

Report on Reorganizing the Anglican Church of Melanesia Archives on deposit at the National Archives of the Solomon Islands and development of future Anglican Church of Melanesia Archives

**By Bishop Terry Brown, Retired Bishop of Malaita
Anglican Church of Melanesia**

This paper was presented at a session called "Resources for Pacific History: recognition and access" at the Pacific History Association Conference held at the University of South Pacific, Suva, Fiji on 12 December 2008.

* * * * *

1. Introduction.

Over the past few years, while bishop of Malaita, I had occasion to consult the Church of Melanesia archives on deposit at the National Archives of the Solomon Islands in Honiara. At the time of the formation of autonomous ecclesiastical province of Melanesia in 1975, archival materials, covering a time range from 1850 to the 1975, which were being stored in the diocesan office, were placed on deposit at the SI Government's National Archives. Access is only with the permission of the General Secretary of the Anglican Church of Melanesia. The material was catalogued by box and a Finding Guide was prepared.

However, as I tried to use the material, I found that much material seemed to be missing or archives staff could not find the right boxes. Then, when I requested other material, the missing original material would appear. I had also heard rumour of theft of archival material during the "ethnic tension" period of 1999-2001 by militants.

I therefore volunteered to take on cataloguing and reorganizing this collection. At the same time, much material has accumulated in the provincial office headquarters from 1975 to the present, in file cabinets, safes and cupboards. There was no plan to do anything with this material. I also heard stories of archival materials overseas that people wanted to send back.

2. The Project.

I therefore volunteered to the Council of Bishops that I stay on, after my retirement as bishop of Malaita in August 2008, to serve as a volunteer archivist to work on all this material. The Council of Bishops agreed to this and promised free accommodation and project expenses for four years for me to do this (2009-2012).

I returned to the Solomons in later October 2008 after my holiday and went to see the national archivist. I asked for (1) access to the repository to search for and reorganize the boxes and files; and (2) some working space. She very cooperatively agreed to both these requests and I began work in January 2009. As my work is voluntary and I have some other commitments, I usually work about three days a week at the archives.

Since the appointment of the new Director, Mrs. Julian Chonigolo, there has been much improvement in the National Archives, including employment of students to clear some backlog, painting, reorganization of the collection, overseas training of staff (from NZ Aid),

new photocopy machine, money for programme, etc. I find it a pleasant working environment, aside from frequent power failures, which can plunge on into total darkness in the repository and a very hot room without conditioning or fan.

3. Progress so far.

I have found that most of the papers and publications in the Finding Guide are still there but often in the wrong place. In some cases, papers had come out of their folders and were just lying as loose files. Some old letters (for example, from Bishop Patteson) had been put in mylar envelopes but others were loose. There were stacks of uncatalogued photos.

What are missing are largely photographs -- several old photo albums, the Melanesian Mission postcard collection. I could not find the old films but later learned that they had been taken to New Zealand converted to video tapes (which I shall convert to DVDs). On the other hand, I found a very full set of original photographs from the 1906 visit to Melanesia in the "Southern Cross" of J.W. Beattie of Hobart Tasmania. I have digitized these and they should eventually be available on the Project Canterbury website. www.anglicanhistory.org, and on CD for local use.

I also found that some items were misidentified in the Finding Guide. For example, what was identified as a journal of Bishop John Selwyn of his 1877 visit to Melanesia turned out to be by an Anglican layman from Nelson, NZ, C. Hunter Brown. It is still significant and I have transcribed and hope to publish it. There is also material not in the Finding Guide at all, such as film strips and boxes of later material from Fauabu Clinic on Malaita. There are also some Methodist photo albums from the Western Solomons.

I have now gone through about half the collection, sorting and putting in new folders and boxes as appropriate. I have particularly concentrated on the piles of loose papers. I have found much important material for the history of the Church of Melanesia, the Solomons and New Hebrides/Vanuatu.

4. The Future.

This year I am concentrating on the collection at the national archives. For 2010 I have asked for an office in the Church of Melanesia provincial headquarters where I can organize the post-1975 material. The Anglican Church of Melanesia urgently needs its own archival building or portion of building, both for the older material on deposit at the National Archives and for the newer material from 1975. This project will again be discussed this year. Finances are the main problem and it would be very good to get some external funding. However, just to begin working on the material will accelerate the process. Some dioceses have also begun their own archives.

I am also aware that I am a church historian not a professional archivist. Therefore, at times there will be a need for more professional expertise, especially preservation.

I am most interested in making the material available on the internet on Project Canterbury. I have been digitizing much of the material including selected stories from the old Southern Cross Logs and old and crumbling pamphlets. In reporting, I have also tried to identify where material has already been microfilmed by PAMBU. This is still more material to be

microfilmed but there should not be no resistance as in the past. PAMBU is planning a visit later this year.

I am finding all this very exciting and making many discoveries. Balancing accessibility and preservation is a challenge but I think the best way to go is digital. However, that involves major work and expense, for example, in digitizing both the English and Australia/New Zealand runs of the Southern Cross Log. However, I am sure that with time that can be done. Thank you.