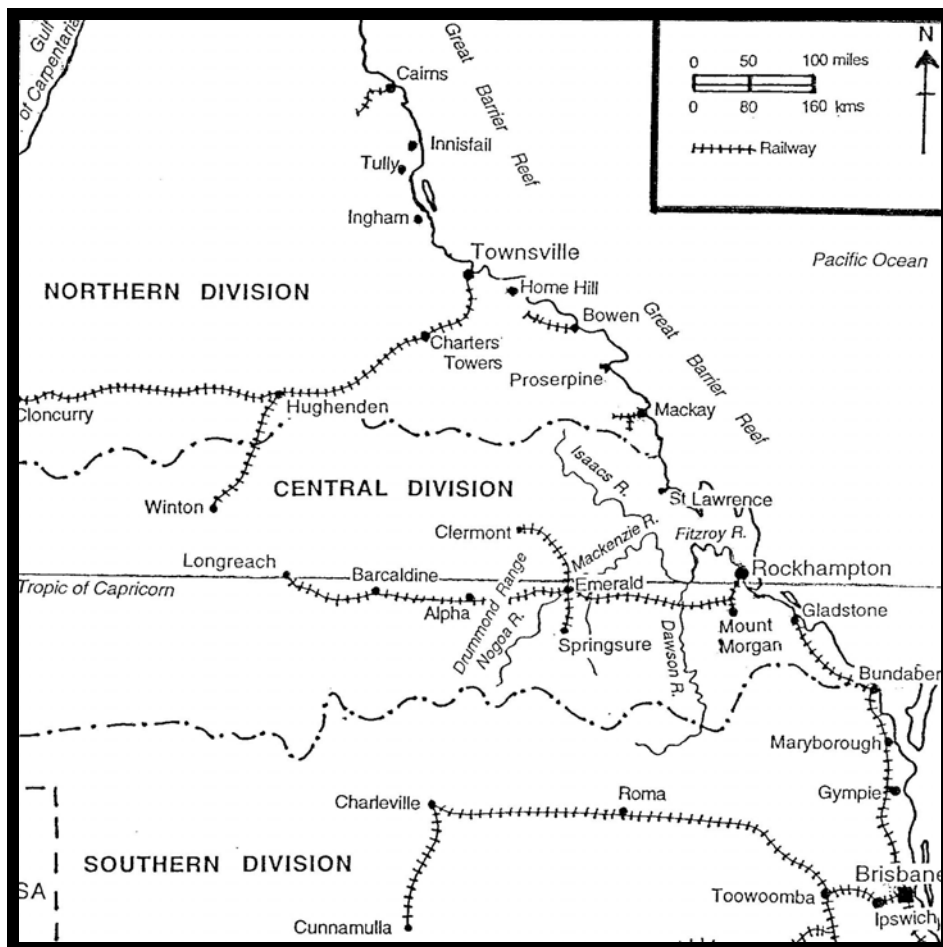


## Early Rockhampton and river trade

When the Archer brothers, the first white explorers and later pioneers of the district, encountered the river they named the Fitzroy in 1853, Charles Archer recorded in his diary that they saw 'a fine and navigable looking stream with the tide running up strong'.<sup>1</sup> As they had come upon the river in their overland travels from the Burnett region, they had no way of knowing the difficult nature of the Fitzroy closer to its mouth. During the first influx of shipping to Rockhampton in the abortive Canoona gold-rush early in 1858—when the New South Wales government declared the settlement an official port of entry with a sub-inspector of Customs—many vessels became stranded or wrecked on the numerous sandbanks and tight bends along the river. Today, features such as Pirate Point, Bronzewing Sand and Satellite Passage bear the names of vessels which came to grief at those places.<sup>2</sup>

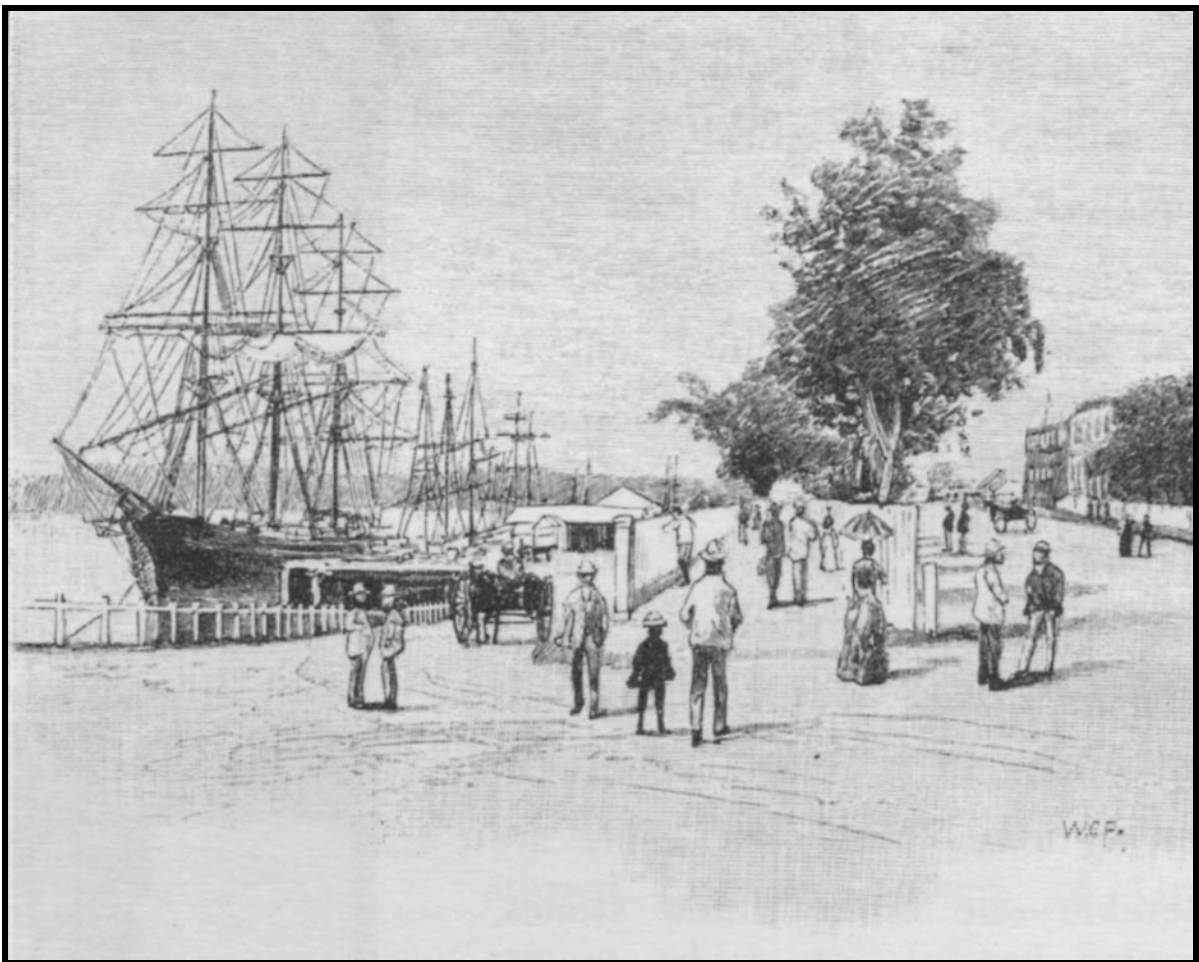
From its origins as a river port for the Archers' *Gracemere* sheep run, Rockhampton soon became the administrative and commercial centre for the newly opened pastoral district of Port Curtis. Between 1865 and 1892, progressive westward extension of the Central Railway to Longreach, with branch lines north to Clermont and the Peak Downs gold and



Queensland's decentralised railway system, 1902.

(based on Comm. for Railways Report, QPP, 1902, vol. 3, p. 80.)

copper fields and south to pastoral Springsure, directed all trade to Rockhampton. As pioneers took up land in the district and farther west for grazing, Rockhampton developed into a bustling port. The wharves drew wool, beef, mutton and hides from the hinterland for export to Britain and, in turn, received British manufactured goods for local and regional distribution. By the late-1880s, gold from Mount Morgan increased the value of exports while blister copper production after the turn of the century swelled the quantity of trade.<sup>3</sup> There was no rail connection to Gladstone in the south until 1905 or to Mackay in the north until 1921, so shipping provided the only reliable means of moving goods, mail and people into and out of Rockhampton. The Fitzroy was therefore the lifeblood of both the local and regional economy. The future of Central Queensland lay with making the river navigable for shipping, at least at high tide and, as the vision for port development grew, at all states of the tide and for increasingly larger ships.



The Wharf, Rockhampton circa 1870s by F.C. Fidler.

(Garran, 1886)



Loading blister copper from Mount Morgan, Rockhampton's Railway Wharf, early 1900s. (CCQC)

INTERCHANGE—continued.

SHIPPING—continued.

Table No XIII.

RETURN of TOTAL NUMBER, TONNAGE, and CREWS of VESSELS CLEARED at EACH PORT in the COLONY of QUEENSLAND in the Year 1888.

NAMES OF PORTS.	BRITISH.						FOREIGN.						TOTAL.											
	With Cargoes.			In Ballast.			With Cargoes.			In Ballast.			With Cargoes.			In Ballast.			With Cargoes.			In Ballast.		
	Vessels.	Tons.	Crews.	Vessels.	Tons.	Crews.	Vessels.	Tons.	Crews.	Vessels.	Tons.	Crews.	Vessels.	Tons.	Crews.	Vessels.	Tons.	Crews.	Vessels.	Tons.	Crews.	Vessels.	Tons.	Crews.
Brisbane	445	326,012	17,390	161	60,331	1,708	696	396,383	19,098	265	15,517	21	15,517	265	450	328,771	17,462	177	70,139	1,691	627	396,910	19,363	
Maryborough	118	60,368	3,422	8	5,359	106	126	66,717	3,528	...	...	...	...	...	118	60,368	3,422	8	5,359	106	126	66,717	3,528	
Bundaberg	54	28,640	2,023	6	1,177	42	60	29,817	2,065	...	...	...	...	...	54	28,640	2,023	6	1,177	42	60	29,817	2,065	
Gladeside	49	27,774	1,860	...	...	...	49	27,774	1,860	...	...	...	...	...	49	27,774	1,860	...	...	...	49	27,774	1,860	
Rockhampton	286	206,682	10,341	20	7,118	195	286	213,700	10,536	...	...	...	...	...	286	206,682	10,341	21	7,365	206	287	214,047	10,649	
St. Lawrence	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
MacKay	131	121,013	6,465	3	728	22	134	121,739	6,473	...	...	...	...	...	131	121,013	6,465	3	728	22	134	121,739	6,478	
Bowen	66	69,061	3,661	4	389	24	70	69,450	3,685	...	...	...	...	...	66	69,061	3,661	4	389	24	70	69,450	3,685	
Townsville	170	191,853	9,000	28	6,689	214	198	198,542	9,114	...	...	...	...	...	170	191,853	9,000	28	6,689	214	198	198,542	9,114	
Dungess	16	2,877	105	...	...	...	16	2,877	105	...	...	...	...	...	16	2,877	105	...	...	...	16	2,877	105	
Geraldton	21	6,085	5,461	...	...	...	21	6,085	5,461	...	...	...	...	...	21	6,085	5,461	...	...	...	21	6,085	5,461	
Baris	107	111,857	5,800	4	1,494	49	129	130,351	5,849	...	...	...	...	...	107	111,857	5,800	6	2,067	65	131	131,052	5,968	
Port Douglas	192	181,460	8,788	5	1,359	41	197	182,739	8,829	...	...	...	...	...	192	181,460	8,788	5	1,359	41	197	182,819	8,909	
Cockatoo Island	85	107,945	4,954	...	...	...	85	107,945	4,954	...	...	...	...	...	85	107,945	4,954	...	...	...	85	107,945	4,954	
Thursday Island	13	4,903	204	18	3,718	118	31	8,651	322	...	...	...	...	...	13	4,903	204	21	4,732	144	34	8,635	343	
Normanton	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Burketown	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...

T. M. KING, Collector of Customs.

Shipping returns for Queensland Ports, 1888, including Rockhampton. (QV&P, 1888)

INTERCHANGE—continued.

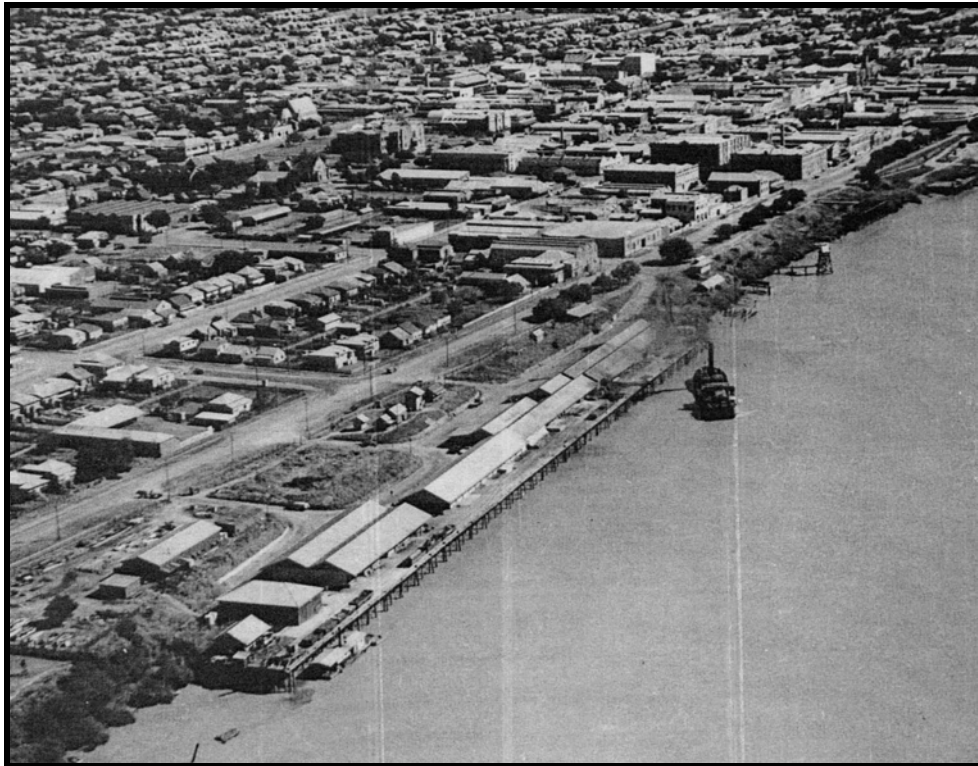
IMPORTS INTO AND EXPORTS FROM PORTS, AND ACROSS THE BORDER—RETURN FOR FIVE YEARS.  
Table No. XLVII.

RETURN showing the TOTAL VALUE of IMPORTS INTO and EXPORTS FROM the several PORTS in the COLONY of QUEENSLAND and across the BORDER during the Years 1884, 1885, 1886, 1887, and 1888, respectively.

PORTS, ETC.	IMPORTS.					EXPORTS.				
	1884.	1885.	1886.	1887.	1888.	1884.	1885.	1886.	1887.	1888.
Brisbane	3,607,578	3,880,645	3,807,123	3,346,214	4,058,713	1,695,821	1,707,596	1,100,542	1,323,273	1,090,761
Ipswich	95,572	106,158	89,275	69,050	75,941	616	316	193	...	...
Stanthorpe	20,757	7,148	5,584	5,271	6,389	15,892	2,055	1,541	885	...
Maryborough	318,159	308,017	296,025	295,672	334,832	192,999	288,275	382,039	426,865	412,901
Bundaberg	90,552	76,885	58,131	64,310	104,616	99,360	127,603	168,302	132,513	177,560
Gladstone	20,259	3,266	8,073	5,436	8,355	61,681	5,344	30,172	33,577	16,140
Rockhampton	620,962	552,400	424,273	437,951	506,561	841,040	1,002,081	781,077	1,296,891	1,448,559
St. Lawrence	1,402	951	455	1,170	435	78,739	67,914	261,974	259,273	74,985
Mackay	143,691	100,593	100,834	129,790	91,128	16,487	16,047	23,891	14,404	7,963
Bowen	31,411	30,758	15,326	28,343	19,927	732,159	856,094	886,686	907,404	918,479
Townsville	626,131	695,203	628,452	678,535	741,775	21,695	65,796	70,850	79,913	42,989
Dungess	8,549	23,013	15,977	12,005	15,933	...	9,296	58,544	...	...
Cardwell	27,532	10,431	10,360	...	...	...	...	...	59,493	46,259
Geraldton	...	...	...	8,634	16,836	...	...	...	78,853	84,106
Cairns	61,179	30,734	56,189	87,353	90,450	70,191	61,903	75,510	182,794	201,964
Fort Douglas	29,598	27,898	20,141	22,701	27,568	193,154	131,037	216,405	125,312	176,093
Cocktown	117,876	96,034	99,676	105,029	151,795	96,864	86,873	85,548	64,097	57,572
Thursday Island	46,989	41,818	34,975	33,434	27,036	160,613	139,887	112,096	166,857	223,264
Normanton	67,744	89,395	57,931	135,519	150,203	1,518	6,558	5,395	16,178	11,398
Burketown	20,795	13,120	9,764	2,591	7,057	1,475	...	...	...	...
Total Seaward	5,957,086	6,085,467	6,728,904	5,458,948	6,435,540	4,180,184	4,573,665	4,261,265	5,168,452	4,994,023
Across the Border (other than Live-Stock)	87,990	105,940	102,657	118,639	108,784	493,680	669,739	672,705	370,109	232,906
Live-Stock (Overland)	336,950	231,083	271,666	244,054	102,414	...	...	...	915,384	899,433
Totals	6,381,976	6,422,490	6,103,227	5,821,611	6,546,738	4,673,864	5,243,404	4,933,970	6,453,945	6,126,362

NOTE.—The above Table has been compiled in the Office of the Registrar-General from the Annual Returns furnished by the Collector of Customs and the Chief Inspector of Stock.

Port statistics for Queensland, 1888, including Rockhampton. (QV&P, 1888)



Railway Wharf circa 1940 with dredge *Fitzroy*. Portion of Town Wharves visible at top right. (RML)

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**References:**

1. Charles Archer's Diary, 4–8 May 1983, Mitchell Library (A 3873) quoted in L. McDonald, *Rockhampton: A History of City and District St Lucia*, 1981, p. 18.
2. F. Rhodes, *Port of Rockhampton: History of its Development*, Rockhampton Newspapers Pty Ltd, Rockhampton, 1949, p. 2.
3. *Pugh's Almanac*, Brisbane, 1911, pp. 864-868.