

Hinterlandgrapevine Online

A brief insight into the history of Maleny & District and other things..

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History of the Witta Cemetery and Mitchell the Aboriginal

To the north-east of Maleny is an area called Witta.

Witta, was first settled by German immigrants around the late 1880's. once known as Teutoburgh in the 1880s.

The name Teutoburgh came from a nearby German mission. Witta. In 1916, due to anti-German sentiment associated with the Great War, the town was renamed Witta.

Depending on who tells the story there appears to be some difference of opinion about the name Witta. The most common explanation is that the name was derived from an Aboriginal word (either wutdah, meaning red cedar, or wetya, meaning

dingo.) Hence the non-German pronunciation. Another explanation is that the named after Witten which is a university city Westphalia, Germany.

Witta is a residential area. There is little else in the area. It was once had a very strong dairy industry. It also once had a school, however that school has long since closed down and students from the area travel by bus to schools in nearby Maleny.

One thing that Witta does have that nearby Maleny, the larger township does not is a cemetery. A walk around that cemetery gives a snapshot of the history of the whole area.

Scattered across the cemetery are the names of the first German families who settled at Witta.

In fact the Witta Cemetery came about as a result of a generous donation from the Van Dryke family in 1898.

The first aboriginal to be buried in the Witta Cemetery was "Mitchell the Aboriginal". Mitchell was a member of an aboriginal group which was part of the Durandir tribe.

He worked throughout the Sunshine Coast hinterland for a number of early settlers. Whilst working for a settler family at Peachester he saved the life of the young son of the settler family. The young lad had a burst appendix. There were no local doctors, the closest being at the Brisbane Hospital. (Now Royal Brisbane Hospital). It was believed that the lad would certainly die without medical treatment.

Mitchell carried the young lad to Coochin Creek from where a steam ship loaded with timber travelled daily to Brisbane.

Mitchell stayed with the lad until he was well enough to return to his home

Following his death in September 1919 Mitchell was buried in the Witta Cemetery. It was very uncommon for an aboriginal to be buried in a



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“white man’s cemetery” in those days.

The then Landsborough Shire Council attended to the burial.

This occurred after Harry Warne, (Grandfather of Hilda Penny who still lives in Maleny), who was Chairman of the Council at the time is said to have said to a council meeting; “If any aboriginal deserves to be buried in a white-man’s cemetery it is Mitchell.”

Local wood-worker, Ludwig Tesch built the coffin for Mitchell at the time. such was the communities feelings for Mitchell.

conjunction with the Sunshine Coast Regional Council commemorated the refurbishment of Mitchell’s headstone which is still in the Witta Cemetery.

The ceremony was attended by Councillors, Tim Dwyer, Deputy Mayor and local Councillor, Jenny Mckay.

place for a final resting place, under the gum trees and overlooking the Witta Sports Ground where young people meet regularly to fight that most important battle of all - a sporting contest.



The ceremony heard from Ms. Beverley Hand and Alex Bond, members of the Gubbi-Gubbi tribe.

Much work has been completed over the past few years to make this final resting place even better.

Much of this work has been done by locals Colin Carbery and Frank Rough with support from the Sunshine Coast Regional Council. Both these people come from local pioneer families.

The “Mitchell Project” was co-ordinated by the Maleny



At the time Mitchell’s headstone was the biggest in the cemetery and remained as the biggest until today.

On Wednesday April 22nd, 2009 the Maleny Historical Society in

Witta Cemetery is nestled in a quiet country location. What a

Historical Society Committee.

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