

# The Bancroft Memorial

Two Queensland Doctors—service for “the greater good of all human kind”

by Professor John Pearn  
Co-Trustee, The AMAQ Bancroft Memorial

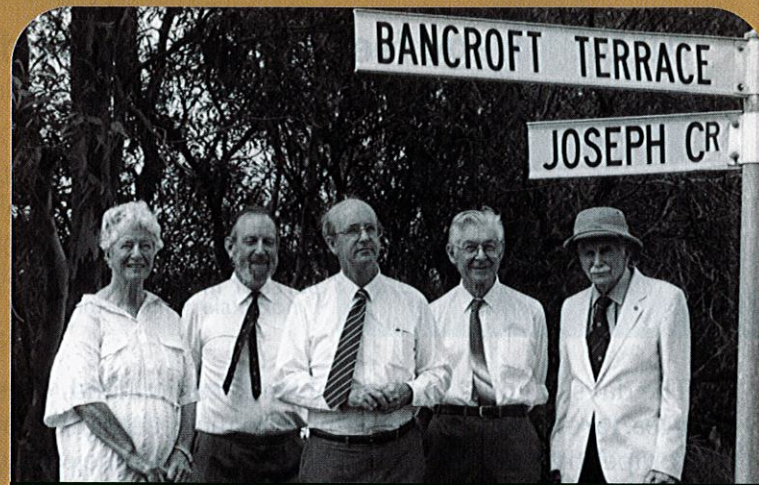
One special item in the AMAQ's collection of material heritage is the Bancroft Memorial. This truncated cone of Ashgrove granite stands as a sentinel above the sea at Deception Bay. It records and honours the contributions of two of Australia's pioneer doctors and biological scientists—Joseph Bancroft (1836-1894) and his son, Thomas Lane Bancroft (1860-1933).

The Bancroft Memorial was unveiled on 21 July 1963. It was the result of advocacy by dedicated and a far-sighted group of doctors within the (then) Queensland Branch of the British Medical Association: Dr Drury Clarke, Dr Percy Earnshaw, Professor Douglas Gordon, Dr Edward Oswald Marks, Dr Stuart Patterson and Dr NV Youngman. The Memorial was made possible by the enthusiastic patronage of the Caboolture Historical Society and the support of the Caboolture Shire Council.

The Memorial is situated in Captain Cook Parade, Deception Bay, within the former boundaries of the Bancroft Farm. This Farm was established in 1881, initially by the purchase of 150 acres on Burpengary Creek nearby. Joseph Bancroft extended the property, and his son, Thomas Lane Bancroft, lived there for 9 years (1895-1904) as a local General Practitioner and as one of the great Australian biologists of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By 1890, the Bancroft Farm comprised 3,780 acres. It was not only a horticulturalist's but a biologist's dream. It was there (in 1890 and 1891) that Joseph Bancroft established his experimental and commercial premmican meatworks, his enterprise of cultured pearls and his experimental plots of sugarcane, wheat, rice and barley. It was there, at weekends from 1891 and full-time from 1895, that Thomas Lane Bancroft discovered and named new species of mosquitos, fish, lizards, snakes and birds; and was the site of his laboratory where he undertook much of his encyclopaedic work on parasitology.

The Bancrofts, father and son, differed greatly in personality. The father, Joseph was gregarious, a leader of the collegiate world of medicine, an innovator of systems and a dominant extrovert. The son, Thomas Lane, was shy, sensitive, retiring and was not motivated to shine as a personality in the ethos of competitive, clinical medicine. He was, however, meticulous and resolute in the pursuit of scientific endeavour and truth.

Joseph Bancroft (1836-1894) was born in Manchester. He was reared on his family farm and from the age of 16 was apprenticed to a Cheshire surgeon. He subsequently studied at, gained prizes and graduated from the Manchester Royal School of Medicine and Surgery. Joseph Bancroft delighted in natural history in all its forms and before his emigration to Australia (in 1864) was for three years President of the Nottingham Naturalists' Society. In Brisbane with his family, he purchased five hectares of bush at Three Mile Scrub and there established his farmhouse, Kelvin Grove. Over the



THE TRUSTEES OF THE BANCROFT MEMORIAL, AT BANCROFT TERRACE, DECEPTION BAY, ON THE SITE OF THE FORMER BANCROFT FARM. LEFT TO RIGHT: DR ELIZABETH (“PAT”) MARKS AO; MR LEONARD (BILL) WARE (FORMER PRESIDENT OF THE CABOOLTURE HISTORICAL SOCIETY); PROFESSOR JOHN PEARN; DR DAVID MACKERRAS (FOR THE EXTENDED BANCROFT KINDRED); AND DR STUART PATTERSON AM, OSTJ.

ensuing 30 years of his life, he achieved perhaps more in the advancement of medical knowledge, than almost any other doctor in Australia. He served as House Surgeon (equivalent to the appointment of Medical Superintendent) from 1868 and as Visiting Surgeon (from 1870) at the Brisbane Hospital and the Lady Bowen Lying-In Hospital. He served on and was elected President of the Central Board of Health (Queensland) and the Health Department of the City of Brisbane; was Royal Commissioner for a Commission investigating the treatment and institutionalisation of psychiatric patients; represented Queensland in the first Australian Sanitary Conference (1884) and was Secretary to the first Medical Society of Queensland (in 1871) and its President when it was reconstituted in 1886. He established gardens, orchards and experimental plots on his farms at Kelvin Grove and Burpengary (Deception Bay).



THE PLAQUE, UNVEILED ON 21 JULY 1963, ON THE BANCROFT MEMORIAL AT CAPTAIN COOK DRIVE, DECEPTION BAY, SOUTH-EAST QUEENSLAND. PHOTOGRAPH, FEBRUARY 2001.

Joseph Bancroft contributed to the breeding of climatic-appropriate strains of wheat, rye, rice, grapes, strawberries, sugarcane and grasses in his adopted land. He described Fusarium disease in bananas, gave evidence to the select committee on Forests and Herbaria, wrote of diseases in sheep and cattle and established a commercial pemmican meat factory at Kelvin Grove and later at Deception Bay. His international medical fame centres on his description of the pharmacy and pharmaco-physiology of Dubosia; his pioneering description of human tick paralysis in Australia; and on his demonstration of the parasitic (nematode) cause of filariasis. The redolent scientific name *Wuchereria bancrofti* is well known to all medical students throughout the world today.

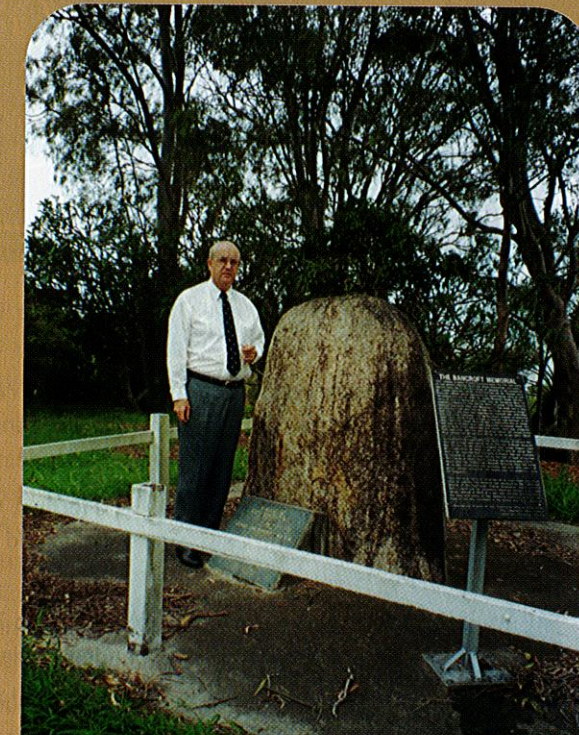
Thomas Lane Bancroft (1860-1933), born in Nottingham, came to Brisbane with his parents in 1864, at a time when the future City had a population of barely 12,000 persons. From December 1864 Thomas Lane Bancroft grew up at Kelvin Grove, the farm at the Three Mile Scrub on the banks of Enoggera Creek. He graduated in medicine from Edinburgh University (in 1883) and practised as a general medical practitioner in Brisbane at Deception Bay; and at Innisfail, Stannary Hills, Eidsvold, Palm Island and Wallaville.

Thomas' contributions to human, botanical, parasitological, zoological, agricultural and veterinary science were enormous. He is perhaps best known for his elucidation of the life cycle of the Australian lungfish, *Neoceratodus forsteri*. In the laboratory which he established at his home in Eidsvold, he discovered that the young lungfish fry must be able to breathe air; and that the genus was truly amphibious.

At a time of strong personalities and clinical dogma emanating from the medical worlds of the southern States, he took a courageous and evidence-based stand (long before his time) against the popular therapy of intravenous ammonia for the treatment of snakebite in Australia.

Together, the Bancroft father and son comprised the most significant medical research team in Australia in the nineteenth century. Joseph and Thomas Bancroft have more memorials than perhaps any other medical family in this country. Besides a township (Bancroft), streets and parks and medals record their works. Thirteen herbs and trees (including a eucalypt, a wattle and a native orchard) records the passing of their lives and their contributions to botany. More than 40 insects were named with some variety of *bancrofti* and more than 19 intestinal and blood parasites, two snakes, a lizard and five arachnids (ticks and spiders) also bear their names.

The AMAQ trustees of the Bancroft Memorial at Deception Bay are Dr Stuart Patterson, Dr Robert O'Shea and Professor John Pearn (for AMAQ), Dr Elizabeth



THE TRUNCATED CONE OF ASHGROVE GRANITE WHICH COMPRISES THE AMAQ BANCROFT MEMORIAL. SITUATED ABOVE THE SEA ON CAPTAIN COOK PARADE AT DECEPTION BAY, IT RECORDS THE LIFE AND WORKS OF TWO OF AUSTRALIA'S FINEST LATE NINETEENTH AND EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY PIONEERS OF MEDICAL SCIENCE; WITH PROFESSOR JOHN PEARN, AMAQ CO-TRUSTEE. PHOTOGRAPH, FEBRUARY 2001.

(Pat) Marks and Dr David Mackerras (for and on behalf of the Bancroft kindred), the Mayor (of the Day) of the Caboolture Shire Council, and the President (of the Day) of the Caboolture Historical Society. For more than a decade, Professor John Pearn has visited the Memorial annually and on behalf of the Trustees reported on its status to AMAQ.

Memorials enrich our environment and provide passing interest to those who pause, read and perhaps reflect upon what has passed that way. Memorials do more, especially in an increasing non-physical world of cyberspace—they provide an enduring datum of preference and reality. Such beacons of excellence are proud referents of the heritage which is the history of the AMAQ and the broader society which it serves.