

HOW IT CAME TO BE

In the late 1880's a society known as the Aboriginal Protection Society was set up in Ipswich by a group of businessmen and women in response to concerns raised about the condition of Aborigines in the area.

Unfortunately, there is no information about the identities of the original members.

At that time the Aborigines were camped in Queens Park, Ipswich. In the space of nearly 50 years, they had been reduced from a 'happy, healthy, energetic people' to 'lazy, dirty, drunken...thin, ragged and miserable. They were refugees in the true sense of the word. They went from door to door as beggars seeking food, often under the influence of alcohol and 'in the suburbs made night hideous with their drunken orgies'. They had, according to one writer, been 'more or less a continuous source of trouble to pioneers in various parts of Queensland; but in so far as Ipswich and its suburbs are concerned are not now numerous enough to cause anxiety'.

In 1889, the society was taken over by members of various local church groups who themselves were businessmen and women within the community. The president of this group was Reverend Peter Robertson of the Presbyterian Church.

Initial efforts to assist the Aborigines, presumably by way of provision of food and clothing, met with limited success because other than the camp in Queens Park they did not have a home to go to. It would seem that their presence in Queens Park not only evoked a sense of compassion but also some consternation and perhaps embarrassment.

The most pressing concern was the accessibility to alcohol, which had already become their curse. Alcoholism was a symptom of the swift decline of their culture. In order to address these concerns the society looked around for land suitable to set up accommodation for them. The Nine Mile Reserve at Purga was initially chosen as an ideal site for the home. This is the property now known as 'Moreton Downs' at Purga containing a trotting track and stables.

After the Nine Mile Reserve was chosen, a deputation of local farmers objected to the gazettal of the site as an Aboriginal Reserve because they claimed that "the Aborigines with their dogs would contaminate the only water that they had to use and it would cause great inconvenience to nearby settlers and to people coming down from the country to camp there." Therefore it can be seen that the benevolent intentions of Reverend Robertson's society were not shared by all, particularly those who would become neighbours to the Aborigines.

The Minister for Lands capitulated to the local landholders and the society looked for other land for the purpose of the home. However, the Minister insisted that the gazettal would remain in place, and the site would remain open for camping purposes and as a water reserve. At that time there were a number of water holes on this property. The Minister said that if the 'blacks' became a 'nuisance' the gazettal would be cancelled. This location would have been an ideal location for the Aboriginal home because of the fertile alluvial soil and abundant water supply but it was not to be, until some time later at least.

The committee found two selections of land, which had been forfeited at Deebing Creek. This land was at the very end of South Deebing Creek Road about "five miles" from Ipswich. It can be accessed by turning left off Warwick Road outbound from Ipswich, through the back of Winston Glades Estate, under the highway then out past Paradise Heights Estate on the right. The property containing the old Army huts is the original mission site. The second parcel of land was a little distance away. Further blocks of land were progressively acquired in the early life of the mission.