A ‘very arduous task’: Charles, Arthur and Frank

In January last [1915] Mr. C.M. Woodford, C.M.G., the Resident Commissioner, retired from the service on a well earned pension. Mr. Woodford had been for many years associated with the Solomon Islands, and, from the establishment of the British Protectorate, successfully carried out the very arduous task of developing and establishing the Government. In the early days this was no easy matter, and lately the work incidental to controlling a new and rapidly progressing Protectorate was beset with many difficulties, which by tact and ability he was able to overcome.

— British Solomon Islands Protectorate Annual Report, 1914–15

Choosing Tulagi

Charles Woodford retired in 1915 at the age of 63. The slim young man of the 1880s and 1890s had become more thickset, with greying hair, and the beard of his youth had been replaced with a neat moustache. He had lobbied for and received the position of Resident Commissioner, created a town and established a colonial administration and a plantation economy. The 1914–15 BSIP Annual Report, prepared by his temporary replacement, Frank Barnett, concluded with an understatement that ‘some years must elapse before complete control of the natives can be brought about’.² The protectorate was well established, although on some islands, such as populous Malaita, little progress had been made.

2 ibid.
Woodford arrived in Solomon Islands in May 1896 at age 44, aboard HMS *Pylades*, to take up the new position of short-term acting Deputy Commissioner for the incipient British protectorate. He toured the islands, mounted a punitive expedition on Guadalcanal to avenge the deaths of Austrian Baron von Norbeck and members of his expedition and established a temporary headquarters at Nielsen’s trading station on Gavutu, 5 kilometres from Tulagi. Woodford had known Nielsen since his first visits as a naturalist in the 1880s and had always enjoyed his hospitality. His initial official report said that there were 48 Europeans in the protectorate, four of them missionaries, and 21 trading vessels. In the days before airplanes, the primary consideration for a settlement was a sheltered port: Tulagi and Gavutu harbours were suitable and central. Tulagi is well positioned for shipboard travel in the Solomons: 25 kilometres from the east coast of Guadalcanal (the largest island in the protectorate), close to Malaita (the most populous island) and central in the archipelago. Its soils are poor, mainly red clay, except for fertile pockets in small valleys. The island was uninhabited, used only for gardening and hunting.

Having been ordered specifically not to establish a permanent headquarters, Woodford seems to have passed off his purchase of Tulagi as a temporary measure. After considering Uki Island between Makira and Ulawa islands, and the Marau Sound area of Guadalcanal, where he had spent time in the 1880s, Woodford purchased Tulagi as the site for the protectorate’s administrative headquarters. The presence nearby of missionaries and traders, and the proximity of sheltered Mboli Passage, which could be used as a shortcut to other islands, proved irresistible. The owners had earlier offered to sell Tulagi to Nielsen. With the trader as his broker, on 29 September 1896, Woodford purchased the island. He paid the neighbouring Gela Sule landowners £42 in gold sovereigns—today equal to about SI$67,700 (A$11,700). Tambokoro and his sons received £12, while the inhabitants of Matanibana, Haleta and Tugumata villages received £10 per village. Misleadingly, Woodford assured the villagers that their garden rights would not be disturbed.

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3 Lawrence 2014, 172–76; Lawrence (p. 105, Figure 16) identifies one of Woodford’s photographs as being possibly of Lars Nielsen’s house at Gavutu, although later photographs do not look similar.  
5 Lawrence 2014, 172.  
Woodford left the protectorate in October 1896, and from Suva and Sydney again lobbied for a permanent appointment. His first official report provided confidence that the protectorate could pay its own way and impressed Joseph Chamberlain, the Secretary of State for the Colonies. There was confusion about the exact nature of Woodford’s position. Initially, it was thought that funds were available for an ongoing appointment as Resident Commissioner, but the Colonial Office only confirmed a non-renewable, six-month appointment as acting Deputy Commissioner. Chaffing under his temporary position, Woodford complained bitterly to authorities in Suva and London, who extended his acting tenure to one year. His continuing appointment as Resident Commissioner—no longer Deputy Commissioner—was confirmed on 17 February 1897. The Colonial Office must have wondered at his zeal to rule the newest far-flung outpost of the British Empire. He was given a £1,200 grant-in-aid, plus his salary, on the understanding that the protectorate would become financially independent as soon as possible. His tasks were to supervise the labour trade, stop illegal sales of firearms, consolidate the boundaries, protect the people and ensure a prosperous future. Woodford had an 8.2-metre open whaleboat purpose-built in Sydney, was given
Martini-Henry rifles with aiming tubes and ammunition for his armed constabulary, purchased supplies and had a small amount of money left over to employ local labour.⁷

In March 1897, Woodford joined HMS Rapid in Suva Harbour. The ship took him to Gavutu, then to the Western Solomons to investigate the deaths of several traders. In May and June, he employed Gela villagers to cut a track across Tulagi, clear sites for the residency and police barracks, cut timber for the buildings and remove enough mangroves to erect a jetty. In early June, he had a hut constructed near the landing place and returned to Gavutu only on weekends. A photograph exists of this flimsy structure—the first temporary British building on Tulagi. From late June, Woodford plus five prisoners and three labourers lived permanently on Tulagi. Soon after, HMS Torch arrived from Fiji with the first members of Woodford’s armed constabulary. They were eight Solomon Islanders who had engaged in the labour trade but had lived in Fiji for some time and spoke Fijian. Among other duties, they served as crew on Woodford’s whaleboat.⁸

**Constructing the settlement**

Woodford worked with local villagers and his armed constabulary, burning off the felled timber. Next, they built a track up to the central ridge and levelled a site for the first residency. The temporary accommodation at Tulagi became overcrowded, which forced the party to once more commute from Gavutu. On 5 August, BP’s ship Titus arrived with extra materials to complete the residency and a prison; the ship brought a carpenter from Australia for the task. A year later, Woodford recorded having the walls of his verandah lined with tongue-and-groove Oregon pine boards, which made the structure much cooler. In 1901, he described his house as 54 metres above sea level, with substantial stone and concrete steps leading down to the landing place.⁹

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⁷ Lawrence 2014, 185–86.
⁸ As they were the first Solomon Islanders to be employed by the protectorate government, they are worth naming. George Homina (or Homiana), a man called Johnson, Jacky Govuna, Peter Suinga (or Suiga) and Harry Tongolia (from Savo) enlisted in Suva on 1 May 1897. Four days later, Johnny Kuria and Jimmy Uvi (from San Cristoval) enlisted and, on 15 May, William Buruku joined the group. They signed contracts to work for one year at £1 a month plus free lodging, rations, clothing and medicine. Solomon Islands Police Force Newsletter, September 1972, 2.
⁹ BSIP AR 1901–02, 18.
Plate 2.2 The first residency, built in 1898 on Tulagi’s central ridge
Source: ANU Archives (ANUA), 481-337-125.

Plate 2.3 The first two homes of the Resident Commissioner
The 1898 residency is to the centre and the 1905 residency is on the right. Government coconut plantations are in the foreground. The photograph is probably from 1907.
Source: British Museum, George Rose's photographs in the Edge-Partington Photographic Collection.
All the members of the armed constabulary were able to relocate to Tulagi on 16 August. The residency and the prison, plus a short coastal track, were almost complete by the time the carpenter left at the end of November. During late 1897 and early 1898, the tracks were expanded, bananas and sweet potato gardens were planted and a permanent water supply was created.\(^{10}\) The residency was ready for use early in 1898 and the prison and the small police headquarters were completed in March—built partly from Australian blue gum and red gum timber, with an Oregon pine floor and leaf walls.\(^ {11}\) The permanent buildings were a useful advance from the early days. When Woodford brought prisoners back from Guadalcanal in September 1897, they worked on the roads and in the gardens during the day and had to be chained to house posts at night.\(^ {12}\)

Woodford’s 1896 and 1897 reports convinced the Colonial Office that a financially self-sufficient administration could be achieved through taxation and development of an economy based on coconut plantations. A smallpox epidemic broke out in German New Guinea in 1898, which required implementing a strict quarantine regime in the protectorate. The next year, when the German Solomon Islands south of Bougainville

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10 ibid., 1897–98, 12, 1901–02, 18.  
12 Boutilier 1984b, 47.
Strait were transferred to Britain, the Colonial Office was pressured to give a larger grant for the protectorate. This enabled the purchase of the 33-ton ketch-rigged yacht *Lahloo*. The protectorate administration had crept over the line to become permanent, through circumstances not all of its own making. The Colonial Office made noises about there being no guarantees for further finances and suggested that the Australian colonies should assist with payment, in the same way as they had originally promised to do (but reneged on) for British New Guinea. The protectorate moved ahead to encourage the development of copra plantations. The companies that dominated the industry in the early days of the protectorate were the Pacific Islands Company and, later, Levers’ Pacific Plantations Limited.\(^{13}\) Levers, a British manufacturing company founded in 1885, successfully promoted a new soap-making process using vegetable oils from coconut and oil palms, rather than from tallow (rendered animal fat). Solomon Islands became Levers’ Pacific base for the production of copra—the smoke-dried kernel of coconuts—to turn into oil.

\[\text{Plate 2.5} \text{ Lahloo, the first government yacht, anchored off Arundel Island} \]
\[\text{Source: ANUA, 481-337-119.}\]

\(^{13}\) Scarr 1967, 263–70; Bennett 1987, 125–49.
Arthur William Mahaffy

Woodford’s first assistant was Arthur William Mahaffy, a top-rate appointment for such an isolated position. Mahaffy’s father, Reverend (later Sir) John P. Mahaffy, was a Classics scholar who served as provost of Trinity College, Dublin. In his younger years, he had taught Oscar Wilde. Born in Dublin in 1869, Arthur Mahaffy was educated at Marlborough Grammar School—one of England’s oldest—and at Magdalen College, Oxford University, graduating with a Master of Arts degree in 1893. After a short appointment as a junior teacher at Magdalen, he spent four years in the Royal Munster Fusiliers, reaching the rank of second lieutenant. He then joined the Colonial Service and was posted to the WPHC, serving first for two years as a junior officer in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Protectorates. His Solomon Islands appointment began in 1898, as a resident magistrate and assistant to Woodford.¹⁴ During his first year, although based in Tulagi, he travelled extensively through the islands. Houses were constructed for Mahaffy at Tulagi and Gizo. He was also appointed a deputy commissioner of the WPHC.

¹⁴ Richards 2012, 87.
Mahaffy’s background suited Woodford’s plans. Posted permanently to Gizo in 1900, he was provided with a force of 25 members of the armed constabulary to suppress headhunting around New Georgia and Vella Lavella. Pacification—the establishment of authority over indigenous polities—was key to the development of copra plantations in the Western Solomons. Mahaffy served under Woodford for several years before he became the assistant to the High Commissioner in Suva in 1904. Between 1909 and 1914, he returned to the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Protectorates as Resident Commissioner.15

Infrastructure, health and welfare

General improvements continued to be made to Tulagi by draining swamps and planting coconut palms and root crops for food, plus other experimental tropical crops such as cocoa, rubber and coffee. Within two years, 24 hectares were under cultivation. By 1901, the cultivated area had increased to 40 hectares, including 30 hectares of coconut palms. Woodford continued to have swampy areas filled in. Two years later, 60 hectares were under cultivation, 54 under palms. Later photographs show that the coconut plantations continued to increase in size. The nuts were used for both food and producing copra. The town’s inner foreshore eventually became a pleasant promenade and transport route, with Queenslander-style office buildings dotted along the shore and houses on nearby hillocks and the central ridge.16

Malaria was a constant problem that debilitated expatriates and Solomon Islanders alike. The infection is spread by parasites in the bloodstream introduced by bites from female Anopheles mosquitoes.17 Although malaria does not usually kill adults, it results in anaemia and its effects generally cause victims to function at about 80 per cent of their full

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15 Lawrence 2014, 198–206; Richards 2012, 87–110; Moore 2013, entry for Arthur Mahaffy. Mahaffy returned to England and in 1914 he was appointed as Administrator of Dominica, a British Crown colony in the Lesser Antilles in the Caribbean. He died in 1919. His extensive ethnographic collection was donated to the National Museum in Dublin.


17 Malarial infections can be carried for many years. The worst form, cerebral malaria, can cause death. Malaria often resurfaces in the body because of another infection. The spleen plays an important part in the body’s fight against malaria, but it enlarges and can rupture.
strength. Influenced by an 1899 report of a malaria expedition to West Africa published by the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, Woodford realised that he had to eliminate swamps. As he commented:

The stagnant water in the swamps on Tulagi formerly swarmed with the larvae of Culicidae (mosquitos). The drains were cut from above downwards, and it is no exaggeration to say that when the first of the effluent matter was allowed to escape it contained as much of mosquito larvae as of water.\textsuperscript{18}

Throughout the 1910s and 1920s, Tulagi’s swamps continued to be drained and its low-lying areas reclaimed. Woodford also destroyed larvae with kerosene. This eradicated most mosquito breeding places and made the island a much healthier place. In 1911, Woodford summed up the situation:

All new arrivals must be prepared, sooner or later, to pass through a course of malarial fever, but the methods of combatting this disease are now so well known that with intelligent precautions its after-effects can be to a greater extent guarded against.\textsuperscript{19}

Sanitation was also improved by building pit latrines and latrines on platforms over the sea, for use by indentured labourers, police and prisoners. Incinerators were established to destroy empty tins and refuse. The first hospital was built in 1913.

Woodford set to work to implement basic laws and regulations. The sale of arms and ammunition to Solomon Islanders was prohibited. Regulations were promulgated in 1897 to try to ensure that cholera, smallpox, measles and yellow fever (an acute viral disease spread by mosquitos) were not introduced from German New Guinea. All vessels entering the protectorate from the north had to first proceed to Tulagi for inspection and, if necessary, quarantine. Licence fees and capitation taxes were levied and exports of tropical products such as copra, ivory nuts, bêche-de-mer and pearl shell, green snail and turtle shell, rattan cane, coffee and orchids were also taxed. Licence fees were lucrative: £3 per passenger from Sydney, £5 for each small boat brought in on a schooner or steamer, £10 for trading licences and substantial harbourage fees. ‘Natives’ were legally defined to stop cash borrowing and indebtedness, and land acquisition began to be regulated. During these early years, the first copper and gold prospectors tried their luck, without success.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{18} BSIP AR 1901–02, 18–19.
\textsuperscript{19} ibid., 1911, 31.
Plate 2.7 The scene from Tulagi ridge, looking towards Gavutu, in the mid-1910s
The hospital is on the left, with the path from the residency passing by.
Source: ANUA, 481-337-121.

Plate 2.8 Tulagi’s first hospital, built in 1913
Note the magnificent woven wall.
Source: ANUA, 481-337-124.
Shipping

Ships, large and small, were the lifeblood of the protectorate. BP’s ships carried most of the cargo and passengers. Regular shipping communication with Sydney was established in 1896 by BP steamers on a route that left Sydney for British New Guinea and returned via Tulagi and Port Vila in the New Hebrides. The first BP voyage to the Solomons was in 1894—an attempt to compete with a temporary steamer service introduced by G.J. Waterhouse and Company from Sydney.21 It took until the early 1900s for the route to become profitable for BP, using Titus, a 760-ton steamer that could carry 40 passengers. Once Tulagi was established, Titus began calling there every two months on a route that included Norfolk Island, Port Vila and the Santa Cruz Group. After 1898, BP’s ship Ysabel (524 tons) was also used on this route, stopping at the New Hebrides, the Banks and Santa Cruz groups and Lord Howe and Norfolk islands. Woodford was critical of these circuitous routes, which took three weeks. A direct trip from Sydney to Tulagi took only eight days, which would have allowed tropical produce to reach Australian markets.

Communications had improved by 1910. BP began running a direct steamer service from Sydney to Tulagi every six weeks, and their Gilbert and Ellice Islands steamer also called in for mail on its way to and from Australia. As the years progressed, BP’s service extended north to Rabaul on a circuit around the Coral Sea, joining the Australian east coast to New Guinea and Solomon Islands. From 1905, Levers’ steamer Upolu called every 11 weeks. It was replaced in 1910 with Kulambangara, which continued in service until 1916, after which Levers used BP’s shipping service to and from Australia. Levers also operated two small steamers within the protectorate.22 A BP steamer made a round trip from Australia to Tulagi every six weeks during the mid-1920s and another sailed from Australia via Rabaul, entering the protectorate from the north at the Shortland Islands before travelling to Tulagi and back to Australia. Although other shipping companies, such as the Union Steam Ship Company and the Australian United Steam Navigation Company, tried to break into the Western Pacific trade, they were never as successful as BP.

21 Bennett 1987, 51.
22 BSIP AR 1902–03, 17, 1912–13, 8.
After 1898, around 50 major voyages called at Tulagi each year, with the number growing as the years progressed. The commercial steamer services allowed direct communication with Sydney and Brisbane around 20 times annually, and a dozen labour trade vessels from Queensland and Fiji called at Tulagi before discharging their human cargoes or commencing recruiting. All ships had to pay harbourage charges, and many made several trips a year. Labour ships had to pay an annual £100 licence fee and allow a medical check of all passengers and crew and a search for contraband. Ships were boarded by Tulagi-based officials—usually the medical officer, who carried out the health checks, and Treasury staff, who dealt with customs and excise matters. Trader and labour recruiter J.E. Philp described the scene in the early 1910s:

[T]he port … official came off in a whale boat pulling five oars—each rower wearing a blue lava-lava with a diamond pointed hem—a leather belt round the waist and a bright scarlet fez atop of his short crisp curly thatch with different styles of ear ornaments—from a stick or piece of bone—to a festoon of seeds—thrust through [each] ear lobe.24

The centrality of Tulagi had its disadvantages for yachts entering from the north or south of the protectorate. Novelist Jack London had to deal with this in July 1908 when his yacht, *Snark*, entered protectorate waters via the New Hebrides and on the way stopped at Santa Ana, Uki and Guadalcanal. His wife, Charmian, made light of the incident:

Mr. Woodford was unfortunately absent when Jack sailed to Gubutu [Gavutu], and he had to deal with a deputy who very tersely demanded the penalty of five pounds for our breach of quarantine. Jack says it is cheap at the price when he considers the six hundred extra miles he would have had to sail if he had entered properly in the first place, beat back to see Port Mary and then covered the return trip to Pennduffryn [a plantation on the east coast of Guadalcanal, later known as Berande]. We are going to frame the receipt for the fine.25

23  Smith 1898, 7 February.
24  J.E. Philp in Herr and Rood 1978, 30. See also Dickinson 1927, 30.
25  London 1915a, 375.
The Australian colonial and Commonwealth governments subsidised BP to supply a shipping service to adjacent Pacific Islands, including carriage of mail.26 This gave the company a virtual monopoly, which it exploited. BP became a major force in the Solomons economy as well as in maritime transport. From the late 1890s, the New South Wales and Queensland governments provided subsidies to run steamers from Sydney, Brisbane and Cooktown to British New Guinea, German New Guinea, Solomon Islands and the New Hebrides. The Australian Government took over the responsibility in 1901, contributing a large subsidy each year, along with additional funds provided by the Australian Papua and BSIP governments. The protectorate contributed £1,800 each year. This rose to £3,000 in the early 1930s and, along with the Australian subsidy, led to lower charges for freight and passengers.27 BP became shippers, storekeepers, copra-buyers, bankers and insurance agents and ran copra plantations.

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26 Buckley and Klugman 1981, 68–71. By 1926, this subsidy had increased to £3,000. BSIP AR 1926–27, 8.
27 BSIP AR, 1934, 12. This cost was partly offset by abatements in the costs of passages and freight.
Plate 2.10 BP’s Makambo Island, showing the rail system that transported supplies to and from the wharf. Tulagi is in the background.
Source: NBAC, N115-520.

Plate 2.11 Makambo Island from the beach, with the manager’s house at the top.
Source: NBAC, N115-520-2.
Plate 2.12 The main store area on Makambo Island
Source: NBAC, N115-520-4.

Plate 2.13 BP’s SS *Mataram* sailing from Tulagi Harbour for Sydney
Source: Clive Moore Collection.
In February 1925, a new BP service began using the *Makambo*, which sailed out of Sydney, travelling first to Port Vila in the New Hebrides and then on to Peu on Vanikolo before proceeding to Tulagi. Overseas steamers arrived, dealt with formal procedures, then headed north to Gizo and the Shortland Islands and into Australia’s New Guinea Mandated Territory (former German New Guinea). Over a two-week period, the ships collected freight and delivered cargo to plantations, missions and trading stations. They travelled to Rabaul before returning to Tulagi and southern ports. W.R. Carpenter and Company (known as Carpenters) also operated an intermittent steamer service via New Guinea, using the *Inga* to call at Tulagi and Vanikolo on the way back to Australia. The other major overseas ships calling in were copra vessels owned by American, Norwegian, Swedish and Japanese companies. Internally in the protectorate, BP steamers called at various islands as they passed through, but in the early 1920s even on this route their holds were only half-full.

The government, planters, traders, labour recruiters and missions all had their own small interisland vessels. Woodford used the *Lahloo* on patrol and to communicate with his deputy, Mahaffy, who was based in Gizo in the north-west. The *Lahloo* was small enough to be propelled by sweep oars if the wind failed. Mahaffy’s main task was to discourage the headhunting that blighted the Western Solomons and Isabel and stood in the way of developing commercial coconut plantations. Gizo and Faisi, in the Shortland Islands, were the first British bases beyond Tulagi, established in 1899 and 1906, respectively. Both later became official ports of entry. The main BP vessel after 1905 was the *Malaita*, while Carpenters used the *Duranbah* in the 1910s. International ships brought mail into the protectorate, which was distributed from Tulagi using smaller craft.

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28 Under different management, before 1923, this was known as San Cristoval Estates Limited.
29 Until 1899, the Shortland Islands had been included in the territory claimed within German New Guinea.
31 ibid., 1928, 9, 1929, 8.
Once official procedures were completed, the commercial steamers anchored at Gavutu or Makambo before setting off around the islands. The recruiting ships left to drop off returning islanders and search for new recruits. At the same time as the external labour trade was closing in the 1900s and early 1910s, labour recruiting began for the approximately 20 plantation companies operating within the protectorate, which drew local smaller vessels to Tulagi. However, once the various district headquarters were established, not all internal recruiting vessels called at Tulagi. British warships from the RNAS fleet continued to visit regularly and sometimes carried the Resident Commissioner to the more distant islands in his domain. During the 1920s, the ungainly steam yacht HMCS *Ranadi* became the main vessel used by resident commissioners. In later years, a series of small vessels served the districts, and the resident commissioners used the handsome HMCS *Tulagi*, the largest ship in the government fleet. Gavutu was crucial for replenishing fuel supplies for steamships; the coal from its store was placed into baskets and wheeled down to the wharf on a rail track.32

BP soon realised the potential of combining cargo transport with regular passenger and tourist trips around the South Seas. Ships in use in the 1920s and 1930s provided comfortable accommodation in two, three and four-berth cabins. The *Malaita* and *Mataram* were replaced with a series of successors, *Makambo*, *Minindi*, *Marsina* and *Malaita II*. Tourists could take a round trip, moving on to mission stations and copra plantations, or get off at Tulagi and pick the ship up again on its return voyage. Visitors commented favourably on Tulagi, finding its inhabitants friendly. Groups of female schoolteacher tourists in the 1930s briefly inflated the number of single women on the island by several hundred per cent, much to the delight of resident expatriate men. When passenger ships were in port there was usually a dance arranged on board to which the resident males flocked, some resplendent in their white tropical suits or ‘Red Sea rig’.

2. A ‘VERY ARDUOUS TASK’

Plate 2.14 A man in a canoe, from an early Burns Philp & Co. advertisement for tourism in Solomon Islands
Source: NBAC, N115-619, June 1934, Vol. 6, No. 3, p. 64.
Plate 2.15 A woman in a grass skirt, from an early Burns Philp & Co. advertisement for tourism in Solomon Islands

‘Steamer day’ was always a red-letter day that buzzed with activity. People from all over Solomon Islands timed their trips to Tulagi to coincide with the arrival of the steamers. Passengers, mail, fresh and frozen meat, fruit and vegetables arrived from Sydney, and protectorate residents boarded the ships, travelling to Australia for business, medical treatment, schooling or holidays. Inbound cargo was unloaded on the Makambo or Gavutu wharves, where it went through customs clearance and was stored, before transhipment into the holds of small vessels to be dispersed throughout the protectorate. Once released by the officials, the passengers and crew went ashore at either of the commercial bases in the harbour or landed on Tulagi, mixing with the local European and Chinese population. Most of the international shipping used Chinese crews from Hong Kong in the engine and boiler rooms;33 these crew made a beeline for Chinatown to pass on news and relax. New arrivals took in the sights of the pretty island capital and the residents gossiped and assessed the ‘new chum’ passengers, particularly if they were likely to become long-term residents. Elkington’s Hotel (1916–34), on the edge of the ridge above the main wharf, bustled with activity and the Tulagi Club (built in 1927 on the outer side of the island) swung into action. Tulagi’s residents tried to answer any mail quickly so as to post letters for return on the same ship. The ships dropped off their cargo and passengers, travelled their allotted route and then passed through again on their way back to Sydney.

These services enabled the Solomons to join the tourist circuit. BP began publishing a travel magazine in 1911, Picturesque Travel, later renamed the BP Magazine, to market Pacific tourism. There were attempts in the 1930s to set up temporary tourist facilities when the steamers were in port.34 The cabins were small and accommodation in Tulagi was primitive compared with that in Suva or Honolulu. It was what would now be called ‘adventure tourism’ and began to bring short-term visitors to Tulagi. BP and Solomon Islands expatriates called it ‘round trip’ tourism. Australians arrived on three-week round trips hoping to see ‘real wild cannibals’.35 During the Great Depression, some residents attempted to tap into the new market. Charles and Kathleen Bignell at Fulakora plantation on Isabel tried to diversify by advertising homestays that included riding, tennis, swimming and home comforts.36 Islanders from the Gela Group

33  Hilder 1961, 36.
35  Bernatzik 1935, 73.
36  PIM, 26 January 1932.
participated in early tourism by making souvenirs to sell to the visitors, and some traders brought artefacts to Tulagi to sell to tourists. In the early 1930s, when Ernie Palmer made a trip to isolated Sikaiana Atoll, he purchased rare loom weaving, mats and model outrigger canoes to sell to tourists back in Tulagi.37 Although they were largely outsiders to this urban development, some Solomon Islanders slowly began to incorporate Tulagi, Gavutu and Makambo into their island world.

Tulagi operated during the decades-long transition from sail to steam power. The early transport system depended on sails. Until engines became more common, sailmakers and repairers were essential on Tulagi, with services provided mainly by a Welshman, Jack Ellis, who was born in Bangor in 1876. An ex-sailor who had lived in the Solomons since the 1900s, Ellis became a fixture on the island. After a short trading career in the Western Solomons, he settled at Sasape in the 1910s, remaining until the outbreak of the Pacific War. He lived in a loft above his workshop, next to his small jetty (see Maps 2.1 and 4.1), with his mate Jack Newman. The relationship was based on alcohol and storytelling. Ellis was well read and rather cynical about humanity, particularly government officers. When not dealing with sails, he worked in Richard C. (Dick) Laycock’s store (next door) or acted as an agent for Chinese traders. As a former sailor, Newman had no fear of heights and took on the annual job of painting the radio transmitter masts.38 Sailing ships—once the main means of transport in the protectorate—were gradually replaced with motorised vessels, which took away the two men’s livelihoods. By the 1930s, with Newman dead, Ellis eked out a living doing odd jobs, and was respected as a gracious but garrulous old man. He had a white beard and moustache and always wore a khaki drill jacket and trousers, which he made himself. Ernie Palmer remembered him as a ‘dirty old man’ who used a peephole to watch naked Solomon Islander women off Ernie’s ships, whom he lured to shower in his bath house.39

37 Struben 1963, 52.
38 His fee to the government was said to have been £5 a day and free hospital treatment for bites from wasps that lived on the masts.
While the age of sail ended, hulls and engines also required repairs, as did the propellers and drive shafts of boats if they ended up wedged on reefs—a common occurrence. Chinatown’s tradesmen had a variety of skills and could fix many mechanical problems. On Tulagi, Carpenters had an engineering workshop and there was another small engineering business. BP’s Makambo had a slipway and workshop, although the only full-scale engineering workshop belonged to Levers, at Gavutu. Once refrigeration was introduced in the 1920s, including large commercial freezers, there were even more engines to maintain and repair.40

Providing services

The Tulagi enclave developed into a service centre for the protectorate, providing postal and banking services, sailmaking and mechanical and engineering services. Today, we are inclined to take for granted that there is a global communication system and that letters sent from anywhere will arrive at the destination written on the envelope. As is clear from the Woodford quote that began this chapter, this was not always the case. In the 1880s and 1890s, it seemed as though Solomon Islands did not exist, or at least no mail system could find it.

Once Woodford arrived in 1896, letters and parcels were placed into canvas bags and given to the crew of steamers to post in Sydney. New South Wales stamps were used and a locked bag was arranged for government business. In 1903, the High Commissioner refused Woodford’s request to overprint Fiji stamps. Three years later, Woodford had a hand-franking rubber stamp made that read ‘British Solomon Islands Paid’ and designed another with a round Tulagi postmark for all outgoing mail. Initially, the envelopes were accompanied by cash or his personal cheque for stamps obtained in Sydney.

Woodford was very happy with the postage system he introduced; he was a stamp collector and was delighted to be able to design and issue his own stamps. However, he was also aware that his administration could make £500–£600 a year from selling stamps. With permission from the Secretary of State for the Colonies, he had the first BSIP postage stamps

printed in Sydney by W.E. Smith and Company, using a lithographic process. The first design depicted a crewed Western District *tomoko* canoe in front of Tulagi, with coconut palms on each side. The first day of issue was 14 February 1907, with the Customs Department and resident magistrates as the postmasters. Woodford had some difficulties when imperfect pages of stamps were sold illegally to a stamp dealer in London, creating a lucrative illicit market. Almost all of these were retrieved, although some facsimiles were also manufactured in Europe. After 18 months, the unofficial stamps were replaced with a similar but simplified design, produced in London by Crown Agents Messrs Thomas De La Rue and Company Limited from line-engraved plates conforming to Universal Postal Union rules. Five years later, this design was replaced with another, showing the head of King George V. Tulagi became the main postal centre in Solomon Islands, linked to Gavutu, Gizo, Faisi, Aola on Guadalcanal, Auki on Malaita and eventually Kirakira on Makira and Vanikolo in the south.41

British currency circulated in the protectorate from the 1880s and 1890s. Solomon Islanders working in Queensland began using the Queensland Government Savings Bank in the 1880s. Those who worked in Queensland until the 1900s often had substantial sums saved in banks.42 In the mid-1900s, Solomon Islanders engaging as labourers within the protectorate often asked to be paid in coins rather than goods, while those returning from Queensland and Fiji frequently brought several pounds sterling with them, and in some cases even bank deposit receipts (which they could never have redeemed). Many returned from overseas plantations with coins—often gold sovereigns—which they kept in bottles buried in the ground. Solomon Islanders did not trust paper money, preferring coins.43

By the 1910s, Commonwealth Bank of Australia money orders were available from BP and Carpenters and postal notes could be purchased at the post office.44 The government discouraged cash advances to Solomon Islanders, who sometimes gained credit facilities through traders. They were protected by the 1896 Native Contracts’ Regulation (No. 2) under which no civil action could be taken to recover debts from Solomon

42 Moore 2015.
Islanders. One reason for this was that Solomon Islanders sometimes refused to recognise debts negotiated by a company when one company representative was replaced with another. Only mixed-race Solomon Islanders had any chance of accessing limited credit. District officers added running money order services to their duties, which enabled funds to be remitted throughout the world.\footnote{BSIP AR, 1922–23, 6.} Before World War II, protectorate residents could transact banking long distance through Suva and Sydney or use the Commonwealth Bank of Australia Savings Bank branches at Tulagi and Faisi—both established in 1931.\footnote{ibid., 1931, 12.} Tulagi, Makambo and Gavutu were at the centre of most of these transactions. In 1918, the BSIP issued its own paper currency (with notes to the value of 5/-, 10/-, £1 and £5) to supplement the British currency and Australian Commonwealth bank notes and gold and silver coins already in circulation. After 1919, the local currency was used to pay labourers, and £4,154 of it was in circulation.\footnote{ibid., 1917–18, 5, 1918–19, 4.}

Plate 2.16 Tulagi, with the port and customs office in the foreground
Source: NBAC, N115-4.
Another logistical issue was printing. When commercial houses or the government wanted to have printing done, it had to be commissioned in Australia or Fiji or they had to ask the missions to help. The Catholic Mission established the first printing press in Solomon Islands at Rua Sura, Guadalcanal, in 1910, using a small, primitive machine. The Melanesian Mission press was transferred from Norfolk Island to Hautabu near Maravovo on Guadalcanal in 1912, into buildings formerly occupied by the Welchman Memorial Hospital. Once Mota was abandoned as the Melanesian Mission language of instruction, and all teaching swung over to English, more translations and printing were required. At this stage, the Melanesian Mission press began to accept private orders, the first of which was to print the rules of the Tulagi Club. All of these buildings were destroyed during the Japanese invasion in 1942. The Methodists also installed a printing press at Kokeqolo in Roviana Lagoon in about 1928. The early exclusivity of the mission presses explains why the *Planters’ Gazette* (1920–23) was published by Bloxham and Chambers Limited in Sydney.

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48 Information from Martin Hadlow, Brisbane, 17 July 2016.
1915: Woodford departs

What was Charles Morris Woodford like to deal with? His first visits to the Solomons were as a young man in the 1880s and he retired in 1915, aged in his 60s. He remained handsome as he aged, although he became more thick set. There is a substantial archive of his papers and photographs that provides some guidance, and a recent biography by David Lawrence.49 Woodford grew into the job of Resident Commissioner and was allowed, within limits imposed by the WPHC, to shape the protectorate between 1896 and 1915. In 1907, Walter H. Lucas, BP’s ‘island manager’ in Sydney, prepared a set of character sketches of Solomon Islands identities. He described Woodford as friendly to BP:

Provided you do not offend him and always remember that he is His Majesty’s Representative, the rest should be plain sailing. He apparently has to be careful how he offends Lever Bros.50

Seventy years later, academic K.B. Jackson assessed Woodford in a similar style, suggesting that he had a ‘finely tuned sense of his own importance’ (which was undoubtedly true) as someone who had guided the beginnings of a substantial Pacific territory.51 Ian Heath, his first biographer, described Woodford as ‘the product and an example of the aggressive empire building of the mid- to late-Victorians, with its assumed racial and social superiority leavened with benevolent paternalism’.52 He could also be quite brutal in the ‘pacification’ methods he used.

Woodford assumed that British civilisation was superior and its technology would win out over any Solomon Islander opposition. He was correct about the technology. Solomon Islanders soon realised that Europeans possessed superior weapons and seemingly unlimited resources. A social evolutionist, Woodford thought Solomon Islanders were a dying race and would decline in numbers to the point of extinction; his views were backed up by missionary and medical opinion from the time.53 Heath compared Woodford with William MacGregor and Hubert Murray, the

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49 Lawrence 2014; Lawrence et al. 2015.
51 Jackson 1978, 165.
52 Heath 1974, 113.
53 Buxton 1925–26; Rivers 1922; Lambert 1934a; Lambert 1934b.
administrators of British New Guinea and Australian Papua, respectively, both in his methods and in his rationale. Lawrence correctly observed that the ‘history of the Solomon Islands from 1896 to 1915 was fundamentally determined by Woodford’.\(^5^4\) For good or for bad, Woodford created the foundations of the modern nation. He chose the development of copra plantations as the fundamental economic underpinning and encouraged large-scale land alienation and development. He was also determined to rely on local, not imported, labour, which stopped the Solomons from ending up like Fiji with its substantial Indo-Fijian communities. Where Woodford was not correct was in underestimating the ability of Solomon Islanders to cope with change, which has proved to be their strength. Their cultures were never static and have continued to adapt.\(^5^5\)

Woodford’s health suffered after many years in the Pacific. As he grew older, illnesses such as malaria took their toll. When Graham Officer visited Tulagi in 1901, he described 49-year-old Woodford as a

\[
\text{lithic thin man with finely cut features, slight moustache, firmly compressed rather than limp, a short incisive way of speaking, very uncommunicative, but a man who is I think ‘not of words but of actions’.}^{5^6}
\]

As a collector of material culture items for a museum, Officer had much in common with Woodford. Officer described the latter as very generous, kind and engendering confidence with the advice he gave. Officer’s colleague Professor Walter Baldwin Spencer, from the University of Melbourne, was less flattering, describing Woodford as ‘a very unapproachable man. Very strict in his manner.’\(^5^7\)

\(^5^4\) Lawrence 2014, 349.
\(^5^5\) Moore 2017.
\(^5^6\) Richards 2012, Graham Officer Diary, 29 January 1901, 137.
\(^5^7\) The comment by Spencer was added by Richards from another source. See also Officer, 23 February 1901, in Richards 2012, 145.
Plate 2.18 Charles Woodford, Deputy Commissioner, 1896, and Resident Commissioner, 1897–1915
Source: ANUA, 481-337-7b.
Used to living rough in his youth, Woodford managed to create a comfortable existence on Tulagi. The first residency was replaced in 1905 with a prefabricated house purchased in Sydney, which, judging from photographs, appears to have been much larger than the original.\footnote{ANU Archives [hereinafter ANUA], 481-337-125; BM, George Rose’s photographs, Edge-Partington Photographic Collection.} Still far from grand, it was built further up the ridge than the first house. On one level, set on high stumps with verandahs in colonial Australian style, the house had a flagpole in the front. Once this new house was ready, the old residency was allocated to the Treasurer, until a new house was built for him on the same site in 1914.\footnote{The Handbook of the British Solomon Islands Protectorate, with Returns up to 31st March 1911 [hereinafter BSIP Handbook] (1911, 23) gives the date as 1905, but official correspondence suggests it was in 1908. British Colonial Office 1925, 406–07; WPHCA, No. 2549 of 1917, A/Treasurer R.R. Pugh to A/RC J.C. Barley, 28 July 1917. I presume Woodford is correct and the later official is wrong.}

In the 1900s, the town had grown to around 20 European residents, with others living on Makambo, Gavutu and Bungana. These interrelated settlements developed the standard trappings of an isolated colonial outpost. J.E. Philp arrived in 1912. Writing in the mid-1920s, he described Tulagi as well established:

> The headquarters at Tulagi is beautifully placed—the foreshore and slopes being all planted with coconuts evenly spaced and of nearly equal growth. Neath their shelter along a curve of beach are situated the boat-houses and natives’ quarters. While on the summit of the slope some 230 feet [70 metres] above the water level are the houses of the officials—each of attractive design, white painted—with red roofs—a striking note of colour in strong contrast with the vivid lush greenery of the verdure. Where the soil is bare—it stands out red—rich volcanic—with rock faces of a creamy grey tint, with deeper shades of scoriated masses.\footnote{Herr and Rood 1978, 30.}

Perhaps Joseph Dickinson’s comment about Tulagi a few years later was more candid. He noted that it was a beautiful spot but that once on shore ‘your first rapture loses its enthusiasm in the sweltering heat, for the harbor side of this station is something fierce’.\footnote{Dickinson 1927, 29.} The civil servants who made Tulagi their home in the 1910s had to learn to cope. Regardless of the numerous eulogies to its beauty and tranquillity, Tulagi was small, hot, humid and isolated.
Woodford’s retirement after 29 years of association with Solomon Islands, and almost two decades after the government was first staffed, was a good time to assess Tulagi and the protectorate. He had reason to be pleased, having created a small town and a rudimentary administration over 900 islands. Viewed from the sea, the red-roofed bungalows perched high on the ridge stood out from the jungle green, with the Union Jack fluttering above the residency. White coral paths ran spider-web–like between the government offices, shops and houses. A series of houses had been built to accommodate the government officials, but with no plan—merely in the best places, usually high on the ridge. The protectorate’s administration was always strapped for finances. Officers eventually received suitable houses, although the time it took them to get comfortable accommodation was always an issue. One early building was the single officers’ quarters, built in 1911, initially with four bedrooms and a large main room that served as a dining and living room, all surrounded by a verandah. It was later expanded and, by the 1930s, was ‘a long rambling building … designed to accommodate the unmarried government officials’. As these officers were often travelling, there was little furniture and a sense of impermanency. Each room contained a single bed with a mosquito net tucked in all the way around. In 1917, the acting Treasurer noted that the ‘cheerless quarters … tend to strain any feelings of good fellowship and make men less inclined to club together for their mutual comfort’. Most officials began life on Tulagi in the single officers’ quarters. Early on, a house and store were also constructed for a Chinese storekeeper, although as Chinatown developed and large commercial companies were established, the concept of a government store became redundant.

When the first Judicial Commissioner (later termed Chief Magistrate) was appointed in 1913, his house was opposite the residency. The first jailer and labour overseer were also appointed in 1913; they bunked in together in a house built for the superintendent of the Public Works Department, who did not arrive until the next year and was not granted his own house until 1916. The first Tulagi Hospital was constructed in 1913. It consisted of two wooden buildings on the ridge above the wharf, beside

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62 Knibbs 1929, 22–23.
64 WPHCA, No. 2549 of 1917, R.R. Pugh (A/Treasurer) to A/RC J.C. Barley, 28 July 1917, High Commissioner’s dispatch No. 259, 17 November 1917.
65 ibid.
the path to the residency. The wireless operator had a house next to the wireless station and transmission towers, all built in late 1915 on the outer coast. The Commandant of the Armed Constabulary occupied a house originally built at Auki on Malaita when the position was based there. It was rebuilt at Tulagi in 1914–15. The first Assistant Inspector of Labour, A. Hedley Abbott, a carpenter by trade, built his own house in 1912—wedged into a precipitous site with no space for a garden. A house for the accountant was constructed in 1914 and another for the Crown surveyor in 1916—occupied first by Stanley Kibbs and then by Spearline Wilson. In 1915–16, quite large quarters were built for the government carpenters. After the cutting through the central ridge—usually known as ‘The Cut’—was constructed in 1918, it enabled easier use of the outer coast, where the Tulagi Club, the wireless station and the second hospital were built. The houses for the doctors and nurses were beside the new hospital. Before The Cut, access to the outer coast was by climbing over the central ridge.

By the time Woodford left, World War I was under way. Germans in the protectorate were interned in a ‘civilised’ manner; all had to move to Mallialli near Tulagi and promise to stay there without any guards. Friends could drop by and they could get supplies from Tulagi, including alcohol. Eventually, the administration let them return to their homes.

Another change brought by World War I is discussed in Chapter 7: the arrival of a group of settlers and officials with military training.

Australia took over German New Guinea in 1914 on behalf of Britain—a control perpetuated from 1921 as a ‘C Class’ Mandated Territory of the League of Nations. While Australia had always been the main trading connection with the Solomons, and regarded the islands surrounding the Coral Sea as its natural area of hegemony, from 1914, there was a joint Australian–British border at Bougainville Strait. Solomon Islands planters’ hopes of accessing Bougainville labour were soon dashed when Australia maintained north Solomons labour for New Guinea’s needs. Hopes for an amalgamation of the British Melanesian territories once more faded. Although initially copra prices were high,

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67 Boutilier 1974, 11.
a lack of shipping meant copra was stockpiled until the United States began to take the surplus in 1916. In the meantime, the price of imported consumer goods rose by 60 to 100 per cent. After the war, copra prices rose again briefly, then fell away, and major import commodities such as rice and tobacco remained expensive. Overseas capital for investment was in limited supply. Overall, there was an economic slump between 1914 and about 1924. When several BSIP Government staff left to enlist in the war they were not replaced, which weakened government services.\footnote{70}

Woodford served the protectorate well, although ultimately he was a man of his times, with all the drawbacks of a fin-de-siècle English gentleman. He had experience of the local people and of working in the British colonial system. He knew that a modern economy had to be constructed. He chose coconut plantations as the main vehicle and the indigenous people as the labour force. When one looks at Fiji, Hawai`i or New Caledonia, where significant numbers of foreign labourers were introduced, the Solomons was saved from issues surrounding non-indigenous citizens—except for the Chinese business sector and the introduction by the British of Gilbert Islanders in the late 1950s and 1960s. Charles Woodford created the first urban settlement. When he left in 1915, he was able to look down from the residency and marvel at what had once been an unoccupied island but was now a minor Pacific administrative centre. However, there must have been many waiting for him to depart, since his presence had dominated for so long.

**Images of Tulagi**

Each chapter of this book includes photographs that mirror the text. Woodford took some of the first photographs of the Solomons in the 1880s and continued to take photographs until 1915. What may be a Woodford photograph, of the first hoisting of the British flag on Tulagi, was reproduced in the *Sydney Mail* in 1900.\footnote{71} Although initially it seemed that not many of his photographs had survived, in recent decades 450 have been located, and many are of Tulagi.\footnote{72} Woodford’s papers also include

\footnote{70 Bennett 1987, 198–201, 219.}
\footnote{71 PMB, Woodford Papers and Photographs, 1290, Reel 2, Bundle 16, 9/29, *Sydney Mail*, November 1900 [newspaper cutting].}
\footnote{72 Phone interview with Joan Presswell (granddaughter of Charles Woodford), Bundanoon, NSW, 14 September 2008. Lawrence 2014, 112–22.}
photographs of Guadalcanal, New Georgia, Ontong Java and Sikaiana atolls and Rennell and Bellona islands—many identifiable as the work of Northcote Deck and Frank Barnett—taken from the 1900s. Some of the most interesting photographs in Woodford’s archives are several of a whale skeleton preserved in a shed—presumably a specimen collected by Woodford, Mahaffy or Thomas Edge-Partington (another early official) to sell to a museum. There are also three photographs of the ceremony used for porpoise hunting at ‘Aoke Island in the north of Langalanga Lagoon, Malaita, taken by Barnett in 1909.

During the final decades of the nineteenth century, cameras began to be used on some labour trade, missionary and naval vessels and by visiting professional photographers and others—usually wealthy amateurs. At least 2,000 photographs have survived from the early decades of the protectorate. In 1892, Bishop H.H. Montgomery from Tasmania travelled on the *Southern Cross* to the Melanesian Mission’s bases. He used equipment loaned by Tasmanian photographer John W. Beattie to take a series of photographs of the mission’s activities. Beattie himself toured Solomon Islands in 1906 on the *Southern Cross*, publishing more than 400 images from the protectorate. In the mid-1890s, Austro-Hungarian Comte Rodolphe Festetics de Tölna visited Santa Cruz, Santa Ana, Choiseul, New Georgia and the Shortland Islands on his 76-ton yacht *Le Tölna*, taking more than 400 photographs. Edge-Partington took around 250 photographs and had copies of more than 100 photographs taken in 1907 by Australian commercial photographer George Rose. Walter Lucas from BP also took a number of early photographs, and Robert Lever, the government entomologist, was an avid photographer in the 1930s. There were many other photographers, but only fragments of their collections have survived. Tulagi was never heavily represented in the photographic record of Solomon Islands. The settlement had no resident commercial photographer and no commercial photo-developer

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73 Rennell and Bellona are atolls, although because of their size and elevation they are usually described as islands.
74 PMB, Woodford Papers and Photographs, 1290, Reel 1, Bundle 5, 10/3, ‘Three photographs of a whale’s skeleton housed in a shed’, Reel 2, Bundle 15, 10/31/1–3, ‘Ceremony of Invoking the Porpoise at Auki, Malaita’ (photographs by F.J. Barnett, 1909).
75 Burt 2015; Lawrence 2014; Richards 2012; Hviding and Berg 2014; Thomas 2014; Wright 2013.
76 Woodford 1890; Rannie 1912, 206–17; Beattie 1909; Festetics de Tölna 1903; Lawrence 2014, 159–60.
A ‘Very Arduous Task’

until the 1920s, when a Japanese trader filled the role. In the early years, Woodford was probably responsible for developing photographs for other residents and visitors.

Photographers found the local people and their material culture far more exotic and photogenic than the buildings and social life in the small colonial town. The settlement was contained at the south and centre of the island and eventually spread on to both sides, separated by the central ridge. It was impossible to photograph the whole urban area in one shot. Most offshore photographs are of Tulagi’s sparsely settled wharf area and show only the government offices, Elkington’s Hotel and the houses on the ridge behind. The first moving pictures of Tulagi were taken by Martin and Osa Johnson in 1917. They filmed the front of the residency, the constabulary on parade, Chinatown and Makambo Island.

The greatest concentration of buildings was in Chinatown and beyond, where Morris Hedstrom’s, and later Carpenters’, stores and wharf were located. In the 1910s, several Chinese-owned stores began selling direct to Solomon Islander labourers who passed through while engaging for or ending contracts on plantations. The Chinese who came to work in the BSIP as artisans were quick to begin trading ventures and a small Chinatown soon sprang up in a swampy area next to the administrative centre. From the 1920s, the hospital, the Tulagi Club, the wireless station and the police headquarters and barracks were on the outer coast of the island and well away from the harbour where ships anchored. The prison was at the south-eastern end, quite separate and facing into the harbour. There are photographs taken from the height of the ridge looking down over the government offices, the wharf and Chinatown, or looking down to the outer coast, which was more spread out and not possible to include in one shot. Photographers used the high ground to capture as wide a view as they could but seldom turned around to photograph the houses of the leading public servants.

77  Johnson 1945, 112; Muhlhauser 1924, 204. Another of the Japanese residents, Ito, was written about by MacQuarrie (1946, 66–84).
78  Moore 2013, entry for Elkington’s Hotel.
Compared with Samarai’s Campbell’s Walk, Victoria Parade in Suva or the palace waterfront in Nukua’alofa, Tonga, Tulagi lacked an extensive coastal promenade. Even in later years, one-third of the island was undeveloped and the formed path never went all the way around. Tulagi did not offer a panoramic view like those available of Levuka, Fiji’s early capital, or the Apia waterfront and harbour in Samoa. Typically, photographs show only parts of Tulagi, such as ships loading export staples at the Gavutu or Makambo wharves or views ashore from out in the harbour. Overseas ships usually did not berth at Tulagi wharf, which meant passengers used small vessels to cross from the commercial wharves. Neighbouring Gavutu and Makambo islands were much more picturesque shorelines for photographers wanting to depict investment opportunities or commercial or shipping potential.80 Paradoxically, when the Pacific War reached Solomon Islands, Tulagi became a major target, not only for bombs, but also for photographs, providing aerial images of the full extent of and the demise of the settlement.

Merchant companies

Tulagi faced on to an extensive protected waterway over to Gela Pile, usually divided into Tulagi Harbour and Gavutu Harbour. Between Gela Sule and Gela Pile, Port Purvis and Mboli Passage provided easy travel to the Anglican headquarters at Siota. In 1902, William Lever, the prominent British soap manufacturer, invested in the Solomon Archipelago, purchasing the assets of the Pacific Islands Company Limited, which held concessions over 112,000 hectares of land. This was the beginning of Levers in the Solomons. George Fulton, who was sent to Sydney to manage the operation, made annual trips to the Solomons. In 1907, Levers paid £40,000 (today about A$5.8 million or SI$35 million) for Oscar Svensen’s assets, including Gavutu Island, which became their central depot, and installed a team of local managers on their plantations. J.J. Huddy was an early long-staying Levers’ Gavutu manager. He was succeeded by Major Frank R. Hewitt between 1925 and 1935, who eventually took over the Sydney position.81 Late in the prewar years, Levers built a small trade store on Tulagi, presumably to compete with Carpenters and Chinatown. In 1929, Levers merged with a Dutch

80 Quanchi 1994; Quanchi 1995; Quanchi 1997; Quanchi 2004; Quanchi 2010a; Quanchi 2010b.
margarine company, Margarine Unie, to form Unilever, the world’s first modern multinational company. Similar in its prominence to the Colonial Sugar Refining Company Limited (CSR)—the Australian company that dominated the Fijian sugar industry—Levers was the largest and most influential company in Solomon Islands. For Solomon Islanders, ‘Lifa’ was a synonym for ‘plantation’.

Plate 2.19 The wharves at Levers’ headquarters, Gavutu Island, 1907
Source: British Museum, George Rose’s photographs in Edge-Partington Photographic Collection.
Europe began to switch from animal fat to vegetable oil–based margarines early in the twentieth century. Then World War I altered the balance in the world market for natural oils. Before 1914, Germany was the world centre for crushing heavy organic materials such as copra. The product was sold in Europe for use in personal soaps and for margarine—the first food to be industrially manufactured, which soon rivalled butter. Much of the coconut and palm kernel oil refined in Germany went to the Netherlands to make margarine for the German and British markets. Once the war began, Pacific copra no longer went to Germany and Britain imported the product directly from Pacific territories or via Australia. During the war, glycerine—once a minor by-product of soap-making—became an important component in propellants and explosives and a major industrial product. Britain needed margarine and glycerine but did not want to set up its own crushing plants. The answer was the United States, which was slower than Europe to switch to margarine, but did so during World War I. The British made arrangements to sell Pacific copra there and buy glycerine in return. This meant that American shipping began to call in to the Solomons to collect copra. Levers had got in early and prospered.
The other two of the big-three merchant enterprises were Australian in origin: BP and Carpenters were products of Australian entrepreneurship. Burns Philp (South Seas) Company Limited and Morris Hedstrom and Company were Fiji-based, although BP’s Fiji company was an offshoot of the Australian mother company. Levers was the first big company to invest in the protectorate, along with their main rival, BP, which began in shipping and diversified into retail trade and plantations. BP became plantation owners almost by accident as they had to take over mortgages from planters who had defaulted on loans. However, they were struggling to make a profit based only on shipping, even with government subsidies, and could only remain competitive if they diversified into copra production and trading. The first of these plantations were part of Shortland Islands Plantations Company. BP’s primary vehicle became the Solomon Islands Development Company, which by the early 1920s had amassed 1,600 hectares of coconut plantations in the protectorate. A new commercial venture was floated in 1920, Burns Philp (South Sea) Company, with headquarters in Fiji. New copra storage depots were erected at Makambo, Gizo and Faisi in the Shortland Islands. About this time, the copra trade began to swing away from Australia towards the United States. With the Fiji-based BP company in ascendancy, the Australian BP company declined as the means for shipping BSIP copra, although the shareholders and directors of the Fiji company were largely the same as those in the parent company.82 These big companies provided a range of commercial services and were avaricious and demanding of debtors. The local expatriates had slang names for them. Two of the nicknames were based on the company initials: BP was called ‘Bloody Pirates’; Carpenters became ‘WRC’, which local wits said stood for ‘Would Rob Christ’. Levers was known as ‘The Octopus’, and some said its acronym stood for ‘Levers Poorly Paid Labourers’.

Gavutu had commodious houses for the Levers’ manager and his offiders, as well as many buildings for supporting staff and its commercial operations. Joseph Dickinson, who arrived in the Solomons in 1908, published A Trader in the Savage Solomons in 1927. His descriptions of Levers’ Gavutu headquarters are a composite of his experiences during those years:

Gavutu was a self-contained station. It possessed a large well-equipped bungalow, a small hospital, a large general store, engine and repair shops, carpenter and boat-building gear, recreation grounds, produce sheds, a large concrete reservoir, and a staff of six white men.83

By the early 1930s, there was also a recreation club, electricity, a reticulated water supply fed from a reservoir and beautiful gardens of flowering trees and shrubs and large rainforest trees and coconut palms.84

At first, BP concentrated on merchant shipping; then, in 1906, they began a new trade store at Gizo, matching their existing store at Faisi in the Shortland Islands. Two years later, BP formed the Solomon Islands Development Company to manage their plantation assets, and also purchased small Makambo Island opposite Tulagi, establishing their local headquarters and completing the three-island centre of the Tulagi enclave.85 Makambo, just a five-minute launch trip across the bay from Tulagi, had large retail and bulk stores, an insurance agency, quarters for European male employees, labour barracks and a substantial manager’s house on the hill, plus gardens, a tennis court and pavilion. The wharf was smaller than the one at Gavutu.

Due to its position, Makambo appears in many photographs taken from Tulagi; Gavutu was further away.86 Martin and Osa Johnson’s mid-1910s film, and company photographs from the same period, shows Makambo to have developed into a substantial commercial base. Photographic and written evidence suggests that vessels either anchored offshore and used lighters to ferry cargo and passengers or used the Makambo or Gavutu wharves if they needed to berth. Although Levers’ Pacific operations were based in the Solomons, BP and Carpenters were part of a wider Australian commercial outreach throughout the Pacific Islands. They dominated in the Australian Papua and New Guinea territories, with BP controlling the shipping routes. From a commercial viewpoint, their Solomons operations were not separate from those in New Guinea.

83 Dickinson 1927, 31.
There were also several Chinese companies and some smaller Tulagi businesses. For instance, Dick Laycock arrived in the Solomons with his brother in about 1905. He began work as a boatbuilder at Aola and then opened a small store at Balusana, both on Guadalcanal. Laycock did well, married a Sydney woman named Violet and moved to Tulagi in about 1914, where he opened a store. He succeeded through building up a reputation for honest trading and was soon able to lease land on Tulagi, as well as establishing plantations on Isabel. Violet and their five children lived on Tulagi, although each child was born in Sydney. Typical of European women based in the protectorate, Violet preferred to give birth in Australia. Around 1921, Laycock sold out to Carpenters, moving to Isabel, while his wife returned to Sydney where their children were being educated. During the Great Depression, he became a goldminer on Guadalcanal, although he was still closely involved with his family. He also leased 1.2 hectares of land at Sasape, where he ran a small trading business.87

The image to grasp is of three long-term settlements that together made up the central islands of the Tulagi enclave. Tulagi—with its government headquarters, Chinatown and one large commercial company (Morris Hedstrom, taken over by Carpenters)—was at the centre, along with Makambo and Gavutu across the harbour. Bungana was more of an outlier, with an Anglican mission and school, not a commercial base, although, as Tulagi’s lighthouse was situated there, it was always in the consciousness of all residents of the enclave and the protectorate. A fifth settlement was added in the early 1940s when the Anglican headquarters was moved from Siota to Taroaniara, on Gela Sule, but within sight of the capital. Diaries, such as those of J.E. Philp, show there was constant movement between the three main islands by canoes, boats, lighters and ships, just as today we would drive around a suburb or town completing our shopping and other business. Missionaries, traders and plantation owners and managers came and went constantly, and there were always Solomon Islanders in their crews.

87 ibid., 327–29.
As an example of the way the commercial web operated, the story of Charles and Kathleen Bignell is symbiotically interwoven with these large trading companies. Charles Bignell was born in 1892 in Dungog, a small rural town in New South Wales. He arrived in the Solomons in 1911 and worked for well-known trader Oscar Svensen, mainly on his ship *Minota*, which constantly visited Tulagi. He began his own trading station at the end of Mboli Passage before purchasing small Beki Island in Sandfly Passage. He picked up his supplies from Tulagi and Makambo and returned with produce to sell to BP. About this time, Levers gave up its early concentration on trading and began to buy plantations, leaving a gap in the market that was eagerly filled by Bignell and other small traders. Bignell began by using whaleboats and then purchased the cutter *Newfoundland* from Levers at Gavutu. He then returned to Sydney to have a 13.7-metre ship built and fitted with a secondhand auxiliary engine. The *Ratu*, capable of carrying 15 tons of cargo, arrived strapped to the deck of BP’s *Moresby*. In his days with Svensen, Bignell had spent time on Isabel and always wanted to begin a coconut plantation there. His trading business prospered, which enabled him to employ an offsider, and in 1913, Bignell leased a 485-hectare block at Fulakora Point on the north-east of Isabel. This was the beginning of Fulakora plantation.

In 1914, he married Kathleen Freeman, the sister of his manager at Beki. Twenty-two years old and from Scotland, she had arrived at Tulagi with her mother on BP’s *Minindi*. She was immediately smitten with the islands, although it took her a little longer to accept Bignell’s proposal of marriage. The couple’s first child, Margaret, was due to be born in early 1916. This required a trip to Australia on the *Minindi* to give birth. Six weeks later, Kathleen and Margaret returned to Tulagi on the same ship, then headed off to Fulakora. *Yield Not to the Wind*, a biography of the Bignells, published by Margaret in 1982, reveals the constant movements between Beki and Fulakora and the close commercial and transport relationships between this family and the Tulagi enclave. They prospered and, although the marriage was troubled, they were typical of many other trading and plantation families who constantly visited the capital and its commercial satellites. In 1919, Kathleen gave birth to a son, Charles Edward—the first white baby born in Tulagi Hospital.88

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88 Clarence 1982.
Chinatown, 1910s–1920s

The collection of buildings on the narrow strip of coastal land around Tulagi’s harbour became an embryonic town, with houses scattered along the shore and the ridges behind. Chinatown was part of this, but always separate, although it bordered on the businesses of Dick Laycock, Morris Hedstrom and, later, Carpenters. There were also some European businesses within Chinatown. The Chinese became a dominant although never fully welcome presence. Even though they were the traders who made middle-level commerce operate smoothly, many impediments were put in their way and a sneering racism permeated many European comments about the Chinese.

The first Chinese business in Solomon Islands was Huong Lee (Wangli)89 Company of Levuka, Fiji. The company began a trading station at Star Harbour on Makira in 1877, with Canadian John Champion Macdonald as their agent. The venture was ill-fated, since by 1880, Macdonald seems to have absconded with Huong Lee’s ship, Star of Fiji, and set up in competition on nearby Santa Ana with his brother William.90 Huong Lee pursued Macdonald to the Solomons to recover his vessel, to no avail.91 The first Asians to live permanently in the protectorate probably arrived in the 1890s and 1900s. In an early report, Woodford said about 10 Japanese and Filipinos were employed in the pearl-diving industry. Chinese first came to the protectorate from German New Guinea as cooks, carpenters and gardeners. Many stayed for only one six- or 12-month contract. Woodford’s explanation of their transitory behaviour was that they ‘become discontented as they find no opportunity here of satisfying their desire for sexual intercourse’ and were also looking for a back door into Australia.92 Once free of their initial contracts, a few continued to work as mechanics and carpenters in government service; most entered business.93

89 There are complex issues with Chinese nomenclature, as several English-language versions are used in the sources and different branches of the same modern family choose to spell the same names differently. I have followed the advice of my colleague Chi-Kong Lai, who provided the new wording.
92 CO, 225/83 (1908), Western Pacific No. 13758, RC C.M. Woodford to HC Sir Everard Im Thurn, 13 February 1908.
93 BSIP AR 1934, 13.
Chinese workers who migrated overseas in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries arrived at their destinations in different ways. Some paid for their own passage, some used a credit-ticket system, which could involve debt bondage relating to their families at home or to themselves, and others came under contract or indenture. In 1908, BSIP plantation companies made moves (which came to nothing) to bring in Chinese indentured labourers. Their lack of success was partly a consequence of British colonial failures elsewhere. A move to import Chinese into the West Indies in the nineteenth century was unpopular, and antagonism from the Boers and the British public to Chinese labourers working in the Transvaal mines between 1904 and 1907 was one of the reasons for the toppling of the British Unionist Government in the 1906 general election. This anti-Chinese ripple flowed through into the British Pacific, where the Australian colonies established discriminatory policies against the Chinese in the second half of the nineteenth century. The new Australian Commonwealth Government also expressed an aversion to Asian migrants, legislating in 1901 to ban non-European immigration. This became known as the White Australia Policy. The Australian Government did not want any similar immigration into neighbouring colonies.94 Although a large Chinese population lived at Rabaul and nearby Kokopo in the New Guinea Mandated Territory, there were virtually none in British New Guinea (the Australian Territory of Papua from 1906), where legislation had been introduced in 1889 to ban Chinese from the new goldfields. Ten years later, Queensland legislation restricting Chinese immigration was adopted in Australian Papua and the White Australia Policy continued the ban.95 In 1910, the Colonial Office declined to allow Indian labour to be imported into Solomon Islands and, two years later, it refused similar plans to import Javanese labourers. During the 1910s and 1920s, Levers unsuccessfully advocated the use of Chinese labourers and BP considered but rejected a Sydney Chinese merchant’s proposal to settle Chinese in the Solomons to grow bananas for the Sydney market. In 1931, Levers again advocated importing Indian labour.96

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95 Inglis 1974, 170–71. The exception was Luk Poy Wai (Lee Poy Wai) and two assistants, who were allowed in as tailors for Port Moresby’s European community during the early decades of the twentieth century.
Nevertheless, some Chinese were in the Solomons for the long term. The nucleus of the early Chinese settlers came south from Rabaul, where the Germans had encouraged Chinese immigration, and later, under Australian rule on behalf of the League of Nations, the strictures of the White Australia Policy did not apply. Although the Germans imported Chinese ‘coolie’ labourers into German New Guinea in the 1880s, the majority of these served out their indentures and returned to China. Most of the early Rabaul and Solomon Islands Chinese were Cantonese who came as free migrants to German New Guinea in the 1890s, 1900s and 1910s. The majority came from four counties—Kaiping, Taishan, Xinhui and Enping—in southern China’s coastal Guangdong Province. Ah Tam (Ya Tan, also called A Tan or Lee Tam Tuk) from Huiyang district in Guangdong, an independent shipbuilder, trader and labour agent, arrived in Rabaul in the late 1870s or early 1880s. He worked initially for the Hernsheim Brothers and was responsible for organising much of this early migration. The Chinese spoke the Szû Yap (Siyi) and Hakka (Kejia) dialects; Siyi became their lingua franca. In 1900, there were about 30 Chinese living in the Bismarck Archipelago, working for the government and the missions as artisans, mainly as carpenters but also

97 Hernsheim 1983.
as cooks. Their next move was to become independent traders, collecting indigenous-produced copra and shell products and establishing a small fleet of trading vessels.

Albert Hahl, the Imperial Judge and later Deputy Governor and Governor (1896–1914) of German New Guinea, supported Chinese immigration through British Singapore. After some illegality at the start, the practice brought permanent Chinese settlers. Their occupations between 1903 and 1914 are listed as merchants, traders, gardeners and artisans in all trades, including tailors and cooks, carpenters and engineers, seamen and labourers. When German New Guinea was taken over by Australia in 1914, there were 1,000 Chinese residents in Rabaul. In the 1920s and early 1930s, the Rabaul Chinese population was around 1,300, increasing after 1933 as Chinese residents brought their families to Rabaul to escape the Japanese invasion of coastal China, and again after 1937 when Chinese artisans were brought in to rebuild Rabaul after a volcanic eruption. The total figures are difficult to establish but officially there were 2,061 Chinese living in or around Rabaul in 1940.

The Australian Government recognised the Chinese who had arrived in the mandated territory before January 1922 as permanent residents, although still foreign nationals. Those born there were not made British subjects. In fact, Chinese born in Hong Kong Crown colony or Singapore—then part of the Straits Settlements Crown colony—were British subjects, even if the Australian administration never acknowledged this. The China-based wives and children of New Guinea Chinese were allowed only limited entry rights. Nevertheless, these families became traders, manufacturers and agriculturalists. It was a small step for them to move into the protectorate and to Tulagi, from where they used their wholesale trade links with Rabaul. Once the steamers were travelling regularly between Rabaul and Tulagi, it was an easy trip, and Chinese trading schooners could easily island-hop their way south from Australian Bougainville.

99 Wu 1982, 20–43.
101 This did not occur until 1957. The Menzies Government offered Australian citizenship to the New Guinea Chinese—a reaction to the communist takeover of China, which had left them stateless. Wu 1982, 75.
102 ibid., 27–40.
The first Chinese, a tailor, arrived at Tulagi from Rabaul in 1912. Charles Woodford granted him permission to lease a small parcel of land on the edge of a swampy area next to the government offices, out of which grew ‘a ramshackle collection of leaf huts and rickety jetties, straggling into the water at all angles’. One of Woodford’s photographs shows the beginning of Chinatown and its wharves. The Quan (Guan) family, originally from Kaiping County in Guangdong Province, were early settlers, and Quan Sung Wai (Guan Songwei) always claimed to have been the first Chinese permanent resident in the protectorate. Family history suggests he initially worked as a carpenter for two years, which must have been in the early 1910s. Another early Chinese was Quan Park Yee

103 Chaperlin 1930.
(Guan Baoyi), who arrived in 1926 via Canton and Australia. He worked on Tulagi as a tailor. Six of Quan Park Yee’s half-brothers followed him to Solomon Islands. He founded the QQQ trade store, which still operates in Honiara’s Chinatown today as QQQ Holdings Limited—the family well integrated into the Solomon Islands community.\textsuperscript{104}

Ah Choi (A Cai) was another of the early residents of Tulagi’s Chinatown, as were Lo King (Lu Jing) from Shun Dak, close to the city of Guangzhou, and James Wang (Wang Desheng), who came from Shanghai. The most common surnames among the early Chinese were Quan and Leong (Liang). The Quan family married into the Leong family, who were also from Kaiping County. Twenty-year-old Quan Hong (Guan Houyuan), a younger brother of Quan Park Yee, arrived from Kaiping in 1924. He adopted the Christian name Augustine and became an important community leader in Honiara’s Chinatown in the mid-1940s. Ho Man (or Ho Nan, also called He Min) arrived in the mid to late 1920s as a cook on a steamer, and stayed on to become well known as a restaurateur, both on Tulagi and later in early Honiara. Johnny Chan Cheong (Chen Chang or Zhang) arrived about the same time, establishing his boat-repair business at Sasape on Tulagi and on Gizo. Another early settler who made a mark was Suete, whom locals called ‘Sweetie’. He was related to the Quan family. The company he founded still operates today from premises at Point Cruz in central Honiara, trading as Sweetie Kwan Wing Leung Limited.\textsuperscript{105}

By 1913, Ah Choi had applied for a land lease on Kokona Island in the Gela Group, and in 1914 Quan Sung Wai and Leong Tung (or Tong; Liang Dong) established a Tulagi-based business named Kwong Cheong (Guang Chang) Company. In the early 1920s, Quan Sung Wai was joined by his nephews Quan Hong (Guan Houyuan) and Quan Park. The other early Chinese companies in Tulagi were Kwong Yong Cheong (Guang Yin Chang) Company, founded by Ho Chi Tak (He Zhide), and another begun by the Yip Yuk (Ye Yun) family.\textsuperscript{106} In a pattern typical of these early immigrants, Ho Chi Tak sponsored many of his relatives to come to Tulagi. These early Chinese settlers sold goods to the indentured labourers who passed through Tulagi and provided an alternative source

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\textsuperscript{104} He references an article in the \textit{Solomon Voice} (9 September 1992, 10), celebrating the company’s 68 years in the islands.
\textsuperscript{105} Willmott 2005, 12–13.
\textsuperscript{106} ibid., 10; Information from Sir Henry Quan, Honiara, 31 January 2016.
of goods, with an Asian bias, to those traded by the large Australian or Fiji-based wholesale and retail companies. They also purchased schooners and cutters and went ‘beach trading’ around the protectorate.

While the labourers provided the bulk of their business, Chinese stores were beginning to provide the necessities of life for other residents as well, and Chinatown developed on 2 hectares of reclaimed mangrove swamp on the edge of the government centre. In 1917, American visitor Osa Johnson did nearly all of her shopping at one of the Chinese stores, ‘which had everything from fish and vegetables to dry-goods and hardware’:

The owner was a jovial old man who would rather talk pidgin English with me than sell me his goods. But, like all the others here, he was probably so lonely that he made the most of every visitor from abroad to catch up on the world he had practically abandoned. He prospered, despite the smallness of the community, and was said to make a real fortune from the traders, who were profligate with their money when they had it.

The 1917–18 BSIP Annual Report recorded 61 Chinese in the protectorate. These Chinese merchants had connections with Hong Kong, Singapore, Rabaul and Sydney. The first Chinese child was born on Tulagi in 1918, and the number of children slowly increased. In 1920, Chinatown had 10 Chinese stores, with 13 Chinese schooners based in Tulagi and operating throughout the protectorate, purchasing copra, bêche-de-mer, turtle shell, trochus shell and green snail shell and selling cheap manufactured items and tinned and dried foods. Small-scale ship and mechanical repairs were available in Chinatown, which also functioned as a reliable source of tradesmen. There were tailors, carpenters and cabinetmakers. If, for instance, a camphorwood chest was required to keep blankets and other woollen items safe from moths and silverfish, Chinatown was the place to go to purchase one or have one built. Other Chinese furniture could also be purchased there.

107 WPHCA, No. 1209 of 1921, A/RC R.B. Hill to HC WPHC, 4 April 1921.
108 Johnson 1945, 111–12.
109 BSIP AR 1917–18, 5.
110 WPHCA, 1918/1289, Dr N. Crichlow, Annual Medical Report, 1917, 2; CO, 225/232/64124, Annual Medical and Sanitary Report, 1927, 2.
111 Ashby 1978, 69.
Despite the usefulness of Chinatown, some expatriate residents were unhappy at its success and alarmed at the quick growth of the trading area. For a variety of reasons—many of them spurious—European settlers wanted to see an end to the growing Chinese commercial presence. In October 1920, 66 European residents (mainly plantation owners and managers, traders, employees of large companies and two missionaries) petitioned resident commissioner Charles Workman to halt the issuing of business and trading licences to Chinese immigrants, asking that existing licences be revoked. The reasons given were that the requested action would be good for Solomon Islanders and would maintain British authority. Chinese were not only luring the best qualified labourers away from other employers, the petitioners argued, but also were undermining European prestige and corrupting the minds of Islanders:

[A]ssociation with the allurements and temptations offered by the Asiatic traders is proving to have a most depraving effect of the native mind, and discloses an increasing tendency to produce a diminution of that respect and esteem which the native has hitherto held for British rule.

Social evils are rapidly developing from this close contact between the trader and the native labourer—contact which would and could not exist but for the prestige, power and authority conferred upon the Asiatic trader by the possession of the British license to trade.\(^\text{112}\)

In his advice to the WPHC High Commissioner, Workman said there were only 55 Chinese in the protectorate, employing 47 Solomon Islanders—22 under indenture and 25 as casual labourers—out of 4,000 employed in the protectorate. The only Chinese store away from Tulagi was at Aola on Guadalcanal and that was situated beside the government station. The British Government had no official racial restrictions and some of the Chinese were from Hong Kong, which meant they were British subjects. There was an 8 pm curfew on Tulagi for Solomon Islanders, which also applied to Chinatown. Allegations of disorder and depravity in Chinatown were exaggerations. Insinuations about ‘social evils’ referred to Chinese women in Tulagi, of whom there were five—all married to Chinese storekeepers. Workman saw no reason for alarm and shone a light on the root of the irritation. The Chinese, despite their disadvantages, were the most popular merchants with Solomon Islanders.

\(^{112}\) WPHCA, 2905/1920, Petition to the Resident Commissioner.
Workman explained that ‘the Chinese pay higher prices for produce and charge lower rates for goods and consequently are much more popular with the natives than are the European traders’.  

High commissioner Sir Cecil H. Rodwell was happy to maintain the existing Chinese trading licences, although he thought any further increases should be gradual. Rodwell investigated when he visited Tulagi in September 1920. He ruled that the number of trading licences issued to Chinese on Tulagi should be capped at 30 and no more were to be issued outside Tulagi, although the Aola licence was permitted to remain.

Map 2.1, based on a government map from 1922, provides a detailed plan of the land leases in Chinatown and the names of the lessees. There were 18 registered blocks in Chinatown and one quite separate; Johnny Chan Cheong’s Sasape slipway and boatbuilding business have been mentioned above. The Chinatown land was leased to 10 Chinese companies, partnerships and individuals. Man Cheong and Company held five blocks. The anomaly was a large block in the centre of Chinatown leased in the name of Owen G. Meredith, a planter on Isabel in the 1910s and 1920s, and one of the Cliffs, either Geoff or Jack. The other interesting feature of the map is a substantial lease, bigger than Chinatown, abutting the area—that of Morris Hedstrom and Company, later owned by Carpenters. There were also other businesses operating in Sasape, further around the island. Chinatown was not an isolated commercial site; it was part of a larger trading area, with each section attracting customers to the other parts.

Solomon Islanders at Tulagi

The introduction to this book makes clear that Tulagi was never a ‘ples blong Solo’ (‘a Solomon Islander town’) in the way that Honiara has become. Yet, thousands of Solomon Islanders, mainly males, visited there and had some level of understanding of its functions. One of the hardest parts of writing this book has been gaining a view of the lives of Solomon Islanders on Tulagi and giving them a ‘voice’.

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114 ibid., No. 206, HC Rodwell to A/RC, 24 January 1921.
Plate 2.22 Solomon Islanders were constant visitors to the Tulagi enclave
This photograph shows Gela canoes off Levers’ Gavutu Island headquarters.
Source: Clive Moore Collection.

Plate 2.23 Solomon Islanders on Tulagi wharf
Judging from their caps, they are likely prisoners being used to unload supplies.
Source: BM, Robert Lever Photographic Collection.
It is unclear just what the population of the BSIP was when Woodford began his administration. In 1911, he estimated the figure was somewhere between 150,000 and 200,000, although he admitted that this was a ‘mere guess’.\textsuperscript{116} The extent to which Solomon Islanders were visitors to and residents of Tulagi is seldom recorded, but can be pieced together from multiple sources. Gela villagers were close by across the harbour. Right from the beginning of the Tulagi settlement, they brought fruit, vegetables, pigs and fish to trade, just as they had done with early passing ships, resident traders and missionaries. They also helped clear land for and build the initial settlement. Another group were the 30 to 40 members of the constabulary who were based on Tulagi, moving out on patrols to surrounding islands. Each day from 6.30 am to 8 am, they were paraded and trained using physical exercises and games and drilled in the use of firearms and bayonets. At six each evening, a detachment marched to the residency, accompanied by drummers and buglers, to lower the flag.\textsuperscript{117} They patrolled the town area and performed sentry duty at the residency and around the wharf and offices. Smartly dressed in \textit{sulus} (wrap-around tailored skirt-like men’s apparel) with leather belts,

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{116} CO, 225/96, Microfilm 2920, Western Pacific Solomon Islands Western Pacific Confidential Dispatch, 30 June 1911, 26126 Recruitment of Indian Labour for Solomons; RC C.M. Woodford, 27 June 1911, Minute on the supply of native labour for employment in the British Solomon Islands, enclosure.
\item \textsuperscript{117} WPHCA, 1921/2682, Constabulary Annual Report, 1920, 3.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
the armed constabulary were always the most permanent and prominent Solomon Islander presence on Tulagi. As will become clear in a later chapter, they were at times ill-disciplined and accused of poor behaviour.

From 1897, the government hired labourers to work on Tulagi. In 1915, at any one time, some 60 to 90 were employed to complete public works on the island. They were accommodated in two galvanised ripple-iron buildings on the island’s outer limits, each holding 20 labourers, and in two leaf houses on the inner harbour side. In the early years, there were no recreational facilities, although work on an oval (the cricket ground) commenced in 1915.118 Alongside this group of labourers were others hired to work for traders or the government. Over several decades, prisoners were the most constant source of labour on Tulagi, and were used to construct paths, keep the grass cut and to help unload supplies at the docks. In the mid-1930s, two dozen prisoners were lent for a day to the Bungana school to help build agricultural terraces.119 Eustace Sandars, subinspector of the armed constabulary in the late 1920s, commented that: ‘They [prisoners] maintained the golf course, roads, sanitation and a special gang of old trustees did all the house painting.’120 There were usually 70 to 80 prisoners on the island.

Other labourers were hired on indentures or as casual appointments. Over many years, until the early 1930s, teams of indentured labourers, mainly from Malaita, worked to fill in swamps to make Tulagi into a ‘first class township’.121 Other Malaitans worked as stevedores. When Charles Weetman arrived in 1937, he watched the labourers at work:

The first job on tying up at the Makambo wharf was the engagement of a native crew to handle cargo while the ship was in the Solomon Island waters. Under the direction of one white man and an efficient ‘boss boy,’ this was soon fixed, and the unloading began, the natives working the winches, loading the slings of goods in the ship’s holds and discharging them either on to the wharf to be man-handled into the big storage sheds or into cargo boats to be ferried by the ship’s launches across to the Tulagi landing stage. The ship’s officers kept a watchful eye over the work.

119 Cross 1979, 26.
120 PMB, Sandars, Papers on the Solomon Islands, 16.
121 WPHCA, No. 1739 of 1932, RC F.N. Ashley to HC WPHC, 9 April 1932.
It was an interesting introduction to the world of natives, this spectacle of ‘civilised’ work being carried out expertly by seemingly uncivilized, barefooted, half-naked, chocolate-coloured gabbling men, with thick mops of hair ranging from jet black through all shades to decided blonde, depending upon the stage to which their peroxiding had progressed.\(^{122}\)

Steamer day also brought other Solomon Islanders to Tulagi. Ketches, schooners and motor launches from all over the Solomons converged on the port, each with its own local crew. This human traffic enabled information about new arrivals and circumstances in the Tulagi enclave to be communicated throughout the islands.\(^{123}\)

Once Woodford declared Tulagi the only port of entry for the protectorate, a constant stream of labourers began to pass through the town. Between 1898 and 1904, 5,085 labourers left for Queensland. Another 1,900 labourers left for Fiji between 1896 and 1910, with 1,493 of them leaving in 1904 alone, after the Queensland labour trade ended. The protectorate government attempted to seize all arms being smuggled in and to ensure that the returning labourers returned via the same passages from whence they came. A substantial correspondence was generated by Woodford as he supervised the returning labourers. At the same time, European and Chinese businesses tried to get the returning labourers to spend their remaining cash in their stores. Also passing through Tulagi were several thousand returnees from Queensland, until 1908, and lesser but still substantial numbers from Fiji until early 1915.\(^{124}\)

Although most of the labourers from Queensland and Fiji purchased their goods while overseas, over decades, tens of thousands of pounds in wages passed to the local traders in return for ‘trade goods’—a remarkably lucrative process for the merchant companies. After 1914, Levers and BP had stores at their labour transit depots at Gavutu and Makambo, while Morris Hedstrom, Carpenters and BP had direct access to the labourers signing off on Tulagi, as did the Chinese stores.\(^{125}\)

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122 Weetman 1937, 33. Foreigners often assume that peroxide is responsible for the blond hair of some Solomon Islanders. In fact, this is the result of a rare genetic characteristic, although sun, salt water and occasionally lime do augment nature.

123 Weetman 1937, 33; Fowler 1959, 225.

124 CO, 2915, 225/91, Western Pacific 18136: Solomons Draft Labour Legislation, 72, Return of Immigrants introduced into the colony of Fiji from the Solomon Islands since 1890, with number repatriated and the total number of deaths in Fiji; Price with Baker 1976, 111; Siegel 1985; Moore 2000a.

125 Bennett 1993, 148.
During the mass deportation of labourers from Queensland in the 1900s and at the end of the external labour trade from Fiji in the 1910s, the scene would have been much as J.E. Philp described at Makambo in 1912:

We then went across in steamer’s boat (native rowers) to Makambo—Burns, Philp and Coy's establishment. About 80 natives (natives of Guadalcanar) from Fiji are here waiting return to their island home or may be engaged again at their option—men, women and children—the latter being very quaint—one pretty little half-caste (about 6 or 7 years) Samoan girl taking my fancy, as, I was told, she had done everyone else’s. There was a babel of voices as they prepared their meals—cooking at fires along the beach in front of the sheds where they are quartered—much laughing and some singing—happy and careless of tomorrow …

At 7 a.m. shifted abreast B.P’s store and took in returned boys with all their possessions of new finery, boxes, etc.—the spending of three years’ accumulated wages. Every boy invests the major sum of his capital in goods which he distributes lavishly on return to his village—and at the same time bedecks himself in new lava lava, belt, pouch, knife, pipe etc. …

Tonight the steamer left with a number of recruits for Guadalcanal. These have just returned from a term in Fiji, and their goods and chattels were of a varied description. I noticed some Fijian food bowls—also a Kava bowl amongst them—and a good many had invested in umbrellas.

Oscar Svensen negotiated a deal with BP to arrange the return home from Australia of around 4,000 Solomon Islanders who were deported under the 1901 legislation that formed the White Australia Policy. By 1908, he had made £9,000 (today about A$1 million or SI$6 million) from this venture.
Plate 2.25 Inspection of an armed constabulary guard of honour, Tulagi Club, 1930s

The drummer in the front row is `Abaeata (Abaeatha) Anifelo from east Kwaio, Malaita, who later became a headman and then Federal Council leader during Maasina Rule. He was the son of Basiana, who was executed for his role in the 1927 attack on William Bell, Kenneth Lilies and their police.

Source: BM, Robert Lever Collection.

Labour and plantations

Complete protectorate labour records for the 1900s have not survived. The plantation industry took off in 1905 when larger-scale capital began to enter the protectorate, encouraged by access to cheap land. By March 1911, there were 3,960 labourers employed within the protectorate and the head of a one-man labour department had been appointed. Between 1913 and 1940, 54,110 indentured labour contracts were issued in the protectorate, probably involving around 40,000 individuals—all males. Many labourers enlisted more than once. Like those in Queensland and Fiji, the protectorate’s indenture contracts were based on English Masters and Servants Act contracts. The first protectorate labour regulation was issued in 1897. In these early years, the BSIP had to compete with Queensland and Fiji for labour, and local contracts were for two years. Labourers were transported to and from the workplace by plantation-

owned or privately contracted labour recruiting vessels. Protectorate employers obtained a licence from the government, officials had the right to inspect all plantations and employers were required to submit reports every three months. The regulations were revised in 1915 to provide heavier fines for labourers who defaulted on their indenture contracts and, as usual in the indenture system, strikes and organised protests were forbidden.

Labour conditions on Tulagi were under constant official observation and were much better than those in the far-flung islands of the protectorate. Early BSIP plantations had unsavoury reputations. Clearing land for coconut plantations was labour-intensive and strenuous. The overseers were brutal and physical violence was a normal part of employment. Conditions did not start to improve until regular government inspections began in the 1920s. The labourers passing through Tulagi, Makambo and Gavutu were often youths or young men following in the footsteps of their uncles and fathers who had worked in Queensland and Fiji. The majority were from Malaita. Photographs from this period show men cutting down huge rainforest trees and clearing hectare after hectare of land. Adolescent workers were easier to obtain than mature men, who were too aware of the poor conditions, having perhaps earned better wages in Queensland. Protectorate wages were low. In Queensland, the basic wage for Pacific Islander indentured labour was £6 a year. In Fiji, it was £3 a year for much of the time, rising to £6. Time-expired labourers could demand much higher wages in Queensland—up to £23 a year in the 1900s. In the BSIP, about 10 per cent of the labour force was paid 10 to 15 shillings a week, although the majority received only 2/6- a week (£6 a year). When the tax on tobacco doubled in 1906, the insult was compounded, effectively reducing the purchasing rate of their wages. However, youths and men often served multiple contracts away from home. The average time spent away on a plantation was six years.

130 Bennett 1987, 150–91; Bennett 1993.
133 Bennett 1987, 160–64.
The costs of labour recruiting varied enormously over the decades, with recruiting expenses per labourer escalating from £6 to £8 in 1911 and to £20 in 1920. The components were the costs of the recruiting process, the ‘beach bonus’ (an advance payment in cash or goods given to the tribe or kin) and the wage. Labourers would have carefully considered the changing beach bonus and wage, plus taxation, and the proportions that were paid in cash and in kind. Initially, until 1922, the basic pay rate was £6 per year along with a beach bonus of several pounds, paid in tobacco, axes, knives and cloth, but not cash. The beach bonus varied between £1 and £12. Malaitans on two-year contracts received the highest bonus, valued at £1 to £3 (1909–13), £3 to £5 (1915–16) and £8 to £12 (1921–23). In 1923, the beach bonus was fixed at £6, out of a total wage that had increased to £12, and, in compensation, recruiting ships could carry their own trade stores. A head tax was introduced gradually in the early 1920s—of £1 a year for all able-bodied males aged between 16 and 60—but was later much reduced. In 1922, the BSIP Advisory Council recommended the bonus be limited to £7.
Some of these changes came after the 1922 Labour Commission, headed by K.J. Allardyce, which had a brief to investigate the beach bonuses. The 1923 regulation forbade payment of passage masters and beach bonuses, although up to one-quarter of the total wage for a two-year contract could be supplied in advance. In 1935, during the Great Depression, the minimum labourer's wage was reduced to £6 a year, with a consequent decrease in any initial bonus from £6 to £3.

The government argued that a head tax was necessary to fund the protectorate. However, given that it was set at a low rate and was costly to collect, it was mainly to ensure recruits could be signed on from heavily populated islands such as Malaita, where there was virtually no other way to earn an income. Taxation did not expand the labour supply; about 6,000 labourers were part of the labour force each year in the 1910s and none of the later policies adopted increased the number. Planters objected to the increased wage and continued to charge 100 per cent (or higher) mark-ups on all trade goods. ‘Passage masters’—indigenous bigmen who controlled enlistment at the various island passages and bays—acted as mediators between the demands of the recruiters and the interests of their kin, gathering prestige and wealth in the process, just as they had since the 1870s. The 1923 regulation reduced the influence of passage masters, who lost their bargaining power over the beach bonuses. They had always levied each recruit a portion of the goods given as the beach bonus and were also rewarded by recruiters with 10 shillings to £1 per enlisted man. Recruiting ships began to carry Solomon Islander assistant recruiters—usually coastal Malaitans—and this, along with the spread of Pijin, caused the complete eclipse of passage masters by the 1930s. Recruits also began to demand that larger portions of their beach bonus be given to them directly as cash—the equivalent of up to one-quarter of their wages for two years. About one-tenth of an individual's wages ended up as tax in some form and one wage might have been used to pay the head taxes for several men.

134 Planters' Gazette, 6, May 1922, 12–13; Western Pacific High Commission Gazette (Supplement) [hereinafter WPHCG (S)], King's Regulation No. 15 of 1921, No. 7 of 1923.
135 Planters' Gazette, 7, 8 December 1922, 1; Shlomowitz and Bedford 1988, 67.
136 Bennett 1987, 164; Bennett 1993, 148.
Table 2.1 Indentured labour in Solomon Islands, 1913–40

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>650</td>
<td>1.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choiseul</td>
<td>424</td>
<td>319</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>768</td>
<td>1.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guadalcanal</td>
<td>1,874</td>
<td>3,831</td>
<td>2,627</td>
<td>8,332</td>
<td>15.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isabel</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>669</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makira</td>
<td>1,064</td>
<td>1,223</td>
<td>926</td>
<td>3,213</td>
<td>5.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaita</td>
<td>10,476</td>
<td>15,707</td>
<td>10,413</td>
<td>36,596</td>
<td>67.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temotu</td>
<td>815</td>
<td>1,490</td>
<td>499</td>
<td>2,804</td>
<td>5.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other islands</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>588</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>1,078</td>
<td>1.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>15,247</td>
<td>23,792</td>
<td>15,071</td>
<td>54,110</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n.d. = no data
Source: Shlomowitz and Bedford (1988).

Although planters wanted more labourers, subsistence production was easy enough for most Solomon Islanders, so special circumstances were needed to encourage participation in wage labour away from home. The statistics in Table 2.1 provide some idea of who was passing through Tulagi, Makambo and Gavutu. Malaitans (68 per cent) were the largest group, although men from Guadalcanal (15 per cent) were also important. These two islands dominated recruiting before the Pacific War, along with lesser numbers from two other significant areas, Makira (San Cristobal) (6 per cent) and Eastern Outer Islands, now Temotu Province (5 per cent). The heaviest labour recruiting was during the 1920s and early 1930s, when 4,000 men from Malaita (about 10 per cent of the island’s population) were away on plantations in any year. Guadalcanal had 7 per cent away each year between the two world wars. This must have affected societies, as the figure was well above what was considered safe for Pacific cultures to remain strong and resilient. The majority passed through Tulagi.

137 Bennett 1993, 139.
As labour was the crucial element for developing the protectorate and was central to the original need to create the WPHC, Tulagi officials must have constantly discussed the labour supply, recruiting practices, taxation and working conditions. In 1929, the High Commissioner in Suva established a board to inquire into labour conditions. A teenage labourer over 14 years of age could perform light duties, although they were not fully eligible for adult work (or adult wages) until the age of 16. A contract system was used, with two years the maximum length. Minimum adult wages were fixed at 20/- per month and 10/- per month for light work. Labourers were usually recruited from their homes by professional licensed recruiters who operated licensed vessels. There were 6,115 labourers employed in the protectorate in 1927 and 6,016 in 1928. In 1929, there were 5,171 labourers employed throughout the BSIP, with a further 2,005 recruited during 1929. The numbers then increased slightly in 1930 (5,363), before beginning to decline further during the Great Depression.

During the late 1920s, labourer death rates averaged 60 per 1,000, with pneumonia and dysentery the greatest causes of mortality.138 Employers were required by law to feed, clothe and house the labourers at fixed minimum standards, to provide medical care and to repatriate them at the completion of their contracts. If dependants accompanied labourers, the employers had similar obligations towards them. The hours of work were controlled by regulation and a ‘task-work’ system was used: 5.5 tasks completed one week’s work. On ‘time-work’, the labourer could be asked to work nine hours a day, while on task-work, the jobs were to be completed in six hours.139 Working as a plantation labourer involved only muscle power, with no prior training needed. There was also a labour elite—men who worked as wharf labourers in the Tulagi enclave, at Gizo and at Faisi. Malaitans from Langalanga and Lau lagoons dominated these jobs at Tulagi, Makambo and Gavutu. Others could be found as crews on trading, recruiting and plantation ships and working as domestic servants.

Tulagi became the main place at which labour was engaged, particularly after 1914, when a government officer had to be present when indentures were signed. Many of the Solomon Islander labourers passing through Tulagi had never left their home islands before and would have been shy teenage bushmen, often travelling with wantoks (kin or speakers of the same language). They would have marvelled at the delights of Chinatown,
while watching the strange white men and the Chinese who congregated in the small settlement. Others were more sophisticated travellers who already knew the streets of Levuka, Lautoka and Suva in Fiji or Mackay and Bundaberg in Queensland, long before they explored Tulagi. They interacted with the canoe-borne visitors from the Gela Group who traded produce to residents of Tulagi and the neighbouring commercial islands, and with the few hundred Solomon Islanders resident in the Tulagi enclave. The picture that emerges is of a large Solomon Islander presence on Tulagi, with only a small core of regulars and the bulk of the individuals changing constantly.

The Great Depression brought a severe downturn in the economy. Indenture contracts protected workers to some extent but also ensured that labour was available for a contracted period. The head tax also forced men to work to obtain cash. Employers reduced costs and used the labourers to produce local foods rather than rely on expensive imports. Indenture contracts were still considered cheaper than a free labour market. Although recruiting continued, the workforce in the 1930s was reduced to half the 5,000 to 6,000 labourers employed each year in the 1920s. Planters experimented with ‘partnership’ and ‘profit-sharing’ schemes, paying experienced labourers by the bag and providing them with land to produce their own food or letting local villagers cut their own copra and then use company-run driers and sell the product to the plantations. This system was first introduced by Fred Campbell, in 1933, on Makira. When the wages of labourers halved in 1934, there were boycotts of enlistment in some areas. Only the steamer gangs who serviced ships in the Tulagi enclave still maintained a reasonable wage—of around 3 shillings a day.

During the first half of the twentieth century, the Solomon Islands plantation economy required local labourers, many thousands of whom passed through the Tulagi enclave at the start and end of their indentures. There was a lot of money to be made from selling items to labourers. Young Solomon Islander labourers had their first experience of urban life. They wandered the streets of Chinatown, congregated around the wharves, walked through The Cut to the hospital and gazed in wonder at the houses on the ridge. If we calculate that labourers received on average £12 per year (in bonus and wage), and we know that after the early 1920s most passed through the Tulagi enclave, even if they had already distributed one-quarter of their wages for personal use or recompense to their elders from their beach bonus, around £18 was paid out on about 38,000 two-year contracts between the early 1920s and the early 1940s (a total of
approximately £684,000). Let us presume that the profit margin on goods sold to the labourers was 100 per cent (it was probably higher); the profits would have been at least £300,000 to £400,000, and much more if we could calculate back to the 1900s. If we calculate an equivalent figure in modern currency, £300,000 in 1930 would be worth around A$107.8 million or SI$645.4 million today.

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A town planning committee was established in 1933 to supervise urban development in Tulagi.140 Tulagi had become a significant British–Australian and Chinese port and township—smaller than but comparable with others in the Pacific. During these early years of the twentieth century, Samarai—one of the administrative and commercial hub of eastern Papua—like Tulagi, was also limited by its geographic size. Rabaul boomed, although the town was destroyed in 1937 by a volcanic eruption and then rebuilt. Port Moresby, on the central coast of Australian Papua, had consolidated. Small Port Vila on Efate in the New Hebrides struggled along with its dual British and French administration.

Planters and their staff and missionaries all frequented Tulagi, passing through on their way to and from the Solomons. Government services, particularly medical facilities, made Tulagi crucial to expatriate life in the protectorate. Officials emanating from Tulagi made and enforced rules, travelling through the islands but always retreating to the comfort of Tulagi. The indigenous trade networks incorporated European settlements of all sizes; mission bases, plantations with trade stores and small government stations were all part of these networks. The Tulagi enclave was the largest and most central of these foreign bases. While established indigenous trade items and circuits continued, adaptations were made to trade with foreigners. The focus of this new trade and power slowly shifted to the Tulagi enclave between the 1900s and the early 1940s.

140 WPHCA, No. 1739 of 1933, RC E.N. Ashley to WPHC, 9 April 1932.
Plate 2.27 Two constables from the armed constabulary, Tulagi
Source: BM, Robert Lever Collection.
Plate 2.28 Solomon Islanders manning a large rowing boat in Tulagi Harbour, 1930s
Source: BM, Robert Lever Collection.