Pechey Sawmill

Location

Beside the New England Highway Toowoomba-Crows Nest at the village of Pechey, on the western side of the road. GPS 27 deg 18 min 34 sec S 152 deg 2 min 27 sec E.

Recommended Heritage Boundaries

The recommended boundaries are the highway, the creek stretching from a line perpendicular to the local road at the southern wall of the hall, north 300 metres to a parallel line from the highway to the creek. This area may be possibly reduced after a more detailed study of the area.

History

Edward Wilmot Pechey, born in Colchester, England, in 1841 came to Newcastle in 1857 and then to Brisbane in 1859, working for the Surveyor-General on the survey of the Downs. In his early twenties he joined Degen and Haege in the Victoria Steam Saw Mill at Highfields. After it was burnt down, the Albert Saw Mill was built further north at what became known as Pechey. After marrying Ellen Bond in 1872, Pechey built a homestead on the hill above the mill. The sawmill was located beside the creek, its water supply.

The 1893 financial depression and bank crashes left Pechey technically bankrupt as he had borrowed heavily. His son William Wilmot Pechey, aged 21, left the business for gold-rich Western Australia, then the only booming economy in Australia. He worked for the Canning Jarrah Timber Company, eventually becoming its General Manager. Younger brother Alfred Edward, aged 17, joined him and found work with the Karri and Jarrah Mills. Both returned when their father died in 1904 and began to pull the business back, William manager at Mill Street, Toowoomba and Alfred at Pechey. They built a new mill at Mount Binga near Cooyar. After William died in 1915, Alfred finally wound up his father's estate. The mill at Pechey closed in 1924 after another slump in timber prices. The buildings were dismantled and were used to build Emmerson's Power House in Crow's Nest. The store, hotel, school, hall and cottages remained at the village. Queensland Trustees Ltd, who had been in charge of the estate since 1904, advised by the Pechey Brothers, advertised the estate for sale as a number of farms. Alfred also turned to farming, building a new house called Listening Ridge on the eastern part of the estate. His son William (1917-1986) became president of the

Tropical Grassland Society in 1981 and Mrs Shirley Pechey holds the surviving records of the sawmilling enterprise.¹

The name Pechey was in use at least since the railway opened on 6 December 1886. A siding to the sawmill had been laid out in 1884 prior to construction. The sawmills were a factor in the 1883 decision to route the line to Crow's Nest to pass by the sawmill.²

Queensland Trustees Ltd requested a three chain extension of the siding in 1909 when they were enlarging the sawmill. By 1910, the prime blocks for Pechey were coming from the Mount Binga Mill, railed from Crow's Nest.³ The Mount Binga Mill was built largely using machinery displaced at Pechey in the enlargement.

E.W. Pechey had taken a lease over the Albert Mill and the yard at Toowoomba on or soon after its construction, in partnership with Robert J. Rotton trading as E.W. Pechey and Co., but this was dissolved on 1 February 1868. By 1876 Pechey was running the business from Toowoomba with I.F. Wells, whose postal address was Albert Mills, Highfields, apparently managing the sawmill. By 1888 E.W. Pechey appeared to be resident at Pechey, leading the application for a school at Pechey. He described the district as rich in blackbutt, gum, ironbark and turpentine pine with most of the buildings of sawn hardwood. The school opened in 1889.

In 1895, only months after borrowing or seeking to borrow £8000 to £9000 from McEvoy & Co. of Melbourne, Pechey was insolvent and the company in liquidation. The whole of the mill machinery including two traction engines, was given to the Queensland Investment and Land Mortgage Company in late 1895 which financed the continued operation of the enterprise. A valuation at this time showed the estate included 7768 acres of land. At first Pechey had to capitalise some of the interest on the loan.⁵

The sawmill, as listed in the valuation, measured about 72 by 72 feet, with 30 horsepower engine and boiler, vertical frames, rack bench, two jobbing benches, planing machine, saw sharpener, blacksmiths and wheelwrights shops, traction engine shed, house of six rooms plus kitchen, stables, Aubigny Masonic Lodge Hall, provisional school and six cottages. workmen's cottages, well, general store, butchers shop and slaughter yards and railway siding, all on Portion 103 Parish of Douglas. Another 6-room house and 4-roomed kitchen, four cottages and other sheds were on portion 936.

William Pechey used Albert Mills, Pechey as the postal address in 1905 when Euston Nolan the engineer asked to give up management of the Pechey mill and Ned (A.E.) Pechey took over. Thackeray became mill and yard foreman. The state of finances may be judged by William's offer to Albert: £3 per week plus free house and rations. By 1910 Alfred J. Robinson was the engineer at Pechey, and E.A. Pechey was being paid just over £6 per week.

The Mount Binga operation started in the second half of 1908. It was similar to Pechey in that Pechey & Co. operated a store there, presumably as the workers lived at this isolated place. According to the estate letterhead, Mount Binga, Blackbutt Range, was a pine mill.

The firm also owned land at Yarraman, Portion 170v in the Parish of Cooyar, offered for sale in 1917.

The whole estate was offered to the government in 1918 but the Works Department reported against its acquisition and Hunter, the Lands Minister, had to be convinced the department could work the sawmill profitably. Negotiations continued with Lands Minister, Coyne until July.⁶

In 1918 Edward Pechey decided to close the Toowoomba depot and move the office to Pechey. At this time, a New South Wales buyer was taking the entire output of either Pechey or Mount Binga. The firm had practically ceased railing logs in august 1916.⁷

The Supreme Court order dated 25 July 1904 which enabled Queensland Trustees to carry on Pechey's business was renewed in 1912 and in 1916 to 1921. Queensland Trustees advised in a letter 2 June 1921 that the mills were closed down and questioned the need for a further extension. The Mount Binga mill was dismantled in 1922, the mill buildings, machinery and plant there sold through R. Sinclair that year.

The sale of Pechey Saw Mill took place on 21 March 1924, to Walter Richard of Boldery at auction for £25,250 (also through Sinclair) payable in instalments. Boldery advised Queensland Trustees that he did not intend to operate the mill but except for the "few items we require for our mill at Yeerongpilly" sought to sell all the plant, buildings and sawmill land by auction, which he was permitted to do.⁸

Site Description and Condition

Pechey was a sawmill village; only part of the village remains intact. The hotel has burnt down, the school has closed. The Highway has been deviated along the formation of the railway to separate local and highway traffic. The cutting parallel to the creek appears to mark the route of the siding built to serve the sawmill, running almost parallel to the site of the main line in order to provide a suitable gradient. There are six stumps about 300 millimetres in diameter and visible for half a metre along the eastern edge fo the siding and one stump further from the siding which appear to be the remains of a building or store. The siding would have been used to unload logs from wagons and to load sawn timber onto wagons and to deliver stores. The sawmill itself would not have been so close to the siding but given the restricted area of the whole site, must have been quite close. There are no remains that were positively identified as from the sawmill.

Fences and a telecom cable now traverse the area. The survival of the cutting suggests the site has not been too greatly disturbed and the absence of sawmill remains can be attributed more to the sale and reuse of the machinery, the dismantling and removal of buildings and possibly fire.

Assessment of Significance

The Albert Saw Mill was the oldest sawmill on the Darling Downs that can be described as being successful over an extended period. The name of the village Pechey after the proprietor provides a recognition of the role, particularly of E.W. Pechey in the history of the region. It is an example of sawmill community. Its proximity to the former railway illustrates the important link between the timber industry and rail transport, in this case, a strong indication that the railway was designed to pass as close as possible to the sawmill to enhance the profitability and effectiveness of the railway.

The site is important in understanding the history of Queensland (criterion a), particularly the role of sawmilling as a means of industrial development providing housing, employment and security and profitably clearing land for grazing, agricultural and timber regeneration. The link with E.W. Pechey (former MLA) may make the site significant under criterion (h).

Recommendations

An site survey by instrument correlated with surviving Railway plans and DNR maps may result in positive identification of the remains at this site. The paucity of surviving remains on the sawmill site makes interpretive signage essential for understanding the site and the adjacent village.

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- 3. File 1910/1697, A/12392, QSA.
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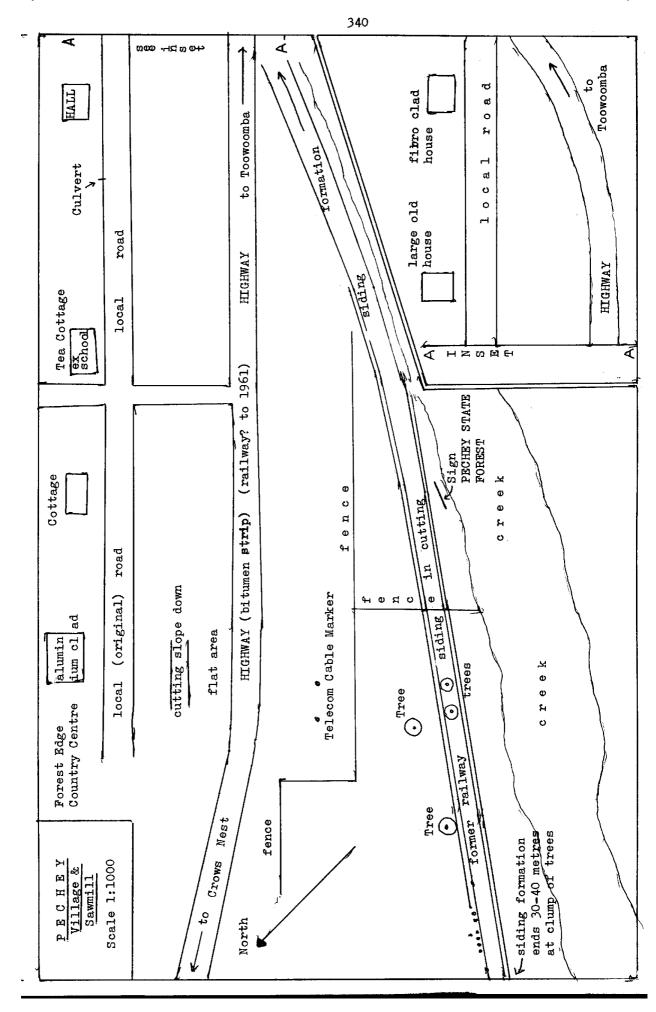
Pechey Sawmill, Pechey Village

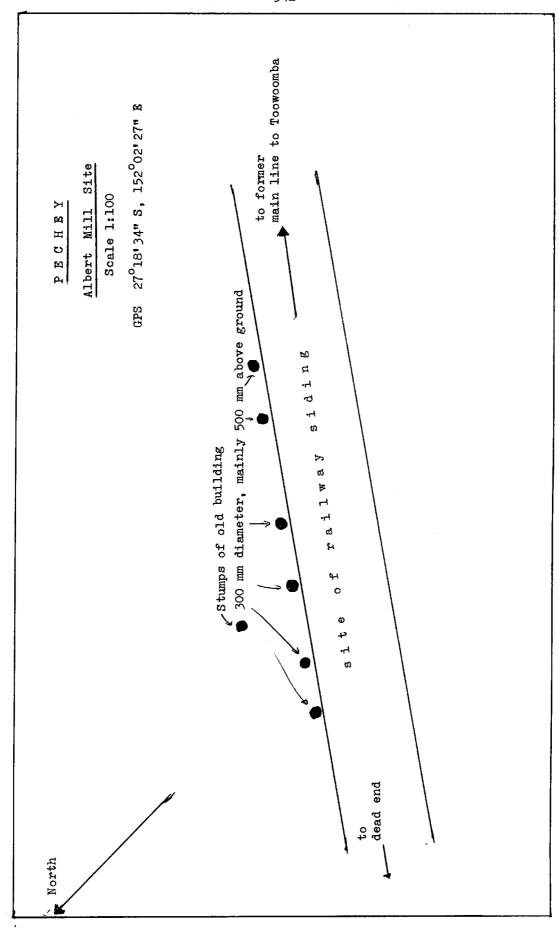


Line of posts, only visible above ground structural remains



Cutting formerly carrying railway siding to sawmill





Taromeo Sawmill

Location

The mill is located two kilometres along the Taromeo Road from its intersection with the Highway. GPS 26°51'11" S, 152°10'1" E.

Recommended Heritage Boundaries

The site has not been recommended for heritage listing.

History

The Taromeo Sawmill near Benarkin was established in 1910 by A.J. Raymond and Company and was bought as a State Sawmill in December 1915. On 1 July 1920 the State Sawmills were transferred to the Forest Service. A tramway from Benarkin to the mill, 3 miles 46.5 chains long, was surveyed in 1920 but not constructed. Taromeo mill closed for some months for lack of logs and was converted from pine to hardwood, replacing the closed-down hardwood mill in Brisbane. When government policy changed, the Taromeo mill and the Newstead yards were sold in 1933 to Yarraman Pine Pty Ltd.²

Site Description and Condition

The old sawmill buildings have been surrounded by a modern operating sawmill. The old

machinery was reported to have been removed to a historical museum. The prominent office like building was reported to be a former local bank branch building.

Assessment of Significance

The Taromeo sawmill has been operating on the same site for a substantial period and important in the district's history. It with Yarraman are surviving examples of former state sawmills. There are few surviving operating business which were formerly part of the system of state enterprises initiated by the Ryan Labor Government of 1915. It was also established by Raymond, an important sawmiller of the early 20th century. The place therefore has importance in the evolution of Queensland history (criterion a) and is rare (criterion b). The site was considered below threshold on either criterion because of the removal of machinery.

Recommendations

Negotiation with the owner is recommended to establish the possibility that what remains might be conserved could combine with a re-evalution to adjust the site as meeting criteria (a).

References

1. Parliamentary Papers (PP) 1917,3,1252-3; S.N. Stocks pp. 77, 49; PP 1920,2,580; PP 1921,2,970. 2. PP 1921,1,986; PP 1933,2,418-9.

Yarraman and Queensland Pine Co. Sawmill and Tramway

Location

The existing sawmill is located at the end of Mill Street, Yarraman. The former rail siding to this mill and the pulp mill may be approached from the access road to the former railway station building (which still stands in situ). The rail cutting is visible on the left hand side of the road approaching the railway yard. Tracing along the siding, the pine mill is to the left and the site of the pulp mill at the right. GPS 26 deg 50 min 27 sec S 151 deg 59 min 13 sec E (siding between pine, pulp mills).

The tramway ran westerly from the pine mill along the side of a ridge across the Yarraman-Nanango road, above the school grounds, ascending steadily with a switchback in a short gully to gain height, curving around the hill and running generally westerly, with a cutting being the main visible and most substantial part of the formation. GPS 26 deg 50 min 33 sec S 151 deg 57 min 53 sec E (tramway cutting).

Recommended Heritage Boundaries

No heritage boundaries have been recommended for the pulp mill site or the existing pine mill. Suggested boundaries for the cutting are five metres either side of the sides and ends of the cutting. It might be possible to extend the boundaries to cover more of the tramway.

History

The Millars Karri and Jarrah Company (1902) Limited was formed in 1902 as an amalgamation of 8 timber companies and in 1909 had 26 sawmills, 560 kilometres of railway and 3500 employees, in Western Australia. By 1908 the company had a sawmill at Yarraman Creek as well as at Indooroopilly, Kingaroy and Barker's Creek in Queensland.

The Queensland Pine Company Limited was floated in 1909 to acquire the assets of Millar's Karri and Jarrah in Queensland, at Yarraman Creek, under an agreement on 30 November 1908. The vendors were Hugh Owen Davies, William Dearden and Bertie Barr Smith and the company had a capital of 75,000 one pound shares, 16,500 issued to the vendors fully paid. The original subscribers were all Adelaide businessmen, the registered office being in Adelaide and the only Queensland shareholders were not sawmillers. The capital of the company was

increased to £100,000 in June 1912. The company was renamed Pines and Hardwoods of Australia Limited in 1922 and five years later it was wound up voluntarily.²

The Queensland Pine Company controlled the former Miller's Karri and Jarrah Company mills from 1909. In 1912 it established the pulp mill in Yarraman as the railway terminus reached the town, a canvas and timber construction town.³

The mill was intended to use pine tops which commonly were just treated as waste, although Forestry director N.W. Jolly considered much of the tops could have become sawn timber. The pulp works were put into operation in July 1913, with ten inch logs ground into pulp, just two weeks before Governor McGregor officially opened the railway to Yarraman and a private siding was provided for Queensland Pine. This was extended in 1919.⁴

By 1924 the Yarraman sawmill was having difficulty getting enough logs. The problem was the cartel arrangement of the sawmillers association which resulted in the association buying the whole log quota and dividing up so that logs were railed to Brisbane sawmillers while the Yarraman mill received insufficient. Queensland Forest Service decided to solve the problem by purchasing the mill in June 1926 and giving it a guaranteed supply.⁵

A tramway was constructed from the pine mill in an easterly direction a little more than 4 kilometres with steel and wooden rails, through Yarraman passing the school and with a single switchback in a steep sided gully. The limit of locomotive working was just beyond the switchback. The tramline continued through a cutting, over a grid at a fence line, curving sharply to cross a creek and then curving gently, apparently terminating at a loading bank from which an track continued in line to a Forestry Camp ("Stables"). A short section of wooden rail was still visible in 1971. There were also concrete remains at the site of the pulp mill. Part of the route has now been made into a walking track.

The sawmill was destroyed by fire in 1929, rebuilt on a small scale and sold to Yarraman Pine Pty Ltd in 1933 with the Taromeo Mill and Newstead yards for £16,000.⁷ (see State Sawmills)

The pulp mill was "the first commercial wood pulping operation in Australia using the then relatively new kraft pulping process and used chips made from the waste timber from the sawmill, a conservation measure which did not become widespread in Australia until the 1970s. Pulp production commenced in 1913 with the pulp being supplied to the Sydney Paper Mills. However production was very spasmodic due to frequent inadequate water availability and this, together with the cost burden of the freight to Sydney, caused the pulp mill to close about 1920."8

In the 1930s J. Gammie had a sawmill and L. or T. Cislowski operated the Union Sawmills in the 1940s at or near Yarraman. F. Sibbles had a mill in the 1940s at Upper Yarraman. In the early 1900s Fletcher's Sawmill was apparently operating near Kooralgin.⁹

Site Description and Condition

The site of the pulp mill is heavily disturbed and overgrown with lantana. The railway siding to serve the pine mill is clearly visible until near the mill where it is heavily overgrown. The pine mill is still operating. The tramway formation is largely obliterated until near the dam where it enters the switchback section and reverses in the gully and curves around the hill and subsequently enters a cutting which is largely overgrown with lantana. The surface formation apart from the switchback and cutting section is difficult to follow. After it enters state forest, the clearing of the land for plantation pine has practically obliterated the tramway although the roadway largely follows or parallels the route of the tramway for about two thirds the remaining distance.

Assessment of Significance

The tramway was an interesting low-capital cost wooden and steel railed line which enabled the sawmill to economically tap a larger area of logs. Given the failure of the government to build the Yarraman-Nanango link (which was an important factor in the closure of the Kingaroy-Nanango link and the whole Brisbane Valley Line since it never reached Kingaroy), the tramway has some added interest since it cheaply tackled the heavy grade out of Yarraman. There are few remains of logging tramways and the surviving cutting is rare (criterion b). The rail siding is a more substantial and longer private siding and is an interesting example with reasonably intact formation and some sleepers and dogspikes of sidings serving sawmills (Criterion d). Nothing was found of the pulp mill.

With the importance of sawmilling in the history of the area, the establishment of a walking trail along the tramway route could be a useful means of understanding and interpreting the district's history for environmental tourists. Freehold tenure may present a problem in achieving this, and there is only a short extent to which the formation has been relatively undisturbed. A walking trail could incorporate some of the roadway where on or parallel to the line. The pulp mill site could be investigated further to see whether anything remains of the pulp mill. The railway siding is comparatively intact to the sawmill.

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Yarraman Sawmill, Pulp Mill and Tramway

View of formation of railway siding leading from railway station to sawmill in background. The pulp mill was to the right

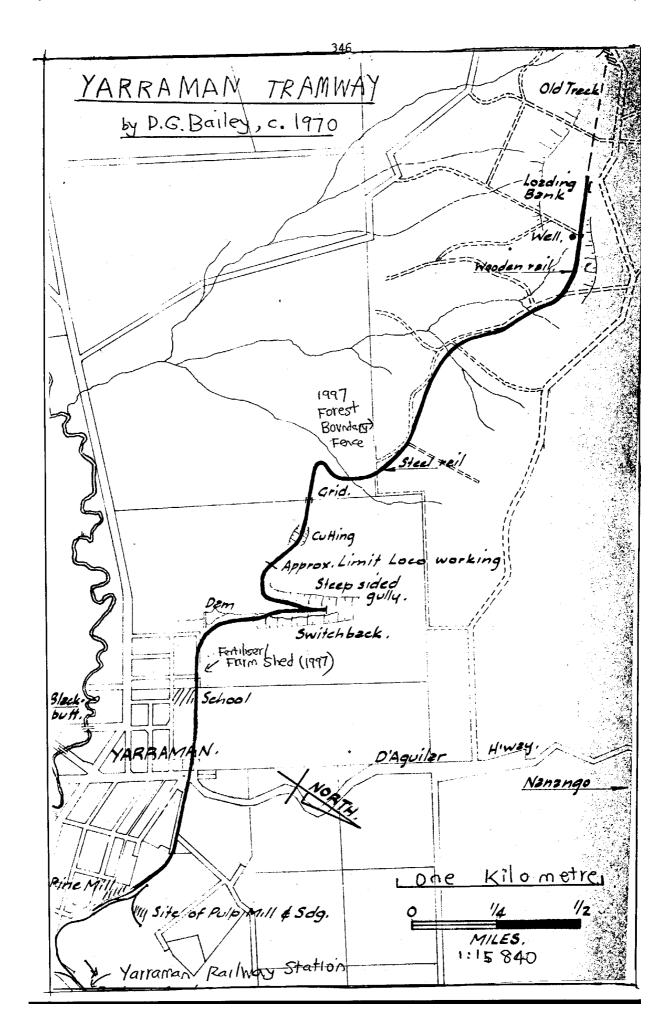


Formation of tramway looking east as it curves left and descends into switchback



Cutting on tramway largely obscured by heavy growth of lantana





Recommendations for Further Work

This report demonstrates the opportunities to heritage listing of a small number of significant aspects of the sawmilling industry, including logging and timber tramways, in Queensland.

There are sites needing further investigation for their heritage value.

A major recommendation is for a thorough study of the issue of retaining sawmilling heritage - or industrial heritage generally - in an effective manner. One of the hazards of the present heritage legislation is that listing an industrial site may hasten the loss of its heritage value. While the listing of ruins may preserve something of past technology, the heritage process needs to be applied to current day technology in order to preserve its heritage value as the history of tomorrow. The dilemma seems almost insoluble, since the successful enterprise will modernise and frequently it is only the failures, the worst rather than the best of business, which provide the opportunities for recording heritage.

Despite the extensive work upon which this report was based, there are many aspects which could not be covered to the depth and extent which such an important, widelydispersed and pervasive industry deserves. The paucity of written records on many aspects of the industry makes that difficult. Despite the gaps in the record, there remains a substantial body of record to be thoroughly researched and a number of experienced people in the industry whose memories need to be recorded. Sources such as newspapers which a time intensive in terms of searching, need to be more fully exploited. More detailed studies of the major successful enterprises would be particularly valuable.

For a balanced picture the study should be extended to the tropical forests and to the cypress forests.

- (a) Complete the process of assessment and, where justified, heritage listing of the sites identified here, both those recorded in detail and those reported in available reports and literature.
- (b) Investigate how heritage legislation may be adapted so that listing assists rather than detracts from the process of preserving heritage aspects of the sawmilling industry.
- (c) Further research work on the sawmilling industry, particular the major successful enterprises.
- (d) Extend the study to the remaining forested areas of the state.

Conclusions

This report has outlined the widespread extent of sawmilling within the south-east Queensland biogeographic zone as defined at the time of commissioning this study. It found a small number of sites where the technology of the early sawmilling days had survived and could be available for heritage listing.

The report found that, compared with other states, there was a comparatively low degree of reliance on self-funded logging and timber tramways. Nevertheless, there were a number of substantial timber tramways, some built as long as 125 years ago.

A small number of complete and almost complete sawmills were located which could form the nucleus of a comprehensive heritage listing process. A number of tramways were also identified, and in general, only the earthworks of timber tramways could be considered as available for preservation.

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BC Brisbane Courier

CR Annual Report of the Commissioner for Railways

MC Maryborough Chronicle

PP Parliamentary Papers, Queensland Parliament.

Pugh Pugh's Almanac Q Queenslander

QPOD Queensland Post Office Directory
QSA Queensland State Archives

OT Queensland Times

QT Queensland Times SE Sunshine Express

WN Weekly Notice, Railway Department.

Note: generally no reference to QPOD lists 1892 to 1949.

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Appendices

The National Estate and Queensland *Heritage Act* criteria of significance are listed in parallel columns which shows the direct correspondence between the two sets of criteria.

The map prepared by the Queensland Department of Environment which concludes this report shows sawmill sites identified in the inventory within the South East Queensland Biogeographic region (which differs from the study region). It should be noted that this map does not indicate the number of multiple sawmills represents by one mark nor should it be assumed that all the sawmills marked were contemporaneous.

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