

Patrick Logan and the early explorers

Logan City and the Logan River were both named in honour of Captain Patrick Logan, Commandant of the Moreton Bay convict settlement.

Logan was a legendary figure, remembered today mainly for his cruelty. However Logan was also a skilled administrator and a passionate explorer - a physically strong man possessed of courage and determination. Any history of the City of Logan should begin with an account of this extraordinary soldier.



The Settlement at Moreton Bay

Convicts transported to Sydney Town did not always become model citizens in their new environment: while many reformed, others committed new offences. The New South Wales authorities were forced to devise additional punishments for convicts who re-offended, and also for free citizens whose first offence occurred in Sydney.

The problem was compounded because the nature of Sydney was changing. By the early 1800s, its inhabitants included many settlers and it was more difficult to maintain tight discipline in this increasingly free society.

In 1819, Commissioner Thomas Bigge was appointed to conduct a wide-ranging inquiry into the affairs of New South Wales. His report was presented in 1822 and included the recommendation to establish additional penal settlements in the north of Australia - at Port Curtis, Port Bowen (near Yeppoon) and Moreton Bay.¹

As very little was known about these three potential sites, John Oxley was sent north to investigate in 1823. He explored the Moreton Bay area, named its major river after the Governor of New South Wales Sir Thomas Brisbane, and made a favourable report on its suitability for a settlement.

Governor Brisbane sent a copy of Oxley's report to London, stating his intention of forming a penal settlement there. In reply, Lord Bathurst suggested that Governor Brisbane should instead consider setting up a free colony in Moreton Bay and re-opening Norfolk Island as a place of severe punishment.²

However, he was too late. Sir Thomas had acted very promptly and a penal settlement had already been established at Redcliffe in September 1824. In the following year, it was moved to a better site on the banks of the Brisbane River. The settlement was named Brisbane.

Patrick Logan arrives in Brisbane

The first Commandant at Moreton Bay was Lieutenant Henry Miller who was followed by Captain Peter Bishop, both of the 40th Regiment. When the 40th was relieved in 1826 by the 57th Regiment, Captain Patrick Logan became the third Commandant.

Several different years have been suggested for the date of Logan's birth; it was possibly 1791, although records of his burial indicate a birth date of around 1796. He was born in Berwickshire in Scotland, the son of a landowner whose circumstances were comfortable rather than wealthy.

Later dates and events in his life are more exactly known.³ He purchased a commission in the 57th Foot Regiment in 1810 and fought in the Peninsula Wars, seeing action at the battles of Vittoria, Pyrenees, Nive and Nivelles.

His regiment was then sent to Canada, spending a winter in garrison but not seeing active service. The escape of Napoleon from Elba brought the regiment back to Europe but by the time their ship reached England, Napoleon had been defeated at Waterloo and the Regiment joined an army of occupation for two years.

Logan had been raised to the rank of Lieutenant but with the final end of hostilities, the army found itself with an oversupply of young officers. Logan and many others were placed on half-pay. This amounted to being retrenched, but retained in a reserve role.

After 18 months of family life back in Scotland, he rejoined his regiment in 1819 by paying what was called "the regulated difference" - an amount paid to the army which entitled him to receive full pay. He rejoined the 57th which was then stationed in Ireland. After the death of his father, he used his inheritance to buy a captaincy and in September 1823, with the security of a higher pay, married Letitia O'Beirne whom he had met in Ireland.

A son was born the following year and shortly afterwards, the 57th was ordered to New South Wales. They were sent in small detachments, each group forming a guard on a convict transport.

Logan, his young wife Letitia and their baby son Andrew sailed from Cork on the ship *Hooghly* and arrived in Sydney in April 1825. An uneventful year was spent in Sydney, until a detachment of the 57th was ordered to replace the 40th at Moreton Bay. Logan, as senior officer, was placed in charge as Commandant of the Moreton Bay Penal Settlement.

Logan's Achievements at Moreton Bay

When Logan arrived at Moreton Bay, the penal station was merely a collection of rough huts, lacking essential facilities. Within four years, the number of convicts jumped from around 200 to more than 1000. In coping with these problems, Logan's skill as an administrator became evident. He created a substantial settlement of brick and stone buildings, complete with school and hospital. He formed additional outstations and made several important journeys of exploration. He received a salary rise and his work was praised in glowing terms in official reports.

The black side of this great accomplishment was that he had also created a notorious hell-hole of punishment and severity which has lived on in popular imagination and which earned him the title of "Tyrant of Brisbane Town".

In 1827, the Attorney General commented on the fact that Logan had ordered punishment of up to 150 lashes on several occasions. When asked to explain, Logan said that he "regretted exceedingly" that he had been forced to order frequent floggings but it was necessary because the convicts did not want to work.

In an attempt to find alternatives to flogging, cells were built for solitary confinement and a flour mill was built and operated by convicts working a treadmill. This mill is still standing on Wickham Terrace.

Logan was a product of his times and had been shaped by his years of gruelling military experience. His regiment, the 57th, had been nicknamed



The Windmill on Wickham Terrace was built in 1828 during Logan's term as Commandant (Source: Author's Collection)



Convicts at Brisbane. (Source: A Complete Exposure of the Convict System Lincoln: Thomas Colmer c1850)

“The Steelbacks” because floggings were such a common occurrence for its own members. His imposition of even more extreme punishment on convicts is not defensible, but is perhaps not surprising.

Logan’s Explorations: finding the Logan River

Logan clearly enjoyed the challenge of exploring and he devoted a considerable amount of energy to trips inland from Brisbane. However he achieved one of his most important discoveries by sea on his first major expedition - the discovery of the Logan River.

The existence of such a river - well known to the Yugumbah people - had been suspected by the white settlers for some time, but no serious attempt had been made to locate it.

In August 1826, Logan set out in a whaleboat rowed by a crew of eight, accompanied by “one other gentleman.”⁴ They rowed into Moreton Bay, then continued south across Redland Bay on the inside of Stradbroke Island. At that time, this was one single island - the passage between north and south did not break through until 1896. Ahead was a somewhat confusing group of islands and channels including Coochiemudlo, Macleay and Russell. Logan appears to have followed his intuition and was rewarded when he realised the boat had reached the mouth of a large river.

He followed the river inland, finding it about 2 metres to 6 metres deep for what he estimated as 120 kilometres, although it was probably less. The river then became more shallow, and several large gum trees which had fallen across the stream stopped the boats going further.

Logan, with a characteristic persistence, followed the river a further 15 kilometres on foot, noting that it still seemed deep enough for a large boat. He also thought the surrounding country was “the finest tract of land I have seen in this or any other country.”

In honour of the Governor, Logan named his discovery the Darling River. However the Governor changed the name and in 1827, announced that it was to be called the Logan in recognition of Patrick Logan’s zeal as Commandant at Moreton Bay.

Letter from Patrick Logan to the Colonial Secretary Alexander Macleay

28 August 1826

I have much pleasure in reporting for the information of His Excellency the governor that on the 21st inst I discovered a very considerable River which empties itself into Moreton Bay about 20 miles to the Southward of Peels Island and about double that distance from the mouth of the Brisbane running from the S.E. and varying in depth from 2 to 6 fathoms for about 80 miles. Proceeding a few miles further, it gradually diminished to 6 feet, and some large gum trees fallen across the stream put a stop to my further progress by water but on tracing its course about ten miles further I found no diminution and I have no doubt if the fallen trees were removed it would be found navigable by boats for many miles further.- As this river is navigable by the largest class of Colonial vessels for eighty miles and running through the finest tract of land I have seen in this or any other country, I conceive it a discovery of the utmost importance to these Colonies, and will be found well worth the attention of Settlers; - I have named it the River Darling which I hope will meet with the approbation of His Excellency⁵.

Inland exploration of the Logan area, 1827

In 1827, Governor Darling decided to visit Brisbane Town. He arrived unannounced and found that Captain Logan was unfortunately not at the settlement - he was once again out exploring.

Logan had left Brisbane Town at 4am on June 7 in a whaleboat, travelling up the Brisbane and Bremer Rivers and arriving at Ipswich at 10pm. Next day, he sent the boat and its convict crew back to Brisbane and set out on foot with several of his men, passing through the area around present day Warrill View. He climbed to the top of Mt French and said he could see the Logan River, although he probably meant a tributary of the Logan, Teviot Brook.

He continued onwards and on June 13th, camped the night beside the Logan River near Mt Barney which he tried unsuccessfully to climb over the next two days.

Continuing his journey, he crossed Christmas Creek and the Albert River, praising the fertility of the countryside. On June 19, he again reached the Logan River near present-day Logan Village and camped for the night. The exact position of this camp is not known.

Next day, he made several attempts to cross the river but was forced to walk about 15km up the riverbank, finally managing to cross at a rocky ledge on June 21. From this point, he continued on to Coopers Plains and Brisbane, reaching a point opposite the settlement where he could signal for a boat to come and collect him and his men.

Expedition in 1828 with Cunningham and Fraser

Note: modern placenames are used to explain the route.

Allan Cunningham and Charles Fraser were both botanists, and of necessity, explorers. Cunningham was collecting specimens of new plants for the botanic gardens at Kew in England, while Fraser was the Government Botanist of New South Wales and had been instructed to set up a garden for tropical plants at Brisbane. In 1828, Logan accompanied them on a trip to Mt Barney, the mountain he had failed to climb the previous year.

They were ready to set out on July 22, with a party consisting of Cunningham, Fraser, Logan, one soldier and five convicts. As they expected to be away for several weeks, they had to carry a large quantity of provisions

with them. Their attempts to load it all onto three pack bullocks failed, so they were delayed while a fourth bullock was obtained.

Next day, they again tried to load but after going less than two kilometres, they found that one poor bullock could scarcely walk because the load was too great. Another bullock reared up and broke part of its harness. This meant a second day's delay while they repaired the harness and sent a large weight of flour back to the settlement to reduce the load.

Finally, on July 24, they started from South Brisbane (approximately where the Performing Arts Centre is today) and followed a rough track that had already been marked to Coopers Plains.

Their exact route is difficult to follow, as Logan's readings of longitude are not exact. However the route seems to have been through Rocklea and across the edge of Archerfield Aerodrome to Acacia Ridge. Here they crossed Oxley Creek and camped for the night on the western side, probably in the Willawong area.

Next day was a beautiful winter day with a cloudy sky. They followed Oxley Creek southwards on the western side, noticing several Aboriginal camps with shelters different from those they had previously seen.

The twisting of Oxley Creek finally made them decide to cross back to the eastern side - not an easy task. They unpacked the loads and allowed the bullocks to rest while they carried the loads across themselves, took the bullocks across and with considerable difficulty, reloaded the reluctant animals to continue their journey through forest of honeysuckle oak trees and casuarinas.

Somewhere near Larapinta, they discovered a recent grave. About 40 banksia trees had been cut down with a hatchet and placed over the grave in an attempt to conceal it. The explorers conjectured that it was the grave of a runaway convict.

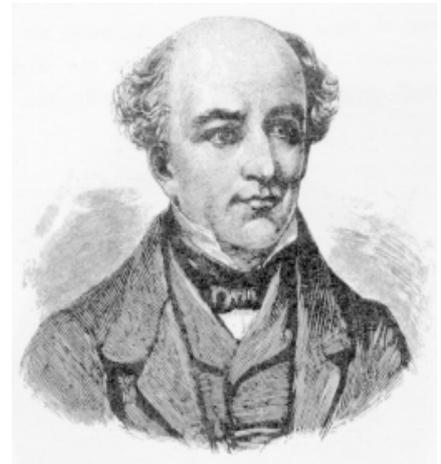
They continued on, passing through Greenbank, camping that night beside a small creek, possibly Norris Creek. As they walked through the area which is now part of Logan City, they noted that there were at first forests of *Banksia Integrifolia* (now Logan City's emblem) and then open forests of sandy soil.

It was an extremely cold night - Fraser recorded the homely fact that he had two blankets and a quilt and was still cold. They set out next morning at 8am and continued south until they reached the Logan River, just east of McLean's Bridge. The riverbank here was lined with native chestnut trees.

One again, they unloaded the bullocks, carried the load across themselves and then led the bullocks across with considerable difficulty. They continued on, but once again met the Logan. Cunningham decided to try to cross it yet again, but they were not able to do so. Instead, they skirted the river and continued south. At one of these river crossings, they found an unoccupied Aboriginal camp.

The group then continued southwards to Mt Barney where Logan finally achieved his aim of reaching the summit. The climb today is still difficult even for experienced bushwalkers. Cunningham climbed to one intermediate ridge, then wisely stopped, particularly as he was carrying a barometer. Fraser recorded in his journal that "on a careful scrutiny of the fearful precipices which overhung us, Captain Logan detected a path by which it appeared possible, and barely possible, to ascend. . . and leaving the rest of the party behind, he and I began scrambling on hands and knees to the first peak, a height of about 300 feet, with great difficulty, but having once attained a certain elevation, we had no alternative but to proceed, any attempt at returning in this direction appearing totally impracticable."

Fraser attempted to follow Logan and graphically described the continued ascent up a steep cliff-face before he also admitted defeat. Logan continued to the top, and his companions had to wait five hours until he returned safely. It is an interesting insight into Logan who was clearly a very fit and capable person, but one in which there was an element of determination to the point of foolhardiness. It was probably this aspect of his character – the refusal to turn back once he had decided to attempt something - which led to his death two



Allan Cunningham

years later.

After further exploring in the Boonah area, Logan and Fraser returned to Brisbane while Cunningham returned to Ipswich, to prepare for a trip to the gap in the mountains which we now know as Cunningham's Gap.

The death of Logan

Logan's term as Commandant was due to end in 1830, but he decided to undertake one last trip of exploration before he returned to Sydney.

He set out in October, accompanied by his personal servant Private Collison and five convicts. Near Pine Mountain, the party was threatened by Aborigines who let them pass only after Collison fired at them. The Aborigines recognised Logan, calling him Commidy (Commandant) and urging him to go back.

Logan ignored the warning and over the next week, explored the area near the junction of the Brisbane and Stanley Rivers. On 17 October, the party was returning to the settlement when they noticed tracks which resembled a horse or bullock. Logan had lost a horse in this area on a previous trip, and apparently decided to follow the track. His men were slowed down by the two pack bullocks they had brought, so Logan instructed them to meet him later that day. He was never seen alive again.

Thinking that there had been a misunderstanding about the arrangements, the men continued on to Ipswich, but when Logan still did not appear, search parties were sent out.

First Logan's saddle was found, with the stirrups roughly cut off "as if by a Native's hatchet". Nearby was a campsite. We will probably never know why Logan failed to meet his men, but the tracks and marks in the ground told the rest of the story.

Logan had tied his horse to a tree and had slept overnight in a bark hut. He was roasting chestnuts in a fire for a breakfast when Aborigines approached. Logan rushed towards his horse and jumped on it bareback to make an escape. The Aborigines followed and he tried to jump his horse across a small creek filled with shallow water, but the horse stumbled.

Moreton Bay

A traditional folksong which reinforces our image of Logan as "The Tyrant of Brisbane Town"

One Sunday morning as I was walking,
by Brisbane waters I chanced to stray;
I heard a convict his fate bewailing
as on the sunny riverbank he lay.
"I am a native of Erin's island
and banished now from my native shore,
They tore me from my aged parents
and from the maiden whom I do adore.

"I've been a prisoner at Port Macquarie,
at Norfolk Island and Emu Plains,
At Castle Hill and at cursed Toongabbie,
at all those settlements I've worked in chains;
But of all places of condemnation
and penal stations in New South Wales,
To Moreton Bay I have found no equal,
excessive tyranny each day prevails.

"For three long years I was beastly treated,
and heavy irons on my legs I wore;
My back with flogging is lacerated
and often painted with my crimson gore.
And many a man from downright starvation
lies mouldering now underneath the clay;
And Captain Logan, he had us mangled
at the triangles of Moreton Bay.

"Like the Egyptians and ancient Hebrews
we were oppressed under Logan's yoke,
'Til a native black lying there in ambush
did give our tyrant his mortal stroke.
My fellow prisoners, be exhilarated
that all such monsters such a death may find!
And when from bondage we are liberated,
our former sufferings shall fade from mind."

The dead horse was found in the bottom of the creek, covered with boughs. Logan's body was nearby in a shallow grave, lying face downwards, his head beaten with waddies.⁶

The circumstances of his death have always remained controversial. It is almost certain that he was killed by Aborigines, angered by the intrusions into their hunting grounds, but some people (both then and now) preferred to think that he was killed by an escaped convict in revenge for Logan's harsh discipline.

Logan's wife and children accompanied the body to Sydney and on a depressing rainy day, a funeral service was held at St James Church, followed by an interment with military honours at the Protestant Burial Ground. The profuse praise given to Logan for his zeal and his discoveries did not extend to concern for his widow. Letitia was forced to pay her own passage home to England, in spite of the fact that she had been left with very little money. She petitioned the Government for a military pension but this was refused and she was given only a small "royal bounty allowance". She continued to petition unsuccessfully for many years.

References

¹ Report of the Commissioner of Enquiry on the Colony of New South Wales (*The Bigge Report*) p180

² Correspondence between Brisbane and Earl Bathurst, quoted in J.G. Steele *Brisbane Town in Convict Days* UQP 1975 and W. Ross Johnston *Brisbane – The First 30 Years* Boolarong 1988

³ Bateson *Patrick Logan, Tyrant of Brisbane Town* Ure Smith 1966

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⁴ Logan to Macleay 28 August 1826; *The Australian*, 18 Oct 1826; Sydney Gazette 28 Oct 1826

⁵ John Oxley Library Logan to Macleay 28 August 1826



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⁶ The best account of Logan's death is in a report from Lieutenant G. Edwards