual, and Bell had occasion to complain again in 1926 about underage recruiting.\(^{41}\) Labourers, ignorant of their rights, were often hoodwinked, even by W.R. Carpenter & Co. or Burns Philp & Co., let alone at isolated plantations. Many reengaged because they were ashamed to return home with nothing. Bell, the former government agent and inspector of labour, was easily angered and never minced words:

> They appear to think that the natives should be treated like cattle, and they do not for one moment consider the people who have suffered pain, and years of worry and toil, in order to provide for them until they reach a state of usefulness. The natives would not continue to propagate their species under cattle conditions and solely for the benefit of the white man.\(^{42}\)

There were other anomalies in labour contracts when labourers were verbally promised higher wage rates than those actually specified. Bell always defended the labourers, but did not always get his way.\(^{43}\)

As calculated in Chapters 2 and 8, there were 36,596 Malaitan indenture contracts between 1913 and 1940, with earnings of around £820,000. In any one year, the number of Malaitans working under indenture remained fairly steady at around 3,000. In 1925, there were 1,451 new indenture contracts, mainly on other islands, and a large number were working as casual labourers on Malaita. Most were single youths and men aged between 14 and 35. The vast majority of the protectorate's

\(^{40}\) *Planters’ Gazette* 6, May 1922, 12–13; *WPHC Gazette*, King’s Regulations no. 15 of 1921 and no. 7 of 1923.

\(^{41}\) SINA, BSIP, 14/60, DO WRB to RC RRK, ‘Annual Report, 1926’, 29 Jan 1927; BSIP, 14/60, DO WRB to RC RRK, 19 Mar 1927.

\(^{42}\) SINA, BSIP 14/55, DO WRB to RC RRK, 16 Nov 1922.

\(^{43}\) SINA, BSIP 14/56, DO WRB to RC RRK, 17 Nov and 11 Dec 1923.
indentured labourers were from Malaita and Guadalcanal. Bell knew which plantations were unpopular and named Levers Pacific Plantations Ltd’s many plantations and Malayta Company’s Yandina plantation as having bad reputations. At Malayta Company’s Su’u plantation, labourers were working more than the regulation number of hours.

The recruiting system in place within the protectorate closely resembled the past one for recruiting Queensland and Fiji labour. Joseph Dickinson was the recruiter on the Dancing Wave in the 1920s, and he described returning labourers arriving at Langalanga Lagoon:

The returning boys are now on deck to a man, admiring their homeland, and arrayed in cheap splendour. Very interesting this dress parade is. New strings of bright beads, white singlets, shirts, hats, long trousers, shorts, umbrellas, belts equipped with three or four pouches, new pipes, whistles, mouth organs. All hands are well perfumed and many gaudy lava-lavas are worn.

Dickson described a recruiting scene near Onepusu, which could have occurred any time onward from the 1880s:

Bang!!! Crash!!! R-r-r-r-r-r-!!! Dynamite has been fired on a float from the ship, its terrific report searching the mountains, that all may know a vessel is looking for workers… Many of them answered the ship’s signal next day, arriving at the far end of the harbour. A wild-looking lot, who when they surround the shore boat hold it fast, and have its occupants at their mercy, although a covering boat may be in attendance. However, one feels security with this second boat. From it suspicious movements are watched …

Excitement prevails on shore at Onapusi, as the boat heaves up on the beach. Three men wish to sign, one accompanied by his wife and son. A big crowd are down with the men and women, old and young. All is above board, although the men are fully armed. Having learnt about the ship, and who she is recruiting for, a number get into the boat, leaving their weapons on shore. On board the new chums’ names are given by their friends. Seldom do natives give them personally. They are entered up, each man touching the pen as a matter of form. He is not officially indentured until when called before Government labour and medical

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44 SINA, BSIP 14/59, DO WRB to RC RRK, 9 Aug 1926.
45 SINA, BSIP 14/60, DO WRB to RC RRK, 21 Mar 1927.
46 Dickinson 1927, 149.
47 Ibid., 151.
officers, who verify everything pertaining to each man. If under age, or medically unfit, they have to be returned home. As each boy is accepted on board, after first signing, the Captain hands him one fifteen-pound box of tobacco, one three-quarter axe, a large bush knife, and a parcel of cheap jimnacks; the lot worth £4.48.

The Bell years coincided with major changes in the labour system. The planters wanted the escalating beach bonus banned. In 1923, the resident commissioner agreed to limit it to a £6 cash advance of the total wage, but stipulated that the wage had to double (it was later decreased) and that recruiting vessels could not sell trade goods. At the same time, between 1921 and 1923, the government introduced an annual head tax of between £1 and 5/- for all able-bodied males between 16 and 60 years of age. The tax maintained the supply of labour (they worked for money to pay tax for themselves and family members), but did not increase the pool of labourers available. Effectively, the government had halved the amount of money that reached Malaita (in the form of goods), and then added taxation.49

Figure 9.4: In 1921 the protectorate provided the Malaita administration with its own patrol vessel, the Auki.
Source: British Museum, R. Garvey Collection, MM034290_33.

48 Ibid., 156.
49 Bennett 1987, 162–64.
Taxation, Beach Bonuses and Trade

Capitalism and government taxation went hand-in-hand. Implementing a capitation (head) tax in the BSIP between 1921 and 1923 had direct consequences on trade and access to manufactured goods. Put crudely, labourers’ wages, once clawed back by planters and traders selling them goods at 100 to 200 per cent profit margins, onward from 1923 were diverted straight to the government. The tax was lower on Malaita than in other areas (5/- as opposed to 10/- and £1), and not collected there until 1923. The first official discussions of compulsory taxation began in 1917, with a suggestion for taxation in the form of obligatory labour on road-making projects. Bell opposed this because the large number of Malaitan men away on plantations was the same group who would have done most of the roadwork. The protectorate was edging its way toward direct taxation, against Bell’s advice. He believed that there was not enough British currency circulating to pay head taxes, and that the burden would fall onto the inland people, and anyway, there was no way to imprison the number who might be arrested for nonpayment. Bell suggested that one way forward was to compel recruiters to pay all beach bonuses in cash, rather than mostly in tobacco as was the existing practice. A tax of 5/- per head would produce nearly £3,000 in revenue, which would have to be squeezed out by reducing consumer spending.

The Gizo branch of the Solomon Islands Planters’ Association proposed making beach bonuses illegal, largely to limit the competition for recruits, which had driven the bonus payment up to between £6 and £10 per recruit. Around 75 per cent of beach bonuses for labourers were paid in tobacco, as much as 30 pounds (13.6 kilograms) weight per recruit. In 1918, Bell calculated that trade goods valued at around £7,000 were being distributed on Malaita each year, mainly in the form of tobacco. In Chapter 8 I calculated, conservatively, that well in excess of 10 tons (9.07 metric tonnes) of tobacco was reaching Malaita each year in the 1900s. Bell’s 1918 figures suggest that labourers were returning with about half of their £6 per year wages invested in tobacco. Men, women and children in the Solomons all smoked.

50 SINA, BSIP 14/45, DO WRB to A/RC FJB, 12 Dec 1917.
51 SINA, BSIP 14/45, DO WRB to RC CRMW, 19 Feb 1918; BSIP 14/12, RC CRMW to DO WRB, 16 Mar 1918.
53 SINA, BSIP 14/46, DO WRB to RC CRM, 19 Feb 1918.
Let us try another calculation. If 3,000 Malaitan males were away from the island each year on two-year contracts, and 75 per cent of their families received 30 pounds of tobacco for the enlistment of each labourer (2,250 labourers), that is 67,500 pounds or 30,617 kilograms. Plus, if the same 75 per cent invested half of their £6 wage per year in tobacco (let us say 22 pounds, almost 10 kilograms), smoked half and brought half home, then each was responsible for 41 pounds (18.5 kilograms) weight of tobacco reaching Malaita. This is a total weight of 92,250 pounds (41.8 metric tonnes) per year, or about 2 pounds of tobacco for each man, woman and child on the island. The level of addiction would have been high and tobacco must have done inestimable damage to the health of Malaitans (and indeed all Solomon Islanders). The tobacco was in twist or stick form, the leaves wound in tight spirals high in resin, and dipped in humectants or sugars, and sold in boxes weighing 24 pounds (10 kilograms), at around 26 sticks per pound. Smoked in small clay pipes (another trade item) or local bamboo or wooden pipes, it was moist and high in nicotine. Bell knew that the need for tobacco was so great that it would be impossible to pay the head tax and maintain the level of use. Furthermore, prohibiting the beach bonus would drastically reduce the number of labour recruits. The only reform Bell suggested was abolition of per capita payments to passage masters, a system that had been in use since the 1870s. He advocated paying them instead a fixed daily or weekly wage.\(^{54}\)

In 1920 the imposition of the head tax was looming. Beginning in 1921, the £1 tax was to be applied to most adult males, except on Malaita and Choiseul, with reduced rates on Guadalcanal and Makira. Bell did not oppose taxation, and used it as a bargaining point to have a suitable patrol vessel allocated to Malaita, as well as an assistant DO and more police. It is hard to see how tax collecting could have been accomplished with less. Bell still believed the population to be around 50,000, and a 4,000-person sample census had confirmed his belief. While there was access to the lagoons and the coastal area north of `Aoke, it remained difficult to make an estimate in large areas of coastal Kwara`ae, Kwaio and `Are`are, as well as all through the centre of the island. Bell argued that no tax collection could begin until better facilities were provided. As 1923 began, Bell was warming to allowing the beach bonus to be paid in cash, and felt that, given notice, the majority would be able to pay

\(^{54}\) SINA, BSIP 14/46, DO WRB to A/RC, 1 Apr 1918.
the tax, although a larger prison would be needed for defaulters. There was little local produce to sell and the only local copra trading was in the southeast, and there in small quantities. Earlier Tóaba’ita plans to plant coconuts for copra had come to little. Even with the large number of labourers leaving the island for plantations, the Langalanga men working as stevedores at Tulagi, Gavutu and Makambo, plus the few working for the Malayta Company as casual labourers, wages would be insufficient to pay the taxes of the entire adult male population. Bell got his way, and the tax was set at only 5/- on Malaita.55

The first taxes were collected in October and November 1923 from 5,003 Malaitan men spread through about one-third of the island. There were 402 exemption certificates granted, usually because a man was maintaining four or more children; also excused were 28 mission teachers and 44 men with physical ailments. Pressed for cash to pay the tax, many had to sell shell currency at vastly reduced rates, often to opportunistic police at tax collections. Bell also revised his estimate of the population upward to 60,000 or 70,000 (found wrong in 1931 when the first census enumerated 41,052, closer to his earlier estimates).56 There was also the question of exactly what Malaitans were getting in return for the £2,700 they now paid each year in head tax, let alone for the indirect taxes on goods, particularly tobacco. The answer, according to Bell, was zero, and in fact services had been reduced because so much effort was going into collecting the head tax; Bell complained that collections consumed much of his time. The expense of collecting the tax was far greater than the revenue generated, but we must remember that it was strongly motivated by the desire to compel indentured labour.57

Over the first two tax years, 1923–24 and 1924–25, 23,000 head taxes were collected, netting £5,750. A further 12,536 taxes were collected during 1925–26, with 1,181 exemptions. Most of the cash taken in came from the beach bonuses. Twenty-five tax collection centres had been erected around the coast. During 1924, court was held on 16 days to hear

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55 SINA, BSIP 14/48, DO WRB to RC CRMW, 14 Oct 1920; BSIP 14/55, DO WRB to RC, 8 Aug 1922; BSIP 14/56, DO WRB to RC RRK, 29 Jan 1923.
56 In some cases 10 strings worth around £2/10s changed hands for as little as 5/- to pay the tax. SINA, BSIP 14/56, DO WB to RC RRK, 2 Dec 1923.
57 SINA, BSIP 14/58, DO WRB to RC RRK, 3 June and 14 Sept 1925; BSIP 14/24, Acting Government Secretary to DO WRB, 17 June 1925.
43 cases, with 34 convictions. In the first quarter of 1925 alone, the court sat for 26 days and tried 161 cases, with 159 convictions, bloated by the many tax default cases. Only five offenders failed to pay their £1 fines.58

The Missions

The tripartite division of Malaita between the Anglicans, the SSEM and the Catholics was disturbed by the arrival of the Seventh-day Adventists, who had begun work in the New Georgia Group in 1914, then slowly expanded their area of influence. Adventist beliefs grew out of millenarian Protestant Christianity in the United States in the 1860s. They observe the biblical Sabbath on a Saturday, believe in a six-day creation, and that the ‘advent’ or the second coming of Christ is imminent. Adventists believe in the doctrine of heavenly sanctuary (a tabernacle or temple) and give special status to the writings of their cofounder Ellen White (1826–1915). They believe that the dead are actually unconscious and that at the time of the second coming the righteous dead and the righteous living will be taken to heaven. The church is in the fundamentalist, revivalist evangelical tradition, with the Bible as the central authority. The key beliefs of the SDA Church are not far away from those of the Plymouth Brethren, and therefore also the SSEM. After White’s death and a 1919 Bible Conference in Michigan in the United States, the church was undergoing reform just before it arrived on Malaita. There was a new focus on education, reexamining White’s role and authority, the place of prophecies and the interpretation of inspired writings.59

The SDA Church is also known for its health care institutions and for following biblical strictures on eating certain foods, particularly proscriptions of pork and crustaceans. Some of these beliefs immediately set the Adventists apart from the other denominations on Malaita. Like the SSEM, they were no respecters of the geopolitical divisions of the earlier Christian missions, and they pursued ‘mission-planting’ in areas where other missions were already established.60

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59 Campbell 2008.
After their initial evangelism in the Western Solomons, the SDAs skipped over the Anglican strongholds of Isabel and the Gela Group and homed in on populous Malaita. They also fairly quickly moved on to the Catholic stronghold of Guadalcanal. SDA records mention a first ‘call’ for missionaries for Malaita in 1922. Various Malaitans were already working for the SDAs in the Western Solomons, including Mae, a crew member on the *Advent Herald*, and Jackie from Makwano. Jackie assisted the first SDA missionaries and he and his wife were the first SDA baptisms on Malaita, in 1926. In September 1924, Pastor John D. Anderson and his wife Guinevere began missionary work on Malaita. Their first base was at O’io Point, at Wairokai Harbour in west ‘Are’are, which caused friction because this was only 8 kilometres from the Catholic station at Rohinari. It was a crowded coast with the SSEM at Onepusu and the Catholics and the SDAs nearby. The next SDA base, established by the Andersons, was at Uru Harbour in east Kwaio, close to today’s Atoifi Hospital. Next, under Pastor A.F. Parker, the church acquired land at Kwailabesi in the Lau Lagoon as their northern headquarters, unnecessarily close to the Anglican base in the lagoon. This Lau SDA base began through the work of Simi, whose wife had been murdered near Uru Harbour in 1929, where he had been a deacon. He was persuaded to shift to Lau where he worked on the artificial islands and made considerable progress at Makwano on the mainland opposite. By 1932, there were 13 SDA outstations in Makwano. The first few years at Uru were difficult and the site was no longer in use in 1935, when it was leased to the Melanesian Mission for two years. In 1934, Parker was joined by his new wife, Dr Dorothy Mills-Parker, who began a medically oriented approach to missionary work. Converts were few and during the 1930s the main outreach was medical, throughout Makwano, and from the mission and hospital at Kwailabesi. The SDAs resumed activity at their Uru base in Kwaio, but merely plodded along.61

Bell believed that all of the Christian missions made an inestimable difference to life on Malaita. One obvious benefit, he thought, was the move to the coast by thousands of inland people and the creation of coastal villages:

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61 BSIP 14/61, DO JCB to SC, 1 Aug 1930; BSIP 14/64, DO JCB to SG, 2 Aug 1933; BSIP14/66, DO to SG, 17 Oct 1935; Steley 1983, 63–67.
I am afraid they do not get the credit they deserve for the tact they display in handling most difficult situations. One has only to recollect the miles of coast line between here and the North-west point of the island which ten years ago had scarcely a house visible near the beach, but now every few miles there is a settlement of followers of one of the Missions made up of people who have been induced to leave their wild life in the bush. These European men and women, who have sacrificed what most of us cling to, have certainly not failed in the work they have undertaken.62

Bell and the missions managed to bring peace to the north by 1916–17 and also encouraged local coconut plantations. Under Peter Abu`ofa’s influence, a local cash economy was created at Malu`u. Bell provided the seed nuts and Abu`ofa encouraged his people to begin plantations, thus augmenting the coconut trees Bell had planted to line his newly constructed north road.

Abu`ofa remained a strong force in the north until his death in 1937, although in his later years he was alienated from the SSEM and had fallen out with his younger rival Shem Irofa`alu. In 1908, Abu`ofa claimed to have been deported from Queensland (which was untrue) and petitioned the King of England for a Solomon Islands basic wage of £1 per week. He also added his name to a similar petition in 1912, which asked the resident commissioner to improve work conditions and reopen the Queensland and Fiji labour trades. He was made a district headman during 1914 and 1915.63 These protests failed, but resentments such as those behind Abu`ofa’s 1894–95 kidnapping case, and especially anger at the exploitative indentured labour system, continued to grow over the decades that followed, and would be foundational to the emergence of Maasina Rule in the 1940s.64

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63 Bennett 1987, 405–10, reproduces these petitions. BSIP 14/9, CMW to TWE-P, 23 Mar. 1914; 14/42, CMW to TWE-P, 17 Apr. 1914; 14/10, FJB to CGN; 14/43, CGN to FJB.
MAKING MALA

Figure 9.5: An elderly Peter Abu’ofa in a SSEM group photograph with his rival Shem Irofa’alu (later a key Maasina Rule leader), among others, probably from the 1920s.


Source: Deck Collection; see also Deck 1928, facing 64.

One should not exaggerate the rate of progress. In 1915, at Rokera (Ariel Harbour), 110 kilometres south of ‘Aoke on Small Malaita, SSEM missionary Walter Gibbon was targeted by assassins from Waisisi, near the SSEM and Malayta Company headquarters at Onepusu and Baunani. A ‘blood money’ reward was offered because Oaniasi had recently been shot on Guadalcanal by a white trader named Pritchard. There had been many murders at Onepusu, two in the previous year. Bell believed the latter were paybacks for earlier deaths and not directly related to the victims. He was beginning to come to terms with Malaitan thinking:

I would like to point out that it is a mistake to think that most of these murders are the result of ordinary vendetta. I find the victims in the majority of cases are women and children who are not alleged to have committed any offences, in some cases it is aimed at the family and in other cases it does not matter what person is killed or to what family the victim belongs.65

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65 SINA, BSIP 14/43, Acting DC WRB to A/RC FJB, 23 Dec 1915.
Edge-Partington and Bell both requested the right to punish adulterers and Bell began jailing male adulterers. Bell had to tread carefully between mission, indigenous and government rules on such matters. On Malaitan, the punishment for adultery, particularly by women, was usually death. Under British law, adultery was an aspect of private morality and not covered under the 1922 Native Administration Regulation. Bell declined to punish women for adultery because `Aoke's prison facilities were not suitable to detain them. Many non-Christians and some Christians wanted a death sentence imposed, although when the SSEM believers at Malu’u held a meeting they decided that flogging was the most suitable punishment. Bell had to explain that the SSEM could not make its own laws, and advised Tulagi of the issue. Resident Commissioner Workman agreed to imprison men for the offence, but not women. The need for a severe punishment for adultery, with some resemblance to its seriousness in indigenous law, was a persistent theme in Bell’s correspondence. Finally, in 1924, the government introduced a fine of £5 or three months in prison for adultery, increased again in 1929. While on some other islands the punishment was thought to be satisfactory or even too heavy, on Malaita the punishment was still thought to be too light.66

When Rev. Arthur Hopkins was transferred away from Lau Lagoon in 1914, he was replaced by Rev. Robert Simmons until 1918, by which time the mission had 588 converts in northeast Malaita. Rev. Albert Mason joined the Melanesian Mission’s Malaita branch in 1914, based at Fiu together with his new wife Gwendoline (née Child), who had arrived a year earlier and helped to found a girls’ school on Gela. The Masons served on Malaita for 30 years, and their perseverance led to the ordination of many of the early Malaitan priests. As occurred on Small Malaita, many of the mission helpers from Hopkins’s time at Ngorefou and the Masons’ years at Fiu went on to become priests: Charles Turu, Sam Sasai from Tangtalau, Martin Fia from Asiasi, George Kiriau from Aama, Jack Taloifulia, Nat Salaimanu and Henry Maabe, and Andrew Dora from Tae (in Lau), Nat Dolaiasi from Gwau’ulu, Willie Au from Walade, Edward Kasutee from Fiu and Henry Geotee. Taloifulia (mentioned in Chapters 2, 3 and 4), ordained in 1915, was responsible for the conversion of most people on Sulufou, the major artificial island. Turu was long the head of the Fiu mission, where his descent group controlled land surrounding the area that he had donated to the church.

66 SINA, BSIP 14/46, DO WRB to RC CRMW, 18 Feb 1918; BSIP RC CRMW to DO WRB, 16 Mar 1918; Bennett 1987, 277–78; Laracy and Laracy 1980; Akin 2013a, 87, 89–90, 367 n 110.
He was ordained in 1916 and died in 1922, and Sasai and Kiriau were ordained in 1934. Salaimanu had been at school at Bungana and then Norfolk Island and was for a time a government headman in Lau Lagoon before he was ordained and took Taloifulia’s place. Au, Dolaiasi, Fia and Ma’abe were younger and had trained at All Hallows’ School\(^{67}\) at Pawa on Uki Island. Kasutee was also ordained, but died soon after. Another man, Matthias Finifolota from ‘Aisaasale in north Malaita, never attended regular schools but was so outstanding that he was ordained in 1943 and served until his death in 1951. Charles Fox noted what a remarkable group they were, and that more men were ordained from north Malaitan during the century’s first half than from any other part of the central Solomons.\(^ {68}\) While this creation of indigenous deacons and priests was 30 to 40 years ahead of the Catholics, I agree with Alan Tippett that it was slow progress nonetheless.

Regardless of the Anglican ordinations, the SSEM was the dominant mission, with 11 European staff on Malaita in 1918 compared with two Catholic priests and one Anglican minister. The SSEM and the Malayta Company combined had 17 European representatives. Bell and the Police Sub-Inspector Frederick Taylor were the only European government representatives.\(^ {69}\)

The SSEM had started purchasing land in 1904 (when it was the QKM) and, as mentioned, was still doing so in 1920 even around their head station of Onepusu, where they also rented extra land.\(^ {70}\) The Catholics were slower, but once well-established at Tarapaina and Rohinari, and then Buma, they set out to emulate the SSEM by acquiring choice plots of coastal land near good anchorages. These leases were supposedly for cultivation, but none eventuated, and Bell signalled that he would grant them no more leases except for mission buildings.\(^ {71}\) Bell was always battling one of the Christian denominations or the Malayta Company over their attempts to acquire extra land at the expense of Malaitans.

The missions undertook some educational and health work, but their main object, particularly the SSEM, always remained to convert people to Christianity.

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\(^{67}\) Moore 2013c entry.

\(^{68}\) Fox 1958, 174.

\(^{69}\) SINA, BSIP 14/46, DO WRB to RC CRMW, census, 1 Jan 1918; BSIP 14/12, RC CRMW to DO WRB, 16 Mar 1918; BSIP 14/56, DO WRB to RC RRK, 18 Feb 1923.

\(^{70}\) SINA, BSIP 14/48, DO WRB to RC CRMW, 29 May 1920.

\(^{71}\) SINA, BSIP 14/59, DO WRB to RC RRK, 29 Apr 1926.
Targeting the Professional Killers

Guns remained readily available on Malaita. In 1908, Woodford thought that there were 4,000 to 5,000 Winchester repeating rifles on the island, and there were many more guns of greater antiquity, most smuggled in by returning labourers.\(^{72}\) As the years passed, most of the poor-quality and older weapons brought in during the external labour trade deteriorated and became useless. However, the supply continued to be replenished from within the Solomons, sometimes aided and abetted by Europeans but also through theft, such as two Winchester repeating rifles, one Martini rifle and a revolver and dozens of cartridges stolen from Malayta Company’s plantation on Guadalcanal in 1916 and brought back to Malaita. Bell pursued these and other firearms that had ended up at Port Adam on Small Malaita.\(^{73}\) The steady resupply of guns and ammunition made his work far more dangerous. The only Malaitan with a permit to keep a shotgun was Queensland-educated Timothy George Mahratta.\(^{74}\) Bell was aware that even the Melanesian Mission’s *Southern Cross* was a source of contraband weapons and his correspondence is full of reports on illegal firearms. In 1920, he tried to compile a register of firearms on Malaita. Six hundred guns were located in north Malaita as far south as `Aoke, although Bell believed that there were 1,500 to 2,000 in the area as well as some 3,000 rounds of ammunition. Many people lived in the central and southern areas as well, and if we estimate (conservatively) 2,000 guns in the remainder of the island, the likely number of firearms was around 4,000.\(^{75}\) One reason Malaitans were angry with Bell in the years before his death was his attempt to confiscate all guns, without compensation. In the 1970s, the oldest of my Fokanakafo Bay informants in east Fataleka remembered a time just before 1927 when Bell came to collect guns and ammunition. He gave the people a chance to shoot off of their remaining ammunition and all day the air was full of explosions.

In 1918, Bell believed that he would bring Malaita under control within a few years; by 1922 he was not so sure and felt that government influence was declining in some areas. Although Bell dealt with all incidents reported to him, his main approach was to target the bounty-hunting

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\(^{72}\) *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 June 1908, 7.

\(^{73}\) SINA, BSIP 14/10, A/DO CGN to A/RC JFB, 10 July 1916; BSIP 14/44, A/DO WRB to A/RC FJB, 9 Sept 1916.

\(^{74}\) Moore 2013c entry.

\(^{75}\) SINA, BSIP 14/48, DO WRB to RC CRMW, 27 Mar 1920.
ramo who killed purely for payment and attacked the weak. He wrote of ‘the innocent victims of a barbaric custom and of the blood-lust of a few professional murderers. Many of those victims are as law-abiding and as entitled to government protection as much as any European or native in the Protectorate’.76 Many of the ramo had previously worked in Queensland, Fiji and within the protectorate and thus were familiar with many European ways. Bell knew that until he could control them, Malaita would never be pacified.

At Rohinari in 1915, Bell attempted to begin dialogue with Arisimae, the major ramo on the southwest coast, responsible for dozens of murders. Arisimae, who was friendly with Catholic Father Jean Coicaud, was not to be found, and seemed to think that the government would not touch him as long as he limited his killings to Malaitans. Other names begin to appear regularly in the records. Bell’s attitude was that they were outlaws who should be tracked down and shot on sight, not treated to the niceties of the British justice system. Before he went on leave in early 1916, Bell reiterated that he still advised Malaitans that if they had to kill to protect themselves he would not interfere. Murders of Malaitans occurred so frequently that it was impossible to tally the numbers. Father Jean Coicaud believed that over the previous three years around Rohinari there had been 60 or 70 murders, mainly of women and children. Further north, at Onepusu, the SSEM headquarters just 64 kilometres from ‘Aoke, seven people had been murdered during the previous six years, two within the last year. Seventeen more murders occurred along the west coast in the first half of 1916. Several occurred within a few kilometres of ‘Aoke, and in most of the cases investigated, no offence against customary ways had occurred.77

Ramo Suina’o, from around Malu’u and Bitama, had been under observation for some years. He had stolen firearms and murdered many people to collect bounties. In July 1916, Suina’o decided to negotiate with Bell, arriving at ‘Aoke with shell valuables to be held as a good behaviour bond to cover himself and his cousin Dalao.78 Another of the northern bounty-hunters, Alifiu, lived near Bitama and worked for ‘blood money’ payments with a group of his kinsmen. Police Commander Campbell had previously met with Alifiu to try to get him to cease his killings,

76  SINA, BSIP 14/44, A/DO WRB to A/RC FJB, 5 Oct 1916.
77  SINA, BSIP 14/44, 17 Jan, 5 July and 11 Sept 1916.
78  SINA, BSIP 14/44, 29 July 1916.
although since then there had been four more murders thought to be his doing. Bell sent police to arrest him, which ended in several deaths and Alifiu’s escape. Alifiu then began to negotiate for a pardon, but Bell was not interested. Bell also begged clemency for men who had murdered in retaliation for murders by Suina’o. In October 1916, Bell travelled with a police patrol to Bita’ama and to an inland village to intimidate some of Suina’o’s supporters. Bell also spoke with several other murderers in the north who requested an amnesty and promised that he would not prosecute them for their past misdeeds if they changed their ways.79

Irokwato from Baegu was the most powerful ramo on the northeast coast. He had been responsible for the killing on Rev. Hopkins’s veranda at Ngorefou in Lau Lagoon in 1910, and since then had committed many more murders.80 His influence extended right through north Malaita as far southwest as Coleridge Bay and ‘Ataa in the southeast. Bell believed that no bigman had any control over Irokwato and his followers, and in 1917 began planning to visit the ramo with a show of police strength to secure a large deposit of shell valuables as surety for his good behaviour. If Irokwato refused, he intended to arrest him and bring him to ‘Aoke. The confrontation took place in April 1918. Irokwato negotiated for similar treatment to Suina’o: he provided 178 strings of shell wealth and 749 porpoise teeth as a surety of good behaviour.81 An interesting combination of indigenous compensation payments and British law was developing, with Bell flexible enough to accept that he could negotiate demands, and the bounty-hunters realising that they had to placate him.

Once Charles Workman took charge of the BSIP, much of the timidity that had marked Barnett’s years as acting Resident Commissioner receded. For instance, after a double murder at the SSEM’s Pou station on Small Malaita in April 1918, Bell was allowed to proceed on the government vessel Mala to make arrests, and if necessary to continue inland. Bell utilised contacts he had made as a government agent on the Clansman 15 years earlier. He gave the local bigman two days to surrender the murderers, then attacked, although the attack failed due to poor information.82

In another 1918 case, Bell was able to penetrate the central mountains in

79  SINA, BSIP 14/44, 5 Aug and 18 Oct 1916.
80  SINA, BSIP 14/44, 11 Sept 1916.
81  SINA, BSIP 14/44, 9 Jan 1917; BSIP 14/46, DO WRB to A/RC, 1 Apr 1918. It is not clear if these were single strings (ridi) or the more usual 10-string tafuli’ae; the latter is more likely.
82  SINA, BSIP 14/46, DO WRB to A/RC CRMW, 30 May 1918, 2; BSIP 14/12, A/RC CRMW to DO WRB, 3 May 1918.
search of Arufoofana of Nalaia who had killed Maifonia. Gone were the
days of collecting evidence and asking advice from Tulagi or Suva. Once
the police party was attacked, they returned fire and killed Arufoofana
and his cousin Furingi. The warriors were no longer laughing at the
government. Bell was a force to be reckoned with.

Arisimae and Ara’iasi of Tarapaina were the most powerful ramo
in ‘Are’are. Arisimae’s power continued for several decades. Joseph
Dickinson knew him well in the 1920s.

Arisimai, with six of his murder-gang, boarded the ship ten minutes after
she had fired her first signal. In his canoe were three axes, and as many
guns, his own, personal weapon being a short-barrelled snider. Cut into
its butt were twenty-six notches. These he no conpunction [sic] in telling
that this represented his bag of humans, and executed by that weapon
alone.

He spoke a little English, and looked to be sixty years old: was tall, sinewy,
and powerful, with a cruel mouth, and unpleasant, black, bloodshot eyes,
which took in everyone at a glance. It was interesting to watch the crew-
boys watching him, in turn, from cover …

So great was his influence over marked men that did they meet him
unexpectedly they became too terror-stricken to move. Never, or seldom,
would he strike face-to-face. His method was to stalk them with the
 cunning of a panther, striking or shooting treacherously at close quarters,
and then disappear with a hellish yell. Sometimes he would leave alarmed
villagers frozen stiff with fright until daylight, when they would discover
the murdered person, with a great hole blown into his back; shot through
the lattice-side of the house where the unfortunate man had lain. Often
a hand, foot, or even head, of the victim was missing. This had been
taken as a token to the instigator of the murder to show that the deed
was done.

Petero Ara’iasi was born in the mid-1880s, the son of a ramo from
Tarapaina. During his life he claimed to have executed 80 Malaitans in
return for payment. Like Arisimae, he was a friend of Father Jean Coicaud.
In 1916, Ara’iasi was accused of yet another murder and was paroled for
four years, to Rohinari, and to Visale on Guadalcanal. This banishment
did not last. In September 1918, after a spate of killings, Bell surrounded

83  SINA, BSIP 14/46, A/RC CRMW to DO WRB, 30 May and 8 Aug 1918.
84  Dickinson 1927, 160.
85  Ibid., 158.
Ara’iasi’s house at Tarapaina before daybreak but failed to locate him. Bell took shell and porpoise teeth valuables and other items from the house, held in pawn to ensure the surrender of Ara’iasi as accessory to murder and his adopted son Kope Pipiala for murder. Ara’iasi then spread rumours that the Catholic bishop had Bell and his police put into prison for their attack on him. Bell demanded a shell wealth deposit as surety, imposed a two-year good behaviour bond and deported him yet again to a Guadalcanal Catholic mission. Based on a reading of government reports, Jean Coicaud was his close ally in an unusual relationship of mutual benefit. Ara’iasi extended his power through access to Catholic medical aid and European goods, and in turn the missionaries received protection that advanced the work of the mission. Ara’iasi was baptised in 1922, and after the death of Bell at Sinalagu in 1927 he was appointed headman of Tarapaina for three years. Thereafter he lived a Christian life, much respected as a hereditary chief. He died on 11 February 1963. Arisimae was never as beholden to the mission, although he was baptised on his deathbed in 1947.

Bell’s surety collection of shell valuables must have been larger than any other repository on the island. In one swoop in February 1919, he collected 200 bata strings from four men because they had posted ‘blood money’ for a death. He must have had thousands of strings in his bank. We can only conjecture as to what Malaitans thought of this new centre of power, presumably based in the residency. Nevertheless, in 1922 Bell was despondent about his progress and forecast trouble ahead. He also made clear that the WPHC’s instructions on how to deal with murder investigations (attack at dawn, etc.) were unworkable.

`Aoke Station

In 1917, `Aoke was costing around £500 a year to operate, plus the wages for the DO and the police. The settlement slowly expanded, although there were no trade stores. In 1915, C.F. Swanson and R.J. Collins were granted a lease over a site at `Aoke for a store, with which they did

86 SINA, BSIP 14/12, A/RC CRMW to DO WRB, 10 Oct 1918.
89 SINA, BSIP 14/47, DO WRB to RC CRMW, 14 Feb 1919.
90 SINA, BSIP 14/55, DO WRB to RC RRK, 22 July 1922.
not proceed. In 1917, Leong Tong, on behalf of Man Chong & Co. of Tulagi, applied for land for a store, which was refused. The same Chinese company tried again in 1920 through Ay Choy, representing Kwong Chong & Co., an associated company. They, too, were refused. Finally, in October 1927, Bell recommended that Chinese traders be allowed to establish stores at Su’u and at ‘Ataa.92

A proper lock-up for prisoners was built in 1917 and station gardens were expanded to increase food supplies.93 The first Solomon Islands clerk, Marcus John Linana`au, formerly a police lance-corporal, was employed in 1920. By 1922 he was considered extremely capable and was earning £48 per year.94 Bell and his police played cricket in their spare time. ‘Aoke was becoming like any other government district headquarters.

Figure 9.6: A game of cricket at ‘Aoke during William Bell’s years as district officer.
Source: Courtesy of Roger Keesing.

Edge-Partington had always feared an attack on ‘Aoke, and 10 years after he opened the station prowlers were found under the DO’s house at night and a sentry was shot in the arm. Bell did not think the incident was part of a general uprising, but rather related to his pursuit of Šuiaisi, a murderer who had escaped from Tulagi prison and was shot by the

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92  SINA, BSIP 14/48, DO WRB to RC, 22 Mar 1920; 14/14, RC CW to DO WRB, 27 Feb 1920; 14/60, DO WRB to RC, 12 June 1927; 14/25, SG to DO WRB, 5 Oct 1927.
93  SINA, BSIP 14/43, A/RC FJB to A/DO WRB, 9 Nov 1915; BSIP 14/45, DO WRB to A/RC FJB, 26 Aug and 29 Dec 1917.
94  SINA, BSIP 14/48, DO WRB to RC CRMW, 27 Mar 1920; BSIP 14/55, DO WRB to A/RC CRMW, 5 Jan and 18 June 1922; BSIP 14/21, A/RC CRMW to DO WRB, 4 July 1922.
Malaita police. In 1921, when Bell went to Australia for dental work, he was willing to leave `Aoke in the charge of Sergeant Alick Kongori from Choiseul, an indication of the change over the 12 years since Edge-Partington had arrived in 1909. In 1920, the government considered shifting its headquarters from `Aoke to Bina, one of the finest harbours in the protectorate, but this never came about.

The days of travel by whaleboat were not over. During the first six months of 1920, Bell estimated that he had travelled over 800 kilometres in the whaleboat and canoes. Only occasionally did he have the use of a small government vessel. However, mail seemed to move between Tulagi and `Aoke very quickly, often within one or two days, and the police were far more mobile than ever before, using the many vessels that travelled around the island. They had also begun to patrol inland along the many tracks that criss-crossed all parts of the island. The first formal European-style road-making occurred at Malu`u in 1919 using no more than digging sticks and bare hands. Once the head tax was introduced in 1923, travel had to escalate considerably to collect it.

### Direct Rule: The District Officer, Police and Patrols

The BSIP’s administrative policy was based on direct rule—from the government official direct to the people—until a 1928 report by Sir Harry Moorhouse advocated a change to indirect rule following the Lugard model from British Africa. In 1922, the government had introduced a Native Administration Regulation, enabling the appointment of district and village headmen and village constables, all selected and supervised by the DOs. Moorhouse’s report was in part a critique of this and advocacy for extending the system. Bell was the classic direct ruler, but even he had started to introduce intermediate local officials.

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95 SINA, BSIP 14/47, DO WRB to A/RC Ralph B. Hill, 16 Sept and 6 Nov 1919.
96 SINA, BSIP 14/20, A/RC Ralph B. Hill to DO WRB, 5 Jan 1912.
97 SINA, BSIP 14/48, DO WRB to RC CRMW, 26 July 1920; BSIP 14/14, RC CRMW to DO WRB, 3 July 1920.
98 SINA, BSIP 14/47, DO WRB to A/RC CRMW, 20 Sept 1919.
99 Akin 2013a, 50–55.
Malaitans living on the artificial islands in the lagoons had always been easy to access, and Bell knew that the people there were rapidly conforming to the needs of the protectorate. Those living inland—the bulk of the population—were another matter. The lagoon-dwellers and the coastal Christian villages had become regular targets for inland men killing to collect bounties. Bell began to make extensive patrols through central and north Malaita. He knew that coastal patrols were ‘little better than a warship doing likewise, which we know is quite useless’ and that until inland people could experience the power of the police and meet the DO they could never feel part of the protectorate. In June 1916 and September 1917, patrols penetrated deep into central Kwara`ae and from Langalanga Lagoon across to Kwai and Ngongosila on the east coast. In November 1916, Bell led a patrol from ‘Ataa at the southern end of Lau Lagoon and over the mountains of Baegu and Fataleka to Coleridge Bay in the west, and a month later left from the same bay and penetrated Fataleka as far as Abarafi in the central mountains. The following September, a patrol left Kwai and Ngongosila, passed through central Kwara`ae and up into Fataleka, before descending back through Kwara`ae to ‘Aoke. At ‘Eri`eri they passed through an area where ‘blood money’ had been posted for the death of a European. The patrols included police, and in some cases a government medical officer and local guides, and used the established tracks. Bell also prepared a map of the geographic territories of To`aba`ita descent groups, but bristled when Barnett refused him permission to arrest known murderers residing nearby.

A police sub-inspector was posted on Malaita in 1918. Unlike Edge-Partington, Bell did not favour having a senior police officer based at ‘Aoke. He preferred to travel with the police himself, recognising that from the perspective of the ordinary Malaitan, whoever was in control of the police was seen as the most powerful, and that person had to be Bell. What he wanted instead was extra police and a small ship to travel around the island to speed up administration. But Workman insisted on the separation of police and routine administration, partly so that police patrols under a European officer could regularly be despatched to difficult areas like Baunani, and to deal with offenders such as Irokwato.

101 SINA, BSIP 14/44, A/DO WRB to A/RC FJB, 17 Jan 1916.
102 SINA, BSIP 14/45, DO WRB to A/RC FJB, 29 Sept 1917, sketch map; 14/44, DO WRB to A/RC FJB, 2 Nov 1916.
103 SINA, BSIP 14/46, DO WRB to RC CRMW, 30 Jan 1918; RC CRMW to DO WRB, 4 Feb 1918.
Sub-Inspector Frederick Taylor spent several months based at Baunani and Onepusu with a police detachment during mid-1918, but then grew ill and departed. Bell again insisted that he wanted an assistant DO, not a police officer.

Bell also continued normal coastal patrols to hear court cases, investigate murders and arrest culprits. In December 1919, one such trip circumnavigated the main island and cut back to the west via Maramasike Passage. Bell believed that Malaitans made the best police, although he had problems finding recruits. Because transport was easier to the north of the island, it was the first area brought under government control, and most of the police came from there. Compared with plantation labourers, the police were well paid, but their job was dangerous, the discipline was strict and food was poor. Police were flogged for offences and, strangely, Sunday drill parades were held in the nude, which did nothing to encourage recruiting from the well-clothed Christian communities. In addition to floggings, punishment of police offenders included being tied to trees.

Bell would have liked to patrol more and believed that the lack of a police presence had allowed murders to increase. When he could patrol he was thorough and continued to arrest people for murder. He also followed the policy he had announced in 1915 of not arresting Malaitans who confessed to having killed in response to murders of their relatives. He merely advised them that they should seek other means of redress. When innocent people were killed for ‘blood money’, he pursued the killers with the full force of the law. The size of Malaita’s police force varied from 25 to 37, the overall numbers having been allowed to increase from 1923 to 1925 when the head tax was introduced.

104 SINA, BSIP 14/46, RC CRMW to DO WRB, 2 May 1918; BSIP 14/48, DO WRB to RC CRMW, 22 Mar 1920.
105 SINA, BSIP 14/47, DO WRB to A/RC CRMW, 1 Dec 1919.
106 SINA, BSIP 14/48, DO WRB to RC CRMW, 12 July 1920.
107 SINA, BSIP 14/49, DO WRB to A/RC CRMW, 20 Jan and 20 Aug 1921.
Indirect Rule: District and Village Headmen and Village Constables

There were experiments with headmen in the mid-1910s, which were never formally instituted until Regulation No. 17 of 1922, known as the Native Administration Regulation. This signalled a change in the style of administration from direct to indirect rule, and a new involvement of indigenous officials. The first official appointments were Joe Uiarai at Su’u and Hauhui in west Kwara`ae, Benjamin Manbili at Kwai in east Kwara’ae, Sirifa at Sinalagu in east Kwaio, and Timothy George Mahratta in Small Malaita. District headmen had the power of arrest, which they began to use, although only Mahratta had the education and ability to perform the duties fully. It was a relatively cheap system: each year district headmen were paid £12, village headmen received £3 and village constables £1 10s annually. Although these were not handsome wages, leading men could now earn money at home and come to understand more about the imposed administrative system. There were falls from grace, such as Uiarai, who was suspended in 1925 and imprisoned for six months. In 1924, Bell expanded the system to include 14 village headmen spread all around the coast. There were already two police posted to outstations, Stephen Gori`i at Malu`u (who had been instrumental in helping the government gain control in the north of the island) and Harry Rafe at `Ataa (ideal, because he had kin connections in Lau, Baegu and Fataleka). Bell suggested that Gori`i and Rafe should be made district headmen.

The year before, new protectorate-wide regulations were introduced for headmen to enforce: abusive language and disorderly conduct received a fine of 5/- or 14 days imprisonment; slander a 10/- fine; and nonperformance of community service a 2/- fine for each day or part of a day missed. Headmen had to report births and deaths within seven days or themselves face a fine of 5/-. Pigs were to be confined more than 15 metres from houses, with breaches bringing a 5/- fine and possible destruction.

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108 SINA, BSIP 14/9, RC CMW to RM TWE-P, 23 Mar 1914; 14/42, RC CMW to RM TWE-P, 17 Apr 1914; 14/10, A/RC FJB to RM CGN, 22 Apr 1915; BSIP 14/43, RM CGN to A/RC FJB, 14 Apr 1915.
109 Akin 2013a, 85.
110 SINA, BSIP 14/58, A/DO A. H. Studd to RC RRK, 5 Mar 1925; ‘Report for the 4th Quarter, 1924’.
111 SINA, BSIP 14/56, DO WRB to RC RRK, 1 May and 21 June 1923; BSIP 14/57, DO WRB to RC RRK, 30 Mar 1924; BSIP 14/58, DO WRB to RC RRK, 3 June 1925; BSIP 14/24, Acting SG to DO WRB, 17 June 1925.
of the pigs. This latter rule angered people since it greatly increased the labour needed to raise the animals. The compulsory community labour regulation was also irksome since adequate footpaths had always existed, but simply did not meet the European ideal of a road. The strangest new regulation required everyone to have the DO’s written permission to be away from their village for more than two months, except for paid employment or attendance at a school or mission. Had they known of this rule’s existence, it is hard to imagine what the people of ‘Ataa would have made of it when they wanted to spend time with their Walade cousins on Small Malaita. It was bureaucracy gone mad, and an insult to the long Malaitan tradition of mobility and freedom of movement. Fortunately, it was also unenforceable in most places, and ignored.

Another proposed regulation for 1926 was similarly ludicrous: the introduction of marriage certificates issued by the DO. For once, Bell was restrained in his comments, saying that the idea might work on Gela, Isabel or the Shortlands, but not on Malaita, where most marriages were customary ones and there were ‘thousands of native women … who had never seen a Government Official, either European or Native’. But the package as a whole—the head tax, the abolition of beach payments, headmen, firearms registration, the pursuit of professional murderers, new village health regulations, obligatory registrations of births, deaths and marriages—was evidence that Malaita was rapidly being incorporated into the government system.

By 1925 there were three district headmen, 14 village headmen and four village constables. The next year, subdistrict headmen were introduced: there were three headmen, 22 subdistrict headmen and eight village constables. The government aimed to have one village constable for every 100 adults—impractical on Malaita, which would have required over 400 village constables. For ordinary Malaitans, this was a sign that the gafamanu (government) was strengthening, although it meant much more to those living along the coast than those in the interior where officials rarely ventured. Malaitans began to take disputes to the local courts, thereby eroding the power of existing leaders. This was certainly

112 Akin 2013a, 86–87.
113 SINA, BSIP 14/22, regulations under Section 19 of the Native Administration Regulations no. 17 of 1922.
114 SINA, BSIP 14/59, DO WRB to RC RRK, 8 Aug 1926.
happening by the 1930s, and Ian Hogbin said it had begun in the north as early as the 1910s, though this seems early considering `Aoke station only opened in 1909. Hogbin first arrived in To`aba`ita in 1933 and was reliant on oral accounts.116

**Health**

Bell managed to get his assistant. A.H. Studd was posted at `Aoke between 1923 and 1925, although he suffered recurrent sickness, including a bout of dysentery that landed him in Tulagi Hospital for five weeks in September–October 1923. Bell himself took 10 months of leave from mid-July 1924, some due to him as annual leave but most of it medical leave and leave on half-pay to allow him to recuperate.117 After 12 years working for the BSIP Government, his health had suffered and he needed a long break. Studd took over in his absence.

![Figure 9.7: Waterfront view of Onepusu, the SSEM headquarters, in the late 1920s or 1930s.](image)

**Figure 9.7: Waterfront view of Onepusu, the SSEM headquarters, in the late 1920s or 1930s.**

Source: Deck Collection, Black and White Photographs, 53.

From the 1910s to 1930s, Malaita was better served by qualified medical personnel that any other island in the protectorate outside of Tulagi. SSEM missionary Norman Deck, a dentist, served on Malaita from

116 Akin 2013a, 86.
117 SINA, BSIP 14/56, DO WRB, 14 June, 26 Sept and 16 Nov 1923 to RC RRR; BSIP 14/57, DO WRB to RC RRR, 12 Feb and 7 July 1924.
1913, his brother Northcote Deck, a medical practitioner, resided on Malaita or at Aloa, Guadalcanal, onwards from 1909 and often visited SSEM bases around Malaita. The SSEM headquarters at Onepusu was commodious and had substantial facilities. Dr Lily Holt-MacCrimmon, the wife of Neil MacCrimmon, the manager of Mala Timber Company, lived on Malaita during the second half of the 1920s. Although most of the Deck brothers’ services went to maintain SSEM adherents and staff, onwards from 1926 Dr Holt-MacCrimmon was paid a small retainer by the government to provide medical facilities for the wider population in her area, with the hospital building constructed by the government.118

Dr Nathaniel Crichlow, appointed in 1911 as one of the government medical officers, between 1926 and 1942 served mainly as travelling medical officer, usually on board SS *Hygeia*, which visited Malaita regularly.119 Dr Dorothy Mills-Parker began work at the SDA Kwailabesi Hospital in Lau Lagoon in 1934, and Dr Lysander Montague Maybury and his wife Florence Edna Johnson-Kaine (a nurse) founded the Melanesian Mission’s Hospital of the Epiphany at Fauaabu in Coleridge Bay in late 1928, which included a leper colony onwards from 1929.

The government records contain many references to monitoring outbreaks of diseases. The excessive tobacco smoking must have caused ill health, although government efforts to limit smoking were usually aimed at pregnant women and children. However, nothing matched the global influenza pandemic that reached Malaita in February 1919. Thousands became sick as it spread through the islands, although the death rate was not as high as first feared. Bell estimated the death rate to be six in every 1,000, although one medical officer guessed that around 3 per cent of the Solomons population died.120 The first effects were felt in northeast and central Malaita. At Baunani between 80 and 100 of the labourers caught the disease. The highest number of deaths recorded was around ‘Ataa.121 In May, Bell reported:

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118 SINA, BSIP 14/59, DO WRB to RS RRK, 9 July 1926; BSIP 14/24a, Gov Sec to DO WRB, 5 July 1926.

119 *BSIP AR* 1928, 5; WPHC no. 2954 of 1926, RC C.M. Woodford to WPHC, 21 Feb and 3 Apr 1914, S.C.M. Davies to C.M. Woodford, 16 Feb 1914, WPHC no. 800 of 1914; N. Crichlow to Government Secretary, 27 May 1926, WPCH to R.R. Kane, 15 Oct 1926; WPHC 4/IV 222/1934, RC no. 530, 13 Dec 1933; WPHC 259/1934, RC no. 21, 5 Jan 1934; Keesing and Corris 1980, 206–09.

120 Akin 2013a, ch. 3, and 177 n 72.

121 SINA, BSIP 14/47, DO WRB to RC CRMW, 7 Feb, 22 Apr and 14 May 1919.
I do not know any part on this island where I am prepared to say that a vessel recruiting therefrom would not be likely to recruit natives who are influenza contacts. There are certain villages which have had the influenza and are now clear of it, but I am not aware of any district which is clear of it. The saltwater people may now be about clear of it, but it is still spreading on the mainland everywhere. Recruiting vessels had spread it around the coast before I knew it was in the islands.\textsuperscript{122}

Six months later, influenza was still spreading and had reached the south of Malaita where almost everyone contracted the disease at some level. Another, similar epidemic appeared in the north in late 1919 and early 1920, although the cause of death appeared to be pneumonia not influenza, and the death rates were higher.\textsuperscript{123} The epidemic ceased after three years, although occasional, less drastic and more localised epidemics continued to appear in different parts of the island.\textsuperscript{124} The DO’s reports are full of mentions of minor localised outbreaks of influenza and dysentery, and in 1926 dengue fever was reported at Su’u and Onepusu, introduced by a steamer from Australia.\textsuperscript{125} Later that year, there were pneumonia and influenza outbreaks around Su’u and Fiu on the west coast.\textsuperscript{126} One task of the headmen was to dispense medicines during epidemics. Native Dressers (male medical orderlies) began to be educated at Tulagi in 1922, although as late as 1926 no Malaitans could be found to join the training.\textsuperscript{127} Dr Crichlow calculated that dysentery was responsible for the deaths of 10 per cent of the protectorate’s population between 1913 and 1915.\textsuperscript{128} Bennett calculated the mortality rate at almost 5 per cent following a 1914 dysentery epidemic, and it remained at 2–3 per cent until 1928, after which there was a lower level until rates rose again during 1937–38. Even so, Bennett is right to remind us that for the most part the health of the labourers was better than that of their kin back in the villages.\textsuperscript{129}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[122] SINA, BSIP 14/47, DO WRB to RC CRMW, 14 May 1919.
\item[123] \textit{Ibid.}; BSIP 14/13, Captain Turner to A/RC CRMW, 14 Aug 1919; BSIP 14/48, DO WRB to RC CRMW, 16 Jan 1920.
\item[124] SINA, BSIP 14/55, DO WRB to RC RRK, 4 Nov 1922.
\item[125] SINA, BSIP 14/59, DO WRB to RC RRK, ‘Quarterly Report’, 14 July 1926.
\item[126] SINA, BSIP 14/59, DO WRB to RC RRK, 5 Oct 1926.
\item[127] SINA, BSIP 14/59, DO WRB to RC RRK, 27 Dec 1926.
\item[128] Crichlow 1929.
\item[129] Bennett 1987, 177.
\end{footnotes}
Figure 9.8: School boys drilling at the SSEM Onepusu School, 1922.
The drilling practice presumably was a transfer from Australia, where 100 hours of military training was introduced between 1912 and 1929 for all boys and youths between 12 and 26 years of age. Secondary schools also had compulsory military cadet training.
Source: Deck Collection, Black and White Photographs, 55.

Conclusion

While it would be wrong to suggest that all Malaitans felt part of the protectorate and accepted modern practices, by the late 1920s there are continual signs of the beginnings of change, such as a will made by Job Maekalai, who died at Onepusu in 1924. He bequeathed his lands and possessions in a formal manner. In the same year, Acting DO Studd suggested that a Malaitan couple with irreconcilable differences be taken to Tulagi to be formally divorced by the judicial commissioner. A photograph of boys drilling at the SSEM’s Onepusu School suggests that the days of casual schooling were over, at least for some. In many ways, ‘making Mala’ was complete in a rudimentary way by the mid-1920s, except for our prescient knowledge of the murder of Bell and Lilley and

130 SINA, BSIP 14/57, DO WRB to RC RRK, 12 Feb and 5 Dec 1924.
their tax-collecting party in 1927. Tax-collection was becoming an annual event, although Bell harped on the amount of work involved for the small financial gain, and wondered if Malaitans thought that his main job was ‘to extract money from them’.131 `Aoke had become a comfortable outpost of empire. The police accompanied the DO to all parts of the island, and two constables were based permanently away from `Aoke. There was even a young bugler for police parades.132
