

RELATIONS WITH THE BANABANS DURING
MY PRE-WAR YEARS ON OCEAN ISLAND.

1. I was appointed a Cadet Officer in the Gilbert & Ellice Islands Colony on the 18th November, 1932, and assumed duty in Ocean Island on the 15th January, 1933.
2. During the years 1933 to 1939, I held the following appointments on Ocean Island:-
 - (a) 24th February - 15th March, 1933 - Acting Secretary to Government;
 - (b) 15th - 18th June, 1933 - Acting Secretary to Government;
 - (c) 29th April - 4th October, 1934 - Acting Administrative Officer, Ocean Island;
 - (d) 13th May, 1935 - 24th April, 1936 - Acting Secretary to Government;
 - (e) 16th May, 1935 - 24th April, 1936 - Acting Administrative Officer, Ocean Island, (conjoint);
 - (f) 27th September, 1937 - 25th May, 1938 - Administrative Officer, Ocean Island; and,
 - (g) 26th January, 1938 - 5th January, 1939 - Acting Secretary to Government (conjoint).
3. In a memorandum which I was requested to write for the information of the then High Commissioner for the Western Pacific, Sir Arthur Richards, on the 18th May, 1937, with regard to Banaban affairs generally, I wrote inter alia as follows:-

"During my period of service in the Gilbert & Ellice Islands Colony I have been stationed at Ocean for 23 months in all. During that time I was deputed by the Resident Commissioner to hold numerous discussions with the Banabans on such matters as their funds, education, hospital, etc.

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I am rather uncertain but I do not think that they have had detailed statements regarding their funds made available to them, although on one occasion in 1935 I discussed their funds with them in considerable detail when trying to effect a settlement. The action appeared to me much appreciated".
4. The occasion referred to in the above quotation was almost certainly that when I procured a blackboard and easel from the nearby Banaban school and set it up in the Tabiang village maneaba where that meeting (and other meetings) normally took place. Certainly, however, I discussed their funds with them on a number of occasions and, inevitably in so doing, the origin of the funds and the previous history of phosphate negotiations were almost invariably raised and discussed.
5. Although I was unable to inform them of such matters as the financial stocks and shares in which their funds were invested by the Crown Agents for the Colonies, I told them that such information would be available in the Treasury, if they so required it. I also told them that the state of the Banaban Royalty Trust Funds, the Provident Fund, and the Landholders' Fund were shown each month in the statements of the Colony's Assets and Liabilities, published in the Western Pacific Gazette each month, and that copies of such Gazettes were available in the office of the Resident Commissioner and in the Treasury. I never heard, however, that they made any enquiry there concerning such investments or the availability of such Gazettes.

6. Although the position of a District Officer, and his duties, on Ocean Island were markedly different to his counterpart in the Gilbert or Ellice Islands - by reason of the industrial environment, and its effects, on Ocean Island - it was necessary for me to keep in close touch with the Native Government there in a variety of ways; for example, review sentences on appeal from the Native Court; sit with that Court in divorce cases; discuss with them such matters as proposals for the expenditure of Banaban funds (e.g. for drought relief supplies); proposals for a Banaban hospital; and so on, quite apart from the minutiae of administration so commonly occurring in such a milieu. This necessitated keeping in close touch with the late Kureta, the Native Magistrate, the late Iete, the Chief of Kaubure, and the late Teati, the Native Scribe, who would often consult me both in and out of office hours as occasion required.

7. It did not, however, fall to my lot at any stage to adjudicate on any land matters; this was probably due to the fact that Mr. H.E. Maude, the Lands Commissioner, had presided in 1931-32 over a Lands Commission on the island, which not only dealt with all claims to, and registration of, lands on the island, but also drew up, in consultation with the native members of the Commission, a code of Banaban land tenure and inheritance, which was approved by the Commission.