

# TIMELINES

The Quarterly Newsletter of the Murwillumbah Historical Society

January 2013 Vol. 1 No. 3



## Welcome

Happy New Year and welcome to the January 2013 edition of *Timelines*, the newsletter of the Murwillumbah Historical Society. The aim of these newsletters is to introduce some of the rich historical heritage we share here in Murwillumbah and environs. Coming soon, you'll be able to access our archive of newsletters online.

Thanks to our readers for the feedback you have provided. **Please keep helping us improve this newsletter - your feedback, input, corrections and contributions are most welcome.**

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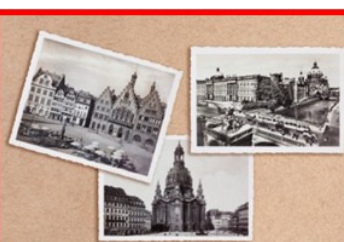
## Bob Whittle OAM DFM

*This article was written by Max Boyd with assistance from Bob's wife Frances.*

The Rotary Club of Murwillumbah was responsible for requesting Tweed Shire Council to call a public meeting in 1959 to form an historical society. President of Tweed Shire Council, Councillor Harold Lundberg responded and a meeting was held in the Jessie McMillan Hall following which the Tweed River Historical Society was formed and Mr Bob Whittle became the inaugural President. The first meeting of that Society was held on 16 March 1959.

Over the intervening years, there have been numerous people who have contributed in a myriad of ways to the progress of that Society and each person's contribution has been important in their own special way. However, the Honour Board carries the names of two people who deserve special recognition. The first was Mr Ron Johansen OAM who was the President from 1992 until he retired in 2012 and whose life was honoured in the previous edition of *Timelines*.

The second is the late Mr Bob Whittle, whose term of office as President ran from 16 March 1959 for 10 years until the Society went into abeyance, and restarted again in 1984 when Bob was again elected as its President.



## WE NEED YOUR HELP!

If you have any historic photos of the old wharves formerly on the south bank of the Tweed River in Murwillumbah please contact the Society (02) 6672 3337, email [enquires@mhsresearch.org](mailto:enquires@mhsresearch.org)

Robert James Clarendon Whittle was born in Brisbane on 10 July 1914. He worked as a chemist in Murwillumbah before he enlisted in the RAAF in April 1940. He was sent to the Middle East after training and posted to 250SQN (RAF) on 5 May 1941. Seeing much action over the Western Desert, his aerial claims rose steadily over the following months until by mid- December, he had amassed 9 Aircraft destroyed, 1 shared destroyed, 2 probables and 2 damaged. Bob received a DFM for his service with 250SQN. The citation saying much about his character:

*“The airman has proved himself to be a courageous and skilful fighter pilot. In one engagement when his formation was fighting against a superior number of enemy aircraft, Sgt Whittle destroyed two, probably destroyed another and damaged a further two of the enemy’s aircraft. His determination is such that on one occasion after being shot down, he walked twenty miles during the night, re-joining his Squadron for duty the next day. During an engagement two days later, Sgt Whittle was wounded in the foot and arm and his aircraft was badly damaged but flew back to base where he made a successful forced landing. Within two days, Sgt Whittle resumed operational flying. He destroyed at least seven*

*enemy aircraft.”*



*Bob back at base after a mission in his Tomahawk fighter (photo from Ron Johansen’s Tales of our Times)*

He served briefly with 730 Training Unit before his return to Australia in April 1942. He was posted to 86SQN in early 1943, flying from Merauke in Dutch New Guinea. He was promoted to Flight Leader in September and Commanding Officer on 17 December. Here he would make his final claims, downing a Zeke and sharing in the destruction of a Betty near Cape Valsch. In June 1944 he left the squadron and served as an instructor until his discharge on 4 December 1945.

Bob Whittle is credited with a total of 14 kills during his service.

After the war he returned to his pre-war profession and helped form the local Aero Club, as an instructor in 1946.

A fifth generation Pharmacist in the Whittle family, Bob’s father Mr F. C. Whittle established his first pharmacy in Murwillumbah in 1910, about where the Imperial Hotel of 2012 is located today but later bought a single storey building (later a second storey was added) at 108 Main Street, Murwillumbah, where it was operated as Whittle’s Pharmacy until it was sold in 1992.

Bob had been a member of the Rotary Club of Murwillumbah for 50 years and served one year as its President. His long association with the Tweed River Historical Society (which later became the Murwillumbah Historical Society after the Tweed Heads Historical Society formed its own entity) earned for him a Life Membership of the Murwillumbah Historical Society.

Bob was educated at Brisbane Grammar School and qualified from Brisbane Pharmacy College in 1936, and that year he commenced work with his



*Flight Lieutenant Bob Whittle (Photo Acc. No. M7-13)*

father.

During his working life he lived in Murwillumbah with his wife Frances and raised 5 children. He was a very active and interested citizen in all matters relating to the town and district. His meritorious active service record and involvement with the local Aero Club was recognized when Tweed Shire Council named its light aircraft landing strip, the Bob Whittle Airfield.

So much of the recorded history of the Tweed and the thousands of artefacts held in the Murwillumbah Museum collection are there as the result of the keen interest and selfless years of devotion to the preservation of this invaluable record of the Tweed's early history and can certainly be attributed to Bob Whittle and his family.

*Reference:*

*Wikipedia - Pacific Victory Roll - Pilots*

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## Art Deco in Murwillumbah - Murwillumbah Hotel

*Research and story by Nick Gouliarov. This story is the second by Nick exploring Murwillumbah's fabulous heritage of Art Deco buildings. We look forward to future instalments covering our art deco pubs, houses, shops and much more!*

- **Murwillumbah Hotel**
- 13 Wharf Street, Murwillumbah
- Construction began - 1936
- Construction completed and opened - 1937
- Built for - Mr Bill Bryant
- Current Owners - Mr Shane Nugent & Mr Rak Naidoo

The present Hotel building replaced the original Hotel (the Club House Hotel), a 2 storey rambling timber structure built in 1891. The business was leased/purchased by Bill Bryant in 1935 however, before the ink was dry on the lease, the building was burned to the ground.

Undeterred, Bill Bryant obtained permission to operate a temporary bar (located in a metal shed) which moved around the site as the new building was being constructed. The temporary bar was made from pine beer cases which in those days held a dozen large beer bottles with a straw sheath over the bottles (this straw was collected by race horse owners for horse bedding). The temporary bar was operated by Bill & his father who lived in Mullumbimby, NSW.

The new building was designed and constructed in the Art Deco Style; a 2-storey structure with external walls of brick cavity construction and internal walls either single brick and or double bricks, all smooth cement rendered/painted with applied Art Deco horizontal decorative grooved features and vertical grooves applied to external street façade wall at first floor level, creating a classic Art Deco horizontality and verticality in the applied features, grooved into the cement wall render. Near the top of the parapet wall/street façade a more decorative horizontal scalloped-edged moulding was applied, extending the length of the building between projecting portions of the feature walls and above the windows. The ground floor was timber framed, supported on brick isolated piers on concrete footings at ground level (which was 900 mm below street sidewalk level). This made the timber lined ground floor of the lounge and dining areas approximately 100 to 150 mm above footpath level.

The ceilings are metal sheets with impressed surface decorative motifs and the cornices are wide plaster throughout.

The Lounge Bar area had seating capacity for 50 and the dining area for 48. All deliveries of beer and spirits were from the back of the building through trap doors at ground level leading to a cellar located under the dining area. The cellar had internal access to a complex tunnel/drain system under Wharf Street draining to Lavender Creek. These tunnels are today closed off from access to the cellar with concrete block walls, smooth rendered over. In 1937 some hotels throughout the state had patrons who carried out illegal SP betting resulting in periodic State Police dragnet raids - the Murwillumbah Hotel's patrons and the bookies engaged in this activity would escape the dragnet by running into the cellar and escaping into the tunnels.

The rebuilt hotel changed its name to 'Murwillumbah Hotel' after completion of all site works in 1937. The ground floor facing Wharf Street was designed to accommodate retail businesses as well as the Hotel, with shops on both sides flanking the Bar Lounge, Dining areas and the main entry foyer to the Hotel. Timber stairs lead from the entry foyer to the upstairs area which had 21 rooms for accommodation with a communal bathroom; these are still in existence today except the number of rooms is now reduced to 17. Many business people stayed at the Hotel and the management allowed them to gamble on the premises by providing 2 euchre tables in the bar area. These were always in great demand and



*The refurbished Murwillumbah Hotel gracing Wharf Street in November 2012 (photo Tony Clark)*

when the sample rooms provided for travelling salespeople were not needed they were used to play cards for gambling, including playing poker.

The upstairs floor is timber framed and lined with timber floor boards. All internal walls were either smooth cement rendered single or double bricks, painted with horizontal grooved decorative line motifs set into the cement render of the walls throughout all corridors and passageways. There were also vertical decorative grooves at the art deco stepped archways in the corridors. The ceilings are plaster with wide, highly decorative cornices still in existence, together with additional stepped plaster cornices installed during the 2012 refurbishment.

All internal doors of the first floor accommodation rooms, corridor closets and service rooms are of a timber-paneled style, recently refurbished with the original ventilation openings above all doors fitted with decorative timber fretwork; all freshly repainted white as per the original Art Deco design.

The rear balconies, accessible from the corridors, have been refurbished (above the ground floor cool room and associated service areas which are visible below). All external service-stairs appear to have been installed in the 1950s and are still in place.

One of the accommodation rooms had a fireplace which is still in place but no longer in use as sometime in the past heat or flames escaping from

the flue singed the roof framing members (these roofing members have been replaced recently).

The rear and side walls of the building's external wall surfaces are the original face brick. The cool room has been upgraded to 2012 standards but back in 1937 the Hotel had the first refrigeration of any hotel in town; the beer was pumped from the cellar to a series of spiraling copper pipes in the refrigerated island in the bar.

The ownership changed in the mid 1950s with Bryant selling the lease to Hickling. However, Bryant came back to town 12 months later and purchased the lease back from Hickling. Soon after this he bought the freehold on the property.

Accommodation was scarce in the town and in 1963 an agreement was reached with the adjoining Tweed Arcade Building to cut through the adjoining party wall brickwork to allow access to the adjoining property. As a result Bryant was able to construct and gain an additional 18 accommodation rooms for his Hotel.

W. E. Bryant died in April 1968 and was succeeded by Bill Bryant Jr. The Hotel was auctioned off and sold in June 1968. It was later operated by "Bluey" Evans, followed by other owners. The most recent owners were F & B Investments Group who sold the Hotel to Shane Nugent and Rak Naidoo who took possession of the property on 24 June 2011.

The new owners decided to fully refurbish the

Hotel while retaining the original façade of the building in the Art Deco style. The refurbishment was extensive, taking 18 months of site work, but the results are truly excellent.

All the ground floor flooring has been removed and the area under the floor filled with sand and also under the associated structural brick piers and structural walls. A new concrete floor slab is now in place throughout the new Bar, Lounge and new dining areas with a new contemporary-style island bar constructed in the main bar lounge area.

The ground floor interior has been refurbished in modern 2012 style but blends into the Art Deco style of the building quite gracefully. The old cellar in the new Cafe area has been opened up to be visible from the dining area, surrounded by a modern balustrade of chrome metal and clear glass with a graceful new timber stairwell leading down to the cellar. The refurbished cellar now functions as a wine tasting area and this new facility is being promoted as an important new development for the town reflecting the changing culture of contemporary drinking in Hotels.

The ground floor has been completely refurbished with new internal walls, ceilings, bulkheads to ceiling perimeters, bar, dining area and an additional facility with the music/band stage at the rear of the Bar Lounge area. There are concrete polished floors throughout and new bar furniture. The new ceiling and new roof over still retain the feel of the original building.

At the rear of the new music and entertainment area is an under-roof, al-fresco dining area. A new pizza oven has been constructed in one corner of the area, complete with a rock-faced oven front and server/rock-faced bench front with a polished concrete bench top. The design here blends well with the Art Deco of the building.

This area is separated from the rear car park via a smooth-rendered, painted, 1800mm-high concrete block wall providing privacy from the car park.

The first floor has also been fully refurbished as mentioned above but has been fully preserved in the Art Deco style with all work skillfully carried out throughout.

#### Research References and Acknowledgements:

- Ron Johansen's story "Memoirs of Bryant's Hotel" from his Tales of our Times series
- Max Boyd, Murwillumbah Historical Society - research discussions, 2012
- Tony Clark, Murwillumbah Historical Society - research discussions, 2012
- 2012 interviews with Shane Nugent and Rak Naidoo (Hotel owners), Josh (Hotel Manager),

Paul (Events Manager) and other staff

- A History of Architecture on the Comparative Method by: Nikolaus Pevsner

*Without such wonderful co-operation and historical memory references, this article would not have been possible. Thank you all. Nick Gouliaev.*

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## The Cottage Hospital

*Edited by David Taylor from the story originally published by Ron Johansen in Tales of our Times Volume 1, November 1992. (All twelve volumes in Ron's iconic series are available from the Society.)*

The first hospital on the Tweed was a small private hospital at Tumbulgum, which was owned by Dr. Sullivan and Dr. Pybus. Also the first chemist shop was established there by a Mr. Vining, a well-known name in the Tweed pharmaceutical circles.

The first move to open a public hospital in Murwillumbah was in 1899 when the town was growing and already supporting 2 hotels. A committee was formed, held a bazaar and raised £200 (a lot of money in those days). But the wheels of government move slowly and it was not until 1903 that the foundation stone was laid by the governor of New South Wales, Sir Henry Rawson.



*The Cottage Hospital (photo from Ron Johansen's Tales of our Times Volume 1)*

When completed the hospital contained one male ward with three beds and one female ward with two beds. Matrons room, bathroom, hail, office, wardman's room, store and laundry. The government made a grant of £500 towards the cost which was £1614 for the building. The local member, Mr. R.D. Meagher officially declared the Cottage Hospital open on 20 May 1904. The remainder of the year saw 44 patients admitted and the matron was only assisted by one nurse. No wonder her stay was a short one. She resigned the next year.

In 1906 extensions were made with six extra beds in the female ward and 160 patients were admitted

that year. 1908 saw much of the grounds cleared of fallen trees, a fence built around the southern side and a start made to beautify the surrounds by planting ornamental trees. Also a tender of £38 was accepted to move the mortuary to the north east corner which would obviate the necessity of the hearse entering the grounds in full view of the patients as before.

After much agitation the government agreed to erect a fever and isolation block which was built by Mr A Modini and with furnishings cost £1263 of which the government agreed to pay £500, leaving the committee to find the balance. Before this, isolation patients were accommodated in tents. Pity the poor patient on a windy winters night. At this time the hospital was served by four doctors, Bell, Goldsmid, Guthridge and Palmer. During 1910 the name Cottage Hospital was changed to Tweed District Hospital and in 1913 word was received that it would be recognised as a nurses training hospital. That recognition continued for 68 years. About this time town water was connected and a hot water system installed. Admissions had now risen to 362 and Tweed Cottage Hospital (in the present grounds of Murwillumbah Hospital) was overcrowded.

Instead of extensions, meetings were held for a "Soldier Memorial Hospital" to be built, but as things turned out the larger hospital was a long, long time coming. But by 1925 a wooden nurses quarters was built at a cost of £6361 plus £400 for furnishings by P.F. Small. The Minister agreed to pay half the cost if the committee could come up with the other half. The committee thinking this was the first step towards the Memorial Hospital agreed. But the Memorial Hospital was still 15 years away. In 1925 the nurses also raised money to build their own tennis court. In 1926 the Ladies Hospital Auxiliary was formed and was a real boon in raising funds and helping at the hospital.

In this period the town also had four private hospitals, St. Margaret's in Wollumbin Street, Sunnyside in Tumbulgum Road, Newbrae in Mooball Street and Roma in Ewing Street. As time passed by and the population continued to grow, new services were needed and expansions to existing services such as x-rays needed to be modernised, the delay in the new hospital probably held up many of these developments. Eventually a fine modern hospital did arrive - but that's another story.

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## Murwillumbah Court House

In October 1869 under the Act of the Colonial Legislature "A place for the holding of Court of Petty Sessions was appointed for Murwillumbah Reserve, Tweed River."

This first Court House was a slab hut, 18ft x 12ft with a shingle roof situated on the river bank near the ferry crossing behind Solomon's store (opposite the entrance to the Art Gallery [now the Coolamon Centre], Tumbulgum Rd. It was built on the river bank because all the traffic at the time was by boat. It was in this slab hut that Joshua Bray, the first JP, settled disputes. He later became the police magistrate, a position he held for 20 years. Before the slab hut, and probably during its existence, Joshua Bray held "Courts of Request" at his residence at Kynnumboon (1869) which was on the main road from the Richmond to Queensland and "courts of Petty Sessions when required" were also held.



*The 1879 Court House (Photo Acc. No. M5-12)*

In 1879 with the growing population and the streets of the township beginning to form, a new Court House was erected where the present one stands in Main Street. At that time Reservoir Hill spread its base down to the street and the Court House was built on the side of the hill. The first entrance was a walk up the hill from near where Police Lane is now. Later a set of about 18 steps were erected up the bank from street level.



*The 1879 Court House with steps down to Murwillumbah Street (Photo Acc. No. M5-7)*

On the night of September 15th, 1907 the business centre of Murwillumbah was destroyed by fire. 66 buildings were destroyed including the Police Station and Court House.

It was announced that court proceedings in future would be held in the police stables until better arrangements could be made. Many a petty criminal started with a clean sheet as all police records were destroyed in the fire.

In the rebuilding the council wanted the Court House and Police building moved out of Main St. The Government refused to budge and their arguments were in vain. However the council did get the street widened and the hill cut down to street level.

Plans for a new Court House in Murwillumbah became a reality when the Government architect Walter Vernon released plans. It was one of a number designed by him for different towns at that time. It was built as a Police Magistrate Court with facilities for jury trials.

Walter Liberty Vernon is referred to as one of the leading exponents of Federation style architectural trends from the United Kingdom. His style of Federation architecture is called "free style". His buildings were responsive to the climate with wide eaves and generous windows.

The Edwardian building was built at street level, thanks to the foresight of the council in excavating the hill on the northern side of Main Street as far as Broadway (Queen Street). It was opened in 1909 as part of the related Police Station and Offices.

1957 saw the addition of two toilet blocks at the rear of the building. More additions were done at the back of the building in 1968.

The Australian Heritage Commission description is "A symmetrically arranged Court House having a central pavilion for the courtroom flanked by lower



The 1909 Court House (photo: David Taylor, December 2012)

single storey wings containing offices and jury rooms. It is constructed of face brick with relief given by pebble dash stuccoed panels and decorations to piers. Interest is given by arched clerestory lights and colonnade like entrances. The roof is a series of hipped forms sheeted in corrugated iron".



One of the old Juno lamps (TRRM Collection MUS1970.17)

Lighting for the building before electricity was by Juno lamps. They are now in the Tweed River Regional Museum collection.

Translation of the motto on the carved cedar crest about the magistrate means "Woe betide he who thinks badly of us" Actually one of the words is misspelt "pence" instead of "pense"

on the Murwillumbah Court House crest.

A unique feature of the Court House is the use of acoustic wires, across the room are stretched four wires and there are two wires across the length of the room. There are two theories regarding these wires- one is they are genuine design features, and do in fact improve the acoustics of the room, the other is that they were installed in buildings that had poor acoustics and didn't have any effect.

When the building was last painted, the wires were removed and the difference was noticeable before the wires were replaced. The ceiling is of approximately 25ft in height and is of fifteen by nine feet squares of intricate plaster design.

The prisoner's dock in the centre of the building, the jury box, press stand, Judges bench and witnesses stand etc are made of timbers of the day and are immaculate as they were in 1909.

In October 2012, the Murwillumbah Court House hosted its first sitting of the Supreme Court of NSW. Justice Stephen Campbell said that "Speaking for myself, I certainly hope it will not be the last" as it was a "rather splendid Courthouse".

#### References:

- Ron Johansen - story from "Tales of our Times"
- Sydney Morning Herald 20 October 1869
- Tweed River Regional Museum research materials

- Tweed Daily News October 2012
- Earlier discussions by Ron Johansen with Don Mackay - Former Clerk of Local Court and Chamber Magistrate

History is a cyclic poem written by Time upon the memories of man. *Percy Bysshe Shelley*

## Mystery Photo

Whenever space in the newsletter allows we intend to publish historical photos where we hope readers will help us "fill in the gaps" around the photos' details - please write in to [david@highwayone.net.au](mailto:david@highwayone.net.au) if you can help or would like to be sent a larger version of the image for close inspection.

Photo 1: Can you help us with where and when this photo was taken, who is shown and the background story?

On behalf of the Society, the Editor would like to acknowledge the generous support of the owners of the **Murwillumbah Hotel** to the Society and also their support for our Timelines newsletter.





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**ABOUT THE MUSEUM:** Established in 2004 by the three local Historical Societies, and the Tweed Shire Council, the Tweed River Regional Museum is one collection and one museum in three special locations; Murwillumbah, Tweed Heads and Uki. In 2012 The Tweed River Regional Museum at Murwillumbah is entering an exciting period of development involving construction of a new addition. For further information about the Tweed River Regional Museum please visit Council's website [www.tweed.nsw.gov.au](http://www.tweed.nsw.gov.au) or contact the Museum Director on (02) 6670 2400.

**CONTACTING THE SOCIETY:** Phone: (02) 6672 3337, email [enquires@mhsresearch.org](mailto:enquires@mhsresearch.org). The Murwillumbah Museum is located in the historic 1915 Shire Council Chambers at 2 Queensland Rd, Murwillumbah NSW 2484 (the Museum is closed for extension and renovation during 2012 - the temporary address is 33-35 Kyogle Rd, Bray Park NSW 2484). The Museum's other branches at Tweed Heads and Uki will remain open as usual during this period.

**COMMITTEE:** President - Max Boyd, Vice-Pres. - Tony Clark, Secretary - Carol Piggott, Treasurer - Ernie Cobb, Members - Beveley Lee, Martin King, Geoff Wilkes, Don Beck, Lynne Beck, Bob Gerdes, Penelope Williams. **NEWSLETTER CONTACT:** David Taylor

