

Mabel Thynne 1874 –1943

As very few people alive today knew Mabel Thynne, it may be timely to remind ourselves of her involvement in the Mary Cairncross Scenic Reserve.

Mabel Mary Josephine Thynne was born in 1874, the third child and eldest daughter of Andrew Joseph Thynne and his wife Mary Williamina Cairncross. (According to the convention of the time, Mabel was publicly known as Miss Thynne, younger sisters being Miss Kate, Miss Mary Thynne etc.)

The children in birth order were Gerald, who died a baby in 1870; Alexander (1871-1959) solicitor and newspaper editor; Mabel (1874-1943) political campaigner and farmer; Katherine (1875-1958) artist; Edward T.F. (1877-1958) farmer, sawmiller, shire councillor; Mary (1878-1956) a people person; Andrew James (1881-1966) draftsman; Elizabeth (1883-1978) pianist with a keen intellect and Dorothy (1890-1936) who married young.

Mabel was a very capable person, an avid reader, a good letter writer and musician who played the violin and sang, and she was a wonderful cook. She always took her responsibilities seriously, helping her mother run the house and care for the younger children, while maintaining her own interests and social activities. It was a political household as her father was a Member of the Legislative Council, the upper house of the Queensland Parliament. They had constant exposure to the movers and shakers of political power and to visiting dignitaries. If her mother was absent, Mabel was hostess for her father, sometimes for lunches on the Government ship *Lucinda* or other vessels.

Following her mother's example, Mabel's passion was for women's rights, in particular the right to vote. While supporting her father's push for Federation (achieved by 1901), her own considerable talents were used in the great campaign for female suffrage. She was a member of the Pioneer Club, the National Liberal Union, and a founding member of the Queensland Women's Electoral League. She wrote papers, gave speeches, and canvassed for signatures required as proof that women did indeed want to vote, and therefore have a say in how taxes were spent, especially if paying taxes themselves.

In 1902 A. J. Thynne had sold properties at Oakey and bought the Burgess land at Maleny, divided into three farms for his son Ted; son Andrew; and for Mabel and her sister Kate together (Sub 1 Portion 98). The girls asked him to provide for them in some way other than land. A career for his daughters at that time was out of the question as it would be prejudicial to his social and professional standing.

Ted and Andrew took up their farms while the girls' farm was managed by their father under Power of Attorney, and he installed a tenant farmer.

Mabel was well travelled, sailing to Japan by 1903, and to Britain in 1905 to accompany Kate who studied art with fine artists there for many years. Mabel wanted to complete a course in physical therapy in London to give her some tangible qualifications, but disappointingly had to return too soon at the end of 1909. Once home in Queensland, she took over personal control of their Maleny farm with its large mortgage and an overdraft and sent regular reports to Kate on their joint enterprise. Land tax was a costly



Mabel Thynne early 1900s

burden, and absentee tax for Kate also had to be paid. The tenant got half the profits, but gradually through cream returns, dividends from the Maleny Dairy Co-op and the occasional sale of a bullock, the overdraft was reduced enough to plan better accommodation for the tenant and his family by mid-1911. Any thought for a house of her own was postponed indefinitely, but Mabel had dreams of a home on the Range which might also take in paying guests recuperating from ill health. "There is a very special brand of air there always, most exhilarating and invigorating. At night it is perfectly delicious with the fireflies everywhere

flashing like small electric sparks. Truly the place is Paradise on earth, and as hard to get to. There is no word bad enough to describe the roads.” It was very hard for Mabel to get away to the Range, which she longed to do, but when she did she stayed with Ted or Andrew. Mabel threw herself into management, going to farming demonstrations at Gatton College and elsewhere, and absorbing knowledge as she travelled the State with her father. Seeing a photo in the Brisbane Courier of Maleny butter on display in a London shop, she sent Kate off to find the shop and see how well the butter had travelled.

Mabel was again caught up in politics, this time campaigning daily against the proposals in the Referenda of 1911 (monopolies etc.), and was pleased at the outcome. She became President of the South Brisbane Branch of Q.W.E.L. and had her paper read out to applause at the National Women’s Liberal Conference in Hobart in 1912. A month later, Brisbane was convulsed by the Tramways Strike, and as the Thynne house at Highgate Hill was under constant surveillance by the strikers, Mabel and the family armed themselves against the threat of attack.

Having unsuccessfully suggested to her father that he buy out Andrew in favour of Bessie, Mabel in 1912 bought Andrew’s Maleny farm herself in Bessie’s name by means of another mortgage. In 1913 Mabel wrote “ We seem likely to be the only people with standing scrub before long. All the others are cutting theirs down. It is hard to wait for any returns to come in, and all the time paying out, and every day more and fresh taxation, till I begin to wonder whether I own the places at all.”

Kate returned to Australia at the outbreak of the First War in 1914, but wanted a regular income not forthcoming from the farm. Mabel was obliged to buy out Kate’s share between 1917 and 1927 by means of yet another mortgage and help from Bessie.

When their mother died in 1918, Mabel, Mary and Bessie continued to keep house for their father. His re-marriage in 1922 changed everything. His new wife Mrs Christine Corrie had been a leading light in most of the organisations Mabel worked for, was only seven years older than Mabel, and was to take her mother’s place in the family home – always a difficult thing for daughters to accept. Christine was a kind and understanding woman, and before agreeing to marry insisted that Mabel, Mary and Bessie be provided for with a living income and a home of their own built on land which Mary owned in Stanthorpe. When their father died in 1927, there were major financial difficulties for the girls and no living income from the farms as the country slipped into the Depression. They

were then too old to train for a career. They could not sell their land as there were no buyers. Taxes, rates and interest were still due and pressures rose. By the early 1930s the sisters retreated from Stanthorpe to Mabel's farm at Maleny and remained there.

Throughout the 1930s there were attempts to have their area of scrub preserved for posterity. The value for wildlife and for tourism was increasingly obvious. (Mabel asked the Council if the entire Landsborough Shire could be made a bird sanctuary, but was refused.) Finally a solution was reached. Mabel handed over the scrub *** and the Mary Cairncross Scenic Reserve became a reality in October 1941, held In Trust by the Landsborough Shire Council (now in 2012 held In Trust by the Sunshine Coast Regional Council).

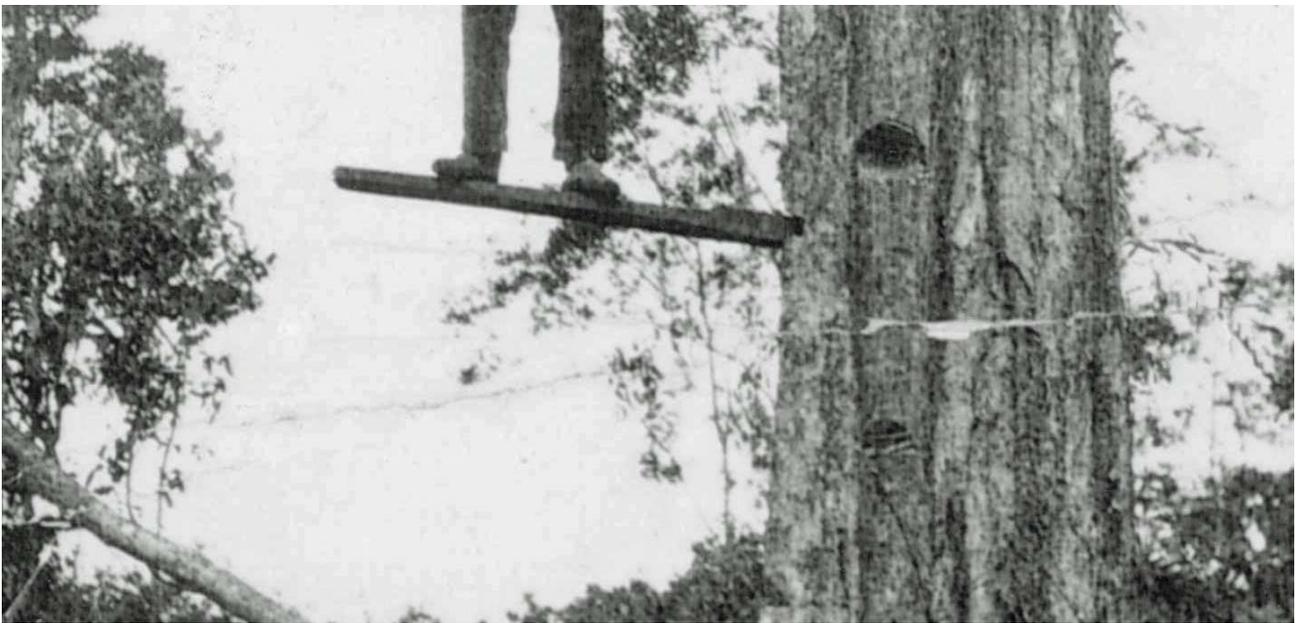
Life had been stressful for Mabel and she suffered a series of strokes - the first within weeks of the official M.C.S.R. ceremony; the last leading to her death in Maleny Hospital in August 1943. Ted and his wife Lily had been a constant support to Mabel and her sisters, offering their home for visits to the Range in earlier days and keeping a watchful eye over the farms. Mary died in 1956. Bessie died in 1978, having donated another piece of scrub adjoining the Reserve.

Mabel worked so hard – for women's rights and the betterment of Queensland, for her farms and family, and for the preservation of her scrub. The inscription on the cairn near the front of the M.C.S.R., carefully worded by family members involved, is indeed how the attribution should be made – that it is because of Mabel, Mary, Bessie and Ted Thynne that the Reserve is here today.

Post Script. In May 2012 the death was announced in New Zealand of Douglas Cairncross Thynne, youngest son of Ted and Lily Thynne, aged 93: the boy on the jigger-board in the 1933 photo.

Douglas Thynne, aged 15 on jigger-board felling a tree in MCSR car park area. This 1933 photo by his father Ted Thynne was previously displayed in MCSR's Education Centre.

by Dotti Kemp, a great-niece and family historian



(The above two photos courtesy of Dotti Kemp.)