

CASE STUDY: Brisbane Cyclone, March 1864

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17-19 Mar 1864 Long period of gales in Brisbane. Finished and unfinished houses, stores, sheds, awnings, and signs blown down; roofs and portion of roofs were carried away; trees blown down and gardens devastated. There were tremendous gales off the coast on 18 March 1865. A stone jetty was washed away at Cleveland. Considerable wind and rain damage occurred at Toowoomba and trees were down at Gladstone. Severe flood at Maryborough reached 27 feet (8.2m) above low water. Water reached the eaves of cottages and one homestead was swept away. The barque *Panama*, 414 tons, was wrecked on the 18 January on Breaksea Spit near Sandy Cape with 10 people on board. At 4 am on 19 January the wind shifted from ESE to NW with increased violence. The ship was then driven onto the beach and broke in two. One of the crew drowned and ten were lost and never seen again.

Flood Heights

Brisbane Flood 1864 20 March 3.78 metres.

Bremer Peaked at 21.3 metres. The flood was at its highest at 1am 21 March 1864.

Weather observations

9am March 17 Brisbane ESE wind cloudy; Lytton SE wind and dull; Ipswich ESE wind and cloudy; Laidley ESE wind and cloudy; Toowoomba E wind and dull; Drayton E wind and cloudy; Warwick SE wind and fine; Dalby S wind and dull.

The Courier Saturday March 19 1864

9am March 18 Brisbane E wind and raining; Lytton S wind and raining; Ipswich, SE wind and steady rain; Laidley SE wind and raining heavily; Toowoomba E wind and raining; Drayton E wind and raining; Warwick SE wind and raining; Dalby calm and raining.

There are no rainfall records in the Bureau of Meteorology's archives for March 1864. Below are accounts of the weather relating to the floods from *The Courier*, which was the main paper in Brisbane at the time.

Account from the *Courier* Monday 21 March.

Early on Saturday morning March 19, the awning in front of Mr. Campens shop was carried away; a new wooden house on Petrie Terrace was blown down at about the same time and in Stanley Street at South Brisbane, a store belonging to Mr. Hockings shared a similar fate. Several unfinished structures in different portions of the town have completely disappeared, and the only proof that they ever existed is a heap of prepared timber, a great deal of which is broken. Roofs innumerable have suffered neither shingles, galvanised iron, slates, nor tiles having been proof against the

violence of the storm. The fastenings of a portion of the galvanised iron roof which covers the ferry houses were burst, and one of the sheets of iron was literally doubled over. Fences have been thrown down in the most remorseless manner, and have been rendered quite useless for any other purpose than firewood.

The damage done to property generally by the gale has been much exceeded by the disasters occasioned by the flood, of which we are at present enabled to give but a meagre account. Previous to the very heavy rain on Friday night the appearance of the river gave no indication of a flood, although an ordinary fresh was observable. Early on Saturday morning, however, apprehensions were entertained that a heavy flood would take place and towards the afternoon the state of the river showed that those apprehensions were not groundless, and precautions were taken by the owners of several of the stores on the banks of the river to prevent any loss. Goods were removed to higher ground. As the night advanced the height of the river rapidly increased, and by daylight on Sunday morning it was evident that the flood would be of such an extent as to cause a great deal of damage to property. Advice was received from Ipswich, to the effect that on Saturday, at six o'clock p m., the telegraph posts at the One Mile Creek Bridge, which had been raised twenty feet higher than they were at the time of the flood in February, 1863, were swept away, although they had been let into the ground to the depth of nine foot, and were otherwise supported by struts. It was also found necessary to remove the goods from Messrs. Wienholt and Walker's new stores, Bremer Street, which was built much higher than it was supposed a flood could reach. The water was at the foot of Dr. Rowland's stable. Oxley Creek was also as wide as the Brisbane River generally is in Brisbane.

In Brisbane the water gradually rose throughout the whole of yesterday and at 1pm Albert-street, from Alice-street to Charlotte-street, was totally impassable, and many of the residents in Frog's Hollow were compelled to leave their houses and furniture to the mercy of the devastating elements. At Ralf's wharf (Today's Riverside Centre) the water was about eight inches higher than at the previous flood, about five feet over the wharf, and it was only by strong efforts that the steamer Settler was prevented from drifting on to it. At Harris's wharf the water was about twelve inches higher than on the former occasion, but in consequence of the necessary precautions having been taken by the removal of the goods in the store, no damage of moment occurred. At Forrest's wharf it was found necessary to remove a large quantity of sugar and other goods into the adjacent immigration depot, and at the ferry houses the water was about seven foot above the floor. Towns' wharf was quite submerged, and the water was within eighteen inches of the eaves of the wharf sheds. The water went as far as Russell-street as Mr. Kinchela's store, and much loss has been sustained by the householders in that street. In the suburbs of the town, damage to an enormous extent has been done.

One account by a Saw-miller (Pettigrew) talked of a Westerly wind after the rain by Sunday which meant the cyclone was then south of Brisbane.