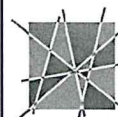


Reference Enquiry

Date: 11 December 2013

Client: Carl Moller

Re: Isis Scrub

Source: *Taming the Isis*, B.W. O'Neill, pp15-18. Isis Shire Council Childers, 1987.

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CHAPTER TWO -

DEBATES ON DISCOVERY AND ORIGINS OF NAMES

Signs at the entrance of Childers proclaim it to be the heart of the Isis. Before examining the transition from the Isis of the traditional Aboriginal era to its current developed and prosperous state, an examination should be made regarding the European discovery of the scrub and the derivation of the names of the towns and areas in the Isis Shire.

For some time a debate has existed in Childers as to whether it was Howard or Walker who was the first white man to discover the scrub. The scrub is best described by George Noakes who describes his first sighting of the scrub in this way -

What struck me most when riding from Stockyard Creek Hotel was the poor class of forest land, very stoney with plenty of grass and undergrowth until you rode right up to the scrub, which looked like a dark green wall, impenetrable and dark, with thick vines growing amongst the tree tops, and when you got a good hundred yards or so inside the scrub you could see no sign of the sun just gloom. (1)

William Howard was born in Hobart Town, Tasmania on the 4th May, 1938, the son of George and Matilda (nee Pattie) Howard. His mother had been governess to the young daughter of Tasmania's governor and his wife Sir John and Lady Franklin. After Mrs. Howard's death, William and his father moved to Melbourne where William was educated at St. James Church of England School. (2)

William commenced training as an engraver under the supervision of Charles Goddard in Sydney, but gave up his apprenticeship at the age of nineteen when he moved to Maryborough where his father and step-mother had a hotel. (3) He took to exploring the uninhabited land in the Wide Bay, (4) and is credited with discovering, exploring and naming a rainforest east of where Bundaberg now stands, the Wongara Scrub, now known as Woongarra. (5)

Howard discovered payable deposits of coal on the Burrum River, and the government named the township Howard on the Burrum River in his honour. (6) He married Elizabeth (Bessie) Broom the second daughter of Thomas and Elizabeth Broom, who had secured the Agnes Vale and Sarahanna runs, in 1853. (7) It was while staying at Agnes Vale, that Howard is reported to have discovered the scrub. He describes his discovery of the Isis Scrub in this way.

One day during that year (1863) in company with Mr. John Broom (then a boy) on business connected with cattle, I went down from

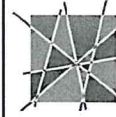
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Agnesvale and through the Saranna block, along the right bank of Broom's Creek to about where it was recognized as the Isis River. We then crossed to the left bank of the waterway - and homeward bound followed the creek upward for some distance. We then for a second time crossed the creek on its right near a hill; the hill is a barren one, a little better than a ballast heap. At the foot of the hill I noticed lumps of glassy quartz or quartzite. After looking at it, I rode to the hilltop to see if there was an outcrop, but happening to look round I was amazed to see quite a mass of pine tops. That indicated a scrub area, but nothing but the tops of the pine trees could be found and not enough of them to inform one whether the scrub was a mere patch or one of a larger area. Young Broom was nearly as surprised as myself to see those pine tops in what appeared to be little more than ti-tree and grass tree country and very nearly hopeless extending for many miles. We rode back to Agnesvale, and found that none of those located there in the two nearest stations Eureka and Stanton Harcourt, had even seen or heard of any scrub out that way, except a small one located at Woco Creek and very little even about that scrub. In a few days, Young Broom and myself rode to the scrub, tracked in near the Hilly (possibly meant to be Lily) Lagoons, and followed all around its other side, and saw it contained pine trees of large bulk - in tens of thousands - an enormous supply of timber, but what seemed still more remarkable was that they were growing on an exceedingly fertile area, in the heart of a forgotten country. Well, of what value was it all? Who wanted agricultural or pine country in 1863 and particularly country as much isolated as if located in our Northern Territory. The nearest place to get any of the necessaries of life was Maryborough, some thirty-five miles away and not even a bridle track connecting the two places. As of Bundaberg it was unborn. I often spoke of that Isis Scrub but none cared in the least whether it existed or not. It was then purely and simply valueless.(8)

It is likely that the hill from which Howard claims to have viewed the scrub was Mt. Kullogum, once called Broom's Knob, although a number of people believe that it was Junction Mountain that Howard refers to in his article. However, it must be remembered that he describes it as a "small hill, little better than a ballast", which refers more to Mt. Kullogum than Junction Mountain. However, when one traverses the area one can see that the incline is not as steep as one would imagine, so that it could quite possibly be from either Mt. Kullogum or Junction Mountain that William Howard first sighted the scrub.

John George Walker (referred to as George Walker) was born in Cork, Ireland around 1820. When he married in 1856 he gave his age as "about 30" but his obituary in the Maryborough Chronicle gave his date of birth as 24th June, 1819. (9) He was the son of James Davenport Walker and the former Mary Larymore, who migrated to Australia prior to 1850. It is believed that George Walker was already living in the Wide Bay at the time of his parents' migration. (10)

Walker gave his occupation as "builder" at the time of his marriage and he

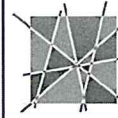
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built the first ship in Maryborough. This was the schooner "Blue Jacket" which was officially launched in 1853. The vessel was rigged by Joe Mungomery of Sydney who eventually became the first pilot of the port of Maryborough. (11)

In 1856, John George Walker married Jane Eaton, the third daughter of John and Mary Ann Eaton of Teebar Station. (12)

Just as William Howard claims to have left his father-in-law's station to go on business concerning cattle when he accidentally discovered the scrub, George Walker claims that he left his father-in-law's station Teebar on cattle business when he accidentally discovered the thick hoop pine rainforest. (13)

Walker was to go to Bingera Station to pick up some bulls for Teebar and got lost. His instructions were to go to the Golden Fleece Hotel on the old Gayndah road and from there to Eureka Station. (14) Walker made it to the Golden Fleece but veered too far to the right and hit the middle of the scrub, near the area called South Isis today. (15) Finding no way around the scrub, he returned to Teebar and told Eaton, who reported it to the Government. (16)

According to supporters of the Walker claim, Walker told Howard about the scrub, and Howard then explored it thus making him the first white man to do so. (17) However Howard claimed that he enticed Walker and Eaton to see the scrub years after the time he accidentally discovered it, and the two visitors rode back to Maryborough where they promptly registered their selections within the scrub. (18)

One important consideration which must be taken into account when examining the two arguments is the fact that while numerous primary sources have been found in which Howard writes about his discovery, no sources where Walker actually states that he, himself discovered the scrub have been located. The only reports pertaining to the discovery of the scrub by Walker were written by other people.

The closest the author has been able to come to finding a solution to the mystery is by way of two articles, one written by Howard, the other by a man by the name of D.J. McGinley. Both refer to a letter supposedly written and signed by George Walker stating that it was Howard who discovered the scrub.

In his article, Howard wrote:

I read a copy of that day's issue (Isis Recorder) and in it I saw that this Mr. George Walker claimed to be the discoverer of the Isis ... I then addressed a letter to this George Walker per favour of the Isis Recorder, which was published in that paper, calling on Mr. Walker to withdraw his deliberate untrue statements. It was certainly not a nice thing to ask any man to do, but he did so and offered an apology to me in the columns of the Isis Recorder. He went on further for he told the truth by admitting that it was I who told him of the Isis Scrub and afterwards took him to it. (19)

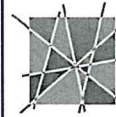
The second article is one written in the Bundaberg Mail of 1925, by Mr. D.J. McGinley who was proprietor of the Isis Recorder at the time Howard called upon

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Walker to retract his claim. McGinley wrote:

I can recall the incident to which you refer when the late Mr. George Walker admitted your claim to that distinction (discoverer of the Isis Scrub). The correspondence should be found I think in the Isis Recorder Office files of either 1899 or 1900. (20)

A search for the files mentioned in the above article for the letter which would positively settle the debate once and for all, was fruitless. A fire swept through the stores on Childers' main street in 1902, and the Isis Recorder Office, at that time situated near the Grand Hotel, was one of the businesses to fall victim. (21) However, from the evidence in McGinley's article, especially in light of the fact that McGinley was an independent third party, one would have to agree and with a great deal of justification, that it was William Howard who discovered the Isis Scrub.

Isis was the Egyptian goddess of fertility. People can therefore be forgiven for believing that the name "Isis" was selected for the river, the shire and the various institutions in the district because of the fertile red soil in the area. However, it is highly probable that the connection between the fertile soil and the naming of the area is coincidental.

It has been reported that the first two surveyors to come into the area were Hodgson and Gataker. These men were surveying around the Burrum and Burnett Rivers, when they swam in an unnamed river. This river reminded them of the Isis River which flows into the Thames River in England, (22) and was consequently named after the English Isis. A tributary of the Australian Isis River was named "Cherwell" after the river of that name which flows into the Isis River in England. (23) No doubt the English Isis River was named after the Egyptian goddess of fertility, possibly at the time of the Roman invasion.

It has also been reported that there are two villages called Abington and Childers near the Isis River in Oxfordshire, England. However although the Isis and Cherwell Rivers and a village called Abington (rather than Abington which is the spelling of the area in the Isis) do exist in Oxfordshire there is no village in existence called Childers. A search through the records in the County Records Office at the Oxford County Office, however revealed that there was once a village called Childre in Oxfordshire. (24) The collection of farms around this village were called Childre's farms. The spelling of this village's name has been changed to Childrey. (25) The pronunciation of Childre's and Childers is similar, and if one considers the fact that the spelling of the name Abington has changed on most records (although some documents spell it as Abingdon), one must agree that the change in the spelling of the name Childers from Childre is also acceptable.

Previously, the most widely accepted belief was that the town was named after the Right Honourable Hugh Culling Eardley Childers who migrated to Melbourne in 1850. He as a member of the Victorian Government in 1851, became Auditor General in 1855 and then Minister for Customs. (26) Childers was instrumental in establishing the University of Melbourne, and in the construction of a telegraph line from Melbourne to Port Phillip Heads. (27) He claimed that it would be useful in telegraphing news of the arrival of ships. In a letter to