

# Captain John Mackay

## First European explorer into the Mackay Region

**Mackay is named after Captain Mackay. The City's Coat of Arms were designed to portray Mackay, it's past, present and future, and to preserve a tie with the city's founder.**

The motto on the Coat of Arms: *Manu Forti* (With a strong hand) is contained on the Clan Mackay Coat and was included in the Coat of Captain John Mackay, (although this coat was not registered) and in the coat of his son, the late R.H. Mackay.

An explorer, sailor and harbour-master, Captain John Mackay led a party that explored the Mackay district.

He was the Brisbane Harbour-Master from 1892 to 1902, Chairman of the Queensland Marine Board until 1914 and, at the time of his death in 1914, Port Master. He was the first European explorer in the area.

In May 1860, after travelling overland from northern New South Wales, searching for good grazing land. Mackay led a group of people into the area via Bells Creek and Pioneer River. He named the river after himself, however, it was subsequently found that Commodore Burnett

of HMS Pioneer had already used that name on a stream near Rockhampton, so he suggested that the name be changed to 'Pioneer', even though that vessel had never entered the river.

On 28th May, the settlers started marking runs after drawing straws for the best lots. In 1861 Mackay brought cattle and horses overland from Armidale in New South Wales.

The following year the tiny settlement of Mackay was established on the banks of the Pioneer River.

The area around Mackay was predominantly used for cattle was until 1865, when John Spiller planted the first sugar.

Sugar mills were built in the area around Mackay in 1867 and the first sugar was exported that year. In 1874, there were sixteen sugar mills in the area. The growth of Mackay and the Pioneer Valley could be attributed to the local sugar production.

Even today it is hard not to be overwhelmed by the magnitude of sugar production in the area. Once outside the city it seems that every road is flanked by endless fields of sugar cane.



The area around Mackay produces over 25 per cent of all Australia's sugar.

The property Greenmount, 19km west of Mackay, was named by Captain John Mackay in 1862 when he camped on site - the first European to do so. He also planted a fig tree - which still grows there today. Mackay's cattle properties were subsequently supplied by sea, using the banks of the Pioneer River estuary as the port.

Fifty years later, in 1912, settler Albert Cook bought the land to breed cattle. In 1915 the Greenmount Homestead was built - this was the first permanent residence on the historic property.