

2 LAND

as the focus of Queensland's history

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The foundation of cultural landscapes, in terms of both the physical setting or platform where human activities occur, and the resources, such as soil and vegetation, which influence the nature of those activities, is the land itself. For this reason, land can be regarded as an appropriate focus for historical studies, all the more so when the immediate concern is cultural and heritage landscapes. Queensland is fortunate to have in W. Ross Johnston an historian who has taken a land focused view of history, and the following is a very brief chronological account of this state's development based on his book, The Call of the Land: A History of Queensland to the Present Day (1982).

Aboriginal Queensland

Before the European invasion, the area we now know as Queensland was occupied by Aboriginal peoples who had adapted to and who, themselves, had adapted a wide range of natural environments. Some of them, particularly the coastal belt, were especially favourable for human habitation, others, notably, the sandy deserts of the interior, much less so. The tropical northern tip of Cape York with its overseas trading and cultural contacts was probably the most densely populated part of all Australia. Despite the shifting hunting and gathering economy and general absence of permanent settlements, there was 'a strong sense of territory' (Johnston 1982:4) To the Aborigines, attachment to the land was important, but not merely for economic reasons. 'Certainly it provided sustenance – but it was a shared frame of reference, shared with the animals, with the vegetation, with the spirits. It provided a framework for life: it was not to be used, to be exploited, to be worked. It was a setting, an environment- not a commodity, not an asset, not a possession. Most significantly it had spiritual meaning' (Johnston 1982:4).

Early European Settlement

This attitude to land was not shared by the invaders who began to penetrate and exploit the area in the first half of the 19th century. The typical European way of evaluating the land is expressed in the words of Logan who, in 1827, described the Brisbane valley as, 'excellently watered, and fit for any purpose to which it may be applied' (Johnston 1982:5). Similarly, in the same year Cunningham described the Darling Downs as ' fine open grazing country...open to our most extensive flocks and herds', an area in which 'timbers, moreover, add to its importance' (Johnston 1982:8-9). At first the 'Aborigines tended to overlook these incursions, failing to realize that the white explorers were sizing up the economic potential of the land' (Johnston 1982:7), but, inevitably, conflict grew. In the ensuing contest the Aboriginal peoples and, to a considerable extent, their landscapes, too, were largely replaced by those of mainly European origin. By the end of 1841 the Darling Downs had been mapped out for the squatters – with no regard for the Aborigines, and well ahead of government regulations. By the end of 1842 there were forty-five runs on the Darling Downs' (Johnston 1982:25). For some, such as Presbyterian clergyman, John Dunmore Lang, the vast open spaces of New South Wales offered suitable land for some of 'overcrowded' Britain's surplus population, and, consequently, organized migration schemes contributed to the flow of European people into the area later to be known as Queensland. By the 1850s colonists had established themselves in the Moreton, Darling Downs and Maranoa regions, while settlement was proceeding rapidly in Wide Bay, Burnett and coastal Capricornia. North Queensland was about to experience a similar fate. It was at this stage, in December, 1859, that Queensland separated from New South Wales to form a new colony.

1860s, 1870s and 1880s

Exploration of the north and the interior continued, 'often in search for minerals, sometimes for pastoral purposes' (Johnston 1982:16), as European settlement consolidated and expanded in the more readily accessible areas, especially in the south-east and along the coast. Apart from the old convict town turned state capital, Brisbane, Ipswich, Toowoomba, Drayton and Warwick were among the more important settlements of the south-east, while further north were Maryborough, which dominated Wide Bay, and Gayndah the centre for the Burnett. Further north still, port towns were centres of growth, their development associated with the exploitation of the interior regions. Between 1863 and 1870, Richard Daintree discovered gold and copper deposits on the Burdekin, Cape, Einasleigh, Gilbert and Etheridge rivers, and he also began to investigate coal seams in the Collinsville area. These discoveries encouraged more explorers and prospectors, and in addition to the mineral deposits which were found, other important resources were reported, including rich land suitable for sugar cultivation and valuable cedar stands between Cardwell and Cooktown. To exploit the state's mineral

resources more effectively, routes were opened up between inland mining centres and ports along the coast.

During this period the Aboriginal people continued to be displaced or massacred by the Europeans, conflict sometimes arising from misunderstandings about the use of land and resources, or over sexual codes of behaviour, but often as a result of the common attitude that it was necessary to get rid of the native population in order to make the best (most profitable) use of the country. With the establishment of the state of Queensland the new legislators sought to adopt a land policy which balanced the interests of the pastoralists and the smaller allotment holders, recognizing the pioneer work and economic contribution of the squatters who had 'opened up' the vast 'empty' regions while, at the same time, encouraging closer settlement. To this end, the 'land was classified into different categories – town, suburban, (very small nearby farming allotments) and country' (Johnston 1982:51). While large areas of the latter were held leasehold, squatters believed that, having 'opened up and developed' (Johnston 1982:50) the land, in some instances even being the 'discoverers', the properties should remain in their possession and not be returned to the government at the end of the lease. Darling Downs pastoralists succeeded in freeholding the best parts of their large runs, particularly the creeks and flats, 'but the basic government intention was to have the land used under reasonably stable leasehold conditions and to encourage the taking up of the whole colony primarily for pastoral purposes' (Johnston 1982:52-53). During this period land as a state asset, a source of wealth from rents and rising capital value, remained a contentious political issue.

Despite government efforts, closer settlement did not eventuate, but there was one major development in Queensland's agricultural development – sugar – a crop suited to the state's tropical conditions. The introduction of cane cultivation brought with it the plantation system and imported Melanesian labour, both influencing the landscape to a marked degree in the coastal lowlands.

Meanwhile, inland mining was transforming the landscape in areas where minerals had been discovered – limestone and coal in the Ipswich area in the early days later followed by gold further north, the rushes generally being short-lived. More substantial deposits, however, could make a permanent impact, as in the case of Gympie which developed on the gold field that shored up the state's finances in the 1860s and flourished into the 1880s and beyond. By this time gold was discovered and mined elsewhere, notably at Charters Towers and Mount Morgan. Gold mining drew to Queensland workers and fortune seekers from the southern states and also attracted many from overseas, notably Chinese who, in some areas outnumbered Europeans. Violent conflict between these groups was common. Other minerals which were exploited included copper, silver and tin, while coal showed sporadic growth through to the 1890s. Associated with mining was the development of railways, but from the miners' point of view these tended to arrive too late, coming when the mines were already in decline. While some of the towns created by mining survived the eventual collapse of the industry, many others declined as rapidly as they arose when the deposits were worked out.

The pioneer work of the pastoralists, farmers, miners and others was followed by the development of transportation and communications infrastructure, including roads and railways, post, telegraph and banking services. Brisbane remained Queensland's dominant city, 'but it did not hold the same predominance as the capital cities in the rest of Australia' (Johnston 1982:92). Although it had grown very rapidly in the 1870s and early 1880s and possessed several fine public buildings, its 'expansion was being held back by the rivalry of provincial cities and towns (Johnston 1982:93). Industry, including manufacturing, was expanding gradually, much of it centred on mining and sugar. The processing of raw materials required relatively simple technology and limited capital, meatworks and sugar mills being scattered throughout the colony.

1890s to 1915

While the rapid exploitation of Queensland's natural resources brought great wealth to a small capitalist class, workers often felt that they were being denied the proper rewards for their labours, and many immigrants found themselves 'dumped on the shore, unable to find work or relief' (Johnston 1982:112). From the mid-1880s rising worker militancy led to the growth of trade unionism in Queensland, the rate of development being slow in comparison with the more industrially advanced southern colonies. Nevertheless, with a growing support for Socialist ideals, signs of the class struggle emerged in the form of labour and employer organizations, and strike action. 'The state plainly came out on the side of employers' (Johnston 1982:117). To 'the forces of conservatism, of the establishment, of men of property, of the middle class in general' (Johnston 1982:117) it was the spectre of Communism that threatened the colony. While labour disunity and repressive government action tended to weaken the union movement, on the political front advances were made in the form of the growth of the Labor Party which officially contested general elections for the first time in 1893. Miners and pastoral labourers provided the basis of support which led to the winning of sixteen seats, most of them in northern and central Queensland.

The landscape was rapidly changing. The broad, open acres with contested stock were giving way to small rectangular farms, with fences, roads and railway lines criss-crossing the panorama, broken up by houses, yards and dams. Little villages and small towns sprang up to service the needs of the farming families. This scene was repeated from the Downs through the Moreton and Mary River regions, and it spread along settled parts of the coast, to sugar areas in Mackay and the Burdekin. The Atherton-Malanda area in the far north also in the 20th century turned to dairying' (Johnston 1982:140). Closer settlement was at last being realized, with dairying and mixed farming, including wheat production, providing a more secure livelihood.

By 1914 Queensland was Australia's leading producer of beef and sugar and the second largest producer of wool. Dairying and wheat production were also important and minerals continued to contribute to the state's development. Manufacturing industry continued to make slow progress, most of it related to the processing of primary produce and the production of building materials – meat works, sugar mills, dairies, timber mills etc. – as well as a range of machinery works supporting the railways, mining and sugar production.

1915-1980

'The distinguishing feature of Queensland's history has been the presence of the rural factor, so that even in the 1980s Queensland is more rurally centred than are the other states of Australia' (Johnston 1982:179). In the 1930s and 40s dairying and sugar were encouraged at the expense of wool and beef, in part reflecting closer settlement policy, while the coal industry 'staggered along' (Johnston 1982:181). The copper mines of Cloncurry gave way to lead and silver production at Mt. Isa, involving vast sums of overseas investment and increasing foreign control. Secondary industry remained at a level of simple technology, mainly processing primary products, although World War II brought some industrial advances, including munitions works and ship building in the Brisbane area. Immigration into the state was relatively slow, partly because of Queensland's attitude to migrants. Nevertheless, by 1933 one-third of Australia's Italian-born population lived in Queensland, mainly in the sugar producing areas of the tropical north.

After 1945 'both the rural population and rural production were losing their share of significance in the overall structure of the state' (Johnston 1982:192). The real basis of Queensland's development in the 1960s and 1970s was in the mining industry, especially coal. The main centres of production moved from the older Moreton field with its many small, mostly underground mines, to new fields, notably in the Bowen Basin. The 1950s and the Korean War gave a boost to Mount Isa's lead, and there was a new surge in the demand

for copper. The 1950s also saw the discovery of bauxite in Cape York, leading to US and UK financed mining there, and to related industrial development at Gladstone. Oil, natural gas and uranium were also added to the list of Queensland's mineral products, while gold production still continued, but at a low level.

It was the golden sands and sunshine of Queensland's coast that gave rise to a valuable new industry, tourism. By the end of the 1970s this had become the state's fourth most valuable industry, the Gold Coast being the major centre, with the Sunshine Coast following suit. With improvements in sea and air transport, the Great Barrier Reef and Cairns and its tropical hinterland also began to develop rapidly as tourist destinations.

'The theme of development is writ large in the history of Queensland. The state is fortunate in being endowed with such a wide range of rich resources – the grasslands for pastoral purposes, the fertile soils for sugar and other agriculture, an array of minerals. Since the beginnings of white settlement the leaders have been determined to exploit the potential of the land, and they have not had to wait to find people willing to take up the challenge' (Johnston 1982:200). The dominance of the profit motive, however, and emphasis on economic growth have sometimes been at the expense of the community. 'In their quest for profit, the developers have overlooked the role of social development'(Johnston 1982:200).

The people most neglected by those pressing for economic development were the Aborigines. Some whites thought that Aborigines should be allowed limited care as they gradually vanished into extinction; others saw them as problem people requiring protection. In 1965, legislation ended the old system of protection, replacing it with assimilation. After suffering years of being exploited, displaced and institutionalised, Aboriginal groups grew increasingly dissatisfied with the official attitudes and became more active in their claims for land rights.

'The problem of Aborigines and Islanders is that of the unresolved issue of their relationship to the land of Queensland, after being disturbed in their occupation of it by the white incursion. Yet for the white population, too, there is a growing problem revolving around relationships to the land and its treatment. In spite of its beauty, in spite of its economic potential, the people of Queensland treat the land carelessly, doing many things to damage it' (Johnston 1982:203;205). This is evident not least in the treatment of Queensland's forests, and it is notable that, in his book, The Call of the Land, W. Ross Johnston gives relatively little attention to the forests or to forestry, even as a temporary land use. In general, the author tends to treat the forests as an assumed background to the history of development, the land they formerly covered entering the story only after the trees had been cleared for pasture or cultivation. This appears to reflect the attitude of the Queensland government which, over the years has had a poor record in forestry policy, largely failing to give adequate protection to the state's forests.

The focus of Johnston's book is the land itself, and human history as played out and impacting on it through social and economic processes. In general, the role of the individual is given little attention, although the author clearly recognises the changes in the landscape that are achieved by individual people working en masse. Perhaps, for the purpose of the Contested Terrains study, more attention should be given to the influence of certain individuals or families, some of whom have left their distinctive mark on the landscape, for example, the O'Rileys (Green Mountain/Lamington National Park), Clem Jones (Brisbane) and even Keith Williams (Hinchinbrook Channel). In other instances, the link between the individual and the landscape is mainly one of historical association, as in the case of Captain Cook and Possession Island, Cooktown, Endeavour Reef and the Glasshouse Mountains.



References

Johnston, W. Ross (1982), The Call of the Land: A History of Queensland to the Present Day. Milton, Qld: Jacaranda Press.