

2. Makira islanders and Europeans

Makira and European contact

William Crossan wrote his Solomon Islands diary while he was a resident for six months at Hada Bay. Hada is at the western end of the island then known as San Cristoval but today usually called Makira Island, in the south-east Solomons (Figure 1). The people living in this part of Makira now number about 7,000 and they speak the Arosi language, which gives its name to the whole district. Charles Fox, the Anglican missionary who lived at Pamua on the north coast from 1911-1924, described the area as follows:

Arosi is not a very large district – about sixty miles of coastline with about thirty villages, and now only a few villages inland, most of the latter very small. ... This western end of the island is largely limestone, ... but the interior of the limestone country consists of a high and breezy plateau with very deep and steep intersecting valleys, sometimes as steep as a Colorado canyon, so that two villages almost inaccessible by path are within hail of each other.¹

Crossan's trading activities only involved the coastal villages. Those that he visited in 1885-86 are shown in Figure 4.

There had been sporadic contact between whaling ships and the people of San Cristoval or Makira Island since the first such record in 1799. By the late 1840s Makira Harbour in the south was well known to whalers and traders as a secure anchorage with easy access to wood and water, pigs, fruit, vegetables and women.² Curios, shells and turtle shell could also be bartered, and on average about three whaling ships a year came to the harbour in the period 1850-70.³ For a while Makira Harbour was the headquarters of the ill-fated Catholic Marist Mission, which operated there from 1845 to 1847 before withdrawing.⁴

In the North West season (November to April) Hada Bay was much less sheltered than Makira Harbour, but it too became known as a relatively safe haven for visiting ships. Along with Makira Harbour, Hada was one of the few places in Solomon Islands with its own Admiralty chart, based on surveys by H.M.S. *Cordelia* in 1861. The chart shows an anchorage with depths of 7-23 fathoms. At

1 Charles E. Fox, *The Threshold of the Pacific: An Account of the Social Organisation, Magic and Religion of the People of San Cristoval in the Solomon Islands* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1924), 7-8.

2 David Hilliard, *God's Gentlemen: A History of the Melanesian Mission, 1849-1902* (St Lucia, Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1978), 82-83; Bennett, *Wealth of the Solomons*, 27.

3 Bennett, *Wealth of the Solomons*, 29.

4 Hugh Laracy, *Marists and Melanesians: A History of Catholic Missions in the Solomon Islands*. (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1976), 20-22.

the head of the bay there is a river mouth ('good water, small boats can enter HW [at High Water]'). The bay is flanked north and south by cliffs, and in the middle there is a 'steep gravel beach' backing on to 'low brush wood'.⁵ Perhaps the earliest depiction of Hada Bay was by Cecil Foljambe, who sketched the view from H.M.S. *Curaçoa* when it anchored there for three days in September 1865 (Figure 5).

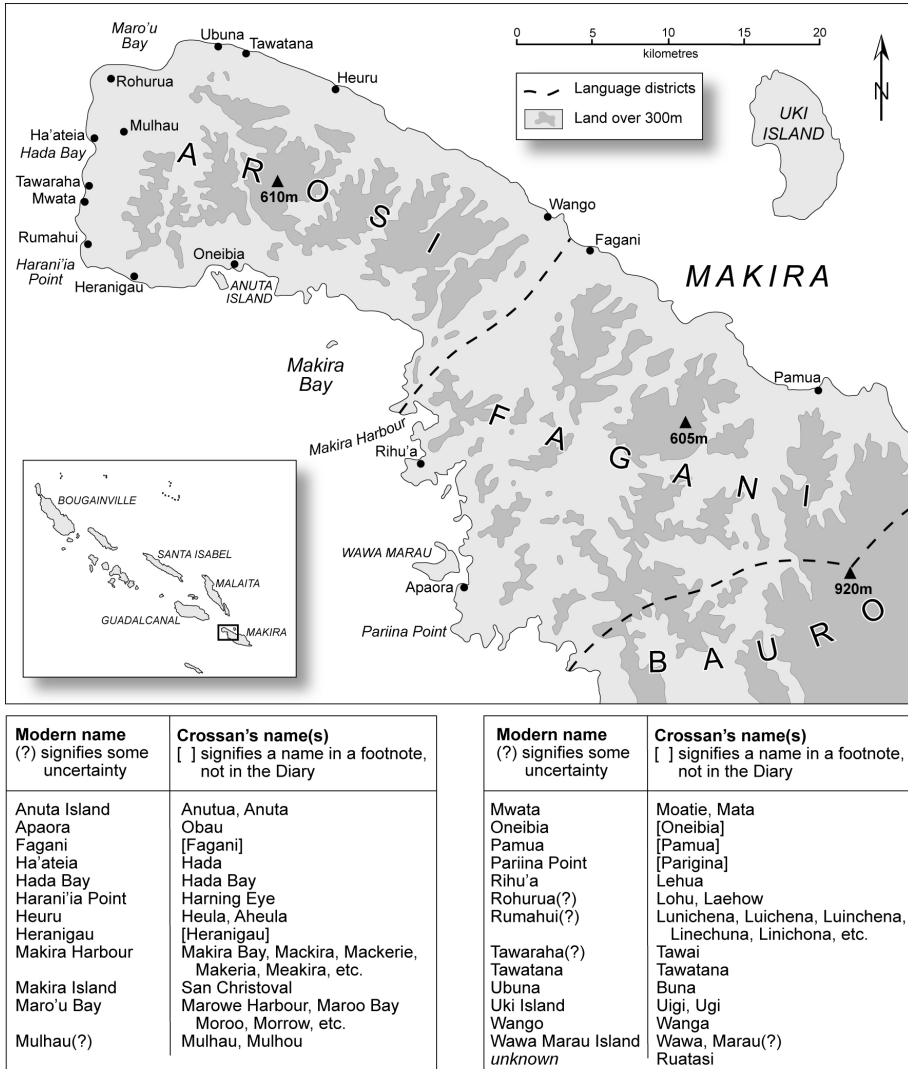


Figure 4. Map of Arosi district and adjacent parts of Makira Island, showing language boundaries and the place names mentioned in the Crossan Diary.

Source: Author's map, drawn from the Crossan Diary and other sources.



Figure 5. Hada Bay in 1865 as depicted by Cecil Foljambe (1868: 206).

Source: Early New Zealand Books, University of Auckland Library <<http://www.enzb.auckland.ac.nz/document?wid=2224&p=1>>

Julius Brenchley was also on H.M.S. *Curaçoa* and he described Hada Bay as follows:

The bay, though very small, is snug and safe; the high cliff on either side is picturesque, and densely covered with wood, and at the bottom of there is a flat, well-wooded beach backed by lofty hills... The village [lay] one or two miles distant at the point of the bay.⁶

Brenchley was told that it might be unwise to go to the village, today's Ha'ateia, and he decided to stay near the beach. Possibly in 1865 Ha'ateia was located just inland from the coast, and certainly no coastal village is shown on the 1861 Admiralty chart. Foljambe believed that Hada Bay lacked any coastal settlement:

Recherche [Hada] Bay... There is no village here, the settlement is in the next bay to the southward. I walked round a point on the right, and after a walk of four miles came to the village [Tawaraha]. We shot some pigeons on the way there. I found the Bishop [Patteson] there, and as he

⁶ Julius L. Brenchley, *Jottings during the Cruise of H.M.S. Curaçoa among the Islands of the South Seas* (London: Longman, Green & Co, 1873), 270, 272.

had come by boat, he was quite surprised to see us arrive on foot. I got a few little curiosities here, such as bracelets, ear-rings, &c, and walked back in the afternoon by the beach...⁷

Despite there being 'no village here', on the second day of *Curaçoa's* visit there were crowds of people in Hada Bay engaged in barter trade on the beach and paddling out to the ship in their canoes, bringing spears, clubs, parrots, opossums, pigs, fowls, yams and taro, to exchange for tobacco, beads, pipes, fish hooks and other things. The visitors on *Curaçoa* found that, unlike on Ulawa and Uki where hoop iron was still in demand, in Hada Bay 'nothing was taken here more greedily than stick tobacco; one could get almost anything for a small piece, even more than for a tomahawk'.⁸ It would appear that previous bartering with whalers and traders had reduced local demand for iron, but it was replaced by an insatiable demand for the new narcotic.

In political terms, too, it is apparent that in 1865 the people in Hada Bay were already well accustomed to receiving visiting ships. H.M.S. *Curaçoa* had steamed into the bay during a flat calm, towing the Melanesian Mission sailing ship *Southern Cross*, and both ships anchored. Almost at once, Brenchley reported, 'a native, calling himself the King, an oldish looking fellow, came on board and showed the commodore some certificates', and later that day he presented the commodore with a pig and other gifts. This unnamed Hada Bay big-man or chief was clearly knowledgeable in the white man's ways, even though one of his 'certificates' described him as 'a bore' and another warned that 'he was an old knave and the less you have to do with him the better'.⁹ This was probably the same man who was named in 1877 as 'King Ledger'.¹⁰

In addition to the King coming on board H.M.S. *Curaçoa* 'another native came also who spoke English'.¹¹ This interpreter might have been a returned labourer from Queensland, or perhaps someone who had worked on ships, like the old man on the beach who addressed Brenchley 'using coarse Hawaiian gibberish, no doubt derived from traders'.¹² Alternatively the English-speaking interpreter might have been a young Sono, who later was himself described as the Hada Bay chief. Twenty years later it was Sono, under the name Johnstone, who acted as go-between with the New Zealanders when Baker and Crossan came to Hada Bay to trade for copra.

7 C. Foljambe, *Three Years on the Australia Station* (187 Piccadilly, London: Hatchard & Co., for private circulation, 1868), 206-7.

8 Foljambe, *Three Years*, 206.

9 Brenchley, *Jottings*, 270.

10 Cairns correspondent, The voyage of the *Loelia*, *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 3 November 1877, 17.

11 Brenchley, *Jottings*, 270.

12 Brenchley, *Jottings*, 272.

Hada Bay as a trading station

It is clear that when William Crossan records his landing from the schooner *Glencairn* at Hada Bay in early September 1885, he was entering a Melanesian world that was already in a state of transition. By the 1880s foreigners, their practices and their technologies were familiar to many coastal people in Arosi district, although the bush people were still largely uncontacted by the outside world, except perhaps for a few who managed to pass safely to the coast. The people on the western Arosi coast had looked after castaways and deserters from 1851 onwards.¹³ Living at Hada Bay in 1865 were two American survivors from a whaling ship wrecked on Indispensable Reef, one black man and one white man.¹⁴ By the 1870s 'blackbirders' (labour recruiting ships) were also regular visitors. The *Isabella* managed to recruit three interpreters in Hada Bay for its recruiting voyage to Guadalcanal, Malaita and then back to Makira, in 1871.¹⁵ The *Woodlark* spent two weeks in the bay in August 1871 making repairs and trying to secure the services of an interpreter, and during this period two other Queensland ships arrived. The Government Agent on board *Woodlark* wrote as follows:

There are no known harbours to the westward of Hadda Bay, where repairs could be executed, and as our foreyard was unsound, rotten, it was a matter of vital importance to reach some secure port in order to replace the worthless spar with a fresh one. Hadda Bay is ... sheltered from the prevalent winds (south-east trades), but fully exposed to westerly winds There are no islanders residing here, but many come from the settlements along the coast, bringing native products for barter. They appear friendly and obliging, and a white man who has been left here as security for the return of a native accompanying a Fijian schooner through the group, speaks well of their kindness and hospitality.¹⁶

Less fortunate was the schooner *Lyttona*, labour recruiter from Brisbane, which struck a reef and was wrecked in Hada Bay during a storm in November 1875. All the recruits on board got ashore, however, and 'during the stay on the island the shipwrecked people being well armed, did not suffer any inconvenience from the natives, who supplied them with yams and other necessary articles.'¹⁷

Missionaries on Makira seem to have experienced greater difficulties. The Marist Mission had failed to get established in Makira Bay in 1847 and it was

13 Bennett, *Wealth of the Solomons*, 29-30, 356, 378.

14 O. Rietmann, *Wanderungen in Australien und Polynesien* (St Gallen: Scheitlin & Zollikofer, 1868), 183-4.

15 *The Brisbane Courier*, Cruise of the *Isabella* to the Polynesian Islands, 8 November 1871, 3.

16 Recruiting Polynesians, *The Brisbane Courier*, 14 December 1871, 3.

17 Wreck of the *Lyttona*, *The Queenslander* (Brisbane), 18 December 1875, 8.

not until 1870 that Christian missionaries returned. In that year the Melanesian Mission (Church of England) founded its first school on the island at Wango on Arosi's north coast. The first missionaries at Wango were the Englishman Joseph Atkin and Stephen Taroaniara from nearby Tawatana village, both of whom were killed the following year at Nukapu in the Reef Islands alongside Bishop Patteson. In 1872 another Englishman Robert Jackson arrived at Wango and the school was revived, but Jackson had little success and he left in 1874. According to the Rev. C.H. Brooke,

[A] visit to Wango is not encouraging; the few people who remain have already received an untoward bias [against Europeans] from the constant succession of vessels – traders, whalers and slavers – which have made the beautiful bay their habitual resort.¹⁸

Another Melanesian Mission school was started further east at Fagani, and then a third in 1882 at Heuru, but the number of Christian converts remained very small.¹⁹



Figure 6. Photograph of a man spearing fish and fishing stands at Heuru, 1906. The steam ship in the background is probably the Anglican mission ship, *Southern Cross*. The same picture is reproduced by Rannie (1912: 293) with the following caption: ‘San Christoval Islands. Fishing scaffolds on the outer reef. The man in the foreground is fishing with a four-pronged spear. In this way he catches mullet, bream, cod-fish, rays and small sharks. (J.W. Beattie, Hobart)’.

Source: Bishop Terry Brown, Honiara, from J. W. Beattie photographic collection, 1906.

18 C. H. Brooke, ‘Progress of the Melanesian Mission’. *Mission Life* 4: 1873, 442. http://anglicanhistory.org/oceania/brooke_progress1873.html (Accessed January 2011).

19 Charles E. Fox, *Lord of the Southern Isles, being the Story of the Anglican Mission in Melanesia 1849-1949* (London: A.R. Mowbray, 1958), 160.

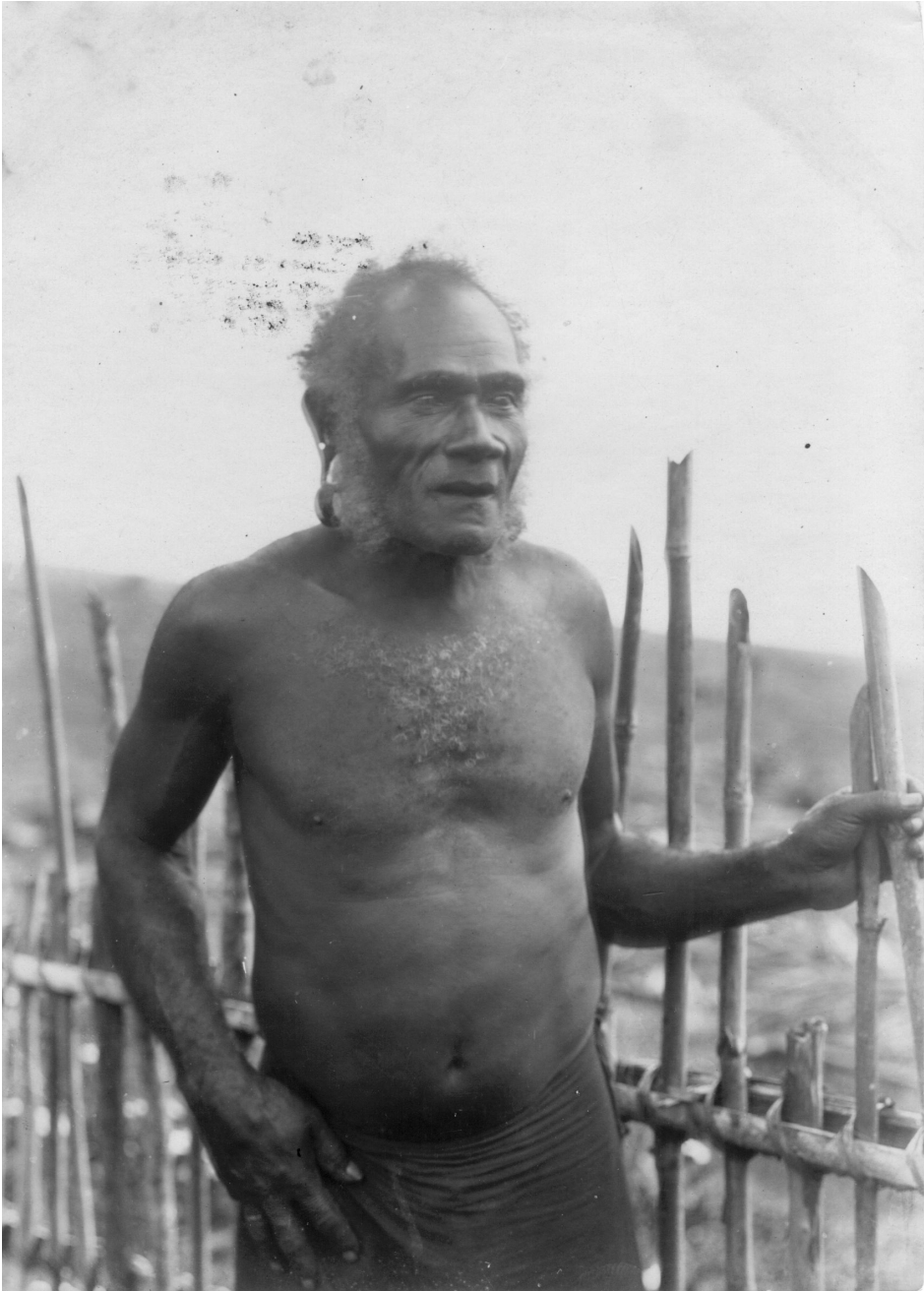


Figure 7. Photograph of David Boo, 1906. A younger man in 1886, Boo was the chief of Heuru.

Source: Bishop Terry Brown, Honiara, from J. W. Beattie photographic collection, 1906.



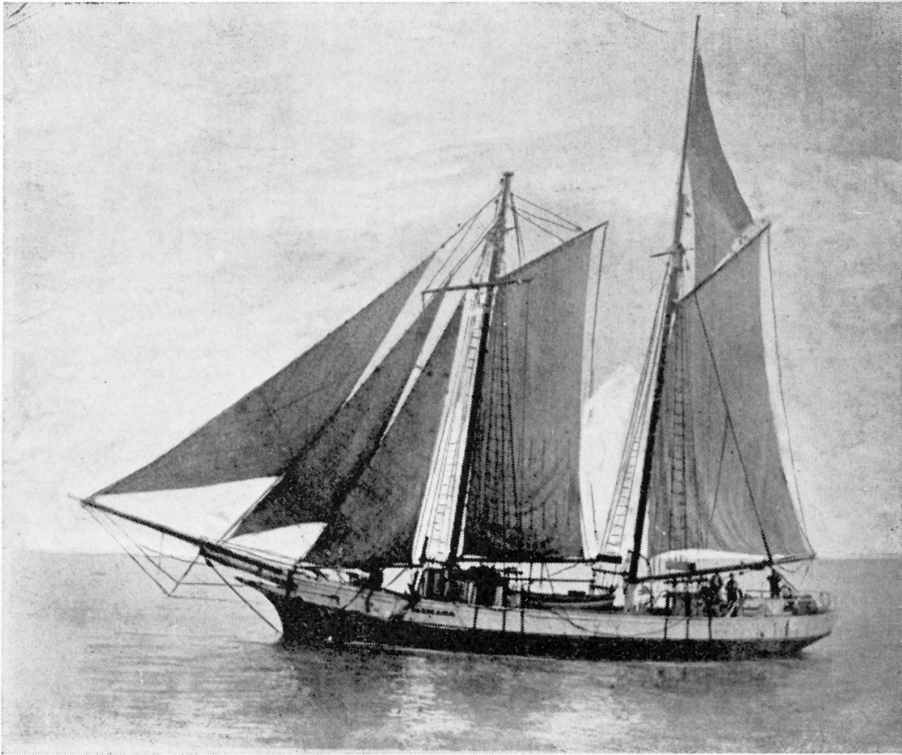
Figure 8. The beach at Heuru, north coast of Arosi District, 1906. Twenty years earlier Heuru village was the furthest place that Crossan reached in his sailing cutter, trading for copra.

Source: Bishop Terry Brown, Honiara, from J. W. Beattie photographic collection, 1906.

A trading station had already existed at Hada some years beforehand, but when Baker and Crossan arrived in 1885 there is no mention that other foreigners were present. The Hada trading station was probably initiated in 1877 by G. Atkinson acting for McArthur & Co., a New Zealand trading firm, the likely Auckland employer of Crossan in 1884. In March 1877, the company sent the *Mary Anderson* to install about seventeen agents on commission in the Solomon Islands, and a number of these were located on the north side of Makira. Others were also showing an interest in this relatively hospitable coastline. In about July 1877 a labour recruiting vessel arrived off Hada Bay:

Off Recherche [Hada] Bay, a chief came out in his canoe and informed them [the ship *Loelia*] that the *May Douglas*, brigantine, Captain Brown, was lying inside. She is engaged in the island trade, and was looking for a place to form a station, having not done so at that time, but intended to proceed further north.²⁰

²⁰ Cairns correspondent, The voyage of the *Loelia*, *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 3 November 1877, 17.



The *Glencairn* — a typical Schooner

Figure 9. The schooner *Glencairn*, 62 tons, was built of kauri in Auckland in the early 1880s and soon went into the islands' trade. This labour recruiting ship took William Crossan to and from Makira. In September 1900, she was wrecked when carrying timbers on the east coast of New Zealand. She ran into a storm before reaching the port of Timaru and turned north, back to Akaroa but sank off Ninety Mile Beach (*Timaru Herald*, 2 October 1900, 4).

Source: Hocken Collections, Uare Taoka o Hakena, University of Otago, Dunedin with permission of the Timaru Port Authority from C. E. Hassall (compiler), *A Short History of the Port of Timaru*, Timaru: Timaru Harbour Board, 1955, 94.

The following year it was reported that at Hada Bay 'a white man was left here by the *Douglas* to collect copra'.²¹ The McArthur company decided to withdraw from the Solomon Islands in 1878 after one of their traders, Townsend, was killed and his companion, a white boy, was speared at Uki.²² In 1879 the trader at Hada was James Martin, working as agent for Captain Brodie (*Ariel*), but Martin soon left Hada for Wango.²³

21 The cruise of the *Isabella*, *Morning Bulletin* (Rockhampton, Queensland), 2 August 1878, 2.

22 Entry 22 May, 1877, Journal of Mr Charles Hunter on Southern Cross, 1877, <http://anglicanhistory.org/oceania/brown1877/> (Accessed December 2011); *Auckland Star*, 30 September 1878, 2.

23 Bennett, *Wealth of the Solomons*, 377.

There is no further evidence of a station at Hada Bay until 1885, suggesting a gap in trading activity and perhaps explaining the eagerness of chief Sono (Johnstone) to assist the New Zealanders when they arrived there. The next record concerns 'Baker, Crossan & Co of Fiji' and refers to Crossan's arrival at Hada on 28th August 1885.²⁴ No formal record of this company can be found, and it is likely to have been an entirely informal arrangement among the partners. Baker with Darrack (whose given names are never mentioned) and Crossan travelled from Suva on the schooner *Glencairn*, which was engaged in returning labourers from Fiji (Figure 9).²⁵

According to the man overseeing labour transactions, the Government Agent on board, the newcomers who were off shore from Hada on 28th August 'intended to establish their trading station there'. Next day, Baker purchased 'a piece of land' and arranged to have a house built, and the three men went ashore. Some of the returning labourers who were aboard also came ashore for some exercise and a wash, and some of these men worked for the day with Darrack building the house and in return were paid with pipes and tobacco.²⁶ Darrack stayed behind at Hada to superintend the building of a sailing cutter to be used in Crossan's copra trading.

After leaving Hada Bay on 3rd September, the ship *Glencairn* continued its voyage around the Solomon Islands including Malaita, the major source of indentured labour. With all returnees landed, the ship returned to Hada on 19th October to collect Crossan's copra, stock up on firewood and water, and add ballast to the virtually empty vessel.²⁷ Darrack, his work finished, also came on board. He had spent the previous two months working with Crossan and Johnstone (known as Johnson as well as Sono), the big man or chief of Hada, building the sailing cutter that was to prove crucial for the success of Crossan's trading network. Later, Johnstone was able to use this boat himself for travelling around the coasts of Arosi district. Baker as well as Darrack went back to Suva on the *Glencairn*, arriving 12th December with three tons of copra from Crossan's and Baker's operations.²⁸

Meanwhile, able seaman Ned Griffiths had decided to work as a 'hut keeper' for Crossan and left the *Glencairn* on 31st October 1885 before it sailed for Suva.²⁹ Griffiths remained at Hada Bay with Crossan until 4th March 1886. In late February 1886, however, Griffiths, 'without any sufficient provocation', had shot

24 Bennett, *Wealth of the Solomons*, 378.

25 G. Pilkington, Journal of *Glencairn*, 1 August-8 December 1885, Government Agents' Logbooks No. 56, National Archives of Fiji (NAF), Suva.

26 G. Pilkington, Journal of *Glencairn*, No. 56, 1 August-8 December 1885, No. 56, NAF.

27 G. Pilkington, Journal of *Glencairn*, Aug.-Dec. 1885, No. 56, NAF.

28 *Suva Times*, 12 Dec. 1885, NAF, Suva. This reference was kindly provided by Prof. Ian Campbell.

29 *Fiji Times*, 1 Aug. 1885; G. Pilkington, Journal of *Glencairn*, Aug.-Dec. 1885, No. 56, NAF.

a local man through the cheek.³⁰ At this time, if Crossan's sketchy comments are any indication, Ned Griffiths was suffering from recurrent bouts of fever, almost certainly malaria. Such illness could have clouded his judgement and frayed his temper. Crossan would undoubtedly have been shocked by this incident and anxious about its consequences. It is perhaps for this reason that he makes no mention of it in his diary, realising the significance of such a document if there were to be a murder enquiry. He must also have been extremely nervous about the possibility of retaliation towards the white men at Hada Bay, though at the time Johnstone's intervention had protected Griffiths.³¹ As Crossan noted in his diary entry for 11th January 1886,

The Bushmen have just killed one Boy belonging to Chief of Lunichena, a return just back from Port McKay. So much for civilized San Christoval [Makira], this is no. 4 that has got his quick dispatch, with one white man, in 4 months, that I know of.

It was perhaps to avoid a similar fate that Crossan and Griffiths decided to leave Makira as soon as possible. Perhaps too Griffiths' repeated bouts of malaria necessitated removal from the Solomon Islands. Even though the man he had injured was said to be 'quite recovered',³² a few days later their opportunity came when the *Glencairn* arrived from Fiji on another voyage to return recruits. On 4th March, after collecting copra at Makira Harbour, Crossan and Griffiths left Hada on the *Glencairn* for Auckland, which offered a market for the copra and a safe homecoming for William Crossan.

There is no record of the total tonnage of all the copra Crossan produced and sold, but he was operating in a period of falling prices. From as high as £32 a ton on the London market, copra fluctuated in price around £20 in the early 1880s and began to fall to a level below £15 per ton in 1886, not to recover until 1901. Crossan's profit on each ton was probably much the same as other Solomon traders, around £2.5 to £3, after recompensing his Solomon agents and shipping costs, but this excludes payments to other Westerners involved at various stages, such as Darrack, Baker and Griffiths.³³ Life as a Solomons trader did not pay well in terms of the risks involved. Perhaps this explains why Crossan abandoned his Pacific Islands ambitions. He put away his Solomon Islands diary-notebook, and seems never to have used it again.

30 G. Pilkington, *Journal of Glencairn*, Dec. 1885-Mar. 1886, Government Agents' Logbooks, No. 58, NAF.

31 Acting Agent of Immigration to Secretary of High Commission, 18 May 1886, Western Pacific High Commission (hereafter WPHC) 79/86, Western Pacific Archives (hereafter WPA), University of Auckland, Auckland.

32 G. Pilkington, *Journal of Glencairn*, Dec. 1885-Mar. 1886, No. 58, NAF.

33 Bennett, *Wealth of the Solomons*, 51-58; Stewart Firth, 'German Firms in the Pacific Islands, 1857-1914', In *Germany in the Pacific and Far East, 1870-1914*, ed. J.A. Moses and P. M. Kennedy. (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1972), 7.