

The Rush to Fields of Gold

After James Nash's 1867 discovery of gold in Gympie came demand for a shorter coach route from Brisbane to the diggings. At the same time, the Crown Lands Alienation Act of 1868 opened up large tracts of former grazing land - previously unavailable for closer settlement.

The country to the north of Brisbane, now known as the Sunshine Coast, was explored in 1838 by Andrew Petrie, and later his son Tom, in search of millable timber. But for many years, there was little European settlement.



Jack Ferris with a log

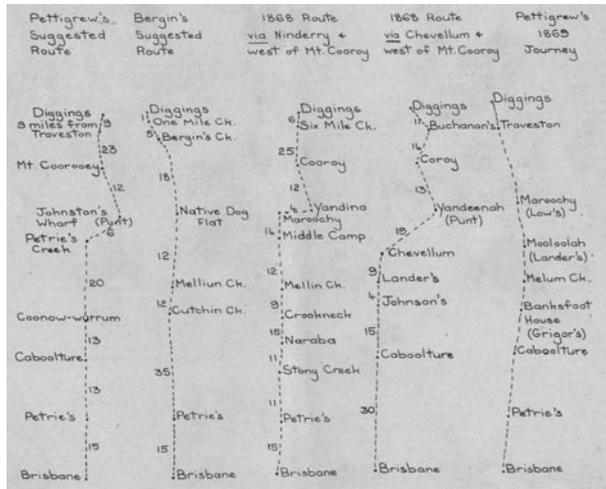
Aware of the special significance of the Bunya trees to Aboriginal people of the Gubbi Gubbi (Kabi Kabi) language region, which includes the Glass House Mountains, NSW Governor Gipps ordered an area of Bunya pine to be reserved for Aboriginal people and he banned settlers from cutting down the trees. However, in 1860 with the formation of the Queensland Government, land was opened up to settlers and to timber getters seeking the giant red cedars for building new towns. They became the early pioneers of what would later become the Sunshine Coast hinterland.

The Homestead Areas Act 1872 (Qld) required settlers to live on their land. With good returns from fertile soils, pioneers settled blocks ranging from 160 to 640 acres (65 to 260ha) - despite difficult access, extreme isolation and harsh conditions.

The local Aboriginal people were forced into relocating from their homelands. In 1897 State legislation appointed a Protector with the power to send Aboriginal people to reserves, such as Cherbourg (Barambah), where they were segregated from Europeans. This Act remained in force until 1939.



Map



Alternative routes from Brisbane to Gympie, 1868-69

Access to Gympie

Initially, rough tracks were developed from Brisbane north, up and over the range east of here and then along the Mary River to Gympie. Alternatively, passengers travelled by ship to Maryborough and then overland to Gympie. The discovery of gold in Gympie demanded a shorter coach route from Brisbane to the diggings.

Staging Posts for Coaches

Between 1853 and 1924, Cobb & Co coaches provided reliable transport for mail, passengers and parcels throughout Australia. On 12 November 1868, using a newly constructed route, a coach left Brisbane for Gympie and another left Gympie for Brisbane; they met at Woombye for the overnight stop. By 1878 Cobb & Co, and later, McCallum Coaches, were running regular services which took two arduous days to reach Gympie. By 1900 Cobb & Co were using 9,000 horses each week throughout Queensland.



Stage coach

The Brisbane to Gympie goldfield run required staging posts and overnight stays so accommodation and hotels sprang up along the run. Horses were changed about every 15 miles (24kms) and it took 10 changes of horses to make the run. Punts ferried travellers across rivers.

In 1868, Edmund Lander set up a coach depot at the Mooloolah River crossing. In October of the same year, taking advantage of the newly built Gympie Road, William and Mary Grigor established Bankfoot House as a coach staging post with accommodation. Meanwhile, James Low established a coach depot and post office on the Maroochy River and in 1871 Isaac Burgess built a store, accommodation and Temperance Hotel south of Mellum Creek (now Landsborough).

The depots soon grew into settlements and later became the small towns of Mooloolah, Glass House Mountains and Landsborough. By 1889, the Brisbane railway was extended from Caboolture to Beerwah to service the timber industry. With the availability of the railway, coach passenger services to Gympie ceased in 1891 and the mail coach ended 2 years later.

First Selection

Established in 1868 on the first selection in the parish of Beerwah, Bankfoot House is the oldest surviving building in the Glass House Mountains area. Three generations of one family occupied this heritage residence over 130 years - the Grigor, Burgess and Ferris families respectively. Members of these families have made a significant contribution to developing industry, community life and local government.

William and Mary Grigor purchased Portion 1, 160 acres (64.75 hectares) of land amidst the Glass House Mountains on 16 October 1868 to set up a staging post with accommodation for Cobb & Co coaches on the new road to Gympie. Coaches pulled in for lunch on both legs of the journey while Cobb's Camp at Woombye further north provided the overnight stop.

Named after a village where Mary lived in Scotland, Bankfoot House also acted as a post office. In 2008 Bankfoot House's significance was recognised with listing on the Queensland State Heritage Register.

Mary Ferris, granddaughter of Mary Grigor, recalled being told of the coach drivers blowing a bugle coming up the hill to ensure lunch could be ready on the red cedar table. Bankfoot also acted as the post office and an accommodation house.



Grigor family in the living room at Bankfoot House 1895. Mary at the piano, son James with violin. Front L to R: Kenneth, William and William Andrew. Bankfoot House Collection.



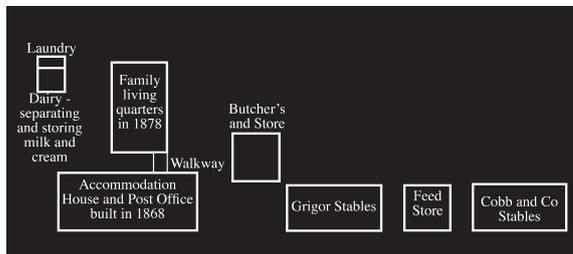
William and Clementina Burgess with their family Ellie (L), Mary (R), William Isaac (Front), Kenneth on this mother's knee. Photograph taken c. 1915 adjacent to walkway between the two dwellings. The horizontal log footings of the 1868 accommodation house can be seen in the background. Bankfoot House Collection.

The site for the dwelling was chosen well. Within easy walking distance of fresh water at Coonowrin Creek, the house took advantage of gently sloping land which protected it from flooding. An underlying layer of rock provided all-weather turning for the heavy coaches and bullock wagons. The creek and its adjacent grassy flats gave an area for growing crops, fruit and vegetables and fodder for the bullocks and horses. Mount Tibrogagan to the east and the surrounding Glass House Mountains were highly visible and attractive landmarks for travellers on the Gympie Road.

A ship's carpenter built the house. Local hardwood was used for the external weatherboards and framing, beech for the internal walls and red cedar for the doors and windows. The timber was pit-sawn on the property. The shingles on the original roof were probably 'narrow-leaved bloodwood'. The original 1868 building was demolished in 1930 to allow for extensions to the second dwelling, which was erected in 1878. The exterior walls of the second dwelling provide the core of the current house. Other remaining historic outbuildings include the dairy and laundry - complete with equipment. Important landscape elements include a mature fig, bunya pines, exotic fruit trees and a trellis.



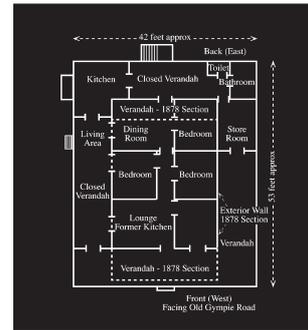
The original Bankfoot House, 1926. At this time the log foundations were rotting and the building deteriorating. The slot of the post box is visible in the centre of the front wall. This photograph illustrates the relationship between the two buildings. The new building's steep pitched roof is showing at the rear of the old building.



Plan of accommodation house dwelling and outlying buildings c. 1878. Bankfoot House Collection.



This dwelling built in 1878 (left) remains as the inner core of the current residence (centre), pictured here in 1930, not long after its construction. The dotted rectangle in the plan indicates the exterior walls of the 1878 building framework.



Community Involvement

Mr Jack Ferris was the last resident of Bankfoot House and he passed away in 2002, aged 101. In 2004 Caloundra City Council acquired the land, house and all its contents from the Ferris family with the intention of preserving it for future generations.

The Council saw the value in sponsoring a volunteer community group to assist with the process of telling the rich history of Bankfoot House by preserving and researching the site, the buildings and its collection, and making this knowledge widely available. A public meeting chaired by Cr Anna Grosskreutz in September 2006 officially launched the Friends support group. The Sunshine Coast Council, in conjunction with the Friends of Bankfoot House Inc, continues to develop Bankfoot House as a partnership heritage initiative, encouraging its use as an educational and cultural community asset.

New volunteers will be made most welcome.

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