Protecting Solomon Islanders

When I first visited the Solomons in 1886, to make zoological collections, there were only about two white men living ashore. Three small trading schooners from 100 to 200 tons each made voyages from Sydney, the round voyage out & home occupying from 5 to 9 months, according as they filled up for copra. During my first visits between 1886 & 1889 was sixteen months without letters from England, as nobody seemed to know how letters should be addressed and arrived back to me sent via Fiji.

— Charles Woodford, 1919

Before the protectorate was proclaimed, the people of Solomon Islands lived in hundreds of small kinship-based groups with no single overarching authority. Only the chiefs on the small Polynesian Outliers could be said to have been autonomous local leaders whose hereditary status and power the British might have recognised. Social units were divided into villages and hamlets. Creating a series of urban centres, albeit small, and choosing one as the capital were decisive British actions in keeping with Western traditions. This chapter provides background on the establishment of the British protectorate over these diverse peoples and explains why Tulagi was chosen as the capital. The chapter surveys aspects of the preexisting European presence—the Anglican Melanesian Mission, the various foreign trading ventures and the participation by Gela people in the movement of labour to overseas colonies—all of which helped make Tulagi a sensible

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choice. Context is also provided on the way British colonialism evolved in the Western Pacific. Choosing a protectorate as the legal form of British territory in the islands shaped the way colonialism developed right through to independence in 1978. The chapter also introduces Charles Woodford, the man responsible for selecting Tulagi as the capital and for running the administration until 1915.

Four centuries earlier, in 1568, Spanish explorer Álvaro de Mendaña y Neira named the main island of the Gela Group Isla de Flores (Island of Flowers) and recorded that the islands were thickly populated. The name ‘Florida’ remains in occasional use and is often still found on maps. There are two passages through the group. Mboli Passage divides the two largest islands, Gela Sule and Gela Pile. The third main island is Mbokonimbeti or Sandfly Island, which is separated from Gela Sule by Sandfly Passage. The smaller Mangalonga, Vitilau (Buena Vista), Hanesavo and Kombuana islands are to the north-west. Tulagi, Gavutu and Makambo—the three islands that made up the core of the Tulagi enclave—nestle close to Gela Sule, and there are also many other smaller islets. The islands have mountainous spines and ridges and many areas of bare plains covered with coarse grass, which was burnt regularly to enable forest clearance—more like similar areas of Guadalcanal’s dry north coast than the heavily forested and wetter Isabel or Malaita.

Tulagi was the capital of the BSIP between 1897 and 1942. In 1942, the Japanese southern push in World War II (also known as the Pacific War) overran the northern and central islands of the archipelago. The British retreated and, after a short Japanese interregnum, the Allies—primarily the United States—gained control of Tulagi. Because the Pacific War destroyed the infrastructure of the Tulagi enclave, the WPHC had to make decisions about the site of the postwar capital. At the end of the war, the WPHC decided to develop a new capital on Guadalcanal. There were three reasons for the choice. First, Tulagi was typical of other small Pacific towns such as Levuka and Samarai, which began in the nineteenth century when transport was by ship. They were located on narrow strips of coastal land or small islands, which later proved unsuitable for expansion into modern cities, which required space for urban development and

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3 Fox 1955, 3.
4 Roe 1993, 17.
airfields. These old Pacific towns became anachronisms—colonial backwaters from another era. The second reason related to the new American facilities available on Guadalcanal, which stretched along the northern coast from Point Cruz east to airfields constructed on Levers’ Kukum estate. The American infrastructure—five airfields and a large military base—made the choice of Honiara logical. Third, Honiara abuts Guadalcanal Plains, the largest area of flat land in the nation and one of the largest areas of well-watered land suitable for agriculture in any Pacific island country. The move to Honiara was inevitable and, as a result, Tulagi forever lost its centrality as the main government and commercial base for Solomon Islands.

Plate 1.1 A hand-coloured lantern slide of the Gela Group, probably from a 1906 photograph
Source: British Museum (BM), Melanesian Mission Collection.
Plate 1.2 View from the end of Sandfly Passage, looking out to Guadalcanal, 1973
Source: Brian Taylor Collection.

Plate 1.3 A panoramic view from Port Purvis showing Gavutu and Tulagi islands in the distance, 1906
Source: National Archives of Solomon Islands (NASI), Anglican Church of Melanesia (ACOM) Collection, J.W. Beattie Collection.
Tulagi and the Gela Group

Map 1.1 The Tulagi enclave in the early 1940s, based around Tulagi and Gavutu harbours off Gela Sule

Between Gela Sule and Gela Pile, Port Purvis and Utuha (also Utaha) or Mboi Passage led through to Siota, the early headquarters of the Anglican Melanesian Mission. Tulagi, Gavutu and Makambo formed the core area, with an Anglican base and, from 1911, a school on Bungana Island, plus a lighthouse. In the early 1940s, Taroaniara on Gela Sule became the new Anglican headquarters, with an interregnum during the Japanese invasion in 1942, then continuing until 1945. In 1941, Tanambogo Island was joined to Gavutu as part of a seaplane base.

Source: Cartography by Vincent Verheyen.

Charles Woodford had multiple motivations in 1896 when he chose Tulagi as the WPHC headquarters for the BSIP. European port communities in the Pacific Islands often owed their origins to traders and missionaries, with the government bases added later. The situation in the Gela Group was similar, as the trading station on neighbouring Gavutu Island preceded the settlement on Tulagi and Christianity was well established in the group, where missionary ‘occupation’ dated back

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5 Ralston 2014.
to the 1860s. These neighbouring trading and missionary bases made establishing Tulagi much easier, as did the participation of Gela men in the external labour trade, which, after a rough beginning in the early 1870s, also assisted by exposing the Gela people to labour away from home and its recompense in the form of ‘trade goods’—the products of European technology. The Tulagi enclave became the centre of commercial activity in the protectorate and Tulagi Island became the centre for the administration of all laws and regulations, licences, labour recruiting, land acquisition and policing. Thousands of labourers were signed on there or passed through when they ended their contracts. Tulagi became the first official port of entry in the protectorate, which forced overseas shipping to make the island their initial port of call. The laws and regulations all emanated from Tulagi and, apart from the district officers, all the protectorate government’s staff lived there. The island became the centre of an important port complex for the Melanesian islands. However, Tulagi was always an extension of the WPHC, which had its headquarters in Suva, Fiji.

The Gela language has three dialect variations and has its origins in Austronesian—the language family widely dispersed throughout maritime South-East Asia, Madagascar and the islands of the Pacific Ocean, comprising about one-fifth of the world’s languages. Austronesian speakers arrived in Solomon Islands several thousand years ago. Bughotu, an Austronesian language from Isabel Island, was also spoken in the small islands around Buena Vista to the north-west. The Gela Group is positioned geographically between Isabel, the Russells, Malaita, Guadalcanal and Savo. Its people have longstanding language, kinship, trade and raiding relationships with these surrounding islands. The Gela language is understood and spoken on Savo and in Russell Islands, where the main languages are of earlier (non-Austronesian) origin. It is also understood on the southern coast of Isabel and along the northern coast of Guadalcanal, which has strong kinship links with the Gela people. Central-west Malaita also has a complex relationship with residents of the Gela Group. The inhabitants of the artificial islands in Malaita’s Langalanga Lagoon obtained shells for wealth manufacture from Gela and the Gela people also traded pigs with the Langalanga.
Plate 1.4 Longapolo village, Gela Group, 1906
Source: NASI, ACOM Collection, J.W. Beattie Collection.

Plate 1.5 Kombe village, Gela Group, 1906
Source: NASI, ACOM Collection, J.W. Beattie Collection.
The first sustained contact between European explorers, traders and whalers and the peoples of Solomon Islands began in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The earliest substantial foreign contact with Gela came later, when the Anglican Melanesian Mission began taking young men away to be trained as pastors. After a few years, they were returned for a few months’ break, then picked up again for further education. The full process took around seven years. Bishop John Patteson first visited Gela in 1862, a year after his consecration. In 1866, Charles Sapibuana from Gela was one of the last pupils to be taken to Kohimarama, the Melanesian Mission’s early headquarters in Auckland, New Zealand. Kohimarama failed because its climate was too cold for men and women from tropical islands and it was too far away for easy communications with home. The next year, Sapibuana was transferred to the new headquarters at St Barnabas’s College on Norfolk Island. Charles Brooke and Joe Atkin—both ordained on Norfolk Island in 1867—first visited Mboli Passage that year. From 1868, Brooke was based at Mboli for a few months each year. Conversions were slow because of hostilities caused in the early 1870s by kidnapping of labour for plantations in Queensland and Fiji, which led to the *Lavinia* massacre in 1872.6

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6 The crew of the trading schooner *Lavinia* was massacred at Gela in 1872 while the ship was anchored at Tiba collecting bêche-de-mer. The captain was away in a boat and some crew members were ashore. All onshore were killed. Pathea, an early Melanesian Mission student who had travelled to New Zealand, was one of the leaders of the attack. Another participant, Musua, was the brother of Charles Sapibuana. Moore 2013, entry for *Lavinia* Massacre; *Southern Cross Log* [hereinafter *SCL*], 15 August 1898, 5.
Plate 1.7 St Barnabas’s College, Norfolk Island, where the early Gela pastors were trained, 1870s
Source: Penny (1888: 30).

Plate 1.8 Siota Melanesian Mission house, Gela Group, 1906
Source: NASI, ACOM Collection, J.W. Beattie Collection.
Brooke was joined by New Hebrideans Tom Ulga from Mota Island and Walter Woser from Motlav Island. All three learned the Gela language and Brooke wrote a detailed description of life on Gela between 1867 and 1874, before he retired to England in disgrace for sexual misdeeds. The first Gela-language prayer book was published in 1873. Permanent village schools were established, a few years later, at Polomuhu (in Mboli Passage), with Dudly Laukoma as pastor, and at Langgo (in the Gaeta district on the south-western coast of Gela Sule), where Charles Sapibuana was the pastor. Reverend Alfred Penny, who replaced Brooke in 1876, conducted the first baptisms on Gela in 1879. Anglican missionaries made further progress after a violent incident involving HMS Sandfly in 1880, when three English sailors were beheaded at Gaeta. Britain sent HMS Emerald and HMS Cormorant on a savage punitive expedition, destroying villages, canoes and crops and strategically sparing only Langgo village. Bishop John Selwyn helped negotiate an end to naval retaliation. He convinced ‘bigman’ Kalekona to give up the culprits; three were executed, although Kalekona’s son Vuria, who had also been involved, was spared. Kalekona was humiliated. The British wrath was remembered, and the mission prospered from it.

Kalekona converted to Anglicanism in 1882, advising his people to destroy ancestral sacred objects. Sapibuana’s congregation grew to 115, and he became a deacon in 1882—the first Solomon Islander to reach this level in the Melanesian Mission. Penny learnt the Gela language and translated the four Gospels and the Book of Acts. By 1884, there had been 600 baptisms in the Gela Group, rising to 1,000 two years later. The mission claimed in 1896 that 3,500 out of a total Gela population of 4,000 had become Christians. While the depth of the widespread conversion can be doubted, and ‘backsliding’ was obvious 10 years later, it was a significant change. One consequence was that the power of the local bigmen was partly usurped by the Norfolk Island–trained mission pastors who often overstepped their authority. To counter this, Reverend John H. Plant, who replaced Penny in 1887, introduced a Vaukolu or ‘meeting’, which functioned as an annual assembly for Anglican leaders.

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8 Penny 1887, 181–84.
10 Whiteman 1983, 142.
11 Lawrence 2014, 142–46.
throughout the central Solomons. In selecting the Gela Group as the centre for administration of the protectorate, the WPHC was aware of the progress of missionary work and the beginnings of a process of collective consultation. The Vaukolu continued to operate into the early twentieth century, although by then its purpose was more social than administrative. The protectorate government took it over and quietly sidelined its communal parliamentary functions. By 1908, its membership was limited to chiefs, priests, pastors and teachers.\[12\]

Plate 1.9 The Melanesian Mission’s Vaukolu congress at Honggo village, Gela Group, 1906
Source: NASI, ACOM Collection, J.W. Beattie Collection.

\[12\] Hilliard 1978, 95; Fox 1958, 42–43, 184; SCL, January 1901, 113, October 1902, 59; Whiteman 1983, 143–44.
Plate 1.10 The Melanesian Mission’s *Vaukolu* congress at Honggo, 1906
Source: NASI, ACOM Collection, J.W. Beattie Collection.

Plate 1.11 The crowd listening to proceedings at the Melanesian Mission’s *Vaukolu* congress at Honggo, 1906
Resident commissioner Charles Woodford is seated at the table, wearing his uniform and pith helmet.
Source: NASI, ACOM Collection, J.W. Beattie Collection.
Another advantage of Gela was St Luke’s School, the first permanent educational institution in the protectorate, which was established at Siota at the northern end of Mboli Passage. Reverend Richard Comins purchased land for the school in 1893. It opened three years later and, by the next year, had 47 male students. The pattern—one that continued in many Solomon Islands schools—was for students to work in gardens to produce food before and after attending classes. Comins ran the school for half the year and Dr Reverend Henry Welchman took over during the other half. English, rather than Mota (the usual lingua franca of the diocese), was used. The school’s site was unhealthy—too close to swamps and mangroves—and four years after it opened a dysentery epidemic killed 11 students and made Welchman very ill. The school was closed.

Plate 1.12 The Melanesian Mission church at Longapolo village, Gela Group, 1906
Source: NASI, ACOM Collection, J.W. Beattie Collection.

Plate 1.13 The Melanesian Mission church at Kombe, Gela Group, 1906
Source: NASI, ACOM Collection, J.W. Beattie Collection.

Plate 1.14 View of Bungana Island, the site of an early Melanesian Mission school, and the Tulagi lighthouse, Gela Group, 1906
Source: NASI, ACOM Collection, J.W. Beattie Collection.
The Gela Group (along with Isabel Island) was the most fully Christian (Anglican) area in Solomon Islands. Even today, Central Islands Province remains 80 per cent Anglican. In 1895, Siota became the first headquarters of the Melanesian Mission in Solomon Islands. A few years later, the Gela Group had 33 schools and almost 100 pastors and teachers. There were about 20 white missionaries based at Siota, mostly priests and pastors or lay teachers, as well as two indigenous deacons—Reuben Bula and Alfred Lobu—supervised by Reverend C.W. Browning. Siota, Honggo and Bungana (close to Tulagi) became the main Gela mission bases. Tulagi was supported by the neighbouring Anglican developments. Each augmented the other.14

Foreign traders had also been operating in the central Solomons since the 1860s and 1870s. Joseph (‘Portuguese Joe’) Emmanuel traded around the Gela Group and Savo during the final decades of the nineteenth century, as did Norwegians Lars Nielsen and Oscar Svensen. Nielsen was the best-known Gela trader. He was shipwrecked in Bougainville Strait in about 1875, as was Frank Wickham, another long-time resident of the Solomons, who is mentioned in Chapter 6.15 Both men worked for trader Alexander Ferguson16 at Roviana Lagoon, New Georgia, until each struck out on his own. Between 1877 and 1880, Nielsen traded for Ferguson on Savo Island. He and his partners later purchased 8.4-hectare Gavutu Island, as well as nearby Bara Island.17

Gela people began trading local produce in return for Western manufactured goods. Once the mission and commercial bases began, and the Tulagi enclave was established, the surrounding Gela Islanders became the primary providers of local foodstuffs—vegetables, fruit, pigs and fish—for the European and Chinese communities. Dozens of Gela villages and hamlets were within easy reach of Tulagi. The foreign presence was a ‘windfall’ for the Gela people because it gave them access to large quantities of European goods. By contrast, nearby Malaita had no direct access to trade goods until its men entered the external Pacific labour trade from the 1870s and 1880s.18 Just as the Melanesian Mission bases and the traders familiarised Gela people with foreign ways, so too did

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14 Fox 1958, 60, 68, 225–26. Siota was destroyed by the Japanese during the war.
16 ibid., 198–201.
17 ibid., 68; Bennett 1987, 25, 82.
proximity to Tulagi, Gavutu, Makambo and Bungana. The local people began to produce their own copra, selling it to traders, and, during the 1930s when copra prices were low, Gela villagers also collected and sold trochus shell.19

Woodford was very familiar with the Gela Group. In 1888, while a naturalist, he chose Gavutu as one of the bases for his explorations and travelled on Nielsen’s ketch Amelie. Nielsen built up his trading station and small copra plantation on Gavutu, where he lived with his Malaitan wife. There was a store and a comfortable house. He also purchased other trading vessels and had a contract to supply coal and water to British naval ships—services that were soon extended to commercial ships. By 1897, Nielsen had added to the existing slender sand causeway joining Gavutu to neighbouring Tanambogo Island, which protected his harbour and increased his access to land. He became prosperous, and owned a 25-ton schooner, Narova, and a 15-ton cutter, Rubiana.20 Nielsen helped all the early Christian missions to become established. One of the early photographs from Gavutu—said to have been taken in 1890—is of Nielsen, bearded and middle-aged, with his employees working in the background. In 1897, Gavutu was well established, with a comfortable house in a fenced paddock, a small copra plantation and shed, a trading boat and a causeway to Tanambogo.21 Oscar Svensen (also known as Captain Marau), the other prominent Norwegian trader, purchased Gavutu and other assets from Nielsen in 1903.22 Florence Young, from the Queensland Kanaka Mission (which later became the South Sea Evangelical Mission/Church), first visited Tulagi and Gavutu in 1904 and provided a description of Gavutu. Svensen had installed 18 huge open water tanks, used to provision ships. His house had two levels under an unlined single gable-shaped ripple-iron roof. The ground floor contained a store, with three rooms above, all of which had lead floors to stop water leakage into the commercial area below. The core of the house was surrounded by wide verandahs and nearby there was a palm-leaf kitchen

19 Bennett 1987, 246.
20 Lawrence 2014, 187.
21 ibid., 187.
22 Golden 1993, 68–70; Bennett 1981. Nielsen became unwell, sold his properties and returned to Norway. In about 1902, he offered to sell his holdings to Burns Philp and Company (BP) for £2,500, which they declined. He then sold out to Oscar Svensen for £3,000. The next year, Svensen offered the Nielsen properties to BP for £10,000, which they also declined, later regretting their reticence when Svensen sold his total assets to Levers for £40,000. BP lost its commercial advantage and in 1908 hurriedly purchased nearby Makambo Island.
with an earthen floor.\textsuperscript{23} Several early photographs of Gavutu indicate that the trading station grew rapidly and became an established commercial venture with a substantial timber wharf.\textsuperscript{24}

Plate 1.15 Gavutu Island, viewed from Halvo, showing fishing platforms, 1906
Source: NASI, ACOM Collection, J.W. Beattie Collection.

As already noted, the Gela Group also supplied labour for indenture in overseas colonies, particularly Queensland and Fiji. Given the population of the group in the late nineteenth century was estimated to be between 4,000 and 5,000, the 2,069 Gela labour contracts for work in Queensland between the 1870s and 1900s involved a large segment of the total male population. To sustain these numbers, it seems likely that there was once a substantially higher population, followed by decline late in the nineteenth century as contact accelerated and new diseases were introduced. Only 86 Gela labourers were contracted to work in Fiji, mainly in the late 1870s and 1880s. Most of the Gela labourers enlisted during the 1880s and

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{23} Young, F. 1926, 145.
\textsuperscript{24} BM, Thomas Edge-Partington Photographic Collection, Album 4, Dscn 1021, 1022, Album 6, Dscn 1115, 1126; Beattie 1909; National Library of Australia [hereinafter NLA] 1909, Photographs R32 Sundry 1.11, Solomon Islands 11, Coaling Station, Gavutu Island.
\end{footnotesize}
1890s worked for three years before returning. After a rough beginning with the *Lavinia* and *Sandfly* massacres, the labour recruiters found Gela largely peaceful and were able to go ashore to collect food, water and wood to refresh their supplies. Gela’s men continued to serve as labourers—in the Tulagi enclave and on the plantations that developed within the protectorate; 659 Gela labourers were indentured between 1913 and 1940, which is low compared with their earlier participation in the Queensland labour trade. Presumably, this means they had satisfactory alternative sources of income because of their proximity to mission bases, plantations that were developed in the group and the Tulagi enclave.

Charles Morris Woodford

The choice of Tulagi as the protectorate’s headquarters by the first Resident Commissioner, Charles Morris Woodford, made good sense. Woodford deliberately lobbied for the creation of his own position within the WPHC. Young, intelligent, fit and seasoned to life in the Pacific and particularly Solomon Islands, Woodford was the perfect choice for the first permanent British official. Born in Kent, England, in 1852, the son of a prosperous wine and spirits merchant, Woodford attended Tonbridge, an exclusive school not far from his hometown of Milton. His talents as a collector of natural history specimens began to emerge while he was still at school and, like many boys in the age of empire, he showed interest in the expansion of the British Empire in Africa and further afield. After school he was absorbed into the family business, until he departed for the Pacific to pursue a future as a procurer of natural history specimens for museums and rich private collectors back in England. At the age of 30, he arrived in Fiji, in March 1882. Woodford worked as a government agent on board the labour vessel *Patience* on a trip to the Gilbert and Ellice islands, where they repatriated 45 Gilbertese who had been incorrectly dropped off on Malekula Island in the New Hebrides by a German vessel out of Samoa. He also held a minor position in the WPHC’s Treasury.

26 Shlomowitz and Bedford 1988; Penny 1887, 122–49.
28 ibid., 27–30; Scarr 1967, 263.
Plate 1.16 Charles Woodford at Aola, Guadalcanal, 1890
Source: Pacific Manuscripts Bureau (PMB), AU PMB PHOTO 56-21 (ANUA 481-1A-21).
Woodford returned to England, sold his Pacific butterfly collection and began, with the assistance of the Royal Geographical Society in London, to prepare for a trip to Solomon Islands as a naturalist. He was back in Fiji in February 1886. In April, he joined the *Christine*, a small labour trade schooner working around the New Hebrides and Solomon Islands. The ship visited several islands in the New Hebrides, then sailed north to Uki ni masi (usually known as Uki), Santa Ana, Makira, Ulawa, Malaita, Guadalcanal and Alu—the last being the largest of the Shortland Islands. They arrived at Uru and Sinalagu harbours on east Malaita not long after a series of attacks on labour trade vessels that had incurred naval reprisals. However, the *Christine* experienced no difficulties along the east coast and then moved on to Malu’u in the north and to Coleridge Bay (Fauaabu) in the north-west. From June to August, Woodford remained on Alu, then transferred to Fauro Island in the same group, remaining there until mid-September. His trip was cut short by fever, although he also spent two weeks on Guadalcanal before returning to Australia, from where he sent his new collection home to England.

Woodford returned again to Solomon Islands in January 1887. He spent two weeks at Roviana Lagoon, New Georgia, followed by six months at Aola on Guadalcanal’s north-east coast. From there he made three unsuccessful attempts to explore the high central mountains. He left for Australia and England in September 1887, having collected 20,000 specimens on the two trips. He was back in the Solomons again in mid-1888, spending another two weeks at Roviana Lagoon, three months in the Gela Group and one month at his Aola house. His rationale changed during these trips. Alongside natural history collecting, he began to allocate more time to exploration and anthropology, even replotting parts of Mendaña’s 1568 expedition route. Woodford then returned to Fiji. Motivated by the British and German annexations in east New Guinea in 1884, and adjustments to the south-eastern German New Guinea border in 1886, he began a campaign to have Britain take formal possession of the remainder of Solomon Islands. His book *A Naturalist among the Head-Hunters* was well received and became one of the two standard early English-language texts on Solomon Islands, along with Henry Guppy’s 1887 book *The Solomon Islands and Their Natives*, based on his 1881 and 1884 voyages on HMS *Lark*. Woodford’s book was part of his campaign.

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29 These were *Borealis* (1880), *Janet Stewart* (1882), *Helena* (1884) and *Young Dick* (1886). Lawrence 2014, 78–79; Fowler 1969; Keesing 1986.

30 Guppy 1887; Woodford 1890.
In 1889, Woodford married Florence (Florrie) M. Palmer, the daughter of a pastoral family from Bathurst, New South Wales. They moved to London, where he worked for a stockbroker, which did not suit his ambitions any more than being a wine and spirits merchant. Bored with settled life, he made up his mind in 1893 to return to the Pacific. He applied to the Marquess of Rippon, the new Secretary of State for the Colonies, to become the Resident or Deputy Commissioner of the newly proclaimed British Solomon Islands Protectorate. He had the support of Lord Amherst of Hackney (who was editing the first English translation of Mendaña’s voyage diaries), the president of the Royal Geographical Society and a Royal Navy captain whom he knew from his Pacific adventures. The British Government, which was not ready to install any official representative, rebuffed Woodford, who then wrote to high commissioner Sir John Thurston in Suva offering to privately fund an official appointment. Thurston refused his request because he doubted Woodford’s administrative abilities and suspected that his real intention was to extend his lucrative work as a naturalist in the Solomons. Woodford then tried another direct approach to Rippon.

Knowing that it was only a matter of the right timing, and never one to give up easily, Woodford decided to move his family to Australia in October 1894, and then returned to Fiji, where he could lobby directly. By this time, there was rivalry between Germany and Britain in Samoa, which, with WPHC staffing changes, led to Woodford being appointed as acting Consul and Deputy Commissioner in Apia. He hoped this would be his proving ground for the BSIP position. In April 1896, he was employed to assist in the High Commissioner’s office. At this time, a dispatch was sent to London protesting the lack of a salary for a BSIP resident commissioner. With all the hallmarks of a Woodford-authored document, it argued that the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Protectorates were already self-supporting, which meant that money could be released to be spent in the Solomons. As well, it said that the minimal costs of administration could be met by the proceeds of trading licences; only a small police force was needed and the Resident Commissioner’s salary was already covered by a local WPHC vote of money. The proposal was endorsed by Thurston, who was then in Sydney, urged on by a personal visit from Woodford on his way to the Solomons.31 The Colonial Office acquiesced at last.

Jurisdictional imperialism

The shape of the modern Solomon Islands nation is an artefact of British, German and French colonialism. Eventually, and only after agreement with Germany and France, Britain assumed legal control of the southern section of the Solomon Archipelago, as well as the Santa Cruz Group and surrounding islands. The situation in the Pacific was extremely complex, requiring some innovative decisions and the manipulation of boundaries. Solomon Islanders seldom question the nature of the British intervention in their islands, but in fact it was an occupation without permission, and the territorial shape of the modern nation-state relates to haphazard political circumstances. The British acknowledged indigenous landownership within the protectorate, at the same time as adopting processes that enabled alienation of large areas.

In colonisation, gaining legal control of the land and people was paramount, although the motivations and legal mechanisms differed. The examples of Australia, New Zealand, New Caledonia and Fiji will suffice to show the very different approaches. In Australia, all land was claimed by the Crown as *terra nullius*, ignoring the rights of approximately 1 million Indigenous people. It took until the Mabo and Wik judgments of the High Court in the 1990s for this legal anomaly to be overturned. After a long period of denial, many modern Australians now accept that their continent was invaded by the British and that settlement was not a peaceful process. In New Zealand, the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi signed by Māori chiefs gave Britain control of the North Island. Although much dishonoured by the British, the treaty provided the basis for subsequent land and political negotiations. The less populous South Island of New Zealand was also secured for settlement. New Caledonia became a French territory in 1853, with the same status as a province in metropolitan France. Control was extended to the neighbouring Loyalty Islands in 1864, which became a dependency of the territory. France wanted a strategic port near Australia and a place to establish a convict colony as well as a settler society. New Caledonia provided a substantial Western Pacific presence to augment their early exploration and existing Christian missions, trading stations and plantations. It was a large island and a valuable asset, but in the process of acquisition the indigenous people were dispossessed of their land and placed on to ‘native reserves’. Neighbouring Fiji was ‘ceded’ to Britain in 1874 by Cakabau, a leading chief, which led to the establishment of a Crown colony—partly to
appease the small settler society there, but also because it suited wider
British plans in the Pacific Islands. Fijian interests were safeguarded: large
areas of their land were made inalienable and a Fijian administration was
established, which led to establishment of the annual Council of Chiefs,
alongside plans for the economic development of some areas.

The same intensity of land acquisition did not occur in most other
Western Pacific Island groups. Usually the process combined some
acknowledgement of indigenous land rights with the enabling of
economic development by foreigners. This was the situation in Solomon
Islands, where Britain established a protectorate and large areas were
alienated from customary landowning groups. Eighty-five years after the
protectorate was proclaimed, Solomon Islanders became independent and
most land is now under the control of extended families in local areas,
not the state. Much of the alienated land was returned to the people,
including some quite outrageous foreign land acquisitions, such as
999-year leases. It could be argued that this retention of local indigenous
ownership was the result of being a protectorate, rather than a Crown
colony. Today, by and large, Solomon Islanders do not think in terms of
British invasion and conquest in the way that First Nation Australians
do. This may be because they never had to deal with a settler society or
importation of large numbers of foreign labourers. During the colonial
years, Solomon Islanders were of course aware that their islands had been
taken over and they resented the fact. Nevertheless, because they had no
central indigenous political core, it was difficult for them to protest in
any organised manner. Britain declared a protectorate over their islands
for reasons related to British interests, emanating from Australasian
settler societies and the Crown colonies in British New Guinea and Fiji.
However, if Britain had not taken this action it is highly likely that either
Germany or France would have claimed the islands.

There is nothing particularly ‘natural’ about the territory included in
the modern Solomon Islands nation-state. The north of the Solomon
Archipelago—Buka and Bougainville (the largest island) plus a few
neighbouring atolls—was claimed by Germany and remains part of Papua
New Guinea. The Solomon Islands nation-state covers the southern
section of the archipelago, from Shortland Islands down to Makira, and
includes the Santa Cruz Group and adjacent islands, which are separated
from the south of the Solomon Archipelago by 400 kilometres of ocean.
Geographically and culturally, Temotu Province is more closely allied to
the islands that became the New Hebrides Condominium—now modern
Vanuatu. In the 1880s, and for the next 20 years, there was a possibility that, using Port Moresby as the headquarters, Britain would annex a huge arc of Melanesian islands stretching east and south to include both Solomon Islands and the New Hebrides. The Australian east coast colonies were in support, although they were unwilling to help pay the costs. Similar proposals surfaced again at various times, and were last revived in the 1950s and 1960s when the future of Netherlands New Guinea (now Indonesia’s Papua provinces), Solomon Islands and the New Hebrides were under international discussion.32

The colonial partition of Melanesia depended on accommodating British, German and French trading, labour recruiting and missionary interests, as well as colonial arrangements made in other parts of the world. Geographic common sense seldom applied, although it did in the choice of Tulagi as the site for the protectorate’s headquarters. Tulagi was centrally located and had an excellent harbour. There was already a considerable missionary and trader presence in the Gela Group, while another obvious option, the New Georgia Group, which had an early whaling and trading presence, was not central to the islands that fell between the German claims to the north and the French claims to the south. Woodford was ready and waiting for the task, and he had Tulagi in mind as the protectorate’s new capital.

Although the British Empire was never a formal legal entity, Britain had several methods of adding territory. Originally, British law had no provisions regarding protectorates. If a new territory was settled, it became part of the British dominions and the common law and statute law of England applied to the settlers. If the territory was obtained by conquest, its original laws remained in force until they were changed. This could be done without local consent, using an order in council. But neither category applied to areas such as Solomon Islands, which were not formally part of the Crown’s dominions, even if the islands were recognised as being under Britain’s sphere of influence. In the Pacific Islands, European powers cooperated by recognising one another’s spheres of influence and then slowly made these into ‘legal’ entities. Before the use of protectorates, new British territory could be annexed or ceded (as in Fiji) or settled (as in Australia and New Zealand). The fourth and much favoured method during the nineteenth century was through proclaiming protectorates.

32 Waters 2016.
The protectorate concept evolved between the 1840s and the 1890s, allowing various degrees of British involvement as local circumstances required. Quite simply, it was a solution to the need for a cheap method of colonial control. British law came to recognise protectorates—usually tribal territories—and protected states, where Britain introduced a form of local internal self-government based on an existing government. In both cases, Britain controlled defence and external relations. Protectorates continually evolved and, by the twentieth century, there was no longer a clear difference between the ways protectorates and Crown colonies were administered. The path was not always the same—for instance, some began as protectorates and became Crown colonies. The difference between the two was extremely blurred in the BSIP. One person in a good position to know this was Colin Allan, the last Governor of the BSIP, between 1976 and 1978. A New Zealander, he first arrived in the BSIP as a cadet officer in 1945 and progressed rapidly through the ranks. In 1952, he took leave to complete legal training and was put in charge of the Special Lands Commission into customary land, the report from which was published in 1957. Allan concluded that Solomon Islanders believed that the government had exceeded its powers in dealing with land alienation:

In connection with this question, it must be emphasised that while today it is generally believed that no difference exists between a ‘colony’ and a ‘protectorate’, the fact remains that for Solomon Islanders the two possess very different meanings and implications. As they see it, a Protectorate is a country under the protection of an alien, yet friendly and benevolent power, which protects and administers the people in accordance with their own wishes and interests. A colony, on the other hand, is a territory whose resources and people are enslaved and exploited in the sole interest of the colonising power. Implicit in the term ‘colony’ for them is the loss of all land interests. This attitude was given full expression during the political troubles of 1946–1952, is still extant, and regardless of how naive it might be held to be, it is one which cannot be lightly disregarded.\(^\text{33}\)

\(^{33}\) Allan 1957, 56.
Allan is playing with words and, as the author of the only major land report since the 1920s, he was not about to concede that the BSIP Government had misinterpreted land law in regard to protectorates. Nevertheless, he does point to a basic truth: a protectorate is not a Crown colony; they are legally quite distinct. Allan also said:

In later years all minerals and exploitation thereof have been reserved to the Crown. Legislation has been enacted to appropriate land required for public purposes. There have thus been steady inroads upon native land interests, and the precise limits to which legislation can go has never been clear. This has caused some concern to successive Commissioners of Lands.\textsuperscript{34}

It is an interesting thought that the alienation of some land in the BSIP might have been illegal.

**British acts of parliament and orders in council**

All through the nineteenth century, Britain grappled with how to administer areas with indigenous tribal organisation that had been brought under international legal jurisdiction. It came up with the concept of the protectorate, legalised under the *Foreign Jurisdiction Act*. Whenever the Foreign Office wanted to extend British authority, it was normally done either by amending the Act or, more commonly, by an order in council under the Act. British protectorates were an evolving legal form, an indication of British territorial interest—initially, just enough to discourage other European nations from making territorial claims. They were not outright annexations or claims of sovereignty, as occurred with Crown colonies.

BSIP colonial officials were guided by several types of laws and regulations—some standard across the empire, some relating only to the WPHC and still others created within the protectorate. While BSIP officials could lobby for modifications when the system appeared to be unworkable or in need of revision, they were always bound by precedent and had little room to manoeuvre. They could always be overruled by the Western Pacific High Commissioner. A basic understanding of the

\textsuperscript{34} ibid.
status of Solomon Islands as a British protectorate, rather than a Crown colony or a settler colony, helps us to understand Tulagi, its functions and its society.

Areas such as New Guinea and Solomon Islands were regarded as ‘uncivilised’ and without states, which meant that in theory they could only become protectorates. However, British New Guinea—culturally similar to Solomon Islands—began as a protectorate in 1884 and became a Crown colony in 1888, creating a local precedent, as did another neighbouring area, the Gilbert Islands Protectorate and the Ellice Islands Protectorate, both of which began in 1892, were administered as one and became a single Crown colony in 1916.35 Protectorates became a means of placing all British subjects and foreigners within a territory under effective legal control, without any commitment to acquire the territory as a colony. As Edward Wolfers suggests:

> They were, in a sense, no more than legal fictions to allow for a type of indirect rule over areas in which the British government did not presently wish to become involved in the day-to-day business of internal administration.36

Britain also had existing sovereign territories close by. Founding a penal settlement in the Crown colony of New South Wales in 1788 was part of much wider British strategic plans. As they developed—all carved out of New South Wales—the eastern Australian and New Zealand colonies were utilised as a convenient British doorstep to the Pacific. Sydney grew into a prosperous port and in the early decades the colony’s economic focus was on the Pacific more than the inland, until the pastoral industry expanded. Early food supplies for Sydney were brought from Tahiti, and New Zealand and Fiji were settled from eastern Australia. Sydney became a Pacific port where marine products from the islands were sold. On a small scale, recruitment of Pacific labour for use in New South Wales began in 1847. At first, settlement spread south and north along the east coast, then in the 1810s, it moved west over the coastal ranges behind Sydney. Pastoralism spread north during the 1840s and 1850s into the northern districts of New South Wales, which became the Colony of Queensland in 1859. Queensland’s interests extended into New Guinea and the

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36 Wolfers 1971, 2.
37 The North Island and about half of the South Island were initially part of New South Wales. In 1825, when Van Diemen’s Land (Tasmania) became a separate colony, the border was altered so that only the top half of the North Island was included in New South Wales.
islands around the Solomon and Coral seas. Once the Queensland labour trade began in the 1860s, the islands closest to Australia were at first loosely incorporated into the British Pacific, and then, increasingly, more formally. Allied to this was the dislike by British Australasian colonists of French and German neighbours in the Pacific.

The ships of the Royal Navy Australia Station (RNAS), which had been based in Sydney since the 1820s, patrolled around Australia, New Zealand and the Western Pacific. Until 1859, the eastern boundaries of the RNAS were 185 degrees west (including Tonga, Niue and Samoa) and 10 degrees south (cutting through Torres Strait and Solomon Islands). In 1864, the boundary was extended west to include the Cocos and Christmas islands, although the northern boundary still cut through Torres Strait. The boundary was extended in 1872, east as far as the Cook Islands and north to include Micronesia and all of New Guinea.\(^38\) The reality was that there were never many ships attached to the RNAS and, at best, they visited parts of the main islands once or twice a year, usually to investigate reports of ‘outrages’. The British Navy had no power to arrest indigenous perpetrators of an act of violence against foreigners or take them for trial in Fiji or the Australasian colonies. The only recourse was to treat any attack as a formal act of war. This led to ‘commodore justice’—the bombardment of villages and often the punishment of innocent people not directly involved in the incident. Any other solution, such as executing the offending persons, left the naval captain open to charges of murder.\(^39\) The temporary answer to judicial problems, arrived at in 1888, was to appoint some of the naval commanders as deputy commissioners. This gave them limited magisterial powers to act on behalf of the WPHC.

The establishment of a British protectorate required a physical visit by a senior officer and some show of compliance by the indigenous leaders in any newly acquired region. In areas such as Solomon Islands, with no substantial hereditary chieftainships, the acceptance of protectorate status was of dubious legality. The neighbouring Gilbert and Ellice islands were made into British protectorates with far more validity, since there were Gilbertese and Tuvaluan hereditary leaders. Even as a single Crown colony, they were still administered by a WPHC resident commissioner until just before independence, when the two island groups were split.\(^40\)

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\(^38\) Bach 1986, frontispiece map.
\(^39\) ibid., 247–49.
By the 1890s, when the BSIP was proclaimed, issues relating to establishing criminal and civil jurisdiction had been solved. A protectorate confirmed Britain’s control over its own subjects in the protected areas, with protectorate functions expanded to include general administrative and regulatory powers over citizens of other nations and indigenous inhabitants. As historian Ross Johnston concluded:

It was a compromise between the extremes of annexation and disregard of the area. It offered an indefinite means of control, a somewhat shadowy amount of jurisdiction and administration, but it was sufficient to satisfy at least the more direct demands for the protection of British subjects and of ‘helpless savages’. But this solution—jurisdictional imperialism—was reached only very slowly and by faltering steps.41

Extraterritorial jurisdiction laws were much easier to establish over protected states that had existing significant government structures recognisable in European terms. In dealing with many parts of Africa and the Pacific Islands, legal advisers to the British Government had to break new ground. They were also subservient to the interests of both the Colonial Office and the Foreign Office, which were less concerned with legal theory than with the practical convenience of governing with few staff, providing legal justification for what had or was about to happen within various spheres of interest and minimising financial costs. They often requested supporting legislation to provide a legal basis for already established policy. Even so, the French and German colonial legal systems were more workable, which was to the disadvantage of Britain.42

Britain made a series of moves between 1872 and 1877 to extend British control in the Pacific, mainly over British subjects in areas not under formal claim. First, to protect Pacific Islanders from depredations by its subjects, Britain tried unsuccessfully to apply existing imperial antislavery Acts and passed new Acts, particularly the Pacific Islanders Protection Acts of 1872 and 1875. These Acts were motivated initially by the murder of Anglican Bishop John Patteson on Nukapu in the Reef Islands in September 1871 and the notorious incidents of kidnapping and massacre on the brig Carl in August 1872, plus other illegal incidents in the Queensland and Fiji labour trades.43 The intention was to bolster

41 ibid., 22.
42 ibid., 29–30.
43 Carter 1999.
the Queensland *Polynesian Labourers Act* of 1868 (the term Melanesia was not then in use)\(^4\) and to regulate the labour trade. The Queensland Act was adopted by the British Consul in Levuka for use in Fiji and there was a substantial new territorial claim. Fiji became a Crown colony in 1874—an assertion of British sovereignty, although, in Fiji, Britain always acknowledged the continued partial sovereignty of Fijians.

When the future status of Fiji was discussed during the early 1870s, the way in which wider control over the Pacific Islands could be achieved was also under consideration. Issues discussed were a Pacific court of justice with civil and criminal jurisdiction over British subjects and how it would relate to the existing court system operating in the Australian and New Zealand colonies, and to laws relating to the Admiralty. The enabling legislation that created the WPHC was in the form of an August 1877 order in council under the *Foreign Jurisdiction Act*. This listed many Pacific Islands by name and included:

> all other islands in the Western Pacific Ocean not being within the limits of the colonies of Fiji, Queensland, or New South Wales, and not being within the jurisdiction of any civilized Power.

Solomon Islands was one of these areas. The order in council also applied to British subjects on British-registered vessels within the area. One of the primary reasons for the formation of the WPHC was to manage the Pacific labour trade, which was criticised as being a new form of slavery, although slavery had been abolished in all British territories in a rolling process between 1807 and 1833. Accusations in the 1860s and 1870s that slavery was flourishing in the Pacific and involved British subjects were an embarrassment in London. While the British Government grappled with how to control its Pacific interests, in 1877, WPHC plans were put forward for a series of deputy commissioners resident in the New Hebrides, Solomon Islands, New Guinea and the Caroline and Gilbert islands. These were dismissed in Britain as being well beyond the available budget. Nevertheless, the WPHC became the main administrative and legal mechanism used to oversee later British interests in the Pacific Islands. To use the words of historian David McIntyre, it was ‘an experiment in providing order and jurisdiction without assuming [British] sovereignty’.\(^4\)

\(^{4}\) ‘Polynesia’ was defined in Queensland Acts as including Fiji, New Caledonia, any of the Loyalty, the New Hebrides, Banks or Solomon islands or any island in the Pacific Ocean not being in her majesty’s dominions and not within the jurisdiction on any civilised power. ‘Melanesia’ was not in common use.

\(^{45}\) McIntyre 1960, 285.
Over time, the purpose of the WPHC became more defined, particularly after the 1884–85 Berlin Conference clarified European spheres of influence in the Pacific. Back in 1875–77, when the Crown Colony of Fiji and the WPHC were being shaped, Britain had ideas that the role of the Governor of Fiji and High Commissioner would include being ‘commander’ of the Pacific ‘tribes’. Almost two decades later, in 1893, another order in council vested the High Commissioner with executive and legislative powers and limited his jurisdiction to territories under formal British control. The WPHC became a unique oceanic territory that governed protectorates, small British Pacific territories such as Pitcairn Island (a colony), half a condominium (the New Hebrides) and eventually also one Crown colony (the Gilbert and Ellice Islands). Administered from the Crown Colony of Fiji and covering a huge area of the Western Pacific, the WPHC worked closely with the British Royal Navy. The title of high commissioner was rare in the British Empire. In 1854, the Governor of the Cape Colony was made High Commissioner for South Africa—responsible for certain affairs beyond the frontier. Another example was in the Palestine and Transjordan mandated territories after 1928. The usual term used elsewhere was chief commissioner. Once high commissioner became the standard term used for British Commonwealth diplomatic representatives, the use of the same term for the head the WPHC became misleading. Nevertheless, the title lasted until the 1970s.

Although the title and territory of the Western Pacific high commissioners were grand, their small team had no real access to most of the islands they were supposed to administer. There was a high commissioner (the Governor of Fiji), a chief judicial commissioner (Fiji’s Chief Justice) sitting in the High Commissioner’s Court and provision to appoint special, deputy and resident commissioners. The High Commissioner had the power to exclude any British subject from a protected area for two years if they committed a breach of the 1872 or 1875 Acts or were considered dangerous to peace and good order. The Australasian colonies

46 Scarr 1967, 36.
47 Initially, the WPHC appointed deputy commissioners for Tonga, Samoa, New Guinea, New Britain and the New Hebrides, with two RNAS officers appointed as roving deputy commissioners. Once colonial territories were under more formal claim, the WPHC governed the protectorates/colony of Gilbert and Ellice Islands (proclaimed in 1892 and 1916, respectively), the BSIP (proclaimed in 1893), the British half of the New Hebrides Condominium (1906), Samoa (1879; initially just Apia, until separation into American Samoa and Western Samoa in 1900), Tonga (from 1900, it was a ‘protected state’ like the Ionian Islands and Zanzibar, with a consul and Britain in charge of foreign affairs) and Pitcairn Islands (a colony from 1838 and under the WPHC from 1898).
also had the power to intercede in the Pacific, although this right was rather vague and untested, except for Queensland’s control over British New Guinea in the 1880s and 1890s at gubernatorial level.

Whalers had operated in the Solomon Archipelago since the 1790s, with their presence declining by the 1860s. European traders sailed there from Sydney in the 1860s, 1870s and 1880s, mostly to buy copra (dried coconut), ivory nuts (from sago palms), bêche-de-mer (also known as trepang or sea cucumbers) and ‘tortoise shell’ (actually turtle shell). In the early 1870s, the labour trade to Queensland and Fiji—then operating in the Loyalty Islands and New Hebrides—moved north into the Solomons. Controls hit legal problems in the late 1860s with failed naval prosecutions of British subjects over breaches of existing laws and the non-applicability of anti-slavery laws to the Pacific labour trade. Attempts to protect the islanders from unscrupulous British subjects—particularly those from New South Wales, Queensland and Fiji—were failing. One improvement was that from 1870 to 1871, each labour vessel of British origin carried a government agent to supervise the recruiting process. Although these agents varied considerably in their reliability, they became the most constant British Government presence in the archipelago until the protectorate was established, even though their legal authority was limited to their ship and the ship’s boats. During the 1860s and into the 1870s, Admiralty powers were still being circumvented by Australian colonial courts.

A different system unfolded in the New Hebrides, where the colonists were French and British. The French Government viewed the New Hebrides as a natural extension of its New Caledonia territory and its Loyalty Islands dependency. The British Consul in New Caledonia monitored French expansion and Australian colonists watched closely, not keen on having French neighbours. The transportation of convicts to eastern Australia ceased in 1853, which meant that British Australians with their new representative governments were not happy when French convicts were sent to New Caledonia between the 1860s and 1897. Neither power was willing to cede the New Hebrides to the other and eventually, after an initial Anglo-French agreement in 1878 guaranteeing continued independence and neutrality, the unsatisfactory Anglo-French Joint Naval

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Commission was established in 1888. This lasted until 1906, when the New Hebrides became a condominium—an unusual form of government that continued until the islands became independent as Vanuatu in 1980. From 1902, both France and Britain maintained resident officials in Port Vila. This Anglo-French arrangement established the southern boundary of the future Solomon Islands nation.

**East New Guinea’s chartered companies, protectorates and crown colonies**

Another BSIP boundary was that with New Guinea and its eastern islands. At various stages, Solomon Islands could easily have become part of a wider British protectorate including New Guinea and island Melanesia, although complicated negotiations between Queensland and Britain, and Britain and Germany, always precluded this outcome. Sir Arthur Hamilton Gordon, the first resident Governor of Fiji and the first Western Pacific High Commissioner, in 1878 sent a special envoy on a naval ship to inspect Solomon Islands. Then, between 1879 and 1881, Gordon undertook protracted negotiations with the Colonial Office and the Admiralty on the relationship between the WPHC and the British Navy. The Admiralty was not interested in having the Commodore of the RNAS assume the duties of high commissioner, nor was the navy willing to continue carrying civilian WPHC officials on its ships. In November 1884, when south-east New Guinea was annexed as a British protectorate, an attempt was made to include Solomon Islands under the Port Moresby administration.

The final decisions about the future of protectorates in the Pacific were made at the Berlin Conference of 1884–85—called between Germany, France and Britain—and at the 1887 Australasian Colonial Conference. The three European nations pursued different approaches to colonisation. The Germans, for instance, continued to use chartered companies as agents of colonialism. In 1884, German New Guinea was proclaimed as a Schutzgebiet (commercial protectorate) and the Neu Guinea Kompagnie was established to settle the north-eastern mainland. The company, although an economic failure, continued to operate until

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51 Bennett 1987, 176–217.
52 Scarr 1967, 136.
1899, when the German Government took control. British colonialism had begun in the same way, with the formation in 1600 of the British East India Company—a chartered company that traded in India and South-East Asia and then expanded its operations to include China. Gradually extended from a trading company to be the government of India, the company remained powerful until the British Crown took over its monopolies in the early nineteenth century. British companies with the powers of governments continued to be established—such as the British North Borneo Company in 1881 and others in Africa, such as the British South Africa Company, formed in 1888, which received a royal charter the next year. However, a commercial company style of development was considered unsuitable for New Guinea and island Melanesia and, by the 1880s, the British chartered company concept was in decline, replaced with formal protectorate or Crown colony status. Britain disapproved of Germany’s 1884–85 claims of sovereignty in the Pacific, which in British legal theory represented protection, not sovereignty, but it enabled the Germans to apply their system of criminal law throughout the German Empire, which was a distinct advantage. The French concept of territories incorporated into mainland France was different again, but their application of domestic law was simpler than the British system. It took until 1890 for the British legal distinctions between sovereignty, annexations and protectorates to become fixed.

The British New Guinea Protectorate (1884–88) was the largest territory partly controlled by the WPHC. In 1883, Queensland audaciously attempted to annex south-eastern New Guinea on behalf of Britain, which refused to recognise the move. Then, in November 1884, pressed by the Australasian colonies, Britain proclaimed a protectorate over a similar area of south-east New Guinea. At the same time, in a planned move, Germany made a claim over north-east New Guinea. Britain then offered British New Guinea to Queensland on condition that there would be no expenses for Britain. Queensland had a new government, which refused the offer. If either of these 1883–84 moves had succeeded, Queensland would have extended into south-east New Guinea and the neighbouring Pacific Islands.

53 Moore 2003, 143.
There were three main officials in early British New Guinea. Major-General Sir Peter Scratchley was appointed as Administrator and WPHC Deputy Commissioner in 1884, although he was based in Port Moresby only for a few months in 1885, where he died from malaria. His replacement was the Honourable John Douglas, a former Premier of Queensland (1877–79), then Government Resident and Police Magistrate on Thursday Island in Torres Strait, where he also held an appointment as WPHC Deputy Commissioner. Once British New Guinea became a Crown colony, Douglas returned to his previous position. It was unusual situation. The Administrator of the British New Guinea Protectorate was always a WPHC deputy commissioner, but owed more allegiance to the colonies of Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria than to the High Commissioner in Suva.

The other important early British representative in New Guinea and Solomon Islands was Hugh H. Romilly. Romilly joined the WPHC staff in 1879 at the age of 23—appointed as a magistrate and private secretary to Gordon. Romilly was one of the first WPHC officials to travel widely on naval ships. Gordon’s replacement, Sir William Des Voeux, sent Romilly into Melanesia and New Guinea in 1881 as a roving deputy commissioner based on HMS Cormorant and HMS Beagle. He returned to Melanesia again in 1883, this time on the Fiji labour trade vessel Meg Merillies. Romilly was also based in Port Moresby in 1883 but lacked power or independent transport, and in 1884 created a farce when he misinterpreted his instructions, mistakenly proclaiming the protectorate before RNAS Commodore James Elphinstone Erskine arrived to make the official proclamation. Romilly acted as Administrator after Scratchley’s death, then in 1886 went to London to supervise the New Guinea exhibits at the Colonial and Indian Exhibition. Despite his experience and talents, he felt underappreciated and, after a short period as British Consul in the New Hebrides (1887–90), he resigned. Like many ambitious young Englishmen, he went to Africa.56

56 He joined a prospecting party to Mashonaland—now a region in northern Zimbabwe. Romilly 1887; Scarr 1967, 130–36, 259.
Dr William MacGregor, Chief Medical Officer of Fiji, became Administrator of British New Guinea in 1887; its status was upgraded to Crown colony when he arrived in Port Moresby in September 1888. Sir John Thurston had been considered for the position, but instead was promoted to acting and then substantive Governor of Fiji and High Commissioner (1885–97). Although Queensland had refused to take responsibility for British New Guinea, the colony was granted an ‘uncertain and anomalous’ power of supervision over the territory. The Lieutenant-Governor of British New Guinea Crown colony was under the supervision of the Governor of Queensland, who was always consulted on important issues. Incongruously, while introducing legislation for the White Australia Policy in 1901—which deported Solomon Islander and New Hebridean labourers—Australia negotiated with Britain between 1901 and 1906 to transfer control of British New Guinea to Australia. There was no

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57 Scarr 1980.
58 Joyce 1971, 104.
mention of any possible transfer of the BSIP to Australia, which could have been accomplished at the same time, although there was interest shown in gaining control of the New Hebrides.\textsuperscript{59}

### Proclaiming the British Solomon Islands Protectorate

Unique in the Pacific because of its size and complexity, the BSIP remained part of the WPHC for almost its entire existence. Senior staff in the protectorate were always deputy commissioners; from 1953, the BSIP became the headquarters for the WPHC.\textsuperscript{60} Colonial plans for Solomon Islands were always made as part of a much wider package of British decisions. Two years after Britain and Germany divided eastern New Guinea between them, they agreed that the Marshall and Caroline islands would become German and the Gilbert Islands and Ellice Islands would be British. In the Solomon Archipelago—its north already part of German New Guinea—they agreed that the German New Guinea border would be extended south to between Isabel and Malaita. The remainder of the Solomon Archipelago as well as the Santa Cruz Group and surrounding southern islands became a British sphere of influence. In the early 1890s, echoing similar plans from almost a decade earlier, lieutenant-governor Sir William MacGregor and Queensland premier Sir Samuel Griffith proposed attaching the central and southern Solomon Islands and possibly the New Hebrides to British New Guinea. Thurston did not support this concept and, after a visit to the Solomons in December 1894, he recommended to the Colonial Office that a separate resident deputy commissioner be appointed for Solomon Islands and the Santa Cruz Group.

London refused, because there seemed to be no prospect of a BSIP administration becoming financially self-supporting. Thurston remained worried about ungoverned European settlements in the territories under his control, especially after the Queensland labour trade, which premier Griffith had signalled in 1885 would end in 1890, was revived in 1892. The Fiji and Queensland labour trades were only loosely governed—by the RNAS, by limited British, Queensland and Fijian legislation and

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[\textsuperscript{59}] Bolton 2000, 246–50.
\item[\textsuperscript{60}] Scarr 1967, 23–35.
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by ineffectual government agents on the labour trade ships. Thurston also needed to support the Anglican’s Melanesian Mission, which was making progress in Solomon Islands. British rights in Solomon Islands were unassailable, whereas the New Hebrides would always be shared with France. A permanent British base in the Solomon Archipelago was the best long-term solution.

An 1890 amendment to the Foreign Jurisdiction Act enabled Britain to exercise jurisdiction over places acquired by treaty, grant, usage, sufferance and other lawful means in the same manner as territory acquired by cession or conquest. The 15 March 1893 order in council covered the whole Pacific, not just the Western Pacific, and British authority was extended to cover indigenous inhabitants and foreign subjects who had allegiance to the British Crown. By 1895, Britain had fallen into line with German and French interpretations of jurisdiction within protectorates. The consent of foreigners to the rule of law within the territory was assumed and the indigenous peoples were presumed to have given up their local jurisdiction to British authority. Ross Johnston put it neatly: ‘A jurisdictional empire was possible and without great military or financial involvement.’\(^{61}\) By the time protectorates were proclaimed over the Gilbert and Ellice islands in 1892\(^{62}\) and over Solomon Islands and the Santa Cruz Group in 1893, the system had evolved into a more workable model.

The 1893 Pacific Order in Council was subject to the provisions of the Pacific Islanders Protection Acts of 1872 and 1875, the British Settlement Act of 1887 and the 1890 amendment to the Foreign Jurisdiction Act. The first three of these Acts empowered Britain to legislate for subjects who were resident outside her dominions, in the Pacific Islands or in any British settlement. Edward Wolfers suggests:

\[\text{[T]he British Solomon Islands Protectorate came under the Foreign Jurisdiction Act only to the extent that it did not conflict with the Pacific Islanders Protection Acts. For that reason, the British Solomon Islands Protectorate seemed to be differently constituted, to have restrictions placed on the jurisdiction of its government, that did not apply in the other British protectorates in Africa and Asia. Elsewhere, while it was clear that the Foreign Jurisdiction Act was specifically intended to grant extraterritorial jurisdiction to the government over British subjects who were}\]

\(^{61}\) ibid., 263.

\(^{62}\) Macdonald 1982.
abroad, the Act was so broadly framed that it could be applied to anyone at all. Only in the Pacific did its application seem to be restricted, and especially in the Solomons.63

Fiji and British New Guinea had already become Crown colonies, followed by the Gilbert and Ellice Islands. The New Hebrides continued to be shared with France in a unique condominium. When the BSIP was proclaimed in 1893, it did not include the same set of islands that make up the nation today. In April 1886, German New Guinea was extended to include Buka, Bougainville and some small Polynesian outliers, the islands of the Shortland and Treasury Groups (except Mono), Isabel and Choiseul, Ontong Java (Lord Howe) and Nukumanu (Tasman) islands. The Marshall Islands in Micronesia were also included in German territory (see Map 1.2).64 The 1893 order in council had declared a British protectorate over the New Georgia Group and Mono Island in the northwest, the central Solomon Islands and the southern part of the modern nation-state—the Santa Cruz and Reef groups and surrounding smaller islands and atolls. Next, the Berlin Convention of 14 November 1899, ratified in 1900, led to Germany renouncing its claims over the northern islands of the Solomon Archipelago, except for Bougainville and Buka, along with the small outliers to the east.65

Although there was no clear source of future income, the immediate justification for the proclamation of the BSIP was to control the trade in firearms and labour. To comply with the specifications requiring acceptance by indigenous leaders, a RNAS expedition was dispatched from Sydney, comprising HMS Curacaoa under Captain Gibson and HMS Goldfinch under Lieutenant-Commander Floyd. The ships visited Solomon Islands in June and July 1893. They landed about 30 times, and at each stop the commanders hoisted the Union Jack, ordered a feu de joie (the required celebratory rifle salute) and read a proclamation. The first was read out on Mono Island in the Treasury Group on 11 June. In most cases, handwritten copies of the proclamations were either handed to local leaders or buried in bottles. On 28 June 1893, HMS Curacaoa visited Port Purvis at the southern entrance to Mboli Passage in the Gela Group. The ship sailed through the passage, landing at Siota, the Melanesian Mission headquarters. Captain Gibson met with local bigman Joseph

63  Wolfers 1971, 8–9.
64  Moore 1984.
65  Richards 2012, 88–89.
Havousi, explaining that they had come to hoist the British flag and declare a protectorate. Reverend Comins accompanied the ship to Malaita and other islands, helping to explain the process at each stop. At Makira, two events were combined, as ‘commodore justice’ was also dispensed through bombardment in retaliation for the death of a crew member of the *Helena*, a Queensland labour trade vessel.66 While Westerners had come to accept hoisting pieces of coloured cloth up poles as an assertion of authority, this meant nothing to Solomon Islanders. At Langalanga Lagoon on Malaita, the local bigman refused to touch the proclamation or gifts, supposedly fearing that alignment with the British would make the inland descent groups think the lagoon people were preparing for war and cease trade.67 At Roviana Lagoon, New Georgia, the people immediately ripped up the flag to make loincloths.68

Some islands were not visited in 1893 or were not officially visited and included in the protectorate until 1897 and 1898. Rennell and Bellona islands, Sikaiana (Stewart) Islands, the Santa Cruz Group (including Temotu [Trevannion] Island), the Reef and Duff (Wilson) islands, Tikopia, Anuta (Cherry) and Fataka (Mitre) islands were all late additions. To correct geographic errors in an 1898 proclamation another was made in 1899 and in the same year Germany handed over its section of the island chain from the Shortland Islands south to Isabel. The borders of the BSIP and the current boundaries of the nation-state of Solomon Islands were finally established.69

67 Western Pacific High Commission Archives [hereinafter WPHCA], 8 III 22 (1), Australian Station, Solomon Islands, 1893, H.W.S. Gibson, HMS *Curaçoa*, to Commander in Chief, 13 July 1893.
68 In 1966, one of the original Union Jack flags used for the proclamation was lodged with the Solomon Islands Museum collection. The flag came from Pileni in the Reef Islands and was thought to have been unfurled at Nukapu, where Bishop Patterson was killed. On 15 July 1970, a photograph appeared in the *British Solomon Islands Protectorate News Sheet* [hereinafter BSIPNS] of one of the original proclamations. The document had come into the possession of Spearline Wilson, the Commissioner for Lands, who took it with him to Sydney during World War II. He returned it to Solomon Islands after the war and it was held in the Treasury Department strongroom. This was probably the proclamation used at Gela. It still existed in 1971 but is now missing. *PIM*, September 1952; *BSIPNS*, October 1961, 21 April 1966; Wolfers 1971, 6.
69 Only two further changes have been made to the nation’s territorial boundaries. As an independence gift, in 1975, Solomon Islands gave Polkington Reef (on the boundary between the two nations) to Papua New Guinea and, in January 1978, sovereign territory was extended to a 321-kilometre limit under the Fisheries Limits Ordinance. *Solomons News Drum*, 13 January 1977; Moore 2003, 196.
This legal fiction of acceptance was enough to satisfy the Colonial Office that Solomon Islands was a genuine protectorate. The 1893 order in council that created the Solomons protectorate gave the High Commissioner, and through him the Resident Commissioner, the power to control prisons, immigration, lodgement of returns of imports and exports and taxation, to operate treaties and to legislate for peace, order and good government. Except for visits from the labour trade government agents and British naval ships, there was no on-the-ground presence until 1896–97.

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Governors of Crown colonies were appointed by the monarch on the recommendation of the Secretary of State for the Colonies. In the 1910s and 1920s, plantation interests unsuccessfully lobbied the High Commissioner and the Secretary of State for the Colonies to have the BSIP turned into a Crown colony, which would have allowed more autonomy.70 The planters also suggested an island confederation, with the

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70 WPHCA, 1184/1925, Deputation to High Commissioner of Representatives of Residents, 29 September 1925, transcript, 2.
WPHC territories separated from Fiji. They objected to being ‘dragged behind the chariot of Fiji’. However, protectorate status was maintained even after WPHC headquarters was transferred from Suva to Honiara in 1953. At that time, the High Commissioner and his administration absorbed the duties of the BSIP Resident Commissioner and his staff, whose positions became defunct.

After the Pacific War, the emphasis changed because Solomon Islands required extensive rehabilitation and reconstruction. Although the High Commissioner proposed that the BSIP be developed as a ‘native territory’, the Secretary of State for the Colonies refused, asserting that to do so would interfere with economic rehabilitation. Britain maintained its protectorate concept, seeing its position as one of trusteeship for the ‘native peoples’ while continuing to believe that the inhabitants were not ready for political participation. The plan was to eventually take over control of the existing mission-based health and education sectors and to develop local government as a stepping-stone towards long-term district and national government. Shifting the High Commissioner and the administration of the WPHC from Suva to Honiara altered the dynamics of government. Although it would also have been a good time to change the status of the protectorate to that of a Crown colony, this did not occur. It was a strange situation. The High Commissioner was resident in a protectorate which he governed, along with half a condominium, the Crown Colony of Gilbert and Ellice Islands, and Pitcairn Island. Once more, the British proved to be versatile in their arrangements. Part of the explanation for British reticence may have been that inhabitants of Crown colonies were entitled to British passports, which gave them easy access to the United Kingdom. It was empire-wide policy that indigenous inhabitants of protectorates had no such rights.

The BSIP Advisory Council began in 1921. In 1950, the number of non-official representative members was increased, although all were chosen by the Resident Commissioner (and later the High Commissioner). Honiara grew quickly: new administrative buildings were constructed and new educational institutions began. This all befitted Honiara’s role as the new urban centre of the WPHC. The BSIP Legislative Council was established in 1960, renamed the Governing Council in 1970. It had 26 members: 17 were elected, three were ex-officio appointees given seats because of their status or position and up to six public service members were
appointed by the High Commissioner. In 1974, the Governing Council was replaced with the Legislative Assembly, with 24 elected members and three ex-officio members, operating under a ministerial system with a chief minister. The BSIP became self-governing in 1976, with a 38-seat Legislative Assembly.

In 1973, the High Commissioner ceased acting for the Anglo-French condominium in the New Hebrides, which left the BSIP and the Gilbert and Ellice Islands as the only large WPHC territories. The High Commission was abolished in January 1976. Rather bizarrely, in 1974, the High Commissioner was redesignated as Governor of the BSIP and the BSIP Chief Secretary became the Deputy Governor. The governors of the Crown Colony of Gilbert and Ellice Islands and the BSIP reported directly to the Secretary of State for the Colonies in London.

The constitution of the sovereign democratic nation of Solomon Islands came into force at independence on 7 July 1978, ending the last British protectorate. The strange legal meanderings that had created the BSIP were at an end.

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72 A few residual functions, such as referral to the Fiji Court of Appeal, outlasted the WPHC.
73 The Crown Colony of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands was split in two in 1975 in preparation for independence as two separate nations. The Crown Colony of Gilbert Islands retained the position of governor, while the smaller Crown Colony of Ellice Islands was administered by a Queen's commissioner until independence. McIntyre 2012.
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