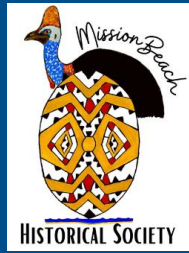


SKETCHES by BEACH HISTORIANS



THE BANFIELDS of DUNK

It was love at first sound.

Ted Banfield had no expectations. None whatsoever, as he politely knocked on the door of his families long-time friends in Liverpool, England. This was merely to keep a promise he had made to his Mum; to visit her 30-year pen pal, Eleanor Golding while he was in England. They knew he was coming. As he waited, he was enthralled by the sound of an alluring female voice and piano coming from within.

In an horrific bicycle accident as a boy in Ararat, Ted all but lost his right eye. It had troubled him ever since then in 1883 he met a notable English correspondent, James Critchell. They cruised the Palm Islands and had a fabulous time, but Ted's eye was really sore. James suggested a trip to London to obtain the medical advice he urgently needed. There was no way that Ted could afford that luxury.

However, his friend, Robert Philp, co-owner of tourism and shipping company, Burns Philp, soon to be Queensland Premier, paid his passage in return for seven articles on his travels. Ted went with a friend, Tom Adlam; onboard was fun and they promenaded the same girl on alternate evenings.

In London, Ted had the eye removed, then went to Essex to recuperate. His eye socket was healing, yet he was nervous about meeting people. Nonetheless, he went to Liverpool to meet the Goldings. His father had left Liverpool for Australia before Ted was born. Ted knew nothing of the Goldings, yet they knew him and had farewelled him as a two year old when his family left to join their father in Australia.

When Ted tapped on the Golding's door he had no idea that romance was about to engulf him. He loved that tantalizing voice though and was soon introduced to the music teacher; Bertha Golding. She was a petite young woman in a white lace dress with a smile that utterly entranced Banfield.

His plan was to stay one or two days. That became two weeks after visits to the Lake District with Bertha. He said nothing of his eye; hoping she would not notice. Bertha knew immediately and always sat on his left. She divulged soon after that she had lost her hearing in one ear, so they were a fine pair.

On the ship home, he wrote proposing marriage and waited an interminable time for the mail. Bertha quickly accepted, saying she was sure her parents would be delighted too. Two years later, they were married in Townsville at the home of Ted's friend Hollis Hopkins. Over time, both Ted and Bertha wrote of the deep and enduring love they shared. Ted knew that without Bertha there would never have been a life on the idyllic Island let alone his brilliant career and fulfilling life as a naturalist and author.

It is difficult to imagine the success of E. J. without B. Banfield. Edmund was a delicate, depressive soul. His symptoms suggest he was mildly bipolar. Bertha hid her own anxieties for fear of impacting Ted. Together, they were rocks and achieved greatness. Hence, this sketch is written of, *The Banfields*.

Ted's father, Jabez, was born in Kent and married Sarah Smith. He worked for a Liverpool printer and with his brother James and friend James Geary migrated to Australia in 1852. Jabez and James Geary left without their families who came two years later, while James Banfield took his wife and son with him. Prospects for the common man in England were bleak, so they followed the gold rush to Victoria.

They had little success prospecting. Jabez and Sarah had Elizabeth 6, Harry 4 and Sarah 2, and Sarah was pregnant with Ted when Jabez left England. So they left prospecting and took on printing jobs in Melbourne, returning to the gold fields later in publishing roles. Jabez purchased the Ararat newspaper. Ted was born in 1852 and his sister, Eva soon after.

Edmund was educated at a church school in Ararat before joining the business. He knew that he would not be Editor of the paper; that role would be inherited by his brother Harry. Ted loved Shakespeare and received three volumes of his works for his 21st birthday. He was a lifetime devotee of Shakespeare and Dickens. His father became a lay preacher, a magistrate, took to the stage regularly and was a lifetime supporter of the Ararat Mental Asylum. Ted joined the Wildlife Society and started reading the philosophical writings of leading natural history authors, including Thoreau.

He joined *The Daily Telegraph* in Melbourne, then *The Argus* in Penrith and then won a job as sub-editor at the *Townsville Daily Bulletin* with past employer, Dodd S. Clarke. He formed friendships with influential people such as Hollis Hopkins and Robert Philp and became a committed NQ separatist.

In May 1889, a quaint Irish woman, Essie McDonough joined the Banfields as housekeeper. Ted Banfield was active in the separation movement and in bird protection and busy at work. When they visited his family in Ararat, Bertha saw that her father-in-law, Jabez shared her husband's mental fragility.

On return, Ted was dispirited when their separatist petition to London failed. He was working long hours and was tired and losing weight, so Bertha insisted on a break. They camped at Cape Pallarenda accompanied by their dog, Rowdy. Throughout their lives they always had a dog.

It was evident after five years that they would have no children. In 1896, they camped with Hollis Hopkins and others on Dunk Island. Local Aboriginal, Tom, arrived in a canoe to greet them. On return, Ted obtained a 30 year lease on 320 acres of land on Dunk at 2s and 6d per acre; but he was depressed again, and unable to sleep. He even tried chloroform. Doctors insisted that he take a six month break from work or he would die in months, before 46 years age. This was a mental meltdown.

They could not afford to take Essie to Dunk. Ted purchased a prefabricated hut and on 28 September 1897, they crossed to Dunk in a storm with a workman to help. They arrived utterly exhausted. After plunging into the sea in the morning Ted's feebleness and dismay vanished and he caught and cooked a seafood breakfast. In a month, they had cleared three acres, made furniture and erected the hut. They decided to stay on and buy the land. With the help of Robert Philp, they eventually won the deeds.

That year, Ted almost drowned in his boat when it upturned. In 1899, it happened again when he was visiting the Cuttens for Christmas. Bertha never went in a boat again but Ted ventured far and wide. In 1899, he lost his mother, then father. Plans to make a living from farm surplus never came to fruition.

In 1900, they received £300 from his father's estate and used it to buy 40 acres of land in Bertha's name. Writing was soon to be their main source of income. He accepted a six-month role as a Townsville

newspaper editor while the owner was overseas. Now they had the capital to build a home. It was completed in January 1903 and survived a small cyclone shortly after.

Ted was asked to be an Honorary Ranger after he did a bird census. He wrote to Robert Philp to have that arrangement formalized and in 1905 was gazetted as Honorary Ranger and the island was declared a reserve. He was sent a metal badge which he was proud of and used as proof of his office.

Ted was writing as *Rob Krusoe* then started *Rural Homilies by the Beachcomber*. He was indulgent of genuine eccentrics so Walter Strickland visited the island for an extended period. Bertha was unimpressed with his antagonism towards England, its monarchy and Christianity but Ted found him a kindred spirit. Strickland urged Ted to write a book and by March 1906 it was on its way to London. Fisher Unwin, his publisher, demanded £300 and Strickland funded it but he disappeared soon after becoming a Czech citizen. He was quite an activist and funded a revolt against the Manchu dynasty.

Confessions of a Beachcomber was released in September 1908 with a black and gold cover. Reviews were positive. *The Times* suggested he could have revealed more of himself in the book so he decided to write a second book and address that issue.

Essie was back with the Banfields and Ted's second book was almost ready. It was created from a selection of his *Rural Homilies*. Bertha's hearing had deteriorated badly and the cardboard cone she used was failing, so she bought a hearing trumpet, naming it *Black Maria*. They took a holiday in Melbourne in 1911 when the book was due to be published. It was their Silver Anniversary and Ted's diary read: *'Our lives together have been extremely happy ... How full of self-sacrifice Bertha has been. ... how understanding ... how loyal to me.'*

Reviews of *My Tropic Isle* were positive with one concern that the language was at times an echo of R. L. Stephenson. Spenser Hopkins became a one man lifeline and often helped maintain the property. A. J. Hordern became another close friend and sent several of his Jersey calves to replace their goats. George Barrymore, editor of *The Northern Miner* and David Green, editor at the *Townsville Daily Bulletin* were now among their closest friends and would do anything for the Banfields. Unwin offered £100 up front for a third book but insisted on all future royalties for himself on the first two books thereafter! Ted reluctantly accepted this one sided deal.

The 1918 cyclone was a big event in Ted's mind and articles. David Green financed their rebuild and Spenser Hopkins came to help with a carpenter and a plumber. Ted at 66 almost gave up hope of staying on Dunk. Bertha insisted that they stay and helped him overcome his depression and guilt at being safe on Dunk during the war while others suffered. His third book, *Tropic Days* was another success. Money worries now weighed heavily and Spenser offered to provide them with a fixed allowance for 15 years in return for half the land. That was a lifesaver and Ted was quickly back to normal.

Ted purchased his second motorboat and again named it *Nee Mourna*, a word he says means Laughing Waters. It is not a Djiru name though. He loved to have vibrant young people on the island and his favourites were Isobel Green, a niece of good friends David and Marjorie Green and Spenser's young sister, Lillian. In 1921 returned serviceman and Clump Point settler, Syd Harris, died fighting a bush fire on his own. The Banfields knew Syd since his childhood and Ted arranged, with three friends at Clump Point, to build a cairn.

Ted was offended by a government poster on bird preservation where they failed to name Dunk Island as one of the sanctuaries. He made a stand and sadly returned his Hon. Ranger badge. His friend, Alec Chisolm secured total protection for nutmeg pigeons in 1922 much to Ted's delight.

Ted Banfield never claimed to be an expert or scientist, merely an observer of nature yet his friends marvelled at what his one eye saw. He died in 1923 of a ruptured stomach and peritonitis after three weeks of intense pain. Bertha wrote to Alec Chisolm, *'We had been everything to one another ...'* Spenser and his men built a cairn using design Bertha thought Ted would approve.

Bertha found a box with many newspaper cuttings of *Rural Homilies* and worked with Alec Chisolm to create a fourth book, *Last Leaves from Dunk Island*. This was another resounding success when published in 1925. Bertha went to Gympie and paid Essie a small income. Bertha died of a coronary thrombosis in 1933 leaving the Dunk land to Spenser, who faithfully maintained Essie's pension.

A search for *Rural Homilies* on Trove reveals much about Ted's interests and writing. There are 429 such articles written between 1908 and 1921. The record is incomplete. Of these 429, 77% primarily focus on four themes. Advocacy for NQ farmers occupies 39% of all *Rural Homilies*. 22% are about Nature observations, 10% are Aboriginal stories and 9% are on Conservation of birds.

Ted was a fierce advocate for underdogs and NQ farmers, and he often criticised southern governments, especially Victorians. He admired the Victorian government's commitment to its apple farmers though and felt that the Queensland government should do the same thing for banana farmers.

Many of his stories were inspired by publications he read. While he was an avid conservationist, he killed wildlife such as sharks, snakes and predatory birds like goshawks, as they killed other birds. His love of Aboriginal people, especially those on the island was unrelenting. He had gained negative views of Aboriginals from his childhood days but changed them when he met Tom on Dunk. The Banfields could never have lived at Dunk without the help of the Aboriginals, Tom and his family.

Ted Banfield often said how much he appreciated their humour and their *'soft spoken words and bush lore.'* He studied them and even attended a corroboree once. However, Ted retained his belief in white supremacy and often spoke to them as if they were children. He respected their unique skills and knowledge yet never quite saw them as true equals.

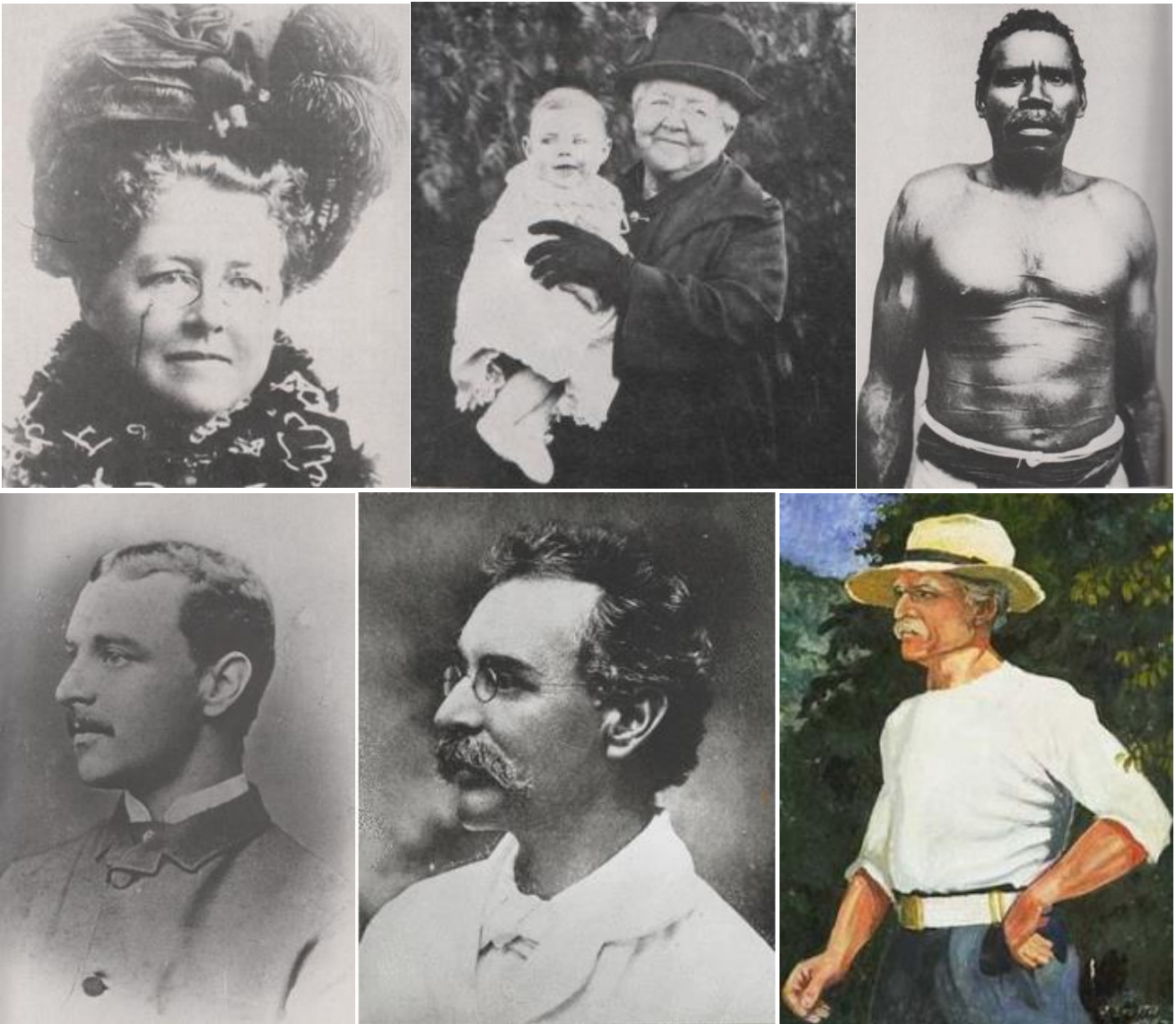
The Banfields had fabulous friends all over the world and knew all the settlers at Clump Point. Their closest local friends were the Cuttens, Chris Wildsoet and John Kenny of the Hull River Aboriginal Settlement when they interacted with. Ted wrote press articles about many of the local characters.

Michael Noonan wrote an outstanding biography, *A Different Drummer: The Story of E. J. Banfield, Beachcomber of Dunk Island*, UQ Press, 1983. That is really all one needs to know the Banfields well for it was exhaustively researched. Noonan observed, *He never tired of writing of North Queensland's wonders, allurements and possibilities.*

The Banfields were warm and generous people who made close, enduring friendships readily. No one from the Mission Beach district was ever known or appreciated more widely than Edmund and Bertha. The district's heritage was much enhanced by their presence and achievements. Ted and Bertha are buried on Dunk Island and their cairn was Queensland Heritage listed in 2010. They were not our district's first settlers in 1897, yet there were only seven families or individuals who selected land and settled on it before the Banfields.

Bertha Banfield. *Dearly beloved and honoured wife Born at Liverpool 19th January 1858, died 6th August 1933. Whither thou goest I will go, and where thou lodgest I will lodge --- where thou diest, will I die and There will I be buried.*

Edmund James Banfield (The Beachcomber). Born Liverpool, England 4th September 1852, died Dunk Island 2nd June 1923. *If a man does not keep pace with his companions perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears.*



Images left to right, top to bottom: Bertha Banfield, 1901, aged forty-three, ready for a visit to Townsville, A. H. Chisolm Papers, Mitchell Library; Bertha with A. H. Chisolm's daughter Deierdre, Mitchell Library; Friend, helper and teacher, Tom, First Edition *The Confessions of a Beachcomber*, Queensland State Library; E. J. Banfield, 1886, age thirty-four, Mitchell Library; Edmund Banfield, 1901, aged forty-nine, National Library of Australia, 22946128; Edmund Banfield by Jack Loutitt, 1967, National Library of Australia, 22830026.

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