

Agriculture

The Brisbane Valley has been noted for its agricultural prowess since the 1860s. The district's advantages were displayed with great success by the Barbour family of Biarra, the late Grace Nunn of Lowood, and the Junior Farmers clubs. Water has been a major factor in fostering the prosperity of agriculture. Today the irrigation water allocation forms 45 per cent of the market value of farms in the Lockyer Creek area. The advocacy, financing, and construction of wells, dams, and barrages has occupied the minds of farmers, politicians, and engineers for over a century.

The other necessity for a stable agricultural industry has been the marketing arrangements. While controlled marketing organizations were established for some agricultural products by the Labor government legislation of the 1920s the Brisbane Valley's industries such as potatoes, onions, and grapes have lacked stable prices until recent times; various price stabilization proposals have controlled the agendas of growers' meetings since the second war, when the decline in family labour made stable markets a necessity for farmers to earn net incomes equal to the basic wage. Marketing and price problems in the 1950s and 1960s brought about major changes in both the agricultural and dairying industries, greatly affecting towns such as Lowood. Mechanization became imperative; coupled with an aging farmer population, this changed the land use in the Fernvale, Wivenhoe, Coominya, and Lowood areas.

Likewise road and vehicle access have been Shire Council priorities for agriculturalists. The century has seen the change from German waggons to utility trucks battling black soil roads with chains taking the produce to the railway, to semi-trailers with refrigerated containers whisking the cool product to the Rocklea and interstate markets.

It was the railway which gave such an enormous stimulus to agriculture in the 1880s. While the railway tonnage figures which Grace Nunn energetically collected for the local newspaper once painted a true statistical picture of the busy loading scenes at Lowood railway station, now the railway is an anachronism, with occasional night trains hauling meagre tonnages.

Since the 1840s agriculture in the Brisbane Valley

has been seen from the viewpoints of both subsistence farming, by selectors and small farmers, and on a large scale to supply the profitable and close Brisbane and Ipswich markets. Railway access fostered that. Just twenty years after initial settlement of the region, there was a railway running through the southern part of the Brisbane Valley. D.C. McConnel was involved in the 1850s in public societies, such as the Moreton Bay Horticultural Society to foster agriculture. At his farm, 'Toogoolawah', at Bulimba in Brisbane, he employed Scottish farmers, including Samuel Johnston of Edinburgh, growing vegetables and making gardens. No doubt cotton interested him most as he came from a cotton spinning family in Manchester, England.

Cotton was being grown in the Brisbane and Ipswich areas in the early 1850s before McConnel returned to Britain on a business trip in 1854. In January 1854 twenty-six bales of cotton were shipped to Britain by John Harris on the *Great Britain* and *Vimero*. The development of the cotton industry changed the landscape of the scrubs along the Brisbane River in the 1860s. Almost a century after the Valley was settled, the wife of one of Esk Shire's retired Councillors, eighty year old Mrs James Barbour, recalled in 1937 that she remembered when there was nothing but cotton picking in the West Moreton.¹

It was the American Civil War which stimulated widespread interest in cotton growing among immigrants eager to commence farming on their own land and to supply an export market for their motherland. One of the first plantations was H. Bauer's on Fairnie Lawn in 1864, established under the Cotton Regulations of 1861. Carl Ludwig Sahl (after whom the Parish was named) freeholded seven hundred acres in the bend of the Brisbane River at Fairnie Lawn for the Sahl Cotton Company on 15 December 1864. Cotton growing was very successful in 1864-5, with Cribb and Foote advancing 1s. per pound for all cotton exported to London, encouraging immigrants to enter the industry. In 1866 Carl Sahl was one of the largest producers in the Ipswich region, producing eighteen bales worth £6,227 out of a total of £89,509 exported in 1866; Cribb and Foote alone exported £30,846 worth of cotton. Sahl had his own ginnery at Fairnie Lawn and bought small cotton growers' produce at 2d. per pound.²



Noble, Jessie and Smiler ploughing on Wolff's farm at Coal Creek.

The late Lillian Wolff

Carl Sahl reported fully to the *Queensland Times* on 20 April 1867 on his cotton plantation. He believed that the land should be ploughed twice and planted in September-October after the frosts, using 20-30 pounds of seed per acre. The plants had to be thinned down to four to six feet using a scarifier. Picking commenced in early March. Women and children were the best pickers, picking forty to seventy pounds of cotton per day, although Sahl said he did not employ any labour. The bolls were then put in four feet broad trays on trestles two feet six inches above the ground and the crop was then held in a large shed. He found that the cottager with one or two acres raised the heaviest crop. In the previous three years one of these farmers averaged two bales of three hundred pounds each per acre.³

In 1868 there were two cotton gins working in Ipswich and, for lack of pickers and sheds, some of the crop spoiled in the fields. In these boom times farmers found that they could not continue without coloured labour. South Sea Islanders were also being used on some farms. Down at Thorn's on the Normanby south of Ipswich Aborigines were being used successfully in the fields. They were paid £1 at the end of the season plus rations (sweet potatoes, beef, bread, and tea and 3s. on Saturday) and tobacco. Slab gunyahs had been built for them.

They had a good reputation as pickers doing the work tidily and cleanly, picking up to fifty pounds per day. At Pine Mountain cotton was considered a safe crop, better than sugar cane in the short term because of the high capital cost of a mill. The potato crop had failed there and 'King cotton will considerably extend his dominion in this quarter'.⁴

Although the Government reduced the cotton bonus in 1868 and the end of the American Civil War eased the crisis in the British cotton manufacturing industry, selectors were still keen to plant cotton. In the next few years cotton was cultivated extensively in the West Moreton at Lockyer Creek, and along the Brisbane River at Fairnie Lawn, Stinking Gully (the old name for the farming area surrounding Fernvale), North's (Horseshoe Pocket), on either side of the river at Vernor, and surrounding Meakin's Eden Farm. Price was always a problem. Cribb and Foote's low price encouraged growers to sell to Harris Brothers through their agent, John Meakin, or to grow maize. Otherwise the prevailing price itself, around 1s. 3d. per pound, was too low to be profitable. In 1871 the cotton growers on the north side of Lockyer Creek were J. Dymmock, with four acres of cotton and six of maize, William Johnstone with maize, and John Paleforth. On the Gatton side there were Isaac Cumner, with seventeen acres of

cotton and eight of maize, and William Cumner. Bell's twelve acres of cotton was heavily infested with weeds, while Marsh had twelve acres of cotton and eight of maize.⁵

Cotton growing in the Fernvale-Vernor area resulted in the construction of two substantial bridges over Sandy Creek at crossings previously very dangerous. Edwards' farm, on the opposite side of the road to North's spacious cedar homestead, had six acres of cotton tilled by his son while the father ran a dairy. There was also a tannery. A great deal of scrub land had been taken up and cleared in this area in 1869-1870 and there were around three hundred acres of cotton and maize being grown in the area around the North's properties.

In the Stinking Gully area J. Cronin and Dan Neurath each had twelve acres of cotton and Charles Ihle, the local Post Master, George Pullen, John Redmond, Samuel Dickens, J.S. Poole of Poolemount, and Emanuel Denman, all had similar acreages of maize and cotton. Mrs Macalister of Melbourne Grove had the largest area, thirty-five acres of cotton.

At North's (or Horseshoe) Pocket there were H.M. Aldams at Newland, John Reid adjoining, John Henderson, James Donald, and Hugh Stewart all with ten to twenty acres of cotton and most with several acres of maize. James Meakin of Eden Farm, agent of Harris Brothers, had eighteen acres of cotton and two of maize and Robert Wylie rented six acres of cotton from Meakin. Adjoining these farms was three hundred acres, owned by Major North and untenanted. There was a stockyard and house in disrepair and all were for sale. John Jones nearby and Mrs Sarah Harlin on 'Cluen' on the river bank had flower gardens and grew fruit and vegetables as well as cotton and maize. Further north in that pocket were William Lancaster and John Gannon. Leith Hay on 'Celebridge' had poor crops because he had been to England. The farm was let to John McDonald of Pine Mountain who had thirty dairy cows on the land and supplied butter to Ipswich. J.S. Spencer of 'Toomburra' had fifty acres of maize. Joseph Boyce of Lucerne Flat had a fine house erected by Thomas Pryde of Ipswich, who later became an Esk Shire Councillor and Esk auctioneer. Across the gully was John McDonald of 'Murthly' with well drained land growing maize, cotton, pumpkins, sweet potatoes, and tobacco which was sold in Brisbane. The pumpkins were to feed to pigs in winter. Adjoining were S. Eldir, Davis and Titmarsh, and R. and J. Hunter of 'Scrub Camp', who produced forty bales of cotton in 1871, the best in the district.⁶

The Germans increased their cotton acreages substantially in 1872 and Samuel Watson had fifty acres of cotton on his Lockyer Creek property, 'Viewfield', in 1878. However the industry declined because of low returns until the 1890s depression. In 1890 some farmers abandoned farming to join the short-lived rush to the Crow's Nest tin mines. The glut of cotton, falling prices, and pests spelled the demise of the cotton industry. It never recovered despite a short revival in 1890 when Robert North, T.B. Cribb and F. Weiss of Lowood promoted the Queensland Cotton Manufacturing Company. Small farmers around Lowood continued to supply the Ipswich cotton gin but it ultimately closed in 1912. The Lowood Shire Council also supplied seeds to farmers and small amounts of cotton have continued to be grown in the Brisbane Valley to the present. A. Schimcke, F. Freese, A. Wenck, G.E. Rose, F. Kuhn, E. Schulz, H. Profke, W.C. Granzien, Otto Mollenhauer and their families have grown some cotton since World War 1, sending it to Whinstanes ginnery.⁷

Another crop which selectors experimented with in the Brisbane Valley was sugar cane. Frederick Bauer (a pioneer of the Queensland sugar industry having been the major shareholder in the Pimpama Sugar Company formed in 1865) acquired 720 acres of land on the Brisbane River in 1869. It had been taken up by Carl Sahl in 1867 under the *Sugar and Coffee Regulations* and in Bauer's time was known as 'Noogoora Plantation'. It was managed by W. King and Creole cane was grown. Forty acres of cotton, forty of maize, thirty of lucerne, 1.5 of Creole sugar cane, and one acre of yams were cultivated by South Sea Islanders. The large cotton shed was situated 200-300 yards from the house. The top floor was for cotton storage and the eagle-gin of fifty saws, and a fireproof cotton room; there was also a small mill for grinding maize meal. The lower floor was used for chaff cutting and also housed the bale press, both driven by horse power. Behind the cotton shed were the Islanders' barracks.⁸

Nearer to Sandy Creek Hill's farm also had good crops. To the west James Ivory experimented with cane also; an assistant, Allan, had manufactured some fine straw coloured sugar from twenty-one month old ribbon cane in 1871.⁹

The main cane land tried in the West Moreton region was in the Marburg area just to the south of the Esk Shire. There were at least three small sugar mills — Pochee's on Portion 299, Parish of Walloon, erected in 1871, Captain Rae's at Lark Hill in 1879, T.L. Smith's Woodlands mill (later the Marburg Sugar Company's) from 1883 to 1918, and one at Kirkheim in the boom of the early 1880s.

History of the Shire of Esk

On 19 April 1869 Biggingee Sorabjee Pochee, a British subject from India, selected 160 acres of agricultural land; in 1871, at the height of sugar boom, he erected a small horse-powered sugar mill purchased from Cribb and Foote who, as his mortgagees, had the selection transferred to them on 3 July 1871. The machinery had been part of their Ipswich cotton ginnery. The mill was enlarged by Pochee in 1872 and Samuel Harris managed an eighteen horse-power, shell boiler set in brick, with horizontal engine driving a small mill with three horizontal rollers, plus the usual battery, clarifier, centrifuge and finishing pan. There was a large brick chimney, a furnace, and water tank, all housed in a galvanized iron shed. The total value in November 1875 was £1,000. However it was then burnt down, just when rust had begun to decimate the cane and the price had dropped dramatically.¹⁰

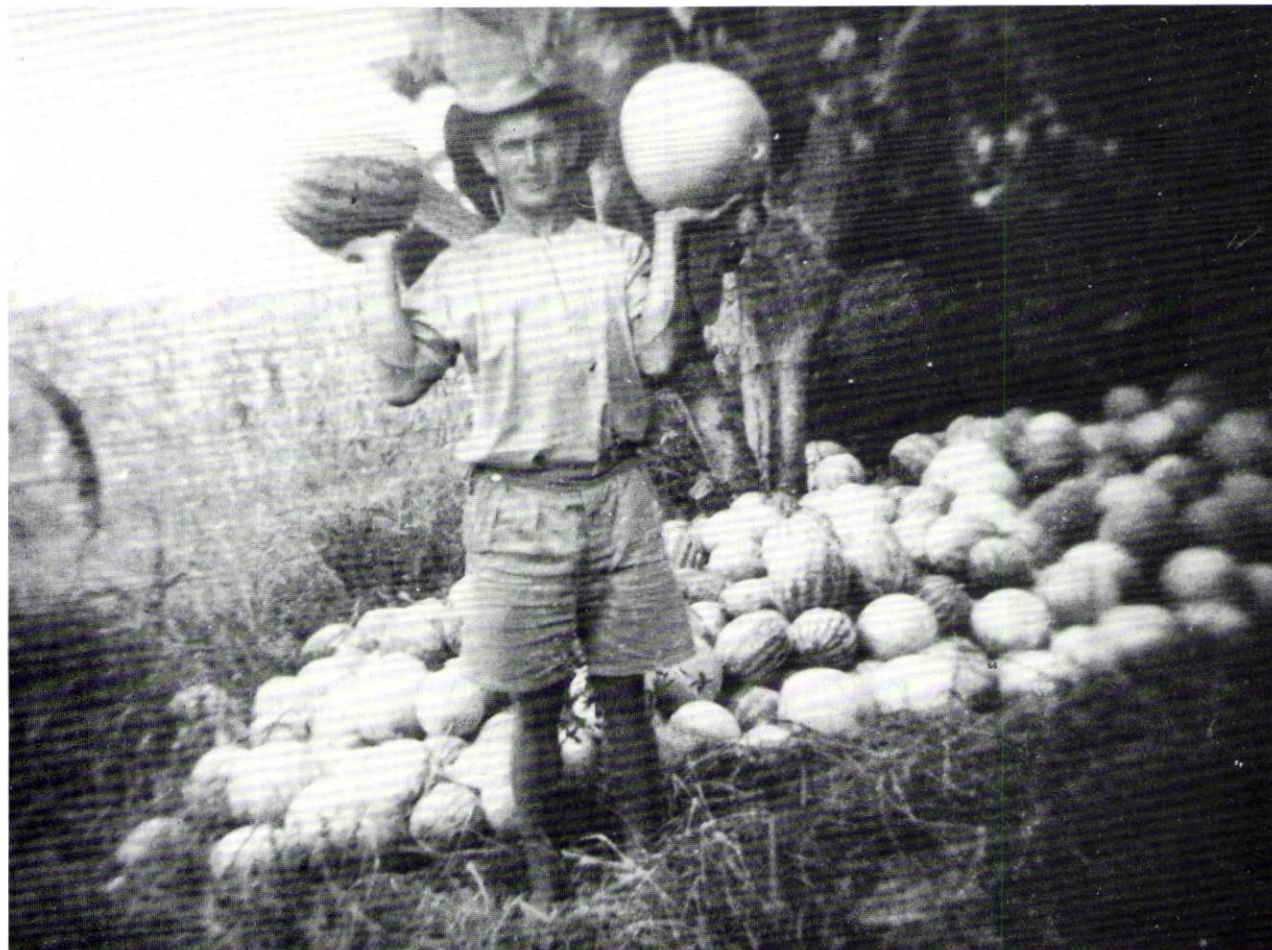
Captain Rae's mill, erected near Walloon railway station in 1879, had a capacity of less than a ton a day and was worked by father and sons in the 1880s boom. German settlers in the Tallegalla area advocated a co-operative mill in 1882. Their needs were met by the sawmiller, T.L. Smith, who

erected a mill, which he named Woodlands, along Glamorgan Vale road at Marburg in 1883. His Mirrlees, Watson and Tait machinery had a capacity of two tons of sugar per day. It was at the peak of the boom and he had difficulty obtaining labour because the cane was ten feet high, weed infested, and untrashed. The area was frost free, enabling the mill to continue for many years. It was taken over in 1906 by the Gibsons of Gibson and Howes of Bingera who formed the Marburg Sugar Company with a working capital of £4,000. Johannes and Adolphus Frederick, Marburg storekeepers, were large shareholders. The company operated the mill until 1919. The railway was opened from Rosewood to Marburg on 18 December 1911 and extended one mile to the mill; this enabled cane to be railed to the mill from other cane farms in the West Moreton and Fassifern areas.¹¹

In 1893 farmers, led by J.D. Handley, held a meeting at Esk to foster the possibility of the sugar industry. Despite boggy roads a hundred attended; thirty-two people offered to grow cane on 233 acres. A committee comprising Major Smith, W.

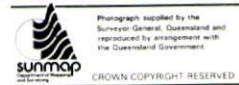
Mount Beppo farmer with a melon crop.

Dennis Teske





Marburg town in a nineteenth century agricultural setting.



Schroeder, W. Beutel, A.J. Kluck, H. Denning, A. Litzow, and J. Janke was formed and H. Berghagen offered some land for a mill. Unfortunately, the project was illconceived and failed.¹²

The drought of 1877 seriously affected most farmers in the Brisbane Valley forcing many to carry water. Pack horses with cans of water on either side trudged over the hills, especially in the Tarampa and Glamorgan Vale areas. Cultivation areas contracted and fodder was grown for farm use only. It was obvious that there had to be better farm management and the planting of native grasses after the land was cleared. Cattle numbers decreased and those normally grazed by Lockyer Creek farmers on the sandy Mount Hallen country were sent further distant to Monsildale on the upper Stanley River tributaries. A favourable result of the drought was the disappearance of fungoid and insect pests; but John Noonan, who had a hundred milking cows at Lockyer Creek, stone paved milking yards, and raised floors in his pig sties, never fully recovered from that drought.¹³

The railway was a strong impetus to both selection and agriculture; prosperity and land values depended on the route selected. The first meeting advocating the railway was held at Banff's hotel at Wivenhoe on 17 August 1876; that meeting recommended a railway from Walloon to the

Burnett via Esk as a revenue earner. There were a number of conflicting objectives and routes, especially as Ipswich and Maryborough were vying for the Gympie trade. The ranges north of Colinton were considered impenetrable for a railway, so David McConnel suggested that the line should go from Walloon to Glamorgan Vale, north to Esk and Colinton. If extension to the Burnett was desired McConnel thought that it should first go to Durundur and Caboolture and then north from Kilcoy up Sheep Station Creek and on to the Burnett.¹⁴

The construction of the railway to Esk via Fernvale opened agricultural land around Tarampa and Lowood but from Clarendon to Esk it served only grazing land. The next stage was from Esk to Toogoolawah which provided a marvellous opportunity for the McConnells to subdivide land for farmers. Built at the turn of the century by day labour, it encouraged the rapid opening of land and shops in Esk, bringing business people who stayed for decades.

Dairying and pigs became the staple industry and the railway also stimulated lucerne growing. The paddocks and railway stations were hives of activity baling and railing hay. The virgin soils at Fernvale and Wivenhoe yielded twelve to thirteen tons of lucerne per ten acres cut. German waggons

History of the Shire of Esk

rumbled in hauling produce; their German masters heaved and stacked their pumpkins, potatoes, onions, and lucerne amidst the teamsters and traction engines with their loads of logs and the raucous chatter of organizing the yard and loading the wooden rail waggons twice a day. Nearby auctioneers offered squealing pigs and calves to abattoir buyers. The grubby teamsters and waggon drivers trudged to the pubs or burgeoning town cafes for a hot lunch with their friends or began the slow trip home to their wives for the late hot dinner. At Esk there were constant complaints about the lack of space in the yards for teamsters and farmers, a situation which existed for a half century. During war time it was disrupted by the loss of the young men and the appearance of the young American negroes in the second War demanding precedence for unloading their fuel and munitions in the Lowood railway yard.¹⁵

The 1902 drought caused graziers to change from fattening cattle to dairying. They had lost so many cattle and so many were too weak for droving. Farmers rapidly built dairies, sending their cream and milk to factories; by 1904 these were centralized close to the railway at Esk and Toogoolawah, whereas previously the small cheese factories, such as at Bryden, had been close to the farms. The prominent graziers never recovered their prowess in the Brisbane Valley after the 1902 drought decimated their livestock numbers. Trustee Companies took control as elderly lessees died. Subdivision along the watercourses became the prevailing practice of the McConnells and the Moores.

These subdivisions kindled a new lifestyle where there was a regular cash income from dairying to supplement the basic subsistence on the farm. Likewise maize growing offered a profitable income but it took some time to recover to pre-1902 drought levels. Prices were very low at the time, and the subsistence lifestyle, with little capital and few debts, protected families in the 1930s depression. A half century later Coominya identity, Ned Hanrihan, reminisced that, by comparison with city dwellers farmers were 'on clover' because they had free butter, milk, cheese, eggs, and meat.¹⁶

Agricultural incomes were always at the mercy of volatile markets. In the 1920s farmers endeavoured to form state maize and butter pools to stabilize the price and control production. Lowood farmers met in January 1925 on this matter. Many conservative farmers preferred to let market forces rule and wipe out the small farmer. Esk Co-operative Association Chairman, Graham,

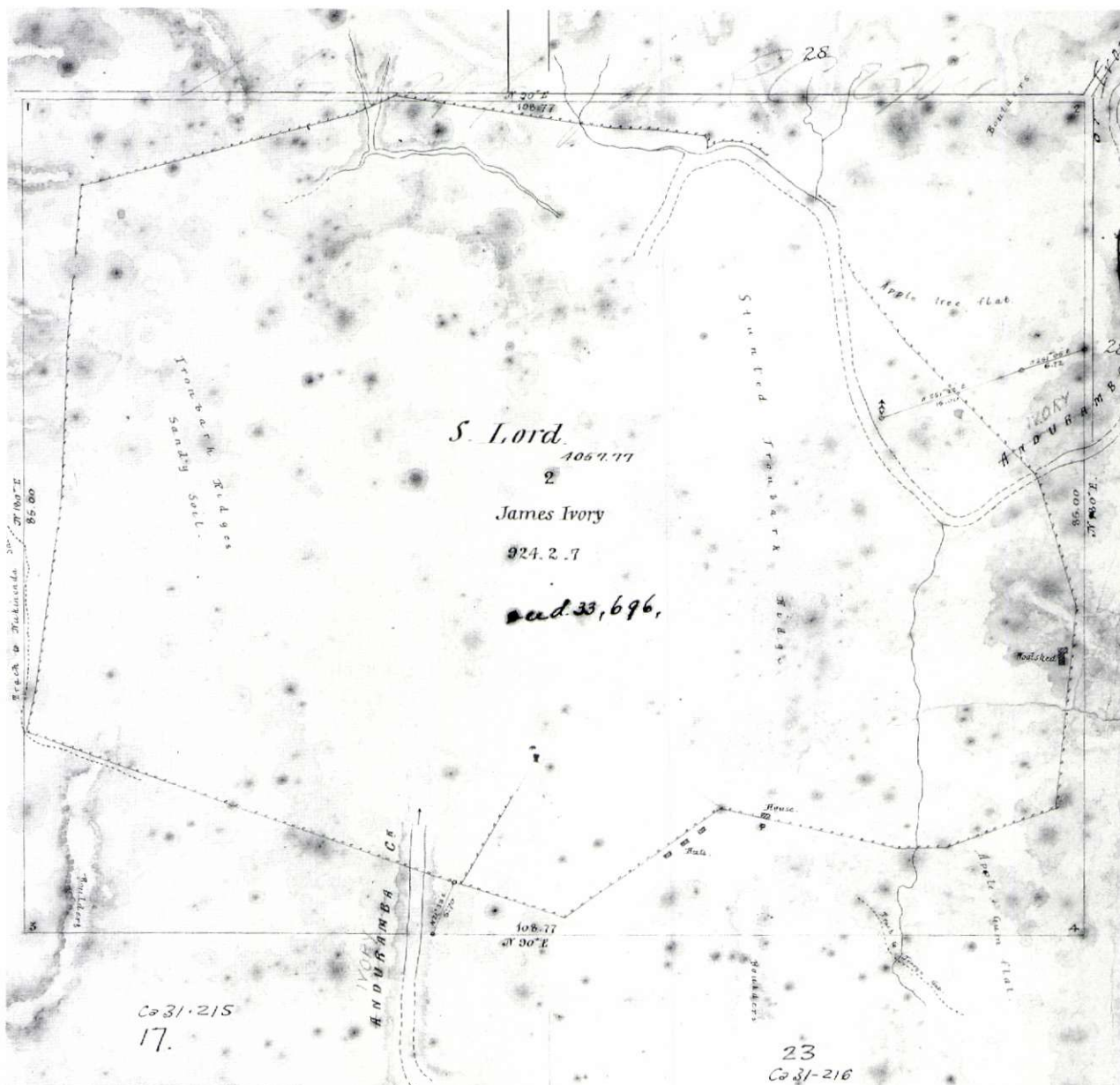
considered that there would have to be amalgamations of farms if the government insisted on fixing maximum prices for primary products.¹⁷

The banana boom illustrated price volatility. Whilst the coastal areas were more prolific banana producers, in late 1923 Alex and Jack Boreham planted Cavendish bananas between Ivory's and Marongi Creeks eight miles west of Harlin. They harvested 2,000 bunches from twelve acres in 1925. Many farmers in the Gregor's Creek area towards Kilcoy grew them as a side line but the disease 'bunchy top' and the price collapse in 1929 wiped them out.¹⁸

Selectors had started growing fruit trees from the 1870s because they required less water than root crops or legumes and because they were less perishable for sending to market. In 1888 William Daniels was growing seven varieties of very good apples at Esk, his sixty trees yielding three tons of fruit. J.M. Chaille's orchard and fencing at Blinkbonnie near Esk was burnt out in 1900. Out along Redbank Creek there were many orchards in the 1920s — C. Findlay, Cormack Brothers, J.M. Gorrie, J. Jones, O. Limberg, the Hertricks, and C. Clarkson. J.A. Milner was at Sunnyside and C. Francis and E. Taylor had excellent orchards in alluvial soil pockets along the banks of Cressbrook Creek. There were other orchards closer in to Esk along the Hampton Road. However, the problem was always lack of markets. Also the land available for the sons of the first selectors after World War I was not so fertile or well watered. J. Williamson's orchard on Emu and Possum Creeks at Colinton in 1932 was a mixed farm in the best tradition. On 200 acres he had a herd of Jerseys and cultivated twenty acres with sweet potatoes, cow peas, lucerne, and maize. Surrounding his five roomed house he had a garden and fernery and the orchard.¹⁹

Fencing was always a problem for orchardists because marsupials nibbled the bark away or ate the young plants whole. In the depression years most of the kerosine tins around the Esk Rubbish Dump migrated to the Redbank Creek orchards to deter the rabbits and bandicoots. As the scrub was progressively cleared the problem disappeared as the marsupial population decreased.

Likewise there were orchards in the Esk and Coominya and Mount Hallen districts. The citrus orchards at Mount Hallen were an economic failure. It was hard, sandy, dry soil that was opened as Soldier Settlement selections after the first World War. All the best land had been selected and freeholded decades earlier and the reward for returned soldiers on these farms was hollow. An



REFERENCE TO CORNERS.

Corner	Bearing	From	Links	M ^o on tree
1	N 33° 30' E	Gum	26	2
2	207°		12	
3	S 8° 30'	Bloodwood	103	
4	145° 40'	M. B. Ash	61	

Scale 10 Chains to 1 Inch.



revised under Printed Instructions from Surveyor-General No. 62-5181 dated October 11th 1869
 transmitted to the Surveyor-General March 17th 1870
 by my Letter No. 70/2 dated March 16th 1870

James Pattinson
 Licensed Surveyor.
 Country, vol. 5, p. 144.
 P. 23. 12. 75.

SURVEY
 OF PORTIONS N^{os}. 2
 PARISH OF ESKDALE
 COUNTY OF GAVENDISH
 DISTRICT OF WEST MORETON
 Cat. N^o Ca 31-40

Plan of Portion 2, Parish of Eskdale. 1870.



Farm near Lowood with paling fences to exclude marsupials.

John Oxley Library

area of 3,281 acres (Portions 94 to 141, Parish of Buaraba, Portions 126 to 151 and 107 to 125, Parish of Wivenhoe) was resumed from Robert, Samuel, and William Watson, along with part of Bellevue (Portions 152 to 166, Parish of Wivenhoe). It was surveyed into 109 portions ranging from 22 to 37 acres each. By June 1920 seventy-six properties had been allocated, 750 acres cleared, 450 acres ploughed, 72 acres of citrus trees planted, 80,000 grape vines planted, and an office erected for manager, A.E. Murray. Settlers planted cotton in 1922 but by 1923 it was clear that the project would fail because the properties were too small, the farmers had no liquidity after building their houses, and the crops withered without water. Many of the settlers were English and had never farmed before. They were given a horse and cart and a grubber and 'paid to work the land'. Their economic position became so distressing that they were helped to leave the area and move to other Soldier Settlements. By the early thirties the farms had all been abandoned and people using the Gatton to Esk Road used to pick the abandoned fruit or select young trees for transplanting before the bandicoots ringbarked them.²⁰

Vineyards have prospered in the Fernvale — Lowood — Coominya area since the 1870s. German immigrants used their native skills vinedressing to earn extra income. They followed the example of

their countrymen in the Brisbane and South Coast areas who had commenced vinedressing in the mid 1860s. W.J. Gutteridge was one of the first to establish grape growing in the Coominya area on his 'Norman' Vineyard. In 1908 his thirty-two acres of vines overlooking the lagoon was the largest vineyard in the Brisbane Valley. As many as 200 people used to visit him on Sundays when the grapes were ripe.²¹

At the same time Banff's 'Clinton' vineyard at Coominya was expanding, its wines were extremely popular. Banff's has become the best known vineyard because of the family's long commitment to the area, their prosperity, and their employment of local people. Jacob Banff and his wife immigrated to Queensland in 1863 on the *Beausite*, purchased thirty acres of land at Fernvale (Portion 82, Parish of North) in 1871; they moved to Coominya in 1880, taking up 'Clinton' of 160 acres (Portion 225, Parish of England). Their two sons, John (Henry) and William, worked the vineyard and the traditions were carried on into the 1950s by their sisters, Charlotte and Tina. It was then taken over by their nephew, Fred.²²

'Clinton' vineyard cellars were expanded in 1912 to hold 10,000 gallons. Two years later new cellars were built of fibro-cement, capable of holding 35,000 gallons of wine. The Banffs also had a

brandy distilling plant and storage room, using all the grapes for wine, none fresh for the table. In 1917 this vineyard was the second largest in Queensland producing 7,000 gallons of wine and 1,000 gallons of brandy annually.²³

By the late 1920s they were selling several thousand cases of grapes per year. In the field they sprayed sulphur on the vines to keep them clean. In the second World War, for lack of suitable labour, schoolboys were employed during the Christmas school holidays to pick the crop. In January 1946 they employed forty pickers, packers, and carters to handle the 5,000 cases obtained from thirty acres of vines. Local women worked as packers. The schoolboys from Brisbane, Nambour, Ipswich, Grantham, and Lowood did the picking singing as they went, under R.C. Schloss's supervision. Henry and Tina Banff supervised the packing. Two boys used to bring in the grapes by horse and cart; they were provided with accommodation, with water and electricity, on the farm. They held concerts, swimming and boxing, and attended Church on Sunday. The Banffs were no longer making wine as the fresh fruit was more profitable, although they still had eighty acres of wine grapes. Lottie and Tina also managed two hundred cattle. They continued to use secondary school students as labourers until the end of the fifties. Students from Gatton College also participated with A. Keyes of Coominya supervising, and Vic Honour came with the Brisbane Grammar boys in 1950. In 1952 Banffs were harvesting four hundred to six hundred boxes per day and road transport took them directly to the Brisbane Markets over night. John (Henry) Banff died in 1953 aged eighty. However Lottie and Tina carried on in a changing economic environment.²⁴

There were also a number of crop failures during the fifties because of pests and natural calamities. However Miss Charlotte Banff rationalized the farm by diversifying: 'If the weather has been bad for the vineyard, it has been wonderful for the cattle. We can't have it both ways.' Feathered vandals also could destroy half the crop by attacking the lower bunches. In the 1954-5 wet season fogs caused mildew; in January 1957 the harvest was wiped out by a hail storm but 1958 was the best harvest for five years when seven thousand cases of Royal Ascot, Red Iona, White Shiraz, and Isabella were predicted. The vineyard has been continued by Fred Banff, trained at Hawkesbury Agricultural College and married to Nerada Von Stieglitz of Brisbane, in 1959.²⁵

Farmers along the Brisbane River, Emu, Lockyer, and Cressbrook Creeks prospered on root crops

and legumes. Mt Beppo farmers had been cropping potatoes in the same ground since 1889. During World War I they were growing the 'Satisfaction', 'Guyra Blue', and 'Circulated Heads' varieties. Records such as 105 bags of potatoes in half an acre from two bags of seed potatoes were achieved in 1916 by T.J. Coleman.²⁶

There were local inspectors to monitor the marketing of the produce but the federal government maintained price control on all the agricultural produce until 1949. This created grievances which led growers to lobby the Queensland Agriculture and Stock Department to establish the Potato Marketing Board; W. Utz was Lowood's first representative on the newly established board in 1947. That year's crop was a record. During one week 221 tons (3,315 bags) of potatoes were delivered to the board's depot at P. Teske's premises. Most had been grown with irrigation. In 1947 eighty Toogoolawah growers formed a branch of the South Queensland Potato Growers Association with W. Guppy (Chairman), John Milner (Secretary), and Alf Luaritz (Treasurer).²⁷

There were difficulties with the administration of the local potato industry by the Potato Board. In 1943 at Toogoolawah one farmer complained of having to pay all the Potato Board charges and then found that his product was sold locally by the agent anyway. There was a potato glut immediately postwar and the board considered applying quotas to reduce production by 25 per cent. In 1952 Henry Phillip Sippel of Mt Tarampa and Gottfried Dising of Brightview had gone outside the orderly marketing system and were fined £1 for delivering potatoes to other than the Potato Marketing Board. O.J. North, appearing for them, stated that their case raised constitutional questions about interstate trade but they would not appeal to the High Court because of the cost. In 1956 the Federal Potato Advisory Conference considered a Commonwealth Potato Marketing plan recommending that acreages be allocated by the Agricultural Council, growers be registered, and a stabilization fund be established.²⁸

Lowood has the reputation of being the centre of the small crops growing area in the Valley. People recall huge tonnages being railed from Lowood when two trains a day carried exclusively Lowood small crops to market. The railings were regularly published in the newspaper so that farmers knew the progress of the harvest. The *Queensland Times* also published lists of prices obtained at auction sales and market prices were avidly followed by farmers. Those were the days when the local radio station broadcast daily prices for produce at the

History of the Shire of Esk

Brisbane Market at times in the early morning and in the evening to suit farmers' time tables.

Up to the depression farmers used horses, waggons, and traction engines to transport produce to the siding. Councillors railed about the damage which the thundering fiery traction engines did to the wooden culverts and bridges. Equally irritating was the fact that they stopped on the bridges while taking on water from the creek, and the drivers were no respecters of whose creeks, dams, or wells they took water from. After the passing of waggons and traction engines and improvements to the roads came lorries.

A new breed replaced the rough talking teamsters — lorry drivers or 'general carriers', as they were known. They drove Bedford, Chevrolet, Dodge, and International trucks — open-backed for produce and battens on the side for cattle transport. They plied to the railway stations on sale days and to the dairy factories, taking newspapers and mail on the afternoon trips. The farmers who could not afford to pay carriers or who were independent-minded took their own produce in utilities. In wet weather they bogged or attached chains to negotiate the black soil roads; the trick was always to stay on the made track no matter how soupy it looked because that was where the Council had

dumped river gravel. Some even negotiated spider bridges in the back blocks. In the wet season, when bridges were submerged, flying foxes were used to transport cream and small crops to market before they perished. Farmers in the Patrick Estate, Wivenhoe, North's Pocket, and Vernor were most affected by floods. Pointings Bridge was a valuable asset; in fact, high level bridges have been an important theme for the Esk Shire Council for over a century. Without satisfactory water crossings there was no income or economic viability for the region.

The form of local marketing of agricultural produce also created a definite social pattern as well. Sale and cream days meant that the town was full of farmers 'talking shop' while their wives were busy in the shops. The town was always full on Saturdays. That was the day off for farming families to go out and purchase all the household requisites. They drove into town over the rough gravel roads, saw all their friends, swapped news and retreated from the shops as they closed. Men stood under trees and horses sneezed nearby on the short grass. In later years the 'seat of knowledge' was a new phenomenon in the towns, especially as the aged selectors retired to the towns. They argued over politics, sport, Council business, the siting of bridges, road and dam construction, and the rate that wages were increasing in relation to

Mount Beppo farmers harvesting.

Dennis Teske





Cabbages near Lowood, 1987.

Terry Conway

the butter or milk prices or the price of spuds and onions.

Times were changing too in the cultivation methods and the influx of pests. Tractors came in in the late 1920s although many farmers continued to use draught horses, single ploughs and planters, scufflers, and rakes into the 1950s. Pests were an increasing problem. Everyone knew about Prickly Pear for it was on everyone's land and it was a constant on the Council agendas. Some Councillors had to be careful how they approached the subject publicly for their own land was equally susceptible to the rapid growth of the plant. To Council's embarrassment, prickly pear grew on road reservations and spread on to ratepayers' cultivated land. Equally debilitating to agricultural crops were grasshoppers which came in plagues regularly. When the seasons were particularly wet, places near the river, such as much of the Lowood area, suffered from mildew.

Another feature of towns like Lowood, Fernvale, Esk, and Toogoolawah was the produce merchants. They were often agents for larger companies in Brisbane who bought lucerne and maize and seed crops to be railed to the Brisbane auctions. Many were agents of the Brisbane Wholesale Potato Distributors Committee. The chief produce merchants were all clustered around the railway stations. They were the influential people in towns,

buying and selling not only produce but also land and taking over as mortgagees when they saw an opportunity. The remains of the railway goods sheds at Lowood and Esk testify to the spirited bidding that despatched the fresh onions and potatoes and paid the farmers in cash. In 1945 in one week in November 7,215 bags of potatoes and 700 bags of onions were railed from Lowood one Saturday morning alone.²⁹

Price stabilization and research on pests were top priorities for Brisbane Valley agriculturalists. It was also well known that damp and cloudy weather could cause blight to wipe out the whole of the grower's crop as occurred to the Schmidt Brothers' crop in October 1949. Toogoolawah crops were also severely affected that year. The Department of Agriculture and Stock pathologists suggested the use of copper sprays. Onions, beetroot and carrot crops in the Lowood area were damaged by the wet weather in 1950 in contrast to the bonanza in 1949 when five hundred tons of onions were loaded on the railway at Lowood in one week in October.³⁰

Potato and onion crops revived in 1951 with high crop yields. This was assisted by record irrigation of the pumpkin, lucerne, potato, and onion crops when there had only been seven inches of rain in seven months. Production fluctuated throughout

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the 1950s according to water availability and disease. Marketing and prices were continuing problems.¹¹

Farmers have always been experimenting with different crops. Ferris grew flax, in Lower Cressbrook area in 1934 and S.F. Knight of Mount Beppo also grew flax, selling it at Queensland Linseed Industries Mill, at Redbank. Jeremiah and Michael Twomey, Irish immigrants of 1921, grew bananas at Banks Creek (Fernvale) and at Sim Jue Creek in the 1930s. Len Jackwitz was growing tobacco in plots at Clarendon under Department of Agriculture and Stock supervision in 1950. Forty-five years earlier, F.R. Spengler, a cigarmaker by trade, grew cigar leaf at Coominya but gave up because the tobacco companies would not buy local leaf.¹²

In the 1980s the value of a potato or lucerne farm is assessed by its irrigation water allocation. Areas such as the Patrick Estate and Clarendon have only come up to full potential since Atkinson's Dam was constructed. Access to that water is essential because the cost of sinking a bore is \$14,000 in 1987. Farms of sixty acres with irrigation were once considered large but increased landholdings are now necessary because of the high costs of electricity and water and the fall in real terms of the price of lucerne to \$5 per bale; twenty years ago it was \$3 per bale. One of the advantages of the Water Resources Commission conditions on irrigated water is that allocations can be transferred from one property to another. However it is now electricity tariffs which determine the lifestyle of farmers; the cost of units between 7am and 9pm is three times that during the evening, so most irrigating is done during the evenings.

Mixed farming has always been prevalent in the Brisbane Valley. From the 1880s cattle were run either as a dairy or for grazing, as well as growing crops. Many farmers combined dairying with lucerne, maize, or potatoes and onions. It was common for dairy cows only to be milked in the morning and some farmers, like the Patricks, ran a dairy of a hundred milkers in summer. That changed in the 1950s as butter prices declined and young sons left for city employment. These farmers then turned to beef cattle and grazed the region heavily. Early this century available grazing land for lease was in the Mt Hallen, Eskdale and Monsildale areas; cattle had to be driven to railheads of Mt Hallen, Esk, and Linville for sale.

The Brisbane Valley has remained a viable agricultural area because of the ready availability of water, the fertility of the soil, and the proximity to markets. Floods have equally determined the

fertility and the profitability. A modern factor is the increase in rural subdivisions which are attractive to retiring farmers, land developers, and young people seeking a rural escape. Together with the Wivenhoe dam these factors gave decreased the area of productive land in the 1970s and 1980s.

ENDNOTES

1. MBC 12 June 1852, 19 and 26 February 1853 and 14 January 1854; ER 6 March 1937.
2. BC 20 February 1864; QT 9 October 1866 p3, 13 October 1866 p4, and 30 October 1866 p2 and 7 March 1867 p3; Survey Plan M32.27, Department of Mapping and Surveying.
3. QT 13 and 22 June 1867 p4 and p3 respectively.
4. QT 30 April 1868, 12 May 1868 and 2 June 1868 p3; BC 27 June 1868 and 4 September 1868.
5. QT 25 March 1871 p3.
6. QT 22 April 1871 p3.
7. BC 7 February 1873 quoting *Queensland Times*; QT 14 June 1890, 6 November 1912 p4, 13 March 1919 p3 and April 1924 (Grace Nunn Collection); LWDM 20 September 1915 p48; ER 16 May 1931.
8. QT 22 April 1871 p3; LAN/216, selection 56, QSA.
9. QT 11 July 1871 p3.
10. Q 5 October 1872 p5 c6 quoting *Queensland Times*; Pugh's *Almanac 1877* Diary of Events.
11. Q 14 July 1879 and 10 June 1882 p711 c4; Company File 56 Book 12.
12. QT 26 August and 14 October 1893.
13. QT 17 and 27 August 1878; QV&P 1878 Vol 2 pp711-715.
14. QT 19 August 1876 p2; BC 25 July 1877 p3 c5.
15. Queensland Tourist Bureau, *Lockyer and Stanley* (Brisbane, Government Printer, 1908) p120; ER 21 October 1933.
16. QT 12 November 1903 and 30 July 1904; BVKS 6 June 1986 p4.
17. QT January 1925 (Grace Nunn Collection); ER 24 January 1931.
18. QT 21 March 1925 p3 and 12 December 1926 p3.
19. Q. 3 March 1888; QT 22 December 1900; BC 4 June 1927; DM 13 June 1929; ER 12 March 1932; Private interview by the author with Mr Jim Brough, Esk, 19 April 1986.
20. QPP 1920 Vol 1 p1,110, 1922 Vol 1 p981, 1923 Vol 1 p1,349; QT 14 October 1922 p5, 20 September 1923 p6 and 18 December 1981 p7; BVKS 6 June 1986 p4.
21. DM 13 June 1929; *Esk Shire* by 'Orion' 1908; Queensland Intelligence and Tourist Bureau, *Lockyer and Stanley* 1908 pp 85 and 87.
22. See Immigration Department and Lands Department Selection records.
23. QT 13 March 1915 p14 and 13 January 1919; QPP 1919-1920 Vol 2 pp1,091-1,229.
24. DM 13 June 1929; QT 18 January 1946, 14 January 1950 and 14 January 1952; CM 19 January 1946; QCL 6 July 1953.
25. QCL 18 November 1954; QT 20 January 1959 and 14 January 1958; CM 9 January 1957.
26. QT 12 June 1913 p3 and 26 December 1916 p3.
27. QT 3 and 24 July 1946 and 20 November 1947 p4; CM 30 April 1946 and 18 October 1947; *Stanley Bulletin* 21 November 1947.
28. QT 30 January 1943 p4 and 25 October 1945; Brisbane *Telegraph* 26 November 1952; QCL 22 March 1956.
29. QT 13 November 1945 and 8 October 1946.
30. QT 24 and 25 March 1949, 26 and October 1949, 11 July 1950 and 19 October 1949.
31. QDF 17 November 1951 p3; QT 7 November 1951; CM 5 November 1952; QCL 23 September 1954 and 1 March 1956.
32. ER 27 October 1934 and 19 April 1940; BVA 24 October 1934; BVS 9 August 1957 and 30 April 1965; QT 18 February 1950.