

# Mission archaeology in Vanuatu: preliminary findings, problems, and prospects

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*Christian missionaries were among the first permanent European settlers in the New Hebrides (as Vanuatu was called before independence in 1980). Notably, Scottish Presbyterians became established in the archipelago from the 1840s through to the early twentieth century. Most of what is known about this early period of interaction between Melanesians and foreigners comes from the official, heroic narratives written by the missionaries themselves, as well as other archival sources such as the accounts of explorers, traders, and naval officers during the nineteenth century. Archaeological research has just begun to explore the sites associated with the earliest New Hebrides missions. Material evidence from these places of interaction hints at the great potential for historical archaeology to create an account of the past that is inclusive of Melanesian and European perspectives, producing new insights about the ongoing role of colonialism in shaping interaction throughout the region.*

## INTRODUCTION

Island Melanesia was one of the last frontiers of European colonialism, despite some early contacts with European explorers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Bedford *et al.* 2009; Spriggs 1997:223-254). While never a place of large-scale European settlement, there were nonetheless dramatic results stemming from the interaction of native Pacific Islanders and people of European descent in Vanuatu and elsewhere in Island Melanesia (e.g. Docker 1970; Shineberg 1967). At the same time, much of traditional life persisted, and much of what changed in the life of the islands can be attributed to indigenous creativity as well as the activities of various foreign powers (e.g. Bedford and Spriggs 2008). Archaeology, with its unique insights into past material culture, landscapes, and living conditions for everyone involved with the colonial process, has much to contribute to our picture of life in Island Melanesia in the nineteenth century. Christian missionaries were some of the earliest foreigners to settle permanently in the region, but they played an ambiguous role in the wider context of the expansion of capital and empire into this remote corner of the world (see below). While archaeological research on the early missions to the New Hebrides is in its infancy (though see Spriggs 1985, 2007), it has already begun to reveal some interesting patterns about continuity and change in the everyday life of these colonial outposts.

Initial fieldwork carried out in 2011 and 2012 on the islands of Tanna and Erromango (Figure 1) explored five different mission stations, documenting 64 archaeological features at 19 archaeological sites. This research focused on documenting and mapping surface features from mission sites and associated places significant to local oral traditions. The features documented ranged from mission stations, including churches, houses, and outbuildings, to petroglyph sites and other features associated with indigenous social memories. Limited test excavations were also carried out at mission house sites (Flexner 2012, 2013b). The goal of initial research was to provide a broad survey of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century mission features, rather than focusing on intensive excavation of a particular site as is more typical of mission archaeology in the Pacific (e.g. Lydon 2009; Middleton 2008). Research on the archaeology of Vanuatu's earliest mission stations aims to contextualise these places within the broader indigenous landscapes within which they were set, and to investigate evidence for interaction between Melanesians and missionaries at the scale of everyday life. Of particular interest is the role of space and material culture in shaping the mission

experience for all involved. Initial site survey and test excavations at mission sites around Tanna and Erromango hint at the hybrid nature of mission architecture and artefact assemblages, while also indicating some of the ways that missionary presence may have transformed local settlement patterns as well as daily practices (Flexner 2012, 2013b).

## CHRISTIANITY, CAPITALISM, AND CIVILISATION IN THE NEW HEBRIDES

The Christian Missions to the New Hebrides (as Vanuatu was called before independence in 1980) were part of a huge pulse of mission activity throughout the Pacific Islands that took place from the 1820s through the turn of the century. The denomination of missionaries was closely aligned with the

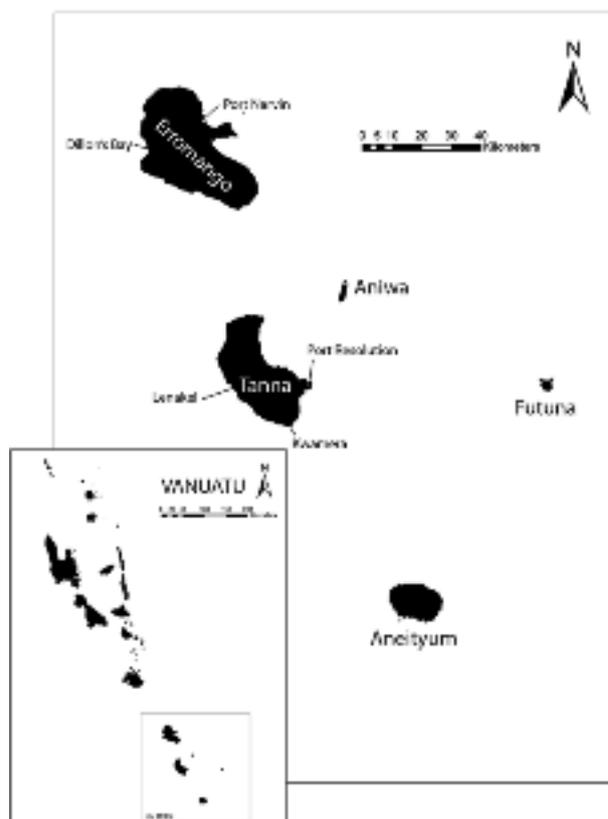


Figure 1: Map of Vanuatu (inset), with detail showing TAFEA province and the mission stations where archaeological fieldwork was carried out in 2011 and 2012.

contours of empire, with the Catholic missions generally establishing footholds in the Francophone parts of the Pacific, and Protestants of various types entering the Anglophone territories. That said, there was a great deal of overlap and conflict in the quest to convert souls to the “true faith”. In the New Hebrides, Catholic and Protestant missionaries co-existed, though with the usual petty squabbles and vitriol over the who, when, where, and how of conversion. In one of the more bizarre outcomes of Anglo-French struggles for imperial domination in the Pacific, the New Hebrides eventually came to be ruled by a joint “condominium” government with shared power, though official colonial rule was only recognised after 1906, some 67 years after the first missionaries arrived in the islands (Bonnemaison 1994:52-96).

Ideologically, Protestant missionisation in the Pacific was marked by an interest in transforming not only the interior world of the soul, but also the exterior world of the converted. Missionaries were expected to be exemplars not only of Christian piety, but also the arts of civilisation, especially the practices of agriculture, economic productivity, and domestic propriety. Archaeological research on protestant missions to Australasia (e.g. Ash *et al.* 2010; Birmingham and Wilson 2010; Lydon 2009; Lydon and Ash 2010; Middleton 2003, 2007a, 2007b, 2008, 2010; Morrison *et al.* 2010) has revealed the complicated nature of mission work under such a directive. Indigenous converts opportunistically adopted different components of civilisation according to shifting sets of social, economic, and spiritual relationships, often to the confusion and frustration of the missionaries. Missions often had to serve as colonial outpost, trading station, and place of worship, again because of the marked entanglement between Christianity and capitalism within Protestant ideology.

In environments such as the New Hebrides that were seen as hostile to the European bodily constitution, two models of missionisation emerged. In the model used by the Anglican Melanesian Mission, islanders were taken to a school in a more temperate climate (initially at Mission Bay, New Zealand, later moved to Norfolk Island) to be trained, and later returned to convert members of their own community (Armstrong 1900; Hilliard 1978). The Presbyterians favoured the presence of resident white missionaries at permanent stations, because of doubts about the effectiveness of the Anglican model, though this also presented myriad difficulties for the missionaries involved. Problems faced by the missionaries included the feeling of distance and isolation from even remote colonial outposts in Australia and New Zealand, problems with local diseases, notably malaria, and often hostile natives. It was a struggle, to say the least, to establish permanent mission stations in the New Hebrides (Miller 1978, 1981).

Further complicating the role of missionaries was the fact that they weren’t the only colonial agents operating in these remote locations. In the New Hebrides, mission activity was preceded by, or took place alongside an emerging capitalist trade with the islands. Sandalwood was recognised as a valuable commodity, especially for trade with China, and many islands in the Pacific were rapidly deforested in the pursuit of this fragrant hardwood (e.g. Sahlins 1992:58-67, 82-91; Shineberg 1967). The New Hebrides were no exception, as a number of merchants came to these islands beginning in 1825 to set up stations to cut sandalwood and trade with the locals, sometimes accompanied by sizable native labour forces from Polynesia (Shineberg 1967:16-28). As sandalwood sources were exhausted, Western traders found a new source of income in the recruitment and export of Melanesian labourers to sugar plantations in Australia and Fiji (e.g. Hayes 2002). Blackbirding, as this practice was called, was well known for its treachery and brutality, and had major impacts on the demographic and social structures of local islands (Docker 1970; Palmer 1871). One result was that missionaries were

often placed in an uncomfortable position between the kinds of social and economic systems they were working to propagate (capitalism, wage labour), and the people who they were trying to protect and convert. The missionaries were meant to turn the natives of the New Hebrides into good, Christian workers, but simultaneously saw the evils and excesses of the sandalwood trade and blackbirding, which they attempted to combat.

## INITIAL FINDINGS TOWARDS AN ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE NEW HEBRIDES MISSIONS

The processes of conversion and civilisation are not simply abstract phenomena recognisable through historical hindsight. They are deeply tied to everyday practice and experience, both for missionaries and the people they were trying to convert. The mission endeavour was about the grandest of scales, eternal salvation, but it was also about day to day life. Archaeological research about the latter can inform us in useful ways about the perception of the former by all involved with the New Hebrides missions. Preliminary archaeological research on early missions in Vanuatu focused on five mission stations: Kwamera, Port Resolution, and Lenakel on Tanna, and Dillon’s Bay (also called Williams’ Bay) and Port Narvin on Erromango. These missions spanned a time period from 1839 through 1917, during which time roughly a dozen Presbyterian missionaries from Scotland, Canada, and New Zealand, along with their spouses, as well as many more catechists from Polynesia were stationed on the islands, for periods lasting from as little as seven months, to over 32 years (Table 1). Survey work focused on documenting surface features related to the mission station, especially church buildings, houses, and material culture with the aid and guidance of local informants. Features related to indigenous life were also documented where possible, though indigenous habitation sites have proven slightly harder to identify through surface survey, a problem to be returned to later. Initial test excavation work focused on mission house sites, which were crucial places of interaction in the history of Christian conversion in the New Hebrides.

**Table 1: Mission encounters on Tanna and Erromango, 1839–1912.**

Island	Missionary name	Year(s)	Place
Erromango	John Williams	1839	Dillon's Bay (1 Day)
Erromango	George Gordon	1857–1861	Dillon's Bay
Erromango	Hugh Angus Robertson	1872–1904	Dillon's Bay
Erromango	James Gordon	1864–1872	Potnuma
Tanna	John Williams	1839	Port Resolution (1 Day)
Tanna	Turner and Nisbet	1842	Port Resolution (7 Months)
Tanna	“Aneityumese”	1862–1867	Port Resolution
Tanna	Thomas Neilson	1868–1882	Port Resolution
Tanna	Joseph Copeland	1858–1862	Port Resolution
Tanna	John G. Paton	1858–1862 [1903]	Port Resolution Kwamera, also Aniwa
Tanna	J.W. Mathieson	1858–1862	Kwamera
Tanna	Agnes Watt	1869–1894	Kwamera, Port Resolution
Tanna	Frank Paton	1896–1902	Lenakel
Tanna	Dr. John C. Nicholson	1903–1917	Lenakel
Tanna	William Gray	1882–1894	Waisisi

## Mission houses

Mission houses were a central locus of activity, the place where missionary and indigenous identities and cultural practices were thrown into relief, and where indices of civilisation were adapted, imposed, and measured according to the beliefs of the missionaries (Lydon 2009:103-124; Middleton 2008:137-145). Missionary accounts often provide some details about the house, as this pattern was well recognised by those doing the work of conversion. Agnes Watt (1896:83-86), who spent 25 years as a missionary on south Tanna along with her husband William, gives a great deal of detail about the mission house in Kwamera, which was a wooden structure measuring approximately 34 feet by 14 feet (10.36 m x 4.27 m). Watt notes that the house was a place of great curiosity for local people, who were often coming to “*asipau*”, or look at the house. While she was concerned about theft, these encounters were crucial to mission work, introducing local people to an exemplar of Victorian domesticity (Watt 1896:88-89, 92-93). Natives entering the mission space were meant to see the house as an ideal to be emulated within their own domestic spaces, though the continuity of indigenous housing forms through the present suggests Western-style housing was not wholeheartedly adopted by local people.

While histories of mission work on Erromango have tended to focus on the dramatic martyrdom of different missionaries (Gordon 1863; Robertson 1902), excavation at mission houses in Dillon’s Bay has attempted to examine the ways that mission life was experienced on an everyday level (Flexner 2013b). George and Ellen Gordon’s mission house (referred to as “the George Gordon house” below), inhabited from 1856–1861, sits at the top of a cliff overlooking the Williams River valley, while the indigenous inhabitants of Dillon’s Bay lived at the mouth of the river far below. Excavations at the George Gordon house consisted of three 1 m by 1 m test units, which uncovered a single cultural layer (Figure 2), containing a modest but informative artefact assemblage (see below). Stone walls on the surface were shown through excavation to have been retaining walls to hold sediment on the flat terrace where the house was located. Future research will be needed to identify the exact location of the house itself, and hopefully rooms and activity areas within the structure.

The location of the George Gordon house would have made access to water difficult, as it is far above the main river, and several hundred metres from the nearest water source, a stream called Vedavil, which is a trickle during the dry season and a torrent in the rainy season. There are several likely reasons for this seemingly illogical house placement, first being visibility. Sandalwooding, as mentioned above, had deforested much of the uplands of Erromango by the 1850s when the Gordons moved in, and the high placement of their house would have provided a good view of passing ships. Considerations for safety were likely an even more important factor in the choice of housing location. Malaria and other tropical diseases, for example, were a major concern that determined the placement of mission houses throughout the New Hebrides, and placing the house at high elevation was thought to protect against these illnesses (Gordon 1863:199-200; Robertson 1902:134-135).

The Gordons also came to Dillon’s Bay 17 years after the murder of John Williams, the first missionary to visit Tanna and Erromango in 1839. Williams was murdered by local people in what local oral histories recall as a misplaced act of retribution for atrocities committed by Australian sandalwood traders, who had murdered the sons of a local chief. This event loomed large in the push to missionise the New Hebrides, and in the imagination of missionaries sent to Erromango. The

Gordons even had a guard house inhabited by a local convert built on the trail leading up the cliff to the mission house. Yet the placement of the house so far from the settlement probably posed a challenge for the Gordons in integrating themselves into the local community, and they were to suffer the same martyr’s fate as Williams in 1861 (e.g. Gordon 1863).

The first successful missionary to Dillon’s Bay, Hugh Angus Robertson, took a far different approach to constructing his station in the threatening settlement. Robertson built his church and house right by the mouth of the Williams River, where indigenous habitation was densest. But, Robertson clearly marked mission space from the rest of the island, building a massive complex of stone walls around and within the station using native labour, as local people were conscripted to carry and stack the locally-occurring beach stones for the walls (Figure 3). Indeed, Robertson’s ability to manage indigenous labour may have been one of the keys to his success. Local people would have recognised this as an expression of the missionary’s power, since organising work projects would have traditionally been a chiefly prerogative.

The walls provided a symbolic boundary, with unruly, native space “outside”, and ordered, civilised mission space “inside”. This separation of spaces was further marked by the materialisation of Christian and non-Christian practices. For example, natives wishing to enter the mission space were required to trade *nambas* (penis sheath), bark cloth, and grass skirts for calico dresses, trousers, and shirts at a store house built for this purpose near the southern entrance to the compound. The monumental space constructed by Robertson, which included a sizable church and an impressive house with a massive stone foundation (called “the Robertson house” below), would have been unique in the landscape of Erromango. Excavation of a 2 m x 2 m test unit by the entrance of the Robertson house revealed a complex stratigraphic sequence, consisting of a series of floor layers and features overlying a large construction trench filled in with large water-rolled cobbles and boulders from the nearby beach. Eventually, the foundations of the Robertson house were revealed, formed of lime mortar poured to well over 1 m below the ground surface (Figure 4), which fits with the monumental scale at which that particular missionary tended to build. This appears to be a clear statement about the power of the mission, marking off the new from the old and the civilised from the wild. Yet the old threat of violence against the missionary was still there (e.g. Robertson 1902:195-196, 315-318), so there is also a defensive aspect to this organisation of mission space, using spiritual and physical means to protect the mission’s inhabitants.

## Artefacts from mission houses

Artefacts recovered from the two mission houses at Dillon’s Bay that were tested in 2012 have provided some interesting material for interpreting these sites (Table 2). It should be noted that the small assemblage of artefacts recovered from test excavations were identified in the field, leaving a more in-depth analysis for future research. That said, these materials still provide some fascinating insights into mission life. The assemblage from the Gordon house contained ample evidence of building material, including lime mortar, which was almost certainly locally produced, window glass, nails and brick. These materials were also abundant at the Robertson house, with the exception of brick, which suggests that particular material was anomalous, perhaps obtained by the Gordons from a ship’s ballast. There is no indication that bricks were locally produced. While lime mortar was likely produced by burning local shells, there is no evidence of brick kilns on any mission sites in the New Hebrides. Architectural artefacts reflect the missionaries’ ideas about “proper”, civilised

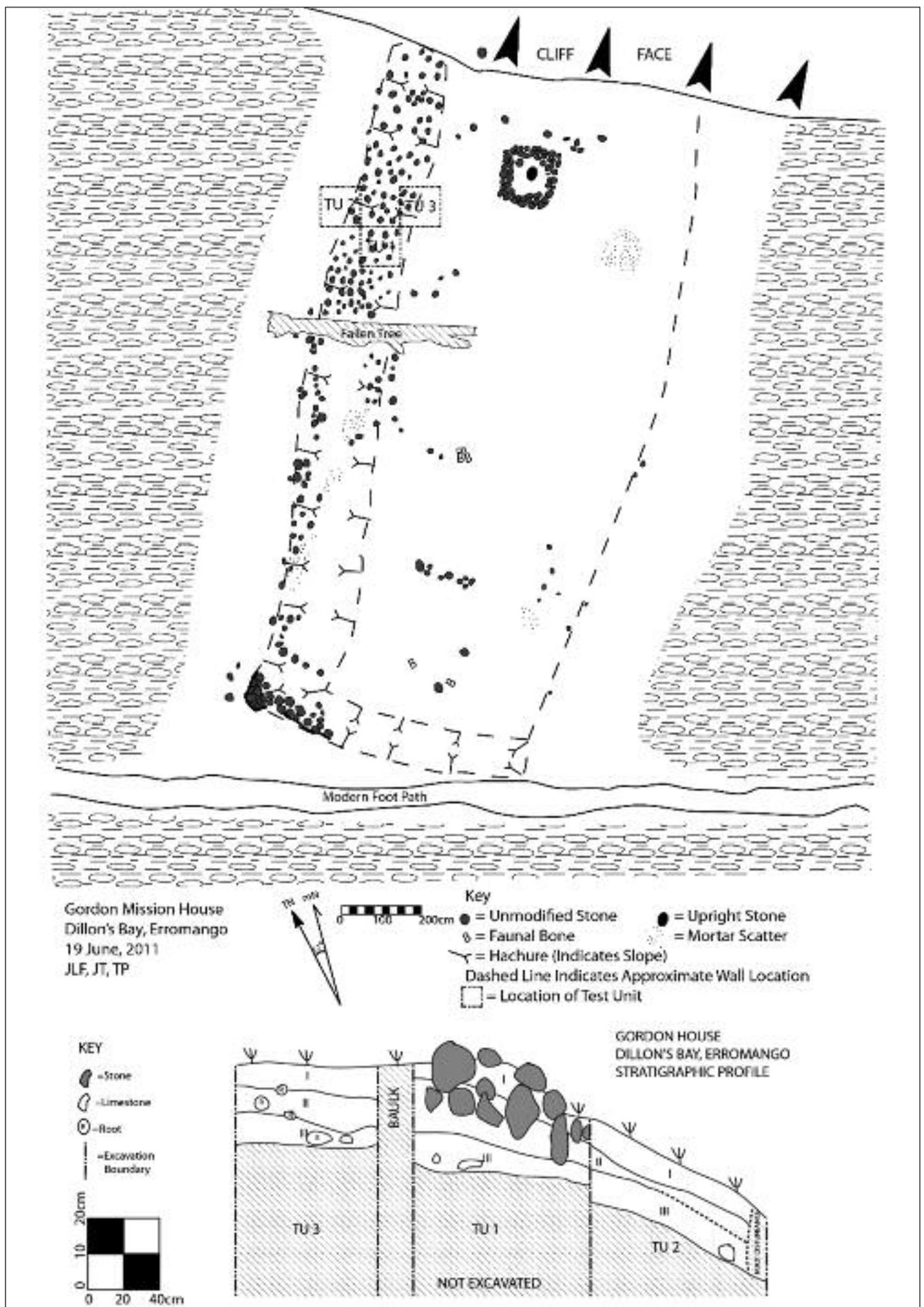
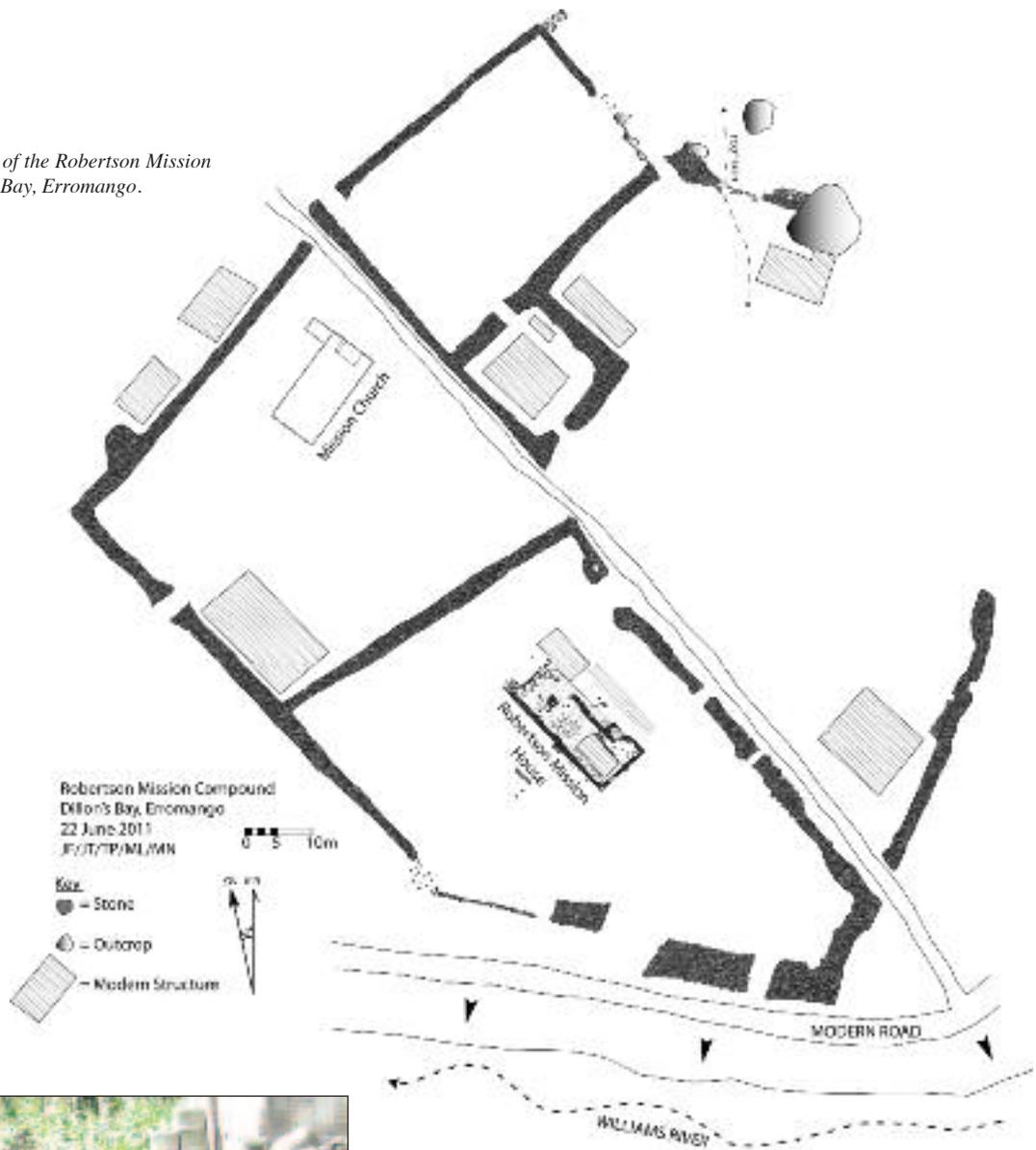


Figure 2: Plan map and stratigraphic profile from test excavations at the George Gordon house, Dillon's Bay, Erromango.

Figure 3: Plan map of the Robertson Mission compound, Dillon's Bay, Erromango.



Below:  
Figure 4: Exposed foundation footing from the Robertson house, Dillon's Bay, Erromango.

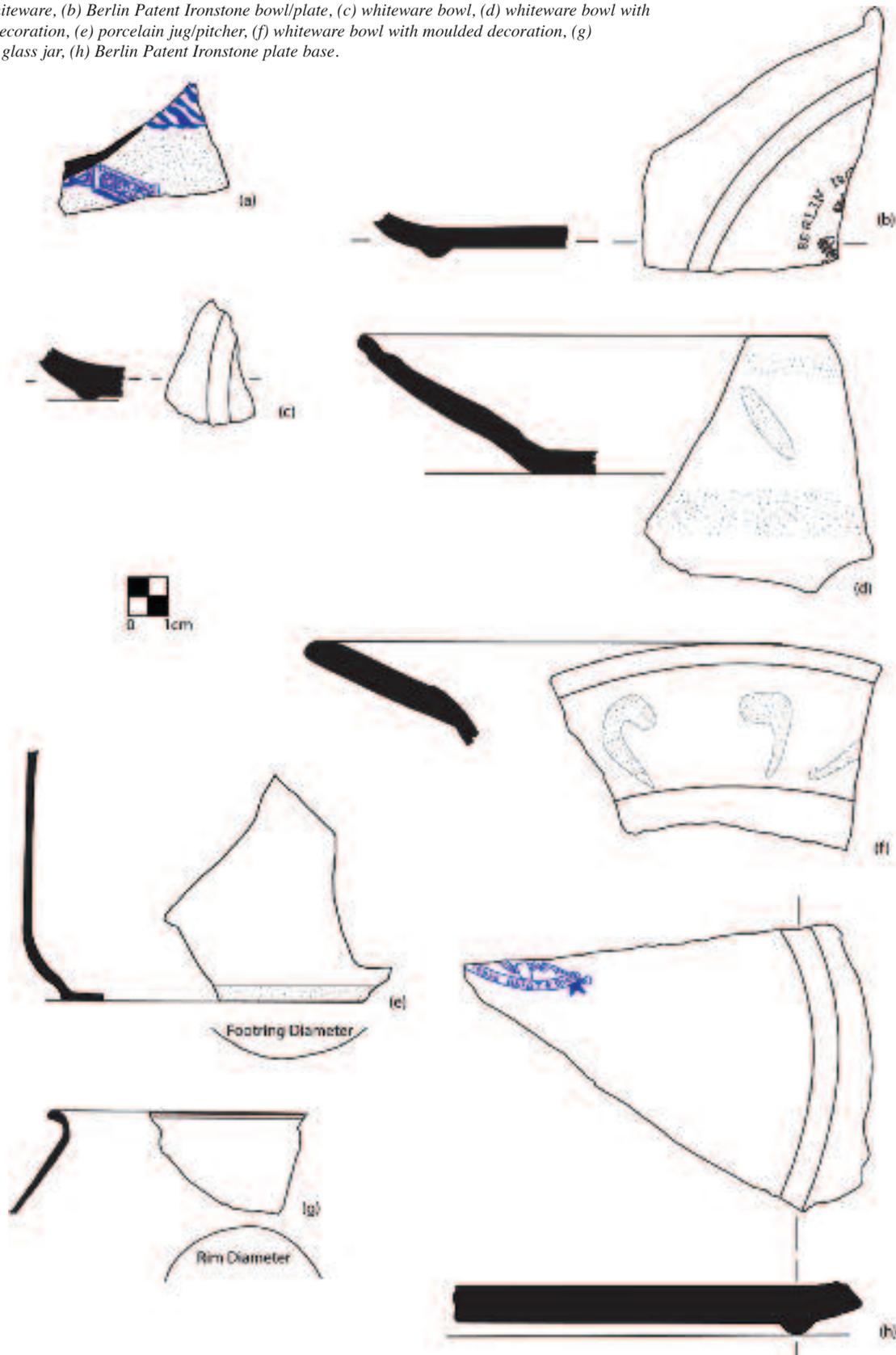


Table 2: Artefact counts from 2012 test excavations at Dillon's Bay mission houses, Erromango.

	Gordon House TU 1	Gordon House TU 2	Gordon House TU 3	Robertson House TU 1	Total result
Adornment				10	10
Brick	41	9	49	6	105
Ceramic			1	11	12
Charcoal	36	39	15	281	371
Coin				2	2
Faunal	3	3	7	1032	1045
Glass		1	22	159	182
Metal		20	15	327	362
Mineral				1	1
Mortar	5	7	5	179	196
Stone	1	3	1	23	28
Wood				1	1
<b>Total result</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>2032</b>	<b>2315</b>

building materials, as housing material was an important marker of social standing in the South Pacific (Mills 2009). Simultaneously, the remoteness of these outposts meant that British house forms were not simply exported wholesale to the antipodes, as archival evidence shows that many of the New Hebrides mission houses had roofs of native thatch (e.g.

Figure 5: Artefacts from James Gordon's Mission House, Port Narvin, Erromango. (a) Blue transfer-printed whiteware, (b) Berlin Patent Ironstone bowl/plate, (c) whiteware bowl, (d) whiteware bowl with moulded decoration, (e) porcelain jug/pitcher, (f) whiteware bowl with moulded decoration, (g) colourless glass jar, (h) Berlin Patent Ironstone plate base.



Robertson 1902:325), among other adaptations to the local climate.

Other artefacts related to daily life likewise reflected the missionaries' sense of domestic propriety. At the house of James Gordon, resident missionary at Potnuma, just north of Port Narvin on eastern Erromango (and brother of George Gordon), surface middens contained a variety of white refined earthenwares (Figure 5), including two sherds of Berlin

Ironstone produced by Liddle Elliot and Sons in Staffordshire between 1862 and 1871 (Museum of Victoria). These kinds of white dishes would have been an important part of Victorian-era dining rituals throughout the British Empire. In addition, a glass ink jar fragment was present on this site, a reminder of the importance of literacy to the mission endeavour. Ceramics were fairly rare at the George Gordon and Robertson houses (only 12 total sherds were recovered in an assemblage of over

2000 artefacts), but artefacts related to personal adornment, such as buttons, sewing pins, and paste jewels, were recovered at the Robertson House, reflecting the materialisation of what missionaries would have considered civilised forms of dress, another external marker relating to conversion. One British “VICTORIA D:G:” penny and a French five centime dating to 1872 were also found in the Robertson House assemblage, which mark the incursion of the cash economy into Erromangan daily life.

Yet domestic assemblages were not composed entirely of European artefacts. At the George Gordon house, a stone adze flake and a basalt core, coral abraders, and a sea urchin spine sewing needle used in the manufacture of grass skirts were recovered. Indigenous artefact types may hint at the possibility of indigenous craft production on site, they may indicate the collection of “curiosities” by the missionaries (Smith 2010), or they may indicate another pattern that future analyses will reveal. The Robertson house contained sea urchin spines, as well as fragments of a coconut shell armband typical of Erromango, suggesting again that there was some continuity in indigenous dress and craft production during the mission period. While these materials provide some interesting hints about mission life, the analysis was by necessity limited to field identifications before the artefacts were deposited with the Vanuatu National Museum, and additional work will be carried out on these assemblages and other recovered materials in the future.

### Churches

Of course, the mission was nothing without a church in which to conduct services; the focal point of the sacred landscape. Church architecture in the New Hebrides was variable, depending upon the resources available and the skills of the missionary. Generally, the churches were fairly simple buildings, and several missionaries note early thatched structures later to be replaced with timber or masonry structures with stone or lime mortar foundations (e.g. Robertson 1902:251). Archaeologically, the remains of very early churches, modest structures of organic materials, are unlikely to be encountered. The stone foundations of the early churches at Potnuma, Erromango and Kwamera, Tanna are still fairly intact, however. At Potnuma, James Gordon’s church is notable for having massive slabs of lime mortar construction on the eastern end, which is where the altar was placed. Notches in these mortar slabs suggest large upright posts that may have supported a fairly large roof. The Watts’ church at Kwamera (Figure 6) was unique among those studied in having the altar and entrance built along the short axis of the structure, which was the opposite of the rest of the churches documented. It is unclear whether this represents an idiosyncratic decision, or an intentionally different creation of symbolic space. These churches would have been a new kind of construction in the islands, a new and unusual sacred space for the white man’s God to match the unusual domestic space of His agents.

Extant standing churches in Vanuatu tend to be more recent, from the very end of the nineteenth century or the early twentieth century. These more recent churches appear to have used pre-sawn timbers, probably from New Zealand or Australia. The church at Lenakel, Tanna, built in 1912 (Figure 7), was a pre-fabricated structure shipped from the Sydney firm Saxton-Binns (later Saxton Island Homes), a company that produced mail order colonial architecture (Rodman 2001:132). Archaeological investigation of this structure indicated several phases of church construction on this site, reflected by the presence of earlier lime mortar foundations under the standing structure. In addition, the apparent re-use of several structural beams may be evidence of a cyclone that

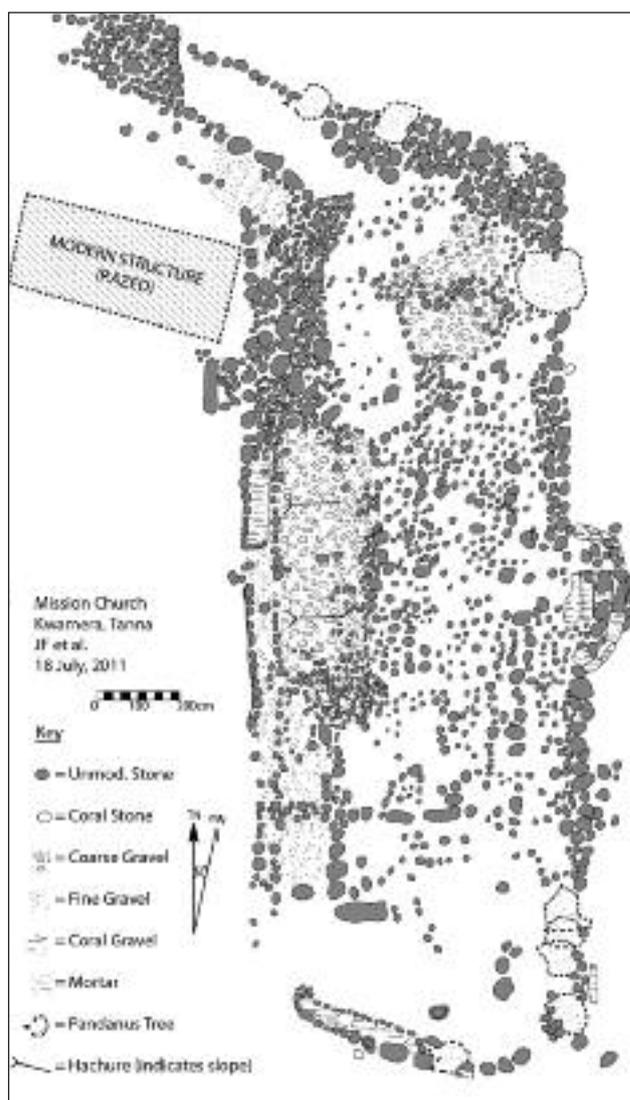


Figure 6: Plan of the Watt Mission Church, Kwamera, Tanna.

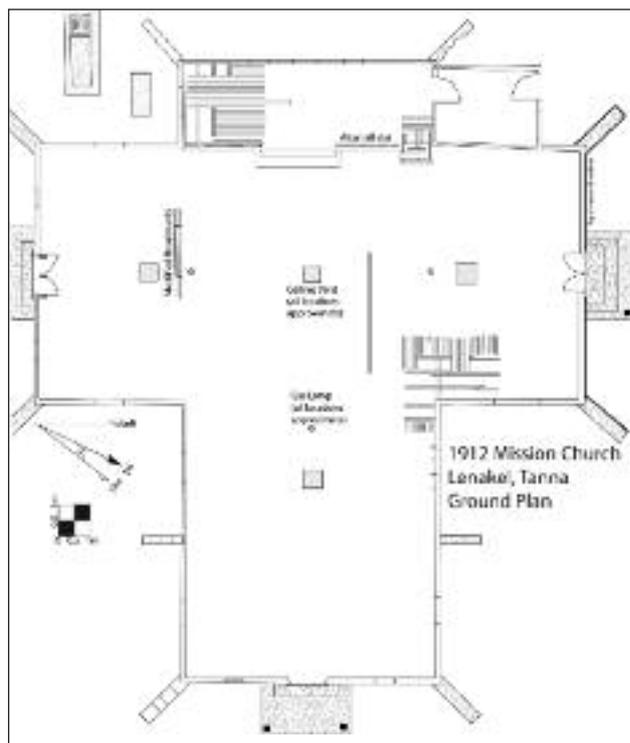


Figure 7: Ground plan of the Lenakel Church, Tanna.

apparently blew the 1912 Lenakel church down during early construction. These events were recorded in church periodicals, notably the *Quarterly Jottings of the New Hebrides*. A close look at building materials, furniture, and hardware showed that this church, from an Australian company, also integrated objects from Great Britain, including “LYSAGHT ORB” brand roofing metal, and door locks from “H&T VAUGHAN MANUFACTURERS”. Prefabricated churches using resources sourced from throughout the British Empire, as opposed to local materials, reflect the growing affluence and success of the New Hebrides mission by the early twentieth century, while their subsequent decay reflects a loss of interest in mission activity after World War I. Local people have begun to work towards reviving these buildings, a reflection of a renewed interest in mission history as Vanuatu seeks to define itself in the twenty-first century post-colonial context.

On a smaller scale, church bells are emblematic of the changes in daily life underpinning larger transformations in the social order. The bell provided, ‘a rhythm to the hours of prayer, heralding when to eat, go to bed, and get up in the morning’ (Bonnemaison 1994: 56). Church bells materialised the new temporal regime the missionaries imposed upon their converts. These artefacts were a recurrent feature of the mission stations on Tanna and Erromango, both integrated into church architecture and standing alone. The bells are often inscribed with places, names, and dates. For example, at Dillon’s Bay, the bell bears the inscription “C&G MEARS FOUNDERS LONDON//GEORGE N. GORDON//POLYNESIA 1856”, and at Port Resolution, “[ST.] PAUL’s, GLASGOW. 1890.//JOHN C. WILSON & C FOUNDERS. GL[ASGOW]”. These objects connected remote mission stations to their ideological homeland in Europe, and sometimes marked the date at which Christianity was established at a given place, though church bells may also have been later additions to mission churches.

### Indigenous landscapes

One of the biggest problems encountered in this research so far has been the ephemeral nature of evidence for indigenous habitation, which is rarely conspicuous in or around the mission landscape. For example, some of the most significant places on Tanna are the *nakamal*, places where local people, especially men, gather to drink *kava* (a drink made from the chewed root of the *Piper methysticum* plant), perform rituals, and dance. These are large, cathedral-like cleared spaces surrounded by large banyan trees (*Ficus* spp., known as *nabanga* in Bislama). The locations of *nakamal* change periodically, so while the location of old *nakamal* are usually known to local people, they are not always particularly visible archaeologically. Likewise, indigenous houses of thatch, bamboo, and wood quickly decompose in the humid tropics, and again the bush often grows back quickly, or old house plots are converted to gardens. This means the surface visibility of indigenous settlements tends to be relatively low. Future fieldwork will aim to locate past indigenous habitation sites using a combination of oral histories and subsurface survey techniques. These sites will be crucial to understanding the ways that local people integrated foreign materials into their everyday lives.

Mission stations were often established near but outside of major indigenous settlements. This meant that natives had to come to the missions, rather than the other way around, which

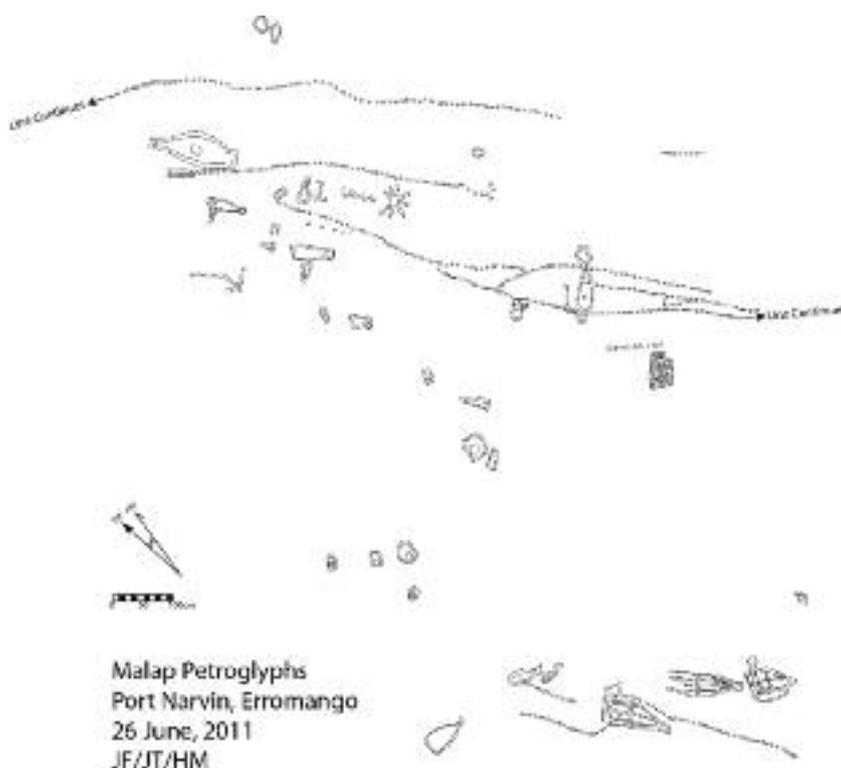


Figure 8: Contact-era petroglyphs near Port Narvin, eastern Erromango.

seems like an unusual pattern given that the goal was to win converts, though further research may shed light on how this dynamic worked. One promising site for understanding the native adoption of Christianity is a complex of stone walls at Kwaraka in the South of Tanna, which was apparently a large ritual site built at least partly during the contact period. This site has yet to be fully documented, and future field seasons will make Kwaraka a priority for mapping and test excavation. It was suggested by local informants that the Gospel first reached Tanna not through the activity of missionaries, but through a local chief from Kwaraka, though there are varying interpretations of this story among local people.

Other potentially useful information about the indigenous perception of missions and other colonial contacts was found on two petroglyph sites near Port Narvin, on the west coast of Erromango. Petroglyphs visually represent powerful meanings, as well as more mundane stories, and oral histories from Erromango often record useful details for interpreting rock art (Wilson 1999). One petroglyph field apparently uses long lines of cupules to record the exploits of SouSou, an early convert to the church who was often involved in physical combat defending his faith. A second petroglyph field at Malap (Figure 8) has many of the classic motifs of culture contact rock art, such as ships, metal tools, and bottles, alongside more traditional motifs such as anthropomorphic figures, fish, cupules, and concentric circles said to be female symbols. These symbols suggest the appropriation of foreign objects into indigenous representational schemes, as people came to terms with the newcomers and their strange customs and materials, incorporating them into the local worldview.

### FIRST IMPRESSIONS, PROBLEMS AND FUTURE PROSPECTS FOR VANUATU HISTORICAL ARCHAEOLOGY

Archaeological research on mission sites in Vanuatu has suggested a few revealing patterns relevant to historical archaeology in the islands. The first is the architectural

separation of mission space, the construction of buildings that clearly demarcate the spaces of civilisation off from those of the uncivilised natives (in the missionaries' terms). Within these buildings, the objects that made Victorian domesticity and Christian piety possible, the practices of dress, meal times, and prayer separated the missionaries and their converts from those without. And yet, this was by necessity an artificial divide, as there was no mission community without heathens to be converted. The mission station was a space of contact precisely because the missionaries needed the unconverted as the object of their work. In addition, the remoteness of the New Hebrides mission meant the missionaries were always going to be dependent to some extent on local people for food and labour. This meant that the things that marked the missionary as different had to be, to some extent (though never completely) accessible to native people. Thus mission landscapes were by necessity permeable rather than pure, because of the need to trade and win converts (see Keane 2007 on 'the work of purification' and colonial mission contexts). These physical boundaries were symbolically linked to problematic ideological structures.

Categories like white/native, civilised/uncivilised, Christian/Heathen had to be somewhat flexible, and the boundaries between these categories tended towards instability (Flexner 2013a, Keane 2007). The results of mission work were unpredictable, not following the simple path from savagery to civilisation envisioned in the minds of the missionaries, who saw this as a matter of directed progress from an inferior to a superior state. But the instability and space for creativity is what makes these kinds of colonial endeavours so interesting, as the mission project's goals and methods might bear on the results in ways that were fully unexpected. Archaeologically, the examination of this process can shed light on just what the potentially ambiguous outcomes were for the missions to the New Hebrides.

Initial research focused on the spaces created by the missionaries themselves. Future work must focus on the lives of the native Tannese and Erromangan populations among which they settled. Patterns of continuity and change in settlement patterns, architecture, and material culture should be useful for understanding the external and internal transformations the mission was meant to inculcate in people. This will be a challenging pursuit, however, as discussed above. One possible solution to this problem is to use local oral histories to find sites that are no longer inhabited, but which may be contemporaneous with historical mission sites, alongside traditional archaeological survey techniques. Further research on the archival sources may also provide useful information, as Spriggs (1985, 2007) found for the island of Aneityum.

One might ask how to interpret the outcomes of the early missionary work in the New Hebrides, given the importance of both the Presbyterian Church and native *kastom* in Vanuatu today. The point of all this is not to judge success or failure, but to point out the complicated nature of the outcomes of the mission project in the New Hebrides. Local people did not simply passively adopt the religious and cultural beliefs and practices of the missionaries wholesale, nor did they remain statically clinging to some doomed form of cultural conservatism. As suggested above, missionaries played an active role in the transformation of lives in the islands, seeking to civilise people's external practices while also converting the internal world of the soul. At the same time, indigenous people would have adapted to the presence of these newcomers and the objects they brought with them using a variety of strategies, ranging from conversion, to avoidance, to outright hostility. Missionaries likewise had many attitudes towards indigenous Melanesians and their material culture, from contempt to fascination and respect, and everything in between

(Smith 2010). The perhaps unexpected outcomes of missionisation reflect the fact that there was no simple dichotomy between unified groups of natives and missionaries. Rather, complex social networks emerged out of these fields of interaction that were structured by a combination of indigenous and foreign phenomena.

Finally, it must be noted once more that the missionaries were not the only agents of empire in the New Hebrides in the 19th century. Mission archaeology here, as elsewhere in Oceania (e.g. Lydon 2009; Lydon and Ash 2010; Middleton 2008) is only one part of a historical archaeology that must include all of the phenomena following from European contact. Thus future archaeological work in Vanuatu focusing on the post-contact era should include: studies of environmental impacts such as those caused by the sandalwood trade; demographic change because of introduced diseases (e.g. Spriggs 2007) as well as the labour trade; economic impacts caused by the integration of capitalist goods and possibly practices into local exchange systems; as well as the social and religious transformations brought about in response to missionisation. Beyond the New Hebrides, archaeological research addressing the conditions of everyday life for native people taken to places like Fiji and Queensland to work on sugar plantations would be remarkably illuminating for understanding colonial transformations in Australasia (Hayes 2002). In other words, mission archaeology in Vanuatu should only be seen as a first step in developing a historical archaeology for the archipelago that examines the lives of all people entangled in the colonial web that enveloped the islands over the course of the 19th century.

Missions were an integral part of the colonial process, and archaeologists should continue to examine the material conditions of everyday life for missionaries and their converts (e.g. Lightfoot 2005; Lydon 2009; Middleton 2008; Walthall and Benchley 1987). The material culture of mission stations played an active role in the complex interactions alluded to above. We cannot understand the experience of Christianity without understanding the context of everyday life within which it took place (e.g. Chenoweth 2009). While this research represents only the beginnings of a hopefully much larger project exploring the many facets of historical archaeology in Vanuatu, it has already revealed some useful patterns enhancing our understanding of the interaction between Presbyterian missionaries and native Tannese and Erromangans. This should be seen as a first step towards developing a deeper understanding of colonial processes that continue to have very real impacts on the lives of people in Vanuatu and throughout the world.

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