Lure of the Land

A Brief History of Quilpie Shire

Lesley Jenkins
January 2002
Lure of the Land
A Brief History of Quilpie Shire

Lesley Jenkins
January 2001
Table of Contents

Timeline

Chapter One
The Aboriginal Presence ........................................... 1

Chapter Two
Early Explorers ......................................................... 8

Chapter Three
Pastoralists as Explorers ............................................... 10

Chapter Four
The Great Artesian Miracle ............................................ 13

Chapter Five
Transport and Travel ..................................................... 15

Chapter Six
Pioneers and Pastoral Stations ........................................ 22

Chapter Seven
The Lure of the Opal ................................................... 60

Chapter Eight
Townships ............................................................... 69

Endnotes ...................................................................... 105

Select Bibliography ....................................................... 108
Preface

The project to document the history of Quilpie Shire was funded through the Centenary of Federation Fund to document the achievements made before and after Federation in this area of remote south west Queensland.

I have enjoyed my contact with the residents of the Quilpie Shire and the wonderful support I have been given by council and by the many people in the community who have welcomed me into their homes and shared their stories with me. Although I could not include every person’s story everything that people shared with me created greater insight into the community for me which has informed the work.

It is envisaged that the following historical outline will encourage people to further document the history of the district and that this will be a ‘living document’ that grows as a result of further community involvement.

Lesley Jenkins
Quilpie Shire Timeline

1845  Sturt’s South West Qld expedition followed Cooper Creek
1845-6  Thomas Mitchell led expedition to find overland route from Sydney to Gulf of Carpentaria. Followed Balonne River into Maranoa District.
1846  Leichhardt attempted east/west crossing of the continent
1852  Hovenden Hely explored Warrego River looking for Leichardt
1857-9  Landsborough explored northern rivers and highlands
1858-9  Gregory followed the Barcoo; Thomson and Cooper Creek
1860  Burke and Wills expedition from Melbourne to the Gulf of Carpentaria. Explorers looking for them led to opening up of the west.
1860  Introduction of land acts to manage the way land was taken up.
1861  John Williams and his brother settled on the Warrego and travel to the Cooper Creek region in search of good pastoral land.
1861-2  Landsborough in search of Burke and Wills. Crossed state from north to south, exploring Barkly Tableland en route to the Gulf of Carpentaria, Albert River, Thomson and Barcoo. Landsborough visited the Ridleys near Cunnamulla.
1863  Patsy Durack, Stumpy Michael Durack, John Costello, Jim Scanlan, Pat Scanlan Tom Kilfoyle, Jack Horrigan, and a German Cook, move up the Warrego and into the Paroo
1863  Native Police formed
1867?  First white child born in the district, a girl named Mary Costello.
1868  Charleville surveyed and named
1868 Kyabba run registered in the name of Michael Costello. Kyabra No 2 run registered in 1875
1868 Establishment of Thylungra Station
1869 Opal discovered at Listowel Downs near Adavale
1870 Newspapers carry the discovery of opals giving rise to an influx of miners during the 1870s. Cobb & Co expand to meet demand.
1871 Pride of the Hills becomes the first registered opal lease in Queensland
1872 Original Thylungra holding incorporating Bulgroo, Stoneleigh, Kaffir and Westbank blocks taken up by 1872.
1873-1875 Opal discovered at Keeroongooloo Station. This claim became known as the Bond Mine.
1874 Sarah and Pat Tully arrive at Thylungra along with Mary & Denis Skeahan. About this time the Hammonds also move into the area.
1874 George Chale Watson, Surveyor with the Lands Department, commences his survey of the Langlo, Paroo and Bulloo Rivers. His job also involved adjusting the location of runs applied for to ascertain the remaining available pastoral land.
1876 Cobb & Co depot established at Charleville. Route included north west to Adavale.
1878 Formation of Adavale and Eromanga as shanty towns to cater to opal miners. (coaching stops indicate mining enterprises, 'The Blackwater, Gumbard Junction, The Crossing of the Mt Margaret and Kyabra Roads)
1878 Adavale Town Reserve gazetted
1878 R.L.Jack appointed Government Geologist and subsequently completed many expeditions in north Queensland as part of his duties
1880 Bulloo Divisional Board is created
1880 Adavale surveyed
1881  JB Henderson was appointed hydraulic engineer and his instructions were to supply public roads and stock routes and attend to the western grazier’s needs
1881  Adavale post office opened
1882  John Costello sells his Cooper Creek properties including Kyabra.
1883  Ridley Williams drives a mob of cattle overland from Bierbank to the Barrow Creek Pastoral Company in the Northern Territory
1884  Crown Land Act introduced to allow for consolidation of runs
1884  Adavale Police Station constructed
1884  Patsy Durack agrees to be a part of a syndicate called the Queensland Co-operative Pastoral Co Ltd. The company was purchased the stations known as Thylungra, Galway Downs, and Sultan in Gregory South, Tongy in the Maranoa, Buckingham Downs.
1885  Artesian bore sunk at Blackall
1888  Rail reaches Charleville
1888  Adavale school opens (closes in 1968)
1889  Adavale Divisional Board is created
1890  The Queensland Cooperative went out of business. Thylungra and Galway Downs passed into the hands of the Union Bank
1891  Shearers and Bushworkers strike
1891  Toompine is surveyed into blocks
1893  South Western Hotel or Toompine Pub is constructed in the ashes of the first pub that burnt down
1897  Aboriginal Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act introduced
1897  Eromanga Provisional School is established
1879  Eromanga Town Reserve gazetted
1885  Eromanga officially surveyed
1898  Rail reaches Cunnamulla
1898-1902 Severe and protracted drought conditions
1900  Toompine Provisional School is opened (closed in 1902)
1900  Eromanga Police Station proclaimed in the Government Gazette
1900  Adavale bore sunk
1901  Duck Creek school opened (closed in 1905)
1903  Adavale Shire Council takes over from the Adavale Divisional Board
1912  Constable John Smith joined the Eromanga Police Force. In 1949 he became the Qld Commissioner of Police
1914  Cheepie surveyed. Railway extended to Cheepie.
1915  Quilpie surveyed
1915  Cheepie school opened. Closed permanently in 1974
1916-17  Police station established in Quilpie. Plans to extend the Great Western Line are abandoned around this time
1917  Railway line extended to Quilpie
1918  Quilpie State School opened
1919  Thylungra passes into company ownership
1921  Jim Corones arrived in Quilpie
1921  Official Quilpie Post Office established
1922  Phone line operates from Quilpie
1923  Quilpie Telephone Exchange began operating
1924  Quilpie Country Women’s Association formed
1926  Formation of the Bulloo Polo Club now known as the Bulloo Polo Association
1926  Fire destroys most of the business centre of Quilpie
1926  Joe Knehr discovers a giant pipe of red crystal opal at the Red Show Mine
1927  Eromanga CWA hall is constructed
1930  Quilpie Shire established from parts of Adavale, Barcoo, Bulloo, Murweh & Paroo Shires
1930  Aviatrix, Amy Johnson, lands on the outskirts of Quilpie
1932  Quilpie bore sunk
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1934</td>
<td>New council chambers constructed in Quilpie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934</td>
<td>The District Herald Quilpie began publication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>Sewerage completed in Quilpie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>Quilpie CWA rooms opened</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>First parish priest to Quilpie, Father Francis Donovan arrived.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1943</td>
<td>Charleville Royal Flying Doctor Base opened</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>£330 000 was allocated for the construction of water facilities. The seven main stock routes in the South West Channel Country became a priority. This included Wheeo to Quilpie-Eromanga After construction handed over to Local Government.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td>Hayricks mine registered by Ivan McCraken</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>St Finbarrs Convent School opened</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>First boarders enrolled at St Finbarrs Convent School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>Proposed Town of Tebin located on the Comongin Holding is cancelled by the survey office.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>John Borthwick, 'Whynot', Quilpie along with E.C.Frecklington, 'Dalmally' Roma designed labour saving shearing tables.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>Last race meeting held at Toompine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>Opening of the Quilpie Bowling Club clubhouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>Quilpie Shire Hall opened</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>Shearers Strike</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>CWA holds a flower show which later becomes part of the Quilpie District Show</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957-8</td>
<td>The parochial district of Quilpie was developed by Reverend Roy Poole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960s</td>
<td>Introduction of road trains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>Water is reticulated to the Adavale township</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>Major flood. Adavale particularly badly affected.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>Opening of the Bulloo River Bridge at Quilpie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>Charleville School of the Air began broadcasting lessons to isolated families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>Des Burton registered his first mine</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1967 Manual telephone annex constructed in Quilpie
1967 Quilpie Memorial Swimming Pool opened
1972 Quilpie Cultural Society develops from the Quilpie Potters
1975 The Quilpie Courier began publication
1976 New Catholic Church constructed
1983 A plane carrying 12 people, chartered by a drilling company, crashes near Adavale. In 1985 a monument is erected on the crash site.
1984 Discovery of oil at the Tintaburra oilfield near Eromanga
1985 New Quilpie Shire Council building is opened
1986-88 Implementation of the Rural Electrification Subsidy Scheme
1987 Racecourse relocated from the eastern side of the Bulloo River to its current site
1987 Power House in Quilpie closed
1987 The Quilpie Manual Telephone Exchange is converted to automatic
1987 Old Quilpie Hospital divided into sections and removed and a new hospital is constructed
1988 Eromanga Hall is replaced by a new hall built by Quilpie Shire Council
1990 Idalia National Park created
1992 The Imperial Hotel in Quilpie burnt down
1992 Mariala National Park created
1993 Welford National Park first created
1999 The contribution made by polish immigrants on the Blackwater Creek Floodwater Project at Adavale is commemorated on 9 April 1999
Lure of the Land
A Brief History of Quilpie Shire

Chapter One

The Aboriginal Presence

The screech of the black cockatoo rising breaks the stillness of the vast plains of Quilpie’s mulga country. This flat land is punctuated by the low ridges of the Grey and Cheviot ranges. Caves can be found in some parts of the country, once the secret keeping places of Aboriginal lore. This hot dry land has an average rainfall of 250 mm per year. This fact has dominated survival for both white and black and for the wide variety of animal and bird life that forms part of the wild beauty of the area.

Aborigines inhabited the country when white pioneers started to cross it in the 1860s and now it is country beloved of both whites and blacks. Five generations of whites have been born, worked, played and stayed on lands that formed the tribal range of the Bunthamarra and Mardgany. If places are significant because of the stories, actions and deeds that have taken place there, and this is what makes people feel they belong, then a transparency featuring white experience overlays the black map. Both maps can be seen and both show the strong connections and interconnections of white and black Australians to the land in the Quilpie Shire.

Land, language and people are linked together in three important elements of Aboriginal culture – family, clan and language. According to the anthropologist Norman Tindale, Quilpie is placed at the junction of four language groups: Wadjalang (east); Ngandangara (west) Punthamara (south-west) and Maranganji (south). Local elder, Hazel McKellar, in her book Matya-Mundu: A History of the Aboriginal People of South West Queensland places Quilpie on the boundary of the Bunthamara and Mardgany peoples (referred to by Tindale as the Punthamara and Maranganji). Quilpie today is also the home of descendants of several other tribes from the region: the Kullilla, Wangkumara and Budjari.

The Bunthama tribe occupied a large area from just north of Quilpie to the west of the Bulloo River. It extended west to Kyabra and Thylungra and south to Eromanga. This area is alive with cave paintings, occupation sites, stone arrangements, native wells and scarred trees. Much of the Bunthamara land was selected in 1867 by the Durack and Costello families.
One well-known family, the Ray family, is a descendant of the Bunthamara. Other descendants of different tribal groups also live in the Quilpie area. McKellar describes the boundaries of the Mardgany tribe in this way:

Their territory extended to the north as far as North Comongin. The western boundary followed the Bulloo River south to Ardoch and then across to the Dynevor Lakes. The southern boundary extended across to the Wadja-Wadja Waterhole on the Paroo River, just south of the present site of Eulo. On the east, the Mardgany tribe’s boundary extended east of the Paroo River northwards to approximately where Cheepie now stands.

Everyday life for the tribe consisted of hunting and gathering food, with times for games, and other social and spiritual activities. The lives of Aboriginal people of this region, naturally enough, centred on the rivers, creeks and lakes and the availability of this water. In a region so dry it is not surprising to find stories about rain-making ceremonials and magic.

Madge Butler remembers her mother, Harriet Watts from Tobermory Station, telling her about rainmaking efforts undertaken by ‘old Wallace’, a station Aborigine:

Sometimes in drought periods, mother would ask ‘old Wallace’ to make it rain, but unless the wind was in the north and he saw a few storm clouds, he was always “too busy, Buchu”. However if the wind went round, say, for a day or so and he could see even the smallest of clouds which perhaps we couldn’t, you’d hear him in the creek throwing all his rainmaking gibbers up in the air.

The tribes of this region had a very specific material culture, which assisted them in their adaption to the harsh climate. Shelters of the south-west were often permanent structures, which shaded the Aboriginal occupants and provided protection from the elements. They were built of heavy timbers and covered with bushes and sometimes compacted sand as well. The doorway in particular was distinctive, being a triangular arch formed by two stout posts. Until recent times a number of these dwellings existed on Ray station. The height of the humpies was approximately four feet and the floor space adequate to fit a number of people as it covered an area of six feet by eight. The humpie was covered with grass and damp sand, which hardened to a sandstone-like finish when dry.
The tribes all had nets, weapons and implements and the boomerang although they did not use the woomera. They had stone arrangements used for fish traps and nets for this purpose:

An agile youth, decorated to indicate an early stage of tribal initiation, beckoned the white man to the water's edge where he displayed a device of stones and nets ingeniously arranged for trapping fish. From this he removed a fine specimen of golden perch or 'yellow belly', flapping alive on the end of his spear...  

Their weapons were often coloured with red ochre, and elaborate carvings were made on them with the front tooth of the opossum and the mussel shells. Their meat and roots were cooked in rudimentary ovens of temporary construction.

The ornaments worn included necklaces made of strong grass stems or reeds, cut in short lengths and strung together. Shells were also hung over the forehead and suspended from the hair. The shells are believed to have come from somewhere to the north or north-west of the Shire.

Quilpie, according to Tindale's data, is just east of the boundary separating those groups practicing circumcision as an initiation ritual from those people not practicing circumcision. Those not practicing circumcision included the Wadjalang, Mardgany and the Kullilla. The prevailing theory is that circumcision was introduced from Melanesia in reasonably recent times.

The primary occupation of the tribe was hunting game and the gathering of food, including the collection of eggs. The duck season occurred at a different time to that of the Emu allowing for a supply of eggs for most of the year. Ducks and waterbirds were also a source of food and the hunters would cover their bodies with weeds for camouflage. Nets made of vines were used to trap birds to supplement the food supply. The tribes were sensitive to the fragile nature of the environment and the effect of droughts on the food supply. As a consequence rules were in place that disallowed the consumption of some foods at certain times of the year:

...women of the Murree class are not allowed to eat golden bream; and black perch are forbidden to Combo women; emu, emu eggs, and
snakes are reserved for the elders of the tribe; and a young woman will fairly run away from an emu's egg or even its shell. Young men and boys are forbidden to eat ducks, turkeys, and opossums in some of the tribes.

The hunting of the emu was done with the aid of the 'boobinch'. The boobinch was used to call the emu and was like a miniature didgeridoo. The boobinch was made by carefully selecting a hollow piece of wood and covering the mouthpiece with either black clay or beeswax. The hunter then went out into the bush and the boobinch was used to call the emu off the nest. The male and female emu took turns in sitting on the nest. When one returned to relieve the other, they make a loud drumming sound that the boobinch imitated. The emu was then tracked back to the nest, which was then robbed. The nests were very hard to find by tracking, because the emu trod very lightly and barely made any imprint when close to the nest. Also the emu, when close to the nest, walked criss-cross fashion.

Post Contact
The breakdown in tribal culture occurred when pastoralists selected and settled on runs bringing into private ownership the waterholes and hunting grounds that had been part of the Aborigines range. Two opposite views about the management and importance of the land collided with the meeting of black and white.

Initially blacks assisted the early pioneers, who would not have survived without them, but as more speculators and settlers arrived this changed. Stock took to the available waters leaving many unfit for human consumption. Other waterholes had been embraced by the nearby station homesteads and were no longer accessible. The blacks found that their resources were depleted or diminishing and that with every influx of whites the situation became worse for them. They started killing stock for food and as rightful compensation and then as a way of fighting back. This apparently wanton destruction enraged the whites. Whites and blacks were killed and whites became fearful of settling in the south-west until the black 'problem' had been dealt with.

The Native Police were formed in 1863 to carry out the task of pacifying the frontier. They comprised Aborigines from outside the area they were operating in who worked under white direction. They offered the cheapest method of controlling a hostile Aboriginal population. Their superior bush
skills enabled them to find, attack and kill blacks under the protective mantle of the dispersal policy. In 1897 their attributes were described in this way:

When dismounted and fighting on his own hook, nothing daunts him, he scales the highest mountains like a goat, traverses the plains in pursuit with the swiftness of a deer, rushes through the scrub like a wallaby, and loads and fires with the precision of an old soldier.6

Patsy Durack, an early settler, had both sympathy and fondness for the Aborigines, now living on his land as station blacks, and he tried to protect the wider tribal population from reprisals following the murder of Welford who lived on ‘Welford Downs’ an adjoining property:

Grandfather at once sent Pumpkin and Willie to Welford Downs to advise all natives in the vicinity to gather at Thylungra where they would be under his protection. The blacks, however, with only a few exceptions, now dared trust nobody and, suspecting a plot to trap them at Thylungra, made off into the surrounding bush. Only a handful that accepted the refuge offered escaped the raid that followed. Faithful station natives and bush blacks perished together, among them one Ngurrun, the emu man, a kindly giant of Boontamurra who could run down emus. Years later when the drifting sand of the plains uncovered the bones of the massacred blacks, some among them were found to be of phenomenal size.7

The black trackers were subject to the restrictions of the Aborigines Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act of 1897 and 1901 as well as various police restrictions and disciplines. The black tracker at Eromanga requested leave ‘to go walkabout’ and this time off without pay was recommended. Tod, a black tracker, joined the Eromanga police in 1916 and was discharged 15 years later at age 50 because he was considered ‘useless’.8

By the turn of the century the Aboriginal population had declined rapidly as a result of disease, the introduction of the poorest quality European foodstuffs to their diet and ‘dispersal’.

The passing of the Aborigines Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act of 1897 and 1901 gave the Protector of Aborigines extensive power to control the lives of Aborigines and to force their segregation on reserves.
South Comongin was part of the traditional lands of the Mardgany tribe. Following dispossession, many stayed to work on the station leased by the Knight family. The Knights were quite distressed to hear that their Aboriginal camp, and the blacks they had grown to love, could be forcibly removed in accordance with the Act. This did not transpire and the blacks remained on the station either working or being supported by those who did.

The Act was also concerned with trying to protect Aborigines from opium and alcohol addiction and abuse by whites. Archibald Meston, one of the first Aboriginal Protectors appointed, travelled to western Queensland where he formed the following opinion:

> Opium is obtained freely from Chinese gardeners, Chinese cooks, Chinese and Syrian hawkers, and from several varieties of white men. Many white men scalpers pay their black hunters with opium. It is kept on many of the stations, and given to the blacks who are engaged as stockmen, in some cases as whole or part wages, or as a necessary bribe to induce them to remain... Opium and syphilis are destroying the aboriginals over the whole of Western Queensland, from the Warrego and Maranoa to the Norman and the Mitchell. The use of opium is also becoming common amongst white men.9

Three Chinese, 2 gardeners and 1 cook, were employed at South Comongin. The police had information that opium was being supplied to the district and suspected the South Comongin Chinese employees. The mounted troopers arrived at South Comongin before the coach and waited to see if it contained a parcel addressed to them. It did, and the troopers where waiting when it was opened. It contained nothing more dangerous than silk handkerchiefs. Although innocent on that occasion rumour had it that the real contents of the parcel did reach their destination.10

The original intention of the Act may have been protection. However within a short period of time, the main trust had moved to the regulation of employment.11 From 1904 all wages of those permanently employed were paid to the protector, who was the local policeman. The police had enormous discretionary power about how much the Aborigines could keep as pocket money and how much was to be banked. Apart from compulsory savings an amount was deducted for the Aboriginal Provident Fund. The scheme was open to abuse and one property owner retold a story told to him by his father of the local policeman offering to split the wages of the Aboriginal
employee rather than bank them. Madge Butler in her family essay on the Watts family of Tobermory Station recalled:

Mother used to tell me about filling in a form for Jack for the Protector of Aborigines, who was always the local policeman, and she said “Jack, would you have another name?” He thought for a while and said “Buchu, I think I’ll take John Edwards.” Mother explained that he couldn’t just ‘take’ a name. I don’t know how it was that he came to be known as Jack Street. In later years when the Aborigines were paid (it was very little), half of their wages had to be sent to the Protector, and half was kept on the Tobermory books, so that if they wanted something, my brother Jack would let them have it. They loved getting the McWhirters catalogues before Christmas and they could get Mother to write away for them.

The main stations, which became camping areas for the blacks were Cowley, North Comongin, South Comongin, Yowah, Beechal, Buthania, Big Creek, Humeburn, Tilbooroo and Toompine.  

Many of the station owners and station workers had worked alongside the black workers. Their children played with black playmates and the station owner’s children were often raised by black nannies. This may not have been an equal partnership, nonetheless, strong links of mutual affection and respect developed along the way.

Currently there a number of native title claims covering parts, or all of the Quilpie Shire, before the National Native Title Tribunal from the: Budjiti People, Bidjara People, Bunthamarra People, Kullilli People, Wangkumarra People, Wanggumara People, and the Mardigan People.
Chapter Two

Early Explorers

Water was the key to survival and pastoral success for the early explorers and for the settlers and their stock who travelled close on their heels. The river courses provided the first paths to follow and the Aboriginal wells became the life-giving source for those seeking new lands and permanent water away from the ‘known’.

William Landsborough led one of four relief missions in search of Burke and Wills in 1861. Burke and Wills had gone missing on their well financed expedition to explore the Australian inland with the aim of discovering a transcontinental route through unexplored country and to report on the natural products and physical appearance of the country. The other relief missions were led by Alfred Howitt from Victoria, John McKinley from South Australia and Frederick Walker and William Landsborough both from Queensland.

Landsborough set out in 1861 where he proceeded to the Gulf of Carpentaria and then overland to the south. He noted the rich Barkly Tablelands and discovered the headwaters of the Georgina River, (Landsborough’s Herbert River) but he was unsuccessful in his attempts to locate Burke and Wills. He received permission to undertake another expedition into the interior which led him to the Flinders River and the present day site of Hughenden where his party turned southward. Aborigines gave his party directions of a well watered route across the divide between the Thomson and the Barcoo. Landsborough reached the site of Isisford a few miles south of the furthest point reached by Sir Thomas Mitchell in 1846. They reached the Langlo which flows into the Warrego and the Warrego proper in May 1862. After several more days of exhausting travel they reached a station.

One can imagine Landsborough’s relief at finally coming upon this small settlement. Landsborough wrote of the hospitable welcome he received at the home of John Williams and his brother, and the provisions of beef and butter he received to carry with him for the journey to come.

According to the latitude observed by Landsborough, this station was situated near Coongoola, 33 miles north of the present town of Cunnamulla on the railway line between that town and Charleville.
Landsborough’s host, John Williams and his brother, were the first squatters in the lower Warrego arriving there in 1860. They may well have travelled through the Quilpie Shire on a trip to the unexplored Cooper’s Creek region in 1861. They were investigating the pastoral possibilities of the area and were but a few miles from the distressed explorers Burke and Wills who were returning from the Gulf of Carpentaria.13 No doubt they discussed the potential of the country around them with their visitors and the opportunities for prosperity for those willing to take on the risks of such ventures.

When Landsborough returned to civilization his critics accused him of choosing a route with potential pastoral property in mind rather than the succour of Burke and Wills. Landsborough’s journal did make many references to the pastoral possibilities of the land and he did pass on his enthusiasm for the area to a group of risk taking settlers eager to hear such positive views. In his own defense Landsborough stated ‘For my part, I must say that I think, with the information we had then, we took the most probably route for finding Burke’s party.’ 14

The four expeditions in search of Burke and Wills opened up the western country and pastoralists like Williams were responsible for settling them.
Chapter Three

Pastoralists as Explorers

Many pastoralists and land holders of all descriptions travelled to Sydney to conduct business and to hear the latest news. Of great interest were discussions centreing on the rich pastoral lands in the newly proclaimed Colony of Queensland and the prosperous living that could be made there. William Landsborough’s exploits had received some attention in the press and the Durack and Costello families, immigrants from Ireland and related by marriage, made his acquaintance on one of their trips to the city.15

This chance meeting is believed to have been the impetus for the Durack and Costello party setting forth to investigate the rich pastoral lands spoken about by Landsborough. In 1863 the Duracks and the Costello’s moved off from Goulburn where they had established themselves. Party members included Patsy Durack, his brother Stumpy Michael his brother-in-law John Costello and two other relatives: Jim Scanlon and Tom Kilfoyle. The party was completed with the addition of a German Cook. Along with them went one hundred horses and 400 breeding cattle. They followed the watercourses of the Lachlan and Bogan Rivers to the Darling making roughly 10 miles a day. They proceeded to Bourke, last outpost of settlement in New South Wales.

From Bourke the Durack and Costello party travelled north west. They split up just inside the NSW border and John Costello, Patsy Durack, Stumpy Michael and Jack Horrigan continued north-west with the cattle, leaving the horses with the other members of the group. They continued until they eventually found water for their drought affected stock and themselves. In the ensuing rush for water most of the herd perished, however the men continued another forty miles until they could satisfy themselves that good land existed for them.

Like so many explorers before them, their salvation lay in the assistance extended to them from the Aborigines of the area who emerged from the landscape to lead them to a concealed water soak. Despite their experiences both Patsy Durack and John Costello decided to return to the area with their families.16

Pastoralists often preceded official exploration enabling them to select their own runs and submit their own rough surveys to the Commissioner for
The settlers often drew their boundaries from water courses or naturally occurring landmarks, and distances were often inaccurately measured by the length of time taken to ride from one landmark, or marked tree, to another. Inevitably this led to future disputes. Thomas Henry Borthwick Barron surveyed the area where the Bulloo River passes through Quilpie around 1865, and a feature survey of the Warrego was conducted by George Chale Watson in 1874.

Pastoral areas were officially opened for occupation by settlers when pastoral districts had been proclaimed. For some time the pastoral district boundaries were fluid sometimes embracing the current Quilpie Shire and then releasing it so that it became part of another pastoral district. The Quilpie Shire fell within the Mitchell District when this area was opened for occupation in 1861. By 1866 the boundaries of the Warrego District had been changed so that Quilpie now fell in both the Warrego and the Mitchell districts. The Warrego District had been gazetted in 1859, however at this time its boundaries fell wholly within north-western NSW. The Gregory South District was gazetted in 1873 and at this stage parts of Quilpie Shire were embraced by three pastoral districts. The effect of this was that land was settled in the Quilpie Shire before districts had been proclaimed and before surveys could be submitted. This squatting also enabled development to occur prior to rent being paid to the Treasury for the lands in question.

Land Tenure
In 1860 the Queensland Government enacted legislation to control the way land was taken up and to encourage real settlement in place of land speculation. Four land acts were introduced to comprehensively deal with the taking up of new land. The first and second bills, the Unoccupied Crown Lands Occupation Bill and the Tenders for Crown Lands Act, ensured that land taken up under license was stocked within 12 months or forfeited to the Government. The requirement was 25 head of sheep or five head of cattle or horses per square mile. This was viewed by the Government as a minimum stocking requirement, the prevailing view was that the land was capable of supporting much greater numbers of stock.

The license fee for the land was ten shillings per square mile with each run restricted in size to between 25 and 100 square miles, although no limit was placed on the number of runs held by one person. Runs were often forfeited for failure to pay the license fee as well as a failure to stock the runs.
Lands under license could not be transferred. After the license period expired the land could be leased for 14 years and the acceptance of tenders to do so was enacted. Regular reviews took place during the leasing period to determine the fees payable.

The third and fourth land bills were the Alienation of Crown Lands Act and the Occupied Crown Lands Leasing Act. The last bill enabled a five year renewal of the lease and the right to compensation for improvements to the property.

In 1868 the Pastoral Leases Act was introduced which made a distinction between settled and unsettled districts in the Colony and first and second class pastoral land. Land which was ‘watered’ was required to be stocked before it was applied for and a license issued, ‘unwatered’ land was not. This made ‘unwatered land’ subject to speculation in a way ‘watered land’ was not. This may explain why some early pastoral runs in the district changed hands after licenses had been held for very short periods of time.

In repudiation of claims that speculation was rife in the Gregory South district, including that area taken up by John Costello, George Chale Watson, a lands department surveyor and officer in charge of the Pastoral Occupation Branch stated:

... the country was settled upon shortly after its discovery by Burke and Wills, by a few honest and intrepid pioneers, who encountered risks from wild blacks and starvation, coming out with their cattle and occupying the country in a legitimate way. The mobs of fat cattle that for years have been driven out of this district to market are an emphatic contradiction to the assertion that the district, speaking generally is unstocked.

The greatest change to the pattern of land tenure emerged with the passing of the Crown Land Act of 1884. This enabled the small runs to be consolidated as one holding. The Act also allowed for homestead selections, grazing farms and pastoral leases.
Chapter Four

The Great Artesian Miracle

Now the stock have started dying, for the Lord has sent a drought:  
But we’re sick of prayers and providence – we’re going to do without;  
With the derricks up above us and the solid earth below.  
We are waiting at the lever for the word to let her go  
Sinking, down, deeper down,  
Oh, we’ll sink it deeper down:  
As the drill is plugging downward at a thousand feet of level,  
If the Lord won’t send us water, oh, we’ll get it from the devil;  
Yes, we’ll get it from the devil deeper down.  
Song of the Artesian Water – Banjo Paterson

The discovery and exploitation of artesian water enabled previously barren lands to be taken up, stocked and settled. This huge change permitted more secure and intensive stocking, enabled stock to travel along watered stock routes rather than river courses, facilitated stock breeding and reduced the costs associated with the pastoral business.

The establishment of paddocks, prior to the discovery of the artesian water supply, demanded the creation of wells of various kinds, weirs, and dams. Dams were created where a depression in the earth could be located and then dug out either by hand or with the aid of horses or bullock teams. High mounds were built around, and still are, to retain the water and to decrease evaporation. Up until the 1880s the dams were usually basins, 18 to 20 feet deep and round in shape.

Robert Logan Jack, the government geologist, noted the possibility of artesian water. Together with input from J.B Henderson, a government hydrologist, the first artesian drilling program was planned. This created great excitement with the government and the press who were agitating for experimental bores to be sunk. In 1885 and soon after successful bores were sunk near Blackall and in 1887 in Cunnamulla, and at Barcaldine which was the first fully successful bore.30

Concerns about diminishing flows and water pressure combined with water wastage necessitated Government intervention. This took the form of regulating the number of bores drilled and the system of watering stock from
open bore drains. In recent years the Natural Heritage Trust has provided funding to graziers to cap open bores and pipe water underground through poly pipe to evenly-spaced and regulated stock watering points.

Welford Pegler, like many in the district, has had a lot to do with dam sinking and bore drilling as he explains in this excerpt from an interview conducted with him in September 2000.

Butler Brothers owned Wallyah, it was unimproved good country but it had no water. About a mile or two to the south of where the house is now, a bore was put down. The fellow that was doing it, Oliver Cameron, said there was oil in that hole, but when he got down to about 2,700 feet he couldn't go on because they were having too much trouble with the hole. A small quantity of water was flowing, but it was terribly bad water, it would kill sheep or anything if they drank it. The fellow reckoned there was oil in it.

Then, in about 1927, they got Tom Gadsby, who had a big horse plant with about 50 or more horses to put in a tank on one of the small creeks on Wallyah. It filled pretty easily and quickly but it dried the next week. They were so disgusted that they couldn't get water with either method that they sold it. When Dad had the property they collected draught horses and they combined that with left over dam sinking gear from the Copai property. Dad started putting tanks down and he employed men to drive the horses and do the tanks. He did a number of tanks on Wallyah and they didn't all leak.

Today's pastoralists liken the enormous impact of the introduction of mains electricity in the 1980s to that of artesian water supplies a century earlier.
Chapter Five

Transport and Travel

The first settlers travelled overland following the rivers and trying to find water when they deviated from them. The routes offering the best water and feed became the stock routes. For about 30 years Bourke became the main supply town and market for the settlers. The isolated routes became the domain of the carrier, the teamster, the stage coach driver, the drover and the camel driver. As sheep gradually replaced cattle, wagons loaded high with wool would make their way to Bourke for the distant markets of Melbourne, Adelaide and Sydney. Bourke was also the source of merchandise for other towns and strong trade links grew between Charleville, which had been surveyed and named in 1868, and the town of Bourke.

Postal services were initially organised by station owners with contractors who carried the mail on packhorses. These were supposed to be regular services although it often took weeks or months for mail to get through when rivers and creeks were flooded. Furthermore mailmen had instructions (apart from those dictated by the need for self preservation) not to cross rivers if the water reached their saddle flaps. Packhorses were replaced by mail services linked to the operation of the coaches.

An unusual English traveller, Constance Jane Ellis, passed through the area between 1888 and 1904. She documented her experiences in a journal published many years after her adventures. Constance eventually married a worker from Thylungra Station. In this excerpt from her journal she recalled the experience of taking the coach from Charleville to Adavale in the 1890s:

... No doubt you have seen pictures of a Cobb’s coach – but they give an idea of something quite decent. His [the drivers] looked as though Noah might have used it to transport his family to the ark! There was room for four persons inside and two on the seat with the driver and four horses drew us. There was myself and a girl going to a situation in Adavale, a station manager looking for 32,000 sheep, the manager of a station on the Bulloo (pronounced Buller) and his head stockman and the driver, a great amount of luggage and many bags of mail. There had been a long drought, but everyone was cheerful this morning – it was so dull and damp and the flies were so persistent that they were sure it would rain soon. We went on till about 1pm when we came to another “mail” change. This was a bough shade (a frame
of saplings roofed with mulga boughs) in charge of a black boy. Then on again to our next stop, the Langlo River Crossing. Rain was fairly heavy by now and I began to see why black soil was "glue-pot" and to understand why we carried a long handled shovel; the soil caked to the wheels and every now and then someone got off and dug it off.

...It was close up five when we got there. A wooden shanty on the river bank. The rain had been much heavier further up, and the river was now a banker, that is, it was over its banks. And the iron boat, kept for crossing at the expense of the Government, had been swept away during the night. But who cared! Wasn't it raining cats and dogs? We went in to dinner. I was asked whether I would have lamb or venison. I chose the latter, and very tasty and tender I found it. Afterwards, I found that both joints were just plain goat. Presently, we went out to see the method of crossing a fast running river without a boat. A man swam across with a rope, our end being fastened to the coach which was then hauled across, endless chain fashion, then the mails and luggage were loaded into washing tubs and ferried over. Meanwhile, the four horses were swum across and harnessed. The male passengers went farther up, stripped and swam over. Then, Delia and I were packed into the tubs and pulled over. I didn't feel too safe, but as everyone took things as a matter of course I did the same.21

When the railway reached Charleville in 1888 and Cunnamulla in 1898 wool was transported there by carriers. Trade connections with Bourke were weakened as a result. The impact of a levy imposed by the Queensland Government on station products moving into NSW further encouraged the demise of the Bourke connection. The following account in the Charleville Courier in 1897 addresses the problems of transportation during the major drought of 1898-1902.

Although the continued dry weather and consequent difficulty of travelling militates strongly against the wool traffic, a very fair amount has been received at the Charleville Railway Station. During the past week the consignments totalled 644 bales, comprising 91 from Bransby, 223 from Milo, 74 from Prairie, 88 from Mount Alfred, 58 from Pinkilla, 33 from Nickavilla and 77 from Comongin.

During drought, travel was very difficult if not impossible, and the droving of stock could be delayed by months. Getting supplies through to stations would also be delayed. Once artesian water was discovered the government worked to provide reliable water to the stock routes. The Quilpie—
Toompine Stock Route intersected South Comongin Station from north to south and was an important route providing access to the railhead at Quilpie from the Thargomindah, Eulo and the Hungerford areas.

Camels were also used in the district and were of particular importance during the 1891 Shearers and Bushworkers Strike when the carriers supported the strikers and withdrew their bullock wagons. Camels were also used on a more regular basis in the Quilpie Shire:

I remember in the ‘30s, I was just a child at the time, Dad bought the camels from a contractor that used to cart wool. He put down a tank for us and he had three teams working together criss-crossing the tanks and he bought half a dozen tanks from Billy Krump. My father stopped using the camels in 1952, he started using a tractor. They just died out, they were here until the late 50s. I worked them, they were a lot better than horses, they wouldn’t jib - they’d pull until they dropped. They’d frighten you a bit because they’d growl and snap at you and slobber on you. They stood the drought well because they could reach these acacia trees. They always had plenty of feed they could reach a long way up.
Barney Rutledge

In the Graziers Review of January 1933 an article noted that Ray Pastoral Company, of Terachy had decided to send wool by camel to Charleville for scouring to avoid the freight rail charge from Quilpie to Charleville via Adavale. The wool was sent by two camel teams – one wagon carrying 12 tons, the other carrying 10 tons and drawn by 17 camels. The average daily stage was 15 miles. The camels were easily able to last out three days without water as they ate mulga, gidyea, or dry roly-poly burr.

With the advent of the motor car the mail coach changing posts became redundant and lonely wayside pubs, such as Jack-In-The-Rocks, became disused shanties. Roads were planned to open up new country to facilitate the transport of cattle to the railheads. One of these roads was the Quilpie-Eromanga-Coonaberry Creek road. Des Simmonds was one of the surveyors working on these roads:

I worked with Ted Hamill. Ted was a bit of a goer. We had to carry bags of pegs, cornbags full of pegs, which were green and were pretty heavy, and on that job we earned the title of Hamill’s camels. In early 1950, we went to Eromanga, and we surveyed a main road from
Eromanga to Coonaberry Creek Flats, which is about 48 miles [77 kilometres] SSW of Eromanga... The key point about that road was that at that time, it was built specifically for road transport of cattle and to my knowledge, even though it wasn't called that at the time, that would be the first big road project of that type that we carried out in the state of Queensland. 24

Despite the construction of the roads the government favoured rail transport over road as it subsidized freight rates for uneconomic commodities and remote areas. This began to alter in the 1950s and the first road trains were introduced into Queensland in about 1960.

The Beef Roads were amongst the most important rural projects of the 1960s and the term ‘Beef Road’ was coined to distinguish those roads for which the Commonwealth Government supplied special funds, by grant or loan. The roads chosen for the first stage included the Quilpie-Windorah road. Other changes in the next few decades involved not the extension of the road system, but its expansion and updating to create all weather roads and new expectations.

At a public meeting in the 1960s, Mr Evans the Minister for Main Roads told the gathering that a traffic bridge would be constructed over the Bulloo River. The bridge would be higher than the railway bridge which was used by those crossing on foot or those brave enough to drive over every time a rise in the river occurred. The long awaited bridge was constructed on 3 June 1964. ‘Chicken’ Carroll was skilled at driving over the railway bridge when the Bulloo flooded. He described the process in the following interview:

The second crossing, which was the main Bulloo River crossing before the bridge was built, used to get flooded and you’d have to cross on the railway bridge if you wanted to go to Charleville. The railway tracks were just narrower than most cars. You’d go across on the sleepers - bounce, bounce, bounce. You only went slowly, in case you bounced off into the River!

The Beloved Horse
The horse has featured prominently in the development of the shire. When the noble beast was not working, it was ridden in races, gymkhanas, polo and polocrosse. All the small settlements have participated in race meetings and most still do.
Horses are rarely used for work on the stations now, having given way to motorcycles and planes for mustering. The sports, which were originally played with stockhorses, are now mostly played with horses bred and trained for the purpose.

The Tullys were great riders and great horse fanciers. In 1885 they entered their race horse ‘Kelso’ in a race in Adavale. ‘Kelso’ won the race and received a cup donated by the Adavale Jockey Club. E.Woodhatch presented this cup to the Tullys at the Great Western Hotel and it remains with Mark and Sandra Tully at Ray Station. Mick Skeahan, a relative, wrote this poem as a tribute to the horse in the late 1880’s:

Am I foolish and soft if I mourn for a horse that of racing tracks once was the pride
A horse that lived through a long withering drought and when rain came last then you died
I grieve for you docile, faithful old beast for though dumb you are honest and true
And I deem it no shame if in the silence I shed a tear as a tribute to you
In the years that have passed fleeting only so fast how often, how often with pride have I watched you careering around on the course with your even and long sweeping stride and when colours did grow in the sun long ago when all the best the district could breed
When the flag that was let fall hard held past them all the green jacket you bore to the lead and when spurs they were stinging and whips they were ringing and reins on the favourites were slack
you could easily outlast them and gaily sail past them with a crushing top weight on your back
At first you were branded not up to standard among racers they classed you a weed
But the doubts you did settle when fair on your mettle you vanished away in the lead
And fast though they chased you, and some of them raced you as passed you the first time around
When the whips they were flashing through all you came dashing and left them behind at each bound
But no more will I feed you, no more will I lead you
you’ve passed from this world cold and hard and you’ll never again scamper around on the plain or come galloping home to the yard
But remorse never found you I know that around you the angel of
happiness nigh
More near did you hover and promise to clover your spirit to guard
when you die
So truce to my weeping I know now your sleeping in peace moss
down by the hill
A poor honest old brute though your silent and mute I will kindly
remember you still

Local lore mentions that the first racecourse in Quilpie was established
shortly after the town was. This was in the butchers' paddock, on the
western side of the Bulloo River, in what was then known as the police
paddock.25

The second racecourse at Quilpie was established on the eastern side of the
Bulloo River. This proved to be an inconvenient location, as the river had to
be crossed to get to it if floods made it unusable. It was eventually relocated
to its current site in 1987 and the Quilpie Horse Sporting Association was
formed. This association is a combination of the racing, polo, polocrosse,
pony club and rodeo committees.

The second racecourse was also near the popular Macaskar's swimming hole
which is named after Paddy McCasker who once lived there with his family.
It is also the place where Donald Angus, the first person to describe Quilpie
in 1884, spent his early retirement years growing vegetables and living in a
hut.

Polo
Polo was played on various properties and at 'Piastre'in August 1926. The
two teams were Womban: Laurie Rutledge, Steve Rutledge, John Borthwick
and Harry Hatten. South Comongin: Jim MacMillan, W.A. Hall, Dave
Richardson and H. Richardson.

One month after the Piastre game a sport's carnival and race meeting was
held in Quilpie to aid the Quilpie Hospital. The Womban and South
Comongin teams played. This was the first polo played in Quilpie. The game
resulted in a win for Womban. Hector McPhie, Laurie's brother-in-law, who
had experience of polo on the Darling Downs, umpired this game. The
Downs Polo Association had formed in 1921, however, Polo is believed to
have first been played in Queensland in 1877.
Laurie, Steve and Brian Rutledge were involved with other interested men in the formation of the Bulloo Polo Club on 25 September 1926, now known as the Bulloo Polo Association. The Association grew in strength and community support. Transportation to the game, the men and horses were described by the *Sunday Mail* in 1932 as follows:

Eight to ten teams came as far as 200 miles. Players were drovers, jackaroos, station hands, property owners, dingo shooters and the occasional Chinese or Aboriginal. Ponies were grass fed and were such an unstable lot that they had stables in Quilpie but the wild horses would not be stabled.

It was played every year with the exception of the war years 1940-1945 and the drought years of 1927 and 1965. Cups have been presented since 1929 including the Dunkley-Corones Cup for A Grade winners. Other cups have since been introduced.

**Polocrosse**

The exact date polocrosse commenced in Quilpie is unknown, although the game originated in Australia in 1939. Kevin Costello, who was closely associated with the introduction of the game to the area, believes it was about 1954. Polocrosse members need only one horse instead of the three needed in polo and both men and women play the game. Team members compete in a circuit, which includes Charleville, Thargomindah and Bollon. The first teams were formed with Thylungra jackaroos and in time the Quilpie Polocrosse Club amalgamated with the Thylungra Club. Early members included ‘Boy’ Speedy, George Yorkston, Graham McManus and Mick Gibson.
Chapter Six

Pioneers and Pastoral Stations

And thus with glimpses of home and rest
Are the long, long journeys done;
And thus 'tis a thankless life at the best
Is distance fought in the mighty West,
And the lonely battles won.
Henry Lawson

Bierbank

Ridley Williams, a son of Williams' senior, former host to Landsborough, was born in 1850 in NSW. Along with his brothers, and possibly his uncle, he took up 18 runs which later formed the nucleus of the Bierbank consolidated holding from which the town of Cheepie was later excised. Some of these runs are now located outside the Quilpie Shire boundary.

These runs comprised surveyed and unsurveyed lands and they included: Fairlie Plains taken up on the 15 August 1865 (50 sq miles), Fairlie Plains West, 7 October 1865 (50 sq miles), Bierbank, 20 Feb 1867 (50 sq miles), Bierbank East 23 Feb 1869, (50 sq miles), Bierbank West 3 Jan 1875, 25 sq miles, Haredean East 23 Feb 1868, (50 sq miles), Haredean West 8 Dec 1868, (50 sq miles), Injuringa, 13 Nov 1868 (50 sq miles), Yarron Plains 18 Nov (46 sq miles), The Cool 30 Dec 1876 (25 sq miles), Quilberry 19 Jan 1869 (50 sq miles), Maroochoo 19 Jan 1869 (50 sq miles), Wokolena 12 Nov 1874 (29 sq miles), Munberry North 12 Aug 1876 (64 sq miles), Munberry South 12 August 1876 (42 ½ sq miles), Yeatman 15 Nov 1874, 27 sq miles, Avron 18 Dec 1876 (44 ½ sq miles), Altanau 18 Oct 1876 (105 sq miles).

Bierbank was stocked with shorthorn cattle and a considerable number of both blood and draught horses. The brothers were keen racing men and they competed in local race meetings at Charleville, Adavale, Cunnamulla, Thargomindah and as far as Bourke.26 In 1882 Ridley Williams negotiated a deal to sell 2000 cows to the Barrow Creek Pastoral Company in the Northern Territory. The requirement that he deliver them obligated him to drive the cattle approximately 1400 miles across unexplored, poorly watered country.
The party set out in 1883 with two mobs of 1000 cattle each following the most well watered and stone free route for themselves and their stock. They travelled up Beechal Creek to Adavale, crossed the Grey Range and followed Powell's Creek before moving to the Barcoo and the Thomson River.

One mob contracted pleuro-pneumonia or 'lung disease' which was initially introduced to Australia in 1858 by a shipment of five cattle from England. Several hundred cows perished due to the condition and the rest continued after a prolonged period of rest. Williams was away for almost two years and an unsuccessful camel party was sent out from the Overland Telegraph to search for his party. He returned as he had arrived – overland. On his return to Bierbank he stopped at the township of Adavale recording these memories in his diary:

On passing Adavale I called at Mr Alfred Skinners store to get a few things and when I walked into the store Mr Skinner asked, 'Is that you or your ghost? I heard you had perished and by jove I am glad to see you back again'. We had a bit of jollification at hotel there that night.

In 1887 Ridley, Thomas and Robert Williams were the only parties still retaining an interest in the Bierbank property (Dreyer having died) and they took out a mortgage over the station and the stock with the Commercial Banking Company of Sydney. At this time the first of many resumptions took place. The property was divided into two parts one comprising 244 square miles and the other portion 613.5 square miles. The larger portion was available for lease to the existing tenants, the Williams, and the smaller portion became available for tender.

The Bierbank property, located 53 miles from Toompine, became a receiving office for postal deliveries in 1895 and the Bierbank Hotel, which was situated on the right bank of Beechal Creek, became a collection point under the care of F.C Langridge.

The hotel was 75 feet long and 32 feet wide, it was made of round mulga plastered with antbed and had a wooden floor. The Bierbank Hotel also included a store, kitchen, dining room, bathroom, wash house, meat house, stable and a yard which was topped off with a picket fence around the hotel garden.
An economic downturn in 1893 followed by low prices for cattle weakened the William’s enterprise. They were dealt a fatal blow by the devastation of the drought which ravaged pastoral Queensland from 1898 to 1902. In 1902 the bank gave notice that they intended to offer at auction 640 acres of the Bierbank lease, including the hotel which was valued at £1200. As a buyer did not come forward and rent was not paid on the lease for 1903 and 1904 the Bierbank holding was forfeited to the Crown.32

In the absence of feed on their own blocks the Welford and Milo Company pastured their stock at Bierbank until 1906. During the same year Bierbank was ‘secured by tender from the lands Department by H.B.Coward of Lyssington Station, NSW, who paid the bank a few hundred pounds for the improvements, put down an artesian bore, and stocked it with sheep’ 33

Kyabra
Much has been written about John Costello, pioneer settler of the district. His fame is linked with that of his relatives by marriage- the Duracks, who were his fellow travellers. By all accounts John was a superb bushman with a sense of direction second to none. It is said that he travelled without making reference to a compass, displaying extraordinary feats of navigation however he was canny enough to use one to carefully mark out the runs he intended to register and sell on.34

John Costello’s parents left Ireland and arrived in NSW to open a store in Yass. There Mrs Costello bore John in 1838 and Mary in 1841. The family moved to Goulburn where John started to develop his skills as bushman, rider, horse-breaker and stockman.

He made an exploratory trip to the region in 1863 with Patsy Durack, Stumpy Michael Durack and others and returned to Goulburn, determined to return with his immediate family and other interested relatives. He travelled with his family and his parents to Waroo Springs, near the Queensland border and established himself there for two years. In 1865 he was joined by Patsy Durack and family and together they travelled north taking up property at Moble Creek in 1865. John Costello established his homestead, calling it ‘Burtna’ after the Aboriginal name for the waterhole. John was married to Mary Scanlon and her brothers joined them to take up the ‘Springfield’ lease.

John and Mary’s daughter, also called Mary, was born at ‘Burtna’ in 1868, and became the first white child born in the district. His second son, John
Thomas, died on the journey north, near Bulloo Creek, perhaps making him the first white child to succumb to the harsh environment, poor water and disease that claimed so many children in the early days of settlement. Remnants of this camp are said to be still visible on the property of Barney Rutledge.  

According to his biographer John went looking for alternative grazing land because Burtna did not have enough water to carry a large herd. On this expedition he discovered Kyabra Creek. He set about making a survey of the property and Kyabba, a run which later became part of the Kyabra consolidated holding, was registered on 14 November 1868 in the name of Michael Costello. On 13 October 1875 Kyabra No 2 was registered and on 4 December 1875 Kyabba No 3 was registered in his own name. His daughters Catherine and Ellen were born at Kyabra.

John Costello registered more runs than any of the other early pioneers, 110 runs encompassing roughly 4,600 sq miles with much of this land falling outside the Quilpie District. This was too much land to manage without the support of a syndicate able to provide capital and support and must have been part of a grander plan of enrichment. As his biographer-son noted "From time to time for some years, John Costello leased from the Crown large areas and sold them to the land-seekers". It has been estimated that John Costello made a quarter of a million British pounds on the sale of the leases, a vast fortune at that time. Some of these sales resulted in permanent settlers to the area and some of the names are still in the district today. They include: Hacketts, Skehans, Hammonds and Tullys.

John Costello lightly stocked his holdings, a legal requirement, and sold off the blocks as quickly as possible to eager buyers. This speculation gave him seed money to enable him to continue to do so until he had exhausted his interest in the area and was ready for new challenges in Rockhampton and the Northern Territory. It has been claimed that he gave some of his blocks away and his biographer writes that land on Farrars Creek was given to Michael Tully and Sandy Abbey, Springfield was given to his brother-in law James Scanlen and Currawilla to his employee, a stockman named Jack Farrar. According to information in Heartbreak Corner John Costello also gave the priest, Father Durham, a station property which was managed by his nephew. John Costello had left the district by 1877 and he sold the Kyabra lease to John Webber and Frederick Peppin in 1882.
By 1882 the property was stocked with cattle and sheep and the station Aborigines took particular responsibility for the sheep, protecting them from dingo attacks and also working as station hands and domestics. The Webbers lived at Kyabra and a traveller told the story of the great numbers of cooks, many Chinese, employed there over a short period of time. One particular story concerned a French cook who fell foul of Mrs Webber. In her autobiography, the traveller Constance Ellis recalls the tale:

Johnny Chapeau was a good and clever cook, but he fell foul of the Missus. She was a cantankerous body. He determined to have revenge for his wrongs. The Missus was not able to swim, but had a love of bathing. She had a tilted cart fixed about the middle of the Creek and every fine day, one of the gins had to row her over to her bathing house where she disported herself on a ladder that reached to the bed of the creek. On the day after Johnny left, she was rowed over as usual. Suddenly the gins heard screams and saw her flopping about in midstream. Goanna swam over and rescued her. When they came to look at the cart, it was found that a square had been sawn almost through in the floor, and as soon as the Missus stepped on it, she fell through! Evidently the work of Johnny Chapeau.

Today there are many Costellos in the district. They are the descendants of Thomas Joseph Costello who is believed to have been the cousin of John. Thomas was the husband of Catherine Hackett from Springfield Station and the owner of a pub at Stoney Point (Windsorah) in 1878. Their son, William Costello, later took over the Greengate Hotel in Adavale and this man was the father of local identity and former councillor Kevin Costello.

Thylungra
Thylungra was 25 miles from Kyabra. Considering the huge distances usually separating neighbours in the district, this was a mere hop, step and a jump to their relatives - the Duracks.

To many, the Duracks were famous for their connection to the Kimberleys and the much-loved book, *Kings in Grass Castles*, written about them by Patsy Durack’s granddaughter, Mary Durack. However, the Duracks great pioneering saga began with their journey to the Quilpie District and their establishment of Thylungra Station in 1868. Most of the runs registered by the Duracks occurred between 1874 and 1877. They had done the government’s work for them by surveying and exploring the area and by
delaying registration of these runs, like John Costello, they had enjoyed many years of occupation before paying rental returns on the properties.  

In 1862, Patsy Durack married Mary Costello, the sister of his friend John Costello. By the time they travelled north they had two children to take with them, Michael and John as well as Patsy’s brother Michael called ‘Stumpy’, two hired stockmen and Soldier, an Aboriginal boy. They met up with John Costello and his family at Waroo Springs and together the group travelled far beyond the reaches of white settlement to begin new lives in what is now the Quilpie Shire. The Duracks, Costellos, Hacketts, Scanlans and the Tullys, were all Irish Catholics and the blood links between these families connected them like the fine lines on a map.

Patsy Durack, Stumpy Michael and the Aboriginal named Cobby went in search of permanent water. They came across the Thylungra waterhole and the Boontamurra people camped near it. When questioned, the Boontamurra said in their language that the water hole never ran dry; sieved through the white ears of Patsy Durack, this became Thylungra and the name stayed and grew to include the whole property.

The hard work of establishing themselves began, with the erection of stockyards and the construction of a ‘temporary’ mud house by the river bank. In 1869 Mary gave birth to a son, Jeremiah, who sadly died after only six weeks.

Patsy Durack had the same land hunger as his brother-in-law John Costello and took up 95 runs or roughly 3,600 square miles. Both John Costello, Patsy Durack and their families endured the isolation, food shortages, illnesses and accidents common to pioneers and for about a decade their lives ran parallel. Patsy also acquired and sold leases and after a while he looked westwards to the Kimberleys to start anew. Before doing so he agreed to be part of a syndicate called the Queensland Co-operative Pastoral Company Ltd. The company purchased Thylungra, Galway Downs, Sultan, Tongy and Buckingham Downs. Patsy Durack believed that this arrangement would allow him to maintain his interest in his Quilpie country while enabling him to pursue his new interests in the Kimberley.

This didn’t transpire as the Company went out of business in 1890 and Thylungra and Galway Downs passed into the hands of the Union Bank. Patsy continued with his interests in the Kimberley, and his links with the Quilpie Shire were over.
The Union Bank offered Edwin John Pegler, son of Augustus Pegler, the position of manager of Thylungra in 1904. He had worked as a jackeroo on Ambathala - part of Milo Station, and that is where he met Amy Gertrude Wickham, the governess who was to become his wife. He brought his jackerooing experience with him in addition to knowledge gained as an overseer at Bulgroo. He remained at Thylungra for 24 years and the station became home to his children, Welford, Murray & Edwin Pegler. The station was also large enough to support numerous station workers and their children, said to number 70 during peak times. Edwin Senior also found time to take an active role in civic affairs. For over forty years he was a member of either the Adavale or Quilpie Shire Councils, and was chairman of the latter council for six years.

Thylungra had one of the first cars in the district. Pat Pegler, the daughter of a Thylungra worker, and later the wife of Welford Pegler, relates this story in her autobiography.42

About 1926 one of the Jackeroos, a very bad tempered lad, went to start the car he had left, facing the water, parked on the bank of the creek. It was a T Model Ford. It had no self-starter and had to be cranked to start. It had a multiple-disc oil clutch, and in cold weather, the clutch tended to drag. One had to chock the wheels or one might get run over. It was June and the oil was very thick when Tom came to start the car. It jumped the chock and ended up in the creek - the deep part. Tom had the cold job of fixing a rope to it and his mates all grabbed the rope to help pull the car out. E.J came on the scene and started to pull too. He said, “Must be a big fish,” but when he saw the car, he was very irate.

Under Edwin’s management sheep were introduced and the station grew from a drought stricken cattle property to one of the world’s largest sheep properties.

The bank remained the lessee of Thylungra until the formation of the Thylungra Pastoral Company and the transfer of the lease to the Company in 1919. This remained the situation until The Australian Estates Co. Ltd purchased the property in addition to the four leases of Kyabra, Bulgroo, Stoneleigh and Westbank. This created a property of 1,336,000 acres. Under a range of managers the property embraced new practices including introducing courses for Australian Estates’ sheep station managers,
overseers and cadets. Also in the 1950s a program was developed to grow sorghum to build up silage as an insurance against drought.43

In 1968, 218,000 acres were resumed which included most of the Bulgroo lease. Following this land sale sheep numbers were reduced. All it took was 25 anxious minutes for local and interstate buyers to become the new owners of 13,610 sheep sold at auction in Quilpie on April 24, 1968.

Thylungra was auctioned for the first time in 1984 and one can only speculate on how the first owner, Patsy Durack, would have responded to hearing that it sold for a record price of $3.9 million. Today it is in the hands of Clyde Agriculture Ltd.

Ray
Patrick Tully was visiting cousins in the Irish enclave at Goulburn in NSW when he met and married Sarah Durack, Patsy Durack’s sister. Together with their children Joe, Patrick and Margaret, their horses, stock, wagons and all the implements needed to start anew they set forth for south-west Queensland to join their relatives at Thylungra. With them were Patsy Durack’s sister, Mary, known as ‘Poor Mary’ and her husband Dinny Skeahan.

For the Tullys, sadness at leaving the graves of their three infant children at Goulburn, must have been mixed with anticipation at starting a new life among relatives who had paved the way for them. On the journey Sarah had another child, Francis, but Sarah did not allow the birth to delay them longer than a few weeks.

After months of travelling they arrived at Kyabra homestead to the welcome of relatives and the refreshment provided by the large Kyabra waterhole. They moved on to Thylungra, staying a month before moving to ‘Lough Ray’ the adjoining property.

It was now 1874 and the Tullys began a garden and orchard and the construction of their first house made of timber and mud and thatched with cane grass.44 ‘Lough Ray’ had been named after a place in Ireland but it was also known as Wathagarra by the Aborigines. These first tentative steps towards establishing themselves was also the start of a Tully presence in the Quilpie district that, so far, has lasted five generations.
The Tully family took up nine runs between 1874 and 1877 covering about 300 square miles. During these years Anne Amy (Annie) was born followed every one to three years by another addition to the family. Sarah had 14 children and five died as infants or young children. Each death was tragic, but none was to cause Sarah more remorse than the death of Anne Amy at Ray Station. The story of Annie has been passed down through the Tully and Durack generations and the story is best told by a Tully descendant, Fleur Lehane:

In September 1878, when Annie was about two, Sarah had another baby – a boy whom she named Jeremiah Francis John. He was always called ‘Jack’. When Jack was about three months old, in November 1878, Father Durham was again doing the rounds of the properties, saying Mass and baptising any children. He arrived at Ray and after Mass he christened little Jack.

Annie was two years and five months, and found it hard to sit still. She soon became restless, so Sarah sent her outside. Mass went on; then Jack was christened, and it was only when Sarah had time to think that she suddenly said, “Where’s Annie?” There was no sign of her. Sarah thought at first wild blacks had taken the child. There had been some hanging around on the fringe of the station’s blacks’ camp.

It was a good season with the grass three feet high. Then searchers found tracks leading down to the creek; her little blue mug was found beside the waterhole. Many hours were spent diving for her body, but all to no avail. Much precious time was lost when in fact she was wandering further and further away. The searchers now spread out in all directions. A trusted boy was sent galloping to ‘Thylungra’ to ask for help, and men and black trackers came from adjoining stations. The long grass made tracking difficult and, of course, because of the time spent searching the waterhole, Annie was much further away than the searchers realised.

As time went on, Sarah grew more and more frantic, knowing her child must be perishing for a drink. The next day was dusty and her little tracks were completely obliterated, but the search went on. That same day Joseph Tully, aged sixteen, was riding three miles from home along a cattle pad, when his horse suddenly shied and threw him. The horse then left him and went home. Joseph had to walk back.
Joseph was so thorough in everything he did that the section he had searched was not given further attention.

Did Patsy, who was always soft with his children, blame Sarah for sending Annie outside? As one exhausting day followed another, and the dreadful heat continued, Sarah was at breaking point. Her mother had come immediately to help cook for the searchers and be with Sarah. She tried to get Sarah to eat to keep up her strength. What of the baby? What if she lost her milk? Summer diarrhoea carried off many a child and for that reason babies were never weaned in the hot months.

All the adults knew by the end of the week that time must have run out for Annie, but Grandmother Bridget and the children went on praying. The desperate search still went on.

Patsy Durack, with his black trackers Pumpkin and ‘Thylungra’ Tommy, found her lying in a gully, with a bunch of everlasting daisies clutched in her tiny hand, as though she had died in her sleep... Sarah was devastated. How could God have taken her beautiful child, ‘the flower of the flock’? Father Durham, who had stayed to help with the search, now spoke to the weeping mother. “Woman, how dare you question God’s holy will? The child is in Heaven.” Sarah was exhausted from days and nights without sleep and sorrowing over her lost child. Her reaction to the priest’s words have been handed down by several members of that generation... “And who is any Englishman whatever to be telling an Irish mother how she must bear her cross!”

It was said that Sarah never recovered from Annie’s death and photographs of her in later life show a small woman whose deep-set eyes frame a grim and resolute mouth.

Despite financial difficulties during the drought years of 1898-1902 the Tullys managed to retain Ray Station. This came about by the family foregoing wages, and with the help of John Leahy, the manager of Australian Estates in Brisbane. He brought his influence to bear when arguing that the property was most likely to survive under those who had worked so hard to establish it.
In 1911 Francis Tully, the youngest son of Patsy and Sarah, married Anne Leahy and they returned to live at Ray Station with his aging parents. By 1906, son Joe was at Congie and another son, Parkie, was at Pinkilla. In 1915 Francis built Terachy on the Nickavilla holding. Terachy was six miles from Ray and was a grand home with a beautiful and renowned garden of six acres developed by Anne. They moved there to live in 1917.

Francis and Anne Tully had 8 children and they named their oldest son, born in 1912, Francis. In turn he became the manager of Ray Station and he fathered 8 children. One of these children, Mark, with his wife Sandra and their children now live at Ray Station making them the fifth generation to do so. It is still a working pastoral property which also provides group homestay.

Although not born at the time, Mark remembers his father talking about the ‘swaggies’ coming to the property during the depression years. The unemployed men walked the main watercourses going from station to station seeking work. They came from the north down Ray Creek and were given jobs cutting scrub if they could use an axe. If suitable, they would stay in scrub cutters camps set up for the purpose. If they couldn’t use an axe they would still be given a meal and told that there was no work.

As a boy growing up at Ray in the 1950s and 1960s Mark recalled the fierce dust-storms rolling across the plain. With the benefit of hindsight many past practices can account for this environmental problem. Practices of overstocking, the effects of rabbits on native grasses (until the introduction of myxomatosis culled their numbers) and lack of knowledge about the delicate nature of the country were all compounded by Ray’s location on the edge of the channel country:

People did run a lot more sheep, even when I was a child, they ran way too many. Now the ground is mainly covered, although we can still get claypan with the best of intentions. It was much, much worse we used to get these terrible dust storms. I can remember in the mid sixties, which was another very dry period of time, 1965, these big red banks used to develop in the south-west and they’d come closer and the whole house would just be engulfed in dust. Mum used to give us all a broom to sweep it out. 47
Other members of the Tully family have spread throughout the district and John Tully, currently a councillor with Quilpie Shire, and his wife Wendy live at Bunginderry Station.

In 1983, in an incident reminiscent of the disappearance of toddler Annie Tully a century before, 3 year old Clayton Freiberg was separated from his grandmother while camping at the opal mines on John Tully’s property. 200 searchers were involved in looking for him in the sparsely populated, dry, scrubby country. Fears for the little boy mounted as the night passed. Due to the efforts of teams of locals, shearer and police he was finally located. There the resemblance to Annie’s story ends. He was reunited with his family and currently lives in the township of Quilpie.

**Tenham**
Frances Tully married James Hammond in the Irish community at Goulburn. James was not an Irish man, however his ‘Englishness’ may have been overlooked because he donated a portion of his block to the Catholic Church. Whatever the reason, he made enough of an impression for Frances, many years his junior, to find favour with him. Frances was John Costello’s aunt and therefore related to the Duracks by marriage. They moved up to the Quilpie district, to the block chosen for them by John Costello, in about 1874. The land became known as Tenham and a nearby block also taken up by them was called Hammond Downs. Tenham was a station on the west side of Kyabra creek.

In all the Hammonds held about 24 runs of about 700square miles. On one occasion Frances was at Tenham, with few people around to help her, when she was bitten on the toe by a snake. Her response was to ask a station hand to cut her toe off for her. After several unsuccessful attempts she succeeded in the amputation herself. What is surprising is that she didn’t die of blood loss, infection or snake venom!

Frances had ten children, naming the first born Frances. Frances married Charles Fitzwalter, a name that was to become well known in Adavale and Charleville for the supply of rural products and services. Business and family interests were further cemented with the marriage in the same year, 1875, of Ellen Hammond (Frances’s sister) to Charles Fitzwalter (George’s brother).
A postal receiving office opened at Tenham in 1880 but closed a year later when the office was opened at Thewin, a station on Kyabra Creek, 3 miles south-east of Tenham.

Both James and Frances died in 1891. The family were struggling with stock losses due to poor conditions when the responsibility of managing the station fell to their children.

The boys, Edward (Ned) and Michael (Mick), managed the two properties until Ned fell from his horse at Hammond Downs where he later died and was buried. Mick married Anthea Moustaka and had four children. The two boys, Themetre (Mitre) and Hector (Jock) were both successfully involved in amateur boxing. Mitre won both the middleweight and heavyweight titles and Jock the featherweight. Mitre was killed in action in France in the First World War. The two girls, Mary and Orea, were partly educated in Europe and remained to assist in the allied war effort when the First World War broke out.

Mick struggled on after the drought but Tenham was eventually passed to the Tully family in about 1930. Hammond Downs is not in the Quilpie Shire, however, it remained in Hammond hands until it was auctioned at the Wool Exchange in Brisbane in 1973. There are still many Hammonds remaining in Quilpie Shire.

**Jack-In-The-Rocks**

Dinny and 'Poor Mary' Skeahan, the relatives who had travelled up to the area with the Tullys, had two runs of about 68 square miles. Patsy Durack had taken up the land for them in 1877. Some of their land was located on what is now the Canaway Downs property, close to a spring that welled to the surface and ran above ground for 15-25 feet before retreating underground again. This soak was called the JD Springs.

The Jack-In-The-Rocks was a pub which was constructed on the Skeahan block at the second horse change on the Cobb & Co. route from Adavale to Windorah. A traveller to the area describes her impressions of arriving at the pub:

> We reached the homestead about noon, a white-washed place built of Egyptian brick, that is, brick made of clay, no straw or grass in them. Very bare and clean. A clean girl ushered us into the 'dining room' with a slab table and benches down each side. Presently, an old man,
and his grown sons all in spotless white shirts and moleskins walked in. Mr Skene (sic) and his entire family. They were painfully shy... We were on the road again by one o’clock. About 2.30 we came across an old woman loading firewood – great boughs of trees- on to a bullock wagon. ‘There’s Mrs Skene’ said the driver. This dirty and ragged old woman doing this heavy work and driving four bullocks, the mother of those spotless young men. I felt quite dazed.52

The Cobb & Co. coach arrived on Mondays at midday with a supply of rum for Dinny Skeahan. Once consumed, which might take a week, he would take over the conveyance of the mail from The Rocks to Ray, Terachy and Thylungra stations. This undoubtedly caused delays for those at the properties and many anxious faces scanned the plains waiting for sight of Dinny with the mail.

The truth behind the pub’s unusual name is not known. Mary Durack in *Kings in Grass Castles* states that an opal prospector, Jack Cummings, put up a shanty pub for miners who would ask the coach driver to take them out to ‘old jack in the rocks’. The problem with the story is that Jack was said to be located at Galway Downs, which is some distance from Canaway Downs!

Many tall tales are told about the pub and one concerns the management of it by two of the Skeahan sons in the absence of their parents. Instructed not to drink too much free grog they took it in turns to serve each other, passing the one shilling they had between them over the bar to the acting bartender on the other side. Without too much trouble they drank the pub dry.

Local knowledge also states that in 1886, a shepherd by the name of Jack Deverall lived in a cave not far from the pub. He had built wooden doors to protect his rations from the Aborigines and a bough shed out the front for shelter. Sheep were watered at the springs and he may have been in the employment of one of the big stations adjoining the Skeahan run.

In 1913 ‘Poor Mary’ Skeahan died and her body was collected in the cool of the evening by Mary Tully, her niece, and station workers and taken to Ray for burial. ‘The Rocks’ no longer stands and the springs were dynamited and no longer flow. Little evidence remains of the lives lived there.

**Comongin and South Comongin**
Unlike the Bierbank Holding, there were a number of owners of the Comongin and South Comongin runs before consolidation in 1888.
Comongin
The consolidated holding of Comongin was comprised of the following 23 runs: Annie Jo Jo, Bonn, Colac, Denman, Derremut, Gap, Galvin, Geneva, Gunnadorah West, Gunnadorah, Godesberg, Koraggarak, Lake Colless, Phipps, Stop, Tabletop, Thiers, Winbin, Winbin North, Womadullah, Owthorpe No.1, Youngwoman and Yungerah.

The settlers that took up the runs determined their names. Some of the names were undoubtedly taken from Aboriginal languages of the area, while others probably related to the names of the family members of the selectors. Others, like Colac, were taken from parish names. The names of the runs, along with rough maps that served to delineate one area from another, were submitted to the Commissioner for Crown Lands for approval. From these individual survey plans Queensland maps were drawn. Subsequent amendments resulted from official surveys.

The lease for the Comongin consolidated holding was taken out on 1 July 1888. On the 14 September of that year Comongin was divided into two parts. The first part was 497.5 square miles and the part the lessees took possession of was 925.5 square miles. The consolidated holding was leased for an annual rental of £890 covering a term of 28 years. The lease term was extended by 7 years in 1898 as the lessees had constructed a rabbit proof fence around their holding with 60 miles of wire netting supplied to them by the government.

In 1865 several runs, generally those with better water and feed, were taken up. These were: Gunnadorah, Koraggarak, Lake Colless, Owthorpe No.1 and Yungerah. As the following run transfers demonstrate, contiguous runs were accumulated by four main parties of selectors to form what amounted to consolidated holdings before the Crown Land Act of 1884 was introduced to regulate this. After the Pastoral Leases Act of 1868 it is also clear that 'unwatered' runs changed hands on Comongin very quickly and that pastoralists were aware that the earlier subdivision of grazing land into such small areas was unviable.

Gunnadorah of 50 sq miles was taken up by Joseph Becker and William Sly. This run was transferred to Becker alone in 1869 and to James, William and George Robertson on the 15 December 1882. One week later they were transferred to William Pitt Barker, John Barker, Donald MacLean and Hugh Chambers who went on to lease the consolidated holding in 1888.
Gunnadorah West was taken up in 1866 and transferred to the same party in 1882. The link with Donald MacLean has been an enduring one as the current owner, Henry Harkin, is MacLean’s great grandson.

John William Colless took up Koraggarak, Lake Colless and Yungerah. The township of Quilpie was excised from the Yungerah run in 1914. Koraggarak and Lake Colless were transferred to Becker in the same year and Yungerah followed in 1867. They were transferred to James William and George Robertson and a few weeks later to William Pitt Barker, John Barker, Donald MacLean and Hugh Chambers.

Wombadullah followed a slightly different transferal pattern being taken up in 1867 by Becker and Sly transferred to Becker only in 1869, transferred again to the Robertson in 1882 and twelve days later to William Pitt Barker, John Barker, Donald MacLean and Hugh Chambers.

John William Colless, Benjamin Clay Hutchinson and James Wallis took up Owthorpe No 1. The run was transferred to Becker and Sly in 1866 and to Becker only in 1869. In 1882 the property was transferred to James William and George Robertson on 9 May 1882. It was transferred to William Pitt Barker, John Barker, Donald MacLean and Hugh Chambers in 1882.

Godesberg run was taken up by Joseph Becker in 1872 followed by the runs of Annie Jo Jo, Bonn, Denman, Gap, Galvin, Phipps, Stop, Theirs and Youngwoman in 1874. Godesberg was retained by him until 1882 and the other runs were retained until 1883 when they were transferred to William Pitt Barker, John Barker, Donald MacLean and Hugh Chambers.

Winbin and Winbin North were both taken up on the 4 May 1875 by Joseph Becker and transferred along with Tabletop run, which had been taken up on 24 July 1876, to William Pitt Barker, John Barker, Donald MacLean and Hugh Chambers in 1882.

Colac, Derremut and Geneva were taken up by James, William and George Robertson in 1877 and transferred to William Pitt Barker, John Barker, Donald MacLean and Hugh Chambers in 1883. A portion of the stud herd developed by the Robertson on Colac became important to the development of the FFS Stud Cattle Company of South Comongin.

By 1882 William Pitt Barker, John Barker, Donald MacLean and Hugh Chambers had taken up the runs that would later be consolidated to form the...
Comongin holding in 1888. The Robertsons had retained an interest in most of these runs and they passed them to the partners, known as MacLean, Barker and Company. Donald MacLean was born in Glenforsian, Scotland and he married Mary Barker the sister of William and John Barker, his partners in Comongin. Hugh Chambers was also a member of the family being a cousin of Donald’s wife, Mary.

Early during the term of the consolidated holding they took steps to ensure that if they lost the Comongin lease they would not lose the home they had constructed. They converted a parcel of land, including Lake Youngwoman on the Gundorah block to freehold. This is now the site of the present homestead. They similarly converted a parcel of land on the Koraggarak block, with Lake Houdraman, to freehold.

Donald spent about 30 years in South Australia, 8 years in Victoria and 6 years as the managing partner at Comongin. He moved to Comongin in 1890 with his daughter, Mary Stewart MacLean, after the death of his wife from tuberculosis. Tuberculosis was also to claim his son Norman two years later at Comongin, where he lies buried. The first homestead was built at Lake Youngwoman, adjacent to the vegetable garden and the Aborigines’ camp. The homestead was later relocated to the opposite side of the Lake.

The Shearers and Bushworkers Strike of 1891

The Shearers and Bushworkers Strike of 1891, which lasted for six months, impacted on properties such as Comongin as they became embroiled in the dispute. Shearers were offered shearing rates lower than in previous years and they opposed the Freedom of Contract principle which enabled pastoralists to employ ‘free labour’ or ‘scabs’, according to the viewpoint of the contending parties. Shearers withdrew their labour, and pastoralists made application to the Queensland Government for police protection, an application which was agreed to. In response to the unrest the pastoralists formed the United Pastoralists’ Association which was the forerunner of the United Graziers Association.

Wool sheds were burnt at Milo and Gumbardo, a wagon from Bierbank station was torched, and teams from Kyabra station had been blocked and intimidated by unionists. A strike camp of 100 men was also located at Adavale. In January 1891, during the peak of the strike, Comongin Station had 84,244 sheep. The station owners and managers held grave concerns for their own safety and that of their stock. They also doubted their capacity to get their wool clip to market. Donald MacLean and partners owed rent to
the Government for their lease and used the strike to highlight their ongoing difficulties:

...Some consideration might well be given to south-western pastoralists who from 1891 to 1896 inclusive were virtually at the mercy of gangs of labour ruffians who blocked all progress and whose policy was robbery and destruction in the carrying out of which all the wool sheds around me but one were burned to the ground, some with sheep and some with wool up to five or six hundred bales.\(^{57}\)

The devastating drought of 1898-1902 followed creating greater difficulties in meeting the leasing payments to the Government. The abandonment of the property by the partners was imminent. Donald MacLean wrote to the Lands Department stating:

‘while our rents are unfixed for the current term we cannot obtain advances or sell and after 49 years squatting in Australia I am most anxious to abandon it even at a heavy loss.’\(^{58}\)

Fortunately, Donald’s daughter Mary (known to all as Stewart), formed a romantic liaison with Harry Webb, a pastoral inspector with the Bank of Australasia. They became engaged in 1896 and married 15 months later. Harry Webb was able to find a way to restructure the debt and ensure that Comongin remained in family hands.

Donald MacLean continued to manage Comongin until the end of 1898 when Mr Officer was appointed as manager with Mr Templeton as his overseer. He managed for twenty months until thirty-five year old Harry (Henry Charles) Pegler and his wife Josephine took over the management of the property on the 19 August 1900.

Harry had become overseer at Milo and ‘Welford Downs’ station under the direction of his father, Augustus Henry Pegler, who had been the manager at Milo for many years. Harry remained at Comongin for thirty-seven years.

In 1908 Hugh Chamber’s interest in the property was transferred to Agnes May Chambers and in 1909 Donald MacLean died. In 1908 land was resumed from the holding. A new 42 year lease over the priority area was given to MacLean Barker and Co.
Harry Webb along with Keith Rupert MacLean created Comongin Pty Ltd in 1914. William Pitt Barker died in the same year and the other partners: John Barker and Agnes May Chambers transferred the pastoral lease, along with any interest they had in Comongin, to the company for £88,360.

**Station Workers**

Comongin was home to the MacLeans, and to their managers - the Peglers, however it was also home to the many white, black and Chinese workers who lived there for varying lengths of time.

Aboriginal stockmen, natives of the area, worked on Comongin and lived at the 'blacks camp'. They continued to do so for many years thus avoiding forcible removal to reserves outside the area.

George Gilmour and wife Clara invited Erskine (George’s brother) and his wife Elsie and their baby Reg, to come to Comongin for work. During their time in the district Erskine and Elsie lived and worked on four stations – Pinkilla, Nickavilla, Comongin and Thylungra. George had run the property store on Comongin where he could supply the property and its workers as well as sell items for his own benefit. After six years at the station he was in a position to assist his brother to make a new start and in 1899 Erskine, Elsie and Reg arrived.

Erskine became a dam sinker using a single-furrow plough and scoops pulled by four to six horses for which he was paid 7.5 or 8 pence per cubic yard. He travelled to the stations to offer his services and it is believed that he worked on a dam on Pinkilla Station during the year of his arrival. He became known as ‘that man with the match box scoops and the pocket plough’ for the method he used, which must have been unusual enough to warrant the appellation.

Erskine and family were there during the worst of the drought years and work became scarce. Properties with mortgages were forfeited to the banks that became responsible for them. As a result Erskine was employed by the Union Bank to clean out existing dams and to sink new ones.

The drought continued and by 1900 not even the banks were spending money on the properties. Erskine and George were very resourceful and bought horses. They were cheap as properties had no feed for them. They took them to markets far afield in Dubbo or Gunnedah and even as far as Ballarat in Victoria. Lack of water along the way forced them to stop at
waterholes for long periods and required Erskine and his men to draw water and cart it from wells to supply the horses. The venture must have provided the family with some money as Erskine was able to employ men to assist him.

Clara stayed at Comongin to run the store and to run the mail receiving office which opened in 1900 and closed in 1904. Erskine, Elsie and Reg lived in camps by waterholes or creeks. They had a tent for sleeping and a bough shed which served as a living room. They received their supplies when the teamsters supplied the station. This was also when they received mail which was about every six months, unless they were able to give it to someone passing through.

When it was time for Elsie’s second baby to arrive she moved from Nickavilla Station to Comongin to be with Erskine’s sister, Marion, who was staying with George and Clara. The new baby, Edith Evilla Gilmour, was born on 6 January 1901. Many workers aspired to own their own land and this was no different for Erskine. He had plans to take up land in Toowoomba, rather than out west, but he became ill with hydatids, putting paid to his plans and requiring him to go to Sydney for immediate treatment.

**Further Resumptions and Additions**

Comongin is still a large and important holding. Over the years land has been resumed from Comongin, and additional lands have been added including Derremut, Nickavilla and Cowley. Cowley has one of the oldest homesteads in the area. Constructed in 1887 for A.H. MacDonald, the former owner of Cowley, the 50 square homestead is of pise’ construction made with mud dug to create the homestead’s cellar.

One resumption was from the Yungerah run to excise land for the township of Quilpie. In 1917 further land was resumed from Comongin holding in exchange for portions 1 & 2 parish of Derrimut. 30 square miles was released for the creation of a reserve for camping, water and stock trucking.

Further land was also resumed for the proposed Great Western Railway. When the planned line to Tobermory was abandoned this area was set aside for the development of a road.

Another township had been planned on portion 4 of the Gunnadorah run and this was for the village of Tebin which was surveyed into 4 sections of 20
allotments covering three streets. 76 allotments were offered for sale but none were purchased. With settlement taking place at a pace that was much slower than originally anticipated the Town of Tebin was cancelled by the survey office in 1952.

In 1937 Acting Premier Rudolph Bedford received a petition calling for the resumption of Comongin. As the Government’s resumption rights had been exhausted according to the terms of the lease the petition was not acted upon. 62

In 1950 the lease expired and on 8 May 1952 an Additional Area Inquiry was held in Quilpie to determine the land needs of nearby pastoralists. 608 applications were received in 1953 for the Preferential Pastoral Holdings ballot held for the Comongin expired holding. As leased land was to be made available Quilpie Shire Council requested that an area of 1 square mile be set aside as a reserve for specific purposes under Council control. This area became the second butcher’s paddock.

The proposed mode of subdivision divided the area into one priority area for the existing lessee, Henry Norman Webb, and nine leases for public competition, comprising areas of about 61,440 acres to about 78,800 acres each.

Applicants for the ballots were required to lodge with the application a years’ rent and 1/5 part of the specified survey fee. They were also required to provide proof of their assets. The land was hotly contended as the country was experiencing a boom period. Bulyera run received 448 applications, Tebin 355, Wanko 514, Greenmulla 522, Gooyana 512, Colac 463, Coolbinga 476, Woolbuna 285 and Boolbanna 564. The successful applicants were all men, apart from Miss Nancy Janson, a nursing sister from Charleville Base Hospital, who successfully balloted for Colac. Most of the successful applicants came from the district and had jobs as contractors, carriers and overseers.

**South Comongin**

Twelve runs formed South Comongin and they were called: Comongin, Owthorpe No.2, Owthorpe No. 6, Owthorpe No. 7, Nyngin, Nyngin West, Corni Paroo, Goorie Goorie, Becker, Green, Balthazzar and Napoleon.
The runs were consolidated in 1888 under the provisions of the Crown Land Act of 1884 by the lessees Sali Cleve, Benjamin Joseph Fink and Henry Henty. The consolidation was described as consisting of 14.5 miles double frontage to the Bulloo River with the following waterholes of permanent water viz Coomelia Waterhole, Pothamunga and Pinkinetta. Other waterholes Boolbannah, Comongin, The One Mile, The Five Mile, and the Thirteen mile lasting twelve months and two holes in a billabong of the river lasting 9 months. Some of the spellings of these waterholes have been adjusted so that we know them today as Possamunga, Pinkenetta and Boolbanna. At this time the Lands Department also determined that 82.75 square miles of the consolidation consisted of inaccessible ranges and dense scrub.

In 1895 Louisa Henty wrote to the Lands Office informing them that Henty was a trustee for her and her two sisters, Caroline MacLeod and Alice Hindson. Benjamin Fink retired from the partnership at this time and was paid £500 and Alexander Magnus MacLeod, the husband of Caroline MacLeod, was appointed to represent Louisa Henty and her sisters. The partnership now included the women, Sali Cleve and Alexander Magnus. The men were indebted to the women for £45,000 and the women held a mortgage over the property to secure their interests.

The leased area was 556.75 square miles with a lease term of 28 years. A requirement of them, as with other leaseholders of the time, was to erect a 'substantial and permanent fence of such a character as to prevent the passage of rabbits' which were in plague proportions. 272.75 square miles were resumed in 1891 with Toompine, the police paddock and the camping reserve excised from this parcel of land. The original house was built of logs near the banks of the Bulloo River. This was washed away in the 1890s and rebuilt further from the River.

During the terrible drought of 1898-1902 there were heavy losses of Shorthorn cattle. Luckily the FF5 stud, the nucleus of which had been developed by the Robertsons, holders of numerous runs on Comongin and South Comongin before consolidation in 1888, remained intact. Like many pastoralists at this time the lessees were unable to make their rental payments and received an extension to pay by the Lands Department.

The Comongin run was originally formed from a subdivision of the Owthorpe No 1 run. This run, and those of Owthorpe No 2, 6 and 7, were taken up in 1865 by John William Colless, Benjamin Clay Hutchinson and
James Wallis. The runs were transferred to Becker and Sly after one year and held by them until 1869 when they were taken over by Becker in his own right. In 1882 the runs were transferred to James, William and George Robertson and to Sali Cleve, Benjamin Joseph Fink and Henry Henty in the same year.

In 1867 Nyngin and Goorie-Goorie were taken up by Becker and Sly and transferred to the Robertsons in 1881 and to the partnership of Sali Cleve, Benjamin Joseph Fink and Henry Henty in 1882. Corni-Paroo was taken up by Benjamin Clay Hutchinson and James Wallis and transferred to Sali Cleve, Benjamin Joseph Fink and Henry Henty in 1882.

In 1874 Joseph Becker took up the runs of Balthazar, Becker, Green, Napoleon and Nyngin West. He held them until 1882 when they were transferred to Sali Cleve, Benjamin Joseph Fink and Henry Henty. A postal receiving office operated at South Comongin, under the direction of A. Imray, from the 20 August 1883 until it closed three years later. The postal service operated again from 1910 until mid 1915 when it was located at the woolshed, where the stock route crossed Goora Goora Creek.

In 1900 Louisa Henty, Caroline MacLeod and Alice Hindson transferred the lease to Sali Cleve, Alexander Magnus MacLeod and Frederick Arthur Herbert Knight.

South Comongin was a large station and had numerous employees. The overseer, if single, lived in the family home along with the bookkeeper and the governess. There was also a blacksmith and numerous black and white stockmen. In the early part of the 1900s Jack Horrigan, the head stockman, lived in a covered wagon near the woolshed which was 12 miles from the main house. Frederick Knight was the son of Frederick Knight senior, one of the lessees of South Comongin station. He lived at the station for many years and recounted the following story about a favoured haunt, near Jack Horrigan and the woolshed, in his memoirs:

His wife, ‘that there Mrs O’, as one of the stockmen called her, was a wonderful cook. For that reason I missed no opportunity visiting the shed. My mother who was more fastidious, lost her appetite and had no further meals there after she had noticed Mrs O wiping out the frying pan with a sock which she had picked up from a pile of dirty clothing, lying on the floor, waiting to be washed.
In 1911 a further 108 square miles was resumed to create grazing homesteads which reduced the South Comongin holding to 438 square miles. The carrying capacity at this time was 10 acres to 1 sheep. In 1920 the consolidated holding was transferred to the F.F.5 Stud Cattle Company Ltd and in 1915 £60171 was paid to Frederick Knight by the South Comongin Pastoral Company Ltd which had formed the previous year.

In 1948 the South Comongin lease expired and an Additional Area Inquiry on South Comongin was held at the Quilpie Courthouse on 3 August 1948. Just prior to its expiration the lease was sold to Winnie Douglas Cameron, wife of Stephen Cameron. The Camerons sought a new lease over the whole area but the Lands Department rejected their claim. The proposed mode of subdivision divided the area into one priority area for the existing lessee, Winnie Cameron, three to become available for public competition and two to be made available as additional areas to existing pastoralists. The blocks of Henty and Margarra became subject to The War Service Land Settlement Acts 1946 to 1950 which gave priority to returned servicemen. Over 200 applications were received for these balloted blocks. The successful applicants were John Reynolds for Henty and Cecil Fenwick for Margarra. Gordon Byrne was successful in acquiring the block known as Napoleon in an open ballot. They each received 28 year leases.

In the 1950s, before the advent of motorcycles and planes for mustering, a small labour force was still needed on the South Comongin holding. During that period the Camerons, lessees at the time, employed a manager, overseer, 2 cooks, 4-5 station hands, gardener, cowboy, housemaid, book-keeper (intermittently) and one permanent boundary rider.

Walter Henry Speedy, known as ‘Boy,’ married Charlene Cole in 1954. Together they bought South Comongin Station. They bred Merino sheep and Hereford cattle. In 1980 they added an extra area to the property by purchasing Napoleon.

**Mt Margaret**

*The holding comprises mixed country, and about one half is good, which includes the Eastern, Northern and Western portions. It chiefly comprises pebbly ironstone and stony ridges and flats, interspersed with patches of clay-pans and gidyea flats, carrying a good deal of low scattered mulga, and lightly coated with nutritious grasses. The western portion including the country in the vicinity Ginniapapa and Tintaburra creeks comprises open*
brown soil flats, ridges and a valley, and should carry nutritious grasses and herbage in favourable seasons...
Land Agents Report.  

Before Mt Margaret was consolidated it comprised 30 runs known as: Ann, Havelock, Ness, Chinton, Moyo, Cromarty, Dingwell, Aberdeen, Forfar, Fife, Clunie, Romsey, Kenmore, Killen, Clyde, Campbell, Grantham, Boorarie South, Boorarie North, Ulloomunta, Athoo, Aros, Ross, Mull, Delga West, Dalga East, Kowroungala East, Kowroungala West, Kalboora East and Kalboora West.

The runs of Delga West, Delga East, Kowroungla East, Kowroungla West, Kalboora East and Kalboora West were taken up in 1867 by Donald McRae. Many of the other runs were taken up in 1874 by Christina McCrae of Coburg in Victoria and transferred to William Moodie, John Donaldson and John Ord Inglis in 1894. The exception to this (bar a few runs) were those of Boorarie South, Boorarie North and Ulloomunta and Aros which were taken up in 1872 by Niel Hugh MacDonald. The station was well enough established at this time to become a postal receiving office which was maintained by Neil MacDonald. It remained at Mt Margaret, 34 miles from Eromanga, until it closed in 1881.

The female traveller, Constance Ellis, commented on the Aborigines working at the station. She remembered one particular girl who had been taught with the Mt Margaret Station children. In her journal she wrote: ‘...her English was much better than theirs. She had kept level and in some cases ahead, of the others, and she played the piano quite as well as any of the girls’. This astonished traveller also wrote about the brolgas that she saw ‘dancing’ when she passed through the Mt Margaret holding:

...I saw Brolgas - ‘Native Companions’ — for the first time. Half a dozen long-legged birds flew overhead and settled in a clear space. As they alighted, they bowed gracefully to each other. More and more arrived until there must have been about thirty, and each, as he came to earth, bowed to those already assembled. Then they went through a most intricate dance — one would think that they were going through a quadrille. They ‘set to partners’, and they had ‘ladies chain’, they ‘chasseyed to the corner’, they had ‘grand chain’, they bowed most gracefully and lightly (because they half flew) to each other. They kept this up for nearly half an hour, until the sun was fully risen, when, with flapping wings and raucous cries they sailed away in pairs
and groups to their feeding grounds. A most wonderful and interesting sight.⁷¹

The Mt Margaret runs were consolidated by the lessees Donald McRae and Christina McRae under the provisions of the Crown Lands Act of 1884. In 1893 the leased land was specified in the Government Gazette as being 1051.25 square miles and the resumed area as 633 square miles. By this time both Donald and Christine McRae were dead and the lease was transferred to Moodie, Donaldson, Inglis and Co. who had taken up some of the early runs. The property was subdivided into Mount Margaret and Mount Margaret East. During the height of the drought the lease was transferred to The Law Debenture Corporation Limited before going to Richard Jones of Tobermory.

The area known as Congie paddock was leased by the Australian Joint Stock Bank who transferred it to Patrick Lawrence Tully and Joseph Michael Tully of Ray Station in 1904.

In 1913 Mt Margaret station was managed by Michael Skeahan, the son of ‘Poor Mary’ Durack and Dinny Skeahan. ‘Poor Mary’ was a member of the pioneering Durack family. When Lena, Michael’s wife, decided to travel to Sydney for her confinement, she had good reason to seek the best medical treatment she could. Lena was facing both kidney trouble and the greater risks associated with delivering twins. The journey alone was enough of a trial with 280 miles over bumpy, dusty roads to cover to get to Charleville and then about 1600 more miles in the long rail journey to Sydney via Brisbane.

Lena delivered two girls she named Patty and Peggy. She returned with them to Mt Margaret, accompanied on the long train journey by the new station bookkeeper. In 1917 the girls developed ‘sandy blight’ which was followed by diphtheria, a contagious disease, from which they never recovered.⁷² They were buried not far from the homestead where their graves remain.

The Mt Margaret holding was subject to resumptions in 1913 and in 1925 the lease was transferred from The Law Debenture Corporation Limited to the Peel River Land and Mineral Company. After further resumption rights a thirty year Pastoral Development Lease was granted. In 1937 The Peel River Land and Mineral Company transferred the lease to Eric and Geoffrey Lyle Killen and George Wallace Henderson.
After subdivision blocks were given new lives under different ownership and new names as a result. One such block was MonIer which was created in 1925 by joining the first syllable of the maiden name of Esther Monteath with that of her fiancee Keith Pegler.

Further changes have taken place to the Mt Margaret holding. An Additional Area Inquiry was held in respect to the 583 square kilometres surrendered from Mt Margaret in 1974. Crown lessee applicants, with a case for additional land, attended the Quilpie Court house at 10 am on the 27 February 1974 to address the Inquiry.73

Kenmore – State Pastoral Station
The Labor Government leased a number of cattle stations in the northern and western districts of the state between the years 1916 and 1920. Four of these properties were in the Quilpie District and one - Kenmore, was originally a run of the Mt Margaret holding. Within ten years all of the State Pastoral Stations had been disposed of at a substantial loss to the government. Apart from mismanagement the world slump in cattle prices in 1920 devastated Queensland’s beef industry and virtually signalled the end for the state stations.74

The State Pastoral Stations included Dillalah leased in 1916 and Kenmore, Keeroongooloo and Monamby which were all leased in 1919. Keeroongooloo, situated on a tributary of Cooper Creek, was one of the first places secured by the pioneer John Costello after settling at Kyabra.

Under the stewardship of the state, Keeroongooloo Station introduced black Berkshire pigs, which locals believe escaped at that time and which may account for the feral pig problem which developed in the Shire.

Alfred James Walker
Alfred James Walker joined his uncle, John Donaldson, who was a lessee of the Mt Margaret holding. When James’ father died he travelled to Mt Margaret to work as a jackeroo. After some years he acquired a position as a government officer in charge of the rabbit netting fence. This involved checking the fence, and the maintenance men who lived in isolation in rough huts along its length. In 1914 Alfred was successful in acquiring, by way of a ballot, Cranstoun, which had been the brood mare paddock of the Mt Margaret holding.75
Francis Murray
Belombre, near Cranstoun, became the home of Francis Murray, an Irish born man who had walked from Tibooburra to Thargomindah and up to Toompine as a shepherd herding a mob of sheep to South Comongin station. Looking for further work he walked from there to Eromanga where he was employed digging a well on a station. It is believed that Francis was in the area by 1874 adding his number to the Tullys and Duracks, the other Irish Catholics in the district. Although chain migration was certainly a factor among these Irish families, the Murrays had come from a different part of Ireland to the Tullys and the Duracks and did not know them before arriving in south-west Queensland.

Francis also worked on the border fence between Queensland and South Australia, winning the contract from bigger fencing outfits. This earned him the name of the 'Big Wampoo' which was derived from a Chinese pirate ship of the same name (Whangpo) which was able to escape capture and which had a similar capacity as Francis for good luck. After finishing this job he returned to Eromanga to buy the Royal Hotel from William McGill who had established it in 1885. Francis Murray then bought The Australian Hotel in Eromanga. At this time the proposed Great Western Railway was to go through Eromanga and the two hotels looked like a good business proposition for the future. The second pub had been leased to his cousin Wilkinson, another Irish catholic.

In 1908 Francis took up Belombre, although it was his wife, Elizabeth, who took the buggy into Charleville to pay the fees and attend to the necessary paper work. Francis had gone looking for gold leaving his wife to take care of the hotel and business matters. 76

Francis died in 1933 and one of his sons, also called Francis, married the girl-next-door, Ivy Walker from Cranstoun. Another son, Edward Ernest Murray (Ted) worked on the rabbit fence that his father had constructed. John Murray, the grandson of Francis senior, has added to the Murray holdings in the district since those early days. John Murray and his wife Fran had nine children with some remaining in the district. He has also been a Shire Councillor and Shire Chairman. He diversified his interests and became the developer of the Quilpie Motel in Brolga Street.

Tobermory
Richard Jones became the lessee of the consolidated run called Tobermory in 1888. This came as no surprise as he had signalled his intention to do so...
in a letter to the Lands Department on 17 July 1885. Tobermory was comprised of the runs: Corangina, Karawla, Call, Mary, Rose, Tobermory and Oban. At this time the holding was divided into 104.5 square miles and 203.75 square miles which formed Tobermory and Tobermory West. The first lease period was for 21 years from 1 July 1888.

In 1895, during the height of the terrible drought, Richard Jones wrote to the Lands Department seeking a review of his rent because of the dire conditions he was facing. He wrote that in January of that year he had had 4887 cattle on the property but by October of that year he had lost 497 of them. The Lands Department generally granted extensions to pay, although there is no record that they did in this case.

Harriet Jane Watts became the lessee from 1904 with a 42 year lease period. This was the beginning of the long association of the Watts, and their descendants, with Tobermory and the Quilpie District.

Harriet met and married John Levi Watts in Broken Hill. He was 14 years her senior and the manager of a number of Sir Sidney Kidman’s properties. After two years at Bulloo Downs they travelled to Norley Station, another Kidman property. John Levi Watts, known as Galloping Jack Watts because of his excellent qualities as a horseman, was both a trusted friend and worker for ‘The Cattle King – Sir Sidney Kidman’. Sidney was to say of Galloping Jack Watts:

“He takes as much interest in a station as if it is his own. He thinks nothing of riding from Bulloo Downs to Norley in a night – 100 miles. Jack is the lightest rider I have ever seen and is like a postage stamp on a horse. I have never been to Norley but that he would come to meet me...”

When Sidney restructured his business in response to concerns about his immense landholdings, he made members of his family, Galloping Jack Watts and business associates shareholders of the series of companies he created.

Most women on the large properties had the help of female Aborigines, or ‘gins’ as they were called, as well as Chinese gardeners, a cook and a governess, and at Norley and Tobermory Harriet Watts was no exception. All the same there was much that was different and much for her to contend with, from the heat and perishability of foodstuffs to mouse plagues and
isolation. Harriet was to have another ten children, all at Norley Station, with only one child dying in infancy. By all accounts Norley satisfied the description of an oasis in the desert. Sydney Kidman and his companion, the writer called Murracurra, recorded this description of arriving there:

"...I had no idea that we were coming to such a beautiful home around which are fine specimens of poinciana, bauhinia, jacaranda, white cedar and mulberry and the orange trees heavily laden with fruit, bananas, grapevines and choice roses. The smooth top of a well-trimmed old man saltbush hedge looks as if it has been cut by the aid of a spirit level. A Chinese gardener produces excellent vegetables. All these results are obtained because of a plentiful supply of water. Norley homestead is on the banks of an immense billabong off the Bulloo River.

The Watts family remained at Norley for some years before moving to Tobermory in 1927. Being the leaseholder of Tobermory, Harriet had an interest in the station well before moving there, although the exact nature of her involvement is not known. By 1922 she had an active and informed role as she wrote to the Lands Department seeking a review of the rents paid on the property. At this time she stated that the five leases for the runs: Mt Margaret East, Nerrigundah West, Tobermory, Corangina and Nerrigundah, should be viewed as one entity as they were run in this way from Tobermory Station. Harriet also pointed out that none of these runs had ever stocked sheep, for Mt Margaret East dingoes were given as the reason. In the Land Court hearing held on 24 May 1922 she claimed that the following disadvantages should also be taken into account when determining the rent:

"... being 290 miles from Bourke, hence 500 miles by rail to Sydney, 100 miles to Quilpie and 624 rail to Brisbane. Sydney is our best market from this district."

In the early days at Tobermory the essential annual supplies of flour, sugar and tea came from Broken Hill via Thargomindah, this may have been because of Harriet’s familiarity with Sir Sidney Kidman’s carting and provisioning arrangements. This included contracts with a large firm of wholesale and manufacturing grocers called G.Wood Son and Co in Broken Hill. When they arrived, often by camel train, the flour and sugar were stored under the boys’ sleeping quarters and wet bags were thrown over the dark brown sugar to prevent it from getting too hard."
In 1928 John Levi Watts died leaving Harriet the full burden of raising the eleven children, Jack, Norley, Jean, Sackville, Keith, Colin, Rupert, Mary, Neil, Madge and Douglas, and the management of the property. In appreciation of John’s efforts for his boss, Sir Sydney Kidman gave Harriet a block known as Itheraway, a 200 square mile block of Norley country now known as Tinderry. This was added to the Tobermory holding.

The elder boys took over much of the heavy work of the property including repairing and constructing the dingo fence. There was a lot of hard work but there was also time for leisure. There were Sunday picnics, team games and fishing with sapling rods and string for golden perch at Gumbo Gumbo Creek.

Neighbours Barney Rutledge at Moble and Laurie Rutledge at Wambin are credited with introducing Colin to polo playing in Quilpie in 1934. In turn, Colin introduced his brother Neil to the sport a little later. The whole family were involved in Polo Week and the Polo Ball and so the link with the Watts family and polo began.

Barney Rutledge moved to the area in 1912, unloading the wagonette at Cheepie and travelling to Toompine as Quilpie hadn’t been established. From this base, land was taken up including Moble in the 1920s. Two other brothers were also establishing themselves in the area but a third did not return from the First World War.

Another dark cloud descended over the country in 1939 and four of the Watts’ boys were swept up in it. Norley, Sack, Colin and Rupert enlisted together in the 2/10th Field Regiment on 2 July 1940. They left Australia in February, 1941, fought in Malaya, and were captured at Singapore. With the Watts were Joe and Hugh Tully, of Congi and their cousin Francis Tully, of Terachy. After surviving as Japanese prisoners of war they returned home to a welcoming celebration in Quilpie. Paul and John Tully also enlisted but sadly John, a Spitfire Pilot, was lost over the North Sea in 1942.

On the homefront Tobermory was a spotting station during the war. Daughter, Madge Watts, had the job of reporting to the US Airforce base in Charleville if there were any sightings. Madge would also go to Moble Station to help in the war effort by making camouflage nets for the army as well as items for the Comforts Fund.
The division of stations, to provide for the needs of adult children who wish to continue on the land, has been a vexing problem for many in the district. It is not always easy to subdivide properties and ensure that they are still large enough to remain viable. Then there are questions about ensuring an inheritance for those children who do not want to remain as graziers. No doubt this was in Harriet's mind when her boys returned from the War. She set about dividing Tobermory to ensure that each would have a share of the land that had sustained them all for so long. In the following edited extract from Madge Butler's family history she describes how this was done:

Jack had his home at Bowalli, where the shearing shed had been built, so he got that portion of Tobermory. Rupert, Colin and Norley were given Tinderry, the part that Sir Sidney had given Mother after Father's death, and Neil retained Tobermory. Colin sold his interest in Tinderry to Rupert and Norley and then bought Gibberoo. Before my father died, he bought Bullawarra Lake, down in the Thargomindah area, for my brother Jack, Goalla for my brother Norley and a place adjoining Tinderry for Sack - although Sack never stayed on the land due to the after effects of a serious head injury sustained during mustering.

Douglas died of a brain tumour at an early age and Jean and her husband Bill McKenzie bought Plevna Downs, a beautiful property in the Eromanga district and moved there in 1937. Their son Sandy and his wife Nan live in a homestead overlooking the lagoon and their son Stuart and his wife live a short distance away.

Mary married Pierce Edwards. They moved to Possamunga in the Quilpie area, which is still held by their son, David Edwards, the current Mayor of Quilpie Shire.

Two other members of this extended family are also councillors, Stuart Mackenzie from Plevna Downs and Duncan Watts from Colac.

Milo
Milo grew in the same way as the other large properties in the area, through the steady accumulation of runs and the inevitable consolidation of them. Milo, even for those times, was an especially large station encompassing 4,343.25 square miles. Before resumptions Milo included areas of four present day National Parks: Hell Hole Gorge, Mariala, Welford Downs and Idalia.
Its early owners shared a vision for a pastoral enterprise ‘par excellence’. It appears that they achieved this goal as the Land Court in Charleville acknowledged the same when sitting on the matter of rental review. The judgment was to say that “... the Court finds that Milo is one of the best improved pastoral properties of its kind in western Queensland. It is probably the best improved pastoral holding of light carrying capacity in the state.” 81.

Milo is well-known for other reasons as well. It can claim the 1892 record for the greatest number of sheep shorn from a single station. This was 713,000 – 503,000 from Milo and 210,000 from the adjoining stations of Eumudilla and Gooya. Milo also takes an historic place in the 1891 Shearers Strike and more recently for the 1992 gazettal of the Hell Hole Gorge National Park that adjoins it.

The Milo and Welford Downs Pastoral Holding was formed from a series of runs that were first taken up in the 1860s. Two companies, Cudmore, Swan and Co and its offshoot, Elder, Pegler and Co were amalgamated in 1886 to form the Milo and Welford Downs Pastoral Co. As the Company history states, ‘this Company, composed of all the shareholders in the two parent companies, held Milo, which had been formed of resumptions from Welford Downs and Tintinchilla holdings.’ 82

The men: Sir Thomas Elder, Augustus Henry Pegler, James Francis Cudmore, William Robert Swan, (and Robert Barr Smith who had a one-sixth interest in Cudmore, Swan and Co.) were South Australian pastoralists with experience and access to capital. Sir Thomas Elder and his brother, Alexander Lang Elder along with Robert Barr Smith were the founders of the stock and station agents, Elder, and they also had other business interests in woolbroking, shipping and merchandise. The ‘Milo’ name was a Cudmore family name and remained associated with the holding.

In 1899, following the resignation of James Francis Cudmore and the deaths of William Robert Swan and Sir Thomas Elder, the Milo and Welford Downs Pastoral Company Limited was formed.

The first manager was Augustus Henry Pegler. Augustus had come up from managing a property called Ned’s Corner, in South Australia in 1886 to take up the reins at Milo. The first mobs of sheep were moved hundreds of miles overland from Ned’s Corner to start the flock at Milo.
The Adavale Progress Association was constantly writing to the Lands Department to seek resumption rights from Milo, and later for additional areas, for the land hungry men it represented. The Department had a clear process to follow and resumptions were part of an early policy to encourage closer settlement. Following resumptions, including assigning Welford Downs to the Crown in 1910, a new 35 year lease was granted to a reduced holding of 2,800 square miles. Under the terms of the new lease a further 700 square miles were resumed in 1918 and again in 1927 when 450 square miles were excised. There were additions to the property as well with the acquisition of Ambathala in 1913 – an area of 720 square miles.

In 1951 with the renewal of the lease 152.25 miles was resumed leaving an area of 1,490 square miles. In 1926 the company changed its name to Milo Pastoral Company Limited.

The Milo School
Augustus Pegler was concerned for the welfare of his children and their future prospects when he contacted Ellen Jones. He was also concerned that the future teacher of his children should be endowed with a fine character and certain refinements; such as the ability to teach music and French. After all, she and any other teachers appointed by the Education Department, were to live in his house and he wanted a right of veto over any appointments. As he stated in a letter to the Department: 'I should not have to sacrifice my children for the sake of a public school.'

The Milo Provisional School developed from the first public meeting held at A.H Pegler’s house at Milo on the 25 January 1888. Augustus offered to provide a school room free of charge and there were 19 children ready to take advantage of the opportunity. Life at school was not incident free as one year a flood ran through the room to a height of 4 feet requiring its closure for 8 days.

During another flood 50 people, including a three week old baby, took to a large bush haystack 80-90 feet long and 25-30 feet wide to survive the rising waters. Some of the brick buildings were washed away as the mortar had been made of ant bed instead of lime. Food was delivered to them by way of pulleys from the various kitchens and the store. Rumour has it that a line was drawn down the middle of the haystack to differentiate the senior staff – the bookeeper, overseer and the manager and their families from the rest of the workers and their families.
Sophia Cameron took over as teacher from Ellen Jones and she could also teach music and French. She stayed with the Peglers for three years and in her resignation letter she wrote that she had been treated “with the greatest kindness and consideration”. Miss Mary Bagot followed, only to stay a short time as falling numbers dictated the school’s closure in January 1893.

Milo & the 1891 Shearers Strike
As Augustus Pegler was working towards establishing the school he and H.C. Pegler, his son, found themselves deeply embroiled in the Shearers and Bushworkers Strike of 1891.

Milo was a non-union shearing shed and throughout the decade it refused work to union men unless they abandoned union rules. Augustus Pegler, in common with many large property owners and managers, supported ‘Freedom of Contract’ or the right to hire workers of their choice.

Augustus Pegler was the manager of Milo Station, a shareholder with vested interests in the property, and both men, as Justices of the Peace at Adavale, sat in judgment on the strikers and supporters who came before them. This conflict of interest was not lost on the shearsers and bushworkers and it served to intensify the ill feeling among the shearsers towards Augustus and Harry (Henry Charles) Pegler, and Milo, the property that was inextricably linked to them. Apart from this Harry Pegler had recently become the vice-president of The Warrego District Employers’ Association, which was mostly made up of managers of large company-owned stations. In addition the government had supported the pastoralists by making available extra police to protect them during the dispute and this no doubt further fanned the fires of discontent.

As an example the Register of Police Charges for Adavale stated:
‘2 March, 1890: Mr Pegler J.P. and manager of Milo described wanted man and promised if offender came to Milo he would give him work and inform constable’ (in other words, keep him busy until the police arrived.)

Nonetheless, the Peglers had much to be concerned about as a strikers camp had been set up at Adavale with 100 supporters. Milo had 375,000 sheep on its books at the beginning of 1891 and finished the year with 480,000. This represented a lot of bales of wool and the potential for huge losses.
Given the background, it is not surprising that Milo’s labour was stoned by unionists and that a mob of forty men wearing masks raided the Milo woolshed on the evening of the 15 April forcing out two guards and setting fire to the shed and 85 bales of wool. The shed was insured for £2000 but the damage was estimated at £4000.

Milo the village
Milo operated like a small village with a central node supporting the workers in the outlying areas of the property. By 1922 the holding consisted of numerous buildings; including maids and bachelors quarters, numerous supply stores, butchers shops, blacksmiths, repair sheds and numerous other outbuildings. The property also included shearing sheds, a wool scour, petrol store, garage and dynamo house. This infrastructure supported the immense holding and also included cottages at Gooyea, Trousers, Coonabilla and 12 Mile and boundary riders huts at Gooyea, 15 Mile, Opal Creek, 5 Mile and Tims Hut. Water was supplied by 80 tanks, 16 dams, 4 sub-artesian bores and 2 artesian bores.

Later Years
In 1969 Milo moved from sheep to cattle with the introduction of 6000 Shorthorns. On July 21 of that year, 14,000 Ambathalla sheep were sold by private treaty and on September 2, 28,000 Milo sheep were auctioned.

The old shearing equipment was still of value, especially in South Australia. To prove the point Frank Doecke and Ron Schultz, working for the Stockowners’ Shearing Co travelled from South Australia in 1976 with a trailer to pick up the eighteen Moffat Virtue shearing stands lying waste at Milo. They were renovated and soon put to use down south.

The Kneipe family purchased 920 square kilometres in 1985 and they called their selection Gooyea. The Mariala Scientific Reserve was created from the Kings Creek area which formed part of Ambathala. The Mariala National Park was created on 16 December 1994.

The Milo Fauna Sanctuary, covering 3592 square kilometres of land, was gazetted on 17 May 1979. This was degazetted when land was purchased by the Queensland Government in 1991-2 to add to the creation of the Hell Hole Gorge National Park. This is an area of rugged beauty which is currently difficult to access. In 1993 Les and Narelle Landsborough and family moved to Milo and took over its management.
Leopardwood Park
Leopardwood Park, the property of Doug and Nell Richardson was originally Milo’s vegetable garden and was maintained in splendid order by the resident gardener, a Chinese man. Doug’s father, Harry Richardson, won the property in a ballot following a resumption from the Milo property in 1914. Prior to leasing Leopardwood Park he had been a manager at Emudilla for 9 years.

The Gilmore gas field is located nearby. In 1958 a seismic survey was conducted in the Quilpie district. This search indicated that promising geological strata lay beneath the Adavale Basin. In 1961 the first well was drilled and three years later the company Phillips and Sunray struck gas in the Gilmore No 1 well. After years of frustrated development plans, the gasfield became part of the Central Queensland Power Project, which was developed to benefit people within 200km of the station, situated at Barcaldine, by generating power.

Trinidad
Trinidad is nestled between the Grey and Cheviot ranges. For an ‘outsider’ it is remote, reached only by a long track through flat lands that narrow as the ranges lower to cup the small settlement. One boundary of the property abuts the Hell Hole Gorge National Park. In 1969 Margaret and Donald Pegler acquired an additional area of 70 square miles from Milo to increase the Trinidad holding that Don had held for some time.

The Pegler name has been associated with Quilpie district since the days Augustus moved from South Australia to take over the management of Milo. Since then his descendants have played an important role in the district as landholders in their own right.

‘New Blood’ is often introduced to the area when women come as teachers, nurses, governesses or to take up other jobs. Sometimes they meet their ‘graziers’ and stay, or they stay anyway because they like the life. Margaret met Don Pegler when she was working as a ‘mothers help’ at Thylungra. “I went for a month, and stayed six months and had a ball.” They married in 1958 and the role of building up Trinidad began.

They got their first sheep in 1961 from Don’s father, Welford Pegler. They only had 251 as a trial to see if they could survive the dingo menace. With trapping, dingo numbers were controlled, and the sheep survived to produce 7 bales of wool from the first clip. The flock was considered so small that
people would ask the Peglers if they had names for them all! From such humble beginnings the flock grew to number 8,000 in the year 2000.

1956 Shearers Strike
The deregulation of investment after the war, soaring wool prices between 1947-48 and 1951-52, and the decimation of rabbits by myxomatosis encouraged an increase in flock size, wool output and consequently the need for shearers. In 1954-55 the wool boom broke, but pastoral investment continued at a slower rate. It was during this period that John Borthwick of Whynot Station developed the ‘Borthwick Shearing Table’. The AWU and shearers saw the development of the machine as an unwelcome addition to the unrest developing between themselves and graziers and it was lampooned in a float entered in Brisbane’s Labor Day procession in 1956.

Conflict intensified between the graziers and the AWU, and between the dominant faction in the AWU and the rank-and-file members. Graziers granted the wool allowance as a concession to shearers between 1949 and 1954. This allowance, above a base level, gave extra payments to shearers in step with increases in the price of wool. Graziers also sought more control in the wool shed to ensure shearers worked intensively for the period they were employed. In 1954-55 with the fall in wool prices, grazier organisations in Queensland sought to cut shearing rates at the federal level. These frictions resulted in a strike in 1956 which lasted from January to October of that year.
Chapter Seven

The Lure of the Opal

*We make our destinies by our choice of gods*

Virgil

Queen Victoria admired opals, in fact, it was said that they were her favourite stone. Under the umbrella of her approval the popularity of the fiery stone grew. Fashionable ladies took to wearing the stone while maids, wishing to imitate their mistresses, sought imitations without success. Such a promising start for the opal industry and such notoriety for Australia’s national gem became a threat to the fledging diamond industry, in particular the De Beers company. In a turn of events that foreshadowed the success of the emerging public relations industry, a myth was put about (some suggest by De Beers) about the evil of the opal. The opal was linked to Ancient Egypt and the stone was said to have the capacity to create misfortune for the wearer. As the story travelled the globe the interest in opals fell and the rise in the popularity of diamonds grew.

The Irish pioneers to the area knew the story and when Dinnie Skeahan, a relative of Patsy Durack, presented opal that he had found to his wife, she reputedly said: "Take them away, Dinnie. As if we have not had enough bad luck without you must tempt providence with the devil’s toys." Her sister, Sarah Tully, had the same distrust of the gem and she threw a bag of opals presented to her by a miner into the creek near Ray Station. 89

The myth of bad luck did not deter the miners who soon got word about opal in the area and the prices they were fetching.

The first recorded discovery of opals was at Listowel Downs, near Adavale in 1869. This chance discovery was recorded by Baroness Brassey during the travels she recorded in her book *The Last Voyage*:

I have heard the real story of the opals, for Mr Milman’s overseer was the first to bring in a piece of opal off the Blackall station on Listowel Downs, in 1869. The beautiful fragment stood on the mantlepiece for several years before it was thought to be of any value, but at the time of the great mining fever attention was attracted to the specimen, and it was sent to a mineralogist, who pronounced it to be a valuable opal.
Two miners, Berkelman and Lambert, worked the opal at Listowel Downs and their opals may have been sent to the London International Exhibition in 1873.

In 1872 some young women were picnicking in the area and discovered some pretty stones which they took home and displayed to the curious. They were opals. As a result four more claims were registered in the "Barcoo District".90

The Queensland newspapers followed up the opal stories in the 1870s giving rise to an influx of miners to the area and to the establishment of the towns of Eromanga and Adavale.

These miners were new to opal and first had to learn to differentiate good opal from bad and where both types of opal – common and precious, could be found.

What is Opal?
The play of colour determines the valuable from the invaluable and precious opal displays this ‘play’ to best advantage. When ‘colour’ is found in association with opaque opal the resulting piece is without value, and is called potch. In chemical terms opal is a hydrated form of silica in which water is chemically bonded in varying amounts.91

There are many types and varieties of precious opal which are called boulder opal, sandstone opal, matrix opal and pipe opal. Quilpie is famous for Boulder opal. This is found as thin veins occupying cracks and cavities in nodules of siliceous concretionary ironstone which occur in the beds of sandstone at varying depths. The boulders can vary between sperical or elongated and can be a few inches to more than 2 metres in length.

Further Discoveries
The lease now known as ‘Pride of the Hills’ was the first registered opal lease in Queensland. The lease is located on the boundary of Comongin and Ardoch Stations and was registered in 1871 by Vincent Dowling and F.A. Powell. The lease of 360 acres yielded little because it was little worked and the mine was abandoned. In 1891, a 20 year lease was taken up at the same place by Joseph Marshall, John Cliff and William Hutchinson. At this time the mining area was given the name “Pride of the Hills”.

61
The opal boom was further encouraged by the discovery of opal on the Bulloo River, north of Thargomindah in 1873 and in 1875 at Keeroongooloo Station. The manager of the station, Mr Coleman and the stockman, Mr Strang who had made the discovery, subsequently made claim to the find. This claim became known as the Bond Mine, after Herbert William Bond, a Regent Street jeweller who had attempted to float an Australian company to support the endeavour. Undaunted, Herbert Bond acquired the leases of the Aladdin, Scotchman, Cunnavaulla, and a number of other mines in 1878 and floated the company in London. He encountered problems in marketing the gem but he was able to freehold his title to the Aladdin Mine. The Mullahy Mine is said to be the oldest mine on the Kyabra Fields. It is located about 5 kilometres from the old Quart-pot workings, which have now been destroyed by bulldozers.

Opal mining at this time was confined to enthusiasts seeking to make, if not a fortune, at least a living from the gem. They were often pastoral workers or shearers working as miners in the 'off season' or old men who had come to the diggings from elsewhere. Making a living proved to be difficult with a small market to sell to, suspicion of the gem overseas, and no independent mining body to support the development of the new industry. Some of the pastoralists also exploited the opal on their properties including Edward (Ned) Hammond who dug in a gully between two mesas. This mine is called Hammond's Mine and has since been cut and transformed into a huge valley.

John Webber and Frederick Peppin purchased the Kyabra lease from John Costello in 1882 and established the Peppin and Webber Mine in the Kyabra Hills. They found a rich deposit of sandstone opal with the help of an Aborigine. They worked this area as an open-cut mine. When the overburden became too dangerous they dug shafts on the hill. Other pastoralists did not encourage miners as they had no control over them or their activities. They suspected them of cattle duffing or worse, and they received no benefits from having the mining activity on their leases.

In order to attract a positive response to opal, Herbert Bond took out a booth at the London Colonial and Indian Exhibition in 1886. The Brisbane Courier commented:

Precious stones do not form a prominent feature of the exhibition, with the exception of a few rough topaz and opals. These are displayed in a separate showcase by Mr W.H. Bond, Torrington,
Toowoomba. They are both in the rough and polished, ready for mounting, there are some fine mounted elegant ladies necklaces. As specimens of opal, we do not remember having seen finer from Queensland than those on display.

Bond continued to register leases in the Kyabra Hills but things began to change when Joe Bridle discovered the sandstone opal and entrepreneur Tullie Wollaston introduced it to the London market.

Tullie travelled overland from South Australia in 1888 to Kyabra Homestead arriving there on 9 January 1889. From there he travelled in the heat of summer to Joe Bridle’s Stoney Creek camp near Eromanga, arriving in a state of exhaustion. Tullie was shown some brilliant opals mined by Joe and he subsequently applied for leases over Stoney Creek, The Southern Gem, Exhibition and Breakfast Creek mines. He made application for two leases on Keeroongooloo – one being for 20 acres and the other for 10 acres on 1 February 1889. Tullie travelled to London to try to market the opal. He had some success as the jewellers Hasluck Bros agreed to employ a cutter and export directly to America where the new opal might find a ready market.

Tullie had made the claims as part of a syndicate with a manager to operate the leases in his absence. The mines were not well managed and Tullie eventually formed another syndicate with David Morton Tweedie; an Adelaide solicitor. Tullie heard of a opal strike 50 kilometres south of Erounghooloo homestead and set out to have a look. The mine was ‘The Little Wonder’ and Bill Johnson showed his opals which Tullie purchased, amazed and excited by their brilliance. Joe Bridle purchased the mine on behalf of Tullie’s South-West Queensland Opal Company in 1891. The company also owned the Gem Mine which once produced quality boulder opals.

In a report written by the government geologist in 1901, R.L Jackson describes the haphazard method of finding opal and exploiting the find:

"Sometimes the mineral is found scattered over the surface, being set free by the denudation of the rock in which it was formed, but as a general rule there is little or no evidence of the whereabouts of valuable patches of mineral below, and the site for a shaft is most frequently chosen at haphazard somewhere in the vicinity of some scattered specimens of 'colours' found on the surface. Exploratory drives are sometimes put in, but opal miners, unless the gem is met"
with in the shaft itself, as a rule do very little driving, and frequently abandon their shafts without any adequate trial.

Mining operations are very simple, the sandstone being generally soft and requiring no more than a pick to work it, only occasionally are explosives necessary. All the tools of trade can be carried on a pack-horse, green hide buckets and plaited ropes of the same material being frequently used, a windlass is constructed at the site.

From the very nature of the occupation every opal miner is a prospector, the work being more in the nature of fossicking; and much the greater proportion of opal mining is carried on outside the limits of proclaimed mineral fields. It seems, therefore, that existing conditions are somewhat different from those anticipated when framing the regulations under which the industry is carried on.

A wonderful variety of different kinds of opal is found, some of the Queensland opal being of the highest quality and unsurpassed in brilliancy, but more than 90 per cent of all the opal obtained is valueless, being common opal ‘stoned’ of the miners, or of the glassy blue variety containing little or no colour. The means of disposal of the gem are very irregular and by no means satisfactory.

The opal mining industry reached a peak in 1895, before the opal revival in the 1960s, when the value of production reached $65,500. The widespread drought of 1898-1902 affected the capacity of miners to continue and the gradual abandonment of established mines followed, except in those few sites located near water.

In 1904 Tullie Wollaston remarked: “The period under review has been one of the worst known since opal mining became an industry i.e., for the past 15 years – not only in the deadly business of the home market, but in the quantity and quality of the stone raised.” In the early days of mining sellers would come up from the southern states to buy opal from the miners. By 1912 this included the sale of opal to buyers from Germany. Tullie Wollaston had large stocks of opal on consignment in Germany, and elsewhere around the world, when the war broke out, so the web of connections for marketing opal was vast. An interview with John Murray indicates that the loss of the German connection, due to the impending war, dealt another blow to the fledgling industry:
Ned Murray, my grandfather’s brother, had a mail run out through the Kyabra Hills to all the opal mines. Opal mining died about 1912. Dad said most of the buyers for opal were called Germans although they may have been Czechoslovakian - but they were middle European people. He thinks that when relations were getting bad between England and Germany those people stopped coming out and buying and the industry virtually died and didn’t really get revived until Des Burton came out here and started the present Quilpie Opals.

**Hayricks**

Joe Knehr is an important figure in the contemporary history of opal mining in the Quilpie Shire. He discovered a giant pipe of red crystal opal in 1926 at the Red Show Mine, which had originally been mined by German prospectors until the drought of ... 1902 drove them out. In October 1929 Joe Knehr and Bill Coleman discovered Hayricks mine which is about 15 kilometres away from the Red Show and they found the Green Show beside it.

Hayricks was an abandoned mine which had been left open and contained water. It is located on the Canaway Downs property, about 120 kilometres north of Quilpie in the Grey Ranges. It was originally part of Patsy Durack’s holdings and he named the three mesas of Mount Canaway ‘The Hayricks’ because they reminded him of haystacks back in his native Ireland.

The opal claim was registered by J.P Ralston in 1930 and Joe, Bill, Doug and Ivan MacCracken were employed to mine it. A number of good parcels were found, but Ralston was unable to sell the opal and he allowed the lease to lapse. In 1935 Ivan and Doug left the mine and Joe and Bill continued working and stockpiling opal until prices increased. In 1935 Joe and Bill went into partnership with a smooth talking American who promised to sell a 200 litre drum of their finest opal in America. The American made his way to England were he displayed and sold the opal at Hatton Gardens. Following media coverage of the wonderful show of opal, Bill and Joe learnt they had been duped. Bill and Joe instigated court proceedings and managed to recover a small amount of money. Joe gave this money to Bill. Disillusioned, Joe moved to Sydney to work and Bill died.

The Hayricks was registered in 1946 by Ivan McCracken as The Hayricks Black Opal Mine. Ivan and his partner Dolly Halpin contacted Joe Knehr to work the mine while they financed the operation. In 1946 a mineral lease was granted over 20 acres of the Hayricks area and extensive development
work was carried out. The syndicate recovered $2150 worth of second grade opal from the tailings. In 1948 a second lease was granted, while the drive in the other lease was extended in the same direction. $6000 worth of opal was recovered.96

Joe, Dolly and Ivan had built a two-roomed bungalow in the side of the mountain. A description of the dwelling is offered here by author and opal miner Len Cram who visited in 1951:

...It was a clean and tidy home with carpet on the floor. There was a kerosene refrigerator, a comfortable sofa and the usual chairs and table in the kitchen, besides natural air conditioning via a disused tunnel, which also doubled as a pantry. It belonged to Ivan and Dolly. Joe's quarters were a room in the back of a large workshop. Their water supply was a 50,000 litre tank built high up in the cliffs, which filled after a good storm from off the top of the mountain.
The mountain was criss-crossed with one and a half kilometres of tunnel, all of which was supported by timber. A set of trolley lines came from the working tunnel and ran around the perimeter of the dump. Joe Knehr gradually constructed Australia’s deepest opal shaft in an effort to get to The Hayrick’s fortune. The shaft stopped at 54 meters. The theory did not work, however it was an amazing feat.

Joe and Dolly began cutting opal at The Hayricks as they probably realised that this would add value and cut costs if they could do this job rather than sending the rough material to Sydney to be cut. Joe built a large cutting shed at the mine and he and Dolly set about learning to cut. After many trials, a successful system was coordinated and Joe and Dolly became skillful opal cutters. Joe Knehr is said to have played a major role in pioneering many of the cutting techniques currently used within the boulder opal industry.

In 1956 an opencut was started and 85ft of tunnelling was done: A shaft was sunk to 136ft and abandoned because of water seepage.

The arrangement between Ivan, Dolly and Joe was that the mine would be left to the last remaining partner. This ended up being Dolly as Joe Knehr died in 1964 and Ivan in 1970. Dolly was now in a position to sell the mine.

Des Burton and the Revival of an Industry
Des Burton had a chemist shop in Quilpie and a drinking problem. He joined Alcoholics Anonymous and also discovered the charms of the opal which turned him from a weekend prospector into a professional opal miner. Des and his wife registered their first mine in partnership with Patrick Crowe and his wife at Pinkilla on 6 September 1967. Des also had another mine called Russell’s Mine which was located 41 km west-southwest of Eromanga and which did quite well. Finding a market for the opal was still a problem and Des devoted much of his time to searching the world for outlets. He registered the name ‘Quilpie Opals Pty Ltd’ and bought out his partners. He became involved in many mines including The Little Gidyea, The Friday Creek Mine, The Bulgroo Mine and Penfold’s Mine. Des Burton’s son Paul explains how the mining camps worked:

Most of the guys that worked out at the camp were alcoholics, they were binge drinkers and they used employment with Quilpie Opals as a way of having a dry period isolated from town. They didn’t need to have to hassle about whether they were going to drink alcohol or not. We ran completely dry camps. As you came to work for Quilpie Opals
you left your alcoholism behind. Some men would stay out at the camp for 8 or nine months. That would mean they would work every day and at the end of that time they would leave and pick up their pay cheque and the world was their oyster.

Des expanded his operations by using explosives, large earthmoving equipment and by providing aircraft and airstrips at the mines. However, the one mine Des wanted was proving elusive. This was the Hayrick’s Mine. His son, Paul Burton, tells the story of how the mine was acquired from Dolly Halpin:

Dad gave this friend of Dolly’s $50,000 to buy the Hayrick’s Mine and she absconded with the money. Apparently old Mrs Halpin particularly didn’t like my Dad and didn’t want to sell him the mine. I think that she saw Dad as the first of the commercial miners and she really saw this as a mine that she wanted to retain – perhaps as a tourist attraction, or to retain it as a hand mine. Dad used a friend of hers to negotiate and buy the mine for him... She disappeared with the money but Dad found her and gave her another $50,000 to buy the mine with, so he really paid $100,000 for it. I think Dolly Halpin found out about it in the end and it was all o.k. Perhaps he got the money back, I don’t know.98

By the 1980s Des had opened a number of retailing outlets including Quilpie Opals in the Queens Street Mall in Brisbane. The Quilpie Boulder Opal Association celebrates an opal expo once a year where opal buyers and opal fanciers get together to exchange information and to buy and sell.
Chapter Eight

Townships

The townships fell within the jurisdiction of Divisional Boards, which were established in 1879 to provide for local government. Some parts of Quilpie Shire fell within the Bulloo Divisional Board established on 3 June 1880 and some within the Adavale Divisional Board established on 9 February 1889. In 1902 Divisional Boards were abolished and city, town and shire councils created. Adavale Shire Council took over from the Adavale Divisional Board on 31 March 1903.

The Quilpie Shire was established on 17 July 1930 from parts of Adavale, Barcoo, Bulloo, Murweh and Paroo Shires.

Toompine and Duck Creek

There were great hopes for Toompine when it was optimistically surveyed into 44 blocks in 1891. This optimism was not totally misguided as Toompine, located near waterholes, provided a useful stopping place for travellers, opal miners on their way to the nearby fields at Duck Creek, and for those awaiting employment on the large pastoral stations that surrounded the township.

Toompine was also a changing post and overnight stop for Cobb & Co coaches on the Thargomindah to Charleville route. At the turn of the century Toompine had several houses, a hotel, blacksmith and stables, a butcher and police station tents. Thuanpine, an Aboriginal word for leech, was originally named by J.D. Steele, the area surveyor, and changed to Toompine by the Survey Department for the sake of euphony. Toompine and Duck Creek were names that were used interchangeably by the Government even though Duck Creek was an opal mining reserve 40 kilometres to the east of Toompine.

The focus of the township has always been the Toompine Pub with its more formal name; The South Western Hotel. The first owners were John Webber and Frederick Peppin, the men who had taken over the lease of Kyabra from John Costello. The dates of their ownership are unclear but it is believed that ownership was transferred from them to Mrs Scanlon. The original hotel was burnt down and the current hotel was built in 1893 of cypress pine and ripple iron by Michael Power. The pub also took over postal functions in 1895 until it was reduced to receiving office status in 1906. This service
ceased in 1909 for a year until it was revived and began operating as a full post office until 1924.

Apart from operating as a pub and post office it was also a store selling to the small community at Toompine and to the opal miners at Duck Creek, whose numbers had swollen to 300 by 1898. Duck Creek Mining Reserve was excised from Beechal Pastoral Lease whose southern boundary was shared with Dundoo Pastoral Lease.

The growth in population at Duck Creek prompted the police to relocate there from Toompine where they had first established themselves. The police, including a constable and a tracker, lived in tents, as they had at Toompine, surrounded by a bush fence with an adjoining police paddock and six horses. The police rations, including a blanket and axe, were stolen from the tents when the police were out investigating a crime and in response more secure accommodation was constructed for them in 1899. The police carpenter constructed the Toompine Police Barracks (at Duck Creek) with material sent from Brisbane. The building consisted of 'one sitting room and one bedroom combined, one kitchen, one cell for prisoners with a small verandah built in front: all built of hardwood and iron.' There were some materials left over so the carpenter used these to construct a small store room for forage and saddlery. The building was equipped with a kitchen stove, tables and a few chairs. A bore from the Beechal Station supplied water for the Duck Creek community.

Both Toompine and Duck Creek supported several families with children and each community wanted to see a school established and a teacher appointed to provide an education for them.

**Toompine and Duck Creek Schools**

The publican, Michael Power, was instrumental in acquiring a teacher for the vacant cottage he offered for the establishment of the Toompine Provisional School. There were twenty children awaiting instruction and Power offered accommodation at the Toompine Pub to 23 year old Arthur George Loxton, the successful appointee.

Arthur arrived in 1900, took vacations with his family when able, and twice required leave for sore eyes. His life must have been a rather lonely and difficult one and the following letter highlights this:

Sir,
I have honour to inform you that I found it necessary to close the school for the period of two days to enable me to make a declaration before a Justice of the Peace.

I was appointed to act as presiding officer at Toompine during the election held on Saturday the 30 March 1901.

As there was no one at Toompine qualified to take the position I thought it advisable to do so. And not receiving my appointment in time to ask for permission to close the school I acted on my own responsibility, and trust my presumption will be overlooked.

The distance to the nearest J.P. here is 25 miles and I also had to swim a river which necessitated taking the two days.

Mr Knight of South Comongin was the Justice of the Peace to whom I made the declaration.

During the terrible drought of the 1890s lack of water and feed for horses and stock impacted on the rural economy. Workers left and school numbers dropped. By 1901 pupil numbers had also dropped at Toompine, and Duck Creek was still seeking permission to establish a provisional school. The Toompine publican, Michael Power, suggested that the solution was to operate each school on a part time basis, with every second week spent at Duck Creek. This provided impetus to the Duck Creek School Committee, who had already established a temporary hessian school, and had acquired a building, which was surplus to the needs of the Warrego Rabbit Board. It was ready for Arthur's arrival and for use as a school in August 1901.

The solution for the two schools to share Arthur required him to travel between them. Initially he was willing to cover the distance by bicycle if one was provided for him. Fortunately it did not come to this as he was offered a regular ride with the mail contractor travelling the route. Around this time he sought a transfer which was refused by the Department.

Numbers were still low at Toompine and the school was closed in July 1902. The Duck Creek School was upgraded to full-time status in the same year and Arthur now found himself living there in the small teacher's room. The drought broke in 1902 but the revival in population did not occur. Numbers at the school had fallen to six by 1904 and the school was closed in 1905.
The Toompine Provisional School fell into disrepair and the Duck Creek School was sold.

Henry Yelf was a member of the Duck Creek School Committee, a miner and the keeper of the receiving post office for Duck Creek in 1901 and 1905. The mining population was declining and the police station closed in 1904, although monthly patrols to Toompine were planned. This was most unsatisfactory to The Australian & New Zealand Mortgage Company who wrote, unsuccessfully, seeking its reopening on the basis of ‘the objectionable characters of the district gravitating to that point’. Henry Yelf was a resourceful man and he put in a tender to remove the Duck Creek police buildings to Cunnamulla but it is not known if his application was successful. The building lay idle for some time and the mail contractor who ran a weekly service from Eulo via Toompine requested, and was given permission, to camp in the old police building.

By 1910 the mining population of Duck Creek had declined significantly and Henry moved to Toompine where he began fulfilling the same postal functions he had at Duck Creek. He also ran a general goods store that sold everything from hats to hair oil. His shop burnt down in 1936 and in the rubble left after the fire, fossickers found a complete alphabet set in stencil, bicycle parts, branding irons, saddlery and a set of wedding and engagement rings. A nearby paddock and a hill both bear the Yelf name.

Quilpie became the economic and service centre of the district and small outposts, like Toompine, declined in influence. The Toompine Pub is still a popular haunt for travellers and there are a few colourful identities from a wide range of backgrounds and nationalities mining at Duck Creek. Toompine now boasts a new community hall supported by the Progress Association and the Council. A shade covered sandpit for young children is located a small way from the pub and there is a tennis court, cricket pitch and claypigeon shoot for community use. The last race meeting at Toompine was held in 1954 with the final race being won by ‘Boy’ Speedy’s Gallant Buzz, ridden by Jack O’Shea. Local knowledge states that it was at this meeting that several energetic young jackeroos from the district drove a buggy (harnessed with jackeroos) through the hall of the hotel.

Fred and Joan Houghton who purchased the freehold and common lease in 1973 now own the pub. They currently have managers operating it, however, when they lived there Joan was renowned for playing the old honky tonk piano in the bar. Before the hall was built film nights were held outside,
projected onto a screen set up for the purpose. During floods, when the nearby Bulloo River bulges to become 8 kilometres wide, the pub can be cut off for weeks. In the 1970s a tourist family of two adults and seven children, the Davidsons from Sydney, were trapped at the pub from January until March waiting for the flood waters to subside.

Eromanga
Eromanga is a small township surrounded by the vastness of the plains that spread west to the Cooper. The Erounghoola Creek is located on the north bank of the settlement and this Creek gave its name to a nearby Station and in turn became the first name for Eromanga. ‘Windy Plain’ is the Aboriginal meaning of Eromanga and this name was coined some time later. It claims to be the ‘furtherest town from the sea’ and by any measure it is certainly a long way away at 860 kilometres.

The Eromanga town reserve was gazetted in 1879. However the town wasn’t officially surveyed until January 1885. By then dwellings had already been erected and the township was experiencing an optimistic period as major opal discoveries had been made throughout the Kyabra and Eromanga area from 1875 until the turn of the century. As a result the town became known locally as Opal Opolis.

The mail route passed through Erounghoola in 1882 and the first postal receiving office opened in 1892. This was located at the Royal Hotel which had been constructed in 1885 of bricks located nearby. The first publican was William McGill and it has changed hands a number of times until purchased by current owners, John and Georgina Walker in 1980.

In 1902 the full functions of a post office were created and George McWilliams the storekeeper became the postmaster. The store, which sold every conceivable thing, was opposite the Royal Hotel and continued operating for many years until it burnt down in the 1960s.

In 1897 the town had a number of skilled tradespeople offering a range of services including William Wholman the hairdresser, Philip Olsson the accountant, as well as a butcher, a saddler, a builder, a carpenter and a contractor. The fledging township supported a grog shanty which gave way to the better appointed Royal and Australian Hotels.

Coinciding with the developing interest in opals was the growth in large pastoral properties around the settlement. The township served to provide
these properties with workers and to supply the drovers passing through. Eromanga was on the main stock route to Bourke and also provided a wool scouring plant to remove some of the grease from wool clipped from the district’s rapidly increasing sheep population. Donald Angus acquired a bullock team in 1894 and carted wool from the area to Charleville. In doing so he pioneered the route to Quilpie and up the Bulloo River to the main town at the time - Adavale. Optimism regarding the town’s prospects grew with talk of the Great Western Railway which planned to bring all country suitable for stock within economic distance of a railway. The Act to commence the construction of the railway was passed by the Queensland Parliament in 1910. A subsequent visit to the area by the Commissioner for Railways, Charles Evans, accompanied by the Chief Engineer and the Inspector of Surveys resulted in a deviation to the proposed route. This would have advantaged Eromanga as it would have passed the town before proceeding to Tobermory. This boost to the community never eventuated as the rail link never proceeded past Quilpie.

The Eromanga Police Station was proclaimed in the Government Gazette on the 31 October 1900, however, it was in existence by 1899. It was located on a two acre allotment and was constructed of hardwood and galvanized iron. It was a modest dwelling one room contained a kitchen which also served as a courthouse when needed, one room was for use as a cell and the other room housed saddlery and the black tracker.

Constable John Smith, who became the Queensland Commissioner of Police in 1949, joined the Eromanga force in December 1912. He made his mark on the first day he arrived by arresting the intoxicated Cobb & Co driver who had carried him from Thargomindah.

These were busy times for the police whose ‘beat’ included the opal fields. Apart from dealing with the premature deaths of opal miners, a common occurrence due to the extreme conditions under which they worked, they also had fraud, theft and assault to deal with. The following case was investigated on 3 September 1904 by the Eromanga police who suspected criminal activity without being about to determine the exact nature of it.

I, Constable Walsh, arrived in Eromanga on the 3rd instance to investigate two opal buyers, Arnold and Claringbold who were supposed to be sending quantities of questionable opal from Eromanga to White Cliffs and Germany. After having made inquiries in the presence of Constable O'Brien, I found that they had only
bought one parcel of opal from William Thompson since arriving, yet had posted off several which are said to have contained opal. We then searched their room with a warrant and found three cases of opal and matrix which they said they had collected from the surrounding mines in the district. On questioning, they said they had sent nine cases of opal from Eromanga during the last three weeks. One of the parcels was what they had bought in town, and contained good opal, the remainder were only specimens. Arnold stated the specimens were of little value here, but in Germany were well sought after. They had no good opal in their possession.

The date the police cell burnt down is unknown, however the Charleville Times of 8 January 1932 decried the police practice of chaining offenders to a convenient post until they could be dealt with.

**Eromanga School**

The residents of Eromanga began agitating for a school in 1889 but it was to be 8 years later before they met with success. In 1891 John Logan wrote seeking the appropriate papers on which to make a formal submission for the assistance of the Department of Public Instruction. A year later a public meeting was held and a school committee formed which included P. Scanlon as secretary and the following men as members: J. Logan, E. Phillips, J. Wall, C. Johnston and Francis Murray.

There were 15 children between the ages 5 and 14 ready for instruction and £45 collected for the purpose. Matters took a different course, when a provisional school was sought by another school committee in 1895, which was believed to have been linked to a private school operating in the area. In 1895 a new committee was elected and a female teacher requested. This proved to be the most difficult aspect of instituting public education in Eromanga. The position of teacher was offered to Mrs Marshall and Miss Annie Dunlop both of whom declined, as did Lily Devlin who wrote stating:

‘owing to the very great distance it is (Eromanga) from my home (Warwick), the difficulty of reaching it, and the salary being too small for living in such a remote district, I decline to accept the offer’.

Four other women were also approached and each declined— it was too far, the money was too low, they were far too unwell etc. Miss Whipham finally agreed but as numbers had increased to 12 the committee decided to re-apply for a provisional school to be supplied by the Department and her
application lapsed. A site was selected and a galvanized iron shed was ready to serve the purpose in 1897.

The first teacher was Margaret Tully. Margaret had been living on Ray Station with her parents and siblings and was eager to get away from her increasingly difficult mother. It was also the peak of the drought and her meagre wages may have made life easier both for herself and her family then cutting scrub to feed the drought stricken stock back home. In 1900 Margaret wrote to the department about the extreme conditions brought about by teaching in the iron school. She went on to say that one child had fainted because of the heat and parents were keeping their children from school as a result. It is not known what changes, if any, were made as a result of her letter. Margaret left her position as teacher that year and was followed by Albert Braysia.

The school closed in 1908 because of low attendance and the committee’s inability to raise £20 contribution to the teacher’s salary. In mid 1909 moves were taken to reopen the school and Godfrey Debois, an itinerant teacher, reported on the situation.

Godfrey was employed by the Itinerant Teachers Service for the Eromanga District. Eromanga was the largest of 15 huge districts covered by 15 itinerant teachers. They had two to six horses to pull their Department of Public Instruction issue buckboards, complete with swags, tools and provisions for themselves and the classroom they established. They generally stayed a few days wherever they found a handful of children, taught them, set them lessons and hoped to get back in a few months. Sometimes parents would complain that the teacher had stayed too long at one place and not long enough with their children. ‘Feed’ was often the answer. If this was plentiful or provided, the teacher and their horses could stay longer. They travelled with an offsider, generally a youth under 18, paid by the Department, who opened gates, attended to the horses and set up and broke camp. In the 1920s the itinerant teachers were issued with a car.

Following Godfrey’s report the school was opened in 1910 only to close again the following year. It remained closed until 1917 when it reopened at Erounghoola Station to be relocated the following year to a rented room in a hotel owned by Francis Murray. The room provided was called the ‘Coffee Room’ and was generally reserved for men coming to the hotel. This custom was breached once when a visiting European gentleman and his wife
took whiskey in the room where she, no doubt accompanied by others, sang songs for hours.

The school did not operate for most of 1919 as a teacher could not be found. By 1923 school was again being conducted in an old galvanized iron shed on Erounhoola Station.

The Department hired a brick room for five years from Francis Murray. The school continued operation until 1936 when it closed for 30 years. In 1967 the Eromanga State School was opened on 9 April with an enrollment of 11 pupils. Since then numbers have fluctuated. The school closed again in 1981 and reopened in 1990. At one stage Betty Marchant, local resident and operator of the exchange, took in boarders from the stations to keep the school open.

In 1991 the Minister for Education, Mr Braddy, formally reopened the school and this was celebrated with a barbecue, stalls and games and a dinner dance held in the hall. This was combined with a roll call of past staff and students of the school. In 1991 all nine pupils of the Eromanga State Primary School appeared in a Weetbix television advertisement promoting the theme ‘Aussie kids are Weetbix kids’.

Recent Times

The Eromanga Branch of the Country Women’s Association has played an important role in the development of Eromanga. The first hall of any size used by them was built in 1927. This hall was pulled down and the Quilpie Shire Council built a new hall in 1988.

The branch reformed in 1966 after periods of inactivity. The CWA in Eromanga has always been active in community affairs and held its first mini show in 1971 as a fund raising venture. The main project of the branch is to support the Royal Flying Doctor Service which has a medical facility in the town. The facility was originally built in the 1950s by Australian Estates, the owners of Thylungra, and passed to the CWA for management. In 1978 Eromanga branch sponsored the Royal Flying Doctor Service charity princess, Miss Narelle Pegler, who raised more than $15,000 for the quest.

The Eromanga telephone exchange was once a vital link to the outside world and the performance of the operator was as important as having reliable equipment. Ellie Schied, and a number of others, took on this role before Betty Marchant took over. Betty worked as the operator for 30 years from
her home until the exchange converted from party lines to automatic services in 1991. The post office was also located at Betty’s house and it closed several years after the exchange. Betty recalls her work in this interview recorded with her in the year 2000:

When we first took it over it wasn’t very busy because hardly anyone rang up because we only had one line to Quilpie and about two to Charleville, and then you’d have to wait to get to Roma. Sometimes you’d have to wait an hour to get a call from here to Brisbane.

There were about 5 party lines and some of the party lines had about 4 subscribers to that line. Some people were quite known to listen in. You never said anything on the line that you didn’t want everyone to know. When they couldn’t hear you’d have to repeat. I remember having to repeat an argument between a husband and a wife. Another time we had to repeat for a doctor and what he said about the lady wasn’t very nice. My husband was repeating that and he said “I can’t say that” but the doctor said, “you have to”.

Eromanga has been given a significant boost in recent years with the discovery of oil in 1984 at the Tintaburra oilfield. There is extensive oil exploration in the region and the Inland Oil Refinery was built in 1985 to process local crude oil into diesel, kerosene and naptha. This has given rise to other businesses, including Mclvers Transport who truck crude oil to the Jackson Oilfield for pumping to Brisbane. The population of the town has grown to approximately 80 since the discovery of oil. In recent years Eromanga has held a seafood spectacular with fresh seafood delivered to the town to celebrate its status as ‘the furtherest town from the sea’.

Adavale

The breeze caught Ada’s veil as she crossed Blackwater Creek giving rise to the call ‘there goes Ada’s veil’ and this place became known thereafter as Adavale. Ada was the wife of Ernest James Stevens, who was travelling in 1870 to the Imbadulla and Injamulla runs leased by him since 1869. These were later consolidated to form Tintinchilla which eventually became part of the Milo & Welford Downs holding. By 1879 E.J Stevens was the member for Warrégo and would later become the State Treasurer.

The Adavale town reserve was gazetted on 3 December 1878 however the town wasn’t officially surveyed until November 1880. By this time there were already dwellings in place. The growth of Adavale was linked to the
discovery of opals in the surrounding area, but more importantly to the
development of the large pastoral properties surrounding it. Adavale
supported a population of 156 in 1886 with the population peaking at 300 in
1925 - five years prior to the administrative centre relocating to Quilpie.\textsuperscript{112}

Adavale became a service centre and a stop-over for Cobb & Co coaches,
teamsters and drovers making their way to Bourke, the station properties and
to the developing townships.

Adavale soon supported six hotels. The first hotel was the Imperial in 1880.
The Duracks later owned this pub in 1884-5. The granting of a publican’s
general license to Fitzwalter and Skinner in 1885 followed. By 1890 there
were six drinking establishments: The Imperial, The Greengate, The
Blackwater, The Great Western, the Royal and the Stockmans Home.

Such a thirsty population required the services of the constabulary and the
first police station was constructed in 1884. The barracks consisted of one
courtroom, a day room, one bedroom and a kitchen with verandah front and
rear with two cells attached for prisoners. The officer’s quarters consisted of
4 rooms and kitchen with a small store and verandah front and back. In
1900, 640 acres were acquired for a paddock with the Adavale Bore running
through it.\textsuperscript{113} Court sittings were presided over by Augustus Henry Pegler,
manager of Milo station, and D.MacNeill, both Justices of the Peace. In a
case reported in the Charleville Times Charley Fan sued W Bundren in 1897
for the non payment of goods supplied. Bundren counter claimed seeking
payment for five years’ wages. Bundren lost the claim to the delight of the
other Chinese present and the rest of the community.

There were two Chinese market gardens near Blackwater Creek and the
gardeners delivered their fruit and vegetables in a horse drawn cart. Two
Chinese men also ran a baker’s shop: Charlie De Chong and Jop Tye.

The National Bank of Australasia established a branch in Adavale. A new
manager was appointed in 1885 to discover that the books had not been
written up for three weeks, the cash was £20 short, and no-one knew when
the cash had last been counted. Geoffrey Blainey in his history of the
National Bank of Australasia summed up the despair of the workers
operating in this far-flung outpost:
The old premises lately vacated consisted of a low iron shed adjoining an iron store quite out of town... The heat in summer of such a building of only six and a half feet high must have been intense...

...the new manager reported that he has selected a “quick reliable officer” as accountant. Eleven months passed, and head office heard again from the new manager at Adavale. His ‘quick reliable officer,’ owed the publicans £170, had embezzled the bank’s funds and the height of ignominy – had spent the previous Saturday afternoon ‘racing through the town in a half nude state mad from drink.’

Progress was being made in the town and the Adavale bore, with its strong smell of sulphur, was sunk in 1900. This hot water still bursts to the surface from an artesian bore sunk to a depth of 3398 feet in 1900. It has served the community since then, being reticulated to the township in 1962.

A mail service operated once a week between Charleville and Adavale from January 1, 1881 until 1889 when Cobb and Co ran a service twice weekly to Adavale leaving Charleville at 7am on Sundays and Thursdays. ‘CrackerJack’ Larkins was one of the better known Cobb & Co coach drivers operating a number of coach runs in the district. He was dubbed ‘CrackerJack’ because the crack of his whip could be heard before he arrived at his destination. It was common practice for coach drivers to sound a bugle on their approach but as ‘Crackerjack’ didn’t have the wind he used the noise of the whip instead. ‘Crackerjack’ went on to operate the mail runs with a car and trailer and then trucks. He eventually sold the contracting business he had developed to Kevin Costello. ‘CrackerJack’ Larkins also became a councillor with the Quilpie Shire Council in 1936, a position he held for many years.

The first post office in Adavale opened on January 1, 1881 and the postmaster was Alfred Skinner who worked for £12 a year. The telegraph office opened in 1888. A new post office was built in 1890 at a cost of £1000. This building was taken over by the Commonwealth following federation in 1901. An exciting development took place in Adavale with the establishment of the telephone exchange and the first connection to Fitzwalter and Co in 1909. At this time Milo and Welford Pastoral Co. Ltd were also connected.
The post office continued to operate until 1940 when it was reduced in status to a non-official post office. Patricia Donohue was appointed postmistress from May 1, 1964, after many years as the authorised assistant. Pat became the postal agent in 1985 in an agreement that terminated in 1991. Pat had worked ‘on and off’ for the post office since 1943 when she commenced her duties as a part-time telephonist.

By 1911 there was a small hospital, a school, a blacksmith, a butcher, a carpenter, a chemist, a tobacconist, a dressmaker, saddlers and storekeepers, including the Fitzwalters. The shops traded in a paper currency called ‘Shinplasters’ before the advent of the Commonwealth Bank. Although Shinplasters were traded in the western region those receiving them were often suspicious that they had been baked and would fall apart like confetti before they could be used.

In the 1890s there was a doctor in Adavale who succumbed to the heat and the grog and often had to be tied to a buggy and taken against his will to see the sick and injured. In the *Charleville Times* in August 1897 the community had had enough of him:

> I am informed that steps are being taken to secure the services of another doctor. It has been proved that the district can support one. A small boy met with a very bad accident the other day and could not get medical treatment owing to our doctor’s indisposition. Talking of accidents the doctor met with one lately, which at first was thought to be serious, but beyond a shaking no ill effects occurred: he had been out on his bike and not turning up as usual a search was made resulting in the missing man and his bike being found; the former on top of the latter!

The Shire Hall had an office built on one end for the shire clerk. In later years, when the council moved to Quilpie, the hall was used for picture shows. The hall was also used for church services. In 1943 the Anglican priest, Brother Roberts from the Bush Brotherhood married Muriel Jones and George Sheenan. It was a February day that was so hot the birds fell dead from the trees. The Catholic Church was also represented in Adavale with St Eugene’s Church.

Augustus Pegler was the chairman of the Adavale Divisional Board and Harry Pegler, among others, was a member of the Shire Council in 1909.
The demise of Adavale was ensured when the decision was made to run the railway through to Quilpie, bypassing Adavale altogether. The political base was moved from Adavale to Quilpie in 1930 and the Adavale Shire Council was dissolved on 17 July 1930 and Quilpie Shire Council established on the same day. The population continued to ebb away slowly until the major flood of 1963 when population decline occurred rapidly leaving the skeleton town that exists today.

**Adavale School**

Frances Quirke from Galway, Ireland, arrived to take up her duties as teacher at Adavale State School on the 1 October 1888. The Adavale School Committee had informed the Department of Public Instruction that they were ready for her and that the rented school premises were ready to be used as a school. This was not so and Frances could not begin to teach her 21 charges until a week had passed and the work of creating a school was finished. Frances immediately informed the Department of the situation and they promptly docked her a weeks’ pay as she was unable to fulfill the duties for which she was paid. She stayed for eight years at Adavale and in 1897 a new school was erected. Frances could not endure the summers nor afford the expense of escaping them and she was transferred in 1906. School numbers peaked in 1900 when there were 67 pupils. Numbers declined from this point until 1968 when the school closed on the 31 December of that year because of low enrollments.

Australia’s post war migration boom resulted in Adavale playing host to a number of migrants from Europe. Many of these men originally came from Poland and travelled to Australia from displaced persons camps in the 1950s. Fifteen of them worked at Adavale on the Blackwater Creek Floodway Project for the Main Roads Department. They lived in tents and took their meals at the Greengate Hotel. Every second week they were taken to Quilpie to buy toiletries and enjoy what a bigger town had to offer. Some of these men, like Jan Jarzembski met local girls, established businesses and stayed in Quilpie.

On 9 April 1999 the contribution made by Polish immigrants between 1949 and 1951 was commemorated in a ceremony at Adavale.

**Flooding**
Adavale has always been subject to floods as Blackwater Creek overflows its low banks and swirls into the township. The swollen, Bulloo River joins the waters of Blackwater Creek to add to the inundation.

One of the worst floods occurred in 1963 when Adavale became famous for the number of people stranded on rooftops and in trees. One party of eleven people were stranded for 24 hours on the roof of the Greengate Hotel in surging 6ft water. In a remarkable operation they were winched to safety by the RAAF.114

Postmaster Dally received a Certificate of Merit for keeping the communication channels open during the flood. He did not feel he was worthy of the award, however Bernie O'Brien, the Director of Posts and Telegraphs made the following statement when presenting the Certificate:

"...from correspondence I have received from Mr Dalley he feels that he is not worthy. When you consider that he had 3'6" of water swirling under the post office and another 18" swirling through his office I am certain that he is worthy and I am very pleased to be here tonight to make the presentation..."

Following the flood many residents left, and others formed the Adavale Re-Building Committee to seek the support of the Quilpie Shire Council and the state government in relocating the town to higher ground. The town was not re-located but most of the buildings were sold and moved. The original hospital was removed to Bulloo Lakes Station. The maternity wing remained for a little longer until it too was removed. The store, butchers shop, blacksmith shop and bakery all folded up. The store has since become the liquor outlet with a limited licence. The Great Western Hotel was dismantled board by board and moved to Quilpie were it was rebuilt as a guest house and dance hall. The Blackwater Hotel the Imperial Hotel and the Greengate were all destroyed by fire.

In 1983, when the Adavale population stood at about 12, a plane carrying 12 people and chartered by the ATCO-AMP Pty Ltd drilling company, developed engine problems and crashed killing all on board. The plane came down very near Adavale. In 1985 a monument was erected on the crash site by Slyvia Anderson in memory of her son who lost his life in the accident.

Cheepie
Cheepie was never a large and bustling town but it was once a busy fettlers’ camp supporting a school, boarding house, post office, hotel, railway workers’ cottages, local hall and a few shops. The flower show, still an important feature of the Quilpie District Show, originated in Cheepie and the tiny township supported two air shows.

Cheepie has an unusual name and it comes from the Aboriginal work meaning ‘Black Duck’. Originally part of the Bierbank Consolidated Holding the Cheepie township was excised from the Munberry run. The town took shape with the development of the line to Cheepie as part of the establishment of the Great Western Railway Line. The township was surveyed into three streets in 1914. The streets were called: Paroo, Munberry and Blakeney, the latter name being that of the surveyor.

Located 80k east of Quilpie, down a track from the main Charleville Road, it sits quietly now, home only to a small receiving post office. In the year 2000 it was still possible to be given change in one and two cent coins, long phased out in the rest of the country, but held here for the purpose, should the need for change arise, in a small jar under the counter.

The railway opened in July, 1914 and the post office opened at the railway station a month later. The railway was the main focus of the township for many years, and the complex included a station master’s house - 2nd class and devoid of ornamentation, which was eventually relocated to Charleville. A goods shed, sheep yards, trucking yards and a 30,000 gallon tank completed the complex. Many of the railway workers’ cottages were removed to Quilpie when the rail went through to the town and the population in Cheepie declined.

In 1916 a portable police station, which was never upgraded, was completed at Cheepie. The station consisted of a tent cover, camphor boards and galvanized tin.

Jack Castles moved with his itinerant family to Cheepie when he was eight. Jack’s father operated the boarding house and store before moving on. Jack stayed at Cheepie working on Buthana Station for a while. He has the distinction of being one of the few people who rode on the first official train from Charleville to Quilpie in 1917. There were many owners of the store over the years and the post office was relocated from the railway station to Mr Schnitzerling’s store in February 1928. In later years Mrs Castles, who operated the post office, would go over and cook breakfast at the railway.
station for the passengers. As the years passed the post office also became the telephone exchange operating the party line from 9am until 9pm Monday to Friday, on Saturday mornings and for an hour on Sundays.

Cheepie also served the surrounding property owners and supported a number of community organisations, including an active branch of the CWA. In 1956 the CWA decided to have a flower show as a fundraiser. The show was always held in September so there was a great range of flowers, vegetables and fruit represented. In all the years of its operation it was only washed out once. The CWA planted trees in Cheepie and regularly decorated a Christmas tree for the children, one year this event attracted 100 children gazing in awe and excitement.

There were also a few race meetings held at Cheepie along with tennis and cricket matches. The Cheepie Progress Association was still active in 1988 and planned a Gymkhana to celebrate the Bicenntennial. In earlier years the Buffalo Lodge met for monthly meetings in the school along with a local branch of the United Graziers Association.

The Council built the air strip and it was used by private planes from Charleville. The local community worked with Charlie Fogarty, the publican, and the Cheepie Progress Association to organise two air shows. The shows featured aerial acrobatics and they were very successful but they proved to be a big undertaking for small town with a declining population.

A further blow to the prospects of the town occurred when the pub burnt down in the 1980s, a temporary bar replaced the pub for some time, although, plans to rebuild never eventuated.

**Cheepie School**

The construction of the railway line through to Cheepie ensured that the township had enough children to sustain the initial establishment of a school. To this end a school committee was formed in 1915 with Ernest Culliford as secretary. There were 18 children and most of them were the children of railway employees engaged on the construction of the line through to Quilpie.

A tent building was erected which served as the first school building. The school closed for many years reopening with classes in the hall, a galvanised iron building, which was made available by the adjoining hotel keeper Mr Redman. At this time the school was visited by the departmental ophthalmic
officer who recommended additional windows be added to the hall and other changes be made to the layout of the blackboard and desks to make more use of the natural light. In 1933 the school ceased to be a ‘provisional’ school and became a state school with a designated school building.

In 1915 the first teacher was Thomas Speedy and all subsequent teachers, except Pauline Baker in 1972, were also male. The school had a chequered career. After two years of operation it closed, reopening again in 1930 as a result of community pressure. It closed again in 1952 to reopen six years later. The school grounds consisted of three acres complete with tennis court. During the long periods when the school was closed thick dust would settle over the seats, and benches were ‘borrowed’ for use in the hall. Apart from this, all was as it had been left when the voices of children could be heard throughout the small township.

The Cheepie State School closed on 11 April 1974 due to low attendance figures. Some time after the school closed for good, the Quilpie Shire Council purchased the school buildings and moved them closer to the hotel, where they were used as camping quarters for the road gangs.

Quilpie

At the time of which I speak, 1884, there was a large camp of aboriginals on the Bulloo, at which is now known as The Gardens, and just behind the present site of the Quilpie Hospital. There was an old cattle yard at the site which was erected in the seventies by a person named Welsh.

Donald Angus

This early description of the site that was to become part of the township of Quilpie was made by one of its earliest residents. Donald Angus travelled with his parents, who were teamsters, throughout the district until eventually settling in Quilpie permanently in 1918.

Quilpie, originally known as Quilpill, was excised from the Yungerah run which formed part of the vast Comongin holding. It was a name derived from the Aboriginal word for stone curlew and subsequent street names have mostly been named after native birds. The town was surveyed in 1915 and became an important centre when the train line inched its way from Cheepie to arrive in Quilpie in 1917. Along with it came the fettlers who had worked on the railway, and settlers from Adavale and beyond, who possibly anticipated the important role Quilpie would play due to the arrival of the
railway connection. Plans to extend the Great Western Line beyond Quilpie never eventuated, some say this was because the local member died and along with him his lobbying power, and others because the First World War created both monetary and manpower shortages. Either way, Quilpie became and has remained ‘the end of the line’. Moves to close the Charleville to Quilpie line in 1993 were met with fierce local opposition. In response Premier Wayne Goss scrapped his plan and the line to Quilpie remained open.

The police established themselves in the 1916/17 financial year with two constables living and working in two tents. In 1918 a five roomed house with a shingle roof had been constructed for them and they also had 1280 acres set aside for a police paddock. They paid the railway 4 shillings per thousand gallons for water and by 1922 this was ‘laid on to the station from the railway water supply tank’.117

Many others in the town paid the local lads to collect water for them in goat carts from the Bulloo River located about 1 kilometre from the town. Goats were enormously important to the area, providing milk in the absence of the dairy cow and meat when beef and mutton were unavailable. Jim Challenor moved to Quilpie in 1917 to work as a blacksmith and a wheelwright. He is believed to have been the first man to wed in Quilpie marrying Ivy Hall in the dining room (in the absence of a church) of the boarding house in 1923. The Challenor family relied on their goats for carrying and for milk. Goats were also scavengers eating the mulga and native herbage and anything else they could get their jaws on.

...I had established a beautiful backyard of vegetables of all varieties. (The ground had been fertilised with goat manure.) I went to bed one night and forgot to close the back gate to my residence. I walked to the back landing of my old weatherboard home the next morning, and for a brief moment...I pondered what the heck had changed so quickly – then suddenly I realised what was different – my ENTIRE vegetable garden had disappeared.118

In 1934 the Council was so concerned about the ranging goat problem they implemented a by-law requiring all goats to be yarded at night time or risk them being impounded. This, at a time when many animals roamed unrestricted by fences or enclosures. Currently goats are fetching more money than sheep. As a consequence the feral goat population is declining.
The proverbial butcher, baker and candlestick maker serviced the settlement and the Chinaman probably provided the vegetables. Fitzwalter and Co established two stores, Mrs Culliford had one boarding house and Percy Smaldon the other. Cullifords had previously had a boarding house at Cheepie and probably cast their fortunes with the development of the new town - Quilpie. There were a number of saddlers and Ted Spice became the tailor. The mail was established in 1917 and Michael Power became the postmaster and mail contractor, servicing an adult population of about 40. Michael Power had previously held the license of the Toompine Hotel and had also established the first Commonwealth bank agency in Quilpie. A Chinese man developed vegetable gardens on the shores of Lake Houdraman. No one knows when he started work, however, the gardens existed until well after the Second World War. Barney Rutledge remembered him well. As a boy Barney found the whole watering system fascinating. In this excerpt from an interview he conducted for the Quilpie Shire History he shares the details:

He had a little windmill pumping water up into a pond and he had a bridge across the pond and two big buckets and he walked across to lift the water up and then walked down the rows and tipped it out. Although he had a windmill he didn’t go any further than putting pipes in. He watered it all by bucket.

There was a feeling of optimism in Quilpie, (despite the effects on the region of the growing slump in beef and wool markets) as services in the town improved in the 1920s and several pubs were in existence with another under construction.

In 1926 a huge fire engulfed most of the commercial sector of town. The buildings burnt included George Burns’ three shops and billiard & refreshment room, a house, Gibson Brothers store, Michael & Rosetta Powers uncompleted hotel, James Corones Quilpie Hotel and Percy Smaldon’s Imperial Café. Michael & Rosetta Power’s hotel, called the Club Hotel, was due for completion in three weeks’ time. The Powers were experienced publicans being the former owners of the South Western Hotel in Toompine. The Charleville Sub Inspector of Police wrote a report on the fire and excerpts from this report follow:

Sir
I beg to report that yesterday the 9th instant at about 1.30am a fire started in a billiard room occupied by Edward Davidson in Brolga Street, Quilpie and practically demolished the whole street.

The billiard room was situated on allotment 7, section 2, of town of Quilpie and all the buildings in that street were practically touching each other and once the fire started it was impossible to extinguish the flames, there being very little water in the town for that purpose ... The new building to be called the Club Hotel was in the course of erection, and was totally destroyed by fire ... James Corones, licensee of the Quilpie Hotel, also had his hotel building completely destroyed by fire: this was a wood and iron structure consisting of 16 bed rooms, bar, two parlous, 2 dining rooms ... the hotel at the present carried a heavy stock of beer and liquors ... I have taken written statements from all owners and occupiers of the destroyed buildings and damaged property and also from eyewitnesses. As I have first hand knowledge in this case and have made searching inquires respecting the destruction of the said properties by fire I am of the opinion that the origin of the fire was an accident and that no person or persons can be blamed for the said fire ... 119

Michael and Rosetta Power rebuilt the Club Hotel and after Michael’s death Rosetta continued to manage it. Rosetta eventually sold the hotel and established the Quilpie Guest House in about 1937, which she later sold to Mrs Lyons.

Quilpie continued to grow slowly in size and importance as its area of economic influence, brought about by the rail head, developed. It annexed territory previously controlled by Charleville and to a lesser extent by Cunnamulla. This modest growth contrasted with a general trend of decline among western Queensland centres.

James Corones
James (Jim) Corones was a colourful figure. His immaculate dress and noticeable charm marked him as different in the largely Anglo-Saxon bush township of Quilpie. He was born in Greece in 1895 and arrived in Australia in 1906. Eventually he joined his uncle and mentor, Harry Corones, who had established the Hotel Corones in Charleville. Jim made a huge impact on Quilpie by becoming joint owner with Harry of three hotels in the town. He arrived in Quilpie alone in 1921 but was soon joined by 20 year old ‘young Harry,’ his brother.
The hotel that Jim bought was a galvanized iron and wood structure known as the Quilpie Hotel. This was burnt down in the 1926 fire and in its place rising ‘phoenix like’ from the ashes was its replacement, The Brick Hotel, which still stands. Jim had immense faith in the prospects of the town and built his second hotel the Imperial in 1925. His third acquisition was the Club Hotel which he leased from 1934 and purchased in 1965. In 1992 fire claimed the Imperial Hotel destroying what was described as ‘the best pub in Quilpie’.

When the Council transferred from Adavale to Quilpie the shire clerk rented a room at the Brick Hotel until new council chambers were completed in 1934. When the Quilpie bore was sunk in 1932 Jim obtained an electricity franchise and built a pelton wheel which worked from the power of the bore water. He lit his hotels and Quilpie’s main street at a cost of 6 shillings and 8 pence. As the town grew the shire council decided to build a power house to meet the town’s expanding needs. Jim Corones surrendered his franchise free of charge and began using council electricity at considerable cost to himself.

Apart from his business dealings in the town he was a great supporter of social and civic life. He raised funds for the hospital, assisted Len McManus when his first grocery shop burnt down, and funded the local rugby teams jerseys, ensuring that they carried the Greek colours.

Jim Corones died on 4 July 1966 and a Greek Orthodox priest who had flown in from Brisbane conducted his funeral service in St Mathews Church. A large entourage of Greek friends and relatives including the Greek Consul, Alec Freckleigh, who was also Jim’s godson, attended along with 500 other people who had been touched by his life and his deeds. His funeral was the largest seen in Quilpie and he was buried in the Quilpie Cemetery. Following Jim’s death an icon of ‘Our Lady of the Myrtle’, the patron saint of the Greek Island of Kythria was installed in St Mathews Anglican Church by Vassilia Corones in memory of her husband Jim.

Amy Johnson
The young aviatrix astounded the town when she landed on the outskirts of Quilpie, about 150 metres west of the sheep trucking yards, in 1930. At this time there were no landing facilities in Quilpie, although Amy may have mistaken the bare, compacted land, made so by thousand of hoofs on their way to the stock yards, for a landing strip.
Amy Johnson landed at Darwin and was scheduled to fly to Brisbane via Charleville. Her map showed that the train terminated at Charleville, when the terminus is at Quilpie. She landed at 2.30pm and the children were dismissed from classes to see her and visit the historic landing place.

Her plane was refueled and serviced by a local mechanic, Bill Clarke; meanwhile she had a meal at the Imperial Hotel before proceeding on her way.\textsuperscript{122}

**Town and Shire Developments**

The Adavale Shire books were closed on the 16 November 1930 and the clerk of Adavale Shire Council, A.S Narracott, performed the duties of acting Shire Clerk to Quilpie Shire Council until the appointment was filled. It appears that Mr Narracott was successful in regaining his position as he continued as clerk with Quilpie Shire Council. Councillors of the first Quilpie Shire Council represented some of the families that are still in Quilpie today. Two members of the Pegler family were on the first council: H.G as chairman and E.J Pegler as councillor, other councillors included F.B Rutledge, W. Paterson, L. Rutledge, R.E Gibson, J.Wade, W. Hall and E.A Sherwin.

The township’s infrastructure developed in the 1930s and the improvements to basic services enabled new businesses to become established. The most dramatic of these improvements was the sinking of an artesian bore. This was first mentioned in the Council minutes of 1931 when quotations were sought from private companies for the sinking of the bore and the reticulation of the town’s water supply. The Council agreed to borrow £10,000 and they rejoiced at the meeting of 8 October 1932 when they received news that the state government had decided to provide assistance. They happily noted the ‘magnificent gift of the Government in subsidizing the cost of the artesian bore and reticulation scheme for the township of Quilpie’.

The introduction of a reliable water supply enabled the development of a wool scour by Thompson and Hulse on the current airport site. In 1939 Council agreed to provide a mains pipe which was able to deliver 99000 gallons per day to allow for the scour’s operation. The scour was one of the only secondary industries in town and though small, employing approximately ten people, its impact was important. An old resident, Ronald ‘Bronk’ McConnell, noted “it was very interesting to watch, they would
have all their washed wool out on tarpaulins nearly dry and a whirl wind
would come and the sky would be white with wool.” The wool boom in the
late 1940s early 1950s undermined the viability of the scour as prices were
so good for wool that cleaning made little difference to them. Another factor
affecting the scour was the higher rates charged by the Railways Department
for the carting of scoured wool.123

Following the successful introduction of water to the town Council wrote to
the lands department for an allotment for the purposes of building a new
council chambers. The first meeting was held in the new chambers on 27
October 1934 and the Chairman invited all councillors and the clerk to
dinner at the Hotel Imperial to celebrate. Around this time Mrs Wildy and
Mrs Watts were celebrating themselves as they had been granted a licence to
screen sound and silent pictures on Sunday nights after church hours.

The removal of nightsoil by horse and cart was a council function until the
town was sewered in 1938, well before many other towns, and decades
before most residents of the capital city, Brisbane, could claim the same
convenience.

Following the Second World War the town experienced a prosperous time
and wool prices were booming. Quilpie had grown as a railhead, trucking
cattle from the Channel Country and beyond. It was also important as a mail
centre servicing the more remote towns. During this period further
community facilities were provided with the construction of the Shire Hall in
1955, the formation of the Quilpie Bowling Club and the opening of the
clubhouse on 4 July 1954. A city visitor has captured some of the flavour of
the town in a letter she wrote to a friend in October 1958:

We went into town this afternoon. Quilpie township boasts three
hotels, a picture theatre, one shire hall, branches of every company
e.g. ‘Primaries’ etc. and about a dozen shops, none of which seem to
have what you want. It also has a bowling green, the only green patch
for miles. It is now 3.30pm Sunday. It is over 100 degrees. There is a
howling dust storm blowing. The floor and everything is covered with
dust, If it keeps up much longer we will have our own private beach,
sand hills and all, but alas no water. Last night we went to the pictures
to see ‘The Solid Gold Cadillac’ which was quite good, then on to the
Church of England Ball for about an hour or so and wound up at
someone’s home in Quilpie carrying on regardless until 3.15am.124
Power

In 1951 the Quilpie Electric Authority formed, and electricity was generated by a Ruskin engine. The power was turned on in March 1952 and extensions to the power house were completed in 1958. This provided power to the town, however, power to the rural community was created by the stations themselves through the use of their own generators.

The most significant event in the supply of electricity to the shire came when the premier, Sir Joh Bjelke Petersen, introduced the Rural Electrification Subsidy Scheme. The premier promised the people of Quilpie, during the heat of an election campaign and a visit to the town, that they would be promptly included in the scheme following his reelection. Quilpie was fast tracked as a result of this promise and the electrification became the biggest rural development in the southern hemisphere built at any one time. Phil Watkins, the man charged with overseeing the construction of the scheme said:

Construction time went from May 1986 to June 1988. We connected 100 rural properties but there were also another 80 additional points of supply, mainly for shearing sheds, or water pumping and second houses on the properties... We had three (teams of) contractors doing the distribution lines, and another (team of) contractors doing the 66kV transmission line from Charleville to Quilpie. They had caravans and shifted along the lines and stayed in shearing sheds along the properties... We had a get-together with the local people and the contractors. And there was a board set up with lights on it to show how the scheme would come on and all these lights would switch on to the north and west and south of Quilpie.

The old power house in Quilpie was closed in December 1987 and the rural power scheme was implemented in 1988 when the shire as a whole was connected to the coastal grid via a 2700km power line to the Tarong Power Station.

A number of councillors...

A number of councillors have served on the council for over 20 years, one such person was Bob Sommerfield OBE. John Waugh, also deserves mention as the recreation reserve ‘John Waugh Park’ commemorates his name. The park has been developed as a sporting venue for football, cricket, tennis, netball and basketball. John Waugh was elected to the council in 1943 stood as chairman for 20 years and resigned in January 1969.
Len McManus was first elected to the Quilpie Shire Council on April 30, 1955. He served seven three year terms and was awarded a certificate for 20 continuous years of service from Sir Gordon Chalk, MLA at Mount Isa during the annual meeting of the Local Government Association. Although he fought for many town and country improvements one of his legacies is the annual fishing carnival.

‘Nelly the Yellow Belly’ has never been caught despite a bounty on her head. Since 1969 a fishing carnival has been held annually at the Como and Harrington waterhole approximately 30 kilometres north of Quilpie on the Bulloo River. Nelly was tagged at the inaugural competition and she has never been caught. Back in '69 the prize for bagging her was $100 and that amount has been going up with ever year she remains uncaught.

Councillor Sommerfield OBE and chairman of the Quilpie Shire Council received the keys to the new council chambers in April 1985. The building in Brolga Street was completed seven weeks ahead of schedule and was opened at a public ceremony by the member for Gregory North, the Honourable WH Glasson, MLA on 3 May 1985.

Communications in Quilpie and the Shire
The huge distances between people and places imposed an isolation that improved communications has diminished. The introduction of technology has allowed services and contact to take place that provides a mantle of security over the district and lessens the disadvantages common to remote areas. Today the challenges relate more to keeping young people on the land and in the district and creating work and other opportunities for them.

Post, telephone, telegraph & 2way radio
The post office grew along with the town. Michael Power’s rooms were rented by the post office, which was raised to official status on 3 May 1921. This development encouraged the promotion of Mr Bown, postal assistant, to Postmaster. Following successful testing of the phone line between Charleville and Quilpie the phone was operating in Quilpie from December 1922. The following year the telephone exchange was opened on 7 November 1923 and a casual telegraph messenger was appointed to relay the messages to the townsfolk.
The phone was connected to the office used by the Council in December 1930 and disconnected at Adavale, severing one of the last ties with the former administrative centre.\(^{126}\)

The post office moved to new offices in 1936 in Brolga Street and the manual telephone annex was built in about 1967. Prior to the establishment of the exchange, graziers like Barney Rutledge's father had a line to Paterson's store in Quilpie who would relay information by phone to the exchange in Cheepie. From there the exchange could contact Toowoomba enabling Barney's father to speak to his father living there.

In 1987 the manual exchange was converted to automatic allowing 286 Telecom customers to dial direct anywhere in the world. Underground cabling was upgraded along with radio links to Roma. In 1990 rural properties were able to use DRCS phones and it was the first time many people could truly say 'when you made a phone call, you could actually hear the other person!'

Sandy McKenzie from Plevna Downs recounts the 'fun' of early communications:

We had no telephone, all we had was the pedal wireless. You used to pedal it to generate the power to operate the wireless. We used to get correspondence papers [for our schooling], we didn’t have School of the Air then.

The School of the Air came in 1966. Originally we were on to the Cloncurry base. All our communication was done through telegram. If you wanted stores, business deals, selling sheep it was all done through telegram via your agent, you would tell him how many sheep you wanted to sell. He would send a telegram back. Of course everyone was listening on the air to what you are doing. There was nothing very private about it. We would send messages through the flying doctor base and they telephoned them through. It was the same when they opened the Charleville Base.

We didn’t have a phone here until 1969. If you wanted to contact another station you would go through the flying doctor base and they would contact them. They did a lot of non-medical work. You would have your sessions three times a day, but the weather would play havoc with it.
I remember my father sending a telegram one day and the pedal came off and he was down on one hand turning the other pedal and trying to talk at the same time as reading the telegram out. It was very funny listening to the women operating the pedal wireless. If they had a long telegram to read out they would run out of puff and you’d hear them getting slower and slower. In the end you could hardly hear them, and you’d miss the last bit and they would have to repeat it. They’d get their breath back and off they’d go again.

The Royal Flying Doctor Service radio network was an important communication tool for many of the isolated properties. Radiogram traffic was taken at the base and immediately typed on a teleprinter which was connected to the Post Office Automatic Telegraph System. From this point the post office took responsibility for delivering the telegram. If the message was to another isolated station, or if a telegram was lodged at a post office for a station, they were transmitted over the Royal Flying Doctor Base network. School of the Air was also conducted over the RFDS network and radio gossip, also called the Galah session, put people in contact with each other.

Radio
Little is known about the early days of radio reception in Quilpie, however, Council minutes indicate the existence of the Quilpie Broadcast Wireless Listeners League in 1936. A reliable medium frequency reception was available from the local Charleville commercial station 4VL, and poor to fair signals from 4QL in Longreach were attainable by some. VLQ9 and southern states domestic high frequency services were accessible for those with suitable receivers.

A new station 4CH, at Charleville went to air in June 1986 providing programming from the ABC regional program via the Longreach. Studio.

Quilpie Newspapers
For a small town Quilpie was remarkable in sustaining its own local paper for many years. The first paper to carry local news and to support itself through local advertisements began in 1934 calling itself The District Herald Quilpie and continued for many years before folding. On September 9, 1975 it was revived, after a gap of 40 years, under the name of The Quilpie Courier. The Courier was published every Tuesday. Unfortunately publication was limited to a few years as the paper was unable to survive with a small readership and limited revenue possibilities.
Television
Television proved to be more difficult to provide for the residents of the shire. In 1974 technical and economic difficulties were cited as reasons for withholding the service to relatively remote and sparsely populated areas. Quilpie Shire Council forwarded many letters on the subject to the Australian Broadcasting Commission, however, it was not until the 1980s that a television service was provided. Many residents had television and video sets to watch hired videos long before they had any TV to watch. Margaret Pegler, from ‘Trinidad’ notes in her diary that she received the first reception on April 20, 1981 of Channels 0, 1 & 2 although the picture was poor. By 1982 she had good reception but this was probably due to the new antennae built by Don, her husband, who provided the same service to others in the district. In 1986 the Peglers and others swapped to the Aussat satellite to receive TV reception from Intersat.

Community and Cultural Services

The Flying Doctor Service
“A snake bit my finger when I was picking cucumbers to take to a party...”
Once this would have meant that you took the axe and tried to chop off your finger, responding like plucky Frances Hammond had done when she received a snake bite in the 1880s.

Today, and since 1928, residents of Quilpie Shire have been able to rely on the Royal Flying Doctor Service for medical emergencies. The RFDS base was located in Cloncurry until the Charleville base opened in 1943 improving response times for residents in the south-west.

Some years ago Margaret Pegler was bitten on the finger by a snake and flown to Charleville for treatment.

We were going to visit some friends at Terachy and we had lots of cucumbers in the garden and I just went out to pick some of them. I had just put my hand in to get the second cucumber and a snake latched on to my finger. I had to shake it to get it off and then I saw it was a brown snake. Doctor Tim O’Leary with The Flying Doctor Service came out to pick me up. The fang marks were about ¼ of an inch apart. When we were dealing with this over the air a chappie called in to the base, after we’d finished the call, and said that if the fang marks were that far apart the snake would have to have been
about 6 foot long. When the doctor came, which took about an hour and a half, he gave me a shot of anti-venine before we left. In those days they gave you tiger snake anti-venine – it wasn’t specialised like it is now. They gave me a test shot but I didn’t react to that so they gave me the proper dose. Of course, it was the double dose of the venine that almost wiped me out!

The scourge of sandy blight and trachoma
Other medical conditions have been so common in the western region, not only Quilpie Shire, that various community services have been involved in responding to the problem. Sandy blight and trachoma were rife in the outback, and both adults and children were so badly affected that some went blind.

When Godfrey Dobois, an itinerant teacher at Eromanga district in the 1900s, was travelling, he persuaded the Department to provide him with an Ophthalmic Chest to take out west to treat the children’s eyes. Later a scheme was introduced to send children with the condition to the Sir Leslie Wilson home in Brisbane for treatment.

John Walker from Eromanga remembers that in the 1940s just about every child in Quilpie, where he went to school, had trachoma and had to go to the local hospital to get bluestone eyedrops. He said “It was a surprise it didn’t burn your eyes out. A lot of people had horrible looking bloodshot eyes from the trachoma lumps.”

The Quilpie Hospital
The Quilpie Hospital has provided a service for the whole shire since it was established in 1922. A group of shearers working at Thylungra decided to fundraise to begin a Red Cross. They were approached by the local community to spend the £204 they had raised on supporting a hospital, rather than on a Red Cross service. The first hospital stood on one block, with a dispensary in the middle section. There was a four bed male section and the same number of beds in a separate ward for the female patients. There was a kitchen and staff dining room and a breezeway which led to the maternity section and staff quarters. Later a theatre and more beds were added. A theatre was needed and Jim Corones along with Dr John Dunkley went doorknocking in a competition to see who could raise the most funds. Jim Corones won the wager by raising £1 more than Dr Dunkley.
Kath Corones came to work at the hospital in the early 1940s staying to marry Spiro Corones (a cousin of Jim Corones), who had business interests in Quilpie. She describes the conditions at the hospital during this period:

When I arrived in Quilpie, the hospital facilities were most primitive. Water bags on the verandah for cold water, charcoal coolers to set the jellies and to keep the butter cook, and one kerosene refrigerator in which to keep drugs cool. Power was generated from the bore near the bowling club at the other end of town, as well as an engine room at the rear of the hospital for night necessities.

The crisis in attracting doctors and nurses to work in remote areas is not restricted to recent times. In 1948 the hospital closed because of staff shortages. The matron resigned because she had the responsibility for the public, private, maternity and isolation wards with a staff of three nurses and no certificated sisters.

The hospital continued to operate in the old building until the government gave the go-ahead for a new ten bed hospital in 1983. The new hospital was officially opened in April 1987. The old hospital was dismantled and parts of it can be found serving new purposes in Quilpie. A section has become the golf club’s clubhouse, a section has been added to a private residence.

Quilpie Country Women’s Association
Often called the backbone of early communities, the CWA formed in Quilpie on the 2 October 1924. The first president was Mrs Patterson, the secretary Mrs Hindmarsh and the treasurer’s role fell to Mrs Daigan. The Association worked very hard to raise funds to build their rooms which were opened in 1939, just in time to provide a working venue for the patriotic fund. The rooms became the centre for packing food parcels and the performance of other duties associated with helping ‘the boys at the front’. The CWA rooms constituted a house that also provided accommodation for mothers waiting in town for the birth of their babies. There was also a special room for the maternal and child welfare clinic along with a room for the Government Dental Clinic. The rooms were also used by the public school for specialised tuition. The membership peaked at 113 in 1957 and membership has declined ever since. Current plans are afoot to create youth facilities in the centre.

Spiritual Life
Irish Catholics settled the area and their spiritual needs were met by travelling priests who carried out all the functions of a parish priest. The new babies were baptised, mass was conducted, confession was heard, last rites given and burials performed. Since then mass has been celebrated in various station homesteads, private homes and halls. The first catholic priest to visit the Cooper Creek area was Father Dunham of Roma.128

Father Dean Cashman was the parish priest of Charleville before and after the First World War. As pastor of Charleville he had the care of the vast parishes of Cunnamulla, Quilpie and Augathella. A small church and a small presbytery were built and these buildings became home to the first parish priest to Quilpie, Father Francis Donovan, who was welcomed to area on 4 June 1939. The small presbytery was extended by Father J.Michael and by Father M Cronin who succeeded Father Donovan.

Father Leahy arranged for St Finbarr’s Catholic Church to be moved from the corner allotment to its present position. The charming wooden church was replaced by a new church designed by Bill Durack (Mary Durack’s brother) in 1976. Apart from fulfilling a spiritual function the opal altar had become a ‘must see’ for tourists visiting Quilpie.

The Bush Brothers of St Paul, based in Charleville, conducted some services in Quilpie from approximately 1938. In 1957-8, the Parochial District of Quilpie was built up with Reverend Roy Poole at Quilpie. The Bush Brothers visited families, homesteads and halls and conducted services where the need arose and the support was there. They travelled in utilities over unmade roads in all weathers to further their message and to provide spiritual nourishment to their flock.

The exact date the St Mathews Anglican Church in Quilpie was built is not known although it is listed in the 1940 Diocesan Year Book. The beautiful stained glass windows in the church were made by an English Anglican Priest and installed by Stella Watts and her three sons, Duncan, Robert and Bill in memory of her husband and their father, Colin Watts. The second window was installed by the children of Harriet Watts of Tobermory in her memory. Much of the church work has been supported by the St Mathew’s Ladies Guild. In 2000 the Reverend John Cutcliffe was appointed Priest-In-Charge of Quilpie.

Schooling
Schooling has been a vexed issue for parents in the Shire and they have responded to the educational needs of their children in a myriad of ways.

In earlier times schooling ranged from ‘learning a bit from mum’, to taking advantage of the itinerant teachers. Itinerant teachers were introduced to Queensland in 1900 and gave way to primary correspondence courses in 1922. Until recently families have been able to pay tutors or governess’ to teach their children, however, this has only been an available option for those with sufficient means.

Since white settlement, a boarding school education has been a common experience for many in the region. For some kids adjustment to the regime of school life in the city, after the freedoms of rural life, has been a difficult adjustment to make. Other parents, like Albert Russell and his wife, decided that they couldn’t send their children away to school so they bought a house in Ipswich next to a school. Mrs Russell lived there with the children for their school years. Albert, a drover and farm worker, wasn’t happy in the city so he moved back to Quilpie. Returning to visit his wife and children occasionally. This drastic measure is not uncommon for many families, who have been unable or unwilling to send their children to boarding school and have left the area to return when their children’s education has been completed.

Quilpie State School
Parents have also lobbied for schools to become established. In 1916 a group of parents signed a petition to seek the establishment of a school in Quilpie.

The parents were fortunate in having to wait only two years for the necessary approvals to take place and for the school to be ready to open on the 10 September 1918. Quilpie’s application may have been fast tracked because they had 33 children awaiting instruction. They encountered difficulties in attracting a teacher but they were eventually successful in appointing A.J Brennard as the head teacher. He worked with two assistants, and eventually two pupil teachers.

In 1927 the Principal’s residence was constructed. The number of children enrolled increased during the 1920s along with the growth of the township. Domestic science and manual arts were offered in the CWA rooms in the 1930s and classes were also offered by visiting teachers. These teachers were a great novelty as they travelled on railcars fitted out with mobile classrooms.
What a joy when about every second year the domestic science carriages (complete with tutors), lurched into town and the choice was ours: to spend the next seven weeks at the railway, or at school. Domestically inclined or not, most opted for the railway. Mornings were spent cooking the dish of the day which was taken home for lunch. In the afternoons we sewed. Boys received tuition in woodwork and metal work.

In 1966 application was made to the Education Department to begin years 8, 9 and 10. Although approval with funds attached, was made the following year, classes continued on the school verandah for the next twenty years. Average attendance for the high school years was 15. In 1988 the school was successful in its application with new buildings following.

School of the Air
In 1966 the Charleville School of the Air began broadcasting lessons to isolated families linked to the Charleville Royal Flying Doctor Service. The Isolated Childrens Parents Association formed to support distance education and to provide a forum and support for tutors, generally the mothers, of children learning in this way. The School of the Air now makes use of computers. Children can send their work in and have it corrected and returned via modem. The School also organises sports days and Speech and Award Day ceremonies to allow for personal interaction.

Quilpie, as the commercial and service centre of the Shire, has provided opportunities for children from the district to extend their education beyond the primary level. In recent times a student hostel has been built for school students from outlying areas to board for the full week or just the 5 days of the school week.

St Finbarrs Convent School
St Finbarrs Convent School was blessed and opened in 1950 by Bishop Basil Roper. The Sisters of St Joseph managed and taught in the primary school, living in a cottage until the convent was ready for them. In 1951 the first boarders were enrolled – 10 boys in one wing and 10 girls in the other. The tradition of taking boarders for the primary school has continued since that time. The school allows children to get a catholic education but also provides a service for isolated and itinerant workers who need to board their
children during the week. Children are returned to their parents over the weekend to rejoin the hostel at the start of the school week.

In 1955 the Parents and Friends Association was formed and in 1977 improvements began on the dormitories, the new laundry facility and the installation of improved fire fighting equipment.

**Kindergarten**
Following a request from the Quilpie Kindergarten Association in 1968, Quilpie Shire Council agreed to the removal of the Girl Guides Hut from John Waugh Park for joint use as a guide hut and kindergarten. The kindergarten now offers a full program catering for preschoolers aged 2.5 to 4 years of age.

**Quilpie Cultural Society**
Starting life as the Quilpie Potters the society formed when it developed a constitution in 1972. This formalised their status enabling them to seek funds from various funding bodies. This allowed them to pay for specialist tutors and to meet materials costs. Len McManus provided the first work space by allowing the dirt-floor shed next to the swimming pool to be used. They changed venues several times but have now found a permanent home in Brolga Street in disused shops which have been renamed the ‘Cultural Centre’. The centre has expanded its classes and support base enabling a wide range of creative pursuits to take place.

**To the past and to the future...**
The confidence that encouraged the pioneers to carve out a future in a harsh and inhospitable environment have been rewarded. They have left a legacy of interlinking family connections which have been enriched by the people that followed them. Whether people were already here, like the indigenous custodians of the land, or they came in the 19th, the 20th or on the cusp of the 21st century their contributions have helped to develop Quilpie Shire as a close knit and supportive community. The following excerpt is from a letter written by Bernadette Walker as a contribution to the development of this history. It pays homage to land, family, hard work and community. These are the things that link people to the area and combined with economic activity in the grazing, minerals and service and tourism industries the future looks assured.

I remember growing up on a property...
I remember how excited we were when we bought Lochabie. After years of saving, and months of searching, we finally had a property of our own. Driving out with dogs, cats, chickens and us (Mum, Dad, my brother and me) in the station wagon. I was 7, and my brother was 4. Lochabie was a child’s playground – better than Dreamworld! Old machinery of all sorts stood around the ‘horse’ paddock (the boundary of our play—we couldn’t go through any fences). Cubby houses galore—I think we reached 100—each one was named, or numbered, and we drew a map so Mum knew where we were going (this because Dad drew ones for her, so she could find him if he didn’t make it home!)

I remember how much work we all had to do—the place had been neglected for years. Sheep that had not been shorn for years—some never in their lives—fleeces as long as 30cm were common) had to be caught. I remember the trip to town to buy a motorbike (second or third hand, probably, but brand new for us). It wouldn’t quite fit in the back—so the door was open all the way home, I watched and hung onto the bike! (It was tied in, but in my mind I had to hold onto it to keep it in the car—it was so precious I had to do all I could to get it home safely).

Now when I look back, I pity anyone who didn’t have such a great childhood. Yes, it was hard work—but there were fun times, and even in the midst of a long day, jokes and antics kept us amused. The best thing was doing it all as a team—every decision, every job, every day.
Endnotes

1 Tindale, Aboriginal Tribes of Australia, ANU Press, 1974, pp.164-186.
4 Mary Durack, Kings In Grass Castles, Hutchinson, 1959, p.94.
5 EM Corr, The Australian Race: its origin, languages, customs, place of landing in Australia, and the routes by which it spread itself over that continent, Government Printer, Melbourne, 1886, p.273.
7 Durack, p.165
9 Ibid, p.200
12 McKellar, p.36
15 Dorac, p.85.
16 Durack, p.91.
17 Anne Allingham, Taming the Wilderness, James Cook University, 1977, p.18.
22 Barney Rutledge interview with Lesley Jenkins on 17 August 2000
24 Marion Diamond, From Bulldust to Beef roads and Beyond – Main Roads The first 50 years, Department of Main Roads, n.d., p.124.
25 Ronald ‘Bronk’ McConnell, local history notes held at the Quilpie Museum.
27 Pastoral Review, 14, 1904-5, p.197.
28 Ridley Williams Diary, 1883-1885, located at the Stockman’s Hall of Fame, Longreach.
29 Government Gazette, 20 October 1888.
30 Government Gazette, 26 March 1887.
32 Government Gazette, 16 April, 1904.
33 Cameron, p.351.
34 Michael Costello, The Life of John Costello: being the adventures of a pioneer, pastoralist and explorer in Queensland and the Northern Territory, Dymocks, 1930, p.48.
35 Lesley Jenkins interview with Barney Rutledge 17 August 2000
36 Queensland State Archive (QSA), Treasury Rental Returns
38 Mary Durack, Kings in Grass Castles, Constable and Company Ltd, 1959.
39 The Costello family historian, Patricia Mahoney, has not yet uncovered ‘paper proof’ that Thomas was the first cousin of John Costello.
40 QSA, Treasury Rental Returns
41 Lehane, p.217.
43 Queensland Country Life, 12 February 1959.
44 Lehane, p.20.
45 Lehane, pp.25-27.
46 John Leahy became the local member for the area and the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly.
47 Mark Tully interview with Lesley Jenkins on 14 August 2000.
48 Lehane, p.33.
49 Coonan estimates in Lehane, p.217.
51 The pub was licensed as the J.D. Springs at Adavale.
52 Ellis, p.8.
54 Government Gazette, 27 December 1913, p.1803.
57 QSA, LAN AF 1053, Run File Warrego, Comongin, Run No 1276.
58 ibid
59 Maria Harding, Onward ever, backard never, in the possession of Maria Harding, Doveton.
60 Frew, n.p.
61 Government Gazette 1917, Vol 1, folio 701
62 QSA, LAN AF 1053, Run File Warrego, Comongin, Run No 1276.
63 ibid
64 ibid
65 Government Gazette, 4 April 1891, p.1219.
66 Knight, p.2.
67 Frew, p.111.
68 ibid, p.4.
69 QSA, South Comongin File LAN/AF 1098
70 QSA, LAN/AF 337
71 Ellis, p.13.
72 Lehane, p.102.
73 The Western Times, 24 January 1974.
76 Lesley Jenkins interview with John Murray 4 August 2000.
77 QSA, SRS218-1-616 Box 31
79 Madge Butler, The West Years of My Life, p.17.
80 ibid p.5.
81 QSA, SRS218 Pastoral Holding Files, consignment 1, Item 392, Land Court Charleville, 10 July 1941
83 Sally Ann Egan, Milo and Ambathala Towards a Pastoral Heritage, Department of Environment and Heritage, 1994, p.3.
84 ibid
86 Svenson, p.133
87 Adam-Smith, p.204.
Durack, p.156.


Len Cram, p.35.

Ibid., p.48.

*The Brisbane Courier*, 7 February 1889.

Annual Report of the Under Secretary For Mines, 1904.


Government Gazette 1930, Vol CXXXV, No 14, p. 191-3

Toompine – An Incomplete History, n.d., n.p., also in a letter from Dick Webber, Wayfarers Farm, Calliope, n.d.

Queensland Police Museum Records.

Ian Simmons, *No Place for a Female Teacher: Toompine and Duck Creek Half-time Provisional Schools*, RQHS, Vol 17 No.3. August 1999, p.132.

QSA, Toompine School file EDU/Z QSA & Duck Creek School File EDU/.

Queensland Police Museum Records for Duck Creek & Toompine.

Surveyors at the Dept of Mapping & Surveying disclose that Eromanga is not the farthest town from any coast in Queensland, let alone Australia.


Cram, p.61.


*Government Gazette*, 3 November 1900, p.1274, also Qld Police Museum Records.


Betty Marchant interview with Lesley Jenkins on 14 August 2000.


*Government Gazette* 6 May 1884, GG 17 March 1900, p. 907.

The 11 men on the roof were: Reg, Barry, Trevor & Brian Brassington, Pat Kennedy, Frank Roberts, Ray Moore, Cecil Dalgeish, Ron Council, Darcy Delaney & Wayne McNought.

Frew, p.233.

Quilpie is a corruption of the word Queelpie. *Nomenclature of Queensland*, 30 September 1935, p.36.

Police Museum Files for Quilpie Police Station


Western Times 14 July 1966.


Queensland Parliamentary Debates 249, 1969, p.484.

Joan Ross letter sent to Bernadette Walker.


Council Minute Book 10 September 1930.


Costello, p.52.

Select Bibliography

Costello, Michael, The Life of John Costello: being the adventures of a pioneer, pastoralist and explorer in Queensland and the Northern Territory, Dymocks, 1930.
Diamond, Marion, From Bulldust to Beef roads and Beyond – Main Roads The first 50 years, Department of Main Roads, n.d.
Durack, Mary, Kings In Grass Castles, Hutchinson, 1959.
Ellis, Constance Jane, I Seek Adventure – An Autobiographical Account of Pioneering Experiences In Outback Queensland from 1889 to 1904, Alternate Publishing Cooperative Ltd, 1981.
Lehane, Fleur, Heartbreak Corner – A Story of the Tully, Durack and other pioneer families of South-West Queensland, Central University Press, 1996.