

## ARCHIVAL WALKABOUT

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In August last year a letter arrived at the Queensland State Archives. It had come from the Justice Department, and contained a copy of a letter from the acting Clerk of Petty Sessions at Croydon stating that, as the Court House had been sold to the Shire Council, he would like some help in deciding what to do with the mass of records which had been stored in the Court House for years. The C.P.S. (in other words, the local police officer) said he was not sufficiently conversant with records to decide which were valuable, but, in his opinion, about 99% could be destroyed on account of their condition, if for no other reason.

The letter stirred up instant activity in the Archives, and I was detailed to go to distant Croydon to see what could be saved. Croydon is 1750 miles by road north of Brisbane and 450 miles west from Cairns - in what is known as the Gulf Country. It was decided that, if the opportunity arose, I should also try to visit Normanton, which is 94 miles distant from Croydon. In 1957-9 Messrs. A.A. Morrison and R.B. Joyce, of the History Department of the University of Queensland, had travelled throughout Queensland, making a preliminary survey of what records existed in the various places, with a view to the eventual compilation of a Bibliography of the Records of Queensland. Mr. Joyce visited Croydon and Normanton and he noted the existence of the records at both places, including records of the Croydon Shire Council in the Shire Hall.

Herberton, another northern town, was also placed on my list because a large quantity of records had been noted by Dr. G. Bolton, of the Research School of the Social Sciences, Australian National University, when he visited there a year or so previously.

Letters were despatched to the various government officials heralding my arrival, and, of course, hotels were written to at Cairns, Croydon and Herberton, booking accommodation. I left Brisbane in a very uncertain state of mind regarding this accommodation, as none of the three hotels bothered to answer, mainly, I suspect, because we did not include a stamp for an answer.

Sunday, 10th September, saw my departure from Brisbane at 9.30 p.m. in the famed Sunlander, heading 1,043 miles north to Cairns. When I left the train at that place at 3.30 p.m. on Tuesday I did a little mental arithmetic and worked out that we had sped the long distance at the very alarming average rate of about 25 miles an hour.

There are two ways to get from Cairns to Croydon, (1) by plane, which takes about  $2\frac{1}{2}$  hours, or (2) by train to Forsayth, 263 miles west, and thence by carrier - four days. In view of the difference in time between  $2\frac{1}{2}$  hours and 4 days, permission was obtained for me to make the trip by air. We left Cairns at 8 a.m. on Wednesday by D.C.4, and reached Croydon

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on time. The wants of the passengers were attended to, not by a glamorous air hostess, but by a very husky flight steward. The reason for this soon became apparent when the plane touched down at the first stop - a large station.

As soon as the plane came to a standstill, up came a car driven by a young man who was accompanied by his wife and baby. It was then that the flight steward came into action - he unloaded the stores for the station with the greatest of ease, the pilot and co-pilot ably assisting him. A little distance further back I noticed about nine or ten female aborigines who had come out to watch the proceedings. Being imbued with a holiday feeling I took the opportunity to wave to them through my window. They duly waved back, so we occupied the time waving to each other at intervals. Unloading being completed, the occupants of the car drove away to a safe distance, and, with a last wave to my new friends, we took off. We came down at another station where much the same things happened except that I had no one to wave to.

Next stop was Croydon. Since my visit there we have received a few letters from the Croydon Shire Council, and I am indebted to their letterhead for the following information:- It was gazetted a goldfield on 18 January, 1886. Gold production, 1885-1915 was 770,000oz. of a total value of £3,336,000. 800 ozs. of silver were also produced. To-day the area of the shire is 10,960 square miles, with a population of 187. The present-day industries number two - pastoral and a little mining. While I was in Croydon I heard varying figures for both the population and the number of hotels in its hey-day. Figures as high as 30,000 were given for the population, while the number of hotels was anything from 30 to 60.

I decided to make a check on these figures in Pugh's Almanac, and I found that in 1893 there were 16 hotels, 25 in 1897 and 28 in 1906. The population, according to the census of 1891, was 4,962 and 4,000 at the time of the 1901 census, so it would appear that the figures have expanded with the years.

When I looked out the plane window at present-day Croydon I saw a small scattered collection of mostly corrugated iron houses. We landed on, as I have since discovered, the racecourse where the first plane from Cairns to Croydon landed in February 1935. After unloading was finished we stood back out of danger and watched the plane take off for Normanton.

There were two vehicles waiting at the aerodrome, one a Public Works utility to meet a member of that Department, and the other a small truck. I made enquiries about getting into the town, and the man with the truck said I could come with him, so I arrived in comfort. Alas for the vaunted 30-60 hotels, there is but one now in Croydon, and that is the Club! I need not have worried about receiving no reply to my letter - with the exception of the Public Works official who had come on the same plane, I had the hotel to myself for most of my week's



stay. I must say that my strength was kept up during my sojourn on the best of food. Every day I returned to the hotel at 12.30 p.m., and, in spite of great heat, consumed soup, roast meat and vegetables, and sweets. Two cups of tea and about three glasses of water also disappeared at this meal, because it is very, very thirsty weather at Croydon.

The town consists of, I should say, 3 main streets, the Club Hotel being in one, the Police Station, Court House and Shire Hall in the second, and the hospital and the store (with a very great distance between them) in the third. I suppose it would take, at the very most, three minutes to go from the hotel to the Court House by road, but I soon discovered a short cut through the playground, so I always advanced on the Court House from the rear after one minute's walk.

And now, I must mention the records that I found at Croydon. Otherwise, I am afraid these notes may be something like a lecture which made a profound impression upon me as a child. I had been taken willy nilly to the Charles Dickens Society to hear one of Brisbane's leading educationalists speak. Naturally, all speakers at the Dickens Society spoke on some aspect of Dickens. However, this lecturer faced the devotees and informed them very bravely that he couldn't stand Dickens. He was an admirer of Thackeray and he proposed to give his lecture on that writer - which he proceeded to do. So I must remember to speak about records.

As one would expect in a court house, I found notebooks of the Northern District Judge, Registrar's notebooks and depositions of the Northern District Court, minute books of the Police Court and of the Small Debts Court.

A back room was lined with pigeon holes, and these were literally jammed full with mining records, all liberally coated with Croydon dust. These records were mainly the original applications for miners' rights, water rights, market garden areas, etc., but, out of these same pigeonholes, would come, at intervals, bundles of correspondence belonging to the Mining Warden, the Police Magistrate and the C.P.S. This room also yielded up, from the floor, many large volumes - registers of applications for gold mining leases, mineral rights, market garden and tailings areas, prospecting protection areas, minutes of proceedings in the Warden's Court, the Warden's letterbooks and also those of the C.P.S. and of the Government Assayer. The Registrar of Joint Stock Companies had preserved all the summaries of capital and shares of companies operating in Croydon. About 12 main fields made up the Croydon area, and they are all represented in the records. Some of these fields were Golden Gate, True Blue, Tabletop and Mountain Maid. A few handwritten electoral registers were also found.

A small number of non-public records were in the Court House, e.g., the minute book of the Recreation Ground Inspection Committee, cash book and ledger of Abdul Resack, an Afghan store-keeper, and



ledgers of one or two of the numerous hotels.

It is a very harsh, dry climate at Croydon, and the opinion of the C.P.S. about the condition of the records was well founded in a lot of instances. A strong wind blows most of the time (which is just as well, otherwise the windmills wouldn't turn). One day I held a sheet of very dry cracked paper in my hand - the wind blew, and the paper was blown into as many pieces as there had been cracks in it.

The C.P.S. was very willing to lend a hand and he also gave me the assistance of his blacktracker, Caesar, and another aboriginal, Syd, aged 17. Caesar was a quietly spoken man with what sounded to me as a slight American inflexion to his speech. To my great surprise Caesar told me he suffered from an ulcer - I thought such things only belonged to people who were harried city dwellers. Such a statement certainly needed verifying, so I asked the C.P.S. It was quite true! It appears that a lot of aborigines get ulcers as a result of the hard food that is eaten when they are away mustering on stations - mostly corn beef and damper. Both my aboriginal helpers were not A1 in health. As well as having the ulcer Caesar had to pay a daily visit to Matron at the hospital to have a poisoned finger dressed, while Syd had had an encounter with a crocodile at Karumba. The crocodile had paid some attention to his foot. Syd had gone into the water after the croc which they had shot, but it was not quite shot enough.

I started to work with the floor as my desk, but, after a while, we dragged out a table and Caesar used to lift the heavy volumes on to it for me. In order to get room to work it was necessary to pack as I listed, so I endeavoured to do it in an orderly manner, with one box for the Mining Warden, one for the C.P.S., etc. Towards the end of the week I could see there was not sufficient time for all this orderliness, so the rest of the records were just piled into boxes with no thought of provenance, Caesar doing the piling.

The boxes were on a narrow verandah with a roof overhead, but I heard the storm season was approaching. This filled me with alarm for the well-being of my records and I immediately imagined all my hard work being deluged when the wind blew the storm rains on to the verandah. I wrote to the State Archivist, telling him of the dire possibilities, and asked him to get permission from the Justice Department to move the records at once, without the usual formality of sending a list to Justice for their approval to transfer to Archives. Back came a telgram giving this permission. Caesar busily hammered lids on the boxes, the C.P.S. arrived armed with a very small tin of black paint and proceeded to paint the addresses on the boxes. He then arranged for carriers at Georgetown to come for the boxes and take them to the rail at Forsayth, so, when I was due to leave Croydon, I left it with a great feeling of security about the records. However, things don't move very rapidly at Croydon. Weeks passed before the carriers picked up the records. Each time they came they had no room for the boxes, and I was back in Brisbane, after being to other centres,



quite a number of weeks before they ever left the verandah. I may mention that no storm eventuated in the meantime.

Films are shown once a week on Saturday night. The venue is the Shire Hall and the projectionist is the school teacher. Owing to the fact that he, and others, were going 94 miles to Normanton for a ball on the Saturday, the night was changed to Friday. Off I went with pleasurable anticipation to the pictures at Croydon. Most of the residents were there, with the babies in their prams and young children on rugs on the floor. I saw Caesar and Syd there. At interval we all trooped out to the footpath where an enterprising young man had set up a table from which he sold ice-cold drinks and chocolates. He has these items flown in from Normanton and he stores them in the butcher's cold room. (I had never seen anything less like a butcher's shop. It opened only occasionally and the housewives had to keep their eyes open for this. If they did not rush over they would most likely be without meat until the shop opened again for a short time in 2, 3, or 4 days.) To get back to the pictures - I did not know that it was customary to come armed with a glass for the soft drink. One buys a bottle (large size) and then pours it out into the glass. I bought a bottle before I found out about the custom, so I had to raise my bottle aloft and drink it as best I could - it was still thirsty weather.

The Croydon Municipal Council was formed in 1892 and it became the Croydon Shire Council for 1907. Mr. Joyce had listed several of the records at the Shire Hall, so I called on the Shire Clerk to seek permission to try to locate these records. Permission was granted, and I succeeded in locating all but one on the list. This was a burial register. On asking about this, the Shire Clerk told me it was still in use, and produced it out of the safe, so naturally, ~~it~~ it remains where it is.

In Queensland we are always talking about the need for opening up the north, especially with railways. They were talking about such things years ago as I discovered the plan of the proposed railway to Karumba and papers in connection with a commission appointed to enquire into the practicability of a railway from Cloncurry to a Gulf port. I found minute books of the Amateur Hack Racing Club, the Patriotic Committee, the School of Arts and of the Croydon Progress Association, also some interesting petitions to the Shire Council from the residents. The Shire Council has approved of the transfer of these records to the Archives, but they have not yet left Croydon.

Croydon has a very fine hospital which, to me, was quite a long distance from the town proper. I wondered why it was so far out until I learnt that the houses used to extend right out to the hospital gates. This hospital received a legacy of £40,000 in 1894 from a man who, at the time, bequeathed 1/- to his wife. The building appears to be two similar houses joined together by a landing and it is a veritable oasis, having, I think, the only potplants in Croydon. These are almost



innumerable and they hang above the railings in gaily painted pieces of tyres. Water is a continual problem in Croydon, but the hospital manages to find it for the beautiful plants.

The Matron, Matron Paskins, is a New Zealander. I called to see her on the Sunday afternoon and I was entertained to afternoon tea and tea. Just before I left she told me she had records belonging to the hospital and would I like to have them for the Archives, always subject to the Hospitals Board's approval, of course. Naturally, I accepted, and the morning of my departure found me and my friend, the C.P.S., plus Caesar, at the hospital at 6 a.m. working diligently through the records in no other place but the morgue! A very interesting find among these records were some registers of hospital patients, showing place of birth, ship of arrival, parents' names, father's occupation, etc.

After leaving the morgue, I was given breakfast by Matron who then rang the C.P.S. to come and drive me back to the hotel. (I should have mentioned before that, during the week, I had written to Brisbane for permission to fly to Normanton which is about 20 minutes' flying time. The two places are connected by a rail motor which leaves once a week. An interesting fact about this railway is that, when it was built, steel sleepers were used to combat the white ants.) I had to go and get my plane ticket, finish my packing and get out to the aerodrome. All was accomplished and I arrived in Normanton at 11 a.m. on Wednesday.

Normanton is 2,063 miles by steamer from Brisbane. It was the port for the Croydon goldfield and Stanhills Tinfield, being 25 miles from the Gulf of Carpentaria. It has an excellent aerodrome. There was a very pleasant looking woman in her seventies on the plane - she turned out to be the grandmother of a young schoolteacher and she had come from Cairns just to pay him a surprise visit. We arrived at the hotel together, and the licensee told us we would have to share a room. I bravely enquired about the possibility of single rooms, but was sternly told that none was vacant. This may have been true or it may not. I saw some empty rooms in my journeys about the hotel.

Our room was most interesting - it overlooked the main street and opened on to a verandah, but there was no sign of a blind or even a muslin curtain on the doors. When we wanted to undress we both retired to corners behind our beds and hoped no one would walk along the verandah during the process because even the corners were still very public.

There are about 200 people in the town. The main street is Landsborough Street, named in honour of William Landsborough, the explorer. There is a well in the middle of this street, and I was surprised when the Shire Clerk told me that the residents depended on that well in dry times. My surprise was due to the fact that, practically



opposite my exposed bedroom, there was water flowing twenty-four hours a day from a bore. This bore is 2,330 feet deep and, in 1895, it gave 293,000 gallons a day. By 1949 this was down to 60,000 a day. It feeds a very nice swimming pool which is lit at night. The bore used to supply the town with water, but not any more. However, anyone who wants water has only to take it - I saw several trucks arrive and fill drums during my few days in the town.

The Shire Clerk also told me that there was no bucket at the well. The Council had ceased putting buckets there as they were souvenired one after the other by tourists. Apparently it is the accepted thing for tourists to have their photos taken drawing water from the well. Now they have to be content to be taken drawing the water with their own billy.

Besides the swimming pool, the town has a golf club and a tennis club. Children are catered for with a playground maintained by the C.W.A. In Landsborough Street are to be found fine Shire Council chambers, a School of Arts, a modern Post Office and a large store owned by Burns Philp. With an eye to business archives, I called on the manager only to find out that all the records at Normanton had been taken elsewhere and were being preserved by the Company.

Normanton is situated on the Norman River up which people used to be conveyed from Karumba on the Gulf to Normanton. One afternoon, being in complete charge, I accepted a ride down to the little wharf to see a little ship, in keeping with the size of the wharf, being unloaded. The "wharfies" were a mixed lot, there being white men, aborigines and a boy who looked no more than 14 to me. They were all working together very happily.

I was most impressed with the number of cars that swished about the town. They were all the latest models, and it seemed to me that the residents walked as little as possible. They were popping into their vehicles to go the shortest distances.

Before I left Brisbane a friend had asked me to check on the story that there was a public bath (not baths) in the main street where everyone went for their bath. Well, my hotel had two bathrooms, as I am sure the other three or four hotels also had, but I think a number of people who had no permanent home in Normanton did go to the showers at the baths for their ablutions. Just at the entrance to the baths there were two laundry troughs and I saw quite a few people, mainly aborigines, washing out clothes and taking them away on the Saturday morning.

And now for a few words about the *raison d'être* for my visit to the town - the records. While in Croydon I had heard dreadful tales about the untidy, dirty room at Normanton where the records were kept, so I repaired to the Court House with a certain amount of trepidation.



The C.P.S. took me to THE ROOM and lo! it had been cleaned and tidied in honour of my visit. However, as the records were not in any kind of order on the shelves I had to pull everything off to see what was useful. Again, I had a list of Mr. Joyce's, and I found all these records, plus quite a few more. They included:- Registers of the Commissioner of Crown Lands, Seamen's engagement and discharge books, Log Books of the Pilot Station at Karumba and the minute book of the proposed Carpentaria Newspaper Association. So far as I know, the records are still in THE ROOM.

There are only two plane services a week to Cairns from Normanton- on Thursday and Saturday, so I finished up and left by the mid-day plane on the Saturday. On Thursday the plane goes back through Croydon, but, on Saturday, the passengers get more for the same money. On that day it goes via Karumba where Ansett A.N.A. have their lodge, Karumba Lodge, where people who want to can catch very large fish and shoot crocodiles.

When we came down fishermen proceeded to load bags of fish on to the plane for Cairns. Having no friendly aborigines to wave to, I decided to count the number of bags being loaded and discovered it to be 21. Later on I found that each bag weighed 115lbs. As the passengers sat in that peculiar falling-back position that one experiences in stationary planes, the bare-headed, bare-chested and bare-footed fishermen (2 of them), plus the flight steward, plus the pilot and co-pilot trudged up the aisle dragging the bags along. I almost forgot- there was another helper who, compared with the fishermen, was decidedly over-dressed as he was wearing shoes and socks, shorts, a silk shirt AND one of those beach hats that the girls have been wearing the last few years - a natural coloured hat with a ribbon hanging down the back.

After the heat of the Gulf Country tropical Cairns seemed positively cold, especially after the sun went down. It was a much further cry to Herberton which is on the Atherton Tableland where winter still prevailed although it was October. Herberton is about 5½ hours by rail motor from Cairns, and the motor passes through magnificent scenery which tourists flock north to see.

Herberton is 2,890 feet above sea level. John Newell is regarded as its founder as he discovered tin there in 1879. Crashing began in 1879. Mining is still carried on to a certain extent, but the main industry now appears to be schools, there being a State School, a State High School, a Church of England Boarding School and a Catholic Boarding School. I was invited to dinner one night in John Newell's home which is built entirely of cedar. The Shire Clerk lives there now with his wife and two children.

Herberton has a Mining Warden and a Mining Registrar, both of whom made the records available for me to see. I was able to collect quite a number of mining records which were not needed for current business.



I also obtained records belonging to the Supreme Court, Northern District Court, Police Court, Warden's Court, the Land Commissioner and the C.P.S. From the top of an extremely dusty cupboard came bundles of in-letters belonging to the Mining Warden, the Police Magistrate, the Land Commissioner and the C.P.S. These letters cover the period ca 1883-92, and they give quite a good picture of contemporary life in Herberton. The last thing to come off the cupboard turned out to be copies of a Herberton newspaper, the Wild River Times, for 1897-1900. As these are the only copies of this newspaper that we have in Queensland, they turned out to be quite a find.

The Inspector of Mines took the opportunity of drawing my attention to innumerable field books that were in his office, together with what appears to be the complete stock of a Herberton photographer's plates. These ~~have~~ arrived at the Archives.

I decided to see what the Herberton Hospital had to offer in the way of records, but, alas, I arrived several years too late. There was just one minute book (1915-23), all the rest having been thrown down a mine shaft. It seems that hospitals are obliged to keep their records only for a certain number of years, after which they can be destroyed. The Hospitals Board has transferred the solitary minute book to the Archives.

If I found very little in the way of records at the hospital, I found something else that was necessary, and that was cases. The Mining Registrar had told me that cases were very hard to get in Herberton, so, when my eagle eye spotted these very things under the hospital, I asked could we have them. On being told we could I hastened back to the Mining Registrar with the glad tidings.

Herberton was to be my last port of call, but, while there, I received a letter from the State Archivist, asking me to go on to Charters Towers to ~~which~~ place records from Ravenswood had been transferred recently.

Gold was discovered in Ravenswood in 1868. There was a rush to the field then, but the most important development took place in 1870. Silver lodes were found in 1879. The greatest recorded annual gold yield was in 1905, being 42,465 fine ozs., valued at £180,380.

The C.P.S. at Charters Towers had written down regarding these records with particular emphasis on their filthy condition. He considered they should be destroyed on account of this. I must have become inured to dirt, because, on viewing them, they didn't seem to be as filthy as I expected even though there was ample evidence that rats had had their residence there.

Leaving Cairns about mid-day I arrived at Townsville at 9.30 p.m. There was no train until late the next afternoon, the Inlander, which runs to Mount Isa. It was about four hours journey to Charters Towers,



and, next day, I reported around to the Court House. This is a most spacious building, with high ceilings and with the most beautiful iron railings in the court room. (Katharine Hepburn and Vivien Leigh would be interested in these railings, for their country homes.) The interior was being painted in delicate pastel colours so that it made me feel it would be a pleasure to be tried in such surroundings.

Two days saw the completion of the sorting of the records, chiefly those of the Magistrate's Court and the C.P.S.

Having been away for almost a month I began to feel I would like to see my home again, so, when a young commercial traveller offered me a lift to Townsville, I was very glad to accept. I had some trouble paying my bill as the licensee did not like to be disturbed while he was having his afternoon's rest. The only other member of the staff on duty would not accept the money, so I had to wait around until the siesta period was over. Then we set forth.

After stopping for petrol, my kind driver told me that we would now put on our safety belts although he didn't ever do more than 70 miles an hour. It is a very good road from Charters Towers to Townsville, having been constructed by the Americans during the war years. However, for a large part of the way, this road is actually on properties and cattle stray across, hence the safety belts in case we had to jerk to a standstill on account of this hazard.

It took 2 hours for the drive and I was deposited right at the railway station and my luggage was carried on to the platform for me. Two hours later I began my long journey home.

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