

It is not known when South Sea Islanders first arrived in Ipswich but it is known that a number were working in Ipswich from 1867 onwards.

The Brisbane Courier of 5 September 1868 reported that fifty-three Polynesians were working for nine employers in the Ipswich District, seven were employed in pastoral work and forty-six in agricultural work.

A number of early Ipswich settlers used South Sea Island labourers to work on their properties including:

- ✕ **Joshua Peter Bell**
(Cotton plantation, Ipswich).
- ✕ **George Challinor**
(Cotton plantation, Yamanto).
- ✕ **William Dance**
(Marburg).
- ✕ **J.A. Jackes**
(Ipswich).
- ✕ **James Ivory**
(former Bremer Mills site, Bundamba).
- ✕ **J & G Harris**
(Store owners in Bell Street, Ipswich).
- ✕ **Mr Lindsay**
(Ipswich).
- ✕ **John Smith**
(Ipswich Agricultural Reserve).
- ✕ **Thomas Lorimer Smith**
(Marburg).

Tarra Gindi Tasserone

Tarra was a South Sea Islander from the Loyalty Islands who worked for Mr and Mrs Alfred Foote. He was born ca1850 and was brought to North Queensland to work in the cane fields. He ran away while only a young lad and was found by Alfred Foote who was a prominent land owner in Brisbane and Ipswich. Alfred Foote saw Tarra sitting on the roadside and took him under his wing.



*The Salvation Army Band in the early 1900s.
Source: Picture Ipswich – Whitehead Studio.*

In approximately 1886, Tarra went to live with the Foote's in Quarry Street, Ipswich and also accompanied them on family holidays. He was a friendly and well-liked man who loved children. Mrs Dorothy Payne who lived for a while with her grandmother Mrs Foote, remembered that Tarra drove them and the neighbouring children to Ipswich Central School in a horse-drawn vehicle (the horse was named Charlie).

Another grand-daughter, Mrs Estelle Kahler remembered that Tarra always had jelly beans to give the children. When holidaying with the family at Southport, he would row them across to Main Beach as there was no bridge at that time.

Viva Cribb said she was told that when land was being cleared for a new house in Brisbane owned by Mr and Mrs W.D. Grimes (Mrs Grimes was a Cribb) that Tarra was asked what they should call the house and he said **“Tarra Gindi”**.

Mrs Payne and Mrs Kahler had a pet parrot that got loose. Tarra climbed a tree to recover it and fell. He injured his hip, complications set in and he died in the Ipswich Hospital in 1913.



Pictured from left are Salvation Army members: Tarra, Mr Smith and Charlie Gorman in the early 1900s.

In 1877, Charles Smith moved his sawmill from Sandy Creek to his Woodlands plantation at Marburg. This building was destroyed by fire three years later but was immediately rebuilt. Thomas Lorimer Smith (son of Charles) decided to plant sugar cane. The first crushing season was in 1883 and it produced sugar which was considered to be of top quality.



Marburg Sugar Mill 1882-1900? Unidentified group of people in front of the mill. Mr Gibson on the far right purchased the mill in 1905.

Source: Picture Ipswich, Ipswich City Council .

The plantation employed white men as supervisors and about 100 South Sea Islanders in the growing season. The Islanders working at Woodlands were time-expired men who had stayed in Queensland after fulfilling their original contracts. These men worked in the fields and lived in huts on the western side of the property. By 1900, there were only 25 South Sea Islanders working at Woodlands.

“No colour bar here,” said former Marburg resident, Mrs F.W.M. Madsen, of West Ipswich, when she displayed this picture of the first Bible school at the Marburg Church of Christ. Taken at a Sunday school picnic 69 years ago (in 1894), it shows numerous Kanakas, who, at that time were employed in the sugar industry at Marburg.



A Sunday School picnic in 1894. South Sea Islanders working at Woodlands were member of the first Bible School at the Marburg Church of Christ.

Source: The Queensland Times, 1969.

They worked for the late Mr. T.L. Smith, who operated a sugar mill and cultivated 500 acres of sugar cane. The property, known as “Woodlands” and Mr. Smith's residence, were purchased later by the Roman Catholic Church and converted to a seminary. The teachers at the Bible school were the late Mr. F. Primus and the late Mrs Alice Houston, both of whom are pictured in the row second from the front.

Mrs Madsen, eldest daughter of the late Mr. Primus, recalled that there were about 25 cottages at “Woodlands” occupied by the Kanakas.

They were all removed and the mill was dismantled and taken to the Bundaberg district. She said the Kanakas, except those who married, were returned to their home islands.



A portion of a photograph taken from Woodlands looking towards Two Tree Hill. Two South Sea Islander huts can be seen in the foreground with a brush fence.

Source: Picture Ipswich, Ipswich City Council Rosewood Scrub Historical Society image.



James Ivory purchased the Bremer Mills at Bundamba on 3 November 1868. During Ivory's ownership of the former Mills site he experimented with pastures, grew sugar-cane and cotton, processed tobacco, fattened cattle and operated the saw mill.

James Ivory wrote letters in diary form to his family in Scotland and his diaries from 1863 to 1883 at the Mitchell Library provide a valuable insight into the history of the Bremer Mills and of Ipswich.

The first mention of South Sea Islanders in his diaries was on 21 January 1866 when he wrote that Ryland passed with a Polynesian servant. The first mention of Islanders on the Bremer Mills site was in 1869.

Extracts from the James Ivory Diaries

Wednesday 9th August 1871

B.D. Thunderstorm & cold wind late last night. Went on board the Lytton & got strapping pleasant looking men, signed agreements & they are to go up with me tomorrow. Paid off Servants & £96. odd for Kanakas. Gave Mr Dickson of Bank Australasia a large sample of my sugar to take to Sydney. Glad to see better accounts of Jamie by Het's letters, soon tire of Brisbane. Bed.

Thursday 10th August 1871

B.D. Rose at 5 a.m. Started for Steamer with my 9 darkies all grinning with delight, Gave them their breakfast on board, they seemed to relish it much. Landed them all safe in their hut & gave them the day to get ready & settle down. Sowed some Tobacco seed. Old Allan a grumbling humbug. I am beginning to lose all patience with him. Burning stumps in Quarry paddock, also ploughing, slight toothache. Chess. Cribbage. Bed.



Portrait of James Ivory.
Source: Picture Ipswich, Ipswich City Council.

Friday 11th August 1871

B.D. Kanakas went cheerfully to work, Undoey the self constituted head man is very useful being a tolerable interpreter & explains what we wish done, they are clearing off the canes the sheep broke down. Bed.

Note: B.D. is a abbreviation for Beautiful Day.

For further information please contact Council's Cultural Heritage Coordinator:

Phone: (07) 3810 6256

Email: strategic@ipswich.qld.gov.au

or visit these online resources:

Australian South Sea Islander

<http://www.ipswich.qld.gov.au/community/multicultural/assi>

James Ivory Diaries

picture.ipswich.qld.gov.au