

# ❖ ERROL GIBBINS ❖

Born in Nambour in 1909, Errol Gibbins grew up on the family farm, a land holding in the western foothills of Buderim Mountain that his father George Gibbins had taken up in 1894. The area became known as Gibbins Pocket and much later as Forest Glen. Errol started school in Woombye and moved to Mons School as one of its original pupils when it opened in 1916. He worked on the family farm helping to look after the citrus orchard, small crops and cattle.

Errol married Madge Halpin in 1932 and the couple had four children – Evelyn, Clare, Gordon and Stephen. Errol had purchased land of his own about two years before his marriage and toiled long hours to clear land and dig drains using only hand tools. As well as growing pineapples and citrus, Errol earned income as a trucking contractor, carting cane from North Arm to the Nambour sugar mill and helping with highway construction.



An ankle injury, legacy of a childhood horse-fall, rendered Errol unfit for military duties in World War II so he joined the Volunteer Defence Corps. His duties included responsibility for evacuating families from the area in the event of enemy invasion. He also supervised Italian Prisoners of War entrusted to his care. Generally no more than two at any one time, these men worked on Errol's farm and had few restrictions other than travel beyond the district.

Errol also worked off-farm, cutting and carting timber – mainly flooded (or rose) gum for case timber. He was a very successful farmer but experienced similar adversities to most primary producers, at one time losing 14 acres of pineapples to frost. He started running chooks free-range in the citrus orchard for the two-fold purpose of egg production and weed management, and then sold dressed poultry from the farm's road-side store. That evolved into full-scale production of chickens for the dressed poultry market, at its peak, employing 138 staff.

Despite the long working hours, there was occasional time for leisure and Errol enjoyed fishing off the rocks at Alexandra Headland. On Saturday nights, his Studebaker truck with canvas seats fitted in the back became the local bus for the trip to the Maroochydore picture theatre. He was an orchid enthusiast, importing rare orchids, entering competitions and proudly showing them to visitors to the farm. He was a Mason with the Nambour Lodge and, as a youth, played cornet in the Nambour District Band.

Errol's children recall weather extremes like the wet seasons when their father used chains on his truck tyres to negotiate Buderim's slippery red-soil roads. They recall their father saving houses and the local church from bushfires that swept eastward from the Blackall Range, and two occasions when fire roared across the highway and swept over Buderim Mountain. They recall the farm's reliance on its own power-plant for electricity until the area was serviced with mains power in the 1950s.

Errol lost a lung to cancer in 1972 but recovered and retained involvement in his business interests until he died in 1988. His lifetime marked a period of significant change – starting when agriculture, though still in its infancy, was the main commercial activity in the area and when rail was the primary mode of transport. The busy Bruce Highway now cuts through the original Gibbins' land holding and the district supports a much greater range of activities. Errol's descendants proudly retain ownership of the family property and maintain the tradition of family business operations in the area.

*Donor: Stephen Gibbins and Evelyn Cogill*