

# THE PIONEER

THE BUDERIM HISTORICAL SOCIETY Inc.

## OCCASIONAL PAPERS

Historical accounts from the Buderim – Mooloolaba area

Number 7 October 2022

### Birdwood Boarding House

by Bill Lavarack

*'A first class boarding establishment. Ocean and mountain views. The garden of the north coast. 'Birdwood', Buderim Boarding House.'* So ran numerous advertisements for Buderim's favourite tourist attraction of the 1920s.

Turn back to December 1914 and the town is buzzing. The Palmwoods to Buderim Tram has made its first trip and Buderim is no longer isolated by steep, boggy, red-mud roads. Now farmers will be able to get produce swiftly to the railhead at Palmwoods. Goods such as fertiliser for the crops and groceries for the farmer's wives are assured fast easy transport and even tourists are a possibility. Those with even a little business acumen can surely see opportunities in abundance.

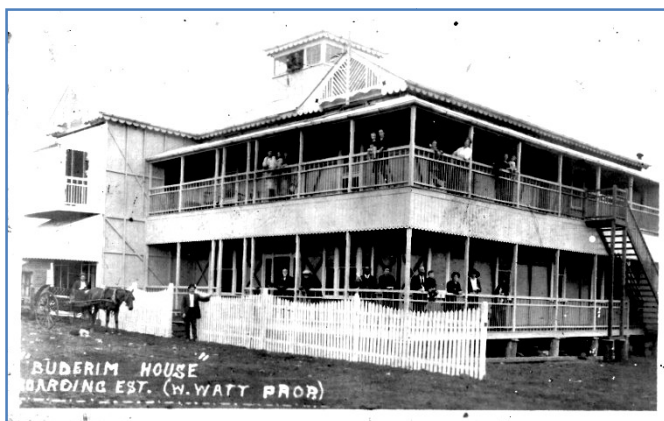
About this time Ernest Middleton, Sion Singh, Bill Mitchell and Jono Waters all opened stores on or near Main Street and William Albert Bruce Watt was right up there with them. In 1914 he commenced building a boarding house on Maroochydore Road (now Gloucester Road)<sup>1</sup> planning to make his fortune

from the numerous travellers he was sure would follow.

Right: (probably)  
William and Rebecca  
Watt.



Left Buderim Boarding House in about  
1916, not long after William Watt built it.



But before the year was out, a strong gust probably from a thunderstorm, blew down the framework for a building which he had

laboriously constructed<sup>2</sup>. Not daunted, he resumed work and by June had built the only two storey building in town. It was the only purpose-built boarding house on Buderim and was operating from July 1915<sup>3</sup>. Business was looking good and William applied for a liquor licence to help keep his customers happy, but he had not counted on the strict views of the Buderim population which included many Methodists and Quakers. They vigorously opposed it and the licence was refused<sup>4</sup>. This was to prove only a minor impediment and the business proved popular with tourists over the next 20 years.

The sequence of ownership of the boarding house in the period 1916 to 1918 is a little uncertain, but it seems likely to have been as follows: in August 1916 William Watt enlisted and went away to war<sup>5</sup>, but before leaving he sold his boarding house to Herbert S. Guy, a Buderim land agent. There is evidence that Bert and Mable Guy were managing the Buderim Boarding House in September 1916<sup>6</sup> and almost certainly well after that, probably up to September or October 1918. A photograph from this time shows the store that Bert opened on the eastern ground floor corner (see below)<sup>7</sup>. Note that there is a sign outside the store reading 'car for hire' which probably places it about 1917 or 1918. In 1918 Bert Guy must have put the business up for sale. A group of local businessmen formed the Buderim Boarding House Company<sup>8</sup> and purchased it, probably in October 1918, advertising that it was under 'New Company Management'<sup>9</sup>. This BBHCo management included employing James and Hannah Dyble who were managers during April to July 1919 at least<sup>10</sup>. The last meeting of BBHCo of which there is a record, was July 1919<sup>11</sup>. The boarding house was then sold to the McIntyre sisters who had previously been operating the Imperial Hotel in Eumundi. They advertised it as 'under new management' in July 1920<sup>12</sup>. The last mention in the newspapers of the BBHCo was in November 1919 and the first which named 'Miss McIntyre' as proprietor, was in July 1920. Presumably the McIntyre sisters purchased it shortly before that.

The 1920s was a boom time for holiday boarding establishments and the Buderim Boarding House (Birdwood) did not have a monopoly. There were two other major establishments on Buderim at about the same time. Neither was purpose built, being modified large private homes. They were 'Ryhope' run by the Lindsay family and 'Floraville' run by Mr and Mrs Wilson. This was the golden age of boarding houses and there were



several others on the North Coast, such as 'Elston' on the Blackall Range at Montville and 'Wahremoana' and 'Bondoola' at Mooloolaba.

Birdwood's heyday was from 1915 to about 1930 when visitors travelled by train from Brisbane to Palmwoods, then by the Palmwoods to Buderim tram. They were met at the tram terminus by Jim Bell<sup>13</sup> who transported them in a horse-drawn cab to the boarding house. Frank Wise, writing for *Buderim Bouquet* (Joan Lilly, Daphne Briggs, Bob Slessor, 1977) gives us an account of the popularity of Buderim at this time:

*I've seen excursions from Brisbane to Buderim bringing 1300 people in one day. They came just to get a look at Buderim. The tram had an engine front and back. There was only one carriage and passengers sat on the flat tops. I've seen the tram doing two trips a day with thirteen trucks all fully loaded. I think they made about £500 profit the first year.*

In the early days the Misses McIntyre generally advertised it as 'Buderim Boarding House' and later as 'Buderim Boarding House, Birdwood' or simply as 'Birdwood'. One early image, probably from the time of W. Watt or H.S. Guy (see previous page), shows the name 'Buderim House' in large letters. 'Birdwood Boarding House' is also used in some advertisements.

Advertisements for the Buderim Boarding House proclaimed: 'music room, tennis court, motor trips arranged, fine panoramic views'. While the views might seem unlikely today, in the 1920s there were no other large buildings around and few tall trees. The building constructed by William Watt featured a lookout tower from which extensive views were available north to Mt Ninderry and south to the Glasshouse Mountains.

The boarding house was popular with tourists, mostly from Brisbane, but also from nearby localities and from inland properties. One account mentions some 17 rooms available for rent. The surrounding gardens supplied abundant fruit and vegetables. In addition adjacent farmland owned by Sion Singh, was available, at a cost, to guests to pick their own produce. From 1916 to probably 1918 Bert and Mable Guy managed the business, organising regular trips to Mooloolaba and Maroochydore and to the mountain towns Maleny, Montville and Mapleton. Initially these were in horse drawn vehicles but by 1918 automobiles were in use.



by 1918 automobiles were in use. An example was Bill Mitchell's stretch limousine the 'White Elephant' (see left at Elston Guest House, Montville about 1930). Tennis was a popular sport on Buderim and in Birdwood's early days arrangements were made for guests to be honorary members of the local tennis club. In 1920 a lawn tennis court was added at the rear of the building. Dinners and meetings for community groups were provided and functions catered for.

Tennis parties on the lawn court were popular, as were picnic parties and dances on the verandah<sup>14</sup>.

An example of the activities at Birdwood at this time is a photograph from 1924 showing the Brisbane Produce Merchants Association in front of Birdwood (see right) where they held a meeting. In the early 1920s the Salvation Army held meetings on Sunday evenings at Birdwood<sup>15</sup> and these were well attended with band music and singing by the local South Sea Islanders. It is probably fair to say that Birdwood was the major centre of social life on Buderim in the 1920s.



On January 26 1924 the Queensland Governor Sir Matthew Nathan visited Buderim to inspect the Buderim Mounted Scout Troop, the first mounted troop in the State<sup>16</sup>. He was entertained for lunch at Birdwood. A photograph of the Governor and the scouts in front of the building shows the faded name 'Buderim Boarding House' with a newer sign 'Birdwood' attached over the top (see left).



In 1930 the McIntyre sisters sold the boarding house to J.F. Anderson who advertised in June 1931 that the business had been thoroughly renovated and repaired and would be re-opening. It was to be 'under the management of Mr and Mrs J.F. Anderson who will personally attend to the comfort of guests'. On September 11 1931 they advertised it under the name 'Belle Vue (late Birdwood)'. As the McIntyres had done earlier, they proclaimed: 'Music Room, Tennis, Motor Trips Arranged, Fine Panoramic Scenery',<sup>17</sup>.

Unfortunately for Birdwood times were changing. The Palmwoods to Buderim Tram closed in 1935, and improvements in roads and automobiles resulted in a much more mobile population. In addition the Great Depression had a marked effect on holiday spending. As a result the Andersons sold the boarding house in 1937 (see Helene Cronin 2015). It was demolished and the timber used to build two houses in Nambour, ending a romantic chapter of two decades in Buderim's history.

ooo000ooo

### Acknowledgements

The photographs included in this paper came from the collection of the Buderim Historical Society.

### References

Bill Lavarack (P.S. Lavarack), 2014, *Stories of Old Buderim*, published by P.S. Lavarack, p. 68, Buderim, for the Buderim Historical Society.

Dorothy Whittington, 2020, 'Flashback, Built in 1911, The 'Dore was always destined to be a popular watering hole', *Sunshine Coast News*, November 26, 2020.

Helene Cronin, 2015, *Buderim's Great War Effort 1914-1918*, written and published by Helene Cronin, Buderim, Queensland.

### End notes

---

<sup>1</sup> Birdwood was on the site now occupied by *Art Nuvo* midway between Main Street and Tindale Avenue.

<sup>2</sup> *Chronicle and North Coast Advertiser*, December 11, 1914, p. 4, Buderim.

<sup>3</sup> *Chronicle and North Coast Advertiser*, June 25, 1915, p. 3, Buderim's Great Day Out.

<sup>4</sup> Maroochydore had a public hotel as early as 1911, Buderim had to wait until 1985 largely due to public opposition.

<sup>5</sup> Helene Cronin, 2015, *Buderim's Great War Effort 1914-1918*, pp 168-169, written and published by Helene Cronin, Buderim, Queensland.

<sup>6</sup> *Chronicle and North Coast Advertiser*, September 15, 1916, p. 7, District Notes.

<sup>7</sup> The legend on the photograph nominates, in white ink, that H.S. Guy was proprietor at the time. The dotted underlining tells us that James Dyble was the photographer. As a later manager of Birdwood, we can assume he knew what he was talking about.

<sup>8</sup> *Chronicle and North Coast Advertiser*, May 9, 1919, p. 4, District Notes, Buderim.

<sup>9</sup> *Daily Mail*, October 7, 1918, p. 3, Advertising

<sup>10</sup> *Chronicle and North Coast Advertiser*, April 11, 1919, p. 7, Buderim.

<sup>11</sup> *Chronicle and North Coast Advertiser*, July 25, 1919, p. 7.

<sup>12</sup> *Daily Mail*, July 21, 1920, p. 4, Advertising.

<sup>13</sup> Jim Bell was a great uncle of Beverley Lavarack (née Bell) Honorary Secretary of Buderim Historical Society Inc.

<sup>14</sup> Vince Crosby, in *Buderim Bouquet*, Joan Lilly, Daphne Briggs, Bob Slessor, 1977.

<sup>15</sup> Reminiscences of Thomas E. Kidd, in *Buderim Bouquet*, Joan Lilly, Daphne Briggs, Bob Slessor, 1977.

<sup>16</sup> *Brisbane Courier*, January 29, 1924, p. 8, Inspection of mounted boy scouts.

<sup>17</sup> *Nambour Chronicle*, September 11, 1931, p. 10, Advertising.