



We are **Queenslanders**

Contemporary multicultural tapestry of peoples

2015

Funded by



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Queensland is filled with a richness and diversity of cultures which we acknowledge and celebrate, and recognise as a result of our long history of migration – this publication was developed with the sole intention of disseminating information for the benefit of the public and promoting the diverse immigration stories and experiences that are an important part of Queensland history.

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*This book is dedicated to the late
Mr Nick Xynias BEM AO
in recognition of lifelong leadership
and volunteer service for the benefit
of a multicultural Queensland.*



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English

– Written by Meredith A., Marcus K., and Barbara Harnes –

From penal settlements to the twenty-first century

The presence of an entry on ‘the English’ in a collection interpreting multiculturalism in Queensland might almost seem counter-intuitive. In terms of Queensland’s history, the English represent first, the colonising impulse of an overseas mother country and second, the cultural dominance of Anglo-Saxon whiteness that prevailed as official policy in not only Queensland but Australia until at least the 1960s. Accordingly, the presence of the English and how we should think of them in the context of modern multicultural Queensland needs some adjustment, as the English as a group have moved from being a culturally dominant group through the nineteenth and much of the twentieth centuries to one cultural group among many others in the twenty-first.

England, one of the constituent nations of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, is approximately 16,500km from Brisbane, but has been instrumental in shaping Australia’s history since white settlement in 1788. The British Isles themselves have been subject to continual processes of invasion and immigration over a chronology spanning several thousand years. Before the Romans conquered parts of the British Isles by 43AD, there had earlier been invasion and settlement by Celtic tribes. In the post-Roman period the British Isles again faced numerous processes of immigration and invasion, including the Angles, Saxons, Jutes and Vikings.

Queensland, of course, is named after a Queen of England: Queen Victoria (d.1901). The name of the state is evocative and imperially potent, claiming the area as a territory under the sovereignty and cultural dominance of the Queen and her government. Victoria was in a position to have the state named after her because the English did not just receive migrants and invaders but in turn colonised, or even invaded, many parts of the world. Victoria was also the Empress of India and eventually she and her son and grandson governed over an extensive British Empire. This Empire was not exclusively an English undertaking, but its centre of gravity was London, the English capital. Subsequently, after the collapse and dissolution of the British Empire from the 1940s onwards, peoples from races who had been colonial subjects migrated to the British Isles, especially to English cities such

as London, Leeds, Leicester and Bradford, coming from Africa, India and the West Indies. Cumulatively this means that the modern day English people are both racially and culturally a conglomeration of many different influences. While from the perspective of Queensland, ‘English’ may suggest the colonising power and carry overtones of cultural uniformity, modern England is itself a multi-cultural society, not least in its major cities such as London, where native-born English people now form a minority of the population.

What was first the British Colony of New South Wales, spreading out from Botany Bay, reached areas we now call Redlands, Moreton Bay and Brisbane by the 1820s. By 1824 there was a detachment of army personnel and convicts at Moreton Bay and by 1825 they were at Brisbane Town.¹ We should be cautious, however, in thinking of the army and the convicts just as the ‘English’. Many (but by no means all) of the convicts were Irish, and the army regiments came from all parts of the British Isles. Nonetheless, we should also consider that cultural dominance lay with the English among the earliest colonisers. The commandants and then the governors reported to the Colonial Office in Whitehall and took instructions from colonial masters in England.²

Reinforcing this impression of the cultural dominance of the English, one other group came to join the garrison and the convicts – the chaplains of the Church of England. To jump forward for a moment from the 1820s to the 1960s, when the Anglican Archbishop of Brisbane Sir Reginald Halse died in 1962, the centre of Brisbane came to a standstill as his cortege passed. The scale of this public mourning reminds us how closely connected the Church of England (later called the Anglican Church) and Englishness were in Queensland. From the time of the penal settlement until the 1970s (when it was overtaken by the Catholic Church) the Anglican Church was the numerically largest in the state. It was also a conspicuous part of public life. Queensland’s governors, who were

¹ Jennifer Harrison, “...not likely to command attention or to conciliate general esteem”: the Revd John Vincent, First Clergyman at Moreton Bay”, in Marcus Harnes, Lindsay Henderson and Gillian Colclough (eds), *From Augustine to Anglicanism: The Anglican Church in Australia and Beyond* (Milton, 2010), p.94.

² J.G.Steele, *Brisbane Town in Convict Days* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1975), pp.1–29.

typically English army officers from the upper crust, were practising Anglicans and so were many members of the state's legislature, the judiciary and the municipalities.

The migration of the English to Queensland has been a constant factor since the foundation of first the penal colony and then the state. There has not been a period in Queensland's history when English people have not moved here in sizable numbers. Their reasons for doing so have obviously changed. The earliest were compelled to do so as either convicts or servants of the state and the nascent colonial Church. Later Queensland, like other parts of Australia, welcomed the so-called 'ten pound poms', English families who migrated cheaply under sponsorship from successive Australian governments, who upheld the White Australia Policy and who privileged white migrants from the United Kingdom. Today the White Australia Policy no longer prevails and many younger Australians would even find its former official status to be shocking. Nonetheless the percentage of Queenslanders who trace direct British descent remains high at over 10 per cent of the population, not least because of the number who entered as the ten pound poms. In recent decades, certainly the 1990s and the 2000s, the types of English migrants have been demographically broad in reflection of the diversity of the English population back in the British Isles. Many of the migrants settling in Queensland choose to go no further than Brisbane, and many are so-called white collar workers who find employment in the professions, such as law or medicine.

The English population in Queensland has been steadily increasing. To consider the last 15 years, figures taken in the last three censuses record that numbers have risen progressively in the last decade. In 2001 approximately 850,000 citizens were documented as being born in England. The 2006 census counted 860,000 residents that were English born and by the 2011 census this figure had risen to approximately 910,000 residents born in England. This means that behind those who are listed as 'Australian', English is the second largest nationality in Australia. Census data for 2011 states that 4.1 per cent of the population of Queensland was English born.³

³ Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Multicultural Affairs, *Diversity Figures* (Queensland Government, 2012), p. 4.

For many English people, Brisbane is considered to be the city to migrate to. Brisbane is seen as a more attractive option than Sydney and Melbourne. Expatriate author and commentator Adrian Davies argues that 'Queensland's capital is a lucrative destination for those relocating from the Old Dart.'⁴ There are many factors which place Brisbane ahead of its southern competitors as a desirable place of residence. Davies suggests that the climate, health services and affordable private schools are important and these are all significant points for understanding the type of lifestyle that English people hope to enjoy in Queensland.⁵

The proportion of English born residents in various Local Government Areas is consistently in the top four nationalities. For example, in the Gold and Sunshine Coasts the proportions are 5.6 per cent and 6.6 per cent respectively. The percentage of British, as opposed to strictly English, residents is a moot point. Specific suburbs of Brisbane, Brisbane City, South Brisbane and Mount Ommaney have high levels of English born residents with 4.4 per cent, 3.7 per cent and 4.5 per cent respectively. Katherine Feeney cites a NatWest survey from 2010 which suggests that 10.4 per cent of the population of Brisbane is British. This is contradicted by the 2006 census which places the figure at 4.5 per cent.⁶ But: 'Regardless of the figure, it accounted for a significant portion of the population born in the British Isles.'⁷ These points are a reminder that much census data and other forms of information about migration do not particularly distinguish between the English and the other peoples of the British Isles, chiefly the Scots and Welsh. Nonetheless available data does suggest that the English form by far the largest grouping among the 'British' migrants who have settled in Queensland. We should also remember that, as was indicated above, post-war England is a multicultural society and by no means all English migrants to Queensland will be from the Anglo-Saxon population. Latter-day English migrants are themselves multicultural and add to the richness of this aspect of Queensland life.

Club involvement is an important factor which exists among the expatriate community. For example, the Brisbane Everton Football club enables expatriates to

⁴ Katherine Feeney, 'Bris Vegas or little Brit-bane?', *Queensland Times* (17 July, 2010), p. 1.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

keep in touch with each other. Another advantage for the expat community is the vibrant social scene it has generated. With more than 1,000 new arrivals each week this has allowed the social scene to flourish. John Aitken, Chief Executive Officer of Brisbane Marketing argues that '(t)his rapid growth has delivered new entertainment precincts, an exciting live-music scene and quaint urban villages.'⁸ Within broader Queensland society, Englishness is perhaps more diffuse than other cultural or national groupings. Aside from some regional variations, English migrants speak the same language as the host society and there is no need of clubs or societies to celebrate a national language. It is also difficult to pinpoint many distinctively English events, ceremonies or dates, such as the high visibility of the Chinese New Year for example, because the original influence of English customs, laws and traditions have permeated and shaped mainstream society from the earliest phases of European settlement.

AUTHOR PROFILES

HARMES, Barbara was born in Queensland from mixed English, German and Danish ancestry. She is a descendant of Danish refugees who fled from Schleswig Holstein during the Franco-Prussian War. She teaches into international language programs at the University of Southern Queensland and for many years has taught students from many parts of the world including Asia, Africa and the Middle East. Her research spans a number of fields from nineteenth-century literature to current pedagogy. Her PhD from the University of Southern Queensland investigated the history of nineteenth-century sexuality and she has also obtained qualifications in English Literature and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL).

HARMES, Marcus K. was born in Australia of mixed English, German and Danish descent. He has long been interested in racial politics and whiteness studies and publishes in this field, including studies of racial identity in works of twentieth century popular culture such as Doctor Who and other science fiction works. He lectures in the tertiary enabling programs of the University of Southern Queensland in Toowoomba. His work involves providing tertiary access to widely diverse bodies of students, including many refugees. He holds a PhD in British History from University of Queensland and other qualifications in German language and Ancient History.

HARMES, Meredith A. was born in London but has lived in Australia since an early age. She teaches into communication and nursing programs at the University of Southern Queensland. Her research concerns politics, religion and society in twentieth-century Queensland, and she has recently published an article in *Queensland History Journal* on religious tensions between Protestants and Catholics in 1950s politics. Current research includes studies of recent British constitutional history and popular culture. These stem from her Bachelor's Degree in Political Science from the University of Queensland, a Diploma of Modern Languages from the University of New England and a Masters from the the University of Southern Queensland in Public Relations.

⁸ Caroline Frost, 'Why is Brisbane attracting so many Brits?', *BBC News Magazine* (13 July 2010), www.bbc.co.uk/news/10600464?print=true, accessed 4 February 2012.

Eritreans

– Written by Saba Abraham –

Asmara is the capital of Eritrea, a country with 5.5 million people. The colour red of the national flag symbolises the blood of the martyrs, green symbolises the country's fertile agriculture and the blue stands for the Red Sea to the east of the country. Nine ethnic groups make up the population of Eritrea: Tigrinya, Tigre, Saho, Bilen, Beja, Afar, Nara, Kunama, and Rashida. The official languages are Tigrinya and Arabic. There are two major religions in Eritrea: Christians belonging to the Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant denominations, and Muslims.

Eritrea experienced colonisation by the Turks, Egyptians and Italians. More recently military conflicts with Ethiopia caused enormous damage to people and the land. Thousands of unfortunate Eritreans had to flee to neighbouring Sudan. In 1993 in an United Nations sponsored popular referendum, Eritreans overwhelmingly voted for independence and the country declared its sovereignty. In 1998 fighting erupted again between Eritrea and Ethiopia, a consequence of a border dispute. Unfortunately, many Eritreans were again forced to flee after having returned home from living in exile in Sudan, beginning with the year 1991. The border conflict developed into a full scale war and lasted until the year 2000. The Peace Agreement of Algiers between Eritrea and Ethiopia, which included the establishment of a boundary commission, did not hold.

By the end of 2001, all dissenting voices demanding democratic reform in Eritrea were quelled. Eritreans were either arrested, driven into exile, or cowed into silence. There was no free press and basic rights and freedoms were denied. According to Amnesty International (2012) an estimated 3,000 Eritreans fled the country every month, mostly to Sudan and Ethiopia. In 2011 the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) indicated that there were 250,000 Eritrean refugees living mainly in neighbouring African countries. Many Eritrean refugees perished when crossing inhospitable lands or in the Mediterranean Sea trying to reach Europe through Italy.

Eritreans began to settle in Queensland in the early 1990s. Most of them came through Sudan and Cairo. The total number of Eritreans in Queensland is estimated to be 1,000, including their Australia-born children. Most Eritreans in Queensland live in the Southside of Brisbane.

Some of the Eritrean new arrivals to Queensland used to live in Libya under the UNHCR protection. During the

Libyan unrest they fled to Tunisia and were living in local refugee camps. These refugees have mainly Islamic backgrounds. They settled largely in Toowoomba where they were welcomed by previously arrived Eritrean people. In addition to these new arrivals there were two families and a single person who came to Toowoomba via Sudan.

Eritrean refugees are very grateful to the Australian government and the Australian people for accepting them for settlement. Muslim Eritreans experience some difficulties adjusting to the Australian way of life, as it is compulsory for every Muslim to pray in congregation every Friday afternoon. Shaking hands with a female is not considered appropriate. In multicultural Australia, Eritreans place much importance on being understood and respected for having different cultural and religious traditions and needs. High schools and Technical and Further Education (TAFE) Institutes do have sufficient institutional flexibility to make some allowances for people with migrant or refugee backgrounds that do not completely conform to the lifestyle of the Australian mainstream population.

AUTHOR PROFILE

ABRAHAM, Saba was born in Eritrea and arrived in Australia in 1992, with her daughter Reem. 'I couldn't speak any English and did not know about Centrelink and banks and all those things. But I just thought this was heaven as a country.' At 13 her education was cut short and at 14 she was a freedom fighter with the Eritrean Liberation Front. Freedom in Australia was only accessible after a decade as a refugee in Sudan. Saba now owns the Mu'ooz (Ethiopian and Eritrean) restaurant in West End (previously located in Moorooka), where she also conducts work-based training programs for African migrant women. She was a founding member of the Queensland African Communities Council and the initiator of the Eritrean Australian Women and Family Support Network. In 2009 Saba was awarded the Fair Go Pride of Australia medal. Her selflessness is legendary in her community. She loves peace, puts a human face on the plight of refugees, has fought since childhood for female empowerment and excels as a volunteer worker and as a business entrepreneur. 'Moorooka (in Queensland) is my birthplace in Australia!'
