

1859

THE QUEEN NAMES A NEW COLONY

Queensland became a colony independent of New South Wales on 10 December 1859 when Sir George Ferguson Bowen was installed as Governor in Brisbane, a town of 7000 people, thirteen pubs, and fourteen churches. It was not an easy commission for the forty-eight-year-old Irishman, who soon wrote to London:

At the start of all other colonies the Governor 'has been assisted by a nominated council of experienced officials [sic]; he has been supported by an armed force; and he has been authorized to draw, at least at the beginning, on the Imperial Treasury for the expense of the public service.

But I was an autocrat; the sole source of authority here, without a single soldier and without a single shilling. There was no organized force of any kind on my arrival, though I have now, by dint of exertion and influence, got up a respectable police on the Irish model, and a very creditable corps of volunteers.

And as to money wherewith to carry on the Government, I started with just seven-pence halfpenny in the Treasury. A thief-supposing, I fancy, that I should have been furnished with some funds for the outfit, so to speak, of the new State-broke into the Treasury a few nights after my arrival, and carried off the sevenpence halfpenny mentioned.

However, I borrowed money from the banks until our revenue came in, and our estimates already show (after paying back the sums borrowed) a considerable balance in excess of the proposed expenditure for the year.

Like Sydney, Brisbane began as a penal settlement — in this case to accommodate incorrigible convicts, who included runaways from Port Macquarie.

In September 1824 Governor Brisbane dispatched John Oxley, a surveyor who had explored the northern coastline the previous year, to guide Lieutenant Henry Miller, some soldiers, and thirty convicts, who were to prepare the new penal settlement at Moreton Bay.

Soon more prisoners were shipped in, and under Captain Patrick Logan, the second commandant, Moreton Bay became a hell hole which rivalled Norfolk Island in brutality.

Logan reigned for nearly five years, during which the death rate exceeded 10 per cent a year as he obeyed with relish the regulations which stipulated that the commandant should ‘assign such punishments as will inflict the requisite amount of pain and misery within the shortest period of time...’

Logan was murdered while exploring the countryside — ostensibly by Abo-

rigines — and his successor, Captain James Clunie, saw the convict population peak at about 1100 in 1832.

But, by 1837, when Queen Victoria ascended the throne, only 311 male and 111 female convicts remained at Brisbane Town; two years later almost all had been returned to Sydney.

On 4 May 1842 Moreton Bay officially became a free settlement, and early the following year Captain J. C. Wickham arrived as police magistrate of the district.

Already the inland was being opened up by squatters seeking grazing for their great herds of cattle — for £10 a year an ‘indefinite’ quantity of land could be used’.

Soon these squatters, desperate for cheap labour, were clamouring for a resumption of transportation. This coincided with similar agitation from squatter interests in New South Wales, so in 1846 the convict ships *Hashemy* and *Randolph* were sent from Britain to test colonial reaction.

Angry demonstrations in Melbourne and Sydney prevented the convicts from landing there, and they were shipped to Moreton Bay where they were hurriedly off-loaded and assigned to squatters.

More convict ships followed, to be met with increasing opposition from free settlers at Moreton Bay, eventually resulting in street fighting and riots. This brought home the message to the British Government.

The last shipment of convicts arrived on 3 May 1850 on board the *Bangalore*,

bringing to a close the penal chapter in the history of Moreton Bay.

The 1850 British legislation 'for the better government of Her Majesty's Australian Colonies', which had created such jubilation in Melbourne with its promise of separation, paved the way for new colonies to be founded.

The New South Wales Constitution Act of 1855 provided for the establishment of a new colony to the north with the same constitution as the mother colony.

On 6 June 1859 Queen Victoria signed Letters Patent to this effect, and six months later Bowen arrived as first Governor to inform the people that the Queen had requested the new colony be named Queensland.

Elections by manhood suffrage were held in the new colony's sixteen electorates early in the following year, and on 22 May 1860, amid cheering and flag-waving, the first parliament was opened in Brisbane's old convict barracks, with R. G. W. Herbert becoming the first Premier.

Out of an isolated prison had grown a colony of 28 000 Europeans living on great inland stations and in Brisbane, Ipswich, Warwick, Drayton, and Toowoomba.