HONOUR DENIED: A STUDY OF SOLDIER SETTLEMENT
IN QUEENSLAND, 1916-1929

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BA Hons

This thesis is submitted in the Department of History, University of Queensland, in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, January 2002.
Statement of Originality

To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except as acknowledged in the text. It has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university.

MURRAY JOHNSON

DATE
ABSTRACT

Post-World War One soldier settlement was an important, though largely neglected episode in our past which has not received the close attention it so rightly deserves. Perhaps this stems from an acknowledgement that the scheme was an abysmal failure. Until recent decades it was far more comforting to parade triumphs rather than ignominious defeats. Such a view, of course, distorts our historical perspective, and in an environmentally fragile land, subject to the whims of the El Nino Southern Oscillation, it is crucial to unravel the intricacies of the past to comprehend the future better.

Soldier settlement in Queensland served a dual purpose. Not only was it intended as a 'reward' for veterans of the horrific global holocaust of 1914-18, the scheme also became an instrument to spearhead the social and agricultural policy being implemented by the newly-elected Labor government. As all forms of repatriation were a Commonwealth prerogative, and therefore entitled to Commonwealth funding, soldier settlement offered a relatively inexpensive means for determining which regions of the State were agriculturally viable, and the minimum area of land necessary for it to be sustainable. While glorious optimism abounded, the rural potential of Queensland was largely undetermined. Soldier settlement ultimately disclosed not only the agricultural limitations, but also the associated problems—particularly marketing deficiencies—which existed at the time.

The scheme was undeniably a defeat; but just as soldier settlement was the product of a specific period of time, so too were a number of factors that contributed to its demise. To grasp these complex issues in full requires examining the scheme and the individual group settlements in close detail. What emerges is a grim struggle in which men who had been traumatised in a horrific war were forced to endure an entirely new nemesis. With their wives and children, many displayed remarkable tenacity and adaptability. Many also paid the supreme sacrifice in their bid to carry out this social and agricultural experiment.

As this thesis will show, the final outcome was far worse than previously understood. For too long historians have uncritically accepted the findings of Justice Pike in 1929, in which sixty percent of Queensland's soldier settlers were believed to have remained on the land. This is not borne out by the evidence. On the contrary, this thesis will demonstrate that post-World War One soldier settlement in the northern State was a tragedy of massive proportion.
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### ABBREVIATIONS

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>ANBVA</td>
<td><em>Atherton News and Barron Valley Advocate</em> (Atherton)</td>
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<td>AJPH</td>
<td><em>Australian Journal of Politics and History</em></td>
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<td>ARHSB</td>
<td><em>Australian Railway Historical Society Bulletin</em></td>
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<td>BC</td>
<td><em>Brisbane Courier</em> (Brisbane)</td>
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<td>DM</td>
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<td>DS</td>
<td><em>Daily Standard</em> (Brisbane)</td>
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<td>HRA</td>
<td><em>Historical Records of Australia</em></td>
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<td>JRHSQ</td>
<td><em>Journal of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland</em></td>
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<td>MB</td>
<td><em>Morning Bulletin</em> (Rockhampton)</td>
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<td>QAJ</td>
<td><em>Queensland Agricultural Journal</em></td>
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<td>QDR</td>
<td><em>Queenslander</em> (Brisbane)</td>
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<td>QGG</td>
<td><em>Queensland Government Gazette</em></td>
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<td>QT</td>
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<td>TC</td>
<td><em>Toowoomba Chronicle</em> (Toowoomba)</td>
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<td>WK</td>
<td><em>Week</em> (Brisbane)</td>
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<td><em>Western St.</em> (Roma)</td>
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TABLE OF MEASURES

Area:

acre = 0.405 hectares

Currency:

one penny (1d.) in 1920s = 42 cents (42c.) in 1999
one shilling (1s.) in 1920s = 5 dollars ($5) in 1999
one pound (£1) in 1920s = 100 dollars ($100) in 1999

Distance:

one inch (1in.) = 25.4 millimetres
one foot (1ft.) = 30.5 centimetres
one yard (1yd.) = 0.914 metres
one chain (1ch.) = 20.1 metres
one mile (1ml.) = 1.61 kilometres

Liquid:

one pint (1pt.) = 568 millilitres
one gallon (1gal.) = eight pints = 4.55 litres

Weight:

one ounce (1oz.) = 28.3 grams
one pound (1lb.) = 16 ounces = 0.454 kilograms
one stone = 14 pounds = 6.35 kilograms
112 pounds = 1 hundredweight = 50.802 kilograms
one ton = 1.016 tonne
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

While many people have contributed to the writing of this thesis, either directly or indirectly, space permits mention of only a few. It has been my good fortune to have been able to study under the guidance of both Dr Raymond Evans (Principal Supervisor) and Dr W. Ross Johnston (Associate Supervisor). Their extensive knowledge of Australian history, as well as their warm personalities, has gained the admiration and respect of many students, myself included. Despite heavy workloads, they very generously agreed to share the supervision of this modest contribution to Queensland history, and for that I remain extremely grateful. Indeed, over the last seven years the academic staff of the Department of History, University of Queensland, have provided assistance far beyond expectation. Staff at the Fryer Library, University of Queensland, and the Queensland State Archives have also provided valuable assistance during the research for this thesis. My peers deserve special mention, as lively and entertaining discussions at odd moments enlivened an otherwise lonely pursuit. Appreciation is extended to my youngest son, Owen, who was called on countless times to explain the intricacies of computer technology—generally without complaint. Finally, a special thanks must go to my lovely wife, Marianne, who was able to look past my varying moods to offer laughter and hope in the depths of despair. The burden has undoubtedly been great.
SOURCE: SUPPLEMENT TO "ANNUAL REPORT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC LANDS FOR THE YEAR 1917", QUEENSLAND PARLIAMENTARY PAPERS, VOL. 1 (1918)
INTRODUCTION:

I have returned to these:
The farm, and the kindly bush, and the young calves lowing;
But all that my mind sees
Is a quaking bog in a mist—stark, snapped trees,
And the dark Somme flowing.¹

Placement on rural lands during and after the First World War was a phenomenological experience shared by tens of thousands of ex-servicemen throughout the British Empire. While the concept of soldier settlement has an ancient lineage, the motivational factors underlying the imperial schemes from 1915 were nevertheless products of their own time and, for a multitude of complex reasons, all failed to achieve their intended purpose.² In Queensland, the futility of closer settlement had already been amply demonstrated well before a soldier settlement scheme was implemented in 1916. Indeed, inherent problems were still opening like festering sores at the very time returned servicemen were being offered the tantalising prospect of financial independence and security as part of a rural yeomanry. It was, after all, their just ‘reward’ for the sterling service performed in the war to end all wars.³ Nor can there be any doubt that those sentiments, generated by patriotic euphoria, were quite genuine in the initial stages. It went deeper, however, when economic factors rose to prominence, and soldier settlement was perceived as the vehicle which could assist in the economic salvation of the industrially disadvantaged northern State. Notwithstanding the tremendous human sacrifice already made, the Anzac ‘heroes’

who had stormed the heights of Gallipoli, struggled through the mud of Flanders, and swept across the desert wastes of Palestine were expected to win one more battle for a Labor government virtually bereft of funds—but still committed to social reform.

By July 1922, 3,425 returned servicemen had attempted to make the transition from warrior to farmer in Queensland, with at least 867 having already suffered defeat. By July 1929 only 1,148 of those who can strictly be termed ‘soldier settlers’ remained on the land, often struggling against abject poverty, and with the dark clouds of a devastating world depression rapidly gathering on the horizon. This represents a failure rate of more than sixty percent, and tends to contradict recent “heretical” assertions such as that offered by the social historian Stephen Garton. While cognisant of individual tragedies, Garton nevertheless suggested that “soldier settlement was not the ‘great failure’ that its critics have sought to portray it as.” As the evidence in this thesis will show, the outcome was far worse than formerly suspected and was not unique to Queensland. Moreover, it will also explain how the critics themselves have erred by uncritically accepting the assessment of Justice G. Herbert Pike, who was commissioned to report on the losses incurred by soldier settlement in 1929.

The seeds sown with such glorious optimism in 1916 indeed reaped a bitter harvest, a degenerative process that clearly exposed the peripheral weakness of Queensland in the

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global economy. Soldier settlers were in the vanguard of an attempted resurgence of primary production which, it was envisaged, would lead to an influx of British capital for further development. The legacy of that unequal struggle in Queensland persists today. It is therefore worthwhile to recall the words of Northrop Frye when he stated, albeit, in a broader context, that an understanding of such events ultimately "leads to a recognition scene, a discovery in which we see, not our past lives, but the ... cultural form of our present life." Indeed it does.

Despite the voluminous published material on war and warfare, demobilisation and repatriation (including soldier settlement) was long neglected. In recent decades this oversight has been steadily redressed, but the picture is still far from complete. It also needs to be understood that while there were many similarities between the imperial schemes, there were wide disparities. Queensland exemplified the latter, for soldier settlement existed within a particularly volatile political climate. Relations between the Queensland and Commonwealth governments were at best lukewarm, while internally the Labor administration required increased rural support to thwart conservative opposition. Soldier settlement and primary production were thus indelibly linked. Yet, while a number of historians have sought to explain the various schemes after the First World War in broad terms, they have only done so by acknowledging the importance of primary production within an imperial framework. In Queensland there was an added

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dimension and, whether through accident or design, the majority of group soldier settlements were established in the electorates of conservative parliamentarians.

Undoubtedly, the most ambitious work on soldier settlement emerged in 1995 when Kent Fedorowich published his doctoral dissertation as *Unfit for Heroes: reconstruction and soldier settlement in the empire between the wars*. Fedorowich pursued two strands of enquiry which consistently overlapped: the problems encountered by placing British ex-servicemen within Dominion soldier settlement schemes; and the difficulties faced by Dominion governments initiating those schemes for their own ex-servicemen. Insisting that they differed from all previous soldier settlement schemes in being motivated by political anxieties and social ideologies, Fedorowich set the scene in Britain and followed the intrinsic link of imperial emigration to Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand—all four Dominions being placed within a comparative framework.

These were, of course, the larger imperial schemes and Fedorowich necessarily ignored those implemented in peripheral regions such as Papua New Guinea and Fiji. British emigration to those regions was certainly of little significance, but they were still part of the imperial economic structure. Moreover, while the Great War had amply demonstrated the need for Britain to reduce its dependence on imported foodstuffs, an escalation of agricultural production within the mother country was hampered by the

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unavailability of suitable land. The only practical alternative was to strengthen imperial bonds. It also required haste. Delays in the demobilisation of troops immediately following World War One brought growing discontent which alarmed authorities. As well, the medical enigma of Spanish Influenza and its deadly impact coincided with the spread of Bolshevism from the Russian Revolution. Both were soon in plague proportions and, it was believed, equally contagious amongst the growing labour pool. Fears of Bolshevism may have ultimately proved groundless, but they were very real at the time. Although varying in extent, similar anxieties were also experienced in the Dominions.

The assertion by Fedorowich that soldier settlement in Australia was merely a phase of land settlement, and not an innovation, is only partly correct. As this thesis will show, soldier settlement was certainly an adjunct to existing closer settlement policies but, correspondingly, it was also an innovation—a means of solving a problem never before encountered. It had not been necessary for the veterans of previous military campaigns, as their numbers were by no means excessive. Despite individual cases of hardship, even the 16,000 Australians who served in the South African War of 1899-1902 were eventually absorbed into the existing structure. However, the sheer volume of Australian troops involved in the First World War, 330,000 of whom saw active

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14 Fedorowich, Unfit for Heroes, pp.30 and 35.
17 Fedorowich, Unfit for Heroes, p.144.
service,\textsuperscript{19} ensured that innovation became a necessity. Furthermore, Fedorowich claimed that “the root of the problem” regarding the failure of soldier settlement in Australia was lack of foresight,\textsuperscript{20} the implication being that innovations had indeed been made, however unsuccessful their outcome.

While “blame” is a harsh word to allocate, Fedorowich stressed that failure also lay with decentralisation and “bickering” between the Federal and State governments. This was clearly a significant factor, but the argument that “pre-war partisanship and regionalism resurfaced” after the cessation of hostilities to the extent that ex-servicemen were “settled as Victorians, Western Australians and Tasmanians not Australians” does not stand closer scrutiny.\textsuperscript{21} Large numbers of soldier settlers in Queensland came from outside the State, the only stipulation being that they had served with the Australian Imperial Force (AIF).\textsuperscript{22} This was, of course, extended to include white ex-servicemen from Britain and the Dominions.\textsuperscript{23} These misinterpretations are understandable given the scope of Fedorowich’s work although, as Graeme Morton pointed out, the comparative framework was also far from complete:

\begin{quote}
The Canadian belief in ‘boosterism’ as a reason for encouraging soldier settlement is not contrasted with the ‘competition’ between Australian states for migrants; the South African Unionists’ policy of
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{20} Fedorowich, \textit{Unfit for Heroes}, p.176.
\textsuperscript{21} \textit{Ibid.}, pp.177 and 197.
\textsuperscript{22} Officer in Charge, Soldier Settlement Branch, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, to Mr. Ernest Harris, c/- Masonic Club, Pitt Street, Sydney, 18 March 1919, LAN/AK120, Batch 709, Part 1 (1919-1924), Queensland State Archives [QSA]; Atherton News and Barron Valley Advocate [ANBVA] (Atherton), 8 October 1919, p.3.
Anglicization is neither compared with Canadian support of Anglo-Saxon culture nor contrasted with New Zealand, the most 'British' of the Dominions, but with the least British ex-servicemen.\textsuperscript{24}

For all that, this work is important for demonstrating the strengthening of imperial bonds in the period following World War One. With his focus on emigration, Fedorowich believed that it was "British ex-servicemen [who] became a vehicle which allowed access to British capital".\textsuperscript{25} That was certainly part of the story, with the Commonwealth government and, by extension the States, remaining subservient partners in an economic system of unequal exchange.

With one major exception, the study of soldier settlement after the First World War has been poorly served by Australian historians. Clem Lloyd and Jacqui Rees certainly touched on the issue in their general history of repatriation in Australia, \textit{The Last Shilling} (1994), but the analysis was far from complete. Interestingly, they did mention that the promise of land was used as an inducement for recruiting purposes during World War One,\textsuperscript{26} a strategy apparently overlooked by Lloyd Robson in his study of recruitment between 1914 and 1918. There was, however, a profound difference between soldier settlement and all other repatriation measures:

Soldier settlement was the most significant, and substantial, of the repatriation programs because it had the inherent potential to transform Australia's physical face, and the demographic and social

\textsuperscript{25} Fedorowich, \textit{Unfit for Heroes}, p.155.
composition of its non-urban areas. Paying pensions, educating soldiers' children, giving medical treatment to the victims of war, supplying homes, even providing rehabilitation and vocational training—all were overshadowed by the land settlement program. This potential was never realised although soldier settlement had an undeniable impact and it influenced the lives and livelihoods of thousands of ex-soldiers and their families, often to their detriment. Other programs had their flaws, sometimes serious as with war service homes, but all largely achieved their objectives in terms of repatriation policy ... Only the soldier settlers' scheme was relatively open-ended because it was based on patterns of land settlement, community organisation and agricultural practice whose ramifications were unpredictable.\(^{27}\)

It was this notion of failure that continually resurfaces in the only major study of soldier settlement in Australia. Based on a doctoral dissertation, Marilyn Lake's regional history, *The Limits of Hope: Soldier Settlement in Victoria 1915-38*, was published in 1987. Lake provides a grim tale but, importantly, also emphasises the strength of imperial bonds and the subservient position of Australia within the British Empire. As Lake asserted, for the sake of British capital Australian manufacturing was to be sacrificed on the altar of expediency, with primary production reigning supreme.\(^{28}\) Unlike Queensland, however, manufacturing did expand considerably in the southern States, notably Victoria and New South Wales, throughout the 1920s.\(^{29}\) Factories in the northern State only employed between five and 6.2 percent of the population in the period 1911-1933. At the same time, the percentage involved in primary production, admittedly a broad category

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\(^{27}\) Ibid., p.219.
embracing mining, quarrying and forestry, was between 33.8 and 37.1. The balance was thus clearly weighted in favour of the latter.

Lake also understood post-World War One soldier settlement to have been "the final phase of the great Australian project to settle the land with a yeoman class". It was not. In Western Australia anachronistic policies were pursued with 'Group Settlement', and land settlement was also seen as a means for alleviating the plight of many South Australian unemployed during the Great Depression. Dreams die hard. In 1945, B.A. Santamaria continued to espouse the sentiment when he claimed that:

"The defence of rural life, the stabilisation of our farming and regional institutions so that farm families can live their lives in security, must take precedence for the preservation of Australia as a nation of European stock."

Large-scale schemes, such as that at Peak Downs in Queensland between 1948 and 1953, gave substance to the ideology and racial rhetoric. It, too, failed miserably. Be that as it may, Lake's work canvasses a number of important social themes and, by so doing, brings the individuals and their vicissitudes into perspective. Of all the Australian States, Victoria settled the largest number of returned servicemen on the land and, like their

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31 Lake, The Limits of Hope, p.xviii.
counterparts across the nation, those 11,140 men, women and children were often caught in a bind from which forfeiture was the only possible escape. Even then many found themselves pursued by the authorities. Yet the percentage of soldier settlers remaining on the land in 1929 was far greater than in Queensland, a disparity which can only be grasped by examining in detail the peculiar circumstances relating to the scheme in the northern State. The position of considerable numbers of soldier settlers in all the Australian States was nevertheless similar to that portrayed by Lake:

Many soldier settlers had taken up land in the hope that they might achieve freedom from financial dependency, from the necessity to sell their labour to others in order to live. But with each passing year, the more entangled they became in debts, until they were finally unable to extricate themselves. With accounts they were unable to pay, storekeepers who had to be avoided and legal proceedings which rendered them formally bankrupt, life became a series of humiliations and their circumstances a mockery of their dreams.

Paradoxically, this passage reveals the major flaw in Lake's study. Despite the claim of one reviewer that "a careful use of sampling gives the book a scholarly framework", the opposite becomes apparent. Lake restricted her archival research to the 'Advance Files', and ignored the more comprehensive documentation of individuals that often disclosed a far different outcome than that suggested. Thus, as Jacqueline Templeton noted, this selective use of the evidence meant that "even the successful [soldier settlers] are

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36 Lake, *The Limits of Hope*, p.171.
glimpsed directly only in their bad patches”. While this undermines the credibility of an otherwise significant historical study, it is also frustrating for the historian in Queensland, who all too often has only a fragmentary archival record with which to work. Soldier settlement is no exception.

Judith Powell has contributed some useful studies on post-World War One soldier settlement, particularly in Victoria and New Zealand, using quantitative data. Outside Victoria, soldier settlement has been relatively neglected. A few historical academic theses certainly exist, but they are often difficult to access. It should also be noted that Dereck Parker’s thesis on the soldier settlement near Stanthorpe in Queensland can no longer be found, an academic tragedy of gross proportions for specialist historians in the northern State. Published material is similarly scant. For example, Tasmanian post-World War One soldier settlement is covered in a single article by Quentin Beresford, who argued that of all the State schemes “none presented a more melancholy story of failure”.

Rosemary Sparkes offered no parochial judgement in her article on the Kentucky Group Settlement near Armidale in northern New South Wales. Placing this soldier settlement within the complex whole, Sparkes agreed that the scheme “must be deemed a costly experiment”, but also paid tribute to those families who managed to hold

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on to their selections after the scheme was officially terminated in 1929.\textsuperscript{43} Importantly, all regional studies tend to agree with Justice G. Herbert Pike's findings in 1929.

Appointed by the Commonwealth government to define the extent of financial losses incurred by soldier settlement, Pike took his mandate further by enquiring into the underlying reasons for the huge deficit. Four factors emerged: soldier settlers were under-capitalised; they mostly lacked a sufficient area of land on which to make a living; many were unsuited for the vocation of primary producer, either through the legacy of war service, or inadequate training; and, finally, Australia experienced a considerable reduction in the value of primary produce.\textsuperscript{44} Of all the Australian States, Tasmania certainly appears to have fared worse, though even by Pike's reckoning Queensland's scheme was the least successful on the mainland.\textsuperscript{45} It was, in fact, a social disaster, but the lack of recognition partly stems from the extremely limited historical research undertaken on soldier settlement in the northern State.

Although dated, Elizabeth Milton's "Soldier Settlement in Queensland After World War I" has remained the most substantial body of work on the subject in Queensland. Submitted as a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) thesis to the University of Queensland in 1968, Milton sought "to delineate the factors which affected soldier settlement" between 1916 and 1929.\textsuperscript{46} By so doing, a plethora of issues were investigated: public opinion and pressure groups, notably the Returned Sailors' and Soldiers' Imperial League of Australia

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(RSSILA); political ideologies and the sensitivity of a rural yeomanry to fluctuating world markets; racism and defence; and environmental factors, including unpredictable weather patterns and insect pests. To account for the ultimate failure of the scheme, Milton also agreed with the findings of Justice Pike. This thesis does, however, suffer from several methodological and structural problems.

Undeniably critical of her sources, Milton nevertheless relied far too heavily on published government reports, which seriously restricted the scope of her work. Moreover, the conservative press, which was often overtly hostile to the scheme, was almost entirely ignored. This was unfortunate, as they offered an alternative interpretation of government policies and, importantly, kept the issues alive in the public domain. Milton’s use of archival material also reveals the limitations of her research. For instance, in the preface it is clearly stated:

The archival material, comprising mainly letters from the settlers to the Minister for Lands, and reports from the Supervisors to the Minister, often present a very different picture of the situation from that in Parliamentary reports.

Yet later it is contended that:

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In the absence of any personal knowledge of the settlers concerned, it is difficult to know exactly how the settlers felt about the scheme, and the effects it had on their lives.\textsuperscript{49}

The material was obviously not utilised, and it is perhaps even more unfortunate that no attempt seems to have been made to collect any oral testimonies from surviving soldier settlers. Many of these shortcomings were due, of course, to the rigid parameters of the academic thesis. Milton demonstrated a clear understanding of the problems confronting primary production in Queensland, yet lacked the broad view to comprehend the position of the State within the imperial framework. The relationship was complex and resulted in a far worse outcome than is suggested by the rather flippant remark that “the story of soldier settlement is not the story of a brilliant success”.\textsuperscript{50}

The only other significant contribution to the subject in Queensland is an article by Ian Dempster. Examining the problems encountered by soldier settlers on the Atherton Tableland in North Queensland, Dempster succinctly outlined a number of factors that militated against a successful outcome:

The original smallness of plots, 60 to 100 acres, the high cost at which the land was bought, the problems of soldiers’ conflicting claims to land, problems of markets, the high transport costs and the burdens on the settler of paying interest on the land’s capital value, improving the land and paying rent, meant success was not on the horizon.\textsuperscript{51}

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., p.94.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., p.96.
In common with virtually all Queensland soldier settlements, ‘success’ was usually a chimera, eluding perhaps two out of every three participants. For the minority it was generally achieved only after years of heart-breaking struggle. This is certainly the picture that emerges from the scant published accounts of the soldier settlers themselves.

One who did battle through to financial independence was John Edey, a soldier settler on the Murray River. The Queensland soldier settler, Hector Dinning, also achieved moderate success, though his academic background ensured that he was not typical of the majority. Conversely, the Western Australian, Albert Facey, clearly was representative of the latter group. A humble man, Facey recounted his grim experience in the ironically titled autobiography, *A Fortunate Life*. Recurring complications from war injuries and falling prices for produce finally drove Facey and his family from the land in 1934. John Ewers, a Western Australian novelist concerned with the plight of the “humbler classes”, based one of his stories on soldier settlement. Placed in similar circumstances to the real-life Albert Facey, Ewers’ central character, ‘Ross Daniels’, lost his sanity and died from a self-inflicted gunshot wound. The author had a clear understanding of both human nature—and soldier settlement.

Victorian-born Frank Dalby Davison was both a novelist and a soldier settler. Living in the United States when war broke out in 1914, Davison crossed the Atlantic to enlist in the British Army, serving with distinction on the Western Front. Returning to Australia in

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52 Templeton, “Set Up to Fail?”, p.42.
1919, he secured a soldier settlement block in the Maranoa district of southern Queensland and raised cattle until 1924, when drought and spiralling debts finally forced him from the land. The memory of those bitter years—when “the burden of debt was the skeleton in all our closets”—occasionally surfaced in his later writings. Notwithstanding the aridity of records, the legacy of soldier settlement is such that acrimony is easily evoked. By examining the scheme in detail through the various soldier settlements this thesis will aid in understanding those enduring emotions.

To fulfil that task involves synthesising the available published material with largely untouched archival documents and seldom-glimpsed newspaper accounts. The latter are particularly important, for although the government claimed that 191 localities were opened for soldier settlement throughout the State, official documentation relates only to the major centres. Thus, in numerous instances newspapers provide the only evidence that many even existed—two examples being Pentland, near Hughenden in the north of the State, and Allora, on the Darling Downs in southern Queensland. Given this lack of documentation, it becomes readily apparent that individuals are extremely difficult to isolate, and this is exacerbated in the case of wives and children. While regional newspapers have been accessed, the major Brisbane publications provide much of the material. The reasoning behind this lies in their hostility towards the government, and a willingness to keep soldier settlement issues firmly in the public gaze. In the case of

59 Brisbane Courier [BC] (Brisbane), 25 April 1919, p.6.
60 Queenslander [QDR] (Brisbane), 16 March 1918, p.22.
61 Week [WK] (Brisbane), 12 December 1919, p.2.
Stanthorpe, Brisbane publications were crucial, as no stocks of the Stanthorpe Border Post for the period under investigation have survived. Taken together, archival sources and newspapers provide the backbone and much of the flesh in this dissertation. It should be noted, however, that as the 1920s progressed public interest steadily diminished. A belief that the war itself had been “a shocking mistake” which had not given birth to an anticipated golden age reinforced the rising disillusion. In his autobiographical novel, My Brother Jack, George Johnston mentioned the bitterness and frustration that resulted:

People found that it’s easy to smash down old standards, but a lot harder to build new ones in their place. Much bitterness had built up out of the war, and by the time I was thirteen all the returned soldiers we knew had come to see the whole conflict as a monument of disorganisation and waste and political chicanery ... People then in those years of the mid-'twenties did not appear to have much faith left in anything at all. Neither the Church of England nor the Y.M.C.A. had emerged from the war with particular credit ... and in Melbourne even the forces of law and order had come to be suspect as a result of the great police strike, which laid the whole city open to licence and anarchy.

Soldier settlers fell victim to apathy, and the steady neglect was indeed most apparent from the mid-1920s. It was particularly noticeable during the research for this thesis, but it was also necessary to extract as much information as possible from the declining years

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to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the circumstances surrounding soldier settlement—a tragedy that will unfold with each chapter.

Chapter One provides an historical overview of soldier settlement in the Western tradition, and its early application in the Australian context. In turn, this requires a brief discussion of land policies, particularly those relative to Queensland. Chapter Two focuses on the development of the post-World War One soldier settlement scheme, with particular emphasis on the interplay between the Federal and State governments. Chapter Three examines the genesis of soldier settlement at Beerburrum and the broad issues surrounding the formative years of the Pikedale settlement near Stanthorpe. Chapter Four examines the racial contours of soldier settlement, specifically the deployment of returned servicemen in the maize, banana and poultry industries. Chapter Five draws attention to the important link between railways and soldier settlement, while also examining the problems on the more westerly areas at Cecil Plains and Mount Hutton. Chapter Six carries forward Beerburrum soldier settlement, before turning to Bald Hills and Coominya, two districts which exemplified the worst aspects of Queensland’s scheme. Chapter Seven outlines the commencement of soldier settlement in the South Burnett district, Central Queensland, and El Arish in the far north. The latter settlement stands alone by achieving relative success. Chapter Eight brings the focus back on the Pikedale soldier settlement during the period 1920-1922, where the position was delicately poised before the tide slowly began to turn. Chapter Nine examines the circumstances up to 1924 on the pineapple and poultry settlements in the south-east of the State, and the settlements of the southern interior. Chapter Ten returns to North
Queensland, before again turning southwards. This chapter thus dwells on the turning point of soldier settlement in the three distinct regions of Queensland. Chapter Eleven, on the other hand, provides an overview of all major settlements until the scheme's official termination in 1929. While the conclusion will necessarily summarise all that has gone before, the important point made that Queensland's Soldier Settlement Scheme was actually far worse than previously suspected will also be explained in detail.

Unashamedly, this thesis is written in a narrative form, as it is the belief of the writer that a linear construct best approximates the life-worlds of the historical actors and present-day readers. Equally important, however, is a belief that the historian should attempt to enter the mentalité of the subjects while remaining aware of their own external position in place and time. This provides the means for understanding individual actions within a broader context. That wider view also entails the adoption or creation of a theoretical model in which to posit the hypothesis, albeit with caution. The warning of Allan Morrison in 1952 is no less relevant today:

Still more dangerous is the attempt made in some quarters to fit the events of the past into the framework of some theory of historical development fashionable at the time, for this can lead to a selection of the facts which may lead to some perversion of the truth or to what is perhaps more insidious, the half-truth.

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In a similar vein the philosopher of science, Carl Hempel, insisted that “theories are not derived from observed facts, but invested to account for them”. Those arguments are all very well, but it is also clear that empirical research often necessitates the use of a theoretical model to comprehend the ‘observed facts’ on a higher level. Ultimately, each model stands or falls by what J.H. Hexter referred to as the “reality rule”; that is, “the best and most likely story that can be sustained by the relevant extrinsic evidence”. That being so, the evidence offered herein still requires a theoretical construct to gain an understanding of soldier settlement in relation to Queensland’s political and economic position between 1916 and 1929. That offered by Immanuel Wallerstein appears best suited for the task.

Wallerstein sought to explain the rise of capitalism from the sixteenth century which, he believed, was based on the geographical division of labour featuring three essential zones:

World-economies then are divided into core-states and peripheral areas. I do not say peripheral states because one characteristic of a peripheral area is that the indigenous state is weak, ranging from its nonexistence (that is, a colonial situation) to one with a low degree of autonomy (that is, a neo-colonial situation). There are also semiperipheral areas which are in between the core and the periphery on a series of dimensions, such as the complexity of economic activities, strength of the state machinery, cultural integrity, etc.

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In turn, this network is broken into units which, at the apex of the pyramid, are represented by political States. At the base are the smallest units, family households. Importantly, the entire system is dependent on the operation of 'unequal exchange' which, as one reviewer has remarked: “is enforced by strong states on weak ones, by core states on peripheral areas. Thus capitalism involves not only appropriation of surplus-value by an owner from a laborer, but an appropriation of surplus of the whole world-economy by core areas.”

Until the Second World War, Britain exhibited the general features of a ‘core area’. Certainly, the cost of war in 1914-1918 had been immense, but Britain emerged from the global holocaust with its empire not only intact, but also enlarged. More significantly, although war had led to increased productivity in the Dominions, devastation on the Continent correspondingly reduced potential markets in the aftermath. The Dominions thus remained subservient through economic domination vis-à-vis British markets and capital. They were, in effect, ‘semi-peripheral areas’ and this was exacerbated when semi-autonomous units within the Dominion structure showed themselves to be recalcitrant. This was certainly the case with Queensland.

Unable to increase manufacturing output as in the more populous States, Queensland had little alternative than to expand existing primary industries. Moreover, political power in the northern State was wielded by the only Australian Labor government to survive the

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homefront turmoils of the Great War, and was quite willing to strain the tenuous bonds of Federation. It went further. Premier T.J. Ryan visited Britain during the war and engineered financial transactions that related only to his State. Queensland remained a recipient of Commonwealth funding, but expansion in the rural sector required increased capital that was unavailable in Australia. Direct dealings with Britain nonetheless further weakened the overall economic position so that it differed little from the former colonial status as defined by Bill Thorpe:

One important definition of a colony is that the territory and people in a colony exist to provide investment opportunities for the inhabitants of the colonising power ... A major source of capital for Queensland “development” relied upon the abilities of colonial politicians to attract British bondholders and British companies.

The analogy was made painfully obvious in the early 1920s, when the withholding of British loans virtually crippled the Queensland economy and curtailed the reforming zeal of the Labor government. Unintentional though it may have been, Queensland’s closer economic ties with Britain intensified the exploitative subservience already existing.

Australia’s population in the 1920s was just over six million, thereby ensuring a limited local market for non-durable commodities, including food. Soldier settlement was unfortunately initiated just before the slump in world markets, and thus there were few outlets for extra produce, internally or externally. Notwithstanding minor upswings in the

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economy, Queensland also experienced considerable recession throughout the 1920s. As Lloyd Robson ruefully pointed out in a brief study of this period, there was “poverty in the midst of plenty”. Seldom did soldier settlers reap plenty in the prevailing winds of circumstance.

There are also two additional factors that require consideration when dealing with soldier settlement. One is the important ideology underlying closer settlement in general, though not soldier settlement in particular. The second is the obvious inability to comprehend fully the constraints imposed by the Australian environment. Reflection on both is crucial, and the first relates to Australia’s sparse population on a large geographic land mass and fears of invasion—especially from Asia. Immigration restriction measures had been implemented by individual Australian colonies throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century to curb the entry of Chinese onto the goldfields but, in 1901, the Immigration Restriction Act became a unifying piece of legislation. Popilarily known as the ‘White Australia Policy’, its application was considered to be of the utmost importance to Queensland:

It is indeed, one of civilization’s greatest experiments. All States, all sections of the people, all political parties are united in an ardent desire to maintain racial purity. Cheap or coloured labour is not to be thought of. There is no compromise on this fundamental issue. Whites and whites alone must people our land … in the “White Australia” policy, Queensland holds the key position. A tropical and sub-tropical State comprising nearly one-fourth of Australia, maintaining one seventh of her people, but still largely undeveloped, its future

administration must materially influence the achievement or otherwise of our national goal [emphasis added].

As late as 1950, it was still being urged that haste was also necessary:

> If we do not settle all the available land in Queensland to its fullest capacity then someone else will come and do it for us ... Any risks we take in a policy of rapid land settlement will be trifling compared with the more terrible risks of delay.

In accordance with the policy, Asian tenant farmers on the Atherton Tableland in North Queensland were expelled and the land utilised for soldier settlement, even though it was insufficient for that purpose; the consequences were more than simply ‘trifling’. This leads to the second major factor in that unlike Britain, where private ownership of land by the wealthy and influential acted as an effective barrier to the intensification of agriculture, Australia’s restrictions were largely imposed by the environment. In a very real sense, Nature itself is a form of “social determinism”.

The zoologist, Tim Flannery, has forcefully argued that the rejection of agriculture by Australian Aborigines was largely due to their understanding of the continent’s unpredictable climatic patterns. They were certainly aware of a number of indigenous plants amenable to cultivation, but deliberately chose to pursue a hunter-gatherer lifestyle. Flannery has further insisted, however, that due consideration must also be

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given to their intellectual grasp of the advantages offered by the low-energy output of a hunter-gathering mode of existence as opposed to the high-energy output of sedentary agriculturalism.\textsuperscript{80} It is a very powerful argument. Only in recent decades have European colonisers begun to unravel the mysteries of the climatic patterns and to acknowledge the fragility of the Australian landscape. Comprehension, of course, is far from complete and the retention of European farming techniques and the introduction of exotic flora and fauna constitutes yet another form of imperialism. The battle to dominate the environment has also claimed many human victims, with soldier settlers being among the fallen.

At the forefront of Queensland's rejuvenated onslaught against the environment from 1916, soldier settlers appeared to offer three distinct advantages: their mythical status as conquering 'heroes'; their knowledge of weaponry and battle tactics in the event of invasion; and, importantly, their cost-efficiency for agricultural development. Repatriation was, after all, the responsibility of the Commonwealth government and therefore Commonwealth funding.\textsuperscript{81} The inherent problems associated with closer settlement were already known, but Queensland's political leaders remained intent on fostering an "agricultural revolution" as the basis for their socialist policies.\textsuperscript{82} Soldier settlers also became the means for determining which crops were amenable to cultivation

\textsuperscript{79} Henretta, "Social History as Lived and Written", p.1296.
in various districts—and the minimum area of land required for that cultivation to be viable for small producers. As well, there was experimental group settlement:

We have it on the authority of the Hon. J.M. Hunter [Minister for Public Lands] that, if the scheme of settlement which has been put into operation in respect to soldier settlement proves successful, it is likely to become the Government's settled policy in respect to ordinary land selection.  

John Hunter and the State Treasurer, Edward Theodore, were the Queensland delegates at the preliminary conference on soldier settlement between State and Federal representatives in February 1916. Both made it abundantly clear that failures were expected. They also attempted to extract as many concessions from Commonwealth authorities as possible, and were far more recalcitrant than any other State representatives. With control of land within their boundaries being one of the most important residual powers left to the States after Federation, Queensland did at least share with the others an intolerance of Commonwealth intervention. It also ensured that soldier settlers became mere pawns in a political contest that would ultimately deny them all honour. Yet, the connection between land and demobilised soldiers has a history extending back into the mists of time. To explain the situation in the northern State after the First World War it is first necessary to reflect on that historical relationship, for they actually came together in Queensland well before the global holocaust of 1914-1918.

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83 *WK*, 19 September 1919, p.22.
CHAPTER 1:

"SOLDIERS AND SOIL": THE PREVIEW

As bronze may be much beautified
By lying in the dark damp soil,
So men who fade in dust of warfare fade
Fairer, and sorrow blooms their soul.¹

The concept of soldier settlement is indisputably ancient. Lloyd and Rees have argued that it can be traced to at least 1200BCE, when returning Assyrian warriors became eligible to purchase farming land from their rulers at special rates. They also shared in the spoils of war, a practice that was continued by others well into the nineteenth century CE.² It nevertheless appears that Lloyd and Rees confused the levying of troops by early Mesopotamian overlords with the later Assyrians who, in fact, created a permanent standing army.³ On the other hand, a number of ancient civilisations certainly did settle their veteran troops on agricultural lands, often in conquered territory. By so doing, they represented a cost-efficient and easily mobilised force for defensive purposes. It is also apparent that many veteran soldiers, including legionaries of the Roman Republic, were experienced farmers.⁴ Yet soldier settlement became somewhat problematical with the establishment of the Roman Principate and its accompanying territorial expansion. In CE14, for instance, a serious mutiny broke out among regular troops in the province of

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² Lloyd and Rees, The Last Shilling, p.7.
Pannonia, on the Danube. According to Tacitus, simmering discontent over their length of service was inflamed by the rhetoric of Percennius, a 'private soldier', who drew on the policy of land settlement to exacerbate an already volatile situation:

Even after your official discharge your service is not finished; for you stay on with the colours as a reserve, still under canvas—the same drudgery under another name! And if you manage to survive all these hazards, even then you are dragged off to a remote country and “settled” in some waterlogged swamp or untilled mountainside.\(^5\)

The mutiny was violently crushed by Drusus, son of the reigning emperor, Tiberius.\(^6\)

While veteran legionaries were to remain ‘settled’ on distant frontiers, problems associated with turning swords into ploughshares recurred through the ages, particularly in relation to conquest settlement. In 1650 Oliver Cromwell attempted to settle veterans of his parliamentary army on the estates of exiled Catholic landowners in Ireland. This scheme failed through lack of capital and an inadequate supply of building materials,\(^7\) an outcome that was partly repeated in Australia after the First World War.

The French, however, achieved reasonable success with soldier settlement during their conquest of Canada. Rewarded for their service with land grants, veteran soldiers formed a protective barrier against Indian raids, while their self-sufficient farms also reduced administrative expenditure.\(^8\) The British followed their example, but not without some

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apprehension. Responding to a proposal in 1760 to settle veterans in Canada’s Maritime Provinces, Colonel Charles Lawrence informed the Lords Commissioners of Trade and Plantations that:

I fear the difficulty of forming them into Societies will be great; that the undertaking will be excessively expensive to the Crown; and that after all it will prove abortive for according to my ideals of the Military which I offer with all possible deference and submission. They are the least quahfyed from their occupation as Soldiers of any men living to establish new Countrys, where they must encounter Difficulties, with which they are altogether unacquainted.9

Although Lawrence’s arguments were fundamentally correct, there can be little doubt that James Wolfe’s victory over the French in Canada three years later radically altered British policies. Certainly, in 1788 when Britain established a new colony in New South Wales, a diametrically-opposed view of soldier settlement prevailed. Largely drawn from the working classes, regular soldiers were now perceived to be ideal colonising material—if they could be induced to remain. Accordingly, many of the non-commissioned officers and men of the Marine Corps were accompanied on the First Fleet by their wives, unlike the commissioned officers, who were expected to return to Britain on completion of their tour of duty.10 Importantly, the instructions of Governor Arthur Phillip explicitly outlined the area of land to be allotted “to such of the non-commission officers and men as shall be disposed to become settlers”:

To every non-commission officer one hundred acres, and to every private man fifty acres, over and above the quantity directed by Our

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9 Ibid., pp.3-4.
General Instructions to You to be granted to such convicts as may hereafter be emancipated or discharged from their servitude, free of all fees, taxes, quit rents, and other acknowledgements for the space of ten years; but after the expiration of that time to be liable to an annual quit rent of one shilling for every ten acres.\textsuperscript{11}

Much was to occur over the succeeding two decades, but this offer was considerably generous, being ‘over and above’ land grants to emancipists. The latter were entitled to thirty acres (12.1 hectares) for a single man and fifty acres (20.2 hectares) for a married couple, with an extra ten acres (four hectares) for each child “who may be with them”.\textsuperscript{12}

In a very real sense, veteran soldiers thus formed the vanguard in the antipodean agricultural experiment, though it was actually an emancipist, James Ruse, who achieved the first modest success.\textsuperscript{13} Unable to capitalise on the results, however, Ruse ended his days as a wage labourer.\textsuperscript{14} Commissioned officers soon began agitating for their right to acquire land. Many insisted that this would provide a support base for the convict women with whom they cohabited, and thereby benefit any children produced from those relationships.\textsuperscript{15} In 1792 Henry Dundas, Secretary for the Home Office, permitted such grants but avoided stipulating the exact area to be allotted,\textsuperscript{16} leaving it to Phillip’s temporary successor, Major William Grose, to seize the initiative:

\textit{I have allotted to such officers as have asked one hundred acres of land, which, with great spirit, they, at their own expense, are clearing}

\textsuperscript{11} Lord Grenville to Governor Phillip, 22 August 1789, \textit{Historical Records of Australia [HRA]}, Series 1, Vol.1 (1914), p.125.
\textsuperscript{12} “Governor Phillip’s Instructions”, \textit{Ibid.}, p.14.
\textsuperscript{15} Governor Phillip to Lord Grenville, 24 November 1791, \textit{HRA}, Series 1, Vol.1 (1914), p.316.
\textsuperscript{16} Henry Dundas to Governor Phillip, 14 July 1792, \textit{Ibid.}, p.365; Governor Phillip to Henry Dundas, 4 October 1792, \textit{Ibid.}, p.383.
... their exertions are really astonishing; and I absolutely expect, if they continue as they begin, that in the space of six months the officers will have a track in cultivation more than equal to a third of all that has ever been cleared in the colony. As I am aware they are at this time the only description of settlers on whom reliance can be placed, I shall encourage their pursuit as much as is in my power.  

Encourage he certainly did, with the practice of bestowing generous land grants on fellow officers being continued by Grose’s own temporary successor, Captain William Patterson. Unfortunately, cronyism gave birth to the powerful monopoly that quickly dominated the fledgling economy. As Jan Kociumbas notes, Grose’s prediction was also confirmed:

By 1796 officers owned 31.5 per cent of all land under cultivation, plus all of the horses, cattle and most of the sheep in the colony other than the livestock owned by the government. By 1800 thirty-four officer-farmers had accumulated 14000 acres and 4000 sheep while the number of convicts allocated into their service had dramatically increased.  

Control by the military continued to increase until, in January 1808, Governor William Bligh was deposed in a bloodless coup d’etat. The difficulty in curbing the excesses of the army officers lay in the appointment of naval officers as colonial governors until Bligh’s overthrow. They lacked the necessary force to uphold their authority, and it was not until the arrival of Lachlan Macquarie in December 1809 that a new era of opportunity opened for the free and emancipated small landholders. It is relevant that

17 Lieutenant-Governor Grose to Henry Dundas, 16 February 1793, Ibid., p.416.
18 Kociumbas, Possessions, p.46.
Macquarie was accompanied by his own troops, the 73rd Regiment. Nonetheless, military veterans continued to receive land grants until 1831 and, from a non-indigenous perspective, their contribution was considerable.

On one hand, they gave birth to the pastoral industry that—notwithstanding ephemeral mineral yields—bolstered the Australian economy until the mid-twentieth century. As well, former military personnel opened many areas for closer settlement. The Upper Hunter River district of New South Wales is one example, largely being settled by veteran officers of the Napoleonic Wars. Apart from environmental despoliation the negative side of European expansion was, of course, the decimation of Australia’s indigenous people. Their suffering was to continue.

In contrast to these early internal policies, colonial veterans of various imperial campaigns during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were not similarly rewarded in Australia. As Ken Inglis reflected in his study of the 1885 Sudan campaign, “it did not occur to either the supplicant or the patron that the state had an obligation to him: the word ‘repatriation’ had not yet acquired its modern meaning”. Land grants were, however, used by New Zealand authorities to attract Australian volunteers for their campaigns against the Maori. In 1863 James Bodell enlisted in Melbourne for New Zealand service and later recorded the apportionment of land based on rank:

The Conditions were we had to serve the New Zealand Govt three years. If required each man would be entitled to [a] 50 acre Farm and a Town lot free, and 12 months free rations after your Services were not required. Corporals 60 acres Sergts 80 acres Subalterns 200 Captains 300 Majors & Colonels 400 acres each.24

Bodell remained in New Zealand, though only after disposing of his land grant and embarking on various commercial ventures. Indeed, the “creeping confiscation” of Maori land and concomitant settlement by veteran European troops was not a success.25 Apart from the unsuitability of many settlers, the lack of roads, distance from markets and, not least Maori hostility, were all factors contributing to the failure of the policy.26 Confiscation of land from indigenous people for the purpose of soldier settlement also occurred in Victoria following World War Two. When the Lake Condah Mission north of Portland closed in 1918, a number of Aboriginal families refused to leave and continued to reside on the site until 1945. Their removal was enforced when the Soldier Settlement Commission subsumed the land. Ironically, Aborigines from the area had served in the Second AIF, but their pleas for the allocation of soldier settlement blocks were ignored.27

While this appears to have been an isolated case, Australian colonial governments did use land grants as a means of attracting recruits to their own volunteer defence forces from the 1860s. The establishment and fluctuating membership of the various units was largely

26 Sinclair, A Soldier’s View of Empire, p.167.
dependent on periodic threats of invasion by remote powers, though in Queensland the strength of indigenous resistance on the frontier was cited by Governor George Bowen as the reason for maintaining a military presence.\textsuperscript{28} Like the Aboriginal guerilla fighters, however, actual land grants for Volunteer Defence Force (VDF) personnel were at times to prove equally elusive.

From around 1840 domestic problems in Britain brought into relief the enormous financial burden of maintaining regular military troops throughout the empire; eighty-seven percent of the two million pounds expended annually on imperial defence was borne by the British parent. Accordingly, Britain began to implement the recommendations of the 1838 Durham Report that, \textit{inter alia}, advised granting self-government to the ‘advanced’ colonies.\textsuperscript{29} Concomitantly, it was understood that such colonies would be willing to accept responsibility for their own defence.\textsuperscript{30} Britain, however, continued to control the external affairs of all its colonies, a policy backed by the superiority of the Royal Navy on the high seas. These new measures were made explicit in 1849, when Britain’s Secretary of State for the Colonies, Earl Grey, informed Australian authorities that henceforth barracks and other military installations would be transferred to colonial control. As well, all military expenditure, apart from the actual pay for remaining British troops, would also be borne by the colonial governments. Grey further advised that Britain would determine the number of imperial troops deemed necessary for colonial service and, if additional troops were required, the colonies would

again bear the cost. Finally, a warning was given that if military accommodation and installations were not adequately maintained the remaining British troops would be withdrawn.31

Yet it was not until 1854, in response to the Crimean War, that Victoria raised the first Australian colonial defence units, members of which were all volunteers.32 This precedent was soon followed elsewhere but, when Queensland was proclaimed a separate colony in 1859, Governor Bowen was dismayed to find on his arrival that the 20,000 European inhabitants were devoid of any military protection.33 Although Bowen’s commission provided him with the necessary authority to raise a local defence force, he continued to request British regulars for service on the frontier. In the event, Queensland did not receive a full garrison of troops until 1866—barely four years before all imperial troops in Australia were withdrawn.34 By then, global events had provided the necessary impetus for the creation of local military units.

In an obvious bid to defray the cost of a British garrison in Queensland, Britain’s Secretary for War, Sidney Herbert, initially suggested that Bowen implement a soldier settlement scheme, whereby retired Indian Army troops could be granted land in the colony. Bowen was at first hesitant, fearing the possibility of political involvement similar to that undertaken by the New South Wales Corps during Australia’s formative

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33 Nicholls, The Colonial Volunteers, p.6.
years. Indeed political interference by soldier settlers was to become a serious issue in Kenya following the First World War, albeit, turning on the racial question of European dominance over an increasingly influential Indian population. Bowen’s racial problems were on the frontier, but given the lack of a formal political structure in the colony his concerns were certainly justified.

Recent research by Jeffrey Hopkins-Weise and Rod Pratt has nevertheless revealed that Bowen acquiesced, with a considerable number of officers and men from both the Indian Army and the East India Company settling in Queensland, where they became quite influential in public affairs and the formation of volunteer defence units. Their exodus from the sub-continent resulted from general dissatisfaction after the Indian Mutiny of 1857, and this coincided with an acceleration of local defence matters in late 1859, when war between Britain and France appeared imminent. With the French colony of New Caledonia a mere 1,100 kilometres from Brisbane, alarmed citizens also flocked to the colours. Yet this sudden arousal should not be considered purely militaristic. Voluntary participation tended to reinforce existing social values that previously found few outlets in the isolated northern colony:

The volunteers could be a movement for raising the respectability and morals of the average citizen. It could inculcate the necessity of accepting responsibility for the defence of his community; it could

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encourage a more responsible attitude to participating in the affairs of the state; it would heighten his feeling of patriotism and would encourage in him the virtue of self-discipline. In an age of evangelical unions, temperance organizations and co-operative societies the volunteer movement could be seen as something more than a military force. 

Experience soon showed that in all the Australian colonies it was nevertheless a popular movement which could only be sustained by the threat of war. The economic circumstances of participants became a major factor behind falling membership once that threat was removed. This was clearly enunciated in the *Brisbane Courier* in March 1862 when offering a vitriolic comment on the inadequacies of Queensland’s VDF:

> A man who has his living to earn for a wife and family attaches some importance to the amount of wages he can bring home on Saturday afternoon, and you may talk about the “critical state of the Great Powers” a very long time indeed before he will believe it to be his duty to place the folks at home on short commons because he is learning to hit the bull’s eye with a rifle at five hundred yards.

At the outset volunteers were also expected to provide their own uniform and other accoutrements, which represented a substantial outlay. Clearly, some form of payment was necessary to maintain enrolments. In 1866 a Joint Select Committee inquiring into the state of Queensland’s defences not only advocated a “system of payment” for volunteers, but also a “Land Order of the value of eighteen pounds” for those members

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39 *BC*, 12 March 1862, p.2.
who had completed three years' "effective service". The timing was unfortunate, as the report coincided with a severe economic downturn and the measures were not adopted. The following year New South Wales passed legislation which entitled volunteer members of its own defence force to fifty acres (20.2 hectares) of the "best land" on completion of five years' "efficient service". In what amounted to a "sleight of parliamentary hand", Queensland volunteers were ostensibly rewarded similarly from 1868.

During a debate on what became the *Crown Lands Act* in Queensland's Legislative Assembly, Ratcliffe Pring MLA, Captain of No.1 Company, Queensland Rifle Brigade, managed to have a clause inserted which provided remuneration for his fellow volunteers:

> Every officer non-commissioned officer and member of the volunteer force of Queensland not being on the paid staff of or serving for regular pay in the said force shall be entitled after having served as an efficient member of such force for a continuous period of five years from the passing of this Act to receive from the Government ... a free grant of ten acres of suburban lands or fifty acres of country land subject to such regulations and conditions as may from time to time be approved of by the Governor and laid before both Houses of Parliament ... [I]n the case of volunteers who have previously served in this colony five years' service shall be deemed to count for three years and three years for eighteen months for the purpose of this Act.

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The clause remained on the statute books until 1876, by which time 439 volunteers had received land grants.\textsuperscript{46} The problem was that successive “regulations and conditions” steadily eroded the value of this reward to the point where its removal became a mere formality. While volunteer personnel still serving in 1876 remained eligible for land grants after fulfilling the stipulated terms, acquisition became extremely difficult. In May 1877, for example, twenty members of the VDF outlined their grievances in a petition to the Minister for Public Lands:

> Certain regulations have been issued ... which considerably affect our rights. By these regulations if a volunteer applies for land simultaneously, with either a homestead or conditional selector, the volunteer has to give way until such other selector is satisfied ... Further in applying for surveyed lands if the area of a block is in excess of a volunteer [Land Order] certificate, he must take the whole block however large, and be prepared to pay for the excess (by cash) at the upset price, but if the area is less than the certificate, then he must sacrifice the whole of it for this area however small as he is not allowed to enter upon any other block to obtain the full acreage to which he is entitled. As much of the blocks are either less or in excess of the quantity volunteers are entitled to select, these regulations virtually exclude us from the surveyed lands which form a large portion of the available land in the colony ...\textsuperscript{47}

Although the volunteers found a powerful supporter in Joshua Bell, soon to become Lieutenant-Governor of Queensland, their plea was to no avail. Bell’s suggestion that the regulations should be amended without recourse to parliament—”which is at best a dilatory process”—was greeted with silence.\textsuperscript{48} Henceforth there would be no tangible rewards for members of the VDF, and numbers continued to fluctuate according to the

\textsuperscript{46} Johnson, \textit{Volunteers at Heart}, p.60.
\textsuperscript{47} “Petition presented to the Minister for Lands, Brisbane, May 1877”, In-letter 5482/77, LAN/A55, QSA.
\textsuperscript{48} Joshua Bell to Douglas Macrossan, Brisbane, 15 June 1877, In-letter 7215/77, LAN/A56, QSA.
gravity of the perceived external threat. The latter was, of course, exacerbated by Queensland's geographical location:

[Defence remained a major consideration in Queensland. It was another example of how emotional reaction proved stronger than logical argument. Defence had always demanded more attention in Queensland than in the southern colonies; even the most sanguine advocate of the theory that Australia's isolation would protect the country from invasion had to admit that the danger of invasion from the north and west was greater than the danger from the south and east. Consequently Queensland felt its vulnerability.]

Free selection appeared to offer a viable means for reducing that risk. In this context the provision of Land Order Certificates for qualified VDF personnel was an important adjunct to evolving land policies, which were continued through the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act of 1917. Land legislation and accompanying ideologies were thus potent forces in Queensland's development.

The dominance of pastoralism in the colonial economies and the political power that it bequeathed was largely unchallenged until the waning of the goldrushes in New South Wales and Victoria from the late 1850s. Crucial to a new direction relating to land apportionment was the mineral boom engineered by Edward Hargraves in 1851, which brought in its wake an upsurge in immigration and radically altered the social composition of Australia. While very few were destined to reap the riches buried within the soil, many did envisage potential on the land itself. Thus, with the demise of the

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goldfields the clamour for ‘unlocking the lands’ rose in crescendo. In 1858 the ‘Colonial Minstrel’, Charles Thatcher, summed up the prevailing mood among the less fortunate on the Victorian goldfields:

Upset Squatterdom’s domination,  
Give every poor man a home,  
Encourage our great population,  
And like wanderers no more we’ll roam;  
Give in mercy, a free scope to labour,  
Uphold purest bold industry,  
Then no one will envy his neighbour  
But contented and happy will be.

Apart from highlighting a class consciousness, this verse signified that the pastoralists’ control of a pliable labour pool would no longer go unquestioned. Yet, as an examination of the Queensland situation clearly shows, the working classes became mere pawns in a contest for power led by the bourgeoisie. Queensland did not experience a major goldrush until 1867, so an alternative method for attracting immigrants was required. Stability was certainly emphasised, with the first Colonial Secretary, Robert Herbert, stipulating that the aim should be a “desirable class of [British] settlers” intent on agricultural production. In line with this policy, Henry Jordan was appointed the colony’s immigration agent in England during October 1860; four years later he was elevated to

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54 R. Joyce, “George Ferguson Bowen and Robert George Wyndham Herbert: The Imported Openers”, in Murphy and Joyce, Queensland Political Portraits, p.25.
Despite aggressive competition from the other Australian colonies— and North America— Jordan’s tireless campaigning quickly bore fruit. It was accomplished by offering liberal inducements:

A land order policy was developed for those paying their own way to Queensland; and a variety of assisted and free passages was devised to attract poorer emigrants who could perform the labouring jobs high in demand in the colony. Jordan saw to the implementation of these details, in early 1863 finalising arrangements with a shipping line, the Black Ball Line, to carry this human cargo.\(^5\)

Immigration and the utilisation of land were expected to stimulate economic growth, but the policy ignored the economic reality.\(^5\) In 1861, for instance, more than ninety-three percent of the colony’s total exports emanated from the pastoral industry.\(^5\) Perhaps even more significantly, Queensland’s political structure was rapidly dominated by a small, but powerful, oligarchy of squatters based on the Darling Downs.\(^5\) Certainly, the *Crown Lands Alienation Act* of 1860 did create agricultural reserves, but as it had minimal impact on the land controlled by the pastoral interests it appears to have been little more than a political concession.\(^6\) Nonetheless, with immigrants entering the colony in growing numbers the demand for agricultural land soon outstripped supply, a development hastened by the American Civil War of 1861-1865.

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\(^6\) Ibid., p.380.
With the curtailment of raw cotton exports from the Confederate States to Britain, Queensland was soon perceived as a viable alternative source for this commodity. The boom, however, was short-lived. Cessation of hostilities on the North American continent led to a resurgence of cotton production in the Southern States until they once again reigned supreme. It was not until the 1920s that cotton production in Queensland again became significant. Largely due to the devastation of the American crop by insect pests, notably the boll weevil, the growing of cotton was again encouraged to alleviate the plight of many struggling soldier settlers and civilian farmers. Through drought, uncertainty over prices, and an attempt by the British Australian Cotton Growing Association to refuse all ratoon cotton (the crop produced from natural regrowth), the vision of success dissipated almost as rapidly as it had during the previous century.

The demise of cotton in the 1860s did pave the way for the cultivation of sugar cane, though the plantation-style economic system that developed in many fertile coastal districts separated this form of agriculture from all others in Queensland. While plantation owners became quite influential, the 1860s also saw the emergence of a diverse group that coalesced and slowly began to break the monopolistic stranglehold of the pastoral interests. In his important study of Queensland’s Darling Downs region

between 1859 and 1893, Duncan Waterson identified the components of this formidable combination:

Brisbane merchants, artisans and professional men; western squatters who were jealous of the Downs pastoralists’ pre-eminence, economic success and exploitation; and an all-important faction on the Downs led by storekeepers and newspaper proprietors who desired wider political and social opportunities as well as the chance to advance their own material interests. These elements were reinforced by a group that could almost be termed professional politicians: men avid for a paid office with its power and perquisites.\(^65\)

The means for achieving their aims appeared to lie in land legislation, particularly the *Selection Acts* that were introduced from 1868. These measures had the added advantage of aligning the working classes more closely with the bourgeoisie, as they provided the former with a chance to gain economic independence.\(^66\) The *Crown Lands Act* that, *inter alia*, provided members of the VDF with land grants, was the first. In practical terms it split the large pastoral holdings in two, with one-half being divided into ‘selections’ (the first use of the term) varying in extent from forty to 640 acres (16.1 to 259 hectares).\(^67\)

For two clear reasons, however, the desired objective was not achieved.

With the demise of cotton the demand for agricultural produce on the scale envisaged was hampered by the limited number of local consumers, and the distance to external markets. As well, the selections were too small for stock-raising to be undertaken as an

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\(^{67}\) Bemays, *Queensland Politics During Sixty Years*, p.34.
alternative. These factors ensured that much of the land eventually returned to squatter control.\textsuperscript{68} The position altered when payable gold was discovered, accelerating population growth and leading to the establishment of urban centres which, in turn, increased the demand for agricultural produce. Yet despite the introduction of further legislation favouring small landholders, the pastoral interests still managed to retain control of vast areas by adopting tactics which were both ingenious and devious.

Comparing the Australian and North American frontiers during the nineteenth century, H.C. Allen elaborated on the various ways by which the pastoral interests circumvented land reform. They were remarkably similar on both continents:

Both employed "dummies"—the very word is the same—to select or homestead adjacent plots which could be "bought for a song" and welded into much larger units. Both were required to reside on their land, but the residences which they built to prove it were often of the most curious character; huts on wheels were common in both cases because they could swiftly put in an appearance in any number of places. In both—the term is Australian—pastoralists "peacocked" large tracts, that is to say, took up or bought all the watered plots, thus rendering great surrounding areas useless except to them... "Improvements" which were required upon holdings proved often to be fraudulent, as when squatters would dump a useless little water tank in their sparselands, or cattlemen would swear that irrigation work had been carried out because they had "seen water on the ground"—in a bucket.\textsuperscript{69}

The American connection was to assume an important ideological dimension in the late nineteenth century, but the necessity for undertaking 'improvements' on the land was a vital supplement to the concept of a rural yeomanry. Marilyn Lake has commented on the

\textsuperscript{68} Skerman, Fisher and Lloyd, \textit{Guiding Queensland Agriculture}, p.4.
narrowing definition of this term, ultimately being applied "exclusively [to] small freeholders", with the emphasis on self-sufficiency and, by extension, family production.\(^{70}\) It continued to exert a powerful influence on the Australian psyche. The concept was an underlying ideology of the *Selection Acts* and also signified a reaction against increasing urbanisation. Rural life was understood as the means by which the character of white Australian society could itself be ‘improved’ and was therefore another variant of social Darwinism.\(^{71}\)

On the other hand, ‘improvements’ to the land stemmed from the Enlightenment, whereby domination of the natural environment was considered essential for raising the quality of human life.\(^{72}\) Both strands were thus comfortably entwined within the ideal of a rural yeomanry. This was strengthened from the 1870s, when increased communication and global shifts in the political economy drew the Australian colonies closer to the west coast of the United States—and the influence of American theorists.\(^{73}\) Perhaps the most significant was Henry George, who propounded the advantages of small-scale farming but, at the same time, forcibly argued against freehold land tenure:

> The earth is an entailed estate—entailed upon all the generations of the children of men, by a deed written in the constitution of Nature ... Each succeeding generation has but a tenancy for life ... It is merely necessary to divert the rent which now flows into the pockets of the landlords into the common treasury of the whole people.\(^{74}\)


\(^{72}\) Waterson, *Squatter, Selector and Storekeeper*, p.66.


Long before March 1890, when George arrived in Australia to the greeting of “enormous crowds”, his influence was already apparent in Queensland legislation. The *Crown Lands Act* of 1884 applied the leasing principle to agricultural selections and grazing farms, thereby permitting those with limited capital to acquire property.\(^\text{75}\) The result was dramatic; in 1887, 17,145,998 acres were under cultivation in Queensland, a vast increase from the 24,463 acres in 1866.\(^\text{76}\) To counter this assault the pastoral interests were forced to borrow heavily from lending institutions, only to be met by economic depression and the devastating droughts of the 1890s.\(^\text{77}\) Their power was finally eclipsed, though it should not be overlooked that their domination of parliament had waned even earlier. The Australian colonies had followed the English example of electoral reform by introducing full male suffrage. In Queensland, the *Electoral Acts* of 1872 and 1874 effectively eliminated a franchise based solely on property or wealth and contributed in no small measure to the political demise of the Darling Downs pastoral faction.\(^\text{78}\) For the small selector, however, life on the land was often anything but an idyllic existence.

In 1874 the Davis family took up a selection at Emu Creek, near Toowoomba in southern Queensland, under the provisions of the 1868 *Crown Lands Act*. A son, Arthur Hoey Davis, later wrote of the family’s trials and tribulations under the pseudonym of ‘Steele


\(^{76}\) Bernays, *Queensland Politics During Sixty Years*, pp.321-2.

\(^{77}\) Skerman, Fisher and Lloyd, *Guiding Queensland Agriculture*, p.5.


\(^{79}\) Skerman, Fisher and Lloyd, *Guiding Queensland Agriculture*, p.5.
Rudd'. Yet, while Davis attempted to portray the lived experience of rural dwellers for the comprehension of their urban counterparts, his humorous style and sardonic wit was readily embraced for its own merits. Ironically, the scenes of despair which were a fact of life for struggling selectors often faded into the background of his rich tapestries. Those cameos are nevertheless a constant reminder that it was also a shared experience, with the selector’s wife not infrequently emerging as the pillar of strength. Similar ordeals confronted many soldier settler families decades later.

A link between these two social groups can also be found in the works of another selector’s son, Henry Lawson, who accepted the vicissitudes of urban life in preference to the poverty and unremitting toil of the bush. As time distanced Lawson from the events of an unhappy childhood, however, his views were steadily transformed—and politicised. While maintaining that life on a selection was often wretched, Lawson elevated the human actors from a position of demeaning ignorance to one in which their endurance and fortitude became celebratory. A misogynist (not necessarily a misogynist), Lawson nevertheless interpreted communal spirit from an almost exclusivist understanding which concentrated on the role of males. In effect, it was a laudation of mateship. These transformations were not solely the product of Lawson’s meandering imagination; rather, they occurred during an era of rising nationalism with its concomitant demand for the strengthening of racial purity.

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Far from diminishing, the ‘Pioneer Legend’ thus created gained added impetus from the military exploits of Australian soldiers in the First World War. The pen again took control, with Australia’s national ‘blooding’ at Gallipoli being well served by the glowing reports of British war correspondent, Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett. It was nonetheless largely due to the unflagging enthusiasm of C.E.W. Bean, official historian of the First AIF, that the ‘Anzac Legend’ was born. Significantly, Bean characterised Australian soldiers as possessors of the very qualities that underlay the ‘Pioneer Legend’ of the late nineteenth century. There were also two further developments in the final decade of the nineteenth century which offer a correlative to the later settlement of returned soldiers.

In 1893 the Co-operative Communities Land Settlement Act came into force in Queensland. This experimental legislation primarily arose from the economic collapse and violent class struggles of the early 1890s and contained two distinct sections. First, it actively encouraged registered groups comprising “not less than thirty” natural-born or naturalised males to form ‘self-governing communities’. Each member was entitled to lease 160 acres (64.7 hectares) within a designated communal area but, at the conclusion of a suitable qualifying period, members of the group could acquire the land in fee-simple on an individual basis. The second component of the legislation was directed towards

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the creation of ‘labour colonies’ and was an obvious development from the ‘blocker system’ of land settlement initiated in South Australia. The intention here was to provide a quantity of land close to urban centres that allowed workers a limited degree of self-sufficiency to alleviate distress during downturns in the economy. Unlike the ‘self-governing communities’, however, this land was subject to rigid guidelines and controlled by five trustees appointed by the government. Both systems were clearly influenced by Victorian notions of independence, self-help, and the rising tide of Socialism.

According to a number of theorists, the adverse effect of capitalism and its demand for wage labour was metaphorical emasculation. In the Victorian world-view dependence was a feminine trait, and Friedrich Engels was among those who argued that reaffirmation of masculinity lay in trade union membership and the contestation of power held by the bourgeoisie. Trade unionism did grow throughout the nineteenth century but the competitiveness and inequalities of capitalism also bred divergent strands to bolster a sense of self-worth for the individual.

Friendly societies and mutual aid was one form; communistic settlements was another, and the latter flourished throughout the Western world. Australia’s first blend of co-operation and land settlement was orchestrated by Johann Krumnow in Victoria. Excommunicated by the Lutheran Church, Krumnow established a commune near Hamilton

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89 "Co-operative Communities Land Settlement Act", p.520.
in 1853 and it continued in operation for forty-four years.\(^{92}\) This precedent was followed by a number of other isolated co-operative settlements during the century, but it was the economic disaster of the early 1890s which triggered a dramatic upsurge in this form of land settlement. Throughout Australia 116 co-operative settlements blossomed into existence and it has been suggested that perhaps one percent of the total population was involved in these alternative ventures.\(^{93}\) At the same time, they also provided a labour pool that was compatible with capitalist imperatives. This was clearly demonstrated by Queensland’s first co-operative community near Barcaldine in late 1891.

More than seventy unemployed shearers gathered on the Alice River in the colony’s western region and began building an agricultural settlement on vacant Crown land that was only later vested in their control. Sustenance was provided from the wages of those members who found casual work—often on neighbouring pastoral properties.\(^{94}\) Although the settlement survived in reduced form until 1907, the idealism had faded within two years; given the harsh climatic conditions it is perhaps surprising that it managed to continue at all.\(^{95}\) Like the Alice River settlement, Queensland’s first ‘labour colony’ was also established before supportive legislation was enacted.

Located at Yeerongpilly, just south of Brisbane, this community of workers received the patronage of Queensland’s Chief Justice, Charles Lilley, and the senior public servant,

\(^{92}\) Metcalf, “A Brief History of Communal Experimentation in Australia”, p.16.
George Watson. In November 1891 the guiding principles were outlined and they provide a direct link to the later Soldier Settlement Scheme. While it was expected that participants should have "some knowledge of kitchen-gardening, tomato and fruit growing and other produce which will command an immediate and profitable demand", the government was to provide supervision and assistance:

The Government to send regularly a competent instructor once every week for the first twelve months, who will inspect the cultivation, show how the soil, seed, &c., are to be treated, the plants attended to, and the produce handled. The Government when the first crops are being gathered to facilitate the creation of small factories for further manipulating the produce, as, for instance, by canning of fruit, preparation of tomato sauce, &c., as in the opinion of an expert may be found necessary or profitable.

With modifications, these initiatives became the basis for the administration of soldier settlements following World War One. They were not implemented during the 1890s, however, as 'labour colonies' were only intended to be an interim measure, and not part of a long-term program. The passing of legislation supporting both forms of communal land settlement was nevertheless prompted by the manoeuvres of Brisbane socialist, William Lane. A prolific writer, Lane urged the creation of a new order based on cooperation, and was probably influenced by the utopian communities already in existence between Chicago and Detroit in the United States. Lane had lived in both cities and at least one unidentified location between the two. In his new order the equality of women was recognised, but Lane was uncompromising in his racial beliefs; a new society would

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96 BC, 16 November 1891, p.7.
97 Ibid.
include only white Europeans. An ardent supporter of the Alice River Co-Operative Settlement, Lane was nevertheless unable to procure sufficient land in Australia to put his own ideas into practice.

Lane’s dilemma ended in 1892, when the government of Paraguay proved receptive to a communal experiment and offered him considerable support. He responded the following year, departing Australian shores with more than 200 followers to establish ‘New Australia’ on the Paraguayan pampas. This mass exodus of ‘desirable’ citizens, and the likelihood that many more would follow, was an affront to the chauvinistic nationalism that had emerged in Australia. It was therefore no coincidence that within weeks of Lane’s departure legislation encouraging, and providing financial support for, ‘self-governing communities’ and ‘labour colonies’ was passed in Queensland.

Unlike communal settlements in Victoria, which were directed towards the creation of a “landed brotherhood”, the fourteen co-operative settlements established in Queensland from October 1893 did not have a religious base. Undeniably utopian, they merged two distinct strands of thought that should perhaps be understood as ‘agrarian socialism’. The importance of agriculture rose rapidly in Queensland during the late nineteenth century, with a separate government department being created in 1887. The first Instructor of

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Agriculture, Edward Shelton, was an American who had participated in a co-operative settlement near Denver, Colorado.  
Moreover, it was in Queensland that 'Arbor Day' was first introduced into schools in 1890, with the planting of trees intended to "inculcate a love of agriculture in children". Co-operative settlements were, of course, based on agricultural production and thus combined agrarianism and socialism. The later settlement of returned servicemen continued this combination, which dovetailed neatly into the Labor government's broader policy. Yet, despite the prevailing ideologies of the 1890s, co-operative settlements were of relatively brief duration.

Bill Metcalf has provided the most detailed studies of these social experiments. With a particular emphasis on the co-operative settlements in the Burnett River district of southern Queensland, Metcalf argued that the crucial factor in their demise was the withdrawal of government support following the electoral victory of a conservative government led by Hugh Nelson. In essence, the collapse of the settlements was engineered "as a political body-blow to the more radical elements of the Labor Party and a warning to recently enfranchised Queensland voters". This explanation is far from adequate. Acknowledging that much of the land was unsuitable for agricultural purposes and that few participants had practical experience, Metcalf appears to have drawn on a single memorandum within the Department of Agriculture as evidence of a major conspiracy. Discarded as insignificant were the adverse climatic conditions, notably drought, which afflicted the settlements and, perhaps even more importantly, internal

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conflict which in a number of instances became extremely serious.\textsuperscript{107} The actual participants believed that all of these factors contributed to the demise of the settlements, with governmental neglect being relatively inconsequential.\textsuperscript{108} Nor was the 1895 amendment to the \textit{Co-operative Communities Land Settlement Act} the terrible weapon portrayed by Metcalf.

This legislation certainly did dissolve existing groups, but it also permitted their reorganisation with not “less than seven of the members of the existing group of which it formed a part”.\textsuperscript{109} While it was obviously intended to reduce the size of the communities, individual settlement was also actively encouraged. Thus, “upon the dissolution of a group”:

\begin{quote}

The area and the group assets shall be divided between the existing members as nearly as may be in the manner provided by the Principal Act for the division and allocation of an area among the members.\textsuperscript{110}
\end{quote}

The ‘Principal Act’ of 1893 had been directed towards later fragmentation to comply with an emerging land settlement policy—repurchase and closer settlement.\textsuperscript{111} Financial advances were made available for communards remaining on the land after 1895, and further funding was provided to assist those wishing to leave.\textsuperscript{112} These were quite liberal

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\textsuperscript{106} Metcalf, \textit{The Gayndah Communes}, p.126.
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., pp.47-8 and 207-8.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., pp.108-9.
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., p.1338.
\textsuperscript{111} “Co-operative Communities Land Settlement Act”, pp.515-6.
\end{flushright}
provisions that merely brought the scheme to its intended conclusion. In Paraguay, the government was only too willing to assist the ‘New Australia’ settlers and yet, after Lane’s departure for Britain in 1896, the community steadily fell apart from internal dissension; it was finally abandoned in 1904. Metcalf’s attempt to expose a government conspiracy simply perpetuates the Victorian concepts of masculinity and femininity—that were replicated during the era of soldier settlement. To elaborate, it is necessary to understand the extension of Enlightenment perceptions by which the environment was feminised to validate its domination. As Kay Schaffer argued:

The assumption that the masculine (man, Empire, Civilization) has an unquestioned God-given right to subdue or cultivate the feminine (woman, Earth, Nature) and appropriate the feminine to masculine domination is a constant structuring principle of Western discourse. As an ideological construct, it underlies British imperial interests and shapes the Australian tradition. As a psychoanalytic construct, it makes possible the inscription of the subject into culture.

The sad reality for many of those at the cutting edge of the antipodean struggle was that Nature frequently emerged the victor. ‘Failure’ in this context equated to the loss of ‘manliness’ and an ardent desire to attribute causation elsewhere. Commenting on soldier settlement, Stephen Garton demonstrated how this was effected, with individual failure thus being seen as ‘unmanly’:

[A]s the result of weakness, the product of ‘misfits’. This was an uncomfortable and unsettling message, and one stoutly resisted by returned servicemen and their defenders. On their side, it was

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imperative to prove that soldier settlement problems were a failure of policy and administration.\footnote{Garton, \textit{The Cost of War}, p.142.}

The connection between co-operative settlements and the later Soldier Settlement Scheme was strong, but the former withered away from social and environmental factors rather than political neglect. The latter differed in that adverse environmental conditions, poor markets, inadequate acreage, and overwhelming financial burdens \textit{combined with} political isolation to bring defeat. There were valuable lessons to be gained from the social experiments of the 1890s; unfortunately, many were ignored. This was perhaps largely due to the emergence of yet another land policy that was carried forward eventually to embrace the Soldier Settlement Scheme. The task of consolidating scattered selections began with a policy of repurchase and fell under the rubric of closer settlement.

In 1894 the Queensland Government passed the \textit{Agricultural Lands Purchase Act}, which allowed for the acquisition of large pastoral estates by debentures and their fragmentation into small agricultural farms. Occupants reimbursed the government for the nominal price paid for their land plus an additional ten percent of the total.\footnote{Roberts, \textit{History of Australian Land Settlement}, pp.336-8.} This measure proved so successful that its scope was steadily expanded, culminating in a series of \textit{Closer Settlement Acts} between 1906 and 1917.\footnote{J. Camm, “Land Settlement and the Development of Farming under the Agricultural Lands Purchase Act of 1894 and Closer Settlement Acts 1906-1917”, \textit{Queensland Heritage}, Vol.1, No.9 (November 1968), p.25.} While the \textit{Agricultural Lands Purchase Act} dealt with properties offered to the government, the \textit{Closer Settlement Acts} provided the necessary legislative machinery to compulsorily resume large estates. Original owners
nevertheless had recourse to a Land Appeal Court, which determined the compensation to be paid. Although theoretically sound, it proved disastrous in practice with land valuations often well in excess of their actual worth.\footnote{Ibid.; “Jimbour Estate Commission: Report with Minutes of Evidence taken before the Royal Commission”, \textit{QPP}, Vol.2 (1919-1920), p.729.} A case in point arose with the repurchase of Jimbour Estate, near Dalby on the western Darling Downs.

Owned by the Queensland National Bank, a large portion of the estate was offered to the government in 1906 for £3/10 per acre. After inspection by Lands Department officials the price was rejected as being unrealistic. When the bank refused a counter offer of £2/2 per acre, steps were taken to compulsorily resume the land. An appeal was subsequently lodged and in August 1907 the Land Appeal Court found in favour of the owners, fixing the price at the original offer of £3/10 per acre. In all, 155 selectors took up land on the estate, with holdings varying in size up to a maximum of 1,280 acres (518 hectares).\footnote{“Jimbour Estate Commission”, pp.729 and 732.} They were soon in trouble.

Consideration had been given to the average annual rainfall of the district but there had been no attempt to define seasonal variations or, indeed, the months in which rain normally fell.\footnote{Camm, “Land Settlement and the Development of Farming under the Agricultural Lands Purchase Act of 1894 and Closer Settlement Acts 1906-1917”, p.30.} Given that the emphasis was to be on grain production, particularly wheat, this was an extremely serious oversight. Moreover, in a bid to increase productivity many of the settlers spent all their available capital to purchase improved agricultural machinery, and it merely required a single climatic abnormality to bring
As a Royal Commission found in 1918, the settlers were struck by an entire phase of seasonal variations:

Since this Estate was made available for selection some ten years ago up to the present time (1909 to 1918) no less than five bad years have been experienced, when the rainfall ranged from 11 to 20 inches, and the average for the ten years was 22.45 inches ... During the five bad years in the last ten the rainfall averaged only 15.33 inches, whilst for the four bad years in the previous twenty-two it averaged 18.18 inches.

Despite experiments with drought-resistant wheat varieties it was soon obvious that the land was at best marginal for grain production. Mixed farming fared little better and dairying was hampered by the restricted size of the holdings. In 1913 the terms of repayment were extended from twenty-five to forty years, with an annual reduction in rent. Two years later the Agricultural Settlers' Relief Act, applying solely to Jimbour, was passed. This removed all financial obligations for the years 1915 to 1917 inclusive, and extended the terms of repayment to forty-three years. These ad hoc measures were ineffectual. By 1918 the settlers were clamouring for an extension of their allotted areas and the substitution of perpetual lease for freehold tenure. Government indifference initially prevailed. When told that “the question of how they were to pay their rents was worrying 95 per cent of the settlers”, the Minister for Public Lands, Harry Coyne, arrogantly replied that “he was glad to hear that the settlers were conscientious in that

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125 “Jimbour Estate Commission”, p.733.
respect". Constant pressure, however, finally led to the appointment of a Royal Commission in 1918 to investigate the problems on Jimbour Estate.

The three commissioners unanimously agreed that the land was over-valued when opened for selection. Their solution was to allow a further reduction of interest and to immediately double the size of each holding to compensate for climatic variations. Although other repurchased estates were experiencing similar difficulties, it was the sheer size and numbers involved at Jimbour which brought some measure of temporary relief. It was to little avail, and by 1925 much of the land was again being used solely for grazing, tending to support the rational argument advanced in 1908 by the conservative Pastoralists' Review that the fragmentation of large pastoral properties did not necessarily benefit the economy:

[I]t does not follow that because, say, 100 families are engaged in the cultivation of mixed farming of 25,000 acres of land instead of one pastoralist, they are going to increase the product of the soil to the extent of 100 times its former output ... In other words, it does not follow that close settlement, with a proportionate increase in agriculture, is going to prove a more profitable investment as a direct means of increasing national wealth than pastoral operations, with a smaller population.

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126 Ibid.
127 ODR, 20 July 1918, p.11.
129 Daily Standard [DS] (Brisbane), 16 August 1918, p.3; Daily Mail [DM] (Brisbane), 30 August 1919, p.4. These reports specifically dealt with the plight of settlers on the Maryvale Repurchased Estate near Warwick on the southern Darling Downs.
130 BC, 21 February 1925, p.16.
131 Pastoralists' Review (Melbourne), 16 November 1908, p.789.
On the other hand, there were even more compelling reasons for increasing the rural population. One was the continual fear of invasion, particularly from Asia, so that it appeared imperative “to get landless men for a manless land”. Immigration from Europe was actively encouraged, but after the First World War there was an emphasis on British ex-servicemen who, along with their Australian counterparts, would provide a trained and easily mobilised defence force similar to the ancient Roman model. Importantly, such a policy was also expected to provide greater access to British capital. This was supplemented by the immigration of British children, who not only ensured racial purity but also provided a cheap and subservient labour pool. All of these strands were clearly compatible with the social ideal of a landed yeomanry which, with an adherence to supplying raw materials for British mercantile interests, comprised the ‘Agrarian Myth’. This illusion was further reinforced by lingering American influences.

Between 1907 and 1913 the American engineer, Elwood Mead, advised three Australian governments—Victoria, Queensland and New South Wales respectively—on irrigation techniques to expand agricultural areas. Mead’s ideas, however, extended far beyond technical matters. An ardent supporter of the ‘Progressive Movement’ in his own country, which protested against monopoly and stressed the “virtues of competition, freedom and

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132 BC, 23 February 1925, p.17.
133 BC, 2 February 1916, p.8.
135 BC, 13 February 1925, p.10.
morality". Mead envisaged a countryside dotted with small farms but also accepted that State intervention was necessary to make it a reality. The philosophy was itself an extension of the Jeffersonian ideal, with independent small landholders perceived as the "chosen people of God". While Mead advised against the creation of a large-scale irrigation scheme in Queensland due to the condition and distance of markets, and the limitations of suitable land, his wider ideals readily complemented existing land policies in the northern State. The election of a Labor government in 1915 ensured that those practices would continue.

Large estates were anathema to a government committed to social reform, particularly one on the periphery of the British economic community. At the same time, however, it was becoming increasingly obvious that existing land policies were failing in actual practice—and at the very time prices for agricultural produce were climbing through wartime demand. Jimbour exemplified the problems associated with closer settlement in the extreme, including a decline in the rural population as struggling farmers abandoned their holdings. Yet it was war, and the 'heroic' performances of Australian troops, which suggested a new means of countering the steady retreat from the bush. Gallipoli and Flanders thus became mere stepping-stones to an environmental battle that was to be waged within Queensland's own territorial boundaries. Casualties were

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certainly expected, and for this reason the State government sought to extract as many concessions as possible from the Commonwealth authorities responsible for the repatriation of ex-servicemen. It was also necessary to create the administrative machinery for the scheme to be carried out. In this context, soldier settlement was not only an adjunct to existing land policies, but also an innovation, a means of bringing to fruition the 'agricultural revolution' vital to Labor's social reforms. In a bid to ensure its ultimate success the government wove a complex bureaucratic web to support the entire structure. Unfortunately, it was also to ensnare many innocent victims.
CHAPTER 2:

‘CUTS AND THRUSTS’: THE BUREAUCRATIC UNDERPINNINGS

I dreams uv honour an’ reward,
An’ ‘ow to pay a debt.
For partin’ cash, and buyin’ farms,
An’ fittin’ chaps with legs an’ arms.¹

Notwithstanding the general Australian ambivalence that initially greeted the outbreak of war in August 1914,² the subsequent departure of troops for overseas service nevertheless gave birth to a plethora of volunteer organisations aimed at raising funds to benefit the antipodean warriors. Moreover, until April 1915 Australian society was only exposed to returning servicemen debilitated by sickness and injury, requiring little more than aftercare services that were readily available and easily funded by voluntary contributions.³ Gallipoli abruptly threw complacency into chaos. While the Dardanelles campaign was seen by many Australians as their nation’s ‘blooding’,⁴ it also savagely ripped aside the veil of innocence. The extent of this carnage finally brought home to the Australian people the possible human cost of their dependence on the British parent.

Accordingly, in July 1915 Federal Defence Minister, Senator George Pearce, announced the creation of a Federal Parliamentary War Committee which was not only to organise recruiting and subsidiary tasks, but also to deal with matters relating to returned

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¹ C.J. Dennis, Digger Smith (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1982), p.104.
² J. Williams, Anzacs, the Media and the Great War (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 1999), pp.49-50.
servicemen. John Christian ('Chris') Watson was appointed Honorary Organiser of this non-partisan body, which comprised twelve members—"six from each party, representing eight members of the House of Representatives and four from the Senate". Briefly Prime Minister in 1904 and, incidentally, the first Prime Minister of a national Labor government in the world, Watson had left politics in 1910 to pursue a successful business career. In 1915, however, he offered his services to the Fisher government and his appointment was to have far-reaching consequences.

At Watson's instigation the Federal Parliamentary War Committee established War Councils in each State of the Commonwealth to perform paralling duties on a regional basis. In essence, this entailed the provision of artificial limbs and surgical aids for maimed veterans and re-training the latter in "useful occupations". Similarly, employment was found for those capable of resuming normal activities, and funds were collected and distributed "for general ameliorative purposes". Finally, the parent body and its State and regional offshoots were responsible for registering those returned servicemen who desired to "settle upon the land". Land settlement had thus emerged as a distinct component of repatriation in Australia.

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While it has been stressed that the questionnaires distributed among AIF troops in Australia and overseas to ascertain the number of men wishing to settle on the land was another Watson initiative, the actual genesis of this idea is obscure. Although Japan entered the First World War as a British ally, fears of Asian expansion remained undiminished in the Australian psyche. Throughout much of the nineteenth century China was the perceived threat; after Russia’s defeat by Japan in the war of 1904-5 the latter had borne the brunt of Australian racial hostility. A declining birthrate, vast areas of unoccupied land and, arguably, mounting casualties in a distant war seemingly rendered ‘white’ Australia ripe for the inevitable Asian invasion. At this crucial juncture, however, the reins of power were handed to an aggressive individual who was uncompromising in his belief that the British people were superior to all others.

In October 1915 William Morris Hughes succeeded Andrew Fisher as Australian Prime Minister, and the timing is particularly significant, closely following as it did the idea of land settlement for returned servicemen. Hughes certainly made his views on Japan abundantly clear at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, and when he spoke for “60,000 Australian dead” there can be little doubt that he was also thinking of 60,000 fewer Australian defenders. Like so many other Australians, Chris Watson fully endorsed the racial sentiments. Nonetheless, it was Hughes who insisted that future Australian

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9 Scott, *Australia During the War*, p.843.
security lay in a full commitment to the British cause, and it was perhaps not surprising that the offer of land for veterans was later extended to British and 'white' Dominion ex-servicemen. The possibility thus clearly exists that the genesis of soldier settlement lay in the racial convictions of William Morris Hughes.

Be that as it may, the entire question of soldier settlement remained tentative throughout 1915 as Watson strove to organise repatriation authorities throughout the Commonwealth—and to collate information provided by the returned questionnaires. The State War Councils, for example, formed local government War Service Committees throughout their respective States, thereby creating a pyramidal structure linked to the Commonwealth government through the appointment of two Federal politicians on each State War Council. The remaining members were usually leading figures in business or the professions, while community leaders comprised the membership of local War Service Committees. In practice the system appears to have functioned reasonably well except for a chronic shortage of funds. This was due to the naïve belief that the cost of repatriation could be borne solely by voluntary contributions. Unlike previous imperial conflicts, the scale of this global holocaust ensured that government funding was essential. Soldier settlement raised even more complex problems.

By February 1916 enough of the questionnaires pertaining to land settlement had been analysed for Watson to estimate that one in every four Australian servicemen, perhaps as

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16 Lloyd and Rees, *The Last Shilling*, pp.30-1.
many as 40,000, contemplated settling on the land at the completion of their military service.\textsuperscript{18} Many of the respondents were from a non-agricultural background and this may offer support for the argument advanced by the German historian, George Mosse. Life in the trenches, insisted Mosse, brought the soldiers of all belligerent nations in this massive industrial war close to Nature. Unlike previous military conflicts, the human ‘enemy’ was rarely seen and Nature itself appeared to become a victim, reinforced by the eerie landscape of ‘No Man’s Land’. Yet, while Nature was in its death throes it conveyed a parting spiritual message:

\begin{quote}
Nature symbolized the genuine, sadness, and resurrection—but always, at the same time, an immortality that could be shared by the soldier and that legitimized wartime sacrifice.\textsuperscript{19}
\end{quote}

The relationship to Nature as an entity perhaps appeared even more tangible to members of the Australian Light Horse amid the desert wastes of Palestine. Even so, it should not be overlooked that many men enlisted in Australia to escape the relentless drudgery of rural life.\textsuperscript{20} Whether their attitudes were altered by the war experience is an avenue that still remains to be explored, for of the 29,543 questionnaires processed by February 1916 3,303 respondents claiming to have agricultural knowledge definitely considered returning to the land. It must be added, however, that little attempt was made to define the extent of their ability.\textsuperscript{21} Of the affirmative answers, 702 had independent resources, thus leaving 2,601 who were presumably from the lower socio-economic levels of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{17} McDonald, "The Australian Soldiers’ Repatriation Fund", p.118.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Garton, The Cost of War, p.123.
\end{itemize}
society. On an individual State basis, a total of 3,600 Queenslanders replied, with 254 desiring land and claiming previous experience; fifty-eight had their own resources. These figures were made available to Federal and State politicians brought together in Melbourne during February 1916 to discuss what was now seen as a major plank in the repatriation program—rural settlement.

This conference requires careful consideration as it set the parameters for subsequent developments but, concomitantly, also raised a number of contentious issues. The tentative plan laid before the delegates had been formulated by the Federal Parliamentary War Committee and, once again, was largely the work of Chris Watson. Anticipating that soldier settlement could possibly require twenty million pounds, Watson conceded that the States alone had the necessary machinery to bring the scheme to fruition. Indeed, responsibility for vacant Crown land within their boundaries was one of the most important residual powers left to the States after Federation in 1901, and it was this factor, perhaps more than any other, which was to plague soldier settlement from beginning to end.

The conference was chaired by Senator Pearce in his capacity as Acting Prime Minister, and he insisted that soldier settlement would provide the means for preventing

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20 BC, 17 November 1918, p.8.
23 Scott, Australia During the War, pp.842-3.
24 Lloyd and Rees, The Last Shilling, pp.43-4.
widespread unemployment when hostilities concluded. Expanding on this, Watson included a less charitable reason for the scheme to be implemented:

The States and the Commonwealth have a material interest in bringing about successful land settlement, for not only does this mean taxable possibilities, but also employment for a number of other men in addition, so that from a Federal and State point of view there is good reason why we should encourage returned soldiers to go on the land against entering into other forms of occupation.

As the conference thrashed out specific issues it soon became clear that the two Queensland representatives, State Treasurer, Edward Theodore, and the Minister for Public Lands, John Hunter, were primarily concerned with developmental aspects on a broader level. Above all, they were intent on gaining from the Commonwealth a guarantee that funds would be provided to create the basic infrastructure for soldier settlement, specifically, railways and roads. Failing this, Theodore warned that Queensland was quite willing to approach alternative sources for funding. Taking his cue, Hunter threw the possible consequences back at Pearce:

If the States cannot find the money—the rate has never been so high previously—to build railways, and repurchase land, what must happen? The cities will be congested with idle men.

Both Queensland representatives rightly argued that unless more liberal concessions were granted for returned servicemen in regard to rural settlement failure was a likely outcome.

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26 Ibid., p.1493.
27 Ibid., p.1471.
As outlined in the previous chapter, selection and closer settlement had taught the Queensland government that caution and careful planning were essential for any new land policy, even though environmental factors were still not fully understood. The question of training farms was also raised at the conference, and it was Hunter who suggested that these should be a Federal responsibility in that “the Commonwealth should find the money for the establishment of these farms, and advance it free of interest to the State Governments”. The proposal was lost when all Federal and State delegates—except Hunter and Theodore—agreed that the Commonwealth should only “assist the States financially in the establishment of such farms”, a vague understanding which was not fully resolved until the following year.

Yet, while the Queensland delegation was insistent that Commonwealth loans should be advanced to the States free of interest, they were equally adamant that no such concession should apply to returned servicemen. Theodore was the first to raise loan conditions for soldier settlers, though he did insist that they should be advanced at a low rate of interest:

Loans to soldiers for land settlement purposes ... will be advanced at reasonable rates of interest, not exceeding 3½ per cent. The difference between this rate and the cost to the Government of the money to be borne equally by Commonwealth and State Governments. The purpose of the motion is clearly indicated. We must make an exceedingly low interest charge upon money advanced to soldiers for land-settlement purposes, because, unless they can get money at a reasonable rate of interest, we will simply be asking them to do the impossible by going upon the land.

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28 Ibid., p.1472.
29 Ibid., p.1489.
30 Ibid., p.1490.
31 Ibid.
The interest rate was to increase annually by half a percent until a maximum rate of five percent was realised. This motion was accepted by all the representatives, who also agreed that a sustenance allowance should also be made available to soldier settlers until their farms became productive. The latter, however, was a separate issue that would be financed by a public fund. The Australian Soldiers' Repatriation Fund was inaugurated the following month, but it ultimately proved an unsuccessful venture into social legislation. Conversely, over the next two years the fund did provide a useful, though tenuous, link between the Federal and State governments. This was certainly applicable to Queensland, whose Treasurer succinctly outlined the entire policy of soldier settlement as proposed by the Commonwealth in February 1916:

What is now suggested is simply the making of arrangements to carry out our existing land settlement policies, applying them to returned soldiers. I understand that in coming here we are asked to do more than that, and that the Conference has been called to consider means by which returned soldiers desiring to settle on the land may be offered more favourable terms than are offered to ordinary citizens.

The Queensland government was agreeable, but with responsibility for soldier settlement having devolved from the Federal to State governments, the latter faced a considerable financial burden if the scheme proved unsuccessful. On the other hand, Hunter contended that Queensland was capable of accommodating 11,000 returned servicemen almost immediately. Fulfilling this quota was, of course, entirely dependent on a massive injection of Commonwealth funds:

\[\text{Ibid., p.1513.}\]
\[\text{Milton, "Soldier Settlement in Queensland After World War I", p.29.}\]
We have in Queensland an area of Crown lands on which we could settle 6,000 soldiers, and at £500 advance per settler, that would represent £3,000,000. To make this land available, however, we would require to build a railway estimated to cost £775,000. We have another large area on which we could settle 5,000 soldiers ... I estimate that we would require £5,500,000.\(^\text{35}\)

Queensland thus regarded soldier settlement as a useful adjunct to existing land policies as it had the potential to minimise the cost of public works to the State. At this stage, the Federal government refused to be drawn. It was agreed, however, that the States would advance £500 to each soldier settler to effect improvements on their holdings, an amount that would be reimbursed by the Commonwealth under loan conditions.\(^\text{36}\) The problem facing the Federal government was twofold: first, the necessity of finding this reservoir of funds and, second, how to retain control of the direction in which it was spent. After all, Queensland had clearly advertised its priorities. The creation of the Australian Soldiers' Repatriation Fund was nevertheless a means of providing almost immediate support for soldier settlers. In the wider sphere, the Commonwealth undertook to approach the British government for a loan to finance the entire scheme.\(^\text{37}\) Therefore, the basic principles for soldier settlement were set in place, and these were later to be incorporated into Queensland's *Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act* of 1917. Although no formal compact yet existed, Senator Pearce, who was often exceptionally obtuse during proceedings, later reflected on the significance of this conference in his memoirs:

[It] laid down in broad outline the procedure that was subsequently adopted by all the Governments, Federal and State. It can, therefore, be claimed that this Conference began the great work of repatriation of the returned soldiers which has been carried out throughout Australia in the subsequent years.  

Pearce failed to add that all parties were also in full agreement that soldier settlement was not to be an “entitlement”. Clearly, different standards prevailed. Returned servicemen had to prove their suitability for rural settlement and financial aid. State governments, exemplified by Queensland, expected Commonwealth financial assistance for soldier settlement as a right.

In May 1916 a second conference was held between Federal and State representatives to finalise the monetary arrangements, but little was achieved. Prime Minister Hughes was politely rebuffed by the British government, and the States could do little more than push ahead with their own schemes under an assurance that the Commonwealth would eventually meet funding requirements. The British refusal to assist Australia in this matter was perhaps understandable given the precarious position of Allied forces on the Western Front. It did not, however, prevent British authorities from pressuring Hughes to provide more Australian troops, a move that divided Australian society with the bitter conscription referenda of 1916 and 1917. Fêted by the British, Hughes strongly advocated conscription, although in fairness—and as pointed out previously—he believed

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38 G. Pearce, Carpenter to Cabinet: Thirty-Seven Years of Parliament (London: Hutchinson, 1951), p.139.
41 Booker, The Great Professional, pp.198-9.
that a British victory would strengthen Australia. One of his most formidable opponents, Archbishop Daniel Mannix notwithstanding, was none other than the Queensland Premier, T.J. Ryan; antagonism between the two governments thus transcended many levels. 42 Soldier settlers were already caught between these opposing forces before conscription was narrowly rejected, but repatriation issues were clearly dominated by Allied military strategy.

The Somme offensive launched on the Western Front in July 1916, and particularly the deployment of Australian troops in the Pozières sector, was a significant factor in the advancement of soldier settlement. Proportionately, casualties exceeded those sustained at Gallipoli the previous year—and they would continue to climb.43 Queensland’s vision of 11,000 soldier settlers in February 1916 had also grown substantially by the following August:

It was estimated that some 8,000,000 acres on the eastern coast of the State which were not at present closely settled were adapted for agriculture and dairying, and were capable of supporting at least 50,000 farmers and their families.44

Glowing optimism was not matched by the State’s financial resources, and for this reason a far more modest 71,000 acres (28,732 hectares) was set apart for soldier settlement the following month. Located in two areas—Beerburrum, north of Brisbane, and Stanthorpe in the far south of the State—the land was to be utilised for agricultural production and

42 Murphy, T.J. Ryan, p.341.
44 BC, 15 August 1916, p.6.
the only tenure offered was perpetual lease, thus incorporating this new scheme with existing land settlement policies. It had already been decided that Queensland would “safeguard” soldier settlement “against cultivating non-exportable products”, a recognition of the limited domestic market but, at the same time, also designed to capitalise on rising world prices. On the other hand, despite a strong demand for beef, the Queensland government purposely restricted grazing land—which “did not grow on trees”—for returned servicemen. Again, this accorded with the ideal of a rural yeomanry who would steadily develop and consolidate all arable regions of the State.

One particularly unfortunate aspect of soldier settlement in Queensland was that it coincided with the spread of prickly pear, cacti belonging to the genus *Opuntia*. By 1924 this pest covered a huge area of the State (Appendix 1). While prickly pear was finally brought under control from 1928 with the introduction of an Argentine moth (*Cactoblastis cactorum*), it is relevant that the beginning of this biological victory occurred barely a year before the Soldier Settlement Scheme was officially terminated. Furthermore, though the Queensland government contended that no land infested with prickly pear would be offered to returned servicemen, “if soldiers made application for pear land they would not be refused”. They were not, and the consequences were occasionally tragic.

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45 *BC*, 16 September 1916, p.13.
47 *BC*, 7 October 1916, p.6.
Admittedly depressed over recent drought losses, Benjamin Harlow, a soldier settler on a prickly pear selection near Chinchilla in southern Queensland, took his own life in June 1923. Harlow cut his throat, with his body being discovered in a hole he had excavated to burn prickly pear, and there is little reason not to suspect that the arduous and constant task of clearing this pest contributed in some measure to his death. Others struggled valiantly on.

As evidenced by the extensive tracts of land surveyed at Beerburrum and Stanthorpe, the predominant policy was to consolidate soldier settlers into groups under experienced guidance. This had been the philosophy of ‘labour colonies’ during the 1890s, but it was also an idea that Queensland shared with most other Australian States. The authorities genuinely considered that this practice was both admirable and sensible:

> It was assumed that many of the men applying for these particular areas would not have had much, or any, previous experience in fruit culture, and so the idea of groups had been evolved that they might be located together and placed in a position to be afforded the best possible instruction with the least possible delay and expense.\(^{51}\)

While the quality of that instruction was to be increasingly questioned, contemporaries were probably unaware of the negative psychological dimension of group settlements. The shared experience of war certainly bonded soldiers and this was perhaps reinforced and continued through soldier settlement. However, after factoring in the relative

\(^{49}\) BC, 7 October 1916, p.6.  
\(^{50}\) BC, 20 June 1923, p.7.  
\(^{51}\) QDR, 23 September 1916, p.40.
isolation of many settlements, it can reasonably be suggested that group settlements served to further estrange veterans from wider society. In other words, the trauma of readjustment into civilian life was intensified. The American historian, Eric Leed, has argued that during the turmoil of war dissociation from civilian society led to the battlefront providing a refuge—"home"—for many combatants.\(^{52}\) Extrapolating from this, the cleavage between soldier and civilian was prolonged in Australia, with group settlements on the agricultural frontier being transformed into a surrogate ‘front’. Moreover, the battle lines were also in a state of flux.

Shire Councils were co-opted into the Soldier Settlement Scheme so that returned servicemen could settle in the same districts from which they enlisted. Acting on a suggestion made at Maryborough by the Queensland Governor, Sir Hamilton Goold-Adams, at least twenty-seven local authorities had permitted the State government to resume water and camping reserves for soldier settlement by October 1916.\(^{53}\) Not all, however, were imbued with the same patriotic generosity. In April 1917, for instance, the Moore family donated 7,075 acres (2,863 hectares) of land just north of Bundaberg to the Australian Soldiers’ Repatriation Fund.\(^{54}\) It was sold the following year to raise funds for “Libraries and School of Arts on Returned Soldier Settlements”.\(^{55}\) While the property was in their possession, the trustees of the fund neglected to pay rates on the property and Gooburrum Shire Council threatened legal action. After the local authority refused a


\(^{53}\) *BC*, 20 October 1916, p.9.

\(^{54}\) *BC*, 5 April 1917, p.7.

\(^{55}\) Memorandum, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 5 November 1918, LAN/AK113, Batch 581, “Gifts to Queensland Repatriation Fund”, QSA.
request from the Under Secretary for Public Lands that the outstanding amount—ninety pounds—should be donated to the fund, the State government finally capitulated in March 1919. This minor episode was, however, overshadowed by the conflict between the Federal and State governments.

In December 1916 Prime Minister Hughes personally advised the State Premiers that British loans to finance soldier settlement in Australia could not be expected in the immediate future. Hughes nevertheless reiterated that “the responsibility for the welfare and comfort of the men who fought for their country rests upon the community as a whole and the Commonwealth Government is the instrumentality through which the community’s responsibility must be discharged”. Arguably, Hughes was motivated by genuinely compassionate concerns, though it is also possible that this statement was premised on a desire to increase Commonwealth power. The State Premiers were in no doubt that the latter was indeed the case, and while Hughes insisted that some measure of uniformity for soldier settlement was the objective, they remained adamant that no infringement of their existing land administrations would be tolerated. From their perspective, the Commonwealth was to merely function as the central lending authority. Hughes did agree to provide two million pounds for the 1917 calendar year, and also suggested that soldier settlement should be opened to British and Dominion ex-servicemen. Apart from defence and racial considerations, this ploy increased the

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56 Under Secretary, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, to Clerk, Shire of Gooburrum, Bundaberg, 28 March 1919, Ibid.
57 BC, 2 January 1917, p.7.
possibility of attracting the British finance he so earnestly required.\textsuperscript{59} Having achieved little, this conference was adjourned until the following month. It was then that Hughes brought matters to a head.

There was little equivocation in January 1917, when Hughes asserted that repatriation necessitated Federal control. Indeed, as soldier settlement was rapidly emerging as the major component of the entire scheme, it was one aspect with which the Commonwealth should be “intimately acquainted”.\textsuperscript{60} Yet there was also room for compromise. After considerable debate, the delegates from all but one State agreed to establish a ‘Soldier Settlement Board of Australia’, with one member from each State and the Commonwealth comprising membership of the board. This was to be an advisory body only, and when Hughes added that the formation of the board was a necessary prerequisite for the provision of Federal funds there was no question as to who would be in control.\textsuperscript{61} Queensland was the lone dissenter.

The decision of Premier Ryan and his deputy, John Hunter, to reject Hughes’ compromise was, according to Ryan’s biographer, “partly due to a reluctance to retard the State’s soldier settlement schemes [sic] and partly to a growing unwillingness to give the Commonwealth Government power over Queensland land laws”.\textsuperscript{62} Certainly, State sovereignty was a major issue with Ryan, but his reference to the board as a “hampering

\textsuperscript{59} Lloyd and Rees, \textit{The Last Shilling}, pp.67 and 72.
\textsuperscript{60} Pryor, “The Origins of Australia’s Repatriation Policy”, p.203.
\textsuperscript{61} \textit{Ibid.}, pp.203-4.
\textsuperscript{62} Murphy, \textit{T.J. Ryan}, p.220.
intermediary” revealed frustration. The northern State’s agenda was to acquire Commonwealth funds for public works only incidental to soldier settlement. Inclusion on a board through which the Federal government controlled the direction of those funds was clearly not in Queensland’s best interest. This was recognised by other delegates at the conference, and the implication was almost certainly directed at the Queensland government when it was stated:

That where the Commonwealth makes available to the States moneys for advances, the full amount charged to the individual shall be expended upon his particular holding ... It had been brought to the notice of the Minister that in some States some of the expenses of making areas available for group settlement—as, for instance, the making of roads within the area—were being charged against advances. The Minister took the view that this was properly a charge against development work, and the soldier’s liability should be rightly confined to expenditure on his own holding.

Queensland had already begun to establish group settlements. On the other hand, the Federal government did make a number of significant concessions. The matter of training farms for soldier settlements was finally resolved, with the Commonwealth agreeing to subsidise the cost “on the basis of a pound for pound contribution”. As well, State War Councils were to be constituted “Commonwealth bodies” and their staffs “paid by the central Commonwealth authority”. The latter relieved the States of a considerable financial burden, though Queensland’s refusal to comply with Hughes’ wishes temporarily placed it outside the scope of Federal funding. Yet there is also some

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63 Lloyd and Rees, The Last Shilling, p.70.
65 Pastoral Review (Melbourne), 16 February 1917, p.128.
justification for John Hunter’s condemnation of the ‘Soldier Settlement Board of Australia’ as an “absolute farce”. Although the board was not formally abolished until October 1918, there was only one meeting between members. Viewed objectively, it can be seen that while members were theoretically equal, Commonwealth control of the purse strings, and the board’s designation as an advisory body only, meant that it was almost certainly a vehicle for increasing Commonwealth influence. For the time being Queensland was forced to rely on its own limited financial resources for soldier settlement, but if Hughes was intent on using repatriation to extend Commonwealth power in the wider sphere, this conference ultimately proved to be a pyrrhic victory.

The States generally complied with the Prime Minister’s proposal as they recognised that defence, and by extension repatriation, was clearly a Federal responsibility—and required some degree of uniformity, especially in relation to soldier settlement. After all, and despite the Allied High Command’s dismissal of Australian divisions as miscellaneous elements of the British Army, the troops were fighting as a national entity and were fully justified in expecting equal treatment on their return, irrespective of which State they happened to reside in. Therefore, while Queensland delegates did not attend the sole meeting of the ‘Soldier Settlement Board of Australia’ in June 1917, they were present at every other conference relating to soldier settlement and general repatriation matters.

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67 BC, 5 July 1917, p.6.
69 Garton, The Cost of War, p.124.
70 Williams, Anzacs, the Media and the Great War, p.264.
71 BC, 5 July 1917, p.6; DM, 17 June 1919, p.5.
Hughes had more immediate political concerns. One result of the conscription referendum in October 1916 was a split in the Federal Labor Party. In November, Hughes and twenty-three followers left a convened Caucus meeting and with the aid of the Governor-General, Munro-Ferguson, joined with the opposition to form a Nationalist government. The alliance permitted Hughes to retain the Prime Ministership. In February 1917 his reconstructed ministry included the re-appointment of Edward Davis Millen as vice-president of the Executive Council, charged with organising repatriation. The following September, Millen became Minister for Repatriation after having created a new Federal department. Millen was no stranger to the problems underlying repatriation, having attended all the important meetings since the issue was first formally raised in 1915. A diminutive figure, standing barely five feet four inches (1.62 metres), he had also been closely associated with earlier closer settlement schemes in New South Wales, and understood soldier settlement to be merely an extension of existing State policies, albeit, one designed to benefit national development. Millen was a firm advocate of the rural yeoman ideal.

By introducing the Australian Soldiers' Repatriation Bill in July 1917, Millen began developing the necessary legislative machinery to provide the foundation for a Department of Repatriation operating on a national basis without infringing State rights. This was accomplished the following September and was largely a displacement of the Federal Parliamentary War Committee and its subsidiary State War Councils and local

War Committees. Put succinctly, it was a blend of volunteer and public service employees, with the former being given a direct administrative role rather than simply undertaking fund-raising activities. The emphasis remained on decentralisation, with regional offices scattered throughout the Commonwealth. However, while Queensland remained outside the national scheme the State War Council continued to operate alongside the newly-created Queensland Repatriation Department, functioning as a central depot for voluntary contributions and co-ordinating soldier settlement. By July 1918 the latter had fallen increasingly within the province of the Soldier Settlement Branch of the Department of Public lands and, when Queensland again came under the auspices of a Federal-State agreement, the State War Council finally became superfluous.

Conservative forces in Queensland argued that with the establishment of a Repatriation Department backed by legislation, the Commonwealth had the constitutional right to intervene directly into the State's soldier settlement scheme. Their argument turned on Section 51, Subsection 31 of the Australian Constitution, under which the Commonwealth has the power to acquire "property on just terms from any State or person for any purpose in respect of which the Parliament has power to make laws". A literal interpretation of this subsection does have the potential to create a constitutional nightmare, but this call for Federal intervention was not acted upon, and nor does it

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74 Lloyd and Rees, *The Last Shilling*, pp.80-1.
75 Ibid., pp.76-8.
76 DS, 20 July 1918, p.3.
78 BC, 7 June 1918, p.6.
appear to have been repeated in Queensland—or elsewhere. Such was the complexity of soldier settlement that confusion was often in evidence during and after the passing of internal legislation in Queensland.

In February 1917 the *Discharged Soldiers’ Settlement Act* came into force and, with later amendments, it was to control the direction of Queensland’s scheme. Opposition to the legislation focused on two specific points: first, the stipulation that all land opened for soldier settlement could only be held under perpetual leasehold and, second, that grazing areas were not included in the provisions. While few critics could fully comprehend the ramifications of the enactment, it is relevant that Queensland’s scheme was examined by Federal authorities when formulating a national policy. Yet, whether it was “a much better scheme ... than has been evolved in any other State” is highly questionable, especially in hindsight. Queensland nevertheless had one important advantage denied to many of the southern States—large areas of unalienated Crown land. In July 1917, for instance, it was estimated that only about six percent of the State had been alienated, and its agricultural potential was as yet unrealised. The influential journalist, Edwin Brady, was among those who looked upon Queensland with unbounded optimism. In 1918 Brady extolled the virtues of the northern State in his monumental tome, *Australia Unlimited*. Naively arguing that “it is now known that the whole State has agricultural values, some of them among the highest in the world”, Brady was soon carried away by his own rhetoric:

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You hear it calling from the West, from the rivers of the gulf, from the Diamantina and the Barcoo, from the farm lands of the Southern Downs, from the sheep lands of the Centre, from the cattle lands of the North, over the salt-bush, over the grassy plains, over the forests and scrubs—a wonderful, exultant, anthem of boundless potentiality, incalculable riches, undeveloped resources and unlimited opportunities for the profitable investment of Labor, and Money, and Brains.84

These fallacious beliefs were widely shared within Queensland. Indeed, it was part of the motivational force behind the State government’s stubborn resistance to the attempted Commonwealth incursion. Unfortunately, the inaccuracy of these assumptions was soon made abundantly clear. During debate on the Discharged Soldiers’ Settlement Bill in February 1917, John Hunter also advised parliamentary members that a number of conditions were “observed strictly” when planning soldier settlements:

One is that the soil should be fertile, that the land shall be well watered and close to railway communication and markets, and that it shall not be infested in any shape or form with pests.85

By this time, of course, two large areas had already been opened for soldier settlement, and neither was located near markets. To be sure, the existence of a railway had been a determining factor in the selection of Beerburrum,86 but the soldier settlement at Pikedale, near Stanthorpe, was devoid of a railway connection until June 1920.87 The

84 Ibid., pp.511-2.
86 Ibid.
87 J. Kerr, “The Pikedale Tramway or Amiens Branch Railway”, Australian Railway Historical Society Bulletin [ARHSB], Vol.29, No.488 (June 1978), p.120.
land at Beerburum, however, was already known to be deficient in soil nutrients,\(^8\) and while watercourses interspersed the area, sufficient quantities of water were only procured by sinking wells to an average depth of nine metres.\(^9\) It has already been mentioned that many soldier settlers also found themselves on the front-line of the environmental war against prickly pear.

Opponents of the scheme considered the most “noxious weed” to be the stipulated land tenure—perpetual leasehold.\(^10\) At the same time they were nevertheless forced to concede that fragmentation of large estates and the nationalisation of land had contributed to Labor’s electoral accession in 1915. The grazier and conservative MLA for Murilla in southern Queensland, James Morgan, summed up his party’s frustration over these issues in September 1917:

We on this side desire that the soldier settler should be given the option of taking up the land under either freehold or leasehold tenure, according as he wishes, but the Labour party will not give them that option. If the Government would only sink that one plank of their platform, and give the soldiers the option of the freehold, then they would get a big following throughout the length and breadth of Queensland. We have pleaded for that to be done on behalf of the returned soldiers, and we plead again to-day, but we know that the Labour party, in caucus, have refused to allow anyone to have the freehold, because it is part of the platform to which they are pledged to and on which they were returned by the people of Queensland.\(^11\)

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\(^8\) A.H. Benson, Director of Fruit Culture, to Secretary, Land Settlement Committee, Lands Department, Brisbane, 4 September 1916, LAN/167 (1916-31), QSA.  
\(^10\) BC, 1 April 1919, p.6.  
Returned servicemen soon became political footballs for both major parties (Appendix 2). Labor ideology certainly precluded the government from embarking on large-scale pastoral schemes for soldier settlers, although in the Maranoa district of inland southern Queensland returned servicemen such as the novelist Frank Dalby Davison were able to engage in stock-raising on limited areas. Nor were returned servicemen prevented from balloting for grazing selections throughout the State. In such cases, however, they did not receive preference and were therefore forced to compete on equal terms with civilian applicants.\(^2\) Ironically, a number of returned servicemen received instruction “on sheep and lamb-raising, and wool” at Brisbane’s Central Technical College—at government expense.\(^3\) On the other hand, grazing required substantial capital and the government’s obstruction was therefore premised on both ideology and practicality. For the limited few, success in a pastoral ballot could also be a mixed blessing.

Formerly from Hughenden in north-western Queensland, Frank Oliver had returned from four years of military service to take up a position as a linotype operator at Katoomba in New South Wales. In 1919 he successfully competed against 182 other applicants for the Aberfoyle Homestead, comprising “23,950 acres of improved pastures” in his home district:

By winning the ballot he secures a 28 years’ lease of the selection at 2d per acre per annum. In addition he has to pay the value of improvements which were provisionally valued at £1304. In common with the other applicants he had to pay down a full year’s rent and one-fifth of the survey fee. The survey fee was £95 10s.\(^4\)

\(^2\) *BC*, 21 May 1917, p.8.
\(^3\) *BC*, 7 August 1918, p.6.
\(^4\) *DM*, 8 April 1919, p.8.
This represented a considerable outlay. Established landholders were also fortunate that Queensland did have an abundance of unalienated land. With the major exception of the area around Tolga and Kairi on North Queensland’s Atherton Tableland, and to a lesser extent Cottonvale near Stanthorpe, most resumptions from individuals occurred in the Brisbane region, particularly in the outer northern and southern suburbs. At Sunnybank, twelve kilometres south of Brisbane’s commercial heart, 120 hectares were also resumed in 1917 for a soldier residential settlement comprising more than 400 houses. This was the largest residential settlement, but there were others, including the later Clifton Estate near Tarragindi, also on Brisbane’s southside, where more than 120 houses were erected for returned servicemen.

Residential settlements, Anzac Cottages for widows, houses built for returned servicemen under Queensland’s Workers’ Dwellings Act and, after the State entered into an agreement with the Federal government, War Service Homes, all fall outside the scope of this thesis. As will later be shown, however, they certainly do have a direct bearing on an evaluation of soldier settlement. It should also be mentioned in passing that while soldier settlement has occasionally been cited as a means for preventing the congregation of returned servicemen in urban areas, the creation of large residential settlements does

97 BC, 7 January 1928, p.7.
suggest that this fear was far from universal among contemporaries.\textsuperscript{98} Apprehension was nevertheless likely to have been prevalent among landholders who faced the prospect of having their properties resumed. The terms offered by the Queensland government were anything but generous:

The price or compensation paid to the owner was open to the Minister for Lands. The alternatives were for him to buy, at his price, for cash from consolidated revenue, or for him to buy, at his price, and pay partly in cash and partly in debentures issued by the Government at par at an interest of 4.5% a year with a life of 20 years. The owner had to either accept cash, part cash/part debentures or accept full payment for his land in the form of debentures. To make it a little harder, debentures could not be cashed for five years. The Government reserved the right of paying out when it felt like it.\textsuperscript{99}

In practice, soldier settlers were to fare little better. The Federal government's acceptance of responsibility for repatriation had led, of course, to the vague agreement whereby the States would be loaned the funds made available to soldier settlers. Refusal to acquiesce in the formation of a national board did not remove Queensland's obligation to advance £500 for each participant in its own scheme. However, as the State most vulnerable to possible external aggression, economically reliant on the rural sector and vastly underpopulated even by Australian standards, Queensland was determined to attract more than just returned servicemen. In September 1917 the State Treasurer, Edward Theodore, briefly expounded his government's grand vision:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{98} M. Lake, "The Power of Anzac", in McKernan and Browne, Australia: Two Centuries of War & Peace, pp.47-8.
\end{itemize}
Let us do things in a large way. Queensland has excellent opportunities for settlement when the war is over. We want population when the war is over, and we need not be confined to settlement on the land in regard to returned soldiers. There is ample space, provided water and markets are available, to settle millions.

Notwithstanding his later assertion that all "bona fide Queenslanders and all applicants for land amongst our own returned soldiers" would receive priority, there was more than just people on Theodore’s mind. Capital was of paramount importance to Queensland’s development scheme and Britain appeared to offer the best possible source. As mentioned earlier, by accepting British migrants it was anticipated that British capital would shortly follow, with immigrants simply “pawns in a borrowing strategy.” These manoeuvres actually began in August 1915 when the Queensland government offered to make available “between 500,000 and 1,000,000 acres of land for ex-service men of the British and colonial forces”—if the Imperial government would provide finance. Understandably preoccupied with the task of sustaining manpower as the war exacted an increasingly ghastly toll, the British did not respond. Nor was any action taken in May 1916, when Premier Ryan personally repeated the offer during a visit to Britain. Other influences were nevertheless working within the mother country.

Even before Ryan arrived in London, the Royal Colonial Institute had dispatched well-known author and British imperialist, Sir Henry Rider Haggard, on a tour of the Dominions to ascertain which governments were favourable to receiving British ex-

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102 Tsokhas, “People or Money?”, p.2.
103 QDR, 1 March 1919, p.11.
servicemen once hostilities concluded. In this case, emigration was seen as a means for alleviating urban congestion within Britain and, concomitantly, strengthening the empire. Rider Haggard met with the Queensland War Council’s Land Settlement Committee (chaired by John Hunter), who reiterated the earlier proposal that Ryan was simultaneously delivering in Britain. The British author also discussed the issue with Edward Theodore who, he astutely noted, was compliant for reasons of expediency. The Queensland offer was finally accepted, but the Royal Colonial Institute did not officially represent the British government. For the time being at least, the war remained of central importance.

The following year the Queensland government initiated another strategy by sending a returned Australian officer, Major Shanahan DSO, to canvas British and Dominion military camps seeking potential settlers and extolling the virtues of Queensland’s Soldier Settlement Scheme. Printed material was also distributed among Allied troops in France. The Imperial government may have been slow to respond, but on one point Queensland never wavered: If Britain could “find the money”, Queensland would “find the land”. Although one was thinking nationally and the other regionally, this provided one of the few common denominators in the policies of Hughes and Ryan. Nor were Queensland’s efforts entirely in vain. The immediate post-war period did see an influx of

104 Ibid.
106 QDR, 1 March 1919, p.12.
109 QDR, 1 March 1919, p.12.
British and Dominion ex-servicemen settling in the State.\textsuperscript{110} It was only later, however, that the expected British capital began to flow into Queensland in any quantity.\textsuperscript{111}

Acceptance into Queensland’s scheme also meant being “settled in every sense of the word”.\textsuperscript{112} Having received a qualification certificate from the Land Settlement Committee of the War Council, or from a Land Commissioner, applicants balloted for available selections and, if successful, were expected to pay one year’s rent. This could either be paid in full at the time of occupation, or by ten equal instalments after taking up residence, in which case interest was added at the rate of four percent per annum.\textsuperscript{113} They were also expected to remain on the selection for a minimum period of five years, exceptions only being made in extreme cases of “illness, accident, or misfortune”.\textsuperscript{114} From five to ten years the lease could only be transferred to another returned serviceman. After ten years the soldier settler was finally free to transfer the lease to any other applicant. The Queensland legislation was extended so that all honourably discharged Australian, British, Dominion and Allied ex-servicemen could ostensibly apply for land.\textsuperscript{115} There is no evidence that any Japanese war veterans applied, and there was absolutely no chance of them being successful. The ‘White Australia Policy’ became the determinant force when screening those from a non-British background and even Belgians fell foul of this measure.

\textsuperscript{110} Bernays, \textit{Queensland Politics During Sixty Years}, p.350.
\textsuperscript{113} Memorandum, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 13 January 1919, LAN/AK120, Batch 709, Part 1 (1919-1924), QSA.
\textsuperscript{114} “Soldier Settlement—Leaflet H”, \textit{QAJ}, Vol.8, Pt.1 (July 1917), p.3.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., p.2.
Ignoring the fact that France was far more important militarily, it was often cited that Britain, and by extension Australia, declared war in August 1914 to protect the neutrality of "poor little Belgium". Those sentiments were certainly not apparent in December 1917 when a Belgian ex-soldier, Constant Van Camp, applied for a soldier settlement holding on the Atherton Tableland under the terms of the Discharged Soldiers’ Settlement Act. Thirty-three years of age, Van Camp had received an honourable discharge after losing an eye and being awarded an unspecified military decoration. Queensland authorities were appalled, and Van Camp was subjected to an internal application of the 'dictation test'. Yet, after having satisfied the Land Commissioner, the latter’s Brisbane superiors decided that he was still ineligible. To this effect, the Under Secretary for Public Lands advised the Land Commissioner at Atherton that if Van Camp was the only applicant for the holding he sought, it was to be immediately withdrawn from selection. Van Camp was the sole applicant and there is no evidence that he ever acquired a soldier settlement holding in Queensland. Nor was any explanation forthcoming to explain this extraordinary reaction.

Arguably, one positive aspect of Queensland’s Discharged Soldiers’ Settlement Act is that it was not gender-specific. Widows and dependants of deceased servicemen, including mothers and sisters, were entitled to ballot for, and select, soldier settlement

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117 Affidavit, M. Watteeuw, Consul for Belgium, Sydney, 22 October 1917, LAN/AE14, Lands Open No.45, “Atherton”, Part 1, QSA; Land Agent, Atherton, to Under Secretary, Department of Lands, Brisbane, 14 December 1917, Ibid.

118 “Certificate that Alien is able to Read and Write from Dictation", 2 January 1918, Ibid.

119 Telegram, Under Secretary, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, to Land Commissioner, Atherton, 2 January 1918, Ibid.
holdings.¹²¹ No examples of women actually selecting soldier settlement holdings were uncovered during research for this thesis, and given the gravity of suffering which occurred during the life of the scheme, it was at best a dubious privilege. Holdings were based on the ‘home-maintenance’ principle, an elusive term as the area set apart was largely dependent on the type of rural activity being undertaken. In 1929 Justice Pike defined it thus:

> [A]n area as would, under average seasons and circumstances, return [the soldier settler] from his labour thereon an amount sufficient to meet his commitments to the Crown, and also to maintain himself and his family.¹²²

As Pike found, the area allotted in all too many cases was insufficient to provide even a frugal living. Yet the Rural Reconstruction Commission, established in 1944 for the express purpose of investigating a more efficient means of settling returned servicemen on the land after the Second World War, highlighted lack of business acumen as a significant contributory factor in the failure of post-World War One soldier settlement:

One outstanding impression has been gleaned from witnesses who have discussed soldier settlement with the Commission, namely, their agreement that many of the men, though skilful farm workers, were poor managers. Such settlers had no idea of budgeting income and expenditure, or of managing a farm as a business.¹²³

¹²⁰ Telegram, Land Agent, Atherton, to Under Secretary, Lands Department, Brisbane, 7 January 1918, Ibid.
Even allowing for the qualification that rural wages “have normally been low, housing often of a very poor standard and opportunities for bringing up a family negligible”, this explanation is too dismissive of the actual financial situation into which post-World War One soldier settlers were thrown. Initially advanced £500, this entire amount could only be spent on improvements (including a dwelling where provided), stock and equipment on a pound for pound basis. In a bid to reduce expenditure, many soldier settlers cleared their own holdings of natural growth; on group settlements, others formed co-operative gangs for the same purpose. Importantly, the ‘advance’ was paid in instalments at the total discretion of the valuer, either a bank official or the settlement supervisor. As one disgusted soldier settler commented:

They are reckless enough to allow in the neighbourhood of 10s per chain for fencing, when the legitimate value of same under existing circumstances is anything from 18s to 22s 6d. Their estimate of clearing virgin forest and scrub is about 30s per acre, and I can point out some soldiers’ country that cannot be cleared under £4 per acre. Thus, clearing and fencing one acre (as an example) costs the State Bank, say, £2, whereas it costs the Digger who is privileged under the scheme to do it £5 ... The soldier does £5 worth of work, and is paid £2.

The conservative parliamentarian and member for Drayton on the Darling Downs, William Bebbington, referred to soldier settlement in Queensland as “merely a scheme for making money out of the returned soldiers”, but it was much more than that.

124 Ibid.
Soldier settlers were expected to extend and develop agricultural land at minimal cost to the government. It has also been estimated that only thirteen percent of returned servicemen had any personal savings.\(^\text{129}\) Apart from deferred pay and, after 1920 a war gratuity, the majority of soldier settlers were therefore largely dependent on either the sustenance allowance advanced through the State War Council from the Federal government, or a Commonwealth pension. The basic rate of sustenance for a single man was one pound per week. This increased to a maximum of £3/2 according to marital status and the number of dependants, and was only provided for a period of six months, after which time a new application was required.\(^\text{130}\) By 1920 approximately one-third of all Australian returned servicemen were in receipt of a pension,\(^\text{131}\) but if they claimed sustenance their pension was reduced proportionately.\(^\text{132}\) Importantly, income from either source was well below the average weekly wage of £4/9/10 in 1920.\(^\text{133}\) On the other hand, repayment terms for their initial loan were theoretically quite liberal, and John Hunter was quick to point out the advantages offered to soldier settlers in comparison with their civilian counterparts:

The advantage in favour of the soldier as against the ordinary settler is that the soldier obtains his money for a term of 40 years, the rate of interest charged being 3½ per cent. the first year, 4 per cent. the second year, 4½ per cent. the third year, and 5 per cent. the fourth year. The ordinary settler has to repay his advance in 25 years, and has to pay 5 per cent. from the date of loan.\(^\text{134}\)

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\(^{130}\) *DM*, 16 June 1919, p.7.

\(^{131}\) Lines, *Taming the Great South Land*, p.177

\(^{132}\) *BC*, 8 January 1919, p.7.


\(^{134}\) *BC*, 17 July 1917, p.6.
The advance of £500 was made available by the Queensland Government Savings Bank, the same financial institution that offered "ordinary settlers" up to £1200 for similar purposes.\textsuperscript{135} While Hunter rightly contended that repayment terms for civilians were tougher, the disparity in these amounts was seized on by political opponents who failed to grasp the complexity of the financial arrangements. In fact, soldier settlers could apply for an additional loan of £700, thus bringing their borrowing capacity up to the equal amount of £1200. It was also argued that perpetual leasehold provided no security to enable the soldier settler to acquire the additional funding.\textsuperscript{136} This was again incorrect. Under the \textit{Queensland Government Savings Bank Act} of 1916 many forms of land tenure—including perpetual leasehold—became acceptable security for borrowing.\textsuperscript{137} Nevertheless, the conditions of the second loan for soldier settlers were harsher, suggesting that they were intended to discourage an enlarged debt:

Advances at the rate of 15s. in the £1, not exceeding £700, can also be obtained for the purpose of purchasing stock, machinery, implements, &c., and also for unspecified purposes. Such advances, however, must be repaid by annual instalments within twenty-five years, with 5 per cent. interest added.\textsuperscript{138}

Unless concealed within "unspecified purposes", neither loan made any provision for living expenses while the farm reached a productive stage. With fruit orchards, this could be anything up to five years.\textsuperscript{139} Sustenance, with or without a reduced pension, and cash

\textsuperscript{139} \textit{BC}, 8 September 1921, p.8.
vegetable crops were frequently the only things standing between soldier settler families and outright penury. Sudden misfortune in the form of illness, accident or detrimental environmental factors, could easily eliminate this barest of safety margins. At the same time, soldier settlers were subjected to a high level of surveillance from government officials that many found intolerable:

Once you have borrowed even £20 from this department [Agricultural Loan Department of the Queensland Government Savings Bank], your liberty of action is gone, until you have scraped together the wherewithal to repay them. They claim the right to grant, or refuse, as they think fit, permission to the selector to leave his home; they decide what is to be done towards keeping up the improvements on which the loan has been granted ... A man leaves home to earn the necessary cash, and is at once requested to inform the department why he left, without permission, how long he will be away, and what arrangements are made for caring for his selection in his absence. 

The government's entry into the property market also brought in its wake inflated land values and increased prices for agricultural machinery, timber, wire netting—indeed, virtually every commodity required by soldier settlers, further depreciating their loan money. This was soon realised, and the States agitated for an increase of the initial loan to £625 per settler in May 1918. The Federal government tentatively agreed, but no formal compact was made. The issue was raised again at yet another conference between State and Federal representatives in October-November 1918. At this stage the war was clearly won—the Armistice being signed on 11 November—and in view of the likely early return of large numbers of troops, Senator Millen urged the States to

140 BC, 3 November 1922, p.4.
141 DM, 2 April 1919, p.11.
142 Garton, The Cost of War, p.127.
accelerate their soldier settlement schemes. Millen advocated an extension of pig-raising and the development of new rural industries requiring “smaller areas and less capital”.\textsuperscript{144} It was an ill-conceived gesture, but the necessity for haste did allow the States to manoeuvre for their own advantage.

Queensland’s new Minister for Public Lands, John (‘Harry’) Coyne, argued that if railways could be built from Commonwealth loans the State could easily settle 19,000 returned servicemen.\textsuperscript{145} Millen agreed that money advanced to the States could be used to effect improvements prior to the allocation of holdings, though it was also expected that one-third of the total would be repaid in ten years, and the balance within twenty.\textsuperscript{146} It was further agreed that each State should settle a specific number of returned servicemen on the land and, notwithstanding Queensland’s characteristic optimism, the quota set for the northern State was a modest 2,367.\textsuperscript{147} Coinciding with renewed patriotic euphoria unleashed by defeat of the Central Powers, the seeds sown at this conference were to bear fruit when State and Federal representatives met again in January 1919. In the absence of Prime Minister Hughes, the Commonwealth suffered a tactical defeat in regard to soldier settlement.

The need for haste proved the Commonwealth’s undoing, with Millen insisting that soldier settlement had to be completed within eighteen months.\textsuperscript{148} With a formal acceptance that £625 would be advanced to each soldier settler, the States began their

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{143} Pryor, “The Origins of Australia’s Repatriation Policy”, p.209.
\item \textsuperscript{144} DM, 2 November 1918, p.7.
\item \textsuperscript{145} DS, 20 November 1918, p.5.
\item \textsuperscript{146} DM, 2 November 1918, p.7.
\end{itemize}
push, and it was Edward Theodore from Queensland who led the attack. Theodore reiterated the long-standing argument that public works and soldier settlement were inextricably entwined. The States were also unanimous that soldier settlement, as an adjunct to existing land policies, should remain entirely in their hands. Until now it had been accepted that it was the responsibility of the States to repay the principal of all loans advanced by the Commonwealth and, in this context, the cost of anticipated failures would be borne solely by the State administrations. To compensate for this, Millen agreed to a demand that the Commonwealth should pay a subsidy of £27,500 on every one million pounds advanced per annum over the first five years. The Commonwealth was steadily weakening.

While New South Wales and Victoria were adamant that they could finance their own public works programs, the other States advanced proposals which required £25,260,000 in Commonwealth funding. Perhaps not surprisingly, Queensland, who had thus far received no advances from the Federal government, claimed the greatest share—£14,450,000. After further debate, Millen suggested that the Commonwealth could finance the States to the amount of £28,183,699, provided the States settled 20,885 returned servicemen. In Queensland’s case, this equated to £912 per soldier settler, but this figure was lower than the per capita cost for all other States. New South Wales, for instance, required £2,106 per settler. From the perspective of the Commonwealth, the

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147 DS, 20 November 1918, p.5.
150 Ibid., p.213.
151 Ibid.
152 Ibid., p.215.
figures were beginning to spiral disastrously. Millen finally agreed to provide £1,000 for every soldier settler in the Commonwealth; of this amount, £625 was to be advanced to the settler, while the States received £375 per capita towards the cost of resumptions and public works. However, as applications for land increased over the ensuing years the Commonwealth’s liability rose accordingly. By June 1935 more than £35,000,000 had been advanced for soldier settlement, a far cry from the original estimate of twenty million. There was one final victory for the States. In February 1919 the Acting Prime Minister, William Watt, advised the State Premiers that “the States are to repay the loans to the Commonwealth as and when the settlers repay their advances to the States”. The burden of failure was thus deflected back to the Federal government, and with these important concessions won the pattern for soldier settlement was set firmly in place.

Conflict between the two levels of government was not entirely removed, however, and both were also confronted by a third force. In 1916 a number of returned servicemen’s associations combined to form the RSSILA (later RSL), an organisation which continued to grow in strength as it campaigned vigorously for repatriation. This aspiration was defeated by the machinations of Hughes and Millen; in exchange for a pledge that the RSSILA would support conservative policies the organisation was granted official recognition and financial assistance. Representatives of the RSSILA worked tirelessly on behalf of soldier settlers, but it is difficult to evaluate just how effective they were in

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153 Ibid., p.216.
154 Scott, *Australia During the War*, p.846.
155 W.A. Watt, Acting Prime Minister, Melbourne, to The Premier of Queensland, Brisbane, 14 February 1919, In-letter 19/354, LAN/167 (1916-31), QSA.
real terms. Many of the concessions gained met with little opposition, and returned servicemen obviously meant votes for all parties, irrespective of their political persuasion. In February 1919, the conservative Pastoral Review questioned whether soldier settlement itself was merely an expedient political measure:

> Are the men to be put on the land in order to get rid of them and keep them quiet for a few years, until the "birds of passage," as the Acting Prime Minister classed politicians, have passed on, or is it the sincere intention of the authorities that the door of opportunity shall be open to them to make, what is to the old and the new socialist of Australia a most despised thing, "profits"?

There can be little doubt that initially there was a genuine desire to provide some tangible reward for Australia's returned servicemen (little being said in regard to Australian nurses). At the same time, the urban environment was seen as a place of decadence and there were some real fears of idle men in congested cities. Civil disturbances involving returned servicemen had been escalating since 1915, reaching their peak with the anti-Bolshevik riots of 1919. Coupled with rising prices, unemployment, industrial strife, and the deadly impact of Spanish Influenza, returning troops were indeed another potentially lethal ingredient in the 1919 cocktail that produced "the strangest, most violent year the Commonwealth had ever known".

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159 Pastoral Review (Melbourne), 15 February 1919, p.127.
Yet the idea of soldier settlement arose early and from quite different concerns. Defence of an under-populated ‘White Australia’ was one aspect, but whether it really was the “proper attitude” as argued by Gough is debatable.\textsuperscript{162} The tenacity with which the States—notably Queensland—retained control of their individual schemes point to an economic imperative. With the Commonwealth providing financial assistance, soldier settlement became the vehicle through which agricultural development could be accelerated.\textsuperscript{163} It was also clearly understood that casualties would result, as “Mother Nature has to be subdued before she will yield up her bountiful gifts”.\textsuperscript{164} From ‘cannon fodder’ on the Western Front, many soldier settlers were to be unwittingly sacrificed on the altar of environmental domination, though it was hoped that success would outweigh the cost of failure.\textsuperscript{165} In December 1918, Brisbane’s \textit{Daily Mail} newspaper summed it up thus:

\begin{quote}
It is as yet too early to judge the success of the State scheme, largely because there is something of an experimental nature in placing men who have been engaged in the excitement of war in an environment where there is very little excitement and a great deal of hard work.\textsuperscript{166}
\end{quote}

It was an experiment, with returned servicemen expected to bolster the flagging fortunes of closer settlement. Unfortunately, by April 1919 it was already apparent that the casualties might well be excessive, with numbers of soldier settlers forfeiting their

\textsuperscript{164} \textit{DM}, 11 December 1918, p.7.
\textsuperscript{165} \textit{BC}, 25 November 1916, p.16.
\textsuperscript{166} \textit{DM}, 11 December 1918, p.7.
holdings. To understand the dynamics at work it is necessary to look back to 1916 and a small railway siding north of Brisbane. Beerburrum was the first, and perhaps the most important, soldier settlement in the State. It also exhibited many of the worst characteristics of the entire scheme.

\[167 \text{DM, 24 April 1919, p.6.} \]
CHAPTER 3:

‘PROMISES AND PINEAPPLES’: THE GENESIS OF SOLDIER SETTLEMENT AT BEERBURRUM AND PIKEDALE

The old home snug amidst the pines,
The trickling creek that twists and twines
Round tall gum roots and undermines,
Is all ablaze with wattle.¹

Queensland’s Under Secretary for Public Lands, W. Gordon Graham, was the first to draw his government’s attention to the availability of a large tract of land, centred around Beerburrum railway siding north of Brisbane, as a potential area for soldier settlement.² Comprising 20,640 hectares of mostly dry sclerophyll forest and wallum heathland, it had been leased to the Federal government in 1910 as a military reserve “for a term of thirty years at a peppercorn rental”.³ Despite this agreement, the Queensland government offered to sell 17,170 hectares outright three years later, but Commonwealth authorities declined, accepting instead “an informal tenure of it at a nominal annual rent of £1, subject to the right of resumption by the State if required for State purposes”.⁴ It had not been required and was therefore available for soldier settlement. The area finally opened for that purpose was considerable, stretching from Glass House Mountains in the north, southwards to Elimbah, and eastwards to Pumicestone Passage, separating Bribie Island

³ William Hughes, Acting Prime Minister, Melbourne, to Premier of Queensland, Brisbane, 17 October 1910, PRE/A465, QSA; Memorandum, Department of Justice, Brisbane, 31 January 1911, Ibid.
⁴ Prime Minister, Melbourne, to Premier of Queensland, Brisbane, 26 June 1913, Ibid.
from the mainland (Appendix 3). Throughout the period of soldier settlement the township of Beerburrum remained the nucleus.

In 1916 Stuart Cameron, of the Department of Public Lands, and Joseph Rose, an experienced pineapple farmer from Woombye, just to the north, who had offered his services to the Queensland government, collected soil samples throughout the district. Perhaps not surprisingly, pineapples were advocated as being the ideal crop for the settlement. The “expert examination” of the soils, however, was illusory and contributed in no small measure to ultimate failure.

At that time the suitability of soil for crops was determined by two methods: observation of soil colour and an analysis of acid content. While suitable dark loams and red volcanic soils certainly do exist in the locality, the evidence suggests that the samples may have been taken selectively:

In all places tested and where samples were taken the soil was of a loamy and sandy nature to a good depth and easily dug with a spade to a depth of eighteen inches. It would be very easy to work and while naturally well drained should retain moisture sufficiently and would give quick results with fertilisers.

Furthermore:

5 A.H. Benson, Director of Fruit Culture, to Secretary, Land Settlement Committee, Lands Department, Brisbane, 4 September 1916, LAN/167 (1916-31), QSA; Nicklin, “‘Diggers’ Securely Entrenched in Pineapple Gardens—Part 1”, p.9.
6 BC, 7 November 1916, p.6.
8 C.T.O. Shepherd, Supervisor of Soldier Settlements, to Minister for Public Lands, Brisbane, 25 August 1924, LAN/167 (1916-31), QSA.
You will note from Mr. Brunnicli's remarks that the soils are all very similar in their character and chemical constituents, that they are deficient in organic matter and plant food, but that they are in an excellent mechanical condition for the growth of citrus fruits, pineapples, and vegetables, and will respond readily to the application of suitable manures.

Yet, in October 1919, Joseph Rose emphatically stated that it was "a well-known fact that virgin land with a rich supply of humus is of more value to the pine plant than all the artificial means that the growers can bring to their aid". By then Rose was Comptroller of Soldier Settlements throughout Queensland and the problems emerging at Beerburrum were expected to be dealt with locally. By contrast, Stuart Cameron expressed concern that the area was heavily timbered and would thus present a formidable obstacle to closer settlement. His assessment proved correct, but it was the presence of the North Coast Railway, which bisected the area, that ensured the opening of the land for soldier settlement.

Staff Surveyor J.E. Muntz was given the task of dividing the former military reserve into soldier settlement holdings, varying in area from eight to sixteen hectares. In an attempt to provide each of these with an equitable amount of fertile land Muntz departed from the traditional checkerboard surveying pattern. Unsuitable heathland was excluded wherever

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8 "Report of Stuart Cameron", Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 15 July 1916, Ibid.
9 A.H. Benson, Director of Fruit Culture, to Secretary, Land Settlement Committee, Lands Department, Brisbane, 4 September 1916, Ibid.
12 "Report of Stuart Cameron", Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 15 July 1916, LAN/167 (1916-31), QSA.
possible, but even here future gains were envisaged through the development of apiary.\textsuperscript{15} The editor of the \textit{Brisbane Courier}, which newspaper remained an ardent opponent of the entire scheme, took this opportunity to point out that “tea-tree honey is inferior and realises low prices”.\textsuperscript{16} Diminishing returns for \textit{all} produce would shortly begin to plague the incoming settlers. It is also clear that the government imposed economic restraints from the very outset.

In September 1916 a training farm was established at Beerburrum under the supervision of Joseph Rose. In selecting equipment, including tree winches and timber jacks for clearing, Rose assured his Brisbane superiors that the entire cost would not exceed £100. Regarding accommodation for early trainees, he continued:

\begin{quote}
We consider that light structures made of round bush timber, covered with iron and having canvas walls will be most suitable as when these huts are no longer required the iron can be used elsewhere ... They should be erected for a cost of about £15 each for material and if supplied with a 1000 gallon tank this would mean an extra £6, but the tanks will be required for the permanent houses on each holding, so that this expenditure like the cost of the iron will not be lost.\textsuperscript{17}
\end{quote}

Operations commenced with nine invalid servicemen, “some of whom had just finished 12 months in hospital”.\textsuperscript{18} During the same month Queensland’s Minister for Public Lands, John Hunter, was questioned on the advisability of permitting amputees to engage in agricultural activities on the Beerburrum settlement. Hunter replied “that he hardly

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{15} \textit{BC}, 7 November 1916, p.6.  \\
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.  \\
\textsuperscript{17} Joseph Rose and A.H. Benson to Secretary, Land Settlement Committee, Lands Department, Brisbane, 1 August 1916, LAN/167 (1916-31), QSA.  \\
\end{flushleft}
thought that men who had lost a leg would find it possible to undertake the working of one of these farms". Yet in August 1920, when the Prince of Wales paused briefly at Beerburrum during his Australian tour, "quite a number of soldiers, each with a wooden leg, hobbled past". This contradiction highlighted one of the gross absurdities of soldier settlement.

Men considered unfit for military service were believed to be quite capable of carrying out the arduous tasks of clearing and farming the land. As time transpired, many soldier settler families were only saved from complete destitution by the meagre resources furnished by an invalid pension. At times, even this pittance was not enough. For others the legacy of war service, either through injury or sickness, did not become evident until years afterwards, aggravated in many cases by the desperate physical exertion necessary to make ends meet. Not infrequently it ended in death. Two of the still-identifiable graves in Beerburrum cemetery reveal that William Wells died at age thirty-three; John Smith was merely twenty-four. They were not only victims of the terrible global holocaust, but also of the grim struggle to succeed in its aftermath.

Returned servicemen from many parts of the British Empire were to try their fortunes at Beerburrum, reinforcing that soldier settlement was one component of the broader immigration policy, albeit, specifically directed towards the reception of British capital. It is also clear that many of those who took up selections had absolutely no experience in

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19 BC, 19 September 1916, p.5.
20 WK, 6 August 1920, p.17.
21 Lake, The Limits of Hope, pp.59 and 134.
tropical agriculture—or farming in any form—and almost invariably failed. Ineptitude, however, was not the sole preserve of deluded ex-servicemen. The concept of training farms, such as that established on 259 hectares at Beerburum, had already been shown as virtually useless in South Africa, where training on approved private farms became the less expensive alternative. Comments made in September 1921 by Queensland’s Director of Fruit Culture, Albert Benson, further suggest that not only the State training farm at Beerburum, but also the soldier settler holdings, were little more than agricultural research ventures for the government:

Experiments that have been carried out at Beerburum, both on the State farm and on soldiers’ holdings have shown conclusively that the majority of commercial fertilisers contain far too great a proportion of phosphoric acid in comparison with their potash and nitrogen contents, and, further, that the application of phosphoric acid in the form of superphosphates or water soluble phosphoric acid is distinctly injurious to the pineapple plant and is the cause of ‘spiking’, viz, the production of narrow leaves indicating the weakened vitality of the plant.

Even worse was the fact that new pineapple farms were being established when fresh fruit markets were known to be saturated:

During the decade 1910-20 the population of Queensland had risen by 19% and that of Australia by 15%, but fruit acreage had risen by approximately 60% and production by nearly 300% at both state and national levels. The increase in production so far outstripped population growth that the problems of a fluctuating, often gluttoned

22 Ibid., p.60.
market were frequently attributed to this disproportionate expansion in production.\textsuperscript{26}

Ignoring the economic reality, the Queensland government remained optimistic. On 6 November 1916 an official party, including Governor and Lady Goold-Adams and the Premier, T.J. Ryan, travelled to the settlement and commented favourably on developments. By then, 4,695 hectares had been sub-divided into 320 holdings and Lady Goold-Adams drew the first ballot:

Mr. Monteith then opened the Land Court ... Ernest Bridges secured lot 489, Robert H. Searle 416, A. Stevens 458, A.J. Alcock 460, J.S. Margill 464, R.D. Robertson 459, J.R. Munro 462, E.B. Newman 463, and T. O’Malley 461. The next drawing for nine portions will take place in three weeks.\textsuperscript{27}

These men had obviously been invalided back to Australia, and it was ill-health that forced Robertson to surrender his selection in March 1918.\textsuperscript{28} Others persevered for many years despite their ailments and an increasing disillusionment with perpetual leasehold. Indeed, in February 1917 nineteen Beerburrum soldier settlers protested over the conditions of this land tenure; at the time there were only twenty-one on the settlement.\textsuperscript{29} Commenting on the official visit in November 1916, the \textit{Brisbane Courier} launched its own scathing indictment:

\textsuperscript{27} \textit{BC}, 7 November 1916, p.6.
\textsuperscript{28} DS, 2 March 1918, p.4.
\textsuperscript{29} \textit{BC}, 9 February 1917, p.6.
A good deal has been heard of what Australia will do for her returned soldiers, and particularly of what the Queensland Government was going to do. Yesterday the first stage of fulfilment was reached—disappointing because instead of providing the returned heroes with a true home—the freehold of the land promised to them—a few of them were given perpetual leases, the rentals of which are subject to reappraisement, and thus the land will never be theirs in the true sense of the word.  

It was also the beginning of liabilities that in many cases ultimately led to financial disaster. Even the cost of clearing three acres (1.2 hectares) on each selection prior to occupation was deducted from the settler’s advance. While the entire loan was of course spread over forty years, repayment was made to sound all too easy:

Approximate payments and receipts concerning “William Digger”, who has his five acres of pines, his house and other improvements, and has drawn (say) £500 on his 40-acre section, which is valued at £1 per acre, will be as follows:- Interest on the amount advanced, first year, £17 10s; second, £20; and third, £25. In the fourth year, rent, survey fee instalment, and shire rates will probably increase the total to £27 12s. This amount will continue until the eighth year, when it will be increased to about £34, payable in half-yearly instalments.  

The spiralling debt is readily apparent. “William Digger’s” crop was not productive until the second year and economic viability largely depended on both a stable price being maintained for produce, and the area under cultivation being steadily enlarged. In 1920, Beerburrum growers received six shillings for every case of pineapples forwarded to the State Cannery in Brisbane. Two years later the price fell to four shillings per case,

30 BC, 7 November 1916, p.6.
32 Ibid.
including a government subsidy of one shilling. Moreover, it was only paid for large fruit of pristine quality.\textsuperscript{33}

As well, clearing by contractors at twenty-five pounds per acre at Beerburrum eliminated a substantial portion of the settler’s advance, and in February 1917 the contractors attempted to have that price increased to thirty-five pounds per acre.\textsuperscript{34} As many soldier settlers were physically incapable of clearing their own holdings, some worked cooperatively, though on numerous occasions clearing also became a family undertaking. It was here—no less than elsewhere—that the wives of married settlers played a pivotal role. Apart from the drudgery of domestic duties and the bearing and raising of children, wives often worked alongside their husbands.\textsuperscript{35} The Scottish war bride of the Beerburrum soldier settler, Peter Ramm, later recalled:

\begin{quote}
Days and weeks went on with lots of hard work for everybody, and, for young men who had never done any clearing before, they were to be admired. The trees were tall iron bark, gum or tea trees and had to be cut down, roots dug up and fences to be erected. The timber was cut with a cross cut saw and I didn’t like them. In fact a lot of arguments went on. I was pushing when I should have been pulling. The tree-puller was interesting to me, I loved swinging the handle till the roots creaked and cracked the ground and Peter would call ‘right’. He would go behind a tree and I another, and down would come this great tree with a thump and branches flying everywhere. When Peter was fencing I would take his smoko to him, the baby on one arm and the billy in the other.\textsuperscript{36}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{33} Memorandum, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 10 August 1921, LAN/167 (1916-31), QSA; \textit{BC}, 9 March 1922, p.7.
\textsuperscript{34} \textit{BC}, 10 February 1917, p.7.
\textsuperscript{35} Lake, \textit{The Limits of Hope}, p.184.
\textsuperscript{36} Hopkins, \textit{The Beerburrum Story}, p.33.
Many other British war brides found homes with their husbands at Beerburrum, and the trauma of a changed lifestyle was exacerbated by terrible loneliness. This neglected aspect of soldier settlement was nevertheless clearly recognised in May 1919:

The change to many of the women is very pronounced. A case in point may be cited. One of the homes is situated directly opposite to a little bush cemetery. A jocular query as to whether the lady of the house was not frightened during those witching hours of night when churchyards and bush cemeteries are alleged to yawn brought forth the reply: ‘I am not afraid of ghosts but it is so lonely here. Before coming to Australia I went to business every day in London.’ From business daily in the hub of the Empire to a little bush home in Australia, about two miles from her nearest neighbours, is decidedly a change [emphasis added].

In May 1918 there were approximately forty-five soldier settlers at Beerburrum, perhaps seventy-five percent of whom were married. The population had almost doubled within twelve months, and such was the anticipated rate of increase that in January 1917 it had been decided to erect both a State general store and a butcher shop to cater for the settlers’ needs. Here, as elsewhere, expenditure was minimised. Along with an adjoining stable the estimated cost of the State store with internal lining was £473/5/3; without lining the cost was reduced to £455/7/9, and it was this figure which was accepted. The building was completed in June 1917.

37 Ibid., pp.32-3 and 35.
39 DS, 10 May 1918, p.6.
40 DS, 2 March 1918, p.9.
41 BC, 29 January 1917, p.6.
42 Memorandum, Department of Public Works, Brisbane, 3 March 1917, TR1158/4, Box 392, Batch E279, “Soldier Settlement Beerburrum”, QSA.
The stable is of interest as there was a chronic shortage of horses on the Beerburrum soldier settlement, though this was partly addressed during 1918 with a number of donations from the public, including the imported Clydesdale, ‘High McKay’. For those soldier settlers who were fortunate to have sufficient capital to purchase a horse, expenses continued. Due to the lack of natural fodder it was estimated in 1925 that the annual cost of feeding a single horse on the Beerburrum settlement was around twenty-six pounds. Dairy cattle, and therefore fresh milk, was another scarce commodity:

Very few cows are to be seen on these farms, indeed most of the settlers have to depend on the supply of condensed milk. The feeding of the cows would be an expensive item, as the land will not grow corn or lucerne, and the farms are too small to permit of a portion being fenced off for grass paddocks and leave a sufficient area for the staple crop, the pineapple.

Conversely, processed bovine supplied by the State butcher at Beerburrum was reputedly twopence per pound cheaper than frozen beef in Brisbane. There was, however, one drawback: “You cannot obtain mutton or pork there—always beef”. Repetition was a common element for those involved in agricultural pursuits, and pineapple farming was no exception.

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43 Honorary Secretary, Land Settlement Committee (Queensland War Council), to Under Secretary, Department of Public Works, Brisbane, 30 June 1917, *Ibid.*
45 *DS*, 21 February 1918, p.6; *BC*, 22 February 1918, p.7; *BC*, 10 April 1918, p.7; *BC*, 4 September 1918, p.9.
46 Land Commissioner Salisbury to Secretary for Public Lands, Brisbane, 17 June 1925, LAN/167 (1916-31), QSA.
This commenced after the arduous task of clearing, which included the removal of large stumps by detonating gelignite. The roots were then grubbed out and the accompanying hole back-filled by shovel, with the stumps being stacked and burnt.\textsuperscript{49} A shortage of gelignite existed on the Beerburrum settlement in early 1920,\textsuperscript{50} but “ex-digger Ryan” managed to procure a supply by the following August with truly devastating results. Formerly from Toowoomba on the Darling Downs, Ryan lost his eyesight and right hand in a blasting accident.\textsuperscript{51} In conjunction with the \textit{Brisbane Courier}, the Soldiers’ Fathers’ Association launched a public appeal for Ryan, and when it finally closed in November 1920 donations totalled £279/5/3—a substantial sum, but perhaps small comfort for what the “ex-digger” still had to endure.\textsuperscript{52}

Having cleared an area for cultivation, the ground was normally prepared with a single mouldboard plough, hence the dependence on equine power.\textsuperscript{53} It did not stop there. Harvesting pineapples has remained a labour-intensive occupation, but during the era of soldier settlement fruit was gathered into cane baskets and the contents emptied at the ends of the planted rows. From there they were loaded onto a horse-drawn slide and conveyed to the packing shed, with the slide also being used to convey the final product to the railway.\textsuperscript{54} Very few motor vehicles were to be found around Beerburrum in the 1920s,\textsuperscript{55} indicative of the soldier settlers’ less than affluent circumstances.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{49} S. Clayton, \textit{50 Years of Pineapples: Through the Eyes of Sylvia Clayton} (Kinka Beach, Qld: Capricorn Coast Communications, 1997), p.8.
\item \textsuperscript{50} \textit{BC}, 17 February 1920, p.7.
\item \textsuperscript{51} \textit{BC}, 13 August 1920, p.6.
\item \textsuperscript{52} \textit{BC}, 3 November 1920, p.6.
\item \textsuperscript{53} Rose, “Pineapple-Growing”, p.178.
\item \textsuperscript{54} Nicklin, “‘Diggers’ Securely Entrenched in Pineapple Gardens—Part 1”, p.8; Clayton, \textit{50 Years of Pineapples}, p.7.
\item \textsuperscript{55} Hopkins, \textit{The Beerburrum Story}, p.32.
\end{itemize}
For rapid growth pineapple suckers, rather than tops, were usually planted. The most
favoured variety of pineapple grown at Beerburrum was the Smooth Cayenne, though
the larger Ripley Queens were grown successfully on the western side of the settlement,
notwithstanding their susceptibility to a plethora of diseases. Supplies of suckers came
from long-established farms in the Woombye district near Nambour, but whereas surplus
stock had previously been burnt, the demand created by the Beerburrum soldier settlers
led to profiteering in late 1919. Depending on quality, the price paid for suckers varied
from £2/5 to £2/10 per thousand; in October 1919 the Woombye growers demanded a
thirty-three percent increase. With the government refusing to acquiesce, planting
operations at Beerburrum ground to a complete halt.

An idea mooted the previous June that an “experiment” should be made at Beerburrum
into peanut cultivation now took effect, with the soldier settlers being advised to
enclose just under a hectare of their selections with a paling fence for growing this
ground nut. Apart from the local administration being unable to provide any technical
assistance for growing the crop, settlers queried how they were to subsist in the interim.
The government held firm until February 1920 before capitulating to the Woombye

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56 Land Commissioner Salisbury to Secretary for Public Lands, Brisbane, 17 June 1925, LAN/167 (1916-31), QSA.
58 BC, 7 October 1919, p.9.
59 BC, 8 October 1919, p.4; DM, 23 December 1919, p.6.
60 BC, 7 June 1919, p.12.
growers, with the extra cost expected to be borne by the Beerburrum soldier settlers. Pineapples remained the principal crop.

There were two methods for planting pineapples. Normally a single row was prepared, with suckers being placed in a shallow furrow from thirty to sixty centimetres apart. Slightly under three metres separated each row. An alternative method was the double row, where suckers were planted sixty centimetres apart in a single row but only half a metre separated a paralleling second row. In this case, the beds were just under three metres apart but, importantly, both methods allowed the intermediate space to be utilised for the cultivation of fast-growing cash crops, such as papaws, passion-fruit and vegetables, until the pineapples reached maturity.

Due to their shallow root system and an inability to compete successfully with weeds, pineapples required almost constant attention. On the majority of Beerburrum selections fertilising was also essential; indeed, a specific formula was devised on the settlement. Consisting of 180 kilograms of dried blood, ninety kilograms of sulphate of potash and sixty-eight kilograms of Holborne Island phosphate, a full application was recommended for each acre in August, September and February. The problem was excessive cost—around seven pounds per tonne—beyond the reach of most soldier settlers. In

63 BC, 17 February 1920, p.7.
64 BC, 23 January 1920, p.4.
66 Johnson, The Pineapple, p.93.
67 Ibid., p.65; QAJ, Vol.16, Pt.3 (September 1921), p.226.
68
1925, when the settlement was rapidly declining, Land Commissioner M.B. Salisbury noted that:

With few exceptions the settlers asking for a transfer [to other districts] have purchased fertilisers at their own expense during the past two years, as far as their finances permitted, in most cases the quantities purchased were, not by a long way, sufficient to obtain good results from subsequent crops; those who do not fertilise state that they had no money with which to purchase fertilisers, consequently their crops for the past two years have produced undersized fruit, or else entirely failed, although the area of cultivation has been otherwise attended to.  

By then many were trapped in a cycle of poverty. Yet the Beerburrum soldier settlers were confronted by a myriad of problems from the very beginning, circumstances they shared with those placed on Queensland’s second major soldier settlement at Pikedale, near Stanthorpe. While the emphasis on the latter settlement was deciduous fruit cultivation, a reliance on long-term production bequeathed its own special difficulties.

A region of high elevation in the southern extremity of Queensland, Stanthorpe largely owed its existence to the discovery of alluvial tin during the 1870s. Diminishing mineral yields led to the exploration of agricultural potential, and by the turn of the century a number of fruit orchards and small crop farms had been successfully established in the district. Development was nevertheless slow, and it was largely due to

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69 Land Commissioner Salisbury to Secretary for Public Lands, Brisbane, 17 June 1925, LAN/167 (1916-31), QSA.
70 E. Walker, Queensland’s Granite Belt in Colour (Stanthorpe, Qld: Walklee, 1972), p.6.
the wartime demand for canned fruit that interest in the region was rekindled. The Granite Belt, as this extension of the Great Dividing Range is generally known, certainly contained a number of admirable characteristics, particularly the rich volcanic soils and dry bracing climate. Yet there were also natural impediments to agricultural expansion, notably the frequent summer hailstorms and a plentitude of insect pests.

Woolly aphis, for example, was the scourge of apple growers until the release of a parasite, *Aphilinus mali*, by the Government Entomologist, Hubert Jarvis. This biological victory occurred from August 1923, and by then a large number of soldier settlers had already lost the battle against natural adversaries. Despite a plethora of innovative techniques encompassing biological controls, chemical sprays and artificial lures, fruit fly continued to ravage stone fruit crops until the advent of DDT in 1945.

Although it was to be even longer before the adverse effects of this chemical on other life forms, including humans, was fully understood, soldier settlers were exposed to a multitude of chemicals only slightly less toxic than the mustard gas many had faced on the Western Front. Lead arsenate was one such mixture, and it was perhaps fortunate that limited finances usually ensured that safer controls were practised:

> Early methods of insect control were simple and of a household kind. Sprays in common use were “Black Jack” made from plaited tobacco.

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74 J. Harslett and M. Royle, *They Came to a Plateau: The Stanthorpe Saga* (Stanthorpe, Qld: Girraween, 1973), p.79.
75 *Ibid*.
sold then for 2/- per pound in eight inch strips of about eighteen to the pound. The method was to boil it. The nicotine water was poured off and applied to crops. 78

Few problems were envisaged in July 1916, when the Queensland government made the announcement that an initial 6,475 hectares of land in the parish of Pikedale, thirteen kilometres north-west of Stanthorpe, was to be opened for soldier settlement:

The land is heavily timbered, indicating deep soil, and is well watered. There is an abundance of timber suitable for building and fencing. The whole area is served by roads constructed under the supervision of the Stanthorpe Shire Council. It will be necessary for the Government to undertake some preliminary clearing of from 5 to 10 acres on each block to enable the soldiers to at once derive benefit from the land.79

Previously reserved from selection by the Department of Mines,80 the area for soldier settlement was soon extended to 7,040 hectares and the Government Surveyor, G.K. Jopp, given the task of sub-division. Jopp experienced considerable difficulty owing to the numerous rocky outcrops that lay concealed by dense vegetation.81 To ensure sufficient arable land it was therefore necessary to vary the size of individual holdings from seven to thirty hectares, though as work progressed some blocks exceeded forty-eight hectares in extent.82 There were also problems with low-lying areas, which were subject to flooding. The various topographical difficulties of the region are perhaps best

78 Ibid., p.79.
80 BC, 1 April 1919, p.4.
81 BC, 8 April 1922, p.8.
exemplified by the selection taken up by C.G. Williams, who found in early 1922 that
his:

47 acres consists of 15 acres of solid rock, 10 acres swamp, 5 acres
unsuitable for fruit growing, and 5 acres (already planted), which is
situated at the mouth of a watercourse, and which has huge channels,
six and eight feet deep, running through the centre and segregating
some of his fruit trees on islands, inaccessible to the plough; the
remainder is, in wet weather, flooded flat.83

Williams’ selection was in the very heart of the Pikedale settlement. The heavy timber
found throughout the district also necessitated the deployment of contract clearing gangs
and the cost, in some instances, reached thirty-five pounds per acre.84 Like their
counterparts at Beerburrum, however, neighbouring soldier settlers not infrequently
formed ‘working bees’, with participants spending a day on each selection in turn.85
Timber was stacked and burnt until an established civilian settler—”Mr. White of
Pikedale”—donated a sawmilling plant that allowed the administration to utilise endemic
hardwoods and cypress pine for building material.86 Minimising costs was a priority for
both settlers and administration.

Notwithstanding the official statement that the entire district was bisected with roads, it is
readily apparent that they were of indifferent quality. The settlement itself was largely
inaccessible until the Stanthorpe Shire Council constructed a road from Stanthorpe to

83 BC, 16 January 1922, p.4.
84 BC, 7 December 1916, p.8; BC, 3 November 1922, p.4.
86 DS, 27 June 1918, p.4.
Pikedale under a government subsidy in mid-1918. Road construction was later to provide relief for many soldier settlers unable to earn a living from their holdings.

In December 1916 an external advisory committee consisting of established orchardists in the area was formed as an adjunct to the Land Settlement Committee. Although this body was never officially disbanded, local knowledge was continually ignored as the advice generally conflicted with the views of government officials. In one instance the orchardists advocated settlement on alternate blocks until the quality of each holding could be accurately assessed. By this means vacant blocks could be incorporated with those lacking sufficient arable land or, alternatively, opened for settlement at a later date. It certainly made sense, unlike the government’s suggestion that as wire netting was both scarce and expensive the exclusion of rabbits from newly-planted areas could best be accomplished by enclosing the entire settlement within a single ring fence, rather than fencing each holding separately. The idea was quietly dropped when the external advisory committee questioned how rabbits already inside the boundary were to be controlled. Rabbits remained a serious pest.

Operations in the Pikedale area began in earnest during August 1917, and by June 1918 1,767 hectares had been sub-divided into 138 holdings, with just over two hectares

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88 BC, 7 December 1916, p.8.
89 BC, 7 January 1922, p.7.
90 Ibid., p.8.
cleared on each. While a number of incoming soldier settlers found the cleared area less than that stipulated, this was quickly remedied by the local administration. On the other hand, it was later contended that the sub-division was itself experimental, “with a view to ascertaining the smallest possible area” on which returned servicemen could eke out a living. As events unfolded, there was indeed some justification for that claim. Although much of the soil was rich, it was nevertheless deficient in lime, a necessary prerequisite for the cultivation of deciduous fruit trees. In February 1918 the Director of Fruit Culture, A.H. Benson, investigated the possibility of extracting limestone from natural deposits near Ballandean, south of Stanthorpe. Apparently it was not undertaken, for in December 1920 “a correspondent” on the settlement sought advice for eradicating the noxious weed, Sorrel (*Rumex acetosella*). He was informed that:

> It usually only grows sufficiently well to be a nuisance on lands that are acid. This acid condition of the soil should be corrected by heavy applications of lime ... In a case in which one desires to rid the land of sorrel for the next year's crop, it would take an application of about 2 tons of lime per acre to have any effect on it.

Deciduous fruit trees had already been planted by April 1918, when forty-one holdings were thrown open for selection. At the same time, a State training farm was established on 8.9 hectares (later increased to 9.7 hectares), with four returned servicemen engaged in

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95 *BC*, 19 April 1921, p.7.
96 *DS*, 12 February 1918, p.6.
98 *DS*, 10 April 1918, p.7.
agricultural production. These initial developments also confirm the experimental nature of the scheme.

The State training farm, for example, was partly planted with fruit—"apples, peaches, pears, plums, nectarines, and grape vines"—while a separate section was devoted to the cultivation of vegetables, including "potatoes, cabbages, vegetable marrows, pumpkins, parsnips, carrots, beans, peas, and beet". That fruit trees such as apples would not reach the bearing stage for at least five years was readily acknowledged, hence the search for a viable vegetable crop. Two of the first soldier settlers experimented with apiary, and poultry farming was also conducted on a limited basis. Vegetables, particularly tomatoes, were to prove the mainstay for many soldier settlers. In January 1919 both Norman Rowland and Tom Gorman obtained good results from potatoes, but in February 1921 growers considered this crop an almost total loss owing to disease.

The principal advantage in growing vegetables on the Granite Belt derives from the high elevation, with harvesting taking place during the warmer months between December and April, a time when fresh vegetables are normally scarce in Queensland and thus realise higher prices. This factor is still exploited by a number of small crop farmers today.

100 BC, 20 January 1919, p.7.
101 BC, 3 November 1922, p.4.
102 BC, 9 May 1918, p.7.
103 BC, 17 June 1922, p.4.
105 BC, 1 February 1921, p.6.
106 BC, 3 November 1922, p.4.
While the frequency of damaging summer hailstorms remains a natural obstacle to successful agriculture, the soldier settlers had to contend with many other problems.

As at Beerburrum, the settlers were eligible for sustenance until their farms became productive but, by being encouraged to cultivate vegetable crops, there can be little doubt the government intended that their dependence on sustenance should be of minimal duration. The amount was, of course, insufficient to add improvements to their holdings once the original loan and any personal savings had been expended. Thus, for the majority who began as vegetable growers, the period from May to November was a period of relative inactivity during which many sought outside work—when available.\textsuperscript{108}

If, however, they were fortunate enough to find employment off their holdings, the sustenance allowance was cancelled. While this imbalance was never satisfactorily resolved, there can be little doubt that it placed considerable strain on the wives of married settlers, who were expected to manage the holding in the absence of their husband.\textsuperscript{109}

This was not evident in April 1918, when the Pikedale soldier settlement was formally established. William Green was appointed as supervisor, though it is clear that the most influential figure during the formative stage was the manager of the State training farm,

\textsuperscript{107}Anonymous, \textit{Stanthorpe and the Granite Belt in Queensland} (Stanthorpe, Qld: Stanthorpe Apple and Grape Harvest Festival Committee, 1978), n.p.
\textsuperscript{108}BC, 25 August 1919, p.8.
A.P. ('Percy') Devereaux. Ill-health forced Green's resignation in April 1919.\(^{110}\) A returned soldier who had been a successful orchardist in Tasmania before the war, Devereaux ventured north after demobilisation with the intention of selecting a soldier settlement holding at Pikedale. Concluding that the available acreage did not present a viable proposition, he successfully applied for the position of manager.\(^{111}\) He also kept alive his dream of eventually becoming an independent orchardist in the district.

By April 1922 Devereaux was employed as Instructor of Fruit Culture on the settlement, and sought permission to select two adjacent holdings totalling forty hectares, approximately twenty hectares of which was suitable for cultivation. As this exceeded the normal entitlement the application was refused.\(^{112}\) Whether Devereaux intended to resign from his official position was not disclosed, but he had already been forced to relinquish management of the State training farm in April 1921, after clashing with Green’s successor, Harry Clark.

Transferred from the Mount Gravatt soldier settlement near Brisbane when Green resigned, \(^{113}\) Clark soon found that Devereaux was intent on maintaining full control of the State training farm and all neighbouring selections.\(^{114}\) The supervisor, who appears to have been highly regarded by many of the soldier settlers, finally forced the issue in March 1921 when he lodged a formal complaint against Devereaux. An inquiry into the

\(^{110}\) “Royal Commission Appointed to Inspect and Report upon a Proposal to Construct a Tramway from the Soldier Settlement at Pikedale, in the County of Bentinck, to the Main Southern Railway, a distance of about Thirteen Miles” [hereafter “Pikedale Tramway Commission”], QPP, Vol.3 (1919-1920), p.820.
\(^{111}\) BC, 7 April 1922, p.4.
\(^{112}\) BC, 8 April 1922, p.8.
\(^{113}\) BC, 29 April 1919, p.9.
\(^{114}\) Queensland Times [QT] (Ipswich), 31 March 1921, p.5.
alleged maladministration of the State training farm was held in Stanthorpe before the Warden, Oscar Meston. In giving evidence, Clark stated that:

From 18th March, 1919, to 19th March, 1921, the total expenditure for wages at the State farm amounted to £5,061, which [Clark insisted] was unnecessary. For the two years very little useful experiment work was carried on at the State farm. He estimated that on the expiration of eight years, when the trees reached maturity, the State orchard would have cost £21,598 or £943 an acre ... The amount received from the sale of fruit and vegetables from the State farm last year was £85. He recommended the abolition of the State farm, and the appointment of two fruit experts to go round the soldiers' settlement to advise the settlers.115

Devereaux could only evince surprise at the heavy expenditure—"if the figures given were correct". Apparently they were, for Clark's recommendations were put into effect and Devereaux was demoted to the position of instructor.116

Yet it should not be overlooked that Devereaux's contribution had been considerable, for it was largely under his guidance that the soldier settlement took form. Green's illness and relative autonomy during the initial stages possibly accounts for Devereaux's reluctance to surrender full authority to Clark. Moreover, developments were rapid—and extensive. In 1918 land on the Stanthorpe Town Common was acquired from the Shire Council and sub-divided into eleven holdings, while 633 hectares was resumed for soldier settlement in the parish of Folkestone, south of Stanthorpe, and sub-divided into a further sixteen holdings.117 On the Town Common, just under five kilometres from

115 Ibid.
116 BC, 19 April 1921, p.7.
Stanthorpe, six soldier settlers had taken up land by January 1919. Two of them were C. Bourke and N. Mowatt, who worked their holdings in partnership:

The men have 5 acres under grapes, and 9 acres under tomatoes, from which they expect to take 2,000 cases during the year. They also have a large number of fruit trees. In addition, they have 14 hives of bees and nine pigs (which they purchased at £1 each some little time ago, and expect in a few weeks to sell at £5 or £6 per head). The tomatoes were showing wonderful growth in spite of the fact that a violent hailstorm had passed over the centre just recently. Peas and beans are marketed and already over £30 has been netted as the result of the sale of cabbages grown by the two soldiers.\(^{118}\)

Diversification to this extent was seldom available for soldier settlers on the Granite Belt owing to economic and topographical reasons. Bourke and Mowatt were also fortunate in being able to capitalise on prices that had not yet suffered their post-war collapse—and they had narrowly avoided devastating hail. Conversely, a soldier settlement largely concentrating on a single crop was later established at Ballandean, further to the south,\(^{119}\) where the lower elevation and milder climate made it eminently suitable for viticulture,\(^{120}\) albeit, with the risk of hail by no means reduced. Eventually, soldier settlement on the Granite Belt extended westwards to Spring Creek and Nundubbermere, though Pikedale remained the centre of major activity and was generally known during the early years simply as "The Settlement".\(^{121}\)

By October 1918, more than eighty hectares had been cleared and ploughed around Pikedale and grape cuttings from South Australia and selected Queensland vineyards were being struck as yet another supplement to the deciduous fruit orchards. When the Land Settlement Committee and a number of parliamentarians made the first official inspection of the district in January 1919, a rudimentary township had already been created and £15,423 spent on developmental work.

Anticipating large numbers of children, approval was given for the expenditure of £550 on a school building in February 1919, with two hectares being set aside as a school reserve the following May. The school was officially opened in August 1919, but such was the influx that it had actually been necessary to open a provisional school the previous March by adding a skillion roof to the rear portion of the communal barracks. The first teacher was Bertha Smith, who was replaced two months later by Herbert Christian; he became head teacher when the permanent school opened. Thirty-five children enrolled, and it was almost immediately apparent that accommodation would be insufficient. By March 1920 the number of pupils had reached fifty-five, and this climbed to seventy the following June, at which time the Department of Instruction finally acknowledged that the school had been built to hold only thirty-seven pupils.

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122 BC, 10 August 1918, p.4; DS, 4 October 1918, p.6.
124 BC, 1 February 1919, p.11.
125 WK, 16 May 1919, p.23.
129 John Hooper, District Inspector, Stanthorpe, to Under Secretary, Department of Public Instruction, Brisbane, 4 March 1920, EDU/Z2209, Batch 1629, “Pikedale Soldier’s Settlement 1919-1920”, QSA; “Report on the Material Requirements of the Pikedale Soldiers’ Settlement State School”, Department of Public Instruction, Brisbane, 30 June 1920, EDU/Z40, Batch 1629, “Amiens 1920-1946”, QSA.
Over-crowding was partly countered by establishing more schools throughout the expanding settlement, but their quality often left much to be desired.

In April 1921, for instance, approval was given for a school to be opened in a private residence at Pozieres, to the east of Pikedale. Rented portions comprised the verandah and one small room measuring 2.7 by 2.7 metres. Installed as teacher, William Turner pointed out the deficiencies to his Brisbane superior the following August:

I might state the conditions at present are almost unbearable. School is conducted on the verandah of a residence kindly lent by Dr. Harlin of Killamey ... At present we are experiencing very cold weather, sleet & snow being prevalent & a cold bitter wind blowing all day. This week in particular has been bitterly cold, so cold that the children are shivering in School & myself much the same. It is of little or no use to take them outside as the wind would almost cut you in two. I am able to take the children in the room mentioned, but time the children get in, there is absolutely not sufficient space for the Black board or desks, & the result is they sit with cold feet.

Winter temperatures on the Granite Belt are not infrequently the lowest in the State. Cold in an altogether unexpected form also impacted on the Pikedale soldier settlement. In January 1919 Queensland closed its borders in a futile attempt to halt the spread of Spanish Influenza which, among other things, disrupted the supply of fruit trees for the soldier settlement from specialist nurseries in Victoria. It was not until the following

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130 A.S. Kennedy, Acting Under Secretary, Department of Public Instruction, Brisbane, to Mr. E. Burgess, Secretary to the School Building Committee, Pozieres, 18 April 1921, EDU/Z2257, Batch 1704, “Pozieres”, QSA.
131 W. Turner, Teacher in Charge, Pozieres State School, Pozieres, to Under Secretary, Department of Public Instruction, Brisbane, 5 August 1921, Ibid.
133 WK, 31 January 1919, p.19.
August that the manager of C.J. Goodman’s ‘Picnic Point Nursery’ at Bairnsdale was finally able to surmount the difficulties:

Notwithstanding the prevalence of the “Flu” which has temporarily reduced my staff by one-third, I expect to put all the Trees [2,950] on the Rails some time on Tuesday. When I wire, I shall give you the numbers of the two Trucks so that you can trace them from here to the New South Wales Border. I will have special Labels printed and pasted on to the Trucks so there shall be no reasonable excuse for delay on the part of the Railways.\textsuperscript{134}

The trees reached their destination. Reliance on Victorian nurseries was partly due to their expertise, though it is also apparent that southern companies were able to offer competitive rates, an important consideration for the Queensland government—particularly in relation to soldier settlement.\textsuperscript{135} Goodman’s was perhaps the most reputable firm with whom the government dealt, for trees from other suppliers occasionally arrived in anything but pristine condition. In September 1919 George Williams, Assistant Instructor in Fruit Culture at Pikedale, reported on the condition of one such consignment:

An assortment of trees—said to be 1,200 was also received in bad order—These came in loose bundles without any packing whatever of either roots or tops, the majority being hopeless. About 5% recovered after being buried in damp soil.\textsuperscript{136}

\textsuperscript{134} Manager, C.J. Goodman, Nurseryman, Bairnsdale, to Comptroller, Soldier Settlement, Lands Department, Brisbane, 21 August 1919, LAN/AK133, Batch 838, “Purchase of Fruit Trees for Soldier’s Settlement, Stanthorpe”, QSA.

\textsuperscript{135} Memorandum, Officer in Charge, Soldier Settlement Branch, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 7 February 1922, \textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{136} “Report by G. Williams”, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 29 September 1919, \textit{Ibid.}
At this time the soldier settlers could not order their own stock, being forced to accept only those varieties recommended by government officials. Many of these were later found to have been unsuitable. However, when the policy was altered to allow the settlers to order their own trees they occasionally fell victim to unscrupulous operators. Charles Doyle, a soldier settler at Thulimbah on the eastern extremity of the settlement, was coerced into ordering from a competitive firm in February 1922:

I wish to advise that since writing to you Ferguson of Ferguson Nurseries and Mr. Hopper their agent in Stanthorpe have called on me with a view of obtaining my order. They informed me that they had official authority to come to me and others to obtain the orders as they had obtained the right over other nurseries to book orders for the Soldier Settlement. They also informed me that it was absolutely no use of me ordering from other nurseries as I would not be supplied and that my only chance of obtaining trees was to order with them. I took their word for it believing that no business men of honour would mislead me and I handed them my order.

In this instance the government intervened, refusing to pay for any trees supplied by Ferguson Nurseries. The reason for this, however, was that a rival Victorian firm, Two Bays Nursery, was able to supply the required trees at a lower price. For Doyle and a number of other soldier settlers, the government’s tight fiscal policies occasionally had positive, if ephemeral, results.

137 A. Devereaux, Instructor in Fruit Culture, Amiens, to Mr. H. Clark, Officer in Charge, Soldiers Settlement, Stanthorpe, 15 March 1924, Ibid.
138 Charles J. Doyle, Thulimbah, Southern Line, to J.H. Coyne, Brisbane, 20 February 1922, Ibid.
139 Minister for Lands, Brisbane, to Mr. C.J. Doyle, Thulimbah, Southern Line, 23 February 1922, Ibid.
Notwithstanding Constant Van Camp’s antagonistic treatment, benevolence could be extended to returned servicemen of non-British origin. In May 1919, it was decided to transfer a Finnish-born carpenter and returned soldier, A.J. Parmvell, from Beerburrum soldier settlement to take up the position of foreman at Pikedale rather than employ a civilian. On the other hand, a number of returned servicemen did not display similar tolerance, particularly if it clashed with their own self-interest. In December 1922 a returned AIF soldier of non-British background, John Johansson, selected Block 400 on the Pikedale settlement. Considered “a good type of man” by the local Field Overseer, J. Goodall, Johansson’s acquisition of the holding drew a vehement protest from his neighbour, C.J. Larkins, who desired the land for himself:

I am writing to you asking the conditions under which portion 400 Parish [of] Marsh has been granted to John Johannson [sic]. There are several selectors round here who wish to know this. We understand that he has been repatriated under the old settlement scheme which closed 12 months last December ... There are men of four years service overseas have been turned down on account of their applications going in after that date and we think it is only fair to the ex soldiers of Queensland to know if a man with two days home service, a foreigner at that, is granted a concession like this. Your early explanation to this matter will be thankfully received by the soldier settlers round here.

Whether there were “several settlers” involved with this protest is not clear, and without denying the obvious pride in overseas service it is apparent that Johansson’s foreign birth inflamed the issue. Larkins was advised that the duration of military service was not a

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140 BC, 7 May 1919, p.6.
141 J. Goodall (for supervisor), Stanthorpe Soldier Settlement, Amiens, to Officer-in-Charge, Soldiers’ Settlement Branch, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 15 December 1922, LAN/AK118, Batch 703, Part 1(F), QSA.
due consideration and Johansson's tenancy was therefore valid.\textsuperscript{143} Indeed, in February 1917 Prime Minister Hughes had informed all State Premiers that men who had enlisted in the AIF, "and through no fault of their own have been discharged before leaving Australia", were to be placed on an equal footing with returned servicemen.\textsuperscript{144} The Queensland government had agreed to follow that course.\textsuperscript{145} How Johansson later fared beside his resentful neighbour is not known.

A number of negative factors were clearly apparent at the outset of soldier settlement, and all would have a detrimental impact on the final outcome. Economic restraint by the Queensland government was perhaps necessary; launching the returned servicemen almost immediately into debt was not. Preparatory work was clearly inadequate, and the experimental nature of soldier settlement is revealed by the soil analyses at Beerburrum, and the variation of acreage at Stanthorpe. This is further reinforced by the trials of various crops on both settlements, though the government did have clear ideas on the principal agricultural produce to be grown. Admittedly, subsidiary crops were possibly intended as a safety mechanism in the event of a downturn in the market, adverse environmental conditions—or if the experiment should go wrong. From the beginning there was also a realisation among the soldier settlers that under perpetual leasehold the

\textsuperscript{142} C. Larkins, 401 Marsh, Fleur Baix, Cotton Vale, to Land Settlement Committee, Brisbane, 2 May 1923, \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{143} Under Secretary, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, to Mr. C.J. Larkins, Fleur Baix, Stanthorpe, 2 May 1923, \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{144} W.M. Hughes, Prime Minister, Melbourne, to The Honourable, The Premier of Queensland, Brisbane, 9 February 1917, PRE/A552, In-letter 4071, QSA.
\textsuperscript{145} J.M. Hunter, for Premier, Chief Secretary's Office, Brisbane, to The Right Honourable Prime Minister of the Commonwealth, Melbourne, 22 March 1917, \textit{Ibid}.
land would never be theirs in the truest sense of the word. That knowledge was likely to undermine any faith in the scheme should difficulties arise.

As shown by the treatment of A.J. Parmvell at Beerburrum, and John Johansson at Stanthorpe, Queensland authorities could be sympathetic to non-British ex-servicemen. They displayed a markedly different attitude when it came to dealing with residents of Asian birth. Soldier settlement in North Queensland was largely instigated through a desire to displace Asian farmers who had been successfully cultivating arable land on the Atherton Tableland. For the majority of white Queenslanders in the early decades of the twentieth century this was an intolerable situation, and soldier settlement thus became a tangible means of eliminating an obvious anomaly surviving the imposition of a ‘White Australia Policy’.
CHAPTER 4:

‘EVictions AND EGGS’: THE RACIAL CONTOURS OF SOLDIER SETTLEMENT

To hold your manhood with such price,
Such love of lineage and race,
That, when the nations give her place,
She shall go forth all purified.¹

While soldier settlers were scattered throughout the Atherton Tableland, behind the northern port of Cairns, the group settlement established around the small townships of Tolga and Kairi in August 1919 became, and remained, the centre of activity. The settlement was clearly not a success, but the available documentation is marked by a number of inconsistencies that makes it extremely difficult to evaluate with any precision. Official figures often include civilian settlers who took up forfeited holdings, and this tends to obscure the actual decline of returned servicemen. A good example can be found in 1923, when 173 holdings were listed as occupied. Yet, eighty-five married and thirty-three single men (almost certainly soldier settlers) were held to comprise the adult male population—a discrepancy of fifty-four.² Importantly, the merger between these two groups strengthened as the decade advanced.

Although various small crops, fodders, and dairying were attempted at various times, the staple industry was maize cultivation. Heavy dependence on a single crop ensured that the soldier settlers were entirely at the mercy of fluctuating prices, with little possibility of diversification when they proved unsatisfactory. From 1918 there were serious attempts to develop pig-raising as a major local industry but,\(^3\) after reaching its peak in 1922 when 1,200 animals were on the settlement,\(^4\) animal husbandry virtually collapsed; by mid-1923 only 215 pigs were being raised for market.\(^5\) Notwithstanding annual outbreaks of swine fever from 1917 to 1921,\(^6\) this rapid demise was clearly associated with marketing problems,\(^7\) and the long-awaited opening of a bacon factory at nearby Mareeba in May 1924 came too late to render any real assistance for the soldier settlers.\(^8\)

For the many contradictions and uncertainties, there was no mistaking the reason for establishing a soldier settlement around Tolga and Kairi. With a large population of Asian farmers successfully tilling the soils of the district, it became the vehicle for eliminating their predominance and reinforcing the concept of ‘White Australia’. In June 1919 Queensland’s Minister for Justice, William Gillies, explained this aspect of the scheme:

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The Government has set out to fulfil a promise that was made to the men who risked their lives to keep Australia free, and defend not only the lives and liberties of its people, but the wealth and freehold land. It
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\(^3\) DS, 31 August 1918, p.2; DS, 1 October 1918, p.5; DM, 2 October 1918, p.4.


\(^7\) BC, 9 February 1922, p.8.

\(^8\) QAJ, Vol.21, Pt.6 (June 1924), p.421.
proposes to place these men on some of the best land in the State, close to civilisation and served by a railway, where there is a good chance of success, removing at the same time a number of coloured aliens, who have for years been a menace to this beautiful district.  

Soldier settlers may have been defenders of freehold land, but they were effectively prevented from acquiring it. Legislation also debarred the majority of “coloured aliens” from owning land. Landowners on the Atherton Tableland were actually Australians and Britons, who usually leased their properties for a nominal term of five years to Chinese, Malay, Cingalese, Indian, Japanese and European tenants. Rents were standardised at one pound per acre, with tenants also required to clear all timber from the leasehold during their period of occupation. In the event of an exceptionally poor season, however, it was not unknown for benevolent landowners to defer rental obligations until the tenant’s circumstances improved, a magnanimous gesture denied to their successors.

These terms and conditions allowed the Chinese, in particular, to develop maize-growing in the region; by 1918 their success had been such that an estimated 300 farms leased by these industrious toilers ringed the town of Atherton, with the heaviest concentration around Tolga. Willingness to adapt and experiment had also led to their pioneering many smaller crops, including peanuts, commercial quantities of which were only later

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9 WK, 13 June 1919, p.18.
12 BC, 27 September 1921, p.7.
surpassed by Australian growers at Kingaroy, far to the south. Soldier settlers were unable to capitalise on their pioneering efforts.

As outlined by Gillies, the replacement of Asian farmers by returned servicemen was consistent with his government’s broad policy, but agitation to have land resumed for soldier settlement at Tolga and Kairi was led by the Shire Councils and local sub-branches of the RSSILA. Despite the enormous contribution made to the district’s economy by Asian farmers, ‘Patriot’ was among the very few supporters of this “inoffensive, law-abiding race”. There appears to have been no organised resistance by the Chinese community against the evictions. Cathy May has suggested that many of the tenants had entered Australia prior to the implementation of the Immigration Restriction Act (1901), and being close to retirement age were resigned to their fate. Conversely, while the Queensland government insisted that any land actually worked by British-Australian owners would be exempt from resumption, it meant little to the few white European tenants. Local residents nevertheless mounted a spirited defence on their behalf, and also extended their sympathy to an Italian farmer:

A well-known and industrious Italian farmer, a resident for over 30 years in the Herberton and Atherton districts, was engaged in charcoal burning in his earlier days, and lost all his savings on an unprofitable Kuranda selection. Later on, however, he settled on 100 acres of dense scrub at Atherton. He has resided there for the past nine years, clearing and fencing, and improving the farm. This man, who has a family, and is one of the best selectors in the district, is to be evicted to make room

14 Anonymous, “The Peanut Industry”, in Tall Timber and Golden Grain, p.34.
15 DM, 10 June 1919, p.5; WK, 27 June 1919, p.6; BC, 10 June 1919, p.6.
16 BC, 14 November 1918, p.5.
17 May, Topsawyers, p.39.
18 WK, 9 May 1919, p.3.
19 BC, 23 May 1919, p.6; BC, 6 June 1919, p.6; BC, 10 June 1919, p.6.
for a man who may or may not make a success of farming. This is only one of many similar cases that is causing widespread distrust of the methods pursued by the State Government in its soldier settlement scheme.²⁰

Protests were ignored and the special Land Court dealing with compensation for resumed areas in December 1919 refused to consider any extenuating circumstances. According to P.W. Shannon, who delivered judgement:

It had been impressed on him that, in some cases, the resumptions involved hardships to the claimants; but the court’s sympathy with any cases of hardship would not be a proper guide in the determination of compensation. Were it open to the court to indulge its sympathies, a share in them might not unreasonably be claimed by the soldier settlers for whom the land had been resumed, and the price to be paid by him who doubtless would be affected by the compensation.²¹

Given this attitude, it was perhaps not surprising that Shannon’s total award of £64,455 for resumed land was only slightly above the government’s valuation of £61,325,²² with payment being made by debenture rather than cash.²³ In all, 5,704 hectares, sub-divided into 170 holdings varying in extent from twenty-four to sixty-five hectares, was opened for soldier settlement.²⁴ By April 1921 this had contracted to 4,903 hectares, with 176 holdings “being developed”.²⁵ The following June allotted holdings had again returned to

²⁰ BC, 30 April 1919, p.9.
²¹ ODR, 3 January 1920, p.12.
²³ BC, 6 June 1919, p.6.
²⁵ “Deputation to the Acting Premier from The Returned Sailors’ and Soldiers’ Imperial League of Australia”, Brisbane, 27 April 1921, LAN/167 (1916-31), QSA.
the original figure, but the total area had dwindled even further to 4,676 hectares.\textsuperscript{26}

Expansion and contraction almost certainly reflect a fluctuating population through forfeiture and re-selection.

As mentioned earlier, returned servicemen acquired isolated selections throughout the Atherton Tableland, and a large area of 63,657 hectares on the Evelyn Tableland, just to the south (Appendix 4), was reserved for soldier settlement in early 1918.\textsuperscript{27} Usually referred to as Oswald’s Track, the latter region remained largely inaccessible, with the rugged terrain and almost incessant wet weather attracting few selectors. By late 1918:

\begin{quote}
It may be mentioned that on the Atherton Tableland 2,310 acres have been selected near Millaa Millaa by sixteen soldiers, 283 acres near Kairi by two soldiers, and 288 acres near Peeramon by two soldiers. On the Evelyn Tableland 372 acres have been taken up by four soldiers near Ravenshoe. The soldiers intend to engage in dairying and mixed farming.\textsuperscript{28}
\end{quote}

Developments accelerated dramatically with the Tolga-Kairi resumptions. An added attraction was the State farm at Kairi, established in 1911 to conduct agricultural research,\textsuperscript{29} and which became the nucleus of the settlement.\textsuperscript{30} To aid the transition, and reduce the possibility of weed infestation, evicted tenants were permitted to tend and harvest their final crop; at the same time, incoming soldier settlers were advised to

\textsuperscript{27} \textit{DS}, 27 June 1918, p.4.
\textsuperscript{28} Anon., \textit{Tablelands of North Queensland}, p.15.
\textsuperscript{29} Skerman, Fisher and Lloyd, \textit{Guiding Queensland Agriculture}, pp.40-1.
confine themselves to an area of approximately four hectares while effecting improvements.\textsuperscript{31}

Weed infestation was not adequately addressed. In August 1923 the Chief Supervisor of Soldier Settlements, C.T.O. Shepherd, lamented that Nut Grass (\textit{Cyperus rotundas})—"this octopus of the farmer"—had virtually overrun the settlement.\textsuperscript{32} By then, however, maize prices had dropped substantially, and in a tragic irony the final harvest made by non-European farmers at Tolga and Kairi in 1919 was a record crop of some 25,000 tonnes. The inflated price of ten pounds per tonne meant, in real terms, a value of £250,000.\textsuperscript{33} The expulsion of Asian tenant farmers thus heralded the end of wartime prosperity on the Atherton Tableland.

Reports on the first maize crop harvested by soldier settlers in 1920 are somewhat ambiguous. At least fifty-six settlers planted a combined area of 1,030 hectares that yielded 2,914 tonnes, "with an excellent average of 45.3 bushels per acre".\textsuperscript{34} While one unnamed soldier settler reputedly made "a profit of £1200",\textsuperscript{35} it is nevertheless clear that it was "impossible to dispose of a big crop of maize at a satisfactory price".\textsuperscript{36} This problem intensified as the area under crop steadily increased and prices simultaneously decreased. In May 1921, with production expected to reach 10,000 tonnes,\textsuperscript{37} William

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{31} \textit{ANBVA}, 30 August 1919, p.3; \textit{BC}, 1 September 1919, p.8; \textit{ANBVA}, 3 September 1919, p.3.
\bibitem{32} C.T.O. Shepherd, Soldier Settlement Branch, to Minister for Lands, Brisbane, 13 August 1923, LAN/167 (1916-31), QSA.
\bibitem{33} \textit{BC}, 9 May 1919, p.21.
\bibitem{34} \textit{BC}, 27 May 1921, p.9.
\bibitem{35} \textit{ANBVA}, 10 November 1920, p.3.
\bibitem{36} \textit{ANBVA}, 19 November 1921, p.5.
\end{thebibliography}
Gillies (now Minister for Agriculture and Stock) unsuccessfully sought Federal assistance for the construction of storage silos on the settlement. They did not become a reality until mid-1924, but it mattered little in 1921, when “excessive rains operated against the maize crop, a yield of about 4,636 tons resulting”. Combined with low prices, it ensured that the majority of the soldier settlers were unable to meet their financial commitments.

Indeed, in November 1921:

The price of maize had slumped to such an extent as to make it unprofitable to grow. Meanwhile the department [of Public Lands] was encouraging settlers to go in for mixed farming—dairying and pig-raising—and individual applications for loans for the purchase of dairy cows and pigs would be granted.

Animal husbandry presented its own unique problems. As noted previously, disease and marketing difficulties inhibited the development of pig-raising for soldier settlers. Increased production again coincided with falling prices which, in practical terms, meant a difference of between eightpence per pound live weight as opposed to sixpence per pound, and the likelihood that it would drop as low as threepence for the same quantity.

Despite a trial shipment of 200 live head sent to southern markets in February 1922 aboard the steamer, Kadina, pig-raising declined to such an extent that in February 1923, “the pigs available to-day are barely more than sufficient to supply the Northern

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38 QT, 15 June 1921, p.5.
39 QAJ, Vol.22, Pt.2 (August 1924), p.120.
41 BC, 27 September 1921, p.7.
42 ANBVA, 19 November 1921, p.5.
44 Ibid.
pork trade". Soldier settlers did not make any further significant contribution to the industry.

Conversely, in February 1923 dairy farming was considered to be the only primary industry "on a really satisfactory footing". Under reportedly judicious management, the Atherton Co-operative Butter Company was a willing participant in the Queensland butter pool, and the directors were able to procure satisfactory prices for their products. Yet, very few soldier settlers were engaged in dairying, and notwithstanding the financial assistance available for purchasing stock it was left to the Chairman of the Revaluation Board, M.B. Salisbury, to point out the inhibiting factors in October 1924:

Dairying is also followed by some of the settlers, but owing to a number of holdings being deficient of a regular water supply and restricted in area, mixed farming cannot be followed with any degree of success. Many of the holdings are cropped to their fullest capacity, to such an extent that they are unable to carry stock for dairying purposes.

While advocating extra land for each holding, Salisbury also warned of damaging long-term consequences if current farming practises continued. He was forced to acknowledge, however, that the soldier settlers had little choice but to maximise the area under cultivation:

46 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
It is a well known fact that the same crop should not be grown, on the same area, year in and year out if good returns are desired. With the average prices existing for maize, most of the Atherton settlers are compelled to plant the whole of the areas at their disposal to ensure a living, leaving no fallowed land or spare areas to be made use of for any other purpose ... It must be remembered that markets are not yet established in the North for the disposal of produce at a satisfactory figure, and, owing to its isolation, the Atherton Tableland cannot successfully compete with other districts in the Southern markets, as a matter of fact Southern maize was recently being sold in Townsville, and other Northern ports, at prices under those ruling at Atherton.⁵⁹

In June 1922 a Canadian soldier settler named Ogilvie missed this point entirely when he insisted that with improved scientific farming techniques production on the Atherton Tableland “could easily reach 3,000,000 bushels, and make this district the premier maize district of Australia”.⁵¹ Although reaching nowhere near Ogilvie’s grand estimate, the industry had indeed flourished prior to the advent of soldier settlement. The retention of the Asian cultivators could not, of course, have prevented the dramatic fall in post-war prices on both national and international markets. Yet those enterprising toilers would almost certainly have diversified their operations to cater for local requirements. Soldier settlers were part of a larger scheme, and while their battles on the Atherton Tableland were to continue virtually unabated, returned servicemen near Brisbane were engaged in the development of an industry designed to curb Asian imports, and thus give greater strength to the concept of ‘White Australia’.

Asians may have been portrayed as repugnant, decadent, and therefore unwanted in Anglo-Celtic Australia, but there was more than one glaring anomaly within the official

⁵⁹ Ibid.
policy. Japanese and Malays, for example, were recognised as being vital for the continuance of the Australian pearlshelling industry. Another was egg production, with a limited number of local producers unable to meet the rapacious national demand. Despite an import duty of sixpence per dozen, or sixpence per pound in bulk, China was a major supplier of eggs to the Australian market until 1917.

Queensland’s imports alone were considerable, as poultry was a relatively neglected industry in the northern State. The Queensland Agricultural College at Gatton, west of Brisbane, had certainly been experimenting with poultry breeds, but commercial egg production was largely an agricultural sideline. From 1915, however, a number of influential Brisbane businessmen and professional people involved with poultry as a hobby began to associate more closely in a bid to have the industry taken seriously. The result was the formation of the Utility Poultry Society of Queensland in February 1917, and the following May a paper was presented to this august body by D.H. Wallace, a health inspector who had conducted an investigation of commercial poultry farms in China. It was a powerful indictment, with dramatic consequences:

His vivid picture of the unhygienic conditions under which eggs were produced in China, such as fowls scratching out dead bodies buried just under the surface of the earth, led to the prohibition of further imports of Asiatic eggs.

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54 Marshall, A New Life, p.23.
55 Ibid., p.24.
This development also coincided with the return of many veteran troops, and a niche was thus created for their entry into yet another experimental project—commercial egg production. At the same time, a poultry retailer in Brisbane, John Beard, was appointed Government Poultry Instructor, though with the industry in Queensland so retarded external assistance was also deemed necessary. South Australia had made many advances in poultry husbandry and the services of that State’s poultry inspector, William Keany, was obtained for an initial period of six months. After three soldier settlements specialising in egg production were established around Brisbane from early 1918, Keany returned as the permanent supervisor.

Perceived advantages for returned servicemen were numerous. The work was not considered to be particularly arduous, and with the prohibition of Asian imports the markets guaranteed. All three settlements—Mount Gravatt to the south, The Gap (usually called Enoggera) to the north, and Wolston just to the west—were in close proximity to the city and local markets. By 1919:

It is anticipated that this form of settlement will become very popular. We are all familiar with the lure of the city, and in this case provision is made by which men and their families may live what is practically a country life and yet have all the city advantages for themselves and their children.

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58 DS, 3 September 1918, p. 6.
The experimental nature of poultry farming was evident from the beginning. As the government’s senior adviser, John Beard recommended combining egg production with fruit-growing; foraging poultry benefited the trees, while fruit provided additional income for the producer.\(^6\) Yet Beard was on the sub-committee that made the decision to resume 108 hectares of land at Mount Gravatt, thirteen kilometres south of Brisbane’s hub, which was already known to be unsuitable for any form of agriculture.\(^6\) The area was nevertheless divided into twenty-six holdings varying in extent from three to five hectares, with one section of four hectares reserved for a training farm.\(^6\) By 1921 a total of 210 hectares had been resumed at Mount Gravatt; 170 hectares being sub-divided into forty-eight holdings.\(^6\) In 1919 the political historian, Charles Bernays, commented favourably on the division of land as applied at Mount Gravatt:

> Though there has been some criticism of the “smallest” of the general idea, we must ever bear in mind that our returned soldiers cannot and do not expect to be all converted into squatter kings. The dominant idea is to provide occupation which will afford a living and preserve the self-respect of the men.\(^6\)

Unlike the returned servicemen, Bernays was also Clerk of the Queensland Parliament and in comfortable circumstances. What he did not state was that the land was also quite expensive, with some holdings valued at £37/10 per acre, an amount borne by the

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\(^6\) QAJ, Vol.9, Pt.4 (April 1918), p.143.
\(^6\) WK, 26 March 1920, p.7; BC, 26 July 1922, p.7.
\(^6\) Bernays, *Queensland Politics During Sixty Years*, p.347.
occupant.\textsuperscript{66} John Beard endorsed the optimism, and was supremely confident about the industry's potential: "We should not fear over-production, as the demand for both eggs and poultry of the right kind is incessant".\textsuperscript{67} Partly due to the influx of ex-servicemen into poultry farming, the production of eggs by late 1921 was well in excess of national requirements and the search for external markets was "one of the most vital problems at present confronting the industry".\textsuperscript{68}

Admittedly, even the provision of suitable stock presented difficulties at the outset. The Queensland Agricultural College was the only institution in the northern State that could not only meet the demand, but also provide the facilities necessary for work to commence. Both, however, were deficient. In March 1920 the Mount Gravatt Soldiers' Settlement Association resolved:

To draw attention to the Land Settlement Committee to the fact that fowls supplied by Gatton College for breeding were unsound, and that of 2000 supplied last season the majority died. It was stated that one settler received 40 supposed pullets from the College, whereof 29 proved cockerels. Another settler had 19 cockerels instead of 42; another 11 instead of 53.\textsuperscript{69}

The provision of pullets at this stage was itself problematical. Pullets do lay earlier and produce more eggs, but older hens, especially those in their second season, were known to be more reliable and to possess greater stamina for commercial production.\textsuperscript{70} Given

\textsuperscript{66} BC, 5 September 1921, p.7.
\textsuperscript{67} QAJ, Vol.8, Pt.3 (September 1917), p.154.
\textsuperscript{68} BC, 1 September 1921, p.7.
\textsuperscript{69} Toowoomba Chronicle [TC] (Toowoomba), 16 March 1920, p.6.
\textsuperscript{70} QAJ, Vol.9, Pt.4 (April 1918), p.144.
that difficulties were being experienced in even sexing birds, it was perhaps no surprise that the training facilities at Gatton were also inadequate. In 1919 forty-six returned servicemen undertook coursework at the Queensland Agricultural College, of whom thirty-two received instruction in poultry farming.\textsuperscript{71} The following year, when 139 returned servicemen were enrolled in various courses, it was revealed that the facilities had only been designed to accommodate twenty-five students at any one time.\textsuperscript{72} Accommodation for soldier settlers was also acute at Mount Gravatt, the first and largest of the group settlements focusing on egg production.

By April 1918 “several” soldier settlers had commenced work at Mount Gravatt, and although the erection of pens for holding poultry was well in hand, cottages for the settlers had not been completed.\textsuperscript{73} From necessity the earliest arrivals lived in galvanised iron sheds until their dwellings were built, with the sheds then being converted into poultry brooder-houses.\textsuperscript{74} With the exception of housing and road construction, the settlers performed all other tasks on the settlement,\textsuperscript{75} but they were unable to overcome the chronic shortage of water.

While each holding was located along a creek running through the settlement, pumps were not provided to utilise this source for either domestic or non-domestic purposes.\textsuperscript{76} Instead, most of the completed dwellings were equipped with a 2,000-gallon (9,092-litre) underground concrete tank which, under ideal conditions, was expected to provide

\textsuperscript{73} \textit{BC}, 10 April 1918, p.7.  
\textsuperscript{74} Marshall, \textit{A New Life}, p.11.
sufficient water for up to six months. Conditions were seldom ideal and the settlers were advised to sink wells on their holdings. The Government Water Diviner, J.H. Bestmann, inspected the settlement and marked out sixty-five sites where he believed water existed below the surface. The task of excavation, however, was left to the settlers, many of whom were suffering from war injuries. By June 1921, when forty-eight holdings were occupied, only four operative wells had been sunk. It had not been from want of effort; rather, it was alleged that none of Bestmann’s sites had produced results.

Ironically, town water was connected within one hundred metres of the settlement. In late 1919, when Stephens Shire Council made their first demand for rate payments, it was found that not one of the settlers was in a position to pay. The Shire Chairman, Councillor Stimpson, evinced sympathy and although a decision was made “not [to] push for the money”, the local authority did not have sufficient funds to expend on the settlement. Thus, while the settlers could not afford rates or the twelve pounds per annum necessary for a town water connection, they were forced to go without. A few months earlier, John Balmer and B.B. Finley, respectively Secretary and President of the

75 *DS*, 27 June 1918, p.4.
76 *WK*, 26 March 1920, p.7.
77 *DM*, 11 December 1918, p.7.
78 *BC*, 6 September 1921, p.8.
79 *BC*, 13 November 1922, p.12.
81 *BC*, 13 November 1922, p.12.
82 *BC*, 5 September 1921, p.7.
83 *BC*, 10 December 1919, p.6.
84 *BC*, 5 September 1921, p.7.
Mount Gravatt Soldiers' Settlement Progress Association—somewhat of a misnomer—disclosed how the settlers' advance had been consumed:

Erection of dwellings, £270 each; erection of eight fowl runs; erection of six breeding pens; fencing three blocks, say, of 10 acres with posts and three wires; sustenance for 19 months at the rate of £2 per week for married men and £1/10 for single men; purchase of fowls; purchase of feed; horse, cart and harness; a 2000-gallon cemented tank. The runs are all of hardwood with 6ft. wire netting.

Capital was simply exhausted. Although the settlers used natural timber on their holdings for construction purposes, they were forbidden to sell any surplus, a ruling that was not satisfactorily explained. Horses and carts, which were essential for marketing eggs and conveying supplies, were initially in short supply, though this had been overcome by June 1921, when the fifty-one horses on the settlement outnumbered the settlers by three. Notwithstanding knowledge that the area was unsuitable for agriculture, the soldier settlers were expected to cultivate the green fodder “absolutely necessary” for poultry. To carry out this task the government made the magnanimous gesture of providing a single plough and harrow, and it was left to the Maimed and Wounded Soldiers’ Fund, a civilian organisation, to provide eligible veterans with the money to purchase their own implements. These were then shared with their more able-bodied neighbours. Other implements and tools remained in short supply until late 1923, when

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85 BC, 12 September 1919, p.8.
86 TC, 16 March 1920, p.6.
87 BC, 11 July 1918, p.8.
89 BC, 5 September 1921, p.7.
91 Ibid.
“farm tools and sundries” were transported to Mount Gravatt from the failing Highlands soldier settlement near Samford, north of Brisbane.\(^{92}\)

Results of the cultivation at Mount Gravatt are somewhat contradictory. In August 1922, ‘Dinkum Settler’ claimed that green fodder could be grown throughout the settlement, in addition to vegetables, fruit trees, papaws and passion fruit.\(^{93}\) While the correspondent may have been a political stooge, A.E.D. Williams also insisted that he had profited from tomatoes, “which grow prolifically here”.\(^{94}\) Contrary evidence nevertheless suggests that only four holdings were capable of producing satisfactory results and, by then, Mount Gravatt had already commenced its decline.\(^{95}\)

The first forfeiture occurred by June 1918, when sixteen soldier settlers remained on the settlement.\(^{96}\) The Queensland Agricultural College supplied the first settlers with, ostensibly, 4,000 six-week-old pullets, for which service they were charged one shilling per head.\(^{97}\) One month later they received “1000 good commercial laying hens”, but the price in this instance was unstated.\(^{98}\) William Keany considered the Gatton poultry to be of a very high standard, which “had been carefully bred for high-egg production”,\(^{99}\) a remarkable statement considering that the staff were often unable to differentiate between male and female birds. Moreover, it was later revealed that much of the stock suffered

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\(^{92}\) *Under Secretary, Department of Public Works, to Under Secretary, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 30 October 1923, LAN/AK133, Batch 842, “Auction Sale, Soldier Settlement Highlands”, QSA.*

\(^{93}\) *BC, 11 August 1922, p.17.*

\(^{94}\) *BC, 15 August 1922, p.4.*

\(^{95}\) *BC, 25 November 1921, p.6.*


\(^{97}\) *Ibid., p.1108.*

\(^{98}\) *DS, 23 July 1918, p.5.*
from defects caused through inbreeding.\textsuperscript{100} The pens, built to hold between 300 and 500 head of poultry, were of a simple design based on South Australian requirements.\textsuperscript{101} In this context, they were themselves experimental:

The earlier settlers were given fowl houses unsuitable to Queensland climatic conditions. They were too hot, did not provide sufficient shade, and were not weather-proof. The later settlers had had their holdings equipped with a different type of fowl house, which was giving better results, but the earlier settlers still had to use the out of date system.\textsuperscript{102}

In October 1918 a Newtown Grant incubator with a capacity of 6,000 eggs was installed on the settlement to enable the settlers to hatch their own stock.\textsuperscript{103} This soon proved insufficient, necessitating the installation of a second incubator by June 1919.\textsuperscript{104} As poultry feed was considered “extortionately dear”,\textsuperscript{105} two 3,000-bushel concrete silos were also constructed, the idea being to purchase grain when prices were low and thus have a reserve supply in times of scarcity.\textsuperscript{106} Completed in late 1919 they were never used, as the creation of a Wheat Board and concomitant pooling prevented the price for this commodity falling to substantially low levels.\textsuperscript{107} Poultry feed remained expensive, while the price of eggs began to fall. In January 1919 the settlers received from 1/9 to two

\textsuperscript{99}DS, 3 September 1918, p.6.
\textsuperscript{100}WK, 18 March 1921, p.22.
\textsuperscript{102}BC, 25 November 1921, p.6.
\textsuperscript{103}DS, 4 October 1918, p.6.
\textsuperscript{105}QAJ, Vol.10, Pt.5 (November 1918), p.211.
\textsuperscript{107}WK, 17 March 1922, p.30.
shillings per dozen for their produce.\textsuperscript{108} By September 1921 the price had dropped to one shilling per dozen and,\textsuperscript{109} in March 1922, the settlers received only ninepence per dozen for their eggs, while the price of wheat had risen to eight shillings per bushel.\textsuperscript{110} There were also times when poultry feed was virtually unobtainable at any price.\textsuperscript{111}

The difficulties are readily apparent, and by March 1920 not one of the Mount Gravatt soldier settlers had managed to become self-sufficient.\textsuperscript{112} Indeed, even by November 1921 only two of the holdings were reported to be “giving a reasonable return”.\textsuperscript{113} The settlers were also dissatisfied with the level of supervision and advice offered by William Keany, whom they considered “not temperamentally suited for the position”.\textsuperscript{114} In February 1921 they demanded his “immediate removal”,\textsuperscript{115} and the following month a deputation of seven soldier settlers presented their grievances to Premier Theodore. According to J. Williams, the settlement was little more than an “experiment” into poultry farming to suit the government’s broad agricultural policy. When Theodore countered that the soldier settlers on the second major poultry settlement at Enoggera appeared to be “getting on all right”, John Balmer suggested that perhaps they were benefiting from the mistakes made at Mount Gravatt.\textsuperscript{116} Theodore defended Keany’s supervision, however, and he remained in that position until 1923, when the death of John Beard resulted in a departmental reshuffle. Beard was replaced with another South
Australian, Percival Rumball, who had been supervising the Enoggera settlement, while Keany became the North Queensland poultry instructor. Supervision at Mount Gravatt thereafter became even more infrequent. Moreover, the Enoggera soldier settlers had also complained of Rumball’s inefficiency the previous year, and rather than “getting on all right”, they were engaged in their own grim struggle to achieve self-sufficiency.

Located just off Waterworks Road at The Gap, nine kilometres north-west of Brisbane’s commercial heart, ‘Enoggera’ was established in September 1919 when an area of 146 hectares was sub-divided into forty-three holdings of three to four hectares in extent. Unlike the majority of their counterparts at Mount Gravatt, the Enoggera settlers were able to cultivate small areas for green poultry feed and, in the case of “Mr. Pickering” and others, fruit and vegetables. Water shortages were nevertheless common. Although Fish Creek flowed through the settlement, it was found necessary to instal an iron tank at the Enoggera Reservoir to supplement water supplies during dry periods. A small number of settlers, including the former Royal Scots Fusilier, David Anderson, also managed to procure underground supplies by sinking wells to an average depth of ten metres. By June 1922, however, only eight wells had been sunk, but insufficient water supplies was merely one serious problem amongst a plethora of others.

118 BC, 11 July 1923, p.9.
120 BC, 28 August 1920, p.4.
121 Horton, Brisbane’s Back Door, p.49.
Forty-two holdings had been allotted by June 1921 and two incubators, with capacities of 8,000 and 6,000-eggs respectively, had been installed for the settlers’ use. These machines generated heat of a different kind. For one thing, they arrived too late to benefit the returned servicemen in their first season, and in November 1920 ‘Settler’ contended:

> Take the incubator, what a splendid failure it is. It was once said to me that the brooder heater was a handy article for burning any dead chicks. Three months’ experience has made me agree that these contrivances are just the thing for burning dead chicks, but not for rearing them, the money paid for them being the only good thing in connection with them.

He was supported by ‘Verax’, who further insisted that on one occasion only six chickens were successfully hatched from a tray of 154 eggs. While that may have been exceptional, the settlers were certainly hampered by dry conditions during the formative years, and drought was perhaps the major factor rendering their farms unproductive.

David Anderson later recalled that few could meet their financial obligations:

> I commenced farming at The Gap during 1920 and within two years fewer than five of the original settlers remained on their farms because their respective incomes did not cover the 3 per cent interest payable on their Government loan of 600 pounds. The only way I could hold on to my farm was by obtaining work off the property and leaving my wife to care for the poultry. I did odd jobs such as clearing scrub and chopping and carting firewood.

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125 *BC*, 9 September 1920, p.6.
Anderson was fortunate in having a wife capable of running the property. Not so W.H. French, a soldier settler on a small poultry farm in the northern Brisbane suburb of Zillmere, who briefly outlined his circumstances in May 1918:

It will be a very difficult matter to me to hatch and rear chickens this (my first) breeding season, as I have to be away from home every day to earn a few pounds to keep the home going. My wife is quite incapable of attending incubators and chicks. There is only myself to do it, and I cannot do it properly and go out to work too.

In many instances, however, there can be little doubt that wives often bore the brunt of these agricultural experiments in Queensland. How French later fared is not known, but in March 1922 the Enoggera soldier settlers agitated for an official inquiry to be conducted into the administration of the settlement. This was refused by the Minister for Public Lands, Harry Coyne, who had “no idea in the world of granting an inquiry to everybody who makes an application for one”. When the settlers proposed to conduct their own inquiry with independent poultry specialists, Coyne warned that any evidence taken under oath would breach existing legislation and lead to criminal prosecution. The settlers therefore held a less formal inquiry, and this revealed that out of 16,438 eggs placed in the State incubators, only 1,805 birds had been successfully raised. Three reasons were provided to account for the inherent problems associated with the

\[130\] W.H. French, Zillmere, North Coast Line, to Mr. Couthbert Potts, Principal, Queensland Agricultural College, Gatton, 21 May 1918, LAN/167/1916-31, QSA.
\[131\] BC, 14 March 1922, p.4.
\[132\] BC, 2 March 1922, p.6.
\[133\] Ibid.
\[134\] WK, 14 April 1922, p.7.
settlement, and a deputation of four soldier settlers presented the findings to Coyne in April:

[First], faulty incubation, which the board attributed to improper handling and improperly constructed incubator houses, especially in regard to ventilation. [Second], faulty construction of [brooder] houses, which were made of iron which made it impossible to retain sufficient heat ... [Third], it appears that the settlers have not had sufficient instruction by virtue of the fact that the greatest number of lectures delivered at the settlement in two years was eight, and only one circular was issued.  

Coyne merely “promised” to place their grievances before the Land Settlement Committee. Rather than addressing the problems, the latter body advised the Crown Solicitor to issue writs against three Enoggera settlers (and one at Mount Gravatt) who had expended funds exceeding their advance of £625. The government thus struck back. In an internal report, however, Percival Rumball candidly admitted his lack of supervision which, he insisted, was entirely due to the apathy of his charges:

One circular was issued. The reason for this was that after giving a lecture on feeding and rearing of chickens I found that some settlers were taking no notice of the instruction given ... the average attendance [at lectures] has been 9 settlers from a Settlement of 40 individuals and the lowest number being two ... Some settlers, I admit, I do not frequently visit. They are the type of men who take no notice of what you say and all the advice in the world would not assist.

Rumball was promoted the following year. His report also made it clear that a deadly outbreak of “Bacillary White Diarrhoea” had decimated poultry flocks on the settlement,

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135 Ibid.
136 BC, 10 June 1922, p.6.
but when commenting on the high incidence of stock theft among the settlers he could see no correlation between the two. Theft, in this case, almost certainly represented a survival strategy. His probable incompetence aside, Rumball did record the unfortunate circumstances of one settler:

Another settler who has just surrendered his portion was doing splendidly. This settler kept a dog which he placed in his brooder-house to catch a stray rat but on this occasion it caught 60 chickens. He made this loss good and was again having splendid results with the Newton [sic] Colony Brooder when he was persuaded to use cold brooders. This he did with the result that he only reared a few chickens and has had to leave.

Whether it was through lack of adequate supervision or other problems associated with poultry farming, the twelve soldier settlers on three and four hectare holdings at Wolston, just west of Brisbane, disappeared from the official records after 1919. Although their situation is not clear, all soldier settlers involved in egg production faced a glutted market in 1921. Produce from the Enoggera settlement was among a trial shipment of 1,000 dozen eggs forwarded to the Sydney firm of Prescotts Limited in September, though the price received—1/3 per dozen—did little to alleviate their plight; packing and transport costs virtually consumed the marginal gain.

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137 Extracts from “Comments by Mr. Rumball”, undated [1922], Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, LAN/167 (1916-31), QSA.
138 Ibid.
139 Ibid.
141 WK, 2 September 1921, p.5.
142 WK, 17 March 1922, p.30.
To temporarily forget their woes, many undoubtedly sought spiritual comfort. During the first two years at Enoggera the Reverend Canon Garland performed services and baptisms in the open, with logs serving as pews and a stump as the font stand. In February 1922 a Church of England hut was opened, serving a dual purpose by hosting various social functions on weekdays. For many British war brides it was also a simple reminder of the life they had left behind.\textsuperscript{143} There was no divine intervention into the rising cost of poultry feed, which increased by up to eighty percent during the first half of 1922.\textsuperscript{144} Five more settlers left the Enoggera settlement as their position became untenable, and of the thirty-seven remaining in June,\textsuperscript{145} "35 [were] up against it".\textsuperscript{146} These were, of course, ex-servicemen who had largely replaced the original settlers. The exodus had just begun.

As at Tolga and Kairi in North Queensland, the poultry settlements around Brisbane formed a tangible plank in the ‘White Australia Policy’, internally and externally. Indeed, in the broad view, soldier settlement across the nation partly arose from the ‘invasion syndrome’ which had preyed on Australian minds since the goldrushes of the mid-nineteenth century. In this context, there could be little worse than an Asian ‘invasion’ from another State in the Commonwealth. Chinese dominated the banana industry in New South Wales and concerns were expressed that they would soon expand into Queensland.\textsuperscript{147} Soldier settlers became the first line of defence.

\textsuperscript{143} BC, 13 February 1922, p.6.
\textsuperscript{144} WK, 16 June 1922, p.6.
In May 1919 the Queensland government repurchased 1,346 hectares of land, known as Highlands Estate, on the D'Aguilar Range north of Brisbane. While the owners, C.E. and Agnes Nicholas, received £19,958/10/9 for the property,\(^{148}\) government sources considered the repurchase to have been "a bargain".\(^{149}\) Of greater importance, this acquisition enabled the government to continue establishing returned servicemen in the banana-growing industry—a scheme that had actually commenced the previous year with the purchase of 400 hectares of land in the Currumbin Valley, on the far south coast.\(^{150}\) Despite the claim that it was intended to satisfy a demand amongst returning servicemen,\(^{151}\) increased involvement in the banana industry was undoubtedly motivated by racial concerns, particularly the threat of Chinese incursion from New South Wales. It is also relevant that when this tactical move began to falter in late 1921, the Queensland government passed the *Banana Industry Preservation Act* providing "for the full engagement of white people in the industry".\(^{152}\) Clause three permitted the application of the dictation test when necessary to ensure the exclusion of non-whites.\(^{153}\)

Very few soldier settlers appear to have been placed in the Currumbin Valley, for the banana plantations were soon ravaged by an introduction from New South Wales which, unlike the Chinese, was detrimental in reality. The disease known as "Bunchy Top" killed banana plants with varying degrees of rapidity, and even those that lingered seldom

\(^{146}\) *WK*, 16 June 1922, p.6.
\(^{148}\) *BC*, 28 August 1919, p.6.
\(^{149}\) *DM*, 24 May 1919, p.7.
\(^{150}\) *DB*, 17 October 1918, p.4.
\(^{151}\) *DM*, 24 May 1919, p.7.
produced fruit—with none being marketable. The disease was certainly present in the Currumbin Valley by 1919, and the repurchase of Highlands Estate near Samford, north of Brisbane (Appendix 5), was therefore most opportune as it allowed for the continuance of banana cultivation on an extensive scale in an area isolated from the scourge. Highlands was soon reinforced by a small banana-growing soldier settlement at Upper Brookfield, on the southern extremity of the D'Aguilar Range.

The soldier settler, Arthur Gibbons, later recalled that returned servicemen were enticed to Highlands by an aggressive government publicity campaign, including a display of “resplendent lithographs” at suburban railway stations around Brisbane. Sixty-six holdings were opened for selection in March 1920, and while sixty were immediately taken up it is notable that they varied considerably in area. At the first ballot, for instance, T.S. Grieg acquired a holding of 109 hectares; at the opposite end of the scale, G.L. Brown’s holding comprised a mere eight hectares. Presumably, many of the larger holdings included inaccessible slopes and heavily forested areas.

An ex-AIF officer, William Latham, soon replaced the first supervisor, H. Collard. Within three months at least three soldier settlers had also left the district. Conversely, H.J. Digweed was among those confident of achieving financial independence. In January 1921, Digweed was harvesting bananas from his holding, while others had

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155 QAJ, Vol.21, Pt.3 (March 1924), p.254.
158 WK, 18 June 1920, p.16.
159 Ibid.
already diversified into dairying and mixed farming.\textsuperscript{160} John Dwyer is credited with having led the way into market gardening,\textsuperscript{161} but bananas were still the principal crop in June 1921:

An area of 143 acres of scrub has been cleared and 72\(\frac{1}{4}\) acres planted with bananas; 17 miles of fencing erected and 6 miles of roads have been constructed. Fifty-four acres ploughed and 24 acres planted with oats, maize, and \(\text{[sweet]}\) potatoes. Nineteen houses have been erected.\textsuperscript{162}

With fifty-seven soldier settlers on the estate, and only nineteen dwellings constructed, many were almost certainly living in sub-standard conditions. Casual work on the roads provided additional income, though this perhaps reflected more on the settlers' necessitous circumstances. In July 1922, for example, it was shown that H. Atherton had earned £17/3 labouring on road construction, albeit, over a period of seventeen months.\textsuperscript{163} By then, disaster had also struck the settlement.

The majority of holdings concentrating on banana cultivation were situated at altitudes varying from 260 and 520 metres above sea level on the western slopes of the range. During the winter of 1920 both Alfred Nind, on Portion 68, and his neighbour, reported the presence of frost. By the time the supervisor arrived in mid-morning, however, it had largely dissipated. No action was therefore taken, and in the winter of 1921 frost returned with a vengeance, wreaking havoc on twenty-two holdings situated on the western slopes

\textsuperscript{160} \textit{WK}, 21 January 1921, p.4.
\textsuperscript{161} Horton, \textit{Brisbane's Back Door}, p.40.
Above 260 metres. Banana plots on the eastern slope largely escaped damage, though subsidiary crops such as sweet potatoes were similarly devastated. Latham could do little more than advise the settlers to cover their surviving banana plants with bags; he was unable to provide the bags—or the funds necessary for their purchase.

Although the affected settlers were granted immediate sustenance allowance, the minimal amount ensured that many were dependent on the credit advanced by Samford storekeepers. This was soon stopped—and then restored—after the personal intercession of conservative politician Hubert Sizer, whose Nundah electorate embraced the soldier settlement. With their holdings officially condemned the settlers could do little more than wait, and while their plight was discussed in Melbourne the inherent political antagonism underlying soldier settlement effectively prevented Federal intervention:

The Assistant Minister for Repatriation (Mr. Rodgers) said that so far as the Repatriation Department was concerned there must be an absolute denial of responsibility. The Commonwealth had no voice in the selection of the land, but simply had to find the money for the States to carry out their policies, which were unknown to the Commonwealth.

By November 1921 the storekeepers had again refused credit, reportedly leaving many of the affected settlers "on the verge of starvation". Those who had escaped damage from frost fared little better the following month when they received demands to pay their first...
year's rent. A number were unable to do so, and forfeited their holdings.\textsuperscript{170} For a few of the settlers who had fallen victim to frost, events finally took a fortuitous turn in December when they were offered alternative selections further north at Amamoor, near Gympie.\textsuperscript{171} By then only ten of the soldier settlers were in a position to accept the transfer and, with one exception, it ultimately proved a wise course. They also received additional concessions:

The settlers affected have been relieved of all loan expenditure in respect of the blocks vacated, and will be eligible to again receive loan advances up to the limit of £625. It has also been approved to make available to such settlers certain additional amounts in view of the improvements effected by them on their vacated blocks. These payments will not be charged to the settler's loan account, and will be made as soon as work in addition to that which is being provided for from the loan account has been carried out by the settler on the new holding to the value of the amount approved in each case.\textsuperscript{172}

While one of the transferred settlers had abandoned his holding at Amamoor by June 1924,\textsuperscript{173} he was quickly replaced, and all ten remained ensconced on an aggregate area of 244 hectares in June 1929.\textsuperscript{174} Banana cultivation continued, but it is significant that all the Amamoor settlers diversified into a range of primary activities, including dairying, sugar cane, pineapples, vegetables and green fodder.\textsuperscript{175}

\textsuperscript{169} MB, 29 November 1921, p.8.
\textsuperscript{170} QDR, 31 December 1921, pp.14-5.
\textsuperscript{171} BC, 22 December 1921, p.8.
\textsuperscript{172} QPD, Vol.139 (1922), p.15.
\textsuperscript{175} BC, 11 October 1924, p.15.
Yet even before they departed Highlands in December 1921, the settlers were being accused of contributing to their own downfall. According to Queensland’s Minister for Public Lands, Harry Coyne, “if the banana plants had been planted at the time the soldiers had been told to put them in they would have been able to withstand the effects of the frost”. This drew an angry response from both the settlers and the Brisbane press. Alfred Nind, who had warned of frost the year before disaster struck, did agree that his planting had been late. He was nevertheless critical of the land on which the returned servicemen had been settled:

I planted in December and January, in accordance with the advice of an old settler, Mr. Morrison, whose experience for the last two years showed him that the late planting gave best results ... In all there were three frosts in one month. Mr. Coyne omitted to mention that the land was condemned for other reasons than the frost ... I planted all kinds of vegetables, which were a failure. Pumpkins that I planted at the beginning of September only grew three inches in two months. In fact, nothing would grow in the clayey subsoil.

Nind was in receipt of a military pension, and poor health influenced his decision not to accept a transfer to Amamoor. For the majority of those settlers not affected by frost, and who had surmounted the demand to meet their financial obligations, there were further barriers to progress:

It is an utter impossibility for the majority of the settlers to make good, for the simple reason that their blocks are too small, some of them being only 40 acres in extent. Dairying and mixed farming on areas of

176 BC, 22 December 1921, p.8.
177 Ibid.; BC, 30 December 1921, p.4; QDR, 31 December 1921, p.5.
178 BC, 24 December 1921, p.10.
this size here is simply a farce, and an inquiry should be made as to the responsibility for cutting up the estate into such ridiculous “farms.”

The entry of soldier settlers into maize-growing, egg production and banana cultivation had been perceived as a means for curbing the reliance on Asian producers and thereby reinforcing the ‘White Australia Policy’. Land was to be held and controlled by Europeans, but very little was actually made available to the supposed ‘protectors’. As Justice Pike asserted in 1929, limited allocations of land was a major contributing factor in the failure of soldier settlement throughout Australia. It was further undermined by adverse environmental factors. Frost struck a major blow on the Highlands soldier settlement but, as Donald Denoon has argued, “environmental determinism” is considerably weakened if it ignores paralleling economic and political dimensions. Soldier settlement did continue at Highlands, and frost and bitter cold recurred annually at Stanthorpe without having any major impact. The Pikedale soldier settlers were forced to contend with quite different environmental problems, while drought undoubtedly played a crucial role in the steady demise of soldier settlement further west. Importantly, they were compounded by economic and political factors.

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CHAPTER 5:

‘RAILWAYS AND RECKONING’: STANTHORPE AND THE PROBLEMS OF THE WEST

But no peaches or cream, no raspberry pie,
No, nothing at all if the rain passes by.
So please Mr Jupiter Pluvius, sir,
Don’t let it be said you’re a Jimmy Woodser.

Notwithstanding the later antagonism against a non-British returned soldier, John Johansson, social relations on the Pikedale soldier settlement near Stanthorpe were characterised by communal endeavour in 1919. It could hardly be otherwise, for the arduous tasks were often beyond the physical resources of individuals or nuclear families, and the single horse-winch provided by the government for clearing heavy timber required teamwork. The shortage of horses on the settlement was partly overcome by one enterprising settler who managed to round up “a couple of hundred wild ones” in the ranges to the west, but their quality was somewhat dubious as they were not fully broken in before sale. While they did prove adequate for ploughing, it was said that many wild rides were experienced when the horses were harnessed between the shafts of spring carts. Lack of transport, and poor roads, also restricted travel so that local community

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1 J, Moses, “It’s Awfully Dry”, in Nine Miles from Gundagai (Wollstonecraft, NSW: Pollard, 1972), p.27.
picnics were a common recreational activity. Winter, however, imposed further restraints, and in 1919 it was particularly bitter:

The nights were very cold, but a fire burning in a drum created warmth until bedtime. It was a very severe winter with a heavy fall of snow in September. Water had to be drawn from a well, and the supply in a bucket was often frozen by 9 p.m.\(^5\)

The hardships were exacerbated by crude living conditions. In August 1919 it was reported that sanitation was absent even within the embryonic township:

Apart from the buildings, there is an unsightly confusion of bark huts and tents huddled together on the banks of the waterway [Thirteen Mile Creek]. These are occupied by the clearing gangs and their families. A careful inspection and a few questions revealed a complete absence of sanitation. There are no “conveniences” for men, women, or children, and the soakage from all the household slops and offal ultimately finds its way into the waterholes of the creek, which at present is the only water supply available. An examination of the creek itself showed that it had long ceased to run owing to the dry spell, and that it consisted of a series of isolated holes half filled with dirty water, around which cows were grazing, and in which they had evidently been standing. There was good, clear water a few hundred yards higher up stream, but one failed to discover whether this was used.\(^6\)

These were truly pioneering conditions, which reflect haste and poor preparation. Optimism nevertheless remained high among the participants. This period was also the height of the post-war boom, and private developers were promoting their own schemes for rural settlement on the Granite Belt (Appendix 6). With production yet to begin on a

\(^4\) Ibid., p.5.
substantial basis it was soon realised that road transport would be totally inadequate to
cater for an increasing number of soldier settlers. Calls for a “light tramway” had been
made from December 1918, but the government kept in view the possibility of extending
any such line further west to the State arsenic mine at Jibbenbar, the product of which
was used to combat prickly pear throughout the State. A number of routes were thus
proposed, and without eliminating a possible future extension to Jibbenbar, a Royal
Commission in April 1919 nevertheless recommended that the construction of a railway
should turn on two quintessential factors:

First, the desirableness of providing the most direct and quickest route
to the market (Brisbane), and the route that will have the effect of
opening up the greatest area of land for settlement.

This was a satisfactory reflection of the government’s development policies: increased
land settlement at the lowest possible cost. Significantly, as the railway was incremental
to soldier settlement, finance was provided by way of a Commonwealth loan. To reduce
expenditure the northern route from Cottonvale was finally selected, primarily because
there were few natural obstacles, earthworks were minimal and ballast was not required.
Rather than a ‘light tramway’, it was decided to build a branch line on the standard three
feet six inch gauge. In this way, no special rolling stock would be necessary and the light,
partly-worn rails replaced on the Brisbane suburban line between Yeerongpilly and Beenleigh, could be used in the construction.\textsuperscript{13}

Whether the soldier settlers actually favoured the northern route is questionable. Press reports stated that nineteen of the twenty-seven soldier settlers then at Pikedale preferred a direct link to Stanthorpe,\textsuperscript{14} and this was the argument advanced by Charles Williams, a soldier settler supposedly representing his comrades before the Royal Commission in April 1919. Yet the petition presented by Williams bore only six signatures, ostensibly gathered at a meeting called to discuss the issue. When the commissioners drew attention to this lack of representation, Williams lamely countered that there had not been sufficient time to gather the rest.\textsuperscript{15} Commissioner H.J. Ryan also considered a direct link between Stanthorpe and the soldier settlement to be advantageous, despite slightly higher freight charges:

\begin{quote}
The route via Cotton Vale to Brisbane is certainly shorter, but as the difference is only about 6d. to 9d. per ton in the freights to Brisbane that would be fully compensated for by the advantage of adopting the Stanthorpe route ... The soldiers at the Settlement will be drawn to Stanthorpe by the commercial, social, and banking activities provided there; while the educational, medical, and hospital and nursing institutions, and the friendly society, political, and fruit-growers' associations at Stanthorpe will attract them for many years to come.\textsuperscript{16}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{12}Ibid., p.778.
\textsuperscript{13}R.E. Sexton, Chief Engineer, to Secretary, Office of the Commissioner for Railways, Brisbane, 23 June 1919, A/8867, Hard Batch 53, QSA.
\textsuperscript{14}DM, 27 March 1919, p.6; BC, 27 March 1919, p.8.
\textsuperscript{15}"Pikedale Tramway Commission", p.800.
\textsuperscript{16}Ibid., p.780.
Ryan overlooked the possible changes that the railway could bring to the nucleus of the soldier settlement itself, apart from the essential provision of transport. He was the sole dissenter, and irrespective of the actual route, construction of the railway was also a political exercise by the Labor government. Continually frustrated by the conservative Legislative Council, the government was able to circumvent normal procedure as the soldier settlement was situated within the Pikedale Goldfield, a reserved mineral area since 1877. The field had not been profitable, but the provisions of the 1898 *Mining Act* allowed the construction of tramways within such designated areas to be decided by the relevant government departments.\(^{17}\) Thus, an endorsement from the intransigent Legislative Council was not required, and the government was able to fulfil the promise made to the soldier settlers.\(^{18}\) It did lead to a minor legal dilemma in late 1920, however, when the Justice Department pointed out that as there was no written agreement between the Mines and Railway Departments regarding control of the line, “the Commissioner [for Railways] apparently has no right to be working on it”.\(^{19}\) The matter was quietly resolved.

Construction began in June 1919 with a workforce of fifty men,\(^{20}\) soon increased to 120, as few mechanical contrivances were made available.\(^{21}\) The survey had managed to avoid the numerous granite outcrops and work was rapid. Twenty kilometres in length, the

\(^{17}\) Secretary, Office of the Commissioner for Railways, to Chief Engineer, Brisbane, 30 May 1919, A/8867, Hard Batch 53, QSA.


\(^{19}\) Memorandum, “Re Cottonvale Tramway to Soldiers Settlement—Amiens”, Department of Justice, Brisbane, 10 December 1920, A/8867, Hard Batch 53, QSA.

branch line, alternatively known as the 'Pikedale Tramway', was opened on 7 June 1920 at a cost of £50,634. Economically, the line was anything but a success. During the first year of operation revenue amounted to £1,062, while expenditure reached £2,692, or a loss of £1,630. The historian of Queensland railways, John Kerr, has shown that it was not until 1926 that the flow of outward goods from the terminus finally eclipsed inward consignments. Although generating only moderate revenue, the figures for a number of intermediate locations along the railway nevertheless show substantial differences. In 1922, for example, Bullecourt received some twelve tonnes of goods, but despatched thirty-eight tonnes, and in 1925 the amounts were three and fifty-one respectively. Between Cottonvale and the terminus passenger traffic was quite the reverse, dropping rapidly from fifty weekly passengers each way, and resulting in daily services being replaced by a thrice-weekly service to reduce operating costs. The emphasis, of course, was on the cartage of primary produce.

Railway buildings were only erected at Cottonvale and the terminus, with sidings being placed strategically along the line for loading produce. These subsequently developed into small townships, and it was the surveyor, George Grant, who proposed naming the

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22 Secretary, Office of the Commissioner for Railways, to Under Secretary, Treasury, Brisbane, 30 September 1920, A/8867, Hard Batch 53, QSA; Secretary, Office of the Commissioner for Railways, to Under Secretary, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 3 October 1921, Ibid.
24 Kerr, "The Pikedale Tramway or Amiens Branch Railway", p.124.
25 General Manager, South Western District, Toowoomba, to Secretary, Queensland Railways, Brisbane, 30 October 1925, A/12720, Batch 37/2510, "Accommodation Bullecourt", QSA.
27 General Manager, South Western District, Toowoomba, to General Manager, Queensland Railways, Brisbane, 16 March 1921, A/8867, Hard Batch 53, QSA.
localities after battlefields where Australian troops had played a prominent role. His idea was accepted, and along the line from Cottonvale arose Fleurbaix, Pozieres, Bullecourt, Passchendale, Bapaume, Messines and finally Amiens, the terminus (Appendix 7). The latter was the third choice of name after postal authorities rejected Romani, “which it is considered bears too much resemblance to Roma”, and Cambrai, “as there is already an office named ‘Cambrai’ in South Australia”.

It was the soldier settlers at Bapaume who, in January 1922, bitterly condemned a further reduction in rail services. As they argued, with no service existing between Thursday and Monday they were unable to market vegetables—“their only produce”—during the latter part of the week, or at the Monday market in Brisbane. Strenuous campaigning finally resulted in increased services. By 1924 trains were again running daily except during winter, when they reverted to the thrice-weekly schedule. This does seem to suggest that until the mid-1920s soldier settlement was still seen as a solid plank in the State government’s dream of increased rural productivity.

While the ‘Pikedale Tramway’ may not have been an economic success, it should not be overlooked that the soldier settlers did benefit considerably from its presence. This was exemplified in the rapid changes that took place in the newly-named terminus of Amiens.

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28 George G. Grant, Thulimbah, to Commissioner for Railways, Brisbane, 10 August 1919, Ibid.  
29 J. McConachie, Acting Deputy Postmaster-General, to Acting Secretary, Commissioner for Railways, Brisbane, 25 February 1920, Ibid.  
30 J. McConachie, Acting Deputy Postmaster-General, to Acting Secretary, Commissioner for Railways, Brisbane, 5 March 1920, Ibid.  
31 BC, 12 January 1922, p.8.  
32 BC, 19 May 1924, p.8.
In March 1920, with the line under construction, the District Inspector for the Department of Public Instruction, John Hooper, noted the increasing fecundity of both settlers and settlement:

Several of the settlers are single men, and several others have no children. During the year 1919, sixty of the soldier settlers were married, and during the same period there were many births, at the Pines Hospital alone, at Stanthorpe, there were 40 births belonging to the Pikedale Soldiers' Settlement. At present the settlement is in a very healthy condition, and the future prospects are very encouraging.

Indeed they were, and Hooper's comments are interesting in that they appear to conflict with the argument advanced by Eric Leed that front-line combat in the Great War, and subjection to massive technological innovations, led to psychic retreat and "impotence that, in a few cases, lasted long into peacetime".34 The condition obviously occurred, but the fecundity of soldier settlers suggests that it was perhaps not widespread, or usually of extremely brief duration.

Rather than being born, the soldier settlement at Cecil Plains, north-west of Stanthorpe and eighty-four kilometres west to Toowoomba, developed out of the historic Cecil Plains station. Established in the early 1840s, Cecil Plains carried 100,000 head of sheep by 1895, with cattle and pigs being of considerable secondary importance.35 Repurchased by the Queensland government in September 1916, the 49,372 hectares was divided into

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33 John Hooper, District Inspector, Stanthorpe, to Under Secretary, Department of Public Instruction, Brisbane, 6 March 1920, EDU/Z40, Batch 1629, "Amiens 1920-1946", QSA.
34 Leed, No Man's Land, pp.183-4.
two separate areas, with 16,421 hectares, or approximately one-third of the property, being reserved solely for soldier settlement (Appendix 8). The latter section was further sub-divided into seventy-three holdings varying in extent from 106 to 259 hectares, though returned servicemen were also granted preference on the larger area opened for general selection. While emphasis was placed on dairying, the limited size of the holdings necessitated an experimental foray into a range of agricultural pursuits.

It is evident that an attempt was made to ensure successful applicants for land did have some practical farming experience. As one disappointed applicant, H.A. Hoggett, lamented in November 1919, those with their own capital also appeared to enjoy preferential treatment:

I may state that I would be very pleased to select but unfortunately for me I have not the money to pay for the improvements or the first years rent, and cannot get it. I have tried to find out where I could get any help from, but failed, so on coming to the conclusion that the returned man with money could get a chance, & that the man with a family and no money could not be settled on the land, I was compelled to give up the idea of ever getting Portion 21.

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35 R. Dansie (comp.), *History of Toowoomba ... a series of articles* (Toowoomba, Qld: Toowoomba Education Centre, 1984), pp.90 and 94.
36 *DS*, 27 June 1918, p.4.
37 Under Secretary, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, to Land Commissioner, Toowoomba, 19 March 1919, LAN/AK120, Batch 709, Part 1 (1919-1924), QSA.
39 Officer in Charge, Soldier Settlement Branch, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, to Mr. Ernest Harris, c/- Masonic Club, Pitt Street, Sydney, 18 March 1919, LAN/AK120, Batch 709, Part 1 (1919-1924), QSA.
Described as “the most valuable freehold estate in Australia held by one owner”, Cecil Plains was certainly an investment on which the government was determined to recoup all costs. Indeed, it appeared quite possible to gain additional revenue. The price paid for the estate equated to two pounds per acre; yet, on opening the land for selection in March 1919, the capital value was assessed at prices ranging from £2/10 to £2/15, rising in some instances to three pounds per acre. With ‘improvements’ valued separately, recipients were also liable for the survey fee of fifteen pounds—payable on each holding. Thus, as the returned soldier, Edwin Burne, noted with disgust:

The annual rent is fixed for the first fifteen years at 4 per cent. of the capital value of the land. It is easily to be seen, therefore, that the Government proposes to extract rent from the settlers, being interest on money which was never invested. The average block on the soldier settlement area is about 500 acres. If this get-rich-quick scheme (for the Government) is permitted to come to maturity it means that the soldier settler will have to pay about £15 per year more than is fair, or honest.

Queensland’s Under Secretary for Public Lands, W. Gordon Graham, did admit that the cost of soldier settlement holdings was indeed higher than those opened for general selection, but argued that this was an “indication” of the former being “of better quality”. For what purpose he did not say, and long-term residents in the district were unanimous in their statements that only those holdings immediately alongside the

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41 *BC*, 31 August 1916, p.6.
42 *BC*, 1 September 1916, p.8.
43 *DM*, 28 March 1919, p.4.
44 *BC*, 28 March 1919, p.3.
46 *BC*, 2 April 1919, p.6.
Condamine River were suitable for either dairying or cultivation.47 George Coxon, a grazier whose knowledge of Cecil Plains extended back to 1879, provided a compelling reason for the general condemnation:

The rainfall is very irregular. For instance, it was quite a common thing to vary up to 10in. in different years. On account of such irregular rainfall, and the deep, hungry black soil, I don’t see that there is the slightest chance of cultivating that land with any chance of success. Take, for instance, 15in. of rain to fall in the first two months, and the total for the year might be 17in.48

Therefore:

The only thing that the settlers can do is graze, and the smallest area they can do that on is 2000 to 2500 acres, when the liabilities would be so great that they would not carry them. The whole of the land must come back to the Government.49

The Dalby Chamber of Commerce had already compared Cecil Plains with Jimbour, where the 1918 Royal Commission found a “living area” to be 2,560 acres (1,036 hectares).50 In reply W. Gordon Graham disputed the similarity but, at the same time, he also confirmed the experimental nature of the State’s land policies:

I have the honour to inform you that, as recommended by the Commission, it has been approved to increase the maximum area on

47 DM, 8 January 1919, p.2; WK, 2 May 1919, p.20.
48 QDR, 12 April 1919, p.13.
49 Ibid.
50 J.A. Hunter, Dalby Chamber of Commerce, Dalby, to Minister for Lands, Brisbane, 13 March 1919, LAN/AK120, Batch 709, Part 1 (1919-1924), QSA.
[Jimbour] Estate to 2,560 acres, as experience has shown that Estate to be more fitted for grazing than for agricultural purposes. This is not admitted in regard to the Cecil Plains Repurchased Estate, and no action to alter the advertised terms will be considered until the result of the opening is seen.51

Under the repurchasing agreement, the original owner retained all livestock on the property.52 By late 1917, however, the government was running at least 877 head of beef cattle at Cecil Plains.53 Taking advantage of ruling high prices in September 1918, 170 mature beasts were railed to the Enoggera sales in Brisbane, where they realised from £13/5- to £16/17/6 per head.54 It was a far different outcome in 1922, when one soldier settler railed fourteen calves to Brisbane and received a total payment of £6/16/6; of this amount £4/1/4 was consumed by freight charges.55 Of the initial £625 initial advance, the soldier settlers were only permitted to expend a maximum of £170 on livestock, and with prices for milking cows varying from ten to eighteen pounds each, herds were anything but substantial.56

Although little trouble was experienced removing cattle from Cecil Plains during the early stages, a number of intending soldier settlers faced considerable difficulty taking up holdings. As the Inverell auctioneer, James McIlveen, pointed out in March 1919, with the State border closed through the spread of Spanish Influenza his New South Wales

51 Under Secretary, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, to Mr. J.A. Hunter, Dalby Chamber of Commerce, Dalby, 22 March 1919, *Ibid.*
52 *BC*, 31 August 1916, p.6.
53 *BC*, 3 November 1917, p.4.
54 *BC*, 26 September 1918, p.6.
clients were unable to lodge applications or even make a prior inspection of the land. Moreover, with Queensland still not having reached a firm agreement with the Commonwealth over repatriation, there was considerable confusion among her own returned servicemen regarding the funding available.

Employed as caretaker at the Toowoomba Soldiers’ Rest Room, former 5th Light Horseman, Walter Stephson, was among those anxious to take up land at Cecil Plains. Married with three children, Stephson claimed to have experience in “general farming, dairying and pig-raising”, but lacked capital. In July 1919 Stephson was allotted Portion 76 at Cecil Plains, and the following month the Toowoomba Repatriation Committee applied on his behalf to the Repatriation Commission for a grant of seventy-two pounds to enable him to pay the first year’s rent. Stephson apparently did not receive the grant, as he continued to reside in Toowoomba while adopting various strategies to raise the required sum. He found a useful ally in the Toowoomba Land Commissioner, Fred Barlow, who informed his Brisbane superior that “he impressed me as being a fine stamp

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57 James McIlveen, Auctioneer, Inverell, to Under Secretary for Lands, Brisbane, 12 March 1919, LAN/AK120, Batch 709, Part 1 (1919-1924), QSA.
58 DM, 2 April 1919, p.8; ODR, 5 April 1919, p.12.
59 Fred Barlow, Land Commissioner, Toowoomba, to Under Secretary, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 31 July 1920, LAN/AK120, Batch 709, Part 1 (1919-1924), QSA.
60 Walter H. Stephson, C/- Mr. F. Matthews, Bath Street, Toowoomba, to Chairman, Wounded Soldiers Fund, Brisbane, 28 July 1920, Ibid.
61 W.H. Stephson, Raff Street, Toowoomba, to Mr. Coyne, Secretary, Public Lands, Brisbane, 22 September 1919, Ibid.
62 Secretary, Toowoomba Repatriation Committee, to W.J. Monteith, Soldiers Settlement Committee, Brisbane, 12 August 1919, Ibid.
of a man personally, and a desirable settler, and thoroughly genuine". Stephson suffered from tuberculosis contracted during the war.

He was still struggling to surmount the financial hurdle in July 1920, when the Federal government rewarded its returned servicemen with war gratuities; Stephson received £73/17/6 in bonds. The amount was sufficient to pay the rent on his holding, and under an agreement reached between Federal and State authorities gratuity bonds could be used for soldier settlement purposes (Appendix 9). By this time, however, the Queensland government was beginning to feel its own financial constraints with the commencement of the loans embargo. The consequence for soldier settlers was that “War Gratuity Bonds cannot be accepted in payment of rents on Crown lands”. Despite continuing ill-health Stephson was nevertheless a survivor. Finally acquiring the holding, he was among the sixty-six soldier settlers remaining at Cecil Plains in June 1929. While this was partly due to his being in receipt of a full military pension, Stephson’s battles with bureaucracy were still continuing in November the same year:

His health appears a barrier to his working the property and he has been forced to sell his dairy herd. He appears to be making good money by leasing the grass, arrangements in this connection being

63 Fred Barlow, Land Commissioner, Toowoomba, to Under Secretary for Public Lands, Brisbane, 27 January 1920, Ibid.
64 Manager, Agricultural Bank, to Chairman, Land Administration Board, Brisbane, 28 November 1929, LAN/167 (1916-31), QSA.
65 Secretary, Department of Repatriation, Local Committee, Toowoomba, to Secretary, Soldiers Land Settlement Committee, Brisbane, 7 July 1920, LAN/AK120, Batch 709, Part 1 (1919-1924), QSA.
66 Under Secretary, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, to Secretary, Toowoomba Repatriation Committee, 6 August 1920, Ibid.
continually made without first obtaining mortgagee's [Agricultural Bank] consent.\textsuperscript{68}

Walter Stephson was definitely not among the thirty-seven soldier settlers who had overcome their own obstacles to take up holdings on the reserved section at Cecil Plains by June 1919. Another seventeen returned servicemen held a combined area of 6,833 hectares on the area opened for general selection.\textsuperscript{69} Making a personal inspection of Cecil Plains soldier settlement the following September, former Minister for Public Lands and Agent-General elect, John Hunter, observed that the settlers were “profiting” by “letting their areas on agistment”. According to Hunter, this was not only of great benefit to the returned servicemen but also the entire district.\textsuperscript{70} With grass fires having raged across the eastern portion of the soldier settlement barely three days after being opened for selection—and with the first of many dry seasons already taking hold—it was a recipe for disaster.\textsuperscript{71}

Many of the first settlers had taken advantage of vacant adjoining holdings to increase the pasturage for their own stock and those taken on agistment. This, of course, was detrimental to the interests of incoming soldier settlers. F.R. Taylor of Pittsworth was among those who refused their soldier settlement blocks after inspecting the damage:

\textsuperscript{68} Manager, Agricultural Bank, to Chairman, Land Administration Board, Brisbane, 28 November 1929, LAN/167 (1916-31), QSA.


\textsuperscript{70} DM, 16 September 1919, p.9.

\textsuperscript{71} BC, 28 April 1921, p.7.
The stock from adjoining country have been grazing on it with the result that the portion in question would not keep a Saddle Horse alive now. The block is in such a state that I could not think of taking my few stock there to starve, they have a better chance of living where they are. For the above reasons, I must now decline to go any further into the matter of selecting Portion 50, as a perpetual lease.  

J. Black complained that up to 800 head of cattle “ate the grass out” on his nephew’s holding over a period of four months. Claiming to have effected forty pounds worth of improvements while his nephew, J.S.J. Black, slowly recovered from the gassing received in Europe, Black’s efforts were in vain. As no formal application had been lodged by July 1920 the holding was forfeited. A month earlier, James Davidson had applied for an extension to his holding, candidly implying that he could no longer pasture animals at the expense of other soldier settlers:

I have 499 acres here & I have 80 heifers in calf which I want to keep going so that I can pick about 60 out of them to milk here. I have no grass & the opening of the adjoining portions puts me in a bad way more ways than one. I should be very glad to have a few hundred acres adjoining in any case.

Davidson may well have continued over-stocking even with this additional land. It mattered little, however, as the only adjacent holding available had a capital value of

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72 F.R. Taylor, Linthorpe, Pittsworth, to Officer in Charge, Lands Settlement Inquiry Office, Brisbane, 17 November 1919, LAN/AK120, Batch 709, Part 1 (1919-1924), QSA.
73 J. Black, Toowoomba, to Land Commissioner, Toowoomba, 14 February 1920, Ibid.
74 Ibid.
75 C.W. Holland for Under Secretary, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, to Mr. J.S.J. Black, Bunya Street, Dalby, 1 July 1920, Ibid.
76 James Davidson, Nangwee, to Under Secretary, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 24 June 1920, Ibid.
£1,084 and Davidson's ambitions were thwarted from want of capital. Unlike John Hunter, the long-term supervisor at Cecil Plains, David Binnie, rightly saw agistment as a "pennywise and pound foolish scheme" which could only be detrimental to the soldier settlement. An ex-AIF officer with genuine agricultural experience, Binnie replaced Alexander Dean as supervisor in May 1920 as part of the departmental reshuffle following the resignation of the Comptroller of Soldier Settlements, Joseph Rose. Binnie was to strengthen his position considerably over the years ahead, particularly after opening a local store in partnership with his mother. As Elizabeth Milton commented, "apart from giving his mother's animals favoured treatment during droughts, he discriminated against and wrote unfavourably of those who did not patronize his store". Importantly, it was the only store on the settlement. Yet Binnie went to great lengths to assist those he did favour. This was shown soon after his transfer to Cecil Plains, when he defended William Thomson, a soldier settler in financial difficulties and whose holding abutted the open selection area:

This position has been brought about mainly by the drought and also by the fact that his selection adjoins that of stock dealers—and other open selectors who have made us attempt to improve Their blocks by fencing and thus allow Their thousands of stock to overrun the portions selected by the returned soldier settlers. The position of W. Thomson is not isolated by any means—other soldier settlers are suffering from a similar state of affairs. Which of course will not

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77 Under Secretary, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, to Mr. James R. Davidson, Nangwee, via Toowoomba, 5 July 1920, Ibid.
78 David J. Binnie, Supervisor, Soldier Settlement, Cecil Plains, to Under Secretary, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 2 July 1920, Ibid.
79 WK, 28 May 1920, p.17.
happen again as in the majority of cases the fencing of the various portions are now completed.\(^2\)

He was a little premature, and it is ironic that in 1923 drought forced the soldier settlers to agist their own stock at places as far apart as Mount Hutton, Taroom, Crow's Nest and Thane.\(^3\) Binnie nevertheless accelerated fencing on the settlement. By June 1921 over 280 kilometres had been erected,\(^4\) a figure which increased by forty kilometres the following year,\(^5\) and reached over 400 kilometres by June 1923.\(^6\) It was a different form of extension, however, which had underwritten the potential viability of Cecil Plains for closer settlement in 1916. In the attempt to bring their 'agricultural revolution' to fruition, Queensland's Labor government relied heavily on railway expansion. Cecil Plains was no exception.

The growth of agricultural production on the eastern Darling Downs between 1891 and 1915, when Labor won office, was clearly reflected in railway freight. Consisting largely of grain, the tonnage in 1915 was eight times what it had been twenty-four years earlier—though it must be added that the eastern branch lines remained unprofitable. The situation was quite different on the western Darling Downs, where branch lines were few and only

\(^2\) David J. Binnie, Supervisor, Soldier Settlement, Cecil Plains, to Under Secretary, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 2 July 1920, LAN/AK120, Batch 709, Part 1 (1919-1924), QSA.

\(^3\) 'BC, 17 September 1923, p.9.


minimal quantities of agricultural produce were forwarded from centres west of Oakey.\textsuperscript{87}

The repurchase of Cecil Plains Estate in this region suggests that the government believed in the agricultural possibilities, and was also cognisant of the need for State direction. In the latter respect the influence of Elwood Mead is clearly apparent, but to make it a reality the construction of a railway was absolutely crucial.

It was fortuitous that the previous government had already begun construction of a branch line south-west from Oakey to Evanslea, roughly mid-way to Cecil Plains. The line was completed in September 1915, and after the repurchase of Cecil Plains it was merely necessary to add a short extension. Thus, in April 1919, just one month after being opened for selection, Cecil Plains was linked to the main railway network and, importantly, markets.\textsuperscript{88} The line had also come cheaply, for an agreement had been reached with the Taylor Estates Company whereby the land was provided free of charge and £20,000 donated towards construction costs. In return, the private company was released from unspecified obligations incurred under the 1906 \textit{Guarantee Act}.\textsuperscript{89}

The railway was therefore the quintessential factor underlying the feasibility of Cecil Plains as a dairying and agricultural proposition. It was further reinforced by the policy of screening applicants for land, which nominally ensured that only experienced producers were placed on the smaller soldier settlement holdings. This was somewhat at variance with the general policy, and perhaps indicates that the State government recognised that a


\textsuperscript{88} Kerr, \textit{Triumph of Narrow Gauge}, p.116.
considerable risk existed in opening this region for agriculture and closer settlement. Due to the sheer size of the settlement, the provision of water for holdings distant from the Condamine River was certainly obvious. To this effect, thirty-five wells, thirty-one bores and sixty-five windmills were in operation by June 1921, with water being obtained at depths between twelve and twenty-seven metres. Later, a problem with brackish bore water necessitated the construction of dams on the western side of the settlement. Difficulties remained. While these improvements became yet another financial burden for the recipients, with the cost of a water supply averaging £160 per settler, it was found that water was still inadequate during prolonged dry periods. Unfortunately, the settlement was plagued from almost beginning to end by severe drought.

Along the river itself, however, prospects looked anything but discouraging in April 1921 when J.H. Cecil Roberts, whose electorate included Cecil Plains, organised an inspection of the settlement for his Opposition colleagues. The party found that:

Approaching the Condamine there was abundant grass, and the stock were fat, a general air of prosperity existing, in marked contrast to the other blocks. Here were dairy farms, established within three months. Milking machines, well-built yards, and splendid herds were features on practically all the holdings in the vicinity of the river.

89 Ibid.
92 BC, 28 April 1921, p.7.
93 Ibid.
Cultivators on the river flats did have to contend with invasive Nut Grass (*Cyperus rotundus*), the same weed which afflicted soldier settlement holdings at Tolga and Kairi in the north of the State. This in itself made a mockery of the early claim that the entire estate was devoid of “noxious weeds”. On the contrary, after repurchase the government was forced to employ three permanent burr-cutters, and in July 1918 it was disclosed that the amount expended on labour, “including burr-cutting and the destruction of all noxious weeds” was £592/3/8. Yet when compared with adverse climatic conditions and limited financial resources, botanical incursions were only of minor consequence. E.F. Muncaster made this clear in July 1920, when a brief period of wet weather encouraged him to plead for a reduction of his first year’s rent. Perhaps it was the excitement of rain that obviated the need for any punctuation:

The rent is £50 per year and I have paid £42-16-0 and this is bare country and I am having to feed my Horses and pay out £20 per month on my cattle to keep them alive you must forgo the remaining £7-16-0 for this years rent and so assist me greatly we are having a big struggle to make both ends meet and with the good rains at present every prospect of a good year to follow.

Muncaster’s plea was in vain; he was granted an extension of just four weeks. Others held no such optimistic hopes. During the same month supervisor Binnie reported the

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94 *WK*, 2 May 1919, p.20.
95 *BC*, 31 August 1916, p.6.
96 *BC*, 17 November 1917, p.4.
98 E.F. Muncaster, Nangwee, to Minister for Lands, Brisbane, 5 July 1920, LAN/AK120, Batch 709, Part 1 (1919-1924), QSA.
lengthy absence of J. Daly. Having been advanced £343 Daly simply abandoned his holding and stock, with several of the latter dying through neglect. Binnie took charge of the survivors.\textsuperscript{100} While the supervisor believed that dairying alone would “turn this settlement into the most progressive one in Queensland”,\textsuperscript{101} wheat cultivation rose in importance. By June 1921, 627 hectares were already under this crop and:

> The suitability of the Settlement for wheat growing was demonstrated by the returns during last season. The ground had very little preparation prior to planting, and returns averaged 5 bags to the acre.\textsuperscript{102}

The following year 6,500 bags of grain were harvested from approximately 566 hectares, but dairying maintained its dominance. Of ninety-six soldier settlers on both areas of Cecil Plains in June 1922, seventy-two were engaged in dairying. During the previous year they had produced 131 tonnes of butter for a return of £14,845, with the average herd now numbering around thirty head. Diversification was nevertheless apparent, with six settlers raising sheep, fifteen stock dealing and “general farming”, and an undisclosed number experimenting with pigs.\textsuperscript{103} It was just as well.

Continuing dry conditions devastated the wheat crop in late 1922. Although the soldier settlers managed to harvest 14,000 bushels from 404 hectares, the remaining 1,011

\textsuperscript{100} D.J. Binnie, Cecil Plains Soldier Settlement, Cecil Plains, to Officer in Charge, Soldiers’ Settlement Branch, Department of Lands, Brisbane, 12 July 1920, \textit{Ibid}.

\textsuperscript{101} \textit{WK}, 5 November 1920, p.18.

hectares was only suitable for cattle feed. An experimental area of forty acres under cotton also proved a failure and, concomitantly, prices for dairy produce fell substantially. The soldier settlers began clamouring for a Royal Commission, and they received support from J.H. Cecil Roberts, who was critical of the limited size of the holdings. Queensland's Minister for Public Lands ruled out any chance of a Royal Commission. Harry Coyne contended that if the soldier settlement blocks were any larger it would merely have increased the rate of failure, thereby involving "the settlers in a very much greater indebtedness". Rather than offering aid, the government informed the soldier settlers that their arrears of rent were to be fully paid before the end of March 1923. With the government attempting to curb the mounting cost of this social and agricultural experiment, the position of the settlers had now reached a critical point. In this way, it differed little from the situation further west at Mount Hutton, where the nadir of soldier settlement was eclipsed around the same time.

Located on the Dawson River watershed north of Roma (Appendix 10), Mount Hutton shared many close affinities with Cecil Plains. Resumed by the Queensland government in 1916, the property was similarly divided into two distinct sections for both soldier settlement and open selection. Unlike Cecil Plains, however, few civilians chose to take up the larger grazing selections and development largely revolved around the

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returned servicemen, whose holdings varied in extent from 130 to 922 hectares. Frank Dalby Davison, who was later to leave his mark on Australian literature, was among the small number of soldier settlers who preferred to take their chances on the open selection holdings. For the majority, the focus of activity centred on dairying and agricultural experimentation in a region where the average annual rainfall was believed to be twenty-seven inches (686 millimetres). The fact that this figure was seldom attained contributed in large measure to the steady demise of the settlement from 1923.

Caution again needs to be applied, for exact numbers are difficult to ascertain with any precision owing to the government’s adroit ability to obscure actual failure rates until the sheer volume began to speak for itself. In common with the majority of Queensland soldier settlements, this became unavoidable from the mid-1920s and Mount Hutton became simply another entry in the catalogue of social disasters. That many abandoned holdings were re-selected by other returned servicemen—with the official figures thereby retaining consistency—is revealed by the published meetings of the local authority, Bungil Shire Council. In November 1922, for example:

Mr. Kincaid [valuer] referred to the number of forfeited selections on Mount Hutton. Mr. Gibbs [Shire Clerk] said the selections were continually changing owners on his books. Someone cleared out, and another took his selection.

108 BC, 5 November 1917, p.6; WK, 24 January 1919, p.17.
109 DS, 27 June 1918, p.4.
110 Dow, Frank Dalby Davison, p.5.
112 Western Star [WS] (Roma), 11 November 1922, p.3.
Closer settlement at Mount Hutton was also intended to serve an internal defensive purpose. With the rapid spread of prickly pear throughout southern Queensland in the early twentieth century, closer settlement and concomitant cultivation was perceived as the means for countering the botanical advance. Undeniably an important aspect of the policy relating to Mount Hutton, the soldier settlers thus occupied a buffer zone to prevent infestation of more arable lands to the north. This was made explicit in February 1923 when John Hunter, who had played a leading role in implementing soldier settlement, paid a visit to his former electorate:

One of the chief objects for the construction of the railway and the resumption of these areas was to prevent the spread of the pear to the cleaner lands lying to the north, and the whole benefit of the thousands spent in this way would be lost if this land was not effectively settled.

Hunter had also been instrumental in having the railway extended northwards from Orallo to Injune. Opened in June 1920, the line bisected the Mount Hutton lands between these two centres, and led to the establishment of a small township, Gunnewin, which served as the hub of the soldier settlement. An Aboriginal term for ‘possum trap’, Gunnewin was to ensnare more than harmless marsupials during the ensuing environmental contest. One of the early casualties was Walter Ford, who held Portion 16

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114 WS, 21 February 1923, p.2.
115 BC, 28 June 1920, p.6.
at Mount Hutton.\textsuperscript{117} Ford disappeared from a neighbouring selection in June 1920, and his body was found a few days later with a gunshot wound to the head. A suicide note explained that he had taken his life after his “brain and nerves had failed”.\textsuperscript{118} War’s psychological impact on the individual was merely exacerbated by the battle of soldier settlement.

According to Hunter’s political opponents, the motivation behind his enthusiasm for the railway extension arose from the forthcoming 1920 State election, when the concentration of railway navvies with their traditional Labor sympathies would provide an invaluable voting bloc in the electorate.\textsuperscript{119} Indeed, during an earlier parliamentary debate on soldier settlement matters the conservative politician, William Vowles, had referred to Mount Hutton as Hunter’s “very valuable corner block in Roma”,\textsuperscript{120} almost certainly referring to the voting potential of soldier settlers. Perhaps this criticism was nevertheless a little harsh, as a Mount Hutton railway extension to foster closer settlement had been proposed as early as 1903—when conservatives reigned supreme.\textsuperscript{121}

The resumption certainly embroiled the Labor government in controversy, though the report by Land Ranger Watson in early 1917 did point to the feasibility of the project for both agricultural experimentation, and as a preventative measure against prickly pear:

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{117} \textit{WS}, 16 June 1920, p.2.
\item\textsuperscript{118} \textit{WS}, 19 June 1920, p.2.
\item\textsuperscript{119} \textit{WS}, 17 May 1919, p.3.
\item\textsuperscript{120} \textit{OPD}, Vol.125 (1916-1917), p.2992.
\item\textsuperscript{121} Kerr, \textit{Triumph of Narrow Gauge}, p.115.
\end{itemize}
The report states that the area of Mount Hutton resumption and lease is 525½ square miles ... The country comprises good open downs and creek flats, with belts of scrub under the ranges, and along the Great Main Range. There are small plains in places, such as the Old Man, Emu, and Cattle Plains; red and black loamy soils in scrubs and on the open country, with good black soil and loamy sandy flats along the creeks ... The property is well watered by Duck, Highland Plain, Horse, Injune, Oakey, Ambrose, and Barramundi Creeks and branches; also good swamps and lagoons in places [but] scrubs and open country off the creeks are dry ... The whole lease is practically clear of [prickly] pear.122

“Practically clear” perhaps signified that Watson was aware of light infestations in the north and north-western areas of Mount Hutton. There was also one heavy patch barely three kilometres from the future site of Gunnewin.123 The initial problem facing the government, however, was to justify the compensation of £73,500 paid to the owners.124 As there were reputedly 10,243 head of cattle on the property,125 it was intended to muster 9,700 for sale to the New South Wales firm of Morrissey Brothers for £30,000. This estimate was soon reduced to £26,000,126 but only 7,858 cattle were eventually delivered and the government was unable—or unwilling—to account for the missing stock.127 Nor was any final figure disclosed, despite considerable pressure from the Opposition.

Hints of shady deals were soon overshadowed by the announcement in June 1918 that 45,482 hectares, approximately one-third of the property, was to be sub-divided for

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122 QDR, 10 February 1917, p.34.
123 WS, 24 September 1921, p.2.
124 BC, 5 November 1917, p.6.
125 QDR, 28 September 1918, p.34.
126 QDR, 10 November 1917, p.34.
exclusive occupancy by returned servicemen. While it was envisaged that this would provide for 175 soldier settlers, only 105 holdings comprising a total area of 31,675 was actually made available. Whether this was an acknowledgement of unsuitable land distant from watercourses is not clear; efforts were certainly made to provide sufficient water throughout the settlement:

Contracts have been let for the sinking of eight surface drainage bores, and the department has sent out a plant to put down two additional bores. The sites for the bores have been selected by the departmental water finding expert after checking by the instrument known as the automatic water finder. The bores are situated in the most convenient places for the whole settlement, and the water will be pumped from them as required. Water has been struck at a comparatively shallow depth in two of the bores. A fair supply is in evidence, and the water is of fair quality and good enough for the use of stock. These two bores have been completed, and work now is proceeding on the third.

The “water finding expert” was J.H. Bestmann. Successful use of the Mansfield Automatic Water Finder supposedly depended on perfect weather conditions but, as C.T. Palethorpe, the historian of water divining in Queensland noted, it was curious that the readings generally concurred with the assumptions of the diviner, regardless of the conditions. Unlike their counterparts at Mount Gravatt, south of Brisbane, the soldier

127 BC, 19 June 1918, p.6.
128 DS, 27 June 1918, p.4.
131 W/K, 24 January 1919, p.17.
settlers at Mount Hutton were fortunate that sub-artesian water existed in quantity—and was easily located.

In February 1919 fifteen returned servicemen selected land at Mount Hutton, and when formally opened the following month seventeen immediately took up holdings. This small number was once again partly due to the closure of the border against Spanish Influenza. By May the physical barrier had been removed and “between twenty and thirty” soldier settlers were ensconced in the area. They came from diverse backgrounds:

Some of the men enlisted from this district, while others came from other parts of the State, and there are several from New Zealand. Some are married men with families, others are newly-married—one selector married in England, and his wife is now on her way to join him on his selection.

Bureaucratic ineptitude marked the initial stages. Two repatriation bodies co-existed at Roma, the nearest major centre, and the soldier settlers quite naturally took their requests for financial assistance to the Repatriation Committee. This was a Federal concern and the information was merely forwarded to Brisbane. They were unaware that a sub-committee of the local State War Council was the appropriate authority as it seldom functioned. The honorary chairman, Land Commissioner W.J. Hooper, was frequently absent on official duties. Indeed, it was during one of Hooper’s absences that an

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133 DM, 7 February 1919, p.8.
135 QDR, 15 February 1919, p.35.
137 WS, 17 May 1919, p.3.
agreement was finally reached between Commonwealth and State authorities, with the 
War Council being dissolved. It was only later that the Land Commissioner was informed 
that his sub-committee no longer existed.\(^{138}\) This was the system that John Hunter 
extolled as being “free from red tape”,\(^{139}\) and it was left to the Comptroller of Soldier 
Settlements, Joseph Rose, to personally unravel the problems at Mount Hutton. State-
Commonwealth antagonism, and insufficient preparation, were the hallmarks of soldier 
settlement.

Many of the soldier settlers had private resources and were able to purchase the necessary 
equipment to commence work immediately on their holdings.\(^{140}\) Rose agreed that this 
expense would be returned through their Commonwealth loan of £625, but he was loath 
to provide rations, insisting that this would reduce their available capital. Instead, the 
settlers were advised to apply for the Commonwealth sustenance allowance.\(^{141}\) 
Eventually, Rose managed to sort out the major problems underlying the opening of 
Mount Hutton compounded, as it was, by the conflict of interest between Federal and 
State authorities. Local government matters were yet another issue, and at Mount Hutton 
they bore no less heavily on the soldier settlers.

While Land Commissioner Hooper briefly took charge of the settlement,\(^{142}\) it was his 
successor, H. Leach, who first clashed with Bungil Shire Council. In April 1920 the local

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\(^{138}\) WS, 21 June 1919, p.2.  
\(^{139}\) WS, 17 May 1919, p.3.  
\(^{140}\) WS, 3 May 1919, p.2.  
\(^{141}\) Ibid.  
\(^{142}\) WS, 21 June 1919, p.2.
authority issued rate notices for holdings on the settlement and Leach defended his charges, contending that all soldier settlements were exempt from local government fees during the first five years as both land and roads were vested in the Crown. The Council disagreed, arguing that land was rateable once licences to occupy had been issued.\textsuperscript{143} The local authority was technically correct, though the circumstances of the soldier settlers ensured that it was to be a lengthy dispute.

Moreover, the State government attempted to pass control of the roads in the settlement to Bungil Shire Council the following month.\textsuperscript{144} As they were in such poor condition the Council called a special meeting, not only to discuss the roads, but also to clarify rate charges. Accordingly, a deputation of soldier settlers was invited to attend and it was explained by the Shire Chairman, Councillor Murray, that payment of rates also entitled the settlers to vote in council elections. Murray went even further by suggesting that a separate division could be created around the soldier settlement, thereby guaranteeing effective representation.\textsuperscript{145}

Speaking on behalf of the settlers, former AIF Captain Knight agreed that this appeared a feasible solution, but the settlers were adamant that the local authority should not take control of the roads throughout the settlement in their present state. Bungil Shire Council was only too willing to reject the transfer, as the expense of repair and maintenance would obviously be considerable for both parties, respectively through direct expenditure

\textsuperscript{143} WS, 14 April 1920, p.2.
\textsuperscript{144} WS, 12 May 1920, p.2.
\textsuperscript{145} WS, 16 June 1920, p.2.
and increased rates. At the heart of the issue, however, was the revenue lost when Mount Hutton was resumed for soldier settlement. Councillor Thrupp elucidated on this point:

It might be news for some of them to know that in former years, before Mount Hutton was acquired by the Government, the council received £140 a year in rates from the property. When it became a Government estate that £140 was cut off the council revenue. It had been an injustice to the settlers beyond there, because the council found they had to spend money on roads from where they received no rates. That £140 was a big item in the council’s revenue.¹⁴⁶

They had no wish to lose it permanently. On the other hand, when the local authority refused to take control of the roads,¹⁴⁷ many of the soldier settlers believed that they were no longer liable for rate charges. They were wrong. In September 1921 the settlers were notified that as rates were accumulative, payments would have to be made.¹⁴⁸ Yet the Council was still prepared to honour pledges made the previous year, and would only take control of the roads if requested to do so by the soldier settlers.¹⁴⁹ When heavy rain washed out creek crossings throughout the settlement in October, the local authority sought financial assistance from the State government to carry out repairs. Receiving an “advance” of fifty pounds, this sparked yet another row with the soldier settlers.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.
¹⁴⁷ Ibid.
¹⁴⁸ WS, 7 September 1921, p.2.
¹⁴⁹ WS, 24 September 1921, p.2.
¹⁵⁰ WS, 22 October 1921, p.2.
By January 1922 ratepayers in Division Two, which included the soldier settlement, owed a combined total of £849/17/7 and legal action was threatened. It came, but arrears were dealt with arbitrarily and no account was taken of individual cases; regardless of when the selector actually took up the holding, he was charged for rates dating back to the commencement of settlement three years previously. Many soldier settlers were thus struck by this accumulative debt at the very time cream prices fell, and incomes were virtually non-existent. An unknown number were forced to abandon their holdings.

In all, 160 petty debt court summonses were issued within the shire, involving both civilians and soldier settlers. Only sixty-three defaulters were able to pay their outstanding amounts, which included court costs, and it is likely that very few soldier settlers were among those with liquid assets. Indeed, extracting rates from the soldier settlers remained a difficulty for the local authority. In February 1925, for instance, a deputation from Bungil Shire Council waited on the Minister for Public Lands, William McCormack, complaining of the inability of soldier settlers to meet their financial obligations. As a Revaluation Board had only recently recommended writing off almost twenty-five percent of the settlers’ total liability of £43,083 to the State government, McCormack argued that they would not receive any further assistance:

\[\text{\textsuperscript{151}} \text{R/S, 21 January 1922, p.2.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{152}} \text{R/S, 28 January 1922, p.3.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{153}} \text{R/S, 11 February 1922, p.3.}\]
As Minister for Lands, he had the same difficulty to face, and had written off £250,000 [throughout Queensland] to give the settlers a fresh start. In the future they would have to pay, or be replaced by men who would pay. He would only be misleading the Shire Council if he promised them relief.\textsuperscript{155}

The deputation returned empty-handed, but their continual demands for the payment of rates seriously undermined the position of the Mount Hutton soldier settlers, who had struggled against adverse conditions almost from the outset. Early 1920 saw the district gripped by drought, with only eight settlers being in a position to supply cream to the Roma Butter Factory.\textsuperscript{156} Returns were also hampered by the limited size of individual dairy herds, and even in June 1921, when sixty-one returned servicemen were engaged in dairying, the average herd consisted of only nine to fifteen cows. Pig-raising thus became an important adjunct, though agriculture was also being attempted as a necessary alternative:

Some of them have also turned their attention to agriculture, and some very fine samples of wheat, maize, and potatoes have been grown in the district, and we can look forward to the development of agriculture here as settlers complete other necessary improvements. In the meantime settlers are growing small patches of Soudan grass, barley, &c., as food for dairy cows. Three settlers have planted orchards of fruit trees and vines, which already show signs of doing well.\textsuperscript{157}

Drought would decide otherwise. By this time, the 105 soldier settlement holdings were all occupied. Due to an acute shortage of timber, however, only thirty-six houses had

\textsuperscript{155} BC, 12 February 1925, p.9.
\textsuperscript{156} WS, 31 March 1920, p.2.
been constructed, and in a bid to overcome the deficiency the Director of Forests, Edward Swain, recommended exploiting a cypress pine forest near Injune Creek, north of Mount Hutton. Presumably, the dominant species was White Cypress Pine (*Callitris columellaris*), an ideal softwood for building purposes, which had the added advantage of being resistant to attack by termites. By November 1921 the mill on Injune Creek was supplying adequate quantities of sawn timber, producing a local fall in timber prices of three shillings per 100 super feet which, in practical terms, meant a saving of between twenty and thirty pounds on each soldier settlement house. By June 1922, fifty-nine dwellings had been erected. There would be little increase, for such was the financial circumstances of the settlers that:

Many of the men did without a house, and preferred to live in humpeys, made of canvas, bark, or iron, so that they would have more money to spend in other avenues of improvement.

A number of the men alleviated their plight by finding work in the mill and forestry at Injune Creek; others took seasonal employment cutting cane along the Queensland coast. Quite clearly, the soldier settlers throughout Queensland were under-capitalised. Rather than timber, the provision of railways was understood to be a major factor for the

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158 Ibid.
159 *WS*, 23 February 1921, p.2.
161 *WS*, 19 November 1921, p.7.
163 *WS*, 3 June 1922, p.2.
success of soldier settlement—exemplified by Pikedale, Cecil Plains and Mount Hutton. Yet some consideration also needs to be given to the Queensland government’s designs for the soldier settlers that were less than altruistic. The branch railway to Amiens, for instance, was undoubtedly a political ploy. On one hand, it was directed towards currying favour with an introduced rural population within a conservative electorate. On the other, it was a manoeuvre to outwit a Legislative Council dominated by conservatives.

That the soldier settlers were pawns in the Labor government’s efforts to create an ‘agricultural revolution’ is undeniable. The Pikedale settlement coincided with private schemes to foster increased agriculture on the Granite Belt. At Cecil Plains and Mount Hutton, the division of estates into two distinct areas suggests that the returned servicemen were deliberately placed there to bolster civilian closer settlement. Moreover, the soldier settlers at Mount Hutton were actually informed that they were a defensive mechanism, deliberately placed there to protect the arable lands further north from prickly pear. The impact of the loans embargo further undermined their position, with the State government being forced to devolve as much responsibility as possible to local authorities. In turn, the latter’s necessary demands on the soldier settlers for rates substantially contributed to weakening the entire scheme.

At Mount Hutton, housing shortages triggered developments in forestry. At Beerburrum the connection between timber and soldier settlement extended beyond the construction of dwellings. It must be added, however, that the abodes of soldier settlers and their

164 Ibid.
families closer to the coast often differed little from the sub-standard conditions to the west. Conversely, for soldier settlers at Bald Hills and Coominya, housing was among the very least of their worries.
CHAPTER 6:

'TIMBER, TIDES AND TORMENT': BEERBURRUM AND THE TRAGEDIES OF BALD HILLS AND COOMINYA

They fought for you, Grey Selections,
The battle of long dry years,
Through seedtimes of sweat and sorrow
To harvests of hunger and tears.¹

Soldier settlers confronted a myriad of problems in their attempts to create ‘pineapple gardens’ at Beerburrum, and one which has thus far received scant attention links fruit-growing with developments in Queensland forestry. While harvesting pineapples was a diurnal activity, packing for transit was generally carried out at night under regulations dating from 1912.² For pineapples, the timber receptacle:

Measures 24½ inches long by 12 inches wide by 12 inches deep, inside measurements, clear of all or any divisions, and of a capacity of not less than 3,564 cubic inches; and further the cases must be marked by the packer with his name and address as well as with the capacity of the case which is guaranteed by him, the name of the variety and the number of fruit in the case.³

² “An Act to Regulate the Size and Description of Cases used in the Sale and Export of Fruit, and for purposes incidental thereof”, Queensland Statutes, Vol.7 (1914), pp.5441-4; Clayton, 50 Years of Pineapples, p.6.
It was found that “dry blady-grass” offered the best packing material as soft grasses broke down into a fine powder and the fruit subsequently bruised. The problem that confronted the soldier settlers, however, was the scarcity of softwoods for case timber that were usually imported into Australia. Global hostilities reduced this to a mere trickle, prompting the Forestry Department to experiment with local substitutes in an effort to meet both the growing demand and to curb rising prices. In July 1918 it was found that:

The timbers commonly known as water gum, cudgerie, maiden’s blush, stave wood, ribbon wood or Donnelly’s cedar, booyeng, and quandong in the South, and China pine, candle nut, milky pine, or Chinkey pine in the North [are] all suitable for the purpose.

By February 1919 the Queensland Forestry Department was:

Offering a number of secondary timbers at 8s. to 9s. per 100 superficial feet in the log on trucks in Brisbane, as against a price of 18s. or 19s. for hoop pine. Knotty hoop pine logs are also being offered at prices ranging from 9s. to 10s. per 100 feet.

While the timber crisis was effectively dealt with, the real vicissitudes of soldier settlement were yet to begin. Nineteen soldier settlers had abandoned their holdings at Beerburrum by the middle of 1918, but otherwise there was little indication that all was

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5 “Forests Office Report”, 10 July 1918, LAN/AK117, Batch 692, QSA.
6 BC, 2 July 1918, p.4.
7 Under Secretary for Public Lands, Brisbane, to R.E. Boardman, Honorary Secretary, The Australasian Conference of Fruitgrowers, Melbourne, 7 February 1919, LAN/AK117, Batch 692, QSA.
not well. On the contrary, “a substantially built and commodious wood and iron School of Arts hall” was officially opened in May 1918 at a cost of £440. Twenty-three children were attending the State school in the same month, although the official opening did not take place until the following August, when the Governor-General, Sir Ronald Munro-Ferguson, and the State Governor, Sir Hamilton Goold-Adams, both arrived to officiate. The average daily attendance had by then climbed to thirty.

The opening of a school was a mixed blessing. Children represented unpaid labour for many struggling soldier settlers and their prolonged dependence was an additional burden. In 1924, irregular attendance by pupils was a significant factor in the closure of Twin View State School in the southern sector of Beerburrum soldier settlement, and there can be little doubt that in many cases their labour was required on the family selection. Other children, such as Beatrice Hollingsworth, whose father was a Beerburrum soldier settler, were perhaps more fortunate. Hollingsworth recalled that “as children we grew up knowing complete freedom”, though whether time had dimmed the memory of chores and schooling remains unclear.

On the other hand, the returned soldier and first head teacher at Beerburrum State School, Thomas Hobgen, managed to combine official duties with primary production. Balancing

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9 BC, 10 May 1918, p.7.
10 DM, 10 May 1918, p.5.
11 DS, 5 August 1918, p.8.
12 Lake, The Limits of Hope, p.145.
13 Gerald Lynch, Honorary Secretary, Twin View School Committee, Twin View, to Department of Public Instruction, Brisbane, 1 August 1924, EDU/Z2764, “Twin View”, QSA.
these dual roles was obviously difficult, for Hobgen later had the audacity to inform his Brisbane superior that:

The work at the school has increased to such an extent lately, that I find it impossible to attend to it properly, and also attend to a pineapple farm.\(^{13}\)

Hobgen had earlier attempted to arouse interest in the establishment of a training farm for children, arguing that it would be a great benefit to the community;\(^{16}\) unpaid labour would concomitantly be semi-skilled labour. The District Inspector vetoed the plan as an impending deviation of the railway line in 1920 left the permanent school site in doubt.\(^{17}\) As it transpired, the school continued to occupy Portion 579, the two-hectare site that is still in use today; the original school building has, however, long since disappeared.\(^{18}\) Four State schools catered for the education of children on the Beerburrum soldier settlement between 1916 and 1929, two of which, Tibrogargan and Twin View, existed for only brief periods. The fourth, Glass House Mountains State School, also remains on the original site.


\(^{15}\) Thomas Hobgen, Head Teacher, Beerburrum State School, Beerburrum, to Under Secretary, Department of Public Instruction, Brisbane, 13 September 1920, EDU/Z150, “Beerburrum”, QSA.

\(^{16}\) Thomas Hobgen, Head Teacher, Beerburrum State School, Beerburrum, to Under Secretary, Department of Public Instruction, Brisbane, 1 November 1919, *Ibid.*

\(^{17}\) J. Benbow, District Inspector, to Under Secretary, Department of Public Instruction, Brisbane, 23 February 1920, *Ibid.*

\(^{18}\) Hopkins, *The Beerburrum Story*, p.94.
Despite a "phenomenally cold" winter in 1918, Beerburrum did not experience any of the severe frosts that were common throughout southern Queensland and which, according to Joseph Rose, "was further evidence of the suitableness of the area for pineapple culture". Although the soldier settlers were compelled to plant two hectares of pineapples, any additional area could be given over to other crops and citrus trees became popular. Established citrus orchards already existed at Glass House Mountains and Elimbah, respectively the northern and southern extremities of the settlement, and lemons were expected to flourish in the sandy Beerburrum soils. As well, several thousand Seville orange seedlings were raised in the nursery on the State training farm. This variety was ideal for manufacturing marmalade, and could therefore be marketed through the canning factory that was to be built for the sole benefit of the soldier settlers. Their dependence on the State store at Beerburrum for supplies was more problematical.

In early 1919 it was revealed that the store had made a tidy profit of £286 for the financial year ending in June 1918. While it was contended that £155 would be "distributed amongst the soldier customers on the basis of purchases made during the year", 'Trade Accountant' retorted:

I can only conclude that the State store has charged its soldier customers a most exorbitant profit, and an ordinary storekeeper would

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20 DS, 23 July 1918, p.5.
21 DS, 28 May 1918, p.3; DS, 27 June 1918, p.4.
22 DS, 24 July 1918, p.5.
be deservedly stigmatised as a heartless and conscience-less profiteer if he exacted similar profits.\textsuperscript{24}

There was certainly some justification for those comments and, with an influx of settlers, it was likely that even greater profits would accrue. Ninety-six soldier settlers were on the settlement in January 1919,\textsuperscript{25} a figure which rapidly expanded to 175 by the following July. With dependants, the total population was then estimated at 400.\textsuperscript{26} The majority still received the sustenance allowance of thirty-five shillings per week, an amount insufficient to provide both daily needs and to effect improvements on the holdings.\textsuperscript{27} This was compounded by the government’s insistence that as a maximum of three acres (1.2 hectares) had been cleared on each holding prior to occupation, the settler thus “finds employment for his time while waiting for the 3 acres to fruit”.\textsuperscript{28}

All very well, except that a number of returned servicemen had been attracted to Beerburrum by ‘Leaflet H’, issued by the government in July 1917. While the leaflet did state that three acres on each holding would be cleared and planted with pineapples, elsewhere it claimed that “five acres on each block are now being ringbarked preparatory to clearing”.\textsuperscript{29} Confusion occurred with the expectation that five acres (two hectares) would actually be cleared and planted. In October 1919, Edward Gilchrist was among those who insisted they had been misled by ‘Leaflet H’:

\textsuperscript{24} BC, 22 March 1919, p.11.
\textsuperscript{25} BC, 8 January 1919, p.7.
\textsuperscript{26} DM, 9 July 1919, p.6.
\textsuperscript{27} BC, 27 September 1919, p.5.
\textsuperscript{28} WK, 18 July 1919, p.13.
Mr. Gilchrist declares that he was tempted to come from West Australia by a leaflet which promised that for each soldier 5 acres would be cleared, ploughed, and planted with pineapples. That had not been done. He had been there over 12 months and 3 acres had not been cleared. Many of the men had not the strength to do the heavy clearing. Then they were told they could get instruction. He went on the State farm, but spent most of his time on the waggon.30

On the other hand, a number of soldier settlers openly declared their satisfaction. C.A. Sutton responded to the adverse criticism of Beerburrm by relating his own experience:

The block I am on (No.512) was only cleared of forest in December, 1917, and in the following May I had 16 different kinds of vegetables, of which no market gardener need have been ashamed. For this last eight months we have had plenty of vegetables; even now, during the dry season we are having, we have five or six different vegetables and four different fruits in full bearing. There has been practically no manure, and I am not a gardener, but am willing to work to make a success.31

Sutton’s comments were endorsed by A. McLean, A.J. ‘Jock’ Alcock, and C.B. Newman, though it should be noted that all four were among the first soldier settlers at Beerburrm and had been able to establish themselves while market prices for produce were still exceptionally high. Furthermore, their length of residence had also enabled them to branch into subsidiary activities. Alcock, for example, had begun to concentrate on poultry, and by June 1919 “was sending away 50 dozen eggs a week”.32 Another settler achieving good results was A. Anderson, who harvested a fine crop of “pumpkins and other vegetables” in early 1919.33 Anderson also had success with watermelons, some of

30 WK, 3 October 1919, p.19.
31 DM, 8 January 1919, p.4.
33 WK, 21 February 1919, p.25.
which weighed up to twenty-eight kilograms, but it was a far more modest specimen that John Hunter and other members of the Land Settlement Committee carried away to impress the soldier settlers at Pikedale in January 1919.\textsuperscript{34}

For government propaganda purposes, W. McLean provided the “typical example” of what could be achieved at Beerburrum. A Melbourne carpenter prior to enlistment in the AIF, McLean reputedly had no farming experience when he took up a Beerburrum selection in late 1917. By February 1919 McLean was living in “a neat little cottage” he had built himself, and had 2.4 hectares of pineapples under cultivation. Having expended only £554 of his advance, McLean expected to reap an annual return of £500 from his land.\textsuperscript{35} There is no evidence that his expectations were fulfilled; in September 1924 McLean’s holding was deserted and the cottage sold to a Nambour resident for seventy pounds.\textsuperscript{36}

There was certainly an air of optimism throughout 1919, with the local branch of the RSSILA planning an avenue of trees to commemorate their fallen comrades. In April the Director of Brisbane’s Botanic Gardens was approached to provide a selection of suitable trees for the project,\textsuperscript{37} and the first, a camphor laurel, was supposedly planted by General Sir William Birdwood during a brief visit to Beerburrum in May 1920.\textsuperscript{38} A photograph does exist, however, which attributes the first planting to Kathleen Alcock, “the first baby

\textsuperscript{34} WK, 24 January 1919, p.3.
\textsuperscript{36} A.G. Melville, Under Secretary, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, to Supervisor, Soldiers’ Settlement, Beerburrum, 19 September 1924, LAN/AK135, Batch 862, Part 2, “Unoccupied Houses on Soldier Settlements—Beerburrum”, QSA.
\textsuperscript{37} BC, 14 April 1919, p.8.
taken to Beerburrum"—in the presence of Birdwood. The following August it was
definitely thirty-three pupils from Beerburrum State School who completed the planting
with "17 weeping figs, 16 Washingtonia palms, and 4 pine trees". The trees
flourished—unlike the settlers’ crops.

In September 1919 a bakery, with an oven capacity of “about three hundred loaves”,
added to the permanency. This was reinforced the following month when it was decided
to construct a “Store, Bulk Store and Manager’s Residence” at Glass House Mountains,
on the northern end of the settlement. The opening of a boarding house in Beerburrum
township during 1920 nevertheless highlighted that adequate housing remained in short
supply.

Private dwellings encompassed two distinct architectural styles (Appendix 11-12), and in
1998 Ernie Lord recalled that his father, a builder, received thirty pounds for erecting
houses with a gable roof and an additional £2/10 for those with a hip roof. While the
government provided materials, the entire cost was borne by the soldier settlers, many of
whom attempted to maximise their resources by living in more primitive abodes. Peter
Ramm’s wife described their first dwelling on the settlement:

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38 WK, 21 May 1920, p.20.
39 S. Tutt, Pioneer Days: stories and photographs of European settlement between the Pine and Noosa
Rivers, Queensland (Caboolture, Qld: Caboolture Historical Society, 1974), p.31.
40 BC, 5 August 1920, p.9.
41 W.J. Monteith, Deputy Comptroller, Soldiers’ Settlements, Department of Public Lands, to Under
Secretary, Department of Public Works, Brisbane, 2 September 1919, TR1158/4, Box 392, Batch E279,
“Soldiers Settlement Beerburrum”, QSA.
42 W.J. Monteith, Deputy Comptroller, Soldiers’ Settlements, Department of Public Lands, to Under
Secretary, Department of Public Works, Brisbane, 29 October 1919, Ibid.
43 Hopkins, The Beerburrum Story, p.42.
The humpy was better than a tent, I could never have taken to a tent, I've hated them always. The humpy was built of split slabs 6 to 8 inches wide and spaces to allow for swelling in wet weather—very splintery and rough wood. The doors were of rolled chaff bags and attached to the top of the doorway, and chaff bags divided the room into a bedroom and kitchen and dining room. Sometimes a fire would be brought in and the smoke polluted everything; even the spider webs, crisscrossed on the roof, which was of iron. The earth floor was swept with grass tree tops, and every night all the soapy suds would be thrown on the earth to harden it. However, as there were 2 second-hand rugs in the collection of home furniture, I put one on the bedroom floor and one in the kitchen. I was learning to be grateful for everything. I couldn’t do anything else.\(^{45}\)

The wives of settlers not infrequently aided in the construction of such abodes.\(^ {46}\) For schoolteachers, accommodation was not only expensive, but also of indeterminate quality. Transferred to Beerburrum as Head Teacher in 1923, Herbert Golding and his family initially took up residence in the house vacated by his predecessor for twenty-six pounds per annum.\(^ {47}\) They did not stay long:

I am unable at present to obtain a residence at Beerburrum. On my arrival here I took a house that was recommended by my predecessor but I was only two days in it, when white ants attacked my belongings. Consequently I have been forced to store my furniture for a time, and my family and self are boarding in a private family.\(^ {48}\)

\(^{45}\) Hopkins, *The Beerburrum Story*, p.31.
\(^{47}\) Percy Barron, Beerburrum State School, Beerburrum, to Under Secretary, Department of Public Instruction, Brisbane, 1 January 1923, EDU/Z150, “Beerburrum”, QSA.
\(^{48}\) Herbert Golding, Head Teacher, Beerburrum State School, Beerburrum, to Under Secretary, Department of Public Instruction, Brisbane, 1 February 1923, *Ibid.*
Four years later termites were banqueting on the school building itself. By then, the position of the soldier settlers at Beerburrum had been undermined by a process that had begun long before, and the fate of the settlement was inextricably linked with the State Cannery, built by the government as "the natural corollary" of soldier settlement:

That promise was given for good reasons. First, the Government, having taken the responsibility of placing men on the land, recognised that it was important that they should be provided with a market—the best market possible. Knowing that there were times when the market was congested with green fruit it was realised that unless a factory was provided injury might be done to the soldiers through having to put their fruit in a congested market.

The problem was not eliminated. Indeed, even prior to the cannery’s construction it had been shown that a congested market already existed for tinned fruits as military demands in 1917 had not reached their anticipated levels. The stock was thus held over by private canners until the following year. It made little difference, and during August and September 1917 Joseph Rose, in his capacity as supervisor of Beerburrum soldier settlement, and the recently-appointed works manager of the proposed cannery, James Sparkes, carried out an extensive investigation of growing and canning operations in Hawaii and California. Their joint report provided the guidelines for future developments, including a central location for the cannery. Despite agitation from the soldier settlers to have the cannery erected at Beerburrum, the government followed the recommendations of Rose and Sparkes:

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49 W. Brewster, District Foreman of Public Works, to Director of Public Works, Brisbane, 14 February 1927, Ibid.
50 BC, 27 February 1918, p.5.
52 BC, 6 July 1917, p.6.
53 BC, 26 September 1917, p.7.
We have no hesitation in stating that we are of the opinion that the Factory should be erected in Brisbane with a water front and railway siding. A most important point is that [the] Factory shall be placed in the coolest position [to eliminate the building of cold stores], and we are of the opinion that this is to be found on the river bank. It is a well known fact, that Pines keep best under a natural cool air condition, and there would also be a double advantage of shipping accommodation. Oblivious of resultant pollution, Rose and Sparkes continued:

There would also be the advantage of direct drainage to the river of a very troublesome liquid waste and washings from a large factory, and there is also a certain amount of disagreeable odours from a canning works, and this position would help to minimise same.

Half a hectare of land on the Bulimba reach of the Brisbane River was accordingly resumed by the government at a cost of £8,565, with the construction of the cannery requiring a further outlay of £16,648. Designed by James Sparkes, and built under his direction, it was predicted in May 1919 that the cannery would be:

Although not the largest, the most up-to-date in the Commonwealth. The building has a frontage of 165 feet and a depth of 210 feet. Light, ventilation and drainage are perfect, and it will be fitted with the latest and best machinery procurable in the United States and the Commonwealth. Practically the whole of this has already arrived, and its installation will be proceeded with in a few weeks. To show how up-to-date it will be, it may be stated that the machinery will be able to make 100 cans per minute and turn out 1000 cases of canned pines per day ... The new factory’s pines will be marketed under a special label—very attractive and very striking. One special feature is a

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55 Ibid.
soldier in khaki holding an Australian flag, while another is a panel with the words 'Buy from the growers who fought for the Empire'.

As suggested by the labelling, canned Beerburrum pineapples were destined for the export market, particularly Britain. The cannery opened on 8 January 1920, in time to handle the summer crop of pineapples, with 23,000 cases being purchased from the soldier settlers at the inflated price of six shillings per case. Troubles soon began.

The feverish post-war demand for Australian products suffered a severe slump in 1920, with British consumers no longer prepared to pay high prices for voluminous produce. At the same time, the claim that the cannery had installed the most “up-to-date” machinery was shown to be fallacious, not only through escalating production costs, but also in relation to the quality of the finished product. In Britain it was found that canned pineapples from California far surpassed the Queensland article:

The get-up was all right, and the outside appearance attractive. The tin was part of the first consignment from the Government cannery ... It was labelled 2lb. nett. Well, we opened it, and at once saw that the packing was all wrong. Very small pines had been used, certainly all one size, but the tin was too large for the fruit, so they packed pieces around the sides. It looked slovenly ... The expert's report was 'bruised, broken, uneven; one a mere shaving, one broken.'

58 Memorandum, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 10 August 1921, LAN/167 (1916-31), QSA.
60 Undated journal clipping (c.1920), Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, LAN/AK132, Batch 831, "Disposal of Pineapples—Beerburrum Soldiers' Settlement", QSA.
On the recommendation of Rose and Sparkes the government had purchased Zastrow processing machines which, although an improvement on earlier types, still required considerable manual labour. Yet as early as 1913 Henry Ginaca had developed a machine that not only processed pineapples with precision, but also virtually eliminated manual operations.\(^6\) Rose and Sparkes reported unfavourably on the Ginaca machines despite their obvious superiority:

Undoubtedly, the Ginaca Machine eliminates the human element, and one of these machines will do the work of four of the Zastrow Machines, which we have recommended. Against this the Ginaca machine is costly and complicated and requires expert attendance ... A still more serious doubt is the one as to whether our fruit in Queensland would stand the operations of this machine.\(^6\)

They could and they did. Ginaca machines were finally installed in 1921,\(^6\) but the soldier settlers were held partly responsible for the problem in that many of the pineapples were undersized through want of fertiliser. Ignoring the fact that many were unable to stand the cost of fertilising their crops, the settlers were advised that henceforth they must “adhere to scientific methods of cultivation” to produce a uniform fruit size.\(^6\) Sparkes was, however, replaced as manager of the State Cannery in August 1920 by L.J. Watson, the latter having extensive knowledge of canning operations in the southern States.\(^6\) While jam production rose in significance, the real problem lay in the cannery being over-

\(^{62}\) "Report on Canning Industry", p.11.
\(^{64}\) *BC*, 20 May 1920, p.7.
\(^{65}\) *BC*, 31 August 1920, p.6.
capitalised. In an effort to increase revenue £60,000 was spent on building and installations up to 1921, an amount that far exceeded the necessary requirements.\(^{66}\)

To overcome the damage wrought on the export market, the labelling was altered and the cannery refused to accept any undersized fruit from the Beerburrum soldier settlers.\(^{67}\) With 60,000 cases of pineapples expected to be harvested in the summer of 1921,\(^{68}\) the Federal government provided a £20,000 loan to the State Cannery and two private concerns, thus subsidising operations to the extent of 7/6 per case.\(^{69}\) By this means the volume of fruit was effectively handled, though the soldier settlers only received five shillings per case for quality fruit—and nothing for the rest.\(^{70}\) Later the same year the price for quality fruit was reduced a further two shillings per case and the settlers faced financial disaster.\(^{71}\)

Staving off the inevitable, the Queensland government agreed to provide a subsidy of one shilling per case to the growers.\(^{72}\) As well, an attempt was made in February 1921 to market small pineapples in rural areas of the State:

The Minister for State Enterprises stated yesterday that arrangements had been made whereby pineapples from Beerburrum, which did not come up to the required standard for canning purposes, were being

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\(^{67}\) W.H. Austin, Commissioner for State Trade, to Minister for State Enterprises, Brisbane, 9 February 1921, LAN/AK132, Batch 831, “Disposal of Pineapples—Beerburrum Soldiers' Settlement”, QSA.

\(^{68}\) BC, 31 December 1920, p.4.

\(^{69}\) BC, 28 January 1921, p.7; QDR, 5 February 1921, p.28.

\(^{70}\) Miscellaneous Government Report, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 10 August 1921, LAN/167 (1916-31), QSA.

\(^{71}\) Ibid.

\(^{72}\) Ibid.
sent to towns along the Western and South-Western lines for sale. It was believed that this would meet a long-felt want, and that the pineapples thus made available would be appreciated by people living in the interior.\(^{73}\)

As the relevant Minister, William Forgan Smith was “gratified at the success of the scheme”, but a resident of Longreach, James Dickson, painted a very different picture. Dickson complained of the rough handling the pineapples received at the hands of railway employees, and the length of time—up to eleven days—that the fruit took to reach far western destinations. After being supplied damaged fruit, few were willing to make further purchases.\(^{74}\)

Rising costs and interest payments on their loans further compounded the problems for the soldier settlers.\(^{75}\) In February 1922, Nature also rolled the dice against them:

> Consequent upon heavy rains, making the roads almost impassable, the settlers are experiencing great difficulty in hauling their pineapples to the station.\(^{76}\)

Greater difficulties were still in store, but it was water from a quite different source that plagued their counterparts at Bald Hills, on the northern outskirts of Brisbane. This settlement, perhaps more than any other, called into question the competence of so-called government ‘experts’, and while there were many aspects of official ineptitude, one of the most crucial turned on the selection of land. In July 1919 Joseph Rose, the pineapple-

\(^{73}\) BC, 18 February 1921, p.6.
\(^{74}\) BC, 23 November 1921, p.4.
\(^{75}\) BC, 25 February 1921, p.6.
grower whose misguided enthusiasm was to commit many soldier settlers to years of unremitting struggle at Beerburrum, reported on the possibilities of opening land at Bald Hills for soldier settlement. Even tidal marshlands could not curb his optimism:

He reported that the soil was rich in quality throughout, and well suited for market gardening and all classes of vegetables and small crops. He considered that the eastern part would be suitable for bananas. Although there was an area of about 100 acres of salt marsh country subject to high tides, he stated that while it was not fit for cultivation, it would make good grazing land, and could be improved by drainage.\(^7\)

The government again accepted the advice of Rose and resumed 565 acres (228.6 hectares) of land at Bald Hills from a dairy farmer, Samuel Miller. Valuation was set at slightly more than eleven pounds per acre.\(^8\) With the acquisition of an adjoining tract of thirty hectares the area was sub-divided into twenty-one holdings, varying in extent from seven to twenty-four hectares, and thrown open for selection in October 1920. Owing to its close proximity to Brisbane, all the holdings were immediately taken up, with ballots being necessary to determine the recipients of sixteen holdings. A returned soldier, J.H. Baynes, was appointed overseer of the settlement, officially called Wyampa soldier settlement, and the Public Estates Improvement Branch constructed a road with access to each holding. Wells and bores were also sunk to provide adequate supplies of fresh water and the prospects initially appeared bright.\(^9\) Within six months it had begun to turn sour.

\(^7\) BC, 11 February 1922, p.7.
\(^8\) BC, 9 July 1921, p.7.
\(^9\) BC, 17 February 1920, p.7.
Concerns first arose over Portion 225, the seventeen hectares of which were occupied by Edward Farrell. A former British Secret Service operative and fighter pilot, Farrell had emigrated to Australia with his wife and two young children to begin a new life. Living on savings, they waited in vain for two months to secure a soldier settlement holding, and Wyampa was thrown open when their funds were virtually exhausted. Despite having no previous agricultural experience Farrell's application was successful, but his efforts to wrest a living from the soil came to nought. It was not surprising. Although two hectares of the holding was deemed to be cultivable, the bulk of his land was inundated by salt water at high tide. Recognising these serious limitations, the Department of Public Lands agreed to reduce the valuation of the holding by one pound per acre, “although this will mean an inevitable slight loss on the resumption”. Farrell, however, had gone public with his complaints, and in July 1921 was subjected to intimidation:

The local supervisor, who by the way is a J.P., has informed me that, acting under instructions, he must refuse to pay me for any work done by me till I have signed a mortgage on the tidal marsh block held by me. Of course, I expected something like this, and it is one of the reasons why we will not complain, knowing that if they do it will mean little or no cash when pay day arrives.

This was happening elsewhere throughout the State, though it appears that Farrell was the first soldier settler at Bald hills to receive a bill of mortgage. While the majority of the settlers did prefer to remain quiet, and thus avoid retaliatory action, it is clear that at least

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80 QDR, 23 July 1921, p.25.
81 Ibid.
82 BC, 15 July 1921, p.9.
sixteen were situated on the littoral zone and virtually destitute. Both H. Carvell and A.H. Davis nevertheless did come forward to support Farrell. The holding leased by Davis extended over twenty-two hectares, with just over half a hectare cleared, and included twelve hectares of brackish marsh and tea-tree swamp. Carvell’s holding was slightly drier, but “he, too, is arduously fighting the battle of reclamation with little or no success”. Carvell was obviously made of tough fibre, for he was among the seven soldier settlers remaining at Bald Hills in 1929. Farrell, whose prospects were hopeless, was not among their number.

The Brisbane press mounted a short, albeit, intensive campaign in mid-1921 to publicise the plight of the Wyampa soldier settlers. Photographs appearing in both the Brisbane Courier and Queenslander provide mute evidence that Farrell’s dwelling was constructed on reclaimed land, with concrete filling clearly visible (Appendix 13). There was no cultivable land, as salt water was struck less than twenty-two centimetres below the surface. Access was also difficult, yet when complaints were expressed over the poor state of the main settlement road, the Minister for Public Lands, Harry Coyne, insisted that the damage was entirely due to the settlers themselves:

The road was graded and formed under the direction of the Public Estate Improvement branch of the department, and was a credit to the engineer. It is impossible to keep the settlers off this road in wet weather, hence the cutting up that has occurred.

83 ODR, 23 July 1921, p.25.
84 Ibid.
85 BC, 9 July 1921, p.7.
This was, of course, their only line of communication and the settlers were often compelled to bring in supplies on foot. 86 Contrary to Coyne’s remarks, it is clear that effective drainage work was not undertaken and, importantly, insufficient quantities of road metal were used in construction. 87 The problem was partly addressed—in 1923—when Kedron Shire Council carried out extensive work in a bid to make the road trafficable in wet weather. 88 George Carseldine, a descendant of the district’s original European settler, agreed that the roadwork was deficient, but otherwise supported the government’s contention that the area was suitable for agriculture. Perhaps it was pride in his forebear’s pioneering past that prompted Carseldine to enter the controversy, for he does not appear to have had any pecuniary interest in the land. Incensed by the publication of photographs showing a number of the soldier settlement holdings inundated by brackish water (Appendix 14), Carseldine argued that “practically the whole of the water shown is surface water, due to the excessive rainfall this winter”. 89 This drew a sharp rebuttal:

In spite of Mr. Carseldine’s assertion that the water shown in the photographs was all surface water, due to the recent rain, our photographer took the precaution to taste the water in every instance, and declares that it was quite salt. If, as Mr. Carseldine says, it was rain water, then the soil must be so saturated with salt that it was able to turn the pure product of the clouds into a very fair imitation of sea water. 90

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86 QDR, 23 July 1921, p.25.
87 BC, 12 July 1921, p.9.
89 QDR, 6 August 1921, p.27.
90 Ibid.
No further comments were forthcoming from the pen of George Carseldine. Yet rain, interspersed with periodic drought, plagued the Wyampa soldier settlement throughout the 1920s. In common with the majority of soldier settlements, Bald Hills also suffered from the divergence of Queensland’s agricultural pattern. In July 1921 an editorial in Brisbane’s *Queenslander* newspaper noted that prior to the implementation of the Soldier Settlement Scheme the general policy had been to select only prime-quality land, leaving inferior areas until the pressure of population and concomitant competition encouraged intensive cultivation. By this means, satisfactory results were possible. This differed with soldier settlement in general, and Bald Hills in particular, in that returned servicemen were expected to undertake intensive cultivation “without the experience and the assistance necessary to make a success of it”.91 It was, indeed, an experimental policy.

Admittedly, there were patches of good soil throughout Wyampa soldier settlement. Thus, while three settlers had been forced to abandon their holdings by July 1922, a combined area of just over twenty-one hectares had been planted with vegetables and fruit trees by the remaining eighteen returned servicemen.92 The 161 dairy cows on the settlement comprised “grades of Shorthorn, Illawarra, and Jersey”,93 which nevertheless suggests further experimentation. In mid-1923, the government withdrew the overseer, J.H. Baynes, even though the district was gripped by drought and the settlers were obviously struggling.94 They were, in effect, being abandoned, and it was not only the salt

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91 *ODR*, 23 July 1921, p.9.
93 *BC*, 9 July 1921, p.7.
marshes and intermittent drought that barred progress at Bald Hills. At a soldier settlement conference held in Brisbane during August 1924, the motion was passed:

That the settlers in Bald Hills benefit by a big reduction in land values (the average at present being in the vicinity of £11 per acre). This is regarded as altogether too excessive, as a large area of the land consists of salt-pan and marsh, which is covered at high tide, also a large area is heavily covered with prickly-pear and groundsell.95

The Revaluation Board tended to agree, recommending a sixteen percent reduction on all sixteen holdings still occupied.96 In a confidential report on the settlement, however, the three members of the Board—M.B. Salisbury, W.K. Sydes and Ouseley Byrne—held out virtually no hope for the future of Bald Hills:

Owing to most of the land being low-lying ti-tree clay flats unsuitable for farming purposes and too limited for grazing purposes, this Settlement has no likelihood of being a success. The greater portion of the settlers are working elsewhere for a livelihood and the greater portion of those who will remain will only hold their holdings for residential purposes. In our opinion not more than 9 of the present settlers are likely to persevere with their holdings. A fresh water supply cannot be obtained by sinking.97

Even that number eventually proved too high. Whether through saltwater inundation, weed infestation, dry weather, unsatisfactory dairy prices, or loss of outside employment, three more soldier settlers forfeited their holdings by June 1925.98 While experiments

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95 BC, 11 August 1924, p.7.
97 “Confidential Report of the Revaluation Board”, to Secretary for Public Lands, Brisbane, 21 October 1924, LAN/167 (1916-31), QSA.
were made with viticulture, both grapes and vegetable crops were adversely affected by heavy rain in January 1926, and another two settlers departed during the year. In December 1926, 'Boomerang' briefly outlined the circumstances of an "average 'dinkum' soldier settler" at Bald Hills:

He came here enjoying the advantages of good health, the determination to succeed. He had a young family, and for a couple of seasons he attempted the impossible task of making a living from market gardening, on a block without water. Forced to obtain work to feed himself and a growing family, this man devoted the whole of his spare time (Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays) to the cultivation of about 10 acres of bananas. These 10 acres are as well cultivated as any on the settlement.

Bananas were not successful, and in early 1927 prices for dairy produce fell; by July only thirteen holdings were still occupied. Heavy rain struck again in early 1928, and there were additional problems:

To add to farmer's troubles, a plague of caterpillars has taken possession of the grass land on the river flats, and has played havoc with the pastures, and consequently milk supplies are diminishing. Market gardeners are experiencing a severe time with vermin. The ground is reeking with slugs and other parasites, and crop after crop of vegetables have been destroyed after transplanting. Noogoora burr has grown most prolifically this season.

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101 BC, 7 December 1926, p.21.
102 BC, 10 January 1927, p.4.
104 BC, 28 March 1928, p.12.
Only nine returned servicemen were still on the Wyampa soldier settlement by June 1928.\textsuperscript{105} Although they managed to harvest a light crop of grapes in January 1929, prices proved to be barely “satisfactory”.\textsuperscript{106} With harvesting just completed, abnormal king tides and torrential rain inundated the settlement, including the main access road.\textsuperscript{107} The onset of winter saw one of the most severe frosts for several years strike the district, with all late crops being “cut to the ground”.\textsuperscript{108} This may have caused the abandonment of two more holdings, for by July 1929 the number of soldier settlers at Bald Hills had fallen to just seven.\textsuperscript{109} One of them was H. Carvell, whose prospects had looked so hopeless eight years before. Carvell was adaptable, and in late 1929 he managed to use the natural deficiencies of his holding to advantage:

In the formation of a recreation reserve on his holding, which is situated on a pretty spot known as the “Deepwater Bend” of the South Pine River. The reserve is becoming popular with boating and fishing parties.\textsuperscript{110}

How Carvell fared when global depression struck is not known. His perseverance was nevertheless remarkable, for the Wyampa soldier settlement exemplified some of the worst characteristics of Queensland’s Soldier Settlement Scheme. The attempt to utilise land that could barely be considered even marginal for agriculture ensured that the Bald Hills settlers were literally littoral. Yet even the disaster experienced on this settlement

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{106} \textit{BC}, 15 January 1929, p.16.
\item \textsuperscript{107} \textit{BC}, 31 January 1929, p.3.
\item \textsuperscript{108} \textit{BC}, 26 June 1929, p.10.
\item \textsuperscript{110} \textit{BC}, 14 December 1929, p.12.
\end{itemize}
was overshadowed by the situation at Coominya, where the plight of the soldier settlers became so desperate that the government was forced to abandon the settlement in 1923. Joseph Rose had also been heavily involved in the initial establishment of a soldier settlement at Coominya.

Located in the Brisbane River Valley north-west of Ipswich (Appendix 15), Coominya soldier settlement was not only an unmitigated social and agricultural disaster, but also somewhat of an anomaly for two clearly distinct reasons. Despite an offer by the Watson family to donate forty hectares of land for the settlement of returned servicemen in June 1918, the State government hesitated for more than a year before any action was taken to open the area for selection. Furthermore, while Coominya was undeniably an agricultural experiment, settlement was actually motivated by the high level of unemployment among returned servicemen in the Ipswich area. The second major difference was that Coominya was officially acknowledged as being a complete failure less than three years after being established. Responsibility thus fell heavily on the local organisations that had subjected the State government to increased pressure in a bid to remove unemployed servicemen from Ipswich.

Coominya had, however, already achieved a fine reputation for the quality of its grapes. W.J. Gutteridge pioneered viticulture in the district from the late nineteenth century, and his ‘Norman Vineyard’ continued to flourish. Banff Brothers and a number of others

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111 BC, 14 June 1918, p.8.
followed up this development in the early 1900s. The main advantage lay in the grapes maturing earlier than the famed vineyards further west around Roma, with harvesting taking place around Christmas—a time of peak demand. Wine production was still in its infancy, and the ‘Colinton Vineyard’ of Banff Brothers was the most notable supplier, producing more than 31,000 litres of wine and 4,500 litres of brandy in 1919. The Queensland government had also established an experimental vineyard at Coominya in September 1916, but it is relevant that the productive vineyards and a few successful citrus orchards were scattered throughout the district, with the land eventually acquired for soldier settlement having previously been passed over as unsuitable for agriculture.

As well, the Watson family’s donation was merely a lure. Once the land had been accepted by the Ipswich branch of the Repatriation Fund, a further 2,761 acres (1,117 hectares) was immediately offered for sale at “the very reasonable price of two pounds per acre for the whole area”. Although this land had been used solely for grazing, the offer was readily accepted and, with a resumption of land from the adjoining Bellevue Homestead, the area opened for soldier settlement totalled 1,328 hectares. There were additional inducements, with Banff Brothers agreeing to purchase the entire crop of

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113 QT, 13 January 1919, p.7.
114 BC, 30 July 1923, p.7.
115 BC, 30 July 1923, p.7.
118 Robert P. Watson (for William J. Watson and Samuel Watson), Ipswich, to J. Rose, Comptroller of Soldier Settlements, Department of Lands, Brisbane, 4 November 1919, LAN/AK132, Batch 822, “Coominya Men Desiring to Remain on Coominya”, QSA.
grapes grown by soldier settlers for eight pounds per tonne,^{121} and ‘Red Hill Vineyards’ of Roma offering to supply grape cuttings “free of charge”.^{122}

According to Oliver Perry, Honorary Secretary of the Ipswich Repatriation Fund, water was obtainable at 1.5 metres below the surface and clearing costs were negligible. Almost gushing with anticipation, he continued:

The return from this land is estimated by competent persons to be Lemons in full bearing 100 trees per acre at £1 per tree £100. Grapes, this land will yield on an average 12 tons per acre which sold at 1d. per lb. will amount to £112. per acre.^{123}

The Comptroller of Soldier Settlements, Joseph Rose, who considered saline marsh at Bald Hills suitable for soldier settlement, also inspected Coominya in November 1919. True to form, the Woombye pineapple farmer pronounced the land “eminently suitable for the growth of lemons and grapes”, which he found “growing profusely without any sign of damage from the continued dry weather”.^{124} Ominous signs were already being ignored. Rose was no less effusive of the Bellevue Homestead resumption, which he personally selected: “The finest land that could be obtained for our purpose in the District”.^{125} Yet no soil analysis was undertaken until 1922, when the settlement was

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^{121} J. Rose, Comptroller, Soldiers’ Settlements, to Chairman, Land Settlement Committee, Brisbane, 28 November 1919, LAN/AK132, Batch 822, “Coominya Men Desiring to Remain on Coominya”, QSA.
^{122} C.T.O. Shepherd, Chief Supervisor, Soldiers’ Settlements, to Chairman, Land Settlement Committee, Brisbane, 31 May 1920, Ibid.
^{123} Oliver Perry, Honorary Secretary, Queensland Repatriation Fund, Ipswich Branch, to Land Settlement Committee, Brisbane, 22 April 1919, Ibid.
^{124} J. Rose, Comptroller, Soldiers’ Settlements, to Chairman, Land Settlement Committee, Brisbane, 10 November 1919, Ibid.
^{125} J. Rose, Comptroller, Soldiers’ Settlements, to Chairman, Land Settlement Committee, Brisbane, 28 November 1919, Ibid.
faltering. Even with the crude techniques then existing, the Agricultural Chemist, J.C. Brunnich, was able to report:

Very disappointing is the result of the analyses of the Coominya Soldiers' Settlement. They are without doubt the poorest soils ever analysed, and the worst feature is the fact that the large amount of insoluble matter in hydrochloric acid, varying from 84 to 96 per cent. contains practically no plant foods ... The samples of soil for the purpose of analyses were taken from portions numbered 114, 116, 136, 141, 154, 158, and 162. The samples are sufficiently widespread to warrant their acceptance as being fairly representative of the entire area.126

Three government officials nevertheless did cast doubts on the wisdom of settling returned servicemen at Coominya. Having replaced Rose as Comptroller of Soldier Settlements after the latter's resignation in December 1919,127 C.T.O. Shepherd inspected the district and found that water supplies were non-existent on the western side of the railway which bisected the township. He recommended that the Government Water Diviner (J.H. Bestmann) be despatched to the district immediately, and if he could not locate sub-surface water it would be “useless to attempt to settle this area”.128 A.E. Murray was appointed supervisor on Shepherd's recommendation, and both officials insisted that a number of holdings should be withdrawn from ballot, and the acreage on the remainder increased.129 Indeed, the Land Ranger had already suggested that the

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126 E. Graham, Director of Dairying, to Under Secretary, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 16 June 1923, *Ibid*.
127 *ANBVA*, 22 May 1920, p.5; *WS*, 20 April 1921, p.2.
129 C.T.O. Shepherd, Chief Supervisor, Soldiers’ Settlements, to Under Secretary (per Officer in Charge), Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 24 April 1923, *Ibid*. 
soldier settlement should comprise only nineteen holdings of sixty hectares each. Their arguments were in vain, and the Land Settlement Committee decided to sub-divide the acquisition into eighty-four holdings varying in extent from nine to fifteen hectares. The majority were located on the western side of the railway.

Increasing numbers of repatriated troops forced the issue. In January 1920, G.W. Allen, Secretary of the Ipswich Chamber of Commerce and Industry, requested that land settlement at Coominya be expedited to alleviate growing unemployment. This call was immediately followed by that of A.L. Shapcott, Secretary of the Ipswich sub-branch of the RSSILA. Oliver Perry of the local Repatriation Fund also suggested that thirty-eight of the fifty returned servicemen then drawing sustenance at Ipswich were available for clearing work at Coominya. As it transpired, the settlement attracted few locals, with the majority of settlers being British ex-servicemen with little more than a rudimentary knowledge of agriculture.

To overcome the water shortage it was decided to sink three bores at strategic points on the settlement to supplement the single bore already provided for the township by Esk

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130 "Report by Deputy Comptroller, Soldiers' Settlements", Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 29 January 1920, Ibid.
132 BC, 30 August 1924, p.15.
133 G.W. Allen, Secretary, Ipswich Chamber of Commerce and Industry, to Mr. Parker, Secretary, Land Settlement Committee, Coominya, 27 January 1920, LAN/AK132, Batch 822, "Coominya Men Desiring to Remain on Coominya", QSA.
134 A.L. Shapcott, Honorary Secretary, Returned Sailors' and Soldiers' Imperial League of Australia, Ipswich sub-branch, to Secretary, Land Settlement Committee, Brisbane, 28 January 1920, Ibid.
135 Officer in Charge, Soldiers' Settlements, to Under Secretary for Public Lands, Brisbane, 18 May 1920, Ibid.
Shire Council. Rather than being tapped at 1.5 metres as stated by Oliver Perry, water was actually obtained at depths varying from 33.5 to 67 metres. The bores and water supplies were soon problematical:

One plant was completed so far, that had the engine been in good order (or powerful enough) we would have had a supply. However when it came to the actual pumping the weight of the lift on the pump was so great that it pulled the engine to a standstill. The Plant is on the most important Site and the lack of water caused great inconvenience. There has been no rain for a month, consequently water holes etc. are almost dry, and it has meant that we have had to get water from a long distance. There has been a certain amount of dissatisfaction among a few of the Settlers owing to the difficulty of obtaining water, but no settlers have at any time been short, excepting by their own extravagance in the use of water supplied.

Water may not have been flowing, but accusations certainly were. A number of settlers attempted to dam Sandy Creek, which wound its way through the settlement to its junction with Lockyer Creek, a tributary of the Brisbane River. Far too often, however, the watercourse lived up to its name, with no water scouring the sandy bed. The settlers were also reluctant to form a board of trustees to maintain the bores, and the government was therefore forced to appoint a caretaker to carry out maintenance. The expense incurred by this arrangement was tolerated only briefly, and when the engine of

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137 Officer in Charge, Soldier Settlement Branch, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, to A.E. Murray, Overseer, Soldiers’ Settlement, Coominya, 4 October 1920, LAN/AK132, Batch 833, “Water Supply and Bores, Coominya Soldier Settlement”, QSA; A.E. Murray, Overseer, Coominya Soldiers’ Settlement, to Officer in Charge, Soldiers’ Settlement Branch, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 14 October 1920, Ibid.
138 Miscellaneous report, “Soldier Settlement Coominya”, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 1 January 1921, Ibid.
139 E. Graham, Director of Dairying, to Under Secretary, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 16 June 1923, LAN/AK132, Batch 822, “Coominya Men Desiring to Remain on Coominya”, QSA.
140 Officer in Charge, Soldier Settlement Branch, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, to Mr. A.E. Murray, Supervisor, Soldiers’ Settlement, Coominya, 15 June 1921, LAN/AK132, Batch 833, “Water Supply and Bores, Coominya Soldier Settlement”, QSA.
No.1 Villa Bore failed the supervisor, A.E. Murray, recommended that no repairs be carried out until the settlers agreed to take control of the bores. The reason for the settlers’ unwillingness undoubtedly arose from their responsibility for collecting payment for water used by individual soldier settlers. Murray’s strategy apparently had the desired effect, but in July 1923 when the settlement was being abandoned, the State government attempted to pass control of the bores to Esk Shire Council—and found the local authority similarly evasive.

Esk Shire Council refused to take control until the pumping plants were made operational. This presented some difficulty, as the Department of Public Lands could not “see its way to make available the money necessary”, and the matter was held in abeyance. To circumvent the impasse A.J. Dean, the last supervisor of Coominya soldier settlement, suggested that his department acquiesce for pecuniary reasons:

Now that the Settlement has been practically closed for Soldiers and being opened up for competitive selection the question of water will have an important bearing on the taking up of the selections and the improvements, and no time should be lost to put the water supply in good order, and on a permanent footing—this is the case for the Department ... Don’t lose [sic] sight of the fact that the Water supply if in order will be a strong incentive towards Selection and Disposal of improvements.

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141 A.E. Murray, Supervisor, Coominya Soldiers’ Settlement, to Officer in Charge, Soldiers’ Settlement Branch, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 23 September 1921, Ibid.
142 Officer in Charge, Soldier Settlement Branch, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, to Mr. A.E. Murray, Supervisor, Soldiers’ Settlement, Coominya, 15 June 1921, Ibid.
143 W.L. Payne, Assistant Under Secretary, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, to Clerk, Shire of Esk, 14 December 1923, Ibid.
144 C.W. Holland, Assistant Under Secretary, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, to Clerk, Shire of Esk, 29 July 1923, Ibid.
145 A.J. Dean, Supervisor, Coominya Soldier Settlement, to Officer in Charge, Soldier Settlement Branch, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 24 November 1923, Ibid.
In May 1924, when Dean was relieved of his final duties, an agreement between the two levels of government had still not been reached, the bores simply being “without control”. In July, Esk Shire Council finally accepted the bores “on condition that all plant for working is put in thorough working order”. This was done, but it serves to show that a regular water supply was absolutely vital for closer settlement at Coominya. Unfortunately for the soldier settlers, they were struck by persistent drought from the beginning. Indeed, there was only one occasion when significant rainfall broke the pattern—and then it brought unforeseen consequences.

Coominya soldier settlement was established in June 1920, with all eighty-four holdings being immediately taken up. In less than a year 113 hectares of land had been cleared, forty-two hectares ploughed, and twenty-six hectares planted with citrus trees. This rapid influx placed considerable pressure on existing services, particularly the school, which had been built to accommodate a maximum of twenty pupils. In November 1920 thirty-nine children were enrolled; the following February it was expected that sixty children would eventually attend. Clement Fox, District Inspector for the Department of Public Instruction, nevertheless advised awaiting further developments before “expensive additions” were made to the school. To be sure, there was little sign of prosperity in the settlement:

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146 “Bores and Pumping Outfits—Coominya Bores”, Public Estate Improvement Branch, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 19 May 1924, Ibid.
147 Shire Clerk, Shire of Esk Council, to Under Secretary, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 11 July 1924, Ibid.
149 J.W. Heers, Secretary to the School Committee, Coominya, to Under Secretary, Department of Public Instruction, Brisbane, 12 November 1920, EDU/Z653, “Coominya”, QSA.
Most of the families live under very rough conditions. One or two good homes have been erected, the rest are mostly tents, or shelters of the crudest types. Very little land has been cleared; roads have not been properly formed; the country is thickly timbered, the soil is sandy; fruit growing will be the main industry. I found in the settlement 12 children of school age, and about 20 below, living within 2½ miles of the school and not yet on the roll. Unavoidable domestic difficulties will probably militate against their regular attendance in many instances for a time; but as conditions become more favourable they will come along to school.  

Housing did improve; conditions did not. School attendance continued to climb until January 1923, when enrolments were "in excess of sixty". Periodic outbreaks of scarlet fever and other contagious diseases were partly attributable to overcrowding, and it was somewhat ironic that additions were not made to the school until the summer of 1923-1924, when most of the soldier settler families had already departed.

On the other hand, wooden cottages soon replaced temporary dwellings and, by June 1921, fifty had been completed. Local timber was used in the construction, with the settlement sawmill understandably kept "very busy". Citrus trees having been planted on the majority of holdings, the cultivation of grapes commenced. This was well under way by late 1921, when the prolonged dry weather was finally broken by showers and overcast conditions—ideal for the spread of fungoid diseases. Incurable 'downy mildew' struck the Coominya vines to such an extent "that the prospect of a crop this season is

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150 Clement Fox, District Inspector, Coominya, to Under Secretary, Department of Public Instruction, Brisbane, 28 February 1921, *Ibid.*
151 R. Quinn, Under Secretary and Director of Public Works, to Under Secretary, Department of Public Instruction, Brisbane, 5 January 1923, *Ibid.*
152 Kerr, *Confidence and Tradition*, p.129.
153 *QT*, 3 June 1921, p.3.
practically nil". Approximately 80,000 vine cuttings were affected, but the plight of the settlers was exacerbated when their sustenance allowance was inexplicably withheld. In May 1922:

The settlers, most of whom are married, are adding daily to their debts in the hope that the obligation in regard to maintenance will be fulfilled. Some are in a very bad way, and if no relief is forthcoming they will have to abandon their holdings.

The following month eight soldier settlers did just that. Until their sustenance allowance was restored, the remainder largely depended on assistance provided by the Ipswich branch of the Sailors’ and Soldiers’ Fathers’ Association in the form of groceries, clothing and even newspapers. The Association also supplied the settlers with laying hens and was instrumental in having a Bush Nurse stationed at Coominya.

With the failure of viticulture, the soldier settlers were urged to cultivate cotton as an alternative until their citrus trees matured. Planting had commenced by April 1922, when J.D. Young of the Australian Cotton-Growing Association inspected the district and anticipated “returns from £12 to £18 per acre”. The following October Queensland’s Minister for Public Lands, Harry Coyne, made his own inspection, announcing that he

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154 BC, 18 October 1921, p.6.
158 BC, 18 April 1923, p.3.
159 QT, 29 April 1922, p.7.
“found that really hard work had been performed by the settlers, and there was no evidence of any slackness of effort”\textsuperscript{160}

With individual cotton plots extending up to nine hectares\textsuperscript{161}, agricultural advisers—including J.D. Young, who revisited the settlement—began warning that fertiliser, “to the extent of £14 per acre”, would be necessary to ensure a successful crop. Yet, expected returns had now fallen to “£10 per acre”\textsuperscript{162}. Perhaps not surprisingly, the settlers held a “stormy meeting” and drew up a petition “to have matters placed on a satisfactory footing”.\textsuperscript{163} A social evening raised the necessary funds to send a delegation of four settlers to Brisbane,\textsuperscript{164} where Harry Coyne admitted the failure of Coominya despite the superb efforts of the participants:

As the result of his recent visit to the settlement he was convinced that grapes and citrus fruits would not be a success commercially, and furthermore, it was indeed a great pity that the land had ever been selected at all. He asked the selectors to attend to their present cultivated areas of cotton, and also pick the crop as it matured. The assurance was given that the proceeds received would not be encroached upon by the Government, and it was also stated that although a fresh start would be made no compensation whatever could be allowed ... It was not possible to shift the settlement en bloc, but it might be possible to place, say 10 or 12, as desired.\textsuperscript{165}

\textsuperscript{160} \textit{QT}, 10 October 1922, p.5.
\textsuperscript{161} \textit{QT}, 14 October 1922, p.5.
\textsuperscript{162} \textit{QT}, 16 October 1922, p.6.
\textsuperscript{163} \textit{QT}, 19 October 1922, p.6.
\textsuperscript{164} \textit{QT}, 1 November 1922, p.9.
\textsuperscript{165} \textit{QT}, 4 November 1922, p.9.
Many more desired to escape Coominya, but in the interim sustenance allowances were guaranteed, including the payment of arrears.\textsuperscript{166} This offered no defence against adverse environmental factors, however, and continuing dry conditions with "excessive hot winds" destroyed virtually all the remaining citrus trees. Nor could many settlers see any advantage in attending to their cotton crops, where expenses were greater than the expected returns.\textsuperscript{167} It mattered little. Drought effectively prevented the cotton bolls from bursting.\textsuperscript{168}

In June 1923 forty-eight soldier settlers were still on the Coominya lands, though transfers had already commenced.\textsuperscript{169} The search for culpability was also well under way, with the Chief Supervisor of Soldier Settlements, C.T.O. Shepherd, deflecting criticism away from himself by placing responsibility firmly on the shoulders of Joseph Rose:

I feel that I personally cannot be held responsible for the present conditions pertaining at Coominya. I certainly advised the settlers to go to Coominya whilst sitting on the selection Committee and after hearing both Mr Benson and Mr Rose expounding its possibilities to intending settlers at that Committee I felt justified in opening the area ... In looking over the report by Mr Rose prior to the repurchase being made it would give anyone the impression that it was the best piece of country in Queensland as he refers to it being some of the best country in Queensland, one portion having 816 acres with not an inch of waste on it.\textsuperscript{170}

\textsuperscript{166} OT, 23 November 1922, p.7.
\textsuperscript{167} C.T.O. Shepherd, Chief Supervisor, Soldier Settlements, to Officer in Charge, Soldiers' Settlement Branch, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 4 April 1923, LAN/AK1 32, Batch 822, "Coominya Men Desiring to Remain on Coominya", QSA.
\textsuperscript{168} BC, 30 July 1923, p.7.
\textsuperscript{170} C.T.O. Shepherd, Chief Supervisor, Soldier Settlements, to Under Secretary (per Officer in Charge), Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 24 April 1923, LAN/AK1 32, Batch 822, "Coominya Men Desiring to Remain on Coominya", QSA.
Harry Coyne was less personal, sheeting home blame to the three organisations that had pressured the government to open the land for soldier settlement.\textsuperscript{171} This brought a vigorous protest from the Ipswich Chamber of Commerce and Industry,\textsuperscript{172} but in many ways Coyne's remarks were justified. The Minister for Public Lands, however, was also facing attack from a different direction. Speaking on behalf of his fellow soldier settlers, William Themor argued that they were not being transferred to "better land" as promised. Striking an aggressive tone, he warned that unless the matter was soon remedied the settlers were prepared to take direct action:

\begin{quote}
I beg to state that your proposals are considered very unsatisfactory by all, in as much as that the various settlements are little or no better for some reason or other than the one we are already on. Soldier settlers are leaving Ridgelands on account of the water problem so how do you expect men from here to do any good up there. The Boyne Valley is similar to this one and Kingaroy is very dry ... I am instructed to inform you that the deputation of four settlers including myself desire an appointment with the Land Settlement Committee with the object in view of obtaining a satisfactory understanding with you re new land. Failing this it is the intention of the settlers to visit Brisbane en masse to obtain what we consider we are justly entitled to. At the same time I shall be obliged to give the Settlement publication through the various daily presses which action I assure you I don't want to have to carry out, if it can be avoided, and I feel sure that if we had the opportunity of putting the whole thing before you that an understanding could be reached.\textsuperscript{173}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{171} BC, 18 April 1923, p.3.
\textsuperscript{172} BC, 20 April 1923, p.6.
\textsuperscript{173} W. Themor, Secretary, Coominya Soldiers Settlers League, to Secretary, Land Settlement Committee, Brisbane, 21 April 1923, LAN/AK132, Batch 822, "Coominya Men Desiring to Remain on Coominya", QSA.
Themor was one of twenty settlers who had elected to stay on the Coominya settlement pending a satisfactory revaluation. His correspondence, coupled with the willingness of the daily press to portray any government policy in an unfavourable light, apparently had the desired effect. In July it was stated that "every facility would be afforded them to select land elsewhere in the State, not necessarily on either of the other soldiers’ settlements". During the same month William McCormack replaced Coyne as Minister for Public Lands, and began his term of office with the curious announcement that the Coominya soldier settlement was not being abandoned. Rather, "we are transferring settlers from there to other districts". They went in earnest.

Those settlers who had intimated their wish to stay at Coominya were nevertheless advised that they would no longer be eligible for further advances. Moreover, they would also have to carry the debt on any land added to their existing holding. Clearly, by this stage the government could do little more than cut losses, and all but two returned servicemen departed the settlement prior to its official closure in April 1924. Both C. Wills and P.E. Smith were to remain on their holdings throughout the remainder of the decade, and it is also apparent that the majority did accept transfers to other soldier settlements throughout the State. A few of the participants continued to retain sentimental links. In September 1924 Sid Boby re-visited Coominya, where he expressed

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174 J. Wilson, Supervisor, Coominya, to Officer in Charge, Soldier Settlement Branch, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 27 April 1923, Ibid.
175 Memorandum, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 30 July 1923, Ibid.
176 BC, 27 July 1923, p.5.
177 Memorandum, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 11 September 1923, LAN/AK132, Batch 822, “Coominya Men Desiring to Remain on Coominya”, QSA.
178 BC, 25 April 1924, p.11.
satisfaction with his new holding at Tarong in the South Burnett district. Although the last supervisor, A.J. Dean, retired to a lucerne farm at Forrest Hill in the Lockyer Valley, he agreed to become patron of the Coominya Bush Nursing Association in October 1925.

From early 1923 local residents had begun renting abandoned cottages on a weekly basis of five to nine shillings, while they had cost between £183 and £271 to build, many were later sold for as little as fifty pounds. It is significant that when the area was opened for general selection, only sixteen holdings, “ranging from 76 to 331 acres”, were actually made available—compared with eighty-four for soldier settlement. Natural regrowth soon began reclaiming abandoned areas, and one elderly resident of Coominya was moved to remark that this brief episode in his district’s history was not simply a tragedy: “It is an atrocity”. While the Queensland government lost an estimated £70,000 in this ill-fated experiment, perhaps no figure could be placed on the personal cost to so many of the victims.

Coominya and Bald Hills are two case studies which offer an important insight into the overall scheme. Lack of foresight, inadequate preparation and the acceptance of

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181 BC, 9 September 1924, p.9.
182 BC, 17 October 1925, p.16.
183 C.T.O. Shepherd, Chief Supervisor, Soldier Settlements, to Officer in Charge, Soldiers’ Settlement Branch, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 4 April 1923, LAN/AK132, Batch 822, “Coominya Men Desiring to Remain on Coominya”, QSA.
184 Memorandum, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 25 August 1925, LAN/AK101, Batch 389, No.12 “Notice of Questions”, QSA.
186 Ibid.
187 BC, 30 August 1924, p.15.
unqualified advice, all contributed to swift failure. While their effects may have taken longer to impact substantially elsewhere, such as Beerburum, they nevertheless existed from the outset. The way the State government dealt with the difficulties at Bald Hills, Coominya and Beerburum is also of interest, as it appeared to turn on the relative population of each settlement.

Beerburum was one of Queensland’s largest soldier settlements, and the sheer numbers involved necessitated that the government implement ad hoc measures in the hope that the situation would eventually improve. This is evident in the alterations made to the State Cannery, and the subsidies offered to the soldier settlers. Although the population of Coominya was by no means inconsequential, growing militancy and the fact that the soldier settlers were able to coordinate their protest forced to government to alter its tack. Acknowledging the insurmountable difficulties the settlement was soon abandoned, with the settlers being dispersed throughout the State. Bald Hills was small and the settlers were already divided. Retaliatory action could easily be taken against outspoken individuals such as Edward Farrell and, when the problems became overt, the few settlers remaining were expendable. They offered no threat to the government’s future electoral prospects.

Above all, the experimental nature of soldier settlement linked all three settlements. Pineapples, supplemented by subsidiary crops, still appeared an agricultural possibility for Beerburum. When viticulture and citrus failed at Coominya, efforts were made to substitute cotton. At Bald Hills dairying was known to be possible, and various trials

\[138\] BC, 22 October 1923, p.7.
were conducted to ascertain the crops which might prove viable on extremely marginal land. In the South Burnett district and further northwards agricultural experimentation was no less evident. Indeed, in the majority of cases the soldier settlers had very little option.
CHAPTER 7:

‘CORRUPTION AND CROPS’: SOLDIER SETTLEMENT IN THE SOUTH BURNETT, CENTRAL AND JOHNSTONE RIVER DISTRICTS

In the surfeit of abundance
Lurks the canker of decay:
From the discipline of hardship
Grows the power to mould and sway.1

The Rosslyn-Barmoya soldier settlement, just north of Rockhampton, differed from all other soldier settlements in central Queensland and the South Burnett district in having extremely fertile soils and an abundance of water. Indeed, there were times when water was over-abundant and presented its own unique difficulties. Far to the north, in the South Johnstone district, El Arish soldier settlement was also endowed with fertile soils and plentiful water supplies. This settlement differed yet again in that it was an ideal location for growing Queensland’s one viable crop during the period of soldier settlement—sugar cane. Well removed from the established sugar-growing areas, Rosslyn-Barmoya settlers experimented with a diverse array of agricultural commodities. Their counterparts elsewhere throughout the central and South Burnett districts were also forced to embark on agricultural experimentation, as they were situated on marginal lands. For those settlers, drought and concomitant water shortages proved to be virtually insurmountable obstacles.

Burrandowan soldier settlement, embracing an area of 10,774 hectares, was established in May 1919 as the administrative hub for all soldier settlements in the South Burnett district of southern Queensland. The reason for this is unclear, as Burrandowan is located sixty-seven kilometres north-west of the major commercial centre of Kingaroy, whereas the majority of soldier settlements were situated to the south and east (Appendix 16). Dairying and grain cultivation initially comprised the principal industries on all soldier settlements in the region, with particular emphasis on the former. In June 1921, for example, twenty-six of the thirty-four Burrandowan settlers were engaged in dairying, with the remainder cultivating maize, oats and barley.

Yet it was not until August 1923 that the area was assessed for its dairying capabilities, and C.T.O. Shepherd, Chief Supervisor of Soldier Settlements, was anything but impressed with the findings:

> Dry belt, too far removed from rail to be a successful dairying proposition. Areas should be increased whenever portions become available, and the settlers allowed [a] free hand in dealing and rearing of stock.

Limited areas characterised virtually all soldier settler holdings in the South Burnett district, although Shepherd considered that Yarraman, Neumgna, Taromeo and Rocky Creek (Cooyar) did have the advantage of “splendid soils”. Gordonbrook, twenty-four

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3 Ibid.
4 C.T.O. Shepherd, Soldier Settlement Branch, to Minister for Lands, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 13 August 1923, LAN/167 (1916-31), QSA.
5 Ibid.
kilometres north-west of Kingaroy, was also included in the Chief Supervisor’s “dry belt”, despite being situated alongside the Stuart River.\textsuperscript{6}

Opened for both soldier and general selection in February 1920, 5,038 hectares at Gordonbrook was initially sub-divided into twenty-five holdings.\textsuperscript{7} Among the first soldier settlers was R.E. Ellwood, a former captain in the Australian Light Horse, who took up residence in the original homestead and commenced dairying on his 365 hectares.\textsuperscript{8} Notwithstanding the abundant supplies of water flowing past in the Stuart River, Gordonbrook also suffered from the drought conditions that persisted in the region throughout the period of soldier settlement.\textsuperscript{9}

In June 1922 the Inspector of Agriculture, C.J. McKeon, investigated the possibility of cotton-growing around Gordonbrook. Finding “patches of soil eminently suitable for the growing of this crop”, McKeon advised the soldier settlers to direct their endeavours in that direction.\textsuperscript{10} Unlike their counterparts elsewhere, few responded. Of twenty-nine settlers at Gordonbrook in June 1923, twenty-one continued dairying.\textsuperscript{11} Conversely, potato cultivation at Neumgna, near Yarraman to the south, had by then replaced grain as the principal crop, with only four of the ten soldier settlers still dairy farming.\textsuperscript{12} This not only reveals variations throughout the region, but also some degree of experimentation.

\begin{itemize}
  \item\textsuperscript{6} Ibid.
  \item\textsuperscript{7} “Report by the Under Secretary for Public Lands under ‘The Discharged Soldiers’ Settlement Acts, 1917 to 1920’”, \textit{QPP}, Vol.1 (1921), p.1046.
  \item\textsuperscript{8} \textit{QDR}, 19 February 1921, p.19.
  \item\textsuperscript{9} BC, 21 June 1922, p.4.
  \item\textsuperscript{10} Ibid.
  \item\textsuperscript{11} “Report by the Under Secretary for Public Lands under ‘The Discharged Soldiers’ Settlement Acts, 1917 to 1922’”, \textit{QPP}, Vol.1 (1923), p.1347.
  \item\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
Nor were soldier settlers in the South Burnett immune from demands made by the local authority, with claims that Kingaroy Shire Council deliberately over-valued the holdings for rate purposes. Writing under the *nom de plume* of 'Go On The Land', one soldier settler bitterly complained in October 1921 that:

I have just received my [rate] assessment for 1921 and the valuation of my selection. The Government charges me rent, £9/8/- a year. Kingaroy Shire Council, and there is not a Labour man on it, charges me rates, £8/13/- . How many people in Brisbane pay 92 per cent. of their rents as rates.\(^\text{13}\)

A few of the soldier settlers did gain a temporary respite from the machinations of the Acting Supervisor, Cyrus Frost, who took up his duties in 1919. Based at Burrandowan, Frost's jurisdiction extended over the entire district, and his term of service was one of the few known instances of official corruption in relation to the scheme. Frost wove a complex web, and it was not until May 1922 that a zealous audit inspector, Francis Price, began unravelling the various strands. That Frost escaped detection for so long was due to the collaboration of soldier settlers, local commission agents, bank officers and at least one of his own subordinates.\(^\text{14}\)

Price found numerous instances where soldier settlers had been paid for improvements that had not been effected, and for stock that did not exist. The audit inspector's investigations were made even more difficult by Frost's habit of passing unauthorised

\(^{13}\) *BC*, 26 October 1921, p.8.

\(^{14}\) Audit Inspector, F.J. Price, to Auditor General, Brisbane, 20 July 1922, LAN/167 (1916-31), QSA.
cheques over hotel bars, and when Price finally closed in he could only prove a deficiency of £1,914, although “in all probability the shortage will amount to £4000 or more”. Arrested at Oakey, just west of Toowoomba in June 1922, Frost was brought before the Kingaroy Police Magistrate, and committed to stand trial at the Circuit Court the following October. Accompanying the former acting supervisor at this first judicial appearance was “settler Modrzynski, who was connected with Frost in racing matters”. The case against Modrzynski collapsed through lack of evidence, but it suggests that Frost’s deviation from an honest path may have been linked to a gambling addiction. Whether he later continued along that same path is not known, but his generosity with government funds may well have been his salvation when he appeared before Mr. Justice Shand at Kingaroy in October:

Cyrus Frost ... was charged with having stolen £1782, being part of a general deficiency of money coming into his possession by virtue of his employment in the public service of Queensland ... The hearing of the case, which caused great local interest, occupied two and a half days. The jury, after deliberation lasting an hour and a quarter, brought in a verdict of not guilty. Accused was further charged with having fraudulently uttered a false document, purporting to be the signature of James Barkle, for £85. He was found not guilty, and was discharged.

The jury consisted of twelve local men, and Price must certainly have been appalled. While no further charges were laid against Frost’s associates, the audit inspector had strong suspicions of at least one other public servant:

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15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
17 BC, 21 October 1922, p.8.
18 'The King against Cyrus Spencer Frost', Kingaroy Circuit Court, 18-20 October 1922, PRV/6081, "Indents and Informations in Criminal Cases", QSA.
Although there is no evidence to connect clerk Mergard personally with the misappropriations there is no doubt that he was cognisant of what was going on, and it is doubtful if Frost could have carried on as long as he did without Mergard's assistance. This is borne out by the fact that stock cards were well kept by Mergard for all lines with the exception of livestock and wagons, the only ones in which shortages were discovered.19

Soldier settlers were literally at the mercy of the administration. If officials were corrupt, as in the case of Cyrus Frost, they could also be further disadvantaged through the lack of professional supervision.20 As well, Frost purchased and distributed supplies of seed that were later found to be deficient.21 Yet even Price would have been hard-pressed to attribute this as a deliberate act by his elusive quarry. By early 1922 the problem of "foreign ingredients in agricultural seeds" had reached such serious proportions that legislation aimed at making suppliers more accountable was introduced.22 Under the Pure Seeds Act, 'foreign ingredients':

Include dead and non-germinable seeds, diseased or insect-infested seeds, weed seeds, or seeds of any cultivated plant other than that to which the sample purports to belong. Also inert matter, which includes chaff, dust, stones, or any other material other than seeds, and broken seeds less in size than one-half of a complete seed.23

19 Audit Inspector, F.J. Price, to Auditor General, Brisbane, 20 July 1920, LAN/167 (1916-31), QSA.
20 Ibid.
21 A.E. Murray, Supervisor, Soldiers' Settlement, Kingaroy, to Under Secretary, Department of Agriculture & Stock, Brisbane, 14 October 1922, LAN/AK132, Batch 807, "Condemned grass seed: Kingaroy Soldier Settlement", QSA.
22 QAJ, Vol.17, Pt.2 (February 1922), p.82.
23 Ibid., p.83.
Frost's competent successor, A.E. Murray, had the misfortune of taking over just as a large quantity of sub-standard Rhodes Grass seed was discovered at Burrandowan. Notwithstanding the legislation, Murray's attempts to have the seed replaced or compensation made payable were frustrated, and the soldier settlers were once again the losers. It made little difference to the Coe family at Burrandowan, who suffered the ultimate misfortune in March 1922 when Alexander Coe was killed in a tree-felling accident, leaving a wife and young son. In the following August the number of soldier settlers peaked at thirty-three; Burrandowan had reached its zenith.

Despite strenuous effort, their counterparts on the little-known Stonelands soldier settlement near Wondai had already passed through their “time of stress” by June 1922:

At least there is abundant evidence that the soldier settlers are determined to accomplish success somehow. They are to be found working early and late, and if hard work, long hours, and determination are factors to ultimate success, then this settlement must eventually be a credit to the district.

Other factors apparently militated against success, for Stonelands thereafter disappeared from the record. The limited size of holdings, loan and rate payments, bureaucratic inefficiency, falling market prices, marsupial depredations, and the all-pervasive drought continued to impact on the South Burnett soldier settlers. These problems were also shared further north on the three major soldier settlements established in Central

24 A.E. Murray, Supervisor, Soldiers' Settlement, Kingaroy, to Officer in Charge, Soldiers' Settlement Branch, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 20 November 1922, LAN/AK132, Batch 807, “Condemned grass seed: Kingaroy Soldier Settlement”, QSA.

Queensland from late 1918. Just as Burrandowan served as the administrative centre for the South Burnett, Ridgelands, north-west of Rockhampton, fulfilled the same function in central Queensland.

Encompassing an old goldfield in the Fitzroy River Valley that had been thoroughly exploited many years before, Ridgelands soldier settlement was established in October 1918. It was a large area extending over 6,460 hectares from Calioran and South Yaamba in the east, westwards to Morinish, and southwards to Alton Downs (Appendix 17). Sixty-three holdings, varying in extent from fifty-three to 203 hectares, were opened for mixed farming, dairying and citrus fruit culture. From the government’s perspective, the singular advantage of opening Ridgelands lay in the presence of a railway which had linked the rich agricultural reserve at Alton Downs to Rockhampton in October 1916. This merely required a relatively inexpensive extension north to Ridgelands, where it was envisaged similar agricultural possibilities existed, even though earlier attempts at farming had met with only limited success. As Rod Milne, the historian of the branch line, caustically remarked:

In a State where unremunerative branch lines were once common, the Alton Downs line, in the Rockhampton district, shines like a beacon for sustained unprofitability. Built for all the wrong reasons in the wrong place at the wrong time, this ... branch line carried meagre loadings for almost its entire life.

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26 BC, 11 August 1922, p.15.
27 WK, 23 June 1922, p.25.
30 Kerr, Triumph of Narrow Gauge, p.117.
Milne elaborated on his condemnation:

Apart from a few small pockets along the river, agriculture in this portion of the Fitzroy Valley had been tried earlier largely without success, and many of the former sugar cane, cotton and maize paddocks were left to regenerate with grass, often accompanied by an abundant regrowth of the original scrub. Even as dairying country, this was fairly marginal land, for the local pastures nurtured only moderate butter fat yields in the cow’s milk.\(^{32}\)

This was the land of promise on which returned servicemen were expected to rebuild their shattered lives under the supervision of E.L. Thomson, also a returned soldier. Assisted by E.T. Wannop and G.A. Urry,\(^ {33}\) Thomson’s task was nevertheless formidable, as his jurisdiction included Ridgelands, Rosslyn Barmoya to the north-east, and the Boyne Valley soldier settlement inland from Gladstone.\(^ {34}\)

By September 1919 twenty-six soldier settlers had taken up holdings at Ridgelands, and they were soon plagued by water shortages.\(^ {35}\) While the settlers agitated for individual supplies, the government decided to sink communal bores throughout the district, but the first was not put down until 1920—at the excessive cost of £800. After five months’ strenuous work, the second bore had failed to produce any water at all by August the same year.\(^ {36}\) Unlike the dry holdings, this ominous warning was submerged under

\(^{32}\) Ibid., p.30.

\(^{33}\) MB, 1 January 1921, p.10.


\(^{35}\) BC, 5 September 1919, p.9.

\(^{36}\) BC, 11 August 1920, p.8.
government promises and optimism aimed at increasing settlement. Moreover, with the
difficulties unknown to them, returned servicemen eagerly responded.

Indeed, so great was the response that many complained over delays in approving
applications after the illness and subsequent death of a Queensland Savings Bank
inspector. Haste also ensured that apart from the small railway ambulance brigade at
Alton Downs, the settlers were virtually devoid of adequate medical assistance. It was
certainly required, for hazards were many. Between September 1919 and December
1921, for instance, at least five soldier settlers were seriously injured in tree-felling
accidents. Unlike Alexander Coe at Burrandowan all five survived their injuries, and in
September 1920 one of them had displayed remarkable fortitude:

H. Gorham was felling scrub at the soldiers’ settlement at Ridgelands
when the axe hit a knot in a tree, causing the knot to fly out. Gorham
was struck by it in the right eye, but he cycled to Alton Downs, a
considerable distance, and was then brought to Rockhampton. It is
feared that he will lose the eye.

Wilfred Tracey (also recorded as William Lacey) was less fortunate. In May 1922 he died
after being thrown from his horse on the settlement. Despite a widespread police search
involving Aboriginal trackers, no trace was ever found of Edward Bowden, who
disappeared from his camp at Morinish in April 1920. Bowden intended to snare possums
to earn extra money, and his disappearance highlights the difficult terrain on many parts

37 BC, 8 October 1920, p.4.
38 BC, 12 September 1919, p.8; BC, 29 December 1919, p.5; MB, 21 April 1921, p.8; MB, 9 December
1921, p.8.
of the settlement. Still they came, and it was not until June 1921 that progress at Ridgelands finally reached its peak:

Area set apart, 63 portions, 15,994 acres. Returned soldiers have also taken up portions on the area opened for general selection. A total area of 27,335 acres, in areas ranging from 200 to 700 acres, has been allotted to 87 settlers. Fencing to the length of 2,563 chains has been erected, 16 wells sunk, and 32 houses completed. Three thousand five hundred and fifty acres of scrub has been felled and 194 acres are sown under Rhodes grass. Nineteen settlers are dairying. Stock supplied, 73 horses and 143 dairy stock.

Houses were of a single design, which perhaps accounts for the plans being “prepared free of cost by the department”. Not so the actual building, “consisting of four rooms, 26 ft. by 22 ft., with a 7ft. verandah, on high blocks, and a 1000-gallon tank, and costing in the region of £220”. This amount alone consumed thirty percent of the settler’s initial advance.

A provisional school was opened in 1921, with Margaret Jackson appointed first Head Teacher. It is also apparent that quality was not a prime consideration when it came to the education of soldier settler children. Jackson was transferred from Sarina State School on the recommendation of her superior, and took up the position at Ridgelands in October. She had twice failed the examination for Third Class teacher. Attendance was very

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40 MB, 18 May 1922, p.8; WK, 26 May 1922, p.22.
41 WK, 16 April 1920, p.20.
43 MB, 1 January 1921, p.10.
44 Alexander Morrison, Head Teacher, Sarina State School, Sarina, to Under Secretary, Department of Public Instruction, Brisbane, 16 August 1921, EDU/Z2335, “Ridgelands”, QSA; Staff Adjustment, “Margaret Catherine Jackson”, Department of Public Instruction, Brisbane, 19 September 1921, ibid.
limited, with only twelve pupils enrolled by July 1922, rising to sixteen the following September. Low enrolments ensured that the school retained its provisional status, despite local efforts to have it upgraded to a State School category.\(^45\)

Throughout 1922 the settlers had even greater concerns to occupy their minds. A fortunate few had taken up selections on the granite soils around the township, where citrus trees grew well and the fruit enjoyed a fine reputation in Rockhampton.\(^46\) Regardless of their actual location, the settlers were nevertheless affected by adverse climatic conditions, notably drought, which impacted on all crops.\(^47\) Dairy farmers were also hit hard in early 1922 when prices fell drastically,\(^48\) necessitating a divergence into cotton in a bid to overcome their financial losses.\(^49\) Occasionally, frustrations boiled over in the private sphere.

In January 1922 James O’Leary, a soldier settler at South Yaamba, returned home one morning after a brief absence with a loaded pea rifle. O’Leary threatened to kill his wife after cornering her in the bedroom, and during the ensuing struggle a shot was fired through the roof of their dwelling. Battering her senseless, O’Leary thereupon disappeared into the surrounding scrub, where he was later arrested after an extensive search. Charged with “striking Mrs. O’Leary with a projectile”, he was detained in police

\(^{45}\) Acting Under Secretary, Department of Public Instruction, Brisbane, to Mr. F. Blanch, Secretary to the School Committee, Ridgelands, 11 October 1922, Ibid.


\(^{48}\) BC, 9 March 1922, p.7.

custody while his wife slowly recovered from her ordeal in Rockhampton Hospital. No official explanation was advanced for his violent behaviour. Domestic violence was, and still is, one of society’s ‘hidden crimes’ as it largely occurs within the private sphere. Yet it was certainly common in the post-World War One period. With Australian soldiers serving as ‘shock troops’ and suffering the highest casualty rates of Allied forces, violence left its legacy. As Raymond Evans notes, many “carried the war home in combat-ravaged minds and battle-hardened bodies to inflict it as a private hell upon their wives and children”. There is also a strong possibility that violence was further inflamed among soldier settlers by their struggles on the land. It certainly emerged in the case of James O’Leary. Less dangerous, but apparently no less offensive, were the verbal outbursts of John Sherrington at Ridgelands:

The defendant was a hard worker, but when he got drunk he had a rather bad tongue. There was no policeman stationed in that district, and the inhabitants were always complaining about the language that was used. On the date in question Constable Dickson happened to be out there on other duties when he saw the defendant and heard the language he used. The defendant was under the influence of liquor at the time, and the language was very bad, being used in the presence of about twenty people.

Alcohol as a release mechanism resulted in a fine of one pound and court costs, with fourteen days to pay. Nor could any settler expect much sympathy from a government under severe economic restraint by this time. In May 1922 a deputation of Ridgelands

50 WK, 27 January 1922, p.22.
52 MB, 21 March 1922, p.6.
53 Ibid.
settlers met with Premier Theodore, requesting that their interest payment and redemption for the financial year be spread over a longer period. Theodore's reply was ambiguous in the least:

He did not think there was any justification for a review of the scheme, but he promised to consult the Minister respecting the interest and redemption, in conjunction with the Land Settlement Committee. Settlers could not expect the Government to continue these payments. If settlement could not be put on a commercial basis, it should end. Settlers could not expect the general taxpayer to go on making advances and suffering losses. The question of tiding over the difficulty was another matter, and the Government was entirely sympathetic towards the man who was prepared to "make a do" of the proposition. If difficulties were hampering them the Government would be only too pleased to help them.

Eleven soldier settlers evidently found this less than satisfactory and forfeited their holdings. It was a slightly different situation on the Rosslyn-Barmoya soldier settlement north-east of Ridgelands, where an over-abundance of water, rather than drought, created its own unique problems.

Usually referred to as Charcoal Scrub, the district had first been proposed as suitable for soldier settlement by Acting Land Commissioner A.C. Stevens in July 1917. Initially vetoed by the Rockhampton War Council due to relative inaccessibility, this did not prevent Stevens’ suggestion becoming a reality in May 1920, when the settlement was

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54 BC, 24 May 1922, p.10.
55 WK, 26 May 1922, p.15.
57 BC, 18 July 1917, p.4.
officially established. Indeed, road communication remained so difficult that in late September 1922 the local authority, Livingstone Shire Council, received £3000 from the joint Commonwealth and State loan to carry out road works at Rosslyn-Barmoya—specifically, “surfacing and re-forming across [the] flat, giving access to Soldiers Settlement”. Unlike Ridgelands, however, the district was extremely fertile, with rich volcanic soils and an abundance of water. This also meant, of course, that natural vegetation was extremely dense, with vine-clad softwoods making clearing operations extremely difficult. Most of the felled timber was stacked and burnt, with the district truly living up to the local name of Charcoal Scrub.

By June 1921 just over 557 hectares had been cleared, and forty-one holdings allotted to soldier settlers. Only two houses had been erected and conditions were to remain primitive for many of those who stayed. Importantly, however, 1921 was to be the peak year. Dairying at first proved moderately successful, but the limited size of the holdings soon ensured a divergence into agriculture. It was then that an unforeseen problem arose. The dense surrounding scrub provided an ideal sanctuary for wallabies, whose nocturnal forays decimated the growing crops. Pleas for wire netting were continually ignored by the Department of Public Lands, notwithstanding the settlers’ willingness to have a lien taken over their future produce to cover the expense of this vital protection.

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58 BC, 11 March 1922, p.17.
59 E.G. Theodore, Chief Secretary’s Office, Brisbane, to Right Honourable Prime Minister of the Commonwealth, Melbourne, 21 September 1922, LAN/AK132, Batch 827, “Commonwealth and State grant for employment on road work of discharged Soldiers 1922”, QSA.
60 BC, 14 March 1922, p.6.
63 BC, 11 March 1922, p.17.
Salvation, in the form of netting, only came after many of the holdings had lost virtually all their crops to marsupial depredations.\(^{64}\)

The government did encourage pig-raising, but only seventeen of these animals had been provided by June 1922.\(^{65}\) Dairy stock, on the other hand, had risen to eighty-six head—an increase corresponding with a fall in prices for dairy produce. As Drane and Edwards have shown in their study of Australian dairy farming, the industry continued to expand in the early 1920s as boom prices disappeared.\(^{66}\) The Rosslyn-Barmoya soldier settlement merely exemplified that ludicrous development, with increased production for a limited market expected to compensate for a diminishing income. How it was to be achieved was never satisfactorily answered.

The figure of thirty-nine settlers engaged in "dairying, pig-raising and mixed farming" in August 1922 tends to obscure the reality of the situation.\(^{67}\) Five months earlier, the number of settlers had actually fallen to twenty-seven, which included twenty-five original settlers.\(^{68}\) Moreover, "mixed farming" encompassed wide diversification—and experimentation:

Maize is again to the fore as one of the main crops ... Cotton, where planted, is growing well and nearing the harvesting stage ... Large areas of scrub, especially where bad burns were effected, have been put under pumpkins ... Other crops grown are small lots of French

\(^{64}\) MB, 10 March 1922, p.6.  
\(^{67}\) BC, 11 August 1922, p.15.  
\(^{68}\) MB, 28 March 1922, p.15.
beans and cucumbers, which sell well on the local market. Then there are Sudan grass and sorghums for feed purposes. Lucerne (alfalfa) has been given a trial ... Sugar, Indian and cow cane have been tried with success mostly for cattle feed. Sweet potatoes for pig feed do well and yield big tubers fit for sale. Rosellas for jam-making are also showing up well. Melons did not do well this year ... A few settlers are harvesting Rhodes grass seed ... Paspalum where tried is growing rampant on the forest land that is subject to inundation. Poa Aquatica (water meadow grass) has been tried with no success ... Messrs. Feeney Brothers have two acres of bananas on the bearing stage ... Of other fruits grown there is the papaw ... The pineapple, the passion fruit and citrus fruits are in their experimental stage yet, but they ought to do well. So should the grape.69

Apart from the devastation of crops by marsupials, the settlers also had to contend with floodwaters. Water flowing in the abundant creeks throughout this low-lying district ultimately entered Alligator Creek, a tributary of the Fitzroy River. With the Fitzroy at its peak, however, water simply backed up to inundate many areas and not infrequently isolated the entire settlement. In September 1922, with the number of soldier settlers having fallen to twenty-nine:

The present method of communication is to use flat-bottomed boats in which to row along about three miles of the main road. As there were seven floods last year, and a fortnight of high water is not infrequent, it is easy to imagine what carting produce fourteen miles to The Caves is like.70

Difficulties of access raised cartage rates to four pounds per tonne over that distance until an enterprising soldier settler named Ferguson decided to undertake the work with his own team for £2/10 per tonne. Quickly monopolising the transit of produce to The Caves,

69 MB, 20 March 1922, p.10.
70 MB, 8 September 1922, p.5.
Ferguson showed commendable community spirit by reducing his rate to £1/10 per tonne. For the soldier settlers in the Boyne Valley, south-west of Gladstone, the conveyance of freight in the formative years remained a major impediment to progress even though there was a railway in their very midst.

The surveyor, W.H. Weame, carried out a preliminary investigation of the Boyne Valley in 1919. Weame chose the old pastoral holding of Ubobo as the central location for the proposed soldier settlement as it lay alongside the Boyne Valley railway line, while a nearby granite ridge neatly bisected an area of just over 400 hectares into two sections. Clearly, the railway was an essential element in Weame’s design, with Ubobo thus acting as a central hub from which a planned road network would radiate outwards, tapping the resources of an even greater area. The roads were indeed built, but for reasons of economy, the Railway Department was extremely reluctant to erect adequate facilities at Ubobo. As late as March 1923 it was claimed that this had still not been fully addressed.

It was certainly not envisaged in late 1920, when the area was thrown open for both soldier settlement and general selection. By April 1921, however, growth had already peaked:

In the Boyne Valley district there are sixty-two soldier selectors, including eight who settled there only last month. Fifty-four of the number selected land between the railway and the Boyne River, and

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71 Ibid.
72 BC, 19 December 1922, p.9.
73 BC, 13 March 1923, p.7.
they are largely engaged in dairying their areas of land ranging from seventy-nine to 199 acres. The recent arrivals are situated on the other side of the river. The areas of their selections are larger, ranging from 490 to 1179 acres.\(^4\)

One soldier settler had forfeited his holding by June 1921, but of greater import was the divergence from dairying to mixed farming.\(^5\) As mentioned above, “recent arrivals” had been allotted larger holdings, a clear recognition that the original allocations were insufficient in area. Yet the earlier settlers were forced to continue on holdings that could not be considered viable dairy propositions; hence their entry into mixed farming. In August 1923 the Chief Supervisor of Soldier Settlements, C.T.O. Shepherd, commented on this serious problem in the Boyne Valley, which was exacerbated by the region’s isolation:

As is the case with practically all the Settlements in Queensland, this section is also troubled with insufficient area. Designs were made in all instances without due regard to the number of stock required to be held by a settler so far removed from cities and dependent entirely on the cream produced and sent to the factories. In close proximity to a city where milk vending is carried out, the returns from 10 to 20 head of good dairy cows constitute a good living, as all the milk is sold to advantage. In dairy farming where one has no other alternative but to separate and sell the cream only, a greater herd is required, and each settler is compelled to carry 60 to 80 head of good cows from which to gain a living for himself and family. A herd of 60 to 80 cows is required to be the means of keeping 25 to 30 head continuously in the bails and in milking profit, and to carry this number, a greater area is required.\(^6\)

\(^4\) _MB_, 13 April 1921, p.8.
\(^6\) C.T.O. Shepherd, Soldier Settlement Branch, to Minister for Lands, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 13 August 1923, LAN/167 (1916-31), QSA.
It therefore comes as no surprise that in January 1922 many of the settlers began directing their attention to the cultivation of cotton when “a guaranteed price of 5½d. a lb.” stimulated production.\(^77\) Joseph Roylance did not live long enough to embark in the new enterprise. A soldier settler on Oakey Creek, twenty-six-year-old Roylance attempted to retrieve some cows from the opposite bank of the flooded watercourse in January 1922, when he fell from his horse into the swirling waters. His body was later recovered a few hundred metres downstream.\(^78\)

For reasons that will later be explained, cotton did not bring salvation to the soldier settlers in the Boyne Valley—or anywhere else in the State. There was one crop, however, which did prove to be a viable proposition further north. For many of the returned servicemen who selected land at El Arish, just south of Innisfail, sugar cane was indeed the commodity of promise. In the Queensland context, this soldier settlement stands like a shining beacon amidst the treacherous uncharted shoals of primary production. Yet even here success came at a price, and by the end of the 1920s the light which had blazed so brightly had also begun to flicker and dim.

Although the idea of settling returned servicemen in this northern district was first mooted by the Cardwell War Council in 1916, two years elapsed before preparations commenced in the vicinity of Big Maria Creek under Staff Surveyor Harding.\(^79\) His task was to sub-divide a total area of 6,890 hectares into 275 cane farms, of which seventy-

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\(^77\) *WK*, 6 January 1922, p.5.

\(^78\) Ibid.

seven were to form the soldier settlement.\textsuperscript{80} Varying in extent from sixteen to thirty-two hectares,\textsuperscript{81} the number of soldier settlement holdings was later increased to eighty-three.\textsuperscript{82} The majority of these holdings had frontages along the tributaries of Big Maria Creek,\textsuperscript{83} and none were located more than three kilometres from the proposed railway station on the surveyed section of the Main Northern Railway then under construction.\textsuperscript{84}

Harding’s work was hampered throughout 1918 by heavy rain, including a cyclone that swept across the region in March causing extensive damage at Innisfail.\textsuperscript{85} These conditions were not particularly abnormal, however, as the proposed soldier settlement lay just north of Tully which, having an average annual rainfall of 4,490 millimetres, is acknowledged as the wettest town on mainland Australia.\textsuperscript{86} Clothed in dense forest the district was nevertheless quite isolated, and when taking up his position as supervisor in 1920 F.P. Martin found the only access was by foot from Innisfail, thirty-four kilometres north.\textsuperscript{87}

High rainfall and humidity proved conducive to the growth of sugar cane, and while poor soils were not unknown, much of it was nonetheless quite rich, of “a loamy granite

\textsuperscript{81} BC, 28 March 1922, p.11.
\textsuperscript{83} BC, 28 March 1922, p.11.
\textsuperscript{86} R. Wilson, The Book of Australia (Sydney: Lansdowne, 1982), p.135.
\textsuperscript{87} WK, 2 November 1923, p.3.
Limitations were imposed by non-environmental factors, and this affected those soldier settlers on larger holdings, who were not able to maximise their returns. Until 1927 the South Johnstone Sugar Mill was under government management, and it was this mill which issued the original permits stipulating the precise area of cultivation available to any individual. Excess production was simply refused, and although the soldier settlers were in a slightly more advantageous position than civilian growers, their permits did not extend beyond an area of sixteen hectares—the minimum allocation for a soldier settlement holding. Moreover, of the eighty-three holdings opened for soldier settlement by June 1923, four were unable to obtain any permit at all. To compensate, experiments into maize-growing, banana cultivation and pig-raising commenced on the settlement from an early date, and these activities became even more important when it was found that the mill had issued too many permits to small landholders by 1923. Over-production was to plague the sugar industry during the 1920s.

Four hectares were cleared and planted on each soldier settlement holding prior to occupancy, with the cost, of course, being debited against the settler’s initial advance. The majority of the El Arish settlers were Australians, with just a “sprinkling” of British ex-servicemen. Largely experienced in agricultural pursuits, many were also reputed to

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88 BC, 28 March 1922, p.11.
90 Jones, Cardwell Shire Story, pp.351-2.
93 Jones, Cardwell Shire Story, p.351.
94 Ibid.; BC, 28 March 1922, p.11.
have had some knowledge of sugar cultivation. That former Light Horsemen predominated is perhaps reflected in the successful request made in 1923 for the official name of the settlement to be changed from Maria Creek to El Arish, a village in Palestine. Unlike the men, wives were mostly English, Scot and Irish war brides, and it may have been due to their shared alien experience that communal relations were said to be harmonious, with regular entertainments being held.

Given the prevailing sentiments of ‘White Australia’, this was undoubtedly reinforced by the large surrounding population of southern Europeans, particularly Italians, who had been settling in the region since the 1890s. There were occasional instances of violence between the two groups. In April 1928, “a fight between some Britishers and Italians” erupted in the township, with the latter emerging victorious. Two of the “Britishers”, Dickson and Shields, were hospitalised at Innisfail, suffering from stab wounds and a broken wrist respectively, and their reluctance to divulge any information to the police suggests that they may not have been innocent the victims of an unprovoked assault.

Seven years before, the forces of law and order had been required to deal with two other soldier settlers. In March 1921, Harry Jones returned to his selection after a brief disappearance, but his behaviour was so “strange” that it was necessary to place him in protective custody. The following December Edmund Banfield, the famed ‘Beachcomber’ of Dunk Island, reported the disappearance of Sid Harris from his soldier

95 WK, 2 November 1923, p.3.
96 Ibid.
97 Jones, Cardwell Shire Story, p.355.
98 BC, 18 April 1928, p.19.
settlement holding near Clump Point. While the Land Settlement Committee attempted to assess the suitability of intending soldier settlers for agricultural activities, the mental equilibrium of potential candidates remained an indeterminate judgement.

By July 1921, twenty-four returned servicemen were on the settlement, with continual rain, this time accompanied by cool conditions, seriously retarding the developing cane crops. Conversely, late the following year it was dry weather that hampered farming operations. The settlement itself grew steadily throughout 1921, although links with the outside world remained tenuous. While the Repatriation Department allocated £9,000 to construct roads and bridges in the district to connect individual cane farms with the railway, it was not until 18 December 1922 that the line between El Arish and Innisfail was finally completed. A permanent tramline between the township and South Johnstone Sugar Mill was also built in late 1922, with portable tracks—"horse tramlines"—being used to transport cane from the holdings to strategic points along the permanent way.

Demographic growth corresponded with improved communications. In March 1922 there were sixty soldier settlers at El Arish, climbing to seventy-eight by the following
November. Individual housing was still far from adequate in June 1922, but the settlement itself was taking substantial form:

Six hundred and twenty-eight acres [of] scrub felled and planting of [a] further 403 acres is proceeding. Fourteen standard houses, 4 smaller dwellings, 869 chains of fence erected. Supervisor’s house, store, and temporary office, kitchen and dining-room, quarters, stables, cart shed and yards erected. A school is about to be erected ... a retail store has been erected ... On the State Farm 18 acres are under cane, including various varieties, some of which will be distributed for planting to the settlers and the balance crushed.

Owing to the shortage of housing most of the single men did not reside on their holdings, preferring barracks accommodation—“quarters”—in the township. The housing deficiency was only slowly alleviated from December 1922, when W. Pearce erected a sawmill at El Arish and began milling the timber felled during clearing. It was a modest concern, and thus could only absorb limited quantities of the available timber. The tragedy was that with houses costing the soldier settlers approximately £250 each, many of the fine timbers in the district were simply left on the ground to rot. Even by June 1923 only twenty-six standard cottages and fifteen smaller dwellings had been built, in addition to an extra barracks for single men.
The State farm is of interest as it differed from those on all other soldier settlements by not being used for training purposes. Rather, the supervisor, F.P. Martin, conducted experiments with different sugar cane varieties to find those most suitable for the district.\(^{114}\) It was also expected to be a paying proposition, and by June 1923 Martin had largely achieved both objectives:

There is a very good crop of ratoon cane on this farm, and it should yield about 27 tons of cane to the acre from 18 acres. This has proved highly successful, and after this year’s harvest has been completed the whole of the debt of putting this land under cane should be wiped off. A good portion of the variety canes has been cut this year for plants and supplied to the settlers. The canes most in favour in the variety lots are H.109, E.K.1, N.G.24A, N.G.24B, Tableland Badilla, and Badilla Seedling. Last harvest this farm yielded 462 tons 9 cwt. 3qrs. at a total valuation of £1,229 10s.\(^{115}\)

This was despite dry weather and the absence of green grass, which encouraged wallabies to feed on the young cane shoots. Unlike the soldier settlers further south at Rosslyn-Barmoya, there appears to have been no hesitation in supplying wire netting to build a protective barrier.\(^{116}\) After all, this viable operation was directly beneficial to the State government.

The settlement reputedly experienced “very little discontent”,\(^ {117}\) and three of the four forfeitures that occurred by June 1923 resulted from the physical incapacity of the

\(^{114}\) *WK*, 29 December 1922, p.2.


\(^{117}\) *BC*, 15 August 1923, p.6.
settlers. All four holdings were re-selected almost immediately. While the coming of
the railway had effectively ended the settlement's isolation, road communication
remained virtually non-existent. In September 1922 press reports alerted Johnstone Shire
Council that it had not been included in the joint Commonwealth and State grant to
employ returned servicemen on regional road works. In a bid to receive an allocation of
funds, the Shire Clerk argued that with the sugar season expected to finish earlier than
usual Innisfail would be beset with high unemployment during the ensuing Christmas
period. This, however, could be alleviated with a "small allocation [of] one or two
thousand pounds" to open a road from Innisfail to the El Arish soldier settlement. The
request was not granted, and from December 1922 the railway became the sole reliable
transport link between the two centres.

El Arish clearly differed from all other soldier settlements. Notwithstanding the problems
of over-production sugar cane continued to return adequate remuneration, and the settlers
were also able to achieve a measure of self-sufficiency by cultivating subsidiary crops.
Nor did the price of sugar fall to the extreme levels experienced by crops such as maize—or
dairy produce. The problem for the soldier settlers in the central and South Burnett
districts was that their produce was aimed specifically at local markets which were
frequently glutted and often distant.

118 "Report by the Under Secretary for Public Lands under 'The Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Acts,

119 Telegram, Shire Clerk, Innisfail, to P. Pease, Brisbane, 28 September 1922, LAN/AK132, Batch 827,
"Commonwealth and State grant for employment on road work of discharged soldiers 1922", QSA.
Unlike the soldier settlers at El Arish, returned servicemen in the central and South Burnett districts were involved in an experiment to determine the minimal area required for agriculture to be viable on marginal lands. Unfortunately, not only were the initial sub-divisions totally inadequate in size, the difficulties were further compounded by water shortages, the onset of drought conditions, and the inexperience of many settlers. The latter again contrasts with El Arish, where the high level of individual competence points to a deliberate attempt at careful selection. As a few cases reveal this was not always successful, for there were few non-combatants who could comprehend the ghastly experience of war and its legacy—and, in some cases, the violence which it also bequeathed.

On the other hand, the Queensland government certainly recognised that railways were a necessary prerequisite for agricultural expansion. The South Burnett district was already serviced by two branch lines. A southward extension from the main northern railway through Kilkivan, Goomeri, Wondai and Kingaroy had reached Nanango in November 1911, while a northward extension from Ipswich terminated at Yarraman in May 1913. Tarong was linked to Kingaroy in December 1915. The steel rails opened up both the Boyne Valley and Ridgelands for closer settlement, and only when floodwaters prevailed did the Rosslyn-Barmoya soldier settlers find their access to the railway temporarily blocked.

This did not happen at El Arish, where tramlines linked individual farms to the main northern line. Far to the south, near Stanthorpe, the railway was no less important for
soldier settlement, and it also provided Pikedale soldier settlement with its one brief moment of glory in July 1920, when the Prince of Wales arrived in Amiens to the rousing cheers of the local inhabitants.

\[120\] Kerr, *Triumph of Narrow Gauge*, pp.224-5.
CHAPTER 8:

‘ROYALS, RESOLUTIONS AND REJECTIONS’: SOLDIER SETTLEMENT AT STANTHORPE, 1920-1922

With Britain’s other gallant sons
We’re going hand in hand;
Our War-cry ‘Good old Britain’ boys,
Our own dear motherland.¹

Following a successful tour of Canada, the Prince of Wales, later King Edward VIII, travelled throughout Australia between May and August 1920.² On 26 July the royal train halted at Cottonvale after entering Queensland and the Prince, accompanied by his entourage, boarded the carriages drawn by a diminutive locomotive bound for Amiens. A journalist provided this scene of the countryside along the line and the royal arrival in the heart of the soldier settlement:

The run on the light line to Amiens was through typical, light sandy fruit country. Trees stood uprooted and upturned in clearings as though there had been an upheaval of nature. It is a way men have of knocking Nature about in order to get on to the soil. Stalwart men were engaged in log-felling, and here and there was a brown bark humpy to catch the curious eye of an Englishman. Most of the men on the clearings are tent dwellers, and some have their land cleared and rabbit netted already. A collection of very new buildings clustered together announced Amiens itself ... At the soldier settlement a splendid and stirring note of patriotism was struck by these sturdy dinkum “diggers,” and by their women folk and children. Two hundred brown and bronzed men stood upright in perfect alignment,

and the Prince has never had a more splendid escort. Ringing cheers echoed through the bush as he emerged from the train.³

For all the exaggeration, there can be little doubt that this reception was greatly appreciated by the Prince. As Kevin Fewster has argued, the 1920 Royal Tour was arranged not just to acquaint the heir apparent with the distant Dominions, but more importantly to strengthen the imperial bonds that had frayed considerably since the war.⁴ Rising costs and high unemployment in post-war Australia had seriously undermined the imperial sacrifice. It also appears that Queensland may have been a specific target for the royal visit, as the northern State exemplified the confusion within antipodean society.

While mention has already been made of the violent ‘Red Flag’ disturbances that erupted in Queensland during 1919, the labour movement itself was in turmoil. On one hand, a radical minority advocated the overthrow of State machinery; on the other, Australia’s only surviving Labor government was struggling to implement socialist reforms within constitutional parameters.⁵ In 1920 Premier Theodore was in London attempting to raise British capital as conservative opponents began their campaign for a financial blockade. The Prince of Wales began the northern leg of his tour with Theodore still absent, and the Acting Premier was an aggressive, pro-Irish Nationalist, John Fihelly.⁶ What could well have been an explosive situation ended with the Queensland government giving a practical demonstration of how a reformist party could co-exist amicably within the

³ BC, 27 July 1920, p.5.
⁴ Fewster, “Politics, Pageantry and Purpose”, p.59.
⁵ Ibid., pp.64-5.
⁶ I. Young, Theodore: His Life and Times (Sydney: Alpha, 1971), p.35.
imperial framework. The Prince was “impeccably hosted” by Fihelly and the tour was a triumph for British patriotism.⁷

There was one further aspect of the royal visit that tended to unite all white Australians, irrespective of their political sympathies. The Prince of Wales personified the British race and, by extension, symbolised the racial ideals of the nation as a whole and Queensland in particular:

The other factor explaining the warm reception given by Queensland was the State’s phobia about its northern neighbours, Japan in particular, coupled with a desire to keep those coloured peoples out of Australia. Queensland’s Labor leaders had been particularly vocal in their support for the White Australia policy, probably because their State would bear the brunt of the expected influx if ever the policy was relaxed. Any possibility of this occurring depended largely on Australia’s relations with Japan which in turn were closely tied to the British-Japanese alliance. This alliance was due for renewal at the time of the tour. The Australian Government hoped the Japanese, in their desire to renew the alliance, might be willing to grant concessions which would allow Australia to retain the White Australia policy and keep Japan out of the South Pacific region.⁸

Whether these wider implications were fully understood by the “sturdy dinkum ‘diggers’” around Amiens is not known, but their imperial loyalty was unquestionable. British flags fluttered through Pikedale soldier settlement as the Prince concluded his brief sojourn among the returned servicemen and returned to Cottonvale.⁹ This visit, and

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⁸ Fewster, “Politics, Pageantry and Purpose”, p.65.
the presence of the railway itself, was an effective antidote for any sense of isolation at
the settlement.

While private landowners had largely donated sections of their properties along the route
of the railway, resumptions were necessary for the expansion of the soldier settlement.
This process began in October 1919 around Cottonvale and, as one long-term resident
had already warned, the government’s entry into real estate could only lead to inflated
values being passed on to soldier settlers. That soon became apparent. A number of
small landholders, including at least one returned serviceman, also suffered considerably
from the effects of land resumption:

In one case an orchardist who owns 40 acres of land, heavily
improved, and resides on it with his family, has had notice that 11
acres are to be resumed. Another man who has 8½ acres, of which four
acres has been cleared, ready for planting trees, has been notified of
resumption. A worse case is that of a returned soldier who is disabled.
He purchased less than one acre of land, and was making
arrangements to build a store to try and make a living for himself and
wife. He also has had notice that his block is to be resumed.

Reducing the area for viable primary producers and installing returned servicemen on
small plots merely serves to highlight the incongruity of this land settlement scheme in
Queensland. Failure to comprehend environmental and regional variations when defining
‘living areas’ was, of course, a major inhibiting factor against success and further
underscores the experimental nature of soldier settlement. Yet while resumptions were

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10 Kerr, “The Pikedale Tramway or Amiens Branch Railway”, p.118.
12 BC, 1 April 1919, p.4.
adversely affecting private landholders around Cottonvale during 1920, Jack McBeth recalled that Amiens was flourishing:

The State Store was the largest building. In addition there was a bakers shop, a butchers shop, a paper and lolly shop, a plumbers workshed, a blacksmiths forge, a sawmill, a Druids Hall, two churches [the Methodist Church was the sole house of worship in 1920], a school, a post office, a Lands Office, a Bush Nurses house, a State Farm with all the necessary buildings ... There was a street of houses on what the locals called Rotten Row. A person in Stanthorpe once asked the way to Amiens and was told to follow the trail of broken spring carts and empty whisky bottles. Rotten Row began as a street of tents and bark humpies erected by the settlers during the establishment of their farms. As far as I can remember everyone drank whisky or rum—I suppose beer was out because of the lack of cooling facilities—so Rotten Row became quite a lively place after dark.  

Even stronger potions were occasionally imbibed. “A returned soldier named Mitchell” died in Stanthorpe Hospital after consuming a bottle of disinfectant at Amiens in August 1919. McBeth’s reminiscences also make it clear that while the township was experiencing rapid growth, roads throughout the settlement remained in poor condition. Community spirit remained strong, exemplified by the first postmaster, Thomas Trevethan, who met the train late at night and sorted the mail by kerosene lamp so that the settlers would experience no delay in receiving news. The Druid’s Hall, located on the opposite side of Thirteen Mile Creek, was an important asset for the community, with membership of a Friendly Society being a vital insurance against illness, accident and

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13 BC, 4 August 1920, p.6.
15 BC, 21 August 1919, p.6.
death for working-class people. This was considerably strengthened with the official opening of a Bush Nursing Association (BNA) centre at Amiens in October 1920.

Formed in Queensland during 1914, the BNA made little headway until May 1920, when the British Red Cross Society donated £150,000 for distribution “amongst nursing and other organisations whose operations would benefit returned soldiers and sailors”. Of this amount the BNA received £15,000 on condition that it was invested in a trust fund, with income being derived from accrued interest. Even with this windfall, however, financial difficulties remained a constant problem:

Run by philanthropic women, the Association provided the salary of a nurse and the cost of her fare to travel and live in the remote community. The community, in turn, provided the nurse’s board and lodging, and the expenses of her duties … The Bush Nurses served a very important need in these isolated communities but their financial survival was always in doubt. Several organisations helped to keep the Bush Nurses from bankruptcy, including the Queensland Country Women’s Association.

The first resident nursing sister at Amiens was Frances Hurley, who actually took up her duties in September 1920. The Land Settlement Committee built a cottage for the BNA the following month at a cost of £280, and while Hurley’s arrival may have been premature it was clearly evident that the service was desperately required. During 1921,
for instance, Hurley attended to 358 patients and travelled an estimated 463 kilometres—much of it on foot.\textsuperscript{23} Medical conditions with which she and her successors were expected to deal ranged from childbirth, gunshot wounds, dentistry, to minor surgical cases.\textsuperscript{24} For this service the settlers paid £1/1 per annum, an amount that covered their entire families excepting in the case of obstetrics and the provision of medicines, both of which drew a small additional fee. Non-subscribers paid a minimal charge for each visit.\textsuperscript{25}

Despite the chronic shortage of funds, the annual fee was reduced to ten shillings in early 1922, which perhaps reflects the altered circumstances of rural dwellers, including soldier settlers, many of whom were unable to pay for even a basic health service by this time.\textsuperscript{26} Consequently, the Amiens BNA committee, largely composed of soldier settlers and their wives, devised numerous strategies to boost income. In January 1922, the “ladies bazaar committee” was able to contribute seventy-two pounds, a substantial sum,\textsuperscript{27} and arrangements were made a few months later to conduct an annual sports carnival and concert on Easter Monday, with proceeds going to the local centre.\textsuperscript{28} The formation of a local branch of the Queensland Country Women’s Association in 1922 brought additional assistance.\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{21} BC, 5 January 1922, p.3; Harslett, \textit{Amiens State School Golden Jubilee}, n.p.
\textsuperscript{22} Harslett, \textit{Amiens State School Golden Jubilee}, n.p.; Selby, \textit{The Golden Gamble}, p.43.
\textsuperscript{23} W.T.P. Phillips, Amiens, Via Cottonvale, to Home Secretary, Brisbane, 12 April 1922, TR1889/1, Box 515, Batch 54/4876, “Bush Nursing Amiens”, QSA.
\textsuperscript{24} \textit{ibid}.
\textsuperscript{25} BC, 5 January 1922, p.3.
\textsuperscript{26} BC, 15 April 1922, p.4.
\textsuperscript{27} Harslett, \textit{Amiens State School Golden Jubilee}, n.p.
Frances Hurley resigned from her position in March 1922, and her replacement, Nurse Dobson, apparently suffered from intermittent bouts of physical exhaustion. It was not surprising. In one month alone—August 1922—Dobson attended to 115 patients and travelled 370 kilometres. From all reports the Bush Nurses were extremely proficient, though their work was undermined by the continual shortage of funds. In April 1922 the Reverend W. Phillips, in his capacity as secretary of the local committee, suggested to the Home Secretary’s Office that they might consider subsidising the Amiens BNA on the basis of one pound for every pound obtained by the committee through subscriptions. This was not acted upon immediately, but the question of subsidisation had already been raised in August 1921 when the Home Secretary, William McCormack, considered the “advisableness of assisting the bush nursing scheme from the proceeds of the Golden Casket” Art Union. The proposal became effective from late 1922, when each of the State’s BNA centres began to receive an annual grant of £100 from that source. It was to prove a godsend for both the BNA and the soldier settlers.

The massive struggle to keep this important health service operational was perhaps not envisaged in late 1920, when the Pikedale soldier settlement appeared to be forging ahead. For a brief period it looked as though a few of the soldier settlers might even benefit from the discovery of tin at Swiper’s Gully, just west of Amiens and within the

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31 BC, 10 August 1922, p.15.
32 BC, 29 August 1922, p.9.
33 W.T.P. Phillips, Amiens, Via Cottonvale, to Home Secretary, Brisbane, 12 April 1922, TR1889/1, Box 515, Batch 54/4876, “Bush Nursing Amiens”, QSA.
34 WK, 5 August 1921, p.7.
35 C.E. Chuter, Assistant Under Secretary, Home Secretary’s Office, to Secretary, Queensland Bush Nursing Association, St. George’s Nursing Home, Milton Heights, Brisbane, 8 December 1922, TR1889/1, Box 515, Batch 54/12288, “Bush Nursing Cecil Plains”, QSA.
boundaries of the settlement.³⁶ The ore was also found to contain small quantities of gold, silver and wolfram, but the report finally prepared by the Government Geologist, J.H. Reid, dispelled all hope of instant riches; the ore did not exist in payable quantities.³⁷ A later attempt to dredge tin in Thirteen Mile Creek also apparently met with little success.³⁸

Wet conditions prevailed in late 1920, making the roads virtually impassable and seriously hampering the planting of fruit trees. This was carried out by government contract gangs and should have been completed by spring. It was not. As ‘One Interested’ complained in October 1920, notwithstanding that many of the settlers had prepared their land up to six months earlier, an estimated 30,000 trees remained to be planted.³⁹ While this delayed potential income for a further twelve months, the settlers did expect to be able to maintain themselves from vegetable cultivation. Global and domestic economics conspired against them.

The post-war boom was of brief duration, with an oversupply on world markets sending commodity prices spiralling rapidly downwards, and leading to a sharp recession from late 1920 well into the following year.⁴⁰ This was the very time that the soldier settlers at Pikedale expected to begin making a living from their vegetable crops. With the maturing orchards being ravaged by hail and insect pests during the summer of 1920-21,⁴¹ vegetable prices fell to an average of two shillings per case for tomatoes and between

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³⁶ BC, 14 September 1920, p.6.
³⁷ WK, 1 October 1920, p.23.
³⁹ BC, 11 October 1920, p.9.
sixpence and two shillings per bag of beans.\textsuperscript{42} In an attempt to avert financial catastrophe the supervisor, Harry Clark, recommended carrying out experiments on the State training farm for the cultivation of small fruits such as “gooseberries, raspberries, currants, loganberries”, which might allow a quick return for the settlers.\textsuperscript{43} The damage had already been done. Unable to obtain an adequate price for their produce:

A large number of settlers are working out by the day, others have started case cutting mills, and still others clear land for newcomers on contract, erect houses for the land settlement committee, &c., to support themselves while waiting for the orchards to bear.\textsuperscript{44}

For many it was to be a grim wait. Others were a little more fortunate, although even this could be tempered with further misfortune. In March 1921 “Messrs. Webber and Roakes”, who resided on adjoining holdings, managed to harvest and market a fine crop of pumpkins and marrows.\textsuperscript{45} Stanley Webber’s luck ran out barely a week later when his house burned to the ground. The building was insured; not so the contents.\textsuperscript{46}

The plight of the settlers was also compounded by the inability of their own co-operative company to achieve expectations. The Pikedale Soldiers’ Jam, Canning and Preserving Company was never to be a success, despite the manufacture of high-quality products. Under-capitalisation and a limited domestic market proved to be the main inhibiting factors, and the company’s very birth was marked by struggle. Floated in June 1920, it

\textsuperscript{40} Garton, \textit{The Cost of War}, p.13.  
\textsuperscript{41} \textit{QDR}, 22 January 1921, p.27.  
\textsuperscript{42} Slaughter, “Glen Niven Pioneer”, p.6.  
\textsuperscript{43} \textit{BC}, 15 January 1921, p.5.  
\textsuperscript{44} \textit{QDR}, 22 January 1921, p.27.  
\textsuperscript{45} \textit{BC}, 10 March 1921, p.8.
was anticipated that the Land Settlement Committee would willingly grant both a factory site at Amiens, and financial assistance, to enable the returned servicemen to have some control over their own destiny.\(^47\)

Queensland’s Minister for Public Lands and chairman of the Land Settlement Committee, Harry Coyne, seized on this point when he objected to the company’s articles of association, which ostensibly permitted the company to enter into partnership with an external body. A deputation of soldier settlers headed by F.C. Sheldon countered that Section 5 of the articles of association clearly showed that only soldier settlers could hold shares, and the directors controlling the company were appointed solely by the shareholders.\(^48\) Yet Coyne readily accepted an alteration that allowed civilian farmers around the settlement to become shareholders in the new company.\(^49\)

An argument advanced in 1923 that Coyne’s initial hostility arose from concerns that the soldier settlers’ co-operative might compete successfully with the State Cannery in Brisbane does not explain why financial assistance was soon forthcoming.\(^50\) With the articles of association revised, the factory was built at a cost of £3,000 and opened in December 1920 under the management of a soldier settler, L.W. McBeth.\(^51\) As it was to deal specifically with tomato pulp, many soldier settlers concentrated on growing this single crop in the expectation of receiving between twelve and fourteen pounds per tonne

\(^{46}\) BC, 17 March 1921, p.8.
\(^{47}\) WK, 18 June 1920, p.16.
\(^{48}\) QT, 15 June 1920, p.5; TC, 15 June 1920, p.6.
\(^{49}\) QDR, 12 February 1921, p.25.
\(^{50}\) BC, 17 May 1923, p.13.
\(^{51}\) WK, 17 December 1920, p.20; BC, 2 February 1921, p.6; Harslett and Royle, *They Came to a Plateau*, p.74.
for their produce. There was also an understanding that the State Cannery would handle any surplus.\textsuperscript{52}

By early February, however, a glut existed, with all the established canneries overstocked with the previous year’s produce. In a bold attempt to circumvent the problem, the directors of the soldier settlers’ co-operative secured an additional loan of £800 to install extra canning equipment and the machinery necessary for manufacturing tomato sauce and pickles.\textsuperscript{53} Fresh tomatoes were also sent as far afield as Sydney, where eight shillings per case was realised for limited quantities.\textsuperscript{54} Less successful were efforts to market both the company’s manufactured products and fresh tomatoes in western Queensland, where the demand was not sufficient to defray expenses.\textsuperscript{55}

By late February orders had begun trickling in from southern States for the locally-produced tomato sauce, but the company’s tomato soup was less well received.\textsuperscript{56} In August 1921 3,000 dozen cans remained unsold and remuneration for the growers had been minimal.\textsuperscript{57} It was at this point that the Amiens postmaster, Thomas Trevethan, launched an aggressive publicity campaign, including a display at the Brisbane Exhibition.\textsuperscript{58}

\textsuperscript{52} BC, 1 February 1921, p.6.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.; BC, 2 February 1921, p.6.
\textsuperscript{54} QDR, 12 February 1921, p.25.
\textsuperscript{55} BC, 1 February 1921, p.6.
\textsuperscript{56} BC, 15 February 1921, p.6.
\textsuperscript{57} QDR, 13 August 1921, p.34.
\textsuperscript{58} BC, 4 August 1921, p.8.
Attractively labelled under the ‘Aussie’ brand name, the company’s products were certainly of high quality. The tomato sauce, for example, was so rich in colouring that the New South Wales Health Department had it analysed to detect artificial additives. The pure foods test revealed that it was entirely due to the natural colour of the produce, and it remains unclear why this finding was not fully exploited in the company’s advertising.

There were still 1,000 dozen cans of tomato soup in stock by January 1922, and with the company struggling the shareholders were increasingly becoming disillusioned and resentful. At a meeting of shareholders the following month the directors were able to counter opposition with an announcement that the Ballinger Canning Company, a private concern in Stanthorpe, had agreed to take 100 tonnes of the Amiens pulp at sixteen pounds per tonne. This had been made possible through a State government loan of £1,500 advanced to the private company as a means of assisting the soldier settlers. The Queensland government went further by deferring interest on loans to the settlers’ cooperative, which was then able to pay the growers five pounds per tonne for the previous year’s produce.

The Amiens factory was connected to the railway terminus in March 1922, with the company agreeing to pay thirty-two pounds for reject lengths of rail supplied by the Railway Department. It was never paid. When shareholders insisted that the factory should concentrate solely on pulping operations, the directors revealed that another

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60 BC, 19 January 1922, p.8.
61 BC, 14 February 1922, p.4.
arrangement had been made with the Brisbane firm, Barnes and Company, to market locally-produced tomato soup in smaller cans under the latter's own brand name. For all the problems, the factory remained a potentially viable operation:

The plant at Pikedale is small, but efficient, and the process of treating tomatoes is simple and comparatively inexpensive. The tomatoes are first put through a pulping machine, which tears them into shreds, and the pulp is then run into 60-gallon steam-jacketed pans. An important feature of the processing is that absolutely no water is added to the pulp in the whole course of the operations. After boiling the soup goes through another machine, which eliminates seeds and skins, leaving the pure product ready for canning.

The company received a slight boost in April 1922, with a “substantial order” being received from Thursday Island through the offices of the State Trade Commissioner. Every possible avenue was explored but, ultimately, it was to no avail. In the same month it was shown that the company’s deficit amounted to £5,000, and with a profit margin of only one pound per tonne it would have been necessary to treat and market 5,000 tonnes of tomato pulp for the company to trade its way out of trouble. It was too much and negotiations commenced in June 1922 for the Land Settlement Committee to take control of the factory and run it in the interests of the soldier settlers.

The announcement of a government takeover was greeted enthusiastically by the growers, and planting operations began in earnest. As the months unfolded, however,

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64 QAJ, Vol.17, Pt.3 (March 1922), p.121.
65 BC, 5 April 1922, p.7.
66 BC, 13 April 1922, p.8.
67 BC, 10 June 1922, p.6.
68 BC, 17 June 1922, p.4.
the Land Settlement Committee continued to equivocate and the soldier settlers were still awaiting confirmation of the government’s intentions in November.\textsuperscript{69} Consternation was rife and it seems certain that in view of the heavy trading losses experienced by the State Cannery in Brisbane from 1921,\textsuperscript{70} the committee was investigating all possible options.

In January 1923 it was finally decided that the Amiens factory would continue to operate, albeit, on a reduced basis. Henceforth the emphasis was to be on the marketing of fresh produce and a tomato pool was implemented to cater for both producers and consumers.\textsuperscript{71} From the settlers’ perspective, a guaranteed price for their produce was a welcome relief, as many had been struggling for bare survival since 1921. Moreover, before the decision of the Land Settlement Committee was finally announced, their circumstances had worsened considerably.

To add to their earlier woes, the soldier settlers had been advised in March 1921 that the sustenance system was to be replaced by an additional advance on the basis of one pound for every fifteen shillings they spent on improvements to their holdings. On that understanding many invested all their available capital, and it had thus “fallen like a thunderbolt” when the decision was unexpectedly rescinded with no explanation offered.\textsuperscript{72} In response, the Pikedale settlers began agitating for their holdings to be enlarged, contending that “a living area” on the settlement comprised no less than twenty

\textsuperscript{69} BC, 3 November 1922, p.4.
\textsuperscript{70} Hawkins, “Socialism at Work?”, p.43.
\textsuperscript{71} BC, 18 January 1923, p.13.
\textsuperscript{72} BC, 17 March 1921, p.7.
hectares, including six hectares of orchard land. This movement was to gain strength but, at the same time, it was also clear that few settlers would now be able to afford the fertilisers necessary to prepare for the next summer crop of vegetables. As this was their only chance of remaining on the land, and encouraged by press reports that the Commonwealth government would provide the necessary grant, they further insisted that the selection of fertilisers should be left to themselves, rather than government officials:

Conditions on the settlement are such that without this grant they will get no return for their labour. The settlers also desire to point out that there are many fertilisers being sold which are quite useless here, and they wish to have an order on a fertiliser firm rather than allow the committee officials to choose the fertilisers for them. Much of the fertiliser supplied last year, they state, was quite unsuitable for the crops grown.

It was not to be. In August 1921 just over 100 tonnes of fertiliser, mostly blood and bone, was railed to Amiens for distribution among the soldier settlers. Regardless of the quality, the quantity was totally insufficient for their needs:

With the very low estimate of 200 settlers, it would provide only half a ton each, and on the statement of successful orchardists in the district the minimum required for ground crops such as cabbages, tomatoes, &c., is 6 to 8 cwt. Per acre. Thus the 100 tons will fertilise less than 1½ acres per settler, assuming that there are only 200 settlers, which is well below the real figure. The official estimate of the bare minimum acreage required to make a living from ground crops is 10 acres ... Men who have been anxiously waiting for the grant are considerably relieved to know that Pikedale is not altogether excluded, but it is considered that if the settlers are to be given a chance to get on their

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73 BC, 19 April 1921, p.7.  
75 BC, 11 August 1921, p.10.
feet this season they should receive at least enough fertiliser to treat 8 acres.\textsuperscript{76}

In September 1921 there were actually 143 soldier settlers in the vicinity of Amiens. Throughout the Granite Belt, however, the total was 408, of whom 194 were farming around Cottonvale and on the recently opened Nundubbermire lands at Spring Creek, just south of Amiens.\textsuperscript{77} Ignoring the deficient quantity, Queensland’s Minister for Public Lands, Harry Coyne, insisted that his government was responsible for the provision of the fertiliser. To some extent this was correct, as the Commonwealth had agreed to re-direct funding from the £375 per capita advanced to the State for public works.\textsuperscript{78} Coyne’s attempt to take credit away from the Commonwealth was nevertheless a poorly calculated political manoeuvre, particularly in view of the settlers’ condemnation of the amount supplied.

With mounting uncertainties pertaining to the entire scheme, the decision to open the Nundubbermire district for soldier settlement in May 1921 was likewise a serious mistake. The first settlers began work on their holdings almost immediately but, within four weeks, a message was conveyed to them that all work was to cease. No explanation accompanied the order, and as one exasperated soldier settler, H.J. Pigram, contended:

\begin{quote}
For a few days we sat down and did nothing, wondering what was coming. Then, gradually, each man started work again, hoping that it was merely a piece of red tape caught in the wheels of administration. And for about six weeks now we have been carrying on, still hoping
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{76} BC, 31 August 1921, p.9.
\textsuperscript{77} QPD, Vol.137 (1921), p.1037.
\textsuperscript{78} BC, 6 September 1921, p.6.
for some word to come through. Nothing doing! Mr. Clarke [sic], the supervisor, has been doing his utmost to get things going again, but without result. We can draw no pay on the improvements we have put down, supplies are dead low, but nary a word from headquarters. 79

The publication of Pigram’s correspondence apparently had the desired effect; the Nundubbermere settlers were advised to “carry on”—still without explanation. 80 As they did so, the soldier settlers just to the north on the Pikedale settlement were steadily forfeiting their holdings. That drift became a torrent when the Queensland government began compelling them to sign a ‘bill of sale’ over their personal effects in October 1921. This made it possible for the administration to seize “goods and chattels” in cases of default where the property of the soldier settler was less than the initial advance of £625. It also acted as a mortgage covering the property, improvements and even the implements for which that advance had been made. 81

Perhaps as many as sixty soldier settlers abandoned their holdings rather than sign the detested documents. 82 Even allowing for a slight exaggeration, it is quite understandable that many would leave rather than place themselves in a position that could possibly cost them everything they owned. Many more, of course, were resigned to their fate and could do little more than hold on in the hope that the situation would eventually improve. 83 Albert Edwards, however, decided to contest the issue. In poor health, and with a wife and young family to support, Edwards “consistently” refused to sign the ‘bill of sale’.

79 BC, 28 July 1921, p.8.
80 BC, 11 August 1921, p.10.
81 BC, 11 October 1921, p.6.
82 BC, 24 November 1921, p.6.
83 BC, 19 October 1921, p.9.
After the authorities officially forfeited his holding in October 1922 Edwards refused to leave, and the Land Settlement Committee took legal action against his “unlawful occupation” in April 1923. There was a brief respite, with the case being adjourned until the following month. It was then that Edwards’ defence counsel, R.J. Leeper, argued:

[T]hat there was no provision prior to the Soldiers’ Settlement Act of 1921 for the forfeiture of the block on the ground of the defendant’s refusal to sign the mortgage, and that as the defendant had taken up the block in 1917, and had carried out the conditions of residence, the block could not be forfeited owing to refusal to sign the mortgage. He further claimed that the Land Settlement Committee must come in as an ordinary creditor.

Police Magistrate R.B. Hetherington disagreed. He issued a warrant of ejectment and Edwards thereafter disappeared from the historical record. Neither Tom Cochrane nor David Cameron, the economic historians of this period, have discerned anything remarkable in the actions of the Queensland government during the latter half of 1921. Yet there was certainly some urgency in relation to expenditure on soldier settlement, and this was almost certainly linked to the loans embargo against the State.

While the ‘bill of sale’ can be seen as a safeguard, the notification received by the soldier settlers in September 1921 that an alteration had been made to their terms of repayment is less straightforward. Under the Discharged Soldiers’ Settlement Act of 1917 the term of their loan was fixed at forty years. Now they were advised that at the end of ten years

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84 BC, 23 April 1923, p.10.
85 BC, 19 May 1923, p.23.
they would be called upon to pay an advance of up to £230.\textsuperscript{87} Although that repayment still lay ahead, the Stanthorpe Shire Council dealt its own expensive blow the following month.

The Queensland government advised the municipal body in October 1921 that henceforth all roads throughout the soldier settlement areas on the Granite Belt would be a local responsibility. When the chairman of the Council, T.J. Ballinger, insisted that the roads were in less than “fair order” and would place an undue burden on the local authority, he was bluntly informed that the State had no further funds available for road maintenance. To surmount their own difficulty, the Council was advised to proceed with land valuations preparatory to striking rate charges. This was to be yet another addition to the spiralling debt of the Granite Belt soldier settlers.\textsuperscript{88}

For those returned servicemen still being settled on resumed lands in the district, there was also a hidden cost which ensured that the State government received the full value for any improvements, regardless of any later finding by the Land Court. The Toowoomba Land Commissioner, Fred Barlow, whose authority extended over the Granite Belt, advanced a proposal that was readily accepted by his superiors. His crafty scheme requires quoting at some length:

\begin{quote}
Land Commissioner suggests that the Court’s determination of the value of the improvements to be included with the value of the land in the Capital value & rent, to be charged to Selectors. The reason of this
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{86} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{87} BC, 11 October 1921, p.6.
\textsuperscript{88} WS, 29 October 1921, p.2.
is (1) that by the time the Land Court comes to sit in Court & determine the amount of the improvements to be paid by the Selectors to the Crown some of the improvements will have depreciated & in the cases of the land at present unselected some of the improvements may be stolen before Selection later (& in any event) (2) There may be a natural inclination on the part of the Court when it does sit to perhaps unduly sympathise with the incoming Soldier Selector when determining the value of the improvements. (3) As the price per acre of the land only will be very small, the price per acre required to be added for improvements will probably not be noticed. In adopting this suggestion we will get the money paid for improvements refunded in full & the Soldier will not have to pay Cash but will get terms for the improvements.89

While on the surface this could be interpreted as a generous measure, the reference to pilfering suggests that the soldier settlers were already in considerable want. Of greater concern was the unspecified number of abandoned holdings on the Pikedale settlement, and the subsequent encroachment of weeds and insect pests on those still being cultivated.90 The Minister for Public Lands, Harry Coyne, considered the forfeitures as resulting from individual physical failings, rather than stemming from financial hardship. His public attacks on the masculinity of defaulters must have been particularly galling for those who had survived the horrors of modern warfare. Having been denied that experience, Coyne was able to contend that:

In every settlement there was a certain proportion of “deserters,” who, for various reasons, could not “carry on” ... Others, of course, were physically unequal to the arduous demands of farming, and were compelled, not by the natural defects of their holdings, but by their own bodily weakness, to abandon the attempt.91

89 Memorandum, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 24 October 1921, LAN/AK119, Batch 703, “Cottonvale Resumptions”, Part 3, QSA.
90 BC, 24 November 1921, p.6; BC, 24 December 1921, p.6.
91 BC, 13 December 1921, p.6.
Given such callous remarks it would be relatively easy to portray Coyne as a veritable ogre. To do so, however, would miss the point that while he was responsible for ensuring the success of soldier settlement, Coyne was almost certainly under pressure to keep expenditure to a bare minimum. There was also a major difference between the actions of the Queensland administration and its counterpart in Victoria, where Marilyn Lake has shown the authorities took active steps to locate defaulters in an attempt to make them accountable. This did not happen in Queensland, where the emphasis centred on the reoccupation of abandoned holdings. Portion 352M on the Pikedale settlement, for example, was originally allotted to Lewis Macgregor, who, according to the supervisor, Harry Clark:

Left Christmas 1921, and has neither been here since nor written regarding his intentions. There seems to be an idea prevalent in the district that he has no intention of coming back. I believe he is engine driving near Charleville but cannot definitely say ... The block is a good one and it seems a pity to let it go back. [Colin] Deans would have a much better chance of succeeding on this portion and I recommend the transfer.  

Macgregor may well have been working away to accumulate capital, but Deans took possession of the holding a few months later. Similarly:

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92 Lake, *The Limits of Hope*, p.171.
93 H. Clark, Supervisor, Stanthorpe Soldier Settlement, Amiens, to Officer in Charge, Soldier Settlement Branch, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 17 May 1922, LAN/AK119, Batch 703, “Cottonvale Resumptions”, Part 4, QSA.
Will you please advise whether Norman D’Arcy has surrendered portion 311, parish of Marsh. It is reported that he has abandoned it, and is living in Brisbane. If surrendered, has it been allotted to anyone else, as J. Moloney wants it allotted to him.\(^5\)

D’Arcy’s right of occupancy was also cancelled, and these are not isolated examples. Keeping the holdings in a cultivable condition appears to have outweighed the expense of pursuing defaulters, who were unlikely to be in a position to meet their obligations even if discovered. There is some evidence, however, that defaulters were declared “black” if they sought credit from any quarter at a later date. This was certainly the experience of the Atherton Tableland soldier settler, Bill Ince.\(^6\) On the other hand, Coyne failed to grasp the problems confronting those who did not leave. Syd Calvert and his wife took up a holding on the Pikedale settlement soon after it was thrown open for selection and their son, James, was the first male child born there.\(^7\) In 1922 they were still in occupation and their continual battle against the odds well illustrates the circumstances of those who did not fit into Coyne’s category of “deserters”:

Mr. Syd Calvert, of Amiens, whose orchard is a household word, as an example of all that a young orchard should be in regard to improvements, cultivation, and development, says, after just under four years’ constant work on his holding, that he has been unable to make bare working expenses from growing crops. Spraying material alone has cost him £50, and he has had to spend £40 on fertilisers. His bare working expenses for 1921 were £240. The cost in labour and material to drain about one acre of ground that had been partly cleared before he arrived was £20. Without this expenditure the land was useless owing to excessive wet. This grower has been constantly

\(^5\) Fred Barlow, Land Commissioner, Toowoomba, to Under Secretary, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 5 August 1922, LAN/AK119, Batch 703, “Cottonvale Resumptions”, Part 3, QSA.


\(^7\) Harslett, Amiens State School Golden Jubilee, n.p.
employed on his own holding for the full term of his residence, and, in addition, had the services of his brother free for 12 months. He has spent of his own money, in addition to the full amount of the advance from the Government, his gratuity bond—£78; proceeds from sale of property, £40; private moneys, £138 and £60; and the whole of his pension and sustenance allowance. In addition to this he has put the best that a sober, industrious, and enthusiastic digger, who earned his bread before the war as a fruit and vegetable grower, could give in labour to his farm ... But he emphatically states that up to the present, in spite of constant work, he has been unable to make bare working expenses from his crops.\textsuperscript{98}

Calvert suffered a physical breakdown and was hospitalised for three months. Condemnation of the Pikedale soldier settlement in the press, including Calvert’s case study, may have prompted Harry Coyne to make a personal inspection in late January 1922. Meeting with a deputation of soldier settlers accompanied by the conservative local Member of Parliament, Edward Costello, the Minister for Public Lands agreed to increase the area of individual holdings where possible, but refused to defer outstanding interest charges. While recognising that many of the original settlers had purchased material at inflated prices during the post-war boom, he nevertheless argued that his government now had the onerous duty of finding money to pay interest on the Commonwealth loans.\textsuperscript{99} The process of enlarging occupied holdings went ahead the following March, and it is relevant that this was made possible by “annexing a portion of adjoining surrendered selections”.\textsuperscript{100} For the soldier settlers, the official visit was thus a mixed success and this encapsulates their own efforts throughout 1922.

\textsuperscript{98} BC, 16 January 1922, p.4.
\textsuperscript{99} BC, 30 January 1922, p.8.
\textsuperscript{100} BC, 17 March 1922, p.7.
Soldier settlers at Ballandean, south of Stanthorpe, suffered losses to their vegetable crops owing to the dry conditions prevailing during the early part of the year, but found the same conditions ideal for grape vines. A number of growers on the Pikedale settlement received good prices for their produce in Rockhampton after the Southern Queensland Fruit Growers’ Society opened up a new market in that city. Others were less fortunate. Cabbages appeared to be a viable option and up to 20,000 plants were being cultivated on some holdings in March. The following month a severe hailstorm struck the western side of the settlement and destroyed seventy-five percent of the crops. It was often a fine line between success and failure, and even the conservative press occasionally admitted that financial independence for a minority was still a distinct possibility:

Although the bulk of the settlers are still seeking road work or other employment it is not impossible to find men here and there who have received as high as £40 or more for the produce of one acre of vegetables. With an allowance of £6 for seed and fertiliser there is still a good margin left for the grower from such a return.

F.R. Boyce was one soldier settler who held similar hopes, though his state of mind is highly questionable, and may have been linked to his war service. A former private in the 11th Machine Gun Company, AIF, Boyce applied for two holdings in the Nundubbermire area in July 1922, but was informed that as he already held the lease for a grazing

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1 BC, 16 February 1922, p.6.  
10 BC, 22 February 1922, p.12.  
103 BC, 17 March 1922, p.7.  
104 BC, 7 April 1922, p.8.  
105 BC, 25 February 1922, p.3.
selection south of Stanthorpe the application could not be considered. Boyce responded that he did not have a grazing selection and his interest lay in viticulture, not animal husbandry. Moreover, he contended that the lease for the grazing selection was actually held by A.J. Boyce. It was then pointed out that not only was the lease for the grazing selection in his name, but he had also been advanced £400 by the State Advances Corporation—an amount that was still outstanding. Boyce thereupon changed tack, insisting that as his brother, A.J. Boyce, was in possession, “I shall not take it off him”.

The Department of Public Lands remained unimpressed.

In April 1923 Boyce tried again, applying for two different adjoining portions at Nundubbermure. His intention now was to plant an orchard. Apparently this was also rejected, for the following July he made yet another application for three holdings in the same area. According to Boyce, these holdings were totally unsuitable for orchard trees—but they were ideal for dairy farming:

I should like to get them at once as I have some cows with young calves and if the calves get big the cows would be much harder to break in. I have lived on a dairy farm till I went to the war and have worked on one last [sic] year. Owing to [having] been wounded I have a weak rist [sic] and could not work an orchard. I have a grazing

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106 F.R. Boyce, Karara, Via Warwick, to J.H. Coyne, Minister for Lands, Brisbane, 23 July 1922, LAN/AK119, Batch 703, “Cottonvale Resumptions”, Part 3, QSA; Minister for Lands, Brisbane, to Mr. F.R. Boyce, Karara, Via Warwick, 29 July 1922, Ibid.
107 F.R. Boyce, Karara, Via Warwick, to J. Harry Coyne, Minister for Lands, Brisbane, 9 August 1922, Ibid.
108 Minister for Lands, Brisbane, to Mr. F.R. Boyce, Karara, Via Warwick, 17 August 1922, Ibid.
109 F.R. Boyce, Karara, Via Warwick, to Mr. J.H. Coyne, Minister for Lands, Brisbane, 30 August 1922, Ibid.
110 F.R. Boyce, Ballandean, to Secretary for Lands, Brisbane, 6 April 1923, Ibid.
farm in the district, but a[s] cattle are so cheep [sic] it is hard to make a living on it.\textsuperscript{111}

Notwithstanding this open admission of his grazing selection, Land Commissioner Barlow refuted the unsuitability of the Nundubbermere holdings for orchard purposes; Boyce was rebuffed once again.\textsuperscript{112} He made one final appeal to Premier Theodore, with the proposed venture now having expanded to become “a combined dairy and pig farm”.\textsuperscript{113} With the failure of this attempt, Boyce appears to have finally accepted defeat.\textsuperscript{114} Whether he was motivated by genuine desperation is unclear. The authorities certainly noted his confusion, and were convinced that regardless of which rural pursuit Boyce followed, there was little likelihood of success.\textsuperscript{115} Conversely, there was little encouragement for those who did stand a chance of success at Nundubbermere. In October 1922, J.S. Dewsbury requested an addition to his holding for a quite understandable reason:

I am a soldier settler at Spring Creek, but having no water whatever on my block I wish to apply to have portion 162 which joins mine added to my block. I have tried [sic] to get water by sinking [wells?] several times but cannot get it. I have to take my horse half a mile for water and I cannot keep a cow. There is water on 162 and if it could be added to mine it would be a great help to me. I am quite willing to take

\begin{footnotes}
\item[111] F.R. Boyce, Ballandean, Via Stanthorpe, to Minister for Lands, Brisbane, 22 July 1923, LAN/AK119, Batch 703, “Cottonvale Resumptions”, Part 2, QSA.
\item[112] Fred Barlow, Land Commissioner, Toowoomba, to Under Secretary for Public Lands, Brisbane, 14 August 1923, \textit{Ibid.}
\item[114] A.G. Melville, Under Secretary, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, to Mr. F.R. Boyce, The Falls, Ballandean, 23 August 1923, \textit{Ibid.}
\item[115] Fred Barlow, Land Commissioner, Toowoomba, to Under Secretary for Public Lands, Brisbane, 14 August 1923, \textit{Ibid.}
\end{footnotes}
over all debts and other responsibilities with the block if you will be
good [enough] to grant me the same.\textsuperscript{116}

The supervisor, Harry Clark, was usually sympathetic to the wants of his charges. This
case, however, proved very different, with Clark recommending that as Portion 162 was
fully improved, it should not be added to Dewsbury’s existing holding.\textsuperscript{117} Dewsbury was
later able to acquire a separate holding, but by October 1924 he was in serious financial
difficulties.\textsuperscript{118}

Yet, there were other returned servicemen willing to embark on small-scale farming who
did receive aid, and the Pikedale soldier settlement continued to grow during 1922. In
June the population around Amiens was estimated at 600. Another 200 were clustered in
the vicinity of Pozieres, just to the east. While the latter area was heavily timbered, the
cleared ground was found to be eminently suitable for deciduous fruit trees.\textsuperscript{119} Their
maturation was still distant as 1922 drew to a close, and the soldier settlers throughout the
Pikedale district continued cultivating vegetable crops, particularly tomatoes. With
government control of the Amiens factory in the offing their success seemed fairly
assured. It was also illusory. Like F.R. Boyce, many were destined to experience even
great disappointments and heartaches.

\textsuperscript{116} J.S. Dewsbury, Amiens, to Chairman, Land Settlement Committee, Department of Public Lands,
Brisbane, 18 October 1922, LAN/AK118, Batch 703, Part 1(F), QSA.
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{118} A.G. Melville, Under Secretary, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, to J.S. Dewsbury, Soldier
Settlement, Amiens, 27 October 1924, Ibid.
\textsuperscript{119} “Report by the Under Secretary for Public Lands under ‘The Discharged Soldiers’ Settlement Acts,
Circumstantial evidence nevertheless does suggest that soldier settlers were among the earliest victims of the loans embargo engineered by Queensland conservatives against the reformist Labor government. Isolation from British capital virtually halted the planned 'agricultural revolution' which, if the soldier settlement scheme is a reliable guide, never recovered its momentum. From the early 1920s there was certainly a contraction of internal funding, and there is no reason not to suspect that the cordiality granted towards the Prince of Wales by the aggressive pro-Irish nationalist and Acting Premier, John Fihelly, was intended to encourage British investment. From the Queensland government's perspective, imperial patriotism ran a poor second to British capital.

The Labor government's plans were further frustrated by the collapse of external postwar markets for primary produce which, in turn, led to glutted local markets. Limited size of the holdings allotted to the soldier settlers on the Granite Belt also confirms the experimental nature of the scheme, and this certainly compounded the difficulties. Whether through arrogance or fear of electoral backlash, the Labor government did not advertise its financial troubles. Rather, 'failure' was focused directly on individuals, who were metaphorically emasculated for their inability to force the feminised landscape into submission. Anachronistic ideologies underlay, of course, the entire concept of closer settlement.

Unlike their Granite Belt counterparts, the soldier settlers further north at Beerburrum were to be frustrated by the failure of their own co-operative company when it had reached the very point of production. For the small number of soldier settlers on
Beerburrum's own northern satellite settlement at Woombye, the formation of a co-operative was not even an available option.
CHAPTER 9:

‘ARGUMENTS AND ASPIRATIONS’: THE MIDDLE YEARS

But what avails the ache of
Remorse or weak regret?
We'll battle for the sake of
The men we might be yet!

Unlike the Beerburrum parent just to the south, Woombye soldier settlement was established on resumed, rather than Crown land, a course of action taken in March 1919 which pushed local land values to unprecedented heights. Ninety-six hectares, subdivided into fifteen holdings for the cultivation of pineapples and citrus fruits, was thrown open for soldier settlement in October 1920. Supervised from Beerburrum, all of the holdings had been allocated within the first year.

In August 1921 the soldier settlers proudly exhibited their produce at the Brisbane Exhibition, but a pineapple glut in 1922, and the ravages of insect pests on citrus crops, quickly combined to erode any faith in eventual success. These problems triggered a brief—and bitter—debate in the Brisbane press. At the heart of the issue, however, were the inflated land valuations that undermined the efforts of the soldier settlers in their battle with adversity.

2 WK, 4 April 1919, p.4.
4 QAJ, Vol.16, Pt.3 (September 1921), p.140.
'Fairplay' sparked the row in November 1922, when he insisted that the State government paid £11/5 per acre for the resumption of 164 acres (sixty-six hectares) of undeveloped land, while the owner had originally paid only 2/6 per acre forty years earlier. It did not end there. An additional £600 had been paid for the remaining stands of timber, thus raising the soldier settlers' costs to nineteen pounds per acre, or "an increase of 15,200 per cent" for undeveloped land. This drew a response from the G. Reynolds, the previous owner, who not only disputed the sum paid for the timber, but also contended that the land in question was far from undeveloped:

I must say there were between 30 and 40 acres cleared and ploughed, two acres of bananas, half an acre of citrus trees, and about 80 chains of fencing.

Yet in June 1921 the official report stated that only sixteen acres (6.4 hectares) had been cleared on the entire settlement, with "progress" being made on a further twenty-three acres (9.3 hectares). Barely three acres (1.2 hectares) had been ploughed. Thus, 'Observer' was able to comment in December 1922 that:

It is questionable if there are 40 acres cleared even now ... The bananas are over 15 years old, and were planted amongst stumps and logs; and the citrus trees number about 16, some of them being jam orange, and practically useless for the market.

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5 BC, 12 April 1922, p.8.
7 BC, 6 December 1922, p.6.
9 BC, 26 December 1922, p.11.
'A Soldier on the Settlement' reiterated the original argument the following day, drawing out Reynolds once again. Not wishing "to continue the controversy" unless correspondents identified themselves, Reynolds attacked the work ethic of the complainants:

I had to rely on my own work and I didn't have the chance to sit on a veranda and watch men clearing my land while I smoked the time away with cigarettes, &c., and then say the work was slummed. The overseer [from Beerburrum] calls on the settlers once a month to see their requirements. Nobody ever came to inquire my wants or wishes. Salt beef and damper, and not too much of that, were all I had. I can assure you I was never spoon-fed.

These vindictive and self-congratulatory statements prompted Harry Brown not only to identify himself and insist that the soldier settlers were "justly entitled" to government support after their sacrifice, but also to point out that conditions were vastly different from the time Reynolds had taken up his land. Moreover, freehold title provided incentive and the same could not be said for perpetual leasehold. There was no response from Reynolds.

Brown was certainly correct; conditions were different. By this time the price for pineapples had fallen from five shillings to 2/8½d. per case, and F. Nicklin summed up the position of his fellow soldier settlers when he advocated foregoing harvesting to

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10 BC, 27 December 1922, p.9.
reduce additional expense. Notwithstanding these problems weighing heavily on their minds, the settlers did not hesitate to assist their colleagues in the event of personal crisis. In December 1922 D.W. Baptie was forced to undergo a serious operation that effectively prevented him from working his holding. Ten soldier settlers carried out the necessary tasks in his absence. In July 1923 disaster from an unexpected direction struck yet another of the Woombye settlers:

Early on Saturday evening the house and contents owned by Mr. Anderson, a settler on the Woombye Soldiers' Settlement, were entirely destroyed by fire. Particulars of insurance are not available, but it is understood that Mr. Anderson is a heavy loser.

Anderson may have recovered from this traumatic mishap, as the official report states that there were still fifteen returned servicemen on the settlement in June 1924. The previous year there had been a positive development when a statutory body, the Committee of Direction of Fruit Marketing (COD), was established to consolidate the marketing of fruit under one umbrella. While it eventually proved to be a highly successful organisation, its effects were nevertheless felt far too late to assist the majority of soldier settlers at Woombye and Beerburrum. In 1923 the State Cannery again reduced the price of pineapples—to two shillings per case—prompting a deputation of Beerburrum settlers to confront the newly-appointed Minister for Public Lands, William McCormack. As explained by George Yule of Elimbah:

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14 BC, 7 December 1922, p.13.
15 BC, 5 March 1923, p.4.
16 BC, 12 July 1923, p.10.
18 Ranger, "Marketing of Queensland Fruit", p.73.
It was impossible to grow pines at less than 4s.0d. per case. The way they looked at it was this,—they were put there to grow pines and the State Cannery was erected to treat them, thus being assured of a market for these products. They were assured that the Cannery would take all they could produce now the Cannery will take only 5" pines leaving the rest of the crop on their hands. The position was that the settler gets dissatisfied and walks off like a criminal.\(^{19}\)

By comparing the official estimates, it is clear that approximately 200 men, women and children had left Beerburrum in the twelve months prior to June 1923.\(^{20}\) While the growers who remained received another government subsidy of one shilling per case for cannery produce,\(^{21}\) they also borrowed £200 from the State government to send pineapples to the fresh fruit markets in Tasmania, Western Australia and New Zealand. The loan was repaid, but as there were no further attempts to emulate this marketing strategy, it does not appear to have been particularly successful.\(^{22}\) On the other hand, the scheme implemented in 1921 to market pineapples in western Queensland was resurrected, with its scope enlarged. Under the slogan ‘direct from grower to consumer’:

Cases of choice pineapples, 16 to 24 to the case, are being delivered to any address in Brisbane or suburbs for 6s., cases to be returned ... Under this system, overhead charges are reduced to a minimum, and agents and retailers’ profits eliminated. The consumer buys cheap fruit and the grower receives a fair return for his labour ... Only choice pines are marketed; cases are packed with straw to prevent bruising, and recipes for wine and jam making are enclosed in each case. The

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\(^{19}\) ‘Minutes of a Meeting between William McCormack, Secretary for Public Lands, and Beerburrum soldier settlers, Brisbane, 26 July 1923’, LAN/AK132, Batch 831, “Disposal of Pineapples—Beerburrum Soldiers’ Settlement”, QSA.


\(^{21}\) BC, 27 July 1923, p.5.

\(^{22}\) Under Secretary for Public Lands, Brisbane, to Secretary, United Fruitgrowers’ Association, Beerburrum, 16 August 1923, LAN/AK132, Batch 831, “Disposal of Pineapples—Beerburrum Soldiers’ Settlement”, QSA; Accountant, Soldiers’ Settlement, Beerburrum, 21 November 1923, ibid.
mail order branch is already in full swing, orders coming from such
distant places as Mount Morgan, Blair Athol, and Cunnamulla.\(^{23}\)

The settlers showed considerable initiative, but crippling financial obligations eroded all
chance of success. This scenario was certainly not envisaged in 1920, when the
Beerburrum soldier settlement was steadily expanding. Though their prayers may not
have been ultimately answered, spiritual needs were addressed from September 1920
when work commenced on a Methodist Church, Beerburrum’s first house of worship.\(^{24}\)

By June 1921 the population peaked at an estimated 1,200 people, with many amenities
available. Agricultural experimentation was nevertheless already apparent:

In the township the following buildings have been erected:—
Administrative office, hospital, Methodist church, School of Arts,
boarding-house, bank and post office, State store, butcher’s shop,
bakehouse, barber’s and fruit shop, saddler’s shop, bootmaker’s shop,
and 9 residences ... The State school has 101 scholars enrolled. A
branch store and butcher’s shop have been erected at Glasshouse
[Mountains]. The staple industry of the Settlement is, of course,
pineapples and citrus fruits, but quite a number of settlers are going in
largely for side-lines—principally poultry-raising, passion fruit and
papaws. Two settlers are going in for dairying on a limited scale.\(^{25}\)

That was the official view of Beerburrum, in which progress reigned supreme. Pulling
aside the veil, however, a somewhat different picture unfolds. Most of the roads radiating
out from the township to individual holdings remained in a deplorable state, as the

\(^{24}\) BC, 25 September 1920, p.8.
\(^{25}\) “Report by the Under Secretary for Public Lands under ‘The Discharged Soldiers’ Settlement Acts, 1917
government did not have any funding available for improvements. Even worse was the actual position of the settlers, many of whom were still dependent on the sustenance allowance. In April 1921 at least twenty-eight soldier settlers were suddenly refused this basic support and in desperation approached the police at Caboolture, the nearest major centre, for rations. Their demands could not be met. The problem occurred through the implementation of a new sustenance system, which the Minister for Public Lands, Harry Coyne, believed would benefit Queensland’s soldier settlers:

It had been decided that to single men who had received the full amount of the ordinary loan of £625, and who were in necessitous circumstances, £1 per week should be paid; to married men, without children, £1/10; and the married men with children £2. This amount was not a loan, but a gift. He added that no men were actually in want, as rations were always available. The applications for this sustenance gift had to be renewed and considered every month.

Caboolture police were obviously unaware that “rations are always available”, and the only major change in the sustenance allowance was that the settlers now had to apply for it—and be assessed—every four weeks, rather than every six months. Moreover, while sustenance was unavailable for those settlers fortunate enough to obtain outside work, Coyne’s rebuttal of Beerburrum soldier settlers being “in want” was contradicted by the experience of many settlers, including C.S. Gibson:

I have drawn roughly about £700, and I value my place with improvements at not less than £1,000. We will not get a payable crop

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26 WK, 4 February 1921, p.3.
27 WK, 15 April 1921, p.25.
28 BC, 22 April 1921, p.7.
29 BC, 27 September 1919, p.5.
until September or October. I have been practically living from hand to mouth for six months. The sudden stoppage of my maintenance allowance has left me destitute. I have had to borrow £10 from my people to enable me to live. I have several obligations to meet by 1st June ... This treatment only serves to drive us off the land.\(^{30}\)

Between April and November 1921 at least forty soldier settlers left Beerburrum, the process accelerated by the government’s issuance of the ‘bill of sale’ over personal goods and chattels.\(^{31}\) For the remainder, an acute shortage of pineapple suckers hampered planting operations,\(^{32}\) though a £12,000 Commonwealth grant did enable existing crops to be fertilised.\(^{33}\) While gluts on the fresh fruit markets plagued pineapple growers, the situation was even worse for those engaged in citrus fruit cultivation. The latter had to compete with growers from many other districts, not only in Queensland, but throughout eastern Australia.\(^{34}\)

Citrus cultivation reached its peak in June 1923, when 23,000 trees had been planted on soldier settler holdings around Beerburrum.\(^{35}\) Thereafter they disappeared from the official records. Citrus was subject to attack by a host of diseases and insect pests and, unlike pineapples, required regular irrigation.\(^{36}\) With insufficient water being available from natural watercourses, the number of wells sunk on the settlement had reached 230

\(^{30}\) WK, 15 April 1921, p.25.
\(^{31}\) MB, 18 November 1921, p.8; WS, 19 November 1921, p.2.
\(^{32}\) A.J. Dean, Supervisor, Soldiers’ Settlement, Beerburrum, to Officer in Charge, Soldiers’ Settlement Branch, Lands Department, Brisbane, 18 October 1921, LAN/AK132, Batch 831, “Disposal of Pineapples—Beerburrum Soldiers’ Settlement”, QSA.
\(^{33}\) QDR, 9 July 1921, p.29.
\(^{34}\) BC, 25 November 1921, p.6.
by June 1923. A few citrus orchards continued in existence at Elimbah and Twin View on the southern extremity of the soldier settlement, and at Glass House Mountains on the north, but apparently none survived around the nucleus itself. In the summer of 1926-1927, crops on the periphery also failed from prolonged drought and the ravages of sucking moths. Queensland’s long-serving Director of Fruit Culture, A.H. Benson, commented on the problems facing the State’s citrus fruit industry in 1926. While noting the selection of unsuitable soils for earlier plantings, it may have been with the Beerburrum soldier settlement partly in mind that Benson continued:

It is, unfortunately, only too true that a very large number of persons who have taken up citrus culture during recent years were totally unfitted for the work, owing to their failure to grasp the fact that a citrus orchard demands one’s undivided attention and very competent management to ensure its being a financial success.

Queensland officials were adept at ignoring the broader context to equate non-success with human failings. Given the general decline of Beerburrum soldier settlement from 1922, there can also be little doubt that the cost of fumigants for insect and disease control was often beyond the financial resources of many growers. Difficulties within the industry were already apparent for the soldier settlers cultivating pineapples by February 1921. In that month the president of the Beerburrum Soldier Settlers’ Committee, Walter Gerber, travelled to Brisbane for discussions with the State Trade Commissioner, W.H. Austin, on the handling and marketing of the settlers’ principal crop. Swiss-born Gerber

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had served in the AIF, and was from all accounts a highly respected member of the community.\textsuperscript{40} He decided to return to Beerburrum the same evening but made the mistake of boarding the Rockhampton express, which did not make a scheduled stop at the settlement.

As the train was passing through Beerburrum he is said to have jumped off. He rolled on the platform, and was dragged along between the train and the platform until he was clear of the platform. The night officer on the station signalled to the driver to stop the train, but he did not hear in time. Subsequently the train was stopped. Gerber was picked up with both his right and left legs partly amputated. [On being summoned] Dr. Crawford pronounced life to be extinct.\textsuperscript{41}

Gerber was buried in Beerburrum cemetery and even the presence of a hospital could not have saved his life. That institution was in the course of construction, and was opened the following year after “financial drives” throughout the district raised the funds necessary for it to function.\textsuperscript{42}

Soldier settlement coincided with “the rise of scientific medicine in Australia”, exemplified by maternal care and increasing surgical intervention in childbirth.\textsuperscript{43} Ironically, between 1922 and 1928 the maternal death rate in Australia climbed steadily, with virtually no interruption. Examining the causes of these deaths, Dr. Janet Campbell found an unusually high incidence of puerperal sepsis. She attributed this to the change from specialist midwives, who were not exposed to the risk of other infections, to the

\textsuperscript{40}BC, 21 February 1921, p.6.  
\textsuperscript{41}BC, 19 February 1921, p.15.  
\textsuperscript{42}BC, 27 August 1921, p.15.  
\textsuperscript{43}Lake, The Limits of Hope, p.186.
availability of medical institutions, which catered for a diverse array of illnesses and, correspondingly, increased the risk of infection as larger numbers of people were brought together.\textsuperscript{44}

The wife of a soldier settler, J.S. Scargill, acted as the local midwife prior to the opening of Beerburrum Hospital in February 1922,\textsuperscript{45} and the institution itself was originally intended to serve solely as a maternity hospital.\textsuperscript{46} Its functions were enlarged, however, and although few records exist it is apparent that the hospital handled an exceptionally large number of cases. Indeed, within three months of opening, 250 outdoor and fifty-seven indoor patients had used the facilities.\textsuperscript{47} By February 1923, with the estimated population of Beerburrum soldier settlement still approximately 1,000, the hospital treated 473 patients. Three deaths had also occurred.\textsuperscript{48} Apart from pregnancies, the majority of these cases were probably of only a minor character, but it clearly remains possible that something was terribly wrong on the settlement. Robert Murray, one of the few researchers to examine this decade in any detail, has nevertheless suggested that “death was much more in the air in the 1920s, in the sense that more people died young”.\textsuperscript{49} Disease claimed children; the legacy of war service claimed many ex-servicemen.

\textsuperscript{45} Nicklin, “‘Diggers’ Securely Entrenched in Pineapple Gardens—Part 2”, p.8.
\textsuperscript{46} BC, 6 February 1922, p.4.
\textsuperscript{48} \textit{WK}, 23 February 1923, p.28.
\textsuperscript{49} Murray, \textit{The Confident Years}, p.150.
An imposing building (Appendix 18), Beerburrum Hospital was constructed of timber at a cost of £3,370, with £300 being contributed from Golden Casket Art Union funds.\textsuperscript{50} Initially containing twenty beds,\textsuperscript{51} this was increased to twenty-six in 1923, and there were three public and three private wards.\textsuperscript{52} The institution also contained an operating theatre, dispensary, administrative offices, doctor's residence and nursing quarters.\textsuperscript{53} Apart from the resident doctor, staff included "a matron, two or three nursing sisters [and] about four nurses".\textsuperscript{54} Local residents were hired for kitchen and cleaning duties, and such was the plight of the soldier settlers that these positions were eagerly sought:

Judging by the numerous applicants from soldier settlers up here for positions in connection with the above hospital, there must be a calamity expected as the result of the Ministerial visit [i.e. the official opening of the hospital]. Already an ambulance stretcher adorns the verandah of the administrative buildings, affording an excellent advertisement for Beerburrum for the train travelling public, inferring that soldier settlers come here in trains and go away in stretchers.\textsuperscript{55}

Many may have done so, but the paucity of information relating to the hospital stems from its administration being quickly passed from State control to a local committee. Members of the latter were responsible for raising the seventy pounds per month necessary to keep the institution operable—yet another financial burden on the

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\textsuperscript{50} BC, 6 February 1922, p.4.
\textsuperscript{51} Chronicle (Nambour), 10 February 1922, p.5.
\textsuperscript{52} "Report by the Under Secretary for Public Lands under 'The Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Acts, 1917 to 1922'", OPP, Vol.1 (1923), p.1344.
\textsuperscript{53} Chronicle (Nambour), 10 February 1922, p.5.
\textsuperscript{54} Hopkins, The Beerburrum Story, p.47.
\textsuperscript{55} BC, 28 January 1922, p.4.
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community. At the official opening of the hospital on 4 February 1922, State Treasurer John Fihelly also made it abundantly clear where the soldier settlers now stood:

Votes of money to aid returned men ... could not be continued much longer, and the settlers would shortly have to rely on their own resources. There might be another war, and then the soldiers of the recent war would come into the same category as those who had served in the South African conflict.

With the loans embargo firmly in place, the Queensland government was in no position to inject funds into this social and agricultural experiment. Fihelly's remarks nevertheless confirm that the heroic image of the Anzac warriors was already being transformed in Australian society. As the decade advanced, returned servicemen were increasingly seen as abject failures—an unwanted burden. Herbert Moran, an Australian surgeon in the First World War, also commented on this shift in public opinion:

By slow degrees and almost unconsciously, the returned soldier descended to the level of a public nuisance. The sight of a uniformed one in crapulent distress angered the respectable citizen, and at the same time disturbed his conscience. From pitiful tolerance the attitude passed quickly to one of irritation and resentment.

For all that, the presence of a hospital at Beerburrum did offer some measure of comfort for soldier settler families, who were susceptible to such maladies as whooping cough,

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56 Chronicle (Nambour), 10 February 1922, p.5.
57 BC, 6 February 1922, p.4.
diphtheria, pneumonia and poliomyelitis. While the extent to which these poverty-enhanced illnesses occurred on the settlement is not known, Margaret Nowack, the two-year-old daughter of a Beerburrum railway settler, was hospitalised after contracting diphtheria in November 1929. The child survived, unlike sixteen-month-old Thelma Simpson, who died from an unrecorded cause and was buried in Beerburrum cemetery.

Despite the hardening attitude towards them, the Beerburrum soldier settlers had already initiated a scheme in an attempt to improve their position. The original failure to have a cannery erected on the settlement was followed by a second campaign to achieve that same objective in 1920. Again, it was to no avail, with the government remaining adamant that the State Cannery in Brisbane could meet all their requirements. The reality was, of course, quite different, but from early 1921 many of the settlers began to believe their salvation lay in an alternative form of fruit processing.

During the First World War J.H. Morton had designed and built a number of dehydration plants for the British government, and after the cessation of hostilities had further developed the process for commercial application. Morton’s visit to Australia in 1920 sparked interest among the Beerburrum soldier settlers, for it was perceived that this method of fruit processing could not only eliminate their dependence on the State Cannery, but also alleviate the problem of glutted fresh fruit markets. Put simply:

60 Charles Twemlow, Head Teacher, Beerburrum State School, to Director of Education, Brisbane, 21 November 1929, EDU/Z150, “Beerburrum”, QSA; Acting Sergeant Hogan, Caboolture Police, to Inspector, City Depot, Brisbane, 13 December 1929, Ibid.
61 BC, 29 June 1920, p.7.
62 BC, 14 August 1920, p.5.
63 BC, 1 April 1921, p.6.
Dehydration briefly means the elimination of the moisture content of a substance in such a manner and to a sufficient extent to enable it to be kept from one to several years without appreciable deterioration, so that it may be restored by soaking to practically its original state of freshness by the addition of its original volume of water—the only substance removed by the process.  

The Beerburrum Co-operative Company was floated in February 1921, with 15,000 one pound shares being issued the following May. A Morton Efficiency Dehydrator was a feature of the Brisbane Exhibition in August, with the inventor providing practical demonstrations, and dehydration aroused such widespread interest that one correspondent to the press compared it to “an epidemic of measles”. When Morton agreed to design and supervise the building of a plant for the Beerburrum company, fruit-growers throughout south-east Queensland eagerly sought to purchase shares. By November 1921 a central location at Nambour, rather than Beerburrum, had been selected and building work begun. The company intended to expand operations by processing “bananas, papaws, mangoes, and other fruits and vegetables”, in addition to pineapples from the soldier settlement.

A Beerburrum soldier settler, Ernest Aston, was appointed managing director, but in January 1922 the company was rocked by internal dissension. Although Aston’s position was confirmed, the shareholders called for the board to be reconstituted to allow fairer
representation. Aston was also subjected to government intimidation, with the State Cannery refusing to accept any pineapples grown by the managing director of the settlers' co-operative. Unlike the tomato pulping plant at Amiens, which could work in conjunction with the cannery, a successful dehydration operation posed a distinct threat to the government's treasured, albeit beleaguered, State enterprise.

Problems intensified for the Beerburrum settlers in April 1922. With the Nambour plant still incomplete, the company's funds ran dry and Aston approached the State government for a £4,000 loan. Perhaps not surprisingly this was refused, though it was Aston's accounting methods which were held to be at fault. After examining the company's books, audit inspector J. McCaffrey expressed the utmost contempt:

> An examination of the accounts disclosed that they were in a very incomplete and unsatisfactory state, so much so that it was impossible for me to proceed with an audit until the cash book had been balanced and adjusted with the bank pass books, and until an entirely new ledger had been written up.

Shareholders were equally appalled, and forced Aston's resignation in August 1922. He briefly retained the position of manager before being dismissed altogether when a new board was constituted under the chairmanship of W.H. Lister, yet another Beerburrum soldier settler. In November the company issued new shares to the amount of £1,500,
thus enabling machinery to be installed in the Nambour factory. By this time, however, interest in the scheme had flagged considerably and few investors were forthcoming.

J.H. Morton accepted the position of managing director in January 1923, and embarked on a promotional campaign throughout the coastal region north of Brisbane to raise financial support. Two Nambour businessmen, William Whalley and T.H. Lowe, finally purchased the remaining shares and operations were able to commence in April 1923. It was an anti-climax. After the long struggle to reach the production stage, the company was once again beset with internal conflict and, importantly, was unable to secure viable orders. By then, cultivation at Beerburrum was also ebbing. Little dehydration therefore took place, and by February 1925 the company was effectively “out of action”, with the factory being used to store sawn timber. There was to be no resurgence.

The failure of the dehydration plant to function on a commercial basis was a serious blow to the Beerburrum soldier settlers. In July 1923 publicly-subscribed funds for their sustenance were exhausted and many families were again destitute. Road work provided twenty men with temporary relief, and the quarry opened at Beerburrum in February 1923 to supply stone for the construction of Anzac Avenue, between Petrie and Redcliffe to the south, provided employment for another thirty. Possibly fifty soldier settlers

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76 BC, 18 November 1922, p.20.
77 BC, 4 January 1923, p.10; BC, 6 January 1923, p.15.
79 QDR, 19 January 1924, p.15.
80 BC, 27 February 1925, p.11.
81 BC, 16 July 1923, p.11.
82 BC, 30 July 1923, p.10.
abandoned their holdings and fled the settlement. The vast majority had little alternative except to struggle on, hoping that both conditions and markets would improve. As the Elimbah soldier settler, A.E. Sigg, commented in July 1923, the plight of women and children was nothing less than “terrible”:

He knew for a fact that about 50 per cent of the women on the settlement were going about barefooted on their farms, so as not to wear out the only pair of shoes and stockings which they possessed, and which they had no hope of replacing for a long time to come ... One man had spent between £500 and £600 on the settlement, and yet to-day his children were living on bread and dripping. That man had told him that he had walked to Landsborough and back to secure work, but without avail, and that his children were continually crying for food.

Other members of the deputation presenting their case to Premier Theodore agreed that the position was critical. Undoubtedly, a few sought spiritual solace in one of the two houses of worship at Beerburrum, after an Anglican Church was built in August 1922. With the opening of this church and, later, a dental surgery, building work in the township had reached its zenith by June 1923—ironically, at the very height of the crisis. For the soldier settlers engaged in egg production around Brisbane, the situation was no better. Mount Gravatt and Enoggera soldier settlements experienced their own irony when new markets were found after virtually half the settlers had forfeited their holdings.

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83 BC, 16 July 1923, p.11.
84 Ibid.
85 BC, 23 August 1922, p.6.
With Queensland markets over-supplied with eggs in late 1921, a trial shipment was sent to Sydney. It proved reasonably successful, and limited quantities of eggs were henceforth sent southwards at regular intervals. Late the following year eggs were also exported to Britain, where it was found that a favourable market existed during the northern winter months. By then, however, the number of producers on both soldier settlements had fallen dramatically.

In June 1921, the Coorparoo sub-branch of the RSSILA complained to Stephens Shire Council that rate charges for soldier settlers were nothing short of exorbitant. In reply, the Shire Clerk insisted that under the Local Authorities Act valuations were set down at twenty times the rental value, and "consequently the council had no power to alter it". In this instance, Queensland’s Minister for Public Lands, Harry Coyne, begged to disagree:

The decision of the council was not correct. Under the basis, now laid down by the Local Authorities Act, as amended by Section 13 of the Local Authorities Acts Amendment Act of 1920, the basis of valuations set down for land held from the Crown under perpetual lease tenure, in which class holdings on soldier settlements would fall, was that the value of such ratable land should be estimated at the fair average value of unimproved land of the same quality held in fee simple in the same neighbourhood.

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87 BC, 6 September 1921, p.8.
88 BC, 2 November 1922, p.4.
89 BC, 15 June 1921, p.6.
90 BC, 16 June 1921, p.6.
There is no evidence that the local authority complied with this ruling, or that the State government took any action to intervene. Indeed, the latter appropriated the £375 per capita advanced by the Commonwealth for public works, insisting that as Mount Gravatt was established prior to the Federal-State agreement, the State was under no obligation to spend the money on the settlement. Apart from the lack of adequate markets, the settlers pointed out that this meant they also had to contend with poor roads and no water supply. Moreover, in September 1921 it was revealed that only forty-four of the eighty-seven holdings originally allotted were still occupied. This already represented a failure rate of marginally under fifty percent, but it was to become worse. While the number of poultry on the settlement reached 10,000 head by June 1922, only thirty-nine soldier settlers remained.

In a bid to recoup some of the losses as soldier settlers walked off the settlement, the government began renting abandoned holdings to civilians under informal lease conditions. In June 1923 nine holdings were also being tenanted on a weekly basis, with rents of up to twelve shillings per week being charged. This made a mockery of the settlers' efforts, and did nothing to either solve existing problems or prevent further departures. In June 1924, only twenty-nine soldier settlers remained on 103 hectares of the original resumed area of 210 hectares. The following month one of their number, Alex Gow, advertised the fact that his colleagues were using the incubators to hatch

91 MB, 6 September 1921, p.8.
chickens for outside interests, thereby inadvertently undermining their own position by increasing competition. Yet there can be little doubt that the 7/6d. charged per tray was also crucial for their immediate economic survival.96

The situation was replicated on the Enoggera soldier settlement, where only thirty-one soldier settlers were in occupation by August 1923. At the same time, the number of poultry peaked at 8,000 head.97 Increasing the size of flocks only aggravated the problem of over-supply, and it was therefore not surprising that another five returned servicemen forfeited their holdings by June 1924.98 While Queensland suffered from relatively high unemployment,99 soldier settlers abandoning their holdings on the poultry and pineapple settlements of southern Queensland did have the advantage of being able to seek work and accommodation in Brisbane. It was far more difficult for those well removed from the metropolis, particularly when the nearest small township was the commercial hub for a large district.

The heart of the Mount Hutton soldier settlement north of Roma was, of course, Gunnewin. In September 1920 the exodus was still distant when the new supervisor, D.S. Armstrong, recommended the building of an accommodation house to cater for growing needs:

96 BC, 11 July 1924, p.9.
97 BC, 15 August 1923, p.6.
99 WK, 6 March 1925, p.11.
There is room for some place here where visitors, Settlers and others could obtain meals etc., and I would ask that approval be given to erect a small place here which could be rented to a married couple as a mixed business, barber's shop etc. on the same principle as the one which was first erected at Beerburrum. This is the main centre for a very large area, and something of the kind is urgently needed.\(^{100}\)

Approval was forthcoming, with the successful applicant also permitted to sell “tobacco, cigarettes and soft drinks”.\(^{101}\) Built by O.H. Dakin from the Department of Public Works at the projected cost of £750,\(^{102}\) the Mount Hutton Boarding House opened in March 1921.\(^{103}\) There was only one applicant for the business, with the annual rent initially set at fifty-two pounds. On a further recommendation by Armstrong this was reduced to £37/10, as the successful lessees, Anthony and Caroline Scollary, had encountered a “big expense furnishing etc.”\(^{104}\) As Scollary was not a returned serviceman, he was soon targetted by the local branch of the RSSILA, especially the vindictive soldier settler, R.L. Twemlow.

Twemlow exemplified those veterans who perceived themselves as having a special status, and thus expected to be accorded privileges denied to non-combatants. It was this arrogance, and the preferential treatment that they did receive, which repelled many

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\(^{101}\) W.J. Monteith, Officer in Charge, Soldier Settlement Branch, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, to D.S. Armstrong, Supervisor, Mt. Hutton Soldiers' Settlement, Gunnewin, 28 October 1920, Ibid.

\(^{102}\) W.J. Monteith, Officer in Charge, Soldier Settlement Branch, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, to D.S. Armstrong, Supervisor, Mt. Hutton Soldiers' Settlement, Gunnewin, 7 December 1920, Ibid.

\(^{103}\) “Extract from Report furnished by Mr. Armstrong, Supervisor, S.S. Mt. Hutton, dated 4th April, 1921”, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, Ibid.

\(^{104}\) D.S. Armstrong, Supervisor, Mt. Hutton Soldier Settlement, Gunnewin, to Officer in Charge, Soldier Settlements, Brisbane, 18 April 1921, Ibid; Mrs. A. Scollary, Gunnewin, to W.J. Monteith, Officer in Charge, Soldier Settlement Branch, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 31 August 1921, Ibid.
civilians as the holocaust of 1914-1918 slowly receded into the past. Twemlow’s crusade against Anthony and Caroline Scollary serves to illustrate the plight of those confronted by this potent force. Fortunately, they had their own supporters, including the supervisor, D.S. Armstrong.

In October 1921 Twemlow made two complaints to the Department of Public Lands. One expressed his concern that “a non soldier named Mitchell” was working “in secret partnership” with a soldier settler named Pendall. Even worse, however, was the fact that the new proprietors of the accommodation house had arbitrarily evicted two returned soldiers. After his Brisbane superior forwarded Twemlow’s allegations, Armstrong replied that Caroline Scollary had merely objected to the returned soldiers consuming alcohol on the premises, “with the result that the men left”. Regarding the “secret partnership”, Armstrong continued:

Pendall has a man working for him named Mitchell, but as to his terms of engagement I do not know. Pendall has a very well improved block and needs assistance, he is preparing to plant 100 [acres] of wheat next year. There may be an arrangement between Pendall and this man for a share of the profits, but this in itself does not create Partnership.

Pendall was forgotten in March 1922, when Twemlow went to the trouble of informing the State Secretary of the RSSILA that the boarding house was being kept by “a non-

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107 D.S. Armstrong, Superintendent, Mt. Hutton Soldier Settlement, Gunnewin, to Officer in Charge, Soldier Settlement Branch, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 14 November 1921, Ibid.
soldier's wife". He also queried whether one of the rooms in the building should be used as a shop, "when the wife of an invalid soldier would be glad of it". After the RSSILA passed Twemlow's correspondence to the Department of Public Lands, it was again decided that no action was necessary. Twemlow struck again in October 1922, claiming that the boarding house was not being run to a satisfactory standard. Armstrong sprang to the defence, as he was well aware that the complaint had little to do with food or hygiene. After praising Anthony Scollary's work and character, the supervisor admonished the local branch of the RSSILA:

Knowing the men who run the Branch of the League here I do not take any notice of them. I have seen the resolutions concerning these matters ... These men have always been a nuisance here they are up against the Administration in everything that it does, in fact the administration cannot do anything right to their mind, and these resolutions are the result. To give way to this small cliqu[e], who do not represent more than one fifth of the total Settlers here would be bad, and would make my position here untenable.

Armstrong and the proprietors stayed. The majority of the soldier settlers obviously supported the proprietors of the boarding house, otherwise their business could hardly have survived. Anthony Scollary also served on the local Bush Nursing Association committee and the boarding house was the setting for many fund-raising activities, including "coin evenings" to raise money for the railway ambulance. They did run foul of the administration in late 1924, when the Land Commissioner insisted that the paddock

109 Officer in Charge, Soldier Settlement Branch, Department of Public Lands, to State Secretary, R.S.S.I.L.A., Elizabeth Street, Brisbane, 26 May 1922, Ibid.
110 D.S. Armstrong, Supervisor, Mt. Hutton Soldier Settlement, Gunnewin, to Officer in Charge, Soldier Settlement Branch, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 25 October 1922, Ibid.
adjoining their premises could not be used for grazing purposes. Anthony Scollary reputedly had four dairy cows on the 200 hectares, but it was later found that the offending stock consisted of two horses.\[112\] The following year fire destroyed the boarding house, and despite a petition from thirty-seven soldier settlers requesting that it be rebuilt as “the settlers & visitors are seriously inconvenienced”,\[113\] circumstances had altered so markedly that the settlement no longer warranted any further expenditure.\[114\]

The involvement of Anthony Scollary and his wife with the BNA and railway ambulance undoubtedly enhanced their position on the settlement. Nurse Anderson was the first Bush Nurse at Gunnewin in May 1921, and the Association’s services were no less important on the Mount Hutton soldier settlement than they were elsewhere. Between May and August 1921, for example, Anderson attended to 129 patients. Although the majority of ailments may have only been of a minor nature:

The nurse they had at Gunnewin was fully qualified to attend to maternity cases, minor accidents, and children’s ailments, and to advise in case of eye troubles ... Serious accidents and cases of infectious diseases would have to go to Roma, where greater facilities were provided for treatment, but such cases would have the attention of the nurse, who could certainly make the patient more comfortable for the journey.\[115\]

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\[111\] WS, 12 April 1922, p.3.

\[112\] Memorandum, Soldier Settlement Branch, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 20 December 1924, LAN/AK132, Batch 812, “Boarding House Mt. Hutton Soldiers Settlement”, QSA.

\[113\] “Petition from Mount Hutton soldier-settlers to the Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 20 June 1925”, Ibid.

\[114\] Minister for Lands to C. Conroy, Esq., M.I.A., Parliament House, Brisbane, 20 October 1925, Ibid.

\[115\] WS, 24 September 1921, p.2.
Unlike Cecil Plains soldier settlement, where the BNA struggled for years to obtain separate quarters, the administration commenced work on a "Nurse's Quarters" at Gunnewin in March 1921, prior to Anderson's arrival. The Association and settlers were further assisted by the women's sub-committee of the Roma Repatriation Committee, who provided clothing for patients under nursing care. After receiving the annual grant of £100 from Golden Casket Art Union funds from late 1922 the Gunnewin centre was able to function successfully throughout the decade. Only a limited number of soldier settlers were able to do likewise.

In March 1922 many were "experimenting" with the cultivation of Soudan Douhra, a cereal crop whose seeds are borne in large plume-shaped ears, with yields expected to be in the vicinity of "50 bushels to the acre". Continuing drought frustrated the results, but the crop did provide ideal fodder for pigs, "which represents one of the subsidiary activities of the Mount Hutton farmers". Two visiting Canadian farmers, J. and R.J. Ringland, also raised the possibility of dry farming on the settlement:

The opinion that there was a bright future ahead of Mt. Hutton was expressed by Mr. Ringland, subject to the proviso that it was properly worked on the dry farming principle. The soil should be ploughed to a depth of six inches, and should be harrowed immediately, so that the sun and wind might not dry the moisture ... Sufficient moisture ought to be able to be conserved in an ordinary year for three years of wheat growing, but proper methods would give moisture for even a longer period.

117 WS, 7 December 1921, p.2.
118 WS, 15 March 1922, p.4.
120 BC, 22 March 1922, p.10.
The idea was not pursued as there were very few ‘ordinary years’ which allowed any moisture to be retained. In May 1922 Governor Sir Matthew Nathan also visited Gunnewin. Acknowledging the harsh climatic factors with which the settlers were forced to contend, Nathan offered encouragement by drawing on the ‘Anzac Legend’ to remind them that despite the difficulties in Gallipoli and France it “did not prevent them winning in the end”.\textsuperscript{121} A member of the Governor’s entourage was the Home Secretary, William McCormack, who also addressed the settlers. While reflecting on the hardships endured by rural dwellers, who were forced to depend on kerosene lamps and “water in the creek”, one exasperated interjector pointed out that “often there’s no water in the creek”.\textsuperscript{122} McCormack’s purpose, however, was to convince the returned servicemen that they were fulfilling a national ‘duty’:

\begin{quote}
The only hope of occupying and holding Australia was by increased population. He lived in North Queensland, and he saw a beautiful country, one fit to develop a white race, in danger because it could not get people. He saw other people in the thickly populated countries of Asia ready and willing to populate North Queensland.\textsuperscript{123}
\end{quote}

To accomplish that task, the Mount Hutton soldier settlers required a viable crop and experiments continued. One individual achieved moderate success from cotton, encouraging others to direct their efforts in that direction.\textsuperscript{124} Indeed, there was little alternative as persistent drought decimated their small dairy herds. In November 1922 the

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{121}] WS, 10 May 1922, p.2.
\item[\textsuperscript{122}] Ibid.
\item[\textsuperscript{123}] Ibid.
\item[\textsuperscript{124}] Ibid.
\end{itemize}
price of cream also fell to sixpence per pound. Drought, however, destroyed any hope of salvation from cotton cultivation:

The dry weather hampered operations in cultivation. The total area cultivated was 472 acres, principally for cotton, but the crop was almost a total failure. This is regrettable, as a good crop last season would have given encouragement to others to embark in this industry for which the Settlement is admirably adapted.

With wallabies devouring struggling subsidiary crops, the settlement nevertheless did prove 'admirably adapted' for one other form of vegetation. In November 1922 Bungil Shire Council expressed alarm at the spread of prickly pear in the Mount Hutton district. The chairman, Councillor Thrupp, insisted that this proved the futility of the State government's closer settlement policy as a barrier against the pest. The shire valuer, "Mr. Kincaid", was perhaps closer to the mark when he argued that "cultivation would eradicate the pear, but the country on Mount Hutton was not fit for cultivation". Such recognition did not, of course, prevent the local authority from attempting to extract rates from the soldier settlers.

Notwithstanding the failure of previous efforts, one unnamed soldier settler and his wife decided to embark on cotton cultivation in 1923. Unable to afford the plough necessary to prepare the ground, they tried the novel approach of appealing directly to the public.
through the Brisbane press. Their personal circumstances also afford further insight into the settlement itself:

They have been hard hit by drought, dairying having failed. For weeks the soldier settler and his wife have been clearing a portion of their land for cotton, he grubbing trees and she helping to gather logs and burn them. In writing to us, asking if we will help them to secure the plough, he says:—“... I have 15 acres of ground ready for the plough, and if you could procure for me a second-hand double furrow disc plough I would be able to pull through. I can assure you it will be the making of me if I can get my ground ready early for the coming cotton crop, which will help me pay my grocery account. If it were not for the local storekeeper sticking to me, I would have to have walked off my selection before now, after putting in four years’ hard labour with a wife and four little ones to keep. It is the drought and slump in butter production that brought me to this.”

Within six days of the appeal being launched in May 1923 it was over-subscribed. The Brisbane machinery firm, Lovelock and Co., supplied the required implement at a reduced price and it was duly forwarded to Mount Hutton. Sadly, they were unable to “pull through”. In June 1924 the editor of the Brisbane Courier received a photograph from ‘Soldier Settler’s Wife’ showing their cotton crop just before it was destroyed:

This is just to show you that we have tried hard to show our gratitude by getting 20 acres under crops. But I am more than sorry to say we had very bad luck, as the grubs ruined all our cotton, which was so loaded with bolls that the stalks could not stand the weight, and split. Millions of grubs or caterpillars ate the leaves, flowers, squares, and even the bolls ready to open, and in three weeks all was ruined.

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129 BC, 23 May 1923, p.4.  
130 BC, 29 May 1923, p.5.  
131 BC, 30 May 1923, p.6.  
Unlike many other soldier settler families they were prepared to try again; by June 1924 the number of soldier settlers in the Mount Hutton district had fallen to eighty-two. W.A. Hann, a soldier settler at Neumgna, in the South Burnett district, followed the example set by the Mount Hutton family and made his own public appeal for a plough in August 1923. The public again responded generously. Hann was still occupying his dry holding in February 1924, but his plans went awry after wallabies devoured all the crops. Although cotton cultivation was also attempted on a few of the soldier settlements in the South Burnett, this district exhibited considerable agricultural diversity as the settlers tried various strategies to overcome natural adversities.

At Cooyar, for instance, only one soldier settler continued dairying by June 1923, with his neighbours receiving "fair returns" from maize. It was quite different at Tarong, where Rhodes Grass and vegetables were coming under increasing attack from wallabies. Due to these depredations, the seven soldier settlers in the area were forced to concentrate on dairying and pig-raising. It was on the Gordonbrook soldier settlement, however, where agricultural experimentation was perhaps most obvious.

J.W. Beveridge planted four hectares of cotton in November 1922, and his satisfactory returns justified increasing the area under cultivation to ten hectares in 1923. R.F. Tancred and W.J. Staines also planted this crop, with Staines raling away one tonne of

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134 BC, 17 August 1923, p.4; BC, 30 August 1923, p.6.
135 BC, 28 February 1924, p.11.
seed cotton in April 1923. Beveridge nevertheless appears to have been the only settler persevering with cotton in 1924, when he displayed his produce at the inaugural Gordonbrook Soldier Settlers' Harvest Carnival in May. This day of festivities attracted a large number of visitors from Kingaroy and, importantly, it also revealed the diversity of the settlers' crops. Many continued with maize cultivation, though T.P. Radford was growing gramma, squash and pumpkins. A.L. Weir was experimenting with both table and cattle pumpkins, and J. Morton, sheaf pannicum. N. Jensen was engaged in peanut cultivation, and a vast array of other small crops were displayed from various holdings on the settlement. There were doubtless indications that many settlers were also in serious trouble; eight had forfeited their land by the following month.

The decline was mirrored throughout the South Burnett. Indeed, on Cinnabar soldier settlement near Kilkivan it had begun very early, with half the unspecified number of soldier settlers reputedly abandoning their holdings shortly after the area was thrown open in 1920. Established on a section of Elimbah Station, the holdings varied in area from forty to fifty-two hectares, and it was later argued that they were too small to provide a sufficient living area. Most of the settlers combined dairying with mixed farming, but with limited land, high valuations, falling prices and detrimental climatic

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137 Ibid.
138 BC, 18 April 1923, p.11.
139 BC, 7 May 1924, p.9.
140 QDR, 10 May 1924, p.19.
142 BC, 14 April 1928, p.13.
factors, it was contended in August 1924 that “not one man has earned the basic wage of £4 per week since taking over his selection”.

It was perhaps even worse at Neumgna, near Yarraman, where water could only be procured at distances of six to nine kilometres from the soldier settler holdings. The State government had originally sunk a bore on the settlement but the supply soon failed and the engine was removed. A second attempt proved a “dud”, and the settlers were left to obtain their own supplies as best they could. By February 1924 twelve soldier settlers were still struggling on the settlement, with only five being original applicants. Among the latecomers was C.T. Hendersen, who had gambled on the second bore proving successful:

So far he has lost, and still has the dreary drudge of taking his horse to water daily. However, he is a sticker; he got some land ploughed, and put in corn and potatoes. So soon as the corn came up the wallabies came out, and Hendersen’s hopes of a corn crop were soon nibbled away. After finishing the corn, battalions of them tackled the potatoes; he dug 12 bags from five acres. He applied for wire netting to protect his crop from wallabies, and got a letter advising him to shoot them. His retort courteous was that he had done enough night-shooting in France to satisfy him for a lifetime.

Hendersen eventually received the netting, but how he later fared is not known. His prospects were certainly not good, as there had only been one “good wet year” in the previous six. Yet another problem facing the South Burnett settlers was the distance to

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143 BC, 11 August 1924, p.7.
144 BC, 28 February 1924, p.11.
145 Ibid.
146 Ibid.
medical aid if physical misfortune fell. This was not the case at Cecil Plains, further south, where the Bush Nursing Association again provided an essential service despite crippling financial difficulties. Drought, however, was a shared experience.

An ex-army nurse, Sister Griffiths, was first placed at Cecil Plains in 1921. As no accommodation was provided, Griffiths and her successors boarded with the supervisor, David Binnie, and his wife in the original homestead. It was not until 1925 that a separate building was finally made available by the Department of Public Lands, and only then becoming possible through the declining state of the soldier settlement at Beerburrum. The importance of the Bush Nurse in community life was perhaps accentuated on settlements such as Cecil Plains, where many of the women were British war brides with little experience of Australian conditions. In February 1922 Mrs. Snowdon, honorary secretary of the Cecil Plains BNA, provided a brief glimpse into the precarious position of the settlers—and the community’s gendered structure:

It is after all the women who make the homes, and if they are not happy and comfortable their husbands naturally are less likely to settle down. Personally, I like the life and am very happy though it is really my first experience of bush life, and we are more than satisfied with our prospects. The fall in prices is, of course, affecting Cecil Plains, as it is the other places, and a man who made £65 with his cream etc., early last year now makes £15 or £20, so that you can imagine that there is not much to spare for ‘extras’.

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148 *Darling Downs Gazette* (Toowoomba), 10 February 1922, newspaper clipping, TR1889/1, Box 515, Batch 54/12285, “Bush Nursing Cecil Plains”, QSA.
From 1922 the Toowoomba Sailors’ and Soldiers’ Fathers’ Association took up the battle to provide the Cecil Plains BNA with separate quarters for the resident nurse and a “Nursing home”. 151 In reply to a request for financial assistance, the Home Secretary’s Office advised that all matters pertaining to the BNA were being held in abeyance until a scheme was launched to increase the number of maternity wards in Queensland’s public hospitals. 152 This led to a request for funding to build a “maternity hospital” at Cecil Plains, 153 a proposition that quickly foundered when specific details could not be provided. 154

In common with other centres, the Cecil Plains branch received an annual £100 grant from Golden Casket Art Union funds from late 1922. 155 While covering working expenses, it could do little to provide separate quarters or a treatment room, a position that remained unaltered until October 1924. The Department of Public Lands then offered a vacant house on Beerburrum soldier settlement, although it was emphasised that the department “cannot bear any part of the cost of removal”. 156

151 Edwin Price, Honorary Secretary, Sailors’ and Soldiers’ Fathers’ Association, Toowoomba Branch, Toowoomba, to Home Secretary, Brisbane, 8 February 1922, Ibid.
152 Under Secretary, Home Secretary’s Office, Brisbane, to E. Price, Honorary Secretary, Sailors’ and Soldiers’ Fathers’ Association, Toowoomba Branch, Toowoomba, 8 March 1922, Ibid.
153 Miss Lilly Lea, Honorary Secretary, Bush Nursing Association (Cecil Plains Branch), Cecil Plains, to Home Secretary, Brisbane, 6 November 1922, Ibid.
154 C.E. Chuter, Assistant Under Secretary, Home Secretary’s Office, Brisbane, to Miss L.L. Lea, Honorary Secretary, Cecil Plains Branch, Bush Nursing Association, Cecil Plains, 11 November 1922, Ibid.
155 C.E. Chuter, Assistant Under Secretary, Home Secretary’s Office, to Secretary, Queensland Bush Nursing Association, c/o St. George’s Nursing Home, Milton Heights, Brisbane, 8 December 1922, Ibid.
156 C.W. Holland, Assistant Under Secretary, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, to Miss Florence A. Wall, Honorary Secretary, Cecil Plains Bush Nursing Association, Cecil Plains, 10 October 1924, Ibid.
With dismantling, cartage and re-erection expected to cost in the vicinity of £100,\textsuperscript{157} assistance was again sought from the Home Secretary’s Office—this time with success.\textsuperscript{158} From February 1925 volunteer labour steadily enlarged the building, and in April it was anticipated that the centre would be included “under the endowment scheme as a Hospital”.\textsuperscript{159} It was not,\textsuperscript{160} and a further request for £100 to purchase a motor vehicle “after the style of an Ambulance”,\textsuperscript{161} was similarly refused the following August.\textsuperscript{162}

The BNA continued to operate at Cecil Plains throughout the 1920s, with Nurse Porter replacing Nurse Cardow in February 1929.\textsuperscript{163} The scheme was an important aspect of Queensland rural life in general, and soldier settlement in particular, which has thus far not received the attention it rightly deserves. In mid-1923, however, the crisis faced by the Cecil Plains soldier settlers intensified, with the Department of Public Lands forced to acknowledge that:

The last six months has been abnormally dry, and the settlers have passed through a very hard time. A large majority have proved themselves good settlers by the care given to their stock in feeding and obtaining relief country, and by continuing to cultivate their land

\textsuperscript{157} Florence A. Wall, Honorary Secretary, Cecil Plains Bush Nursing Association, Cecil Plains, to Home Secretary, Brisbane, 1 January 1925, \textit{ibid.}

\textsuperscript{158} R.H. Robinson for Assistant Under Secretary, Home Secretary’s Office, Brisbane, to Miss Florence A. Wall, Honorary Secretary, Bush Nursing Association, Cecil Plains, 22 January 1925, \textit{ibid.}

\textsuperscript{159} Edwin Price, Honorary Secretary, Sailors’ and Soldiers’ Fathers’ Association, Toowoomba Branch, Toowoomba, to Under Secretary, Home Secretary’s Office, Brisbane, 24 April 1925, \textit{ibid.}

\textsuperscript{160} R.S. Mackay for Assistant Under Secretary, Home Secretary’s Office, Brisbane, to E. Price, Honorary Secretary, Sailors’ and Soldiers’ Fathers’ Association, Toowoomba, 30 April 1925, \textit{ibid.}


\textsuperscript{162} R.S. Mackay for Assistant Under Secretary, Home Secretary’s Office, to R. Bedford, M.L.A., Parliament House, Brisbane, 21 August 1925, \textit{ibid.}

\textsuperscript{163} \textit{BC}, 22 February 1929, p.23.
under depressing conditions. Much of their hard-earned savings have been expended, and they have suffered slight losses of stock.\textsuperscript{164}

Under these circumstances, tempers occasionally flared. Aubrey Robinson appeared in Toowoomba Police Court in January 1923, charged with having caused grievous bodily harm to William Power at Nangwee. Power's injuries were consistent with having been struck a number of times with a stick, and Robinson was remanded on bail.\textsuperscript{165} The assailant and his victim were among the ninety-eight soldier settlers on both sections of Cecil Plains estate in June 1923.\textsuperscript{166} The population had peaked, but such was the determination and fortitude of the settlers that only one forfeiture occurred during the following year.\textsuperscript{167}

Notwithstanding the steady demise of the entire scheme, the initiative and determination of the soldier settlers throughout Queensland is clearly evident. Frustrated by glutted markets and low prices for their pineapples, Beerburrum settlers devised a number of strategies to improve their position, including the ill-fated dehydration co-operative. It surfaces again with the efforts of the unidentified Mount Hutton married couple, who were prepared to battle on despite the annihilation of their entire cotton crop. This particular case also reinforces that soldier settlement was a shared experience, with wives and children playing a largely anonymous, though crucial role.

\textsuperscript{165} \textit{WK}, 5 January 1923, p.24.
\textsuperscript{166} "Report by the Under Secretary for Public Lands under 'The Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Acts, 1917 to 1922'', \textit{QPP}, Vol.1 (1923), p.1345.
Lack of sufficient funding and the limited size of holdings were certainly important factors which undermined the overall scheme. What cannot be overlooked, however, were the detrimental environmental forces with which they were forced to contend. Drought impacted on many soldier settlements throughout the State, though recognition also needs to be accorded to the less prominent adversaries such as plant disease, insect pests and marsupial depredations. For a great many individuals they were totally devastating.

Suffering from its own economic dilemma, particularly through the loans embargo, the Queensland government was unable to provide financial assistance above and beyond that provided by the Commonwealth. Even worse was the inability to secure viable markets, a problem exemplified by the Tolga-Kairi soldier settlement in the far north, where distance and heavy dependence on a single commodity placed the returned servicemen in an extremely precarious position. In common with many of their counterparts to the south, 1923 also proved to be a critical year on the Atherton Tableland.
CHAPTER 10:

MONO-CULTURE AND MALEVOLENCE': THE TIDE EBBS

Times I 'ave thought, when things was goin' crook,
When 'Ope turned nark an' Love forgot to smile,
Of somethin' I once seen in some old book
Where an ole sore'ead arsts, "Is life worf w'ile?"^1

In August 1923 the Atherton Tableland Maize Board was established under the auspices of the Primary Products Pools Act to aid marketing and stabilise prices. The latter was certainly achieved, though as the RSSILA argued in January 1925, the five pounds per tonne paid to growers was barely sufficient to cover production costs. With many soldier settlers being forced to seek outside employment to make ends meet, the organisation warned that perhaps seventy-five percent of the settlers would have to abandon their holdings unless increased payments for maize were made. L.R. Macgregor, Director of the Queensland Producers' Association, responded that the price received under the pooling system was actually two pounds per tonne more than would otherwise have been possible. His argument apparently had the desired effect, for the threat of a mass exodus soon passed. In June 1925, 148 soldier settlers remained on their holdings around Tolga and Kairi, a decrease of only eight from the previous year.5

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3 BC, 10 January 1925, p.16.
4 BC, 13 January 1925, p.6.
For all its inadequacies, there is no reason to accept Ian Dempster’s argument that the Atherton Tableland Maize Board “appears mainly to have served to press for an embargo on South African maize”. Criticism of “black grown” South African maize being imported into Australia and undermining the position of soldier settlers was certainly voiced by the RSSILA, but North Queensland was too peripheral and inconsequential in the Australian economy to have any real impact on national policy.

They were a voice crying in the wilderness, but the stance taken by the RSSILA had altered markedly since the inception of soldier settlement, when their most pressing concern appeared to be the persecution of an ex-AIF soldier settler, George Hennings. According to the RSSILA Hennings was not a bona fide returned serviceman, as he had not served overseas. Attention was also directed at the appointment of W. Hastie as temporary supervisor of the settlement. Transferred from the Public Estate Improvement Branch, Hastie had certainly not served in the AIF, but his Brisbane superiors vociferously defended the appointment, forcing the RSSILA to withdraw their protest.

It is relevant, however, that the permanent position was later given to W.A. Frost, a discharged soldier.

While developmental work relative to soldier settlement normally included the construction of roads, this did not happen on the Atherton Tableland. Instead, shire council roads were requisitioned by the State, with the local authorities being forced to

[^7]: ANBVA, 17 September 1919, p.3.
[^8]: ANBVA, 3 September 1919, p.3.
undertake new work despite their own inadequate funding. They proved to be virtually impassable in wet weather and this exacerbated the problem of marketing produce. Although a macadamised road did not link the Atherton Tableland with the coast until 1926, the settlers did have access—in dry weather at least—to the railway, which had reached Atherton from Mareeba in August 1903.

Fencing was also inadequate prior to 1921. Cattle wandering onto the soldier settlement holdings and damaging cultivation sparked calls for their impoundment, but the Tolga sub-branch of the RSSILA was outraged in March 1920, when it was alleged that soldier settlers were maiming and destroying trespassing stock. The RSSILA countered that “cattle have been shot around Tolga previous to Soldiers Settlement”. Evidence of this was not provided. By June 1921, 6,528 chains of fencing had nevertheless been erected on the settlement, increasing to 7,592 chains by mid-1922. The strength and comradeship of local RSSILA sub-branches was due to many of the first settlers having been discharged members of the Ninth and Fifteenth Battalions, AIF, two of the original landing battalions at Gallipoli. Social solidarity does not appear to have extended to economic matters. An attempt in early 1920 to form a Returned Soldiers’ Co-operative Society dissipated quickly, despite a general merchandising business in Atherton being

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10 ANBVA, 17 September 1919, p.3.
13 ANBVA, 17 September 1919, p.3.
14 ANBVA, 13 March 1920, p.4.
17 WK, 24 October 1919, p.31.
offered to the returned servicemen for a modest sum. Perhaps finances were insufficient, for it was “decided to drop the matter, the present time being inopportune.”

Soldier settlers around Tolga and Kairi were nevertheless fortunate that much of the land had previously been cleared by non-European tenant farmers. Scrub-clearing and timber-felling were dangerous tasks requiring considerable skill, particularly in the dense forest and jungles of the Atherton Tableland. As maize cultivation expanded this was still necessary on the group settlement, although it was the returned servicemen on isolated selections elsewhere who were more exposed to the risk of injury and death when clearing land. Due to their relative inexperience, soldier settlers appear to have been more susceptible to serious accidents than their civilian counterparts. That such mishaps were by no means uncommon was made clear in August 1920:

Another of those terribly frequent scrub felling fatalities occurred on Saturday afternoon last, when a young man named William Wells was killed near Malanda. The deceased had been felling by himself when a tree, kicking back, caught and practically crushed both his legs to pulp. A near neighbour happened to hear his coo-ee for assistance and cut the tree away to release him, but the unfortunate young fellow died within an hour ... With his brother Cecil he had seen a considerable amount of active service, and was one of the last back from the war. The accident happened while clearing his own selection.

Another not infrequent cause of death among returned servicemen occurred the following month when R.J. Evett, a soldier settler near the Barron River, committed suicide “by

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18 ANBVA, 14 February 1920, p.5.
19 ANBVA, 13 March 1920, p.5.
shooting himself". Importantly, there is clear evidence that suicides increased amongst the ranks of soldier settlers as their situation continued to deteriorate. Others struggled on their holdings until finally being overcome by injuries or illness received during military service. In November 1921 J.J. Melvin, a soldier at Kairi, died from complications arising from the gassing he received in Europe. A week later Jack Duffy, a soldier settler at Barrine, died after "a lengthy illness, the aftermath of war services". Notwithstanding these depressing casualties, the Tolga-Kairi soldier settlement continued to grow.

By August 1922 there were 166 soldier settlers at Tolga and Kairi, with six schools catering for the education of their 123 children. One of those pupils was Oscar Bell, who went on to become a school principal. Commencing his schooling in 1920, Bell provided a rare account of a child's experience during soldier settlement that is worth repeating here:

In wet weather it was mandatory to scrape the red soil off one's feet on strips of hoop iron set into wood and stretching across the full width of the stairs. Very few wore shoes, certainly not the boys, whose proudest accomplishments were perhaps the ability to strike a wax vesta match on the sole of the foot or to run bare-footed across a patch of goat's head bindi-eyes. After the first summer rains and the first grass shoot, a child holding a leafy branch would be stationed on each side of the doorway to brush the flies from the back of each child entering the classroom. Children filed to their places at the desks and stood to receive such commands as "Turn", "Seats In", "Sit", etc. Most actions were initiated by commands eg. "Slates" (hands grasped top corners of

21 *ANBVA*, 25 August 1920, p.5.
22 *ANBVA*, 4 September 1920, p.5.
24 *ANBVA*, 12 November 1921, p.3.
25 *ANBVA*, 19 November 1921, p.5.
26 *BC*, 11 August 1922, p.15.
slates). “Out”, (slates withdrawn from slot and placed quietly on the
desk), “Hands Away” (hands placed behind back). When mental
problems were given, hands were held up when the answer was
known. Then came the commands “Answer Down, Hands Away”. We
stood on command, we sat on command, and we filed out and
dismissed on command ... I can’t remember that the school possessed
much sports equipment, or that any attempt was made to organise
children’s activities. Kids then seemed to be a fairly self-reliant lot
endowed with the ability to organise something of interest even at
short notice. There were games of all sorts, requiring little or no
equipment, most of them played seasonally.27

Bell went on to briefly describe the children’s games, but what is important here is the
high degree of regimentation. The spirit of militarism and imperial loyalty was pervasive
in schools after the First World War although, as Libby Connors has shown, it was
certainly in place from the late nineteenth century.28 While the retention of these twin
themes in the public school system did not go unchallenged, it should not be overlooked
that their longevity may have also been associated with the imposition of discipline and
defference on the lower social classes which, of course, included the soldier settlement
children.

By June 1923 there were two additional children on the Tolga-Kairi settlement, though
the number of soldier settlers had fallen to 118.29 The maize harvest was expected to
reach 7,000 tonnes, with the price to be paid to growers reaching £8/10 per tonne—a total
realisation of £59,500.30 This was the one bright year for maize producers on the

28 L. Connors, “‘The Memory of the Anzacs ...’: Implications of World War I for Queensland Schooling to
29 “Report by the Under Secretary for Public Lands under ‘The Discharged Soldiers’ Settlement Acts, 1917
30 BC, 15 August 1923, p.6.
Atherton Tableland, but many had also begun experimenting with subsidiary crops, especially potatoes.

In 1920 six hectares of potatoes were under cultivation on the soldier settlement, increasing to eight hectares the following year, and in 1922 potato crops extended over twenty hectares.\(^\text{31}\) Experiments on the Kairi State farm had shown that the two most suitable varieties were ‘Guyra Blue’ and ‘Up-to-Date’,\(^\text{32}\) with the latter gaining particularly wide acceptance.\(^\text{33}\) Less well received was an attempt in March 1922 to promote sugar cane in the district. While it briefly put “fresh life into the settlers”,\(^\text{34}\) they largely remained dependent on maize, and their ephemeral success in 1923 appears to have quelled any further experimentation in that direction.

The relative prosperity of 1923 quickly gave way to further struggle as prices fell. Perhaps the only affordable ‘commodity’ over the next two years was the cheap labour provided by British ‘farm boys’. The first party arrived in Cairns during July 1924, and all were immediately placed in positions on the Atherton Tableland by the New Settlers’ League.\(^\text{35}\) Their presence did not, however, stem the diminishing area under cultivation at Tolga and Kairi. Falling from 6,304 hectares in 1923 to 4,748 hectares in 1925,\(^\text{36}\) future prospects looked anything but bright. Yet, while inexorable stagnation was gripping the

\(^{31}\) BC, 15 February 1922, p.6.
\(^{32}\) ANBVA, 18 February 1920, p.4.
\(^{33}\) BC, 15 February 1922, p.6.
\(^{34}\) MB, 21 March 1922, p.8.
\(^{35}\) ODR, 26 July 1924, p.32.
Atherton Tableland soldier settlement, their counterparts on the coast at El Arish were forging ahead.

El Arish was to all intent a self-supporting community, with the soldier settlers being paid "especial rates" for contract work which included road construction and bridging, building, fencing, and the laying of portable rails for conveying cane to the mill tramway. Indeed, they were even paid contract rates for loading cane onto the tramway wagons. Unlike soldier settlement elsewhere in Queensland, the prosperity of El Arish through sugar cane growing clearly encouraged the State government to provide liberal support. Nor was there any shortage of basic commodities:

Every homestead has its acre or two of farming, its garden plots, its vegetable patch, its fruit trees, horses, and cattle, drays, carts, and implements. Every housewife boasts of good breeds of poultry, abundance of eggs, of milk and butter.

The township had also experienced substantial growth by November 1923:

An interesting feature of the settlement is a township near the station which now is being formed, consisting of some 69 quarter-acre blocks. These are being taken up with a wonderful readiness. Stores and trades of all kinds are beginning to make a show, whilst already the butcher, the baker, and the grocer are thriving. The founding of a School of Arts, and the building of a big social hall are all planned for the near future. There is a post office with telephone connection to Innisfail. A bank has been opened, and a State school has a daily average attendance of over 30 children. There is no hotel, and none likely to be in the El Arish settlement itself.

37 *WK*, 2 November 1923, p.3.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
The post office and telephone exchange occupied one section of the general store operated by a returned serviceman, which was permitted to run in opposition to the State store. Compared with many other soldier settlements, the administration of El Arish was thus remarkably flexible, perhaps partly due to the supervisor, F.P. Martin, who was considered to be both an experienced agriculturalist and "a most capable administrator". To be sure, he was almost certainly given a relatively free hand by the State government.

By June 1924 eighty-three soldier settlers were cultivating a combined total of 2,347 hectares, with cane production rising accordingly. 6,000 tonnes of cane was crushed during the first season in 1922, and 17,500 tonnes the following year. In 1924 the 28,000 tonne estimate was still well within the 40,000 tonnes permissible under the permit system. For all that, El Arish was not immune from the constant experimentation in Queensland to maximise agricultural production:

Badilla is, of course, the main cane grown, but several growers are trying out E.K.28, M.1900, Q.116, Sport, and 7R.428 (Pompey). Some growers are inquiring for Q.813 for the poorer classes of land.

There was a clear contrast between the two major soldier settlements in North Queensland, and yet both concentrated on a single crop. El Arish was soon to experience
its own minor downturn, but sugar cane was a rigidly controlled primary industry with a largely guaranteed market. Maize, on the other hand, was usually at the mercy of fluctuating markets that defied efforts to stabilise prices. The soldier settlers on the Atherton Tableland had far more in common with their southern counterparts than those at El Arish. On the Highlands soldier settlement near Samford in South Queensland, the destruction of banana crops from frost ensured a temporary divergence from monoculture, though it did not lead to an elevated financial position for the remaining soldier settlers.

By June 1922 the number of soldier settlers at Highlands had fallen to twenty-eight. Only three persevered with bananas, the extent of cultivation being less than fourteen hectares. Oats, maize and potatoes were being grown, dairy cattle had increased to 488 head, and the twenty-three pigs on the settlement served a dichotomous purpose by consuming excess separated milk which fattened them for market. Poultry had also risen in importance. In 1922, Henry Jorgensen acquired an abandoned holding adjoining his own and commenced growing small crops. After first taking up land at Highlands in 1921, Jorgensen lived in a tent, travelling home to his family in the Brisbane suburb of Gaythorne every weekend. In 1922, however, he built a slab humpy that became the family home for the next three years:

It was lined with hessian, which was whitewashed. The floor was rammed earth, covered with cornsack carpet (cornsacks were opened lengthwise, then sewn together to make a rug). This was laid firmly on

44 Ibid.
the earth and spiked down with long nails. (I remember Mum used to sprinkle tea leaves on it before sweeping, to keep the dust down). It never moved. 46

In 1925 Jorgensen had prospered well enough to build a more substantial dwelling. Like many others he also made the mistake of later returning to banana cultivation. 47 There were, however, more immediate problems. Despite the State government having spent £18,500 on road construction in the area up to March 1922, the soldier settlers still experienced considerable difficulty in conveying their produce to the railway at Samford. 48 They found a useful ally in former Federal parliamentarian, Patrick Leahy, who urged State authorities to use the available Commonwealth funds to improve the settlement’s main access road:

The length of this road is about three miles. The grades are easy, but there are not many places wide enough for two vehicles to cross, and it is absolutely necessary that there should be additional crossing places. About a mile of the road is soft, and, after even light rain, is slippery and not safe for traffic. This mile would require to be gravelled. I do not think that the expense of making the necessary crossing places and the gravelling would amount to a very large sum. There are Returned Soldiers on the settlement to whom work on this road would be very acceptable. 49

Premier Theodore agreed, advising Prime Minister Hughes that Pine Rivers Shire Council would require £3,000 to carry out “metalling or gravelling bad sections” of the

46 Ibid., pp.8-9.
48 P.J. Leahy, National Mutual Chambers, Brisbane, to Treasurer, Treasury Buildings, Brisbane, 30 August 1922, LAN/AKl 32, Batch 827, “Commonwealth and State grant for employment on road work of discharged Soldiers 1922”, QSA.
Highlands access road.\textsuperscript{50} Ironically, the long-term effect of improved road conditions invested the soldier settlers with yet another financial burden. By early 1928 increased tourist traffic resulted in higher rate charges for road maintenance.\textsuperscript{51}

Perhaps it was cotton that encouraged five more returned servicemen to take up selections at Highlands in 1923, for twelve settlers experimenting with this crop achieved such promising results that by June "practically every settler is preparing land for cotton". At this stage only two settlers continued with bananas.\textsuperscript{52} Prospects looked even brighter the following month when it was announced that a Revaluation Board would conduct investigations into soldier settlement and make recommendations.\textsuperscript{53} G.S. Hulcombe was elected to place the case of Highlands before the Board,\textsuperscript{54} which proved only moderately sympathetic to their plight. Of the £15,217 liability and interest owed by the twenty-six soldier settlers still in occupation by late 1924, £2,276 was written off.\textsuperscript{55} That still left a considerable sum owing.

Minor gains were made from cotton in 1924, with one unidentified soldier settler harvesting 5,542 kilograms from his nine hectares.\textsuperscript{56} They were indeed fortunate. Preparing their land for cotton the previous year the settlers commenced burning off large areas of brush, and the fires soon raged out of control. A. Broughton lost part of his

\textsuperscript{50} E.G. Theodore, Chief Secretary’s Office, Brisbane, to Right Honourable Prime Minister of the Commonwealth, Melbourne, 21 September 1922, \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{51} \textit{BC}, 4 February 1928, p.13.
\textsuperscript{53} \textit{WK}, 20 July 1923, p.7.
\textsuperscript{54} \textit{BC}, 7 September 1923, p.10.
\textsuperscript{56} \textit{BC}, 23 May 1924, p.11.
banana crop and a packing shed, while John Dwyer's house was only saved by the "strenuous efforts of himself and neighbours". L. Meharry was lucky to escape alive. Cut off by the fire, he was forced to run through the flames "which severely burned him about the face and head". Gains thus came at a price.

The resurgence of cotton growing in Queensland was of relatively brief duration. With the industry and concomitant markets dominated by British investors, particularly the British Australian Cotton Growing Association (BACA), a guaranteed pricing structure could not be effected. The BACA also incensed many Queensland growers by its insistence on new plantings, rather than the common practice of allowing new shoots (ratoon) to grow after each harvest. This became an extremely serious issue in Queensland, with the growers eventually forcing the BACA to accept ratoon cotton, or face the alternative of a reduced supply through producers turning to alternative crops.

The State's cotton industry was complex, with over-investment by the BACA undermining its own position. Internal problems were further compounded by the disastrous drought conditions persisting throughout much of Queensland during the 1920s. As Robert Longhurst noted in his study of the industry, cultivation dwindled rapidly:

In spite of their victory in the ratoon debate, growers were increasingly concerned with the prospect that the guaranteed price per pound would cease in 1926. This uncertainty, combined with a series of drought

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57 BC, 29 September 1923, p.9.
58 Longhurst, Queensland Cotton, p.51.
59 Cochrane, Blockade, p.65.
years, saw acreage picked decline from 50,186 acres in 1923/4 to 40,062 in 1924/5, and suddenly to 25,000 in 1925/6.\(^6^0\)

The Highlands soldier settlement was seldom affected by drought, but with their previous over-reliance on a single crop there can be little doubt that anxieties were great among the settlers. On the broader stage their harvests were also inconsequential, and in the event of a sudden downturn the settlers stood to lose practically everything. It is clear that few continued growing cotton after 1924. For the soldier settlers at Ridgelands in Central Queensland, drought and water shortages had a major impact not only on cotton, but all forms of agricultural enterprise.

Heavy crop losses from water shortages occurred in early 1923 and, in an attempt to overcome the problem, wells varying in depth from twenty-seven to thirty-six metres were sunk throughout the settlement. The result was saline water for some, no water at all for others.\(^6^1\) While a number of soldier settlers at South Yaamba were able to draw supplies direct from the Fitzroy River,\(^6^2\) a proposal to divert water from this source to other areas received no encouragement.\(^6^3\) There was thus little alternative than to diversify. By June 1923 pig-raising had been added to dairying, and crops under cultivation included cotton, potatoes, maize, pineapples, bananas, lucerne and Rhodes Grass.\(^6^4\) A deputation of soldier settlers also met with Acting Prime Minister, Earle Page, during his visit to Rockhampton in October. The subjects were water, or lack thereof, and

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\(^6^0\) Longhurst, *Queensland Cotton*, p.57.
\(^6^1\) BC, 20 April 1923, p.6.
\(^6^3\) BC, 23 April 1923, p.9.
additional finance. Beyond a request that their case be put in writing, little was achieved.\(^5\)

Yet State officials clearly recognised the predicament of the settlement. In August 1923 the Chief Supervisor, C.T.O. Shepherd, commented:

> Good country, but in a particularly dry belt. The drawback to success being the inability to obtain water, and, in some instances, smallness of area. The latter question is now being remedied ... Until difficulties of obtaining water are overcome, I see no future for this Settlement as a dairying proposition. In my opinion, Ridgelands should never have been selected.\(^6\)

The only possibility for success, continued Shepherd, lay in the cultivation of cotton. In October rain brought temporary relief for the settlers. As the Head Teacher of Ridgelands Provisional School, Elizabeth McLaughlin, pointed out to her superiors, this unusual change simply added to her own difficulties:

> I am writing to inform you that I did not attend school on Tuesday 4\(^{th}\) September, as it was raining the previous night and that morning, and owing to the road being under repair it was impossible for me to walk along it. I have 2½ miles to walk to school and the majority of the children have at present 3 or over 3 miles to walk. The present site of the school is the main cause of non-attendance and lates.\(^7\)

\(^5\) *BC*, 29 October 1923, p.5.
\(^6\) C.T.O. Shepherd, Soldier Settlement Branch, to Minister for Lands, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 13 August 1923, LAN/167 (1916-31), QSA.
\(^7\) Elizabeth McLaughlin, Ridgelands Provisional School, Ridgelands, to Under Secretary, Department of Public Instruction, Brisbane, 2 October 1923, EDU/Z2335, "Ridgelands", QSA.
Non-attendances were soon to increase as the soldier settlers began abandoning their holdings. Sixty-four remained on the settlement in June 1924, but environmental factors, particularly water shortages, meant that the £8,323 recommended to be written off the total liability of £71,841 by the Revaluation Board brought no tangible relief. In October 1924 the Board's chairman, M.B. Salisbury, acknowledged the adverse conditions yet, at the same time, contended that much of the problem lay with the settlers themselves:

A number of the settlers are inexperienced in all matters pertaining to the land and, consequently, only a few are so far successful. A good many take work on roads and on construction work in connection with the Yaamba water scheme, their holdings being neglected in the meanwhile. Large areas of cotton were grown last season with partial success, those settlers who got early crops were more successful than those who had late crops. The dairying industry is greatly retarded by the want of surface water, in which this section of the Settlement is deficient ... Water is difficult to obtain by sinking, even to great depths ... Fortunately the greater portion of the settlers of a bad type have taken their departure: there are still a few who are simply 'hanging on' to their holdings (some of which comprise fair to good cultivable areas) for convenience and who have no intention of ever trying to make a success of the venture.

Ironically, the Yaamba Water Supply Scheme on which a number of the soldier settlers were employed, was commenced in January 1924 to supply pure water to the city of Rockhampton—not to the settlement. More difficult to understand is Salisbury's scathing criticism of the settlers, whose only reason to remain for "convenience"

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effectively meant until such time as outside work terminated or they were in a position to vacate the settlement. As time was to show, those who finally left included far more than Salisbury’s “bad types”.

At Ubobo, in the Boyne Valley to the south, many of the soldier settlers were undoubtedly inexperienced in agriculture. By April 1923 most had also exhausted their available funds and began agitating for financial assistance. It was not forthcoming. Yet according to the official government report on the settlement, the settlers remained “optimistic” regarding their prospects—notwithstanding the “past dry seasons” that had resulted in heavy crop losses. The acreage under cotton was increased in 1923, only to be decimated by insect pests, rather than drought. Combined with the embargo on ratoon cotton, few attempted to repeat the experiment the following year. Unfortunately, many turned to maize with almost equally disastrous results:

Some very good crops of maize have recently been harvested, but owing to the low price offering and the uncertainty of the market settlers were not keen on producing further large areas of this particular crop; other cereal crops (oats, barley, wheat, etc.) and potatoes and lucerne are, however, being cultivated, a portion of which is being grown for dairy cows, dairying being more profitable to the farmer and a more certain income than large areas of cotton imperfectly cultivated and which are likely to become grub infested, or destroyed by drought.

71 L. McDonald, Rockhampton: A History of City and District (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1981), p.120.
72 BC, 24 April 1923, p.12.
75 Ibid.
How dairy cattle were to cope with drought conditions was left unsaid. In contrast to his condemnation of the soldier settlers at Ridgelands, however, M.B. Salisbury considered the Ubobo settlers to be "a good type, hard-working and industrious". This was an unusual assessment, as the majority of the settlers were British ex-servicemen with virtually no knowledge of Australian conditions. Moreover, by June 1924 only forty-five remained in the Boyne Valley. In Queensland's extreme south, high altitude and cooler conditions ensured that there was no possibility of cotton providing an alternative crop for the soldier settlers on the Granite Belt. Yet their circumstances were little different from the settlers to the north through their heavy reliance on vegetable cultivation. In early 1923, for instance, over-production of Granite Belt tomatoes contributed to a serious glut in southern Queensland markets. It also made a mockery of the State government's adoption of a new marketing strategy, implemented the previous year.

Under the Primary Products Pools Act of 1922 producers in various primary industries were brought together to facilitate bulk handling and marketing. The scheme was already in operation for wheat and cheese and was simply extended to encompass a plethora of agricultural produce, including tomatoes. As over-production led to a serious fall in

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76 Ibid.
77 J. Threadingham, Some Memories of the Boyne Valley (s.l: s.n., 1982), p.53.
79 Skerman, Fisher and Lloyd, Guiding Queensland Agriculture, p.146.
prices, it was envisaged that susceptible produce, now classed as commodities, could be held in storage until the price again rose to an acceptable level. That was the theory.

To carry out procedures local boards were constituted in specifically defined geographical regions, though it is clear that many growers were actually located outside the jurisdiction of the boards and continued to compete on the open market. Importantly, no arrangement was made between the States to prevent the deposition of surplus produce across State borders. In his study of Queensland’s primary industries during this period, Douglas Blackmur suggested that perhaps the most significant factor contributing to the failure of pooling by 1925 was the regular arrival of southern produce on Queensland markets. Conversely, it is readily apparent that among other crops, substantial quantities of Queensland tomatoes were frequently sold on Sydney markets.

The output of tomatoes from the Granite Belt in January 1923 was considerable, amounting to 250,000 cases. Canners, including their own government-run co-operative, processed 80,000 cases, with the remainder being sold on fresh fruit markets. Under the pooling system the soldier settlers received 3/6 per case, a price which fell far below the usual market price of eight shillings. The entire crop was sold, and though it appears that the growers were initially satisfied with gaining a guaranteed price, rather than

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81 BC, 27 February 1923, p.8.
82 Blackmur, “The Primary Industries of Queensland”, p.44.
83 BC, 24 February 1923, p.8.
85 BC, 27 February 1923, p.8.
having to compete on the open market, it also meant that few made any profit.\(^6\) In April
the State government advanced twenty pounds per acre to each settler who cleared up to
ten additional acres (four hectares) on their holdings.\(^7\) What seems to have been
overlooked was that more clearing, more crops, could only exacerbate over-production.

Pikedale soldier settlers found that any minor gains were quickly dissipated. In April
1923 it was alleged that the Amiens State store was over-charging customers, and
accrued profits had not been re-distributed among the settlers as promised.\(^8\) Revenge
came in July, when thieves broke into the store and removed a cart and a quantity of
harness.\(^9\) It may have been the same culprits who raided the house of a soldier settler
named Cameron the following August, when more harness was stolen, along with a horse
and cart containing a plough.\(^10\) The State store was struck again in October 1924, but this
time the object was seed potatoes and maize, perhaps indicative of increased want on the
settlement.\(^11\) While no arrests were made in relation to these thefts, the Amiens baker,
William Stokes, was fortunate on the two separate occasions when his premises were
burgled. In September 1923 Thomas Paton was charged at Stanthorpe with the theft of a
stove from the bakery and committed to stand trial.\(^12\) Dave Brooks committed the same
offence in May 1924 and received a two-year suspended sentence. Placed on a good
behaviour bond,\(^13\) Brooks was almost certainly in desperate circumstances.

\(^{86}\) BC, 20 March 1923, p.7.
\(^{88}\) BC, 11 April 1923, p.17.
\(^{89}\) BC, 30 July 1923, p.10.
\(^{90}\) BC, 1 September 1923, p.10.
\(^{91}\) BC, 13 October 1924, p.11.
\(^{92}\) BC, 18 September 1923, p.9.
An ex-AIF soldier, Brooks was allotted Portion 366 at Thulimbah in November 1920.\textsuperscript{94} Having failed to lodge a formal application with the accompanying deposit, the State government began pressuring Brooks and other soldier settlers to meet their obligations in August 1924.\textsuperscript{95} Brooks replied that drought, then hail, had respectively affected his crops during the past two seasons and sought an extension of six months.\textsuperscript{96} He was granted two months, but did not lodge his formal application and was unable to pay the deposit.\textsuperscript{97} In June 1925 Brooks explained that he had been forced to take outside work and had only just begun to prepare his land for cultivation, but he assured government officials that “if I make anything out of the crop I shall be able to pay a Deposit of the first years rent”.\textsuperscript{98} He was supported by Harry Clark, now Land Ranger, and granted an extension until the following December.\textsuperscript{99} When payment again fell due he insisted that:

As I have nothing to send away off from crops untill [sic] about the end of January I cannot see how I am going to pay my deposit of rent ... Will you please let me know if you will give me another month as I have a good crop of Potatoes & other vegetables that I shall be able to send between now and then—otherwise there is nothing fit to send away now only a few bags of Beans & Peas and that will not be very much but I shall be pleased to pay in the deposit as soon as I get the money off my crops. I cannot do any better than that.\textsuperscript{100}

\textsuperscript{93} BC, 21 May 1924, p.5.
\textsuperscript{94} Under Secretary, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, to Land Commissioner (Stanthorpe District), Toowoomba, 19 August 1927, LAN/AK118, Batch 703, “Cottonvale Resumptions”, Part 1(B), QSA.
\textsuperscript{95} A.G. Melville, Under Secretary of Public Lands, Brisbane, to Mr. D. Brooks, Soldier Settlement, Amiens, 27 September 1924, LAN/AK118, Batch 703, “Cottonvale Resumptions”, Part 1(E), QSA.
\textsuperscript{96} D. Brooks, Thulimbah, to Under Secretary, Dept. of Public Lands, Brisbane, 23 September 1924, LAN/AK119, Batch 703, “Cottonvale Resumptions”, Part 2, QSA.
\textsuperscript{97} A.G. Melville, Under Secretary, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, to Mr. D. Brooks, Soldier Settlement, Amiens, 27 October 1924, LAN/AK118, Batch 703, “Cottonvale Resumptions”, Part 1(E), QSA.
\textsuperscript{98} Dave Brooks, Thulimbah, to Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 16 June 1925, LAN/AK118, Batch 703, “Cottonvale Resumptions”, Part 1(D), QSA.
\textsuperscript{100} Dave Brooks, Thulimbah, to Land Agent, Stanthorpe, 19 December 1925, \textit{Ibid.}
No further action appears to have been taken against Brooks until March 1927, when he was again forced to explain his personal situation:

I would like you to give me until the middle of next month to pay off my first years rent as I did not have much to send away in the early part of the season on account of the Drought & I am only just starting on my late crop. I cleared four acres of ground last Winter & also put a good well down on the place. I want to get my first years rent paid up as soon as I can & will try to get it fixed up by next month as I want to keep this Block. I also had to replace another horse on the Settlement as the one I had died & that cost me a few more Pounds. ¹⁰¹

By the following September even his erstwhile supporter, Harry Clark, accepted that Brooks was unlikely to meet his financial obligations. Yet Clark’s comments also suggest that Brooks was largely a victim of circumstances beyond his control:

Brooks is at present working away from home, but from information received from the wife of the settler, I believe there is little likelihood of his meeting his obligations, in this connection, for some time to come. Part of the available cleared land has recently been cultivated and the fruit trees pruned, but returns from the late season’s crop have been small, and Brooks has a family of eight; his prospect for the coming season is therefore not bright.¹⁰²

On Brooks making yet another promise to pay, Clark supported a further extension of time.¹⁰³ It was not met, and Brooks now complained of the quality of the fruit trees which

¹⁰¹ Dave Brooks, Thulimbah, to Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 4 March 1927, LAN/AK118, Batch 703, “Cottonvale Resumptions”, Part 1(B), QSA.
¹⁰³ H. Clark, Land Ranger, Stanthorpe Soldier Settlement, Amiens, to Land Commissioner, Stanthorpe District, Toowoomba, 23 September 1927, Ibid.
he had been supplied. After inspection by officers of the Department of Public Lands, it was agreed to replace 150 trees on his holding.\textsuperscript{104} Time, however, was fast running out. In July 1928 Brooks notified the department that he had again been forced to take outside employment, “and doesn’t see any way of paying the dues in the near future”.\textsuperscript{105} He elaborated on his position the following month:

\begin{quote}
Untill \textit{[sic]} last year there was no fruit produced, and last season I was unfortunately hit with hail on two occasions, and with the low price on the markets for prime fruit, mine was practically unsaleable. I have a large family of little ones depending on me and it has taken me all my time working away from home to provide for them. This year promises to be a good one for the orchard, as a large amount of fruit is showing & with my work outside, saving a little I think by the end of February I would be able to do something satisfactory.\textsuperscript{106}
\end{quote}

Brooks disappeared from the official records after having been granted a further extension of one month. This time he was warned that non-compliance would definitely result in forfeiture.\textsuperscript{107} The evasive tactics of Brooks are notable for their longevity, and according to comments made the Reverend J.H. Brown-Beresford, divine intervention was often a necessary prerequisite for success. During an inspection of the Stanthorpe soldier settlements in June 1923 Brown-Beresford noted that a number of settlers on poor land were doing remarkably well, and “oddly enough, these were good churchmen”.\textsuperscript{108} Brooks was not among them.

\textsuperscript{104} “The Discharged Soldiers’ Settlement Acts”, G.S.S.1399, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 25 October 1927, \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{105} Memorandum, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 31 July 1928, \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{106} Dave Brooks (Block 366), Thulimbah, to Mr. T. Dunstan, Secretary for Public Lands, Brisbane, 15 August 1928, \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{107} Secretary, Department of Public Lands, to Mr. E. Costello, M.I.A., Parliament House, Brisbane, 23 August 1928, \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{108} BC, 19 June 1923, p.6.
The official figures for June 1923 reveal that ninety-four soldier settlers had abandoned their holdings on the Granite Belt during the previous year. In view of this massive exodus the State government began encouraging civilian settlers to take up the abandoned selections, as H. Slade found when making inquiries in September 1923. The following month Arthur Facey, a soldier settler, was able to negotiate an agreement over the now defunct State farm, whereby he harvested the remaining fruit “on a 50%-50% basis”. The deal proved satisfactory to both Facey and the government, unlike the leasing arrangement made the following year. In March 1924 Harry Clark informed his Brisbane superiors that:

The lessees have had repeatedly to be warned in regard to their lack of attention to harvesting the crop and have occasionally to be forced to comply with the conditions of the lease. On one occasion I have been compelled to employ an extra hand to assist in picking up and destroying unmarketable fruit, at, of course, the expense of the lessees. I have warned the lessees that unless the very best attention is given to the area in question, the lease will be cancelled and I recommend such action if the desired attention is not given.

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110 H. Slade, Ballandean, via Stanthorpe, to Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 8 September 1923, LAN/AK119, Batch 703, “Cottonvale Resumptions”, Part 2.
111 Arthur E. Facey, Block 197, Amiens, to Officer in Charge, Soldier Settlement, Amiens, 8 October 1923, Ibid.
112 “Extract from Monthly Progress Report by Supervisor Clark, Amiens Soldiers’ Settlement”, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 4 March 1924, Ibid.
113 H. Clark, Supervisor, Stanthorpe Soldier Settlement, Amiens, to Officer in Charge, Soldier Settlement Branch, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 4 March 1924, Ibid.
The lease was apparently cancelled, and despite Clark's belief that the orchard would "become a valuable asset", his Brisbane superior warned that no further expense was to be incurred. The reduction of expenditure in regard to soldier settlement had clearly risen to the fore. On the other hand, over-ambition eventually proved to be the undoing of the soldier settler, Geoffrey Stinson, who applied for an abandoned holding, Portion 263, adjacent to his own at Spring Creek, south of Amiens. Stinson made his successful application in December 1923, under the impression that "being a condemned block suitable for grazing only" the land could be held free from rent. That had been previous policy, but times had now changed. Without any legal basis, the Department of Public Lands began extracting rents from such holdings.

As with F.R. Boyce, Stinson's own machinations confused the issue. When made aware of the altered policy in February 1924 Stinson denied that he had applied for Portion 263, insisting that his application had actually been for Portion 264. The following August, however, he readily agreed that he had applied for Portion 263, and also to pay £297/10/3 for improvements, as it is "my ambition to have the two areas joined together". Unfortunately, Stinson was unable to make the payment on his original holding and sought the assistance of the RSSILA:

114 "Extract from Monthly Report dated 8th April, 1924, from Supervisor, Amiens", Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, Ibid.
115 A.G. Melville, Under Secretary, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, to Supervisor, Soldiers' Settlement, Amiens, 16 April 1924, Ibid.
116 G.H. Stinson, Spring Creek, via Stanthorpe, to Minister for Lands, Brisbane, 29 December 1923, LAN/AK118, Batch 703, "Cottonvale Resumptions", Part 1(D), QSA.
117 G.H. Stinson, Spring Creek, via Stanthorpe, to A.G. Melville, Under Secretary for Public Lands, Brisbane, undated, Ibid.
118 G.H. Stinson, Spring Creek, via Stanthorpe, to Minister for Lands, Brisbane, 14 August 1924, Ibid.
I am asked by our Secretary at Stanthorpe to state that Stinson is unable to pay the amount stated now since he spent all his money on fertilisers etc., and it will be December before he gets a return from his Crops. Would it be possible for you to arrange that he pay the necessary deposit then.\textsuperscript{119}

A.G. Melville, Under Secretary for Public Lands, complied with this request,\textsuperscript{120} but Stinson never did get around to making the payment on his land. In April 1926, after numerous reminders, the Lands Inspector was unable to “ascertain the borrower’s whereabouts and it is the general opinion in the district that he has now gone for good”.\textsuperscript{121} Stinson had finally joined the exodus.

Thoughts of surrender were still far from the minds of “thirty or forty” Bapaume soldier settlers in January 1924, when they prepared to harvest an estimated 15,000 cases of tomatoes from their combined acreage.\textsuperscript{122} Similarly, soldier settler vineyards were reportedly flourishing two months later at Glen Aplin, south of Stanthorpe.\textsuperscript{123} Others were less fortunate. Soldier settlers at Amiens, who were dependent on road construction to subsidise their incomes, received a devastating blow in May 1924 when they were suddenly retrenched.\textsuperscript{124}

\textsuperscript{119} G. Simpson, Acting State Secretary, Returned Sailors and Soldiers Imperial League of Australia (Queensland Branch), to Under Secretary for Public Lands, Brisbane, 20 August 1924, \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{120} Under Secretary, Department of Public Lands, to Mr. G. Simpson, Acting State Secretary, The R.S.&S.I.L.A., 155 Elizabeth Street, Brisbane, 19 September 1924, \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{119} “The Discharged Soldiers’ Settlement Acts”, G.S.S.1363, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 10 June 1926, \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{121} \textit{QDR}, 19 January 1924, p.20.
\textsuperscript{122} \textit{QDR}, 15 March 1924, p.23.
\textsuperscript{123} \textit{BC}, 19 May 1924, p.8.
With a few minor exceptions, the situation was clearly deteriorating. In June 1924 eighty-five soldier settlers remained around Amiens, with a further 118 near Cottonvale and forty-four scattered elsewhere throughout the Granite Belt. Over the previous twelve months at least fifty had abandoned their holdings. The position became even more intolerable from August, when the State government made a concerted effort to force the settlers to lodge formal applications along with the stipulated deposit fee—and to pay interest on improvements. In response to this pressure the Pozieres soldier settler, Ashby Sikes, outlined his circumstances:

I beg to inform you that I have not got this amount of money as small as it is, and it seems to me from the notification sent to me ... I am to lose my block after 3 years of occupation and work. Last season was a bad one for me. 10 acres of tomatoes yielding about 50½ bushel cases, owing to hail and wilt disease. The hail also destroyed my crop of 2 acres of cabbages. As a matter of fact my expenses were more than I received, which has caused me to get heavily into debt. I owe the local storekeeper £40, Butcher £10 and Baker £7. It is going to be a severe task to wipe off these debts and to keep square as the season advances even if the season is a good one besides I am having to get all seed and fertilizer on credit indeed the outlook is gloomy.

With a wife and child to support, Sikes was under no illusion regarding his future if the holding was forfeited: “I am 35 years of age, and do not like my chance of finding employment in the city again”. B. Vise at Cottonvale was in a similar predicament:

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127 Ibid.
I am trying hard to make this vegetable & orchard proposition a paying concern, but have had very little success so far—most of us rather complain of the short seasons here—but I am thinking if they were of long duration, the agony would only be prolonged.  

This seemed to be fairly typical throughout the Granite Belt, for in December 1924 the Land Agent reported that “a considerable number of the portions” at Nundubbermere, south of Amiens, had been abandoned. Future prospects only appeared bright for the fortunate few on good land, with the right crop, at the right time. Moreover, though a number of orchards were beginning to bear commercial quantities of fruit from early 1925, many soldier settlers still remained heavily dependent on vegetable cultivation. K.H. Malpas of Thorndale was among the latter, with dependence at the mercy of environmental factors:

I find that I have not been able to clear as much off the crops as I anticipated owing to the complete failure of my tomatoe [sic] crop, on a/c of hail, having no fruit trees bearing just my tomatoes were my main crops. Since taking over my holding, three years ago, I have not made enough money off my block to keep me in food, & have expended the money I had when taking over this portion. So far this season I have not made enough off my block to pay [the] storekeepers a/c, so find it beyond my means to meet my rent. 

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128 B. Vise, Cottonvale, to Under Secretary for Public Lands, Brisbane, 26 September 1924, Ibid.
130 BC, 13 February 1925, p.11.
Malpas fell ill in March 1925, and it was agreed to allow him until the following June to meet his financial obligations.\(^{132}\) No extension was sought by another Thorndale settler, E.H. Little, who graciously informed Harry Clark that “I am sorry to have to write this letter to you but owing to not having anything to carry on with I am obliged [sic] to give up here.”\(^{133}\) Little abandoned his two selections in May 1925.\(^{134}\)

In yet another attempt to recoup some of the lost expenditure, the Department of Public Lands held an auction at Amiens in February 1925. Comprising property from abandoned holdings, it drew a large attendance, with “a lot of the iron and timber” being purchased by the remaining soldier settlers.\(^{135}\) Whether this reflected a shortage of those materials, or that reserves were low enough to make them affordable, is not clear. One who almost certainly did not purchase was Frank Hewitt, a soldier settler at Pozieres. An ex-imperial serviceman, Hewitt recounted his experience in April 1925 and his statements are worth quoting at some length, for the reality of soldier settlement was at complete variance from what he had been led to expect:

> Whilst in a Manchester hospital recovering from the effects of gas poisoning, I read an article explaining what the Queensland Government were doing to place ex-soldiers on the land. Beerburrum was the settlement briefly mentioned, where £250 per year could be made out of 5 acres of pineapples, & with such a glowing account I decided to write to the Soldier Settlement Dept Brisbane, & after

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\(^{133}\) E.H. Little, Thorndale, Stanthorpe, to Mr. H. Clark, Supervisor, Stanthorpe Soldier Settlement, Amiens, 14 April 1925, LAN/AK119, Batch 703, “Cottonvale Resumptions”, Part 4, QSA.


\(^{135}\) *BC*, 19 February 1925, p.13.

At the time of Hewitt’s arrival no land ballots were being held at Beerburrum, and he was advised to apply for a holding on the Pikedale soldier settlement:

I asked how long it would be before I got a return for orcharding, & was told a few years, but that keep would be afforded to enable me to carry on. I have been on my block almost five years & hav’n’t slept off it for three—& after working as hard as my physical condition will allow, I am far worse off than on the day of my arrival. I had £45 when I started on my Block & what with bad seasons the prospect is hopeless. Last season, early on I put in 2 acres of potatoes & owing to the torrential rains I got only 50 sugar bags & they only brought £5 or £6. Seeing that I have wasted five years of my life & have lived in a state of semi-starvation … I am justified in asking for some consideration to enable me to get back to England to my old employment which by the way is open to me. I am not strong—in fact my weight is only 7½ stone and having to look after myself I dont [sic] get the food I should. I have never been in receipt of a pension as most settlers are & that is the reason why they are hanging on to their blocks … I have worked hard & the number of my consignments sent to the market will justify my assertion.\footnote{W. McCormack, Minister for Lands, Brisbane, to Mr. Frank Hewitt, 20 Julia Street, [Fortitude] Valley, 13 May 1925, \textit{Ibid.}}

Hewitt had already fled to Brisbane when he was informed that “no funds” were available to assist him.\footnote{Under Secretary, Department of Public Lands, to Manager, Agricultural Bank, Brisbane, 28 May 1925, \textit{Ibid.}} On the other hand, the Department of Public Lands was obviously delighted that Hewitt’s “movable articles have been recovered and taken into stock”.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}}

He was almost certainly left in virtual destitution.

\footnotesize{\begin{itemize}
\item \textit{Ibid.}
\item W. McCormack, Minister for Lands, Brisbane, to Mr. Frank Hewitt, 20 Julia Street, [Fortitude] Valley, 13 May 1925, \textit{Ibid.}
\item Under Secretary, Department of Public Lands, to Manager, Agricultural Bank, Brisbane, 28 May 1925, \textit{Ibid.}
\end{itemize}}
Nor was Hewitt alone. Responding to questioning by Edward Costello MLA, whose electorate encompassed the Granite Belt, the Minister for Public Lands, William McCormack, revealed in August 1925 that since the inception of soldier settlement in the district, 501 returned servicemen had selected land. Of that number 215 remained, with 286 thus having forfeited their holdings. The pressure placed on the settlers to meet their repayments was worse for those whose residence had only been brief. A.E. Fordyce, a soldier settler at Cottonvale, commented on this in June 1925:

I would point out that I have only had this place for twelve months and transformed it from a wilderness to a young orchard. So far I have made a bare existence [sic] & no provision was made for this years rent.

Fordyce received an extension until the end of the year—along with the ominous warning that “this extension is final”. For others, hardships were compounded by personal tragedies. Thomas Poole was a dominant force behind many community activities on Pikedale soldier settlement, and he threw himself into this work with increased vigour following the death of his wife in September 1925. Despite being burdened with six dependent children, Poole’s energy seemed inexhaustible. Barely one month after his wife’s death he was elected to the directorate of the Local Producers’ Association.

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141 A.E. Fordyce, Cotton Vale, to Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 22 June 1925, LAN/AK 118, Batch 703, “Cottonvale Resumptions”, Part 1(E), QSA.
142 Under Secretary for Public Lands, Brisbane, to Land Commissioner, Stanthorpe, 29 July 1925, Ibid.
Personal tragedies and the exodus of soldier settlers was not, of course, the sole preserve of the Granite Belt region. Indeed, the overall demise of soldier settlement in Queensland was so rapid, and to some extent so expected, that even previously sympathetic newspapers tended to relegate the subject to less prominent columns. Pressured to repay their financial obligations to the State, the settlers frequently found that environmental obstacles were insurmountable. Experimentation was attempted, but this, too, often failed. Moreover, many of the returned servicemen were further handicapped by their lack of farming experience, and this is certainly borne out by the evidence in central Queensland.

El Arish, of course, was not typical of the soldier settlements. Concentrating on sugar cane, the settlers benefitted from the rigid control imposed on the industry, and also liberal government support. It was clearly a viable agricultural proposition, unlike the drama being played out on the Atherton Tableland where the soldier settlers’ maize crops were at the mercy of an open market and fluctuating prices. Yet despite the adversity, Tolga-Kairi soldier settlers evinced a special pride in their status as veterans, particularly those who had served at Gallipoli, and it was undoubtedly the comradeship and a belief in their own superiority that kept many grimly holding on. As Frank Hewitt, the English ex-soldier on the Granite Belt found, the Queensland government was not in the financial position to support the rhetoric which it espoused. The tide had begun to ebb.

143 *BC*, 12 September 1925, p.17.
144 *BC*, 20 October 1925, p.9.
Amidst the disappointments and heartaches many soldier settlers only yielded when all was lost. There were also times when valiant rearguard actions were fought after the ‘limits of hope’ had long been passed. This was certainly evident on Beerburrum soldier settlement north of Brisbane, where in 1923 the settlers tried desperately to avoid being subdued by forces over which they had no control.
CHAPTER 11:

‘TRIBULATION AND TERMINATION’: THE DEMISE OF SOLDIER SETTLEMENT

‘Tis two years since they saw city life;
This soldier settler and his worthy wife;
Who, hit by drought and trials on land,
But for the grocer could never stand.¹

From the mid-1920s, the social and agricultural experiment with soldier settlement faltered rapidly. Queensland’s inability to attract adequate British capital was certainly one dimension of the demise though, in common with all Australian State governments, the refusal to allow Commonwealth intervention was clearly an important underlying factor. When considered carefully, it can also be said that a small population and the peripheral position of Australia (and Queensland in particular) on the imperial commercial network substantially inhibited the growth of markets. Coupled with the adverse environmental conditions pertaining throughout much of the State during the 1920s, and internal geographical distance in many instances, it effectively ensured that agricultural experimentation was unavoidable. Although it was soon apparent that Queensland was not the agricultural paradise espoused by those such as Edwin Brady, the truth remained politically unpalatable. For this reason, Queensland politicians became adept at equating non-success with individual human failing. From Anzac ‘heroes’, the soldier settlers were soon perceived as little more than a burden on the State.

A few soldier settler families along the more fertile Tibrogargan Creek, between Beerburrum and Glass House Mountains, commenced experiments with sugar cane in late 1923. It was not a success, though the reasons are unclear as satisfactory results were obtained from this crop just a few kilometres further north. While the soil had been pronounced eminently suitable by representatives of an unspecified “sugar milling company”, only one settler was continuing with sugar cane by October 1924, his neighbours having diversified into vegetables, bananas and apiary. According to May Bowen, teacher at Tibrogargan State School, the local settlers were a particularly determined group. With the school under threat of closure in October 1923, Bowen insisted that:

The parents of the children are very uneasy in their minds at this move [closure] ... I think the attendance will improve as time increases because of the number of family people who entertain large hopes of an improved pineapple market and who intend remaining on the settlement in expectation of its future prosperity.

There was no mention of sugar cane, and doubtless Bowen was concerned with retaining her own position. It was to no avail. The school closed temporarily in December 1923, re-opened again in early 1925 after funds were raised by local families, and closed

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2 J.H. Brebner, Honorary Secretary, Tibrogargan School Committee, to Under Secretary, Department of Public Instruction, Brisbane, 8 October 1923, EDU/Z2681, “Tibrogargan”, QSA.
3 BC, 23 November 1926, p.9.
4 BC, 31 July 1922, p.10.
5 BC, 18 October 1924, p.15.
6 May Bowen, Head Teacher, Tibrogargan State School, to Under Secretary of Public Instruction, Brisbane, 10 October 1923, EDU/Z2681, “Tibrogargan”, QSA.
7 Under Secretary, Department of Public Instruction, Brisbane, to J.H. Brebner, Honorary Secretary, Tibrogargan School Committee, 15 January 1924, Ibid.
8 Honorary Secretary, Tibrogargan School Committee, to Under Secretary, Department of Public Instruction, Brisbane, 13 December 1924, Ibid.; BC, 31 December 1924, p.8.
permanently in September the same year. The average attendance had by then fallen to a
mere seven pupils.9 At the southern end of Beerburrum soldier settlement, Twin View
State School suffered the same fate. Opened in 1921, the school was permanently closed
in October 1924.10 This was the same month the Revaluation Board released its findings
on the state of Queensland’s soldier settlements. Regarding Beerburrum, the “confidential
report” disclosed that:

There is very little prospect of the Settlement ever proving even a moderate success. The poverty of the soil on the greater portion,
coupled with the average price of pineapples—the staple crop—render it practically impossible to make a living. At the present price of
pineapples, settlers would require to increase their areas under pines to at least 10 acres and as this area would be more than one man can
properly attend to, it would be necessary for him to employ labour, so that he would not be much better off by cultivating the extra area ...
Tibrogargan Creek, which [is] comprised in this Settlement, may be claimed as the only [part] which will prove successful as [it has] fair
arable soil suitable for mixed crops and vegetables. It is estimated that about 80% of the present settlers will abandon their holdings. The
stabilising of the market for pineapples to a nett price of, say, 5/6 or 6/- per case, appears to be the only solution of making this Settlement
even a moderate success.11

By 1929 that price had still not been achieved,12 and by then it was far too late. As the
number of producers declined from 1925, however, the State Cannery finally began to
make a profit.13 It continued to do so until 1929, when the conservative Moore

9 “Miscellaneous Report”, Department of Public Instruction, Brisbane, 16 October 1926, EDU/Z2681,
Tibrogargan”, QSA.
10 Hopkins, The Beerburrum Story, p.98.
11 “Confidential Report of the Revaluation Board”, to William McCormack, Secretary for Public Lands,
Brisbane, 21 October 1924, LAN/167 (1916-31), QSA.
13 Bernays, Queensland—Our Seventh Political Decade, p.116.
government privatised many of the State enterprises, including the cannery. The government began reducing its administrative staff at Beerburrum from January 1924, although there were still 214 returned servicemen on the settlement in August the same year. Of this number 127 had applied for, and been granted, adjoining land forfeited by their neighbours. In November a further eighty-two settlers requested transfers to other settlements. One of them, J.T. McDermott, contended that the average income over the previous year had only been fifty pounds per settler, and “take away the price of cases, nails, fertilisers, and horse feed, which is only part of the expenses of running a farm, what is left?” Minister for Public Lands, William McCormack, saw it quite differently. Echoing the views of his predecessor, McCormack once again insisted that the fault lay with the settlers themselves:

Beerburrum had been condemned absolutely as being no good for anything before a settler was brought on the place, but it had been proved beyond any doubt that the soil, when properly cultivated, could, and had, produced pineapples second to none in Queensland ... The whole question of the ultimate success of Beerburrum lay in the hands of the settlers themselves, and the men who made use of their time and energy were making a good living ... The cry of poverty came from the apathetic settler who, after having had an area cleared for him, had never attempted to increase or cultivate his holding, and while there was a chance of being able to dodge the question of repayments of interest and redemption, such class of settler would continue to do nothing else than cry poverty in the hope of being transferred to another area.

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14 Hawkins, “Socialism at Work?”, p.44.
17 BC, 13 November 1924, p.12.
18 BC, 28 October 1924, p.7.
Presumably, McCormack had not yet consulted the confidential report by the Revaluation Board, which he had received seven days earlier. Further contrary evidence was nevertheless emerging. In November 1924 it was disclosed that at least 550 soldier settlers had taken up holdings on the Beerburrum settlement; in February 1925 only 176 remained. McCormack finally agreed to transfer “about 100” settlers, but “it was pointed out that between 60 and 70 of the other settlers, who were in receipt of pensions, were able to continue at Beerburrum”. This was an open admission that Beerburrum was a failure, and McCormack refined his statements further when Nature struck once again.

In 1916 Joseph Rose had confidently predicted that Beerburrum would become a major pineapple-growing district as it was not subject to frosts. He was proven wrong in 1925 when frost destroyed the crops on twenty-seven holdings. With the damage so severe that none of the holdings were expected to recover, McCormack now asserted that:

There were no cases of absolute destitution on the Settlement, but ... there were some in poor circumstances. A list of these settlers and their families was immediately supplied to the Manager of the State Store at Beerburrum and a weekly credit granted to them—To-day this

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19 BC, 4 November 1924, p.15.
20 WK, 27 February 1925, p.7.
21 BC, 5 March 1925, p.6.
22 BC, 7 November 1916, p.6.
23 “Transfer of Soldier Settlers from Beerburrum to Other Holdings”, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 8 December 1925, LAN/167 (1916-31), QSA.
24 BC, 19 August 1925, p.16.
Credit is still available and is being taken advantage of by some settlers.\textsuperscript{25}

Credit thus extended meant an increased debt, which probably accounts for only “some” of the affected settlers being willing to accept this onerous relief. While frost did accelerate the transfer of settlers from Beerburrum, a number of men were refused for various reasons, including their alleged moral failings. E.W. Baker, for instance, was not considered to be “a bona fide settler”, while J.J. Baker was an “indifferent settler [who] neglected [his] farm”. G.H. Doggett neglected his holding as he was “away too much”. C.W. Hughes was also considered guilty of neglect, but though he remained on his holding he was “not a good settler” due to being “addicted to drink”. Despite apparent temperance, P.H. Moore was apparently “not a good settler”, and as A.L. Shea and T. Scott often worked away, they were similarly categorised as “indifferent settlers”. It made little difference to W.E. Wells—“now dead”.\textsuperscript{26} Indeed he was. Thirty-four years of age, William Wells was married with two children. After having “been very depressed for some time” Wells finally shot himself in April 1925.\textsuperscript{27}

For those settlers transferred further north to areas around Gympie, the ordeal continued. Twelve began dairying and banana-growing at Tagigan in 1925. In June 1931 the remaining six still owed the government an average of £241 each.\textsuperscript{28} Transferred settlers at nearby Wolvi were faring little better:

\textsuperscript{25} “Transfer of Soldier Settlers from Beerburrum to Other Holdings”, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 8 December 1925, LAN/167 (1916-31), QSA.
\textsuperscript{26} Land Commissioner Salisbury to Secretary for Public Lands, Brisbane, 21 July 1925, Ibid.
\textsuperscript{27} BC, 1 May 1925, p.8.
\textsuperscript{28} “Report of the Agricultural Bank”, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 30 June 1931, LAN/167 (1916-31), QSA.
I have been asked by the wives of these settlers to forward a recommendation to you, asking you to give them your help ... These women are known to me and all were forced off Beerburrum after five years struggle and loss and their six years at Wolvi seems to have been spent struggling against bad markets, pests and latterly “rust”. These women I know are all depending on the leniency of the storekeepers for their food and all seem to be “down and out”. At the same time with some encouragement and help they are all prepared to work their utmost at dairying or any other proposition that will help them to regain in a measure their independence.29

In the prevailing economic climate they had little hope of relief. Ironically, the mass exodus from Beerburrum in 1925 actually enhanced the position of their counterparts on the satellite settlement of Woombye. With an increased demand for fresh pineapples emanating from the southern States, “the small quantities being railed” from Beerburrum allowed the thirteen settlers at Woombye to dispose of their crop at satisfactory prices.30

In March 1925, the government held a sale of abandoned equipment at Beerburrum in an attempt to recoup some of the lost expenditure.31 The following October, when the RSSILA made it clear they were under no illusion regarding Beerburrum’s fertility (Appendix 19), the government began selling the cottages on forfeited holdings. There was also a need for urgency. Many of the dwellings were being pilfered for materials; termites were consuming the remainder.32

30 BC, 10 November 1925, p.19.
31 BC, 27 March 1925, p.11.
32 A.P. Dreghorn, Clerk, Beerburrum Soldier Settlement, to Land Commissioner, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 14 October 1925, LAN/AK135, Batch 862, “Unoccupied Houses on Soldier Settlements—Beerburrum”, QSA; W. Ryan, Commissioner of Police, to Under Secretary, Department of
The sale of abandoned dwellings was also a priority on the Enoggera soldier settlement near Brisbane. Despite the Revaluation Board writing off an average of £103/4/8 on each holding in September 1924, only twenty-four settlers remained in June 1925. Cottages which had reputedly cost between £600 and £700 to construct were thereafter sold "for about one-tenth or less". Why they had cost more than double the price of similar structures at Mount Gravatt was not explained, but the expense—whatever the true figure—undoubtedly undermined the settlers' position. A later claim that the holdings were too small in area may have actually been advantageous in May 1925. They certainly offered smaller targets when two shells were inadvertently fired on the settlement from the nearby military base during artillery practice. Damage was fortunately minimal and no injuries occurred (Appendix 20), "although any of the returned soldiers who might have been suffering from shell-shock would have their nerves jarred by the sensational incident". Such was indeed the case. At the Cecil Plains soldier settlement a large heavenly body had descended the previous month.

In May 1924 Cecil Plains soldier settlers organised their first "show and sports gathering", with the agricultural entries indicative of wide diversification:

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Public Lands, Brisbane, 12 April 1926, LAN/AK136, Batch 862, "Valuation of abandoned buildings at Soldiers' Settlement, Beerburrum", Part 2, QSA.
33 "Twelfth Batch Revaluations", Accountant, Soldier Settlements, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 26 September 1924, LAN/167 (1916-31), QSA.
35 BC, 30 October 1925, p.6.
36 BC, 5 October 1927, p.11.
38 ODR, 23 May 1925, p.40.
39 WK, 11 January 1929, p.36.
In produce, the maize, sorghum, and millet classes were the strongest features. There was good competition also in pumpkins and potatoes. There were 13 exhibits of hay. Six cotton growers had exhibits.\textsuperscript{40}

Women were also represented with displays of needlework and cookery. Whether alcohol was consumed is not known, as Cecil Plains was ostensibly a ‘dry’ area. For regular imbibers, however, sly-groggers were able to fill an important niche. This came to at least a temporary halt in April 1925 when police raided a house on the settlement and seized a quantity of liquor. A resident of Oakey was later charged with “sly grog selling”.\textsuperscript{41} Early the same month, T.W. Sewell and his family experienced a far more unusual visitation:

The meteorite appeared to be descending in the direction of his homestead, and eventually it reached earth in one of his paddocks. On proceeding to the spot he found it had set fire to the grass for a space of nearly 12ft., and the heat emanating from it was so intense that one could not approach within 6ft. or 7ft. of it. It presented the appearance of a solid block of molten metal.\textsuperscript{42}

Falling prices rather than heavenly bodies was the general experience, and that was of greater concern to the soldier settlers. In June 1925 ninety-eight soldier settlers were officially held to be occupying holdings at Cecil Plains.\textsuperscript{43} Eleven more abandoned their holdings during the following year.\textsuperscript{44} The Minister for Public Lands, Thomas Dunstan, announced in November 1926 that eighty-five soldier settlers were in residence, with twenty-five holdings having been forfeited, and thirteen “reselected by other soldiers”. It

\textsuperscript{40}OQR, 10 May 1924, p.15.
\textsuperscript{41}BC, 15 April 1925, p.20.
\textsuperscript{42}BC, 2 April 1925, p.18.
is also relevant that eighty settlers were behind in their repayments, owing an aggregate sum of £12,616/0/11.\textsuperscript{45}

Drought and the "heavy burden of taxation" were held to be responsible for their plight. Wheat growers could "ill-afford" the ten shillings per acre to plant seed, while the cost of feeding dairy cattle absorbed any profit made from cream returns.\textsuperscript{46} More than 500 pigs had previously been sent to the Toowoomba Bacon Factory annually:

\begin{quote}
[B]ut owing to the drought and the consequent lack of food there are already big losses ... One settler recently lost 24 pigs out of 30. In some instances settlers are turning their pigs out to forage for food as best they can, but this is of little advantage, and is creating a nuisance in destruction of vegetable gardens, which are essential to the food supply of the community. Many of the settlers have small flocks of sheep, but here again the drought has been responsible for heavy losses, and out of a total number of 6000 it is not expected one-half will be alive if the drought continues even a few weeks longer.\textsuperscript{47}
\end{quote}

Drought did continue, and with it the number of forfeitures. This scenario was also being played out on Mount Hutton soldier settlement to the west. Frank Dalby Davison abandoned his selection at Mount Hutton in 1924,\textsuperscript{48} the same year that the Revaluation Board recommended writing off £10,148 from the total liability of £43,083.\textsuperscript{49} It achieved little. In August 1925 it was revealed that only seventy-one soldier settlers remained from

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{44} "Report by the Under Secretary for Public Lands under 'The Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Acts, 1917 to 1920'\textquotedblright, \textit{QPP}, Vol.2 (1926), p.396.
\textsuperscript{45} \textit{QPD}, Vol.148 (1926), p.1913.
\textsuperscript{46} \textit{QDR}, 9 October 1926, p.11.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{48} Dow, \textit{Frank Dalby Davison}, p.5.
\end{footnotes}
the 131 who had selected land over the previous six years.\textsuperscript{50} Certainly, there were many problems. Davison saw the drought \textit{and} loan repayments as the major factors operating against success,\textsuperscript{51} with the environmental aspect an added dimension to the statement made in 1922 that “the place was over-valued and under-capitalised”.\textsuperscript{52} In 1924, however, Land Commissioner Salisbury retorted that such was not the case; rather, “the settlers are of a poor type, generally, and few are inclined to work”.\textsuperscript{53}

Salisbury’s blinkered conclusion ignored falling dairy prices, marsupial depredations, the spread of prickly pear, loan repayments, rate payments and perhaps the greatest burden of all—drought. The latter, which was not supposed to inhibit the settlers from meeting their financial obligations (Appendix 21), was also impacting in Central Queensland, where the number of soldier settlers in the Boyne Valley dropped to forty-two in June 1925; sixty remained at Ridgelands.\textsuperscript{54} With one major exception, soldier settlers in the South Burnett region were similarly afflicted.

Booinbah, nineteen kilometres from Goomeri, had been opened for soldier settlement in October 1918, and was one of the few areas serving that purpose which had the tacit approval of long-term residents.\textsuperscript{55} Their judgement was confirmed in January 1926, when it was revealed that eleven of the twelve original selectors were prospering. James

\textsuperscript{50} \textit{QPD}, Vol.145 (1925), p.186.  
\textsuperscript{51} Davison, \textit{The Road to Yesterday}, p.95.  
\textsuperscript{52} \textit{WS}, 3 June 1922, p.2.  
\textsuperscript{53} “Confidential Report of the Revaluation Board” to William McCormack, Secretary of Public Lands, Brisbane, 21 October 1924, LAN/167 (1916-31), QSA.  
\textsuperscript{55} \textit{BC}, 18 October 1918, p.4.
Murray, a former Light Horseman, had succumbed to his war injuries. Unlike other soldier settlements in the South Burnett, Boombah was located on swampland, with an abundance of water, and extremely fertile soils. Even the limited size of the holdings, averaging forty hectares each, was sufficient to provide a living area with the settlers able to combine dairying, pig-raising and mixed farming. While prices remained acceptable, cotton was also grown, with F. McIntosh harvesting “3 tons 7cwt. From 5 acres” in 1925. Cream returns alone averaged twenty pounds per month throughout the year, with herds comprising around twenty-five head of stock. Indeed, such was their success that “all the settlers” were able to employ labour, albeit, cheap labour, “recruited chiefly from the ranks of newly arrived British boys”.

It was quite the reverse elsewhere, and perhaps Gordonbrook soldier settlement encapsulated the general conditions in the South Burnett. Twenty-one settlers remained on 8,200 hectares in June 1925, but four years later only thirteen were left. Gordonbrook had begun with dairying and the cultivation of grain crops, industries that were considered ideally suited for the region. The difficulties, however, were considerable: limited acreage, falling prices, distance to markets, high valuations and repayments, insufficient water supplies, marsupial depredations and drought. All combined to force the settlers into diversification from an early date. Although the Commonwealth government imposed a high tariff duty in the early 1920s to encourage

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56 BC, 9 January 1926, p.15.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid.
peanut cultivation, it is clear that N. Jensen’s experiment with that crop on the settlement in 1924 was not continued. This may have been related to the high cost of labour for harvesting, and although machines were certainly available, they were also expensive. The majority of soldier settlers could afford neither. Ironically, by July 1927 more than 4,000 hectares of land was under peanuts around Kingaroy, all of it grown by civilian farmers with superior resources.

In the far north, returned servicemen on the El Arish soldier settlement experienced their first major setback in 1925. During September the management of South Johnstone Sugar Mill implemented changes after the legality of assignments and permits was challenged. Henceforth, allocations on the settlement were transferred to Tully Sugar Mill and reduced to a maximum area of twelve hectares per individual grower. Despite considerable pressure for enlargement, the alteration remained effective until August 1929, when the Central Cane Prices Board finally allowed an increase to 14.5 hectares.

This was not simply a localised disruption. In 1925 the Australian sugar industry was in crisis after the creation of a large export surplus coincided with a severe price slump. Following a brief period of stabilisation, prices continued to decline steadily until the 1930s. Cuban exporters, who sold the bulk of their crop on the protected American market, largely determined the world price for sugar. A surplus, however, forced the price down and this impacted on Australian producers with their limited domestic

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62 BC, 6 January 1922, p.4.
64 WK, 8 July 1927, p.31.
The problem was intensified by the acreage under cane being steadily increased. At El Arish, for example, cultivation reached its peak in June 1926, when eighty-three soldier settlers were farming a combined area of just over 3,187 hectares.

For soldier settlers on the Atherton Tableland, it was the reputation of their maize that was falling in 1925. Indeed, the quality of their major staple was not only attracting adverse comment locally, but also in distant markets:

Serious statements have been made about the quality of Atherton maize. In one case, it is alleged, when a silo was emptied a foot of grain stuck to the walls owing to the concrete having sweated. The grain smelt sour and afforded a great contrast to the maize from Kingaroy. So little is thought of Atherton grain locally, one authority states, that orders are being sent to Brisbane for southern maize. One shipment was sent to New Zealand and it was stated that no wharf labourers were required for its removal as the grain walked off the boat itself, assisted by weevils.

While the total crop of 17,100 tonnes was eventually sold, the growers received only minimal payments of twenty-seven pence per bushel. Ironically, after unsuccessfully agitating for the dissolution of the Maize Board in early 1926, they had a brief respite. In September of that year 21,000 tonnes was harvested and the board was able to pay the growers up to £13/1 per tonne, an abnormally high price. It is clear that a number of

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66 Ibid., p.352.
69 *MB*, 22 May 1925, p.9.
soldier settlers reaped even greater profits from illicit sales, and the official price itself actually peaked at £13/15/3 per tonne in October. Conversely, there were internal problems working to the detriment of the soldier settlers.

Contractors charged substantial rates for harvesting, shelling, grading and transporting maize, thus eroding the gains made by the settlers. In a bid to surmount this impediment, a meeting was called at Tolga in October 1926 to discuss the possibility of growers carrying out these operations on a co-operative basis. The contractors, however, turned out in force, using their majority vote to elect a committee that not only quashed any chance of a producer’s combine, but also increased the contract prices already being charged. The soldier settlers were left in an intolerable position after the Maize Board refused to intervene, contending that the matter was outside its jurisdiction. On the Granite Belt, far to the south, the soldier settlers experienced terrible conditions throughout 1925, only to achieve their own moderate successes in early 1926.

While the winter of 1925 was so severe that “no one is eulogistic at present about the climate in the Granite Belt”, it merely compounded the difficulties already existing:

Prospects for the winter are far from encouraging. Many settlers will have to leave their blocks, and seek work for the winter months. In many cases this is a serious set back to the work of the coming season, but is unavoidable. The returns from ground crops after expenses for seed, fertiliser, horse feed, sprays, and marketing charges have been

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72 BC, 12 October 1926, p.16.
73 BC, 6 October 1926, p.16.
74 BC, 17 July 1925, p.15.
deducted do not leave sufficient to tide the average family over the long winter experienced in the Granite Belt.\footnote{BC, 8 May 1925, p.14.}

By the following August the plight of many was such that they were unable to afford the fertilisers necessary to prepare for the coming season.\footnote{BC, 7 August 1925, p.11.} For those who did manage to plant crops, hailstorms also struck at the height of the season.\footnote{BC, 14 December 1925, p.10.} Yet, after all the grim hardship, a new phase appeared to be dawning in early 1926.

The Local Producers' Association was instrumental in organising the first Amiens Show in January, a day of festivities, produce displays and sports.\footnote{BC, 27 January 1926, p.5.} The Commissioner for Railways had also entered into the spirit by organising a special train to convey visitors direct from Warwick to Amiens.\footnote{BC, 22 January 1926, p.11.} The Railways Department also went further by acting with the Committee of Direction of Fruit Marketing to dispatch produce from the Granite Belt soldier settlements to stations along the western line between Toowoomba and Cunnamulla. This was a weekly service, with customers placing orders with their local stationmasters.\footnote{BC, 8 February 1926, p.5.}

The helping hand appeared contagious when the Department of Public Lands agreed to reserve land at Amiens for a School of Arts.\footnote{BC, 13 February 1926, p.23.} Designed free of charge by the Land Ranger, Harry Clark, the building was erected by A. Wardill and opened in June 1926,
after three years of fund-raising efforts. Shortly afterwards, “Miss May” opened a drapery and fancy goods shop in the township, thus reinforcing the veneer of prosperity.

Certainly, prices were high for summer vegetables and, after a slight delay through boiler defects, the pulping factory began processing tomatoes from February 1926. Warm weather nonetheless presented a new danger, with several bushfires raging through the Pikedale settlement. One soldier settler’s residence was only saved from destruction by the concerted efforts of thirty firefighters. If anything, this characterised soldier settlement on the Granite Belt in particular, and across the State in general; for every gain made new hazards invariably appeared. It was too much for some. In June 1926 the official report disclosed that sixty-nine soldier settlers remained around Pikedale, with another eighty-four farming in the Cottonvale area. Thirty-one were scattered elsewhere in the Granite Belt.

When the Agricultural Bank made fresh demands for interest repayments in July 1926, volatile meetings erupted in many centres. As the soldier settlers contended once again, their position was markedly different from those who had already forfeited their holdings:

Those who had gone were no doubt earning the basic wage in the cities, while the land they had left had reverted almost to its virgin state. Those men had been made a free gift of £700 or £800, while those who were now toiling on their blocks, and keeping the security for their loans intact, as well as adding further improvements, were

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82 BC, 22 June 1923, p.15; BC, 7 July 1926, p.20.
83 BC, 7 July 1926, p.20.
85 Ibid.
being pressed for interest which the land had not as yet had a chance to
earn.  

The wrath of Nature was also at hand. The following month a serious outbreak of influenza struck the Pikedale soldier settlement, “in some cases whole families being affected”. No deaths occurred, but the energy of the Bush Nurse was undoubtedly taxed to the full. This service had again been in a precarious financial position from September 1925, when an urgent request was sent to the Home Secretary’s Office for a continuance of the annual grant. The latter agreed, but the local BNA’s finances were dealt another blow in late 1926 when their erstwhile ally, the local branch of the Country Women’s Association, withheld fifteen pounds from the funds. Christina Jackson, State Secretary of the BNA, angrily insisted that:

I heard today only of a maternity case where the nurse attended to both mother and babe quite alright, but nothing in the house to nourish the mother. This is where the C.W.A. should come in if only we had that £15 in the Branch the mother could be fed till she recovered. If they collect the money they should pass it on to be spent on these people who need it.

Many certainly did need it. In November 1926 Harry Clark reported on the circumstances of George Lister, another imperial ex-serviceman on the Pikedale settlement:

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87 BC, 10 July 1926, p.9.
89 B.F.S. Allen, Honorary Secretary, Bush Nursing Association, Amiens, to Home Secretary, Brisbane, 7 September 1925, TR1889/1, Box 515, Batch 54/4876, “Bush Nursing Amiens”, QSA.
90 Christina Jackson, New Farm, to C. Chuter, Assistant Under Secretary, Home Secretary’s Office, Brisbane, 24 December 1926, Ibid.
I have to report that the settler is steady, and industrious, and is making every effort to meet the amount now due, but is unable at present to do so, owing to the continued dry weather. Beyond a light crop of peas there are no subsidiary crops so far to assist the settler, and, as in all other parts of the District, the setting of the fruit crop has been exceptionally light. 91

Lister had two adjoining holdings but was forced to forfeit one of them in May 1927. 92

When threatened with foreclosure on his remaining holding in August 1928, he explained that:

I have sunk £500 of my own cash, together with seven years of hard work, & I have been able to pay the first years rent through the generosity of a friend. I have been engaged in agriculture all my life, & if I give up the place, I shall be compelled to apply for assistance to enable me to get back home, as I shall be without [a] home, & absolutely without means. 93

Lister thereupon disappeared from the official records, and it is not unlikely that he faced destitution just as Frank Hewitt had three years before. Unlike many of the settlers, the Amiens branch of the BNA managed to survive and was reconciled with the Country Women's Association after Jackson's scathing criticism. 94 A membership drive in early 1927 resulted in many new subscribers, 95 for the settlers were undoubtedly aware that despite their crippling financial burdens the service was an absolute necessity. In March 1927, for example, the nurse attended thirty-six cases, eighteen of which were surgical,

91 H. Clark, Land Ranger, Stanthorpe Soldier Settlement, Amiens, to Land Commissioner, Stanthorpe District, Toowoomba, 8 November 1926, LAN/AK118, Batch 703, Part 1(C), QSA.
92 Under Secretary, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, to Land Commissioner (Stanthorpe District), Toowoomba, 13 May 1927, Ibid.
93 G.E. Lister, Amiens, to Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 2 August 1928, Ibid.
95 BC, 13 April 1927, p.21.
seventeen medical and one obstetric. The BNA was a unifying feature of the community; and misfortune was another. While no professional medical facilities existed on the Highlands soldier settlement near Samford, misfortune again rose to the fore in early 1926.

In June 1925 there were only twenty-six soldier settlers at Highlands but, unlike other soldier settlements, the figure actually rose to thirty-four the following year. The increase was due to a resurgence in banana cultivation, as “almost every dairy farmer has a patch of bananas and the fruit commands the highest price in Brisbane and Southern markets”. Banana plantations flourished along Dawson Creek (Appendix 22) and activity was intense:

Crops were picked on Sundays and then packed ready to send off to market on Mondays. Bananas were lowered by ‘flying fox’ across the Dawson Creek to the road where they were put in the packing shed nearby. Here they were graded and those for the southern markets were packed in cases, while those for Brisbane markets were left in bunches. The produce was taken to Samford Railway Station by spring cart and railed to Roma Street. Material for the cases was picked up at the Station and taken back to the packing shed to be made into cases ...

On Sundays, they would all group together and help each other with their crop picking and packing, enjoying the company.

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96 Ibid.
Nature struck once again, though it was not a repetition of the winter frosts in 1921. The dreaded banana disease, ‘Bunchy Top’, had been steadily moving north, decimating the small Brookfield soldier settlement by late 1925, and in January 1926 it made its first appearance on the Highlands soldier settlement. Maude Campbell, a daughter of the soldier settler, Henry Jorgensen, recalled that by 1927 the devastation was complete:

> We all walked down to the Highlands School (now Highvale) and the lower slopes of the mountain were covered in bananas. Acres and acres of them. Plantation blending into plantation. They were good days and the growers were at last reaping their harvest, but bunchytop appeared ... In a panic the Government ordered that all plantations had to be dug out and burned. Nobody had the money to buy enough kerosene to burn thousands of banana stools, so they just walked off their farms and left everything they had worked for, broke in pocket and in heart. In no time the whole area was derelict and the Dawson Creek Valley, where there were so many homes, still looks lonely and forgotten to my eyes [emphasis in the original].

Six soldier settlers remained on their banana farms, but such were their circumstances that kerosene remained unaffordable. In December 1928 all six were fined substantial sums for failing to comply with the directions issued by the Department of Agriculture and Stock regarding the destruction of infected plants. The sixteen other returned servicemen on the settlement in June 1927 had almost certainly returned to dairy farming, which was not an available option for the ninety-seven soldier settlers struggling at Beerburrum. In late 1927 a number of the latter commenced experiments

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103 Campbell, “At Mt Nebo”, p.9.
104 *WK*, 21 December 1928, p.30.
with tomatoes. The crop, however, was “not up to expectations, as the grub has been very bad in the district this year”. Environmental and economic barriers blocked their every move, and the general apathy that had descended on Beerburrum was apparent in October 1926, when the local baker sustained a shocking injury:

Mr. Albert Higginson (the local baker) had his right hand blown off while examining a detonator at Mr. Jack Baker’s home. He was taken to the Beerburrum Hospital, where he was attended by Dr. Bower, and is now making good progress. Mr. Higginson’s brother at once took his brother’s place in the business, with the result that the settlement was not without bread delivery for even one day.

The continued supply of bread was clearly more important than the personal welfare of Higginson. With pineapple production falling and the cultivation of alternative crops frustrated, the end of Beerburrum was in sight. By June 1928 seventy-five remained in occupation, but when the scheme was officially terminated in 1929 the number of soldier settlers at Beerburrum had fallen to just sixty-nine. One of those survivors was Peter Ramm, who had successfully applied for an adjoining holding as an “additional area” in June 1926. With seething bitterness, his wife later remarked:

To put men on heavy timbered land to turn it into any kind of farm, after living through a distressing war experience for years, was a cruel, unintelligent thing to do. Shame to the person or persons who thought

107 BC, 19 November 1927, p.12.
108 BC, 26 October 1926, p.10.
111 A.P. Dreghorn, Clerk, Beerburrum Soldier Settlement, Beerburrum, to Land Commissioner, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 29 June 1926, LAN/AK136, Batch 862, Part 2, “Valuation of abandoned holdings at Soldiers’ Settlement, Beerburrum”, QSA.
up this scheme, for it brought great unhappiness, poverty and loss of self respect to many a married couple. Luring them on with £600; how far would that go with implements to buy, for clearing the land? £200 for a house, land £30 an acre, fertiliser to be bought and then the wait till the crops were returning a few pounds. Years before pioneers had it worse, but they knew what they were doing. It was their idea and their brain was clear not war beaten ...

Perhaps the ultimate irony occurred in August 1929, when members of the Town Planning Association, meeting in Brisbane, travelled to Beerburrum to investigate the possibility of establishing a health resort. It did not eventuate, but in the face of enormous adversity a few returned servicemen still managed to carry on at Beerburrum as the Great Depression took hold. By then, commercial businesses had largely disappeared, and the hospital was dismantled in 1932. A single private store, owned by a soldier settler who had relinquished his holding, continued to serve the district.

Living almost until the final curtain fell on Queensland’s Soldier Settlement Scheme, the conservative State politician, John George Appel, may well have reflected on the words he uttered during the second reading of ‘The Discharged Soldiers’ Settlement Bill’ in 1917. Appel condemned the Beerburrum district, arguing “that many a returned soldier will break his heart on that wretched land on which it is proposed to put him to-day”. Appel died in March 1929—long enough to see his prophesy become a grim reality.

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112 Hopkins, The Beerburrum Story, p.35.
113 BC, 22 August 1929, p.11; BC, 27 August 1929, p.10.
114 Ibid., p.48.
115 Memorandum, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 30 July 1929, LAN/167 (1916-31), QSA.
Personal tragedy was not infrequently an associated element of soldier settlement. In July 1926, when only thirteen soldier settlers remained at nearby Woombye,¹¹⁸ R.H. Dent literally went through his second baptism of fire:

A five-roomed cottage and contents, owned by Mr. R.H. Dent, a soldier settler, were completely destroyed by fire yesterday morning. The cause of the outbreak is unknown, as the occupants were not aware of the outbreak until the house was enveloped in flames, which, aided by a high wind, destroyed the house in a remarkably short time. Nothing was saved, the occupants being left with only the clothes they were wearing. About £15 in cash was also destroyed.¹¹⁹

The house and contents were only partly covered by insurance and, like Anderson three years before, Dent was “a heavy loser”.¹²⁰ The risk of fire was not, of course, the sole preserve of soldier settlers. W. Adams of Woombye lost his house the same way in 1927 and applied to purchase one of the soldier settlement cottages, “formerly owned by Mr. Hogg who has since left”.¹²¹ By June 1927 Hogg had been joined by four others,¹²² and in mid-1928 only nine remained on a combined area of fifty-nine hectares.¹²³ When the scheme was finally terminated in 1929, Woombye soldier settlement comprised a mere eight returned servicemen and their families.¹²⁴

¹¹⁹ BC, 29 July 1926, p.12.
¹²⁰ Ibid
The decline was paralleled in Central Queensland. Thirty soldier settlers occupied holdings in the Rosslyn-Barmoya district in June 1926, but largely due to adverse environmental factors and repayment demands, the number dropped by seven during the following year. In June 1928 only sixteen were left, with two more abandoning their holdings in early 1929. On the dry Ridgelands soldier settlement fifty-seven returned servicemen were struggling to eke out a living in 1926. Although another government investigation was made during the year, no substantial change was effected. On the contrary, the exodus clearly accelerated. Only thirty-eight remained on their holdings in June 1927, falling to twenty-seven in mid-1928. In June 1929 Ridgelands soldier settlement comprised merely twenty-three occupied holdings. The position was little better in the Boyne Valley to the south, where thirty-three occupied holdings in 1929 were all that remained of the original fifty-three. In June 1929 potato crops had virtually failed due to dry conditions, and "cream production [was] at a low ebb". Their future looked bleak. Such had been the outlook for their counterparts on the Atherton Tableland in February 1927, when a devastating cyclone swept across the region:

130 QPD, Vol.147 (1926), p.73.
134 Ibid.
135 BC, 15 June 1929, p.20.
Tolga Road has been transformed into a morass and it is almost impossible for a car to get through the scrub. Many [maize] tanks have been lost. One field of maize at Tolga was badly damaged through a number of empty maize tanks being bowled across the young maize by the wind. Many farmers are suffering considerable loss at Kairi and Tolga.\textsuperscript{136}

In all, 63.2 inches of rain fell on the district during 1927, a volume only surpassed by the 63.9 inches that inundated the soldier settlement two years later. Both were well above the annual average of 52.7 inches.\textsuperscript{137} It proved too much for Albert Page, who reputedly had “one of the best farms in the Atherton district”. After seven years of struggle, Page took his own life in late January 1928.\textsuperscript{138} Despite the heavy inundations and associated problems, 129 soldier settlers continued on their holdings the following June,\textsuperscript{139} but their position was further undermined by the machinations of the Agricultural Bank. At a branch meeting of the RSSILA in Atherton during June 1928:

The secretary (Mr. Robinson), reported that the Agricultural Bank was issuing liens on the incoming maize crops of the soldier settlement, and insisting on payment of the first advance, which, if done, would mean that many men would have to work off their holdings. The storekeepers having stopped credit the men cannot carry on, and some of the liens are alleged to be for redemption, and not for interest overdue.\textsuperscript{140}

\textsuperscript{136}WK, 25 February 1927, p.12.
\textsuperscript{137}Warren, Results of Rainfall Observations made in Queensland, p.117.
\textsuperscript{138}WK, 3 February 1928, p.14.
\textsuperscript{140}BC, 5 June 1928, p.11.
The situation deteriorated even further in January 1929, when the price of maize fell to £6/9/4 per tonne. Even then, however, many of the settlers had been unable to plant crops due to the excessive rainfall. When fine weather returned, “an abnormal growth of weeds” quickly infested the prepared land, effectively preventing further cultivation.141

By June 1929 the number of soldier settlers at Tolga and Kairi had also fallen—to 111.142 With the advent of global depression their position steadily grew so desperate that the majority were transferred south to the Upper Burnett and Callide Valleys in 1931.143

Yet, how many had actually departed from the settlement and been replaced by others before this time is extremely difficult to ascertain. The government had obvious reasons for inflating population figures, and the number of soldier settlers recorded as occupying holdings in 1929 was certainly not an accurate representation of the state of the settlement. At the same time, their heavy dependence on a single crop had also exposed them to even minor fluctuations on national and world markets. Like their counterparts throughout the State, the Tolga-Kairi settlers had also been at the mercy of natural elements.

With the exception of the years 1923 and 1926, which brought their own intrinsic difficulties, maize prices remained at unsatisfactory levels. Viewed in this light the Tolga-Kairi soldier settlement cannot be considered to have been a successful venture. Experiments with alternative crops nevertheless paved the way for later developments,

141 BC, 29 January 1929, p.20.
and the contributions made by the soldier settlers in this respect have been virtually ignored on the Atherton Tableland—as they have elsewhere. On the other hand, El Arish soldier settlement to the south has been seen as the one bright chapter in an otherwise gloomy tale.\textsuperscript{144} In the final analysis, however, even this was not an unequivocal success.

Through failing health L. Lister was forced to relinquish his holding at El Arish in August 1927.\textsuperscript{145} He may have been replaced by two returned servicemen working in partnership, for the number of soldier settlers at El Arish officially stood at eighty-four in June 1928, though there had been no increase of land under cultivation.\textsuperscript{146} It was quite different the following year, when thirteen settlers abandoned their holdings and the area under cultivation contracted to 2,819 hectares.\textsuperscript{147} Over-production and falling prices were undoubtedly responsible, and the settlers left just before the Central Cane Prices Board finally increased allocations.\textsuperscript{148}

Notwithstanding this minor downturn, El Arish does stand as an anomaly. While there were minor fluctuations, the percentage of settlers remaining at the end of the decade was extremely high in comparison with all other major Queensland soldier settlements. Concentration on a single viable crop in a rigidly controlled industry was the most significant factor, though this was aided by a capable local administration and the ability of the settlers to reduce costs by producing many of their own consumables. The latter

\textsuperscript{144} Milton, “Soldier Settlement in Queensland After World War I”, p.94.
\textsuperscript{145} Jim Ryan, Honorary Secretary, Queensland Soldier Settlers’ Organisation, Gordon Brook, Kingaroy, to Minister for Lands, Brisbane, 16 August 1927, LAN/167 (1916-31), QSA.
was determined by the provision of sufficient land and an equitable climate, and few other soldier settlements in Queensland were similarly blessed. It was certainly not the case for those settlers battling conditions in the west.

At Mount Hutton the number of soldier settlers fell steadily. Sixty-eight remained in June 1926; sixty-one in 1927; fifty-five in 1928; and forty-five in June 1929. As outlined earlier their problems were considerable, though the main contributing factor in the demise of the settlement was undeniably drought. Dry conditions prevailed throughout the first half of the 1920s, and it continued virtually unabated. Rainfall statistics during this period are not available for Mount Hutton, but records were kept for nearby Injune from 1925—indicative of conditions slightly to the south. For the years 1925, 1926, 1927, 1928 and 1929, annual rainfall at Injune was respectively 12.66, 16.84, 24.16, 34.55 and 19.76 inches. Only in 1928 did rainfall exceed the average, with most years falling well below. If lack of rain was not the quintessential factor, it was certainly a major impediment to prosperity.

To the east, at Cecil Plains, a disastrous fire destroyed much of the township in April 1926. By the following October rebuilding was well advanced, but drought and loan

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154 BC, 7 April 1926, p.7.
repayments forced many of the original settlers off their holdings. They were replaced, however, "by other returned soldiers, and their number now would be about one hundred". Unlike the town buildings there was to be no rebirth for the soldier settlers.

Seventy-nine were still occupying holdings in June 1927, falling to seventy-five in 1928, and sixty-six in June 1929. A complete assessment of the settlement is again elusive owing to the unrecorded number of forfeitures and re-selections. Drought, low prices and high repayments were the major contributing factors in the demise of Cecil Plains. When Labor finally lost office in 1929 the new Minister for Public Lands, William Deacon, assured the remaining settlers that their land would be revalued, either on conversion to freehold or under existing perpetual leasehold. On the threshold of global economic catastrophe, few would have benefitted.

Two years earlier, the soldier settlers of Amiens, Bapaume and Messines had voiced their grievances to the Federal Minister for Trade and Customs, Herbert Pratten, when he made an official visit to Pikedale soldier settlement. Spokesman for the settlers in January 1927 was W. Smaile, who argued that while the abandonment of holdings represented a substantial loss to the State government, virtually no assistance was provided for the settlers prepared to struggle on. The previous year a request for deferred interest payments and revaluation had been rejected, although a promise was given that

155 BC, 9 October 1926, p.15.
unsuitable orchard trees would be replaced. Nothing had eventuated, and the settlers could hardly have expected any change when Pratten weakly replied that “he was sorry to hear that the money supplied to the State by the Commonwealth had not been wisely expended”. The settlers were further advised “to make every endeavour to get the State Government to take action”—wasted words for those who had been doing just that for many years.  

While a considerable quantity of fruit and vegetables was forwarded from the Pikedale settlement in early 1927, heavy rain had damaged the crops, and a sudden cold snap in March reduced the expected returns from tomatoes. In June 1927 only fifty-seven soldier settlers continued farming around Amiens, with another seventy in the Cottonvale area and twenty-four elsewhere on the Granite Belt.

Angus McKechnie had occupied a selection at Fleurbaix from at least September 1924, but had been unable to meet his financial obligations to the government. Three years later he was still refusing to lodge a formal application for the land, and his evasive tactics were little appreciated by the Land Ranger, Harry Clark:

He is a hard working settler, and has plowed, and prepared for spring planting, the cleared land on the Portion. The fruit trees also have had some attention. Evidently, it is his intention to select the land, but I

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159 BC, 3 December 1929, p.19.
160 BC, 13 January 1927, p.7.
162 BC, 21 March 1927, p.17.
164 A.N. McKechnie, Upper Freestone, via Warwick, to Mr. McCormack, Minister for Lands, Brisbane, 4 September 1924, LAN/AK118, Batch 703, Part 1(F), QSA.
believe he will avoid the payment of his dues, as long as it is possible [sic] for him to do so. I recommend a final warning be given, and an extension of time allowed, not longer than six months as from 1/10/27.  

McKechnie held out a little longer than that. It was not until August 1928 that he received a ‘Show Cause’ notice, the final action before cancellation of tenure. The fact that it had reached this stage nevertheless suggests that McKechnie was more likely to have been unable, rather than unwilling, to meet his financial commitments.

Fruit prices increased marginally in early 1928, though they were still reputedly below production costs. There was also the weather. “Unusually oppressive” conditions brought with it the possibility of hail, one of the most relentless adversaries of primary producers on the Granite Belt. It came. James Winter of Pozieres outlined his circumstances in April 1928:

[My] intention is to select the Block but I cannot select it at present owing to the failure of the crop because the hail settled everything even smashed the little bit of fruit that there was on the place and the Peas and Beans and Tomatoes got the Blight and sir there is only six acres of cleared land on this place and only 300 apple trees and 45 Peaches because there was a lot of late Peaches condemned and cut out before I came onto the place. So sir I will try and get a bit of work and select the Block as quick as possible because I have got to work right or wrong.

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165 H. Clark, Land Ranger, Stanthorpe Soldier Settlement, Amiens, to Land Commissioner, Stanthorpe District, Toowoomba, 20 September 1927, LAN/AK118, Batch 703, Part 1(C), QSA.
166 Secretary, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, to Mr. A. McKechnie, Fleurbaix, 1 August 1928, Ibid.
167 BC, 10 February 1928, p.25.
168 J.E. Winter, Portion 310, Pozieres, to Under Secretary for Public Lands, Brisbane, 4 April 1928, LAN/AK118, Batch 703, Part 1(C), QSA.
Winter received moral support from Harry Clark:

I have to report that allottee is indeed in poor circumstances. The season's early crop has been almost utterly destroyed by a severe hail storm, and the excessive moisture during the later stage of the season prevented a recovery. Winter has not made sufficient on which to live.¹⁶⁹

Winter held out until April 1929—unlike many others.¹⁷⁰ By June 1928 the number of returned servicemen on the Pikedale settlement had fallen to forty-eight, with another sixty-five around Cottonvale and twenty-one scattered elsewhere on the Granite Belt.¹⁷¹ One of them was John Wylie of Spring Creek. In August 1928 he envisaged some chance of success with the assistance of child labour:

I am sorry I have not been able to pay owing [sic] to last season being bad, with low prices, if you could possibly grant me four months [extension] I would be able to pay by that time my crop of peas and beans should be ready for market, it has been really impossible for me to pay as I have to depend on vegetables my family of five is young, but my two oldest boys are now able to work so prospects are looking brighter, I have cleared seven acres of land since I took up the selection and planted plum trees, my wife and I have worked hard on this selection and we would not care to lose it after all the labour we put on it.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁹ H. Clark, Land Ranger, Stanthorpe Soldier Settlement, Amiens, to Land Commissioner, Stanthorpe District, Toowoomba, 4 May 1928, Ibid.
¹⁷⁰ Secretary, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, to J.E. Winter, Pozieres, 9 April 1929, Ibid.
¹⁷² John Wylie, Spring Creek, via Stanthorpe, to Minister for Lands, Brisbane, 15 August 1928, LAN/AK118, Batch 703, Part 1(B), QSA.
The Wylie family had been on the holding since 1923. Having already received a 'Show Cause' notice their plea was in vain, and they were thus forced to join the general exodus.¹⁷³

In February 1929 the Amiens soldier settler, D.T. Swan, tried a novel approach to farming when he managed to acquire and fence just over forty-eight hectares of land for the purpose of breeding possums.¹⁷⁴ The marsupial fur trade was of some importance to the Queensland economy during the 1920s, and also had the advantage of alleviating rural unemployment.¹⁷⁵ Notwithstanding that a four-week open season on koalas in August 1927 had seriously damaged the government’s credibility in the eyes of the general electorate, the trapping of possums continued intermittently.¹⁷⁶ Swan’s venture was therefore a sensible alternative to indiscriminate slaughter, and he expected to earn in the vicinity of forty pounds per hectare annually from selective breeding and culling.¹⁷⁷ Whether he achieved his objective is not known, but he was almost certainly one of the 122 soldier settlers scattered throughout the Granite Belt in mid-1929.¹⁷⁸ This represented a mere fraction of those who had selected land since the region was first thrown open in 1916.

¹⁷⁴ *BC*, 11 February 1929, p.22.
¹⁷⁵ *WK*, 5 May 1922, p.12.
There had been no question of the soil being unproductive. Rather, the holdings had initially been too small for the returned servicemen to make a living. By the time they had been enlarged, the majority of the settlers still in occupation were burdened by spiralling debts. That many had survived glutted markets and a drastic fall in produce prices was remarkable, but adverse weather conditions, particularly hail, often proved to be an insurmountable hurdle. It was thus small consolation to the settlers in December 1929 when William Deacon informed them that their holdings would again be revalued, as “the difficulties of the situation were very apparent”. Somewhat of an understatement it certainly was, for new winds had already begun to blow and this time the clouds bore more than just hail.

Despite their disastrous predicament, soldier settlers on poultry farms around Brisbane do not appear to have received any such assurance. At Enoggera, only twenty-three were occupying holdings by June 1926, and the following year another four departed. In June 1928 the number of holdings occupied by soldier settlers dropped to seventeen, and many had foregone poultry in favour of dairying. A few were also working in the city and, like David Anderson, their families carried on the task of poultry farming. In January 1929 twenty families remained on the settlement, but of this number only eight

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180 *BC*, 26 December 1929, p.15.
were original settlers. While their holdings were slightly enlarged in early 1929, this was not enough to counter the impact of the Great Depression. By 1931 a mere eight soldier settlers remained. While the Enoggera soldier settlement was another obvious failure, it went far deeper than the records suggest. As David Anderson related, by 1922 more than five of the original settlers had already been replaced, so the exact number who failed in their attempt to wrest a living from poultry remains elusive. Clearly, this poultry settlement was an almost complete failure, and their counterparts at Mount Gravatt fared no better.

By June 1926 only twenty-eight soldier settlers remained at Mount Gravatt, with one more departing the following year. It was not until 1927 that the English market for Australian eggs had been developed to a viable level—too late for any real benefit to be derived by the soldier settlers. In June 1928 seventeen returned servicemen were still occupying holdings, and in January 1929 it was disclosed that of the original forty-eight soldier settlers who originally took up holdings, only four remained. Three more holdings were abandoned before the scheme was officially wound up in 1929. There can be no doubt that the soldier settlers at Mount Gravatt, The Gap and Wolston had been

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185 WK, 11 January 1929, p.36.
187 Horton, Brisbane's Back Door, p.49.
victims of a ghastly experiment to develop a commercial poultry industry in Queensland—motivated, as it was, by racial concerns. Perhaps more pertinently, their pioneering efforts have also been virtually forgotten.

In August 1929 the report of Justice Pike confirmed that the Soldier Settlement Schemes implemented by all Australian States had been costly failures. Yet on closer examination Pike’s report can also be seen as a gross understatement. For too long historians have accepted the results of his investigations at little more than face value, without seriously questioning how the figures correlated to the actual experience. To conclude, it is necessary to evaluate those figures and their specific applicability to soldier settlers in Queensland. Researchers in other States then face the task of extrapolating the evidence presented here to provide a more complete appraisal of soldier settlement throughout Australia. It was certainly far worse than previously envisaged.
CONCLUSION:

I see the farmer coming up the field,
And as I look, imagination lifts
The sullen veil of alternating cloud,
And I am stunned by what I see behind.¹

Soldier settlers and their families were participants in a social and agricultural experiment that had largely grown from Australia’s lingering fear of foreign invasion. Indeed, the war itself had reinforced those concerns through the massive casualties sustained by the antipodean ‘shock troops’, and suspicion of Japan’s future intentions—particularly the “grave possibilities” of Japanese expansionism.² Both issues were raised by the Australian Prime Minister, William Morris Hughes, during the 1919 Peace Conference and, as suggested earlier, the idea of soldier settlement may have been germinated in Hughes’ fertile mind. This “crisis mentality” was, of course, most obvious in Queensland, the State geographically vulnerable to foreign invasion.³

For this reason, productive Asian farmers on the Atherton Tableland were forced off their leaseholds to make way for returned servicemen. The importation of eggs from China was halted by fostering a local poultry industry heavily dependent on soldier settlers, while the involvement of returned servicemen in banana-growing ensured that this branch of tropical agriculture remained firmly in European hands. In line with the ‘White

² BC, 11 June 1923, p.5.
Australia Policy’ and prevailing racial ideologies, soldier settlement was further intended to demonstrate European capabilities and superiority. That it was born from fear appears to have been overlooked.

Yet it was a quite different fear that contributed to the failure of soldier settlement. Under the Australian Constitution one of the most important residual powers left to the States was control of land within their boundaries. Notwithstanding this, the Commonwealth financially underwrote soldier settlement, with the States maintaining control of their individual schemes. Unless it was economically expedient—and limited—State authorities continued to deflect any attempted Federal intervention, fearing that their semi-autonomy would be weakened further.

Soldier settlers were caught between these two levels of government and local authorities, with the latter frequently using the scheme to enlarge their own economic base. Rent to the State, and rates to local authorities, impacted severely on the limited economic resources of the soldier settlers, exacerbated by the knowledge that the land would never be theirs in the true sense of the word. Certainly, civilian farmers on group settlements such as Gowrie, Maryvale and Jimbour faced similar difficulties, and disillusionment with perpetual leasehold persisted until the Labor government lost office in 1929 (Appendix 23).

While soldier settlers were expected to become a self-sufficient yeomanry who would develop Australia’s resources and safeguard the nation, they also served as pawns in the
Queensland government's own 'agricultural revolution'. This was motivated by a genuine desire to bring about social reform, but also operated in the cause of political and economic expediency. Backed by Commonwealth funding, soldier settlement was perceived as a relatively inexpensive means for determining which rural enterprises would be suitable for different regions of the State, and the minimum area of land required for production to be viable. Soldier settlement was used in a bid to prevent the consumption of arable lands by prickly pear and, as railways were often incremental to soldier settlement, the Labor government was able to extend the State's network with the aid of Commonwealth loans.

The problem was that the 'agricultural revolution' also depended on expected British loans to bring it to fruition. When conservative forces engineered the loans embargo against the Queensland government in the early 1920s, this vital plank in Labor's platform was brought to a grinding halt. By the time external finance was obtained it was already too late for the vast majority of soldier settlers. Queensland did share one major difficulty with the rest of Australia. With a small population, and on the periphery of the British Empire, markets for primary produce were extremely limited. That this was indeed a national concern is reflected in the call for "men, money and markets" by the Australian Prime Minister, Stanley Melbourne Bruce, at the Imperial and Economic Conference held in London during 1923.\(^5\)

\(^4\) BC, 7 June 1921, p.9.
With the post-war boom, however, these problems were not anticipated, and early enthusiasm led to Queensland soldier settlers being placed on marginal and, at times, virtually useless tracts of land. Bald Hills and Coominya stand as classic examples of official ineptitude and, as this thesis has shown, they were by no means unique. In an important sense, the soldier settlers and their families were agricultural pioneers who were to spearhead an accelerated program of closer settlement. Their contribution and sacrifice has also been virtually forgotten. This was partly due to the apathy which replaced patriotic euphoria as economic and environmental forces steadily eroded the grand agricultural vision. Not that it destroyed the dream. When the Labor Party was returned to office in 1932 the new Premier, William Forgan-Smith, again insisted that:

I take the view that, no matter how much secondary industries may be established in Queensland, this State will continue for all time to be a primary producing State. It is desirable that it should be so. Primary production is the natural occupation of mankind. No one would desire for this State the industrialised type of civilisation which exists in many countries today.  

This anachronistic conviction continued to ignore the point that Queensland remained a ‘semi-peripheral area’ within the imperial economic framework. Moreover, that subservient position had already been amply demonstrated with the onset of the Great Depression when, along with the closure of the London long-term financial market, there was a devastating fall in world prices for Australian exports. Although soldier settlement

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had been officially wound up in 1929, the Great Depression hammered the final nails into its coffin.

The scheme itself cannot be seen as having existed in a vacuum. Soldier settlement coincided with the rise of dominance by the medical profession. The pioneers of this incursion into rural areas were undoubtedly the Bush Nurses. The BNA did, however, alleviate many of the physical problems experienced by soldier settler families, and the nurses themselves were soon integrated into general community life. Schools were more problematic. Compulsory education restricted the use of unpaid labour for many struggling soldier settlers and, with the children also remaining dependent for a prolonged period, it further ensured that an increased financial burden was placed on those battling rural producers.

The number of returned servicemen who participated in Queensland’s scheme is also problematic. Information provided for Justice Pike by August 1929 disclosed that out of the 6,031 ‘soldier settlers’ who had entered the scheme since its inception in 1916, 3,617 remained on the land. A simple calculation thus enabled Pike to contend that the failure rate in the northern State equated to forty percent. But the previous June, official figures in the *Queensland Parliamentary Papers* revealed that only 1,148 soldier settlers were occupying land on “Group Settlements” or “other Crown Lands”. There were, however, another 2,650 recipients of financial assistance distinct from soldier settlement. The largest category consisted of 2,012 returned servicemen who had been advanced loans.

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against property already held by themselves or families. A further 612 comprised discharged servicemen or widows who had received advances for workers' dwellings. Another eight occupied perpetual town leaseholds, and eighteen held perpetual suburban leases. Combined with actual soldier settlers the total receiving some form of assistance was 3,798.\(^9\) Allowing for a deteriorating situation over the subsequent two months, this figure is therefore compatible with that proffered in Justice Pike's report.

The experience of the latter groups was markedly different from that of soldier settlers. In urban areas there were undoubtedly failures through unemployment, injury and illness, or death. In rural districts a number may have succumbed to environmental or economic factors, but established holdings with sufficient land—particularly freehold land—offered a measure of relief denied most soldier settlers. It is also unlikely that they were undercapitalised to the same extent as soldier settlers, or forced to engage in specific rural pursuits. This, of course, begs the fundamental question: How many of the 6,031 allegedly involved with the scheme were actually soldier settlers?

The answer is elusive, but it can be conclusively shown that Pike's figures are wildly inaccurate. In the peak year of soldier settlement, 1921, there were 2,577 returned servicemen on group settlements and other areas of Crown land in Queensland.\(^10\) As mentioned above, this number had dwindled to 1,148 in June 1929—or a failure rate in excess of sixty percent. As this thesis has amply demonstrated, holdings were sometimes

re-selected two, three or perhaps more times, but it was only the soldier settler occupying land in June of each year who was included in the official statistics. In other words, while the maximum number of those who can categorically be identified as ‘soldier settlers’ was 2,577, there is little reason not to suspect that they may have been in excess of 3,000. While that can certainly not be proven, the fact remains that the failure rate was clearly above sixty percent and Justice Pike’s figures can no longer be accepted as valid. Indeed, the percentages require reversal, as less than forty percent remained in occupation by mid-1929, and many more are known to have abandoned their holdings during the Great Depression. Similar miscalculations apply to the rest of Australia, and further research into the various State schemes should finally lay to rest the “heretical assertion” that “soldier settlement was not the ‘great failure’ that its critics have sought to portray it as”. On the contrary, it was clearly far worse than previously suspected.

There were numerous other factors which militated against success. Soldier settlement was implemented during the brief period of post-war prosperity, but it also resulted in high prices being paid for materials. Their available capital was thus rapidly consumed during initial establishment, and when recession set in there was virtually no financial buffer to alleviate the impact. The specific timing of soldier settlement largely separated the scheme from civilian endeavours. In many cases soldier settlers and their families also fell victim to the adverse environmental conditions pertaining throughout the 1920s.

11 Garton, The Cost of War, p.141.
Drought, flooding rains, hail, insect and botanical pests, marsupial depredations and, in the case of Bald Hills, even abnormal tides, were detrimental to soldier settlement.

The position of the returned servicemen was further undermined by official incompetence which, in many instances, ensured that they not only had an insufficient area for their purpose, but also infertile and unproductive land on which to eke out a living. Certainly, many of the soldier settlers were also unsuited for a rural existence, either through temperament or physical disability. It was, after all, an experiment sustained by little more than blind faith, parochialism and chauvinism. Commonwealth-State antagonism and detrimental economic forces were extra ingredients in this potential recipe for disaster—the final outcome.

In June 1924, when the entire scheme was already beginning to exhibit strong signs of failure, the Beerburrum soldier settler, E.J. Coghlan, was moved to remark that:

Altogether 370 men have failed in Beerburrum, and the remainder are failing. Beerburrum has done what the famous Prussian Guards could not do—it has beaten the Digger. Let that go to the credit of the Government and the people of Queensland. History will make strange reading, when it records how men who fought for their country were penalised by being settled on the sandy wastes of Beerburrum.\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{12} BC, 11 June 1924, p.19.
Coghlan was referring specifically to the authorities responsible for the scheme, as many people had already expressed grave concern for the plight of the soldier settlers—not only at Beerburrum—but throughout the State. With the exception of El Arish, the scheme certainly defeated the returned servicemen, and Coghlan’s comment is all the more poignant in that soldier settlement was presented to the returned warriors as compensation for the traumatic experiences they had endured. Unfortunately, it merely became a new nemesis, filled with further, albeit hidden casualties.

A further tragedy was that many of the participants saw failure as a reflection on their own masculinity, and politicians such as Harry Coyne and William McCormack were adept at playing on that feeling of inadequacy when defending their government’s actions. While history does not necessarily make the “strange reading” that Coghlan suggested, it is pertinent that it was not until the 1960s that historians began to question seriously the positive portrayals of Australia’s past. Until then, there was a general reluctance to engage in negative interpretations. Post-World War One soldier settlement in Queensland is one facet of that negativity which has been virtually ignored—until now. Yet an understanding of this tragic episode is still far from complete. Apart from the need for more comparative studies throughout Australia, more research is also required into the silent victims of the Queensland experience. Women and children have their own stories to tell, and the historian will undoubtedly find such research a worthwhile task.
The area of Queensland in round figures is 430,000,000 acres. The hachures show the area—approximately 51,500,000 acres—that is pear infested, and give a good idea of the serious nature of the prickly pear menace. As a comparison it may be mentioned that England, Scotland, and Wales aggregate 53,978,880 acres, Victoria 56,608,640 acres, and Tasmania 16,700,000.

APPENDIX 2

The Politics of Patriotism

SOURCE: WORKER (BRISBANE), 12 DECEMBER 1918, p.8.
APPENDIX 3

1922 Parish of Beerwah Map
Scale: 40 chains to an inch

SOURCE: ANON, TABLELANDS OF NORTH QUEENSLAND: ATHERTON AND EVELYN TABLELANDS AND OSWALD’S TRACK (RETURNED SOLDIERS’ SETTLEMENT) (BRISBANE: QUEENSLAND GOVERNMENT INTELLIGENCE & TOURIST BUREAU, 1918), SUPPLEMENT.
APPENDIX 5

SAMFORD DISTRICT
HISTORICAL MAP

SCALE

KILOMETRES

[Map of the Samford District with various landmarks and features marked, including Mount Kobble, Mount Samson, and the Highlands Soldier Settlement.]

HIGHLANDS SOLDIER SETTLEMENT

SOURCE: E. MARKS (ED.), SAMFORD REMINISCENCES (SAMFORD, QLD: SAMFORD AND DISTRICT HISTORICAL MUSEUM COMMITTEE, 1984), PP.28-9
APPENDIX 6

2300 ACRES, none of it more than one mile off the Railway. Two miles from STAN-THORPE. The healthiest district in Australia. The main Brisbane-Sydney line cuts the property in two, and the Severn River runs through the Estate. SEE US about it to-day before you do another thing.

50 MEN wanted for all classes of work.

REALTY DEVELOPMENT CO.

SOURCE: BRISBANE COURIER (BRISBANE), 1 JULY 1919, P.12.
SOURCE: LAN/AK120, BATCH 709, PART I (1919-1924), QUEENSLAND STATE ARCHIVES.
APPENDIX 9

Telegram.

To Edwin Price

Soldiers Fathers Association

Tba.

Federal Parliament House Melbourne

Recent Lands Conference Melbourne approved acceptance Gratuity Bonds in payment of amounts due Lands Dept. If amount of Debit less than amount Gratuity Treasury will issue new Bond for balance.

Donald Cameron

War Gratuity Bond No. 080677 for £73.17.6 in favour of Walter Harold Stephson lodged 13.7.20. - No receipt issued.

H.F. 15.7.20.

B/C The Under Secretary, Lands.

The application of Walter Harold Stephson No. 7770 - Toowoomba District for portion 76, Parish of Cecil Plains, was adjourned at the Sittings of my Court to-day, to the 10th August Court, awaiting verification of the above telegram and your instructions in the matter.

Land Commissioner.

Public Lands Office,

Toowoomba, 14th July 1920.

SOURCE: LAN/AK120, BATCH 709, PART 1 (1919-1924), QUEENSLAND STATE ARCHIVES.
"FARMING" ON MANGROVE FLATS.
MORE VIEWS OF THE SOLDIERS' SETTLEMENT AT BALD HILLS.

MR. FARRELL'S COTTAGE.

SOURCE: BRISBANE COURIER (BRISBANE), 23 JULY 1921, P.17.
APPENDIX 14

FARMING ON MANGROVE PLATS. THE BORDER SETTLEMENT AT BAY HILLS

--- "GOMERAL NEWS" (All the water shown in the views is salt)

Photos by F. C. Wilman

Government reservation on the Pine River, at the entrance to the settlement.

About three-quarters of Mr. Farrello's block of 43 acres, owned by Mr. Farrello, is dead grazing land and valued at £100 an acre.

The boundary fence of Mr. Simpson's block.

Part of Mr. Davies' block, 4310 of an acre.

Mr. Dickson's block.

Mr. G. W. Cordon's block, "Ruby Prospect." (Mr. Cordon is one of the satisfied settlers, he does not live on this block.)

SOURCE: QUEENSLANDER (BRISBANE), 23 JULY 1921, P.24.
SOURCE: CRAIGIE’S ROAD MAP AND GUIDE - 100 MILES ROUND BRISBANE (SYDNEY: KENNETH CRAIGIE, 1920).
APPENDIX 16

1 BURRANDOWAN
2 GORDONBROOK
3 CHARLESTOWN
4 STONELANDS
5 BOOINBAH
6 CINNABAR
7 NANANGO
8 YARRAMAN
9 NEUMGNA
10 TARONG
11 COOYAR

SOURCE: QUEENSLAND DIGGER (BRISBANE), Vol.1, No.6 (OCTOBER 1925), "BEERBURRUM SOLDIER SETTLEMENT", JOHN OXLEY LIBRARY PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTION, BRISBANE: NEGATIVE No.65594.
Rent Executioner: He can't stand any more. He was "all in" from the drought when I got him here.

Land Officialdom: Drought; dear fellow, don't matter to us! Give that lever another turn, and we'll wring a bit more out of him.

Section of the Soldier Settlement allocated to returned soldiers who had served in World War I 1914 - 1918 and settled in early 1920's. This is Dawson Creek Road, the Highlands (Highvale).

Scheldt family photo

A BETTER PLOUGH.

Farmer: Ha! Something like a plough. I'll have a chance once I get this going.

SOURCE: BRISBANE COURIER (BRISBANE), 12 JUNE 1929, p.16.
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