

Lang / Mildmay Street

5 Generations of Stories

By Jeff & Robyn Jenkinson



Lang / Mildmay Street



The Lang/Mildmay Street renaming epic was triggered by a major event, namely the 1893 floods here in Brisbane, when it was decided to immediately relocate the train line from its flood prone location near Fairfield Road to its present location on higher flood free ground. Up until this time Lang Street was one long straight thoroughfare between Cornwall Street and Venner Road. To achieve this outcome the train line cut across Lang Street at two locations and thus required some realignment of the street. For over 60 years this caused much confusion as there were now parts of Lang Street on both sides of the train line. This situation was finally resolved in 1957 when Lang Street was renamed.

Starting at the Cornwall Street end we now have Rusk Street, Tamar Street, Mildmay Street and finally Lagonda Street. These names were selected from a London Street Directory. It needs to be mentioned that the sketch above is for illustration purposes only.

Our focus is Mildmay Street where five generations of the Hubner family lineage have resided continuously to the present day. We represent generations four and five. Here are some of our memoirs – not listed chronologically or in any priority of importance.



Blandine Hubner “Queen of Fairfield”

In the early days the family ran a mixed dairy/crop farm and even made their own wine from vines they grew on the property. Robyn’s great grandmother, Blandine, was affectionately known as “the Queen of Fairfield” where she was a natural healer and midwife to the local aborigines who lived down by the Brisbane River. Fairfield was always a swampy, flood prone suburb so we now know why they relocated to higher flood free ground at Lang Street.

Our daughter, who is also a natural healer, has her home located on the exact site where the Hubner family hut was first located at 131 Lang Street all those years ago.

When their circumstances improved they built their first real home at 129 Lang Street. This is where Robyn’s aunty and father were born.

It was a workers cottage and the back yard was largely a vege patch.

In about 1926, Robyn's grandfather relocated this house – rolled it down their block and turned it around to face Mearns Street. He then built a much grander Queensland style home facing Lang Street, in its place.



77 Mildmay St (Hidden behind trees), 129 Lang St (73 Mildmay St)



73 Mildmay St Painting by Sonia Jenkinson

It was between these two houses a tennis court was built and named the "Glad Will" tennis club – after their two children, Gladys and William.



Glad Will Tennis Club

As a sign of the times this space now has a two-storey multiunit complex built on it with a besser block wall up against our boundary fence line. We were powerless to stop this happening. Our ancestor's home at 131 Lang Street has now been our family home for the last forty years. We need to mention here that a three-bedroom Queenslander was built on the site in front of the original hut, facing Lang Street. We recently found out that many decades ago a family member who ran the local funeral parlour used to store coffins under our house. That might explain a few strange 'happenings' shortly after we moved in here. Piano playing, unexplained shadowy movement, curtains moving in the still of the night.

This next extract can be found in the 'Echoes of stories of Stephens' book – Chapter 6, Part A, Page 70 recognizing the early settlers in the shire, Quote "In September 1959 my grandparents were invited to attend a Pioneer Dinner hosted by the Lord Mayor of Brisbane, Alderman T.R. Groom. It was held at City Hall on 29 September 1959 to honour all of the pioneers and their families. It was a great honour for them to be invited and attend". Unquote. Chapter 6 is dedicated to the Hubner and Mewing families.

The Hubner Family Lineage has had an association with Junction Park State School over a long period of time with four generations attending the school.

Robyn's Grandfather – 1890s
Robyn's Aunty Glad – 1910s to 1920s
Robyn's Father – 1920s to 1930s
Robyn and her two sisters– 1950s to 1960s
Both our children – 1980s

1974 Floods – The underpass at Denham Street was flooded so the only way in or out by vehicle to high ground was via a road bridge over the train line at Wilkins Street West or Cronin Street. Somewhere around this time it made no sense for these two road bridges to be reduced to pedestrians only. This would leave no way in or out for stranded vehicles to access higher ground, should this situation ever occur again, in the future.

2011 Floods – Not as bad here as 1974. This time the Denham Street underpass remained open. This created grid lock chaos caused by sight seers and emergency workers trying to access our street as there was no through road as the Fairfield Road end of Ashby Street was under several meters of water. There were all types of vehicles trying to chuck U turns everywhere. It got to the critical situation where we had to show our drivers licence to police, to prove we were residents, to gain access to our street. One memorable moment – our brush with fame – was after the floods when the Prime Minister at the time, Julia Gillard, paid a visit to Fairfield Gardens Shopping Centre to witness the reopening of the centre and sign the wall, which was a boost for us locals. We felt very privileged personally, when she walked up to us, shook our hands and asked how we were coping.

2014 Super Cell Storm – Carved a path of destruction across many Brisbane suburbs. In our street everyone suffered from extensive rain and hail damage to homes and gardens. The day after the storm some residents were just wandering about trying to process what had just happened. In the following months lots of Tradies came to work all day and to do their bit. However, in our street we have a restricted 2hr Parking Limit. The solution provided by the Brisbane City Council – Move or pay the fine. Our wonderful and pragmatic local councillor, Nicole Johnston, stepped in to save the day and was able to issue Temporary All Day Parking Permits – to be renewed monthly if required. It was that easy and a godsend for both Tradies and homeowners.

2022 Floods again – In most locations about one metre lower than 2011 but still bad enough for those effected again, so soon. Fortunately, for the business community and local residents the Fairfield Gardens Shopping Centre was not inundated this time, so there was only minor inconvenience with regards to shopping here for a short period of time. Unfortunately, the 7/11 Service Station was once again under meters of water and will be out of commission for quite some time.

In days gone by there were two general stores and a butcher's shop in our street which are now private residences. One little house in our street has played host to Odin's warriors bikies, an unlawful panel beater and spray painter, backyard mechanic, sewing machine sweat shop, boat people, refugee families, punk rockers, furniture restorer, an escort agency and possibly more. Once, nearly burnt down, it remains standing as a private residence. Now in May 2022 we can report the house is earmarked for demolition within the next two months and will be replaced by a single two storey house style dwelling. Now in the first week of October 2022, we can report the house was unceremoniously crunched, flattened and the site cleared. Now that the noise has abated and the dust settled we wait to see and hear what disruption the construction phase will bring.

Where Fairfield Gardens Shopping Centre now stands there used to be Tickles Distribution Warehouse, prior to that an open field affectionately known as 'the paddock' and before that the Hubner family dairy farm.



Clearing the site of 'The Paddock' for Fairfield Gardens Shopping Centre



Fairfield Gardens Shopping Centre under construction

When the shopping centre was opened in 1987, we had another grid lock situation in front of our place. This time it was shopping trollies. It seemed to be the designated drop off point before continuing the journey home with parcels in hand.

Now the developers are moving into our street. Old Queenslanders are either being relocated on their existing site, demolished or removed and/or replaced with multi storey unit blocks. With insufficient parking allowed inside the unit complexes our street is now clogged with the overflow of parked cars destroying the character of the streetscape.

Our street has witnessed, experienced and evolved in many ways – It was, amongst other things, often used as a racetrack by the local hoons and by 'rat runners' looking for a short cut from Annerley Road to Fairfield Road. It was not uncommon for cars to get air borne in front of our place.

In the middle of our street the carriageway divides with the high side heading south and the low side of the cutting heading north.



This causes confusion for some road users who ignore the 'keep left' sign resulting in many near misses, a few vehicle collisions and tragically fatalities here and in the vicinity of the pedestrian exit from the railway station. So, as a pedestrian, when crossing you need to keep an eye out to watch for motorists unexpectedly appearing on the wrong side of the street. It has gone from a dirt track to bitumen with painted lines, safety barriers and signage, carried everything from horse and cart to the latest in motor vehicles, kept up with latest in technology going from no electricity to high voltage power lines for trains, commercial and domestic use and even provides access to gas, telephone and Foxtel if required.

Last, but not least sewerage finally arrived in about 1967 which sounded the death knell of the 'Outside Dunny'. Hooray, no longer any need to worry about spiders, running out of saw dust or being disturbed at the most inappropriate time. This triggered a series of events known as 'Tooty pushing over parties' throughout the neighbourhood to celebrate the occasion.

Proximity to the train line used to encourage opportunists. They would get off the train, rob a few houses, get on the next train and be gone. To combat this, plain clothed police randomly patrolled the street for some time. On more than one occasion police chased drunken yahoos across our street into our yard before apprehending them. Police even caught up with an escapee from Boggo Road Gaol, hiding in the long grass next to the train line.

The 'Station House' for Fairfield Railway Station used to be occupied by the Railway Station Master/Mistress.



Station House 'Timber & Tin'

We watched as the old timber and tin house was demolished and replaced with a single storey brick dwelling and carport. This was many years ago now.



Station House 'Brick'

The house was then used as a halfway house, frequently visited by police after domestic disturbances but has now been vacant for over a decade.

On one occasion we came home to find one of the residents in our yard, 'just doing some shopping for clothes, towels and bed linen', off our clothesline. She could not see why this was not OK!!! After we politely sent her packing, she continued her wicked ways at other neighbours before the authorities finally caught up with her. After that we never saw her again. It brings a whole new meaning to the term, "On line shopping"

In May 2022, as part of the Cross River Rail upgrade, we received written notification that the station house and carport were to be demolished then 'reinstated' when the project is finished. This was as the site was to be used to store building material and equipment as we move into the reconstruction phase of the Fairfield Railway Station. We received this same notice in June, July, August, September and again in Oct when this time the house was finally razed one day while we were away for a few hours.

Cross River Rail – On-going and will continue to have differing degrees of inconvenience for local residents and business owners for quite some time yet. We have had our moments, to put it mildly. In the early stages of planning it was suggested Mildmay Street would be the preferred site for the portal at the southern end of the tunnel. This would have meant that our place along with most of the other neighbour's homes would have been resumed and we would have been homeless without a leg to stand on. Fortunately, due again in part to the efforts of Nicole Johnston, this idea was scrapped and the portal is now located in the railyard behind the Princess Alexandra Hospital.

As we speak, the Fairfield Train Station is in the process of being upgraded and this time to include servicing the needs of the disabled.



Across Christmas 2021 and in to 2022 it was a hive of activity 24/7 adjacent to our place on the trainline as a 'track lowering' project took place.

Flood lights, heavy machinery and lots of noise in an area that went from the vicinity of the Fairfield Station for approximately 300 meters north to Cronin Street.

There was Stop/Go traffic control for local vehicles only.

Across Easter 2022 for two weeks it was once again a 24/7 hive of activity with the same amount of noise and heavy machinery on site but this time was a major project which saw the entire Fairfield Station removed i.e. buildings and platforms gone.

Fairfield Station upgrade & Track works

This time Mildmay Street was completely blocked off to through road traffic except for access of construction machinery to the work site. The most recent major disruption was in October when the pedestrian overpass was lifted into position.

Trains – In the early days they were Steam Driven Locomotives which were smelly and noisy and the stench permeating the atmosphere from the carriages transporting cattle and pigs was most unpleasant, to say the least. Then along came Diesel

Powered Locomotives. When hauling coal, we have to tolerate double headers (two locomotives coupled together) along with forty-two carriages making their way up hill past our place. The noise is unbearable and can happen any time day or night. In dry weather our house vibrates, the windows rattle and the exhaust fumes, grime and coal dust find their way inside to collect on curtains and window ledges. Now we also have electric trains too. They are quieter and not as smelly but more frequent. You win some you lose some!!!

Once there was a building, which used to be Tickle's Distribution Warehouse, where the rear carpark of the shopping centre is now located. Once again, this building was being used as a 24/7 distribution outlet. Their entrance created potholes in our street from excessive truck use and the 24-hour noise for local residents caused much distress. Fortunately, they were not there for very long. That was in the early 1980s.

Leutenegger Hat Factory once occupied space in Mildmay Street for some time before it was demolished to make room for a massive multi-unit complex, next to the area where the rear carpark of the Fairfield Gardens Shopping Centre is now situated.



Site Cleared



Leutenegger's Hat Factory



Multi – Unit Dwelling Complex

Our street is frequented by visually impaired pedestrians. Getting about is difficult enough but they also have the additional challenge of navigating the street during

building construction and when removalist trucks block the footpath while assisting unit tenants to move in or out.

Like so many others we used to have milk and/or newspapers delivered. Unfortunately, we had to stop this practice as it got to the point where we were paying and someone else was enjoying the spoils.

From our windows we can see and hear trains, helicopters, jets, drones, cars, trucks, skateboarders, people on scooters, pedestrians, dog walkers, early morning joggers, the postie, various other delivery services, watch the moon rising and setting and fireworks over Southbank.

For years, one dedicated dog walker pounded the pavement relentlessly. He was always ready to stop and 'have a chat' and would spend all day chatting if he could, in his unmistakable broad and loud Scottish accent. If you were in a hurry, evasive action was necessary. He wore out several pairs of shoes, a few pet dogs and eventually himself – "R.I.P Have a Chat".

We also had a young boy living in our house many years before we returned to reside here. His name is William Robinson, but he was affectionately known as "Billy" at the time. Born in Brisbane in 1936, he moved into our street in 1943, the year his father died. He was only seven years old. He attended Junction Park State School where he excelled at Art. Each afternoon he would watch the horses from McDougall's Bakery make their way up past his house in Lang Street on their way to where they would spend the night in 'the paddock', where Fairfield Gardens Shopping Centre now stands.

In 1987 he won the first of his two Archibald Prizes for Portraiture with "Equestrian Self Portrait". In a recent publication we found it heart-warming to know he drew inspiration for this painting from that early memory. He is fondly remembered by members of both the Hubner and Peel families who knew him well.

Robyn's father, Bill Hubner, who lived next door to us, was at our place one day in our daughter's room admiring some of her art work when he casually said, "You know Billy Robinson used to live here in this very room for a while. Must be a good room for artists". We did not fully understand the significance of the comment at the time. We now know he went on to twice win the Prestigious Archibald Prize for Portraiture, The Wynne Prize for Landscape along with many other awards for his artwork.

He even rated a mention in a poem by another close neighbour, Glenda Peel, who wrote about growing up in our street, quote:

"Mrs Hubner next door handing little cakes over the fence
Mr Hubner going into town for "big business"!!
Piano lessons with Gladdy Hubner and duets with Billy Robinson
Singing around the piano"



69 Mildmay St 'Peel's House'

Glenda said that 'Aunty Glad Hubner' taught her and Billy to play the piano. Aunty Glad's tuition got him started and obviously served him well as he went on to play piano with the Queensland Symphony Orchestra.



We need to mention here that Aunty Glad was also locally famous for her delicious Birthday and Special occasion cakes (18th, 21st, Wedding, Anniversary etc).

She went on to have a successful career teaching commercial subjects (shorthand and typing) at the prestigious Brisbane Girls Grammar School.

Robyn's 21'st Birthday Cake created by Aunty Glad

In 1949 Billy and his family moved away from Fairfield where he went on to have a very successful career and became globally recognized. He now has a dedicated gallery located in Old Government House in the grounds of the QUT Gardens Point Campus. Well worth a visit.

Robyn's father lived his entire life in the family home except during WW2 when he enlisted in the Army. He served in various locations in Queensland between Brisbane and Townsville dealing with 'pay and supply'. The most memorable of these years was when he was posted to Maryborough. Here he was attached to Z Force, a commando unit, who were based on Fraser Island. They were involved in the specialist training in espionage, unarmed combat, jungle craft signals and demolition. He was involved behind the scenes in the vital role of logistics. He was aware of what they were doing without knowing where or when they would be off onto their next covert operation.

He was also aware of the exploits of the Motor Vessel, the mighty KRAIT, a Japanese fishing boat which was acquired and repurposed for use by the Australians and its collaboration with Z Force. Anyone associated with Z Force and in fact all military personnel signed the secrets act when they enlisted. Any leaks could potentially thwart an entire operation and cost lives. Like so many others who were involved in WW2, this is why he never talked about this whole experience until just before he died when the whole story of Z Force became public knowledge.

Robyn's uncle Bill had a totally different experience during his military service, as a member of the 2/10 Field Regiment RAA, in WW2. Unfortunately, for him and many others, he was taken prisoner when the Japanese captured Singapore. He spent some time in the infamous Changi POW camp. From here he worked in shockingly cruel conditions on the infamous Burma Thailand Railway, as part of D Force, in a location known as Hell Fire Pass (Konya Cutting), where 'Weary' Dunlop saved his badly infected leg from amputation. When this job was complete, those that were able were herded like cattle onto a ship, the Byoki Maru, bound for Japan.

He survived the 70 day journey despite having to endure inhumanely cramped and shockingly poor living conditions. As if this was not bad enough, along the way the ship was torpedoed and had to face the fury of a life-threatening typhoon. The ship finally reached its destination, and the prisoners were divided into a variety of work groups. Uncle Bill was to spend the rest of the war working in a coal mine. When he was finally repatriated back to Australia, because of his physical and emotional scars, he was never able to fully integrate back into a 'normal' life and became a recluse.

However, the HUBNER family home became his HUB, pardon the pun, "HUB as in HUB-NER" or safe house, as it did for many other friends and family members.

"It's a small world", so the saying goes. This anecdote takes us back to when we announced our engagement but is also accidentally and with the benefit of hindsight, linked to events which occurred in WW2. Back in 1971, it was necessary for a Justice of the Peace (JP) to witness an Application Form before an advertisement was able to be placed in the Courier Mail. Robyn's father knew a neighbour who was ex Navy and a JP and casually mentioned, "He was on HMAS Perth in WW2". We did not realize the significance of this casual comment until just recently. HMAS Perth was sunk in combat in March 1942 in the Sunda Strait between Java and Sumatra in Indonesia. Whilst researching the 'story of our street' we discovered a remarkable coincidence. This very neighbour (JP), Robyn's uncle and 'Weary Dunlop' (Famous Surgeon) were all in Changi POW camp and on the Thai – Burma Railway at the exact same time.

On a brighter note – A bit about the authors – Like her father, Robyn has lived her entire life in the family homes, except when she said, "I do" and for the next nine years stepped in to the great unknown and accepted the challenge of becoming an Army wife – and without any training did a wonderful job.

However, the magnetic pull of Mildmay Street is undeniably powerful. Take it from someone who knows. After enlisting in Melbourne, successfully completing recruit and trade training, it was not long before I somehow found myself in Mildmay Street, now over 50 years ago.

Boy meets girl and as they say, 'the rest is history'. Mildmay Street was always our safe house or temporary base between postings. As an ex-digger himself, my father-

in-law got a great deal of enjoyment, on many occasions, at my expense. Jokingly, he would laugh out loud saying, 'I always sleep better knowing you are on guard duty keeping us all safe'.



We moved around quite a bit as you had virtually no say in where or when your next move would be –for us it was various locations on the east coast of Australia and one posting to Port Moresby in PNG.

Part of my job description was weapon maintenance – everything from hand-guns to heavy artillery – in either a workshop or live firing range setting. After a 6 year period when we moved 6 times, with both our kids at school age it was time to say, 'time to find a place to call home'. So, it was back to Brisbane and Mildmay Street.

Live Firing

Now back in 'civi street' I got a job as a Diesel Fitter overhauling, repairing, maintaining and assembling heavy earth moving equipment of all shapes and sizes.



Diesel Fitter (Leigh Creek South Australia)

It was once again my father-in-law found another reason to have a bit of fun at my expense. He used to say, 'I've finally worked it out' and of course everyone would say, 'What?' He would roar with laughter by saying, 'I've found the Missing Link'. Here he was referring to the contrast in my appearance – Neat, clean shaven soldier in ironed uniform versus long hair and ginger beard and more often than not covered in mud, grease and oil. When circumstances changed it was time to find a new career again.



Soldier in the Army



"The Missing Link" Diesel Fitter

So, I spent the rest of my working life as a TAFE Teacher in the Heavy Earthmoving Machinery Industry. Robyn seamlessly transitioned and continued in her role as home maker, TAFE coordinator and carer for aging parents while providing a safe house – a not for profit B and B – for family and friends.

Robyn's father chimed in again by saying he was glad to hand the BATON to me as 'The Universal Provider' for the family.

So here we are, all of a sudden over 70, retired, grandparents and enjoying being given the opportunity to share some of our family stories as our contribution to the local history with the Annerley Stephens History Group.

And now for something completely different – Lightning Strikes – On several occasions, so far, we have received a direct hit. Two of our favourite Palm Trees, our TV, an EFTPOS machine, our phone landline and some burnt electrical wiring have paid the supreme sacrifice. If not for safety switch circuit breakers, outcomes could have been a lot worse. The worst of these events occurred about 2012-13-14. "Who says lightning never strike twice in the same place?"

With this colourful past, who wouldn't want to live here. There has never been a dull moment and this trend looks like continuing into the future.

Centrally located close to shops, primary and secondary schools, University of Queensland, Princess Alexandra and the Mater Hospitals, trains, buses, only a few kms from the CBD and Southbank with easy access to the river and the freeway system. And on three occasions, water-front living – 1974, 2011 and 2022, so far.

All of the above eclectic series of events occurred as a result of being somehow connected to a street which is approximately 650 metres or 32 2/5 chains long.

In closing, Mildmay Street, the postie will confirm, has been spelled in many ways – Mildmay, Mildway, Midman, Midway to mention just a few. This only adds to the complexity, mystery, diversity and the ever-changing profile in the rich tapestry which is the life story of our street, so far..... BUT WAIT..... THERE'S MORE.....

In early October 2022, we were in the process of putting the final touches to our talk, after several rewrites, when three names, well worth a mention, surfaced.

Ken Blanch - was another resident of Mildmay Street, well known to the family, who once lived near the Denham Street Rail Overpass. A renowned author and journalist at many national newspapers, including crime reporter and editor at the Courier Mail here in Brisbane. Amongst other things he once served in the Australian Army as a Captain in Vietnam in 1966 as a Public Relations Officer. He was awarded the Order of Australia (OAM) for services to journalism.

1 November 1927 to 23 September 2020. Born in Sydney, moved to Qld in 1949.

Ken Fletcher – A very successful Australian Tennis Player, who has a park named in his honour, at the Tennyson Tennis Centre, here in Brisbane. He won numerous doubles and mixed doubles Grand Slam Titles. Being a tennis family, Robyn's father, Bill, knew him well. We cannot confirm it but they may have even played a bit of tennis at "Glad Will".

Rosenlund Demolition Contractors – mentioned earlier with regards to the demolition of the station house just across the street from our place, it reminded us that our son did his apprenticeship, as a diesel fitter, with them, now over 20 years ago. On one occasion during this time, the mid 1990s, we were out of town when our house was burgled. At the time Rosenlunds were doing some demolition work on Boggo Road Gaol. We now have several Boggo Road Prison Cell bars repurposed to protect the rear windows of our home. We are literally now 'safe as houses' from intruders.

Our street is certainly mild by name but so much more.

Compiled by Jeff and Robyn (nee Hubner) Jenkinson

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Updates from May 2022