

## ARRIVAL OF SOUTH SEA ISLANDERS IN QUEENSLAND

### **The Courier, Tuesday 18 August 1863, page 5**

The schooner Don Juan, the arrival of which was noted in our issue of yesterday, is from the group of islands in the Pacific named the New Hebrides. She brings a number of the natives of those islands to be employed as laborers by Captain Towns on his cotton plantation, on the Logan River, at the remuneration of 10s. per month, with rations, as is currently reported. We understand that there are sixty-seven natives on board, and that one man died on the passage.

### **The Sydney Morning Herald, Saturday 22 August 1863, page 6**

Brisbane, Arrival.

August 15. – Don Juan, from South Sea Islands.

The schooner Don Juan, Captain Grueber, left Erromanga on the 4<sup>th</sup> instant, sighted Moreton light at 3 o'clock on Friday morning, rounded Moreton Island at 8 a.m., and anchored off the lightship at 9 p.m. During the passage she experienced a fine S.E. breeze and fine weather until the 12<sup>th</sup> instant, when the wind changed and blew a heavy gale from the N.E. The Don Juan has on board in all seventy-three South Sea Islanders for Captain Towns' cotton plantation. One of the islanders died on Saturday last from exhaustion caused by sea sickness. He was buried on Mud Island. The agreement made with these men is, that they shall receive ten shillings a month, and have their food, clothes, and shelter provided for them. – Queensland Guardian, August 18,

### **The North Australian, 20 August 1863**

The arrival of the Don Juan, schooner, at the port of Brisbane, with sixty-seven natives of the New Hebrides, to be employed on Captain Towns Cotton Plantation at the Logan River, would under any circumstances be an addition to the population of the colony worthy of more than ordinary notice. But this somewhat novel description of immigration has many features about it, deserving of public attention and enquiry. The announcement made by a Brisbane contemporary, in chronicling the arrival that these islanders are employed at Ten Shillings per month with rations, is very significant of the equity of the contract made with them; more particularly, as the gentleman to whom they are engaged has a passion for very cheap labor; and, has, throughout his connections with Australia, mixed in every scheme for the introduction of the inferior races of mankind, by whom the end might be attributed.

With the arrangements between capital and labor, where the parties are European, any enquiry or comment on their proceedings, would be uncalled for interference with the acknowledged laws of trade. Where, however, the contract is made between a member of a civilized nation and a barbarian, and there is evidence on the face of the agreement, that the ignorance of the savage has been used to his disadvantage, it would be a stigma on civilization and Christianity to countenance Such dealings by their proper name. A civilized community have a right to enquire why a race of savages should be introduced amongst them? And, also the nature of the guarantee given, that their social laws will not be outraged, their lives endangered, or the public revenue be made to suffer for the support or control of so peculiar an addition to their number?

We do not assert that, in the case of the batch of islanders who have reached our shores, the nature of the contract was not fully explained to them, together with the usual rate of wages in the colony, to which they were about to be ..... (*this line difficult to read*) fair means were resorted to, inducing them to leave their island home. But as this immigration has come upon the colony, without notice or consent, it is only fair to all the interests concerned, that the fullest information in respect to its nature and conditions should be made public, as well for the general

satisfaction that the country is justified in receiving this immigration, as to remove from the immigration itself certain unpleasant suspicions, which recent revelation have laid it open to.

Within the last few months we have had amongst us a gentleman, long a missionary to the South Sea islanders, who described to us and the neighbouring colonies, the system of kidnapping the islanders, and carrying them as slaves to South America. We were informed that France had already interfered to prevent this inhuman traffic and we were imported to influence Great Britain to aid in its suppression. The mode of enticing the islanders in their ignorance of design and love of barter, on board the vessels has been described, and atrocities equalling those of the African system perpetrated on the victims who did not willingly submit to their expatriation.

It is not unreasonable to believe that, where islanders are being kidnapped and treated in these manner reported, with their ignorance between the difference between service and slavery, it would be very difficult, if not impossible, to induce a large number of an island population to emigrate. In proportion to the supposed difficulties of such an undertaking, should be the desire of the community amongst whom they are landed, to be furnished with reliable evidence, that none but fair inducements had been used in obtaining their services. That the reward or remuneration for such services, was agreed to, after knowing the rate in the country in which the service was to be performed, and that the remuneration is not designed as an evasion of the enactments against slavery. Every Briton, is proud in the knowledge that slavery cannot exist in any part of Her Majesty's vast dominions, but even that assurance does not bind men to the existence of contracts of service, entered into with barbarian or inferior races, which in their design and fulfilment amount to virtual slavery. It is the duty of every community under the British crown, to discourage such contracts of service, and where they exist to watch their conduct, so that the intention of the laws against slavery may not be violated, or the faith of the Islanders in the justice of the nation be jeopardised to serve the purposes of greedy or unprincipled men.

The natives of New Hebrides have the same manners and customs as other islanders of the South Seas. They are cannibals, fond of warfare and the chase, and, unless when in slavery, unused to labor. The fertility of their islands supply them with the necessaries of life, and their geographical position has afforded them less intercourse with Europeans than most of the other groups of islands. They have, therefore, very little knowledge of the habits of civilized life, and are neither so ready in acquiring nor so tractable under control, as many neighbouring islanders. Nearly twenty years ago Ben Boyd, the manager of the Royal Bank in New South Wales, imported and tried to use a large number of these islanders on works at Twofold Bay. They were known in Sydney as "Boyd's Red-headed Blackfellows," the speculation as to their labor turned out a complete failure, and such of them as did not succeed in running away in whalers or vessels bound to the islands, were obliged to be sent back at Mr. Boyd's cost.

The natural habits of these islanders does not in any way fit them for service in this colony, and their introduction in large numbers might be attended with very unpleasant consequences. The disease known as "small pock," has been acclimatised among them, and has carried off large numbers, so that care should be taken that the pest be not introduced into this country by their means; but looking at the circumstances and prospects of our labor market, we cannot see the least necessity for giving countenance or encouragement to their introduction. They cannot mix with the other sections of the community, and they will always be viewed with suspicion and repugnance; while they themselves may be ill used to any extent and be unable to make their grievances known. The reply of the Colonial Secretary, to Mr. Pugh's question, is far from

sufficient to satisfy the public, and Parliament will be remiss in its duty if it fails to gain fuller information in TOWN'S immigration scheme.

**Telegraphic Despatch (From our own Correspondent).**

The Argus (Melbourne, Victoria), Tuesday, 25 August 1863

The arrival of some Polynesians at Brisbane is exciting attention. The subject has been brought before the Assembly, and allegations have been made that captain kidnapped them. The Colonial Secretary stated that he had made inquiries, and that the men had signed an agreement for one year.

**The Courier, Wednesday, 2 September 1863, page 2**

IMPORTATION OF SOUTH SEA ISLANDERS

The following is a copy of the correspondence which has been furnished by the government in accordance with a motion made by Mr. Pugh, M.L.A.:-

Sydney, 30<sup>th</sup> May, 1863.

MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT for engaging natives for my cotton plantation in Queensland, for six or twelve months

Witnesseth: 1, Robert town, hereby engage and undertake to pay as wages to any able adult native that may be hired for my service, at and after the rate of ten shillings (10s.) per month in such trade as he may prefer at the end of his agreement, and to return him to his home within twelve months should he require such.

2. I also agree to find the native huts or houses, or tents, until huts can be put up, and to supply them with good and sufficient food, such as they are accustomed to, and to provide them with cooking utensils, and in every way watch over and protect them, during the period of their servitude..
3. The labor these natives will be required to perform, will be chiefly field labor, of a light and easy description, such as cleaning and picking cotton when in season, and any other work they may be called on to perform.

Witness my hand this 30<sup>th</sup> day of May, 1863.

R. Towns.

Sydney, 29<sup>th</sup> May, 1863.

Sir, - Referring to our verbal agreement for your present employment on the intended expedition of the Don Juan, after a number of natives to be employed on my cotton fields in Queensland:

I now give you my written instructions for your guidance, and, as I understand you are no scholar. Captain Grueber will read them for you and explain what is required of you.

First, you will proceed to, and call at, such islands as you are known to the natives and then explain to them what your object is, namely, to engage for me from fifty to one hundred natives, all males, on the present voyage, until they are better known in the district and colony.

I will prefer young lads, from fourteen and fifteen to eighteen, in preference to older men, as the bulk; you must have some old hands amongst the lot to induce the young ones to enlist.

In engaging or persuading these people you must tell them exactly what they will have to do, that is, their chief work will be in the cotton fields, and that they will have good huts to live in, a kind master to protect, and that you will take them back within twelve months, perhaps in six, and that you will be on the station to explain and interpret for them, and that they will be paid in goods at the rate of 10s. per month (over and above their rations) for the able men, and the others according to their worth and value.

I presume you will call at Leifoo or Ware first, and then to Sandwich; I leave this for you and Captain Grueber to arrange; and while I am on this, I must here remind you, that while you are on board the ship you are to act, and do the duty in every way, as second mate, for which service you have signed the articles of the vessel, and in which capacity you will be paid at and after the rate of £5 (five pounds) per month, which pay will be continued you on the station so long as you remain or other arrangements are made.

In conclusion, I must remind you of my earnest desire that the natives are treated with the greatest kindness, and on no account allow them to be ill-used by the crew, or any person on board; if such is offered to them. It is your duty to report the same to the captain. I will be satisfied with fifty young men and boys if you can get them, but will be better pleased with seventy if the vessel can bring so many comfortably; but on no account crowd them or delay the vessel for the purpose.

You must endeavour all you can to keep the natives in good humour and friendly, and on good terms with each other; on no account allow them to quarrel or have any of their national disputes on board, - and keep all such quarrelling from them; if you find such, unfortunately, to take place, at once separate them, and put up bulkheads between them. Take care non of the old beach-coomers – European sailors – smuggle themselves on board with the natives.

You had better call at Leifoo, before Hayes gets there, and leave before he may arrive.

I think I have now said all I have t mention, and hope you may have a successful voyage.

I am, &c., R. Towns.

Mr. Ross Luin.

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29<sup>th</sup> July, 1863.

Dear Sir, - Your vessel now ready and victualled with supplies sufficient for the voyage and return with natives, you will at once proceed to sea, and make the best of your way to the isle of Leifoo, or such other island as you may first make, for the purpose of procuring natives for the cotton fields, with which you will return to Moreton Bay with all possible despatch, where I will in all probability be to receive and direct you. The above is an outline of your intended voyage.

I will now proceed more in detail to instruct your for your future guidance.

The nature of your voyage is, as before stated, to proceed to the different islands of Leifoo, Ware, and Sandwich, and any other islands you may find it necessary to proceed to for the purpose of selecting the natives, and with a view to collect a useful class of men, lads, and active boys. I have engaged Mr. Ross Luin, who speaks the native language, and well known amongst the islands. This man, now shipped as second mate, will do the needful in engaging the men, which I promise to return to their native land within twelve (12) months from the time they leave. You must endeavour to convince the friends of the people, as well as themselves (those you engage), the honesty of our intention, and if there should be any legal authority, give them guarantee to the same object that the people will be returned in accordance with their agreement.

And as the natives may not be cognizant with our language, I wish you to be present when these arrangements are made through the interpreter. I have sketched out a memorandum for Mr Ross Luin to explain to the natives in your presence the terms of their engagement, and the work they have to do; also the rations they will receive, at the same time assuring them of every protection the British law will afford them. In this, you will please to observe, we wish you to act as our agent, and not allow any advantage to be taken of the natives, even to our interest.

And when engaged, I look to you to see that they are properly cared for, that they have proper food and attention, and that they are made to keep the place in which they live thoroughly clean.

I have put on board two suits of shirts and trousers for one hundred natives. You will please serve out one suit when they first embark, keeping one for their landing. If you can procure seventy natives in all, you may do so; but half the number will do. If you find much difficulty in getting them, on no account attempt force to take the people against their own free will and consent. If you find any missionaries at the islands, make their acquaintance, and tell them from me what my object tis in engaging the natives to leave the island they belong to, and engage for a short season to serve in cultivating cotton. The labor will be light, in weeding, cleaning, and picking cotton; and I will engage to provide them comfortable huts, and regular rations of rice, meat, pumpkins, potatoes, and yams (if they will grow), and return them to their homes within the twelve months – very likely within six months.

And you may also mention to the missionary that it is my intention to bring over their wives with them next year if they like the place, and answers my purpose to do so.

I will make their wages for the best men equal to ten shillings per month, with others in proportion. These natives will have every protection equal to Europeans in Queensland, which is a climate as warm as the one they leave. This much you may tell the missionaries; and if they can find a reader or interpreter, I will gladly receive him, and pay him for what he may be worth, over and above his food and lodging, which I suppose will be little; but he will learn civilisation. I mean to exchange these people every six or twelve months, and bring over their wives and families with them when they get accustomed to the country and the work.

I have now shadowed forth my views and intentions, and leave you to carry them out; and, in conclusion, I will again repeat, on no account allow the natives to be ill-used. They are a poor, timid, unoffending race, and require all the kindness you can show them. You may lead them to anything, and I will not allow them to be driven.

If you find it difficult to procure the natives through Mr. Ross Luin, you had better run over t Erromanga, to Mr. Henry's station and he may be able to assist you, should such be necessary, but

it will be a disappointment to me if you cannot procure for me from fifty to seventy natives for the purpose required.

In reporting your ship inwards from the islands, be particular, and state the number, names, and ages you have on hand as passengers for Mr. Towns' Cotton Plantation – let everything be clear in your proceedings, Mr. Palmer, my agent in Brisbane, will have my instructions respecting you, if I am not in Queensland, to which you will please attend.

Use your utmost endeavour to get over the ground, and land the people as soon as possible. You must be a little easy with Mr. Ross Luin, but if he fails to give you satisfaction, go to Mr. Henry, at Erromanga, or Underwood, at Anataw, and they will put a man on.

Yours, &c.,  
R. Towns.

Captain Grueber, "Don Juan"

**The Brisbane Courier, Thursday 7 July 1864, page 2**

**IPSWICH STEAMERS**


The Premier, s., is to proceed to the bay this morning, to convey the health officer to inspect the South Sea Islanders, who arrived by the Uncle Tom, schooner, on Tuesday last. If passed, the Islanders will be conveyed from the schooner direct to Captain Towns' plantation on the Logan River. It will be remembered that some eleven months ago Captain Towns introduced a similar number of the Islanders by the Don Juan. These men were under an engagement for twelve months, at the termination of which they are to be sent back to their native islands in the South Pacific. In the event of any of them wishing to return to Queensland, they will be required to enter into an agreement to work for five years; and will be allowed to bring their wives and families with them. We understand that the vessel which conveys them hence will cruise among the islands for some time, to afford those who may be desirous of returning an opportunity of doing so.

**The Maitland Mercury & Hunter River General Advertiser, Thursday 11 October 1866**

The Logan – October 4 – The want of rain is now most severely felt for all growing crops, and for every purpose of agriculture. During the last week scarcely any progress is visible in the growth of anything, and it is astonishing how dry the land has become. Should October this year be dry, as is usually the case, fears will be entertained that the season which commenced so auspiciously is going very quickly to betray itself. – During the last week Captain Towns has received another large addition of South Sea islanders. They were brought up the river by Mr. Pettigrew's new steamer. The number is said to be seventy. Townsville plantation is a great success, and 259 bales of cotton have been sent away this last season. – Brisbane Courier's Correspondent.

N O T I C E .

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**A** Vessel will be despatched to the SOUTH SEA ISLANDS, so soon as the necessary arrangements can be made, to take back about one hundred (100) natives from the Townsvale Plantation.

As no more are required for that Establishment, parties desirous of obtaining NATIVES from the Islands will have the opportunity of sending for them.

Applications to be made without delay to the undersigned, from whom all particulars as to terms, &c., can be obtained.

O'REILLY & PRITCHARD,  
Agents.  
Brisbane, September 2, 1867. 677

The Darling Downs Gazette and General Advertiser, Saturday 21 December 1867, page 3

SOUTH SEA ISLAND LABOUR

The following report has just been made to the Government by Mr Macdonnell, Immigration Agent in Brisbane –

In accordance with instructions, I visited and inspected, on the 13<sup>th</sup> instant, the barque King Oscar, 248 tons, Captain Gibbon, which arrived in Moreton Bay from the South Sea Islanders on the 11<sup>th</sup> instant; and I have now the honour to report that this vessel was chartered by Messrs W.D. White and G. Mylne for the purpose of obtaining labourers from the South Sea Islands for employment in Queensland. Mr. H. Ross Lewin acting as recruiting agent; and the employers for whom the Islanders were engaged are – Messrs G. Raff, W.H. Walsh, G. Mylne, G. Sandeman, J. Fraser, Phillips, and others; the agents for the ship are Messrs Bright Brothers. There was one European passenger besides Lewin.

The King Oscar left this port about two months since, and commenced taking in Islanders nine days after leaving Moreton Bay. The voyage back was performed in thirteen days. The cargo consisted of cocoa-nuts and live pigs. There were 270 Islanders on board, exclusive of boat's crews. These were procured from the undermentioned Islands –

Sandwich	67
Mow	28
Mare	31
Pee	33
Ambrim	72
Mii	<u>39</u>
Total	270

Their apparent ages ranged from 14 to 40 – the natives of Mow containing a large proportion from 14 to 18. The men appeared to enjoy good health, with the exception of a Sandwich man, ill from chest disease; an Ambrim man, ill from dropsy in the hand; another, from same island, with a boil or abscess on the knee; and an Apee man, who fell down the hatchway and hurt his leg. One death occurred on the voyage among the Sandwich men, from a chest disease, probably consumption. I questioned them respecting this death, and they pointed to their chests and coughed, when endeavouring to describe the illness. This man, no doubt, was ill when taken on boards and should not have been allowed to come. Mr Lewin stated that he did not discover that he was ill until it was too late to put him on shore. There was no medical attendant on board, but the ship was provided with a medicine chest and a medical guide.

I mustered the natives of each island in separate groups, and, with the assistance of one of their own number, who could speak a little English, and Mr Lewin's interpreter, I examined them with a view of ascertaining if they knew the object for which they came. The time for which they were engaged? The amount of wages promised to them? The allowance of clothing promised? The food they are to receive? At what time they expect to be taken back to their respective islands? Their treatment on board ship? Their food on board ship? And, lastly, whether Mr Lewis stole them from their islands.

To all these questions satisfactory replies were given, which were substantially as follows – They came with the intention of working for employers in Queensland. The term of service to be three years. Wages to be £6 per year, or £18 in all. Clothing to be supplied at the rate of two shirts, and two trousers per annum, or six of each in all, and blankets as required. Food to consist of meat, flour, sweet potato, rice, and sugar; the quantity of these articles to be supplied daily or weekly. (Although stated in their separate agreements, did not appear to be well known to the men). They are to be returned to their native islands at the end of three years. They were well treated on board ship. They were satisfied with the food issued to them during the voyage, consisting of pork, yams, rice and cocoa-nuts. The last question appeared to amuse them, as they all laughed at the notion that Mr Lewis ran away with, or stole, them; and they gave a decided negative to the question, which I put to them in various forms, with the same result.

I inspected the 'tween decks," and found it tolerably well ventilated by three hatchways. An open raised berth or sleeping place extended fore and aft at each side, six feet in width, leaving an open space amidships thirteen feet wide by about seventy-seven feet long; the height of the "tween decks" is about six feet.

The men were all supplied with clothing and blankets, and they appeared to be contented, and in good spirits. They are a good class, especially those for Mare; they all appear to be simple in their habits, and, if properly treated, will doubtless make good labourers.

Mr Lewin, in the absence of Captain Gibbon, afforded every facility for the inspection, and invited all possible inquiry. He stated he was glad the Government interfered in the matter, as he hoped it would tend to remove many erroneous impressions with regard to this description of labour.

Mr George Raff, one of the employers, accompanied me on board, and signed agreements with fifty islanders, namely: - Five from Mare, fourteen from Ambrin, and thirty-one from Mii, after the contents had been fully explained to them in my presence. A copy of one of these agreements is appended hereto.



The whole of the islanders signed their marks to an agreement with Mr Lewin, to serve him or whom he may appoint. A copy of this agreement is appended. They also signed their marks to separate agreements with Mr Lewin, as agent for various employers in Queensland.