

FLORENCE PERRIN (1884 – 1952)

Florence Perrin (1884- 1952) was an early conservationist, she collected and did in-depth research into seaweed and it was she who single handedly helped to preserve Low Head into the quiet, charming relatively undeveloped sea-side village that it is today. She was a woman ahead of her time.

Florence Dawson (1884 - 1952) was the daughter of the Rev. and Mrs Dawson and the grand-daughter of T W Monds who built and owned Carrick Mill outside Launceston. She married George Perrin, son of well-to-do Launceston draper, Walter Perrin and in 1914 she bought most of the land at Low Head, then known then as The Heads. It was intended to be used by her brother, who went to Abyssinia and died there and never returned to Tasmania. The reason is uncertain but it was possibly because he was doing missionary work there.

The first love of the couple was the bush. They were enthusiastic bushwalkers and climbers and they were skiers and photographers, philanthropists and very community minded. They went on climbing expeditions when many of Tasmania's mountain peaks were virtually unknown; to Europeans at least. Florence was intrepid and determined and she is reputed to be the first European woman to have climbed many of the mountain peaks around Tasmania. She even designed her own mountaineer garb and she was also reputed to be the first Tasmanian woman to wear the divided skirt with pants buttoned below the knee. Before this time when women went mountaineering they used to wear long to the ankle, heavy skirts. How difficult, restrictive, even dangerous, that must have been. She became a very proficient photographer on these trips, taking photographs of scenery, now gone forever. These photographs are now to be found in the Launceston Museum.

Florence and George Perrin were good friends with Gustav and Kate Weindorfer and spent weekends away staying with them in the Waldheim Chalet at Cradle Mountain. They went on many climbing expeditions, and Perrin's Bluff was named after the couple in 1916. In the 1930's Florence and George used to rent out the chalet for weeks and they would take a large party of people there for cross-country skiing. Florence was part of the syndicate which purchased Waldheim at Cradle Mountain after Gustav Weindorfer died. She was key to ensuring the continuing operation of the chalet and it is said she saved the surrounding ancient King Billy forests from being logged and turned into a plantation. In the early 1940's Florence publicised the necessity of a South-West National Park declaring, "We are a sordid, wretched lot of people with a commercialised outlook".

She was an active member of the Launceston Horticultural Society as well as the Launceston Field Naturalists. She made native orchids her special study and having collected nearly all of the 90 varieties known, she painted or sketched most of them. These are also to be found in the Launceston Museum.

She became a good friend of a Professor Arthur Lucas, a professor of Mathematics at the University of Tasmania. He was a noted scientist who made a particular study of seaweed. He would visit the Perrin home at Low Head for 3 months in the Summer and many people joined them with their seaweeding forays. Apparently she was very talented in that direction, networking and gathering assistants to her cause. Those with boats were persuaded to travel up and down the Tamar Estuary dragging a kind of wire dredge to scoop up the weed. After the day ended they would all go to the Perrin home where Florence would have prepared a hearty dinner. After dinner they would settle down to the serious business of sorting, classifying and cataloguing the day's catch.

Florence and Arthur Lucas went to the mainland doing research on seaweed, Lord Howe Island, the islands of Queensland and South Australia. Finally they co-authored a book on the subject called "Seaweeds of South Australia" Her collection is now in the Museum in Launceston and in university libraries in the UK and Australia and she lectured to the Royal Society on the subject.

Florence was a founding member of the Country Womens Association, the CWA, at a time when there were not many such organisations solely for women. She held many executive positions throughout Tasmania such as Vice-President of the organisation and she took on the role as the editor of 'Tasmanian Country Woman', the newspaper of the CWA. She travelled throughout Tasmania with the aim of reaching isolated areas and making contact with the women there; to set up branches and connect with the wider organisation.

Locally, in the Heads, as Low Head was then called, Florence donated a parcel of land to the Country Womens Association. Soon she raised funds to build a holiday home there for women "who couldn't afford a holiday at a hotel" for them to "to forget about their daily life and household chores for a while".

The Perrin family donated land where the walled picnic ground is in Low Head, in what was once known as the tennis courts. They also donated land directly behind East Beach. Much of the land that Florence did sell, was sold to women or anyone with a dire need of housing. When she did sell on the open market she hand-picked her buyers and devised a strategy of placing stringent conditions as to the use of the land; for example, no further sub-division, no liquor licences, to be used for residential use only and no retail. Interestingly there has only ever been one shop, a Post Office and no hotels. Undoubtedly

this covenant strategy reduced the amount of money Florence could have made out of the sale of the land but she was determined to save The Heads from the developers and to preserve it for recreational or heritage purposes and to save it for the people who actually lived there. Even today there is still a lot of undeveloped land in Low Head. The land north of the Pilot Station to the Lighthouse and the land from the lighthouse in the semicircle right around East Beach is almost empty of the rampant development to be found in many other Northern Tasmanian coastal towns. Low Head still has only a ribbon strip of development and is still a pleasant place in which to holiday or live. The people who have chosen to live in Low Head, indeed, have many reasons to thank Florence Perrin.

She could see the big picture and she lived a life rich in an appreciation of the unique Tasmanian environment, its beauty, its wildlife and its plants. She helped to preserve the old-fashioned, sea-side village nature of Low Head and made it the pleasant place to live and holiday that it is today.

Marita Bodman, Low Head, March, 2023