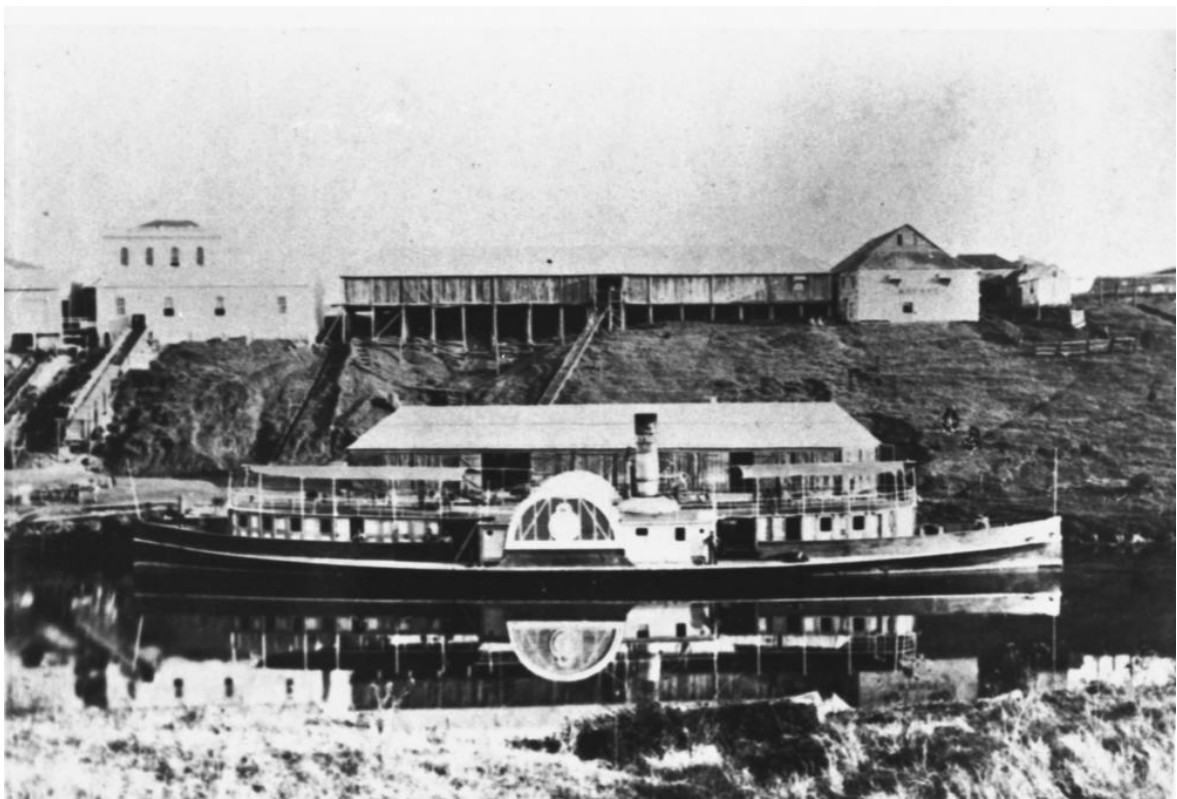


Chapter Two  
The Highway Nature Built  
Commercial Functions of the Bremer 1842-1880



*The Bremer Wharves and Stores with a paddle steamer. Source: John Oxley Library.*

From its foundation in the penal system we are able to see how Ipswich grew around and was influenced by the Bremer. The following section is organised into themes, as each one highlights an aspect of the significances of the Bremer to Ipswich and the surrounding region.

### *River Trade*

The Bremer and Brisbane Rivers enabled Ipswich and Brisbane to be the outlet for the produce of the Darling Downs, the area from which most of the colony's early wealth was derived. Free settlement allowed Ipswich and Brisbane to be part of a larger pattern of towns in Australia whose function "was to act as bases for the opening up of new farmland"<sup>35</sup>. Such towns were generally located on harbours or river junctions "where products bound for market were required to undergo some change in the mode of transport, from, say, wagon to canal barge or ocean-going sailing ship"<sup>36</sup>. This rather accurately describes the function of Ipswich, as the head of river navigation at the eastern end of the overland route from the Darling Downs and Brisbane as the site of ocean-river transshipment.

By the time Moreton Bay was opened for free settlement in 1842, the Brisbane and Bremer Rivers had been established as a communication and transportation link between Brisbane and Limestone. The latter's name was officially changed to Ipswich a few years later. The trade route was extended beyond Ipswich to the west making the river important to the surrounding region, not just locally. The growth of the pastoral presence on the Darling Downs was the staple of river trade, as conveyance was largely either produce destined for market, or supplies and stores needed by the graziers. Before the arrival of paddle steamers in the late 1840s, river cargo was conveyed on flat-bottomed punts or barges, as in the convict days. A journey down the river could take up to two days depending on the wind and tide<sup>37</sup>. The introduction of powered craft, in the form of steam driven paddle wheelers,

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<sup>35</sup> Lionel Frost, 1990, *Australian Cities in Comparative View*, McPhee Gribble, Ringwood, p.8.

<sup>36</sup> Frost, *Australian Cities in Comparative View*, p.8.

<sup>37</sup> Buchanan Heritage Services, 2001, *History Report: The Bremer River Catchment: A Report for the Environmental Protection Agency and SE Qld Regional Water Quality Management Study*, Environmental Protection Agency, Brisbane, p.48-49

eventually reduced the journey to four or five hours, however environmental factors still varied the travel time<sup>38</sup>. River trade boomed between the 1850s and 1870s as these were the years between the establishment of pastoralism on the Darling Downs and the completion of major railway.

The first steamer arrived on the Bremer in 1846 after James Canning Pearce purchased the *Experiment* and brought it to Brisbane. He intended to establish a regular service to Ipswich. The *Experiment's* maiden journey was interrupted when it ran aground near Goodna, but was able to continue and arrived in Ipswich later that day. The return trip was incident free. This was the first of many steamers to ply the rivers, moving passengers and cargo. The steamers that ran regular services at various times throughout the period of river trade include the *Experiment, Raven, Hawk, Swallow, Bremer, Ballarat, Breadalbane, Samson, Brisbane, Ipswich, Settler, Enterprise, Platypus, Emu, Kate, Kangaroo, Louisa, Francis Cadell, Redbank, Premier, Nowra, Kalara, Amy* and *Boko*<sup>39</sup>. A number of navigation companies began to operate runs, including the Hunter Steam Navigation Company. Local companies like the Bremer Steam Navigation Company were founded, only to merge or to be bought out by larger interstate operators.

While the vessels and companies changed periodically, the cargo transported along the Bremer remained largely the same. During the 1840s, wool had been one of the largest exports. Beef, hides, tallow and timber were also listed in January 1845 by the *Sydney Morning Herald* as exports, showing that “the squatters...[were] the fountain from which all [the colony's] profits...are derived”<sup>40</sup>. An early riverman George Holt recalled that “Squatter's stores, building materials and farm implements were the chief up-river cargo” in the early 1850s<sup>41</sup>. A number of boiling down works were situated along both rivers and tallow became a large export, especially during

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<sup>38</sup> Buchanan Heritage Services, *History Report*, p.50.

<sup>39</sup> Rod McLeod, 1969, *Two Rivers to Ipswich*, The World Ship Society Queensland Branch, Brisbane, pp.2-7.

<sup>40</sup> RL Whitmore, 1981, *Coal in Queensland: The First Fifty Years: A History of Early Coal Mining in Queensland*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, p.12; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 January 1845 cited in Donovan, 2000, p.53.

<sup>41</sup> Cited in Buchanan, *History Report*, p.48.

the period when wool prices and demand dropped overseas<sup>42</sup>. Passenger travel was also a function of the Bremer as people “usually chose to travel by river steamer, as this was by far the fastest and most comfortable means of making the journey”<sup>43</sup>. Though some found river travel not so comfortable. In Nehemiah Bartley’s recollection of a journey he states: “I went up to Ipswich in the [*Swallow*], and oh! what a hot trip it was up the river, to my southern nerves. The “Swallow” puffed, and wheezed, and sighed, as if from the heat”<sup>44</sup>. He was rather unimpressed by the Bremer overall, saying it was “a mere ditch, for narrowness, after the Brisbane down below”<sup>45</sup>.

River boat traffic peaked in 1866<sup>46</sup>. In that year “there were 18 steamers, 18 sailing vessels, and 23 barges and about 70 market boats plying between Brisbane and Ipswich”<sup>47</sup>. This can be explained by the increased produce coming from the Darling Downs, allowed by the railway connection as produce could be more reliably and efficiently transported to the head of navigation for transshipment to the port. The number of steamers on the rivers had trebled in the decade to 1870<sup>48</sup>. However, this was also the time of bank collapses in Britain, sparking an economic downturn in Australia. In all, the rivers conveyed a variety of cargoes and were an avenue for the majority of freight transport in South East Queensland during the mid nineteenth century.

River trade required a number of facilities on the riverbank in order to operate, chiefly wharves and stores. Together with the public wharves in the town reach (see the images below) there were a number of private wharves along the river before

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<sup>42</sup> Margery Brier-Mills, 1982, *The Romance of the Bremer*, Historical Society of Ipswich, Ipswich, pp.40-43.

<sup>43</sup> McLeod, *Two Rivers*, n.p.n.

<sup>44</sup> Nehemiah Bartley, 1892, *Opals and Agates; or, Scenes Under the Southern Cross: Being Memories of Fifty Years of Australia and Polynesia*, Gordon and Gotch, Melbourne, p.99.

<sup>45</sup> Bartley, *Opals and Agates*, p.103.

<sup>46</sup> McLeod, *Two Rivers*, p.6.

<sup>47</sup> *Harbours and Marine: Port and Harbour Development in Queensland from 1824-1985* 1986, Department of Harbours and Marine Queensland, Brisbane, p.49.

<sup>48</sup> Whitmore, *Coal in Queensland: The First Fifty Years*, p.84.

the Junction<sup>49</sup>. The public wharves on the southern bank in the Town Reach were erected around 1848<sup>50</sup>. Higher up the bank were the stores and nearby was the Customs House built in 1863. Goods under bond could be shipped to Ipswich without going through Customs in Brisbane, reducing the time before customers could access the goods<sup>51</sup>. The Railway Department constructed a wharf on the northern bank in 1864. Heading towards the Junction, the North Ipswich wharves were on the northern bank and were surrounded by coal mines, boiling down and brick works<sup>52</sup>. The next major private wharves belonged to the Bremer Mills Estate of Joseph Fleming. Established in 1852 the site had its own wharf, as well as a flourmill, timber mill, boiling down works, brick works and accommodation for Fleming and his large workforce<sup>53</sup>. The estate was situated on the southern bank. The Surveyor-General Lieutenant Heath also mentions wharves owned by Panton and Boyland<sup>54</sup>. A number of coal loading facilities existed along the Bremer, as indicated in Images 4a and 4b. Also an Immigration Depot built in 1863 to help ease labour shortages was located on the northern bank, across from the town wharves<sup>55</sup>.

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<sup>49</sup> Brier-Mills, *The Romance of the Bremer*, pp.64-69; Buchanan Heritage Services, *History Report*, pp.53-55.

<sup>50</sup> Buchanan Heritage Services, *History Report*, p.52.

<sup>51</sup> Buchanan Heritage Services, *History Report*, p.56.

<sup>52</sup> Brier-Mills, *The Romance of the Bremer*, p.69.

<sup>53</sup> Brier-Mills, *The Romance of the Bremer*, p.65.

<sup>54</sup> G.P Heath, 1861, 'Report on the impediments to the navigation of the River Bremer', The Honourable The Colonial Secretary, Colonial Secretary's Office, 24 April 1861, Queensland State Archives, Z5599, 1861, pp.5-6.

<sup>55</sup> Buchanan Heritage Services, *History Report*, p.22.



*View of the Town Reach looking west. The wharves are situated on the left hand bank, below the railway bridge. Source: John Oxley Library.*

### *Coal: A Goldmine*

Coal or 'black gold' was first noted on the Brisbane and Bremer Rivers by the early explorers. Fraser mentions seeing "Numerous beds of coal, lying in veins of considerable thickness [...] adjacent to the lime" in his observations of 1828<sup>56</sup>. Coal mining soon became an important industry in the Ipswich area and continued through to the twenty-first century. There is some speculation over the exact year in which the first mine commenced operation. Suggestions range from 1843 to 1848<sup>57</sup>. Coal historian R.L. Whitmore suggests the first mine, located at Redbank and operated by John Williams, "began in the early months of 1843 to fuel the steamship *Sovereign* which was attempting to maintain a regular service between Sydney and Brisbane"<sup>58</sup>. He also states that early mining was "closely tied to the advent of the steamship"<sup>59</sup>. Somewhat ironically, the first steamer on the river, the *Experiment*, was originally powered by "four horses working around a capstan which in turn worked the paddles" but was converted to a twelve horsepower engine before

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<sup>56</sup> Whitmore, *Coal in Queensland*, p.5.

<sup>57</sup> Whitmore, *Coal in Queensland: The First Fifty Years*, pp.28-29.

<sup>58</sup> Whitmore, *Coal in Queensland: The First Fifty Years*, p.29.

<sup>59</sup> Whitmore, *Coal in Queensland: The First Fifty Years*, p.13.

arriving in Brisbane<sup>60</sup>. This highlights the fact that the Bremer had a dual function as both a site for coal transportation and consumption of coal.

Coal mining has played as much a part in the development of Ipswich as the Bremer River. The two had a close relationship as “The river played a vital role in the early years, firstly as the site of the initial discovery of coal and subsequently as a transport artery for coal won from underground mines in and adjacent to the river bank”<sup>61</sup>. The river conveyed a significant share of early mining produce to buyers and the Brisbane wharf for export. While the Bremer was used to transport coal, getting it to the river or railway was another matter. In the late 1870s, tramways from collieries to the river replaced the haulage teams of horses and carts<sup>62</sup>.

During the 1840s and 1850s, coal was bunkered as fuel for industries along the rivers such as boiling down works, forges and saw mills<sup>63</sup>. Locomotives on the southern and northern railways in Queensland converted to coal after 1870 after they had burnt wood for the first few years<sup>64</sup>. During the middle part of the century, southern Queensland coal was mainly used locally and was always in competition with New South Wales. A mineralogical surveyor for the Australian Agricultural Company predicted, inaccurately, in 1852 that “The coal seams of Moreton Bay will remain of very local interest and their produce would merely supply the few steamers to that harbour”<sup>65</sup>. The deposits in New South Wales were thicker, richer and located close to the sea-ports of Newcastle and Wollongong. As well, New South Wales had already established its place in the market before Queensland mining developed on a large scale<sup>66</sup>. Regardless, the importance of coal to Queensland and locally to Ipswich cannot be understated.

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<sup>60</sup> McLeod, *Two Rivers*, pp.2-3.

<sup>61</sup> Michael O’Flynn & Mark Thornton, 1990, ‘Sand, Gravel, and Coal Resources of the Brisbane River and Adjacent Areas’, in Peter Davie, Errol Stock & Darryl Low Choy (eds.), *The Brisbane River: A Source-Book for the Future*, Australian Littoral Society, Moorooka, p.29.

<sup>62</sup> Buchanan Heritage Services, *History Report*, p.129.

<sup>63</sup> Whitmore, *Coal in Queensland: The First Fifty Years*, p.22.

<sup>64</sup> Whitmore, *Coal in Queensland*, p.7.

<sup>65</sup> Whitmore, *Coal in Queensland: The First Fifty Years*, p.16.

<sup>66</sup> Archibald Meston, 1891, *Queensland Railway and Tourists’ Guide*, Gordon and Gotch, Brisbane, p.33.

### *Roads or Ruts?*

During the convict years, the majority of communication between Moreton Bay and the rest of New South Wales was done by sea, and mostly by official personnel. Even as the penal system was scaled down and Moreton Bay opened for free settlement, “Except for stray overlanders, most new inhabitants arrived by boat”<sup>67</sup>. Only a few overland routes had been forged around the region. As pastoralists took up more of the Darling Downs, their need for adequate transportation to market and port increased. Early attempts found “It was one thing to have the supplies in Brisbane but another to get them safely to the Darling Downs”<sup>68</sup>. As navigable rivers only penetrated a short distance from the coast, the rest of Moreton Bay’s hinterland required roads.

The difference in distance of river and road travel between Brisbane and Ipswich was rather significant. In fact, the distance by road of twenty-four miles was half that of the river at fifty miles, as noted by Archibald Meston<sup>69</sup>. The major reason for the Bremer-Brisbane trade was the lack of or poor quality of alternative transport. Initially this meant roads. Water carriage was the most common form of long distance haulage in England and when transplanted to Australia, settlers faced the disappointing reality of a narrow coastal plain across which the rivers were too short to be useful for inland travel<sup>70</sup>. Waterways, like the ocean, as explained by Geoffrey Blainey, were viewed as communication lines<sup>71</sup>. Though due to their limited penetration inland roads were cut. Like southern parts of the colony, the first major roads were made by squatters “from old horse and dray tracks to carry their wool, by bullock and horse to eastern ports”<sup>72</sup>. The two major roads in the area were that

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<sup>67</sup> Rod Fisher, 2000, ‘The Brisbane Scene in 1842’, in Rod Fisher & Jennifer Harrison (eds.), *Brisbane: Squatters, Settlers and Surveyors*, Brisbane History Group, Kelvin Grove, p.17.

<sup>68</sup> Val Donovan, 2000, ‘Down Rode the Squatters’, in Rod Fisher & Jennifer Harrison (eds.), *Brisbane: Squatters, Settlers and Surveyors*, Brisbane History Group, Kelvin Grove, p.49.

<sup>69</sup> Meston, *Geographic History of Queensland*, p.53.

<sup>70</sup> Geoffrey Blainey, 1966, *The Tyranny of Distance: How Distance Shaped Australia’s History*, Sun Books, Melbourne p.119.

<sup>71</sup> Blainey, *The Tyranny of Distance*, p.118.

<sup>72</sup> Maurice French & Duncan Waterson, 1982, *The Darling Downs: A Pictorial History 1850-1950*, Darling Downs Institute Press, Toowoomba, p.110.

from Brisbane to Ipswich, and between Ipswich and Toowoomba, the major centre on the Darling Downs.

The road to Ipswich was situated on the southern side of the Brisbane and Bremer Rivers. While the original settlement at Brisbane was on the northern bank, the south side was soon occupied by convict works and later a settlement rivalling its north-side neighbour. The road gave South Brisbane “direct intercourse with the interior”<sup>73</sup>. Ferries ran across the Brisbane River until the first of several incarnations of the Victoria Bridge opened in June 1865<sup>74</sup>. Settlements along the rivers up to Limestone were predominantly located on the southern bank and so followed the course of the main road between these locations. The German explorer Ludwig Leichhardt travelled overland from Brisbane to Port Essington in 1844, via the Darling Downs over what was described as a boggy track<sup>75</sup>. Contemporaries speculated that the lack of road construction and maintenance was due to the adequate transport provided by the rivers. Pugh also attributes the establishment of a cattle station at Redbank to the deficiencies of overland transport<sup>76</sup>. Local historian Fred Clark notes that the Brisbane-Ipswich road would have incurred limited use before free settlement as there was restricted movement of convicts and from “1846 onwards the ‘*Experiment*’ and other steam boats would take the bulk of any goods in and out of Ipswich”<sup>77</sup>. In March 1852 the road was described as “the difficult serpentine dray track”<sup>78</sup>. The Darling Downs road did not fare much better.

The journey between Toowoomba and Ipswich was slow for three main reasons. Freight haulage was bullock powered rather than motorised, and had to negotiate a poorly maintained road made more difficult by its black and red soil therefore

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<sup>73</sup> JJ Knight, 1895, *In the Early Days: History and Incident of Pioneer Queensland*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, Sapsford, Brisbane, p.130.

<sup>74</sup> Knight, *In the Early Days*, p.130; John Kellet, 2004, ‘Bread or Blood, 1865’, in Raymond Evans & Carole Ferrier (eds.), *Radical Brisbane: An Unruly History*, Vulgar Press, North Carlton, p.41.

<sup>75</sup> Fred Clark, c.2006, *Ipswich Road 1839 to 2005: The History of the Brisbane to Ipswich Road and Its Current Route*, Richlands, Inala and Suburbs History Group Brisbane, p.5.

<sup>76</sup> Theophilus Parsons Pugh, 1859, *A Brief Outline of the History of the Moreton Bay Settlement, the time of discovery of the Bay by Captain Cook to the Present Time: compiled from various sources*, unknown, Brisbane, p.63.

<sup>77</sup> Clark, *Ipswich Road*, p.9.

<sup>78</sup> Cited in Clark, *Ipswich Road*, pp.9-10.

becoming impassable when wet, as well as the Main Range<sup>79</sup>. The story of road travel and searching for more practical routes began in the years immediately preceding free settlement when squatters began to arrive in numbers on the Downs. In October 1840, the then commandant of Moreton Bay, Lieutenant Owen Gorman, set out with a group of men mostly from the Downs to find a more practical route for drays over the Range as Cunningham's Gap would not allow transit for "drays with any sort of loading"<sup>80</sup>. They found a passage that became known as Gorman's Gap "that drays pass [could] with very little difficulty carrying about a ton and a half each" and made the journey about thirty miles shorter<sup>81</sup>. Gorman's claim however was somewhat inaccurate as he travelled in what was described as "a queer specimen of the Irish jaunting car"<sup>82</sup>. The pastoralists who tried to use the route with their bullocks and loaded drays found it quite difficult.

Gilbert Elliot tried to return to the Downs via Gorman's Gap, with stores from Brisbane, in November 1840. He found the journey extremely difficult with his loaded dray, prompting him to refer to the section at the bottom of the Range as the 'Hell Hole'<sup>83</sup>. After others attempted and also found the route difficult Arthur Hodgson put together a party and over seven to ten days cleared a route to Grantham in January 1842<sup>84</sup>. Gorman's Gap was still used periodically after the second route was created. This second track was then superseded when the Toll Bar road was opened in the late 1840s<sup>85</sup>. Blacksmiths were established at both ends of the road. Campbell had a blacksmith's shop at One Mile on the track to the Downs, where Patrick Flanagan operated a shop at Drayton "to service the teams using the track to Ipswich"<sup>86</sup>. By the late 1860s and 70s "Roads had increased in numbers if not

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<sup>79</sup> DB Waterson, 1968, *Squatter, Selector and Storekeeper: A History of the Darling Downs 1859-93*, Sydney University Press, Sydney, p.195.

<sup>80</sup> Gorman cited in JK Jarrott 1976, 'Gorman's Gap', *Queensland Heritage*, vol.3, no.4, 1976, p.24.

<sup>81</sup> Gorman cited in Jarrott, 'Gorman's Gap', pp.24-25.

<sup>82</sup> Henry Stuart Russell cited in Jarrott, 'Gorman's Gap', p.24.

<sup>83</sup> Jarrott, 'Gorman's Gap', p.29.

<sup>84</sup> Jarrott, 'Gorman's Gap', p.29.

<sup>85</sup> Jarrott, 'Gorman's Gap', p.29.

<sup>86</sup> Buchanan Heritage Services, *History Report*, p.21; Waterson, *Squatter, Selector and Storekeeper*, p.79.

in quality and there was a substantial cartage industry”<sup>87</sup>. Cobb and Co. started running mostly passenger services in the region in the late 1860s.

The improvement and maintenance of roads was not taken to with any great effort. Nearly all descriptions of roadways during the nineteenth century were statements regarding their poor quality. Despite the need for an adequate passageway from the Darling Downs to the east “The main roads themselves were, by 1863, in an atrocious condition and almost completely incapable of sustaining dense traffic”<sup>88</sup>. The reasons were that road development was “Costly, unremunerative and subject to political whim”<sup>89</sup>. It was only two years later when the railway took most of the Downs produce to Ipswich before the river completed the journey. In all, overland transport between the Darling Downs and the coast was better suited to small, light vehicles as heavy loads were met with difficult terrain. While the demand for wool meant high road carriage costs were paid willingly, the Bremer provided a cheaper and quicker alternative for the easternmost part of the journey.

### *Negotiating a Mine Field*

From the beginning, commercial use of the Bremer had to contend with its deficiencies in terms of navigability. Being narrow and shallow were two of its main obstacles. This meant river steamers were “much smaller than the coastal packets, possessing a very shallow draught”.<sup>90</sup> In some places the depth at low tide was less than a metre<sup>91</sup>. There were also numerous static rocks or boulders in the water and pollution from industry, such as pine logs floating adrift from sawmills<sup>92</sup>. A report by Lieutenant Heath in 1861 on the impediments of the Bremer noted the numerous rocks and boulders<sup>93</sup>. He recommended the removal of the rocks so that steamers could manoeuvre more easily<sup>94</sup>. Four years later the Engineer of Harbours and

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<sup>87</sup> RL Whitmore, 1985, *Coal in Queensland: The Late Nineteenth Century 1875 to 1900*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, p.2.

<sup>88</sup> Waterson, *Squatter, Selector and Storekeeper*, p.195.

<sup>89</sup> French & Waterson, *The Darling Downs*, p.110.

<sup>90</sup> Whitmore, *Coal in Queensland: The First Fifty Years*, p.21.

<sup>91</sup> Whitmore, *Coal in Queensland: The First Fifty Years*, p.21.

<sup>92</sup> Queensland Votes and Proceedings, 1865, p.1296.

<sup>93</sup> Heath, ‘Report on the impediments to the navigation of the River Bremer’, pp.1-2.

<sup>94</sup> Heath, ‘Report on the impediments to the navigation of the River Bremer’, p.3.

Rivers, Joseph Brady reported on works underway including channel deepening in the town reach, the removal of parts of the Two and Five Mile Rocks and burning off of timber and logs along the banks<sup>95</sup>. This kind of work was carried out periodically, though was never completed to a stage where navigation had remarkably improved.

Once at Ipswich, steamers had to turn around for the return journey to Brisbane. At the wharves in the town reach, as with much of the river downstream from the Junction, the river was too narrow to allow turning. Fortunately an area of the river just to the east of the town reach forms a wider section called 'The Basin'. John Dunmore Lang was opposed to the head of navigation being located in the town reach, instead he suggested "a site a mile down the river, below the Basin"<sup>96</sup>. William Henry Traill noted in 1886 that Ipswich owed its development not just to the river, but specifically to the Basin<sup>97</sup>. It is uncertain whether vessels turned around before or after visiting the town wharves, though this was not an issue for the steamer *Ipswich* as she was a double-ender meaning it "did not have to turn in the swinging basin at Ipswich" for the return journey<sup>98</sup>. Without the Basin, river traffic would have been severely disadvantaged.

The Brisbane River's biggest obstacles for trade were its shallow bar and meandering course. The issue of the bar in a commercial context was quite a problem. No ocean going vessel had easy access to the town reach and consequently any cargo brought downriver had to go through a series of transhipments before being ready to travel beyond the Bay. Johnston explains this problem in the context of the purpose of Brisbane's settlement. He states: "The penal reason of settlement was primary; perhaps it was sensible to have barriers frustrating easy escape by sea, and so an up-river location [protected by a difficult bar] seemed more suitable"<sup>99</sup>. The meandering course made travel slow as did the numerous rocks and other obstacles. The challenges of the Brisbane River were also disadvantages imposed on the Bremer, as

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<sup>95</sup> QVP, 1865, p.1293.

<sup>96</sup> Buchanan Heritage Services, *History Report*, p.21.

<sup>97</sup> Cited in Buchanan Heritage Services, *History Report*, p.51.

<sup>98</sup> McLeod, *Two Rivers*, p.4.

<sup>99</sup> Johnston, 'Not a Capital Idea', p.239.

this was the latter's only outlet to the sea. Whitmore notes "The major inland river port in Queensland was Ipswich although ships from the southern colonies were unable to reach it because of the tortuous course of the Brisbane River and its shallow depth"<sup>100</sup>. Thus, by virtue of being a tributary, the Bremer, along with its own obstacles, had its commercial potential limited as easy access to the ocean was not forthcoming without extensive and costly human intervention.

Glenn Lewis explains that only "a prohibitively costly programme of river improvements" would have allowed larger steamers continuous access to Ipswich<sup>101</sup>. Enough work and money was spent on the bar at the Brisbane's mouth to make it accessible to ocean going vessels that it seems rather unlikely the work required to make the Bremer a deep draught channel would have been implemented, particularly due to the knowledge and popularity of rail transport and its 'conquering' of the landscape<sup>102</sup>. Even during the height of river trading "governments were reluctant to spend too much money on river maintenance"<sup>103</sup>.

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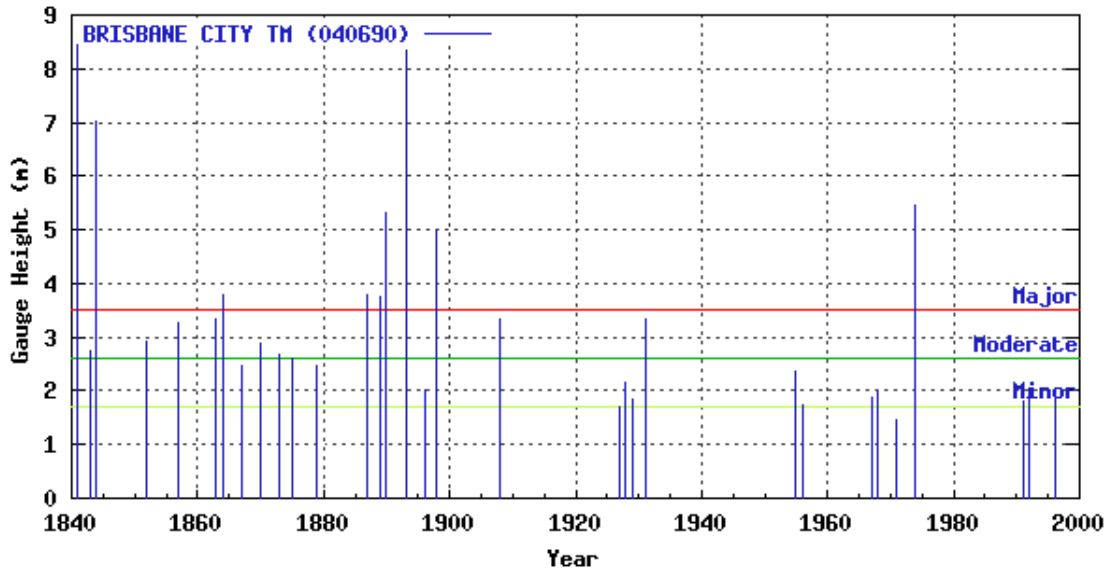
<sup>100</sup> Whitmore, *Coal in Queensland: The First Fifty Years*, p.84.

<sup>101</sup> Glenn Lewis, 1973, *A History of the Ports of Queensland: A Study in Economic Nationalism*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, p.10.

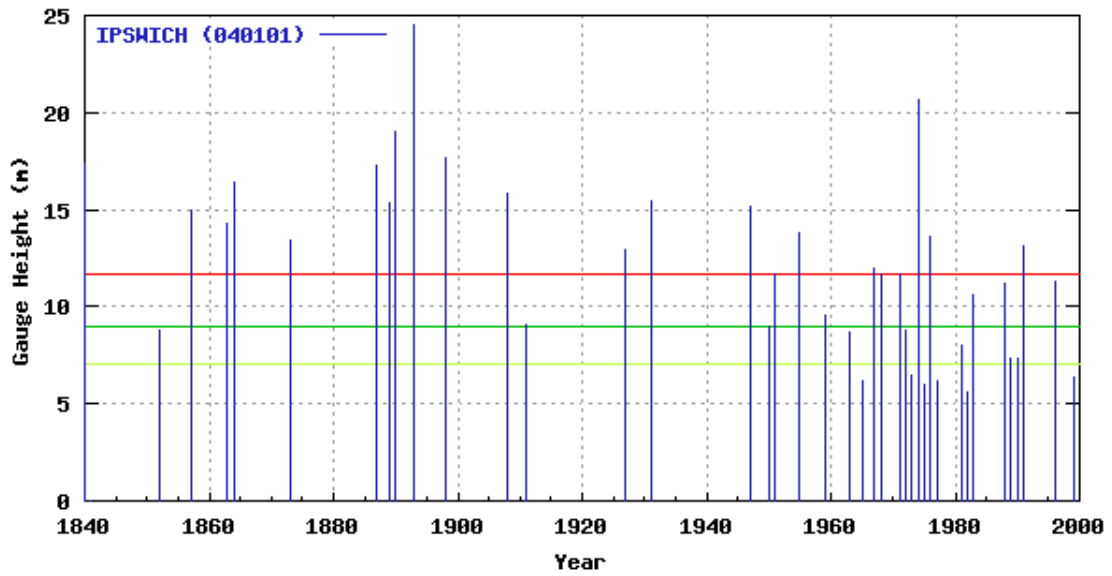
<sup>102</sup> Lines, *Taming the Great South Land*, p.110, Railways were said to conquer time, shrink space and master nature.

<sup>103</sup> Buchanan Heritage Services, *History Report*, p.44.

**BRISBANE RIVER at BRISBANE CITY TM  
Highest Annual Flood Peak**



**BREMER RIVER at IPSWICH  
Highest Annual Flood Peak**



*Flood Peaks for the Brisbane and Bremer Rivers 1840 to 2000.  
Source: Bureau of Meteorology, 2001.*

The confluence of the Brisbane and Bremer Rivers, known as the Junction, was also a hazard. Rocks and shoaling were navigation obstacles, and during floods, water from upstream on the Brisbane would backup in the Bremer. Flooding causes difficulty to river navigation in a number of ways. Most obviously, it raises the water level, thus disguising the channel and other obstacles. Floods deposit material and erode the bank and riverbed in an exaggeration of regular patterns. They also disrupt the river's surrounds, causing damage to property and livestock, some of which become obstacles in the waterway. The Brisbane and Bremer Rivers experienced flooding rather often throughout the nineteenth century, including a few major ones, like 1864 and 1893<sup>104</sup>. Records of flooding in New South Wales and Queensland have been kept since 1841 as the graphs on the pervious page show<sup>105</sup>. The floods, while a natural and expected occurrence, caused temporary yet costly disruptions to all industry along the rivers. Therefore the Bremer, while being strategically located would never reach the potential some hoped could be achieved through various engineering works and modifications.

### *The Iron Highway*

There are two phases of the relationship between the Bremer and the railway. The first was of cooperation which was then followed by railway domination. The Bremer was a major factor in influencing the location of the first section of track in Queensland. As Buchanan states, the Brisbane-Ipswich route "was already provided by an efficient river trade and the most urgent need for a rail link was seen as the Ipswich to Darling Downs section"<sup>106</sup>. In this area, as discussed earlier, land transport was the only option available and subsequently left travellers and cargoes to contend with poorly maintained roads<sup>107</sup>. The first section of line between Ipswich and Grandchester was opened on July 31 1865<sup>108</sup>. The railway continued to extend

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<sup>104</sup> Brier-Mills, *The Romance of the Bremer*, pp.47-54.

<sup>105</sup> Brier-Mills, *The Romance of the Bremer*, p.45.

<sup>106</sup> Robyn Buchanan, 2000, 'Athenians v. Thebans: Brisbane by Ipswich Journalists', in Rod Fisher & Jennifer Harrison (eds.), *Brisbane: Squatters, Settlers and Surveyors*, Brisbane History Group, Kelvin Grove, pp.32-33; Whitmore, *Coal in Queensland*, p.8.

<sup>107</sup> AE Cole, 1945, 'Early History of the Queensland Railways', *Royal Historical Society of Queensland Journal*, vol.3, no.4, p.286.

<sup>108</sup> John Kerr, 1990, *Triumph of Narrow Gauge: A History of Queensland Railways*, Boolarong, Bowen Hills, p.10; Whitmore, *Coal in Queensland*, p.8.

west, bringing export produce to the head of navigation. Though the following year petitions were submitted to the Legislative Assembly calling for the railway to extend to Brisbane. One submitted by the bankers, traders, merchants and other residents of Brisbane read “No system of Railway can prove successful that does not connect the Metropolis (the principal shipping port) with the interior of the Colony”<sup>109</sup>. They did not get their wish for another nine years.

Wool was southern Queensland’s major export and improving its passage to port was a high priority. The speed and reliability of trains over paddle steamers justified the expense of railway construction and freight charges to the authorities and pastoralists respectively<sup>110</sup>. From the 1860s the colonial governments set about providing infrastructure such as railways, “necessary to consolidate the permanent European occupation of rural Australia”<sup>111</sup>. Millions in overseas capital “poured into Australia...to finance railway construction and the farms, mines and sheep stations the railways made profitable”<sup>112</sup>. It soon became apparent to many in Queensland that “restricting transport between the seat of Government and the vast interior to horse coaches and small steam barges” was, as Cole describes, absurd<sup>113</sup>. The eastern route was constructed in the mid 1870s, connecting Sherwood on October 5 1874, Oxley Point on February 4 1875 and Brisbane on June 14 1875, ten years after the first line headed west<sup>114</sup>. The navigation problems of the rivers and the logic of connecting the hinterland directly with the port meant that “the river trade for both freight and passengers collapsed”<sup>115</sup>. Limited river traffic remained “with...a few punts, coal barges and small cargo vessels [but] the days of the Paddle-Steamers had slipped into oblivion”<sup>116</sup>. The large crane at the Ipswich wharves was removed in 1878 as it was no longer needed<sup>117</sup>. The coming of the railway saw road and river

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<sup>109</sup> QVP, 1866, p.1555.

<sup>110</sup> Blainey, *The Tyranny of Distance*, p.243.

<sup>111</sup> Lines, *Taming the Great South Land*, p.109.

<sup>112</sup> Lines, *Taming the Great South Land*, p.109.

<sup>113</sup> Cole, ‘Early History of the Queensland Railways’, p.307.

<sup>114</sup> Meston, *Queensland Railway and Tourist’s Guide*, p.20.

<sup>115</sup> JG Steele, 1976, *The Brisbane River*, Rigby, Adelaide, p.24.

<sup>116</sup> Brier-Mills, *The Romance of the Bremer*, p.37.

<sup>117</sup> McLeod, *Two Rivers*, p.7.

freight transportation largely replaced by the child of the 'age of progress', indicating a shift in the population's views of efficiency and using their surroundings.

The location of coal mines on either side of the Bremer largely determined how their produce was transported downstream<sup>118</sup>. The main line was originally constructed to cater for pastoral interests and was situated on the southern side of the Bremer<sup>119</sup>. This was not ideal for coal. Only coal from the Bundamba and Dinmore areas could travel straight to the Brisbane wharf by rail as branch lines were constructed connecting the mines to the trunk line. Mines on the northern side however had no access to the rail line, as there were no convenient river crossings<sup>120</sup>. As the major Ipswich mines were on the north side, the Bremer "isolated them from the railway and the small mines used drays to haul their coal along the dusty, rutted roads to a station while the larger mines built tramways to the river and relied on punts for transporting their coal to Brisbane"<sup>121</sup>. The mines on the north side close to the river suffered little disadvantage in cost compared to those on the south side with rail access. The Bundamba and Dinmore connections reduced the cost of haulage to Brisbane by about 20 cents per tonne, while on the northern side there was a roughly equal charge for river conveyance<sup>122</sup>. North side mines that were located further from the river however, had to pay an extra 30 to 35 cents per tonne for cartage by road on top of shipping charges<sup>123</sup>. Ultimately, while rail offered an alternative for coal transport its potential was hindered by its location in relation to the Bremer and major coal mines, a situation arising from the rail initially focusing on the movement of wool.

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<sup>118</sup> Whitmore, *Coal in Queensland*, p.12.

<sup>119</sup> JCR Camm, 1970, 'Railway Development and Agricultural Settlement on the Darling Downs, 1898-1920', *Australian Geographical Studies*, vol.8, p.31.

<sup>120</sup> Whitmore, *Coal in Queensland*, p.21.

<sup>121</sup> Whitmore *Coal in Queensland*, p.12.

<sup>122</sup> Whitmore, *Coal in Queensland*, pp.21-22.

<sup>123</sup> Whitmore, *Coal in Queensland*, p.22.

### *Ports and Politics; Rocks and Whines*

The location and initial purpose of Ipswich played an influential role in determining its place in the new colony of Queensland after separation in 1859. The influence of the Bremer is a direct link to this. By the end of the convict era, Brisbane had an established administrative foundation and Limestone was its primary production centre. This relationship remained similar for the rest of the nineteenth century, with Brisbane continuing as the administrative and commercial centre while Ipswich was largely the industrial neighbour. While providing a point from which the hinterland was opened up and goods flowed through for export, Ipswich was also an industrial centre from the beginning of its life in 1827. Clive Forster explains that the Australian capitals were from the outset commercial and mercantile in function, rather than industrial<sup>124</sup>. Brisbane on the other hand, was less reliant on industry and had the advantage of having “a headstart as the commercial, maritime and administration centre of the Moreton Bay District”<sup>125</sup>. To say that Ipswich was destined not to be the capital due solely to its early industrial heritage is too simplistic, as a combination of factors made the prospect rather unlikely. And so, from the mid-1870s Brisbane was able to dominate, particularly the southern section of the state, with the help of the railway.

A struggle for political influence and potential status as the principal town, and later the capital city, arose between Ipswich and Brisbane soon after free settlement. One of the most significant ways Ipswich tried to gain influence was through trade and commerce and this tied directly to the river. Ipswich was growing as the centre of the transport and trade network. Produce from the Darling Downs travelling east from the 1840s took the general journey of bullock-drays to Ipswich where it continued by road or river steamer to Brisbane before being moved into lighters for transshipment to ocean going vessels in Moreton Bay<sup>126</sup>. Money was sought to clear

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<sup>124</sup> Clive Forster, 2004, *Australian Cities: Continuity and Change*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, p.3.

<sup>125</sup> Fisher, ‘The Brisbane Scene in 1842’, p.30.

<sup>126</sup> Leslie Slaughter 1960, *Ipswich Municipal Centenary*, Leslie E. Slaughter, Brisbane, p.17; AG Davies, 1935, ‘The Genesis of the Port of Brisbane’, *Royal Historical Society of Queensland Journal*, vol.2, no.6, p.287; Firmin McKinnon, ‘The Halcyon Days of Cleveland’, *Royal Historical Society of Queensland Journal*, vol.4, no.1, p.104.

the obstructions and improve the rivers' navigability<sup>127</sup>. This would ensure Ipswich could remain the centre of commerce. Ipswich was not alone in this desire, and had the support of the squatters of the Darling Downs who themselves could hold greater influence if Ipswich rather than Brisbane was the centre for trade. The first Queensland government in 1860 realised "that the Brisbane River and a dray road to Dalby were not sufficient traffic facilities"<sup>128</sup>. With an economy reliant on the products of pastoral production, any means of improving the efficiency of transportation was imperative. Three years later, railways were a key election issue<sup>129</sup>. This signalled a shift in thinking about transport and the efficiency of water carriage compared to rail, reflecting the trends that had already taken place in the southern colonies and overseas.

The squatters used Ipswich as their main commercial centre and pressed for the region's main port to be established at Cleveland, situated south of the Brisbane River mouth in Moreton Bay. There appears to be two suggestions involving Ipswich's role in securing this desire. One proposal was to carve a 'wool track' from Ipswich to Cleveland, making the whole journey overland before cargo was loaded onto ocean going vessels<sup>130</sup>. The other was to clear the rivers of obstacles "to admit vessels [that]...could ply at all times of the tide and could easily go to Cleveland loaded with wool to be transhipped from there"<sup>131</sup>. These proposals were rivals to Brisbane's claim for the port. In 1871, Benjamin Cribb, an Ipswichian member of the Legislative Assembly, suggested that the necessary improvements required to the rivers could be completed with tools, punts and manual labour. He said works along the river were left unfinished due to the change of government and the proceeds from the sale of a dredge should have been used to complete this work<sup>132</sup>. Though, when the Upper Flats of the Brisbane River were cleared in 1872 "which permitted

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<sup>127</sup> Bruce Davis, 1974, 'The Influence of Ipswich in Early Queensland', MA thesis, University of Queensland, Brisbane, p.121.

<sup>128</sup> Meston, *Geographic History of Queensland*, p.45.

<sup>129</sup> Meston, *Geographic History of Queensland*, p.46.

<sup>130</sup> Brier-Mills, *The Romance of the Bremer*, p.7; Slaughter, *Ipswich Municipal Centenary*, p.39.

<sup>131</sup> Slaughter, *Ipswich Municipal Centenary*, p.41; Davis, *The Influence of Ipswich in Early Queensland*, p.14.

<sup>132</sup> Benjamin Cribb, 3 April 1871, Letter to The Honourable The Colonial Secretary, Colonial Secretary's Office, General correspondence records, Queensland State Archives, COL/A155.

larger vessels to reach the town wharves” Brisbane’s claim to the port was solidified and Ipswich started to lose influence<sup>133</sup>. While this effectively finished the port debate, the Bremer was still pushed as the best route from Ipswich to Brisbane.

The political rivalry was also documented by the local press. An editorial in the Ipswich newspaper, the *North Australian*, from February 1856 discussed the central position of Ipswich, stating “Even should it be resolved that the Head Quarters of the future Governor shall be situated at the port [of Brisbane, Ipswich] must always be the commercial capital”<sup>134</sup>. Complaints came from Brisbane in 1864 over Ipswich’s request for funds to improve the rivers. The response in the *Queensland Times* stated, “The river navigation as it exists is quite sufficient for all Ipswich purposes. But it happens, also, to be the main highway of the colony and the chief avenue of communication with the interior”<sup>135</sup>. Buchanan makes the point that the squatters really only needed Ipswich to be their political ally and not necessarily the capital, so long as they were able to move their goods as they wished<sup>136</sup>. While Ipswich was able to have a large number of representatives in the Legislative Assembly, it used the Bremer, as a corridor of trade, as its main bargaining chip<sup>137</sup>.

Ipswich’s efforts to gain commercial and political supremacy were ultimately unsuccessful. It had however managed to delay railway development to Brisbane as a result of works undertaken on the rivers. The influence Ipswich exerted to the mid 1870s was also perhaps due to the colony making a number of rapid transitions. These were from a convict foundation to free settlement and then self-government in just under twenty years, after which it took around another twenty years to settle and consolidate its position and resources. Hence, it was easier to destabilise the power base and Ipswich was not the only centre making a claim for capital. The close proximity between the two settlements made it hard for Ipswich to really evolve outside of Brisbane’s shadow. Being connected by the river also meant Ipswich was

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<sup>133</sup> Lewis, *A History of the Ports of Queensland*, p.51.

<sup>134</sup> Cited in Buchanan, ‘Athenians v. Thebans’, p.32.

<sup>135</sup> *Queensland Times*, 1864, p.2.

<sup>136</sup> Buchanan, ‘Athenians v. Thebans’, p.32.

<sup>137</sup> Davis, *The Influence of Ipswich in Early Queensland*, p.122.

reliant on Brisbane's cooperation concerning river maintenance. Once the railway was established "it became even harder to make a case for dredging and clearing" and harder for Ipswich to keep using the Bremer for political sway<sup>138</sup>. From the mid-1870s the influence of Ipswich declined, but as Davis notes "in the long term [Ipswich] was not to suffer because...coal mining activities developed with a consequent expansion in industry; and a more secure base for the town's welfare was to result from this"<sup>139</sup>.

It is curious that there seems to be no official announcement that Brisbane was the capital of Queensland. There is no notice of a capital being officially designated in the Government Gazettes, proceedings of the Legislative Assembly or newspapers. In an age where proclamations were rather important, this seems a little odd. There was much uncertainty as to whether Brisbane would become the principal town or major port in the region. As early as 1839 other sites were considered for a port<sup>140</sup>. By 1844, authorities "still refused to give any guarantee that Brisbane Town would ever become the...headquarters"<sup>141</sup>. The centre for administration in Queensland had always been Brisbane, which it had by virtue of being the original, and most established settlement. While capital city and major port are not exclusively the same entity, all Australia's colonial capitals were initially the first site of settlement and subsequently being established as ports and later the major port of the state<sup>142</sup>. Perth and Fremantle are the exception as they were and have remained separate entities. This can be explained by the concept 'geographical momentum' meaning the capitals, regardless of their original purpose, were the most established settlements in their regions and, despite their shortcomings, continued to gain importance to become the capital<sup>143</sup>. This is certainly true of Brisbane.

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<sup>138</sup> Buchanan Heritage Services, *History Report*, p.44.

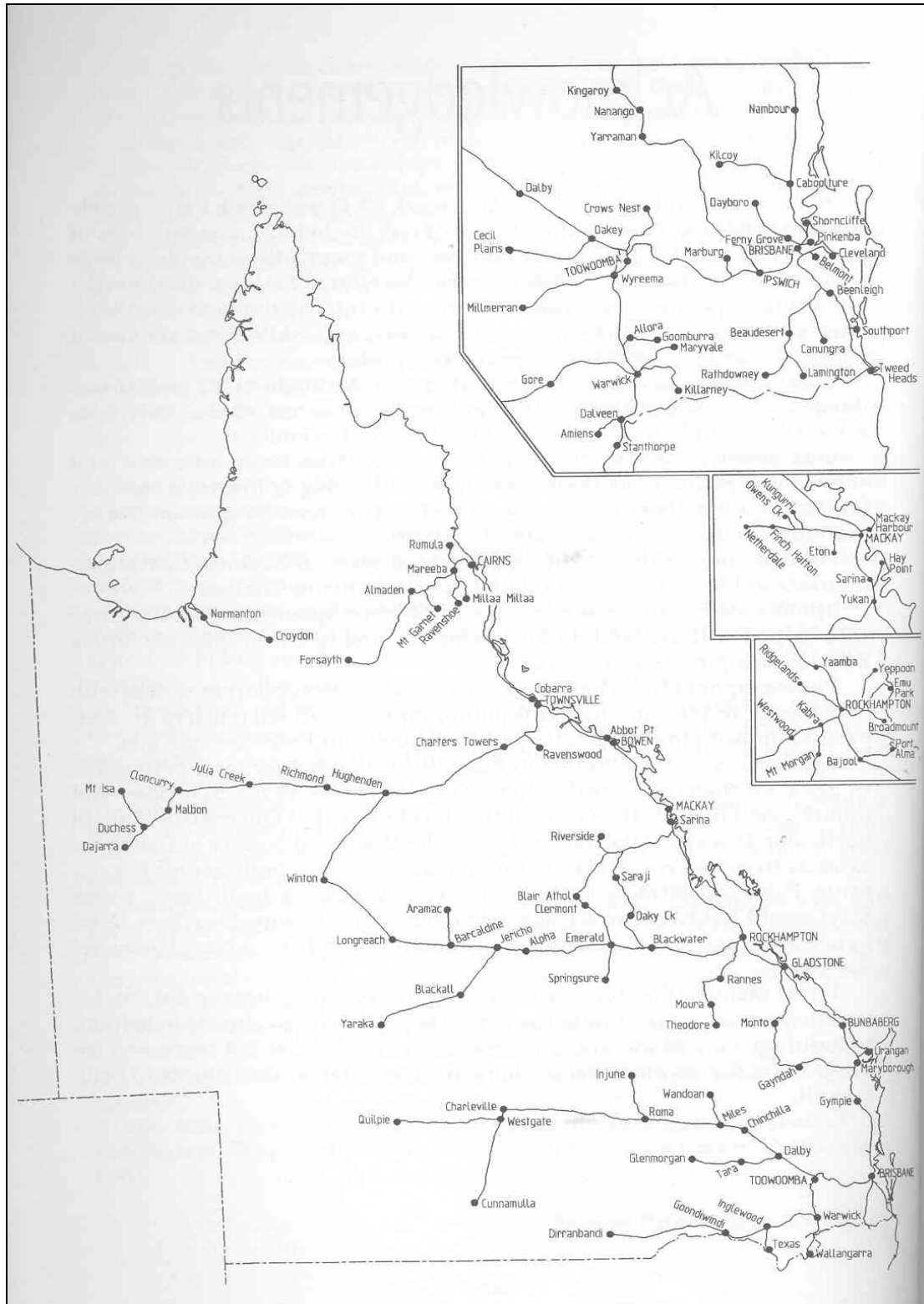
<sup>139</sup> Davis, *The Influence of Ipswich in Early Queensland*, p.123.

<sup>140</sup> Fisher, 'The Brisbane Scene in 1842', p.29

<sup>141</sup> Knight, *In the Early Days*, pp.129-30.

<sup>142</sup> James Bird, 1965, 'The Foundation of Australia's Seaport Capitals', *Economic Geography*, vol.41, no.4, p.283.

<sup>143</sup> Bird, 'The Foundations of Australia's Seaport Capitals', p.297, Geographical momentum is "the tendency of places with established installations and services to maintain or increase their importance after the conditions [that] originally determined their establishment have appreciably altered".



Queensland's Railway Network. Source: John Kerr, *Triumph of Narrow Gauge*.