

Bringing Christianity to the Cannibals

Missionaries of the Islands of the New Hebrides

Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.

Mark 16:15

So said the priests in their sermons. When new territories were discovered, missionary societies made plans and sent out people and supplies in ships. They faced many hardships in their new lands and some were killed and eaten by the natives they were sent to convert.

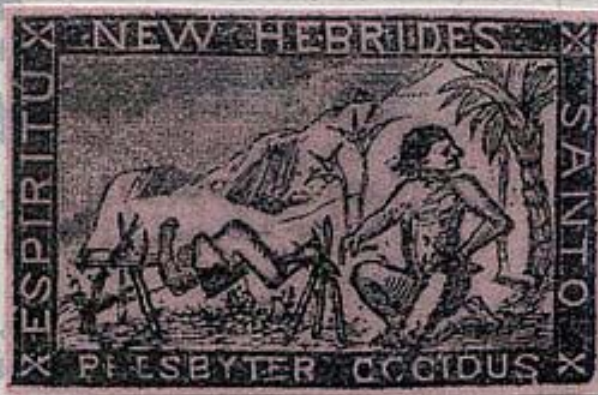
This exhibit illustrates the efforts by missionaries to bring Christianity to the natives of the various islands of the New Hebrides through a series of vignettes shown generally chronologically.

It begins with explorers who claimed the islands for their faith as well as their country, and ends with the clergymen who were part of the process of the British and French governed Condominium becoming independent as Vanuatu in 1980.



The location of each story is illustrated by a stamp affixed to the appropriate spot on the watermark map.

The Roast Missionary stamp



Pink forgery printed 25% larger, from one of two in the Crompton Collection

This fantasy stamp was prepared by the Englishman G. Collingridge in 1903 after several missionaries had been killed by the heathen cannibals. He offered it to residents as the long-awaited stamp issue as a bit of fun.

Although the design greatly amused most of the colonists, one took it seriously, and suggested that "as cannibalism was a thing of the past, the design should be altered to something more in keeping with the flourishing Archipelago."

Plan

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Pedro Fernandes de Queirós, 1606

Roman Catholic
Church of Spain

Long Live the Faith of Christ!

Espiritu Santo

In six proclamations, the captain announced of his taking possession of the newly-discovered land in the name of the Catholic Church, and in the name of His Majesty the King, etc.

Many shouts of "Long Live the Faith of Christ!" were uttered by all the party.

Queirós founded a new Order of Chivalry, the Knights of the Holy Ghost, to protect the new colony.

However, due to the hostility of the natives and to disagreements among the crew, the idea of a colony was abandoned.

Future explorers, such as Louis Antoine de Bougainville (who named some of the islands the Great Cyclades) and James Cook (who named the archipelago the New Hebrides), did not claim land for religious purposes. Their expeditions were more scientific in nature.

*A native of
Espiritu Santo*

The first known contact the New Hebridean natives had with the outside world was in 1606, when Portuguese explorer Pedro Fernandes de Queirós arrived. He was in the service of Spain, on a quest for Terra Australis.



Nouvelles-Hébrides. — Un indigène de Sancto-Espiritu
A Santo native

John Williams, 1839

London Missionary Society

I am all anxiety, but desire prudence and faithfulness in the management of the attempt to impart the gospel to these benighted people, and leave the event with God.

Erromanga

In spite of de Queirós' claiming Santo for his faith, the New Hebrides had no Christian influence until John Williams and James Harris from the London Missionary Society landed at Dillons Bay at Erromanga on 20 November 1839. Both missionaries were killed and later eaten by cannibals only minutes after going ashore.



Landing stores at Erromanga

The death of John Williams was the highest expression of his sacrifice through all the years of his missionary career.

He himself knew the risk that he ran every time he set foot upon heathen shores, but his passion for souls was so intense, and his devotion to his work so absorbing and over-powering, that he would not allow concerns about his safety to stop him.

In December 2009, descendants of John and Mary Williams travelled to Erromanga to accept the apologies of descendants of the cannibals in a ceremony of reconciliation.



To mark the occasion, Dillons Bay was renamed Williams Bay.

John Geddie, 1848

Presbyterian Church of Nova Scotia

... I will look forward in the vision of faith to the time when some of these poor islanders will unite in the triumphant song of ransomed souls.

Aneiteum

John Geddie was born in Scotland. Whilst still a baby, he became very sick. His parents prayed to God and offered their son to a life of bringing Christ to the heathen should he live.

Geddie and his parents moved to Nova Scotia, Canada in 1816. The tales of missionaries in Polynesia fascinated him, and he wanted to be a missionary himself. He set in motion the process for his church to fund missionaries, and was selected as the first missionary to be sent.

He and his wife Charlotte arrived at the island of Aneiteum in 1848. Initially it was very difficult but after a few years he could see progress. He managed to stop the ritual strangling of widows from going on, by showing love rather than force or punishment.

Geddie and his wife learned the local language and taught the natives to read. He wrote a 12-page booklet in the language, and printed copies on a press he had brought with him.



*Kauri trees,
native to Aneiteum
and Erromanga*

The Geddies traveled to other islands, once money had been raised to purchase a vessel, called the *Dayspring*, which arrived at the islands in 1864. They established schools, and translated the New Testament, then the whole Bible.

John Geddie died in 1872 after 24 years of service. A plaque was placed behind the pulpit of the church in Anelcauat where he had preached. On it was the following inscription:

"When he landed in 1848 there were no Christians here; when he left in 1872 there were no heathen."



The Gordons, 1857

Presbyterian Church of Nova Scotia

(Mr and Mrs George Nicol Gordon, and James Gordon)

... Infanticide, war and cannibalism, etc., are among the dark things practiced by this people ...

Erromanga

George Gordon and his wife arrived on the coast of Erromanga in June 1857 to evangelize among the natives. About 40 natives of Erromanga were converted to Christianity.

In March 1861 sandalwood traders intentionally exposed the natives to measles, and Gordon spent most of his time caring for them. However, the two children of one of the island's chiefs had died in his care, and the chief thought that he had put a spell on his children.



Mission house at Erromanga

He banded together a group of warriors and killed both George and his wife on 20 May 1861.

Gordon's younger brother James followed him to Erromanga, and was also martyred.

To gain more converts, Gordon had spread the belief amongst Erromangans that the Christian God had sent the 1861 measles epidemic to punish them for the killing of Rev. Williams and the other missionaries.

However, some of his contemporaries disapproved of this tactic.

Erromanga was eventually successfully converted by Canadian Presbyterian missionary Hugh Angus Robertson, who lived on Erromanga from 1872 to 1913.



John Gibson Paton, 1858

Reformed Presbyterian
Church of Scotland

...come what may, He will use us for His own glory and our real good!

Tanna

John Gibson Paton came to Tanna with his wife Mary Ann in 1858 and built a small house at Port Resolution. The following year both Mary Ann and his newly born son Peter died of a fever. Paton stayed on for 3 more years until on 1 Jan 1861 after one attack by the cannibalistic natives, he narrowly escaped.

Aniwa

In 1866 he returned with his new wife Maggie to Aniwa, the island close to Tanna. The natives here held "the same superstitions, the same cannibalistic cruelties and depravities, the same barbaric mentality, the same lack of altruistic or humanitarian impulses" as those on Tanna.



John Gibson Paton digs a well

Here Paton had much more success with teaching the natives the Word of God. He learned the native language and wrote a translated version of the New Testament.

Paton lived to see the whole island of Aniwa converted to Christianity.



John Coleridge Patteson, 1861

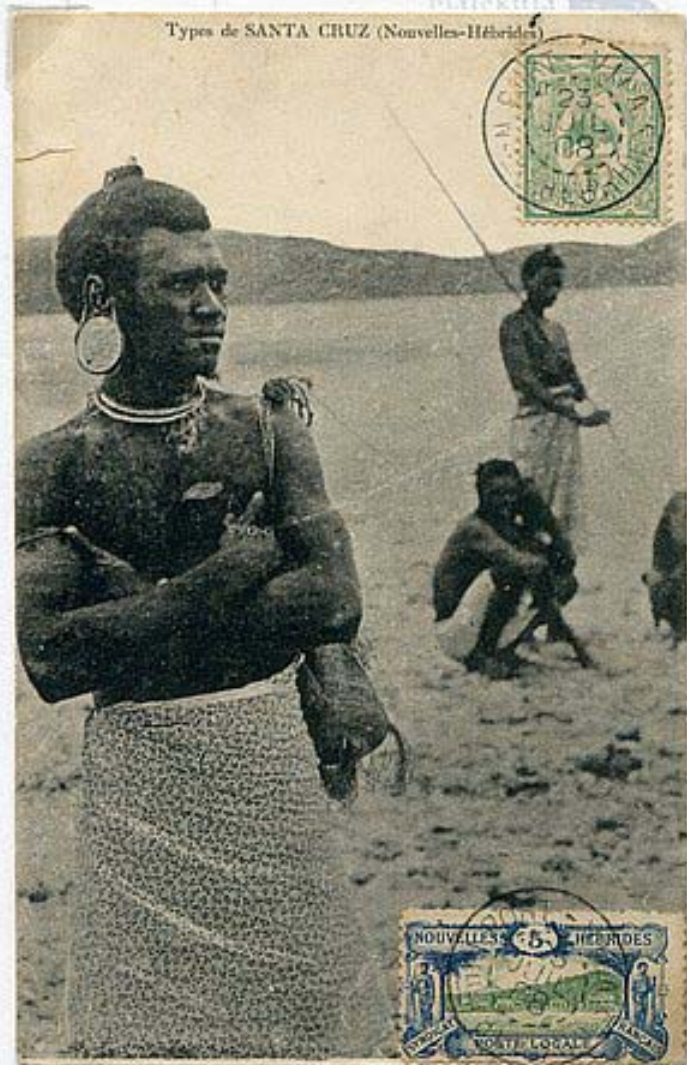
Melanesian Mission (Anglican)



Banks Islands

The diocese of the first Bishop of New Zealand, Dr. G. A. Selwyn, included the New Hebrides. In 1847 he made his first voyage to the islands, with the aim of finding young lads to take back to Auckland in the summer, teach them, and then return them to their homes. He visited most of the islands between New Zealand and the Santa Cruz group.

In 1850, he attended a meeting of bishops of Australia in Sydney, and got an Australasian Board of Missions established. A branch of this was formed at Auckland in 1851.



*The immense Pacific smiles
Round a thousand little isles--
Haunts of violence and wiles.*

*But the powers of darkness yield,
For THE CROSS is in the field,
And THE LIGHT OF LIFE revealed.*

In 1855, the Rev. John Coleridge Patteson, M.A., joined him, becoming the first Bishop of Melanesia in 1861.

Bishop Patteson regularly visited the Banks islands and the Solomons group. Between them lay the Santa Cruz and Swallow island groups.

He had hoped to build a mission school on the island of Motu in the Banks group, but this did not work out, so it was eventually built on Norfolk Island. They used the Mota language for translating religious texts.

The islanders generally were much attached to Patteson. However, in 1871 he was killed by natives at Nakapu, in the Swallow group, in expiation of the deaths of five natives at the hands of the white men.

Charles Godden, who followed him, was also killed, in 1906. The school on Norfolk Island was closed in 1918.

*Natives of
Santa Cruz*

William and Agnes Watt, 1868

Reformed Presbyterian
Church of New Zealand

I live for Tanna, and if need be, will die for it.

Agnes Watt

Tanna

After John Gibson Paton left Tanna, there was no mission activity there until 1858, when John and Mary Matheson came from Canada, and built a beachside house in the Kwamera region of south Tanna. They had a series of illnesses so went to Erromanga and Aneiteum to recover. When they returned, they built their house higher on the hill.

William Watt was appointed by the northern branch of the Presbyterian Church in New Zealand. He and his wife Agnes settled at Kwamera in 1869. They divided their time between there and the mission station at Port Resolution.

They obtained a printing press from the Glasgow Foundry Boys in 1873, and began printing religious books in the local language.



Tribe of Tanna natives going to a wardance

The Watts won their first baptised Tannese converts on 4 October 1881, as two men, four women, and three children took the sacrament.

Agnes Watt died in 1894, after 25 years on the island. William Watt remarried and remained on Tanna until 1910 when he retired to Australia.



Thomas and Helen Smail, 1890

Southern Presbyterian
Church of New Zealand

*An awful crowd of savages surrounded us :
all were naked, and carried muskets, cocked.
Notorious district :
many murders and cannibal feasts on this coast.*

Epi

The Southern Church, despite some promising success, was by 1887 less interested in sending out additional missionaries, and contributions had tapered off somewhat. But a young volunteer, the Rev. Thomas Smail, managed to catch their imagination and they agreed to send him out, including his new and equally capable wife Helen, in 1890.

They were stationed on Epi Island. After experiencing the greatest difficulty in gaining a footing, he at length succeeded in settling six teachers there.

His death from a chill in 1902 after rescuing a native woman during a hurricane was a crushing blow to the Islanders.

His loss was also keenly felt by the whole NZ Church which had finally solved their differences and combined in 1901.

His wife Helen loved the islands and its people and had equally shared her late husband's evangelistic zeal.

She assisted the Rev. Thomas Riddle, her late husband's replacement on Epi, for four more years.



Campagne du "Kersaint"

G. de Sébaste, Adieu, Nouméa - Reproduction interdite

20. - NOUVELLES-HÉBRIDES. - Foreland

Foreland, Epi

Dr Robert Lamb, 1893

Northern Presbyterian Church of New Zealand

Death has been busy and consumption (TB) is mowing people down like a scythe.

Robert Lamb was born in New Zealand and studied medicine at Edinburgh, Scotland. He was appointed in 1891 to begin a badly needed medical mission on the islands. He chose Dip Point on the west coast of Ambrym.

At first, he was faced with a hurricane which completely levelled the mission buildings and killed his twin sons. He built a makeshift hospital in 1894, but it burned down later that year.

He went back to New Zealand and came back with funds to build a modern hospital on the same site. Unfortunately, he contracted TB and was forced to leave Ambrym in 1896.

Dr John Tait Bowie ran the hospital from 1899 until 7 December 1913, when two volcanoes erupted, and it was burned down.

It was decided not to rebuild the hospital as the Presbyterians had built Paton Memorial Hospital on Efate on Iririki island, Vila in 1911.



In 2013 a reconciliation ceremony was held to allow locals to tell their own version of the story of the destruction of the hospital, as they knew it, and offer apology.

This included a belief that the villagers of Dip Point were angered by the missionary, having picked some coconuts from a taboo tree, and that they had called down fire to destroy the hospital.

Not long after this, the volcano erupted, and the resultant lava flow caused much death and devastation, including the destruction of the hospital.



The hospital at Dip Point, Ambrym, before the volcanoes erupted

Maurice Frater, 1900

Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland

*Jesus bids us shine with a pure clear light,
Like a little candle burning in the night.
In this world of darkness, so we must shine,
You in your small corner and I in mine.*

Paama

In 1900, John Paton informed Maurice Frater that he was allocated to the islands of Paama and Lopevi, islands that he had never heard of till then. Three months later, the Fraters landed at Paama and were warmly received, thanks to the efforts of other missionaries in the area..

Already at services they could see the difference between the natives who had been worshipping for some time, and those newly converted. As most of the natives had been at war with each other not too long before, it was a wondrous sight to see them together in a friendly atmosphere.

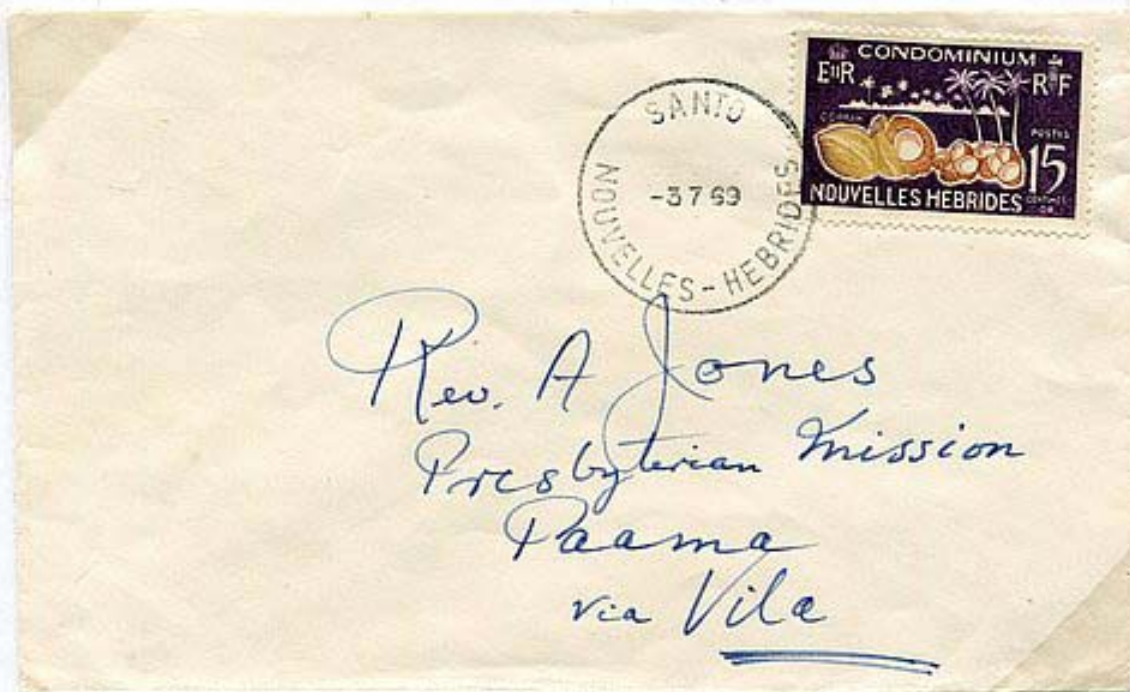
That was not always the case.

After a group of natives from the south of Epi paid a friendly visit to the island of Lamanu, they encountered rough weather on leaving, and both their canoes overturned. The Lamanu attacked and killed everyone.



They did this because by their custom, shipwrecked people were fair game for cannibalism.

Maurice Frater stayed at Paama till 1939, building 21 churches and converting most of the islanders to Christianity.



3 July 1969

Letter sent to the Rev. A. Jones, at the Paama mission station

Mère Marie Alexis, 1902

Soeurs missionnaires de
la Société de Marie

*Our specific vocation in the Church is to be at
one and the same time Missionary, Marist, Religious.*

Efate

7 November 1945

Letter written by
Mère Marie
Alexis to Mère
Marie Basile, at
the Convent for St
Therese of
Lisieux, Bedford,
Massachusetts



Marie Alexis was born in Montbert, France in 1876. She came to Sydney on the *Ville de la Ciotat* in 1902, and continued to the New Hebrides on the Burns Philp steamer *Titus*.

Her first task was to supervise the construction of a new hospital at Anabrou, Efate.



Missions des Pères Maristes en Océanie



Rade de Port-Vila, L'Eglise et l'Ecole.
Nouvelles-Hébrides.

In 1911 after the Condominium was formed, the French administration took over responsibility for the hospital.

In 1913 it was moved to Port-Vila. Mère Marie Alexis managed the hospital, together with Soeur Marie-Eugénie, until after WWII.

Frank Filmer, 1908

Church of Christ

... just nurtured what had been planted by the returned Kanakas.

Pentecost

Pentecost today is known for its land-diving ritual (or *goŋ*), whereby young lads prove themselves to be men, but in the early 1900s a different conversion was taking place.

Whilst other Christian church organizations were sending out missionaries to new lands, the Church of Christ members who first spread the teachings were natives recently returned from having worked on sugar cane plantations in Queensland.

They gathered people into small groups, started reading classes and eventually began services during which they taught from the Bible and sang from the Sankey's hymn book they had brought from Queensland.

Two of these teachers were unfortunately killed at Banmatmat on Pentecost when they entered the village during a custom tabu dance ceremony.



One of the most influential early leaders, Tabimancon, was particularly diligent, and worked hard to get the rest of the islanders reading and knowing about Christ. Soon the need for a missionary was great.

John Thompson came to fill in the gap until a permanent replacement could be organized, only to contract malaria, and he had to return to Australia. By the time 23-year-old Frank Filmer arrived at Pentecost in 1908, there was a lot of follow-up work to be done.

Filmer baptized 116 people in the next few months, and the church grew to 300 members. 800 people were taking classes. He moved to Banmatmat a year later, to set up a center to train men for evangelizing, teaching and leadership.

There was still danger though, and Filmer was known to worship with a rifle on his knees and have a helper keep his eyes open while he prayed - just in case!

Dr Joeli Taoi, OBE, 1961

Seventh Day Adventist Mission

***True fella God hem stop withem olgeta Sabbath mission
(The true God is with the Sabbath mission.)***

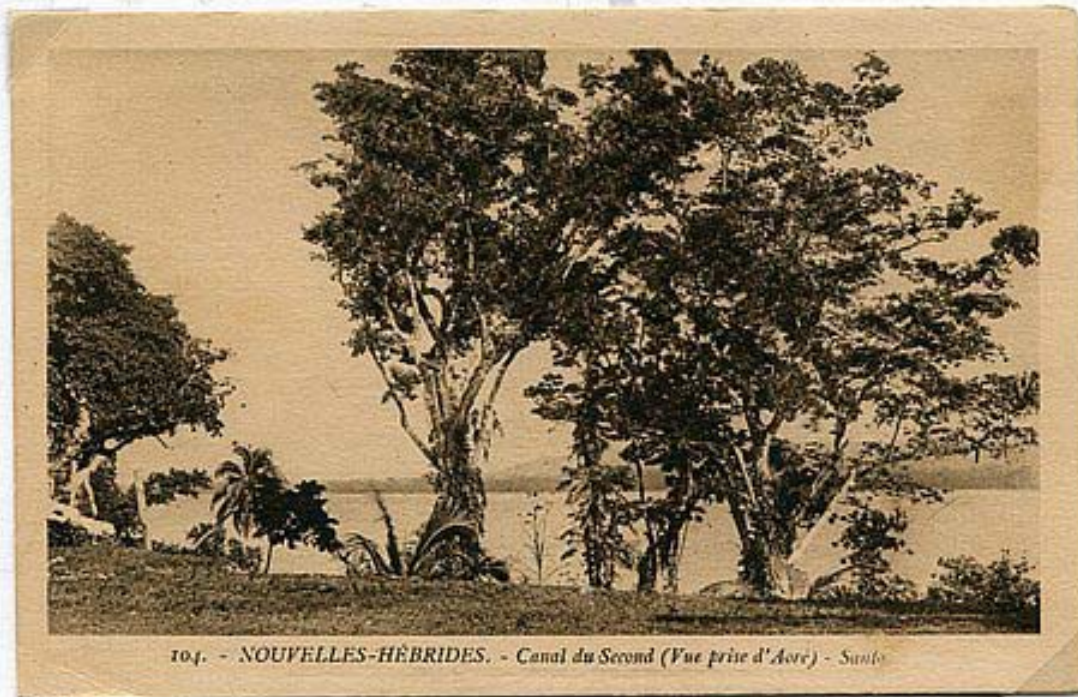
Aore

An Australian nurse, who worked with him for eight years, declared him to have become a legend in his own lifetime.



Dr. Joeli was a Fijian who, after completing his medical training in Fiji, embraced the Seventh-day Adventist faith. He worked for the Fijian Government for ten years, then accepted full-time service for the church.

Doctor Joeli was challenged to build up a partially constructed hospital on the small island of Aore just south of Santo.



Santo and the Second Channel, seen from Aore

For thirteen years, as medical director of the twenty-eight-bed hospital, he battled with superstition, primitive conditions and lack of equipment to build a solid medical practice. With limited facilities and a staff with little training, the doctor performed remarkable feats of healing, including difficult surgery.

The British government awarded Joeli with an OBE in recognition of his efforts.

In 1975, due to financial reasons and the return of Dr Joeli to Fiji, the hospital was closed.

Mavis Salt, M.B.E., 1955

Melanesian Mission (Anglican)

... My trust is in God, it matters not what I do, or where I go.

Aoba

Mavis Salt was the last of a long line of Melanesian Mission teachers. After parish work in Britain, she went to the Solomon Islands to work replacing a sick friend, and moved to the New Hebrides the following year.

She was principal at the Torgil Anglican girls' secondary school at Lolowai, Aoba, from 1955 to 1976.

Her girls loved her and thought of her as "my teacher". Some of her girls went on to higher education in New Zealand.



A number of them continued their teaching studies. Her brother, Fr David Salt, noted that "these were girls who were eventually to take a major part in the government of Vanuatu when the joint Anglo-French Condominium gave way to Independence."



7 January 1974

Letter to Mavis Salt
at the Torgil school,
Lolowai, Aoba

Mission Station,
Lolowai Bay, Aoba

Mavis also did much to promote the Girl Guide Movement, and was recognized for her achievements by being awarded an M.B.E.



Derek Rawcliffe, 1959

Melanesian Mission (Anglican)

*We urgently need your prayers for peace and
unity and for a righteous government here.*

Aoba

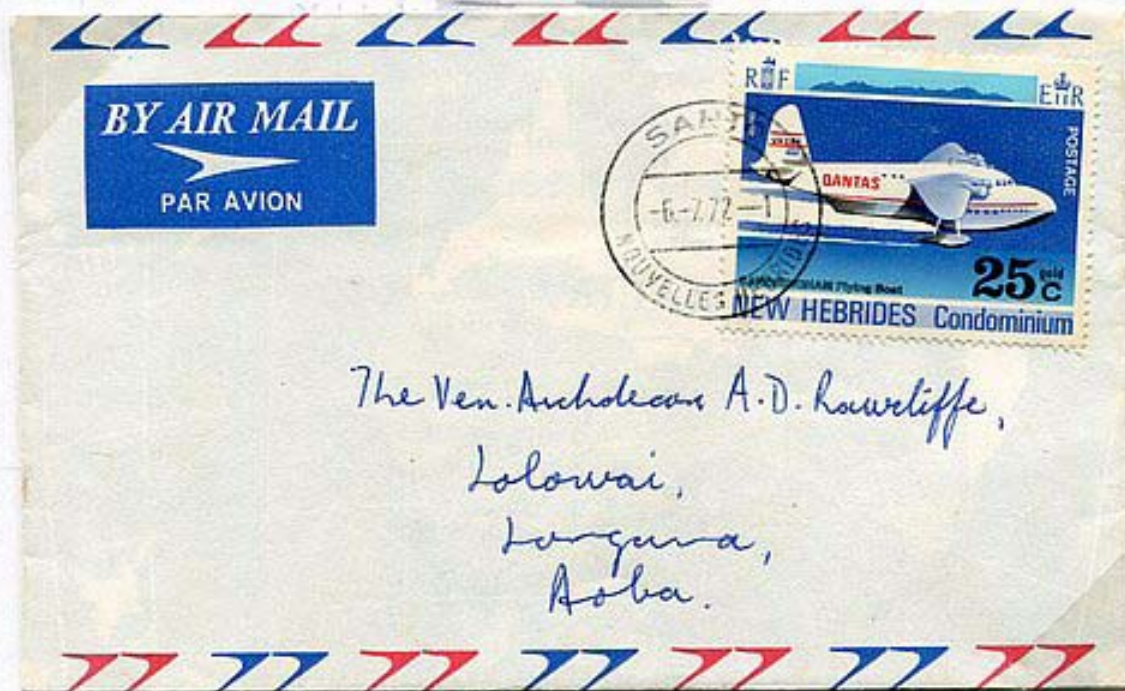
Rev. Derek Rawcliffe was an important figure in the Anglican Diocese of Melanesia, which established their centre for the archipelago at Lolowai Bay, Aoba in 1961. He traveled to the Solomon Islands in 1949 as a teacher.

He was appointed Archdeacon of Southern Melanesia in 1959, and became the first Bishop of the Diocese of the New Hebrides (which also included the Anglicans in New Caledonia) in 1975.



In his 1978 Christmas letter, he mentioned the political changes that were sweeping the archipelago on the eve of independence.

He also wrote of the imminent consecration of Father Harry Tevi from Pentecost as Bishop.



6 July 1972

Letter to Archdeacon Rawcliffe from Fr. Harry Tevi

This was a preliminary part of the diocese's original intention to eventually replace him with a native New Hebridean.

The consecration duly took place, during a cloudburst. Bishop Harry went on to become the first Melanesian Bishop of the New Hebrides in January 1980 when Bishop Rawcliffe left. He saw the country become independent as Vanuatu in July of the same year.