

Section Three: Islanders, Central Mills, and Mackay

9. Kanakas: The Pacific People Trade

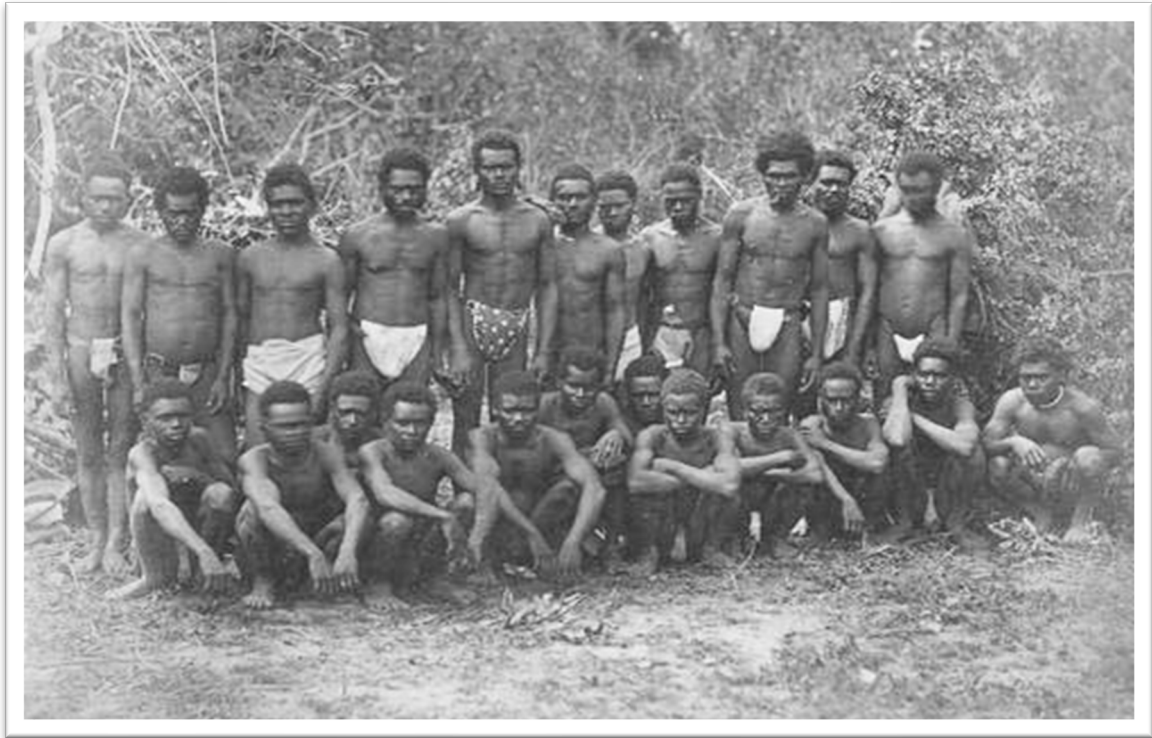
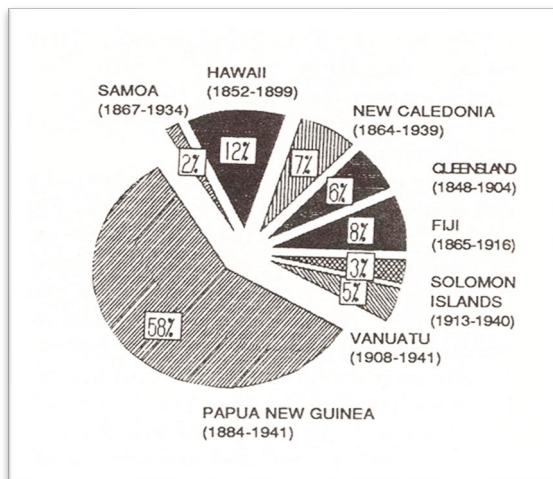


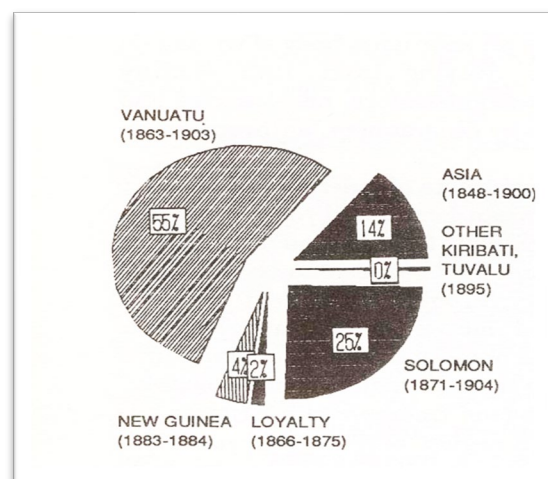
Plate 9.1: Islanders at Mackay in the 1870s. Most of the labourers squatting in front appear to be underage.

Source: State Library of Queensland.



Graph 9.1: Indentured labour migration to eight major Pacific colonies, 1848–1941.

Source: Clive Moore Collection.



Graph 9.2: Queensland indentured labour migration, 1848–1904.

Source: Clive Moore Collection.

The Pacific People Trade

Indentured labourers from the Pacific Islands brought to work in Queensland in the nineteenth century were known as ‘Kanakas’, a term derived from a word meaning of common Hawaiian descent, which developed derogatory meanings in Queensland. Present-day descendants are divided over the use of the word, although it has been reclaimed as a term of pride, often now voiced as ‘Kanak’, in the French style still in common use in New Caledonia and Vanuatu. They were also called ‘South Sea Islanders’ (SSI in government records), and their descendants are now known as ‘Australian South Sea Islanders’, to differentiate them from more recent Pacific Islander arrivals. The nineteenth century government records and Acts of Parliament often call them Polynesians. This is incorrect, as the vast majority came from the islands that are considered to be part of Melanesia; although Polynesia was then defined more broadly.

The historical dimensions of the lives of Australian South Sea Islanders need to be viewed against other Pacific labour movements. Graph 9.1 shows the movement of Pacific and Asian indentured labourers into Pacific colonies between the 1850s and the 1940s. Millions of Africans, Asians and Pacific Islanders were moved around the world to work for European colonists, before and after the abolition of slavery in the British and other European empires. Around one million Pacific Islanders and a further half a million Asians were involved in the Pacific labour trade during the 100 years before World War II. Since then, more than double that number of Islanders have in various ways been involved in the ebb and flow of internal and external labour migration. Asian indentured labour was imported into Queensland before separation from New South Wales in 1859, and then continued in the 1880s and 1890s, involving Chinese, Malays, Sri Lankans, and Japanese. Asian labour was also used in Fiji, New Caledonia, Samoa, the New Hebrides (Vanuatu), and Hawai`i. Graph 9.2 illustrates Pacific and Asian indentured labour in Queensland between 1848 and 1904.

The movement of Pacific peoples into Australia began in early New South Wales once Sydney became a Pacific port onwards from the 1790s. Then, in 1847, Benjamin Boyd, a banker and entrepreneur, imported 122 Islanders into Eden on the south coast to work on his inland pastoral properties—an unmitigated disaster. He was the son of a wealthy London slave-trader who shipped thousands of African slaves to the Caribbean and fought against the abolition of the slave trade. Another New South Wales link to labour in Queensland is little known. Onwards from 1860 and into the 1870s, when Pacific Islanders began to be imported into the Torres Strait to work in the emerging maritime industries, they entered via Sydney.

The year usually given for the arrival of the first Pacific indentured labourers on the Queensland mainland is 1863 at Brisbane, on their way to Robert Towns’ cotton plantation nearby at Beaudesert. Other sugar and cotton plantations followed suit and 526 Islanders arrived between 1863 and 1866. In total, 62,000 indentured contracts brought around 50,000 overwhelmingly male (94 percent) Pacific Islanders to Queensland between 1863 and 1904. For a variety of reasons there were always humanitarian, ethical, and political voices which decried the Queensland labour trade. The dubious methods of obtaining labour were always one reason, as were allegations of slavery. Another reason was the high mortality rate they suffered in Queensland.

The labour trade took off in 1867 when 1,237 Pacific Islanders arrived, including the first 68 to reach Mackay. Up until 1904, 17,399 indenture contracts were entered into by Islanders at Mackay. Initially they came from the New Hebrides (now Vanuatu) and the Loyalty Islands (now part of New Caledonia), and a few from southern Polynesia. Just as the Queensland frontier moved north, opening new districts, the same occurred in the Pacific Islands. During the 1870s, the labour trade frontier moved north to incorporate the Solomon Islands and finally the archipelagos off eastern New Guinea (now part of Papua New Guinea). In the mid-1880s, New Guinea islands recruiting was closed due to a resurgence of

kidnapping, the high mortality rate, and colonial partition. The Queensland labour trade continued until the mid-1900s, limited to the New Hebrides and Solomon Islands, along with small numbers from the Gilbert (modern Kiribati) and Ellice islands (modern Tuvalu). As depicted in Graphs 9.2 and 9.4, over 40 years the majority were initially New Hebrideans (56 percent of the total), then Solomon Islanders (25 percent of the total) predominated onwards from about 1893. Indenture in the Pacific was a post-slavery development of capitalist labour exploitation. We can say that it bridged between slavery and free labour, and that it shared some of the characteristics of unfree labour, yet it was not the same as slavery.

Viewpoints

About 12.5 million Africans were imported to the Americas between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries through the slave trade. At least one million Africans died on the long voyages. They were ‘chattel slaves’, which has a specific legal meaning—that the individuals involved were purchased and owned, and could be sold, they were not paid, and their children were under similar restrictions. Around 472,000 were brought to North America, nearly three-quarters of them before the start of the American Revolution (1775–83). After centuries of chattel slavery, British legislation prohibiting British ships from carrying slaves came into force in 1807, and onwards from 1808 no slaves could be landed in British colonies. Further legislation in 1811 made the trafficking of slaves a felony. The final Bill passed through Parliament in 1833 and manumission of the entire British slave population occurred in 1834, although the full rights of employers of ex-slaves over their labour continued. In many places there was a transition to apprenticeships and indenture contracts, the latter widely used for sugar labourers. Ex-slaves were compelled to provide 45-hours of unpaid labour each week for their former masters for four to six years after supposedly being liberated. Further agitation cut short apprenticeships in 1838. Britain had made its ex-slaves pay for their own freedom and gave financial compensation to the ex-slave owners, yet did not compensate or assist the ex-slaves.

France, reluctant to follow Britain, particularly after a failed experiment in abolition between 1794 and the 1800s, was pressured to agree in 1848. The European slave trade was officially abolished worldwide in 1851, although it continued in many localised instances, such as in Spain’s Cuba until 1886, Brazil until 1888, and in the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia) right through the nineteenth century. Legal termination of slavery was one thing but changing the related socio-economic structure of an ex-slave society was another. When slaves were granted their freedom, they continued living side-by-side with the owners of the land, capital and means of producing a monocrop, little of real importance altered. Legal servitude was replaced by socio-economic servitude with the labourers working, sometimes under indenture, for their ex-owners.

Until the late eighteenth century, indentured servitude for Europeans was common in British North America. Often there was no wage until the costs of importation had been paid off, and, like any loan, an indenture could be sold, which could happen when the person arrived at their destination. Early in the nineteenth century, European indentured servants also emigrated to New South Wales, Tasmania, and Western Australia. They could marry and move about locally and might be given small plots of land to use by employers. Over years, they blended into the wider labour force. Indenture was abolished by the British Government in 1917. It was a mechanism for providing labour that we have trouble understanding today.

There have always been accusations that indenture (when applied to non-Europeans) was a form of slavery, and that First Nations Australians were treated no differently from slaves. The Melanesian labour trade operated on the cusp between slavery and free labour. Nineteenth century indenture contracts, widely used to employ Pacific Islander sugar,

pastoral and maritime labourers in Queensland, have been described as a new form of slavery, and recently by Emma Christopher as the illegitimate child of slavery. Another term used is ‘Blackbirding’, meaning to steal people from Pacific Islands. However, indenture comes in the form of a contract for a specific period and a wage, and the children of indentured labourers were not bound by indentures. The early Pacific recruiting practices certainly involved kidnapping. This did not continue over the decades, although previously I have called the whole practice ‘cultural kidnapping’. Early on, the labourers did not understand the indenture agreements, and the governments had little control over the process, which ended after four decades when Federation introduced the White Australia Policy. The result was the enforced deportation of several thousand South Sea Islanders from Queensland and New South Wales.

I have always argued that Pacific indenture was an unsavoury practice but was not the same as slavery. To use the word slavery loosely is emotive and inaccurate. Similarly, I seldom use the word ‘Blackbirding’ as it has different meanings to different people. To some it means to kidnap labourers in the Pacific, while others use it to describe the entire 40 years of the Queensland labour trade. Its colloquial use is too imprecise to be used as a standard term.

The Pacific labour trade—rightly called the people trade by historian Dorothy Shineberg—is a fraught area of history. The contemporary Australian, New South Wales and Queensland Governments have acknowledged that the Pacific labour trade was unsavoury at best and slave-like at its worst. All three governments have apologised to the Australian descendants. Australian South Sea Islanders believe that indenture was slavery by a different name. However, most historians are careful to differentiate between illegality and willing enlistment, which they believe was the situation for the majority.

The word continues to be used in the context of ‘modern slavery’. In 2018, the Australian Government passed a *Modern Slavery Act*, acknowledgement that ‘modern slavery’ exists—forms of human exploitation which have new meanings quite different from those in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In 2020, I took part in a seminar on Modern Slavery, organised by the Federal Police in Brisbane, speaking about the circular movement of Pacific Islanders to Queensland as indentured labourers and its modern-day form—seasonal workers from Pacific nations, who work in agriculture, the meat industry, hospitality, and health care. Many of the victims of ‘modern slavery’ in Australia are disadvantaged recent migrants, both legal and illegal, and not necessarily from the Pacific. It was obvious from talking to participants from the Federal and State police, the Home Affairs Department, and the office of the Fair Work Ombudsman, that they subscribed to the linear connection of ‘modern slavery’ with ‘Blackbirding’.

‘Blackbirding’ and ‘slavery’ are slippery emotive words that mean different things to different people. The histories of colonialism, slavery and indenture are closely connected. In 1974, historian Hugh Tinker published *A New System of Slavery*, the first volume of his trilogy on the history of Indians overseas, which characterised indentured servitude as a close relative of slavery. Tinker described indenture as temporary servitude, rather than life-long bondage. While Tinker’s view of indenture is losing ground—it was too one-dimensional and failed to deal with worker resistance and agency—there are overlaps and similarities. Nineteenth century apprenticeship and indenture agreements were used to bind labour after the abolition of slavery. Indenture, originally used over hundreds of years to bond European labourers in the Americas, became a mechanism for binding labour in other parts of the colonial world, partly accomplishing the same objectives as slavery. It was also a flexible mechanism for binding non-European labour into the plantation system.

Today, as we can see from the *Modern Slavery Act*, the term is used as a legal and moral judgement on working conditions, quite separately from its earlier meaning of chattel slavery. The precedents cited for the 2018 legislation all relate to chattel slavery elsewhere, quite deliberately not to Pacific Islanders in the labour trade, or First Nations Australians, both groups forced into colonial work and living systems which often have been equated with slavery. Alongside the tenuous connection between ‘modern slavery’ and the Pacific indentured labour trade there has been constant pressure from the modern media, which blithely ignores the differences and elides the several historical meanings of slavery. However, it is true that some of these modern Pacific Islander workers in Australia on government-sponsored work schemes (when the system is abused), or working illegally on tourist visas, throw echoes back to the most negative aspects of the labour trade.

‘Modern Slavery’ and ‘Black Lives Matter’ debates have created new weapons in the armoury of anti-racism, as has ‘Woke’ politics—meaning a perceived awareness of issues concerning social and racial justice. The word ‘Woke’ has also been ‘weaponised’ against what are seen as conservative views based on historical precedent and law. Upholders of the differences between slavery and indenture, particularly when applied to non-Caucasians, are under attack. Recently, a leading Australian South Sea Islander told me that it is ‘Most annoying being told that we were not slaves...’. ‘We are in an era of truth-telling...’. ‘History is subjective in relation to the person writing it and their privileges... Language truly is an interesting art form, and I won’t be bullied.’ There are elements of ‘Woke’ politics woven into all of this which try to stifle other views. History is never simple and should always incorporate multiple viewpoints.

Chapters 9, 11 and 12 discuss the history of Islanders at Mackay, concentrating on the last four decades of the nineteenth century, although the final biographic section in Chapter 12 extends into the 1920s and 1930s. Indenture has long been challenged and depicted as a slavery-like process. A newer version of this analysis can be found in recent writing that re-connects the British slave-owning world with the Queensland plantations, stressing that the Pacific labour trade was a kindred form of unfree labour to that of the transatlantic slave trade. This new research traces the connections of several prominent Queensland European plantation families back to the Caribbean. The Armstrong, Black, Boyd, Cumming, Davidson, Denman, Donaldson, Hope, Long, McCready, and Young planter family connections with the Caribbean were substantial, although there has been only one major direct family capital transfer located. The closest connection is John Ewan Davidson’s father Henry, an ex-slave owner, who in the final years of his life held a minor holding in the Melbourne-Mackay Sugar Co. In most cases, Queensland colonists with connections to the Caribbean—particularly plantation owners—were reticent to reveal them. They were much keener to point out that indenture was legally not slavery, and that the Pacific Islander labourers were on fixed contracts and able to return home after serving one or more terms of indenture. There were some descendants of Caribbean slave-owners involved in the Queensland sugar industry, but they had to adapt their labour needs to the indenture system. The planters argued that the slavery accusations were absurd.

Like most of the writing that equates Queensland’s indenture system with slavery, this Caribbean linkage research stresses the early years—the 1860s and 1870s—and does not extend the argument on until the 1900s, nor to Pacific labour migration as it continued until the 1940s in the actual Pacific Islands colonies. This new Caribbean-connected research, while useful and fascinating, is inclined to be Eurocentric and pays scant attention to the Pacific Islander point-of-view.

As with slavery, indenture came to an end. Recruiting for Queensland's Pacific labour trade ceased in 1903–04 and the *Masters and Servants Act*, 1861 (which included European labourers) ceased to be used in the 1910s, except, sadly, to control First Nations Australians. The Act was rescinded by the Ryan Labor Government in 1916. The end of the indentured labour system (it trailed on in the Pacific territories until the 1940s) relates to economics, the rise of trade unions, the racism behind the 1900s White Australia Policy, and finally the advocacy for abolition by international organisations such as the League of Nation and the United Nations. Also, there had been a structural change in the sugar industry—government sponsorship of central milling onwards from the 1880s led to grower-owned mills crushing cane produced on small farming units owned and staffed by Europeans, as covered in Chapter 10. This central milling system was more efficient than the earlier total institutions—the plantations—which had owned the land and the mills and employed their own labour. The plantation days were over by the end of the 1890s, although a few survived into the new century. White small farmers also employed Pacific indentured labourers, and, in the end, the system of importing Pacific labour on short contracts had become too expensive to maintain. Then, the White Australia Policy put a swift end to it all.

Early twentieth century analysis of the Pacific labour trade came out of imperial history—the history of European empires. This was superseded onwards from the 1950s and 1960s by Pacific historians and anthropologists attempting to look from both sides of the colonial frontier, trying to understand the motivations of the indigenous peoples involved. Historians of the Pacific, while not shying away from the horrors of the labour trade voyages and poor conditions in Queensland, Fiji, Samoa and New Caledonia, usually also stress the benefits and strengths of 'agency'—positive choice and participation in the process. They argue that the benefits from indigenous participation, Islander acquiescence and the connivance of their indigenous leaders—not deception or force—enabled the Queensland, Fiji, Samoa, and New Caledonia labour trade to continue over several decades, and that the participants learned how to manipulate the exploitative system to their advantage. Plantations in the twentieth century Pacific colonies operated in ways remarkably like the Queensland plantations of the nineteenth century, although this is seldom considered in analysis of indentured labour in Queensland. Plus, in recent decades, Islander oral testimony and Islander family research in Australia, and back in the islands, has enabled non-Pacific Islander historians to add a human face to this unique history. The Islander family stories in the final section of Chapter 12 show how complex their motivations were. The small essay above challenges several myths and attempts to understand wider mechanisms of labour mobilisation. I will now tread carefully as I attempt try to undo the Gordian knot which binds the history of Australian South Sea Islanders.

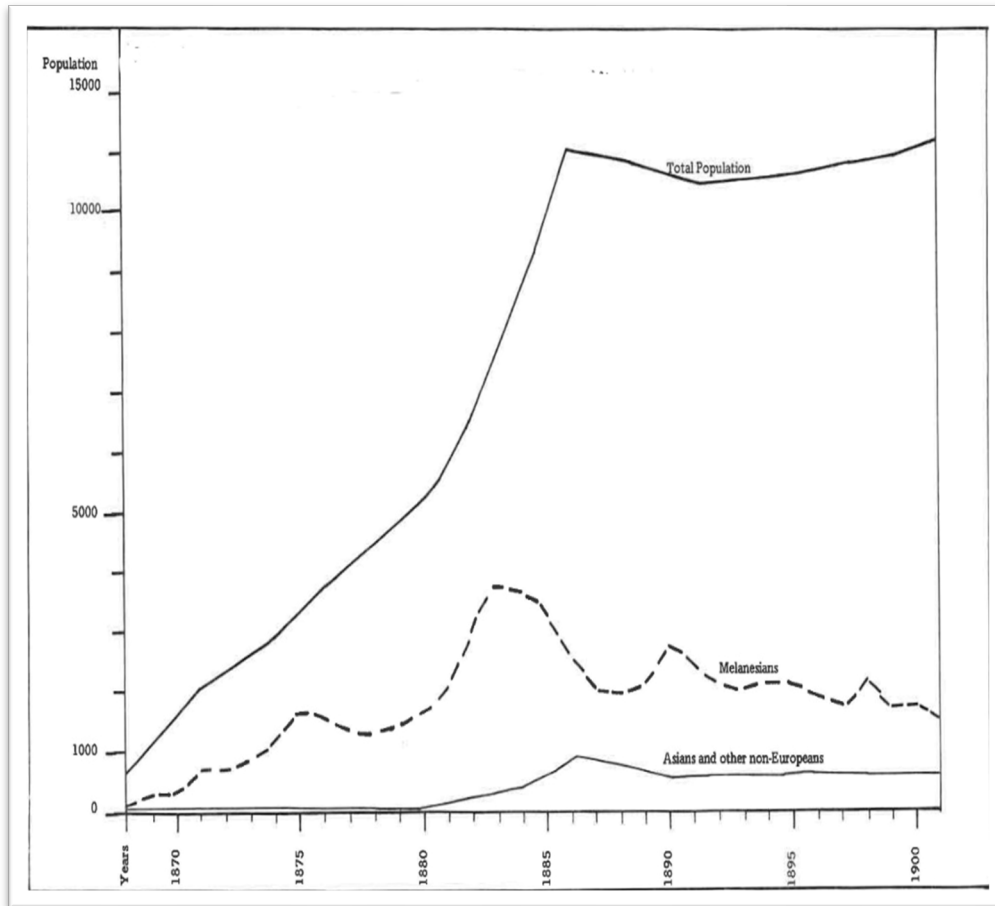


Plate 9.2: Islanders on Barrie plantation.

Source: State Library of Queensland.

Pacific Peoples in Colonial Queensland

Graph 9.3 shows the size of the indentured non-European population in the Pioneer Valley during the nineteenth century. If we were able to know the size of the First Nations population more exactly (Chapters 1 and 6 estimate at least 2,500 to 3,000, with the number declining to 100 or 200 by 1900), up until the mid-1880s the non-European population equalled and may have exceeded the number of European colonists. Since the 1860s, the Pioneer Valley has had two Indigenous populations: First Nations Australians—the people of the land; and South Sea Islanders—immigrants from the Pacific. Many of the first generation of Islanders came to Australia before colonial territorial boundaries had fully evolved in Australia and the Pacific. They were mainly from the islands around the Coral and Solomon seas (see Map 9.1), a region which colonial Queenslanders regarded as part of their area of influence. I have always found it weird that the discussions of the nineteenth century are based on modern borders, not on the reality of that time.



Graph 9:3: The Immigrant population of the Pioneer Valley, 1868–1901. The non-European portion of the population, mainly made up of indentured labourers, was of significant size.

Source: Clive Moore Collection.

We need to remember that in the 1870s Queensland's border was twice moved north through Torres Strait (part of Melanesia) towards New Guinea, and in 1883 Queensland rather audaciously attempted to annex, on behalf of Britain, much the same area as modern Papua New Guinea. Britain refused to accept the Queensland annexation, but a year later south-east New Guinea became a British Protectorate, and onwards from 1888, when its legal status changed to that of a British Crown Colony, the area had a Lieutenant-Governor under the oversight of the Governor of Queensland. Onwards from 1902, when Britain transferred the territory to Australia, the new Australian Government took control. In 1906, British New Guinea became the Territory of Papua within the Commonwealth of Australia. German New Guinea, the north-east of the island, bordering British New Guinea and Dutch West New Guinea, was also proclaimed in 1884, then captured by Australia in 1914 at the beginning of World War I. In 1921, it became a League of Nations Mandated Territory. The remainder of the Pacific Islands, in a variety of legal forms, became colonial territories of various European powers between the 1850s and the 1900s. The British Solomon Islands Protectorate was claimed in 1893, and the joint British-French New Hebrides Condominium began in 1908. Thus, about 48,000 of 62,000 (77 percent) of Pacific labour contracts to Queensland date from the years before the Melanesian islands were divided into Imperial territories.

Queensland's interest in the islands of the south-west Pacific were part of European territorial acquisitions between the 1860s to the 1900s. The colonists regarded the Coral and Solomon seas as a Queensland Lake, available for exploitation, and sent 870 labour recruiting voyages to Western Pacific islands between 1863 and 1904. Nineteenth century European

racial ideas placed Australian and Pacific Indigenous groups low down human classification lists, with Asians not far behind. As outlined in Chapter 6, Australian Aboriginal people were often treated with murderous contempt, and other non-European immigrant groups were exploited. Torres Strait Islanders have cultural similarities with Queensland's South Sea Islanders, and there were Pacific indentured and mission workers in the Strait, to an extent that half of contemporary residents have some 'South Seas' ancestry.

A series of questions arise. Is it accurate to argue that South Sea Islanders were brought to Australia as kidnapped slaves and worked unpaid for callous employers? If we accept that indenture is not the same as slavery, how do we categorise the cultural and physical exploitation which undoubtedly took place? Did the European colonists treat the South Sea Islanders differently, and, despite clear discrimination, better than they treated the Aboriginal mainland population, and that of the Torres Strait Islands? What role did the indenture system play in controlling the lives of South Sea Islanders and were their advantages for them? Is there evidence that many of the Islanders made a conscious choice to leave their small-scale island societies to join the largely circular migration to Queensland? What do we know of their working and living conditions? What were their motivations when they enlisted, returned home, or stayed in Queensland? How were so many of the immigrant generation—around 2,500, including their Australian-born children—able to remain in Australia, contrary to the Commonwealth Government's White Australia legislation of the 1900s. The intention of the legislation was that all but a few hundred were to be deported. Surely, if their lives in Australia were so bad, they all would have taken advantage of the deportation order and left in the 1900s, not fought against it?

Today, several thousand descendants of these Queensland immigrants live in the Mackay district, considerably outnumbering the contemporary First Nations population in the Pioneer Valley, most of whom also have South Sea Islander ancestry. While it is undeniable that the first hundred years were difficult times, contemporary South Sea Islanders make a point of saying that the farming families and the general population of the district are their friends, and they have married into the wider community. They are respected citizens and one of the local members of parliament is of South Sea descent.

Historians, politicians, the media, and Pacific Islanders themselves, have long debated the Pacific labour trade. Several historians (me included) and anthropologists have noted that despite quite clear evidence of kidnapping in the early years, it is demeaning to the intelligence of Pacific peoples to presume that they presented themselves to be kidnapped from the same beaches, generation after generation for 40 or more years. Others, particularly descendants of the original indentured labourers, continue to stress that the labour trade was a form of slavery, always exploitative, and that all labour recruits were either kidnapped or lured by beguiling recruiters. This view does not stand up to scrutiny, and a good number of the family histories in Chapter 12 contradict the assumption. The truth is that, as so often in history, motivations, circumstances, and finances varied over the decades—1860s, 1870s or 1880s etc.—and on each island and island group, and for each individual. On some islands in southern Melanesia, sandalwood groves had been cut and exported for two decades before the labour trade began, Christian missions were well established in southern Melanesia, and there were also trading stations. Loyalty Islander men were among the earliest of the Pacific labourers to come to Queensland; they were great travellers, working on ships throughout the Pacific. Yet, on some of the other islands involved there was negligible contact with the outside world.

Four main reasons explain the differences that emerged in Queensland. One is the nature of the indenture system, and another is that the Islanders did not belong to the land—they were never a threat to controlling land in the way First Nations Australians were. The indenture system shaped the labour trade, and, despite some shady and scurrilous practices,

generated unusually good documentary sources on Australian South Sea Islanders. No other nineteenth century immigrant group in Australia was as thoroughly monitored by Acts of Parliament and regulations, plus close supervision by officials. The remaining primary and secondary sources are voluminous, making it possible to reach concrete and irrefutable conclusions based on statistics. The third reason relates to the finances of colonialism. Procuring Islanders was an expensive exercise and employers had large investments in maintaining their presence. Although not owned, they were integral to the economy of the early pastoral industry and to the first four decades of the sugar industry.

The fourth reason is the Islander viewpoint. Oral testimony began to be collected by historians during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, enabling an indigenous perspective to emerge and be cross-checked with documentary sources. As well, Australian South Sea Islanders such as Faith Bandler, Noel Fatnowna, Cedric and Christine Andrew, and Teresa Fatnowna, have all written histories of their people at Mackay. The Islanders themselves remain at the forefront of reassessment, producing family history books, exhibitions, and websites. They have relinked with their families in the islands and obtained oral accounts. They have gained confidence in their own interpretation of their history. Nevertheless, the way they present their point of view does not always equate with the findings of non-Islander historians.

The combination creates a fuller but not always harmonious account. Australian Islanders stress kidnapping and slavery as a primary part of their heritage and believe that surviving often fragmentary oral testimony is superior to written records. The Islanders are inclined to use 'Blackbirding' as a generic word for the entire labour trade. Although wonderfully descriptive, the word is too inexact to be useful. There is a need to be clear whether individuals were kidnapped or voluntarily enlisted.

The Islanders are part of the Indigenous 'Black voice' of contemporary Australia and since the 1970s have received media attention. Islander historical explanations often skip straight to illegality and a folk version of the similarities with the enslavement of Africans imported into the Americas between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. South Sea Islanders view their forebears as caught up in an extension of the same historical sequence, and do not accept that onded labour (on indenture contracts) was quite distinct from earlier British slavery. This said, there were similarities relating to racial attitudes, exploitation, and capitalism. Australian descendants also ignore (or do not know of) the history of the movement of 1.5 million indentured labourers from India to 16 areas of the British empire between 1834 and the 1920s, including Fiji (1879–1916), which was also post-slavery and had much in common with what occurred in Queensland.

The Islanders' oral testimony and writing often homogenises the forty years of the labour trade, and ignores the majority analysis by academic historians, which concludes that the conditions of the 1860s and 1870s were different from those in the 1890s and 1900s, with the 1880s as the turning point. To be fair, the descendants may not even know that the academic analysis exists, as the view is poorly disseminated and not promoted by the media. The academic argument is that onwards from the late 1880s, large numbers of the Islanders were making multiple voyages to the various colonies and expressing agency in making decisions. A variety of work categories developed, and the Islanders negotiated over wages, attended mission classes, and became literate and Christian. The Islanders also learnt to manipulate the indenture system, very occasionally taking employers to court, and using Indigenous cultural mechanisms to 'pay-back' errant employers. For their part, the Government and employers also used the legal system to control the Islanders.

While acknowledging the shortcomings in government records, they are voluminous and cannot be easily dismissed without analysis and explanation. For instance, the records enable us to know the proportions of labourers from each island or group of islands, and the time-spread of their arrival, the levels of wages paid, and working conditions. The largest

group by far came from Malaita Island in the Solomon Islands which produced 9,186 indenture contracts, 14.7 percent of the overall total Queensland number. Although the first Malaitans left home in 1871, 6,000 (two-thirds) of the Malaitan recruits departed their island for Queensland in the 1890s and 1900s, and others (sometimes the same men and women) went to Fiji, New Caledonia, and Samoa. My 1970s research on Malaita concluded that around 80 percent of Malaitan labourers made deliberate decisions to enlist, some on multiple occasions. Five to 10 percent of Pacific labour importation was clearly illegal, and another five to ten percent are in an ambiguous category. There are examples from as early as the 1870s where it was clear that negotiation was the only successful method to obtain labour. The mid-1880s was the cut-off date between the shady years of the 1860s, the middle years—an increasingly voluntary period—and the later predominantly voluntary period of the labour trade. Their reasons for participating were manifold, most relating to the desire to access new technologies, the persuasive power of existing exchange networks, political and social pressures, and to predictable stages in traditional male life cycles.

Once the products of European and Asian industry—metal and other manufactured items—began to circulate in the islands, Malaitans found that they were not part of the supply network. There was no whaling nearby (which stimulated the economies of some other Solomon Islands all through the first half of the nineteenth century), and no foreign settlements on their island until the 1900s. The coastal and then the inland leaders made a conscious decision to send their young males into the circular labour trade. Although there are cases of physical kidnapping, on Malaita, these were largely confined to the early 1870s and had ended by the mid-1880s. Although there is evidence of a few anomalies, in the 1890s, largely it became a well-controlled process, and recruiting was by negotiation not force. While it has become fashionable to play down ‘agency’ (making a deliberate choice), and to attack historians who dare to use this explanation, it still appears to be the reason why the majority enlisted, some on multiple occasions. The question to ask is do the new generation of academic naysayers really comprehend what motivated Pacific Islanders to participate in the labour trade, or are they just taking a contemporary political stand?

This is not a justification of the labour trade. Europeans with a more global outlook, and as part of the colonial outreach of capitalism, were taking advantage of Melanesia’s small-scale societies and the peoples’ desires for European and Asian manufactured goods. As I have argued elsewhere, ‘cultural kidnapping’ (taking cultural advantage) continued throughout the nineteenth century labour trade and into the twentieth century. Nevertheless, the only valid standard to judge the behaviour of nineteenth century Pacific Islanders stems from what can be understood of how they perceived the enticements offered. Sometimes it was a calculated communal decision to send young men (and some women) away for three years, to return with trade boxes stuffed with items not available at home. (Even the meagre basic wage of £18 over three years could achieve this.) We must not underestimate the impact of trade goods, particularly iron and steel, which caused a technological revolution in the Pacific. The hours of labour involved in heavy work clearing and fencing gardens, in canoe- and housebuilding, fishing, and toolmaking, were reduced to at least a third or a quarter of those needed in the same manufacture before iron was available.

Usually, on return to their islands, these goods were distributed to family members—a customary way to behave—but it also meant that the returning labourers found themselves several rungs further up social ladders than their brothers and nephews who had stayed at home. Having travelled away as a labourer, a man was likely to be able to find a wife more easily as exchanges of ‘trade goods’ for ‘bride wealth’ payments provided the necessary shell money and other valuables. Labour recruiting became a new rite of passage, particularly for

young males. The attraction of returning with trade goods was the key factor. Women—only six percent of the overall labour recruits—usually enlisted with their male partners, although there are examples of ‘run-aways’ escaping unhappy marriages, and of elopements.

If these goods were unavailable on an island, or hard to access from trading stations on surrounding islands, or from itinerant trading ships, the more likely it was that young men and women would be sent to sign-on by their communities or made their own decisions to enlist. This was certainly the Malaitan motivation. Today, it is difficult to realise the changes that iron and steel tools and guns brought to Pacific societies, which made obsolete their tools and weapons manufactured from stone, wood, plants, and shells. Agriculture, fishing, building, and fighting were transformed by the new tools and weapons. Although colonial partition of the islands was taking place at the same time, until large-scale alienation of land for plantations, there was little direct threat to the Islanders’ local sovereignty over their ancestral lands.

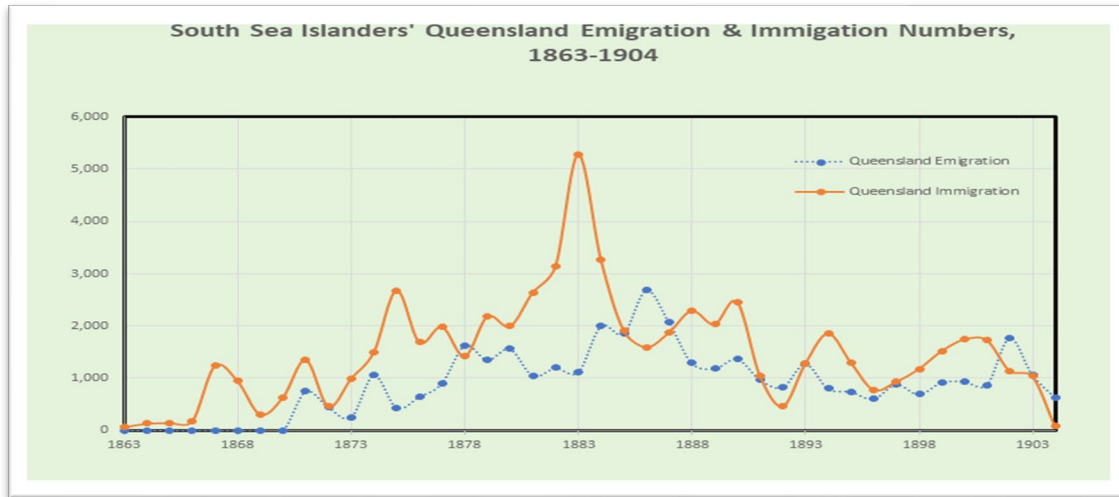
The Queensland Circular Trade in Labour from the Pacific Islands

Between 1863 and 1904 there were more than 790 voyages between Queensland involving 85 south-west Pacific islands and island groups. Mackay was central to 430 of the total voyages—more than half. Indentured labourers were paid low wages under contracts which privileged the employers. Strikes were illegal, although working conditions, particularly wages after the first contract, were always negotiable. Labourers could return to their islands after three years or stay in Queensland. The longer they remained, the better the working conditions became. Yet, regardless of the legal differences and interpretations, the labour trade, including the recruitment process in the islands, the voyages, and life in Queensland and eventually also northern New South Wales, involved deeply structured inequalities of power which produced relations based on coercion. Unlike slaves from Africa in the Americas, Pacific Islanders in Queensland could legally be part of contracts and could marry. Yet, at the same time they were excluded from being British subjects, and before 1876 were not considered to be competent witnesses in court. Undeniable illegalities in the recruitment process, particularly of the early years, challenge the concept that indenture was always a legal process. And the Melanesians’ dark skins and cultural differences meant that racism also played a strong part in determining attitudes. Racist beliefs were and are powerful mechanisms of social control. The introduction of the White Australia Policy, including an Act to deport Pacific Islanders and stop further immigration, is absolute proof of this.



Map 9.1: The Pacific Islands from which Islanders came to New South Wales and Queensland, 1847–1904.

Source: ASSIPJ website, www.assipj.com.au/southsea/wp-content/uploads/ASSIPJ-map.pdf.



Graph 9.4: South Sea Islanders' Queensland emigration and immigration numbers, 1863–1904.
Source: Clive Moore Collection, courtesy of Padma Narsey Lal.

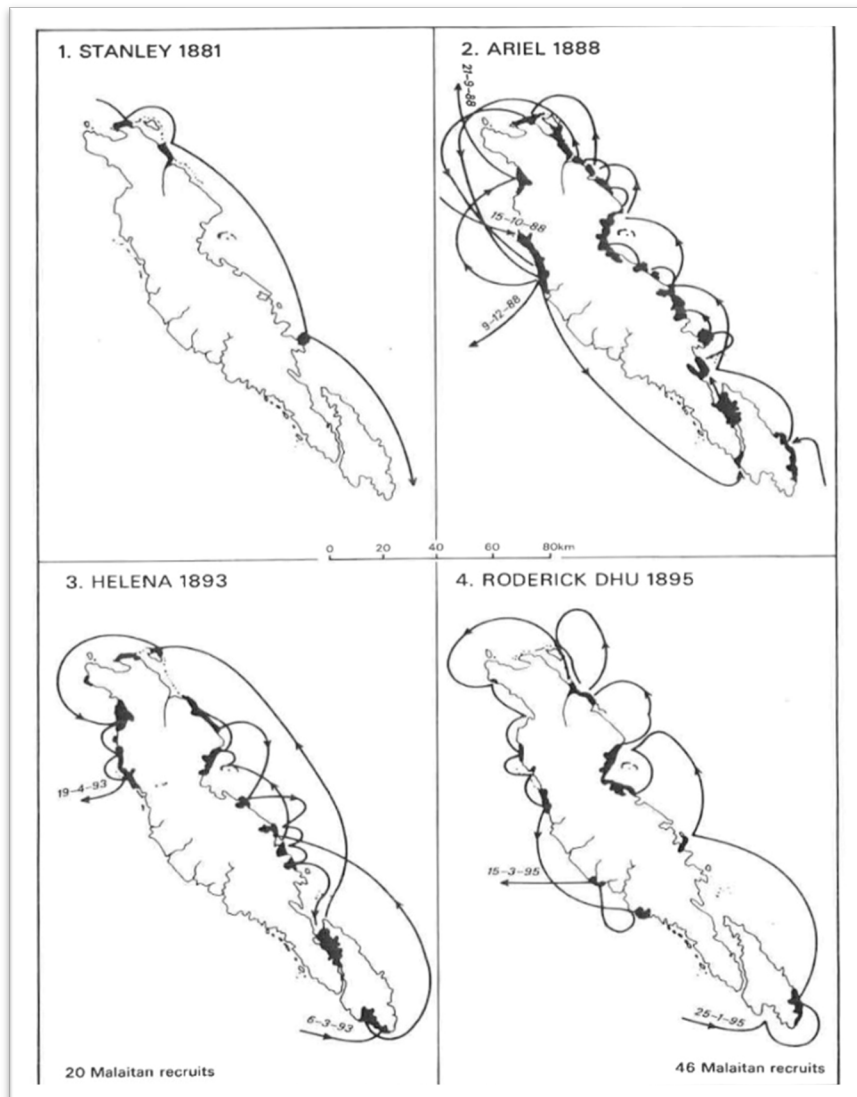
A Pictorial Essay on the Labour Trade

The mortality rate at sea was low, although travelling on small, crowded sailing vessels across the Coral and Solomon seas at all times of the year, including the cyclone season, must often have been unpleasant, frightening and sometimes horrific. Even the most experienced labourers would have found the voyages difficult, and the 'new chums' had no idea of what the trips involved. The voyages could take three to five months; returning and new labourers could easily have been on board for two months of any voyage. They were not paid while on the voyages. The many hundreds of voyages over 40 years make it hard to generalise.

The Islanders' level of geographical knowledge was limited and certainly never included Australia. Some were kidnapped, while others were cajoled by recruiters into boarding the vessels. However, their own people were 'passage masters' and interpreters, in cahoots with the recruiters and well-rewarded for their roles as middlemen. The below-deck conditions were always basic, and discipline was harsh, for crews and passengers alike. The labourers were exposed to other recruits from the far reaches of their own island (who might speak a different dialect or even a different language), and surrounding islands, who may have been their traditional enemies, and to others from a thousand kilometres away, whose languages they could not understand at all. They were suspicious of strangers, frightened of malevolent spirits, unused to the type of food provided, lived in unsanitary crowded conditions in the holds of the ships, and often had no idea of their destinations, nor the amount of time they would be on the ships or in Queensland. Their time up on deck was heavily supervised with only small numbers allowed up from the hold at any one time. There is no evidence that they were kept in chains on the ships (like slaves from Africa) although in difficult incidents restraint would have been used. Chains and ankle irons were even used to restrain one Government Agent, John Meiklejohn on the *Jason* in 1871, an indication that they were available onboard some ships. Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that tens of thousands chose to enlist for work in the colonies. We cannot now untangle their motivations, but the majority made a conscious decision to spend three years or more in Queensland.

The labour trade vessels were mainly small wooden sailing ships, schooners, barques, and brigs between 80 and 250 tons, usually converted cargo ships and not at all like the much larger purpose-built ships in the Indian labour trade, each of which carried a doctor. On the

Queensland ships the only medical care came from the Government Agents (these positions began in 1871) who had charge of a small medical kit.



Map 9.2: Four recruiting voyages around Malaita, 1881, 1888, 1893, and 1895.
Source: Clive Moore Collection.

Labour trade vessels used a variety of contact points around islands. Sometimes they called in at just a few passages (bays or gaps in the reefs). On other occasions they worked right around a major recruiting field like Malaita over several weeks. The captains and recruiters exploited previous contacts with ‘passage masters’ and interpreters—the coastal leaders who controlled the flow of recruits. The same labour ships would visit an island two or three times a year and continued to do so over two decades. It was not in the interests of the crews to be deceptive in their dealings with the local people. Attacks on ships were common and several were captured and destroyed by Malaitans, and at other islands. It was a dangerous business and Malaitans were quite capable of holding their own with the recruiters. Ships

signalled their arrival by letting off a charge of dynamite and allowing time for inland people to come down to the coast to enlist. This pattern was similar elsewhere.

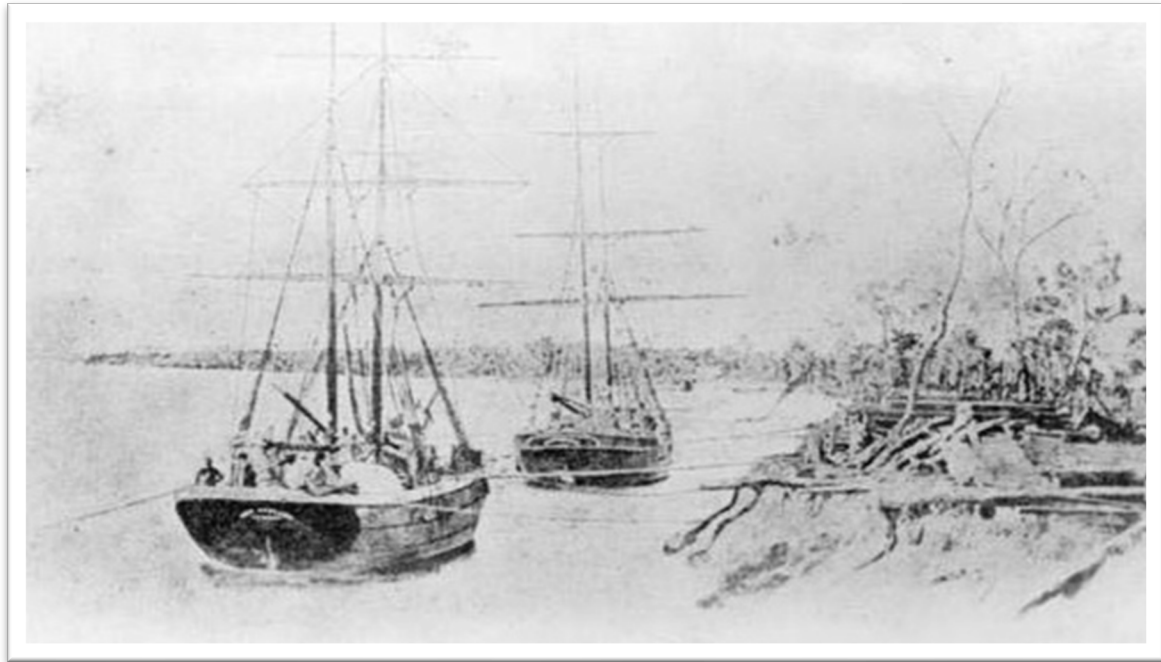


Plate 9.3: The *Amy Robsart* and *Hannah Newton*, Pioneer River, Mackay, 1868. The *Amy Robsart*, a 72-ton brigantine-rigged cargo ship, was converted for labour trade use at Mackay, and made two voyages, in 1870 out of Mackay, and one in 1873 out of Maryborough. On its first voyage the ship left Mackay with 60 returns and recruited 43 new labourers for Alexandra plantation. The voyage took five months. Source: Roth 1908, 124.



Plate 9.4: The 82-ton *Mystery*, Mackay, 1870s. The ship operated in the labour trade between 1870 and 1879, licenced to carry 82 labourers. Owned by Alfred Hewitt and Charles Romilly of Pleystowe plantation, the *Mystery* made 17 voyages, all out of Mackay. Source: Clive Moore Collection.

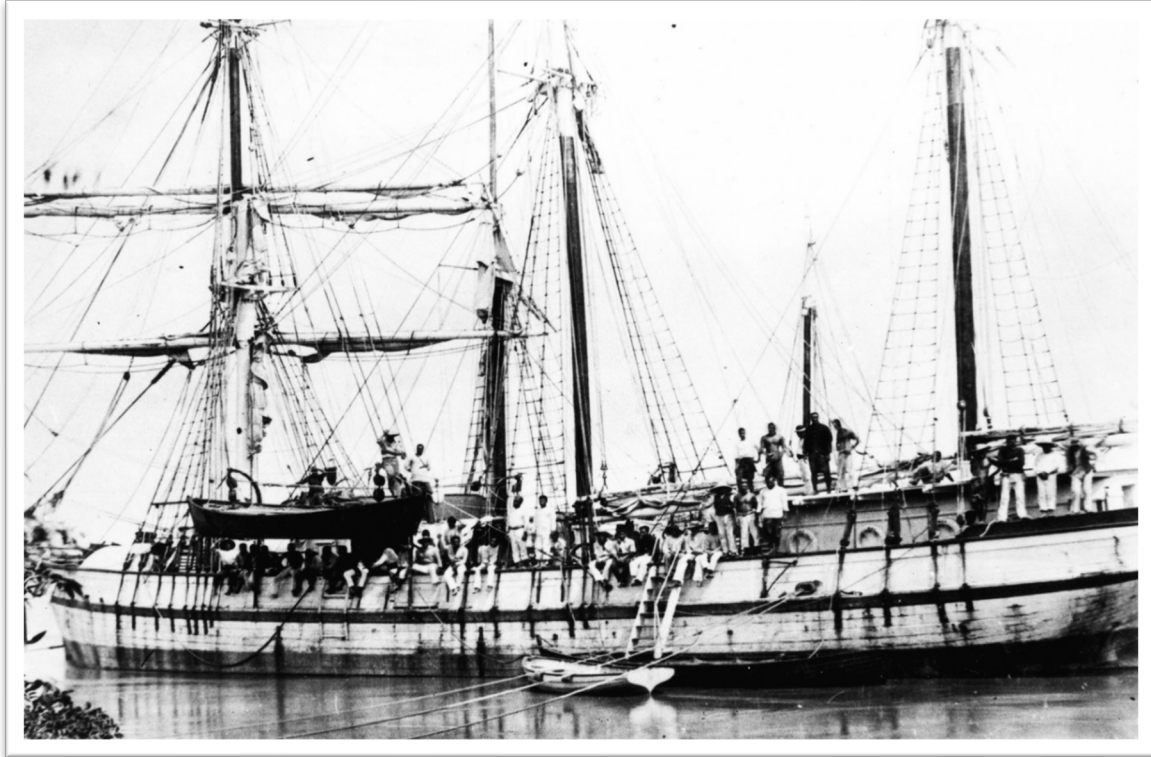


Plate 9.5: The 286-ton *May* made 15 voyages between 1888 and 1894. The ship usually sailed out of southern Queensland. It was much larger than many of the earlier vessels in the trade, although typical of vessels used in the final decades. The *May* could carry up to 170 recruits.
Source: State Library of Queensland.



Plate 9.6: Douglas Rannie (centre) was a Government Agent on labour trade ships and later was an Inspector of Pacific Islanders at Mackay. He served on the *May* (Plate 9.5) for two voyages in 1889. This photograph is probably from that year as it appears to be part of the crew of a labour trade ship.
Source: Rannie 1912, 238.

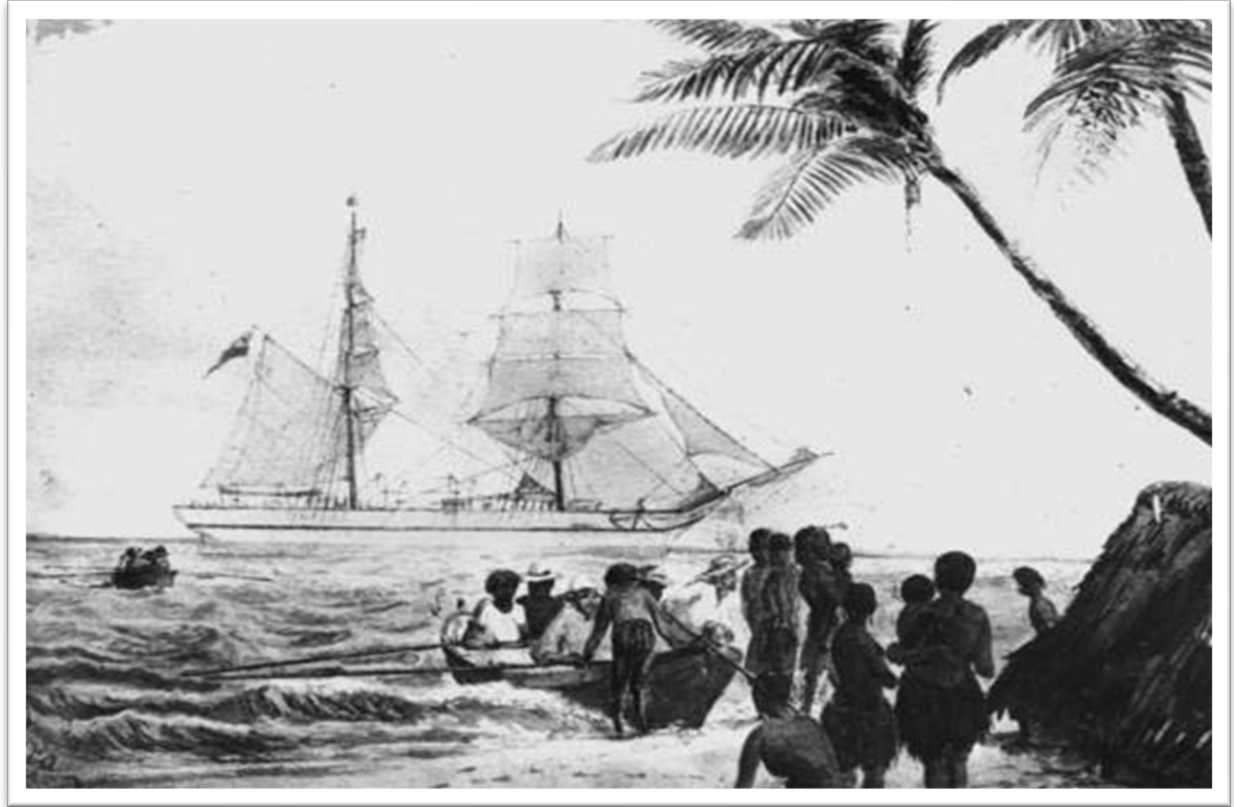
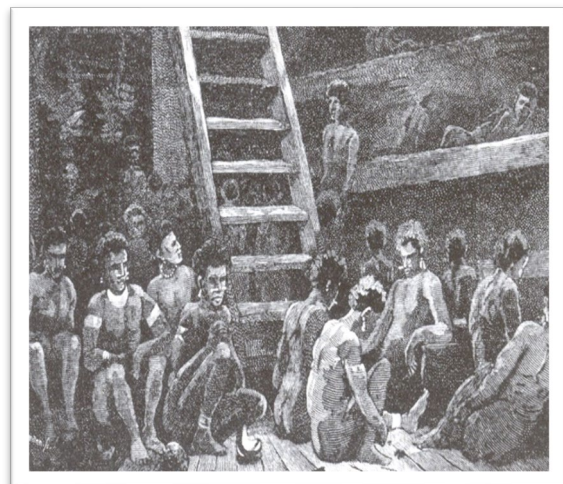
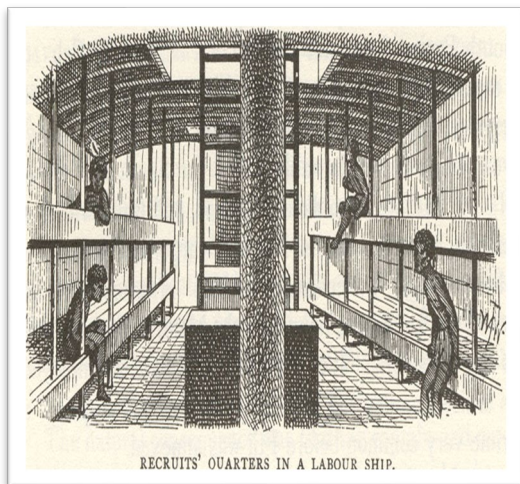


Plate 9.7: Labour recruiting usually used two ship's boats, one onshore negotiating, and the other further out to cover any attack. This sketch depicts the 252-ton *Para* in the 1890s.

Source: Wawn 1893 frontispiece; and State Library of Queensland.



Plates 9.8–9: There are no below-decks photographs. The two sketches, both probably from the 1880s, show Islanders in their below-decks quarters on Queensland labour trade ships. The quarters were basic, a re-fit of cargo holds. The smell from bilge water under the floor of the hold was unpleasant and sanitation was through use of buckets which had to be emptied regularly. Conditions must sometimes have been horrific. They were allowed on deck only in small numbers at one time.

Source: (9.8) Wawn 1893; (9.9) *Picturesque Atlas on Australia* 1886.



Plate 9.10: Islanders arriving in Australia from the Islands. They are all carrying bows and arrows or clubs.

Source: Clive Moore Collection.

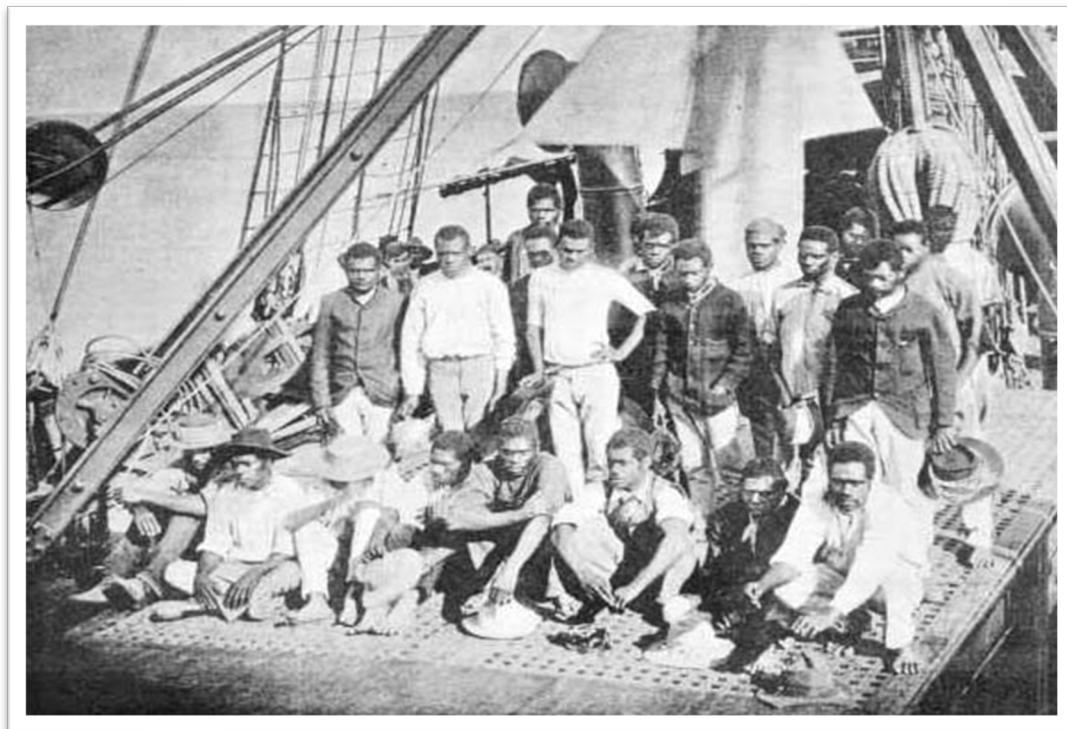


Plate 9.11: Islanders returning to the Islands in the 1890s, dressed in clothes they have purchased from 'Kanakan stores'.

Source: Clive Moore Collection.



Plate 9.12: Islanders on the beach just after returned labourers have been landed with their boxes of trade goods, east Malaita Island, Solomon Islands, 1907. One of their boxes is visible.

Source: British Museum, photograph by George Rose, Rose Stereotypes, Neg. 1257, in Thomas Edge-Partington Collection.

Arrival at Mackay

Table 9.1: Summary of Mackay South Sea Islander emigration and immigration statistics, 1867–1903.

Ships involved	52
Total voyages to Mackay, 1867–1903	430
Total voyages from Mackay, 1870–1903	156
IMMIGRATION	
SSI Adult and Child Immigrants from the Islands to Mackay	17,401
SSI Indentured Immigrants from the Islands to Mackay	17,388
SSI Adult Male Indentured Immigrants from the Islands to Mackay	16,311
SSI Adult Female Indentured Immigrants from the Islands to Mackay	1,077
SSI Child Immigrants from the Islands to Mackay	13
EMIGRATION	
SSI Adult and Child Emigrants from Mackay to the Islands	7,975
SSI Adult Indentured Emigrants from Mackay to the Islands	7,891
SSI Adult Male Indentured Emigrants from Mackay to the Islands	7,367
SSI Adult Female Indentured Emigrants from Mackay to the Islands	525
SSI Child Emigrants from Mackay to the Islands	84
Total SSI passengers entering and leaving Mackay	25,376

Between 1867 and 1904, 17,388 adult Islanders are recorded as arriving at Mackay on 430 voyages: 16,311 men, along with 1,077 (10 percent) women, and 13 children. The number

returning home was considerably smaller (7,891), as is the number of ships involved (156), carrying 7,367 adult males, 525 (5.25 percent) adult women, and 84 children, almost all of the latter born in the colony. The numbers returning are much lower because of deaths (about a quarter, well over 2,000), and those who chose to stay or had moved to another district. Even so, the differences in the statistics cannot be fully explained.

Immigration in the labour trade to Mackay peaked in the early 1880s, remaining high until the closure of the trade in 1891–92 and its new beginning in 1893. Statistics suggest that only 15 ships carried returning Islanders out of Mackay between 1890 and 1903, with zero voyages in seven of the years, one voyage a year in four of the years, and two voyages a year in two of the years. Emigration was always lower than immigration, except in the early 1870s. Climatic effects on the cane crops could be a factor: a cyclone in 1898 and severe frost in 1899, ruined crops, meaning that less labour was needed. The lack of new labour recruits can also be explained by the government restrictions in the early 1890s, but also because in the final decade there were enough time-expired and ticket-holder workers in the district to satisfy labour needs. They were cheaper to employ overall (even with higher wages) and a more efficient option. The declining number of voyages is also partly because much larger vessels were in use than in earlier years.

The first Pacific Islanders arrived at Mackay in mid-May 1867 on the *Prima Donna*: 68 Melanesian males from Mare (3) in the Loyalty Islands, and New Hebrides islands of Epi (8), Emae (17), Efate (20), Tanna (12), and Tongoa (8). This was the tenth ship to bring Islanders to Queensland since 1863. The nine earlier voyages, all docked at Brisbane, except for two going to Townsville and one to Bowen. The *Prima Donna*'s voyage was an adventurous labour-seeking move by the South Kennedy settlers who chartered the ship.

Mackay was quite new, founded in 1862 on the southern bank of the Pioneer River. The *Mackay Mercury and South Kennedy Advertiser*, established in 1866, commented that the new arrivals looked fit, unused to wearing clothes and very happy to be on dry land. What they thought of the muddy little settlement we will never know. Thirty of them walked the track to Davidson and Fitzgerald's Alexandra plantation, and 20 crossed the river to Spiller's Pioneer plantation. The remainder were indentured to various settlers, some going to Cook and Ross' Balnagowan pastoral property. The *Prima Donna* returned immediately to the Loyalty Islands and the New Hebrides, arriving back at Mackay in January 1868 with 67 men and one woman. They came from Mare (2), Epi (15), Erromango (2), Santo (8), Emae (12), Efate (5), and Tanna (25). Forty-one went up-country to pastoral stations, while the rest remained in the valley, working for planters, squatters, and farmers.

We know little about these labourers. They arrived before the 1868 Act was passed and were not bound by standard working conditions. There is good reason to be suspicious of the manner of their recruitment and treatment. There are no indications whether they enlisted voluntarily or were kidnapped, although it is possible that they all had previous contact with Europeans, as there were a few traders and missionaries in the Loyalty and New Hebridean islands in these early years. However, the chances that all were willing recruits is slight. Certainly, these early Mackay Islanders would have had communication difficulties between themselves, and with the European residents, although basic Pijin English was already in use in some areas on some islands through the sandalwood trade. In each of the next seven years, Islander numbers grew absolutely and as a proportion of the total population in the district, reaching 1,700 in 1875, about 45 percent of the immigrant population (Graph 9.3). Although this proportion declined as European settlement increased, the Islanders remained the core of the field labour force in the sugar industry until the 1900s.

Within a few months, the 1867 arrivals supposedly settled down to become a useful addition to the labour force. John Spiller was effusive in his praise of his first Melanesian labourers:

It required all the patience I could muster at first, but they gradually got acquainted with the different tools, before unknown to them, and now I am reaping the benefit, and proud to see every morning turning out for the field four good plough-men with their six bullocks each and drivers; others with their horse teams that can mark out a drill as straight as I can.¹

Spiller also used Islanders as boat pilots, guiding his produce-barges down river to the port. He began to learn words in their languages and claimed to have established friendly relations. On other properties in the district the men were ginning cotton, processing arrowroot, and building fences. After three days of instruction, one settler claimed to have been able to leave his Melanesian labourers to split and mortice the timber and erect a three-rail fence.

Government Supervision, Categories of Labour, and Wages

Earlier chapters make clear that there was little government authority on the northern fringes of colonial settlement in the 1860s. There is no doubt that there were dubious aspects of the 1863–67 Queensland labour trade. Some of the recruiting practices were scurrilous, contracts were for both two and three years, wages and working conditions varied. There was only patchy government supervision, covered ineffectually by the 1861 *Masters and Servants Act*. In 1868, the Queensland Government attempted to rectify the situation by passing the *Polynesian Labourers Act*, which laid down formal conditions for employment and began to regulate recruitment and working conditions. Before this, there were four different types of agreements and employers were quite lax over returning labourers to their islands after their contracts ended.

The new Act set the duration of indenture agreements at three years, after which the labourers had the option to return home or reengage. The wage was set at not less than £6 per year (today \$816), along with payments in kind, of food, shelter, clothing, tobacco, and medical care. (By comparison, in 1868 an unskilled European male labourer would have received about four or five times as much, with better but still primitive accommodation and food, although there were no procurement or transport costs.) The employers were also responsible for arranging and paying for the Islanders' transport to and from the islands and had to enter a bond with the Government to ensure contractual conditions were adhered to. In law, both parties were liable to prosecution for default. In practice, it was a more uneven process.

Over subsequent decades, although a raft of new Acts related to employment of Islanders, some of the working conditions remained standard until 1906. Initially, the 1868 Act was badly thought out and not properly enforced. Then, over years, new Acts, amendments, and regulations were introduced. Conditions and wages were supervised first by the Government Agents on all voyages after 1871, by the local Police Magistrate in the district in which they were employed, who acted as Inspector of Pacific Islanders for the Immigration Department, and then by full-time inspectors onwards from 1878.



Plate 9.13: Islanders from Guadalcanal and Malaita on Foulden plantation at Mackay in the 1870s.
Source: Amherst and Thompson 1901.

Over the 40 years, most Pacific Islander indentured labourers returned home after one three-year contract, with little change in their outlook on the world. We know that they were able to suspend many cultural observances, and then resume them, with compensation paid after they returned home. Interaction with employers would have been minimal as the Islanders dealt mainly with the overseers. Waged employment was quite foreign to most of the Islanders. They may never have realised that the White planters in the big houses nearby were their employers. Initially, they were paid every 12 months, then every six months after 1880, or at the end of shorter contracts.

They could hold the money themselves or have the Magistrate or Inspector place it into a bank account, to be withdrawn on request. They would not have understood the very alien concept of a bank, although presumably they thought that the official kept the money for them. Islander folk-law is that they were never paid, which is untrue, as evidence of payments in plantation ledgers and government records listing deposits attests, and some of their savings bank books still exist. At a time when most Aboriginal labour was not paid in cash, Pacific Islanders certainly were. The glaring anomaly, and a blot on the system is that the residual wages of dead Islanders, and money from their bank accounts, remained in the Government's Pacific Islanders Fund, with only about 15 percent repaid to their families in the islands. Rather disgracefully, the Government used the remainder of the fund to pay for administrative and hospital expenses, and finally for deportation in the 1900s. (There have been discussions about mounting a class action against the Queensland Government and given the success to First Nations Queenslanders in relation to misappropriation of wages held in trust, there is distinct possibility of success.)

The way in which new farmland had to be cleared was described in Chapter 7. Cane planting took place at staggered intervals between March and September. Until new cane was high enough to overshadow the weeds, labour was needed to clean between the rows. Then, a short time before cutting, the cane was cleared of trash (the old cane leaves) by hand, which was laid in the rows between the cane to act as mulch. Cane was also ratooned (allowed to re-grow from the cane roots), usually only twice on the river flats, but up to six times in some

hilly areas. Before tractors were used onwards from the 1920s, hilly areas were farmed as well as the flats. The harvest and crushing season extended from June to December, all mills endeavouring to complete crushing before the wet season arrived in December or January. Cane was cut green, using wide-bladed machetes with a hooked end, heaped into drays pulled by bullocks or horses, and carted to mills, or onwards from the 1880s heaped onto wagons on rails, either temporary or permanent, and transported to mills by small locomotives. This manual labour was done by Islanders and some Asians, supervised by White overseers. The growing and harvest process occupied most of the year, slowing only during the wet season.



Plate 9.14: Islanders at Mackay planting cane under the watchful eyes of two overseers, 1870s.
Note the children working in the field.
Source: State Library of Queensland.

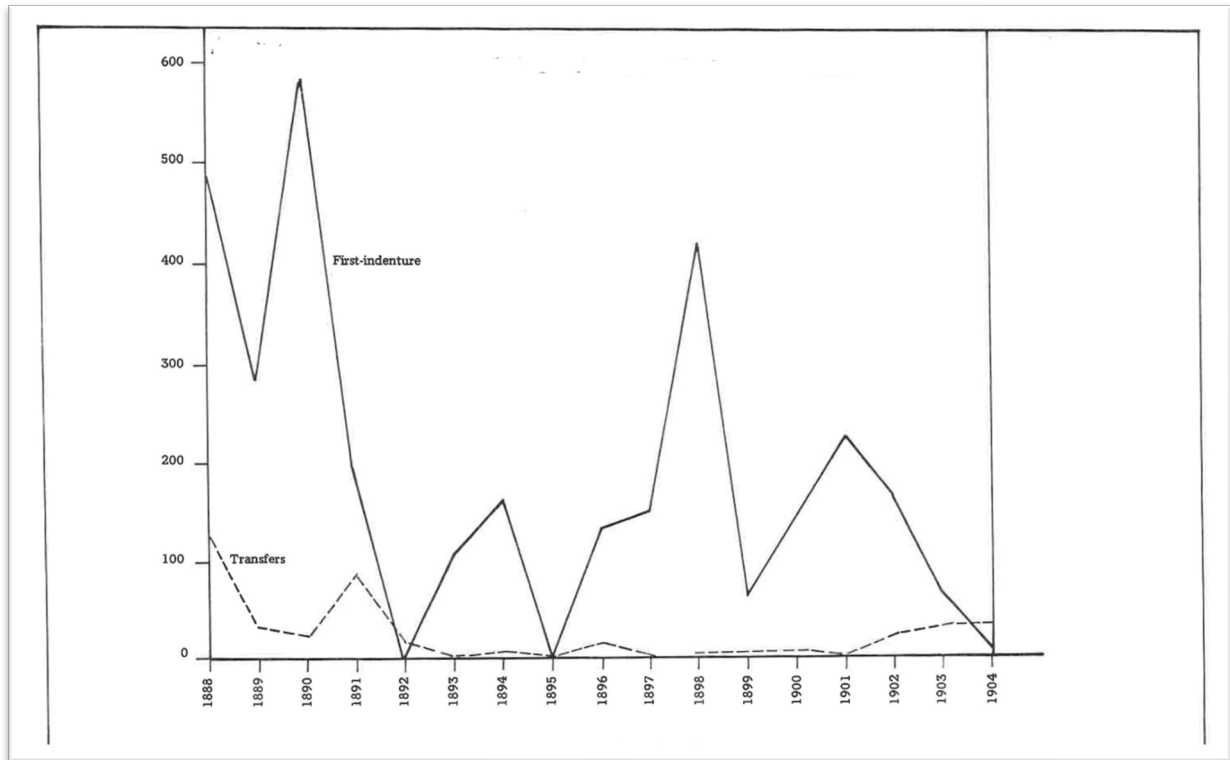


Plate 9.15: Islander women with hoes for weeding cane, and an overseer on horseback.
Source: Clive Moore Collection.

Over the passage of years between 1863 and 1906, several distinct categories of Islander worker emerged: first-indenture labourers leaving home for the first time; re-indentured labourers in the islands doing the circuit again; time-expired labourers who re-indentured in Queensland; and ticket-holders. For most of the years under review here, first-indenture labourers were the majority, and most of them worked on plantations. With no colonial labour experience, these 'new chums' were always paid £6 a year on three-year indenture contracts.

Right from the 1860s, there were those who re-indentured in the islands—labourers who had already worked in Queensland, Fiji, Samoa, or New Caledonia. By the 1880s and 1890s, a high proportion of the Melanesian labourers travelling to Queensland were 'old hands' who had previously worked away from their home islands. In the 1880s, and onwards to 1906, they commanded as much as £12 per year, double the wages of 'new chums'. Because of their work experience, probable immunity to common diseases, and fluency in Pijin English, they were able to bargain for higher wages before they re-enlisted. However, their employers still had to pay the cost of their passage money to and from Queensland, which increased over the years from £5 to £20, and lessened their bargaining power. Statistics on re-enlistment are firm only between 1892 and 1904. During these final years, the yearly average of re-enlistments on Queensland ships varied between 22.5 and 35.5 percent. There are no statistics on the number of return trips each made, although from oral testimony we know that some made three and four trips to the colonies.

The other time-expired group was those who chose to remain in Queensland and re-engage for one or more subsequent contracts. Employing them included no passage cost from the islands, other than the initial £10, then £5, which was already deposited in the Government's Pacific Islands Fund to ensure there was money available for return passages. They had larger bargaining power. Two-thirds of these in-colony re-engagements were for less than twelve months, mainly to cover the harvest season. The average contract became shorter after 1893 when the labour trade resumed after its short hiatus, and many of the plantations began to be sub-divided into small farms. In the late 1880s and 1890s, the average time-expired wages were between £16 and £25 a year. These labourers preferred the mobility that short contracts enabled. They liked to rest between jobs and to move from job to job. They also enjoyed the more personal relationship they developed with employers and their families on small farms. At Mackay, between 1888 and 1904 there were 18,413 new individual contracts of varying lengths. Over the same years, 3,201 new labourers entered three-year contracts, and 398 of them experienced transfers during their agreements. The time-expired segment of the Islander labour force grew increasingly important over the four decades, with ramifications for colonial society. By 1895, 65 percent of the Melanesians in the district were time-expired. They were quite at home in the labour market. They were mobile within the district and beyond, travelling at will on steamers up and down the Queensland coast. Some were engaged by local agents for plantations, while others chose to move to another district where they had heard work was available, or where they had kin or members of the same language group. They also walked long distances between jobs. For example, in 1901, time-expired man Alex Daniels from Guadalcanal walked from Proserpine to Mirani in one very long day—around 108 kilometres.



Graph 9.5: First-indenture agreements and transfers at Mackay, 1888–1904.

Source: Clive Moore Collection.

The Government knew that it was losing control of the Islander labour force. Effectively, they were becoming Black colonists as they could not be forced to re-engage or to go home. Then, in 1896, regulations increased the minimum contract length to six months with no more than one month between agreements, and permits were supposed to be obtained to travel on coastal steamers. Shorter contracts were only available while awaiting a voyage home. These new regulations were never enforced, and in fact the small-farm operators had little use for extra labour in the non-crushing season, managing with family labour. The inter-district travel permits were easy to obtain and seem to have acted as a register, not a deterrent.

The final group was the ticket-holders: 835 Islanders resident in Queensland for five years or more before September 1884, who had no further restrictions placed on the type of work they undertook. No complete list of their names remains, but roughly one-third of these would have been based at Mackay. In 1884, when limits on places of Islander employment were introduced, a significant proportion of the members of Parliament felt that the new regulations were unjust and were akin to introducing a limited system of slavery. The salve to their consciences was that complete freedom of occupation and movement was continued for all pre-September 1879 Islander arrivals who had worked on the Queensland mainland or as *bêche-de-mer* or pearl-shell divers in Torres Strait. They had their own farms and occupied a variety of occupations: miner, carter, keepers of boarding-houses, fisherman, and market-gardener. None of today's Australian Islanders claim descent from these individuals, although they were a major category of those allowed to stay after 1906. The majority of the ticket-holders would have been early recruits from the Loyalty Islands and the New Hebrides. Along with time-expired Islanders, ticket-holders made up the majority of the first generation of the current Australian South Sea Islander community.

Initially, there were no occupational or geographic restrictions, which meant Islanders could be found on properties spread from the Gulf of Carpentaria to Roma in south-west

Queensland. Moves to limit their employment to semi-tropical agriculture (essentially the sugar industry) began in 1878 when new legislation proposed, failed to be passed and the limits were introduced through regulations under the 1868 Act. The restrictions seem to have had little effect until included in 1880, 1884 and 1892 Acts. In 1884, the Islanders were restricted to unskilled jobs (field work or outside mill work) in tropical and semi-tropical agriculture.



Plate 9.16: Islanders cutting cane at Mackay, 1880s. Note the shape of the cane-knives there are holding, which was still the standard form in the 1950s and 1960s.

Source: State Library of Queensland.



Plate 9.17: Islanders at Mackay with cane carts, ca. 1895

Source: State Library of Queensland.

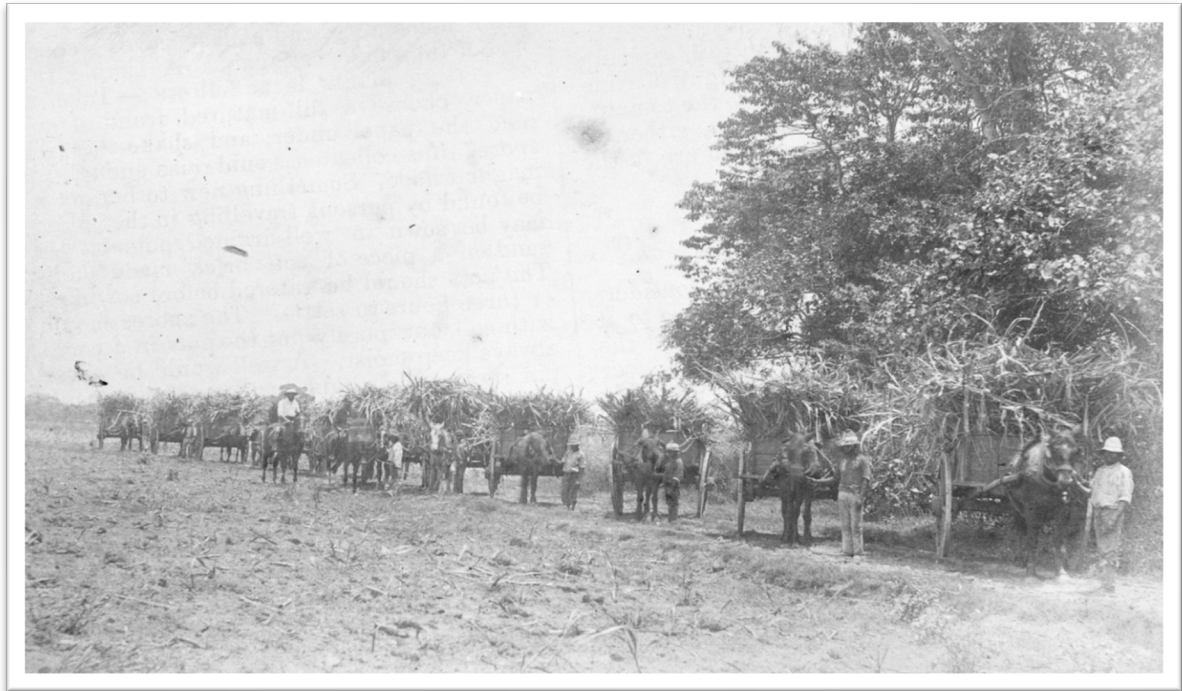


Plate 9.18: Islanders carting cane at Mackay, 1880s.

Source: State Library of Queensland.



Plate 9.19: Islanders loading cane wagons to take to a mill.

Source: State Library of Queensland.

Before 1892, most mills employed 12 to 14 Islanders on each shift, and bigger mills up to 20. As mills only worked in the six-month crushing season, these labourers were either on short-term contracts or hired out by surrounding plantations and farmers. After 1892, most

of the Islanders (not the ticket-holders) were excluded from mill work. They could still use horses and carts in the fields, but not on public roads or around the mills. Ploughing became largely a European preserve, as was maize cultivation. Islanders could still clear the path for a furrow, and the only task they continued to undertake around mills was handling raw cane and clearing megasse. William Fordyce was a ploughman on Richmond plantation and in later years became a tenant farmer on Long and Robertson's Habana plantation. His son George was born in 1895, the year Richmond closed. He remembered the late 1890s and 1900s when he helped his father, who used a swing plough with no disk. An Islander always accompanied him to push debris away from the beam of the plough as he proceeded. Another task was to take a team of Islanders into the bush to cut firewood for the mill furnaces. Then, one teamster and one Islander would take a dray out to pick up the wood.

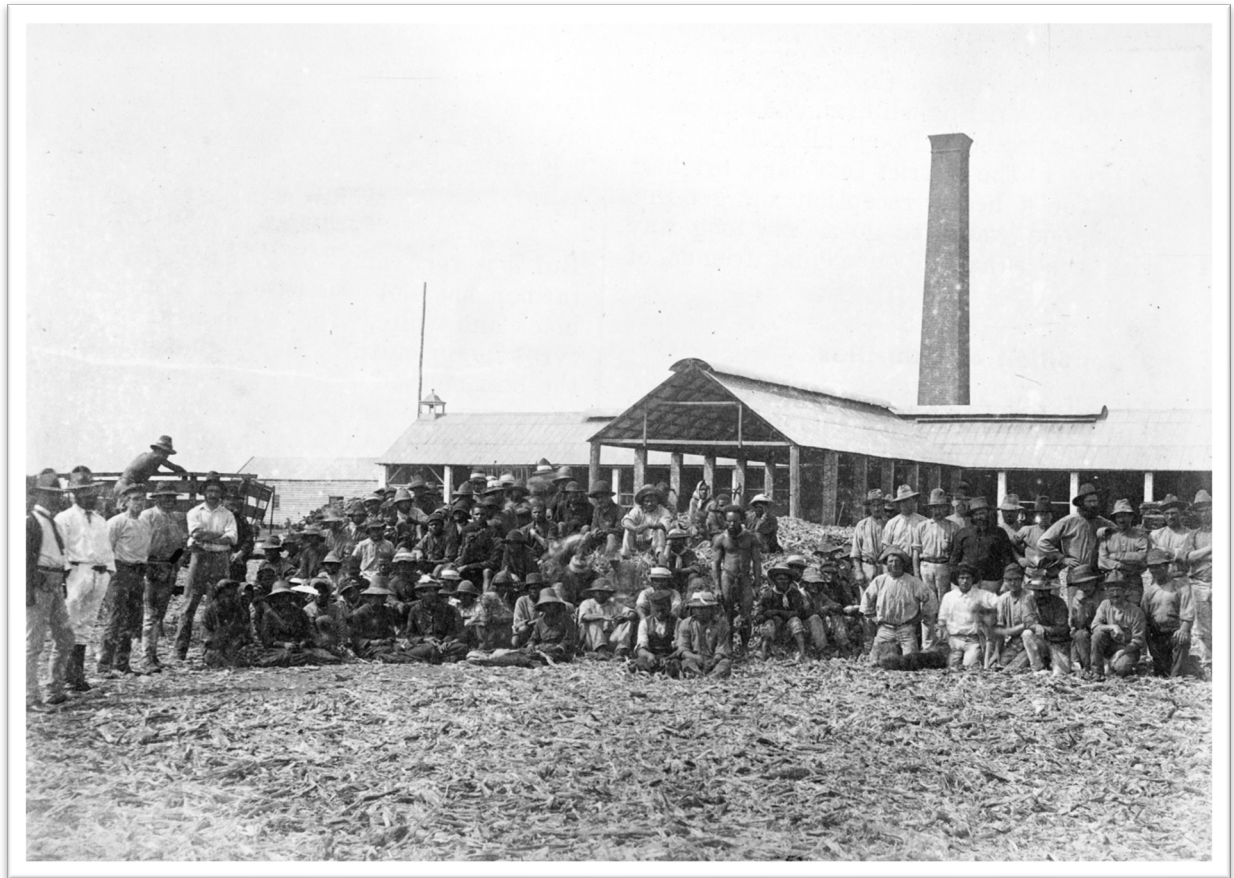


Plate 9.20: Islanders workers in the megasse yard at Foulden mill, 1880.

Source: State Library of Queensland.

Descriptions of the Islanders working vary greatly and take no account of categories of employment. Right from the 1860s, Islanders worked in the mills, feeding the rollers and the furnaces, ladling, and skimming the boiling liqueur, digging sugar crystals and molasses out from tanks, and breaking up megasse (or bagasse). Regulated field labour took getting used to, but the mills were an altogether different world. They were dangerous places with unguarded revolving parts, enormous wheels, gushing steam, and boiling liquids. They must have seemed both fascinating and frightening. Some terrible accidents occurred. Documentary sources and oral testimony suggest that Islanders, seeing a mill in action for the first time, usually refused to venture close. Most mills used steam whistles to signal changes in shifts. One standard story is that, on first hearing a blast from the whistle, 'new chum'

Islanders ran pell-mell for the scrub and hid. The *Mackay Mercury* described them at work in a mill in 1869:

...these men are invaluable as workers, and their masters find it profitable to supply them with unlimited quantities of good food, comfortable dwellings etc. without expecting more than a reasonable amount of labour in return.²

Nevertheless, a visitor to a Mackay mill in 1876 thought the mill scene reminiscent of hell:

...naked, sweating South Sea Islanders...stand toiling with long spades and pitchforks in the reeking, sweltering vats, up to their ankles in clammy sugar and molasses, like Dante's demons in Malebolge.³

Michael Davitt, an Irish republican politician who visited Mackay in the 1890s, said that the Islanders appeared to work 'sullenly', whereas Harry Blake, writing in *The Antipodean* a few years earlier, described them as affectionate and like 'frolicsome urchins'.⁴ The truth is somewhere in between. Oral testimony from Islanders adds little to the picture. Their descendants remember stories that the hours of work were long—daylight to dark—and that overseers sometimes resorted to violence. Photographs of Islanders at work usually show supervised workers on plantations, seldom Islanders working on small farms. However, this pictorial evidence relates to the cost and limited availability of photographic equipment, not the actual spread of the labourers. Around the mills, Islanders worked at many tasks. Robert Kia, from Malekula in the New Hebrides, helped build the chimney at Racecourse mill in the late 1880s, and worked in the mill. Kia was not a ticket-holder. In 1891, another Islander was working in the saddlers shop at Ashburton mill.

Before the 1880s, it was legal to use the younger Islanders as domestic servants. One 1883 comment was that:

... there is no planter's house in the Mackay district wherein Polynesians are not domestic servants. When in the house of the member for the district [M.H. Black of The Cedars] I found a black girl making my bed.⁵

After the 1884 legislation, the practice should have ceased, but did not. Employment of children as domestic and urban servants continued throughout the century. Other Melanesians continued to work as ploughmen, grooms, carters, woodcutters, and fencers. Then, as the trade union movement strengthened during the 1890s, most cases were quickly reported, and employers fined. Some Islanders were clearly familiar with their legal situation. In one 1894 Mackay court case, Strumbo, a first-indentured labourer, was asked by Toby, a time-expired labourer, to help with a fencing job. Strumbo refused, saying it was illegal. Toby, displeased, ended up in court for assaulting his law-abiding friend.

Sold on the Block, or Transferred and Hired?

One aspect of employment that has survived in folk memory is being 'sold on the block' like slaves. Transfers and hiring were sometimes construed this way. In 1880, a writer for *The Queenslander* described transfers taking place down on the wharfs:

...the landing of islanders became a kind of speculation in the market which, as some people thought, looked very like buying and selling, especially as the price of the

passage money paid by the employer was often three or four times what the cost of the passage really was.⁶

Employing Islanders was big business with substantial profits to be made, and circumstances could change quickly for employers. The rust epidemic in 1875–76, which bankrupted some planters, is the best example of this. Many plantations changed hands. British indenture agreements always included a mechanism to transfer labour, as circumstances could arise where there was no longer a valid employer. Although the three-year basic contracts provided a stable workforce, they made it difficult to adjust the size of the workforce at peak periods, or in situations where labour was over-subscribed. The need for labour was greatest when the land was first being cleared, and there was a seasonal peak during the crushing. Transfers enabled a degree of flexibility, although they were supposed to occur only with the agreement of both parties and supervised by the Magistrate or Inspector. Law and practice were not always the same, and there is little doubt that transfers were usually arranged with the interests of the employer in mind, not those of the employee.

There were two types of transfers: immediately on arrival; and a substantial time into the contract. Employers applied for a set number of indenture contracts before a labour trade vessel departed. Immigration Agent Grey questioned the procedure in 1876:

When I was appointed Immigration Agent, the practice prevailed of issuing one licence to recruit the whole number of Islanders the vessel was capable of carrying, and upon arrival in the colony to distribute them on applications which were received from employers, as if to recruit. It merely amounted to this; that instead of before it left, the applications and bonds under which the license was issued being replaced by the applications and bonds of employers until the whole of the Islanders were absorbed.

I objected to the practice as contrary to the letter of the law, but was instructed not to alter it; there was certainly no very great harm in it, and it is perhaps a more simple way than compelling the importers to engage the whole lot, and then to distribute them by transfer immediately afterwards under section 13.

...no transfer takes place at all. The applications are made on arrival of the vessel, as if to recruit them. One employer does not engage the whole lot.

It saves of stamps, does it not? There is a saving in duty stamps.⁷

Over-ordering may have been a form of insurance against failure on the part of the recruiter to fill the recruiting quota, which could easily occur. It may have resulted from over optimistic estimates of the progress of a newly established plantation, especially in clearing land. It may have been designed to secure a profit from the transfers, although there is no clear evidence to substantiate this.

The second type of transfer occurred when the ownership of a plantation changed hands. The indentured labourers were not part of the sale (as they were not chattel slaves), but the old employer was required by law to make the transfer as soon as possible after the sale. Usually, the contracts were swapped to the name of the new employer, causing no change in the place of employment. A typical example occurred in 1876 when G.N. Marten and E.M. Long sold Branscombe plantation to G.H.M. King. Marten transferred 38 indenture agreements to King and arranged several other labour transfers to Branscombe from other near-by plantations and farms. It seems likely that the labourers never realised what had happened.

In the 1860s and up until the mid-1870s, labourers could easily be transferred 20 to 30 kilometres from their first place of employment, and before 1880 from a sugar to a pastoral district. The Islanders could find themselves separated from friends and family. Transfers were usually initiated by the employers, although not always. In one case, a woman working on Branscombe in the 1870s applied for transfer to neighbouring Alexandra, so that she could live with her husband. In another case, an Epi Islander asked to be allowed to leave Dumbleton plantation to join two Ambrymese he had met onboard ship, then working near Walkerston. Both requests were granted. These compassionate cases were unusual. Early transfers, even out of the district, were made without consulting the employees. Five new regulations were gazetted in December 1876. Henceforth, no transfers could be made without good reason and none could be made from any district until a reasonable time after arrival in the colony, which in 1884 was defined as six months.

Exact figures on transfers are only available between 1888 and 1904 (see Graph 9.5). Even in this late period, 12 percent of all first-indenture agreements were transferred: 398 out of a total 3,201. Most of these were transfers a substantial period after the indenture began, usually because a plantation was sold or closed.

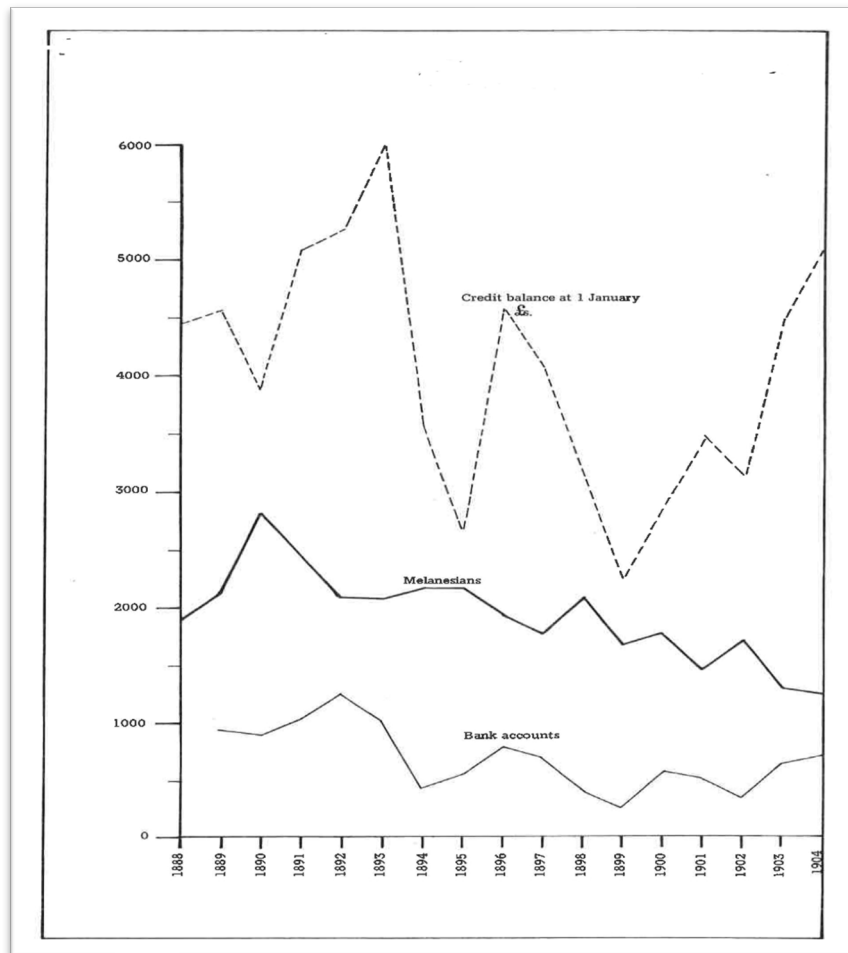
Short-term hiring was also possible, although the practice was constrained by the Acts. Hiring was supposed to require the consent of the official in charge, and the labourer. Plantations hired out labourers on daily rates to small-scale farmers and to other plantations. In the second half of the 1870s, William Sloan & Co. was hiring out labourers on short-term contracts between their various Mackay plantations. This also happened with CSR in later decades, particularly after the subdivision of their Homebush plantation. The rate was affected by market conditions. CSR charged a 25 percent premium on their daily hire rate in the crushing season, only reducing the rate if they had an excess of labour. Transfers and hiring enabled the most efficient use of indentured labour and was seldom to the employee's advantage. The process was always traumatic and sometimes humiliating but was still a transaction distinct from slavery in law and reality.

Although we are dealing with what was clearly exploitation of labour, recruitment and employment was a business—an investment in human capital. There were anti-kidnapping bonds which ships' masters had to pay the Government, the outlay of passage money, employer bonds and levies paid to the Government, wages, and the concomitant costs of maintaining a labour force, which took up a large part of any cane growers' liquid funds. Under the 1880 Act, the original employer paid a £5 return passage bond to the Government, which was not refunded. In 1884, this was altered so that the current employer paid, and the previous employer received their money back. After 1892, the onus was placed back on the original employer. Employers took all of these fees into account when calculating the costs of hiring indentured labourers.

Wages and Money

The different levels of earning by the various categories of labour were outlined earlier. However, 1970s interviews recorded with scores of Islanders leave no doubt that they were firmly convinced that their forebears were invariably paid either nothing or 'two and six a week'. Faith Bandler, the most prominent descendant, always claimed that her father, who worked at Mackay, was never paid. Let us then make a counter-assertion. Collectively, Pacific Islanders in the Queensland labour trade were paid more than half a million pounds, around one third of this at Mackay. Individually, it was quite possible for one Islander to amass 30 to 40 pounds, and to keep the money in the Government Savings Bank, although most of the time-expired labourers never had more than 10 pounds in savings, and large numbers kept very little in cash, converting their money into clothes and other goods. Others

gambled their wages away or spent them on trips to prostitutes. The unfairness of the set £6 a year standard wage, which remained unchanged for 40 years, has never been adequately criticised. Nevertheless, except for a few instances, there is no doubt that they were paid and received accommodation, clothing, food, and basic health care. In the 1890s and 1900s, long-staying Islanders earned up to £24 a year. Some of the wage-earners were women—who were always paid less than men—but once more altering the traditional Pacific exchange dynamics.



Graph 9.6: Melanesian Government Savings Bank deposits at Mackay, 1888–1904.

Source: Based on statistics in annual reports of the Pacific Islands Branch of the Immigration Department. Clive Moore Collection.

Back in the islands, manufactured wealth items were made from stone, wood, shells, feathers, and teeth. Although the items had some of the same qualities as cash, they also had spiritual purposes and were used to provide compensation for breaches of customary behaviour, or major exchanges for whole kin groups. They were also used to obtain building materials and canoe hulls, to make ceremonial payments like dowries for marriages, and for murder rewards and the products used in mortuary feasts. Group payments could be made to provide for individual needs, customary reciprocity binding the receiver and the giver. These exchanges linked people to their ancestors, the ultimate source of *mana* (spiritual power). For some plantation labourers, three years in Queensland was £18, turned into European and Asian industrial artefacts to take home and incorporate into exchange cycles. For others it became money in the bank or hidden in bottles buried in safe places. Items such as Solomon Islands' shell wealth were brought to Australia—usually only short strings of shell wealth to

use in compensation payments to appease ancestors. They began to use the two systems intertwined, just as occurs in the islands today.

Reports of fraudulent non-payment or lower payment of wages are rare and seem to be confined to the early years. There were too many experienced workers, and Magistrates, Inspectors and missionaries, who would report irregularities. An errant employer could not get away with it for long. Nevertheless, non-payment did occur. In 1876, one bankrupt Mackay planter refused to pay his labourers; and in another case from the same year 10 Ambrymese working for two years for a pastoralist over the ranges were suddenly told to leave, received no payment, and had their rations stopped. They wandered towards the coast doing odd jobs for settlers until they reached Mackay and reported their plight to the Magistrate. In 1883, a Government Agent on a labour vessel reported that two Epi Island men said that they had receive only three pounds for 12 months work. New chums often had little understanding of currency and could sometimes be persuaded that the larger the coin the greater its value. They were also swindled by shopkeepers when they changed their coins for trade goods, or their money could be stolen from their huts on plantations and farms. As well, the Islanders had little ability to assess different qualities in merchandise. The thriving 'Kanaka stores' in each sugar town catered predominantly for South Sea Islanders.

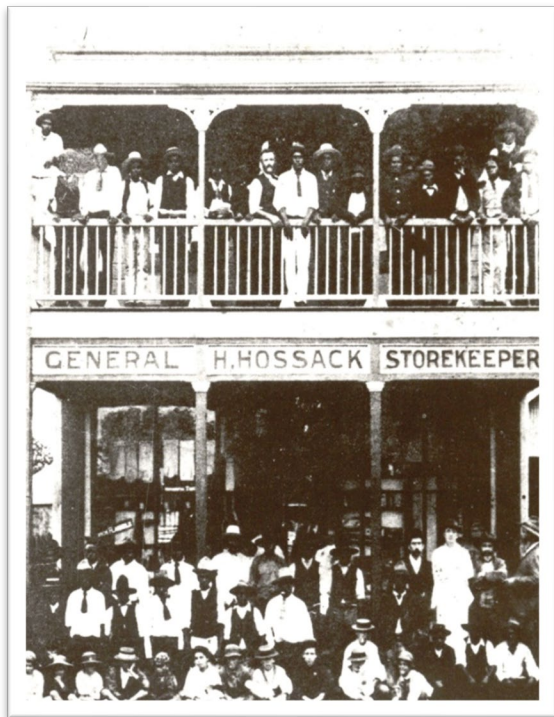


Plate 9.21: Hugh Hossack's store in River Street, Mackay, which catered for Islanders. There were other similar stores in the central business district and in Chinatown.

Source: Clive Moore Collection.

Plate 9.22: When they went to town on a Saturday afternoon or evening, the Islanders did the rounds of the Kanaka stores in the main part of town and Chinatown. In this photograph they are dressed in ill-fitting clothes and holding alarm clocks.

Source: Clive Moore Collection.

In 1894, small-scale cane farms in the district were employing more than 1,200 labourers: 500 Europeans; and more than 700 Mackay Islanders. The plantations employed just over 1,870 labourers: 500 Europeans; 1,070 Islanders; and 260 Chinese, Malays, Javanese, and Japanese. Asians were also leasing land from plantations, estates, and farms.

There is, of course, a wide gap between Farleigh plantation with its 240 Islander labourers, or even Palms Estate plantation with 38, and a typical farm employing two to five. The experiences of Islanders on large plantation and those on small farms would have differed by a corresponding margin. However, there is insufficient evidence to reach firm conclusions about the nature of the differences, and the ways in which Islanders perceived them. A typical Islander was to be found on a plantation, not a small farm, but on the other hand, for every plantation owner or manager in the 1890s, there were more than 30 farmers employing Melanesians. The number of employers increased every year before 1899, accounted for by the increasing number of farmers.

By 1901, the average Islander was re-recruiting or time-expired and cost a planter or farmer around £32 a year to cover all expenses. Between the 1880s and the 1900s, a European farm labourer received between £30 and £50 a year, to which should be added the cost of board and lodging (perhaps £10 to £15 a year). The costs of the two groups were not hugely different, although employing experienced Islanders was still cheaper.

Prosecutions under the Legal System

My research collected 1,598 offenses charged against Melanesians at Mackay between 1871 and 1907. More than 45 percent (729 of the cases) related primarily to their working lives: common assault, using abusive language, breaches of the *Masters and Servants Act*, failure to obey court orders, and vagrancy. These charges were heard before the Police Magistrate or two of more Justices of the Peace, sitting in the Court of Petty Sessions. The Justices of the Peace were often owners or managers of district plantations and pastoral properties employing Islanders. Punishments varied considerably, from being dismissed with a caution, to a fine of five to 20 shillings, or from 24 hours to a maximum of one month in the local lock-up. Sentences of more than 30 days were given only for refusing the bench's order to return to work and were served in Rockhampton prison. Prosecutions under the Acts were more frequent onwards from the 1890s, when the number of Melanesians in the district was declining. Most of the prosecutions in the final years were brought by small-farm operators. Absconding received a heavier sentence than disobedience, and fines became more severe, from a minimum of five shillings to about £5. Fewer served time in the local lock-up as fines were usually paid immediately, an indication that they had access to cash. Time-expired labourers were constantly re-engaging on short contracts and were knowledgeable about the labour market.

There are cases of assaults on employers and overseers, and reports of Islanders being whipped by overseers, and cruelly treated by police. The case of John Spiller being attacked by his labourers was mentioned in Chapter 7. There is a case from 1874 when police arrested Luigi and Mauno for murder of another Islander. They were seen by several witnesses to have been driven handcuffed and whipped along at a run, in a state of exhaustion. The case was dismissed with a caution. There is an 1877 suggestion in *The Queenslander* that whipping was so widespread that it would be better to be legalised and regulated. In the 1870s, Richard Atherton received a warning from Magistrate Goodall after Tatutero and another Islander employed by him claimed that their rations were inadequate, and that Atherton had beaten and kicked them. Goodall told Atherton that they were 'habitually illtreated by yourself'.⁸

Tempers often frayed out in the heat of the cane fields. Some overseers wore revolvers, which brought reactions from the labourers. On Te Kowai plantation in 1887, one overseer got more reaction than he bargained for when he chastised an Islander for throwing cane on the ground instead of handing it to him. The Islander grabbed him and bit his chest.

At Nindaroo on the other side of the river in 1884, Tallygooner attempted to murder an overseer, but was not convicted as the court decided that he had been provoked. In 1896, at Ashburton plantation, two Islanders felt cold on a winter's day and stopped work to light a fire. They were ordered to put out the fire, then a fight ensued. These are only a few of the assaults which occurred.

Although in theory there was equality of employers and employees before the law, in fact this was never so. There were charges brought by Islanders, but only 22 as opposed to 1,598 brought by employers, and most of the Islander-initiated complaints were brought by the Inspectors on their behalf. The number of charges is also nothing like the number of incidents that occurred. For instance, only eight charges against employers for assault were recorded, of which only one was successful. The same applied to employers who breached working conditions, and to cases of police brutality. In the 1890s, vagrancy laws were also used increasingly to force unemployed Islanders either to work or to return home.

Some of the retaliation was secret, skilfully managed, or by intimidation and inuendo. There is an 1897 report of a plantation overseer who was probably murdered by his workers, although the police were unsure. There is oral testimony of an overseer supposedly killed by his labourers in the fields, then hidden until they could dispose of his body. Perhaps more typical was a case recounted to me by a leading Mackay Islander in the 1970s. A Malaitan man working in the fields caught a rat and cooked it over a fire. The overseer watched while the man skinned, gutted, and pushed a stick through the rat, then turned to him and said: 'If you ever come to my island this is what will happen to you.' The overseer got the message and left the man alone.

There were always covert ways to seek redress. Sabotage in the fields and mills was common. Rocks hidden in the cane had a disastrous effect on mill rollers. Acres of cane mysteriously caught fire and mill sheds accidentally went up in smoke. Sometimes fires in cane crops began in the centre of the fields, a sure sign that someone had deliberately set them alight. The hills were farmed as well as the flats. Early drays had no breaks; cut cane was allowed to drag on the ground off the back as a partial brake. It was easy to send the drays careering down the slopes. Later drays had brakes, but a favourite way to sabotage proceedings was to let the brake off. And cane roped in bundles and slung on 'flying-fox' wire ropes coming down from hills was easy to sabotage, scattering the loads.

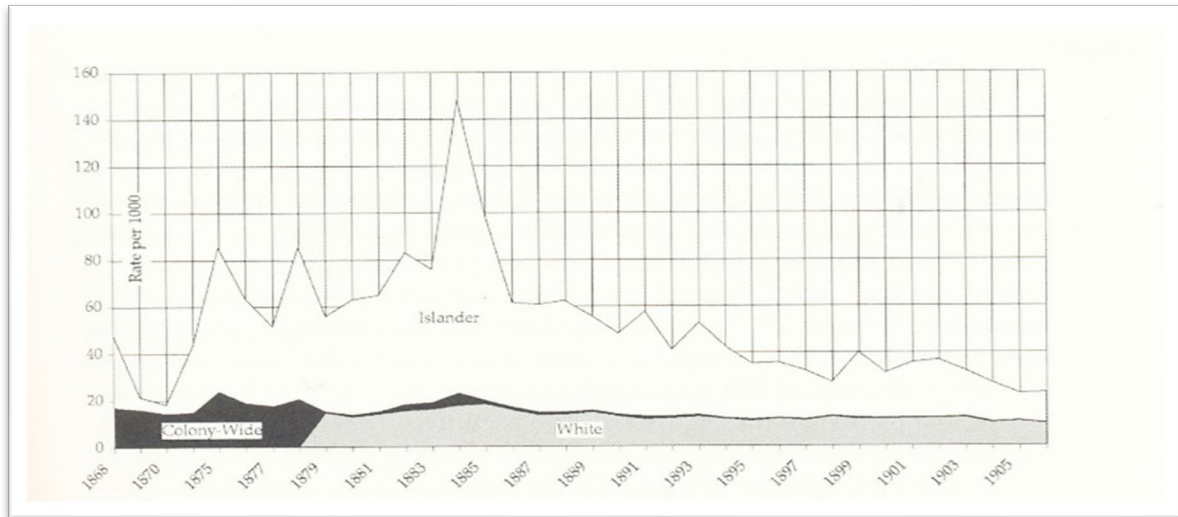
The most famous example of racial conflict occurred in 1884 at the Mackay Racecourse where there was an altercation between Islanders and White spectators, exacerbated by alcohol on both sides. There were deaths and injuries among the Islanders. The Islanders were all sent back to their various plantations and farms, and the road entries to Mackay were guarded for the night.

Health and Mortality

The Melanesian reaction to death and illness is further examined in Chapter 11. The Queensland Government kept statistics on Islander mortality. The mortality levels on voyages were much lower than the rates for Islanders while in Queensland, which were astoundingly high—around 30 percent of indenture agreements, or 25 percent of all Islander employees. For example, between 1873 and 1894, 252 (242 men and 10 women) died on recruiting voyages to and from Queensland, out of a total embarked of 45,916 (42,660 men and 3,256 women), which is a death rate of 0.54 percent. The worst years were 1867 (24 deaths on one ship from dysentery), 1876 (52 deaths during a measles epidemic), 1883 (30 deaths), 1884 (34 deaths). The latter two years were when the New Guinea islands recruits arrived. Overall, compared with European immigrant vessels, these death rates were not excessive. (Although the time spent onboard for European immigrants was longer and the age ranges were larger.)

The death rates on labour trade vessels between 1890 and 1900 was never more than five in a year, and zero in three of the years.

Are the ship statistics accurate? After all, the only government authority on the labour trade ships came from the Government Agents, who could perhaps be bribed. My guess is that there was some falsification of the statistics from the vessels, but even allowing for this possibility, the overall death statistics from the voyages are still low.



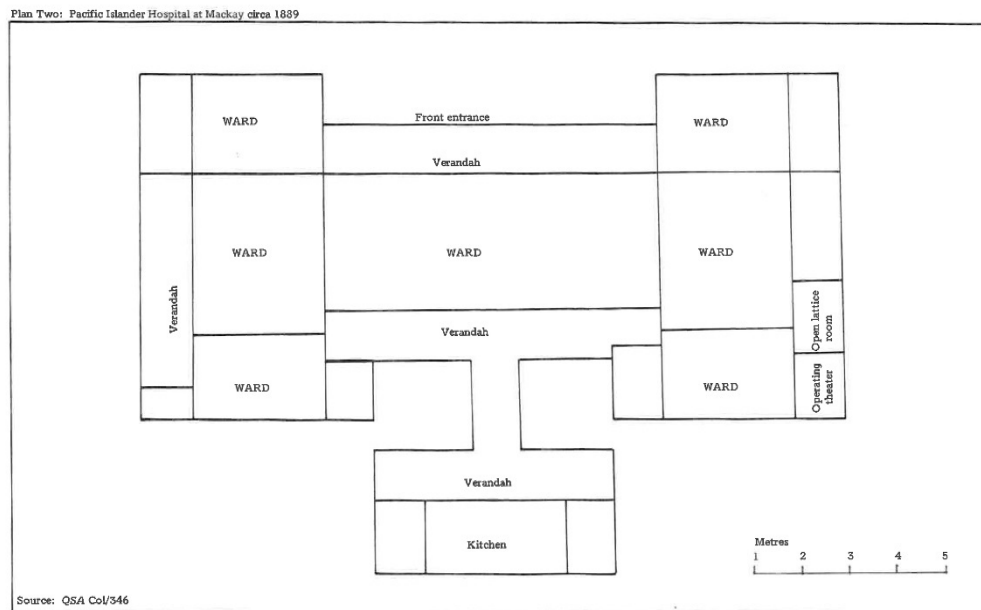
Graph 9.7: Islander mortality in Queensland, 1868–1906.

Source: Banivanua Mar 2007, 51.

Once in the colony, statistics show 14,918 Islander deaths in Queensland between 1870 and 1906, mostly of fit young adult males in their first three years in the colony/state. The death rate was high, primarily caused by lack of immunity to what are now common diseases originating in Europe and Asia. Between 4,000 and 5,000 Islanders died in the Mackay district between 1867 and 1907. The major killers were bacillary dysentery and respiratory tract infections, such as tuberculosis, influenza, pneumonia, bronchitis and pleurisy. The next most common causes of death were diseases of the gastrointestinal tract, infectious diseases (particularly measles), and fevers. After they had survived three years in Australia, the Islanders' mortality rate was like that of other colonists. In 1885, the death rates worried the Queensland Government enough (along with other issues such as a resurgence of kidnapping) to order the closing down of the labour trade, to take effect by the end of 1890. During the 1880s, four Government Hospitals were established for the Islanders, one at Mackay in the grounds of the main hospital. They were closed because the costs, which came from the Pacific Islanders Fund, were too high.

Constantly bringing new labour recruits to Queensland had disastrous consequences, which were quite recognisable by the mid-1870s, and should have been enough evidence to close the labour trade. In Graph 9.7, the spike of deaths in 1875 relates to influenza and measles epidemics in Queensland and the islands. At Mackay in 1875, measles killed 58 Islanders in two months; the Northside was worst hit, with 20 deaths on Foulden alone.⁹ The highest death rate in the colony was between 1883 and 1885, primarily among labour recruits from the New Guinea islands. Large numbers of the New Guinea islands recruits had been kidnapped, and suffered high death rates in Queensland, presumably for psychological and epidemiological reasons. All survivors were returned home at Queensland Government expense, 405 of them on SS *Victoria* in 1885. The lower figures in the late 1880s, 1890s and 1900s are an indication of the number the labourers who were time-expired long-term residents of Queensland. Their levels of immunity were higher. And, as a slight amelioration,

over the forty years, we also need to consider normal mortality (at a lower age than today) which is included within the statistics, although there is no indication of any dramatic change in the 1890s and 1900s, other than declining deaths generally.



Plan 9.1: Plan of the Pacific Islanders hospital at Mackay, 1881–91.

Source: Queensland State Archives, COL/346.

What were the experiences of a new recruit? Particularly if they were from an inland area on a large island, they had probably never left their island before. Leaving their kin was a gut-wrenching experience, the trip on the ship was unpleasant and could be dreadful. Once they arrived in Queensland, usually with no ability to communicate in Pijin English, it was frightening, and they relied on help from other labourers who had been there longer. From 80 different islands and islands groups, if they were lucky, they had *wantoks* ('one talks', others who spoke the same language). Gradually, they understood what was required, and that the minimum period of the indenture contract was three years. They worked out the authority structures on the plantations, both European and Pacific Islander. In their limited spare time, they explored the district and the small urban centres. They gravitated towards the Christian missions established in the 1880s and continued to fulfil customary obligations as best they could. Chapter 11 deals with the pan-Melanesian society that developed.

The South Sea Islanders in the Pioneer Valley formed most of the work force over several decades. Although government-regulated, the system of employment that developed was open to abuse. They began as workers on plantations and pastoral properties, followed by a transition to work on farms in small groups, which they much preferred. In many ways they became a combination of circular migrants and colonists—the lower end of the working class, much to the consternation of White trade unionists who never welcomed them into their midst. They also underwent a series of social and cultural changes as they became more skilled at agricultural work and became Christians and literate. Beside this, they also continued traditional practices relating to the spirit world, reciprocity, and compensation. When thousands were forced to return to their islands in the 1900s, they also used their newly found skills in negotiations with colonial authorities in Queensland and the islands. Although

the evidence for this is firmer for the New Hebrides, it also occurred in the Solomon Islands, in the way they negotiated on plantations, missions and with the colonial Government. The best example is Timothy George Mahratta, one of the leaders of Maasina Rule, a proto-nationalist movement between 1944 and 1952, centred on Malaita Island. Probably the best-educated Solomon Islander at this time, he was born in Queensland in 1892 and attended primary schools at Bundaberg.

Having here introduced the Islanders into the Pioneer Valley scene in the nineteenth century, the next chapter will deal with the European small farmers and the change-over to central milling. Chapters 11 and 12 return to Melanesian society, concentrating on its development in the valley between the 1880s and the 1920s.

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The bibliographies for all chapters are in a separate file.

Endnotes

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³ Archer 1977, 60.

⁴ Davitt 1898, 273; Blake 1892, 80–81.

⁵ *Mackay Mercury* 4 July 1883.

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