From 1827 to 1842 the settlement known as Limestone was an outlying station of convicts from Brisbane under the surveillance of a small military detachment. This station was formed by Captain Patrick Logan, the commandant who explored the Bremer River in early 1827. He subsequently gave the name of Limestone Hills to the ridge overlooking the future site of Ipswich.

Some months later a lime kiln was erected and a working party of convicts stationed there to assist Logan’s building projects in Brisbane. Transport was by boat or punt along the Bremer and Brisbane Rivers.

Not long afterwards government sheep and then cattle were sent up to graze on the Limestone Plains. A brick cottage erected there in 1829 formed the nucleus of what was to become the town of Ipswich. The site of this cottage is the block of land on the east side of Thorn Street next to the railway line. By 1835 the cattle establishment at Limestone Station extended as far as Redbank Plains. An agricultural establishment was soon added, known as the ‘Ploughed Station’.

In 1838 George Thorn was transferred through the Commissariat department to Limestone Station with his wife Jane and infant son. They were the first free settlers in the district. In 1839 Thorn retired as superintendent of the cattle establishment and opened an inn in due course.

It was not until February 1842 that the District of Moreton Bay was opened to free settlers, though the penal establishment had been officially closed three years before. Even then the agricultural establishment continued on the outskirts of Ipswich until 1848. During convict days a regulation had prohibited settlement within a fifty mile radius of Brisbane. Though Limestone was within this distance, this breach had sometimes been overlooked.

Early in 1842 Henry Wade surveyed some riverside garden allotments (later Little Ipswich and then West Ipswich), a mile from Governor Gipps’ proposed site for the main settlement. Later in the same year Wade surveyed the township of Limestone including East, Bremer, Bell, Nicholas and Brisbane Streets. In February 1843 Gipps changed the name of the proposed township to Ipswich, as in Suffolk, England, without explanation, though the earlier name persisted for many years.

The auction of these first Ipswich allotments was held in Sydney on 11 October 1843. Among the purchasers were George Thorn, Robert Dix, Thomas Adams, Henry Wade, William Berry, Evan McKenzie, George Wise, William Pickering, Frances Pickering, John Harris and Robert McGregor, most of whom were Brisbane residents.

Business enterprises were established in the 1840s to serve settlers and sojourners alike, including the bakery by Martin Byrne, and the general store by John Smith in Bell Street. Hospitality was provided by St Patricks Tavern at West Ipswich and the Golden Fleece Inn, while George Thorn was proprietor of the Queen’s Arms Hotel from about 1843 and Thomas Moore became keeper at the Caledonian. Thomas Moore was the town blacksmith and wheelwright. At West Ipswich Dr William McTaggart Dorsey and his wife, who arrived in 1842, established the first cottage hospital, while Donald Campbell operated a smithy. The 1846 census showed the population of Ipswich to be fully 103 persons, though the town did not gain its first tailor until
the next year, when Arthur Mann set up a drapery shop in East Street. Such trading increased the need for regular transport from Brisbane.

In 1846 James C. Pearce bought a paddlewheeler called the *Experiment* for trading between Ipswich and Brisbane. She was joined in 1847 by the *Mary Anne*, which was built for John Boyland and James Reid of South Brisbane. About the following year William Wilson began plying between Ipswich and Brisbane in a punt called the *Model*. Since only a rough landing stage served the quickening river traffic, a regular wharf was well under way by mid-June. Two other boats, the *Jenny Lind* and the *Raven* were plying the river route by October. In particular the *Raven*, which was run by the Hunter River Steamship Navigation Company, cut more than two hours off the *Experiment*s time, taking only five hours to reach Ipswich from Brisbane. The old *Experiment* dropped out of the running by September 1849 and was dismantled in Brisbane, her engine being used by Captain Taylor Winship, an enterprising boatbuilder, for his new *Hawk*.

Thus the town became more of an inland port, at the head of river navigation, with tentacles towards the Darling Downs and upper Brisbane Valley. Warehouses and stores were built along the river, and riverside coal mines began to supply the steam boats to Brisbane.

Being situated in such a strategic location by road and river, Ipswich soon increased its complement of public houses. In July 1847, Martin Byrne opened his new hotel in Nicholas Street, called the Harp of Erin. During the following year George Thorn sold the Queens Arms Hotel to David Young and established a wholesale and retail store, while Thomas Moore sold the Caledonian Hotel and developed a farm at Long Pocket. A new hotel was built opposite the Caledonian Inn, named Prince Alberts Head in honour of Queen Victoria’s Consort.

Other community needs were met in this burgeoning frontier town. A post office was opened in 1846 to handle mail delivered by the *Experiment*. In the same year Dr Dorsey was appointed magistrate of Ipswich, with Henry McRohan as the first inspector of cattle and slaughter houses in the district. Court meetings were held in a small room at the Queens Arms Hotel with William Moore, who became the chief constable in 1847, acting as bailiff. Most important for law and order in this fluid, largely male society, the NSW government decided in that year to build a courthouse and lockup in the police paddocks.

Not that the town was without religious and educational influences. Various congregations including the Methodists were established by the late 1840s. In 1849 Ipswich obtained its first resident priest on the arrival of James Hanly, who conducted mass in a slab hut with only shutters on the windows. A Church of England which also served as a school was erected in the following year. John Gregor taught day school from 1843 to 1847, while Mr Munro opened a school in a boarding house owned by the storekeeper John Smith in 1844. Daniel McGrath also started a school in a slab hut in 1847. The Loyal Ipswich Lodge of Oddfellows was established in 1850. These were some of the facilities provided for a population which almost reached our figures by 1851 (530 males, 402 females).

Yet all was not well economically during the late 1840s. Wool and tallow prices dropped disastrously in England, causing local stagnation. To save the pastoralists from disaster, Ipswich followed the example of Brisbane in establishing a timely industry on the river. In 1847 Robert King founded a salting and boiling down works at Long Pocket, about a mile and a half downstream. Not long after, John Campbell, the Brisbane entrepreneur, opened his own boiling down works. The boiling down works of John Smith were destroyed by fire in 1850, but reopened in the same year. This boiling down of animal carcasses into saleable tallow rescued the pastoralists from disaster.

Though the 1850s tended to be sluggish, especially towards the end of the decade, Ipswich possibly did better than Brisbane. Free immigrants helped to dilute the exconvict element of the region, especially those sponsored by Dr John Dunmore Lang. These included such enterprising newcomers as Benjamin Cribb who in 1849 opened the London Stores in Bell Street, forerunner of the historic Ipswich firm Cribb & Foote. As the squatters’ capital, Ipswich saw the foundation of the North Australian Jockey Club in 1852.

At the same time, the activities of the 1840s were consolidated and diversified as population increased to some 3000 inhabitants by 1859. Though wool and beef formed the basis of the local economy, cotton became profitable due to the American Civil War which commenced in 1861. The first cotton was grown
commercially in 1862 by John Panton, followed by others including Cribb & Foote and the Ipswich Cotton Company. Thus Ipswich became the chief cotton-growing area in southern Queensland by the 1860s. However, once the Civil War was over, locally produced cotton could not compete with the American product in cost and quality. The industry, which suffered from pests and the climate, also petered out during the 1890s, despite government bonuses. As the region and Queensland in general developed, Ipswich was called on to supply coal, coke manufactures and dairy produce rather than cotton.

During the settlement period there was also a shortage of coins, so that many firms produced their own interchangeable tokens, with officially approval. In 1853, however, a branch of the Bank of New South Wales opened on the corner of East and Union Streets in a cottage owned by Frederick Forbes. Later in the same year the Bank of Australasia opened its doors in Ipswich and three years later the Australian Joint Stock Bank.

Other signs of the times were the regular delivery of mail by horse-drawn coach from Brisbane in 1853. The town’s first newspaper *The North Australian* was founded in 1855, followed in 1859 by the *Ipswich Herald* which continued from 1861 onwards as the *Queensland Times*. Congregational and Presbyterian Churches were built in 1855, followed by a new Methodist Church in 1858 and a Baptist Church in 1859. St Mary’s Catholic Church and St Paul’s Church of England were also completed in 1859. Merchant John Panton bought land in Thorn Street backing onto Milford Street, where his substantial house called Claremont and two-storey warehouse were built in 1856. In 1859 the core of another heritage survivor was erected – the new courthouse in Brisbane Street – though the hospital building completed in the same year has been demolished.

These developments justified the proclamation on 3 March 1860 which granted municipal status to Ipswich after several petitions and counter-petitions. Though the first council election was held in the courthouse in April a number of residents demanded another which was held on April 19. There were twenty-five candidates, of whom nine were elected, namely John Murphy, John Johnston, Charles Watkins, Donald Bethune, Christopher Gorry, John Malbon Thompson, John Pettigrew, Francis North and Thomas Stanley. Murphy, who was appointed the first mayor of Ipswich, held that position five times. E.B. Cullen became the first town clerk in May 1860. In that year Ipswich was gazetted as a port, and in 1861 its population topped 4500.

All of this activity augured well for civic life in Ipswich during the early decades of Queensland’s separation from New South Wales. It was agreed in October 1860 that an engineer should survey and prepare a plan for the formation of Brisbane Street, and in November that a toll should be erected on Brisbane Street at Little Ipswich, because of the heavy use by drays and bullock teams. During this year the council was granted some land on the corner of Roderick and East Streets to build council chambers. Nevertheless funds were insufficient and ratepayers did not approve of the scheme, so that the council rented a building in East Street. In November 1860 a floating bridge suspended between two punts was placed over the Bremer River at North Ipswich. The telegraph line between Ipswich and Brisbane was opened in the following year, as were the state schools in town and at West Ipswich, and the School of Arts.

Despite this auspicious start, the council ran into financial trouble during 1861. It was short of money and had difficulty in extracting rates from inhabitants. This did not prevent the mayor from obtaining an Ipswich crest and arms which are still in use. After many requests the Queensland government agreed in October 1862 that the council could borrow four thousand pounds and was entitled to a portion of the crown lands which had been sold since July.

Nor did all go as planned during 1862. Thought the government brickfield was handed over to the council, which also gained three thousand pounds from Parliament for the recreation reserve in Brisbane Street, by October the municipality was in debt.

The financial situation was aggravated in 1863 by serious flooding, following which many residents unsuccessfully demanded compensation from the council. These difficult times of high unemployment and financial scarcity affected most people, including John Panton who was forced to sell Claremont to George Thorn. As the provision of a town hall had been delayed indefinitely, the site was rented out. The council also decided that the School of Arts, which was opened by Governor Sir George Bowen in October, should
house the town hall offices as well as the council chambers. Though the city fathers agreed to build premises for a fire brigade and purchase a fire engine, these were not proceeded with until October of the following year, but delayed yet again. However, the fire brigade itself was launched under the watchful eye of Superintendent George Cuthbert, and two fire hydrants were installed in Ellenborough Street and one at the bottom of Nicholas Street. Other civic improvements included a kerosene street lamp on the top of the wall in East Street and another at the corner of Brisbane and Nicholas Streets. Ipswich Grammar School was also established in 1863, a picturesque Gothic style edifice housing the first secondary school in the colony of Queensland.

Within this variable context, the most momentous decision in 1863 was that of the Queensland Parliament to construct the first railway line – not from Brisbane to Ipswich, which was already served by the river route, but from the latter inland, all the better to tap the pastoral wealth of the Darling Downs. Early in 1864 Ipswich was launched on its career as a major railway town by the erection of the first workshop across the river at North Ipswich, followed by an iron rail and road bridge in 1865 and the first train as far as Bigges Camp (later Grandchester) in 1865. Though an attempt was made to mine coal at North Ipswich in 1866, it was railway development which provided the impetus for North Ipswich. In addition to the state school, which opened in 1867, the suburb gained three hotels: Frederick Chapman’s White Hose at the corner of Lowry and Pelican Streets; William Later’s White Swan in Lowry Street; and Patrick Donegan’s Queensland on the Terrace.

Despite this economic stimulus, the rate of unemployment coupled with immigration was so high by 1866, that both the Ipswich council and the unemployed made representations to the Queensland minister for lands. The government succeeded in dispersing the agitated workers who had marched upon Brisbane, but was unable to stem the economic tide which brought severe depression to Queensland in July 1866 and only gradual improvement over the next decade. Nevertheless the railway was completed to Toowoomba by 1867 and opened with much pomp and ceremony.

In 1869 the council acquired the School of Arts when the latter foundered financially. The council moved from East Street into the School of Arts, which began to flourish under a new regime. In 1872 a clocktower was deemed necessary but this was not built until 1879. In the latter year the committee also provided a fountain with a tall column at the intersection of Brisbane and Nicholas Streets (the Blackall Memorial).

As the economic climate improved during the 1870s, business and industrial activity picked up. Commencing in 1871, the name of Whitehouse became synonymous with catering in Queensland for many years. In the same year Samuel Shillito expanded his engineering and machinery workshop (est. 1867) to a site in Limestone Street. In 1872 Thomas Hancock Sr established Hancock Bros sawmill in Canning Street, North Ipswich, where Springall & Frost’s engineering works were also founded in the 1870s. The Ipswich Gas and Coke Company was established at North Ipswich fronting The Terrace, so that the town was lit by gas in 1877. Later in that year, the Queensland Woollen Mills also began production on The Terrace, though their warehouses and offices were located in East Ipswich. In 1879 the town gained the first pumped water supply in Queensland.

With confidence increasing during the late 1870s, Ipswich entered a period of economic prosperity and building activity leading to the boom of the 1880s. The opening of the railway line to Brisbane in 1875 provided readier communication while contributing to the ultimate decline of river transport. In 1879 Limestone railway station was opened to serve the growing suburb which was officially renamed East
Ipswich in 1891. Further growth at North Ipswich resulted in the opening of the Hotel Cecil in 1888 and St Thomas Church of England in the following year. The Ipswich Baptist Church was built in 1876 and the Roman Catholic presbytery, followed by St Mary’s convent in 1884 and the lower storey of the Christian Brothers school in 1889. In 1878 the Lands Office was built on the site of market reserve or saleyards. A coach-building establishment was opened by F.W. Johnson & Sons in Brisbane Street in 1884.

Lined with stylish buildings and stable institutions by the 1880s, the main street demonstrated that Ipswich had come of age. With a swelling population of some 7625 in 1891 and burgeoning suburbs on both sides of the river, the town offered a variety of urban services, occupations and attractions, based upon regional development in railways, coalmining, brick and pottery manufacture, timber and woollen mills and butter production. As Thomas McLeod wrote in his Table of Towns, Ipswich was noted as an ‘agricultural centre, for its woollen manufacture and coal, and was head of navigation’ (1890).

Severe flooding in 1893 and the overall depression of the 1890s afflicted Ipswich as elsewhere, so that the population reached only 8637 by 1901. Nevertheless gains of the decade included the Girls Grammar School in 1892, a separate rail bridge in 1897, Pommer Bros ice and butter factory in the same year and the first trunk telephone lines to Brisbane in 1899.

By the turn of the century Ipswich was regaining its momentum. The Ipswich Technical College opened in 1901 with a curriculum covering science, mathematics, mechanical engineering, commerce, domestic sciences and trades. The flour mill opened in the same year. Alexander Stewart & Sons built a shirt factory which had 650 men. Two iron foundries, Shillito & Sons on the corner of East and Limestone Streets, and Barbat & Sons in North Ipswich produced agricultural and railway equipment. The new railway workshops were opened at North Ipswich in 1903 and employed some 1077 persons by 1907. In the latter years the Joyce Brothers reopened a cotton factory in East Ipswich, which had been established by 1900 and relied upon locally-grown cotton. West Ipswich had its own postal receiving office after 1914. As the dairy industry was prospering, there were three butter factories and once cream depot in the City. St Andrews Hospital was established in 1909 and Cribb & Foote opened their new three-storeyed department store in 1912. Electricity was supplied to town in 1918-1919.

Such was the standing of Ipswich by 1904 that the municipality was proclaimed a city. By 1906 this totaled three wards of 2560 acres, each returning three aldermen. The other areas forming Greater Ipswich were added from 1916 onwards.

Development was resumed after the First World War, including further collieries, brickworks and engineering works. However, progress was hampered by the financial depression which commenced in 1930. The government introduced the intermittent work scheme in 1931, which resulted in work on the roads, in quarries, on school grounds and in parks. This included the entrance to Queens Park on Limestone Hill. The stone wall and terraces on each side of the road were built by the unemployed during the succeeding years. In 1937 the council commenced the slow process of getting the City sewered.

By the end of the interwar period, more than half of Queensland’s coal was supplied by mines from the Ipswich area. Maize, lucerne and potatoes had become the staple crops, and the district supplied a large
portion of milk needed for Brisbane as well as Ipswich. To cope with an expanding population of some 23,000 persons, an incinerator designed by Walter Burley Griffin was located in Queens Park in 1936.

Following the interruption of another world war and subsequent austerity, Ipswich bounced back once more. By 1960 the railway workshops at North Ipswich employed 2500 people while coalmining engaged 3000 and the woollen mills another 1000. Other major works included sawmills, foundries, brickworks, potteries, printeries, engineering and boilermaking works, plywood and bondwood factories and abattoirs. The total population was 43,200.

During the 1960s many older buildings were replaced with modern brick, metal and glass structures. Residential areas expanded rapidly as families moved out from the older urban centres and overseas immigrants arrived. Consequently by June 1971 the City had a total of 17,457 dwellings for 61,000 people, representing an annual population increase of 3 percent. In that year the council approved no less than 740 housing plans. The economy was broadly based upon 96 manufacturing industries, especially furniture manufacturers and the like, followed by engineering works and steel fabricators. Foundries, machine shops, brickworks and concrete block manufacturers were also doing well. Most of the adult population (8836) was employed in production processes and labouring jobs or were craftsmen of some kind.

Agriculture was still important, especially cotton, closely followed by barley, sorghum and wheat. Other crops included maize, lucerne, potatoes, soybeans and onions. None of these crops except barley, which was used locally in the production of malt, were processed in the area. Though little timber remained in the vicinity, other reserves were being used for production purposes. The major market for the joinery, cabinet-making and woollen textile industries was in New South Wales and Victoria, while the engineering and steel fabricating industries supplied the needs of both the southern state and Queensland.

Since the, however, changes in the Queensland economy have seriously eroded the traditional mining, industrial and agricultural base, so that Ipswich is now developing in new directions.