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The Early History of Pioneer Cottage

by Bill Lavarack

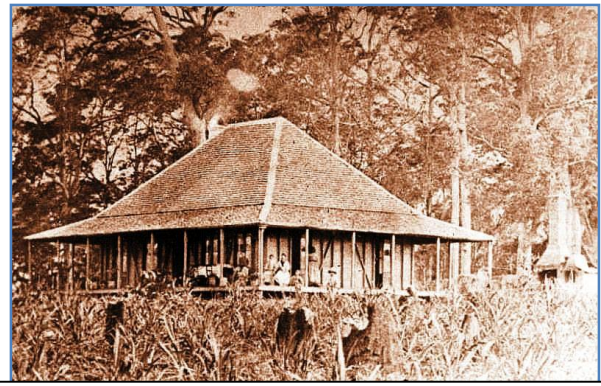
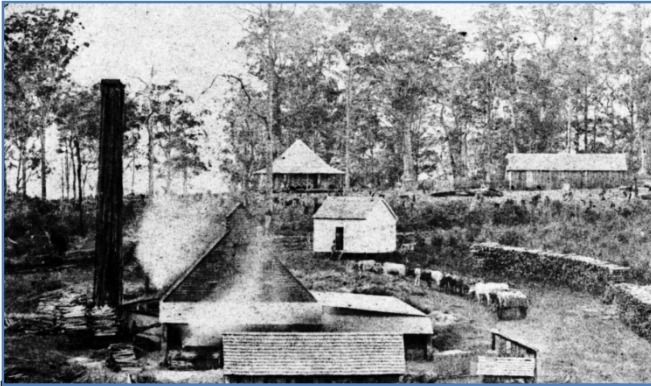
In the following pages some aspects of the early history of John Kerle Burnett's house built in 1882 and now a museum, will be summarised. The story of this building is well known thanks largely to two publications by the Buderim Historical Society – *Pioneer Cottage, Buderim, Queensland, a Queensland Home Built in 1876*¹ (no date given, but certainly after 1980), and *Pioneer Cottage – the House that Buderim Saved* by Joan Hogarth, 2006, both available from Buderim, Historical Society Inc.

Having said that, it has always seemed to me that, while the history of Pioneer Cottage from 1950 onwards is well documented, the early history of the building is a little hazy in some respects. I will attempt to clarify this in the following pages.

The background to the story starts with John Kerle Burnett and his wife Ann and four children (the family was growing and five more were to follow) moved to Buderim in 1876. At that time there were less than twenty houses on Buderim and with only three or four in the central part of the town and no shops. When J.K. Burnett first arrived at Buderim in 1876 he worked at the sugar mill recently built by Joseph Dixon and John Fielding. Later that year he was followed by his wife Ann and four children. The family initially rented Tom Ridley's house near the present Box Street, one of the first houses built on Buderim. In November 1877 J.K. (as we will call him) purchased portion 49, parish of Mooloolah, for £15, obtaining the deed of grant in March 1879. In 1882 with the assistance of local builder, Harry Board, he built a four roomed cottage on what is now Pioneer Crescent (originally Ballinger Crescent). This house is now Buderim's museum known as 'Pioneer Cottage'.

¹ The date of the building of J.K. Burnett's house was actually 1882. Queensland Government <https://heritage-register>, Pioneer Cottage, Buderim, October 1992.

The original house remains essentially intact today, but with the original shingled roof replaced by corrugated iron in the early 1900s. It was a simple plan widely used at that time, with a central corridor and four rooms, two on each side. There was an open verandah on all four sides, later partially enclosed. Early photographs show a large brick oven at the rear separated from the house, undoubtedly as a precaution against fire. Two upstairs bedrooms accessed by a steep staircase in the corridor, were used as children's bedrooms. These rooms must have been exceedingly hot in summer. One story suggests that the children were permitted to sleep on the verandahs once they reached the height of the bottom of the glass in the doors.



Two early images of J.K. Burnett's house (Pioneer Cottage), from about 1883/4. Both show the brick oven at the rear, but no detached kitchen building.. The left image, taken from Campbell's Sugar Mill, shows a long building which may be the barn. Note that the rear right corner of the house is not enclosed. Sugar cane is growing right up to the verandah and there is forest nearby. Possibly the earliest photographs of the house, both taken before the kitchen building was constructed. Campbell's mill closed in 1888, so the image is before that date and after 1882 when the Cottage was built.

Original sources all agree that there was a detached kitchen at the rear. Lucinda Mitchell, a granddaughter of J.K. says in a letter that the kitchen building was there before house and was used as a house originally¹, but contemporary photographs show that this cannot be right. The kitchen probably was built very soon after the house. A photograph taken from Campbell's sugar mill (see above), probably in the early 1880s shows no detached building, although the tall brick oven is visible. Other early photographs also show there was a clear gap between the brick oven and the house.



A detached kitchen was a common feature of houses at that time due to the risk of fire. A painting by Fred Mead hangs in the rear of Pioneer Cottage (see above). It was painted from memory and shows the house as he remembered it in 1910. A large kitchen building is shown attached to, or very close to, the rear of the house and incorporating the brick oven at the western end. This building was used for cooking, eating most meals, laundry, pantry and for a maid's accommodation. In the absence of any sort of bathroom, it would also have been used for bathing in a tin tub, probably about once a week.

¹ Letter quoted by Joan Hogarth in her book 'Pioneer Cottage, the House that Buderim Saved', page 31, 2006.

The house, as first used in 1882, had an open verandah around all sides. It is not clear exactly when the two rear corners and the back verandah were enclosed, but according to Joan Hogarth, this would have occurred as the family grew, perhaps about 1892. The back verandah was probably enclosed in the 1930s when the detached kitchen was demolished¹.

As the family grew the extra space provided by the detached kitchen must have become almost a necessity. The two rear corners of the house would not have been enclosed originally as they are now, and this can clearly be seen from the old photographs on previous pages, at least for the right hand corner which is now the bathroom.



Playing croquet on the lawn in front of the house. 1912.

Both rear corners would have been enclosed after some years, initially to provide additional sleeping space or for storage and later utilised as a kitchen and a bathroom as they now are.

In BHS files there is a note by respected Buderim historian, Stuart Weir who commented 'In addition to the house he built a baker's oven and a large barn, blacksmith shop, buggy shed on what is now 8 Ballinger Crescent west of his house'. A long building west of the house, shown in the photograph taken from the sugar mill, may well be the 'large barn'. Alternatively, or in addition, there is a building just visible in this photograph, partly obscured by trees, which may be part of the original out-buildings erected by J.K. Burnett.

Life on Buderim in 1890. In 1890 Buderim had a population of less than 250. One report gives the numbers for 1889 as '25 families and many labourers, 50 school children'². There was no power, no reticulated water or sewage. There were no automobiles before about 1916. There was no store on Buderim before J.K. Burnett opened his general store in 1889.

Today we all recognise that the pioneers had it rough, but sitting in our comfortable living rooms in front of our television, with the bathroom not far away and the kitchen with its electric or gas stove, refrigerator and microwave even closer, do we really have any idea? If we want to go to the supermarket for a loaf of bread and a few groceries we don't have to go down the paddock and catch and saddle the horse and ride in the rain. In 1890 we baked the bread in our external brick oven. And a visit to relatives in Brisbane is now only 90 minutes in a comfortable car. Then it took days either by ship or by horse-drawn vehicle over incredibly rough roads, although things improved markedly in 1891 when the rail reached Palmwoods and Woombye.

Joan Chilton was a friend of Lionel Burnett's daughter Dorothea and was a guest in the 1930s. She remembers the house before the War when the detached kitchen was still present. She describes the kitchen as containing a large wood stove and a large table at which meals were eaten, except for special occasions when the dining room was used³.

Toilet arrangements of the time were primitive at best. The 'privy' was described by Joan Chilton as being down the back garden 'complete with spiders, cut up newspapers and a box of sawdust'.

¹ Joan Hogarth, 2006, *Pioneer Cottage, the House that Buderim Saved*, Buderim Historical Society, Buderim.

² *Brisbane Courier*, March 1, 1889, page 7.

³ Letter from Joan Chilton to Esme Oliver, May 3, 2002, held by BHS.

She describes a 'jug and basin in the bedroom' and 'of course a potty under the bed'. All that she describes would be much the same as in 1890.

Today a bath, or better still, a shower is taken as a pleasant everyday occurrence, but in 1890 it was a once a week requirement in a tin tub on the kitchen floor in water already used by others if you were down the pecking order. Of course the water had originally been fetched from a well at the rear of the house and warmed on the fire.

John Tytherleigh had a store at Woombye and he would ride around Buderim on horseback once a week taking orders which would arrive a few days later as back-loading on



Pictured Left to Right: John North Burnett (seated), John Burnett Senior, Edgar Wallace Burnett (on bike) with Herbert William Burnett, John Kerle Burnett with wife Anne (in background), James Kerle Burnett (with dog) in front of Harold Board (Buderim carpenter), Edward Lionel Burnett with Beatrice Emma Burnett (in white) and sister Ellen Burnett. Ca. 1888.

wagons which had previously taken produce to the railhead¹. The rail reached Landsborough in 1890, and then to Palmwoods and Woombye in 1891. Before the rail reached Landsborough, goods such as groceries, clothes, furniture, etc all had to come through the port of Mooloolah Heads, often with considerable delays due to weather. Fresh meat was obtained from locally killed bullocks and fruit and vegetables were grown locally. Roads were extremely rough and barely trafficable for wheeled vehicles before about the mid 1920s and even then, Buderim's red-soil roads were particularly boggy and often unpassable.

But at least Buderim had a school as early as 1875 when a provisional school opened on the Mooloolaba Road. Then the Buderim Mountain State School opened on its present site in 1887.

Further Reading

Buderim Historical Society, (no date given), *Pioneer Cottage, Buderim, Queensland, a Queensland Home Built in 1876*.

Hessie Lindsell, 1995, *Buderim Born*, printed by Moore Print, Brisbane.

Joan Hogarth, 2006, *Pioneer Cottage the House that Buderim Saved*, Buderim Historical Society.

¹ Interview with Agnes Jones (maiden name Wordie, born 1887) by Sybil Vise in 1975 held by Buderim Historical Society.