

# CHRIS and GARY

The FORBES FAMILY of BINGIL BAY



*Natural images*  
BY SUSAN KELLY

Abridged Version by Chris Forbes & Ken Gray



This is the story of Bingil Bay resident Chris Forbes (nee Cope) who has lived in this district for 54 years. Chris and her husband Gary camped on the beach at Bingil Bay when they first visited the area in 1961. They settled at Bingil Bay in 1969 after purchasing one of the most notable home sites in the district. Chris still lives there, right on the edge of the Bingil Bay escarpment at the site where the Cutten family, the district's first settlers in 1885, had lived in their 13-room homestead, *Bicton*.



Forbes family at their Bingil Bay home.



Forbes home-site, uncleared, 2022. From *Google Earth*.

The *Google Earth* Street image above shows how Chris and Gary took a strong conservation approach by minimising building size and vegetation clearing. Their home is all but invisible from the air, so long before people were talking about *minimizing our footprint*, Chris and Gary were doing just that.

After migrating in 1961 from England, Chris started her life in Australia travelling in a VW beetle with her good friend, Anudhi Wentworth. An unexpected romance changed the course of Chris' life and was to be the start of a long and happy journey. Chris and Anhudi joined the crew of a ketch, aptly named *Rendezvous*. This was where it all started for Chris Cope and Gary Forbes.

One minute Chris was frolicking without a care, and then she was married. That was the last thing on her mind, yet it happened in no time at all. Gary was working as a salesman for a photographer and, shortly after they met by chance in Townsville, Chris and Anhudi then went on to Cooktown. They worked in a hotel with Chris as a chef. Anudhi wrote to the skipper of the *Rendezvous* and learned that it was leaving for Cooktown with Gary joining the crew and eager to hook up with Chris again. In the next letter, Gary sent a card with his address, so Chris wrote telling him of Cooktown life. When the ketch came into the Endeavour River and neared the wharf, Chris saw Gary on deck in his dark green sweater and felt suddenly and strangely that he was all she could ever wish for.



*Vivacious Anudhi ...* from a later newspaper article. Engagement Cooktown, 12 October 1961.

Shortly after, the *Rendezvous* was on its way to Thursday Island and on the way, it was the perfect weather and atmosphere for a marriage proposal. On his birthday on 12 October 1961, Gary popped the question.

They had known each other for merely two months and were not together for all that time. They decided to be married on Thursday Island in the Anglican Cathedral Church soon after.



Thursday Island's Anglican Church: All Souls' & St. Bartholomew's Cathedral Church and Quetta Memorial.

## COPE-WADDICOR FAMILY

Chris' family can be traced on *Ancestry.com*. back five generations to John Cope and Elizabeth Timmis in 1721. Beyond that, you can trace the family back to Thomas Timmis in 1505. These families all lived in Wyburnbury in Cheshire, England. Her grandmother, Sophie Peacock, came from Darwen in Lancashire, and her grandfather, James Waddicor, and his ancestors came from Edgworth in Lancashire.

James started a varnish business that flourished, and he bought a large house, *Oakleigh*, on the main street of the village of Bradshaw. They had six children: Louisa Maud 1887, Elsie (Chris' Ma) 1892, Annie 1895, James 1897, Marion 1901, and William 1905.

Elsie was well-organized and helped make their business successful. She had a big kitchen and was an amazing pastry cook and a keen bottler of preserves. Elsie was educated at Bangor Training College for Teachers and taught at Bradshaw Primary School. Unfortunately, she contracted breast cancer in 1951 while Chris was in college. Elsie was an outstanding teacher and when Chris graduated from Teacher's College herself, she was appointed to her mother's role at Bradshaw.

Chris' Pa, Rupert Cope, was born in Cheshire, the sixth child of 12. He was a quiet man who loved to read Dickens and smoke his pipe. He had wanted to be a farmer, but after the war, he had to settle for a bank job and rose to become the Bolton branch manager.

Chris' sister, Mary, was academically clever and a brilliant musician. She studied Latin and music at Bolton and was a scholarship student gaining a distinction in violin. She was invited to the Royal College of Music but chose instead to do English at the University of London. Mary continued playing violin in many orchestras until she was 90. After graduating, Mary had a year at the University of Cambridge to qualify as an English Literature teacher. There she met a medical student, John Whitehead, and they married in 1952. They soon migrated to Adelaide and had a family of six children.

## CHRIS COPE UK DAYS



Christine Forbes, 1933.



Bolton School

Chris Cope was born on 17 May 1931 in Bolton, England, near Manchester. Her health was poor for much of her childhood, yet that would not affect her as an adult. She was educated at Bolton in a large Victorian mansion, *Beech House*, and started early at four years of age. At junior school, she made her first true friend, Anne Lowe. They played duets at the concerts – even the Double Bach. Chris was often bedridden but always had her dog, *Taffy* as a friend.

In 1949, Chris was accepted as a student at Froebel College at Roehampton University in London. Froebel was an educationalist who believed in learning through play, preferably outside, so Roehampton was bliss for her. At Froebel, Chris had three close friends: Rosemary whose father was French and cooked delicious meals, Molly from Rhodesia, and Hermione, from Singapore.



Froebel College, Roehampton University, London.



1956 Fiat Bambino.

## TEACHING 1953 - 1959

Chris loved teaching at *Beech House*, where she experimented and learned. *All my geese are swans* was her mother's favourite maxim and Chris lived by that ever after. At the end of 1956, after their Ma died, Mary and Chris cleared out the house, sold it and left Bolton. Her good friend, Rosemary, was living in Broxbourne in the stables attached to her parents' large guest house and suggested that Chris come and live there. Chris won a job in Hertford nearby and went to work in her green Fiat Bambino.

After three years, sister Mary and her husband, John invited Chris to migrate to Australia with them and she agreed. It was to be a huge fork in the life of Chris Cope. She had enjoyed her three years with Rosemary and holidaying with her parents in their house at Cap Martin (French Riviera), but now was perhaps the time to move on. It meant leaving her dog, *Susie*, and her much-loved Fiat, but Chris was sure she would reunite with both after two years.



## MIGRATION

SS *Strathmore* was a one-class ship and Chris shared a cabin with an elderly Irish lady, a chatterer and a whisky drinker and they got along well.



P&O SS *Strathmore*.



VW Beetle.

Chris' first Australian friend joined the voyage. Anudhi had lived in Melbourne for some time running a restaurant in Prahran. Her father was a Dutch Burgher and her mother a Singhalese. She had been home on a visit before taking a job opening at *The Tea Centre* in Melbourne, promoting Ceylon tea. They were soon in Perth and Chris immediately found Australia ideal and thought everything glowed brilliantly and the light was clean and clear. The *Strathmore* sailed across the Bight in chilly weather leaving Anudhi who flew to Melbourne.

Chris met her Aunty Sara (Uncle Jim's wife) in Adelaide. They had migrated to Australia earlier to join their daughter Pat. Chris stayed with the family for a while before moving to Melbourne and accepting a post at Ivanhoe Girls' Grammar School. By February, Chris had her Australian driver's licence and thanks to her grandfather's trust, a beautiful dark blue VW Beetle. She moved into a house with Anudhi, and life was fun. Even so, it was city life, and Chris was always a country person. So, she told the headmistress that she would leave at the end of the year. The headmistress was furious.

Anudhi was earning a lot in tips at *Mario's Night Club*, and Chris got a waitressing job first at the *Riata* and later at the *Two Faces* in Darling Street. There with tips she earned more than she did teaching. So, flush with the earnings, they set off North. Chris was so excited that she ran into the back of a ute at the first set of traffic lights. They crossed into Queensland with great expectations and were soon up to Mackay. That was where they found the *Rendezvous* and life took another huge turn.

After being married, Chris and Gary returned to Cairns. Soon after, in another moment of serendipity, they met Florence Wheatley who sold fruit in Cairns. She recommended that they, *Go to Mission Beach - paw paws grow wild there*. On that recommendation, they spent the rest of their lives in Bingil Bay.

In 1963, they crewed on another yacht and after many adventures from Australia to India they travelled widely in Europe and later in Asia.

## BINGIL BAY

In 1965, Chris and Gary moved to Bingil Bay to camp on the beach below the cliff – near where the toilet block is today. It was peaceful with little traffic and the Main Roads Department employed Gary for two shillings a day to read the meter they had installed to count the passing cars. While they had toast over a campfire for breakfast, Perry Harvey would pass by with his tourists in a red bus. Postmaster, Eric Bull who came to collect the rent would come by, as would Mrs Rosa Perry, and occasionally they would see Mrs Armhurst who shopped for others in the district. They got milk from the *Moonglow Motel*, the first motel in Mission Beach, then at the *Blue Pacific Motel* run by Iris and Howard Watson and went to

Tully occasionally on unsealed roads. The groceries were wrapped in brown paper and string to keep out the dust.

By 1968, they were keen to buy land as a base. Chris had heard of the Cutten estate now owned by Les Alexander who was in Charters Towers. She acquired half an acre of that estate on the beachfront. Chris and Gary moved their caravan onto the land in 1970 under a cascara tree that was in full flower with a bright yellow canopy. On a trip to Cairns, they found a friend, Max Beattie, and suggested that he might help them build a shed to house the caravan. Max was Anudhi's friend. He had never built anything, but his grandfather was a coach builder. Why not?

In 1970, the Silkwood Brick Factory was still operating, and their handmade bricks were attractive pink colours and perfect for the floors. Max built the house as if he were making a piece of furniture and the structure is still perfect after three cyclones and 50 years.

Gary and Chris lost their savings in the stock market crash in 1971 and went south. In Sydney, they rented a room in the second oldest house in Kirribilli. Gary had a job on the roads, the stop-go man. In an exclusive area, he found elegant ladies mouthing obscenities at him! He soon found different work as a landscape gardener laying grass around the Opera House while the first stage was built. Chris worked at a kindergarten where the children sang like angels and were lovely and would have stayed longer but she was offered a job at Tully Primary School starting in 1970 with the Year 1 Class she wanted. She stayed there three years while Gary was on the fugals at Tully Sugar on the night shift.

Chris and Gary tried several times to have children with no success and they considered adoption, but Gary's lungs were failing, and he was told he only had another ten years to live, so they decided to enjoy their lives. They worked when they needed money and played when they had it.

In Bingil Bay, the couple had a hard time initially with the police who had questioned their lack of a steady income and their lifestyle, but they met Iris and Howard Watson who were wonderfully supportive. In 1973, the wet season started early, and Chris was unable to drive to Tully State School so was transferred to El Arish Primary. Soon after, Richard Hodgson broke the news that Mission Beach State School was now a two-teacher school. Chris marvelled at her luck in Australia and started the year with nine students and ended it with 25. It was her last year of full-time teaching, and after that, she chose contract roles.

In 1972, they bought a 170-acre rainforest lot at Millaa Millaa on the Atherton Tablelands. Gary's health had been poor, but improved when they were there in their caravan. In Bingil Bay they planted fruit trees and vegetables and had a West Indian lime tree given to them by Mr Nakken who was known as the *Baron of Bingil Bay* and built *Tana Kita*, Indonesian for *our house*. The Nakkens had lived in Indonesia before retiring here. Success in selling pawpaw at the gate inspired Chris to start selling plants. They specialized in ferns as they were hardy and travelled well. Tree ferns were popular and available in abundance at their Millaa Millaa lot.

Cyclone Winifred 1986 ended the plant business, and it was time to visit Gary's mum more in Coolangatta. Gary's Dad had died in 1961. When his Mum died in 1984, Chris was called for an interview with Queensland Education and was passed to do Supply Teaching. This job proved ideal, but they had no phone. Helpful retired neighbours were happy to take messages. They rigged up a line and the neighbours pulled it to ring a bell in the garden. In 2004, a telco tower was erected on the hill at Ninney Rise, and Chris had a mobile by then.

Gary's health was deteriorating. He went to a specialist who declared that *80% of patients with lungs like yours have cancer. But not you.* Growths can remain inactive for years but once it was malignant it grew quickly and soon after, in February 2017, Chris lost her wonderful life partner.

## GARY FORBES

Gary's family can be traced back 36 generations to approximately 780 C.E. *First Forbes* is found in The Kingdom of Dal Riata, a Gaelic kingdom that existed on the west coast of Scotland and included the northeast corner of Ireland. This included major portions of Argyll in Scotland and County Antrim in Northern Ireland. The famed Iona monastery was in this kingdom. The family name was often written as *de Forbes* in early times and by 1172 the clan had moved to Aberdeenshire on the east coast of Scotland. They were in County Meath in Northern Ireland by 1670 C.E.



Tolquhon Castle at Tarves, Aberdeenshire, Scotland.

Many of Gary's ancestors were Lords or Lairds. There have been twenty-three with the title, Lord Forbes, since Alexander Forbes, 1380-1448, became First Lord Forbes. Eight of Gary's direct descendants were lairds of Tolquhon (pronounced *Tob-bon*) and two were lairds of Knappernay. Sir William Forbes, 7<sup>th</sup> Laird of Tolquhon, rebuilt Tolquhon Castle in 1589. It is a ruin now yet is visited by more than 500,000 tourists a year. His father, the 6<sup>th</sup> Laird, was killed by the English at the Battle of Pinkie in 1547.

Several of Gary's ancestors were knighted, the most recent being Sir Alexander Forbes 1500 – 1547. One was Castle Governor of Urquhart Castle on the shores of Loch Ness, one of Scotland's largest castles. Another ancestor, John d Forbes, was the Sheriff of Aberdeen. Many of Gary's more recent ancestors had careers in the Church and in medicine and law. John Forbes, 1703 – 1759, was a Dublin barrister, and Uncle John (1750 – 1797) was an MP and a barrister and, for a short while, was Governor of the Bahamas Colony. Arthur Forbes, 1713 – 1788, was also an MP and was the Sheriff of County Meath in Northern Ireland and one of the founders of the Whig party in Ireland. His son, Arthur Forbes, was awarded a Doctor of Law from Cambridge University. Gary's grandfather, 1846 – 1912, was born in Italy, migrated to Queensland in 1885, and was the first farmer to plant cane in NSW. That was near the QLD/NSW border. Dr Litton Armitage Forbes, Gary's father, 1895 – 1960, was born in N.S.W.

Gary Litton Armitage Forbes was born on 12 October 1935 in the hospital at Toogoolawah, a small town in the Brisbane River valley just north of Esk. Toogoolawah had been a flourishing town, but its population was halved in 1929 when the *Nestle* Condensed Milk factory closed. Dr Litton and his wife Joyce were keen followers of cricket and arrived at one test match only to see Bradman dismissed by the first ball. In 1939, the hospital burnt down, and the town could not afford a resident doctor, so they moved to Greenmount on the Gold Coast, QLD. This was a perfect place for the family. Lynette, Gary's sister, was five years older than him and they both spent all their free time on the beach.

Gary attended Coolangatta Primary on the hill above the beach. It was a disaster for him – days spent gazing at the surf. He lived for 3 pm and the beach. Coolangatta in the 40s meant American soldiers on R&R leave, hit songs on the sand and an opportunity to supply the troops with brochures he got for free. The gullible GIs gave him tips – often two bob (shillings). Aged 15, he started at Southport School. This was wonderful as the school allowed him to develop in his own way and as a weekly boarder, he had the advantage of the surf every Sunday.

After finishing school, Gary sold encyclopaedias in Brisbane for a while, but a more successful job was as a salesman for a photographer, Ralph Tornquist, who travelled the outback taking family photos. He employed two other salesmen, Hughie Gibbs the father of the Bee Gees and Gary Frost. The two Gary's worked together and introduced themselves as *Mr Frost and Mr Winterbottom*. Once Gary had earned \$100, he would hitch a ride to Sydney and spend the lot. Life was not always carefree; he was often homeless and penniless on the road thumbing a lift back to Coolangatta.

### **BINGIL BAY BATTLE 1987**

This was a huge event for the little town of Bingil Bay. Chris was not the ringleader of this resident uprising but was a key player. It all started when Johnstone Shire Council (JSC) advertised a change to the zoning for Bingil Bay. A Development Application was made to Council to change the land use at a lot in Cutten Street to Special Facilities so that a block of six two-bedroom townhouses could be built. 55 residents flocked to a meeting called by Iris and Howard Watson, and they were unanimous in their opposition to the proposal and to the newly discovered zoning change for Bingil Bay.

Chris wrote to JSC objecting and JSC responded, saying the zoning had been changed minimally. The residents of Bingil Bay were immediately awoken. Everyone realised that there could now be up to one block of six units built on every fifth residential block. People were alarmed by this Gold Coast-like prospect. A ringleader emerged, an unlikely ally, a Brisbane developer living in Bingil Bay, Neil Chesney.

A second resident action meeting was held at Watson's home in 1987. It was standing room only. The residents vowed to fight with all their energy. Such changes are difficult to effect, yet the political cycle favoured the resident group: a Council election was due in 1988. They sent a delegation to JSC immediately. The campaign was instantly energized. The four candidates for Division 4 in Council were approached and asked if they would support a zone change. Bob Anderson was the most unequivocal and supportive of the group. He won the election and set about the task of changing the zone.

On one occasion, the group gained signatures from 90 Bingil Bay residents. In 1988, the group sent another delegation to Council and Neil Chesney hired a planning consultant to help. Another group emerged as *Bingil Bay Committee for Balanced Views*, representing landowners who wished to cash in.

By April 1989 the first battle in this war was won: Council voted unanimously in favour of rezoning to low density. This was the end of a successful activist career for Chris and Gary Forbes.

### **REFLECTIONS – by KEN GRAY**

As we helped Chris Forbes create her family history, it was soon evident that she was not the reserved, unadventurous, English-born schoolteacher that one may imagine. There was a twinkle in the eye.

Chris had loving parents who understood the power and value of education. Her mother was a strong and independent woman who wanted her daughters to live their lives in the same manner. Both of her daughters did well academically and could have chosen any career and Chris chose to follow in her Mum's



footsteps and be a teacher. She was a naturally gifted teacher, especially for young children and enjoyed being with them.

What distinguishes Chris from most people perhaps is that she is bold and decisive, like her mother, and her choices in life have not always been mainstream or what others may have expected. She chose to go to Australia rather than live the safer option, in England. She chose to trek north with her adventurous friend, Anudhi, rather than stick to Sydney or Melbourne. She chose Gary in seconds, just when it looked like she would choose no man to share her life with. She chose Bingil Bay and then decided to stay there. Chris made timely and wise decisions when she faced forks in her life.

When Chris arrived in Australia, she immediately bonded with the culture and place and knew she was no city girl. She has lived her life by making choices that are well ahead of their time. While the world is discovering the value of *life balance*, Chris has lived that way for decades. While humans wonder how they will live with fewer resources and leave a *lighter footprint on Earth*, Chris and Gary have always lived that way without compromising their lives.

It is unsurprising that friends, colleagues, and pupils of Chris Forbes respect and love her so much.

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