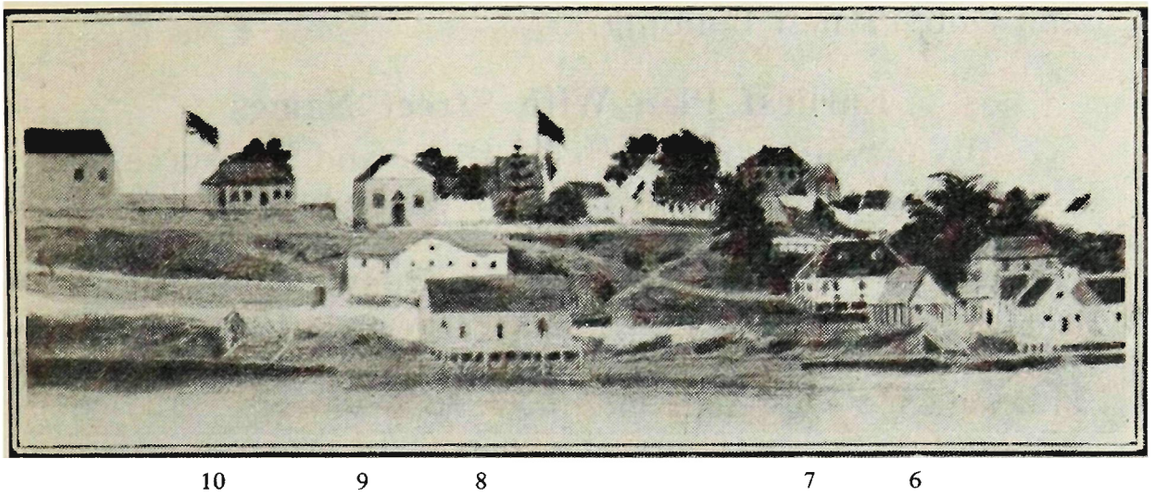
THE CHANGING FACE OF BRISBANE

[By MR. E. D. MELLOR, Acting Surveyor-General.]

(Read November 26, 1959.)

To illustrate this paper, I arranged that two maps be prepared on a scale of one chain to an inch; one of these maps shows Brisbane as it was at the time of the survey by Robert Dixon in 1840; the other, plotted on a transparent medium, shows the existing alignment of



North Quay and William Street area.

1. St. John's; 2. Commandant's House (afterwards Colonial Secretary's Office); 3. Evangelical Church; 4. Capt. Feez' residence; 5. Devonshire House, George St.; 6. Dowse's Wharf; 7. Ship Inn; 8. Queen's Wharf; 9. Commissariat Stores; 10. Ferry to Russell St., Sth. Brisbane.

the city streets. By superimposing the latter on the base map the changes which have taken place in the original alignments may be clearly seen; the changes were effected principally in the period when civil jurisdiction followed the closing of the convict era in 1839.[1]

Unfortunately, it is impracticable to reproduce these two maps in this publication; however, a copy of part of Robert Dixon's 1840 survey plan is reproduced on page —.

It should be noticed that no street names appear on

1.—In 1839 surveyors were sent to Moreton Bay to lay out sites for towns and villages. These were Robert Dixon, James Warner, Stapylton, Tuck and Dunlop. Stapylton and Tuck were murdered by aboriginals near Mt. Lindsay in 1840. Dixon was recalled to Sydney in August 1841 and replaced by Henry Wade. Dixon committed the unforgivable crime of publicly commenting on the improper conduct of the then Commandant Gorman. Although Governor Gipps conceded that the comments were true this, coupled with the fact that Dixon had published in Sydney a map of Brisbane (which was prepared from his official survey work), led to Dixon's removal.

this plan; the earliest plan which shows street names is Surveyor Henry Wade's proposed design of Brisbane in early 1842. On the Robert Dixon plan, it will be noticed that Queen Street appears approximately in its present alignment, but what we now call Albert and Elizabeth Streets were at an oblique angle to Queen Street; George Street did not exist. Buildings which should be noticed are Government House (Captain Wickham's Office), on the bank above the wharf with the Commissariat Stores nearby; the Military Barracks, the Hospital and the Female Factory and the homes of the Rev. Handt and Deputy Assistant Commissary-General Kent[2] with their gardens opposite on what is now covered by the area from the Taxation Block to Gordon and Gotch's new building.

Earliest Plan With Street Names

Dixon was sent south in 1842, and his successor, Henry Wade, early in 1842 submitted a proposed design of Brisbane Town and this is the earliest plan which shows street names. (It may be of historical interest to mention here that the man after whom Brisbane was named, Sir Thomas Brisbane, visited the area in 1824 and carried out astronomical observations at Point Lookout.)

On Wade's proposed design plan, the name Albert Street appears on the present Ann Street, Edward Street on the present Albert, Thomas where George Street is now, George where Charlotte Street now runs,

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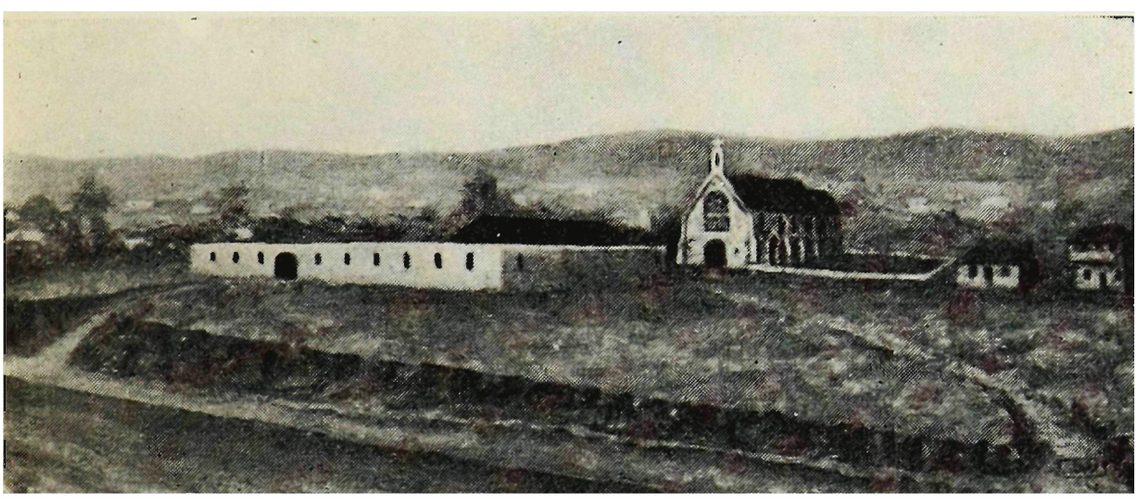
2.—John Kent (1809-62) was appointed deputy assistant Commissary-General in 1839. When in August 1844 the first Leichhardt expedition assembled at Brisbane, Kent presented the explorers with a supply of chocolate, and because of that Leichhardt gave the name Kent's Lagoon to a spot on the northern Darling Downs where the party was held up during October. Subsequently Kent was appointed by Queensland's first Government to be police magistrate at Maryborough, and in that capacity he figured in an extraordinary case early in 1862. A boy of eight years had been caned at school for disobedience. His father laid an information against the schoolmaster, R. S. Kerley, and the case came before Kent and another magistrate, R. B. Sheridan. A young son of Sheridan, who was called as a witness, failed to appear. Sheridan left the bench, and returned later with his son. Kent insisted that young Sheridan be sworn, but the father demurred, contending that at such an age (10 years) he was too young to appreciate the meaning of a court oath. After a stormy passage between Kent and Sheridan, sen., Kent committed young Sheridan to the lock-up for seven days for contempt, and ordered a constable to remove Sheridan himself from the court. Kerley was sentenced to six weeks' imprisonment with hard labour, in Brisbane Gaol. Protest meetings at Maryborough demanded Kent's removal from the bench. Kent shortly afterwards arraigned the chief constable and his two subordinates and charged them with wilful disobedience in having failed to remove Sheridan forcibly from the bench, and inflicted fines on all three constables. Following another storm of protest, the Government released Kerley and suspended both Kent and Sheridan. A few weeks later, Kent was transferred to the position of Land Commissioner at Mitchell. However, he committed suicide at Maryborough on Christmas Day of the same year—1862. He had married in 1842 at Brisbane and there were five children. A daughter married Berkeley Basil Moreton, later the 4th Earl of Ducie, shortly before her father's death.—Ed.

and Parker Street on the present Margaret Street. The proposed design is shown as an overlay on the survey of existing streets and buildings, and shows the first attempt to align the subsidiary streets into rectangular blocks based on to Queen Street. The proposal was carried into effect by Wade on June 24, 1842, when he surveyed the first sale allotments in Brisbane which were contained in the whole block bounded by Queen, Elizabeth, Albert and George Streets, the names of which were now set down in their present position, excepting Albert Street which remained as yet unnamed.

Queen Street Compromise

Wade's design proposed widths for the principal

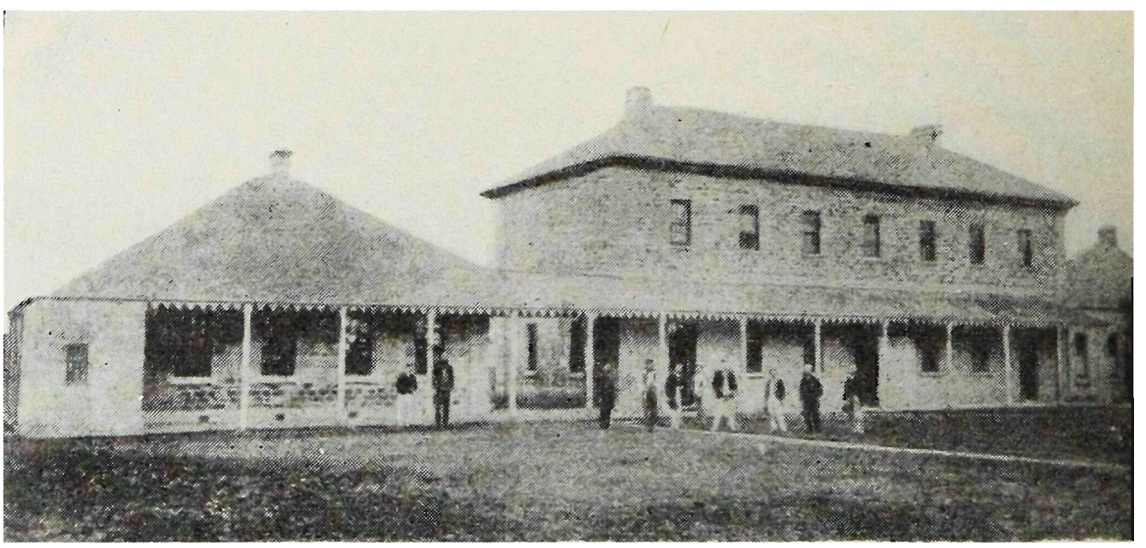


Old "Female Factory" on site of present rear block of G.P.O. (Elizabeth St.). (Old St. Stephen's in background.)
See No. 13 in Legend.

streets of 140 links (92.4 feet). However, in the interval between this proposal and the survey of the sale allotments, Governor George Gipps paid a visit to the Moreton Bay settlement on March 24, 1842. One apparent result of this visit was a new design by Surveyor Wade on April 26, 1842, in which the widths of the principal city streets were reduced to 100 links (66 feet). However, on the plan of the sale allotments a compromise was apparently reached with Queen Street, which was finally determined at 121 links (about 80 feet). The remainder of the streets, unfortunately for present-day traffic planning authorities, were fixed at one chain width. There must have been a degree of uncertainty about Brisbane street widths for some time afterwards,

as those of the main streets were eventually proclaimed by New South Wales Government Gazette on May 29, 1854.

The transparent map was compiled from information on plans of surveys effected between 1842 and 1856, with a few modern emendations, e.g. the widening of Albert Street to form King George Square. As stated at the beginning of this paper, placing this transparent map over the base map we can observe the changes that have taken place on the face of Brisbane. First we may notice the narrowing of Queen Street from its original width of 140 links to the existing 121 links; we note also that the street which ran from Queen Street opposite the entrance of the Prisoners' Barracks



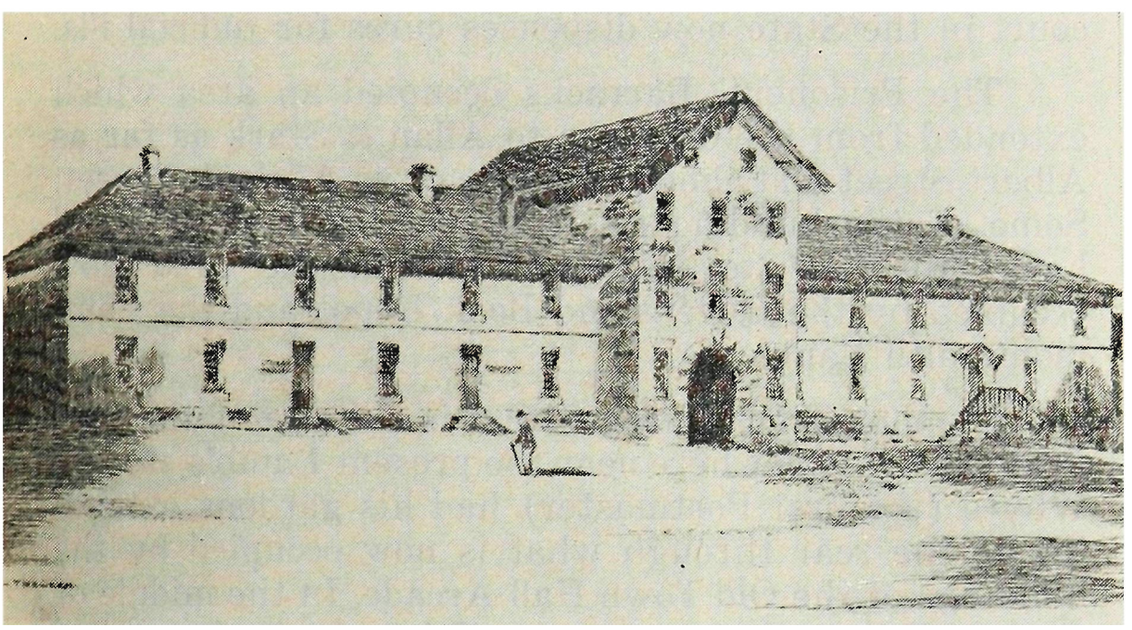
Old Military Barracks (later Immigration Depot) and, at left, oldest Government "Treasury" (later first Savings Bank); on site of present Treasury Building.
See No. 6 in Legend.

at an oblique angle is now replaced by Albert Street—meeting Queen Street in a right angle about two chains north-east of the original inter-section. Reference to the plan on page — will show the existence of a street next to Queen Street on the south-east running from what is now William Street to the street opposite the Prisoners' Barracks. This street has now disappeared and its place is taken by the present-day Elizabeth Street, which is, of course, parallel to Queen Street. Buildings on one side of this street would now be in the middle of or on the opposite side of Elizabeth Street. The street which gave frontages to Handt's and Kent's homes and divided their dwellings from their gardens, is replaced by George Street which cut right across the alignment of the original street.

What often is forgotten is that the Hospital had a frontage to the road along the river, but had no access to any street at the rear; in fact there were no streets on the north-west side of Queen Street, George Street being an entirely new street introduced after 1842. The Military Barracks had access to three streets—Queen Street, William Street, and what we might conveniently if erroneously refer to as the old Elizabeth Street; on the fourth side were the Military Gardens through which George Street was designed.

Then and Now

It will now be very interesting to turn to a com-



Prisoners' Barracks, Queen Street.
See No. 11 in Legend.

parison of the locations of early buildings with their modern counterparts. The original Government House, i.e. the office of Captain Wickham, was located near the William Street frontage of the present Government Printing Office near Stephens Lane. Across William Street from this site and below the street level on the bank still stands the Commissariat Store with the words "Government Stores—1829" across the entrance doorway. The first road which ran from the wharf to Queen Street can still be traversed behind the Public Library to the rear entrance of the Stores. The houses of Handt and Kent now lie beneath the imposing structure of the Executive Building; Dixon's house, which used to boast a street corner position, now is lost in the

maze of buildings near the Elizabeth Street bar of the Carlton Hotel and the "Telegraph" newspaper offices; the new alignment puts the buildings on the opposite side of the street! Chandler's building on the corner of Albert and Charlotte Streets was once the old stables and piggery adjoining Dixon's house. The site of the old Military Barracks is now occupied by the Treasury Building, and the Military Gardens covered the area from the Bank of New South Wales to Pike's and the "Telegraph," and the old lumber yard is now replaced by the Prudential Building. The old Hospital and its attendant buildings have long disappeared; where once medicines were prescribed for physical ills, the highest court in the State now dispenses cures for judicial ills.

The Prisoners' Barracks occupied an area which extended from the entrance to Allan & Stark as far as Albert Street and almost as far back as Adelaide Street. Some of the buildings, if they existed to-day, would have frontages to Burnett Lane in the area now occupied by the Queensland Book Depot and the Commonwealth Bank.

Further along Queen Street is the site of the first Post Office (somewhere near the present Lamb's store); Whyte (the first Postmaster) had his gardens extending to the rear through what is now occupied by the buildings of the Old Town Hall Arcade. In the middle of George Street, almost opposite Tritton's, is the site of an old well with a pump to Whyte's gardens; numerous wells and pumps were scattered throughout the little settlement, one of which was on the Treasury Hotel site. The site of the Female Factory is now occupied by the present General Post Office.

The fate which overtook these early Brisbane plans recalls Robert Burns' lines:

The best-laid schemes o' mice and men
Gang aft a-gley.

So thoroughly has the broom of Time swept away the original Brisbane that very little of it remains to-day. The last vestiges of Brisbane of the 'forties and 'fifties were swept away in the Great Fire of 1864, which began in the drapery store of Stewart and Hemmant, at the

corner of Queen and Albert Streets. In a little more than two hours the entire block formed by Queen, George, Elizabeth and Albert Streets was a huge heap of smouldering ruins. The loss was estimated at between £100,000 and £150,000, and for several days afterwards Queen Street was closed to all traffic. *Sic transit gloria mundi!*