

AUSTRALIAN JOINT COPYING PROJECT

REVEREND HENRY WELCHMAN

Diaries, 1891-95

Reel M728

**Rev. W.F. Browning
Parish House
Greatworth
Banbury, Oxfordshire**

**National Library of Australia
State Library of New South Wales**

Filmed: 1971

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Henry Palmer Welchman (1850-1908) was born in Lichfield, Staffordshire, and was educated at Queen's College, Birmingham. He qualified as a surgeon in 1876 and worked in his father's practice in Lichfield. He was a licensed lay reader and preacher and had contacts with former staff of the Melanesian Mission, including Bishop J.R. Selwyn. In 1888 he joined the Melanesian Mission as a doctor-missionary. He was at first stationed at Santa Cruz in the Solomon Islands and in 1890 moved to Santa Isabel Island. He was ordained as a deacon in 1892 and as a priest in 1893 and for some years divided his time between Santa Isabel and Norfolk Islands. He devoted much of his time to translating the Bible, Book of Common Prayer and hymns into Bugotu, one of the main languages on Santa Isabel.

In 1896 Welchman married Helen Rossiter, whose family lived on Norfolk Island, but she died six months later. He continued to live on Santa Isabel and also spent several months each year at Siota on Nggela Island, where he developed medical facilities and taught at St Luke's School. He opened a new mission station on the nearby island of Lilihigua. Due to failing health, Welchman left Melanesia in 1901 and spent his last years in England and New Zealand.

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Diaries of Henry Welchman kept while working for the Melanesian Mission as a doctor, teacher and priest in the Solomon Islands and Norfolk Island, 1892-95.

Diary 1: 24 July 1892 – 30 November 1893 (160pp)

Diary 2: 1 December 1893 – 31 May 1895 (168pp)

The entries in both diaries are generally quite detailed and provide a full record of Welchman's daily activities, his relations with his missionary colleagues and the islanders, and his observations of Melanesian life. There are numerous references to church services and attendances, sermons, baptisms, confirmations, marriages and burials, Sunday schools, schools and the training of teachers, Welchman's medical duties and treatment of the sick and injured, his work on translating and printing catechisms, hymns and other works into Bugotu, gardens and agricultural work on Norfolk Island, the management of stores, Welchman's work as a mediator in family disputes and in feuds and conflict between various groups of islanders, cruises among the islands and journeys into the interior of Santa Isabel, ship arrivals, court cases, relations with traders, ethical and religious discussions, festivities, dances, music and feasts, and the weather.

The first diary opens when Welchman was working at Santa Isabel. It describes the visit of H. Montgomery, the Bishop of Tasmania (Sept. 1892), Welchman's return to Norfolk Island (Oct. 1892), his training for the priesthood, his journey to New Zealand (June 1893), his ordination as a priest by Bishop W.G. Cowie at Auckland (25 June 1893), his first communion services and sermons, missionary meetings, discussions about the future of the Melanesian Mission, travels in New Zealand including visits to Wellington, Christchurch, Dunedin, Nelson and Napier, his return to Norfolk Island (Aug. 1893), and a cruise in the Solomon Islands including visits to Ulawa, Sepi, Savo and Vatilau (Sept.-Oct. 1893).

The first part of the second diary also records Welchman's life in the mission at Santa Isabel before moving to Norfolk Island in May 1894. It refers to news of the appointment of Cecil Wilson as Bishop of Melanesia (April 1894), Welchman's first meeting with Wilson (27 June 1894), synod meetings, the proposed industrial college at Siota, dealings with Pitcairn Islander families such as the Nobbs, Quintal and Buffet families, Welchman's association with the Rossiter Family and his marriage proposal to Helen Rossiter (9 May 1895), engagement celebrations, and his voyage back to Santa Isabel (May 1895).

Among the many missionaries mentioned in the diaries are Robert Codrington, John Palmer, Robert P. Wilson, Charles Browning, A.E.C. Forrest, Richard Comins and Walter Ivens.

Note: The images appear from right to left on the film.