

6. The British Solomon Islands Protectorate: Colonialism without capital

Thurston made a visit of inspection to Tonga, Samoa and the Gilbert Islands in 1893 on the corvette HMS *Rapid*. On 17 September, Wilfred Collet, Secretary to the High Commissioner, formally announced that the provisions of the High Commissioner's court and the consolidated Pacific Orders in Council were extended over the southern Solomon Islands (The Pacific Order, no. 78, 1893; Woodford papers PMB 1290 Item 8/4/1, *The Queenslander* 30 December 1893: 1253). The southern Solomons, while officially a protectorate since June, still had no administrative staff to enforce British law and order (WPHC 8/III Items 27 & 28). Thurston reported that it was not possible to establish a protectorate on so satisfactory a basis as existed in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands as no treaties could be made with local authorities and no local revenue could be expected to finance British administration in the islands (Scarr 1967a: 258–259). In fact Thurston had simply visited each island group in the Gilberts and appointed a tax collector to collect one dollar's worth of copra per year per adult man to offset the cost of colonial administration. This could hardly be called mutual agreement by treaty. Enforcement of the Pacific Order in Council was impossible in such a circumstance. In fact, British protectorate status in the southern Solomons only extended over New Georgia, Malaita, Guadalcanal, the central Nggela Islands and present day Makira and surrounding smaller islands. At that time, the protectorate did not extend over Rennell, Bellona, the Santa Cruz Islands, and the Polynesian islands south to Tikopia. These would not be added to the protectorate until 1898 and 1899.

The proclamation declaring the establishment of the protectorate was reported in the *Brisbane Courier* of 10 August 1893 and in the *Argus* and the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 22 August 1893. In May HMS *Curaçoa* and the HMS *Goldfinch* had left Australia charged with secret orders to raise the Union Jack in the southern Solomon Islands (Woodford papers PMB 1290 Item 8/21/9, 1893: 3–4; PMB 1290 Item 9/2/3; see PMB 1290 Item 9/24 for copies of the proclamations). The crews were to raise 30 flags starting at Mono Island in the north, continuing throughout the western islands and the on to the main southern islands. The *Argus* also reported an incident when the *Curaçoa* inflicted 'Commodore Justice' on the village of Abona (Ubuna) for the murder of a crew member of the recruiting vessel *Helena*. And so, during the formal ceremonies of gun salutes and flag raising, the Royal Navy continued its fine tradition of bombarding coastal villages. In Britain the newspapers also announced that the 'Solomon Island which have

long been within the British sphere of influence have been placed under the protectorate of Great Britain' (*The Manchester Guardian* 29 July 1893). Almost simultaneously the *Manchester Guardian* (21 September 1893) reported that the HMS *Curaçoa* had both formally raised the flag in the islands and bombarded a village, location not given, and destroyed the principal huts. This was the same Ubuna village on the north coast of Makira mentioned in the *Argus*. To the local people British justice was both complex and contradictory (Woodford papers PMB 1290 Item 8/21/9, 1893: 14). In fact, there was some justification for the attack on the crew members from the *Helena* for they had been desecrating graves on the island (Bennett 1987: appendix 6). The rest of Ubuna area was then torched by a landing party after which the crew of HMS *Curaçoa* fired a 21-gun salute when the British flag was raised and '[m]any of the natives were so scared at the booming of the guns that they took to their heels and hid themselves in the bush'. The reporter for the *Manchester Guardian* reinforced British opinion of the inherent savagery of the local people by finishing the article: 'Tribal wars are very frequent in the islands, and about the time of the annexation one canoe passed nearly filled with the heads of natives who had fallen in the fight, and whose heads were cut off and carried away as trophies of victory'. These articles were a combination of fact and pure fiction but they fed popular imagination of the lawlessness and brutality of the islanders. At the same time the Melanesian Mission at Siota on Nggela Sule could proudly proclaim that it had 3,000 Christian converts (*The Sydney Morning Herald* 22 August 1893: 5).



Figure 22. Group of village people Uji (Uki ni Masi).

Source: PMB Photo 56–048.



Figure 23. Small canoe house Uji.

Source: PMB Photo 56–051.

The Solomon Islanders were often in the news for all the wrong reasons. The *Daily Graphic* (2 August 1893), a popular illustrated newspaper in competition with the *Illustrated London News*, reported on the establishment of the protectorate in a long article that paraphrased much of Henry Guppy's material with some poorly sketched illustrations of Gorai, his wife and son, Suenna village on Uji and some village houses from Fauro. The article declared: 'The British Protectorate which has just been proclaimed over the Solomon Islands, in the Western Pacific, is part of a slowly-developed scheme, the broad lines of which were settled ten years ago'. This was a reference to Australian colonial concerns about the expansion into the Pacific of the Germany trading companies and the aborted claim over British New Guinea attempted by the Queensland government in 1883. The article contained veiled criticisms of 'the tedious negotiations between the Imperial and Colonial authorities' to annex the north-eastern corner of New Guinea and the Bismarck Archipelago. This rendered the delimitation agreement with Germany necessary. The article in the *Daily Graphic* named Woodford as the source of an interesting shark cult on Savo but made no reference to his recently published book on the Solomon Islands.

The *Australian Town and Country Journal* of 12 October 1895 also ran a long article, this time illustrated with some excellent photographs of Roviana villages and people taken by William Lodder, an engineer on the steamer *Kelloe*. While the article began by saying that the purpose of the report was not to describe the numerous and brutal murders of white men by natives of the islands, and in particular those from Roviana Lagoon, 'the inhabitants of which are noted

as the most fearless and warlike race in the Solomons', it went on to describe these murders in much detail. The purpose of the article was to highlight the 'extraordinarily beautiful appearance, magnificent fertility, and potentialities for future settlement' of the islands. The *Australian Town and Country Journal* was a well-respected newspaper published in Sydney that featured colonial issues, parliamentary reports and rural affairs. Obviously Woodford had been collecting articles about the Solomon Islands at that time for a large number of these cuttings and articles may be found in his archive (Woodford papers PMB 1290 See Item 9/38/2).

Woodford's commission of 1896

There was some confusion about the appointment of Woodford to the position of Resident Commissioner in 1896. Thurston wrote to Sir Henry Berkeley, the Assistant High Commissioner, about the possible appointment and Berkeley, assuming that establishment funds were available, appointed Woodford as Resident Commissioner in April 1896. However, the Colonial Office in London did not confirm this. Berkeley was notified that an appointment as Acting Deputy Commissioner for six months was acceptable but was not renewable. This direction was later repeated in a telegram from the Colonial Office forwarded by the Governor of New South Wales confirming that Woodford's appointment was for six months only (Governor of NSW to Thurston 2 October 1896, WPHC 4/IV 399/1896; Thurston to Chamberlain 20 October 1896 CO 225 50 26148). The Colonial Office was definite that Woodford, with instructions from Berkeley to inspect the southern Solomon Islands as a newly appointed Acting Deputy Commissioner, was to report local conditions only and not establish a permanent post in the islands (Heath 1974a: 50; WPHC 4/IV 115/1896).

Woodford left Suva on the HMS *Pylades* on 20 May 1896 and arrived in Santa Ana on 30 May (Rear Admiral Bridge to Berkeley 6 May 1896 WPHC 4/IV 146/1896). The *Pylades* then took him on a tour of inspection of all islands, except Mono, in the north and Vella Lavella in the west, arriving back at Gavutu on 24 July (Woodford papers PMB 1290 Item 1/9 Diary of tour of duty aboard the *Pylades* 30 May to 10 August 1896). In June, Woodford reported to Thurston on the activities of traders in the islands and sent the letter to Fiji via the Burns Philp steamer *Titus* that he met in Marau Sound (Woodford to Thurston 6 June 1896 CO 225 50 17325). For a time Woodford even considered Marau a possible place for a government station. Accompanying the letter to Thurston was a draft regulation prohibiting any future freehold land purchases in the islands unless approved by the High Commission in Suva (Woodford to Thurston 6 June 1896, WPHC 4/IV 199/1896; Woodford to Thurston 26 June 1896 and Thurston to Colonial Office 21 August 1896 CO 225 50 21667). For some time traders and

planters had been buying land from local people in exchange for cash and trade goods. There were few formal records of these land sales and those that existed were legally dubious. The tour of the islands was not without incident. In August, Woodford was distracted from his mission.

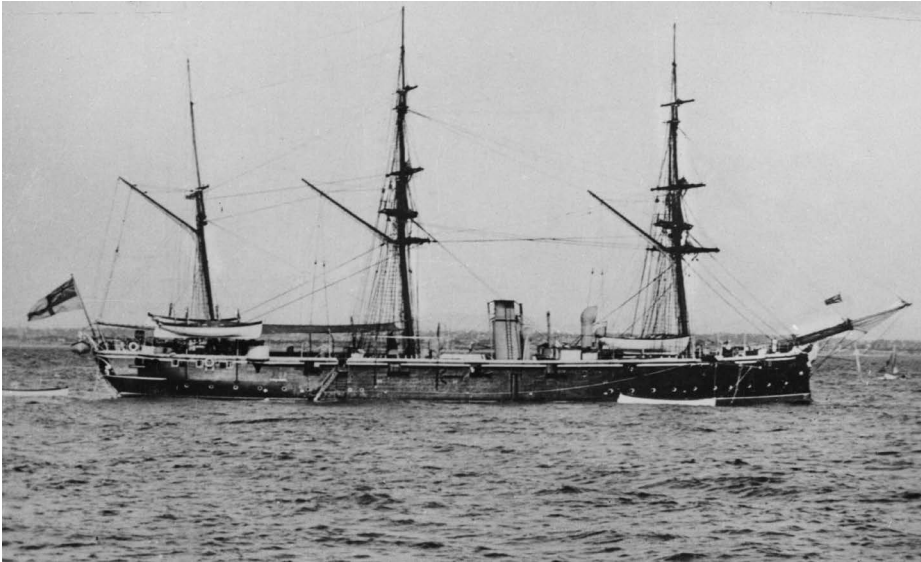


Figure 24. HMS *Pylades*, 1884.

Source: Australian War Memorial (www.awm.gov.au/collection/302246).

International attention: The murder of Baron von Norbeck

In his brief diary written during the *Pylades* voyage Woodford noted that he met with the captain of the Austrian survey ship SMS *Albatros* at anchor off Guadalcanal and was informed that a party of 30 men were planning an expedition to the Lion's Head in the interior of Guadalcanal (Woodford papers PMB 1290 Item 1/9 Diary 8 August 1896). Little further mention was made in the diary of this expedition of Austrian marines and naturalists but the results would create international exposure. The leader was Baron Heinrich Foullon von Norbeck, a geologist and Director of the Imperial and Royal Geological Society in Vienna during the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Described as about 50 years old, short, stout and not unlike the Prince of Wales (later Edward VII) von Norbeck was commissioned to search the New Hebrides and the Solomon Islands for nickel. Apparently the idea was that if deposits were found the Austro-Hungarian Empire would annex the islands as a colony. Von Norbeck left

Europe in late 1895 and at Sydney connected with the steam-frigate *Saida*. He was in charge of exploration parties and more than 30 surveys were undertaken in the New Hebrides without incident (Horthy 2000). No deposits of nickel were found but von Norbeck returned to the Pacific the following year to continue his investigations, this time on the *Albatros*, a barque-rigged wooden screw steamer of about 600 tons that had been converted to a surveying ship in 1888 and was based in the Pacific (Schaller 2005; *The Sydney Morning Herald* 19 September 1896). The *Albatros* also undertook detailed hydrogeological surveys of the waters between New Hebrides and the Solomon Islands. At Marau Sound, Oscar Svensen and the crew of his ketch, *Siskin*, were contracted to provide supplies to the main vessel and to the various landing parties (Veperdi n.d.).

On 3 August 1896, von Norbeck and a large, well-equipped exploration party landed near Tetera village on the north coast of Guadalcanal. Here three local chiefs, Saki, Billi and Jonny Parramatta—a man who had served on trading vessels to Sydney—set out for the Lion's Head along a route between the Mbalisuna and Mberande Rivers. Apart from the four local guides the party had no previous experience of the country inland from the Guadalcanal coast. The eight officers and petty officers and 16 sailors were heavily armed with either Manlicher rifles or with revolvers. At night, the well-provisioned party camped on the side of Mount Tatuve. On 10 August the parties separated on von Norbeck's orders despite concerns from the military leader. One group remained guarding the camp and stores while von Norbeck and the rest of the team continued to climb towards Mount Lammas. This group was attacked that day and the rear party was simultaneously attacked at the camp. Foulon von Norbeck had his skull crushed and four others died, including a young midshipman, Armand de Beaufort. Their bodies were left behind under cover when the exploration party retreated. Word was sent back to the *Albatros* and a relief party set off to find the wounded sailors still on Mount Tatuve.

Woodford at that time was in the middle of his tour of inspection of the islands. From Gavutu he sailed in Lars Nielsen's schooner, *Narovo*, and met up with the *Albatros* off Guadalcanal. Woodford first reported to Captain Josef Ritter von Mauler von Elisenau and then cabled the news of the massacre to Admiral Cyprian Bridge, Commander of the Royal Navy Australia Station, on the day that the international news broke (Woodford to Bridge 22 August 1896 CO 225 51 22666; Commander in Chief Australia to Admiralty 18 September 1896 CO 225 51 19711; Franks and Forrestier Smith 2001; *The Sydney Morning Herald* 18 September 1896). Woodford joined the relief team sent to retrieve the wounded. He then took part in a second, but unsuccessful, attempt to recover the bodies of the dead. This time he was accompanied by Fred Ericson, another trader from Gavutu. They found the bodies had been removed and were not retrieved at the time. Much later the remains were found on Tatuve by Dr Northcote

Deck from the South Seas Evangelical Mission when on an overland crossing of Guadalcanal (Woodford papers PMB 1290 Items 2/501, 9/25 and 7/36; *Daily Telegraph* 21 October 1910; *The Sydney Morning Herald* 12 August 1911: 5; *Advocate* [Burnie] 10 April 1936: 11).

Woodford was highly commended by the captain of the *Albatros* for his assistance and sympathies. Being on hand at the time and bearing his official title as Deputy Commissioner he appears to have smoothed over a rather unpleasant diplomatic incident (*The Sydney Morning Herald* 13 October 1896; Woodford papers PMB 1381/012). Woodford was not uncritical of the Austrian expedition and in his report stated: 'The Baron doubtless was an able scientist and a most estimable man, but something more is needed than this when leading an expedition into the forest clad mountains of perhaps the most ferocious people in the South Seas' (Thurston to Colonial Office 3 October 1896 CO 225 50 22808). Certainly the expedition was a disaster—the result of carelessness, inexperience and a lack of planning. Later the Austrian Emperor sent Woodford a jewelled box as a token of gratitude. A monument to the expedition was erected near Tetera village and Count Deym, the Austro-Hungarian Ambassador in London subsequently wrote to the Foreign Office thanking Woodford for his assistance with the erection of this memorial (Schaller 2005, Woodford to Jackson 26 March 1903 enclosing letter from Austro Hungarian Embassy London dated 23 October 1902 and report Woodford to Thurston 25 August 1896 WPHC 4/IV 351/1896; Deym to Lansdowne 20 May 1901 CO 225 61 18461).

The incident made the papers right across the region, not only because it raised diplomatic issues at a difficult time in relations between the British and the German governments, but also because many of the Austrians involved were gentry (*The Brisbane Courier* 18 September 1896: 5; *The Age* 18 and 28 September 1896; *The Advertiser* 18 September 1896: 5; *The Sydney Morning Herald* 18 September 1896: 5 and 19 September 1896: 9, 13 October 1896: 5; *The Queenslander* 26 September 1896: 581; *The Australian Town and Country Journal* 26 September 1896: 20, *The Argus* 28 September 1896: 5; see also Woodford papers PMB 1290 Item 9/31). Nevertheless, not all the papers were sympathetic to the plight of the Austrians despite their high social status. The *South Australian Register* (21 September 1896: 4-5) reported: 'This massacre will doubtless lead to more 'justice' and probably to further revenge, so that the danger to life [of white men] increases rather than decreases. The Austrians must have known what they had to face, and it is greatly to be regretted that they should have rashly incurred the risk of so lamentable a disaster'. Later in October, Woodford met with Captain von Mauler von Elisenau in Melbourne who informed him that the blame for the attack was placed upon Midshipman de Beaufort, who had been killed. De Beaufort had been asleep during guard duties on the night of 9 August when the party were camped at the base of the

Lion's Head and in the morning had ordered the men to pile their weapons but stand guard without them. For this, he would have been court marshalled and shot (Woodford to Thurston 30 October 1896, WHPC 4/IV 459/1896; Woodford to Thurston 30 October 1896 and Thurston to Chamberlain 9 December 1896 CO 225 50 1848).

The *Albatros* continued its survey work in German New Guinea and the northern Solomon Islands for another year (*The Sydney Morning Herald* 6 July 1897). During that time two fine harbours were located, one on Isabel Island and another on Choiseul. While Bougainville and Buka were the favoured recruiting grounds for German traders, the northern Solomons was seen as attractive for its harbours, labourers and potential plantation areas. Later Woodford protested at a proposal by the captain of the *Albatros* to make a second expedition to the Solomons. He made sure that the HMS *Rapid* was in Guadalcanal waters before the arrival of the German warship and that no shore expeditions would be permitted (Admiralty to Colonial Office 28 April 1897 enclosing confidential report by Rear Admiral Bridge 20 March 1897 CO 225 53 9142; Woodford to High Commissioner 27 March 1897, WPHC 4/IV 144/1897).

The report to Joseph Chamberlain

On 14 September 1896 Woodford met with the *Pylades* at Ugi and was taken back to Gauvtu. During this time he again reported back to Thurston in Suva on regular intervals. Subsequently he sailed on the *Titus*, to Sydney on 4 October arriving on 16 October. In the meantime, Woodford had crafted his report to Thurston while on the *Pylades* and delivered it to him on 25 November (Woodford to Thurston 5 July 1896, WPHC 4/IV 292/1896; Berkeley to Chamberlain 21 April 1896 CO 225 50 12714). This report was then forwarded on 8 December 1896 to Joseph Chamberlain, the Secretary of State for the Colonies. The Colonial Office appeared impressed with the extent and content of Woodford's report for Chamberlain wrote: 'All these papers show that Mr Woodford is an energetic and sensible man who w[oul]d make a good resident [commissioner]' (Heath 1974a: 53).

Woodford's report was indeed a comprehensive and detailed document (Great Britain. House of Commons. Parliamentary Papers 1897b). He noted that there were 48 Europeans resident in the Solomon Islands including four missionaries but by the time the report had been published at least two traders had been killed. The nationalities of the resident traders varied: British, French, Norwegian, German and Swedish were mentioned. There were 21 trading vessels of various sizes. The exact number of traders and trading vessels was important for they were to be a source of taxation revenue. The question of

finance was the most important one in the minds of the officials at the Colonial Office. Woodford recommended a capitation, or poll, tax of £5 per head for any European man aged between 16 and 60. Missionaries were exempt. Each trading station was to be taxed at £10 per station and ship licences for vessels operating within the protectorate were to be charged at the rate of £1 per ton to the maximum rate of £100 (Thurston to Chamberlain 8 December 1896 CO 225 50 1846). Vessels operating to and from the protectorate were to be taxed at the rate of £100 per vessel. Basing his figures on this Woodford arrived an ambitious estimated revenue of £1,245 a year (Great Britain. House of Commons. Parliamentary Papers 1897b: 20). When these new taxation regulations were published in the Australian newspapers they incited considerable criticism from traders and merchants both in Australia and in the islands (*The Queenslander* 7 August 1897: 253).

Woodford quickly realised that this revenue estimate was unreliable, certainly in the first years of establishment. He therefore submitted a revised set of figures below the original estimates. The anticipated poll tax revenue was reduced to £120, calculated at £5 per man based on a permanent resident white population of 22, the trading station tax was reduced to £120 based on £10 per station with 12 permanent trading stations and the 21 trading vessels of various sizes would earn around £350 a year. As there were only four trading vessels operating to and from the protectorate they were to be charge £50 per ship, earning only £200. Optimistically he also assumed that additional fees and fines would bring in about £30 a year. Total revenue would now be only £800. The four vessels operating to and from the Solomon Islands were the *Titus*, a 760-ton steamer built in 1878 and purchased in 1896 by Burns Philp based in Sydney, the *Chittoor*, a schooner, and the *Kurrara*, a steamer, both owned by G. J. Waterhouse, and the *Lark*, a schooner owned by J. Hawkins also from Sydney. Woodford believed that with increased fees the two sailing vessels would prove to be unprofitable and the two steamers would take over most of the traffic. The *Titus* began making between four and seven round trips from Sydney to the Solomon Islands from January 1896 (Burns Philp & Co 1883–1983 AU NBAC N115/72).

The Solomons (Revenue) Regulation of 1897 (Queen's Regulation no 3 of 1897) was published in the *Victoria Government Gazette* (no 52 Friday April 30, 1897) with full details of the head tax and the various fees listed. The title of the regulation, 'To provide for the raising of a local revenue in the British Solomon Islands', only partly described the reason for the imposition of taxation in the islands. By imposing a head tax and a trading station tax Woodford hoped that traders would increase the prices of shop goods and this in turn would force the local people to increase the production of cash crops, especially copra. It would also help to reduce the 'wild competition now existing' in local trade and force out 'the beachcombing class and their loss would not be matter for

regret' (Great Britain. House of Commons. Parliamentary Papers 1897b: 20–21). When he returned to Fiji, Woodford again refined his revenue estimates. He proposed that the protectorate would earn only £120 from capitation taxes, £5 each from a population of only 22 permanent traders, and that the trading stations tax would be eliminated in favour of a ship licence fee of £10 per vessel that would include the trading station licence. This would hopefully earn the administration £550 a year. In addition, the estimated revenue from fees, fines and registrations would remain at £30. Total revenue was now to be £700.

In his covering letter to Joseph Chamberlain, Thurston yet again revised the scheme of taxation proposed for the protectorate. He submitted estimates of revenue based on a £5 capitation tax on adult non-native males, not being ministers of religion, a trading station tax of £10 and a trading vessel fee of £1 per ton. Open boats also would be charged at £1 per ton based on carrying capacity. Thurston believed revenue would now amount to £820 a year. All the figures indicate that the internal trading system was highly unstable and market driven. In 1898 the revenue regulation was amended slightly to correct any anomalies in fees imposed on recruiting and returning labour vessels (Queen's Regulation no 1 of 1898; 1 J. Soc. Comp. Legis. Ns 475 1899). There were no accurate figures for beach trading at this stage and movements of traders and their vessels, in and out of the protectorate, had not been recorded except privately. Few traders knew the details of their neighbour's business operations. In March 1897 Joseph Chamberlain wrote on Woodford's report: 'This really is a most excellent report and I think we should express our appreciation. Mr Woodford must be a clever and practical man and might I think be very useful in any Tropical possession which we want to develop. He should be kept in mind'. All things considered this was a most favourable report from the Secretary of State for the Colonies.

In the middle of his tour of investigation Woodford was caught up in a murder case that attracted newspaper attention. A trader on Uji, Edward Hamilton Wright, was murdered by local men apparently at the request of the local chief Rora (Woodford to High Commissioner 3 October 1898 WPHC 4/IV 343/1898). Woodford could come to no conclusion as to culpability despite interviewing local men including a native policeman who had returned to Uji. Rora was well known to visiting ship crews. He would often dress up in cast-off naval uniforms with strange decorations (Bennett 1987: 99; Festetics de Tolna 1903: 303). According to Bennett (1987: 98), Woodford confiscated these clothes from a recalcitrant Rora because he could not tolerate this aping of British authority. The report by Woodford to the High Commissioner does not mention this. He certainly found evidence of stealing on the island and Thomas Woodhouse, the 'Old Commodore' was now living there in fear of his life from Malaitans who came to trade copra. Woodhouse was by now a cripple having broken both

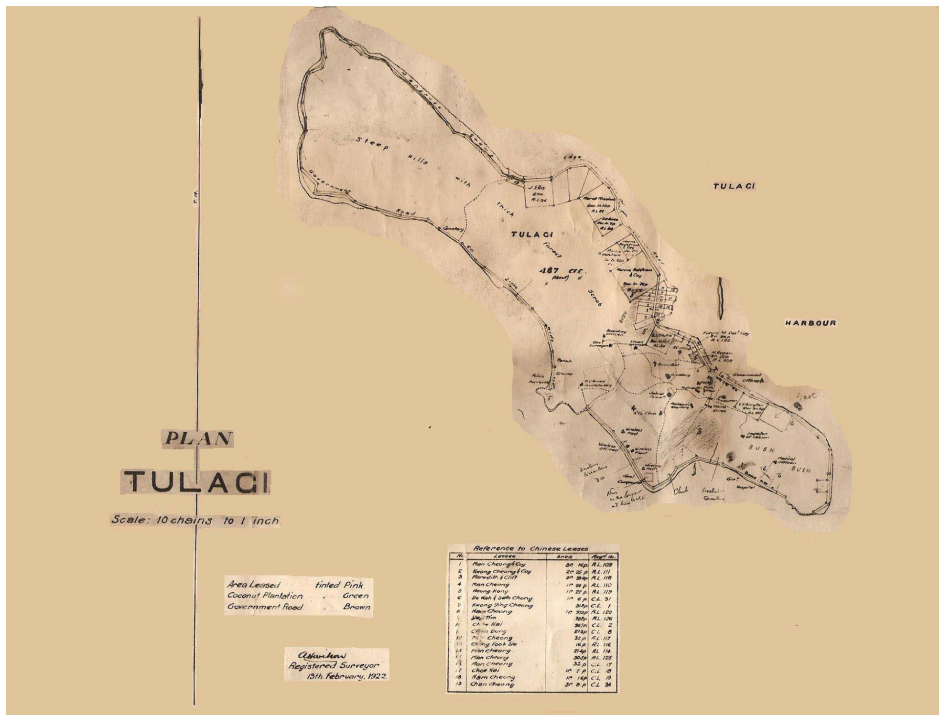
thighs, the bones in one leg and his knee cap. He complained to Woodford that the Uji villagers were stealing his pigs and chickens. Woodford was spending an enforced stay at Uji as his cutter, his only transport, was being repaired. He found that the Eti-Eti villagers were implicated in the thefts and so with the sailors from the HMS *Goldfinch* he raided the village, shot 12 pigs and took away some food troughs and wooden drums. Valuables in the houses of the chiefs, Rora, Tomani and Tahio were also confiscated. Among these were Rora's uniforms and medals. Woodford reported: 'The chief Rora has indeed been quite a pet among the crews of warships visiting Uji and has been in the habit of appearing in complete naval full dress uniform covered with medals and orders of various kinds. The uniform I found in his deserted house and as I thought he would probably have no further use for it at present I removed it, leaving it with Mr Woodhouse to be returned to Rora in case of his future good behaviour' (Woodford to O'Brien 3 October 1898 WPHC 4/IV 343/1898). Presumably Rora receive his uniforms and medals later. There is no mention of anger at the aping of British formality.

Tulagi: Purchased in anticipation

In the meantime, and in anticipation of a positive response to his request for establishment of the British Solomon Islands Protectorate, on 29 September 1896 Woodford purchased the island of Tulagi, off Gavutu, for £42 (£15,600 in current values) (Woodford to Thurston 25 November 1896, WPHC 4/IV 474/1896). The deed of purchase was signed by Woodford and 32 local men representing land owners from nearby Nggela. Tulagi was ideally situated for a small government station. It was hilly, well covered in forest, had some good springs of fresh water, a high annual rainfall of nearly 120 inches (3,000 mm), faced the cooler trade winds, and had a well-protected harbour. Apart from some pockets of good soil in the small valleys, it did not have good gardening land but would soon be converted into coconut plantations and attractive domestic gardens. The payment, in gold, was divided between a local chief Tambokoro and his sons, who received £12 (£4,500 in current values), the village of Matanibana that had used Tulagi for garden lands was given £10, Haleta villagers were given £10, and Tugumata village was given £10 (£3,700 each in current values) (*The Manchester Guardian* 9 June 1897; Moore 2009b: 6). The £12 given to Tambokoro and his sons was the equivalent of three years' hard work for one adult male labourer in the Queensland sugar fields. Woodford's friend, Lars Nielsen, acted as a broker between Woodford and the Nggela communities who owned the island (Heath 1979: 79).

Tulagi Island was also a convenient three miles from Gavutu, the island owned by Nielsen. In all the island was about three miles in length by half a mile

in width and about 800 acres in area (4 square kilometres or about 400 ha). Woodford reported that the island was hilly and a 'healthy site for a residence with extensive view is to be found at the east end of the island with an elevation of about 200 feet' (Great Britain. House of Commons. Parliamentary Papers 1897b: 24). He had obviously made a quick decision to buy the island when he was at Gavutu because Woodford wrote: 'I trust that in going beyond my instructions in the matter if purchase I have your Excellency's approval'. The decision could not be rescinded. The 32 local people who had signed the land sale had already been paid and the cash distributed (Woodford to Thurston 25 November 1896 WPHC 4/IV 474/1896). Woodford's Tulagi was set to become the headquarters for the British Solomon Islands Protectorate until the Japanese invasion on 1 May 1942.



Map 3. Drawn 19 February 1922.

Source: Courtesy of Hugh Laracy.

Laws and regulations

Although Woodford informed the Colonial Office that, to the best of his knowledge, the sale of arms and ammunition had been discontinued, at least

by the British traders, the transshipment of arms and ammunition was still a problem. On board the *Titus* returning to Sydney Woodford received an anonymous letter, posted to him from Port Douglas in Queensland, that stated: 'Sir-A Winchester carbine was sold at Sisipi [village on] Savo in June last year and paid for with turtle shell. Ammunition in large quantities [is] still sold, especially in places where men-of-war are not likely to call, for example, Tawatauna and Ubuna [both villages on] Makira-(Sd) Fairplay' (Great Britain. House of Commons. Parliamentary Papers 1897b: 25). Early in 1893 two regulations, *The Arms (Amendment) Regulation of 1893* (Queen's Regulation no 3 of 1893) and *The Liquor Regulation of 1893* (Queen's Regulation no 4 of 1893) were imposed to restrict the sale of arms, ammunition and explosives to 'natives of the Western Pacific' and restrict the sale of intoxicating liquors. Both were unenforceable. Woodford proposed that the administration offer a £10 reward for information leading to the successful conviction of anyone found trading in arms, ammunition, alcohol and dynamite. A regulation specifically addressing the issue of the sale of arms and ammunition in the Solomon Islands, *The Solomons (Arms) Regulation of 1897* (Queen's Regulation no 4 of 1897; 1 J. Soc. Comp. Legis. Ns 102 1899), was also published in the *Victoria Government Gazette* (no 52 April 30, 1897). Woodford and the High Commission in Fiji were certain that much of the arms, ammunition, dynamite and alcohol being sold to local people in the islands—like the Samoan case—originated in the Australian colonies. A later amendment would allow an employer to give a shotgun to a 'servant for a day to shoot birds, etc' but that too would have been practically unenforceable (12 J. Soc. Comp. Legis. Ns 388 1911).

Locally, Woodford's most urgent concern during this inspection was the possible introduction of cholera and smallpox from German New Guinea where it was causing deaths both among the native population and the German settlers (Woodford to Collet 10 January 1897, WPHC 4/IV 16/1897). Quarantine regulations (*The Solomons (Quarantine) Regulation no 1 of 1897* (Queen's Regulation no 1 of 1897); 1 J. Soc. Comp. Legis. Ns 102 1899) designed to prevent the introduction of contagious diseases such as cholera, smallpox, yellow fever and measles from the northern Solomons into the southern islands. This meant that all vessels were required to go to the 'seat of government [Tulagi] and perform quarantine till pratique is granted'. This included all vessels from German Pacific colonies and applied to trading ships, such as those of Burns Philp that entered the protectorate through German New Guinea.

While Woodford and Thurston had reasonably well grounded ideas about the possible taxation potential of a small island protectorate, the estimates for export potential and agricultural opportunities were rather unrealistic. In 1895 Woodford's estimates for export of produce from the Solomon Islands were 1,200 tons of copra, 585 tons of ivory nuts, 6.5 tons of pearl shell, 891 pounds

of turtle shell and 8 tons of bêche de mer. Freight to Sydney by steamer was 35 shillings (£1 15s) a ton. In 1896 the figures were similar, and not spectacular: 1,400 tons of copra, 600 tons of ivory nuts, 9 tons of pearl shell, 1,400 pounds of turtle shell, and 4 tons of bêche de mer. Clearly the protectorate, with a maximum of 40 traders buying from local sellers where no productive plantations had been established, had limited economic potential. In addition the copra was smoke-dried, dirty and of poor quality. By comparison, the copra from the large German plantations in Samoa was sun dried, or kiln dried, and commanded a higher price. Local people sold dried copra to beach traders by the string: 10 full kernels or 20 half kernels threaded onto a string made from bush rope (*Hibiscus tiliaceus*) generally about 6 feet in length. This was purchased for one stick of tobacco at a cost to the trader of only one halfpenny. The profit was about £2 a ton.

People were honest in the dealings and advances of trade goods would eventually be repaid, but the concept of credit was unknown and could be abused by traders. Tobacco was the universal currency. Beside the trade in imported goods from Australia, many white traders also dealt in local currencies like dogs' teeth, porpoise teeth, whales' teeth, shell armlets and shell money from Malaita. A *Native Contract Regulation of 1896* (Queen's Regulation no 2 of 1896) designed to protect 'aboriginal natives of the Pacific' who entered into contracts with 'non-native persons' was in place. In essence the regulation meant that no native person could be sued in the High Commissioner's court in Suva but that natives could sue non-natives when in disagreement over money paid, labour undertaken, or goods supplied. While this regulation protected local people to some extent it also meant that they would not be able to secure credit. Traders would not lend money to any person who defaulted and who could not be forced by law to repay the loan. It was not until 1907 that the definition of a native was established in law. Under the *Definition (Native) Regulation of 1907* (King's Regulation no 3 of 1907) a native was defined, without much real clarification, as 'any aboriginal native of any island in the Pacific Ocean'. But any person of mixed descent, on the application of a parent or guardian, and 'who has abandoned native ways of life and speaks one European language' was considered a European.

Despite the potential few commercial plantations had been developed. The only plantings had been made at Gera (Mbara) Island off Aola, a small plantation of 30 acres near Aola and one at Marau Sound, all by Oscar Svensen. Svensen paid only £1 for the Aola plantation previously owned by the now bankrupt firm of Kelly, Williams and Woodhouse (Woodford to O'Brien 15 December 1898–18 February 1900 WPHC 4/IV 48/1899). Lars Nielsen had a small plantation of 15 acres on Gavutu. 10,000 acres of land had been purchased by the Marau Company, Oscar Svensen again, between the Kaoka and Singgalia Rivers in east

Guadalcanal. Here the aim was to plant coffee, cocoa and bananas. There had been numerous speculative land purchases before the protectorate had been declared. Kelly, Williams and Woodhouse bought 50–60 square miles at Lungga on the north coast of Guadalcanal in 1886 for £60 paid in trade goods (Heath 1979: 82). Louis Nixon bought two islands off Nggela for £30 in 1881 but died that same year. John Stephens, the trader at Uji ni Masi, was also dead. He owned several thousand acres of land that was now left idle. In 1891 a company called Messrs Carpenter and Young bought land at Wanderer Bay on Guadalcanal but their aim was gold prospecting. Large tracts of land on the Guadalcanal plains had been bought by Joseph Vos, the former blackbirder and captain of the *Hopeful* and *William Manson* (Moore 1985: 43, 45; Wawn and Corris 1973: 295). This land between the Taivo and Mbalisuna Rivers on north Guadalcanal included the entire village of Tasimboko. These areas were never developed by Vos (Great Britain. House of Commons Parliamentary Papers 1897b: 8–9). The people of Tasimboko had been driven off their lands by raids from the inland bushmen in 1893 but after investigation Woodford found in favour of the remnants of the Tasimboko people and Vos's land claim was disallowed (Woodford to O'Brien 9 November 1898 WPHC 4/IV 12/1899).

As a result of these speculative deals, the first regulation relating to land acquisition was also drawn up. *Queen's Regulation no 4 of 1896* was designed to restrict the further alienation of lands in the British Solomon Islands (Woodford to Thurston 6 June 1896 WPHC 4/IV 199/1896; Butterworth and others 1897: 203; *Victoria Government Gazette* no. 115, Friday 20 November 1896). The regulation specified that land could be purchased from local people, leased from them or leased from the government but only after formal approval by the High Commissioner in Suva (Allen 1957: 35). However, the largest land speculator was Oscar Svensen who, between 1890 and 1907, bought 51,000 acres either from local people outright or from other Europeans who had failed in their plantation and trading ventures and who wanted to leave the islands (Bennett 1987: 143). Svensen would later capitalise on these purchases. DHPG also laid claim to areas of land on Kolombangara, Gizo, the Shortland Islands and at Tangarere, north of Wanderer Bay on Guadalcanal. When the company presented Woodford with a deed of sale for this land he saw it as a 'notorious and gigantic land grab' (Heath 1979: 86; Woodford to High Commissioner 3 July 1900 WPHC 4/IV 91/1898).

Copra was to be the only sustainable plantation crop in the islands. Ivory nuts (*Metroxylon salomonense*), a subspecies of the *Arecaceae* sago palm family and endemic to the Solomon Islands were, for a short time, used in Germany for buttons and as wheels for roller skates. The price in Sydney was only £5 a ton. Pearl shell was known to occur at Port Purvis south-east of Tulagi in the Nggela Islands and in the Manning Straits between Choiseul and Isabel Islands. At a time when pearl shell was becoming scarce in the Torres Strait it was felt that the

Solomon Islands would offer new collecting grounds. Turtle shell obtained from the villagers in the New Georgia islands was brought into the British protectorate after head hunting raids that ventured into German territory. Before firearm regulation, turtle shell was traded for weapons. The price: three turtle shells for one Snider rifle. At a time when the cost of one rifle was about £5 or the equivalent of 10,000 dried coconut shells (about 83 days of work) access to the Manning Straits was contested by rival chiefs in the western islands (Bennett 1987: Table 2, 81). *Bêche de mer*, also subject to market demand from Chinese traders, was collected in the Roviana Lagoon close to Frank Wickham's trading station. But the badly cured sun-dried product fetched poor prices.

Woodford supplied the High Commissioner with a detailed list of possible agricultural products that the protectorate could supply (Great Britain. House of Commons Parliamentary Papers 1897b). In addition to copra, the main market crop, Woodford felt that Para rubber would be a suitable product. However, local rubber production would never compete with the high-grade product secured from the commercially successful Malayan plantations. He also considered that sago produced from local palms would also be marketable in Sydney, but local production was mostly confined to the Shortland Islands, then part of German territory. It was also made by washing the pulp with seawater and putting beach almonds into the mix. While this may have been palatable to local villagers it would not meet domestic market tastes in Sydney. Quality sago sold at £8 to £10 a ton in Sydney but this was mostly used in the production of paper and some adhesives. It was unrealistic to think that a local produce could be transported and sold to a domestic market that had little use for the material other than as a thickening agent. Manila canes were also found throughout the islands and used for the manufacture of strong baskets but cane could be sourced elsewhere. Sandalwood was not available in the Solomon Islands and there was little accessible timber apart from trees found along the coastal strand. Sponges were considered a possible product but those collected by local people would only fetch one shilling a pound. There was no incentive to collect, process and then try to market such a commodity. The possibility of minerals, in particular gold, was also considered by Woodford. He felt that Makira and Guadalcanal had the potential to be good locations for gold prospecting and so he recommended that the protectorate have a set of mining regulations in place in case of possible exploration activity.

Establishment of the Protectorate

Following presentation of his report Woodford returned to Fiji to await the decisions of the Colonial Office about a permanent appointment. In February 1897 he wrote to Wilfred Collet, Secretary to the High Commissioner, complaining of

the delay. He asked Collet: was he to be sent to establish a protectorate and then see it abandoned, was he to do the rough work at a labourer's wages and then hand over to another man, and did the Colonial Office object to him personally? All reasonable questions to a man impatient to begin and who wrote 'whoever they get I can safely say they will get not one who takes a greater interest in the place of more anxious to make it a success than I am' (Heath 1974a: 54). In the meantime Woodford moved with his family to Sydney and rented 'Trevenna' at 21 Billyard Avenue in Elizabeth Bay. From there he again wrote to Joseph Chamberlain at the Colonial Office requesting a permanent position as Resident Commissioner in the Solomon Islands. Chamberlain's reply only stated that his application had been read and noted (Woodford to Chamberlain 7 February 1897 CO 225 54 6068).

The Colonial Office remained ambivalent about establishing a post in the Solomons. In Suva local salary savings from the High Commission vote were used to pay Woodford's first year in Tulagi and 'Downing Street gave in to the excellence of his [Woodford's] reports' (Scarr 1980: 313). This argument over salary payments continued well into 1897 (Thurston to Chamberlain 12 December 1896 CO 225 50 1850). A coded telegram from the Lieutenant-Governor of NSW to the Acting High Commissioner on 15 February 1897 clearly stated that Treasury had made no authorisation for payment of Woodford's salary from the 1896 estimates (Lt. Gov of New South Wales to High Commissioner 15 February 1897 WPHC 4/IV 65/1897). In fact a grant-in-aid of £1,200 (£400,000 in current values) had been made by Treasury for the establishment of the protectorate but this had to include the physical construction of the offices and residency on Tulagi, salaries for employees for one year, including the six policemen recruited from Fiji, and the cost of a whaleboat (Coates 1970: 229). Scarr (1967a: 263) has estimated that with all expenses removed from the grant Woodford would have been left with just 6d to spend (Coates 1970: 220–239). Finally, on 17 February 1897 Woodford was formally appointed Resident Commissioner and he acknowledged his appointment in March (Woodford papers PMB 1381/008h copy of appointment signed by Berkeley 17 February 1897; Woodford to Berkeley 3 March 1897 WPHC 4/IV 83/1897). At the same time the separate Governors of the Australian colonies wrote to Berkeley acknowledging Woodford's appointment as Resident Commissioner in the Solomon Islands (WPHC 4/IV 93/1897, 112/1897, 123/1897; Woodford papers PMB 1381/008h). His duties were clear. As Resident Commissioner he was required to watch over the Pacific labour trade operating in Solomon Island waters and to stop the illegal trade in firearms that was destabilising the islands (Scarr 1980: 275). The mandate of the colonial state was consolidation of the boundaries, the protection of the people, their life and property, and the creation of a prosperous economic future. Apart from this fine moral philosophy the Colonial Office was only concerned that the Solomon Island protectorate be self-sufficient.

In March 1897 Woodford left Suva with his police and a 27-foot open whaleboat on HMS *Rapid*, her last patrol duty of a 12-year attachment to the Australia Station. This was to be her 'most exciting cruise' (*The Sydney Morning Herald* 20 September 1897: 5). On board Woodford had a whaleboat specially made for him in Sydney at the cost of £39, the 20 Martini-Henry rifles, 6,000 rounds of ammunition, a further 2,000 rounds of blanks, 2 aiming tubes and 2,000 rounds of aiming tube ammunition all purchased from the Sydney Naval Yards for £125/16/6- (Woodford to Berkeley 8 February 1897 WPHC 4/IV 42/1897 see also 38/1897 and 41/1897). The arms and ammunition that accompanied Woodford and the police was almost double that specified on the supply listing sent by Rear Admiral Bridge to the Admiralty in London. The Naval Yards in Sydney also charged almost four times the original estimates (Admiralty to Colonial Office 22 July 1897 CO 225 53 16013). Food and provisions to feed him, his police and any local workers cost £28/13/6- out of the financial allocation (Woodford to Berkeley 20 March 1897 WPHC 4/IV 133/1897). The *Rapid* took Woodford to Gavutu and then, accompanied by Woodford, made the annual visit of a British man-of-war to the Solomon Islands where the sailors avenged the deaths of traders at Rendova, New Georgia, Nggatokae and Vella Lavella. The warship then met with the Burns Philp steamer, the *Titus*, at Gavutu. The group of Fijian police—most likely Solomon Islanders trained as police in Fiji—arrived later on the HMS *Torch*. But even company steamers needed checking. The *Titus* was found to be carrying arms and ammunition for Peter Edmund Pratt who was cautioned by Woodford (Woodford to Berkeley 8 February 1897 WPHC 4/IV 43/1897). Also on board were whaleboats that traders were now selling to local people to replace *tomoko*. The crew of the *Rapid* also took away a large wooden carving said to be 'a hideous wooden god with shining and monstrous eyes', most likely a *beku* carving of an ancestor or chief, and a war canoe seized from Vella Lavella. Both were given to the British Museum (*The Sydney Morning Herald* 20 September 1897: 5). British colonialism had arrived.

A journalist reports on the establishment

On its regular calls to trading stations in Papua, the Bismarck Archipelago and the Solomon Islands, the *Titus* now called at Gavutu. A passenger on the May, June and July cruise in 1897 was a special correspondent from the *North Queensland Register* (21 July 1897: 12–13) in Townsville who later filed a long and rather poetic report on the Solomon Islands. Passing through the Hathorn Sound and the Diamond Narrows separating Kohinggo and Vonavona (Parara) from the main island of New Georgia, on the way south towards Rendova, the reporter, like Woodford and Somerville before him, wrote eloquently: 'On both sides [of the passage] the bare coral reef could be discerned projecting into the

water and dropping off perpendicularly to many fathoms in depth, creating the impression as of artificial walls'. Entering the Roviana Lagoon he reported: 'What appeared a continuous stretch of land ahead dissolved into hundreds of picturesque islands'. These are the outer barrier islands of the long lagoon that stretches from Nusa Roviana and Honiavasa to Rereghana, Ndora and Petani Islands. Along the shore of both the islands and on the mainland were numerous settlements but most were concentrated along the Munda shoreline.

The *Titus* was making the circular voyage profitable for Burns Philp for under the new regulations enforced by Woodford the cost of £100 a year for a ship licence was forcing the smaller and slower schooner trade out of business. Steamers had the ability to carry more cargo and passengers and were charged the same ship licence as other vessels. The *Titus* called at the trading stations of Norman Wheatley Frank Wickham in the Roviana Lagoon. The schooner, *Chittoor*, belonging to G. J. Waterhouse was also anchored off Nusa Zonga. The new fees imposed by the administration included the ships' licence for trading vessels from Sydney, plus a fee of £3 per passenger and £5 for each small boat carried on the schooner or steamer. For local traders a fee of £1 a ton based on carrying capacity of the vessel applied. Each station had to pay £10 for a trading licence and there was a head tax of £5 for each permanent non-native resident. Vessels like the *Titus* coming south from German New Guinea were quarantined for three weeks at Gavutu or had to pass back to Australia via German New Guinea. This was causing some disquiet among the old traders who, it was noted by the *Morning Post* (29 July 1897) from Cairns, now had to submit to strictly imposed regulations—the once free and easy days had finished.

When the *Titus* arrived at Gavutu on 8 June 1897 the reporter found the HMS *Rapid* at anchor in the harbour. By then Lars Nielsen on Gavutu had a well-established property, a fine house in a fenced paddock surrounded by coconut trees with the island connected to nearby Tanambogo by a stone causeway. He had a comfortable house, copra sheds, small plantation and a trading boat. It was at Tulagi where the 'newly appointed Deputy Commissioner Mr C. M. Woodford intends to reside. At present his headquarters are Gavutu. He is a comparatively young man, but his experience on the islands has been a large one from 1886–89. He is the author of a valuable contribution to the entomological knowledge of the Pacific, called "A Naturalist among the Headhunters" but the ominous title covers excursions rather among bugs and butterflies than encounters with ferocious natives'. Woodford, the reporter continued, 'is gifted with that talent one cannot acquire, the ability to get on with the natives'. 'At present', the reporter continued, 'the entire Government staff consists of Mr Woodford, but by the cruiser "Torch" that comes to relieve the "Rapid" (the latter is going to Cairns), a secretary is coming up, and a troop of Solomon policeboys from Fiji'. The journalist's impression was that: 'Mr Woodford, [is] a quiet and unobtrusive

man, with an iron will and a constitution of the same material ... he is of course handicapped, as his actions are controlled from Fiji'. The writer had little regard for Thurston whom he said represented the majesty of the law so well that local people looked upon him as 'Government incarnate'. When Thurston died in 1897 it was reported that the view of the people was that Government died with him (see also obituary in *South Australian Register* [Adelaide] 9 February 1897: 6 and list of appointments in *The Australian Town and Country Journal* 15 May 1880: 17). Thurston had the same complaint as Sir William MacGregor, according to the reports, and this was 'an overwhelming prejudice in favour of the natives'. Apparently, Thurston had the Roviana men make him a *tomoko* that was elaborately carved and decorated with shell but as Thurston was dead by this stage the canoe remained rotting on the beach at Frank Wickham's trading station on Hombupeka. The Special Correspondent was probably expressing local trader gossip when he remarked that the massacre of Foullon von Norbeck and party was muddled, a mystery and most likely due to their own foolhardiness (*The North Queensland Register* 21 July 1897: 12–13). Some of these comments were reasonably perceptive. They give a good description of the social, economic and political position of the southern Solomon Islands from the point of view of a causal visitor. The overall impression is that warfare in the Roviana Lagoon was coming to an end, that beach trading was the mainstay of the cash economy and that the administration was constrained by control from Suva and a lack of resources. His description of Woodford was accurate and his opinion of the ineptness of the Austrian exploration party was justified.

Building Tulagi

One constant theme underlying British colonial expansion in the Pacific is the reluctance of the Colonial Office and the Foreign Office to support further annexation of small island groups with few economic attractions (Overlack 1998: 133). Apart from the comprehensive report written to Chamberlain, Woodford's own impression of the establishment of the protectorate comes from the first, second and third annual reports for British Solomon Islands for the years 1897–1898, 1898–1899 and 1899–1900 (Great Britain. House of Commons. Parliamentary Papers 1898, 1899 and 1901; see Woodford papers PMB 1290 Item 8/7 and 8/13 for copies of reports from 1896 to 1904/05 & 1913). It is clear he was busy. The most important task was the physical establishment of a government headquarters at Tulagi. Woodford employed local villagers from the Nggela villages across the harbour, to cut timber and clear pathways on the island. Sites for the residency, to be located on top of the main hill, and police quarters were selected. During May and June 1897 Woodford and five prisoners and three local men lived in huts on the beach near the landing place. Each Saturday

Woodford and his prisoners, for there was no jail, travelled back to Gavutu for the weekend (*The Sydney Mail* 8 March 1911 shows a photograph of the bush material hut Woodford used as his first government residence; Woodford papers PMB 1290 9/24; Woodford to O'Brien 21 June 1897 WPHC 4/IV 305/1897). In June 1897 the eight police had arrived but they too had to live at Gavutu at the end of the working week.

The *Titus* from Sydney brought in a supply of cut timber and a carpenter on 5 August 1897 (Thomson 1899: 511 shows photograph of Woodford, the carpenter and local men unloading timber). The carpenter was employed to build the residency and jail. By the end of August the police, at least, were living in bush material huts on Tulagi (Woodford to O'Brien 10 June 1897 WPHC 4/IV 302/1897). Woodford reported to the High Commissioner on the slow progress of cutting trails, removing large trees and unloading timber. To this report he attached some photographs of the work that he developed himself, some taken by Walter Henry Lucas from Burns, Philp & Co who arrived on the *Titus* (Woodford to O'Brien 25 September 1897 WPHC 4/IV 507/1897). He was able to move across to his newly constructed house in November—this was built at the site of the first temporary hut—and at the same time the jail was finished and a permanent water supply for washing was installed (Woodford to O'Brien 24 November 1897 WPHC 4/IV 3/1898; *The Sydney Morning Herald* 23 December 1897: 5; Moore 2009b: 7). Malaria was a problem. The police and the carpenter all fell ill during the clearing work.

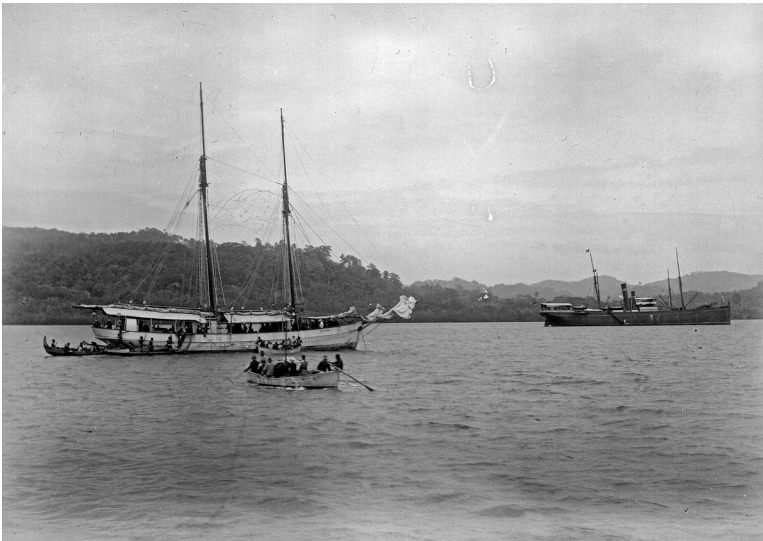


Figure 25. The Melanesian Mission vessel *Southern Cross* and the Burns Philp steamer *SS Titus*, Gavutu Harbour, 1897.



Figure 26. Woodford's arrival at Gavutu, 1897, with SS Titus in background. Painting by Brett Hilder.

Source: Noel Butlin Archives Centre, The Australian National University, Burns Philp collection, N115-503-2.

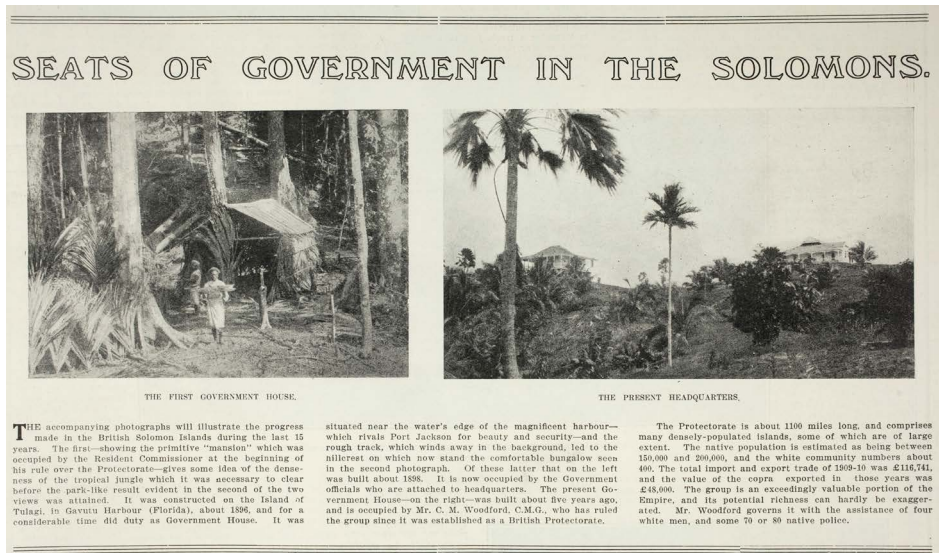


Figure 27. 'Seats of Government in the Solomons'. Source: *The Sydney Mail*, 8 March 1911.



Figure 28. 'The First Government House'.

Source: WPHC 4/IV 507/1897. Photograph possibly by Walter H. Lucas but developed by Woodford.



Figure 29. 'Unloading timber for Govt. Residence and Lock up at Tulagi. Photographed by Mr Lucas SS 'Titus'. a. Resident Commissioner. b. The Carpenter'.

Source: WPHC 4/IV 507/1897. Photo developed by Woodford.

Pressing administrative matters intervened. Woodford wrote to O'Brien about the continuing illegal trade in arms and ammunition and the distressing accounts of dynamite fatalities that occurred when men used old explosives for reef fishing. At a meeting of all the traders of the newly established protectorate held on Gavutu, it was agreed that they would discontinue the practice of giving out trade in credit and to insist that 100 coconuts would equal 10 sticks of tobacco—an agreed currency of sorts. All trading disputes would from that time be handled by the new Resident Commissioner and as from 31 March 1898 all traders in the area would agree to pay their trade store, shipping and boat licences (*The Sydney Morning Herald* 23 December 1897: 5). By 1898 Tulagi was, more or less, the established site of colonial government in the protectorate (Great Britain. House of Commons. Parliamentary Papers 1899a: 12–13).

A boathouse and landing stage were built and some of the swampy north-east foreshore was partially drained and planted with coconuts. A garden of about 7 acres was established in the 30 acres of cleared land and a wide variety of food plants and ornamental plants were being grown there. This would be

increased each year. By now local villagers from Nggela were bringing fruit and vegetables for sale to the small community. This compensated for the lack of good gardening land on the island. In the next annual report Woodford also announced that a house for an Assistant Commissioner had been started (Great Britain, House of Commons. Parliamentary Papers 1899a: 14–15). Woodford's first annual report concluded with a request for more police but Sir George O'Brien, the High Commissioner in Suva, in his covering letter to Joseph Chamberlain, rebutted that request by stating: 'Mr Woodford at the end of his Report refers to the desirability of increasing his police force, and of his being provided with a small steamer to facilitate his visiting the distant parts of the group; but as you are doubtless aware, the revenue of the Protectorate is at present barely sufficient to balance the existing expenditure' (Great Britain. House of Commons. Parliamentary Papers 1899a: 3).

The Imperial treasury grant-in-aid of £1,200 for 1897 was spent by March 1898 although the new protectorate had a balance of £460 in the Bank of New Zealand in Sydney (Woodford to O'Brien 7 August 1897 WPHC 4/IV 378/1897). This balance was not from savings made during the year but simply unexpended monies. Licence fees and capitation taxes would not generate sufficient resources to enable the protectorate to expand without Treasury grants (O'Brien to Chamberlain 5 February 1898 CO 225 55 3275). Judging from the annual figures the export potential of the colony was poor. In the 1897–1898 year only 1,600 tons of copra was exported. This would not improve until March 1900. Ivory nuts were unsaleable due to the poor quality of the product and competition from better quality supply in South America. The market fell from around 600 tons in 1897 to a mere 20 tons in 1900. Pearl shell rose due to better collecting methods, the use of diving suits—using white divers—and the rise in the value of gold lipped shell. Exports rose from a little over 8 tons in 1897 to more than around 16 tons in 1900. Turtle shell also showed a marked rise. About 400 lbs had been collected from locals in the western islands in 1895, but this rose to more than 3,000 lbs in the 1900 figures. It seems incongruous that as the demand for turtle shell rose, the administration was exerting a protracted pacification campaign against head hunters from the western islands, and head hunting raids were performed as part of turtle hunting expeditions.

The market in *bêche de mer* remained steady with a little more than 5 tons a year exported to Chinese markets. In 1900 a market for green snail opened up. The shell, like pearl shell, was used in the manufacture of buttons and jewellery. In the first year of exporting more than 31 tons were shipped overseas. This was not a stable commodity and, like the market in rattan cane, it soon fell away. The sale of plants—mostly orchids—fluctuated. Some indication of the volatility of the market for tropical products can be seen in the export of palm seeds. In 1897 seven bags were exported, in 1900 only one box was sent away (Great Britain.

House of Commons. Parliamentary Papers 1899a: 6, 1899:8 and 1901: 8). The figures would not have excited the attention of the bureaucrats in the Colonial Office or the Treasury in London. Plantation development was beginning. *Queen's Regulation no 4 of 1898* (1 J. Soc. Comp. Legis. Ns 102 1899 and Ns 475 1899) allowed for men to be removed from the Solomon Islands to work on foreign vessels but only with a permit from the High Commissioner in Suva. *The Solomons (Labour) Regulation of 1897* (Queen's Regulation 7 of 1897; 1 J. Soc. Comp. Legis. Ns. 102 1899) was designed to regulate the recruiting of labourers within the protectorate, and their employment both in the islands and outside. Labour ships had to be licenced and regulations were made for the inspection, feeding, wages and hours worked, treatment and repatriation of the labourers employed on plantations. While Woodford considered that most labourers were well treated and that conditions on labour vessels, and on plantations, were better than the 'sordid conditions' that existed in most villages, it was clear that this regulation did not give the administration sufficient powers to control abuses against workers. It would have to be repealed in 1912 and new, tighter, regulation implemented (Bennett 1987: 153).

Niels Peter Sorensen and the quest for gold

Speculators, beachcombers and miscreants still made trouble in the islands. In September 1897 the *Sophia Sutherland*, a former Canadian sealer under the command of Alexander McLean, left San Francisco on a trading and exploration cruise to the Solomon Islands (Laracy 2001). The attempt by this group of prospectors to search for minerals was a failure in large part due to the false hopes provided to the Americans by 'a man of notorious character' (Great Britain. House of Commons. Parliamentary Papers 1899a: 8; *The Sydney Morning Herald* 23 December 1897: 5). It was a spectacular misadventure. The unnamed man was Niels Peter Sorensen. He had convinced 14 Americans to finance a trip to search for copper at Rennell and Bellona, and for gold on Guadalcanal (Woodford to O'Brien 27 January 1898 WPHC 4/IV 84/1898). The scheme had been promoted to financial backers in the United States by the disreputable Sorensen who claimed to have purchased Mono Island from chief Mulekupa, a relative of Gorai of Alu. This was despite Mono being a coaling station for British men-of-war since 1884 and the fact that DHPG had purchased land there in 1886 (Laracy 2000). The term coaling station sounds grander than it really was. Essentially, it was just a pile of coal on a beach, hopefully covered from the sun and rain, and left in charge of a resident trader or chief. Likewise, DHPG had never invested time or money into plantation development on Mono. Regardless of the legality of the situation, Sorensen claimed ownership of the island for most of his rather pathetic life.

Sorensen had a criminal record in Queensland. He had been released from St Helena prison in Moreton Bay after serving a sentence for crimes of violence and robbery committed while running a pearling station in southern Isabel. Among other notorious dealings he was reported to have killed one local man and flogged another at the station. Captain McLean, warned about Sorensen by Woodford, was nevertheless issued with temporary prospecting licenses. The mineral quest came to nothing (*The Sydney Morning Herald* 16 February 1898: 4). To avoid the failed mineral explorers from lynching Sorensen in anger, McLean put him ashore on Gavutu leaving Woodford £5 for the fare to Sydney. Sorensen was living in a 'native hut on the mainland opposite Tulagi' and Woodford made sure a daily report on his activities was sent across from local villagers (Woodford to O'Brien 27 February 1898 enclosed with O'Brien to Chamberlain 2 March 1898 CO 225 55 8659). The malaria ridden crew of the *Sophia Sutherland* returned empty handed to San Francisco. The *Sophia Sutherland* had another brief claim to fame. Jack London, the American author, sailed on it in 1893 on a long Pacific seal hunting voyage that became, in part, the basis of his 1904 novel *The Sea Wolf* (Laracy 2000: 156; 2001). Later Jack London and his wife Charmain Kittredge London visited Tulagi and corresponded with Woodford over a number of years after they returned to the United States (Woodford papers PMB 1381/004a-d). London set his novel *Adventure* in the Solomon Islands (London 1911). But Woodford unfortunately was not finished with Sorensen. In June 1913 he again turned up at Tulagi reclaiming his rights to Mono. In order to get rid of him, once and for all, he was declared a person dangerous to peace and good order and deported (Laracy 2000: 161). He was a more notable example of the troublesome, beachcombing confidence trickster found in the Western Pacific at that time.

Massacre at Kaoka and retaliation campaigns

Meanwhile, Oscar Svensen had established a coffee plantation at Kaukau (Kaoka) near Marau but his plans for rubber had not met with success. For the land between the Kaoka and Singgalia Rivers he had paid porpoise teeth and trade goods to the value of £35 (Woodford to Thurston 5 September 1896, WPHC 4/IV 414/1896). But life in the islands was still precarious for isolated white men. Svensen's manager, Jean Pouret (Porret), a Swiss national who had been in New Caledonia, and two local men were murdered at Kaoka in 1896. Woodford, with six police and ten traders went to the area to arrest the killers (Woodford to O'Brien 25 September 1897 WPHC 4/IV 508/1897). Newspapers reported that three local men were shot and two were arrested. These men were sent to Fiji via Sydney for trial where they were imprisoned for ten years (*The Brisbane Courier* 21 October 1897; *The Queenslander* 13 November 1897: 960). Actually the traders

shot two local men and by mistake almost shot police sergeant William Buruka who was accompanying Woodford. This was the start of the questionable practice of using local traders to support police, militia and government officers in punitive raids. Many of these police actions turned to ill-disciplined rabble with junior and inexperienced officials trying to manage aggressive, often drunken, traders and planters. Captain John Williams of the *Titus* was reported as stating 'the natives not only on Guadalcanar but everywhere pretty well are too insolent; they are not by any means the poor, benighted, suppliant creatures they are represented to be, but tricky, treacherous, eminently untrustworthy and dishonest and withal as cheeky as they make them' (*The Queenslander* 12 November 1897: 960). This sort of language would be used to describe local people right through the colonial period. This latent racism led to exploitation by traders, plantation labour abuses and, as a consequence, Solomon Islanders retaliated (see O'Brien 2009 for a discussion of similar attitudes in Papua).

Their retaliation then led to punitive campaigns that caused much death, widespread destruction and considerable enmity. One example of this is the search for Zito Latavaki after the attack on Jean Pascal Pratt. Pratt, also known as Jean Pierre Prat and Pascal Jean Pratt, in 1897 purchased land at Narovo on Simbo to build a trading station (Woodford to O'Brien 21 April 1897, WPHC 4/IV 185/1897). He was the brother of Peter Edmund Pratt. Late in December 1897 Jean Pratt was wounded when his schooner *Eclipse* was raided at Vella Lavella (Woodford to O'Brien December 1897 WPHC 4/IV 8/1898). Woodford only had a whaleboat for his official duties at that time and as the distance was far from Gavutu he did not attend to the case (*The Sydney Morning Herald* 23 December 1897: 5). Pratt was the victim of a failed trading agreement involving illegal arms and ammunition between his brother and Zito (Sito) Latavaki, a local *warane*. Jean Pratt was taken by his islander crew to Gavutu for treatment. He was treated by Dr Henry Welchman of the Melanesian Mission, the most qualified medical missionary based in the islands, in the small hospital at Siota on Nggela where many accident cases were treated (Wilson 1935). Pratt later died from a seizure, the result of the severe wound to his head. The hunt for Zito, the man considered responsible for the attack, would then become a major part of the work of Gizo District Magistrates.

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