

TIMELINES

The Quarterly Newsletter of Murwillumbah Historical Society Inc.

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Welcome

Welcome to the January 2019 *Timelines*, the newsletter of the Murwillumbah Historical Society. Keeping with a military theme from previous editions, we kick off with an engaging letter written by local soldier Cess Fox written while on active duty in 1941, plus much more!

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- Outdoor Dunny to Indoor Loo
- Did You Know? - Anthony Lafranchi
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A Letter to Al from Cess

Thanks to our Society President Ian Fox (ex-RAN) for sharing this eye-opening letter written by his father Cess, recounting a harrowing period of his life while on active service with the Army in the Mediterranean theatre in 1941. His advice to his friend to join the RAAF rather than the Army is heartily endorsed by this ex-RAAF editor!

4/6/41

NX17771

Pte CR Fox

C Coy 1st AMG Bn

A.I.F. Abroad



NX17771 Pte CR (Cess) Fox (Photo: Ian Fox)



WE WANT TO COPY YOUR OLD PHOTOS!

If you have come into possession of any old family or historic photos, please lend them to us to copy! Please contact the museum on (02) 6670 2493 by email at trm@tweed.nsw.gov.au

Dear Al *[believed to be Allan Priddle from Woodburn NSW]*,

I received your most welcome letter a few days ago, and I was damned pleased to hear from you.

Well old pal, I have been having some thrilling times since I last wrote to you, I think that was on the Rhona just after I left India. Well I have been in Palestine, Egypt, Greece and Crete since then and seen a lot of each. Palestine is not a bad place, its very hot, but the camps are decent, we have a theatre, wet and dry canteens, which are very good, whereas in Egypt it's very hot and dusty and the camps are not near so modern.

I had three weeks of action in Greece. We had a bad time, but we gave the Huns a worse one even though it was necessary to get out. I'm sure we are more than a match for the German soldier. It was the German dive bomber that used to worry me, they bombed and machine gunned us every day we were there. I had plenty of narrow escapes; sometimes the bombs would land close enough to cover me with dirt. The machine gunning is the worst, you can't dodge or run away from them, you can only lay down and trust to luck he doesn't hit you.

The biggest thrill I had was on board ship the first day out from Greece, on our way back, we had



SS Rhona in the Suez Canal 1940 (Photo: AWM 004196)

three raids before dinner & just as we were lined up for mess the cows came over and sunk us, but thanks to the good old Navy no lives were lost.

When our ship went down they decided to take us to Crete which was much closer than Egypt. I was on Crete nearly three weeks. We had plenty of air raids there, but they didn't worry us much as we had plenty of shelter. I would have enjoyed my stay there if hadn't been for the lack of food & clothing. We lost all our personal gear on the ship, we only had the clothes we wore which was very little.

They had a crack at sinking us after we left Crete, they managed to drop bombs all around the ship. There was a native lookout up in the Crow's Nest and they nearly drowned the poor cow; give you an idea how close the bombs landed.

Jack [Jack was Cess' oldest brother] was with me; I am in his unit now. Charles [Charles was Cess's 2nd oldest brother] was in Greece also, but was evacuated with broken ribs in the first lot to leave. We are all back in Palestine now, getting ready for another go at Gerry. Bill [Bill was Cess's 3rd oldest brother] is not going home now, he has managed to get out of it, the damned fool. I went down to see him on Sunday, and Charlie came down here, so they are both coming here next Sunday if possible, it will be the first time we have all been together. *[Oldest four brothers of eleven children in the family – ten boys and one girl, all ten boys saw active military service at some time in their lives]*

Jack had a letter from Margo a few days ago, I was surprised to hear she had left school, I didn't think she was old enough, but when I come to think about it she must be nearly sixteen now. I'll bet she is a real heartbreaker too. I wouldn't mind being back there myself now.

If you have any snaps send us one Al, I did have a couple but I lost them in Greece when my kit bag got blown up.

I have no snaps left at present, but I will get some when I get leave and will send you one.



NX17771 Pte CR (Cess) Fox (Photo: Ian Fox)

I had a letter from Mrs Dagg and the two boys [Albert & Kelvin] a couple of days ago, I was very pleased to hear from them.

Judging from your last letter Al, you are thinking of joining up; well Al, don't. Take my advice old pal and stay at home. There was no one more keen to get away than I was but I wish I had stayed home. It's a not a bad life but its a hard one. If you do join up join the Airforce.

Well Al, its time I went to bed, so I will say cheerio, hoping this scrawl finds you all in the best of health. Give my love to your Mum and Dad and Heather. To Margo lots of love and xxxxxxxx

From old pal
Cess

Outdoor Dunny to Indoor Loo

Following on from her article on Murwillumbah's iconic Queen St toilet block, Di Millar digs deep with this history of sanitation technologies and their implementation in Murwillumbah.

No matter how humble, the toilet is an essential part of every Australian home. The proper disposal

of human waste was recognised in the early days of European settlement particularly because of the link between unsanitary conditions and the spread of disease however the treatment of raw sewerage continued to cause problems for town planners right up until fairly recent times.

Following European settlement in Australia an early form of toilet was the earth closet where human waste went simply into a hole in the ground. This type of toilet was still in operation at Terranora Public School where I started my education in the 1950s. There was a separate toilet shed for girls and boys in which a long, raised wooden seat containing a number of uncovered holes to sit on was positioned over a very large pit. For the young first time user there was the scary thought of falling through the hole and sinking into the noxious mire.

In the 1880s the dry closet system was introduced into residential communities. An outhouse contained a toilet pan that held no water and instead earth, ashes or some other substance was added to the waste after each use. The contents were then regularly collected by someone employed for the job.



A part of Australian folklore (and the stuff of nightmares!), the giant redback spider in the outdoor loo (photo: David Taylor 2011)

Town dwellers such as those who lived in Murwillumbah in earlier times relied on the night soil man who was paid to take away the household waste and leave a clean pan along with a fresh supply of sawdust for sprinkling over the pan's contents.

Murwillumbah was incorporated as a municipality in Apr 1902 and in August of that year the first election was held for Murwillumbah Municipal Council.

Murwillumbah's waste disposal became the responsibility of the newly installed council members who contracted for a town sanitary service. Residents who paid a council rate for the service were entitled to complain if their full pan was slopped when removed or an inadequate supply of sawdust was left behind.

Farming folk had a habit of building the family outhouse a little further away from the back door. When the pan needed emptying rural families dug a hole in the nearby paddock and dispose of the contents themselves.

For both town and country dwellers chamber pots stored in a side cupboard or under the bed made the nocturnal call of nature more tolerable.

The wish of every Murwillumbah resident was to see the end of phenol (the brown bottles sat near every toilet pan) and enjoy the luxury afforded by a septic tank sewerage system which was a vast improvement on the pan system.

The works consisted of septic tanks and filter beds. The toilet pans outside a sewered area were conveyed to a clearing house and emptied. The waste made its way into the septic tank and then on for treatment.

Waste discharged through the sewer pipe from premises connected with a septic system gravitated to the septic tank, then to filter beds and finally into discharge tanks.

Sludge chambers collected and filtered all earthy matter which was carried over from the dissolving tank to the filter channels. The sludge was pumped to drying beds where it was removed and it could be used by people on their gardens.

Early information on Murwillumbah sewerage works is sketchy. In Jun 1910 the tender of Messrs Perry and Jones of £911 was accepted for Murwillumbah sewerage works. In Oct 1913 a notification appeared in the NSW Government Gazette "that a new sewerage system for Murwillumbah is now completed. The sewerage district is defined as follows: - County of Rouse, Parishes of Condong and Murwillumbah, area about 700 acres... .."

This undertaking seems to have been a water drainage system for the town. At the

commencement of the works Murwillumbah Municipal Council had even looked at the idea of erecting public urinals to connect with this proposed sewerage scheme.

In Apr 1922 Murwillumbah Municipal Council had plans underway to install a septic sewerage system. At this time, the council was paying £1,355 a year for a sanitary service and council believed that the septic system could be installed at a lower annual outlay.

By Oct 1924 a sewerage system had been completed at Tweed District Hospital by the NSW Department of Public Works at a cost of £1,750. An "antiseptic tank" was installed and the hospital system was then connected to the town's sewerage system.

In time, the septic system needed replacing. In Jan 1936 Ald. F W Elliott stated at a municipal council meeting "The establishment of a sewerage scheme for Murwillumbah is absolutely essential and is a matter of importance to the community."

Council decided at Ald. Elliott's insistence to ask for applications from competent engineers to prepare plans and specifications for a sewerage scheme for the town on the basis of a cost of £60,000.

Plans were underway to implement the scheme at a cost of £85,000 pounds (£67,000 from MMC and £18,000 from NSW Gov.) when WW2 broke out.

In Sep 1944 a letter from the NSW Minister of Public Works was read out at a municipal council meeting and it stated that the installing of sewerage at Murwillumbah was regarded as very necessary. The scheme was therefore one that had been advanced to the stage where it could be commenced at comparatively short notice as soon as the financial and manpower position permitted.

The scheme was included in the Public Works Department's list as one to be carried out in the early stages of post-war reconstruction.

By Nov 1946 a tentative estimate of the cost of Murwillumbah's sewerage scheme was £148,000 pounds with Murwillumbah Municipal Council to pay £120,000 and the NSW Government contributing £28,000 pounds.

After years of delay an announcement was finally made in Nov 1949 that Murwillumbah's sewerage scheme would commence no later than Jun 1950.

Problems of course did not end and in Apr 1951 sewerage excavation work at South Murwillumbah was suspended because of underground seepage and the subsequent wait for pumping equipment to arrive from Sydney.

In the same month 22 year-old Stanley Knight of Upper Crystal Creek was injured by a fall of earth

in Wardrop St. Another Upper Crystal Creek man, 35 year-old Jack Sharman, injured his back when he jumped in the trench to help his younger workmate.

By Feb 1952 Tweed Shire Council was in arrears in payment for the progressive cost of the sewerage works and unless it could raise a loan to pay for its share the Murwillumbah sewerage scheme would close down. Council decided to ask its president Cr C E Cox who was in Sydney at this time to talk to local MLA Mr S T Stephens and the Commonwealth Bank.

In Jul 1953 a report by an engineer of the NSW Public Works Department indicated good progress was being made with the construction of the sewerage disposal works and the first section of the Murwillumbah sewerage system was expected to be ready to come into operation by the end of 1954.

Did You Know?

This series of stories, selected and edited by Max Boyd, highlights the prominent people, families, clubs, institutions and more who have had a connection with Murwillumbah. This latest instalment features Anthony Laffranchi.

Anthony Laffranchi was born in Murwillumbah on 16 November 1980 and was educated at Mt St Patrick's College.



Laffranchi in Kangaroo colours (photo: Wikipedia)

He became a professional footballer when he was picked to play for Wests Tigers in 2001 where he continued to play until 2006. In 2005, the Tigers won the NRL premiership. He was selected to play Country Origin from 2006 - 2010. He was selected for New South Wales in 2008 in Game 1 of the State of Origin series, Anthony started from the bench and scored the winning try off a Mark Gasnier break and lead the tackle count for the blues.

Laffranchi made his test debut against New Zealand in Australia's Rugby League World Cup 2008 game on 26 October playing in the second row. He followed this up with a two try effort in Australia's second match of the World cup. He was selected for

Australia in the one off test match against New Zealand on 8 May 2009.

He then transferred to the Gold Coast Titans in 2007 and stayed until 2011 when he signed with St Helens, to start in 2012.

Reference: Wikipedia

George William Fletcher

A biography has come to hand, written by long-term Tweed resident George Fletcher after his wife passed away in 1995. His reminiscences give a fascinating insight into the lives of ordinary working folk in the Tweed, particularly in the period leading up to and after WW2. George was closely involved with the Murwillumbah Historical Society for many years, with his daughter Joan, a Society Life Member, continuing the tradition and now provides most of our family history research services. George passed away in 2015.

I was born in Lincolnshire, England on 3 Sep 1916. My father moved around quite a bit so I went



A young George and sister Doris (photo: Joan Cutheil)

to several schools which didn't do much for my education.

Dad was a labourer on farms. My sister Doris was born two years later on 30 Sep 1918. My youngest sister Mary was born on 11 Feb 1924.

I came to Australia and arrived on 30 Sep 1930 in Brisbane. We came by train to Tweed Heads and from there I think we travelled by car to Murwillumbah, then by train to Billinudgel to meet some of our relations who were dairy farming at the Pocket. I think we had a week or so holiday, then came back by train to town.

I am not sure how we travelled to Tyalgum where Dad worked on the dairy farm. Mum had to learn to milk cows so that was a rude awakening for Mum.

Anyway the three of us went to school at Tyalgum Creek. I only did one year, then I had to leave home and work on dairy farms. I just hated milking cows.

Then Dad stepped out to farming on half shares, so the lot of us could all be together. Dad became ill with a nose problem and the doctor told him to leave the Tweed and go to a dryer climate, so we went to Beaudesert in Queensland.

I went farming up there for 12 months before I enlisted in the army on 6 Aug 1940. I did my training at Grovely and then I went to the Middle East. On the way by boat, we stopped off at Bombay. I was lucky as I got picked with a few other chaps to form an advanced party to Puna where we set up camp for the rest of the troops. After a few weeks we left by boat for Palestine where we were stationed at Camp Hill 69.

I was in a transport company. We did all the different supplies to the other army groups. After a few months we went to Syria for a short time, then up to Egypt and El Alamein. Twenty of us were in charge of a forward ammunition dump from which we supplied the army with ammunition. I got sick there and was carried out on a stretcher with yellow jaundice and was taken back to a hospital in Alexandria. I was in bed for a month. I got out of there and went back to a convalescent camp where I got tonsillitis and finished up in hospital for a few days. The tablets they gave me made me



George & Mary Fletcher, wedding 1944 (Photo: Joan Cuthel)



George & Mary Fletcher 21 Apr 1994 (Photo: Joan Cuthel)

see snakes and all sorts of things on the ceiling. They got me out of there and back to my camp for Christmas Day. When I got there, the tables were all set with beer and turkey and all the goodies but I took one look at it and that was it.

We came home just after that and I had a months leave and during that time I met my beloved wife Mary Davis. We married in Apr 1944 before I went to New Guinea. After a short time there, my old boss at Beaudesert asked me by mail if he could get me out of the Army to work the farm would I be interested. I said yes and I got my discharge on 24 Oct 1944 and came home on leave and then went to work on the farm. I did one year and my father-in-law said he could get me a better job at the Condong Sugar Mill. My first daughter was born while on the farm.

When we came back home, about 1945, we stayed with Mary's parents for about 18 months..

We started making our own concrete bricks to build our garage to live in while our house was being built. We had bought the block of ground from Mary's father. We got the garage built and I did my share,

Then we got the house built and Mary and I did the painting right through the inside of the house. I was working at the mill, so was only able to work at night and weekends on the painting. I did two extensions on the house in the 21 years of our life in that home.

I had 7½ years at the mill and two years after Margaret was born, we had a son John in 1947. Joan was born in 1954.

After leaving the Mill, I got a job at the Ford garage for about 9 years,

I got a job as caretaker at the Murwillumbah TAFE College. That was the best job I ever had and after 8 years there, I retired.

That was the best thing I ever did. It was a great life. Mary and I did a trip to Cape York and then to

New Zealand where we did both Islands. In retirement, Mary and I took up bowls and I am still enjoying my bowls.

I lost my dear wife on 8 May 1995 and since then I have lived a very quiet life with housework, bowls and the Murwillumbah Historical Society.

Early Cricket in the Tweed

Thanks to Di Millar for this interesting insight into the early playing of cricket in the Tweed. Thanks also for sharing the fascinating photo of the cricket ground formerly in Knox Park.

CRICKET has been an important sporting activity on the Tweed for over 140 years. Initially local communities mustered enough men, both young and old, to form a side and challenge the nearest settlement to a friendly match for bragging rights. Cricket also formed an important social activity with friendships forged between players of opposing sides.

In Mar 1878 the Tweed Junction (later Tumbulgum) Cricket Club (McLeod captain) played against a Tallebudgera side winning by 30 runs but then came up against a stronger Nerang team and was beaten by 11 runs.

In May 1878 a combined team from Tweed, Tallebudgera and Nerang districts took on a team representing the Albert Cricket Club in a match which the combined side won by an innings and 56 runs. In the evening the combined team were entertained at dinner by the Albert Cricket Club where the hosts expressed the hope that matches with their country friends would become more frequent, help promote cricket and develop mutual good feeling between those who patronised the noble game.

A more competitive game was played in Apr 1879 with the combined team scraping home by 14 runs over the Beenleigh Cricket Club who were gracious in defeat and entertained their visitors that evening at a banquet held at the Beenleigh Hotel followed by a ball and supper.

Cross border cricketing continued to grow. In Jul 1883 a Tweed team played a match against a Tallebudgera side at Tumbulgum which the Tweed eleven won by four wickets.

As cricketing expanded on the Tweed more clubs were formed. In Feb 1885 the Cudgen Cricket Club played against the Point Danger Cricket Club and after the game the players sat down to a substantial post match dinner hosted by Mr Robert Harrison at his Commercial Hotel in Coolangatta. Music and singing wound up a very pleasant evening.

Clubs were formed and then folded in the early years of Tweed cricket as working men found it

difficult to find time for a game particularly when they had businesses to operate and farms to run. Civil and Government employees who played the game left sides short of players when they were transferred to new towns.

Following a loss of membership and a period of inactivity the Murwillumbah Cricket Club was reformed at a meeting held at the Australia Hotel in Sep 1890. Murwillumbah post master Mr William James Grime chaired the meeting where it was resolved to "resuscitate the club" and the following month the club fielded a side to play a Brunswick team.

The Murwillumbah eleven included R Wardrop, F A Halliday, G C Halliday, J Shepherd, E J Smith, L Galvin, W J Grimes, L Solomons, S G Gray, A Dallas and C Burgess. Emergency players were W Skinner, T Wardrop and J Waldron.

In Dec 1891 a match was arranged between a side entitled All Comers and a team called Banks, Civil Service and Professions. This match was won by All Comers and was so successful that in Jan 1892 a cricket match was held at Tumbulgum between teams named Marrieds and Singles.

Cricket began to be played more competitively and less as a social outing by the men of the Tweed but it was necessary for them to improve their skills

The first cricket match for the 1893-94 season took place on the first Saturday in September between Banks, Civil Service and Professions and All Comers. Murwillumbah newspaper proprietor Mr George Francis Nicklin made 71 not out for All Comers who won the one innings match with a total of 90 runs while the opposition could only manage 48 runs in a game "in which nothing very remarkable in the way of scoring was done."

Tweed players had some way to go in order to provide stiffer competition. In Nov 1893 a visit by the Tweed River Cricket Club to Southport where they played the local side was considered a fiasco. The men from the Tweed could only



Young cricketers with headmaster (c 1903) (TRM M8-19)

muster innings of 26 and 3 against a Southport innings of 138.

Local cricket matches remained uninspiring during the 1894-95 season and apathy set in. Lack of interest in training by the Murwillumbah Club prior to a match played in Apr 1895 saw the Murwillumbah first eleven humbled and beaten by two runs by a Tumbulgun team.

Interest in the game continued to grow however and by 1895 a cricket club was firmly established at Byangum. On Monday 2 Sep 1895 a meeting

was held to again form a cricket club at Cudgen with about forty members enrolling.

The 1895-96 cricket season on the Tweed opened at Burringbar with a match between Excelsior, the Murwillumbah side, and Burringbar. Cricket clubs now in the Tweed competition were Burringbar, Byangum, Condong, Cudgen, Dungay Creek, Murwillumbah and Tumbulgun.

Early cricket clubs still struggled to survive, Burringbar went into decline and was reformed on 23 Sep 1905, however a strong local competition was pioneered.



An early photo of Murwillumbah's Knox Park showing the cricket pitch in the middle

ABOUT THE SOCIETY: Formed on 16 March 1959, the Society's aim is to research, preserve and promote the rich and unique history of our town of Murwillumbah and its surrounds in the picturesque Tweed River Valley of far northern New South Wales. The Society operates out of our Research Centre in the Tweed Regional Museum's historic Murwillumbah facility. The Society is proudly supported by the Tweed Regional Museum, a community facility of Tweed Shire Council.

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ABOUT THE MUSEUM: The Tweed Regional Museum is a Tweed Shire Council community facility, established in 2004, with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between Tweed Shire Council and the Murwillumbah, Tweed Heads and Uki and South Arm Historical Societies. It is one museum that operates across three branch locations; Murwillumbah, Tweed Heads and Uki, and in association with these three local Historical Societies. The three locations connect the Tweed Shire from the coast to the mountains, providing a unique journey into the history, people and places of the majestic Tweed Valley.

For information about the Tweed Regional Museum please visit: <http://museum.tweed.nsw.gov.au/> or phone on (02) 6670 2493.