

THE HISTORY OF THE CALLAGHANS ON COOCHIEMUDLO ISLAND

As narrated by Olive Walters in 2001

(original held in the Coochiemudlo Island Heritage collection)

Before I begin I'd better tell you a little about our family. I was Olive Callaghan before my marriage and my parents were Lou and Isabel Callaghan. Mum was known as "Cally" for much of the later part of her time on the Island. I have four brothers in order – Les, Con, Robbie and Bernie and I have a husband Andy and four daughters – Jean, Susan, Lesley and Maree. I won't enumerate my nieces and nephews or the next generation, my Mum's greatgrandchildren, but Coochiemudlo Island is or will be a part of their lives I'm sure.

It is believed that Coochiemudlo Island was discovered by Matthew Flinders but for our family the true discoverer of Coochiemudlo was my older brother Les. When he and his wife Edna were first married they lived in Wynnum and at times spent part of their weekends driving around the bay areas and doing some fishing and crabbing. A friend asked Les if he had ever visited Coochiemudlo Island and tried the fishing there. Having a few days off work Les suggested to Edna that they make a day trip to the island. They drove to the jetty (one then on the northern side of the Victoria Point) and waited for the advertised ferry to arrive having just seen it move off. It didn't return and after making enquiries were told they had to ring Doug Morton on the island and he would come across in his open motor boat to pick them up. Arriving at Coochiemudlo they walked around the beach and tried their luck fishing from the beach. The tide was out and they caught nothing and returned to the mainland in Doug's boat (this was the ferry service during the week including Saturdays; Dick Whitehall's ferry ran from the southern jetty on Sundays only).

They must have been impressed with the island because a few weeks later they saw an advertisement in the paper offering land for sale at Morwong Beach on Coochiemudlo and made the trip across on the following Saturday morning and bought an allotment in Cypress Street. Our brother Rob who accompanied them to the island described it as semi-desert with trees pushed down towards the beach. Les doesn't agree with this and says that most of the large eucalypts were left standing and the cypresses were already beginning to grow back.

That year, 1961, Les began to build on his allotment. He obtained a book of plans and chose the one he wanted to build and secured the plans and

specification for it. He'd never built anything before except a fowl house from scrap timber and iron when he was quite young but had always used Dad's tools when he lived at home or visited. He had concreted and made household cupboards and fittings after he was married. He began by building a small shed to lock up materials, tools and a tent. He also installed a tank to catch water from the roof of the shed as there was no reticulated water on the island. These materials and sand and gravel were brought over by truck and barge from Redland Bay. Small items such as bags of cement were brought over in his small dinghy with outboard motor. He cut the building material to length at home in Wynnum and arranged for it to be transported to the island by truck and barge. It was picked up by a truck returning from the markets on Friday morning for delivery to the island on Saturday morning on the high tide with the barge landing on Morwong Beach. There was about ten inches of rain on the Friday night and when the barge landed it was obvious the truck couldn't be driven to the allotment and the timber was unloaded above the beach. Les was able to make arrangements for two of the island's residents who owned horses and carts to transport the load to the allotment during the week. Les had assistance from Edna's brother-in-law and occasionally his brother Rob. The second load of material was taken over by Snow Jorgenson and Bill Phillips towing two 18 foot dinghies behind a motor boat and then the horses and carts to the site. Les with help soon had a semi-habitable dwelling of two bedrooms, a bathroom and a kitchen/living area built in the usual timber and fibro on hand poured concrete stumps.

My father and mother had a short holiday and were taken over to visit the island. They had worked for the Queensland Railways all their married lives and as Mum was a Station Mistress cum Post Mistress they had always lived in a Railways house. They were approaching retiring age and we were all wondering where they would find a suitable home in which to spend the rest of their lives. Mum agreed to make the visit to the island but was heard to say that there was no way she was going to live on an island. She actually fell in love with the island and she and Dad bought a piece of land on the second subdivision on the red soil which Dad declared would be good growing soil. (He was later to complain about the rate of growth of the trees Mum planted.)

Approval (the island had now become part of the Redland Shire) to build the second house was granted on 14th June, 1963. Les and our youngest brother Bernie began building soon after. Bernie had drawn up the plan for the house while he was attending high school in Toowoomba and Rob traced it at the Engineering section of Queensland University before he finished his degree there and went to Tasmania to work as a mining engineer.

The boys again built the laundry as a storage shed and put up a small tank to collect water. By now Bill Phillips had bought a truck and material was transported by him on the dinghies and motor boat on the water and the truck on the island. I believe Dad spent some vacation time working with the boys and Con when on leave from the Navy helped with the erection and roofing. Con spent a week of his leave on the island and sawed all the studs.

Les and Bernie with Edna's help must have put all their spare time into house building because by May 1964 when Mum and Dad retired from the Railway the new house was certainly up and weather proof. I came up from Tasmania with my then three daughters to spend a last holiday with them at Acland and became involved in the packing and moving.

We travelled in two cars from Acland to Coochiemudlo, Mum, I and the three girls in Edna's VW and Dad, Bernie and the dog Slasher in a ute Dad owned at the time. We arrived safely at Victoria Point to be greeted by Les and Edna coming off the island with the news that Dad had broken down en route. We spent that night at Wynnum and Les drove to Gatton next day to pick Dad and Bernie up. Edna delivered us to Coochie. Dad and Mums' furniture could not be delivered for some weeks so we were to stay in Les' place in Cypress Street for the time being.

So I had my first holiday on Coochiemudlo Island. I remember the pleasant walk around Victoria Parade to Morton's shop to buy milk and bread and trips to the beach at Morwong where my girls swam and posed for photos. I had to return to Tasmania as our school holidays were over and Mum and Dad stayed in Les' house until their furniture arrived.

Mum did some shopping in Brisbane for a new stove, sink, cupboard, bath and laundry tubs and arranged for these to be delivered with the furniture. In the meantime she and Slasher explored the island. One day something spooked Slasher and he jumped and knocked Mum over badly injuring her knee. When the furniture finally came in on the barge and the big move took place Mum

was installed in a temporary bed in the living room and directed operations from there.

Conditions were fairly primitive for a while. There was no power so lighting was provided by kerosene lamps. Dad had bought a power generator for the island and this was delivered with the furniture but it wasn't put into use until my husband Andy had to travel to Townsville for the wedding of his youngest sister. He came to the island for a weekend and with Bernie as offsider wired the house and connected it to the generator. It was a full day's work and when the wiring was completed the generator motor was started and there was light. This was a big step forward – batteries were charged during the day and lights could be switched on in the evening. Mum could also use her washing machine but she still heated Potts irons on the stove for ironing. A kerosene fridge kept food fresh. Water was collected in two tanks. A large tank was set up on high stumps and the generator was housed in the space underneath.

The house was gradually finished while Mum and Dad lived in it, visitors pitching in with painting, curtains etc. A front verandah was added as protection from the weather especially the South Easterlies.

Mum quickly made friends on the island. Among the permanent residents at that time were the Mortons, the Elliots, the Phillips, the Pullens, the Jorgensons, Ted Jones and Mrs Smith who lived in a caravan on the corner of Victoria Parade and Erubin Street. It was Mrs Smith who rescued Mum when Slasher injured her leg and administered first aid and helped her home.

At that time there were a few weekenders along Victoria Parade, cottages and orange trees in the Orange Grove area, Osborne's house, the white two storeyed house that became the store, the "haunted house", the Opala's and one other house above the creek as well as the residences of those mentioned earlier.

I made irregular visits from Tasmania in the following years and my children had memorable holidays with their grandparents – sometimes without me. Each visit revealed changes to both my parents' home and to the island in general. The building of the tennis court was a big step up in the social activity. Dad and Bernie were both labourers on this project. Mr Elliot used to organise tennis days in which we all took part. Later there was an "honour board" on which we booked times at which to play and this was not always amicable as overnight rain could erase bookings or sometimes bookings were just

mysteriously changed – but a lot of tennis was played on the old court. I guess the new courts are a big improvement – no more strange bounces off joins in the concrete, no overhanging branches to deflect shots in or out, lots of room to move back to take deep shots but I doubt there's as much laughter or as many disputes as in the "good old days".

Flinders Day was a day in which my mother was always involved. She befriended Ted Jones and they had lively discussions about his theory that Coochiemudlo was Flinders' Sixth Island. She dressed Con's children in their father's sailor gear to be some of Ted's crew in early re-enactments of Flinders' landing. Flinders Day began in 1977 and continued from that time but it was a much smaller event than now.

Gradually houses were built on vacant blocks adjoining the Callaghan's place including an A frame immediately behind. This came on the market in the 1970s and was purchased by Rob and Bernie. They both had young families and needed more space when they came on visits. The block of land beside the A frame came on the market and Andy and I bought that. Next the piece next to Cally's became available and we bought that too. Thus we gradually built up the "Family Estate" on which there are now three houses and a little bit of space for car parking and for our grandchildren to play when they too visit.

Les did not keep his house on the island – he sold it as he wanted to build a house at Ormiston and needed the money from the sale to help. His house is still there - added to and improved and obviously loved.

My Dad died in 1972. He suffered a massive stroke and had to be transported from the island by hand stretcher to the beach, Whitehall's ferry and then ambulance (arranged by Dr Foley and Les). He died in the P.A. some days later and was buried in the Southport cemetery. Mum continued to live on the island until 1988 when she fell and broke her hip. She died on October 19th – her bones healed but she didn't. She too was buried at Southport with Dad and my only sister.

The family has celebrated many events on Coochiemudlo. The first would have been the announcement of Rob's and Isabel's engagement during Isabel's first visit.

The next would have been Mum's eightieth birthday. She was so proud of reaching this figure that she decided to have a "shivoo" - this Bernie organised

in the back garden – talking both Rob and me into making surprise visits for the occasion.

She survived to celebrate her ninetieth on which occasion all the extended family came together for the first and only time. Many island friends joined in both these big “shivoos”.

Other celebrations include: Lesley’s 30th, Bernie’s 50th, Con’s 60th and Les’ 70th birthdays.

My grandson James was christened here and Bernie’s eldest son Graeme was married here – it’s obviously a good place for a party.

The changes to the island in our families’ time of association have been many. Water and power have made big changes as have ferry and barge services. There are positives and negatives to all these things – too many to speak of here. Among the things that sadden me is the loss of natural bushland to be replaced by concrete, exotic plants and rolled out turf. With these has come a loss of fauna, particularly birds – no longer can I look from Mum’s house at a mother quail followed by her row of babies – no peaceful doves, no double-bars – less honey eaters to be seen on my block. Have these been replaced adequately by feral peafowl? I think not!

I think we have missed the boat on planning to escape the complete urbanisation of our lovely island. Why, last Friday night as I drove some visitors down to the jetty I was stopped by two policemen and breathalysed – how urban was that?

I must finish on that note. I still love visiting the island though we still haven’t made the big decision to move here permanently. That was our intention at the time of building which is why we built an “urban” type home with modern conveniences but too many daughters live in the south – they pressure us to keep up the Melbourne house and we give in. However, being able to live here comfortably for long stays is a bonus and we have great family gatherings here. My three Queensland brothers always visit when we are here and Rob comes up from Tasmania for long visits each winter. We also have every second Christmas here and these are always extended family gatherings with a lot of laughter and enjoyment.

I’m sure Mum looks down on us and is pleased we can still enjoy ourselves so much on her Island Paradise. (Copied 5 April 2017)