

# **ROBERT MITCHELL, ELIZA AGNES and EMILY BURTON BOYD**

## **PREFACE**

This is one of three biographies of my direct Boyd ancestors in Australia, covering the period 1814 to 1957. They are;

Dr. Sprott Boyd (1814-1902) and Catherine Cutler (1819-1894)

Robert Mitchell Boyd (1849-1912), Eliza Agnes Brown (1855-1884) and Emily Burton Bradley (1862-1954)

Isabella Sprott Boyd (1882-1957) and George Stanley Newton Connor (1871-1951)

Sprott and Catherine Boyd were born in England and followed the footsteps of other Boyd family members to Australia, but returned to the homeland towards the end of their lives. Mitchell and Eliza Boyd were also immigrants to Australia, but stayed until their deaths. Emily Boyd, Stan and Isabella Connor were born in Australia. The stories span the history of Sydney post the gold rush, the early years of the Australian sugar industry in New South Wales and Far North Queensland, Federation, farming in Gippsland Victoria and market gardening near Sydney.

Each of the stories can be read in isolation. Inevitably, there is overlap between them, so some repetition is unavoidable but I have tried to keep this to a minimum. For easy reference, family trees are included at the end of each story.

Robert Mitchell and Eliza Agnes Boyd are my great grandparents. In researching their biographies, I had access to the huge store of Boyd papers and memorabilia saved and cared for by my second cousin once removed, Elaine Isobel Roberts, to whom I am eternally grateful. The National Library's TROVE database was also an invaluable resource.

Andrew George Connor

Perth, 2017

## Robert Mitchell Boyd's early years

Robert Mitchell Boyd, always known as Mitchell or 'Mitch', was born in the seaside town of Weymouth on the south coast of England, where his father had a medical practice. The name Mitchell comes from his great grandmother, Isabella Mitchell (1729-1806). Mitch was the last of three children born to Dr. Sprott Boyd and his wife Catherine Cutler. His birth date is not recorded in the Dorset Registry Office, but he was baptised according to the rites of the Church of England on 4 May 1849 in the Parish of Melcombe Regis. We assume he was born earlier the same year because both his brother John Archibald ('Archie') and sister Frances Isabella ('Fanny') Boyd were baptised in Melcombe Regis about four weeks after their births.

Judging from the testimonials of his patients and the townspeople of Weymouth, it appears that Dr. Sprott Boyd had a thriving medical practice, and that the family was relatively well-off. Mitch's mother Catherine came from an aristocratic family connected to the Dukes of Norfolk and English monarchy but I suspect that little of their wealth filtered down to Catherine – just the access that nobility gave her to a good education and to a circle of influential relatives and acquaintances. Her grandfather, Rev. John Cutler had been head master of the exclusive King's School at Sherborne, Dorset and Catherine herself had been a schoolmistress before her marriage, so I am sure that she gave her own children the best education she could afford.

Around the time of Mitch's birth, the family moved to 18 Royal Terrace (now 68-84 The Esplanade), a three-storey Georgian terrace house on the seafront at Weymouth. All the children, and Archie in particular, were interested in the natural world, and perhaps this interest began at Weymouth, where they could explore the coastline. Mitch was not long in to his education when his parents, Sprott and Catherine, made the decision to move to Australia. Their reasons for doing this are unclear. Eleanor Boushey<sup>1</sup> says that Sprott had accepted an offer of employment from the "Australian Mutual Benefits Providence Society", but records of the A.M.P. Society show that Sprott did not join this organisation until long after his arrival in Sydney. More likely, Sprott was attracted by the stories of New South Wales he had heard from his elder pioneering brothers Archibald and William and sister Anne, and from newspaper accounts of the exploits of his cousins, the Boyds of Merton Hall. The colony was growing fast following the gold rush of the early 1850s and had scarce medical services. I am sure that Sprott would have been armed with many letters of introduction, and with the names of people to contact when he arrived.

## Emigration to Australia

On 15 July 1857, the family held an auction of their effects at their residence 18 Royal Terrace, Weymouth, and prepared to leave England. They booked a first-class passage on the maiden voyage of the *Duncan Dunbar*, a brand-new clipper ship, which left Plymouth on the 1 September 1857 for Sydney. On board were Sprott (42) and Catherine (37), their three children Archie (11), Fanny (9) and Mitch (8), two servants and Sprott's younger sister Margaret 'Maggie' Alexina Boyd (29). There were 57 other cabin passengers, and 36 in steerage. One of the other cabin passengers was Mrs Maria Kneller Parker, who later became Fanny's and Mitch's governess and school teacher. The ship also carried prized cattle and horses, and general freight for the colony. The Boyd's voyage was slower than usual due to light winds until reaching 47°S, and a very severe storm across the Indian Ocean. For the children, the voyage must have been an adventure, but I wonder how many times they asked "are we there yet?" Seeing the Australian mainland for the first time must have been exciting. They arrived in Sydney on 16 December 1857 after a voyage of 102 days, with no loss of human life.<sup>2</sup> Coincidentally, a sister ship, the *Dunbar*,

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<sup>1</sup> "The Boyd Family Story", by Eleanor Sprott Boyd Boushey, 1995

<sup>2</sup> Maitland Mercury and Hunter River General Advertiser 17 Dec 1857

*Robert Mitchell Boyd (1849-1912), Eliza Agnes Brown (1855-1884) and Emily Burton Bradley (1862-1954).*  
By A.G. Connor, 2017

was wrecked at Sydney Heads on 20 August 1857 with large loss of life. News of this tragedy did not reach England until after the *Duncan Dunbar* had sailed, and there were local rumours in Weymouth that Dr Boyd and his family had died. The newspapers eventually corrected the rumour.



*Duncan Dunbar*, 1374t, wood clipper, built in 1857 by Laing, Sunderland for Duncan Dunbar.<sup>3</sup>



Lyons Terrace, Liverpool Street, Sydney circa 1875-85<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> "The Clipper Ship 'Duncan Dunbar' 1600 Tons". T.G. Dutton, printer and engraver. Day & Son (engravers). William Foster (publisher). Hand-coloured lithograph: Royal Museums Greenwich, London (PY0653)

<sup>4</sup> State Library of NSW. Collection

The family settled initially at 140 Castlereagh Street, Sydney. Sprott put up his shingle and quickly began drumming up business. In October 1858, the family and the medical practice moved to 6 Lyons Terrace on Liverpool Street, looking north over Hyde Park. One of the other houses in Lyons Terrace was occupied by John C. Belisario, a dental surgeon who had several daughters. The Boyd and Belisario children became friends and kept in touch for many years.

At the start of 1858, Archie Boyd was enrolled at The Grammar School (later Sydney Grammar School or "Grammar"), which was situated a short walk away across Hyde Park. Archie was student number 186 on the school register and stayed at Grammar for his entire education. Fanny and Mitch remained at home in 1858 and were taught by Mrs. Kneller Parker, who lived with the Boyd family for seven years after arriving with them on the *Duncan Dunbar*. In 1859, Mitch was enrolled in the Preparatory class at Grammar, and was student number 286 on the school register, but he only stayed there until April the same year. Perhaps having an older brother at the same school led to some victimization, perhaps Mitch was not ready for a mainstream school, perhaps he was expelled, or more likely, Sprott was unimpressed with the standard of the Preparatory teaching at Grammar.

From 11 April 1859, Mitch attended a new Primary Classical School at Eglinton House, Glebe Point, established by the Rev. John Pendrill, who was a patient and friend of Sprott's. The school was "*intended to meet a specific demand in the department of education, and to provide facilities for the early preparatory training of young boys designed for admission to the public schools of the colony. The course of instruction will comprise all the elementary branches of a useful and liberal education.*"<sup>5</sup> There was no co-education in those days. Pendrill's School became a Primary + Collegiate School soon afterwards and attracted boys from many of Sydney's elite families. Mitch stayed on at Pendrill's Collegiate School and completed his education there.

Next door to Sydney Grammar School is the Australian Museum and, no doubt, the school took advantage of this to assist teaching natural history subjects – zoology, botany and geology. The acting curator of the Museum, Mr. Gerard Krefft, must have recognized a potential army of young collectors, which could help him rapidly expand the Museum's collection. From July 1860 onwards, Archie Boyd became an enthusiastic hunter, collector and contributor to the Museum's collection and became great friends with Gerard Krefft, who acknowledged all contributions publicly each month in the newspapers, and who classified and named the specimens. Archie's enthusiasm must have rubbed off onto his siblings, because both Mitch and Fanny began contributing to the Museum's collection, although not as prolifically as Archie. A close school friend of Archie's, H. Houghton Bradley, also participated in Archie's specimen collecting trips. Houghton would later become the Boyd family's solicitor and confidante, and his baby sister, Emily, would later marry Mitchell Boyd.

The three Boyd children and Houghton Bradley ranged far and wide in pursuit of specimens for the Museum – around the southern shores of the harbour; through the rain-forested gullies that lead down to beaches like Bondi, Tamarama, Bronte, Clovelly, Coogee, Maroubra and Malabar; around the rocky platforms, crevices and cliffs between South Head and La Perouse, and through the creeks and streams that lead down from the lakes near Randwick to the wetlands along the northern shore of Botany Bay.

Archie collected almost anything. His contributions to the Museum collection included mammals (possum, native cat, flying fox), large birds (hawk, pelican, owl, duck, grebe, gannet and their nests and eggs), reptiles (snakes, lizards), amphibians (frogs), fish of many kinds, and invertebrates (insects, spiders, shellfish). Fanny seemed to specialize in small birds (finches, wrens, honeyeaters, robins, tits, flycatchers and even a canary), and she also shared an interest in botany with her teacher, Mrs Kneller Parker. Mitch collected birds, reptiles and contributed

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<sup>5</sup> Sydney Morning Herald 4 Apr 1859

botanical specimens as well. Surprisingly, there are no cockatoos, parrots or rosellas in the list of specimens. They collected both live and dead specimens – the Museum had a large collection of live snakes and lizards, but most of the bird specimens were dead, which suggests that Archie (at least) possessed a light-gauge shotgun and/or rifle and was proficient in using it. The house at Lyons Terrace must have had a variety of live and dead animals on the premises at any one time, and I suspect that they had an aviary and several cages in the back yard. Behind the Terrace was a field where horses and domestic animals grazed.

In May 1863, Gerard Krefft of the Australian Museum read a paper "On the Frogs and Snakes of the Neighbourhood of Sydney," before the Philosophical Society of New South Wales, in which he paid a high compliment to Archie Boyd (and his helpers).

*"I beg to inform this meeting that, whatever discoveries with regard to Australian reptiles have been made during the last three years, have been brought about through the interest taken in this class of the animal kingdom by my young friend Mr. Archibald Boyd, and by Mr. James F. Wilcox, William Macleay, Esq., M.P., Edward Hill, Esq., Mr. F. W. Blackman of Warroo, Miss Helena Scott of Ash Island, Mr. George M. Pitt of Bronte, Miss Macintosh of Lane Cove, and many other friends who co-operated with me in developing the Reptilia Fauna of the Australian continent. The result of our labours has exceeded the most sanguine expectations, and if I look back upon the twenty odd badly preserved and nameless species of Australian reptiles which the Museum possessed three years ago, and compare them with the collection as it stands at present, second to none, not even to the British Museum collection, I can only say that I am proud of such results."<sup>6</sup>*

A year later, Gerard Krefft who had been acting Curator of the Museum for some years was formally appointed Curator<sup>7</sup> in recognition of the "*splendid collection of reptiles, living and preserved, at the Museum*", and his devoted attention to that branch of science.

Also in May 1864, with Fanny's education completed, Mrs. Kneller Parker left Lyons Terrace to set up her own school of "Education for the Daughters of Gentlemen", citing Spratt Boyd as the referee. Spratt arranged for son Archie Boyd to be introduced to Sydney society by attending a formal reception, or "Levee", held by the Governor Sir James Young at Government House on the occasion of the Queen's birthday<sup>8</sup>. Houghton Bradley and his father were also there. Fanny, being female, was excluded. Mitch was still at Pendrill's school and was too young to attend. In December 1864, Mitch Boyd was dux of Class V (Classical Division) and was first in Order of Merit for Mathematics (Upper Division).<sup>9</sup>

After two terms at Sydney University, a stint on a sheep station in Queensland, and a job in a Sydney bank, Archie Boyd eventually followed his love of nature and on 31 May 1865, sailed away to start a new life in the Fiji Islands, where he continued collecting specimens and regularly sent them back to the Museum. He wrote to his family often, but without their brother's constant drive, Fanny and Mitch curtailed their specimen collecting, although they continued to contribute to the Museum collection whenever they found something interesting or new. Mitch's last contribution to the Museum was in 1877.

## **Mitch's early working career**

Mitch Boyd finished school (Class VI) at the end of 1865 aged 16, and was headed for a career in business. His father Spratt, and the many friends Mitch had rubbed shoulders with at Pendrill's school probably made job hunting easy, and opened almost any door in Sydney. It was really a matter of Mitch deciding what direction he wished to follow. Mitch attended the vice regal

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<sup>6</sup> Sydney Morning Herald 1 Jun 1863

<sup>7</sup> Sydney Morning Herald 13 May 1864

<sup>8</sup> Empire, 25 May 1864

<sup>9</sup> Sydney Morning Herald 22 Dec 1864

*Robert Mitchell Boyd (1849-1912), Eliza Agnes Brown (1855-1884) and Emily Burton Bradley (1862-1954).  
By A.G. Connor, 2017*

reception in May 1867 and again in December 1867, where he was presented to the retiring Governor, Sir John Young. In January 1868, he was presented to the new Governor, the Rt. Hon. Earl of Belmore. All of these receptions attracted the elite of Sydney and New South Wales society, and were “networking opportunities” for the businessmen of the colony. Among those who attended the receptions in 1867-68 was Edward W. Knox, director of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company (C.S.R.) and chairman of the Commercial Banking Company of Sydney. I don’t know how or why Mitch Boyd became interested in the sugar industry. He was still in Sydney in March 1868 where he attended a fancy-dress ball to welcome His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh. On 13 October 1869, Fanny married George Wildman Yates Fitzgerald at Christ Church (of England) Sydney. Mitch attended. Rev John Pendrill, Mitch’s school headmaster assisted at the ceremony – clearly, he was a family friend also<sup>10</sup>. Sprott Boyd and Houghton Bradley were the witnesses. Archie married a Fijian woman, Meri Matanisiga and in 1870, they had a son named Reginald Boyd, called ‘Reggie’.



Robert Mitchell Boyd ca 1869

By October 1870 Mitch was involved in a sugar milling operation at Green Point on the Hastings River inland from Port Macquarie, working for Messrs. Morrison and Davies for thirty shillings per week<sup>11</sup>. The fledgling industry was very fragmented – in 1870 there were 27 sugar mills in New South Wales, mostly small and inefficient, but despite this, the number was growing fast and

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<sup>10</sup> Sydney Morning Herald 14 Oct 1869

<sup>11</sup> North Queensland Register 28 Oct 1896

farmers were optimistic about the industry's future. They willingly opened their doors to inspection, by both private interests and the press and shared experiences and ideas with their fellow sugar growers, millers and refiners (less so with officers from the Government Department of Agriculture). Mitch's employers sent him to several of the sugar growing districts and operations in New South Wales, to learn the fundamentals of the sugar business. Among them, he visited the C.S.R. operations at the Macleay and Clarence Rivers and met the C.S.R. management, and would certainly have met Edward Knox who was in the process of reshaping C.S.R.'s business on the Clarence River. No doubt he returned to the Hastings full of ideas.

In 1871, Mitch Boyd was witness to a death at his workplace, the Green Point sugar mill. It seems that Mitch was working on the mill floor at the time. A man was crushed between a cane truck and cane-feeding table. This may have been the first death he had witnessed. Mitch had to give evidence at the inquest.<sup>12</sup> In November, Mitch's parents decided to return to England and by the end of the year had put up for sale their household furniture and effects, and the medical practice. They sailed from Sydney on 29 December, it seems for a year-long holiday, because they returned to Sydney again in January 1873.

The sugar industry on the Hastings River struggled. The farmers of the district were traditionally maize and corn farmers and had little knowledge of sugar cane. The cane they selected grew well, but was susceptible to frosty weather and flooding, which was fairly common along the Hastings. The cane variety they chose was juicy, but the juice was not so rich in sugar, so the millers and refiners did not achieve satisfactory sugar yields. Several mills changed hands or closed after one or two seasons. The Green Point mill went the way of many others. Morrison and Davies became insolvent in December 1872, the sugar mill was sold, dismantled and taken to Queensland<sup>13</sup>. Morrison purchased another mill and erected it on the Hastings River, but it too failed and became idle – Mitch was out of work. As he later said "*I lost every sixpence I had in the world*"<sup>14</sup>. Only C.S.R. seemed capable of building sugar mills with the necessary efficiencies, economies of scale and robust, low cost technology. This they did by constructing large mills at Southgate (1869-70) and Chatsworth Island (1870-71) on the Clarence River, and Darkwater (1869-70) on the Macleay River.

By the time Mitch's parents were returning from Europe, Mitch was still looking for another job. His sister Fanny wrote to him on 29 December 1872, saying "*I can't tell you what a pleasure and relief it was to get your letter – I had got dreadfully anxious about you, it was two months after date when I received it. I hope this last trip will have been equally successful. I shouldn't wonder if raising produce for the market paid better than cotton, the latter seems so precarious.*"<sup>15</sup> From this it appears that Mitch spent the latter half of 1872 travelling in search of long-term employment, or a primary production business venture. Fanny, her husband Wiley and daughter Elsie returned to England in May 1873. Wiley died from the effects of tuberculosis during the voyage. The family regularly corresponded with each other, by letter and telegram, throughout their lives.

By mid-1873, C.S.R. had concluded that the Macleay River district and its farmers, like the Hastings, could not support a large sugar mill, so they decided to relocate their Darkwater Mill to Harwood Island on the Clarence River<sup>16</sup>. It is around this time that Mitch was employed by C.S.R. in their Clarence River operations. Perhaps he was directly involved in relocating the Darkwater Mill to Harwood Island. It was under construction in January 1874 and was renamed the Harwood Mill. A rum distillery was added to this sugar mill, the first (legal) distillery in New South Wales. Mitch's address in the front of Archie's 1874 diary is "*R.M. Boyd, Rocky Mouth, Harwood Mill, Clarence River*". Rocky Mouth is now the town of Maclean, and the Harwood Mill is situated about

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<sup>12</sup> Australian Town and Country Journal 16 Sep 1871

<sup>13</sup> Australian Town and Country Journal 2 Aug 1873

<sup>14</sup> "Sugar Commission Report". Evidence of R.M. Boyd, 29 Jan 1889

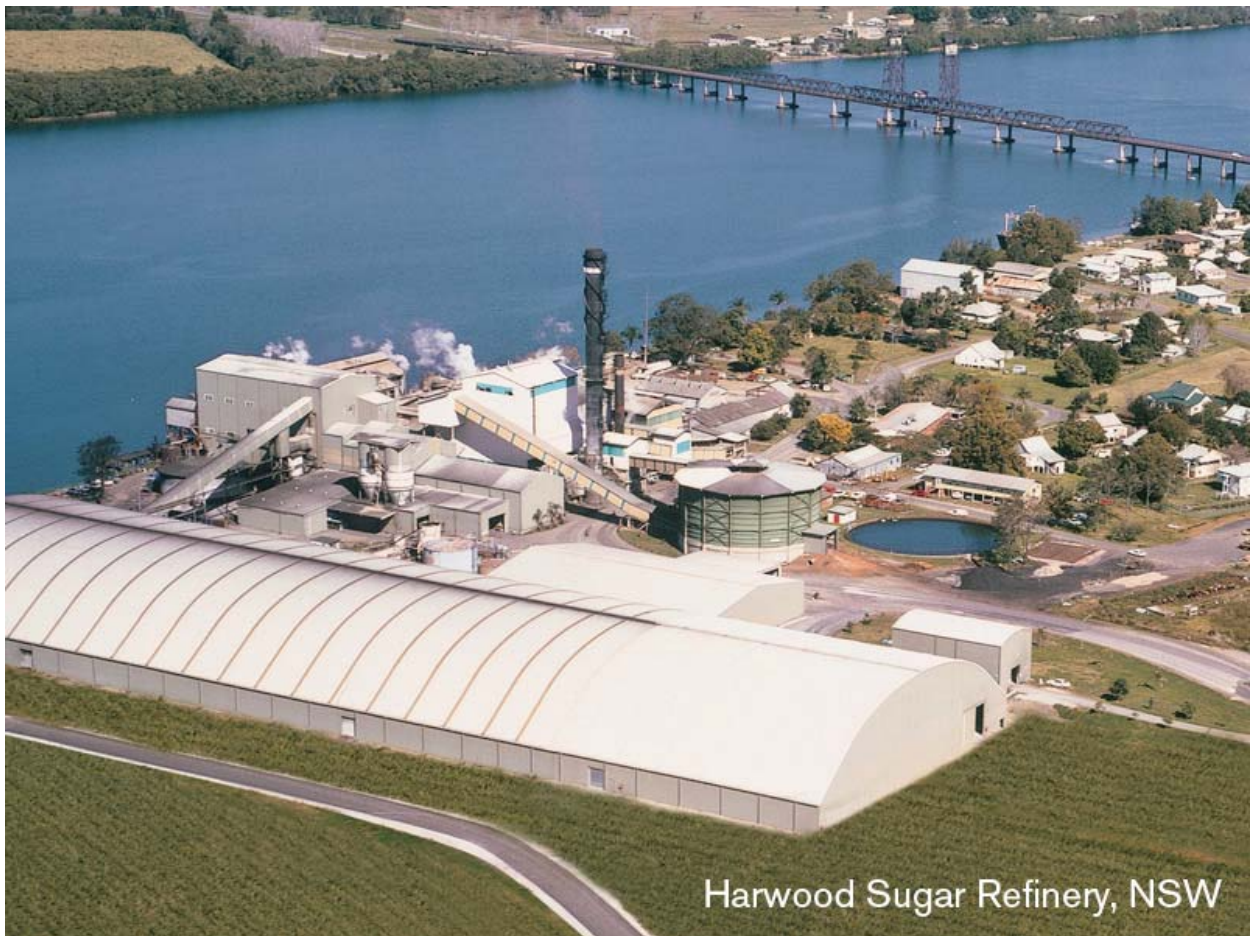
<sup>15</sup> "The Boyd Family Story" by Eleanor Sprott Boyd Boushey p101

<sup>16</sup> Clarence and Richmond Examiner 13 Jan 1874 p4

*Robert Mitchell Boyd (1849-1912), Eliza Agnes Brown (1855-1884) and Emily Burton Bradley (1862-1954).  
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five kilometers downstream. The manager in charge of all C.S.R.'s operations on the Clarence at that time was Edward W. Knox.

The 1874-75 sugar season on the Clarence, Mitch's first season with C.S.R., was very successful. Farmers and millers made good profits, some of which C.S.R. reinvested in improvements to the Harwood Mill and a doubling of the distillery's capacity. To celebrate the end of the season, and the Queen's birthday, the towns along the Clarence held a regatta in May 1875. Mitch Boyd entered the race "for amateurs who do not gain their living by manual labour, pulling four oars, with coxswains, in string-test gigs, not exceeding 42 feet overall." Mitch's crew won by six lengths in a time of 23 minutes 30 seconds to take the £50 prize money. He did not fare as well in the race for all skiffs under canvas, finishing last in a field of four in his skiff "Ella"<sup>17</sup>. Ironically, the regatta was held on the same river in which Mitch's uncle Philip Domville Boyd was drowned when attempting to cross it in 1847.



The Harwood Mill today. It no longer has a distillery. The bridge was opened in 1966.

The following rather factual description of Harwood Island appeared in the local paper in August 1875. "Harwood Island is one of many Islands, situated in Shoal Bay. It is about 14 miles in circumference, and of alluvial formation. The chief industry is the culture of the sugar-cane and manufacture of sugar, for which it is well adapted, the sea breeze tempering the atmosphere that the cane is not effected by frost, or scorched by the summer's heat. The mill and distillery erected here by the Colonial Sugar Company are about 10 miles from the Clarence Heads and 40 miles from Grafton; it has a fine deep-water frontage enabling the ocean steamers to load and unload at the wharves. The length of the mill building is 40 feet by 175 feet, and the size of the mill roller, 72 inches by 28 inches. The steam engine is of 60-horse power

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<sup>17</sup> Sydney Morning Herald 31 May 1875.



*and capable of crushing 12 tons of cane per day. When in full work from 13 to 14 tons of sugar is turned out. At the distillery, there are three stills at work, which turns out about 5000 gallons of spirits per week. At this mill the company employ about 160 men. For the purpose of bringing the cane from the various wharfs on the river the Company have 1 tug steamer, a launch, and eleven punts. About from 100 to 150 tons of coal per week are consumed at the works. Since the erection of the mill a village has sprung up and can now boast of two stores, a public house, and a school with 50 children enrolled. The number of acres of ground under cultivation is, in round numbers 1,000 acres; the chief objects of culture are sugar-cane, maize, potatoes, and bananas; cotton, tobacco, oranges, pineapples, loquats, lemons, apples, and peaches, are likewise cultivated for home consumption. The Island has been all taken up by free-selectors and is fenced into paddocks throughout and fully stocked with cattle. The inhabitants are mostly Scotch Highlanders with a sprinkling of English and Irish.”<sup>18</sup>*

To the above were added a post office, church halls, a bakery, and many new houses built of locally made brick and tile. It must have been exciting for Mitch Boyd to be involved in the growth of a new enterprise and a new town where nothing except fields had existed before, and to feel part of a growing community. Although work was hard and relentless during the harvest season, the townspeople of Harwood Island found plenty to amuse themselves during days off and public holidays, and during the cane-growing season. Water transport was the only way of moving between Harwood Island and the larger river communities of Rocky Mouth, Lawrence, and Grafton, so naturally, water sports were a favorite pastime. Apart from participating in regattas, Mitch took time to fish and to collect specimens from the district and send them to the Museum in Sydney. He probably attended church on Sundays. There were many inter-mill and inter-town cricket matches but Mitch's name is not mentioned in any of the teams, so perhaps he wasn't inclined to such sports. Social events included athletic carnivals, company picnics, dances and an occasional ball, school fetes, concerts and local dramatic productions. Occasionally, a magic lantern show came to town.

During the cane-harvesting and crushing season, between about July and December each year, all the sugar mills in the district needed to increase their labour force. Men would come from as far afield as Brisbane and Sydney to line up at the mills and compete for work with local farm hands. During this season, the mills ran as continuously as possible. Tempers sometimes became frayed and, on one occasion, Mitch had someone charged for assaulting him. The man was found guilty but was only fined 2s 6d plus costs, so the magistrate clearly thought the assault was trivial<sup>19</sup>. During the other six months, farmers were busy tending new cane and other crops, and the mill operators were busy maintaining their machinery and making modifications and improvements in preparation for the next harvest. The community had to deal with the usual trials of the Australian bush – floods (which the Clarence River did regularly), fires during summer, mosquito plagues and snakes but as is the case in all Australian country towns, neighbours helped each other in times of hardship. Mitch was acknowledged for one such deed, as follows; “C.B. DOBBIN takes this opportunity of THANKING No. 1 Gang of Canecutters, also Messrs. David and Robert Boyle; but for whose strenuous exertions in cutting a clearing through my cane-field, the whole must have been totally destroyed by fire on Saturday last. Also, to mention that through prompt assistance on the part of Mr. Boyd, the partially damaged cane is being utilized”<sup>20</sup>.

By the end of 1875, Mitch was 26 years old; he could see a career ahead of him, had a comfortable niche in Clarence River society and perhaps was thinking about getting married and starting a family. His brother and sister had already started families, but Fanny was already a widow and Archie was married to a Fijian, which was probably not what his parents hoped for or approved of, so perhaps Mitch was getting some pressure from his mother and father to marry well. Males, however, greatly outnumbered females at Harwood Island, - women of marriageable age would have been in very high demand so it was unlikely that Mitch would find a wife there. As with his father Sprott, Mitch seemed to regard marriage as a necessity or an obligation, and

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<sup>18</sup> Clarence and Richmond Examiner and New England Advertiser, 10 Aug 1875, p4

<sup>19</sup> Clarence and Richmond Examiner and New England Advertiser 19 Oct 1875 p5

<sup>20</sup> Clarence and Richmond Examiner and New England Advertiser 23 Dec 1876 p5

that a marriage was like a business partnership. Selecting an acceptable and suitable partner was important, and an arranged marriage was a realistic option.

In 1876, Sprott and Catherine decided to return to England for good, mainly because they both had health problems. Once again, they sold their belongings in Sydney, and sailed for Marseilles on the R.M.S.S. *Normanby* on 26 February<sup>21</sup>, having seen both Archie and Mitch before they left. They would have carried this photograph of their son Mitchell, taken on 28 May 1875, with them. On arriving in London, Sprott and Catherine lived at 34 St. George's Road, Hannover Square with Fanny and granddaughter Elsie Fitzgerald. After settling in, I think they began searching for a suitable wife for Mitch.

On 12 May 1877, having completed preparations for the harvest season, Mitch sailed on C.S.R.'s steamer the *Fiona* for Sydney<sup>22</sup>, and on the 16<sup>th</sup> he sailed for London via Mauritius<sup>23</sup>. No doubt his parents and sister had a list of potential wives waiting for him to peruse.



## **Eliza Agnes Brown's early years.**

One of the potential wives they selected was Eliza Agnes Brown, known always as Agnes or 'Aggie'. Aggie was the fifth and youngest child of Sprott's first cousin, Elizabeth Boyd, who married William Craufurd Brown, an Assistant Surgeon in Her Majesty's Indian Army. Aggie was born in 1855 in Rajkot, India which, at that time, was a British Protectorate and the headquarters of the British Political Agent. It is now a large city in the Indian State of Gujarat. She was born into a military family that was used to being posted to various garrisons within Britain and its empire. Aggie's older brothers and sisters were born in Bombay and Edinburgh so the family was quite used to life in India. The British Government had been in Rajkot since 1818 and had made improvements to the city to suit the English lifestyle and culture, so by the time the Browns arrived in early 1855, Rajkot would have been a comfortable posting.

Life was fairly routine until 10 May 1857, when the Indian Mutiny began. Sepoys of the British East India Company at Meerut mutinied, and the unrest spread to other garrisons. By July, several British Cantonments had been attacked, and the residents forced to take refuge in forts. The Indian Army, including Aggie's father, were mobilized to put down the rebellions. The fighting was fierce and many on both sides were killed. Aggie's father was in action at Ahwa (now Ajwa)

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<sup>21</sup> Sydney Morning Herald 28 Feb 1876

<sup>22</sup> Evening News (Sydney) 14 May 1877

<sup>23</sup> JA Boyd's diary 11 Jun 1877

in September 1857<sup>24</sup> and then at Kotah (now Kota) in 1858<sup>25</sup>, both located in modern day central Rajasthan and several hundred kilometres north east of Rajkot. Here he saw some of the most ferocious fighting of the entire mutiny. Many troops and unarmed civilians were slaughtered and, for William Brown as a surgeon, it must have been a horrifying experience. His family back in Rajkot were relatively untouched, but he must have been very concerned for their safety.

According to family stories, William Brown was very disturbed by his experiences during the Mutiny, - he and his family were repatriated to Britain in 1858. These days, he would be diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. In the census of April 1861, the entire family was living at 18 Salutory Place, St Sidwells, Exeter, Devon. They had a live-in nurse maid, parlour maid and cook. Aggie was aged five and no doubt went to school in Exeter. Elizabeth was a very pious person and the family were frequent church-goers.

William Craufurd Brown was formally promoted to Surgeon on 10 Sep 1862<sup>26</sup>, although he had been promoted to this rank in the field on earlier occasions. He never fully recovered, however, from his experiences during the Indian Mutiny and he died at Salutory Place less than a year later on 26 August 1863<sup>27</sup>, leaving his wife and five children. Elizabeth was granted a war widow's pension.

By April 1871, the Brown family (except William junior who stayed at boarding school in Exeter) had moved to 59 Boundary Road, Hampstead St John's Wood, London. They had a ladies' maid, parlour maid and a cook, so Elizabeth and the family were comfortably well-off. Her eldest son Hugh had a job at a city bank. None of the children were married at the Census date, but Lucy married (advantageously) to William Carstares Dunlop in June that year. Aggie was sixteen.

Sometime before November 1877, Elizabeth Brown and her remaining family moved back to her home city of Edinburgh, and took up residence at 2 Blantyre Terrace. I don't know if the move happened before or after Sprott and Catherine Boyd returned to London in about May 1876, but Fanny would have had ample opportunity to get to know her Brown cousins while they were in London. Elizabeth Brown now had two unmarried daughters, Isabella (known as 'Ella') aged 25 and Aggie aged 22, and she set about looking for suitable husbands. This studio portrait of the two women was one of several taken in Edinburgh in late 1877.



Isabella 'Ella' Erskine Brown (standing)  
and Eliza Agnes 'Aggie' Brown, Edinburgh, 1877

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<sup>24</sup> Morning Post 25 Nov 1857

<sup>25</sup> UK Roll of Indian Medical Service 1615-1930. 1845. No 776.

<sup>26</sup> London Daily News 26 Sep 1863

<sup>27</sup> England & Wales, National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations) 1858-1966

## Marriage and children

Mitch arrived in London in June 1877. Arrangements for Mitch and Aggie to meet must have been well in hand because the courtship and the negotiation of their marriage took less than six months. Mitch and Aggie were second cousins, but had never met before. Marriage between cousins was quite common in those days – there are several examples in the Boyd family.

Marriage for many Scottish families involved negotiation of a settlement and ante-nuptial agreement, wherein the bride's parents promised to bequeath money and/or property towards their daughter's and potential grandchildren's future well-being. Sometimes these negotiations were long and complicated, as had been the case for Sprott Boyd's sister Jane Boyd when she married William Bartrum Evans. I don't know how hard the process was for Mitch and Aggie, but an ante-nuptial Contract of Marriage was signed on 30 January 1878. In it, "*certain property of the said Eliza Agnes Brown was assigned and disposed upon certain trust therein mentioned, and in the said Contract is contained a provision that the funds and estate the subject of the said Contract should be divisible among the children, if more than one of the intended marriage or their issue, in such shares and proportions as I and the said Eliza Agnes Brown jointly, or the survivor of us, might appoint by any writing under my, our or her hand.*"<sup>28</sup>

In line with Scottish tradition, the wedding took place in the bride's domain. They were married in St Bernard's Parish Church, Edinburgh on 31 January 1878<sup>29</sup>. Mitch is listed in the marriage register as "*Merchant, Clarence River, Australia, presently residing in London*". The couple returned to London after the marriage.



Mitchell and Agnes Boyd, London, ca March 1878

<sup>28</sup> Last Will and Testament of Robert Mitchell Boyd. 22 Feb 1911

<sup>29</sup> London Standard 6 Feb 1878

We do not have any letters written by Aggie, so we can only guess how she was feeling. She had led a fairly sheltered life after returning from India as a young child. She was well educated, used to having servants to help her, and probably never wanted for anything. The thought of going out to a sugar plantation in the Australian outback would have been frightening. One comforting factor may have been that her elder brother, William Crawford Brown junior and his wife, had preceded Aggie to the antipodes, and had just moved from Adelaide to Auckland when Mitch and Aggie were married. From London, the distance between Auckland and New South Wales probably seemed short to her.

In April, the couple left London on a P&O liner, via Suez for Singapore, where they caught the R.M.S. *Bowen* coming south from Hong Kong to Australia on 30 April. The *Bowen* reached Cooktown on 14 May, but a Chinese passenger on board developed smallpox symptoms, so the passengers were not allowed to disembark before reaching Brisbane<sup>30</sup>. Brisbane passengers were put into quarantine at Peel Island, but Sydney passengers including Mitch and Aggie stayed on board and arrived in Sydney on 23 May<sup>31</sup> where the ship was quarantined. They spent five weeks in Sydney, including 21 days in quarantine<sup>32</sup>. The delay must have been very frustrating. No doubt Mitch was keen to show Aggie the city where he had spent many of his formative years, introduce his new wife to friends, and purchase the necessities for a married life on the Clarence River. They arrived at the Clarence on 28 June 1878, just in time to begin the new harvesting and crushing season. In Mitch's absence, the interior of the Harwood Mill had been extensively renovated.



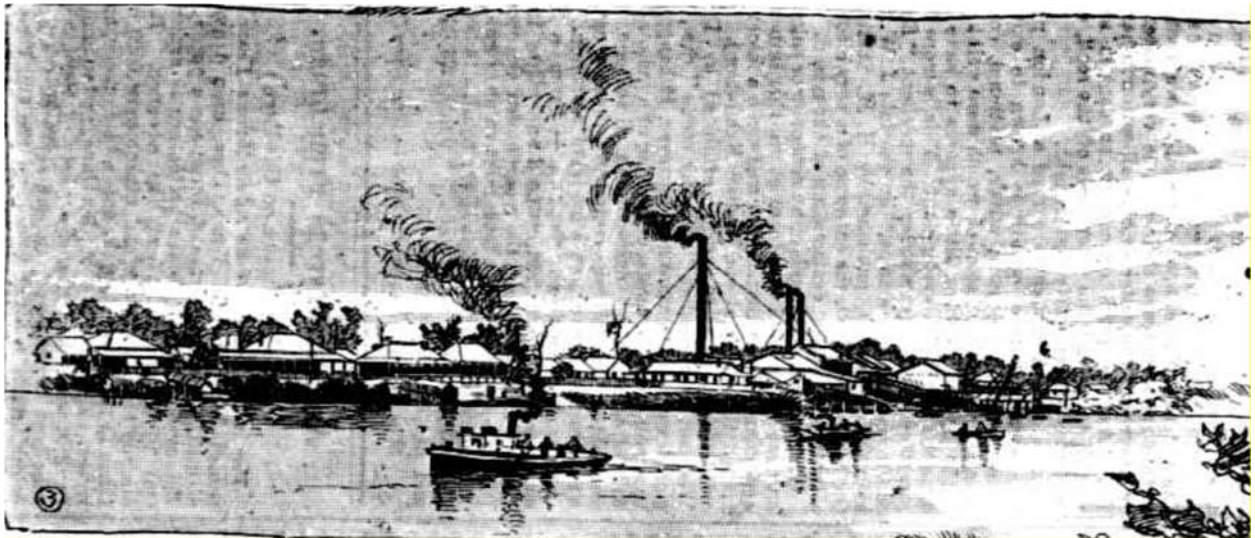
Clarence River Region, Northern New South Wales

<sup>30</sup> Australian Town and Country Journal 18 May 1878

<sup>31</sup> Evening News (Sydney) 23 May 1878

<sup>32</sup> Sydney Morning Herald 13 Jun 1878

On his return, C.S.R. appointed Mitch as Manager of the older Chatsworth Mill, situated on the North Arm of the Clarence River, about three kilometres north of Harwood Mill. The fact that C.S.R. allowed Mitch to spend a year away from the business, and install him as a mill manager on his return shows that the company valued him highly. Being an older town, Chatsworth was more established with better accommodation and living conditions than Harwood. The Manager's position probably came with benefits over and above a salary, and the Mill Manager's house would have been one of the best in the town – a comfortable nest in which to start a family. Chatsworth “had four hotels, two large stores, post and telegraph offices, together with a colossal sugar mill that envelopes the place in a cloud of saccharine prosperity.”<sup>33</sup>



Sketch of Chatsworth, 1887<sup>34</sup>

Aggie became pregnant at about the end of August 1878. She decided to have the baby in Sydney and, in December, travelled down to Sydney to make arrangements, leaving Mitch to finish the cane crushing season. Aggie returned to Chatsworth on Boxing Day. About eight weeks before the baby was due, Mitch and Aggie sailed to Sydney<sup>35</sup>. While Aggie stayed in Sydney, Mitch travelled back and forth. Mitch was in Sydney on 26 May to attend the Governor's reception in honour of the Queen's birthday. He probably stayed in Sydney awaiting the birth. William Sprott Boyd, always known as Sprott, was born on 6 June 1879 at Pembroke House, a furnished boarding house at 215 Macquarie Street, Sydney where Mitch and Aggie were staying. “Sprott” is a common name in the Boyd family, and originally comes from William Sprott who married Mitch's great aunt, Isabella Boyd in 1788. Aggie had an uncle on her mother's side named William Sprott Boyd, and of course, Mitch's father was named Sprott. The family returned to Chatsworth after Aggie's confinement, but returned to Sydney again for the Christmas period, where young Sprott had his portrait taken, and Aggie again became pregnant.

<sup>33</sup> Town and Country Journal, 7 Feb 1880

<sup>34</sup> Town and Country Journal 15 Jan 1887

<sup>35</sup> Sydney Morning Herald 15 April 1879



William Sprott Boyd, Sydney, January 1880

Mitch Boyd must have been an ambitious man. Having worked for ten years in all aspects of the sugar industry, from growing to refining the product, Mitch started investigating ways to get into the sugar business on his own. Unlike C.S.R.'s business approach of making profits by purchasing cane from farmers and processing it in a large central mill, Mitch thought there was money to be made in growing cane as well. In March 1880, Mitch advertised two partly cleared 60 acre lots on the bank of the Tweed River, close to C.S.R.'s Condong Sugar Mill<sup>36</sup> for rent. I am not sure if he was doing this on behalf of C.S.R., or if this was a personal investment, but it is clear that in 1880, Mitch and his brother Archie in Fiji began a serious correspondence about going in to business for themselves.

Meanwhile, Aggie's pregnancy progressed normally and she decided to have the baby at home, but they realised that they would need more help, and advertised for a general servant, parlourmaid and nurse. Robert Sprott Boyd was born at Chatsworth Island on 26 September 1880. He was baptised in Lawrence at the end of October – at that time Chatsworth did not have a Church of England. As usual, the family went to Sydney for Christmas - New Year, and Robert's portrait was taken. Assuming the colouring is accurate, it looks as if he had red hair.

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<sup>36</sup> Clarence and Richmond Examiner 13 Mar 1880



Robert Sprott Boyd, Sydney, January 1881

Although Mitch had to prepare the Chatsworth Mill for the next crushing season and was on the fund-raising committee for building a Church of England Cathedral at Grafton, during the first half of 1881, Mitch started looking for a suitable place to begin his own sugar business. He travelled firstly northwards up the coast of Queensland, probably as far as Cairns, calling in at the various ports and rivers along the way. On 19 March, Mitch arrived in Fiji and spent until the 26 April looking at many plantations around the Fijian islands with his brother Archie<sup>37</sup>. It was the first time he had met his Fijian sister-in-law Meri, and nephew Reggie (then aged eleven). Mitch arrived back in Sydney on 4 May<sup>38</sup>.

A tragedy struck the family when Robert Sprott Boyd died at home on Chatsworth Island on 24 August aged eleven months. He had been ill for nine days and died of pneumonia<sup>39</sup>. He was buried the same day in the Maclean cemetery. This sad event didn't seem to curtail their desire to build a family, because Aggie became pregnant again in September. After crushing was finished, the family had their usual holiday in Sydney over the Christmas – New Year period, returning to the Clarence at the end of January 1882.

## **Tropical Queensland**

While Mitch continued managing the Chatsworth mill for C.S.R., he was all the while planning his own business venture, perhaps in secret. During the first half of 1882, he decided on the Herbert River district in Far North Queensland as the location for his future business, identified the land he wanted, negotiated a price with the owner, and found a financial backer. He consulted his brother Archie on some of these decisions, but it was up to Mitch to implement his plan. He and the family made another two-week trip to Sydney in April 1882, probably to check on the progress of Aggie's pregnancy, and also to transact business.

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<sup>37</sup> JA Boyd diary 1881

<sup>38</sup> Sydney Morning Herald 5 May 1881

<sup>39</sup> New South Wales Death Certificate 5981/1881



The land Mitch bought was a selection owned by John Thomson Arnot, one of the first Europeans to settle along the Herbert River. Arnot and his wife were Scots who had decided to return to Scotland for an extended period. The selection ran along the northern bank of the Herbert River where Ripple creek enters the river, and extended north to the Seymour River. The land was rich alluvial flats and virgin scrub which Mitch thought was ideal sugar country and the best he had seen in Australia<sup>40</sup>. There were two sugar plantations and mills already established in the region, namely Macknade and Gairloch with others being planned, including the Victoria Mill owned by C.S.R., so Mitch probably had some in-house knowledge of the area's productivity.



Herbert River Region

For finance, Mitch approached the Wood Brothers. John and Joseph Wood came from Newcastle-on-Tyne to Newcastle New South Wales in 1856<sup>41</sup>. In 1865, they established a merchant wine, beer and spirits business which, by 1882, had grown to become one of the largest and most successful companies in the colony, and the Wood brothers had become highly respected and well-known members of the community. I don't know how Mitch Boyd met the Wood brothers. Possibly he had been introduced to them at a Governor's reception, or at the Harwood Mill, - Wood Brothers bought sugar and rum wholesale from C.S.R. - but for this business venture, Mitch probably travelled to Newcastle and explained his plan to them in person. The brothers must have been impressed with Mitch and backed his business plan. They formed a partnership named Wood Bros and Boyd, with 90% and 10% interests respectively. Apart from his 10% share of the profits, Mitch was paid a salary as manager of the business. The Wood Brothers bought the product wholesale without charging commission, received 90% of the profits and sold the retail product also. Their business reputation and political influence contributed to the partnership. The Wood Brothers were to visit the Ripple Creek plantation every couple of years and eventually became "Uncle John" and "Uncle Joe" to the Boyd family.

<sup>40</sup> The Queenslander 12 May 1906

<sup>41</sup> Newcastle Morning Herald and Mining Advocate 24 Nov 1908

Isabella Sprott Boyd, my grandmother, was born at Chatsworth Island on 10 June 1882. She was always known as 'Ella'. Only eleven days later, Mitch sailed alone to Sydney to finalise arrangements for his North Queensland venture. He advertised for a "strong boat to carry 2 tons on 18in of water" for ferrying supplies between the plantation and the coast<sup>42</sup>. On 6 July, Mitch sailed on the steamship *Wentworth* via Brisbane for Townsville<sup>43</sup>, arriving there on the 15 July. Townsville was the nearest large town to Ripple Creek, being only 100 kilometres away as the crow flies, but to reach Ripple Creek involved catching a small coastal steamer north to Lucinda Point and the hamlet of Dungeness, then waiting for the rising tide to row up the Herbert River for ten kilometres through the mangrove country to Halifax, then drive 16 kilometres in horse and buggy along the north bank of the Herbert River.

J. Archibald Boyd was not a partner with the Wood Brothers, but Mitch employed his brother as his plantation overseer. Archie had long experience with growing crops in a tropical climate, and of managing a Melanesian workforce, whereas Mitch's expertise lay in milling and refining sugar. Archie and his twelve-year-old son Reggie left their plantation near Levuka on the Fijian Island of Ovalau on 19 July 1882. Reggie's mother Meri stayed on a neighbour's plantation and she never saw them again. Archie and Reggie arrived in Sydney on 28 July,<sup>44</sup> and sailed up to the Clarence soon afterwards to meet Aggie, Sprott and baby Ella. With her mind on a future in North Queensland, Aggie asked Archie to seek out a Mrs Burgess in Sydney and employ her as a governess, which he did. Archie spent the last half of August in Sydney catching up with friends and transacting business for Mitch. Telegram was the only rapid means of communication. Archie and Reggie Boyd reached Dungeness on 15 September 1882 and were met by Mitch.

Aggie was left to pack up the family's belongings on Chatsworth Island and arrange for their removal. Aggie said goodbye to the many friends she had made in her four years on the Clarence River, including the Hayley family from the Southgate Mill. Edward Hayley was selected to take Mitch's place as manager of the Chatsworth Mill. Mitch's decision to go into competition with C.S.R. must have had their blessing because, in an interview in 1901, Mitch said there was an agreement with C.S.R. on the maximum annual production from Ripple Creek.<sup>45</sup> Mitch persuaded some skilled ploughmen, timber, machinery and mill hands to follow him north, also probably with C.S.R.'s blessing.

Before leaving Grafton, Aggie had the following portrait taken.

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<sup>42</sup> Sydney Morning Herald 27 June 1882

<sup>43</sup> Brisbane Courier 10 July 1882.

<sup>44</sup> Australian Town and Country Journal 5 August 1882

<sup>45</sup> Brisbane Courier 11 May 1901

*Robert Mitchell Boyd (1849-1912), Eliza Agnes Brown (1855-1884) and Emily Burton Bradley (1862-1954).  
By A.G. Connor, 2017*



Eliza Agnes Boyd, with William Sprott Boyd and Isabella Sprott Boyd, Grafton, 1882

Aggie, Sprott, baby Ella and a servant left Sydney on the steamship *Quiraing* on 17 October<sup>46</sup>, and arrived at Dungeness per the *Porpoise* from Townsville on 27 October 1882. They were welcomed by Mitch, whom they had not seen for four months. Aggie and the family arrived during a tropical downpour which lasted all day while they travelled up-river to Ripple Creek – a damp introduction to their new home<sup>47</sup>.

Unlike the Clarence's temperate to sub-tropical climate, the Herbert River is truly tropical, at latitude 18.5 degrees South. It has a summer wet season with average rainfall of 1616mm and temperature range of 22 to 32°C, and a winter dry season with average rainfall of 471mm and temperature range of 16 to 27°C. During the wet season, the climate can be uncomfortably humid, and the area is regularly affected by tropical cyclones. The climate had a significant impact on field labour availability – more about that later.

While waiting for his family to arrive, Mitch and his team of skilled workmen had not been idle. Their first tasks were to clear land for the Ripple Creek buildings, develop a saw pit to cut local timber for building, and start clearing land for planting cane. They had to buy horses for ploughing the fields and for riding, bullocks for hauling, cows for milking, steers for food, and chickens for eggs. They planted a vegetable garden and orchard. Mitch had time to go to Gairloch on the 9 October to see the new sugar mill there begin operation, with much fanfare<sup>48</sup>. William Canny, the manager at Gairloch and later at the Macknade plantation (which were both owned Fanning, Nankivell and Co. of Melbourne), were the Boyd's nearest neighbours and, as country neighbours do, they helped each other, loaned implements to each other, and exchanged experiences often.

The local town was Ingham, nine kilometres away on the other side of the Herbert River. In 1882, it consisted of the *Royal* and *Day Dawn* hotels, two grocery stores, a telegraph and post office, a branch of the Queensland National Bank, a police station and half a dozen houses, but was growing fast. Ingham also had the only resident doctor in the district. Dr. Queely must have travelled many kilometres every week to do the round of his patients, and he visited Ripple Creek regularly. Along with William Canny at Gairloch, brothers Arthur and Frank Neame were their neighbours at Macknade, six kilometres away on the same side of the river. Mills under construction and plantations on the other side of the river were Victoria (7km away, C.S.R., Mr E. Cowley); Hamleigh (13km away, Mr Alfred S. Cowley) and Trebonne (14km away, Mr A.R. Traill). To get to Ingham and to the mills on the other side of the river, the Boyds kept a carriage and a couple of horses in a paddock on the other bank of the river opposite Ripple Creek. They would row across the river, catch the horses, hitch them up and drive into town – a trip to Ingham and back took most of a day<sup>49</sup>.

By October, the Boyd family was installed in the new Manager's residence at Ripple Creek, and by end November, Archie and Reggie had their own residence also. With the accommodation for the workmen, a small village had been established in a very short time, where nothing had existed before. Mrs Burgess and her son William arrived at Ripple Creek on 2 November 1882<sup>50</sup>, so Aggie had some support at home, and Sprott (3) could begin formal lessons. It wasn't long before Aggie was travelling to neighbouring properties, with the children, to introduce herself and become part of the community also. The area was serviced by travelling clergymen and, occasionally, the bishop visited Ingham and held a service - a good reason for the community to congregate. But Aggie did not always feel safe. The area had many itinerant workers of various nationalities and

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<sup>46</sup> Australian Town and Country Journal 21 October 1882

<sup>47</sup> J.A. Boyd diary, 27 Oct 1882

<sup>48</sup> Brisbane Courier 31 Oct 1882, p3

<sup>49</sup> "The Boyd Family Story", Eleanor Sprott Boyd Boushey. p104

<sup>50</sup> J.A. Boyd diary, 3 Nov 1882

cultures and when combined with alcohol, they sometimes threatened the planters and their families. If Mitch was away overnight, Archie would stay in the “big house” to provide protection.

In between laying out the site for the sugar mill, the stables, a new road and a tramway, Mitch became involved in the local community also. He regularly visited neighbouring plantations, all the while learning from their experiences, and trying to establish a Planters’ Association for the Herbert River district. He was appointed to the Road Board for the Division of Hinchinbrook, and in 1883 was on various committees to establish a hospital in Ingham. This seemed to involve many meetings in Ingham, but I suppose that he did business there also and telegraphed his partners the Wood brothers often. Considering the small population, by Christmas 1882 Aggie and Mitch (and Archie) would have met everyone important in the district.

During 1883, Sprott and Catherine Boyd returned to Australia to visit their family. They arrived in Sydney in early April, spent about five weeks there and then headed north, arriving at Ripple Creek on 28 May<sup>51</sup> for an extended stay. It was the first time they had met their Australian grandchildren Reggie, Sprott and Ella. They were eagerly shown around the district by the family; met all the Boyd’s neighbours; saw sugar cane being planted and grown at Ripple Creek and sugar being made at Gairloch; a wharf built on the Seymour River to receive the Ripple Creek mill machinery, and the foundations laid for the sugar mill. They left Dungeness for Sydney on 9 September, returning to London in October. By the time they left Ripple Creek, Aggie was pregnant again.

Mitch took possession of a launch in October 1883 and then, in November, the much-anticipated sugar milling machinery arrived via the *Unicorn*<sup>52</sup>. The machinery was built in Glasgow by Mirlees, Watson and Co; it cost £30,107 and had capacity to crush 300 tons of cane per day, or about 40,000 tons in a normal cane harvesting season<sup>53</sup>. At an average yield of 15 tons per acre, this equates to a requirement to harvest 2667 acres of cane annually to keep the mill working at full capacity – many more than the original 600-acre selection at Ripple Creek. To fill this shortfall partly, Mitch selected more land adjoining Ripple Creek and contracted to buy cane from smaller plantations nearby.

## Hard Times

Aggie’s pregnancy went normally, and Dr W.C.C. Macdonald (who replaced Dr Queely) was on hand at the Ripple Creek homestead for the birth of her son Archibald Herbert Boyd on 25 March 1884. Sadly, Aggie had a post-partum haemorrhage, and despite the doctor’s best efforts to save her, she died about twelve hours after the baby was born. Before she died, Aggie left baby Archie in the charge of his uncle Archie Boyd<sup>54</sup>. Aggie was buried the next day at the small cemetery at Ripple Creek by Rev. Taylor according to the rites of the Church of England. Aggie was not the first grave in the cemetery – two labourers had been buried there earlier that year. Most of the plantations on the Herbert River had their own cemeteries. Typhoid fever, dengue fever, malaria, dysentery, consumption and pneumonia were common causes of death among the labour force, and there were accidental deaths due to falls (from horses), drownings and sometimes, snake-bites. Mitch ordered a marble stone monument from Sydney monumental masons Ross and Bowman, inscribed “*In Memory of ELIZA AGNES, beloved wife of ROBERT MITCHELL BOYD who died 25<sup>th</sup> March 1884 aged 26 years.*”<sup>55</sup> The grave was surrounded by a white railing fence. The

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<sup>51</sup> J.A. Boyd diary 28 May 1883

<sup>52</sup> Brisbane Courier 22 Nov 1883, and J.A. Boyd diary 21 Nov 1883

<sup>53</sup> The Queenslander 12 May 1906 and “Sugar Commission Report” Evidence of R.M. Boyd 29 Jan 1889

<sup>54</sup> Letter from J.A. Boyd to H.H.B. Bradley May 1916

<sup>55</sup> According to the 1861 and 1871 English Census and her death certificate, Aggie was actually 28.

Ripple Creek cemetery was officially gazetted, but the cemetery and its graves disappeared long ago, ploughed under a cane field<sup>56</sup>.



Aggie's grave at Ripple Creek, 1901

Archibald Herbert Boyd was baptized by Rev. Taylor on 9 April. Of the other two children, only Sprott, aged almost five, had any memory of his mother in later life<sup>57</sup>. Ella was too young to remember her. Mitch now had three children under five to care for and, although he had Mrs Burgess and servants to help, he was at a critical phase of his plan to produce sugar at Ripple Creek and could not give his children much of his time. Mitch's sister Fanny Fitzgerald decided to come out from England to help him in this crisis. She arrived at Ripple Creek on 29 May 1884<sup>58</sup> and was reunited with her siblings - the first time they had all been together for at least eleven years. Fanny stayed at Ripple Creek until 5 November and watched the Ripple Creek Mill crush its first cane. Fanny took young Sprott, plus a few pet animals and birds, back to England with her<sup>59</sup>. The agreement was that Sprott was to spend nine months of each year with aunt Fanny and his paternal grandparents in London, and three months with his maternal grandmother in Scotland<sup>60</sup> until further notice.

The second crisis to hit Wood Bros and Boyd's business was the difficulty in attracting and keeping labourers to work in the cane fields. Australia has always struggled to attract workers into the agricultural sector, especially where the work is of a seasonal nature, such as harvesting, fruit picking or pruning. Mitch's uncles Archibald Boyd (1801-1864) and William Mitchell Boyd (1803-1894) were pioneer settlers on the New England tableland around Glen Innes, N.S.W. in the 1830s and 1840s. Finding suitable and willing labour for their pastoral selections was always difficult. Archibald in particular spent years lobbying the British Government to encourage greater emigration to support the colony's growing agricultural economy, with little success.

The use of labour from the South Sea Islands dated back to 1847 when Mitch's distant cousin, Benjamin Boyd, brought a shipload of 65 indentured South Sea Islanders (New Hebrideans) to work as shepherds on his sheep stations in the southern New South Wales highlands<sup>61</sup>. Predictably, this experiment did not work and most of the islanders were repatriated after a year. The gold rushes of the 1850s alleviated the labour shortage in temperate Australia, but from 1863,

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<sup>56</sup> "The Ripple Creek Plantation. An unhappy place." Bianka Vidonja Balanzategui. Nov 2011 History Queensland.

<sup>57</sup> "The Boyd Family Story". Eleanor Sprott Boyd Boushey, p 116

<sup>58</sup> Brisbane Courier 28 May 1884

<sup>59</sup> Brisbane Courier 12 Nov 1884 and J.A. Boyd diary, 5 Nov 1884

<sup>60</sup> "The Boyd Family Story". Eleanor Sprott Boyd Boushey, p117

<sup>61</sup> Maitland Mercury 24 Apr 1847

South Sea Island men began to arrive in Queensland to work on cotton and sugar plantations. They were brought to Queensland in a variety of circumstances ranging from kidnapping to voluntary enlistment and were contracted to work for up to three years. This labour trade became regulated in 1868 when the Queensland Parliament passed the Polynesian Labourers Act. This Act was strengthened and succeeded by the Pacific Islander Protection Act (Britain, 1872) which was amended in 1875, and the Pacific Islanders Labourers Act (Queensland 1880).

By the time Wood Brothers and Boyd purchased Ripple Creek, there were many regulations to follow when employing labour, and a bureaucracy was in place to monitor the trade and enforce the regulations. Captain C.D.F. Penefather was the Police Magistrate and also the Inspector of Pacific Islanders at Ingham. There was a police sergeant and three constables<sup>62</sup>, and there were many hundreds of alien labourers. In 1883, Ripple Creek had about 200 South Sea Islanders, and almost 100 Chinese labourers who had come to Australia at their own expense, 65 of whom were contracted for periods of between three and twelve months. They worked 58 hours per week for wages, food, shelter and clothing<sup>63</sup>. Whenever they could, Mitch and Archie employed South Sea Islanders, known locally as “kanakas”, although they were not natives of the Hawaiian Islands. Malays were the other main ethnic group at Ripple Creek in 1883-4. White labourers were usually skilled, and were employed at ploughing or with machinery. They could not attract white labourers to work in the cane fields for a sustained period at any sensible price, and they were always competing for alien labour with the other sugar growers in Queensland.

Archie Boyd had experience of managing South Sea Island and Cingalese labourers from his days in Fiji. From reading his diaries, it seems that labourers from all ethnic backgrounds sometimes broke their employment agreements with Wood Brothers and Boyd by absconding. Malays seemed to be the worst offenders. On a few occasions, they fled after assaulting an overseer<sup>64</sup>. To discourage absconding, Mitch Boyd as the company representative would prosecute absconders at the Ingham Police Magistrate’s court, which is one of the reasons Mitch went to Ingham so often. Those found guilty received penalties ranging from a fine to a gaol term of up to three months where no violence was involved. The only gaol at that time was in Townsville, so the Queensland Government was put to considerable expense transporting and escorting absconders from all the plantations on the Herbert, Burdekin and Johnstone Rivers to the Townsville gaol<sup>65</sup>.

On 10 November 1883, Samuel W Griffith was elected Governor of Queensland. One of his election policies was further restriction of alien labour, including abolition of the immigrant labour from India. His party’s election slogan was “*Queensland for Europeans*”<sup>66</sup>, and it was clear that his ultimate goal was to stop all imported labour, including from the South Sea Islands. The sugar planters of the colony were feeling very threatened, and there were several petitions and depositions made to the new Government to try and influence their direction. Mitch did not travel to Brisbane, but he and the other Herbert River planters wrote letters and sent telegrams to the Colonial Secretary, expressing their concerns. Mitch Boyd sent an ultimatum by telegram: “*If prohibition to employ Polynesians in manufacture of sugar is carried, shall immediately greatly reduce staff of whites and mechanics, and advise partners to close the estate*”<sup>67</sup>.

Just before Aggie’s death in 1884, the Government amended the Pacific Islanders Labourers Act 1880, so that employment of South Sea Islanders would be restricted to tropical agricultural field

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<sup>62</sup> Townsville Daily Bulletin 11 Jul 1935 p7

<sup>63</sup> The Queenslander 28 May 1883

<sup>64</sup> Warwick Argus, 26 Jan 1884

<sup>65</sup> Queensland Figaro 31 May 1884

<sup>66</sup> The Week, 5 Jan 1884 and Queensland Figaro 19 Jul 1884

<sup>67</sup> Mackay Mercury and South Kennedy Advertiser 6 Feb 1884 p2

activity. It also created a special class of South Sea Islanders who had arrived before September 1879. These 835 men were termed "Ticket Holders" and were exempt from all further special legislation. The Government also repealed the Indian Labourers ('Coolie') Acts which regulated the labour trade in Indian and Cingalese people. These additional regulations and restrictions had the effect of increasing costs for all the sugar planters.

At the same time, the price that millers received for their sugar was falling in response to increased supply of cane sugar from Queensland, stagnant domestic demand and rapid rise in subsidised European beet-sugar production, displacing cane sugar in that market. Mitch was luckier than most, in that his partner Wood Brothers took most of the Ripple Creek production for their own use, but the smaller mills sold their sugar to C.S.R., who announced that prices for first quality sugar would reduce by £3 per ton in 1884, to their lowest level ever. Second and third quality sugar was unsaleable, as was molasses. Into this environment, the Ripple Creek Mill entered its first crushing season, producing 700 tons. Joseph Wood and Robert Prendergast, representing the owners of the Castlemaine Brewery, were on hand to witness the first crushing. Canes from the Ripple Creek plantation took out all the first prizes at the North Queensland Pastoral and Agricultural Society's Show in Townsville that year<sup>68</sup>, but these successes were overshadowed by Aggie's death and the unprofitability of the business.

The labour shortages and low sugar prices continued into 1885. The *'Hopeful'*, a labour recruitment ship that in 1883 had supplied Wood Brothers and Boyd with a dozen South Sea Islanders<sup>69</sup>, was found to have illegally recruited people from the Bismarck Archipelago during a voyage in late 1884, and landed the unwilling recruits in Dungeness. The captain and crew were charged and found guilty of kidnapping and murder; the murderers received death sentences and the others long prison sentences. Following this case, in 1885 Mr. Griffith established a Royal Commission of Inquiry into recruiting practices, which resulted in the Queensland Government immediately banning further recruitment from the Bismarck Archipelago; announcing the end of the South Sea Islander labour trade by the end of 1890; and the establishment of the Pacific Islanders' Fund, partly to distribute the wages of deceased workers.<sup>70</sup> The Herbert River planters formed a Planters Association, but even as a group, they steadfastly refused to address their main problem –the methods used by employment agents to recruit labour and the negative public opinion that the labour trade was generating towards the sugar planters. They believed that recruitment was not their business and all they needed to do was look after the labourers once they had arrived. Mitch and Archie Boyd began to look for longer term alternatives to kanaka labour, but it was the same recruitment model, just a different source.

Two or three years of low sugar prices and a locust plague in 1884 had its impact on Ripple Creek's neighbours. Hamleigh, Gairloch and Macknade were all owned by a Melbourne-based company, Fanning, Nankivell & Co. This company, which had borrowed heavily since 1881 to establish its sugar estates, was placed into administration in 1885 owing about £300,000 and the North Queensland assets were put on the market. No bids were received for Gairloch or Hamleigh. The Neame brothers still held a partial mortgage over Macknade and the estate was handed back to them instead of the money owed. Hamleigh was eventually sold for £12,500. Gairloch was offered to Wood Brothers and Boyd for £20,000 but they declined<sup>71</sup>. Eventually Gairloch was split up – on 29 August 1887 Wood Brothers and Boyd bought 500 acres adjoining

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<sup>68</sup> Queenslander 14 Jun 1884 and 4 Jul 1884

<sup>69</sup> J.A. Boyd Diary, 22 Nov 1883. *Mike came home with a dozen kanakas, all we got out of 75 ordered per "Hopeful"*

<sup>70</sup> "Australian South Sea Islander Historical Chronology" [assipj.com.au](http://assipj.com.au)

<sup>71</sup> The Sugar Commission. Report of evidence by R.M. Boyd, 29 Jan 1889



the Ripple Creek plantation<sup>72</sup>; other portions, the machinery, tramways, the homestead and buildings were sold separately to local buyers.

Mitch and the children travelled to Newcastle in May and June 1885. Mitch was probably discussing the threats and opportunities of the business with his partners. On his return, he found himself back in the routine of dealing with absconders, meetings of the Road Board, the Hospital Committee, and a committee to establish a Church of England at Ingham. Ripple Creek harvested about 400 acres to produce about 1000 tons of sugar that season, despite a fire in the cane during November. The estate had grown to 1200 acres in total.

With the continued shortage of kanaka labourers, Archie Boyd travelled to Asia in February 1886 looking for workers. He returned in May 1886 with 152 Malays and 8 Chinese workers. They seemed resigned to losing access to kanaka labour after 1890. Mitch stepped up his efforts to lobby the Government, with the aim of improving the revenue from Ripple Creek. Firstly, he argued for a free trade agreement between the colonies of Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria which at that time applied duties on cross-border trade<sup>73</sup>. Secondly, he requested the Queensland Government to subsidise exports of sugar so that they could compete with subsidised sugar from other countries<sup>74</sup>. Mitch's letters and submissions painted a pessimistic picture for the future of the sugar industry unless the Government provided some relief soon, and he was prepared to open his books for inspection to back up his claim. At the same time however, Wood Brothers and Boyd bought seven town allotments at Dungeness<sup>75</sup> and were negotiating to purchase some of Gairloch, which shows they did have some confidence in the future.

Mitch Boyd developed an interest in horse racing at the newly established Ingham Jockey Club. Mitch himself was no great horseman - he was often in horse riding accidents, either falls or being kicked. But he liked owning and working with horses, and Ripple Creek had a large string to play with. At the Ingham Show in November 1886, Mitch won the prize for best blood mare and for their ponies, as well as first prize for their cane. One of the Wood brothers was there to see the prize-giving. Mitch also liked to go hunting for wallabies and waterfowl, catching cassowaries, and fishing for garfish off the Seymour wharf. His hunting trips were often in the company of the local aboriginal people who lived in a camp nearby Ripple Creek homestead. On one occasion, the aboriginals shot a 13ft 10in crocodile and asked Mitch to come and skin it - he managed to mix some pleasure with business. Archie Boyd was a heavy drinker when the monthly whiskey stocks arrived from Brisbane and, according to his nephew Sprott and niece Ella, he was a frightening man when drunk<sup>76</sup>. Mitch sometimes went to parties at other plantations and the annual Bachelors' Ball, so I think Mitch also drank, but there are no stories of excessive drinking.

From 8 January 1887, Mitch Boyd travelled south for four months, leaving Sprott, Ella and young Archie in the care of Mrs Burgess. It was probably partly for business and partly for pleasure, for his itinerary took in Townsville, Brisbane, Newcastle, Sydney, Melbourne, Dunedin, and Hobart. It is possible that he visited Aggie's brother William Crawford Brown in Dunedin. He was back in Sydney on the 15 April and sent a telegram from there to Archie at Ripple Creek informing that he had become engaged to Emily Bradley, Houghton Bradley's sister<sup>77</sup>. I get the impression that Archie was taken completely by surprise at this news. Mitch returned to Ripple Creek on 5 May with some race horses that he had bought, so perhaps he spent the time in Victoria, Tasmania and New Zealand looking at horseflesh. One of the horses he brought back, Boomerang, won

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<sup>72</sup> J.A. Boyd diary 29 Aug 1887.

<sup>73</sup> Morning Bulletin Rockhampton 6 Jul 1886

<sup>74</sup> The Queenslander 10 Jul 1886

<sup>75</sup> The Queenslander 3 Jul 1886

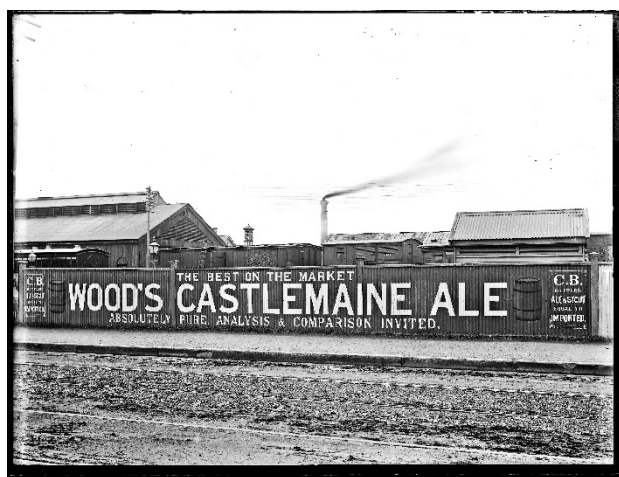
<sup>76</sup> "The Boyd Family Story" Eleanor Sprott Boyd Boushey pp 93 and 106

<sup>77</sup> J.A. Boyd diary 15 Apr 1887.

*Robert Mitchell Boyd (1849-1912), Eliza Agnes Brown (1855-1884) and Emily Burton Bradley (1862-1954).  
By A.G. Connor, 2017*

the feature races at the August Herbert River Jockey Club meeting, so perhaps he had a good eye for selecting horses,<sup>78</sup> or perhaps the competition were just country hacks.

Mr John Wood, the elder of the Wood brothers, died in Newcastle on 6 September 1887. As a result of this, and the ill-health of Joseph Wood, the brothers decided to sell their businesses Castlemaine Brewery; Prendergast, Wood & Co and Wood Bros & Co to McIlwraith McEachern & Co of Melbourne and London. The old businesses were to be amalgamated to form "*The Castlemaine Brewery and Wood Bros and Company*", with Robert Prendergast and Joseph Wood retaining directorships of the new company<sup>79</sup>. Robert Prendergast visited Ripple Creek in September to explain the changes to Mitch and to observe the start of the harvest. It seems that the sale did not have any impact on the Wood Brothers and Boyd partnership, so arrangements for sale of product from Ripple Creek must have been carried over to the new owners. The sale was completed on 31 October 1887, and was accompanied by an offer to sell some shares to the public, but Joseph Wood and Robert Prendergast retained major shareholdings.



That year, Ripple Creek produced 900 tons of sugar and began to advertise its product directly to storekeepers and others via the major newspapers.

Mitch left Ripple Creek in December 1887 and headed for Sydney, with a gift of ten pounds from brother Archie as a wedding present. On 11 January 1888, he signed an Indenture of Marriage Settlement in which, after his death, he agreed to provide for his new wife from the proceeds of two life assurance policies with A.M.P. The following day, Robert Mitchell Boyd and Emily Burton Bradley were married by the Rev. W. A. Charlton at St. Phillip's Church, Sydney.

## **Emily Burton Bradley**

Emily Burton Bradley was the seventh daughter and the youngest of eleven children, born on the 29 May 1862 at the Terraces, Glenmore Road, Paddington, the house of her parents Henry Burton Bradley and Charlotte Sarah Bradley, nee Spedding. By 1862, Henry was a high-profile solicitor in Sydney and would have known Mitch's father, Dr Sprott Boyd, well; Emily's older brother Henry Houghton Burton Bradley ('Houghton') and the Boyd children would already have been going on collecting trips for the museum. It is no wonder then that Emily was given the nickname "Tiny" by Archie Boyd, but Mitch and the rest of the family called her "Tattie". As she

<sup>78</sup> Queensland Figaro 10 Sep 1887

<sup>79</sup> Sydney Morning Herald 10 Nov 1887, p10

*Robert Mitchell Boyd (1849-1912), Eliza Agnes Brown (1855-1884) and Emily Burton Bradley (1862-1954).  
By A.G. Connor, 2017*

grew up, Tattie was probably a nuisance under their feet, being 13 to 16 years younger than Houghton and his friends.



Emily Burton Bradley ("Titters"), May 1871, Sydney

Tattie lacked for nothing material during her early childhood - being the baby of the family, she was probably spoiled. In 1872, when Tattie was not quite ten years old, her mother Charlotte died. A year later, her father Henry, aged 57, remarried to Louisa Portia O'Ferrall, aged 24. Louisa was younger than Henry's five eldest children, which probably caused some internal family tensions and raised some eyebrows in Sydney society. Henry and Louisa went on to have seven children between 1876 and 1886, a total of 18 children for Henry – eleven daughters and seven sons. Marrying off his daughters must have occupied his mind somewhat.



Emily Burton Bradley, April 1876

After 1876, Tattie (aged 14) was no longer the baby of the family. Six of her older siblings had already married and left home and, no doubt, she took on more responsibilities to look after her half-siblings. From March 1877 to February 1878 Tattie may have been a student teacher in Armidale, but she was very young<sup>80</sup>. By the time Henry and Louisa completed their family in 1886, Tattie (aged 24) was the senior child of eight in the household at the Terrace.

From 1881 aged 19, Tattie attended Mrs Hughes' school at Lotaville, Surrey Street, Darlinghurst - a Finishing School for Young Ladies, established by Mrs Mary Hughes and her husband Professor Patrick Henry Hughes. Why Tattie's formal education was delayed for so long is a mystery. Perhaps her home duties took precedence over her education, and perhaps Henry did not believe in higher education for girls. Henry certainly had some strong opinions about education based on his long years of dealing with delinquency in the courts. He aired his opinions often in the press and, in 1881, wrote a series of twelve lectures on "*Domestic Economy*" covering household and personal cleanliness and habits, as teaching aids for Mrs Hughes' school<sup>81</sup>. There is more than a touch of evangelism in the way these lectures are written. He was clearly a very

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<sup>80</sup> New South Wales Teachers' Rolls 1869-1908

<sup>81</sup> The Telegraph and Shoalhaven Advertiser 19 May 1881 p4

*Robert Mitchell Boyd (1849-1912), Eliza Agnes Brown (1855-1884) and Emily Burton Bradley (1862-1954).*  
*By A.G. Connor, 2017*

religious man, Vice President of the Church of England Association, and probably instilled his strong beliefs in his children.

Tattie did well in her studies, passing the Civil Service Examination held on 2 November 1885<sup>82</sup>, and then the University of Sydney Junior Public Examination in November 1886<sup>83</sup>, with an A in Geography and B's in History, English, French, Arithmetic and Geology. As a relatively mature student, Tattie was also introduced to Sydney society, attending the Government House reception held by Lord and Lady Carrington on 31 December 1885<sup>84</sup>.



Emily Burton Bradley

When Mitch Boyd returned to Sydney during the first four months of 1887, met his friend and family lawyer Houghton Bradley and was reintroduced to Houghton's baby sister Emily, he would have found a confident young woman, very different from the toddler he vaguely remembered when growing up in Sydney in the 1860s. The age difference was thirteen years. It would have

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<sup>82</sup> Sydney Morning Herald 26 Nov 1885

<sup>83</sup> Sydney Morning Herald 2 Dec 1886

<sup>84</sup> Sydney Morning Herald 1 January 1886

been interesting to know how the courtship progressed, but all we know is that Mitch and Tattie became engaged in April 1887.

## **New beginning**

Following their marriage in Sydney on 12 January 1888, Mitch spent a few weeks purchasing equipment and supplies for the plantation. He and Tattie headed to Brisbane for a short break before travelling on to Ripple Creek and a new life together, arriving there on 29 February 1888<sup>85</sup>.

The continued depressed state of the sugar industry was having an impact in Ingham, and some of the old hands in the district decided to leave, including William Canny and Ephraim Cowley. Mitch Boyd was becoming an 'old hand' himself, and the general community and the Planters' Association demanded more of his time. Mitch became a trustee for the racecourse reserve at Ingham<sup>86</sup>; he was on the committee of management of the Pacific Islander Hospital<sup>87</sup> and on the Divisional Board. On behalf of the planters, he approached the Government to support building a bridge over the Herbert River near Ingham, and a tramway from Ingham to Dungeness. Meanwhile, there were the usual demands of managing Ripple Creek; trying to find 300 kanaka labourers, prosecuting absconders, chartering coastal shipping, etc. It appears, though, that Tattie accompanied Mitch on his trips to Ingham more often than Aggie had done, and that the two of them regularly made social visits to the Neames at the Macknade plantation. In 1888, Ripple Creek produced 1025 tons of sugar, won first prize for canes at the Ingham Show, and in January 1889, their sugars won second prizes among national entries at the Melbourne Centennial Exhibition<sup>88</sup>. There was some personal sadness for Mitch and Archie to hear that their mother Catherine Boyd had suffered a paralytic stroke and required full time care.

In November 1888 in response to many submissions from the sugar industry, the Queensland Government appointed a Royal Commission, "*TO INQUIRE INTO THE GENERAL CONDITION OF THE SUGAR INDUSTRY IN QUEENSLAND, AND TO REPORT UPON THE CAUSES WHICH HAVE LED TO THE PRESENT LANGUISHING CONDITION OF THE INDUSTRY THROUGHOUT THE COLONY, THE BEST MEANS TO BE ADOPTED FOR REVIVING AND MAINTAINING ITS PROSPERITY, AND, GENERALLY, UPON THE PROSPECTS OF TROPICAL AGRICULTURE IN QUEENSLAND*"<sup>89</sup>. The Commissioners, one of whom was A.S. Cowley late of Gairloch plantation, visited most of the main sugar growing districts and interviewed 154 planters and others associated with the industry. They interviewed Robert Mitchell Boyd at Ripple Creek on 29 January 1889. This gave Mitch an opportunity to expand on the cause of the depressed industry (high cost of labour, low price of sugar) and his ideas for solutions (guaranteed cheap labour managed by Government, free intercolonial sugar trade, subsidized sugar export trade). It also provided a snapshot of Wood Bros and Boyd's Ripple Creek business, which are summarized below.

Plantation; 1650 acres total, 800 acres under cultivation, 720 acres under cane.

Mill; capacity 1500 tons per season with single shift

Production; 1888 season, 620 acres harvested for 1025 tons sugar and 38,000 gallons molasses

Productivity; 1888 season, 10 tons cane per ton white sugar

Capital investment; £85,000, including £30,107 for the mill and accrued interest. No return (yet)

Working capital; £60,095. (1885-1888); Receipts; £49,464 (1885-1888); Loss; £10,631

Labour force; 50 Europeans, 71 Chinese, 36 Malays, 122 kanakas

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<sup>85</sup> J.A. Boyd diary 29 Feb 1888

<sup>86</sup> The Queenslander 30 Jun 1888

<sup>87</sup> Brisbane Courier 21 Dec 1888

<sup>88</sup> Brisbane Courier 21 Jan 1889

<sup>89</sup> The Sugar Commission Report, Apr 1889. p1

Ploughing; 19 teams working

Tramways; six miles of tramway; horse drawn; 74 horses and two bullock teams<sup>90</sup>

Archie Boyd was quite pessimistic that the commission would help the sugar industry, but when the report was presented, it made four recommendations to the Queensland Government; in summary

- Investigate higher yielding cane from Java and Borneo,
- Negotiate with Victoria and South Australia to abolish duty on Queensland sugar imports,
- Assist public bodies and individuals to irrigate, where sufficient water supplies exist, and
- Permit the introduction of Polynesian labour for some years beyond 31 December 1890<sup>91</sup>.

Labour shortages continued to limit Ripple Creek's potential. Mitch attended a sugar planters' conference in Townsville, and the delegates agreed to vigorously pursue the recommendations of the Royal Commission, particularly an extension of five years for access to Polynesian labour. Meanwhile, Ripple Creek continued to seek kanakas from the employment agents/ships and were not averse to working around the bureaucracy if necessary, without breaking the law. Their employment tactics were mentioned in parliament when the local Polynesian labour inspector at Ingham was replaced, allegedly at the instigation of Wood Bros and Boyd<sup>92</sup>. There were some threats to withdraw Wood Bros and Boyd's licence to use Polynesian labour, but it did not happen. The labour shortage forced Archie Boyd to seek field labourers elsewhere, and in May-August 1890, he visited Java to recruit workers and brought many Javanese back to Ripple Creek, at considerable expense, only to have them go on strike during wet weather.

In January 1891, Mitch employed Dr Henry C. D'Orban, who became the plantation's physician and lived with his wife at Ripple Creek. The same month, in collaboration with the Neame brothers at Macknade and R.G. Blackmore at Hamleigh, Wood Bros and Boyd decided to try and bring Italian (Piedmontese) farmers to the Herbert, inducing them with the promise of their own land and house, on ten-year repayment plans. The first 266 Italian immigrants to North Queensland arrived on the *Jumna* in December 1891, and 113 of them were sent to the Herbert River plantations. There were some initial disagreements with planters, and some left the plantations for work elsewhere, but a good many stayed on and became a valuable and integral part of the Herbert River community.<sup>93</sup>

On 7 May 1889, Mitch's son Sprott returned from England, and was introduced to his stepmother Tattie. Sprott, now aged almost 10, had been very happy in England and had formed strong attachments to his aunt Fanny and cousin Elsie Fitzgerald. He was very sad to leave and, on the trip back to Australia, fell and broke his arm so perhaps he was not in the most receptive mood when he arrived home. Tattie also may have carried some baggage from her own experiences as a stepchild. For whatever reason, Sprott did not get on well with his stepmother, and his father was often away on business, so Sprott sought the company of his cousin Reggie and the two often went fishing,<sup>94</sup> sometimes with uncle Archie. Soon after Tattie's arrival, Mrs Burgess and her son left Ripple Creek and, on 26 June 1889, was replaced by a Miss Julia Robson as Ella's governess. Tattie, Ella and Miss Robson liked to visit Ingham and the nearby plantations to play tennis. Tattie also arranged social occasions at Ripple Creek and invited all the other planters. She was becoming a leader in the Herbert River society. 'Uncle' Joseph Wood visited Ripple

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<sup>90</sup> The Sugar Commission Report, Apr 1889. Minutes of Evidence taken. p115

<sup>91</sup> Report of the Sugar Commission, Apr 1889, pp XXXVI

<sup>92</sup> Queensland Government Gazette. 7 November 1889

<sup>93</sup> The Italian Experiment – Jumna Immigrants 1891. northqueenslandhistory.blogspot.com.au/2015/09/

<sup>94</sup> The Boyd Family Story.1995 by Eleanor Sprott Boyd Boushey. pp121-122

Creek during the winter, usually in August or September to coincide with the Herbert River Jockey Club annual race meeting, and the beginning of the harvest. He regarded these visits more as a holiday than as a check on his investment in Ripple Creek, and he would happily talk about his impressions of the place to his friends, business associates, politicians and the media back in Newcastle. He was a great ambassador for Ripple Creek and the sugar industry.

Also in 1889, Mitch became interested in prospecting and mining. His first speculative foray was a gold prospect at Charters Towers but in late 1889 he began to explore the country on the tablelands west of Ingham. This took him to the Kangaroo Hills Silver Field, where a pegging rush was happening. Mitch formed a syndicate, the Running River Silver Mining Company, No Liability, which raised £50,000 through issue of 5,000 shares at £10 each, and was oversubscribed. Archie Boyd and Arthur Cowley also became shareholders. Thanks to Mitch, the company secured two 40 acres leases and put mining parties to work sinking shafts<sup>95</sup>. Some very high-grade parcels of silver-lead-copper ore were produced and the hope (or hype) in 1891 was for a "New Broken Hill"<sup>96</sup>. The company expanded its leases to 485 acres. Everything looked positive, but in December 1891, the sale of a majority interest to a Broken Hill Syndicate fell through<sup>97</sup>. Several large contributing shareholders of Running River Silver Mining Company N.L. decided not to pay the fifth call for capital of 7s 6d per share, thus forfeiting their shares. There was a subsequent run on the shares which fell to 5s each, and no additional funds could be raised. Despite positive results from the diggings, the company went into voluntary liquidation in January 1892<sup>98</sup>. The leases were eventually forfeited for not meeting the work commitments - Mitch and Archie's shares were valueless.

Luckily for Mitch, the fortunes of the sugar industry began to improve in around 1890. Prices increased, and Ripple Creek kept increasing its production of sugar, so the mill was being run more productively – 1250 tons in 1890, 1700 tons in 1891, 1900 tons in 1892. The mill suffered some damage from a major cyclone on 23-24 March 1890, but Ripple Creek got off lightly compared to other plantations. Tattie, Ella and Archie junior were in Sydney on holidays and missed the excitement completely. Wood Bros and Boyd sugars were gaining a wider customer base in the colonies, and Ripple Creek cane and sugars kept winning prizes at the Ingham, Townsville and Brisbane Agricultural Exhibitions.

There were improvements also in the infrastructure of the district. Ingham in 1890 had grown to include a hospital with separate wards for different nationalities and a resident doctor (Dr. Macdonald); a State School with about 40 pupils; a courthouse, Divisional Hall, two stores, two hotels in town and a third out on the road to Victoria Mill, a cordial maker, Q.N. bank, bakery, butcher, two lodge buildings (Odd Fellows and Freemasons), but there were no churches in the town until 1895.

There was a hotel at Halifax (nominally the head of navigation on the Herbert River) and one at Dungeness which was described by one visitor as a "*desolate looking godforsaken hole*"<sup>99</sup>. The roads were dry and dusty in winter, and quagmires in summer. The most important development for the Boyds was a bridge across the Herbert River at Gairloch. It was completed on the 11 November 1891; Mitch, Tattie and Henry D'Orban travelled to Ingham the following day and brought the buggy back over the bridge on the return journey – no more rowing across the river to get to and from town. For Gairloch, the bridge would have replaced an aerial ropeway they used for taking cane from the fields on the south bank, to the mill on the north bank of the river,

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<sup>95</sup> Brisbane Courier 6 Jun 1891

<sup>96</sup> The Week. 2 Jan 1891

<sup>97</sup> The Telegraph 4 May 1892 p5

<sup>98</sup> The Brisbane Courier 15 Jan 1892 pp5-6

<sup>99</sup> The Northern Miner, 13 Aug 1890



but it came too late to save the Gairloch mill. The bridge was solidly built of iron at a cost of £6000 and survived a major flood in 1892 with only minor damage.



Gairloch Bridge over the Herbert River, ca 1892. Looking south

In October 1889 Sprott went to board at the Townsville Grammar School. He came home three times each year, but saw his father sometimes when Mitch went to Townsville on business. Tattie usually headed south in December for the cooler climate of Sydney, taking Ella, young Archie and Miss Robson with her, leaving Mitch and Sprott at Ripple Creek. Tattie and Sprott seemed to avoid each other as much as possible. Sprott also stayed behind when Mitch, Tattie, Ella and Archie junior took a trip back to England to visit Mitch's aged and infirm parents, and introduce Ella and Archie junior to their maternal grandmother Elizabeth Brown.

## Prosperous Times

After a decade of hard work establishing the business at Ripple Creek, Mitch and his family (minus Sprott) left Townsville for London per the *Jelunga* on 23 January 1892<sup>100</sup> and returned to Townsville aboard the *India* on 23 July 1892<sup>101</sup>. Coincidentally, they shared the return passage with J.T. Arnot, who had sold them the Ripple Creek selection in 1882. The decade following their return from England was one of relative prosperity, when the hard work of the previous decade began to pay off.

While the family was in England, Queensland Governor Samuel Griffiths announced a ten-year extension to the use of Polynesian labour in the North Queensland sugar industry. The extension came with additional restrictions and regulations, the cost of which was to be borne by the industry in the form of *per capita* fees and taxes. Then in November 1892, the Queensland Government

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<sup>100</sup> Brisbane Courier 15 Jan 1892

<sup>101</sup> Brisbane Courier 11 Jul 1892

*Robert Mitchell Boyd (1849-1912), Eliza Agnes Brown (1855-1884) and Emily Burton Bradley (1862-1954).  
By A.G. Connor, 2017*

sponsored the introduction of Japanese labourers on three-year contracts, some of whom came to Ripple Creek. The looming labour shortage had eased for a while, although during its entire existence, the Ripple Creek sugar mill never reached its maximum production capacity, due to shortage of cane, which came back to shortage of field labour.



Robert Mitchell Boyd, London 1892

In 1893, it was Archie Boyd's turn to visit his aging parents and his sister Fanny in England. He left Sydney on 16 January aboard the *Oruba*, arriving in London on 29 March. Archie stayed mainly in London and at Bovey House, Beer in Somerset. He left London again on 30 June aboard the *Ormuz* and arrived back in Sydney on 14 August, having become engaged on the return passage to Miss Sarah Jane Miskin, known always as Jeanie. Archie's first wife and Reggie's mother, Meri Matanisiga, had died in Fiji in 1890. Archie arrived back at Ripple Creek in August to find Mitch on crutches with his leg broken in two places, the result of being thrown from his horse.<sup>102</sup> Jeanie arrived at Ripple Creek on 24 October 1893. Archie had been getting their house ready, but it was unfinished. Tattie nagged Archie to get married quickly, so perhaps they were co-habiting in the new house and Tattie almost certainly would have disapproved. When they did 'get spliced' (as Archie described it), at Ripple Creek on 3 February 1894 by Rev. Dainty, their house was still unfinished and Tattie was in Sydney. Archie was 48 and Jeanie was 33 years old.

By this time, Ripple Creek had become a large village, situated about half a mile up Ripple Creek from its junction with the Herbert River. Besides the imposing sugar mill, it had an engineers' shop, smithy, bakery, a hospital, doctor's quarters, office, store, implement sheds, stables, Europeans' quarters, staff headquarters, head ganger's, field manager's and Japanese inspector's residence. The general manager's house, where Mitch and his family lived, was situated closer to the mouth of Ripple Creek. Their house was high-set, surrounded by tropical gardens and an orchard, with views south over the Herbert River (about 100 metres away) and north towards the Cardwell Range. It was admired by all who visited. Mitch had also brought in some roses from Sydney – growing flowers became one of his hobbies.



Ripple Creek homestead

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<sup>102</sup> Brisbane Courier 8 Jul 1893

*Robert Mitchell Boyd (1849-1912), Eliza Agnes Brown (1855-1884) and Emily Burton Bradley (1862-1954).  
By A.G. Connor, 2017*



Planters meeting at Ripple Creek homestead (R.M. Boyd standing, second from left)



Timber Bridge over Ripple Creek

*Robert Mitchell Boyd (1849-1912), Eliza Agnes Brown (1855-1884) and Emily Burton Bradley (1862-1954).  
By A.G. Connor, 2017*



Ripple Creek sugar mill, ca 1892



Ploughing cane field



Laying horse-drawn tramway



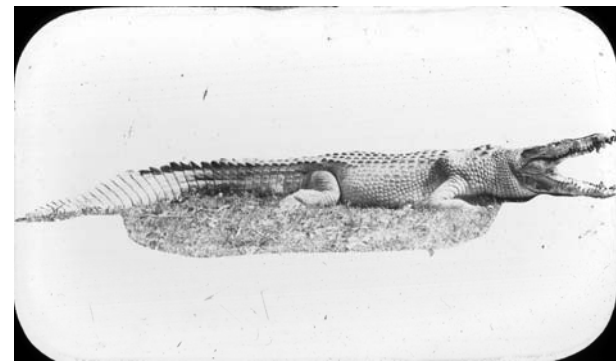
Harvesting cane



Ripple Creek mill from the Manager's balcony



Bullock train carting refined sugar



Herbert River crocodile

The plantation now had its own school, the Ripple Creek State School No 699, which opened on 15 June 1893. It was a one teacher school and initially had nineteen students of various nationalities and religions. Their ages ranged from five to twelve, and their fathers were farmers, bakers, carpenters, sugar boilers, groomsmen, storekeepers, butchers, firemen, blacksmiths, cooks, engine drivers, fitters and turners, and labourers. Miss Robson had left Ripple Creek the previous year<sup>103</sup>, much to Archie's relief. It seems that Mitch and Tattie had decided that their children no longer needed a governess, and they didn't attend the Ripple Creek school either<sup>104</sup>. Sprott was still at Townsville Grammar School. He was a brilliant student and at the age of fourteen passed the 1893 examination for matriculation to Sydney University with honours. Mitch did not see the need for a university education and hoped that Sprott would eventually succeed him to manage the Ripple Creek business, so Sprott stayed on at Townsville Grammar until 1896, repeating the sixth form, twice! In his last year there, Sprott won a full scholarship to university and Mitch gave up his succession plan. In 1897 aged 17, Sprott enrolled at Sydney University in the Faculty of Engineering.

In 1894 as Archie and Jeanie were getting married, Tattie was taking Ella to board at Kambala girls' school, which overlooks Sydney Harbour at Rose Bay. Ella stayed at Kambala for 1894 and

<sup>103</sup> J.A. Boyd diary 27 Aug 1892

<sup>104</sup> Ripple Creek State School Admissions 1893-1900 Queensland State Archives ID2515,

1895, and did not return to Ripple Creek until 15 Jul 1896<sup>105</sup>, aged fourteen. While at Kambala, Tattie took Ella to various functions in Sydney – dramatic productions, a reception for visiting tennis players, etc. That was the last of Ella’s formal schooling, so perhaps Tattie held her father’s views about the (low) value of higher female education. Earlier the same year, Archie junior aged eleven was sent to board at Townsville Grammar, so he had one year of overlap with his brother Sprott. Archie stayed at Townsville Grammar until the end of 1899, then went to the Kings School at Parramatta until end 1901, aged seventeen.

In February 1894, Catherine Boyd died in England after several years as an invalid. Both Catherine and husband Sprott suffered terribly from rheumatism and arthritis and used to regularly visit Bath or Bad Ems to ‘take the waters’. For Fanny and Elsie, her main carers, Catherine’s death probably brought some relief mixed with sadness. She was buried at Brookwood Cemetery, Guildford, Surrey. Her sons could not attend the funeral.

There was another sad event when Archie and Jeanie’s first child, a daughter, was stillborn at Ripple Creek on 19 May 1895 and was buried in the plantation cemetery near Aggie. But they tried again and their first healthy child, Archibald Sprott Boyd, was born at Ripple Creek on 19 March 1897.

Notwithstanding the shortage of field labour, Wood Bros and Boyd continued to expand their own plantings under cane, and to contract for purchase of cane from neighbouring farmers. They experimented with different varieties of cane, trying to find a balance between sugar yield and disease resistance. They had to deal with various pests and weather conditions. To deal with occasional grasshopper plagues, Mitch bought a flock of turkeys. As soon as a plague was discovered at the hopper stage, the turkeys were transported to the site and gorged themselves on hoppers. The larvae of the cane beetle, called the cane grub, was a more difficult pest to control, and caused damage to cane crops every year. Farmers tried to remove fig trees from their properties which, they believed, were the habitat of the parent beetles. Eventually, the planters and farmers resorted to paying a bounty of sixpence per quart of grubs collected<sup>106</sup>. This motivated and mobilised the children of the district into an army of grub collectors. In December 1897, children at Ripple Creek had collected and been paid for 2000 quarts of cane grubs<sup>107</sup>. (Cane toads were introduced in 1935 to control this pest, at great cost the Australian environment). To counter depletion of soil nutrients, Wood Bros and Boyd experimented with application of various fertilisers (‘manures’, as they called them), some of which were imported from England. They also experimented with various planting and drainage regimes, and contracted steam ploughs to clear the fields of remnant timber stumps. There were some events which could not be managed, such as a drought in 1897 which limited their ability to produce steam for the mill; and the first recorded frost on 4 July 1899, which severely affected the sugar output that year<sup>108</sup>.

Like C.S.R., Mitch Boyd came to realise that profits in the sugar industry did not come from growing cane, but from the processing, refining and distribution of the end product. Over time, Mitch extended his network of tramways to run from the Gairloch Bridge, past the Ripple Creek Mill and all the way to the Seymour River, the full length of the estate. This allowed him to ‘capture’ cane from third party farmers close to the tramway and deliver it to his mill. He had strong competition for cane from C.S.R., who bought the neighbouring Macknade plantation and mill from the Neame Brothers for £65,000 in December 1896. There were rumours at the time that

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<sup>105</sup> J.A. Boyd diary 15 Jul 1896

<sup>106</sup> North Queensland Register 30 Sep 1896

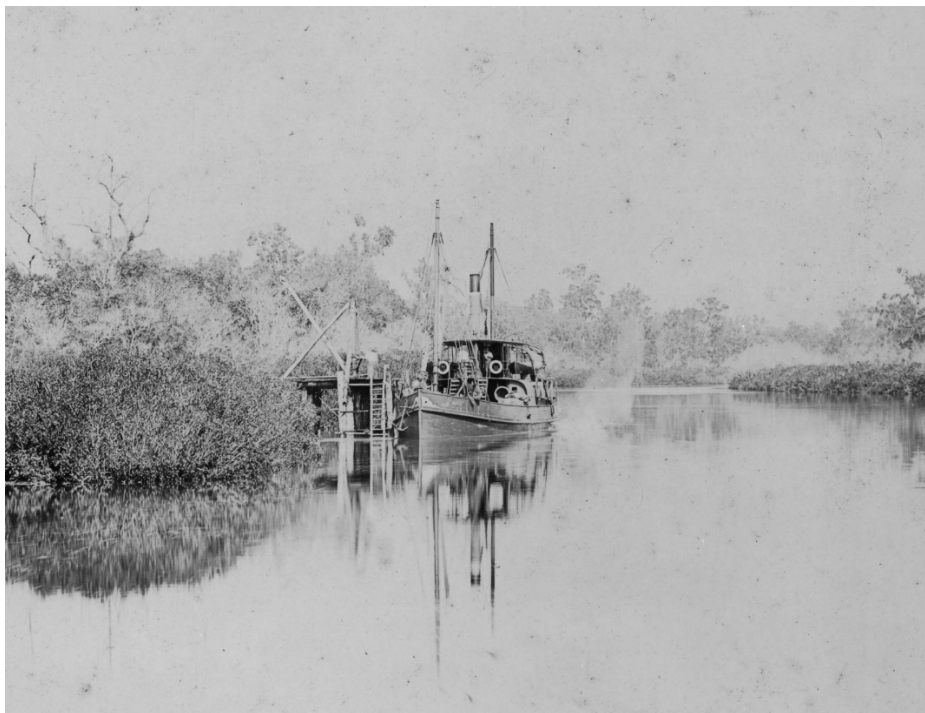
<sup>107</sup> Northern Miner 23 Dec 1897

<sup>108</sup> North Queensland Register 20 Nov 1899

they had also bought Ripple Creek, but this was not the case<sup>109</sup>. By June 1897, C.S.R. had bought nearly all the sugar mills north of Mackay which produced white sugars, leaving the Ripple Creek and Pioneer (Ayr) mills as the last independent producers of 'plantation white' sugar.<sup>110</sup> C.S.R. did not see Ripple Creek as a threat because of their agreement with Wood Bros and Boyd to cap sugar production from Ripple Creek. Mitch invested additional money in the Ripple Creek mill, installing a sugar drier, screens and a two-storey sugar storage room. The milling process was fully automated from the cane entering, to the bagging of sugar. Those who visited the mill were impressed with its efficiency and cleanliness.

Mitch was also concerned that C.S.R. would monopolise the transport infrastructure necessary for sending sugar to market – C.S.R. already controlled the river port at Halifax - so in July 1898, Wood Bros and Boyd leased the Seymour wharf and river punts from the owners. They also commissioned construction of a ship at Dunn's shipyard in Sydney, to secure their transport route to Townsville. The S.S. *Ripple* was delivered on 25 January 1900. She was 100 feet long, 20 feet beam, with carrying capacity of 150 tons and speed of about eight knots. She had a fairly shallow draft but on her maiden voyage, managed to get stranded on a sandbar in the Seymour River for a few days – nothing unusual for navigation along the Seymour and Herbert Rivers<sup>111</sup>.

The final piece in Wood Bros and Boyd's strategy to compete with C.S.R. was to have their product recognised more widely in the marketplace. Ripple Creek sugars were entered in the main Sydney and Melbourne Agricultural Society shows, and won prizes. Their product was promoted and sold in Vancouver where it gained some acceptance, but they could not compete on price with Indian sugar in the North American market. Most of the product from Ripple Creek was sold within Queensland – Castlemaine Brewery still being a major customer. By the end of the century, the "Ripple Creek" brand of sugar was a household word throughout Queensland<sup>112</sup>.



S.S. *Ripple* at the Seymour River wharf. 1900

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<sup>109</sup> Singleton Argus 30 Dec 1896

<sup>110</sup> Northern Miner 1 Jun 1897

<sup>111</sup> North Queensland Register 19 Feb 1900

<sup>112</sup> Northern Miner 23 Dec 1902



Mitch and his nephew Reggie Boyd maintained a strong interest in buying, breeding and racing horses at the local Ingham and Seymour race meetings, but Archie Boyd was not very interested. Mitch's and Reggie's horses did fairly well, but I think that friendly local rivalry with other planters was the driving force behind their interest in racehorses, rather than making a living from it. Occasionally, they lost horses to crocodiles in the Seymour River.

Tattie and Ella's trips to Sydney to escape the tropics grew longer and more frequent, and the tropical climate started to affect the health of both Archie and Mitch Boyd. Like his father, Archie began to suffer badly from gout, rheumatism and arthritis. Archie, Jeanie and their baby took a holiday for three months in early 1898 to visit the cooler colonies of Victoria and Tasmania. On his return to the north, everyone at the plantation came down with influenza. In August 1898 and again in October, Archie's doctor in Townsville advised him to leave the tropics as soon as possible<sup>113</sup>. In November, Archie decided to leave Ripple Creek and find somewhere cooler to live. Just before Archie and his family were due to leave, they were on their way to Ingham when their trap overturned near the Gairloch bridge. They were all injured – Archie had two broken ribs<sup>114</sup>. Archie, Jeanie and their son left Ripple Creek for good on 7 December 1898 and arrived in Sydney nine days later by train from Brisbane. They spent January and February looking for places to live along the New South Wales coast, ranging from Eden to Newcastle, and saw a lot of their nephew Sprott, who had just passed his first year Sydney University examinations with honours. Archie and Jeanie decided to settle in Eden on the far south coast of New South Wales, and moved there in March 1899. Mitch had lost his right-hand man at Ripple Creek. Although the Boyd brothers were different in many ways and I am sure they had many disagreements during their eighteen years at Ripple Creek, their skills and experience complemented each other and they developed a successful enterprise together. They continued to write to each other often, and to see each other when an opportunity arose. Archie maintained a strong interest in the progress of Ripple Creek and the sugar industry during his semi-retirement in Eden – after all, his son Reggie and nephew Archie were still on the plantation.

## **Federation – the beginning of the end.**

From October 1889 when it was first advocated by Sir Henry Parkes in his Tenterfield oration, the Australian colonies worked towards a federation, holding numerous state and national conferences and conventions to discuss and agree a constitution. Mitch kept a wary eye on constitutional developments and, when proposals were likely to affect his business and industry, he became involved in the discussion and debate. He was only too happy to entertain travelling journalists at Ripple Creek, explain to them the practicalities of sugar growing and harvesting in tropical Queensland and the economic drivers of his business, backed up with relevant examples, data and statistics. Generally, Mitch managed to get favourable press coverage, as did uncle Joe Wood.

The Commonwealth of Australia was proclaimed on 1 January 1901 and it immediately had a positive impact on the Ripple Creek business. Duties of £6 per ton for Queensland sugar entering Victoria and £3 per ton for sugar entering New South Wales and South Australia were abolished overnight. The free inter-colonial trade that Mitch (and others) had advocated to the Royal Commission back in 1889 had finally been realised.

By invitation of the Governor General, Edmund 'Toby' Barton became Australia's first prime minister. He was a contemporary of Mitch Boyd's from Sydney and, after graduating in law, worked in Henry Bradley's legal practice from 1868-1870, so he probably knew the Boyd and Bradley families. One of his first challenges was to win an election and confirm his position as

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<sup>113</sup> J.A. Boyd diary 1898

<sup>114</sup> North Queensland Register 14 Nov 1898

Prime Minister, which he did in May 1901. His election platform included the “White Australia” policy, which caused great concern in Queensland but was necessary for Barton to gain support from the Labour Party and liberal voters in the southern states. Upon election, he had to rely upon support from the Labour Party for a majority in the Lower House, and “White Australia” was one of the prices for that support.

The North Queensland sugar growers mobilised themselves to oppose any loss of kanaka labour. From April 1901, several reporters and politicians visited North Queensland to find out for themselves what the loss of kanaka labour would mean for the sugar industry. Most of them visited the Herbert River and Ripple Creek, so Mitch Boyd’s views were widely reported. In particular, bad experiences with employing white labour to harvest cane at the Ripple Creek plantation and to construct the Halifax to Ingham tramway<sup>115</sup> were used to argue that white labourers would not and could not replace Polynesian labourers. A secondary argument was that without Polynesian labour, white farmers would be replaced by Chinese or Malay farmers (there were already many examples) which was contrary to a “White Australia”. In October 1901, Mitch deliberately employed a gang of white labourers from Townsville to cut cane. This was a failure, as were several other attempts by other planters to use white labourers for cane trashing and cutting, and these were duly reported in the press<sup>116</sup>. But “The Worker” newspaper always presented a contrary view, spread disinformation, highlighted any misdemeanours by kanaka labourers and would not accept any inquiry as independent.

The Pacific Islanders’ and cane growers’ objections to the proposed Federal “Kanaka” bill, as presented in various petitions and submissions to the King, Federal and State Governments, were largely ignored by the new Federal Parliament. As one journalist wrote “*Mr. Barton must have the support of the Labour party and he finds he can buy it cheapest at the expense of the sugar growers of North Queensland.*”<sup>117</sup> During the parliamentary debate, J. Christian ‘Chris’ Watson (a future Prime Minister) made it clear that the objective of a White Australia should be given precedence over any potential damage that could be done to the Queensland sugar industry. The Pacific Island Labourers Act was assented to on 17 December 1901. It stipulated that;

- no Pacific Island labourer could enter Australia on or after 31 March 1904 except under a licence
- there were annual quotas on the number of licences which could be issued to ensure net negative immigration of Pacific Islanders,
- It was an offence to employ a Pacific Islander in any other way than an indentured labour agreement, punishable by a fine of £100.
- Up to 31 December 1906, a Magistrate could summarily order deportation of any Pacific Islander who could not prove they had been employed under an indentured labour agreement at any time in the preceding month
- after 31 December 1906, the Minister for External Affairs could order the deportation of any Pacific Island labourer found in Australia
- after 31 December 1906, all labour agreements made with Pacific Islander labourers no longer remained in force
- There were various grounds for exemption from deportation, including marriage to an Australian.<sup>118</sup>

For Mitch and his partners, this was the beginning of the end for Ripple Creek. Despite their best efforts, they could not find any class or race of people who would and could match the Pacific

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<sup>115</sup> Brisbane Courier 11 May 1901

<sup>116</sup> Sydney Morning Herald 12 Dec 1901

<sup>117</sup> Northern Miner 13 Nov 1901

<sup>118</sup> Museum of Australian Democracy. <https://www.foundingdocs.gov.au/item-did-15.html>

Island labourers when it came to trashing and cutting sugar cane in the tropics. Mechanised cane cutting was a dream which would not become a reality for another sixty years. As some consolation to the sugar industry, in 1902, the Federal Government passed the Excise Tariff Act which imposed a £6 per ton protective duty against all foreign cane sugar, but the same Act also taxed the producers £3 per ton on locally grown sugar, with a rebate (known as the Sugar Bounty) of £2 per ton for sugar grown using all white labour.<sup>119</sup> With best (No 1.) white sugar selling for less than £20 per ton at the Seymour wharf, this was a significant impost on the business.

Mitch's father Dr. Sprott Boyd died at his home in London on 15 April 1902. He had been crippled with arthritis for some years, was living a miserable existence and towards the end, his memory was failing.<sup>120</sup> He was buried at Brookwood Cemetery next to his wife Catherine, brother Robert Boyd and daughter Fanny Fitzgerald who died in 1900. Sprott left money and effects to Archie, Mitch and granddaughter Elsie Roper. Among the effects were various bronze sculptures and family portraits. It took more than a year for the executors, Archie, Mitch and Elsie's husband Freeman Roper to wind up the estate.

In December 1902, Mitch Boyd forecast, publicly, that the Ripple Creek plantation and sugar mill would close by end 1906 as kanaka labour is withdrawn. They began to arrange their contracts for labour and for buying cane to terminate on or before the end of 1906. The 1902 season was a record at Ripple Creek, with 2400 tons of sugar produced, but production gradually declined in subsequent seasons as the increasing labour shortage in the cane fields limited cane deliveries to the mill. In early 1903, Mitch spent some time with his partner Joseph Wood in Newcastle. Joe was 62, his health was failing and, given the outlook for the industry, he and Mitch decided to try and sell Ripple Creek. Unfortunately for them, there was only one likely buyer, and with the industry downturn, it was not a sellers' market. Nevertheless, Mitch wrote to his long-time friend Edward Knox in October 1903, offering to sell Ripple Creek to C.S.R. for £45,000. His reasons for selling were; *"I have been up here long enough – over 21 years. My wife never has good health here. She and Ella see no society and I get none and am away from my sons. Since the Dad's death I have now a private income of £1000 to £1500 a year on which I could live nicely in a quiet way for the last 15 years left me if I am spared that long."*<sup>121</sup> C.S.R. refused to negotiate. Their internal analysis suggested they would not recover the purchase price before December 1906, even if they purchased Ripple Creek for £25,000. They hoped that Ripple creek would be offered publicly for sale, thus reinforcing industry requests for further consideration by the Federal Government. They wanted Ripple Creek, as a private mill, to continue fighting for kanaka labour up to December 1906 and then close, whereupon C.S.R. would snap up any land they wanted<sup>122</sup>.

As C.S.R hoped, Mitch Boyd continued to fight for a better deal for the sugar industry, and to operate the Ripple Creek business. He became more closely involved in politics, including in preselection of candidates as a member of the Herbert Divisional Executive Committee of the National Liberal Union of Queensland. Mitch was often in the press pointing out, from bitter experience, that there was no alternative to kanaka labour in tropical cane fields. He pushed for a Sugar Conference to be held under the auspices of the Townsville Chamber of Commerce which was well attended and was highly successful in coordinating the sugar industry's views to the State and Federal Governments. However, Mitch remained determined to exit the sugar industry, and he offered the business to C.S.R again in September 1905. Although C.S.R. did negotiate with him, by January 1906 they had not reached an acceptable settlement. Mitch took a house in Indooroopilly, Brisbane and wrote to Edward Knox at C.S.R. regretting their lack of

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<sup>119</sup> The history of Queensland, its people and industries. 1919. Compiler Matt. J. Fox. pp 688

<sup>120</sup> J.A. Boyd diary, 25 and 30 May 1901

<sup>121</sup> Letter from R.M. Boyd to E.W. Knox 15 Oct 1903

<sup>122</sup> Internal C.S.R. Note from W.F. to E.W. Knox 24 Oct 1903

agreement and saying “*I have just ordered new boilers and shall put the factory in order and carry on as long as labor will let me or I can find a purchaser.*”<sup>123</sup>

On 12 May 1906, a double-page illustrated advertisement appeared in *The Queenslander*:

***HOMES FOR SMALL FARMERS.***

*Messrs. Wood Brothers and Boyd have decided to dispose of their well-known Ripple Creek Estate, which is situated on the Herbert River in North Queensland; and they announce that they are now prepared to subdivide it into lots to suit purchasers.*

There followed a long and glowing description of the Ripple Creek Estate. Mitch said that he would retain the mill and the homestead, and guarantee access to the mill for cane grown by farmers.<sup>124</sup> But in June that year, there was a revised proposal for the mill to operate on a cooperative basis, whereby the producer of the cane received a fixed sum for cane on delivery to the mill, plus an annual share of the profits. Mitch tried to get the Queensland Government interested in purchasing the mill, because the Government had, for several years, been promoting the concept of centralised cooperative mills in Queensland as a way to move from large plantations using kanaka labour, to small owner-farmers using family labour. The farmers themselves signed a petition requesting that the Government purchase the Ripple Creek mill.

At the end of 1906, as the deadline for use of kanaka labour was reached, the Japanese and Malay workers at Ripple Creek thought they had some bargaining power and wanted to renew their contracts at higher rates. Mitch refused their demands, and all the Japanese and Malay workers left the plantation. Mitch took the house in Indooroopilly again for the summer and while in Brisbane, he became a vice president of the Immigration League of Queensland. This organisation had the goals of;

- educating Queenslanders as to the need of increased population of the agricultural class.
- disseminating information in Australia and Europe about immigration and land settlement.
- providing practical assistance and advice to immigrants arriving in Queensland.
- advocating a vigorous policy of placing city people on the soil.<sup>125</sup>

Through the League, Mitch employed a gang of twenty white labourers who arrived at Ripple Creek on 26 February. Remarkably, most of them stayed on for the 1907 harvest, but there was insufficient labour available (as usual) and Mitch resorted to advertising widely for ploughmen and farm hands<sup>126</sup>.

In August 1907, the Queensland premier advised the Ripple Creek farmers that the Government did not have funds to purchase the Ripple Creek mill.<sup>127</sup> Mitch had exhausted all options to sell the mill in other than a fire sale so, in December 1907, he apparently reached agreement with C.S.R. to sell the mill to them for £34,000<sup>128</sup>. In April 1908, Mitch announced that the Ripple Creek mill would close and he advertised the Ripple Creek plantation for subdivision and sale (again), having secured a guarantee from C.S.R. that they would take over Ripple Creek’s contracts to purchase cane for the coming season.<sup>129</sup> Mitch, Tattie and Ella held a sale at Ripple Creek on 27 June 1908 and, a week later, the family departed Ripple Creek, leaving instructions with their

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<sup>123</sup> Letter from R.M. Boyd to E.W. Knox, 9 Jan 1906

<sup>124</sup> *Queenslander* 12 May 1906

<sup>125</sup> *Queenslander* 30 Mar 1907

<sup>126</sup> *Singleton Argus* 27 Aug 1907

<sup>127</sup> *Townsville Daily Bulletin* 28 Aug 1907

<sup>128</sup> Letter from J.A. Boyd to R.M. Boyd 22 Dec 1907

<sup>129</sup> *Townsville Daily Bulletin* 16 Apr 1908.

*Robert Mitchell Boyd (1849-1912), Eliza Agnes Brown (1855-1884) and Emily Burton Bradley (1862-1954).  
By A.G. Connor, 2017*

agents in Townsville to offer all the Ripple Creek land (1232 acres) for sale. The end of an era, as the last private sugar mill in Queensland closed, although Reggie Boyd and Archie Boyd junior stayed in the north to keep the connection alive. C.S.R. salvaged what they needed or could sell from the Ripple Creek mill - and then demolished it. Today there are two sugar mills operating on the Herbert River, Victoria and Macknade. Ironically, in 2017 both these sugar mills, as well as the CSR Sugar brand name, are owned by Wilmar International Limited, a global agri-business based in Singapore.

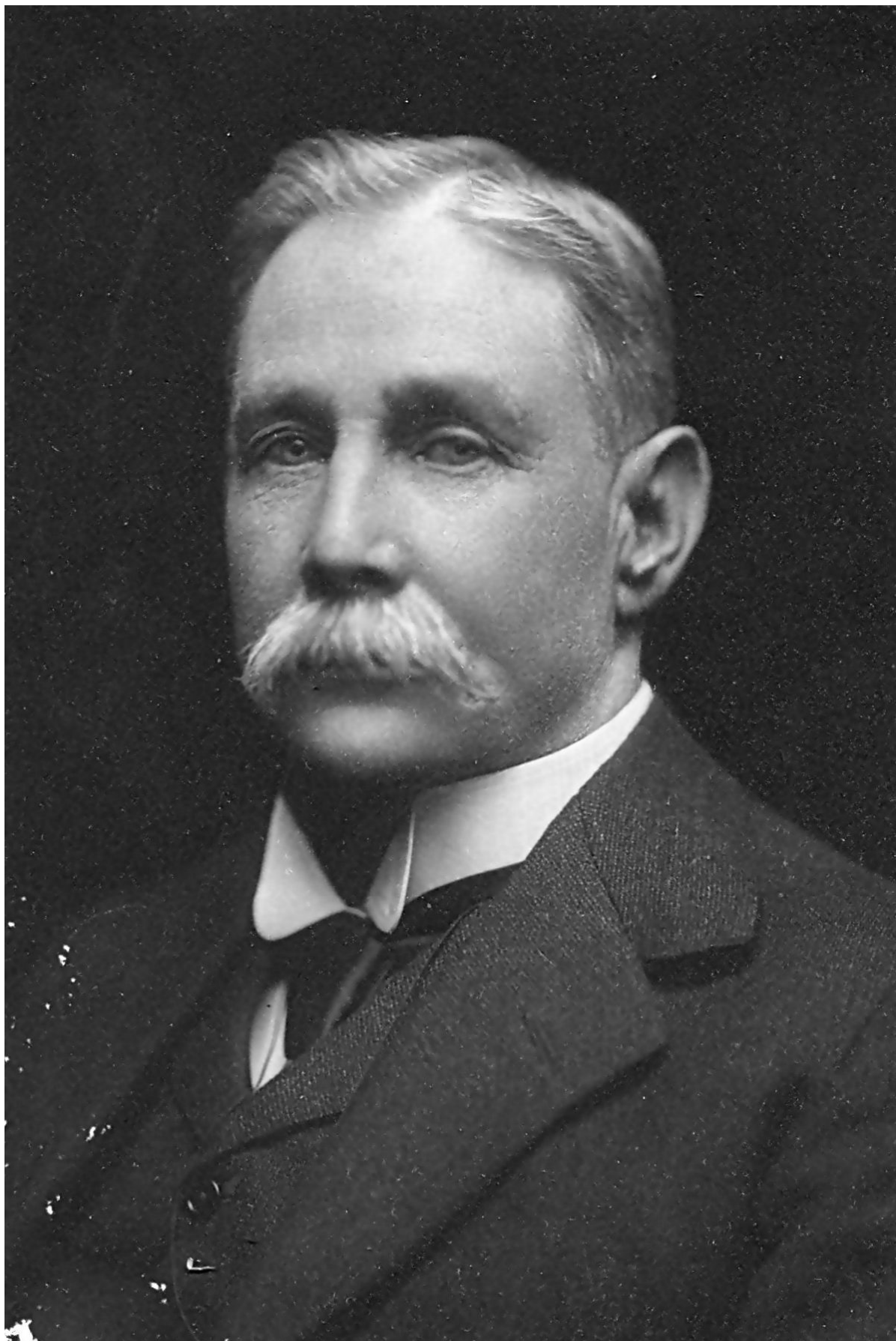


## Retirement and grandchildren

After 26 years working on the Ripple Creek Estate, Mitch went on an extended and well-deserved holiday. Mitch (59), Tattie (46) and Ella (26) boarded the S.S. *Geelong* on 24 July 1908 for London via Melbourne, Adelaide, Durban and Capetown. They arrived in London on 19 September. In their absence, Archibald Herbert Boyd married Elizabeth Baker in Mackay Queensland on 8 August 1908. Elizabeth, known always as 'Bessie', was seven months pregnant at the wedding, so it is possible that Mitch and Tattie knew nothing of the impending marriage – Tattie would certainly have disapproved. Mitch's first grandchild, Mitchell Sprott Boyd, was born on 9 October 1908 at Ripple Creek, where Archie was working as an engineer. Mitch was also unable to be present at the funeral of his business partner and great friend Joseph Wood, who died in Newcastle on 23 November 1908.

Mitch, Tattie and Ella spent the remainder of 1908 in England and Scotland, visiting relatives and friends. In October, they were at Forde Abbey in Somerset, which Mitch's niece Elsie had inherited in 1905 from her cousin, William Herbert Evans. At Christmas, they were in Weymouth, where Mitch was born. While in London, Mitch had the following portrait taken, which appears to be the study used for the oil painting now owned by William Sprott Boyd's descendants in America.

*Robert Mitchell Boyd (1849-1912), Eliza Agnes Brown (1855-1884) and Emily Burton Bradley (1862-1954).  
By A.G. Connor, 2017*



Robert Mitchell Boyd, London, 1908

*Robert Mitchell Boyd (1849-1912), Eliza Agnes Brown (1855-1884) and Emily Burton Bradley (1862-1954).*  
By A.G. Connor, 2017

Between January and April 1909, Mitch, Tattie and Ella toured Europe, taking in Venice, Florence, Rome and Paris among other cities, and also catching the measles. On 25 June 1909, they boarded the S.S. *Virginian* for Montreal, arriving in Quebec on 2 July. They spent the next six weeks sightseeing their way across the U.S.A. and Canada. At some stage, they met up with son W. Sprott Boyd who had left Australia in 1905 to build his career as a mining engineer in America. In 1909, Sprott was working for the Boston Consolidated Mining Company in Salt Lake City, Utah, and this may be where the following photograph was taken.



Left to Right; Ella, Sprott, Mitch and Tattie Boyd, U.S.A. 1909

*Robert Mitchell Boyd (1849-1912), Eliza Agnes Brown (1855-1884) and Emily Burton Bradley (1862-1954).*  
By A.G. Connor, 2017

Mitch, Tattie and Ella left Vancouver on 13 August 1909 per the S.S. *Marama*, stopped in Hawaii and Suva, Fiji and arrived back in Sydney on the 4 September<sup>130</sup>. They were met by Archie Boyd senior, who had travelled up from Eden to spend a few days with them in Sydney. Archie would have recounted in detail all the family and business events that had happened during the year they had been away. Mitch wasted little time in heading back to Ripple Creek, arriving in Townsville on 3 October. As well as meeting son Archie and his new family, Mitch was in time for the arrival of his second grandchild, Phyllis Evelyn Boyd, who was born to Archie junior and Bessie at Ripple Creek on 15 October 1909. Mitch's visit also coincided with the Ingham Agricultural Show, and he saw his nephew Reggie Boyd win prizes for his draft horses.

Mitch, Tattie and Ella's first home after arriving back in Sydney was part of a terrace named "Stradbroke", at 51 Walker Street, North Sydney. Mitch's nephew Archie came from Eden to board at Sydney Church of England Grammar School ('Shore'), North Sydney in 1909, and he enjoyed spending his free days at uncle Mitch and aunt Tattie's place.<sup>131</sup>



51 Walker Street North Sydney (with flagpole), c.1910<sup>132</sup>

In February 1910, the family rented a larger house with a garden – "Kuring-gai"<sup>133</sup> on Ben Boyd Road, Neutral Bay. Ben Boyd Road was named after Mitch's distant cousin Benjamin Boyd and while this may have influenced his choice of house, more likely they wanted a large garden (which had been their pride and joy at Ripple Creek) and the location was near Houghton Bradley's house "Grantham" in Alfred Street, North Sydney. Tattie's brother Houghton was a very keen

<sup>130</sup> Sydney Morning Herald 6 Sep 1909

<sup>131</sup> Elaine Roberts pers.com.

<sup>132</sup> Face of North Sydney. Stanton Library

<sup>133</sup> "Kuring-gai" was demolished long ago and replaced by a block of very uninspiring home units at 154 Ben Boyd Road. The block is named "Merton Hall" in homage to Benjamin Boyd's ancestral home in Wigtonshire, Scotland.



gardener, especially of flowering bulbs, and had been actively involved in the Horticultural Society of New South Wales for many years. He and Arthur Yates were keen competitors at the various flower shows, and Houghton persuaded Mitch to become involved also. Mitch and Tattie preferred growing roses, and they did well in the Horticultural Society's Flower Show and the local Neutral Bay Flower Show, winning numerous prizes.<sup>134, 135</sup> Mitch maintained his interest in racing horses, and he occasionally attended race meetings in Sydney. He returned to the Herbert River each year, his visits coinciding with the Herbert River Jockey Club meetings and the Ingham Show, where he caught up with nephew Reggie who was the storekeeper at Ripple Creek, and Archie junior and family who had a farm there. Another grandchild arrived on 3 March 1911 when Herbert Craig Boyd was born at Ripple Creek to Archie and Bessie. Mitch also visited Eden at least once a year to go fishing and shooting with brother Archie.

On 23 September 1911, Mitch's son Sprott married his long-term fiancé Helen Henrietta Germaine McMicking in New York, but Mitch could not be there for the wedding. Around the same time, Ella had made up her mind to marry George Stanley Newton Connor, one of her uncle Archie Boyd's friends whom she had met several times when on holiday in Eden. In January 1912, Stan Connor proposed to Ella and was accepted. Mitch came down to Eden again in July that year to meet Stan and make arrangements for Ella's future financial security. This included placing a deposit to buy a 48-acre farm on the outskirts of Sydney at Lugarno, where Stan and Ella would settle down. I doubt that Tattie thought Stan was a suitable husband as he did not come from a wealthy family.

In February 1912, Mitch was called to give evidence at another Royal Commission into the sugar industry – this inquiry arose because of the dominance of C.S.R. over sugar pricing. Edward Knox refused to disclose C.S.R.'s business costs to the commissioners, fought the case all the way to the Privy Council, and won. Mitch's evidence was no longer highly relevant, but he made it clear that his business had been taxed out of existence by the Federal Government<sup>136</sup>. In retirement, Mitch kept a keen eye on business developments and maintained a large share portfolio, of which C.S.R. represented about 15% by value. He also held stock in Sydney Ferries Ltd, and in January 1912, offered himself as a director on the board, but was unsuccessful.<sup>137</sup>

In mid-November 1912, Mitch became very ill, and his brother Archie sailed to Sydney to visit him, staying five days. Mitch did not recover from his illness and died of bronchial pneumonia on 4 December 1912 at his home "Kuring-gai". He was buried at Waverley Cemetery the following day. Neither Archie Boyd senior nor Archie Boyd junior were able to reach Sydney in time for the funeral.

Mitch left his inheritance from the ante-nuptial agreement with his first wife Aggie to be divided between his three children. The remainder he left in a trust for his wife Tattie and any remainder after she died to the children. Mitch also left some personal effects to his children, including two bronze statues and a silver fruit stand that had belonged to his father Dr. Sprott Boyd.

Ella and Stan had planned to get married at the end of 1912, but following Mitch's death, Ella's stepmother Tattie insisted that the marriage be postponed for a suitable mourning period – two years. This may have been a deliberate test of Stan and Ella's commitment, but Ella had been Tattie's constant (and captive) companion for twenty-five years, so there may have been some selfish motivation behind Tattie's insistence. While Stan moved to Lugarno and began life there as an orchardist to wait out the period of mourning, Tattie and Ella moved from "Kuring-gai" to a

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<sup>134</sup> Sydney Morning Herald 26 Oct 1910

<sup>135</sup> Sydney Morning Herald 1 April 1912

<sup>136</sup> Sydney Morning Herald 7 Mar 1912

<sup>137</sup> Sydney Morning Herald 24 Jan 1912

*Robert Mitchell Boyd (1849-1912), Eliza Agnes Brown (1855-1884) and Emily Burton Bradley (1862-1954).  
By A.G. Connor, 2017*

house called “Bauhinia” in Ivy street, Wollstonecraft.<sup>138</sup> In March 2013, they travelled north to visit Archie, Bessie and their family at Ripple Creek<sup>139</sup>. While they were visiting, Archie’s family grew to four children with the addition of Florence Isabella Boyd on 23 April 1913. Archie and his family left Ripple Creek for good on 7 October 1913<sup>140</sup>, and found a house called “Wakefield” at 27 Hampden Road, North Sydney.

Tattie’s local Church of England was St Thomas’, North Sydney, which she and Ella often visited. Stan and Ella were married at St Thomas’ on 14 February 1914, and Ella moved down to Lugarno with her husband. With no Harbour Bridge, Lugarno was a long journey from Wollstonecraft but Ella returned to see Tattie as often as time and children permitted. After the telephone was connected at Lugarno, Ella rang Tattie almost every day. On 3 May 1914, Florence Isabella Boyd was christened at St Thomas’<sup>141</sup> and not long afterwards, St Thomas’ underwent a six-month restoration. Tattie and the family decided to donate a new altar for the church, richly carved in dark oak, in memory of Robert Mitchell Boyd. The altar was dedicated in November 1914 by Bishop Stone-Wigg<sup>142</sup>. At the side of the altar is a brass plaque, which reads

*“In Memoriam  
Robert Mitchell Boyd  
who departed this life  
4<sup>th</sup> December 1912  
In the Faith and Fear of God  
Erected by his wife and family  
Blessed are the pure in heart  
For they shall see our Lord. Matthew 5:6”*



St Thomas’ Anglican Church, North Sydney. Tattie donated the east stained-glass window of the church in 1915.

<sup>138</sup> 9 Ivy St Wollstonecraft now backs on to the North Shore Railway line, which didn’t exist in 1913.

<sup>139</sup> Townsville Daily Bulletin 1 March 1913

<sup>140</sup> Townsville Daily Bulletin 11 Oct 1913

<sup>141</sup> North Sydney, St Thomas’ Parish Registers (Ancestry.com)

<sup>142</sup> Sydney Morning Herald 16 Nov 1914

In about 1916, Tattie moved a short distance up the hill from Ivy Street to a house she purchased called "Bradlea," at 7 Gillies Street Wollstonecraft, which put her within walking distance of St Thomas' Church. I don't have much information about how Tattie occupied herself after moving to Gillies Street. She supported various charities such as the Bush Brotherhood of the Good Shepherd by holding annual fund-raising lunches from 1922 until at least 1931.<sup>143</sup> She had a small circle of friends associated with the church, including Rev. Horace Crotty who at that time was the Rector of St Thomas' and later became Bishop of Bathurst.

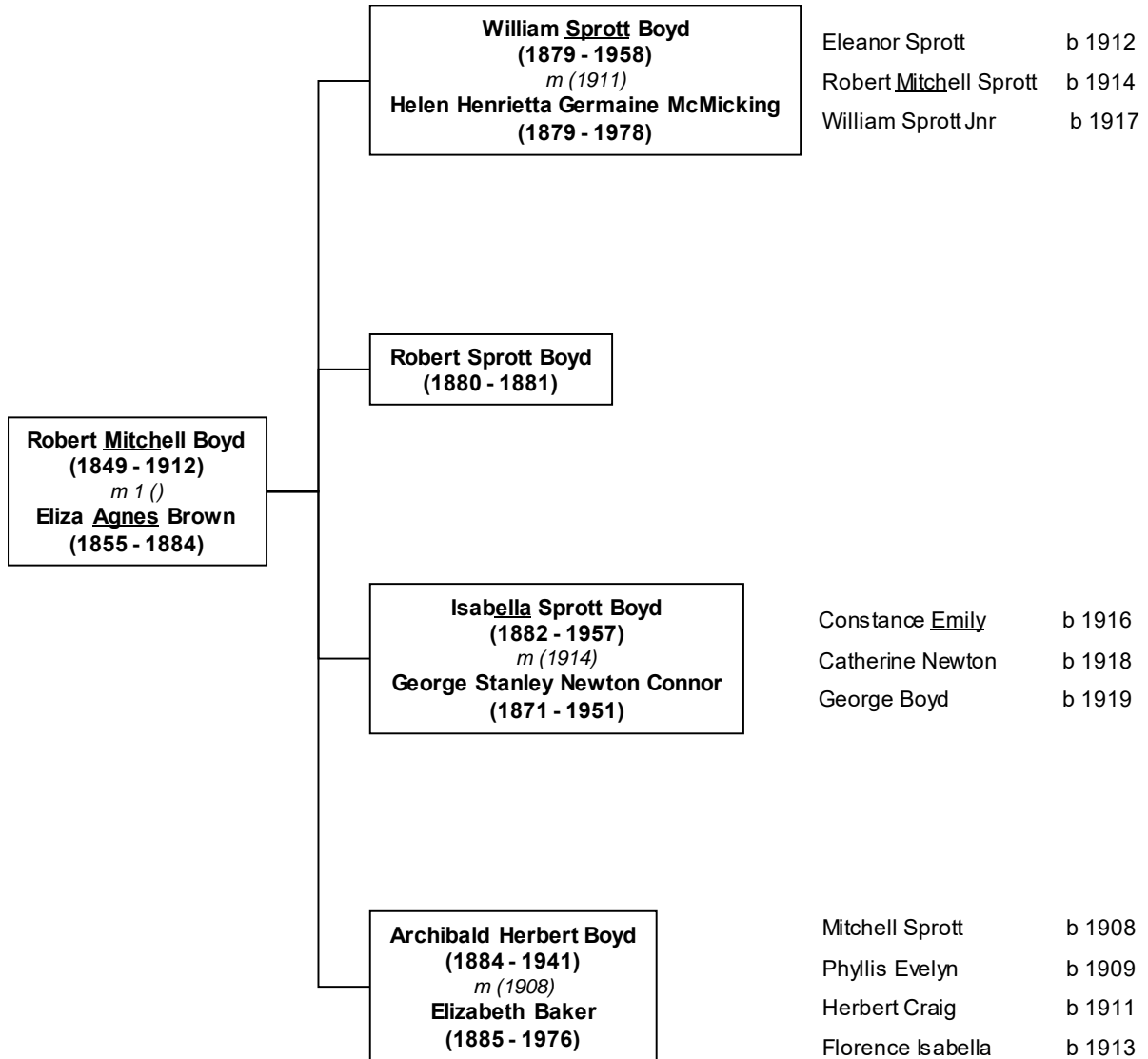
Tattie also took great interest in her nieces, nephews, and step-grandchildren. In particular, she mentored her nieces Constance ('Bess') Chauncey and Helen Chauncey after their parents died. Stan and Ella Connor had three children, Constance Emily, Catherine Newton and George Boyd Connor, who were all born at private hospitals in North Sydney between 1916 and 1919, so that Tattie could help Ella through the births. From 1927 until 1937, these three children boarded at schools in North Sydney – the girls at Wenona and George at Shore. They all spent Sundays visiting their grandmother Tattie, whose house was within walking distance of the schools. George remembered Tattie as rather stern, and he didn't enjoy the visits very much. After the Sydney Harbour Bridge was opened in 1932, he preferred to go home to his parents in Lugarno, south of the harbour.

In 1939, Stan and Ella Connor sold the orchard in Lugarno and moved to a house at 8 Roslyn Avenue Roseville. This allowed Ella to visit Tattie often, and as Tattie grew older, Emily and Catherine helped care for her also. With live-in housekeeper Jessie McEachern and later Stella White, Tattie remained independent at her Gillies Street house up until her death on 4 November 1954 at the age of 91. Tattie was cremated, and her ashes were buried next to her husband Mitch in the Waverley Cemetery. Tattie left the bulk of her estate to her nieces Constance Chauncy and Helen Wright, and nephew Clement Bradley, with small legacies to her Boyd relatives and to various charities.

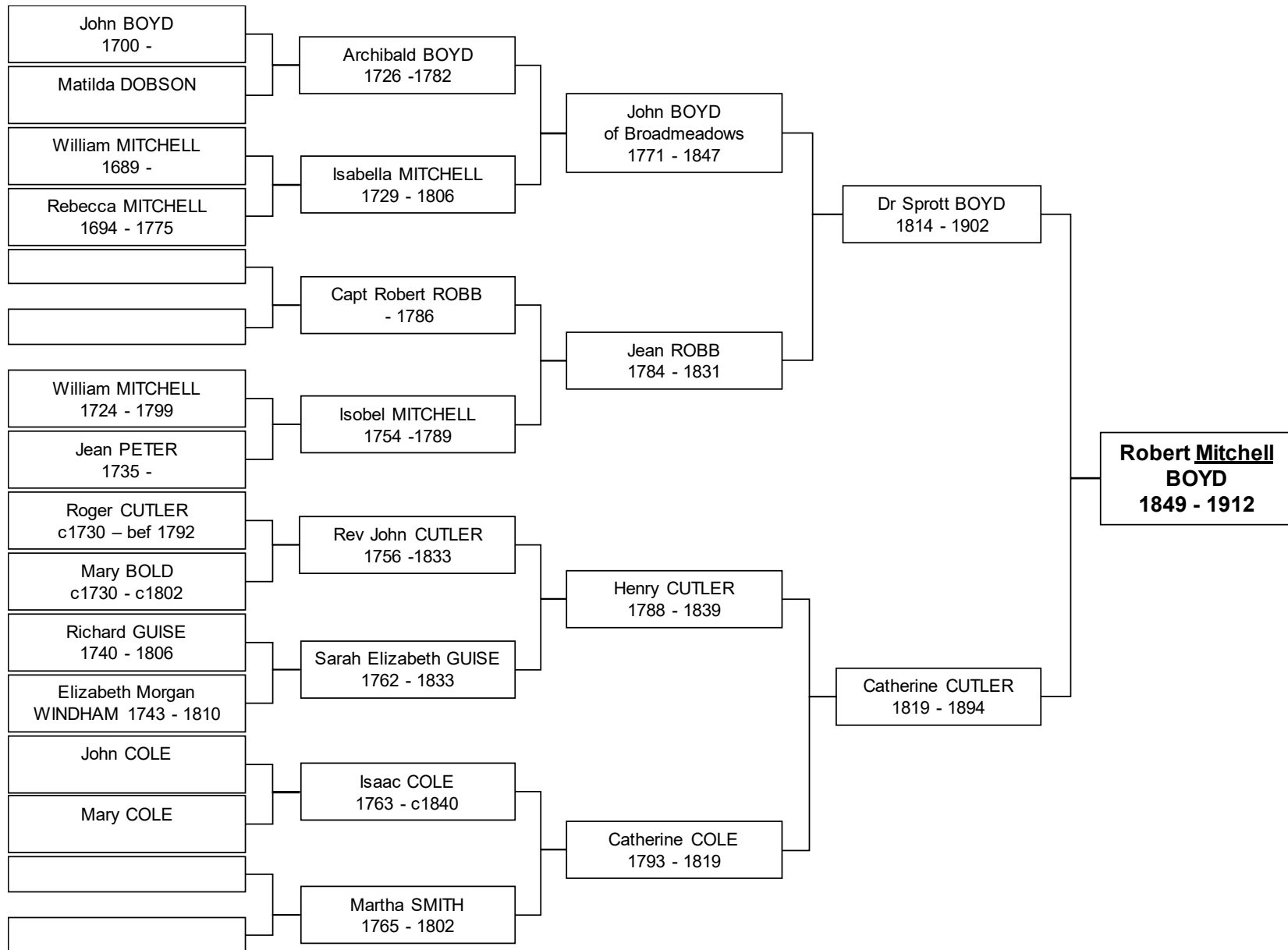
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<sup>143</sup> Sun 24 Oct 1931 pp 7

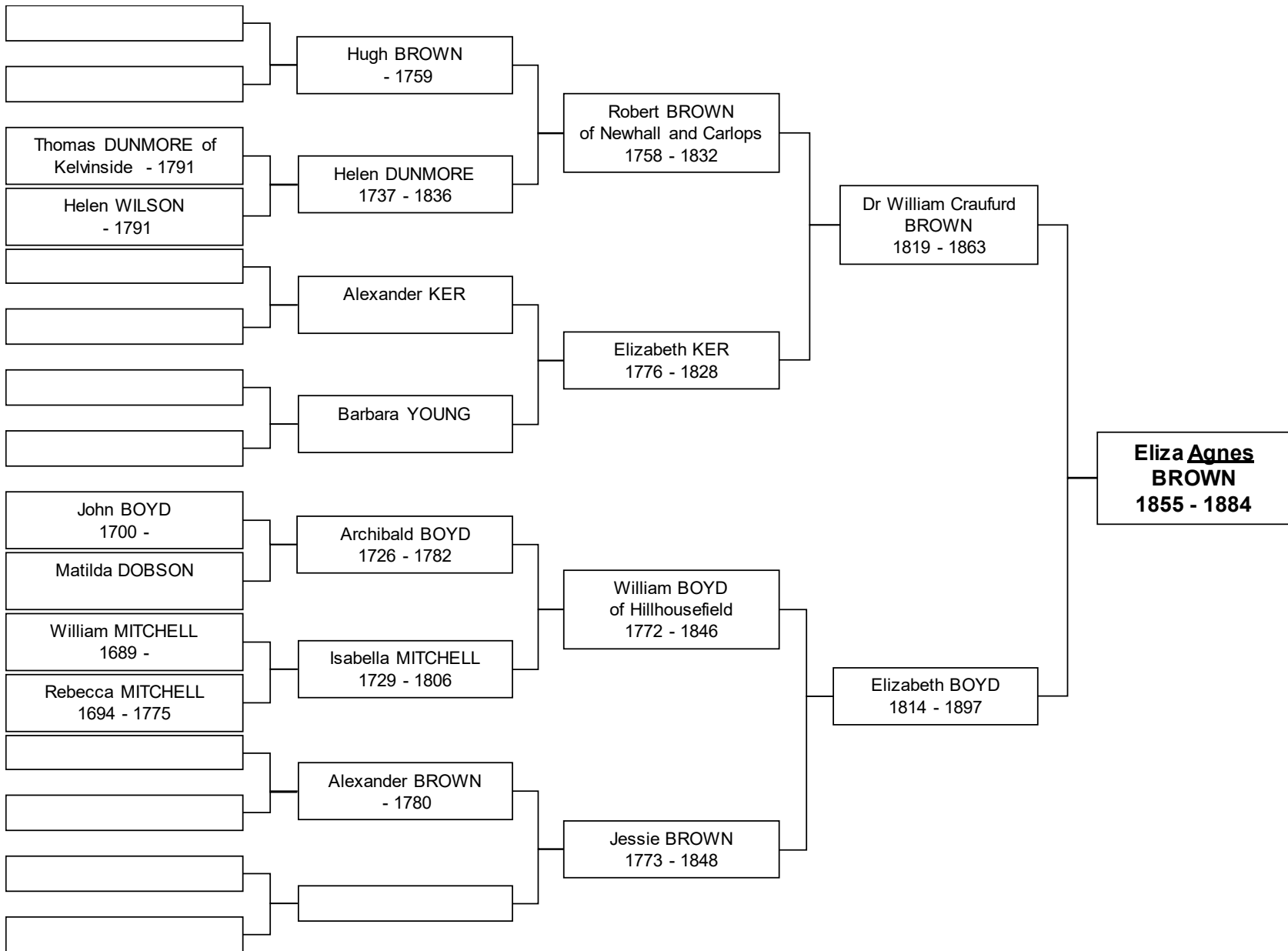
## MITCHELL AND AGNES BOYD'S FAMILY



## ANCESTRY OF ROBERT MITCHELL BOYD



## ANCESTRY OF ELIZA AGNES BROWN



## ANCESTRY OF EMILY BURTON BRADLEY

