

THE RELOCATION OF DEEBING CREEK TO PURGA MISSION

At the time of the move there were only 54 residents at Deebing Creek and a further 21 out in contracted work. However it was decided that the cost of removal of the buildings at that time was too great. In any event a homestead was erected at the new location in 1914.

There was some correspondence as early as 1913 about the relocation of the mission site from Deebing Creek to Purga. In October of 1913, Secretary W.H. Foote wrote to the Chief Protector endeavouring to obtain funding for the new venture. In the course of this letter he made mention of the reserve of 1600 acres with good timbers on it for the use of the "blacks at the foot of Peak Mountain" which the committee was willing to surrender in exchange for the sum of 350 pounds. The merits of the new site were promoted and the most attractive feature was that it was 4 miles further away from Ipswich than Deebing Creek.

The new settlement was to have better quality dwellings, discarding the old system of slab huts with ground floors. Reverend Robertson reported in October 1914, that 10 new small cottages on stumps were in the course of being erected a fair distance apart and in line around 3 sides of a square paddock of about 6 acres hidden from the public road, but of course under close scrutiny from the Official's quarters. Although there may have been intentions to construct 10 cottages it would seem that only 6 cottages were ever erected.

Another of the features of moving was that it would be very cheap to erect the cottages, as with the available native labour a great deal of the work in removal could be carried out without expense. It was the initial idea that the dwellings at Deebing Creek would be dismantled and re-erected at Purga but it transpired that some of the wood in those dwellings were useless and it was necessary to purchase large amounts of wood and corrugated iron for use in the construction of the new dwellings.

It was while the discussions were taking place that the farm at Purga was acquired and the committee paid the amount of 600 pounds for this. 50 acres of that land was already under cultivation with oats, maize and potatoes. There was also ready access to water as Purga Creek runs through the back of the property.

The existing property at Nine Mile Reserve and the newly acquired property appear to have addressed all of Meston's criticisms concerning proximity to Ipswich, poor soil quality and availability of water.

After the hive of activity utilising the labour of the residents in the construction of the new buildings new mission at Purga. The people from Deebing Creek took up residence at Purga in about 1914 or 1915 and there were 85 residents. The whole concept of Purga was to "raise them up another step in the social scale". Around 9 percent of the running costs were taken from the earnings of the residents from outside work. There was a crippling drought in 1915 and the building program stalled. It would appear that this is the reason why there were only ever 6 cottages at Purga and not the 10 originally intended. The mission limped along until about 1919. During the intervening period Reverend Peter Robertson passed away after many years of service to the Aboriginal cause. Consideration was given to closing the mission down completely and sending the residents to Cherbourg. The Deebing Creek committee, incidentally, was also instrumental in the setting up of the village at Cherbourg in 1904 but that is entirely a different story.