Introduction

Tulagi Island is one of more than 900 islands and atolls in the modern Solomon Islands nation—a beautiful tropical archipelago stretching over 1,400 kilometres in the eastern Coral Sea off north-eastern Australia, neighboured by Papua New Guinea, Nauru, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and Fiji. The major islands in the nation form a double chain that begins south of Buka and Bougainville (an autonomous region of Papua New Guinea) and converges again at Makira (San Cristobal). The largest islands—Choiseul, Isabel, Guadalcanal, Malaita and Makira—vary from 150 to 190 kilometres in length and 20 to 50 kilometres in width. The island of New Georgia is a smaller, but still substantial, part of an island group of the same name. On Guadalcanal, Mount Popomaneseu reaches 2,355 metres—higher than any of Australia’s mountains. To the south, separated by 400 kilometres of ocean, the Santa Cruz Group, Reef Islands, Vanikolo, Tikopia and other more scattered islands and atolls are also part of the modern nation. The islands have been inhabited for many thousands of years. The indigenous cultures of Solomon Islands are all quite closely related and similar, although remarkably diverse linguistically. The people participated in and did not separate themselves from their natural environment and spirit world. Then, in 1893, they became a British protectorate, centred on Tulagi.

Within the Gela Group, Tulagi nestles close to the larger Gela Sule. This small group of islands, now within Central Islands Province, is typical of many Solomon Islands, replete with rugged mountainous interiors, crystal-clear streams, sandy beaches, mangroves and fringing reefs. Tulagi is approximately 320 hectares in size, 5 kilometres long and 0.8 kilometres wide. It was originally covered by rainforest. Aligned north-west to south-east, the island has a steep stony central ridge extending its full length, varying in height up to 120 metres and flattened at each end. A coastal rim allows easy access to all areas. The island receives rainfall of 2,230 to 3,800 millimetres per year and there are natural springs and a safe, commodious inner harbour. A walk around the island takes about two hours.
Plate I.1 Tulagi viewed from the harbour, 1972
Source: Brian Taylor Collection.

Plate I.2 Tulagi, looking into the harbour from the old prison area, 2013
Source: Annika Korsgaard Collection.
Plate I.3 Tulagi Harbour, 2013
Source: Annika Korsgaard Collection.

Plate I.4 Tulagi docks, 2007
Source: Clive Moore Collection.
Tulagi was the capital of the British Solomon Islands Protectorate (BSIP) from 1897 until 1942. It was a town, albeit small, as well as an enclave of islands. Tulagi, Gavutu and Makambo islands were at the enclave’s core, with Bungana a little further away, housing an Anglican school and the lighthouse that guided ships to the port. Two new sites were added in the early 1940s: the Anglican headquarters was shifted from Siota to Taroaniara, across the harbour on Gela Sule, and Tanambogo was joined to Gavutu as part of a seaplane base. During World War II, the Tulagi enclave was heavily bombed by the Japanese and the Americans, erasing 45 years of colonial history.

Once the decision was made in 1945 not to rebuild Tulagi and to move the administrative headquarters to Guadalcanal, to what became Honiara, Tulagi was no longer central to Solomon Islands. A great deal is missing from the history of the nation without an understanding of the Tulagi enclave. Most Solomon Islanders are aware of where Tulagi is and that it was once the capital, but they know nothing more. Before the war, Tulagi was part of the lives of tens of thousands of Solomon Islanders, particularly men and youths who passed through on indentured or casual labour contracts. It was the only town most of them knew and the focus of a new system of government they did not understand, which claimed control over them. It was a European and a Chinese town imposed on to the indigenous communities. Although the number of Solomon Islanders in the Tulagi enclave was as large as that of the expatriates, they were never able to make it their own in the way they have in recent times with Honiara, Gizo, Auki or Noro. Neither Tulagi nor Honiara has a history written about it and this book aims to restore old Tulagi to modern Solomon Islands.
Plate I.5 Tulagi market on the harbour beach front, 2007
Source: Clive Moore Collection.
When Richard Kane, the third Resident Commissioner, arrived in 1921, he held a function at the residency that was attended by 78 Europeans. The *Planters’ Gazette* proudly announced that this was ‘perhaps the largest assembly of white people ever congregated together in the Solomons’.

About 50 were from the enclave, where they lived alongside a Chinese population of around the same number. In its last days just before the Pacific War, the enclave’s permanent population was around 600—300 foreigners, one-third of European origin and most of the remainder Chinese; and 300 Solomon Islander residents—made up of police, hospital staff and patients, prisoners, clergy, clerks, labourers and servants. Although eclipsed by Suva, Tulagi enclave was the second-largest urban settlement under Western Pacific High Commission (WPHC) jurisdiction before the Pacific War. Nevertheless, compared with Honolulu—the largest Pacific Island city, which had a population of almost 15,000 in the 1870s, including several hundred foreigners, and grew to become a major city of almost 180,000 by 1940—the Tulagi enclave was tiny.

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1 *Planters’ Gazette*, 3 August 1921, 4.
2 Daws 1967; Daws 2006; Daws and Hymer 2008; Johnson and Turnbull 1991.
Plate I.7 The view down the stairs from the Resident Commissioner’s residency in the 1910s

The hospital, built in 1913, is on the right near the path and Gavutu Island can be seen in the background.

Source: British Museum, George Rose’s photographs in the Thomas Edge-Partington Photographic Collection.
Of the neighbouring urban centres, only the Ocean (Banaba) Island headquarters settlement in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Crown colony and Port Vila in the New Hebrides Condominium were smaller. The argument presented in this book is that Tulagi’s size and the smallness of its overall foreign population have a lot to do with the way in which colonial legacies played out. Several Melanesian urban centres operated during the same years as Tulagi: Thursday Island, Port Moresby, Samarai, Rabaul, Levuka, Suva and Nouméa. The equivalent north-east Australia urban centre was 350-hectare Thursday Island just off Cape York, which was Queensland’s administrative base in Torres Strait and which began in the 1870s, replacing moribund Somerset on Cape York. In the late 1890s and early 1900s, 1,500 people lived on Thursday Island, and during the first decades of the twentieth century, the island became a substantial urban base with a population several times that of the Tulagi enclave. Similar to Tulagi, the settlement spilled over on to neighbouring islands and, as

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3 Thursday Island’s population was 1,515 in 1903, 1,079 in 1922 and 1,047 in 1934. Information from Steve Mullins, 9 July 2018, and Ian Townsend, 19 September 2018. See also Singe 1979; Mullins 1995.
a pearling port, it had a substantial European, Japanese, Malay, Filipino
and Sinhalese (Sri Lankan) population, along with Torres Strait Islanders
and other Pacific Islanders. As many people lived on the pearling lugger
and schooners anchored near Thursday Island as lived on the island itself.
There have been several histories of Torres Strait and its people, but none
concentrates on Thursday Island. There was also a string of Queensland
coastal towns on the Coral Sea, within easy distance of Tulagi.

Neighbouring Australian Papua had two urban centres during the
Tulagi years. Port Moresby included a substantial local Motu-Koita
population within its boundaries, and late nineteenth-century Chinese,
Malay and Filipino traders had married into the nearby coastal Papuan
community.4 There were very few urban Asian settlers during the first half
of the twentieth century because they had been blocked by the White
Australia Policy. When World War I began, Port Moresby had a foreign
population of 453 Europeans. In 1921, it was home to 577 Europeans,
190 of them female; then during the 1930s the town shrank back to just
over 300 Europeans.5 In 1939, legend has it that there were only three
Chinese in Papua—all in Port Moresby and all involved in tailoring and
a laundry. Australian Papua’s second town was Samarai on Dinner Island,
just off the mainland in China Strait in the east, which was established
in the 1880s. Samarai covered 25 hectares and, with its white crushed-
coral paths and a profusion of flowering shrubs, it physically resembled
Tulagi, although no Asians lived there. Samarai was also an enclave, with
a London Missionary Society mission on adjacent Kwato Island (which
seceded in 1917 under its founder Charles Abel)6 and the town’s cemetery
on the mainland. Its port trade was three times the size of Port Moresby’s,
and there were around 100 European residents in 1907 and 293 in 1919.7
Port Moresby has attracted the attention of historians, while Samarai has
been almost ignored.

German New Guinea was the northern neighbour of the BSIP. Captured
by Australia in 1914, it became a League of Nations mandated territory
administered by Australia.8 Rabaul (originally Simpsonhafen), the capital,
on New Britain’s Gazelle Peninsula, was a substantial Pacific settlement.
In the 1920s, Rabaul had a European population of around 300, who

4 Dutton 1985, 149–94.
5 Oram 1976, 13, 38; Stuart 1970.
6 Wetherell 1996.
7 Oram 1972, 1028–29; Quanchi 2006.
were outnumbered by the Chinese residents. Around 200 indigenous police and 300 contract labourers also lived in barracks there. Rabaul had roads, cars and trucks, a newspaper, schools, a movie theatre, a race track and a prosperous large Chinatown and market. The town was beautiful, its rich volcanic soil supporting prolific gardens, with the whiff of sulphur from the surrounding volcanoes always in the air. There were grand mansions around the bay in the late German period, belonging in particular to leading traders and plantation owners. The total European population of Kokopo and Rabaul—the two main urban centres on the Gazelle Peninsula—was around 2,000. The Germans had encouraged Chinese migration and, after 1921, as a mandated territory, the strictures of Australia’s White Australia Policy did not apply. Rabaul’s Chinese population increased from 1,000 in 1914 to 1,300 in the 1920s and to 2,000 by 1940. Although the town has attracted the attention of historians because of its volcanic activity, its significance in two world wars and its Chinese community, there is only one historical overview.

The most significant urban centre in the south-west Pacific was Suva. Between 1877 and 1952, Fiji was the administrative centre of the British Pacific and, like Solomon Islands, Fiji had two capitals. In the 1870s, Fiji already had a substantial settler society of 3,000 Europeans. The small multiracial beachside community of Levuka became the main town. From meagre beginnings in the 1820s and 1830s, Levuka in the 1840s had a population of about 50 foreigners. The town began to flourish during a cotton boom in the 1860s and reached a population of 1,250 in 1869, peaking at 2,670 in 1872, and then declining to 500 by 1886. Suva replaced Levuka as the capital in 1882, becoming a sizeable town. It was described by a visitor in the 1910s as ‘a large English town, with two banks, several churches, dental surgeons, a large gaol, auctioneers, bookmakers, two newspapers, and all the other apparatuses of civilization’. There were substantial government buildings and the magnificent Grand Pacific Hotel, built in 1914—equalled in the region

10 League of Nations Mandated Territory of New Guinea Annual Reports [hereinafter LNMTNG AR], 1925; 1935; 1940. These statistics were provided by Peter Cahill, Brisbane, 24 January 2016. See also Johnson and Threlfall 1985, 68, 79; Cahill 2012, 113; Inglis 1972.
13 Quoted in Scarr 1984, 79.
only by the Queen’s Hotel in Townsville in north Queensland. Fiji in the 1920s and 1930s had an indigenous population of around 90,000, with Indo-Fijians (originally labour immigrants) numbering only a few thousand less than the Fijians. Suva in 1921 had a population of 13,982, with 6,449 living in the central town and 6,342 in the suburbs. There were 1,753 Europeans in Suva, 1,436 of whom lived in the central town.\(^{14}\)

The Fiji European and part-European community numbered around 8,000 in the 1930s, along with 1,700 Chinese, who were concentrated in Levuka and Suva, with outposts in rural areas. They sold basic necessities from small stores and often married into the indigenous community.\(^{15}\)

After indenture ended in 1920, the Indian labourers became farmers on leased land and shopkeepers. Most were still engaged in agricultural work, but rather than a Chinatown or Indian quarter, Suva developed regional multiracial trading areas. The shops provided general merchant services, plus tailoring, laundering, boot-making, jewellery manufacture and outreach through hawking.\(^{16}\) Government policy kept the Indians separate from the Fijians. Despite its importance, Suva has not been the subject of a single historical study on its growth.

The first foreigner to settle on nearby New Caledonia was a British trader in 1851. The French were anxious to gain Pacific territory and settled Port-du-France in 1854—renamed Nouméa in 1866—after which a small number of free settlers arrived. However, the French used New Caledonia as a penal colony from the 1860s to the 1890s—much to the disgust of the east coast Australian colonialists, who had managed to end the importation of British convicts there. Just over 30,000 male and female convicts were sent to New Caledonia. Nouméa grew slowly, from a population of 4,000 in 1890 and 8,700 in 1911 to 11,000 in 1936. This included French ex-convicts and free settlers, Metis (mixed race), Asian workers and Kanaks, whose overall number declined in the 1920s.\(^{17}\)

\(^{14}\) Statistics provided by Brij Lal, 14 July 2018.
\(^{15}\) Lal 1992, 63–65. See also Lal 2016.
\(^{16}\) Scarr 1984, 35; Lal 1992, 76.
\(^{17}\) There are histories of many aspects of Nouméa, although there is no overriding history of the city, which now has a population of 100,000. I have been unable to obtain any early statistics. Amiot and Terrier 2007; Association Salomon 2008; Cauville et al. 2006; Daly 2002; Barbançon et al. 2004; Delathière 2000; Delathière 2004; Kakau 1998; Moyen 2004; Patarin 1997; Rolland 2002. Frédéric Angleviel and Max Quanchi helped provide the statistics.
Tulagi was the poor cousin, with only basic services available, no newspaper and too few students to warrant a primary school. This study of Tulagi provides an understanding of the origins of modern Solomon Islands. It also enables a close analysis of race, sex and class, and the process of British colonisation and government in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Because of the destruction caused by the Pacific War, researching Tulagi is a historical detective story pieced together from fragments. The hardest thing to retrieve in writing this book has been an understanding of how and why Solomon Islanders reacted to what they saw and experienced at Tulagi. I hope that, in a small way, I have helped to elucidate their side of the story, while also advancing study of British imperialism in the Pacific.

Tulagi today

Today, Tulagi is a ghost of its former self. While it is clearly an interesting island—and it remains the urban centre for a province—very little of the protectorate’s first capital is still visible, except for the cutting through the central ridge made in 1918, remnants of the police and prison compounds (including cells) and the concrete foundations of what were once large buildings. Concrete steps that once led up to the front of the Resident Commissioner’s house now ascend to empty space. The beautifully tended tropical gardens and the white coral paths have long gone.
Plate I.9 The first section of the residency stairs, 2013
Source: Annika Korsgaard Collection.
Plate I.10 One of the many sets of concrete steps on Tulagi that once formed the entrances to government buildings, 2013
Source: Annika Korsgaard Collection.

Plate I.11 An attempt at heritage identification on Tulagi. A Ministry of Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening sign outside the old prison, 2013
Source: Annika Korsgaard Collection.
After the war, there were suggestions that a new capital should be established on Gela Sule, which would have utilised the commodious harbour. However, in October 1945, the BSIP Advisory Council agreed to shift the capital to a site centred on Point Cruz and the Mataniko River on Guadalcanal, which was already in use as an American military base and, since 1943, had also housed the remnant protectorate government. The advantages of inheriting a fully built town next to airfields and plains suitable for agriculture were too large to ignore. Despite initial reticence from the ‘old hands’, by mid-1949, Tulagi was almost deserted.\textsuperscript{18} Even the post office closed that year, when the central district headquarters moved to Honiara. Tulagi went into decline, although its wartime docks and slipways remained in use until new port facilities were established in Honiara in the 1950s and 1960s. Tulagi was sustained by the Solomon Taiyo Limited fish cannery, from the early 1970s until the 1980s, followed by National Fisheries Development Limited.

\textsuperscript{18} Pacific Islands Monthly [hereinafter PIM], January 1948, May 1949; Douglas 2004, 41.
Plate I.13 The Solomon Tayo Ltd fish cannery on Tulagi in the 1970s
Source: Clive Moore Collection.

Plate I.14 Inside the Solomon Tayo Ltd fish cannery on Tulagi in the 1970s
Source: Clive Moore Collection.
Today, it is a provincial headquarters town and a pleasant but sleepy diving destination with a plentiful supply of World War II wrecks to lure tourists and Honiara’s expatriates on weekends. There are a couple of small hotels, dive centres and eco-lodges and a marketplace on the beach, administrative buildings, a Telekom building, McMahon Community High School, a hospital and a few scattered houses. An Anglican presence remains, in the form of the Mothers’ Union and Women’s Resources Centre and the Christ the King Cathedral and house. The ruins of the fish cannery remain on the sheltered inner coast. During the 2010s, the Sasape area was revitalised with a government slipway—now a joint venture between the Solomon Islands National Provident Fund and Silent World Shipping and Logistics Limited, an Australian company. Clustered at the south-eastern tip of the island is a public housing precinct for government workers. Gavutu and Makambo islands—the old commercial headquarters for Levers Pacific Plantations Limited (known as Levers)¹⁹ and Burns Philp and Company (BP)—are close by across the harbour. Makambo carries little evidence of its commercial past and when I visited Gavutu it was deserted except for a couple of caretakers. Gavutu was renamed Dolphin Island in the 1990s and 2000s, during an attempt to farm and export dolphins to theme parks around the world. There is a derelict house high on a hill and empty dolphin-holding ponds—witness to this disastrous enterprise. Only two remnants of Levers’ long tenancy remain. One is the company’s strongroom, which in 2007 was in use as a rather odd and airless residence. The other is the slowly subsiding but still grand concrete wharf. Most of the wartime causeway to Tanambogo is still there.

¹⁹ The original company was Levers Pacific Plantations Limited (1902, United Kingdom), which became Levers Pacific Plantations Proprietary Limited (1928, Australia). The usual short form is Levers or Lever Brothers.
Plate I.15 Vanita Motel, Tulagi, 2007
Source: Clive Moore Collection.

Plate I.16 Walking towards the cutting through the central ridge, past the Telekom building, Tulagi, 2007
Source: Clive Moore Collection.
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Plate I.17 The author at the cutting through the ridge, Tulagi, 2007
Source: Clive Moore Collection.
Plate I.18 Christ the King Cathedral, Anglican Diocese of Central Solomons, Tulagi, 2007
Source: Clive Moore Collection.

Plate I.19 The Anglican Mothers’ Union building, Tulagi, 2007
Source: Clive Moore Collection.
Honiara, which replaced Tulagi as the capital, has been a constant presence in my life for over 40 years, and although Tulagi is close by, these days it is off the normal shipping routes. Twice I have visited Savo Island, Tulagi’s neighbour—once in my youth, climbing up almost boiling streams into the smouldering sulphurous crater of the volcano. I have taken many voyages to Malaita, passing through Mboli Passage in the Gela Group, close to Tulagi. My only visit to Tulagi was for a few days in 2007. To get there I travelled on a small coastal trading vessel piled high with passengers and cargo. To return to Honiara, I hitched a ride with a speedboat full of divers who had spent the weekend exploring various wartime wrecks. It was enough to make me curious about Tulagi’s past. There was no local knowledge of the fascinating history of the Tulagi enclave. There was no historical literature available on Tulagi, not even a pamphlet for the tourists and divers who venture there. I left disappointed. However, the trip whetted my appetite to try to find out more about the early settlement. Since then, there appears to be a new interest emerging to understand the history of Tulagi and there has been talk of rebuilding the residency as a tourist destination.
Plate I.21 The remains of the strongroom at Levers Pacific Plantations Ltd headquarters on Gavutu, being used as a house, 2007
Source: Clive Moore Collection.

Plate I.22 The remains of the Levers Pacific Plantations Ltd wharf at Gavutu, 2007
Source: Clive Moore Collection.
Plate I.23 One of the Japanese tunnels on Tulagi, constructed during their occupation of the island in 1942, photographed in 2013
Source: Annika Korsgaard Collection.
Tulagi may yet rise again as a port and transport hub. There are proposals from the Central Islands Provincial Government for it to become a transhipping port for international cargo liners distributing cargo to the smaller Pacific countries, such as Tuvalu, Kiribati and other nations in Micronesia. The characteristic that made Tulagi great for half a century—its sheltered extensive harbour—may once more become an asset to the nation and neighbouring countries. As well, during the 2010s, successive national governments have announced a desire to promote Solomon Islands as a tourist destination. Let us hope Tulagi features in this new policy, as the former capital is an important part of Pacific and local history. Tulagi is a short trip from Honiara and deserves to be visited more regularly. My hope is that, as Solomon Islands grows as a tourist destination, Tulagi, which was on the early Pacific tourist and shipping routes from the 1900s, will regain its rightful place as a beautiful and historical Pacific port and town.

Tulagi: Pacific Outpost of British Empire has several aims. It is a study of the British Empire in the Pacific, but it is also a local urban history that seeks to understand what colonial life was like in the island enclave. The book is also a contribution to heritage studies and the national estate in terms of the historical, physical and built environment and social fabric of Solomon Islands. I have tried to evoke place and time and to understand how Tulagi functioned as a community, including its foibles and eccentricities. Chapter 1 situates Tulagi within British imperialism in the Pacific, along with the prior European trading and missionary bases in the Gela Group, and includes a sketch of the background of Charles Woodford, the first Resident Commissioner. Because Tulagi was a British protectorate, we need to understand the legal framework and the strengths and limitations of being largely a public service town with trading companies and a small Chinatown tacked on. Chapter 2 concentrates on the early days of Tulagi—roughly from 1897 to 1915, the year Woodford retired. Chapter 3 covers the 1920s—Tulagi’s middle years—concentrating on the establishment of government departments and an examination of the administrative staff and their duties. Chapter 4 stays with the 1920s, dealing with other aspects of the Tulagi enclave as it developed into a port and trading complex involving major Australian, British, Fijian-based and Chinese merchant houses. The chapter looks at social institutions and extends the discussion of Chinatown begun in

Chapter 2. It also covers the Kwaio attack on Malaita’s District Officer in 1927 and the subsequent government-sponsored retribution. The debacle that followed was Tulagi’s most critical emergency before the Pacific War.

Chapters 5 and 6 detail the domestic and social scenes, covering the lives of expatriate women within the Tulagi enclave. The chapters explore what it was like to run a household and to live in the Tulagi enclave. The 1920s and 1930s produced discriminatory legislation, which raises questions about the relationships between white women and indigenous men in Pacific colonies, moral panic and other power relationships. Earlier historians of Fiji and Papua New Guinea have argued that white women formed fundamentally different relationships with the indigenous people than did white men. European women lived on Tulagi over many decades. Some had independent lives, although the majority were there because of their husbands’ positions. Hitherto unknown similarities with the social scenes in Port Moresby, Rabaul and Suva have been uncovered. Chapter 7 concentrates on assessing the final years—the flourishing settlement of the 1930s, which was cut short by war in 1942. This chapter brings together many strands that surface in the preceding chapters and fits Tulagi into the wider picture of the colonial Pacific and British imperialism. Chapter 8 examines the British defences against the Japanese, the evacuation and the destruction of the capital of the protectorate. European, Chinese and Solomon Islander residents, and visitors, are interwoven throughout. Tulagi’s history since 1942 is not covered, except in the photographs within this introduction.

The final stages of writing this book came after my retirement from decades of teaching and research in universities. I am experiencing a slowly developing sense of liberation. My own voyage away from academic life caused me to reassess the style of the book. It is full of characters and eccentricity. Alongside the book’s more serious moments, it can also in part be read as a ripping yarn. Although I have provided a web of references, in a quest for readability, I have kept academic debates out of the text. They will not be relevant to most readers, although those who wish to mine the reference notes and bibliography can do so easily.
Plate I.24 Fishing boats anchored in Tulagi Harbour, 2007
Source: Clive Moore Collection.

The illustrations will also help Solomon Islanders, visitors and others interested in Solomon Islands and Pacific and colonial history to understand the early centrality of Tulagi to the history of the nation. This book is an attempt to restore Tulagi to the people of Solomon Islands. My apologies for any misinterpretations and imperfections.