

## A TOWN CALLED PROSERPINE

[By MAVIS I. McCLEMENTS]

(Read at a Meeting of the Society on 24 April 1975)

Proserpine is a very small dot on the map of the large State of Queensland, indeed, on some maps one may search for it in vain. It is not as well known, or considered as important as Mackay or Bowen, although it links up the history of both centres. However, one does like to think that one's own town or city has some distinction, or is unique in some respect and to me, Proserpine qualifies on both counts.

First, it is distinguished by being the gateway to the Whitsunday Coast and Islands which jealously guard the Whitsunday Passage. Second, it is unique because several geographical features are named after characters in Greek mythology. There is Mt. Hector, named after that Trojan warrior, son of Priam, King of Troy, the nearby river Andromache, wife of Hector; Mt. Pluto, Roman variant of Hades, God of the Underworld; Lethebrook, after Lethe, the river of forgetfulness, and Proserpine, the Roman variant of Persephone, wife of Hades and daughter of Demeter. Hecate Holdings, a cattle station of later date, obviously was named by someone intent on perpetuating the mythological flavour of the area. Hecate was the Goddess of the Moon.

Both town and district take the name of the river which slices the shire in two. The town sedately straddles the river which rises in the Clarke Range and makes its way via a series of tortuous loops into Repulse Bay. It is an old, tired river, outliving the dried-up billabongs and filled-in lagoons which nudged its banks in former times. The river comes to life each wet season and convulsively tumbles collected debris before it in its rush to the sea. Numerous creeks and the Gregory, Proserpine and O'Connell Rivers are fed by summer rains cascading down mountain slopes, whereas in the "dry", most of them present a series of tranquil waterholes, and form a delicate tracery when seen from the air.

Proserpine is a sugar town and forms an important link in the chain of Queensland sugar mills. Cattle, timber and tourism are valuable adjuncts to the town's economy.

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Mrs. McClements, an authority on the Proserpine district, compiled its centenary publication, "The Story of Proserpine", in 1973. She established the Proserpine Folk Museum.

The first recorded appearance of white men in this area was that of Lieut. James Cook, who passed through and named the Whitsunday Passage, a few islands and the whole group of islands, the Cumberland. He was impressed by the coast, or the Main as he called it, the islands and the bay which "repulsed him". Rounding the cape from Repulse Bay he named it Cape Conway after the Secretary of State for the North and a cousin of Horace Walpole.

Two centuries later, huge oil tankers, ore carriers and cruise ships sail through the same waters delighting in the beauty and tranquillity of the islands and the wooded slopes which form part of the 48,060 acres of Conway National Park's glorious virgin bushland.

### EARLY EXPEDITIONS

The next seaborne visitor was Lieut. Phillip Parker King, son of the Colony's third Governor. He passed this way in 1819 when he landed on the small islets in Repulse Bay and named them the Repulse Isles. He observed an oar, apparently of European origin and the recent traces of natives. The *Mermaid* passed through the Passage again in 1820 when King named the lofty mainland peak, Mt. Dryander after Swedish botanist Jonas Dryander, a contemporary of Sir Joseph Banks.

King was followed by naturalist J. Beet Jukes in the survey ship *Fly* in 1843. Jukes was also impressed with the area, but when he landed on the Main, he found the woods too dense and the hills rising too abruptly to permit exploring. He noted that the steep slopes were "completely covered by a magnificent forest, the greater part of which is pine tree." Jukes finally confided to his journal that "If . . . it should be desirable to push the settlement of New South Wales further to the north, I think this part of the coast has greater natural advantages than any other we have seen."

Overlanding, or Major Mitchelling as it was then called, into undiscovered country was quite often quixotically indulged in by adventurous spirits, who kept their journeys and the results secret until a district was thrown open for occupation. A young grazier, William Kilman, is credited with having traversed the rich river flats of the mysteriously remote area beyond Repulse Bay in 1854. Another, W. H. Gaden from near Gympie, claimed to have passed through the Proserpine region in December 1856 and September 1857.

George Elphinstone Dalrymple led a privately-promoted expedition to explore the Burdekin watershed in 1859. The party numbered eight in all—Dalrymple, Sellheim, Henry, Houghton, Hood and Stone, with two aborigines. Starting from

Marlborough Station, they travelled north through the valley of the Proserpine River which Dalrymple named, as well as some geographical features. He prophesied excellent results regarding various agricultural pursuits, among them being sugar!

Although Dalrymple was an educated man, I cannot give credence to his being a classical Greek scholar. His friend, Sir George Ferguson Bowen, was and I believe Dalrymple named the geographical features in deference to Sir George. I also presume that the mixture of Greek and Roman names stems from the fact that Dalrymple was not as familiar with Greek mythology as I, and perhaps others, first supposed.

### FOUNDING OF BOWEN

The Kennedy district was opened up when Dalrymple and a group of settlers founded Bowen in 1861. Dalrymple accompanied by squatters, native police, horses and cattle left Rockhampton on 25 February, to travel overland to Port Denison. The settlers in the *Santa Barbara* and *Jeannie Dove* arrived a few weeks before the overland party, but met on the town beach on 12 April. The enterprising settlers soon busied themselves with the founding of Queensland's northernmost town.

As Bowen's first Magistrate and Government Commissioner, Dalrymple was kept extremely busy with land occupational licences and leases; he took his responsibilities quite seriously. Land on the Proserpine was not immediately snapped up by land-hungry settlers, especially for homestead leases. The land was mainly taken up for grazing and agistment purposes.

Daniel Emmerson and his two sons, Joe and William, were among the vanguard of settlers and they took up leases in 1861, 1862 and 1863, but it was not until 1882 that Joe and Amelia removed themselves from Pretty Bend Station at Bowen to Amelia Vale Station in the Proserpine area. They ran cattle and horses on the Proserpine properties. Daniel R. Emmerson had married Captain Sinclair's widow. Sinclair was the co-discoverer of Port Denison two years previously. Amelia was Captain Sinclair's daughter.

Actually, Charles Bradley was the first *bona-fide* settler in what is known today as the Proserpine Shire. He selected land around the Gregory River on the Bowen side of Mt. Dryander, and built a home surrounded by a stone wall and enclosing a fine garden. Bradley was firmly established on his property by the end of 1871, but he first occupied it in 1870. The blacks were very troublesome—hence the high stone wall, with broken glass cemented to the top for good measure. Some of Mr. Bradley's employees were murdered by the blacks, usually those tending sheep.

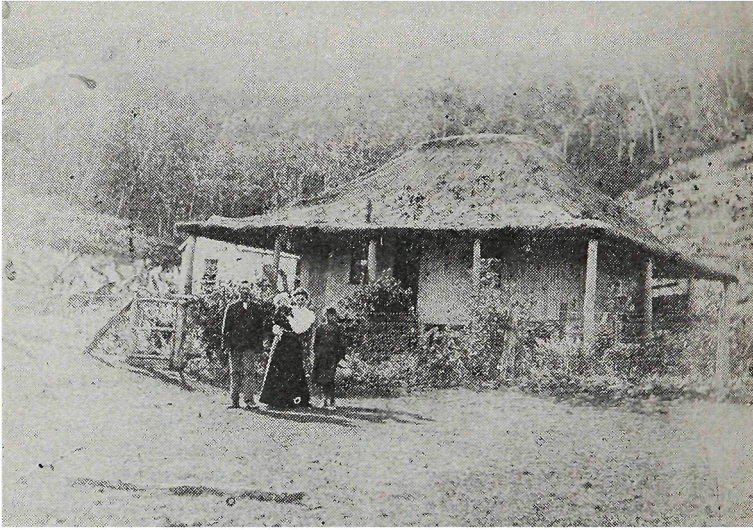
J. A. Gregory (after whom the river is named) selected land in the vicinity of Mt. Dryander in 1872 and employed men to work it. He did not live there permanently himself and at one time there was a dispute between Bradley and Gregory over a parcel of land and the matter of Gregory cutting down trees belonging to Bradley. This dispute was settled in court.

### LARGE CATTLE RUNS

By the late 1870s the future township of Proserpine was surrounded by large cattle stations and squatting on rich, virgin agricultural lands through which the Proserpine, O'Connell, Gregory and Andromache Rivers flowed. Sugar was unthought of then. There were Bloomsbury, Goorganga and its sister stations Bonaventura and Neotsfield; Proserpine, Amelia Vale and Cattlevale; Collingvale owned by James Collings, known as "terrible Jimmy" to the blacks; and C. Bradley's Myrtlebrook. Jockheims had a property near what is now the Proserpine/Bowen Shire's boundary. They eventually sold that property and took up a holding south of the town which they named Hillrise.

Bloomsbury was taken up first by J. A. Macartney and Dalrymple in 1862; Dalrymple later sold his share to Sir John (J.A.) and his brother William and Robert Graham. Graham overlanded 800 head of cattle from Waverley to stock Bloomsbury: it was now divided into three stations, Jolimont, St. Helen's and Bloomsbury. William Macartney owned Bloomsbury and built his homestead on the bank of the O'Connell River. He had married a Miss Bessie Tyser in 1872, a niece of well-known Tom Fitzgerald, and occupied their house a few years afterwards.

In 1862-63 Frederick Bode and William Dangar took up Bromby Park, which was substantially three properties, Goorganga, Bonaventura and Neotsfield apparently named after the N.S.W. Neotsfield Station of the Dangars. Consolidated under the name of Bromby Park, it later reverted to the three separate stations. Bode accompanied Dalrymple on the overland trek to Port Denison and secured Strathdon Station in that district. He was a lover of well-bred cattle and horses and let it be known through the *Port Denison Times* that he had imported a Suffolk Punch, "Emperor" by name, a rich chestnut 16½ hands and eight years old. The advertisement read: "From heavy mares get good pullers fit for dray work; from well-bred mares get good cobs and roadsters. Terms single mares £3/3/-; 3 or more £2/10/- paid in advance." Bode also brought stud bulls from N.S.W. for breeding purposes. He married in 1863, but it was not until the late 1870s that they resided at Bromby Park.



The old Fuller home, Strathdickie, in 1905.

The Emmersons took up Proserpine and Amelia Vale Stations and the MacDonalds had Cattlevale. Collingvale is now owned by the Deike family, who had Proserpine Station at one time. Breadalbane was taken up by A. H. and C. B. Waite in 1873, transferred from Thomas Holt who leased it in 1871. The Waite brothers remained on Breadalbane until their deaths.

Goorganga was taken over by Federick Bode's son-in-law, A. J. Cotton, and then in 1907 it was acquired by E. G. Lascelles, cousin of the Earl of Harewood, Princess Mary's husband. Goorganga was in the possession of the Lascelles family until recent years. E. H., son of E. G. Lascelles, died in February last in his eighty-second year.

Proserpine has had its share of landed gentry, Bradley, Macartney, Bode, Cotton and Lascelles—all well connected and well educated, who took part in shaping the destiny of the district, as well as those not so well connected, and that mainstay of every country, the ordinary "bloke"—the working man. They all shared the responsibility and hardship of creating a home out of the wilderness.

### EXPERIMENTS WITH SUGAR

The Queensland climate was found to be ideal for sugar cane and so men's thoughts naturally turned in that direction. Proserpine settlers were no exception and some started experimenting with cane. The fertile soil, combined with a consistently high rainfall, appeared to them most suitable for cane growing.

A Melbourne company acquired a large acreage of land near what is now the town area and the Glen Isla Company proceeded to start a sugar plantation. Kanakas were employed and housed in barracks, a mill manager's house was erected and the mill opened for crushing in 1883. After about two years it was closed because it was feared Sir Samuel Griffith's Bill prohibiting recruiting of Pacific Islanders would mean the cessation of cheap labour and make the local sugar industry economically impracticable. The machinery was dismantled and shipped to Mackay; some of the building materials were later used in the Proserpine Mill.

The crisis into which the banks plunged the nation in the early 1890s resulted in the Queensland Government's framing the Village Settlement Act and the Sugar Guarantee Act. It was hoped that in doing so the bad economic situation would be relieved. Several village settlements were surveyed and a site at Preston (part of the shire) was chosen for settlement.

Rumours of new mill sites being considered in connection with the Sugar Workers' Guarantee Act sparked off agitation in various centres, and Government officials were sent to assess the most suitable locations. A Progress Association was formed in Proserpine to agitate for an area mill and they bombarded the Government with petitions and letters commending their cause. But they were told bluntly ". . . there was not enough area for a mill; the few settlers could carry on with corn and pumpkins." Cold comfort indeed! Parliamentarian Hume Black, of Mackay, was luckily on their side, and when an inspection officer examined Proserpine's available land and ideal climatic conditions, his glowing report resulted in selection of this area for a sugar mill.

Promise of a mill set off a mild land rush, and disgruntled miners from Ravenswood, Danes and Swedes from other localities, bought up land and started clearing, grubbing and planting cane. Town land which had sold for five shillings an acre after having been previously forfeited to the Crown, now sold at five pounds and up to seven pounds an acre.

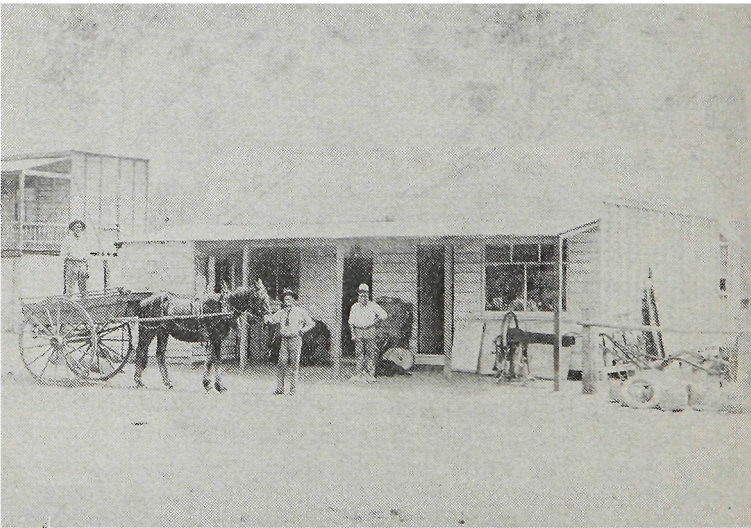
George and Gideon Pott, formerly of Bowen, imported per steamer *Henrietta* several tons of plants. It took them 24 hours with two bullock teams to transport the plants from the wharf on the river which was constructed before the mill buildings, to their farm, a distance of ten to 12 miles! Hauling the teams across the river bed in close proximity to their farm, was back-breaking work. The Potts' had 40 acres under cane when the mill first crushed, with a yield of three tons to the acre. For the first three years they received eleven shillings, ten shillings and eight shillings a ton. A government subsidy of four shil-

lings a ton was paid; but farmers usually had to wait six months before they received the money, or until the sugar was sold.

The mill, after a grand opening, crushed its first cane in September 1897, and 10,919 tons of cane were put through. It had 38 suppliers which increased to 63 when the Government took over in 1902. There are now 231 suppliers and an area of 10,947 hectares is harvested. Five mills are in operation crushing cane, and the extracted molasses is used for stock feed and power alcohol; bagasse is used for fuel in the furnaces, and the residue, filterpress is sold as fertilizer. Nothing is wasted. Sugar has been sent in bulk containers to the terminal at Mackay since 1958. Previously, it went through the port of Bowen.

Radiating from the mill are 101 miles of tramway lines feeding the cane from farm to mill. Cane is also transferred in motorised trailer bins. Eight locos are operating—all diesel with a two-way radio system. Two old “Puffing Billy” locos were sold in 1973, and townsfolk were sorry to see them pass out of the district. The last steam loco was bought in 1953 and the first diesel in 1954. There is only one old steam loco in working order left at the mill; another one is in Rotary Park.

The mill workers felt an affection for the steam locos and they all had names. As Germany was mostly their country of origin, it was natural for them to be called German Annie, Fritz and Crown Prince. Others answered to the names of Mae West, Little Billy and Tilly on the Gunyarra run, and Digger.



The first store in Proserpine — Jonathon Jupps'.



An era passed when the old "Puffing Billies" were considered outdated and replaced.

To revert to the mill's early days, tramlines were gradually laid down, the permanent ones replacing the portable lines. Sledges or slides were used to carry cane down the steep hillsides. The marks they made can still be seen in some places. However, it became apparent that growing cane on the hills could be dispensed with as returns were not commensurate with work involved. The early sugar farmers were a tough breed—they had to be. Cane was first planted by hand in soil softened by a hand plough or by hoe.

As the mill began to take shape, so did the town around it. By 1902 there were sixteen shops, hotels and houses in close proximity. There was no doctor, dentist, railways, banks, shire council or court-house. Cases of sickness were attended to by bush nurses or visiting doctor from Bowen; otherwise folk had to travel to Bowen by coach, dray or sulky. The town could boast of a Farmers' Association and a cricket and bicycle club. Entertaining was done in the home.

### **POLICE STATION IN TENT**

Around 1896 Constable Tasker was stationed in Proserpine as a deterrent against lawlessness and disorder. He erected two tents, one to live in and one as a Police Station. Wrongdoers were chained to a large log under a massive Moreton Bay fig. On one occasion Constable Tasker and his tracker were away for the day, leaving two "naughty" boys chained to the primitive lock-up; on his return, they and the log had vanished. It was a very relieved constable who found his prisoners still attached to the log behind the hotel, drinking beer.

In 1907 the Bank of New South Wales opened its doors for business. The 1,020 square miles of Proserpine was originally part of the Wangaratta (Bowen) Shire. Council meetings were held monthly in Bowen, and councillors were required to meet all expenses themselves, the return trip from Proserpine taking three days. Men were apparently more dedicated to whatever cause they espoused in those days!

Dissatisfaction with service, the maintenance and repair of roads, enraged ratepayers and they petitioned the Government to have this division constituted a separate shire. Success attended their complaints and Proserpine was declared and gazetted a shire in 1910. A few months later the tramline between Proserpine and Bowen was opened, a 3 ft. 6 in. gauge. This line brought cane from Bowen to be crushed and returned as sugar together with the local sugar, and disposed of through the port of Bowen. A train ran once a week between the two

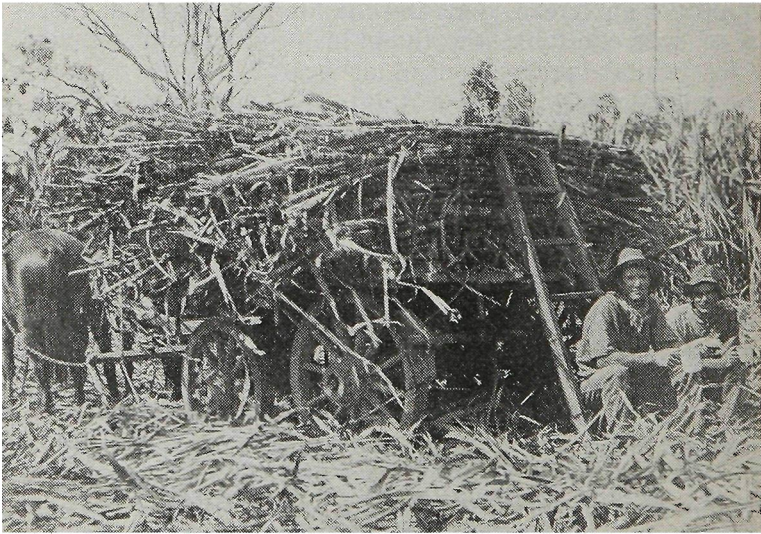


centres for the convenience of travellers and shoppers. This small service was incorporated in the North Coast Railway, completed in 1923. Added impetus was given to the sugar industry by the North Coast Railway network. Coaches also ran.

Unfortunately, adverse conditions, an unhappy relationship between management and directors, and most likely inexperience on the part of those early mill directors, forced the Government to take over the administration of the mill in 1902. In 1931 it was returned to the farmers, who have successfully run it on a co-operative basis.

By the operation of mill peaks and quotas imposed by the Central Sugar Cane Prices Board, the mill may produce up to 83,000 tons of sugar annually, but this figure is subject to late seasonal adjustments upwards, frequently to offset the inability of other Queensland mills to reach their quotas.

The thrilling news that gold had been found burst upon the good folk of Bowen and environs in September 1871. Sam Verge, known as "Long Jim" to his mates, a stockman from Havilah Station, was the discoverer and with three of his mates staked their claim. The field was known as the Normanby. Happy Valley on the Proserpine had its minor gold rushes as did Kelsey Creek. Gold was not found in great quantities. Isolation, together with a reversion of profits, caused a decline. In the 1930s three local lads discovered gold in the Kelsey area



"Smoko" time while cutting cane in the Proserpine area. A picture taken before 1920.

in a spur of the Clarke Range. A local doctor acquired the mine and it became known as Dittmer Gold Mines Ltd. The vein was worked until World War II, and was one of the outstanding gold producers of Queensland, with 5 oz. of gold to a ton of ore, plus up to 6% in copper. More than a million dollars worth of excellent quality gold was produced up to that time. It re-opened in 1949 under the auspices of a new company. The Clarke Spur Gold Mining Company closed down the mine in 1971 because of high costs and lack of capital for further development.

### NECKLACE OF ISLANDS

The Whitsunday group of islands, comprising 74 in all and part of the Cumberland group, are the most exciting necklace of islands in the whole Barrier Reef. At least, that is the opinion of the prejudiced natives of Proserpine. They are not coral islands but the tops of drowned mountains. Tourism was extremely slow in starting; their alluring and Elysian appeal was not recognised—far-away places seemed more enticing. Lindeman and Hayman were the first to take visitors under quite primitive conditions in the late 1920s. Other islands were leased for stock grazing before opening for tourists. Now there are resorts on Hayman, Dent, Long, South Molle, Daydream, Lindeman, and a fascinating underwater observatory on Hook Island. The tourist industry is really flourishing both on the islands and mainland coastal resorts. Nature's Wonderland is one thing they all have in common.

Cannon Valley, which runs through from the town to the coast, was initially the embarking point for the islands and cruise boats, but cyclones struck the jetties with disastrous results and so the road was pushed through to Airlie and thence to Shute Harbour, which affords more protection from the elements. The five-and-a-half mile road from Airlie Beach over jungle-clad ridges plus the new jetty, was opened in December 1961, at a cost of \$560,000.

Proserpine, like many other towns, has a colourful past and to mention a few incidents would not go amiss . . . A pioneer of the district, Mr. A. J. Setter, a brickmaker by trade, made the bricks for the Glen Isla Mill in 1882. In 1883 he was engaged as a teamster at Bloomsbury Station. On his second trip to Bowen, he and his assistant, a Kanaka, were camped in the Crystalbrook area when they were ambushed by wild blacks. Luckily, the spears missed them, so Setter and his mate had the team caught and harnessed by daybreak. They had not gone far when from the side of a ridge a whole tribe of blacks came up and from a distance showered them with spears and then

disappeared. Some of the spears struck the horses; Setter got one in the arm and two in the leg, and the Kanaka was hit in the leg. This spear had to be chopped off with an axe and then pushed through the flesh to remove it. After removing the spears from himself and the horses, Setter lay the wounded man on top of the load and drove to some clay holes from which he obtained clay to fill the wounds of the horses and both men. He arrived at Bromby Park with 17 spears still sticking in the load. A messenger was despatched to Bloomsbury Telegraph Repeater Station, and in due course police arrived from Mackay and Bowen, and with station hands to swell the number, the tribe was located and a wholesale massacre ensued.

A Mr. Armhurst had a sizeable portion of land between Bloomsbury and Lethebrook and he engaged one Ben Toll, a timber merchant from Charters Towers, to bring the land into production. Toll usually called at Bloomsbury Station once a fortnight for his rations and when he failed to put in an appearance, a search party was organised to look for him. He was found hanging from a tree, having been killed by the blacks; the Kanakas working with him had also been murdered. The whites retaliated and rounded up all the blacks in the area and slaughtered them; the place was afterwards known as Slaughter Camp or Slaughter Waterhole.

Clashes between whites and blacks have not been fully documented; the fragmented notices of blacks killing a missionary, shepherds, the lone hut-keeper, the traveller through the bush—makes one wonder at the circumstances surrounding these killings. Two of our well-known pioneers were known to have been trigger-happy when blacks were around and shot them at the slightest provocation—they regarded them as no better than animals. This was a serious blot on their escutcheon, as otherwise they were honourable men.

### A BANANA VENTURE

Lethebrook was also known as Banana Pocket and some old identities still speak of it as such, Lethebrook has become one of the best sugar-growing areas in the district, but before sugar was produced the farmers went in for mixed farming. In September 1913 a syndicate of Chinese leased 100 acres from E. G. Lascelles for the purpose of growing bananas. Before going into business on a big scale, the Chinese made arrangements for their fruit to be picked up by small ships and taken to Mackay for wider distribution. This was not always a satisfactory arrangement, because on numerous occasions the bananas would arrive at Mackay in bad order, so they acquired a small ship of their own, the *Edris*, a 40 tonner. Conditions did not alter overmuch

as space on the large inter-state steamers was not always available for their bananas. For five years they worked hard raising their fruit, but fate decreed that Banana Pocket was to be essentially a sugar-producing domain when the 1918 cyclone delivered her knock-out blow. The trees were flattened by the terrific wind which left a trail of debris in its wake. The disheartened Chinese walked off their plantation. This was the end of banana growing at Lethebrook.

Wild pigs had just about taken over Goorganga Station in 1907, so E. G. Lascelles engaged two drovers to round them up, sort out those of suitable age, especially the progeny of domestic pigs, and drove them to Mackay. Lascelles made arrangements with a Mackay butcher to purchase them. One man found the work too hard, but the other carried on and delivered 120 pigs after a ten-day trek to Mackay. In all, three mobs were rounded up and delivered; about 1,000 porkers were caught, those not fit for market were shot.

Before World War I, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Moncrieff and daughter Gladys spent some time in Proserpine. They had a movie projector with films. Gladys sang popular songs of the day, while slides with words and scenes were flashed on the screen. The Moncrieffs proved a popular attraction with Proserpinites and Gladys is remembered by her contemporaries and some of the following generation with much affection.

### SNIPPETS OF THE PAST

The following are snippets of news taken from the *Port Denison Times* and the *Proserpine Guardian*:

- 1872—Meeting in Mackay to subscribe to fund for discovery of a road from Mackay to Normanby.  
Fitzalan (botanist), Rainbird (conchologist) and two other men from Bowen climbed Mt. Dryander, they being the first white men to scale its heights. Fitzalan wrote a prophetic poem while sitting near the summit.
- 1873—Lucky fellow at Happy Valley found a 10 oz. nugget and 1 lb. of loose gold.  
Men working on the Kelsey Gully on about seven miles of watercourses are all on payable gold, although it is impossible that it will be permanent. Two week's holiday is allowed to Happy Valley diggers for Christmas.
- 1926—Another aeroplane passed over Proserpine yesterday travelling at great speed, shortly before 1 o'clock. We learned later that it was the manager of General Motors, who is on a Northern tour.

1930—This year no fewer than five cane-cutters have severed their fingers while cutting.

1934—Police had to come into the ring during amateur wrestling match between Fighting Mac and Duke Beams last Friday night. At first it was a willing bout, which had spectators on their toes, but it finished up with both wrestlers taking on the ref., and police had to intervene to restore order.

1971—Flashback . . . The Drinkwater farm at Kelsey was a staging camp for Overlanders between Mackay and Bowen, in the early days: particularly teamsters. Proserpine was by-passed completely, Bloomsbury being of far greater importance with its Telegraph Station (and line). Creek crossings were problems in the district's early days, and the further inland, the drier the country. When the railway line was being surveyed there was a strong move to have it pass through Kelsey. (One wonders how the town would have developed if it had.)

This is a short summary of my town's history, too short to do it justice, and if I have dwelt too long on Proserpine's past, my only excuse is that I find the past more tantalising than the present. A thread is followed—it breaks—sometimes the ends can be joined, other times there is just a mysterious void.

Many places are well documented, others, like Proserpine, up to a point; one must then have recourse to newspapers and the reminiscences of the remaining "oldies". Old age is often apt to slip a cog or two in memory. Dates can often be traced in the best Sherlock Holmes manner and I'm sure that most historians and students of history have the qualities needed for a good detective.

Author John O'Grady introduces Proserpine in his book *Gone Troppo* and perhaps his impressions may serve as a garnish to a delicious dish of tropical holiday:

"It's upstream on the Proserpine River. A quiet little town that sits and suns itself in the middle of flat green cane fields. Or sits and tries to drown itself in the middle of hundreds of acres of flat brown waters in times of floods. It falls as though somebody had emptied the Pacific over the town's head.

"There was a one-strip airfield . . . and a nine-hole golf course and enough pubs for everybody.

"The town lived on cane. Its people lived on steak. And in the crushing season its women swore at the dark grey dust from the mill that prevented their sheets from becoming whiter than white. And golfers pulled their trollies round from hole to hole, going dark grey to the knees.

“It was an unaffected town, shunning hypocrisy and pretence. And big bare-legged men wearing dirty shorts, and shirts hanging out and sweat-stained hats, were likely to be wealthy men.

“Men wearing clean white shirts with ties hanging out were likely to be commercial travellers. And worried looking men wearing suits and cameras with their pale faces hanging out, would be tourists from ‘down south’ on their way to the islands to get sunburnt.

“If their faces were brown and happy, they’d be on their way back loaded with colour slides to show their neighbours. Their women would be brown and laughing too and wearing hats they wouldn’t be seen dead with in Collins Street, and that no Proserpine woman would be seen dead with in Main Street.”

And on that happy note I shall conclude.

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