

# TIMELINES

The Quarterly Newsletter of Murwillumbah Historical Society Inc.

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## Welcome

Happy New Year and welcome to the January 2021 *Timelines*, the newsletter of Murwillumbah Historical Society.

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## William Horace Moss and HMAS Sydney

*Thanks to Bill Larkin for contributing this entertaining piece of history with a Murwillumbah twist. Please note that the story was not written by the Society and the accuracy of all details cannot be guaranteed. The story has generated quite some interest with Society researchers and there may be more to add to the story in future.*

William Horace Moss was born in Fareham England on 14 Feb 1882. Fareham is located on the northwest corner of Portsmouth Harbour and has a long history as a trading port and also shipbuilding.

Although his Naval service records name him as Horace William, he was known locally as Will. Will served in three wars, the Boer War, the Boxer Rebellion, the Great War and 'various minor skirmishes in various parts of the world'. He spent most of his time during the Great War at sea serving on HMAS Sydney. Records show that he was listed as a sailmaker. His family must have had ties with the shipping industry and he must have been a handy sort because his enlistment papers show him to be 31 years of age in 1913.

How Mr Moss came to be in Australia and his other adventures are a source of mystery at this time of writing. The Moss family is described as a 'fighting family', who had 'done their bit' with 14 of them, including seven brothers, brothers in law and nephews all serving in the Great War.

On Friday 11 Dec 1914, the Tweed Daily printed a small article about the sinking of the German cruiser the SMS Emden. The article briefly described the battle and the number of casualties, both German and Australian. The article came about from a letter William sent home to his brother, Mr Len Moss. The news spread to the offices of the Tweed Daily and the editor, who must have realised that this was a scoop, published the account. News of the sinking of the Emden spread like wildfire, the Tweed Daily article blowing the lid off the war time press censorship of the day.

Though acting in good faith, Horace Moss was



## 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](mailto:trm@tweed.nsw.gov.au)



## THE SYDNEY-EMDEN FIGHT.

Mr. Will Moss, brother of Mr. Len Moss, of Murwillumbah, in a letter to his brother from Colombo, dated 17th November, describes the fight between the Sydney (on which vessel he is engaged) and the Emden. The fight lasted one hour 45 minutes, and the casualties on the Sydney he gives as four killed and 11 wounded, and on the Emden 200 killed and 40 wounded. He encloses a photo of the Emden, secured from that vessel, which is now shown at Keppie's.

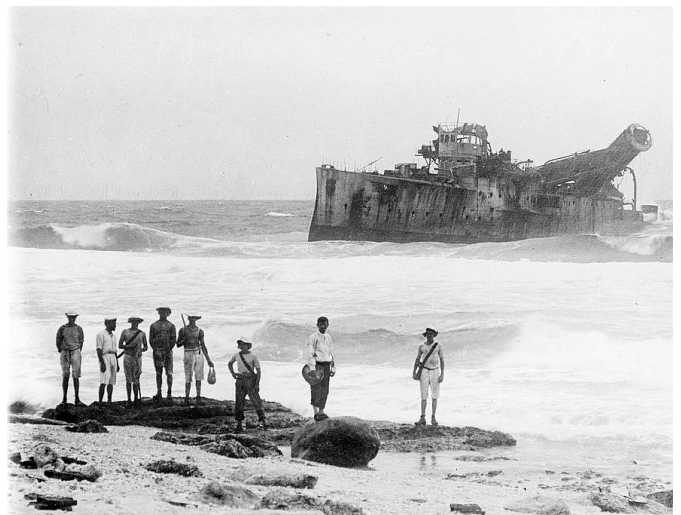
*The 11 Dec 1914 Tweed Daily report which broke the story.*

court martialled as a result of the letter he wrote to his brother. War records show that Horace was involved in other misdemeanours whilst serving on the Sydney and although the details are not clear, his granting of a 'Good Conduct' badge was deprived, restored, deprived and restored a number of times. Another piece of interesting fact is that Mr Moss received £15 as prize money from the Navy for his part in the sinking of the Emden. Despite the end of hostilities in November 1918, Will remained on HMAS Sydney for another 10 months 'to fill vacancies' made by rapidly evaporating crew members.

Looking through history and reading between the lines, Will must have been an adventurer, a dreamer and a bit of a wag. He rose from the lowly ranks of an Able Seaman to Sailors Mate. He returned to Murwillumbah after the War with his two brothers Len and Don and lived with a Mrs



*HMAS Sydney steaming out of Sydney Heads following the outbreak of WW1 (RAN Heritage Collection)*



*The wreck of SS Emden beached on North Keeling Island (By Allan C. Green 1878 - 1954 - State Library of Victoria [1], Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=10436719>)*

Canning of Ewing St, an elderly widower. She is described as a mother to the three boys before the war. The three Moss brothers remained bachelors. They had planned on taking up a parcel of land under the returned soldiers repatriation scheme. Brother Len was a stretcher bearer at Gallipoli and later France and was awarded the Military Medal for rescuing the injured under heavy shell fire in No-Mans-Land.

Sadly, Len died of war injuries within a year of returning to home and Don moved to Bundaberg. He too passed away seven years later aged 32. The Moss brothers never did take up that piece of land and Will remained at Ewing St with Mrs Canning until his death in August 1935 at the age of 51. He is buried with his brother Len at the old Church Hill cemetery, Banner St Murwillumbah.

## The Banana

*Researcher Maris Bruzgulis continues to unearth historical treasures for us. This time it's a historical film on bananas in the Tweed with some classic footage of local landmarks.*

The National Film and Sound Archive has digitized a film titled *The Banana*. It was first screened in Murwillumbah in 1934.

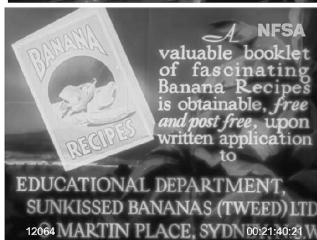
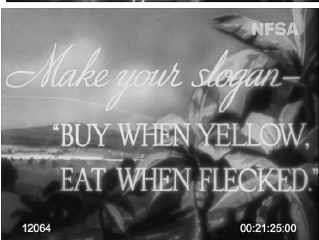
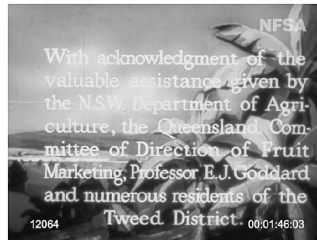
The location of this premiere was only to be expected as the film had been made on the





Tweed.

A little over twenty minutes long, it spends six minutes touring the district and then the remaining time explaining the growing, harvesting and marketing of the banana. It finishes with advice about buying and consuming bananas: 'Buy when yellow, eat when flecked'. A recipe book accompanied the release of the film, offering foods from broiled or baked bananas with bacon ('[r]oll half lengths of peeled Bananas in strips of bacon'), to banana coffee (which was prepared by drying, roasting, and grinding bananas for the beverage powder).



A historical footnote: In 1935 Sunkissed Bananas, the company whose forbidding 'No trespassing' sign appears at ten minutes fifty seconds, sued both the Banana Growers' Federation and its chairman of directors, Hubert Lawrence Anthony, for £20,000 each for 'alleged slander and the false and malicious publication of certain matters'. The slander was that Anthony in a 1933 conversation with H Gordon Bennett expressed alarm that the



Sunkissed plantings should cause a glut of bananas, urged Bennett to withdraw as a trustee for the good of his

reputation, as well as making derogatory remarks about the scheme. The publications were an article in The Bulletin in May 1933 which described Sunkissed Bananas' business plan as a 'prospectus [that] is a disgrace to the company laws of N. S. Wales'; and another in Smith's Weekly on 2 Sep 1933 that summed up the fund raising on behalf of Sunkissed Bananas as a

'proposition [that] is not attractive'. In the event, two of the three counts were proved in favour of Sunkissed Bananas – the slander in respect of Hubert Lawrence Anthony's 1933 conversation with the Sunkissed Bananas trustee H Gordon Bennett (who as the commander of the AIF's 8th Division was to '[relinquish] his command [in Singapore in 1942] without permission'); and the second libel as a result of circulating the Smith's Weekly article, but the 'historic' outcome was the judgement – a 'farthing damages in each case', the verdict of a total of 'a halfpenny damages awarded by the jury'!

## Fruit Machines on the Tweed

*Thanks to Di Millar for this interesting and comprehensive history of the ubiquitous poker machine on the Tweed.*

Machines operated for gambling purposes have been around far longer than some people may realise. Known as poker machines or fruit machines, these gaming contraptions offered people the chance of a prize, if they were willing to part with their money, as early as the 1890s.

In August 1895 a responsible tobaccoists' deputation complained to the New South Wales Colonial Secretary in Sydney that a number of "poker" machines could be found in certain tobacco shops around the town and were being used solely for the purpose of gambling. It was stated that the ingenious contrivance enabled people to speculate small sums of money and by putting a coin in the machine, cards were made to appear. The cards represented various amounts of money and entitled their holder to their winnings in cigars.

The machines were not only used for winning cigars but also for money. The different forms of gambling were hurting legitimate tobaccoists who felt they had a right to protection from such undesirable and illegal competition. By 1898 poker machine prosecutions were taking place for businesses who were unlawfully disposing of cigars by means of a poker machine.

Australians were not the only ones who liked to try their luck on gaming machines. By March 1929 automatic fruit machines were installed in London and they enabled people to purchase any desired fruit in season by placing sixpence or one shilling in a slot. Unfortunately it wasn't long before London clubs were operating fruit machines for gambling purposes. The machines' fruit symbols were located on a revolving drum and certain combinations of fruit which, when the drums stopped turning, gave the players a prize three to twenty times the amount of money invested. One combination also won a "jackpot".



1899 "Liberty Bell" machine (Wikipedia)

In early 1930 fruit machines were being installed in many Brisbane hotels with "coin of the realm" exchanged for discs that were placed in the machine. Counterfeiters were soon making discs that, although not genuine, still fooled the machine.

Not everyone was happy with the operation of the new machines. One disgruntled Brisbane resident wrote to the Courier Mail asking how the police could frequently raid betting shops but allow fruit machines to be played as he saw no difference between betting on the races and betting on the fruit machines.

In April 1930 all states except Queensland were offered exclusive rights for the distribution and sale of Automatic Jackpot Bell fruit machines that were marketed by Brisbane company Gordon and Gotch as being the most popular and profitable.

In July 1930 a deputation representing the Liquor Employees Union made a request to the Queensland Home Secretary asking him to amend the Liquor Act and prohibit the use of fruit machines in Brisbane bars as bar attendants were yielding to temptation and expending their week's wages on a game of chance. Employment in the industry slumped and very little drinking was done in the bars as people played the machines.

Following this request, fruit machines in Queensland hotels and elsewhere were prohibited

under a bill introduced in the Queensland Parliament and which came into force on Saturday, August 9, 1930. Any premise found to have fruit machines installed would now face police action and be prosecuted under the Gaming Act.

New South Wales was also planning to crack down on the operation of fruit machines in clubs and hotels. In January 1931 the New South Wales Legislative Assembly's Chief Secretary announced that police had been ordered to take action against establishments where gaming machines were previously allowed to operate. The following month a strong plea for the restoration of fruit machines was made by a deputation from licenced premises to the Chief Secretary claiming that gaming machines had been in use for nearly thirty years, had done no harm and their removal would jeopardise the existence of clubs.

The New South Wales Government, in March 1932, approved the licencing of fruit machines in hotels and other public places. At the same time the New South Wales Minister for Health stated in Parliament that the state's hospitals were overdrawn to the extent of fifty thousand pounds and something was needed to be done to create additional revenue. It was decided that fruit machines would be given a trial of six months during which a percentage of takings would go to the licensees, who would be under the supervision of the Hospitals Commission, and a percentage to the hospitals.

In April 1932, at a special meeting of the Board of Directors of Tweed District Hospital, Murwillumbah, a proposal by Mr P Fitzenmaier to install fruit machines in the town's six hotels was accepted. A percentage of takings would go to Tweed District Hospital.

For the next six weeks all was going well with forty five percent of the fruit machine's takings, amounting to nearly six hundred pounds, going to the hospital board for the support of Tweed District Hospital. The situation changed on 11 May 1932 when board chairman, Mr K. L. Cameron was contacted by a Mr Shelley who intimated that he had been placed in charge of all machines from Newcastle to the N.S.W./Queensland border by the Hospitals Commission and had been granted a franchise by the Hospitals Commission to supervise them. Mr Shelley stated that no doubt Tweed District Hospital would receive its fair share of money however the hospital's allocation would be reduced to thirty five percent.

The matter was discussed at length by the hospital board and a unanimous expression of resentment was felt at the turn of events. The board decided to disassociate itself from any connection to the fruit machines and inform the public that all the hospital



money would now go to Sydney.

Tweed District Hospital's board of directors was not alone in feeling a sense of indignation at having their control of the fruit machine money wrested from them. The Lismore Hospital Board had also installed fruit machines in April and had received almost four hundred pounds for the Lismore Hospital.

Gaming machines, however, were here to stay and in February 1966 poker machines in Murwillumbah were converted to take the new decimal coins with only a slight adjustment needed for the machines to accept either sterling or decimal currency.

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## 100 Years Ago

*We have a slightly different take on (almost) "100 Years Ago" this time around. Betty Hamill entertains us with a scary story about the "Cudgen Cyclone" of 1950 as experienced by her as a girl, and follows it with the first part of the transcription of a charming interview with her father Hec Robertson, the owner of the house at the centre of the Cudgen Cyclone.*

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The date was 23 Jun 1950. It was a grey day with everyone indoors. At 10.00 am, a waterspout emerged from the sea at Kingscliff. On land it became a whirlwind, or what we would now call a tornado.

Our neighbour in Cudgen Road, Mr Fred Hughes watched as it hit our family house with full force.

The first sign of trouble was the lino lifting off the floor. Our father, Hec Robertson, quickly gathered

our mother Ena, his mother Lizzie, cousin Freda and the three girls, Lynne, Nancy and Betty into the relative safety of the hallway. Gran bent over and shielded me with her body because, by now, events were happening fast.

The entire house was in the air and moving towards Kingscliff, only to reverse and head back towards Cudgen. The cyclone then dumped our flying house and us heavily enough to force the stumps up through the floor in many places. It moved on with roofing and other articles in tow. The resting place for the house was eight feet closer to Cudgen than its original site. The sun came out. Everything was eerily quiet until we heard a weak voice calling for help. Freda's daughter, Jacqueline, had been missed in the quick round-up and was trapped in a bedroom. She had been knocked unconscious. Coming to in a panic, she thought she was the only one left alive.

The bedroom door was jammed, so Dad ran to the back door only to find the steps were destroyed. He jumped down and was able to reach the bedroom window because the house was now lower.

Jacqueline was not seriously hurt but quite frightened. Inside, the room had been swirled around as if by a giant hand. The mattress had slid onto the floor and the wardrobe had fallen on top of it. Other furniture was rearranged.

About this time, Mr Hughes ran up ashen-faced, expecting us to all be dead.

The kitchen, where the ladies had been working



Severe damage to the Robertson family home after the Cudgen Cyclone (Photo: courtesy of Betty Hamill)

minutes before, was full of bricks from the double chimney between the kitchen and lounge room. Much of the roof had blown off and many windows were broken.

Next door, our grandfather, Jim Robertson had been sitting at the dining room table and reading and moved when the wind started. The window opposite blew in and shards of glass were embedded in the wall behind where he had been. Damage to their house was less than ours, but still substantial.

Crops were ruined, carrots were blown out of the ground, and cane flattened. One old chook was found three days later huddled in the cane, too frightened to move.

A corrugated iron tank was found three miles away, another was never seen again. The wind followed a narrow path missing many houses, but flattening a couple of other more modern buildings. That our place held together was credited to its ironbark frame and strong local timbers, with nail holes bored.

Afterwards, people showed kindness in so many ways in the time we relocated while our house was being rebuilt. Not the least of these were the daily visits by our minister, Rev. Donald McLeod, to clean bricks so they could be reused for the chimney.

Although it was five years after the war, corrugated iron was still in short supply. Our builder, Jack Prosser, was able to get suppliers to give us priority.

Although we had insurance, the damage was classed as an "act of God", which made it ineligible for a claim. The rebuild cost was £3,000.

Sightseers were thick on the ground for quite a while afterwards. The story was on the front page of The Courier Mail.

How blessed we were to escape without physical injuries.

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*Following on from the family's lucky escape, Betty shares the first part of the transcription of a taped interview with her father, Hec Robertson, as he talks about his early life.*

I was born on 16 May 1910, at Dudley NSW in a little house two blocks down from the pub. My father was a coal miner at that time. He was James Robertson. Mother was Elizabeth Robertson. She was Elizabeth Rundle. In Dec 1918 we went onto a farm at Cudgera. This belonged to Neissmanns. Dad's brother Jack was married to a niece of Mrs. Neissmann and this is how we got the contract for the farm at Cudgera. Dad bought a going concern. People by the name of Ward had the lease. Their lease was about running out so Dad bought the herd and took over

the leases.

Coming up from Sydney we came on a steamship, the "Wollongbar," to Byron Bay and disembarked at the jetty. From Byron Bay we caught a train to Burringbar and then went out to Cudgera. Dad had come up before us. He bought a sulky and a horse and he took Mum and Aunty Mary (Mother's sister) to the farm. Aunty lived with us for almost all the time we were on Neissmann's farm. She used to work for us.

There was a chap who worked for us brought in a spring cart to take the luggage out and I rode in the spring cart to Cudgera. It was very strange going up over the Burringbar Range with a lot of rainforest that I'd never even seen before. I thought it was terrific.

After about four years there, the length of our lease, we bought a place at Lower Cudgera on the Mooball Road and we lived there for twenty odd years. We sold it during the War. As I grew up I didn't like dairying very much so I started to grow bananas. In between, when I was about sixteen I worked in a garage at Murwillumbah. I sold and serviced Ford motor cars for R.H. Trevan.

We had bought a Ford motor car, T Model. The salesman was Norm Walker. Any time he was in the district he used to pop in and have a cuppa. So, he offered me a job in the garage and I worked there for about eighteen months. Part of the job was to go home and stay with the buyer to teach him how to drive.

I really enjoyed the time I was there but there didn't look to be too much future in it. I couldn't see me ever owning a garage or working all my life in a garage. Actually, I was boarding with Norm Walker, this salesman, and his wife Ida.

He still used to go out and have cups of tea with my folk. He came in one time and he said "You know you're mad to be in here. Your mother's sick out there and doing your share of work on the farm. You should be out there helping them." It sort of got under the skin a bit so within a day or so I told the boss I was leaving. At home they all got a shock when I told them I was coming home, although they had really hinted they'd like me home.

I'd gone to Cudgera School. The teacher was Jack Kelly. I went there for about four years. I left when I was twelve and a half. In those days you went until sixth class and that was it. The teacher didn't teach you anymore.

Had I wanted to go on I could have boarded either at Lismore or Murwillumbah. Mum and Dad offered to send me if I wanted to go. I was the only one in the family, so had I wanted to go I could have, but

I wasn't that keen on schooling. All I wanted to do was leave and work on the farm. Dad said "Righto, you can leave for a fortnight. At the end of a fortnight, if you want to go back, then no harm done."

I can always remember the first Monday when it came time to work on the farm. Dad gave me a little mattock and we were digging out little hardwood suckers. I tell you what, by eleven o'clock the old knees were getting trembly and I was that weak I felt as though I was starving to death. It was pretty hard work. Anyhow I stuck it out and of course after a few days he eased off a bit. That was the end of my schooling. Later on Mum decided that I should have a bit more education, so she enrolled me for a correspondence course. Each afternoon I was supposed to do this correspondence. But I sort of

kept lagging and lagging and it had to be done each week. I don't know whether Mum gained much by it but she used to do this correspondence to get it done to send it back. That petered out after a while.

## Uncovering domestic details of the Past Part 2

*Sandra Jones follows on from her earlier nostalgic piece about the kitchen and recipes of the past with this eye-opening piece about "labour saving" tips and tricks for the lady of the house back in 1958.*

The Australian Women's Weekly featured 500 Household Hints in July 1958 and I quote:

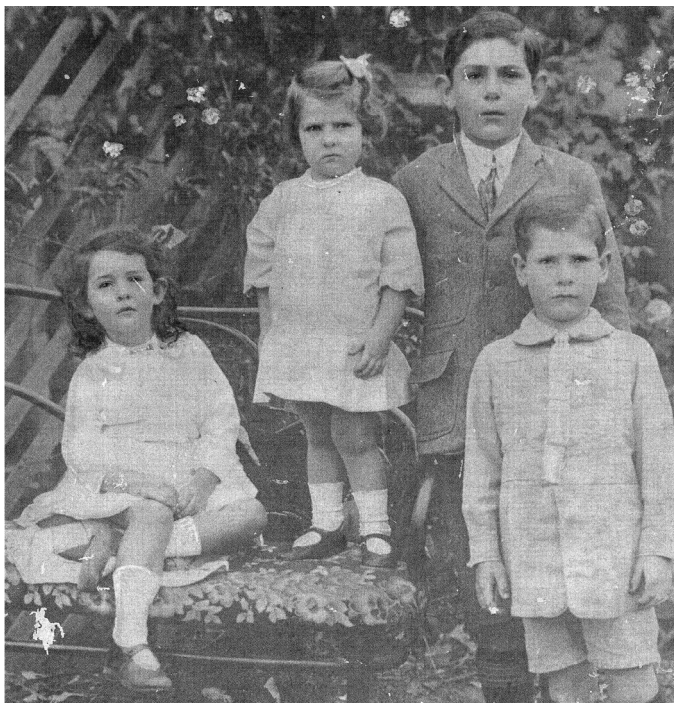
These hints will save time, save money, cooking,

## Our 2020 Enquiries from the Public

Month	Total	Family	Property	Other	Other
January	3	1	1	1	Macedonian Church at Crabbes Creek
February	3	1		2	Knox Park palms - referred to Museum staff Murwillumbah Power House
March	1	1			
April	4	3	1		
May	6	5		1	Civic Café – referred to Museum staff
June	5	4		1	NAB Bank Murwillumbah
July	10	1	2	7	Numinbah school in the 1960s Salvation Army operated emergency hospital in 1919 Visit of King Peter II to Murwillumbah Traction engine used at Back Creek sawmill Surf life saving clubs Rose Café Ladies' Committees of the Murwillumbah Show
August	5	4	1		
September	8	1	3	4	Cudgen-Chinderah cemetery and South Sea Island community Farm equipment Murwillumbah Bowling Club Churches in Nullum Street
October	10	6	3	1	R Moore and Company photos
November	3	1		2	Budd's Grainery Store Council issued World War II 'Appreciation' certificates
December	3	2		1	Earngey and Hatfield pharmacies
Total	61	30	11	20	

*These are the enquiries we received from the public in 2020. Interesting stuff! We're always looking for keen new members to help so if you'd like to join our happy team, visit: <http://www.murwillumbahhistoricalsociety.org.au/member.htm>*





Sandra's father Merthyr Vercoe with brother Harold and sisters Florence and Gladys at Tyalgum around 1917. Clothing would have needed some boiling in a copper or hand washed as other housewifely duties of the day (Photo courtesy of Sandra Jones)

washing, cleaning and ironing.

**Matches** – If your menfolk have the habit of stealing the kitchen matches, cut away a third of the box top. The matches are still satisfactory for household use but men won't carry a box likely to spill in their pocket!

**Ashtrays** – You need not wash your pottery or metal ashtrays every time you use them. Apply a thin layer of floor wax to the ashtrays after you wash them next time and allow to dry. Polish well. This prevents ashes and moisture from clinging and the ashtrays can be wiped out quickly with a

facial tissue or cloth.

With matches and cigarettes dealt with, let us look at PESTS (not cats and dogs but ants, weevils etc.)

**Bedbugs** – Spray mattresses and bedheads thoroughly with 5 per cent D.D.T. The same applies to Bees, Wasps, Ticks and Sandflies. Do people still use D.D.T in the household?

Not wanting to bore the reader with too many hints another three will complete my quick perusal of the 500 AWW Service Feature in July 1958 magazine.

**Cheap Slippers** – Instead of throwing away children's socks when the feet have worn out, buy a small length of dark coloured felt, cut into shoe sole shape, and attach to feet of worn socks with wool crochet. They make warm and economical indoor slippers.

**Ironing** – Before ironing a man's tie, insert a piece of cardboard the same shape. This will prevent seam marks from showing.

**Last but not least:** Stand on a rubber mat or soft floor rug when ironing. It keeps your feet happy.

To preserve maximum space in Timelines for content, sources and references will not usually be listed. These are available upon request to:  
[editor@murwillumbahhistoricalsociety.org.au](mailto:editor@murwillumbahhistoricalsociety.org.au)

While every effort is made to provide accurate and complete information in our Timelines newsletters and research, Murwillumbah Historical Society cannot guarantee that there will be no errors. The Society makes no claims, promises or guarantees about the accuracy, completeness, or adequacy of the contents of our newsletters and research and expressly disclaims liability for errors and omissions. The views and opinions expressed therein are solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Society.

**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.

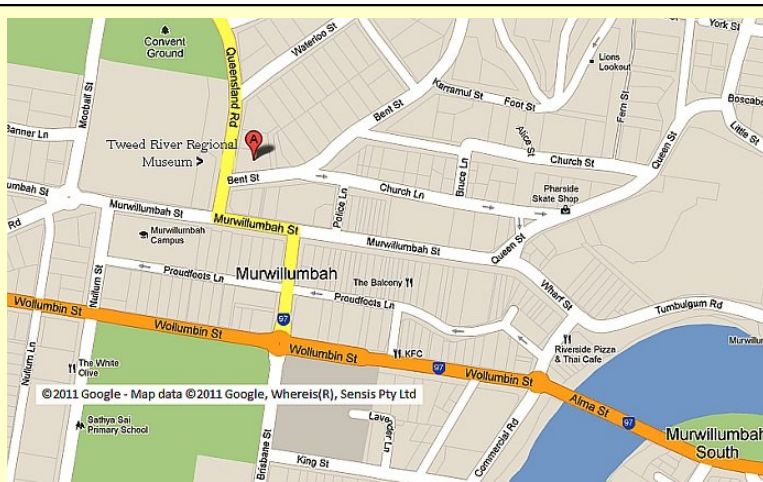
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**ABOUT THE MUSEUM:** The Tweed Regional Museum is a Tweed Shire Council community facility, established in 2004, with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between Tweed Shire Council and the Murwillumbah, Tweed Heads and Uki and South Arm 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.