

## **COMMUNICATIONS ACROSS THE GENERATIONS**

### **An Australian Post Office History of Queensland**

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The story of communications is one of the great stories of man. It is a proud story which stretches back through the centuries into remote antiquity to the very genesis of the postal service.

From there it traces the emergence of various forms of this postal service in Ancient China, Persia, Rome, Greece, Egypt, to France, Spain, England and other countries to our day. But the real story of communications did not begin until the 19th Century when electricity was harnessed and commanded to carry the messages of man across the nations and the world at the speed of light. Out of the great scientific discoveries of Morse (1791-1872), Wheatstone (1802-1875), Siemens (1823-1883), Maxwell (1831-1879), Bell (1847-1922), Edison (1847-1932) and other great men, a natural communication partner arose—Telecommunications. First came the telegraph in 1844 and on its heels, the telephone in 1875, while wireless and television had to wait until the 20th Century.

To tell this story fully would be impossible to man yet who would want to miss the pathos, dogged determination, courage, sacrifice, vision, ingenuity, disappointments and achievements of the men and women who made it possible? Who can ignore the saga of the moulding of the eternal elements into technological wonders so that man can speak with man across the street or across the world?

Reluctantly, therefore, I have had to select a portion of this fascinating story. However, it is one which will show the illustrious role of the Australian Post Office in providing communications across the generations.

Let us then turn back the clock to the late 1700's and

early 1800's to Sydney Town where the birth of our nation began.

### EARLY POSTAL SERVICES

Early Postal Services in the new-found Colony of New South Wales were practically non-existent for twenty years. Captain Arthur Phillip was too concerned with establishing a settlement, averting a famine and exploring<sup>1</sup> nearby areas for agricultural lands to worry about the postal system. However, some fragments of historical information reveal that in 1803 an official notice was published in the *Sydney Gazette*, 10 July, determining charges for carrying letters by boatmen plying between Sydney and Parramatta.<sup>2</sup> Authority was given to charge two pence for each letter carried providing it was not Government mail which was free.

Apart from these regulations, authority was not exercised in the control of mail matter and colonists were compelled to make the best arrangements they could to have letters conveyed by trading vessels.

On 25 April 1809, a significant event occurred in the Colony which was to change the whole outlook toward postal service. The Government Administrator, Colonel William Paterson, issued a notice in the *Gazette* which read:

"Complaints have been made to the Lieutenant-Governor, that numerous Frauds have been committed by Individuals repairing on board Ships, on their arrival at this Port, and personating others, by which they have obtained possession of Letters and Parcels, to the great injury of those for whom they were intended. The Lieutenant-Governor, in order to prevent the practice of such Frauds in future, has been pleased to establish an office, at which all Parcels and Letters addressed to the Inhabitants of this Colony shall be deposited, previous to their distribution: which Office shall be under the direction of Mr. Isaac Nichols, Assistant to the Naval Officer, who has entered into Security for the faithful discharge of the trust reposed in him."<sup>3</sup>

The order went on to say Nichols was appointed to

"... repair on board, and to require that all letters and Parcels directed to this Colony shall be delivered to him; for which he is to give a Receipt to the Master, Mate, or Supercargo. An office for their reception shall be established at his house ..."

Nichols' new two storey stone house was situated in High Street (now George Street North).<sup>4</sup> Later on, a few doors south, Australia's first newspaper editor, George Howe, printed the *Sydney Gazette* and *New South Wales Advertiser*.<sup>5</sup>

At the time of Nichols' charge he had fairly widespread interests and government activities. Being assistant to the Naval Officer precluded him personally from boarding all ships arriving at Port Phillip. However, the mandate stated "on the arrival of any Vessel, Mr. Nichols (or a Person properly authorised by him) is to repair on board."<sup>6</sup>

Announcing his appointment in the *Sydney Gazette* of 30 April 1809, Nichols said:

"His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor having been pleased to appoint me to receive and attend to the due delivery of all letters and parcels directed to individuals, I beg leave to inform the inhabitants at large that a list of persons to whom such may be directed will always be conspicuously posted in front of my house, which is near to the Hospital Wharf. And I beg leave to add that every possible attention shall be paid to the observance of punctuality, which alone can render such an establishment generally beneficial, or give satisfaction in the performance of its duties to the public's very respectful servant, I. Nichols."

There followed a list of 33 names of persons for whom letters were "on delivery at the offices of the naval officer's assistant at the Hospital Wharf."<sup>7</sup>

Following Nichols taking up duty on 1 January 1810, Governor Major-General Lachlan Macquarie ratified this appointment by Foveaux and Paterson, the two government administrators in charge during the interim between Governor Bligh and himself.

*Isaac Nichols therefore became Australia's first Post-master.*

On 23 June 1810, a further Government order<sup>8</sup> was issued amending somewhat the regulations contained in that of 1809. This order intimated that the office would be established from the 25 June 1810 at Mr. Nichols' house in High Street (later known as Lower George Street). And the charges to be levied by him reduced as follows:

On every letter English or Foreign eight pence (prev. 1 shill)

On every parcel not exceeding 20 lbs. in weight One shilling and sixpence (prev. 2/6).

All parcels over twenty pounds three shillings (prev. 5/-).

For every colonial letter from any part of the territory four pence. "Soldiers' letters and those addressed to their wives, agreeably to the established regulations, to be charged only one penny."

## THE FIRST POST OFFICE

*The first Post Office in Australia is officially recognised as Isaac Nichols' house and the 1809-1810 appointments the beginning of the Australian Post Office.*

The man chosen to represent the Government in all postal matters is certainly a worthy subject of examination at this time.

## ISAAC NICHOLS

Born in Wiltshire, England, Nichols was transported to New South Wales in the ship *Admiral Barrington*. He arrived on 4 October 1791 at the age of 21 years. His crime was a minor offence like so many others of the day, exaggerated by officialdom and punished beyond reason.

Once in the new colony the real character of the man led him towards immortal destiny. His good bearing, obedience and sterling qualities brought him under notice of the Governor. By 1796 his sentence served, he became a free man and was appointed Superintendent of convicts by Governor Hunter, replacing the aged Nicholas Divine.

### "MOST EXEMPLARY CHARACTER"

Governor John Hunter wrote in his despatches—"Being a free man, although formerly a convict, his sentence having expired some years, and being a most exemplary character, he had a small farm, upon which, having no salary, I allowed him, as compensation for the weighty duties he performed, two men. By means of his sobriety and industry, he had saved as much money as enabled him to build himself a comfortable house for the accommodation not only of himself and family but he let it occasionally to strangers; and in a short time this man, by his diligence and sobriety, was prospering."<sup>9</sup>

Nichols married Miss Mary Warren in 1796. Unfortunately, she died by drowning in 1804. The following year he married Miss Rosanna Abrahams. His son, George Robert, who later became the first Australian-born solicitor and member of the Legislative Council, was born to Isaac and Rosanna (called Julian) in their new stone house and store, High Street, in 1809. They had two other sons, Isaac David (born 1808) and Charles Hamilton (born 1810). Prosperity came to this man in the form of positions, property, ships and other assets.

Nichols remained as Postmaster until his death at 49 years, on 8 November 1819,<sup>10</sup> in the house he so much loved. He is buried in the Rookwood Cemetery, Lidcombe, Sydney, New South Wales.

## SECOND POSTMASTER

Mr. George Panton succeeded Mr. Isaac Nichols as Postmaster.<sup>11</sup> Mr. Panton held the office of Wharfinger, transacting both duties in a small apartment on King's Wharf until March 1828, when accommodation was provided for postal work in a small office in Bent Street.<sup>12</sup> He died in April 1829.

## NEW SOUTH WALES POST OFFICE

### Established as a Government Department (1828)

The Post Office in New South Wales was established a Government Department in March 1828. Antecedent to this date it was carried on as a private arrangement. There were not, however, any Inland posts and the Office appears to have been chiefly made use of by the public as the medium for transmitting and receiving their correspondence with England, the neighbouring Colonies, also Foreign Parts, for which accommodation, moderate Charges—

All Colonial letters 4d. Parcels not exceeding 20 lbs in wt. 1s.6d.

English and Foreign 8d. Parcels not exceeding 20 lbs. in wt. 3s.0d.

Soldiers' Letters 1d.

varying in amount, were made by the Postmaster (no law on the subject then existing) and allowed by the Governor as a remuneration to the former for his trouble.<sup>13</sup> There appears to be some anomaly here as Isaac Nichols' appointment was by Government Gazette and surely this was hardly a "private arrangement".

However, Mr. Panton was the last "private" Postmaster in Sydney and on the formation of the Post Office, was officially appointed Principal Postmaster. A Clerk and Letter Carrier positions were created although no record appears available on who was appointed in the two positions.<sup>14</sup>

By then Post Offices had been established at Parramatta, Windsor, Penrith, Liverpool, Campbelltown, Bathurst and Newcastle.<sup>15</sup>

Up to this time the Mounted Police had carried mail at no cost to the Post Office.<sup>16</sup>

## FIRST POSTMASTER-GENERAL

Upon the death of the first Official Postmaster, Mr. Panton, Mr. James Raymond was appointed as Principal Postmaster. That was in April 1829. His only commission was a letter from Governor Darling informing him of his appointment which was subsequently gazetted and approved

by the Secretary of State. His salary was the high sum of £400 per annum.

The title of Postmaster-General was first conferred on Raymond by Governor Sir R. Bourke in June 1835, when a revision of the rates of postage occurred. Mr. Raymond's salary was increased to £500 on 1 January 1836.<sup>17</sup>

Now that we have seen the establishment of the Post Office in the "mother" State, we turn our attention northwards to Moreton Bay then part of the territory of New South Wales.

The first knowledge of this area, at least by a European Navigator, was recorded in Captain James Cook's journal of 1770—

"16 May—on the north side of Point Lookout the shore forms a wide, open bay, which I called Moreton's Bay, in the bottom of which the land is so low that I could but just see it from the topmast head."

He did not enter the bay but sailed past with the prevailing winds.

### **CAPTAIN FLINDERS' EXPLORATION**

The next explorer on the scene was Captain Matthew Flinders 29 years later.<sup>18</sup>

He states in his journal for the year 1799—

"... his Excellency accepted a proposition to explore Glasshouse and Hervey Bays—two large openings to the northward, of which the entrances only were known. I had hopes of finding a considerable river . . ."

On the 14 July 1799 he was in the sloop *Norfolk* off the islands of Moreton Bay. However, he missed the river's mouth and incorrectly reported none of importance, although he did name Red Cliff Point (now Woody Point).<sup>19</sup>

### **DISCOVERY OF BRISBANE RIVER**

It was the third party headed by John Oxley (Surveyor-General of Lands, N.S.W.) in 1823 who discovered the Brisbane River. He left Sydney in the cutter *Mermaid* on 23 October 1823<sup>20</sup> to "Survey Port Curtis, Moreton Bay and Port Bowen with a view to forming convict settlements there." However, he owes much of his success to shipwrecked timber-getters, Thomas Pamphlett who, with his two companions, John Finnegan and Richard Parsons, had wandered around the shores of Moreton Bay and "went up a river which they found to be fresh at some distance from its mouth". Oxley entered this stream at 8 a.m. on 2 December 1823 and explored up the river for many miles.<sup>21</sup>

His report on the area on his return to Sydney was highly

favourable to the authorities who wished to establish a penal colony for the worst type of felons from the crowded, stinking gaols at Port Phillip.

### FIRST SETTLEMENT AT REDCLIFFE

It was not until 1st September 1824<sup>22</sup> that the first contingent of convicts and their guards left for northern waters and Red Cliff Point, the spot recommended by Oxley.

The journey was made in the brig *Amity*. On board were John Oxley, Lieutenant Miller, a small detachment of the 40th Regiment and their wives, 29 convicts and tradesmen, provisions, stock and plants enough to start a new settlement.<sup>23</sup> They arrived at Redcliffe at 7 a.m. on 13 September 1824 and Oxley, with the agreement of Miller, selected a site near permanent water, rich soil, plentiful timber and grass.

The next day they planned the layout of the settlement and the most suitable locations for the buildings.

The first buildings erected were "humpies"—slab huts with bark roofs. One writer says the convicts discovered good quality clay and a brick kiln was erected which provided bricks for building construction for a short period.<sup>24</sup>

### MOVE TO BRISBANE IN 1824/25

During the first few weeks of Redcliffe's history, Oxley continued to survey the Brisbane River, aided by Allan Cunningham. On their return, they discovered great dissatisfaction with the site, and it was decided to move the settlement up the Brisbane River. However, approval was only obtained after the visit of Sir Thomas Brisbane, Governor of New South Wales, in November 1824. With the Governor were the first Chief Justice of the Colony, Sir Francis Forbes, John Oxley, McArthur and Francis Stephen. The river site was chosen for permanent settlement and named Brisbane after the river on which it stood. Sir Francis had suggested Edinglassie, after his Scottish town, but Oxley disagreed and recommended Brisbane after the river.<sup>25</sup>

It was decided to break camp in late 1824 or early 1825 and move up the Brisbane River to land near the present site of the Customs House. The party moved south until they reached the river again. There they pitched their tents on the site now occupied by William Street and adjacent land. At the time there were 45 male and 2 female convicts. Thus Brisbane Town was born the year George IV was on the British throne, and George Stephenson drove the first steam locomotive from Stockton to Darlington at 12 m.p.h.

## MAILS BY SHIP

In the early days of the settlement, the few soldiers and convicts' letters, and official correspondence were carried by small sailing vessels, which plied between Sydney and Brisbane at infrequent intervals. The Military was in charge of these mails as Moreton Bay was a military establishment. It is believed that the first "Post Office" in Brisbane was conducted in the Commissariat Stores Building (erected 1829) near the Government Wharf (King's, later Queen's Wharf) (see Plan of Brisbane Town—Moreton Bay 1839 map for location of Commissariat Building). No doubt this was only a small room or bench to handle the few items of "military mail".

The first steamship, ss *James Watt*, arrived in Moreton Bay in 1837 from Sydney, but did not negotiate the Brisbane River. She had Andrew Petrie, his wife, two sons and daughter aboard. The passengers disembarked at Dunwich and were brought up the river in the pilot boat.<sup>26</sup> Mails were probably carried aboard this vessel, as every opportunity was taken by the Postal Authorities to develop and improve communications.

## FIRST POST OFFICES

With the growth of the settlement, there were 1,066 convicts and 175 soldiers in December 1831. A Post Office was opened at Moreton Bay in 1834.<sup>27</sup>

Mr. Allman, a military officer, was appointed Deputy Postmaster, Moreton Bay. It was the first official move towards the establishment of regularity in the postal affairs of the settlement. At this time the contract system of carriage of mail superseded the conveyance by the Police.

It is interesting to note that on 3 June 1835 a letter was received in Moreton Bay from the Colonial Secretary "requesting report respecting the application of the Inhabitants of Brisbane and Bligh for the establishment of a Post Office."<sup>28</sup>

## FREE SETTLEMENT

Not too long after Petrie's arrival the few free men living in Moreton Bay District and a number in Sydney were agitating for greater freedom. The first free settlers were George Thorn at Limestone Plains in 1835,<sup>29</sup> and Andrew Petrie at Brisbane,<sup>30</sup> but they were Government Officials. The next free settlers were a group of Gossner<sup>31</sup> Missionaries (Lutheran) who settled at German Station in March 1838.<sup>32</sup> Later it was to be known as Nundah. They were brought out by the indomitable Dr. John Dunmore Lang.

They were not the only ones interested in the Moreton Bay District. Alan Cunningham's discovery of the rich Darling Downs and the gap from the coast in 1827 had "opened many eyes" to the possibilities beyond the mountains and the coast. Many were waiting for an opportunity to pioneer the rich land of Northern New South Wales.

It was a welcome day for them when the penal settlement at Moreton Bay was closed officially on 5 May 1839.<sup>33</sup> (However, a few convicts remained until March 1842 as they were engaged on building and road maintenance.) But no official sanction had been given at the time for sale of Crown Land. Nevertheless, some could not wait and in the year 1840 the settlement of the Downs by Patrick Leslie and others took place. Leslie took up Toolburra, on the Condamine River on 20 March; his brother, George, Canning Downs on 12 April and Ernest E. Dalrymple on Talgai, also on 12 April.<sup>34</sup>

However, at last the official declaration of free settlement was made on 10 February 1842 and notified in the Government Gazette.<sup>35</sup> This was followed by proclamation "By His Excellency's Command" on 15 April 1842 in which "Sale of Town Allotments at Moreton Bay at eleven o'clock on Thursday, the 14th day of July next, the Colonial Secretary will put up to auction at the Colonial Treasury, in the Town of Brisbane, on terms authorised by Government; the upset price of each Allotment being the rate of £100 per acre."

### **GROWTH OF POST OFFICE—EARLY POSTMASTERS**

Not only did 1842 mean a great deal to the future new State in its developing stage, but side by side the Post Office was growing too. Mr. William Whyte, Clerk of Petty Sessions, was appointed in 1842 as the first non-military Postmaster, a position which he held until his death on 18 February 1844.<sup>36</sup> History does not reveal her secrets on the subject of the location of the early Post Office he conducted, but in a plan of North and South Brisbane, prepared by Mr. H. N. Wade, "Post O" is written on the block at the corner of Queen and George Streets, later known as Wilkin-son's Corner.

Mr. Whyte's successor was Mr. George Miller Slade, formerly Paymaster 60th Rifles, appointed 20 August 1844 and died in 1848.<sup>37</sup> He was replaced by Mr. William A. Brown, first Sheriff of Queensland and at the time, Clerk of Petty Sessions.<sup>38</sup> On Mr. Brown's appointment as full-time C.P.S. in 1852, *Captain J. E. Barney was appointed as the first full-time Postmaster.*<sup>39</sup> The Post Office at that time was

in a single storey building part of the Superintendent of Convicts' quarters<sup>40</sup> (site, formerly Edwards and Lambs, is now Woolworths, Upper Queen Street). This building became the first General Post Office between April-May 1860.<sup>41</sup> Captain Barney died on 25 November 1855, and his wife appointed Postmistress the next day. She became Queensland's first official Postmistress and also Postmistress of a G.P.O. Mrs. Barney retired with a gratuity of £2,000 in 1863 and died on 5 July 1883.<sup>42</sup> She is buried at Toowong Cemetery.<sup>43</sup>

### EARLY MAIL STEAMERS

In the meantime, the 1840's was the beginning of a new era for this State. Only a short time before the first steamship to arrive from England had berthed in Moreton Bay;<sup>44</sup> then the iron-built steamers *Rose*, *Shamrock* and *Thistle* arrived in Sydney in 1841 or soon afterwards, for the Hunter River Steam Navigation Company which commenced a mail run to Brisbane from Sydney in 1842. The story behind the arrival of these famous paddle-wheel iron steamers I think, is well worth the telling, especially as Mr. John Fyfe, the Marine Engineer who built the engines of the *Rose*, was my great-great-grandfather. He originally came from Scotland, and made a name for himself in marine engineering in this country.

### JOHN FYFE—ENGINEER OF "ROSE"

Mr. Fyfe from Rutherglen, a suburb of Glasgow, went to London in 1839 "and obtained employment at Millwall, in the works of Messrs. Fairbairn & Co., who were under contract to supply a new iron steamer, for the Hunter River Steam Navigation, which had been formed the previous year in Sydney, New South Wales. Mr. Fyfe was employed constructing the engines for this vessel, completed in 1840, and named the *Rose*, 172 tons register, and in October of that year was engaged to proceed with her under steam, to Sydney. The voyage was completed in five months and twenty days, and the vessel entered the Sydney Heads on the 6 April 1841, being the first new steamer that had come to the land of Australia, and was also the first vessel owned by the H.R.S.N. Co.; the *Thistle* and the *Shamrock* (similar vessels) soon followed. Mr. Fyfe continued engineer of the *Rose*, trading to Newcastle and the Hunter River district until October 1845."<sup>45</sup> The *Rose* was actually the first iron-built steamer to arrive in Australia.<sup>46</sup> *Shamrock* made regular trips to Brisbane from Sydney after her arrival in Aus-

tralia soon after the *Rose*, and carried regular mail shipments.<sup>47</sup>

John Fyfe, later to become the first President of the Engineering Association of New South Wales, built the engines of the steamer *Raven* and altered the engines of the *James Watt*.<sup>48</sup>

It seemed inevitable that a man who had so much to do with ships should come in contact with another sea-faring man who features in this story. It was not long after Mr. Fyfe's contact with northern mariners that he met Captain John Nicol Rea. Nor was it very long before the tall sea captain caught the eye and won the heart of John Fyfe's eldest daughter, Janet. They married and that is how I happened to appear on the scene 80 years later.<sup>49</sup>

### FIRST INLAND MAIL

Ipswich and Drayton were the first two country towns to receive inland mail in the Moreton Bay Colony. So let us examine these two earliest towns. The limestone hills of Ipswich were discovered by Captain Patrick Logan in 1826 and he established Limestone Station on 7 June 1827.<sup>50</sup> The same year Limestone Plains cattle station was started, a brick cottage erected in 1829, and George Thorn appointed superintendent of the "cattle establishment" in 1835. The station was a branch convict settlement of Brisbane. Limestone was named Ipswich in 1843 and the same year allotments were sold. George Thorn purchased the first two pieces at £12.5.3.<sup>51</sup>

People began to settle in the town and in 1846 it had a population of 103.<sup>52</sup>

### FIRST IPSWICH POSTMASTER

In a letter dated 27 December 1845, addressed to Mr. W. Horseman, Postmaster, Ipswich, James Raymond, Postmaster-General, G.P.O. Sydney (as Ipswich was in the Colony of New South Wales) advised the Government had approved of the establishment of Post Offices at Ipswich and Darling Downs from 1 January 1846, viz.:

"Sir,

The Governor having been pleased to approve of the establishment of a Post to Ipswich and Darling Downs from the 1st of the ensuing year the following will be the arrangement for the exchange of Mails with your office.

To leave Brisbane on the 1st and 15 of each month arrive at Ipswich the same days and at Darling Downs on the 3rd and 17 of every month.

To leave Darling Downs on the 10 and 25 of each month and Ipswich on the 12 and 27 arriving at Brisbane on the same days.

And I trust you will be particular in charging the full rate from your office and in adding any additional postage chargeable on letters delivered to your office according to the Scale herewith and in accordance with the 24 and 25 paragraphs of the Post Office Regulations.

It will be only requisite for you to exchange mails with Darling Downs and Brisbane putting all letters for Sydney and other places in the Mail Bag for Brisbane.

I am Sir,

Your obedient servant,

Postmaster-General.”<sup>54</sup>

In the Government Gazette of 2 January 1846 the following notice appeared:

#### “NEW POST OFFICES

Notice is hereby given, that His Excellency the Governor having been pleased to approve of the establishment of Post Offices at the following places, viz.:

Ipswich, situated 25 miles from Brisbane, and Darling Downs, situated 90 miles from the same Township.

Parties wishing to receive their communication through either of these Post Offices are advised to caution their correspondents to address their letters and newspapers to the place distinctly, by its name, and so to provide against the chance of their being forwarded to any adjacent Post Office of the same Country or District.

JAMES RAYMOND,  
Postmaster-General.”<sup>54</sup>

The notice came at a time when according to a statement by a local resident, William Handcock, “Ipswich is still going ahead—it will yet be the downfall of Paris”. Taverns, inns, a blacksmith and wheelwright and other businesses provided accommodation, “good dinners, good stabling and careful attention for horses”. Wool was sent to Brisbane by river on the ss *Experiment*.

Ipswich was the nearest and largest township to the Darling Downs. Toowoomba did not exist at the time.

The growing importance of Ipswich and Drayton soon reached the officials of the Postal Administration in Sydney, New South Wales, and careful analysis of various reports convinced Postmaster-General Raymond of the need to establish post offices outside of Brisbane in the rapidly developing pastoral centres.

## TENDERS FOR POSTAL LINES

Apparently it was the establishment of these two offices which James Raymond had in mind when he called tenders for a postal line in the Moreton Bay district.<sup>55</sup> The notice said "To and from Brisbane and Alford's Inn, Darling Downs" with the mails to be carried once a fortnight.

Settlements outside of Brisbane at Ipswich and on the Downs had brought about this need to establish lines of communication with Brisbane Town and thence to Sydney and overseas. The price of wool, news of British Wars in Africa and India, shipping time tables and family happenings, was wanted by those intrepid pioneers. What matter if the news was a little stale, at least it was contact with the outside world and for the moment this was all that mattered. Now to the other centre, Drayton.

## DRAYTON POST OFFICE

Mr. Isaac Titterton was granted the contract to carry the mail from Brisbane in 1846. His destination was Thomas Alford's store and Post Office on the Darling Downs (later Drayton).<sup>56</sup> Unfortunately, Mr. Titterton, a Councillor for Macquarie Ward in Sydney in 1845 and 1846, also undertook to run a four-horse coach daily from Sydney to Campbelltown for £150 per annum, and was not able to carry out his contract to carry mail between Brisbane and Darling Downs by horseback for £110 per annum. Other arrangements had to be made and records do not reveal who it was, that conducted the run.

Dr. F. W. S. Cumbræ-Stewart, in "The Moreton Bay Postal System" states: "The road to Drayton was about as bad as a road could be. Travellers leaving Brisbane for the Darling Downs could cross the Brisbane River either by the Kangaroo Point Ferry, or the Ferry to South Brisbane. The track ran through Eight Mile Plains, past Woogaroo,<sup>57</sup> where Dr. Simpson, the Crown Lands Commissioner, lived, to Limestone, now Ipswich. Thence the way went on through Rosewood, Laidley Plains, Gatton, part of Tent Hill, Grant-ham and Helidon. From thence the old road crossed the Lockyer up a steep spier into a place called Darkey Flat, at which place there was a military station; for in those days the blacks were so bad that all drays had to be escorted through the scrub by soldiers. The road up the range was very steep and finally ran into Drayton, or as it was then called, "The Springs".

From Drayton the road ran across the Downs past Cambooya, to Warwick and Armidale, where there had been a post office and communication with Sydney since 1843."<sup>58</sup>

Of course at the time of the first mail run in 1846 settlement was very sparse or non-existent along the route described.

### EARLY BEGINNING OF DRAYTON

It is noteworthy that Drayton, the terminal of Queensland's first inland mail service had an interesting beginning:

"Originally 'The Swamp' (*sic*) to which afterwards the name Drayton was given. Little is generally known as to its origin which dates back to 1842; but after the discovery of the Toll Bar Road, about six weeks later, it became a camping place for all the teams travelling north, south and west."<sup>59</sup>

The name Drayton is alleged to be a corruption of Dray Town, so named because of the drays which congregated there in early days.

Archibald Meston in his book *Queensland's Towns, Districts and Stations*, states that on 2 September 1844, Crown Lands Ranger Rolleston wrote to the Colonial Secretary, asking if he were to make a charge of business licences on vacant lands at a place called The Springs, under the main range on the high road to Moreton Bay. He mentioned that a blacksmith had established himself there; that a shoemaker was putting up a hut, and that he anticipated applications from other tradesmen.

The Commissioner also reported on 1 January 1845:

"that a building licence for 'house and premises' had been granted to Thomas Alford, of 'The Springs'; and a fortnight later he advised the Colonial Secretary of the inauguration of the first regular mail service between 'The Springs' and Moreton Bay . . ."<sup>60</sup>

At the time there were 400 people living on the Darling Downs.

The Alford family did not remain very long in Drayton and Mr. and Mrs. Lord erected a Store which became the Post Office for many years.

### NEW SOUTH WALES POSTAL LINE EXTENSION

The Sydney-Armidale postal line was extended through Warwick to Drayton in 1847.<sup>61</sup> Brisbane was now in touch with Sydney on a regular basis by the inland route. A Post Office was established at George and Walter Leslie's Canning Downs a little earlier than 7 January 1848 (probably 1 January) when an official announcement was made in the *Sydney Gazette*. This was the beginning of the Post Office at Warwick and was another communication outpost for the settlers.

## EARLY MAIL CONTRACTORS

The first mention of the mail contractor for this route was in the Government Gazette 28 January 1848, when tenders were accepted from John Gill and Abraham Adell for a fortnightly service on horseback between Armidale, Warwick, Darling Downs (Drayton) and Brisbane, via Ipswich, for £346 per annum.<sup>62</sup>

What a ride this service was! Regrettably, there appears to be little else on the subject than the awarding of the contract.

Most of these contractors were a fine body of men, great horsemen and skilled with bushcraft; *they had to be to survive*.

One aspect of the Mail Contract system was that in 1845 objections were raised to the one-year term of contract because it was stated, it did not give the contractor sufficient time to remunerate himself for preliminary expenses.<sup>63</sup> Later a three-year term was arranged.

## FURTHER EXTENSIONS

In 1849 Post Offices were established at Callandoon, Gayndah and Maryborough,<sup>64</sup> showing the trend of settlement towards the north and further west. The following year Post Offices were opened at Goodes Inn, Burnett River now Nanango, and Woongaroo (Goodna).<sup>65</sup> New postal lines linked Drayton and Gayndah, Warialda and Callandoon.<sup>66</sup>

The postal lines reached out to wherever squatters, pioneers, and others were domiciled. It was a lone horseman with his saddle bag filled with letters and packets who brought comfort to these men and women in the lonely and isolated homesteads.

These early mail services continued to increase until the routes criss-crossed the young State born on 10 December 1859, with Sir George Ferguson Bowen as its first Governor. Postal lines soon stretched from the border to the gulf and from the coast to the Cooper.

## EARLY COACH SERVICES

The story of the Mail Services of Queensland would be only partly complete without the next stage of development, the horse-drawn mail coaches.

Perhaps nothing has captured the imagination of people from every walk of life in most countries of the world, more than the Cobb & Co. coaches. While it is true a real empire of coach lines was started by Freeman Cobb<sup>67</sup> and three

partners in Melbourne in 1853 and built up by James Rutherford<sup>68</sup> and others, this was by no means the only company operating passenger and mail services.

One record<sup>69</sup> states "at the beginning of September 1851, a four horse coach began a service between Ipswich and Drayton. It left Ipswich on Tuesdays and Saturdays and Drayton on Mondays and Fridays; the single fare was £2. It was the intention to extend the service to Brisbane, as soon as the road to Ipswich was made usable." Apparently this was completed or expected to be completed within a year or two because: Tenders for the carrying of the mail between Brisbane, Ipswich and Drayton were invited to be lodged at the Colonial Secretary's Office, Sydney, by 13 September 1852.<sup>70</sup> The mail was required to be carried by a four-horse carriage licensed to carry four persons. The term of the contract was for one, two or three years from 1 January 1853.

Later James Collins had the mail coach run between Brisbane and Ipswich; leaving daily from McIntyre's Hotel, South Brisbane. Joseph Booth next had the service as Collins' business failed.<sup>71</sup>

Other contractors were G. Williams, James Woods, and the last one before Cobb & Co. took over was John Nolan, who owned the Royal Mail Hotel in Stanley Street, South Brisbane.<sup>72</sup>

Other contractors even after the entry of Cobb & Co. on the scene in 1865 were operating in many parts of the State. A two coach run began in 1866 between Maryborough and Gayndah<sup>73</sup> while a firm of Williams and a partner carried mail from Miles to Taroom, via Wallan, in 1887.<sup>74</sup>

The official Postmaster-General's Report to Parliament for 1864 shows the following contracts for Mail Service in Queensland:

"M.S.2 from and to Brisbane and Ipswich—twice a day (Sunday excepted)—Coach 24 miles.

M.S.7 from and to Ipswich, Toowoomba, and Drayton—thrice a week—Coach 64 miles."

These two services were the only coach contracts amongst the 42 mail services which covered a total of 428,224 miles in a year over a route distance of 4,538 miles.

### COBB & CO. SERVICES

Queensland's first Postmaster-General Thomas L. Murray-Prior in his fourth report to Parliament dated 20 February 1866 for the year 1865 stated—

"The tenders of the well-known mail contractors, Messrs. Cobb and Co., having been accepted for the ser-

vices between Ipswich and Brisbane and Grandchester and Toowoomba, very commodious coaches have been placed on these lines. I fear, however, that the coaches used between Brisbane and Ipswich may prove too heavy during wet weather.

The mails from Brisbane to Toowoomba are now conveyed through in one day. Mails are also carried by coach three times instead of twice a week between Toowoomba and Dalby; twice a week instead of once a week between Dalby and Condamine; and a vehicle will be substituted for the horse conveyance thence to Roma."

### **FIRST QUEENSLAND RUN**

It was Mr. H. Barnes (Road Manager and Driver) who came to Brisbane to inspect the route and later brought 16 coaches for the new run from the Cobb & Co. factory at Bathurst. He opened the line in 1865 by driving a coach and team of 12 splendid horses after being strapped to the box seat<sup>75</sup> because of the shocking state of the road. The Queensland Manager for the firm was Mr. H. T. Millie. Their first stables were in Albert Street, Brisbane (present site of the Metro Theatre).<sup>76</sup>

Cobb & Co. bought out the coach line from Bigges Camp (Grandchester) to Toowoomba and also the Toowoomba to Dalby run owned by Mrs. Hartley of the Jondaryan Hotel,<sup>77</sup> so establishing themselves very early in the new transport business.

The advent of the steam railway to Queensland was to give impetus to Cobb & Co. business at first but ultimately the railway became both ally and foe and finally with the motor vehicle sounded the death knell of this romantic service.

### **FIRST RAILWAY LINE**

The first Railway Line in Queensland was opened between Ipswich and Bigges Camp (Grandchester) on 31 July 1865—a distance of 21½ miles.<sup>78</sup>

### **RAIL EXTENSION**

The Cobb & Co. Services on this route were further reduced as the railway line was extended to Gatton by 1 June 1866, Helidon 31 July 1866, and by 12 April 1867, it was opened to Toowoomba.<sup>79</sup> However, it was not until July 1876 after the Indooroopilly Bridge was completed that uninterrupted rail communication between Brisbane and Ipswich was effected.<sup>80</sup> During this time the Cobb & Co coaches had carried thousands of passengers and many tons of mail, goods and cargo.

### COBB & CO. ROUTES

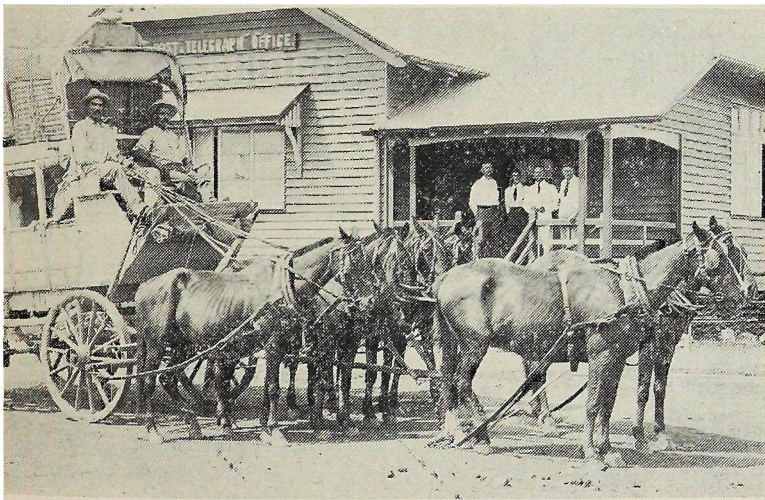
In 1870 Cobb & Co. coaches ran between Brisbane and Ipswich, Brisbane and Gympie, Brisbane and Pimpama (near Southport), Warwick and Tenterfield, N.S.W., and between Dalby, Condamine and Roma.<sup>81</sup> On some of these routes they carried the mails, but it is difficult from the records to establish exactly what mail subsidies Cobb & Co. received, as the contract periods for the various lines overlapped.

The Queensland business had been converted into a public company in August 1881, under the title of Cobb & Co. Ltd., Queensland. Nominal capital was £50,000 (\$100,000) in 500 shares of £100 (\$200) each, of which 300 shares were issued fully paid. James Rutherford was the Governing Director, and he and W. R. Hall were the principal shareholders.<sup>82</sup>

By 1883 Cobb & Co.'s operations were on a gigantic scale. The total length of the lines operated in Queensland was over 4,000 miles and using 3,000 horses.<sup>83</sup> It was possible to travel from Normanton on the Gulf of Carpentaria or Port Douglas on the north coast of Queensland all the way to northern Victoria and then into South Australia by Cobb & Co. coaches.

### COACH CONSTRUCTION

One feature of the company which undoubtedly added to its success, was the special "Yankee" or Concord coaches



Cobb and Co. Coaches (Situation unknown)

*By Courtesy Post Office Historical Archives.*

costing £600 each which, although very high priced, were worth every penny. Where heavier coaches bumped and jolted their way slowly over great ruts and roots in the road, giving the passengers a terrific shaking, the light Yankee coaches with improved leather suspension travelled much faster and smoother. True, they rolled like a ship at times and were sometimes called "ships of the west". But for passengers, they opened up a new era of travel. Of course, there were variations to the coaches as required by the route and availability of equipment.

Several interesting features were the use of "5s" or "6s"—two horses in front (lead team) and three or four behind them (wheel team) pulling the coach. Later on, trailers were also used and it was not unusual to see bags of chaff or grain, wicker baskets of mail, and many other commodities as well as a host of passengers all aboard (see photo Coach in front of P & T Office).

C. Daley described it well when he refers to the mighty day of Cobb's coaches:

*Behind six foaming horses,  
and lit with flashing lamps,  
Old Cobb & Co., in Royal State  
Went dashing through the camps.*

### NEW FACTORY

In 1886 all Cobb & Co's coaches were built in a factory at Charleville, having moved 500 miles from the coach and buggy factory at Petrie Bight, Brisbane, because it was drier at Charleville and more suitable for coach construction.<sup>84</sup> Even the Bathurst factory was closed in preference to the Queensland location. The Charleville built coach was typically Australian, not only because it was designed for Australian conditions, but also in that it reached its final form after motor vehicles had appeared on the roads.<sup>85</sup> The modified coaches built at the Charleville factory were painted a gleaming white all over, relieved by red lettering, and this colour for the Queensland coaches was retained until the end. A useful improvement also incorporated in the Charleville coach was a folding hood over the box seat, a necessity in Queensland where shade temperatures often reached above the one hundred degree mark. Another provision was a canvas apron that could be pulled up over the legs as a protection from rain and cold. Two standard sizes were evolved, one licensed to carry eight passengers and another fourteen. One description of the coach which ran between Richmond and Cloncurry went like this:

"It was loaded for six feet above its roof with parcels—

post, of beef and tinned meat and hams, trace chains and whisky, and clothing and flat-irons, so making the Commonwealth mails a delivery cart for Brisbane storekeepers; although in drought time it was almost an indispensable service to outback settlers. From four on Tuesday morning to until six o'clock on Wednesday night, the great seven-horsed coach lumbered across the interminable plain—the top of its load fifteen feet above the earth; rolling over the central sea of waving grass.”<sup>86</sup>

Despite their height, these coaches were remarkably steady. They ran with a fore-and-aft rocking motion; but due to the placement of the wheels on wide axles well outside the body, their lateral stability was great. The Charleville coach was the most scientifically built horse vehicle known.

### **CONTRACT PENALTY CLAUSES**

The coaches had to keep to a fairly tight schedule and had to maintain a good average mileage. For example, a clause in the conditions of the Post Office mail contracts included: “a fine of ten shillings for every ten minutes late in their time of arrival, and the same amount of fine if not at the Post Office ready to start at the time appointed.”<sup>87</sup>

### **COACHING INNS**

But with a State the size of Queensland there were literally thousands of miles of country to traverse and the proliferation of the Coach lines helped considerably in the pioneering of the vast country. A feature of the coaching era was the establishment, under Cobb & Co. auspices, of inns at stages along the routes for the convenience and comfort of passengers and also for a change of horses. Some of these buildings still exist today.<sup>88</sup> Many towns in Queensland, it is believed, sprang up because they were “one day’s Coach trip” apart—about 100 miles.

The Post Office was satisfied with their efforts because not only did it continue to renew and increase the number of contracts for mail carriage but the Postmaster-General reported “the contracts of the firm Cobb & Co. by coach . . . have been carried out with greatest regularity”.<sup>89</sup>

### **END OF THE COACH DAYS**

Unfortunately the legend-making days of Cobb & Co. had to end. Trains and motor vehicles were intruding upon the domain of the horse-drawn vehicle—the age of steel was upon us and sentiment was no barrier to progress.

The final winding-up scenes took place in Queensland, the

last stronghold. The old drivers to at last lay down their reins were:

George Reardon who drove Cobb & Co's last coach on the Mitchell-St. George run in 1918.

Joe Clarke on the St. George-Bollon run 1920.

Charlie Egan who drove Cobb's last coach on the Mitchell-Bollon run 1920.

Bill McDonald who drove Cobb's last coach on the St. George-Thallon run.

Ted Palmer and Billy White on the Charleville-Augathella-Tambo run 1921.

Massey Hood and Ollie York on the Cunnamulla-Thargomindah run 1922.

Fred Thompson who drove the last Cobb & Co. Coach in Australia on the Yuleba-Surat run in 1924.<sup>90</sup>

Ernie Richard, who died in June 1968, was the last of Cobb's drivers. He was the youngest driver starting at 14 and drove the coach on the St. George-Bollon run in 1888-1919 at the age of 17 years. He handled mail, both coach and motor lorry for more than 40 years continually. His father owned the last coach on its final run from Mitchell to Bollon—1920. This eight-passenger coach is now in the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney, and a photograph of the coach hangs over the door in the Mitchell Post Office.<sup>91</sup>

### **COMMEMORATION OF COBB & CO. BY STAMPS**

On 6 July 1955 the Australian Post Office issued two new postage stamps a 3½d. and 2/- at all Post Offices in Australia to commemorate the pioneering work of Cobb & Co., who carried the Royal Mail for over 70 years. The stamps depicted a Cobb & Co. coach in sepia for the 3½d. and warm brown for the 2/- denomination. The design was a reproduction of a well-known etching by Sir Lionel Lindsay which he did in the early nineties when on the Western Australian goldfields.<sup>92</sup> At the time of the stamp issues an original Cobb & Co. coach was used to carry 2,000 letters and eight passengers, all veteran Cobb drivers, from Moorooka to the Brisbane G.P.O. The mail bag included letters to Sir Anthony Eden, President Eisenhower and Sir Winston Churchill.<sup>93</sup>

As the next stage of communications across the generations is in the 20th century, after the Australian States were Federated and when the technological giant was beginning to awaken, a reflection upon some of the more important developments from 1840 is, I feel, necessary at this stage before continuing.

## **POSTAL RATES**

In the early days of mail handling extremely heavy charges were required, e.g. Nichols was authorised originally to charge 1/- for each letter delivered over the counter and for heavy parcels (over 20 lbs) he could charge 5/-. Now "these high charges were an inherent feature of the costly and cumbersome system of mail handling, long in force in England and other countries, whereby postal charges were assessed on the distance as well as the weight. The system did not encourage the prepayment of postage so that the burden of postage costs almost invariably fell upon the recipient and not upon the sender of the letter or parcel."<sup>94</sup>

## **FIRST STAMPS AND LETTER SHEETS**

Sir Rowland Hill, in England, became the champion of Postal Reform and he invented the first adhesive postage stamp. His name is linked with the famous 1840 "Penny Black" of Great Britain.<sup>95</sup> In N.S.W., postal reform was watched carefully and James Raymond, Postmaster-General, with Government approval (after reading one of Hill's pamphlets) issued the world's first letter sheets impressed with the Post Office seal.

They were first sold for 1/3 doz. or 1½d. each during November 1838.

Also, New South Wales became the third British Colony to issue adhesive postage stamps, these appearing on 1 January 1850. Queensland used New South Wales stamps until she issued her own about a year after separation, on 1 November 1860; compulsory prepayment by postage stamps having been introduced in 1852 following an Act of New South Wales in 1851, which required prepayment of postage on inland and ships' letters except those to and from the U.K. (15 Vict. No. 12 Statistics of New South Wales). They were London printed and had 1d., 2d. and 6d. values featuring the royal portrait of Queen Victoria. Queensland continued to print her own stamps until 1913.<sup>96</sup>

## **FIRST LETTER CARRIER**

As early as 28 February 1850 the first letter carrier was appointed in Brisbane.<sup>97</sup> His job was to carry mail to the business houses and householders for which he was paid £20 per annum, £8 more than many Postmasters of the day. Ipswich had to wait until 1858 for the first letter carrier to be appointed.<sup>98</sup>

In 1861 the first private letter boxes<sup>99</sup> were made available at the first General Post Office in Queen Street, near the Town Hall.

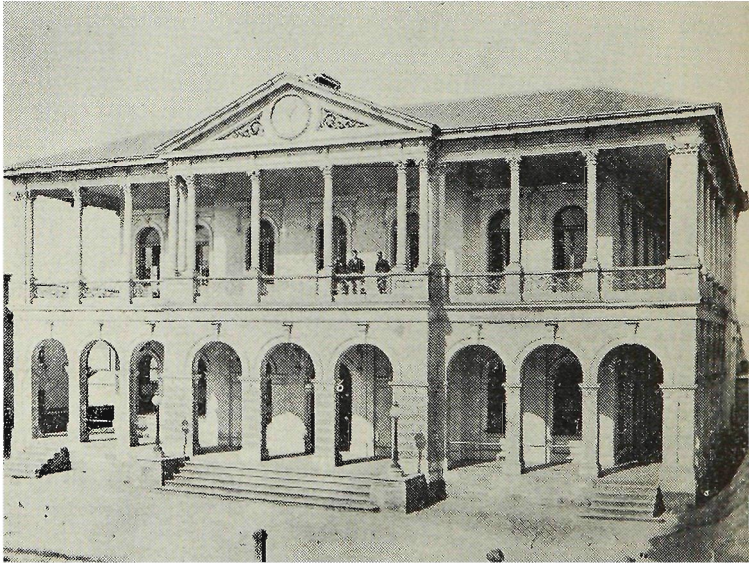
This was the year Queensland's first non-political Postmaster-General, Mr. Thomas Lodge Murray-Prior, was appointed, although he did not take his appointment until 4 January 1862. The permanent office was abolished on 1 March 1866 when the Hon. John Douglas obtained office with control over the Posts and Telegraphs Department. On 20 July 1866 Murray-Prior succeeded Douglas.

On 1 July 1862, the Money Order system<sup>100</sup> was introduced in Queensland with issues at Brisbane and Ipswich Post Offices. On 1 January 1863 it was extended to the Country Post Offices of Rockhampton, Toowoomba, Dalby, Warwick, Maryborough and Gayndah. Orders were issued upon any Money Order Office in the United Kingdom, Victoria and South Australia.<sup>101</sup>

Queensland was ahead of some other States with New South Wales following in April 1863 and New Zealand in June the same year.<sup>102</sup> The Late Fee Service was also introduced in the 1862-63 period.<sup>103</sup>

### NEW G.P.O. BUILDING

In 1863 Mr. T. L. Murray-Prior requested of the Colonial Secretary a new General Post Office<sup>104</sup> site further down Queen Street between Edward and Creek Streets as the



Brisbane G.P.O. about 1877. Possession taken on 28 September 1872, with staff of 40. Built by John Petrie at a cost of £7,450 (\$14,900). The Telegraph Wing, central archway and clock tower completed by John Petrie at a cost of £19,000.

*By Courtesy Post Office Historical Archives.*

present buildings were "too small and scattered" which retarded the work and were a fire hazard.

Tenders were let for the erection of a new G.P.O. building<sup>105</sup> on 20 December 1871 for £7,450. The imposing building was completed by John Petrie and occupied by 28 September 1872.<sup>106</sup> In September 1972, it will be 100 years old. The clock tower and telegraph wing was added in 1879 for £19,784 and housed the Postal and Telegraph Departments under one roof for the first time (completed in August and occupied in November 1879).<sup>107</sup>

In the meantime, the first submarine cable in Queensland was laid from Brisbane to Cape Moreton, via Cleveland, Stradbroke Island and Moreton Bay and completed in 1864-65.<sup>108</sup>

### REGISTRATION SYSTEM

Under the Postage Act of 1871 Clause 32, Postmasters were authorised to register any letters or packets suspected of containing money or other valuables and charge it the proper fee.<sup>109</sup>

In February 1876, a system of lock boxes extensively used in the United States of America was established in the Brisbane General Post Office as an experiment. They were so successful that by 1878, 82 boxes were in use.<sup>110</sup>

Amalgamation of the Post and Telegraph Departments occurred in 1879 and became known as the Post and Telegraph Department.<sup>111</sup> Therefore Telegraph Stations and Post Offices previously in separate buildings could both exist under the one roof. This made it more convenient for customers and the system has continued until today.

### POSTAL NOTES

Queensland was the first place in the British Dominions to inaugurate the Postal Note system and actually preceded the United Kingdom.<sup>112</sup> The service began on 1 November 1880 in Brisbane and by 1 December was extended to many country towns and offices where the service proved popular. Post cards were sold for the first time on 29 October 1880 and 33,666 were sold by the end of the year.<sup>113</sup>

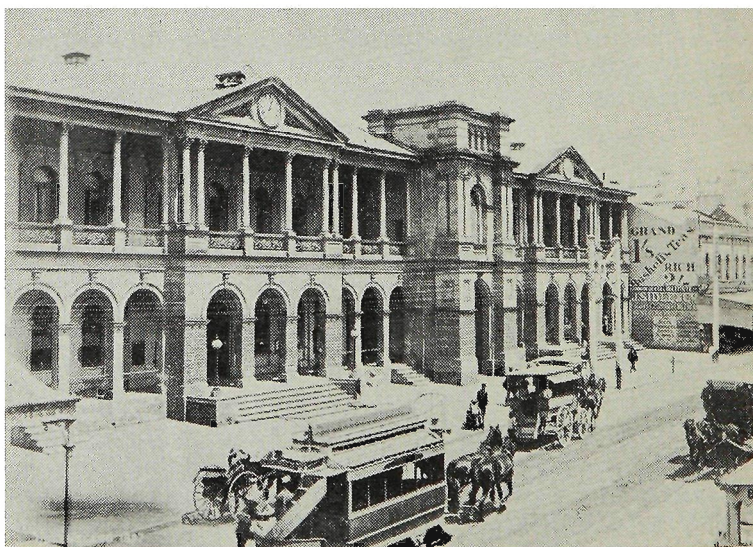
The Parcels Post was established in Queensland as an inland service and intercolonially (except New South Wales) on 14 January 1892 (authorised by the Post and Telegraph Act of 1891).<sup>114</sup> It was extended to the United Kingdom on 6 February and to foreign countries through the United Kingdom on 1 April 1892.<sup>115</sup> "The extension of the Parcel Post to coaches in 1895 caused a considerable expansion of business and the returns for 1896 show an

increase on that of the previous year, which indicated the public interest in this branch of the mail service" (page 4, report James R. Dickson, P & T Dept., 1 July 1897).

### MAILS AND TELEGRAMS BY TRAM

Another interesting chapter in communications was the use made of trams to carry mail in Brisbane and later during war years, telegrams.

During more than 40 years of their early history, Brisbane trams carried the Royal Mail from Suburban Post Offices to the G.P.O. The first services began in 1887, only two years after horse-drawn cars on tracks were introduced on 10 August 1885.<sup>116</sup> A contract was drawn up between the Metropolitan Tramway and Investment Company and the Post and Telegraph Department at the General Post Office, Queen Street, for the carriage of mail between three Post Offices and the G.P.O. It was called Mail Service No. 173<sup>117</sup> and operated twenty-four times a week. Two years later this service was extended to the Woolloongabba Post Office which opened on 23 September 1889.<sup>118</sup> The newly appointed Postmaster in charge of the despatch of tram mails from this new office was Mr. P. J. McDonald, previously at the South Brisbane Post Office. A Mr. T. Geddes<sup>119</sup> took charge of affairs at South Brisbane Post



Horse-drawn trams and omnibuses in front of the G.P.O. in 1897. Note telegraph messenger waiting to load mail aboard trams.

*Photo Courier-Mail Library, May 1969*

Office on 1 November 1889. Each of these officers was paid £180 per annum.

### **WOOLLOONGABBA POST OFFICE**

The service to Woolloongabba now extended two miles from the G.P.O. and was operated once daily in 1889 and 1890. In 1891 it was increased to 30 times per week. The next year it had settled down to a once daily basis or as often as required.

### **MT. GRAVATT POST OFFICE**

In the meantime, Mail Service No. 181, South Brisbane to Mt. Gravatt, a distance of six miles had also commenced in 1887. There were two means of conveyance on this run—the tram and omnibus and was a daily service.

By 1888 the service had increased to 12 times a week. In 1889, the mode of conveyance became omnibus although the frequency was unchanged.

The service continued as MS. 181 in 1890, but operated between Woolloongabba (in lieu of South Brisbane) and Mt. Gravatt as MS. 173 carrying mail as far as Woolloongabba to and from the G.P.O.

### **BREAKFAST CREEK SERVICE**

The third service to start by tram in 1887 was MS. 1 and was probably introduced concurrently with MS. 173 and MS. 181. This service was from the Brisbane G.P.O. to Breakfast Creek Post Office a distance of  $2\frac{1}{2}$  miles. It operated 12 times weekly by tram; previously it was by omnibus.

The Postmistress at the Breakfast Creek Post Office at the time was Mrs. A. Smith, who received a salary of £15 per annum.

Other services were called to tender from time to time, e.g. Bulimba Ferry-G.P.O. introduced on 17 September 1888 (later shortened to G.P.O.-Fortitude Valley) and G.P.O. to Jubilee, MS. 307 started on 1 July 1892.

### **FIRST ELECTRIC TRAM CARS**

The first Electric Cars, Brisbane Tramways Company, were introduced on 21 June 1897<sup>120</sup> and in 1899, contracts were called by the Post and Telegraph Department for carriage of mail by electric tram car. The first service MS. 239 was from the Brisbane G.P.O. to George Street Post Office. This was for a three-year contract to end December 1902. Mail Service 183—G.P.O. to Red Hill followed in 1900 and operated five times a week from 1 January 1901.

In February 1912 records show a Porterage Service No. 730 by tram for mails between the G.P.O. and the Post and Telegraph Office at George Street. In 1914 tenders were called for Mail Services by tram for routes 726, 727, 728, 729, 730, 731 and 732.

Unfortunately a description of these services is not recorded. However, it is known that in March 1914, tram mail services operated between the G.P.O. and South Brisbane, G.P.O. and Woolloongabba, G.P.O. and Paddington, G.P.O. and Jubilee and between the G.P.O. and Fortitude Valley Post Office.

These services continued until the late 1920s when an investigation was made by the Post Office into the practicability of retaining this mode of mail transport. The Department had begun to build up a fleet of motor vehicles and it was thought these could satisfactorily replace the trams for carriage of mails from suburban Post Offices to the Mail Room at the G.P.O.

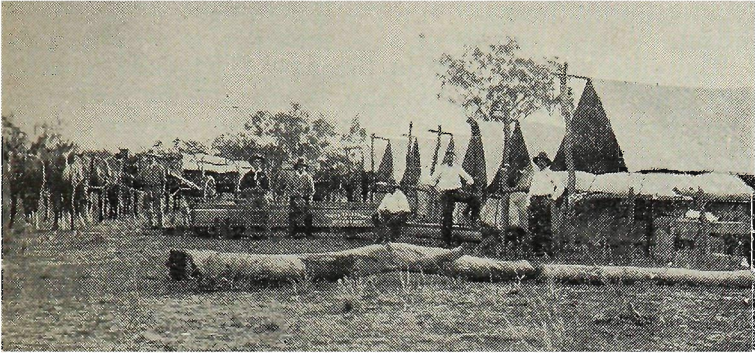
On 11 December 1929 it was decided to discontinue Porterage Service No. 1033, G.P.O. to George Street (then Markets Post Office) from 14 December 1929. This was done and Post Office transport collected the mail from 16 December 1929. Although there are no records to substantiate this, it is thought this was the year all contracts ceased for the carriage of mail by tram in Brisbane.

### **POSTING BAGS ON TRAMS**

The system of attaching posting bags to tram cars and omnibuses was introduced in Brisbane on 1 June 1894 (Queensland was the first of the Australian Colonies to adopt this method of posting).<sup>121</sup>

Letter receivers or posting bags were hung on the left hand front of the tram near the motorman. Passengers could conveniently deposit their letters as they embarked on or disembarked from the tram. The boxes were made of a galvanised plate at the top, painted red, with good quality stiff canvas underneath it to hold the letters. The bag was unhooked when the tram stopped in front of the G.P.O. and a new bag attached. At the same time the Mail Assistant from the G.P.O. would collect a mail bag from beside the tram driver where it had been deposited by officials at various Post Offices, such as Woolloongabba, Fortitude Valley, and so on.

The Mail Assistant, usually a lad, would then carry the mail along the G.P.O. lane and deposit the bags in the Mail Room at the rear.



Camp Telegraph repairers, 45 miles from Charters Towers on the Burdekin.

*By Courtesy Post Office Historical Archives.*

Sometimes the tram motorman would gong his bell as he drove the tram along Queen Street on his approach to the G.P.O. This was to let the Mail boys know he was coming, just to warn them so he wouldn't have to wait.<sup>122</sup>

Later on trams, which served Paddington and Red Hill, were stopped in Adelaide Street, and the mail bag was carried by the motorman to a large box on the footpath near the fence of the Normal State School and deposited inside. The box had a security door to prevent unlawful removal of the bags. Later in the day two officers from the G.P.O. Mail Room would walk over to Adelaide Street to collect the bags.<sup>123</sup>

### TELEGRAM DELIVERY BY TRAMS

Royal Mail was not the only communication material carried by trams. During the latter part of World War II telegrams were sent by tram. Before the advent of the teleprinter, telegrams were transmitted by Morse from the Chief Telegraph Office in Elizabeth Street to a number of suburban Post Offices.<sup>124</sup> With the influx of thousands of servicemen and the heavy demands of the Pacific War these Morse lines became heavily loaded. Therefore in order to expedite delivery of telegrams to the suburbs a shuttle service at half-hourly intervals was developed between the G.P.O. and suburban Post Offices. About twelve female Telegraph messengers were recruited to carry telegrams from the Delivery Section at the G.P.O. by tram to Woolloongabba, Red Hill, Paddington and Albion Post Offices. At these offices the telegrams were delivered locally by telegram boys on bicycles or transported by bicycle to Post Offices further out. The girls were called Transport girls

and were used from about 1943 to 1946 for these "shuttle" services.

The girls were dressed in the navy blue uniform of the Post Office with white peak cap, blouse and serge skirt and a serge jacket for winter months. They carried a small leather bag over one shoulder to hold the telegrams. They were issued with a tram pass as they rode the trams constantly.

Another service provided by trams was during blackouts. As bicycles couldn't be used the male Junior Postal Officers would ride the trams to various Post Office delivery areas and then walk through the suburban streets to deliver the telegrams. They would then return to the G.P.O. by tram.

However, the Brisbane tram era, to many an extremely interesting and pleasant one, ceased not without some opposition on Sunday, 13 April 1969.<sup>125</sup>

### MAIL BY MOTOR VEHICLE

Many people have heard that the first motor vehicle in Queensland was Mr. James Trackson's steam "locomobile"<sup>126</sup> which he landed from England and drove proudly through Brisbane streets in the mid 1890s. This was followed by a two-cylinder De Dion Boulton, the first petrol-driven car in the State, and two Yorkshire steam lorries, which with trailers could carry up to ten tons. These were all imported in 1900.

Little is known about the introduction of motor vehicles for the carriage of mail in Australia or even in Queensland. However, the *Brisbane Courier*, as early as 6 March 1901, reported that:

"A trial of the Motor Car to test its utility in the collection of mails had been made.

The Department approached the question in the first instance with a view of using the motors in drought-stricken areas.

The test was 'fairly favourable'.

A letter has been received stating that two motor cars, said to be a great improvement—were coming to the State (N.S.W.) and the Queensland Authorities have been advised to wait until the trials of these are known"

Apparently a number of private vehicle owners existed early in the new century as original papers held in the Post Office archives reveal an interesting traffic breach by a motor mail contractor, one Albert Lythall as early as 1908. He was no doubt one of the earliest motorised mail contractors in this State.

These "Crown Liability papers" regard a summons in a Magistrate's Court in November 1908 in Brisbane in that:

"Albert Lythall was fined 10/- with 3/6 costs for driving across an intersection of streets at a rate faster than four miles an hour.

Lythall stated that at the time of the offence he was conveying late fee letters to the Sydney mail train . . ."

Mr. Lythall was the Royal Mail Contractor and driving a motor vehicle. He was of course, it was confirmed, liable to "comply with the municipal regulations as to speed." (Justinian Oxenham, Secretary, P.M.G. Department, Melbourne, memorandum to the Deputy Postmaster-General, Brisbane, 22 July 1912.)

It was later stated (in 1912) by Mr. Oxenham (in a memo to all States, Circular No. 380) that the Crown Solicitor stated: "In my opinion it is not legally necessary for motor cars belonging to and used by the Postal Department for the purposes of such distribution to be registered under the said Act.

The Act is a State Act, and in my opinion the State Parliament has no power under the constitution to require that the Commonwealth shall register the cars or obtain the licence of the State before they can be used for Commonwealth purposes (carriage of mails, etc.). Section 24 in my opinion refers only to the Public Service of the Crown as represented by the State and its servants, and not to the Public Service of the Crown as represented by the Commonwealth and its servants."

*So the Post Office did not register its vehicles with the State (and does not today).*

However, to confirm the liability of a driver to regulations he went on to say:

"As to the compliance by Postal Motor Cars (*sic*) drivers with the traffic regulations in the Act, see opinion expressed by me on 8 December 1908, headed—"liability of Post Office mail drivers to comply with the municipal regulations as to speed" (if not unreasonable, and if they do not interfere with the efficient work of the Department.) (CO7854 Post and Telegraph Department, 2 August 1912).

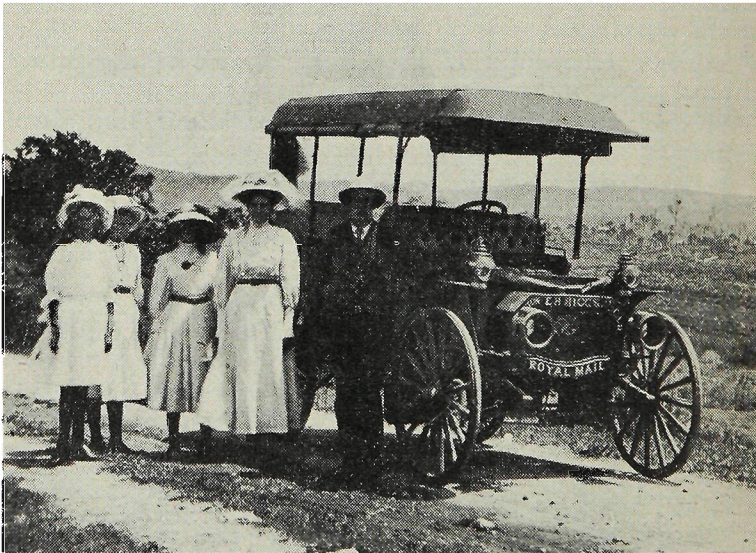
So Mr. Lythall's fine was valid and were it not for these papers and others, we would still think that the first mail carried by private motor vehicle in this State and Australia began on 1 April 1910, between Ilfracombe and Isisford. Certainly Mr. Lythall's contract was over a short distance—from the G.P.O. mail room to the railway station at South Brisbane, but nevertheless was one of the first motor vehicles to carry mail in Queensland.

## MAPLETON-NAMBOUR MAIL-RUN

Also research has revealed that in February 1910, Mr. E. B. Biggs began operating a motor coach for passengers and mail between Mapleton and Nambour.<sup>127</sup> The vehicle was an 18 h.p. International Motor Buggy with solid tyres and seated sixteen passengers. It was the second motor vehicle in the Maroochy Shire. The day it arrived at Mapleton the school children were given the day off to go to see it.<sup>128</sup> On steep pinches in the hilly country it travelled, where the road surface was rough, passengers used to get out and walk.

## MANY ADVANTAGES OF MOTORISED MAIL

Before long the many advantages of the motor vehicles were discovered. It didn't have to be fed chaff, it could travel long distances with heavy loads at sustained speeds in excess of horse or coach rate and in comparative comfort. By the late 1920s the motor vehicle had established itself. Indicative of this was the fact that in July 1924<sup>129</sup> the Queensland Postal fleet consisted of one two-cylinder Renault and two "T" Model Fords but by 1927 the Austra-



In February 1910, Mr. E. B. Biggs began operating a motor coach for passengers between Mapleton and Nambour. It was an 18 h.p. International Motor Buggy with solid tyres and seated sixteen passengers. It was the second motor vehicle in the Maroochy Shire, and the day it arrived at Mapleton the school children were given time off to go to see it. It is believed that this was the first motor vehicle to officially carry mail in the area. It is said that on steep pinches where the surface of the road was bad, passengers used to get out and walk.

*By Courtesy Post Office Historical Archives.*

lian fleet had 96 cars and vans, 146 trucks and 55 lorries.<sup>130</sup> No more was heard the singing wheels of Cobb & Co. coaches or the creaking carts and swishing buggies, but the chugging of rubber-tyred trucks or tourers pulling overloaded trailers over the western dust trails on His Majesty's Mail runs. Man was moving forward, each generation was seeing change, seeing the tyranny of distance fade and the fears of isolation removed. Yet who could visualize at that time, the marvels that lay ahead, when mail would be carried by a huge fleet of motor vehicles, travelling millions of miles, between towns and cities all over the State and throughout the nation or when the miracle of flight would be developed to carry payloads of people and goods at more than the speed of sound. Although the motor vehicle to the people of the 1920s was a marvel, yet man had to leave the earth to fly to achieve faster communication.

### MAIL BY AIR

Aviation in Australia goes back as far as 1851 when Dr. William Bland<sup>131</sup> of Sydney sent drawings of a design for an "atmotic ship"—a long balloon, with steam-driven propellers—to England. He built a model which was exhibited in the Crystal Palace, London, in 1852. His ship was supposed to fly non-stop London-Sydney in four days. What he lacked was efficient engines to do the job and it took technologists more than 100 years to achieve this.

Other notable aviators were Harry L'Estrange in the 1870s, Lawrence Hargrave from the 1880s to 1900s, Harry Houdini in 1910, the Duigan Brothers in 1910-11, Harry Hawker and many others who assisted in the pioneering of aircraft in Australia.

The Wright Brothers' achievements in the United States were well known in Australia as similar experiments were being carried out here about the same time.

### EARLY CARRIAGE OF MAIL BY AIR

Carriage of mail by air in Australia dates back to 1914. Up to that time there had been only a few such flights beginning with the German Zeppelin posts in 1909 and aeroplane flights in India, Denmark and England in 1911. However, the importance of aviation was recognised in Australia and the Australian pilot Harry Hawker had proposed a Melbourne-Sydney flight but could not obtain a sponsor. At this time a Frenchman, Maurice Guillaux<sup>132</sup> arrived in Australia with a Bleriot XI monoplane powered by a 50 h.p. Gnome rotary engine. The machine had been strengthened for acrobatic flying and he gave demonstrations in Victoria

and New South Wales. He performed the first loops seen in Australia.

Apparently his demonstrations bore fruit because on 7 May 1914 a Mr. Arthur Rickard, a Sydney entrepreneur, wrote to the Deputy Postmaster-General in Sydney.

"I am promoting an aeroplane flight between Melbourne and Sydney and have engaged the services of a tried aeronaut . . . This flight is to take place about the first week in May, and will mark an epoch in Australian History. I now ask your co-operation . . . to grant permission to carry a postcard mail . . . The postcards will need to be printed on specially light material to enable the aviator to carry a sufficient quantity . . . up to 140 lb. As such a flight has not yet been undertaken in any part of the world . . . I would request your Department to officially stamp these communications and I am prepared to defray the expenses connected therewith."<sup>133</sup>veyance by airship (*sic*)".<sup>134</sup>

The proposal was submitted to the Postmaster-General (Mr. Agar Wynne) who approved of the enterprise:

"On the distinct understanding that it is made clear to those who purchase and post the cards that the Department does not undertake any responsibility for their delivery and that no charge is to be made for their conveyance by airship (*sic*)".<sup>134</sup>

So everything was arranged and the flight widely publicised.

With about 2,000 postcards and a number of letters (the exact total is uncertain) Guillaux took off from the Melbourne Showgrounds at 9.12 a.m. on 16 July 1914. Weather conditions over the first leg of the route were a foretaste of what was to come; the flight was being made in mid-winter, over the most mountainous portion of the continent, where today airline time-tables are frequently disrupted in winter even with modern navigational aids. Guillaux was flying over terrain unfamiliar to him, with maps designed for surface travellers.

He landed successively at Seymour (61½ miles), Wangaratta (145½ miles), Albury (190½ miles), Wagga Wagga (268½ miles), Harden (352½ miles), Goulburn (446½ miles), Mossvale (495½ miles) and Sydney (total of 582½ miles), arriving 2.50 p.m. on 18 July 1914 (9 hours 33 minutes flying time).

The Governor-General, Sir Ronald Munro-Ferguson, was there to shake his hand and he was carried shoulder high into the nearby sportsground to hand a letter from the

Governor of Victoria to the Governor of New South Wales, Sir Gerald Strickland.

Guillaux had delivered the first official air mail in Australia and at the same time had flown the first air freight (some merchandise).

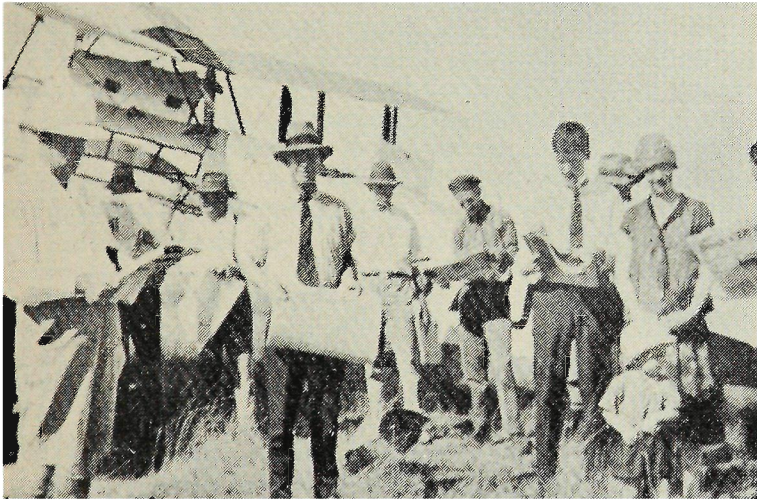
He had made further history because the 580 miles covered were a world record for the carriage of an aerial mail.

### **FIRST AUSTRALIAN AIR MAIL SERVICE**

Although Guillaux carried the first mail in Australia his flight was not the beginning of a regular air mail service. It is believed the West Australian Airways Ltd. commenced the first air mail service between Geraldton and Derby in Western Australia on 5 December 1921, over a distance of 1,160 miles once a week each way.<sup>135</sup> The aircraft used was a single-engined Bristol, 240 h.p., with a cruising speed of 95 m.p.h. and seating for three passengers and the pilot.

The second aerial service in Australia and the first in Queensland was commenced on 2 November 1922 by the Queensland and Northern Territory Aerial Services Ltd. (QANTAS) between Charleville and Cloncurry, via Tambo, Blackall, Longreach, Winton and MacKinlay.<sup>136</sup> The route covered a distance of 577 miles and operated once weekly each way. A single engined DH4 of 375 h.p. was used. It had a seating capacity for five passengers including the crew and cruised at 90 m.p.h.

On 2 February 1925, QANTAS extended the Charleville-



Normanton received its first mail and papers by air in 1927.

*By Courtesy Post Office Historical Archives.*

Cloncurry service to Camooweal and Mount Isa, an additional 248 miles.<sup>137</sup>

The only new service introduced in 1927-28 was on 1 July 1927 when QANTAS began operating between Cloncurry and Normanton once a week each way, a distance of 215 miles. A single engined DH50 of 240 h.p. was used on this route.

On 17 April 1929, the Charleville-Camooweal service was extended to Brisbane via Roma and Toowoomba, a distance of 444 miles.

Brisbane and Sydney received their first air mail service when the famous Sir Charles Kingsford Smith and C. T. P. Ulm inaugurated a daily return flight over the 490 miles, on 1 January 1930.<sup>138</sup> A new company, the Australian National Airways Ltd., was formed by these two successful trans-oceanic aviators for this and other purposes. At the time there was little air mail used between the two cities. However, the success of the service did result in the new company establishing a daily service between Sydney and Melbourne on 1 June 1930.

Considerable interest was being engendered in aviation in the 1930s and other new services introduced were Brisbane-Townsville, via Maryborough, Rockhampton and Mackay, a total route distance of 728 miles twice a week. Queensland Air Navigation Ltd. operated this service. The Larkin Company operated a service from Camooweal to Daly Waters, via Alexandra, Brunette Downs, Anthony's Lagoon, and Newcastle Waters, a distance of 475 miles once a week from 20 February 1930.

On 27 January 1931, Queensland Air Navigation Ltd. suspended the Brisbane-Townsville service but it was reopened by QANTAS on 7 May 1931, but because of lack of subsidy was discontinued four months later.

The first air mail to Monto from Brisbane was inaugurated on 10 November 1936 by Aircrafts Pty. Ltd. with Capt. Gilbertson piloting the de Havilland dragon aircraft VHUXG on the first flight.<sup>139</sup>

### **FIRST AIR MAIL TO ENGLAND**

In April 1931, Imperial Airways flew the first experimental air mail bound for Australia.

It left Croydon, England, on 4 April on the regular England-India service and arrived at Karachi on 12 April 1931. The following day the "City of Cairo" departed with mail and flew via Jodhpur, Delhi, Calcutta, Akyab, Rangoon, Singapore and Batavia to Koepang where it crashed on 19 April.

However, the Australian National Airways was chartered to carry the first mail from Australia over the Darwin-Akyab sector. The "Southern Star" and "Southern Sun" were used for the Melbourne-Sydney and Sydney-Brisbane sectors, respectively. The mail arrived in Brisbane on the 24 April 1931.

Leaving Archerfield the same day, QANTAS flew the mail to Darwin in the "Apollo" where Kingsford Smith took it over for the flight to Akyab in the "Southern Cross" leaving on the 27th. The mail was delivered to Imperial Airways at Akyab on the 3 May, who flew it to Karachi to connect with the regular service to England where the mail arrived in London on the 14 May 1931.<sup>140</sup>

### **BRISBANE-DARWIN-SINGAPORE SERVICE**

This successful flight led to the establishment of a Brisbane-Darwin-Singapore air service—a distance of 4,361 miles. It connected at Singapore with the British Imperial Airways service from London. QANTAS Empire Airways now with combined interests with Imperial Airways won a five-year contract for the service and commenced operations on the Brisbane-Darwin sector from 10 December 1934. The Government subsidised this service as it did a number of other domestic services. In 1935, the new QANTAS took over the Brisbane-Singapore sector from its partner.<sup>141</sup> At the time this was the world's fastest overseas commercial service and of course carried air mail.

### **POST-WAR DEVELOPMENT**

Following technological advancement in the manufacture of aircraft during World War II, post-war years saw many changes in the air mode of transport and rapid carriage of mail. Many new services were introduced progressively. As each new type of aircraft was built, from the Constellations and Skymasters of the late 40s and 50s to Super Constellations, to the Jet Age beginning in 1959 and the early sixties, speed and size of these machines was increasing. Not only was Queensland in rapid contact with other States but "ships of the air" carrying tons of mail, freight and passengers sped across the international skies faster than a bird, bringing nations ever closer together.

### **THE ELECTRIC TELEGRAPH**

For thousands of years man had communicated with man by mechanical means. He'd written his letters, regulations, proclamations and commercial data on clay tablets, papyrus, skins, bark, copper, gold and other metal plates. In war and

peace, intelligence had been carried across the centuries by runners, horsemen, ships and many other means. But the most startling change occurred with the harnessing of electricity.

It was the key that unlocked the door to the secrets of man's ingenuity and they came bursting out in the early 19th Century. This was the age of inventors and scientists like Davy, Faraday, Maxwell and Edison.

It's interesting to note that "Telegraph" is taken from the Greek, meaning "To perform the act of writing at a distance" and this definition took on new meaning when coupled with electricity—the electric telegraph—"Writing at a distance by electricity".

Indeed the invention of the electro-magnetic telegraph revolutionised the world's communication media. To men such as Cooke, Wheatstone, Morse, Vail and many others the practical application of the electric telegraph can be credited. These were the pioneers that laid the foundation for the future marvels of telegraphy.

It is believed that Sir William Fothergill Cooke and Sir Charles Wheatstone were the first to bring the electric telegraph into daily use.<sup>142</sup>

Joining forces and utilising the cleared path of a railway track, they ran an experimental line with a sixth return wire between the Euston terminus and Camden Town Station of the London and North-Western Railway on 25 July 1837.<sup>143</sup> The actual distance was  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles.

The five needle telegraph, which was an alphabetical signalling system using five needles in combination, was used. The trial was successful.

However, the public did not patronise the invention until the early 1840's.

In July 1839 a line was erected from the Paddington terminus to West Drayton Station, a distance of 13 miles.

In 1840 Wheatstone patented an alphabetical telegraph or "Wheatstone ABC Instrument" which moved with a step-by-step motion, and showed the letters of the message upon a dial. The same principle was used in his type-printing telegraph patented in 1841. This was the first apparatus which printed a telegram in type.<sup>144</sup>

However, this system was clumsy and was replaced by the "Double Needle System" using two-line wires. This in turn gave way to the "Single Needle System". In 1845 Wheatstone introduced these two improved forms of the apparatus—the single and double needle instruments in which the signals were made by the successive deflections of the needles.

### Samuel Morse

Cooke and Wheatstone were the first to introduce a public telegraph worked by electro-magnetism, but it had the disadvantage of not marking down the message. There was still room for an instrument which would leave a permanent record that might be read at leisure and this was the invention of Samuel Finley Breeze Morse<sup>145</sup>—born Charlestown, Massachusetts, U.S.A., on 27 April 1791.

After much deliberation and experimentation he devised the telegraph relay in 1836 or earlier.

In 1837, in his own rooms he constructed a model of his apparatus. He was stimulated to greater urgency by a Government Circular—which stated “In February 1837 the American House of Representatives passed a resolution asking the Secretary of the Treasury to report on the propriety of establishing a system of telegraphs for the United States.”<sup>146</sup> A circular of enquiry was issued 10 March.

In September 1837 Alfred Vail came in contact with Professor Morse and joined him in his experimental work. Their work moved ahead so that the American patent was obtained by 3 October 1837.<sup>147</sup>

### Morse Code

These two men devised the Morse Alphabet or code of signals in dots and dashes. The system was exhibited to Congress at Washington and was so successful that a Bill appropriating \$30,000 for the erection of an experimental line between Washington and Baltimore, was passed.<sup>148</sup>

However, Samuel Morse unsuccessfully tried to patent the invention overseas as he was very low in funds and also despairing relief.

However, after much tribulation the Government paid him for the erection of a line between Capitol, Washington, starting on 1 April 1844, to Mt. Clare Depot, Baltimore, and finishing on 23 May 1844. The distance was about 40 miles.

The next day 24 May 1844, Miss Annie Ellsworth, a friend of Morse, indited the first message—*What hath God wrought!* The now famous message was transmitted by Morse from the Capitol at 8.45 a.m. and received at Mount Clare Depot by Alfred Vail.

This was the first message of a public character sent by the electric telegraph in the Western world and is preserved by the Connecticut Historical Society.<sup>149</sup>

The dots and dashes representing the words were not drawn with pen and ink but embossed on the paper with a metal stylus. Thus the received message was permanently recorded.

The method of embossing was invented solely by Alfred Vail in 1844 prior to the erection of the line.

On 1 April 1845, the Baltimore to Washington line was formally opened for public business.

## INTRODUCTION OF TELEGRAPH IN AUSTRALIA

While curious men in England and the United States of America were experimenting with and developing the science and art of telegraphy through the 1840s, at the time Australia seemed disinterested in these overseas developments. Perhaps the Government and settlers were too concerned with their own domestic problems of establishing conventional postal lines and consolidation of settlement to worry about the new and costly telegraph system.

It took the visit of one of the students of Professor Morse to stimulate interest in the electric telegraph. Mr. S. W. McGowan "arrived in Victoria in 1853 with the intention of forming a private company to establish and work telegraph lines between Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide, Ballarat and Sandhurst (Bendigo)."<sup>150</sup>

He even brought the necessary apparatus—instruments, batteries, line wire, insulators and the like.

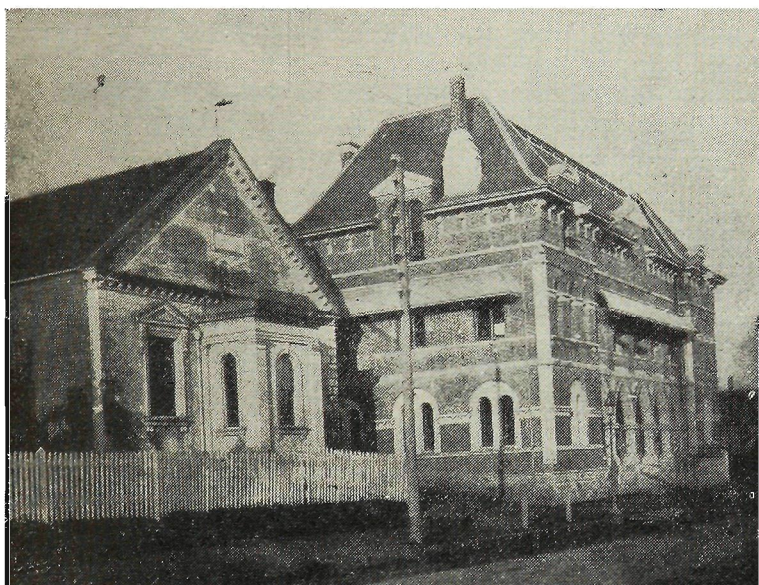
However, during his negotiations with the Victorian Government, they saw the possibilities of the new system and decided to capitalise on the idea. In September 1853 tenders were invited for the construction of a line between Melbourne and Williamstown,<sup>151</sup> a distance of 9½ miles. One consolation for McGowan was that his offer, probably the only tenable one, was accepted. Work soon started and a single wire aerial line was completed in February 1854, although it was not opened to the public until 3 March.<sup>152</sup> Having proved his worth to the Government, Mr. McGowan was appointed General Superintendent of Telegraphs.

The closed circuit system of morse working was employed on these lines with the received electric signals transformed into embossed code by the recorder. Many extensions took place and by 1857 lines to the western and north-western boundaries of Victoria were completed. A line between Adelaide and Port Adelaide was erected by a private company a few weeks before the Government line joining Adelaide, Port Adelaide and Semaphore was opened on 18 February 1856. Tasmania was next with their first line opened in August 1857 between Launceston and Hobart. In New South Wales the Government built a line from Sydney to South Head and Liverpool by 30 December 1857 and opened to the public on 26 January 1858.<sup>153</sup>

## INTERCOLONIAL TELEGRAPH LINE BETWEEN BRISBANE AND SYDNEY

The construction of a telegraph line between Brisbane and Sydney in 1861 meant Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia were linked by a chord of iron stretching thousands of miles. The intention to connect Queensland (only just separated from New South Wales) to other States, and also to promote colonisation in the north, was evidenced by the fact that on Saturday, 22 September 1860, tenders<sup>154</sup> were called for the erection of the first Electric Telegraph in Queensland. It was to be erected from Brisbane, via Ipswich, Toowoomba, Drayton and Warwick to the frontier of New South Wales. On Saturday, 13 October 1860, a contract was made with Messrs. Brown and Sherry, who tendered the lowest price of an expenditure rate of £38/5/6 per mile for the line.<sup>155</sup>

Mr. J. J. Austin was appointed Inspector of Telegraphs



FIRST TELEGRAPH OFFICE IN BRISBANE

L.H.S. Dr. Lang's Evangelical Church situated at the corner of William Street and Telegraph Lane (now Stephens Lane—since 1902). This church building was originally opened in April 1851 and closed December 1860, when it was acquired, altered and made ready for the Telegraph Department at the end of January 1861. The first telegraph line ran down William Street from this building (notice pole) through the Gardens, across the river to Kangaroo Point, then down through Woolloongabba, along Ipswich Road to Ipswich. The line was opened for traffic on 13 April 1861 with the two Mayors exchanging greetings.

The building alongside of the office is the Government Printing Office.

*By Courtesy Post Office Historical Archives*

and Superintendent of Works for Queensland on 24 November 1860, and was placed in charge of the project.

With the commencement of the line to Ipswich, which is reputed to have crossed the river from the Domain to the high ground above the coal wharf at Kangaroo Point, arrangements were made to prepare a Telegraph Office in Brisbane. The building chosen was Dr. Lang's Evangelical Church,<sup>156</sup> situated at the corner of William Street and Telegraph Lane (since 1901 called Stephens Lane). This building was originally opened in 1851 and closed in December 1860, when it was altered for use as the Central Telegraph Office.<sup>157</sup> (The site of this building is now portion of the old Executive Building, between William and George Streets, Brisbane). The building was ready at the end of January 1861.

By 13 April 1861, the line work had progressed sufficiently to open the first Telegraph Line in Queensland.<sup>158</sup> The wire stretched from Brisbane to Ipswich, a distance of 24 miles. On that historic day of 1861, the Mayors of both cities exchanged congratulatory telegrams. During the day ten telegrams were transmitted from Brisbane to Ipswich and 12 in the opposite direction. Photostat copies of the original record of "Queensland's First Day's Telegraphing" are held in the archives at the G.P.O., Brisbane. (See photo.)

### **CENTENARY COMMEMORATED**

One hundred years later, in order to commemorate the Centenary of this momentous occasion, the Mayors of both Brisbane and Ipswich exchanged telegrams on 13 April 1961, and the first day's record of 1861 was televised over the National Television Station ABQ Channel 2, Brisbane.<sup>159</sup>

The line was extended to Gatton and opened for business on 28 April 1861. Several months later the telegraph line was completed as far as Toowoomba and this line was opened on 17 August 1861. The completion of this line opened the way for telegraphic development in the west and brought the rich Darling Downs area into contact with the coast. Within a short time Drayton and then Warwick were joined to the Telegraph line. The Warwick office was opened on 22 October 1861. It was the last of the Queensland stations on the Intercolonial Route.

Meanwhile, New South Wales stations were completed at Windsor (5 June 1860), Wiseman Ferry, Wollombi (3 March 1860), West Maitland, Singleton, Murrurundi, Tamworth (10 October 1861), Armidale and Tenterfield. Traffic was hand repeated at Tenterfield, N.S.W., where

separate New South Wales and Queensland staff were stationed.

As, perhaps, indicative of the public interest shown in this line, a letter to the editor of a Brisbane newspaper, dated 24 October 1861, says, in part, "View it as you will, whether as an outstanding adaptation of scientific knowledge to the common uses of life—as a triumph obtained by labour and capital in a new country—or as a blessing vouchsafed to men by God himself . . . the subject is equally inspiring. Surely, we in this corner of the world should hail with acclamation the means thus provided on gleaning a faint whisper of the doings of the great world far away . . . The latest wonders of the 19th century, prolific of inventions and adaptations as it has been, is now brought home to us. Through a desolate wilderness, through tracts of inhospitable country of which 50 years ago the nude savage—of almost the lowest order of human intellect—was the sole occupant, a fragile string is stretched; and through populace cities, through lonely hamlets, over arid wastes from hence to the Southern Sea, the tongue of life is laid and man can speak with distant man."

### **LINE FROM BRISBANE TO BORDER**

The line from Brisbane to the border, was completed on 2 November 1861, and joined to the New South Wales line, near Maryland.<sup>160</sup>

Mr. W. H. Butler, Superintendent, Works, Telegraph Department, N.S.W., arrived in Brisbane on the 4 November and stated that construction of the line was completed in every particular. Mr. J. J. Austin, Superintendent, Works, Telegraph Department, Queensland, stated on 6 November, that the Brisbane-Sydney line was tested on 4 November and worked well.

After some preliminary delays and difficulties, the first formal message was sent by the Governor of N.S.W., Sir John Young, to the Governor of Queensland, Sir George Bowen, on 6 November 1861. His Excellency's telegram read:

"From His Excellency, Sir John Young, to His Excellency, Sir George Bowen, dated 6 November—"I congratulate the two colonies, New South Wales and Queensland, on the completion of the communication between them by telegraph. The wire is an emblem of the congenial feelings which unites them to rejoice, each in the resources and advancement of the other. Signed Sir John Young."<sup>161</sup>

Unfortunately, at this stage, the Governor of Queensland could not make an immediate reply as a storm had fused the lightning conductors at Tenterfield and the telegraph line was also down. It was not until three days later, after repairs had been effected, that Sir George Bowen's reply could be despatched.

### **SIR GEORGE BOWEN'S MESSAGE**

It was at 3.50 p.m. on Saturday, 9 November 1861, that Sir George Bowen sent the following message:

"Cordially reciprocate on behalf of Queensland, your congratulations of the reunion by the telegraphic wire of the two great neighbouring colonies, whose feelings and interests are so nearly identical. With you, I pray that this new bond may prove an emblem of mutual good will, and of rapidly increasing prosperity. Signed G. F. Bowen."<sup>162</sup>

### **Rates**

The line was opened to public traffic shortly after, and the following rates of charges were applied:

Brisbane to Sydney—6/- for first ten words, plus 4d. for each additional word.

Brisbane to Melbourne—9/- for first ten words, plus 6d. for each additional word.

Brisbane to Adelaide and South Australia—12/- for first ten words, plus 8d. for each additional word.

Rates to repeater stations, such as Ipswich, Gatton, Toowoomba, Drayton and Warwick were advertised, and also rates to offices in New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia.

The hours of business for Queensland stations were from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., except Sundays.

### **APPARATUS**

The apparatus used on the Intercolonial Telegraph line was called morse simplex (closed circuit).<sup>163</sup> It employed a key, galvanometer, relay, lightning arrester and sounder at each telegraph office. An electric current supplied by an electro-chemical battery, usually in the form of a large glass jar, was applied to the wire. Signals were transmitted by sending impulses in a pre-arranged order by intervals of current and no current, in accordance with the code invented by Samuel Morse. These signals were recorded by the electro-magnetic coils of the sounder in the distant office. Intermediate stations were necessary to repeat the messages. Only one message at the rate of 25-30 words a minute was

transmitted at a time and with the transcription period, the whole process, though miraculous at that time, was very slow compared with modern standards.

### COLONIAL LINES

With the two colonies joined, the Queensland Government turned its attention to providing lines internally. A formidable task lay before them—over 670,000 square miles of virgin country with a great deal of it still largely unexplored and its relatively few people scattered far and wide.

While 170 miles of line were constructed in 1861 to connect with the N.S.W. extension, the next three years saw only 212½ miles of line work with none in 1862. By 1864 work was increasing so that Rockhampton and Gladstone were joined and by the end of 1865 an impressive 654 miles of telegraph route was added to the Queensland Telegraph.<sup>164</sup> By this time the lines consisted of the Brisbane, Ipswich, Toowoomba, Warwick and Tenterfield Intercolonial line with the 1863 spur to Dalby extended northward on the inland route to Camboon and on to Rockhampton completed 4 January 1865. This line went through Durah, Hawkwood, near Taroom (opened 29 December), and Banana. Thus Rockhampton and the Port of Gladstone were joined telegraphically with other east coast ports and cities. The north-bound line was also extended eastwards from a point near Taroom to Gayndah and Maryborough and further northwards along the coast to Marlborough from Rockhampton in 1865. By 1867 the northern telegraph route had been blazed from Brisbane to Bowen over 800 miles of vast untamed land, joining the ports and the States with a rapid communication system. But this was not all, greater work was to be done. The telegraph line swinging inland from Brisbane to Rockhampton was extended along the coast to Mackay, Bowen, Townsville and Cardwell in North Queensland. The next proposal, following F. Walker's<sup>165</sup> expedition from Cardwell to the Albert River, Burketown in 1866 and 1867, was to connect the Colonial and Intercolonial Telegraph line to a port in the Gulf of Carpentaria.

### LINE TO THE GULF

One writer notes that "Settlement in Queensland had followed the coastal strip and advanced early into the northern districts which were so rich in natural resources. Export trade in early Queensland was restricted to wool and gold. Initially products for export were sent to Sydney for overseas shipping and it was difficult to get them there. Trans-

port was a formidable problem.”<sup>166</sup> Certainly ports had been opened along Queensland’s seaboard and the telegraph interconnected them as did the steamers.

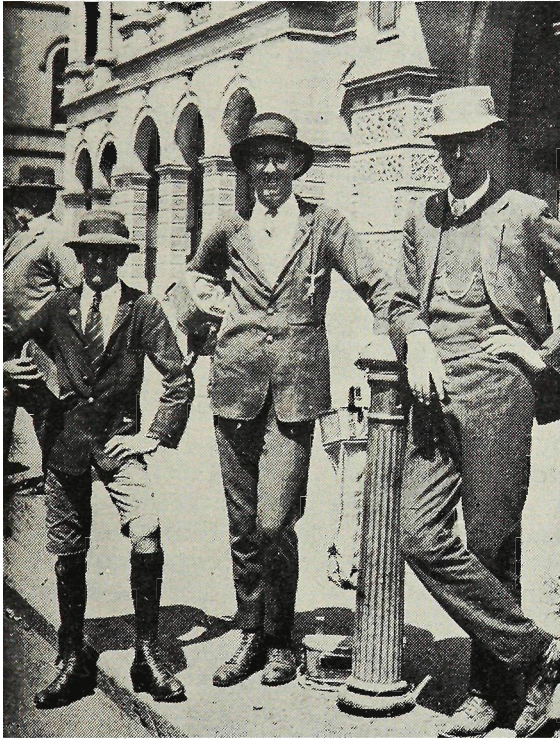
Hence pressure was applied very early to establish an overseas shipping route from Queensland ports to at least Singapore. In 1865, Parliament authorised the expenditure necessary for a regular steam service between Port Denison (Bowen) and Java through the Torres Strait. At the same time authority was given to provide funds for the extension of the telegraph from St. Lawrence to Port Denison and across to the Gulf of Carpentaria to meet steamers. J. Douglas, member for Port Curtis later P.M.G. and Queensland’s Agent-General in London, had deep concern for the establishment of a base in the Gulf to serve on the hoped for steam service to England, via Torres Strait and Singapore. It was he who in 1869 urged the Council to approve a motion to grant £30,000 for a telegraph extension to Normanton which seemed to be the most suitable location for an overseas terminus on the Gulf. The motion was passed on 9 June when both Houses of the Queensland Parliament approved the construction of a telegraph line from Cardwell to the shore of the Gulf of Carpentaria. It was stated that the Gulf extension “will not only prove of great utility in placing the present remote settlements at Carpentaria and the Gilbert Goldfields in direct communication with the various centres of business in this and the neighbouring colonies, but will be a great step towards placing Australia and New Zealand in telegraphic communication with India and Europe”.<sup>167</sup> Queensland authorities had taken it for granted that the Eastern Asia Telegraph Company’s undersea telegraph cable being laid between India and Java would landfall in the Gulf. Charles Todd, Superintendent, Telegraphs, South Australia, in his 1869 report stated he was aware of two schemes for an overseas telegraph link. One was to landfall at Perth and join to an overland telegraph line from South Australia and the other was the proposal to landfall at a point in Northern Australia to link up with the Queensland lines. However, the route decided on for the Queensland line was from Cardwell across the Sea View Range by a route newly discovered by Mr. McMillan, Engineer for Roads in the Northern Division, then by as direct a route as the nature of the country permitted along the route marked by A. E. Young (Walker’s second in command) on his return journey from Burketown two and a half years earlier.<sup>168</sup>

## CONSTRUCTION OF LINE

Contracts were let for the construction of the line in two sections, one from Cardwell to the Etheridge River, and the second from the Etheridge to the Gulf.

The Eastern Section was completed on 23 October 1871, and Telegraph Stations at Cashmere, Junction Creek (later Mount Surprise) and Georgetown were opened on that date.

The Western Section had been completed in August but it was not until 3 January 1872, that the line was opened for traffic with stations at Gilbert River, Creen Creek, Norman-ton, and Norman Mouth (Carpentaria also called Kimberley now Karumba). Because of the lack of trees suitable for poles on the Western Section, iron poles twenty-four feet long were used on the last one hundred and thirty miles of the line.<sup>169</sup>



Left to right (taken 1915)—V. J. Jobst (Vic.), Telegraph Messenger; J. Burke (Tapper) Jim, Telegraph Messenger; unknown country lad (not P.M.G. employee) down to enlist 1914-1918 War.

Telegraph Messenger—Hours of duty 8 a.m.-6 p.m.

Salary—15/- per week (£39 per annum)

Notice: Mail Bags for trams on hitching post.

*By Courtesy Post Office Historical Archives.*

The station buildings on the Eastern Section were constructed of timber cut on the spot, but the timber for the buildings on the Western Section was shipped round to Normanton from the Eastern Coast and this apparently was the cause of the delay in opening the line for traffic.

The line was inspected personally by Mr. W. J. Cracknell, Superintendent of Electric Telegraphs, who rode the whole length of the line, some four hundred and forty miles, in company with Mr. McMillan, the Roads Engineer. They left Cardwell on 19 August 1871, and arrived at Normanton on 3 September. The return journey to Cardwell occupied from 7 to 21 September.<sup>170</sup>

### OVERSEAS LINK

During this time, proposals were being put forward by a number of companies to link Australia telegraphically, via a submarine cable, with the outside world. The British and Australasian Telegraph Co. favoured bringing their submarine cable to Port Darwin and building their own line from there to Burketown.

Strenuous efforts were made by John Douglas, Queensland's Agent-General in London, to persuade this company to bring the cable to Normanton, instead of Darwin, and thus link up with the land-lines on the Eastern Route, which were almost completed at this time. Unfortunately, he could not persuade the company to agree to this as the South Australian Government's proposal to erect an Overland Telegraph Line from Port Darwin to Port Augusta, thus obviating the B. & A.T. Co.'s costly land link, was more acceptable, although there were probably other reasons too. They therefore, contracted to lay the great ocean cable<sup>171</sup> to Darwin by 1 January 1872 providing that the South Australian Overland Telegraph Line was there to meet it. However, when the cable from Java to Darwin was laid there was no Australian line to meet it.<sup>172</sup> The Overland Telegraph Line between Port Augusta and Port Darwin was many months behind schedule and was not completed until 22 August 1872.<sup>173</sup>

However, Australia was not actually placed in telegraphic communication with Europe until 21 October 1872.<sup>174</sup>

### NEWS OF LANDFALL

Meanwhile the first news that the cable had been laid successfully to Port Darwin came to the Southern and Eastern colonies by the Queensland Telegraph line. The Electric Telegraph Stationmaster at Normanton telegraphed Brisbane on 18 December 1871, that the Government cutter

from Port Darwin had brought the news to him. The message was published, relayed to Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide and appeared in the Southern newspapers the next day.<sup>175</sup>

Apparently the submarine cable was subject to faults for some time as pointed out by Mr. W. J. Cracknell, Superintendent of Electric Telegraphs, to the Queensland Parliament on 19 May 1876—"Owing to some misunderstanding in London, the proposed cable between the terminus of our land lines at Kimberley on the shore of the Gulf of Carpentaria, and Singapore, has not been laid.

"The International line, via Port Darwin, Java and British India, has not worked altogether satisfactorily during the last twelve months, by reason of serious faults in the ocean cables; indeed, direct communication with Europe has been subjected to interruptions for some time past by breaks in the Suez-Bombay and Penang-Madras sections, and is now entirely suspended by a defect between Port Darwin and Java." Other faults occurred on the South Australian Overland Telegraph Line itself, and gave Queensland a bargaining point to pursue its argument for a duplicate line through the Gulf stations. However, after much discussion the proposal was finally defeated and as a result of London negotiations, a cable from near Nelson, New Zealand, to Sydney, Australia was opened in February 1876.<sup>176</sup> It was abandoned in 1933.

At this time a telegram of 20 words sent from the eastern colonies to London cost £9/8/6 which must have been costly indeed for private or business transactions. The overseas link was little used by Queenslanders because of these high costs.

### CAPE YORK TELEGRAPH LINE

Another telegraph line which played a significant role in communications in Queensland was the Telegraph Line from Cooktown to Thursday Island. Concerned with European interests in a number of countries immediately north of Australia and realising the commercial and strategic importance of Torres Strait, the Queensland Government under Sir Thomas Mellwraith commissioned the Telegraph Department to survey a Telegraph line through Cape York Peninsula to Somerset on the Cape itself. Early in 1883, Mr. Alexey F. Matveieff, Superintendent, Electric Telegraphs, Brisbane, selected his friend and expert bushman, John Richard Bradford<sup>177</sup> to lead the expedition.

As Inspector of Lines and Mail Route Services as well as supervisor of the construction of the Cooktown-Palmerville

Telegraph line, he was an obvious choice. He departed from Brisbane on the coastal steamer *Corea* on 9 May 1883, arriving in Cooktown on the 17th with a copy of Mr. Robert L. Jacks' 1879-1880 Cape York expedition map in his pocket.<sup>178</sup> Leading a party of seven men (including a Chinese cook and an aboriginal stockman) and 36 horses, they left Cooktown on 6 June 1883. The party headed west for Laura telegraph station and in the next 85 days the greatest adventure of their lives. They braved hardships, loss of stock, attacks by blacks, shortage of food, to survey the entire route marking mahogany, bloodwood and iron bark trees to their last camp near Somerset, on Wednesday, 29 August 1883. Frank Jardine, the station owner, welcomed the party with great hospitality no doubt being glad of some company in that remote area. It's interesting to note that the mathematical tables "Lommis' Practical Astronomy" used by Bradford on this expedition now lie in the Post Office archives having been presented to the Historical Society by Commander Norman S. Pixley, M.B.E., V.R.D., Kt.O.N., F.R.Hist.S.Q., on 21 June 1967. John Bradford was a nephew of John McDonnell, Under Secretary, Queensland. Commander Pixley is a grandson of Mr. McDonnell.

After checking on the route of an undersea cable across the strait to Thursday Island on Captain Brown's schooner, Bradford and Healy (his second in command) embarked for Brisbane on the ss *Corea* on 5 September 1883<sup>179</sup> to present the report to the Telegraph Authorities at the General Post Office.

### CONSTRUCTION OF LINE IN TWO SECTIONS

Now came the actual building of the line. Tenders were called for its erection in two sections of approximately 200 miles each, one from the north and one from the south. Messrs. Brodziak and Degen, with a gang of forty-seven men, completed the southern section by the 13 October 1886—ahead of schedule.<sup>180</sup> But in the north, many delays occurred and that section of 192½ miles was not completed until 18 August 1887,<sup>181</sup> eight months after the contractual completion date.

Contractors were troubled by rain and by the destructive activity of the blacks who found that the telegraph wire made excellent spear points for attacks on game and on the construction gang. They carried off insulators, pins and plates, bent down the iron poles and generally tried desperately to destroy the line. Stores were raided, horses and bullocks speared and the country burnt out for miles. For the protection of the construction parties, native police

camps were established at intervals along the route and were maintained for a number of years while the old hates still flamed.

### TELEGRAPH STATIONS

Telegraph stations were constructed at Musgrave (23/12/86), Coen (29/12/86), Mein (14/7/87), Moreton (1/9/87), McDonnell (25/8/87), and Paterson (25/8/87), situated about a hundred miles apart, and built as fortresses to withstand native attack. Up to twenty-five years later they were still used intermittently for defence.<sup>182</sup>

The construction was also fraught with overland transport difficulties, so material was shipped in from the coast where that was possible. Frank Jardine, in charge of transport for the northern section, gave considerable help through his knowledge of the Ducie River by which supplies were floated thirty-five miles inland. The carriage of water and poles was expensive. While awaiting completion of the northern section, it was the practice to send a courier between the approaching extremities—in those days rather a dangerous journey.

### COMPLETION OF LINE TO CAPE YORK

Eventually, on 25 August 1887, the whole line, from Fairview to Thursday Island, was completed, thus putting Thursday Island into touch with the distant capital.<sup>183</sup> The undersea cable between Paterson and Thursday Island was laid over 18 sea miles by the Cable Ship *Recorder* for the Eastern Extension Company at a cost of £10,000.<sup>184</sup> Something new then came into Cape York Peninsula.

The line gave impetus to the pastoral industry; cattle runs grew up in large tracts within what had seemed to many a barren land. These runs, together with various small mineral finds, brought the white man north. Yet for all that, the great north country was, for many years, to go on dreaming with only the thin, lonely, telegraph line running through its heart.

Chronologically the next interesting events were the introduction of bicycles, typewriters and international morse code.

Bicycles were introduced for the first time to carry telegrams by the Telegraph Messengers at Warwick in 1891.<sup>185</sup>

“The desirability of introducing typewriters in connection with telegraph work was brought under the notice of the Department in 1892. Subsequently a number of Hammond typewriters, about twenty, were purchased and supplied to the operators in Brisbane and some other of the principal

offices. They were rather expensive, frequently requiring repairs, and it was generally considered that more favourable results would be obtained if operators were allowed to provide their own instruments, as in America, and an adequate allowance made."<sup>186</sup>

Arrangements were therefore made, it was stated by the Under Secretary and Superintendent of Telegraphs, John McDonnell on 1 July 1897 for his 1896 report, "to admit of the operators providing typewriters and using them in connection with their work, and an allowance is made proportionate with the work done by them, the maximum of 100 messages per day being 5/- per week, this covers the cost both of purchase and maintenance, a limited number of ribbons only being supplied by the Department."

He went on to say that "There can be no doubt that the combined use of sounders and typewriters represents a high development in commercial telegraphy, as it enables the operators to take the messages by ear and typewrite them at the same time. An expert typewriter is more than a match in speed for the fastest of operators sending by hand, as it takes less time to touch one letter on the typewriter keyboard than to transmit a signal consisting of two or three dots and dashes on the telegraph key."<sup>187</sup>

### INTERNATIONAL CODE

On 1 August 1897 the International Morse Code, as fixed by the Telegraph Bureau, was brought into use in all Australian Colonies.<sup>188</sup> Consider the difficulties operators must have experienced with overseas countries using variations of the morse code, especially with the increase in the number of countries being connected to the world systems by undersea telegraph cables in only a generation.

While the complete story of the development of Telegraphic communications in Queensland is beyond the role of this article, two overseas cables should be mentioned because of their Australian significance. They are the Bundaberg-New Caledonian line and the All Red Route.

### BUNDABERG-NEW CALEDONIAN CABLE

A French company laid an undersea telegraph cable between Bundaberg and New Caledonia in 1893. The cable terminated in the top floor of the Bundaberg Post Office, Bourbong Street, and opened for business on 18 October 1893.<sup>189</sup> Morse messages were transmitted on the cable until an undersea fault occurred in October 1923 and after consideration was abandoned in 1925 having been replaced by a radio service through Sydney.

## ALL RED ROUTE—PACIFIC TELEGRAPH CABLE

The first British cable across the Pacific was from Vancouver Island to Southport. The scheme was first suggested in 1879 by Sir Sandford Fleming, at that time Chief Engineer of the Canadian Government Railways. With great foresight, he wrote:

"If these connections are made we shall have a complete overland telegraph from the Atlantic to the Pacific coast. It appears to me to follow that, as a question of Imperial importance, the British possessions to the west of the Pacific Ocean should be connected by submarine cable with the Canadian Line. Great Britain will thus be brought into direct communication with all the greater colonies and dependencies without passing through foreign countries."<sup>190</sup>

The Pacific cable project formed the subject of discussion at the Colonial Conference of 1887, and at a number of Postal and Telegraph conferences in Australia and New Zealand. Dominions favoured the project and, in 1894, a Colonial Conference was held at Ottawa.

### Tenders

As a result, the first practical step was taken by the Canadian Government which obtained tenders from three firms.

In 1896, a Pacific Cable Committee, which included the representatives in London, Canada, New South Wales and Victoria, was appointed. They were favourable to the scheme and prepared the way for its execution. Finally, after considerable correspondence, agreement was reached between the Governments interested, as to the ownership and management of the proposed cable. In 1901, an Act of Parliament was passed by the Imperial Government (*The Pacific Cable Act, 1901, Edward VII., Cap. 31*) "to provide for the construction and working of a submarine cable from the Island of Vancouver to New Zealand and to Queensland".<sup>191</sup>

After this, no time was lost in proceeding to bring the scheme into effect.

## UNDERSEA CABLE LAYING

The £1M sterling cable ship *Colonia*, built specially for the job, commanded by Captain H. Woodcock, with Chief Engineer E. Sclater, arrived in Victoria, Vancouver Island, British Columbia, Canada, mid-September, 1902. She was to make history by laying the trans-Pacific cable linking Canada to Australia. After loading for several days, the *Colonia* left for Bamfield Creek, Vancouver Island.

During the previous summer, a telegraph line had been completed from Nanaimo to Bamfield Creek, through the wilderness of forests, lakes and mountains.

The undersea cable, composed of a copper wire core protected by gutta percha wrapping and wound with twelve strands of steel armour wire, was only one inch in diameter but sufficiently heavy to withstand deep-sea pressure. The *Colonia* laid the cable from Bamfield, Vancouver Island, Canada, to Fanning Island, to Fiji, Suva (2,043 nautical miles), to Norfolk Island (982 nautical miles), to Southport, Queensland (837 nautical miles). The operation was successfully completed at the end of October 1902 at a capital cost of approximately £2 million. On 7 December 1902, the line was opened for public traffic.<sup>192</sup>

### SOUTHPORT STATION

The Southport cable station, the Australian end of the Pacific cable, was situated in Bauer Street, Southport, with the staff quarters (trainee telegraphists were called probationers and Submarine Cable Operators when qualified), next door, on the corner of Bauer and Chester Streets. The manager's residence was on the other side of the cable station, also in Bauer Street.<sup>193</sup> The Pacific Cable Board operated this station. (Prior to this, temporary premises were set up at the residence of Mr. Kirk, Brighton Parade, in 1901). The landfall of the cable from Norfolk Island was just south of the Southport Main Beach. It terminated in a cable hut in Cable Street off Ocean Road.<sup>194</sup>

The cable route was along Cable Street, across Nerang River to Barney Street, to Brighton Parade, to Chester Terrace, into Bauer Street to the Cable Station.<sup>195</sup>

Southport was the terminal station for all telegraph calls from overseas. From this telegraph station, international calls were transmitted to destinations throughout Australia. However, in 1923,<sup>196</sup> a direct cable between Fiji, New Zealand, and a cable between Southport and Sydney, were laid as the first part of a programme for duplication of the whole of the Board's cable system. The major effect on Southport was a reduction in staff as it was now possible to modify the method of traffic circulation. Messages for Australia, passing from Fiji to Sydney, were now relayed automatically at Norfolk Island and Southport. The Southport station became a repeater station to Sydney. In 1932, the Pacific Cable Board and Eastern Extension Co. were amalgamated, and many of the P.C.B. staff retrenched. The Southport-Norfolk cable was closed in 1962 and the buildings sold.<sup>197</sup>

Shortly afterwards an approach was made through Cable

and Wireless Limited, London, on behalf of a number of bodies who wished the abandoned cable to be retained for various research and scientific purposes, such as recording measurements of earth currents and sea temperatures from the cable ends as part of a long-term International Geophysical project.<sup>198</sup>

### **DEVELOPMENT OF TECHNICAL EQUIPMENT**

So far I have dealt with the building of Intercolonial, Colonial and Overseas Submarine cables because it was through these links with other States and Nations that the whole system of telegraphy was built with all its benefits to our community and theirs. It would take many thousands of words to explain the development of the technical equipment. Suffice it to say that from the simple Morse key (simplex) transmitting twenty to thirty words a minute over a single wire in 1861, was developed a quadruplex system transmitting four messages simultaneously was in operation by 1885; then Wheatstone using paper tape in 1874, was abandoned in 1876 and revived in 1909 on the Brisbane-Sydney line. The next was the Murray Multiplex, the prototype of Teletypes with alphabetical keyboard and five unit code operation introduced in 1923. Teletypes came in as early as 1926-27 on the Brisbane-Toowoomba line. However, the real introduction was the U.S. type with perforated tape introduced during World War II (1942). However, an English teleprinter was put on trial in Brisbane as early as 1933 and was used during the war. The second World War marked the eclipse of Morse by machine telegraphy.

### **MULTI-CHANNEL EQUIPMENT**

The advent of multi-channel or "Carrier" equipment meant many telegraph channels could operate simultaneously over one pair of wires. By 1971 a huge network of teleprinters serving businesses, airlines, newspapers, radio and TV Stations, Government departments and others, has been set up by the Australian Post Office. This system called "Automatic Telex" allows these subscribers to call each other and many countries overseas by the mere press of a switch. A keyboard like a typewriter allows messages to be sent and received instantaneously day or night and a typed permanent record obtained. By 1959, through TRESS, a somewhat similar system, the Post Office sends off its telegrams to thousands of places across the nation or the world.

### **PICTUREGRAM SERVICE**

Then there is the "Picturegram" service or a "photo by

wire" where by a special machine photographs can be scanned by a small light beam and these light variations, through transmitted electrical signals, interpreted at a distant place for conversion into a replica of the original photograph. Truly we live in a marvellous age.

That is not all, for data from computers is transmitted on telegraph channels far and wide with distance hardly any obstacle. Weather reports so necessary for shipping, aircraft and industry are being gathered from the four quarters of the State and Nation feeding the clicking tapes of the "TRESS" machines to amass readings for Meteorological Bureaux.

In more than 100 years the telegraph in Queensland has been a contributing factor to the development and settlement of the State, especially in the first twenty to thirty years when the lines reached out to far-flung stations and towns, bringing the "singing wires" to their doorstep. It has served the nation during two World Wars bringing hope and sadness. It has changed its physical characteristics in harmony with science and technology to provide a sophisticated communication media equal to any in the world.

### CONCLUSION

However, the story of communications doesn't end here. There is the fascinating story of the telephone, radio and television, but unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say these media have become symbols of the new world with each bearing the imprint of advanced technology. In a little more than 90 years, we have seen the growth of the telephone system from a few primitive instruments in capital cities, to millions of highly efficient telephones located in nearly every home in the nation. Radio, from the early part of the century, has grown to provide a mantle of safety, a conveyor of entertainment and news, and a medium of education for young and old everywhere. In only one and a half decades the impact of television has been felt in most families. This audio-visual medium has almost unlimited application to education, industry, science and entertainment. Surely we live in a wonderful age, when man can communicate with man across the world or across the street by the pressing of a button or switch. The barriers of time and space, even beyond the realms of this earth, have been transcended and the Australian Post Office is proud to have grown with the State and the Nation and be part of the continuation of communications across the generations.

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