# The Michelmores of Gilberton: A Tribute

## CONTENTS

- Editor's preface .................................................................................. iii
- Map of North Queensland ................................................................ iv
- Introduction ....................................................................................... v
- Ernie’s family .................................................................................... 1
- Young Ernie ....................................................................................... 2
- Cattle droving ................................................................................... 3
- The droving route ............................................................................... 4
- The great adventure .......................................................................... 5
- Ernie arrives in Gilberton ................................................................. 6
- Mustering at Werrington ................................................................. 7
- Horse racing at Lyndhurst .............................................................. 8
- The Martels come to Gilberton ....................................................... 9
- The Martel family ........................................................................... 10
- The Martels move to Christmas Hill ............................................. 11
- Tragedy at Oakville .......................................................................... 12
- Ernie marries .................................................................................. 13
- The Martels disperse ....................................................................... 14
- The Michelmore family grows ..................................................... 15
- Hard times ....................................................................................... 16
- ... and harder still ........................................................................... 17
- Ernie’s tracking skills ....................................................................... 18
- Another of Ernie’s stories ............................................................. 19
- Tom Michelmore ........................................................................... 20
- Tom’s education ............................................................................. 21
- Tom’s humour ................................................................................ 22
- The 1926 drought ........................................................................... 23
- Penny’s Pocket ............................................................................... 24
- Paul Badley ..................................................................................... 25
- Ernie’s butchering skills ............................................................... 26
- Fencing on high ground ................................................................. 27
- Rushing bullocks ........................................................................... 28
- Charlie Buttle ................................................................................ 29
- ... The Basalt Terror ...................................................................... 30
- Conditions improve ......................................................................... 31
- The family all help .......................................................................... 32
- Death of Ernie ............................................................................... 33
- Life at Gilberton continues .......................................................... 34
- Death of Lydia ................................................................................ 35
- Tom marries .................................................................................. 36
- Death of Tom ................................................................................ 37
- REQUIESCAT IN PACE ................................................................ 38
- OBITUARY .................................................................................... 39
- Editor’s notes .................................................................................. 40
Editor’s preface

The following history mainly concerns Ernest Horace Michelmore 1874-1951, known as Ernie, a real pioneer of North Queensland. Also featured are Ernie's father Philip Ching 1838-1934, who immigrated from England about 1849; his wife Lydia Abigail née Martel 1882-1953; and his son Thomas Philip (Tom) 1905-1977.

The author, J. H. (Jack) Lethbridge, was best friends with Tom when he was at Werrington Station, and knew Ernie and the rest of the family well. He took a keen interest in local history, and also wrote histories of his own family and of the Nimmo family. Jack died soon after writing it, and permission to edit his manuscript and publish it more widely was kindly given by his son John.

The document was accordingly edited as a contribution to the M*CH*MORE One Name Study, which is investigating the history of the surname Mitchelmore (including variant spellings such as Michelmore) all over the world. It is also available on the internet at http://www.mitchelmore.info/families/stories/gilberton.htm.

A map showing the location of the major towns mentioned in this history is provided overleaf. The locations of other places mentioned in the text are explained in the editor’s notes at the end of this document.

Mike Mitchelmore, Editor
May 2010
Map of North Queensland

An interactive version of this map is available at
http://www.mitchelmore.info/families/stories/gilberton-notes.htm#map
Introduction

"He writes as bush folk themselves would if they were able."

This quotation was part of the Introduction to A Book of Collected Verses by A. B. Paterson, contributed by Fredrick T. Macartney.

We are indebted to both A. B. Paterson and to Will Ogilvie for portraying for us in verse the type of men who figured so largely in the development and settlement of that vast and often inhospitable region known collectively as the Australian Outback.

Paterson wrote of Clancy of the Overflow\(^1\) who, according to a letter from his shearing mate, "had gone to Queensland droving, and we don't know where he are." But Clancy turned up again when "that colt from Old Regret had got away", and so did Harrison and "that stripling on a small and weedy beast".

And what about "the old man with his hair as white as snow?" I recall an old man—he was quite grey—racing after a bullock breaking from the mob as we were yarding at Duck Hole Yard. A stunted wattle caught between leg and saddle flap hurled the old man out of the saddle, giving him a nasty fall; but he was back on his horse again next day, tailing\(^2\) those bullocks. The identity of this old man will be quite evident as my story proceeds!

Then there was "The man who steadies the lead"; and what about the chap who was "handy with a ropin' pole and handy with a brand, and could ride a rowdy colt". The point I make is that there were many such men of whom no trace remains today. That is why I want to try, if I am able, to leave some record of Ernest H. Michelmore and his family before what little we know fades into the limbo of the past.

Ernie Michelmore would have more than held his own in the distinguished company of riders who set out to run in "the colt from Old Regret". I have seen him ride at many a muster; and the memory leaves me in no doubt whatever that he would have been with the man who "let his pony have his head" and raced down the mountainside. He would not have been among those who were "standing mute, watching from the mountain—top"! Incidentally, he would have been able to shoe that "rowdy colt" as well as ride him! I think Tom Dixon Snr., a great friend of Ernie in the old days, is looking over my shoulder as I write this, and he agrees: "He'd shoe him, alright".
Ernie's family

Ernest Horace Michelmore was born at Duaringa in the Dawson Valley, in the Rockhampton District, on 10 November 1874.

Remembering his nature, I rather fancy he would not have relished the name "Horace". It seems to smack somewhat of the landed gentry—"holier than thou" sort of thing! I think he would have settled for Ernie, and besides, we all knew him as Ernie or Old Mich anyway.

Ernest's father was Philip Ching Michelmore who had immigrated from England, as had his mother, whose maiden name was Florence Margaret Bowen.

Ernest was the only son, but he had two sisters: Florence and Adelaide. These girls both married—Florence to a Mr Turner and Adelaide to a Mr Jack Freestun. There were two children of this marriage, Phil and Fern.

Since writing the first draft of this story, I have been advised that Mr Charlie Freestun, who is known and respected by a great number of friends in the north, is a direct descendant of this family. It will be remembered that Charlie managed Wando Vale Station for many years.

Ernest was ten years old when his mother died. Unfortunately, we have no details.

In due course Philip married again, giving Ernie three half-sisters: Edith, Bessie and Rose. These girls all married—Edith to Thomas Ernest Martel, who will be mentioned later in the story; Bessie to a Mr Charlie Clarke; and Rose to Algenon Pilcher—a name which is very well-known and highly regarded in the Pentland district, long associated with farming in the area.

Philip Michelmore was a teamster who, we imagine, had a considerable turn-out of possibly both bullock and horse teams. He had been carrying in the Dawson Valley for quite some time, as indicated by Ernie's birthplace; but at about the time Ernie was born, Charters Towers was producing literally thousands of ounces of gold. The railway line which was to link the goldfield with the newly opened port of Townsville was under construction, and was to be extended further west. Accordingly, it is not surprising that we find Philip Michelmore moving his teams up into this locality.

To the best of our knowledge he did not go directly to Charters Towers, though he did spend some time there. He would have found, no doubt, that all the best carrying contracts on the goldfield were taken up already; so he established himself at Pentland, to which place the railway line was steadily approaching and which was soon to become the temporary terminus as the line extended further west. There were quite a few cattle stations in the area. Some of them had been established for a few years—since the mid-sixties—while others were still in the formative stage.

With haulage to these places, as well as carting sleepers for the railway, Michelmore soon found that he had about as much business as he could handle.
And as time went on, we learn of the young Ernie spending quite a bit of time on the old Cape River goldfield doing a bit of fossicking. There may have been a school at Pentland at the time, but we think young Ernie spent rather too much time fossicking and possibly off-siding for his father with the teams. Whatever the reason, he had very little schooling. However, he more than made up for this shortcoming by showing great natural aptitude at an early age in the handling of horses and cattle, a calling at which he was to become an expert, as we shall see.

I hope readers will forgive any errors in the chronological sequence of events as this story proceeds. Much research has produced only snippets of information in conjunction with which we use known dates. We know that Ernie grew into a fine stamp of manhood, standing six feet and built in proportion. A photograph taken in his teens reveals a tall, strong youth.

One of Ernie’s first jobs would have been on Reedy Springs station, working for Frank Anning. This historic old property had been taken up by the Annings in the sixties. Ernie soon proved his worth as a stockman on the station though still only a youth; and became a trusted and valued hand.

A rather humorous incident occurred here when Ernie was entrusted to take the Anning girls out riding. Their mission was to meet someone along the road, but the visitor was delayed. Darkness fell, and out on the reed bed the mosquitoes became very troublesome. Gentleman Ernie soon had the matter in hand. "I'll make a fire," he said, "and put some cow dung on it to make a good smoke. That'll chase the mozzies!" The girls, with their gentle Victorian up-bringing, were horrified at such profanity. On regaining her composure, one of them said: "Ernest! You should say manure!"
We shall come shortly to what would have been a major episode in the life of Ernie Michelmore; and he had not yet attained the age of twenty-one years. Actually, he was most probably still working on Reedy Springs. Let us digress for a moment to see how it came about.

The late I. R. Nimmo Snr., who had bought Oak Park station from Edward Mytton in 1888, decided to send a draft of good Hereford bullocks bred on the property down to the Victorian market at Wodonga. Markets for fat cattle in the north were extremely limited at the time. A few could go to the goldfields, but the only other market of any significance was the boiling-down works in Townsville operated by a Mr. Cordingly, where good prime bullocks brought as little as 30 shillings a head.

Mr. Nimmo had spent quite some time in the Maranoa District before coming to Oak Park. He worked on both Mt Abundance and Nive Downs stations, which were under the general management of his uncle, Mr. Robinson. During this time, he would have seen a lot of cattle going from these south-western Queensland properties into both New South Wales and Victoria for sale as fats, and bringing good returns. He would have been involved in such movements from the stations mentioned, and there can be little doubt that this would have influenced his decision to send the Oak Park cattle down there.

Mr Mytton, who had purchased Wando Vale station after selling Oak Park, was sending cattle south to Wodonga for sale on a regular basis with reasonable success. Wando Vale adjoined Oak Park in those days, so Mr Nimmo would have this as an added incentive to do likewise.

Let us return then to Oak Park and the mustering of those bullocks which were to travel almost half way across Australia to market. There were few improvements on the property at the time, so a strong team of musterers would be needed to put them together. In those early days when an undertaking of this nature needed extra hands, neighbouring stations would help by lending men, which is, most likely, why we find young Michelmore over from Reedy Springs. This movement began about 1894/5 when Ernie was at just such an age to be filled with the spirit of adventure!

My father, who had come to Oak Park with Mr Nimmo to act as overseer, told me that one of his early jobs was to build some tailing yards on the property, using a small team of bullocks to haul in the timber. One of these yards was on the far south-eastern part of the run, and became known as Pine Yard. In doing this so early, I feel sure Mr Nimmo had in mind the mustering of these bullocks, as well as the yards being useful as facilities for routine mustering.
The droving route

I am going to assume that Pine Yard would have been the point of departure as these cattle left Oak Park, as the yard was large enough to hold the whole mob overnight. Those fresh bullocks would have been quite restless for the first few nights on the road, so some of the musterers would have gone with the drovers for a few days till they settled.

Now I am going to invite criticism from the knowledgeable ones as I try to trace the route followed.

I can picture them going past where Gregory Springs and Clark Hills stations are now situated, and on to Reedy Springs. There would have been no trouble watering the cattle on this route, and there are good ridges on which to camp a big mob of restless bullocks. From Reedy they would have gone to Mt Emu where they would have taken the Hughenden road—a dray track in those days—water at White Cliffs and in Galah Creek where it runs out of the Porcupine Gorge; this gorge being quite a noted tourist attraction these days!

Leaving the Hughenden road, they would cross the Flinders at about the present site of Glendower station. There could have been water here if it was early in the season. The next water would have been in Tower Hill Creek which they would follow down through Robert Christison’s Lammermoor station where this great old pioneer would have given them all possible assistance. Thence, on down Tower Hill Creek and the Tompson; then across past old Bowen Downs, Aramac, Barcaldine and across the heads of the Barcoo to Blackall. Then to Tambo following the water and best travelling on to the Nive River, and down to Nive Downs. They may have spelled here for a while.

Thus far, I have some knowledge of the route, having been down that way by car on several occasions. However, I am not going to follow them down the Warrego into New South Wales and across to Wodonga, but I feel sure that this would have been their route.
The great adventure

Those of us who are cattlemen can visualise so easily that fine mob of Hereford bullocks with their white faces, mustered and ready for the road; and can feel with those old-timers the great sense of anticipation which would be in the minds of all present as they prepared to start those 1,150 bullocks on that ambitious and epic journey. Such a large mob of big, evenly conditioned Hereford bullocks is a fine and imposing sight to the most casual observer, and Ernie Michelmore would have been proud indeed to be associated with their movement—for he had offered his services and been accepted as a drover for the trip, much to his delight! And he was to go right through with them.

What a wealth of experience the young Ernie would have gained on this trip, and what an accomplishment for one so young. In the old days round the campfire when out mustering cattle, we would listen by the hour to Ernie's tales of that great journey. He was a gifted raconteur, to which was added a rich sense of humour.

He told of keeping watch on bitterly cold nights in south west Queensland with ice on the billy cans every morning. There were the odd nights when the cattle would get a fright and run off the camp, which would bring all hands out of their swags and on to night horses to help control the mob and bring them back on to the camp. Then there were the odd times when it rained, making conditions miserable. On the whole, though, one gathered that those bullocks travelled very well, giving little trouble day or night, and that they were delivered in very good condition.

However, Ernie could not allow the occasion to pass without telling at least one story in which he came off second best. Apparently, when they had been on the road several months and the bullocks were very docile, they had them settled on night camp, not very far from where there were several tents pitched. On investigation, they found that there were quite a few people in the camp, including some ladies of doubtful reputation, and quite a bit of grog. It was apparent that, as the night wore on, a good time was being had by all—all, that is, except the disgruntled drovers. Ernie decided to do something about this, so when he went out on watch, he thought he would simulate a "rush"—stampede—by galloping his horse past the camp and yelling "Wooo back!" This he did, but he did not allow for the clothes line erected a short distance from the camp between two trees, just at the height to catch him across the midriff and lift him neatly out of the saddle! The good old night horse did not panic, so when Ernie got his wind he was able to catch his horse and resume his watch, where all had remained quiet during his performance.

There were many other stories, many of which I have long since forgotten, but quite a few of them were unprintable anyway! I have learned that on arrival at Wodonga, Ernie turned 21 years of age. It was quite something to celebrate the attainment of his majority so far from home, having just completed this notable droving feat.
Ernie arrives in Gilberton

I would imagine that, when he returned from Victoria, Ernie would have rejoined his father at Pentland for some time, and perhaps helped with the teams. It is easy to imagine that the steady, uneventful life of a teamster would have little appeal for this young stockman. In fact, it would have been something of an anti-climax after what he had just accomplished. The long droving trip just concluded would have provided sufficient funds with which to set himself up with a small plant of horses and pack gear. This would have enabled him to go in search of more active employment and, perhaps, further adventure.

Accordingly, it is not surprising that the next authentic news we have of him is making his way to the Gilberton area with a Pentland friend, Phil Ah Pan. This is an old and much respected Pentland family. Ernie would have heard of much activity in the Etheridge district with so many mines producing on the various goldfields, offering the prospect of droving fats to butchers, and possibly working on surrounding stations.

The site of the original township of Gilberton

Gilberton was, in those days, a most inhospitable place, as so many of those old goldfields were, with their extreme remoteness and frightening isolation. To their eternal credit, Ernie and others were prepared to ignore these disadvantages, for he was destined to live there and raise a family, as we shall see.

Ernie Michelmore's activities were many and varied from the time he arrived at Gilberton until he finally married and settled down. We find him driving fat bullocks from Chudleigh Park to butcher Perry at the Gilbert. That old bridle track through the ranges would be known to very few men, even today. Fats had to go from Oak Park to the Percy field as well, where, for a time, there were two butchers, Jim Clarke and the Chinese Foo Cha, who was well known in the area. With some of his Oriental colleagues, he had a flourishing vegetable garden at a place known now as Garden Spring. There was a spring there which was used to irrigate the vegetable patch, and a few old gnarled mango trees remain as mute testimony to the industry of these hardy Chinese workmen.

There was a pack horse mail service from Lyndhurst to Gilberton via Oak Park, and Ernie had this contract for a time. This old bridle track is of considerable interest as it was known as the "Back Track", being much shorter than the wagon road. This track went much more directly from Oak Park to Gilbertton, keeping much to the south of the wagon road. Crossing Yarraman Creek, the track went over on to the Gilbert fall, and about ten miles from Oak Park met a creek where there was quite a large water hole. This is known to this day as the Ten Mile Hole; and the creek, Ten Mile Creek. This creek runs into the Gilbert River many miles above Gilbertton, and from its junction the river takes a huge bend away to the south before returning north by west to Gilberton. The old track cut straight across the bend, going down another creek known as Oak Park Creek which runs into the river a short distance above Gilberton.
Mustering at Werrington

Ernie spent some time on the Percy River, horse-tailing for some miners who were working in a sparsely grassed area. Ernie camped higher up the river where the grass was better, and to protect himself from the fierce midday sun, he built a "bough shed". The place retains the name Bough Shed, and is a well-known meeting place for musterers.

At this time, the late R. L. Lethbridge was in the process of forming Werrington station; so we find Ernie working there quite often, helping with the mustering, both before and after he was married, as we shall see. He and Lux Lethbridge were great friends as they had so much in common, each respecting the ability of the other. Ernie remarked to me one day that my father could muster cattle!

Heading out on muster (photo taken in 1908)

I remember when, as a very small boy, bullock musters would be in progress at Werrington. My sister and I would ride out with black Eddie, who was mother's quite wonderful servant. We would meet the musterers at the dinner camp which was closest to home, and rather dreaded the meeting because Ernie Mich was such an inveterate tease! He would be sure to find something on your person or your equipment or your horse to be the butt of his teasing, and poor old Eddie was a prize victim! On one such occasion Lux put boiled sago on the brim of his felt hat to stiffen it—Ernie's reaction to this can well be imagined!

Werrington today

A meat works had been established at Biboora near Mareeba, providing a convenient outlet as a market for fat cattle from this area. Lux sent his bullocks there regularly for quite some years. They had to be driven to Einasleigh to be trucked from there, and Ernie had this droving job, using the Werrington plant. Lux's two good Aboriginal stockmen, Fred and Peter, would have been a great help.
Horse racing at Lyndhurst

Before he married, Ernie worked for quite some time at Oak Park. There was a horse on the station which had quite a reputation. Apparently he was a very good stock horse, like some of his kind, but especially when he was fresh he would buck and he would not be held up. If he did buck, it took a good man to ride him, and Ernie Michelmore was one of the few who could do this. This horse was named Hotspur.

In the year 1904 when A. W. Murphy was managing Oak Park, the inaugural meeting of the newly formed Lyndhurst Amateur Picnic Race Club was held. I can well imagine that it was at Ernie's suggestion that he give Hotspur some track work in preparation for the meeting, as it was quite clear that the horse had a turn of speed. Not wanting to invite trouble, he worked the horse in a stock saddle and was both pleased and impressed with his pace when timed, and his general behaviour on the track was good. He appeared to enjoy galloping on the track even when placed in the company of other horses.

Ernie was much too heavy to ride as a jockey, but there was no trouble in finding a rider for the horse. Charlie Paine Snr., a foundation member of the Club, volunteered to ride him. At the time of the trials when it was suggested that he ride the horse in a stock saddle, Charlie declared that he would be pounds overweight, and said, "Put a pad on him and I'll see how he goes." With some reluctance, Ernie put a pad on him and led him round a lot to get him accustomed to the feel of it. He admired and respected Charlie Paine's courage, for everyone knew this horse's reputation. Charlie mounted, and strangely, the horse behaved wonderfully and ran a good trial.

The horse was nominated for his first start in a WWFA race with performed horses. I think Ernie and Alick Murphy showed good judgement here. Even though it might have been a bit much to expect the horse to win such a race, at least he could be expected to behave better in such a field than with a field of maiden horses which might play up and cause trouble.

When the great day arrived, everyone held his breath as Ernie legged Charlie up, but with a friendly pat on the neck and stroke from forehead to withers, Charlie rode him round the saddling paddock and took him out on to the track to do his preliminary. The sigh of relief from the crowd was almost audible as the horses made their way to the starting post to be sent on their way by the late R. L. Lethbridge, who was official starter for the Club for many years. The race was The Fulford Plate over 6 furlongs and resulted in a close finish. Though unplaced, Hotspur was well up in the field in this close finish, and had run very truly. He went out in the afternoon and ran third in the Consolation Race.

Was it like this?

At subsequent meetings he was tried over most distances, and was placed on several occasions—his best performance possibly was a second in a 4 furlong race. All credit then to Ernie, and to Charlie Paine for riding him. These old chaps were game men!
The Martels come to Gilberton

It's now time to introduce the other important family in this story: the Martels.

Thomas Stephen Martel was born in Guernsey on 8th January, 1842. He came to Australia aboard the Abdalla in 1855, and his marriage to Lydia Abigail Jones (who came from Plymouth, England) took place in Rockhampton on 10th March, 1867. At this time he was already established as a teamster, his father having been a farmer in Guernsey.

It is not known with any certainty just when the Martels first came to Gilberton, but we have documented evidence to show that they were well established there in the year 1871. An old file of the "Port Denison Times" of Bowen gave an account of the murder by Aborigines of John Corbett, a storekeeper of Gilberton, in June 1871. In the inquest held at the Court House in Gilberton, it is most interesting to find Tom Martel testifying to the fact that he was carrying between Western Creek and Gilberton and had unyoked his team to camp for the night when Corbett rode up and asked the distance to the upper crossing of the Robertson River. Martel, who had seen a large number of tribesmen during the day, suggested that Corbett remain with him for the night, but Corbett declined, saying he would press on to the upper crossing. From this, it would appear that Tom Martel was the last white man to see poor Corbett alive.

Actually, it was Tom Martel who found the Corbett's body and his horses and reported the occurrence to the police. The pack horse was still carrying the pack wherein there was a considerable quantity of gold, which was taken into custody at Western Creek. Constable Kincaid reported that Tom Martel had cooperated willingly and most commendably during the whole unfortunate occurrence.

It was the death of Corbett, together with several other spears culminating in a planned attack on the town itself, which caused the evacuation of the whole of the white population from Gilberton, and the Martels would have been among those who left the place. These facts lead me to believe that Tom Martel did build a stone fortress which was part of his house; and when added police protection enabled the white people to return, he took up residence in this same house.

Historians tell us that Gilberton was the only established white settlement of any size which had to be evacuated due to the constant menace of war-like Aborigines, which, I feel, is not surprising. The very nature of the surrounding country with mountain fastnesses close by made it possible for the tribesmen to retreat to safety from reprisals. And there were reprisals of a bloody nature by the Native Mounted Police, which tended to increase the hostility of the Aborigines still further.

I realise that I have devoted considerable space to the early settlement of Gilberton and to the dangers confronting the hardy frontiersmen and women from the war—such as the tribesmen who inhabited the mountain fastnesses nearby. However, I feel that it played a vital part in the early lives of those of whom I write.
The Martel family

We have no other details of Tom Martel's life at Gilberton in those early days. His main occupation was in the carrying business with many trips to and from Western Creek. It could be assumed as well that he would have done trips to and from Townsville, carting supplies for the storekeepers and others. Townsville was the newly developed port supplying goldfields and cattle stations over a vast area of the north, via the old Harvey's Range Road. I seem to remember someone telling me that he was in partnership for a time with his son-in-law, Harry Perry, in a butchering business. Perry owned a store and had a block of country nearby called Perryvale, where he ran some cattle.

There was an Aborigine stockman who worked for my father on Werrington for many years. His name was Fred and he worked for Perry when he was a youth. He was a splendid example of the loyal old Aborigine stockmen of those days, and a consummate cattleman. He may have told me of the butchering.

There would have been battery machinery to be carted to the field from various places including the Cape River. In passing, I would love to know the history of that old iron wheel, part of some battery machinery, lying partly broken in a gully near Clark's Paddock on the old wagon road from Oak Park to Gilberton. It must have broken loose and fallen off a wagon; and being cast, would have cracked when it hit the ground. Was it bound for Gilberton or the Percy—and, if so, imagine the costly delay awaiting a replacement. Did it fall off a Martel wagon? Only a trivial thing, you say, but it would have been a matter of major concern for those involved. It remains as just one of the occurrences in the history of our land, the story of which we may never know.

Elizabeth Mary, the eldest of Tom and Lydia's children, was born in Rockhampton in 1868. On evacuating Gilberton they moved to Georgetown, where Tom became a soda water manufacturer in 1874. Here their son Thomas Ernest was born in 1875. The rest of the family, as far as we know, was born at Gilberton. Among these was Ernie's future wife, Lydia Abigail Martel, born in the old stone house on 7th June 1882. Her two brothers Henry Alfred and Albert Edward were also born in Gilberton.

By the time Henry was born on 13th March 1885, this pioneer couple had lost eight children—one male and seven females. As far as we know, they all died at birth, or soon afterwards, at Gilberton. From information we have, the father had to assist his wife at some of these births in the absence of anyone else. We hesitate to contemplate the physical suffering, and indeed our imagination pales at the thought of the mental anguish as this brave couple lost child after child in the absence of professional help. Later years saw them lose yet another son and daughter in infancy, making a total of ten. There can be no doubt that the Rev. John Flynn knew of similar cases, which resulted ultimately in the formation of the Royal Flying Doctor Service.

Memorial to Rev. John Flynn, founder of the Royal Flying Doctor Service
The Martels move to Christmas Hill

As time went on into the mid-eighties of last century, it seemed reasonable to suppose that mining operations would continue for some time, not only at the Gilbert, but also at the later fields of The Percy, Mt Hogan, Ortona, etc. Tom Martel reasoned apparently that if he could breed a few cattle for slaughter near the scene of operations, it would be no problem and entail little expense to drive fats to the fields. We find him, then, leaving Gilberton and moving to a place on a branch of what was known to the teamsters as the Styx River—now known as Sawpit Creek—and the branch on which Martel settled became known as Christmas Hill Creek. The origin of such names is always a matter of historical interest, and should be preserved for posterity.

A party of miners was travelling from Gilberton along the old wagon road which passed close by Tom Martel’s new selection. They were on their way to spend Christmas amid the social amenities of Townsville and they camped on what we now know as George’s Gully. As they waited for the billy to boil we find them washing a few dishes of dirt from a gully nearby, as was the habit of such men. Imagine their surprise when they found good traces of gold—but we have no record as to whether they continued on their way to spend Christmas in Townsville, or pegged claims and began to work the gully! There is a hill at the head of the gully where the mother lode was discovered later, and yielded gold assay ing as much as 5 ounces a ton. Hence Christmas Hill and Christmas Hill Creek.

It is a sparsely watered region, making it necessary to sink a well in the creek, where a reasonable supply of water was found for the house and a few stock. It must have been a quite substantial cottage built on low blocks, many of which can still be seen. A stockyard was built, but there were no paddocks, making it necessary to keep some horses in hobbles. It is much better quality country than round Gilberton, with better quality grasses.

Christmas Hill

It was not long after he settled here that Tom Martel built a tailing yard for Mr Nimmo of Oak Park. It was vacant country at the time the yard was built, but there were no boundary fences to prevent cattle from straying up there. Quite soon afterwards the area was opened for leasehold and became part of R. L. Lethbridge’s Werrington Station. Tom had some of the young members of his family with him as he camped on this job, for I remember my father telling me that the dingoes were quite cheeky round the camp. When Tom rode to Oak Park for rations and beef, the young ones would climb a tree to await his return!
Tragedy at Oakville

I have ever found it a matter for wonder as to how many informal amateur picnic race meetings were held in those early days. I feel that this is one of the many things which go to illustrate the indomitable spirit which prevailed among these old-timers, both men and women. No amount of hardship was going to prevent them from having their bit of fun!

In these modern times, if a man wants to take his family anywhere, he simply fuels his modern Land Cruiser (which is fitted with air-conditioning, stereo radio, electrically-controlled side and rear windows, etc., etc.) and loads up. Then, as happens all too often, they are on their way before the engine has been given time to get the oil circulating!

In the time of which I write, most people had quite large families, so it had to be a buggy and pair, or even a four-in-hand. With few if any paddocks, the horses had to be found, and the womenfolk busy preparing food that would keep without refrigeration, and bake a lot of bread. In short, quite a lot of preparation requiring a lot of energy—and there were no Eskies to keep the drinks cool!

On 1st January 1895 just such a meeting was held at Oakville, which was a small mining settlement near the present Robin Hood station. We can picture a happy crowd gathered there in anticipation of a bit of fun, for they were not to know that tragedy was about to strike that lonely outpost.

At about 11 am the horses went out to start in the Maiden Plate, with Tom Martel Snr. mounted on his own horse. They got away well, but soon after the start Martel's horse bolted out of control and ran off the track, smashing into a box tree. The rider was killed almost instantly from fearful head injuries.

I leave it to the reader to imagine the terrible shock sustained by all present at this terrible tragedy, and especially by the family, some of whom were still quite young; and the feeling of gloom which would be cast over this otherwise happy gathering scarcely bears contemplation. Daughter Lydia was just twelve years old when she faced this tragic event in her life.

An enquiry into the accident was held next day, and Tom Martel Jnr., who was first to reach his father's side after the fall, stated in his testimony that the horse his father was riding was a vicious beast and not safe to ride. This is just another instance demonstrating the gameness of these men of that era who never knew the meaning of the word "fear" when it came to riding horses.

After their father's death the young folk carried on at Christmas Hill, though at the time of the tragedy Tom Jnr. was mining at Mt Hogan. I feel sure he would have gone home to join the others soon afterwards. There were Tom, Henry, Albert and Lydia, and their mother was with them.

I pause here to pay tribute to the memory of this courageous woman who had migrated from England, as we have seen. We can picture her as she stepped ashore after that long sea trip with a heart full of wonder and hope as she contemplated life in this new land. We have no details as to why or when she came to Queensland until we learn of her marriage to Tom Martel. From this point enough has been written to demonstrate that she could take her place with distinction in the forefront of that noble band of women whose loyalty, fortitude, and great courage in adversity played a major part with their husbands in the pioneering of this country.
Ernie marries

We hear of Lydia even at this tender age, driving fats to butchers at The Percy and Mt Hogan. She would be riding side-saddle with possibly a faithful blackboy to help her. She was a splendid horsewoman and rider, and a top hand with stock. As time went on she rode astride and I remember her so well in her divided skirt with such a neat seat on a horse, and with splendid hands.

Hands, tired hands; when the reins are useless bands
On a mad brute going faster: it's a toss-up who is master,
And it's then you'll meet disaster if you do not have
The saving gift of hands! Anon.

With their station quite close to the old Oak Park—Gilberton road, one day we find these brave young pioneers after the death of their father, with a pen full of calves to be branded. They had already begun operations with Lydia working one leg rope, when a very smart looking young man rode up to the yard. He was passing through with his horses and packs. He took one look at what was going on and, after securing his horse plant, he vaulted the stockyard fence and took Lydia's rope out of her hands quite gently—remarking the while that it was no job for a girl! You've guessed it: He was none other than Ernest Michelmore. So we wonder if this was where the romance first started, for in 1904 Ernest H. Michelmore married Lydia Martel in Hughenden.

So we now find Ernie in the early years of a brand new century. In 1904, not only did he race the notorious Oak Park buckjumper, Hotspur, at Lyndhurst but also there was his marriage later in the same year—easily the most important event in an eventful life.

Ernie would have been about 29 and Lydia 22 when they married; and we find them in 1906/7 making their first home, "Elmgrove", at Gilberton. This was situated up the river some distance above and on the opposite side from the old town site; actually, about opposite what is known as The Danish Hole. Here, they built a house and yard for horses and cattle, and were able to keep a few cows for milking and some domestic fowls. Thus for a time they were able to sell milk and butter as well as beef and eggs to the few miners who were still working some claims on the field, their ore being crushed in the one battery still working and managed, I think, by Jack Magallan. Ernie may have been able to use a slaughter yard used by earlier butchers as well as, possibly, a shop.

Milking time

Ernie's humorous streak was never far below the surface; so perhaps I could be forgiven for including this rather funny tale. Ernie was helping Lydia with the milking one morning, his main job being the bailing up of the cows. When his wife was not looking, he tied two cows' tails together with just a few hairs from each tail and called out, "Hey Mum, which one will you back?" With a deft sidestep he was able to avoid the milking stool which flew harmlessly past his head. Lydia may have thought that the tails were more securely tied, so was not, at first, amused!
The Martels disperse

We cannot say with any certainty just when the Martel family abandoned the station at Christmas Hill, but it could have been about 1910/13.

It was at about this time that Henry left the district and went to Townsville and purchased a cab which he drove for hire. Tom went to Pentland where he took up a property, Betts Vale, where, among other things, he bred horses for the Indian market. As already stated, he married Edith, Ernie's half-sister and they had eight children, of whom one son is still living in Atherton. All the mining fields were being deserted by the above-mentioned dates; consequently, there was little incentive to carry on, with so many on such a small holding.\textsuperscript{15}

We have no details as to how the assets were divided when they all finally split up, but we know that Lydia acquired a fair share of the cattle. She was able to take up country under Occupation Licence down near Gilberton and moved the cattle down there where there was, at least, more water.

We know as well that after their marriage Lydia and Ernie stayed for some time at Christmas Hill before moving down to Gilberton in 1906. This could have been when Lydia took her share of the cattle with Ernie to help her. We old-timers remember with considerable affection the old L4F which was her brand, and the N4F which was Ernie's brand. He transferred this brand to his daughter, Florence, in 1929.

There were no boundary fences so the cattle ranged far and wide. By now, Lux Lethbridge of Werrington had acquired a large block of country on the Gilbert River which was O. L. tenure as well, and joined that held by Lydia. Over a long period of time they used to join forces in mustering, and shared the problem of making water for the cattle, bailing out of sand wells in the river-bed during dry times.

I can remember Ernie telling me that some time after their marriage he and Lydia spent a second honeymoon, as he called it, riding round the country checking on their cattle, and one day when we were mustering together he pointed out a spot on Bridle Gorge Creek which he called Honeymoon Flat. I regret sometimes when I realise that the place no longer goes by that name!

I have ever been grateful for the company of men who, no matter how hard they battled on for years under extreme hardship, were able to retain their innate sense of humour. It is a priceless gift, especially in the tough life of bushmen; and I will refer again to this matter later in the story. The Michelmores and their children after them never ever lost their sense of independence and great dignity, no matter what the odds.

This great bush woman possessed a heart of gold, filled with human kindness. Friend and traveller alike were welcome to whatever she and Ernie could offer at their quite humble little home. Many an old fossicker down on his luck would be given the means whereby he could carry on a little longer, or make his way back to civilisation. She had many bush remedies, and this, backed by common sense and great skill, saved many a life—as when Harry Hoolihan was bitten by a brown snake.
The Michelmore family grows

Ernie and Lydia had a family of six children, and in order of arrival they were:

Thomas Philip b. 22 January 1905 at Pentland
Florence Josephine b. 13 May 1907 in Georgetown
Bertha b. 22 July 1913 at Gilberton
Lydia Abigail b. 26 September 1918 at Forsayth

Mrs Cooper was available to assist at Bertha's birth. She had nursing experience and was a good midwife.

There were two other children whom they lost. One, Albert Edward born 9th August 1909 at Percyville, died at the Einasleigh Hospital when he was only four months old. It was said that he bled to death after circumcision, thanks to a drunken doctor. The little girl Rose, born at Gilberton on 11th August 1911, died at birth. Lydia Michelmore never spared herself when it came to strenuous work. Having known her so well, I strongly suspect that she was overdoing it during pregnancy.

They were left, then, with four healthy children—the first four listed. It is not my province in this story to follow closely the destinies of the three surviving girls except to say that they all made good marriages. Florence married Dalton Hoolihan, a son of a well-known carrier in the district. The wedding was at Kidston on 27th August 1929, and they had four children—Ernest, Adelaide, Kevin and Jean. It was sad indeed for them when they lost their eldest boy, Ernest, from rheumatic fever. He died on 15th October, 1948 at the Cairns Base Hospital and is buried in the Cairns Cemetery. He was 17 years old.

Happily, the three other children are still with us, all are married and have families: Kevin married Marion Southall and lives on the old family property, Gum Flat; Jean married Syd Smerdon of Normanton; and Adelaide married Robert Gustave French (Gus) and has two sons, Trevor and Robert. In 1986 Robert married Lynette Croker and settled at Gilberton on a site on the river immediately opposite where the original Michelmore home, Elmgrove, stood. They have two children, Kerri-Ann and Ashley.

Thus we find fourth generation members of the family still engaged in pastoral pursuits on the same area, Gus and Adelaide having purchased the property some years ago.

We have yet to mention the two other Michelmore girls, Bertha and Lydia. Bertha married William Frank Wyatt, an Englishman, on 2nd August, 1939 at Kidston and there are six children of the marriage—Frank, Tom, Barbara, Rupert, Dulcie and Marion. Lydia married William T. Fitzsimmons of Forsayth on 3rd September, 1938 and they have four children—Clive, Sandra, Dudley and Philip. Clive was a motor mechanic with J. I. Case Co.
Hard times ...

It was the big flood of 1917 which quite literally washed the Michelmores out of their home at Elmgrove. As a temporary measure they took refuge in an old disused store building on the old town site. This was quite uncomfortable, but at least it afforded them shelter as the very heavy wet season rains of that year continued to pour down on them.

As soon as time permitted, they built another home again up the river, but on the same side as the old town site, just below the junction of Granite Creek. This position has proved safe from floods, and there was room here to build a stockyard and outbuildings. This was to remain the Michelmore home to the present day, but as time went on many additions and renovations were made. Tom Michelmore's wife, Eva, is still in residence.16

Before passing on, it should be recorded that as well as the Mrs. Cooper already mentioned, there was a Mrs. Hosford who lived at Percyville. She was a tower of strength in delivering babies and nursing the sick throughout the district. The presence of these women with nursing experience in those remote outposts was a great comfort to everyone, especially the womenfolk, so they deserve special mention as a tribute, in a story such as this. Actually, it was Mrs. Hosford who helped the original Mrs. J. R. Nimmo of Oak Park station when several of her children were born there.

It was necessary in those early days to keep most of their horses hobbled as there were no paddocks. It was a constant job looking after the horses and bailing water for them when surface water in the river dried up. Greenhide hobble straps had to be made, together with halters and ropes. Ernie was an expert at this work, and I still remember him showing me quite a few skills in plaiting a rope. The dictates of necessity made him become a quite competent saddler to line pack- and riding saddles and repair gear generally. He would make his own beeswax.

At this time, the only access to Gilberton was by the old, deeply rutted road. The Michelmores had a buggy and a dray to cart timber and firewood. The buggy was used occasionally to go to Kidston for supplies, but to drive a buggy or a four-in-hand over that road was an extremely rough experience and very hard on the horses. There were two stores trading in Kidston at the time. Alf Jago and H. O. Smith were the storekeepers as well as Abdul Hoosain who had a small mixed business. Abdul moved his business to Einasleigh when Kidston was on the wane, and went on trading there for many years, having quite a strong clientele with people from the surrounding stations as well as local residents, especially while the copper mine was working.

On numerous occasions, then, we find Mum Michelmore (as she was affectionately known to many) on her way with several pack horses to Kidston for supplies, accompanied by one of her children to help, when they were old enough. The place known as "Mum's Flat" on the way to Kidston takes its name quite obviously as having been one of her camping places. Ernie would remain at home, bailing water for horses and caretaking generally.

From early records we learn that a State School was opened in Kidston in 1911 with a Mr Stormonth as teacher—and then came Sam Favel, who taught there for the next three years. Sam was well known in sporting circles, being a fine tennis player as well as a very good cricketer. We learn from her own writings that Bertha Wyatt, nee Michelmore, boarded for a time with the Yeo family in Kidston while she attended school there. (John Yeo was the local blacksmith.) Perhaps other members of the Michelmore family had some schooling in Kidston, though Ernie's son Tom told me that he had very little opportunity for any schooling; but more of this later.
... and harder still

It was inevitable that, owing to their lifestyle and circumstances, the Michelmores would be faced with the grim spectre of real poverty. Low cattle prices and droughts would reduce them to the stage where it was necessary to get some dingo scalps and possum skins to provide the bare necessities of life; and with low prices for gold at the time, there was little incentive and too much uncertainty to try to make ends meet by this means.

At such a time we find Ernie lying full length on a big flat rock in the Bismuth Gorge on the Gilbert River, looking down on a nest of small dingo pups playing in the mouth of a cave just below him. He had with him some small kangaroo-liver baits nicely laced with strychnine. He needed to exercise great skill with his timing as he dropped the baits, but with his knowledge of the habits of dingo pups, he was able to see that each one got a bait. Yes! He got them all, so that was a couple of bags of flour, anyway!

Dingo pups

Then we find son Tom, who by now was old enough, camped at Dinner Hill on Gorge Creek where there were some good Queensland Blue possums. Tom did quite well here, with several dozen prime skins, and they were bringing good money at the time.

We have seen already that when possible Ernie took jobs on Werrington and elsewhere to help out; and I remember it was on one such occasion that he and my brother, King, were the first to open up a well for bailing at the junction of Horse Creek. That was in 1928.

It could have been at this time that they yarded a big cleanskin mickey in the old Wire Yard which was a very big tailing yard built, for the record, by R. L. Lethbridge, Hugh McLeod and Fred Abo, in 1902. There was no smaller yard in which to brand, but King had the brands and ropes with him. Ernie suggested that he climb into a bushy pine tree near the centre of the yard, taking the headrope and tying it to a low branch of the tree. The idea was for him to drop the noose over the bull's head as King drove the cattle under the tree, then jump down and help King throw the bull. He was sitting in the fork of the tree with one leg hanging down the trunk, and roped the bull first try. The roped bull then proceeded to bind Ernie's leg to the tree by running round the tree! However, he did not have to yell for mercy for long, as King was able to "unwind" the bull and so free Ernie's leg. No real damage resulted. Incidentally, the trunk of this tree is now a corner post in the modern drafting yard built near the river, but it retains the name "Wire Yard".

In a story such as this, I feel the writer must try to avoid tiresome detail and avoid as well the tendency to become morbidly sentimental in dwelling on hardships and tribulations faced by this pioneer family throughout their lifetime. Let there be no mistake, however; life was never easy for the Michelmores. One never ceases to admire the great fortitude and strength of character displayed by these people as they lived on to face, at times, almost impossible odds.
Ernie's tracking skills

Let us return to that muster of which I wrote when Ernie took that nasty fall at Duck Hole Yard. The mob of L4F bullocks was being mustered to go to Greenvale station. Jim Atkinson had bought them, and Ernie and family had to deliver them there with little other assistance. They would be paid 4 pounds a head, delivered, and the bullocks would have averaged 650 to 700 lb dressed weight. Cattle were hard to sell at the time, which was why the Michelmores were in quite straitened circumstances, pending this sale. I have forgotten details, though I remember Ernie was doing the tailing as we mustered, with a young lad helping him. And Mum said we just had to find the L bullock. This was a beast Lux Lethbridge had ear-marked, castrated, and put the L of his 5LU (horizontal) brand on him, not having a 4 and F to complete the brand. He was running on Anning's Creek but we found him, and the mob was duly delivered.

Cattle branding (photo taken about 1900)

One day as we were putting some fresh bullocks from the day's mustering into his tailing mob, I remember Ernie saying, "See that young ——**—— letting the lead get too far from the tail when they are feeding. Doesn't he know that they will all look up directly, and either the lead will run back to the tail or the tail will run up to the lead!" All these finer points with the handling of cattle were as second nature to Ernie. He had learned the game the hard way as we have seen, on a trip with bullocks nearly halfway across Australia.

Then there was the time when an old Aborigine (Werrington Fred's father) was reported missing as he was footwalking from Oak Park to Gilberton. After much tracking on those hard granite ridges, Ernie found him—or what was left of him—out near Bell Flat. I recall the rails on forked sticks surrounding his grave, but with many bush fires there remains no trace today. It was said that the old fellow perished, but I feel this could not have been the case. The Gilbert River was but a short distance from where he was found and the old chap would have known this. I think it more likely that he was a victim of some "bone pointing". It was his superb bushmanship which enabled Ernie to find several men who were lost in the mountain fastnesses surrounding Gilberton, and he was one of the few old-timers who knew the old pack track from Gilberton to Woolgar.

There came a time when the two old trusted black servants from Oak Park were on "walkabout" and were wanted by the police. Billie and Nordie had committed no crime, but the idea was to transport them to Palm Island Settlement to spend their declining years. Billie would have none of this. He was a descendant of either the lana or Tagalag tribes who had made life untenable for the miners at Gilberton all those years ago, and he mistrusted the sea. They took to the ranges round Gilberton and the police never found them. Ernie was in complete sympathy with the old black couple and he knew where they were. Of course, they lived off the land as they were well able to do; but Ernie kept them supplied with some "white man tucker" and tobacco, which made life easier for them. I do not remember the sequel to this story as it was many long years ago, but I knew both Billie and Nordie very well.
Another of Ernie's stories

In common with many bushmen of that era, Ernie smoked a pipe with the good old Dark Havelock Tobacco Plug. It is strange, but I never heard of any of those old-timers dying of lung cancer or suffering any disability whatever from pipe smoking. I think that old Havelock Plug was pure tobacco and did not contain any of the impurities to be found in the modern commercial cigarettes which are killing so many people.

Your choice of tobacco

One could go on relating stories of incidents occurring in the lives of the Michelmores, but perhaps enough has been written to give a picture of life as they knew it, up to the time this fine couple approached middle age. However, I leave the reader with one last little story which is quite humorous in retrospect, but not all that funny, perhaps, for those involved.

My brother, King, was camped with Ernie and "Mum" again at Duck Hole Yard. It was in the dry time of year, so they had with them only an old tent-fly. A sudden storm blew up during the night, so with a few old tent sticks which were lying round the camp they rigged the tent-fly and all got under it for shelter. When they were all comfortably settled, except for a few leaks through the old canvas, the ridge pole broke—and the campers were all enveloped in wet canvas! No one was directly under the pole, so all escaped injury. Ernie was the first to crawl out from under and called out, "Are you there, Mum?"

"Of course I'm here, you silly ——**———, where do you think I'd be?"

A pause of quite a few seconds before Ernie replied, "Just my luck!" That inveterate humour was never far below the surface, no matter what the odds.

Next day they were having lunch at the junction of Anning's Creek. When Mum went into the river to fill her quart pot, she became bogged to the waist in quicksand, and King had to help her out. It was just then when Ernie rode up and turning to King said, "A man can't leave his missus with you young ——**———s for five minutes without you bogging her in quicksand!"

Great days—and wonderful people!
Tom Michelmore

From the time he was old enough, Tom, their son, had been a tower of strength, and naturally, as his parents grew older, his responsibilities increased proportionately with his care of them and of his sisters till they married. His parents could be justly proud for having produced such a man as their son.

I make absolutely no apology for this slight digression. Indeed, I am delighted to have the opportunity to pay a tribute so richly deserved.

Tom Michelmore was a highly intelligent man, and I have yet to meet one of finer character. As I have written, he devoted his life, quite literally and in the most selfless manner, to the care of his family to the bitter end; and I am proud indeed to remember him as my friend. We spent weeks on hard musters on the Gilbert working very short-handed because we could not afford to employ much labour in those hard times, and of course we fought drought on more times than I care to remember. It was superb bushmanship which enabled Tom to find water in the most unlikely place in the river when we had exhausted all the known waters higher up. This prevented what would have been an absolute disaster, for there proved to be enough water here to water upwards of 3000 head of cattle in the emergency, till it rained, with the supply showing no signs of diminishing.

There is another great proving ground for friendship when you share several trips on the road droving cattle in all sorts of weather. You would be having a bit of trouble on watch at night with the cattle walking about and you trotting, trying to keep them together. He hears your horse trotting and you could be sure that he would be the first to come out of the warmth of his swag, get on a horse and help you to settle them down. Then, when there was real trouble with the cattle "rushing" (stampeding) off camp, you knew that pure instinct would find him where he was most needed, even if he had been sound asleep in his swag when they "went".

The cook at work

When he had the thankless job of cook on the road droving, in charge of the pack plant with a horse-tailer to help him, you knew that you could leave that responsible job entirely to him; there would be no need for you to worry. You remember the tasty meals he could prepare and have ready when you reached night-camp with the mob, in all sorts of weather, and you were tired and hungry, and sometimes wet and cold. And, above all, you remember his continuing cheerful disposition, no matter what the odds.

Then, you develop toothache on the road, which always seemed to be worse at night when you were on watch! You were always too healthy to bother to carry any medicine yourself, not even an Aspirin! Tom had some Sloan's Liniment in his swag. "Put a bit of that on it, Jack; it might stop it—if it doesn't poison you!" By now I am ready to try anything. Toothache when watching cattle at night is no fun, but next night at The Lakes, the toothache stopped!
Tom's education

We trucked the cattle at Prairie. While we were trucking we had our pack horses unpacked and tied up in the shade some distance from the yard. When we returned to the horses to pack up after trucking, we found that pack mare "Silver" had pulled away, breaking the halter-shank but leaving about five feet of the shank hanging in front of her, on which she would tread sometimes as she walked; and by jerking her head upwards, she would pull it out from under her foot. Tom and I saddled our horses and went in search.

There were a great many horses on the big Common at Prairie, none of them being shod, and neither was Silver; but it was Tom who picked up her track and found her. He saw where she had followed some horses out along a dusty cattle pad and she was treading occasionally on the halter-shank and dragging it out from under her foot as I have described. This left a peculiar mark—if you were a good enough tracker to see it! It was a slender piece of evidence but it was all Tom needed.

I have written that Tom had little formal schooling, save to mention the very infrequent visits of itinerant teachers who were Government sponsored and visited those far-flung places with a buggy and pair. One visit was about as much as you could expect from such a service acting on an annual basis. He realised, however, that he must acquire some general education to enable him to carry on in a fast developing world. This he proceeded to do by diligent reading of suitable books. The outcome was that few bushmen possessed a better general education.

He could write fluently, both personal and business letters; and converse with assurance on practically any subject which might arise in any company. He had more than a nodding acquaintance with radio and motor mechanics including the electrics, and was able, when he came to acquire motor vehicles, to keep them in good running order. He was one of the very first to have transceiver radio in the district; in touch firstly with the Cairns Aerial Ambulance, and later, of course, with the Flying Doctor Service. He was a very active and helpful supporter of these great services. I have no hesitation in repeating what I have written already, and that is that the Royal Flying Doctor Service has made a major contribution to the development of Outback Australia.

I saw quite a few of the books Tom used to read. They included, as well as text books, novels from the higher literary field. However, I admit to some surprise when I glanced over his shoulder one day, to see what he was reading and saw the title: *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. I have read that book, and can assure readers who may not have done so that it is quite heavy going!
Tom's humour

However—and I think this most important—with all this deep reading and self-application, and no matter how impossible the odds against him, Tom never ever lost the delightful sense of humour inherited from his father. No matter where or in what company, he was a fine raconteur and mimic. Fruity laughter could be heard round camp fires both mustering and droving, resulting from his inimitable skill as a storyteller, with mimicry thrown in where needed.

Quite a few of those humorous stories were based on the antics of the old Aboriginal stockmen for whom Tom, and indeed all of us, had a very high regard. Some of these stories have appeared in my previous writings, but for those who have not come across them, I am going to include two here quite briefly as a tribute to the memory of Tom; and to illustrate how he could turn a quite ordinary incident into a subject for real mirth.

He had just arrived at Werrington to join the mustering camp. Next morning at the station he offered to do the milking. He could not be expected to know the calves, so Peter (quite old and very much a Myall) was detailed to help. The job proceeded quite smoothly until Peter released what he thought was the right calf, but the calf ran across the yard and began to suck another cow.

"Hey, Peter—that the wrong calf!"

Peter looked at the offending calf for quite a few seconds before replying, "Aw, Tom. That silly bugger don't know his own mother!"

We can imagine Tom’s amusement for, as cattlemen, we all know that a calf never—but never—makes such a mistake. Nor will a cow allow a strange calf to suck without a protesting kick!

We were riding away from our camp at Pine Yard one morning, going mustering with some of us on green colts. My old blackboy, Charlie, was one, and his colt was weaving about a lot, going any way but straight. "How your colt goin’, Charlie?"

"Or, he orright, Tom; but he only got the one mouth!" Yes, reader, the colt was a bit one-sided.

You needed to hear Tom tell these stories!
The 1926 drought

I can come into the picture now and tell you that this was possibly the worst drought which had occurred in our district up to that time. It was not because of acute shortage of water. By now we were used to sinking sand wells in the river-bed and bailing for the cattle; but in 1926 there was literally no feed. Naturally, the area along the full length of the river was the worst affected. This compounded the problem for we depended on the river in those days for water, where the various bailing sites were located. And at this time there was no way to procure feed, even for our working horses.

The year is significant for another reason. Tom Michelmore had his 21st birthday during this year, and what a celebration! By now his father was 51 and his mother 43—no longer young—as they set about to try to save some cattle from this crippling drought.

There was some rough feed away from the river where few cattle lived. Such a place was up Anning's Creek. Leaving their camp at Red Bar early one morning, Tom and his father rode up there taking a prospecting bar, and found quite an area of sand with a few feet of water under it, in a hole in the creek.

They decided to take tools and sink a well and rig a "whip" for bailing, with a couple of hollow logs scarfed out to use as troughing. Most of their cattle were already at Red Bar; so with help from Mum and possibly one of the girls, they moved them all up to this new well where Ernie camped to do the bailing.

There was no soakage in Anning's Creek, so it was quite obvious that this supply of water would not last long with a body of cattle on it, and so it proved. Here, then, was a desperate situation, but these people were not easily daunted. They knew that there was a good spring of water up in Penny's Pocket. There was fair feed up that way, too; so they moved the cattle up there. That sounds easy, dear reader; but go and see the country over which they would have to take those cattle! They knew about all there was to know about handling cattle and this was fortunate because there were few of them to do the job, and the cattle would not be keen to go any further away from their home run. They would need to conserve every ounce of energy their poor horses possessed. There was no way to procure feed for them so they would have to exist on the scanty natural grasses.
I feel that I owe it to posterity to digress once again from the main theme, for there are so few of us left who know from whence the name "Penny's Pocket" originated. This story in itself would rank highly as an epic endeavour which occurred in those stirring days at the turn of the century.

The late Tom Penny had cattle and horses at Mt Hogan or thereabouts when the drought of 1902 forced him to seek elsewhere for water for his few stock. This was just before Lux Lethbridge took up that large area on the Upper Gilbert; so it was, then, vacant country.

Tom Penny went firstly over on to what we now know as Pinnacle Creek; and at what we now know as The Cattle Camp he put in a "Micory" to get water. This was achieved by a great deal of shoveling sand to make a sloping walkway down to water level with logs placed to hold back the sand. As with Anning's Creek this was only a rock hole, so did not last long.

In the meantime, he went over on to the upper Gilbert but found all the semi-permanent water holes in the river were dry.

Accordingly, he went on up the river and put in another Micory just below the present Wire Yard on Glenmore. He did this before the water at Pinnacle cut out, as he realised it would.

The stock were moved then on to this Micory in the river. Here again it was obvious that it was only a rock hole and would not last. We find Penny, then, taking long, hot rides up the river in search of more water.

It was on one such ride that he decided to look along the foot of the massive conglomerate wall which is the northern edge of the huge mountain range which divides the waters of the Flinders and Gilbert Rivers. He knew from experience that springs were to be found associated with these conglomerate walls, and so it was that he found the mouth of the very large "pocket" which bears his name.

In those days the spring in the pocket was much stronger than it is now, and for this reason he must have seen good indications of water where the creek emerges from the pocket; otherwise there is little inducement to go further up the creek for it is quite rough.

Actually, by looking about, there was quite a good track to be found entering the pocket; so he went on in and was delighted to find such a handsome stream of water. He was able to water his thirsty horse, fill his water bag, and return to the Micory down the river—quite a long ride. The next move, of course, was to take the cattle up there.

I think he may have sold what remained of this lot of cattle; and years afterwards he had property in the Prairie district.

We used to truck cattle more or less regularly at Prairie, years ago. In those days there was a younger son, Nicol Penny, who was Common Ranger at Prairie. He was a fine horseman and had some very good horses which he rode as hacks and hunters at the local shows. We valued his services greatly, and he obviously delighted in helping us to yard our bullocks at the trucking yard. They never yarded well there, so it was good to have such a good man well-mounted, to help. He did this quite gratuitously, obviously enjoying the opportunity to work a favourite horse.
I do hope that my readers have enjoyed the small diversion on the origin of Penny's Pocket, as I return to the main theme with the Michelmores settling their cattle down on the spring where there was still a good stream of water.

These brave people now faced yet another menace to their stock. Heartleaf Poison grew in profusion in the Pocket and on surrounding ridges, right over on to the head of Gorge Creek which, incidentally, was a little-known area at that time. They spent days grubbing the poison from near the water but there was so much of it. In the event, however, I don't think they lost many cattle from the poison, possibly because there had not been a fire through it for some time, so there was not much of the new growth which is so lethal.

Those long, lonely rides from that camp to Gilberton, riding a poor horse and leading an equally poor pack horse, hardly bear contemplation; but these people did it to collect mail and supplies—of which they made do with just the bare necessities.

We remember as well that the three girls (Florrie aged 19 at the time and Bertha and Lydia, aged 13 and 8 respectively) were holding the fort at home, bailing water for horses and all other jobs which go with caretaking.

There were a few old-timers camped on the old goldfield working the gullies, who were good friends of the Michelmores; but there is one who deserves special mention as he actually lived with the family from 1912 until his death at Gilberton on 29th September, 1930.

Paul Badley was an Englishman from Lincolnshire, where he was born on 6th June 1856. He was a fine character and a very great friend of Ernie and indeed all the family, who looked on him as a grandfather.

It was a very great help to be able to leave the home and their family in the care of this fine old man when the parents and son Tom were away for long periods mustering or fighting drought, as we now find them; so one welcomes the opportunity to pay tribute to the memory of one who was so highly regarded by all who knew him.

Many years later, when Ernie died, his dying wish was granted and he was buried beside his great old friend of many years, Paul Badley.

It was a merciful release when the drought of 1926 broke quite early in the year. There was good relief rain over a wide area in September, and one can imagine how, when the rain did come, those cattle would have ranged far and wide from Penny's Pocket.

For many years afterwards the Michelmores had to muster that vast area drained by the branches of Gorge Creek, a major tributary of the Gilbert. It was vacant country at the time and known to very few men. They had to build some yards up there so they could muster it. One yard they called Lily Hole which was situated not very far above where the present Gorge Creek homestead now stands, up the right hand branch; and another yard was at the junction of the two main branches.

Other cattle would have gone up the main Gilbert to its head, but these could be recovered by attending musters with the Werrington plant over that area. Until quite recent times there were no boundary fences, so over a period of many years, as mentioned previously, Werrington and Gilberton would combine to muster a wide area of country, joined by the Dixons of Bagstowe and the McDowalls and Hoolihans, all of whom had country joining.
Ernie's butchering skills

This, then, was the pattern of life over many years, but all this time Tom was gradually improving the lifestyle for the family.

He installed pumping facilities to supply water reticulated to house and garden, and built paddocks to hold working horses and cattle when mustering. These paddocks were built both at the Gilbert and at Red Bar; so this finally released the family from the continual drudge of having horses in hobbles.

Eventually, there was a revival of mining on the field, and men were engaged in carrying out quite extensive prospecting. This resulted in a great improvement to the road which received some attention from the Council as well as from the mining company carrying out the survey. Before the days of dozers and excavators it was all pick and shovel work, which took quite some time. The Michelmores took advantage of this by supplying meat.

In order to do this and to comply with the Slaughtering Act, they had to build a shop to specifications as well as a concrete killing floor. At this time Tom was able to buy a truck which, with the improved road, made it possible to land building materials on the spot. Killing operations began quite soon; and it was here that Ernie, with his previous butchering experience, came into his own. He was an excellent slaughterman and boner, with his work right up to professional standard; and of course Tom acquired considerable skill as well. It was Ernie Michelmore who showed me how to take the brains out of the beast's head without damaging them, as well as other hints and tips of the trade, generally. Thus, and for quite some time, they were able to make some relatively easy money while marketing some cattle in the process.

With horse paddocks and many other amenities provided for the old people at home, Tom was able to leave them with an easier mind when he went mustering or took the occasional contract job on Werrington or elsewhere. Life then took on a quiet pattern of routine for quite a few years; and apart from having to cope with the occasional drought, they were in reasonably comfortable circumstances.

The marriages of the three girls would have been the next important events in their lives. An outline only of the marriages was given earlier in the story, but one could add here that Florrie and Dalton have recently celebrated their Diamond Jubilee at a dinner kindly given by the management of Kidston Gold Mines. Their children presented them with a leather-bound photo album which they are seen holding in the following photograph. Congratulations indeed to this fine old pioneer couple!
Fencing on high ground

Among the many jobs which Tom undertook to augment income was quite a lot of contract fencing on Werrington. With Jack Withers as mate, he rebuilt the holding paddock at Pine Yard, and built a similar paddock at Yarraman Yard.

The toughest assignment, though, was boundary fencing between Oak Park and Werrington, most of the line being on top of the dividing range between Gilbert and Copperfield Rivers, where the country is both steep and rough. I don't think many men would have been keen to attempt this job, for the use of a vehicle of any sort was out of the question.

Tom took it on in the Wet. He had to keep his horses sprayed to ward off the March flies which were in plague proportions up there, and there was the attendant discomfort of being camped out in the Wet. I had the job of carting the wire out from Oak Park with a buggy, to the foot of the range, then packing it up to the top with pack-horses.

In order to put the wire and posts on the line, Tom made a sledge using the fork of a tree with a few saplings lashed across to form a deck. He had a good harness horse to pull this contraption, which saved a lot of lifting.

Fortunately, the timber was quite good up there for fencing, making it possible to fell a lot of trees close to the line so when posts were split from them, they could be shouldered on to the line.

Tom had a mate on this job, whose name I have forgotten, but I do remember Tom's quite graphic story as to how he treated a boil which the poor chap developed on the anal region. When the boil was "ripe" he used the well-known method of creating quite a strong vacuum in an empty jam bottle by filling it with boiling water, and on emptying it, applying it to the site of the boil to draw out the pus. It worked quite handsomely, but brought a wild yell from the patient and "You bastard!!" Tom was relieved to learn later that this loud exclamation had not been heard at Oak Park, some eight miles away!

Lacking a forge for sharpening his fencing bars, Tom built one using antbed and rocks to form a flue which, in the event, proved to have sufficient draught to bring a bar to welding heat. In the course of the job he had broken a bar and was thus able to weld it. He had a piece of old wagon axle for an anvil.

This is just another illustration of how this man could improvise in an emergency.
Rushing bullocks

One day, Tom wanted to collect some good aged bullocks which had been missed in previous musters as there was a chance to get them away with a mob from Cheviot Hills, walking to meat works in Townsville.

Tom had one blackboy and I went from Werrington with our boy, Charlie of the "colt with one mouth", to help muster the bullocks and take them over to Cheviot.

From Red Bar we went up to Lily Hole Yard on Gorge Creek and soon had them mustered. They were quiet old fellows and easily handled, even though they may have never seen a yard since they were branded. They had never seen a paddock fence, as will be seen.

On our way to Cheviot we went from Lily Hole over to Oven Hole Yard on the head of the Gilbert, Charlie and I taking the bullocks and Tom and his boy the horses. We took the bullocks over the head of the Dip Creek branch of Gorge Creek and down what is known as Buttle's Gully. This is a branch of Woolpack Creek, one of the main heads of the Gilbert.

The old bullocks were travelling so beautifully as I gave them a lead down Buttle's Gully. Suddenly, I was riding for my life as I tried to steady them as they rushed!

There is an old disused paddock there, practically all the wire lying on the ground and crossing the brumby track we were following. The wire was stretched quite tightly here with fallen trees lying on it, and was a few inches above the ground where the bullocks were stepping over it. One of them tripped as he caught it with his foot, and the resultant "twang" was something these old fellows had never heard; so that was enough for them! It was quite some time before Charlie and I had them settled down again.

Next day we went over to a paddock on the head of the Copperfield River which was on Cheviot country. Arriving there, all would have been well, but one old fellow caught his tail in the barbed wire of the fence. This resulted in another rush; and even though there were only 50 or 60 bullocks in the mob, we had to withdraw about half a strain of wire out of the fence before we could get them near it again, and so into the paddock.

The rest of the trip was uneventful, with the cattle duly delivered to old Charlie Coolie, who was the drover in charge for the trip to Townsville.
Let us return, then, to that mysterious old paddock out there in the middle of nowhere. I have written that this was a little-known region even when Tom and I made that trip, and the old paddock was there for quite some time before anyone other than the builder knew of its existence. It concerns our story quite intimately because Ernie Michelmore knew the man who built the paddock, and like many other bushmen of the time in the north, he had great admiration for the quite uncanny degree of bushmanship which this man possessed, together with consummate skill as a cattlemman.

This man was Charlie Buttle, alias The Basalt Terror, whose philosophy in life was that if those big stations had "bitten off more than they could chew", and so could not keep their cattle branded up, the resultant clean skins—especially those which had left their mothers—were fair game for him if he had the ability to lift them undetected. I never ever heard of him lifting branded cattle.

However, it was inevitable that, no matter how careful such a man could be to cover his tracks, one day there would come a time when he would leave a trail which would be seen, and so it proved. He had lifted a mob of poddies off Wando Vale station and was making his way across the extreme southern part of Oak Park as it was then, an area seldom visited, towards the maze of ranges wherein lay his paddock and his hideout. Someone saw the trail and reported it.

The late A. W. Murphy, manager of Oak Park at the time, and O. W. Brown, manager of Chudleigh Park, both of them pioneer bushmen, soon organised a patrol with police to follow the trail which was easier as they entered the ranges. Buttle never went near the paddock but kept well clear of it over on to the head of Gorge Creek which was where the patrol overtook him, late in the evening.

The poddies were down on the gully where there was a soak and Buttle was well clear of them up on the ridge in a clump of pine trees with his horses hobbled out, and had made himself comfortable with his hat over his eyes and his saddle for a pillow, resting. One of the horses in the approaching patrol whinnied as it saw or smelt the hobbled horses, which warned Buttle of their approach.

The policeman in the patrol rode up, bid Buttle the time of day and asked him his name. He then asked Buttle if he owned the cattle down on the gully. Of course, he feigned surprise that there were any cattle nearby, and made no claim on them as they were cleanskins. So no matter what the circumstantial evidence, they had nothing on him! The patrol took possession of the poddies and took them back where they belonged, and so ended the episode.

The paddock at the hideout was quite cleverly constructed using natural features. One side of it was formed by a conglomerate wall with a spring running down the side which provided water for horses and camp. There is a cave in the rocks on the side of the hill, quite close to the spring, and the cave afforded good shelter where supplies could be left, out of the weather. There are a lot of rough granite knobs in the valley, so by fencing from one to the other of these, the paddock was completed.

It was all plain wire, some of which my brother, King, used to build a tailing yard—the Oven Hole Yard—near the river. The original yard, which had been built by my father out off the river in a stand of cypress pine, was destroyed by fire. You needed radar to find this yard, situated where it was, and I would be one of the few men left who had used it. My father held that block of country on the head of the Gilbert under Occupation Licence for a time.
... The Basalt Terror

Ernie was so moved by the life of Charlie Buttle that he composed a poem relating the above episode. This would have been about 1900. I am fortunate that my friend, Tom Dixon, was able to provide me with the original of this old poem.

Have you ever heard tell of the terror,
A ringer that's knocking around,
Just one of those reckless riders
From 'way back Kidston Town.

He would ride the roughest brumby
And he'd yard the wildest mick.
He would muster up the squatter's runs
Where he knew the calves were thick.

He would split them off their mothers
And drive them night and day,
Till he reached his secret Pocket
In the ranges far away.

He thought of his lonely position
'Way out in the ranges there,
He thought of the 'way-back township,
And many a girl so fair.

The police they swore they'd catch him
If it took them half their lives;
But they never lay a footstep in
The lonely spot where the Basalt Terror rides.

The moon was shining on the gap,
The Terror lying down,
When a strange horse chanced to whinny
Which caused him to look around.

He rose upon his elbow
As he sat upon the grass,
And whistled to the "Johnnies"
In fear they would go past!

Up rode a burly policeman
A bit bolder than the rest;
Came riding to the Terror
Before he was half dressed.

"What is your name," the policeman asked.
The Terror gave his name.
They rounded up the poddies
And asked him would he claim.

He gave a grin and wagged his chin
And said: "I don't travel on the game!"
They turned them back in fair disgust;
They had muddled up their scheme.
For tracking up such Terrors
Was a game they'd never seen!

Perhaps the scansion of this poem would not impress the purists; but for one who was practically illiterate, I think it a good attempt to describe an incident which amused him greatly at the time.

There can be no doubt that it was just as well for The Terror that he did not have Ernie Michelmore on his trail. Ernie had the skill and bushcraft to have caught him red-handed, in possession of the cattle!
Road conditions improved throughout the district to the point where it was possible to travel by car from Gilberton to Cairns and Townsville. The introduction of four-wheel-drive vehicles was a major breakthrough for isolated communities, and Tom bought a Land Rover to take advantage of this. In an emergency a patient could be taken to the airstrip at Lyndhurst, to be met by the Cairns Aerial Ambulance before the Flying Doctor Service was introduced. Quite soon there was a similar facility at Kidston.

In mentioning the Cairns Aerial Ambulance, one name comes readily to mind. Tom Briggs was Superintendent of this fine institution for many years. He and Tom Michelmore were great friends. Tom Briggs was always concerned for the welfare of people in the bush, and often lamented the fact that there were so few landing places—which prevented serious cases from receiving prompt attention. And many of us remember with affection Nick Watling who gave sterling service as pilot for the Ambulance and also with the Flying Doctor Service when it began operations out of Cairns.

Tom cleared a road up to Red Bar and was able to carry out improvements there which had been impossible before the days of 4WD. Self-priming centrifugal pumps became available to pump out of sand wells, thus doing away with a lot of water bailing. He was able to build a large corrugated iron supply tank at Red Bar which, with troughing installed, made water available for stock in the paddocks as well as outside. He had little experience at this work which usually calls for a tradesman; but he made a good job of that tank, which is still in use. Actually, he built several tanks to my knowledge; one being at the Danish Hole already mentioned, and one on a well he had sunk on the run.

To meet the problems of house-lighting, he purchased second-hand a hollow wire gas reticulated system for lights which gave good service but had the disadvantage of depending on mantles for the lights. These were very fragile, calling for frequent replacement.

When low voltage direct current home lighting plants became available, he was able to install one of these; and this, together with kerosene, and later gas-operated freezing units, made life much more comfortable, especially for people who through most of their lives had to make do with slush lamps or, at best, acetylene gas lamps which were quite good both in the house and when camped out. They were far from odourless, and had a habit of exploding!

A few years ago the old goldfield, which had remained dormant for many years save for a few hardy fossickers in the gullies, took on a new lease of life with a sharp rise in population. With modern earthmoving machinery and advanced gold recovery techniques, more alluvial gold has been won than ever before. With a much improved road and an airstrip available to the Flying Doctor for regularly conducted clinics, the old isolation and inhospitality have practically disappeared.
The family all help

Through these years life followed a quite normal pattern as this old pioneer couple entered the twilight of their lives with son Tom well into middle age. It was then that he was able to call on his nephews, Dudley and Philip Fitzsimmons, to help with the stock work. This was a tremendous advantage to them as well, as they learned the finer points in handling stock from an acknowledged expert. As well as this, it was soon apparent that they had inherited the Michelmore aptitude for this work.

With their help and for quite a few years, Tom was able to market his sale cattle relatively easily by taking them to Oak Park and loading them on to transports. He had a very satisfactory arrangement with a Tableland buyer who bought fattening age steers from Tom for quite a number of years. This was Tom Johnson, and the two Toms became firm friends.

On the trip to Oak Park Tom was able to use his Land Rover in place of pack horses; so the boys with the cattle needed to drive just a few spare horses, making the job much easier. There were times when he took the opportunity to buy a few replacement bulls from Russell Nimmo at Oak Park, which could be driven back on the return trip.

During the time he was working at Gilberton, Philip saw service in the Army when Australians were mobilised to fight the dirty war in Vietnam. Happily, he survived this grim ordeal and returned to resume work for his uncle at Gilberton.

The Michelmores were fortunate that there were two other nephews on whom Tom could call for assistance with stock and other work. Ernie and Kevin, the two sons of Florrie and Dalton Hoolihan, spent quite some time at Gilberton.

It was during the severe drought of 1948 when Ernie was working there, digging sand wells and shifting cattle, that he became very ill. One suspects that, as the son of a true pioneer, he was already suffering in silence from the grave illness which finally overtook him.

Kevin spent most of 1958 in continuous employment at Gilberton, and returned on several occasions afterwards to help with the mustering. All these boys had inherited the natural aptitude for station work passed on through generations of Michelmores, but Ernie and Kevin had the advantage as well of being the sons of acknowledged experts.

Over many years and before the days of boundary fences, Dalton Hoolihan used to attend muster with the Werrington Camp at Pine Yard on the Gilbert. I was often in charge of this camp, so I am able to commend him as a consummate cattleman who was always a great help with the mustering.

I never ceased to wonder at Dalton's quite uncanny ability to "know" cattle. There would be sixty or seventy calves drafted off their mothers ready to be branded, many of them little red fellows, as alike as peas in a pod, and the property of up to four separate owners. As he roped each calf he would call out the name of the owner so the correct brand could be applied; and over many years when helping with the branding, I never knew him to make one mistake.

The same could be said of the sons of Gus and Adelaide French. Not only do these boys show the natural aptitude of Ernie Michelmore to be able to "think like a bullock", but also they have as a tutor to show them the finer points, Gus, their father, being another acknowledged expert.
Death of Ernie

We come now to the end of the active life of this fine old pioneer couple. Through his active lifetime I don't think Ernie had known much illness. Quite obviously, he had a strong constitution. There came a time quite late in life when he was hospitalised with a complaint common to ageing men. This could have been the only time he was ever in hospital, but as he progressed well into his seventies he became increasingly frail. There can be no doubt that Tom and other members of the family realised that they may have been better off in an Old People's Home. But they realised also that to put old people like their mother and father, who had been fiercely independent all their lives, into a home for the aged—no matter how comfortable it was—would be tantamount to placing them in prison and would surely hasten their end. All credit, then, to those members of the family who were involved in caring for them in their later years, and at the very end; and especially Tom, on whom much of the responsibility devolved. Over a long period he showed great patience and forbearance; for as everyone knows, old people (even one's parents) can be petulant at times, trying the patience of even their nearest and dearest.

It was very early in January 1951 when Ernie took a bad turn, and it was quite apparent that the end was near for him. It was most fortunate that his daughter, Florence, with her children Adelaide, Kevin and Jean, had gone to Gilberton for Christmas and had stayed over for New Year. Actually, they could not have left sooner, even if they had chosen to do so, for the heavy Wet Season of that year had set in quite suddenly and it was quite some time before anyone could either travel to, or leave, Gilberton in a vehicle. All creeks and the river were in high flood and the country was very boggy. It was quite impossible to evacuate anyone seriously ill; for even though they were in touch by radio with the Cairns Aerial Ambulance, there was no airstrip.

It was in these circumstances that we find Ernie failing fast, making it necessary for someone to be in attendance at his bedside day and night. Florence, Adelaide and Tom relieved each other in maintaining this vigil, and it was his grand-daughter Adelaide who had the traumatic experience of seeing her grandfather pass away at midday on the 15th.

There were two employees working at the place at the time, and besides these there were three families of miners living at the old town site. These were the Bojack, Rappolt and Taylor families. Henry Bojack was visiting the Michelmores and was there to pronounce Ernie dead. He then very kindly laid him out, and afterwards, read the Burial Service. It occurs to me that Bojack may have been a Justice of the Peace; but be that as it may, it was fortunate to have someone so capable and willing to help the family in their sorrow.

Fortunately, there was some timber available from which the men were able to construct a coffin; but because of the floods, only those already at Gilberton were able to attend the funeral. Tom notified the Aerial Ambulance and they rang Dr MacIntosh in Mareeba, who had treated Ernie when he was in hospital, and he issued the Death Certificate.

I prefer not to dwell at any length on this sad event, for I remember how deeply moved I was when, with the floods subsiding, mailmen were able to travel again and I received a letter from Tom with details of their sad experience. We can but pause a moment to reflect on the great courage and fortitude displayed by a great many people of Outback Australia when they have been called on to face events of great sadness and real tragedy with absolutely no hope of any assistance from the outside world. Believe me, isolation can be a very frightening thing, a fact for which many an old pioneer of our country can vouch wholeheartedly.
Life at Gilberton continues

After Ernie's death, life at Gilberton settled down again; but it was early in February before Florence and family were able to return to their home in Kidston. This was made possible by Dalton taking horses out for them to all ride home. The country was so boggy that it was some time before motor traffic could venture down the road.

1951 with its heavy wet season was quite a good year. Tom took advantage of the situation by having quite a bit of fencing done—both boundary and paddocks—up at Red Bar. It should be stated here that some of these improvements in the Red Bar area were on Werrington country, but Tom had the full concurrence of the Lethbridges to carry on with this work. He did have a solicited Agreement that all improvements were to revert to Werrington at no cost, but Werrington did supply some of the wire for fencing.

With the departure of a mining family from Gilberton, Tom's mother bought their house and contents; and with the employment of carpenters, renovations and improvements were carried out on their home with the materials thus made available. It is something of a coincidence, perhaps, that just at this time (1952) we had Florrie's daughter, Adelaide, working for us as help with the children who were all quite young, as my wife, Thora, awaited the birth of John, the last of our family. It was good to have this capable girl with us and her help was greatly appreciated.

Soon after leaving us, Adelaide went to work for her Granny at Gilberton, which was opportune. She was able to be of great assistance when all the developmental work of which we have just written was taking place, entailing a lot of extra cooking and housework. As well as this, her Granny was failing and needed nursing attention.

Taking advantage of the good season, Tom took a few weeks holiday, which threw greater responsibility on his niece, Adelaide; for it was during this time that her Granny became practically crippled, losing all use of her legs; and she was, indeed, very frail otherwise.
Death of Lydia

Immediately on his return from holiday, Tom decided to send his mother to Cairns with the Aerial Ambulance. This meant a trip to Lyndhurst, the nearest airstrip; and he needed help to lift his mother who, by now, was completely helpless. At the time he had only his truck, into which it was quite impossible to lift his mother. He was able to call on Ted Hoolihan from Kidston, who was joined by Florrie and her school-aged children.

They stayed overnight with us on their way, and the poor, frail old lady greatly admired our newly-arrived son, John. She remarked that the little fellow was fortunate indeed, to have as grandfather the late R. L. Lethbridge, who had been a lifelong friend of the Michemore family. They went on to Lyndhurst next day, only to find the aeroplane delayed, so they had to remain there overnight as well.

Next morning Lydia Michelmore left the Etheridge district for the last time, her loyal granddaughter, Adelaide, with her. The sentence I have just written is a simple statement of fact, but as I read it, many thoughts crowd into my mind—which, owing to my limitations as a writer, I find difficult to express. Allow me, then, to follow just one line of thought which arises from what I have written, which could be summed up in just two words: human progress.

If we return to the days when Lydia Martel was born in that old stone house at Gilberton and, indeed, for many years afterwards, anyone in her condition when she was flown out would be left to die where she was, with what little comfort her sorrowing dear ones could give. She would have had only the simplest of sedatives to mitigate her sufferings, which would be all the more distressing for the family. Situations such as this arose frequently in the early days of the settlement of Outback Australia.

In the name of progress, engineers developed the theory of the Carnot Cycle to the point where they created the modern internal combustion engine to drive our motor cars and trucks. Aircraft engineers wrestled with problems to be solved relating to dihedral angles, propeller pitch, etc., etc., before they came up with the modern jet. And we remember as well those quite wonderful scientists who developed radio transmission and reception.

All these people played an important part in development and progress; but let us not forget that the land had to be settled and developed as well; and this great bush woman had, with her husband, made no small contribution in settling what was a quite unkind corner of our land. No amount of scientific achievement could replace the great courage and determination which were needed to "stick it out" in times of real adversity; and we know that these people knew the meaning of that word.

We remember as well that descendants to the third and fourth generation are carrying on the good work to such good purpose that the area now knows an advanced state of development, to the point where many cattle are being produced on this land which, not so many years before, was the undisputed territory of the fierce Tagalag tribesmen.

With apologies to readers for my display of sentimentality, we return to the main theme of the story to report that on arrival in Cairns, Lydia was admitted to Calvary Hospital; but transferred later to the Base. She was in hospital about a month before she died on 17th October, 1953. Her granddaughter, Adelaide, maintained her loyal vigil to the end, when she was joined by other members of the family. Lydia Michelmore lies in the Cairns cemetery far from the land she loved, despite its many cruelties.
We are left, then, with their son, Tom, of whom a great deal has been written. He is well into middle age as he tries to take up the threads of life again after the sad experiences of the last few years. He had never married. I feel he purposely refrained from doing so as he realised it would add to problems with his home life when his main responsibility lay with the care of his mother and father during their lifetime. He still had his nephews to help with the cattle work, and he had a very good vegetable garden at Gilberton. It became a sort of hobby with him as he applied quite a bit of science in growing a great variety of vegetables. He sold the surplus to local hotels, etc., all proceeds going to the Aerial Ambulance and, later, to the Royal Flying Doctor Service.

One feels that a great void would have been left in his life with the loss of both mother and father in such a short space of time, and that he could be forgiven for bouts of loneliness and possibly depression as he contemplated the past, and thought of things that might have been. However, he did not allow a state of morbid depression to overtake him, which was to his eternal credit; and I am sure all his friends were filled with genuine pleasure when news of his marriage to Eva Wells became known.

They were married in Rockhampton on 5th July, 1954, less than a year after the death of his mother. This may have seemed somewhat disrespectful to some people, but I simply cannot agree. Surely it was at this time that Tom really needed the love, understanding, and genuine companionship which a good wife and helpmate could give him. It would be quite impossible to imagine a more deserving case, and here my apologies go to Eva for not knowing more of her background beyond that she was about six years younger than Tom, but old enough to have that degree of stability in life which only age and experience can bring. They were to have over twenty years of happy married life.

Tom was able to hand over practically all the responsibility of the stock work to his nephews; so he and Eva were able to go to the seaside and stay for a time at a motel or such, and so enjoy a good break away from life at Gilberton which had taken on quite a dull routine—though there could scarcely have been a happier period in Tom's life, even though he was no longer young and was beset at times with painful bouts of arthritis.
Death of Tom

So it was that none of us was prepared for the great shock we sustained when Tom Dixon came over and reported that, on his return from Einasleigh Tom Michelmanore's Land Rover had overturned, killing him instantly. This happened on 7th January, 1977, so he was almost 72 years old at the time. No one will ever know exactly what happened, as there were no eye-witnesses. It may have been a sudden blackout or an acute heart attack. There were multiple fractures, including the neck, with severe internal injuries.

It was my daughter, Joan, who with Tom Dixon went down to Gilberton to break the news to Eva. Her grief scarcely bears contemplation, but all members of Tom's family did all in their power to help her face this tragedy and shock. The grief was hers to bear and to overcome, and this brave woman soon showed the world that she had the strength of character and the fortitude to live down this tragedy in her life. To her eternal credit, she elected to remain in the home where she had shared those happy years with Tom.

A large number of family and friends attended his funeral in Atherton. Five nephews—Kevin Hoolihan, Clive, Dudley and Philip Fitzsimmons, and Tom Wyatt—were pall bearers. The sixth was a good friend—Jim McDowall.

A great revival in mining activity on the old field means that now she has quite a few near neighbours, which is a good thing. The Flying Doctor conducts clinics on an airstrip nearby which removes still further the feeling of loneliness and isolation.

I feel that it was quite likely that it was as a tribute to the memory of her husband that last year Eva (now quite elderly) undertook a walkathon in aid of the Royal Flying Doctor Service. With attendants to help her on the way she walked from Gilberton to Kidston and was given a rousing reception by the mining company and many others on her arrival. The effort raised literally thousands of dollars for the R.F.D.S. and this great achievement attracted quite a bit of coverage and favourable comment from the media, as well it should.

Eva had proved a worthy successor to the girl who was born in that old fortress at Gilberton and became Mrs. Ernie Michelmore all those years ago; and she can take her place with pride and great dignity as one of that indomitable family of whom I have written; and it would have been an honour indeed, to be remembered as the second "Mum Michelmore" of Gilberton!

With that last remark I must conclude my saga. I regarded it as a singular honour and indeed a privilege when it was suggested that I should attempt its writing. I felt that these people so richly deserved the recording of something of their trials, tribulations, and indeed their triumphs over adversity, to be handed down to posterity. I hope that members of future generations who may read it will gain some idea of the type of people whose pluck and fortitude in face of hardship, and indeed whose great sacrifices, made such a major contribution to the foundation of Australia as a great nation.
REQUIESCAT IN PACE

In conclusion, VALE ERNIE MICHELMORE! Pioneer Bushman, Cattleman and Horseman Emeritus. A legend in his lifetime and a tremendous character. A great companion and true friend. The same could be written of his son, Tom, and of his wife "Mum" (to us). Our lives are enriched by the privilege of our association with such people.

JHL 1990
OBITUARY

It was not until I had completed the writing of the story of Ernie Michelmore and family of Gilberton that I heard of the death of another member of this pioneer family. This was Lydia Fitzsimmons, née Michelmore, one of the younger daughters of the family of Ernie and Lydia Snr. Lydia died on 29th May 1990, actually during the writing of the story, which had not yet gone to print. So perhaps this small tribute could be added.

Gilberton was a remote and lonely outpost when Lydia and her sisters spent the time of their early youth there. One is reminded immediately of the touching little poem by A. B. Paterson as he wrote of:

Little bush maiden wondering-eyed,
Playing alone in tile creek-bed dry,
In the small green flat on every side
Walled in by the Moonbi Ranges high.

I would imagine that the towering ramparts of the conglomerate ranges—Mt. Nation and others—with which Gilberton is surrounded, would be just as mysterious and menacing to Lydia and her sisters as were the Moonbi Ranges to Paterson’s little girl.

These girls had little opportunity for a secondary education; but they made up for this lack of academics with their intimate knowledge of the bush and its creatures, and their great expertise in the handling of stock.

Mention has been made already in my story of what great assistance Lydia and her sisters were to their parents in what were, really, grim fights for survival against drought, fire and flood, and, of course, low cattle prices. They held the fort at times when Ernie, his wife and son Tom were away for weeks caring for the cattle in time of drought.

I am sure that Lydia, throughout her life, would have carried fond memories of their great old friend and retainer with whom Ernie was happy to leave his girls during his absence, knowing they would be safe from molestation by any undesirable character who might wander on to the old goldfield. Vale Paul Badley.

Lydia was almost 20 when she married, and spent her entire married life at Forsayth, where she passed away shortly after suffering a stroke. She was laid to rest in the Forsayth cemetery beside her husband, Bill, who died at Forsayth on 30th December, 1986. Her funeral was largely attended by family and friends. She is survived by her family.

Accordingly I would conclude this short tribute to Lydia with the final verse from Banjo’s poem:

Child you are wise in your simple trust
For the wisest man knows no more than you.
Ashes to ashes, and dust to dust:
Our views by a range are bounded too;
But we know that God hath this gift in store,
That, when we come to the final change,
We shall meet with our loved ones gone before
To the beautiful country over the range.

J. H. L.
2. Tailing was a method of settling in young or new animals through the slow, controlled movement of a mob as they grazed.
3. Fossicking: searching for gold or other minerals in abandoned workings, rivers, etc.
4. Off-siding: assisting a teamster by attending to the bullocks on the off (right hand) side of the team.
5. Reedy Springs station is approximately half-way between Lyndhurst and Pentland.
6. Oak Park station is about 50 km east of Gilberton.
7. Tailing yard: a temporary pen where animals were kept overnight while they were being "tailed" (see Footnote 2).
8. The Gilbert: the gold fields located on the Gilbert River, which flows past Gilberton and eventually into the Gulf of Carpentaria.
9. The Percy: the gold fields located along the Percy River, about 30 km north of Gilberton. The main town was Percyville.
10. Werrington station adjoins Oak Park to the south.
11. The first Lyndhurst picnic race was held on 15th May 1885. The Lyndhurst Amateur Race Club is now known as the Oak Park Race Club. For further details, visit http://www.oakparkraces.com.au/History.htm.
12. Christmas Hill is located about 30 km north east of Gilberton.
13. Oakville was about 60 km north of Gilberton.
14. Bailing: the procedure of digging for water and bailing it out into troughs for cattle to drink.
15. For more on the Martel family, see A Christmas card in April: Station life on the Palmer River in the 1940s and 1950s, edited by John Illingsworth; James Cook University, Department of History and Politics: Records of North Queensland history, No. 5.
18. Bone pointing: a method of execution previously employed by some Australian Aborigines, in which a ritually prepared bone was pointed at the condemned person.
20. Soakage: an area where water has soaked into the ground rather than running off.
21. Micory: a water source, usually under the sandy bed of a dried-out river, which can be accessed by scooping out a large hole. A ramp is then built and surfaced with tree branches to provide a secure footing, in order to allow the cattle to reach the water at the bottom of the hole.