

BICTON

THE CUTTENS OF CLUMP POINT



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Cover Image

Cutten's open air coffee mill 1902 – image from R. J. Taylor *The Lost Plantation: A History of the Australian Tea Industry*, G K Bolton, Cairns, 1982.

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FOREWORD

If Mission Beach has any past residents who could be considered celebrities, the Cuttens would come closest. Maybe Dunk's famous author, the *Beachcomber*, Edmund Banfield, or our incredibly successful Reef activist, John Busst, would be known more widely in their time, yet locally the Cutten family are icons. *Trove* searches reveal over 200 newspaper articles that mention them and more than 100 letters written by them were published in one or usually several papers. Their story is one of our most important.

Yet, it's a dilemma. Should this be a short history or the complete version? This is the full Monty. Most want a quick read but there are several of those available. A broad picture has not been written with references to enable future writers to easily expand on and evolve this history over time.

Little is written about who the Cuttens were apart from being incredibly hard working, skilled, articulate, and resilient farmers. The Djiru people who were their neighbours and workers in the early years are also largely absent from histories of *Bicton* and in some articles what is said is wickedly untrue and oft repeated. That needs altering. I make no apology for the considerable focus on Djiru before and after the Cuttens arrived.

The choice of a title for this history presents another dilemma. *Bicton* is probably what the Cuttens would prefer. We see from Len Cutten's letters that names mattered to them. Len wanted the first post office of the district to be named, *Bicton* rather than *Bingil Bay* as proposed. The government rejected *Bicton* as that was already used in WA. Len suggested *Clump Point* Post Office. The government acceded to this request at the time, but a few years later, everything in the area was tagged as Bingil Bay and Clump Point as a district name was replaced by the term, Mission Beach.

Len had argued that Captain Cook named Clump Point, so it was the 'ancient name'. It was actually named by Captain Owen Stanley but the truly ancient name is the Djiru term, Bingil Bay. Leaving aside these details, we acceded just this once to Len's 1926 request because this is his story too.

Some refer to the Cuttens as, *Australia's Coffee Barons*. That's interesting, yet it is evident that this term was not used by the main characters in this tale and it was not used in the myriad of newspaper articles of the day. We found only one reference to this phrase being used, that by James Cutten in private correspondence in 1906. James was different. Sid, Len and Herb were humble characters and would have cringed at being called Barons of any sort. So, the Barons are in the bin too.

The other option is, *Cutten Brothers*. We have the *Cutten Brothers' Graves* and the *Cutten Brothers' Walking Track* so that makes sense, yet it implies that the only important members of this family were the four sons. Their parents and four sisters are a vital part of this history. Florence Cutten and her Alexander flock returned to *Bicton* in 1913 and continued the legend until the 1950s when *Bicton* was abandoned.

This story is about the Cuttens of *Bicton*, from 1885 until 1955. It's a 70 year saga. Their lives are depicted in most writing to date as a tragedy, and that assumption will be challenged here.

This history lacks detailed input from Djiru people, yet the hope is that one day some of their number will access and assess this account and contribute their views and recollections to ensure accuracy and due respect and to balance and complete the *Bicton* picture.

LONDON TO CLUMP POINT

No one expected this family to suddenly migrate. Let alone to end up in one of the most inaccessible and little known districts of north Queensland. When 1940s Australian race caller, Ken Howard made famous the long odds saying of 'London to a brick', he surely never envisaged that someone had once swapped London for Clump Point!

Yet this family did just that.

Fred and Margaret Cutten were living happily in London in 1870 with a healthy family of four sons and four daughters aged from four to 18 years. They enjoyed regular holidays at the beautiful *Bicton Hills* country estate of Lord Rowles in Devonshire. Life was good. Fred was a successful lawyer and their children were being educated in the best London schools.

However, this family had larger horizons than most and Fred wanted the very best for his children. He felt that they would have better prospects and enjoy more fulfilling lives if they moved out of the old world and into the vibrant new world of Britain's newest colonies.

They staged their seismic life change patiently. Fred (54), Herb (15), Len (14) and Sid (12) boarded the sailing ship, *Indus* 19 April 1871. The excitement was palpable, yet little did they know of the amazing lives that would unfold in their chosen destination; Queensland, Australia.

They arrived, cock-a-hoop on 20 July 1871, eager for adventure.¹

The remainder of the Cutten family waited a seemingly long year until Fred and the younger boys were well settled and accommodated before the rest of the family ventured out and left London. Mrs Cutten (Margaret, 44 years old in 1871), James (18), Jessie (14), Margaret (10), Florence (8) and Alice (4) boarded that same barque, the *Indus* on 10 April 1872.²



The *Indus*, at Brisbane, a sailing ship converted from the original steamer, image 105604, John Oxley Library..

¹ R. J. Taylor, *The Lost Plantation: A History of the Australian Tea Industry*, G. K. Bolton, Cairns, 1982, p. 11.

² *English Shipping. Departures. Rockhampton Bulletin*, 11 June 1872.

Trove newspaper accounts report that the *Indus* was a 1,300 ton steamship converted to sail. It made six voyages from London to Brisbane carrying migrants. It typically took 80 days to sail via Capetown and a few more days to return. On the 1871 voyage for Fred and the boys, there were 399 migrants aboard and for the 1872 trip there were 515, with 100 of those being Cornish miners bound for the Peak Downs Copper mine. Over 90% of the migrants were English (67%) and Irish (26%) with the remainder being mainly Scots. The passengers of the 1972 voyage wrote glowing reports of the captain and the way the ship and its passengers were handled.

By the time Margaret arrived with James and the girls, Fred had selected land for a sheep farm on the Darling Downs. He found a small parcel, once owned by the entrepreneur, James Tyson who soon after owned huge tracts of land on the Tully River. This land was at Felton, south of Toowoomba and they named the property³ *Gentleman's Seat* and set up a homestead before James and the girls arrived. In a few years, they required more land for their growing flock, so they acquired land at *Comet Downs*, south of Emerald in central Queensland. Felton remained their home base for their first 10 years in the colony. Len Cutten had tried to select land at Pittsworth on the Darling Downs but was unsuccessful.⁴

Unfortunately, the Darling Downs, while a highly successful farming community to this day, endures drought periods and the Cuttens were unlucky to arrive in the midst of a dry patch, so they decided when they could not select a larger acreage that they would seek land in wetter regions.

Herb Cutten stayed on and managed the Felton farm, while the others sought work to raise capital. James found work as a surveyor in the Rockhampton district, while Len and Sid worked on a property at Winton before going out west, to pit sawing in Georgetown and Croydon on the Gulf. Later, Herb and James joined them and in 1882 they all headed north to Cardwell when they heard of land selections opening up at Clump Point. By coincidence, that same year, Edmund Banfield, later to become a close family friend, left his work at a Sydney newspaper to be an editor at the *Townsville Daily Bulletin*.

Len Cutten⁵ reflected on the days he was working in the north before *Bicton* in a letter he wrote in 1917 telling us of 'Early Cairns':

Sir, - I just want to have a chat with you and as I can't talk I must write. The first time I saw Cairns (only there wasn't any Cairns then) was when I went up in the brig Kishap with horses for the first Palmer rush, and next when I passed coming back in the S.S. Alexandria. The next I saw of Cairns was when I brought a dray load of tin from Herberton, coming down the old Smithfield track, and a jolly rough road it was, especially the middle crossing of the Barron in the scrub. Cairns wasn't much in those days and I was told anyone could buy all the allotments and houses in the main street for £1,000. By the way, the main street was the only street. Port Douglas was booming. I was all over the country, looking for land to select. There is a lot of fine country at the back of Cairns and to the north. I tried to select in the Atherton scrub, and I tried to get land at [Herberton].

³ Dorothy Jones, *Cardwell Shire Story*, Jacaranda Press, Brisbane, 1961, p. 237.

⁴ *The Cutten Family at Clump Point*, *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 4 June 1924, accessed on *Trove*, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/61145216?searchTerm=The%20Cутten%20Family%20of%20Clump%20Point>.

⁵ Leonard M. Cutten, *Early Cairns*, *The Northern Herald* (Cairns), 16 November 1917, accessed on *Trove* at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/150909711?searchTerm=Early%20Cairns>

There was no road to Clump Point, so they had to get there by sea. In Tully, the four Cutten boys called in on a farm near the Tully valley owned by their neighbour from Felton, James Tyson. The property was managed by Mr. E. Hewitt and he loaned them a dinghy to access the land at Clump Point. That was a 30km trek; not an easy task in a flat bottomed rowboat. They took provisions from Cardwell and stayed a few days at Clump Point. There they found fabulous land and returned excitedly to Cardwell to claim it at the Lands Office.

Unfortunately, W. Hyne, a Mackay selector, had beaten them to it in 1880⁶ and taken up the 1,280 lot they coveted on the seafront right on the point. That land was ideal in all respects with good stands of timber trees for building and flat, fertile soil in a stunningly attractive setting.

Undaunted, they again worked hard to accumulate funds and found jobs building the Junction Creek Post and Telegraph⁷ office in 1883, then moved to the tin fields at Fossilbrook Creek west of Mt Garnet, taking the ore to Port Douglas.

In 1884, they returned to Clump Point when more land became available for selection. They found the perfect lots a couple of miles north of the point in an area known then by the Djiru people as Bingil Bay, meaning camping ground with good water. The Cutten family always called the whole district, including their land, Clump Point, and when some suggested the new post office be named Bingil Bay (as the area where Bicton was located is now named and was on government maps in 1923) Len campaigned against the change,⁸ first suggesting it be called the Bicton Post Office, then when that name was rejected because it was used in WA saying it was the ‘ancient name’ and had been ‘Clump Point’ since Captain Cook had named it thus. The origins of the name Clump Point are debated, yet it was most likely named by Captain Owen Stanley on the *Rattlesnake* voyage of 1848. Of course the ancient name was that of the Djiru people, Bingil Bay, and that is the name it became soon after Len died.

Len wrote to Johnstone Shire Council to thank them for retaining the name, Clump Point. And one of the councillors commented that:⁹

It is the first time Mr. Cutten has ever praised anything. He has never, up till this, said anything in favour of a Council or a Government yet.

This time the Cuttens hit the land selection jackpot. They applied for six homestead lots; one each of approximately 160 acres for three of the boys and three of the girls. Sid and Len selected the two beachfront lots between Bicton Hill and Ninney Point (Lots 158 and Lot 159 on the cadastral map next page). James selected the flat land north of that behind the small range at Ninney Point, Lot 167. Emily (Lot 166), Alice (Lot 162) and Florence (Lot 168) took the hillside lots west of the beachfront lots. The title deeds were issued 1 April 1884.¹⁰

⁶ Cardwell, *The Queenslander* (Brisbane), 2 October 1880, accessed on Trove, February 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/20335829?searchTerm=poor%20blacks>

⁷ James Cutten, *Correspondence, Clump Point Pioneers*, Townsville Daily Bulletin, 4 September 1923, accessed January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/62470543?searchTerm=Clump%20Point%20Pioneers>.

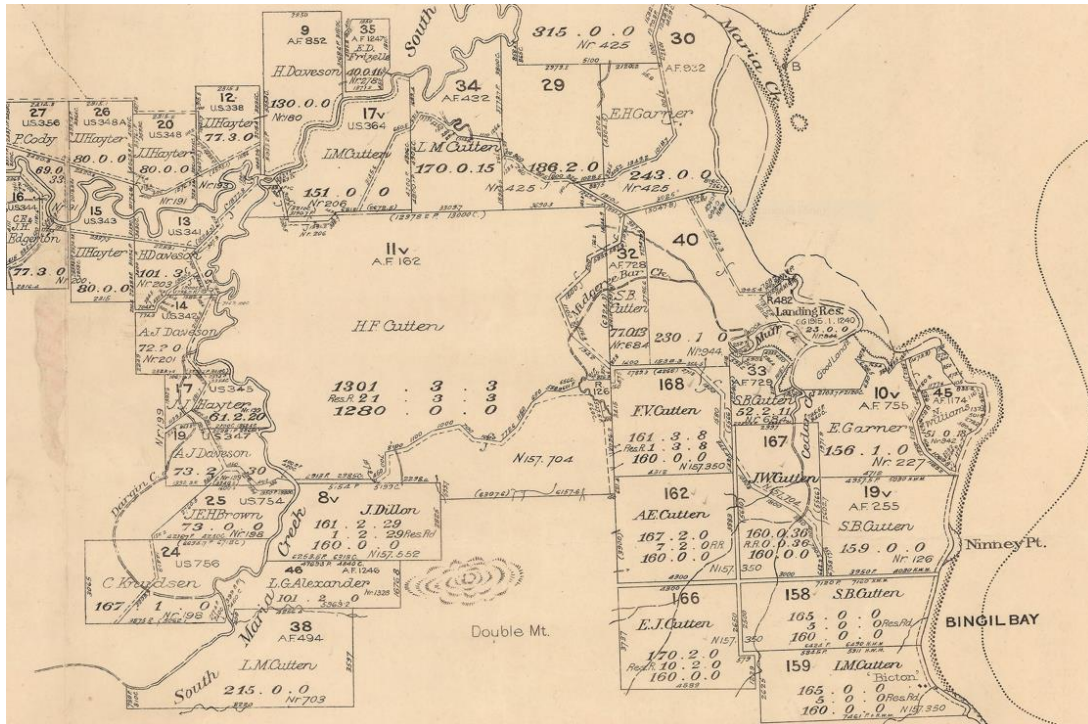
⁸ *What's in a Name? Clump Point Insistent, Bingil Bay Mooted*, Cairns Post 25 January 1929, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/40656503?searchTerm=What%27s%20in%20a%20Name%3F%20Clump%20Point%20Insistent>.

⁹ “Wretched Place,” *Mr. Cutten's Opinion*, Cairns Post, 23 February 1929, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at:

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/40660791?searchTerm=%22Wretched%20Place%2C%22%20Mr.%20Cutten%27s%20Opinion>.

¹⁰ Dorothy Jones, *Cardwell Shire Story*, Jacaranda Press, Brisbane, 1961, p. 238.

On the deeds, the land was described as, *Thickly timbered. Dense tropical Jungle. Rich chocolate soil.* The other lots selected by the Cuttens and Alexanders later are shown on the 1923 cadastral map as well. Sid selected the land adjacent to his lot on the northern side of the valley in 1903. That was labelled Portion 19v and was 155 acres, at Ninney Point on the beachfront. 19v was originally described as *Taken by the Crown for National Park purps (sic) and vested in the Crown from 18/6/83.* However, Sid managed to make it freehold, but it was never cleared apart from a small part for the tea nursery at Plantation Drive (as of 2022) on the south side of Cedar Creek. When Sid died, Portion 19v transferred to his nephews Len Dun and Ken Alexander and in 1946 Margaret Edith Bunting (nee Alexander, daughter of Florence) owned it for a time before selling it to the notable Bingil Bay Reef activists, Alison and John Busst in 1953.



1923 cadastral map of Bingil Bay (named on this map), showing the Cutten selections - source Queensland Archives.¹¹

Herb had the largest land holding, that being Lot 11v, 1,280 acres but most of it was not cleared. Len held four lots totalling 696 acres and Sid had four lots totalling 448 acres while Jessie, Alice, Florence and James held one lot each of 160 acres. The total land area was 3,064 acres but Lot 35 shown in 1923 as owned by Edmund Frizelle was previously owned by Sid and Lot 46 of 101 acres is shown as being owned by Les Alexander but that was probably originally selected by Len Cutten so their original land area may have been 3,205 acres.

The Cuttens eventually owned land reaching all the way across to Garners Beach where Ted Garner's family had settled in 1910. It is difficult to fathom why they selected so much land, for they did not use more than 400 acres; approximately 200 acres for crops and 200 acres for pastures. A report in 1904 stated that they had 'about 200 acres under cultivation' plus grassed areas.¹²

They did not settle on the land immediately after they had selected in 1884. In July 1885, James Thorn, a Cardwell storekeeper they used as an agent, informed them that timber getters were cutting

¹¹ Queensland Archives, ITM627015 Parish of Hull, County of Nares. 40 chains to the inch. Survey Office, Brisbane, June 1923.

¹² *The Messrs. Cutten's Estate, Clump Point, The Northern Miner* (Charters Towers), 5 August 1904, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/search/advanced/category/newspapers?keyword=The%20Messrs.%20Cutten%27s%20Estate>

cedar on their selections, so they returned and settled on the land 27 August 1885.¹³ They had provisions transported there by Henry Blakesley in his lugger. Henry was a selector on the lower reaches of the Hull River.¹⁴ The Cuttens also had a boat and followed Blakesley.



Bingil Bay c1930 showing part hillsides cleared. The home by the beach was that of Charles and Gertrude Alexander, known as Alexander's Inn.

In October 1885, James returned to Felton and took his parents and sisters to stay at Cardwell, in the Royal Hotel, now a boarding house, until they had the *Bicton* homestead built in 1886. On return to *Bicton*, James surveyed the land with a prismatic compass, as there were no surveyors available.

Soon after, the Cutten family arrived at their destination, *Bicton*, Clump Point.

All eight of them arrived bar Margaret who by this time, had married Henry Dun of Irvingdale near Dalby so did not live at *Bicton*. Florence and Alice became bored with farm life and sought work as governesses elsewhere. An advertisement¹⁵ in early 1888 stated:

Re-engagement wanted as Governess or Companion. Usual subjects. Good musician. Experienced manager and teacher. Disengaged end of January. References. V. C., Bicton, Clump Point via Townsville.

That was placed by Florence Violet Cutten, who went initially to the Herbert River working as a governess for the Blackmore family until she chose to move, as indicated in her advertisement. Florence then went to California Creek near Herberton and married Charles Alexander in 1890. Alice went to Townsville to work as a governess and married Albert Carne of Roma late in 1893.¹⁶

¹³ James Cutten, *Correspondence, Clump Point Pioneers*, Townsville Daily Bulletin, 4 September 1923, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/62470543?searchTerm=Clump%20Point%20Pioneers>.

¹⁴ Queensland Archives, Parish of Rockingham, County of Cardwell 40 chains to the inch survey map, reference ITM625955 (L2/32, 1923.)

¹⁵ *The Queenslander* (Brisbane), 14 January 1888 accessed on Trove, January 2022.

¹⁶ *Ancestry.com.au* accessed January 2022.

DJIRU

The history of interactions between the Cuttens and Djiru people are important for this was the first European-settler contact (rather than explorers, beche-de-mer fishers or timber getters earlier) with Djiru. Much happened before the Cuttens arrived that could easily have made the relationship difficult because the Djiru people were so unjustly treated earlier, especially by the Queensland police. It is not possible to tell the story of Djiru-Cuttens relations properly without delving in some depth into the Djiru experience of white people pre-*Bicton*.

Djiru country lies between Maria Creek, just south of Kurrimine Beach and the Hull River in the south. The approximate boundaries of their Traditional Lands are marked on the map below.

There remains a large proviso with this account of Djiru-Cuttens relations at *Bicton*. It is written by a person of European descent, not by a Djiru Elder and the evidence was gleaned from written European sources. Whatever the intent of the author, there will always be some bias based on the author's view of the world.

There is little input from the people who matter most in this part of the *Bicton* story; the Djiru. It is hoped however, that by making the effort to relate the history honestly without consciously applying bias that one day some Djiru people will find a way to add their perceptions and recollections to this story.

This account of the interactions between Djiru people and the Cuttens family is a minute part of Djiru history. Scientists are far from agreeing on the exact date that First Nations people arrived in Australia, but current scientific thinking suggests that *Homo sapiens* migrated out of Africa circa 55,000 years ago and at approximately 50,000 years ago¹⁷ they arrived in WA. They spread across the continent in a short space of time. In 2018, University of NSW scientific reviewers concluded that:

Many Aboriginal Australians would say with conviction that they have always been here. Their ancestors and traditional learnings tell them of this history, and their precise place within it. Our review of the scientific evidence, published today in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, suggests that for all practical purposes, this is indeed the case. Their ancestors arrived shortly after 50,000 years ago – effectively forever, given that modern human populations only moved out of Africa 50,000-55,000 years ago.

We are therefore looking at a fleeting yet devastating moment in time just over 100 years ago; that is seconds ago in the Djiru timeline.

There's no avoiding the reality that the Cuttens were the first Europeans to dispossess the Djiru people; put simply, they took their Traditional Lands from them in the Bingil Bay area.

The Djiru people knew that white men were coming. Shortly after George Dalrymple landed at Cardwell in 1864, he issued a harsh ultimatum to the Aboriginal people on the foreshore through a German man, James Morrill, who spoke a dialect that they probably understood after being rescued by an Aboriginal tribe in Cleveland Bay and living with them for 17 years¹⁸. He told them that:¹⁹

¹⁷ Alan Cooper, Alan N. Williams, Nigel Spooner, *Newsroom: Opinion, When did Aboriginal people first arrive in Australia?*, UNSW Sydney, August 1918, accessed February 2022 at: <https://newsroom.unsw.edu.au/news/science-tech/when-did-aboriginal-people-first-arrive-australia>

¹⁸ Margaret Heuschele and others, *In the Shadow of Castle Hill*, Townsville Library Service, 2000, accessed March 2022 at: https://www.townsville.qld.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0023/5378/In-the-Shadow-of-Castle-Hill.pdf

The white men had come to take possession of that part of the coast ... no war was intended and they would be molested in no way but they must turn and leave the white settlers severely alone in their territory. They were asked to repeat this to the neighbouring tribes and, after several repetitions, seemed to accept the terms. Morrill's version of what he actually said to the blacks abandoned diplomacy and was bluntly to the point.



Map adapted from Google Earth.

The news of that devastating moment for the rainforest tribes of the region would have spread very quickly via the inter-tribal meetings. There were many violent events soon after this where Aboriginal people in Cardwell or the Murray River Valley were set upon by the police or Dalrymple's militia. A massacre at Dalrymple Gap conducted by police on the Herbert River was particularly brutal in 1870.²⁰ Some of these incidents are outlined in *Cardwell Shire Story* by Dorothy Jones. Again, the Aboriginal networks would have spread this news rapidly, so the Djiru people were no doubt expecting the worst.

In light of the impending invasion of the Djiru Traditional Lands, we must put ourselves in the place of the Djiru people at that time and ask what we would have done had a boatload of voracious, land hungry and sometimes brutal people arrived on our shores most likely to take our land. Most humans would have done all they could to ensure the invaders did not return, so the Djiru actions when European ships arrived in 1872 and 1877 were far from surprising.

The black-white conflict in Djiru country that was spoken of most sensationally in the newspapers of the day, and for decades afterwards, was the 1872 event termed, 'the massacre of the brig *Maria*.' Almost every press report at the time and thereafter has painted this as a picture of exceptional Djiru 'savagery.' It has always been depicted as a *massacre of white people*.

Yet it was not so. This was a *massacre of Djiru people*.

¹⁹ Dorothy Jones, *Cardwell Shire Story*, Jacaranda Press, Brisbane, 1961, p.76.

²⁰ Dorothy Jones, *Cardwell Shire Story*, Jacaranda Press, Brisbane, 1961, pp. 157, 158.

The stories of the brig *Maria* are grossly exaggerated in terms of the actions of the Djiru and are incredibly silent in respect of the violence of the retribution exacted upon the Djiru by police troops and settlers helping them.

This series of events was triggered by the wreckage of the brig *Maria* on Bramble Reef east of Cardwell with 75 men on board, who had failed in their attempt to reach New Guinea where they had hoped to find gold in 1872. Such is the media exaggeration and misinformation regarding the *Maria* wreck event that in many reports it is now merged with another independent event that occurred nearby in 1878. That event did not involve Djiru people when the schooner, *Riser* was wrecked on King Reef north of where the *Maria* foundered.

On that occasion two of the sailors on the *Riser* were found dead by Sub-Inspector Robert Johnstone, a leader of one of the Queensland government's police units in Cardwell. Johnstone declared that the two men had been murdered by the Aboriginal people in that area (not in Djiru country) and claimed, as he usually did to raise the level of fear among the European community, that their skulls had been smashed in and their flesh eaten.²¹ There was a timber-getter who gave independent testimony at a magisterial enquiry on the *Riser*, but he did not corroborate Johnstone's testimony regarding the smashed skull or cannibalism.²²

These two deaths led to the area now known as Kurrimine Beach being called *Murdering Point* shortly after, so combining the two shipping accidents adds to the myth that the Djiru were evil 'savages.' Claims of cannibalism by Johnstone were common, as he knew that made settlers and any people from afar who dared to criticise his actions, believe the Aboriginal people he was dealing with were not Christians (an indictment in those days) and were by any measure extremely savage.

Recent historians such as Richards, Bottoms and Reynolds have condemned the actions of Johnstone and the *Native Police*. However, many European historians have been kind to Robert Johnstone; and painted him as a Saint, yet anyone who reads the full history of this region can see that he would be more accurately described as a rogue who regularly led his militia to kill Aboriginal people, often 'dispensing' them (a way of saying murdering without saying so) and burning their camps. Furthermore, he was doing this in the name of the Queensland government. It's fair to say he was not the only policeman doing so in north Queensland. Len Cutten was aware of the police brutality and called it out in the press on occasions.²³

However, Robert Johnstone was popular in Cardwell and encouraged in his deeds by the settlers who were in great fear of the local Aboriginal tribes and thought an attack on Cardwell was imminent.²⁴ Bolton in his book, *A Thousand Miles Away* says, 'After the wreck of the *Maria* in that year, a punitive expedition with the assistance of the H.M.S. *Basilisk* did something to satisfy the settlers ...'

This was an immense understatement.

²¹ *The Wreck of the Riser, Cutter and Massacre of the Crew, The Brisbane Courier*, 13 September 1878, accessed on Trove, February 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/1374981?searchTerm=Riser>

²² *The late outrage by blacks at Cardwell*, 8 October 1878, *Western Star and Roma Advertiser*, 8 October 1878, accessed on Trove January 2022 at <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/97447873?searchTerm=Riser%20enquiry>

²³ Leonard M Cutten, *Protection for Northern Settlers, The Brisbane Courier*, 23 December 1886, accessed on Trove January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/4492193?searchTerm=Protection%20for%20Northern%20Settlers>

²⁴ G. C. Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away: A History of North Queensland to 1920*, ANU Press, 1970, p 94.

Cardwell was 300 miles north of the nearest town, Port Denison (Bowen) when it was settled, so it was far from any law courts. Clump Point was further north and the reality was that most of what happened here was not subject to the rule of law or the State's justice processes.

There are many articles in books and newspapers explaining, in fine detail, the alleged depth and depravity of the alleged Aboriginal violence upon the survivors of the *Maria*. One article, circulated in many papers as 'The Cruise of the HM *Basilisk*' had a sub-heading, 'Lieutenant Hayter's Expedition' where the impacts of their actions on the Djiru were greatly downplayed and the need for the slayings and camp burnings was somehow able to be justified:²⁵

In this expedition, some few natives were killed and all the camps between the points above mentioned were destroyed. This was an absolute necessity the blacks being so strong and continuous in their attacks ...

According to some, Sub Inspector Johnstone was not present on the *Basilisk* retribution expedition, but that is refuted. His team of troopers worked with Royal Navy people and Cardwell settler volunteers in several raids designed to inflict maximum damage to the Djiru tribes.

Johnstone and Lt Hayter of the Royal Navy led the massacres and brutal camp burnings at Tam O'Shanter Point and beyond. As time went on, the *Maria* massacre articles became less accurate and ever more vehement in damning the Djiru:²⁶

Seven miles from Clump Point is Tam O'Shanter Point which has a very sorrowful tale to tell. It was at this point where the schooner Maria went on shore some 15 or 16 years ago and nearly all the hands were massacred by the blacks ... The blacks in this neighbourhood are very savage and never go near a white man unless to spear him.... Dunk Island is right opposite Tam O'Shanter Point ... This island is infested with very savage blacks, said to be the worst in Australia. ... Last year the Queensland Government sent a small steamboat up here in charge of an inspector of black troopers. ... In very bad cases the black troopers were sent out after the savages – then woe betide them.

These are the facts:²⁷

- The *Maria* did not land; it was wrecked on Bramble Reef 72km south-east of Cardwell beyond Hinchinbrook Island and well south of Tam O'Shanter Point
- Djiru people killed three of the seven *Maria* crew who landed at Tam O'Shanter Point and allowed four to escape, when they could easily have killed them all.
- A rusty rifle barrel was discovered in the sand at Tam O'Shanter Point in 1915 and Edmund Banfield wrote²⁸ to one of the living survivors of the *Maria*, Lawrence Hargrave about this. Hargrave, who had achieved much in the aviation field and was well regarded and living in Woollahra at the time said, *I think you can place it (the rifle barrel) in your local museum as the one that Captain Stratman fired on the blacks with and brought about the deaths of*

²⁵ *The Cruise of the HM Basilisk*, *Wagga Wagga Advertiser and Riverina Reporter*, 10 April 1872, accessed on Trove January 2022 at <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/104089498/10538289>

²⁶ *From Mourilyan Harbour N Queensland Southward*, *The Australian Town and Country Journal (Sydney)*, 12 January 1884, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/71007502?searchTerm=%22Mourilyan%20harbour%22>.

²⁷ *Peter Maiden*, *The Shipwreck of the New Guinea Gold Explorers: The wreck of the brig Maria off Hinchinbrook Island 1872*, Central Queensland University Press, 2000, pp. 117 – 144.

²⁸ *Rural Homilies by the Beachcomber, A Remarkable Man*, *The Northern Miner (Charters Towers)*, 5 August 1915, accessed on Trove, April 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/79334943?searchTerm=Rural%20Homilies.%20A%20Remarkable%20Man>

himself and some of his boat's crew. In other words, the Djiru people, when they killed three white men had done so in self-defence.

- The police, in a planned retributive raid, which was sanctioned by the Police Magistrate at Cardwell, Brinsley Sheridan, killed almost all of a tribe of approximately 120 people (an estimated 113 Djiru people died in that raid). They also kidnapped a three year old Aboriginal boy and burned all the Djiru camps they found.
- Captain Moresby of the Royal Navy, aboard the HMS *Basilisk* ordered the raids after hearing Sheridan's case for this incredible brutality. His first mate, Lieutenant Francis Hayter led the attack with sixteen of his RN men on the *Peri*, accompanied by one of the *Maria* survivors and several Cardwell volunteer settlers plus the squad of police 'hand-picked' by Johnstone.. They had a heavily armed flotilla of four vessels, the HMS *Basilisk*, the *Peri* and two of Cardwell's small private boats.
- The next day the militias planned another massacre of a large gathering of 100 or more Djiru people seen on the banks of the Hull River. They never found that large group but did find a handful of people repairing canoes. Three were executed and a woman threw her baby into the Hull River rather than yield to the troopers confronting her. They kidnapped the Aboriginal woman²⁹.
- Peter Maiden says in his book, that the search parties never found the three men alleged to have been murdered and eaten by the Djiru. They found bones in fires yet could not tell if they were from European or Aboriginal people.
- Before that massacre of Djiru, the murdering militias stopped off at Dunk Island to see if any offenders were hiding there. Sub Inspector Crompton took his militia searching down one side of the island while Johnstone led his militia with Hayter the other way. Johnstone's party found no Djiru people, only vacated camps which they destroyed but Crompton's party said there were 'only a few blacks on the island'.³⁰ 16 Djiru were killed according to Gowlland's journal.³¹
- They had killed eight Djiru people and injured another eight in an earlier raid led by Lieutenant Sabben on the *Peri* using local volunteers with two of the crew of the HMS *Basilisk* and a survivor of the *Maria*. They went in search of the Captain's boat at Tam O'Shanter Point.
- The only other record of Djiru causing European deaths was in 1877 on Dunk Island where the crew of the schooner *Thomas Hardy* were looking for wood and left two sailors in a hut once owned by beche-de-mer fishers. Six Djiru attacked and killed the two sailors and four Djiru were killed in reply.³²
- Robert Johnstone was pleased to report that by 1877 there were no Aboriginals left on Dunk Island. There were a few left however, and they obviously remembered police patrols of the past and acted accordingly.

Peter Maiden's book on the *Maria* is the most comprehensive account available. His research was exhaustive and, I believe, as accurate as it could possibly be. He was English and wrote many books,

²⁹ Lt. Frances Hayter, *March 1872 Journal, HMS Basilisk January 1871 – July 1873*, transcribed by Helen Pedley, May 2022, sourced from National Library of N.Z.

³⁰ Peter Maiden, *The Shipwreck of the New Guinea Gold Explorers: The wreck of the brig Maria off Hinchinbrook Island 1872*, Central Queensland University Press, 2000, P. 142

³¹ Lt J. T. Gowlland *Manuscript*, transcribed handwritten journal, April 1872 held in the Cassowary Coast Regional Library at Innisfail catalogue reference: <https://cassowary.spydus.com/cgi-bin/spydus.exe/ENQ/WPAC/BIBENQ?SETLVL=&BRN=21039>; this was kindly provided by historian Helen Pedley who originally catalogued the article. P. 21.

³² Dorothy Jones, *Cardwell Shire Story*, Jacaranda Press, Brisbane, 1961, pp. 204-205.

most of them with a Christian focus. He unearthed all possible evidence including accessing the diaries of people such as Lt Hayter. That diary is held in the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, England and demonstrates that the Navy and Police of the day were determined to kill every Aboriginal person they encountered anywhere near the scenes of the deaths of the survivors.

Maiden discussed the assertions of a journalist from the *Pastoral Times* that Johnstone's massacres were sanctioned by the Queensland Premier, Arthur Palmer. Palmer denied the charges strongly in Parliament showing a letter from Robert Johnstone who also denied any such assertions.

Peter Maiden added that there was a further retributive raid made after the HMS *Basilisk* led massacres. This occurred when the *Governor Blackall* eventually arrived at Cardwell and its Captain (John Gowlland) led more searches for survivors and 'guilty' parties north of Djiru country near the Johnstone River. He once again took Robert Johnstone and his troopers to 'work over' the supposed Aboriginal offenders. Gowlland said in his report, 'I have also to state that I have severely punished the guilty parties, having found the property of the missing men in their possession,' Maiden concluded that meant death for any Aboriginal people found nearby.³³

Even in the Cutten obituaries almost 60 years later, the libellous attacks on Djiru people continued unabated. In several newspapers, for example, this comment was made in obituaries for Len Cutten in 1930:³⁴

A few years prior to the arrival of this family, members of one of the most fiendish tribes of Aboriginals ever known in Australia had murdered and eaten white survivors who came ashore from the brig Maria.

The reporter was trying to show how brave and intrepid the Cutten family were, yet even in 1930 this was a grossly unjust smearing of the reputation of the Djiru people. Shortly before that, Herb Cutten³⁵ had died and similar diatribes were used in his obituaries. The *Johnstone River Advocate and Innisfail News* went one stage further, exclaiming that the tribe, *killed and ate them all* and, *The place was appropriately called Murdering Point, a name it retains to this day*. Why let facts get in the way of a good story? They added, *The Cuttens, undismayed and determined, went ahead with their settlement, and in doing so gradually converted the blacks into useful members of society*. This assumes that the Djiru people were not *useful to society* before the Cuttens arrived.

Fortunately, while the Queensland press largely did a good job of masking the truth of this event, *The Queenslander* (Brisbane) did the right thing in 1872 by publishing an excerpt from *The Melbourne Argus*:

The Melbourne Argus of the 1st instant, in its telegram from Sydney referring to the wreck of the Maria, says that 'it is reported that the Native Police of Queensland have killed 93 blacks.'

Note though it is the 'Native' Police not their white leader, Johnstone, who receive the blame for this; almost as if it were a case of Aboriginal people harming one another.

Testimony from a Banyan selector,³⁶ who was brought up with Aboriginal children and spoke their languages shows that the Djiru death toll after second raid was closer to 113. Chris Wildsoet

³³ Peter Maiden, *The Shipwreck of the New Guinea Gold Explorers: The wreck of the brig Maria off Hinchinbrook Island 1872*, Central Queensland University Press, 2000, P. 151.

³⁴ *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 14 July 1930, accessed January 2022 on Trove at <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/60778750?searchTerm=%22brig%20Maria%22>

³⁵ *In Memoriam, Frederick Herbert Cutten, Johnstone River Advocate and Innisfail News*, 25 February 1930, accessed January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/212538621?searchTerm=%22brig%20Maria%22>

³⁶ F. P. Woolston, and F. S. Colliver, *The Wildsoet Interview – Some Recollections of the Aborigines of the Tully Area, Queensland Heritage*, 1975, Volume 3, Issue 3, pp. 3-14.

provided oral histories stating that only five survived of the approximately 120 Djiru slain by Robert Johnstone and his partner in crime, Lieutenant Hayter of the H.M.S *Basilisk*. A boy from the tribe was kidnapped and died soon after and another boy survived and was found among the Bingil Bay people that the Cuttens employed.

The Queensland government were aware of this massacre of the Djiru people by their employees. An enquiry was held in Cardwell. One of the survivors of the wreck provided information that was published in a country journal regarding the punishment meted out to the Aboriginals.³⁷ This was raised in Parliament by the Home Secretary, where Johnstone was accused of having ‘punished the innocent along with the guilty’ and partaking in ‘slaughtering whole camps, not only of men, but of women and children.’ This news reached London when it was sent to the Permanent Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, Robert Herbert. However, those allegations were dismissed by the Governor of Queensland, Lord Normanby who claimed that the Aboriginal people of the north, ‘are numerous, savage, treacherous, and very commonly cannibals.’³⁸

Johnstone subsequently was never sanctioned. 42 settlers of Cardwell and two survivors of the *Maria* wreck gave him a vote of confidence soon after by signing a letter of petition in his favour.

In summary, much written of the *Maria* records this event sensationally as a massacre of white shipwreck survivors. The toll was 11 white people were killed by Aboriginal people (3 by Djiru) and 8 were saved by Aboriginal people. It is probably unknown and unknowable exactly how many Aboriginal people were murdered by the Queensland Police and Cardwell settler militias. The five raids of retribution were:

Raid	Estimate of No. Killed	Location	Perpetrators	Comment
1	8 Djiru, plus 8 injured	Tam O’Shanter Point	Navy, settlers	
2	16 Djiru	Dunk Island	Police, Navy	
3	93-113 Djiru (estimate)	Tam O’Shanter Point	Police, Navy, settlers	+ 1 boy kidnaped
4	4 Djiru	Hull River	Police	+ 1 kidnapped
5	27- probably Mamu	Cowley Beach	Police	

An estimate puts the overall numbers of Djiru people killed in the raids at between 113 (using minimum estimates and excluding the initial 8 Tam O’Shanter deaths) and 141 (high end estimates.) Two Djiru were kidnapped as well. All that in response to three European people being killed by Djiru people *in self defense*. The total numbers of Aboriginal people slayed by whites following the *Maria* wreck was between 140 and 168 with two kidnapped. The Djiru people were described in newspapers as ‘savages’ for their brutality in killing three people from the *Maria*, but one could ask, on reflection, who were the true ‘savages’?

Eight Europeans were also killed by Aboriginal people south of the Johnstone River (probably by Mamu) and eight were saved by Aboriginal people north of the Johnstone River. The number of Aboriginal people (most likely Mamu in that area) that Johnston’s posse killed in retributive raids south of the Johnstone River was reported in Gowlland’s handwritten journal as 27.³⁹ Gowlland’s April 1872 journal says: *Mr. Johnstone’s trackers shot 27 of the blacks in the camp.*

³⁷ Dorothy Jones, *Cardwell Shire Story*, Jacaranda Press, Brisbane, 1961, p. 176.

³⁸ Roslyn Poignant, *Professional Savages: Captive Live Western Spectacle*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2004.

³⁹ Lt J. T. Gowlland *Manuscript*, transcribed handwritten journal, April 1872 held in the Cassowary Coast Regional Library at Innisfail catalogue reference: <https://cassowary.spydus.com/cgi-bin/spydus.exe/ENQ/WPAC/BIBENQ?SETLVL=&BRN=21039>; this was kindly provided by historian Helen Pedley who originally catalogued the article. P. 22.

Also recorded in Gowlland's handwritten journal are the killings of 16 Djiru people on Dunk Island. The journal says: *We observed on shore several new tracks of natives but I think they were Gins, tho' there is one man left alive – Mr. Johnstone and his trackers having given a very good account of the sixteen he came across* (in the same Gowlland Manuscript cited above, page 21). However, it seems that this time, as stated earlier, it was Sub-Inspector Crompton's troops who slayed the Djiru, not Johnstone.⁴⁰

A summary of the fate of people aboard the *Maria* is that of 75 people on the vessel, 40 survived; 35 died and, of those, 23 were drowned (including 14 left on the masts), one died of exposure and 11 were killed by First Nations people. It must be said that eight were saved by Aboriginal people.

Dorothy Jones in 1961 wrote a history of Cardwell and was quite accurate in her extensive account of this disaster. She prefaces her 15-page chapter 23, *Wreck of the brig Maria*, with:

Not only was all Cardwell in uproar, the whole colony was aroused and news was printed in almost all country newspapers as it came to hand. The wreck of the brig Maria is not just part of Cardwell's history, it has become part of Queensland's history.

Unfortunately, most of the history of the *Maria* wreck as told by Europeans in newspapers is hyperbole and does not reflect the reality of events. Jones had it largely correct though when she said, when an attempt was made to recover the Captain's lifeboat and the sailors were rushed by ...

about 120 natives. ...They opened fire at eighty yards and in return were pelted with a volley of spears. When the affray became too hot the natives retreated leaving eight dead and eight wounded on the beach.

She then outlined some of the police retributions and those who read her history of the Cardwell Shire will see that she researched two of the retribution raids quite well and gained the testimony of Captain Moresby:

Moresby agreed to help Sheridan [Police Magistrate, Cardwell] to transport his police, Johnstone and troopers, to the scene of the latest murder, that of the Captain's men – 'there to inflict a decisive punishment...' sending with them three officers and twelve men of the H.M.S. Basilisk under the command of Lieutenant Francis Hayter'.

Moresby continued: 'The tribe was surprised before daylight and several unfortunate blacks were shot down by the native troopers, who showed an unrestrained ferocity that disgusted our officers, and the camps, in which some clothing and effects of the four murdered men were found, were destroyed. This work of justice over, the party returned to Cardwell taking with them a little native lad about six years old, whose father had been shot. Eventually he was taken to England and educated by Hayter. He died three years later of a lung disease.'

A version of this act of justice which would be repugnant to Moresby indicates that the few unfortunates killed amounted to almost total massacre of the tribe. Five of the tribe, all who escaped, later related their side of the story to an early settler (Chris Wildsoet).

The number of Djiru people in pre-European times who were living in the entire Clump Point district and the number at Bingil Bay is unknown, yet several researchers have estimated the populations. Interpreting the data, I estimate that the population for the district was approximately

⁴⁰ Peter Maiden, *The Shipwreck of the New Guinea Gold Explorers: The wreck of the brig Maria off Hinchinbrook Island 1872*, Central Queensland University Press, 2000, P. 142.

450 in 1860, and that number was greatly reduced before the Cuttens arrived in events such described here in 1872.

From Djiru testimony in 2022, there are merely 11 Djiru people living on their Traditional Lands today. Most Djiru people now live at Innisfail, Palm Island and Tully.

Les Alexander, who came to live at *Bicton* with his mother, Florence Alexander in 1913, told R. J. Taylor that, “The Bingil Bay tribe numbered 300-400 Aborigines ...”⁴¹ That number seems well above reality. By 1898, it was known that the population of Djiru at Bingil Bay was 80 – 100 because Senior-Inspector Douglas⁴² cited a report from officials who visited the farm and assessed the treatment of the Aborigines nearby:

In all between 80 and 100 Aborigines were camped on the beach near the Messrs Cutten’s orchards ... some 30 are engaged in work in the orchard and in coffee planting.

The number of Aboriginal people who had work with the Cuttens varied over time. Les Alexander⁴³ said that at the peak of the coffee boom the Cuttens employed 60-70 Aborigines to maintain *Bicton*. Len Cutten, in his letters, usually spoke of a number in the range of 25-30 workers. James was interviewed by the *British Australian* when in England in 1899 at the Great Britain Exhibition and told the reporter that in that season they employed 39 Aborigines; 26 boys and 13 girls who were indentured under Government supervision (ie on labour agreements).⁴⁴

Despite the Djiru-European conflict prior to *Bicton*, the Cuttens arrived with no false assumptions about their new neighbours. They did not come armed and ready for battle. In contrast, when Willoughby Smith and his team first landed at Clump Point in 1887 to inspect the Hyne selection, the Cuttens were quite amused to see them in a whaleboat and armed heavily, predicting severe conflict.



Djiru people circa 1906, Bingil Bay, from R. J. Taylor, *The Lost Plantation, A History of the Australian Tea Industry*.

⁴¹ R. J. Taylor, *The Lost Tea Plantation, A History of the Australian Tea Industry*, G K Bolton, Cairns, 1982, p. 12.

⁴² *North Queensland Register* (Cairns), 5 October 1898, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/83664975?searchTerm=%22Cутten%20Bros%22>

⁴³ R. J. Taylor, *The Lost Tea Plantation, A History of the Australian Tea Industry*, G K Bolton, Cairns, 1982, p. 28.

⁴⁴ *A Fruit Farm in Queensland, The North Queensland Register* (Townsville), 13 November 1899, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/83146044?searchTerm=A%20Fruit%20Farm%20in%20Queensland>

The Cuttens had been told the same false tales about the Djiru for they relayed the Cardwell prophecies to a visitor to *Bicton* in 1917.⁴⁵

When wiseacres heard of this enthusiastic Englishman and his wife and children going to settle there, they unanimously prophesied that the pioneers would be frizzled in stone ovens to the tune of war dances in double quick time. But they diplomatically surmounted these difficulties without friction.

That is, that they no doubt did their homework and found there was no danger, while Willoughby believed the rumours and was taking no chances.

The Cuttens never asked for police intervention, or ever needed it. They often engaged in verbal conflict with the Queensland government and its police force via letters to the press, mainly from Len, and mainly regarding the flawed laws and policies designed to ‘protect’ Aboriginal people. Len railed at how the police failed to ensure compliance with these laws to stop the use of opium residues to pay Aboriginal workers; a practice common among Chinese banana farmers in the Tully River valley.⁴⁶

Len Cutten wrote to a newspaper about two men charged with the murder of an Aboriginal and spoke very harshly of the Government’s policies and the inability of the police to protect settlers.⁴⁷ He was advocating for other settlers rather than himself and charged the State government with ‘blood-guiltiness’ stating that their policy was to give the ‘black troopers’ guns and to ‘send them periodically to scour the country and shoot every black that they see.’

Len was one of the few settlers to speak out about the brutal police practices in the north. To make the government sit up and listen, he concluded that the settlers should have the same right as the police – to ‘kill any black at any time or place.’ That was well over the top and he admitted his hyperbole in later correspondence⁴⁸ saying, ... ‘it could only be that the earnestness of our feelings prompted us to put the matter in that plain language which would be most likely to arrest your attention.’

Len loved to use such opportunities to create headlines and raise awareness of issues and he was focused on the brutality and inefficiency of the Government and its police force. The government sent people to investigate the situation and disagreed with Len’s assertion that the Aboriginal people were starving.

There were no severe conflicts reported in newspapers between the Djiru people and the *Bicton* settlers. Len Cutten recalled an event⁴⁹ where the Aboriginals at the beach came running to say there was a large crocodile in the shallows that had nearly eaten someone. Len rushed off with the rifle and took a shot at it from a distance and surprised himself by hitting its head and instantly killing it. He laughed at the memory and thought it helped make him look invincible.

⁴⁵ *Sketcher. The Pioneers of Bicton. A Tragedy of the Fertile Far North. The Queenslander* (Brisbane), 29 December 1917, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/22345601?searchTerm=Sketcher.%20The%20Pioneers%20Of%20Bicton>

⁴⁶ Leonard M. Cutten, *Correspondence: To the Home Secretary per favor the “Northern Miner”, The Northern Miner (Charters Towers), 2 August 1910*, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/80261001?searchTerm=%22Leonard%20M%20Cutten%22>

⁴⁷ Leonard M Cutten, *Protection for Northern Settlers, The Brisbane Courier*, 23 December 1886, accessed on Trove January 2022 at: [1886https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/4492193?searchTerm=Protection%20for%20Northern%20Settlers](https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/4492193?searchTerm=Protection%20for%20Northern%20Settlers)

⁴⁸ *Alleged starving blacks, An official view of the question, The Week* (Brisbane), 4 January 1890, accessed on Trove, February 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/172114008?searchTerm=Alleged%20starving%20blacks>

⁴⁹ Miss Constance Mackness, MBE, *Clump Point and District, An historical record of Tam O’Shanter, South Mission beach, Mission Beach, Bingil Bay, Garners Beach and Kurrimine*, G. K. Bolton, Cairns, 1983, p. 68.

At times there were tense and angry moments when the Cuttens did unthinking things like cutting down a precious Djiru food tree unnecessarily, but even that seemingly caused no physical confrontation.

Arthur Garner recalled an event and a conversation with Len Cutten in the early days while Djiru were still camped on the beach at Bingil Bay and relayed this story to Constance Mackness:⁵⁰

... angry mutterings came from them at the felling of a big bean tree. They had joyously accepted the regulation amount of flour and trade tobacco paid as compensation for the destruction of a native food tree, but, to the sawmiller their mood seemed an ugly one, but Cutten was quite unruffled; and the blacks went off, more or less pacified, after a few words of good humoured argument from him. He admitted that, in the early days at Bicton, the blacks had been a 'bit difficult' whenever a wonga tree or a bean had been cut down, 'which probably means', says Garner, 'that they went close to tearing him to bits'. Cutten laughed at the suggestion; Bicton blacks had never been really savage. 'It is just that they weren't exactly pleased about it – or with us.'

On reflection, Len may have been wiser to have spoken to the Djiru before he cut a food tree down as they had over 3,000 acres of land and leaving a few clumps of fruit trees standing would surely not have caused much of a problem for the farm.

Confrontation could have occurred when a severe drought left the Cuttens short on supplies. Len sought assistance from the government to feed the Djiru people who were camped on the farm yet not employed there or not supported by those employed on the farm. They moved some of the camp away from *Bicton* which must have been a difficult and unpleasant occurrence. Between 20 and 40 people re-settled on a creek at Brookes Beach about a mile north. In response to a letter to the press from Len Cutten, the government visited this camp and deemed these people fit and capable of looking after themselves and merely issued them with some clothing for the older people.⁵¹

An article was published widely in newspapers in 1899 about the *Bicton* coffee farm and it described the way the Cutten family treated the Aboriginal people.⁵² The language was filled with the common negative stereotypes of the day, yet leaving aside the hopefully, inadvertent racial insults, the essence of the report was positive regarding the treatment of Djiru people at *Bicton*:

From this hasty sketch of a coastal coffee plantation, it will perhaps be admitted that men who, like the Messrs Cutten, take up land and establish upon it profitable industries and who at the same time improve the condition of the primitive inhabitants, deserve well of us all The country wants more of such men ... Labour is, of course, an important item in such an undertaking, and the brothers have, by kindness, fair treatment, the payment of regular wages for regular work, overcome the philosophical disinclination of the natives of the country to manual work and have in command quite a strong contingent of erstwhile savages.

⁵⁰ As above, p. 68.

⁵¹ *Feeding The Northern Blacks*, *The Brisbane Courier*, 3 January 1890, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/3512787?searchTerm=%22The%20Northern%20Blacks%22>

⁵² *A Coastal Coffee Plantation*, *The Northern Miner* (Charters Towers), 29 April 1899, accessed on Trove January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/84867138?searchTerm=A%20Coastal%20Coffee%20Plantation>

In 1897, police from Geraldton (Innisfail as it is known in 2022) visited the Cutten farms and interviewed people, including the Djiru, about conditions and treatment of Aboriginals there. The findings were positive:⁵³

All [Aboriginals] were comfortably clothed, appeared to be well contented with their lot and obedient. Of these, some 30 are engaged in work in the orchard and in coffee planting, and receive on an average 10s. to 12s. a month and rations, and are under agreements drawn up by the Police Magistrate at Geraldton under the Aboriginals' Protection Act. The blacks' children gave evidence of being well fed and carefully looked after.

Len was a prolific writer of letters to the press and to politicians, governments and the Chambers of Commerce. While much of his writing involved advocacy for north Queensland's farmers, the most common issues he wrote about after farming and land selection were about the harsh treatment of Aboriginals in the north.

We have probably not uncovered every letter Len Cutten wrote yet found 11 that he wrote on Aboriginal issues and two written by James Cutten also advocating for Aboriginal people. Len stated on many occasions, they employed Aboriginal workers at *Bicton* and were often unable to gain a response from the government when they applied for the required employment agreements.

In a letter published under the title, *The Case of the Aboriginal* in 1901, Len wrote about the difficulties the Aboriginal people faced and the inadequacy of the government's response to their plight.⁵⁴ He argued that better outcomes could be achieved for the Aboriginal people if the government had, *people who took a kindly interest in the Aboriginal [and were] more involved in their care*'. He spoke at length about the 'Protection Laws' and their flaws and argued that the farmers employing Aboriginals could make a difference if they treated the workers equally and provided support for the unemployed among the tribe when able to do so:

The effect is not to the advantage of the Aboriginal, for the value of his services is thus rendered almost worthless ... The situation would be greatly altered ... if the Colonial Secretary were to instruct the police magistrates to treat the Aboriginal in every respect as a white man in regard to agreements made with them, always satisfying himself that they understood the nature of an agreement with an employer, which in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred they thoroughly do. Added to this it would be easy for the Aboriginal Protector to arrange that those employing the men of a tribe should look after the welfare of those too old or too young belonging to the tribe to be useful workers.

Len stepped up his rhetoric on Aboriginal 'Protection' in 1904. He was becoming ever more strident:⁵⁵

Will you permit me to draw the attention of the Home Secretary in particular to the shocking methods – or want of administration – of the Aboriginals Protection Act in this district. Well might the blacks exclaim, "I have forty protectors, and no one to protect me." It is a fact that from Cardwell to Cairns it is as easy to obtain opium as it is to purchase a stick of tobacco. ... The Chinese are the largest employers of blacks in the district. They never pay them money. It is

⁵³ *North Queensland Register* (Cairns), 5 October 1898, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at:

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/83664975?searchTerm=%22Cutten%20Bros%22>

⁵⁴ Leonard M. Cutten, *The Case of the Aboriginal, The Queenslander* (Brisbane), 17 August 1901 accessed on Trove, January 2022 at:

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/21265539?searchTerm=The%20Case%20of%20the%20Aboriginal>

⁵⁵ Leonard M. Cutten, *Letters, Aboriginals "Protection" Act, The Queenslander* (Brisbane), 27 February 1904, accessed on Trove, February 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/22261463?searchTerm=Letters.%20Aboriginal%20Protection%20Act>

safe to say that at least three hundred Aboriginals are working for Chinese and Malays today and it is a foregone conclusion that every night they receive a dose of opium-tea; that is a decoction of opium (the refuse of opium pipes) and sugar and water. By the Act, these people are prohibited from employing Aboriginals. ... Last year I had employed some twenty-five or thirty, as usual I applied for permits in the usual way. I have not got permits yet. ... The same thing happened the year before.

In 1905, Len continued to apply the blow torch to the government and police:⁵⁶

Will you permit me to say that before the Act be repealed that it ought to be put in force ... Whilst Dr. Roth [Aboriginal Protector] ... is making or getting made regulations that practically prohibit the white employer from engaging an Aboriginal, he undoubtedly fosters and encourages the vile trafficking of their women by the blacks for the sake of opium, with the consequent effect of causing numerous deaths by poisoning and diseases, which are concurrent with reckless prostitution. Murders [are] committed and no one punished ...

He continued the theme relentlessly in 1910 with a letter to the press again.⁵⁷ His letters were seldom brief and this one exceeded 1,100 words as was common when he wrote. He was responding to earlier letters about duty on bananas. He reverted to the old favourite topic of Chinese banana growers and their impacts on Aboriginals and on other farmers needing Aboriginal labour. He did not deny that some European farmers were also engaging in the use of opium as part payment for wages.

The interesting thing here is that Len Cutten publicly acknowledges that he dispossessed the Aboriginals of their land and went on to add that those who do so have an obligation to provide employment if that is within their means. Not many settlers were prepared to make such statements in 1910:

My firm laid down a coffee plantation, to be exact it measured 101 acres. We were wholly dependent on Aboriginals to gather the crop. Before the Chinese banana growers came we had plenty of labourers available. Within three years of the advent of the Chinese and their opium pots, we had perforce to abandon coffee culture from dearth of Aboriginals to gather the crop. They were all with the Chinese. I am still employing a score or more. I am not ashamed; we white people have dispossessed these people of their lands, and in my opinion the white settler should never refuse to give the Aboriginal employment if his means enable him to do so.

Soon after, Len wrote another letter on a similar theme, damning the Asian banana farmers and the government's failure to enforce the laws.⁵⁸

The vast preponderance of them live with the Chinese and other Asiatics. The boys trade their women to them for food and opium. A boy who has no young woman to earn him an easy living has perforce to work and is paid with opium The Aboriginal Protection Act was passed to prevent this. Within the area I speak of, there are, at a mild computation, a thousand breaches of this Act committed by Asiatics every day in the year with about one prosecution per month, and one conviction per year.

⁵⁶ Leonard M. Cutten, *Correspondence, Treatment of our Aborigines, The Northern Miner* (Charters Towers), 10 October 1905 accessed on Trove, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/79071866?searchTerm=Treatment%20of%20our%20Aborigines>

⁵⁷ Leonard M. Cutten, *The Banana Question, The Northern Miner* (Charters Towers), 21 March 1910, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/80245468?searchTerm=The%20Banana%20Question>

⁵⁸ Leonard M. Cutten, *Correspondence: To the Home Secretary per favor the "Northern Miner", The Northern Miner* (Charters Towers), 2 August 1910, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/80261001?searchTerm=%22Leonard%20M%20Cutten%22>

After this constant volley by Len Cutten, the police and government decided the best defence was attack and they ordered an investigation of the *Bicton* operation. The police provided a report to the Home Secretary in an all-out effort to neutralise Len's growing influence. The Home Secretary, using Parliamentary privilege, read selected highlights of the police report to Parliament. *The Worker* (Wagga), which was also at odds with Len Cutten over his views on unions, made the most of the moment and eagerly published a long article⁵⁹ with bold headlines: *Treatment of Blacks. Sensational Revelations in North Queensland. Allegations against a J.P. A Scathing Report.*

I have now to disclose another evil (which I discovered when visiting Clump Point) to which the blacks are subject. Mr. Cutten is a justice of the peace; he grows fruit and has a small sawmill. The following deductions have been made by me: 1st That the Chinese on Maria Creeks and Liverpool Creeks and the Tully River employ Aborigines and give them charcoal opium. 2nd That owing to constant patrols and prosecutions, and evil is minimized on the Tully River. 4th That the blacks at Clump Point, Maria and Liverpool Creeks are not under close enough police supervision. 5th That Mr. Cutten has almost twenty blacks employed, but not under agreement. 6th That he, the employer, is allowed to pay the blacks direct. 7th That he pays most of their wages in rum. 8th That a number of blacks get drunk on Saturdays. 9th That owing to the rum, wounding has taken place. 10th ... Mr. Cutten, though a justice, took no steps to have the guilty ones punished. 11th That two of Mr. Cutten's employees are living with two little Aboriginal girls about the age of ten years.

There will have been elements of truth in these allegations, but while the newspaper stated that there, 'probably will be further proceedings', there were not. The government and police would have fared badly in the courtroom and the publicity war that any prosecution would have caused for Len's allegations were substantially true. Further, several previous police inspections and reports of *Bicton* operations would provide solid evidence that the Cuttens largely abided by the laws and treated the Aboriginal people working for them well compared to many farmers.

It is highly likely that by 1910 that the Cuttens did augment the wages of their Aboriginal workers with grog to combat the continuing use of opium residues by the Chinese. However, if the police and the government as well as the Wagga newspaper had hoped to neutralize the influence of Len Cutten, then they would have been utterly disappointed. By then, after 25 years on the land, facing the most severe of challenges, and being such a vigorous and effective advocate for north Queensland farmers, Len's voice was well respected and known and most readers would understand that this was largely a well-orchestrated attempt to discredit Len Cutten and neutralize his influence.

The Chief Protector of Aborigines, Mr. R. B. Howard had also inspected the *Bicton* farm and reported on the treatment of their treatment of Aborigines and, after interviewing the workers there, was happy with the Cuttens:⁶⁰

At Clump Point I interviewed Mr. Cutten, who has a coffee plantation and employs some twelve or fifteen natives. These boys are well treated and look well. They told me they liked their employer and the work.

James Cutten also wrote in support of Aborigines. In the first titled, *Blacks' Blankets* he made an impassioned plea for fairness in the delivery of blankets by the government and accused those in

⁵⁹ *Treatment of Blacks, Sensational Revelations in North Queensland. The Worker* (Wagga) 27 October 1910, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/145737100?searchTerm=Treatment%20of%20Blacks>.

⁶⁰ *Northern Aborigines, The Queenslander* (Brisbane), 19 October 1907, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/22274652?searchTerm=Northern%20Aborigines.%20The%20Chief%20Protector%27s%20Inspection>

control of blanket distribution of corruption and more.⁶¹ In other letters, James referred to some of the Aboriginal workers at *Bicton* as friends of his and indicated that he respected their opinions and testimony. James spoke of some friends who were on Palm Island and suggested that in the investigation of a crime, 'I would have a yarn with some of my coloured friends and in the course of a few hours I would learn more than the police or any other authority will ever learn as to the real facts.'⁶²

In 1899, he spoke to the British press⁶³ about the fruit farm and the Aboriginal people they employed:

The household consists of the four Messrs Cutten and their mother and sister, with thirty-nine Aborigines attached, twenty-six 'boys' and thirteen 'gins,' who are indentured under Government supervision as labourers receiving 10s and 6s per month, respectively. The Aborigines have their camp on the beach and make fairly efficient and faithful servants; by way of rations they receive flour, sugar, potatoes, and bananas, and are also very fond of meat, of which they receive their share when any animal is taken to the block. The Cutten family object to 'pidgin English' and have taught their black allies to speak the language in the correct form.



From R. J. Taylor, *The Lost Plantation: A History of the Australian tea Industry*.

Overall, European records of the Cutten's interactions with and treatment of Aborigines are largely positive. With the benefit of hindsight, no one would suggest they did everything right by the Djiru people. They acknowledged in the press that they had dispossessed the tribe at Bingil Bay. They

⁶¹ James W. Cutten, *Letters to the Editor, Blacks' Blankets*, *The Queenslander* (Brisbane), 30 August 1892, accessed on Trove, January 2022, at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/19826452?searchTerm=Blacks%27%20Blankets>

⁶² Jas. W. Cutten, *Correspondence, More Palm Island*, *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 12 February 1930, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/60758936?searchTerm=More%20Palm%20Island>

⁶³ *A Fruit Farm in Queensland*, *The North Queensland Register* (Townsville), 13 November 1899, accessed on Trove, February 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/83146044?searchTerm=A%20Fruit%20Farm%20in%20Queensland>

recognized the value of the labour provided by the Aboriginal people and also acknowledged their own obligations to employ them when they could to afford it. They educated the workers in farm practices and the English language.⁶⁴ James had friends among the Djiru and respected them⁶⁵, so the Cuttens were probably well ahead of the average European settler in terms of the fair treatment of Aboriginal people.

After allowing their police force and the settlers to run amok in the Cardwell region for 50 years, killing and dispersing Aboriginal people and burning their camps at will without referral to the courts, the Queensland Government decided that that they would 'protect' them from harm. They built the Hull River Aboriginal Settlement in 1914 at a site at what is now South Mission Beach.

Without engaging with First Nations people to determine their preferred outcomes, the government took them from their Traditional Lands across Cape York and incarcerated them. The history of that establishment is told by Ken Campbell in *Superintendent Kenny: The Hull River Aboriginal Settlement*.⁶⁶ The settlement was blown away in the 1918 cyclone and those Aboriginal people who did not die in the storm, flee to the bush, or have themselves recaptured were sent to a new reserve at Palm Island near Townsville.

Some people looked back on this era and spoke of the Cuttens' lives as being a tragedy. While I agree that there are elements of their story that are sad, analysis of the full history of *Bicton* later in this paper shows they largely lived happily at *Bicton*.

The Djiru story is the tragedy.

After reading everything I could unearth on the history of the Aboriginal people of our district, I admit I was shocked at how badly we had treated the First Nations people in the north of Queensland. After reading about other districts of Australia I gained the impression that the disastrous depopulations and dispossessions were similar across the continent yet perhaps it was only in north Queensland that the police caused so much of the mayhem. The impression was crushed when I read the work of Ray Gibbons who reported that this picture was common across the country.⁶⁷

Perhaps a few last words and thoughts from the district's earliest historian, Miss Constance Mackness would allow us to reflect upon this sad history.:

A lady from Narragon tells how, in her early twenties, she followed the old track to call on Mrs. Garner. Under shady trees on the northern foreshore of Bingil Bay, there was a solitary gunyah, with a rough lean-to against one of the trees. A pink silk umbrella hung from a low limb, and from near the two lowly dwellings there poured a stream of lean and hungry looking dogs, snarling and barking furiously. Out from the gunyah came a plump, cheerful looking old [Aboriginal lady], pipe in mouth. She laid about her half heartedly with a stick, then turned to reassure her white sister in surprisingly good English: "No need to be scared, Missus; they wouldn't hurt a flea even – just barking for something to do." On the rocky end

⁶⁴ *A Fruit Farm in Queensland, The North Queensland Register* (Townsville), 13 November 1899, accessed on Trove, February 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/83146044?searchTerm=A%20Fruit%20Farm%20in%20Queensland>

⁶⁵ Jas. W. Cutten, *Correspondence, More Palm Island, Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 12 February 1930, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/60758936?searchTerm=More%20Palm%20Island>

⁶⁶ Ken Campbell, *Superintendent Kenny: The Hull River Aboriginal Settlement*, Mission Beach Historical Society H025, 2022.

⁶⁷ Ray Gibbons, *The Australian Land War and Aboriginal Depopulation*, 2015, accessed February 2022 at: https://www.academia.edu/11857662/The_Australian_land_war_and_Aboriginal_depopulation?pop_sutd=false

of Ninny's Point, the northern limit of the bay, the [lady's] black mate was spearing their dinner. Seven smallish fish the visitor counted, one above the other on the spear. Whereas he was garbed in the briefest of shorts and nothing else, his good lady wore a pair of over-long moleskin trousers, with a floral frock that covered them to the knees. It was the Bay's last sight of these simple, kindly, carefree people: the police came during that very week to take them to the Palm Islands Aboriginal Settlement.

Mackness went on to wonder about whether this removal was really necessary:

Paternal interest in their welfare was the Government's motive; but to any Aboriginal tribe the locality that served as its hunting ground and camping ground was not only its home, but its homeland: removal to the Palm Islands was exile. It would have been far kinder to give the tiny remnant of the Bingil Bay tribe a weekly ration of flour, tea, sugar and tobacco to which employment had accustomed them, and let them supplement it with seafoods for themselves. With the land bringing in no income at all, there was no employment left for them; but they might have been pensioned off at home.

Constance Mackness assumes that the government's policy intent was to protect Aboriginal people. I doubt that was the core motive. Aboriginal people had no vote. The settlers with the vote wanted them removed to make their own lives easier and to retain their land rights so this was achieved by removal of the Aboriginals despite its adverse impacts.

The concept of leaving the remaining Djiru people on their Traditional Lands probably had merit and the State owned 4,000 acres of land near the Hull River marked as 'Reserve for the use of the Aboriginal Inhabitants of the State.' Someone in government must have thought that was a fairer way to resolve the immense dilemmas that the invasion caused. What a shame that they recanted on that tacit promise and quit that land.

If they had asked the Djiru people what they wanted a more sustainable future may have been achievable.

We will never know.

THE BICTON FAMILY

Imagine if we had access to some phone calls or conversations between the Cuttens to learn more about them and what they were talking about. Maybe this was a typical phone call in 1889 (there were no phones there at that time):

Margaret: Good morning Alice. I'm so glad you called. I was thinking about what we will do for Herb's birthday – he will be 34 this year!

Alice: Laughs. That's getting up there. Broughton just gave me a flash new Galaxy S22 and I wanted to give it a burl.

Margaret: Aren't you just a fancy Nancy. Henry told me not to waste our money, so I still have my old i12 but it's OK. Better than Len's though; he's clinging to his ancient i8. He's dropped it in the creek 100 times by now I reckon and cursed every time it rang.

Alice: Really? It always sounds crackly; it's a wonder it still goes.

Margaret: That's not his phone crackling, it's the tower at Clump Point. They only have 4G you know. Poor things.

Alice: Giggles. Len will be cranky about that injustice. He'll be texting the PM next!

Margaret: I was thinking we should nominate Herb for 'The Farmer Needs a Wife'. That would get him going; it's time he found himself a woman; all the boys do is work, work, work.

Alice: That's a terrific idea but he wouldn't go on the show, too shy. Why don't we just hook him up on 'Tinder'? We have some good photos of him in his snappy new double breasted suit...

Perhaps not. The world has changed a bit in 136 years. We cannot know what the Cuttens would think of our self-obsession and fixation on mobile phones today yet would expect them to be unimpressed. Fortunately, we have many letters, newspaper clips and web articles written about them, so we can get a glimpse of who they were.

How long each of them were at *Bicton* or in the district provides some perspective and in some cases we only know the answer approximately from the electoral rolls:

- Herb and Len: Cutten 45 years *Bicton*
- Les Alexander 37 years *Bicton* + 8 years nearby
- Florence Cutten/Alexander 37 years *Bicton* + 2 years nearby
- Sid Cutten 38 years *Bicton*
- Alick Alexander 22 years *Bicton* + 8 years district
- Margaret Cutten snr 21 years *Bicton*
- James Cutten 20 years *Bicton*
- Jessie Cutten 19 years *Bicton*
- Margaret Alexander 6 years *Bicton* + 24 years district
- Fred Cutten 4 years *Bicton*
- Ken Alexander 36 years *Bicton*/district
- Sid Alexander 30 years *Bicton*/district
- Charles Alexander 30 years *Bicton*/district

Of the four Cutten sons, only James married. James had a daughter, Isabel who did not marry, so Frederick Cutten has no direct descendants named Cutten today. Fred came from a large family of ten children and at least one of his brothers (Edward) had sons, so the Cutten name lives on through the many cousins.

Six of the original Cutten family were buried at the family graves in Bingil Bay: Frederick and wife Margaret (nee Holtzkamp) with Jessie, Herbert, Leonard and Sidney. James was buried at Toowong in Brisbane and Alice at Hemmant in Brisbane. Florence was buried in Tully and Margaret in Dalby.

In this chapter, are details of documents written about their lives and threads of similarity that enable some conclusions to be drawn on their characters, beliefs and actions. Conclusions can largely be drawn by the reader, but a few obvious highlights are outlined before disclosing the detail by person.

As farmers they were undoubtedly, committed, creative, hardworking and skilled; they produced quality outcomes in a wide variety of crops. They were not only accomplished agriculturalists, but were also good at marketing their produce, and for coffee they excelled at manufacture. They were clever problem solvers and found a way to make the most of their opportunities.

It is difficult to generalise about many individuals but there were characteristics that were *Cutteneque*. They were widely admired for their congeniality and welcoming of visitors and new settlers. Anyone who came to the district was warmly received and assisted where possible.

Their relationships with the Djiru people seemed also to be reasonable in the circumstances. They appear to have treated them with some respect despite their language being infused with the general racist stereotypes of the era. They even made some effort to educate their workers in the English language. There is no evidence of them learning the Djiru language. Les Alexander seems to have interacted meaningfully with Djiru people and enjoyed their company. James had several Djiru people as friends.

The family valued education and culture and continued learning all their lives, reading what they could of world affairs. They enjoyed music and literature and the company of others.

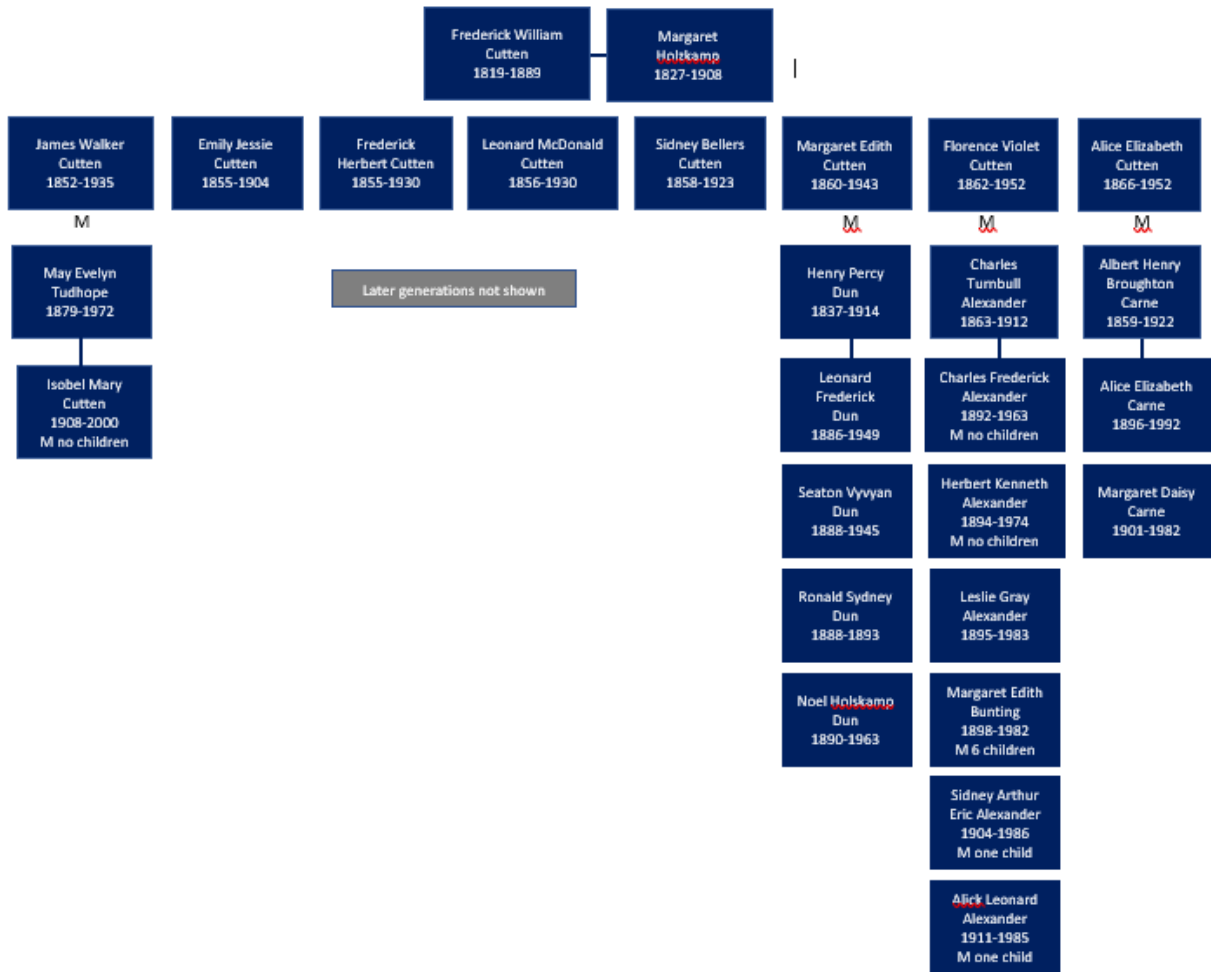
They met with many influential people and engaged well with them earning their respect. Meeting with Percy Pease when he was at school in Townsville was one such moment and the family enjoyed a long and fruitful relationship with him. The meeting at Percy's school was another innovative moment for the Cuttens, where they took their produce to the school and conducted a lecture demonstrating how important north Queensland agriculture was to Australia.

The five main characters in the research are Len, Herb, James and Florence Cutten and Florence's son Les who seems so like his uncles Herb and Len. Sid and James had their foibles and perhaps they were not quite as urbane, engaging and popular as the others.

Above all else, the Cuttens were committed to their family and their district. They did everything humanly possible to ensure that both prospered.

There is less of the Cutten 'girls' in the records; merely a bias of the era. The overarching impression is that the women of this family were equally capable and admirable people and contributed greatly

to the energy and outcomes of the *Bicton* family. Florence along with her son Les were the most akin to Herb, Len and Sid in nature, skill and determination. Together they were a formidable force.



Partial Family Tree: Cutten Family.



Frederick William Cutten, image from *Ancestry.com.au* (shared by Craig Alexander)

Frederick William Cutten 1819 - 1889

Fred Cutten, the initiator of the great adventure, arrived from Islington, London via the Darling Downs, Queensland when the house, *Bicton* was completed in 1886. He died 7 July 1889 at age 70. He had been ill for some time with ‘tropical fevers,’ so his life was cut short by the rugged tropical environment.

He lived for only three years at *Bicton* yet must, nonetheless, have enjoyed seeing his family so active and engaged in their exciting enterprise. He lived to see only one of his children married (Margaret). Fred was buried on the edge of the escarpment overlooking the forest and the Coral Sea. The service was read by Willoughby Smith who lived at Clump Point proper and was the Cuttens only European neighbour at that time. The burial ground is now a heritage site and was listed as a nature reserve in 1979. It is known as the *Cutten Brothers’ Graves*.⁶⁸

Emily Jessie Cutten 1855 - 1904

Jessie, as she was known as, twin sister of Herb, did not marry or leave *Bicton*. One interview suggests that she did return to Europe for a visit with her mother, but this has not been confirmed. She died only 49 years old after being hospitalized for a mystery illness, perhaps heat apoplexy,⁶⁹ in 1904. She was visiting her brother Herb in the Geraldton hospital at the time and became terminally ill when she returned home. Jessie was buried beside her father at *Bicton*.

Margaret Cutten nee Holzkamp 1827 - 1908

Margaret Cutten senior was distraught at the loss of her husband in 1889 and left *Bicton* to recover for a year with her daughter Margaret Dun living in Irvingdale near Dalby. While there, she booked a trip back to England with her sister-in-law Jane.⁷⁰ They were booked on the *Quetta* but arrived too late to board it. A stroke of luck as the ship sank off Thursday Island losing all but three of the people on board. Jane and Margaret travelled later on the *Dacca*, Margaret staying a further year in England.

Margaret Cutten was always spoken of as a welcoming and convivial hostess. She was well educated and spoke seven languages.⁷¹ There can be little doubt that she continued the education of her younger children when they arrived in Australia.

The family were known for their generosity to new settlers and their willingness to invite visitors into their comfortable home at *Bicton*. A reporter on a cruise on the S.S. *Palmer* visited them⁷² and reported that:

Enquiries enlightened me to the fact that Clump Point is noted for extensive fruit cultivation. This I learnt from a dear old soul named Mrs. Cutten, a dweller at Clump Point, and talking to

⁶⁸ Cassowary Coast Regional Council, *Local Heritage Places*, May 2013, accessed January 2022 at <https://www.cassowarycoast.qld.gov.au/downloads/file/2005/local-heritage-places-may-2013pdf>

⁶⁹ *The Northern Miner* (Charters Towers), 20 December 1904, accessed on Trove, February 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/79043653?searchTerm=Miss%20Cutten%20of%20Clump%20Point>

⁷⁰ R. J. Taylor, *The Lost Plantation: A History of the Australian Tea Industry*, G. K. Bolton, Cairns, 1982, p. 16.

⁷¹ *Obituary, Mrs. Florence Violet Alexander, Cairns Post*, 10 December 1952, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/42763939?searchTerm=%22Obituary.%20Mrs%20Florence%20Violet%20Alexander.%22>

⁷² *From Cairns to Townsville, By the S.S. Palmer, Cairns Post* 19 March 1890, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/39431142?searchTerm=From%20Cairns%20to%20Townsville>

her I came to the conclusion that if she was a fair sample of the inhabitants they grow ladies as well as fruit.

There was an obituary for Margaret Cutten in the Northern Miner:⁷³

... none the least of the pleasures of a trip to Bicton was the conversation of the venerable hostess, who came of a good English family and possessed great conversational powers; she was a great student and admirer of Dickens. ... It will be many years before the venerable hostess of Bicton will be forgotten by those who were fortunate enough to enjoy her hospitality.

Edmund Banfield read the burial service for Mrs. Margaret Cutten's ceremony.

Sidney Bellers Cutten 1858 - 1923

Sid's second given name was Bellers. That was the family name of his paternal grandmother.

Late in 1917, Sid incurred major injuries⁷⁴ when a tree fell on him dislocating his hip, breaking his collar bone and slicing open his head. Sid was clearing the land on one of their outer selections to ensure that they did not lose it through non-compliance with the terms of the Land Selection Act.⁷⁵ He was carried seven miles to a motorboat and taken to hospital. Sid did not die from those injuries as some suggest, rather he contracted malaria⁷⁶ soon after that. The disease state endured and was probably the cause of his death in 1923.

There is little in the records of Sid Cutten as he was not one to write letters. He appears as the quietest of the brothers and everything points to his being very closely aligned with the thinking and values of Herb and Len, of whom considerably more is known.

Sid's estate was granted to Len and Herb; the value was £635.⁷⁷

⁷³ *The Northern Miner* (Charters Towers), 8 October 1908, accessed on Trove, January 2022.

⁷⁴ *The Brisbane Courier*, 21 December 1917, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/20203715?searchTerm=S.%20H.%20Cutten>.

⁷⁵ R. J. Taylor, *The Lost Plantation: A History of the Australian Tea Industry*, G. K. Bolton, Cairns, 1982, p. 28.

⁷⁶ *Innisfail Pioneer Indisposed*, *The Northern Herald* (Charters Towers), accessed on Trove, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/40172212?searchTerm=Innisfail%20Pioneer%20Indisposed>.

⁷⁷ *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 11 January 1927, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/60738180?searchTerm=Sidney%20Bellers%20Cutten>

Frederick Herbert Cutten 1855 – 1930



'Herbert Frederick Cutten, A dashing figure in the eighties.' From R. J. Taylor, *The Lost Plantation: A History of the Australian Tea Industry*.

Herb, as he was known as, was a literate man who had no difficulty writing, yet he seldom wrote letters to newspapers as his brother Len did so often. As R. J. Taylor noted in his book on the tea industry (cited above), Herb was a good looking man and dressed smartly for occasions. No images of James Cutten have been found, but Herb, Len and Sid all looked alike, all with the bushy beards that were in vogue in their day.

Some have mused about why it was that Herb, Len and Sid did not marry and one can only assume that their focus was so fixed on making *Bicton* succeed that they had no time to seek female company. The answer to that dilemma is unknown, but even James only married as an afterthought at 55 years age hoping to bring home some female companionship for his mother. He corresponded with his girlfriend for many years before deciding to propose after his sister died. James had far more opportunity to meet women, as he was in Europe for about two years (two trips) while the other three Cutten men continued the farming grind.

When Herb was elected as the Secretary for the new Progress Association of Clump Point, he wrote to the *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, firmly in his sights was the Johnstone Shire Council:⁷⁸

Moreover, we claim that we are entitled to some consideration from the Government, which levies tremendous taxes from us, for which we receive no adequate return. We have no roads other than what we have ourselves made, and the country is seamed with deep and ever-running creeks; the Shire Council, which collects a large sum annually from us has not for the past 20 years expended a single shilling in the making or maintenance of any road the settlers use or are likely to make use of.

⁷⁸ *Clump Point Wants*, *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 11 April 1912, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/58826826?searchTerm=Clump%20Point%20Wants>

Herb was similar in his views to Len. When Len wrote, he often spoke as ‘we’ referring to the three brothers and his sister Florence, that is, the Cuttens remaining at *Bicton*. Herb died in February 1930 after being admitted to Nurse Finlay’s private hospital with ‘heart trouble.’

It is odd that James did not attend for he was not a great distance away but the records show no instances of James ever returning to *Bicton* after he sold his share of the venture. Perhaps he left on adverse terms. The ceremony was performed by close family friend, Mr. G. E. Markwell, a solicitor from Innisfail.

Herb’s obituary:⁷⁹

A grand type of the Far North citizen passed away in Innisfail on Sunday last. ... It would take volumes to tell of the many and marvellous vicissitudes of life through which the Cuttens passed, but the story would be fraught with many a thrill, and read more like a romance than a determined work of a family of plucky people who, undaunted fought their way through and established themselves on a sound footing in a beautiful settlement on the coast, which is now attracting the public in vast numbers, who are availing themselves of holidays and week-end visits there, and are received with every kind attention the Cuttens can show them. It was the special delight of Frederick Herbert and his surviving brother Leonard, to meet them and show them round, but neither of them spoke much of their past experiences and the many frowns of fortune which they had to suffer. ... The name of Cutten is a household word with all people of the district and is always referred to in kindly and even affectionate terms, for nobody ever visits them at Bicton but who has hospitality showered upon her or him.

It is almost universally regretted that none of the last three brothers were married, and perpetuated the family name, but there is one thing certain – that the good name will survive many generations at Bicton, and one of the sisters, Mrs. Alexander, a real downright Cutten, with her fine family of grown boys, will certainly perpetuate the family traditions through her sons.

Leonard McDonald Cutten 1856 – 1930

Len Cutten was a prolific letter writer and was quite successful in having his letters published widely in newspapers. In later life, the reporters sought him out and sometimes had a chat about affairs in north Queensland and at *Bicton*. The papers wrote stories of *Bicton* in romantic tones from about 1918 onwards. In one of those chats,⁸⁰ Len, while he was visiting Cairns, told reporters at the end of the interview that he had attended London University before he left for Queensland. That is unlikely, for Len was only 13 years old in the full university year before they left England. It is more likely that he attended one of the private schools affiliated with that university. That interview was the last we heard from Len Cutten in the newspapers.

Despite leaving school at only 13 years of age, he had an excellent grip on language and literature and sometimes capably cited legal terms. His provocative letter in December 1886, where he was

⁷⁹ *In Memoriam. Frederick Herbert Cutten, Johnstone River Advocate and Innisfail News*, 25 February 1930, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/212538621?searchTerm=In%20Memoriam.%20Frederick%20Herbert%20Cutten>.

⁸⁰ *Link With The Past, Clump Point Settlement, Interesting Chat, The Northern Herald* (Cairns), 8 May 1929, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/149645564?searchTerm=Link%20With%20The%20Past.%20Clump%20Point%20Settlement>.

hammering the Queensland Government for what he saw as their policy of exterminating the Aboriginals using its 'Native Police,' he used the legal maxim, *Qui facit per alium facit per se*, (He who acts through another does the act himself) to press home his point that the government was culpable.⁸¹

He was often provocative and used humour and barbs effectively to fend off critics, as when someone from Cardwell tried to take credit for his proposal for a Soldiers Settlement in the area:⁸²

... a certain proposition re returned soldiers has been dubbed a "Cardwell proposal.". ... "Cardwellite" appears to think that to be a landowner should debar anyone advocating a scheme that will benefit every resident in North Queensland. He evidently belongs to that "party" that believes every landowner is a criminal, and ought to be taxed out of existence. ... If "Cardwellite" deems it an outrage that I should at the same time endeavour to assist the soldiers who have fought for us he is welcome to his opinions. Cardwell has great natural resources; 40 years ago it had its Court House and its bonded stores, was the centre of the North Queensland pilot service, was a town before Innisfail was surveyed. To-day it is more desolate and poverty stricken than it was then. Largely because it contains too many "Cardwellites."

The first of Len's letters to the editor from the files of *Trove* online was from January 1886 - *Land Famine in the North*. Less than a year at *Bicton* and here he was, right into the politics of the north. Len would make some 2022 north Queensland politicians proud with his bold, parochial rhetoric. Already he wants the north to secede:⁸³

Now, sir, I ask you, can you reasonably wonder why the people of the North want separation? Their roads are in bad order, and no money is forthcoming to repair them, their pastoral industry is harassed at the very time it is suffering so severely from other causes, the land is shut up; the mining industry is further taxed ...; the railway to Herberton is delayed beyond all reason, and hundreds of men are debarred from obtaining work on that field..

Throughout his time at *Bicton*, Len Cutten wrote to newspapers, governments, Chambers of Commerce and anyone who would listen and had influence. He wrote at least 70 letters that were released in papers and many of the letters were published in five or even more different newspapers. Like some of the Federal politicians of north Queensland in later times, Len loved to create shock and awe headlines to generate interest and hopefully, some action. While in 2022 letters to the editor have little traction, in Len's day people had little option but newspapers; there was no TV, radio, Internet or social media. Letters to the editor were a more potent means of communication and influence back then.

The essence of his political activism was advocacy for the north Queensland farmers. He wrote letters most years and had more time to write them as he grew older but had kept up a steady stream of correspondence throughout his life apart from the years 1911 to 1915. The chart below shows the

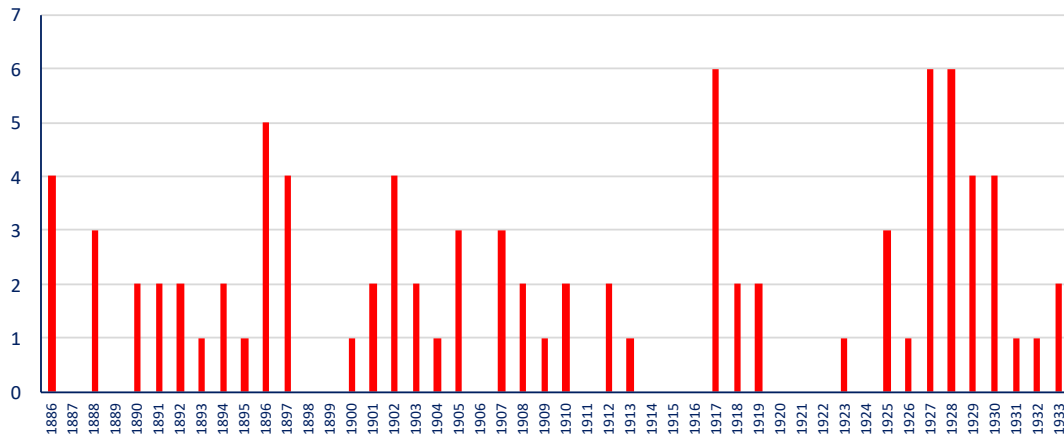
⁸¹ Leonard M Cutten, *Protection for Northern Settlers*, *The Brisbane Courier*, 23 December 1886, accessed on *Trove* January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/4492193?searchTerm=Protection%20for%20Northern%20Settlers>

⁸² Leonard M. Cutten, *Soldiers' Settlement*, *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 13 February 1918, accessed on *Trove*, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/62266674?searchTerm=Soldiers%27%20Settlement>

⁸³ *Land Famine in the North*, *The Queenslander* (Brisbane), 9 January 1886, accessed on *Trove*, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/19802702?searchTerm=Land%20Famine%20in%20the%20North>

frequency of Cutten letters published by year (this will not show all the letters, just the ones so far found). In some years they had six letters published.

Cutten Letters to Press | Number by Year



The main themes of the Cutten correspondence were:

- Fruit farming issues 17 letters
- Land selection issues 12
- Aboriginal treatment 11
- Coffee farming and tariffs 10
- Unemployment and unions 9
- Need for sugar mills 5
- Right to work 4
- Council bashing 4
- Need for soldier settlements 3
- History of the area 3

Len was often unhappy with Councils or governments and spoke of their unwillingness to act in the best interests of people living in north Queensland and in Clump Point in particular. He was on the theme of north Queensland secession early on as shown above and in 1912 he worked with the new Progress Association and the Mourilyan Farmers' Association in an effort to create a new council separate from Johnstone Shire.⁸⁴ He derisively called the Johnstone Shire Council the *Innisfail octopus*, stating that the Councillors all voted to spend every penny of income in the town.⁸⁵

The reasons for the severance of the No. 3 sub-division are accentuated in every particular. We are still without roads. Our population has doubled, the rates per valuation have been doubled,

⁸⁴ *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 31 May 1912, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/58477714?searchTerm=Clump%20Point%20Progress%20Association>.

⁸⁵ *Clump Point's Grievance. Cairns Post*, 14 April 1926, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/40531515?searchTerm=Clump%20Point%27s%20Grievances>

the rateable value has more than doubled ... Our grievances are such as surely entitles us to severance from the Innisfail octopus Council.

Secession was a big ask though as the population of the district, according to the electoral rolls, was only 20 voters. That forgets the 200-300 Aboriginal people held in the Hull River Aboriginal Settlement who had no voting rights. The low population numbers did not daunt Len who was never afraid to make a case for the district.

Some Councillors were not subtle or sympathetic to people who wrote, so they added fuel to the fire with comments⁸⁶ being reported such as, *He has to carry his goods half a mile, but it seems that is his own fault.* This was in 1925 and after a 40-year wait there was still no made-road from El Arish to Bingil Bay so Len had a reasonable gripe and it was several miles, not half a mile.

He spoke passionately about the need to settle the land in north Queensland and felt strongly that Lands Office practices and policies unnecessarily impeded that goal.⁸⁷ His theory was that if the land was in the hands of hard working (preferably British) farmers, then the economy would grow and unemployment would drop quickly.

He was against the land being selected by absentee landholders such as the large Tully River landowner, Tyson, who did not occupy the land, yet gained titles and engaged in land speculation without adding to the economy or community. Len spoke of the tricks of men like James Tyson who used 'dummy' land holders to have a presence on the land without actually farming or developing it.⁸⁸ Tyson had beaten him to prime land at Pittsworth on the Darling Downs by using 'dummy' landowners. That was never forgotten by Len Cutten.

While Len said once that he was always a supporter of the Labor Party, he was right-leaning in politics yet not attached to the Country Party, although some of their members asked him to stand for the State electorate of Herbert in 1922,⁸⁹ in the 'interests of the farmers and moderate unionists'. For some reason that did not happen. He was strongly against trade union practices and felt that they adversely impacted the farmers costs and limited opportunities for hard working people to find employment. In 1925 he spoke out clearly on that matter:⁹⁰

When the Australian ceases to grovel at the feet of his Trade Union God things may alter and our countrymen across the land will be permitted to enter upon and utilize their fair lands. Mark you, I am personally a consistent upholder of the principles of trade union societies, but there is, to my mind, friendly society and a trades union social and political tyranny under which this unfortunate country is at present suffering.

⁸⁶ Cairns Post 21 September 1925, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at:

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/40509667?searchTerm=Mr.%20L.%20M.%20Cutten%20Clump%20Point>

⁸⁷ L.M. Cutten, *Correspondence, Northern Lands, Cairns Post*, 13 March 1929, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at:

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/40663356?searchTerm=CORRESPONDENCE.%20NORTHERN%20LANDS>.

⁸⁸ Leonard M. Cutten, *Settlement on Remote Lands, The Queenslander*, 1 March 1902, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at:

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/21621223?searchTerm=Settlement%20on%20Remote%20Lands>

⁸⁹ *Townsville Daily Bulletin, Innisfail Notes*, 18 December 1922, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at:

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/62458209?searchTerm=Clump%20Point>

⁹⁰ *Foreign Immigration, The Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 14 February 1925, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at:

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/61572607?searchTerm=Foreign%20Immigration>.

In 1922, he was asked by the residents to present a Maria Creek-Banyan sugar mill petition to Premier Theodore when he visited Tully.⁹¹

Mr. Cutten read a lengthy address in support of his contentions and handed in a list of farmers embracing 9000 acres, the owners of which were refused crushing facilities by the S. Johnstone Mill. Mr. Cutten claimed he was the oldest resident of the district and had been asked by the settlers to present them. Mr. Cutten spoke with emotion of the dire hardships he and others had experienced. ... Mr. Theodore congratulated Mr. Cutten in the way he had stated his case.

Herb and Len were interviewed by a reporter from the *Cairns Post* in 1923 who said, when referring to the causes of fruit and coffee farming failures:⁹²

Mr Cutten asserts ... It is a thorn in the side of local industry, proof of the meddling propensities of the southern oppositionists who hold a biased opinion of North Queensland industry and misled by pernicious Press propaganda. The malcontents have extinguished one industry by foul means, nothing else need be added.

Len was never keen on the establishment or enamoured of the aristocracy:

It did not need Lord Masham to come forward to tell us that the backbone of every country is necessarily "agriculture." Aristotle and Confucius and heaps of really clever men have told us the same thing. I only mention Lord Masham because he is a lord and I know what a lot of crawling sycophantics the mass of the people are, and how they listen awestruck to the dribblings of anything with a title ...⁹³

He always asked for a fair go for Aboriginal people and their gainful employment, yet that advocacy probably had a good deal of self-interest attached to it. He was continually at odds with the Queensland police and government on the issue.

While engaged in a strong war of words with the Queensland government's Protector of Aboriginals, Dr. Roth over treatment of Aboriginal people in 1905, Len used his oft applied wit and hyperbole to chastise the Church⁹⁴ as well for tolerating the alleged mistreatment:

Murders [are] committed and no one punished ... [it] is an open disgrace and a reproach to the rule of the white man, and priests, parsons, ministers, whatever they call themselves, [who] rally Dr. Roth and applaud vociferously; such shocking hypocrisy is enough to cause the Lord to send a plague through the land.

He objected to Dr. Roth's application of the Aboriginal Protection Act and in the same letter he blasted Roth and the priests for eagerly 'seizing any young [Aboriginal girl] he could lay his hands on ... and condemned the unfortunate creatures to penal servitude for life' (in Church Missions). Len Cutten was no fan of the Church. It is not entirely clear if he and his family were religious or not

⁹¹ *The Maria Creek-Banyan Mill. Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 17 May 1922, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at:

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/62323515?searchTerm=The%20Maria%20Creek%20-%20Banyan%20Mill>.

⁹² *News of the North, Clump Point, Cairns Post*, 17 May 1923, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at:

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/40189123?searchTerm=News%20of%20the%20North.%20Clump%20Point>

⁹³ Leonard Cutten, *Ithuriel and the Unemployed, Worker* (Brisbane), 12 September 1896, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at:

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/70930847?searchTerm=Ithuriel%20and%20the%20Unemployed>

⁹⁴ Leonard M. Cutten, *Correspondence, Treatment of our Aborigines, The Northern Miner* (Charters Towers), 10 October 1905, accessed on Trove, February 2022 at:

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/79071866?searchTerm=Correspondence.%20Treatment%20of%20our%20Aborigines>.

from what is written of them, but judging by Len's harsh words, probably not. James did, however, follow the Anglican faith after leaving *Bicton* for he was cited to attend the Townsville Anglican Synod in 1913.⁹⁵

In 1925, Len branched out into his own movement in politics speaking loudly of the 'right to earn a living'. He called it a *Charter of Freedom* later and a *Union of Covenanters*. That caused widespread intrigue and amusement and achieved good press coverage yet came to nothing. It was not entirely clear what his objectives were in that respect but probably it was aimed at combatting the 'black-hand,' a group of standover merchants among the Italian community. Len's movement possibly had an anti-union thrust.

He was openly racist about Chinese ('Chinamen' and 'Asiatics') and detested the way they treated Aboriginal people, evaded police sanction and ruined the land with their banana growing methods. He said in one of his vitriolic letters⁹⁶ that, 'As far as settlement of the land by Chinese is concerned, twenty years' experience has proved to me completely that every Chinaman in a district is a bitter curse to that district.' That sounds incredibly racist today yet at the same time, E. J. Banfield, a most tolerant and modern man was saying the same things in gentler words. Len spoke in favour of Italian settlers and was always keen to see north Queensland settled, especially by more people of British descent.

When readers responded to Len's letters, one thing that really made him passionate was any hint of criticism of his innovativeness or lack of enterprise or suggestions that farmers in general were not skilled and creative. He also resented criticism of farmers when it came from people who had no experience of farming. In a protracted and vigorous debate⁹⁷ with a reporter at the *Worker* newspaper in Brisbane, Len spoke of the knowledge needed to run a farm, saying:

... for to become a farmer requires more ability, more patient perseverance, and a larger experience, [than any role] unless you include the higher branches of scientific knowledge.

By 1926, Len was well known in the Press and was by now liberally using humour and extolling the virtues of Clump Point as a resort destination.⁹⁸

With a more high sounding name say Mesopotamia, the glorious surroundings of Clump Point might have gained more attention as a resort for tourists ...

The reporter added:

The boom will begin when the place becomes a little more familiar to Innisfail and Townsville residents. Then the world will become more familiar with the fifty years pioneering of King Cutten and the stories of alligators, Aboriginals, floods, cyclones and adventures that have never yet been heard about.

⁹⁵ *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 25 June 1913, accessed on Trove, February 2022 at:

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/79071866?searchTerm=Correspondence.%20Treatment%20of%20our%20Aborigines>.

⁹⁶ Leonard M. Cutten, *Increased Duty on Bananas, The Northern Miner* (Charters Towers), 30 December 1909, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/80333183?searchTerm=Increased%20Duty%20On%20Bananas>

⁹⁷ Leonard Cutten, *Ithuriel and the Unemployed, Worker* (Brisbane), 12 September 1896, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/70930847?searchTerm=Ithuriel%20and%20the%20Unemployed>

⁹⁸ *From Mr. L. M. Cutten, Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 16 June 1926, accessed on Trove February 2022 at:

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/60936176?searchTerm=From%20Mr.%20L.%20M.%20Cutten>

The reporter was right to forecast a tourist boom, but that did not come for another 50 years and by then Len was long gone yet not forgotten.

Len's involvement in local affairs continued throughout his life and in 1928 he was appointed secretary of the Clump Point Progress Association.⁹⁹ Len died shortly after Herb in July 1930 and never recovered from the deep loss of his brother. Despite all efforts and taking him to his sister, Mrs. Dun at Irvingdale, he continued to mourn Herb's loss and insisted on returning to *Bicton*. There were many tributes to Len on his death and this example¹⁰⁰ acknowledged his significant contribution to the community:

A widely known and respected citizen in the person of Mr. Leonard Cutten, passed away at Clump Point over the week-end. Mr. Cutten was a member of a family whose name will ever figure prominently in the history of this part of the Commonwealth, he having lived in the Innisfail district since the early 80s, when with his brothers and sisters he came north to take up a settlement at Bingil Bay. ... The vicissitudes through which the Cutten family passed would require many volumes to tell, but the narrative would record the determined work of a family of plucky people who wrote one of the best records to be found in Australian colonisation. Their home at Clump Point was a revelation to those fortunate enough to enter its doors. The Cutten Bros. were deeply read men and possessed a library containing some of the finest works ever written.

Len certainly had a sharp wit and an ability to influence people and was dubbed the *King of Bingil Bay*; a good choice of monarch. His close friend and family solicitor, George Markwell of Innisfail said, 'A grand type of the Far North Citizen passed away in Innisfail of Sunday last – F. Herbert Cutten ...'

Len's probate in 1931 was £3,736¹⁰¹ (to Len Dun and Ken Alexander) worth \$326,000 in 2021 currency. Herb's was £1,444 (\$126,000 in 2021); the notice did not say who that went to.

James Walker Cutten 1852 – 1935

In 1899, James managed to have himself invited to act as an honorary commissioner for Queensland at the Greater Britain Exhibition so probably scored a free trip back to London.¹⁰²

James wrote several letters to the press providing some picture of who he was. His letters were about a variety of topics and many were personal spats with others or about Council politics rather than district advocacy letters. He did write about the plight of Aboriginal people and the injustice of their treatment a few times and was genuine in that concern. He, like Len, was involved at the edge of politics and James unsuccessfully sought pre-selection for the Labor Party in the seat of Herbert¹⁰³ at one stage so was theoretically somewhat different to Len in political terms.

⁹⁹ *Clump Point Notes, Progress Association, Cairns Post*, 27 October 1928, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at:

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/40644197?searchTerm=Clump%20Point%20Notes%20Progress%20Association>

¹⁰⁰ *Innisfail Notes, Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 14 July 1930, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at:

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/60778750?searchTerm=Mr.%20Leonard%20Cutten%20passed%20away>

¹⁰¹ *Northern Estates, Wills Probated, Cairns Post*, 29 August 1931, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at:

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/48721454?searchTerm=Northern%20Estates>

¹⁰² *A Fruit Farm in Queensland, The North Queensland Register* (Townsville), 13 November 1899, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at:

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/83146044?searchTerm=A%20Fruit%20Farm%20in%20Queensland>

¹⁰³ *The North Queensland Register* (Townsville), 1 August 1904, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at:

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/85566961?searchTerm=Labor%20candidate%20John%20A.%20Menzies>

In 1919, James wrote a letter speaking of the need for railways and protective duties on sugar,¹⁰⁴ saying at the end: 'North Queensland is as likely to get protective duties from our southern masters as one is to get decency from a German.'

James had been corresponding with his girlfriend, May Tudhope for many years. He met May on an earlier visit to England¹⁰⁵ and finally proposed to her in a letter in 1906, boasting that he was the 'oldest son of the famous Australian *Coffee Barons*.' When he married in 1907, he was 54 years age, yet no Baron. May was almost half his age at 28 years. James thought that after his sisters left home and the loss of Jessie that his mother would appreciate some female company. However, when the couple moved into *Bicton* the family, and most particularly Mrs. Cutten were not at all happy with the arrangements. May and James sold their share of the venture to Herb, Len and Sid and moved to Cairns where James worked initially for the Kamerunga State Nursery.¹⁰⁶ There is no record of their returning to visit the family.

After selling up to his brothers, James and his wife May went to Cairns where he worked in the State Nursery for a while, then as a draftsman for the Tolga Railway project. Later, they had a cane farm in Proserpine before he reverted to his surveying career in Townsville. *Ancestry.com* shows that when James died, May returned to England with her daughter Isabel and both lived there for the rest of their lives dying at an old age. Isabel married in London and had no children.

James died while under anaesthetic and being operated on for a fractured thigh¹⁰⁷ that he incurred in a car accident in Brisbane.¹⁰⁸ Obituary 1935:¹⁰⁹

James Cutten, who died in Brisbane in hospital after an accident to his hip on March 19, was the last of the original members of the family of that name, which took up a large tract of land at Clump Point, North of Cardwell. ... The Cuttens were English people, their father an English lawyer, and thinking Australia would be a good country with opportunities for his sons he came out with his wife and family. He was a man of some wealth, and I think they settled first on the Darling Downs. ... They, like many pioneers of other industries, were before their time, and when the Queensland Government segregated the blacks, the death knell of Bicton, as an orchard and coffee plantation, was rung. ... James Cutten, the last of the brothers, has died at the ripe old age of 84 years. They loved North Queensland in spite of having lost so much money there. They were educated men with a strong belief in the wealth of the North Queensland soil. They may not have been wise in the selection of Bicton as an operative centre, but they loved the place and fought for it and its welfare to the last ditch.

James appeared to be in conflict with others quite often and there are at least four minor court cases involving claims for compensation covered in newspapers. In some cases James was the litigant and in others he was being sued, and on no occasion did James win a case. The cases involved disputes over payments for labour or for survey charges.

¹⁰⁴ J. M. Cutten, *Our Coastal Lands*, *Cairns Post*, 15 January 1919, accessed on *Trove*, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/40384949?searchTerm=Our%20Coastal%20Lands>.

¹⁰⁵ R. J. Taylor, *The Lost Plantation: A History of the Australian Tea Industry*, G. K. Bolton, Cairns, 1982, p. 21.

¹⁰⁶ *The Queenslander* (Brisbane), 12 December 1908, accessed on *Trove*, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/23595920?searchTerm=Kamerunga%20Nursery>

¹⁰⁷ *Collapsed under anaesthetic, Aged man's death*, *Courier Mail* (Brisbane) 25 April 1935 accessed on *Trove*, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/35875977?searchTerm=Collapsed%20Under%20Anaesthetic.%20Aged%20Man%27s%20Death>.

¹⁰⁸ R. J. Taylor, *The Lost Plantation: A History of the Australian Tea Industry*, G. K. Bolton, Cairns, 1982, p.43.

¹⁰⁹ *Obituary. James Cutten*, *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 28 March 1935, accessed on *Trove*, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/61987370?searchTerm=Mr.%20Leonard%20Cutten%20passed%20away>

It seems, reading about the Cuttens, that of the four brothers, James was the odd one out. The other three, Len, Herb and Sid were more bonded. At the start, it was James who stayed home in London with the girls, while the three younger boys went with their father to start the venture. James also returned to London at least twice for extended periods, while there are no references to the three other Cutten men doing likewise. During 1891, he returned to London for a year and again, in 1899-1900 he spent a full year in London.¹¹⁰ That must have created some resentment among his brothers who were left to do the hard work running the farm.

Usually, when some of them had to go out West to raise income through physical work it was Sid, Herb and Len doing that work, while James was the one left to look after the farm. That happened again after the 1890 cyclone, but James was hospitalised for a considerable period with rheumatic fever and it was about a year before he recovered.¹¹¹

Their mother left her estate of £1,755 (\$260,000 in 2022 currency) to James.¹¹²

Margaret Edith Dun nee Cutten 1860 - 1943

Margaret was the first of the Cutten sisters to marry and was wed before the family arrived at *Bicton*. She married Henry Dun in 1885 and lived the rest of her life at Irvingdale near Dalby. From *Ancestry.com* we see they had four children. She maintained contact with the family at *Bicton* and was visited by some of them on occasions.

Alice Elizabeth Carne nee Cutten 1866 - 1952

Alice married Broughton Carne, a farmer who managed many sheep and cattle stations in Queensland and the NT and later in life had his own sheep farm at Roma (1906). They moved to Clermont in 1919. Broughton died April 1923.¹¹³ They had two daughters.

Florence Violet Alexander nee Cutten 1862 - 1952

Florence was well connected through people she met and impressed early in her life. When the Queensland Land Minister, Percy Pease visited the region to open the new Bingil Bay Road in 1936, he and his wife, Sarah paid a courtesy call to Florence¹¹⁴ showing her standing in the community as a surviving sister of the Cutten brothers. Percy was the ALP Member for Herbert and was Deputy Premier but made time to see Florence and had a long-standing association with the family.

Florence was also connected well in the mining industry via her husband's and father-in-law's employment. Her husband, Charles Turnbull Alexander was a miner in the Herberton district when he met Florence. They were at the thriving mining settlement at Irvinebank¹¹⁵ until Charles died and

¹¹⁰ North Queensland Register (Townsville) 2 April 1900, accessed on *Trove*, January 2022 at:

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/81641440?searchTerm=%22J.%20W.%20Cутten%22>

¹¹¹ *C.W.A. Pioneers, The Cuttens of Clump Point, Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 9 February 1931, accessed on *Trove*, January 2022 at:

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/61580907?searchTerm=C.W.A.%20Pioneers.%20The%20Cутtens%2C%20of%20Clump%20Point>.

¹¹² *The Northern Miner* (Charters Towers) 7 January 1909, accessed on *Trove*, January 2022 at:

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/80307406?searchTerm=probate>

¹¹³ *A pioneer of the North, The Queenslander* (Brisbane), 14 April 1923, accessed on *Trove*, January 2022 at:

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/22642220?searchTerm=A%20pioneer%20of%20the%20north>.

¹¹⁴ *Bingil Bay Road, Official Opening, The Northern Herald* (Cairns), 11 July 1936, accessed on *Trove*, January 2022 at:

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/150540863?searchTerm=%22Mrs.%20F.%20V.%20Alexander%22>

¹¹⁵ *A Link With The Pioneering Era Is Broken, The Evening Advocate*, 25 November 1952, accessed on *Trove*, January 2022 at:

[https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/212580736?searchTerm=%22A%20Last%20Link%20with%20The%20Pioneering%20Era%20Is%20Bro ken.%22](https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/212580736?searchTerm=%22A%20Last%20Link%20with%20The%20Pioneering%20Era%20Is%20Broken.%22)

(a year later) Florence took her family to *Bicton*. Charles' father was a civil engineer and was employed in England and brought to Australia by mining magnate John Moffatt, known then as the *Emperor of Northern Mining*. Later he became a noted industrialist. Charles senior became a partner in some of Moffatt's enterprises.

Florence had many exciting times as a governess in the north when she was single and working for a few different families. She started with the Blackmore family at Gairlock on the Herbert River (Mr. Blackmore was the engineer at the sugar mill then). She moved to a similar position at California Creek near Herberton with the Dunford family then went with the Clarke family at Lornsleigh station near Ravenshoe. She returned to work for the Dunfords and at that time met Charles Alexander. At one stage she travelled by Cobb and Co coach from the Tablelands to Port Douglas.

Florence married in 1891 and moved to Irvinebank with her husband, Charles Turnbull Alexander. She was a keen pianist and played at public events on occasions and was the pianist for the first Masonic Ball ever held at Herbert River.

Long-time local resident, Dave Nissen recalled meeting with Florence around 1951 when he was a boy and said she was almost deaf at that stage and held up a large black box in front of her in an attempt to hear his voice.¹¹⁶

Florence left *Bicton* late in life and lived with Les on Bingil Bay Road in a small timber cottage. When she died in 1952 at Tully, she was survived by six children, 11 grandchildren and six great grandchildren.

Charles Frederick Alexander 1892 – 1963

Charles was a son of Florence and married Gertrude Goodwin in 1917. They built a two storey home near the beach in 1927 on what was once Sid Cutten's land. They started a tourist accommodation venture in 1926 which was only the second accommodation facility built in the district after the one at Garners Beach. It started out as a few huts and in 1927 they built the main building designed to accommodate 40 people. It was known by a few names: *Alexander's Inn*, *Alexander's Guest House* and even *Alexander's Temperance Hotel*.

The inn was run by Gertrude, and when she died prematurely, the venture was done and Charles moved on. This was the site of the first post office in the district and the phone line was linked to the house as well in 1929.¹¹⁷ It also became the polling booth for the district taking that role over from *Bicton*.

Shortly after the Inn was built, they put it up for sale but found no buyers. The timing of the new business was far from ideal, for the impacts of the worldwide Depression hit Queensland severely in 1930. However, in 1929 the business was going well as shown in a letter to the press by Ken Alexander during a dispute he had with Ted Garner over a mail tender for the district.¹¹⁸

Charles and Gertrude had one child, Muriel. Gertrude ran the tourism business but died early at only 42 years age in 1934. Charles died at Omeo, Victoria.

¹¹⁶ Ken Gray, *Odin's Beach: Nissen Navigates 80 Years of History*, Mission Beach Historical Society, 2022.

¹¹⁷ H. K. Alexander, *Correspondence, Postal Facilities, Clump Point, Cairns Post*, 16 February 1929, accessed on Trove, February 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/40659848?searchTerm=Correspondence%20Postal%20Facilities%2C%20Clump%20Point>

¹¹⁸ As above.

Herbert Kenneth Alexander 1894 - 1974

Ken and Les Alexander both wrote to the newspapers about their experiments with sheep farming in Bingil Bay. A letter in 1925 from Les, gave the best details of their farm.¹¹⁹ Les explained that they purchased a flock of Corriedale sheep in 1923 and initially experienced severe losses due to cattle and scrub ticks and overcame that, then they had mysterious losses due to poisoning. They sent samples of suspect weeds to experts and found the cause was a broadleaf named Rattle Pod. They eradicated that from the pastures somehow and reported excellent results with good quality wool being produced.

By 1933, Ken Alexander had switched from sheep farming to dairy. Ted Garner at Garners Beach was also a dairy farmer by then and they sent their milk to the new butter factory at Silkwood.¹²⁰

Ken Alexander did not figure often in the newspapers but there were several articles written in 1939 when he sued his neighbour, Harry Plumb for allegedly starting a fire.¹²¹ Ken won a £10 settlement yet I suspect that claim went down like a lead balloon in the community for Harry was an injured, returned soldier and was struggling financially.

Ken married Mary Dun (nee Callaghan) later in life. Mary had previously married Leonard Dun, a son of Ken's sister Margaret. Oddly enough, Len Dun and Ken Alexander were the beneficiaries of Len Cutten's will. Leonard Dun died in 1949. Ken and Mary had no children.

Margaret Edith Bunting nee Alexander 1898 - 1982

Margaret was married in 1919 to Jack Bunting, a local timber-getter who lived on the Hull River. They lived for many years in the district before moving to Charters Towers. They had six children, but two of their daughters died at under two years age. Their daughter, Dorothy, married Francis Bowen and they had three sons and a daughter. It is easy to be confused about who 'Jack Bunting' was for his father was named John yet commonly known as Jack and he had a brother named John as well. Jack's brother-in-law was the well-known local, Christian Magnus Wildsoet (Chris) who owned land a few miles from Jack and Margaret Bunting lived near where the town of Carmoo is in 2022.

¹¹⁹ Les Alexander, *Sheep on the coast*, *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 28 January 1925, accessed on *Trove*, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/61571946?searchTerm=Sheep%20on%20The%20Coast>

¹²⁰ *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 17 October 1933, accessed on *Trove*, January 2022.

¹²¹ *Clump Point Fire, Dairy Farmers in Court, Johnstone River Advocate and Innisfail News*, 10 November 1939, accessed on *Trove*, February 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/216066910?searchTerm=Clump%20Point%20Fire%20Dairy%20Farmers%20in%20Court>



Les Alexander with his sister Margaret Bunting.

Timber was still a strong industry in north Queensland in 1938 with output reported at 250,000 super feet per week and ten timber getters operating in the region, mainly in the Palmerston but also in Clump Point and Silkwood.¹²² Silky oak was the main species targeted at Clump Point; the cedar was long gone with the Freshney brothers starting their logging in 1880.

In 1908, Jack Bunting snr reported¹²³ on the fine stands of timber in the area. He owned a property on the Hull River and had two acres cleared to grow food for his horses. He was working for the Rooney Company in Townsville and most of the timber was sent to their Ross River Mill. He was focusing on Northern silky oak (*Cardwellia sublimis*) and Queensland maple (*Flindersia brayleyana*) and the logs were averaging 4.5 metres girth. He estimated that a good axman could earn ‘a fiver a day’ – that is \$740 per day in 2022 currency. At the time he was cutting maple for ‘Mr. Porter’s nice new dwelling now being erected on the Clare Road.’

Later the same year, there was another report on Jack Bunting senior’s successes in timber saying he had *increased his hauling power by about 32 bullocks* [from the Burdekin]. He had sent 22,000 feet of timber (20 logs) to Townsville in the last week.¹²⁴ E. J. Banfield was a regular columnist in the newspapers in the area and was close to the Bunting family and to Chris Wildsoet. He wrote an extensive account of their timber-getting in 1915.¹²⁵ He spoke in awe of Jack Bunting senior and his quiet ability to manage his bullock teams without using a whip. He was working with Chris Wildsoet his son-in-law, his son Jack and Peter Petersen; they were felling oak, maple and quandong trees.

Jack Bunting junior (Margaret Alexander’s husband) was a well-known and respected person in the district as was his brother-in-law Chris Wildsoet. Both were actively involved in the rescue of people after the cyclone of 1918 along with other notable residents, Les Alexander and Edmund Banfield.

¹²² *Timber output, Importance of thriving industry, Johnstone River Advocate and Innisfail News*, 28 January 1938, accessed on Trove, February 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/212535351?searchTerm=Clump%20Point%20silky%20oak>

¹²³ Jack Bunting, *Our Timber Resources, Morning Post* (Cairns), 23 July 1908, accessed on Trove, February 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/238829962?searchTerm=Our%20Timber%20Resources>

¹²⁴ Lower Tully River Notes, *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 5 September 1908, accessed on Trove, February 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/59284307?searchTerm=Jack%20Bunting>

¹²⁵ *Rural Homilies, Silky Oak Camp, The Northern Miner* (Charters Towers), 21 April 1915, accessed on Trove, February 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/60065476?searchTerm=Rural%20Homilies%20Silky%20Oak%20Camp>

Leslie Gray Alexander 1895 - 1983

While Leslie's mother, Florence was often spoken of as the 'last link' with the Cutten family of Clump Point, her children also lived at *Bicton* with her for some time from 1913 on. Les arrived at *Bicton* when he was 18 years old and stayed in the area until 1958 and he was the last direct link the family had with the district. He was quite similar in character and beliefs to his uncles, Len and Herb.

Les recalled his days at home in Irvinebank west of Herberton and says he always loved to stay at *Bicton* during the school holidays. He went out on the boats to load cargo and fondly remembers interacting with the local Aboriginals and seeing them make dilly bags, baskets, boomerangs and spears and he sometimes went to the reef with the Aboriginal boys in their bark canoes. They used their hands and cuttle fish as paddles.¹²⁶

Les met with Roz Glazebrook, a freelance writer from Brisbane, not long before he died in his late eighties. They chatted about the old days at *Bicton*. Roz published her interview notes with images that Les provided for the Innisfail District Historical Society's 100 year anniversary of the 1918 cyclone. The article provides good insights into *Bicton* times when Les was there.¹²⁷

An accident with dynamite exploding prematurely caused Les to lose his left hand in early 1918. When the cyclone came, only six weeks after this accident, Les was at Innisfail, but he was immediately up and about and organizing a group to take supplies to the people in Clump Point. Les had initially been in the Strand Hotel on the Esplanade when the cyclone hit Innisfail. During the lull, when the eye was above them, he was surprised at the calmness, but the wind suddenly picked up again so he joined hundreds of others in the old Shire Hall. That was one of the few buildings to survive the second stage of the cyclone. In the morning Les found boat owner, Harry Worth and asked him to take him to Clump Point to assist survivors. One of Harry's boats was still afloat, the *Olive* and they had it ready to sail at the beginning of the next day. Les was refused assistance and food supplies for the people of Clump Point initially by the senior Council people on the Disaster Committee who were saying that the people of Clump Point numbered only 24 and Innisfail residents would have priority.

That was a comment typical of the day; placing Innisfail interests above all others and note that while there were 24 European residents at Clump Point, the Council did not mention the more than 200 inmates of the Hull River Aboriginal Settlement in their calculations of people needing assistance at Clump Point. Apparently they were not 'people' in their eyes.

Fortunately, Les patiently insisted and gained a few supplies to take south to Kurrimine, the Barnard Islands and Clump Point. He and Harry with deckhand, Otto Krabbenhoft, set sail early on the 12th of March 1918 and once in Clump Point, the rescue crew were joined by Jack Bunting (husband of Margaret Cutten) and Chris Wildsoet, a fellow timber-getter and soon to be Jack's brother-in-law, also from the Hull River area of Clump Point.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ Roz Glazebrook, *100-Year History of Innisfail Cyclone*, March 2018, accessed February 2022 at: <https://www.weekendnotes.com/100-year-anniversary-of-innisfail-cyclone-innisfail-historical-society/>

¹²⁷ Roz Glazebrook, *100-Year History of Innisfail Cyclone*, March 2018, accessed February 2022 at: <https://www.weekendnotes.com/100-year-anniversary-of-innisfail-cyclone-innisfail-historical-society/>

¹²⁸ R. J. Taylor, *The Lost Plantation, A History of the Australian Tea Industry*, G. K. Bolton, Cairns, 1982, P. 33. Spelling of Krabbenhoft corrected by referral to Innisfail electoral roll, 1917.

The team found that three white settlers (Alf James and John and Kathleen Kenny) were killed in the cyclone as were at least three Aboriginals from the Hull River Aboriginal Settlement. Les said no one was sure how many Aboriginals died in the storm surge that swamped their camp. Some residents were badly injured, yet all at *Bicton* did survive the storm. The wharf, boats, buildings and orchards were all completely destroyed. The new government-built wharf at Narragon Beach was also lost. The Cuttens had waited for 32 years for this infrastructure and it was only used three times before it was swept from them in a few tempestuous hours.¹²⁹

Edmund Banfield wrote an extensive piece on the 1918 cyclone for the *Townsville Daily Bulletin* and gave us an idea of what happened when speaking of the devastation at *Bicton*.¹³⁰

At Bicton, the home of Messrs. Cutten Brothers, a dismal amount of damage was done. At the time the three brothers had for company a niece [Margaret Alexander] and nephew [Ken Alexander] a son of Mr. J Bunting [Jack Bunting, soon to marry Margaret], their sister with two children being at Cairns on a visit. At a quarter to eight on the fateful Sunday evening, the house beginning to be rickety, the occupants rushed out and were scattered. Mr. Sidney Cutten, disabled by an accident some weeks before, fell and crawled he knew not whither for about half an hour, eventually bringing up against a garden fence, and there he lay throughout the long hours of the night. Kenneth Alexander and Jack Bunting took care of Miss Margaret Alexander, each holding a hand. Kenneth had secured a blanket before leaving the house with which to envelop his sister. He struggled to keep it, but it tore in two, and with the remaining fragments as a covering, the young lady passed the night with her protectors. Messrs. Herbert and Leonard Cutten found themselves on the brink of the cliff in front of the house, and towards dawn groped their way back to the ruins, there meeting their nephew and niece and Jack Bunting. A brief search revealed Sidney, enduring his privations as philosophically as circumstances permitted. At daylight all walked to the dismantled sawmill, one of the buildings that afforded some shelter.

In a letter to the Cardwell Shire in 1926, Les Alexander asked for a six mile extension of the Tully-Clump Point Road and also wrote to the Minister for Lands, Percy Pearce on the matter.¹³¹ Les began to take up the role of Len Cutten in advocating for Clump Point and wrote many letters to newspapers, mainly seeking infrastructure for the district. He requested support in the campaign to have a phone line to Clump Point and made the case strongly citing the need arising out of increased visitors to the remote villages there. Les spoke of two recent cases of illness where a phone would have helped secure the safety of those involved.¹³² He also vigorously re-ignited Len Cutten's debate with the State government over railway problems and damaged fruit in 1929.¹³³

¹²⁹ R. J. Taylor, *The Lost Plantation: A History of the Australian Tea Industry*, G. K. Bolton, Cairns, 1982, pp. 33-39.

¹³⁰ *The Storm Wind by the Beachcomber*, *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 27 March 1918, accessed on Trove, February 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/62264509/5591016>

¹³¹ *Road from Tully to Clump Point*, *Cairns Post*, 24 July 1926, accessed on Trove, February 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/40550111?searchTerm=Road%20from%20Tully%20to%20Clump%20Point>

¹³² *Clump Point. A Request*, *Cairns Post*, 21 June 1927, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at:

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/40574710?searchTerm=Clump%20Point.%20A%20Request>.

¹³³ *At Wallangarra, Transhipment of fruit, C. O. D's View*, *Cairns Post*, 11 October 1929, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/40683208?searchTerm=At%20Wallangarra.%20Transhipment%20of%20fruit>.

Les was prepared to experiment with new farming ideas and went into sheep farming with his brother Ken and imported Kikuyu grass¹³⁴ finding it had good dry season resistance and was ideal for dairy cattle which they went into instead of sheep.

Les joined forces with influential Silkwood resident, Alf Daveson who owned land near the Cuttens and also at Silkwood and was a Johnstone Shire Councillor at that time. At a Royal Commission hearing in 1931 they argued for the necessary access roads to develop Clump Point.¹³⁵

In 1938, Les wrote to the Johnstone Shire Council¹³⁶ suggesting that they re-instate him as 'beach inspector' at Bingil Bay for Easter and Christmas and offered terms that were rejected by the Councillors. However, he continued to maintain the beachfront flora, planting calophyllum trees and placing protective timber fences around them.

By 1946, Les was actively advocating, again with Alf Daveson, for a Liverpool Creek sugar mill at another Royal Commission hearing.¹³⁷ In 1950 he won an award for his banana quality at a Cairns show.¹³⁸

Les was still in the district in 1950 when he wrote to Council about the freshwater system at the southern end of Bingil Bay being damaged¹³⁹ and he wrote to Johnstone Shire again in August 1954 regarding damage to a bridge¹⁴⁰ so he lived and farmed land at Bingil Bay for at least 41 years and moved on to Townsville not long after this.

Alick Leonard Alexander 1911 - 1985

Florence's youngest son, Alick married local Clump Point girl, Florence Anderson in 1935. They had one child who married and had three sons and two daughters. Alick and Florence have at least four great grandchildren.

Sidney Arthur Eric Alexander 1904 - 1986

Sid was always referred to as 'S. A. E. Alexander' in writing, not Sid or Sidney. He was commonly named Eric. As with his older brother Les, he was a strong advocate for the district, following in the footsteps of his Uncle Len (Cuttan). In 1928, he started fighting for access roads to the district in his role as Secretary of the Clump Point Progress Association. He continued the important relationship that the family had with the Deputy Premier, Percy Pease, ALP Member for Herbert. Percy was close to Len Cutten after meeting him early in his life at school in Townsville.

¹³⁴ Kikuyu grass in Queensland, *The Queenslander (Brisbane)*, 10 April 1926, accessed on Trove, February 2022 at:

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/22753499?searchTerm=Kikuyu%20Grass%20in%20Queensland>

¹³⁵ *Welfare of the Far North, The Royal Commission, The Clump Point Area, Cairns Post*, 16 June 1931, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at:

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/61045570?searchTerm=%22Cardwell%20Notes%22>

¹³⁶ *Johnstone River Advocate and Innisfail News*, 25 February 1938, accessed on Trove, January 2022.

¹³⁷ *Bingil Bay Advocated as Good Sugar Land, The Evening Advocate*, 4 April 1946, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at:

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/212560659?searchTerm=%22Bingil%20Bay%20Advocated%22>

¹³⁸ *Cairns Post*, 20 July 1950, accessed on Trove, February 2022 at:

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/42675446?searchTerm=%22L.%20G.%20Alexander%22>

¹³⁹ *The Evening Advocate (Innisfail)*, 27 March 1950, accessed on Trove, February 2022 at:

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/212226031?searchTerm=%22L.%20G.%20Alexander%2C%20Clump%20Point%22>

¹⁴⁰ *Works Committee presents many matters to Council, The Evening Advocate (Innisfail)*, 25 August 1952, accessed on Trove, February 2022 at:

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/212421939?searchTerm=%22L.%20G.%20Alexander%22>

Sid wrote to Percy, the Minister for Lands, and visited him in Brisbane¹⁴¹ and Percy promised¹⁴² that the State (Main Roads) would survey the road for the optimum route either via Mardi or El Arish.

J. P. Hourihan sought Sid's help when he applied for a hotel licence at Bingil Bay in 1928.¹⁴³ Sid answered a barrage of questions at the commission hearing that said he, *took over the partnership for Cutten Bros.* Len Cutten also gave evidence at that hearing. The application failed, but Sid continued to become more politically involved, probably motivated by his uncle's Len and Herb and their fruitless 45 year campaign for access roads to Clump Point.

In 1932, when writing to Percy Pease again, Sid was indignant about Fiji banana imports asking him to influence the Federal Government to ban those imports. Sid was an accountant at El Arish early on and seemed to be doing quite well and owned a rental property in Tully in 1932.¹⁴⁴

Moving up in politics in 1935, Sid was reported to be at the Bingil Bay polling booth (at the residence of his brother Charles) supporting Percy Pearce's re-election. Percy won with a large majority. Soon after, Sid was elected as a Vice President of the El Arish branch of the ALP then endorsed as the district's ALP candidate for the upcoming Johnstone Shire Council election.¹⁴⁵ In a nail biting finish, Sid was the last Councillor to be elected, merely winning by seven votes over the next best candidate.¹⁴⁶

As a Councillor, Sid was in a stronger position to seek assistance for his district and many noted that he represented the district strongly. He advocated for a school at Granadilla for 30 students. He continued asking for roads and by this time, Percy Pease had delivered in spades and the road from El Arish to Bingil Bay was constructed and opened by Percy with much fanfare. The road to Fenby's Gap was also being made and now Sid was pleading for the link to be made from Bingil Bay around Bicton Hill (on the foreshore rocky outcrop) to the Cardwell Shire boundary then to Mission Beach to join up with the road through Fenby's Gap.

Making the most of his affiliation with Percy Pease, and of the success in gaining access roads for Bingil Bay, Sid was now campaigning for the neglected lands at the south of the Parish of Hull (called the 'Culpa Lands' at the time) to be taken from the Cardwell Shire and transferred into Johnstone Shire. He colluded with Percy, seemingly promising to complete the access roads if the landowners petitioned for the transfer.¹⁴⁷ This was rather robust politics, but the move succeeded and Councillors at Cardwell Shire Council were incensed, particularly fellow Clump Point farmer, Councillor, Peter White. Sid probably reached the pinnacle of his minor political career at that point when he poured a bucket of petrol on this simmering fire by stating at a Council meeting.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴¹ *Clump Point, Garner's Beach and Range Road*, *Cairns Post*, 7 January 1931, accessed on *Trove*, January 2022 at:

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/41105546?searchTerm=%22S.%20A.%20E.%20Alexander%22>

¹⁴² *Cardwell Notes*, *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 7 November 1930, accessed on *Trove*, January 2022 at:

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/61045570?searchTerm=%22Cardwell%20Notes%22>

¹⁴³ *Clump Point, Should it have a hotel? Interesting application*, *Cairns Post*, 13 April 1928, accessed on *Trove*, January 2022 at:

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/40617405?searchTerm=%22S.%20A.%20E.%20Alexander%22>

¹⁴⁴ *The Telegraph* (Brisbane), 4 April 1932, accessed on *Trove*, January 2022 at:

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/184040209?searchTerm=%22S.%20A.%20E.%20Alexander%22>

¹⁴⁵ *A.L.P., El Arish Annual Meeting, Labour Candidates Endorsed, Johnstone River Advocate and Innisfail News*, 31 January 1936, accessed on *Trove*, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/212384030?searchTerm=%22S.%20A.%20E.%20Alexander%22>

¹⁴⁶ *Johnstone River Advocate and Innisfail News*, 14 April 1936, accessed on *Trove*, January 2022 at:

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/212382069?searchTerm=%22S.%20A.%20E.%20Alexander%22>

¹⁴⁷ *Cardwell Shire, Portion wanted in Johnstone area*, *Cairns Post*, 27 July 1936, accessed on *Trove*, February 2022 at:

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/41745229?searchTerm=%22S.%20A.%20E.%20Alexander%22>

¹⁴⁸ *Tully Criticised*, *Cairns Post*, 21 August 1936, accessed on *Trove*, February 2022 at:

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/212381422?searchTerm=%22S.%20A.%20E.%20Alexander%22>

Probably I should not say it but it is a fact that Tully is but a parasite on the southern end of the Johnstone Shire. They should not be attracting business out of the El Arish end of this district. They will not be taking it when there is a better road. It is only a matter of time when the Culpa lands will be cut out of the Cardwell Shire ...

Peter White was a successful farmer from Tully who owned substantial land holdings north of the Hull River in the Clump Point district as well and was a Councillor at CSC for many years. He would later become Mayor (Chairman).

The *Cairns Post* would have been delighted with the sparks caused by Sid and they attended a feisty meeting in Tully and wrote:¹⁴⁹

Braying in Wilderness 'Like an ass braying in the wilderness,' observed Cr. Peter White, with some feeling, in referring to some remarks allegedly uttered by Cr. S. A. E. Alexander and reported in to-day's Cairns Post. I have been a councillor for a very long time, and I can tell you straight, that I very strongly object to such a reference.

Cr. White continued on with his tirade in that article and several others, justifying the actions of his Council, saying they had done more than enough to support the Clump Point farmers in their efforts to build roads. However, they were always well behind in their efforts to construct roads to Clump Point and did not construct the road fully through from Tully until 1940. Sid, with his mate the Deputy Premier, had trumped Cardwell Shire and it hurt. That spat continued for some time with Cardwell Shire continually pleading with the State to reverse their decision to transfer the Clump Point land to Johnstone Shire.

In 1941, Cardwell Shire tried once more to overturn the decision and 150 members of the El Arish, Bingil Bay and Mission Beach areas signed a petition protesting against the reversal.¹⁵⁰ In the washup, it made little difference for in 2008 the two squabbling Shires were finally merged by the State Government which was always going to be the best outcome for Mission Beach (Clump Point) which could not achieve infrastructure development while it was split in two.

At a Council meeting, Sid spoke of considering an apology for his anti-Tully outburst, but it seems he never got around to it. He became severely ill in 1937 and was hospitalised and off work for three months and in 1938, he had a major difference with his fellow ALP Councillors and resigned from the caucus. As a result he was fired from his job as a ganger¹⁵¹ with the P. E. I, the State owned body that built the roads. This led to a public conflict between Sid and Percy Pease¹⁵² and Sid was never going to win that one. Now he was out on a limb without the backing of his powerful Brisbane ally. He stood for election as Chairman at the next election and was defeated so soundly that he polled only 7% of the vote; less than the informal count.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁹ *Council Shire, Lively Council Meeting, Remarks Resented, Braying in the Wilderness, Cairns Post, 21 August 1936, accessed on Trove, February 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/41756143?searchTerm=Braying%20in%20the%20Wilderness>*

¹⁵⁰ *Proposed Transfer of Shire area, Vigorous protest, Cairns Post, 14 November 1941, accessed on Trove, February 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/42318480?searchTerm=Proposed%20Transfer>.*

¹⁵¹ *Service Terminates, Cr, S. A. E. Alexander no longer P. E. I. Ganger, Johnstone River Advocate and Innisfail News, accessed on Trove, February 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/212535539?searchTerm=%22S.%20A.%20E.%20Alexander%22>*

¹⁵² *Johnstone River Advocate and Innisfail News, 29 April 1938, accessed on Trove, February 2022 at:*

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/212535028?searchTerm=%22S.%20A.%20E.%20Alexander%22>

¹⁵³ *Cairns Post, 3 April 1939, accessed on Trove, February 2022 at:*

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/42172745?searchTerm=%22S.%20A.%20E.%20Alexander%22>

It is interesting to reflect back on the years of struggle for access roads to Bingil Bay or Clump Point and how all the emphasis was on the potential for the district in terms of agriculture. Percy Pease, in 1934 focused more on the tourism potential and felt that was the main reason for the road by then. How prescient that was.¹⁵⁴ However, the tourist boom was delayed for another 40 years and it largely occurred at Mission Beach from 1970 onwards, rather than at Bingil Bay and Garners Beach which had been the centre of the buds of tourism earlier.

Sid moved to Edge Hill in Cairns and married Norma Taylor late in life. They had one child, Neil who he died at only 21 years age in Bondi, NSW. Sid was the District Pricing Officer in Cairns for six years until 1954 and he was regularly cited in the newspapers in that role, usually when running court cases for merchants he was prosecuting or for rulings he made that were often advertised.¹⁵⁵

The last we read of S. A. E. Alexander in the press apart from a few further court hearings for his job was when he was elected to the Federated Clerk's Union Committee for the Cairns Sub-branch in 1954.¹⁵⁶

An advocate to the end.

Alexander Drive was suggested as a street name in 1938 and accepted by Johnstone Shire Council shortly after.¹⁵⁷ The Alexander name lives on in the district.

The only other family member who stayed at *Bicton* was a cousin, William Edward Cutten (1891 – 1962) and his wife Selena (nee Kingsford, 1903 - 1975), who arrived to stay in 1930 for short period. William was a grandson of Fred Cutten's brother Edward. The couple divorced in 1933 and did not have children.



Cutten Graves in the forest, from Cassowary Coast Regional Council Heritage Places 2013.

¹⁵⁴ *Tourism Resort, Bingil Bay, Future Forecast, The Northern Herald* (Cairns), 23 September 1934, accessed on Trove, February 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/150253545?searchTerm=Tourist%20Resort.%20Bingil%20Bay>.

¹⁵⁵ *Bread Prices, Cairns Post*, 6 March 1954, accessed on Trove, February 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/42802816?searchTerm=%22S.%20A.%20E.%20Alexander%22>

¹⁵⁶ *Federated Clerks Union, Cairns Post*, 15 July 1954, accessed on Trove, February 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/42832519?searchTerm=%22S.%20A.%20E.%20Alexander%22>

¹⁵⁷ *Naming of Localities Within the Johnstone Shire, Johnstone River Advocate and Innisfail News*, 25 February 1938, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/212535140?searchTerm=%22Alexander%20Drive%22>

THE BICTON ENTERPRISE

A description of events that occurred on the *Bicton* farm is recorded later in this chapter. It includes the types of produce they grew and what success they had selling it. Much of that aspect of the Cutten history has been told before and most of the accounts are essentially accurate.

I cite the statements and beliefs of Len Cutten often in this story, for Len was the communicator for the family and wrote most often to the newspapers. However, Herb, Len and Sid thought alike (they even looked alike), and we can readily assume that Len spoke for all three on most occasions. Florence was of a similar mould, but James was quite different in some of his priorities and beliefs.

The success of a business venture is largely judged on economic measures. For the main Cutten era at *Bicton*; a period of 33 years from 1885 to 1918, the venture was an economic failure. The Alexander era from 1918 to 1950 was more successful, mainly with banana growing. The Cuttens did not make a fortune at fruit and coffee farming or timber getting. They invested over £20,000 at *Bicton* in the farm, house and infrastructure. They ended up with only £5,000 in assets, mainly land.

The enterprise burned money in reality. Their capital came from what Fred and Margaret had originally in London and what their children earned in Australia away from *Bicton*.

The questions that this raises are many. How they lost so much money and whether they made good decisions and ran the farm well are matters to explore.

Answering the last question first, were they good farmers? They had no experience at all before they emigrated yet learned very quickly and sought advice from the right places. They were incredibly hard working, resilient and capable farmers and grew brilliant produce in every category of crop they grew. Their coconuts were top quality as were their mangoes and citrus and the coffee plantation was a model; an exemplar for anyone to follow. They were outstanding farmers. Lack of hard work and skills did not contribute one iota to their economic failures.

For their fruit farming, the reasons for failure were many and differed over time, but in essence they were too distant from the markets and the cost of freight and production usually exceeded the selling prices. Demand for fruit fluctuated and in the depression years of 1890 – 1893 it flagged considerably. A large impediment was the farm's lack of access to efficient transport options. Initially they shipped fruit south by sea but that often left them stranded with rotting fruit and stopped entirely late in WWI. They did their utmost to gain roads to the railhead, but the railway was not an option until 1924 when the Cutten farming era was well over.

Len spoke often in the newspapers about how Councils never built any infrastructure for the settlers of Clump Point. That is so; they did nothing until 1926 when they sought funding to build three bridges and make the dray track to El Arish useable by motor vehicles in dry weather. That road was never viable until the Main Roads were prompted by a long-time admirer of the Cuttens, Deputy Premier Percy Pease. It was completed in 1936 after all Cutten brothers were gone. However, this road did benefit Florence and her family.

One cannot altogether side with Len Cutten in his criticism of Councils on their slow response to road building. From Commonwealth electoral rolls, the population of Clump Point District was not

much more than 20 by 1912. It increased for a while then collapsed by 1917 and did not reach more than 50 until after WWII. Councils and State governments faced huge demand for roads to open up small towns in those days, but they had small budgets. They had many larger settlements wanting roads and at the time, the highway from Tully to El Arish across the range was still to be built.

Some would say the problem was that they were here before the time was right to grow fruit in north Queensland. That argument has merit, yet with the benefit of hindsight we see that the only fruit crop to become viable long-term in the area was bananas. The Cuttens did not focus on bananas, though they had a small plantation (14 acres) latterly. The Alexanders were successful with bananas later on and bananas were still grown on the *Bicton* land (on the lots of James, Alice and Florence) up until about 2010 when the large plantation was subdivided and sold as hobby farms. In 2022, there is no significant farming activity on *Bicton* land.

At the start, progress with clearing at *Bicton* was slow as they had to cut timber and build their home as well as source plant stock and start planting crops. They had some assistance with South Sea Island labour (Kanakas) for the clearing phase but did not use that source of labour later. By 1890, they had 30 acres cleared. They had no income for some time so had to continually down tools and seek work pit sawing out West while they were establishing the crops.

They began with fast growing annual crops to provide income and food. First they tried corn, but that was not to be a significant exported crop long-term. It was usually planted immediately after clearing the land and was an excellent food crop for the family, their workers and the farm animals.

On reflection, while the lack of transport infrastructure, the fluctuations in labour availability, a lack of government support and the ever present natural disasters hit the *Bicton* enterprise mercilessly, one cannot but conclude that the Cuttens were just here too early. The timing was not right. So, the question might be, did they make poor decisions?

It is highly probable that if they had stuck out the drought on the Darling Downs and been able to select more land there, they would have fared better long-term in an economic sense. They did their best to select more land on the Darling Downs and elsewhere yet were thwarted. Len often wrote of the injustices of the land selection processes and the ways the Land Office was administered. In particular, he railed at the common practice of rich absentee landowners occupying the best tracts of land and keeping competent and hardworking farmers from that land. Len spoke of ways they circumvented the rules and placed 'dummy' farmers on the land to gain land deeds without complying and settling on the land. That was an enduring thread in Len's thinking.

It is possible that, if economic success was the only criteria on which to judge the validity of decisions, then the Cuttens made the wrong moves when they selected *Bicton* land. That will never be known with certainty.

As it happens, the district ended up being a successful niche tourist destination rather than a booming farm economy. Much of the beautiful rainforest land is kept for nature reserves and parks and much of the area is now World Heritage listed. This has limited the scope for farming economies. The Cuttens had a small hand in starting the tourism industry so might not be disappointed at that outcome if they were able to revisit us today and see how their land remains in such beautiful condition.

Labour was freely available with many Djiru people camped on the beach in front of the estate, but it took time to train them in farming and many were working for the beche-de-mer operation run by Stephen Illidge and his family on the Barnard Islands. Stephen's wife was Aboriginal so they had an advantage in attracting the workers using their language and relationships.

Bananas

They progressed to bananas for a while but could not compete with the Chinese farmers in the Tully River valley who controlled that market and had the advantage of low costs due to their ability to employ Aboriginal workers and not pay them wages; they gave them opium residues in return at no cost and a few clothing remnants. The Chinese did not own freehold land, they leased it at low cost and spent nothing to maintain soil quality. This was always a great bone of contention for the Cuttens and other European settlers who had to invest in their freehold land. When the Chinese abandoned the land it was spent and became a weedy wasteland.¹⁵⁸

The Chinese left after prices slumped at the turn of the century and the banana industry did not pick up immediately at Clump Point. It was never to become a large part of the Cuttens' venture. By 1911 however, they had 14 acres in bananas.¹⁵⁹ The family of Florence Alexander purchased part of the Cutten estate and were successful from 1913 to 1917, so banana farming was the strength of the Alexanders at *Bicton*.

Len argued that for banana farms to be viable they needed, a *few years of high duty on imported fruit*.

While some bananas are still grown in the Mission Beach district, mainly on the Hyne lot, the area under bananas has contracted over time. The highly efficient farms are mainly in the Tully River valley where they gain economies of scale that are impossible to achieve in many places. An example is the highly successful 1,100 hectare (2,500 acre) farm of the Mackay family at Tully. Not only is that farm run on a mammoth scale, but it's a state of the art farm and is well diversified with large cattle and sugar holdings. Oddly enough, those highly successful farmers started after WWII and had banana holdings at Mission Beach for a time.

Sugar

Eventually, the wider district's agricultural economy was to be driven by sugar and bananas. Bananas were a large part of the Clump Point farming economy after 1910, but sugar crops were not possible without rail access to the mills at Tully and South Johnstone and those railway lines were never built.

Bicton included a small plot of experimental sugar cane for a while and that grew well, but they did not go on with it because of the lack of access to a mill.

¹⁵⁸ Leonard M. Cutten, *The Banana Question*, *The Northern Miner* (Charters Towers), 21 March 1910, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/80245468?searchTerm=The%20Banana%20Question>

¹⁵⁹ *Rural Homilies. By the Beachcomber. Bananas Again*, *The Northern Miner* (Charters Towers), 8 February 1911, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/80345632?searchTerm=%22Bananas%20Again.%22>

Coconuts

They planted coconuts of many varieties for copra having 40 acres of mature trees at the peak. That plantation had more than 1,000 trees yet that was not a good source of income either, ultimately because of the price competition from low labour cost economies in the Pacific islands. The trees took eight years to bear fruit and the bush rats caused much damage.

In 1903, the Cuttens were visited by government fruit expert, Mr. Benson who reported that the farm had an excellent coconut variety that they had imported from India to obtain the best quality coconuts.¹⁶⁰

In 1917, the coconut plantation helped provide a small income for their retirement.

Fruit Trees

There were over 2,000 fruit trees planted at *Bicton* by the end of 1886 excluding pawpaws and bananas or fruit bushes. Mangoes were a large crop, and these trees also took some time to mature and provide fruit. One observer said there were 700 mango trees there in 1899 and 40 different varieties.

There were 1,800 orange trees at that time but already, many citrus trees had been chopped down. In the early days, citrus fruit of every variety was grown and this was a big part of the venture along with pineapples. Oranges were the main revenue earning crop for a few years. However, while their production volume and the quality of fruit were excellent the prices-costs equation often led to losses. The markets were small, far away and fluctuated and more than half the fruit grown usually rotted on the ground either because of shipping delays or market price drops. Later on, there was resistance from the Victorian government to Queensland grown citrus.

Len Cutten clearly saw the writing on the wall for fruit growing right at the beginning of the fruit farming venture and said so loudly in 1886:¹⁶¹

Alas! And Alas! Mr Editor, I am one of those who took off his shirt, took up three holes in his belt, and went bald-headed for "fruit."

He went on to explain the many reasons why fruit growing is unprofitable and is a mug's game. He said that he had not given up but essentially was happy for someone to buy the farm. At times they made some money out of fruit and they tried every option imaginable to capture a market. They pressed 700 gallons of lemon juice by hand in 1898 and made some money on that for a while.¹⁶²

However, Len Cutten in a letter mainly about the ills of using Asian and Kanaka labour spoke of the losses they continued to make on fruit farming:¹⁶³

¹⁶⁰ *Fruit Culture. In North Queensland. The Telegraph* (Brisbane), 6 November 1903, accessed on Trove at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/174840634?searchTerm=Fruit%20Culture.%20In%20North%20Queensland.%20Good%20Work%20by%20Mr.%20Benson>.

¹⁶¹ Leonard M. Cutten, *The Other Side of the Picture, The Queenslander* (Brisbane), 26 October 1886, accessed on Trove, January 2022, at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/19818067?searchTerm=The%20Other%20Side%20of%20the%20Picture>

¹⁶² *A Coastal Coffee Plantation, The Northern Miner* (Charters Towers), 29 April 1899, accessed on Trove January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/84867138?searchTerm=A%20Coastal%20Coffee%20Plantation>

¹⁶³ Leonard M. Cutten, *Black Labour And The Farmers, A North Queensland Farmer on the Colour Question, Worker* (Brisbane), 28 May 1892, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at:

... during the last 12 months [we] shipped 62 tons of fruit (we grow nothing but fruit, no bananas) at a loss of £120 and mark you sir, no wages paid for any of us, not a penny, the only wages paid are to the two or three blacks employed ...

He confirmed that status in a letter to *The Queenslander* in 1893: *Does Fruit Growing Pay?*¹⁶⁴

Whether fruit growing pays is a matter of opinion, but there is an orangery of about 15 acres within a mile of where I write ... abandoned to the blacks as worthless. We have more than double that acreage of various kinds of fruit at the present time, and can't make a living or even pay expenses from the returns. The reason for such poor results from fruit at the present time I think lies in the fact that fruit is essentially a luxury, and the people of Australia are too poor to indulge in luxuries ...

After a long boom, Australia's economy went into recession in the period 1890-1893 so Len was correct about the nation being poor at the time. Len wrote again about the unprofitability of fruit farms in March 1894 to the same paper and suggested the solution had to include some Government assistance. That year, the Cuttens started to chop down fruit trees and Len reported that they cut down 300 fruit trees in 1894 and another 300 in 1895.¹⁶⁵

Herb said that in 1905 citrus provided their best return and that they expected to export 2,000 cases of oranges and mandarins from their 2,000 tree plantation but that the Victorian government was blocking supply claiming the fruit must be fumigated. This incensed Herb who said the fruit was always clean. However, they were still making some income from fruit farming in good years.

In 1905, Herb was interviewed and in that chat,¹⁶⁶ he said that the mango orchard was the biggest in the world yet was, *the most useless*. He added, *there is nothing in mango growing*.

Len estimated that the families losses on their fruit orchards were on average £300 per year over ten years i.e. £3,000 for the first decade at *Bicton*¹⁶⁷. That sounds like pocket money today perhaps, yet in 2022 currency is approximately \$500,000. Len, ever the pragmatist, went on to say,

If this orchard was put up to auction to-morrow it might fetch £50, but probably it would not bring a bid. Small wonder then that we are devoting ourselves more particularly at the present to coffee-culture.

In the same letter, Len spoke of the 1896 crop saying they had sent away 3,000 cases of fruit (150 tons) for the season, 'principally pines, mangoes and oranges.' And 'for limes, lemons, cumquats of which we have some hundreds of trees, there was practically no sale.

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/search/advanced/category/newspapers?keyword=BLACK%20LABOUR%20AND%20THE%20FARMERS&l-artType=newspapers&l-state=Queensland&l-category=Article&l-decade=189&l-year=1892&l-month=5&l-title=191>

¹⁶⁴ Leonard M. Cutten, *Does Fruit Growing Pay? The Queenslander* (Brisbane), 14 January 1893, accessed on *Trove*, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/20337883/2456864>

¹⁶⁵ Leonard M. Cutten, *A word from a Farmer, The Queenslander* (Brisbane), 13 July 1895, accessed on *Trove*, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/21633929?searchTerm=A%20Word%20from%20a%20Farmer>.

¹⁶⁶ *Our Northern Fruit Industry. Bicton Agri-Horticulturalists. The North Queensland Register* (Townsville), 27 March 1905, accessed on *Trove*, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/85547119?searchTerm=Our%20Northern%20Fruit%20Industry>.

¹⁶⁷ Leonard M. Cutten, *Can Fruit-growing be Profitable, The Queenslander* (Brisbane), 28 November 1896, accessed at *Trove*, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/20767001?searchTerm=Can%20Fruit-growing%20be%20Profitable%3F>

Pineapples

They planted pineapples early on and had some success with that crop before prices dropped.

In a letter to the press¹⁶⁸ in December 1891 one of the Cuttens reported that they had a successful season selling nearly the entire crop of 12,000 pineapples and were sending away five ton a week at the time of writing.

In 1899, a farm report noted that there were many acres of pineapples planted on the hill slopes and in ravines at *Bicton*, so pineapples were planted for an extended time at *Bicton* but the revenue from the crop seldom exceeded the costs of growing and transport.

Tea

Ever on the lookout for alternative revenue, they started a tea plantation on the south bank of Cedar Creek on Sid's second lot, Portion 19v. This was inland, alongside James' lot. The tea grew exceptionally well, but the tea bushes needed regular picking cycles every two weeks and they soon realized they did not have an available labour force to do that reliably.

Their tea nursery was located on what is now called Plantation Drive. A few of the giant trees remain there. While this was later an important source of plants for starting Australia's and PNG's tea industries, for the Cuttens it was another well conducted yet, in the end, unsuccessful enterprise.

R. J. Taylor, the author of the history of Australia's tea industry, attributed much of the expertise and drive on the Cutten tea and coffee plantations to Herb Cutten. He named Herb¹⁶⁹ the *Father of the Australian Tea Industry* and spoke glowingly of him as a man. The other three Cutten brothers undoubtedly had strong involvement in tea and coffee as well, especially Len and Sid. The tea was planted on Sid's selection.

Coffee

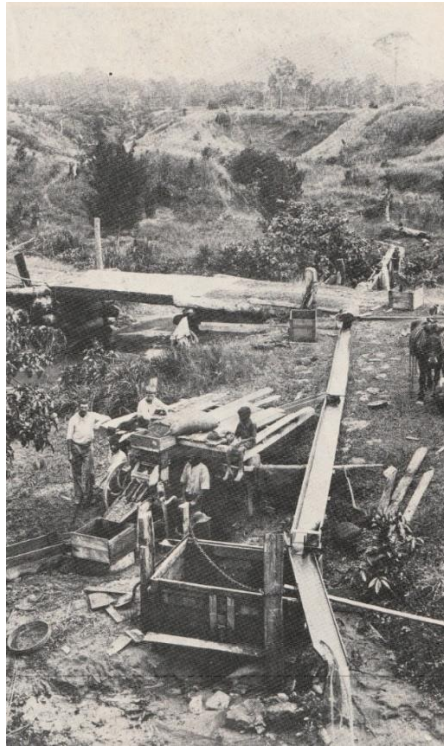
Initially, coffee was a different situation to tea. It was a biannual harvest so worked well for the Aboriginal labour available. James was a surveyor and laid the plants out in perfect lines. The bushes took between 3 and 5 years to produce a crop. The presence of coffee bushes at *Bicton* was first reported in newspapers in 1894 when they sent a branch of Arabian coffee to a correspondent.¹⁷⁰

The coffee operation was the focus of the majority of the Cutten investment and effort after 1890, and for almost a decade they were successful at that. They spoke of the loss of their Aboriginal workers to the Chinese banana farmers as one cause of the coffee's demise and it did make it difficult for them to harvest the crop after 1900. However, coffee's demise came when the federal government lowered import duties on coffee beans. Len Cutten was convinced that governments had lured them (and others) into coffee farming and just when they needed help most the support was withdrawn. They were disappointed and somewhat bitter at that perceived U-turn.

¹⁶⁸ *Northern Mail News, The Morning Bulletin* (Rockhampton), 15 December 1891, accessed on *Trove*, January 2022 at: [https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/52427814?searchTerm=pinest20\(12%2C000\)](https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/52427814?searchTerm=pinest20(12%2C000))

¹⁶⁹ R. J. Taylor, *The Lost Plantation: A History of the Australian Tea Industry*, G. K. Bolton, Cairns, 1982, p. 13.

¹⁷⁰ *Coffee in Queensland, The Telegraph* (Brisbane), 2 August 1894, accessed on *Trove*, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/173170017?searchTerm=Coffee%20in%20Queensland>



Open air coffee mill 1902 – image from R. J. Taylor *The Lost Plantation: A History of the Australian Tea Industry*.

In 1899, they received a coffee mill capable of handling four tons of the coffee berries per day. This included a *Gordon* pulper and huller; a large investment in modern coffee manufacturing gear.¹⁷¹

A newspaper report in 1899 provided a comprehensive description of their coffee plantation.¹⁷²

The chief coffee plantation is a couple of miles away up the valley, whence can be seen the roof of the sugar shed at the Mourilyan Harbour wharf. Here there are 80 acres, representing 80,000 plants, with an additional 10 acres ready for planting. These 80,000 plants occupy the place of what, two years ago, was dense jungle. They are set out in straight rows, and in the blossoming time – the whole area will be a mass of creamy white blooms of delicious all pervading fragrance. To keep the plantation supplied there are two nurseries, extensive places lightly thatched with palm fronds, and so situated as to command permanent supplies of water. The best part of the energy of the proprietors is now devoted to the cultivation of coffee, and its preparation for the market. By the study of all available works, practical experience, the brothers have acquired enviable knowledge on the subject; and with such a magnificent piece of country, soil of unsurpassed fertility, meteorological conditions said to be about perfect for the growth of the plant, never-ceasing rivulets intersecting the estate, there can hardly be any doubt that they will enjoy success.

At the height of their success, in the late 1890s, they were Australia's largest suppliers of coffee. Their coffee mill was producing 250,000 lb annually of coffee beans, ground coffee and coffee-chicory in 1lb tins. It was branded as *Bicton Coffee*. They engaged Mr Robert Connin, an experienced coffee and tea planter from Ceylon, to run the operation for three and a half years.

In 1899, James said they had 80,000 coffee bushes. They eventually had 101 acres of coffee planted.¹⁷³ Queensland had 200 coffee growers with 700 acres of coffee planted¹⁷⁴ in 1900.

¹⁷¹ *The North Queensland Register* (Townsville), 19 June 1899, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/84408085/8790560>

¹⁷² *A Coastal Coffee Plantation, The Northern Miner* (Charters Towers), 29 April 1899, accessed on Trove January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/84867138?searchTerm=A%20Coastal%20Coffee%20Plantation>

The duty on imported coffee (hulled bean) was initially sixpence per pound but it was quickly reduced and by 1902 Len reported that the reductions in duty were killing the industry and farmers were already ploughing their plantations into the ground.¹⁷⁵ Shortly after, Len wrote to report that the Federal Labor government had dropped the duty to tuppence a pound and shut down the industry:¹⁷⁶

I have always been a consistent supporter of the Labor party, and have, in my small way, suffered for it ... The prevailing drought is causing widespread distress, and the Labor party, by forcing on the country a 'free' trade policy ... has much accentuated the distress. ... I write to accentuate the fact that the tariff has practically shut down the coffee growers in Queensland. ... What I have I have earned, and it seems monstrous, now that I am getting old, that the fruits of my labour, almost sunk wholly in coffee, should be snatched from me by legislation which, while ruining us, will benefit no one, for it is certain that, the local growers once destroyed, the importers – always a small compact 'ring' – will at once raise the price. Since coffee growing has been an industry in this State the price of coffee has been lowered by one-half. We ourselves are now offering at [prices below 'free trade' London]. ... We have four tons of coffee in the store, which we are unable to sell. ... I am getting on in years, and the brightest prospect before me is – the Old Age Pension Bill!

Len was 46 years old when he wrote that. In 1903, he wrote once more about tariffs and contrasted the approach of the USA government and people to their farmers with that of Australia, ruefully declaring that Australia lacked the same commitment to its farmers. Anyone would feel for farmers who had invested their life savings and energies in a stunning coffee plantation with modern production equipment and succeeded in both their production and marketing endeavours yet were instantly ruined by a sudden drop in the import duty.

Later that year, Len wrote an embittered plea for a bounty on coffee, saying the farmers were lured into the industry by the government then destroyed by that same government.¹⁷⁷ He pointed out that the Cuttens had invested £3,000 (without counting wages) in their coffee farm (approximately \$0.5 million in 2022 currency) and it was lost overnight with the duty change.

By 1908, *Bicton* was still producing a little coffee and the Cuttens claimed a bounty from the State for the 10,000 lb sold. Len wrote a letter¹⁷⁸ to the press saying the bounty was never paid, he cynically named the legislation, the 'Bounties (hypocrisy) Act.'

E. J. Banfield, in one of his regular newspaper columns, *Rural Homilies*, wrote in 1912 in support of his friends at *Bicton* to demonstrate the injustice of government tariff changes on coffee beans:¹⁷⁹

A kindly disposed friend sends me a long commercial article on coffee and chicory, with the thought, no doubt, of supplying a text, since he is one of those who finds consolation in what is

¹⁷³ Leonard M. Cutten, *The Banana Question*, *The Northern Miner* (Charters Towers), 21 March 1910, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/80245468?searchTerm=The%20Banana%20Question>

¹⁷⁴ *Coffee Growing, Remarks of the Instructor*, *The Queenslander* (Brisbane), 1 December 1900, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/21251258?searchTerm=Coffee%20Growing>

¹⁷⁵ Leonard M Cutten, *A Voice from the North*, *The Queenslander* (Brisbane), 24 May 1902, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/21624227?searchTerm=A%20Voice%20from%20the%20North>

¹⁷⁶ *The Tariff and the Workers. Follies of the Labor Party. Important Industries Imperilled.*, *The Age*, 29 May 1902, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/199400427?searchTerm=The%20Tariff%20And%20The%20Workers>

¹⁷⁷ Leonard M. Cutten, *The Coffee Industry. An Open Letter to the Hon. C. C. Kingston*, *The Queenslander* (Brisbane), 6 June 1903, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/21646095?searchTerm=The%20Coffee%20Industry>

¹⁷⁸ Leonard M. Cutten, *The Bounties Act – An Indictment*, *The Northern Miner* (Charters Towers), 30 July 1908, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/80294276?searchTerm=The%20Bounties%20Act>

¹⁷⁹ *Rural Homilies: Beverage of the intellectual, by the Beachcomber*, *The Northern Miner* (Charters Towers), 25 April 1912, accessed on Trove, February 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/80342088?searchTerm=Rural%20Homilies%20Beverage%20of%20the%20Intellectual>

described as the beverage of the intellectual and being a loyal Australian would prefer it home grown. The legal definition of coffee and chicory is a mixture which contains not less than 50% of chicory and no added substances, while it is possible to obtain in some cities absolutely pure coffee Coffee from this district submitted to experts and connoisseurs Has been pronounced to be equal in fragrance and flavour to the best in the world. The other day I visited the estate of the Messrs Cutten Bros., Bicton, Clump Point. ... The plants which at one time stood in long regular array and in due season were encumbered with the weight of fruit have almost disappeared in an over-bearing jungle. ... The failure of Messrs Cutten Bros. to establish themselves as the most extensive producers of coffee in Australia was not due to themselves. They planted the estate according to an expert planter, imported the most approved machinery for the treatment of the fruit and bean; they purchased experience in the dearest market, and, independent of the counsel of experts, learned wisdom by boldly defying their own mistakes. I am personally aware of the amount of enterprise and work which went into the coffee plantation at Bicton. ... The Commonwealth does now encourage coffee-growing to the extent of a small bonus and insists that the individual who buys coffee shall have a fair deal. If these laws had been in existence when the plantation came into bearing the Messrs Cutten Bros. would have had some sort of comfort and encouragement during a critical period. The recognition of North Queensland as a coffee-producing country came too late and was not substantial enough to warrant the maintenance of the enterprise. Yet from the overcrowded plants £100 worth of coffee was picked this season.

Some, including Len, spoke of the inability to obtain labour after the Chinese banana farmers lured them away was the factor that ended the coffee plantation but the change in duty was a larger and more terminal threat to the *Bicton* farm. Coffee farming was undone by the lower costs of production in tropical climate overseas and the high cost of labour in Australia compared to Africa, Asia and South America. The only way it could survive was with import duties and Australian governments on both sides of the house gradually turned to free trade to protect the stronger industries like mining, cattle, sheep and cereal farming.

The irony is that if this beautiful and very well operated coffee farm existed in 2022, it would be a booming success. While less than 1% of Australia's coffee consumption is grown in Australia today, the industry is re-emerging. There are 50 coffee plantations in Australia now with 600,000 coffee bushes on 500 acres. The *Bicton* plantation had 100,000 plants on 100 acres so in 2022 it would be the largest coffee farm going; producing about 20% of the nation's home-grown coffee.

The reason that coffee farming, while small, is alive again in Australia today, is that people are seeking more sustainable 'organic' produce which Australia's coffee farmers do well. Further, coffee drinkers increasingly ask for specialty coffees. Hence, the demand for Australian-grown coffee is increasing and demand now exceeds supply as some beans are exported.

Another reason for this comeback is that Australians invented the first mechanical coffee harvester, the *Coffee Shuttle One* on the Tablelands in the 1980s. Most of Australia's coffee is produced in northern NSW and south-eastern Queensland but farms are operating successfully on the Atherton Tablelands where different varieties grow. It will take time for this industry to build momentum and awareness among Australians, yet the growth is inevitable and it will in time mimic the success of Australia's fabulous wine industry on a smaller scale.

Oh, if only the Cutten descendants had *Bicton* coffee going today. It would fit so well with our boutique tourist economy and the Cocoa farm nearby. Yet maybe the Tablelands has a better climate for coffee; we will never know.

Len advertised that he had started a Coffee Growers Co-Operative Association¹⁸⁰ in 1894 yet that seems to have gone nowhere as there was not further talk of it in the press.

The great coffee venture was, sadly, at an end.

Bicton's economic stocks declined thereafter.

Other Crops

Tobacco (cigar leaf) and cotton were tried at *Bicton* briefly without success. The tobacco grew well but was not viable in the market conditions.

They imported plants of all sorts from Asia and India including chicory, ginger, pepper, citrus, mangoes, tobacco, cocoa, vanilla, spices, Jack fruit and soursop. Their home garden had every sort of vegetable and spice imaginable in it.

Timber

The Cuttens imported horses and drays early on and had to walk them overland and cut miles of tracks through the dense rainforest to achieve that goal. They also had cattle on the property.

The Garner family were in charge of timber operations from 1909 when the sawmill was built. While they had access to coastal shipping there was some value in timber exports (1909 to 1915) but much of the timber was milled to make fruit cases. Looking at the logs the pioneers dragged around evokes awe at the effort and ingenuity of the people who achieved these feats. It adds an extra dimension to the Australian term, 'hard yakka.'



Timber hauling at *Bicton*.

Infrastructure

The family invested major amounts of capital into their plantations and infrastructure. The governments, including Councils, built no infrastructure in the Clump Point district for the first 30 years of the *Bicton* farm.

The first, desperately needed infrastructure the State government built, after much lobbying, was the jetty at Narragon Beach 2km south of *Bicton*. That was to allow coastal shipping to pick up freight

¹⁸⁰ The Queenslander (Brisbane), 3 November 1894, accessed on *Trove*, January 2022.

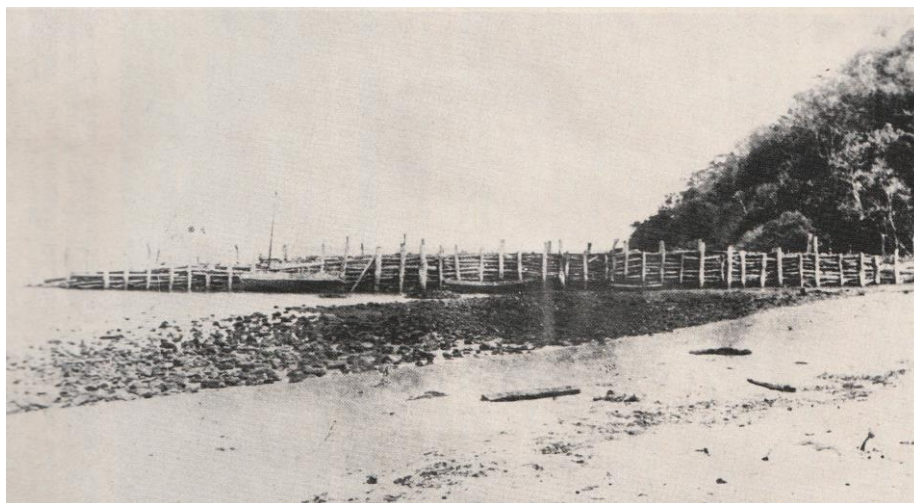
safely from the Clump Point farms. It was completed in 1917 and only used three times before being destroyed in the March 1918 cyclone. By the time the government finally built the jetty, the shipping was all but gone due to the intervention of the First World War. Fate dealt this family so many heavy blows and each time they recovered and found a way to continue.

The 1918 cyclone ended farming for the Cuttens, apart from their sister Florence and her young Alexander boys who started anew with some success.

The Cuttens had built a stone and timber breakwater structure in 1891 for their little fleet of launches and rowing boats to moor on and load cargo to take to coastal ships or bring supplies in from those ships. Building the wharf was a mammoth undertaking for a private concern. It was over 80 metres long and built to last but was not spared by the monster cyclone of 1918.

Infrastructure built by the Cuttens included:

- A steam-driven sawmill
- A case mill to make fruit cases
- Timber jinkers to haul the logs to the sawmill
- A railway of about 800 metres length with wooden rails and steel rails on the curves which transported goods from the sawmill and fruit packing sheds to the breakwater
- A large, 15 room homestead
- A two storey fruit packing shed and store, a workshop and byre
- Two coffee nurseries of large dimensions with frond covered roofs
- An 80 metre long timber and stone jetty built before 1889
- A water-ram driven coffee mill and huller
- Thatched roof huts for Malay and Kanaka labourers. The Aboriginal workers built their own grass huts (gunyas) on the beach nearby.
- A dray track to El Arish
- Bridges and roads on the property
- They also built a lookout to spot passing shipping at the top the nearby hill known now as Bicton Hill; a pyramid shaped hill on the coastline.



The 80 metre, stone and timber breakwater with their sailboat and dingy moored alongside.

Shipping Facilities

Their jetty gave them some access to shipping but it was not an ideal port. The coastal shipping companies needed loads of 10 ton guaranteed to come to the wharf and sometimes the ships did not arrive when planned so the produce was wasted.

When World War 1 intervened, shipping became scarce and by 1917 it stopped entirely leaving all farmers in the Clump Point district without an ability to run their fruit farms. That ended the venture really and the 1918 cyclone was the nail in the coffin for the Cutten era but later the farm was renewed in part by Florence Alexander and her family.

Access Roads

The roads to Clump Point came too late to save the Cutten brothers. They were without road access for the first 40 years of life there. They built their own dray track with the help of the Garner and Mackness families in 1921 but it was just a rough trail. In 1922 they were finally granted some small funding from Council who offered to pay the Cuttens £600 to build a bridge over South Maria Creek.¹⁸¹ The family owed £400 in rates so received only the residue for the work done.

Late in 1926, after the Johnstone Shire Council helped the Clump Point community to build three bridges over the main creeks, the road from Bingil Bay to El Arish was open to some motor vehicles; just. The council waxed lyrically¹⁸² about how they had built a wonderful road and how, *as many as two hundred people visit this picturesque spot every week-end now, and the road has made that possible*. They failed to acknowledge the work done by the Clump Point settlers to create the road.

An entertaining essay,¹⁸³ *The Wonderful Liz*, written by Neville Searle of Silkwood, described the road condition. Tin Lizzie made it to Bingil Bay. but they walked back such was the damage to their Ford jalopy. The road did enable picnickers and holiday makers from nearby sugar towns to visit Bingil Bay but the only safe access was by lorry and the road was impassable at times in the wet season.

Clump Point eventually won State funding for a made road from El Arish to Bingil Bay in 1935, after 24 years of persistent advocacy by the Cuttens. That was a pattern that would endure and in 2018 the Mission Beach community finally had a swimming pool built after 18 years of incredible battles, and robust advocacy. Innisfail and Tully ratepayers were never keen to spend money on basic Mission Beach infrastructure and the same battles were necessary to achieve a mail service, electricity, water and boating facilities. The Cuttens had made a grand start for the district, nonetheless.

When the El Arish-Bingil Bay road was opened to much fanfare in 1936, it was obviously far too late to save *Bicton* as the Cuttens knew it, for they were all deceased by then. However, it would be of much value to *Bicton's* new farmers, the Alexanders.

The Queensland Government Minister, Percy Pease, was in Bingil Bay to cut the ribbon for the new road and at the ceremony he recalled meeting the Cuttens early on in Townsville.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸¹ *Innisfail Notes, The Northern Miner* (Charters Towers), 1 November 1922, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/80530306?searchTerm=bridge%20over%20South%20Maria%20Creek>

¹⁸² *Visit to Clump Point, Cairns Post*, 16 December 1926, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/40541327?searchTerm=Visit%20to%20Clump%20Point>.

¹⁸³ *The Wonderful Liz, Maryborough Chronicle and Wide Bay and Burnett Advertiser*, 6 August 1926, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/153160190?searchTerm=Motoring%20in%20North.%20Trip%20Around%20Innisfail>

¹⁸⁴ *Bingil Bay Road. Official Opening. Praise for Pioneers, Cairns Post*, 10 July 1936, accessed on Trove at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/41741045?searchTerm=Bingil%20Bay%20Road.%20Official%20Opening>.

As a pupil of the West End State School at Townsville, the Cutten brothers, then on a visit to the Townsville Show, had brought down a tropical exhibit comprising sugar cane, oranges, coffee and desiccated fruit and in a lecture to the scholars they told of the wonderful possibilities of the Far North. They were a wonderful type of settler. They never grumbled. All they did was to ask us to do something. And here it is. He went on to say he remembers when it would take half a day to travel from Bingil Bay to El Arish and now it would take half an hour.

He also spoke of the epic coffee marketing battles they had:

The merchants could not buy the foreign article under 5d per lb, and on top of this was an import duty of 3d. What they actually offered to Messrs. Cutten Bros. was the London market price, and they seemed to think they would either force the growers to sell to them or burn it. The Messrs Cutten, however, saw another course open: they started to put their own coffee on the market and entered into competition with the other merchants. This led to a compromise and at the present time they dispose of about ten tons in the parchment to southern firms.

Farming Ups and Downs

There is no doubt that the best times for the farm were when coffee was paying well between 1895 and 1902. Farming at *Bicton* was incredibly challenging with the forces of nature and of governments often working against these brave and persistent pioneers. Most people facing the challenges they endured would have left soon after they arrived, as Willoughby Smith and many after him did in the district before 1918. The district was almost devoid of residents a year before the 1918 cyclone, such was the devastating impact of World War I on the coastal shipping.

When Florence Alexander spoke of Willoughby Smith as ‘no battler’ and ‘easily disheartened,’ late in her long life, she was speaking in words that that her three youngest brothers would have nodded in full agreement with. They were, above all else, committed to *Bicton* and were not quitters. This was a proud family. Returning to England or leaving Clump Point was never mentioned.

James left after 22 years and had two long holidays in England during his stay at *Bicton* so his commitment was never on the same level of his younger brothers, but Herb, Len and Sid were as one about *Bicton*; they were there for the long-haul. The only times they left were for supply, business issues, to influence governments or to raise capital to repair storm damage.

The challenges of nature constantly set them back. The first big event for them was a cyclone in 1890; a small yet lethal storm for *Bicton* as it destroyed the homestead and much of the farm and infrastructure. Damages were estimated at £5,000 which is \$1 million in 2021 currency, so they were forced to leave the farm (Len, Herb and Sid) to raise capital to restart it. Insurance was not an option in those days of course. James stayed on the farm but contracted rheumatic fever and was hospitalized for a long period while Herb, Len and Sid did the hard yards out West.

The only members of the family who had lived at *Bicton* and returned to England were May, James’ wife and her daughter, Isabel. They both returned there after James died in 1935. May was at *Bicton* fleetingly and would have left with mixed feelings, as her mother-in-law did not ‘get along’ with her.

The farm experienced a tough drought in 1902, enduring five months without rain, so they lost the crop for the year and fought fires which destroyed parts of the pineapple plots and some of the coffee plantation. Herb was injured badly in one of these fires and his arm took two years to heal.

In 1911, another cyclone encroached and created further havoc. This was the storm that sunk the *Yongala*. That cyclone also caused considerable crop damage and the breakwater had to be rebuilt.¹⁸⁵ By this time, most of the Aboriginal labourers they had relied on so much in the past were off to work for the Chinese banana farmers on the Tully River. The Chinese attracted their workforce by paying them in addictive, poisonous opium residues ('unchee'). The three Cutten brothers left at *Bicton* were in their 50s so it was a great struggle to repair the damage and restart the farm. They were forced to mortgage some land to finish the repairs then another small cyclone caused havoc in 1913.

After all the storms and the drought, the labour shortages and the loss of import duty protection they would not unreasonably have hoped for an ounce of luck and a period of freedom from the forces acting against their hard earned efforts. However, World War 1 broke out in the following year and with that came a rapid slowdown in shipping available to transport their produce to the markets. By 1917, no ships were available. Farming ceased across the district and most settlers left.

Then came the biggest cyclone ever to visit this part of the Queensland coast: the March 1918 cyclone with its seven metre tidal surge. That ended the farm for Herb, Len and Sid. They clung on and rebuilt the homestead and largely retired from farm life.

Fortunately, by 1913, Florence had returned to stay at *Bicton* with her Alexander family who would rebuild the *Bicton* enterprise to some extent mainly via banana crops and dairy farms *Bicton* continued on until 1952 when Florence Alexander died. Florence and Les moved into a small timber house nearby and *Bicton* was abandoned. The old piano remained in the vacated homestead.¹⁸⁶

Herb, Len and Sid always had their vast landholdings to sell to provide income in their retirement, but the land had relatively low values compared to cane lands nearby. Most of their land was bequeathed to the children of their sisters, but they sold one lot in 1924,¹⁸⁷ and Len sold the coconut land (160 acres) in 1925 to Harry Plumb,¹⁸⁸ a Tully sugar cane farmer who had been injured in WW1.

They had a dream that there would be a town at *Bicton* and in 1926 began to fulfil that vision when they surveyed part of the seaside land into allotments¹⁸⁹ and sold many of them for holiday cottages. To entice buyers to Bingil Bay, they sold beachside land at a nominal price of only £20 each, with an added incentive of a refund of half that cost to buyers who erected cottages within a year.

Some cottages were built quickly after, but most of the land was purchased by speculators and when the road was again delayed most of the lots ended up with Johnstone Shire Council,¹⁹⁰ when the owners failed to pay their rates.

In late 1936, after the road was built, part of Len's original lot was subdivided into *57 township allotments and 9 virgin scrub farms* and auctioned.¹⁹¹ This was ideal for week-end cottages at Bingil Bay. Many lots were sold and dwellings were built, re-starting the establishment of a Bingil Bay village.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁵ R. J. Taylor, *The Lost Plantation: A History of the Australian Tea Industry*, G. K. Bolton, Cairns, 1982, p.28.

¹⁸⁶ Ken Gray, *Odin's Beach: Nissen Navigates 80 Years of History*, Mission Beach Historical Society, 2022.

¹⁸⁷ *The Cutten Family of Clump Point*, *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 4 June 1924, accessed on Trove, February 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/61145216?searchTerm=The%20Cutten%20Family>

¹⁸⁸ *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 16 December 1925, accessed on Trove, February 2022 at:

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/61172676?searchTerm=Plumb>

¹⁸⁹ *Clump Point by W. J. D.*, *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 30 July 1926, accessed on Trove, February 2022 at:

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/60923294?searchTerm=Clump%20Point%20By%20W.%20J.%20D.>

¹⁹⁰ Miss Constance Mackness, MBE, *Clump Point and District, An historical record of Tam O'Shanter, South Mission beach, Mission Beach, Bingil Bay, Garners Beach and Kurrimine*, G. K. Bolton, Cairns, 1983, p. 52.

¹⁹¹ *Cairns Post*, 14 October 1936, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at:

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/41774216?searchTerm=Frank%20Byrne%27s%20Auction%20Sale%20Bingil%20Bay>

Len Cutten's land was bequeathed to Les Alexander. When they subdivided the land they retained the area where the *Bicton* homestead was located. In 1969, Les subdivided that part and sold it to Christine Forbes. Christine and her husband Gary built their home at the edge of the escarpment and Chris still lives there in 2022, enjoying the vista so much appreciated by the Cuttens.

In the last few years, Herb, Len and Sid were said to have augmented their income by working at times for the Councils doing road making contracts. Ryko¹⁹³ recounted that in an article written while he stayed at *Bicton* for some time in 1917.



1917 Cuttens collecting coconuts

They also earned a few dollars harvesting coconuts before they sold the plantation, but in the last years of their lives they sold some land to live well enough and had plenty of land left to give to their much loved nephews and nieces.

Innovation

The Cuttens were innovative in their approach to farming in terms of what they chose to produce, how they grew it and how they marketed it. In the early days they tried nearly everything to make a living from the land and had even grown calamus ('wait-a-while vine) which sold for 8 shillings a hundredweight to a Townsville firm for ships' fenders.

The most profitable produce at the start was pineapples and when the prices went down they even tried to export them to England:

We thought to try the English market [for fruit], but the cold meat boats won't ship for fear of damaging the meat, and the B.I. Company could not or would not grant space in their cold storage department, considering we only wanted a ton, doesn't show much push on their part or encouragement to those desirous of opening up a fruit trade.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹² *Clump Point, Cairns Post, A Great District, Cairns Post*, 11 August 1926, accessed on Trove, January 2022.

¹⁹³ *Sketcher. The Pioneers of Bicton. A Tragedy of the Fertile Far North. The Queenslander* (Brisbane), 29 December 1917, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/22345601?searchTerm=Sketcher.%20The%20Pioneers%20of%20Bicton>

¹⁹⁴ Leonard M. Cutten, *Does Fruit Growing Pay? The Queenslander* (Brisbane), 14 January 1893, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/20337883/2456864>

They persisted with the idea of exports however, and ultimately won approval to experiment with refrigerated exports to England in 1897.¹⁹⁵

By the steamer Jumna Two cases of prime pineapples were shipped by Messrs. Cutten Bros., of Bicton, Clump Point, near Cardwell, in order to test the carrying capabilities of the fruit, and its value on the London market.

The refrigerated cargo included some mangoes individually wrapped in tissue paper, but no further reports of exports to London were seen in the records, so we assume this was a failed experiment. However, the Cuttens were never afraid to try something new, and they left no stone unturned.

Their approach to growing coffee was innovative and they found an expert in India and invited him to stay for 3 years to learn all they could of the art of coffee culture. When they grew mangoes they realised that there were many varieties with greatly varying taste and texture, so they imported 40 different varieties to test. They did the same for coconuts so ended up with the very best of plant varieties to maximise their chances of success.

In 1904, they tried another creative way of raising revenue and sent samples of the bark of different mangroves to Glasgow to be tested for suitability as a tanning agent.¹⁹⁶

Five weeks after the 1918 cyclone, the family must have been at rock bottom and wondering how they would rebuild their home and make a living, yet they never stopped exploring options. They placed an advertisement in the papers:¹⁹⁷

Wanted a person, with some capital, to correspond with view to erection of Tourist Seaside Hotel, at Bicton, Clump Point. Cutten Bros.

They quickly picked themselves up and saw that the future probably lay in tourism, which had yet to start but was not far from doing so. They had the seaside land for such a venture but had lost their hard earned capital to the war, the cyclones and untimely government interventions. Yet they still fought on and set about attracting people to buy lots for holiday homes in their later years.

¹⁹⁵ *The Week* (Brisbane), 5 January 1894, accessed on *Trove*, January 2022 at:

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/181823963?searchTerm=Pineapples%20and%20Mangoes>

¹⁹⁶ *Morning Post* (Cairns), 16 September 1904, accessed on *Trove*, January 2022 at:

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/42964362?searchTerm=Bicton%2C%20Clump%20Point>

¹⁹⁷ *The Queenslander* (Brisbane), 23 February 1918, accessed on *Trove*, January 2022 at:

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/22358118?searchTerm=To%20Hotelkeepers%20and%20Others>

LIFE AT BICTON

Life at *Bicton* was never going to replicate that of Islington, London. Such a chic district in 2022. Not that they charged out into the wild, remote outreaches of the antipodes to replicate their life in England. However, they retained much culture and comfort in their home life and re-created some elements of London life and with their books, magazines and many different newspapers, they maintained reasonable contact with the wider world.

We have no image of the Cutten's Islington home in 1870, but here is one from the suburb (2022) that probably resembles its nature. Somewhat Dickensian, just as Margaret Cutten would like.



An Islington home, 2022.

They traded up to this homestead (below). There are no internal colour zooms of *Bicton*, yet the considerable difference in abodes is obvious. The homestead lacked a little in architectural style, but lacked nothing in comfort.



The *Bicton* homestead pre-1918 cyclone.

The Cutten family appears to have had no qualms whatsoever about the change. They were delightfully positive and merely made the most of the great advantages that *Bicton* afforded them. Visitors who wrote about the place were in awe of the beauty and romance of the homestead and the area and wrote many complimentary words about the lifestyle and people of *Bicton*.

At its peak, *Bicton* was a bustling 15-room home. It had many huts nearby for the Malay and Kanaka workers before 1900.

In 1899, newspapers published¹⁹⁸ a comprehensive description of *Bicton* titled, *A Coastal Coffee Plantation*, with a few words about the *Bicton* home and its ‘hospitalities’ ... and ... ‘evidences of comfort and refinement on every hand.’

... in the gay flower garden, the well-kept bush house, brilliant with varied shades of begonias (the favourite flower of the hostess), in the plentitude of books and periodicals, and curios collected during continental travels, upon which the hostess is a great authority, and the daughter of the house a great enthusiast. ... But one cannot move from the broad verandah without an exclamation of surprise at the commanding prospect it affords of the lustrous sea upon the rim of which great ocean steamers pass up and down, while near at hand, just beyond the Barnards, lies the track of the smaller coastal boats. Seldom is the view comprehended without some vessel being in sight.

It was, without doubt, a lonely existence at times. If the family desired human company other than with those living at *Bicton*, then for the first 20 years, they were going to be largely disappointed unless they learned the Djiru language.

When they arrived in 1885, they had no European neighbours or friends who could visit. In 1888, Willoughby Smith and his wife, Alice had a new home on Clump Point 2km south as the crow flies. It would have been a monumental effort to cut a track through that terrain at the time, yet they must have made some sort of trail and had contact occasionally because in mid-1889, when Fred Cutten died, Willoughby attended and read the burial service for the family.

Unfortunately, when the 1890 cyclone destroyed both *Bicton* and the Smith’s house and farm, Willoughby and Alice abandoned the property and moved to the USA. In an article in 1984, Florence reflected.¹⁹⁹ on that time and suggested that Willoughby Smith gave up too easily with the casual observation:

Willoughby wasn’t here that long. ... Poor Willoughby wasn’t a battler. He was easily disheartened.

No such charge could be made of Florence and her three brothers, Herb, Len and Sid.

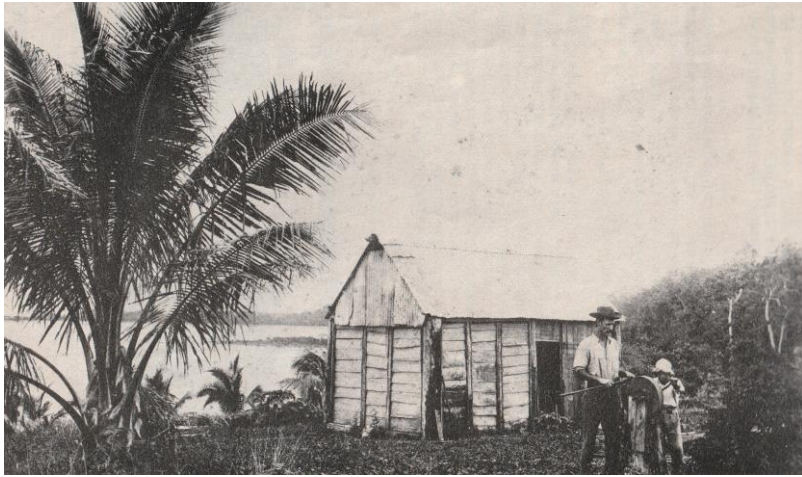
The damage done by the 1890 cyclone to the *Bicton* house, buildings and farm was estimated²⁰⁰ at £5,000, and in 2022 dollars that equates with \$1 million. They worked out West to regain capital and built it all again then purchased Willoughby’s damaged house to improve their homestead.

John Unsworth of *Narragon*, only 1.5km south of *Bicton*, selected his land in 1892. For the first few years *Jacky Walkabout*, as the Djiru people named him, would not see much of the Cuttens. He had no capital so was always walking long distances to the Atherton Tablelands and beyond for paid work, doing fencing and the like. His wife, Mary (Margaret Cutten’s help) and daughter came later. Unsworth joined the *Bicton* team in 1903 as a foreman for the workers.

¹⁹⁸ *A Coastal Coffee Plantation*, *The North Queensland Register* (Townsville), 01 May 1899, accessed on *Trove*, February 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/84406345?searchTerm=A%20Coastal%20Coffee%20Plantation>

¹⁹⁹ Valerie Albiston, *Bingil Bay, This Australia*, Spring 1984, Volume 3, Number 4, accessed on *Ancestry* February 2022 at: https://www.ancestry.com.au/mediaui-viewer/collection/1030/tree/113803780/person/102003232882/media/599eaa9-4033-407c-9e61-258731e97041?_phsrc=Fqa408&usePUBJs=true

²⁰⁰ *The Messrs. Cutten’s Estate, Clump Point, The Northern Miner* (Charters Towers), 5 August 1904, accessed on *Trove*, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/search/advanced/category/newspapers?keyword=The%20Messrs.%20Cutten%27s%20Estate>



Jack Unsworth, working at his hut when foreman on the Cutten farm, 1903. Image from R. J. Taylor, *The Lost Tea Plantation*.

Bertha and Edmund Banfield settled on Dunk Island in 1897, but their first year was taken up with clearing and building. Edmund eventually had a close relationship with the Cuttens, particularly with Herb. They were birds of a feather with their love of music, literature and nature, but initially Banfield found fault with the Cuttens, thinking they were ruining the environment with their farming venture so they did not see much of each other before December 1898. Ted Banfield purchased a small motorboat and named it *Nee Mourna*. In 1899, he upturned it and almost drowned and Bertha refused to go in his small boats thereafter.

When starting their coffee and tea plantations, the Cuttens brought coffee and tea planter, Robert Connon, in from Ceylon and he stayed on at *Bicton* for three and a half years.²⁰¹

A few people were settled on the Tully River by then, but that was 20km from *Bicton* in a direct line with no track before 1900. Another settlement was beginning at Mourilyan in the north, a similar distance from *Bicton*. The largest settlement was at Cardwell, at 50km distance, but the only way to access Tully and Cardwell was by boat. Cardwell was settled in 1864, and it was a town that promised much early on with the boasting of George Dalrymple who claimed the harbour was akin to Sydney's Port Jackson. He owned tracts of land in the interior south of Cardwell at the Valley of Lagoons so had a vested interest in making a success of Cardwell.

Regarding the port at Cardwell (Port Hinchinbrook), nothing could have been further from the truth than Dalrymple's extravagant claims. It was very shallow and even the longest of jetties was never going to solve the sea access problems posed. Shortly after Cardwell was settled, Townsville was developed and it quickly usurped Cardwell which had small fits and bursts, as when the Palmer River gold rush was on, yet never grew to be the significant town Dalrymple dreamed it would be.

Dorothy Jones summed up the sad state of the Cardwell economy²⁰² in the 80s:

The eighties was a period of wide expansion and investment throughout the colony, but Cardwell, after a decade of startling headlines, subsided into being a quiet backwater independent of the external boom years. It's position on the northern coasts as a port and a centre of a district was subsidiary to all the newer towns. Gradually the Government officers

²⁰¹ Cassowary Coast Regional Council, *Local Heritage Places*, May 2013, accessed January 2022 at <https://www.cassowarycoast.qld.gov.au/downloads/file/2005/local-heritage-places-may-2013pdf>

²⁰² Dorothy Jones, *Cardwell Shire Story*, Jacaranda Press, Brisbane, 1961, p. 255.

and officials were removed to more important centres and as a consequence the town lost even the trade of those who had had to ride to Cardwell to transact their official business.

That said, it was still a small trade centre and was the closest access point for the Cutten family. That changed when Innisfail, Tully and Ingham all grew quickly after 1920.

James Dillon selected land in 1903 at Garners Beach. He had a farm, yet it is not clear from the records if he had more than a humpy built. James was gone by 1909 and forfeited the selection.

The property was taken up by Ted Garner in 1910. Ted came to work with the Cuttens to build and run their new timber mill and case plant in 1909. He had run a timber mill at Bedford Creek earlier. This was the first significant human company that the Cuttens experienced at *Bicton* for Ted brought with him his family including his wife Catherine his younger children and oldest son Ted junior with his wife Edith. Lou Wildsoet came from Cardwell and married one of Ted's daughters, Elizabeth. Lou also worked at the timber mill.

There was quite an influx of settlers to the area after 1910. Many of them banana farmers further south on what is called Wongaling Beach and South Mission Beach in 2022. 'Yankee Dan' Keogh was probably the first of these around 1888. He cleared a Hull River frontage and planted bananas, but there is little sign of any contact with the Cuttens, as his farm was 20km south and there was no track between the two farms.

Some of life's old traditions were maintained by the Cuttens that were similar to London life. They rose at daybreak and had breakfast strictly at 8 am, lunch at 1 pm and dinner after 8 pm (a similarity). The 15-hour working day was definitely not akin to life in London, but they stuck to the ritual of dinner being a 'dress' occasion every day. Coats were worn.²⁰³

Christmas was always a big occasion as well and was not too different from the event in London. Later on, Edmund Banfield joined in for these celebrations.

As shown earlier, the *Bicton* home bore no resemblance to a London house, yet they made it comfortable and large. It was destroyed by a small cyclone in 1890 and totally obliterated by the 1918 cyclone, yet they rebuilt it assiduously each time it was damaged.

16 March 1912 was the date of the first meeting of the Clump Point Progress Association and as Secretary, Herb Cutten sent the minutes to the press²⁰⁴. Motions were moved to seek a mail service from the Postal Authorities. A petition was drawn up and signed by all members of the new association and the group stated that they 'derive no benefit from any Government services so are entitled to special consideration in this matter.' There were 12 members mentioned in the minutes, a fabulous turnout considering there were merely 20 residents on the Commonwealth electoral rolls for the district at the time and many had long distances to travel.

In 1913, Florence returned from her home at Irvinebank after her husband died at under 50 years age and she came to *Bicton* with her six children. That would have brightened the homestead up greatly for by then only Sid, Herb and Len were living at *Bicton*. Florence's daughter, Margaret married the well-known and liked local timber getter, Jack Bunting in 1919 and they lived at Jack's Hull River property 20km south of *Bicton*. Gertrude Alexander, Charles' wife also lived at *Bicton* and the place was warming up socially. Florence, like her mother Margaret, was a fine entertainer and

²⁰³ R. J. Taylor, *The Lost Plantation: A History of the Australian Tea Industry*, G. K. Bolton, Cairns, 1982, p. 16.

²⁰⁴ Frederick H. Cutten, Secretary, *Minutes of the first Clump Point Progress Association*, *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 11 April 1912, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/58826814?searchTerm=Minutes%20of%20the%20first%20meeting>

piano player. That was always another important element of London-life that they retained, and the old grand piano was still there after *Bicton* was abandoned.

After the cyclone in 1918, the Johnstone Shire Chairman, S. K. Page was asked for help from the Disaster Committee by Les Alexander who was at Innisfail during the storm.²⁰⁵ Page said that they 'had more than they could handle with the pressing problems around town without worrying at that stage about the twenty-four residents of Bingil Bay ... who might or might not be in trouble. Les persisted and gained some assistance. Despite most farmers leaving the area before 1918 due to the lack of shipping services, 24 people remained (that was the total for all of Clump Point, not just Bingil Bay).

From time to time, the Cuttens had interesting visitors stay, some for extended periods. One intriguing visitor was Edward Reichenbach, known as Ryko. At age 21 years, he created widespread publicity in Australia and abroad when in 1914 he broke the cycling record for Adelaide to Darwin. He rode it in only 28 days and 7 minutes, breaking the record by more than 15 hours. Ryko was a photographer and adventurer and would have created much entertainment at *Bicton*. Before he left, he wrote to the newspapers²⁰⁶ and took up the cudgel for Len, advocating for the north Queensland fruit farmers.



Ryko with his famous bike.



Posed photo with Aboriginal people Ryko had befriended in Arnhem land. Photo courtesy Northern Territory Library, Karilyn Brown Collection

²⁰⁵ R. J. Taylor, *The Lost Plantation: A History of the Australian Tea Industry*, G. K. Bolton, Cairns, 1982, p. 33.

²⁰⁶ *In North Queensland, Nhill Free Press*, 30 October 1917, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/129571209?searchTerm=In%20North%20Queensland>

Ryko wrote a 2,400 word essay²⁰⁷ in a regular column of *The Queenslander*, named *Sketcher* under the title, *The Pioneers of Bicton, A tragedy of the Fertile Far North*. There is little doubt that Ryko reflects the sadder side of feelings of the surviving family in this essay and how they felt considerably let down by governments at all levels:

Three of the sons survive, and a married sister, who, after losing her husband elsewhere, has now thrown in her lot with her brothers and has brought her grown-up sons and daughters to assist. A sadder situation would be hard to find. For the three sons, whose ages are 60 to 70, are obliged to accept council road-making contracts to earn sufficient dollars to buy crusts to exist on. If ever a soldier on the battlefield has staked his life for his country, these men have staked their lives to prove to deaf ears and blind eyes what can be produced in this El Dorado section of the continent. Alas! they have no loving wives to smooth the wrinkles, or drag them about by their whiskers. For in the days when they viewed their prospective futures through "rose-coloured spectacles," there were no women in their world. ... They have never seen an automobile. They have never seen "Charlie Chaplin" cutting his antics on the canvas [After losing everything in the 1890 cyclone] these men were not discouraged, they rolled up their "blueys," and went out West on timber and cattle lands, and worked for a few years till they earned enough to come back and carry on. This is the one and only locality for repatriation post-war settlement, and a place where we can produce the very foodstuffs required to carry on the war ...

This slant on the Cutten family story needs to be seen in the context it was written. Len Cutten had been running a decades-long propaganda campaign. His objective was to have the governments and people of Australia see the value of north Queensland agriculture and the need for it to be supported. Len Cutten and his brothers, Sid and Herb, would never have written such a 'woe is me' and tugging at the heartstrings account of their lives. However, it was a powerful way to add to Len's narrative about farming in the north. It probably served that purpose well, yet it should not be taken literally as a true reflection of life for the Cuttens at *Bicton*.

Visitors to *Bicton* were ever amazed at the welcome and the hospitality. The family were visited in 1921 by a group passing on a boat who said:²⁰⁸

The cyclone washed everything away and the place is becoming desolate. Orange orchards, coconuts, bananas Are not worth giving away owing to lack of shipping facilities. The old gentlemen were very good to our landing and forage party. And when on enquiry they found out of the party aboard, messages were sent, saying "Come ashore and be entertained," else they threatened to shoot the blankety lot.

And while the Cuttens were at times a little saddened by their reflections they remained very positive about living at Clump Point. The *Cairns Post* reporter who interviewed them in 1923 found,²⁰⁹ 'the brothers to-day scarcely show any signs of the effects which follow misfortune, but rather their genial natures are a striking characteristic.'

²⁰⁷ *Sketcher. The Pioneers of Bicton. A Tragedy of the Fertile Far North. The Queenslander* (Brisbane), 29 December 1917, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/22345601?searchTerm=Sketcher.%20The%20Pioneers%20Of%20Bicton>

²⁰⁸ *To the Barrier Reef, Toowoomba Chronicle and Darling Downs Gazette*, 25 May 1921. Accessed on Trove, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/253202877?searchTerm=Clump%20Point>

²⁰⁹ *News of the North, Clump Point, Cairns Post*, 17 May 1923, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/40189123?searchTerm=News%20of%20the%20North.%20Clump%20Point>

Bicton was a centre for the wider community of Clump Point for many years and was even the district polling booth in the early days. A reporter from the *Townsville Daily Bulletin* observed²¹⁰ that, *Although not in business, Mr. L. M. Cutten is always prepared to meet visitors. He has an extensive library himself. I must go to Clump Point.*

By 1926, the Cuttens had their own small fan club and correspondent, ‘W.J.D.’ wrote:²¹¹

For the writer of this article, the greatest pleasure was to meet Mr. L. M. Cutten, the king of the settlement, in his own romantic home. Here amongst the extensive shelves of books and his tables covered with papers and magazines like a School of Arts, he is a student of every question under the sun. It is indeed a great loss that such a keen critic of public affairs should not have a greater voice in the management of the country. A student of nature too; he has long practical acquaintance of every form of tropical plant life; of birds, beasts and insects; of the sea in all its humours of storm and calm; of the progress of North Queensland settlement in all its phases. His mind still retains all its freshness and vigour and to know him indeed is a liberal education. Very soon I again hope to visit Clump Point and have further converse with Mr. Cutten in his own happy surroundings.

Shortly after Herb and Len Cutten died, there was a history of Clump Point published in the *Johnstone River Advocate and Innisfail News*²¹² saying:

Cutten Bros. were well known throughout the district and every settler who came into the district was treated at Bicton as one of the family.



Cutten family with Edmund Banfield (rear, second from right) before the 1918 cyclone.

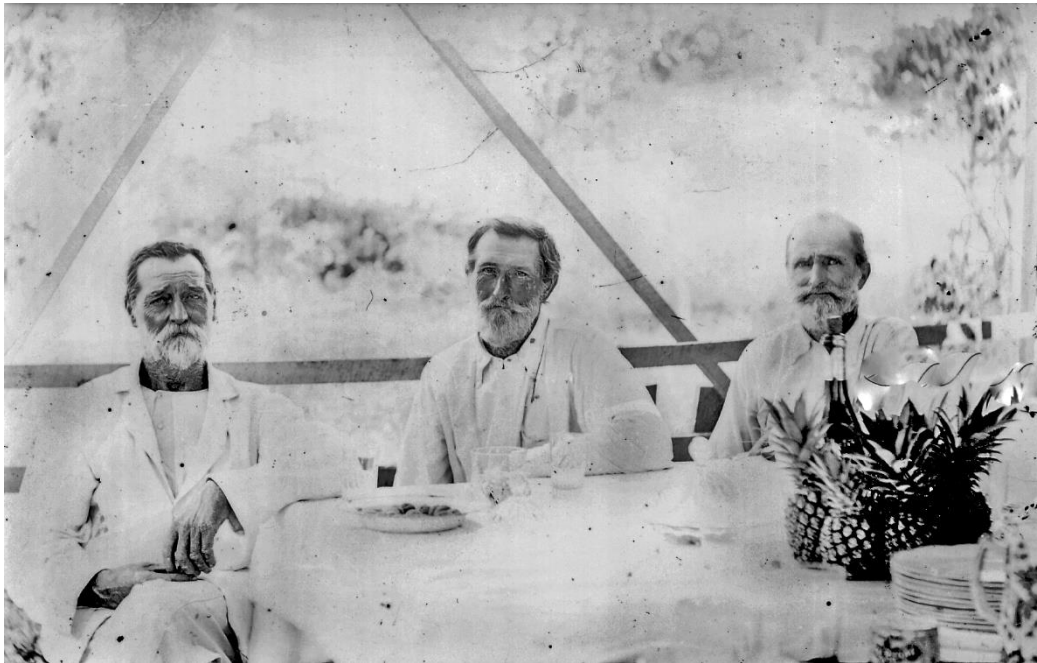
²¹⁰ *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 23 December 1925, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/61170575?searchTerm=%20must%20go%20to%20Clump%20Point>.

²¹¹ *Clump Point* by W. J. D. *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 30 July 1926, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/60923294?searchTerm=Clump%20Point.%20By%20W.%20J.%20D>.

²¹² *Clump Point Develops. Pioneering Settlement Has Interesting History*, *Johnstone River Advocate and Innisfail News*, 29 May 1931, accessed on Trove at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/215476145?searchTerm=Clump%20Point%20Develops>



Bicton Homestead, rebuilt after the 1918 cyclone.



The long-term Cutten team at *Bicton*: Herb, Len and Sid.

In his summary of the lives of Herb, Len and Sid and their lack of financial success and absence of female partners, their visitor, Ryko concluded²¹³ that, *A sadder situation would be hard to find*. He depicted them as sad and almost victims of their own errors and of unfair treatment by nature, fate and governments. They were far from the truth, yet Ryko was merely endorsing Len's propaganda on the difficulties of NQ farming.

While Ryko spoke of their lives as a tragedy, they lived a fulfilling life at *Bicton*. They had misgivings about some of their decisions and felt hard done by governments and knew they were unlucky with the frequency and severity of the cyclones in that period, but they had a wonderful life for all that.

They could have ended their *Bicton* adventure at any time and were entirely capable of rebuilding their lives elsewhere. They were decisive people and would have moved on had their lives not been rich for they always remained in charge of their own destinies.

²¹³ Sketcher. *The Pioneers of Bicton. A Tragedy of the Fertile Far North*. *The Queenslander* (Brisbane), 29 December 1917, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/22345601?searchTerm=Sketcher.%20The%20Pioneers%20Of%20Bicton>

Every indicator in the records available points to them loving their chosen district and ever advocating for it. In their retirement, reporters always spoke of their positive outlook and welcoming demeanour. They made the most of every moment they had at *Bicton*.

Constance Mackness spoke of Florence Alexander²¹⁴ in her district history and quoted Florence's words about *Bicton* just a few days before her death:

Mrs. Alexander was the last survivor of this first pioneering group. A big-hearted, cultured lady, she shared the courage of her family and their passionate love of Bingil Bay. To a neighbour who visited her in Tully Hospital a few days before her death, she said: "You know I am never going home again, don't you?" then added softly and slowly, as if arming herself to endure it, "Never – going – to see – Bicton – again."

The Cutten's life at *Bicton* was a true triumph. Reading of the challenges and ordeals that this family faced and decisively dealt with provides a wonderful perspective to reset our personal compasses in modern times. Constance Mackness shared another charming Cutten recollection²¹⁵, this time with Len musing late in life and saying how he felt about *Bicton*:

A lady who came up from Brisbane on the second train [1924] that ran right through tells of chatting about it to Leonard Cutten as he sat looking out from the terrace-top over the sea and his domain. ...'You have a lovely green picture spread out around you to look at' she commented. 'Lovely? Yes, indeed', he agreed. 'Did I ever tell you that we came here on an April Fools Day? We had some bad setbacks, but that doesn't make us fools to have come here: Bicton was a grand place to work for, and it is a grand place to sit and look at when you are past working.'

²¹⁴ Miss Constance Mackness, MBE, *Clump Point and District, An historical record of Tam O'Shanter, South Mission beach, Mission Beach, Bingil Bay, Garners Beach and Kurrimine*, G. K. Bolton, Cairns, 1983, p. 52

²¹⁵ As above, p. 52.

LEGACY

When we ask ourselves what the Cuttens left us that was of value to those who followed there are several benefits.

Knowledge

One of the major legacies the Cuttens left was that they experimented in so many ways in fruit growing and shared their learnings with farmers widely. They probably benefited less from the knowledge that these experiments generated than did others who followed.

In a story titled, *The Cutten Family of Clump Point* in 1924, it was concluded that:²¹⁶

The orchards and the different plantations were always productive, but the marketing was often distressful. There can never be great fortunes from agriculture when the progress is subject to periods of dislocation. And besides, an experimental farm, such as was necessarily conducted by Messrs. Cutten Bros., is never of great direct benefit to the proprietors. Most of the advantages of course, are reaped by the population that come afterwards. Although Messrs. Cutten Bros. have been moderately successful, they have never been properly rewarded. But if all the energy that was exhausted at Bicton had been concentrated on our wet belt sugar cultivation, then the Cuttens might have emulated the riches of Tyson.

That conclusion has much merit in terms of the knowledge they created yet probably draws on some false assumptions as well. It assumes that success is based solely on financial measures and there is no doubt, the Cuttens had far more aims in life than merely making money.

Within a year of arriving at *Bicton*, it was obvious to Len that fruit farming would never generate great riches. They knew at the start that there was no easy way to make *Bicton* work. Yet that did not stop them.

Another fallacy in that 1924 description of the Cuttens' lives was the idea that they could have made a fortune in sugar as their Darling Downs neighbour, James Tyson did. James built his wealth first as a butcher on the goldfields, and then he ploughed those profits into a cattle empire and topped up his capital by negotiating canny land deals. That game involved many dodgy deals and using 'dummy' landowners to hold down land and obviate the Land Laws, and the Cuttens were averse to such dealings.

Tyson owned half the Tully valley sugar land but never really got into sugar farming himself. He planted 100 acres of sugar cane in 1908 but that was merely to ensure he could obtain title to the land and partly comply with the Land Office rules. The cane was lost to fire shortly after.²¹⁷

Sugar came far too late to north Queensland for the Cuttens to be involved; the Tully sugar mill was not operating fully until 1926 and that was 40 years after the Cutten family arrived. By then, the Cutten brothers were all near to 70 years age.

²¹⁶ *The Cutten Family at Clump Point*, *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 4 June 1924, accessed on Trove, January 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/61145216?searchTerm=The%20Cuttens%20Family%20of%20Clump%20Point>.

²¹⁷ Ishmael, *The Sketcher*, *Echoes from the Past*, No. 2, *The Cairns Morning Post*, 2 December 1908, accessed on Trove, February 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/39417964?searchTerm=The%20Sketcher>

Genesis of our Tea Industry

Herb Cutten was the leader of the tea and coffee farming ventures at *Bicton* and has since been named the *Father of the Australian Tea Industry*.

A tangible legacy of the Cuttens came from their tea plantation, which was oddly enough, one of the least successful of their agricultural adventures. However, the plants they abandoned became valuable to others.

In the 1950s, a GP from Innisfail who had migrated from India, took an active interest in creating a tea industry in north Queensland. That was Dr Alan Maruff. Alan read about the Cutten tea nursery and eventually found the giant tea trees still there, surrounded in seeds and seedlings. From those sprigs of life Alan Maruff, with others, successfully created the *Nerada Tea* plantation on the Atherton Tablelands. He also passed on plants that were used to create a tea industry in Papua New Guinea.

District Identity: Djiru and Cuttens

There are many less tangible benefits that flowed to those who came to the district after the Cutten family. The major strand here was the value the family contributed to our reputation as a district.

After 70 years, they left an indelible mark on our community and district. When you lift the hood up and look carefully at the entire information about any person, invariably there are blemishes. For this family there are few blemishes or doubts expressed of their actions or behaviours.

Mary Guthrie in a memoir on Edmund Banfield noted that some districts are known by the names of their most famed or first pioneers when she said:²¹⁸

We said 'Banfield of Dunk Island' just as we said 'Cutten of Clump Point' or 'Fitzgerald of Geraldton' (now Innisfail), and many others of pioneer fame.

From the evidence available we can be proud of the district's two founding 'families' – the Djiru, the original founders, who have been here for eternity and the Cuttens who were our first European settlers.

Their lives should be remembered and celebrated.

The image (next page) below illustrates their core values. Les Alexander is lodging his vote at the polling booth at *Bicton*, days after the 1918 cyclone. Les was 22 years of age and merely six weeks previous to this, had been in a serious accident when using dynamite. It exploded prematurely and blew his left hand off. He was at Innisfail during the cyclone but rose early from his recuperation and set off in a boat with two others to assist the survivors of the storm.²¹⁹

²¹⁸ Mary Guthrie, *Banfield of Dunk Island, A Memory of 'The Beachcomber' and his tropic isle*, *The Brisbane Courier*, 3 June 1933, accessed on Trove, February 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/22182098?searchTerm=Banfield%20of%20Dunk%20Island>

²¹⁹ R. J. Taylor, *The Lost Plantation, A History of the Australian Tea Industry*, G. K. Bolton, Cairns, 1982, p. 33.



Les Alexander votes in State election among ruins of *Bicton* six days after the 1918 cyclone.
Image from story by Roz Glazebrook *100-Year Anniversary of Innisfail Cyclone* for Innisfail Historical Society, 2018.

Those of us who have been through category 4 or 5 cyclones know how devastating they can be and how much work they create after they pass. When one thinks of how difficult it must have been at *Bicton* with no home insurance to cover the cost of restoring their properties. They pitched in and found a way to rebuild, as they could not call on trades people to do the repairs.

Building standards were also non-existent, so homes in 1918 had no steel tie downs and were easily destroyed. No army troops or SES people came to help and Council would not come. Nobody had chain saws to clear the mass of broken trees. It was all manual, back-breaking work.

Yet we hear of no complaining and blaming others; everyone just got in and helped until the place was restored. Nobody even mentioned in the aftermath that Les had recently recovered from a devastating arm injury. Banfield mentioned in passing that Sid Cutten was disabled by his recent catastrophic injuries only months before, yet Sid was nonchalant after surviving the wild night alone and pinned to a garden fence.

This was Mission Beach's first European family showing us their grit. They had no Church to fall back on, they relied upon their own resilience and determination and their way of coping was to stand by their family and their community and work as one. Faith came not from deities but from their intense belief in the wonder and beauty of nature and their genuine love of those around them. If all that this family do for us is remind us of those values and show us what we can achieve by sticking together when facing extreme adversity, then they serve us well.



Bicton beachfront lands at Bingil Bay and Brookes Beach circa 1930.

Looking at the *Bicton* landscape during Cutten times and after, the image above shows the extent of land clearing in 1930. That clearing offended E. J. Banfield initially when he called the place *Red Cliffs*, indicating that the escarpment at the beachfront was eroding. The image below shows *Bicton* land as it is in 2022. The only signs of *Bicton* here are their coconut cultivars thriving in the wild.



Bingil Bay and Brookes Beach area 2022, image courtesy Susan Kelly, Natural Images.

The land at Brookes Beach (foreground in image below) was not cleared by the Cuttens and has not been cleared since. Their envisaged village was built on their land with the houses largely tucked away among the rainforest trees (shown peeping through the trees on the second image below) and much of the land in the district has been assigned since as reserves and parks.

The Cutten romance endures, albeit without these wonderful people living their active lives at *Bicton*. Sadly, it is also largely without many of their neighbours and owners of this land for eons, the Djiru.



2021, Bingil Bay (left) and Brookes Beach (right) showing Sid Cutten's two beachfront lots, Lot 158 and Portion 19v (foreground). Image courtesy Susan Kelly, *Natural Images*.



2021, Bingil Bay south showing houses on Len Cutten's Lot 159 where *Bicton* was located at the beachfront.
Image courtesy Susan Kelly, *Natural Images*.

Paradise it was when the Cuttens lived their lives to the fullest at Bingil Bay and paradise it remains.

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