

## STEPHEN SIMPSON, M.D., M.L.C.

[Presented by E. V. STEVENS, Hon. Life Member,  
March 26th 1953.]

When we realise that the subject of this sketch was one of the earliest free settlers in Moreton Bay, a highly cultured man, an excellent doctor of medicine, a Justice of the Peace, a Police Magistrate, a member of the Legislative Council of Queensland and our first Commissioner of Crown Lands who, for a brief period, administered Moreton Bay's public affairs prior to the arrival of Lt. J. C. Wickham, it is surprising how little about his career is known.

References to him in our early newspapers are few and relatively unimportant. The factual accounts are embodied in Government Gazettes mostly prior to Separation and Governmental papers in the Mitchell Library unavailable except through the courtesy of that institution.

Regretably one or two points essential to his history cannot, as yet, be cleared up. His date of birth has not been ascertained, but would probably have been around the year 1800.

Henry Stuart Russell (Genesis of Q'ld.) enlightens us on Simpson's early years; he began public life as a member of the 14th Light Dragoons, but abandoned that in order to study medicine. On obtaining his degree he became attached to the train of one of the continental nobility as personal physician and in that capacity travelled extensively in Europe.

Attracted to the homeopathic doctrine of Hanne-mann (1755-1843) Simpson published a book upon it in London in 1836. This is said to be the first book on the subject written in the English language. Strongly adverse criticism seems to have unduly affected him for he appears not to have again practised his profession in a private capacity though associating himself with the Brisbane General Hospital in its early days.

Smarting under the attack, Simpson decided to migrate to New South Wales and, accompanied by his recently married wife to whom he had been engaged for twenty years, left by the ship "Wilmot," arriving at Port Jackson 26/1/1840 (C 22/5/1869). By the same vessel came also his friends R. Davidson and W. H. Wiseman.

Here another blow fell upon him; his wife died within a few days of landing.

Simpson, with Wiseman, then sought and received permission to go to Moreton Bay (22/7/1840). "They were to proceed by 'Speculator,' and no expenses were to be incurred by the Government on account of their passage" (Mit. Library). They were granted permission to occupy a vacant cottage at the recently abandoned Female Convict Establishment at Eagle Farm, where Stuart Russell records meeting them.

Influential friends in London, including Lord John Russell, strongly recommended Simpson to Governor Gipps, another, D. Inglis, doing likewise to Deas Thomson, Colonial Secretary, Sydney (Mit. Lib.).

The medical officer of Moreton Bay at the time of Simpson's arrival was Dr. Ballow, appointed (G. Gaz. 5/5/1840) to act as medical witness at Coroner's Inquests. On 6th May 1841 the Governor approved of the inclusion of the name of Dr. Simpson in pay abstracts of the settlement for remuneration at the rate of 7/6 per day for the time he attended to medical duties during the absence of Assistant Surgeon Ballow (Mit. Lib.).

On a certificate of evidence given in the matter of the removal from office of Assistant Surveyor Dixon by the Military Commandant (Lt. Owen Gorman) Simpson signs as Acting Colonial Surgeon (Hist. Rec. of Aust., Series 1 v.22).

By notice in the Government Gazette (10/5/1842) Moreton Bay District was proclaimed, under "an Act passed in the second year of Her Majesty's Reign (i.e. 1839) intitled (note spelling) 'An Act to further restrain the unauthorized occupation of Crown Lands and to provide the means of defraying the expenses of a Border Police'."

The area was defined as "bounded on the south by the ranges which separate the sources of the rivers Brisbane and Logan from those of the Richmond and Clarence; on the west by the ranges dividing the sources of the rivers flowing into the western interior from those which fall into the eastern coast; on the east by that coast and on the northward by the limits of Colonization until a more definite boundary shall be determined on that side." G. Gipps, 5/5/1842.

With the concurrence of Lord Stanley, Secretary of State for the Colonies, Governor Gipps appointed Simpson to be Commissioner of Crown Lands for this area (Gaz. 1842, p. 509).

On the removal from office of Lt. Gorman by Governor Gipps (3/5/1842) he (Gorman) was instructed to deliver to Dr. Simpson all papers, etc., relating to the settlement at Moreton Bay (Mit. Lib.) thus ending the military administration.

Simpson's appointment was of course temporary pending the arrival of Lt. J. C. Wickham, R.N., then residing at Parramatta. He had been raised to the magistracy on 10th October 1842 (G.G., v. 2, p. 1471 and 1701) and posted to Moreton Bay on 20th November, but did not arrive here until early January 1843.

Newstead House, later Wickham's official residence, was not then built and he took up quarters at the Government Cottage, William Street, now the site of the Executive Building. The deed of Grant for the purchase of allotment 62, comprising 25 acres, at Newstead, dated 19/7/1845, describes him as resident in South Brisbane (Hist. Socy. Journal, vol. 3, October 1940).

As Commissioner of Lands, Simpson dealt with matters relating to aborigines. From "Papers on Aborigines 1844" (Oxley Lib.) we learn that Missionary W. Schmidt writes to him at Eagle Farm, 14/1/1843, and Simpson writes to Deas Thomson, Colonial Secretary, Sydney, from Woogaroo, 6/5/1843.

In the same source is an account by Simpson of his excursion to the Bunya country, 10/3/1843. He took with him the Rev. Eiper, four mounted policemen and six unnamed prisoners of the Crown. It is said that Jas. Davis (Durrumboi) was one. The country was Durrumboi's "town," but it is more probable that David Bracewell (Wandi) was of the party. Stewart Russell calls Bracewell "the great talker"; he could speak four local dialects.

Bracewell was accidentally killed 28/3/1844 while tree-felling at Woogaroo. He was at the time employed by Simpson so time and locality point more to him than to Davis.

The party returned to Woogaroo on 28th April, having been absent fifty days and travelled an estimated 500 miles without serious mishap.

The diary records meeting the schooner "Edward" in the Nunnabulla (Wide Bay or Mary) River. "Edward" was one of the earliest vessels trading in Moreton Bay, and "Sydney Morning Herald," 11/12/1842, reports that her master, Capt. Chambers, "has built a capacious dwelling and store at Redbank." As distances went in those days, Chambers thus would have been Simpson's next door neighbour.

There was, however, settlement at Woogaroo somewhat earlier. Coote (p. 32) writes that when Patrick Leslie and his family arrived in Brisbane by "Shamrock" early in 1841 en route to Canning Downs there was no punt available to ferry his goods across the river and one had to be obtained from Woogaroo.

Govt. Gazette 1843 (p. 505) notifies the establishment of the first Court of Petty Sessions in Moreton Bay. Simpson sat upon it in September of that year (G. Gaz. Sept., v. 2, p. 1180).

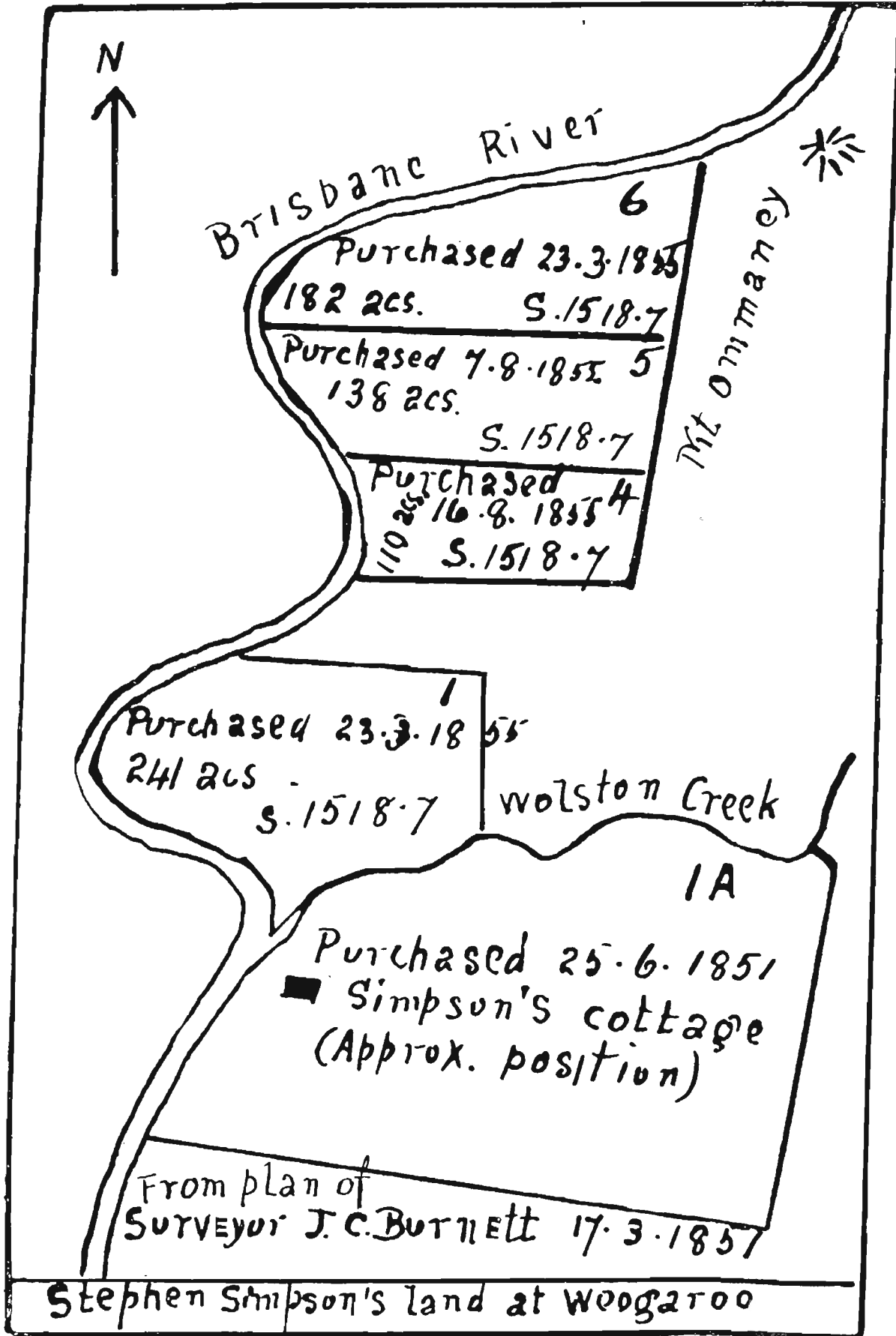
Gerler's "Map of Brisbane" 1844 shows Simpson in residence close by the river bank where the Wool Exchange now stands. Adjoining on either side dwelt "Old R. Jones" and "Old Major Prior."

In late November 1845 "Sovereign," Capt. Cape, brought Dr. J. D. Lang on his first visit to Moreton Bay. During his local tour he reports (Queensland, p. 80) being introduced to and dining with Dr. Simpson, then residing in a slab hut at Redbank which he afterward vacated for a substantial house he had erected on a property of his own further down the river on Woogaroo Creek."

Lang must have made a second visit, at an unspecified date, to Simpson's new house as he describes its location and the luxuriance of the garden, but no date of its first occupancy. What indecision and fruitless search he would have obviated had he supplied a date for this historically important event!

He records with interest his sight of a Moreton Bay fig tree (still standing in front of the house in 1952) and mentions that only once before had he seen this species of tree. This was at a place called Breakfast Creek when on a visit to the German Mission Station.

As his route to the German Station would almost certainly have been through what is now Newstead it



is interesting to speculate whether the tree he saw was that which now graces the drive at Newstead House. It should, however, be noted that this particular tree is not a Moreton Bay but a *Ficus infectoria* fig, not confined though to more northern latitude.

Lang's book (Queensland) indicates that this first visit to Moreton Bay terminated early in 1846; this makes it clear that Newstead House was not built when he visited the Mission or he would surely have called, or mentioned its existence.

"Moreton Bay Courier," 8/8/1846, reports an up-river trip by "s.s. Experiment," a small vessel built by Mr. Pearce, a station owner below the Range (Pugh 1859-60, p. 77), for trading to Limestone. Simpson's property is described as "well developed, the gardens producing abundantly and showing evidence of the labour expended upon them." This plainly has no relation to the slab hut seen by Lang.

Which then is the older, Wolston House or Newstead? On the scanty evidence available it seems probable Wolston, but by a very narrow margin. Definite proof may be supplied when the numerous Leslie's letters, now in the Oxley Library, have been transcribed. One that has, dated 25/8/1846, from Patrick Leslie to his father, gives a floor plan of Newstead House and describes the rapid growth of the garden.

"The Police Station at Woogaroo has been broken up between Ipswich and Cressbrook. As from 1st March 1847 two men only with horses will be left at Woogaroo" (C 6/3/1847). Govt. Gaz. 26/1/1847 notifies the appointment of W. Moore as Chief Constable at Ipswich and S. Mason at Cressbrook.

Govt. Gaz. July-December 1851 (pp. 1266, 1360) shows Dr. Simpson to be appointed Returning Officer for the Electoral Districts of Moreton, Wide Bay, Burnett and Maranoa; but shortly after, those Districts were taken over by J. S. Ferriter, Simpson being transferred to the Stanley Boroughs comprising (Coote, p. 122) "North and South Brisbane, Kangaroo Point and Ipswich."

Wide as the area was the work could hardly have been excessive as "M. Bay Courier," 4/7/1846, gives the total population of the Parish of Stanley as 1,599 only, comprising:

Those born in the Colony or came free .....	1,168
Other free persons .....	213
Ticket of Leave .....	129
Private Assignment .....	8
In Government Employment .....	81

Of these few would have electoral qualifications for in 1847 there were but seventy-five electors on the Roll for North Brisbane (C 17/4/1847).

In 1851 Simpson began the first of his extensive purchases of land at Wolston. On 26th June he acquired 640 acres at the upset price of £1 per acre on Wolston Creek with a frontage to the Brisbane River. It is upon this block that his house stood and still stands, now inhabited by the Grindle family.

A tracing of the original survey has been very kindly supplied by Mr. C. Gorman, Survey Branch, Lands Department. Upon this plan is shown the approximate site of the house, yet strangely no notice of its existence is given in the notification of the sale of the land (G. Gaz. Jan.-June 1851, p. 772).

Quite plainly then the Crown did not own the house and Simpson's deed to the land was issued to him dated 1/3/1852. Extracts from old correspondence, indices of letter books, etc., unavailable here, have been supplied by the Mitchell Library, Sydney; while these establish the legality of Simpson's occupancy they throw no light upon the conditions permitting him to build upon land to which, apparently, he had no clear title.

These extracts comprise: a letter from the Colonial Secretary to the Colonial Treasurer dated 5/5/1849 allowing Mr. Commissioner Simpson £200 as compensation for improvements to his station at Woogaroo.

From the Colonial Treasurer to Stephen Simpson, dated 23/5/1849, requiring a further sum for the balance of the piece of land. (Neither the area of the land nor the price is stated.)

From Simpson to the Colonial Secretary, 16/12/1850, dealing with a threat of legal proceedings (details not given).

The above are from indices only, the actual letters cannot be located.

A letter from the Under Secretary Lands, Sydney, 5/2/1853, states that the land, 640 acres, was sold to Simpson under an Act of 1847, but on the Grant there

is no indication of any remission to him of the purchase price of £640.

"Moreton Bay Courier," 17/4/1852, commends Dr. Simpson's valuable service in salvaging considerable property swept down the river during heavy flooding.

Govt. Gaz. (vol. 2, p. 1726) of 1853 records his appointment as Police Magistrate for the Moreton and Darling Downs districts, as well as Commissioner for Lands.

He made additional purchases of land adjoining his original block, but on the downstream side of Wolston Creek in 1855.

On his recommendation (Pugh 1859-60, p. 75) a small detachment from the 28th, 58th, and 99th military forces was stationed at, or near, Helidon as a check against depredations by natives.

Tragedy again overtook him on 11/3/1856 when his visiting nephew, J. M. Ommaney, was killed at Wolston by a fall from his horse. Cumbrae Stewart (C 15/3/1924) states he was buried at Christ Church, Milton. His local memorial is Mount Ommaney which, despite the persistence of some writers, is not spelled "homminy" even though they may regard that word as appropriate to the main diet of the penal era.

At a revision of the list of Justices for 1861 Simpson's name was deleted. It may have been at his request. At all events he lost no prestige by it for the general standing of that body was very low.

Commenting on the revision "Courier" writes "many of the new appointees can barely write their own names, others are habitual drunkards and grossly immoral characters."

On a revision of the Special Jury list "Courier" writes, "Mr. ———, a bank manager, presided on the Bench and struck off the names of three of the four jurors who had given a verdict for the defendant in which action his bank was plaintiff. The jurors were T. Bowden, W. Brooks, and E. Southerden."

Simpson appears to have retired from his Commissionership in 1855. Govt. Gaz. 1855, v. 2, p. 2771, notifies the appointment of Arthur Wilcox Manning to be Commissioner of Crown Lands for the New England district, 3/10/1855, and on 5/2/1856 (p. 368) to administer the Darling Downs and Moreton districts in the room of Stephen Simpson, retired. Manning is also appointed Police Magistrate for his Districts.



When the first Legislative Council of Queensland was set up Simpson was appointed to it as a life member. 23/5/1860. He resigned therefrom 3/2/1865 (G. Gaz. p. 88).

With Jas. Laidley, Simpson had been granted, somewhat irregularly it transpired, two years' leave of absence to visit England. Laidley left Brisbane for Sydney by "Yarra Yarra," 19/9/1860, Simpson, by the same vessel on 15th December. He sailed from Sydney by "Jeddo" 22/12/1860 (C 3/1/1861), Dr. J. D. Lang being a fellow passenger.

Due to their non-return and the lax attendance of other Council members, notably W. Landsborough and W. Wood, the question of their eligibility to hold office was raised. Minutes of Proceedings of the Legislative Council, 19/8/1863, show that a message had been received from the Governor, Sir Geo. Bowen, as follows:

"The Governor begs to state that on the 30th April 1861 he advised the President of the Council for the information of members, that he had granted leave of absence in virtue of the fifth clause of the Constitution to the Hon. Stephen Simpson and the Hon. James Laidley.

"The Governor is under the impression that, in the spirit of the above-mentioned clause, he would not be justified, as a general rule, in granting leave of absence for more than two consecutive sessions, and he is advised that the seats of the gentlemen above-named should be declared vacant, if they have been absent during the last two sessions without the permission of Her Majesty or of the Governor of the Colony during these last two sessions, i.e., the second session of 1862 and the first session of 1863.

"The question, however, can be determined only by the Legislative Council itself and the Governor merely refers it to the Council for such determination under the sixth clause of the Constitution Act."

On debate in the Council, Bramston, Leader of the Government, moved for the appointment of a Select Committee. Watts moved an amendment questioning the legality of all four to retain their seats. Bramston moved a further amendment to exclude the names of Simpson and Laidley from Watts' list. This was carried by seven votes to four.

The Select Committee unanimously agreed that Landsborough and Wood had not forfeited their seats.

All appear to have been leniently treated, Landsborough especially. The List of Members of the Parliament of Queensland shows that while he was summoned to the Legislative Council on 20/12/1862 he did not take the oath or his seat until 2/5/1865.

He was reappointed for life 17/5/1865, and resigned 23/9/1865.

Simpson did not return to Queensland and died 11/3/1869 at Bryaston Street, Portland Square, London. His obituary (C 22/5/1869) records that "he was born at Lichfield, Warwickshire (but gives no date) . . . he was regarded as one of the cleverest men of his day in medicine and one of the ablest and most impartial men in the Commission of the Peace. In politics, though not taking an active part, he was known to be in favour of the "popular" when opposed to the 'squatting' side."

Limitation of space prevents any quotation from Miss E. F. Lord's minute description of the interior of Wolston House or the family vault of the Goggs family who purchased the property from Simpson. A full account can be seen in the Historic Homes Cutting Book at the Historical Society's Newstead House.