

# Holder of the Tabua

By Jacky Abbott

**T**HE Commissioner of the Fiji Police is Philip Arnfield, a former Deputy Chief Constable of Cheshire in England. He is employed on a three-year contract in the Fiji Islands, having retired after 30 years in the UK force, and works from Vanua House in busy downtown Suva.

Policing runs strongly in his family. His father and four uncles on his mother's side were police officers. However, neither of his two sons has followed him, one being a banker and one an accountant.

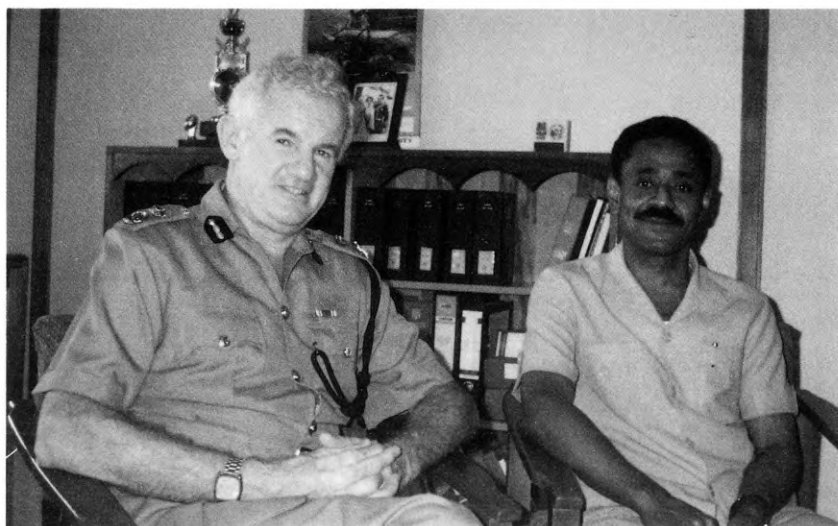
The Commissioner's work takes him all over the islands. Many Fijian villages lie inland in precipitous terrain. These people may have seen few police and live according to traditional custom, ruled by their chief, or Ratu. Commissioner Arnfield tailors his approach to those customs, to seek the respect due him as a powerful Ratu. He sends his 'herald', PR spokesman Aisake Rabuku, with the sacred tabua to announce his arrival.

The ceremony of the tabua dates from age-old custom. A chief possessed this venerated object, roughly in the shape of an animal's tooth and originally made of wood. After contact was made with Europeans, the tabua began to be fashioned from a whale's tooth, in a similar shape. Important meetings begin with the formal exchange of tabuas. Mr Arnfield has also used them for presentations, for instance to the widows of police killed on duty.

## Politics and policing

Mr Arnfield brings to his office the experience gathered from a training secondment in both the Royal Fiji and Royal Solomon Islands Police Forces. He came to the task shortly before the coups by which the government of Timoci Bavadra was overthrown by Sitiveni Rabuka and his supporters. Further elections will take place in 1992. The coups had a profound effect on both the society's ethnic mix and its policing.

The new Constitution gave greater power to ethnic Fijians at the expense of the Indian Indians. In its aftermath, many Indian police officers resigned, some to other industries, many attempting to emigrate. The recent arrest



*Fijian Police Commissioner Philip Arnfield with his Public Relations spokesman and 'herald' Mr Aisake Rabuku.*

by the AFP in Sydney of a Fijian Indian and his wife for an Australian passport scam indicates the situation: people were willing to pay up to \$30,000 to be able to enter Australia.

The Fijian Police number about 2000, split more or less evenly between ethnic Fijian and Indian officers. There are 25 women in the force, the highest placed being at sergeant rank. Some 400 police have been recruited since the coup, but the drain particularly at commissioned officer level is still severe.

However, the Commissioner believes there is plenty of talent in his force. Many of the Assistant Commissioners have been through the Bramshill course in the UK and one Senior Superintendent, Govind Raju, head of the Fijian CID, is a graduate of the Australian Police College at Manly.

Commissioner Arnfield is also trying to improve the package he can offer employees, particularly in non-salary aspects. He is strengthening the anti-corruption unit, in the wake of charges against a number of senior officers.

Fiji is a multi-racial society, with a population roughly half Fijian and half Indian descent. The Fijian Indians are descendants of Indian sugar cane growers brought out to help establish the Fiji sugar industry in the 18th century. There is much political disunity. Religious affiliations among the Indians cover Hinduism, Islam and Christianity.

The Fijian population is largely Methodist, the fruits of strenuous missionary endeavours by the Wesleyan Church last century. There are also however a number of Fijian Catholic communities. Some 5000 Chinese operate mainly in the business community, eschewing politics.

Finally, there is a small number of European residents.

The average wage in Fiji is about \$F2000 a year. A police constable starts on about \$F4000 and income tax is levied at 5 per cent.

Crime rates in Fiji reflect the generally law abiding nature of the community. Some 2000 incidents are reported annually. This compares with Commissioner Arnfield's previous experience in Cheshire, where the borders encompassed parts of Manchester and Birmingham, and some 54,000 incidents were reported annually.

In Fiji, most serious crime (homicide, rape, etc.) has a high clear-up rate, with the unsolved incidents largely comprising minor housebreakings and theft. Owing to the low incidence of car ownership, there is less opportunity for motor vehicle crime. In fact the police have difficulty finding sufficient qualified drivers to meet the force's needs.

Media handling is similarly uncomplicated. There are two newspapers and no television. TV broadcasting is not expected to be up and running in Fiji until the Olympic Games, the product of a co-venture with New Zealand.

Fiji is not currently a member of the Commonwealth, having left during the time of the coups. However, it has applied for readmission. Membership is very much the wish of the Fijian people.

Commissioner Arnfield met Commissioner McAulay recently at the South Pacific Police Commissioners Conference. Discussion at the conference centred on concern at the amount of questionable investment and fraud beginning to flow into the region from other parts of the world.