

THE PIONEER

THE BUDERIM HISTORICAL SOCIETY Inc.

OCCASIONAL PAPERS

Historical accounts
from the Buderim – Mooloolaba area

Number 17 August 2023

Living on Buderim 1890 to 1900

by Bill Lavarack

A few landmark years stand out in Buderim's history after the first settlers arrived in 1870. Firstly the arrival of the rail at Palmwoods and Woombye in 1891. Secondly the start of the Palmwoods to Buderim Tram in 1914 and thirdly the official opening of the Bruce Highway in 1934. In the following paper I will discuss the first of these and the effect it had on the citizens of Buderim.

In 1891 Queen Victoria was starting the final decade of her long reign. The railway had reached Landsborough in 1890 and Palmwoods, Woombye and Nambour in 1891. This decade marked a major watershed in the history of Buderim. Up to 1891 almost all passengers and goods came to Buderim via the port of Mooloolah Heads.

Two of William Pettigrew's ships. The *Gneering* moored in front of the *Tadorna Rajah* in the Brisbane River. The *Gneering* was a regular visitor to Mooloolah Heads.

Bill Bell delivers a load of bananas to the train at Landsborough in 1890, a year before the rail reached Woombye. According to Bill's grandson Ken Chadwick, he would break the journey by camping under the Mooloolah River bridge.

After 1891 transport increasingly changed to rail to Woombye and then by a horse drawn vehicle to Buderim. However the steep, often boggy red soil



roads on Buderim's flanks meant that Buderim was still somewhat isolated, even though the railway was well established.

In 1890 Buderim had a population of about 200 and most of these would have seen themselves as British as much as Australian. Many, perhaps more than half the adult population, were born in the British Isles and had little practical experience of pioneering or farming in the Queensland subtropics. But they were fast learners. Many of the original pioneers from the early 1870s were still farming on Buderim in the 1890s.

Many of the Buderim pioneers were Methodists or Quakers and it was a God-fearing population. A Good Templar's Lodge was established in 1873 and, on the whole, the local people believed in abstinence from alcohol. There were no purpose-built churches until the Methodist Church was built in 1907. It was not until 1985 that a hotel was established on Buderim, although there was a hotel selling liquor at Maroochydoore in 1911.

By 1900 virtually all the forest on the top of the plateau was cleared with only a few small remnants – one near the reservoir on William Street and another was Fielding's Scrub on Orme Road. Extensive eucalypt forests remained on the slopes and these were subject to logging. The major creeks were lined with remnants of the rainforests.

Coffee bushes growing in amongst bananas.



In 1890 there were large areas of bananas and coffee with citrus and other crops.



A sulky on one of the better roads.

Prior to the rail in 1891, almost all transport was by sea through Mooloolah Heads, with very little arriving at Buderim by road. But sea transport was unreliable, often being delayed by bad weather with dire consequences for perishable crops. Motor cars were almost 20 years in the future and everyone walked or rode horses locally. There were a few sulkies, but many horse-drawn drays and wagons. Most roads were still little better than bush tracks and Crosby Hill Road did not exist. The main southern access in 1890 was from the Mooloolah River Bridge, north across the swampy Sippy Creek and then east to a crossing of Mountain Creek and up Ballinger Road to Buderim.¹ This was a difficult route, often closed due to flooding and boggy conditions in the wet season. The road south towards Brisbane from the Mooloolah River was equally rough, so much so that Cobb and Co coaches ceased carrying passengers from Brisbane to Gympie in 1876.

By 1891 the rail was at Woombye, making travel and transportation of farm produce much easier and more reliable. Travel to Brisbane involved a horse ride or a walk to the train at Woombye.

¹ Bill Lavarack, 2020, *Pathways to the North Coast – to Buderim & Mooloolaba by Horse, Boat, Train, Tram & Car*, publ. by P.S. ('Bill') Lavarack, Buderim, Australia.

There was only one shop on Buderim, run by J. K. Burnett on the corner of Ballinger Road and Main Street, also serving as the post office. In addition to Burnett's shop, John Tytherleigh who owned a store in Woombye, came around once a week on horseback and took orders for groceries, bread and other items. Then the carts, which had taken bananas and other crops to the rail at Woombye via Mons Road, would bring the orders back and drop them on the roadside as close as possible to the house of the person who had ordered them. Mail came up from Woombye three times a week on horseback. The telephone was not available until 1921.



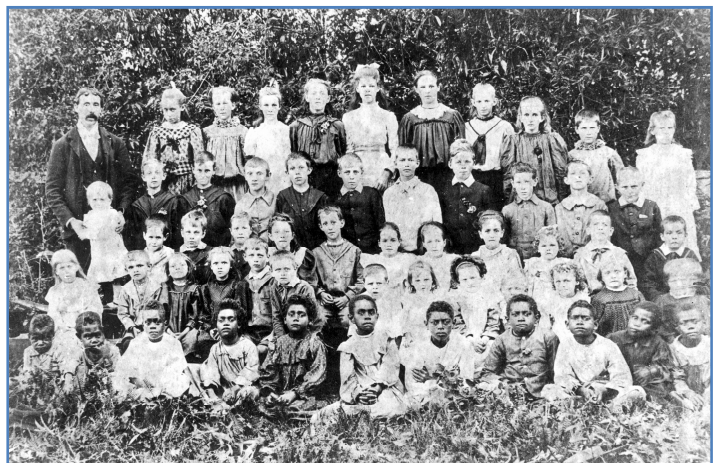
J.K. Burnett's store.

Most families baked their own bread or damper and Agnes Jones recalls her father building an oven from an oil drum and ant's nest in which he baked bread.¹ Everyone grew their own fresh vegetables and fruit and most had fowls, while several had a cow or two for fresh milk. One of the Burnett Brothers had a butcher's business near where the present Crosby Hill Road meets Burnett Street. This situation of Buderim being self-sufficient was eroded by the advent of the rail to Palmwoods and Woombye.

Of course there was no electricity – that didn't come for another 50 years. Even ice to keep food fresh was not available. Cooking was done over open fires or on wood stoves. Reticulated water was even further in the future (1968) and the settlers relied on tanks and wells. A sewage system was well in the future and the toilet was a small building in the back yard or a pot under the bed.

Have you ever been caught in the daily 3 o'clock school traffic crawl on Buderim? Well, it was very different in the 1890s. Agnes Jones, one of Buderim's pioneers who was born in 1886, recalled walking to Buderim School from Tanawha - no mothers picking up children then.

Buderim Mountain State School about 1899. Note several children of Islander/ Aboriginal descent.



The school had about 50 pupils in 1899 and all walked to school except for a handful who rode horses. In those days the Crosby Hill Road did not exist and Agnes would have walked up a bush track. It would surprise modern residents just how many people walked considerable distances to get to the shop or the School of Arts or even to the train at Woombye. Most had horses, but there were not many sulkies. On occasions school attendance would be low if the children were required to help with a harvest on the farm.

Buderim had several families of Aborigines and South Sea Islanders and of mixed marriages between the two groups in the 1890s and beyond. The Islanders were brought to Buderim by Joseph Dixon in 1887 to work in the sugar industry. It must have been a new experience for the Buderim population to have this very different group arrive in their midst. With a few exceptions, relations between the different racial groups were good and they were well accepted by the community. In 1902 the Government banned any more recruitment of Islanders and required all

¹ Interview with Agnes Jones (née Wordie), born 1886, held by Buderim Historical Society Inc.

those who could not meet certain requirements to be repatriated to their home islands. Many were well entrenched in the community and managed to stay.

Buderim was showing signs of prospering and, as early as 1892 and Harry Board established the first boarding house to meet an increasing need for accommodation.

By 1900 the sugar mills had closed and the only work available was on farms. According to Charles Short, who was born on Buderim in 1890, wages for farm work in those days were 12 shillings a week if food and accommodation were provided, or 18 shillings if the worker provided for himself.¹ Hours were 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. with an hour for lunch and no smoko. At lunch the billy would be boiled. On Saturdays knock off was at 4:00 p.m. Sundays were free and, with Buderim's strong religious background, most people attended church. Working or playing sport on Sunday was frowned on. William Bell staged a farm workers strike and achieved the right to play sport on Saturday afternoons.

Sport was always popular on Buderim. Cricket was played against other districts such as Bli Bli, Woombye, Montville, Landsborough and Nambour. The players, along with wives and other supporters, rode horses. Some of these matches would have involved an overnight stay and sometimes this involved a dance. One such match was played at Kenilworth in about 1900. The Buderim team rode to Mapleton, camped there and went down to Kenilworth in the morning and played the match. Then back to Mapleton for another overnight camp and the next day back to Buderim – three days to play the match! Games between different towns were made easier when the rail arrived in 1891. On Buderim, cricket was played on Townsend's paddock which was opposite the present Lions Park.

Tennis was popular with both sexes and was a social occasion. There were at least two teams on Buderim – the Mountaineers and the Tartans and they regularly played each other or occasionally played against Nambour and other towns.



Mountaineers Tennis Club August 15 1908

There were unfenced grass courts at Guy's and Townsend's. In September 1905 a Buderim tennis team travelled to Yandina 'by the morning train'.² They would have ridden horses to Woombye to catch the train. The Buderim team, which consisted of Mr Fountain, Miss Wise, Mr Guy, and Miss Burnett, won by 13 games.

In the year 1900 there was no television, radio, mobile phones, computer games or movies. Even visits to friends or to events at the School of Arts were more difficult, as travelling was on foot or on horseback.

There were occasional visits from travelling entertainers such as magic lantern shows provided by Mr Beasley from Brisbane who travelled around to



Buderim School of Arts about 1900, scene of many concerts and dances.

¹ Interview with Charles Short, born 1890, held by Buderim Historical Society Inc.

² *The Chronicle and North Coast Advertiser*, September 1905, page 4.

country schools and halls. However most entertainment had to be found from within the community. The School of Arts, which was built in 1888, was centrally located and was the focus for concerts and dances. One such concert was reported in *The Nambour Chronicle* of 25 December 1903 on page 4, but similar events were common through the 1890s. This particular one was typical. It was held to raise funds for the School of Arts and over 100 people attended. This would have amounted to half the population of Buderim. Mr James Lindsay was the Master of Ceremonies and about 15 people, all locals, sang about 30 songs. Well known Buderim resident Mr H.V. Fielding sang 'Doreen' in a 'nice light bass voice'. Other local performers included Miss J. Guy, Mr S. Townsend and Mr G. Burnett. After refreshments there was dancing with the music provided by violinist Mr G. Robinson. According to Agnes Jones there were few, if any, piano players and the instrument of choice was usually the button accordion. There was an Islander who would play the accordion all night for ten shillings. She also recalls riding to Woombye or Nambour to attend dances, arriving home at first light, then getting changed to work on the farm.

At Christmas, and sometimes at Easter, families camped at Alexandra Headland or Mooloolaba. At Alexandra Headland the Salvation Army rented out tents for accommodation and had a large tent with groceries and other needs for sale. Agnes Jones recalls walking from Alexandra Headland to Maroochydore or Mooloolaba where friends were camped. About this time Woombye held an annual show, complete with sideshows, and Buderim people attended, either walking or riding horses.

Acknowledgements

Much of the information and some of the text included here was taken from 'Stories of Old Buderim' by Bill Lavarack, publ. for the Buderim Historical Society Inc in 2014.

The photographs are from the collection of the Buderim Historical Society Inc.



Unloading sacks of coffee at the Woombye Railway Station about 1900. Before 1891 produce such as this (e.g. bananas) would have been sent by sea, either from Mooloolah Heads or from the Eudlo Creek wharf. By 1915 produce would have been transported by the Palmwoods to Buderim Tram, then by rail to Brisbane markets. After 1934 transport was by truck to the Buderim or Woombye Depot, or direct via the new Bruce Highway to Brisbane.