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Entertaining Buderim's Settlers – the First Half Century

by Bill Lavarack

I have often wondered just exactly what life was like for Buderim's first settlers in the 1870s, 1880s and 1890s. In other Occasional Papers I have examined how they achieved the basics of life, but I paid little attention to how they spent what leisure time they had. To examine this in detail, I looked at 'Trove'¹ searching for topics such as 'Buderim', 'Buderum', 'sport', 'cricket', 'tennis' 'picnics' and 'music'. There was nothing before 1890, except for a couple of references to picnics. However, after 1890 references to these topics start to appear and, after 1900, they are more numerous. Does this suggest that the early settlers had no time for relaxation before 1890 – or is it that it was not reported as it was considered too frivolous? Establishing a new farm in 1870 occupied virtually all the new settler's time with hard work, but everyone needs time for recreation and rest. So how did the new arrivals on Buderim spend their down time?

The obvious few options included reading, card games, sport, music and trips to the beach. So, before 1880 there was little time for sport, and recreational pursuits were necessarily simple such as picnics and musical evenings. This situation changed markedly for Buderim after 20 years or so, with increasing population and improving communications. In 1871 the railway, the Palmwoods to Buderim tram and motor vehicles were still well into the future.

Clearly in those very early years there was little time for relaxation and such pleasures as they had needed to be simple. Picnics were one diversion. Joseph Dixon in his 'Reminiscences' mentions in 1876 *'New Years Day, went with Good Templars to a picnic at Moo. Heads enjoyed ourselves very*

¹ 'Trove' is a research website operated by the National Library of Australia which allows the user to search old newspapers and other documents.

much' and Good Friday 1877, 'Burnett family and the man with our selves went to the coast in the Bullock dray for a picnic.'

In 1872 the *Brisbane Courier* reported:

*'Buderim Mountain is but little known. It lies directly between the Mooloolah and Maroochy Rivers only about three miles from the harbour of the former. It is a tableland, upon which is heavily timbered scrub, with a rich chocolate soil, somewhat stony in places, but of excellent quality. There are some ten or twelve settlers, sturdy pioneers, busy at work, and many a noble tree, the growth of ages, is brought low. They have about 50 acres down, and several more comfortable houses built. It is a most favoured locality, the cane grows all winter, and is beautifully green, forming a great contrast to the dead look of the cane crops in other places. The Government are about to have a cutting made down the eastern edge of the mountain, which is very abrupt, and, when done, will give the selectors easy access to the coast.'*¹



Left: An early photograph of the Buderim School in 1889. Right: the first school teacher Robert Bruce Grant. He was teacher from 1875 to 1882. Photos: BHS.

The first rather tenuous mention of sport on Buderim that I can find, comes from Buderim's first school which, in June 1877, just six years after the first settlers arrived, held a function to raise funds: It was reported that over 100 people attended a luncheon to raise funds to effect repairs on the school house and that: *In the afternoon the youngsters had sports, running, jumping, etc, under the able superintendence of Mr. G. Berry.*² However I am sure that the children (and some of their parents) found the means to entertain themselves with some form of sport from earliest times on the Mountain.

In the first two decades Buderim was an isolated community with no railway and no decent roads, only rough tracks. While other settlements developed not too far away, there was little communication with them due to very rough tracks which, on Buderim, became boggy and slippery in the wet season. All goods in and produce out, and almost all people, came by sea to Mooloolah Heads harbour. Things improved somewhat in the 1890s with the advent of the railway to Landsborough in 1890 and to Woombye and Yandina in 1891, representing a huge step forward.

All this led to a self-reliant community which, in the early days, looked inwards to provide recreation and entertainment opportunities such as picnics, trips to the beach and possibly musical evenings. There would have been no organised sport in the 1870s, and probably not in the 1880s either, but an escape from the hard work of the day could be found in picnics or in an impromptu

¹ *Brisbane Courier*, 3 October, 1872 page 2.

² *Brisbane Courier* (Qld. : 1864 - 1933), Tuesday 5 June 1877, page 3.

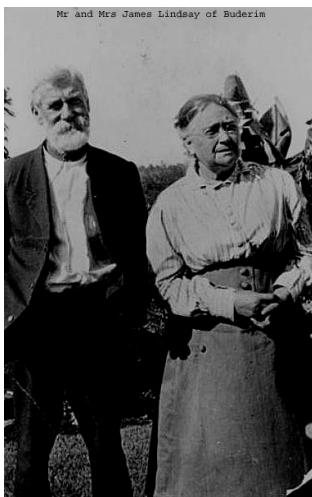
musical evening. Agnes Jones, who was born in 1887, speaking of the period around 1890, says that when she was a girl there was no piano available and the button accordion was the earliest instrument of choice.¹ She tells, in an interview with BHS, that for dances in the hall (built in 1888) they would hire an Islander who would play all night for ten shillings.² Mouth organs and perhaps fiddles, were probably available. There were card games and board games and, of course, reading by candlelight. Buderim had a Good Templars Lodge from the early days and this strongly religious group was popular. One report from December 1876 announced that: *The Good Templars are going in for dissipation in the shape of a teafight, sports, &c.*³ One wonders exactly what the ‘sports’ involved? Sports such as croquet which had simple requirements, would have been popular in the early years of the new community, but there are few, if any, records.

In terms of sport, the settlers were clearly too busy and there were very few people to make up sporting teams. From the ‘10 or 12 settlers’ in 1872 (mentioned above), the *Brisbane Courier*, in 1887 reported ‘25 families and many labourer, 50 school children, and a School of Arts.’⁴ In 1892 the census had Buderim’s population as only 160. Clearly numbers were small, but growing to the stage where in the 1890s a cricket team was viable, and four to eight people could be found to make a game of tennis. I can find no definite references to any organised competition before 1900, but it is certain that cricket and tennis were being played in these years. Evidence for this is to be found in the *Brisbane Courier* of June 25 1896, which informs us that there were cricket and tennis clubs operating on Buderim in 1896:

A great want of Buderum⁵ is a recreation reserve. Our lawn tennis and cricket clubs are dependent on the generosity of owners to be allowed to play on their private lands, and generosity is fickle at times. Now that land is so cheap I think it would be a good time to petition the Government to buy and set apart about ten acres or so for such a purpose.

Unfortunately Buderim sports men and women had to wait another 52 years, relying on the good graces of local farmers for playing fields, before the wish for an official sports ground was fulfilled.

In 1887 James Lindsay organised books to be sent from Brisbane to his home and he ran a lending library. Gradually Buderim’s population increased to the point where, in 1888 at the instigation of James Lindsay, a School of Arts Hall was built and the lending library was later housed there.



.Left: Mr James Lindsay and Mrs Lindsay Right: Buderim School of Arts 1888.

¹ Agnes Jones, interview held by Buderim Historical Society.
² Islanders or ‘Kanakas’ were imported from Pacific islands to work in the canefields in 1877. They brought an innate love of music with them.
³ *The Queenslander*, 16 Dec. 1876, page 6, CABOOLTURE AND MOOLOOLAH.
⁴ *Brisbane courier* 1 March, 1889, page 7.
⁵ ‘Buderum’ is the spelling used in the newspapers up to about 1908, after which ‘Buderim’ is used.

Buderim finally had a central hall where meetings, concerts, dances, and other functions could be held. As soon as the School of Arts was built in 1888, it became the social centre of Buderim, with concerts, dances and other community functions being held. Such an event is reported in *The Nambour Chronicle* of 25 December 1903. It was held to raise funds for the School of Arts and over 100 people attended. This would amount to more than half the population of Buderim. Mr James Lindsay was the Master of Ceremonies and about 150 people, all locals, sang around 30 songs. Well known Buderim resident Mr H.V. Fielding sang 'Doreen' in a 'nice light bass voice'. Other local performers included Miss J. Guy, Mr S. Townsend and Mr G. Burnett. After refreshments there was dancing with the music provided by violinist Mr G. Robinson. It would be safe to assume that similar events were held in the late 1880s and early 1890s.

The first mention of tennis on Buderim was that, as early as 1893, the school principal, Mr W. Earnshaw organised a club which played on a court near the present War Memorial Hall.



Tennis at Guy's 1912. Although this photo is from 1912, it is probably very similar to conditions in the 1890s. Note the lack of a fence. Photo from BHS.

The first record I can find of an organised cricket match is from 1896 when Buderim played Eudlo: *Monday was a great day on Buderim. The cricket match, Buderim v. Eudlo, came off, with the result that Eudlo was defeated by 123 runs. The Buderimers batted first, making 62 runs; Eudlo responded by making 11; Buderimers' second Innings resulted in 96 runs, Eudlo's In 24. After the match all adjourned to the School of Arts, where singing, dancing, and speechifying were indulged in, until nearly midnight.*¹

So we see that Buderim had tennis and cricket clubs by 1896. On Buderim, cricket was played on Townsend's paddock which was opposite the present Lions Park. On one occasion Buderim travelled by horseback to Kenilworth 'about 1900' as recounted by Tom Milne to Charles Short. The Buderim team rode horses to Mapleton and camped there, went down to Kenilworth in the morning and played the match. Then back to Mapleton for another overnight camp and then back to Buderim. Three days to play a match which took only one afternoon.² Other reports from the *Nambour Chronicle* mention matches with Diddillibah and Montville in the early 1900s. Although I found no official records, it would be safe to assume Buderim was playing 'friendly' matches in

¹The *Brisbane Courier*, 1 June, 1896, page 6, COUNTRY MAILS.

² Bill Lavarack, 2012, *History of Sport on Buderim- The First 100 Years Revised Edition*, publ. Buderim Historical Society, page 9.

the 1890s against places such as Palmwoods, Woombye Bli Bli and Eudlo. They were organised on an individual basis and were not part of an organised district competition. Transport must have been a major problem before the advent of the rail, motor transport and the Palmwoods to Buderim tramway. Mostly the players rode horses as there were few sulkies in the early days.

Who were the people involved? They were farmers or farm labourers and later a few shop keepers. Sport was mostly played late on a Saturday, or where religious beliefs allowed (which initially was rarely), on Sundays.

While this croquet game at JK Burnett's house (Pioneer Cottage) was in 1912, it is safe to assume croquet was played informally, in the 1890s or before. Photo BHS.



One factor with a long term effect on the future of sport and music on Buderim was the arrival of indentured South Seas Islanders imported to work on the early sugar plantations in the mid 1870s. This group inter-married with local Indigenous people. They had an innate love of music and by 1900 they were expressing this in the local community.¹ As well as their love of music, they adapted to the local's ways and became involved in sport. Initially they were not familiar with sport as we now know it, but their children mixed with white children at school in the late 1880s and 90s and their children, in turn, were important to sport on Buderim in the coming years, particularly in cricket and football. There seems to have been few discernable racist tendencies in sport right from the early days. In fact one of Buderim's notable sporting identities in the 1900s was Henry Iscak whose father emigrated from India in about 1890. Local families of mixed Islander and Aboriginal ancestry were the Muckan, Eggmolesse and Chilly families, who were to appear in cricket, rugby and soccer teams over the years.

Further Reading

Bill Lavarack *Occasional Paper no. 17 Living on Buderim 1890 to 1900*, August 2023, 5 pages.

Bill Lavarack *Occasional Paper no. 27 Buderim Early History up to 1870*, August 2023, 5 pages.

Bill Lavarack *History of Sport on Buderim the First Hundred Years (revised)*, 2020, 52 pages. Buderim Historical Society,

This undated image is typical of a local impromptu cricket game around 1900. Photo: BHS



¹ See page 2, Agnes Jones reports an Islander playing the button accordion in about 1885.