

AUSTRALIAN JOINT COPYING PROJECT

REVEREND WILLIAM EDGELL

Diaries, 1897-1901

Reel M721

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

William Henry Edgell (1873-1960), was born near Dover, England. His father was a solicitor and his maternal grandfather was Henry Jenner, the first Anglican bishop of Dunedin. He attended St Augustine's College, Canterbury, in 1893-96 and in April 1896 joined the Melanesian Mission, which was based at Norfolk Island. He was ordained a priest in 1899. From 1897 to 1905 Edgell and Thomas Ulgau were missionaries at Raga on Pentecost in the northern New Hebrides. He translated a number of works into the Raga language, including the New Testament, the Psalms, hymns and the Catechism. In October 1901 his house, church and schoolhouse at Raga were burnt down by the crew of a French labour recruiting vessel.

In 1904 Edgell had a breakdown of health, was given leave and went back to England. He returned to the Pacific in 1905, but did not re-join the Melanesian Mission. From 1905 to 1914 he was a missionary priest in the Diocese of Auckland. In 1910 he married Dorothy Mellsop. They returned to England in 1916 and Edgell served as a chaplain in the Royal Navy. From 1921 to 1925 he was the vicar of Stow-Bedon in the diocese of Norwich and from 1925 to 1930 he was the chaplain at Smyrna, Boudjah and Bournabat in Turkey. He was the rector of Chelmondiston, Suffolk, from 1932 until his death.

TRANSCRIPTIONS OF THE DIARIES OF W.H. EDGELL

The 1897-1901 diaries are in more than one hand. A note in the first diary states that they are a fair copy of the original diaries, which were soiled, weatherworn and growing indistinct.

DIARIES OF REVEREND WILLIAM EDGELL

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1 Diary, 27 April – 6 July 1897 (56pp)

Edgell was accompanied on this voyage by Cecil Wilson, the Bishop of Melanesia. The diary describes the voyage from Norfolk Island to Ambrym and Pentecost, arrival at the villages of Raga and Opa, meetings with teachers and villagers, impressions of the villages, church and vicarage, Edgell's relations with Wilson, church services, insects and rats, Edgell's study of the Raga and Opa languages, conflicts between indigenous groups, journeys between villages, dances, and the return to Norfolk Island.

2 Diary, 23 July – 19 December 1898 (110pp)

The diary begins with a list of Mota words and phrases and a list of the books in Edgell's library. The diary describes the voyage from Norfolk Island to Vila, Ambrym and Pentecost, baptisms and weddings, inspections of schools, an earthquake, the activities of labour recruiters, visits by British warships, labourers who had returned from Queensland, meetings with French missionaries, social customs, problems with school teachers, school attendances, weapons, quarrels between chiefs, dealings with traders, diseases of villagers, boat crews, and the voyage back to Norfolk Island. At the end of the volume are population and school statistics, registers of baptisms and marriages, and lists of names in Opa and Maewo.

3 Diary, 23 July 1899 – 11 July 1900 (187pp)

The diary describes Edgell's voyage from Norfolk Island to Pentecost, accompanied by Bishop Wilson, visits to villages, settlement of disputes, baptisms, the activities of Catholic missionaries, journeys on foot and by boat, the construction of school houses, encounters with Queensland labour vessels, labourers returned from Queensland, medical treatment of villagers, feasts and dances, negotiations with the Roman Catholic missionaries, Edgell's reading and his translations of the Prayer Book and Psalter, the opening and closure of schools, and conflict between the Islanders. At the end of the volume are school statistics, registers of baptisms, marriages and burials, and a list of dedicated churches.

4 Diary, 19 September 1900 – 10 September 1901 (180pp)

The diary describes Edgell's voyage from Norfolk Island, travels by foot and by boat, inspection of churches and schools, baptisms and confirmations, observance of the end of the nineteenth century,

attacks on French missionaries, relations with the Roman Catholic mission, settlement of disputes, the introduction of new laws, relations with traders, Edgell's work on a dictionary and translating the Psalms, a visit by Bishop Wilson (August 1901), and travels among the islands, including the Santa Cruz Islands.

5 Diary, 11 September – 20 November 1901 (34pp)

The diary describes Edgell's travels with Bishop Wilson to the Solomon Islands, the consecration of the first stone church in Melanesia, their return to Raga to find his home, church, school and outhouses, together with his books and stores, destroyed by the French schooner *Julia*, investigations and claims for compensation, their return to Norfolk Island, Edgell's meeting with his mother and sister, and their voyage to Auckland. At the end of the volume are some cookery recipes.