

The Queensland Royal Mail

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Forerunners

1866 – an experimental service. Queensland was always tail-end-Charlie on the normal packet route from the UK via Egypt and the southern ports of Albany, Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney. This led successive Queensland administrations to fund separate services north about via Torres Strait to connect with the P&O steam service at whatever point was most convenient. In 1866 an experimental service opened between Brisbane and Batavia, operated very erratically by two small steam ships, the *Hero* and the *Souchays*. Between Batavia and Singapore the mail was supposed to have been carried by the French Messageries Imperiales, but in practice usually by the Dutch Nederlandsch-Indische Stoomvaart Maatschappij line. At Singapore the mail connected with the UK either by the P&O service or by the French Messageries Imperiales. There were only five voyages by this experimental service, which terminated owing to lack of funds by the Queensland Government. Full details will be found in Reference 1, where the only known cover to have been carried on this service is illustrated. (In the 5 years since this was written a second cover has been found, with an adhesive missing.)



Fig 1. Front and back of the only cover known to the Author to have travelled by the experimental service to Batavia. Endorsed "Mail steamer *Souchays* via Marseilles." *Souchays* left Brisbane on 6 Apr, arriving Batavia 27 Apr. *Capitole* of the Messageries Imperiales left Batavia 30 Apr to Singapore 4 May. *Imperatrice* of the same company left Singapore 4 May to Suez 27 May and *Peluse* left Alexandria 29 May to Marseilles 4 Jun. Prepaid 10d for the ½oz rate via Marseilles.

1873 to 1880 – the Eastern & Australian Mail Steamship Company. In these years an excellent monthly service was provided by the Eastern & Australian Steam Ship Company (E&A) between Brisbane and Singapore, the connection with the UK being completed usually by the P&O service, but on occasion by French steamers of the Messageries Maritimes. The contract for this service was pushed through a reluctant Queensland parliament by the far-sighted Governor, the Marquis of Normanby, who was one of the early users of the mail service, as illustrated by the cover below. Full details of the E&A service will be found in Reference 1.



Fig 2. 1874 cover from the Governor of Queensland, George Augustus Constantine Phipps, Marquis of Normanby & Co to his sister, Lady Constantine Phipps.

Endorsed via Torres Straits & Brindisi, prepaid the 9d single rate introduced for that route on 27 Dec 1870. Left Brisbane 29 Mar per E&A ss *Bentan* to Singapore 16 Apr, thence per P&O ships *Avoca*, *Bokhara* & *Malta* to Brindisi 22 May, mails in London 24 May. Backstamped at Whitby 25 May.

The E&A contract ended in 1880, the Company declining to extend for a further period for commercial reasons. Queensland now sought a new partner, and found one in the British India Steam Navigation Company.

The Queensland Royal Mail 1881 – 1895?

The Queensland Royal Mail (QRM) contract was between the Government of Queensland and the British India Steam Navigation Company. The initial route for the main line steamers was London-Plymouth-Naples-Aden-Colombo-Batavia, and then Thursday Island, Cooktown, Townsville, Bowen, Rockhampton or Keppel Bay, ending up at Brisbane. Initially the mails were to go via Brindisi and P&O to Singapore, whence by British India branch line steamers to Batavia, taking about 2 days, to be picked up there by the main line steamer. The return route was to be a reciprocal of that, exchanging mails again at Batavia for Singapore and P&O homeward.¹ I have yet to find a copy of the contract, so it is not clear whether this pro-forma timetable reflects the contract precisely, but there must have been some flexibility in the contract as the *Brisbane Courier* of 16 Feb 1881 was already suggesting that the homebound mails should be exchanged at Aden. This is clearly what happened very early on for homebound mails: outbound the mails went via Singapore and Batavia until Oct 1881, after which outbound mails were certainly transferred at Suez, and later at Aden.

The P&O link Alexandria-Brindisi (later Port Said or Suez-Brindisi) was used for the fast mails, but from the beginning the Queensland Post Office instituted a system of cheaper 4d letter postage by the long sea route all the way to UK via the Suez Canal, such mails being landed at Plymouth. It is not certain that the long sea route was used outbound – the UK Post Office did not advertise the sailings nor mention a 4d rate in the Post Office Guides, and I have not seen an outbound QRM cover at the 4d rate. If anyone has one do please let me know.

The first ship, *Merkara*, left Gravesend on 12 February 1881, but the British Post Office did not start advertising the route in GPO Notices until GPO Notice 21/1881, dated 21 Sep 1881, wherein the 7 October mail to “Queensland via Aden and Torres Straits” was advertised. This seems strangely dilatory, as the British Post Office was aware of the service long before this date. For example, *The Times* dated 20 Jan 1881 reported: “STEAM COMMUNICATION WITH AUSTRALIA. In connexion with the new direct mail service between London, Java, and Queensland ports, which is to be opened by the steamship *Merkara* on Feb 11, a luncheon was given on Tuesday afternoon on board that vessel in the Victoria Docks. Mr Dawes, of the firm of Gray, Dawes, & Co, presided, and stated that the contract was concluded by the Prime Minister of Queensland on his

¹ Pro-Forma timetable printed in the *Brisbane Courier* on 15 Feb 1881. This had yet to be finally approved by the Queensland PMG

The Queensland Royal Mail

recent visit to this country, and argued that such a regular service would not only be of immense value to the mercantile community, owing to the acceleration of the mail service, but would also develop the growing resources of the Colony. Mr Macallister, Agent-General of the Colonies in this country, hoped that if the gentlemen who were carrying out the contract conducted it on the same commercial principles as their other similar undertakings, the enterprise would prove successful.”

There is strong evidence that British mail went on the first voyage despite the lack of GPO support and publicity, as indicated by this communication from the British Post Office Agent at Suez, replying to a letter from the Secretary to the GPO London: **Minute No 67**. To the Secretary, GPO London. Acknowledges letter dated 20 Jan 1881 announcing establishment of a mail service every 4 weeks with Queensland via the Torres Strait ... “and I note that on the outward voyage the first mail will be despatched from London on the 25th proximo, from which date the Queensland mails will be forwarded via Singapore [sic] & on the homeward voyage the mails will be transferred to the P&O Company's packets at Aden.”² As far as I can determine the British India packets never went to Singapore, but this Memo clearly establishes Aden as the usual transfer point. The link between Aden and UK was via the P&O service through Egypt and Brindisi.

Initially the mails left England every 4 weeks, more frequently later, but it is not clear that the extra vessels carried packet mails - they certainly were not advertised in GPO Notices to the public, so any letters carried may well have been treated as ship letters.

From October 1881 onwards the British public were made aware of the mails by these ships in GPO Notices, which quote London despatch dates. It is not always clear where these mails joined the QRM ships, as the GPO advertised the route as “via Brindisi, Aden, and Torres Strait.” It may be significant that, from September onwards, no calls at Naples were reported in *The Times*, presumably because the P&O link from Brindisi to Egypt was used, mails joining the Queensland ships either at Suez or Aden. As Aden dates are very often quoted the latter must be a distinct possibility.

More work is needed, but some transfers are known. For example on 16 Oct 1881 the British Postal Agent at Suez acknowledged a letter from the GPO London. Minute No 143 to the Secretary, GPO London: Queensland mails to be landed and embarked at Suez. New instructions for Queensland mails via Torres Strait. “Your instructions are duly noted & in accordance the mails despatched from London on 7th inst were delivered to the packet *Chyebassa* at Suez on Friday last [14 Oct].”³

From the website “Clyde Built Ships.”

“*Jumna* was the first ship completed for British India Associated Steamers Limited following its registration as a company in May 1885. Together with her two virtual sisters, namely *Jelunga* (1890) and *Avoca* (1891), she was designed for the company's Royal Mail service to Queensland, Australia. She had temporary 'tween deck quarters for emigrants on the outward voyages. The engine of the *Jumna* was the first of Brock's patented design and the first quadruple expansion in the British India fleets. In each vessel, the steam was taken from three double-ended boilers. *Jumna* sailed from London on her maiden voyage on 21 September 1886, causing a considerable stir as the largest vessel yet seen in Queensland waters. She had an unpleasant mishap while in the Royal Docks at London in December 1890, when a steam pipe burst, scalding to death seven of the engine room workers and severely injuring two more. In 1895 she made a trooping voyage to Cyprus. Unlike her near sisters, she continued on the Queensland service **after the termination of the mail contract in 1895.**” [Author's emphasis].

(Last updated: by Peter Stewart from the original records by Stuart Cameron).

Comment. I have never been able to find any of the mail contracts between Queensland and the Company, and would appreciate help from anyone who can supply either a copy or information as to where copies could be obtained. The statement above that the mail contract ceased in 1895 is probably true: Mabey asserts the same at page 173,⁴ and it may be that the website author took his cue from Mabey. However, post 1895 ships of the line continued to run to Queensland via Torres Strait on an intermittent basis, and some were designated as “QRM steam ships”, so one wonders.

From Website <http://www.bishop.com/history.htm>

“The opening of the Suez Canal gave British India the opportunity of running for a while the longest mail service in the history of shipping—from London to Brisbane, Queensland. This voyage took fully two months to complete. The service was inaugurated by the BI vessel *Merkara*, which left London on February 12, 1881, and anchored in the approaches to the harbour of Brisbane on the evening of 13 April that year.

² POST 48/322 Suez Letter Book 1880-4

³ POST 48/322 Suez Letter Book 1880-4

⁴ Mabey, John M: *North Star to Southern Cross*; Stephenson, Prescott, 1967. In my opinion the best book ever written on shipping between the UK and Australia/NZ.

The Queensland Royal Mail

“The history of BI's contacts with Australia in the later decades of the nineteenth century is curiously confused. Long before William Mackinnon founded his shipping company, he and his partner, Robert Mackenzie, had been trading speculatively with Australia during the fabulous days of the Gold Rush, shipping the consumer goods the new settlers required. It was not until the arrival of the *Merkara*, carrying immigrants and a cargo of refrigerating machinery, that a regular service was established.

“The idea was largely that of Queensland's forceful Prime Minister, Sir Thomas McIlwraith. He realised that emigrants from Britain, travelling by the conventional route south-about round Cape Leeuwin, were tempted to land at the first Australian port of call - Adelaide, Melbourne or Sydney - and he wished to attract to Queensland more than the riff-raff left at the end of the long voyage, not to mention the goods a community in the pioneer stage sorely required. Against bitter opposition, he therefore pushed through the Legislative Assembly a Bill to provide £55,000 a year for a mail contract with British India.

“Unpopular as the arrangement may have been in the colony, as it was then, especially among the owners of small coastal shipping lines, it greatly benefited Queensland over a period of years. (It is on record that, when an emigrant ship arrived, she was immediately boarded by lone settlers looking for wives off the peg, so to speak). It was not, however, a great bargain for BI. The obligation to come into Brisbane north-about by Sumatra and the Torres -Strait, and home again by the same route, meant that the ships could rarely pick up for the homeward voyage the pay-load of cargo that might have been collected at the larger southern ports from Sydney round to Fremantle.

“The direct London-Brisbane service petered out in 1895. BI had put on an adequate service from Calcutta to Queensland, but the ships from London had taken to coming south-about, getting the advantage of calls at Fremantle and other ports on the way. Economic troubles within Queensland itself checked the stream of assisted immigration.

“For some time thereafter the story of BI's association with Australia is still more confused. The company's interest in the island continent had by no means abated, but it is a fair surmise that the Managing Agents in Calcutta were worried to know where to find the ships to meet the growing demands on the ramifying services they already provided over thousands of miles of ocean. More than one merger of shipping interests about the Australian coasts was arranged; two Australian shipping companies of substance were acquired—the Ducal Line and the excellent little fleet of five vessels built up by Captain Archibald Currie.”

Comment. Much of this seems to be drawn from Maber⁵. Despite the assertion that “the ships from London had taken to coming south about”, this was not true of the mail steamers, which continued to run via Torres Strait & Cooktown. The Ducal Line ships were used as mail carriers on occasion, but again it would be helpful to see the postal contracts to ascertain precisely what was going on.

Postage Rates

I am much indebted to Hugh Campbell's work for the following extracts.⁶

From 1881. The postage for the route via Torres Strait and Italy was set at 6d per half ounce from the initiation of the contract in Feb 1881, whilst if sent via Melbourne and Brindisi it cost 9d, and via Sydney and San Francisco 8d. The extra costs by the other routes were because Queensland had to reimburse those Colonies that were partners to the P&O contract and NSW for the 'Frisco route.

From 11 Jan 1884 the rate by any route to the UK was reduced to 6d, albeit the 4d Long Sea Route rate continued – see below.

Long Sea Route Rate from 1881. The fact that the QRM steamers went all the way through to the UK allowed Queensland to set a Long Sea Route rate of 4d for letters going all the way by sea to England. As far as I can ascertain this Long Sea Route rate was not used by the other Colonies until the 1888 joint P&O/Orient Line contracts came into force. I have not found any evidence that the UK offered the same reduced 4d rate for outbound letters. Queensland Long Sea Route rate mail at the 4d rate is extremely difficult to find. Some quotes from *The Times* may make it clear why – most of the mails went on the faster route via Brindisi, and even these are difficult to find.

“The Queensland Line steamer *Roma* arrived at Plymouth early yesterday. 41 passengers and 77 bags mail, 65 of which were landed at Aden.”

“*Almora* arrived Plymouth noon 11 Sep 1883 from Brisbane 17 July, Rockhampton 19, Mackay 20, Bowen 21, Townsville 22, Cooktown 23, Thursday Is 26, Batavia 4 Aug, Aden 22, Suez 28, Port Said 29 Aug. Brings 31 passengers & 87 sacks mail, 74 of which landed at Aden. Mails forwarded at 2 p.m.”

So it would seem that less than 20% of letters sent from Queensland were at the 4d rate.

1 Jan 1891 the rate to UK was reduced to 2½d by any route, a rate that applied to all other countries from 1 Oct 1891 when the Colonies joined the UPU. This rate remained in force until 1905.

⁵ Op Cit

⁶ Campbell, HM, RDP, FRPSL: *Queensland Postal Rates and Charges, 1823-1913*; RPS of Victoria Inc, Melbourne 1995, ISBN 0-947345-10-8

Postcards. Postcards to the UK were allowed from 1 Jan 1889. The initial rates were 3d via Brindisi and 2d via the Long Sea Route. On 1 Jan 1891 this was reduced to 2d by any route to the UK, and from 1 Oct 1891 was reduced to 1½d to any country as Queensland joined the UPU. A postcard from Queensland at the 2d or 3d rate has yet to be seen by the author, and would be a rare prize. If any reader has one I would be most grateful for a scan or photocopy.



Fig 3. 1884/5 cover from Yeppoon to London at the 4d long sea route rate. Backstamped at Rockhampton on 24 Dec, and Kingston-on-Thames 25 Feb. Carried by the QRM ss *Waronga* arriving at Plymouth at 1100 on 24 Feb. The mails left Plymouth by train at 1530 and were delivered within London on 25 Feb. The addressee was a niece of Lewis Carroll.

Identifying Mail via the QRM

For the first 3 years of the contract the postage rate of 6d prepaid from Queensland to UK ought to indicate carriage via the QRM, since other routes incurred higher costs (see Rates above). However from 1884 onwards a uniform 6d rate by any route (except the 4d long-sea-route rate) makes it absolutely essential to have either: a ship named on the letter's directions (extremely rare), a route instruction (via Torres Strait, also extremely rare) or a detailed knowledge of the sailings dates of the QRM ships, which can be obtained from Reference 2. Even with detailed sailings data the analysis is not always clear-cut, since the UK-Aden leg was usually carried out by P&O steamers. A sample table is given below for 1883, a particularly interesting year because of the cholera problems in Egypt and the occasional extra mail steamers as recorded in the Notes.

If any reader has a cover that he thinks might have been carried by the QRM 1881-1895 I would be happy to offer an opinion given a quality (300 dpi) scan of both front and back either via the Editor or direct to colintabeart@btinternet.com

There are occasional surprises. Figures 4 and 5 below show some of the possibilities. "Too Late" and "Insufficiently Prepaid" covers are always worth buying, since there is usually a good story to be discovered given sufficient research.

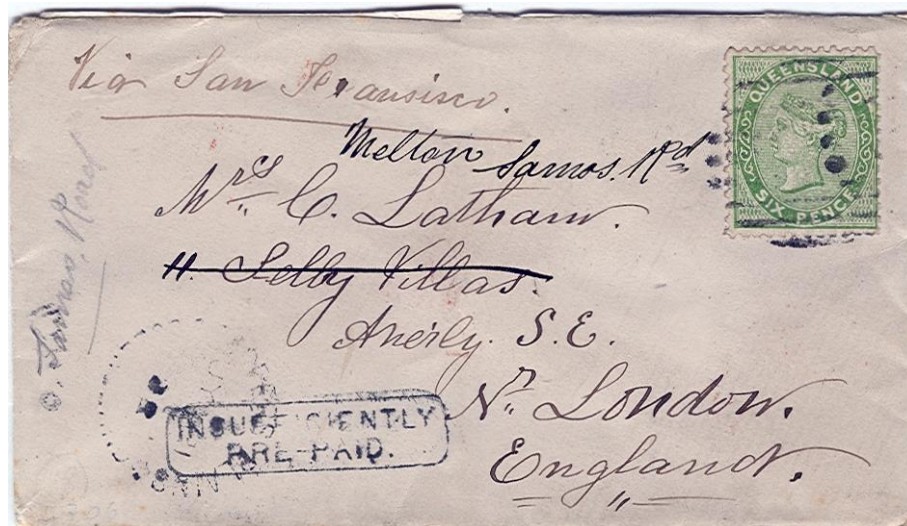


Fig 4. 1882 Brisbane to London. Endorsed “via San Francisco” but “Insufficiently Prepaid” by that route so sent via QRM.

Backstamped at Brisbane 21 Jul 1882, London 9 Oct and Anerly 10 Oct. The rate via San Francisco was 8d so it was not allowed to go that way. Consulting the data in Reference 2 the only possible routeing was QRM steamer *Camorta* from Brisbane 12 Aug to Aden, where transferred to the P&O service, arriving at Brindisi on 6 Oct, mails in London 9 Oct as per backstamp.



Fig 5. 1887 Melbourne to Ireland “per RMS *Massillia*”. The letter was too late for the P&O ss *Massillia* and also the overland train to catch the ship at Adelaide, so the Melbourne GPO decided to route it by rail to Sydney, thence by coastal ss to Brisbane and onward by the QRM. *Almora* left Queensland on 29 Mar and arrived at Plymouth on 16 May, the only possible sailing from Australia that could have landed the mails in the UK in time to arrive at Bray on 17 May as backstamped. Interestingly had the Melbourne GPO awaited the next Orient Line sailing from Melbourne on 2 April the letter would have been in London on 1 May, over two weeks earlier. However, at this time Victoria had no mail contract with the Orient Line so presumably Melbourne GPO ignored the possibility.

1883 Outbound

Although advertisements show a more or less fortnightly service during most of 1883, GPO Notices advertising the mails continued to show only a 4-weekly service throughout the whole year, routed via Aden and Torres Strait. However, contemporary newspaper reports state that mails were carried on some of the intermediate sailings. Where these do not accord with GPO Notices for mails the departure from London in

The Queensland Royal Mail

column 2 is shown in square brackets. The P&O links from Brindisi to Aden are given for each mail. There is a complication; on arrival of the *via Brindisi* mails at Suez: two P&O ships left Suez, one bound for Colombo with the Far East mails, and one for Bombay. It is not clear which one of these took the QRM mail on to Aden – I have usually shown the Colombo ship, but for no good reason.

Periodically mails from the main line steamer were transhipped to smaller coastal steamers that, in theory, could deliver them quicker at Brisbane as they did not have to unload large cargoes at intermediate ports and could go alongside more easily than the bigger ships. From July 1883 the Queensland Govt contracted the Australasian Steam Navigation Company to take on the English mails at Cooktown and bring them on to Brisbane faster than the mail line steamer. The first attempt failed – see *Chyebassa* and note 9 below.

Advert dated 28 July: “The Queensland Royal Mail Line of steamers sail from Royal Albert docks, London, (calling at Plymouth) for Thursday Island, Cooktown, Townsville, Bowen, Mackay, Rockhampton, Brisbane, taking cargo for Gladstone and Maryborough. Special terms for return tickets and abatements for families. Apply Gray, Dawes & Co, 13 Austinfriars, or Gellatley, Hankey, Sewell & Co, 51 Pall Mall, and 109 Leadenhall Street. *Roma* depart London 30 Jul & Plymouth 1 Aug; *Duke of Devonshire* 16/18 Aug; *Bulimba* 27/29 Aug.”

Different form of advert dated 3 Oct: “British India SN Co mail and passenger steamships ... British India Association steamers - Queensland Royal Mail Line - to India, Java and Queensland Ports. Loading berth, Royal Albert Docks. To sail: *Almora* 8 Oct; *Merkara* 22 Oct; *Duke of Sutherland* 5 Nov; *Waroonga* 19 Nov.”

GPO (London) Notice dated 27 Nov 1883.

“At the request of the Queensland GPO all correspondence for that Colony will be sent alternately by The Queensland Line steamers via Torres Strait or via the Orient Line via Melbourne, accordingly as the correspondence may be posted in time for either line, unless otherwise addressed as to route.” This was probably as a result of the award of a contract by New South Wales to the Orient Line in September 1883.

Cholera Outbreak.

Kirk notes a serious outbreak of cholera in Egypt that affected the mails from August 1883 for the rest of the year, and indeed well into 1884. The outbound steamer from Brindisi then went through the Canal to Suez and transferred her mails there.

Ship/Depart Plymouth	Mail left London	Brindisi to Alex	Depart Suez	At Aden	At Batavia	At Cooktown	At Rock hampton	Arrive Brisbane	Notes
<i>Chyebassa</i> 17 Jan <i>Tanjore</i> <i>Khedive</i>	26 Jan	29 Jan–1 Feb	1 Feb 2 Feb	5/7 Feb 7 Feb	24 Feb	8 Mar	11 Mar	12 Mar	1
<i>D of Devonshire</i> <i>Mongolia</i> <i>Peshawur</i>	9 Feb	12 – 15 Feb.	20 Feb 16 Feb	26/26 Feb 21 Feb	17 Mar	1 Apr		9 Apr	2
<i>D of Buccleugh</i> <i>Tanjore</i> <i>Kaiser-I-Hind</i> <i>Polly</i>	23 Feb	26 Feb-1 Mar	5 Mar 4 Mar	10/10 Mar 8 Mar	28 Mar	11 Apr	17 Apr	19 Apr 20 Apr	3
<i>Merkara</i> 14 Mar <i>Tanjore</i> <i>Assam</i> <i>Gunga</i>	23 Mar	26 – 29 Mar	6 Apr 30 Mar	11/12 Apr 3 Apr	29 Apr	11 May	16 May	19 May 15 May	4
<i>Waroonga</i> 1 Apr <i>Mongolia</i> <i>Thibet</i> <i>Quetta</i>	[6 Apr]	9 – 12 Apr	16 Apr 15 Apr	21/21 Apr 20/21 Apr	10/24 May 17 May	6 Jun 29 May	11 Jun	19 Jun 5 Jun	5
<i>Quetta</i> 12 Apr <i>Tanjore</i> <i>Clyde</i>	20 Apr	23 – 26 Apr	27 Apr	30 Apr/2 May 2 May	16/17 May	29 May	3 – 4 Jun	5 Jun	6
<i>Almora</i> 25 Apr <i>Mongolia</i> <i>Ganges</i> <i>Ranelagh</i>	[4 May]	7 – 10 May	11 May	15 May 15 May	2 Jun	15 Jun 16 Jun	23/24 Jun	26 Jun 21 Jun	7
<i>Eldorado</i> 9 May <i>Tanjore</i> <i>Thames</i>	18 May	21 – 24 May	23 May 25 May	29 May 29 May	15 Jun	27 Jun	3 Jul	5 Jul	8

The Queensland Royal Mail

Ship/Depart Plymouth	Mail left London	Brindisi to Alex	Depart Suez	At Aden	At Batavia	At Cooktown	At Rock hampton	Arrive Brisbane	Notes
<i>Chyebassa</i> 6 Jun <i>Tanjore</i> <i>Parramatta</i>	15 Jun	18 – 21 Jun	19 Jun 22 Jun	24/26 Jun 26 Jun	18 Jul	30 Jul	4 Aug	5 Aug	9
<i>D of Buckingham</i> <i>Mongolia</i> <i>Kaiser-I-Hind</i>	29 Jun	2 – 5 Jul	3 Jul 6 Jul	11 Jul 10/11 Jul	31 Jul		20 Aug	21 Aug	10
<i>D of Westminster</i> <i>Tanjore</i> <i>Shannon</i> <i>Governor Blackall</i>	13 Jul	16 – 19 Jul	17 Jul 20 Jul	22 Jul 24 Jul			26 Aug	28 Aug	11
		Brindisi-Suez					22 Aug	26 Aug	
<i>Roma</i> 1 Aug <i>Hydaspes</i> <i>Carthage</i> <i>Governor Blackall</i>	10 Aug	13 - 17 Aug	18 Aug	21 Aug 22 Aug	9 Sep	20 Sep	23 Sep	25 Sep	12
<i>Bulimba</i> 29 Aug <i>Lombardy</i> <i>Nizam</i>	7 Sep	10 - 14 Sep	11 Sep 15 Sep	15/19 Sep 19 Sep	6 Oct	16 Oct	20 Oct	21 Oct	13
<i>D of Buccleugh</i> <i>Gwalior</i> <i>Malwa</i>	21 Sep	24 - 29 Sep	27 Sep 30 Sep 30 Sep	2/4 Oct 4 Oct	23 Oct	6 Nov	11 Nov	13 Nov	14
<i>Dorunda</i> 26 Sep <i>Venetia</i> <i>Siam</i> <i>Ranelagh</i>	5 Oct	8 - 13 Oct	11 Oct 14 Oct	16 Oct 18 Oct	3 Nov	13 Nov	16 Nov	18 Nov	15
<i>Almora</i> 11 Oct <i>Surat</i> <i>Khedive</i>	19 Oct	22 - 27 Oct	27 Oct	31 Oct/1 Nov 1 Nov	19 Nov	4 Dec		11 Dec	16
<i>Merkara</i> 24 Oct <i>Cathay</i> <i>Peshawur</i> <i>Governor Blackall</i>	2 Nov	5 - 10 Nov	7 Nov 10 Nov	12/15 Nov 15 Nov	2 Dec	12 Dec		17 Dec	17
<i>Goulpara</i> 7 Nov <i>Bokhara</i> <i>Australia</i>	16 Nov	19 - 24 Nov	22 Nov 24 Nov	28 Nov 29 Nov	18 Dec	30 Dec		6 Jan	18
<i>Waroonga</i> 22 Nov <i>Lombardy</i> <i>Ancona</i> <i>Governor Blackall</i>	30 Nov	3 - 7 Dec	8 Dec	12 Dec	29 Dec	8 Jan		14 Jan	19
<i>D of Buckingham</i> <i>Gwalior</i> <i>Teheran</i>	14 Dec	17 Dec	20 Dec 23 Dec 23 Dec	25/28 Dec 28 Dec	16 Jan	27 Jan	3 Feb	5 Feb	20
<i>Roma</i> 19 Dec <i>Surat</i> <i>Nizam</i> <i>Governor Blackall</i>	28 Dec	31 Dec/6 Jan	3 Jan 84 6 Jan	8 Jan 1884 11 Jan	28 Jan	8 Feb	12 Feb	14 Feb	21
						8 Feb		12 Feb	

Notes

- Chyebassa* arrived Aden 5 Feb, but had to wait 2 days for the mails ex *Khedive*. Detained 2 days at Batavia, but still arrived Brisbane 2 days ahead of contract time p.m. 12 Mar. Mails brought off by Govt ss *Kate*, arriving late 12 Mar for delivery in the city a.m. 13 Mar.
- Left Plymouth 4 Feb, 3 days later than originally advertised. At Aden 26 Feb, where she picked up the mails according to the *Brisbane Courier*. At Thursday Island 28 Mar, at Bowen 4 Apr.
- Left Plymouth 16 Feb with 702 immigrants. *Duke of Buccleugh* anchored in Cleveland Bay (Townsville) evening of 12 Apr. *Polly* transhipped the mails and sailed south at 1430 on 13 Apr. *Polly* arrived alongside at Brisbane at 0400 on 20 Apr with the mails, whilst *D of Buccleugh* arrived in the roadstead at 1915 on 19 Apr.
- Merkara* arrived Brisbane Bar 19 May. Delayed for 8 days in Suez Canal by going aground. Captain invalidated off and the Chief Officer took over. Arrived Aden 1700 11 Apr, coaled, received the mails and left at 0200 on 12 Apr. Malaria epidemic en route to Batavia. Reached Townsville Sat 12 May where mails were transferred to the ASN *Gunga* and sent on, *Gunga* arriving Moreton Bay on 15 May.

The Queensland Royal Mail

5. *Brisbane Courier* 20 Jun: "Capt AA Fyffe reports that *Waroonga* left Glasgow 28 Mar, Plymouth 1 Apr with emigrants, and arrived Suez 14 Apr. Arrived Aden 1200 on 21st, **received Queensland mails**, and sailed 2000 same day. Arrived Batavia 10 May - cause of detention at this port, high pressure piston broken and 2 blades off the propeller. Executed all repairs and proceeded at 1600 on 24th May. Anchored in Moreton Bay 0500 on 16 Jun." *Quetta* brought *Waroonga*'s mails on from Batavia.
6. At Aden 30 Apr to 2 May. At Batavia 16/17th & left with mails from the ss *Waroonga*. Arrived Thursday Island 26 May. "By the RMS *Quetta* mails from Europe reached Brisbane last night, 5 Jun."
7. *Brisbane Courier* 27 Jun: "*Almora* arrived Brisbane at 1430 on 26 Jun with 236½ immigrants⁷ and mails **from the coast ports**. Arrived Aden night of 15th May, took on mails [sic], fresh water & coals & left. At Batavia 2 Jun. At Thursday Island 12/13 Jun. Arrived Cooktown a.m. 15th & **transferred mails**. At Townsville 2300 16 Jun to 1000 22nd. At Bowen 22 Jun. At Rockhampton 23rd. Arr Moreton Bay 1430 - ss *Francis Caddell* conveyed saloon passengers and coast mails to town." No definitive statement found that *Ranelagh* brought the mails on from Cooktown but dates make sense.
8. *Brisbane Courier* 6 Jul: "Capt Bergeman reports that *Eldorado* left Suez 23rd, arrived Aden 29th, received mails and set off same day. At Batavia 14/15th Jun. Anchored off Thursday Island 23rd awaiting pilot, arrived Thursday Is 24th & left same day. Arrived Cooktown 27th and discharged mails and 4 immigrants. Arrived Townsville 29th & discharged mails and 94 immigrants, detained there 60 hours. At Bowen 1 Jul, at Mackay 2nd - discharged no cargo as lighterage not procurable as usual. At Rockhampton 3/4 Jul, detained 26 hours." The mails were 1 day behind schedule, attributed by the local agents to the negligence of the Townsville agents who allowed the *Gunga*, which arrived in Brisbane on Tuesday last [3rd Jul] to sail while the officers of the *Eldorado* were in the act of transshipping the Brisbane mail bags to her. The Captain's report also mentions that she anchored most nights on her way down the Queensland coast, a not uncommon practice due to navigational hazards.
9. Five days late leaving Batavia so the new feeder mail service from Cooktown to Brisbane under contract to the ASN Company failed, as the *Governor Blackall* was unable to wait that long (*Brisbane Courier* 28 Jul). The Captain's report on arrival at Brisbane was brief and gave no reason for the delay at Batavia, but a subsequent report in the *Brisbane Courier* on 7 Aug says she was repairing machinery smashed in a tremendous gale between Aden and Batavia. *Chyebassa* was at Bowen 2 Aug.
10. Left Plymouth 20 Jun. *Brisbane Courier* 23 Aug: "*Duke of Buckingham* arrived at Aden on 11 July and took the mails on board omitting Port Said due to the prevalence of cholera there." ["Minute No 413 dated 9 June 1883 to the Secretary GPO London acknowledges letter advising that an extra packet is appointed to sail from Aden with Queensland mails, which will be despatched from London on 29th June. On reaching Suez mails will duly be forwarded to Aden."](#)⁸ The *Brisbane Courier* for 23 Aug confirms that she took mails aboard at Aden, "omitting Port Said in view of the cholera there."
11. The mails were transferred at Cooktown: "Arrivals Brisbane. August 26. - *Governor Blackall*, A.S.N. Company's s., 331 tons, Captain N. G. Buttrey, from Cooktown. Captain Buttrey reports that the *Governor Blackall*, s., left Cooktown at 9.20 a.m. on the 22nd instant with the English mails onboard, calling at the intermediate ports, and arriving at Brisbane at 11.10 p.m. on the 26th." (*Brisbane Courier*, 27 August 1883). The first successful speeding of the mails by the local contract from Cooktown.
12. Kirk notes serious cholera outbreak in Egypt. Brindisi mails went through the Canal for transfer at Suez. *Brisbane Courier* 21 Sep: "Cooktown 20 Sep: RMS *Roma* arrived this morning. She had a good passage - 4 deaths occurred, 3 from dysentery and one from heat apoplexy. The ss *Governor Blackall* left today with the English mails. Captain Mann reports that the Netherlands India Govt sent 3 gunboats into the Straits of Sunda to warn shipping of the dangerous condition of the Straits. Had it not been for this the *Roma* would probably have gone ashore where there had been 20 fathoms of water previous to the recent volcanic disturbances.⁹ The tidal wave that swept through the Straits of Sunda is stated to have been 100 feet high." *Brisbane Courier* 25 Sep: "Capt NG Buttrey reports that *Governor Blackall* left Cooktown with the English mails at 1100 on 20 Sep, and arrived in Brisbane at 2100 on 24 Sep."
13. *Brisbane Courier* 22 Oct: "RMS *Bulimba* arrived Brisbane roadstead early evening 21 Oct, 3 days before her contract time although she was detained at Aden awaiting the P&O steamer. The mails were immediately transhipped by the Govt ss *Kate* which reached Queen's Wharf about 2230. *Bulimba* arrived Aden about 1200 on 15 Sep. Having made a very fast run to Aden she was obliged to waste 3 days awaiting arrival of the *Nizam*, 24 hours late with the Brindisi mails. Arrived Batavia 4 Oct and spent 2 days coaling there. Arrived Thursday Island 0930 on 14 Oct and left at 1730. At Cooktown 0825 to 1440 16 Oct. At Townsville 1140 on 17 Oct, left 1725 on 18th. At Bowen and Mackay 19 Oct. Arrived Keppel Bay 0850 on 20 Oct and left at 1420." Mails apparently not transferred at Cooktown.

⁷ Children counted as half an immigrant

⁸ [POST 48/322 Suez Letter Book 1880-4](#)

⁹ This entry refers to the explosion of Krakatoa

The Queensland Royal Mail

14. [POST 48/322, Suez Letter Book 1880-4](#), noted that an extra mail was to be despatched from Brindisi to Aden to be transferred to the extra Queensland packet *Duke of Buccleugh* for conveyance via Torres Strait. *Brisbane Courier*: "Capt West reports *Duke of Buccleugh* left Plymouth 12 Sep with 710 emigrants. Arrived Aden 2 Oct and detained for mails per *Gwalior* until the 4th. At Batavia 22/23 Oct. At Thursday Island 2/3 Nov. At Cooktown 6th and Townsville 7 to 9 Nov. At Bowen with *D of Westminster* on 9th, and Keppel Bay 10th to early 12 Nov.
15. *Ranelagh* arrived Brisbane Bar at 0100 on 18 Nov from Cooktown and landed the mails a.m. 18 Nov, nearly 15 hours before they were due. *Dorunda* anchored in Brisbane Roadstead at 1200 on 18 Nov, nearly 3 days ahead of her contract time, having gained 2 days since leaving Cooktown.
16. [Minute No 492 dated 15 Oct 1883 to the Secretary, GPO London](#) noted that an extra mail for Queensland was to be despatched from London on 19 Oct via Brindisi for transfer to ss *Almora* at Aden.¹⁰ Left Malta 20 Oct. Arrived Aden 31 Oct, Colombo 9 Nov. At Bowen 8 Dec.
17. *The Times* dated 25 Oct: "*Merkara*, Queensland Line ss from London for Queensland, left Plymouth yesterday after embarking emigrants - 418 souls equating to 368 statute adults. At Bowen 14 Dec. *Brisbane Courier* 17 Dec: "*Governor Blackall* arrived Brisbane with the English mails on 16 Dec at 0850, 14 hours ahead of contract time." The mails were transferred at Cooktown.
18. [Minute No 505 dated 4 Nov 1883 to the Secretary, GPO London](#). Noted that an extra mail for Queensland was to be despatched from London on 16 Nov via Brindisi for transfer to ss *Goulpara* at Aden.¹¹ Arrived Aden 28 Nov.
19. *Brisbane Courier* 9 Jan: "*Waroonga* arrived Cooktown 8 Jan and transhipped her mails to the *Governor Blackall* who leaves for the south this evening 8 Jan." "*Governor Blackall* with the English mails ex RMS *Waroonga* arrived Moreton Bay at 1630 on 12 Jan. Weather too thick to proceed so anchored. At 2130 weather cleared, up anchor and alongside 2220, 26 hours ahead of contract."
20. *Brisbane Courier* 6 Feb: "*Duke of Buckingham*, supplementary mail ss, Capt W Turner, anchored in Brisbane Roadstead at 1400 on 5 Feb. Left Plymouth 6 Dec. Arrived Aden evening of 25th and was delayed there three days for the Queensland mails per P&O ss, which was delayed through a block in the canal. Left Aden 28th. At Batavia 14/15 Jan. Arrived alongside the hulk at Thursday Island on the 23rd & left same day. At Cooktown 27th. Passengers and mails for Bowen had to be landed by the ship's boats, the tornado experienced there before her arrival having swamped all the boats in the harbour." This tornado flattened Bowen.
21. *Brisbane Courier* 15 Feb: "*Roma* anchored Brisbane Roadstead shortly after 0800 14 Feb. Capt Mann reports she left Plymouth 19 Dec. Arrived Suez 3 Jan being 3 days passing through the canal. Arrived Aden on 8 Jan and there detained 3 days awaiting the mails. At Batavia 27/28 Jan, At Thursday Island 5 Feb, arrived Cooktown 8 Feb & left same day. At Townsville 9/10 Feb, and Rockhampton 12 Feb." Mails transferred at Cooktown. "The ASN Co ss *Governor Blackall* with the mails from RMS *Roma* arrived Brisbane at 2030 on 12 Feb. Left Cooktown at 1200 on 8 Feb."

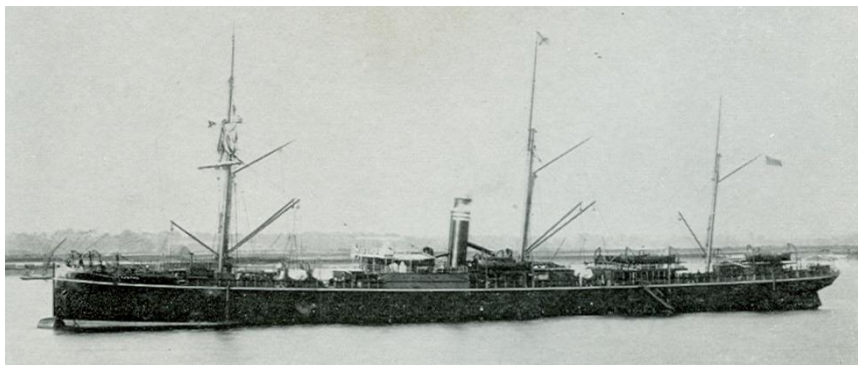


Fig 6. RMS *Quetta* – a typical ship of the QRM service. She was wrecked in Torres Strait on 28 Feb 1890, 158 people saved, 133 lost, and all mails lost. The uncharted rock she hit was subsequently named Quetta Rock.

¹⁰ [POST 48/322 Suez Letter Book 1880-4](#)

¹¹ [POST 48/322 Suez Letter Book 1880-4](#)

The Queensland Royal Mail

1883 Homebound

<i>Ship</i>	Depart Brisbane	At Rock hampton	At Cooktown	Depart Batavia	At Aden	Arrive Suez	Alex to Brindisi	Arrive UK	Notes
<i>Merkara Ballaarat Mongolia</i>	4 Jan	7 Jan			9 Feb 15 Feb	15 Feb 20 Feb	21-25 Feb	5 Mar G'send [28 Feb]	1
<i>Almora Thames Malwa</i>	31 Jan	1 – 2 Feb	6 Feb	20 Feb	7 Mar 8 Mar	13 Mar	? – 17 Mar	1 Apr G'send [20 Mar]	2
<i>Dorunda Pekin Surat</i>	28 Feb		5 Mar	17 Mar	1 Apr 6 Apr		11 – 14 Apr	21 Apr Plym [17 Apr]	3
<i>Chyebassa Cathay Bokhara</i>	28 Mar		2 Apr	14 Apr	2 May 3 May	8 May	8 – 11 May	24 May Plym 14 May evng	4
<i>Bulimba Ganges</i>	25 Apr	27 Apr	30 Apr		2 Jul 4 Jul	9 Jul 10 Jul		21 Jul Plym	5
<i>Roma Verona Surat</i>	22 May	24 May	27 May	10 Jun	27 Jun 27 Jun	3 Jul 2 Jul	To Trieste 3 – 9 Jul	19 Jul Plym [12 Jul?]	6
<i>Quetta Nizam Mongolia</i>	20 Jun	23 Jun	27 Jun	9 Jul	25 Jul 29/30 Jul	31 Jul 3 Aug	Alex to Venice 7-11 Aug	13 Aug Plym [14 Aug]	7
<i>Almora Siam Mongolia</i>	17 Jul	19 Jul	23 Jul	4 Aug	21 Aug 21 Aug	28 Aug 27 Aug	Port Said to Venice 28 - 2 Sep	11 Sep Plym 4 Sep p.m.	8
<i>Govnr Blackall Chyebassa Cathay</i>	15 Aug 14 Aug	17 Aug 16 Aug	20 Aug 20 Aug	2 Sep	18 Sep 24 Sep	25 Sep	1 - 5 Oct	9 Oct Plym 8 Oct	9
<i>Govnr Blackall D Buckingham Lombardy</i>	13 Sep 11 Sep	15 Sep	18 Sep 19 Sep	30 Sep	22 Oct 25 Oct		? - 6 Nov	20 Nov G'send 9 Nov a.m.	10
<i>Govnr Blackall Roma Surat</i>	11 Oct 9 Oct		X 18 Oct	1 Nov	16 Nov 22 Nov	22 Nov 27 Nov	? - 4 Dec	6 Dec Plym 7 Dec	11
<i>Ranelagh D Westminster Thames Mongolia</i>	8 Nov 6 Nov	10 Nov 8 Nov	14 Nov 14 Nov	25 Nov	13Dec 13 Dec	18 Dec	Port Said to Brindisi 20 - 24 Dec	27 Dec a.m.	12
<i>Bulimba Peshawur Bokhara</i>	20 Nov	24 Nov	27 Nov	14 Dec	30 Dec 2 Jan 3 Jan	5 Jan 7 Jan 7 Jan	? - 13 Jan	21 Jan 16 Jan	13
<i>Govnr Blackall Dorunda Nepaul Mongolia</i>	6 Dec 4 Dec	7 Dec	11 Dec 11 Dec	24 Dec	8/9 Jan 10 Jan	14 Jan 15 Jan	16 – 20 Jan	30 Jan Plym 23 Jan a.m.	14
<i>Nuddea Shannon Gwalior</i>	16 Dec	18 Dec	25 Dec	6 Jan 84	26 Jan 31 Jan 31 Jan	5 Feb 5 Feb	7 - 10 Feb	20 Feb G'send 13 Feb	15

Notes

- Brisbane Courier* 4 Feb: “*Truganini*, ss, left Normanton 2 Jan for Thursday Island with the mails for transmission by the RMS *Merkara*.”
- At Bowen 5 Feb. Left Aden 7 Mar. Passed Deal 31 Mar. Arrived Gravesend 1 Apr.
- At Bowen 3 Mar. “The British India mail ss *Dorunda* arrived Plymouth 21 Apr, disembarked passengers & mails & left for London.”
- At Bowen 31 Mar. *Bokhara* arrived Brindisi 1330 on 11 May with the Indian mails ex *Cathay*. Mails left at 1500 - expect London Monday 14 May evening. “The Queensland Royal Mail Company's steamer *Chyebassa* arrived Plymouth yesterday [24 May] from Brisbane 28 Mar, Aden 2 May, Suez 8 May, Port Said 9th. Landed passengers & mails & proceeded for London.”

The Queensland Royal Mail


5. At Bowen 28 Apr. Arrived Colombo 25 May. *The Times* dated 21 June reported: "*Bulimba* left Colombo 19 Jun for Plymouth." Either this is wrong, or she had problems that kept her at Colombo for nearly 4 weeks. Subsequent reports: Left Aden 2 Jul, arrived Suez 9 Jul, so the Colombo report seems to be correct. *The Times* 11 July: "Due to quarantine restrictions the India, China & Australian mails that arrived at Suez on 9 Jul will be brought direct to Plymouth by the *Ganges*. *Ganges* arrived Plymouth late on 21 Jul. Assuming the long delay at Colombo it is almost certain that *Bulimba*'s mails were brought on from that port by another mail steamer, but no report yet found.
6. *Roma* arrived at Plymouth early 19 Jul with 41 passengers; 77 bags mail, 65 of which were landed at Aden. Landed 23 passengers and 12 bags mail & left for London. Dates: Brisbane 22 May, Rockhampton 24, Mackay and Bowen 25, Townsville 26, Cooktown 27, Thursday Island 30th, Batavia 7 June, Aden 27, Suez 3 Jul. *Roma*'s bulk mails came on from Aden per *Verona* to Suez. *Surat* left Alexandria 3 Jul for Brindisi, but not allowed to land there. "Trieste 9 Jul. The P&O ss *Surat* from Brindisi with the homeward Indian mail arrived here at 0900 today (*The Times*). Mails in London probably 12 Jul – proving cover needed.
7. *Brisbane Courier* 19 Jun: "Mails per *Quetta* close at the GPO today 19 Jun at 0915." Venice 12 Aug: *Mongolia*, with India, China, & Australian mails ex *Nizam* from Calcutta, *Verona* from Shanghai, and *Malwa* from Bombay arrived 5 p.m. yesterday. Mails fumigated at Poveglia & left 9 a.m. for London - expect 14 Aug a.m. *Quetta* Capt Templeton RNR, arrived at Plymouth evening of 13 Aug from Brisbane 20 Jun, Rockhampton 23, Bowen & Mackay 24, Townsville 26, Cooktown 27, Thursday Island 29, Batavia 9 Jul, Aden 25, Suez 30 Jul. She had 12 sacks of mail on board, 76 sacks landed at Aden to be forwarded by the overland route." A rare case where the long sea route mails probably arrived before the "fast" mails via Europe.
8. "Suez 27 Aug - the *Siam* from Bombay 14 Aug has arrived at Suez and entered the Canal at 0900 today for Plymouth. Her mails will be transferred at Port Said to the *Mongolia* for transit to Venice." "*Almora* arrived Plymouth noon 11 Sep from Brisbane 17 July, Rockhampton 19, Mackay 20, Bowen 21, Townsville 22, Cooktown 23, Thursday Island 26, Batavia 4 Aug, Aden 22, Suez 28, Port Said 29 Aug. She brings 31 passengers & 87 sacks mail, 74 of which landed at Aden. Mails forwarded at 2 p.m."
9. *Brisbane Courier*: "*Governor Blackall* leaves on Weds evening 15 Aug for Cooktown with the mails for transmission by the RMS *Chyebassa*." "RMS *Chyebassa* left Cooktown at 1700 on 20 Aug after receiving the English mails from the *Governor Blackall*." "*Cathay* from Bombay left Port Said 2 a.m. 1 Oct for Venice with India, China, & Australian mails." *The Times* dated 10 Oct: "*Chyebassa* arrived Plymouth 5 p.m. yesterday from Brisbane 14 Aug, Rockhampton 16, Mackay and Bowen 18, Townsville 19, Cooktown 20, Thursday Island 22, Batavia 2 Sep, Aden 18, Suez 24, Port Said 25. 18 passengers, 15 sacks mail. Mails forwarded by the 7.45 p.m. train."
10. *Brisbane Courier* 10 Sep: "Mails for India, China and the East, the UK, Europe and foreign places Per RMS *Duke of Buckingham* and *Governor Blackall* via Torres Straits. Mails will close at this office on Thursday 13 Sep at 5 p.m. for registered letters, 7 p.m. for packets and newspapers, at 8 p.m. for ordinary letters. *Gov Blackall* left Brisbane at 2200 on 13 Sep. *Brisbane Courier*: "Rockhampton 17 Sep [Monday]. The *Duke of Buckingham* with the homeward mails arrived on Saturday [15th] and went on to Cooktown to await the arrival of the *Governor Blackall* with the supplementary mails. At Port Said 29 Oct – 3 Nov – why the delay? Passed through the Downs on 20 Nov for London from Brisbane.
11. *Roma* arrived Cooktown 16 Oct, expecting *Governor Blackall* same day with the mails, but the latter broke down at the Palm Islands (40 miles N of Townsville), whence *Roma* was ordered to retrieve the mails. *Roma* passed Cooktown again on 18 Oct with the mails. "The Queensland Line ss *Roma* arrived Plymouth 5 a.m. yesterday [6 Dec]. She had on board 15 passengers and 12 sacks mail. Landed 3 passengers and the mails and proceeded for London."
12. Delayed a day at Cooktown awaiting arrival of *Ranelagh*. Arrived Aden 13 Dec & left same day for London. Left Port Said 21 Dec direct for London. *Mongolia* left Port Said 20 Dec & arrived Brindisi 5.30 a.m. 24 Dec with Indian mails ex *Thames*. Mails left at noon for London - expect Thursday a.m. [27th]. The first mail home to revert to the Brindisi route, albeit not via Alexandria.
13. "*Bokhara* arrived Brindisi 11.30 a.m. 13 Jan with India, China, & Australian mails. Mails left for London 8 p.m., -expect Weds a.m. [16th]. Delayed by heavy weather." "*Bulimba* arrived Plymouth yesterday morning [21 Jan] from Brisbane 20 Nov, Rockhampton & Mackay 24th, Bowen 25th, Townsville 26, Cooktown 27, Thursday Island 28, Batavia 14 Dec, Aden 30 Dec, Suez 5 Jan, Port Said 8 Jan. Landed 5 passengers and 7 sacks mail and left for London." Plymouth date proven by cover.
14. "*Nepaul* arrived Suez and entered the Canal at 1200 on 15 Jan - mails will be transhipped to *Mongolia* at Port Said for Brindisi." "*Dorunda* arrived off Plymouth 7 p.m. 30 Jan. Left 8.30 p.m. for London."

The Queensland Royal Mail

15. Mails closed at Brisbane evening of 15 Dec. At Bowen 20 Dec. *Nuddea* left Cooktown 25 Dec for Glasgow." "*Gwalior* with India, China, & Australian mails left Port Said 7 Feb for Brindisi." "*Gwalior* arrived Brindisi midnight 10 Feb. Mails left 8.30 a.m. 11 Feb, due in London Weds evening 13th Feb."

insert before Darling, Meeting

QUEENSLAND MAIL



ROYAL STEAMERS.

Programme of Sailings for February and March, 1885,
CARRYING CARGO AND PASSENGERS TO
THURSDAY ISLAND FOR NORMANTON, COOKTOWN,
TOWNSVILLE, BOWEN, MACKAY, ROCKHAMPTON,
BUNDABERG, MARYBORO' AND BRISBANE.

Screw Steamer.	Tons.	Commander.	TO SAIL.	
†MERKARA	3000	G. PHILLIPS	From London. 9th February.	From Gravesend. 10th February.
§DUKE OF DEVONSHIRE ...	3100	H. WATERMAN	23rd "	25th "
†WAROONGA	2600	A. FYFE	9th March	10th March.
§DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM...	3200	W. TURNER	23rd "	25th "
†CHYEBASSA	2644	A. MORRIS	6th April	7th April.

† Passengers by these Steamers (which only carry 1st and 3rd class) can exchange at Batavia for Padang, Samarang, Sourabaya, Macassar, and other Ports called at by the Steamers of the Netherlands India Steam Navigation Company.

The above full-powered and well-appointed Mail Steamers will be despatched on the dates named with the strictest punctuality.

§ ASSISTED PASSAGES will be granted in these vessels to eligible persons at following rates:—
SECOND CABIN ... £21 10s. THIRD CLASS ... £7.

The bookings by the "**Merkara**" and "**Duke of Devonshire**" are well advanced.
Applications must be sent in quickly.

Fares: BATAVIA First Class, 50 Guineas.
QUEENSLAND PORTS as above 55 "
Second Class, 30 "

Steerage to all Ports, £17.

Baggage Allowance:—5 cwt. each, *First Class*; 20 cubic feet, *Steerage*.

SURGEON AND STEWARDESS IN ALL STEAMERS.

FOR PLANS AND FURTHER PARTICULARS APPLY TO
GRAY, DAWES & CO.,
13, Austin Friars, E.C., London,
Or to GELLATLY, HANKEY, SEWELL & CO.,
109, Leadenhall Street, E.C.,
Or the Local Agents. or 12, Renfield Street, Glasgow.

27-1-85.

Fig 7. Advertising leaflet for the sailings in February and March 1885.

The presence of a surgeon on board, as stressed in the advertising leaflet above, was important – it was unusual for ships to arrive at destination without at least one death on board during the long two-month voyage. The passage through the Red Sea particularly caused problems in these iron-hulled ships with no such thing as air conditioning, and only rudimentary ventilation.

One of the prime reasons for the colony's subsidy to the QRM was the need to attract good quality immigrants from the UK. Free passages were offered to the types of people wanted – figure 8 being a typical form of advertising for desirable candidates.

EMIGRATION TO QUEENSLAND.
FREE PASSAGES
ARE GRANTED TO
Married and Single Farm Labourers,
Farm Servants, and
Female Domestic Servants,
BY SHIP
'ORIANNA'
JUNE 25th.
Another Large LINCOLNSHIRE PARTY Going.
No time must be lost if wishing to go this Ship.
G. RANDALL, Esq.,
Of BRISBANE, QUEENSLAND, and
MR. JOHN H. WHITE,
Of GRIMSBY,
Acting for the Queensland Government,
Can be seen on the following MARKET DAYS at
SPILSBY, Monday, June 6th.
SPALDING, Tuesday, June 7th.
BOSTON, Wednesday, June 8th.
HOLBEACH, Thursday, June 9th.
STAMFORD, Friday, June 10th.
GRANTHAM, Saturday, June 11th.
(Where to be seen will be made known by Crier, about Mid-day.)
Only Farm Labourers are Eligible; they must be Country
Resident; have never been at any other kind of Labour;
under 35, if Single; 45, if Married; should not have more
than Three Children under 12; must be seen by the
Lecturer or Agent.
For Forms of Application and all particulars, write, or apply to
JOHN H. WHITE, Osborne Street,
GRIMSBY.
"GRIMSBY NEWS" CO., PRINTERS.]

Fig 8. Flyer of 1888 seeking labourers etc to emigrate to Queensland. Orianna was not a QRM ship, but they carried large numbers of emigrants.

Termination

Various sources suggest that the QRM mail contract ceased in 1895 but did it? The *Brisbane Courier* 12 Jan 1895: "It has been arranged that the Queensland Royal Mail Service via Torres Straits is to be continued on the present basis for another six months to give time for consideration of details with regard to frozen meat and dairy produce requirements, which it is proposed shall be provided in the new contract."

The Times 28 Jun 1895: "Brisbane 27 June. At today's sitting of the Legislative Assembly the Hon HM Nelson, Premier and Colonial Treasurer, referring to the Torres Straits mail contract, announced that arrangements had been made providing that each steamer of that service should have provision for a considerable quantity of frozen produce to be carried at a fixed minimum rate. The contract also provided facilities for immigration by stipulating that people desiring to come to the colonies should be carried at a much lower rate than hitherto." No other details given, such as frequency, ports etc, but clearly the mail contract via Torres Strait continued. Reports in the *Brisbane Courier* confirm continuation of the contract, but again without details. By this time only the very northern parts of Queensland were being serviced via Torres Strait, basically Thursday Island and Cooktown, the mails for the more southern ports being sent via Adelaide by the weekly P&O or Orient Line services.

The Brisbane Courier 8 Feb 1898: "From our own correspondent, London 31 Dec (1897). The Government and the BI Company - withdrawal from the subsidy. The withdrawal of the British India Company from the subsidised arrangement under which it has been carrying mails to and fro, emigrants inwards, and of late refrigerated products homewards, for the last 15 years or so, is an event of some importance in the commercial records of Queensland. I hear that the shipping company voluntarily abandoned the subsidy in the tender (which has been the subject of discussion for so long) in order to have a free hand; the subsidy asked for was £19,500 per annum for a service of 13 passages both ways, practically the same subsidy as the one under the old contract. I understand that after the tender of the British India Associated steamers had been accepted there arose in the colony certain proposals re the details as to carriage of refrigerated produce which would have caused the company so much inconvenience in the way of hampering their operations as carriers, that they considered a free hand would be worth more to them than the £20,000 a year."

The Brisbane Courier 11 Aug 1898: "Not a month has passed since the mail contract with the AUSN Co expired and in Thursday Island we are having an experience which must sooner or later raise a cry of dissatisfaction. The *Rockton* which left Brisbane on 20 July will bring the first mail from the south we shall have received in three weeks, the English mail which she carries having now been under way nearly 9 weeks. It might be possible occasionally to get an English mail more expeditiously by the British India route; that service was practically killed last year when, owing to the irregularity of the steamers' sailing dates from Aden, it was decided to send all English correspondence by the southern lines. Nearly 9 weeks to wait for a mail when we have been used to what was practically a 7 week service is decidedly retrogressive."

Although not altogether clear from the reports above it would appear that the mail contract ended at the end of 1897. This supposition is reinforced by the fact that GPO Notices from 1898 no longer quoted departures of the Queensland mails for Thursday Island and Cooktown via Torres Straits. Some of the ships reported below were still referred to as Royal Mail Steamers in the newspapers, but rarely, and not at all after July. Additionally, reports in the *Brisbane Courier* show the ships **passing** Cooktown rather than calling there, which one would have expected had they been carrying mails. It therefore seems that contract mails ceased at some time in 1898, but some of the British India ships continued to go via Torres Straits – they may well have carried parcel mails, and a few letters – the latter technically as ship letters.

Acknowledgements

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