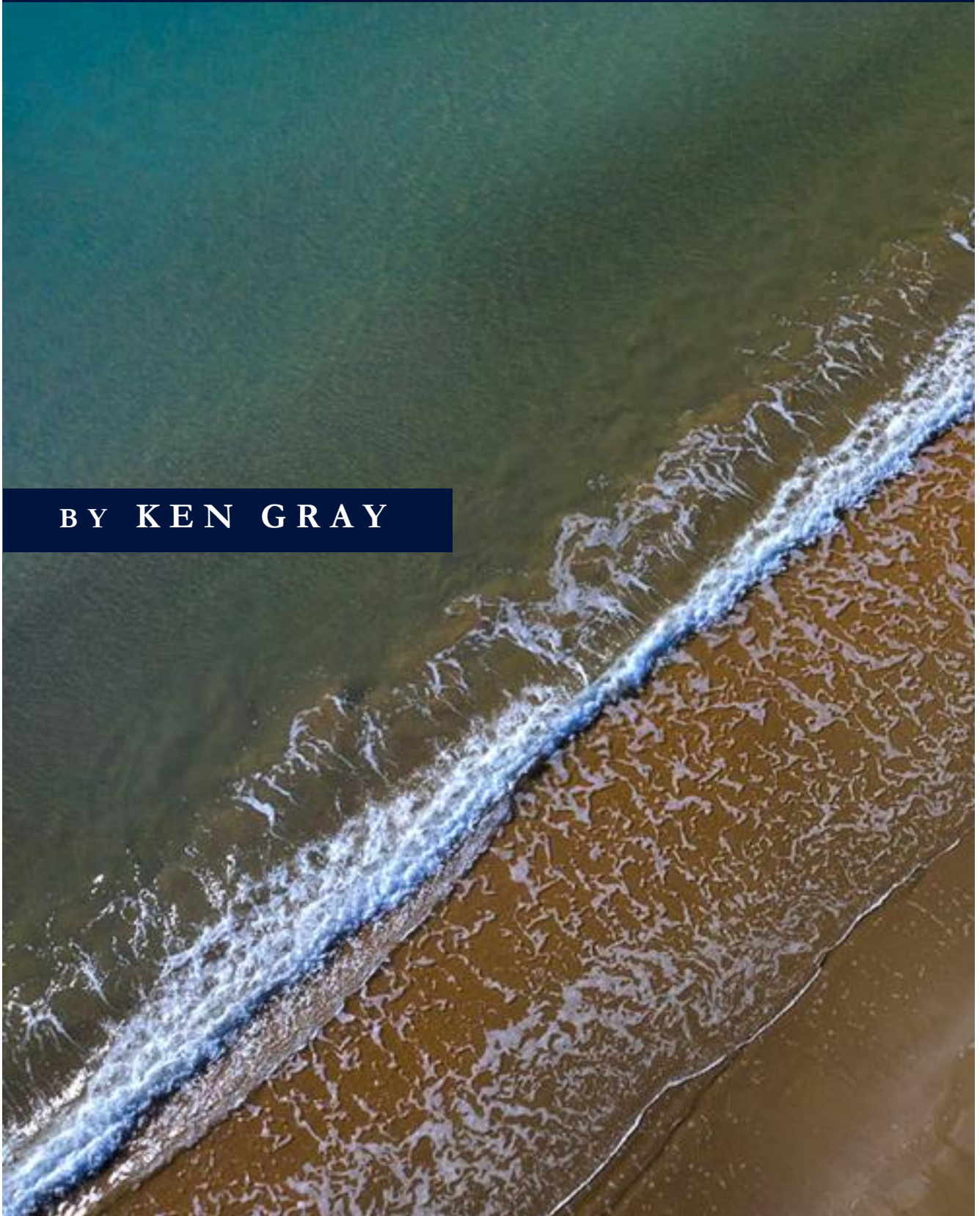


# LIVING LINKS

THE BERRY-PORTER FAMILY of MISSION BEACH

BY KEN GRAY



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Cover

The image is taken from a portion of a photo by Susan Kelly of *Natural Images* showing the beach near where Porters Creek crosses the sand and releases into the Coral Sea.

# CONTENTS

The Link	4
Family Tree	5
Arrival	6
Neighbours	7
Exodus	14
Return to the Beach	18
A Chat with Ab	19
Lake Tinaroo	19
Dick and Bill Berry-Porter	20
Dad and his Siblings	25
Living in Mission Beach	33
Locations of Houses on Lot 4v	36
Remembering	37

## THE LINK

This is a story of living links between the district's early European settlers and the Mission Beach community of 2022. The cover features an image of water and sand at Mission Beach taken by the district's gifted photographer, Susan Kelly of *Natural Images*. The beach is the natural link between the Coral Sea and the rainforest alongside it.

The Berry-Porter family history provides Mission Beach with unique living links to its European settler past. Brothers Bill and Dick Porter arrived at Clump Point in 1901, 16 years after the Cuttens settled at Bingil Bay. Dick and his family and Bill Porter had all left the district by 1925, yet they retained their land holdings and their descendants returned in the 1930s momentarily then in the 1950s. Several family members remain in the district today.

Few Mission Beach families can claim to be *Living Links* to the early settlers. The Cutten family were our first European pioneers, settling here in 1885, but the last member of that family living in the district was Les Alexander who left in 1954.

What makes the Porter family link to the past even stronger though is that Ab Berry-Porter, a grandson of Dick Porter, is living at Lake Tinaroo on the Atherton Tablelands in 2022 at the age of 91 years. Ab (Albert) knew his grandfather Dick Porter well and knew a little of his great uncle Bill. Ab lived for 35 years at Mission Beach when some of the family returned and he agreed to have a chat with us about the district's early days. As far as we know, Ab is the only living person in 2022 who personally knew one or more of the Mission Beach people who lived here around the turn of the century.

The original settlers in this district were the Djiru people who arrived eons before any Europeans. Some of their people live here now, so they are the ultimate links to our past.

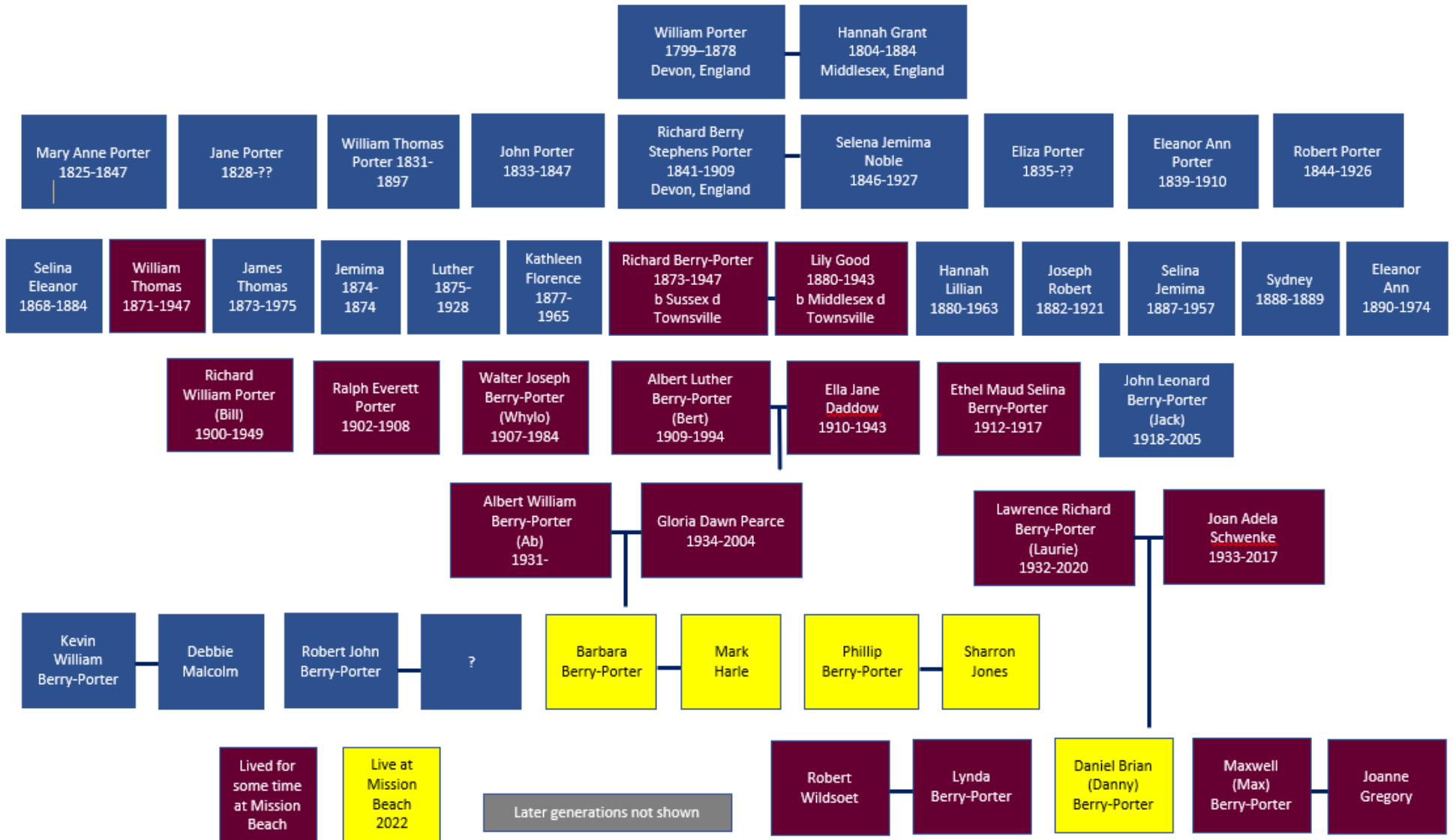
The *Porter brothers*, who were among our first European selectors to live on and work their land, were William (Bill) and Richard (Dick) Porter. From our research, the Porters were probably the ninth European family to come to the Mission Beach district. Bill, the older brother, married but did not have children as his wife died soon after they were married. Dick had five children, but two did not survive past childhood.

Dick's great-grandson, Phil, and his wife, Sharon Berry-Porter, live in Mission Beach in 2022 and Dick's great-granddaughter, Barbara, and her husband, Mark Harle, live on a portion of the land once owned by Dick Berry-Porter. Ab's nephew, Daniel Berry-Porter, is also living in Mission Beach.

To create this history we first researched documents available on the web to determine what has been written and recorded about the family in the past. We found a few newspaper articles, some stories recorded in books, followed up records on *Ancestry.com.au* online and searched the electoral rolls of the time. Then we interviewed Ab Berry-Porter with the assistance of his daughter, Barbara Harle. These threads of evidence were then blended to cross-check the data and complete the available history.

With most family histories, there is scant information available and no one alive to corroborate the story, but this time we had Ab Porter to help us piece it all together.

# Family Tree



## ARRIVAL

*Ancestry.com* poses more questions than it answers at first glance. However, it shows that Richard Berry-Porter was born in Hollybrook, Skibbereen, Cork, Ireland in 1873 and was living in Sussex England in 1881 before migrating to Queensland in 1884. William Thomas Berry-Porter was born in 1871.

The year that Richard and William Berry-Porter arrived to stay permanently at Clump Point is not precisely known. We know with certainty that they were here in 1908 because of a newspaper article speaking of timber to be used for building Richard's house.<sup>1</sup> We also know from Ab that the Porters first came to the district seeking land in 1901 and they lived at Mission Beach on and off before building their homes.

The press article was written by Jack Bunting, a timber getter who lived on the Hull River and sent his logs to the Rooney Company's timber mill in Townsville. The Rooney's built the second home to be erected in the district when they sent carpenters Don and Buchanan from Townsville to build a two-storey home for W. Hyne in 1888.<sup>2</sup> The first home built in the district though was *Bicton*, built by the Cuttens in 1885 and the Porter home referred to below was probably built by Rooneys. However, we see in a later article written after the 1918 cyclone that Bill Berry-Porter was building a home for someone else on the beachfront in 1918, so the Porters may have built their own houses, as the Cuttens did. This is what Jack Bunting said in 1908:

*To give any of our readers who may not be versed in the timber trade an idea of the contents of the big maple tree mentioned above [15 feet in girth] it may be mentioned that the sawn timber it would provide (8,000 feet approximately) would just about supply material for the building of Mr. Porter's nice dwelling house now being erected on the Clare Road.*

The electoral rolls for Herbert/Innisfail confirm that the Porter brothers were here in 1909. Dorothy Jones, who has written the most comprehensive histories of the wider region, suggested that it was around 1910 that they arrived, but they were here well before that.

*Around 1910, give or take a few years, quite a few people had taken up land in the Mission Beach Clump Point area under the freehold system. ... Towards the bottom end of North Mission Beach were Bob (sic) and Dick Porter with their families. R. B. (Dick) Porter's child died there and is buried on the beach. The creek the natives called Wongaling is also known as Porter's Creek. ... Rupert Fenby, a former English motor engineer from the large automobile factories in Rugby, landed in Cairns in 1910 and came in the Cutten's boat to Mission Beach. The Porters were then already established.<sup>3</sup>*

A 1931 article in *The Brisbane Courier* also refers to the Porters and suggests they may have been here as early as 1904:<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Our Timber Resources*, *Morning Post* (Cairns), 23 July 1908, accessed on *Trove*, February 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/39409278?searchTerm=Our%20timber%20resources>

<sup>2</sup> Dorothy Jones, *Cardwell Shire Story*, Jacaranda Press, Brisbane, 1961, p. 239.

<sup>3</sup> Dorothy Jones, *Cardwell Shire Story*, Jacaranda Press, Brisbane, 1961, p. 295.

<sup>4</sup> *Clump Point, Bananas and Dairying*, *The Brisbane Courier*, 11 July 1931, accessed on *Trove*, February 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/21715747?searchTerm=Clump%20Point%20Bananas%20and%20Dairying>

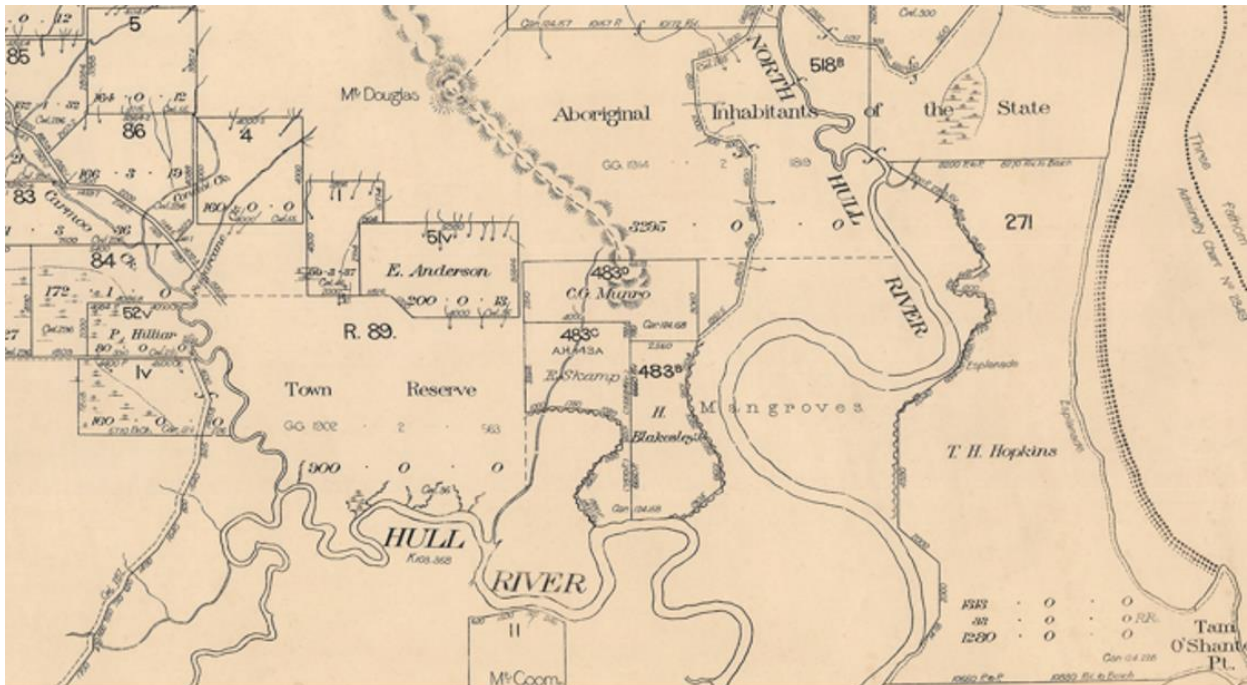
*Pioneer Settlers: The late Cutten Bros. were the first settlers to start fruit growing at Clump Point. They arrived in 1887 or a little earlier [it was 1885]. These sturdy pioneers were well known throughout the district; they fought a hard battle at Bicton and newcomers were welcomed and treated there as one of the family. Next came the Porter Bros, about 1904. They started to plant 20 acres of rubber trees but were forced into fruit growing and followed that industry until 1916 when most of the boats were taken off the run for war purposes.*

Unfortunately, the author of that article did not state where they sourced the 1904 date from.

We now know with certainty that the Porter brothers first looked at land at Carmoo Creek but found it unsatisfactory due to the ever-present snakes, mosquitoes and crocodiles and shifted to North Mission Beach. That was confirmed in our chat with Ab who said they rowed up the Hull River in a dinghy.

The Porter brothers worked on the Cuttens' farm for a time and were still working in Townsville and Chillagoe for a while so came to Clump Point on and off before settling permanently. That notion is confirmed in the early electoral rolls for 1903 and 1905, as the Porters were enrolled in both Chillagoe and Townsville, Dick as a boilermaker and Bill as a fisherman.

There are some rumours that the Porter brothers selected land at Carmoo initially but that was not the recollection of Ab Berry-Porter and a search of titles shows no evidence of that. The Hull River portion of the 1923 cadastral map of the Parish of Rockingham shows that the Carmoo area as it is named today was settled by Henry Blakesley (Lot 483d), Robert Skamp (Lot 483c) and Colin Munro (Lot 483) and E. Anderson (Lot 51v) owned the lot to the west of Carmoo:



Cadastral Map of the Parish of Rockingham, Hull River area, June 1923.

Published Land Court decisions show that Blakesley and Skamp selected their 160-acre lots at Carmoo in January 1884 and Munro selected 1,280 acres at the same time<sup>5</sup>. In July 1889, Blakesley

<sup>5</sup> *Land Courts, Cardwell, The Queenslander* (Brisbane), April 1884, accessed on Trove, March 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/23972130?searchTerm=H.%20Blakesley>

and Skamp were granted certificates of title, so by that time they must have complied with the conditions of residence. I have not located the Land Court decision on Munro's selection, yet it appears from the 1923 cadastral map that his application for 1,280 acres was denied and he gained title to only 160 acres.

These reports show that the Carmoo land was selected by Munro, Blakesley and Skamp in 1884 and that Skamp and Blakesley were living there by mid-1889. In 1884, Dan Keogh also selected 160 acres in the Hull River area, but that lot is not shown in the 1923 cadastral map. His application for a certificate of title was postponed in June 1889. Richard Berry-Porter was only 11 years old in 1884 so would not be old enough to have applied for selection until 1894. Dorothy Jones stated that selectors in the 1880s near the Hull River mouth included Dan Keogh, Blakesley, Robert Skamp, F. A Primrose and C. Munro. She added that Keogh, Blakesley and Munro lived there for several years.<sup>6</sup> Records show that Henry Blakesley was back in Brisbane<sup>7</sup> by 1897.

The 1931 article cited earlier is probably inaccurate in placing the Porters as the *next to settle in the district after the Cuttens* because we know that Willoughby Smith settled on Lot 21A in 1887, the Banfields settled at Dunk in the same year, plus Yankee Dan Keogh, Colin Munro, Robert Skamp and Henry Blakesley were on the Hull River around 1889. Furthermore, Jack Unsworth was on Lot 5v on and off from 1892 and worked for the Cuttens in 1903 and James Dillon was at Garners Beach on his selection for a few years from 1903. That places the Porter family as being probably the ninth of the district's settler families to arrive here.

There are a few short accounts of what the Porters did on their land in that early period but it was largely banana farming. Initially, Jones reports that they planted rubber trees and the trees grew well yet were never tapped:

*Some rubber was planted in the district but the absence of cheap labour ensured that the trees were never tapped. ... the largest plantation was put on Wongaling Creek by the Porter Brothers. They had fine trees which were never tapped.*<sup>8</sup>

Ab Berry-Porter said that he noticed that one or two of the trees were tapped at some stage, yet it seems that the crop was not commercially viable. Don Wheatley noted that during the war years the defence forces tapped about 12 of these rubber trees when rubber was scarce.<sup>9</sup> As it became apparent that rubber was not viable, the Porters turned to fruit farming, growing bananas and some citrus:

*The new settlers who did come in to make homes and farm on that beach [North Mission Beach] chose its southern end. Of them, the Porter Brothers – W. B and R. B. – took up selections and farmed them on the tidal creek that still bears their name. They, too, had worked for a time for the Cutten Brothers. Dunk Island was then the home of the Banfields, so fruit from the Porter farm could be taken across there for easy picking up by a cargo boat.*<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Dorothy Jones, *Cardwell Shire Story*, Jacaranda Press, Brisbane, 1961, p. 229.

<sup>7</sup> Henry Blakesley, *Ancestry.com.au* accessed March 2022 at: [https://www.ancestry.com.au/family-tree/person/tree/44468980/person/162067888921/facts?\\_phsrc=Fqa481&\\_phstart=successSource](https://www.ancestry.com.au/family-tree/person/tree/44468980/person/162067888921/facts?_phsrc=Fqa481&_phstart=successSource)

<sup>8</sup> Dorothy Jones, *Cardwell Shire Story*, Jacaranda Press, Brisbane, 1961, p. 298.

<sup>9</sup> Ken Gray, *Wheatley Beach Tales*, Mission Beach Historical Society, H011, 2022, P. 29.

<sup>10</sup> Miss Constance Mackness, MBE, *Clump Point and District, An historical record of Tam O'Shanter, South Mission beach, Mission Beach, Bingil Bay, Garners Beach and Kurrimine*, G. K. Bolton, Cairns, 1983, p. 20.



That was confirmed by Dorothy Jones:

*Further south [of Narragon] on the creek now called Porters were the Porter Brothers, Bob (sic) and Dick, producing fruit which they were able to take across to Dunk Island for the regular cargo boats to load.<sup>11</sup>*

By 1914, they were employing some labour on the farm as reported in an article at the time:<sup>12</sup>

*... a black boy in the employ of Mr W. B. Porter, who owns a selection on Wongaling Creek, about two miles and a half south from Clump Point, found a bottle containing a drift note.*

The bottle was released at 25 degrees south near Bundaberg and the note was sent back to the address given in Melbourne.

Edmund Banfield in his regular newspaper column, *Rural Homilies*, wrote in July 1917 about the wharf being built at Clump Point<sup>13</sup> and how the Minister (Pease) who had come to meet the community earlier had kept his promise to seek funding for the wharf, but it was all too late for the settlers on fruit farms. Ted described the district as being deserted and the Progress Association (which had 20 members at one time) now only had a secretary and one member left. Most people had left the district because of the lack of shipping to transport fruit.

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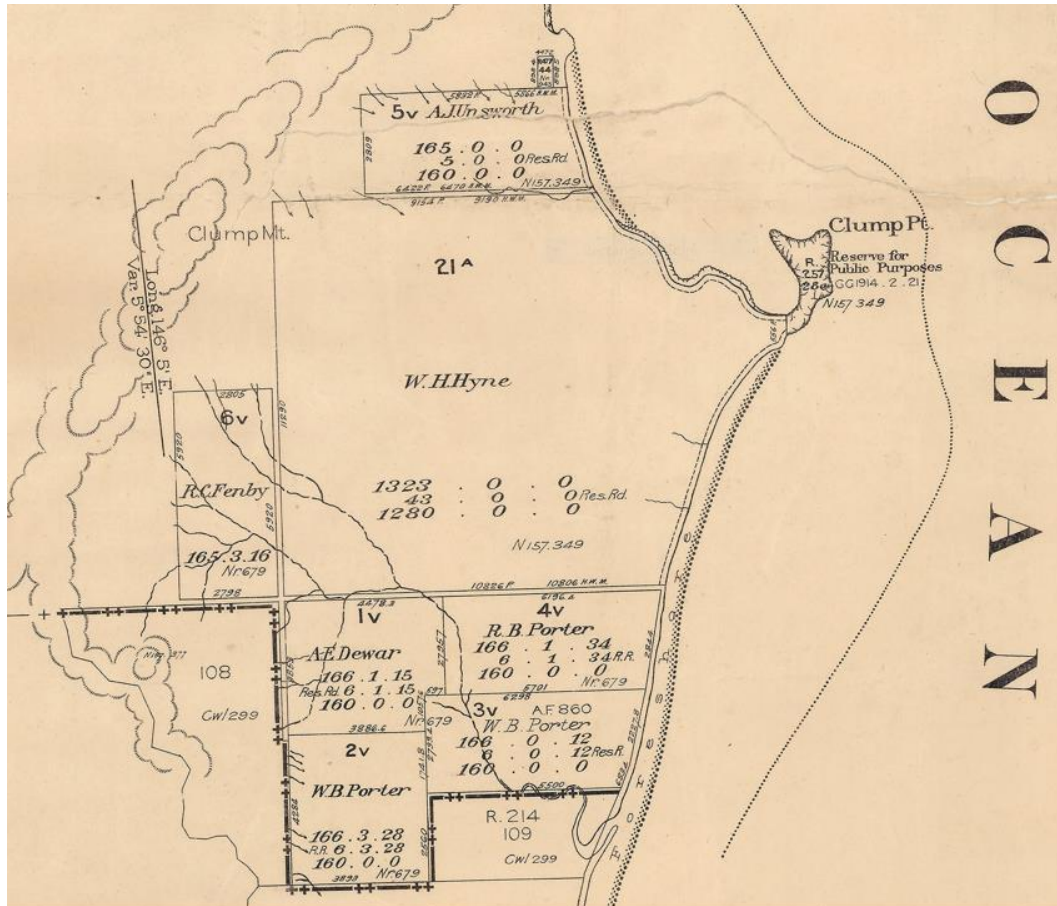
<sup>11</sup> Dorothy Jones, *Hurricane Lamps and Blue Umbrellas: The story of Innisfail and the Shire of Johnstone North Queensland*, G. K. Bolton Printers, Cairns, 1973, p.318.

<sup>12</sup> *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 6 January 1914, accessed on Trove, March 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/59088277?searchTerm=W.%20B.%20Porter>

<sup>13</sup> *Rural Homilies by the Beachcomber, Some Plain Talk*, *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 26 July 1917, accessed on Trove, March 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/62574494?searchTerm=Rural%20Homilies>

## NEIGHBOURS

The easiest way to picture what was happening and where people lived is to show an old cadastral map. The map below is a 1923 cadastral map of the North Mission Beach area as it was known later with the lots selected.<sup>14</sup>



Cadastral Map, June 1923, showing selectors at 'North Mission Beach.' From Queensland Archives.

The map shows Jack Unsworth's Lot 5v at Narragon. Jack arrived in the area in 1892 but was for several years unable to make an income from his fruit farm, so he travelled widely on foot seeking farm work and fencing, mainly in the Atherton Tablelands. The Djiru people knew him well and called him *Jackie Walkabout*. He had a wife, Mary, who worked for Mrs Cutten before marrying Jack, and they had a daughter later on.

Another near neighbour was Rupert Fenby on Lot 6v. Fenby came in 1911 and built a hut and had a fruit farm as well growing bananas, citrus and pineapples.

Adam Dewar arrived in 1912 with his co-farmer friend, Albert Bryant. They had large areas under banana and citrus plantations. Albert enlisted in WWI in 1915 and died in action shortly after in France. They owned Lot 1v next door to the Porter brothers.

<sup>14</sup> Queensland archives, ITM627015 Parish of Hull, County of Nares. 40 chains to the inch. Survey Office, Brisbane., June 1923, Part of P9 Series SRS1856/1/347, accessed February 2022.

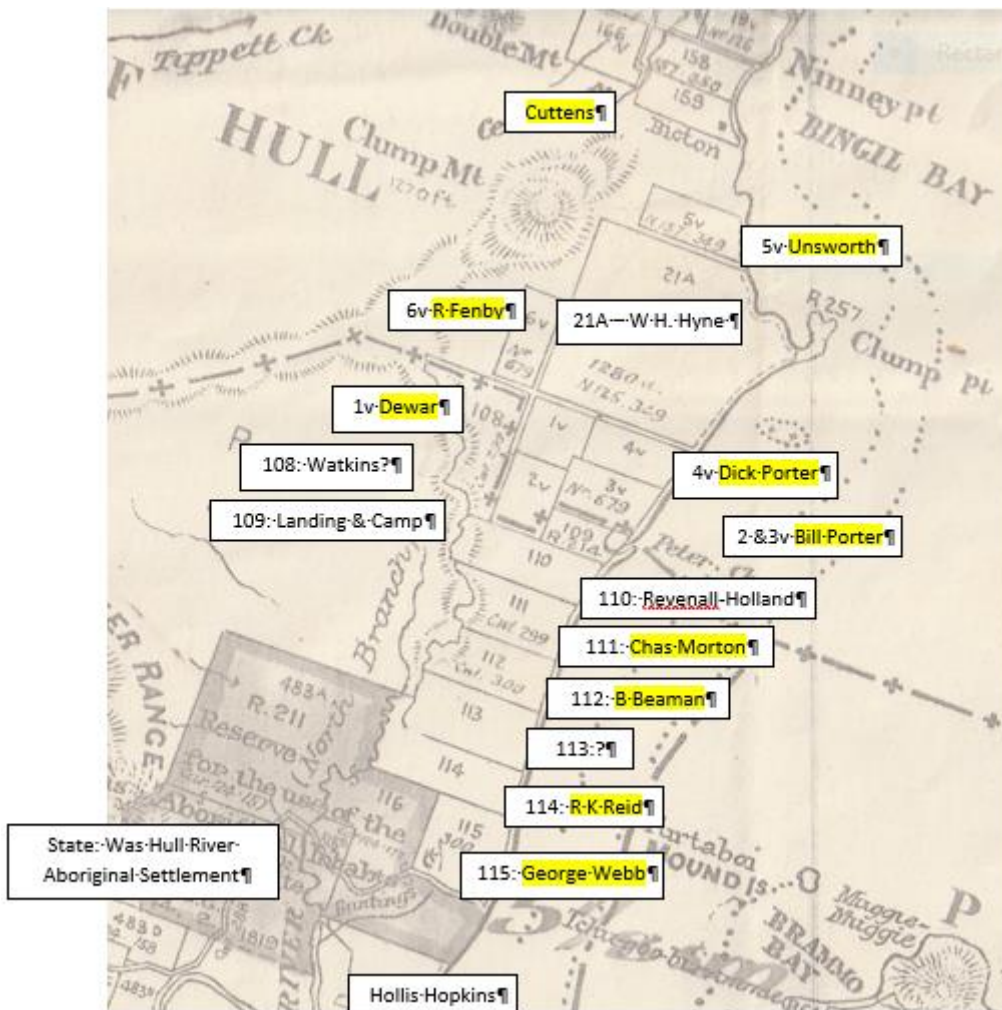


Rupert Fenby on his farm



Jack Unsworth and daughter at his hut at *Bicton* when he was a foreman there in 1903

A wider view cadastral map from 1921 shows more.



Cadastral map 1921 Clump Point, from Cassowary Coast Regional Council library. Those highlighted **yellow** lived on their land.

The Garner family lived at their property on Garners Beach after they arrived in 1909 and Irishman, Edmund Frizelle, purchased a small lot from the Cuttens near Garners Beach as well and was on the land for several decades from 1912. Dave Nissen in his recollections of the district's past spoke often to Ab Berry-Porter's father, Bert.<sup>15</sup> Dave remembers Bert saying he came from the Tablelands via the Palmerston Highway on horseback to Mission Beach in early times and he visited Frizelle for a stopover on the way. He then went on to his home near Castaways; he was staying in the original home of Richard Berry-Porter on the beachfront.

Some insights into the social life of the time are found in a newspaper article, *Clump Point Notes*, 1914:<sup>16</sup>

*A most enjoyable gathering of residents and visitors from Ingham took place at Mr. R. B. Porter's on the 4<sup>th</sup> inst., and on the 11<sup>th</sup>. Mr. R. K. Reid gave the visitors and residents the pleasure of a trip in his motor launch. These outings are a decided step forward in the social life of our community. The charming coastline between the Hull River and Maria Creek is rapidly becoming settled and there are now considerable areas of land about to be planted with bananas, coconuts and citrus fruits.*

By 1914, as the above article suggests, the district was being settled a little more intensely and the cadastral map on the previous page has labels added indicating the landowners. Those highlighted in yellow are where the land was occupied by farmers in 1914. W. Hyne had a manager (Willoughby Smith) living on his land (Lot 21A) with many workers from 1887 to 1890, but they left the land after the 1890 cyclone. In 1914, the Hyne land was owned by A. J. Bolton who had subdivided part of Lot 21A into six lots for sale.

The population of the district was booming just before 1917 with 70-80 European residents plus up to 400 Aboriginal people being held in the Hull River Aboriginal Settlement. Most of the farmers left though before the cyclone in 1918.

A list of early settlers of the Clump Point district includes:

1. Cutten family, arrived 1885, *Bicton*, many lots, Bingil Bay
2. Willoughby and Alice Smith, 1887, 1,280 acres at Clump Point
3. John Unsworth, 1892, Lot 5v, *Narragon*, Narragon Beach
4. Banfields, 1897, Dunk Island; also Essie McDonough, companion, 1912
5. Dan Keogh, 1889, Hull River
6. Henry Blakesley, 1889, Hull River
7. Colin Munro, 1889, Hull River
8. Robert Skamp, 1889, Hull River
9. Bill and Dick Porter, 1901, Lots 2v, 3v and 4v, *Calbra*, north Mission Beach
10. James Dillon, 1904, Garners Beach
11. Buntings (timber getters) 1908, Hull River
12. Garners 1909, *Wilford Hill*, Lot 10v, Garners Beach
13. Reids: Captain Reid (launch owner) 1909, *Kirkemichael* and two cousins Robert and David who farmed the 283-acre property Lot 114; David died in a gun accident in 1914
14. Lou (Adolph) Wildsoet and wife Elizabeth (nee Garner) at Garners farm, 1910
15. Rupert Fenby, Lot 6v, 1911, north Mission Beach

<sup>15</sup> Ken Gray, *Odin's Beach, Nissen Navigates 80 Years of History*, Mission Beach Historical Society, H018, 2022, pp. 13-14.

<sup>16</sup> *Clump Point Notes, The Northern Miner*, 17 October 1914, accessed on *Trove*, February 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/61822998?searchTerm=Clump%20Point%20Notes>

16. (East Feluga: Christian and Maud Wildsoet, Lots 3 and 8, Carmoo Creek, 1912)
17. Edmund Frizelle, Lot 35 Maria Creek-Garners Beach (purchased land from Cuttens), 1912
18. Albert Bryant and Adam Dewar, 1912, *Carinya*, Lot 1v, direct neighbours of the Porters
19. Alexanders at *Bicton* with Cuttens, 1913, Florence returned with her family of six children
20. Henry and Maud Allason, Dunk Island, 1914, owned Bedarra Island
21. John and Elizabeth Kenny (and 3 children) Hull River Aboriginal Settlement, 1914
22. George Webb, *Koongul*, 1914, Lot 115, joined by wife Lilian 1925, daughter Elizabeth
23. Ben Beaman, Lot 112, 1915, wife and 2 children
24. Roland Jackson, 1915 (with Garners, enlisted WWI)
25. Charles Morton, 1915, Lot 111
26. Walter Johnston (bananas) 1915
27. Edwin Masters (bananas) 1915
28. Arthur Keeler (bananas) 1915
29. Andrew Andersen (bananas Maria Creek) 1915
30. John and Ellen Hazeldine (Aboriginal Settlement), 1916
31. Edward and Jessie Taylor (Aboriginal Settlement) 1916
32. Thomas Bell (bananas) 1916
33. Adolph and Catherine Henschel (farmers) 1916

Like many Clump Point farmers, the Porters gave their estates a name as seen in this article of 1910:<sup>17</sup>

*Messrs. Porter Bros., of Calbra Clump Point, are also shipping bananas each week, from three and four acres, one of their last shipments being a dozen three-foot cases.*

The genesis of the name *Calbra* is not known.

The published minutes of the first meeting of the Clump Point Progress Association<sup>18</sup> in 1912 show the Porter brothers were active within their community. The meeting was well attended with 12 different people mentioned. Seven motions were proposed and carried. Bill Porter proposed one motion and seconded another while Dick Porter proposed another motion.

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<sup>17</sup> *Rural Homilies, by the Beachcomber, Revised Version, The Northern Miner* (Charters Towers), 2 July 1910, accessed on *Trove*, February 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/80258050?searchTerm=R.%20B.%20Porter%20Clump%20Point>

<sup>18</sup> *Minutes of the First Meeting of the Clump Point Progress Association Held at Clump Point, March 16, 1912, Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 11 April 1912, accessed on *Trove*, February 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/58826814?searchTerm=Minutes%20of%20the%20first%20meeting%20of%20the%20Clump%20Point%20Progress%20Association>

## EXODUS

The small community of fruit farmers at Clump Point grew in numbers in the early 1900s despite the lack of roads for them to access transport for their produce. Len Cutten's activism for the first 20 years, pushing Councils and the State Government relentlessly to build roads, produced no result and there was no road or even a half-made dray track until 1921 when the Cutten, Garner and Mackness families worked together and built it themselves. They expanded an ancient Aboriginal track to achieve that.

It was merely a dray track from Bingil Bay to El Arish.<sup>19</sup> Johnstone Shire Council built three bridges on the track in 1926, but a properly made road would not be built until the State funded it in 1936. There was no road from Mission Beach to Bingil Bay until after 1940, and the road to Tully was only completed properly in 1940. That was all too late for Dick and Bill Porter.

The fruit farmers, therefore, were entirely dependent on unreliable coastal shipping to call in and take their fruit to Townsville and beyond. Often ships did not come when scheduled and the fruit was wasted. At the time, a neighbour, Charles Morton, on a 269-acre lot just two lots south of Bill Porter, was sending fruit as far afield as Adelaide despite these constraints.<sup>20</sup>

There was a push by the Cuttens and by the newly formed Clump Point Progress Association in 1912 for roads and a wharf to be built to make transport easier and they were successful in achieving a wharf at Narragon Beach by mid-1917. That was used only three times before being destroyed in the March 1918 cyclone.<sup>21</sup>

Before the cyclone came and ended fruit farming for many years in the district, World War I intervened and devastated farming at Clump Point. Coastal ships were seconded for the war effort and by 1915 there were few available. By 1917 shipping was almost all gone and farms came to a halt.

The timing of the Porter family's exits from the district is not exactly certain, but we can tie it down to within a year or so.

*French naturalist Frizelle [Irish] and Britisher Rupert Fenby survived the cyclone [1918]. The Porter Brothers and Unsworth's had already left the district as had the Reids and others.*<sup>22</sup>

Dorothy Jones and Constance Mackness both declared that the Porter family had left the district by 1915, but an analysis of the electoral rolls shows that Dick and Lily left in 1917 and that Bill stayed on, until probably 1925 or slightly longer.

The 1909 Herbert/Innisfail roll included Dick and Bill and in that year the only other families in the district were: Cuttens (Bingil Bay), James Dillon (Garners Beach), Unsworths (Narragon Beach) and Banfields (Dunk Island). Dan Keogh did not enrol, yet he was probably gone by 1909.

1912, 1913, 1915, 1916 and 1917 electoral rolls listed Dick, Bill and Lily Porter as residents.

<sup>19</sup> Ken Gray, *Bicton: The Cuttens of Clump Point*, Mission Beach Historical Society, 2022, p. 36.

<sup>20</sup> Dorothy Jones, *Cardwell Shire Story*, Jacaranda Press, Brisbane, 1961, p. 295.

<sup>21</sup> R. J. Taylor, *The Lost Plantation: A History of the Australian Tea Industry*, G. K. Bolton, Cairns, 1982, pp. 33-39.

<sup>22</sup> Dorothy Jones, *Cardwell Shire Story*, Jacaranda Press, Brisbane, 1961, p. 211.

1919, 1921, 1922 and 1925 rolls have Bill Porter listed. The 1928 roll has no Porters listed.

Most times on the electoral rolls, both Richard and Lily used the 'Berry' as a second given name rather than a part of the family name. They appeared on Chillagoe rolls in 1903 and 1905 and were on the Townsville roll in 1919 and on Babinda's rolls thereafter; 1925 - 1943. After Bill left Mission Beach in 1925 he went to Wonga Plantation at Rocky Point north of Mossman and he stayed there until he died. He worked with the copra at the plantation.

Richard and Lily lost two children early in life, Ralph at Clump Point aged six and Ethel at Townsville aged 4, so there was much sadness for the family during their time at Clump Point:

*R. B. Porter paid the price of pioneering by losing a son through lack of medical attention. When the lad contracted the usual mysterious fever – 'scrub typhus' was an unknown name for it then – they rowed him across to Dunk Island to catch the Kuranda on its trip south to Townsville; but the ship continued on its way unheeding their signals; the unfortunate boy did not last long. After Mr. Banfield's representations to the shipping company, its captains thereafter called in at the island when signalled to do so.<sup>23</sup>*

That was not all of the Porter family sadness of the early 1900s.

Bill Porter married Margaret Lony at Townsville on 7 July 1902. Then in the 1903 Townsville electoral rolls, we find both Margaret and Bill are listed as being in the Plague Hospital in Townsville.<sup>24</sup> There was a full study conducted on bubonic plague in Queensland by Cumpston and McCallum<sup>25</sup> which showed that in the February 1903 outbreak in Townsville, three people contracted the disease and two of those people died. One can reasonably assume then, that the reason there is no further record of Margaret Porter nee Lony to be found is that Margaret succumbed to the deadly disease. Bill had been married merely seven months before losing his wife to bubonic plague.

Between 1900 and 1909, 499 cases of plague were reported in Queensland and 219 of those died so there was a 44% mortality rate. In 1900, Townsville hastily built a Plague Hospital as shown in the electoral roll extract below.<sup>26</sup> We do not have an image of the Townsville Plague Hospital, but there is one showing the isolation 'wards' at Maryborough (next page).

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<sup>23</sup> Miss Constance Mackness, MBE, *Clump Point and District, An historical record of Tam O'Shanter, South Mission beach, Mission Beach, Bingil Bay, Garners Beach and Kurrimine*, G. K. Bolton, Cairns, 1983, pp. 22, 23.

<sup>24</sup> *Queensland's History – 1900s*, Queensland Government, accessed March 2022 at: <https://www.qld.gov.au/about/about-queensland/history/timeline/1900s>

<sup>25</sup> Dr. J H L Cumpston and Dr F McCallum, *The history of plague in Australia, 1900 – 1925*, Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Health, Service Publication No. 32, 1926, p. 27, accessed March 2022 at: <https://dro.deakin.edu.au/eserv/DU:30068631/cumpston1926historyplague.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> Australia, Electoral Rolls 1903 – 1980, Queensland, 1903, Herbert, Townsville, accessed at: [https://www.ancestry.com.au/imageviewer/collections/1207/images/RDAUS1901\\_100651\\_\\_0016-00228?pid=6259946](https://www.ancestry.com.au/imageviewer/collections/1207/images/RDAUS1901_100651__0016-00228?pid=6259946)



Nurses tending to isolated plague cases, Maryborough, 1905. John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland. Neg 168821<sup>27</sup>

Australia, Electoral Rolls, 1903-1980					
Queensland > 1903 > Herbert > Townsville					
4851	Porter	Luther Berry	M	Baywater road	labourer
4852	Porter	Margaret	F	Plague Hospital	domestic duties
4853	Porter	Mary	F	Gleeson street	domestic duties
4854	Porter	Mary Ann	F	Queen's road	domestic duties
4855	Porter	Richard Berry	M	Baywater road	boiler-maker
4856	Porter	Richard Berry Stephens	M	Mt. Louisa	no occupation
4857	Porter	Rose Anna	F	Baywater road	domestic duties
4858	Porter	Selina Jennima	F	Mt. Louisa	domestic duties
4859	Porter	Thomas William	M	Queen's road	carpenter
4860	Porter	William	M	Plague Hospital	fisherman
4861	Potter	George Graham Irwin	M	Mougrave street	railway guard
4862	Porter				

Electoral Roll 1903 showing Margaret and William Porter resident at the Townsville Plague Hospital.

Bill Porter's presence during the 1918 cyclone is documented. A report on the cyclone by Ted Banfield outlines how different people were involved in the storm, and among them was Bill Porter:<sup>28</sup>

*Perhaps the solitary men of the bush have more vivid perceptions of the convulsions than those surrounded by families and friends. Two or three, each separated by miles of jungle live in this neighbourhood out of a call for help and self-dependent in case of mishap. One of these is Mr. W. B. Porter of Wongaling Creek, about two miles south from Clump Point. When his own humble hut began to fall he set out to reach his brother's empty house about a mile and a half away but found the strength of the wind so overpowering that he could not struggle against it even as far as the beach about 100 yards distant. Squatting under the lee of a new house he was engaged in building, he soon began to realize that it would topple on him and went inside, covering himself with a loose sheet of iron, and listening to the screeching of the wind and the slash of falling trees. Feeling rather wetter and colder than might be, he peered out from the uncompromising blanket to find the floor awash, the water being brilliant with phosphoric lights. Every rain drop sparkled, every splash was a flame. He knew then that the sea must have broken over the protecting sand ridge, about a hundred yards away, but since the water was*

<sup>27</sup> *Black Death in Queensland*, State Library of Queensland, John Oxley Library, September 2008 accessed March 2022 at: <https://www.slq.qld.gov.au/blog/black-death-queensland>

<sup>28</sup> *The Storm Wind, By the Beachcomber*, *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 27 March 1918, accessed on Trove, February 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/62264509/5591016>



*surgeless felt no fear and made himself comfortable again. As suddenly, and as quietly as the water rose, so it receded, though the wind continued to rage most furiously.*

*Time passed slowly; the house was driven off its supports, and at last, daylight appeared, never more fervently hailed, and the lonesome man was able to look abroad on a strange and disorderly scene. The strand line had been driven back fully one hundred yards; Wongaling Creek was an unswimmable flood and there was nothing to be done but to wander about wet to the skin, cold, hungry, and without means of obtaining either clothes or food, the nearest neighbours being two miles away with the raging creek between. Walking in the opposite direction he passed his brother's house, still standing, though the surrounding coconut palms were prostrate, he determined to try to get to Mr. R. C. Fenby's three miles in the jungle to the west, but found not only the tracks, but the whole country impassable, owing to the fallen timber, and entanglements of vines.*

*On returning to the scene of his own desolation, a singular circumstance relieved his mind for the time being from brooding over his misfortune. He had noticed in the morning that a bee hive had been overthrown, and the bees had been apparently lifeless, bees clinging in masses to the frame of the comb and the bottom boards of the hive and all glistening with salt water. Now the bees were working away as industriously as ever, although the hive was partly embedded in a mass of sand, seaweed and pumice stone.*

*The scene heartened him up, and moving south, he crossed the creek and pushed on to his friend Mr. B. Beaman, who, with his mate, Mr. Peck, had suffered like everyone else. The beach was strewn with all sorts of flotsam, among which was the Dunk Island dinghy, safe and sound.*

*Mr. Porter and Mr. Beaman came across to Dunk Island in the dinghy, both off-hand rendering invaluable help in making the house habitable. If one wishes to have object lessons in real co-operation, let him dwell in the bush, not among those who are co-operators by word of mouth, but among men who are individualists by necessity if not by choice. Then is the co-operation like what Longfellow said of life – real and earnest; not a matter of principle, but of practice. If personal matters may be intruded for a moment, let it be to acknowledge the strenuous and clever help afforded by neighbours much more harshly dealt with by the storm than myself. If the house and appurtenances had been their own, they could not have laboured more zealously, or with energy which forgot to be tired. As at Bicton and elsewhere the same happy conditions of neighbourly and practical sympathy existed. The storm was one of those touches of nature.*

This story graphically demonstrates what incredible challenges the settlers faced at times. While large cyclones are rare events, there were small tropical cyclones in 1890, 1911 and 1913 before the monster of 1918 which was the second largest cyclone to hit the Queensland coast after European settlement. These storms always devastated the farms and the 1911 cyclone caused the sinking of the *Yongala*.

Today, people in big corporates love their jargon and acronyms and part of the silly language used by many in their rush to mimic one another is the word *grit*. Some people have made it into an acronym no doubt using it in their computer recruitment algorithms. They deem it to mean, *Guts, Resilience, Initiative and Tenacity*. Recruiting people with such attributes makes sense in any era and in the time of the Porter brothers at Clump Point, this word truly resonated. Few things were easy in the lives of the Clump Point early settlers, yet they had it better than their Djiru neighbours did, nonetheless.

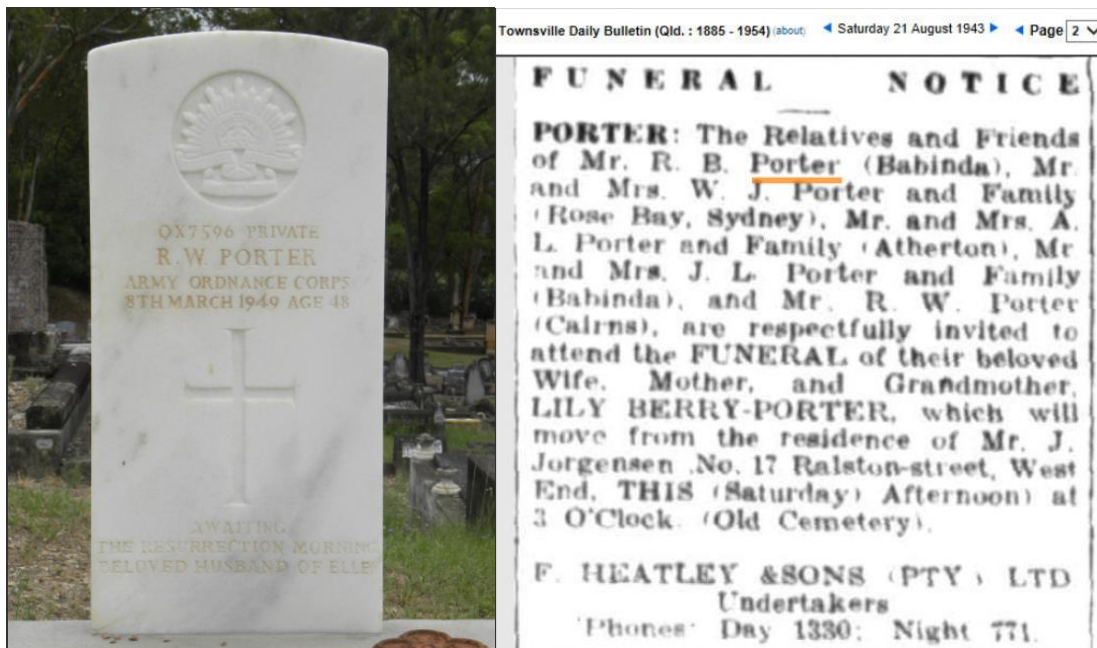
## RETURN TO BEACH

The comings and goings of the Berry-Porter family make your head spin at times and take some careful thinking to sort out accurately. The family retained the three 160-acre lots of land after leaving the district in 1925 and their descendants returned and settled once more, some staying on thereafter.

The first to return were two of Dick Porter's sons, Bill (William Richard) and Whylo (Walter) in 1938 when they built a house for Whylo and his wife, Nancy, to live in. That was the plan. They built the house, but the war intervened and Whylo, Nancy and Bill enlisted and did not return to this district. Whylo went to Sydney after the war.

Dick's son Bert (Albert Luther), while living in Atherton, came down to Mission Beach and stayed at times in the original beachside home that his father (Richard) built in 1908. He came on horseback.<sup>29</sup> From the electoral roll records, we can see that Bert mainly lived in Atherton, then in Cairns for a while and he did not settle fully in Mission Beach until 1980.

Ab's family came to Mission Beach in 1956. Ab and Gloria stayed for 35 years on their banana farm and when they retired to Tinaroo in 1991, they left two of their children, Barbara and Phillip, who stayed on and remained in Mission Beach thereafter.



Bill Porter's gravesite, Brisbane, wife's name Ellen.<sup>30</sup>

The use of the family name, 'Berry-Porter' varied. Some family members used it and some preferred to be known only as 'Porter.' Bill junior used Porter as shown above<sup>31</sup>, while Lily used the full name – see advertisement above.

<sup>29</sup> Ken Gray, *Odin's Beach, Nissen Navigates 80 Years of History*, Mission Beach Historical Society, H018, 2022, PP. 13-14.

<sup>30</sup> Gravestone R. W. Porter, Accessed on *Ancestry.com.au*, April 2022 at: <https://www.ancestry.com.au/mediaui-viewer/tree/157759147/person/412271619168/media/9cbd0164-8548-47a1-be22-4137ad6a642e? phsrc=Fqa511& phstart=successSource>

<sup>31</sup> *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 21 August 1943, accessed April 2022 at: <https://www.ancestry.com.au/mediaui-viewer/tree/157759147/person/412268822615/media/6017b46e-582e-44b3-9088-4c8a52683f01>

## A CHAT WITH AB

**Lake Tinaroo**

*Scribe:* I travelled to Lake Tinaroo to interview Ab [Albert William] Berry-Porter and his daughter Barbara Harle, who volunteered to join me to facilitate a recounting of the Porter family story at Mission Beach.

We arrive at Ab's home, which is perched on an elegant hill overlooking the lake and surrounded by tall rainforest trees and delightful lawned glades. I can understand why Ab has stayed here so long. The abundant wildlife with many overtly hyperactive birds is eager to please. They frolic joyfully, close to the home. A pair of curlews greet us curiously on the verandah and the mudlarks fossick noisily while a wee willy wagtail rides around on a pademelon's back preying on small insects. Life is fun for the critters at Ab's place. They are utterly unafraid of our quietly spoken host who seems to appreciate the welcome and entertainment they provide for his guests.



Ab Porter circa 1950.



Ab mountain trekking

Ab is a man of few words; most unassuming. He's not one to exaggerate or try to make things sensational. He was encouraged by his adult children to tell his story and merely related events of the past without embellishment and was clear about the limits of his memory. Barbara brought along a swag of old photos to aid recall. Ab's son, Phillip gave us a map of the lands the family owned in the early 1900s to help us determine key dates. Ab was mildly amused that people would be interested in his recollections yet good natured about it and his self-deprecating sense of humour was ever ready to make me feel at ease.

## Dick and Bill Berry-Porter

*Ab:* Richard Berry-Porter was my grandfather. He and his family came to Australia by boat from Sussex, England. I am unsure what year they came to Australia. I recall them saying that Richard (Dick) and William (Bill) Berry-Porter first came to the Clump Point district together looking for land to select in 1901. They rowed a dingy up the Hull River and looked at land near where Carmoo is today. However, they were unimpressed with the area and said it was rubbish country and was overrun with mosquitoes, snakes and crocodiles, so was no place to settle and farm. They subsequently selected three lots just north of the border between Cardwell and Johnstone Shires.

Bill selected two lots, each being 160 acres, and Dick selected one lot of 160 acres. Wongaling Creek, or Porters Creek as it is often called near the mouth today, runs through these properties and flows into the sea on what was once Bill's beachside lot (Lot 3v.)

Dick owned Lot 4v, the most northern one, and when he died, he left it to his family. It's shown on the old map Phillip has sent for us today; let's see. This map is the title deed dated July 1911 and has amendments dating up to 1956. That says the title for Lot 4v went to my father Bert and his wife Ella and their two children: myself and my brother Laurie. After our parents died, I owned Lot 4v and Laurie owned one of Bill Berry-Porter's lots, the inland one, Lot 2v.

The other lot that Bill Berry-Porter owned, Lot 3v, was sold to two Townsville ladies I believe. I am not sure of their names, probably Bourke and Good but I am struggling to remember that. They could not afford the rates so sold it to old Nonda.

Nonda was a Greek with a name like Stathopoulos. He was the guy they named that street [*Scribe:* Nonda Street] after. He lived in a house down the end; near where the Wheatleys' two houses are today. Nonda's house is long gone though. He had no road access and, while we were away, someone cleared the road area about a chain-wide across our property and got all of our timber on that land [*Scribe:* 4 acres] in the process. Then Council took that land and built the road for Nonda's access. [*Scribe:* Epaminondas and Margaret Stathatos are listed on the Federal electoral rolls in 1949, 1954 and 1958.]

*Ab:* My grandfather was a blacksmith working in the Chillagoe mine in 1909, but after Mission Beach, he ended up working in the Babinda sugar mill. My father, Albert Luther Berry-Porter, was born in 1909 in Chillagoe he said or while they were still living at Chillagoe on and off. *Barbara:* We know that Richard and Lily retired in Babinda as I have photos of them in that house and they were quite elderly then.

*Ab:* Yes. I was told about the cyclone in 1918 that went through Babinda. My grandmother stepped out the front door but she was only little and the wind picked her up and held her against the wall. It was pretty savage that 1918 one. I do not remember exactly when they left Mission Beach and you say they are listed in the electoral roll as still being there in 1917 but not 1918. That fits with what I know. I cannot remember them saying they called the farm *Calbra*, though as you say it was recorded in the electoral rolls. What's *Calbra* mean? I never heard that name.

I met our grandparents [Richard and Lily Berry-Porter, nee Good] quite often when they were living in Babinda. As far as I know, after they left Clump Point they came to Babinda. When we were living in Cairns, we used to go down to Babinda on odd weekends and spend half a day with our grandparents. The house in Babinda that the family lived in is still there. The people who owned it later built in the verandas. *Barbara*: Yes, I've got photos of it. *Ab*: We also met our great uncle, Bill Berry-Porter on occasions yet not often. I do not know a great deal about him though.



Richard (Dick) Berry-Porter.



Dick and Lily Berry-Porter, Cairns Show 1936.

*Barbara*: We have a photo of a picnic at Mission Beach way back in 1911 or 1912 and that has so many locals in it but we are not sure exactly who is who. I can see one who is almost certainly my great grandfather in the back row and my grandfather is there. He was young then, two years old or so, as was Bert Wildsoet who was also in the picture. *Ab*: That photo was probably taken near the house where we lived on the beach later. They all used to meet there on a Sunday. [*Scribe*: roughly at the site of Castaways Resort of 2022.] Behind the house was a bit of cleared land. It is still there. That's why we built it there. They used to go there in the early days on horses and drays because of the clearing near the beach.

*Scribe*: someone seeing this image commented that the people seemed solemn. They are dressed up in their Sunday best, yet that may have been the custom then. Then again, this may have been more than a picnic event.



Picnic at Clump Point circa 1911, taken near where Castaways is in 2022. *Scribe*: 20 adults and 16 children; there were 20 adults on the Federal electoral rolls at that time but some people were probably visiting the district.

At Babinda, my grandparents had a citrus tree out the back that had four or five different fruits all bearing on one tree. It's strange the little things you remember. My grandfather was a bit into gardening and grafting stuff. Not much I recall of them, but my grandmother (Lily) had a stiff leg and used to throw it and walked only with much difficulty. I never found out why.

*Barbara*: People had nicknames that were commonly used in those days, which makes history more difficult to piece together. Richard Berry-Porter was 'Dick' and his brother was 'Bill.' Richard's sons were 'Bill' (Richard William), 'Whylo' (Walter), 'Bert' (Albert Luther) and 'Jack' (John Leonard.) That can be confusing.



Lily and Dick Berry-Porter outside their family home in Babinda.

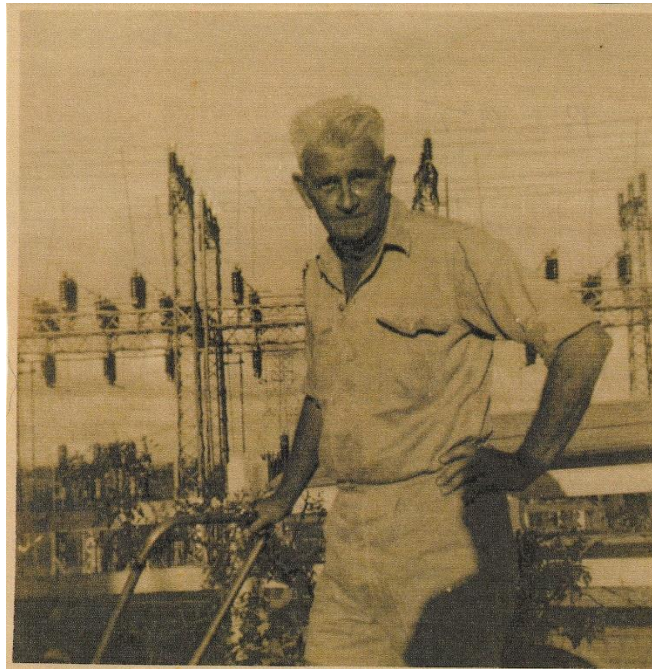


Dick, Lily and youngest son, Jack at Babinda.



Bill Berry-Porter (left) alongside his nephews, Laurie and Ab; Bert second from right, Condons from Townsville left of Bert, photo taken at Bill's place.

*Ab:* You can see in this picture (above) that both Laurie and I had our arms in casts; we broke our wrists at the same time, but the injuries were not bad.



Bert Porter.



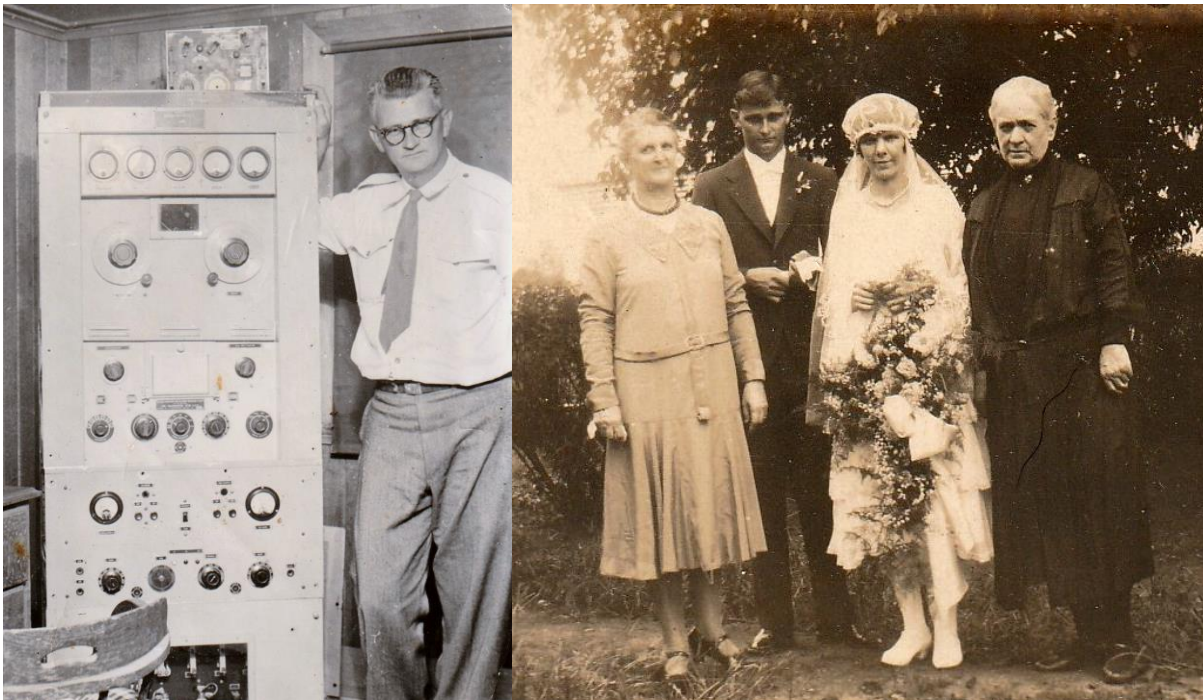
## Dad and His Siblings



Bert and Ella Berry-Porter.

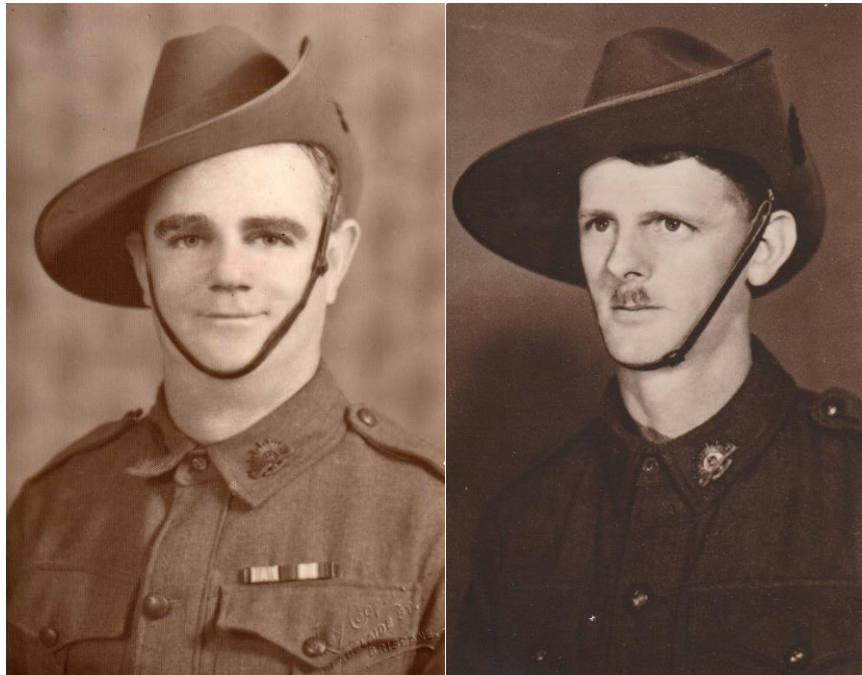
Jack, Lily and Whylo's son, Jimmy.

*Ab:* My father [Albert Luther, known as Bert] had four brothers and a sister as shown in the family tree earlier. He served his time as an electrical apprentice at the Babinda sugar mill. Dad eventually became the Cairns Regional Electricity Board (CREB) District Superintendent in Atherton. Two of his siblings died as young children, Ralph and Ethel. We found Ralph's gravesite at one stage. It was marked by a metal bedframe as was the custom in those days. The site was not far south of where Castaways is today, between the property boundaries and the beach. *Barbara:* The death of their young girl, Ethel, may have led to do with this family leaving Mission Beach in 1917. I am unsure. Ralph was the one who contracted scrub typhus and could not be saved when the passing ship failed to stop.



Bert Berry-Porter, CREB, Atherton.

Lily, Bert and Ella with the priest.



Bill (Richard William) Porter enlists.

Whylo (Walter Joseph) Berry-Porter enlists.

Dad tried to enlist, but for some reason, he was knocked back. My Uncle Bill was Dad's eldest brother. He enlisted in the Army at the start of WW2, as did Uncle Whylo the second brother. One of them told me they joined up because they could not get work. I think they did it for the money. At one stage, they were just shovelling gravel into railway trucks. I remember though that one of them was over in Crete during the war. Bill married late in life. [*Scribe*: Name 'Elle' on his headstone.]

*Scribe*: While I did not access the full war records of the Berry-Porters, three of them enlisted early in WWII: Bill, Whylo and John. Bill enlisted on 28 May 1940 in Cairns in the Army in the 2<sup>nd</sup> AIF, Service No. QX7596. He was in the Army Ordnance Corps (known as the 'Roaches') and was discharged in March 1942 from the Australian Depot Battalion.

Whylo enlisted on 8 June 1940 at Cairns and was a sapper in the 2/2 Field Company, Corps of Royal Engineers, Service No. QX7744. This was an artillery regiment and as a sapper, Whylo would be making and repairing roads, bridges etc. That regiment went to the Middle East (Tobruk) in mid-1940, then to Greece in mid-1941, and then to Crete. They went to Ceylon in mid-1942, then returned to Australia and Whylo was discharged in October 1942.

Ab's Uncle John enlisted with the RAAF, Service No. 24289, 04 July 1940 at Cairns as well. He was with No 21 Squadron, a reserve squadron from Melbourne. That squadron saw considerable action, first as a fighter plane unit in the Malayan Campaign, then as a dive bomber unit in the New Guinea Campaign and then they became a heavy bomber unit in the Borneo Campaign. John served for the duration of the war and was discharged in December 1945 as a Leading Aircraftman. His record seems impressive. Few pilots survived so many years of action in WW2.

*Ab*: Whylo had two sons, named Jim and Earn. He married Nancy and they lived in the house at Mission Beach that he built with Uncle Bill for six weeks before all three of them enlisted for the war. They all

survived the war, but Aunt Nancy died quite young after it, as did Uncle Bill. Bill died of liver problems and these days they would fix it, but he died soon after. Whylo went to Sydney after the war. I also remember Whylo saying that he often played with Aboriginal kids who lived near the bridge across Wongaling Creek but I am unsure what year that was in.

On the beach side of where the Mission Beach Child Care Centre is today is where the old house is. That was where we lived from 1956, until 1976 when we shifted down to a beachfront site to a new house. Uncle Bill was a cabinet maker and he and Uncle Whylo built the house by the Child Care Centre in 1939. We lived there with four kids for 20 years from 1956, after Gloria (Gloria Dawn Pearce) and I married in 1954.

After Bill and Whylo came Ralph, then me. I went to primary school at Atherton then to boarding school for a while at the Church of England All Souls school in Charters Towers. At that school, I was in the Mortar and Machine Gun Cadets, but I did not go to the war with my uncles. I was not old enough to enlist. We learned to use Vickers machine guns.



Green Island, Bert, Ab and Laurie.

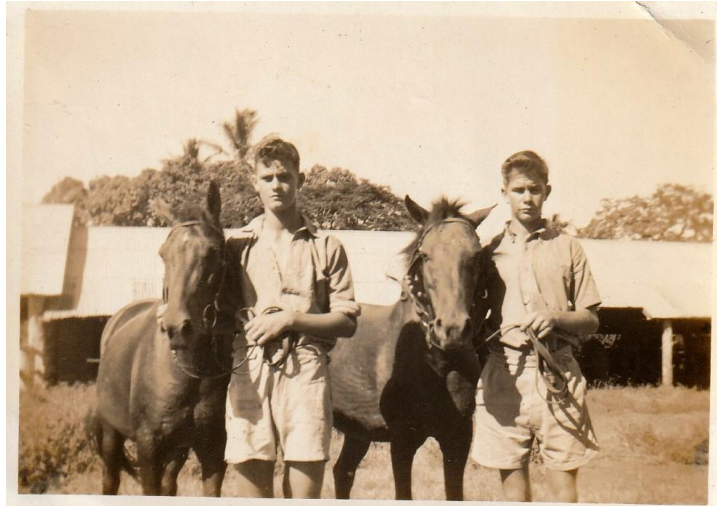


Ab, All Souls School: Army Cadet

We once holidayed on Green Island when we were kids, and we stayed there for two or three weeks. Once we went up to the Mitchell River Mission and camped there for a few weeks. Dad and his friend, Ronnie Gray, came and Ronnie was a bit of a photo man and could even develop them. Few people had cameras in those days. Went up in an old 1928 Chev Four. I remember us learning how to spear from the Aboriginals and they gave us a spear to keep or we bought it, perhaps.

Ronnie was a mechanic and my old man was an electrician, and when we got to the Mission on the Mitchell River, the power plant had failed. Ronnie and Dad got stuck into it and soon had it going again, so for the weeks we were there, we had fresh supplies of meat and bread every two or three days. When we were up there, we would take two or three Aboriginal blokes with us to the river; we weren't camped on the Mitchell River.

This photo (below) of two boys with horses – that's me (right) with Don Ashwell. He was a cousin of some sort. I went to boarding school with him. That photo was taken near the Pioneer sugar mill at Brandon where Don lived. Don's father managed the Brandon mill and they had a two-storey house on a lagoon. They had a servant; a black girl who did the cooking.



Don Ashwell (left) and Ab Porter, schoolmates at Don's family property at Brandon.



Pioneer Mill residence at Brandon where Ab stayed.<sup>32</sup>

After school, I worked for a silo company in Atherton and did an apprenticeship with them to be a fitter and turner. I still use the skills as a hobby making gadgets and rebuilding vintage cars. That was the Atherton Maize Board; they had many large corn silos. Both Gloria and I worked there. She worked in the office for about two years. That's where we met before we married.

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<sup>32</sup> Pioneer sugar mill residence, Brandon, accessed on *Queensland Places*, April 2022 at <https://queenslandplaces.com.au/exhibit/slide/bs012>



Gloria and Ab Berry-Porter, marriage 1954.

The bloke I worked for at the silos left after I had been there several years. He did mechanical engineering by correspondence and qualified then left to work at Mount Garnet. The foreman I then had to work for was not a very nice bloke, so I was looking to move, and my father asked me to go to the farm at Mission Beach. My brother, Laurie was in Mission Beach at the sawmills after working for Ken Campbell for a while.



Gloria and Ab Berry-Porter 1954.

*Ab:* We used to go over the side of the silos with two ladders tied together with rope; we wouldn't be allowed to do that these days. You were 75 feet up and just dropped over the side and went down on a ladder and we had a sort of platform we would stand on. Our job was to maintain the silos. Later on, all ten silos were demolished. *Barbara:* There's a relic of the silos left in the shopping centre.



Atherton corn silos being demolished.



Joan and Laurie, New Year 1966.

My brother, Laurie, came down to Mission Beach a while before we did, say 1952, or around three years before us. He settled on Lot 4v initially. After 18 months, he married Joan Schwenke [*Scribe:* 1954] and stopped on the farm for another 18 months before working for the Wildsoets and Wheatleys in their sawmills. Joan didn't like living in the sticks; she liked the city life, and after 4 or 5 years (I am guessing there) they went to Cairns where Laurie worked for the Cannons on their cane farm. When he returned, I was making money again on the bananas on Lot 4v and the old man suggested he return to do the same thing. That would be around 1967 when he returned, I'm not sure.

*Barbara:* His children would know. Lynda is the eldest, then Danny and Max. Max and his wife, Joanne, are in Rockhampton now and Lynda is living near Dad in Tolga. She married Robert Wildsoet. The two

families, Wildsoets and Porters are sort of linked up now. Danny was married to a really lovely girl, [*Scribe: Michelle*] but that did not last, and I think he was at Magnetic Island for a while. He had a little yacht. *Ab:* He was on the bananas with Laurie for a while. *Barbara:* Danny is back here now living on his boat and we see him around with his big grey beard and a car full of hats, bags and bowls made from coconuts. He mainly gives these to locals but sells a few to tourists.

*Ab:* The house we first lived in at Mission Beach was very strong, so instead of the usual 3 by 2-inch wall studs it had 4 by 2's and the corner posts were above spec as well at 4 by 4. This was the one I mentioned earlier that was built in 1939. It has withstood several cyclones since. There was a small cyclone in 1956 just after we came to live here.

We moved into a new beachfront house in 1976. We built that with Jimmy Merrill who did most of it. Later, we used Bob West to build homes. *Barbara:* Yes, Bob built much of our home too. *Ab:* In 1991, Gloria said she wanted me to leave the area and build her dream home on the Tablelands. I was still farming the land and owed the bank money. The farm was all bananas, but by that time you had to have a larger acreage to do any good, and we only had 15 acres in bananas. Most of the land we owned was all rubbish and swamp.



Home of the Berry-Porters built in 1939, still there 2022 beside the Mission Beach Child Care Centre.

At one stage, we leased six acres of land from the Donkins who lived on the hill opposite our first home, just north of it. I grew bananas there for three years. *Barbara:* That was Jack and Roma Donkin. *Ab:* Yes. Roma packed cases for me when I could not get it all done. Jack had all that ground; such beautiful red soil and he did nothing whatsoever with it so it was frustrating to see it unproductive.

Our house at the beachfront still wasn't finished and Gloria knew bloody well I would never get around to it. Where I live now, here at Lake Tinaroo, was her dream home; Gloria designed it herself.

My Uncle Jack, John Leonard Berry-Porter, also enlisted in WW2, in the RAAF. He had four kids, three boys and one girl. *Barbara*: Jack was the youngest of my granddad's siblings. *Ab*: Yes, he was considerably younger than the others.

*Barbara*: Jack had talented children who lived in the area here for some time. You might have heard of Stephen Berry-Porter? He played bass guitar for *JuJu Moon* festival band; it was based at Mission Beach. Two of Jack's boys were in a Cairns band called the *Jelly Roll Big Band* at one stage when Jack was in Cairns. They won the *Battle of Sounds* once. Jonathon was the youngest boy; their girl was Diane. *Ab*: Graham was the other boy. *Barbara*: I remember them in Cairns when I went to high school there for three years and lived with my grandparents. That was before they had buses going to Tully for high school kids living at Mission Beach. Stephen does photography these days.

## Recent Generations

*Ab*: My children are Kevin, Robert, Barbara and Phillip.

Barbara and Phillip are still living at Mission Beach. Kevin was a mechanical engineer and is retired. He married Debbie Malcolm and moved to Toowoomba. He went into college as an adult student and qualified as a mechanical engineer. He had done fitting and turning at Innisfail earlier and has remained living just outside of Toowoomba. Kevin had a diploma in mechanical engineering, and Robert got a degree in the same field. Robert was the one with the brains and he has retired too. Lives in Brisbane now.

Phillip was a high school teacher and married Sharon (nee Jones), a local State Primary School teacher. Phillip changed careers later and qualified in horticulture and has his own lab.



## Living at Mission Beach

*Barbara:* Dad and I loved to go to the old pubs around the area. I remember how we liked the Feluga Pub. I also remember that Mum was an excellent dressmaker. She was severely ill for many years after age 55, and that was difficult for Dad and the family. Dad has been without her now for almost 20 years.

*Ab:* I remember cutting black bean trees and splitting the timber for fence posts. We built a shed beside the 1939 wooden cottage that had at least five different species of trees used in it; all that came from the land we owned.

Lot 1v next door to our Lot 4v was originally selected by Adam Dewar. He sold it to Alf Daveson, and when Alf was ready to let it go, I tried to buy it but could not raise the money. Bruce Shepherd purchased it. He was working up in Cardstone in those days.

Ted Wildsoet owned a block nearby at the time. I knew him, and he owned a newspaper shop in Tully so was not farming. He used to call in and see me now and then. Ted Boyett was here then as well, and I vividly remember all the work he did bringing the phone line in. He waited and waited and finally gave up and strung the line along the trees himself.

We purchased our banana cases from the Wheatley case mill, and Don Wheatley often delivered them here. Sometimes I took my 30 hundredweight Bedford and went round after dark and loaded the truck. Peter Wheatley was a hard worker and, as I recall, read a lot; I liked him. The Wheatleys had a few dongas on their land for patients to sleep over when Alfred Wheatley was treating them.

I made a tank for my brother once to go on the back of our Fergie tractor. My brother wanted a three-quarter hole in the pipe. We wanted to use it to spray the banana bunches, so I started the welding. It exploded. I did not realize that the spray in the tank was dieldrin which has highly flammable toluol in it. I was a hell of a mess. I'll never forget that and we all got a terrible fright.

I saw Rupert Fenby occasionally. He walked down to the shop at the post office and would call in and see me in the shed occasionally. He talked to my old man more though. When Fenby died, they had to carry him out in a blanket. A religious bloke came to our farm a little later and asked me to take the old Fergie up there to carry Fenby to where we could bury him.

My old man was not at Mission Beach all the time. When the war started, there was no one in the house that Whylo and Bill built. There was a small rainwater tank beside the house and in the end, Fenby rolled it up to his place as it was not being used. The place was full of bottles, as people used it for wild parties at the weekends; the family went down there for a fun time. At one stage, Jack Parsons said someone was growing stuff on our farm, so we went down to see.

Jack and the old man and me, yeah, we went down and when we were there, we got the idea of growing pineapples. Next thing Laurie was growing pineapples and so was Jack Parsons. He was farming the land that the Brueckners owned earlier [MARCS Park today]. Brueckner sold the ground there to the Council. The three of us slept on the beach that night and that's how the farming re-started really. The bloke

growing stuff on our land was doing no harm and the old man did not chase him off overnight or anything.

When I first went back, I saw some of the rubber trees that my grandfather and his brother planted on the farm, and they were about two feet in diameter at that stage. I am not sure if there are any left now after all the cyclones. I may have cut some of them down and not known it.

*Barbara:* I remember Mrs James from near Narragon. She had a high-pitched voice and sounded like a witch, which scared me when I was little. *Ab:* She used to drive a scooter thing to my place and leave it here in the bananas and catch a lift to Tully. She often came in and asked me to push her as she could not start the bloody thing. Don't know how many times I pushed that bike! I think she did cleaning work and lived at James Road.

I also remember the Holts and Bussts coming to buy pineapples from us. They were larrikins, just going to the pub all the time. The Davids owned land at north Mission Beach back then.

*Barbara:* Dad and Mum seldom went out socializing. Mum went out more than Dad; she joined in on groups with Nancy Wheatley and others. *Ab:* Gloria had some *Tupperware* parties at our place; she liked that. I knew the Wheatleys well. Donkin would come over to my shed at times but my day was taken up farming bananas, so there was little time for socializing. If we did go out, it was generally fishing with others. I sometimes went out in Vince Hutley's boat. We went down to Hinchinbrook with Doug Campbell once and the Wheatleys came in their boat too. *Barbara:* We always had a boat on the farm and went out on the Reef a lot. In those days you could lie on the front of the boat and watch the dolphins; that's not allowed anymore. Sad. We went out on the water, usually as a family. *Ab:* It was just an 18-footer, but we all went out and several boats came at times. *Barbara:* His father used to build timber boats by hand but seldom used them. He loved building them and generally sold them. He occasionally went out with Whylo though.

*Ab:* It was not all peaches and cream living here, as you had to do the bananas first and could not just go when the weather was good. The two reefs we went to most were Beaver and Taylor. Usually, we went out on flat tides in calm weather, and sometimes we found big shells; you're not allowed to take them now. It would be cheaper to buy the fish than what it cost to do the fishing, but we had fun.

When Gloria and I first came to the Tablelands we froze. I did not want to come here, but I love the climate now and would not change. *Barbara:* Life was very simple yet always terrific fun. Mission Beach is a great place to live and grow up in. *Ab:* We had a small cyclone in 1956 when we went to Mission Beach. The roof was coming off but it survived the storm. Always some excitement.

I am soon to be 91 and always stay in good shape by walking up hills. We did the Pyramid a couple of years ago; I don't know how they run up it. I started walking up hills when I was 81 years old, and Phil comes up these days and goes on treks with me. Mt Baldy and Mt Yabby are the ones we often walk up. I also walk on the mountain bike tracks. I've walked them all. One took me five hours, and I ran out of water.

When I retired and came up here, I was quite affected by the insecticide and fungicide sprays like dithane that we used so often. It rained often, so we had to spray repeatedly. The doctor threatened me and said, knock it off or die. I went another 18 months or so but that was enough. We made quite good money from bananas early on. Laurie came back and worked with us for 18 months later on. Today you need huge farms. We could nearly live off a three-acre farm in the old days. *Barbara*: It was bananas everywhere when we first came to Mission Beach. *Ab*: Now some of the big farms on the Tully River are thousands of acres. Cattle farms are starting again.

## Locations of Berry-Porter Homes on Lot 4v

The Berry-Porter family built several homes on Lot 4v. Bill Berry-Porter built a home on his beachside lot in the early 1900s and that is not shown on the figure below which was on the east side of Lot 3v. That was destroyed in the 1918 cyclone.

The homes that Dick Berry-Porter's family built included:

1. The original Porter home, built for Dick and Lily in 1908. That survived the 1918 cyclone but has gone since.
2. The 1939 home, built by Dick's sons, Whylo and Bill. That was used by Ab's family from 1956 to 1976 and remains there in 2022 alongside the Child Care Centre.
3. The home built and used by Bert Porter, Dick's son.
4. The second home used by Ab and his family from 1976 until 1991.
5. The home of Barbara and Mark Harle today.



## BARBARA HARLE | GROWING UP IN MISSION BEACH

I will do my best to recall a few things about Mission Beach in the 1960s when I was at Primary School.

At that stage, we were living in the old home that Uncle Whylo and Uncle Bill built in 1939 beside the Day Care Centre of today. The house was strong, as Dad said, but it was very basic with no wall linings. There were gaps in places and the louvre windows were cracked badly. It worked but was no mansion. The front door would not close but we were happy with it ajar a bit. We loved living there.

There was no power apart from a generator we had use of later, and we had no reticulated water. There was a well and we pumped water up into the above-ground tank beside the house, but in the dry season, we sometimes ran out of water. When that happened, we just went to the beachside toilet block and they had showers and tubs so we got by. At times, like after Cyclone Winifred, we went to Lacey's Creek so we always found a way.

The crops Dad grew were bananas and some pineapples for about five years. Our farm was near the beach and Dad was always pulling cars out of Porters Creek when they were bogged in the sand. When Dad initially cleared the land of trees, they left the logs and vegetation lying on the ground as mulch and merely dug holes in the ground with a shovel to plant the banana suckers. It took almost five years for the trees to rot down properly, and that was the way it was done without large machinery and modern chain saws.

I suppose we were relatively poor, some families had far more than we did, but we had not a care in the world and envied no one.

There was a sawmill below where Doug Campbell lived, where the shops are now in Mission Beach. We got timber from the mill and made banana cases. I think that mill was owned once by Bert Wildsoet or Frank Rick; maybe both. The Post Office was near the beach and when Jean and Eric Bull went out they had me in to look after the manual phone exchange. South Mission Beach had a party line in those days and more than one person could speak at a time.

I went to the old school in Boyett Road, started in 1963, and it was a one-teacher school. Gary Hatcher is the teacher I recall most. Sometimes only a couple of pupils would be in a grade and the older children helped by reading to the younger kids. They still used chalk and slate for some time while I was there. Swimming lessons were held up Boyett Road at the Huttleys' pool. There were no uniforms and no one wore shoes. We had a Barrier Reef Club where we learned about the Great Barrier Reef and Dame Zara Bates (wife of the Prime Minister, Harold Holt) came as a guest speaker once.

In front of the school, down on the flat, was the cricket pitch, where the Norm Byrnes Arboretum is now. That was where the annual Banana Festival was held initially and they had an event where they tried to break the world record for the longest banana split.

The jetty at Narragon Beach was very busy, Perry Harvey had several boats and the place was abuzz with tourists. Gwen and Jack Romano had the Motel Moonglow by then. It was built on land they bought from my grandad, Bert Porter. They had the local shop as well and I loved the By-Jingoes (Icy Poles). Gwen and Jack initiated the tourist documentary called *Paradise Found* and the movie makers stayed at the Motel Moonglow. That was fun and they took footage all over the place, on farms, on the Reef and islands, with Constance Mackness and her shell collection and at Bicton with Marita Romano and me being in the film there. I was close to the Romano family. Marita was a good friend. We knew all the people in our community in those days and were friends with them all.

The Romanos were lovely people and very popular with the residents and guests. Gwen had a special personality and was kind and caring. Jack was the joker, the centre of the party and full of life. I spent much time at the Moonglow and enjoyed my time there. A Dr Barnes from JCU was an early marine stinger researcher, who stayed there when he was trying to create an antivenin. Volunteers went out in dinghies and caught buckets full of stingers, and Marita and I tried to help. We sat on a chair on a rubber mat with a box jellyfish in a bucket beside us. We had to remove a tentacle and tease it with an implement that had an electric charge running through it. This made the tentacle discharge the venom which was collected for the antivenin.

The other motel that opened shortly after the Moonglow was the Blue Pacific Motel at Bingil Bay. The owners were Howard and Iris Watson and I did not know them well but saw Howard when he delivered the mail and the milk. The milk was in plastic bags, and he had blue plastic holders for the bags. Very different to 2022.

The roads in and out of Mission beach were rudimentary and either bumpy and dusty in the dry season or muddy and near impassable in the monsoon season. We had an old Studebaker ute at the time that Dad's father gave our parents when they moved to Mission Beach.



Gloria poses by the family ute.



1949 Studebaker Ute.

When we had time, we would head up the Palmerston Highway to see our grandparents near Atherton. The highway was narrow and windy with so many milk trucks on it so it was quite an arduous journey. My mother's mother lived in a tiny old, corrugated iron-clad home on Herberton Road with a copper to boil water for a bath. She lived a frugal life and had chooks and ducks and grew her own vegetables. She

cooked on a large wood stove that also heated the house in winter. My father's parents lived on the other side of Atherton, near Tolga in a two-storey home with polished timber floors.

In the early days, there were no lights or streetlights and it was pitch black at night apart from the stars and moon. I was quite disappointed when the lights came and spoiled the night views. I was happy with the candles. Mum purchased a coke stove for her kitchen from money left to her by her father. Eventually, she acquired an electric washing machine as well and that ran off 32 volts.

Mum sewed all of our clothes and I wore many hand-me-downs. TV and electricity came later. Before we had TV, Doug and Linda Campbell had one so all the kids would rock up to watch cartoons after school and Robin Hood was a favourite. We had a TV by 1969, and Dad worked long hours but came home by 6 pm to watch *Dr Who*. Amazing how long that show endured. His favourite show on TV was *Bellbird* and he thought that *Bob Santamaria* was a must-watch program. I think it was a weekly show where they spoke of politics, religion and current affairs. I just watched cartoons and remember doing so while I was on the floor, supposedly doing my homework.

My brothers loved to tinker with old cars and turn them into beach buggies. I remember my brother Phil skylarking in a beach buggy on the flat sand when Sonia McMahon was here with her husband, the Prime Minister, Billy. They stayed at The Moonglow and we met them there. Phil entertained Sonia, showing off in the buggy and she took photos of his antics. As Phil says though, you could not do today what I did back then.

We had so much fun growing up here. The most memorable times were when we were out in a boat fishing and picnicking on the islands. I could not have asked for a better childhood.

## REMEMBERING

*Scribe:*

Mission Beach has some splendid, indelible memories etched into its heritage thanks to the Porter family's rich past. Our main street bears the family name; Porter Promenade.

The stream flowing across the coastal plain is named both Wongaling Creek (its original Djiru name) and Porters Creek. The two 'Porter' names stemmed from Dick and Bill Berry-Porter who were known as the 'Porter brothers.'

The family name also lingers on informally with many residents using the term, *Porters Straight* to describe the long section of road between Mission Beach Aquatic Centre and Wongaling Beach. Laurie Porter lived halfway down that straight and the roof of his home was torn asunder by a small cyclone on Christmas Day. Diane Bull recalls that time and the hilarious radio interview that Laurie gave after the event. The cyclone carried a mini-tornado within it and struck hard in small areas and not others. The house was destroyed in a later cyclone and before it could be rebuilt Laurie went into the Tully Nursing Home where he died in 2020. Laurie is gone yet is fondly remembered.

Ab Berry-Porter is such a delightful man that any town would be proud to have his memory featured, and perhaps we can find a suitable way to remember him in time.

The Porter family's love affair with Mission Beach endures.

The town's heritage is that much richer for it.