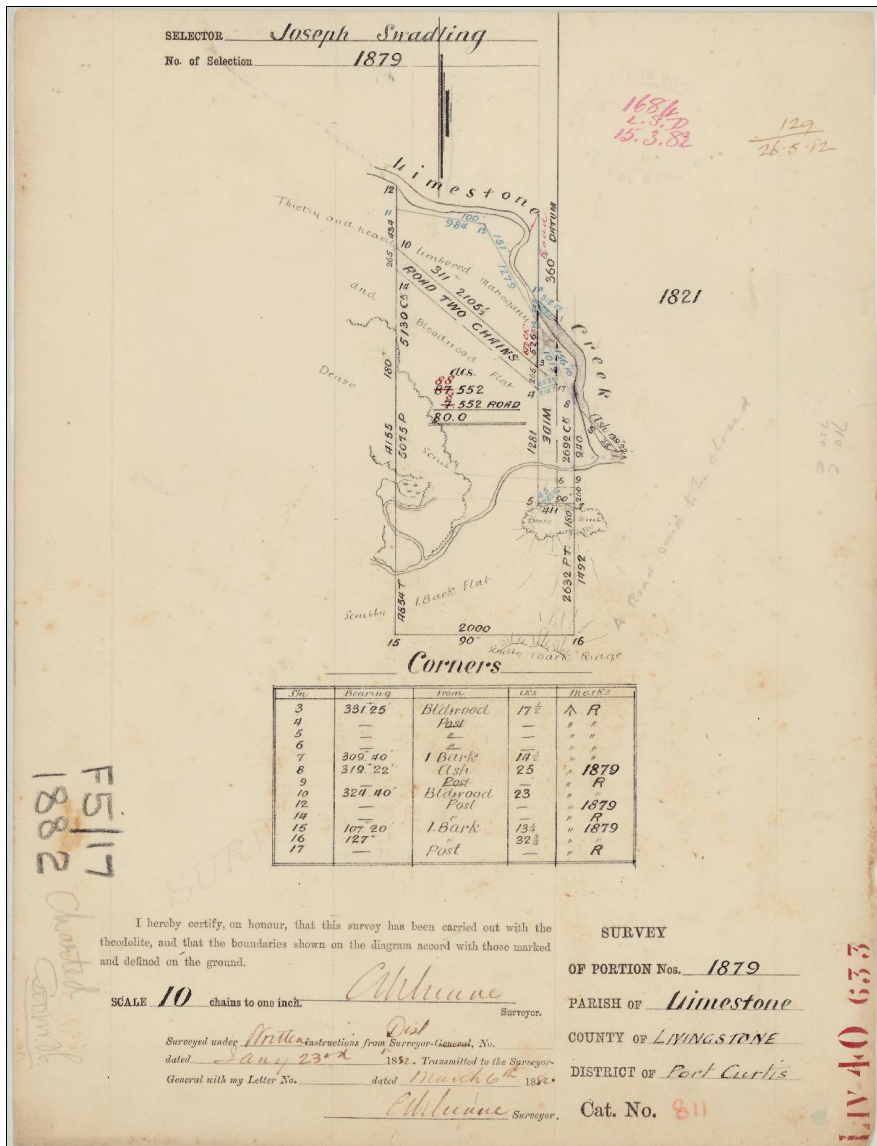


THE SEARCH FOR PORTION 1879

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This is the original survey of Portion 1879 (also known as Liv 40.633) in the Parish of Limestone, County of Livingstone, Central Queensland, which my great grandparents, **Joseph**¹ and **Bessie**² Swadling selected in 1882.³

It's stating the obvious, but in order to own land, you must know where it is. You also have to know where it begins and ends, and where its boundaries are. Its size and shape needs to be marked with unerring precision

and the direction of all its edges need to be known. Most of that information is shown on the survey and Joseph, Bessie and their children would have known exactly where they were.

Unfortunately, over a hundred and forty or so years and four generations later, the survey is of little use to their descendants in identifying the exact location of the selection because all the compass bearings on the map are based on impermanent objects (bloodwood post,

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ironbark post, etc) rather than fixed geographical features; and latitudes and longitudes aren't shown.

From time to time over some thirty years I had made sporadic attempts to find the property's location, which is at Dalma, about 30 kms northwest of Rockhampton. My father's cousin, **Ralph Wilfred Swadling**⁴, had given me a large black and white cadastral map based on an original 1875 version. He had pencilled in an outline of where he thought the property is and unfortunately that sent me down the wrong track for a long time.

Typical of cadastral maps, it identified properties by number and sometimes by the name of the owner. It showed property boundaries but I could never find what I was looking for. In 2015, using a magnifying glass, I scanned Ralph's map from the top left-hand corner to the bottom right-hand corner and eventually found a sliver of the property's northern boundary in very small print right on the bottom edge of the map. Ralph's pencilled area was miles away.

The map was of no use to me and I donated it to the Rockhampton Historical Society. I needed the next map south of that one. Then followed a run-around through government departments to find the right map. The Queensland Department of Natural Resources and Mines referred me to the National Archives in Canberra. They referred me to the Queensland Department of Natural Resources and Mines.

Finally, in desperation I emailed my old fall-back position, the Queensland State Archives, the only government department – federal, state or local - I have ever dealt with in my life which has unfailingly provided exemplary service. They rose to the occasion yet again: I received a phone call from a nice bloke called Keith. He said, "Ken, Narelle's not here at the moment. She's the one who handles maps, but she'll be back on Monday. In the meantime, tell me more about your problem."

Of course, I had never met Keith or Narelle but I explained what I was after and the following Tuesday, which was the day after

Narelle came back to work, Keith called me again. He described what they'd found, which was exactly what I was looking for. He offered to send me a digital copy of the map but warned me I'd have to pay a fee. After all this time, I didn't care what it cost – I was almost prepared to mortgage the house - and I paid for it over the internet by credit card. It cost \$3.65.

That wasn't the first time I had spoken to Keith. On two previous occasions he had phoned me to clarify requests I had made. Both times he was unable to satisfy my requirements and he returned my cheques uncashed. Recently, one of Keith's colleagues also phoned me helpfully. Keith wouldn't have remembered me but I asked her to pass on my regards to him. The customer service standards of the Queensland State Archives are wonders to behold.

But I digress.

I discovered that it was possible to identify the current owners of properties. So, in October 2016 I contacted the Queensland Department of Natural Resources and Mines, paid the appropriate fee, and obtained the name and address of Eric, the present owner of Portion 1879. I won't reveal Eric's and his wife Kerry's surname – or the location of their home – for privacy reasons.

My wife Denise and I were on our way north from Melbourne, towing our caravan to Rockhampton and I wrote to Eric, asking permission to enter his property. I told him I had no claim on the land; I merely hoped to find and photograph the original homestead or, if it no longer exists, its foundations or, if they no longer exist, any stand of exotic trees at the homestead site. (Joseph and Bessie were English and they may have planted elms or oaks or maples to remind them of home, a common practice among British pioneers).

Failing that, I at least hoped to stand on the land my great grandparents farmed over 130 years ago. I promised to disturb nothing, take nothing but photographs and leave nothing but footprints. The original homestead, a rough bush hut, was unlikely to be still standing.

THE SEARCH FOR PORTION 1879 (Cont.)

In due course I received a phone call from Eric at 7.30 one morning. Obviously, anyone who phones at that time of day must be a farmer and we arranged the visit. My nephew Gary and his wife Leann came with us.



The cadastral map immediately south of Ralph's map. Portion 1879 is to the right of centre. Joseph also selected Portions 2041, 1730, 2011 and 1756 which I only discovered after finding 1879.

Eric and Kerry gave us a typical country welcome. We sat around their kitchen table and chatted over cups of tea and cakes and biscuits before Eric took us on a tour of the property.

Eric and Kerry also loaned us their copy of the local school's 1889-1989 centenary booklet, which contains mention of Joseph and his family; the four youngest Swadling children **Bob, Joe, Ralph and Doris** all attended the Dalma school, and four of Joe Jnr's children, as did Eric's ancestors. Leann copied it and later returned it to Kerry.

Eric dumped half a tonne of bits and pieces from his truck cabin to make room for me and we drove off, with the others following in Gary's vehicle. Eric showed us the boundaries of the property and the three creeks which flowed through it: Limestone, Middle and Bonley which are all small and not very deep but capable of wide flooding.

He told us some of the history of the area.

Apparently, Joseph had been well-known and one of the leading citizens in the community. Eric's mother remembered the Swadling family and used to tell stories about them. She would have been too young to know Joseph and Bessie but she would have known their children, since the property remained in family hands until the 1920s.

Eric explained the nature of farming in the area. To us non-farmers the soil looked poor: away from the creek beds it seems to consist mainly of hard dry clay and very stoney ground and I can understand why Joseph was eventually bankrupted. Most of the soldier settlement blocks in the area also failed after World War 1.

Joseph had ringbarked 100 acres (40.47 hectares) on the total landholding, which was about one square mile (259 hectares) in area. In those days, of course, the only way to clear the land was by axe and cross-cut saw (if you were lucky enough to have a partner on the other end of the saw). Hard yakka doesn't begin to describe it.

According to Eric, in order to be a farmer you have to be either very dumb or very smart. Eric's family must breed smart farmers because they've farmed in that area for more than 140 years. Eric had previously grown sorghum on his land but has now changed to raising Droughtmaster cattle, which he has trained to be very docile. The land is in good hands.

We visited on a dry, warm spring day and it was easy to imagine how oppressive the summer climate would be. The area was originally called Dalmah Scrub, because of the nature of the flora. While some of the area was forested, the rest was covered in small scrubby bushes, an indication of its lack of fertility. Joseph's successful lobbying to change the name and spelling to Dalma made it sound a little less down-market.

Eric gained permission to take us to the old school site, which was on someone else's property. He identified the site easily, but there's nothing left of the school building but some rotting posts lying on the ground, next

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to a large fig tree. The age of the tree isn't known.

He then took us to where the original family homestead had stood. We had to drive across Limestone Creek, which was very shallow and shaded by trees along its banks. There's no trace left of the old homestead but Eric was certain of the site, which stood on the western, higher bank of the creek. The roads in the area have all changed since Joseph's day but the original creek crossing is just below the homestead site and faint traces of the track are still visible.

Eric and Gary and I trudged down the old track and crossed the creek on stones without getting our feet wet. This rough old crossing may be the last trace of any mark Joseph left on the land as "a man of practical ability in the making of roads and bridges and such like kindred works". Gary later went back and established the latitude and longitude of the site.

Eric was concerned that possums, once plentiful, have disappeared from the area. I offered to put him in touch with hundreds of people in Melbourne who would gladly let him have the possums that are destroying their gardens.

It was a satisfying and worthwhile visit and I'm grateful to Eric and Kerry for their

kindness. I hadn't really expected to find any trace of Joseph's and Bessie's occupation of the land and I certainly felt no spiritual connection to it. But in some small way I can appreciate the hardships they must have endured. I couldn't help wondering how Bessie would have felt about living in a rough bush hut as compared to her comfortable upbringing in Berkshire.

Now I know the area and I'm able to envisage my great grandparents in their environment. Another blank space in our family history has been filled.

References:

¹ Joseph Swadling b. 2/7/1850, Birth Indexes of England and Wales, September 1850, Sup Registrar's District 320 Wycombe, Vol 6 p.420.

² Sarah Elizabeth Stubbs, b. 10/7/1849, English birth certificate, Year of Registration 1849, Quarter of Registration Jul-Aug-Sep, District Cookham, County Berks, Vol 6, p.160, entry number 196. According to Ralph Wilfred Swadling, Joseph and Bessie's grandson, she was always called Bessie within the family.

³ Use of survey plan Liv 40.633 "QSA ID 1081711" was approved by the Department of Natural Resources and Mines, Queensland, Australia in 2014.

⁴ Ralph Wilfred Swadling b. 27/7/1910, Queensland certificate #25445/010375.

(Maps provided by the author). ■