



*Carting cane in a horse-drawn wagon 1930, possibly at Eagleby. (Source: Keith Schmidt/Miss W. Herse)*

## Sugar and Rum

While the fortunes of cotton waxed and waned, Louis Hope of Ormiston had been experimenting with another new crop – sugar.

In 1864, the Queensland Government introduced regulations for coffee and cane growing, offering incentives similar to those for cotton. The same year, a former Barbados sugar planter John Buhot stated that the land on the northern side of the Logan River was highly suitable for cane production.<sup>1</sup> Buhot himself started the Pimpama Sugar Company and in November 1866, claimed to have produced the first bulk quantity of sugar locally - 670 lbs (305kg). James Strachan immediately claimed that he had produced 220kg of good sugar from half an acre of cane at Cleveland the previous January.<sup>2</sup>

The *Brisbane Courier* commented a little tongue in cheek that “sugar growing is to become the order of the day and we are no more to bother with maize and potatoes. We are not to look forward for anything from cotton, but we are to become sugar planters all of a ruck, and that very quickly.”<sup>3</sup>

Logan farmers needed little further encouragement. In February 1867, for example, Hinchcliffe and McDonald held a meeting of farmers to try to introduce sugar growing near Waterford.<sup>4</sup> It is interesting to read the terms offered because they were probably common to most sugar mills. The farmers were to grow and harvest the cane and, when ready for the mill, to cut and deliver it into punts at the nearest point of navigation to their farms. The manufacturers were to provide the punts and labour to get the cane to the mill and were then to provide all the labour and equipment at the mill for the manufacture of the sugar. The farmer then received half the sugar and half the molasses produced, but had to provide his own bags and casks. The manufacturer kept the other half as payment. A listener commented that the manufacturers were “going to make a jolly fine thing out of the scheme by taking half the produce” but was told it was the usual custom. Ten people signified their interest in the project.

In September however, a further meeting was held and McDonald indicated that he was not able to start a mill, but that Louis Hope of Cleveland would supply cane cuttings in exchange for produce, and wished farmers to enter into an agreement for a term of several years to supply cane.<sup>5</sup> Samples of sugar and molasses were shown to the meeting and several farmers immediately signed up. The cuttings soon started to arrive for Hinchcliffe to distribute to farmers for planting – around 3000 on the *Nora*, 7000 on the *Wonga Wonga* and 19,500 promised on the *Maid of the Mill*. One of the German communities asked for enough cuttings on credit to plant 30 acres. As the Brisbane Courier commented, there was “a regular bustle and talk about sugar and sugar cane planting” all along the Logan.

Practical information about planting and growing was printed regularly in newspapers.<sup>6</sup> Sugar could be grown relatively easily on the good, fertile soils of the Logan area and was soon a staple crop for small farmers.

Larger plantations also started production. Henry Jordan grew cane at Tygum, employing 20-30 farmers<sup>7</sup> and at Townsvale, Robert Towns converted smoothly to the new crop, continuing to use Kanaka labour.

The cotton mill of William Fryar and James Strachan became a sugar mill and new mills included Schneiders at Schneider’s Road, Jordan’s mill at Tygum, two mills at Gramzow (Carbrook) and mills at Mt Cotton.

The cane was conveyed to mills by punt – another labour intensive process. The loading was done by hand and the average daily rate was 7 tons per man for the low wage of 7 shillings.<sup>8</sup>

Sugar, however, had its own problems. Severe frosts some years destroyed the crops, affecting virtually all the growers. The crop could also be destroyed after it was harvested, when the cut cane was transported to the small sugar refineries to be crushed and made into sugar. If the weather was hot and humid, as it often is in southern Queensland, the fresh cane would wilt and lose its sugar content.<sup>9</sup>

There was a proliferation of small mills as farmers tried to avoid the processing costs charged by big mills and retain all their produce. These small mills were uneconomic, and could not always afford to install newer, more efficient technology to improve the sugar yield.



*Carbrook Mill c1920 (Source: John Oxley Library Neg 65331)*



*Loganholme Sugar Mill 1886. Its most famous owner was James Tyson, commemorated by Banjo Paterson in his poem T.Y.S.O.N. (Source: John Oxley Library Neg 2583)*

The small primitive mills also undermined efficient operations such the one owned by Fryar and Strachan. William Fryar was a practical man who had previously been manager of Moggill coal mine and a part-time surveyor for the Queensland Lands Department. In spite of the mill's efficiency, its owners lost money and the mill and plantation were assigned to the merchant firm George Raff and Co of Brisbane in October 1873.<sup>10</sup> Fryar returned to his occupation as a surveyor and was appointed Inspector of Mines in 1882.<sup>11</sup>

*The Queenslander* described the mill in 1875:

It is in a capital position on the Logan River, surrounded by quantities of rich sugar lands under cane crop. ....Loganholme Sugar Mill has sufficient land attached to the manufactory capable of sustaining a succession of crops equal to the power of the machinery to complete easily 30 tons of sugar a week. Some canes are purchased from neighbouring farmers.... We can safely assert there is no finer machinery for sugar making or better arranged plant in the colony and a very high class sugar, without doubt, is produced from this mill.

In 1876, the mill passed to James Tyson, the legendary pastoralist who had become wealthy supplying the goldfields of Victoria. Tyson employed his nephews and the husband of one of his nieces as sugarmakers. However in January 1882, he subdivided the plantation and sold it in 22 lots, sending the mill machinery to Tully where sugar had better prospects. Tyson died in 1898 and was commemorated by Banjo Paterson in the poem "T.Y.S.O.N."

The mill continued to operate under a succession of owners but in a state of decline. *The Queenslander* again described it in 1885:

The well-known Loganholme Mill is working, though not the fine and powerful machinery it used to have when it belonged to Mr James Tyson, but a small mill which was purchased by the present proprietary company of farmers from a failure at Mt Cotton. The distillery is again in operation and a good sample of rum is being produced. This one-time bustling centre now looks dilapidated and unthrifty...<sup>12</sup>

Some of the cane grown on the Logan was of such poor quality and sugar content, even after two years growth, that it was not even worth harvesting. In north Queensland, one-year-old cane yielded more sugar than two-year-old Logan cane, but while sugar prices were high, the southern growers could continue to make a living from the crop.<sup>13</sup>

When the price fell in the 1880s, sugar became uneconomic. In 1885, growers were paid only 5 shillings a ton for cane when it had been cut and carted to the river. Two years earlier, the price had been 10 shillings a ton standing in the field, with the mill owners paying cutting and cartage costs.<sup>14</sup>

The agricultural reporter of *The Queenslander* added:

In the cane fields of the small farmer who has to sell his cane at this low figure, I saw no Kanakas, but I did see women and boys and girls. It is evident that only by the employment of family labour for which no actual cash is paid, a living can be made by cane-growing.

In these circumstances, small farmers could not grow enough sugar to be profitable – it could now only be economic where there were large areas of cane and enough capital to install efficient sugar crushing plants or refineries.<sup>15</sup>

In 1885 there was severe frost in winter, followed by drought in spring and early summer. This resulted in many farmers abandoning the growing of sugar cane completely, turning instead to cultivating crops such as corn (maize), potatoes and lucerne. Dairying also began to grow in importance.

A Royal Commission into the Sugar Industry was held in 1889. The Commission reported:

In the Logan district, I found many of the older plantations abandoned, but many of the smaller ones are still in existence and are growing cane, in some cases profitably and in others, affording the owners only a bare subsistence.

Nevertheless, sugar continued to be grown in the Logan area, and 1890 was hailed as the best harvest ever. However in 1889, Bundaberg produced 13886 tons of sugar, and in 1890 Mackay produced 15358 tons, each of which was nearly twenty times as much as the acclaimed Logan sugar production of 1890.

The area growing sugar in Logan increased from 1039 acres in 1890 to 1369 acres in 1891, but though an extra 330 acres of cane was planted, the amount of sugar produced only rose by 50 tons to 1170 tons.<sup>16</sup> Not all the cane grown at Logan was crushed for sugar production at this time – as the dairying industry and cattle grazing in general became the main local primary industry, much cane was used for cattle fodder rather than for sugar.<sup>17</sup>

Even in 1892, 921 acres of cane were grown, producing 1197 tons of sugar.<sup>18</sup> This was grown by 119 growers, nearly all of it in small patches, which was crushed in one of the 15 local mills. The farmers either sold their cane to the mills outright, or took a percentage of the sale price of the sugar that the mill received. As long as the price of sugar remained high, the growers received enough to make a living, especially some exceptional cases, such as two Mt Cotton growers who were able to produce nearly 3 tons of sugar per acre of cane, which was more than double the normal rate.

A new mill began to operate at this late stage in the sugar era – Musch and Appel's mill at Carbrook which opened in 1905 and continued until 1926.

When this closed down, farmers took cane to the Eagleby Mill across the ferry in wagons. When the tide was low, the pull up the Eagleby bank was too difficult for two horses, and additional horses had to be hooked on to help.<sup>19</sup> The ferry was pulled across the river hand-over-hand by a rope, an extremely difficult task with a strong tide or wind.



*The famous “Walrus” - a floating sugar mill and rum distillery on the Logan River 1873  
(Source: John Oxley Library Neg 63112)*

## Rum

Sugar growing fostered another industry – distilling rum. In 1869, the Pioneer Floating Sugar Mill Company fitted up the steam ship “Walrus” as a floating sugar mill and rum distillery. The secretary J. Campbell Moffatt and the manager John Falconer requested government protection (ie exclusive rights) for a period of two years, basing this on the high cost of their investment and asserting that this was the only way small growers could have their cane crushed at a reasonable price.<sup>20</sup>

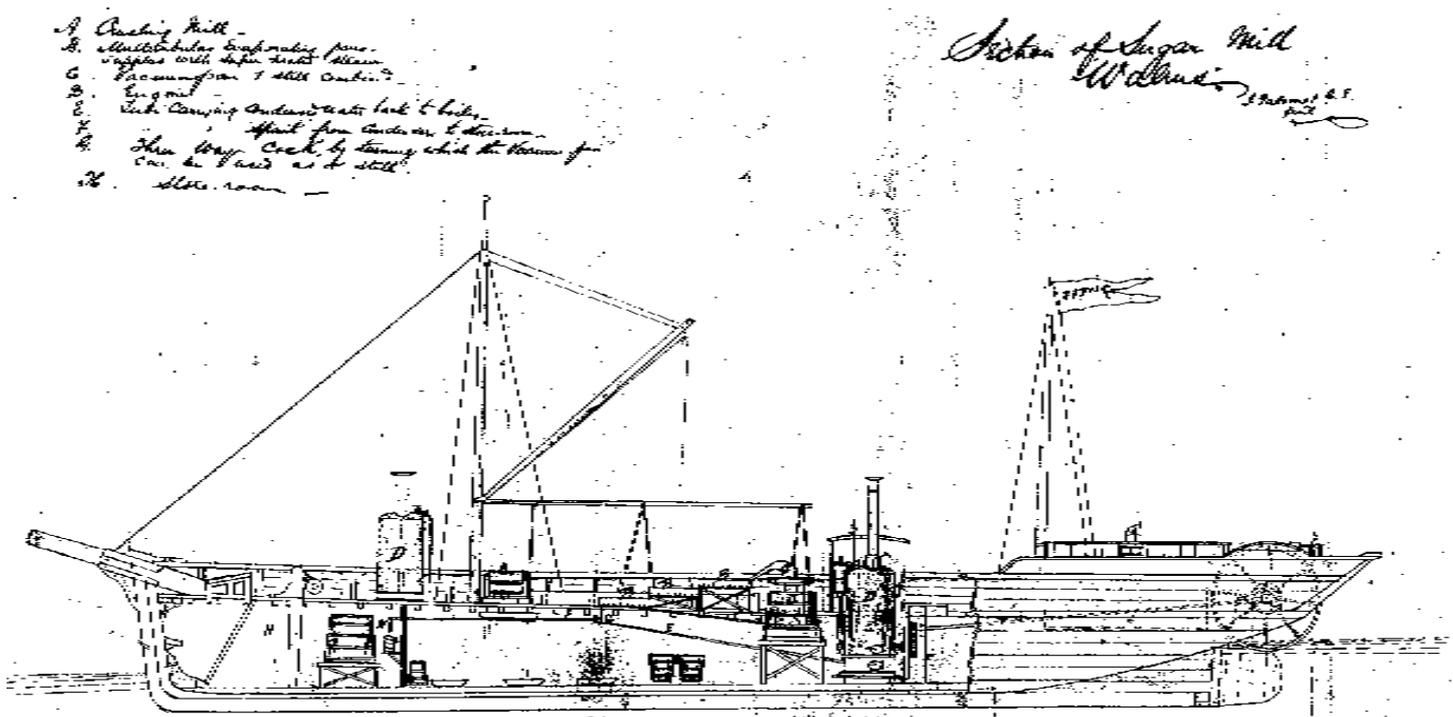
In its short career, the Walrus became quite famous but proved a considerable headache to authorities trying to keep track of rum production. The boat officially produced 18,621 gallons (84,725 litres) of rum before closing its operation in 1871.

Several land-based mills such as Loganholme also installed equipment for distilling rum. Production in the Logan area was, however, small compared with northern production. The large Ageston Distillery near the mouth of the Logan produced 23,227 gallons of rum in 1880, while three in the Mackay area produced nearly 90,000 gallons.<sup>21</sup> In 1882, the Ageston Distillery made only 12,811 gallons of rum.<sup>22</sup>

The large local production of rum had its own social problems. Many people succumbed to temptation and conducted an illegal still, or manipulated the returns for licenced stills.

### **Amount of sugar produced in the Logan district:<sup>23</sup>**

	<b>1880</b>	<b>1881</b>	<b>1882</b>	<b>1889</b>	<b>1890</b>	<b>1891</b>	<b>1892</b>
Land under cane (ac)	1808	2586	3051	1199	1154	945	1010
Area crushed (ac)	1402	1930	2008	838	707	799	921
Sugar produced (tons)	1980	2150	2413	817	782	1065	1197
Rum produced (galls)	23227	18447	12811	23621	18799	31791	
No. of mills	19	23	26	16	20	13	15
No. of Distilleries	1	1	1	3	3	2	



*Drawing of the Walrus, showing its equipment and method of operation.  
(Source: QSA COL/120 69/1167)*

### **Letter to the Premier of Queensland from J. Campbell Moffatt and John Falconer April 1869**

We, the undersigned, on behalf of the Pioneer Floating Sugar Mill Company have now in consideration of the great amount of time and money expended by us in fitting up the Comp. Ship "Walrus" with all the latest improvements for the economical production of Sugar and Rum, and as the Major part of these are original so far as this Colony is Concerned, and seeing that Messrs Hart, Mort and others have obtained protection in this colony by letters patent and otherwise for the introduction of improvements from abroad, We the Petitioners Now Make application for a protection for two years for the system of Manufacturing Sugar and Rum by the means employed by us on board the Comp. ship, so as to ensure us remuneration for this outlay of capital invested in this experiment, being the only way by which the Majority of Sugar Cane growers can be accommodated and their Cane Crushed at remunerative prices to themselves.

We beg to enclose a sketch of Comp. boat shewing arrangements of Sugar Machinery by the new principle of Multitabular boiling pans and super heated steam.

We have the honour to be, Sir, Your Obedient Servants

J. Campbell Moffatt Secy      John Falconer Manager

## Towns, Jordan and Kanaka Labour

The most contentious aspect of cane production was the use of Kanaka labour. As already mentioned in the chapter on cotton, Robert Towns was the first to bring Kanakas to the Logan in an attempt to overcome the shortage of labour for cotton growing.

When he changed to sugar, he continued to use Kanaka labour. A journalist visited Townsville in 1867 and described the daily routine:

We were told by Mr Walker, the superintendent of Townsville, that they are very industrious, requiring very little white supervision to direct their labours, quick in comprehending any manual work they are put to, anxious to please and honest. We could see for ourselves that they are cheerful and contented.

In summer, they go to work at 6 o'clock in the morning, knock off at 8 for breakfast, have two hours in the middle of the day and leave off at 6 in the evening. In winter, they work about the same number of hours, the times being differently arranged. Their food consists of corn flour, for which rice is substituted as a change; beef and molasses. Nominally they are on rations, 1½ pounds of corn flour (680gm), 1½ pounds of beef and half a pound of molasses being served out daily for each man, but this scale is not rigid so if the cooks of the various gangs have not sufficient to satisfy the men, they have only to ask for more and they obtain it. That they are well fed, one only has to look at their fat and sleek bodies to see for himself.

They have readily adopted the habit, common to most white men, of smoking and a fig [small packet] per week is given to each man.

In the evening when their day's work is completed, they spend considerable time before they turn in, talking round the fires or in singing and dancing for which they make elaborate preparations and they frequently get up in the middle of the night to bathe.

Their quarters will compare favourably, so far as regards cleanliness and accommodation, with the average station hut.

The number of Islanders on the plantation at present is 196. The time of agreement of those who came in June 1864 expired last June, that being three years since their arrival. They would have been sent back on that date but as the time of those who arrived in November 1864 would be up soon after, it was thought advisable to keep them a little longer. This was explained to them and they indicated that they were perfectly satisfied. The two lots will be sent back in about a month and for some time Mr Walker has been busy making arrangements for their departure. The carpenters have been at work making boxes for the Islanders, to contain their effects which consist of the prizes they have obtained in the cotton picking and the goods they have chosen instead of wages (£6 a year). [Note: as a comparison, a cook at this time was paid £30 a year plus keep]

They all appear glad that they are going, though many of them state that they will come back. That they are anxious to go and see their friends cannot be wondered at; the wonder is that they should have been satisfied to stop here away from their relatives so long.

When they are sent back, there will still be 90 left and Mr Walker thinks this number will be sufficient to work the plantation at present. At all events, he has no intention of obtaining any more for some time. He states that he does not think there is any economy in employing this description of labour. This is partly to be accounted for by the fact that amongst so large a number, there must be a comparatively useless proportion and as it is impossible to discharge any, the cost of labour is materially increased.<sup>24</sup>

This glowing description is somewhat at odds with statements made by recruiter Ross Lewin. He said he was driving along the public road through Townsville on other business in August and was surrounded by a group of Islanders, demanding to be sent home. Lewin offered to take a deputation to see a magistrate and was promptly accused by Mr Walker of inciting mutiny.<sup>25</sup>

By contrast, Henry Jordan was opposed to South Sea labour. Jordan was a dentist who became a missionary to Aborigines in South Australia and was a member of the first Queensland Parliament. He became Emigration Officer in London in 1860, travelling throughout Britain to recruit immigrants for Queensland.<sup>26</sup> In particular, he organised the migration of the Manchester operatives who settled on the Logan in 1863. (See chapter on cotton)

Jordan was recalled in 1866 when a financial crisis affected Queensland and he then devoted his attention to his own plantation at Tygum. However, he employed local farmers as labourers, his Wesleyan religion leading him to oppose use of Kanakas.

Jordan was by no means the only opponent of Kanaka Sea labour. Letters for and against the system appeared regularly in every newspaper. In March 1878, for example, a local resident wrote a letter to the *Logan Witness*, claiming that Polynesian labour was “the curse of Beenleigh and the whole of the southern district”. He said unlike other farmers, Polynesian labourers didn’t settle on land or pay taxes. He also believed recruiting was kidnapping.

In 1872, Jordan won the prize for sugar at the first Beenleigh Show. The same year, he acquired a large area of pastoral land at what was later to become Palm Beach and Currumbin. The Tygum estate was sold progressively to the Lahey Brothers who continued to use the mill until the machinery became obsolete; it was then converted to a timber mill and operated until 1888.<sup>27</sup>

The obsolete machinery was purchased by Schneider and Co who planned to site it at “a very central location near Waterford township, close to a fresh water lagoon” The mill which had previously made 9 tons of sugar a week was to become the joint property of a number of farmers living at German Pocket who could take their cane direct to the mill. There was some local opposition because of fears that site could affect the water supply.<sup>28</sup>

In 1889, a Royal Commission was held into the Sugar Industry. One of the witnesses was H. Heinemann of Mt Cotton Plantation and his evidence gives a snapshot of a farm late in the sugar era, using Kanaka labour.

Heinemann stated that he had 150 acres under cane, and had crushed 30 acres the previous season. The total tonnage crushed by his mill was 2400 tons. A few years earlier, there had been three other mills in the area, but they had closed. Heinemann’s mill had cost about £2500 and had recently been updated from open pan to the newer vacuum pan system. His annual working expenses were £1950 and he took £3055, giving him £1105 profit. He said he had been growing cane for 10 years and had always made a profit.

Some 40 acres of his land was leased to Chinese people who paid £200 a year and tended bananas which had originally been planted by Heinemann.

The cane plantation was worked by six white men as engineers and ploughmen who were paid between 50/- and 30/- a week. The previous year, he had employed 30 Kanakas who did all the field work and were paid £19 each. They were “agreement boys” – they had not been recruited directly from the islands. He said he thought he could work the plantation using only white men if no more South Sea Islanders were allowed to come to Queensland.

## Tygun sugar mill 1879

From a description by a young immigrant Arthur Gunter.<sup>29</sup>

Gunter said the mill was on the banks of the Logan River. The farms on both side of the river were owned by Germans who grew the sugar cane and brought it to the mill in flat-bottomed punts. It was unloaded at the little jetty into wagons which were hauled up to the mill by a steam winch. After the cane was crushed, the residue was spread over a paddock to dry and then used for fuel in the boiler. The molasses produced was allowed to run into the river because it didn't pay the owners to save it.

The mill employed a total of six white men who lived in a bark bunkhouse. One of the Lahey brothers operated the mill engine while the other worked at different jobs and helped supervise. As well as cane residue, the engine used large quantities of firewood – Gunter mentioned helping to unload eight German wagons on his first day of work, each holding 6 tons of wood.

Gunter was paid well, 15/- a week plus rations which consisted of approximately 5kg of flour, 5kg of beef or mutton, 1kg of sugar and 100gm of tea. A Kanaka was employed as cook, but the meals were monotonous, invariably consisting of damper and a piece of meat boiled in a kerosene tin. As a recent immigrant, Gunter found it difficult to accept the rough bush method of cooking, using almost no utensils. He said “It took a bit of getting used to, to see the kanaka mixing up the flour and water on the inner side of a sheet of bark. He might have been clean, but he didn't look it.”

The mill had a shop which sold any extras such as jam, tobacco or rum at above the usual prices. Many employees ended up with little cash to show at the end of the sugar season, having spent most of their pay in the shop or having gambled it away at cards.

Unlike the white men who were paid off at the end of the crushing season, Gunter thought the Kanaka's contract meant he had to be employed full time and was kept on to do odd jobs in the off season.

## Tygun Plantation

Henry Jordan's “Tygun Plantation” is today recalled by the name “Henry Jordan Park” at Waterford and by the row of bunya pines near the intersection of Tygun Rd and Kingston Rd, once part of the drive which led to Tygun House. In contrast to the basic existence of most early settlers, Jordan's plantation reflected a wealthy and relatively sophisticated lifestyle where there was leisure for creating gardens. His daughter Annie Dunn described the plantation in an article in the Brisbane Courier<sup>30</sup>:

Tygun was situated in a very picturesque situation, a pocket in the bend of the river, water on three sides of it and a road that connected with the Loganholme Road on the fourth side. Its gates, opposite to “King Leo's Hotel” opened on the road to the ferry – where is now the bridge....

Tygun House was a low white bungalow with wide verandahs and green shutters, built on a knoll, sloping down to the river in front and dark glossy scrubs on either side. The large grassy lawn was dotted with many ornamental shrubs and trees, where my father had constructed a circular seat. My mother was the gardener and it was the loveliest spot, always bright with flowers; absolutely private, encircled as it was with a sugar cane field and approached by a winding path and rustic bridges over the gullies on whose banks grew young cedar trees that lent themselves to us as horses and flew up straight again when we ceased to ride them.

## References

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- <sup>2</sup> BC 8.12.1866 and 18.12.1866
- <sup>3</sup> BC 21.12.1866
- <sup>4</sup> Qld Times (QT) 16.2.1867
- <sup>5</sup> BC 30.8.1866
- <sup>6</sup> eg BC and QT 7.10.1867
- <sup>7</sup> Waterford SS Centenary
- <sup>8</sup> Logan Witness (LW) 10.1.1880
- <sup>9</sup> QVP, II, 1870, p. 119.
- <sup>10</sup> John Oxley Library (JOL) Fiche 923.9 tys Zita Denhom MA thesis 1969 James Tyson
- <sup>11</sup> R.L.Whitmore *Coal in Qld* UQP 1981
- <sup>12</sup> Qlder 31.10.1885
- <sup>13</sup> QVP, II, 1872, p. 1310.
- <sup>14</sup> Qlder 24.10.1885
- <sup>15</sup> Jack Camm, "Agriculture in Queensland in the 1880s, Optimism and Reality" *Australia 1888*, No 5 Sept 1980
- <sup>16</sup> Report from the Dept Agriculture and Stock, QVP, 1892, IV, p. 733.
- <sup>17</sup> QVP, 1891, IV, p. 808.
- <sup>18</sup> Annual Report from Inspector of Distilleries, QVP, 1892, IV, p. 767.
- <sup>19</sup> Carbrook SS Centenary 1977
- <sup>20</sup> QSA COL/A120 69/1167
- <sup>21</sup> QVP, II, 1881, p. 975.
- <sup>22</sup> QVP, II, 1882, p. 1150.
- <sup>23</sup> These figures are from the Annual Reports of the Inspector of Distilleries in QVP for each year.
- <sup>24</sup> QT 10.9.1867
- <sup>25</sup> BC 30.8.1867
- <sup>26</sup> Jennifer Harrison "A Handful of Heroes" RHSQ Vol XIV No 5 Dec 1990
- <sup>27</sup> Waterford SS Centenary
- <sup>28</sup> LW 27.3.1880. LW 24.4.1880; reply from A. Holzheimer 1.5.1880
- <sup>29</sup> JOL OM 74-66 Manuscript
- <sup>30</sup> Recollections of Mrs Annie Dunn. Undated typescript, Logan Local Studies Centre



*Carting cane by truck (Source:Keith Schmidt/Mrs M. Johnson)*