

AUSTRALIAN JOINT COPYING PROJECT

REVEREND ROBERT CODRINGTON

Papers, 1867-82

Reels M993-94

**Melanesian Mission
15 Denewood Close
Watford Hertfordshire WD1 3SE**

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Robert Henry Codrington (1830-1922), the son of Reverend Thomas Codrington, was born at Wroughton, Wiltshire. He was educated at Charterhouse and Wadham College at Oxford University, graduating with a Master of Arts in 1856. He was a fellow of Wadham College from 1855 to 1893. He was ordained as an Anglican priest in 1857. He was a curate at the parish of St Peter-in-the East, Oxford, where the priest was Edmund Hobhouse. In 1858 Hobhouse became the first bishop of Nelson, New Zealand, and Codrington followed him to Nelson in 1860. He served on the Collingwood goldfields in 1860-61 and then worked in the diocese of Nelson. In 1863 he accompanied Bishop John Patteson on a cruise on the *Southern Cross* to the islands north of New Zealand. He joined the Melanesian Mission in 1865.

In 1867 the Mission moved from Auckland to Norfolk Island, where Codrington worked for twenty years. During that time he went on several cruises to the Banks Islands and the Solomon Islands, but he was a poor sailor and preferred to spend most of his time at Norfolk Island. He was in charge of the Mission school which taught boys from the islands who went on, in many cases, to be teachers, deacons and priests. Following the death of Bishop Patteson in 1871, Codrington declined offers of the bishopric, but he was in charge of the Mission until John Selwyn was ordained as the second bishop in 1877. Codrington played a leading role in the design and construction of St Barnabas's Church on Norfolk Island, built as a memorial to Bishop Patteson, which was consecrated in 1880.

Codrington was one of the most scholarly members of the Melanesian Mission. He had a great knowledge of the languages of Melanesia and compiled grammars of about 35 languages. His book *The Melanesian languages* was published in Oxford in 1885. He was fascinated by the cultural diversity of Melanesia and, encouraged by the anthropologists Lorimer Fison and Edward Tylor, he recorded in great detail the rules and customs of Melanesians, their religious and spiritual beliefs, material culture, music and games. He continued his studies after he returned to England in 1888. His book *The Melanesians: studies in their anthropology and folk-lore* was published in 1891 and, with John Palmer as co-author, his *Dictionary of the language of Mota* appeared in 1895.

Codrington was vicar of Wadhurst in Sussex from 1887 to 1893 and prebendary of Chichester Cathedral from 1888 to 1895. He lectured at Chichester Theological College for many years. He visited Norfolk Island in 1892 and maintained an extensive correspondence in Mota with many of his former students.

Reference: Allan K. Davidson. The legacy of Robert Henry Codrington, *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, vol. 27 (4), Oct. 2003, pp 171-76.

Note: The papers of Robert Codrington, together with many records of the Melanesian Mission, are now (2018) held in the library of the School of Oriental and African Studies, 10 Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square, London WC1H 0XG.

REVEREND ROBERT CODRINGTON

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Journals of Robert Codrington, 1870-81

- 1 Journal, 1 September – 10 October 1870. (45pp)

Most of the entries in the journal are extremely detailed. They refer to Codrington's daily activities on the island of Mota in the Banks Islands, the weather, his school, teaching, gardening, books read, language difficulties, conversations with Islanders, his journeys, the arrival of Bishop J.C. Patteson on the *Southern Cross* (6 Oct.), and a voyage to Ambrym in the New Hebrides. There are descriptions of the landscape and accounts of conflicts among the Islanders, poisoned arrows, woundings and killings, feasts, food preparations, the breadfruit trade, kidnapping, the return of labourers from Queensland, customs and crafts of the Islanders, healing practices and legends. There are references to George Sarawia, the first Melanesian to be ordained as an Anglican deacon.

- 2 Manuscript copy of journal, 1 September – 10 October 1870.

- 3 Journal, 29 July – 21 August 1872. (55pp)

A detailed account of a voyage on the *Southern Cross* from Norfolk Island to the New Hebrides, the Solomon Islands and the Banks Islands, referring to a meeting with HMS *Basilisk* at Vanua Leva which was pursuing labour traders, conversations with returned labourers, their experiences in Queensland, church services, funeral customs, Codrington's daily activities and the weather.

- 4 Manuscript copy of journal, 6 July – 19 September 1872. (143pp)

The manuscript is a copy of the previous journal, but it covers a longer period. It describes the voyage of the *Southern Cross* to the New Hebrides, Banks Islands and the Solomon Islands, describing many of the islands visited, meetings with islanders including returned labourers from Queensland, an attack on a trading vessel, schools, relations with teachers, illnesses of Islanders, and Codrington's daily activities. The journal ends with his return to Norfolk Island and his reflection that the trip had been disappointing, with hurried visits and no real opportunity to get to know people. There is a rough map of the Banks Islands at the end of the journal.

- 5 Manuscript copy of journal, 3 May – 5 June 1875. (80pp)

The journal describes a voyage made by Codrington and John Selwyn from Norfolk Island to the New Hebrides, Banks Islands and the Solomon Islands, particularly Mota, Vanua Lava, San Christoval (San Cristobal), Malaita and the Florida (Ngella) Islands. The entries, which are mostly very detailed, refer to the return of boys who had been pupils at the school at Norfolk Island to their homes, meetings

with former students, news of visits by labour vessels, kidnappings of Christian Islanders, depopulated islands, the familiarity of many islanders with the English and Mota languages, conversations with Islanders, visits to schools, the question of educating adult Melanesians as well as children, conflict among Islanders, impressions of islands and the landscape, vegetation, anchorages, villages, houses and canoes, fishing practices, yams, mangoes and other crops, birds and insects, and an encounter with an 'iguana'.

6 Account of a cruise in Melanesia, July – September 1881. (101pp)

This manuscript may have been based on a journal, but it contains very few precise dates and it is essentially a retrospective account of Codrington's first visit to the islands of Melanesia since his cruise in 1875. There are references throughout the text to accompanying sketches and it may have been written with a publication or talk in mind. Codrington's main purpose was to visit schools and meet teachers and some of his former pupils. At the end of the manuscript he stated that he had visited 27 of the 40 schools that had been set up by the Melanesian Mission.

For part of the cruise Codrington was accompanied by Bishop John Selwyn and Rev. John Palmer and, for one stretch, Rev. Richard Comins, who was based at Makira Island in the Solomon Islands. After leaving Norfolk Island on 12 July 1881, he sailed to Pentecost and Aurora (Maewo) islands in the New Hebrides, Mota and Vanua Lava in the Banks Islands, Santa Cruz, the Reef Islands, Ulawa Island, Guadalcanal, Santa Ysabel Island, Cockatoo Island, San Christoval (San Cristobal) Island, the Torres Islands and back to the Banks Islands, returning to Norfolk Island in mid-September.

The manuscript refers to meetings with chiefs, teachers, deacons and Codrington's former students, the fluency of boys in Mota, languages, church services, baptisms, chapels, schools, houses, canoes, differences between the Santa Cruz people and other islanders, and earlier visits that Codrington had made to the islands. There is also a lengthy account of a meeting with officers of HMS *Cormorant*, the news of the murders of Lieut. James Bower and five seamen of HMS *Sandfly* on Nggela in 1880, and the involvement of Bishop Selwyn in the resolution of the dispute.

Letters of Robert Codrington, 1867-82

1 Letters from Codrington to his brother Tom Codrington, 1867-72

Apart from a few letters written while sailing on the *Southern Cross* or when visiting Auckland in 1872, the letters were all written at Norfolk Island. They commence in May 1867, when Codrington first arrived at Norfolk Island. They record his first impressions of the island and the Pitcairn Islanders who lived there, including Rev. George Nobbs and Sidney Nobbs. He also wrote about the geology of the island and a hurricane which struck the island in 1872.

The letters deal generally with the affairs of the Melanesian Mission, Codrington's work as a teacher and his relations with his students, his daily routines, the arrival of trading vessels, American whalers, French vessels and British warships, visits by Prince Alfred, the Duke of Edinburgh, and William Cowie, Bishop of Auckland, baptisms and confirmations, the ordination of George Sarawia as the first Melanesian deacon and priest, cruises of the *Southern Cross*, and Codrington's visits to Mota, Auckland, Sydney and Queensland. There are many references to Bishop George Selwyn, Rev.

Charles Bice and Bishop John C. Patteson, the travels of Lord Pembroke in the Pacific, the deaths of Patteson and Joseph Atkin in 1871, the resulting disruption of the Mission, retaliatory action by HMS *Rosario*, criticisms of Captain Albert Markham, the Queensland and Fijian labour trade, problems with returned labourers, the possibility of sending missionaries to work with the islanders in Queensland and Fiji, and Codrington's refusal to accept the bishopric of Melanesia. More generally, the letters refer to Codrington's health, family and financial matters, English friends and acquaintances, the printing and distribution of his photographs, his collection of stone and shell adzes and other artefacts, the transmission of artefacts to the Blackmore Museum in Salisbury, the climate and weather.

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2 Letters of Robert Codrington to his brother Tom Codrington, 1872-82

The letters were nearly all written in Norfolk Island, apart from a few written on cruises on the *Southern Cross* or during Codrington's visit to New Zealand and Australia in 1880. Recurring subjects include the receipt of parcels, clothes and books, the slowness of mails, arrivals and departures of vessels, financial matters, family news, general news from England, photography, and Codrington's health.

Throughout this period Codrington regularly reported on the design and construction of St Barnabas's Memorial Church on Norfolk Island. He often wrote in great detail about the original plan of the church by Gilbert Scott, the appointment of Thomas Jackson as architect, relations with Miss Patteson (sister of Bishop Patteson), the foundation of the church (1875), donations by Charlotte Yonge for an organ, work on the construction, his despair at the slow progress, the decoration of the church, and its completion in December 1880. The letters also refer to the progress of the Melanesian Mission, Mission finances, the isolation of the Mission and shortages of provisions, relations with Norfolk Islanders, the arrival of John and Clara Selwyn (1873), Codrington's relations with Selwyn (who became Bishop of Melanesia in 1877), other members of the Mission including John Palmer, Charles Bice, Charles Brooke, John Still, Alfred Penny, Richard Comins, Arthur Brittain, William Kendall and Arthur Baker, supporters of the Mission such as Bishop G.A. Selwyn, Bishop Charles Abraham and Sir William Martin, Melanesian students at Norfolk Island, an Islander's account of the killing of Bishop Patteson, cruises of the *Southern Cross* to the Solomon Islands, Banks Islands and Reef Islands, the Queensland labour trade, the marriage of John Palmer (1876), the death of Clara Selwyn (1877), and relations with the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel and the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

As well as containing references to collecting artefacts for the Blackmore Museum, the later letters give increasing attention to the languages and anthropology of Melanesia. Codrington wrote of his studies of Mota and other Pacific languages, and also Malagasy and Malayan languages, his speculations on the relationships between languages, the different types of English spoken in the Pacific Islands, his work on grammars, the publication of his anthropological notes, and his correspondence with the anthropologists Lorimer Fison in Fiji and Edward Tylor in England.

Amongst the 1877 letters is a letter from Rev. John Palmer (Norfolk Island) to Tom Codrington, 28 June 1876.