

The Lost Plantation

A HISTORY OF THE AUSTRALIAN TEA INDUSTRY



**BY
R.J. TAYLOR**

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TO LES ALEXANDER

Without whose keen interest and help
this book would not have been published.

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INTRODUCTION

There is something particularly attractive and romantic about the tea industry. Everyone has his own inner vision of the planter's life, and imagines it to be one of endless days inspecting the plantations, tasting teas and addressing women's clubs. Nothing is ever as easy as it seems and the Australian Tea Industry is no exception. It is a long history of sweat and toil and failure, that goes back far far further than most people today can imagine.

In the nineteen eighties it seems to have all come together and the thousands of tourists who visit the Nerada Tea Plantations constantly thirst for knowledge about this superb industry, which today is such a showpiece of Queensland agriculture, and technological know how. One of the first questions is always to know when the tea industry started. It all seems so new and bright and successful that the anticipation of the answer is always that it must have been a few short years ago.

The purpose of this book is to describe the start of the tea industry in Australia — not just back to 1969 when Tea Estates of Australia was formed, nor even back to 1959 when Dr Alan Maruff started growing tea bushes at his surgery in Rankin Street, Innisfail. The real start of the industry occurred back in the pioneering days before the turn of the century, and it is to this era that we owe the industry of today. This story is about those days and those men, their lives and their times, their successes and their failures.

This story is a story of 36 years of struggle in the tea and coffee industries and attempts to capture some of the flavour of life between 1882 and 1918 when the great cyclone and tidal wave spelled the end of the era at Bingil Bay.

Many people have contributed to the making of this work, but easily the most important of them is Les Alexander. He is the only one of the Cutten family who saw something of the "Cutten Era", still living to relate its history. Much of the detail given is his, and the chapter on the aftermath of the 1918 cyclone has been written almost entirely from his reminiscences, and is previously unpublished. Also tireless in digging up long forgotten pieces of history has been Mrs Ted Wilson, daughter of J.B. Perrier who was shire Clerk of the Johnstone Shire Council from 1918 to 1934 and who lived the last part of his life in the idyllic surroundings of Clump Point. His recollections of the 1918 cyclone have also been used. Others whose enthusiasm has helped me along the road have been Mrs Ena Webb whose husband Eddie was Chairman of the Johnstone Shire Council from 1958 to 1973, Mr Bulla (E.B.) Butler a long time friend of Les Alexander and many other people interested in the history of the early days and too numerous to mention.

If the story seems to diverge from the history of pure tea growing, it is because it seeks to bring to light a history of the people who grew tea, and why it all came to nothing in the end. The remarkable thing about this history, is that from this failure, like a phoenix from the ashes, has arisen a new industry with new generations of people involved. Many of them today know nothing of the history of tea growing at Bingil Bay in the eighteen eighties, nor that the very trees they harvest and fertilise and prune are descendents from those trees a century ago. This book is about the people who made it all possible and who lie for ever on that magnificent bluff at Bingil Bay facing the environment they loved so well — the rich cyclorama of rainforest and flowering trees and the infinite variety of the birds of the jungle. This book is about the Cuttens.



Les Alexander

Nephew of the four Cutten brothers, born 1893

The Lost Plantation

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CHAPTER 1.

“THE FORGOTTEN GIANTS OF BINGIL BAY”

Deep in the eternal twilight of North Queensland rainforest live some of the largest tea trees in the world. Unknown to the general public and abandoned for almost a century to fight for survival in one of the most hostile environments in the Pacific, the trees have grown into a giant species almost unrecognisable as the familiar small tea bush known the world over as “*Camellia Sinensis*”. This gentle plant is a cultivated descendent of the wild *Camellia*. An evergreen, it is normally pruned to a plucking height of one metre, but has been known to grow to a height of nine metres in the wild. In the impenetrable jungles of Far North Queensland, the law of survival of the fittest has transformed these gentle plants into forest giants fighting for sunlight with tropical hardwoods, towering far above the ground. A century of natural selection has resulted in trees that have survived and overcome all their natural enemies and are now immune to ordinary ills, be they bugs or cyclones or droughts.

These trees are the ancestors of the tea industries in Australia and New Guinea, industries which are among the most scenic and picturesque of all agricultural industries. The vistas of neat lines of tea bushes at Nerada stretching for miles towards Queensland’s highest mountain, Mt. Bartle Frere, have become one of North Queensland’s most photographed tourist attractions. In New Guinea it is hardly possible to get past Port Moresby airport without seeing posters of the marvellous panorama of tea hedges at Mt. Hagen in the fabulous Wahgi valley — New Guinea’s premier agricultural tourist attraction. These industries are now making a significant contribution to employment and national income. Besides, people find tea fascinating. No other beverage with the possible exception of wine, has such mystique, such subtle variations of flavour and aroma, and it has as well endless variations and conceptions of the right way to serve it from the “turn the pot three times” of England, to the elaborate ceremonies of China and Japan.

Believers agree that no other beverage has such power to calm and cheer you, nor has such amazing variations in flavour and aroma due to its sensitivity to the differing places where it is grown. It has been the world’s most popular beverage for two thousand years, and to more than half the population of the world it is a staple in their everyday lives. It is little wonder then, that the venerable ancestors of the industries in

1903

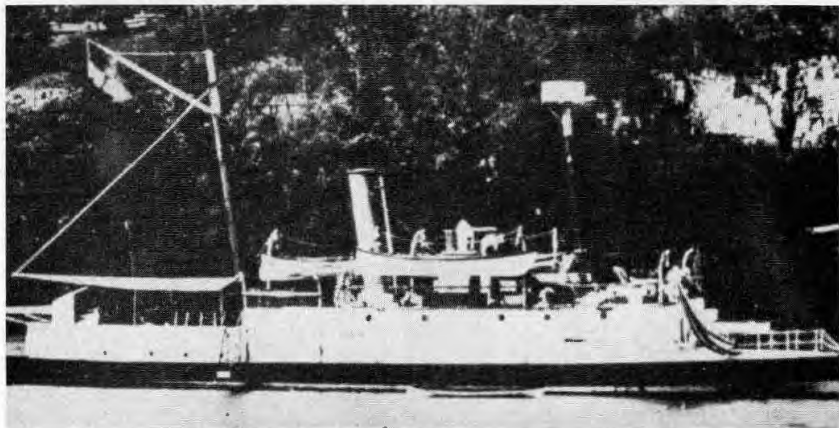


Jack Unsworth the foreman for Cuttens working outside his hut

CHAPTER 2.

“THE 1880’s

THE RUSSIAN MENACE AND THE RACE TO TAKE SELECTIONS”



H.M.Q.S. "Gayundah" The guardian of the North Coast.

In the eighteen eighties all the talk was about the Russians. Indications were that the Russians were planning to attack North Queensland, and in the event of hostilities Great Britain might be unable to assist the Colonies. In 1882 there was of course no Commonwealth of Australia and no Australian Navy. Queensland had become a state in 1859 and in 1864 Parliament repealed the "New South Wales Defence Act" and replaced it with the "Queensland Defence Act". On 6th August of that year the "Queensland Light Horse" was created. During the eighteen seventies the Russian Menace became a real one, and a series of annual encampments for volunteer's commenced in 1875.

In 1878 the first of the State Cadet Corps was formed at the Brisbane Grammar School. Real proposals for Queensland defence began to crystallise in 1882. The Government tried to accelerate the system of land grants in North Queensland on the premise that the more people who were there, the easier defence would be. Parliament also stressed the "paramount necessity for floating defences for the protection of commerce and the seaboard of the Colony".

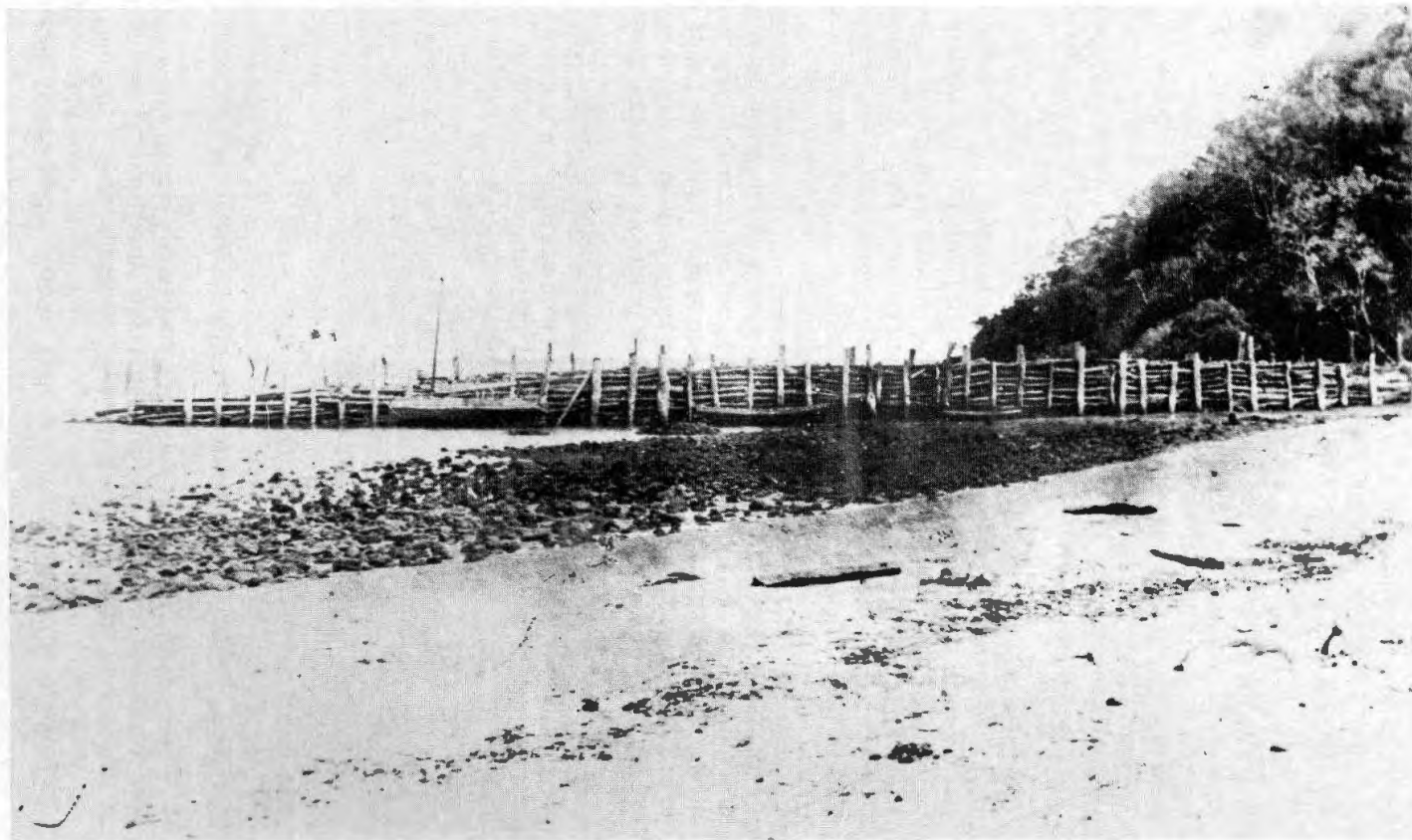
On the 18th July 1882, the Colonial Treasurer (Hon. A. Archer) moved in the estimates for £60,000 for defence for the purchase of two gun-boats, one to be stationed at Thursday Island (fortified to be a Naval Base of sorts in the seventies) and one for the Brisbane area. Orders were

placed at Newcastle — on — Tyne and in due course the “Gayundah” (aboriginal for “Lightning”) and the “Paluma” (aboriginal for “Thunder”) were launched. The “Gayundah” later was located at Thursday Island from which vantage point it was to patrol and presumable defend Queensland’s sparsely settled Far North Coast.

In 1884 a volunteer Naval Force was established. It was a time of “high excitement and expectancy. Queensland’s annexation of New Guinea had been stupidly disallowed, and Germany and others were shouldering aside the pretensions of Australia in the South Pacific”. Considerable interest was aroused when the “Mosquito” a second class torpedo boat was the first unit of Queensland’s “Navy” to arrive. By 1886 Queensland had two gunboats, two torpedo boats and the refitted Government steamer “Otter” as an auxilliary. Five steam propelled hopper barges of the Department of Harbours and Marine were armed with 5 inch B.L. 2½ ton guns. One of these armed coastal craft was the “Polly” which grounded and sank in the Johnstone River at Innisfail in 1912 — gun and all. By 1888 a cadet corps was established in Cairns — the first in the Far North and Townsville followed in 1889.

Such was the background when the Cutten family showed an interest in acquiring a selection in the Far North. The selection was finally to be at Bingil Bay and to create one of the richest periods of history in the area. And of course the fact that it all came about because of the Russians has a special significance in the light of events in the twentieth century.

CUTTEN BREAKWATER 1895



The 30 ft sailboat shows how very large the breakwater was

CHAPTER 3.

THE EARLY CUTTEN ERA — PIONEERING AND HARD WORK

On April Fool's day 1882 four young sons of a pioneering British family rowed a boat they had borrowed from James Tyson on the Tully River up the coast scouting out suitable land that they might be able to take up as a selection. It was 11 years after their father, Frederick Cutten (born 1819), came to Australia in 1871 with three of his sons, Herbert, Leonard and Sidney, on the "Indus" which arrived 21/7/71. In 1872 his wife, eldest son James and four daughters came out in the same ship to join them on 1/7/72.

During the mid seventies as the boys entered their twenties they travelled all over Queensland getting a variety of experience, while their parents and sisters had taken up a selection at the Felton resumption near Toowoomba — part of a property owned by James Tyson. When this selection proved inadequate for their increasing flocks they purchased Comet Downs in Central Queensland.

The boys gained considerable experience. The eldest, James, was a surveyor and worked in the Rockhampton district. Leonard and Sidney were working on a property at Winton in 1877, and subsequently pit sawing timber in the boom towns of Georgetown and Croydon in the gulf. James and Herbert later joined them and all four made a journey to Cardwell via the Valley of Lagoons, for the purpose of looking for suitable land in the Clump Point area available for conditional selection.

In more ways than one, 1882 seems to have been a significant year. Not only was it the crucial year in the fledgling Queensland Government's "muscle raising" to counter the Russian menace, but these four energetic and ambitious men were embarked on a journey that was to have far reaching effects in the Far North. Simultaneously a British journalist E.J. Banfield seems to have been enticed north to the tropics from his newspaper work in Sydney, and in 1882 took up a post with the Townsville Bulletin. What the Cuttens were to accomplish with the axe and plough, Banfield was to equal with the pen. He later lived for a quarter of a century on Dunk Isle and went on to become one of the famous Australian authors of the era. His book "The Confessions of a Beachcomber" was to become a world best seller, and this and his subsequent books give us some idea of the Paradise that the Cutten brothers saw when they stepped from their flattie on the shores of Clump Point.

The Cutten boys were tired when they beached their flattie. They had rowed it down the Tully River to the sea from James Tyson's property, and then some 30 miles up the coast — a total journey of some 40 miles. They liked what they saw at Clump Point, and the sight of the long hard shining sands of Mission Beach, and the incomparable shady beach lov-

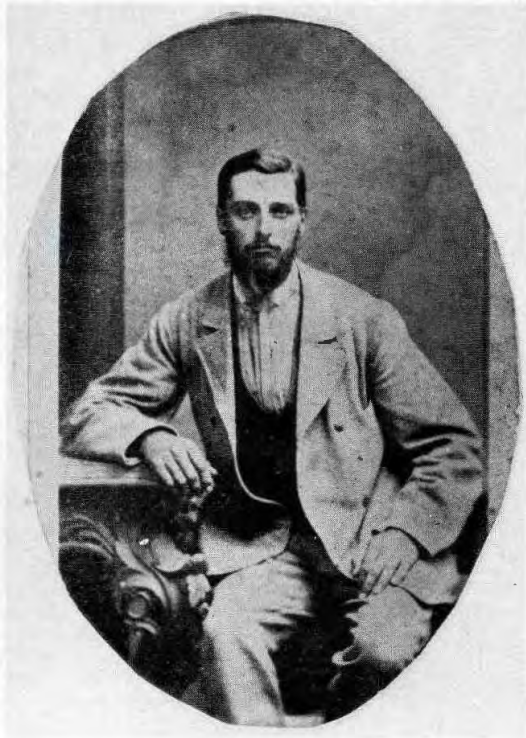
ing calophyllums giving off their profuse but gentle fragrance, made them forget their long hard journey.

James Cutten with his surveyors eye was impressed with the rich looking vistas of many hundreds of acres of gently rolling and well watered land, supporting a heavy forest of white cedar, nutmeg, bean tree, quandong, and native ginger. Towering high up on the hills were bloodwoods and stringy bark and Moreton Bay Ash so that the brothers could see ideal timber from which they would be able to build houses and sheds and furniture in the years to come. The precipitous mountains so close at hand seemed to guarantee a high rainfall and conditions were obviously ideal for the growing of many tropical crops. The scenery too was breathtaking with the majestic peak of Clump Mountain standing like a many footed sphinx between the long sandy flats of Mission and the sheltered Shangri-La of Bingil Bay.

The Cuttens made application to the Lands Office for three selections of 1600 acres. Unluckily, they were too late as the main block of 1280 acres had been selected already by Mr Hynes. Deciding however, that such marvellous country must have similar land to the North, they explored further north around Bingil Bay. Here they found the country even more heavily timbered with the jungle entwined with Loya vine (calamus) and even larger vines, Entanda Scandens, which festooned the jungle from tree to tree bearing giant pods four feet long. It was a strange foreign and exotic land to the four young Englishmen, but they liked it well enough to apply to the Lands Department for a selection. This time they were successful and title was finally confirmed in 1886. They named the property Bicton, in memory of pleasant times in England as guests of Lord Rowles at his country home of Bicton Hills.

It was slow, hard and tedious work settling in at Bingil Bay. All their supplies had to come from Cardwell, and so much time and energy seemed to have to be used just to get the materials they needed. The rest of the family stayed on at Felton on the Darling Downs until accommodation could be built at Bicton. Today clearing land is easy with powered chain saws and bulldozers, but for the Cuttens it was back breaking work with axe and saw and long hard hours in the steaming heat of the jungle. But four young strong men in their twenties are a powerful team, and it wasn't long before a few acres were cleared, and the brothers had quick growing crops of bananas and pineapples planted. Besides they had managed to enlist help from the large colony of aboriginals who lived there. Residents in Cardwell feared they would meet with disaster and were quick to remind the boys of the killing of the crew of the Brig Maria when it was wrecked on the reef at Kurrimine. For many years this beautiful resort beach only two miles north of Bingil Bay, was called Murdering Point. "Bingil" incidentally was an aboriginal name meaning "good camping ground and plenty of fresh water". The Bingil Bay tribe numbered 300 - 400 aboriginals and was a

complete homogeneous community with its own language quite separate from the tribe a few miles away at Mission Beach, with whom they could not converse.



*Herbert Frederick Cutten
C 1880 Born 1855 Died 1930
He specialised in coffee and tea
plantings. A dashing figure in
the eighties. Herbert Cutten is
the father of the Australian Tea
Industry.*

1902



1902 the Cutten brothers working on their coconut plantation

CHAPTER 4.

HOUSE BUILDING — ALL THE FAMILY TOGETHER — FRED CUTTEN DIES—THE 1890 CYCLONE—BACK TO THE SAWPITS

The building of an adequate home seemed to be taking a long time so the boys encouraged the rest of the family to come north to the Royal Hotel, Cardwell. 1884 saw the boys busily engaged pitsawing timber, and still busily plying to and from Cardwell by cutter. They were planting every variety of tropical seeds — tea, coffee, chicory, coconuts — all from Ceylon. They planted every known citrus they could get their hands on and pines and mangoes. Seventy years later in the nineteen fifties the mango trees were still there with huge branches interlocked 50 feet above the ground like a huge natural cathedral. Shortly after they were removed to make way for a new housing development.

In 1885 Margaret Edith Cutten married Henry Dun at Dalby and they made their home at Irvingdale. So when the family finally moved to the new house at Bicton in 1886 there was one Cutten less to be accommodated. The boys' father Frederick Cutten had not long moved into the house when he suffered several bouts of tropical fever, from which he was slow to recover. Work proceeded rapidly on the embryo tea and coffee plantations once the pineapples were under control. They shipped a hundred tons of pineapples to the south. James the Surveyor using his theodolite set out the coffee trees in neat rows with mathematical precision on the rolling land on the western end of the selection. With Herbert Cutten's help he arranged the first small tea plantation on the extreme northern end of the selection on the southern banks of Cedar Creek. This was an ideal spot and the Nursery comprised perhaps two acres with water in easy reach. The land was some 40 feet above sea level and several hundred yards from the sea sheltered from it by a gentle hill. Part of this old Nursery still exists in the forest today and perhaps a few of these giant old tea bushes — now huge trees are survivors from the first plantings in 1884/1885. With the present alignment of the road they are some seventy yards away from the traffic which uses the main road to the north out of Bingil Bay.

From India the brothers brought tobacco (cigar leaf) ginger, spices, pepper, cocoa, Jack fruit and vanilla. They grew enormous quantities of oranges and there seemed little they didn't grow in their tropical paradise. They engaged the services of a tea and coffee planter in Ceylon — a Mr Conin to teach them about the growing and proper propagation of the various crops. As the land gradually became cleared they felt the need for horses, so these were imported from a Mr Weinholt at Gracemere station at Rockhampton. The horses were overlanded, and many miles of track had to be cut in the jungle to get the horses in. So life

became a steady routine of work six days a week, with only the English ritual of meal times to break the monotony. Breakfast was at eight, lunch at one and dinner never before eight at night. Despite the rugged pioneer circumstances of their life dinner remained a dress "occasion", and coats were worn. Florence and Alice found life dull, and Florence welcomed the opportunity to become a Governess to the Blackmore family on the Herbert River.

Tragedy was soon to strike however. Fred Cutten suffered yet another attack of coastal fever — perhaps it was the deadly Denghi fever — and he died on 7th July, 1889. This was a terrible blow to the family, who had to attend to the coffin and burial. A Mr Smith who was manager for Hynes read the burial service. And so the oldest of the Cuttens was the first to die, and the boys buried him near the edge of a magnificent bluff on the southern side of the property looking over the forests intertwined with vines and enlivened by the blood red flame trees, — a rich cyclorama in which the sulphur crested cockatoos feast on the red flowers leaving a carpet of red staining the grass floor of the jungle. In this exotic and beautiful place nearly all the Cutten family now lie.

Mrs Cutten went to Irvingdale to her daughter Margaret Dun to recover. Subsequently she booked with Aunt Jane (Fred Cutten's sister) on the steamer "Quetta" for England. Luckily for them they arrived in Brisbane too late and the Quetta sailed without them, only to founder on an uncharted rock near Thursday Island with the loss of the entire ship's company, save three. They sailed later on the "Dacca". In England Mrs Cutten arranged for Aunt Jane to go to an old Ladies Home where she died a year later.

Yet more trouble lay ahead. Back at Bicton a cyclone was brewing in the Coral sea, and on 28th January, it lashed the Far North Coast. The home was wrecked, crops and orchards severely damaged. While the cyclone was not of hurricane force, it was a severe set back to the Cuttens who now found themselves short of money. So it was back to Georgetown for Leonard, Herbert and Sidney on their old pitsawing contract, to make money quickly to repair Bicton.

James carried on looking after the property with Mr Conin, but troubles came in threes. James was smitten with the dreaded tropical fever and spent three months in Ingham hospital. After his return, Alice went off to Townsville as a governess, and Florence left Blackmores to go to Herberton for a similar position at California Creek. From there she subsequently went to Lornsligh near Ravenswood.

CHAPTER 5.

SUCCESS AT LAST — THE NEW AUSTRALIAN COFFEE BARONS

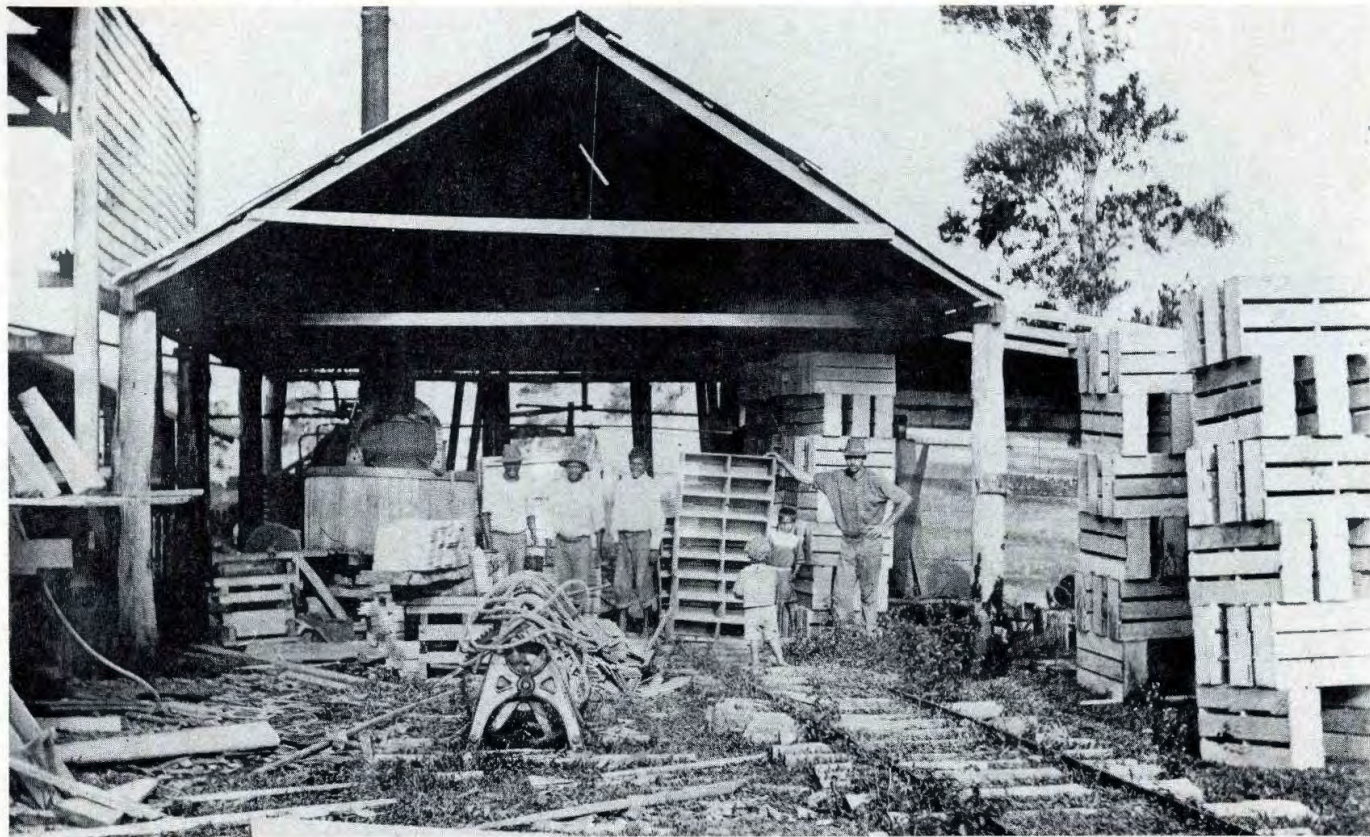
It was from this point that the Cutten family entered on to the high point of their 48 year odyssey at Bingil Bay. Shipping companies were increasing on the coast and they were able to arrange regular calls to Bicton provided they were guaranteed ten tons of cargo. Returned from Georgetown, the boys enthusiastically threw themselves into the construction of a solid stone breakwater. (see photograph) This enabled them to handle small lighters and enormous quantities of pineapples (up to 140 tons were exported per year), mangoes and citrus fruit were shipped South. By 1891, the tea and coffee plantations were mature. The tea had not been successful as the aboriginal labour was not reliable enough to pick the leaves on the ten day regular rotation needed. Occasional "walkabouts" left the Cuttens stranded and the tea out of cycle. The labour, however, was suitable for the once a year annual coffee bean picking, and the Cuttens enlarged their coffee plantings. They imported the latest machinery, and a coffee mill was set up with pulper, fermenting tank and fluming, and served by a ram in Bengre Bay Creek. Fruit was marketed under their XIZ brand, and though prices remained low, their volume was high enough for them to earn a good living. As well as this they marketed their coffee in one lb tins, filled with ground coffee with or without chicory, and it proved successful under their brand name of "Bicton Coffee". They used a great deal of aboriginal labour and eventually had 100 acres under coffee, producing a quarter of a million pounds a year. This was a very big business for the eighteen nineties, and they must have enjoyed a quite amazing market penetration in the infant colony. Based on present Australian consumption of coffee per capita, and on the population of Australia in the period, I estimate that their market penetration in Australia in their heyday was considerably higher than the market penetration of the much publicised Nerada Tea ninety years later, which sells in every state in the Commonwealth.

And so things prospered at Bingil Bay. Florence returned to Herberton and met Charles Alexander and they were married on 7th April, 1891. The boys became famous as the Australian Coffee barons, and as things prospered they added to the homestead using sections from the Hyne house at Clump Point, which had been damaged in the 1890 cyclone and subsequently abandoned. Finally, it comprised thirteen rooms plus an annexe with kitchen and dining room. As well there were thatched roof cottages for the Malays and Kanakas while the aboriginals had their own grass gunyas. What a sight this settlement must have been in the nineties! They erected a two storey packing shed, and then a sawmill and casemill. They built a wooden railway line and a bridge over Bingil Bay Creek, all the way from the sawmill to the stone wharf — a distance of 800 yards. To draw the logs out of the forest they built timber jinkers with unique



"BICTON" 1895 A 13 room homestead built from material on the selection

CUTTEN CASE MILL 1908



Frame at left from Garners Tully 1905 — went on to Wangan 1916

LOGGING TO THE CUTTEN SAWMILL 1902



The sawmill was erected in 1890

solid wooden wheels. (see photograph) These were pulled by horse and bullock teams. In the midst of all this wonderful activity Mrs Cutten arrived from England where she had stayed over twelve months. She had been away two years during which time she had missed a cyclone, and unprecedented building activity. She hardly knew the place on her return. Things were so prosperous that eldest son, James, decided on an English holiday as well. He stayed twelve months and met a girl, May Tudhope, whom after many years he was destined to marry.

Life continued successfully for the Cuttens through the turn of the century and it was not till the great drought of 1902 that they had to face their next severe test. This was the drought of the century and rainfall declined to unprecedented levels. After a lower than normal wet season, the Cuttens suffered a drought of crisis proportions — almost no rain at all for five months. There had been no year remotely like it. The forest dried out, many trees in the orchards died, and production declined to nothing. Forest fires raged in the hills and they were lucky to come through this period without serious loss. For the year they had registered only 60 inches of rain, but in the last five months, only five inches. The only tragedy occurred when the Cuttens were burning off in the dry weather. A fire got away through the pineapple plantation and across into the coffee plantation, burning out many acres of valuable coffee trees. Even worse, Herbert Cutten was severely burned — so badly, in fact, that his arm took two years to heal. The Cuttens lost another family member in 1904, when Jessie Cutten was taken ill and died in the Geraldton (Innisfail) hospital on 14th December, 1904. Perhaps it was the loss of Jessie which prompted James to get married — to have another young woman in the house. Family record has it that he “thought it would be a good plan to get married” — “he thought she would be a companion to his mother”. James was in mid fifties by 1906, but he had been corresponding with May Tudhope all those years — fifteen years since he had known her in England. So he wrote and asked her to marry him — he, the eldest son of the famous Australian “Coffee barons”. And she accepted, and so on 6th June, 1907 they were married in St Peters Church of England, Townsville.

When May and James came back to Bicton it didn't work out, especially with Mrs Cutten, despite the fact that James had married her “to be a companion”. The result of it all was that Herbert, Sidney and Leonard bought out James, and he and May went to live in Cairns, where James became a draftsman for the new Tolga to Malanda railway section which was being built at that time.

Over the years, E.W. Banfield had become a great friend of the Cuttens. Overcoming his initial objection to the Cuttens as despoilers of the environment, Banfield found them cultivated and charming. One of the greatest Australian writers of the era, and a source of endless knowledge on flora and fauna, Banfield found Herbert Cutten in particular, a kin-

dred spirit. Herbert was a brilliant scholar and a living encyclopedia. His books lined both sides of the large lounge at Bicton. It seemed that no matter what the subject, his knowledge was wonderful. Cultivated, charming, interested in music (there was always a piano at Bicton), witty, kind, gentle and thoughtful — he lived on something of the same plane as Banfield. Although the Banfields lived a splendid isolation on Dunk Isle, there was often a time when they joined the Cuttens, and Christmas was a particular occasion. So when, in 1908, Mrs Fred Cutten finally died, it was E.W. Banfield who read the burial service. So once again there was a gap in all their lives.

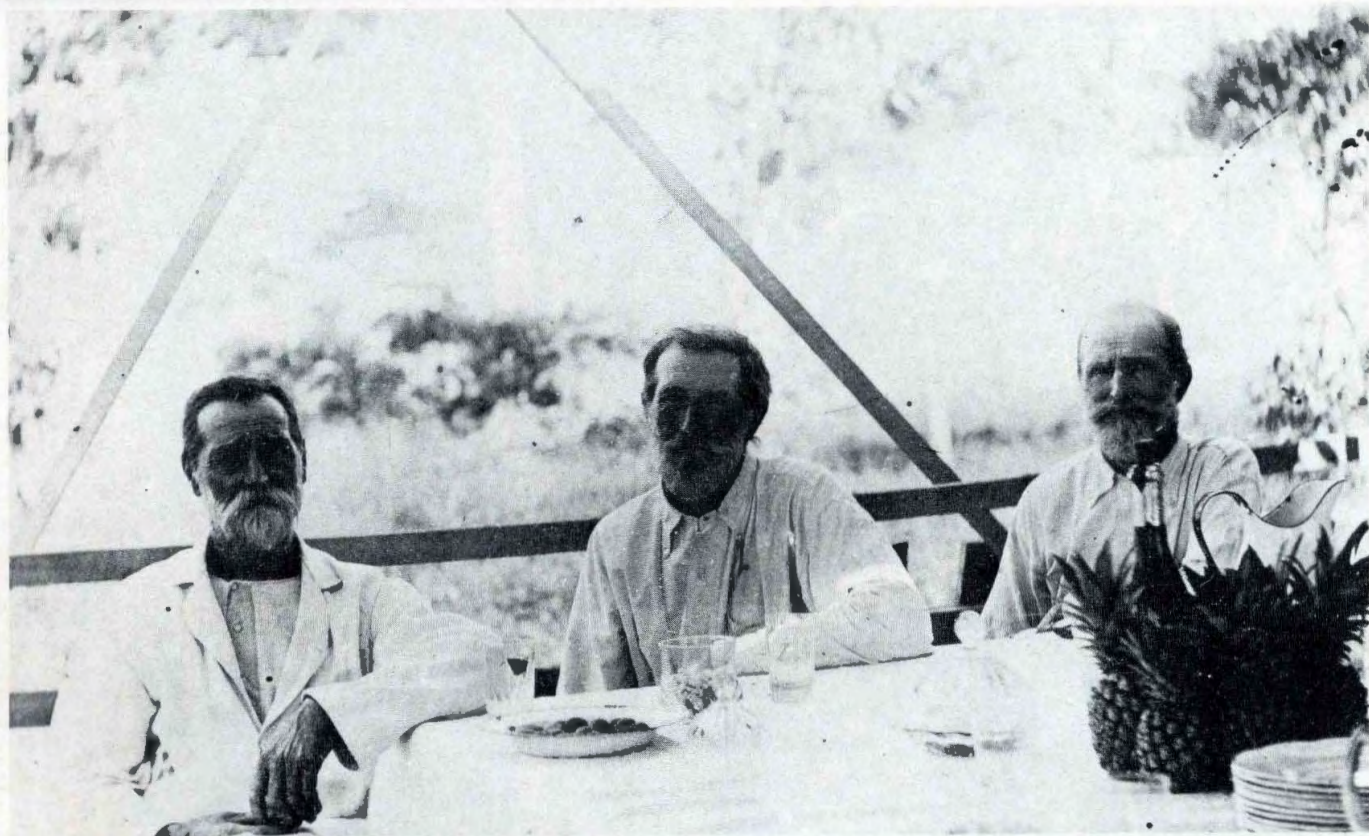
Mrs Cuttens & Co.		Cardwell		
De Las Thorn		12 April 1882		
Apr 1	300 flour 2/10 1 bag sugar 12 lbs 1/10		3	18 0
	2 boxes tea 2/0 20 lbs currants 1/3 1/4		3	3 4
	2 horse bells 1/6 2 lbs soda 1/6 3 lb cream tart 1/6		1	4 0
	4 lbs candles 4/8 3 bars soap 2/6 tucker 1/1			8 2
	3 files 9/9 6 lb 7/6 4 chains 1/1 1 shovel 4/6		1	0 1
	1 chisel 1/6 1 tin bark 1/6 6 plates 7/6			14 6
	1 lb nails 1/1 6 yds calico 3/6 2 towels 1/1			10 6
	1 doz pickles 1/1 half axe 1/1			16 0
			11	14 7
	1 lb nails 6			6
	1 pair blankets 1/0 10 1 doz jeans 10/6		11	15 1
	1 pair boots 9/6 1 canyover 7/6		1	10 6
	jack & hay 3/1			17 0
				8 0
			14	5 7
Total De Las Thorn				

The first supplies for the Cuttens bought at Cardwell, 1st April 1882

COFFEE MILL 1902



This open air mill produced over 200,000 lbs of coffee per annum in its heyday



Herbert, Leonard and Sidney Cutten

BINGIL BAY 1902



The wooden "railway" over Bingil Bay Creek, and the aboriginal Gunyahs on the beach



N. Q. ABORIGINALS "OFF FOR THE DAY".



ABORIGINALS FROM CUTTEN'S SELECTION
BINGIL BAY
 1906

CHAPTER 6.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END — THE 1911 CYCLONE — THE GREAT WAR

A few short years before Mrs Cutten died, the fortunes of the Cutten Plantation Empire stood at their zenith. But in a few short years circumstances brought about a total reversal that would see the end of the era as it had been known. The first of these circumstances began unobtrusively enough. The Cuttens began to have labour problems when the Chinese banana growers began paying native labour in opium, in lieu of wages. This habit gradually grew worse until finally the Queensland Government stepped in and formed aboriginal settlements to which all aboriginals in the area had to belong. Employers were limited to two -three boys only, and as sixty - seventy boys were required just to maintain Bicton, this spelled the death knell to life at Bicton as the Cuttens had known it. They attempted to reduce the size of the holdings and rationalize their products to reduce the necessary upkeep, but times became more and more difficult.

Another disaster lay ahead in the form of a violent cyclone of hurricane proportions. This famous cyclone became known as the "Yongala Cyclone" as it was the storm in which this liner was lost with all hands. On March 16th, 1911, the cyclone lashed the Far North Coast and Bingil Bay received enough of the tail to cause havoc on the troubled plantations. Not only was there considerable damage to crops and orchards, but the breakwater was badly damaged and boats lost. Rainfall was estimated at thirty inches in thirty-six hours before the cyclone carried down the coast to its ill fated appointment with the "Yongala" on 23rd March, leaving behind it a swathe of destruction, which the Cuttens, without their native labour, were ill equipped to deal with. The Cutten brothers were no longer young, all approaching their sixties, so that restitution of the orchards and rebuilding of the breakwater and boats, took a long time. They were forced to mortgage the property to raise money to carry out the repairs. Half way through, yet another cyclone in 1913 wreaked further damage.

No sooner were the repairs effected than war broke out and a whole new set of difficulties beset them. With the start of World War 1, in 1914, Bicton's lifeline was irrevocably cut as all ships were taken off the run for war service. It became impossible to get any produce away, so the orchards became of little value. Once again the brothers pulled in their belts and attempted to get by, by concentrating on the sawmill, putting in extensions and cutting timber for southern markets. This too proved a failure. Yet another disaster came when Sidney Cutten was seriously injured when scrub fell on one of their outer selections, to prevent losing the property under terms of the land Selection Act. The Cuttens turned their hands to various enterprises to keep their finances on an even keel,

but worse lay ahead. The great cyclone of 1918 was to bring to an end the forty year epoque of the Cuttens at Bingil Bay.

CHAPTER 7.

THE 1918 CYCLONE

In coastal areas of North Queensland, residents live with a constant fear of the Annual Cyclone season. This begins in mid December and continues on for several months so that only on 1st April do residents begin to relax and feel that the danger period is behind them. For those that have lived in these areas all their lives, there comes a feeling for the natural rhythm of things so that old residents know when a cyclone is brewing. A change in the quality of the heat, a breathless hush and decline in the normal wind patterns, certain gradual changes in wind direction, a change in the natural pattern of the waves with a tidal jumble and a breathless calm, a tingling intensity of the atmosphere and at the last a grey colour of the clear sky which gradually becomes an overcast — these are the signs of the coming of a great cyclone. And if along with these forewarnings quite suddenly the Frigate birds fly inland from the islands then it's batten down the hatches and everything of value and take refuge in your strongest room under a heavy table.

Very seldom in the history of cyclones in Australia have two killer cyclones come close together in one year. Invariably, every year a whole batch of cyclones is brewed in the coral sea, but only in 1918 of all the 114 years of recorded cyclone history in Queensland have two cyclones designated hurricane force hit populated centres on the Queensland coast in the one season. On January 20th 1918 the first killer cyclone hit Rockhampton with seventeen inches of rain, and then proceeded up the coast to maul the Sugar City of Mackay, which suffered thirty lives lost and over a million pounds worth of property damage from hurricane winds and a tidal wave. While residents in Mackay and Rockhampton sadly cleaned up their shattered homes, farms and businesses, those in other centres breathed a sigh of relief and thanked their lucky stars to have escaped yet another year.

Further north, four families with a lifetime experience of cyclones behind them were unknowingly yet inexorably moving towards their appointment with the next killer which was to demolish the town of Innisfail, leaving twenty-eight dead in the district and change many of their lives forever. On Dunk Island, author E.J. Banfield noticed the change in the quality of the heat in early March, "with the sky cloudless and serene, and the light wind dry and burning with a tingling intensity as rare as uncomfortable." J.B. Perrier, on his farm at "Keepit" at Mourilyan Harbour, some miles north of Dunk, also noticed the change in weather conditions which he recorded in his diary. Further north, in Rankin Street in Innisfail, Tom Nisbett was keeping barometric records from the only monitored barometer which was to survive the holocaust. Thirty miles south, a hundred feet up the high cliff above Bingil Bay, the Cutten brothers at Bicton had a grandstand view of the tidal jumble and

the breathless calm on the ocean below them. Conditions were ripe for yet a fourth cyclone in their time at Bingil Bay. They had survived cyclones in 1890, 1911 and 1913 and now so soon again they felt ominous forebodings of yet another brewing over the grey horizon.

The morning of March 10th 1918 dawned clear and still after a night of southerly breeze. A short, confused sea jumbled in the channel between Dunk Island and the mainland and the Cuttens searched the horizon for signs of the coming storm. Further North, J.B. Perrier, at Mourilyan Harbour, decided on an early morning walk up the hill behind his farm and by 9 a.m. could see a peculiar and distinctly colourful haze some miles out to sea. On the blind (Western) side of Dunk this was not seen and remarked by Banfield. J.B. Perrier went down to warn his wife that he was convinced a cyclone was approaching and to start getting the house prepared for a blow. The Cuttens too feared the worst, but their young nephew Les Alexander, unluckily was not around to help them batten down, having gone up to Innisfail for a couple of days. By midday an astounding straight line of ominous dark cloud had built up in the east and looked to be approaching the coast.

Increasing westerly and south-westerly, sympathetic winds making in-to and aiding the storm made the families certain that a cyclone was approaching, and hurried preparations were made to meet it. China glass, books etc. were all packed away for safety, windows secured and doors battened down. By 4 p.m. the sympathetic winds were blowing at gale strength and veering from South to South East. On the spit of Dunk Island, a long sand spit pointing westward from the coastal or channel side of the island, a consignment of goods for the Cuttens including cases of tinned goods and sacks of flour, were waiting in the receiving shed for trans shipment to the mainland.

Almost unobtrusively the sea seemed to recede so that the spit stood out like a giant sand dune against the sullen grey sky. Suddenly with a fearsome assault the wind veered completely to the east, and at twenty to five the huge black line squall hit with a furious power whittling the scrub with a tremendous roar of sound. Rain deluged from the black heavens and a huge tidal wave swept out of the east enveloping all the islands from the Barnards South to the Family Group — then right over the top of Clump Point thundering in to Bingil Bay and north around the Point to Maria Creek where the cyclonic surge went two miles inland. The wave crashed against the hundred foot cliff below Bicton smashing the stone breakwater in an instant and engulfing the boats in the harbour. The bridge over Bingil Bay Creek was swept off its pilings and taken a quarter of a mile upstream.

Although the Tidal Wave was restricted to the Mission Beach/Bingil Bay area only i.e. the southerly end of the cyclonic core, the hurricane winds hit with equal ferocity over an area up as far as Innisfail, and con-

tinued for five hours. On Dunk, Banfield was forced to abandon his barometer just as it dropped two hundredths with a jerk to 29.18 at 8 p.m. In Innisfail the town was almost totally demolished, the Post Office barograph destroyed, and the town a litter of smashed houses, broken roofs and splintered timbers. Among the only buildings to survive was the old Town Hall in which hundreds of residents had taken shelter. These included Les Alexander who thought it must have been the immense weight of the crush of Innisfail humanity which kept the old hall from blowing away into the night. Also relatively unscathed was the Riverview Hotel and the home of Tom Nisbett in Rankin Street about five buildings up from the wrecked Roman Catholic Church. Around 10 p.m. with a "conglomeration of terrifying sounds varying from falsetto shrieks to thunderous roars, the centre of the cyclone seemed to bear down". This devastating assault lasted for about half an hour, during which time the barometer in Nisbett's house (sometimes accused of being low set) dropped to an astounding 27.97 — the lowest barometric reading ever recorded in Australia. (The lowest official recording stood at 28.50 for cyclone Leonta in Townsville in 1903.) At Mourilyan Harbour the whole top storey of the house at Keepit blew off into the night and J.B. Perrier, for safe keeping, placed his young daughter Bunty under the kitchen table in part of the bottom storey which remained relatively intact.

At Bicton the big thirteen roomed house gradually disintegrated as did the Timber Mill and the thatched cottages. Only Banfield on the lee side of Dunk escaped the holocaust, and even he lost the roof of his house, his boatshed and boats. After 10 p.m. the eye of the cyclone passed over, and only then was lightning seen or thunder heard. Then at intervals, the tumultuously racing clouds were eerily luminous in the unnatural calm. Les Alexander and others ventured into the streets in Innisfail to see the damage only to be forced to scatter for shelter as the cyclonic winds returned from the opposite direction.

These reverse winds later in the night completed the damage that had been left undone in the attack from the east, and rain thundered down all night. With the Post Office destroyed no record existed of the rainfall. Banfield told how his gauge quickly overflowed at 10.5 inches, but it seems likely that over 20 inches fell during the night. Likewise, no official wind velocity was recorded, but later estimates at the university indicated that some wind gusts could have reached two hundred miles per hour. Unfortunately in the history of natural disasters in the world the really great ones have usually been beyond the scope of man's feeble recording. So it was with this great cyclone, but Banfield records it as the cyclone of the century in Australian waters and one of the greatest natural disasters to hit the Eastern Coast of Australia.

CHAPTER 8.

THE AFTERMATH

During the height of the cyclone, Les Alexander, who was staying at Mrs Graham's Strand Hotel on the Esplanade, took refuge in the nearby Ambulance Centre. He recounts that when the eye of the cyclone passed over Innisfail "there wasn't enough wind to blow out a lighted match". He and others curious to see the damage had barely had time to see more than a few buildings in the main street when the returning cyclone forced them to scatter for shelter. It was then that he joined hundreds of others safely waiting out the storm in the Shire Hall — Innisfail's largest building.

What had happened at Bingil Bay? This was his principal worry when he woke in the morning in the midst of frantic activity as the Disaster Committee swung into action. How had his uncles and family fared during the terrible night exposed as they were on the high cliff of Bingil Bay to all the elements? He immediately contacted boat owner, Harry Worth, to see if either of his two boats were still in action, so that he could mount a rescue mission. He found that the "Wanderer" was swamped but that the "Olive" was still afloat and with some work would be serviceable. From there he went to the Disaster Committee and sought help to set up a rescue party with emergency supplies. All food stocks in the town were frozen and were being rationed out to the hundreds of residents who had lost everything — their homes and all their possessions. The committee comprised of the Shire Chairman S.K. Page, the Shire Clerk and the Stipendary Magistrate felt that they had more than they could handle with the pressing problems around the town without worrying at that stage about the twenty-four residents of Bingil Bay or the twenty-five at Chapman's Sawmill at Maria Creek, who might or might not be in trouble. They decided to lend assistance however, when Les Alexander insisted that if they wouldn't do anything then he would try on his own.

But in the chaos of the aftermath of the cyclone, it took time to put together the emergency supplies he needed so that it was the next morning before the "Olive" was ready to do. So it was early on the morning of 12th March that Les Alexander with Harry Worth and deckhand Otto Krabinoff slowly and carefully chugged down the Johnstone with their hastily put together supplies on their rescue mission. They had been instructed to make their first call on the Lighthouse at North Barnard Island, to check on the safety of the Lighthouse Keeper and his family. They passed the wrecked Pilot Launch on the rocks at Flying Fish Point, and then chugged gently through a sullen heavy swell past the mouth of Mourilyan Harbour and on to reach North Barnard Island. On landing they forced their way through the tangled mass of jungle debris up the two hundred foot climb to the top. Here they found the residence a heap

of matchwood, and even the solid concrete Lighthouse itself had a huge crack in it. From the flagstaff the shredded distress flag still flew its desperate signal, but of the Lighthouse Keeper and his family there was no sign. Subsequently, they found that the S.S. Wyandra had seen the signal in time and had taken the family off.

With nothing to be done there, they reboarded the "Olive" and, taking the inside passage continued on to Murdering Point (now known as Kurrimine). There a lonely figure rushed out onto the beach waving his shirt to attract their attention. It was Andrew Illidge, the sole resident of the place, who had lost everything and was cut off from civilisation and help because the track through to Silkwood was impassible after the cyclone. After sharing out a portion of their precious rations to him, they continued on to Garner's Beach where they found the Garner family homes a complete write-off. Here they saw their first evidence of the huge tidal wave which had swamped and battered the exposed northern end of the beach. Damage here appeared worse than further north, so after rationing out further supplies from their stock, it was with a sense of foreboding that they reboarded their boat and continued on around the Point into Bingil Bay.

Disaster. As they rounded the Point they could see that Bingil had taken the full force of both the cyclone and what must have been a truly gigantic cyclonic tidal wave. Before them was absolute catastrophe. Gone was the familiar big stone breakwater as if it had never existed — gone the boats and receiving shed which had contained all the boat gear, home stores, extra furniture and household effects. Looking up on the hundred foot bluff at Bicton, gone was the big thirteen room house which had apparently disintegrated during the hurricane with timber and iron and all the furniture blown to the four winds. The nearby house belonging to Les Alexander's brother, Charles, had likewise disappeared as had the big two storey Packing House.

The neat plantations of citrus and coffee were destroyed — the trees broken and twisted, completely denuded of leaves. Of the Cutten Empire nothing remained — just a forelorn flattie swept high up onto the lower slopes of Bicton Hill by the tidal wave, and at the southern end of the bay, the stern of a sailing ship still showing above the long swells rolling in from the east.

Les Alexander's immediate thoughts were for the safety of his uncles and all the rest of the twenty-four people who lived at Bingil Bay. Were they alive or dead? He could hardly wait for the boat to get close enough so that he could swim ashore and begin his search. But where to begin to look? From the beach the three of them could see the twisted and collapsed remains of the Timber Mill. Imagine their relief when it was there that they found the survivors, battered and hungry, but alive. The building had collapsed onto the big boiler, the wreckage forming a cave-

BINGIL BAY 1912. Before the Cyclone



Note the breakwater and the receiving shed and how far the land was cleared

AFTER THE 1918 CYCLONE AT BINGIL BAY



All that was left of the stone breakwater and receiving shed — nothing

like shelter where they had all taken sanctuary. It was here that they were to continue to live during the weeks and months that it took to rebuild the houses.

In the bay, there still showed the stern of the sailing ship which proved to be the Mission Launch from the Aboriginal Mission at South Mission Beach. It had been swept up the coast by the hurricane fully two miles from its safe anchorage by the new wharf built only the previous year under the lee on the protected northern side of Clump Point. What precious treasures it might contain if only they could get out to it - tools, ropes, kitchen utensils — anything would have been valuable in their present circumstances. They set their hopes on the flattie but unfortunately it proved to be stoved in on one side, and before they could think of some other way to get out to the ship it slipped under the waves forever. The carvel built twenty-eight foot launch is probably still there today under only some twenty feet of water at normal tide.

Very little else remained to salvage at Bingil Bay. The tramline bridge over Bingil Bay Creek had disappeared having been swept a quarter of a mile upstream by the tidal wave, and the wooden tramline itself had been smashed to pieces and washed into the tangled jungle. To the North they searched for the two hundred thousand super feet of logs which had been stacked three tiers high on the timber landing of Muff Creek, just opposite to where Cedar Creek joins Muff Creek. The tidal wave had smashed into this valuable stock washing most of it away, and leaving what was left scattered in a jumbled mess around the landing area. Les Alexander also tried to find another two hundred thousand super feet of logs which he and his brother Charles had cut and left in the scrub for collection. These logs also proved to be a write-off, being inextricably entangled in the smashed wreckage of the jungle, so that the cost and work in trying to recover them was out of the question.

In the Muff Creek area, three men were swept away by the tidal wave and two of them live to tell the tale. One of the men, Alf James, was drowned and they buried him where his body was found. Of his two companions, Anderson was swept towards Maria Creek but managed to find refuge in the fork of a large tree where he stayed all night waiting out the cyclone. The third man, George Brett, in the maelstrom of water smashing through the forest managed to straddle a floating log, and had an unbelievable experience when the immense tidal wave tobogganed him what must have seemed an immense distance across the bay, through the mouth of Maria Creek and a great distance inland, up the creek.

It wasn't long before the rescue party worried how the residents at Clump Point and Mission Beach had fared. So they continued on down the coast with the remainder of their supplies. At Clump Point, Rupert Fenby was well back in the scrub towards the mountain and was safe enough, but the mission at South Mission Beach was badly hit. They

found that the Mission Superintendent, Jack Kenny and his daughter had both been killed — speared by timber wreckage during the cyclone. Mrs. Kenny was seriously injured but was ferried out to the passing steamer “Lass O’ Cowrie” which took her safely to Townsville, where she was nine months recovering in the Townsville Hospital. The others at the Mission, Mr and Mrs Hazeldeane and Mr and Mrs Hamilton were uninjured. Rescue operations were aided by Chris Wildsoet and E.J. Banfield who courageously made the perilous crossing from Dunk Island in heavy seas to come to their assistance.

Mission Beach was particularly exposed to the tidal wave and the cyclone being almost flat. The entire beach area for miles was totally swamped by the tidal wave which covered it for hundreds of yards inland to a depth of around twelve feet. The rescue party were left in wonder at the power of the surge which had thundered over the line of Casuarina or She Oak trees lining the beach bending them to the ground, and washing inland to the nearby hills. Imagine their astonishment to discover in the tops of several Casuarinas close to the beach the remains of five bags of flour, a case of jam, a case of tinned beef and a drum of kerosene. Manna from Heaven for the beleaguered survivors who were completely without food and to whom the find was truly Heaven sent. But the supplies had not come from Heaven — merely from Dunk Island. When the cyclone struck, the tidal wave thundered across the Spit, gathered the shed and all the goods within in its mighty embrace and swept them across three miles of open sea to the mainland. The Cutten’s consignment was found with all the items no further than one hundred yards from one another jumbled in an entanglement of seaweed in the tops of several Casuarinas. What incredible power had caused this unique feat for, of the whole consignment, only a long handled shovel and a bag of sugar was missing. Banfield’s missing boat (Prom he called it) was found nearby having been swept out of the smashed boathouse at Dunk Island. One of its oars lay nearby. Out of the five, fifty pound bags of flour, Les Alexander and his party were able to salvage the equivalent of about one bag of flour. The foraging party had comprised of Les Alexander, Chris Wildsoet and Jack Bunting, and to this day Les Alexander regards this as one of the most remarkable occurrences he ever saw.

The only other structure of any size in the area was also totally destroyed. This was the new wharf on the northern or lee side of Clump Point, which had been built only the previous year in 1917, and had been used only three times by the S.S. Innisfail. This unusual structure, built by the Queensland Government after pressure by local growers and Banfield, was an island wharf with black cypress piles and hardwood top, which stood in ten feet of water at low tide. Considered cyclone proof and well sheltered, it was situated one hundred and fifty yards from the beach, and growers rowed their produce out to the wharf for collection. This big heavy structure was swamped by the tidal wave which went right over the top of Clump Point and the first hill behind it. To this day

pumice can be found on this hill — mute evidence of the height and power of this enormous wave. The wharf vanished as if it had never been, and was never seen again, but remains of some of the smashed cypress piles were washed upon the beach. The wharf was never rebuilt. For years the local Council used the Clump Point area as a source of pumice and took truckloads away. Some pieces, so Les Alexander recalls, were as big as a shovel, and for years the pumice lay feet deep in many places.

There isn't much else left as a reminder of early era of Bingil Bay — Mission Beach. For an era it was. The cyclone and tidal wave destroyed everything above the ground and not a building was left standing. Many of the people were dead, and in war time, none of the survivors could rebuild the buildings, the industries and even the lifestyle that was. The work of nearly forty years was destroyed in an instant at twenty to five on that afternoon of the 10th March 1918. It is sad to recall that no memorial exists of this forty years — the coffee plantations, the timber mill, the tea, the pineapple and coconut plantations, the timber railway line, the wharves, the boatsheds, the houses and the people themselves have faded from the memory of all but a few of the pioneers still living. In the natural order of things this unique cyclone was to be judged "the event of the century" by not only Banfield, as the eminent conchologist Charles Hedley recorded that it destroyed certain coral reefs some three hundred years old. That it destroyed an era is part of the legend and history of North Queensland.

CHAPTER 9.

WE FIND THE TREES

One sunny day in the winter of 1980, a group of people associated in one way or another with Nerada Tea, set out for a jaunt to Bingil Bay, to try to find the lost tea trees. The author and his party had never seen these trees, although twenty years previously, Dr Maruff had not only found them, but had taken hundreds of seedlings from under the octogenarians when he established his nursery in Rankin Street, Innisfail, before beginning his plantation at Nerada.

Sadly, Dr Maruff had passed on in 1979, and it was hard to find anyone who knew exactly where to find the tea trees. Pictures show that in the eighteen eighties and nineties, all the Bingil Bay area had been cleared of standing scrub by the Cuttens. A century later, however, the whole area had gone back to forest except for a small area for housing behind the main beach, so that landmarks one sees in surviving photographs which could have pointed the direction to the tea trees, are all themselves hidden deep under rain forest, fifty and more metres high.

Many people gave us clues and directions which led us on false trails. Eventually, it was on the forty-eight hectare property belonging to Mrs Alison Busst, that we found the trees a kilometre north-west of Bingil Bay Township, well hidden in dense rain forest near the banks of Cedar Creek. After an hour's fruitless search in this general area, we came on our first clue when we found a white *Camellia* flower on the ground in deep shade under the forest canopy. Yes, it was "*Camellia Sinensis*" — unmistakably, a tea flower. Yet, nowhere nearby could we see a tea tree — no shiny dark green serrated leaves that we knew so well. We realised, however, that the flower must have fallen from a great height, and that one at least of the nearby forest giants with straight trunks and no branches visible for fifteen metres, must be a tea tree, and its familiar dark green foliage was invisible to us, being lost in the jungle cover overhead.

We were close then. We realised this at once, so continuing on we were soon rewarded when we saw one, then dozens, then thousands of tea trees — an absolute undergrowth of tea in which there almost seemed to be no other living plant than tea. Fallen tea seeds over the decades had sprouted into a wild nursery so virile, that it had become a thicket overpowering all the other young trees and plants of the forest. Only in an environment almost uniquely suitable for tea could such a thing have happened to a species so notoriously fickle and difficult to rear in the first two years of life. What super race of tea trees had we discovered? Survival of the fittest! Had the process of natural selection resulted in a new super species immune to the natural disease of the tropics? These were thoughts that flashed by as we searched to identify which of the phantom forest giants over our heads were our patriachs — the century old lost tea

CHAPTER 10.

EPILOGUE

The cyclone disappeared and war ended. The Cutten brothers rebuilt the homestead at Bicton, but things were never the same again. After the war, the brothers were in their mid sixties, and no longer had the drive and the spirit to attempt to rebuild the Estates. Things were not easy after the war. Even the sawmill proved a failure when they attempted to sell timber on the southern markets. They lived quietly on at Bicton for five years until once again tragedy struck. Urgent improvements had been needed on one of their outer selections, and Sidney went out to do some scrub felling. Unluckily, he was seriously injured with a broken collar bone, dislocated hip and head split open. He was carried out and taken to Innisfail Hospital, where Dr Edwards, the Medical Superintendent, attended to him. (Dr Edwards was connected with the New Zealand branch of the Cutten family.) Despite all medical aid, Sidney became gravely ill and died in Innisfail on 21st March 1923. His wish was to be buried at Bicton, but owing to very heavy weather at the time, it proved to be impossible. Some time later, however, permission was obtained to exhume the body together with the body of his sister, Jessie, who had died in Innisfail in 1904. So his last wish was carried out when their burials were completed in the family graveyard at Bicton.

Next to go was Herbert. A brilliant scholar and a living encyclopedia, he had originally been the driving force in the tea and coffee enterprises. He was witty and kind, was thoughtful in his selection of words for all occasions, and had many close friends. Early in 1930, he became ill and died in a private hospital at Innisfail on 22nd February, 1930. He was buried at Bicton, and the service was read by a close friend of the family, George Markwell, a solicitor of Innisfail. On his death there were many tributes to this wonderful man. Representative of them is a tribute by his friend George Markwell, which was published in a northern newspaper:-

“A grand type of the Far North Citizen passed away in Innisfail of Sunday last — F. Herbert Cutten, with his brothers and sisters came north and settled at Bingil Bay in the early eighties. They displayed wonderful pluck, for within a few miles of where they settled, only a few years before, some of the survivors of a wreck — the Brig Maria — had been killed and eaten by the natives. It was called Murdering Point, where this occurred, and is so named to this day.

Mr Cutten and his family, undismayed and determined, went ahead with their settlement, and in doing so, gradually converted many of the blacks into useful members of the society.

It would take volumes to tell of the many and marvellous

vicissitudes of life through which the Cuttens passed, but the story would be read with many a thrill, and would read more like a romance than a determined work of a family of wonderful plucky people, who, undaunted, fought their way through and established themselves on a sound footing in a beautiful settlement on the coast.

They devoted themselves to the production of practically everything the tropics would grow, but the bad administration of the Governments of those days, caused much misfortune to these plucky settlers. They established a sawmill, boxed all their fruits and produce themselves, and placed them on coastal steamers, which called only when they liked, and many a cargo carefully prepared by the brothers, had to be "scrapped" because the boats did not call in for them. This spelt much loss to the Cuttens, running into many thousands of pounds. They still struggled on bravely, and eventually the Tully Central Sugar Mill was established. The Cutten's land was included in the gazetted area, but somehow their hopes of turning a good area to profitable account were dashed to the ground.

The name of Cutten is a household word with all the people of the district and is always referred to in kindly and even affectionate terms, for nobody ever visits them at "Bicton", but who has hospitality showered upon them by these kindly folk.

"Vale" Frederick Herbert Cutten, and may our Infinite Creator reward you in proportion to the nobility of character displayed by you, and your kindness and thoughtfulness for all with whom you ever came in contact. All our sympathies are with the bereaved ones left behind."

Herbert Cutten's passing spelt the death knell of "Bicton" for Leonard, the last remaining brother at "Bicton", so mourned Herbert's death that he too became ill, and despite all efforts and taking him to his sister, Mrs Dunn at Irvingdale, he insisted on returning home and died in Innisfail on 5th July 1930. And so the "Bicton" chapter closed, forty-eight years after it had begun. The eldest brother, James, who had left "Bicton" in the early years of the century, died in a motor accident in Brisbane, in 1936, aged eighty-four. Of the sisters who survived them, Mrs Dunn died at Dalby in 1948, Mrs Carne at Wynnum North in 1952. The last member of the Cutten family, Mrs Alexander died at Tully on the 20th November, 1952.

The last link with the Cuttens today is their nephew, Les Alexander, who has outlasted all his pioneer relatives and lives quietly in Townsville. Born in 1895, he is the only one left who remembers the old days.

CHAPTER 11.

THE MODERN ERA BUREAU OF TROPICAL AGRICULTURE — DR MARUFF

Long forgotten and lost in the dense rainforest regrowth at Bingil Bay the Cutten Tea Plantation slumbered on into the thirties, even when interest in tea was reawakened at the Bureau of Tropical Agriculture. An experiment farm at Bartle Frere (North of Innisfail and near the famous peak Mt Bartle Frere, Queensland's highest mountain) had some tea on trial, and seed was brought down to the Bureau at South Johnstone where it was planted in 1936, to examine the suitability of soil and climate.

In 1942 an additional area of half an acre was established where it grew unchecked for a number of years. Tom Graham, Officer-In-Charge of Tropical Agriculture at South Johnstone was mainly responsible for the revival of interest in tea growing. In 1953 under his control, hedges of various widths up to 5 ft were established with closely spaced tea plants.

In 1956 and 1957, he published a long article in the Queensland Agricultural Journal "Tea Growing Experiments in North Queensland", and this was used as a principal reference for tea at the Bureau until the much later articles by Richard Hobman, "The Economics of Tea Growing" (1969) and "Tea Growing" (May 1973).

DR MARUFF — AN ERA ON ITS OWN

The publication of articles on tea growing by the Bureau may have been useful to Dr Maruff, but it was not the reason for his 13 year adventure into the tea industry. Dr Maruff was a romantic, so the reason was very simple — he fell in love. He fell in love with the marvellous concept of tea as a new industry for North Queensland and Innisfail. Anyone can fall in love, but none so completely as someone with real imagination, and so it was with Alan Maruff. Of all the people in 100 years of tea growing in Australia who have sought to create an industry, Dr Alan Maruff was one of the ablest and best educated. Born in 1911 in India, he graduated at only 21 years of age from the University of Calcutta as a Doctor of Medicine. He also gained a degree in surgery, and so attained his L.R.C.E. and L.R.C.S. He came from a long line of doctors. His father was a doctor as was his father before him, and his father before him, and his father before him. Years later his son Peter was to follow in the tradition and become a doctor as well. Doctors are among the most highly educated people in any community, but their education does not normally fit them for an avocation in Agriculture. With Alan Maruff it was different. He had graduated first in his class at medical school in Botany, for which he was awarded a gold medal.

He earnestly believed that Innisfail, the town where he had settled with his family, was one of the most beautiful and desirable places on earth. Certainly it was wet — but the bountiful rainfall was the cause of its magnificent environment. Affluent in middle age, Dr Maruff looked for ways to help in the development of the area. He looked for a new industry. It was his wife Carra who pointed him in the direction his life was to take. The same magnificent environment reminded her of her early days in India. Her family had a holiday home at Darjeeling, one of the famous tea areas of the world, and she could see Innisfail too as a tea production district. Alan Maruff agreed with his wife, and it wasn't long before he was asking Eric Shaw at the Blood Bank in Brisbane to save the plastic bags in which blood was stored, so that he could use them as planters bags.

Was it strangely symbolic for him to use bags that had held blood — he an ex army surgeon who had seen so much blood in the Second World War. In the Western Desert he had been a Major in charge of a mobile surgical team, and had later been in a surgical hospital in Iran at Koramshah — scene of another bloody war in 1981-82. Later he had seen service in Russia, and after the war was a Thoracic Surgeon in New Guinea.



Tea Harvesting Partly Mechanised. An individual cutting unit is here up-ended to show gauze container on top, cutter-bar and reel at bottom, and electric motor and carrying handles on right.



So in 1958 he was saving these bags and cultivating the young seedlings from under the old tea trees at Bingil Bay. He transplanted them into the bags, and soon there were hundreds of them surrounding his surgery in Rankin Street, Innisfail. He proudly showed them to his patients to whom he confided his ambition of starting a tea plantation. His patients were numerous for Dr Maruff had a high reputation in the field of Tropical Diseases, in which he was considered an authority. His patients came from all over North Queensland and beyond. His ancestors, generations of doctors as they were, had been professors of Tropical Diseases and he was again following in the tradition.

It was in 1958 that Dr Maruff achieved his biggest ambition. He bought a block of land — 320 marvellous acres at Nerada, some of the finest tea growing land in the world. It was ideal, with access by a good gravel road to Pullom and Nerada Roads, with boundless water bordered as it was for a mile on its Northern side by the North Johnstone River. Late in the year he began clearing, and in 1959 with Ivan Rodgers acting as foreman, they planted out the seedlings from Rankin Street into a nursery at Nerada. Soon they built a small cottage to act as a “gatehouse” and by 1960 the embryo tea plantation was taking shape. Peter Maruff took 6 months off his medical studies to help at the time, and he vividly remembers this period when he tried his hand at everything from driving tractors to planting seed and helping to clear the land. He remembers how he was as brown as an Islander, and has never again been so fit. This was the time when the foundation for a future Tea Industry was laid, years of hard work trying to make the dream a reality. The first five rows planted out into the field were entirely seedlings from the Lost Plantation at Bingil Bay. Later plantings included seedlings from the Bureau of Tropical Agriculture at South Johnstone, which over the years had increased the size of its experimental tea area to a couple of acres. Seed from this source was also used in the nursery as well as seed from Bingil Bay. Jaap Shrieker and Dr Bert Grough from the Bureau helped a great deal at this time, and their advice and wholehearted support were tremendously important to Dr Maruff. It was fortunate for the venture that such a Government run back-up facility was available.

As the plantation developed Dr Maruff engaged in trials in vegetative propagation but the idea proved too labour intensive. By 1962 the plantation extended some 20 or more acres over the ridge to the East, and on to a magnificent high set plateau which in later years was to become one of the finest blocks of tea to be seen anywhere in the Pacific. But in 1962 disaster fell when the area was struck by a terrible drought in the second half of the year. The district rainfall in the period fell to one of the lowest in recorded memory — from 1st October there was no rain for 6 weeks.

With no irrigation the sensitive tea trees soon wilted, defoliated and then dried, especially on the high ridge to the East which they named “heartbreak ridge”. In all, over 70 percent of the tea trees died, but the



In the early years on the Nerada Plantation all the cultivation was done by hand labour.



Dr Maruff pouring a "cuppa" from the billy in the early years.

casualty rate on the ridge was nearly 100 percent. All those years of work for nothing! But men and women on the land have to expect this sort of disaster, and the 200 years history of agriculture in Australia is packed with similar stories.

In 1963 they replanted and installed an irrigation system. Three men were employed with Ivan Rodgers in charge of operations, and Dr Maruff visited several times a week. Better years came and the plantings thrived, so that by 1965 there was upwards of 30 acres beginning to hedge, and to make an impressive panorama on the great high set plateau. Dr Maruff used school children — sometimes up to 50 of them — to plant the tea, and at this time they could earn two pounds a day working on the plantation. Dr Grough continued to give his excellent advice. Now in Heidelberg University in West Germany, he is still remembered as part of the happy days while Nerada was being built.

In the middle sixties Dr Maruff supplied a quantity of seed to the new plantation at Garaina in the Eastern Highlands of New Guinea. This seed helped build the 250 acre plantation which was later to play a vital role in supplying planting material to the many plantations in the Western Highlands of New Guinea around Mt Hagen and Banz, which constitute the very substantial New Guinea industry today. And so a mighty oak grew from the tiny acorn which was the Lost Tea Plantation of Bingil Bay.

By 1968 the tea had spread over 80 magnificent acres and most of it was approaching maturity. Dr Maruff bought a small experimental tea harvester based on the French made Tarpon. This pilot machine had only a 4 foot 6 inch blade cut — too small for the 8 foot hedges at Nerada, but it played a vital role in convincing everyone that mechanical harvesting was possible. By this time Ivan Rodgers had sterling support from Jaap Shrieker and Amos Baker and all were infected with the dream. The tea looked so marvellous, so green and so abundant that success seemed already proven. Dr Maruff sent the Tarpon down to Toft Bros at Bundaberg, asking them to build a new larger and improved harvester based on this model.

In 1969 they set about building it, and slowly it took shape. Unlike the baby Tarpon it grew to be a 5 ton monster with huge tyres and a 6 foot cut. And so it was, that a few months after the historic day when Tea Estates of Australia commenced operations next door, the harvester was a reality. Early in 1970 it commenced trials at Nerada. It was obvious from the start that while the machine performed quite well, the tea cutting head was unsatisfactory. Dr Maruff sought the advice of Ced Hourston at Hourston Engineering, Innisfail, and he designed a new cutter bar head and chute which, while not perfect, worked a great deal better. This was the start of an involvement in the Tea Industry for Hourston Engineering which was to eventuate with them manufacturing

Tea Harvesters for the Innisfail Industry and as well Malaysia and South Africa.

In 1970 Alan Maruff was at the crossroads. He had a 320 acre property with 80 acres of mature tea, a harvester, a good team of workers and no way of manufacturing tea. Tea factories don't come cheaply and he had already spent all his surplus capital developing the plantation to its current state. Looking for ways to finance a factory he first approached the members of Tea Estates of Australia who were at that very moment of time planting tea next door. But like him, they too had expended their ready resources in buying the large property, clearing the land and planting tea. It was then that the great solution came about. Dr Maruff interested the Australian Trading firm Burns Philp and Co who had large vested interests in the North and in the Islands, to come in with him in a joint venture to develop a full scale Tea Industry. They formed a private company which they called "Nerada Tea Estates Pty Ltd". Dr Maruff received a substantial cash payment, and the remainder of his equity was converted to a 40 percent holding in the new venture, in which Burns Philp were to supply additional capital for expansion for 60 percent interest. They supplied the remainder of the Board Members while Dr Maruff became Chairman of Directors. It seemed an ideal solution — the joining together of the visionary ideals of the pioneer with the solid business experience of Burns Philp, and for a while at least it worked very well.

Money immediately became available for expansion. Dr Maruff convinced his fellow directors that a factory was needed immediately to prevent waste of thousands of pounds of tea leaves which were being harvested with the new harvester and unused. He convinced them that the resulting cash flow from the sale of leaf would offset money spent on expansion, and bring the final economic stage of the venture that much closer to realisation. But it was probably this decision alone which was to spell disaster for the enterprise.

In 1970 the new company made two major decisions and acted on them immediately. It was decided to build a factory, and to plant more tea. The crown was bulldozed off a hill on the Western boundary, close to the entrance, and late in the year construction commenced on the factory building. The field team went ahead with more plantings. The factory was designed on very similar lines to the new factories in Indonesia and New Guinea, using a 15 inch Rotorvane, Ballbreaker, 8 inch Rotorvane, Ballbreaker arrangement in the "Rolling Room". C.T.C. machines were avoided in order that the factory could concentrate on the production of orthodox leaf of good quality. A Sirocco 5 foot fermenter was used, followed by a Sirocco - 2 stage drier powered by a diesel burner. It was a good conventional set up, capable of making very good tea and still totally viable and in use to this day.

One departure from convention was in the withering troughs. They were set at 90 degrees to the usual direction to take advantage of a unique monorail system which allowed the green leaf to be discharged into the withering troughs from 10 ft x 5 ft bins which could be taken off the trailers behind 4 wheel drive vehicles and moved on rollers from the monorail to any point on the withering troughs desired. Hinged bottoms allowed the bins to discharge half a ton of leaf in seconds. This unique design has been admired by tea planters all around the world, and is one of the reasons why the Nerada Factory is more cost efficient than all non mechanised factories. Initially four 60 ft troughs were built of which three were operational by 1972. By 1982 the factory had gone through two expansions and troughs had been increased to 9 x 120 ft troughs — six times the 1972 figure.

FORMULA FOR DISASTER

In 1971 more tea was planted and another 120 acre block of land was purchased from David Booth. Manufacture continued with tea produced being sold to blenders in the South. Tea quality however was not good, due to starting up problems, and on-going harvesting problems. Prices attained therefore were very low, averaging at that time only 17 cents per lb. There were rumbles at Board Meetings that production was not reaching Dr Maruff's estimates, and prices were well below expectations. There had been cost over-runs on the factory construction, and Burns Philp directors found themselves in a situation where mounting bank overdrafts were increasing the overhead burden of interest, and every week the situation worsened.

Despite this adverse monetary climate more tea was planted in 1971, and directors went on hoping that better times lay ahead. Dr Maruff tried to influence the Queensland Government into giving him the State Government Tea Contract, on the grounds of Nerada being the only State producer. The Government, bound by regulation, was unable to do this, advising only that when the contract came up for tender in 1972, Nerada would enjoy the local preference clause (15%). Dr Maruff was bitter about this "rejection" and felt that the Premier, the Hon. Joh Bjelke Petersen, could have got around the regulations somehow.

In 1972 Dr Maruff went to Russia to study their methods of mechanical harvesting. The trip was another source of argument on the Board. The other Board members felt that all of Dr Maruff's projections were vastly inflated. Their objections and doubts were answered only by his supreme confidence that things would improve. Unable to contradict him on tea matters they felt they needed another expert opinion. Tea production for the 1971/72 year reached only 66,000 lbs which netted a paltry \$17,000 for the year. The Board members sought the advice of Clive Batten, Managing Director of Carpenters New Guinea. He visited in June 1972 and his advice was that they should close it immediately

before matters got even worse. Accordingly the plantation and factory were closed on 30th June 1972. Burns Philp bought out Dr Maruff's holding for a vastly reduced amount, and the Board met several times in the second half of 1972 but could not agree as to whether they should continue in the industry. Eventually early in 1973 they decided to sell the assets, which were bought by Tea Estates of Australia in March 1973. Burns Philp director Bob Stone had been in favour of keeping on.

In the years since, the question has often been asked "Why did the operation fail?" In the light of hindsight, which is always easy, I venture the following principal reasons that are worth considering:—

1. The factory was built too soon as there was insufficient tea available to work it more than an hour or two a day, which was far too expensive. Once built, the huge expenditure needed work and cash flow to service it.
2. Despite a superb modern factory the quality was bad. This was due to harvesting. Later experience showed that it takes years to train the tea to a flat table for mechanical harvesting. So the tea was uneven, and full of stalk, and attracted low prices.
3. The Board did not have sufficient confidence in the tea quality to market it as a name brand. They were therefore at the mercy of the packers, and low wholesale packer prices. In hindsight this is hard to understand, as Burns Philp, with their Australia wide connections, were in a far stronger position to market their name brand than were Tea Estates of Australia who went on to succeed at it.
4. Low production came from insufficient use of fertiliser. Later testing was to show the need for heavy application of nitrogen, and that the tea needed applications of zinc and copper sulphate. When this was applied production greatly increased.

Despite all this, a decision to delay building the factory three years could have eventuated in success. Dr Maruff remained interested in tea, and in 1977 at Brookfield near Brisbane he had 22 acres and 200,000 tea trees. He died in 1979 at the age of 67.

CHAPTER 12.

THE TEA INDUSTRY BECOMES A REALITY

In Innisfail and Tully, tea was the talking point of the sixties. In these relatively safe, dependable economic years, talk was of new industries, new initiatives, new horizons. The Vietnam war, far from inhibiting prosperity, seemed to have fed it with its constant consumption of energy and goods, fanning economic growth in the United States and therefore the world — and Australia. So in the sixties, opportunity for growth and new industries seemed unlimited.

In India and Sri Lanka in the sixties, the traditional British Tea Industries were being handed over to local control. Communist Governments in some instances nationalised the plantations and factories, so that many highly skilled British tea planters and factory managers were forced to leave and find employment elsewhere. A certain number of these British planters found their way to Innisfail. Dr Maruff employed two of these at his property at Nerada in the late sixties. The British planters sought to get the Innisfail Chamber of Commerce interested in promoting a big new tea plantation, that would offer a new industry and employment to the area, and at the same time offer management job opportunities to the British planters. The President of the Chamber of Commerce at the time was Mr Harold Taylor.

Among the British planters in the group were Truss, Lees, Tidd and Passey. One of the beguiling things about the tea industry has always been that it is an industry of charts, diagrams and graphs, with a heady mix of statistics. Put any group of planters together and you will find them busy at these controls talking about kilos of made tea per hectare, ratio of green leaf to made tea, rates of kilos of fertiliser per hectare and in what mix etc, etc. But of all these beguiling statistics easily the most impressive is a production and planting chart, showing estimated yields per hectare, which increase for each year the tea gets older. The British group pored over these charts, fascinating local residents with the magical future of tea, showing thousands piling on to thousands of kilos of production annually. Long discussions centred around just what was the realizable potential of fabulous Nerada with its deep red volcanic soils, its perfect drainage, its high Ph factor, and its marvellous and reliable rainfall. Predictions varied, but the optimistic one of those days was that production could reach 2000 lbs per acre (2250 kilos per hectare), per annum. (In actual fact mature plantings at Nerada reached 3500 kilos per hectare by 1982). The ideal plantation of 500 acres was judged to have an optimism output of 1 million lbs of tea and this was to be the ultimate.

While these discussions were taking place, Will Manton of Tully planted tea on a Government leased property on the road to Kareeya some 20 kilometres West of Tully. Will's father, Ivor, had pioneered tea in Papua, near the township of Mt Hagen in the Western Highlands, and eventually had a plantation of over 1000 acres. Will started a tea nursery of ten acres in 1967 and by 1969 had some 60 acres of tea planted out. It soon became evident that the growth of the tea on the Tully lands, with their clay sub soils, was not as good as in New Guinea, or at Dr Maruff's property at Nerada. In late 1969 the Mantons sold their holding to Eddie Collins and Dan Leahy, from New Guinea, and themselves went back to New Guinea to commence a coffee plantation. Later John and Vicky McLean managed the property but it was never to become a tea producer and by the late seventies all the bushes had grown 40 feet high and were used only for seed purposes.

In Innisfail the Chamber of Commerce attempted to get Government Lease Land suitable for tea growing. Ideal lands existed across the North Johnstone River from Nerada, in the upper Daradgee area. These were under Forestry leases. Approaches to the Government were unsuccessful, as the land could not be made available until the fairly long term Forestry leases were concluded.

The high cost of land, plus the unavailability of a block of suitable size gradually whittled away the confidence of the English tea planters. One by one, with no job opportunities offering they left the area, without exception, taking jobs outside their beloved tea industry. By 1969 they had all gone with the exception of Ted Truss and Jock Lees who were working with Dr Maruff at Nerada.

It was in 1969 that one day Joe Raymond came in to see Rod Taylor at the Holden Dealership in Innisfail. He had a great proposition. A big block of 797 acres owned by Queensland Forests N.L. was to be auctioned, and with a lifetime interest in timber Joe thought good money could be made from selling the timber if the land could be secured. Discussing the project with Mr Harold Taylor, predictably the chairman of the Chamber of Commerce saw it as a proposition to launch the long discussed tea project as well. Realising that this potential exciting new commercial industry would be highly capital intensive, the Taylors wisely researched the attitudes of the few key people who had been keen on the industry in discussions through the sixties, and other wealthy friends who would be likely to have funds available for support, as well as civic interest to participate. So at the outset the embryo new industry had the support of the Taylor automotive and accommodation company group, and as well the keen backing of Eddie Webb, Chairman of the Johnstone Shire Council, and Dr Bill Markwell, his long time partner in business ventures (including Turalba Farming Syndicate, the largest sugar farming group in the Shire). With leadership from these four influential and public spirited men, the foundation existed for a

THE MODERN ERA



Afternoon tea at Nerada

powerful local consortium to establish the industry. Keen interest fanned like a bushfire, and with the decision made that the industry package should be a partnership spread over 10 of the most influential families in the area, very soon the tea project became the central reason for the affair, and the original project based on the timber on the land became a secondary consideration.

The Honour roll of civic minded and influential citizens was to be almost a cross section of Innisfail business. Locals referred to it as the Tea Rotary Club including as it did, motor dealers, moteliers, sugar growers, cattle farmers, a doctor, a dentist, a butcher, a solicitor, an engineer and timber contractor and a chemist. Let it be known that this distinguished group comprised the following people:—

HAROLD TAYLOR	Motor dealer, motelier
ROD TAYLOR	Motor dealer, motelier
EDDIE WEBB	Sugar and cattle farmer
DR BILL MARKWELL	Sugar and cattle farmer
JOE RAYMOND	Engineer and timber contractor
VINCE VANDELEUR	Solicitor and cattle ranch N.T.
NOEL REES	Butcher
ALBERT & SANTO LAGANA	Chemist and sugar grower
JOE GIAROLA	Dentist and sugar grower
JIM NUCIFORA	Sugar grower

So important had the tea project become in everybody's mind, that when the time for the auction in the Exchange Hotel Lounge came about, any involvement in timber was purely incidental. So Mr Harold Taylor, acting on behalf of the group reduced potential bidding opposition by forging an alliance with the most powerful opposition bidder, the Hyne and Son Timber group. It was arranged for them to take the timber on a 10 year contract, and for the partners to take the land in freehold possession. According to plan, Mr Taylor eventually won the bidding at \$115,000 and the Tea project became at that moment a reality.

But where were the English Tea planters? By a strange freak of fortune, at that long awaited moment, they had scattered to the four winds, and the once intense lobby had not one available person to answer the advertisement for an experienced and enthusiastic person to commence the project. The keenest person on the horizon was an enthusiastic English planter by the name of Mike Stephenson, who, learning of the job drove all the way from Adelaide to present himself for selection. A personable young man with a wife and children in the country, and some years of experience on a plantation in Kenya behind him, he had his foot in the door. And impressed with his keenness in driving so far to present himself in person, the Taylors promptly hired him, and the project was off to a start.

In the first year the main activity was clearing some land, and building a new home for the Stephensons. Joe Raymond did much of the early clearing. He and Rod Taylor attended a Department of Supply auction in Townsville and bought a second hand International LTD 20 Dozer which Joe then used to do most of the clearing, getting a contractor with a large dozer for the really heavy work. Joe Lagana, a building contractor, completed a 15 square home on the highest hill near the entrance to the property and early in 1970, the Stephenson family were in residence, and a nice block was cleared ready for planting preparations. With a new Massey 178 tractor, Stephenson prepared the land after it had been carefully cut, barred and deep rooted by a dozer, and in April and May 1970 the first 30 acres of tea were planted. It resulted in a good strike with a planting density of around 10,000 bushes to the acre. Subsequently this was to prove one of the highest production areas on the estates, spoiled only by being planted by mistake at 7 foot centres instead of 8 foot. This error in planning has perpetuated a harvesting problem, rather like having different railway gauges in different Australian States, and for this small area a harvester with a narrower track has had to be kept to harvest this block alone, being suitable otherwise for harvesting immature teas, not at full hedge width.

In 1971 Mike Stephenson left to commence his own business in Innisfail, and the management position at Nerada went to Bill Boylan who was in the next 12 years to see the embryo project go on to become a large estate producing a million lbs of tea annually. In 1971 he planted a further 50 acres of tea making 80 acres in all.

CLOSING OF NERADA TEA ESTATES PTY. LTD

In June of 1972 the tea industry received a set back of major proportions. The partnership company of Dr Maruff and Burns Philp & Co. Ltd., ceased as an operating tea estate due to severe cash flow problems. Tea production from the 80 mature acres remained disappointingly below budget, and expenses mounted accordingly. It was decided that Burns Philp would buy Dr Maruff's shares, and so in the second half of 1972, this modern day tea pioneer ceased to have an interest in the tea industry after 13 years of pioneering work, and setting the foundation for a commercial Tea Industry in Australia. Burns Philp let the plantation go unmaintained into the wet season of 1973, while weeds 10 feet high overgrew the young hedges and their board argued whether to go on with the project. By February of 1973, they decided that the project was non viable, and the assets were offered to Tea Estates of Australia, including 440 acres of land (adjoining the 797 acre blocks owned by TEA), the new Tea Factory, machinery shed, and gate cottage. Acting quickly to secure a Development Bank loan with the initiative of Dr Markwell, TEA bought the property in March 1973, and both properties were in effect joined together, physically separated only by the ravine of Rankine Creek running approximately down the boundary of the two properties.

Much of the young tea had to be abandoned. By early 1974 160 acres had been restored to cultivation, 80 acres of which were mature. The other 80 acres were teas planted in 1970 and 71 on Tea Estates of Australia property making 240 acres in all and the Maruff plantation became known as the Western Plantation and the other the Eastern Plantation.

MARKETING DECISION

The crucial decision of 1973/74 was in marketing, when it was decided to market the tea as the "Nerada" brand and not to sell it at wholesale level to blenders and packers. The old Danesi Spaghetti Factory in Edith Street was bought and turned into a tea packing factory, using a Purepak milk carton machine, married to a batch weigher. This was set up in early 1974. A Brisbane distributor was appointed — Reg Morris with his Brisbane Trading Coy — and the first Nerada Tea Packets were stocked by the Cut Price Stores group in February 1974. They were the exclusive stockists for over 12 months until increasing production necessitated a wider market.

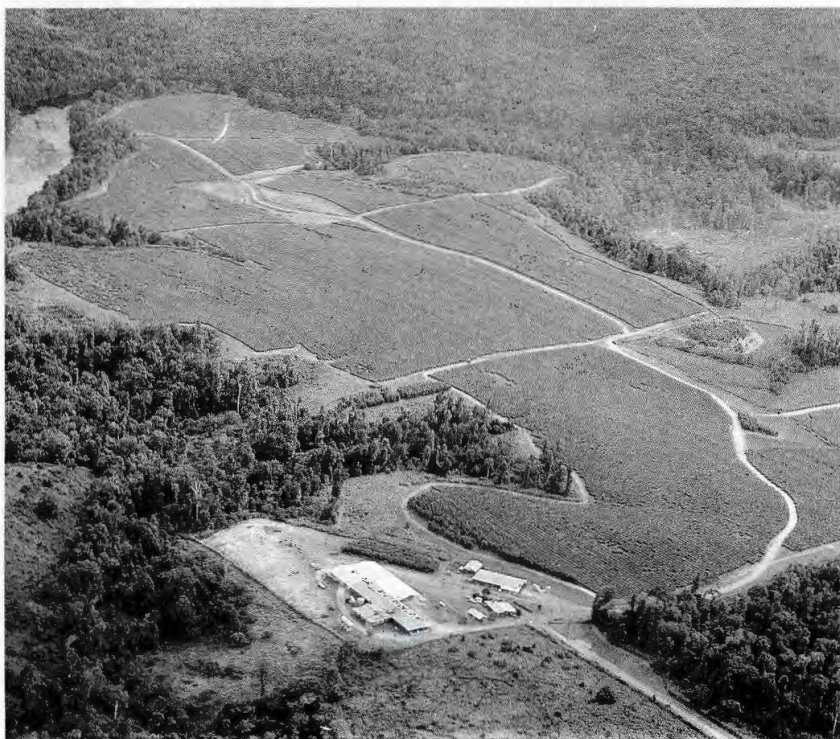
Installation of packaging machinery was supervised by Harold Taylor, while Rod Taylor began handling marketing using ideas from many years experience marketing in the motor industry. He designed the packets, and while their quaint milk carton shape was initially a sales deterrent, once they tried the tea people found the packets convenient, and the tea had a very long shelf life in them.

In 1974 the local Engineering Coy. "Hourston Engineering Pty. Ltd.", in which some tea partners had a big vested interest, designed a new Tea Harvester based on the old Toft machine but lightened and improved. It went into service to harvest tea on the 1970 and 71 teas which were beginning to produce small quantities of tea. The design was an improvement of the old Toft machine based on ideas by Ced Hourston and Bill Boylan.

These were years of quiet consolidation while the partnership watched the maturing hedges produce more tea each year. No new areas were planted to tea, and attempts were made to improve the quality of tea manufactured in the Nerada factory. Jock Lees was succeeded as Tea Factory manager by Ivan Rufus from India, and then Ron Bertus and finally Greg Thompson. Two partners left the partnership — Joe Raymond and Jim Nucifora. Incoming partners were Frank Byrne Pty. Ltd., and the Ireland family from Cairns, while the Taylors increased their shareholding. New harvesters Teabird 1 and Teabird 2 were manufactured by Hourstons in 1976 and 1977 and tourism to the plantations grew apace. At the packing factory a teabag machine from England was installed. Marketing increased to cover most stores in Queensland, and the State Government contract for tea was secured for the first time in 1976.

TEA ESTATES OF AUSTRALIA

NERADA, Near INNISFAIL
NORTH QUEENSLAND



The foothills of "Bartle Frere"

By 1977 production had reached sizeable proportions and with a big rise in tea prices following coffee prices which had risen following a failure in the Brazil crop, it was decided to embark on an expansion programme. A big new area of 75 acres was planted with assistance from a development bank loan, and a four year expansion was commenced which was to result in a total of 160 acres of tea in a new plantation as large as the whole Western Plantation. An invitation Field Day was held to celebrate the launch and the Premier, the Hon. Joh Bjelke Petersen officially opened the expansions to the Nerada Factory in October 1977. The occasion received wide publicity. Following this a group tour to P.N.G. was organised by T.E.A. and Rod Taylor and a group comprising Bill Boylan, Pat Byrne and distributor Reg Morris went on a fact finding tour of the New Guinea Tea Industry. The group visited six tea factories in P.N.G.

TEA PLANTED IN OTHER AREAS

In 1977 tea was planted in other areas of Australia. On the Tablelands, Don Soley, Bob Barclay, Fred Meluish, and Les Burton individually planted their first tea, and continued planting intermittently throughout to 1982. By this time these enterprising dairy farmers had well over 100 acres of tea among them. At the same time Michael Grant Cook commenced a tea plantation near Condong, North of Murwillumbah, South of the Queensland border. Calling the plantation Madura Tea, by 1982 he was producing tea in small quantities in a "micro" factory, and had commenced a tourist business based on tea.

Key tea personnel went on another fact finding mission in 1978 to Malaysia and Indonesia. On return another 35 acres of tea was planted at Nerada and a big infilling programme was mounted to fill in gaps in the 1977 plantings. Record rainfalls continued in this period, and production continued to grow. 1979 was a big year, the third year of the expansion, and saw a further 50 acres of tea planted and another major expansion in the Tea Factory, at Nerada. The withering trough area was duplicated doubling the factory capacity to handle green leaf. The extension of 750 square metres allowed the installation of 5 extra 40 metre troughs increasing absolute capacity handling of green leaf to approximately 15,000 kilos per day.

While these extensions and new plantings were proceeding at Nerada, arrangements had been made with the Department of Commercial and Industrial Development, to lease a large new factory on the Innisfail Industrial Estate to become Nerada's new packing factory. On 1st August, 1979, equipment at 180 Edith Street was moved to the new factory, including a newly leased Hesser Soft Pack High Speed Tea packer capable of an output of 90 packets per minute. On 17th October, 1979, a second national Tea Field Day was held, including the opening of the new Tea Packing Factory by the Minister for Tourism and Travel, Mr Max Hooper, and

the member for Mourilyan Mrs Vicky Kippen. The celebration also included an all comers Ladies Tea Tasting Championship which was won jointly by Mrs O'Connell and Mrs Barclay. Again the event attracted considerable media attention, and was attended by many people from southern capitals, who were involved or associated with the Tea Industry.

DROUGHT A MAJOR SETBACK

No sooner had this spectacular event concluded than Nerada faced a new and unexpected set back. The seemingly boundless rain suddenly stopped, and after the 6th November, 1979, no rain fell for 56 days — a drought of unparalleled proportions for the wettest area in Australia. Tea which is unwatered for 21 days ceases to produce and will soon die. Nerada possessed two irrigation systems, but both of these were needed to keep the young tea alive. By the end of November the plantations were in dire straits and on December 4th production ceased completely. Men were laid off and the factory closed down, and every day the tea men searched the skies in vain for the hoped for rain clouds. What had started as a serious loss of production became a fight for survival as many hundreds of bushes turned black and then defoliated. As Christmas approached the position became critical, and when rain finally fell on December 26th, it was thought that it was already too late for much of the Western Plantation.

When it rains in Innisfail it really rains, so that very soon the landscape was drowned in rain, and to everyone's relief the tea gradually recovered. But the worst affected areas did not recover fully for six months and production suffered as a result. The irony was that the drought occurred in a year in which the area totalled 250 inches or 6250 mm in the year.

In late 1979 T.E.A. had again invested in a new harvester. It was the new generation Teahawk 1, a front rank harvester with an airconditioned cab, and a capability of handling the highest hills and the toughest assignments on the estates. It was harvester No.5 and as the flagship of the fleet it became the most photographed mechanical harvester in Australia, with its handsome and massive profile to be seen on millions of Nerada Tea packets, against a background of Nerada rainforest and vistas of green tea hedges. Due to the drought however, and a consequent drop in production, for many months its main usefulness lay in its photogenics, and it was the next season before it began to work in earnest.

Through the winter of 1980 partners worried whether after seven fat years of heavy rainfall they were now to enter on to seven lean years. Accordingly, they made arrangements to buy a big fixed boom travelling irrigator, a Behometh with a boom span of nearly 80 metres, which had a water path 130 metres or 50 rows of tea wide. Irrigator roads were cut through the tea on the Western Plantation. Partners were soon to see how wise the decision was. Once again, they were hit with a November drought

in 1980, and this time the irrigator kept the Western Plantation emerald green and in top production, while the Eastern plantation languished and then ceased production altogether. Partners assessed that they paid for the huge and expensive irrigator in 27 days of production which they would otherwise not have had. So partners again dipped into their pockets to buy a second irrigator for the Eastern Plantation so that from 1981 onwards the plantations were fully irrigated and immune to droughts.

In 1981 Nerada Tea began to be sold in quantity interstate — particularly over the border in N.S.W. As production increased Sydney with its massive 3.25 million population was a logical market. So markets were increased to cope with the greatly expanding production, which was expected to accelerate with the 1977-80 expansion areas beginning to come on stream.

The 1981/82 season was to be the end of the long road. All the predictions about the fabulous potential of the Nerada countryside were to be realised. It began in November, when Bill Boylan's ideal fertiliser programme began to fire in earnest. Tea production accelerated madly, and the factory record fell in this unlikely month with a mammoth 95,000 lbs (43000 kilos). But more records lay ahead. Early rains in December boosted the total to 122,000 lbs (55000 kilos). January stayed almost level on 120,000 lbs (54000 kilos), February a short working month dropped to 110,000 lbs (500,000 kilos) and finally March set a new record again with 123,000 lbs (56000 kilos). So Nerada set its sights on the long predicted magic million discussed so many times by tea planters fifteen years earlier. In 1982 the record production set in motion the final links of the expansion with the duplication of the fermenter and drier line in the Nerada Factory which doubled factory production capacity per hour, and the addition to packing equipment in the packing factory of an IMA C51 high speed automatic teabag packing and cartonning machine.

By 1982 Nerada Tea was selling in all mainland states right round to Perth, and the old magic million had been reached. Ninety-eight years after Herbert Cutten and his brothers planted tea at Bingil Bay, the tea industry had finally arrived. Tea was a lost industry no more. Nerada tea had become "The Nation's Cuppa".

THE 1982 NERADA HONOUR ROLL

TEA ESTATES OF AUSTRALIA

PARTNERS

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R.J. TAYLOR
DR W.N. MARKWELL
V.J. VANDELEUR
MRS E.G. WEBB
P. REES
A. & S. LAGANA
P. BYRNE
G. GIAROLA
R.F. & M. IRELAND

Chairman of Directors
Marketing Director

ORGANISATION

General Manager Nerada
Factory Manager Nerada
Field Supervisor Nerada
Packing Factory Manager Innisfail
Engineer Innisfail
Associate Marketing Manager and Distributor

Tourist Concessionaires — Nerada

W. BOYLAN
G. THOMPSON
P. PURCELL
P. AGIORITIS
R.W. HARRIS

R.J. MORRIS

A. & L. DODD

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