

# THE OTHER SELWYN

John Richardson Selwyn in Melanesia and Cambridge

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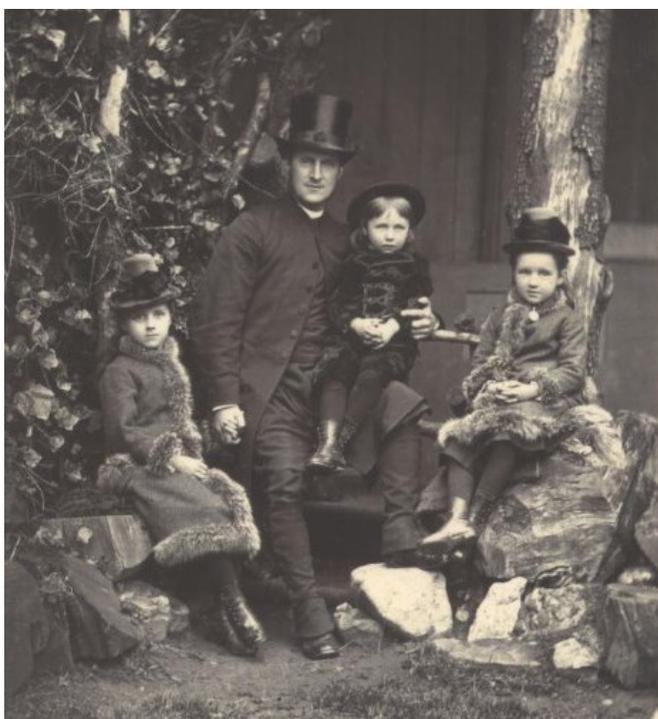
John Richardson Selwyn (1844-1898) was born in Waimate, Bay of Islands, New Zealand. He was the second son of George Augustus Selwyn, Bishop of New Zealand in charge of the Diocese of Melanesia. He grew up in Auckland, where his father had established St John's College for the religious training of Māori and Melanesian students.

John Selwyn first travelled to England in 1854, following in the footsteps of his father by attending Eton and studying at the University of Cambridge. At Trinity College, he developed a strong reputation as a rower and, like his father, rowed in the Boat Race.

After a short career in England, he returned to the Pacific as head of the Melanesian Mission. He divided his time between its headquarters on Norfolk Island and voyages to Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands to recruit new students and oversee mission-related work. In 1892, his health led him to resign and return to England. He was appointed Master of Selwyn College the following year.

In Melanesia and in Cambridge, John Selwyn was a passionate, dedicated and diligent man. Despite his quick temper, his kindness and attention to others made him a loved figure wherever he worked.

But John Selwyn's own achievements have been overshadowed by the celebrated men who preceded him. His own father's pioneering missionary work in the Pacific has been the focus of much historical research on the Melanesian Mission. Arthur Lyttelton, first Master of Selwyn College, achieved greater fame than his successor for his role in the foundation of the College.



John Selwyn and his children, Margaret (1872-1930), Rebecca (1874-1921) and Stephen (1875-1878), photograph by Whitlock Bros, Wolverhampton, late 1870s. Selwyn College Collection.

The exhibition presented at Selwyn College Library (8-24 September 2017) is the result of a collaboration between the Pacific Presences project at the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, and Selwyn College Library & Archives. Bringing together objects, archival documents and publications relating to John Selwyn's life, the exhibition highlights his legacy in both institutions.

## Missionary work in Melanesia, 1873-1891

With his father often absent on trips around his Diocese, John Selwyn's first ten years in New Zealand were spent amongst the Mission's Māori and Melanesian students in Waimate and Auckland. Here, he developed an ear for languages and an open-mindedness which marked his own activities as a missionary later in life.

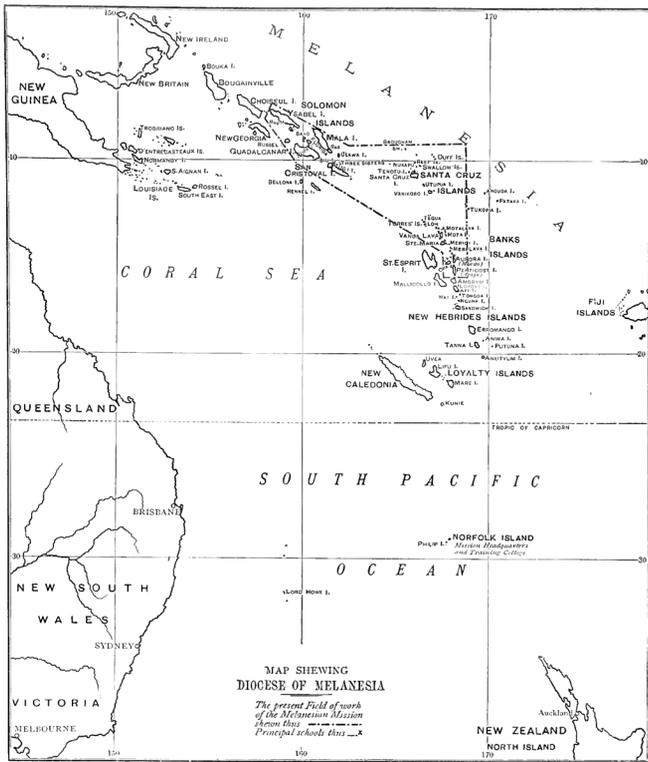
It was in England, while attending Eton, that he formed an understanding of the intellectual and religious ideas underpinning the Mission's foundation and development. Letters written to him by his father during long voyages around Pacific Islands recorded George Selwyn's observations, hopes and frustrations, and described the many challenges and set-backs he encountered. Often illustrated with small watercolours or line drawings, these letters (now in the archives of Selwyn College, below) shaped John Selwyn's understanding of missionary work, and probably triggered a desire to take part.

In 1871, Bishop John Patteson, first Bishop of Melanesia and invaluable colleague to George Augustus Selwyn, was killed at Nukapu, in the Santa Cruz Islands, during a missionary voyage. John Selwyn was offered the difficult task of succeeding him at the head of the Melanesian Mission. In 1873, he, his wife Clara and their daughter Margaret settled on Norfolk Island, where the Melanesian Mission had relocated its headquarters in 1867. His first few years in the Pacific were punctuated by joyful and tragic moments: successes and set backs with the Mission's evangelical attempts in the islands of Melanesia, the birth of three children (Rebecca, Stephen and Clara), the death of his wife and youngest daughter and his consecration as Bishop of Melanesia in 1877.

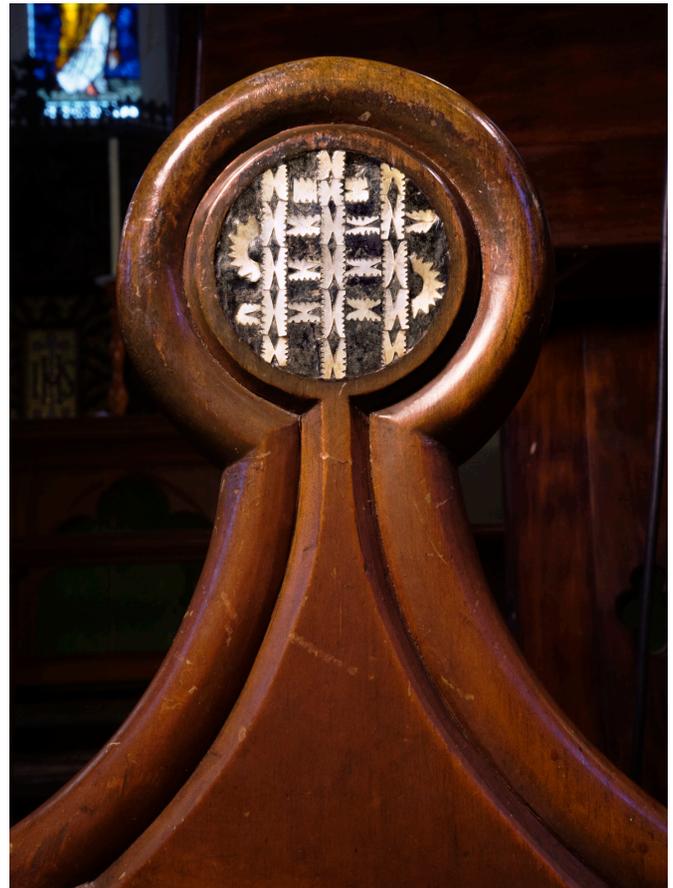
Between 1875 and 1880, John Selwyn and Reverend Doctor Robert Henry Codrington supervised the building of St Barnabas, a memorial chapel dedicated to the memory of Bishop Patteson. St Barnabas was more than a holy space.



Santa Cruz Islanders calling for 'toki' (axes), drawing by Bishop George Selwyn, 25 September 1857. Selwyn College Archives, SEPP/SEL/4316 (formerly D.6.j)



Map of the Diocese of Melanesia. Published in 1900 in *ES Armstrong, The History of the Melanesian Mission, London: Isbister & co.*



St Barnabas Chapel, Norfolk Island. Photographer & date unknown. NIM archive collections, NIM 5507. Courtesy Norfolk Island Museum.

(top right and right) Bishop Selwyn's monogram and panels showing religious iconography, (below) inlay representing a double-headed frigate bird. Photographs by M. Adams, June 2016.



Open day and night, it was a place for all to congregate, European clergy and Melanesian students alike. The internal arrangement of the chapel, with stalls facing the nave, was conducive to a collegial atmosphere - an idea that was without doubt important to John Selwyn when he supported the erection of the chapel at Selwyn College almost twenty years later. The building and decoration of St Barnabas was the result of the joint efforts of all the members of the Melanesian Mission on Norfolk Island. Although the Melanesian students were involved in the erection of the chapel, their mark is better felt inside, on the many inlaid panels decorating the pews. Using a technique traditionally employed in the Solomon Islands, minute pieces of shell were assembled to form geometric and Christian motifs, as well as traditional Solomon Islands ones. This unique decorative programme reflected the values of respect and inclusiveness at the core of the Mission.

For almost twenty years, John Selwyn worked tirelessly at consolidating the work of his forebears. Firearms were brought to the Pacific by whalers and traders in human labour from the 1840s onwards, disrupting existing trade systems and intensifying intercommunity warfare. John Selwyn's father was a strong opponent of the Pacific labour trade, equating it with the transatlantic slave trade. Although partially regulated in the late 19th century, the labour trade continued to violently displace thousands of islanders to plantations in Fiji and Australia, and was firmly condemned by the Melanesian Mission. The paddle illustrated here highlights the incorporation of new ideas and practices into Melanesian societies. The iconography is traditional to the Solomon Islands - a man in a canoe, frigate birds and fish, - but the figure is holding a gun. This paddle was brought back to England by John Selwyn and donated to the MAA by his second wife, Annie, in 1900.

John Selwyn developed a deep interest in the languages and cultures he encountered. As a distinguished visitor to mission communities in Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands, he was often presented with gifts and occasionally collected artefacts himself. The *tevau*, or feather money, shown here was given to him by Dr Welchman of the Melanesian Mission. Originally used in the Santa Cruz Islands (Solomon Islands) as currency to purchase prestige goods such as canoes and pigs and to act as dowry, Dr Welchman exchanged it for a Norfolk Island pig in 1889. John Selwyn must have valued it for he did not donate it to MAA with the rest of his collection. It was presented to the Museum by his children in 1901, three years after their father's death.

In 1885, John Selwyn travelled to England to visit Selwyn College for the first time. While in Cambridge, Arthur Lyttelton, first Master of Selwyn College, introduced him to Baron Anatole von Hügel, curator of the newly established Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. A few months later, John Selwyn sent a few objects to the Museum - the beginning of a relationship between the institution and the Selwyn family that was to last many decades. Today, over 250



Paddle. MAA, E 1900.185.

objects in MAA's collection are associated with John Selwyn, either sent from Melanesia during his bishopric, or donated by him or his family after their return to England. While these objects are often mobilised to tell wider stories about Melanesian cultures and arts, they also illustrate the complex relationships that developed between Indigenous communities and European missionaries in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

John Selwyn's health started deteriorating in 1889, leading him to resign his post in Melanesia and return to England in 1891.



*Tevau (feather money). MAA, E 1901.208.*

### **Master of Selwyn College, Cambridge, 1893-1898**

Selwyn College was founded in 1882 in memory of George Augustus Selwyn (1809-1878), first Bishop of New Zealand and later Bishop of Lichfield. The first Master was Arthur Lyttelton, who had been Tutor at Keble College, Oxford. He was tasked with leading a new college in Cambridge that was for members of the Church of England but aimed to “encourage habits of simple living”, which was one of Bishop Selwyn’s own ideals.

In 1893, Arthur Lyttelton resigned to take up parochial work and John Richardson Selwyn was appointed the second Master of Selwyn College. To the Council, it was important that the new Master was known outside Cambridge, and represented aspects of the work of the Church not hitherto visible. Appointing a member of the Selwyn family was an added advantage.

John Selwyn was installed as Master on 16 June 1893. On the day preceding his installation, he attended the consecration ceremony and laying down of the foundation stone for the new Chapel being built at Selwyn College. He did much to support the construction of the Chapel, initiating a subscription list and regularly corresponding with the architect, Arthur Blomfield. John Selwyn and his family donated generously to the building fund. The Chapel was consecrated in October 1895 and names of the visitors were recorded in the Visitors Book maintained by his second wife, Annie Selwyn.

John Selwyn changed the structure of the college by separating the offices of Master and Dean and appointing several lecturers. He is remembered for improving discipline as well as supporting the students and improving the life of the servants. He wrote regular reports to Council.



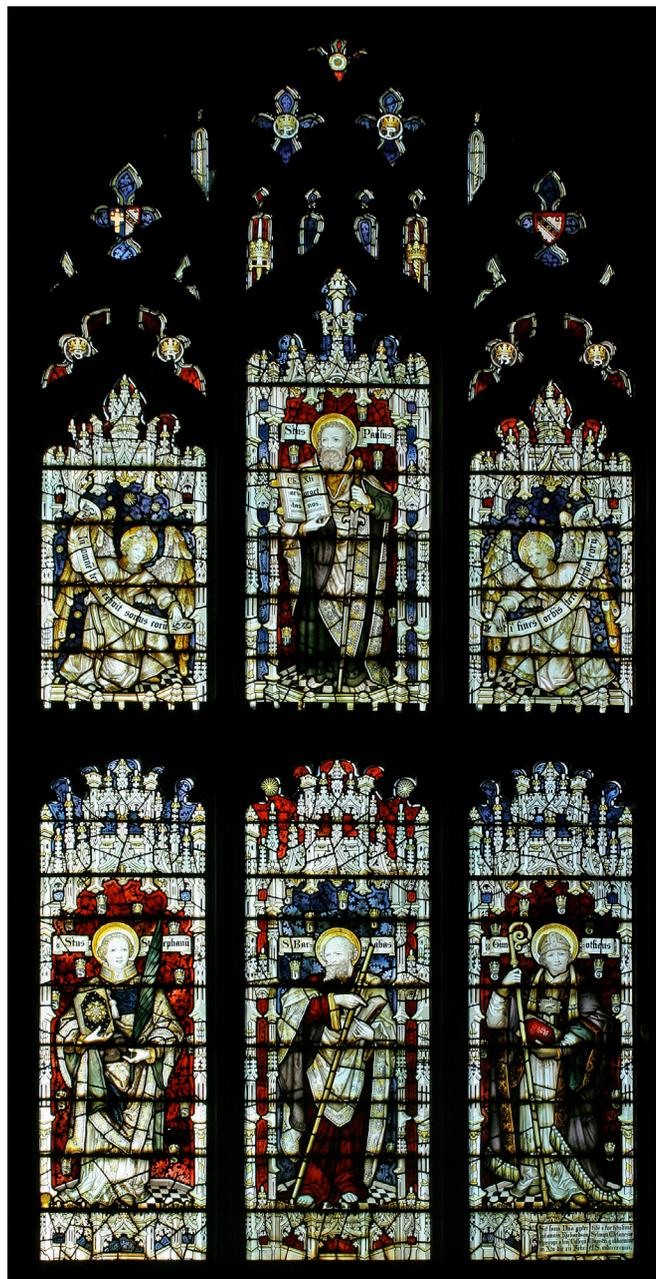
*John Selwyn in wheelchair. Photographer unknown, 1890s. Courtesy of the Diocese of Melanesia.*

Years of bad health in the Pacific and a poorly treated abscess in his leg left him unable to walk unaided and caused constant pain which at times hindered his ability to conduct his office of Master. Yet he remained active and engaged with the College's activities: a keen rower while a student in Cambridge, he assisted with the Boat Club and was often seen on horseback or in a specially designed wheelchair. As he was unable to stand for long periods, the loyal toast was said at dinner in College with everyone sitting down. This tradition has continued, with special permission granted by the Queen to Owen Chadwick, the then Master, in 1976.

John Selwyn and his family lived in the Master's Lodge at Selwyn College, and his youngest child, named George Augustus Selwyn after his grandfather, was born there and baptised in the College Chapel in 1896.

When John Selwyn's health deteriorated, he and his wife travelled to the south of France, where he died in 1898 at the age of 53. He was to be fondly remembered with various memorials including a window installed in the Chapel in 1900 depicting three saints that held particular significance to him: St Stephen, the first Christian martyr and aider of the poor; St Barnabas, and St Timothy, who were both early Christian missionaries.

*Photograph of memorial window to John Selwyn, 2009. One of a collection of photographs of Cambridge college chapels taken by Rev Steve Day. Selwyn Archives, SEPHI7/DAY*



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Selwyn College Cambridge



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Oceanic art & European museums

Cover image: Portrait of John Richardson Selwyn by Walton, c. 1870s. Selwyn College Collection.