Cherbourg Ration Shed Museum *by Rhonda Prescott*



"From tradition to invasion & annihilation and dispossession", the timeline depicted at the Ration Shed Museum in Cherbourg provides a potent snapshot of Australian history. The timeline "traces the history of Cherbourg from the Barambah reserve created in 1901 as a place where a dying race could live out its last days in peace to the proud and resilient town of today".

I recently visited Cherbourg for the first time with a group of people from the Noosa area. Travelling from the lush green vegetation of Lake Macdonald area, the countryside became much drier as we drove northwest from Gympie. After a quick stop for an excellent coffee at the Goomeri Bakery and Coffee Shop, we continued towards Murgon and then to Cherbourg, arriving about 2 hours after leaving home.

I was intrigued by the name of the bridge over Barambah Creek on the way into Cherbourg, the Frank Big Shot Fisher Bridge! During the day I learned that Frank Fisher from Cherbourg became a champion rugby league and cricket player in the 1930s and was given the name "bigshot" by the community in recognition of his sporting prowess and his community leadership.

Upon arriving in Cherbourg my first impression was that the town is lovingly cared for. The museum is beautifully curated, as you will see from my photos. The Ration Shed is just that, a shed from which rations were handed out to the people living at Cherbourg.





Our guides for the Ration Shed tour were the venerable elders Eric Law AM and Manny Hegarty assisted by trainee guide Siobhan. Nicola and Stacy from the Cherbourg Historical Precinct facilitated our visit.



Left: *Eric Law AM*
Right: *Manny Hegarty Dormitory*

Uncle Eric Law was also a renowned rugby league player and a member of Cherbourg's first-ever senior Premiership side coached by Frank Fisher. Eric is also a Vietnam War Veteran, the first aboriginal superintendent of Cherbourg (appointed by Bob Katter who was a Queensland Government Minister at that time), former Mayor of Cherbourg and an educator. He was awarded an Order of Australia (AM) in 2018 for his lifetime of community service.

Eric teamed up with Manny Hegarty, another Cherbourg man with a distinguished public service career, to share their histories and passion for the future of Cherbourg.

Barambah Reserve was renamed Cherbourg in 1931 to avoid confusion with the nearby Barambah pastoral station. Under the "Aboriginal Protection Act" people from numerous clans and tribes in all parts of Queensland and northern New South Wales were relocated to the reserve, often in cattle trucks or force-marched overland. Some were Kabi Kabi people from the Noosa area. Others came from as far away as Palm Island and Cape York. Upon arrival at Cherbourg, children were separated from their parents and accommodated in dormitories. Control of Aboriginal children was removed from their parents and given

to government-appointed white superintendents. In the name of "protection", Aboriginal people were subject to near-total control. Their entry to, and exit from, reserves was regulated as was their everyday life on the reserves, their right to marry and their employment. The permit system used to control every aspect of their lives was introduced in 1897 and not repealed until 1969, following the successful 1967 referendum. This referendum changed the Constitution to include Aboriginal & Torres Strait Island people as part of the Australian population and to give the Commonwealth the power to make laws for all Australians including Aboriginal & Torres Strait Island people previously controlled by State regulations. I find it astounding that this is such recent history! Manny had to apply for a permit to leave Cherbourg to take up employment in Brisbane.

Manny's mother, Ruth Hegarty, has written an autobiography about her experiences growing up in Cherbourg. Is That You, Ruthie?, University of Queensland Press (1999) is available from the Noosa Library and the shop at the Ration Shed.

For more information about the Ration Shed, or to book a tour, go to: https://rationshed.com.au/

I felt privileged to experience the shared knowledge and wisdom of these two amazing men. The Cherbourg story is a story of dispossession, oppression and heart-breaking cruelty, but also a story of survival, resilience and hope for the future.









Aboriginal art



Cherbourg Dormitories and Buildings



Frank Bigshot Fisher and Eric Law



Rations Handout



Totem



Grevillea



Shadow Boxes



The Ration Shed Rear Verandah including the Visiting Group