

## NEW CENTURY BEGINS

The town of Ipswich entered the 20th century with confidence.

The 1890s had been marked by devastating floods, a severe financial depression and uncertainties about the effects of Federation. Although these uncertainties continued, the new century also brought exciting new possibilities. Technology was making an impact on everyday life as the first motor cars appeared in the streets, telephones were installed and the first moving pictures entertained audiences.

Social life was also changing. Women gained the vote without suffragette-style conflict and general working conditions improved.

Queen Victoria, for so long a symbol of permanence and stability, died in January 1901 after a reign of more than 60 years and a new king took her place. In Ipswich, as in the rest of Australia, loyalty to Britain and its monarch remained strong and large public events marked the royal funeral and the subsequent coronation.

Ipswich people were taking part in Australia's first overseas conflict, the Boer War, and had gained a greater sense of their own place in world affairs. Colonel Deacon, several times Mayor of Ipswich, was one of the volunteers.

Some migrants were still arriving at the Immigration Depot at North Ipswich and in December 1900, for example, four young women from the ship 'Jumna' were in residence, hoping to gain employment as housemaids or nurserymaids.

The most obvious sign of early 20th century confidence in Ipswich was a minor building boom. People complained in 1900 that builders were so busy that 'some little difficulty is experienced in getting them to give prices for small jobs'. Large projects which would usually have produced tenders from numerous contractors were now lucky to receive three or four quotes.

Houses were being built in great numbers and new estates were opened up - even the historic old Grange racecourse site at Raceview was sold off for subdivision in 1901. Some of the new houses at this time were small rental properties built by investors but others were major residences including 'Fairy Knoll', completed in 1901. Many existing houses were also being renovated or 'embellished' by their owners.

Several of the town's landmark public buildings were constructed during this period. Arguably the most impressive of them all was the new St Mary's Church. Preparations began in 1900, when a new brick hall was built to provide a temporary place of worship. The old stone church completed in 1860 was then demolished and work on the new church began.

It was to be a church of cathedral proportions, based on a design by the architect F.D.G. Stanley but supervised by Brisbane stone mason and contractor Patrick Nugent. For several years, people watched as the church gradually took shape and it was finally opened and blessed in October 1904.

In the centre of town, the handsome new Post Office was completed. Designed and built by the Queensland Government, it passed to the new Federal Government as a result of Federation.

Nearby, a Technical College building was constructed on part of the old Pump Yard reserve. The college had begun in 1891 but held its classes in borrowed and rented premises. As it grew, it became clear that permanent premises were needed and this became a special project to mark the Golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria. Its opening in 1901 marked another phase in the educational history of Ipswich, joining the two Grammar Schools and the boys and girls colleges at St Mary's Church in providing a higher level of education.

At Booval, a new butter factory in Jacaranda Street processed its first milk in April 1901 and in Brisbane Street, a brick flour mill was constructed for Francis Kate in 1901-1902.

On the north side of the river, huge new railway workshops were being built. The Workshops had started near The Terrace, but the site proved too restrictive and a new location was selected on the old rifle range immediately to the north. Several new buildings were constructed in the 1880s but the depression of the early 1890s halted the work. Two explosions in locomotive boilers in 1899 alerted the government to the fact that workshops facilities had been badly neglected and as the new century started, the building program recommenced.

While the railways were expanding, the mining industry was bracing itself for problems. In the lead-up to Federation, coal was a constantly recurring theme in Ipswich. Hard as it was for locals to admit, Ipswich coal was of slightly lower quality than coal from New Castle and was more expensive to produce. However, it was protected by the colonial system. Each colony imposed tariffs on imports and had customs houses protecting its borders and its ports, so Ipswich coal was able to remain reasonably competitive and find local markets.

When Federation was proposed, it meant that Australia would become a single commonwealth, and tariffs would be abolished. What would happen to Ipswich coal then, and the hundreds of families who depended on mining for their living? The rural communities around Ipswich were also concerned about effects on their own produce and the region voted 'No' in the Federation referendum in 1899.

The fears of the miners were justified, although Federation was only partly to blame. Sales of Ipswich coal fell and by 1904, the industry was looking seriously at measures to assure its future.

Other industries were progressing more steadily and the city and surrounding district had several large and successful businesses including foundries, joineries, sawmills, brick and pottery works, meatworks and butter factories.

Ipswich at this time also had one woollen mill, operating since 1877, and the only cotton mill in Australia, built 1892 but not operating at that time. It had been hampered by lack of local cotton and at one stage, had been forced to import cotton from India.

In the surrounding country areas, dairying was the main industry but all rural enterprises received a major setback in the great drought of 1902-1904. So serious was its effects that the Government declared a special holiday to allow people to attend 'Day of Humiliation and Prayers for Rain'.

Sugar was grown in the Marburg area, and processed at a mill at 'Woodlands'. Other less usual crops included pineapples, grown at Marburg and Pine Mountain.

But in 1904, Ipswich although an important place, was still classified as a town.

