When Woodford died at ‘Bramley’, his home in Goring Road, Steyning, on 4 October 1927, he was 75. He had sold his large country house ‘The Grinstead’ in the same year and moved to the nearby town. He was buried at St Peter’s Church, Cowfold on 8 October. His headstone reads:

CHARLES MORRIS WOODFORD C.M.G

First Resident Commissioner of the

British Solomon Islands

Loved husband of Florence Margaret

Died October 4th 1927

Aged 75 years.

Figure 43. Headstone of Charles Morris Woodford, St Peter’s Church, Cowfold, Sussex.

Source: Courtesy of Herbie Whitmore, 2013.
His estate was valued at £5,245 (£750,000 in current values). His two sons were educated at Tonbridge School and in 1914 they enlisted in the British Army. The youngest son, Harold Vivian, the favourite of Florence Woodford, commissioned in the 8th Battalion of the Royal Berkshire Regiment, was killed on 13 October 1915, early in the war, and buried in France. He is listed on the memorial plaque at Loos-en-Gohelle cemetery in Pas-de-Calais and on memorials in Cowfold, West Grinstead, at Tonbridge School and at the Hawkesbury Agricultural College in New South Wales where he had been a student (Woodford papers PMB 1381/006; H. Whitmore, West Grinstead Local History Group, pers. comm. 2013). It is perhaps befitting that the Loos memorial was designed by the noted architect, and fellow Tonbridgian, Sir Herbert Baker. Surprisingly, given the antipathy between the two men, im Thurn wrote Woodford and his wife a kind, sympathetic and warm personal letter in July 1916 when he heard of the death of Harold during the war (Woodford papers PMB 1381/017). It appears that im Thurn had heard much about Woodford’s son from Mahaffy in Suva. Their working relationship cannot have been too acrimonious if they could discuss other men’s children. The eldest son, Charles Edward Montgomery, went to Oxford and then worked on rubber plantations in Malaya. During the First World War he became a Captain in the 1st Battalion of the Sherwood Foresters. Later he bought ‘Bowshot’s Farm’ in West Grinstead not far from the family home outside Partridge Green. In 1929 he returned to Australia with his mother and settled at Denman near Sydney. He subsequently bought the family property, ‘Gowan Brae’, at Bundanoon, north of Canberra. He also served in the Australian Army in the Second World War (Woodford papers PMB 1381/017).

The only daughter of Charles Morris and Florence Woodford, Sylvia Margaret, was born on 16 February 1900 but died in Sydney at 10 months from a fever caught in Tulagi (The Sydney Morning Herald 20 February 1900).

In 1928, Woodford’s obituary in The Geographical Journal made some mention of his explorations, his publication and journal articles but largely overlooked his many years of administrative experience in the Solomon Islands. Again reference was made to the ‘firm but benevolent administration [that] was to effect a complete transformation in the conditions of the group, which settled down to a flourishing and in the main peaceable British Protectorate’ (Anon 1928: 206–207). The Ibis, the journal of the Ornithological Society, reported on the valuable collections of birds sent to the British Museum and to the chapter on birds in Woodford’s 1890 monograph (Sclater 1928: 140–141). His death was quickly noted by the Sydney Morning Herald on 8 October 1927 and the Brisbane Courier on 11 October 1927: 21) but the Sydney paper followed this brief notice with a much longer obituary in December written by R. F. Thomson, the chief inspector of native labour at Tulagi from 1925 to 1931 (The Sydney Morning Herald 12 December 1927: 10). The obituary title ‘A remarkable man’ covered Woodford’s personal life, his collecting and explorations and his
official life. It is a remarkably sympathetic and affectionate report on Woodford’s life. In it Thomson again repeats the lines that bringing peace and security to the islands ‘is an object worthy indeed the devotion of one’s life’. Thomson accurately summarised Woodford’s early collecting career and his official life in Tulagi. Thomson also stated the long held belief that it was well known in days when access to the High Commissioner’s court in Suva was long and costly ‘[a] nod by him in the direction of the Burns Philp steamer to a rough diamond meant to German Charlie or Russian Harry’, or any other itinerant in the islands, that if they could get an accursed man out of the islands it was best for all. Court cases were not only long and costly but guaranteeing the attendance of witnesses in Suva was almost impossible. Securing a conviction was likewise near impossible. There remained one rule for the coloniser and another for the colonised. Woodford undoubtedly ruled with paternalism. Even Thomson remarked: ‘He governed the Islands in a strong fatherly way and was greatly assisted by his good wife who accompanied him nearly everywhere in the Government vessel’. Such action, and similar comments made today, would be taken as condescending. This paternalism was not unique to Woodford. Sir William MacGregor, a close associate, describing the best method of government for Papua wrote ‘the paternal form [of rule] is the most suitable for a native population in the act of stepping out of savagery into civilisation’ (Joyce 1971: 36 quoting MacGregor to Lamington 3 June 1898 in Lamington to Colonial Office 13 August 1898 CO 422 12). Both men were supported by a strong Victorian morality that saw British civilisation as infinitely preferable to any other.

Woodford’s death in 1927 came at the same time as the murder of William Bell, then District Officer on Malaita, along with Bell’s European cadet, Kenneth Lilies, and 13 Solomon Islander police and servants on 4 October at Sinarango (Sinalanggu) Harbour on the east coast of Malaita (Keesing 1990: 279). In fact R. F. Thomson, who paid tribute to Woodford in a long obituary, had only that October given warm praise to the work of Bell on Malaita after news of the murders had been received (*The Sydney Morning Herald* 11 October 1927: 11). The comparison in the obituary between Woodford and Bell was not lost on old Solomon hands. Thomson began and ended his obituary to Woodford with tributes to both men. It is worth briefly comparing the two. William Bell was a Boer War veteran born in Victoria who first went to the Solomon Islands as a Government Agent aboard the Fijian labour schooner, *Clansman* (Chapelle 1976: 387; Giles and Scarr 1968: 121). He worked on the schooner for about three years before applying for the position as Labour Inspector in 1911. He clashed with Woodford over what Bell considered to be the inadequacies of the labour regulations of 1910. Bell was a complex loner with a commanding physical presence. Despite his size, heavy-handedness and apparent ruthlessness, Bell was considered a remarkably good local administrator (Keesing 1967: 86). Bell was sent to Malaita as relieving officer but Edge-Partington wrote to Woodford...
in 1913 to say: ‘There is too much Mr Bell over here [Malaita], what I mean to infer is that a lot of natives think because Mr Bell was Government Agent of the “Clansmen” that he is the Resident Commissioner at Tulagi’ (BSIP 14/41).

When the First World War resulted in many young men enlisting for the services, Bell, who had been wounded in the arm, was made the District Officer on Malaita. Bell had respect for Malaitan customs but he opposed the role of the ramo, the culturally sanctioned paid killer used in ritual ‘pay-back’ and he wrote angrily to Barnett that the ‘blood-lust of a few professional murderers’ did not deserve sympathy and attention (BSIP 14/44). In 1916, he even requested permission to return to his former post as Inspector of Labour because he disagreed with policy concerning police action on Malaita. The Kwaio warriors from central Malaita had long-standing grievances relating to taxation, the confiscation of firearms and were antagonised by Bell’s heavy-handed strongman approach (Keesing 1990: 282). The Kwaio had also been the victims of the punitive action in 1911 when the HMS Torch bombarded coastal villages. To the hill tribes, taxation represented tribute and being forced to disarm meant surrender to British law. By this time, local men could only carry a firearm if they were in the employment of a white man (King’s Regulation no 5 of 1910). While this would have been seen as a minor issue among whites, among the local men this was a further act of surrender and a sign of subservience.

Many young men from the Kwaio, and the ‘Are’are peoples from the south, had been recruited into the Pacific labour trade. When the local plantation economy expanded and Malaitan migrant workers were again recruited, they were juxtaposed against the more prosperous land owners in Guadalcanal and the New Georgia group. Their resentments were long and deep. In the inquiry into the Bell massacre, Commissioner Harry Moorhouse could not lay the cause of Kwaio resentment to any single issue and concluded that ‘no single act or administrative measure of the Government … led to the murder, but the combination of circumstances’, as he set out in his report. These included government interference in Malaita customs, the penalty of a fine or short imprisonment for adultery, a grievous crime on Malaita, the insistence on village rules of health and hygiene and finally the order to surrender firearms (British Solomon Islands Protectorate 1929: 12–13). The massacre was, in Kwaio eyes at least, a symbol of the struggle for autonomy, a challenge to colonial power and the assertion of cultural status. In the eyes of the colonial government it was an outrage caused by primitivism and fanaticism. HMAS Adelaide was sent to Malaita and a defence force of traders, government officials and police attacked the Sinalanggu area. Both missionaries and planters supported the retaliation campaigns that included Malaitan police, notably from the northern Lau and To’aba’ita regions that Bell had favoured. These northerners had been Christianised by men like Walter Ivens. These coastal lagoon dwellers now
saw the Kwaio as pagans and sought to avenge the deaths of kinsmen who had been murdered by them. In the retaliation campaigns Kwaio men, women and children were shot by police, many in cold blood (Keesing 1967). 198 Kwaio men were arrested in all and removed to Tulagi. 28 died there, 16 during a dysentery epidemic in the jail. 18 men were sentenced to longer imprisonment terms in Tulagi and six warriors, including Basiana who instigated the attack, were executed. Eventually, on Moorhouse’s recommendation, the remaining 134 men were returned to their homes (Boutilier 1983: 71; Keesing 1990: 282; British Solomon Islands Protectorate 1929: 14). After more than 30 years of direct colonial rule the administration was still focussed on punitive police actions, the suppression of armed insurrection and the maintenance of an economically sub-standard copra industry.

The Bell massacre and the retribution signalled the start of peace in the short term. The administration had to realise that punitive measures and extractive policies—seeing Malaitans as wage labourers on other people’s lands—was not conducive to peace. Malaitans learnt that access to government services, however poor, required the grudging acceptance of colonial law and order. In local terms, being given peace required a reciprocal gift of submission. But Malaitans would not accept submission except on their own terms. Kessing’s account of the rebellion and his not ‘quite standard colonial history’ still resonates within any truthful examination of the British colonial period in the Western Pacific. Keesing (1990: 287) wrote:

Not once did the British authorities concede that Solomon Islanders had ever had sovereign rights to their islands. The Solomons were simply there waiting to be ‘discovered’ and colonized by the Europeans. Not once did the government recognize … that colonization was a process of armed invasion and conquest … To resist the recruiters who trafficked in human cargo, to resist the missionaries, to resist the government, was to commit ‘outrages’ and ‘murders’. To violate colonial statutes and follow old customs was ‘lawless’. Not once did the administrators of the Protectorate doubt that it was their right, indeed their duty, to pacify, to civilize and to uplift ‘the natives’.

Moorhouse echoed these words in his official report on the massacre and the following actions when he wrote: ‘In the early stages the relations between the Administration and the natives were necessarily in the main punitive; head hunting and inter-island and inter-tribal wars were rife and murder was almost a feature of daily life; their repression was essential before any settled form of administration could be introduced’ (British Solomon Islands Protectorate 1929: 19). But Moorhouse also laid some of the blame for the disparity in fortunes between islanders and settlers when he criticised the woeful education
services provided by the administration and the poor quality teaching at the mission schools where the more than 7,000 children learnt little apart from Christianising, and good habits of discipline, order and hygiene.

When Woodford died in 1927 the Solomon Islanders had been British protected persons for more than 30 years. Contact with the Royal Navy, traders and missionaries predated that. By 1927 the islanders had little to show for this colonial benevolence in the way of meaningful social progress, economic development and political unity. The colonial administrations of the British Solomon Islands were concerned with the administration of justice and the plantation economy. A ‘dual economy’ was taken for granted. The villagers lived in small communities where they grew their own produce, raised pigs and chickens, and caught fish. Surplus labour circulated through the plantations and colonial workplaces such as on the wharves, on small ships and some as domestics in the homes of expatriates. The indentured labour system was ‘invidious, inefficient and expensive, existing solely to make plantations viable as the only possible form of economic development in remote, tropical places’ (Campbell 2007: 56). Private capital had not been able to develop any more than 14 per cent of the land alienated despite the exaggerated claims of access to abundant land and a willing labour force. Before the First World War, the annual reports of the administration discuss native affairs only in relation to pacification and the labour supply, either the external Pacific labour trade before 1911 or the internal labour force after that date. In comparison with the annual reports of British New Guinea and Papua which contain substantial ethnographic, linguistic and cultural notes, exploration maps and patrol reports, they are rather dreary affairs.

Campbell (2007: 59) stated: ‘Economic viability of the government was understandably the highest priority, and it is difficult to be sure whether development was the means to achieve the morally higher objective of pacification, or whether pacification was the means to achieve the morally higher purpose of commercial agriculture’. The British government saw costly, uneconomic protectorates as a burden. The proviso for accepting them as colonies or protectorates, under whatever name they were called, was that they should come at no cost to the British taxpayer. While the proviso was that these overseas territories should come at no cost to the British taxpayer, there were few if any that did not receive subsidies, support funds or Imperial Treasury grants (Campbell 2007: 57). This self-sufficiency policy was hostage to fluctuating copra prices. With the Solomon Islands producing poor quality copra the fluctuations in price were even greater, with marked economic consequences. The penury of the Protectorate and the parsimony of the Treasury led to the postponement of advances in social services. It was only just before the First World War that a formal cadet scheme was implemented, with young male university graduates
being appointed to the colonial administration. They faced isolation, illness and physical discomfort. By contrast the Kiap system in the Territories of Papua and New Guinea held greater prospects for career advancement within a wider social circle of expatriates in a climate not too unlike that of northern Australia. The history of British colonial policy in the Solomon Islands is marked by Colonial Office conservatism, Treasury restraint, an antagonistic Western Pacific High Commission, and an isolated administration in Tulagi. It is little wonder that Woodford was often judged critically by his superiors.

When Woodford (1890b: 23fn) wrote, ‘I know of no place where firm and paternal government would sooner produce beneficial results than in the Solomons. The numerous small tribes into which the population is split up would render any organised resistance to properly constituted authority quite futile, while I believe that the natives themselves would not be slow to recognise the advantages of increased security to life and property. Here is an object worthy indeed the devotion of one’s life’, the Solomon Islands were a loose collection of islands inhabited by small tribal communities living largely, but not wholly, independent from each other. The only whites were the itinerant trader, often living on a small offshore island for self-protection and security of property and the occasional missionary supported by regular visits from the home mission base. The islands were visited annually by Royal Navy ships administering ‘Commodore Justice’ to communities that had broken the English laws of which they had no knowledge. Socially and culturally the colonial structure of the British Solomon Islands Protectorate had little real contact with the people. This was true for most colonial situations in the Pacific. After 18 years as Resident Commissioner, the Protectorate was largely Woodford’s creation. For many years it was almost wholly under his supervision and ‘[i]n a very real sense the administration was his’ (Heath 1974a: 8). The history of the Solomon Islands from 1896 to 1915 was fundamentally determined by Charles Morris Woodford but the dilemma that faced him and his successors was how to reconcile the tension between conserving traditional society and modernising it. This tension still exists.
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