Morinish

Where the Bottle Tree Stands

The unknown miner, photographed by Charles Johnson (1888–1948)

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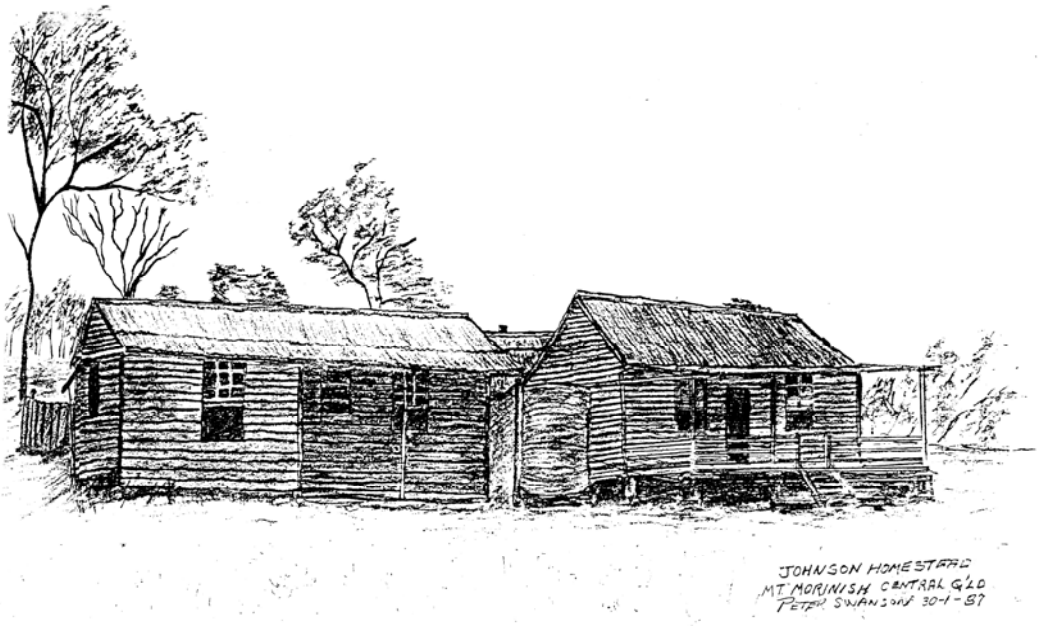
Morinish

Where the Bottle Tree Stands



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Morinish

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Lex Johnson

Especially for Grandad Martin and Grandma Lizzie,
who gave the best parts of their lives to Morinish
all those years ago

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Acknowledgments

This book has been a long time coming and many people have moved in and out of my world during the research, analytic and writing stages. There is insufficient space here to list everyone and describe their individual contributions, so a summary will have to suffice. I thank everyone for their assistance, guidance and patience.

First and foremost, I thank my parents and earlier family for fostering strong interest in knowing who we are and where we came from. Little things they said throughout the years, some of which were barely snippets in their own recollections of what they were told many years earlier, helped form the initial pieces of the puzzle for this book. Perhaps the desire for exactness, to prove, and disprove too, came from them. Morinish's vibrant past came alive with personal meaning through the stories told by my father, his cousins Clive, Wally and Betty, my grandfather's cousin Ernie and family friend Bob Edgar. Their perspectives, wisdom and memorabilia will remain more valuable than sterile insights found in some archive or another. I am very grateful for the collecting behaviour of some of my late relations, such as Dad, Uncle Ernie, Aunty Flo and others. Thanks also to the later generations for sharing, and not destroying, their hand-me-downs.

In contrast to my previous books, this one drew upon the collections of very few public archival repositories. I wish to thank the staff at formal repositories such as Queensland State Archives and the Capricornia CQ Collection at CQUniversity Library, the two principal public archives used. Vital content-based resources were gleaned too from National Archives of Australia in Brisbane, Central Queensland Family History Association, Rockhampton and District Historical Society, Rockhampton Regional Library, the former Livingstone Shire Council at Yeppoon and archives in Nottingham and Hamburg.

Particular thanks go to John Fletcher, whose intimate knowledge of recent-day Morinish and its people provided inspiration, and Jennifer Lentell for her ideas and suggestions for locating government archival items.

Quite a number of Danes and Germans helped with the early groundwork for the European component. The list begins with the late Palle Lauring, eminent historian and author of *'A History of Denmark'*. I am fortunate to have received generous and valuable insight for a Danish understanding of the Slesvig problem from this man prior to his death in 1996. More than a decade earlier, Professor J. A. S. Grenville of Birmingham guided me toward an Englishman's understanding of the same Schleswig-Holstein problem. One thing led to another, and another, and another. If I had not met Matthias Feddersen tending his family's grave at Drelsdorf in northern Germany in September 1995, the search there would have taken much longer. Oke Friedrichsen of Drelsdorf showed me his manuscripts about Hans Friedrich Friedrichsen, a fellow who knew the early Johannsens well and influenced their migration to Australia. Stefan Carl and Martin Koehm of the *Dithmarscher Landeszeitung* newspaper in Heide helped me re-establish contact with German cousins "missing" for generations. Special thanks go to Peter Heinrich Clausen of Ahrenshöft, the Lauridsen family of Stenderup and the late Peter Kruse of Lübeck. Herr Kruse diligently researched our very early family and tried re-establishing contact with the Australian descendants shortly before the Second World War, but bigger events got in his way. He passed away in 1995 without having achieved his dream and only a couple of months before I finally tracked down his own address! Another Peter Kruse generously told me some old stories about the early Kruse and Johannsen family which his father Ejnar still remembered at the age of 94 years in 2001. Anecdotes collected from these friendly and helpful people meshed well to guide my own research in the original documents.

The book is a collection of paper, ink and binding, but its heart came from all these people and places and its soul remains at Morinish itself. I have done what I could to meld the information into a meaningful account, but any remaining mistakes, misinterpretations and misrepresentations are mine and no-one else's.

Preface

Welcome to a history of the Morinish district covering its first fifty years of European settlement and activity. Named after a place in Scotland, it is pronounced locally as *'MOR-nish'* by leaving out the middle vowel.

Research began by delving into the lives of only two men – Martin Johnson and Nathan Wilson. The first fellow fled the European upheavals of the late 1860s for the Queensland goldfields, but quickly found himself in an even worse pickle there and high-tailed it home again. The young man managed to return a few years later with his youngest brother and realised his dream to be a goldminer on the Morinish diggings near Rockhampton. The second fellow was an illegitimate English soldier who brought his young wife and child to a mixed mining and agricultural lifestyle alongside those same diggings. Johnson married Wilson's daughter so, in one sense, the story began as a family history. Several years of personally-undertaken research expanded the ancestral tree of each man back to the 1600s and broadened them to discover thousands of cousins, some genealogically distant and others just a long way away.

However, one cannot learn about people without knowing something of their environment. Initial attempts at documenting the combined family soon highlighted many interactions between these men and many others in the Morinish and Rockhampton communities. It also raised thousands of questions, many of which remain unanswered. During the struggle to find answers, the research focus changed gradually and significantly from family history to local history. The final result is the story of the development and decline of a goldmining district near Rockhampton, as seen through the lives of two men and their associates, followed by its transformation into a mostly-grazing community. The book's coverage and depth dovetail perfectly with the author's previously-published history of Rockhampton, Mount Morgan and districts as witnessed and influenced by the Black and Parker families from 1865 until 1930.

How much attention is given to each component? What is the balance between Morinish and family? Strictly speaking, it is difficult to be precise. The easiest way is to say three of the eleven substantive chapters outline the two families before they reached Central Queensland. However, those chapters are smaller than average and account for only 10 percent of the book. After arrival though, the families' lives became so interwoven with other local people and events that a history of the people is also a history of the district. One does not happen without the other.

The family history perspective combines anecdotes with verifiable facts. Key points of their respective pre-Morinish histories are summarised into a condensed format. A great swathe of other stories and consequential events, many of which have become part of the family's folklore, are bypassed in favour of keeping the main focus on Morinish.

The chapter about the early Johnson heritage begins with a précis of Schleswig-Holstein's key role in European history. Although perhaps unusual for a book about Central Queensland goldmining, this overview lays critical groundwork for understanding the motivation behind Martin Johnson's migration and the turmoil caused by his family's separation. Something has to be said about his determination to bring younger siblings into his lifelong dream of hard work in the quest for gold. He did not enjoy the old farming lifestyle. He also abhorred everything Prussian and worked hard at becoming a first-generation Australian.

The section about Patrick Halligan's murder at Alton Downs, which features strongly among Johnson anecdotes, is made far more meaningful by the preceding history of Alton Downs, Ridgelands and Morinish. Similarly, reasons for Martin Johnson's immediate disappearance become clear in the context of events in Rockhampton and Denmark.

At first glance, the chapter about the early Wilson family in Nottinghamshire, England, may seem out of place too. However, it provides basis for understanding Nathan Wilson's motivation and attempts to resettle the remnants of his family to better conditions near his new home. He too came from an agricultural family, but dabbled in mining before settling back on farming.

The book truly comes to the fore as a local history of Morinish and, in part, its sister community of Ridgelands during the period from 1858 until 1915. This period witnessed the most intense goldmining activity, but set against a constant backdrop of grazing and agriculture. Some physical secrets are withheld though, such as special geological arrangements and shapes, waterfalls and several local burial grounds which aptly belong to the district's private world.

Morinish's story would be pathetically incomplete without such a strong focus on the Wilsons and Johnsons. They and their immediate family farmed the district from the mid-1870s until beyond 1915 and shared more than one-third of the goldmining claims registered on the goldfield between 1882 and 1899. They and their adventures became part of the local folklore. Some of their stories were relayed to the eldest of us, but most pre-date even those memories and risked being lost completely. The story had to end sometime and winds down as the families' core members either passed away or drifted from Morinish, which happened coincidentally around the fiftieth anniversary of local European settlement and about a century before now. So, from perspectives of both family history and local history, it seems the story was meant to end when it does.

Of course, other people and families also lived at Morinish, not just these two core families, and these are amply described in context at the appropriate historical stages. In all, hundreds of lives are outlined and thousands are mentioned. Many of these people pop up at several stages of the district's early development.

History is all about people and the events which gel them together and this book describes many of each. Some people introduced with the earliest goldmining activity in the late 1860s resurface decades later with the resurgence of the late 1880s, but others will have long given up their dreams of finding their fortunes in the dry, unforgiving terrain. Throughout everything though, the multiple uses of the land persist. Gold prospecting and the grazing industry both continue to this day, sharing Morinish in a sometimes-shaky truce, just as they have done for several generations.

Whispers of the Past

The goldfields of Morinish are silent
Long gone are the miners of old;
Along with the schoolhouse and cottage –
Forgotten… their story untold.

We set out to find the location,
Where forebears a fam'ly had reared.
On the site was a battered old billy,
But nought showing how they had cared.

We picnicked beneath an old shade tree
And shared local stories we'd heard.
Enjoying the country about us
And the trill of a lone butcher bird.

Then wandered around the old diggings,
Our thoughts upon those who had gone.
Describing their lives to the youngsters,
So they, in their turn, could pass on.

To the children who'll come in the future
With thirst for the knowledge of kin.
Though all that's now left are the photos…
And a billy of rusty old tin.

Dell Johnson, November 1994[1]
(reproduced with permission)

Introduction – Gold in Central Queensland

'Unless you know where you come from,
unless you know what your ancestors have been through,
you have no reference point.'
Lee Kwan Yew, Prime Minister of Singapore 1959–1990

I.1 Early culture of goldmining in Australia

The story begins with gold. Without it, Morinish would not generate the same interest.

Everyone knows gold has been a valuable commodity since, well, a long, long time ago. Civilisations on almost every continent used the precious metal to decorate and adorn themselves and their possessions.

Its first discovery in Australia was probably not documented, but convicts reportedly discovered nuggets west of Sydney on several occasions during the early years of the penal settlement. Certain major reasons prevented anything but small-scale discoveries being reported until about 1851. Transport networks were rudimentary at best. Men were not well-informed about how to find and extract gold from the ground. Under English law, the Crown owned all gold deposits. Businessmen and graziers who depended on a stable workforce feared the consequences of their employees leaving for a goldrush. Anyone actually finding gold feared the authorities would confiscate it. Therefore early gold discoveries were kept under wraps by all levels of society.

The need to populate their colonies and fund intercolonial trade in the mid-nineteenth century drove governments to change their policies, from which developed the decision to reward men for reporting gold discoveries. This single move led to reported discoveries at Lambing Flat in New South Wales and Ballaarat in Victoria in 1851, Fingal in Tasmania, Echunga in South Australia and Bingera near present-day Bundaberg in Queensland in 1852. Some of these discoveries led to full-scale goldrushes which drew men from around the world.[1]

Queensland was not a separate colony until late 1859, so the gold discoveries at Bingera in 1852 and near Rockhampton in 1858 occurred in New South Wales. The colonial government revised its goldfield laws on 11 March 1857. Henceforth its governor issued renewable twelve-month licences for ten shillings, which allowed the holders to mine for gold on Crown wastelands and goldfields. Any gold found was deemed to be the miner's absolute property. Special licences costing £4 per annum allowed people to operate businesses, such as general stores, on a goldfield. Any person found living or working on a goldfield without these rights or licences was liable to be fined £5 in the first instance and £10 thereafter. Proven goldmines took precedence over pastoral leases.[2]

I.2 Discovery of gold near Rockhampton (1857–1859)

Since the mid-1850s, pastoralists had used the prime parts of Rockhampton's hinterland for running cattle and sheep. Examples include the Archer family of *Gracemere*, Colin Campbell Mackay of *Morinish*, John Mylrea of *Lake Learmouth*, Peter Fitzallan McDonald of *Yaamba*, James Atherton of *Rosewood*, John Atherton of *Woodlands*, Thomas Atherton of *Barmoya* and Samuel Birkbeck of *Glenmore*.

A now-unknown miner discovered gold near the Fitzroy River in November 1857. In a letter published in Sydney's *Empire* newspaper on 21 August 1858, the Chief Commissioner of Crown Lands Maurice Charles O'Connell claimed personal responsibility but the miner actually did the work. At the time of the discovery and before his promotion to Sydney, O'Connell was Crown Land Commissioner for the Port Curtis district based at Gladstone. He and the miner left Gladstone on 11 November 1857 and arrived at the colony's far northern settled district near Rockhampton six days later. While O'Connell looked on, the miner tested several locations and unearthed enough samples to warrant further investigation. News spread quickly to Gladstone where subscribers contributed £50 towards kitting out a twelve-person prospecting party for a six-week expedition. This party left Gladstone in late-November 1857, but found nothing.[3]

The lure persisted, but fruitlessly. In February 1858, O'Connell sent W. C. Chappell to thoroughly investigate the surrounding countryside. In mid-June, Chappell reported finding gold

nuggets in payable quantities on the *Canoona* pastoral run beside the Fitzroy River about 30 miles north of Rockhampton.[4]

Chappell's find reignited enthusiasm at Gladstone. The government's former surgeon there Dr Archibald Clinton Robertson went to the Fitzroy to see for himself and reported to a public meeting at the *Gladstone Hotel* after his return on 9 July 1858. Robertson, himself a veteran of the Californian goldrush of 1849, described the ease by which a number of specimens were found. Most were found using a tin washing dish or quart pot, but one piece was simply picked up by a Chinese cook travelling with the party. Robertson estimated a man could unearth about 15 shillings worth of gold per day. He had found gold also near Mr Clarke's station on the Calliope River and expected it to be found between the Boyne and Dawson Rivers too. Robertson and Chappell tabled their specimens. Based on reports from the meeting, it seems Robertson, rather than Chappell or the government, was credited with having brought the find to the public's attention. However he acknowledged Chappell's important precursory hardship and efforts. Almost as an afterthought, the meeting agreed to tell the Sydney and Moreton Bay newspapers about the find.[5]

Stories of the magnificent find became more impressive as the news reached Sydney and Melbourne. One messenger, Mr Wilmott, sailed from Port Curtis to Sydney with the news and reported he had seen some very fine specimens and brought tales of the gold being found in large quantities. If the gold was truly as enticing as the stories suggested, one wonders why men headed away from it with the news.[6]

Initially only six or eight men prospected within three miles of the original find. The run's proprietors estimated diggers were making 10 shillings per day each, but the stories grew as the news spread farther. Chappell in Gladstone cautioned prospective miners that the washings yielded only about 20 shillings per day. Optimists and pessimists alike compared the Canoona find with the Ballaarat goldfield in Victoria.[7]

Between 60 and 70 men worked the government's new goldfield by early August 1858. Water was scarce, but the men extracted patches of gold from near the surface. Two stores opened on the ground, one by Richard Hetherington of Gladstone and the other by Messrs Ramsay and Gaden, the operators of *Canoona* pastoral station. Henry Friend, a Gladstone storekeeper, planned to build another store and personally escorted the shipments of gold back to Gladstone. Perfectly within their rights, the diggers kept some of the gold for themselves.[8]

The pendulum soon swung the other way. By October 1858, reports from the Canoona goldfield were more realistic. Ships from Keppel Bay (Rockhampton) to Brisbane were crammed with would-be miners returning with tales of horrendously dry conditions at Canoona. Rain, they said, would have made digging all the more troublesome though. They had found the true payable size of the field to be very small and therefore did not expect the surrounding terrain to produce worthwhile gold either. The *Moreton Bay Courier*, a Brisbane newspaper, ended its derisory report in early October 1858 by saying nowhere within a seven-mile radius yielded any gold. [9]

Consider for a moment the extent of settlement throughout New South Wales' northern districts in February 1859. Brisbane was the chief town with a population of 5844, of whom 889 were under fourteen years old and only 3281 could read and write. Other places in the district included Casino, Dalby, Drayton, Gayndah, Glen Innes, Grafton, Ipswich, Leichhardt, Maryborough, Port Curtis, Surat and Tenterfield. The northernmost of these places was the Port Curtis district, which stretched from Wide Bay in the south to Broad Sound in the north and was located by white men in March 1854. A census shortly before 1859 suggested the Port Curtis district had only 287 people, of whom 201 could read and write.[10]

In this immature condition, Queensland separated from New South Wales and was established as a colony in its own right. Queen Victoria signed the Letters Patent on 6 June 1859 for implementation on 10 December that year. The new border passed essentially along 29 degrees South latitude, but followed a number of rivers and ranges near the coast. The Brisbane-based government focussed attention on the southeastern corner around Brisbane and Ipswich, but depended upon districts farther north for financial resources. Although initially promising, Canoona's collapse left the government destitute until the Gympie goldfield burst into life in 1867. In the meantime, the colonial administration went practically bankrupt. Some diggers stayed near the failed goldfields and worked the land. For example, Patrick Fairlie settled at Morinish practically across the river from Canoona, and employed men to tend his sheep.[11]

In the meantime, the government introduced reforms intended to encourage goldmining activity and stimulate the colonial economy. One iteration was passed as an Act of Parliament, 20

Victoria No. 29, for the management of its goldfields and published in the government gazette on 12 August 1863. The regulations identified miners' entitlements. In return for first registering with the local commissioner's office, people were issued a miner's right which entitled them to claim and occupy up to 800 square yards of land. However, they were obliged to work that land in search of gold or else forfeit it if someone reported them for any unexcused absence. Business areas measuring up to 60 feet by 120 feet could be granted too. Unauthorised work of any sort resulted in £5 fines or 3-months' imprisonment. Groups of four miners could request permission to build their own road to assist their access, even if they had no claim over the land through which it would pass. Miners could apply for permission to build machinery, convey and use a given amount of water or operate market gardens. Claims over quartz reefs and veins were limited to certain dimensions, perhaps to encourage more miners to work the ground and allow more than one to enjoy the bounty. Shafts on adjacent quartz claims had to be at least three feet apart. Some rules governed claims along rivers and other alluvial features. Pegged or fenced boundaries were to be respected, both above the ground and below. Shafts within ten feet of roads had to be enclosed within a two-rail fence at least 3½ feet high. Larger areas could be leased, but these were subject to further regulatory conditions. Any miner discovering gold which would support fifty miners was entitled to claim ten additional patches of ground within the relevant declared goldfield or twenty patches if the discovery was more than three miles from an existing goldfield. These were called reward claims. Queensland's first ever reward claim was granted to John Theophilus Symons Bird and his colleague Mr Hosking for their discovery at Ridgelands in February 1867, but the government paid them only half of the prescribed £500 financial reward.[12]

Section 16 of the goldfield regulations said claims had to be worked within 48 hours of being granted. Some enterprising diggers put up all sorts of excuses to retain unworked claims, so Rockhampton's gold commissioner John Jardine required *bona fide* gold-seeking activity at least two hours before noon and at least two hours after noon in each working day.[13]

Mining activity trumped everything else, even if the land was already used for another established purpose. Farmers and graziers were vulnerable to having their leasehold land commandeered by goldminers.

I.3 Risks and rewards

The risks of investing in goldmines and claims are the same today as they ever were. Miners and prospectors needed capital to work their claims, and sought investors who were willing to accept the investment risk in return for a slice of the potential profits. From an investor's perspective, a slickly-worded promise of fortune from an unproven claim could easily develop into financial disaster and complete loss of capital. Hundreds or perhaps thousands of goldmining companies were established in Queensland during the second half of the 1800s. Some managed to make a profit, but the vast majority failed and stole men's dreams and lives. The smaller operations were equally insecure. Miners too and their creditors, such as local storekeepers, would lose everything if the goldfield failed.

Many Rockhampton businessmen and tradesmen during the 1880s held shares in nearby claims, reefs, mines or the companies which worked them. Occasionally but not often, poor struggling men with nothing else to their names chanced upon claims which secured their futures. Claim names such as *Poor Man's Reef* and *Who'd Have Thought It* represented the extremes of men's hopes and aspirations. Rockhampton had its own stock exchange for a while, but the constant need for southern capital meant it soon had to close in favour of a Brisbane bourse. Prudent miners maintained their traditional occupations or provided services to other prospectors and miners. The true investors though never took time away from their day jobs.

Queensland yielded more gold in 1889 than ever before. In that year, the colony extracted 737,822 ounces valued in those days at £2,771,304, far exceeding the 481,643 ounces yielded the previous year. By a greater margin than the year before, the Rockhampton district was the greatest single contributor with almost 341,000 ounces or over 10 tons, which was about 46 percent of the colony's total yield. Today, the Queensland and Rockhampton extractions in 1889 would be valued at about $1.2 billion and $550 million respectively. The Charters Towers field, the second most prolific, yielded a little over 165,000 ounces. Gympie yielded almost 113,000 ounces. Others at Croydon, Ravenswood, Eidsvold, Etheridge, Palmer, Gladstone and Clermont showed a mixture of promise and despair.[14]

Men were drawn to numerous fields around Rockhampton, including mines and claims at Crocodile Creek, Mount Morgan, Cawarral, Morinish, Blackfellow's Gully, Norton and others. In the Rockhampton district, the large Mount Morgan mine eclipsed all others, but its yields per ton were not as impressive as some of the others'.

Professionals, businessmen and tradesmen from Rockhampton invested in these operations, some without ever setting foot on the goldfields. Some investors managed to make a profit, either from gold yields or by selling their shares to others, but relatively few managed to generate immense wealth. Most watched their capital erode as dreams faded.

The overall wealth generated at Morinish was always more moderate than at Mount Morgan, as the Morgan brothers themselves discovered in the mid-1880s when they unsuccessfully tried to emulate their earlier success. Conversely, their employee Conrad Miller and his friend Martin Johnson each understood and loved Morinish for what it was and happily worked the field for more than 40 years.

Figure 1. *Map of northern continental Europe*

Bibliography

The study of local and family history involves a wide range of sources, many of which are available in only some locations. All sources, even original materials, must be questioned and cross-checked and ensuing analysis must incorporate all knowledge before forming hypotheses. The following list can not aspire to detail all sources used, but nominates the major sources used to form the expressed knowledge. On the whole, the unnamed sources used would repeat the expressed knowledge, but without offering strength to the result.

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The Peak Downs Telegram and Queensland Mining Record
The Rockhampton Bulletin (1871–1877)
The Rockhampton Bulletin and Central Queensland Advertiser (1861–1871)
The Western Champion and General Advertiser

Other Queensland

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The Moreton Bay Courier
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The North Queensland Register (Townsville)
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The Queenslander

Other Australian

The Advertiser (Adelaide)
The Argus (Melbourne)
The Australian Town and Country Journal
The Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers Advocate (Parramatta)
The Empire (Sydney)
The Gippsland Times
The Inquirer and Commercial News (Hobart)
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The Maitland Mercury and Hunter River General Advertiser
The Mercury (Hobart)

The South Australian Register
The Sydney Morning Herald
The West Australian

New Zealand

The Auckland Star
The Bay of Plenty Times
The Evening Post
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Death certificates (47 items)
Marriage certificates (34 items)

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Death certificates (2 items)
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About the author

Lex Johnson is an analytical researcher of problems in local history. He has a passion for showcasing the districts and social environments of his heritage. His achievements include publications, a radio series, presentations in Australia and abroad throughout a broad career spanning medicine, mathematics, information technology, business, university management and local history. His historical specializations cover Ireland, Scotland, England, Scandinavia, Switzerland, Canada, United States of America and Australia. Few other researchers match his depth of study. He is a research academic with CQUniversity Australia.

His first two books outlined the Black, McKim and Meredith families of County Sligo, Ireland, to provide an illuminative insight into their influential lives from the 1600s until the mid-1800s. His third book continued the story of the Black and Parker families' subsequent influence upon the development of Central Queensland from the time of European settlement and the dawn of Australian federation. This latest publication explores the first fifty or sixty years of settlement at Morinish and the men and women who were attracted to this now-depleted Central Queensland goldfield.