

CHRIS and GARY

The FORBES FAMILY of BINGIL BAY



By CHRIS FORBES



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The histories published by Mission Beach Historical Society Inc., are as accurate as we can make them. Few accounts of history are 100% correct and there are going to be more errors when we recall events from many years ago. We always welcome suggested edits and additions or deletions and where possible we will edit where we find we are in error. However, the oral histories we record are the words of the people we interview, and we can only alter those with the authorisation of the people we interview. At times we record the full story of a family and have it on record for research purposes yet publish an abbreviated version on the web page to make it more readable and relevant to our regular audience. In this case, we have three versions including a family version with all details.

Cover

Top: Coat of Arms for the Cope and Forbes families. Bottom: Bingil Bay image copyright © Susan Kelly, *Natural Images*.

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PROLOGUE

This is the story of Bingil Bay resident Chris Forbes (nee Cope) who has lived in this district for 54 years. Mission Beach Historical Society Inc. has started collecting and publishing family histories from people who have been living in the district for at least 50 years. We focused first on older residents and 92-year-old Christine Forbes certainly fits that criterion.

The hope is that by accumulating several such histories we will amass a reasonable record and a good diversity of views and experiences so that when people in the future want to know what happened here, they will have some ability to complete this jigsaw puzzle. Rather than seeking to create a bevy of best sellers, our aim is to create records that future researchers may reliably use and build upon.

We do not normally go far back into the family trees in these tales so largely focus on the time the residents have spent in the Mission Beach district, but in this case, we found the Scottish and Irish genealogy of Chris' husband, Gary Forbes, and a little of the Lancashire times of the Cope family worthy of inclusion.

Chris Forbes 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 today, 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, named *Bicton*.



Bicton homestead Bingil Bay c. 1900.



Bingil Bay 2021, image © Susan Kelly, *Natural Images*.



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

The black and white image on the previous page shows how the land was cleared when the Cuttens were farming there. The forest has regrown as shown in the second image. 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 started talking in riddles with words like *minimizing our footprint*, Chris and Gary were doing just that.

This story is one of the classic *Ten Pound Pom* tales. That was the colloquial term for immigrants from the UK who were provided with assisted passage to Australia or New Zealand following WWII. Chris did not follow the usual path of such migrants, who remained in Australia's larger cities. She followed in the footsteps of the notable 23-year-old Yorkshire girl,¹ Nellie Brett, nee Bately, who landed in Townsville in 1913 and was one of the first female settlers in Banyan (Tully). Chris (28) was a little older than Nell when she arrived in Australia in 1959 but, like Nell, quickly found North Queensland and stayed. Perhaps her life journey is not quite as intrepid as Nell's was, yet it is similarly intriguing.

Chris has contributed significantly to the Mission Beach Historical Society spending much time editing and approving stories. As an experienced schoolteacher, she is well qualified to do so and during discussions on the publications, we asked her if she would consider writing her own story. Many residents of the district speak fondly of being taught by Mrs Forbes, as they call her, in their primary school days.

She agreed to share her story and write it at her own pace, and it was a pleasure to work with the positive, charming, and humble soul that Mrs Forbes undoubtedly is. It is fortunate that Chris kept a diary for much of her life so when in doubt about aspects of her life she could check that for accuracy.

Ken Gray, editor.

¹ Ken Gray, *Wheatley Beach Tales*, Mission Beach Historical Society, H011, 2022, PP. 10-20.

RENDEZVOUS

I was travelling in Queensland in my beloved VW beetle with a good friend, Anudhi Wentworth when an unexpected romance changed the course of my life. This was the start of a long and happy journey.

Anudhi and I were having a fabulous time on our North Queensland trip in May 1961, and we decided to ramp up the excitement and join the crew of a ketch, aptly named *Rendezvous*. This was where it all started for Chris Cope and Gary Forbes.



Vivacious Anudhi ... from a later newspaper article.

It all happened quickly when I reflect on that period of my life. Anudhi and I were heading north from Mackay and, on our way to seek a job, we stumbled on two bearded chaps, obviously sailors, and stopped to chat with Alan Lucas and John Williamson. Alan had built a 32-foot yacht *Rendezvous* in Sydney and, with John as navigator, was sailing up the coast to see the harbours and anchorages etc. to obtain information for a book he was writing, *Cruising the Coral Coast*.

Little did I know of the surprises that 1961 would bring. One minute you are frolicking in the north then you are married! Marriage was the last thing on my mind, I was not sure that I even considered it necessary in my life. Yet it happened.

They offered to take us on a cruise around the Whitsunday islands. The Whitsundays had few tourists at the time but Hayman, South Molle and Lindeman Islands had accommodation. The lighthouse and the other islands were uninhabited and totally unspoiled. We ate oysters, fish and occasionally goat which Anudhi curried. John was a canny fisherman and said if he was unsuccessful for 10 minutes, *we'll move on and try elsewhere*. It usually worked.

Eventually, running out of the basics like flour and rice, we returned to the harbour at Mackay where Anudhi and I reclaimed the VW and drove up north meeting the boys again at Townsville. John was older and was a plasterer so found work immediately and Alan joined him as a labourer. Anudhi and I collected our mail and sat outside the Post Office wondering if we should get jobs or travel to Cooktown, when suddenly, a tall, dark and handsome chap (true story!) poked his head through the car window and said, *did you come up the centre?* As an opening, this lacked veracity and I had no idea that this was a life-changing moment. It was, of course, obvious that we had done no rough driving, but Gary's Irish gift of the gab soon had us laughing and enjoying a fizzy grapefruit juice in the sun outside the Queen's Hotel.

Gary was working as a salesman for a photographer. He explained that he looked for *the flags flying* i.e. nappies on the clothesline and then talked the mum into having her child photographed. He usually walked but offered me a job driving him. I did this for a couple of nights and after work, he bought fish

and chips for us and a bottle of milk which he drank. I found him interesting but thought he was too sophisticated for me being well-dressed and with perforated shoes. How wrong I was.

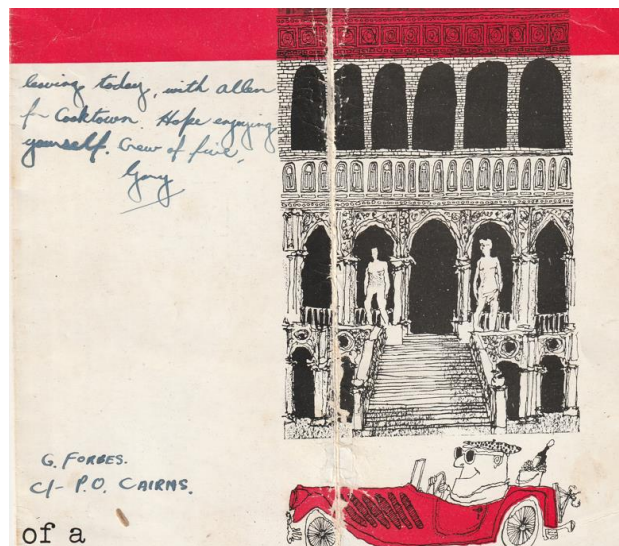
Anudhi and I were ready to move on and headed north reaching the Annan River just short of Cooktown by nightfall. We were woken in the morning by wonderful birdsong. Cooktown, we found to be incredible, a Tennessee Williams set up with derelict houses and general lethargy. Muffy, an alcoholic lady in the bar of the Sovereign Hotel offered us refuge in her hotel on the waterfront. *Just watch the first floor, it's a bit rotten.* Two Hungarian boys were already occupying it but Mr Stewart, who ran the R.S.L., said we could live in their Hall with the proviso that *you'll have to move out for the Buffs (R. S. L.) meeting every fourth Friday of the month.* It was a comfortable home with electricity so was OK and amazingly enough, we did move out one Friday and stayed at the *Lions Den* in Rossville for the night.



Lions Den Hotel south of Cooktown.

We soon settled happily into Cooktown life, fishermen arrived at the wharf every morning and stayed all day, often giving us their catch and the SS *Malanda* came in every Tuesday with fruit and vegetables. There was a baker and butcher and three pubs and a ghost in the wrecked convent. I got a temping job cooking at the Sovereign until their permanent cook arrived. Mrs Hallam was not convinced that I could do it, and neither was I, but I made pastry well and the mains were simple roasts and corned beef.

Anudhi had written to Alan and received a letter saying that *Rendezvous* was leaving for Cooktown and that Gary had joined the crew. In the next letter, Gary sent me a card with his postal address at Cairns, so I wrote telling him of Cooktown life. Later, he told me that if I had not replied he would have left the yacht and returned to his old job.



Gary's cryptic yet life-changing card.

I had not realised that my life would be changed by that card but knowing that they were on the way we were alert for sightings, spending a day at Archers Point. We saw nothing until the next evening when, sitting on the wharf at dusk, talking to the Thursday Island crew of a pearling lugger, I saw *Rendezvous* silently gliding into the harbour.

Gary was on deck in his dark green sweater, and I felt suddenly and strangely that he was all I would ever need. Once on land, he developed a high temperature, so the R.S.L. Hall became a nursing ward with me keeping him alive. That was a sure way to develop or destroy a relationship – ours blossomed. With pills from the hospital, Gary enjoyed a long convalescence trying to gain the weight he had lost.

Gary was always a good talker, and a good listener as well and we learnt much of one another in that short yet intimate period. As Gary's health improved, the relationship grew stronger until, in October, Alan decided to sail on to Thursday Island to spend the monsoon season there.

It was perfect sailing weather with cool, starry nights, perfect for a marriage proposal. During his birthday celebrations on 12 October 1961, Gary popped the question. It was amazing really; we had met only two months previously and were not together for all that time.



Engagement Cooktown, 12 October 1961.

Gary knew TI had a Cathedral Church, built to commemorate the *Quetta*, a steamship that was wrecked with few survivors, because his school Chaplin at the Southport School was Bishop Matthews, Bishop of Carpentaria. We decided to be married on Thursday Island in that Cathedral Church on 3 November.

Bishop Matthews was away on pastoral duties so Father Rogers presided and that meant that we were married in time to catch the M.V. *Waiben* back to Cairns

The R.M.S. *Quetta* was sunk in Torres Strait in 1890. This was the *Quetta's* 12th trip to England with its usual cargo of mail, passengers and refrigerated meat. I learned of an incredible coincidence later.² Mrs Margaret Cutten of Bingil Bay, whose *Bicton* homesite was sold to us by her grandson in 1969, lost her husband Frederick in 1899. After his death, she had booked a trip to England with her sister-in-law, Jane, on that ill-fated *Quetta* voyage. Fortunately for them, they were late for boarding in Brisbane and the

² Ken Gray, *Bicton: The Cuttens of Clump Point*, Mission Beach Historical Society, H005, 2022, P. 30.

Quetta left without them. Almost all the Europeans aboard the *Quetta* drowned; in all 134 of 292 people on board died.



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

The wedding was all we hoped it would be and *It's moments like these you need MinTies* was a well-known advertising slogan in those days, so we ate *MinTies* that fateful day. In future, we remembered the day fondly and ate *MinTies* to mark important occasions.

Anudhi went sailing after this with Alan and later moved to Sydney and married William Wentworth and had a child. She then separated from him, moving to Byron Bay and was elected as a councillor where she died after becoming blind. I always remember her fondly and valued her adventurous spirit and ability to have fun.

COPE-WADDICOR FAMILY

With the help of friends, I traced my ancestors back five generations of Copes to John Cope and Elizabeth Timmis in 1721 on *Ancestry.com*. Beyond that it is uncertain, but you can trace the Timmis family further back to Thomas Timmis in 1505. These families all lived in Wybunbury in Cheshire, England. There was nothing greatly exciting or surprising there, but I have not done exhaustive genealogical research on the Cope family tree.

My grandmother, Sophie Peacock, came from a market town in Lancashire named Darwen, and her ancestors were from the small cathedral city of Ripon in Yorkshire, which is just north of Leeds and west of York. My grandfather, James Waddicor, and his ancestors came from Edgworth in Lancashire which is near Darwen. James built a successful business in varnish manufacturing. My ancestors had a variety of occupations such as farmer, shoemaker, loom weaver, die-setter, joiner, labourer, and hawker. Many of my family of recent generations became teachers.

The Waddicors (Ma's Family)

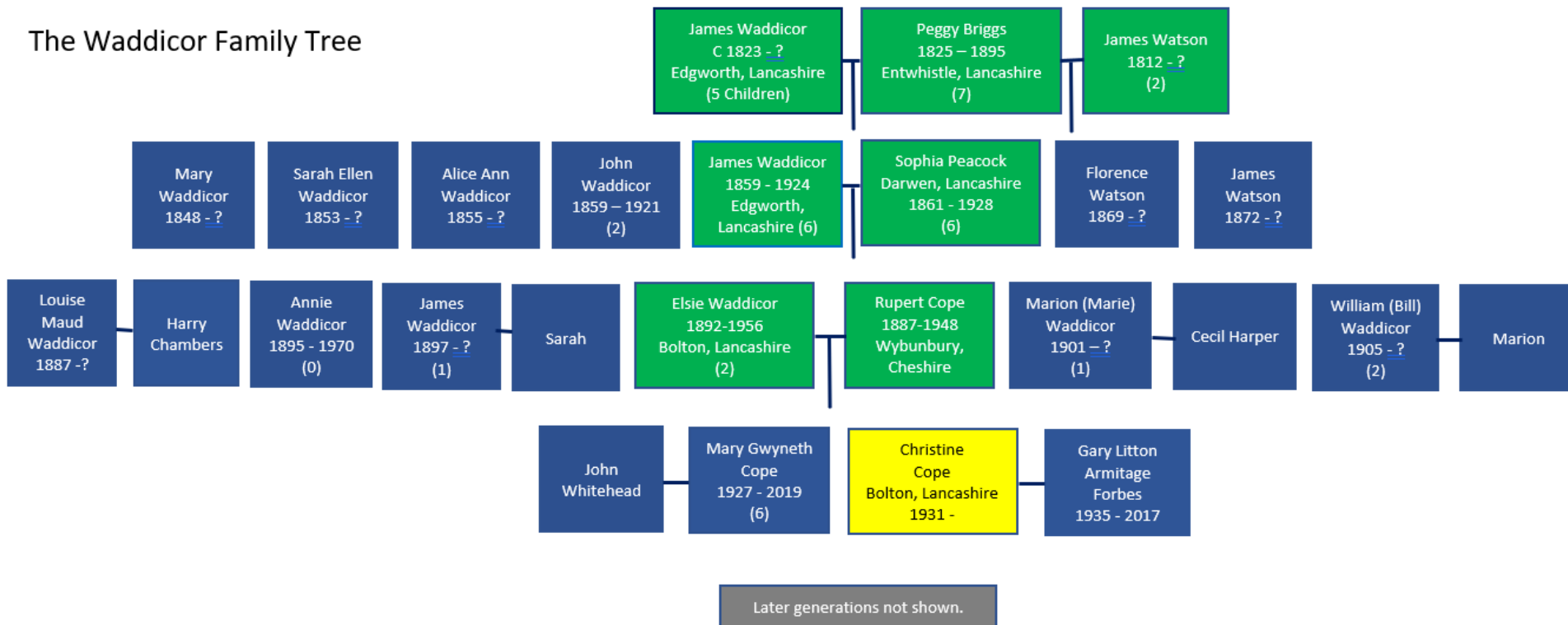
James Waddicor, my grandfather, with his twin brother, John, was born in 1859 on *Cole Farm*, Edgworth. The *Farm* was only 20 acres, so he augmented his income as a shoemaker. James became a varnish manufacturer and married Sophie Peacock who was born in Darwen in 1861. After peddling his varnish from a handcart, he soon established *The Works*. The business 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 1892, Annie 1895, James 1897, Marion 1901, and William 1905.



Waddicors: circa 1906. Left to right: Grandma Sophie Waddicor (nee Peacock), Marie, Bill (baby), Elsie (Ma), Annie, Louie, Grandpa Cope and Jim.

Varnish manufacturing was a successful business in James' lifetime and when Fred Cussons asked him for a loan of £50 to begin his soap factory, he was happy to do it with a handshake. Fred never forgot this. When varnish became unpopular, and James was dead, his son Jim wanted to be bought out of the business, and Fred rescued the varnish works and turned it into a Chemist Warehouse Distribution Centre. James' children became directors in turn and Bill, their travelling salesman. I believe that Richard, Bill's son still receives directors' fees. James left a trust fund for his children to be wound up when they had all died and given to their offspring.

The Waddicor Family Tree



I wish I had met my grandparents; Kames and Sophie Waddicor, they were artistic and amusing. Auntie Sara (Jim's wife) remembered James as great fun. He believed in education for women; my mother was the only daughter to take advantage of this. Sophie, I felt, was very like my mother and possibly the reason that the varnish business was a success; she was a behind-the-scenes manager.



Anne Cope (nee Roiley) – paternal grandmother. From *Ancestry.com*.

Her first child, Auntie Louie (Louisa Maud), married Harry Chambers who wore plus fours and made silly jokes – a perfect Uncle. They made a lot of money buying old grocery shops and much of the profit was invested in silver. When the jeweller asked if the family crest should be engraved on it, Henry replied that Chamber Pots were unsuitable. At the time, Mary and I found this extremely funny especially as Auntie Louie used to send leftover articles from the shops as presents. These were shoved in the back of my mother's wardrobe, but we still had to write thankyou letters. Mary was in trouble for writing only, *Thank you for the present* instead of a proper letter one year.

Their third daughter was Auntie Annie. Mary and I wondered if she had lost a *sweetheart* in the 1914 – 18 war but there was no evidence of this. She had some mental problems and was one of the original patients given electric shock therapy at Dumfries Mental Hospital in Scotland which was an early user of ECT in the UK. She never quite recovered, either Elsie or Bill had to travel to Scotland periodically to persuade her back into the hospital after she caused problems in a hotel or even on the street. With her trust money, she bought a small cottage in Wales in a tiny village living happily there until her death.

Jim, the first boy and black sheep of the family, when young fell off a horse and the accident left him with a humpback and a lack of self-discipline. Pat, his daughter, said he was brilliant at inventing Duco paint but was spoilt as a child and became tiresome and difficult. He and my Ma never got on together, Ma described his wife, Auntie Sara, as a saint. He had an infuriating habit of disappearing just as a meal was placed on the table. He never forgot or forgave Ma for giving his bird's egg collection to Bradshaw Primary School with a label, *Donated by Elsie Waddicor*.

Sara had money and Jim soon helped her spend it with trips to the Canary Islands and the purchase of a large old home called *Wood End*. It had an aviary and a ballroom, the garden was a child's paradise, overgrown with secret places and a Ha-ha. It joined a wasteland with rabbits called *The Jumbles*.

When Jim left the business, he went to Coventry to the munitions factory and is said to have invented a luminous paint, but he failed to patent it. When Coventry was blitzed by the German bombers in WWII, the bombing became horrific, so he put Pat and Sara in the car with a couple of suitcases and drove through the night to Anglesey in Wales using the light from burning buildings to see.

After the war, he tried growing roses and had writing paper printed but nothing came of it so he sat in the pub and was given rabbits sometimes. Sara cooked them, using many herbs and they were delicious.

Daughter Pat had an Arts degree from Liverpool Uni and became a dress designer. She was the first of our family to migrate to Australia where she settled in Melbourne and married Gordon who was in the army. She persuaded her parents to join her in Australia. Jim was ever ready for a new scene. They went to Adelaide where Sara ran a corner store. Jim developed pernicious anaemia and refused to see a doctor for treatment so died as Pat explained *with tuppence halfpenny in his pocket*. A chain store opened opposite Sara's store, so she became a companion to a wealthy lady, Mrs Bickford whose lemon cordial is available in Woollies. They lived in Glenelg and then in Waterville and enjoyed going to the races and betting.

The youngest daughter was Auntie Marie (Marion) who was delicate yet outlived the rest of the family. She had the dubious distinction of having driven her father's large car, possibly an Armstrong Sidley, into their front fence. She was a great flirt and married a rather solemn man, a dentist, Cecil Harper. The name Cecil was enough to send Mary and me into fits of shameful giggling. When I was old enough to visit him professionally, he would fill my mouth with cotton wool and then say nasty things about women not needing education or careers. His daughter was allowed to work in the surgery handling instruments in an attractive white coat. I do not think he paid her, and she managed to be engaged three times before marrying a lovely chap. She had three children and makes lovely woollen goods that are hand-spun and knitted.

The baby in the family photograph is Uncle Bill. He was my favourite Uncle, my mother's favourite too and my idea of a romantic figure. He drove a dark green Riley and had leather driving gloves. He had driven in the Monte Carlo Rally and told exciting tales, all car-oriented. He married an elegant lady called Marion who was always beautifully dressed. They lived in a shady lane in a house, Beechwood, with a large drawing room, two fireplaces and a grand piano. They had two children, Caroline, and Richard. Richard became director of the Works and lives now, retired, in a home close to the site of the Battle of Hastings.

Ma, Elsie Cope nee Waddicor, 18 March 1892 – 25 March 1956

Ma was born in 1892, the second girl and the one most like her mother Sophia. I believe they were both 'managers' and suspect that Sophia was the reason James made a success of the business and was able to afford *Oakleigh*.

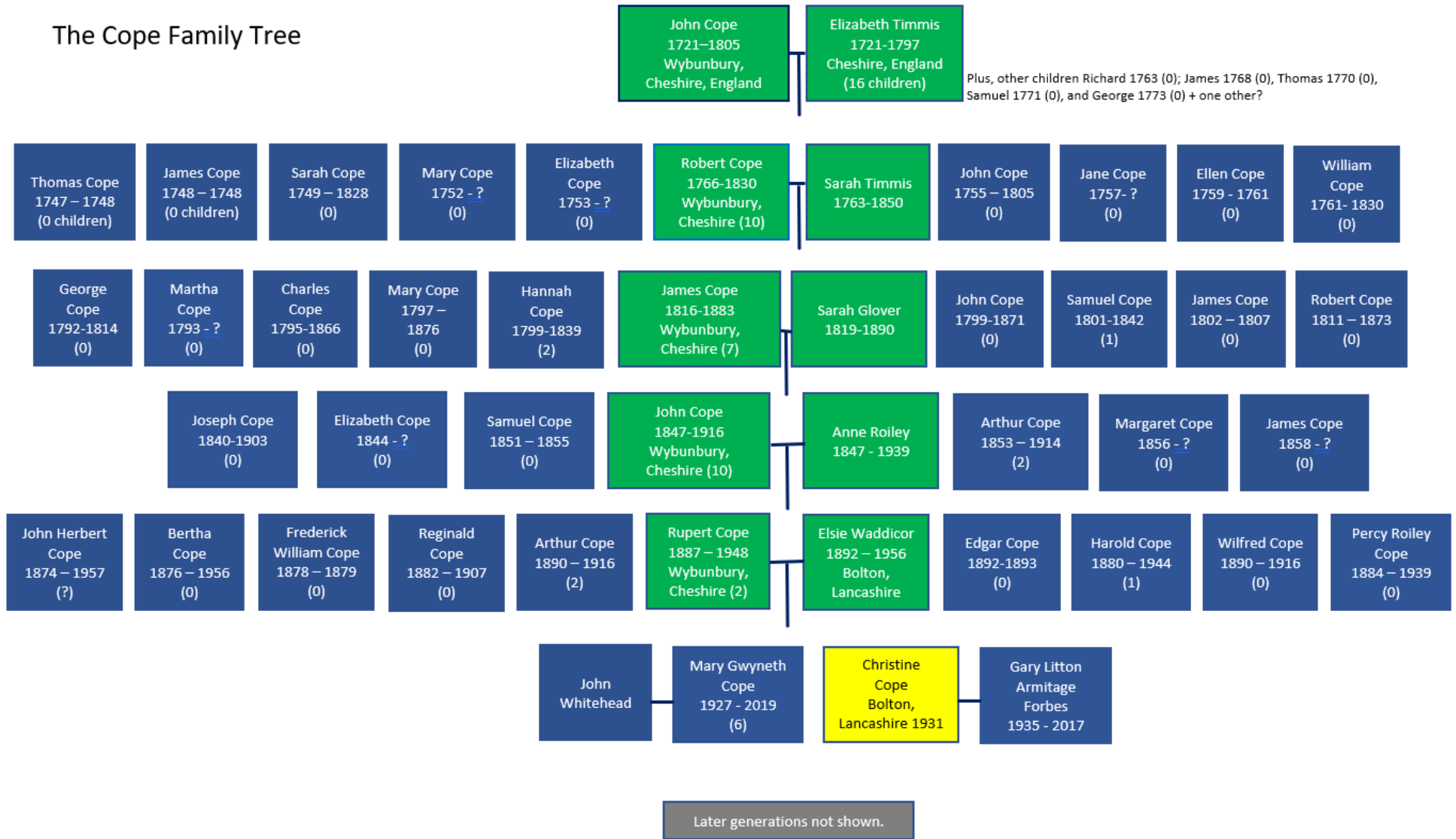
Oakleigh had no garden in front, but a big one at the back bordering on fields where they kept a cow and chooks. They had a set of Sheraton chairs, two of them were large with arms and four had the same Prince of Wales Feathers carvings but no arms. The set was split when Bill moved to *Beechwood*. He and Jim got the *father and mother* ones, and the girls got the ones without arms.

Pat (Jane's daughter) thought Granny Waddicor haunted *Oakleigh* as when Caroline (William's daughter) was a baby and sick, Auntie Marion saw a small elderly lady dressed in black hovering over her cot. Uncle Bill said *That would be my mother*.

Ma told me about the big kitchen where bread was baked twice a week in the hot oven and, as it cooled, pies and cakes, then milk puddings and parkin. Parkin is a northern type of gingerbread, I call it *survival food*, made with oatmeal, treacle and spices. It is economical to make so good wartime food and post-war it was often made with dripping instead of butter. The ration of butter was only two ounces a week so saving that was important.

Ma was an excellent cook and a keen bottler of preserves. and we all loved Ma's pies - she made the best pastry I have ever eaten.

The Cope Family Tree



My father's favourite was whinberry pie. The fruit is very small and deep purple with an intense flavour. They grow on the moors but are not prolific like blackberries. We ate a lot of fish, and I am amazed that the suppliers kept up. The fishermen must have risked their lives doing so. Plaice and cod were usually available, turbot, sole and halibut were expensive and seldom eaten.

Ma (Elsie) was the only girl in her family to have a career. She was educated at Bangor Training College for Teachers and when qualified taught at Bradshaw Primary School. I saw samples of her needlework with perfect examples of embroidery stitching and smocking. She thought life was more than housework and spent her dividends from the Waddicor family business on books and our violin lessons. She also bought a fridge and washing machine that was like a large boiler and chugged noisily. It had a wringer, but she thought it was useless and still used the old wooden hand-turned one. The sheets went to the laundry, but the other washing was hung outside or on an old clothes horse by the kitchen fire. There was also a rack that hung under the ceiling and held everything to air after it was washed, dried, and ironed.

Ma never just sat, she could knit and read at the same time except when turning the heel of my father's socks. He wanted hand-knitted socks, and they often wore into holes on the heels, and I had the job of mending them. Ma also knitted socks for the navy during the war. These were made with lanoline so were greasy with a strong smell. Ma belonged to the Ladies Guild at the church and made embroidered tablecloths to be sold in the Bring and Buy stalls.

She did complex drawn thread and cut-out work as well as the coloured stitches of bunches of flowers or garlands. Sadly, I left much of her work with Auntie Marie when I migrated. Gary and I visited in 1963 but I did not like to ask for it back.

While I was in College, Ma taught at Beech House and in 1951 was diagnosed with breast cancer. Once I was qualified, I took over her position. She was an excellent teacher and I learned much from her. The children loved her dearly.

The Copes and Pa, Rupert Cope, October 1887 – 13 July 1948.

Pa, Rupert Cope, was born in Cheshire, the sixth child and fifth boy. His mother, Anne, had ten children, two died in infancy and Wilfred died in WWI in action in Flanders, France. Percy 1884-1939 age 55 died in a nursing home.

Pa's eldest brother was Herbert who we saw with his wife Flo occasionally. They lived at Blackburn where Herbert was a bank manager. I have little memory of them apart from Flo's bosom which was singular in that it was impressive with its undivided appearance. Ma had a flat chest. They had two children, Rex and Muriel. Rex was a solicitor and I recall that he discovered a trust fund with so little money in it that more would be needed to discover its beneficiary.

Uncle Arthur and his wife Marjorie came to visit once. He was a customs officer in Southampton. They had two children, John who survived flying Lancaster bombers in WWII and Pamela.

Auntie Bertha was the only girl in the family. Possibly all the male babies in the family were too much for her as she did not marry and was reputed to be a *great beauty*. It is possible that my sister's good looks came from Bertha as all of Ma's family were quite plain looking. Bertha was a teacher as well and lived to 79. When she died, she left me a very pretty diamond ring and Mary her desk which is still used in Adelaide by my niece, Judy.



Auntie Bertha (Cope) Pa's sister.³

Grandfather Cope was Headmaster at Nantwich Grammar School during WWI. We had a barometer with an inscription telling of its donation to him. It was always pessimistic in rainy Bolton and never climbed up to read Fair. I inherited it and left it with friends when I migrated until it was obvious, I would never have a suitable home for it. I donated it back to Nantwich Grammar where it hangs in a corridor. My grandfather died in 1916 but his wife lived to 92. I recall her being rather fearsomely dressed in black trying to get me to watch a clock and sit still for five minutes – impossible at age three.



The barometer

Tam O'Shanter tobacco tin.

Pa was a very quiet man. I remember him sitting in an armchair by the fire smoking a Tam O'Shanter-filled pipe and reading Dickens. He had a full set of Dickens novels in large green books with thin pages and delicate black and white illustrations. He was gassed and wounded in WWI but only talked about it if asked directly. I heard of the rats and the cold, and the French chimneys left in a devastated landscape where all else was gone. And wet socks, perhaps that was why Ma's knitted ones were so important to him.

As a child, I thought he was a recluse. This was wrong as he was the People's Warden at St Margarets, our local church, and its Treasurer. At the District and County Bank, later to merge with Barclays, he was often on the counter dealing with customers. We also had some old photos of him dressed up in an amateur production of a musical comedy. He loved Gilbert and Sullivan and the popular songs of the era. However, he did tell of a woman customer saying she had been at a wedding that weekend. He asked, *did you see me?* She answered, *No*. He did not reveal that he was the groom.

³ Image accessed on *Ancestry.com.au*, August 2022, at <https://www.ancestry.com.au/mediaui-viewer/tree/118337605/person/372176770446/media/9bda09a9-fc22-4c11-baea-d42d7df9f84a>

In his spare time, he would take me for a walk or to work in the garden. He had wanted to be a farmer but after the war, he had to settle for a bank job. At home, he grew roses – the old-fashioned highly scented ones, and one year he grew small potatoes. He had raspberries in the garden too.

Pa had a small shed where he mended our shoes, chopped wood chips for the fire and no doubt enjoyed a peaceful time alone. On Sundays, he went to Matins and Evensong, coming home with the collections. At Matins, I would put my sixpence on the plate knowing that I would see and count it that evening. I enjoyed making piles of the different coins - pennies, halfpennies, and the occasional farthing with a robin engraving; they were attractive - yet mostly it was tanners (sixpences). I like to think that I was accurate as I never saw him do a recount before writing the totals, dates etc in a large ledger with perfect copperplate handwriting.

A couple of years before his retirement he left the bank in Bolton and became a manager of a branch in Heywood. That meant he came home in the evening by tram on Chorley New Road near the school so I would walk down the hill with my dog, Taffy, to meet him. He nearly always wore a bowler, carried an umbrella and smoked a pipe, for gifts, we gave him Tam O'Shanter tobacco in a shiny tin.

It smelt delicious, he smelt of it too and we had no idea that it was lethal. He retired at age 60 but only a year later became ill with throat cancer in November. He received radium treatment but died the following year.

My Sister - Mary Gwyneth Cope 18 March 1927 – 21 April 2019

My sister, Mary, was born on our mother's birthday. When I was born, four years later, I was told that she welcomed a sister and tried to feed me marmalade. I suspect she was a little neglected, me being such a weakling, and I know she went to live at Auntie Louie's in Lytham St. Annes for a short time. There she roamed the sandhills and read books. When Ma collected her, she was horrified at the amount Mary had read. It was believed to have caused her short-sightedness.

Mary was not only academically clever but also a brilliant musician. She studied Latin and music while at Bolton School. She had to skip a year and then do an extra year in the sixth form as she was considered too young to enter university. There were no gap years at that time, and she was a scholarship student from the age of 16 and gained a distinction in Grade 8 violin. She had an opportunity to audition for the Royal College of Music but chose instead to do an English course at Bedford College at the University of London. Mary continued playing violin in many orchestras until she was 90.

While the last doodle bombs were falling, Mary was in London. After graduating, she had a year at the University of Cambridge to qualify as an English Literature teacher. At Cambridge, she met a medical student, John Whitehead, and it was love at first sight for him when Mary arrived at his room for a Christian Union meeting bearing a whole pound of sugar which was still being rationed. John described himself as a *sugar freak*.

They married in 1952 and John was due for army service, so they considered emigrating. They were sponsored by Auntie Sara and left for Adelaide on the S.S. *Aradia* in August 1959 with two children, Diana (4) and Sarah (18 months). John joined a medical practice in Mount Gambier, and they lived there for over a decade before moving to Adelaide in 1970. By that time, they had four more children, Jill, Judy, James, and Elizabeth.

Mary loved living in Australia, she said one of her best memories was being toasted and thanked by her children for giving them a life in Australia. After a short stay in the hospital, Mary died on Easter Sunday, April 2019.

CHRIS COPE UK DAYS

I was born on 17 May 1931 at 8 New Hall Lane at Heaton in Bolton, England, a town near Manchester. I was not expected. Ma was thinking I would be a little Rupert. Furthermore, I was not expected to live, so they chose a name quickly. My sister was given two names, Mary, and Gwyneth, she hated her middle name and never used it. I was often called Biddy at first, yet glad I was not called Bridget.



Christine Forbes, 1933.

It must have been hard work raising me. I had a defective right arm that was noticed early by Ma and her attentive doctor. I was treated by some sort of physio, probably painfully as I have a dim recollection of screaming. Aged three, I had my appendix out and learnt that some people told lies. My mother had dressed many small dolls with china heads and cloth bodies which the hospital nurses said were from Father Christmas. I knew my mother had sent them because I recognised all the materials from her ragbag. They also said I could have a syrup tart, but it was not syrup tart as I knew it.

I started a vomiting habit in the hospital and, once out, bilious attacks were frequent as were other diseases. I had middle ear infections, whooping cough, measles, German measles, and mumps but not chicken pox or diphtheria as one could be immunised for that. All this was hard work for Ma – a coal fire upstairs in my bedroom, special meals and reading aloud, mostly Hans Andersen until her voice gave out. I became used to bed and enjoyed convalescing – given tempting beef tea and calves foot jelly and boiled eggs chopped up with butter in a cup. It must have been a relief when, aged four, I started kindergarten at Beech House.

School 1935 – 1949

I was educated at Bolton School which, in 2015, celebrated 100 years since its re-endowment by Lord Leverhulme who merged the Bolton High School for Girls with the Bolton Grammar School for Boys in 1915. 2016 was the 500th Anniversary of the foundation of the original Grammar School; the first recorded educational establishment in Bolton (May 1516).



Bolton School preps 2022: the strings still play.

A large Victorian mansion, *Beech House*, included the Prep Department where I started in 1935, aged four. It had lawns and gardens with many bushes and willows where we could make tents and play Hiawatha games. I am told that I objected to going to the school on my second day as, *I had seen it all*.

We wore little blue smocks and changed our shoes frequently having outdoor, indoor and gym shoes all with laces and so time-consuming to change. At age seven, I left Beech House and started junior school. I had found my first friend, Anne Lowe, so the change, although awe-inspiring, was not a problem as we faced it together. At school, we called ourselves *Panny* and *Tissy* and formed the Y Club. Panny was two months older than me and was Y1 and I was Y2. We held our meetings on the roof of Mrs Lowe's hen house. After one session, I was stuck there frozen with vertigo. Panny had the sense to leave me there saying *You can't stay there forever and I'm hungry*. Sanity returned with my appetite for Mrs Lowe's brown ones and yellow ones, little cakes.

We learnt Morse Code – Beethoven's 5th was our signal. There was always some scheme, but we avoided trouble. Both of us had plaits, were small for our age and played the violin. As Juniors, we had half an hour to wait for the orchestra practice after school, so we spent the time in the cellars with a candle and food.

We were never caught but at one evening concert, we watched our music teacher climb onto the portable dais to conduct and there, in full view of the audience, were tinges of red candle grease – we had used it as a table. We played duets at the concerts – even the Double Bach – less scary than solos but it was a relief when it was over.

We managed to avoid compulsory walks when the weather was unfit for sport. We would be at the back end of the crocodile and make a sudden, sharp turn to Panny's house for indoor games. It was inevitable that Panny's mother would arrive home earlier than expected one day so that ended that lark.

Time not spent with Panny was spent in bed with various diseases. I had bilious attacks mostly at violin exams. Climbing the stairs to the music room, up would come whatever I had managed to get down for breakfast and the next candidate would have to take my place. One year, it took three attempts to finally reach the door accompanied by Miss Ricketts holding a bowl. The examiners were all kindly, elderly men and once through the door my nerves settled, and all was well. My sister had a theory that nerves made one perform better; she might be right as I ended up passing all grades.

Panny often stayed for school dinners, but I always went home, enjoying the 15-minute walk unencumbered with violin and attaché cases, only the compulsory gas mask in its ugly brown box, hanging around my neck. We had to practice breathing through the horrible things; I could never manage it properly and thought I'd rather be gassed than suffocated. On my way back to school, my dog Taffy would come to the main road and then return, I suspected, via a small field housing a large, peaceful carthorse.

Panny's father, Frank Lowe, was an ornithologist who was an expert on the heron and was writing a book for a series on water birds. I went with them on Saturdays to Malham Tarn on the Yorkshire Moors. It was a wild chilly place and we explored and discovered creatures like insects, caterpillars, and spiders. Mrs Lowe made a stew from tinned Aussie beef and had it hot in a thermos. In wartime that was the food of the Gods, a real treat.

Aged about 15 years, I was taken to see a woman Doctor whom I disliked on sight; she was fat and wore shapeless knitted cardigans. I disliked her, even more, when she said I had a heart murmur from Rheumatic Fever and must stop doing *extra things*. This meant no sport, gym, music lessons and fun. I spent all the time in the library and began *not fitting in the class with other girls*. This ban was lifted in the 6th form but by then I hated all aspects of school except my violin lessons. I had only a Credit in French in the school certificate (taken at 16) but was told I should do it as a Main Subject in the H. S. C. When I turned up with the Distinction students, the French teacher was horrified and exclaimed, *not you!*

Ma had me coached by two large, lovely Quaker ladies. They did not do much for my French, but I learnt a lot about the Quaker religion. I went to a meeting which I remember as a peaceful interlude in an unpleasant period in my life.

Panny always knew she wanted to be a doctor. I remember she split her chin skating and watched the doctor sew it up by holding a mirror. She went to Belfast University and enjoyed her time at school in the 6th Form. I used to escape to the Prep Department whenever possible.

College 1949 – 1952

A reprieve came in 1949 when I 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, and in all-around development – physical, social, emotional, and academic. He established the first Children's Gardens Kindergarten. Roehampton was bliss for me. The main building was a mansion with lecture rooms, a dining room, and a music room with an Adam fireplace. One music teacher was related to Solomon Cutner, the pianist known as Solomon, and he gave us a recital every year.



Froebel College, Roehampton University, London.

The teaching course was intensive. I cannot imagine how today's students have jobs. We had so much work, especially during teaching practices; three weeks in the first year, half a term in the second and a full term in the third year. We had to plan lessons, deliver them, and then write a critical report each night when exhausted and desperate to retire to bed.

I had three close friends: Rosemary whose father was French and cooked delicious meals for us and the guesthouse inmates in their old house in Broxbourne Hertfordshire. Molly from Rhodesia – after college, she did an Arts Course in Paris and returned with a better French accent than Rosemary to teach at Roedean Girls School in Sussex. And Hermione, a Eurasian who was a little older and more sensible, was the student representative of our year. Unfortunately, we lost touch when she returned to Singapore. The college had beautiful grounds, a lake, and a small rowboat surrounded by some aged, gigantic Cedars of Lebanon. On one side of the grounds was the Roehampton Club, on the other an asylum for the mentally disturbed and a little further away a rehab hospital for amputees.

Teaching 1953 - 1959

I took over Ma's position and taught at Beech House for three years until she died in 1956. I loved teaching there and was able to try out my ideas and learn a lot. One only learns how to teach by doing it and one never stops learning. *All my geese are swans* was my mother's maxim and I kept to it throughout my career. At the end of 1956, Mary and I cleared out the house, sold it and left Bolton. Mary was married with a child. John, her husband was a doctor doing his army service and they lived in Radlett, a small town north of London. Rosemary was living in Broxbourne in the stables attached to her parents' large guest house and suggested I live with her, so I got a job in Hertford, the County town. She was teaching in Ware, close to Hertford, so we travelled to work together in my much-loved green Fiat Bambino.

St Andrews was a government school, so I cleared my obligation for two years of tuition fees at Roehampton by teaching there. Beech House was attached to the Direct Grant Bolton School so probably did not count. My mother had paid all three years' board and the first year's tuition fees. I enjoyed my three years there and taught a composite class of six to eight-year-olds. The headmistress was a dog lover, so I took Susie, my Lancashire Heeler (a small, short-legged dog that looks like a blue heeler) with me every Tuesday, as that day I would visit my sister. We went to an evening class in archaeology as St Albans was a Roman site. We were allowed on one dig and some lucky person found a coin but otherwise, we dug up only bits of pottery.



1956 Fiat Bambino.

After three years, I was offered a position at the new school being built for St Andrews. It was only three classes for infants, and they needed someone to be in charge. I was tempted, but Mary and John with their two children decided to emigrate, sponsored by Auntie Sara. They suggested that I go with them.

I had enjoyed three happy years in the stables with Rosemary and holidaying with her parents in their house at Cap Martin (French Riviera) but now was perhaps the time to move on. I was nursed by Mary, having caught jaundice in France. Their passage was booked and would be cancelled if any of them caught the disease. No one did, thanks no doubt to her prodigious use of *Milton* disinfectant, a chlorine solution for treating baby bottles. I always felt sorry for infants enduring that as when I was convalescing everything tasted of it.

The six-week boat journey was enticing, £10 was only one week's salary and staying in Australia for two years would be interesting. I took the plunge and life changed for me in an instant.

Once I recovered, I was still lethargic yet ready for a new start even though it meant leaving my precious Lancashire heeler, Susie, behind. She was happy living in the stables with Rosemary's dog, Parker, and I really expected to be back in two years, so I left the Fiat there as well.

Once decided, it was off to Australia House and was horrified when they told me the normal sailing date would be December but that I could shortlist to go with seven days' notice. This felt awful. I was not ready and returned to the Broxbourne stables in a panic. I had already passed my medical so set off to Lancashire to farewell my relations in Bolton. It was a quick trip for on my second day Rosemary rang to say that a telegram had arrived with news that my passage was booked on the SS *Strathmore* on the 17th of October 1959. Only a week away!

Trying not to panic, I drove back to Broxbourne. Rosemary found an old truck that belonged to her aunt. It was enormous and swallowed all my books and my violin easily. I knew it had to go that Sunday, so we took the seats out of the Fiat and Colin, Rosemary and I managed to drive, seatless and deliver it to the station on time. I had a *where and when will I see this again* moment. *Not for six weeks and then in Australia* was the answer.

Five more frantic days were spent shopping, stressing, and farewelling friends. I was farewelled at St Pancras Station, Susie held high in the air by Rosemary.

SS STRATHMORE

SS *Strathmore* was a one-class ship. Once on board, I found my cabin and my companion, an elderly Irish lady and a fluent chatterer and whisky drinker. We were a good match, as she went to bed early and rose early, while I went to bed late and got up late.



P&O SS *Strathmore*.

On the second day out, a passenger told me there were no migrants on the ship. I kept quiet, but when migrants were not allowed ashore at Port Said, in Egypt there seemed to be many goats among the sheep. The weather had warmed to 92 degrees Fahrenheit, and the ship's sides were crowded with people in highly coloured boats yelling loudly as they hawked stuffed toys and cushions. We were warned, the toys were stuffed with hospital waste.

The Suez Canal was uncanny, with miles of sand on either side and a bypass where, for four hours in the steamy heat, we waited while another convoy passed. The heat increased for several days. The pool was 90°F and far from refreshing and there was no air conditioning in the cabins. I began sleeping on deck in a chair.

At Aden, there was mail for me from Mary and Rosemary and I went ashore in the heat and purchased a sari. The market was filthy, with many poor and maimed people, flies everywhere, but beautiful children.

That night, I started to sleep on deck but woke up cold, blown, and uncomfortable so returned to my cabin. The next port was Colombo, a lovely place, full of incongruities with red pillar boxes for mail and old London buses.

My first Australian friend joined the voyage here. 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.

We enjoyed many discussions in the evenings after she emerged from her cabin with a copy of *Ulysses*. The night before we reached Singapore, we slept on deck waking at 4 am to see the harbour lights. Four more days and we were in Perth.

I found Australia amazing – the light was so clean and clear, and everything glowed brilliantly. A friend whom my sister had met there came to show me around. We visited the university and had lunch at beautiful Kings Park.

The *Strathmore* sailed across the Bight now in chilly weather leaving Anudhi who flew to Melbourne.

NEW to AUSTRALIA

Aunt Sara met me in Adelaide. I did not see much of the city as there was a heat wave with temperatures soaring to 100°F and that exhausted me. I was relieved to reach Mt Gambier where Mary lived with Diana and Sarah. Mary declared that *All Scottish migrants come here because they like the weather, it's rarely hot.* She was right, while staying there I was able to enjoy gardening.

I went to Melbourne to the Agency and accepted a post at Ivanhoe Girls' Grammar School. Back in Mt Gambier, we went to Penola to a rodeo which I found horrific. The minute we arrived a rider fell and was rushed to hospital. All the horses were frighteningly wild-eyed, it was very rugged, real, yet odd. I felt safer sitting on a friend's ute – a better view and less danger.

By February, I had a driver's licence and thanks to my grandfather's trust, a dark blue VW Beetle.



This is not my car yet looks much like it.

I stayed with my cousin Pat at first. Gordon, her husband was in the Army and only home at the weekends. Pat took me to Jimmy Watsons, a winery and a welcome place after work. Pat lived in South Melbourne, so when I found Anudhi I moved to an old house in Darling Street where she lived in the basement and I on the top floor. Alex Legge, whose sister Belinda was Mary's friend, lived in a room in the middle.

As I drove down Punt Road to Ivanhoe, I thought about how lucky I was. The children in Year 1 at Ivanhoe were bright and happy, though I missed boys in the class, the girls brought flowers, gardenias and camellias every day. Melbourne was a wonderful city, full of life and interesting people. I met Germaine Greer, Harry Belafonte, and the entire cast of West Side Story as, after a performance, Anudhi and I joined them for a meal. Even so, it was city life, and I am a country person. So, I told the headmistress I would leave at the end of the year. She was rightly furious. At the time teachers were expected to stay longer as it was thought that they were not much use until their third year. She said I should see Queensland in the holidays and that she would never employ another English girl. I felt awful but it did not stop me from leaving.

Anudhi was earning a lot in tips at Mario's Night Club, and I got a waitressing job first at the Riata and later at the Two Faces at the bottom of Darling Street with a Swiss Chef. Herman Schneider. There with tips, I earned more than I did teaching. It was delicious food too and Herman cooked us meals from the menu for three shillings.

So, flush with the earnings we set off North in the lovely warm Australian Autumn weather. I was so excited that I ran into the back of a ute at the first set of traffic lights. Pots and pans joined us in the front

seat but all I had was a damaged headlight. Undaunted, we pushed the headlight with a towel to face in the right direction and drove on happily to Sydney and then Newcastle. There Anudhi's friend gave us a bed and I spent my first birthday in Australia, waiting for my VW to be repaired.

From Newcastle, it was onwards across the border into Queensland with great expectations, and we were soon up to Mackay. There I saw my first mango tree in flower, and we celebrated our arrival in Queensland when we reached Rockhampton where we were allowed in the pub bar at last and could have a drink after 6 pm.

We hoped to get jobs in the tourist winter season so, dressed to impress, we arrived at the Ambassadors Hotel to see Captain Medear. He seemed interested but all was unnecessary as driving to the harbour we saw two bearded chaps, obviously sailors. You read the story of *Rendezvous* earlier.

After being married on Thursday Island in 1961 we returned to Cairns.

Once back in civilization, Gary worked as a photographer again and I enjoyed Cairns at the beaches. I met Mrs Wheatley who had a little shop in Freshwater. This was Florence Wheatley⁴ who was the wife of Alfred Wheatley, a physiotherapist and naturopath who purchased land in Mission Beach in 1940 and lived there with his family. Mrs Wheatley was generous and immediately recognised that I loved paw paws and gave me extra saying, *this one's a bit jammy – needs eating*.

She had to go south for a time and was worried her plants would die and told me that her husband always said, "*Trust in God and Wheatley*" and *I don't trust either of them*.

She also said, *Go to Mission Beach - paw paws grow wild there*. So, it was to be. On the recommendation of a wise lady, Mrs Wheatley, we spent the rest of our lives in Bingil Bay.

By 1965, we were camping regularly on the beach at Bingil Bay.

⁴ Ken Gray, *Wheatley Beach Tales*, Mission Beach Historical Society, 2022, P. 7.

OVERSEAS ADVENTURE

In March 1963, we chose to travel. I still had considerable savings from my inheritance, and we could use some of that to see the world.

We left Australia on the *Roma* for Singapore, staying at the Chinese TongAh Hotel. From a room perched up on the top floor, we could watch life happening below. Gary whistled to the boys working in the café below for two cups of hot water which he pretended to drink. Possibly they believed him as they came up with big smiles and never saw the *Nescafe* tin.

After a week of living there, we met an American, John Claytor. He had a large yacht and needed a crew to travel to Europe. After some confusion finding one another, our story was published in a Penang newspaper, and we eventually joined John.



Penang Strait Times, 24 April 1963.



Yacht *Helly* with Captain John Claytor aboard.

This was a perfect opportunity for us. We went to Thailand and then joined him on the *Helly* in Penang. It was a beautiful yacht, built for entertaining, but John had damaged the centre board in a typhoon when sailing from Hong Kong. The yacht had a large cockpit and black sails and that was fortunate as it made the vessel nearly invisible at night when Indonesian pirates were a danger near Penang. The first night we heard a motorboat nearby, so put the lights out to avoid trouble. Chris Blair, a Scot, was the fourth crew member and was a pessimist, always expecting the worst. Gary and I were probably too optimistic, and John was cautious and sensible about any risks.

It was glorious sailing, with enough wind and beautiful weather. At every evening drinks session, Chris recited from Robert Browning's poem, *Home thoughts, from the sea*:

*Nobly, nobly Cape Saint Vincent to the North-West died away;
Sunset ran, one glorious blood-red, reeking into Cadiz Bay;
Bluish 'mid the burning water, full in face Trafalgar lay;
In the dimmest North-East distance, dawned Gibraltar grand and gray;
"Here and here did England help me: how can I help England?"—say,
Whoso turns as I, this evening, turn to God to praise and pray,
While Jove's planet rises yonder, silent over Africa.*

He also had a copy of the Admiralty Guide of the 1930s and would read out the scary bits to alarm us. John had collected many green coconuts, so we drank the juice with white rum, so delicious. At first, we swam from the boat, but after Chris saw a two-metre shark we had bucket baths instead.



Great Nicobar Island.

By 01 May, we reached the Nicobar Islands, 150 Km northeast of Aceh on Sumatra, and anchored in the lagoon. The Admiralty book said it was like the Andamans, the natives were head-hunters. When three young lads paddled out, we managed to communicate and learnt that there were only seven young people on the island, but we did not know if that was permanent. They all arrived later, and we gave them food and a mirror and matches and taught them to say *Pepsi* cola as they found a crate of it washed up there.

They lit a fire that night, so Chris insisted that we take turns keeping watch. He thought they were boiling water in their cooking pots! The island was beautiful with so many ferns and climbing plants. We were sorry to leave but needed to use the wind. Just as well as after a week it died. There were squalls all around, but we were becalmed and very hot. A passing ship *Lars Milling* whistled and was close enough to provide us with fish and tell us that we were 200 miles from Nicobar. There were wallowing whale sharks all around and they disappeared and then reappeared, it was scary, but nothing happened, and the days passed in a haze. By 12 May, the tank was dry, we still had 20 gallons in the bathroom tank and a small emergency one, but I was somewhat worried and knew the food would not last much longer.

We had rice which I cooked in salt water and some tins of peas. We were tired and weak by then and fed up with just bobbing about. Then on 16 May John saw what he thought was an island at first and then realised it was the mainland. Our spirits lifted with the wind and on 17 May, my birthday, Gary and I on our watch had a fabulous sail before John woke and furled in the sails. That was essential as we were now in the shipping lane trying to get around Dondra Head at the south end of Sri Lanka. That night was so scary, as one ship failed to see us, and the black sails were a disadvantage now. We only had one small torch to wave at ships. One ship was so close, but John said *don't jump yet, the bow wave may push us away*. Then the ship saw us, I suspect there was much swearing on board.

We couldn't get around the heads that night, but next day fishing boats offered a tow into Tangalle, a village on a beautiful beach, reminiscent of Bingil Bay being of similar size with headlands at each end. There was a rest house among the huts, a haven with hot water and food. A tough chicken curry that night – bliss.

John and Chris settled into a drinking life, sitting on the verandah, but we met a Sinhalese student. He was writing a thesis on village life and suggested we join him in visiting the people and seeing their customs. This was a fantastic opportunity. That night we joined the villagers in a *Devil dance*, a celebration of a man's life in a noisy party to chase away the worldly demons so the patient could pass into the next life easily. Everyone wore bright, colourful clothes and waved streamers while drumming or dancing. The

student told us that it all cost a lot, but everyone contributed as did we. I did wonder how the patient felt. I hoped that was not like me the next morning when somewhat bleary-eyed we went to see the *oriental doctor*. He was skilled in medical arts after a nine-year apprenticeship but unfortunately, I have forgotten most of what I learnt from him, as was the case with a Buddhist monk I met.

We could have stayed in Tangalle enjoying village life; everyone was extremely friendly, giving us paw paws and mangoes. Two insurance assessors then arrived at the Rest House. They suggested we drive with them to the Tea Country, a lovely change of climate. Driving up, a wild elephant suddenly appeared out of the jungle and there were many monkeys playing in the treetops. We stayed in an English-style hotel with *bed tea* in the mornings and salads safe to eat from the garden. The trip ended in Colombo where we met the authorities, having been illegal immigrants in Tangalle. We also met the press. With newly stamped passports we left on a train for India, arriving in the dark to travel by oxcart to a hotel.

We found India exhausting. In Madras (Chennai), the monsoon threatened, the humidity was excessive and the train journey to Bombay (Mumbai) was an ordeal. Once there, we found a cheap hotel, but on arrival in the early morning, the water was off. Storms threatened every afternoon, so after buying a honey jar, a wooden carved spoon and buffalo hide sandals it was time to fly to Beirut.

What a difference. In 1963, Beirut was highly civilised with delicious fresh food and hot showers. We had a breakfast to dream of with yogurt, hard-boiled eggs, anchovies, and various kinds of cheese. There was a French influence, and we saw many large ladies eating strawberries and cream on the beachfront. They served excellent coffee, instead of tea with condensed milk. We enjoyed lamb on spits roasted outside. The poverty was hidden from tourists, and it was an expensive place, so we flew on to London via Paris and then back to Broxbourne. In France, Gary was ill, and he was in bed all day before we travelled to London via Amsterdam.

After several days of reunion with Rosemary, Colin and Susie in London, we reclaimed the Fiat 500 and left for the north reaching Nantwich, Bolton which looked depressingly wet and horrible. My rellies were away so we moved on to the Lake District where it was raining yet beautiful. It was July but the bad weather had set in, and we drove further north to Scotland through the Grampians and found a bed and breakfast cottage. Gary had a swim in the *Burn* in icy water; it was too invigorating for me but gave Gary an appetite and he enjoyed his ham and poached eggs for breakfast.

This was the Forbes family country we were in now and Gary had to buy Black Watch Tartan as worn by his clan with a white check woven in. We reached Inverness, then across to the Isle of Skye in the west. One evening we enjoyed a walk-in bright sun at 9 pm with an icy wind blowing in our faces. The next day we walked in the rain, and then I sat by a smoky peat fire while Gary cleaned the points of the Fiat. We then drove to Dunvegan on the Isle of Skye, which was a lovely old place rather like Cooktown but with a splendid castle. The Cuillin mountains looked wonderful at dusk. There is an old Scottish saying *If you can see the Cuillins it's about to rain, if you can't, it is raining* – that seemed very appropriate.

Back in England, we visited the Harpers and collected stuff, mainly brass candlesticks, and a silver teapot which we sold to buy a cheap tent. That leaked, as did the *Lilos* and by morning our beds were flat. We did not camp in UK; it was far too cold and the B & Bs were so comfy with Shetland sheepdogs by hot fires and bacon and egg meals.

It was late summer when we headed south to Europe where it was warm enough to use our tent. We took a ferry from Dover to Dunkerque which took three hours, and we had no Green Card for Europe so had to buy insurance every time we entered a different country. We eventually got a Green Card from our friend, Colin, in Germany.

To Gary's surprise, we drove across Belgium in an afternoon. We were unable to find a suitable camp spot there. Holland had no customs office and was totally different. The air smelled of onions. We found a reclaimed area to camp on and the water was less icy than I expected. By now it was mid-August and Germany was hot and the Fiat was unhappy. We crossed on a ferry to Copenhagen and at the camping area there was a rally and all the Danes had superior equipment.

In Germany, the border police had made us place a large UK sign on the rear bumper. So, when a sudden storm blew after we had gone to bed in the Denmark campsite all the flashy campers sitting in their tents saw the poor *Brits* hammering in tent pegs. We loved Denmark and Copenhagen, and everyone seemed so incredibly good looking, the shops were full of wood, carved and made into elegant furniture. The Tivoli Gardens amusement park had dancing to Bandstand music and a free concert which was a variety show with tiny dogs showing their tricks.

During our last overseas trip in 1964/65, Gary thought of importing Asian goods. We had big ideas for an exotic shop in Sydney but gave up that idea after learning of import duties and the horrific bookwork. We had collected many interesting goods in our travels, so had a stall at Paddy's Market on Fridays. The goods sold well, and we enjoyed these market days buying vegetables with the proceeds of our sale. One day, Gary returned from a walk with a black and white puppy. *Bessie*, as we named her, was adorable being part sheepdog with many other breeds. No more overseas trips for us and we had to move out of Kirribilli Guesthouse.

We had an EH Holden by then and soon found a caravan and headed north again beginning a routine of spending summer in the south and winter in Cairns and Bingil Bay. One June, we camped at the Barron River and met Dick Roughsey, a pioneer of Indigenous art who came from Mornington Island. He was a lovely person and very unassuming despite his fame. Percy Trezise, the Indigenous rock art expert, and Aboriginal rights activist did his framing. Dick was about to go to Canberra to exhibit his art. He always wore a singlet and shorts, and we knew Canberra would be freezing so Gary offered him a suit. Dick accepted and took Gary's thongs he was carrying as well! They were important to Gary, but he could not ask for them back. We imagined Dick in Canberra wearing his suit and thongs together.

In 1964, we heard of *Flying Cloud*, a yacht in Cairns that was looking for paying crew. Being on our way north, we hurried and eventually caught and met Charlie, the Skipper, who was prepared to take us for \$100. He was going to Taiwan, and we needed visas, so got Anudhi in Sydney to visit the Portuguese Embassy while we had our cholera and other shots. With sore arms, we flew to T.I. where *Flying Cloud* was waiting. They could not wait long enough, however, and the Portuguese Embassy were difficult and closed most of the time so, without visas we missed the boat. Later, we met Helen, one of the crew members in Singapore, and heard that Charlie was a *Captain Bligh*, and they had a grim trip in awful weather, so perhaps we were lucky.

On Thursday Island, living on a friend's very small boat we discussed ideas, all mad, the maddest one – buying the pub on the foreshore where the licensee spent her day painting in the bar – a seemingly idyllic lifestyle. This idea lasted till Brisbane when a killjoy solicitor told us we needed to get a job in a pub and try it before buying. Discouraging and sensible, so we booked a *Messageries* liner to Vietnam. Despite being a French ship, the food was awful, but the wine made meals almost bearable. We found that we could continue to Japan for only £5 each. Unfortunately, Japan was impossibly hot and humid and with a thick cloud ceiling. We got to Kyoto after a frighteningly fast train ride. In Kobe, we went to travel agencies or airconditioned cafes where we ate delicious fruit salads with a tiny piece of exotic banana on top of the lovely stone fruit.

Eventually, we found the *Hermod* sailing to Hong Kong. It had 1st class with 12 European passengers and a 2nd class empty as cargo was going to Shanghai so it could not take Chinese passengers. On our last day in Japan, we bought a record player and records including *From Russia with Love* for the voyage. Alone in 2nd class, we were fed the same as 1st class without trimmings. The steward, who sat on a wooden stool most of the day, always tried to feed us at 5.45 pm with, *ready, ready!* The only English he attempted.

A pilot boarded to take us up the Yangtse River to Shanghai where the smog was horrific. Filthy black or dark brown smoke poured out of many thin chimneys. There were many unseaworthy-looking ships and rusty, tattered junks. A few were clean, newly painted and, we think, government vessels. From our deck, we watched male and female wharfies. A woman with a bucket kept them cool replacing the cold towels they wore around their necks and there were large industrial fans.

The officials looked at our passports which said *Not China*. We expected to be kept on the ship, but they said, *Not friendly of your government* and gave us a landing pass for two days. Of course, we had a *guide* for one day to show us things they could be proud of. We saw a closed Cathedral, a Research Art and Craft Centre, a school, and an unused Monastery. There was a tree-lined French Avenue, and everywhere was clean despite the smog. There was no rubbish, but lots of cycles, lorries, buses and trams, no private cars at all and lots of children on holidays. The next day we were allowed to look at the old buildings and the people were smiling and friendly. Women doing carters jobs were paid the same as men and had a 48-hour working week. It was an interesting two days with much to think about. That was fortunate as a typhoon was threatening Hong Kong. The ferries had stopped, and boats were moved from their moorings. We missed the worst weather but had two wild days imprisoned in our cabin with the decks awash. It was extremely rough. Neither of us was seasick, but Gary had the lifejackets ready.

We reached Hong Kong at 10 pm and stayed aboard till morning then off to the YHA where we had a large room with a view of the harbour. Hong Kong was exciting. Wonderful shops and food, but I felt lethargic and was soon to be ill, but we were soon back on a cargo ship heading for Australia.

BINGIL BAY BEGINNINGS

In August 1965, we moved to Bingil Bay to camp on the beach below the cliff – we were located just south of where the toilet block is today near Cutten Street. It was cooler there than in the camping area at the north end of Bingil Bay. 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.

There were few cars. Perry Harvey passed with his tourists in a red bus while we were having toast over a campfire for breakfast. Eric Bull who came to collect the rent came by too as did Mrs Perry, taking Raymond to school and occasionally we saw Mrs Armhurst who shopped for others in the district. Main Roads soon had the data they wanted.

By 1967, there were two bakers in the district who delivered twice a week, one a German from Tully who made rye bread and an Italian from Silkwood who made Italian plaited loaves and pizzas at weekends. We went to El Arish to the butcher for meat and he used vegetable scales that measured in quarter-pound intervals, nothing in between. Later, the Blenners took over the meat supply and delivered once a week placing the meat in our fridge if we were out. Mrs Hodgson sold frozen mangoes and bananas and beans which she brought to us in a bucket.

There were oysters and sometimes fish such as Watson's Bonito and Flathead, but we were not very successful at fishing. We only caught one Whiting which a tern snatched off the beach. We got milk from the Moonglow Motel, the first motel in Mission Beach, then at the Blue Pacific Motel run by Iris and Howard Watson. We went to Tully occasionally, but the roads were unsealed. The groceries were wrapped in brown paper and string to keep out the dust.

By 1968, I was keen to find land we could use as a base. There were several suggestions. Butler's house on the creek behind the Hodgson's banana farm and land on the point at North Narragon were two possibilities. Mrs Morrow, who lived in Cutten Street and knew Les Alexander when he and his mother lived opposite the chook farm, told us that Les might be interested in selling his land on the cliff. That was nearly half an acre. By then, Les was living in Charters Towers and had recently put in a new bathroom so it was thought that he might be tempted to sell.

I wrote to Les immediately, offering \$3,000 as Alison and John Busst were selling at Brookes Beach quarter acre lots for \$2,000 each so I hoped this was a fair price. We settled at \$3,250 on 20 December 1969. We now had two addresses, 2 Alexander Drive and a postal address at 35 Pioneer Street. We moved our caravan in January 1970 onto the land under a cascara tree that was in full flower with a bright yellow canopy.

26 January 1970 was a wild day with a cyclone threatening. Our forest was dark yet comforting and there was a clearing with a luminous green light in the tree canopy and a carpet of dark sisal or mother-in-law's tongue. After being exposed to all in a caravan for so long, I was ready for life in this welcoming rainforest. We heard of a ghost, an Aboriginal lady, and such is the power of suggestion I have often felt a presence living here but these were always happy vibes.

In the winter of 69, on a trip to Cairns, we found Max Beattie at Yorkeys Knob and suggested that he might help us build a shed to house the caravan. We knew Max when we camped at the Barron River. I had just missed him when I was in Melbourne. He was a stowaway on a Greek ship to Europe and was Anudhi's friend. Since those days, Max had married and had two children. He said he had never built anything, but his grandfather was a coach builder so why not?

In 1970, the Silkwood Brick Factory was still operating. The handmade bricks were attractive pink colours and perfect for our floor we thought. Our Holden station wagon could handle any load, so we collected the bricks ourselves. That was slow work, so Max persuaded us to hire a truck to bring them in hundreds. This was a mistake; the bricks were fragile and better moved by hand and we lost many using the truck. Gary and I laid the bricks ... and it shows. Many a crooked line and as we laid them on a mix of concrete and sand there were several *saggy* areas, but the colour is still beautiful.

Max built the house as if he was making a piece of furniture and the structure is still perfect three cyclones and 50 years later.



Forbes family at their Bingil Bay home.

There were two sawmills in El Arish at the time and we were able to buy beautiful timbers such as Red Stringybark and Silky Oak. Max liked the latter as it was a softwood, and easier to saw by hand. Fortunately, the sawmill had a large pile of Red Bean timber. It was covered in mould because nobody wanted it. It is beautiful timber but gives workers violent hay fever. We used it but suffered from streaming eyes and noses and had to go to the beach frequently to swim and wash the dust off. The work was slow as we had no electricity, yet this gave us time to think and plan. The house grew slowly yet suitably on the edge of the escarpment. We have had to move out three times for cyclones over the years and allow the wind to blow through, but the house has withstood it all.

We lost our savings in the stock market crash in 1971 and had to go south. In Sydney, we 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! So, he soon found different work as a landscape gardener laying grass around the Opera House while the first stage was built. The gardeners threw the lawn rolls at each other and he damaged his back there.

I worked in a sandwich shop with lovely owners near the stock exchange. I left that job when I was offered a kindergarten job at Newtown Catholic Church School. The teacher I replaced was on her first job out of college and had a nervous breakdown as there were 40 kids and only two with English-speaking parents. Almost every European country was represented in the class except France and French was the only language I could attempt apart from a little Italian. The children sang like angels and were fantastically lovely and lively children. The nuns never raised their voices and the parents never complained. I did the whole term there and would have stayed on happily had North Queensland and Bingil Bay not called me back so loudly.

Queensland Education offered me a job at Tully Primary School starting in May 1970. We arrived back in Bingil Bay on time except that on my first day at school the VW broke down and had to be left in El Arish. Gary rescued me in the old Holden, but it was not a good beginning as the quite rightly annoyed Principal greeted me with, *I know only two things about you, you are overseas trained and have not taught for 10 years!* I put him right about the latter error but could do nothing about the former.

He gave me the Year 1 class I wanted nonetheless, and I thoroughly enjoyed teaching there for the next three years. Gary worked in the Tully Sugar Mill on the fuggals, and we would wave to one another as we passed on the highway, Gary returning from night shift and me arriving at school.

BINGIL BAY MEMORIES

The house was progressing slowly, but we were reluctant to spend too much time on the brick floor as it was a tedious job we did badly, yet it served the purpose. I was cramped and irritable one afternoon, in no mood to welcome visitors, especially police who suddenly marched in without calling out first. They towered over me sitting among the bricks, so I did not offer them a cup of tea. Gary arrived with a load from Silkwood and was asked to go outside as they had something to discuss. However, Gary exclaimed that anything they have to say is to be said in front of my wife. The cop asked him how he earned an income. At the time we had no income as we worked periodically and spent what we earned. Gary was reasonably well-controlled and said, *Do you ask everyone who comes here to live that question?* He was annoyed and made them listen to a lot of stock market jargon they did not understand.

There was another incident later on a perfect day when we had walked around the rocks to Brookes Beach and were sitting on the rocks at the northern end. Two figures appeared, in uniforms and boots looking entirely out of place in that idyllic place. By the time they reached us, Gary's temper was up and yelled, *What are you doing here?* One cop meekly replied, *Can't we come to the beach too?* However, the other cop asked why we were there. Too much for me I responded, *Look around, haven't you got eyes?* Of course, they thought we had come here to smoke! They thought we were itinerants or dope-smoking hippies for some reason.

By the 1970s, the police were becoming more tactful and helpful, but they were far from subtle in the early days. We were busy gardening one day and saw two of them walking down our driveway. Gary called out, *Stop. Is it business or pleasure?* The cop we knew said, *I only wanted to introduce you to the new El Arish Sergeant.* I think his name was Sergeant Crooke as the children at school at Mission Beach used to laugh and say, *We've got a Bell for a teacher and a Crook for a cop.*

Of course, the police were not the only ones to query our way of life. Luckily, we had Iris and Howard Watson at the Blue Pacific, and they were wonderful support. Without them, we would have been treated as pariahs for a lot longer. Howard was a great source of information, he knew about building and plumbing and was always ready to stop what he was doing and help us. On many stormy nights, he arrived with a bowl of steaming chicken and spaghetti or some other delicious meal that Iris had cooked. Commercial travellers detoured off the Bruce Highway to stay with the Watsons at the Blue Pacific for Iris's meals and hospitality.

Another lovely lady was Mrs Hodgson, who made mango ice blocks and sold beans and gave us bananas, *Just ready for a custard* she would say.

I had done three years teaching at Tully by 1973 and the wet season started early, and I was unable to drive over the spoon drain so missed the last two days of the term. The Education Department transferred me to El Arish not realizing that if I could drive to El Arish, I could get to Tully too. It seemed a good time to retire and try to help Gary regain some weight, but one wet evening Richard Hodgson came with the news that Mission Beach was now a two-teacher school and would I apply for the second position. Wonderful! I marvelled at how good Australia had been for me and here was yet again a lucky opportunity.

Mission Beach was growing quickly. I started the year with nine students and ended it with 25. David Bell was the principal. His wife made our morning tea. She was a teacher, so realized the need, often bringing her two small children to join us. I had a terrific time teaching there for one year; the parents

were helpful and willing to discuss everything. They got together and made a wonderful 'shop' full of goodies and it was fortunately decimal by then.



The Class of 75:⁵ Back row at left Chris Forbes, Teacher.

The whole school visited the Mourilyan Mill that year and put on a great show for the Christmas breakup. My lot played *Mr Faksimily and the Terrible Tiger*. I recall saying at the party, *If this is to be my last year teaching, it will certainly have been the happiest*. It was my last year full time, as after that I did relief and contract roles.

In 1972, after a torturous march fly season we bought the Millaa Millaa block of land. It was 170 acres with 40 acres cleared and the remainder was clad in rainforest. Gary's health always improved when we were there; the air was so fresh and pure. We kept a caravan on the lot and Jerry Daley, a dairy farmer, gave us milk fresh from the cow. I made yogurt and cottage cheese and hoped he would gain weight; at least he felt well there. At Millaa Millaa there was plenty of rain, but we discovered Watsonville, a tiny tin mining town west of Herberton and we camped on the river there. There we could be sure of some sunshine when the rain set in at Milla Millaa.

We had a prolific garden in the 70s. There was enough sun filtering through the canopy to have a vegetable patch. The weather was kind, beans were only washed out once and we grew tomatoes, lettuce, egg plant and okra successfully. We also had a mass of pawpaws and put them at the gate for sale with the small ones free. The lookout at the end of our street was worthy of its name at that time so there was traffic passing by our gate. Singapore daisy had not been introduced then and you could get a good view of the beach from the lookout.

The block opposite us was owned by people from Mareeba and they allowed us to keep a goat there. She was named Agnes and had a kid named Zorba because he enjoyed dancing on our outdoor picnic table. Bessie, our mixed breed bluey dog hated them both and was pleased when we were both working and had found them a home at Cardwell.

We put in some fruit trees as well as vegetables – lychee, grapefruit, orange, and West Indian lime. The latter was given to us by Mr Nakken who was known as the *Baron of Bingil Bay* and built *Tana Kita*, Indonesian for *our house*. He was Dutch and Mrs Nakken was English, and they lived in Indonesia before retiring here. He hoped to have a plantation of lime trees, but cyclone Winifred stopped that in 1986. He

⁵ Judy Heath and Diane Bull, 50th Anniversary Mission Beach State School, 1953 – 20023, Limited Edition, Bookmen Publishers 2003, P. 58.

planted avocados that survived the cyclone and Arabica coffee which had white flowers with a heavenly scent. The blooms lasted only three days.

The coffee process is quite complicated, the red berries are soaked to remove the flesh and reveal a small bean with a hard husk that can be removed when dried. Gary tried to hasten the process by trampling the berries a la grapes, but only succeeded in losing the skin from his feet.

Success in selling pawpaws at the gate inspired us to start selling plants. It was good timing as the indoor plant craze started down south and reached us in NQ. People asked for an indoor plant as if it were a special species so I had to learn quickly what would qualify and hopefully grow indoors. We specialized in ferns as they are hardy and look good when small for travelling. Tree ferns were popular and available in abundance at our Milla Milla lot. There were many varieties there and we mainly sold *Cyathea cooperi* except to collectors. They are hardy and easy to grow. The business could have been successful had we stayed at home more. People were honest and left money in the change box. One lady left a note saying, *Are you ever here?*

Nobody had gates or fences here and we didn't own a dog at the time until we had Lucy the Wolfhound. Pigs were a pest, keen to dig up freshly planted seedlings, cassowaries visited often at Bingil Bay. Our blue dog Bessie tried to ignore them, but when one appeared at the house, she was kicked and badly bruised. Snakes usually stayed away but we once found a dead yellow-belly black snake on the path. Bessie had five puppies and was extra protective. One evening she was staggering so we rushed her to the vet at Innisfail. They gave her antivenom but were not optimistic, so we worried for two days. By Saturday she could only move her ears and the tip of her tail. Back home, I fed her egg flips with a syringe. The puppies were happy to see her but had to be weaned early. She was tough and made a complete recovery. We found homes for the pups and kept one and named it Penny.

That year the mangoes were prolific, and Mrs Nakken gave me her chutney recipe. The mangoes were stringy but had a lovely flavour and great juice. Recently they have flowered too early and had poor crops.

The back of our Bingil Bay lot was covered in a mango orchard from the Bicton farm. We were on the beach when we heard the bulldozers. The whole area was sold to a man who declared that he would not touch a leaf. He was true to his promise, but immediately sold the land to a developer, who had no qualms about bulldozing the beautiful trees.

Our fernery was a success at Bingil Bay, and we sold plants at the markets – that paid for our electricity bills. Tourists from Queensland often purchased our ferns. I had to reassure the buyers that they were genuine ferns, not bracken; most of the trade was in maiden hair ferns.

Cyclone Winifred in 1986 ended that venture, and it was time for a change. We needed to visit Gary's mum more often in Coolangatta. When she died, I was called for an interview by the Queensland Education department. Unfortunately, I was feeling unwell when my interview was due and I had already cancelled once while we were in Coolangatta, so felt I must go, despite looking and feeling ghastly. Yet again, I was lucky. One of the inspectors had recently visited TI and seeing that I was married there he was keen to discuss it rather than ask education questions, so I passed marginally and was able to do Supply Teaching.



Mission Beach State Primary School Staff 1992. Front: Joy Dent, Christine Forbes, Madonna Watt, Gordon Robertson (Principal), Diane Bull, Emmetje Giardina, Judy Pople. Rear: Wendy Charlwood, Margaret Mullins, Nicola Matthews, Rodney Kent, Jenny Mitchell, Fiona Lauriston, Jenny Arcidiacono.

Most teachers were retiring at my age. This job proved ideal even though we had no phone, for we had helpful retired neighbours who were happy to take messages. We rigged up a line and they pulled it to ring a bell in our garden. I got messages at 7.30 am to 8 am and sometimes schools booked me ahead. In 2004, a tower was erected on the hill behind Ninney Rise, and I had a mobile by then.

Fellow schoolteacher and friend, Diane Bull, remembers those days well:

Chris took my class many times and the last time was in late 2003 when she had my class for five weeks while I was on leave. Chris was 71 and taught for many years after that. I always remember when she did Supply Days and she always took a packet of Smarties which the children enjoyed and remembered her for.

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.* His problem was in the left lung and growths can remain inactive for years but once it became malignant it grew quickly and soon after, in February 2017, I lost my wonderful life partner.

GARY FORBES

Ken Gray: Editor: The genealogy of Gary Forbes is quite extensive and intriguing. With little difficulty, his family can be traced back 36 generations to approximately 780 C.E.⁶ *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. In today's terms, this included major portions of Argyll in Scotland and County Antrim in Northern Ireland. The famed Iona monastery on the Isle of Mull was within this kingdom.



Gaelic Kingdom of Dal Riata (Scotland and Northern Ireland) C6 and C7.

The Forbes family name was often written as *de Forbes* or *d Forbes* in early times and by 1172 the Forbes clan had moved to Aberdeenshire on the east coast of Scotland. They were in County Meath in Northern Ireland by 1670 C.E.

A cursory look into Gary's ancestors reveals many were nobles, such as 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 Laird's of Tolquhon (pronounced "Toh-hon") and two were Laird's of Knappernay. Sir William Forbes, 7th Laird of Tolquhon, rebuilt Tolquhon Castle in 1589. It is a ruin now yet is visited by more than 500,000 tourists a year. Sir William's father, Sir Alexander Forbes, the 6th Laird, was killed by the English at the Battle of Pinkie in 1547.

⁶ Accessed on Ancestry.com.au May 2022 at:
https://www.ancestry.com.au/family-tree/tree/175489868/family?_phsrc=Fqa622&_phstart=successSource&cfpid=342282839089&fpid=342287716947&usePUBJs=true



Tolquhon Castle at Tarves, Aberdeenshire, Scotland.

Several of Gary's ancestors were knighted, the most recent being Sir Alexander Forbes 1500 – 1547. John A. d Forbes (died 1305) was Castle Governor of Urquhart Castle on the shores of Loch Ness, one of Scotland's largest castles. John d Forbes (died 1387) was the Sheriff of Aberdeen.

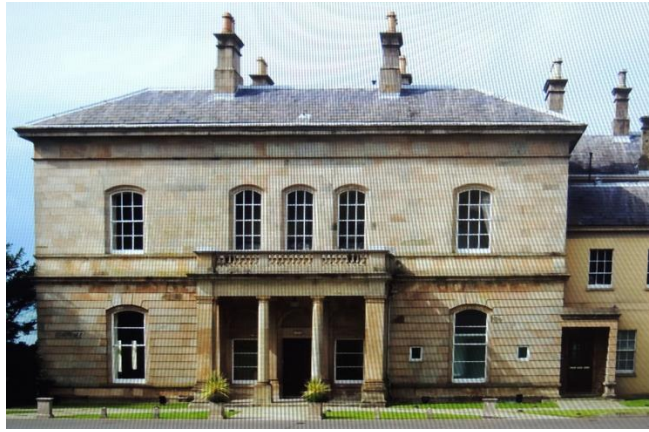
Many of Gary's more recent ancestors had careers in the Church and in medicine and law. John Forbes 1703 – 1759 was a Dublin barrister, and Uncle John (1750 – 1797) was an MP and a barrister and, for a short while, was Governor of the Bahamas Colony. Arthur Forbes, 1713 – 1788, was also an MP and was 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.

With such a full closet of known and notable ancestors there are bound to be some proverbial skeletons and without looking too hard we found *Evil Duncan de Forbes* 1250 -1289. However, the most sensational story from Gary's distant relatives was of the brother of Sir William Forbes, 7th Laird of Tolquhon, John, Master of Forbes, who was beheaded by James V of Scotland at Edinburgh Castle in 1537. There had been an ongoing feud between James V and Douglas, Earl of Angus, who had controlled the realm in 1525 when James was young. John Forbes was accused of siding with Angus and trying to restore him to power so was executed for treason. The king then had second thoughts and compensated the family by appointing William to become the gentlemen of his bedchamber in 1539.⁷

Looking at more recent ancestors, Gary's great-grandfather, Reverent Armitage Forbes, 1820 – 1846, was born in Herefordshire, England and died in Malta. Dr Armitage Forbes, Gary's grandfather, 1846 – 1918, was born in Italy and migrated to Queensland in 1885 and was the first farmer to plant cane in NSW. That was near the QLD/NSW border. Litton Armitage Forbes, Gary's father, 1895 – 1960, was born in N.S.W. The name Litton is derived from Gary's great-grandmother, born Charlotte Emily Litton.

The name Armitage was introduced in the Forbes family given names the generation before Charlotte, when Caroline Armitage married Arthur Forbes (1776 – 1841.) However, three generations before that Arthur Forbes (1670 – 1737) married Ann Armitage so the name was long associated with the Forbes family.

⁷ William Forbes, 7th Laird of Tolquhon, accessed May 2022 at: <https://www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk/usbiography/f/williamforbes.html>



Home of Arthur Forbes and Caroline (nee Armitage) at Craig a vad, Hollywood County Down Ireland. Courtesy of Chris Dow on Ancestry.com.au

Christine Forbes: 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. His father, a doctor, made sure that midnight meant the 12th, not the 13th when he signed the birth certificate.

Toogoolawah had been a flourishing town with the hospital, but its population was halved in 1929 when the *Nestle* Condensed Milk factory was closed. Dr Litton Forbes and his wife Joyce enjoyed a beautiful location in the Brisbane River valley, close enough for a day's outing to the city occasionally. Being keen followers of cricket, they arrived at one test match only to see Bradman dismissed by the first ball.

In 1939, the Toogoolawah hospital burnt down, and the town could not afford a resident doctor, so Dr Forbes bought a practice at Tweed Heads and moved his family to Coolangatta and rented a home at Greenmount. 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 with his sister Lynette Coolangatta 1939.

Gary attended kindergarten in Tweed Heads before moving to Coolangatta Primary on the hill above the beach. It was a disaster for him – days spent gazing at the surf and never doing homework; 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) and that was enough for two large ice creams or a tomato sandwich.

Aged 15, he started at Southport High School. This was wonderful for him, the school allowed him to develop in his own way and as a weekly boarder, he had the advantage of the surf every Sunday. During his last year there he spent much time in the school's excellent library, improving his general knowledge considerably. With his thin frame and long legs, he was a natural runner competing in distance running events. The school's champion said he had only done so well because Gary was always pushing him from behind. Gary lacked a competitive spirit and his mood determined how well he did.

He was elusive enough to avoid trouble yet came close one night. He and a friend would do the sights of Surfers Paradise by swimming across the river holding their clothes above their heads. One night, they turned a corner and saw Dr and Mrs Forbes strolling arm in arm towards them. Were they seen? A quick side-step and there were no repercussions, but they never knew.

After leaving Southport High, Gary had a mixed bag of jobs, the most extraordinary as a travelling audiometrist. Not a bad career move, despite his long fingers, though he was hopeless at using them delicately. One poor elderly gentleman went away saying, *I don't hear as well as when I came in*. When Gary realised that he had left an irretrievable wad of cotton wool in the man's ear he decided it was time to move on.

He sold encyclopaedias in Brisbane next. The deposit on one sale was enough to pay for a night's lodging at the People's Palace, so he sat in the sun all morning before making the necessary effort. This was fine until winter winds made the park less attractive.

A more successful job was as a salesman for a photographer, Ralph Tornquist, who travelled the outback taking family photos. He had an aluminium caravan, boiling during the day and freezing at night. He employed two other salesmen. One was Hughie Gibbs the father of the Bee Gees who talked about his talented kids all the time and the other was Gary Frost. The two Gary's worked together and introduced themselves as *Mr Frost and Mr Winterbottom*. It was very hot, Gary had one nylon shirt which he would wash when showering and put on wet and they both needed a brandy to get started in the mornings. Once Gary had earned \$100, he hitched to Sydney and spent the lot.

Life was not always carefree; he was often homeless and penniless on the road thumbing a lift back to Coolangatta, but being ready to try anything, something always turned up even if it meant being in a jobseeker queue and chosen by a builder to wheel barrowloads of cement wearing his pale grey suit and perforated shoes.

He was back in the photo business when I met him in Townsville, selling for Mill, a mad Czech.

His father had died that year and his mother hoped he would stay in Coolangatta. After we married, he visited her twice a year. She had a room at *Kirrahaven* Nursing Home but kept the house at Golden Four Drive, so we stayed there and drove her around for meals. Gary would cook her BBQ chops over a campfire, her favourite food. She had little sight in the end, yet still enjoyed drives to Springbrook or Currumbin until she died aged 86 in 1989.

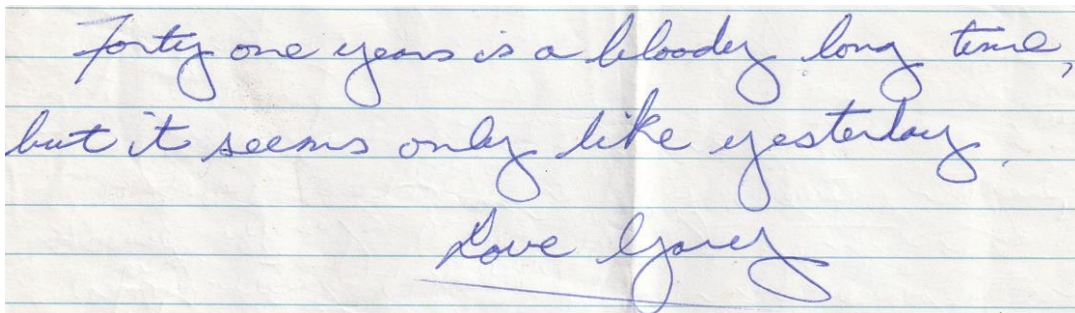
We had tried several times to have children and had no success and considered adoption and decided we were unlikely to be successful with no fixed abode at the time and no regular income. I tried to see the

advantages of no children – freedom, and fewer health problems for me, Gary’s lungs were enough of a worry by then and he was told he only had another ten years to live, so we decided to enjoy our lives. We worked when we needed money and played when we had it.

When we had the Bingil Bay property and land at Milla Milla, Gary’s health improved, with fresh clean air and hard physical work he felt well and lived on until he was 81. His dormant cancer had become active again and suddenly grew dramatically. He died in February 2017 at home overlooking the beach as he would have wished.

The ‘card’ I received from Gary on our 41st Wedding Anniversary gives you some idea – he did not waste money on cards though he did make an exception in 1960 you may recall.

It seems that our hasty union worked as well for Gary as it did for me and his card suggests that he was happy with the life we lived ...



Gary's 41st Anniversary 'Card'.



Gary, Lucy, and Chris Forbes.



Gary's Mum, Joyce.

BINGIL BAY BATTLE 1987 - 1993

Ken Gray: When assisting Chris with the creation of her family history, we talked about what more she could recall of early Bingil Bay days. Chris nonchalantly handed me a thick blue folder full of newspaper clippings and letters to and from Council and said, *I am not sure if that is something worth mentioning.*

In its day, this was a huge event for the little town of Bingil Bay. Reading through the file it was evident that while Chris was not the ringleader of this resident uprising, she was a key player. Hence, we have a small story about Chris and Gary Forbes and their brief period as political activists in their community.

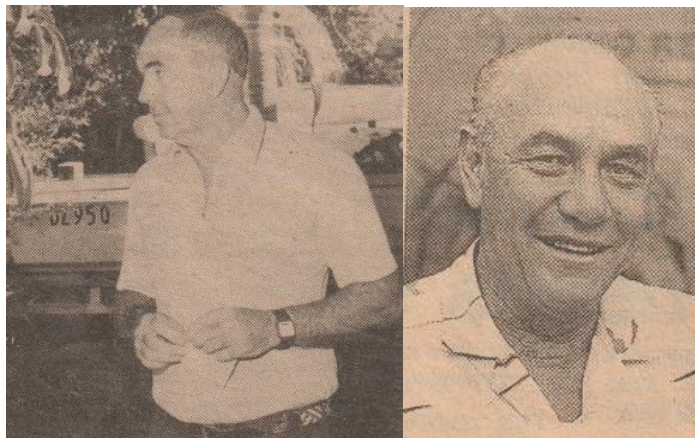
It all started in 1987 when Johnstone Shire Council (JSC) advertised a change to the zoning for Bingil Bay in the Innisfail Advocate. No one in Bingil Bay saw the advertisement it seems, for while the residents were keen to retain their quiet residential amenity, not one person made an objection – the proposal passed into law without a whimper.

In October 1987, a Development Application (DA) 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 on the site. This was close to Iris and Howard Watson's land where they had not long before applied for approval to build their Blue Pacific Motel – the second motel to be built in the Mission Beach district.

55 residents flocked to a meeting called by the Watsons, and they were unanimous in their opposition to the proposal and to the newly discovered zoning change for Bingil Bay.

Chris immediately wrote to JSC objecting to the proposal and to the recent Bingil Bay zone change saying it had been altered from low density to medium density. JSC responded, saying the zoning had been changed minimally, it was previously medium density allowing the development of up to 90 persons per hectare and was changed to allow up to 100 persons per hectare.

The residents of Bingil Bay were immediately awoken. They assumed the Bingil Bay zones only allowed a landowner to build one house per lot with some discretion to have a granny flat added. This was a game changer and now everyone realised that while building heights were limited to two-storey buildings, there could now be up to one block of six units built on every fifth residential block in Bingil Bay. People were alarmed by this Gold Coast-like prospect and most wanted no unit developments; those could happen at Mission Beach and Wongaling. A ringleader emerged, an unlikely ally, a Brisbane developer living in Bingil Bay's Cutten Street, Neil Chesney. Neil assumed leadership for the group with his good knowledge of Council Town Planning.



Neil Chesney, the ringleader. Bob Anderson Cr for Division 4: was an effective advocate.

Bingil Bay battle hots up

Innisfail Advocate, 9 February 1989.

A second resident action meeting was held at Watson's home in Cutten Street on 22 November 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 March 1988. They went into overdrive and sent a delegation to JSC immediately to meet with the Shire Engineer, his deputy, and the Building Surveyor. The campaign was energized instantly.

The four candidates for Division 4 in Council were all approached and asked if they would support the zone change for Bingil Bay. Bob Anderson of Kurrimine was the most unequivocal and supportive of the group. He won the election and set about the task of changing the zone.

The group ran petitions objecting to DA's proposing unit or accommodation developments and supporting changes to the zoning. On one occasion, the group gained signatures from 90 Bingil Bay residents. Chris was fully involved and among the leaders, writing letters, seeking signatures and letters of support, writing to newspapers, and doing all she (and Gary) possibly could to prevent unit developments in Bingil Bay. It was intensive work over several years.

Soon after the election in March 1988, the group sent another delegation to Council and this time Neil Chesney hired a Brisbane town planning consultant to make the case. Neil retained the consultant for the duration of the campaign.

Residents did not have it all their own way. Another group emerged and named itself, *Bingil Bay Committee for Balanced Views*, representing landowners who wished to cash in and seek approvals to build units.

Neil Chesney sent letters, mostly delivered by hand, to Bingil Bay landowners seeking their views on the zoning issue. He sent out 147 questionnaires and received 70 responses: 65 said Yes to the rezoning proposal, 4 said No and one said Unsure. Neil wrote again to JSC saying the group had support from 94.2% of landowners for the rezoning. However, Council replied by saying that he had not canvassed all landowners and the real number was 47% who favoured rezoning, not 94% - most landowners had not provided a view.

By this time though, the group had their voice heard widely and Council polled all landowners. While they did not publish their findings (or I cannot find them), they obviously found overwhelming support for a low-density residential zone for Bingil Bay. By April 1989 the first battle in this war had been won: Council voted unanimously in favour of rezoning Bingil Bay to low density.

The battle continued for some time because JSC had to wait for the State Government to gazette the rezone. Several landowners quickly lodged DAs to seek unit developments before the change. Some won approvals and just sold the land for a profit of up to \$100,000 but every DA was fought with letters of objection – up to 84 for some DAs. A few applications that Council refused won court appeals, but Council played hardball and insisted that developments must be completed in short timeframes or face a lapsed approval. In the end, the campaign was an overwhelming success, and no unit developments were built. This was the end of a successful activist career for Chris Forbes.

EPILOGUE

When Chris Forbes joined Mission Beach Historical Society and began to edit and approve our histories, I did not know her well. We saw her occasionally when we visited friends or passed the Forbes with their dog many times on Narragon Beach. All we knew of them was that they seemed friendly, loved their dogs, often sun-baked on beaches and always looked contented together.

Some Society members who had known Chris for many years, both as a friend and as a colleague, were keen to record Chris's story as she is one of our oldest residents and had much to tell. Visits were made, but for some time, Chris was not interested in being interviewed. However, when I visited her several times later to discuss her edits of other works we spoke of another option, that being for Chris to write her own history with some assistance with research and transcription. Chris agreed to write it in her own time and images were added. As we assembled her story together, it was soon evident that Chris Forbes 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. The enigma is that she taught for six years in England yet when she came to Australia, while she spent a few years teaching, for most of her life she did not teach.

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.

She could have been a violin teacher or even a notable School Principal if she wished. Her sister, Mary, was a concert violinist in Adelaide playing for a university ensemble. Chris could have done that too, for she too was an accomplished musician. However, a career in violin would have meant much practising and living in a climate where the violin would not be destroyed by humidity and these options were not for Chris. Few of her friends will know of her musical talents though as Chris Forbes hides her light deep beneath a bushel.

When Chris arrived in Australia, she immediately bonded with the culture and place and knew she was no city girl. She soon gravitated to the far-flung edges of the continent, to North Queensland, and while she and Gary spent some time in Sydney, they always returned to the place they most loved, Bingil Bay.

Chris Forbes 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. I am not at all surprised at how her friends, colleagues, and pupils of the past respect and love her.

Ken Gray, editor.