

# THE PIONEER

THE BUDERIM HISTORICAL SOCIETY Inc.

## OCCASIONAL PAPERS

Historical accounts  
from the Buderim – Mooloolaba area

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### Buderim to the Beach - Buses, Service Cars and Limousines

Bill Lavarack

The first car on the Sunshine Coast was an 'International Motor Buggy', a 2 cylinder 18 h.p. vehicle with large carriage-like wheels suited to the rough roads. It was owned by Edmund Harris Biggs of Montville who purchased it in 1910. It was used for transporting fruit to the rail at Palmwoods. The first car, as we know the term, in Nambour was owned by George Pitman also in 1910 and he brought it to Nambour by train, not risking the roads. When he pulled into the back of his old cordial factory, a horse grazing nearby jumped the fence and had to be restrained. However, in April the following year a Bleriot car (a French made vehicle) became the first to reach Nambour on its own wheels.

The first car on Buderim was almost certainly a Studebaker owned by Percy Board. It probably arrived in 1916 or 1917. In January 1918 there was a 'Motor Car Service' using a Studebaker, running between Buderim, Nambour and Mapleton.<sup>1</sup> Was this Percy Board's Studebaker?

In 1923 a local reported that:

*The prosperity of Buderim is evidenced by the increased number of motor vehicles owned by the residents. During the past 12 months no fewer than 12 motors have been purchased. This from a population of about 300 people is really remarkable.*<sup>2</sup>

New Motor Car Service.	
Nambour-Buderim-Mapleton.	
STUDEBAKER MOTOR SERVICE.	
Leave Nambour for Buderim,	N
Sundays, 8 a.m. and 2 p.m.	W
Leave Nambour for Mapleton,	N
Sundays 10 a.m., and 4 p.m.	E
Leave Buderim for Nambour,	N
Sundays, 9 a.m., and 3 p.m.	P
Leave Mapleton for Nambour,	N
Sundays, 11 a.m., and 5 p.m.	N
Return Fare to Buderim 6/- each.	
Return Fare to Mapleton 5/8 each.	B

Once the Palmwoods to Buderim Tram commenced in December 1914, passengers could travel by rail to Buderim in reasonable comfort, but many wanted to visit the coast at Mooloolaba, Alexandra Headland or Maroochydore. Horse-drawn transport was available from Birdwood Boarding House

<sup>1</sup> Nambour Chronicle and North Coast Advertiser, January 8, 1918, page 2.

<sup>2</sup> Nambour Chronicle and North Coast Advertiser, Buderim the Beautiful, December 21, 1923, p. 6.

on Buderim from 1915, but this was soon to be replaced by motor vehicle, either car or bus. A scan using ‘Trove’ through local newspapers of the time reveals numerous references to travel by motor bus in various parts of Queensland including the North Coast area where Buderim, Cooroy, Noosa, Palmwoods and Montville figured from 1917 onwards, but particularly after 1920.



These two images from the early 1900s illustrate the change from horse power to motor vehicle at Birdwood Boarding House. The vehicle is possibly a Cadillac of about 1910 vintage according to Noel Williams (pers. com.) (Photographs: Buderim Historical Society)

The opportunity to provide motor vehicle transport between the Buderim Tram and the beach was quickly embraced by several operators amongst whom Charles Clarke was foremost.



Charles Clarke ca. 1920

Charles's bus 1924 (Photographs: Buderim Historical Society)

Before 1920, according to Charles's son Sydney, he had a Ford Model T one ton truck which he used to take passengers to Mooloolaba at the same time as he was working for the Palmwoods to Buderim Tram. In 1922 he put a passenger body on a new model T chassis creating an eleven-seater bus and ran a regular service to the beach. However it lacked sufficient power to take full loads up the hill (then known as Foote's Hill) on Mooloolaba Road to Buderim, so adult male passengers had to walk up the hill while ladies and children rode.<sup>1</sup>

**Milk Service.**—Mr. Chas. Clarke's new motor 'bus, which is to carry mails and passengers from Buderim to Alexandra Heads and Mooloolaba, arrived here on Sunday, and will make the first trip during this week. The new 'bus will carry 16 passengers.

The Brisbane Courier, 26 February 1924.

It seems Charles was not the only entrepreneur before 1924, although it is doubtful if he was operating much before 1920. What other transport was available between Buderim and Mooloolaba at this time?

<sup>1</sup> Syd Clarke (no date) Much of the information in this paragraph, and later, is from notes written by Charles Clarke's son Syd Clarke, held by the author and By Helene Cronin. Noel Williams tells me that in the Model T, the petrol tank was under the driver's seat and was gravity fed to the carburettor causing problems on steep hills.

There was horse-drawn transport for Birdwood Boarding House in about 1915, but what about motor cars or buses? As early as July 1920 Birdwood Boarding House was advertising: 'Every Convenience Motor Car Service'.<sup>1</sup>

Charles Clarke's bus, 1924. Note the conditions on the road to Mooloolaba. (Photo. Len Olive collection .)



It is difficult to find specific details, but several newspaper articles make it clear that there was a busy trade for motor vehicles taking passengers between Palmwoods, Buderim and Mooloolaba. A typical example is:

The *Chronicle and North Coast Advertiser*, January 6, 1922: 'All the motor cars and vehicles plying for hire from the mountain are doing a roaring trade'.<sup>2</sup>

So clearly motor transport between Buderim and the coast was occurring in 1922 and presumably before that. In December 1923 Wahremoana Guest-house at Mooloolaba advertised 'motor lorry will meet passengers by arrangement at Buderim Tramway or Palmwoods, Woombye or Nambour'. This suggests different types of vehicles, including trucks, were being used to transport passengers at that time.

In *Backward Glance* published by the Sunshine Coast Council Library, Charles Clarke is stated to be running a motor bus service before 1920 on a part time basis while working for the Palmwoods to Buderim Tram.<sup>3</sup> He resigned from his position as manager of the Tram in April 1919 and then operated a billiards parlour on Buderim while continuing to operate his bus. The *Backward Glance* article describes the life of Charles Clarke as a Buderim-based bus operator in the early 1920s:

*He purchased a Model T Ford truck fitted with a covered wagon with weather protection and canvas seats, to start a daily transport service from Buderim to Mooloolaba and Alexandra Headland. Once he had completed his days' work on the tram he would take the day passengers and holiday makers from Buderim to the coast. He would also arrange to pick them up for their return journey to Buderim when their holidays had ended. It was not an easy task running a passenger service prior to 1920. The roads were still only bullock wagon tracks suitable for a horse and buggy. Instead of the usual toolbox, Charles carried an axe, shovel, crow bar and mattock for removing fallen trees and dealing with road washouts. In addition, he would fit chains to the rear wheels in wet weather.*

In the *Daily Mail* November 9, 1924 it is clear that several motor services were available in 1924 Buderim and Charles certainly had competition:

*A motor bus service runs twice daily from Buderim tram terminus to Mooloolaba and Alexandra Headlands, carrying passengers, mails, etc. The bus also makes special trips to the sea side or surrounding districts to suit the conveniences of visitors. Two other motor buses and several cars are also plying for hire on the mountain, so that visitors and picnic parties are never at a loss for rapid transport at reasonable rates.*<sup>4</sup>

Helene Cronin in her book agrees with this, stating that:

*Charles [Clarke] had built an eleven seater passenger bus on a new Mode T Ford chassis to meet the Buderim Tram connecting Mooloolaba with Buderim which was the first regular*

<sup>1</sup> *Daily Mail*, July 21, 1920, page 4, advertising. This could be the vehicle shown on the top right of page 4.

<sup>2</sup> *Chronicle and North Coast Advertiser*, January 6, 1922, page 3, District Notes.

<sup>3</sup> *Backward Glance – Charles Clarke, a pioneering entrepreneur*, July 4, 2019, publ. by the Sunshine Coast Library.

<sup>4</sup> *Daily Mail* November 9, 1924, page 13.



*service ca. 1922. The bus provided a daily service between Buderim, Alexandra Headland and Maroochydore except Wednesday and Sundays.*<sup>1</sup>

It seems, to sum up the foregoing, that there were motor services between Buderim and the beach before 1920 and that Charles Clarke was one of the first in 1919, initially using a truck, then in 1922, an 11 seater bus on a Model T chassis. From 1924 on there is more detailed information about Charles Clarke and other Buderim-based operations. In 1924 it was advertised that Charles had a new bus that could hold 16 passengers.<sup>2</sup> The first advertisements in local newspapers for Charles' new bus were in February 1924 (see page 2). In 1924 he was granted a contract to carry mail from Buderim to Mooloolaba and Maroochydore. A year later he purchased a more powerful Federal Knight chassis for his bus body and all passengers could then ride up the hill. In 1925 Charles moved his family from Buderim to Mooloolaba where he had been running tours in his motor boat from 1917.



A happy group of holiday makers with Charles Clarke's bus on the road to Mooloolaba ca. 1924.  
(Photograph: Len Olive collection)



Left: Charles Clarke's Federal Knight bus ca.1925. Right: Gertrude Clarke with one of Charles's Vehicles Possibly a Buick, ca. 1928.

(Photographs: Len Olive collection)

<sup>1</sup> Helene Cronin, 2019, *Timber Trains Turmoil – a History of Buderim and its Tramway*, publ. Helene Cronin OAM, for the Buderim – Palmwoods Heritage Tramway Inc. Page 352.

<sup>2</sup> *Brisbane Courier*, February 26, 1924, Mail Service.

In the late 1920s Charles replaced his buses and, along with Boyd McLean and Bill Mitchell, used cars and stretched limousines or tourers in their place. Charles named his transport business 'The White Line Motor Service' and, in the late 1920s and early 30s, added more vehicles including a five passenger Willy's Knight, a Nash 6, Hudson Super 6, a Buick V6, a Graham Paige stretched limousine and the original 16 passenger bus.<sup>1</sup>

In the late 1920s Charles found that the tram was too infrequent and too slow and he moved his transport business base from Buderim to Mooloolaba. He extended his bus run to meet the train at Palmwoods and take passengers via Buderim to Mooloolaba. His bus also carried mail, newspapers, goods including groceries and ice.<sup>2</sup>

Lionel Burnett was an early operator of motor transport on Buderim. In 1924 he started a business transporting passengers from the railway at Palmwoods to Buderim and Mooloolaba in an Oakland. He continued up to 1927 when, due to competition from Bill Mitchell, he ceased. In the late 1920s business for buses and service cars increased significantly.

In 1927 Bill Mitchell purchased a spectacular white Paige stretched limousine (or more correctly, a 'tourer'), which was popularly known as the 'White Elephant'.

Bill Mitchell's 'White Elephant' at Elston Guest House, Montville. About 1930. The other vehicle, a Chevrolet 6, is also part of Bill's operation. (Photo: Buderim Historical Society)



He named his business 'the Buderim Mountain Car Service' and started a tourist run in conjunction with the Queensland Tourist Bureau. Tourists were picked up at Palmwoods station then taken to Buderim where they stayed overnight at Birdwood Boarding House. The next day they were driven through Buderim, Mooloolaba, Maroochydore, Nambour, Mapleton, down to Kenilworth and Conondale, then to Maleny and back to Palmwoods. Such trips were co-ordinated with train and tram timetables. Business was so good that Bill purchased a second car - a 1929 Chevrolet 6 which is pictured above parked next to the White Elephant. It was the first year of the six cylinder Chevrolets.<sup>3</sup> Local identities Eddie Bell and Sami Singh drove for him. Typical bus fares in the 1920s were: bus Buderim to Mooloolaba three shillings and sixpence each way. The late Joyce Short (b. 1927) stated:

*as a very young child, I was fascinated by the men in their white trousers and maroon blazers who used Bill Mitchell's White Elephant Tourer Bus to go to and from their days duty with the Life Savers at Mooloolaba.*<sup>4</sup>

In the period before the Second World War Bill Mitchell of Buderim and Boyd McLean of Mooloolaba ran bus services from Palmwoods or Landsborough Station or from the Buderim Tram to Mooloolaba, Alexandra Headland and Maroochydore. Sami Singh and Eddie Bell were regular drivers for both Mitchell and McLean.

<sup>1</sup> Backward Glance, loc. cit.

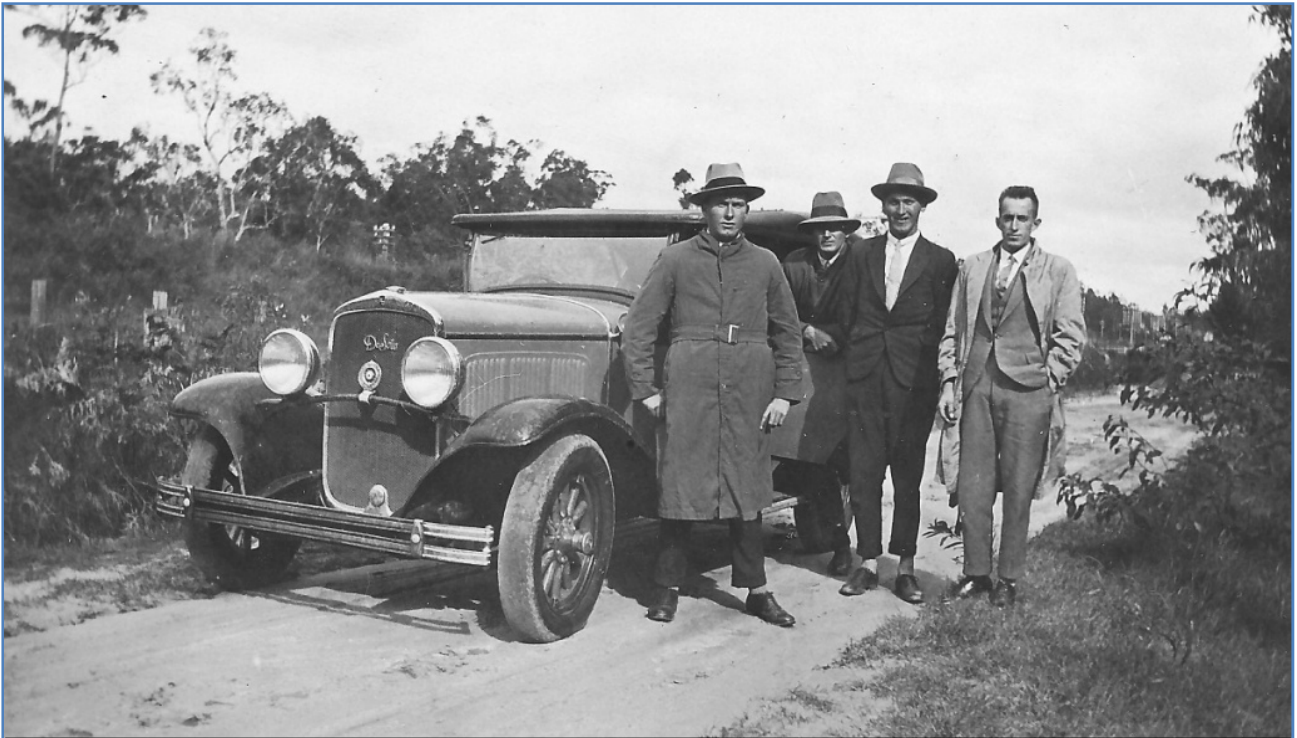
<sup>2</sup> Backward Glance, loc. cit.

<sup>3</sup> Pers. com. Noel Williams.

<sup>4</sup> Joyce Short, *Buderim Stories*, September, 2011, typescript held by Buderim Historical Society.



From about 1928 some of these services were operated by vehicles more like stretched limousines rather than our modern concept of buses. Typical examples are Mitchell's 'White Elephant' Paige tourer and Boyd McLean's Graham Paige. Charles Clarke also operated a Graham Paige stretched limousine (see image page 7).



No its not Al Capone and his gang! Probably a service car or hire car about 1935. From left: Laurie Bell, Frank Fielding (possibly the owner), Eddie Bell (probably the driver), Sonny Crack. Service cars ran on a timetable basis o were available for hire like a taxi. Note the dress standard. (*Photograph from the Bev Lavarack collection.*)

Service cars were abundant in many parts of the State in the 1930s. Locally they offered transport between towns such as Landsborough, Palmwoods, Nambour, Buderim and the beach towns, and to the mountain towns as well as to and from Brisbane.

There were two or three regular services per week between Mooloolaba, Buderim and Brisbane and other scheduled services to Landsborough and Palmwoods to meet trains. Apart from the regular scheduled services, the service cars were the equivalent of modern taxis. After the Buderim Tram closed in 1935, a service car was the most convenient way to get to Buderim from the train. In 1934 the *Telegraph* stated:

*To-day the Buderim resident is served, in addition to the tramway, by two motor trucks running to Woombye and by service cars to Landsborough and to Palmwoods.*<sup>1</sup>

Boyd McLean of Mooloolaba was an important operator in the 1930s. Eddie Bell was a driver for McLean and it was said that people would ask him to make small purchases on his Brisbane trips, or run other small errands and he always remembered each request without making any notes.<sup>2</sup>

In 1935 the Buderim Tram was no longer operating, put out of business by improved roads and improved motor vehicles. In the 1940s Nambour was establishing itself as the business and administrative centre of the Maroochy Shire. The major bus services were between Nambour and other towns and the beach.

<sup>1</sup> The *Telegraph*, November 1934, page 16, BUDERIM: HISTORY OF ITS DEVELOPMENT.

<sup>2</sup> Ken Chadwick, pers. com.

Possibly the first bus that looked somewhat like a modern bus in the Mooloolaba area, was run by Percy Forester of Maroochydore. He had a Federal bus that carried passengers between Nambour, Maroochydore and Mooloolaba in the late 1930s and 40s.



Percy Forester's bus.

Things did not always go to plan. Late 1930s.


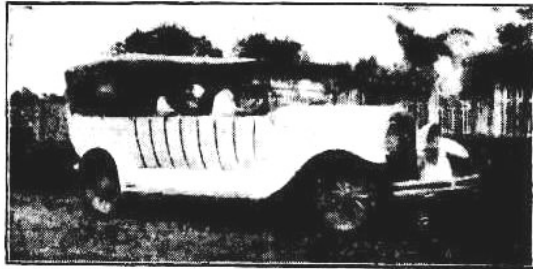
*(Photographs: Sunshine Coast Council Heritage Library)*

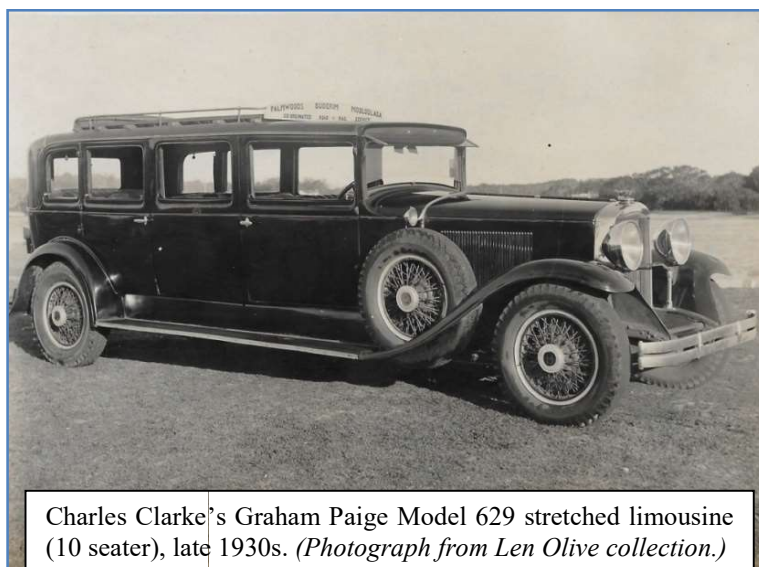
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My thanks to Noel Williams for help with the identification of old cars in the illustrations.

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Advertisements for Boyd McLean's and Bill Mitchell's service cars/buses.

<p><b>BOYD McLEAN</b> Phone 2, Mooloolaba</p> <p>PETROL OILS TYRES SPARE PARTS ACCESSORIES &amp;c.</p>  <p>HOUSES FLATS Accommodation. Local Information. Cars for Hire.</p> <p>Tourist Trips Arranged</p>	<p><b>Buderim Mountain Car Service,</b> DAILY SERVICE CONDUCTED TO MOOLOLABA, ALEXANDRA HEADLAND, via MAROOCHYDORE.</p>  <p>ONE OF THE MODERN SERVICE CARS.</p> <p>Sunday's Ideal Special Tourist Trip, connecting at Palmwoods with Sunday's Excursion Train from Brisbane, embracing Buderim Mtn, Mooloolaba, Alexandra Headland, and Maroochydore. Return, 5'.</p> <p>(For further information see letterpress, or apply office of Queensland Tourist Bureau.)</p> <p>Popular trips to all parts of the district arranged at most moderate prices.</p> <p>Phone: Buderim 2 W. P. MITCHELL, Ptor.</p>
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Charles Clarke's Graham Paige Model 629 stretched limousine (10 seater), late 1930s. *(Photograph from Len Olive collection.)*