

# THE PIONEER

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## OCCASIONAL PAPERS

Historical accounts  
from the Buderim – Mooloolaba area

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### **Buderim – Early History up to 1870.**

**by Bill Lavarack**

#### **The Environment**

Buderim is unusual, even unique, in many ways. It is an isolated plateau, the upper soil layer being derived mainly from volcanic rock resulting in deep red fertile soil. It is an outlier of the volcanic soils of the Blackall Range. Reaching an altitude of only 180 metres, it may not deserve the name 'Buderim Mountain', but it is high enough to intersect the prevailing south easterly winds, resulting in a relatively high average yearly rainfall of 1665 mm. The red volcanic soils sit on top of good, but rather less, fertile soils.

Vegetation. Before white man came to the Sunshine Coast area some 160 years ago, the area we now know as 'Buderim' supported a mosaic of different vegetation types. One popular view of Buderim is that it was originally covered in dense sub-tropical rainforest. This may have been partly true of the eastern half of the Buderim plateau, but the main rainforest area would not have extended far west of the present Gloucester Road. Further west the predominant vegetation type was tall eucalypt or 'sclerophyll' forest. But this is over simplifying the situation. Various mixtures of vegetation were common, depending on soil, topography, fire history and weather considerations. William Pettigrew, who was one of the first white people to visit Buderim, describes it as *a realm of 'immense timber' . . . In many spots the trees were packed dense enough to halt sunlight reaching the ground.*<sup>1</sup> The rainforests are almost completely gone now with the exception of some creek banks and a few rocky areas. At their most luxuriant the rainforests were dense, often difficult to penetrate, featuring tall trees, palms and numerous vines and epiphytes. A small area known as 'Fielding's Scrub' remains on Orme Road, but is now much degraded.

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<sup>1</sup> Tainton, Rev. 1976, Maruchti (mss-Nambour Local Studies). Tainton is here quoting from Pettigrew's diary.

Valuable timber trees were abundant including large specimens of red cedar, kauri pine, hoop pine and white beech. There were no bunya pines on Buderim originally. To the west of the rainforests tall eucalypts dominated including tallowwood, blackbutt and flooded gum, some trees growing into extremely large specimens. Most of these eucalypt forests supported a mixed understorey of vine forest species which varied in density in response to fire history. True rainforests were virtually never subject to wildfires, but eucalypt forests were subject to periodic burning usually by the local Indigenous People. The plateau was largely a mosaic of eucalypt forest and rainforest, with the latter more common on the eastern part, but with the history of fire of importance in most areas. Mixed forests were perhaps the most common type on top of the plateau. These included elements of both the previously mentioned types and were held in their current state by their fire history. There was one major creek, Martin's Creek, which flowed from the west and down the northern escarpment, but there were numerous smaller streams draining the plateau top, most seasonal.

### The First People

It is uncertain when humans first reached Australia, with estimates varying between 45000 and 65000 years ago. When the first Aboriginal people reached the area that is now known as the Sunshine Coast, they would have encountered lower sea levels and a climate a little cooler but not too different from today. The recent environment (i.e. before white man arrived 200 years ago) was diverse and rich with a relatively benign climate. It was an environment which they found fruitful and well suited to their needs. In addition the Buderim Plateau was close to the sandy wallum coastal plains and the salt water



resources of the Maroochy and Mooloolah river estuaries. This diversity of habitats resulted in a fertile environment for the Gubbi Gubbi (or Kabi Kabi) Aboriginal people. They tended not to live permanently in one location, but travelled the whole extended area seasonally in response to the availability of natural resources. This lifestyle included trips as far afield as to the bunya nut trees of the Blackall Range. All things considered, Buderim Mountain must have been a favourite site. It has been estimated that about 1500 people lived in the wider Maroochy area with 300 of these living along the coast.<sup>1</sup>

Left: Kitty 'Bournbobian' Moreton Island – in a bark hut.

Photo: from 'Tom Petrie's Reminiscences'.

Above: Martins Creek today. Photo: BHS

The forests provided a variety of resources including fibres and lawyer cane, bark, resins used in basketry, net making and matting for hut floors and, of course, food. In terms of edible resources Dr Ray Kerkhove writes: *In a foretaste of its later role as the region's fruit bowl, Indigenous Buderim was home to a cornucopia of edible nuts, berries, tubers and stems.*<sup>2</sup>

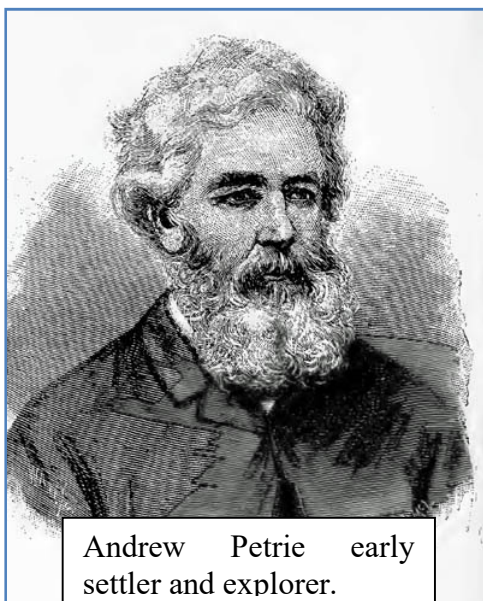
<sup>1</sup> Helen Gregory 1991, *Making Maroochy, A History of the Land, the People and the Shire*, Boolarong Publ.' Brisbane, page 1.

<sup>2</sup> Ray Kerkhove 2014, 4.0, *Trees, Vegetation and Indigenous People* in Meredith Walker, *A History of Trees in Buderim – Research and Preliminary Inventory*, Buderim Historical Society Inc., Buderim.

Some of the food resources Dr Kerkhove lists include: lilli pilli fruit, kurrajong fruit (roasted), black bean (beans leached to remove poisons and roasted), Moreton Bay fig fruit, native ginger roots, native raspberry fruit, cabbage tree palm pith, macadamia nuts and honey from native bees. In addition to the food and fibre plants, there were numerous medicinal plants.

### **The Arrival of the White Men**

The first Europeans to see Buderim would have been Captain Cook and his crew, although Cook saw little of it as they sailed by well offshore. Cook named the Glasshouse Mountains, so probably he saw nothing remarkable about the Sunshine Coast area a little further north. Three 'ticket of leave' men Finnegan, Pamphlet and Parsons, were shipwrecked and blown ashore on Moreton Island in 1823.<sup>1</sup> They were befriended by local Aborigines and wandered north along the coast and a short distance up the Maroochy River and then to Noosa, but did not climb up to the Buderim Plateau. Two escaped convicts from Moreton Bay, David Bracewell ('Wandi') and James Davis ('Durramboi') lived with the local Indigenous People for several years, but apparently were mostly north of the Maroochy River and did not visit Buderim.



Relations with the Aborigines in the North Coast area were initially harmonious, but deteriorated to the point where explorer Andrew Petrie was threatened by local tribesmen when on an expedition in 1840 to collect seeds and specimens of the bunya pine in the Blackall Range country. However by 1862 when Andrew Petrie's son, Tom, lead a party of Aborigines to the Buderim Plateau and to an adjacent area near the Maroochy River, things had settled down and many Aborigines were subsequently employed in the timber industry in the following years.

Although several 'ticket of leave' men, escaped convicts, cattlemen and explorers had visited and some had lived with the local Aborigines in the area we now know as the Sunshine Coast, no one of European origin appears to have visited the Buderim Plateau until 1854. In that year ex-convict Richard Jones, guided by a group of Aborigines, climbed to the plateau and saw stands of red cedar and other valuable timber. Jones had been a convict crew member in 1842 when Andrew Petrie sailed in a small boat to the Mary River. Later Jones was employed by William Pettigrew to establish a depot at Cotton Tree on the Maroochy River in 1863.

### **The Timber Industry begins**

In 1853 William Pettigrew established a sawmill on the Brisbane River. Always on the lookout for stands of timber, in particular valuable rainforest trees such as red cedar, he employed Richard Jones to work the stands of timber that he had discovered adjacent to the Maroochy River. In 1861 Brisbane businessman Richard Symes Warry financed Jones to lead an expedition which crossed the Maroochy River Bar and proceeded to cut and load logs of red cedar from near the river.<sup>2</sup> In 1861, at Warry's instigation, Lieutenant Heath surveyed and chartered the Mooloolah River mouth

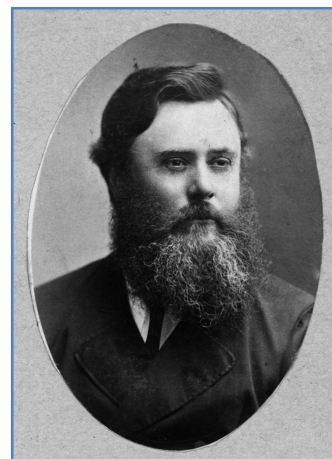
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<sup>1</sup> A ticket of leave was a document of parole issued to convicts who had shown they could now be trusted with some freedoms.

<sup>2</sup> Brown, Elaine Rosemary, (2005), *William Pettigrew 1825 - 1906 : sawmiller, surveyor, shipowner and citizen : an immigrant's life in colonial Queensland*, PhD Thesis, School of History, Philosophy, Religion and Classics, The University of Queensland.

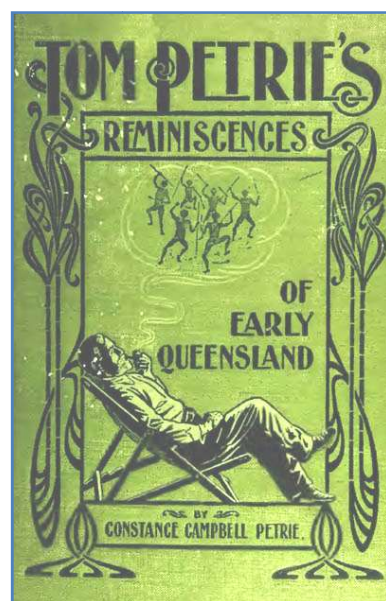
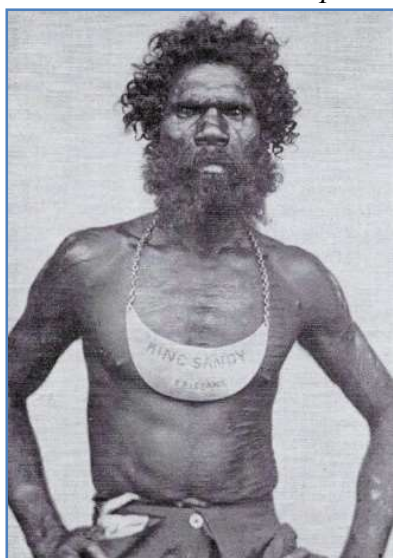
and harbour, reporting that it was a 'a very snug, perfectly landlocked little harbour', but he was not impressed with the Maroochy River as he found the bar was too shallow to cross.<sup>1</sup>

**Tom Petrie** (1831-1910). Andrew Petrie's son, Tom, was to become the pioneer of the Buderim timber industry. We know a great deal about Tom and his work with local Aborigines from his daughter Constance Campbell Petrie, who compiled a book titled *Tom Petrie's Reminiscences of Early Queensland* published in 1904. As a boy, Tom played with local Aboriginal children and learned to speak their language. As he grew into manhood, he remained on good terms with them and was respected by the local people from the area which included his home at Murrumba near the North Pine River, Bribie Island and the North Coast (modern Sunshine Coast).



Constance wrote in her book about her father's adventures:

*In 1862 my father started from the North Pine River in a ship's longboat with about ten blacks (a few having their wives with them), to go to Mooloolah and Maroochy, to look for cedar timber. Calling at Bribie Island on their way, more blacks were picked up, four being murderers of white men. One of these was 'Billy Dingy', of whom I have spoken, and the other three were the natives who had attacked the two men at Caboolture killing one and leaving the other for dead. Crossing to the mainland, some of the party walked along the beach, while the rest of the natives occupied the boat with my father; they thus journeyed to Mooloolah. Arriving there, they camped for the night, and next morning made for Buderim Mountain, and, having climbed it, the blacks informed Father that he was the first white man who had ever set foot on the mountain. He had a good look round through the scrub, escorted by the blacks, and saw forests of fine timber, then had the satisfaction of being the first to cut a cedar tree there. However, he saw that it would not be possible to get timber from the locality to the water without the assistance of a bullock team, as the Mooloolah River is some distance from the mountain, so he decided to leave it till a more convenient time. The party then started back to the boat at the river's mouth, and remained there all night, leaving next day for Maroochy.*<sup>2</sup>



Kerwalli also known as 'King Sandy'. The leader of the Aborigines who guided Petrie to Buderim in 1862. Photo from Kerkhove 2014.

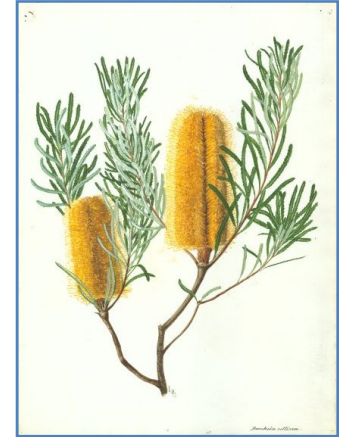
Clearly Tom Petrie and his daughter Constance were not aware of Richard Jones's 1854 visit to Buderim. The red cedar tree felled by Petrie was close to where the current road from Mooloolaba reaches the edge of the plateau, probably near the junction with Foote Avenue. His first timber camp on Buderim, later in 1862, has been accepted as the first European settlement on Buderim. Petrie's success was due to his extremely friendly association with Aborigines including those from

<sup>1</sup> Heath, G.P. 1861. Report on the New Harbour. *The Courier*, 3 June 1861, page 3.

<sup>2</sup> Constance Campbell Petrie, 1904, *Tom Petrie's Reminiscences of Early Queensland*, (Dating from 1837) Recorded by his Daughter, Constance Campbell Petrie, Watson, Ferguson and Co, Brisbane, page 191.

Bribie Island, extending to the Mooloolah River area. In fact E.G. Heap states that Tom Petrie's friendly links with local Indigenous People was also important to those who followed in his footsteps such as William Pettigrew.<sup>1</sup> Tom visited Buderim again on more than one occasion along with a large group of Aborigines, including wives and children, and cut 222 cedar logs on Buderim.<sup>2</sup> Petrie's efforts encouraged other timbergetters including William Grigor, James Low and the Chambers brothers to cut timber on Buderim only a year after Tom Petrie's 1862 expedition.

Constance Campbell Petrie, in her book, presents lists of Aboriginal names as recorded by her father, Tom Petrie. Tom had a close association with the local indigenous people and recorded many Aboriginal words including the name for the hairpin honeysuckle (*Banksia spinulosa* variety *collina*), which he gave as 'Badderam'. From this came the modern name for the area, 'Buderim'. Other versions such as 'Budderim' and 'Buderum' were used in the early days. It is not clear how this name came to be applied to the Buderim Plateau where the dense forest is unsuited to hairpin banksias. They grew in the nearby open coastal 'wallum country' and on the more open lower slopes of the mountain.

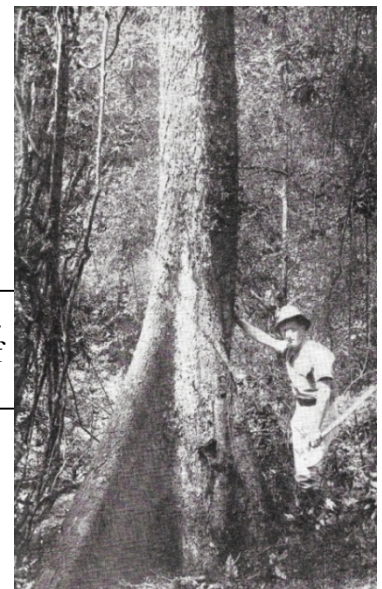


**William Pettigrew** (1825-1906)<sup>3</sup> was to become the most important figure in Buderim's emerging European history. He was a sawmillier, politician and diarist who came to Queensland from Scotland in 1849. He established Brisbane's first steam sawmill on the Brisbane River in 1853. From 1862 to 1865, while looking for timber, he explored and mapped the coast north of Moreton Bay up to the Mary River and began to acquire lands and forests and a fleet of steam and sailing ships. In 1863 Pettigrew was aboard his ship the stern paddle-wheeler *Gneering* when it sailed to Mooloolah Heads to take on board cedar logs cut by Petrie. While the logs were being loaded, Pettigrew with William Grigor climbed to the Buderim plateau and he wrote in his diary: *Went looking for good agricultural land. This I found at the top of Buderim, a hill about two miles long and from a quarter to half a mile broad. The top is fine red soil covered with scrub and would be suitable for 18 farms.*<sup>4</sup>



Red Cedar tree. This is a medium-sized specimen – they grew much larger. From W.D. Francis *Australian Rain-forest Trees*, Commonwealth of Australia, 1951.

Following hard on Petrie's heels, James Low and William Grigor established a timber depot for Pettigrew at Mooloolah Heads and from here the logs were sent to Brisbane. Timber getters including J. Kinmond, Dan Cogill, Charles and Thomas Chambers and Robert Pitt, were soon on Buderim, cutting cedar, white beech and pine.



<sup>1</sup> Heap, E.G.. 1966, In the Wake of the Raftsmen A Survey of Early Settlement in the Maroochy District up to the Passing of the Crown Lands Alienation Act, 1868. [Part III], Qld Heritage 1, (3-4), November 1966.

<sup>2</sup> Ray Kerkhove 2014, 5.2, Buderim's Indigenous Timber-getters (1862-1869) in Meredith Walker, *A History of Trees in Buderim – Research and Preliminary Inventory*, Buderim Historical Society Inc., Buderim, page 57.

<sup>3</sup> This portrait of William Pettigrew is from an original drawing from T.W.H. Leavitt, *Australian Representative Men* (Brisbane: Muir and Morcom, 1888), hanging on the wall in Pioneer Cottage, Buderim.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Tainton, no date, *Memoirs of Buderim*, unpublished typescript held by BHS, page 2. Tainton is here quoting from Pettigrew's diary.

The Chambers brothers transported the logs by bullock wagons down to the harbour. Buderim forests soon were a labyrinth of snigging tracks leading from tree to tree in a mess of abandoned unsuitable logs and trimmed branches. There was a considerable waste of good timber.<sup>1</sup>

Also cutting timber at this time was an Aboriginal crew operated by Richard Jones, probably mostly in the Petrie Creek area and possibly the northern slopes of Buderim. Logging on Buderim continued at a rapid pace for five or six years until, by the late 1860s, most of the valuable rainforest timber had been cut.

In its earliest days Buderim was isolated - the only practicable transport for passengers, supplies, timber and produce was by sea. This mostly involved one of Pettigrew's ships such as the stern paddle wheeler *Gneering*, seen here at Pettigrew's wharf on the Brisbane River.

Photo: BHS.



In 1864 surveyor William Fryar surveyed two blocks for which Pettigrew made a successful bid. The first of these, of 250 acres, was on the bank of the Mooloolah Harbour in the area that is now Charles Clarke Park and the other, of 80 acres, was on the high ground of Alexandra Headland. Here he built a house, *Coolaluthin* overlooking the ocean, which he used as a base and a holiday home for his family, as it was free from the sandflies of the river banks. From this base he then developed enterprises which enabled him to dominate the timber trade in the Maroochy District for the next thirty years. He established a timber depot and wharf which was operated by James Low and William Grigor at Mooloolah Heads and shipped timber south from Buderim. He later exported timber from the Maroochy River area when the weather allowed his ships to cross the bar.

In 1864 Pettigrew applied for, and was granted, a Special Timber Licence on the northern slopes of Buderim in the area that is now near the present Fountain Road. In 1869 he selected 540 acres of this lease. He built a house there, one of the earliest on Buderim. In 1865 Brisbane was in a state of economic decline and the operations of Low and Grigor at Mooloolah Heads virtually ground to a halt. However Pettigrew was pleased with the growth of timber and grass on his Special Timber Lease on Buderim, noting that, if fenced, it would support a large number of cattle.<sup>2</sup> In the same year he travelled as far as the present Nambour area accompanied by Richard Jones. He was not impressed with the agricultural potential of the area, stating:

*Agricultural land I saw little unless for fruit trees, being too steep for the plough. I believe that the lower part of Petrie's Creek is suitable. Buderim is certainly the best land hereabout.*<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Tainton, no date, *Memoirs of Buderim*, unpublished typescript held by BHS.

<sup>2</sup> William Pettigrew Diary, 7 June 1865.

<sup>3</sup> Heap, E. G. *In the Wake of the Raftsmen: A Survey of Early Settlement in the Maroochy District up to the passing of Macalister's Act (1868) Part I*. Qld Heritage 1, (3), November 1965, page 12.

By the late 1860s almost all of the red cedar on Buderim had been cut. About this time Pettigrew and Grigor explored along the top of the plateau to the west, recording stands of hardwoods and some white beech. This marked the transition to hardwoods such as blackbutt, which were then cut in 'immense quantities' according to Pettigrew in his diary.

At this stage there were still 'many blacks about' according to Pettigrew. These Indigenous People had come to consider timber-getting as their new livelihood. However as the timber work ceased they became a problem, stealing flour from Low and Grigor's store as a sort of 'welfare relief'. To attempt to gain the loyalty of the group, Pettigrew had brass plates made and presented them to the leaders, King Bingeeye and his Queen Sarah. Bingeeye managed to stop the thefts and in return the group of Aborigines were permitted to cut 40 trees in a particular area.<sup>1</sup>



Breastplate presented to Kabi Kabi leader 'King Bingeeye'. The inscription reads:

***King Bingeeye***  
***Yaroon . Buderum***  
***Presented by Donald Cogill***  
***1869***

'Yaroon' was the name for Bribie Island.

*Photo: BHS*

Jim Guy and Billy Muckan beside a flooded gum log cut from near the present reservoir on William Street in about 1900. Huge hardwood trees were common on many parts of Buderim, particularly the western side.

The red cedar and other rainforest trees were quickly cut out, but the hardwood forests were a resource that lasted longer over the years.

*Photo: BHS.*



<sup>1</sup> This is the story given by Kerkhove (2014) page 59, Brown (2005 page 207), says the Aborigines were given flour in return for clearing some land.

## Buderim's First Selectors

By 1870 the stands of valuable rainforest timber on the plateau were almost exhausted. In 1869 Government surveyor William Fryar surveyed Buderim into blocks which were made available for selection. William Guy and John Caton were in the original survey party. In 1870 the first selections were gained by Joseph Dixon, William Guy, John Caton, William Grigor, Dan Cogill, Charles Ballinger, Tom Ridley and several others.

The process of selecting a block required the selector to be at least 16 years of age and a natural born or naturalised British subject and companies could not apply. If the applicant was successful, they paid the first year's rent and survey fee. The selection could not be mortgaged or transferred except in the case of death of the licensee. There were conditions the applicant had to meet. Typically the selector had to 'improve' the land by constructing buildings, clearing timber, creating paddocks, building fences, and commencing farming of crops or animals (these conditions were often specified in great detail). Failure to do so in a specified time would result in forfeiture of the selection. Having fulfilled all conditions, the selector could apply for freehold of the selection after the payment of the final rent and fees for the survey and the Deed of Grant. According to Tainton, William Guy paid £11.15.00 for his 80 acres.<sup>1</sup>

In 1872 *The Queenslander* reported<sup>2</sup> :

*Buderum Mountain is but little known. It lies directly between the Mooloolah and Maroochy Rivers only about three miles from the harbour of the former. It is a tableland, upon which is heavily timbered scrub, with a rich chocolate soil, somewhat stony in places, but of excellent quality. There are some ten or twelve settlers, sturdy pioneers, busy at work, and many a noble tree, the growth of ages, is brought low. They have about 50 acres down, and several more comfortable houses built. It is a most favoured locality, the cane grows all winter, and is beautifully green, forming a great contrast to the dead look of the cane crops in other places. The Government are about to have a cutting made down the eastern edge of the mountain, which is very abrupt, and, when done, will give the selectors easy access to the coast.*

Initially the selectors cleared part of the land and lived in tents. Then came huts made of slabs of rough-cut timber and bark similar to that shown opposite owned by Sion Singh (this is a very basic example, others were larger with more than one room and with windows).

They had a shingle or bark roof and a hard-packed floor covered by an imported mat or even one woven from local materials. Photo: BHS.



## Conclusion

So Buderim, as we know it, was underway in 1870. It was an isolated community and the only viable link for transport of goods, produce and people was via the port of Mooloolah Heads. There was no trafficable road to Brisbane and the rail was twenty years in the future. The first commercial crop was sugar cane and a mill was established on Buderim in 1876. Other crops such as citrus, coffee and bananas followed, but that is another story.

<sup>1</sup>Joseph Tainton, no date, *Memoirs of Buderim*, unpublished typescript held by BHS, page 3.

<sup>2</sup>*The Queenslander*, 28 September, 1872, page 11.

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An imaginary image of Buderim rainforest – but the Moreton Bay Fig looks real.

The caption with this old engraving reads '1861' but this must be questionable as that date is before Tom Petrie's expedition of 1862.

Source: BHS

*Moreton Bay Fig - Buderim Mountain  
1861*



This attractive waterfall on Martin's Creek is a popular feature of Buderim today and would have been well known to the original Indigenous inhabitants. It goes by several names including 'Lindsay Falls', 'Buderim Falls' and 'Serenity Falls'. *Photo BHS.*