Journeys to
Sugaropolis
The Australian South Sea Islander
Story of the Gold Coast Region
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ON 14 AUGUST 1863 the schooner, *Don Juan*, arrived in Moreton Bay. Aboard were 67 indentured labourers from the islands of Melanesia in the western part of the South Pacific. They had been engaged by Captain Robert Towns, a member of the New South Wales Legislative Assembly and businessman, to work on his 4,000 acre (1618 hectare) cotton plantation, Townsville, at present-day Veresdale on the Logan River near Beaudesert. The landing of these workers began an important, controversial and at times tragic chapter in the history of Queensland. Between 1863 and 1904 an estimated 55,000 to 62,500 South Sea Islanders were recruited to work in Queensland, mostly as rural labourers, and the Gold Coast was an important early centre of work and settlement for them. They faced harsh conditions and treatment in an alien land, yet they adapted and were vital to the success of various industries. Ultimately the government excluded most of these people from Australian society and forced them to return home. A few managed to stay.

This book looks at the lives and contributions of Australian South Sea Islanders – those early indentured labourers and their descendants – to the Gold Coast and nearby areas.
The demand for labour

When Queensland became a separate colony from New South Wales in 1859, its small population faced the daunting task of opening up a vast expanse of undeveloped land. With the ending of convict transportation from Great Britain some years earlier, finding cheap and reliable labour to do this work became difficult. European workers were scarce and expensive, and it was also widely believed that they were unsuited to fieldwork in hot climates.

In 1868 The Argus stated:

“The immigration of South Sea Islanders into Queensland will facilitate the cultivation of tropical produce, which it would be hopeless to attempt to raise by the labour of Europeans; since the latter could not pursue out-of-doors occupations under a torrid sun in the height of summer.”

The labour shortage was made worse when gold discoveries lured many people off the land and in search of their fortune on the goldfields. Part of the solution was to import indentured workers: workers who were contracted to their employer for a fixed period in exchange for a wage, goods and rations. A large number came from the scattered islands of Melanesia. These people were commonly referred to as South Sea Islanders, Pacific Islanders or Kanakas. Kanaka comes from a Hawaiian word for ‘man’. Today there are some members of the Australian South Sea Islander community who regard that particular term as offensive and demeaning. Others view it as part of their heritage and identity.

South Sea Islanders were also called Polynesians. This was because in the 19th century all of the islands of the South Pacific were known as Polynesia, whereas today it is divided into four regions, of which Melanesia is one.
One of the earliest commercial crops in Southeast Queensland was cotton, and it relied heavily on Melanesian labour. This crop attracted local investors during the American Civil War (1861-65) when the American cotton supply to British textile factories was disrupted. Robert Towns’ estate, Townsville, was one of the earliest commercial cotton plantations, but other growers soon followed. Cotton production was labour intensive, and in order to meet their needs some enterprises imported factory workers and their families from the depressed British cotton manufactories. This proved to be a dramatic failure as these urban workers were totally unsuited to plantation life. Robert Towns was the first to import South Sea Islanders, and this turned out to be much more successful. Large plantations using Melanesian labour spread across the region.

The cotton experiment was cut short because of poor seasons and the end of the American Civil War. By the late 1860s many investors went bankrupt but others were determined to keep their plantations going. They turned to sugarcane. Like cotton, sugarcane was labour intensive to produce, but it generally grew well in the sub-tropical climate of the region and at the time, with high world sugar prices, was very lucrative. As it had similar cultivation requirements to cotton, sugarcane was ideal for sustaining the plantation system - and the employment of South Sea Islanders – with minimal changes to existing infrastructure.

Captain Louis Hope at Ormiston Plantation, near Cleveland, was the first person to grow sugarcane commercially, and between the 1860s and 1880s, planters and investors established sugar plantations on the floodplains and valleys of the Brisbane, Nerang, Coomera, Pimpama, Logan and Albert Rivers, at Cleveland and Caboolture, in northern New South Wales, and as far west as Rosewood near Ipswich. The southern Moreton Bay islands of Lamb, Macleay, Karragarra and Russell also had sugar plantations. South Sea Islanders were indentured on most of these estates.

While the bulk of South Sea Islanders were engaged in cotton, and then sugar, growing in coastal districts, they were also employed in other occupations. Some were employed as sailors on many of Queensland’s ships, including the labour vessels visiting Melanesia. They also found work as domestic servants; in the houses of the wealthy in Brisbane and the towns of the sugar districts, islander men could be seen as house servants and coachmen, while women were valued as maids and nannies. Out west, South Sea Islanders worked as shepherds and stockmen on pastoral stations.
Recruitment

The majority of the South Sea Islanders employed in Queensland came from New Caledonia, the New Hebrides (now called Vanuatu), the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea, with smaller numbers from Tuvalu and Kiribati. Of these, most were young men between 16 and 35 years of age. Six per cent were women while 19 per cent were under-aged youths as young as nine.

ROBERT TOWNS’ FIRST RECRUITS came from Vanuatu and the Loyalty Islands in New Caledonia. He had experience of employing islanders, having engaged some as sailors on his trading vessels and considered them to be excellent workers. In 1863 he arranged for the sandalwood trader, Henry Ross Lewin, to recruit islanders for his cotton venture in Queensland. Lewin had been in the Royal Navy and was a suspected slaver to Peru. Although reputedly instructed by Towns not to use force, it would seem that coercion was one of the methods Lewin used to obtain workers. Lewin eventually came to a violent end, being shot dead on Tanna Island in 1874.

The other major employers of South Sea Islanders at this time were George Raff, Louis Hope, Claudius Whish and Gordon Sandeman. These men founded the plantation system in Queensland and were key political supporters of the South Sea Islander labour trade.

As supplies of suitable labourers dwindled on the islands visited in the 1860s, the labour vessels moved on to unexploited areas. The annexation of Pacific territory by the imperial governments of Great Britain, France and Germany affected where recruiters could work. Some islands were avoided because the inhabitants had a reputation for being extremely warlike or not well suited for plantation work. The Queensland Government also banned recruitment on islands where there was a threat of depopulation occurring. However the trade in South Sea Islanders became a thriving business and at its peak there were up to 40 ships visiting the islands with more than 800 voyages made.
During its first decade, this trade was poorly regulated and the abuses begun by Henry Lewin became widespread. Some people were recruited by unscrupulous means, a practice that has become known as ‘blackbirding’. They were abducted by force or lured aboard vessels by promises of trade goods or a fun trip to another land. Some people signed up without fully understanding what their indenture entailed.

Once on board the recruits often found themselves locked below decks. The voyage to Queensland was hazardous and recruits could be kept in crowded holds for weeks or months while the ships visited different islands to fill their quotas. In the early years they were given poor food, no sanitation and subject to harsh discipline. Under such conditions, deaths, fights, and attempted escapes occurred.

Among the strongest critics of the labour trade were the missionaries working in Melanesia, some of whom arranged protection for the communities. Growing outcries over the illegal labour trade forced the Queensland Government to pass the Polynesian Labourers Act in 1868. This and later legislation aimed to improve control of the labour trade and provide some protection to South Sea Islanders. It became mandatory for labour ship captains to be licensed and pay a bond as an assurance that they would not engage in illegal recruiting. The labour ships had to provide adequate care and conditions for South Sea Islanders, and were only permitted to carry a specified number of passengers (to avoid overcrowding). Only healthy men and women over 16 years of age were allowed to be recruited. Employers had to arrange for the return of their workers to their home islands after their indenture ended or, if they did not wish to leave immediately, pay money into a fund to help cover the cost of their eventual return. From the 1870s government agents were appointed to be present on labour vessels.

Over time, illegal labour recruiting stopped, although it was still noted in some parts of New Guinea and adjacent islands as late as 1885. Partly the practice faded away due to government pressure, but another factor was the growing willingness of the islanders themselves to sign on to work. When the first recruits returned home with desirable trade goods, young people were encouraged to seek adventure in Queensland. Some people left to escape difficulties they faced in their communities, such as punishment for breaking a law or, in the case of some women, poor treatment by their husbands or kin. Most left with the consent of their elders and saw their period of indenture as a chance to improve their social standing in their home community.
Journeys to Sugaropolis

South Sea Islander and European sugar workers, Gold Coast region, 1872.
Arrival

When Robert Towns’ first shipment of 67 islanders arrived in Moreton Bay on the Don Juan on 14 August 1863, passengers and crew had to remain aboard a few days until being cleared by the government Health Officer. The appearance of the Don Juan generated a considerable public outcry and concerns were raised about the start of an evil slave trade in Queensland. Medical inspection generally determined that the recruits were in good health, although one had died of exhaustion from sea sickness a few days earlier and was buried on Mud Island.

After the labour trade became well established, recruits destined for South East Queensland usually disembarked first at Brisbane. Obtaining reliable labour was one of the chief concerns of the plantation owners, and in the early years when a labour vessel was about to arrive in port, an advice notice was published in the local newspaper. Plantation managers or the owners themselves would go to Brisbane to select their employees. Other planters, as well as big companies such as the Colonial Sugar Refining Company (CSR) and Burns Philp Ltd financed their own labour ships. After 1877, employers had to apply formally through government channels to bring in labourers and were not permitted to introduce any unless they had made arrangements before the vessels left the islands. On landing, the islanders travelled by road or boat to plantations that had engaged them.

HOW the islanders got to Townsvale plantation is not clear. One view is that they were shipped to Redbank where Robert Towns had a coal mine, boiling down works and wharf. There they stayed a couple of days, arousing the curiosity of the locals. Items were exchanged, such as bows and arrows for boots and hats, and eating habits and other aspects of life were compared. Afterwards the islanders were taken by wagon or on foot to the estate. Another view is that the workers were sent up the Logan River to Logan Village, where Robert Towns also had a wharf, and from there moved to Townsvale.
The home islands

Melanesia is one of the four main culture areas of Oceania, the others being Australia, Micronesia and Polynesia. Melanesia is a distinct cultural region which includes New Guinea, the Bismarck Archipelago, the Solomon Islands, Santa Cruz, Vanuatu, Fiji and New Caledonia.

HUMAN COLONISATION of New Guinea began at least 40,000 years ago, while the more distant islands were reached around 10,000 years ago. When Europeans arrived in Melanesia, they discovered a bewildering diversity of languages and cultures. Traditional life was supported by hunting, fishing, pig rearing and the cultivation of garden plots. Warfare was endemic, and despite the scattered nature of the islands, there was extensive movement of people between islands, encouraged by wars, feuds and kinship ties.
Prior to the arrival of the recruiting vessels, the islands of Melanesia had been visited by whalers, naval vessels, sandalwood getters and missionaries. Melanesians also proved themselves to be capable sailors and were often used as crew for trading ships working in the region. As well, Melanesia was a place of great interest for European anthropologists and explorers. The effects of this contact included the spread of Christianity and the introduction of syphilis and other foreign diseases.

When the indentured labour trade began, outside contact intensified. The inhabitants of islands that had little previous experience of the European recruiters were fearful that their friends and relatives were being taken away to be killed. Suspicions and vendettas towards the recruiters, especially among those groups who had lost loved ones in Queensland, led to violence. On occasions labour ships were attacked by canoes or shot at.

By the 1880s labour ships and plantation work had become an accepted part of everyday island life. Islanders not only went to Queensland to work but also to plantations in Fiji and other Pacific islands. The labour trade affected island communities in many ways. With the temporary loss of many young men, there was greater pressure on women and children to grow food and sustain the community. The labour trade also accelerated cultural and political change. When people returned home after their time away, they brought stories of far away lands and different ways of life. They had goods such as tobacco, metal tools and guns. Firearms in particular had a major influence, changing both warfare and hunting practices. Some Islanders positioned themselves as middlemen for the recruiters, supplying the ships with labourers, and they became very wealthy and powerful within their communities.

The introduction of new ways coupled with new materials and weapons saw the loss of some island traditions and culture. The impact of the ongoing introduction of foreign diseases was also detrimental to island life. In one instance, in 1893, it was reported that one fourth of the population of the island of Fortuna (Futuna) died after a labour vessel landed a sick returnee.7
Journeys to Sugaropolis

In the 1860s, government regulations permitted sugar blocks of between 320 and 1280 acres (129 and 518 hectares) to be located within 10 kilometres of the sea or a navigable river. They attracted retired military officers, well-educated sons of British gentry, planters with experience in the West Indies or Southern United States, and businessmen who had acquired wealth during the Australian gold rushes.

It was quickly confirmed that sugar was a viable crop for Queensland conditions and in the southeast numerous sugar plantations and farms appeared, causing the district to be dubbed ‘Sugaropolis’. Early technological improvements in milling and growing were tested here and the results subsequently encouraged the expansion of the industry in both northern Queensland and New South Wales.

Although there were many smaller farms also growing sugarcane, the large plantations accounted for the bulk of sugar production. They were mainly located along the region’s five navigable rivers: the Logan, Albert, Pimpama, Coomera and Nerang. The rivers acted as highways allowing vessels to take sugar to Brisbane and bring in supplies.

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These estates were run as self-contained villages, which could include a manager’s residence, stables, blacksmith, workers’ barracks, carpenter’s house, stores and buildings which housed the mill, and perhaps a distillery. The mill-house and bagging store were generally located near a wharf. Much of the land was enclosed with post and rail fence and then subdivided into cultivation and grazing paddocks with a killing yard for the plantation’s meat supply. A sawmill often adjoined the sugar mill, cutting wood for the Brisbane market. Large plantations generally maintained a river steamer, cutter or a small fleet of punts for transport.

South Sea Islanders did much of the heavy manual labour involved in clearing the land, fencing, building drains and roads, and harvesting the sugarcane. They also helped with the milling operations, and at W.K. Witty’s plantations of Tatala and Yellowwood were noted as skillful drivers of the punts that brought the cane to the mill. A small number worked as sugar boils.

The plantations of the Gold Coast usually employed gangs of up to 60-70 people in their fields. For instance, Arthur Robinson’s 1280 acre (518 hectare) Helensvale Plantation on the Coomera River employed 58 South Sea Islanders and 16 Europeans in 1885. In the same year David Fullerton’s 1196 acre (484 hectare) Bundall Plantation at the mouth of the Nerang River employed 60 South Sea Islanders and 15 Europeans. Further upstream from Bundall, Robert Muir’s 1100 acre (445 hectare) Benowa Plantation employed 69 South Sea Islanders and 30 Europeans. Much bigger Melanesian workforces of up to 500 people were used on the plantations of north Queensland, where far larger areas of sugarcane were able to be cultivated. South Sea Islander women usually found employment as house servants – for instance at Kooroovoo Plantation on the Albert River a South Sea Islander woman worked as a children’s nurse and domestic. However, many also laboured beside the men in the fields. By the early 1880s it was reported that all the sugar manufacturing in the Gold Coast region was being done by islanders under the supervision of European managers. When the Queensland Census was taken in 1881, there were 454 South Sea Islanders in the Gold Coast and Logan regions, representing 11 per cent of the total population. This figure included 25 women, 15 working as domestic servants and 10 engaged as agricultural labourers.
Smaller gangs of South Sea Islanders were also widely employed on the sugar farms of the region. Near Muir’s estate was the farm of Edward Cooper at Carrara. Called Birribon, this was a holding of around 120 acres (48 hectares). It didn’t have its own mill and sent cane to Muir’s mill for crushing. It was run as a family enterprise, with Edward being assisted by his wife Lena and brothers Rolland and Herbert. Apart from sugarcane, the estate also grew corn, potatoes, bananas and other crops. While one or two European workers were employed, the rest of the workforce consisted of South Sea Islanders who lived in a hut which the brothers thatched with cane tops. Edward Cooper’s surviving diaries from the early 1880s provide a rare glimpse into life on a sugar farm, and show a more casual relationship between the islander workers and their European employers than what was the norm on larger estates. Although the South Sea Islanders employed at Birribon undertook heavy manual labour such as scrub clearing, weeding and cutting cane, the three Cooper brothers also worked alongside them in the fields, doing the same arduous duties as well as the ploughing and forming of drains.

Edward’s entry for Friday 9 March 1883, for instance, says:

I ploughing in Carrara and Bertie dropping potatoes.
Islanders cutting down weeds for potatoes. Rolie cutting potatoes and brushing in afternoon. I went to township in morning to get plough share done. Bertie went to post in evening. Fine weather rather warm.

On Monday 4 June, it was reported that:

We falling scrub all day. Islanders brushing scrub, fine weather. Frost in morning, Bertie went to post.
In the late 1880s Coudery and his family had moved onto Aegston. By this time the profitability of sugar was declining. For this reason Coudery was a strong advocate for the use of South Sea Islander labour, but by the 1890s had stopped sugar growing in favour of cattle and horse breeding. The family moved to another of their properties, Cedar Grove, near Veresdale. William Coudery died in 1919 and the plantation was subdivided from 1925.

Recent archaeological investigations at the former plantation have revealed an extensive and impressive landscape of old fields, drains and tramway cuttings, as well as the remains of the mill and residence. Although owned and controlled by Europeans, this is a shared historic landscape, as it also represents the toil and lives of South Sea Islanders. Here they had huts and gardens, went to work each day in the fields, and, perhaps, rested at midday under trees, looking out at the sweep of the river entering the bay and gardens, went to work each day in the fields, and, perhaps, rested at midday under trees, looking out at the sweep of the river entering the bay and representing the toil and lives of South Sea Islanders. Cuttings, as well as the remains of the mill and residence.

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As the local sugar industry dwindled, what was left was increasingly controlled by German settlers who had been arriving in the region since the 1860s. They took up farms, particularly around Alberton and Pimpama, and unlike their British counterparts, they tended to avoid employing South Sea Islanders. Partly this stance was due to their strong Protestant ideals, which promoted hard work and self-sufficiency. However it was also practical, as few could afford to hire labour. Instead, the Germans worked their farms as cooperatives, drawing on the free labour of their families. Despite their views, a few Germans actually did employ South Sea Islanders, and these included larger growers, such as Karl Rehfeldt, who engaged small numbers of South Sea Islanders at his mill at Alberton. It was also observed that as the German farmers became more prosperous, they wanted to send their children to school to get a better education rather than keep them in the fields, and so they began hiring South Sea Islander farmhands to fill the labour gap.

By 1890 mills at Birribi, Benowa and Bundall had ceased operation. A government funded central mill (the Nerang Central Mill) near the site of the old Benowa Mill struggled along through a series of bad years and a lack of confidence in sugar growing, until its closure in 1918. Further north, Helensvale Plantation was subdivided into small dairy farms and around Pimpama and Coomera, farmers turned to arrowroot growing. The sugar industry was not to be revived until the 1960s through the introduction of new drainage schemes and mechanisation.

With the decline of the plantations, the need for South Sea Islander labour also ended. When the Queensland Census was conducted in 1886, the number of South Sea Islanders in the region had decreased to 344, which was down 24 per cent from 1881. The 1891 census recorded a population of 94, and in 1901 the number had fallen to 37. This dwindling community continued to work mainly in agriculture, but not just as labourers. Some people set up their own farms and market gardens, or went into sawmilling, carting and shellfish collecting.

By the late 1880s the plantation system was in decline on the Gold Coast. Sugarcane rusts, droughts, frosts and a devastating flood in 1887 took their toll on many growers. Poor management, the extravagant lifestyles of some owners, and reliance on primitive milling technology were also to blame. Furthermore, there was a growing shortage of South Sea Islanders due to the demand for them in the northern sugar districts, and later, government restrictions on their entry and employment in Queensland.

Images from top (left to right): courtesy City of Gold Coast
HAND DUG DRAIN AND FORMER CANE FIELD
MILL SITE SHOWING MACHINERY FOUNDATIONS, 2012
EXCAVATING A POSSIBLE BLACKSMITH’S FORGE
REMAINS OF A KILN AT THE MILL SITE
COOKING BOILER AT THE MILL SITE
Indenured life

Was the South Sea Islander labour trade a form of slavery? This question is still debated. Slavery had been officially abolished in all British colonies by 1843, and unlike slavery, the Queensland indenture contract was for a finite period and did not give the employer absolute control of the worker. Some members of today’s Australian South Sea Islander community feel that government protection was never properly implemented and so the indenture situation was a form of slavery in all but name. What is certain is that indentured South Sea Islanders had to endure harsh conditions and treatment. They were generally contracted to undertake the heaviest manual work, and usually did the minimum of a 10 hour day.

THE FIRST FEW YEARS of the labour trade were particularly repressive. While workers in Queensland were offered some protection under the Master and Servants Act 1861, only a small number of South Sea Islanders were engaged on formal labour contracts under this legislation. In any case the Act favoured the rights of employers over those of employees, delivering heavy punishments to any difficult servants. Many islanders had little legal protection and employers were largely free to exploit them at will. Some did not have any formal contract at all, or when they did, conditions varied greatly. Often people found themselves pressed into harder duties or longer periods of indenture than were originally agreed to.

When the Queensland Government passed the Polynesian Labourers Act in 1868, the term of indenture was standardised to three years. The law stipulated a small wage of £6 per year as well as the provision of food, accommodation and clothing. Ration day became a highlight of plantation life. This was when the South Sea Islanders received their food, tobacco and clothing allowance from the storehouse.

Other protective measures introduced included the appointment of health officers to assess the condition of new arrivals. Some people were rejected for work on the grounds they were ill or underage. Employers had to put their employees’ wages into a Government Savings Bank account, and each islander was issued with a passbook. Within the sugar districts, an Inspector of Polynesians was stationed whose job was to ensure fair dealings and treatment.
Employers were expected to provide adequate housing for their workers. In some instances employers put South Sea Islanders in purpose-built barracks, but in other cases the islanders built their own huts out of locally available materials following traditional designs. It was often reported that they preferred these small dwellings, where they could live with their own kin, to barracks where people from other tribes also lived. Wherever possible people from the same island worked and lived together for mutual support.

WHILE SOME EMPLOYERS created their labourers fairly, others continued to be unscrupulous and ignore government regulations. Work on the plantations was highly regimented and controlled by European managers and overseers who often overworked their employees and were slow to provide clean drinking water and proper sanitation. Living quarters could be overcrowded and filthy, a fire hazard and infested with fleas. Among the worst of fates, however, was to be sent out west. This happened to a group of twenty South Sea Islanders recruited to work on Collin Munro’s Fishersfield Plantation on the Albert River. Instead of being taken to the plantation they were sent to an outback sheep station. This was isolated work, with terrible living conditions. It was considered the worst kind of employment by the islanders, who frequently deserted or went insane if made to work for pastoralists.

On the plantations, meals for South Sea Islanders were often prepared in bulk by contractors who at times provided cheap or rotting food. Arthur Dixon of Yatala Plantation, for example, was known to have fed his workers rancid meat. Even when fresh rations were available, the diet did not ensure adequate nutrition or kilojoules to cope with the heavy manual labour that had to be performed, and malnutrition and conditions such as scurvy were common. The European-style diet also made people sick, as it was unvaried, heavy on cheap carbohydrates and did not include the wide variety of plants islanders were used to. Wherever they could, then, islanders supplemented their diet by establishing gardens near their quarters where they grew yams, taro, bananas, mangos and other familiar foods. On their days off they went hunting and fishing.

The hard life of South Sea Islander labourers led to an alarmingly high death rate. Between 1868 and 1904, on average 5.1 per cent of the population died prematurely, with a peak of 14 per cent occurring in 1884. In comparison the mortality rate for Anglo-Australians in tropical Queensland at the same time was 1.5-1.7 per cent.

A major contributor to mortality among South Sea Islanders was disease. They lacked immunity to many of the illnesses common in European society, and were particularly susceptible to lung infections and dysentery, which were often picked up during their voyage to Queensland. These conditions were exacerbated by many plantations being in low-lying, swampy areas and plagued by mosquitoes and other disease carrying insects.

**Stresses of life**
Journeys to Sugaropolis

Social life

Despite the gruelling conditions of the labourers’ daily toil, there were opportunities for recreation. Saturday afternoons and Sundays were free days. Christian South Sea Islanders would hold their own services. Parties also occurred among workers who came from the same island, who would usually gather on an estate for singing and dancing. After 1877 islanders were paid their wages twice a year, and on those occasions they would hold great feasts. Large quantities of alcohol were bought through the ‘sly grog’ trade that existed in the towns and pubs near the plantations.

Conflict and Resistance

South Sea Islanders did not readily accept poor conditions or ill treatment. Those who had worked in Queensland for a while became more independent and confident in dealing with employers. An early form of unionism developed on the canefields that predated such action among European sugar workers and was very effective in bargaining for higher wages.

At Coomera in 1885, for instance, it was reported that: Employers here are not so enthusiastic as formerly in praise of kanaka labour. The boys are apt to become rowdy and defiant under the influence of the older hands amongst them, and they wander a great deal by night. 30

Desertion was common. In 1883 nine newly arrived islanders being sent to work on a plantation in Upper Coomera were frightened by a discharging gun and fled into the scrub. 21 Armed with cane knives, they made their way down the Coomera River and were at large for three weeks, living off the land and evading capture by hiding in the mangroves. As local and Brisbane police searched, there were sightings of them on Pimpama Island and Stradbroke Island. On Stradbroke hunger drove them to steal some roasted fowls from a camp at Kooran and also kill and eat two horses. The gang was eventually recaptured and incarcerated in the Nerang goal.
At times there was open violence against employers. The carrying of guns, as well as traditional weapons such as spears and clubs, was so common that from 1877 the Queensland Government prohibited South Sea Islanders from having firearms. The prohibition was never well enforced and islanders continued to be heavily armed.

A number of clashes involving South Sea Islanders occurred on the Gold Coast. In 1877 at Rocky Point Plantation, a disagreement over wages caused an islander nicknamed ‘Monk’, who came from Apo Island, to shoot and wound the owner, Captain Smale, and his son, and injure one of their neighbours with an axe. After that incident, local employers met to petition the government to disarm all islanders.

Social harmony on the plantations depended greatly on the nature of the overseers. If they were fair, relations were generally good, but unfortunately the kind of men attracted to the overseer positions tended to be uncompromising and callous. On the whole the indenture system worked to control islanders through coercion and alienation rather than outright brutality, although across Queensland there were some terrible episodes of extreme punishment that resulted in deaths. Rarely was the full force of the law brought to bear on cruel masters, and even if the matter made it to court, it was usually very difficult for South Sea Islanders to represent themselves or have their evidence taken seriously.

Warfare and rivalry between different South Sea Islander groups came with them to the plantations. It was common practice on the sugar estates for the managers to employ gangs from different tribes or islands and use feuds as a means of controlling or subduing their workers. Often fighting erupted over women or property, but other times fighting was due to traditional rivalries. Issues could be resolved on Sundays when ritualised battles were staged.

Ageston Plantation was the site of some South Sea Islander fights. In 1878 there was a clash amongst a group of Erromango Islanders from Vanuatu armed with bows, arrows and waddies. There were severe injuries and the three ring leaders were arrested and put in prison. In 1883 there was a smaller fight over a man’s wife.

Alcohol fuelled violence could also erupt between islanders, police and other people, particularly on Saturday nights when it was usual for large numbers of islanders from the plantations to converge on the towns and illegally consume alcohol. In South East Queensland, islanders who were convicted of serious crimes were sent to gaol in Brisbane or St Helena Island.

Johnny Lefu, from Apu Island, was convicted in Brisbane in 1880. Queensland State Archives, Item ID341532
Time expired

When their three year indenture was complete, many South Sea Islanders chose to return home and resume their old life. Before leaving Queensland, they withdrew their money from the Government Savings Bank and used it to stock a ‘trade’ box full of items such as knives, axes, cloth, tobacco and fishhooks. These were gifts to be distributed to relatives and other people to whom there were obligations.

GOVERNMENT LEGISLATION stipulated that employers had to return first-contract Islanders safely to their home islands when their employment ended. According to official reports, most people were sent back to their own communities, but some irregularities did occur. It appears that some people were simply dumped on the nearest convenient island. More often, though, the continuous movement of people among the islands of Melanesia meant that in many instances returnees asked to be dropped off at another island to seek out friends and family who had moved while they had been away.

There were those South Sea Islanders who did not return home immediately but decided to sign up on another contract or find employment outside the estates. These were known as ‘time expired’. Choosing to stay was risky as it annulled the original employer’s obligation to provide safe passage home, and it was not always easy to find another ship later. In some instances, people became stranded for lengthy periods.

Time expired South Sea Islanders shifted between different towns and districts seeking work. In doing so, they could move considerable distances. In 1893 one man in Beenleigh was found to have previously worked at Mount Cotton, the Tweed River, Rockhampton and Mackay. Many islanders had skills in fishing, gardening and boat building, and a small number were able to become refinery workers or set up independently in occupations such as land clearing, boarding-house keeping or tenant farming. They employed their kin or fellow islanders, and pooled resources to purchase equipment and stock. By the 1890s, a growing shortage of South Sea Islander labour meant that time expired workers could be choosy about where they worked and demand better wages and conditions. Brisbane, as the largest port and
labour market, was where islanders often congregated as they sought further employment.

Time expired South Sea Islanders also congregated in Beenleigh, where they shared houses with their friends. This situation was of concern to some locals who believed that, because the South Sea Islanders were not on contracts, they were not subject to proper surveillance. Their living conditions were thought to be unsanitary, and they were said to be buying alcohol and getting drunk in the streets.

To make matters worse, in 1895, a Solomon Islander called Maselite was discovered to have Hansen’s disease (leprosy). Much fear was associated with this disease at the time, and afflicted South Sea Islanders were sent to the lazaret on Peel Island in Moreton Bay, where they were restricted to a special compound reserved for non-Europeans.

Some South Sea Islanders settled in the Gold Coast and Logan regions and started their own families. Of these, a number managed to buy or lease land. Brothers Peter and Alexander Roache came from Santos, Peter arriving around 1886 and Alexander in 1889. They married locally born German women and settled in the Beenleigh area in the early 1900s. Alexander, who was a wood cutter, lived with his wife, Fredericke, and six children in Beenleigh township. Peter and his wife, Augusta, leased a small farm on Pimpama Island where they grew sugarcane and corn, until later joining the other branch of the Roache family in Beenleigh.

Connections

Indentured work in Queensland brought South Sea Islanders into contact with people from many different backgrounds, as sugar plantations also employed European, Aboriginal and Asian workers. In the Gold Coast region a cosmopolitan society developed that was made up of mostly of British and German colonists, Melanesians and the Indigenous inhabitants. Sometimes there were disputes, but generally islanders learned to mix with different ethnic groups. As the bulk of the islander population comprised young men, sexual encounters with local women were also to be expected. While instances of rape and prostitution were known, marriages also occurred. The intermixing that occurred in Queensland’s sugar districts tended to break down many cultural barriers, leading to marriages between South Sea Islanders from different tribes or islands as well as between them and other racial groups. Particularly close ties developed between the South Sea Islander and Aboriginal communities, and there was much intermarriage and socialising between the two.

Belief

Traditional religious and magical practices were continued among South Sea Islanders in Queensland, although these were usually kept hidden from European eyes. In many districts sacred or taruuga huts were built where male elders met to form decisions for their local community and male ceremonies could be observed. Belief in totems and garden magic was maintained, and sorcerers practiced both good and hostile magic.

Christian missionaries became very active in Melanesia, and so some of the South Sea Islanders who came to Queensland were Christian. Most were not, and by the 1880s concerted attempts to convert the islander workforces of the plantations were occurring. Many South Sea Islanders became closely tied to the church as it provided a substitute for the social and kinship networks they had left behind.
Closing the door

Over time the South Sea Islanders in Queensland felt increasing discrimination and exclusion.

IMPORTATION of all ‘coloured’ labour was opposed by Australian unions on the grounds that it competed with European workers, and by conservative political factions who believed it was creating an exploited underclass. The White Australia movement was growing and there was a widespread belief that Australia had to remain British, or at very least, European. Plantation owners, on the other hand, demanded continued access to cheap labour.

Under Queensland’s Pacific Island Labourers Act 1880 and its amendment in 1884, most South Sea Islanders were banned from employment in the colony’s pastoral and maritime industries and restricted to working in tropical and semi-tropical agriculture along the coast. They were also barred from domestic service and skilled positions in mills and refineries. Only those who possessed an exemption ticket, which were issued to just 700 long-term residents, were able to work in skilled jobs. Even then restrictions applied, as they were not allowed to become naturalised British subjects, a precondition for voting and owning land.
In 1885 the Queensland Government passed legislation that stated that no more licenses to recruit South Sea Islanders were to be issued after 31 December 1890. Planters were given until then to phase out islander labour, and the government began to encourage small-scale white owned farms processing their sugar at communally-managed central mills. However, due to a depression in the sugar industry, the labour trade was allowed to continue.

In 1901 the newly formed Australian Federal Government introduced two pieces of legislation that had a major impact on South Sea Islanders. The Immigration Restriction Act 1901 banned almost all non-European immigration. The Pacific Island Labourers Act 1901 opened the way for the deportation of Melanesians from Queensland and New South Wales. By then there were approximately 10,000 South Sea Islanders living in these states. The Pacific Island Labourers Act 1901 prohibited islanders from entering Australia after 31 March 1904, and those arriving before that date required a license. All indentured labour agreements were annulled in 1906, and any South Sea Islander found in the country after 31 December of that year could be deported immediately.

While many wished to return to their islands, others who had started families in Australia wanted to remain.

There was public concern over the social impacts of deportation, including the fate of Aboriginal women who were married to islanders and forced to leave with their husbands. Despite this, mass deportation commenced from 1904. Steamers collected people from ports along the Queensland coast and brought them to Brisbane’s immigration depot at Kangaroo Point, and from here most were sent back to Melanesia. Some were enticed to go to Fiji and work on plantations there.

A total of 7,068 people were repatriated between 1904 and 1908 and a further 194 between 1909 and 1914. South Sea Islanders staged a campaign against the Pacific Island Labourers Act and were able to achieve some softening of the regulations. In 1906 exemptions were granted to 1654 people to allow them to stay. Almost 1000 other people managed to avoid deportation by illegal means. In some instances people simply fled into the bush. In 1906 a Royal Commission was held into the deportation, during which six South Sea Islanders were interviewed at Beenleigh. All had been in Queensland many years, most had bank savings and property, and most wished to stay.
The impact of deportation on the sugar industry was dramatic. In 1902, 85.5 per cent of Queensland sugar was produced by ‘coloured’ labour. By 1908, 87.9 per cent was produced by European labour.

Although some South Sea Islanders were able to settle in the country, from 1909 to 1942 this remnant community endured severe difficulties. They faced similar types of discrimination to Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander people, but were further disadvantaged by not being recognized as either Indigenous or a legitimate immigrant group. Segregation existed at school, at the workplace, in shops and theatres, and elsewhere. Unions resisted their employment in many industries and they could not obtain loans from banks. The Queensland Government placed further restrictions on the use of all non-European labour in the sugar and banana industries. Islanders who wished to work in these industries had to obtain an exemption certificate, which were only granted to people who had been resident in the state for a period of time and were previously engaged in the industries. As employment for South Sea Islanders became harder to find in the 1900s, the number of unemployed congregating in the towns and countryside grew. Although elderly members were able to receive an ‘indigence allowance’ this was only one quarter of the age pension. It was not until 1942 that South Sea Islanders and Aboriginal people were able to receive the age pension.
Islanders were also drawn into the district because for a long time New South Wales did not have discriminatory laws dealing with South Sea Islander labour, and so they enjoyed many of the rights denied them in Queensland. Another attraction was the mill built by the Colonial Sugar Refining Company (now known as CSR) at Conond in 1889. For many years the mill employed South Sea Islanders as well as leasing land to South Sea Islander sugar growers.

In 1894 it was noted that:

The Kanakas who have completed their time in Queensland and have settled on the Tweed, number about 400. Many of these lease the land and cultivate it on their own account and are large employers of white labour, to whom they pay the current rate of wages—£1 a-week with board. They are frugal, sober, thrifty, and are good colonists.34

By the late 1890s, the New South Wales government followed Queensland in discriminating against South Sea Islanders. In 1912 the Cudgen Estate was sold to CSR and subdivided for European farmers. The islanders on the estate lost their jobs and leases but many found subsequent employment in the Tweed area clearing land. Others moved into banana growing, which became one of the chief industries in the Tweed and Gold Coast areas by the 1930s.

Despite the mass repatriation of South Sea Islanders after Federation in 1901, various families were able to stay on the Tweed, some intermarrying with Aboriginal and other local people. Their descendants continue to live in the district.

Among the people who settled on the Tweed was Peter Musing (Wacvte Musinkingرم), who landed in Queensland as a 13 year old from Ambrym Island, Vanuatu, in 1883. He made his way to the Tweed in 1895, and in 1905 married Ida Venno, who was Anglo Indian, at Cudgen. He died in 1924, leaving Ida with seven children. Peter’s brother Harry also started out in Queensland and made several trips to the islands as a recruiter. In 1910 he was the first man to grow bananas at Eungella, and in 1913 he married Elsie Venno. He died at Murwillumbah in 1950.
Journeys to Sugaropolis

The Freeman Family

AT TOMEWIN, in the upperCurrumbin Valley, one of the largest banana plantations was established by Englishman, Arthur Freeman, in 1912. This was a 360 acre (145 hectare) property, which he named ‘Viria’, and is widely regarded as the beginnings of commercial banana growing in the southeast. Arthur Freeman had previously been a planter in Fiji, and when he settled in Currumbin with his wife, Fredericka, and daughters Marie and Jane, he readily engaged South Sea Islander workers, providing employment for them during the difficult years of the Great Depression and the White Australia Policy. Up to 1000 cases of bananas, packed into wooden boxes, were sent by horse and cart to the Currumbin railhead. In addition peanuts and beans were also grown.

South Sea Islanders worked as labourers on Viria and the many other banana plantations in the district, as well as leasing their own five-10 acre (0.8 – four hectare) farms or going into share cropping. Tomewin became one of the main areas of settlement for South Sea Islander families, which included the Togo, Susyser, Massing and Toar families. With a growing number of children, there was a need for a school, as the nearest was over six kilometres away. Fredericka Freeman helped lobby the government for the establishment of a school at Tomewin, and Arthur donated a portion of his land for the erection of the building in 1949. The old Beeches State School at Currumbin was moved to Tomewin and the school opened in 1950. Jane Freeman ran the local Sunday School. The Freeman family had numerous islander friends and when Arthur died in 1965, his funeral was well attended by the Australian South Sea Islander community.

Families

Banana farmers of Currumbin

After the end of the sugar era, banana growing sustained many South Sea Islanders living on the Gold Coast and in northern New South Wales. The banana industry boomed in the 1920s and 30s, with the main growing area being Currumbin Valley and the Tweed. Bananas were also grown at Coomera, Mudgeeraba, Mount Nathan, Tallebudgera and Numinbah.
For children growing up on the banana farms in Currumbin and on the Tweed, life was very basic but happy. Johnny Itong recalls: “The family home had about four rooms. Our house had a dirt floor. We used to put bags on it to keep the dust down. Inside, my mother had a camp oven over an open fire with cross bars. At night, a fire was lit inside. Foods we ate were taro, yam, potatoes, meat preserved in kerosene tins, corned beef. Plenty of vegetables, plenty of fish. We used to do chores. We had a happy family.”

The Tomewin families maintained strong links to relatives living across the border. Saturday was the main day when people from all around the district went to Tweed Heads to buy food, meet with friends and go to the pub. When they went into a town they faced segregation, such as being restricted to a special section of the picture theatre. In Murwillumbah, South Sea Islanders were not accepted into the main wards of the hospital but treated in tents within the hospital grounds.

AMOS, CELIA AND RAKILA TOGO IN THE FREEMAN GARDEN, TOMEWIN, CURRUMBIN VALLEY, C. 1950
City of Gold Coast Local Studies Library, image LS-150-CD946-IM00023

GIRLS FROM LOCAL SOUTH SEA ISLANDER FAMILIES, TOMEWIN, CURRUMBIN VALLEY, QUEENSLAND, C. 1950
City of Gold Coast Local Studies Library, image LS-150-CD945-IM00104

WORKERS AND ARTHUR FREEMAN WITH HANDS OF BANANAS ON THE FREEMAN PLANTATION, TOMEWIN, CURRUMBIN VALLEY, C. 1950
City of Gold Coast Local Studies Library, image LS-150-CD946-IM00128

TOM ORA, TERRY TOGO AND JANE FREEMAN WITH HARVESTING EQUIPMENT IN THE BANANAS ON THE FREEMAN PROPERTY ON TOMEWIN, CURRUMBIN VALLEY, C. 1950
City of Gold Coast Local Studies Library, image LS-150-CD945-IM000098

JOE SLEBA AND ARTHUR TOAR WITH BUNCHES OF BANANAS GROWN ON THE FREEMAN PLANTATION ON TOMEWIN, CURRUMBIN VALLEY, QUEENSLAND, C. 1950
City of Gold Coast Local Studies Library, image LS-150-CD945-IM00098
South Coast Town Council and the family became highly respected for their commitment to local sport and community service. In 1988 the Santo Family Park at Biggera Waters was named in their honour.

Family building fostered national loyalty, and Australian South Sea Islanders have served the Australian nation in both world wars and later conflicts. Among these service personnel were Jack and Dave Santo, who enlisted during World War II. Until recently, this wartime contribution by Australian South Sea Islanders was not acknowledged, as they were generally classed as Aboriginals by the military.

The Emzin family of Surfers Paradise

Charles (Charley) Emzin came from Tanna Island in Vanuatu and got a job as a sugar boiler at Robert Muir’s Benowa plantation.44 He was also employed for a time on Edward Coopper’s farm, Birribon. In 1888 Charley bought four blocks of land on the east bank of the Nerang River, but because he could not own land in his own right, he made arrangements with the Brisbane solicitor, H. Buhning, to act as trustee. These blocks were originally part of land owned by J.H.C. Meyer, who established Meyer’s Ferry and a hotel. On this land Charley built a cottage and kept a farm. In later years he ran Meyer’s Ferry and lived in a cottage on land owned by J.G. Appel, who lived next door in ‘Sea Giant’ the first private holiday residence in Surfers Paradise (built 1885). Charley let out his farm to various tenants.

A relative of Charley, Sam Tanna and his wife Annie Mallico or Ormalekula had a child, William, on his farm in 1889. Sam and Annie were employed by Edward Coopper at Birribon in 1884. When Sam and Annie’s contracts were up, they were sent back to Vanuatu — Sam to Tanna Island, and Annie to Mallico (Malekula) Island. Because he was born in Australia, William, or Bill as he was usually called, was able to stay in the country. Concerned about the welfare of their child if taken to Melanesia, Sam and Annie made the decision to leave him with Charley, who was exempt from being repatriated. Bill became Charley’s adopted son and took on the Emzin name. Charley made arrangements for him to be brought up with a local European family at Benowa and to attend the Benowa school.

In 1905 Charley became one of the first property owners within the new subdivision, Pacific Ocean Estate, which would later form the heart of Surfers Paradise. He bought three blocks of land in what would become Cavill Avenue for £11 each. On one of these he built a cottage for a sum of £300–£400. To complete the building, he borrowed £90 from Mr Appel, who had such high regard for Charley that he loaned the money interest free. These properties were given to Bill as a present on his marriage to Eileen Norris in 1921. Eileen had Irish and Scottish parents. Because she was Catholic, and he was Anglican, they had to have a private wedding ceremony.

Charley wanted his son to take over the farm, but Bill was more interested in making a living on the sea. For much of his life he was a skipper of cargo boats sailing between Brisbane, Southport and Caloundra. He was also the master of two of J.G. Appel’s boats and for a period owned the fishing and towing boat Trophy II. So the farm was sold before Charley’s death in 1921, and the proceeds left to Bill. After Charley’s death, Bill and Eileen left Mr Appel’s place and moved into the house in Cavill Avenue, where they had a son, Charley, and a daughter, Mary. At this time the Emzins were the only South Sea Islander family within the area.
The children grew up thinking of themselves as Aboriginal, and the family had strong social ties with the Yuke, Dillon and Graham families of Southport, who were of Aboriginal descent. They also had some close friendships with European fishing and farming families. The children attended Southport School and were sent to the Methodist Church every Sunday. Due to a lack of transport, they walked most places, and spent much of their free time swimming in the river, despite the numerous sharks. Bill became well known for playing the accordion at dances at Tippler’s on Stradbroke Island. The family was respected throughout Surfers Paradise and Southport and because of this, did not face much in the way of discrimination from locals. During the Great Depression of the 1930s life was very hard for the Emin family, and Bill was forced to do relief work and bring in food for the family by shooting birds and fishing.

Eileen did ironing, washing and cleaning for other people. At the age of 12 Mary brought in income by minding children. Bill made news in 1958 when, at the beginning of the Gold Coast property boom, he sold two of the blocks of land left to him by his adopted father for £20,000. When he died in 1961 at the age of 72, Eileen lived with her son, Charley, and his family in the house on the remaining block. Charley worked as a taxi driver and a racehorse trainer before his early death at the age of 43. His nine children went into a variety of occupations, including teaching, police service, nursing, pathology and local government. One of his sons, Graeme, was taken on by George Schofield, the General Manager of the Chevron Hotel. Graeme became an executive with the Chevron before embarking on a distinguished career in the hotel industry in Australia and overseas.
Activism and recognition
– Australian South Sea Islanders

As the 20th century progressed, many South Sea Islanders came together in small communities on the fringes of major port towns, and here they were able to preserve some traditions such as gardening, fishing and living in extended family networks. While they did have to change and adapt to Australian society, in time they began to speak up and protest against discrimination.

May I take the liberty of asking you to publish this letter of how the coloured population of the district are treated. At certain places they are directed to a place reserved for the coloured people alone, and are not allowed to sit where they choose, the same as the whites do. This act of segregation has been going on for some years. On July 1, 1951, my wife and I wrote a letter to Mr H.L. Anthony, MHR, concerning the matter. In his reply to our letter Mr Anthony stated it was not a Federal matter and he therefore forwarded our letter to Mr S.T. Stephens, MLA, for attention. Mr Stephens passed our letter on to the Chief Secretary, and said as soon as he had a reply from the Chief Secretary he would convey it to us. So far we have had no reply from Mr Stephens. I have come to the conclusion that there has been nothing done concerning the matter. I’m sure the coloured people of the Tweed district and Coolangatta are worthy of better treatment than they are receiving. It appears to me that the act of segregation is neither a Federal nor a State matter. Where is the democracy the coloured men of both world wars helped to preserve? I may also mention that my brother, Pte. E. Mussing, 2/26th Battalion, 8th Div., paid the supreme sacrifice on the Burma Road, also that my nephew, Pte. D. Runge, 8th Div., had both legs amputated as the result of Japanese atrocities. (Both boys were well known on the Tweed). Is this the type of freedom they were defending for the coloured people? 

LEFT TO RIGHT: MR J. ITONG; PRIVATE (PTE) EDWARD MUSSING AND HIS BROTHER THOMAS MUSSING AT COBALE, NEAR TWEED HEADS, NOW SHORTLY BEFORE PRIVATE MUSSING’S DEPARTURE FOR SERVICE OVERSEAS

Pte Mussing enlisted in June 1940 and served with the 2/26th Battalion. He died of illness whilst a prisoner of war on 7 July 1943, aged 34. Edward and Thomas were sons of Peter Mussing an Australian war memorial ID 104879/002

ONE PERSON to do this was John Mussing. John was the eldest son of Peter and Ida Mussing. John ran a local campaign for equality in the Tweed area during the 1950s. In 1952 he wrote a letter to the editor of The Tweed Daily, stating:
Peter Musing’s daughter, Ida Lesing Faith Musing, also became an activist. Better known today as Faith Bandler, she has played a pivotal role in championing Aboriginal and Australian South Sea Islander civil rights.

In the second half of the 20th century the descendents of the early South Sea Islander workers began to form their identity as Australian South Sea Islanders. They campaigned for recognition, and this was achieved when they were formally recognised as a distinct cultural group by the Federal Government in 1994. In 2000 the Queensland Government offered a similar formal statement of recognition. Today there are approximately 15,000-20,000 Australian South Sea Islanders living in Australia. There are also other people who have some, perhaps undiscovered, Australian South Sea Islander ancestry. Most Australian South Sea Islanders live in Queensland but approximately 1400 reside in northern New South Wales. Members of the community have played prominent roles in politics and the civil rights movement and have excelled in sport, particularly rugby league. Australian South Sea Islanders are also achieving in many other areas such as trades, academia, nursing, teaching, music and art.

From labouring on the early cotton and canefields to building families and businesses, the Australian South Sea Islander community has suffered social and economic disadvantage, but has also brought a unique contribution to the development and cultural landscape of the Gold Coast and South East Queensland. This is a story which needs to be acknowledged and understood as a key aspect of the region’s rich past.

Endnotes


3 The Brisbane Courier, 24 August 1863, page 2.
6 The Brisbane Courier, 16 February 1924, page 15.
7 Queensland State Archives item ID2435094, correspondence.

The Queensland, 2 December 1876, page 29.
8 Helenesvale and other plantations in the Comrners and Nerang districts are described in detail in a newspaper report on the sugar industry in 1885. The Brisbane Courier, 26 November 1885, page 2.
10 Cooper, E., 1883, unpublished diary.
11 For a detailed account of Agostin Plantation see City of Gold Coast, 2013, Agostin Plantation Excavation Report, unpublished report, Nerang: City of Gold Coast.
12 Legge Winson, 16 April 1881 page 3.
13 City of Gold Coast, 2000, Sower-jarret: the sugar industry and the Gold Coast, Nerang: City of Gold Coast.

Queensland State Archives from ID244458, file – estates, mentally incapacitated persons.
17 The Brisbane Courier, 12 November 1885, page 3.
18 The Queensland, 27 October 1883, page 694.
20 The Queensland, 9 November 1878, page 568.
21 Queensland State Archives, item ID89505, batch file.
22 Queensland State Archives, item ID661883 Correspondence; item ID866184 Correspondence.
23 Northern Star, 4 May 1895, page 2.
24 The Brisbane Courier, 14 May 1895, page 4.
25 The Brisbane Courier, 14 May 1895, page 4; Northern Star, 4 May 1895, page 2.
The following information is from Queensland State Archives, item 613445 register - admissions, state school, years 1902, 1909, 1910, 1911.

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ASSI 150 SEQ acknowledges the heritage and contribution of the Australian South Sea Islanders (ASSI) to the growth and development of SEQ and Australia. The program showcases the art, heritage and culture of the ASSI people.

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