

8. Sugar Entrepreneurs

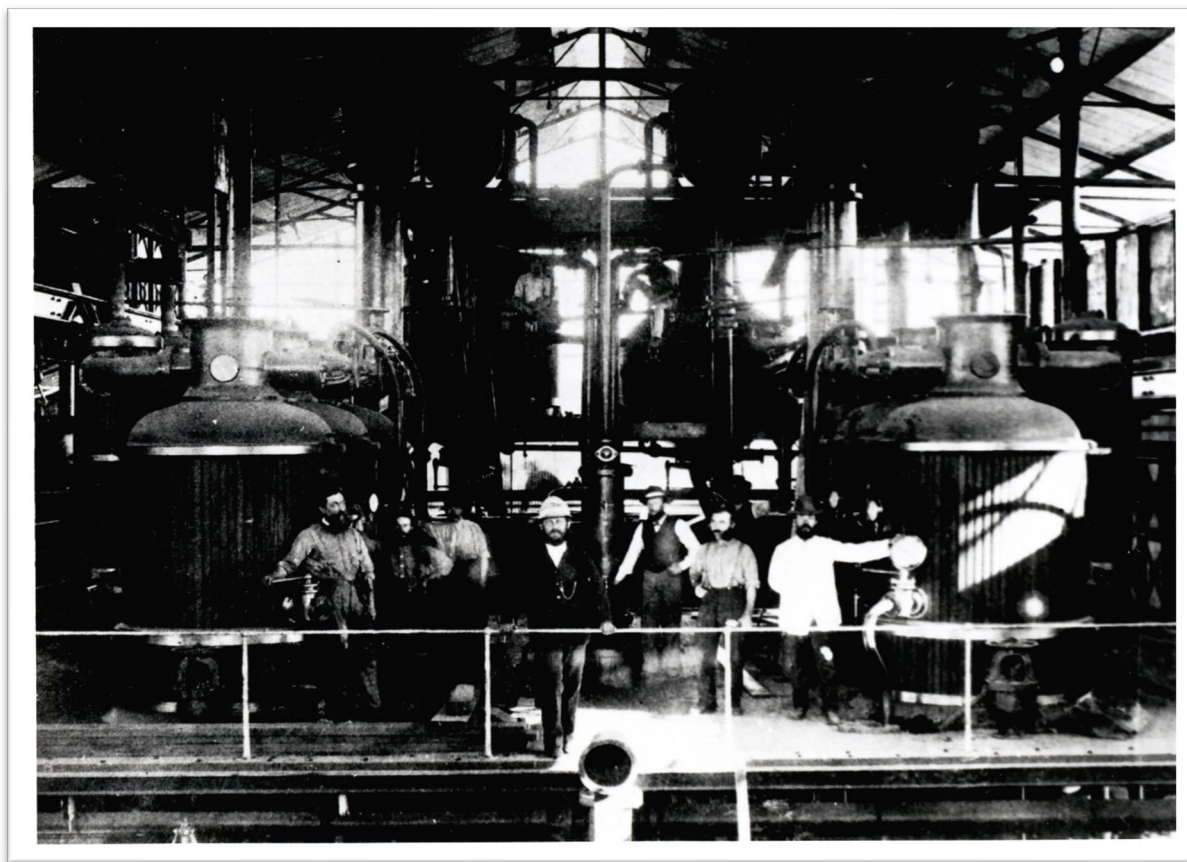


Plate 8.1: CSR's Homebush plantation mill in the 1880s, the largest in the district, showing its vacuum pans.

Source: Clive Moore Collection.

Rollers and Pans: The Milling Process

Today's sugar mills are huge, complex, efficient factories that waste nothing. The cane, already cut in small lengths called 'billets', is delivered from the fields. Once it reaches the factory it is dumped onto a conveyor belt, shredded by large rollers and run through multiple crushing mills, to extract the majority of the cane juice, which is then clarified to remove impurities. Evaporation concentrates the juice into a thick syrup, after which it is crystallised, and passed through centrifugal machines to separate the sugar crystals from the mother liquid. Then the sugar is dried, packaged and ready to leave the factory. This product is called brown or raw sugar, or sometimes 'mill white', and often undergoes further processes to become white sugar, either at another factory or as the end stage of the process in the main factory. The three remaining Mackay Sugar Ltd mills in the Pioneer Valley (Farleigh, Marian, and Racecourse), and Wilmar Sugar's Plane Creek mill at Sarina, annually process over 1.2 million tonnes of cane into 180,000 tonnes of raw sugar, along with a large bioethanol distillery. By comparison with today's mills, the first thing to realise about the many mills of the 1860s to 1880s is that they were all small. Even in the 1880s, many mills were not much more sophisticated than Alexandra plantation's steam-powered mill which opened in 1868, then the biggest sugar mill in Queensland.

This chapter continues the history of the plantation era, concentrating on the 1880s to 1900s years. Chapter 2 described the first pastoralists as frontier entrepreneurs. The term also applies to the sugar planters, and sometimes they were the same individuals. In its first 20 years the sugar industry was dominated by plantations, which combined sugarcane cultivation with milling. Farmers were at the mercy of the mill managers when negotiating a price to crush their cane, which was useless without a mill, and they needed quick access once it was cut. Today, fresh cut cane travels long distances to reach the mills, using an efficient network of tramways and roads. In the 1870s and 1880s, tramways were primitive and not extensive, and roads were rough. Farmers usually carted their cut whole sticks of cane in wagons to nearby mills.

The biggest of the early plantations were almost total institutions in themselves and could operate independently of their neighbours and surroundings. The Colonial Sugar Refining Co. (CSR) was the supreme example of a company that owned its own plantations, procured its own labour, grew much of its own cane, leased and sold land to farmers, milled its own cane and that of others, owned its own ships, and refined its own sugar (Plates 7.31–38). Their Homebush plantation was a small part of the total company which operated several plantations in Queensland, New South Wales, and Fiji, and owned refineries in the southern capital cities. CSR began investigating a site near Mackay in 1881, almost immediately clearing what had been Homebush cattle station, to create cane fields. The large modern mill, linked to an extensive two feet (61 cm) tramway into the fields, began operations in 1883. The Melbourne-Mackay Sugar Co. was next in size in the district, owning a slice of prime cane land between Mackay and Walkerston. Farleigh came third. Other plantations were not so large and independent but compared with the farmers all were able to practice economies of scale and to spread their risks.

Plantation owners were involved in a range of economic activities which to some extent evened out the uncertainty of the sugar market. The price which mills received for their products varied constantly, depending on the quality of the product, and market conditions. On behalf of CSR, W.H. Paxton & Co. at Mackay negotiated to buy entire sugar crops from various plantations. CSR exactly delimited the terms under which the company would buy sugar. Although planters were often locally regarded with awe and respect, they were of no individual importance in the eyes of sugar buyers. John E. Davidson, general manager of the Melbourne-Mackay Sugar Co., held almost lordly sway over the district, but he impressed CSR not at all in 1882 when he tried to get them to purchase his company's entire crop for £23 a ton. Although CSR was generally willing to pay a little extra for Mackay sugar, they firmly rejected Davidson's offer:

...we can not pay anything like the price Mr. Davidson asks. At about £20.10/- in sacks, for whole crops, open pan; or £22, £17.10/- & £15.10/- in sacks for Firsts, Seconds and Thirds, separately, I think we could give about 10/- per ton more for vacuum pan sugar; but over these prices we can do much better in Java and Mauritius. You must not forget that it takes fully £3 to land sugar at our Refinery when allowance is made for loss in weight and paying net cash in Mackay as compared with the long credit for Eastern purchases.¹

Aside from the extensive CSR archives and a small cache of William Sloan & Co. records, most of the business records relating to plantation activities at Mackay no longer exist. However, from surviving fragments of information it is possible to give some idea of the range of business activities. The picture does not show aristocratic self-indulgence and vast profits, which is often the image of the planters conveyed by popular writings. Plantations were often financially quite marginal.

The nineteenth century mills were factories in the fields. Their most prominent features were one, or later two, brick chimneys and a series of galvanised ripple-iron sheds, often added piecemeal as the mills increased in size. The chimneys were mainly based on those used in Welsh and Cornish copper and tin smelting. None of them were imposing structures; they were all of supremely functional design.

The first steam-powered mill, Alexandra, operated onward from 1868: cane was brought from the fields to the mill by horse and cart, piled in the mill grounds and fed through the single set of four feet (1.2 m) wide rollers by Islanders by hand (Plates 8.2, 8.21). The megasse, the cane fibre left after the sugar had been extracted, was then collected and laid out in the sun to dry. The sugar syrup was heated and mixed with lime, after which the clear juice was drawn off. The clarified juice was boiled in large vats which were constantly raked and skimmed to remove impurities. A large dipper on a crane arm decanted the resultant syrup into four open granulating pans in which it was heated and agitated. Molasses, the residual syrup, was syphoned off and collected for the distillery.

After some granulation, the syrup was drawn off and run into underground cooling chambers, where it remained for 24 hours, becoming a solid mass of sugar crystals. After cooling, the sugar was dug out of the underground vats by Islander labourers and put into two centrifuges making 800 to 1,200 revolutions per minute. The molasses ran out through fine copper gauze into storage tanks, and the dry sugar was collected at the base of each centrifuge. Once again, labour was needed to dig the sugar out of centrifuges, and to carry it to the curing room and thence to the sugar store to be bagged. Graded by colour and crystal quality, the sugar was placed into heavy hessian sacks or matting, then taken to the port by bullock drays.

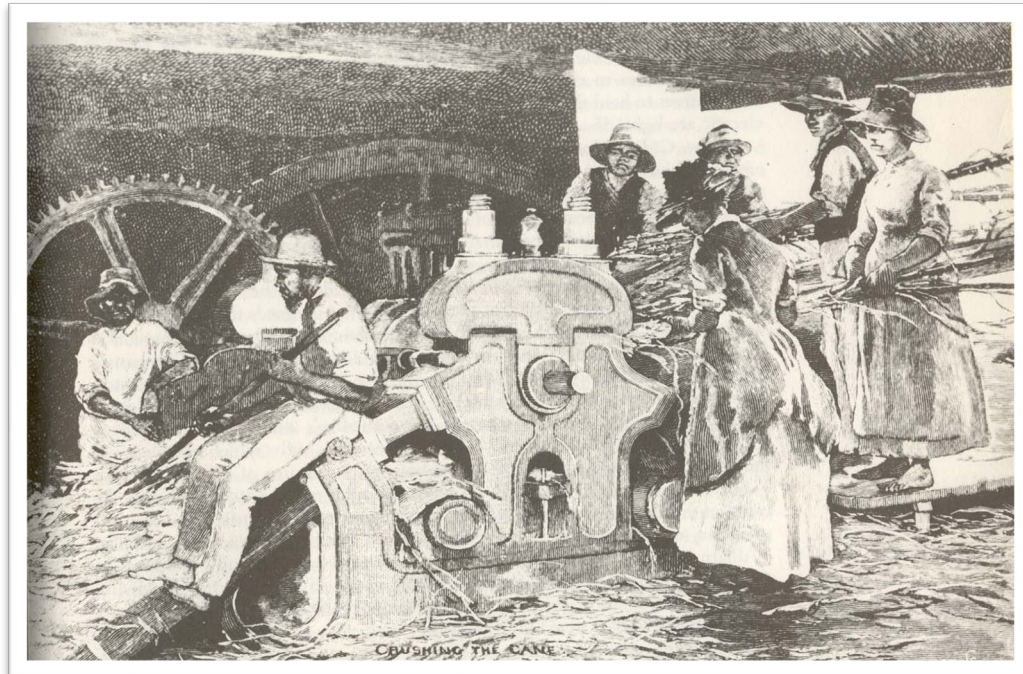


Plate 8.2: This etching is from a photograph that is clearly staged and probably depicts the mill on Alexandra plantation in the late 1860s. There was only one set of four feet (1.2 m) rollers.
Source: Clive Moore Collection.

Many other mills were not as efficient, even in the early 1880s. Some estimates suggest that in the early years around 40 percent of the sugar was lost in the milling process.

It is easy to see how this occurred. Today, cane is shredded before it reaches the multiple rollers; back in the 1860s and 1870s whole cane was fed into the rollers. The key person in the mill was the sugar boiler, on whose competence the success of the operation rested. Often, the sugar boiler's tools of trade were a piece of litmus paper to test the acidity of the cane juice, and his eyes and fingers to test the consistency of the product. Molasses was a by-product of the milling process; with incompetence, it often ranked with sugar as a major product of a mill, and one for which there was no use other than in a distillery. The quality of the sugar and its final colour were fully in the hands of the sugar boiler. One 1893 observer remembered the shoddy chemistry practised by the sugar boilers a decade earlier:

A typical mill of the period was one I saw just before 1883. It was thought a large one and had a capacity of, I should say, some 1000 tons. It started late in the season on a crop capable of producing in those days about 300 tons, but which nowadays would give at least 500. The sugar boiler was the sole boss of the whole concern. No one was supposed to know more than he, and in the light of experience I am inclined to think that no one knew less. The sugar was a deep unhealthy green. This he explained away for some weeks, but at last another boiler was believed in more than he and took charge and made sugar that was not green.²

Changes in milling technology led to a chaotic situation with various sugar factories producing different qualities of sugar, at different costs. Labour and fuel shortages, changes in the weather, and the different levels of staff competence, all affected the final product. In the fields, different cane varieties, irrigation, fertilisers, and the change from manual cultivation to the use of animal-drawn and steam ploughs, all had direct bearing on yields. The same labour-intensive approach to cane-growing continued all through the nineteenth century, relying on the supply of cheap labour and relatively primitive field machinery. Inside the factories, change was more easily discernible as scientific method came to the fore. The industry grew in Queensland in a period of rapid world-wide advances in scientific knowledge, affecting agricultural and manufacturing techniques.

The variety of the owners' backgrounds, mixed with different levels of sophistication of their mills and the expertise of the overseers, sugar boilers, and managers, partly explains the success or failure of their operations. The sugar boiler was the key person dealing with the sugar crystals produced. In the 1870s, there were some competent sugar boilers, such as James W. Cran, a member of the Cran family of Robert Cran & Co. and Tooth & Cran Co., leading sugar manufacturers at Bundaberg. Cran was the sugar boiler at Cassada in the late 1870s and early 1880s, producing high quality sugar from an open pan and a Wetzell reel, the latter concentrating the syrup more quickly and halving the time spent treating molasses.

The standard of technical competence of the mill staff improved over the decades, although even in the 1890s some mill-owners still had not realized the necessity of employing competent sugar chemists to supervise the quality of the sugar produced. Apart from expertise, two major mechanical improvements were made to the milling process in the 1870s and 1880s. First, the whole cane was put through a second set of rollers to extract the maximum amount of sugar juice, and in the 1890s many mills added a third set of rollers. Second, open pan boiling of the syrup was replaced by boiling in a vacuum, enabling far better control of the process at a crucial stage. Wetzell's vacuum pans allowed evaporation at the lowest possible temperature. There were various brands of evaporating pans, but Wetzell's pans were a quarter of the price of the others, tough, efficient, and easy to maintain. These two processes—extra rollers and boiling in a vacuum—modernized the production of sugar.



Plate 8.3: An 1870s open pan from Inverness mill, still in use in 1975 as a horse and cattle trough.
Source: Clive Moore Collection.

Pastoralists could walk away from leased pastoral land, taking their flocks and herds with them. Growing and milling sugarcane on plantations required large investments in factories, which no owner could afford to abandon. Much of the milling machinery, even if primitive, was a permanent fixture. However, no other cash crop had the potential of generating the same high level of income. George Marten of Branscombe supplied details to Richard Daintree, Queensland's Agent General in London in the early 1870s, relating to his partnership in Branscombe and River Estate plantations. Branscombe first crushed in 1871, the sixth mill in the district. River Estate mill first crushed two years later, the fifteenth mill in the district, an indication of the speed of development of the sugar industry. His mood was buoyant, and he estimated a substantial profit after three years. Marten and his partners, the Long brothers, had enough capital to purchase land and erect two mills on opposite sides of the river. They were looking forward to a very comfortable income. However, both plantations went broke in the 1875–76 rust epidemic in the cane (outlined in Chapter 7), losing many thousands of pounds. Nevertheless, his advice to new planters was sound, even if he could not anticipate the disaster about to occur.

The crushing season extends from June to December, when usually the wet season sets in. A good average crop of plant canes should yield 5,000 gallons of juice to the acre, of sufficient density to produce two-and-a-half tons of dried sugar. The ratoons give a somewhat smaller return. A fairly well-worked crop of first and second ratoons should produce on an average one-and-a-half tons of sugar, but, as in all kinds of farming, the produce will depend on the working of the ground, and the care taken in weeding.³

Marten provided a rough estimate of the cost to purchase a suitable piece of coastal land and working it for 18 months until the first crop was cut and milled. He suggested that no less than 600 acres were needed to form a plantation and produce an annual crop of from 200 to 300 acres. Marten calculated that the planter needed to spend around £12,000 to get a first-year result. If operations commenced in March, the planter would have 100 acres planted by the end of August, and the machinery complete by July the next year, ready to begin the harvest and crushing. His recommended using a three-roller mill 4.5 feet (1.37 m) wide and 2 feet (0.6 m) in diameter, driven by a horizontal high-pressure engine, with steam clarifiers, open evaporating pans, and a steam-heated pan for the final concentration of the sugar crystals, before the use of a Wetzels, or other types of revolving low temperature pans. Marten thought that the coolers should be made of wood or iron, or be cemented brick tanks, from which the sugar was taken and dried in centrifuges. At that stage, there was only one mill in the district equipped with a vacuum pan and he did not recommend including one in a new mill, as it was far too costly, although they delivered higher quality sugar. Once the process was complete, the sugar product was packed into pandanus mats on the plantations and carried to the port for shipment.

Table 8.1: Costs and profits in establishing a new plantation in the first eighteen months, 1870s.

(Note: 1 acre equals 0.4 hectares)

COSTS

Purchase of Land

600 acres at £4 per acre £2,400

Cultivation

First cultivation of 100 acres

2 ploughings, at 50s per acre 250

2 harrowings at 10s, per acre 50

40,000 plants

4,000 to the acre, at 5s. per 1,000 100

Carriage, drilling & planting, 40s 200

Weeding, trashing, etc, to maturity, 50s. 250 850

Machinery and other infrastructure

Cost of machinery sufficient to manufacture a crop of 350 acres 3,500

Buildings for and erection of the same 1,700

Fencing, implements, houses, stock, carts, stores etc. 800

Cost of manufacture to end of first 18 months 300

TOTAL: £9,550

Labour and Transport

Cost of importing 45 Islander labourers at £6 each per year £450

(Labourers' wages, if calculated until the end of the second year, would be higher.)

Recruitment cost per labourer, and some government fees. £450

Carriage, freight, commission, and other charges £1,000

TOTAL: £1,900

GRAND TOTAL COSTS £11,450

PROFITS

110 tons of 1st class sugar, at £33 3,630

55 tons of 2nd class sugar, £28 1,540

35 tons of 3rd class sugar, £22. 10s 780

3,000 gallons of molasses, at 3d. per gallon 40

TOTAL PROFIT FOR FIRST YEAR: £5,990

TOTAL PROFIT FOR SECOND YEAR: £5,990

GRAND TOTAL PROFIT AFTER TWO YEARS £11,980

Marten did not separate out the cost of cutting the cane, which presumably is included under the figure for Islander wages. Cane was cut by hand during the second half of the year. It was stacked into large bundles then topped, the tops loaded onto drays and taken back to the stables in the evening, where they were fed into a chaff cutter for animal feed. The cane was loaded into drays to take to the mill, usually in long lengths (Plates 9.16–19). Cane for planting was cut into 12-inch (300 mm) pieces and carted to where it was to be planted. The drills were marked out with a swing plough. Cane was carried in sacks cut to fit on the shoulder, then each stick was dropped on the ground and stepped on to press into the furrow. Marten calculated that by the third year the profits should have paid for the land and infrastructure, with recurring costs of less than £2,000 a year. In these circumstances, the profit would have been handsome.

The quality of Queensland sugar stood up well to competition from places like Mauritius, Java, Louisiana, the Caribbean Islands, and Guyana. Nevertheless, to ensure the local industry succeeded, the Government introduced a £5 a ton tax on all foreign grown sugar, which was sufficient to ensure sales of the local product. Beet sugar was still being imported into the southern colonies. By the mid-1880s, when large-scale mills like Homebush were built, with its initial 5,000-ton capacity, whole cane was brought to the mill by locomotive and placed onto a carrier belt to feed a double set of rollers. In 1883, when the last new plantation mills were erected, only Homebush and Ashburton had double sets of rollers, although other mills soon upgraded. In the 1890s, as mills were further modernized, maceration and pulping of the cane and diffusion of the juices was added to the process, and more immediate use of the megasse in the furnaces was introduced. In the 1880s, doubling the sets of rollers was the major advance in the extraction method.

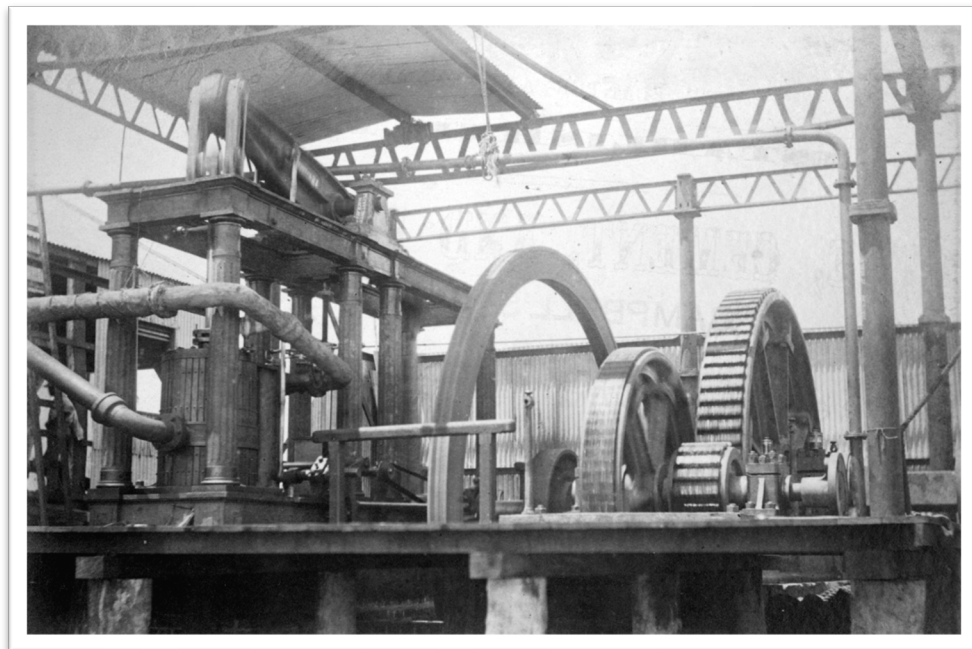


Plate 8.4: Pleystowe mill machinery, ca. 1880.

Source: State Library of Queensland.

Pleystowe, owned by Alfred Hewitt and Charles Romilly (as a silent partner) and trading as Hewitt & Co., was the third sugar plantation begun in the district. Similar in size to Alexandra, the mill began crushing 12 months later, in 1869. Begun in 1867 by Joseph Holmes and his partner Mr Julian, Pleystowe, covering 2,330 acres (943 ha), initially grew cotton and sugarcane. Julian's involvement was short-lived, his name no longer in the records

by February 1869. When Hewitt first arrived, he invested in Fitzgerald and Davidson's Alexandra, although aiming to set up his own plantation. His mill arrived in August 1868, along with a distillery to convert the molasses into rum. Pleystowe mill had 4 feet (1.2 m) rollers, 2 feet (0.6 m) in diameter, mainly manufactured in Sydney by R.N. Russell & Co., although part of the mill machinery was also imported from England. The engine was 7 feet (2.13 m) above the ground, enabling the juice to flow into the clarifiers without pumping, and the megasse fell into drays. There was an iron hook and scoop, iron coolers and a pair of centrifuges, with foundations prepared for a 'Jamaica pan', presumably a vacuum pan. When the mill began, about ten percent of the land was planted with cane, there were 70 employees, 40 of them South Sea Islanders. Hugh McCready, newly arrived from the West Indies, became the manager until May 1873. In 1870, the mill crushed 428 acres of cane: 270 from Pleystowe, 110 from Branscombe (then owned by Spiller), and 48 from Frank Bridgeman on land at Greenmount where he was manager of the pastoral station. Hewitt & Co. were in control by 1869, when the first crush occurred. Hewitt had the land transferred into his name in 1870.

Both the acres under cane and the number the mills increased rapidly. In 1878, Pleystowe covered 6,000 acres (2,428 ha), having more than doubled in size. Most of the single-roller mills had been improved. At Pioneer in 1877, Spiller added a cane conveyor belt to feed his mill and new four feet six inches (137 cm) rollers. He also added multi-boilers, clarifiers and centrifuges, and in 1880 a tramway with a steam locomotive, the first in the district. Double sets of rollers were added to Pleystowe in 1884, Meadowlands, Palms, and Habana in 1886, River Estate, Farleigh and Nindaroo in 1887, and as a hopeful (but unused) ornament to the dormant Victoria mill in 1891. Only the most efficient single-roller mills survived into the 1890s. Palymra, an admirable model of a single-roller mill, kept crushing until 1894 when a five-roller mill was added, the first of its kind in the colony.

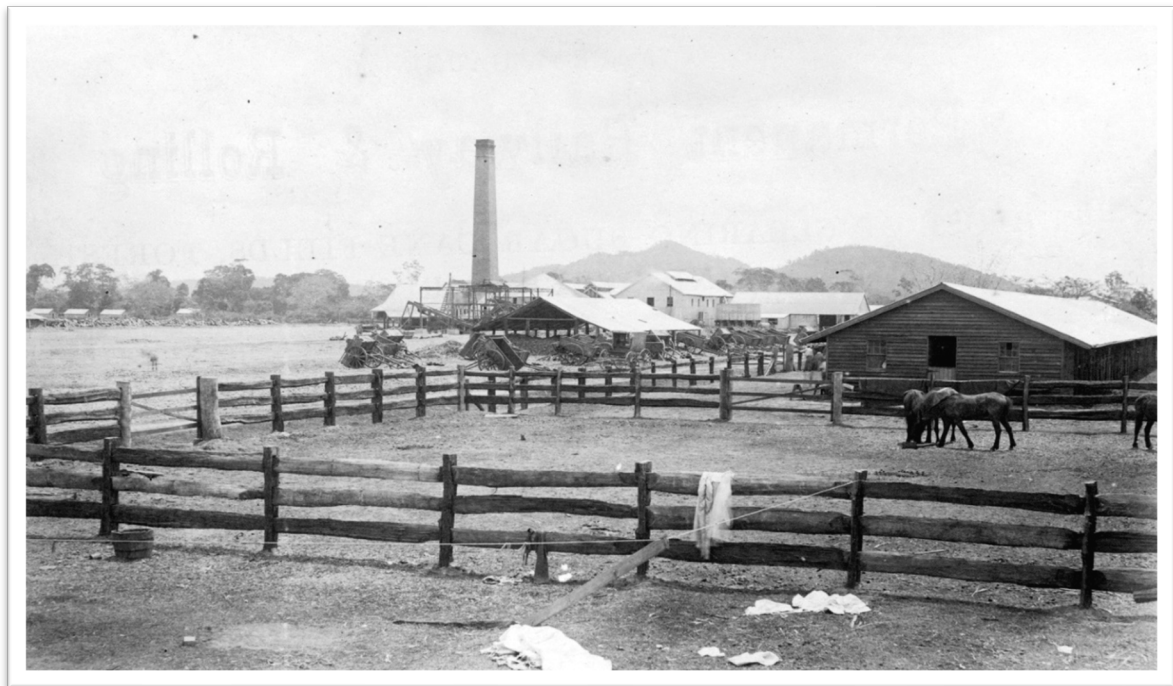


Plate 8.5: Pleystowe stock yards and mill, 1880.

Source: State Library of Queensland.



Plate 8.6: Palmyra plantation mill in the 1890s, built by Hugh McCready in 1883.
Source: Queensland State Library.

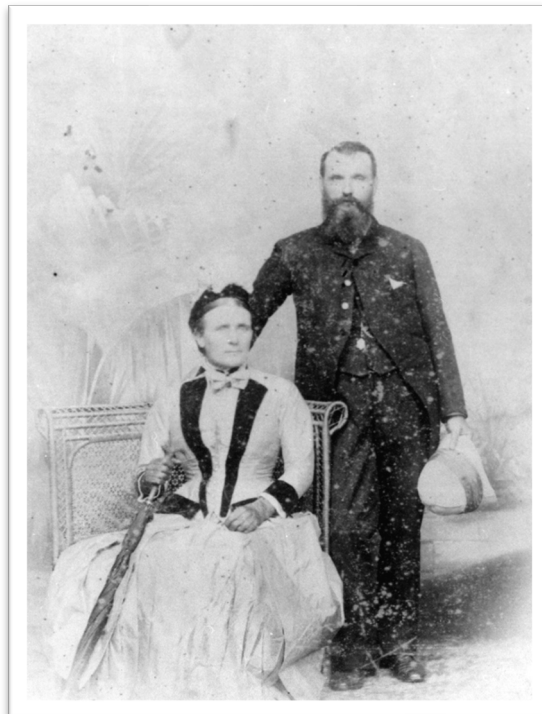


Plate 8.7: Hugh and Mrs McCready of Palymra plantation. He is wearing his uniform from the Volunteer Militia.
Source: State Library of Queensland.

The other major change in milling technique was the substitution of vacuum pans for

open pans at the granulating stage of the process, and the use of multiple-effect (also effect) vacuum evaporator apparatus. The first vacuum pan was invented in 1813, eventually supplanting entirely the open pan system of boiling the sugar liquor. Boiling in a steam-powered vacuum enabled production of purer sugar. Vacuum pans enabled the thickened cane juice to crystallize and allowed experimentation with improved methods of cleaning and condensing milled juice before it reached the vacuum pan. The higher the boiling temperatures, the more the resulting crystals discoloured. In open pans, the temperature of the boiling sugar liquor was at least 121°C, whilst in a vacuum pan 65°C was sufficient. White sugar could never be totally obtained through open pan boiling. Vacuum pans also made it possible to re-boil molasses into 'second' sugar and to reprocess brown sugar into a purer yellow form. Multiple-effect apparatus was based on the concept that hot vapour rising from boiling cane juice could be used to evaporate water contained in multiple vessels. The advantage was higher quality sugar, less danger of scorching, and a greater retrieval rate.

In the mid-nineteenth century, Java and Cuba were the biggest sugar-producers in the world and led the way in industrialisation of the process. Technically, the sugar milling process used in Queensland during the 1860s and 1870s was two or three decades behind that used in some areas of the Caribbean. Once Queensland caught up in the final decades of the nineteenth century, there were still other areas—the French Caribbean, Brazil, the Philippines and India—dragging behind. For instance, Wetzell vacuum evaporating pans, invented in the 1830s in Réunion, a French Indian Ocean colony, were widely adopted to improve the efficiency of processing sugarcane juice to produce higher quality sugar and reduce wastage as molasses. Javanese, Cuban and some Caribbean plantations began installing vacuum pans in the 1840s. These devices were not installed at Mackay until the 1870s. Amhurst and Pocklington installed the district's first vacuum pan at Foulden mill in 1872. Similarly, Long & Co. fitted their River Estate plantation mill with a vacuum pan from the time it opened in 1873. Fitzgerald and his partners followed their lead at Meadowlands in the same year, and at Te Kowai in 1874. Three mills converted to the vacuum process in the second half of the 1870s: Pioneer in 1876, and Alexandra and Nebia in 1879. Brothers Robert and James Donaldson, previously from the West Indies, began with a horse-driven vertical mill at Cassada in 1870, using the open pan method (the same mill that Pioneer first used). This primitive mill was replaced by a Smellie & Co. steam-powered mill from Brisbane, with a vacuum pan installed in 1880. Cassada was surrounded by larger mills offering better prices for farmers' cane, and the plantation only had 400 acres of its own cane. Pleystowe and Richmond also added vacuum pans in 1882. All but two of the mills built in the 1880s had vacuum pans when they first opened. The exceptions were John Avery's Conningsby, built in 1882, which was a small mill with one set of rollers, and the Pagets' Nindaroo mill which began crushing in 1883, with no vacuum pan until 1887.

Mills were constantly renovated and improved. Eventually, the primitive machinery was all replaced and the mills' boiling houses ultimately resembled a set of huge pressure cookers inside which the juice was clarified and condensed by recirculated steam heat. Sometimes mills were completely renewed, although kept the same names. River Estate plantation is the best example. The original mill operated from 1873 to 1887, with North River juice mill built in 1881, which operated until 1886. They were both replaced by a new River mill which crushed between 1887 and 1891. Of the 30 Pioneer Valley mills established before 1884, nine had single rollers and no vacuum pans. None of these survived into the 1890s: Lorne closed in 1877, The Cedars, Miclere, and Barrie closed in 1886; and Dumbleton and Conningsby closed in 1887. Sometimes the final provocation for a mill closure was an amalgamation or rationalization on the part of a company owning two or more mills. The first amalgamation was that of Balmoral with Meadowlands in 1878. Likewise, in 1883 Pioneer was replaced by Ashburton, built higher up on the same land. Inverness was closed in 1884,

and the plantation land incorporated into neighbouring Richmond, a more sophisticated mill.

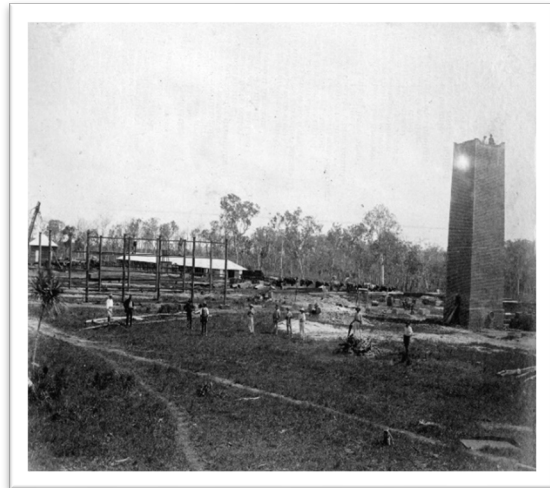
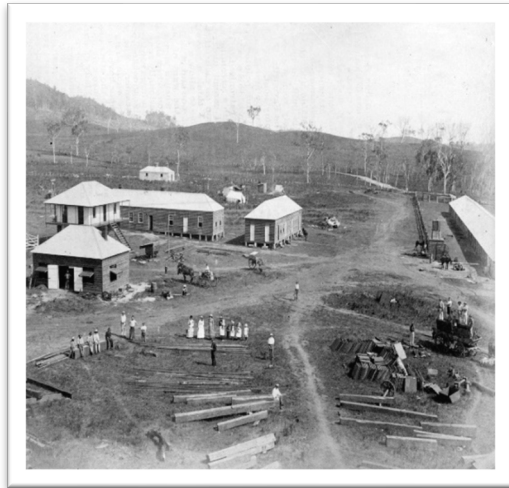
As discussed in Chapter 7, three new players entered the Mackay financial scene: William Sloan & Co, Colonial Sugar Refining Co., and the Melbourne-Mackay Sugar Co. William Sloan & Co. (1861–84) began business as a stock and station agent in Victoria in about 1858. Three years later, William Sloan went into partnership with financier Robert J. Jeffray (1830–1913), born in Kirkmahoe, Dumfriesshire, Scotland, the youngest son of the Rev. John Jeffray of Kirkmahoe. In 1884, William Sloan and Co. and Jeffray's company became the Union Mortgage & Agency Co. of Australia Ltd. William Sloan & Co. was dissolved in 1885 and the next year the Union Mortgage & Agency Co. became London-based. The final iteration was as Australian Estates & Mortgage Co. Ltd in 1894, and Australian Estates Co. (Southern) Ltd in 1957, taken over by CSR Ltd in 1975.

William Sloan & Co. set up in Mackay in 1874, in partnership with Davidson & Co., expanding their interests into the sugar industry. William H. Paxton was manager, until 1876 when he set up on his own as W.H. Paxton & Co. William Sloan & Co. lent money to plantation owners and after the rust epidemic in the cane were able to take control of several plantations. One example is Charles Fitzsimmons' Nebia, over the river from Branscombe, which operated between 1872 and 1886. When his plantation was badly affected by the rust outbreak, Fitzsimmons borrowed from William Sloan & Co. After he died the next year, Nebia was incorporated into William Sloan & Co.

Lorne on the south side of the river, another Sloan acquisition, was a single roller open pan mill taken over in 1877 after the rust outbreak, its land absorbed a few years later into the Melbourne-Mackay Sugar Co. Miclere, on about a square mile on the Northside, another single roller open pan mill, was purchased by William Sloan & Co. in 1881, after the death of its owner Michael Carroll the previous year. The next year it was sold to Sir John Lawes, who built Farleigh in 1883, then closed Miclere in 1886, although he used the land and continued to operate his Foulden mill until 1887.

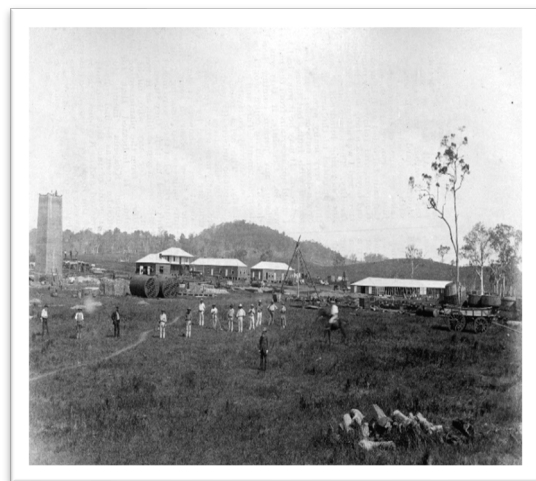
The principals of Melbourne-Mackay Sugar Co. during its early years were Davidson, Jeffray, and two London merchants John S. Hall, and Ernest W. Ehlers. When interviewed by the 1889 Royal Commission into the sugar industry, Davidson reported that as managing director he controlled over 8,000 acres, with 3,500 acres under cane, using 80 European workers, 320 Islander labourers, and a few Malays and Chinese. The company had invested £301,500 (today \$44,740,235) in its Mackay estates. Davidson used a sound scientific rationale, although he was slow to modernize his milling process and in the 1880s and 1890s, even when faced with central milling as the obvious future of the industry, refused to give up his plantation style operations using indentured Pacific Islander labour.

Interestingly, Henry Davidson, father of John Ewan Davidson, held shares under the original 1880 Melbourne-Mackay Sugar Co. memorandum, and a new one in 1882, establishing a direct investment line between West Indies slave plantations and manumission finances and Mackay's plantations. In 1882, the agreement was redrawn to include George H. Maitland King's Branscombe plantation.⁴ Branscombe and Alexandra became redundant in 1884, the Melbourne-Mackay Sugar Co. concentrating its efforts on its large new Palms Estate mill (1881–1924).



Plates 8.8–9: Construction of Ashburton mill, 1883, on Northside hilly scrub land adjoining Pioneer Plantation, by C.F. McKinnon & Co. of Melbourne. Spiller and Brandon had sold Pioneer and the Ashburton land to C.F. McKinnon & Co.

Source: State Library of Queensland.



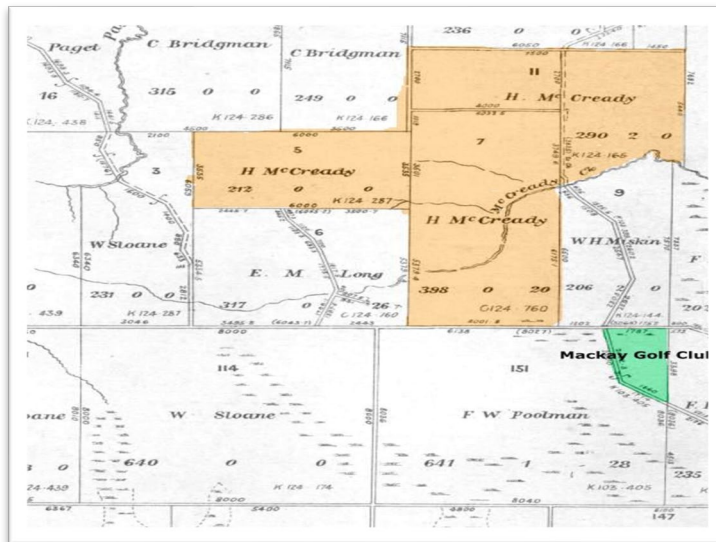
Plates 8.10–11: Construction of Ashburton Mill, 1883.

Source: State Library of Queensland.

When it began in 1873, Maurice Hume Black's The Cedars mill (Plate 7.20) used a small 21-inch (53 cm) mill rollers and an open pan mill process, purchased second-hand from Robert Towns' failed 1860s Townsville mill. Although Black had 2,150 acres (870 ha) of prime land bordering Inverness plantation, his mill, despite additions, was always hopelessly outdated. It closed in 1886, no longer worth operating, the cane sent to River Estate North juice mill for processing. Encumbered by his financiers, first William Sloan & Co., and then the AJS Bank, Black opted instead for a parliamentary career. A Conservative, he stood for Parliament in 1878, failed to be elected, won in 1881 and held the seat until 1892. He had two brothers living in Mackay. Initially his brother Henry B. Black assisted him, then became a partner in a local newspaper in 1877. The other brother was a merchant. Neither had time to help run The Cedars. When he entered Parliament, Maurice Hume Black installed a manager. In 1898, The Cedars land was subdivided and sold as farms.

Similarly outdated, Dumbleton closed in 1887. Barrie, opened on Sandy Creek at Eton in 1872, had single rollers and used an open pan process. Always marginal, it finally closed in 1886. Neighbouring Victoria was built in 1882, with a vacuum pan added later.

Both Victoria and North Eton were central mills, taking in cane from farmers who had previously supplied Barrie. Victoria was intended to rely solely on farmers' cane, but when North Eton central mill opened less than a kilometre away in 1888, Victoria soon closed. Pleystowe, with double crushing and vacuum pans, closed in 1888 after a series of bad seasons, unable to withstand the competition from its new neighbour, Racecourse central mill. The land was still used to grow cane, which was sent to Racecourse. Under a new central milling company, a modernised and enlarged Pleystowe mill reopened in 1893, minus most of its land, which was sold off to its farmer shareholders.



Map 8.1: The location of Hugh McCready's original selections which made up the bulk of the Richmond land. W.H. Poolman's land is also shown. For orientation, the position of the modern Mackay Golf Course is shown in green.

Source: 1908 Bassett Parish Map, with colour added by Glen Hall.

Plantation mills varied in size and purpose. There were experiments with central milling operations. Richmond, first mentioned in Chapter 4, is the best example. John McBryde and Hector Mackenzie Finlayson began a new Richmond mill in 1882, the land purchased from the estate of Andrew Cumming. The Cumming family had been sugar planters on St Vincent Island in the West Indies since at least the 1770s. Born in Ayrshire, Scotland in 1836, Andrew Cumming joined the family business on St Vincent, and in 1856 or 1857 married a widow, Lydia Ann Chadband Shaw, at Richmond on St Vincent. In 1862, Cumming was manager of New Adelphi Estate when he was severely beaten and his house ransacked during an uprising, which led the family to leave for Scotland, then Melbourne and finally Queensland, where he worked for Tooth & Cran at their Yengarie refinery at Maryborough. Three of their children were born in St Vincent and two more in Queensland. The Cummings were in Mackay by 1870, where Andrew was joined by Hugh McCready, his ex-overseer from New Adelphi. They became partners in Richmond plantation, the partnership dissolved in March 1877. Lydia Cumming died in 1878. Richmond was sold in 1880 or 1881 to McBryde and Finlayson, although Cumming retained his Woodland estate bordering Nindaroo plantation. Cumming died in March 1881 while developing a new plantation on the Johnstone River with Thomas Henry Fitzgerald, one of the founders of the Mackay sugar industry.

McBryde had selected land on the Northside in 1869, east of Miclere plantation, and north of River Estate plantation, which he named Glenalbyn. He began to clear land and plant cane, forming a partnership with Finlayson, who owned 492-acre (199 ha) Gladfield estate on the north bank of the river, where he too had started cultivation in 1869, like McBryde hoping

to build a mill. McBryde also reared thoroughbred horses at Glenalbyn. In 1880, 850-acre (343 ha) Glenalbyn, with its 100 acres of cane and a substantial garden and orchard, was sold to John Spiller of Pioneer plantation for £6,200. The next year, McBryde and Finlayson combined their resources to build a new Richmond mill, the district's second private central mill (after Victoria), depending entirely on cane from surrounding small farms and plantations.

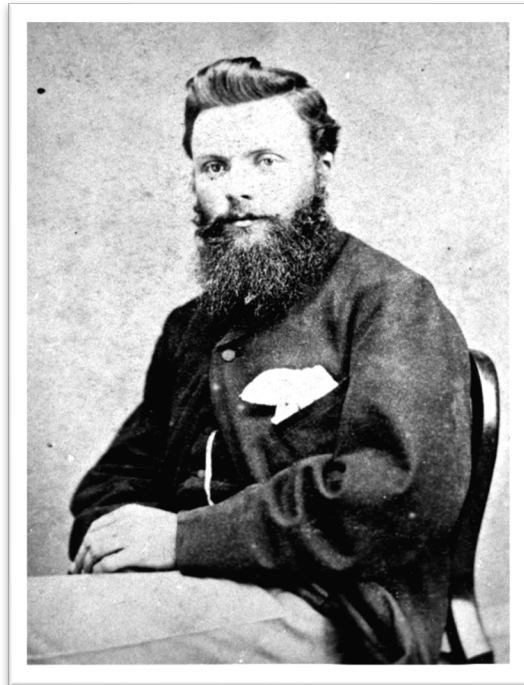


Plate 8.12: Hector Mackenzie Finlayson of Gladfield estate and Richmond plantation.

Source: Mackay Regional Council, Greenmount Homestead Collection.

The state-of-the-art mill was operational by 1882. Its brick 44 feet chimney still stands, the only remaining plantation mill chimney in Australia, a tribute to its Cornish builders. The Divisional Board helped with a new road connecting the mill to Mackay, and to Habana and Shoal Point roads, making transport easier. Richmond produced 'mill white' sugar and golden syrup to rival that from Foulden, the only other similar producer in the district. Unfortunately, Richmond was not a success. In the same year the mill began operations, their bankers demanded the business be put on the market, although there were no takers. McBryde and Finlayson retreated to the plantation concept, teaming up with their neighbour F.W. Poolmen to purchase nearby primitive Inverness mill and its 1,070 acres (433 ha) of land from George Raff & Co. of Brisbane, to expand their land area. In 1894 the mortgagees stepped in and put Richmond on the market again. The core of the land (including the mill site) was sold to the Fordyce family, who still own it, although the mill ceased operating and cane growing stopped for some time. Inverness was closed, and Richmond operated until 1895, although McBryde still owned some of the land as late as 1902.

As discussed in Chapter 2, in the early 1880s McBryde and Finlayson also attempted to start a large new plantation, Seaforth near Cape Hillsborough, but were stymied by restrictions on Pacific Islander labour supplies, and disappointed when a planned government railway was positioned far away from their Seaforth land.



Plate 8.13: Richmond Mill in 1895. The chimney, built in 1881, is still standing today, the last plantation mill chimney in Australia.

Source: State Library of Queensland.

Ungovernable circumstances, rather than any logical reason, could just as easily explain the demise of a mill. William S.C. Adrian was a cousin of Hugh Adrian, a Mackay-based captain in the Pacific labour trade. W.S.C. Adrian, a baker and hotelier at Mackay in the 1870s, established Mount Pleasant mill on the Northside of the river in 1883. A small factory with a single set of rollers, built complete with a vacuum pan, the mill had a 600-ton capacity. Adrian, with only 500 acres of his own cane, intended to accept cane from neighbouring farmers. When Mount Pleasant's vacuum pan was installed, it was, unfortunately, dropped as it was swung into place, severely damaging the concrete foundations. Adrian was grief stricken, allegedly furthering the destruction by getting drunk and galloping his horse into his cane, setting fire to his crop.

Recovering from these mishaps, Adrian did reasonably well for two years, then in 1886 an excessive wet season ruined his harvest, lowered the sugar content of his cane and that of his suppliers, and added considerably to his operating costs. This, and problems with obtaining Melanesian labour, forced him to use more expensive and less reliable European labour. The extra expense broke him and 1887 saw him several thousand pounds in debt. A.P. Ashdown, manager of the Mackay branch of the Sydney-based Commercial Banking Co., described Adrian's plight:

Mr. Adrian's...management during the past year [1886], taking everything into consideration has been as good as that of any of his neighbours, and more successful than that of many of the other planters in the district... His management has been characterized by a rigid economy, and the disastrous result of his efforts has been due to the force of circumstances, which he has combatted and controlled to the best of his powers and ability.

...The results of his efforts will compare favourably with that of any other Estate in the district, similarly situated, both as regards expenditure for the year, and the return of sugar per acre... Not a single plantation in this district, I believe, has managed to pay working expenses during 1886...⁵

As Ashdown pointed out, the misfortunes which closed Adrian's mill affected many other producers. Conningsby, Victoria and Foulden, all closed in the same year, probably faced by similar circumstances. Ashdown could not have known at the time that these problems heralded the end of the second boom period in Mackay's sugar industry. The prosperity of the years 1883 to 1885 had depended on good seasons, high sugar prices, and cheap and reliable labour. This combination did not prevail again during the remainder of the nineteenth century.



Plate 8.14: Mount Pleasant Plantation mill.

Source: State Library of Queensland.

Valley Entrepreneurs

Selling sugar was the most important money-making activity. However, the sugar market was always precarious, and had to compete against foreign sugar imported into the southern colonies. Proprietors wisely relied on a spread of business ventures. Investments in land were always a mainstay. Some planters owned several plantations, in succession or two at the same time. They also speculatively purchased smaller parcels of land away from their plantations, presumably hoping to make a future profit. Many of the names on Lands Department maps of the district are instantly recognizable as pastoralists, plantation owners and town businessmen. In the 1890s, some of the planters rode with the changing circumstances of the industry and became shareholders in mills established under government central mill legislation, or subdivided their sugar-holdings into small farms, whilst maintaining control of their mills. Others also had land investments in other areas of Queensland, establishing, or attempting to establish, sugar plantations in other districts. Many partners in plantations were absentee owners who viewed their sugar land as part of an investment portfolio, not a lifestyle. Some of the resident planters also had southern and overseas business connections, while others pursued professional careers alongside their plantation activities.

Spiller and Creese initially had limited capital, which forced them to sell their Branscombe land to Long & Co. and George Marten in 1870, after which Spiller concentrated on Pioneer, with his new mill operating by 1871. In later years, he had the financial assistance of the local branch of the AJS Bank, through its manager Henry Brandon, who became his partner. After the rust outbreak in the cane during the mid-1870s, which ruined many early investors, with Brandon's help, Spiller took over Edward M. Long's River Estate in 1878, after being supervising manager there for the AJS Bank for two years. River Estate had the largest mill in the district, supplied by Mirrlees, Tait & Watson of Glasgow, outdoing Foulden, previously the most substantial. Spiller constructed tramways and, after using a locally manufactured locomotive from Victoria Foundry for a short while in 1880, imported a small John Fowler & Co. steam locomotive, which increased efficiency of cane transport to Pioneer's mill. Next, he purchased McBryde's adjoining Glenalbyn estate, extending his fields. He also crushed cane from other farmers. By 1879, Spiller was able to build a substantial residence. Three years later he and Brandon sold Pioneer to C.F. McKinnon & Co. of Melbourne for £95,000 (today \$12,265,357). It was an inflated price for an old mill but included a large area of land. The new owners, C.F. McKinnon & Co. of Melbourne, centred their activities on the Ashburton part of the land where they erected a new mill with six feet rollers, each three feet in diameter. The Pioneer mill became the Ashburton No. 2 mill. In 1888, C.F. McKinnon & Co. controlled 4,800 acres (1,942 ha), Ashburton mill was valued at £40,000, and the company had invested £200,000 (today about \$28 million). Ashburton finally closed in 1895, amalgamated into Farleigh plantation.

Spiller and Brandon retained River Estate plantation. The pair also began a new Pioneer plantation on 5,000 acres (2,023 ha) in the Burdekin River district, which they sold to the Drysdale syndicate in 1883. In 1887, Spiller and Brandon sold River Estate for £40,000 (today \$5,652,300) and returned to England a rich man. Spiller's profit was the largest in the district to that time, and it was an even better deal than he ever imagined. Soon after, the river engulfed the River Estate mill and much of its riverside land.



Plate 8.15: Fully developed Pioneer Plantation mill, 1880s.

Source: State Library of Queensland.

The path to plantation wealth was not always so easy. T.H. Fitzgerald, Spiller's early

rival, crashed financially in the rust epidemic. Others, like Andrew Henderson, were only moderately successful plantation owners working their way up from a small capital base. Born in 1831 in Aberdeenshire, Scotland, Henderson was one of Mackay's first settlers, with business and plantation interests covering three decades. Before coming to Mackay, he was based in Rockhampton and had worked as an overseer on Newstead pastoral station south of Fort Cooper. He and his nephews James and Andrew Robb arrived in September 1862, opening the first store in the hamlet. Henderson was also part-owner of an early hotel. In the mid-1860s, Henderson and James Robb contracted to plough the first land tilled on Alexandra plantation, for cotton. A few years later, James Robb owned Robbsleigh, a 50-acre farm on The Lagoons off Nebo Road in West Mackay, where he erected a short-lived horse-powered mill in 1871. Henderson was also an early managing partner of what became River Estate plantation before its sale to George Marten and Long & Co. in 1871. Henderson participated in the early 1880s boom when he began 800-acre (323 ha) Beaconsfield plantation in 1882, which he operated until 1887, then held the land until his death in 1891. Beaconsfield was a single roller mill with three 42-inch (1.06 m) rollers and a three-ton vacuum pan. Ten years earlier it would have been considered modern. In the 1880s it was not, except for its small single vacuum pan. He also owned a large area of land at Wallingford.

Land Speculation

It was quite usual for the early settlers to hold land as a speculative investment, to be sold when the price was right, or when capital was required for another project. Like Spiller, Hugh McCready did land deals when he erected Palmyra. He had owned the land that became Richmond plantation. The Palmyra land belonged to his brother David, and in 1882 Hugh McCready, as agent for his brother sold a different 2,000-acre (809 ha) block to CSR for £10,000 to add to their Homebush plantation. The Palmyra mill cost the McCreadys £8,499 in 1883, presumably financed by the sales of Richmond to McBryde and Finlayson, and his brother's land to CSR. In 1882, McCready also attempted to diversify his interests outside of the district, going into partnership with four others to purchase two square miles of sugar land outside of Cairns.

Blocks of land, and pastoral and agricultural properties changed ownership frequently. T.H. Fitzgerald's 1860s pastoral land dealings were mentioned in Chapter 4 and his sugar properties were discussed in Chapter 7. Alfred Hewitt bought his Pleystowe land in 1868 and opened his mill there the next year. As already mentioned, he had an earlier financial interest in Fitzgerald and Davidson's Alexandra plantation. John McBryde of Glenalbyn estate and (and later Richmond plantation) was another early sugar-grower. In 1869, he failed to establish a new central mill, the Mackay Crushing Co.

No plantation remained static for long: acreage was expanded or reduced; mills were expanded; tramway systems extended; and by-products varied. Acreages altered dramatically. In 1883, Cassada had 400 acres (162 ha) of arable land, while Homebush had 10,000 acres (4,047 ha). Planters bought up surrounding parcels of land to add to their plantations, and if faced with decline sold off land. For instance, CSR's Homebush plantation was cobbled together out of 3,000 acres (1,214 ha) of pre-emptive land from Homebush station, and land from surrounding selectors. One was Robert McBurney, the Government doctor in Mackay, who sold CSR 2,400 acres (971 ha) he held as an investment, which netted him about £14,000. Another example is River Estate plantation, which extended from the Pioneer River to Glendaragh estate. After Spiller bought McBryde's estate, he also took over James Wales' selection on Glendaragh Road, and Mark Kelly's neighbouring 75-acre selection, which he had obtained in 1881. This gave River Estate a boundary with Beaconsfield plantation.

Planters often leased land from each other, sold crops, and molasses (for rum-making), to each other, and to varying extents bought cane from surrounding small-scale farmers.

Town and rural residents bought and sold urban land, many holding multiple blocks of land, which they used for investments in the same way as the larger rural land deals.

Transport, Distilleries, and Production Techniques

After cutting, the cane was loaded into horse- or bullock-drawn wagons in the fields, or onto wagons on portable railway lines, then taken to a siding of the main plantation tramway to be carried to the mill. Speed was essential to preserve sugar content. The transport factor is important to the whole organisational structure of the industry. Transport considerations meant that the land closest to the mills was reserved exclusively for sugarcane, and there was incentive to co-ordinate the flow of cane from various farming units, to keep the mills constantly supplied. The optimum size of all mills was constrained by their transport network.

Tramways made transporting the cane from the fields to the mills much easier. Planters installed portable and permanent tramways on their own land and extended tramways into new cane areas to secure cane from surrounding growers, not always successfully. In 1886, the owners of Victoria plantation built a tramway to Joseph Antoney's large estate to enable him to send his cane to their mill. Unfortunately for them, Antoney became a shareholder in the new North Eton central mill, erected in 1887, and Victoria lost his cane. The first tramways with a locomotive ('locos', as they were called) were built on Pioneer plantation in 1880. The loco made five trips a day, each carrying the equivalent of 16 to 20 dray loads (Plate 7.1). Others were not as efficient: The Cedars had a two-mile (3.21 kilometres) two-foot (0.6 metres) -wide horse-drawn tramway, which curled around its hills. Used to collect firewood and move cut cane, it had wooden rails capped with iron in places where the wear was greatest.

Eventually, hundreds of kilometres of tramways snaked all over the district, some using small steam locos. Not all of the locos were efficient, particularly those made locally. River Estate and Habana plantations never had much success with locos and continued to use horses to draw rail-wagons on portable lines. Other tramways were contemplated but never completed. In 1889, E.M. Long considered extending Habana's tramway as far at Seaforth, but old age, his involvement in the revamped Pleystowe mill, Federation and the concomitant halt of the labour supply from the Pacific, seem to have made him change his plans. Instead, he closed Habana in 1901. As mills closed, all of the surviving twentieth century mills developed extensive tramway networks.

The distilleries were very necessary; given the inefficiency of the early mills, molasses was a huge by-product. Alexandra produced 24,500 gallons of molasses from cane that became 301 tons of sugar, and, similarly, Foulden and Pioneer both produced 16,000 gallons from their 1870s annual sugar yields. Alexandra, Balmoral, Lorne, Pleystowe, and Te Kowai all had rum distilleries. Alexandra, the first mill, was built with a 1,200-gallon copper still and 8,000-gallon vats for fermentation. In 1869, Alexandra produced 7,000 gallons of rum, and Pleystowe produced 6,000 gallons. Te Kowai, Lorne and Balmoral distilleries were operating by 1874. They all accepted molasses from other mills; for instance, in 1875 Lorne processed 7,000 gallons of molasses for David Jack of Barrie plantation. There were also specialist operations: Edward Denman produced Dahru rum, a liqueur, the recipe for which he brought with him from the West Indies.

There were a variety of special processes used in mills. The introduction of vacuum pan methods was discussed in the previous chapter. McBryde and Finlayson's Richmond was the only early Mackay plantation mill able to refine its own sugar; and Richmond and

Foulden produced golden syrup as a by-product. All the mills added lime to cane juice to stop the sugar changing to 'grape' sugar. The mixture settled while in subsiders and the impurities were removed as filter press. The next step was to boil the juice at reduced pressure at a lower boiling point in multiple-effets, a similar system to vacuum pan boiling. Molasses was then spun out of the mixture in the centrifuges.

A new chemical process was widely adopted in the 1870s, invented by Dr Edmund Icery from Mauritius and promoted in Queensland by C.B. de Lissa. The Icery process used sulphuric acid and bisulphate and monosulphate of lime to improve the quality of the sugar, before adding lime in the usual manner, which reduced the sugar to a pale-yellow colour. Sulphuric acid was added to a stream of water filtered down pumice stone placed in two earthenware cylinders which fed into lead tanks below, with the sulphur fumes ascending. Sulphate of lime was added to neutralise the acid. The juice was then raised to clarifiers, each holding about 600 gallons, where it was boiled and skimmed. Granulation occurred quickly and there was a lowered level of molasses. The whole process was cheap to operate, and the apparatus was compact. William Sloan & Co. purchased the Queensland rights to the Icery process. It was adopted by Branscombe, Foulden, Meadowlands, River Estate, and Pioneer mills, in William Sloan & Co.'s mills, Airdmillan mill on the Burdekin, and others in the south of the colony. At River Estate plantation, the process increased the value of its sugar by a significant £4 a ton and enabled recovery of 23 gallons of golden syrup per ton of sugar.

In 1875, Foulden adopted new mechanical charcoal filter processes that gave juice an extra treatment after boiling and clarification, reheating and pumping it to a raised tank, from where it was fed into a row of thin iron cylinders each filled with charcoal made from bones, then returned to the vacuum pan. The liquor was pale amber in colour, the sugar was hard and crystalline, not syrupy, and there was less molasses. By using extra charcoal filters, Foulden produced sugar said to be equivalent to a refined product. Again, the amount of molasses was reduced, and the charcoal cost was low. In 1876, Foulden sugar sold at £30 a ton on the Brisbane market. Frank Amhurst of Foulden claimed that for an outlay of 30s. per ton of sugar, he had raised the value by £9 per ton.

The milling processes were often quite inefficient. Sometimes they depended on the availability of money (for instance the number of rollers and vacuum pans able to be installed), although often it seems that some of the owners and managers had little idea of changes already in use in other parts of the world that could be introduced. Better carriers to lift the cane to the rollers, and more efficient clarifiers, boilers and engines all improved the 1870s mills.

Ships and Wharves

Some planters also owned ships and wharves, used to bring Melanesian labourers to and from the plantations, to export sugar, and carry goods to and from Mackay. The usual pattern was that each ship was owned by several partners. Without checking Lloyd's Register, it is difficult to know exact details. Several of the labour-recruiting vessels were owned locally. The Rawson brothers, pastoralist in the Pioneer Valley since the 1860s and Mackay businessmen, who later set up the North Queensland Sugar Estate Co., are known to have owned the *Fanny* in the 1870s. F.T. Amhurst of Foulden owned the *Isabella* and was co-owner of the *Petrel* with the Long brothers of Branscombe and River Estate. Robert McBurney, the town's government doctor and a partner in Marian plantation, at one time was also part-owner of the schooner *Lavinia*, as was E.M. Long. The *Noumea*, *Jabberwock*, *Hector* and *Borough Belle* are remembered as owned by Branscombe. At different times T.H. Fitzgerald of Alexandra, Meadowlands and Te Kowai, and Alfred Hewitt of Pleystowe, owned the *Lady Darling*. In 1873, the *Mystery* was owned by Hewitt and his partner Romilly, one of the Robertson brothers from Lorne, Lloyd and Walker of Dumbleton, and

Fitzsimmons of Nebia. The Melbourne-Mackay Sugar Co. owned *Lady Belmore*, and CSR also chartered or owned their own recruiting ships.

In 1873, T.H. Fitzgerald owned Victoria wharf at Mackay. William Sloan & Co. had their own wharf at Mackay in 1881, in 1887 Rawson & Co. owned a wharf and 246 feet (75 m) of river frontage in Mackay. E.M. Long had his own wharf in Reliance Creek. William Sloan & Co. and CSR chartered ships to transport Mackay's sugar products to the southern refineries and both usually negotiated to buy the total production of one or several plantation mills. For example, in 1883 CSR purchased the entire outputs of Pleystowe, Conningsby, Palymra, Nindaroo, Dumbleton, The Cedars, Beaconsfield, and Barrie plantations.

Pastoral Connections

More than 25 plantation owners, managers and estate owners were at some stage involved in the pastoral industry. Many of the planters had transferred their management skills and finances from running pastoral properties. Frank Bridgeman, connected to Fort Cooper, Lake Elphinstone and Homebush, became a partner in Balmoral and Meadowlands plantations. In reverse, William Hyne of Hyne & Co. of Meadowlands and formerly a pastoralist, in 1889 purchased Fort Cooper North station. Maurice Hume Black migrated to Victoria in 1852 with his brother Henry Boyer Black, to join another brother Hulbert, who was a pastoralist in Gippsland. Maurice tried his luck on the goldfields, then pursued pastoralism in the Riverina district, South Australia, and New South Wales, working his way up to manage large properties in Queensland onwards from 1864. In 1867, he became manager of Lenton Downs station and Eaglefield (which included Burton Downs and was later renamed Dabin), while his brother Henry was manager of Lake Elphinstone station. They both moved to Mackay in 1871, beginning The Cedars plantation the next year.



Plate 8.16: Maurice Hume Black (1835–1899) of The Cedars plantation, was later member for Mackay in the Legislative Assembly, 1881–93, a Minister in 1888–90, and Queensland Special Agent in London in 1893–94. He spent his final years as an attorney for mining companies at Coolgardie in Western Australia
Source: State Library of Queensland.

Also in the 1870s, Michael Carrol of Miclere plantation was a pastoralist and successful goldminer at Clermont before he settled at Mackay. A.H. Lloyd, who began Dumbleton plantation, had earlier owned Blue Mountain station, and Charles Walker, his partner on Dumbleton, had been manager of Cotherstone station. Charles Fitzsimmons of Nebia plantation, in the 1860s had been manager on Cardown and Lotus Creek pastoral

stations. Similarly, Arthur Kemmis, manager of Fort Cooper station in the 1860s, was involved in the Oakenden Sugar Co. in the 1880s. Their skills were in management on the frontier, although initially they were not knowledgeable about the sugar industry, which explains some of their failures.

Andrew Henderson had worked on Newstead and Callaroy stations, and R.J. Jeffray, a partner in William Sloan & Co., also had significant southern pastoral investments. F.T. Amhurst in 1874 owned a share in the Macartney and Murray's Jolimount cattle station. C.F. McKinnon, who purchased Pioneer plantation from John Spiller, owned pastoral land in New South Wales. They were able to raise cattle and bullocks on their properties to use on their plantations. W.H. Hyne of Balmoral, the Rawsons from The Hollow, and the Martins from Hamilton and Hopetoun runs, David Jack of Barrie plantation, and Charles Romilly of Pleystowe plantation, all operated butcheries. William Hyne and Frank Bridgeman owned the Walkerston Boiling Down Works for a few years in the 1860s, and E.M. Long operated Habana as a dairy, before, during and after its time as a plantation. In 1905, Frank Bridgeman of Meadowlands was involved with E.M. Long in the Mackay Bacon Curing Co., which operated at Habana.

Pastoralists also invested in the government-financed central mills of the 1880s and 1890s. John Harney and Cornwallis Wade-Browne from Bolingbroke station, 1867–79, invested in Racecourse central mill, John Cook and his son Albert from Balnagowan and Greenmount invested in Pleystowe central mill onwards from the 1890s, and the Bell and Atherton families, who were the first pastoralists at Plane Creek in the 1860s, later invested in the Plane Creek central mill.

The varieties of their business interests were boundless. T.H. Fitzgerald was always willing to try his hand in any new enterprise. In 1873, he had a financial interest in the Mt Flora copper mine west of Mackay. Andrew Henderson, another planter and town businessman, had mining interests at Mt Vince. Rawson & Co. of The Hollow operated in Mackay as agents for planters and pastoralists and as auctioneers and wharf-owners. Town businessman George Smith was a partner in Marian and Victoria plantations. Henry B. Black left his partnership with his brother Maurice at The Cedars in 1877 and with another partner founded the *Mackay Standard* newspaper. The list can be expanded to add in Charles Rawson's firm Rawson & Clayton, Australian agents in London, and Davidson & Co.'s connection with William Sloan & Co. and the large Melbourne-Mackay Sugar Co.

Professions, Politics and Management Skills

Some planters had professions. As listed in the previous chapter and in Table 13.1, several represented the district in the Queensland Legislative Assembly and Council. As mentioned above, Mackay medical doctor Robert McBurney owned shares in a recruiting ship, and a plantation, sold land to CSR, and invested in the failed Hamilton private central mill company. F.T. Amhurst had been called to the bar in England and in 1875 was admitted as a barrister in Queensland. Henry Brandon seems to have pursued simultaneous careers as a bank manager and planter. The most usual extra occupation was as manager of another plantation in the same district or in some other area of Queensland. Hugh McCready obtained the land at Richmond in 1869 and became part-owner of the plantation with Andrew Cumming; but during this time, he was also manager of Pleystowe (1869–73) and Te Kowai (1875). Robert Edward Donaldson, partner with his brother in Cassada, was Te Kowai's manager for a period in the 1880s. In 1887, W.H. Hyne of Meadowlands sent one of the Paget brothers of Nindaroo to oversee establishment of his 1,198-acre (485 ha) property at Clump Point, north of Rockingham Bay, and Hyne himself was a temporary manager at Farleigh mill. Even more common were cases of estate owners augmenting their incomes as

plantation managers. J. Costello of Millicent estate near Habana, was manager of Branscombe in 1874 and of Meadowlands in 1877. Edward Denman of Etowrie estate at various times managed nearby Inverness, Richmond and Miclere plantations.

Reusing Tramway and Mill Parts

Mills, locomotives, and iron rails linking the fields to the mills were expensive property. When mills were upgraded or closed, any removable machinery found a ready market elsewhere and often at bargain prices. There are many examples. As far back as the 1860s, Fitzgerald purchased Davidson's unused mill from his Bellenden plantation near Cardwell. Lorne, a primitive 1870s mill, was finally used in 1879 to power a chaffcutter for animal feed at Te Kowai plantation. After Victoria mill closed in 1893, it came to life again in 1897, this time with its rollers installed at Seaforth mill in the Lower Burdekin and other mill parts were later incorporated into Kalamia mill at Ayr. The best example of a mill built from cannibalisation is Cattle Creek central mill at Finch Hatton. With no government funding available, the mill was patched together from others in the district that had closed—Nindaroo, Habana, and River Estate.

Just as there is a great diversity in the range of activities in which planters engaged, so also there was in the importance of the plantations among their total financial interests. For some, their plantations were of minor importance. When Sir John Bennet Lawes died in 1900, *The Times* weekly edition described his Rothamsted Agricultural Experiment Station in Hertfordshire and called him 'one of the greatest benefactors of agriculture—perhaps the greatest—the world has seen'.⁶ His £150,000 Farleigh plantation, the largest on the Northside of the Pioneer River, did not even rate a mention. For other planters, it was their other investments which were minor.

Human Capital Investments

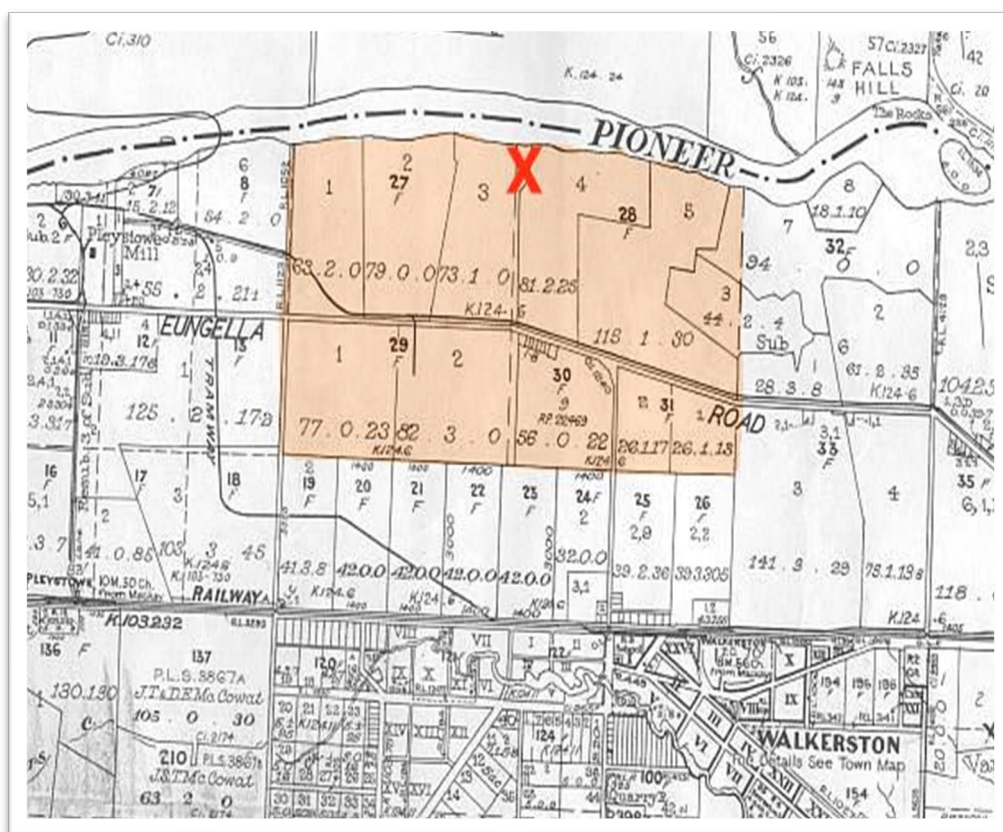
Those who invested in the boom years of the 1870s and early 1880s in hope of a quick profit were usually badly disappointed. As with pastoral stations, owning plantations never guaranteed riches or even financial success. More failed than succeeded. Luck, as well as good management, capital, and technological advances, were all elements in the fortunes they made or lost. The plantation mode of production was labour intensive, each plantation requiring a cheap and reliable labour force to work its fields and mill. Planters were under considerable restraint in respect to sources and methods of recruiting Melanesian labour, as well as the way the labourers were treated on the plantations. Legislation and regulations passed by the Queensland Government controlled, restricted, and for a while in the early 1890s halted the migration of Melanesians to work as indentured labourers in the colony. In 1901, legislation from the new Commonwealth Parliament finally ended access to Pacific labour.

Each plantation's human capital investment in European, Melanesian and Asian labour was as important to success and failure as investments in transport systems or new milling techniques. Once the Pacific labour trade began, several categories of Melanesian labour emerged. Employers had a choice of employing newly arrived indentured labourers, recruits returning for a second visit to Queensland, re-indentured labourers already in the colony, time-expired labourers free to work on shorter contracts, and the ticket-holders (who had arrived before September 1879 and after 1884 were free of any restrictions). They all had different levels of skill and received different wages. Susceptibility to disease among Pacific Islander labourers might also have been a consideration for experienced managers. This is further discussed in Chapter 9. Large plantations were in the best position to select the more

productive workers, and to get the best out of new recruits by putting them alongside experienced workers from the same language group or island. There was also the option of employing Asian indentured labourers, and Europeans as indentured and free workers. Selection and management of a labour force can confidently be postulated as one of the major variables which accounted for the success or failure of any plantation venture.

The Longs, Martens and Kings at Branscombe, River Estate and Habana

This final section of the chapter deals with three families and three plantations, attempting to bring together many aspects of the plantation era covered in this and the previous chapter. When writing about plantations, several questions come to mind. What were the origins of the owners and how did they finance the operations? Did some of them know each other back in England? How efficient was each plantation and mill? What were the lifestyles of the plantation and manager families like? To understand this better, I have tried to position them within their origins and social class, both at home in Britain and in the Mackay district. In this section I have attempted a detailed analysis of River Estate and Branscombe plantations, both on the banks on the Pioneer River, and Habana plantation on the Northside.



Map 8.2: The core area of Branscombe Plantation land, shaded in brown with the mill site marked with an X.

Source: Courtesy of Glen Hall, www.mackayhistory.org/research/sugar_mills/branscombe.html.

There are many tantalising details missing from our plantation histories. Did George N. Marten, who left Mackay and returned to England in 1876, know Sir John Bennet Lawes (of Farleigh plantation after 1882 and a probable investor in Foulden plantation) at St Albans in the 1880s and 1890? He must have. Marten managed a local bank and Lawes also lived

there. Did John Davidson, Francis Amhurst and George Marten know each other in the early 1860s through the University of Oxford and the Marylebone Cricket Club at Lords? The likelihood is great as they all played first class cricket at Lords. Amhurst graduated a year before Davidson. In the case of Branscombe and River Estate plantations, did Edward Maitland Long (1842–1905) and George Nisbet Marten (1840–1905), the early owners, know each other in Britain? I think so, as they came from similar gentry and aristocratic landed and merchant families, with West Indies plantation and British India connections. The chances of them meeting for the first time in Mackay in 1870 is slight.

E.M. Long, the son of an English archdeacon from a wealthy family, arrived in the Mackay district in 1870 after an apprenticeship with Captain the Hon. Louis Hope (son of the Earl of Hopetoun) at Ormiston plantation at Cleveland near Brisbane and then on another sugar plantation at Maryborough. The family company, Long & Co., was owned by brothers Edward Maitland Long and George Long, with E.M. Long as principal partner. Presumably, there was family money involved. E.M. Long shopped around for land as soon as he arrived in the district. He applied for two blocks of 320 and 480 acres (together 324 ha) on the Proserpine River on 11 June 1870, a month before Long & Co. and George Marten bought the 680-acre (275 ha) block of Branscombe land, John Spiller's large holding on the southside of the river opposite what is now the small town of Walkerston. Branscombe was all rich and deep alluvial soil. In December 1871, they purchased 1,200-acre (486 ha) River Estate, which began at Fursden Creek on the northern riverbank and stretched north to Miclere plantation, also just developing.

Over years, the Branscombe owners purchased surrounding land until they had doubled the size of the plantation. Spiller had obtained the land as a speculative investment, which he transferred to the Union Bank in Brisbane as part collateral for developing Pioneer plantation. Once they had ownership, the two Long brothers and Marten immediately invited tenders to break up the soil, which although fertile was beset with small 'devil-devil' clay mounds. At the start, trees had to be removed, the long blady grass had to be burnt off, then the ground was broken up with a heavy bullock-drawn plough, cross-harrowed, cross-ploughed by bullocks or horses, harrowed again, and drilled into rows from four to six feet apart ready for the small pieces of plant cane. The intention on Branscombe was to have 160 acres of sugarcane planted ready for the 1871 season. The mill machinery arrived in May 1871. The plan was to erect a mill the equal of Alexandra, Pleystowe and Meadowlands, then the three biggest in the district. Crushing began in October. Once the mill was operational, E.M. Long increasingly concentrated on opening up River Estate, leaving the less practical Marten to run Branscombe with a manager.

River Estate's mills operated from 1873 to 1891. When the first mill crushed it had the largest set of milling machinery yet imported to Mackay, made by Mirless, Tait and Watson of Glasgow. The initial rollers four feet six inches (1.3 m) wide and two feet six inches (76 cm) in diameter, fed by a 40 feet (12 m) self-acting carrier to the rollers. The mill used two open Wetzell pans, and a 35-feet-long elevator raised the megasse waste to a height of 18 feet. There were 50 European and 140 Islanders employed on the plantation and the mill could produce around nine tons of sugar a day. Once the first bridge across the river opened in 1877, River Estate was convenient to the town.

When Branscombe and River Estate fared badly in the 1875 rust epidemic in the cane, Marten bought out Long, and the AJS Bank took over River Estate, installing John Spiller as manager, who in January 1878 purchased the plantation. Spiller added a vacuum pan and other processes to manufacture good quality sugar, turning out 54 tons a week, which increased to 70 tons a week, outproducing his own Pioneer mill. He also operated it as a part-central mill, taking cane from small farms on one to five-year contracts. In 1880, River Estate was connected to Pioneer plantation by a tramway and locomotive, becoming one farming

and milling unit. Spiller sold Pioneer in 1882 and River Estate in 1887. His partner Henry Brandon moved their finances to the Burdekin region, although Spiller soon returned to England.



Plate 8.17: The new locomotive on River Estate plantation in 1880.

Source: Henry Brandon Collection, State Library of Queensland.

River Estate's new owner, R.B. Ronald, was a Victorian pastoralist who purchased it for £40,000 at the height of the sugar boom, with no knowledge of the sugar industry, but no shortage of money. He employed William Archer as his manager. Spiller and Brandon's profit was large, and Ronald was the loser. He had arrived in Australia in 1852 and built up a prosperous mercantile and pastoral firm in Victoria with his partners James McBain and his brother Byron Lord Ronald. He returned to England in 1875, becoming an absentee investor in properties, including River Estate. Unusual for Mackay milling, Ronald installed a juice mill in the north of River Estate in 1885, then a loco transported the juice to the main mill. In 1887, after severe flooding and erosion in 1884, Ronald moved the mill to the bank of Fursden Creek, where he installed a double crushing plant, triple-effet evaporators, filter presses and a megasse drier, for a cost of £30,000. Ronald, influenced by John E. Davidson, did not continue Spiller's central milling plans, which was his downfall. The plantation had a large capital debt, overworked land, and lost its grower-suppliers to Racecourse central mill. Although the mill had a 3,000-ton capacity, its tonnage decreased to 800 tons a year. The Government's 1890 halt to new supplies of Islander labourer certainly finished it off. After the 1890 crushing season, a thoroughly demoralised Ronald announced closure and tried to sell in 1891 but failed. The mill closed anyway, although the *Mackay Mercury* recorded a small crushing in 1891. Overall, Ronald's company had invested £200,000 (today \$29 million). There was an attempt to reopen it as a central mill in 1895, and to throw open the land, first for agistment of cattle, then for lease and sale to farmers. When Pleystowe became a grower's mill in 1893, River's last chance evaporated. Next, in 1898, Cyclone Eline unroofed the buildings and swept the remains of the original mill into the river. Sir John B. Lawes, owner of Farleigh, died in August 1900, and the River Estate plantation land was incorporated into Buss and Cran's revived Farleigh company in 1902. The remaining machinery was sold off to Cattle Creek central mill in 1906.

The original mill and plantation house were on the river almost opposite the Mackay Hospital. The sites of River and neighbouring Foulden plantation mills have long since been swallowed by erosion of the riverbank. E.M. Long, ensconced at hilly Habana, and part of the resurrection of Pleystowe, must have watched it all with great interest, and perhaps a smile.

Family Connections to the West Indies and India

The Davidson, Long, Marten and King families were substantial landed gentry and merchant families with aristocratic connections, who had done well in other areas of the British Empire. We have no detailed knowledge of the families' financial backgrounds, except visual estimates based on the opulence of their houses, the size of estates, and other historical connections. Research into the Long family by historian Emma Christopher has revealed the family's Caribbean connections. Christopher described the Long family as 'among the wealthiest and most influential slaveholders in Jamaica since 1655'.⁷ The Long brothers were from an ancient and powerful Wiltshire family with substantial West Indies connections through plantation ownership, slavery and general merchandising. Their great-grandfather Beeston Long (1710–85) was a senior partner of West Indian merchants Long, Drake & Long Co., and chairman of the group known as the 'West Indian Merchants', which grew rich on sugar estates and the enslavement of Africans. He was vice-president of the London Institution (an educational institution founded in 1806) and leader of the merchants and speculators who built Wapping Docks in east London. Their London Docks Co. had a 21-year monopoly on the unloading of all ships entering the port carrying tobacco, rice, wine and brandy (except from the East and West Indies). In the next generation, his son Samuel was a member of Parliament and another son, Charles, a friend of William Pitt, also became a parliamentarian on several occasions between 1789 and 1826, Chief Secretary to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, and on his retirement in 1826 became the 1st Baron Famborough. Samuel Long's marriage to Lady Jane Maitland, daughter of James Maitland, the 7th Earl of Lauderdale, introduced the Maitland name into the Long family names. The family finances remained connected to their being London merchants associated with the West Indies. They would have done well financially out of the manumission of slaves in 1834. The Long brothers' father's cousin Edward Long was the author of *The History of Jamaica* (1774). Edward Maitland Long also left obvious evidence of the Caribbean connection when he called his Mackay farm and later plantation La Habana, after the Cuban capital.

There were four Long brothers in the district, who seem to have been the grandchildren of Samuel Long, and the sons of Archdeacon Charles Maitland Long. Edward Maitland Long was the best known. His brother George also lived there but drowned in 1873 when the labour recruiting vessel *Petrel*, owned by the Longs in partnership with Amhurst and Pocklington of Foulden plantation, was wrecked at Erromanga in the New Hebrides during a cyclone. (Harry James, a cousin and partner of the Rawsons at The Hollow, also drowned on the same voyage.) Their brother William Houston Long (1843–1912), based at River Estate, was a nominated member of the Legislative Council (1873–78). Another brother, Charles Long, stayed for some years, then returned to England. With George dead and William often away in Brisbane, supervision of their plantation investments fell to Edward, who concentrated on River Estate.

His early partner George N. Marten was born in Ghazeepeer, Bengal, India, the son of Thomas Powney Marten and Clara Elizabeth (née Nisbet). In the 1820s, Thomas Marten was assistant to the Magistrate and Customs Collector in Ghazeepeer, and in the 1840s Opium Agent in Benares for the East India Company. On return to England, he lived in Digswell Hall (Plate 8.18) with its 120-acre estate in Hertfordshire, having also inherited other smaller estates nearby, originally purchased with wealth accrued in India. Hertfordshire was a favourite retirement county for officials and merchants associated with the East India Company. The Marten family were also the principals of the local St Alban branch of the Unity Joint Bank.

George Marten was educated at Harrow School and matriculated for Pembroke

College, Oxford in 1859. While at Oxford he was commissioned as a lieutenant in the Hertfordshire Militia in 1861, and in 1866 was promoted to the rank of captain. After graduating from Oxford, he played first-class cricket for Marylebone Cricket Club at Lords, was a member of the Gentlemen of England team, and in 1869 played against Oxford University at Lords. In 1872, Marten and his wife Annie (née Pring) emigrated to Queensland and entered a partnership with the Long brothers at Branscombe plantation. Their oldest child Winifred was born in Mackay in 1874. Marten and his family returned to England in 1876, his plantation devastated by the rust epidemic in the cane. On his return home, after the death of an uncle, George Marten became the manager of the St Alban Unity Joint Bank and lived on the premises. Since 1803, the Marten family had owned the Marshal's Wick estate (Plate 8.19) at the village of the same name in the St Alban's area, where George's father had lived since the 1870s and which became George's home when his father died in 1889. G.N. Marten died in 1905.

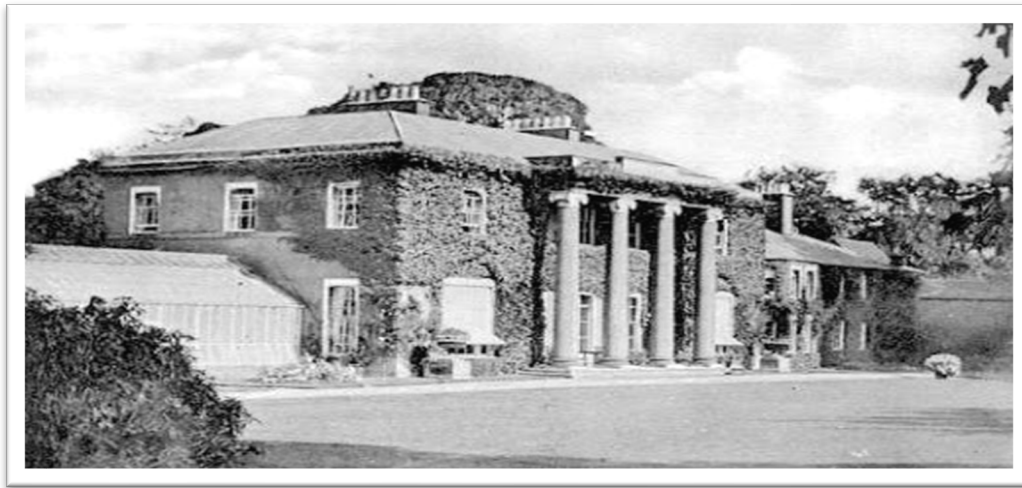


Plate 8.18: Digswell Hall, Hertfordshire, home of George Marten's father.

Source: Wikipedia en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digswell_House.



Plate 8.19: Marshal's Wick house, the home of George Marten's father, and finally of George himself onwards from 1889.

Source: Courtesy of St Albans; Own East End, stalbansowneastend.org.uk/topics/marshalswick/

George Marten arrived in Mackay in the early 1870s and became a long-term resident. Why he chose Mackay is not clear. There may have been family connection with the Long family, as King shared the same Maitland surname as Edward Maitland Long, and possibly there was some relationship between him and Charles J. King who invested in T.H. Fitzgerald and Edward B. Kennedy's Meadowlands in 1870, dying in 1872 at the age of 28. In September 1876, George Marten sold Branscombe to G.H.M King for £15,000. By 1877, with King in charge, Branscombe had 600 acres (243 ha) under cultivation, although the harvest came from only 240 acres, which produced over 400 tons of sugar.



Plate 8.20: Branscombe plantation mill on the bank of the Pioneer River, *ca.* 1870s. Branscombe plantation house in the left of the photograph was built in 1870 by brothers Edward M. and George Long. Source: State Library of Queensland.

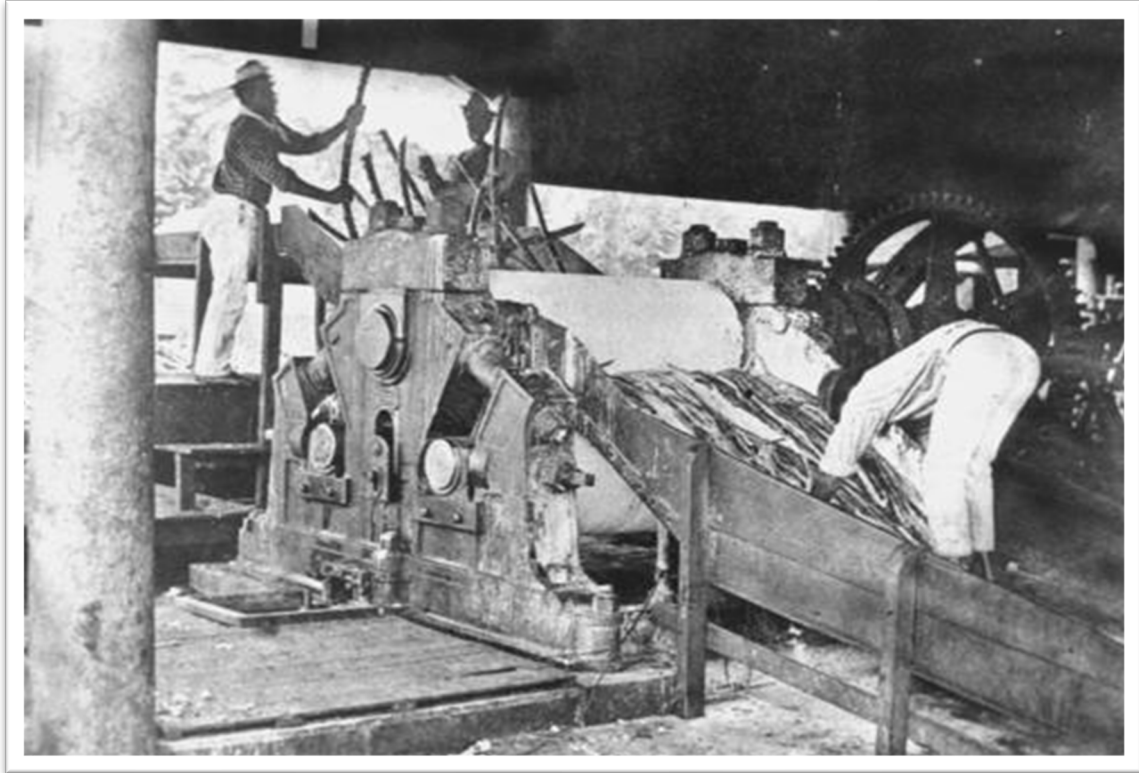


Plate 8.21: This is Branscombe mill in 1871. Similar to Alexandra's first mill (Plate 8.2), the mill's inefficiency is obvious, as is the danger to the operators.

Source: Daintree 1972, 27.

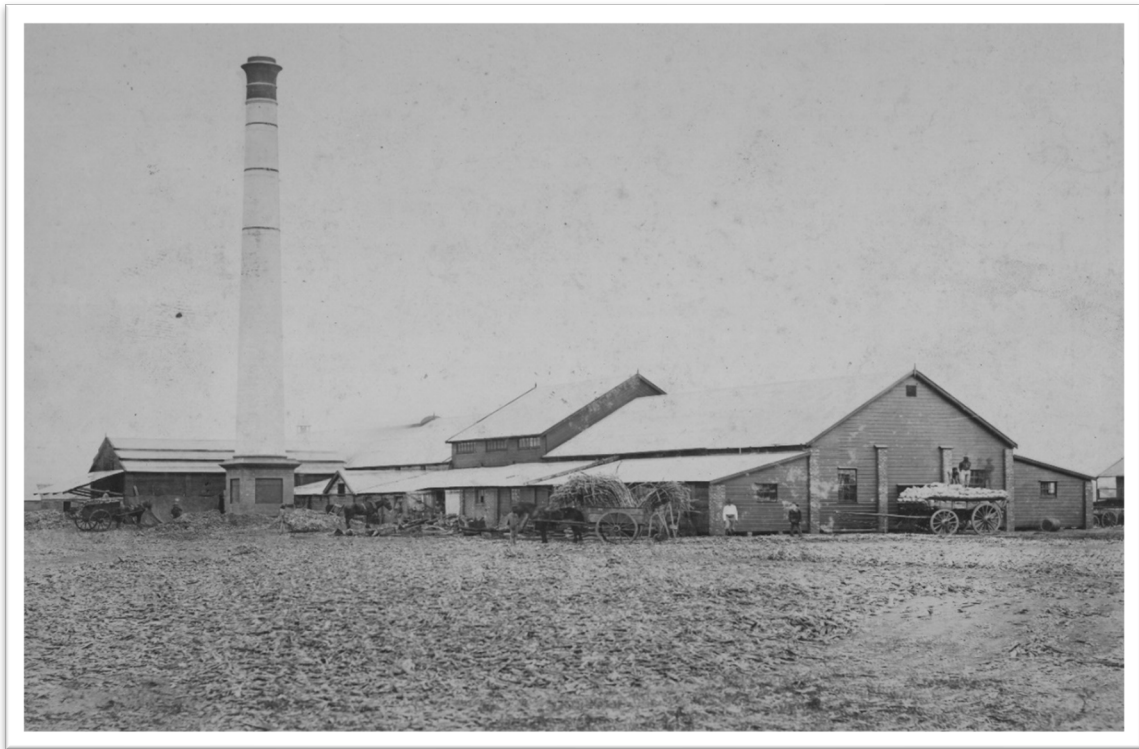


Plate 8.22: River Estate plantation mill about 1880.

Source: State Library of Queensland.

E.M. Long was always entrepreneurial. After being bought out of Branscombe and losing River Estate to the bank, in 1875 he and Robert Walker (manager of Foulden plantation) purchased Lake Elphinstone pastoral station from brothers George and John Hess, a reverse of the more usual moves from pastoral properties to sugar plantations. In the late 1870s, Long began a dairy farm and butter factory, a piggery and horse stud at his 1,197 acre (484 ha) Habana property on Reliance Creek on the Northside. In the 1880s, he had a financial share in Clunes plantation in the Burdekin, although he concentrated his efforts on Habana where he took on William (Bob) Robertson, ex-manager of the AJS Bank in the early 1870s, as a partner, providing extra financial backing. Their mill, which first crushed in 1883, was a duplicate to that used at River Estate. Initially he continued to use horses to pull cane carts to the mill, then purchased a locomotive and six miles of track in 1891. Habana was the first Mackay mill to have total chemical control of the milling process and the first to use dried megasse in the boilers, cutting back the wood supply needed by a quarter. Long realised that the days of plantations as single units of production were over. In 1889, he returned to England for several months, the first time in 13 years. He also travelled to Germany to arrange to bring out 50 German couples to Habana to work the estate as a central milling system with small farms. Long still used Islander labour but was also known as the 'Whiteman's friend', as in 1891 he cut up his cane land into 20-, 40- and 80-acre (8, 16 and 32 ha) blocks on five-year leases for a return of 1s. per ton of cane grown, or for outright sale at £3 to £12 an acre. Outside cane was purchased at 13s. per ton, and that year Habana crushed 1,500 tons. Long also employed 200 Japanese labourers in 1894.

In the late 1890s his pace appeared to be slowing. In 1896, illness forced him to take a six-week holiday in New Zealand and he did the same in 1901. Habana mill, the last on the Northside until Farleigh reopened in 1905, was efficient, even though the fertile hill land had thin soils, and fertilisers were not yet available. The final straw was the federation of the colonies and the end of Islander labour, which led to the mill's closure in 1901. In 1903, Habana ceased growing sugarcane. W.T. Paget from neighbouring Nindaroo plantation (closed in 1901) purchased Habana, by then including 2,790 acres (1,129 ha), and turned it back into a dairy, butter factory, and general farm. In similar style to River Estate mill, its machinery was cannibalised, sold to begin Cattle Creek central mill, and the tram tracks were sold to Racecourse central mill. In the 1890s, Long was a member of the Pleystowe Land Syndicate Ltd. which purchased the closed Pleystowe plantation and was instrumental in re-opening the mill in 1893 as a farmers' central mill operated under the 1893 *Sugar Works Guarantee Act*. In 1903 and 1904 Long was managing director of Pleystowe mill, then in May 1905 he left for England again, this time for twelve months and signalled that he might not return permanently. He died in London in August that year at the age of 63.



Plate 8.23: Habana Plantation Mill, ca. 1895.

Source: State Library of Queensland.

The Martens of Branscombe

Plantation lifestyles, once the land was cleared and the mills were established, could be extremely pleasant, but never grand like Southern US plantation houses with Doric column facades. John Spiller, who started with a thatched-roof house in the 1860s, was living in great comfort by the 1880s when he sold out for a substantial fortune. Not all were so lucky. Nevertheless, even some of those who failed lived in very comfortable circumstances. One of the best sets of plantation photographs is of Winterbourne, the home of the Martens on Branscombe. The house, built in 1872, had a garden containing graceful palms, elegant cypress and pine trees, manicured hedges, and lawns of buffalo grass sloping down to the river.



Plate 8.24: Marten's 'Winterbourne' house in the 1870s on the west side of Branscombe about half a kilometre west of the mill.

Source: State Library of Queensland.



Plate 8.25: ‘Winterbourne’, the Branscombe plantation house built for George Nisbet Marten in 1872. It was on the edge of Branscombe, well away from the original house built by the Long brothers. The kitchen is the separate building on the left. Marten and his wife are in the buggy. F.J. Brierly and A. Romilly are on the verandah. Because of the rust outbreak in the cane, in November 1876 the property was sold to George H.M. King, and the Martens returned to England. ‘Winterbourne’ was put out to rent in October 1876 and was demolished in 1880, after being attacked by termites.
Source: State Library of Queensland.

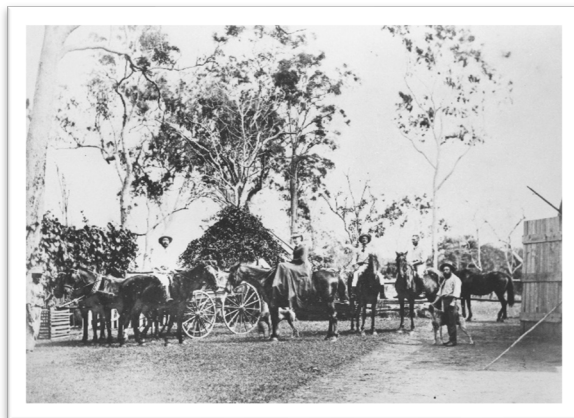


Plate 8.26: Outside ‘Winterbourne’ on Branscombe in the early 1870s. L to R: Riplap (the Aboriginal groom), G.N. Marten on Splinterbar, A.P Marten on Vagabond, G.H.M. King on the Duke, Harry Robinson on Traveller, and Foster (a servant) holding Agaffe.
Source: State Library of Queensland.

Plate 8.27: On the stairs L to R: Charlotte, Foster and Agnes (servants), G.N. Marten with Winifred (Winnie), and Annie Marten. On the ground L to R: F.J. Brierly, John E. Davidson, and Brenda the greyhound.
Source: State Library of Queensland.



Plate 8.28: An afternoon at ‘Winterbourne’, Branscombe plantation, relaxing on the verandah: Winifred Marten is in the hammock, next to a child, then Agnes Foster (nursemaid and family servant), George Nisbet Marten, and Annie Pring Marten.

Source: State Library of Queensland.

Plate 8.29: A corner of the drawing room at ‘Winterbourne’ house, Branscombe plantation.

Source: State Library of Queensland.



Plate 8.30: Morning tea at ‘Winterbourne’, Branscombe plantation, 1870s. Note the Aboriginal artefacts on the verandah wall.

Source: State Library of Queensland.

The next owner of Branscombe, George Henry Maitland King (1853–1937), came from an aristocratic Scottish family. He was born in St Helier, Jersey Island, Channel Islands, the only child of Royal Navy Captain Henry King, born in Sussex in 1819, and Isabella Louisa Maitland-Heriot, born in Kettle, Fife in Scotland in 1828. She died the year he was born, possibly at his birth. George H. Maitland King, married Hannah Rose Maud Mysia Giffard Tate, born in 1860. They had two children, Frank Jerome Maitland King, born in Queensland in 1884, and Mysie Caroline Maitland King, born in Scotland in 1892. His grandfather was Peter King, the 6th Lord King, Baron of Ockham. The son of the 7th baron became Viscount Ockham and Earl of Lovelace in 1838. In 1835, Lovelace married Hon. Augusta Ada Byron, the only legitimate daughter of poet George Gordon Byron, 6th Baron Byron.

G.H.M. King never lived on the plantation although his house ‘Fryerne’ was not far away, on the river nearer to Mackay. His manager was H.V.G. Robinson, who seems not to have made any major improvements to the mill, which had been built with open, not vacuum pans. In 1877, the plant comprised a round battery and a Wetzell pan, producing 400 tons of sugar, using the Icery sulphur and lime method. There were 1,200 acres (486 ha), double its original size. In 1879, they experimented with a Sutton’s atmospheric evaporator, which made the boiling process faster. In 1881, King sold Branscombe to William Sloan & Co. of Melbourne for £32,000, with King retaining a large shareholding. The next year, William Sloan & Co. and other financial interests were incorporated into the Melbourne-Mackay Sugar Co. with John E. Davidson as managing director. Branscombe’s final crushing was in 1883. The new company owned a huge area around Walkerston and towards Mackay. New large Palms Estate mill was less than two kilometres away, which helped make Branscomb redundant. King and his family returned to England.

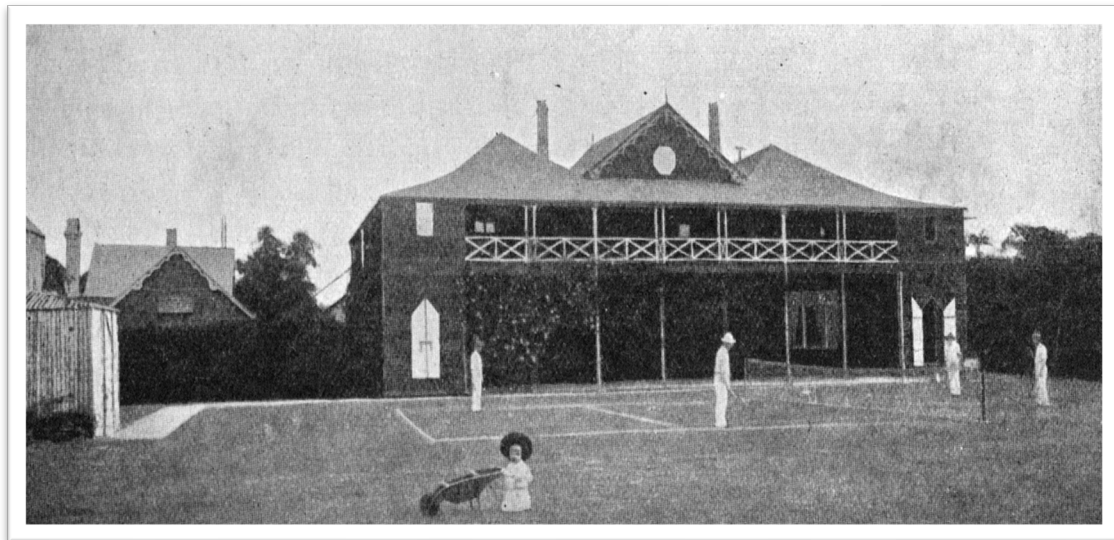


Plate 8.31: ‘Fryerne’, the house of George H.M. King, was built in 1883 and destroyed by fire in 1888. King purchased Branscombe plantation from Marten and Long in November 1876, then became a principal partner in the Melbourne-Mackay Sugar Co. through his 1881–82 incorporation of Branscombe into the company. His house was in Landsdowne Road at the back of the Mackay Hospital, close to the river, and on the northern edge of Meadowlands. After it burnt down, the *Mackay Mercury* (2 October 1888) described it as ‘a fine two storied building and probably the best in the district’. King was in England when it caught fire. Insured for £3,000, it was said to have been worth £4,000. The next house on the site, also called ‘Fryerne’, was built by commission agent Henry Lindesay Black. It is said to have been built in 1882, which is incorrect, with 1889 more likely. It still exists, owned by descendants of H.L. Black, and once had a tennis court in the same position as the one pictured above.

Source: Roth 1908, 66, Fig 37, a drawing based on a photograph supplied by G.H.M. King.

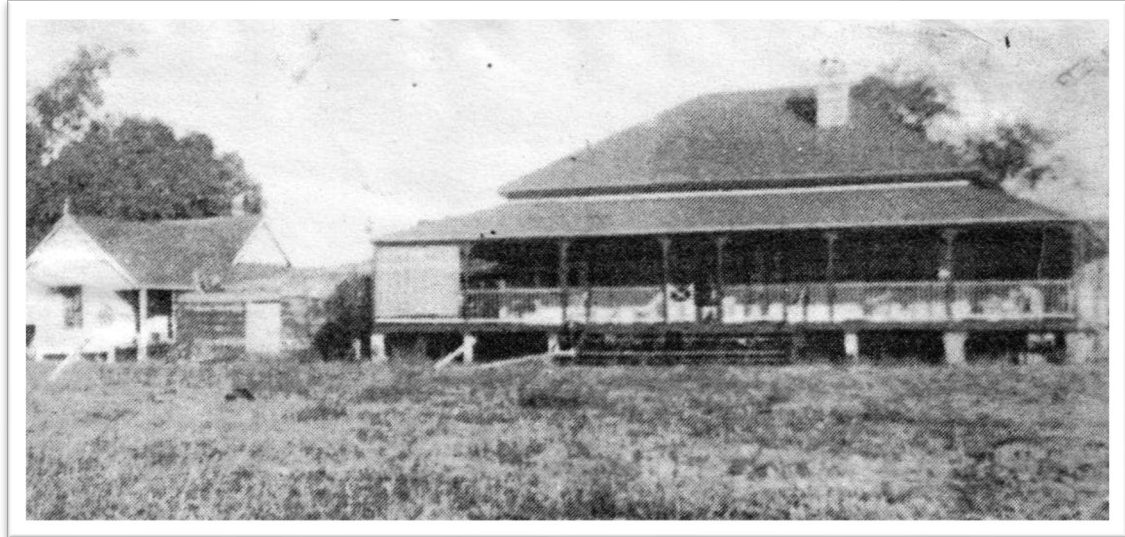


Plate 8.32: 'Fryerne', the home of Henry L. Black and family, built in about 1889 on the site of G.H.M. King's home of the same name.

Source: Have You Seen Old Mackay.

<https://m.facebook.com/haveyouseentheoldmackay/photos/pb.342209215033.-2207520000.1403059871./10154139997230034/?type=3&source=43>

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³ Daintree 1872, 24.

⁴ Melbourne-Mackay Queensland Sugar Company Limited Memorandum of Association to acquire the businesses of Robert Jonathan Jeffray, John Sheriff Hill (London Agent), Ernest William Ehlers (London Agent), John Ewan Davidson, and William Sloan & Co., 31 March 1880; Melbourne-Mackay Sugar Company Agreement between J.E. Davidson, Henry Davidson, J.S. Hill, James Duke Hill, E.W. Ehlers, and George Henry Maitland King (owner of Branscombe), 31 March 1882, Melbourne University Archives, Blake & Riggall Collection. Collection used in 1977.

⁵ CSR Archives, Sydney, B. 20: 1:9, A.P. Ashdown to E. Knox, 29 Mar 1887 (accessed 1979; now in the Noel Butlin Archives, Australian National University).

⁶ Lawes 1900.

⁷ Christopher 2021.