

Bygone Brisbane: Its History, Your Heritage

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Published

2018

Journal Title

Queensland Review

Version

Version of Record (VoR)

DOI

[10.1017/qre.2018.17](https://doi.org/10.1017/qre.2018.17)

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similar vein to Bill Metcalf's research on the Gayndah communes of Bon Accord, Resolute and Byrnstown, Veronica Dawson investigates the three socialist settlements in Chinchilla: Mizpath, Manmouth and Industrial.

The book commences with a brief description of the Queensland economy at the beginning of the twentieth century, including the devastating effects of the 1893 floods. Premier Samuel Griffith, influenced by the socialist William Lane, appointed a Select Committee to investigate the concept of communal land settlement, where the land was provided and the settlement's members were to be financed by government loans. On 4 October 1893, The *Co-operative Communities Land Settlement Act* was passed. The Act set out the requirements for establishing a 'group' of settlers and the terms under which each group was to function.

The author deals separately with each commune, tracing its formation, daily life and dissolution, and the effect on the small town of Chinchilla. Most men who signed up for the scheme possessed little or no experience in farming. There were very few women living at the settlements and a chapter of the book reflects on the difficulties faced by the communal women, especially their experiences with childbirth and child mortality. The book concludes with an assessment of the success or failure of the scheme.

Dawson's impressive research into primary sources such as archival records, Queensland parliamentary papers, the Queensland *Government Gazette* and newspapers is supplemented by the biographical entries on individual members of the communes where possible. The author's interest in the communes is undoubtedly inspired by her own history: Members of Dawson's family were founding settlers at Mizpath settlement in 1893. The book is well indexed and contains 61 illustrations, many of which are photos supplied by descendants of original members of the three communes.

Chinchilla's Communal Settlers makes a valuable contribution to Queensland's social and labour history 'from below'. The extensive biographical research will appeal to genealogists. Overall, it is an informative and enjoyable read.

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doi [10.1017/qre.2018.17](https://doi.org/10.1017/qre.2018.17)

Rod Fisher, *Bygone Brisbane: Its History, Your Heritage*. Brisbane: Boolarong Press, 2016, 410 pp. ISBN 9 7819 2523 6828, A\$39.99.

Heritage has captured the imagination of generations of Brisbane's residents. The decision to demolish the iconic Bellevue Hotel in 1979 is widely regarded as emblematic of the corruption and arrogance of Joh Bjelke-Petersen's government. The destruction of koala habitat for a new highway between Brisbane and the Gold Coast was similarly a touchstone for criticism of Wayne Goss's administration in 1995. Communities' emotional attachments to their histories and environment remain at the forefront of protests in the state today, with widespread concern that

over-development in suburbs such as Woolloongabba and West End will destroy unique communities and heritage precincts. Facebook pages such as *Lost Brisbane* are enormously popular, as people seek to renew memories and reconnect with their suburbs' histories. The book *Bygone Brisbane* is at the heart of this ongoing public enthusiasm for heritage and history, and investigates the fraught relationship between our communities, histories and lived environments.

Bygone Brisbane is one monograph in the author's final trilogy regarding Brisbane's built heritage. Rod Fisher sadly died in July 2017, after many decades teaching and researching at the University of Queensland until his retirement in 2001. His impressive obituary is available on the website of the University of Queensland's School of Historical and Philosophical Inquiry. Fisher founded the Brisbane History Group in the early 1980s to encourage local research, and similarly led the development of the University of Queensland's Applied History Centre in the 1990s, always seeking to encourage a 'history in the service of society' (2016: v). His commitment was clearly prescient, given the now burgeoning interest in public history and renewed interest in critical engagement with heritage studies.

This monograph is a collection of seven seemingly disparate chapters, revised from a series of papers given over a thirty-year period. Although the chapters are wide in their scope, themes relating to the environment, community and built heritage are present throughout the collection. Each chapter is a witness to Fisher's commitment to making history accessible to the public, and his desire to renew communities' emotional connections with their past.

The book provides a compelling point of reference for future scholarship regarding Brisbane and its surrounds. Based on meticulous archival research, it draws on less well-known collections and local museums as well as the Brisbane History Group itself. This research is paired with Fisher's work in the better-known collections of the John Oxley Library, Mitchell Library, National Library of Australia and all three levels of government. In this manner, the author has connected environmental and social histories to provide new insights into Brisbane in its regional, national and global contexts. He creates a compelling case for the importance of heritage for community identity. While his own interest in the built environment is clear, everyday objects of heritage are not disregarded (most obviously in the chapter, 'Showcasing the Relics of the Brisbane River').

The environment emerges as one of the most important topics of analysis in *Bygone Brisbane*. This is evidenced most clearly in the largest chapter, 'Reconstituting the Region of Southeast Queensland'. Fisher develops a series of recurrent themes in this section, which are connected to the shared environments of Brisbane, Ipswich, Toowoomba and (to a lesser extent) the Fassifern and Gold Coast regions. The environment becomes the site of contestation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal residents, and the landscape through which diverse cultural antagonisms and alliances are enacted during centuries of human habitation. The author investigates the multilayered disputes relating to access to land, the development of diverse industries, the introduction of various species of plants and animals, and (most compellingly) the emergence of networks of social contacts that spread across the region. These networks emerged from the unique natural environment of what became South-East Queensland, and the author is careful never to lose sight of this singular location during his study.

One of the more interesting themes to emerge is the centrality of parks and recreation to Brisbane's unique heritage and communities. Fisher takes care to consider this in the context of global academic debates on the importance of parks, and the emergence of national parks in the United States in particular. His exploration of the tensions between general recreation, organised sport and government is particularly compelling. Chapters investigate the evolution of Lang Park and Yeronga Memorial Park over a period of several decades, charting their use by various public and private stakeholders. Each chapter reveals differing tensions as local and state governments jostled for ownership of public spaces, with significant impacts for local communities. The evolving importance of sport and recreation for Brisbane's sense of identity and tourism is an important body of research to which Fisher's work will contribute.

Bygone Brisbane is based on many decades of work. The author sets a sometimes brutal pace in his desire to cover an enormous topic, and many brief comments in this book are obvious opportunities for future research in their own right — a cultural history of the yet-to-be-smashed avocado begs to be completed (the fruit's introduction and farming being mentioned repeatedly throughout). Similarly, and more substantively, Fisher draws attention to the global context for South-East Queensland's history. The communal land settlements of the 1890s are importantly connected to the *Nueva Australia* settlement in Paraguay of 1893 (2016: 256), and the sugar industry's growth referenced back to the outbreak of civil war in the United States during the 1860s (2016: 205). Although relatively well known, there is a need to revisit such instances of global connectivity in the light of more recent scholarship and newly accessible archives overseas. There are occasional times when the author's enthusiasm for such international connections gives way to scholarship that is less rigorous — the spurious claim that the Portuguese sailed the South-East Queensland coast in the seventeenth century being one such example (2016: 171).

Bygone Brisbane represents a fine example of careful archival work, which is crafted with the aim of revealing the important connections between the past and present for Brisbane's communities. It is beholden on me to give the author a last invocation that public history be accessible to the communities from which it derives, and for whom it serves. In Fisher's (2016: vi) words, the chapters of this book

explore how history may be turned into heritage, that great enriching corpus of tangible and intangible things — places, precincts, streetscapes, landscapes and objects as well as institutions, traditions, customs, beliefs and ideas — which we not only wish to retain as significant for ourselves, but also to convey intact to future generations. As people appreciated their value in the past, and busted a gut to create them, what right has the present passing generation of custodians to disfigure, discard or destroy that inheritance without even a backward glance?

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