

3. British Solomon Islands Protectorate, 1893–1978

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, European colonial powers began to partition the Pacific Islands into settler colonies, Crown colonies and Protectorates, claiming control over indigenous societies. The borders of what is now the Solomon Islands nation were created by Germany, Britain and France between 1886 and 1899. The British Solomon Islands Protectorate was proclaimed in 1893 and remained in place until 1978, when the islands became an independent nation. The northern boundary was established by Germany when it created German New Guinea in the mid-1880s and the southern boundary was created by the British and French declaration of the New Hebrides as neutral territory in 1878, replaced by a joint naval administration in 1887, which became the New Hebrides Condominium in 1906 and the nation of Vanuatu in 1980. The eastern boundary was created by the British declaration of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Protectorates in 1892–93. A boundary with Fiji has existed since 1881, when Britain annexed Rotuma, which was administered from Fiji. The headquarters of the British Protectorate were established on Tulagi Island in the Gela Group between 1897 and 1942. Fighting during Second World War destroyed the town. In 1945, a new capital, Honiara, was created out of an American military base on Guadalcanal.

With more than 70 indigenous languages, Pijin English, originally used by labourers on overseas plantations, became the *lingua franca*. The Solomon Islands colonial economy was based on the development of coconut plantations and the processing of copra, the smoke-dried flesh of coconuts. The labour force was drawn from the Protectorate. Until after the Second World War, the government left provision of health and education services to the Christian missions, but then began to develop the islands with the aim of eventual independence.



3.1. An Armed Constabulary policed modern law and order. These police were stationed on Malaita in the 1910s. (Clive Moore Collection)



3.2. Guard of honour at Tulagi, September 1932. (British Museum, Robert Lever Collection)

Two British administrative decisions after the Second World War changed the Protectorate. In 1945, the decision was made not to rebuild Tulagi, the first capital, and to shift to Honiara. In 1952, the headquarters of the Britain government in the Pacific, the Western Pacific High Commission, previously based in Suva, Fiji, was moved to Honiara. This led to the development of more substantial administrative buildings and educational institutions which catered for other Pacific nations as well as local education. BSIP was drawn more into the centre of the British Pacific. Another change also came after the war: the world-wide move towards decolonisation which accompanied the ideologies behind the United Nations. In BSIP, attempts were made to widen the economic base by introducing new agricultural crops such as cocoa, and to foster co-operative movements to market produce at village level. Large-scale rice and oil palm production began on Guadalcanal Plains close to Honiara, and a commercial fishing industry was established. The development strategy was to make Solomon Islands self-sufficient in rice and tinned fish production. The public service began to be localised and modern political systems were developed. Local government councils were introduced and a process of representative government expanded during the 1960s and 1970s, which led through to independence on 7 July 1978.



3.3. Auki Police Station, Malaita, 1957. (Alan Lindley Collection, in Clive Moore Collection)



3.4. High Commissioner Sir Robert Stanley with chiefs on Tikopia, late 1950s. (John Hearsh Collection)



3.5. Rakwane leaders at Fakanakafo, 1950, meeting High Commissioner Sir Lesley Freestone. Tom Russell is the District Officer wearing a kilt. (Tom Russell Collection)



3.6. The pomp and ceremony of British colonialism continued throughout the Protectorate years. This photograph is from Auki, Malaita, 1965. (John Hearsh Collection)



3.7. The High Court of the Western Pacific High Commission building was completed in 1964. The building was also used for meetings of the Governing Council, the Legislative Council, and the early years of the National Parliament. (Brian Taylor Collection)



3.8. Particularly in Honiara, government officers lived in substantial houses with verandahs and large overhangs to protect windows from the rain and provide shade. This 1960s house was photographed in Honiara in 2008. (Clive Moore Collection)



3.9-10. Old Government House, 1950s. The early Resident Commissioners and High Commissioners lived in a makeshift but comfortable Residency (Government House) which dated back to the Second World War. The thatched roof building had been an old US Officers hospital, and was later used by New Zealand Army nurses. (British Museum, Patrick Barrett Collection)



3.11-12 New Government House. Plans to replace old Government House began in 1967: a new building was designed by New Zealand architects. New Government House came into use in mid-1969 and the old house was demolished. The building is now incorporated into the Heritage Park Hotel. (Brian Taylor Collection)



3.13. The High Commissioner's Humber Super Snipe carrying the Duke and Dukes of Kent in 1969, undergoing a traditional challenge by warriors. (Brian Taylor Collection)