

Information Sheet No. 4

A U S T R A L I A N S O U T H S E A I S L A N D E R S I N M A R B U R G

SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- Woodlands
- Marburg Sugar Mill
- Labourers at Woodlands
- Strike at Marburg 1890
- Agriculture about Rosewood and Marburg
- Sugar Industry
- Marburg Church of Christ

Historic Woodlands, is located on Seminary Road, Marburg. Charles Smith who was the first owner of the estate was born in England. He immigrated to Australia in 1864.

The family lived in Ipswich for two years and then moved to the Marburg area.

Charles acquired his first sawmill at Sandy Creek about 1865 then five years later, he acquired several thousand acres stretching from Marburg to Glamorganvale.

"The mill was moved to Woodlands circa 1877. It was equipped with machinery that was considered to be extremely advanced for its time.

W O O D L A N D S

The entry for Woodlands in the Expanded Ipswich Heritage Study states that The mill burned down in 1880 but was immediately rebuilt. The mill site included a number of outbuildings and cottages for workmen and was like a small township.

As the timber resources were used up, 'T.L.' decided to plant sugar cane. The first crushing season was 1883 and produced sugar which was considered of top quality.

The plantation employed white men as supervisors and about 100 South Sea Islanders in the growing season".



M A R B U R G S U G A R M I L L



Marburg Sugar Mill, 1882-1900?

Unidentified group of people in front of the mill.

Source: Picture Ipswich, Ipswich City Council

LABOURERS AT WOODLANDS

"At its height 120 men were employed at Woodlands. Not all were Kanakas. Much white labour was available, but labourers were brought from the Pacific Islands because it was difficult to get the hard work done by whites. When white labour was used the cost to cut the cane alone was 6/- per ton. A year's wage for the Islanders was £15. In the field, in the late 1880s, there were 12 islanders to each white man. At the mill they worked at the carriers and at the clarifiers. White labourers in general were considered incompetent.

They couldn't even hoe. They were lazy, discontented, not willing to work and some were likely to get drunk on pay day, according to Proprietor Smith.

It is reported in Smith's evidence to the Royal Commission on the Sugar Industry, March 1886, that the white labourers who were available for work at the plantation at that time were in the habit of saying "It is only a kanaka's job, and I will see you damned before I do it. Do it yourself". This referred to cutting cane, loading and

working about the mill.

None of the Islanders working at Woodlands were brought to Marburg. They were time-expired boys – that is, they had willingly stayed in Queensland after fulfilling their original contract. This did not mean that they were completely content. The records show that they appeared in the Marburg Court House on the charge of absconding. People with European names also appeared on a similar charge".
Source: Expanded Ipswich Heritage Study 1997.



*T.L. Smith.
Source: Moreton
Shire Queensland:
Discovery and
Settlement. Joan
Starr, 1988.*



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.



Australian South Sea Islander workers on a sugar plantation near Marburg, ca 1895. Source: State Library of Queensland. Record No. 608392

The Centenary of Marburg State School 1879-1979 reveals that: "Thomas Lorimer Smith decided to plant sugar on his Marburg property and he also contracted other local farmers to grow for him. In 1882, he built a modern steam-operated sugar mill. The plantation employed 60-70 men including South Sea Islanders (known then as Kanakas) who laboured in the field and lived in huts on the western side of the property.

South Sea Island or 'Kanakan' labour had been stopped after Federation (1901) and white growers were being paid a government bonus in compensation".

Ipswich in the 20th Century by Robyn Buchanan states that: "In 1886 Thomas Smith built a rum distillery and the following year produced 270 tons of cane and 1300 gallons of rum. The estate employed Kanaka labour, with about four Kanakas to each European worker. When in March 1889, Thomas appeared before a Royal Commission set up to inquire into the state of the sugar industry in Queensland he employed 36 Kanakas".

On Friday March 15, 1889 at a hearing at Rosewood Scrub, he told the Commission that he had been growing sugar cane for about seven or eight years, on his Woodlands plantation. The

property then covered about 1200 acres, of which 250 acres were under sugar cane. In a fair season he expected to get about 25 to 30 tons per acre from that land. He claimed to have Invested £20-25,000 in the sugar mill, distillery, planting, fencing, and tramway.



THE QUEENSLANDER SATURDAY 28 JUNE 1890

The kanakas in the employment of Mr. Thomas L. Smith, of Woodlands sugar plantation, Marburg, numbering altogether twenty-seven, struck work last night. Mr. Smith, first thing to-day, sent into Marburg for the police, and Senior-constable Short accompanied by Constable Fergusson, I immediately went down to the mill, which is situated a distance of less than a mile from the township.

Eight of the boys had left during the night, and upon the appearance of the police eighteen of the remainder immediately resumed work, the other, who is regarded as the ringleader, being placed under arrest and marched off to the lockup. Warrants were then issued for the absconded, and Constable Fergusson was despatched in pursuit. Information was also sent to the Ipswich police, with the result that the runaways were captured today, and will appear at the Ipswich Police Court tomorrow morning to answer for their conduct. It would appear that dissatisfaction has existed among the boys for a considerable time past, and when some little time ago one of them ran away Mr. Smith took no effective means to secure his return. This appears to have produced an impression in the minds of the boys that they also might run away with impunity.

The whole of the boys at work on the plantation were time-expired, and were engaged by agreement to Mr. Smith for a certain time. Last night the ringleader and some of the others told the cook, who is also a kanaka, that it was no use his baking any bread for the morrow, as the whole of them intended to run away from the plantation during the night, and the cook taking them at their

words, baked none, with the consequence that when called upon to go to work those remaining refused, saying that they did not get enough to eat. Although the regulation amount is 1½lb. of flour per day for each boy, the kanakas on Woodlands had been in the habit of receiving 2lb., and sometimes even more, for Mr. Smith supplied them with flour whenever they wanted it; but it having come to his knowledge that the boys were in the habit of wasting the bread, he determined to restrict the allowance.

They were supplied with a 200lb. bag of flour on Thursday last, and told that it was to last them till the Tuesday evening following; but this was completed yesterday morning, and upon the request being preferred another bag was supplied. The boys seem to have brooded over the intimation that no waste would be allowed, and the present strike is the consequence. Thirteen of them were seen last night passing through the township, and they were then making for Walloon, but it appears from the place where they were arrested this morning that they were making for Ipswich instead. Five of them had in the meantime returned.

Constable Fergusson traced them along the road from Marburg till he came upon them and arrested them, in company with the Ipswich police. They were conveyed into Ipswich, and will be brought up there on Wednesday morning. The boy, Jimmy, who is in the Marburg lockup, will also be brought up at the local Police Court on Wednesday. The rest of the boys are now working quietly. It is fortunate for the owner of

Woodlands that this strike has occurred previous to the crushing season, which commences during the latter end of next month (July), for a strike during crushing is always an annoyance, and is a source of endless inconvenience and expense. Our Ipswich correspondent writing of this case on the 25th instant, says:—"The defendants were from six different islands, and as no interpreter could be got, and the kanakas 'no saveed' English, the court was in some what of a fix. It was ascertained, however, that Mr. Smith had a man in his employ who engaged them, and would be able to interpret for them at Marburg. They were accordingly remanded to that place.



*Kanaka Strike
Marburg, 1890.*

*From our own
correspondent.*

Marburg.

June 24.

A G R I C U L T U R E - R O U N D A B O U T R O S E W O O D A N D M A R B U R G

"25 Kanaka boys are kept on the plantation owned by Mr. Smith. Some of the contract farmers had to borrow the blackboys to cut the crop, as it was found impossible to get white men to do it. As to the difference in cost of black labour and that of white, Mr. Smith said that the white labourer would be cheaper to employ than the black when the conditions under which the latter are engaged are considered. The Kanakas are paid 8s per week as wages, and have to be found in medical attendance, food, and

accommodation all the year round. Under the regulations the kanakas can only be used for tropical agriculture, therefore they cannot be employed profitably all the year. If white labour could be obtained when it was required it would be cheaper for the planter to pay twice the amount for it".

The Queenslander

27 October 1900

S U G A R I N D U S T R Y

The Travelling Correspondent for the Rockhampton Morning Bulletin wrote an article titled "Sugar Industry, North's great problem, Sugar Agreement" which appeared in the newspaper on Saturday, 26 August 1922. He wrote: "Rather more years ago now than I care remember, when only a cub reporter on the Ipswich papers, I used to do a good deal of country work. Very frequently I had to visit Marburg, or Townshend as it is now called. There was a big plantation there owned by Mr. L.L. Smith, which was known as Woodlands. You went up a long and gentle ascent from the little church at Minden, with smiling farms on either side. Gaining the height you dropped suddenly, crossed a small creek, and then ascended the hill to Kuchheim. From Kuchheim you looked across hundreds of acres of wavering cane. Spelling from memory, I think there

were over 2000 acres in the estate and there was also a small sugar mill. It was worked by kanakas, and many a time and often I have seen the islanders' trading along the road from Walloon to woodlands plantation. On one occasion I saw a red-headed kanaka among the boys – the only one I have ever seen with Titian hair. That night, bursting with excitement, I proudly announced the fact to the assembled staff. The senior arose in his wrath. "Saw a red-headed kanaka and you?" he said: "anyone would have thought you had seen Barnum's Greatest Show on Earth or Madame Tussand's Waxworks judging from the noise you are making." I collapsed, but my turn came next morning, for I had secured in journalistic parlance, a "scoop." A farmer run amok, carved up his wife and daughter, and then cut his own throat. I got the story practically

first-hand. Next morning the senior expressed surprise that I should have been so full of the red-headed kanaka and saw nothing about the tragedy, he made caustic remarks about "news value" and the relative value of various items".



MARBURG CHURCH
OF CHRIST

In 1969 The Queensland Times carried the following article: "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.

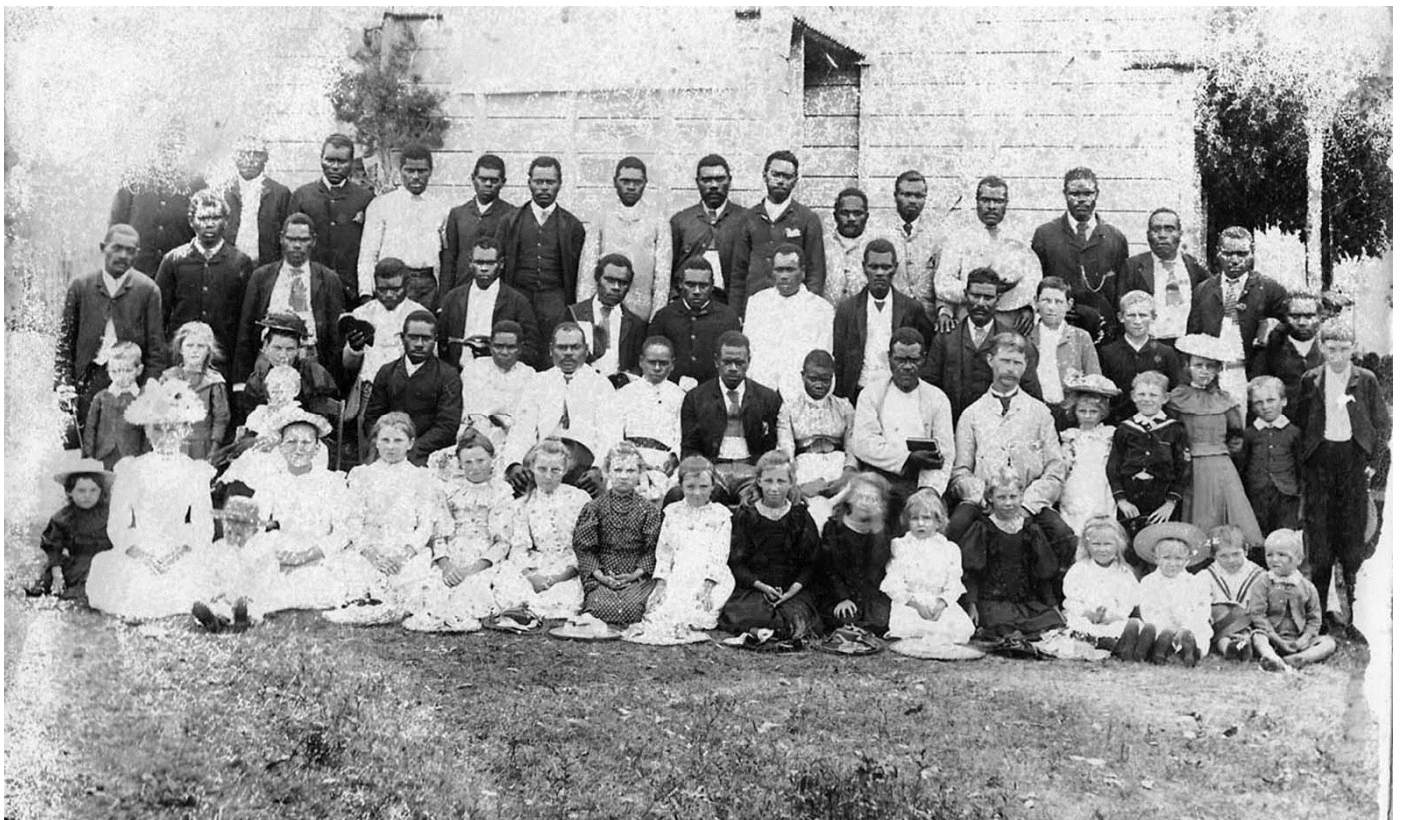
They worked for the late Mr. T.L. Smith, who operated a sugar mill and cultivated 500 acres of sugar cane. The property, known as "Woodlands" and Mr. Smith's residence, were purchased later by the Roman Catholic Church and converted to a seminary.

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.

"The young people of today find it hard to realise the Kanakas once helped operate a sugar industry in Marburg," said Mrs. Madsen.

She added that only a few people remained who could remember the sugar mill. She said the picture of the Kanakas had been sought for the Church of Christ federal conference, to be held in Brisbane next month. The old church in the picture has been rebuilt.



A Sunday School picnic in 1894. South Sea Islanders working at Woodlands were members of the first Bible school at the Marburg Church of Christ. Source: The Queensland Times, 1969