

Maleny History Preservation & Restoration Society

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Interview with Isobel Wright (Bryce) who lives at Maleny 31/03/1993
by Gerry Cole, on 4th October, 1993.

Transcribed by Desley Malone, 24th October 1999.

Gerry - This is Isabella Wright, formerly Isabella Bruce and we really call her Isobel.

Isobel, what date were you born?

Isobel - 10th November, 1914

Gerry - Were you born in Maleny?

Isobel - I was born in the old house. With a midwife.

Gerry - The house that is still on the property?

Isobel - Yes

Gerry - Were your parents born in Australia?

Isobel - Dad was born in Australia and Mum was too.

Gerry - Whereabouts were they born?

Isobel - Mum was born in Brisbane and Dad was born in NSW.

Gerry - Where did they get married?

Isobel - They got married in Brisbane.

Gerry - When did your father come up to Maleny?

Isobel - 1905 with his brother Charles.

Gerry - Did they select the properties up here?

Isobel - They bought part of Portion 98. I think it was part of Isaac Burgess at the beginning.

Gerry - What are your first memories of being at home Isobel? What can you remember about being at home when you were a small child?

Isobel - Well, the greatest excitement I had was when my cousin Alec sent my birthday present over. It'd be in Nov 1915. I would have only been one year old, or 18 mths old.

Gerry - And you can remember it?

Isobel - O yes. I'll never forget the excitement of the doll coming.

Gerry - Have you still got the doll?

Isobel - I've still got the doll. He was to go and fight for the Anzacs. And see when the fighting got too bad they stopped them coming on to shore. So he was back in the boat and all the men were on the boat was sent to France. Alec was in France and fighting in France at the time my birthday came up. He bought a French ceramic doll and she's beautiful. And I can never forget the excitement I had when I opened the parcel. It came by post in a box. And she was so beautiful. We already had a big celluloid baby sized doll, but this one was just so far better.

Gerry - Where did the one come from that's in the case at Erowol? Is that one of yours too?

Isobel - No.



Gerry - When you were a little girl, did you help on the farm at all? What did you do?

Isobel - We used to play with animals and we used to have chooks and chickens and we used to put a spring on the chook's leg and used to walk around with it. We'd sit down in front of it and talk to it. Chook, chook,.... chook.....chook.

Gerry - Can you remember the house? What kind of furniture did you have in the house?

Isobel - Well we had the old bed and the dressing table. And we had a wardrobe with a mirror on it. We used to like to run in there and have a look in the mirror at ourselves.

Gerry - Did your father do all the work on the farm or did your mother work as well?

Isobel - We all helped milk.

Gerry - You were milking by hand in those days I suppose.

Isobel - Umm Umm.

Gerry - Can you remember when milking machines came in?

Isobel - Well Dad bought milking machines in 1916.

Gerry - That would have saved a lot of hard work.

Isobel - Yes.

Gerry - Did your children have to round up the cows I suppose.

Isobel - The dog did.

Gerry - Did you have much in the way of entertainment? Did you go out at all, away from the farm much at all?

Isobel - No, not a lot. But I had a year's music lesson.

Gerry - Who taught you, do you remember?

Isobel - Mr Frame was my teacher.

Gerry - How old were you then?

Isobel - Well I was about 8 years old when I started music. He lived in the old boarding house. In the end room there was the piano. And we had to go into that room where the piano was to have our music lessons.

Gerry - Did you have a piano at home to practice on?

Isobel - Yes, still got it.

Gerry - You must have started your love of music, playing and everything in those early days.

Isobel - Mr Frame was a good music teacher.

Peg Burnett - He used to play for the pictures. Remember?

Isobel - Yes

Peg - When the picture shows came, he was the first one to play for the pictures.

Gerry - Your farm, Isobel? Did you have a road into Maleny or how did you get from Maleny, because the road didn't go past as it does now.

Isobel - No. We went down through our own paddock, across a gully, creek and up to the main road into town and came along past where the High School now is, down into Bunya Street.

Gerry - O you went right up there and round?

Peg - Church Hill. Down Church Hill.

Gerry - What happened in the wet weather? Could you get out of your property?

Isobel - Well all we had was horse and sulky. Horse drawn vehicles. But otherwise on horseback.

Gerry - When you went to school, you rode your ponies into school didn't you?

Isobel - Yes.

Gerry - Did you ride two on a pony or did you have one each?

Isobel - We had one each. We had two Welsh Mountain black ponies and they were very frisky.

Gerry - Were they?

Isobel - Yes. We used to gallop a lot. A full gallop. As hard as they could go. And I can remember Mrs Skipper had the half way house from Landsborough to Maleny with tea and scones. And we went down there to visit one day and we were on the horses and Mum & Dad was in a motor car. So they set off and we started gallop. We galloped all the way from Bald Knob to the house and we kept up with the car and the driver of the car I think was Ben Tesch. You know Ben?

Peg - Yes. Cars didn't go very fast in those days.

Isobel - Yes. Forty miles an hour. The ponies were doing 40 miles an hour. As good as a racehorse would go.

Peg - They were lovely ponies.

Isobel - Yes they were buet ponies.

Gerry - When you rode to school, what did you do with your ponies when you got to school?

Isobel - We unsaddled and put the saddles in the saddle shed and let the ponies in the paddock with all the other horses. There'd be 30 or 40 ponies and horses in the paddock. They had to ride in those days. No school buses.

Gerry - You wouldn't have been one of the first at the school?

Isobel - I went to school in 1921.

Peg - But the school was opened about 1913.

Gerry - That's right because Archie Sinclair went the second year, 1914.

Peg - Yes. I've got pictures of the opening.

Gerry - Can you remember who the teachers were when you were at school?

Isobel - I had Miss Mead and she was later Mrs Neale. Mrs Muriel Neale.

Gerry - She married and stayed up here?

Isobel - Yes

Peg - Bernie Bruce. Don't forget Bernie Bruce.

Isobel - O yes. He was the headmaster.

Peg - Stiffy Horn?

Isobel - And Stiffy Horn later on. Yes.

Gerry - He was fairly tough wasn't he?

Isobel - A bit tough. But he was a good teacher. I can still count very well and add up very good. I got on okay.

Gerry - Did the girls get the cane as well as the boys in those days?

Isobel - O we never ever got the cane on the hands. If we were a bit dreamy and not taking much attention, Stiffy would just run along the front seats with a cane and whack, on our legs this way that way, and we never ever got it on our hands. He just had to tickle us on the leg with the cane to wake us up.

Peg - Like you did to the ponies.

Isobel - Umm, Umn.

Peg - Stiffy had a bad reputation but he was a very good teacher.

Isobel - Yes.

Gerry - Every learnt because they were frightened not to I think.

Isobel - Bill Cooke had the riot up there.

Peg - Bill Cooke deserved all he got.

Gerry - According to Archie Sinclair he also faced up on the same time. He went upstairs and Mr Bruce came out and said "What's going on", and that all stopped it. But they didn't get into quite so much trouble.

Isobel - Mr Bruce had to come in on Bill too. That was a day wasn't it?

Peg - yes, laughs.

Gerry - When your parents took the farm over, it was mainly covered in scrub was it? Or had it been cleared?

Isobel - It was all rainforest and vines. And they got it cleared and felled and burnt and they got a good strike of Rhodes grass, paspalum and Coxfoot grass. There's still a few clumps of the Coxfoot grass still around down the other side. The Coxfoot grass is a winter grass, and it doesn't frost. Thinned up a nice little stalk, straight up with a fluffy little top.

Gerry - The cattle liked it?

Isobel - They like it and it stayed green all winter.

Gerry - What's your first memory of Maleny town? There was the church on Church Hill?

Isobel - Yes.

Gerry - When you were a teenager, as a young girl, what did you do?

Isobel - We mostly sat and did needlework when we had spare time.

Peg - Very good needle work too. We had a lot of church activities.

Gerry - Did you go out with young people from the church?

Isobel - Well, we went on Easter camps. Went away to Alexander Headlands, Nambour with a couple of hundred young people. And they had programmes for the day. It was very good.

Peg - We had Tea Meetings. Do you remember the Tea Meetings?

Isobel - Yes we had Tea Meetings.

Gerry - What were the Tea Meetings?

Isobel - At the church, before a Sunday night service they always had a Tea Meeting, tea together, and then they went to church service later, for the evening service.

Peg - We had concerts.

Isobel - And concerts.

Peg - And you used to play.

Gerry - Did you play for the concerts?

Isobel - We played the piano accordion a couple.

Peg - The eisteddfod - Did you ever play in the eisteddfod? You must have?

Isobel - Yes, I played the piano.

Gerry - Where was that? In Nambour?

Isobel - No, in Maleny.

Gerry - They had eisteddfods in Maleny?

Isobel - yes

Peg - Eisteddfods were big. They started on Thursday night with the Ball and all the bands played and they'd finish on Sunday morning at 3 o'clock in the morning. Really big. They came Nambour. A lot of people came from Nambour. But that was in Mrs Innes's time wasn't it?

Isobel - Yes. Mrs Innes bought that in.

Peg - The speech people would come, one act plays and all the six and under used to play the piano solo, the duets.

Isobel - I remember I used to play in the duets.

Peg - Yes, you used to be in duets. ? and I played them.

Gerry - Incidentally Peg Burnett is the other one who is talking. She grew up in Maleny also so she and Isobel remember a lot of the early days. Same age.

Gerry - Tell me something about the Maleny "Younger Set". What did you do?

Isobel - Peg knows more about the "Younger Set" than I do.

Peg - Well I went to a CWA Conference and they were just getting Younger Sets starting. So we came back to Maleny and we decided we'd form a Younger Set. So all the girls, whose Mothers

were in the CWA, all started it. But we ended up, we had, one year we had a membership of 88 young people and we used to have debates, functions, we used to have afternoon tea parties. Didn't we?

Isobel - Yes.

Peg - It was very good and it went on I think, probably 'til the War. I'd say that's when it stopped.

Isobel - The VAD.

Peg - The VAD's came in after that. And then Guides started.

Gerry - Can you ever remember any of the really big floods around Maleny? Really really wet seasons. When it rained forever.

Isobel - Rain for 3 months at a time.

Gerry - My mother in law used to say it was wet for 9 months, then we had the Wet Season. It used to rain 13 months out of the 12. It's always wet up here.

Isobel - Always very wet.

Gerry - Did you have any problems being out here, going to school?

Isobel - No, we didn't have to cross any big creeks.

Peg - Did your ponies get bogged in the mud?

Isobel - No.

Peg - They didn't get bogged on Church Hill? Remember how the cars all used to get bogged on Church Hill?

Isobel - Yes I remember.

Gerry - They had to be pulled up one side and down the other. Did you get your supplies from Maleny, or from Landsborough?

Isobel - We always got our supplies from Maleny.

Gerry - How did they come?

Isobel - In the early days Tytherleighs used to send out a man on horseback and get orders from the farmers and deliver it a few days later. Mum always bought a 50 pound bag of (calico) flour and we'd put it in a cream tin and it kept quite fresh until it was finished. Mum made scones and cakes and whatever was needed. Puddings and so forth. We always bought the sugar in a 70 pound sugar bag. And that went in the other cream can. And the cream cans were the first old cans that Dad only had a few cows and he used to have to take the cream to the factory. The only way he could get it there was by pack horse. So the 6 gallon cans. They have a flat side that goes on the pack saddle and flat on to the side of the horse. That was the sugar and flour bins.

Later on then Dad's take it on the horse and cart and later it was picked up by truck.

Peg - Who took yours? Did Tom Sinclair take it?

Isobel - Yes. Tom Sinclair, he picked our cream up. He had a team of 4 horses. A wagon with a team of 4 horses.

Gerry - What was your family's reaction when women smoked and drank?

Isobel - They didn't like it very well at all.

Peg - They'd have a glass of port at Christmas?

Isobel - Yes.

Gerry - But you didn't have any other drink in the house at all?

Isobel - No.

Gerry - What kind of food did you eat? Did you grow all your own food?

Isobel - Yes. Fruit and vegetables.

Gerry - What kind of fruit did you grow?

Isobel - Well we grew peaches and cooking pears and all our vegies. We used to buy a packet of seed and grow them from seed. And we kept ourselves in fresh vegetables. We'd just go out and pick them and cook them straight away.

Gerry - It's a really healthy way to have them, isn't it?

Isobel - Yes.

Peg - I remember Ben Bryce sending in great piles of vegetables for the Church Fete too. They used to call them bazaars. He used to bring in corn and things like that.

Isobel - Yes, we had a patch of corn. Sweet corn. And we used to grow a lot of pumpkins and jam melons.

Peg - And you know in those days we didn't have peas in the summer did we? Because they were winter things. We used to have beans in the summer and peas in the winter. Cauliflowers in winter.

Isobel - Cauliflower and cabbage. Later broccoli.

Gerry - Your family were very involved in building the first Presbyterian Church weren't they Isobel?

Isobel - Union Church.

Gerry - Union Church up on Church Hill?

Isobel - Yes. Francis Dunlop gave the land on a 99 year lease basis and if the church ever went, the land went back to his farm. The Union Church was built and Dad and Uncle Charlie and quite a few of the local men helped build it. It was a Union Church because all the denominations came there to hold service on Sunday

Gerry - Alternate Sundays?

Isobel - Yes. And then the Baptist Church decided they were going to build their own. They were first out. The Anglican was second out and the Presbyterian built in 1939. There was only the Methodist left so they kept the service going there for a number of times and they decided they'd bring it to land up in Myrtle/Coral Street. They removed the church down there into Maleny township. And at Union time it became the Uniting Church. Later on.

Peg - Now the Union Church. It's where Ted Hankinson built his house?

Isobel - Yes.

Peg. Yes, I think that was it.

Isobel - It was a surveyed block. It originally went back to the farm. Ted got that for his allotment. Talking about the shops in Maleny. I said I can remember some. But I forgot to mention Tytherleighs were the first general store. And I forgot to tell them now it's been remodelled and is a supermarket with shopping trolleys and checkouts.

Gerry - Remember where the old barber shop was?

Isobel - Yes, the old barber shop and the first bank still standing. ES & A.

Gerry - When was it built?

Isobel - I don't know.

Peg - Well the old first bank, they started off in a bit of Hunts, which was Myer and Waddels, now Boxsells. They started off there. Then they built the bank beside that with the bank residence where Dennings used to live. Then they went across the street. Now they're back down the corner. So they've changed 4 times. The other shop, the one that was Myers & Waddel. Well it was Hunts to begin with, wasn't it?

Isobel - Yes.

Peg - Well, it's still got the same frontage as it was. It was built about 1907 I think. 1908.

Isobel - I can remember it later on. When I was 14.

Peg - You probably lived out in the sticks see? You were a whole mile out of town!

Isobel - I didn't come into town a lot to do shopping. But we had a baker and a butcher.

Peg - We always had a butcher and baker.

Isobel - And your cafe.

Peg - Well it was the bakers.

Isobel - We could buy the lollies and ice cream from your shop.

Peg - laughs!

Gerry - Did you eat many lollies and ice cream when you were a girl?

Isobel - Well, we were given our little bit of money to spend and we'd get a bit of a handful. And Phyllis and I said we're not going to spend all this. But we'd buy an ice cream. You know it was only about three cents.

Peg - Threepence

Isobel - And we'd get on, it was in a cone, and we'd get on the pony and start riding home and the pony knows and he'd be coming round looking at us all the way and in the end when we'd eaten all our ice cream off, there'd be a little bit in the cone, we'd put our hand down the side of the horse's neck and it'd put its nose round and eat it munch it up. O they looked forward to their ice cream too.

Gerry - You spoilt your horses did you?

Isobel - Yes.

Peg - They were precious.

Isobel - O Yes.

Gerry - Did you have many different ponies/horses as you grew up?

Isobel - We bred from my first old pony. Sproxtons bought a beautiful black stallion up. We bred from my little pony and she had a lovely black Welsh Mountain pony and she was Phyllis's pony. We had 2 foals. They were lovely to see around. Little foals.

Peg - Remember the shows?

Isobel - We used to ride in the shows. I think the first show I rode in was 1923.

Peg - You must have been about 7. 7 or 8? That must have been nearly the first show?

Isobel - I think it must have been. I can remember riding in that show. I had my little pony and she cantered around beautifully you know, and I could control her. Phyllis was on the young pony, only about 2 year old and when we should have been cantering, it went full gallop and we were in for best girl rider see? So anyway, when she steered it round, it'd come round into its right place and the judge said "Goodness me. I'm going to give you a prize." He said "I didn't think you'd be able to control it after it got into a gallop". But she was able to bring it round into its place and she won a prize. My pony, she just cantered round nice and steady.

Peg - You'd be the only person round left that ever rode in those shows now? I used to ride a lot, but I never ever rode in shows.

Isobel - Aubrey Skerman used to ride.

Peg - She's not here.

Isobel - No. She got killed in an accident.

Peg - You're unique that way. Laughs. The Old Show Rider!

Isobel - Yes. You know at Snow McKillop's birthday I said to Noela just sitting next to me. "Who's that young man?" And she said, "it's Allan Nickols". I said, "we used to compete together in the Maleny Shows". So we got him over and were talking. I said, "Hello Allan. I can remember you competing in Maleny and Shows and Nambour Shows". He said, "I can remember you had the black ponies". I said, "yes". You know he's in his forties now.

Gerry - Did you actually ride in the Nambour Shows as well?

Isobel - Yes.

Gerry - How did you go over there?

Isobel - Well we got won prizes too.

Peg - Did you ride over or take them by truck?

Isobel - We rode over.

Peg - Rix used to ride for all the shows. Like Gympie. He'd set off a couple of days before. He had 3 horses that were jumpers and hunters. He used to ride to all the shows. He'd be a week for a one day show.

Isobel - Yes. We'd started off 5 o'clock in the morning. Rode along over to Montville and down the Hunchy Road and then down the Blackall Range Road and come in by Woombye and across the railway bridge and come into Nambour. Then we'd have to take the saddles off and dry them because they were sweaty, brush them down and be ready for competition by 9 o'clock. Afterwards we'd be at the show all day. Go up and see the pavilion and then we'd come home. Ride home at night. Alec Fleming always went with us. Come home at night. When we got to Montville, we'd say we'd see if the pony know their way home. So we didn't guide or steer them. Just let them have the reins down on the neck. And they came home, along the road, stopped at the gate. We were just testing them out if they knew where they'd come from.

Peg - No one else around now would have that experience. Isabel, what relation was Alec Fleming to you?

Isobel - Alec Fleming was Dad's sister's boy. Dad's sister's name was Isabel and anyway she died when the children were young. Isabelle, that's Mrs Thomason was only a baby. A few weeks old. Isabelle died. So Grandmother reared Isabelle. And Alec was a boy, about 4 or 5. He stayed with his father. He came up here later.

Peg - Where they living down where you came from?

Isobel - At the beginning, when they were just young children. Down NSW. Yes. He came up here and bought a piece of land up on the hill and he married May Gardner. And she died.

Peg - He had a very lonely life. He always seemed to be a lone man didn't he?

Isobel - Yes. She had a stroke. He used to go to hospital every day to feed her.

Peg - He looked after her so well.

Isobel - And what have we got now? Memorabilia?

Gerry - Do you remember using them as pots iron??

Isobel - Yes, I used to use them, pots iron. My mother always supervised. She'd put them on the stove and get them hot and put the handle in and come out to the table and put the ironing board on the table and we were able to iron. I started off ironing hankies first. We were allowed pillowslips and the light ironing.

This is the end of the tape.

