

CAPTAIN PATRICK LOGAN 1791-1830

Patrick Logan was born at East Renton in Berwickshire, Scotland in 1791, the youngest son of Abraham Logan and his second wife, Janet Johnston. There is no record of his exact birth date. His baptismal entry, dated 15th November 1791, records the baptism of twin children, Mary and Peter, a name which seems to have been corrupted almost immediately to Patrick.

The Logans were an extremely ancient Scottish family, dating back to the days of Robert the Bruce when two of Patrick Logan's ancestors accompanied the Bruce's heart to the Holy Land. In accordance with the traditional career options of younger sons of good families at this time (the Army, or the Church), the young Patrick Logan purchased a commission as ensign in the 57th Foot in 1810. In view of his subsequent reputation amongst the convicts at Moreton Bay this was perhaps an ominous choice; the 57th had such an unenviable reputation for flogging its soldiers that it was popularly known amongst the forces as the "Steelbacks". At this time, the 57th was fighting against Napoleon in the Peninsular Campaign and, in 1811, Logan was sent to Spain as part of a relieving force. Acquitting himself well in some of the heaviest fighting of the campaign, he was promoted to lieutenant in March 1813, and following Napoleon's defeat he served in Canada, in France with the Army of Occupation and in Ireland, where he met and married Letitia O'Beirne, the daughter of a fellow officer. About this time he purchased a captaincy, presumably with a legacy from his father's estate.

A year after Logan's marriage in 1823 the 57th Regiment was transferred to New South Wales, and in early 1825 Logan, his wife and their baby son Robert set sail for Sydney on the convict transport *Hooghly*. After a year spent in garrison on their arrival, they were posted to Moreton Bay penal settlement, where Logan assumed the duties of Commandant in March 1826. The settlement had been established mostly of re-convicted criminals from other parts of New South Wales. Conditions were harsh; owing to limited resources and lack of skilled labour, there were no permanent buildings, and neither of Logan's predecessors as Commandant, Lieutenant Miller and Captain Bishop, had proved satisfactory in what was admittedly an extremely difficult posting. In his four years as Commandant, Logan was to change all this, and from a struggling outpost, the future city of Brisbane grew into a viable settlement of more than a thousand people. More than any other early Commandant of Moreton Bay, Patrick Logan can be said to have laid the foundations of the future state of Queensland.

A professional soldier, Logan was a man of action, and by the end of his first year of office, work had commenced on a hospital, surgeon's quarters, gaol and barracks for the soldiers and convicts. These were the first permanent buildings to be erected in Queensland, and two buildings from this period, the Commissariat Stores in George Street, and the notorious Windmill of Wickham Terrace (both dating from the late 1820s) are still standing.

Farms were established at South Brisbane and Kangaroo Point and the first school, opened shortly before his arrival, continued to grow under the auspices of Mrs Esther Roberts. The township of Dunwich on Stradbroke Island was set up as a depot for ships arriving from Sydney and a quarry and coal mine established at Limestone Hill, the site of the future city of Ipswich.

As soon as he and his wife had settled into the routine of the settlement, Logan wasted no time in setting forth on a formidable programme of exploration. It has been suggested by various historians that Logan found the restrictive desk duties associated with his position as Commandant irksome, and that his exploratory activities provided a good excuse to escape from them. His first expedition, in August 1826 saw the discovery of the Logan River (originally named the Darling as a compliment to the Governor) and the re-discovery of the Southport Bar. In later expeditions he explored the Bremer River as far as Ipswich and accompanied Allan Cunningham, the Government Botanist on part of his journey to the gap which now bears his name. On this occasion Logan climbed to the summit of Mt Barney, then Mt Lindesay. This was then the most elevated point in Australia reached by a white man.

Nevertheless, despite his remarkable achievements as Moreton Bay's first real administrator, Patrick Logan is popularly remembered today as a "hard man"; a cruel tyrant and persecutor of convicts, a merciless and unimaginative despot whose power was wielded through the treadmill, the noose and the cat-o'-nine-tails. That he had no sympathy for the convicts he was responsible for is obvious from the horrific stories which circulated about him even in his own lifetime, though his brutal behaviour would seem to stem less from any inherent sadistic streak than from an unshakeable belief in his own authority. An autocrat in every sense of the word, as far as Logan was concerned, the convicts were less than human; they had been sent to Moreton Bay to be punished, and idleness was not to be tolerated under any circumstances. In many instances he meted out punishments which he was not legally entitled to impose, lengthening the sentences of prisoners who had absconded by up to three years. This behaviour drew only mild reproof from the authorities in Sydney. Other people however, did not share Logan's convictions, and at the time of his death he was involved in a libel case with the editor of the *Monitor*, a liberal newspaper which had published the "confessions" of a Moreton Bay convict named Thomas Matthew, and which was threatening to prosecute him for murder.

Revisionist historians have tried to justify Logan's worst excesses by concentrating on the positive aspects of his administration, and by highlighting the immense difficulties under which he laboured. There is certainly no denying that during his time as Commandant the population exploded from about one hundred to over one thousand convicts, and that this placed severe strains on the settlement's extremely limited resources.

Crops failed due to severe drought, relations with the aborigines deteriorated, convicts were absconding in unprecedented numbers (approximately one in ten in the difficult year 1828-1829) and, exacerbated by the primitive conditions and poor food there were outbreaks of dysentery and fever amongst the prisoners which sent their death rate soaring. Most of these factors were outside Logan's control, and it is remarkable in retrospect that he was able to achieve as much as he did.

In 1830, after five years in Australia the 57th Regiment was posted to India. Logan, who was waiting to testify in the *Monitor* libel case, decided to occupy his last days in the colony with yet another exploratory expedition. It was a decision which was to prove fatal. Exploring in the region of Mt Beppo in the Brisbane River Valley, he set off on his own and became separated from the rest of the party. An extensive search failed to find any trace of him other than his saddle and, about a week later, some leaves from his notebook, part of his compass and the bloodstained ruin of his waistcoat. By now hopes of finding the Commandant alive must have been fading quickly and, on the twenty-eighth of October the search party discovered the body of his horse, lying in a creek and camouflaged with boughs. Logan's own badly decomposed body was found lying face downward and covered with sticks in a shallow grave on the other side; he was naked, and had been partially disinterred and eaten by dingoes. An examination by the settlement's Surgeon Dr Cowper, revealed that his skull had been crushed by native waddies, and the official version of the story, as it subsequently appeared in the *Sydney Gazette* was that he had been surprised and killed by aborigines. The convicts, whose gleeful reaction to Logan's death is recorded in the ballad "Moreton Bay", preferred to believe that he had been murdered by escapees from the penal colony, a tradition which gains some credence from the fact that the aborigines of the area were not accustomed to burying their dead.

Logan's body was shipped back to Sydney, and after a state funeral in St James' Church he was buried in the Protestant burial ground in Surry Hills. He was survived by his wife, Letitia and two young children, Robert and Letitia Bingham. Logan's widow returned to England, where she made various ineffectual attempts to obtain a pension from the British Government. After thirteen years persistent application she was eventually granted a beggarly seventy pounds per annum and drops out of the pages of history. Robert Logan was later to become a Colonel in his father's old regiment, and gave distinguished service in the Crimea, in India during the Mutiny and in New Zealand during the Maori Wars.