

WILD HEART BOUNTIFUL LAND

AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE MARY RIVER VALLEY

by Murray Johnson and Kay Saunders





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FOREWORD

Wild Heart, Bountiful Land: An Historical Overview of the Mary River Valley was commissioned by Queensland State Archives for the Department of Public Works as a member of the Community Futures Task Force.

The Community Futures Task Force provides support for the communities affected by the Queensland Government's decision to develop proposed dams at Traveston Crossing and Wyaralong.

This fascinating booklet by respected Queensland historians Professor Kay Saunders AM and Dr Murray Johnson chronicles the Mary River Valley's history obtained from research of archival records held at Queensland State Archives, State Library of Queensland, the Cooloola Shire Council and historical groups.

This booklet provides a valuable historical account of the Mary Valley. I trust it will prove to be an important record for current and future generations of the Mary Valley and researchers of Queensland history.

Major General Peter Arnison AC, CVO (Ret'd)
Chair, Community Futures Task Force

It is my great pleasure to contribute to the foreword of *Wild Heart, Bountiful Land* about the Mary River Valley's long and colourful history.

The Mary River Valley has been an area of historical and cultural significance dating back to the triennial Bunya Feasts held by Indigenous people to celebrate the Bunya nut harvest.

Later, the discovery of gold by James Nash in 1867 earned Gympie the moniker of 'the town that saved Queensland' while years later the area also yielded future Prime Minister, Andrew Fisher.

Today the Cooloola region boasts an enviable lifestyle based on a sound and diverse economy including a steadily growing tourism industry.

Professor Kay Saunders AM and Dr Murray Johnson have written a thorough and professional historical account of the Mary River Valley. During the writing of the booklet, they received the cooperation of many sources, including local libraries and Gympie historian, Dr Elaine Brown.

The result is a publication which will prove to be an important additional resource for local schools, libraries, and historical societies and a valuable tool for future researchers of our rich and significant history.

Cr Mick Venardos
Mayor of Cooloola Shire



LEFT: Mary River Crossing at Tuchekoi (Undated)
River crossings were the important connection points through this district.
Source: Queensland State Archives Item ID392337

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Murray Johnson



A recipient of the University of Queensland Medal, Dr Murray Johnson has lectured on various aspects of Australian history at the University of Queensland, the Australian National University in Canberra and the University of Tasmania. He has also been involved in a number of projects designed to forge closer links between academic institutions and the wider community, including the National Museum of Australia's Youth Challenge (2005). He has published widely on Australian history, his latest book being *Trials and Tribulations: A Social History of Europeans in Australia 1788-1960* (2007). As well as wide-ranging issues, he has a particular interest in local and regional history, with his co-edited collection, *Health, Wealth and Tribulation: A History of Launceston's Cataract Gorge*, released in November 2007. He is currently a Research Fellow at the Brisbane Institute.

Kay Saunders



Trained in political science and anthropology, Kay Saunders AM was Professor of History and Senator of the University of Queensland from 2002-06. Serving on the Council of the Australian War Memorial, she was Chairman of the Official History to the Australia at War Committee. Professor Saunders was appointed to the Council of the National Maritime Museum of Australia and was director of the National Australia Day Council. She served as Chair of the Queensland Government's Cultural Advisory Council and was a member of the Premier's Advisory Council on Women's Policy. She is a Fellow of the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia, the Royal Society for Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, the Royal Historical Society (London) and the Royal Anthropological Institute. In 2001 she received the Medal of the National Museum of Australia and in 2006 was the recipient of the John Kerr Medal from the Royal Historical Society of Queensland. Her most recent books include *A Crowning Achievement: A Study of Australian Beauty, Business and Charitable Enterprise* (2005) and *Between the Covers: Revealing the State Library of Queensland's Collection* (2006).



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LOCALITY MAP OF STUDY AREA



INTRODUCTION

This historical study is primarily concerned with an area of the Upper Mary River Valley bound by Lagoon Pocket in the north and Brooloo in the south, from the ranges in the west to Traveston and Kybong in the east. Land-use is clearly the most significant factor in the development of this district. From hunter-gathering as practised by the Indigenous Kabi Kabi people, European settlers embarked on timber-getting, pastoralism, mineral exploration, mixed farming, dairying and intensive agriculture. More recent years have seen a return to grazing and the advent of hobby-farming. While pastoral enterprises and timber provided the initial economic base for Europeans in this district, the discovery of gold at Gympie by James Nash in 1867 accelerated development. As the alluvial gold disappeared, the demand for both farmland and timber increased, with attention being increasingly directed towards the upper reaches of the Mary River.

There were two distinct waves of European settlement. The first occurred from the early 1870s with the discovery of gold, and was strengthened in the 1890s during a period of economic depression. The arrival of a branch railway in 1914-1915 triggered the second, and major wave of settlement, which resulted in the coalescing of scattered communities into townships. The year 1915 also saw the retirement from politics of the man who had represented the Wide Bay electorate in federal parliament since its inauguration in 1901,

but whose political career began at Gympie in 1893. Scottish-born Andrew Fisher rose to become the Prime Minister of Australia on three separate occasions, his legacies including the foundation of a national capital, the creation of the Commonwealth Bank, and maternity allowances for women.¹ Railways had loomed large in his vision, and it was perhaps fitting that the important branch line in his electorate became fully operational in the very year that he stepped down from public life.

The importance of the railway cannot be over-emphasised, for the creation of distinct townships provided a sense of belonging which was strengthened by educational and religious facilities, sporting competitions, and a host of other communal endeavours. It also needs to be remembered that the lifeblood of this district is the Mary River. When timber was first cut on the hillsides it was the river which conveyed it downstream, and it was the river that created the fertile flats which encouraged Europeans to settle permanently. The river has brought wealth and it has also brought tragedy for catastrophic floods have regularly marked the district's history. It remains at the centre of debate in a region which has played a vital role in the history of Queensland.

Hopefully, this modest study may go some way towards revealing part of that fascinating story.

¹ L. Nance, *Prime Ministers of Australia* (London: Bison, 1989), pp.27-29.



Storm Clouds Gather Over Imbil 19 October, 1965
Source: Queensland State Archives Neg No 435774

1. THE INDIGENOUS INHABITANTS

Ancient conifers stand as mute sentinels around the headwaters of the Mary River, whose glistening waters steadily wend their way to the sea. Not infrequently those same waters can also become a raging torrent when nature chooses to vent its fury. It is these angry outbursts which created a landscape of great fertility, attracting in times past an extraordinary diversity of fauna and flora which in turn drew the attention of the Aboriginal people. The Kabi Kabi people came and stayed, lending their name to a language group stretching across a wide swathe of territory from the Kilcoy-Woodford district to Double Island Point, north to the Burrum River and west to the Burnett.¹ Knowledgeable Aboriginal sources are nevertheless quite clear that the Kabi Kabi people themselves remained closely tied to the Mary River,² a section of which they knew as *mooraboocoola*:³ the meaning is now obscure.

Occupying both banks from Yabba Creek downstream to the vicinity of Mount Bauple, the Kabi Kabi were fragmented into smaller groups closely associated with specific areas: Gympie, for instance, was the home of the Kulbainbura;⁴ Yabba Creek and Imbil belonged to the contentiously named Baiambora, which is possibly a post-contact term meaning pipe;⁵ Tungul was the home of the Jungwubera.⁶ As a river-dwelling people they made full use of their environment, developing a range of strategies for the extraction of aquatic resources. Log traps, hand lines, nets, spears and poisons were utilised with good effect.⁷ Catfish, eels, mullet, and perhaps the most favoured piscatorial species – the genetically distinct Mary River Cod

known as *dokko* – were all caught in home waters.⁸ So, too, was the Queensland Lungfish.⁹ Freshwater turtles and their eggs provided further culinary delights, while on land mammals were no less abundant. Marsupials ranged in size from Great Grey Kangaroos to bandicoots and native rats. Larger macropods were usually hunted with clubs in organised battues,¹⁰ in which the game was driven from cover into a line of hunters, although wallabies were reputedly herded to their death over Brooloo Bluff.¹¹ At the opposite end of the scale, the Tungul area was the well-known haunt of bandicoots; every year until the early 1900s the Kabi Kabi people used fire to flush these small marsupials from cover.¹² Notwithstanding their scarcity throughout the district, echidnas were said to have tasted like pork, so it was not surprising that after the arrival of European settlers their domesticated pigs were called *gugart*, the same name as the spiny monotreme.¹³

Bird life was no less prolific. Among many other species emus frequented open areas, scrub turkeys roamed the forests and ducks were sought along the waterways, where they were brought down with boomerangs.¹⁴ During the course of the hunt there were many delicacies to be found, ranging from the honey produced by native stingless bees to large grubs called *buruga*, extracted from dead trees.¹⁵ Vegetable foods were also necessary for a balanced diet. Depending on the season, yams, native limes, figs, quandongs, waterlilies, fern roots, Queensland nuts and the tops of young cabbage palms were readily obtainable. Others, such as the River Chestnut, required careful preparation owing to their toxic qualities.¹⁶

No such measures were necessary for Bunya nuts, a resource so valuable that they attracted Aboriginal people from a wide area of South East Queensland. Although the Bunya Pine produces seeds annually they are most bountiful every third year, and it was the triennial harvest which developed into a time of ceremony and cultural exchange. Festivities concluded with ritualistic combat between opposing forces who had become well-nourished on a regular supply of Bunya Pine seeds and auxiliary food sources.¹⁷ When fresh the Bunya seed can be eaten raw, but mature seeds were either roasted or ground into a meal called *nyangu*. They were also stored for future use, the seed being carefully separated from the cone, placed in net bags and buried in the beds of streams.¹⁸

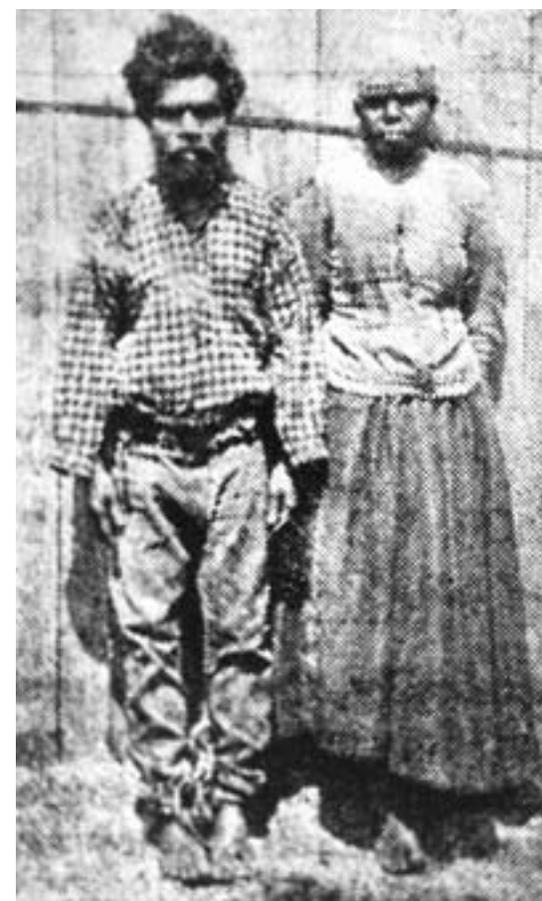
The Bunya Pine was thus a central feature of Kabi Kabi life, its importance so great that a number of trees were claimed as personal property and passed down from father to son.¹⁹ Let it not be thought, however, that this concept of private ownership reflected a utopian existence. In common with all Aboriginal societies across the continent, the Kabi Kabi were subject to the whims of nature. While possum skin cloaks might provide some measure of comfort in cool weather,²⁰ hunger could not be similarly allayed during periods of flooding rain or prolonged drought. That the Kabi Kabi people recognised the vulnerability of certain resources is revealed by their invocation of totemism, which meant that members of the group could never taste the food symbolised by their totemic ancestor. In poor harvests, consumption of the Bunya nut was also

forbidden to women.²¹ Nor could the Kabi Kabi people sustain their way of life in the face of European intrusion.

While resistance and accommodation were parallel themes in the post-contact period, the Kabi Kabi people suffered heavily at the hands of Europeans long before settlement of the Mary River Valley even began. Perhaps as many as 60 Giggabarah men from Mount Bauple – who appear to have been a Kabi Kabi sub-group – died from arsenic poisoning at Kilcoy Station in 1842. This brutal measure had resulted from their sporadic raids across the Conondale Range in search of livestock; two shepherds were later speared to death in retribution.²² Outbreaks of violence also occurred in the Mary River Valley, most involving patrols of the Native Mounted Police, a paramilitary organisation comprising Aboriginal troopers under the command of a European officer. Their task was to ‘disperse’ Aboriginal groups on the expanding frontier,²³ with one such ‘dispersal’ reported to have taken place between Amamoor and Kandanga Creeks in 1860 after a Kabi Kabi raid on livestock at Manumbar Station near Kilkivan.²⁴ A second ‘dispersal’ occurred in early 1861 on Imbil Station.²⁵ Yet two years later Lieutenant Frederick Wheeler was able to recruit three Kabi Kabi men from Imbil for the Native Mounted Police: he believed more would have joined if his visit had not coincided with the Bunya harvest and its important ceremonies.²⁶

A number of early cedar-getters were also directed to valuable stands of trees by local Aboriginal people, who further assisted with logging operations.²⁷ Others were employed intermittently on pastoral runs and, from

the 1870s, on the farms of selectors.²⁸ On the other side of their divided frontier, the Kabi Kabi people continued to hold ceremonies at Kandanga, Lagoon Pocket and Mooloo until at least the early 1880s. Virtually the entire local European population turned out to watch these performances,²⁹ but by then it was clear to all that the Aboriginal people were rapidly becoming outcasts in their own land. Fringe camps had already formed on the edge of the European settlements, the first being at Gympie in the late 1860s,³⁰ where the occupants suffered considerable harassment and physical violence.³¹ During a visit to Gympie in August-September 1876, the Reverend Duncan McNab, who had migrated to Queensland the previous year to work among Aboriginal people, petitioned Minister for Lands John Douglas to grant three local Aboriginal men homestead titles so they could at least secure some land to call their own.³² His efforts were unsuccessful.



Imbil-born Johnny Campbell (undated)
Source: Maroochy Libraries' Heritage Library, Nambour

Race relations in the district were particularly tense three years later when a Kabi Kabi man decided to take matters into his own hands. Born at Imbil around 1846, Johnny Campbell spent much of his working life on Manumbar Station, returning occasionally to his ancestral haunts where he found casual employment among the selectors – including William Chippindall at Bunya Creek.³³ It was at Manumbar, however, that Campbell first came to the attention of the police when he attacked the wife of a European shepherd. Sentenced to seven years' imprisonment for

assault and attempted rape, he was released in June 1879 vowing to seek revenge.³⁴ Until his final capture in March 1880 Campbell pillaged isolated huts and homesteads from Maryborough southwards to Esk, with his threats to rape European women keeping the



Stand of Bunya Pine (*Araucaria bidwillii*) with Hoop Pine (*Araucaria cunninghamii*) behind

entire region in abject terror. Yet for all his wild taunts, all but one of his victims were Aboriginal women. It was only after his arrest and conviction for assault and robbery that Jane Macalister, a European woman from the Esk district, came forward to allege that she had been sexually assaulted by Campbell. In the racially tense atmosphere of colonial Queensland this was regarded as a particularly heinous crime, especially given Campbell's violent reputation. Retried, he was quickly found guilty and hanged at Brisbane Gaol on the morning of 16 August 1880.³⁵ Death was also to stalk his compatriots.

Measles decimated the fringe camp at Gympie in 1894,³⁶ and four years later the survivors were forcibly removed to Bogimbah Aboriginal Reserve on Fraser Island.³⁷ The remnant population in the Mary River Valley managed to avoid that fate until 1915, when five Aboriginal men and women were removed from Imbil and placed at distant Taroom.³⁸ For all that, the Kabi Kabi people did not entirely disappear into the

historical wilderness. In 1963, for instance, W. Mackenzie – 'an 83-year-old survivor of the aboriginal tribes who once lived in the area' – accompanied members of the Queensland Naturalists' Club during a visit to Imbil.³⁹ Sections of two trees bearing notches made by Mackenzie's kinsmen in their search for wild honey were later removed to Imbil Forestry Station for preservation.⁴⁰ There are other reminders of the rich cultural past of the Kabi Kabi people, with surely more still to be found.⁴¹ Apart from a preliminary investigation of Rocky Hole Creek, south-west of Imbil, no adequate archaeological investigation has yet been undertaken in the Mary River Valley.⁴² This is particularly surprising given that place names such as Imbil, Kandanga, Brooloo and Amamoor conjure up powerful images of that haunting Aboriginal presence which had its origins deep in antiquity. Fracturing of the Kabi Kabi world began with the arrival of the first Europeans, and so delicate was the balance between people and land that within a remarkably short span of time it had shattered completely.

- 1 S. Tutt (ed.), *Caboolture Country: Stories of the area once controlled by the Caboolture Divisional Board* (Caboolture, Qld: Caboolture Historical Society, 1973), p.4.
- 2 Anon., *Lengthening Shadows on Durundur Country* (Woodford, Qld: Woodford Bicentennial Committee, 1988), p.3.
- 3 F. McKinnon, 'Early Pioneers of the Wide Bay and Burnett', *Journal of the Historical Society of Queensland*, Vol.3, No.2 (October 1940), p.97.
- 4 R.H. Donald (ed.), *Gympie 1867-1967: A Golden Past A Golden Future* (Gympie, Qld: Gympie City Council and Widgee Shire Council, 1967), n.p.
- 5 J. Mathew, *Two Representative Tribes of Queensland: with an enquiry concerning the origin of the Australian race* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1910), p.127.
- 6 J.G. Steele, *Aboriginal Pathways in Southeast Queensland and the Richmond River* (St Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press, 1983), p.221.
- 7 G. Langevad (trans.), 'Some Original Views Around Kilcoy – The Aboriginal Perspective', *Queensland Ethnohistory Transactions*, Vol.1, No.1 (1982), pp.50-51.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p.50; S. Tutt, 'Codfish and spuds bring back bag full of memories', *Sunshine Coast Daily* (Maroochydore), 30 October 1987, p.7.
- 9 C. Lumholtz, *Among Cannibals: An Account of Four Years' Travels in Australia and Camp Life with the Aborigines of Queensland* (London: John Murray, 1889), p.385; C. Powell, 'The Ceratodus', *Lone Hand* (Brisbane), 1 March 1917, p.182; Anon., 'The Queensland Lungfish', *Australian Museum Leaflet* No.1 (March 1971), p.3.
- 10 Z. Skyring, 'Hunting with the Wide Bay Blacks', in Anon., *Gympie in its Cradle Days: Reminiscences of Gympie's Pioneer Days* (Gympie, Qld: Gympie Times, 1952), p.27.
- 11 I. Pedley, *Winds of Change: One hundred years in the Widgee Shire* (Gympie, Qld: Gympie Times, 1979), p.187.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p.185; Steele, *Aboriginal Pathways in Southeast Queensland and the Richmond River*, p.221.
- 13 Skyring, 'Hunting with the Wide Bay Blacks', pp.27-28.
- 14 Mathew, *Two Representative Tribes of Queensland*, pp.71 and 90.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p.89; C. Petrie, *Tom Petrie's Reminiscences of Early Queensland* (Brisbane: Watson, Ferguson & Co., 1904), p.16; *Gympie Times* [GT] (Gympie), 20 June 1963, p.8.
- 16 Mathew, *Two Representative Tribes of Queensland*, p.92; Langevad 'Some Original Views Around Kilcoy', p.54.
- 17 Petrie, *Tom Petrie's Reminiscences of Early Queensland*, pp.16 and 19.
- 18 Mathew, *Two Representative Tribes of Queensland*, pp.93-94.
- 19 Petrie, *Tom Petrie's Reminiscences of Early Queensland*, p.16.
- 20 Mathew, *Two Representative Tribes of Queensland*, p.95.
- 21 *Ibid.*, p.91; Donald, *Gympie 1867-1967*, n.p.
- 22 J. Mackenzie-Smith, 'The Kilcoy Poisonings: The official factor 1841-43', in R. Fisher (ed.), 'Brisbane: The Aboriginal Presence 1824-1860', *Brisbane History Group Papers*, No.11 (1992), pp.61-63.
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- 24 P.W. Mitchell, 'Story of Imbil and Bunya Creek', in Anon., *Gympie in its Cradle Days*, p.57; Pedley, *Winds of Change*, p.21; D.W. Bull, *Short Cut to Gympie Gold: Stories of Tewantin and the Sunshine Coast* (Yeerongpilly, Qld: F.H. Watson, 1983), p.62.
- 25 'Report of the Select Committee on the Native Police Force and the Condition of the Aborigines Generally', *Queensland Legislative Assembly Votes and Proceedings [QV&P]*, Vol.1 (1861), pp.102 and 106.
- 26 Frederick Wheeler to A.W. Manning, 16 September 1863, COL/A44, In-letter 63/2144, Queensland State Archives [QSA].
- 27 Mitchell, 'Story of Imbil and Bunya Creek', pp.57-58.
- 28 G. Mills, 'Blacks at Tiaro and Lagoon Pocket', in Anon., *Gympie in its Cradle Days*, p.31; M. Prentis, 'The Life and Death of Johnny Campbell', *Aboriginal History*, Vol.15, Pts.1-2 (1991), p.141.
- 29 Skyring, 'Hunting with the Wide Bay Blacks', p.28; Mills, 'Blacks at Tiaro and Lagoon Pocket', p.34; F.E. Chippindall and O. Tinkner, 'Settlement in the Mary Valley', in Anon., *Gympie in its Cradle Days*, p.54.
- 30 Steele, *Aboriginal Pathways in Southeast Queensland and the Richmond River*, p.223.
- 31 *GT*, 16 September 1876, p.3; John Bligh to Under Colonial Secretary, 11 October 1876, COL/A228, In-letter 76/2894, QSA.
- 32 Archibald Meston to Under Secretary, Home Secretary's Office, 18 April 1898, COL/140, In-letter 98/5120, QSA.
- 33 Chippindall and Tinkner, 'Settlement in the Mary Valley', p.55; Prentis, 'The Life and Death of Johnny Campbell', p.140.
- 34 E.G. Heap, '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: Pt.3', *Queensland Heritage*, Vol.1, No.5 (November 1966), p.12.
- 35 Prentis, 'The Life and Death of Johnny Campbell', pp.144 and 147-49.
- 36 Lionel Towner to Colonial Secretary, 3 June 1894, COL/A772, In-letter 94/6462, QSA.
- 37 Archibald Meston to Under Secretary, Home Secretary's Office, 18 April 1898, COL/140, In-letter 98/5120, QSA.
- 38 Aboriginal Movement Records; Series KC, Community and Personal History Unit, QSA.
- 39 *GT*, 18 April 1963, p.8.
- 40 *GT*, 20 June 1963, p.8.
- 41 Golder Associates, 'Report on Initial Advice Statement Proposed Traveston Crossing Dam – Mary River, Queensland' (Submission to Queensland Water Infrastructure Pty Ltd, Brisbane, September 2006), p.17.
- 42 Steele, *Aboriginal Pathways in Southeast Queensland and the Richmond River*, p.220.



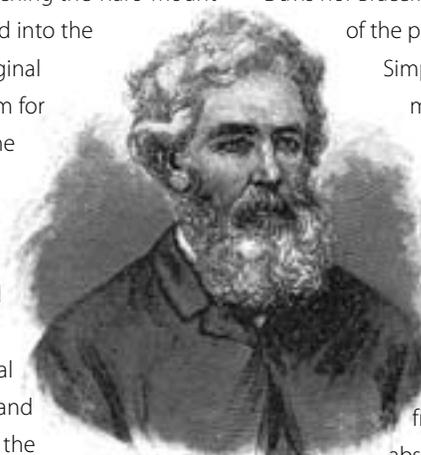
Mary River Crossing at Kandanga (Undated)
Source: Queensland State Archives Item ID392337

2. EXPLORATION OF THE MARY RIVER VALLEY

The first Europeans to enter the Mary River Valley were escaped convicts from the Moreton Bay penal establishment on the Brisbane River, not all of whom lived to tell the tale. In the late 1820s at least four runaways – John Lawson, James Murphy, Edward Tracy and John Chapman – were killed by Aboriginal people in or about the Mary River Valley. Seventeen-year-old convict James Davis was more fortunate. The blacksmith's assistant made his escape in March 1829 and after successfully reaching the Tiaro-Mount Bauple district he was accepted into the kinship network of local Aboriginal people. He remained with them for 13 years, regularly attending the Bunya feasts in the immediate hinterland. Another successful runaway was James Bracefield (or Bracewell), who absconded in July 1839 and spent the next three years with Aboriginal people on the Cooloola coast and Fraser Island. He also attended the Bunya feasts in the hinterland, where he met Davis.¹

Both men were located by a party led by Andrew Petrie in May 1842. Sailing north from Brisbane, Petrie found Bracefield near Noosa Heads, with the runaway agreeing to assist in locating Davis. Continuing along the coast they discovered a large watercourse which they ascended for some 80 kilometres, and which Petrie named the Wide Bay River. Near present-day Tiaro they managed to contact Davis, who eventually

agreed to return to Brisbane.² Both men were duly granted freedom, but John Mackenzie-Smith has argued that this could well have been their reward for silence. Davis and Bracefield had first-hand knowledge concerning the poisoning of Giggabarah Aboriginal people on Kilcoy Station in February 1842, an incident that had the potential to shake the upper echelons of Brisbane's civil society to its very foundations.³ If Mackenzie-Smith's conspiracy theory is correct, neither Davis nor Bracefield remained quiet. Both gave details of the poisoning to Petrie and Dr Stephen Simpson, the Land Commissioner and magistrate in Brisbane.⁴ Three years later Davis repeated what he knew to a visiting John Dunmore Lang, who subsequently used the information to launch an attack on the government.⁵



Andrew Petrie

John Fahey was a different matter again. He was certainly not a runaway from Brisbane, apparently having absconded from servitude far to the south. It was unfortunate that his marathon overland trek and subsequent life among the Aboriginal people was not recorded by officials, for Fahey remained at liberty for up to 15 years. Finally captured by a detachment of Native Mounted Police somewhere between Kenilworth and Conondale in December 1854,⁶ he was returned to Sydney and sentenced to 12 months' labour in a chain gang. At this point Fahey disappears from the historical record just as he had initially vanished into the wilderness.⁷

By the time of Fahey's arrest an increasing number of Europeans had begun entering Kabi Kabi territory. W.K. Joliffe, who had been a member of Petrie's expedition to the Wide Bay River, had been impressed with what he had seen. In the employ of John Eales, a pastoralist on the Hunter River, Joliffe overlanded 20,000 sheep through New England and the Darling Downs to Durundur and along Mary River Valley in late 1842 or early 1843. Guided by James Davis, he established a grazing run near Tiaro, but was warned by the ex-convict that the Aboriginal people would prove hostile. His words were prophetic. After a number of shepherds and hutkeepers had been killed, the former British Navy midshipman was fortunate to escape with his life. His replacement as overseer lasted little longer, and by the end of 1843 the Giggabarah people had temporarily reclaimed the full extent of their territory.⁸

Another member of Petrie's party had been Henry Stuart Russell, who followed in Joliffe's wake. Disappointed with the district, Russell headed north and then west before taking up land.⁹ In April-May 1843 the Moreton Bay Land Commissioner, Dr Stephen Simpson, accompanied by the Moravian missionary Christopher Eipper, followed the same route from Durundur to Tiaro. Simpson was at this time conducting an official inquiry into the Kilcoy poisoning and was hopeful of contacting the Giggabarah people, while Eipper was seeking a new site for an Aboriginal mission.¹⁰ Both men failed to achieve their desired objectives, and Eipper's journal makes it clear that the track over the Conondale Range and into the Upper Mary River Valley was an extremely hazardous undertaking:

... about noon came down to the foot of the Range by a steeper road than the one by which we had ascended. There are again large rocks of Granite in the road, and the dray was capsized into a gully but no damage was done. The road then follows a creek, one of the heads of the Wide Bay River, which before its juncture with another branch from the eastward we had to cross twice. It is henceforth called the Wide Bay River.¹¹

Staying as a guest of the Archer brothers at Durundur in July 1843, explorer Ludwig Leichhardt made a number of forays into surrounding areas,¹² including a trek over the Conondale Range to the mouth of the Wide Bay River.¹³ This was one of many experiences that would lead him to great acclaim and to his eventual death.

In 1847 George Furbur took possession of one of Eales' abandoned outstations and opened a store and shanty alongside a makeshift wharf. This was the genesis of Maryborough, and the fact that he was able to create a viable business suggests that the volume of traffic using the track from Durundur as well as entering the river was steadily increasing. Not that Furbur lived long enough to see its full potential emerge, for he was killed by local Aboriginal people in 1850.¹⁴ His choice for a townsite had nevertheless been confirmed in July 1847, when James Burnett was commissioned to survey both the Burnett and Wide Bay rivers. The second watercourse was renamed the Mary following the tragic death of Governor Charles FitzRoy's wife in December 1847.¹⁵ Lady Mary FitzRoy sustained fatal injuries after falling from a carriage in the grounds of Government House at Parramatta.

The following year John Carne Bidwill was appointed first Land Commissioner for Wide Bay, taking up residence at Tinana. Soon afterwards he was instructed to survey a new road from the fledgling settlement to Brisbane. Bidwill's route went through the future site of Gympie, where he found abundant traces of gold.¹⁶ After travelling to the upper reaches of the Mary River Valley, Bidwill and his assistant became hopelessly lost in the Conondale Ranges before finally being rescued by Aborigines from Durundur Station. Bidwill never recovered, dying at Tinana in March 1853.¹⁷ His name, however, is commemorated by the Bunya Pine

(*Araucaria bidwillii*), the first samples of which had been collected by Andrew Petrie in 1842.¹⁸ Due to Bidwill's illness, 'Mr Buchanan, late surveyor, was called upon by the New South Wales Government to finish the line to Durundur'.¹⁹ The Buchanan Line continued in use until Alexander Jardine surveyed a more direct coastal road from Brisbane to the Gympie goldfield in 1868.²⁰ By then, however, much had happened, though it was not the glitter of gold which induced the first Europeans to settle permanently in the Upper Mary River Valley. The prospect of wealth for those pioneers lay in their livestock and rich grazing lands.

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Santa Gertrudis Cattle Stud at Tuchekoi (1971)
Source: Queensland State Archives Neg No 435768



3. THE PASTORALISTS

In July 1851 John David Mactaggart successfully tendered for two pastoral leaseholds in the Mary River Valley – Bunya Creek and Bluff Plains – which he combined with his adjoining 20,000 acre Amamoor or Police Creek leasehold to operate as one immense holding.¹ Mactaggart renewed the leases for Bunya Creek and Bluff Plains in May 1857 for a period of eight years, but just five months later they were transferred to Clement and Paul Lawless. At that time Bunya Creek and Bluff Plains comprised 16,000 acres each, though their estimated carrying capacity differed considerably – 11,000 sheep on the former, 6000 on the latter.² Sheep, however, were soon found to be unsuitable for this region and under the control of the Lawless brothers a transition was soon made to cattle. Combining both acquisitions, they called their run Imbil, the Aboriginal name for a vine which grew prolifically throughout the district.³

In September 1857 Mactaggart renewed the lease for Amamoor,⁴ which he continued to hold until June 1859, when he sold out to James Sheridan.⁵ It proved to be an ill-fated venture for Sheridan, who forfeited the lease in 1862 for non-payment of rent. The land seemingly remained vacant, for it was not until May 1875 that the Minister for Public Lands directed that Amamoor be opened for closer settlement under the terms of the *Crown Lands Alienation Act* of 1868.⁶ This legislation was the first substantial attempt to break

the monopoly of Queensland's pastoral fraternity by reducing their leaseholds by up to 50 percent, opening the remainder for small selectors.⁷ The Lawless brothers felt its impact when Imbil was reduced in size from 50 to 34 square miles.⁸

Imbil was carrying 3000 head of cattle in October 1873 when the lease was transferred to John Elworthy and Matthew Mellor, with the Lawless family retaining an interest in the area by



Droughtmaster Cow

selecting 333 acres on Imbil Island, a pocket encircled by Yabba and Anabranck Creeks.⁹ Lacking sufficient capital to purchase the property outright, Elworthy and Mellor arranged to meet their debt by paying two annual instalments at seven percent interest. It appears they

had some difficulty in meeting that commitment, for in 1875 they borrowed £3000 from the Bank of New South Wales.¹⁰ Indeed, even though their situation steadily improved over the following years the financial institution was still the listed mortgagee as late as 1890.¹¹

In 1876 the Queensland Government passed the *Settled Districts Pastoral Leases Act* which, among other things, stipulated that pastoral leases on the brink of expiration were to be put up for auction.¹² This was the situation Elworthy and Mellor found themselves in the following year. In a bid to keep possession of their run they expanded the partnership to include their respective brothers, William Elworthy and James Mellor, the strategy proving successful.¹³



Droughtmaster Bull
Sumner Droughtmaster Stud

provisional school.¹⁹ By 1911 Imbil still carried 3200 head of cattle, mostly Hereford breeders, with the Elworthy-Mellor partnership using another pastoral acquisition,

Dovedale, for fattening purposes. Imbil's leasehold area had by this time been reduced to 20 square miles, though a further 13,980 acres was held under freehold title.²⁰ When Elworthy finally retired, direct control of the property fell to a succession of managers, the last of whom was Warwick Green. With the branch railway from Monkland having already reached Kandanga, Imbil Station was sub-divided and the blocks offered for sale on 17 March 1914.²¹ An era had thus come to an end.

The stability which Elworthy and Mellor had provided in this district was reflected to some degree by Thomas Powell on the opposite side of the Mary River Valley. Although Robert Glisson may have been in occupation earlier,²² it was not until April 1858 that his tender for two adjoining pastoral runs known respectively as Traverston and North Traverston was accepted. Both runs comprised 11,000 acres, with the same estimated carrying capacity of 4000 sheep.²³ Glisson sold out to Broughton and Fallerini, and the properties subsequently passed through the hands of S.D. and L. Moffatt before finally being acquired by Thomas Holt. Like Sheridan across the valley, Holt forfeited the runs for non-payment of rent in 1868. The following year 16,000 acres was opened for selection,²⁴ though the large homestead block comprising 3000 acres had already been acquired by Thomas Powell, who arrived in the district during 1864.²⁵

In 1882 and 1883 further sections of Imbil were excised for closer settlement, and in 1884 the property was again put up for auction.¹⁴ The successful tender on this occasion was that of William Elworthy and Matthew Mellor, their respective brothers apparently pursuing other interests. Elworthy and Mellor were lifelong friends who had also been associated in timber-cutting, gold prospecting – and more successfully – butchering.¹⁵ They nevertheless faced a familiar problem, with government legislation continually reducing the size of their holding. The partners countered by either purchasing or 'dummying' adjoining selections. The latter was a common practice in Australia, with family members or close associates balloting for blocks and then transferring the land back to the pastoralist.¹⁶ By fair means or foul, Elworthy and Mellor managed to regain possession of 3500 acres which had been opened for selection by late 1878, all of it eventually becoming freehold property.¹⁷

In 1880 the property comprised 40 square miles of leasehold land for which Elworthy and Mellor paid an annual rent of £80.¹⁸ From around this time management was left solely in the hands of William Elworthy. Imbil Station provided important services for the surrounding population. It was a staging post for Cobb and Co. coaches and the property also contained a store, butchery, post office and, in 1897, a

He was certainly well entrenched by 1868 when a hopeful prospector named James Nash stayed overnight with two of Powell's stockmen before moving on to discover the Gympie goldfield.²⁶ From all accounts a man of relatively simple means, Powell continued to live in a slab hut until the sudden death of his brother Charles in 1882. Taking responsibility for his brother's widow and four children, he built a more substantial dwelling solely for their accommodation. When Powell married Louisa Clarke, Charles' widow and children were resettled at nearby Kybong.²⁷ When a railway station was established close by in 1891, officials dropped the second 'r' from the name – hence the present name of Traveston.²⁸

Powell gradually built up an outstanding herd of Hereford cattle, while also engaging in breeding horses, fattening pigs and experimenting with orchard fruit. After suffering severely in the 1893 flood, followed by the decimation of his cattle from tick-borne redwater disease, Powell's enterprises were once again flourishing by the time of his death in 1909.²⁹ The following year, however, Traveston Station was sub-divided and the blocks put up for auction. Two were purchased by relatives, so the association between the Powell family and Traveston was set to continue well into the future.³⁰ It is also significant that both sides of the Upper Mary River Valley experienced the shift from pastoralism to closer settlement, a process which fell as a backdrop for the mineral discoveries at nearby Gympie.

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JAMES NASH
THE PROSPECTOR WHO DISCOVERED THE GYMPIE
GOLDFIELD 1867

James Nash – The Lone Prospector
Source: John Oxley Library – Neg No 4264



4. MINERAL DISCOVERIES

James Nash, an Englishman from Wiltshire, emigrated to New South Wales in 1858 to seek his fortune in gold. Gaining valuable experience on the Turon and Kiandra fields, Nash headed north to Queensland where he was forced to take labouring work at Nanango. Although he found the first traces of gold in the district it was not sufficient to satisfy his hunger for wealth,¹ so Nash headed towards Gladstone, prospecting along the way. Crossing over the Conondale Range into the Mary River Valley, he was told that gold had been panned at nearby Bella Creek. As the first washings gave encouragement, Nash made a quick journey to Brisbane where he expended his remaining funds on the purchase of a horse and rations. Returning to Bella Creek, the location did not live up to expectations and he continued along the track towards Maryborough. Nash spent a night at Imbil Station, and the following day met R.J. Denman, a former Victorian prospector who had forsaken gold for timber. Denman advised Nash to try his luck further north at Six-Mile Creek, and after spending the night at Traveston Station he duly arrived at the watercourse. By his own account Nash was unimpressed with Six-Mile Creek and made no attempt to wash any colours until he reached Caledonian Hill, where he finally found his El Dorado.²

After breaking his pick, Nash made a fleeting visit to Maryborough where, after some difficulty, he managed to exchange the gold he had found for tools and rations. Returning to the site, Nash recovered another 75 ounces in just six days, sufficient to catch a steamer from Maryborough to Brisbane where he purchased a dray and more provisions. He also took a partner,

William Malcolm, and sent a message to his brother John requesting that he hasten north to join them. The partners worked the area for another fortnight before Nash finally decided to make the discovery public.³ With Queensland in the throes of a severe economic depression, the government had offered a £3000 reward for anyone finding a payable goldfield close to Brisbane,⁴ and Nash was hopeful of gaining this as well as the larger claim area due to the initial discoverer.

Although duly acknowledged as 'the discoverer' in the Brisbane press,⁵ the goldfield was just beyond the distance stipulated by the government for their payment of a pecuniary reward. It was only after a year-long battle that Nash grudgingly received £1000 from the authorities, though he did very well from the claim shared with his brother. Unfortunately, Nash's business acumen did not match his knowledge of prospecting. After investing unwisely in mining stock and a drapery store he was virtually penniless by 1885, when a less grudging government appointed him caretaker of the Powder Magazine at Gympie on a salary of £100 per annum.⁶ When the explosives were moved to Traveston in 1898 for safety reasons Nash followed, finally retiring due to ill-health in 1912; he died the next year.⁷

Nash witnessed considerable changes to the landscape during his life. Initially two villages, One-Mile Creek and Nashville (the latter named in his honour) arose to cater for the wants of the prospectors.⁸ These villages were later amalgamated to become Gympie, the Aboriginal name for the stinging tree which grew profusely in the region.⁹ The alluvial gold had all but disappeared by

the end of 1868. Deep sinking followed, tapping the massive subterranean reserves; as the depth increased extraction was soon beyond the financial resources of independent prospectors, many of whom subsequently became paid employees of large companies. Mining by syndicates finally reached its zenith around 1906 when yields began to decline,¹⁰ though limited operations have continued to the present day.

While the Gympie goldfield generated desperately needed revenue for the Queensland Government, it was also the catalyst for accelerated development in the Mary River Valley, with timber and agricultural produce required by mines and miners. The Mary River Valley district also experienced its own minor mineral booms. As mentioned earlier, Land Commissioner Bidwill discovered the first gold in the Gympie district 16 years before Nash, though the exact locality remains unclear. William Dart, one of Bidwill's assistants, insisted the discovery had been made on the banks of the Mary River at Gympie.¹¹ The announcement in Brisbane's *Moreton Bay Courier* in September 1851 is less clear, merely stating that gold been found between 'the waters of the Brisbane and Mary [Rivers]'.¹² Confirmation of gold existing south of Gympie came in April 1870 when a dairyman on Imbil Station, W.H. Boyd, found alluvial deposits.

Coinciding with major flooding of the Gympie mines and concomitant unemployment, it sparked a minor rush. Three hundred miners immediately descended on Imbil,¹³ with the number possibly rising to 1000 before disillusionment set in. By March 1871 the population

had dropped to 120, and the field was abandoned by August 1872. D.W. de Havilland has estimated that perhaps 25 ounces per day was won from the Imbil goldfield during its brief heyday,¹⁴ and enough gold was still there during the 1890s to support two small operations: Thomas Durham worked one claim, John Dautil and a partner worked another. Both parties were still active in 1905 when Walter Woolgar, a later editor of the *Gympie Times*, passed through on a tour of inspection.¹⁵ Returning six years later, Woolgar found only 'two fossickers on the diggings'.¹⁶

In 1923-1924 and again from 1928-1939 the areas along Breakneck and Western Creeks were worked with modest results, and the occasional prospector continued to put in an appearance until the land was claimed for reforestation.¹⁷ Across the valley, Traveston had also experienced a brief rush in 1885 when two prospectors named Smyth and Cowell found gold. Perhaps as many as 100 prospectors tried their luck before the gold petered out two months later.¹⁸ In May 1914 it was Kandanga's turn, with Messrs Robin and Walker following a lead which produced small quantities of precious metal before their shaft bottomed.¹⁹ Yet these were inconsequential when compared to the financial gains derived from pyrolusite and psilomelane, two minerals collectively known as manganese, a basic component in the manufacture of steel.

Deposits of manganese were uncovered near Amamoor, Kandanga and the Bollier in late 1918.²⁰ More than 900 tonnes was extracted from Kandanga and 157 tonnes from the Bollier, all of it railed to the

Newcastle smelters of Broken Hill Proprietary Limited. Amamoor had come into production by March 1921,²¹ by which time the leases for Kandanga and the Bollier had been forfeited for non-payment of rent.²² In January 1949 a heavy demand for steel and a higher price for manganese prompted a syndicate headed by A.J. Campbell to develop an open-cut mine on Yabba Creek, 15 kilometres west of Imbil.²³ Some 232 tonnes of ore valued at £2500 was extracted over the following

year.²⁴ Mining continued intermittently at Amamoor until 1969, when the lack of markets forced the mine's closure.²⁵ Minerals, however, were not the only riches to be found in the Mary River Valley. R.J. Denman, who advised Nash on his way through the district in 1867, was among many others who ignored potential wealth in the ground. Unlike the miners, their sights were set firmly on the forests.

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Hoop Pine Nursery Imbil (1941)
Source: Queensland State Archives Neg No 392347

5. TIMBER AND FORESTRY

It is not known when timber-getters first made their appearance in the Upper Mary River Valley. Hard men engaged in a dangerous and physically demanding occupation kept few records and their role in pioneering much of coastal Queensland and New South Wales is often forgotten.¹ They mainly sought Red Cedar (*Toona australis*), a timber in great demand for its similarity to mahogany and 'the ease with which it could be worked'.² In the early period cedar logs were sent downstream to the tidal reaches, formed into rafts, and floated down the coast to be loaded onto coastal vessels. Sometimes the rains failed to appear; on other occasions logs were swept far out to sea and lost.³ R.J. Denman was one of the first to take out a timber licence in this district. The Elworthy and Mellor brothers who purchased Imbil Station in 1873 were also among the vanguard,⁴ cutting cedar as far upstream as Conondale. So prolific were their activities that at times the Mary River above Gympie was said to have been completely blocked with the fruits of their labour. Other trees were left to rot where they fell, still visible in Brooloo State Forest in the late 1920s.⁵ Hoop Pine, Bunya Pine and hardwoods were also exploited similarly in the mistaken belief that timber reserves were virtually inexhaustible.⁶

In 1870 the government began to set aside timber reserves – with the timber retained for government use only, particularly railways.⁷ Ten years later a minimum girth size was established for the felling of cedar and Hoop Pine,⁸ leaving it to the imagination how such regulations were going to be enforced in remote areas. Thus, it was not until 1900, when cedar was almost

extinct and perhaps 30 percent of the Hoop and Bunya Pine forests cleared, that a separate branch of forestry was established in the Department of Public Lands. Fortunately, the individuals appointed to oversee forestry operations were determined to maintain timber as a sustainable resource,⁹ and they were greatly assisted in their task by the passing of the *State Forests and National Parks Act* (1906). This important legislation meant that any areas so designated could not be alienated except by an Act of Parliament,¹⁰ and Queensland's first State Forest the following year was Reserve 135 at Brooloo.¹¹

Recognised as the district with the largest combination of Bunya and Hoop Pine, Brooloo State Forest had been increased to 41,600 acres by July 1909, and a further 33,000 acres had been set aside at Imbil.¹² At the same time, however, it was announced that a number of timber reserves would be made available to local timber-getters,¹³ as it was equally important to maintain a balance between long-term goals and immediate want. Another 15 blocks of timber were auctioned in 1915.¹⁴ Despite intense lobbying for larger areas to be made available to local timber workers the government held firm.¹⁵ One frustrated forestry officer was nevertheless moved to remark that 'this district has fought every change which has been made in the interests of the State'.¹⁶

In 1913 an experimental forestry station was established at Brooloo, followed by a more substantial complex at Imbil three years later.¹⁷ In a major initiative, the government of Premier T.J. Ryan built a sawmill



Workmen at Kandanga Sawmill Approx 1920
Source: Local History Section, Cooloola Shire Library, Gympie. Neg No.P8-12

close by. This was one of a number throughout Queensland aimed at keeping timber prices at an affordable level. Although moderately successful, the sawmills were sold off to private enterprise in 1932.¹⁸ In 1920-21 Imbil State Forest became one of the first three commercial plantations in Queensland, with an emphasis on native timbers.¹⁹ This eventually achieved results beyond all expectation, for in 1979 it was found that Hoop Pine planted more than five decades earlier produced almost eight times the volume per hectare of natural forests.²⁰ Conversely, attempts to carry out reforestation with Red Cedar failed dismally. A small moth known as the cedar twig-borer decimated seedlings in the Imbil nursery as well as young saplings already planted out.²¹

Notwithstanding increasing restrictions, the Mary River Valley sustained a considerable number of private sawmilling operations. The most prominent of the early sawmillers were the Doyle brothers – John, Andrew and James. In 1909 Andrew Doyle opened a mill at Brooloo which he ran until his death in 1962, when it was purchased by J.W. Lutton and Sons.²² John Doyle initially opened a pine mill at Upper Kandanga in the early 1900s before building a more substantial concern at Imbil in 1911. He finally sold out to the Richmond River Company in 1923, with this mill also finding its

way into the hands of J.W. Lutton and Sons around 1940.²³ The third brother, James, opened his own mill at Kandanga in 1914, thereby benefiting from the branch railway.²⁴

Sandy Parr also took advantage of the railway to open another mill at Dagon. Shortly afterwards two mills began operations at Mount Tuckekoi, and around 1920 a small sawmill was established at Traveston. The banana boom of the early 1920s spawned a plethora of small case mills throughout the valley.²⁵ Tighter controls and rising costs in the 1930s forced the closure of many,²⁶ though it had little impact on John Lutton, who had begun working at the Marsden Sawmill at Kandanga in 1923 before taking control and expanding the business.²⁷

Hyne and Sons was yet another family sawmilling business to make an important impact on the timber industry in the Upper Mary Valley, although their entry into the district did not occur until 1947 when the processing of pine thinnings began at Amamoor. Mills at Imbil and Kandanga were purchased as operations expanded, culminating in the amalgamation of the company's interests at Melawondi in 1976.²⁸ While the timber-getters clearly played a vital role in the history of this district, the settlers who followed in their wake were also to play a major part.



Brooloo Sawmill (Date unknown)
Source: Local History Section, Cooloola Shire Library, Gympie

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Maize Crop Imbil (Undated)
Source: Queensland State Archives Neg No 392319

6. CLOSER SETTLEMENT AND EARLY AGRICULTURE

Until a branch railway was constructed from Monkland to Brooloo in the second decade of the twentieth century, closer settlement of the Mary River Valley somewhat resembled a patchwork quilt. Large areas, particularly those heavily timbered or steep, were avoided, while many flood-prone sections were often settled and then abandoned as nature's propensity to wreak vengeance became evident. Agriculture, on the other hand, had its origins in the garden plots of the pastoral runs. Wheat, barley, maize and potatoes were all basic staples, with both maize and potatoes becoming the dominant crops of early agriculturalists.¹

Due to its close proximity to Gympie, the fertile Lagoon Pocket was used by miners for pasturing horses until settlement began in 1869.² James Ogden and Isaac Butler were early arrivals, with Ogden sustaining heavy losses from floods in 1870 and 1875. In the first instance his dwelling was entirely washed away, forcing relocation to higher ground where he was cultivating maize, potatoes, oats and hay in 1878.³ An experimental orchard and vineyard were also being developed.⁴ Isaac Butler settled in the district soon after Ogden, where he grew maize, potatoes, and green fodder for his cattle. By installing an American chain pump Butler was able to irrigate his crops during extended dry spells.⁵ From 1871 they were joined by Leary and Biggar, the latter suffering extensive crop losses from floods four years later.⁶ By then some 10 families had settled in the vicinity of Lagoon Pocket, three being located on the opposite side of the Mary River.⁷

Just south of Lagoon Pocket on the Imbil Road, James

Corley selected 302 acres in 1870, while settlers such as Weking, Pedersen, Stewart and Lunn moved into the Calico Creek district in 1876 where they directed their efforts towards the growing of maize.⁸ By 1878 Abraham Hutchinson had established his 550 acre Northumberland Farm on the junction of Amamoor Creek and the Mary River, where he was growing peas in addition to maize and potatoes. Hutchinson's neighbour, James Meakin, preferred to graze cattle on 560 acres.⁹ Having taken part in the Imbil gold rush of 1870, Peter Mitchell later selected land where the town of Amamoor now stands, remaining there for only a short period before selling out to Thomas Busby. In 1882 Mitchell was living on the present site of Kandanga,¹⁰ and it was in this district that William Chippindall developed an outstanding property known as MacQuarrie Farm.

Although John Stephens was the first to select land on Kandanga Creek, he was not the first settler, for after returning from the Warrego district, he found Chippindall already comfortably installed as his neighbour.¹¹ Stephens had 160 acres, while his son, also named John, established the adjoining Ferndale Farm where he grew maize, potatoes and fodder crops.¹² Chippindall was far more ambitious. A former manager of Yandina pastoral run, he had £500 when he took up his first 90 acres of land on Kandanga Creek in 1870, successively adding to it until his famed MacQuarrie Farm covered 4200 acres in 1889, at which time it was sub-divided and sold.¹³ During his occupancy Chippindall was the largest single producer in the Mary River Valley. In 1877, 2000 bushels of maize, 30 tons of

potatoes and 20 tons of hay were harvested for market, with another 800 bushels of maize and 30 tons of hay being consumed by his livestock.¹⁴ In 1884 Chippindall produced 7000 bushels of maize, 20 tons of potatoes, 100 tons of hay and 40 tons of lucerne solely for market. At this time he was also running 500 head of cattle and 140 horses,¹⁵ achieving widespread recognition as a breeder of both.¹⁶ His son, Frank Chippindall, later carried on the farming tradition when he took up land of his own on Tuncal Flats in 1908.¹⁷

While James Tincknell pioneered the cultivation of cotton, pineapples and peas in the Kandanga district from 1895,¹⁸ Oliver Tincknell faced years of heartbreaking struggle before achieving moderate success. Having worked on Imbil Station for three years Oliver Tincknell began farming an area known as the Bollier in 1884, his holding within the boundaries of Elworthy and Mellor's Imbil run. Slowly building up a herd of cattle, horses and poultry while he grew maize, Tincknell was flooded out in 1889. The following year another flood destroyed one-third of his crops, and during the first of two floods in 1893 his family barely escaped with their lives. In 1898 yet another flood was followed by the ravages of the 'Federation Drought',¹⁹ arguably the worst in modern historical times.²⁰ He withstood these enormous hardships to become the first settler in the Mary Valley to take cream into Gympie, and by 1905 was successfully cultivating maize, potatoes, cabbages, cauliflowers and arrowroot.²¹

Undeterred by floods, William Barsby took up land on the opposite side of Yabba Creek in 1891,²² a decade

which saw many others move into the valley. A bullock driver named Thomas Rodwell selected 160 acres on Coonoon Gibber Creek, near the present site of Brooloo, the land mostly given over to grazing.²³ His neighbours were more determined to extract benefits from the soil. John Organ, for instance, successfully grew tobacco in 1899, only terminating the venture when the Government intervened into the industry.²⁴ Downstream, William Everett and George Sterling were farming land on opposite sides of the creek from 1893.²⁵ This district was known as Tuncal Flat, and seven years later Albert Lowe took up 1280 acres on which he mainly grew maize and potatoes. Lowe also bred pigs, experimented with sugar cane and, by 1905, had ventured into horse-breeding.²⁶

The area from Tuncal Flat to Tuchekei was first settled during the 1890s almost exclusively by Danes, thereby becoming known locally as 'Little Denmark'. Jacob and John Olsen were the first, closely followed by P.M. Jorgensen, Harold Meyers and Marius Andreassen. The Fredericksen, Carlson, Andersen and Thomsen families were among others who moved in shortly afterwards.²⁷ Again, their principal crops were maize and potatoes, although Meyers also grew rice very successfully for a number of years.²⁸ In 1905 two Danish brothers, Poul and C.A. Poulsen, purchased 1060 acres just to the south on Mulligan's Flat which they called Beechwood, and where they engaged in mixed farming.²⁹ Poul Poulsen was one of Brisbane's leading portrait photographers and Danish Consul to Queensland, while 'C.A.' was almost certainly Anders, who operated his own photographic studio in

Gympie.³⁰ Around 1900 two more Danes, Christian Jensen and Niels Rasmussen, had also taken up land to the west on Kandanga Creek.³¹ As the vast majority of settlers in the Mary River Valley were either of British or Irish descent, the Danes added an important ethnic dimension which was long-lasting. Not so for a group of Germans who attempted to establish a communal settlement at Tuchekei in the early 1890s. Four years of serious flooding entirely washed their dreams away.³²

Until his death in 1909, Thomas Powell owned much of the land on the eastern side of the valley. There were nevertheless a few small selectors who managed to establish themselves from an early date. One was William McVicar, who took up 200 acres of land at Traveston in 1887, where he engaged in dairying. A subsidiary orchard was also developed, lending its name to the property – Orange Grove. In 1997 the land was still held by the McVicar family, albeit after a shift from dairy to beef cattle.³³

Early settlement of the Mary River Valley was characterised by a heavy dependence on two crops – maize and potatoes. Maize was particularly important, for although it suffered considerable fluctuations in the market place it was more than just a basic commodity. Shelled grain could be fed to pigs, horses and poultry,

with dry grain (corn on the cob) also suitable for pigs. Husks were used on the farm as toilet paper, or when shredded were used to stuff mattresses and pillows. Hand-turned corn crackers made porridge for human consumption, while the cobs themselves were used as handles on small tools such as files, or used as kindling for stoves and boilers.³⁴ It was this versatility, and the ease with which it could be grown, that raised maize to dominance and made it the basis for future agricultural developments. At the same time, experimental work was well under way. Although John Organ's tobacco and Harold Meyers rice did not reach their potential, Albert Lowe's sugar cane, the peas grown by Abraham Hutchinson and James Tincknell's pineapples were all to play important roles in agriculture during the following century. Fodder crops also signalled the rise of dairying which, from the 1890s, began to occupy its own significant niche.

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Advertisement for the subdivision and sale of Imbil Estate, March 1914
Source: *Gympie Times* (Gympie), 23 December 1913, p.2



World Champion Billiards player Walter Lindrum with samples of Australian butter in the 1920s. Note the Gympie ‘Golden Nugget’ brand. Source: John Oxley Library, Neg No 107256

- 1 Pedley, *Winds of Change*, p.12.
- 2 *Ibid.*, p.181.
- 3 M. Burkhardt (comp.), ‘Farming in the Gympie District 1878’, (monograph held by CSL), p.1.
- 4 Anon., ‘Extracts From “The Gympie Miner”: Agricultural Jottings 1878’ (monograph held by CSL), n.p.
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 Burkhardt, ‘Farming in the Gympie District 1878’, p.2.
- 7 Report of A.R. Campbell, District Inspector, Gympie, 20 November 1875, EDU/Z1539, QSA.
- 8 Burkhardt, ‘Farming in the Gympie District 1878’, p.4.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p.5.
- 10 Anon., ‘Story of Imbil and Bunya Creek’, p.57.
- 11 Bull, *Short Cut to Gympie Gold*, p.61.
- 12 Burkhardt, ‘Farming in the Gympie District 1878’, p.7.
- 13 Pedley, *Winds of Change*, pp.182-83.
- 14 J.R. Thackeray, *Gympie And Its District: A Field for Emigration and Settlement* (Maryborough, Qld: Robinson & Co., 1885), p.39.
- 15 Vickery Lockwood, ‘History of Gympie’, p.71.
- 16 P. Towner, *Kabi Country: The Story of Kandanga* (Kandanga, Qld: P.A. Towner, 1989), p.5.
- 17 Anon., *Imbil School Centenary*, p.10.
- 18 Thomas, Burkhardt and Parker, ‘Gympie and District Farming and Grazing Industries’, pp.91-92.
- 19 Chippindall and Tincknell, ‘Settlement In The Mary Valley’, pp.53-54.
- 20 G. Blainey, ‘Dry and Drier’, *Weekend Australian* (Sydney), 30-31 December 2006, pp.13-14.
- 21 Thomas, Burkhardt and Parker, ‘Gympie and District Farming and Grazing Industries’, p.84.
- 22 *Ibid.*
- 23 *Ibid.*, p.82.
- 24 *Ibid.*, p.87.
- 25 Pedley, *Winds of Change*, p.184.
- 26 Thomas, Burkhardt and Parker, ‘Gympie and District Farming and Grazing Industries’, p.82.
- 27 ‘Imbil Oral History: Notes taken from taped interviews’, Series CHI, File Letter C (1992), Vivian Chippindall, CSL; King, *Imbil—Jewel of the Mary Valley*, p.75.
- 28 Anon., *Imbil School Centenary*, p.44.
- 29 Thomas, Burkhardt and Parker, ‘Gympie and District Farming and Grazing Industries’, p.72.
- 30 J. Cato, *The Story of the Camera in Australia* (Melbourne: Institute of Australian Photography, 1977), p.178.
- 31 Towner, *Kabi Country*, p.14.
- 32 Pedley, *Winds of Change*, p.44.
- 33 *Leisure Time* (Gympie), 6-19 September 1997, pp.2-3.
- 34 C.K. Pfeffer, *The Fassifern Story: A History of Boonah Shire and Surroundings to 1989* (Boonah, Qld: Boonah Shire Council, 1997), p.87.



7. DAIRYING

With the demise of pastoralism in the late nineteenth century, ruling authorities in Queensland cast around for alternative primary industries to boost economic development. A separate Department of Agriculture and Stock was established in 1887 to investigate ways in which this could be effected, and one of the first measures was to increase wheat yields in South East Queensland. Climatic factors, limited technology and competition from southern colonies ensured that only minimal success was achieved, prompting a turn towards dairy farming. Most rural holdings, large or small, kept some dairy cattle for either self-sufficiency or as an adjunct to existing farming operations. Larger producers supplied the wider community, but their output was not sufficient to satisfy local demands, and until 1893 Queensland remained dependent on imports of butter and cheese.¹ The expansion of dairying was underwritten in 1888 by a tariff imposed on southern imports,² but there was also a determination to compete for the lucrative British market: with the introduction of refrigeration in 1883, New Zealand and the southern Australian colonies had secured dominance in this trade.³ Now it was to be Queensland’s turn.

Until the 1880s the production of butter was a lengthy, complicated and wasteful process. Milk was set overnight in large shallow pans with fluctuations in temperature allowing the cream to rise. It was then skimmed off and churned until the butter began to resemble grains of wheat. The buttermilk was drained off and the remaining granules covered with salty water; after standing for some time it was salted,

worked and shaped with a wooden pat until the final product emerged.⁴ Quality varied widely and it required five gallons of milk to produce just one pound of butter.⁵ This archaic process was finally revolutionised when mechanical centrifugal separators were introduced.

A Swedish-born architect in Gympie, Hugo Durietz, is credited with having brought the first mechanical cream separator into Queensland in 1882. Separators only required between 2.5 to 2.9 gallons of milk to produce one pound of butter,⁶ thus returning producers a higher profit margin. Although Durietz turned out butter for local consumption his innovative plant failed to bring the anticipated financial rewards, forcing the pioneer to redirect his efforts towards poultry breeding as a rural sideline.⁷ Durietz nevertheless paved the way for the establishment of centralised creameries where farmers could take their whole milk and return home with skim milk to feed calves and pigs – the latter remaining closely associated with dairying.

The Queensland Government recognised the merits of mechanical separation, organising two travelling dairies in 1888 to visit rural centres throughout the colony. By educating farmers in the benefits to be derived from butter and cheesemaking it was hoped that production would increase, and by the time the scheme was terminated through drought in late 1896, demonstrations had been given at 108 centres in southern Queensland alone.⁸ In September 1890 a travelling dairy was briefly set up on the property

of Lagoon Pocket pioneer, Isaac Butler, and although initial response was lukewarm later visits to the Gympie district brought increasing acceptance.⁹ Knowledge was one thing, prices were yet another. The Babcock Test, an exacting means of measuring cream content at creameries, was introduced in 1892,¹⁰ though it did little to regulate the wide variation in payments made to producers. While separators became available for use on farms during the 1890s,¹¹ dissatisfaction with proprietary companies invoked a determination among farmers to establish their own cooperatives.¹²

The cooperative movement was widespread, and in the Gympie district it led to the creation of the Gympie Central Dairying Company in December 1897. Unfortunately, subsequent production was not sufficient to cover operating costs, and the plant was taken over by the Silverwood Dairying Company in 1899. Despite drought and a devastating outbreak of redwater disease among cattle in the first years of the twentieth century, Silverwood managed to remain afloat. This was largely owing to the factory being the central depot for a region stretching from Caboolture in the south to Maryborough in the north.¹³

Notwithstanding the efficiency of the Silverwood Dairying Company, another cooperative movement took shape in 1906, with the Wide Bay Co-operative Dairy Company successfully negotiating with Silverwood to purchase its building and equipment.¹⁴ It came at an opportune time, for with mining at Gympie passing its peak attention turned to the expansion of agricultural and pastoral industries.¹⁵ Large areas of land

which had previously been passed over were cleared for settlement in the Mary River Valley, the rich red soils and vine scrubs proving to be 'magnificent dairying land'. Another advantageous factor was the consistent rainfall, averaging 60 inches per annum.¹⁶

When tenders were called for carting cream, J.M. Smith won the contract for the Mary Valley district. Prices ranged from two shillings sixpence per 100 pounds from Upper Kandanga, two shillings from the Bollier, down to one shilling from Lagoon Pocket. When Smith found his prices uneconomic the cream run passed through a succession of hands,¹⁷ including James Tincknell, before it stopped with Vincent Jensen of Kandanga. James Doyle ran an opposition service to Traveston Crossing where cream was railed south to the Lowood Butter Factory until the Caboolture co-operative opened its own factory at Pomona.¹⁸ Unlike the cream carriers, the introduction of improved breeds and pasturage ensured that both the butter factory and the industry flourished. Indeed, by the end of 1906 a trial shipment of 1392 boxes of Gympie butter had been exported to Britain, and by 1915 it was clearly evident that larger premises would soon be required.¹⁹ This coincided with the arrival of the branch railway line to Brooloo, providing a more efficient transport system for carting cream supplies.

The majority of dairy cattle in the Mary River Valley at this time were either Jersey or Shorthorn crossbreeds, though a number of alternative breeds were undergoing trial. The Jersey remained dominant, and in 1938 14 dairy farmers in the district were members

of the Jersey Cattle Society of Queensland.²⁰ While herd size on the western side of the valley averaged between 25 and 30 head, they tended to be smaller in the Kybong and Traveston district. There were, of course, obvious exceptions, with John English of Amamoor milking up to 60 Jersey, Shorthorn and Ayrshire cows in 1911.²¹ The same breeds were favoured by Con Walsh of Traveston, who milked more than 50 cows on his Ferness Farm.²² Experiments were also being undertaken with introduced grasses, particularly Rhodes Grass and Paspalum, with Kandanga pioneer James Tincknell claiming to have been responsible for introducing the first Paspalum into the Gympie district.²³ Improved pastures were essential to the industry.

In 1924 the cooperative company underwent reorganisation to become the Wide Bay Co-operative Dairy Association Limited,²⁴ finally opening a new factory at Cooroy the following year. This was reputed to be the largest butter factory in Australia at the time,²⁵ and the expense was clearly justified for dairying experienced a veritable boom following the First World War, partly due to the decimation of European dairy herds.²⁶ Production at the Gympie factory peaked in 1925, when slightly more than 2384 tons of butter was produced. Whole milk in excess of 10 million gallons per annum also meant the wider region supplied 10 percent of Queensland's total production.²⁷ This was extremely significant in monetary terms, for dairying was literally worth more than its weight in gold. Between 1880 and 1917 gold production in Gympie had amounted to £147,500 per annum, while in just 12

years from 1915 to 1927 dairying had earned £317,744 per annum.²⁸ Pigs returned another £30,000 per annum merely as a sideline during the 1920s.²⁹

Moreover, expansion continued. In 1952 the Gympie district produced 15 percent of Queensland's total butter supplies.³⁰ Some idea of the production in the Mary River Valley can be gained from railway consignments. In August 1939, for instance, 176 cans of cream were dispatched from Imbil, Kandanga, Dagun, Amamoor and Lagoon Pocket in a single week. This, of course, was in addition to fruit and vegetables,³¹ as most producers continued to engage in mixed farming.³² Nor did all cream supplies go to Gympie. Limited quantities were also forwarded to the Pomona butter factory operated by Caboolture Co-operative Dairy Association, a more convenient location for the 30 dairy farmers clustered around Traveston during this boom period.³³

In early 1943 the Gympie factory of the Wide Bay Co-operative Dairy Association produced more than 520 tons of butter in a single month, an amount that stood for many years as an Australian record for one plant.³⁴ The large quantities of milk being produced also induced Nestlé to establish its own factory at Gympie 10 years later. While many producers welcomed this new competitor, few could foresee that the golden days of dairying were rapidly drawing to a close. In the late 1950s a steep rise in production costs coincided with lower prices,³⁵ a trend which continued through the 1960s and 1970s, when margarine manufacturers began to have a major impact.³⁶ Increasing numbers of dairy farmers redirected their efforts to raising beef



Gympie Factory of the Wide Bay Co-operative Dairy Association Ltd in the early 1920s
Source: John Oxley Library, Neg No 5205



8. THE MARY VALLEY BRANCH RAILWAY

cattle – including Robert McVicar of Traveston, who made the transition in 1986.

The Wide Bay Co-operative Dairy Association ceased butter production in 1978 and Nestlé abandoned the dairy industry altogether. Milk processing at Gympie

ground to a halt in 1987, and the receiving depot finally closed its doors in October 1994.³⁷ There was to be no renaissance, and the downward spiral was to some extent paralleled by the branch railway which, like the dairy industry, had brought its own huge benefits to the Mary Valley.

Shortly after Gympie was connected to Maryborough by rail in 1881, proposals were advanced for the main northern line to pass through the Mary Valley and thus connect the mining centre with Brisbane.¹ They were rejected in favour of a more easterly route through Cooroy and Traveston, with the line being completed in 1891.² Following a decade of economic depression Premier Arthur Morgan's government and its successors placed a new emphasis on the construction of small branch lines to boost both agricultural production and population. So closely were those threads linked that the Secretary of Agriculture and Stock often held the railway portfolio.³ In 1904 a great deal of interest was shown in the Mary Valley, and three years later a Railway League formed at Bunya Creek near Kandanga to actively lobby for a branch line.⁴ By 1910 Premier William Kidston's government was in office and, like his predecessors, one of Kidston's major policies was to use railways for initiating closer agricultural settlement.⁵ Surveys were undertaken and the government committed itself to building a branch line into the Mary Valley, a decision no doubt assisted by Gympie City Council agreeing to fund one-third of the cost.⁶ An added factor was the availability of timber not only as freight, but also for use as sleepers and bridge construction.⁷ For reasons of economy the junction was shifted from Keefton to Monkland, and work commenced in June 1911.⁸

A shortage of labour slowed the work considerably. In 1913, however, production in the Gympie mines slumped and unemployed miners were among the 550 men who were finally engaged on the railway. A

number of others were recent immigrants, and local farmers also grasped the opportunity to earn extra income from cutting sleepers.⁹ The large construction camps scattered along the surveyed route contained their own well-stocked mobile stores,¹⁰ and by February 1914 the line had reached Kandanga, which became a temporary terminus while work continued further south. In the first month of operation from Kandanga the railway transported 495 tonnes of goods – mostly timber – to generate a revenue of £126.¹¹ In 1910 it had been envisaged that when the railway was completed it would initially earn around £5000 per annum, with running costs expected to reach £3600, thus reaping a profit of £1400 per annum.¹²

In April 1915 the branch railway finally reached its southern limit at Brooloo. Kenilworth residents lobbied hard for the line to be continued south, with their arguments receiving close attention in 1918 when surveys were carried out. Final approval to build an extension from Brooloo to Kenilworth was given in 1920, but by then financial resources were strained and nothing eventuated.¹³ Gympie, in the meantime, had campaigned for the terminus to remain at Brooloo, fearing a southern extension would be continued to the Caboolture-Kilcoy line, thereby becoming the conduit for the valley's produce. With Brooloo remaining the terminus such fears were laid to rest.¹⁴

Depending on demand, mixed train services operated three or five days per week, and in 1928 daily rail motor services were introduced for passenger traffic. As there was no secondary school in the Mary Valley until 1963,

- 1 J.C.R. Cramm, 'The Development of the Geographic Pattern of Dairying in Queensland, 1890 to 1915', *Australian Geographer*, Vol.11, No.5 (March 1971), pp.473-76.
- 2 M. Lake, *A Hundred Years of Dairying: A History of Dairying in the Fassifern* (S1: Morris Lake, 198–), p.15.
- 3 Cramm, 'The Development of the Geographic Pattern of Dairying in Queensland', p.473.
- 4 D. O'Sullivan, *Dairying History of the Darling Downs* (Toowoomba, Qld: USQ Press, 1992), p.36.
- 5 Cramm, 'The Development of the Geographic Pattern of Dairying in Queensland', p.483.
- 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 Anon, 'Gympie and District: Farming and Grazing Industries', p.15.
- 8 P. Skerman, 'Queensland's Travelling Dairies', *Queensland Agricultural Journal*, Vol.110, No.4 (July-August 1984), pp.215-16.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p.216; Pedley, *Winds of Change*, p.275.
- 10 Cramm, 'The Development of the Geographic Pattern of Dairying in Queensland', p.483.
- 11 A.H. McShane, 'Dairying in Queensland', *Queensland Agricultural Journal*, Vol.11 (July 1902), p.31.
- 12 G.T. Nuttall, *The Jersey Breed: History of its Development and Progress in Queensland* (Brisbane: Jersey Cattle Society of Queensland, 1938), pp.72-73.
- 13 Vickery Lockwood, 'History of Gympie', pp.122-23.
- 14 D.C. Tilgham, *The Queen State: A Handbook of Queensland Compiled under Authority of the Government of the State* (Brisbane: John Mills, Govt. Printer, 1933), p.252.
- 15 A. Hegarty, 'Agriculture in the Mary Valley and Adjoining Districts', *GT*, 21 February 1953, p.11.
- 16 *Brisbane Courier* (Brisbane), 2 September 1927, p.8.
- 17 Pedley, *Winds of Change*, p.279.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p.191; J.M. Long, 'A Glimpse into the Past (Early days of Dagon)', *GT*, 7 December 1972, p.4.
- 19 Vickery Lockwood, 'History of Gympie', p.124.
- 20 Nuttall, *The Jersey Breed*, pp.860ff.
- 21 Woolgar, 'Through the Mary Valley', p.18.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p.38.
- 23 *Ibid.*, p.15.
- 24 *Brisbane Courier* (Brisbane), 2 September 1927, p.8.
- 25 Vickery Lockwood, 'History of Gympie', p.124.
- 26 P. Skerman, A. Fisher and P. Lloyd, *Guiding Queensland Agriculture 1887-1987* (Brisbane: Department of Primary Industries, 1987), p.78.
- 27 *Brisbane Courier* (Brisbane), 2 September 1927, p.8.
- 28 *Brisbane Courier* (Brisbane), 9 February 1927, p.8.
- 29 *Brisbane Courier* (Brisbane), 2 September 1927, p.8.
- 30 A. Hegarty, 'Agriculture in the Mary Valley and Adjoining Districts', *Queensland Agricultural Journal*, Vol.75, Pt.6 (December 1952), p.311.
- 31 *GT*, 8 August 1939, p.6.
- 32 R.H. Greenwood, 'The Rural Pattern of South-Eastern Queensland', *Australian Geographer*, Vol.6, No.6 (November 1956), p.13.
- 33 Pedley, *Winds of Change*, p.145.
- 34 Vickery Lockwood, 'History of Gympie', p.125.
- 35 Pedley, *Winds of Change*, p.281.
- 36 *Ibid.*; Pfeffer, *The Fassifern Story*, p.64.
- 37 Brown et al, *Cooloola ... a golden past*, p.40.



Above: Workers on the Mary Valley Railway, Hutchins Rd, Amamoor
Source: Local History Section, Cooloola Shire Library, Gympie. Neg No.P25-12

Right: Traveston Rail Disaster June 1925
Source: John Oxley Library, Neg No 164962

high school students made up a large segment of this travelling public,¹⁵ and as population increased and agricultural activities expanded the line was both busy and profitable. The rise of dairying meant that cream became a significant freight, recognition of its importance amply demonstrated during flood periods. As the railway bridge at Dawn was susceptible to flooding, a locomotive would be despatched to Brooloo with rolling stock when the Mary River began to rise. On reaching Dawn the trucks were backed into the flood waters and the cream cans loaded onto boats to be ferried across the river.¹⁶

Occasionally the line was so busy that mishaps were inevitable. In August 1958 a goods train ploughed into the rear coach of a stationary rail motor just north of Imbil, the impact so great the rail motor was pushed 50 metres along the line. By good fortune only four passengers sustained injuries, none serious.¹⁷ This was in contrast to an accident which occurred on the main northern railway line near Traveston on 9 June 1925. In the early morning hours the Rockhampton Mail passed slowly through Traveston Station before gathering speed on its way to Gympie. Two kilometres before the 96-Mile Bridge a brake-shoe is believed to have fallen on the rails, forcing the luggage van off the tracks.¹⁸ The jolts caused some consternation among the few passengers remaining awake in the preceding coach, though none could foresee the terrifying consequences. On reaching the bridge the luggage van plunged down the ravine dragging the passenger coach in its wake.

Ten people were killed and another 55 injured.¹⁹ As the funeral cortege made its way to Gympie cemetery two days later, local businesses shut their doors and flags flew at half-mast in mourning for the victims.²⁰ At the time it was Queensland's worst railway disaster, unsurpassed until the Camp Mountain tragedy on the Dayboro line in May 1947 which claimed 16 lives.²¹

Throughout these years the Mary Valley branch railway continued to prove a boon to the townships which grew along its length. Agricultural industries may have varied in form, but production continued. So, too, did the timber which remained an important freight until the very end. Passenger traffic, on the other hand, was a very different matter. Increasing use of private motor vehicles meant fewer railway travellers, a situation exacerbated in 1963 when a secondary school was opened at Imbil.²² Despite diminishing returns, the rail motors continued to operate until January 1970 when the inevitable happened and they were finally withdrawn from service. Thereafter a passenger van was attached to goods trains until Queensland Railways made a blanket decision to terminate mixed train services throughout the State in January 1989.²³

By the 1970s goods trains were also becoming unprofitable except during the busy harvesting seasons, particularly pineapple harvesting time. Rumours that the line would be closed brought such a vigorous protest from the district's pineapple growers that government officials decided a wiser course would be to defer the decision.²⁴ At the same time,

however, they began removing facilities and scaling down operations. The turntable was removed from Brooloo in 1971,²⁵ and the following decade saw the removal of Brooloo's loop line and the station master's residence. Crossing gates were taken away from Dagon and Amamoor,²⁶ though the Dagon railway station managed to survive after being closed down.²⁷ All loading was centralised at Kandanga, and by 1991 regular goods services only ran as far as Hyne and Sons' timber plant at Melawondi. Depending on demand,

locomotives and rolling stock made the occasional trip to Imbil until 1996, when arrangements were made with the Mary Valley Heritage Railway Board to operate tourist services along the line – a concept that came into effect as the 'Valley Rattler'.²⁸ The line was never formally closed, and the 'Valley Rattler' offers a tantalising reminder that the branch railway was responsible for spurring development and creating many of the towns which exist along the track today.



- 1 J. Kerr, *Triumph of Narrow Gauge: A History of Queensland Railways* (Brisbane: Boolarong, 1990), p.111.
- 2 Anon., 'Gympie's Railways', in W. Woolgar and A. Stumm (eds), *Historical Sketch of Gympie 1867-1927* (Gympie, Qld: s.n., 1927), p.121.
- 3 P. Carroll, 'Railway Policy in Queensland 1863-1914', Queensland University of Technology Working Paper, No.16 (December 1990), pp.26-27.
- 4 P. Towner, *Rock 'N' Rails: The history of the Mary Valley railway line* (Kandanga, Qld: P.A. Towner, 1998), p.1.
- 5 Carroll, 'Railway Policy in Queensland 1863-1914', p.30.
- 6 'Proposed Branch Railway from Keefton to Imbil', *QPP*, Vol.3 (1910), p.501.
- 7 Minutes of Evidence taken before the Select Committee on the Proposed Branch Railway from Keefton to Imbil, *ibid.*, p.510.
- 8 Kerr, *Triumph of Narrow Gauge*, p.111.
- 9 Towner, *Rock 'N' Rails*, pp.10-11 and 14.
- 10 J. Long, 'A Glimpse Into The Past (Early days of Amamoor township)', *GT*, 30 November 1972, p.4.
- 11 Towner, *Rock 'N' Rails*, p.18.
- 12 'Proposed Branch Railway from Keefton to Imbil', p.501.
- 13 R. Milne, 'The Mary Valley Branch Line', *Australian Railway Historical Society Bulletin*, Vol.47, No.710 (December 1996), p.365.

- 14 G. Brennan, 'Looking back Along the Line', *Sundowner* (Gympie), November 1978, p.5.
- 15 Anon., 'Mary Valley Rail Line', *Imbil Community News: Commemorative Edition* (Imbil), September 1997, n.p.
- 16 Long, 'A Glimpse Into The Past (Early days of Dagon)', p.4.
- 17 *GT*, 28 August 1958, p.1.
- 18 *Week* (Brisbane), 14 August 1925, p.10; *Brisbane Courier* (Brisbane), 21 August 1925, p.7; J. Armstrong, 'The Traveston Smash', *Australian Railway Historical Society Bulletin*, Vol.20, No.386 (December 1969), p.286.
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- 20 *Brisbane Courier* (Brisbane), 12 June 1925, p.7.
- 21 K. Blanch, 'Day trip to disaster', *Sunday Mail* (Brisbane), 4 May 1997, p.74.
- 22 Brennan, 'Looking back Along the Line', p.6; Anon., 'Mary Valley Rail Line', n.p.
- 23 Milne, 'The Mary Valley Branch Line', p.371.
- 24 Towner, *Rock 'N' Rails*, p.34.
- 25 Brennan, 'Looking Back Along the Line', p.6.
- 26 Towner, *Rock 'N' Rails*, p.34.
- 27 S. Cook, 'New life for Dagon station', *GT*, 9 April 2005, p.8.
- 28 Milne, 'The Mary Valley Branch Line', pp.372-73.



Kandanga Branch of the Queensland National Bank 1918
Source: John Oxley Library, Neg No 1262



Above: Township allotments for sale at Imbil Dec 1920
Source: Local History Section, Cooloolo Shire Library, Gympie

Right Upper: Moynehan's Store Imbil (Undated)
Source: John Oxley Library, Neg No 109794

Right Lower: ES&A Bank Imbil 1933
Source: John Oxley Library, Neg No 40810



9. GROWTH AND PROSPERITY: THE TOWNSHIPS

Until the arrival of the branch railway in 1914-15, the demographic pattern was widespread. Dagon, Amamoor and Kandanga, for instance, existed only as scattered communities, although Kandanga did have a small commercial centre nearby at Bunya Creek. It was all to change with the arrival of the railway, and perhaps one of the most remarkable examples of this early growth was exhibited at Brooloo, the railway terminus.

Until 1914 Brooloo consisted of three sawmills and scattered farms.¹ A new era began in July 1914 when W.C. Anderson sub-divided part of his land into town allotments varying in price from £11 to £40. With the arrival of the railway due the following year, there was no shortage of purchasers and a town rapidly came into being.² Erected in 1914, the Grand Hotel was destined to be the most enduring commercial enterprise, continuing to operate until it was destroyed by fire in 1958. Located in Sutton Street, the main thoroughfare, it was joined the following year by a post office and general store, confectioner, milliner, bank, butcher and baker, while a blacksmith was situated on the road to Kenilworth Gap.³ A School of Arts was erected by community endeavour, and in 1922 a cooperative store joined the list of Brooloo businesses.⁴ While private residences lined Sutton, Anderson and Parry Streets, this was Brooloo's high point. Despite being the railway terminus, Brooloo was quickly pushed from pre-eminence by nearby Imbil, thanks to the timber industry.

When Imbil Station was sub-divided and put up for auction in March 1914, an estimated 300 eager buyers

descended on the homestead to cast their bids.⁵ One hundred town and 53 farm allotments had been advertised,⁶ with the former selling at an average price of £31. Farm allotments in the surrounding area also fared well, and within two years Imbil had become a substantial town with numerous businesses serving the community. Two general stores competed for patronage, one of which included a post office. A branch of the Royal Bank conducted transactions and a butcher, baker and saddler were located close by. So, too, was Philip Wallander, a blacksmith who continued to practise his trade in the town for more than four decades.⁷

Initially refused a licence due to the presence of the Grand Hotel at Brooloo, James Larney finally opened his Railway Hotel at Imbil in 1917. Larney soon sold out and the imposing hotel has experienced a steady turnover of publicans to the present day.⁸ Limited alternative accommodation in the early years could also be obtained at George Whittington's boarding house,⁹ while other business enterprises later extended to a café, motor garage, confectioner and ice works.¹⁰ In 1925 a branch of the Country Women's Association formed at Imbil – the first in the Mary Valley.¹¹

In 1936 Harley Maudsley opened the Empire Theatre which continued to run until the 1960s when television reduced patronage to an unprofitable level.¹² During the 1940s feature films were supported by shorts and newsreels,¹³ and when the cinema finally closed the building was converted into a restaurant. For more than a decade Ernest Hinds also operated a cordial factory at Imbil.¹⁴ The town was well served by medical facilities



Left: Amamoor Township Busby St, 1932
Source: Local History Section, Cooloolo Shire Library, Gympie
Neg No P25-1

during the 1920s and 1930s, including a private hospital.¹⁵ The growth of forestry in the post-World War Two period was reflected in the construction of 50 new houses between 1945 and 1960, with Imbil's population reaching an estimated 550 people in 1971 before mill closures stymied further increase.¹⁶

Kandanga's growth matched the pace set by its southern neighbour. Until 1911 the Union Church and the cemetery, gazetted in 1907, represented the future township of Kandanga. The commercial centre for the area was at Bunya Creek where Bowes and McMahon had their general store. By 1911 businesses also included a butcher, blacksmith and saddler, quietly confident that the railway would arrive in their midst.¹⁷ Four sawmills in the immediate district appeared to strengthen Bunya Creek's claim,¹⁸ but J.E. Farrell had other ideas, opening his store close to the church in 1911. By 1912 it was confirmed the railway would pass above Bunya Creek, an announcement that prompted Sidney Stephens to sub-divide part of his farm as town allotments. Twenty-six blocks were advertised, and even before the sale a branch of the Royal Bank of Queensland had already opened its doors for business.¹⁹

A postal receiving office was added to Farrell's store and within months of the railway's arrival Charles Boyling opened the Kandanga Hotel. Other businesses included a tinsmith (plumber in today's parlance), blacksmith, saddler, a branch of the Queensland National Bank, and an office of the Mary Valley Stock and Land Agency, the first of two land agencies. Clientele largely came from the 54 settlers living within an eight-kilometre radius,²⁰ and like Imbil it was initially timber which gave substance to Kandanga. With the completion of a new community hall in 1928, Boyling opened another general store, the third in the town,²¹ and despite the impact of economic depression in the 1930s, Kandanga's growth was maintained.

In 1933 William Reinke was optimistic enough to begin showing films in the hall, an enterprise taken over by James Doyle three years later. In 1942 Doyle built a cinema which continued to show films until the late 1960s.²² By 1949 three general stores in Kandanga were catering to a surrounding population of 550,²³ and although floods have remained a constant feature of life the town has comfortably ridden the vicissitudes up to the present day. On a smaller scale, much the same

can also be said for Dagon and Amamoor.

The land on which Amamoor now stands was originally owned by Thomas Busby,²⁴ with most of the surrounding population engaged in the timber industry at Diamond Field just to the west. Forty town allotments were surveyed near the railway station in 1914,²⁴ changing hands at the July sale.²⁵ Three years later benefits were shared with Dagon when William Henderson sub-divided his 6000-acre Amamoor Estate. The bulk of the land sold for £2 per acre, with many purchasers being banana farmers from southern Queensland and northern New South Wales whose crops had been decimated by bunchy-top disease. In the late 1920s Sidney Watts opened a general store, post office and telephone exchange to provide services for the growing population.²⁶ Samuel Pring opened a general store at Amamoor, where he was soon joined by a butcher, William Weller. A bakery followed and in 1921 residents erected a community hall,²⁷ evidence that the future was looking secure. While both Dagon and Amamoor have been able to retain their quiet charm, excitement strikes Amamoor every August with the annual Country Music Muster held in a nearby

forest reserve. Inaugurated by the Webb brothers and Apex in 1982,²⁸ the event was first held on the Webb brothers' Thornside property until it was transferred to Amamoor in 1985.²⁹

Development was even more modest at Traveston and Kybong on the opposite side of the valley. A solitary general store served the needs of Traveston residents until it burned down just after the Second World War and was never replaced.³⁰ For all that, the town has attracted residents seeking a quiet rural lifestyle, and in 2004 the population had reached an estimated 167.

Kybong began somewhat differently, for in the 1860s the Seven Mile Hotel was an important rendezvous for travellers and coaches on the Gympie-Brisbane road. Burnt down, it was rebuilt and continued to cater for passing trade until the arrival of the main northern railway line in 1891, which brought an end to the coaching era.³¹ In many ways, Kybong's history has turned full circle with the giant Matilda complex offering service to travellers and employment for local people.³² It was also at Kybong that hockey was first introduced to the Gympie district during the early 1930s,³³ and sport has been a powerful element in community life right throughout the Mary River Valley. Sport, in its many forms, has acted as an outlet for the intense rivalry that developed between the various towns, and an important nurturing ground was in the schools which sprouted throughout the district. Notwithstanding its promotion of moderation rather than exhilaration, religion marched closely in step with education.



Diamond Field State School Official Opening 11 April, 1914
 Source: Local History Section, Cooloola Shire Library, Gympie. Neg No P25-6

- 1 King, *Imbil — Jewel of the Mary Valley*, pp.93-95.
- 2 Pedley, *Winds of Change*, p.195.
- 3 Towner, *Rock 'N' Rails*, p.23.
- 4 *GT*, 17 January 1922, p.3.
- 5 Pedley, *Winds of Change*, p.193.
- 6 *GT*, 23 December 1913, p.2.
- 7 Pedley, *Winds of Change*, p.194.
- 8 K. Allison, 'Pub founded in early days,' 'Great Weekend', in *GT*, 7 October 1994, p.7.
- 9 J. King (comp), *Catalogue for Imbil from the Gympie Times 1898 to 1965* (Imbil, Qld: Joy King, 2001), p.92.
- 10 *GT*, 9 December 1999, p.13.
- 11 *GT*, 17 December 1925, p.2.
- 12 Pedley, *Winds of Change*, p.195; King, *Catalogue for Imbil from the Gympie Times 1898 to 1965*, p.138.
- 13 *GT*, 5 September 1944, p.4.
- 14 Pedley, *Winds of Change*, p.195.
- 15 King, *Imbil — Jewel of the Mary Valley*, p.138.
- 16 Ernst, *'Imbil — Past, Present, Future'*, p.3.
- 17 Towner, *Kabi Country*, p.20.
- 18 *GT*, 13 May 1911, p.4.
- 19 Towner, *Kabi Country*, pp.25-26.
- 20 *Ibid.*, p.30.
- 21 *Ibid.*, p.53.
- 22 P. Towner, 'Kandanga to lose theatre,' 'Kandanga Clipping File,' CSL.
- 23 Towner, *Kabi Country*, p.75.
- 24 L. Tonks, *Amamoor State School: 75th Anniversary* (Amamoor, Qld: Amamoor State School, 1996), p.7.
- 25 Pedley, *Winds of Change*, p.199.
- 26 L. Tonks, *75 Years of Education at Dagun State School 1924-1999* (Dagun, Qld: Dagun State School, 1999), p.13.
- 27 Pedley, *Winds of Change*, p.199.
- 28 *GT*, 19 August 2006, p.22.
- 29 Anon., Annual Report: Commonwealth Bank Country Music Muster, CSL, pp.15-16.
- 30 Pedley, *Winds of Change*, p.145.
- 31 Anon., 'King Kybong', *Gympie and District Historical Society Quarterly Journal*, No.30 (October 1985), p.10.
- 32 A. Gorrie, 'Bypass threat to cheap fuel', *GT*, 27 March 2007, pp.1 & 3.
- 33 Anon., 'King Kybong', p.11.

10. EDUCATION AND RELIGION

Great emphasis was placed on education by the farming communities in the Mary River Valley, an attitude often shared by rural dwellers. Education was seen as the means of self-improvement, children being given the opportunities often denied to their parents. Sacrifices were necessary to achieve this goal, particularly when farming families were only marginally above subsistence level. Such was the measure of determination that despite hardship in some quarters, schools proliferated throughout this district from the 1880s. Where no land had been reserved for educational facilities it was not uncommon for generous donations to be made or for families to pool their resources to purchase an appropriate site. The majority of schools began on a provisional basis; that is, their future depended on growing enrolments, and local communities were often called on to erect the building, accommodate the teacher and, in some instances, contribute part of the teacher's salary. The Department of Public Instruction provided basic infrastructure and staff. This arrangement nevertheless provided local school committees with considerable influence in the running of their school and woe betide the teacher who failed to meet community standards. For all that, the district was blessed with a number of long-serving teachers who took their duties seriously, guiding pupils towards a wise and fruitful path. On the other hand, it was unfortunate that the standard school curriculum in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries also placed a great emphasis on 'King and Country';¹ for this would cut short a number of promising young lives in the carnage of World War One.

One of the first schools in the valley was at the Bollier, where settlers formed a school committee in 1891 to push for the education of their children. It took another three years of agitation to make it a reality, but in 1894 the school finally opened on a 10 acre reserve at the junction of Tuckekoi and Lowe Roads.² Less delay was experienced at Brooloo, where settlers complained of the distance and dangers their children faced travelling long distances to either Bollier or Imbil schools.³ Conceding this was a legitimate grievance, the government opened The Bluff Provisional School in 1907,⁴ the name being altered to Brooloo in 1915.⁵ The following year Thomas Bath was appointed Head Teacher, a post he retained until retirement in 1952.⁶ Bath was forced to close the school in 1920 when an outbreak of diphtheria claimed the life of one pupil and hospitalised 'about one third' of the remainder.⁷ When Bath retired enrolments stood at 29, the number rising to 53 in the following decade before they fell low enough to force the school's closure in 1970.⁸

Imbil Provisional School followed a chequered path in its formative years. Opened in 1897, the school closed in 1906 due to the unavailability of teachers, reopened for six months in 1907 and then closed until September 1908. In 1911 the school was again closed, but when it reopened in 1915 it was upgraded to a State school.⁹ In the early 1920s special emphasis was placed on training male students for rural occupations – including forestry – and Imbil was classed as a rural school,¹⁰ drawing students from many other areas of the Mary Valley. Enrolments had reached 142 when the school burned down in July 1937.¹¹ Rebuilt, it reverted to State



Dagun State School 1931
Source: John Oxley Library, Neg No 111991

school status and in 1963 became the only Mary Valley school to incorporate a secondary department.¹²

Kandanga has been particularly well served by educational institutions, with William Chippindall instrumental in having a provisional school opened at Bunya Creek in 1881. The school continued to operate until 1928, when it was superseded by a school in Kandanga township.¹³ In 1900 Kandanga Provisional School opened further upstream,¹⁴ and was upgraded to State school status nine years later. With the opening of the township school in 1915 the name was changed to Kandanga Creek,¹⁵ and in 1926 yet another school – Kandanga Valley Provisional School – was opened even higher up Kandanga Creek. Low enrolments forced its closure in 1935,¹⁶ a scenario avoided at Kandanga Creek where the school celebrated its centenary in the year 2000 with an enrolment of 48.¹⁷

Kandanga Township School opened in 1915 and within two years it was necessary to construct a new building to cope with growing student numbers.¹⁸ In 1924 'Township' was dropped from the name and,¹⁹ like Kandanga Creek, this school continues to serve the community, a continuity denied Yabba Vale State School to the east, where the attendance hovered at 18 in 1928 before the school finally closed in August 1943.²⁰

The first school in the Amamoor district was opened at Diamond Field in 1914,²¹ and it was not until 1921 that Amamoor State School finally opened with an enrolment of 31.²² Originally located just to the west of Amamoor, the school was relocated to its current

site following World War Two.²³ Diamond Field closed in March 1939 when Forest Station State School was opened, with the latter suffering the same fate in January 1965 when student numbers fell below a sustainable level.²⁴

When the Department of Public Instruction found the proposed location for a school at Dagun unsuitable, the community raised sufficient funds to purchase the current site.²⁵ Opening in 1924, the school initially struggled to maintain the attendance necessary to keep it viable. William Howe took over as Head Teacher soon after it opened and remained in that position until his retirement in 1949.²⁶ Under Howe enrolments rose to 66 in 1930, and although numbers have occasionally fallen to perilously low levels the school has continued to serve the Dagun district.²⁷

Judy Cornwell attended Dagun State School before going on to become an acclaimed actor in Britain.²⁸ Before moving to Dagun, Cornwell had previously lived at Lagoon Pocket where a provisional school first opened in June 1875 with James O'Sullivan as Head Teacher.²⁹ Local settlers informed the District Inspector they had built the school on land 'owned by the Government'. Indeed they had; the school stood on a public road which they considered too dangerous to use. With no other land available the building remained where it was,³⁰ though it was not classified as a provisional school until 1882.³¹ Seventeen years later it officially became Lagoon Pocket State School,³² and in 1936 a school was also opened at Calico Creek.³³

In 1897 a provisional school opened at Traveston Crossing, reaching State school status in 1909. At the request of the school committee, the school formally became Traveston State School in 1929.³⁴ The school closed in July 1967, when a decision was made 'in favour of transport to the State School Monkland'.³⁵ Kybong began more ambitiously in 1905, having sufficient enrolments to circumvent provisional status altogether,³⁶ and it offered one instance where sport and education were not compatible. In 1921 members of the adjacent tennis club began using the school amenities on weekends, raising the ire of the school committee. After being barred from the school grounds, the issue completely divided the local community, placing Head Teacher Bennetts in a very unenviable position.³⁷ Yet it must be said that this was an exceptional incident, for schools became and remained important institutions in the Mary River Valley. Religion, on the other hand, began as a vital component of daily life before diminishing in significance over time. It is frequently overlooked that the church once stood as a pivotal point around which community life revolved.

Prior to building houses of worship, services were frequently held in the homes of settlers, local halls, or in fact any sheltered area.³⁸ This was a time when the community came together, and socials were regularly held to pay stipends for local clergymen.³⁹ They certainly earned their money. One minister is said to have begun his Sunday services at Kandanga, cycled to Amamoor to hold another, then on to Dagun for yet

one more. He then joined the rail motor to Imbil in time to hold an evening service.⁴⁰

The Methodists built the first church in the Mary Valley at Lagoon Pocket in 1887.⁴¹ A Union Church, used by all denominations, was built in the grounds of Kandanga Cemetery in 1905. It remained there until 1958 when the building was purchased by the Lutheran congregation, dismantled and rebuilt at Imbil.⁴² In 1918 the Sacred Heart Church was built at Kandanga from money raised by the local Catholic community. A special excursion train from Gympie carried 500 people to the dedication by Archbishop Duhig, with another 100 arriving from Brooloo.⁴³ In 1933 Archbishop Duhig was called on to dedicate another Catholic church – the Holy Cross at Imbil.⁴⁴ This was the third permanent house of worship at Imbil, where the Congregational Church had been built in 1919 to serve all Protestant denominations. It was purchased by the Methodists in 1941, but long before then the local Anglican congregation had been holding its own services in Christ Church, which opened in May 1924.⁴⁵

In 1925 a building was moved from Deep Creek to Dagun to serve as the spiritual home for Methodists in the district,⁴⁶ and in 1937 the Fellowship of the Assembly purchased a building of its own at Imbil. The Presbyterian Church at Imbil was built with donated timber, the first services being held in 1955.⁴⁷ The opening of a church signified a coming of age and a sense of permanency, standing in bold contrast to the farmlands where patterns of land use altered considerably throughout the twentieth century.



11. CHANGING PATTERNS OF LAND USE

- 1 L. Connors, 'The Memory of the Anzacs ...': Implications of World War I for Queensland Schooling to 1939', in 'Brisbane At War', *Brisbane History Group Papers*, No.4 (1986), pp.17-18.
- 2 Anon., *Imbil School Centenary*, pp.10-11.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p.21.
- 4 Pedley, *Winds of Change*, pp.129-30.
- 5 Deputy Postmaster-General to Under Secretary, Department of Public Instruction, Brisbane, 25 May 1915, EDU/Z351, In-letter 5348/15, QSA.
- 6 Anon., 'Brooloo 1952-1970', *Imbil Community News: Commemorative Edition* (Imbil), September 1997, n.p.
- 7 Thomas Bath, Head Teacher, Brooloo State School, to Under Secretary, Department of Public Instruction, Brisbane, 11 May 1920, EDU/Z351, In-letter 21108/20, QSA; Thomas Bath, Head Teacher, Brooloo State School, to Under Secretary, Dept of Public Instruction, Brisbane, 25 June 1920, EDU/Z351, In-letter 30602/20, QSA.
- 8 Anon., 'Brooloo 1952-1970', n.p.
- 9 Pedley, *Winds of Change*, p.129.
- 10 George Pestorius, State School, Imbil, to Under Secretary, Department of Public Instruction, Brisbane, 16 September 1922, EDU/Z1300, In-letter 42945/22, QSA.
- 11 J. Farrell, District Inspector, Imbil, to Director of Education, Brisbane, 7 October 1937, EDU/Z1300, In-letter 50709/37, QSA.
- 12 Anon., *Imbil Secondary Department: 25th Jubilee 1962-1987* (Imbil, Qld: s.n., 1987), p.3.
- 13 Pedley, *Winds of Change*, p.123.
- 14 Violet Fielding, Blenheim, to Secretary of Public Instruction, Brisbane, 5 April 1900, 5 April 1900, EDU/Z1417, In-letter 5118/00, QSA.
- 15 P. Towner, *One Hundred Years: Kandanga State School 1900-2000* (Kandanga, Qld: Kandanga Creek State School, 2000), p.2.
- 16 *Ibid.*, pp.5 and 9.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p.31.
- 18 I. McKay and P. Towner, *Only Our Best: 75 Years of Education at Kandanga State School 1915-1990* (Kandanga, Qld: Kandanga State School, 1990), p.11.
- 19 Pedley, *Winds of Change*, p.130.
- 20 Pearl Robinson, Head Teacher, Yabba Vale State School, Kandanga, to Under Secretary, Department of Public Instruction, Brisbane, 17 October 1928, EDU/Z3032, QSA; Towner, *Kabi Country*, p.105.
- 21 Under Secretary, Department of Public Instruction, to Under Secretary, Department of Public Works, Brisbane, 10 July 1913, EDU/Z769, In-letter 7454/13, QSA.
- 22 Tonks, *Amamoor State School*, p.12.
- 23 *GT*, 17 February 1987, p.3.
- 24 Tonks, *Amamoor State School*, pp.48 and 51.
- 25 Long, 'A Glimpse Into The Past (Early days of Dagon)', p.4.
- 26 Tonks, *75 Years of Education at Dagon State School 1924-1999*, p.26.
- 27 *Ibid.*, pp.19 and 22.
- 28 *Ibid.*, pp.26-27.
- 29 James Francis O'Sullivan, Lagoon Pocket, to Secretary, Board of Education, Brisbane, 29 June 1875, EDU/Z1539, In-letter 1490/75, QSA.
- 30 Report of District Inspector of Schools to Under Secretary, Department of Public Instruction, Brisbane, 18 September 1876, EDU/Z1539, QSA; Anon., *Gympie South & District Schools: 75th Anniversary* (Gympie, Qld: Gympie South State School, 1985), p.90.
- 31 'Report on the Material Requirements of the Lagoon Pocket Provisional School', 6 June 1893, EDU/Z1539, In-letter 6529/93, QSA.
- 32 Memorandum, Department of Public Instruction, Brisbane, 13 April 1899, EDU/Z1539, In-letter 3155/99, QSA.
- 33 Pedley, *Winds of Change*, p.130.
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- 35 Memorandum, G.K.D. Murphy, Director-General of Education, Brisbane, 5 April 1968, SRS53/7, Batch 767, 'Traveston', In-letter 68/27026, QSA.
- 36 Pedley, *Winds of Change*, p.128.
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- 39 *GT*, 13 May 1911, p.4.
- 40 Anon., 'A Tribute to the Churches', *Imbil Community News: Commemorative Edition* (Imbil), September 1997, n.p.
- 41 Pedley, *Winds of Change*, p.200.
- 42 Towner, *Kabi Country*, pp.20-21.
- 43 Anon., 'Church celebrates jubilee', 'Great Weekender', in *GT*, 21 May 1993, p.7.
- 44 King, *Imbil—Jewel of the Mary Valley*, p.125.
- 45 *Ibid.*, pp.121-22.
- 46 Tonks, *75 Years of Education at Dagon State School 1924-1999*, p.14.
- 47 King, *Imbil—Jewel of the Mary Valley*, pp.123-24.

Maize, the staple crop of the early settlers, continued to be grown in the Mary River Valley during the following century, and in 1922-1923 the Department of Agriculture and Stock carried out successful experiments with new varieties at Imbil and Kandanga.¹ Much of it was grown as a fodder crop for dairying and pig-breeding as these rose to become significant primary industries. The fodder crops were reduced as food crops made their importance felt in the local economy, particularly when mining at Gympie declined. In 1912 the Gympie sawmilling firm of Ferguson and Company established the experimental Maroonda Farm on their Amamoor Estate, and it was no coincidence that Maroonda was the Fijian word for banana. Suckers were brought from Buderim and planted on a 35 acre plot where they thrived. Pineapples also proved highly successful,² but it was the decimation of large banana plantations in northern New South Wales and southern Queensland which elevated this plant to eminence in the Mary River Valley.

The southern plantations had been struck by aphids which caused bunchy top, a disease which killed banana plants with varying degrees of rapidity. Those which lingered seldom produced marketable fruit. Bunchy top totally devastated the industry.³ Maroonda was free of the disease, and with the first commercial consignments of bananas being forwarded on the newly built branch railway,⁴ it directed the attention of southern growers to the Amamoor district. It was therefore not surprising that when the Amamoor Estate was sub-divided and sold, many purchasers were southern banana growers.

After the disruption of World War One when many local men served overseas, banana crops began to proliferate on the hillsides above frost level.⁵ By the 1920s banana growing was undergoing a boom, with war veterans among those who engaged in this branch of primary production. As part of its broader scheme the government created small soldier settlements at Lagoon Pocket, Calico Creek and Tuchekoi, all directed towards the cultivation of bananas.⁶ Subsidiary crops were grown in lower areas; at Traveston, for instance, beans and tomatoes dominated the flats below the banana crops.⁷ In the prevailing air of optimism a group of public-spirited valley residents came together in December 1918 and formed the Mary Valley Pastoral, Agricultural and Industrial Association. Discussions in early 1919 focused on the possibility of organising an annual show,⁸ with the inaugural event being held in November the same year.⁹ Henceforth, the Mary Valley Show loomed large in the district calendar.

The banana boom was finally brought to a grinding halt in the mid-1920s by boring insects which caused 'rust' to develop in the fruit. By the time rust-resistant varieties became available from 1932,¹⁰ pineapples had already emerged as the principal crop. Other fruit and vegetables continued to be grown profitably, and in the 1930s French beans began to make an impact on the local economy, particularly after new markets were found in Sydney and Melbourne.¹¹

Sugar cane, which had earlier been grown with some measure of success at Kybong,¹² underwent its own resurgence during the inter-war years. Cane was grown

Right: Banana Plantation Kandanga (Undated)
Source: Queensland State Archives Neg No 392321



commercially at Lagoon Pocket, Dagon, Amamoor and Kandanga, and railed to sugar mills at Nambour and Mount Bauple.¹³ Attempts by local growers to establish their own co-operative mill failed to receive government support and the closure of Mount Bauple mill following World War Two doomed the sugar industry in the Mary Valley.¹⁴ By then, however, there were numerous alternatives; along with pineapples and beans, commercial crops in the early 1940s included pawpaws, cucumbers, peas, cabbages, cauliflowers, potatoes and oranges. Egg production had also grown and at Kandanga an unusual enterprise arose with the collection of eucalyptus leaves for distillation.¹⁵

By 1944 beetroot grown at Lagoon Pocket was also making a contribution to the growing larder,¹⁶ with labour shortages having partly been overcome by Italian prisoners of war who generally revelled in the opportunity of limited freedom.¹⁷ The advent of electricity in 1946 opened new horizons by allowing the installation of efficient electric pumps for irrigation.¹⁸ Cultivation increased during the next decade to the extent that an estimated 14,000 acres was under crop in the Mary River Valley and immediately adjacent areas.¹⁹ Pineapples still reigned supreme, and to celebrate a record year which produced 527,041 cases of fruit the inaugural Pineapple Festival was held at Kandanga in August 1956.²⁰ It was to become an annual event.

The completion of Borumba Dam on Yabba Creek in September 1964 allowed for irrigation to be increased

to 18,000 acres in the Mary River Valley alone. In November 1959 there had been 46 licensed pumps drawing water from the river system. With the new dam the number permissible now rose to 70,²¹ with bean growers among those who reaped the benefits. Large-scale irrigation at an unprecedented level also saw the emergence of new marketable crops such as eggfruit, avocados, rockmelons, capsicums and passionfruit.²² This was the high point of production. Dairying was already in its twilight years, with fruit and vegetables soon to follow. Problems within the pineapple industry added to the decline, and by the 1990s land degradation had become a serious problem.²³ There were social factors as well. The drift to the cities, which was a general characteristic of rural Australia, resulted in family farms ceasing production with the retirement of the older generation. Where beef had replaced dairying, hobby farms began replacing commercial agriculture. Changing social dynamics have a positive side when newcomers and established families come together to defend an ideal both cherish.

While rumours of a proposed dam were afloat in early 1990, it wasn't until April 2006 that continuing drought conditions prompted the State Government to announce its intention of building a large dam at Traveston Crossing.²⁴ Responses to the announcement were rapid, with some residents forming the Save the Mary River Coordinating Group whose strategies were wide-ranging. Debate concerning the future of the district continues to be robust and spirited.

- 1 'Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture and Stock for the Year 1922-1923', *QPP*, Vol.2 (1924), p.74.
- 2 Donald, *Gympie 1867-1967*, n.p.
- 3 R. Watt, E. Goddard and J. Osborn, 'Investigation of "Bunchy Top" Disease of Bananas', *Queensland Agricultural Journal*, Vol.21, Pt.4 (April 1924), pp.264-65.
- 4 Donald, *Gympie 1867-1967*, n.p.
- 5 Long, 'A Glimpse Into The Past (Early days of Amamoor township)', p.4.
- 6 'Report of the Under Secretary for Public Land under "The Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Acts, 1917 to 1922"', *QPP*, Vol.1 (1923), p.1344; *Brisbane Courier* (Brisbane), 11 October 1924, p.15; Anon., 'Slip puts paid to settlement scheme', *Sundowner* (Gympie), February 1979, p.5; Pedley, *Winds of Change*, p.77.
- 7 *GT*, 28 July 1923, p.7.
- 8 Anon., 'The Mary Valley Pastoral, Agricultural & Industrial Assoc.', *Imbil Community News: Commemorative Edition* (Imbil), September 1997, n.p.
- 9 King, *Catalogue for Imbil from the Gympie Times 1898 to 1965*, p.58.
- 10 Donald, *Gympie 1867-1967*, n.p.
- 11 Vickery Lockwood, 'History of Gympie', pp.129-30.
- 12 Pedley, *Winds of Change*, p.285.
- 13 *GT*, 8 August 1939, p.6; *GT*, 8 October 1940, p.7.
- 14 Pedley, *Winds of Change*, p.285.
- 15 *GT*, 8 October 1940, p.7.
- 16 *GT*, 5 September 1944, p.4.
- 17 Tonks, *75 Years of Education at Dagon State School 1924-1999*, pp.22-23.
- 18 Long, 'A Glimpse Into The Past (Early days of Dagon)', p.4.
- 19 Hegarty, 'Agriculture in the Mary Valley and Adjoining Districts', p.12.
- 20 *GT*, 7 August 1956, p.4.
- 21 *GT*, 15 September 1964, p.1.
- 22 Pedley, *Winds of Change*, p.293.
- 23 Anon., *State of the Environment 1999* (Brisbane: Environmental Protection Agency, 1999), p.4.18.
- 24 *The Dam Busters Newsletter*, No.12 (April 2007), n.p.



The 1870 Mary River Flood
Source: John Oxley Library, Neg No 57928



CONCLUSION

Much has happened since the Kabi Kabi people first walked this landscape. The district has witnessed the rise and fall of small pastoral empires, the excitement of gold rushes, the dangers of clearing land, and the grinding labour of tilling its soil. Then there was the river, always ready to take back what it had given. The Mary River has endowed the people who live in close proximity with a special character, enabling them to withstand vicissitudes and uncertainties of a life unknown to urban dwellers.

The genesis of community endeavour can be traced back to the early days of European settlement.

The community pushed hard for the provision of educational facilities, while the cooperative movement placed the local dairy industry on firm footing. Agitation to release timber blocks for logging frustrated Government officials, and the settlers had their way with a branch railway. Perseverance has paid off in the past and given hope for the future.

While land use has proven to be the most significant factor in the development of the district, it is this strength of community endeavour that will ensure the Mary Valley continues to play a vital role in the history of Queensland.



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