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Trip Report

PMB Fieldwork in Honiara, Solomon Islands

28 June – 13 July 2015

Summary:

The main purpose of this trip was to copy the National News Bulletins of the Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation (SIBC) and copy Fr. Brun's papers relating to his life and work on Makira.

Over 30,000 digital images were taken and processed creating the following PMB titles:

PMB 1414 Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation, National news bulletins, 1980-1998. PDF. Available for reference.

PMB 1415 Bruns, Gerard Fr., Papers relating to the Kahua language and Makira in the Solomon Islands, 1953-2015. PDF. Available for reference.

During my stay, Tropical Cyclone Raquel came across the north-west area of the Solomon Islands. For all but one of the days I was in Honiara it rained and rained and rained! Big fat drops and non-stop downpours made moving around difficult. For most of my fieldwork I left the digitisation equipment in a secure room at the National Archives of the Solomon Islands. On returning to Canberra, my laptop has had some serious problems that may have been caused by the wet and humid environment. Luckily it was still under warranty and has been re-built and is now working well again.

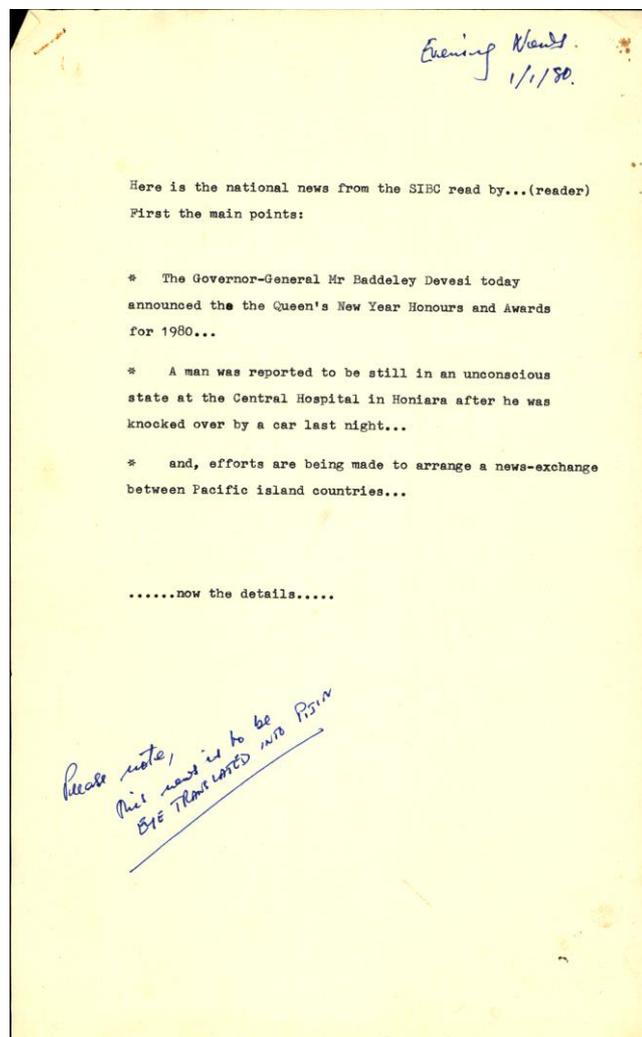


The rain was unrelenting during my two week stay in Honiara in June.

Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation

I arrived in Honiara on Monday 29 June and was met at the airport by Salei Rukasi and Thelma Nieng from the Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation (SIBC). We went straight to the SIBC Headquarters and surveyed the boxes of SIBC National News Bulletins that were to be copied. We also visited the National Archives of the Solomon Islands (NASI) and viewed the SIBC News Bulletins that are held in the NASI repository.

*"Here is the national news from the Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation read by..."
(PMB MS 1414)*



The first page of the SIBC National News Bulletin from 1 January 1980
(PMB MS 1414_1980_01)

Background

Carmel McInerney from the National Library of Australia undertook a volunteer placement with SIBC for three weeks in 2012. During this placement she worked on the National News Bulletin collection with SIBC staff to remove rusted staples. Carmel advised the Bureau that the News Bulletins had good potential for a sheet feed scanner with minimal preparation

required (mainly manual separation of the sheets). She also reported that the reports had good potential for Optical Character Recognition (OCR) because of the mainly clear, well spaced type.

Pambu's work with SIBC

I followed up on Carmel's suggestion and made contact with SIBC in early 2015. I was invited to work with SIBC and arrived to the Solomon Islands on Monday 29 June 2015. I was met by Salei Rukasi and Thelma Nieng, from the SIBC at the airport. I surveyed the collections held at SIBC and at the Solomon Islands National Archives. Together, we decided to begin scanning the earliest collections 1980-1990, which were transferred to NASI in 1993 where they have been conserved and are housed in 17 large archive boxes in NASI's Repository B.

The Bulletins are the English scripts read by the 6pm (and sometimes 9pm) radio newsreaders. They generally are in two parts per bulletin with an average of 5 stories per part (total approx 12-14 pages per day). Each of the two parts begins with a news headlines page. The Bulletins contain local news, including reports on events, quotes from government officials, statements from political parties etc. Subjects include elections, court matters, education, development plans, health issues, sport, unions, weather events, fishing, cross border activities. They don't contain international news except for nearby Pacific countries.

The Bulletins are single sided, typed, mainly letter and A4 sheets, arranged in chronological order in bundles per month, then daily within. Each of the daily sheets is usually sequentially numbered in pen in top right corner. The bundles were arranged in reverse date order, so before any scanning could take place the bundles were re-arranged so that the earliest date of each month was scanned first. I am most grateful for Thelma Nieng and Lincoln Kuse, from SIBC Library, in assisting me with this work.

Before travelling to Honiara I enquired about the possibility of using a sheet feeder scanner to digitise the news bulletins. Salei Rukasi visited NASI and negotiated for us to work at NASI to digitise the SI National News Bulletins (1980-1990). NASI agreed and allowed us to use their Avison AV8350 document scanner which scanned the pages as .TIFF files. I also arranged for a smaller sheet feeder scanner to be sent to SIBC for future scanning.

Each of the daily broadcasts begins with a one page summary of the day's news items (news headlines) and from 1992 there are also mid broadcast summaries ('...and next in this bulletin'). Thelma Nieng, Lincoln Kuse the audio librarian at SIBC, and I developed a workflow that included re-ordering the National News Bulletins, digitizing the Bulletins using the Avison sheet feeder scanner and then post-processing the documents into PDF and OCR-ing the Bulletins so that the text is searchable. We worked very hard for 10 days straight copying the news bulletins.

The Digitisation Workflow



Step 1. Lincoln Kuse, SIBC Audio Librarian, re-ordering and checking the SIBC News Bulletins prior to digitising



Step 2. Thelma Nieng, SIBC Librarian, using the Avison scanner to digitize the SIBC National News Bulletins



Step 3. Kylie working on two Pambu laptops to index, post-process, PDF and OCR the digitized SIBC News Bulletins

There are still more SIBC National News Bulletins that the Bureau needs to copy in order to finish this job. The following National News Bulletins are held at NASI and are still to be copied: 1984 (May-Aug), 1986, 1987, 1988. The following National News Bulletins are held at SIBC and are still to be copied: 1991-1998. I estimate that undertaking this work will take approximately twelve days.

Pambu's work with Fr. Bruns

On Saturday 4 July Annie Kwai, a Solomon Islander who graduated with a MA from the Australian National University in 2014, and I travelled to Tenagai to see Fr. Bruns.

A number of academics who have studied anthropology and linguistics on Makira in the east of the Solomon Islands had previously informed the Bureau that Fr. Bruns had a collection of vocabularies and dictionaries he had prepared on the Kahua language of Makira as well as an autobiography that he recently completed.

Fr. Gerard Bruns was born on the 17 August 1932. He arrived in the Solomon Islands in September 1960 and worked as a Marist priest on Makira, Solomon Islands. Fr. Bruns took a great interest in the people of Makira and has documented much about the Kahua language and the culture of east Makira in the Solomon Islands. In 2008 he moved to the Marist Brothers at Tenaru Secondary School outside of Honiara. Fr. Bruns now lives at Tanagai Parish Centre close to the sea shore which has been his home ever since.

The Fr. Gerard Bruns collection (PMB 1415) includes documents that Fr. Brun has written on his personal typewriter throughout his 50+ years of living in the Solomon Islands. The documents include grammars and vocabulary/dictionaries of the Kahua language. The collection also includes Fr John Espagne's thesis on Makira religion, entitled 'Witless Trust', written in 1953. Fr. Brun edited "Witless Trust" to make the text more readable and typed the manuscript himself, entitled 'Origins of Religion in Makira. Anthropological Investigations. Father Iron John Investigations 1918-2001'.

Also included in the collection is Fr. Brun's autobiography 'Antipode' (2015), his manuscript 'Augunua, Among the Kahua' (2011), which summarizes Espagne's thesis and also the ideas of Lorenzo Marau, a Makiran who had described origin stories and beliefs, developing syncretic approach to Catholicism and traditional beliefs. 'Auguna, among the Kahua' includes kastom stories as well as insights into Makiran society. The collection also includes Fr. Brun's manuscript on "The evangelisation of Makira, 1845-1847; 1908-1960". Fr. Brun worked with Solomon Islanders and translated the Bible into the Kahua language.

Annie assisted me to digitise Fr. Bruns collection using the Bureau's overhead digital SLR camera. I then OCR-ed the typed documents items in Fr. Brun's collection. The collection includes 2089 pages scanned to digital format.

After copying Fr. Brun's collection we bought a new plastic tub at a local Chinese store and returned it to him in the tub. Fr. Bruns is a humble, but feisty man. He typed out every single page of his archive and story on his old typewriter, refusing to try to understand

computers! In any case, I prepared an index with linked PDF files of the items that we copied and Annie returned the digital copy of his collection to him on a USB stick.



Fr. Gerard Bruns, Annie Kwai and Kylie Moloney outside Fr. Brun's home in Tenagai, Guadalcanal

Other PMB work in Honiara

I presented a talk to staff of the National Archives of the Solomon Islands about the Bureau's digitisation equipment and use of ICA-AtoM software. The staff were very keen to learn about the Bureau's digitisation workflows and asked many technical questions about digitising and using the open-source software ICA-AtoM.

I had hoped to meet with Ofani Eremae, the editor of the Solomon Star newspaper, to discuss the possibility of the Bureau working with staff at the Solomon Star newspaper to digitise historical issues of the newspaper. Unfortunately Ofani had to go on leave and I was unable to meet with him. There are several collections of the Solomon Star newspaper in Honiara and elsewhere throughout the world. The Solomon Star is keen to further this discussion in collaboration with NASI staff. Staff at the Solomon Star newspaper want the title to be open access and they wish to undertake the digitisation themselves. The Bureau could assist with this digitisation project by assisting with the acquisition of digitisation equipment and training staff in how to use it in Honiara. The Bureau would also like a copy of the digitised title for the PMB collection. Further discussions regarding this project will take place using email correspondence.

On the final day of work the staff at SIBC organised an afternoon function to thank me and celebrate our achievement of digitising over 30,000 pages of the Solomon Islands National News Bulletins.



On my final morning in Honiara, the rain clouds cleared to reveal this beautiful sunrise

Thank you

I would like to thank the following people for their support and assistance during my stay.

Salei Rukasi, Thelma Nieng and Lincoln Kuse from the Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation.

Bernard Rizu, Louisa Laekeni, Kabini Fa'ari, Margaret Infiri and Julian Chonigolo from the National Archives of the Solomom Islands.

Staff at Chester Rest House in Honiara.

Kylie Moloney
Executive Officer
Pacific Manuscripts Bureau
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