

Forgotten and remembered

The martyrdom of Charles Christopher Godden

John Harris

On 16 October 1906, on a lonely jungle track high on the jungle-clad slopes of Mount Manaro, the brooding volcano that is the island of Ambae in Vanuatu, Australian missionary Charles Christopher Godden met his violent death. This is the story of what happened to him, and of how it has been both forgotten and remembered.¹

Charles Godden's early life

Orphaned when only a child, Charles Godden supported himself as a youth by labouring on his elder brother's farm near Violet Town in Central Victoria.² At the urging of the Revd William Hancock, the faithful Church of England rector of St John's Euroa, Charles reluctantly agreed to attend confirmation classes at Moglonemby, 'provided he didn't have to present

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himself for confirmation'. But in those classes he became a Christian and, with the sincere impetuosity which defined his character, he changed his mind and asked to be confirmed with the others by Bishop Field Flowers Goe of Melbourne. Shortly afterwards he told William Hancock that he felt called to the ministry. Hancock had come to know young Charlie Godden well and encouraged his vocation. Impressed by his genuineness and intelligence, and despite his youth and very limited education, various country clergy willingly helped him learn Greek and Latin in return for his services as a Lay Reader. At 19, after only two years, Godden mastered both languages plus the other required subjects and passed the entrance examination to attend Perry Hall, Nathaniel Jones's little theological college in Bendigo.

Two years later, in 1897, Nathaniel Jones was appointed Principal of Moore Theological College, Sydney. He brought his two best students with him. One was Charles Christopher Godden. On completing his studies, Godden was ordained by the Archbishop of Sydney in 1899 and appointed curate at St Michael's, Surry Hills. There he met Eva Dearn, the woman he would later marry. Godden was priested in 1900.

On a Sunday evening a few months later, the Bishop of Melanesia, Cecil Wilson, was the missionary preacher at Surry Hills church. Wilson spoke passionately of the Pacific islanders 'crying out for someone to teach them the gospel'. Godden, with his typical enthusiasm and impulsiveness, offered for missionary service immediately afterwards. He wrote prophetically to his mentor in Euroa, William Hancock: 'There have already been six martyrs ... I shall therefore have the opportunity of glorifying God by my devotedness to the lost sheep whom the Good Shepherd is seeking'. Godden left Sydney a few weeks later for the Melanesian Mission's headquarters on Norfolk Island.³

After his missionary training on Norfolk Island, Godden was appointed to the island of Ambae, then part of the New Hebrides, now the independent nation of Vanuatu.⁴ He reached the isolated little Lolowai mission on the sea coast in April 1901.

The blackbirding era

Charles Godden arrived in the New Hebrides during the final years of the infamous 'blackbirding' era, the slave-like labour trade in which Pacific Islanders were 'recruited', often by force or bribery, to become labourers on sugar cane plantations in North Queensland and on islands such as Fiji.⁵

While there were a few plantations where Pacific Island labourers were treated decently, with some even choosing to try to make a new life in Australia, on many other plantations they were treated as slaves and suffered violent abuse. Over a period of 40 years, from 1863 to the early twentieth century, Pacific Island men were taken from their home islands to work in these Queensland canefields. Most were taken from the New Hebrides, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and New Caledonia. In Queensland they were generally called 'Kanakas', a term derived from a Pacific word for 'man'.

Blackbirding ships sailed regularly between Queensland and the islands. The ways in which the men were taken varied greatly. Some went willingly, especially when the recruiters dealt with local chiefs and paid them. Some were tricked with false claims of future wealth, or lured onto the ships with food and gifts, only to find themselves taken captive on board and the ship sailing away with them. Many, however, were taken by violent means. The recruiters carried guns and large numbers of men were simply kidnapped. Over the 40 years of Pacific labour recruiting, more than 60,000 islanders were taken to Queensland. On some islands this amounted to half the male population. Conditions on some ships were terrible and men often died en route.

Whatever the voyage was like, when the Islanders arrived in Queensland, most of them encountered very bad working conditions on the canefields. Slavery was theoretically illegal in Queensland but the reality was different. The workers were officially designated 'indentured labourers', which meant that they 'signed' legal papers agreeing to the lengths of their contracts and to their working conditions. They were simply made to 'sign' with a thumb print. In reality, few if any could read or write and had no understanding of why they were forced to put their thumb print on a piece of paper. As indentured labourers they were bound to their employers. The law gave their employers wide powers over their lives. It was a criminal offence to run away. Escaped workers could be pursued and taken into custody by the police or shot if they resisted arrest or fled.

Working and living conditions varied with different employers but on the worst of the canefields the labouring life was no different from slavery with little shelter, inadequate food, no medical assistance and severe physical punishments for disobeying orders. As many as a quarter of all labourers died on the canefields. Many tried to run away. Some did manage to escape

the police and survived by reaching remote places such as the Torres Strait Islands and assimilating with the local people.

The canefield owners were supposed to return the workers to their islands after their 'contracts' expired. This rarely happened, however, until the later years of blackbirding, especially after 1901, when Queensland became a state of Australia. Under new Commonwealth laws all Pacific Island recruiting was banned after 1903 and Islanders were supposed to be returned to their islands by 1906. It is thought that, one way or another, about 10,000 labourers remained in Australia, including those who had married Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island women. Today called 'South Sea Islanders,' there could be as many as 200,000 Australians descended from the blackbirded indentured labourers.

It was by the hand of an angry returned labourer, abused and mistreated in Queensland, that Charles Christopher Godden was to meet his untimely death.

First years on Ambae

Ambae is simply a volcano, said to be one of the ten most dangerous on earth. It has been a long time—far too long—since a major eruption. Mount Manaro's rugged jungle-covered slopes rise steeply from the seabed. Charles Godden's little mission was on Lolowai harbour, a deep water anchorage formed in the crater of an underwater volcano.

Only 24 years old, Godden was the sole Christian missionary on Ambae and one of only two white men living there. He was keen and hard-working, visiting the coastal people by boat and venturing inland to the jungle villages high on the slopes of the mountain. People liked him and called him *Sale* (Sah-le) which is how they pronounced Charlie. He gained a reputation for a natural gift of healing, for his enthusiasm for teaching the Bible and for his efforts to begin schooling for children. Godden was also a natural linguist, no doubt the reason for his easy acquisition of Latin and Greek in his youth. He rapidly learned the local Lombaha language (now known as Havai). The people living near the mission understood a little English but the people from the more remote villages did not, so initially Godden had to teach and preach with one of his local assistants interpreting as best he could. As soon as Godden was able he started to preach in the Havai language, to the delight of the local people, hesitatingly at first but then gaining confidence.

Contact with the world beyond Ambae was spasmodic so, in 1903, Godden took advantage of a convenient ship to take two months leave in Sydney. There Charles Godden became engaged to Eva Dearin whom he had met at St Michaels Surry Hills parish. Eager to be involved with Godden's work, Eva immediately took up further study and gained a theological qualification.

Returning alone to Ambae, Godden continued his dedicated hard work, preaching, treating injuries and diseases as best he could, encouraging local church-building and devoting himself to the teaching of new converts. As his Havai language skills improved, Godden started to translate some Bible verses into the local language, the beginning of his dream to see the Gospel in the heart language of the people.

Charles Godden came back to Sydney late in 1905 to marry Eva at St Michael's on 12th December. His best man was the Revd David Knox, his Moore College classmate, father of Canon Broughton Knox who would later become principal of the College. Godden was glad to have time to spend some of his leave drafting his proposed translation of Mark's Gospel into the local Havai language.

In April 1906, the Melanesian Mission vessel, *Southern Cross*, landed Charles and Eva back at his Lolowai mission amidst a crowd of islanders with welcoming flowers. Once more Godden resumed his demanding work schedule with vigour and enthusiasm, healing the sick, preaching the gospel, faithfully pastoring a scattered flock, checking his Bible translation with the local speakers and trying to supervise mission building operations.

In early October a Christian family high up on the jungle slopes in the little village of Duvivenu asked him to come urgently to baptise new converts, and especially to baptise a seriously ill child. This was the family of Moses Warilawau, who had become a Christian and built a little thatched church in his village, and who was doing his best to evangelise his own people despite his own very limited Christian experience. The Lolowai people warned Godden not to go. Alamemea ('Ala'), a 'blackbirded' labourer, who returned after being jailed and tortured in Queensland, had threatened to kill the first white man to tread on his land.

The Story of Alamemea as told by Chief Joseph Mala⁶

“Let me tell you about Alamemea or Ala as we generally call him. The description of him passed down to us is that he was a very strong man of very quick temper. He lived alone and people were frightened of him. Eventually he came to live by himself here in what is now our village of Lowainasasa while his relatives remained further up the mountain at a place called Ambeo. It is also said that he was a giant of a man. Even though he lived far up here on the mountain, he was a fisherman. He kept his canoe up here in his house, and when he wanted to go fishing, he carried the canoe down the track to the coast and back again, sometimes filling it with water.

“One day when Ala was down on the sea coast, the crew of a passing blackbirding ship saw him fishing. They sent out a boat and somehow they managed to trick him into boarding their ship or perhaps they threatened him with a gun, and so he was kidnapped. He was taken away with other islanders who were already on board. Ala said they were chained in the cargo hold for fear they might escape by jumping into the sea, as some had done in previous voyages. It was a long and sickening journey in the stifling hold. Several of the imprisoned men died because of the shortage of fresh air. When they arrived in Queensland, the captain of the ship sold Alamemea and the other men to the owners of a sugar cane plantation who made them into their slaves.

“Ala said they were given poor shelter and little food. They were immediately organised into different working gangs, each with its own white boss. Ala said that the bosses were harsh, cruel and totally unsympathetic. Every day they beat some of the workers violently, sometimes leaving them lying there unconscious. Ala had been watching this cruel way his fellow workers were treated and decided that if it happened to him, he wouldn't just take it lying down.

“So it happened one day that Ala didn't feel well enough to work because of severe back pain. He felt that he should be

allowed to be absent from work on that day, but Ala's boss did not accept complaints about illness. "It did not matter how ill you were; you had to go to work all the same", Ala said. So he did as he was told and went off with his other fellow workers to cultivate more land.

"Ala was sent to hoe in the fields. His back continued to give him trouble. He stood up from his work and tried to straighten his back. The boss saw him from a distance and quickly came up behind him, giving him a hard blow on the back of his head. Ala fell, still clutching the handle of the hoe. He said he was briefly knocked unconscious and saw different colours spinning in his head. After a few moments he came to and found himself lying on the ground with the boss standing over him. But he was still holding the hoe. Ala got up and with his full strength, he planted the hoe in the boss's neck. According to the traditional account which has been passed down to us, the man died instantly although some wonder if this is so and why, therefore, in Queensland, Ala was not ever made to suffer the death penalty for murder. Perhaps the boss recovered but was sent away somewhere else which is why he was never seen again.

"Ala was seized by the police and thrown into jail. He was never tried in a court of law but kept in jail. Ala served a lengthy prison term. During his time imprisoned in the jail, he was treated very cruelly and inhumanely. He was regularly placed in a pit filled with water up to his neck and left standing in it for many hours. He could only just manage to drink some water by straining his neck and head. Sometimes his own waste floated on the water he was forced to drink. The jailers tortured him like this very frequently.

"Ala became very bitter and angry at his treatment, humiliated and, as he put it, treated like an animal. Ala said, '*Tuturani, rau veieu nau gani na taiku simboku*', which means 'White men, you made me eat my own shit'. So Ala vowed that if he ever was released, and returned to his home island, he would kill any white man who set foot on his land.

“When Queensland became part of the new Australian Commonwealth, the recruiting of labour in the islands was made illegal and the Australian government set about returning many of the labourers to their home islands. Ala was released and taken back to Ambae, always a sullen and angry man.”

Martyrdom

Despite the warning not to place himself in personal danger, Charles Godden responded to the request.⁷ He considered it his sacred duty to tend the struggling little Christian families, to him a fragile and needy part of his scattered flock whom it was his duty to encourage. He left Lolowai on Monday the 15th of October, travelling first by boat down the coast to the village of Lovuivetu. The mission boat was crewed by the mission ‘boatboys’, in reality grown young Christian men, Godden’s missionary assistants, who helped him on his journeys and acted as interpreters. They included men who were to have important future roles, men whose names are still remembered today such as Walter Aru, Arthur Sawi and Stephen Mwera. Godden and his boat crew visited the nearby trading post of a German trader, Dick Hoffman, and then slept the night nearby at Lovuivetu village.

Next day, the fateful 16 October 1906, Godden and his crew set off from Lovuivetu at daybreak, hoping to get up the mountain to Duvivenue and back down again in one day. Their departure was progressively signalled up the mountain by the blowing of conch shells. They climbed the steep jungle tracks to the region known as Lombaha. There they passed first through Lowainasasa, where a village now stands. The present village did not exist then although Alamemea lived alone in the vicinity. They continued on and up to Duvivenue, the remote little village high up the mountain, arriving late in the morning.

The people were happily gathered there awaiting Godden’s arrival. He was warmly welcomed by Moses Warilawua and his family. Godden then conducted a church service, preaching in the Havai language about being a follower of Jesus. He baptised the dying infant, other children and young people, and consecrated the new little thatched church. After the service, everyone sat down to a traditional midday feast.

Then the time came to return down to the coast and take the boat back to Lolowai. When Godden and his party left Duvivenue village, a number of people decided to go part of the way with him. Unknown to them all,

Alamemea had come up furtively from Lowainasasa and hid himself near Duvivenue village, lying in wait for Godden to leave. Armed with a musket and an axe, he followed behind the crowd, unnoticed.

On the way down, Godden decided to divert down an even steeper path to visit some people who lived there and then to take a different path from there that would lead down to the coast. The Duvivenue people were still accompanying him with Ala hidden at the rear. They carefully made their way across very rugged slopes on narrow tracks that fell away steeply on either side. When they arrived at a place called *Wai noi Toangutu* (Toangutu's Water), there Godden felt a sharp pebble in one of his shoes. He stopped to remove it, falling slightly behind the others who went on a few paces ahead. Taking off his shoe, he tapped it on a rock to remove what was inside.

While Godden was trying to put on his shoe again, Ala, who had been following stealthily behind all the time, came up within musket range and shot him, hitting him in the right thigh. Charles Godden fell down, lying on the rocks in a pool of his blood, bleeding mainly from a severed artery in his thigh. He tried to staunch the blood but Ala leapt forward and raised his axe. Godden held up his hand to deflect the blow and pleaded, "*Netuku, gomese tai vagamateau, nai mate gina matai nomu bolo*", which means, "My son, don't hack me to death, let me die from the wound of your bullet". But Ala swung his axe, slicing through Godden's outstretched hand between his thumb and the forefingers and continuing on to hack him across the neck.

There was great confusion with people screaming and women running away, carrying their children for fear of more gunshots. But Ala quickly disappeared. The men who were some distance ahead rushed back to aid Charles. They tore up clothes to try to stem the flow of blood and bandaged his wounds as best they could. They cut branches to make a rough stretcher on which to carry his body. Placing him on it, they carried him down towards the coast, bleeding profusely but still alive.

That same day, the people of Duvivenue dug a hole to cover his blood, putting stones around it to signify that his life blood was spilled in that exact spot. Still today, this place is called *Dai Sale*, meaning The Blood of Charlie.

On the way down, although Godden was very weak from loss of blood, he asked his carriers to detour via Nasalagora, the village of Paramount Chief Roroi. When they arrived, Roroi saw the fatal wounds. Grieved and angry, he said he would set out to find Ala and avenge the attack on Godden. But Godden found the strength to restrain him, saying, "*Hatie, nau himei hano*

lo tamwata, nai mate lo tamwata”, which means, “No, I come down here in peace, I will die in peace”.

Satisfied that he had prevented further bloodshed, Godden asked to be carried down to the boat. He whispered to the carriers to hurry so that he could see his wife before he died. So his crewmen, with the help of the people, carried him hastily down to Lovuivetu. Dick Hoffman, hearing of the tragedy, rushed across to the boat. They lifted Godden carefully in and pushed the boat out to sea, rowing him as fast as they could along the coast back to Lolowai. Sometimes he whispered but gradually his breathing weakened.

As the sun was setting, the boat rounded Vui Nago headland and entered Lolowai Bay. In sight of home Godden briefly rallied and uttered his now legendary final words: “Let there be no fighting because of me. Let there be peace”. Charles Godden died just before the boat reached the shore at Lolowai but in his dying moments he whispered his wife’s name, Eva. Thus Charles Christopher Godden died the death of a martyr.

Not really knowing what to do next, the men covered Godden’s lifeless body with a woven grass mat and stood by the boat. Sensing the tragedy, Eva rushed to the beach where she climbed into the boat and lay beside Charles’ body for a long time until Walter Aru lifted her gently out. Only then did she ask what had happened but Walter was unable to speak. Eventually, haltingly, Arthur Sawi explained. Dick Hoffman, almost a stranger, assisted her to walk home. They had been married only ten months. Godden had died not knowing she was pregnant with their child.

The people of Lolowai grieved with Eva and cared for as best they could. Mabel Sawi looked after Eva, trying to get her to eat. Walter Aru, head of the boat crew, would not leave her and slept every night at the foot of her bed.

Eva did not want Charles buried immediately, as was customary in these tropical islands, hoping to get a message out so that missionaries could come to the funeral from other islands but the weather turned bad for several days and they could wait no longer. Samuel Taritaga conducted a simple burial service. The people buried Godden there near the mission house. Eva wanted to bury him in a wooden coffin as would have been done at home in Australia, rather than wrapped in island mats, a local custom still unfamiliar to her. Having no such thing as a coffin or the ability to construct one, they buried him in her wardrobe.⁸

Eva Godden returned to Australia. They had been married only ten months and had spent six of them at Lolowai. Charles had not known she

was pregnant with their child. Eva settled in Sydney, never to return to Ambae, and died in 1964.⁹

Aftermath

The mission boat crew managed to intercept a passing ship and sent a report of Alamemea's crime to the British administration in the capital of the New Hebrides, Port Vila. The message was relayed to the British High Commission of the Crown Colony in Fiji. The New Hebrides was then a British/French Condominium and the French authorities cooperated, dispatching the warship *Vaucluse* with armed officers to arrest the murderer.

In the meantime, Ala's family decided to take action themselves. Two of Ala's brothers, Isaac and Vanu, and other strong men, managed to trick Ala into drinking *kava* with them, the local drink with a soporific effect. They prepared a coconut shell full of very strong *kava* and when he had drunk it and been affected by it, they were quickly able to seize him and bind his hands and feet. They carried him bound down the mountain to Dick Hoffman's trade store. Local tradition has it that he snarled and struggled all the way. They kept him prisoner there for six days until the French warship arrived. The armed men who came ashore to try to locate and arrest Ala were surprised indeed to find him already bound and awaiting them. They handcuffed him and put him on the ship to be taken to Fiji. He was tried in Fiji, found guilty, and imprisoned there.¹⁰

Following Godden's death, Paramount Chief Roroi immediately ordered that a peace ceremony take place as soon as possible in order to prevent any retaliation and bloodshed.¹¹ Ala's brothers were deeply ashamed. They gave Paramount Chief Roroi a highly-valued and high-ranking pig which they named Ala for him to kill in Alamemea's place as a sign of a peace agreement. The slaying of this pig, Ala, in a solemn traditional ceremony, provided a symbolic but traditionally powerful sacrifice. It was a potent symbol that peace must always prevail in Lombaha.

This island custom of slaying a pig (instead of a guilty person) as atonement is often used now by local preachers as a parable of Jesus' atoning death.

Paramount Chief Roroi died soon afterwards. The commitment to peace which arose from Charles Godden's martyrdom was so powerful a pledge that an immense grave was dug for Chief Roroi and in it were buried all the weapons of war of the Lombaha people.

Charles Godden's grave is still by the sea at Lolowai where the old mission used to stand. A plain stone cross in the jungle marks the place of his martyrdom. Nearby, the rock at which Godden paused has been grooved by a century of passers-by who have also removed a sandal and knocked it on the stone in his memory. A simple monument at the little St Christopher's village church high up the volcano at Lowainasasa, holds for ever the stones on which his blood fell. Revered as one of the Melanesian Martyrs, the Calendar of the Church of Melanesia records Charles Godden Day on 16 October, but every Sunday in Lowainasasa red flowers bleed on the simple monument to the man they call a saint.¹²

Reconciliation

In 1994 the author of this account, John Harris, began visiting Ambae as the Bible Society's Translation Consultant, assisting a team of local Christians to translate the New Testament into Havai. Harris soon learned the story of Charles Godden and saw the way in which they revered his name and perpetuated his memory. As the centenary of his death approached, the Lombaha people began talking of a big ceremony on 16 October 2006. Harris decided to try to locate the Godden and Dearin families in Australia and see if they could be represented at the commemoration. He also realised that the Lombaha people still bore a sense of shame about the slaying of Charles Godden. It is easy for others to say they had no need to feel shame but negative community feelings which run as deep as this are not simply solved by outsiders telling people how they should feel. Harris saw that what they needed was a genuine act of reconciliation.

Searching for memories of Charles Godden in Australia proved elusive. He had two memorials in Australia, one in Moore College Chapel, Sydney, and another in St John's Church, Euroa.¹³ Little if anything was known about him at either Moore College or Euroa. This paper, which began life as a sermon preached at St John's Euroa, excited interest in Godden's life and death, and local research provided clues to the Godden family. Finally, as a result of publishing Charles Godden's story in the Christian press, members of the Godden and Dearin family and several people who knew of them contacted Harris.

Because of Eva and Ruth Dearin's later lives in Australia, older members of the extended Dearin family remembered Eva's side of the story. The Godden family were descendants of Charles' brothers. They knew that an

uncle had been killed in the islands, but within the extended Godden family the details were only sketchily recalled.

Many Godden family members, however, showed very immediate and sincere interest in the story of their uncle and great uncle. When I broached with them the possibility of attending the Charles Godden Centenary in 2006, and of taking part in a ceremony of reconciliation, they were enthusiastic.

Just as the planning for a major ceremony was beginning on Ambae, Mount Manaro showed signs of erupting. Dormant for so long, this had the potential to be a very destructive event. People were moved from villages high on the mountain such as Lowainasasa and children were evacuated to other islands. Naturally the Charles Godden centenary was postponed. Fortunately, after the release of some smoke and dust and the boiling of the lake in the crater of the volcano, the eruption subsided and after a few months, island life returned to normal. The centenary was rescheduled for 2007.

In October of that year a great crowd gathered at Lowainasasa, having travelled from all over Ambae and many other parts of Vanuatu. A large contingent from Australia included members of the Godden and Dearin families, and representatives of the Anglican Diocese of Sydney, St Michael's Church Surry Hills, and the Australian High Commission.

For three days the Lombaha people and their Australian visitors retraced Charles Godden's steps on the journey that led to his tragic death. At the key sites they shared solemn and moving Christian services of confession and forgiveness and they took part in traditional *kastom* (custom) ceremonies of reconciliation. The chief pilgrim was Ian Godden, the oldest member of the Godden family present and the great nephew of Charles Godden.

At Lolowai, Chief Silas and the coast people welcomed the visitors with drums and traditional dress, leading them to Charles' grave site. They had enlarged and beautified the grave, a duty taken seriously as the people who first welcomed Charles to the island. Dancers led the visitors in circling the grave and then honoured them with gifts and a *kava* ceremony.

It was a profoundly emotional experience for the Godden family in particular, who had only just begun to treasure again the story of their ancestor's martyrdom. It was also very emotional for the family of Alamemea who felt that the guilt had never been properly worked out in reconciliation between them and the Godden family.

The visitors then went down to the beach to be taken around the island by boat, imitating the boat journey which Charles undertook from Lolowai

to the Lombaha coast. Disembarking, they were greeted by the sound of a conch shell blown by the coastal chief, a sign that important visitors had arrived. The message was relayed with a series of conch shell signals to the festival sites.

They then walked up the narrow mountain path following Charles' exact route, until hours later they reached the edge of the Lowainasasa village. Hundreds of local people were gathered there to welcome them with a *salusalu* ceremony of hanging floral wreaths around the visitors' necks, a coconut drinking ceremony, songs by the school children, *kastom* (traditional) dancing, *kava* and speeches, John Harris translating everything into English. After early prayers and breakfast, visitors and local people began the long trek up the mountain, once again retracing Charles' steps. Some frail visitors were carried. The steep climb through jungle tracks and high gardens brought them to Dai Sale where Charles had been attacked by Alamemea. There they gathered at the cross in the jungle which has long marked the spot where Charles' blood was shed.

"We have cared for your great uncle's memorial for 100 years", the local people said to Ian Godden, "and we will care for it for ever." People tearfully placed wreaths on the memorial cross until it was completely hidden beneath a bright covering of flowers. Many people removed a shoe, as Charles had done, and struck it on the rock.

The pilgrims then walked back down the mountain to Nasalagoro, where Charles Godden's body had been carried to Paramount Chief Roroi. At Chief Roroi's grave, his descendants re-enacted the arrival of Charles' body. The chief, angered by the attack on Charles, had wanted to seek instant revenge but it was then that Charles had spoken his now-immortal words:

"I came here in peace and I will die in peace. Let there be no fighting because of me. Let there be peace."

Chief Roroi had himself died not long after Charles Godden's martyrdom and in his grave the people had buried all their weapons of war. The grave was now dominated by an immense banyan tree, the ancient 'chiefly tree' which had sprung of its own accord from the grave.

These stories from long ago filling their minds, the modern-day pilgrims left the grave of Chief Roroi and walked back to Lowainasasa, Alamemea's village and the village where his family now live. There, that afternoon, the visitors, with thousands of Lombaha people, all gathered at the memorial to

Charles Godden outside St Christopher's Church. The simple monument, now restored, contains the stones on which Charles' blood had fallen, brought down in 1936 to rest in the village when it was established there.

There, before the monument, in the open space between St Christopher's Church and Lowainasasa school, Australian visitors and the Lombaha people alike all knelt together on the ground—thousands of people. Led by the Bishop of Vanuatu, James Ligu, the Lombaha people confessed the sins of their ancestor, the awful slaying of Charles Godden. But the visitors also had spoken to the bishop before the ceremony. They too wanted to confess the sins of their Australian ancestors and their part in the cruel injustice that had twisted Alamemea's mind, and the gross error that had led to the 'blackbirding' of the men of Ambae.

"God have mercy on us", they all repeated, "God have mercy".

Bishop Ligu pronounced a simple absolution.

Then came the wonderful and moving central event of the day. Women of Alamemea's family surged forward to weep at Charles Godden's monument. Men in *kastom* dress stripped Ian Godden of his shirt, dressing him in a red mat and traditional leaves. A ceremonial white mat was presented to Ian Godden by Rachel Garae, a descendant of Alamemea's family, asking for forgiveness for what Ala had done to this great man of God so many years before.

In his response Ian Godden told the packed crowds that they had been forgiven long ago. It was not anyone's individual fault, not even Ala's. It was the curse of injustice by 'blackbirders' that triggered such awful consequences.

Canon Keith Stephens, a member of the family of Eva Dearin, Charles Godden's wife, then spoke. His grandfather had been Eva's brother. Keith revealed that after Charles' murder, instead of acting with anger, Eva's family had acted with sympathy, speaking out publicly against unfair labour conditions on the Queensland cane fields.

The ceremonial leaders then circled the monument, performing the correct ancient rituals. A special pig was led out. Ian Godden was given a wooden club and with it he killed the ceremonial pig which would later be solemnly consumed. Blood was shed. Reconciliation and forgiveness could now flow.

Ian was then adopted into the village of Lowainasasa and the community of Lombaha. Chief Joseph Mala became his father. Ian was the great nephew of Charles Godden and so the great nephews of Alamemea,

the man who killed Charles, became Ian's brothers: Godwin Gama, Jonas Vanu and Gadwell Vanu.

Ian also struck with his club the dried skull of a special pig with high-ranking tusks. Ian was given the high chiefly rank of *Vire* and the title *Vire Tambe Tamwata*, 'The Man who Holds Peace'. His name was called out—*Vire Tambe Tamwata*—and, obeying his instructions, Ian accepted his name and title by calling out "Io"—"Yes"—in response. There was a long and very audible sigh of relief from the people of Lombaha. The name of 'The Man who Holds Peace' had been heard at last in their land and he had answered "Yes!" The stones in the monument on which Charles' blood had fallen were given their old name again, *Vatu Maraga* or Stepping Stones: the way to higher and greater things. The whole monument was named *Vatu Tambe Tamwata*—the Stone that Holds the Peace. The people rose as one and joined the *kastom* dancers to dance their joy long into the night. Peace at last had descended on the lands of the Lombaha people.

That night heavy rain fell. People saw it not as a disruption but as a miracle, a sign of the washing away of past guilt and sadness, and the bringing in of a new day. At the Charles Godden Day Communion Service next morning, the Gospel was brought in by jubilant *kastom* dancers for me to read. They also carried ancient weapons of war, now broken, to usher in the Gospel of Peace.

The congregation was told that Charles Godden's blood was for us a symbol of an even greater sacrifice. Guilt was only truly washed away by the blood of Jesus. The bishop confirmed over twenty young people that morning as full members of the Church. Outside afterwards, the Revd Francis Chalwell, Rector of St Michael's Surry Hills, the church where Charles heard and answered the call to Melanesia, unveiled a plaque on the Charles Godden memorial.

The next day was full of feasting, dances and singing. Chief Joseph Mala told the full, carefully researched story of Alamemea and Charles Godden.

Many tears were shed the next morning as the visitors set out to walk back down to the coast to the sound of farewell songs. The boat took them back down to Lolowai. Rounding the point, they recalled Eva waiting so long ago on the beach and Charles Godden's unforgettable words: "Let there be no fighting. Let there be peace".

This is Charles Godden's abiding legacy and on the island he will be remembered forever.

“Let there be forgiveness. Let there be reconciliation. Let there be peace.”

Postscript

Under the guidance of Chief Joseph Mala and the Rev Dr John Harris, the New Testament in the Havai language was completed in 2013. It was paid for by generous donations from the Godden and Dearin families and the Anglican Diocese of Sydney. By decision of the people of Lombaha, it is named the Charles Christopher Godden Memorial New Testament. It was dedicated and released at the memorial to Charles Godden on 16 October 2014.

Endnotes

1. This is an updated and extended version of an address originally given at St John's Church, Euroa, Victoria, in August 2005.
2. Details of Godden's early life can be gleaned from his daughter Ruth Godden's semi-published account of his life. *Lolowai: the Story of Charles Godden and the Western Pacific*, Sydney: The Wentworth Press, Sydney, 1967. Unless otherwise indicated, direct quotations of Charles Godden's words are from that work. Parts of *Lolowai* are best described as 'historical-fictional' because the author recreates scenes and conversations. She also expresses her own emotions in poetry and the presumed emotions of others. The book, however, contains many letters and other valuable original material. Some of these are of a very personal nature, apparently included to justify certain aspects of Charles Godden's romantic life. Opinion is divided in both the Godden and Dearin families about whether or not Ruth Godden should have made these letters public. However, there are also many important documents in the appendices which are our only extant source for some of this information.
3. George Augustus Selwyn, Bishop of New Zealand, established the Melanesian Mission by bringing five young Melanesian men to St John's College Auckland, the first of whom was baptised there in 1852. The Diocese of Melanesia (now a Province with nine dioceses) was created in 1854. Melanesia encompasses the present nations of Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and New Caledonia. For the history of Anglicanism in Melanesia,

see David Hilliard, *God's Gentlemen: A History of the Melanesian Mission, 1849–1942*, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia Qld, 1978; Allan K. Davidson (ed.), *The Church of Melanesia, 1849–1999*, College of St John the Evangelist, Auckland, 2000; and Michael Gladwin, ‘“Magdalen Tower on the shores of the Pacific”: Anglicanism in Oceania since 1914’, in William Sachs (ed.), *Oxford History of Anglicanism*, vol. 5, Oxford University Press, Oxford (forthcoming, 2015–16).

4. Previous spellings include Ompa and Opa.
5. Only the essential and well-known facts of blackbirding are detailed here. There is a wealth of information available. For those interested in pursuing the history of blackbirding, see Wal Bird, *Me no go Mally Bulla: recruiting and blackbirding in the Queensland labour trade 1863–1906*, s.n., Canberra, 2005 and <http://www.blackbird.vu/?view=featured>.
6. The story of Alamemea can only be understood now through the firmly established local traditions about him. These people are in fact the best placed to know about him. The version given here is drawn from the speech delivered on Charles Godden Day, 16 October 2007, by Chief Joseph Mala, the recognised authority on Alamemea and the slaying of Charles Godden.
7. The facts as presented here are as I have understood them from conversations with the Lombaha people over the past twenty years. They accord quite closely with Ruth Godden's account in *Lolowai* (see note 2) but as she takes the liberty of recreating scenes and conversations, where there is a discrepancy I have preferred the local tradition. Research in other sources, such as British and Australian newspapers and other reports, will reveal considerable discrepancies due to the garbled and abbreviated nature of the original reports as well as the inadequate journalism at the time, which was characterised by general ignorance of New Hebrides and island life.
8. The information about the wardrobe was not recalled by the islanders but recently came to light through correspondence with an elderly woman who remembered stories Eva told as her Sunday School teacher in Bankstown (Sydney).
9. Eva never returned to Ambae but was a loyal and active Christian in Sydney, especially among children and young people. She died in 1964. Their daughter Ruth was born in Sydney on 7 July 1907. She studied medicine at Sydney University and became a medical practitioner. Ruth never married, so Charles and Eva Godden have no direct descendants. In later life Ruth

came to Ambae because she wanted to see where her father had been killed, although she had never known him. The men of Lombaha carried her to *Dai Sale*, the place of her father's martyrdom. A very strong local tradition holds that Ruth was seen to have birthmarks between her thumb and forefinger and across her collarbone, the place of the axe wounds suffered by her father.

10. Alamemea was eventually paroled in Fiji. In the 1950s the Fijian authorities asked the New Hebrides authorities to investigate whether Ala could be released and repatriated to Ambae. The now peaceful people of Ambae said they did not want him sent back. Ala was never permitted to leave Fiji and died there.
11. The 'payback' system, which operated somewhat like the Old Testament 'eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth' system, was a very powerful part of Melanesian culture in these days.
12. The Anglican Church of Melanesia remembers Charles Godden as one of those who was killed while engaged in bringing the gospel of Christ to these islands, numbering him therefore among the Martyrs of Melanesia. At the time of the centenary of Godden's death, the matter of his martyrdom was debated in the Synod of the Diocese of Sydney and passed in the affirmative. Resolution 16/2006 reads: 'Synod thanks God for the courageous witness and missionary service of the Rev Charles Christopher Godden, especially for his faithfulness in the face of the danger which culminated in his martyrdom. Further, this Synod observe one minute's prayerful silence to commemorate the centenary of his martyrdom in Vanuatu, 16 October 1906, and other brothers and sisters who have given their lives in the cause of the gospel.'
13. There is now a third but recent memorial near the organ at St Michael's Church, Surry Hills.