

A brief biography



This group portrait, from one of Harry Moore Dauncey's own photograph albums, shows himself (right) with other London Missionary Society (LMS) missionaries who worked in Papua New Guinea (PNG), including James Chalmers (left). Chalmers, known locally as *Tamate*, became famous as a martyr when cultural misunderstanding led to his death at the hands of Goaribadi Islanders in 1901.

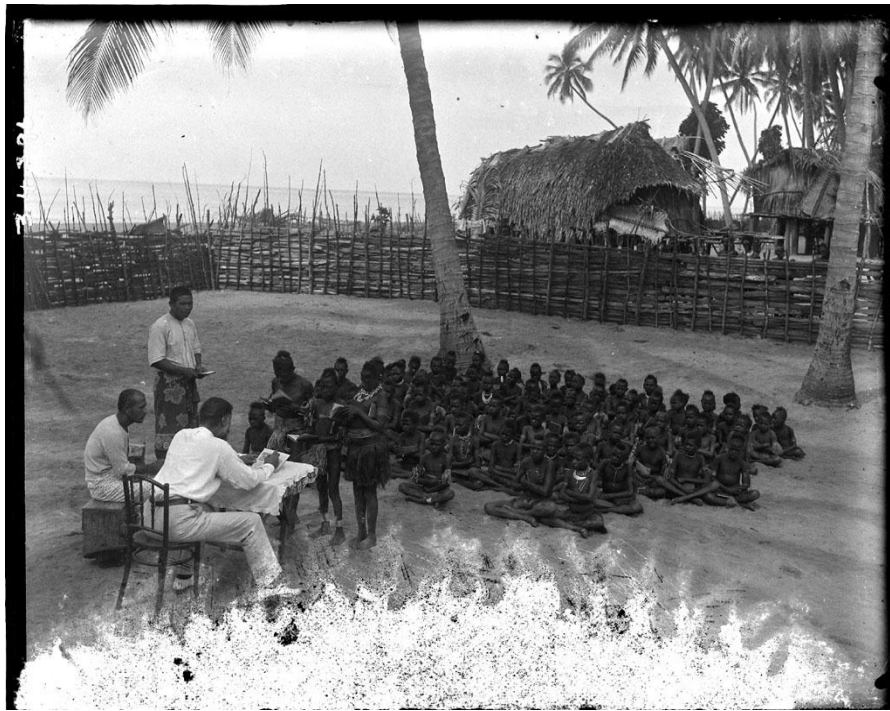
Dauncey was born in Walsall, near Birmingham, in 1863. LMS archival papers, now held at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) at the University of London, give us insights into his motivations and frustrations. He came from a middle-class, religious family (they attended a

Congregationalist church) was inspired by missionaries who visited his church, and from an early age wanted to be a missionary overseas. He was more sociable than academic, receiving mediocre grades in his exams but glowing reports from his tutors at the theological college - Cheshunt College in Hertfordshire - where he trained to be a missionary. He was only really interested in knowledge and skills that would help in his chosen career, and was delighted when was offered his first choice of posting, to Papua New Guinea (then British New Guinea) in 1888. At the age of 25, he was stationed at Port Moresby (the capital city of PNG), then at the Western Central village of Delena, where he remained until he retirement to Bournemouth in 1928.



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Dauncey was supported by his wife, Mary Ellen (née Hinton), who joined him 1894. They had four children, three of whom survived. 'Breakfast on the Beach' (above), a page from one of Dauncey's own photograph albums, shows a typical scene of colonial life - two local men serve the missionary and his wife. Mrs. Dauncey is pouring tea, and the palanquin on which she was sometimes carried rests in the background. Mrs. Dauncey suffered from ill health and had to return home to Britain on several occasions, so the family spent a lot of time apart. Dauncey eventually returned to England in 1928 and died in 1931. By this time Mrs. Dauncey had already died, in 1921.



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Educating the locals was core to the missionaries' efforts. Children and adults were taught to read, so that they could understand the Bible for themselves. The image above shows Dauncey teaching a group of children in an outdoor classroom. At the left are two teachers from the Pacific Islands.



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The photograph above shows Mrs. Dauncey (right), with a Pacific Islander teacher and his wife. Islanders who had been converted to Christianity - including those trained at the LMS theological college in Samoa - were recruited to assist the missionaries in their endeavours. Dauncey was responsible for smaller missionary stations in his area and he frequently complained about the high turnover of staff, as some of them chose to return to their home islands.



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The photograph above shows the mission house, where the Dauncey family lived.

The strength of Dauncey's Christian commitment is clear from his writing, but he also believed that local people should aspire to a European way of life. He was keen that everyone should participate in English traditions like team games and sports days. He thought that they were idle and vain and ought to work harder; that their traditional mode of dress was immodest and that they ought to wear European-style clothes; that their traditional houses and furnishings were inadequate and they should build European-style buildings. But above all, he thought that the local system of sorcery was damaging and must be replaced by Christianity.



Courtesy and copyright Royal Anthropological Institute (RAI 34353)

The photograph above shows the church in Delena that Dauncey encouraged the local people to build, using funds raised by gathering and selling sandalwood.

It is clear from Dauncey's writings that missionary life could sometimes be tedious. He relished visits by European travellers, and trips to other parts of the country. Life could be disheartening from a missionary's point of view, as local teaching assistants left their jobs, new buildings were left to decay, and people returned to traditional ways of life. There was clearly a sense of rivalry between Catholic and Protestant missionaries in the region, which Dauncey feared would confuse the local people. He complained of these setbacks in his diaries, letters and reports, but remained optimistic in public. Ultimately he contributed to the religious transformation of Papua New Guinea, now largely a Christian country.