Journeys through a shifting landscape: the tours of Queensland Governors 1859-1901

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On 10 December 1859, amid scenes of general rejoicing, Sir George Ferguson Bowen proclaimed the separation from New South Wales of the vast and largely unexplored area to be known as Queensland, and the appointment of himself as Captain General and Governor-in-Chief of the same. Until the first Parliament met in May 1860, he was, quite simply, 'the person for the time being lawfully administering the Government of Queensland'. As soon as possible, he embarked on 'two tours, one of three hundred miles on horseback, and another of about one thousand miles by sea, touching at the settlements on the coast' in order to maintain loyalty to the Crown and to observe for himself what was needed. All but one of the subsequent colonial governors undertook at least an annual tour.

A study of these tours offers useful insights into the Governor's role as the Queen's representative in a new British colony. This is because the tours extend over short periods of time, on a regular basis, over the whole of the colonial period, and they are well documented. The reports and letters from the Governor to the Secretary of State for the Colonies show what was, or what the Governor thought might be, of interest to Britain. The press coverage, the speeches and the events staged show what was of interest to those who were visited. The itineraries chosen tend to reflect where development was occurring.

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1 Queensland Government Gazette, 10 December 1859
and the issues that must be acknowledged. Over time, changes occurred in the places visited, in the ease of travel and in the entertainments offered, as the establishment of infrastructure, towns and industries progressed.

Striving for progress

At Separation, Queensland had virtually no infrastructure. The European population of less than 25,000 was mainly in the southeast corner of a territory of 668,224 miles, much of which was unexplored. It was thought that the interior was virtually waterless and the existence of a series of natural harbours sheltered by the Great Barrier Reef was unknown. The ‘new’ territory was already inhabited and along the pastoral frontier sporadic hostilities continued as Aborigines were displaced by white settlement.

During the period in which Moreton Bay had been a penal colony and therefore not open to free settlement, towns had developed elsewhere at Ipswich, on the Darling Downs, at Maryborough and at Rockhampton and there were strong local rivalries. There were also differences between townspeople, agriculturists and squatters and the task of government would fall to men who had little experience in administration, let alone parliamentary experience. Shaping this territory into a successful colony was a formidable challenge for both the government and the people. Nevertheless, it was observed in 1889 that ‘a generation in Australia effects more transformation than a century in Europe or a “cycle in Cathay”’, and by 1902 the government’s annual review could consider Queensland’s first half-century with a certain smugness.

There were, naturally, differences in style between the eight nineteenth-century governors. Sir George Ferguson Bowen served between 1859 and 1868, but by the time he left his autocratic style was resented. Colonel Samuel Wensley Blackall (1868–71), his successor, won instant popularity for his warm, affable manner and his willingness to learn by touring. Making themselves visible and approachable continued to be key factors in the popularity or otherwise of governors. The Marquis of Normanby (1871–74) and Sir Arthur Kennedy (1875–77) followed Blackall’s lead, but William Wellington Cairns (1877–83) did not move

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5 Our first half-century: a review of Queensland’s progress, Brisbane, Government Publication, 1909, p. 16.
8 Lane-Poole, Thirty years of colonial government, p. 80. The annual review of Queensland, Brisbane, Queensland Government Publication, 1902.
9 Bulletin, 4 November 1869, p. 2.
10 Bulletin, 4 November 1869, p. 2.
beyond Ipswich and this contributed to his unpopularity. Sir Anthony Musgrave (1884–88) covered considerable distances on tour though occasionally had an imprudent candour. In Clermont, a mining centre, he denounced mining as having little long-term value, 'on which no reliance could be placed', provoking a prompt public contradiction by the locals.¹¹ Tact proved an essential virtue in a successful governor.

From the 1880s, Queensland had some say in who was appointed and this was also a time when, reflecting the increasing power of the Empire, governors were more glamorous. Military hero Sir Henry Wylie Norman (1889–95) pleased admirers and raised money for charity by giving public lectures on such events as 'the Relief of Lucknow', and was followed by the young and aristocratic Lord Lamington (1896–1901).¹² Most governors undertook at least one tour of the western districts and the north during their terms and many made annual trips.

Changes also occurred in tours as infrastructure developed. Even in 1892, as Sir Henry Wylie Norman explained to his Georgetown hosts, it was 'almost impossible for Governors to visit these distant parts of the Colony on account of the terrible journey'.¹³ However, by that time, many places were accessible because of the growth of the railway network. By 1890 the special train could travel at a brisk 52 miles an hour and had a dining car.¹⁴ This was a far cry from the travels undertaken by Sir George Bowen on horseback and 'encamped in the primeval forest or on the open prairie'.¹⁵ By the end of the century, short visits for specific events such as the Charters Towers races were often more appropriate.¹⁶

The territory itself changed, as can be seen in the itineraries of vice-regal tours. Initially, Rockhampton and Maryborough were referred to as the 'Northern Ports'.¹⁷ Over the next decade, ports further north were established and Cardwell, first visited by Bowen in 1865, became a regular port of call for governors.¹⁸ In 1872 Queensland was extended by the addition of a large area to the west, which was inspected by the governor that year in what one newspaper dubbed 'the Annexation Cruise'.¹⁹ The economic resources of the colony developed along unexpected lines when major strikes of gold and other minerals were made, first at Gympie in 1867 and then at several north Queensland fields in the 1870s. The

¹¹ Brisbane Courier, 10 June 1887, p. 5.
¹³ Brisbane Courier, 6 May 1892.
¹⁴ 'The Governor in the North', Brisbane Courier, 26 April 1890, p. 5.
¹⁵ Despatch GF Bowen to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 16 December 1864. QSA, GOV 22-GOV25
¹⁶ Brisbane Courier, 24 June 1899.
¹⁷ Lane-Poole, Thirty years of colonial government, p. 224.
¹⁸ Dorothy Jones, Cardwell Shire story, Brisbane, Jacaranda Press, 1961, p. 98.
¹⁹ Brisbane Courier, 3 September 1872, p. 2.
existence of natural harbours also facilitated the establishment of towns such as Townsville and Cooktown. The importance of this development was acknowledged by regular northern tours. By 1901 the pattern of settlement was more diffuse than it had been at Separation.

Some changes in tours reflect social changes such as the increased participation of women. Bowen travelled with a surveyor and an architect and most visits incorporated business meetings at which women were not expected to participate. The first governor’s wife to break the solidly male atmosphere was the Marchioness of Normanby who, in 1871, asked to attend a civic banquet at Ipswich and so automatically opened the guest list to other women, for which the mayor thanked her. However, many public dinners featured heavy drinking and political speeches and remained strictly men’s business until at least the end of the century.

Figure 2: Visit of Sir Anthony Musgrave and Lady Musgrave to the North Phoenix Mine, Gympie, 1888. Sir Anthony with the light colour hat and beard. Lady Musgrave is beside him, facing in profile. (John Oxley Library neg. 39220)

As time went by, more mixed-gender events were incorporated into the entertainments. In 1888 Lady Musgrave participated actively in a tour to the extent of descending the North Phoenix mine at Gympie with her husband, and the group photograph taken to commemorate this occasion suggests that other women in the party may have accompanied her. She also held a ladies’ reception at Rockhampton while Sir Anthony held a meeting for

20 Despatch GF Bowen to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 4 December 1860.
21 Queenslander, September 1871, p. 172.
their husbands, but this was unusual and she did not join her husband on an excursion to Clermont, which was considered a business trip. Lady Lamington, young and enthusiastic, travelled to a number of places considered fairly remote with her husband. She requested a bath in a drought-stricken area, and was startled to be given an inch and a half of water at the bottom of a large tank. She later felt guilty about her thoughtlessness, but the incident does reinforce the idea of tours as a learning experience. A governor who toured was thought to be learning about the country and listening to people’s views, which was appreciated.

Tours became more sophisticated as the colony developed. Although in 1860 the North Australian could sneer that the guests had lingered after supper at Drayton to see if the governor really wore his dress uniform and sword to bed, this was merely a first acquaintance. Already by 1865 Bowen could report that the goldfields now no longer displayed:

...[the] recklessness and turbulence of former years [and] nothing could have been in better taste than all the arrangements which the miners at Gladstone made for my reception – the dinner (served in a tent), wines and speeches were all equally good.

Balls, plays and concerts became standard entertainments, although there was sufficient adventure left in the colony to supply two days of crocodile shooting when a cyclone held up the government steamer.

While progress was reflected in the tours and was part of the reason for them, the basic reasons for touring did not change, nor did their ceremonial aspects. However, the issues of the day did affect the choice of destination, who accompanied the governor, how the tours were arranged and what was discussed.

The view from the crowd – a loyal demonstration

In a period when most Queenslanders were proud to be members of the British Empire and a visit from the Queen herself was an impossibility, the Governor, as her personal representative, was the next best thing. A visit from him emphasised the link with a distant Britain and provided a sense of belonging and of contact with the capital. It encouraged a sense of community within the places visited and was an opportunity to display progress and to receive official recognition for achievements. A vice-regal visit provided the opportunity to

22 Brisbane Courier, 13 June 1887, p. 6.
23 Peak Downs Telegram, 18 April 1890.
25 ibid.
26 North Australian, 10 April 1860. Despatch GF Bowen to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 10 November 1865.
27 Brisbane Courier, 14 September 1872.
bring matters of local interest to the Governor’s attention and to educate him about local conditions. It was often seen as a chance to appeal to Caesar, although most governors treated this aspect with great care, to avoid appearing to take sides.

Although royal progresses between great houses were an old custom, a modern pattern was established during the late eighteenth century. At this time, during a journey between Windsor and Weymouth by the beleaguered George III, the people in places along his route responded in a way that established a new relationship with the monarchy. Visible and approachable, the king was seen as a benevolent parent to his people and as the representative of patriotic virtues. Many features of this tour can be seen during governors’ tours, including a reception by the local council, loyal addresses, and the presentation of gifts and local curiosities. For the Governor’s part, accessibility and an interest in the activities and welfare of the people were expected. At Gympie, giving a cheery wave as he was lowered down a mine shaft put the final seal on Blackall’s popularity, because it made him seem willing to be an ordinary mortal, although it would not have been liked if he were too ordinary. The popularity or otherwise of governors makes it clear what qualities the public desired in them. Bowen was too autocratic and formal; Cairns withheld contact; Norman struck a balance between dignity and warmth and was popular. Tours were used to maintain loyalty to the Crown in exactly the same way as they were used in Britain.

There is almost a blueprint for vice-regal visits, which began with the welcome afforded the Governor. On Bowen’s first tour, he was met outside town and escorted into it by scores of men on horseback. He was greatly impressed by the standard of his reception, and not least by the superbly mounted reception committees, who immediately made him think about the possibility of cavalry and to whom he referred in correspondence as ‘the Centaurs’. In later years crowds would gather at the railway station, or take small boats out to meet the government steamer carrying the Governor. This welcoming crowd was in fact referred to as a ‘loyal demonstration’. It was not quite as spontaneous as it appeared and often required stage management, as when the Lady Bowen carrying Sir Arthur Kennedy arrived several hours too early at Maryborough and had to stand out to sea until the appropriate time arrived.

Following his arrival, the Governor was escorted into the town where he paused at the nearest ‘official’ building so that addresses could be presented. These professed loyalty to

29 J Butler, The Governor’s visit to Gympie with an historical sketch of the discovery and progress of the Gympie goldfield, Gympie, 1869, p. 7.
30 Moreton Bay Courier, 27 March 1860.
31 Lane-Poole, Thirty years of colonial government, p. 122.
32 Brisbane Courier, 26 March 1878.
the Queen, welcomed the Governor and expressed the hope that the visit would assist him to further the interests of Queensland. The crowds were often so large that there was no suitable building large enough to accommodate them. Rockhampton tackled the problem by erecting ‘a marquee of green branches’ topped with the royal arms, near the quay.\(^{33}\) Speeches were presented on behalf of Divisional Boards and Municipal Councils, and by lodges and friendly societies. When responding, the Governor could use the occasion ‘to afford useful information, and to tender practical advice to the inhabitants’.\(^{34}\) Addresses were later forwarded to the Queen. The ceremonial nature of this part of the proceedings was underlined by the performance of the national anthem, played by a local volunteer band or sung by schoolchildren, who were scrubbed, starched and often dressed in white for the occasion.

Children were important participants in the welcome, singing, performing drills, or presenting the Governor with flowers or local produce. Governors almost conventionally congratulated the community members on their healthy appearance. They represented the future and in 1899 Lord Lamington remarked to the people of Clermont that it was ‘a source of pleasure to him to note that the children were being brought up to understand the privilege it was to belong to the mighty British empire’.\(^{35}\) The provision of a picnic or other treat for the children, followed by a holiday from school, no doubt reinforced this understanding by ensuring a pleasurable memory of the occasion.

Following the formal welcome, the Governor was escorted through town in a procession to the place where he was to stay during his visit. The souvenir booklet of Lord Normanby’s visit to Gympie in 1873 gives a breakdown of the composition of a typical procession: schoolchildren 800, Chinese 50, Hibernians 200, Good Templars 200, Oddfellows 120, Aboriginals 20.\(^{36}\) It was also usual for the local Volunteer Rifle Brigade to take part, where one existed. This provided an opportunity to demonstrate patriotic fervour and to display the town at its best. Every available flag of any description was flown and commercial premises vied with each other by decorating their buildings with loyal mottoes, flags, evergreens and bunting. Triumphal arches at the junctions of major streets were a feature of these decorations and were usually constructed of evergreens and flowers over a framework and topped with flags and a message.

Having arrived at his accommodation, the Governor was allowed little rest, as he was expected to hold a levee where important local men were presented to him. This conveyed

\(^{33}\) *Bulletin*, 26 October 1861, p. 2.
\(^{34}\) Despatch of GF Bowen to the Duke of Newcastle, 4 December 1860.
\(^{35}\) *Peak Downs Telegram*, 16 April 1899.
\(^{36}\) Governor Normanby’s visit to Gympie; with descriptive accounts of the Gympie goldfield and the Newsa District*, *Gympie Times*, 1973, p. 8.
social distinction, but also gave the men the chance to gain the Governor’s ear for a few
minutes. At Maryborough, where the hubbub was too great for anyone to be heard, ‘the
people contented themselves with what may be termed a good square stare’.\(^{37}\) The
Governor was then taken on a tour of places of interest and might publicly endorse
achievements by opening a new school or laying the foundation stone of a hospital, before
returning for the evening’s events. The *Northern Miner* in Charters Towers summed it up: ‘as
we cannot have the Governor with us always, we ... made up our minds ... that when we
had got him we would make the most of him’.\(^{38}\)

When Sir Henry Wylie Norman visited Charters Towers in 1890, the goldfield was by then
almost at the height of its phenomenal gold production and a determination to show the city
nicknamed ‘The World’ at its best prevailed. Norman was treated to a trip down the Mills
United Mine and a gift of ore (‘it is needless to say that he did not pass through the changing
room on his exit’), a public banquet, fireworks, a theatrical performance and a ball in the
space of a single day.\(^{39}\) Afterwards, the *Northern Miner* could express the general
satisfaction that ‘Charters Towers can congratulate itself of having done the handsome thing
by His Excellency during his brief stay here’.\(^{40}\) To have impressed the Governor, particularly
one who had seen a good deal of the world, provided a considerable boost to local
confidence and civic pride.

As part of a statement of identity, there was a tendency to show governors local oddities or
specialties, such as a Billy Goat Brigade or the decorated steam dredge that saluted
Governor Kennedy with whistles at Maryborough.\(^{41}\) Displays of Aboriginal skills fell into this
category and groups of Aborigines gave demonstrations of dancing or boomerang throwing
on numerous occasions. On one occasion, at Goondi, the governor was treated to a display
of Kanaka dancing.\(^{42}\) To some extent, the participation of Chinese groups fit into this
category as well. This was undoubtedly because they added welcome colour to the
proceedings, but unfortunately also because their formal costumes and traditional music
provided a source of hilarity.\(^{43}\) The Chinese had their own reasons for participating: they
made deputations and formal addresses to the Governor requesting more favourable
treatment at the hands of the government.\(^{44}\)

\(^{37}\) *Brisbane Courier*, 26 March 1878.
\(^{38}\) *Northern Miner*, 24 April 1890.
\(^{39}\) *Northern Miner*, 24 April 1890.
\(^{40}\) *Northern Miner*, 25 April 1890.
\(^{41}\) *Brisbane Courier*, 26 March 1878.
\(^{42}\) *Brisbane Courier*, 15 May 1890.
\(^{43}\) *Brisbane Courier*, 7 May 1890.
The opportunity to display achievements was welcomed in a young colony where progress was everything. Governors were taken out to sugar plantations on decorated cane trains, lowered down mines, opened bridges and schools, and turned the first sod of projected railway lines. On one memorable occasion, John Robb, the contractor for the Cairns railway line, gave a lunch for the Governor's party. It was held in a small shelter constructed in the middle of the almost completed rail bridge at Stoney Creek near Kuranda. This spectacular position on a single, narrow-gauge line spanning a chasm (the sleepers had been planked over), with the creek 70 feet below and the falls thundering alongside the line, was symbolic of nature conquered by an exceptional feat of technology and human skill and says much about the spirit of the era. To the governor, the attendant politicians and the press, it drew attention to the continuing progress of the colony in the most dramatic way.

![Image](image.jpg)

Figure 3: The banquet held for Sir Henry Wylie Norman on the Stoney Creek Bridge, Cairns-Kuranda railway, 1890. (John Oxley Library Album APO-25-0001-0010)

Although a number of governors had previous experience in tropical postings, there was much that was unique to Queensland. Tours offered communities the perfect opportunity to educate the Governor. Following the visit of Lord Normanby in 1873, the *Gympie Times* announced with satisfaction:

> The Governor has now so satisfactorily and completely – we had almost written suddenly – retracted the opinions in reference to goldfields once attributed to him, that we all cannot be otherwise than gratified by the reflection that our very creditable

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45 *Brisbane Courier*, 29 April 1890, p. 5.
demonstration, as a practical refutation of these mistaken views, has been quite a victory. 46

Lord Normanby had thought agriculture more important to the future of Queensland than mining, which was naturally of concern to Gympie, as mining developments required capital.

Sir George Bowen took surveyors, architects and ‘others of the Chief Executive Officers of the Government’ with him on tour, and subsequent governors did the same, but later politicians were more experienced and the governors more tactful about their power. 47

Usually, when the official party was in a town, any deputations spoke to accompanying ministers, but matters were still drawn to the Governor’s attention. Often, this took the form of mentioning a problem in an address, or of approaching the Governor directly, or by demonstrating it to him. It was known that the Governor had considerable influence, both in Queensland and in Britain, and for places outside the capital a tour afforded the only opportunity of gaining his support.

It is interesting to speculate on how Aborigines felt about the vice-regal tours, because they were constantly involved on the periphery of the proceedings and much of the governors’ experience of Aborigines was probably gained through tours. They were associated with vice-regal ceremonial in Queensland from at least the date of Bowen’s first visit to Maryborough in November 1860. Even though this area had recently been the focus of serious interracial conflict and Native Police raids, large numbers of Aborigines in and around Maryborough performed a corroboree for the Governor and were rewarded with provisions. 48

Sometimes, because blankets and provisions were handed out in the Queen’s name on these occasions, the Aboriginal people arrived of their own volition, but on other occasions they were simply rounded up. 49 Participation was clearly not voluntary during the 1890 tour, when an impromptu visit to a camp near Pentland by the Governor and his entourage caused panic, as the whole camp fled, believing that the visit was a police raid. 50

The use of Aborigines as living statues in triumphal arches is a curious feature of tour decorations, which possibly dates to Prince Arthur’s 1868 visit to Queensland 51 and may relate both to a celebration of the conquest of the wilderness by progress and to the custom of displaying curiosities peculiar to a place. By the end of the century, they were seen as belonging to an era that was passing into memory, and in 1890 the men on the arch at

46 ‘Governor Normanby’s Visit to Gympie’, p. 3.
47 Despatch GF Bowen to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 4 December 1860.
48 Moreton Bay Courier, 15 November 1860.
49 ‘Mr Cowley had wired from Townsville to the Reception Committee to get some of the blacks in …’, Brisbane Courier, 15 May 1890, p. 7.
50 Brisbane Courier, 5 May 1890, p. 5.
51 Constance Petrie, Tom Petrie’s reminiscences of early Queensland, St Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 1992 (1904).
Charters Towers were presented to the Governor as ‘Kings’ and perfectly performed their role as ‘noble savages’.

That there was a widespread belief in the value of vice-regal visits is supported by the fact that there was little argument about the costs. The government voted an annual sum to cover the cost of travelling, usually by train or government steamer, although it must be remembered that parliamentarians and public servants also travelled with the Governor. In 1872, when the Kate left for a tour of the Northern Ports, it carried two months’ supplies, although later the Governor used regular steam packets for travelling. The cost of entertainment was usually divided between the local Divisional Board and the Municipal Council, although the Governor sometimes stayed with individuals. Banquets and balls were paid for by public subscription at a price that was carefully calculated to ensure good attendance while keeping the riff-raff out. A considerable amount of political and practical work was done along with the social aspects of the tour and so the tours undoubtedly provided good value for the government and for the communities visited.

The view from the podium – ‘tendering practical advice to the inhabitants’

The Governor of Queensland had considerable power, directly through the authority of Letters Patent and indirectly by influence. Standing in place of the monarch, he was ‘not a mere figurehead in the Government’, but was ‘so to speak, one of the three branches of the Legislature’. He had control of assent over expenditure and Bills, opened and could dissolve Parliament, appointed ministers and statutory officials and acted as President of the Executive Council. His position was described rather pompously by the Queensland government in 1909 as carrying

... a distinctive atmosphere of Imperial comprehensiveness which usefully neutralizes a narrow parochialism that might tend to induce men and women to forget that they, while a politically independent community, yet form an integral part of the great Empire of the Mistress of the Seas.

One of the reasons that the Governor visited as many parts of the colony as he could was to carry this reminder with him.

The Governor’s role as head of society was considered only second to his capacity as head of the Executive. It was intended that Queensland should replicate the British system of

52 Despatch GF Bowen to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 16 December 1864.
53 Pugh’s Queensland almanac, directory and law calendar, Brisbane, 1873.
54 One pound, ten shillings at Toowoomba in 1860, Darling Downs Gazette, 22 March 1860.
55 Cuneen, The King’s men, p. 6.
56 Our first half-century, p. 19.
58 Our first half-century, p. 19.
59 Despatch GF Bowen to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 25 May 1860.
government, which presupposed the formation of a society from which future leaders would emerge. In a new colony, it was expected that this would be based on merit rather than on birth and that the Governor would play a major role in this, not only by judicious appointments but also in hosting and attending the kind of functions that would attract and educate such a society. In order that this should not be limited to the capital, it was important that the Governor should hold levees and attend banquets, meetings and balls in as many regional centres as possible.

A governor on tour also made use of the opportunity to promote policies that were in the broader imperial interest or which Britain felt were in the interest of the colony. One such project was the promotion of cotton growing during the American Civil War in the 1860s. Although the matter had been discussed earlier, the blockade of Confederate ports shipping cotton had had disastrous consequences for the British textile industry. Queensland offered land grants for growers and Bowen promoted the matter strongly on his tour of the ‘northern ports’ in 1860, with the result that a Cotton Growing Association was formed in Maryborough. It should be noted that this scheme was well supported by the Queensland government as a means of assisting Britain in an economic crisis and did not depend on the tour for promotion. However, the Governor’s personal recommendation and the newspaper coverage always afforded tours were no doubt valuable.

If the tours were useful to the Governor, they also provided excellent training for the politicians who accompanied him. When Queensland was first separated from New South Wales, it suffered from ‘a dearth of seasoned public men’. By the turn of the century it was acknowledged that the first ministers had learned as they had gone along and touring the towns and countryside with an experienced administrator would have been valuable experience. From Blackall onwards, the ministers who accompanied the Governor on tours put practical matters in hand. For example, in Maryborough in 1878 Sir Arthur Kennedy toured schools and hospitals while Douglas, MLA for Wide Bay, saw deputations from the sugar and timber industries. The gathering together of a wide variety of people and the atmosphere of goodwill that were part of tours may have been helpful to discussion. In Charters Towers it was reported that ‘The Waterworks Board members, in a short conversation with Mr Donaldson, smoothed over the difficulties that have so long retarded the works’. By 1886 the Premier and several ministers were making tours on their own,

60 Moreton Bay Courier, 24 November 1860.
62 Our first half-century, p. 5.
63 Traill, Historical review of Queensland, p. 63.
64 Brisbane Courier, 26 March 1878.
65 Brisbane Courier, 7 May 1890.
though politicians continued to accompany vice-regal tours. The governors might offer advice but they did not interfere; a complaint by the Mayor of Rockhampton to Blackall elicited only the ‘hope that remonstrance through your properly constituted representatives will lead to a reform’.  

Political issues influenced the choice of destination, who accompanied the Governor and what was discussed in speeches and at meetings. The itineraries had a certain rhythm, in order to ensure a fair coverage of areas, but response to political and economic situations can be seen. The growing importance of north Queensland, and agitation for separation from the south, ensured an annual and lengthy ‘Northern Tour’ in response.

Several major issues developed during this period, but it is noticeable that two of them surfaced repeatedly during tours. These were the use of indentured Melanesian labour in the sugar industry and the separation of north Queensland from the southern part of the colony. The British government was opposed to both, although there was considerable popular support for them in Queensland. In spite of a generally congratulatory style, the addresses and banquet speeches given on tours give a good indication of this. In Mackay in 1869, sugar growers used their loyal address to point out that ‘tropical agriculture is as important as pastoralism and that coloured labour is needed to ensure its growth’. Blackall replied that while the British Government did not want to stand in the way of ‘such immigration’ it was necessary to guard against abuse and that Britain was ‘jealous against anything resembling that slavery which she has spent so much life and treasure to abolish in all parts of her domains’. This was a delicate issue and Blackall not only mentioned the incident in his despatch to the Colonial Office but also enclosed a copy of the Mackay Mercury report.

This continued to be an important issue for sugar growing areas and in 1890 Norman reassured his hosts by noting that accusations of abuse of Kanaka labourers were not supported by what he had seen, but that black labour could not continue. His role on the tour was to assess local feeling and look for ways in which the impact could be lessened. Sir Henry had been a Governor of Jamaica and pointed out that as the West Indies had diversified its agricultural interests beyond a single crop, so should Queensland. This kind of advice clearly goes beyond the ceremonial and social aspects of tours.

The issue of the separation of north Queensland from the colony also recurred during vice-regal tours. Sir George Bowen had felt that neglect of the needs of those who were establishing themselves on the frontiers of European settlement had caused the separation.

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66 Bulletin, 26 October 1869.
67 Mackay Mercury, 16 October 1869.
68 Mackay Mercury, 16 October 1869.
69 Brisbane Courier, 7 May 1890.
70 Brisbane Courier, 7 May 1890.
of Victoria and Queensland from New South Wales in the first place and he was determined that such neglect should not occur again. Even so, the way in which the colony had developed tended to cause dissatisfaction. Many of the natural resources were in the north, while the largest cities and most of the population (and therefore the expenditure) were in the south. Britain was not in favour of separation, and as late as 1887 Musgrave had written, ‘I regard the division of the colony both as improbable and undesirable’. The Separation movement believed that the Queensland Parliament had no power to decide the issue and that a decision rested solely with Britain. This meant that the Governor was put under particular pressure.

The political influence on the 1890 northern tour can be seen in the timing, when the matter was being discussed between Cabinet and the British government. The vice-regal party visited those towns that most strongly supported separation and articles on separation often march beside coverage of the Governor’s tour in newspapers. No fewer than three ministers and eight members of parliament accompanied the tour, which was unprecedented. ‘It was the question of the day and all others sank into insignificance in comparison.’ Feeling in the north was running high and is indicated by the fact that the Melbourne Argus promised to wire a précis of the Governor’s speech in Townsville and any future items on the separation question to the London press.

In Charters Towers, the Australasian Republican Association threatened to hold an alternative demonstration of its own and the Mayor felt obliged to put an overnight guard on the decorations. However, vice-regal fever, and the stronger issue of separation, for which the governor could be lobbied, prevailed. When the train carrying the governor arrived, a cheer went up from the crowd, ‘Democrats, Radicals and Republicans joining in’. The Republicans were later so taunted by the press for this that they felt obliged to justify themselves by saying that their quarrel was with the rotten system and ‘not against those individuals who support it’.

Sir Henry was very careful in what he said, although finding suitable replies to pointed comments in addresses must have taxed his diplomatic skills. Several of the most radical pro-separation politicians were with him and at every stop the matter was raised to cheers in addresses and after-dinner speeches. The Governor declared that ‘he had no doubt their

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71 Lane-Poole, _Thirty years of colonial government_, p. 179.
72 Despatch A Musgrave to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 21 May 1887.
74 _Brisbane Courier_, 23 April 1890.
75 _Brisbane Courier_, 23 April 1890.
76 _Brisbane Courier_, 8 May 1890.
77 _Northern Miner_, 28 April 1890.
78 _Northern Miner_, 28 April 1890.
representatives would receive every consideration in the proper quarters, and if it was permitted him to do anything which would benefit any portion of the colony he would gladly do so.\(^7^9\) This was a tactful non-answer in which the key word is ‘benefit’—he did not think it was beneficial to the colony, and neither did Britain.

It is clear that this tour marks something of a turning point. It was made at a time when a series of political and financial crises loomed and the position of the Governor really mattered. This was borne out by the extensive press coverage of the tour and by the interest that the Melbourne Argus and London papers took in it. It is interesting to note that in 1898, when the new, Queensland-born premier TJ Byrne undertook a tour of the north around the same time as the Governor, it was Byrne’s tour that attracted intense press interest.\(^8^0\) Although Federation was discussed on later tours, it was warmly endorsed by both governors and politicians and did not attract as much controversy or interest as the separation issue had.

By the turn of the century Queensland was no longer an infant colony and tours had also undergone changes. Politicians preferred to travel without the Governor, Federation was approaching, and the future role of state governors was being discussed. Sir Herbert Chermside, Queensland’s first governor after Federation, felt that his role had been eroded, and he was right.\(^8^1\) Vice-regal visits to various parts of the state continued, and were of value and welcomed by the communities concerned, but they did not have quite the same resonance when Queensland ceased to be an independent colony.

**Conclusion**

During the nineteenth century, vice-regal tours of regions outside Brisbane were important to Britain, to the Governor and to the communities visited. By making himself visible and approachable, the Governor, as the Queen’s representative, helped to establish and maintain a relationship between Britain and its daughter colony, thus helping to guide it to a useful place within the Empire.

At Separation, Queensland was a very large territory, much of which was as yet unexplored by Europeans. Tours were a valuable means for the governors to gather information and to learn about the land and the people, especially when they were new to the colony. Views gathered in this way were transmitted to Britain through reports and dispatches and were of assistance in formulating policy.

If the Governor brought a wider view to the communities he visited, those visited also used this moment of contact to bring matters that were important to them to the attention of

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\(^7^9\) Brisbane Courier, 8 May 1890.
\(^8^0\) See Daily Record, 26 May 1898 and Cairns Post, 6 May 1898 for an account of Byrnes’ tour.
\(^8^1\) Proctor, The office of governor, p. 10.
someone impartial in authority. It is not surprising that Governor Blackall was praised, because he listened.\textsuperscript{82} A vice-regal visit provided communities with an opportunity to show themselves at their best, and to have their successes acknowledged and encouraged. In a new colony, where progress was often difficult, this helped to affirm the worth of what might well be a daily struggle to move forward.

Between the first arduous journeys on horseback in 1860 to the tours of far north Queensland at the end of the century, many things changed. The places that were visited, the manner of transport, and the things that were said and done all altered with time. In these ways, the tours reflect the changes that took place in Queensland over this important period of development, physically, socially and politically.

Some changes were linked to the personalities of different governors. Each handled tours in a slightly different way, although virtually all travelled and believed it to be important. Though aloof from party politics, governors did have opinions and tours did have political aspects. These often affected the itinerary and timing of tours and might be used to assess public opinion or defuse controversy. The speeches and addresses delivered on tours were often printed in newspapers and therefore had a considerable influence on opinion. They cast light on what matters were considered important to the Crown, the colony and the people of Queensland during this formative period. As the editor of Bowen's correspondence wrote:

\begin{quote}
Only the leading men resident in the Colonies really know how great and pervasive is the influence of a Governor who understands and performs his duty; how many – even in Colonies which have long enjoyed representative institutions – are the serious crises to be smoothed away, and how serious the constitutional and imperial interest to be guarded – always, however, with the gloved hand and sheathed sword – by the Queen's representative.\textsuperscript{83}
\end{quote}

If there is truth in this observation, then it is clear that vice-regal tours were a major tool in carrying out this duty. To consider the tours made during the period when Queensland moved from early settlement to a successful colony on the eve of Federation is to gain a considerable insight into the way in which the governors worked and the way in which Queensland developed.

\textsuperscript{82} Bulletin (Rockhampton), 4 November 1869, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{83} Lane-Poole, Thirty years of colonial government, p. 80.