

## Ada's Place – 20 Pullen Street Coochiemudlo Island

When Ada and Noel Mears bought a tiny weatherboard cottage on Coochie in 1987 little did they know their 'fishing shack was purportedly in a past life, the **Beenleigh Lock-Up**. The Mears were living on the Gold Coast running a major business when Noel's health signalled it was time for some 'R&R'. In the search for peace and quiet they booked a few days at the Coochie Island Resort. Lazing on the beach and easy walks around the island were just what the Doctor ordered. It must have worked because they fell in love with the island.

On one of those walks around the island whilst wandering down Pullen Street Ada and Noel spotted a tiny dwelling for sale. Denise Foley was the real estate agent handling the sale and she gave the Mears a photo of the Lock-Up. The dwelling was shipped across to Coochie approximately 25 years previously and had until the Mears bought it, only ever used as a fishing shack.

Photo 1: Dwelling at Pullen Street purportedly the Beenleigh Lock-Up (1987)



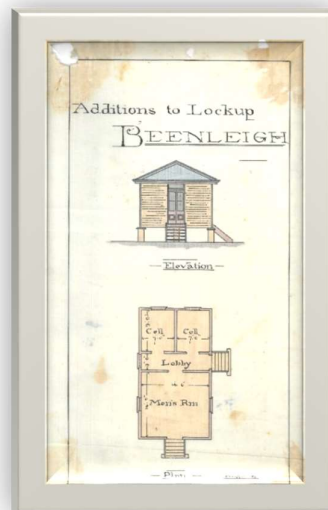
The property had no toilet, no plumbing of any kind, no power and no water, but these issues couldn't dampen the couple's dream to purchase their island getaway.

The first police presence to be established in Beenleigh was in October 1872

([http://www.logan.qld.gov.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0017/7334/richinhistory-police.pdf](http://www.logan.qld.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0017/7334/richinhistory-police.pdf)).

Figure 1 which was provided by the Queensland Police Museum shows a building that appears to be larger than the Coochie dwelling. The QLD Police Museum agrees that the Pullen Street structure definitely looks like a police lock-up with two-roomed lock-ups generally being of a similar design, but they were unable to conclude definitively that the Pullen

Figure 1: A plan of the Beenleigh Lock-Up c 1886



Street dwelling came from Beenleigh.

The Mears were members of the Brisbane Boat Club and Noel (Figure 3) was a real boatman, so a 'tinny' kept on a trailer on the block until the next Coochie holiday was a 'must'. Sojourns were spent fishing, crabbing, gardening and working on the little cottage.

*Photo 2: Noel Mears early 2000*



*Photo 3: Noel working on the first stage of renovations, replacing and expanding the roof*



The first major project was a new roof, followed by a rear extension creating the space for a separate bedroom and bathroom. An annex was added on the ground floor for relaxing under an umbrella and overlooking the garden.

Ada's plan of 'anything goes' saw all traces of lawn disappear amidst a blaze of colours and riotous foliage. Anyone who has visited Ada's Place knows what a passionate and creative gardener Ada is, and after nearly 12 months of buying the purported Beenleigh Lock-Up, as the block next door (No. 18) was still for sale, Ada saw opportunity knocking and the Mears bought it. It took a further 10 years of keeping up two homes and a business that the joy of maintaining two properties was starting to wear thin. Meanwhile the Lock-Up was slowly transforming and expanding on all sides.

Garden rooms discreetly separated by winding gravel paths evolved all over the two properties and provided a home to Zebra finches (*Taeniopygia guttata*) and Blue eyed honeyeaters (*Entomyzon cyanotis*) also known as Blue-faced honeyeaters. Ada recalls planning a Brazilian Rain Tree in the middle of the garden which over 20 years grew so

enormous she reluctantly had to cut it down. Ada ruefully recalled how a \$17.50 seedling ended up costing nearly \$4,000 to get rid of.

*Photo 4: Early stages of Ada's garden after purchasing the block next door*



Small communities often see greater community engagement in local events and activities as many Coochie-ites will attest, so it's no surprise that apart from gardening, fishing and crabbing the Mears' threw themselves into a hectic social life by joining the Redland Bay Square Dancing Club, the Donald Simpson Centre for Cleveland's Over 50s, the Coochie Garden Club and much more.

Ada reminisced of how the Beenleigh Garden Club used to come over in a twenty-seater bus for functions and garden tours, and the Cleveland Over 50s often enjoyed BBQs and dancing at 'Club Mud' AKA Ada's Place in Pullen Street. Good friend and Coochie poet Brenda (Joy) Prichard, Australia's leading female bush poet, used to come and play the guitar and recite her poems at island gatherings at Ada's Place. Throughout the following years (early to mid-2000s) there were many Christmas parties and nights of dancing that spilled over into neighbours Alistair and Eithne Barber's place. Wally Wellings would bring out the mouth organ with Noel Mackenzie and Gene Madford 'calling' the dancers through a sequence of steps to the beat of the music. The Coochiemudlo Song written by a fellow from Macleay island was a favourite at the time. These happy days changed with Noel's passing in September 2012.

Ada's indomitable spirit was her source of strength evidenced by travelling around Australia TWICE on her own. It was on those travels that in 2014 she met kindred spirit and partner Kevin Reynolds. After winning multiple garden awards over the years Ada and Kevin's garden today is a joy to see.

*Photo 5: one of the garden rooms*



*Photo 6: Flinders Ranges mural in Kevin's Corner*



*Photo 8: Mural of the Flinders Ranges in spring time*



A similar mural of an expansive view of the Flinders Ranges in springtime overlooks a garden room of bromeliads

From humble beginnings of what is thought to have once been the Beenleigh Lock-Up, Ada's garden rooms skirt what is now an artistic expression of liveable comfort and transports the visitor to an extraordinary world that celebrates a kaleidoscope of flora and nature

### **Acknowledgements**

Ada Mears, Pullen Street, Coochiemudlo Island. 2017

*Written by C. Leonard*