TIMELINES

Welcome

Welcome to the April 2021 *Timelines*, the newsletter of Murwillumbah Historical Society.

This edition's contents:

Cows out on the Town

Thanks to Di Millar for this charming and nostalgic story of a yesterday that is hard to reconcile with societal expectations and attitudes of today.

Brownie and Creamy held lofty positions on my grandparents' Terranora dairy farm. The two soft-eyed, gentle and extremely patient girls were our house cows, owned by my mother, and who allowed me to pull clumsily on their teats as I developed my milking technique in the 1950s with the aid of an old jam tin.

Once it was common for families in residential settlements to own what was known as a town cow. Parents in poor circumstances with a large number of children to feed relied heavily on their town cow to provide milk and cream that was churned into butter.
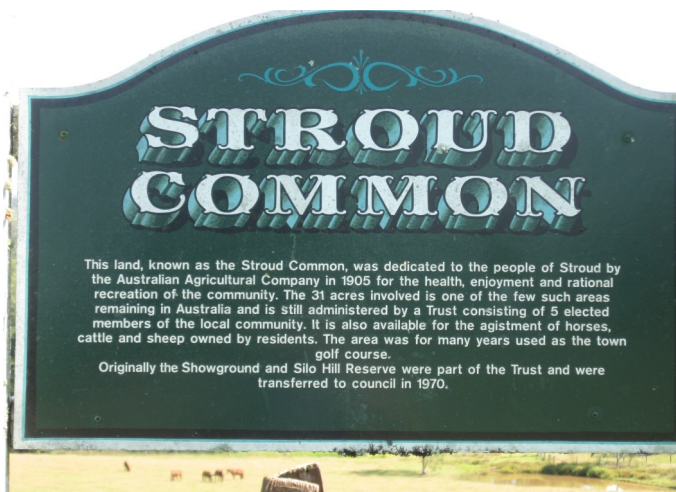
Town cows could roam freely along roadsides

Three girls together. Me, my mother and one of our cows. (Photo c. 1950s, courtesy of Dianne Millar)

The use of town land for grazing was widespread in country Australia as in this photo from Stroud NSW (Photo: David Taylor 2010)

where good grass was plentiful. In Murwillumbah township its central 25-acre reserve (Knox Park) once served as agistment for the town cows and horses. Each household that grazed their animals on the reserve was charged an agistment fee by Murwillumbah Municipal Council.

All stock on the roads needed to be dipped regularly to eradicate ticks which transmitted a blood parasite that caused red water, or tick, fever. In the 1920s there was a major outbreak on the Tweed and elsewhere which caused the death of a great number of animals.

Sometimes dipping was difficult to enforce and unless horses and cows had a distinguishing mark on them to show that they were dipped, the animals were impounded.

In 1921 an article in The Tweed Daily reported that straying stock had completed their primary school education in opening gates and demolishing treasured flower gardens and had entered a higher course of training. The paper detailed how two fair-sized calves rudely awakened a well-known Murwillumbah resident one Saturday morning with one calf found standing in his bedroom doorway while the other was found exploring his dining room. The animals were speedily conducted outside.

According to the story it appears that the animals had negotiated gates and steps and, once on to the home's verandah, it was easy to gain access

inside as all the doors were left open due to the hot weather.

During the early 1920s Murwillumbah Municipal Council assessed the need to beautify Knox Park which was described at the time as only being a stockyard. Although agistment fees brought in what council considered to be a fair income, council also felt there was a great need to spruce up the town. A plan to enclose a portion of Knox Park for stock agistment was considered but it was met with heavy opposition from residents who objected to their cows being confined.

Town cows continued to cause upset among Murwillumbah residents as they roamed around town. In 1927 a Mr E.R. Johnston, who lived in Wilson Street, complained bitterly to council that a belled cow wandered in the vicinity of Wilson Street and Byangum Road to the distress of the residents. Mr Johnston's complaint on the use of cow bells in Murwillumbah was promptly dealt with at the next council meeting where the council's clerk of works was charged with locating the offending animal.

During the 1930s Murwillumbah Municipal Council received an increasing number of complaints that cows, who were at liberty to roam the town freely both day and night, were causing inconvenience and damage as well as leaving their cow pats (manure) in unsuitable places.

In 1934 the council restricted the number of cows moving around town to milking cows only and ruled that dry cows should be constrained. At a Murwillumbah Municipal Council meeting held in July of that year one alderman again made the point that it did not take a town cow long to become thoroughly educated in the art of opening gates.

By the end of the 1940s town cows were beginning to be treated as straying stock and their days of roaming at will were numbered. The gentle brown eyes of a town cow could no longer gaze out over a townscape they had considered their home.

More on Horace William Moss

Maris Bruzgulis was intrigued by Bill Larkin's story in our previous Timelines and brings us the fruits of his further research.

Bill Larkin's article in the last *Timelines* piqued my interest in the statement that the editor of the *Tweed Daily* in 1914 reckoned that Will Moss' letter to his brother Len gave the paper a 'scoop' about HMAS *Sydney's* sinking of the *Emden*. A little bit of digging showed that this was probably a slip of memory on the part of the journalist writing Will's obituary in 1935. Ironically, looking in to this

AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL   EN0401

A seaman on the deck of HMAS Sydney looks at the wrecked German cruiser Emden (Australian War Memorial [6045666])

statement brought up a better candidate for a 'scoop' from Will Moss, and also the odd situation that the *Tweed Daily* needed to explain why Rabaul, in German New Guinea, had been 'taken' twice by the Australians.

In both cases the 'scoop' was a retrospective call. The news of the destruction of the *Emden* by HMAS *Sydney* was remembered in the obituary mentioned above, appearing on 7 Aug 1935.

Owing to press censorship, details had not been published when the late Mr Moss, who was a member of the Sydney's crew, wrote to his brother, Len, in Murwillumbah, from Townsville, where the Sydney was coaling, and gave the full story. The Tweed Daily editor of the time realised it was a "scoop" and published the account.

This, of course, could not have happened, as the *Sydney's* next stop after sinking the *Emden* (or more correctly, running her aground – '"*Emden* beached and done for"' and '"*Emden* beached to avoid sinking"') was islands of the Cocos Group (particularly Direction Island) and then Colombo.

The earlier ascription of a 'scoop' to Will Moss occurred on 29 July 1919. This had more veracity.

Through the instrumentality of this Mr Moss, the Tweed Daily was the first paper in Australia to publish the news of the Australian capture of

German New Guinea, being 21 days in advance of any other journal in the Commonwealth. The news was contained in a letter which Mr. Moss wrote to his brother Len, who was then on the staff of the Tweed Daily, and its publication caused a mild sensation, particularly in official circles.

Sadly, this statement was only partly true. The 'scoop' referred to here was published on 28 August 1914 in a report sub-headed 'The Australian Fleet. Doing good work. Force landed in German New Guinea.', and was dated 'Townsville, 24 August' and 'From Aboard H.M.A.S. Sydney'.

We have returned here for a short stay, and ere this reaches you will be again on the high seas. I must tell you we have been on the go all the time. We have been to German New Guinea and Samoa, but haven't seen anything of the German fleet yet, but hope to. This ship and three destroyers, Warrego, Parramatta and Yarra, made a night attack on Raboul [sic], Bismarck Archipelago, hoping to have a set to with some of the German ships said to be there, but luck was against us; they had gone. It was a well-thought out plan and great credit is due to our captain and the captains of the destroyers for the way it was carried out. We waited till daylight, and then took the town. We landed to look for, a wireless station, but could not find it. We believe they dismantled it
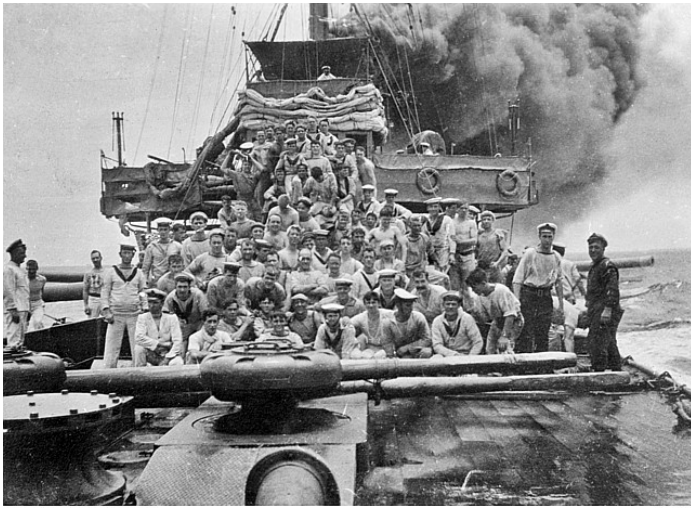
AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL   EN0211

Group portrait of some unidentified members of the crew of HMAS Sydney (Photo: Australian War Memorial [4179560])

before we got ashore. We broke up the post office and cut the telephone cables, and completed a few other important missions.

This report described the searching of the Rabaul harbour, Simpsonhafen (Simpson Harbour), on the night of 11 August and the raid on Rabaul the following day, when the Australian ships were searching for German warships and seeking to locate the wireless station. The capture and occupation of Rabaul only occurred later, from 11 to 13 September, and was carried out by the Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force. The *Sydney* was part of the naval escort and provided personnel for the land operations. On 22 September the *Tweed Daily* explained how it was

that Rabaul had been taken twice, drawing on a 19 September *Sydney Morning Herald* article, 'German islands. Twice taken by the British' for corroboration of its 'scoop'.

On Friday, August 28th., we published information to the effect that Rabaul, in the Bismarck Archipelago had been taken by an Australian force, unresisted. On Monday, September 14th., our telegrams gave news of the capture of the same German possessions, entailing loss of life to the Australian Expeditionary Force. In order that a better understanding of a seeming contradiction may be had we append further particulars of the two occasions.

Details of the two actions followed. The *Tweed Daily* 'scoop' was the report of the raid of 11 and 12 August, and more than likely was based on Will Moss' letter.

As Bill Larkin relates, Will Moss did write a letter about the destruction of the *Emden* – but from Colombo. It was published on 11 December, in this case a full month after the news was first received in Australia.

Mr. Will Moss, brother of Mr. Len Moss, of Murwillumbah, in a letter to his, brother from Colombo, dated 17 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.
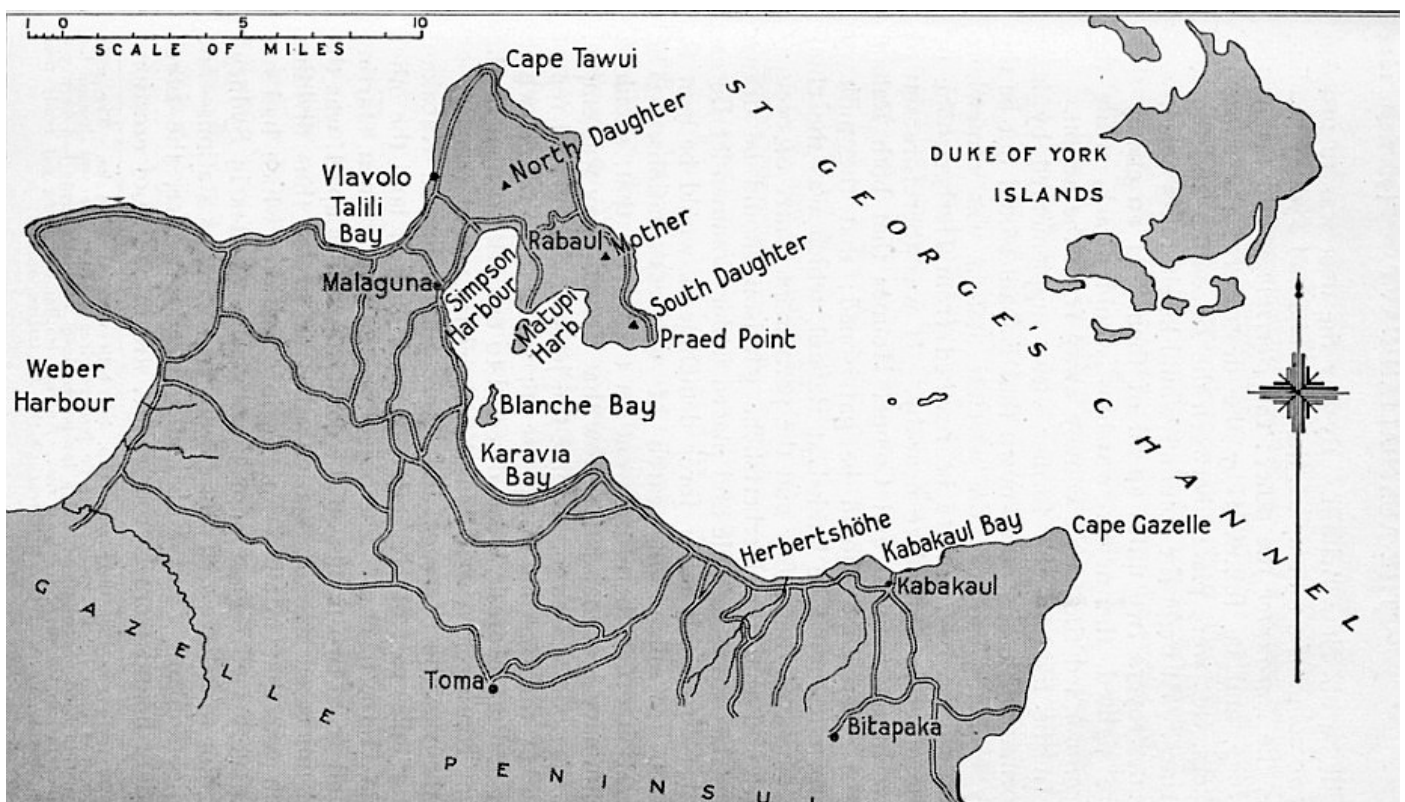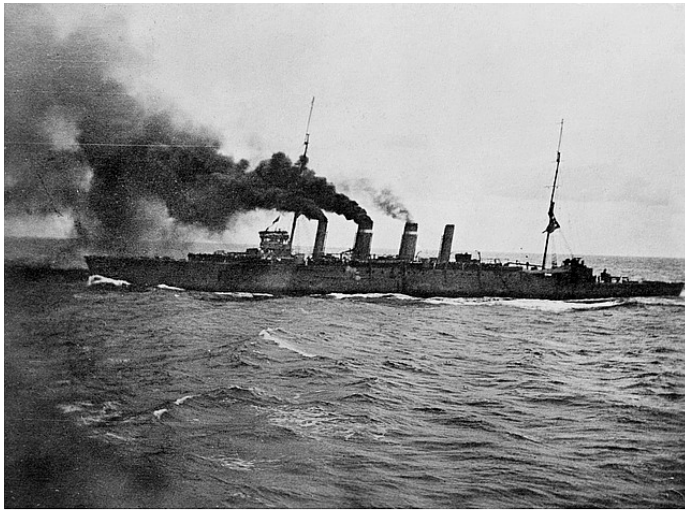
EN0194

The light cruiser HMAS Sydney steams towards Rabaul. (Photo: Australian War Memorial [6212890])

Sadly, no 'scoop' there – but definitely an exclusive.

By the way, where are the letters now?

Postscript: The "mystery" of Will Moss's earlier life can now be revealed. His record with the Royal Navy is freely available. Before his naval service he was an errand boy. He served on the training ships HMS *St Vincent* and HMS *Agincourt* and HMS *Wallaroo* from 6 Sep 1898 (when he was fifteen) to 13 Feb 1901. His continuous service engagement commenced on his eighteenth birthday, 14 Feb 1901. He served for twelve years. On the completion of this service he signed up with HMAS *Sydney* on 18 Feb 1913 for five years.

Did he serve in three wars? The Boer War is dated from 11 Oct 1899 to 31 May 1902. The Boxer Rebellion is dated from 2 Nov 1899 to 7 Sep 1901. Will Moss's record shows he was serving on HMS *Wallaroo* from 15 Feb 1900 to 7 Dec 1903. The Australian War Memorial writes: 'In June 1900 the British government sought and received permission from the Australian colonies to send the Auxiliary Squadron ship *Wallaroo* based in Sydney, and two Australian squadron ships to China. They arrived in September 1900 but were too late to see any significant fighting.'

This service with HMS Wallaroo also places him in Australia earlier than his service with HMAS Sydney.

The questions that remain are how did Will Moss get to Australia to join the crew of HMS *Wallaroo*? What role did HMS *Wallaroo* play during the Boer War?

Leo Appo, the Tweed's World Champion Axeman

Di Millar reminds us of the exploits of Leo Appo, another amazing local world champion, this time in wood chopping.

The Tweed's Leo Appo was considered one of the outstanding axemen of the time from the 1920s until after World War Two. Leo was reportedly born at Tumbulgum although no registration of his birth has come to light. Conflicting reports of his age occurred during his life (in a 1934 Sydney court case his age was given as 37).

Leo was only young when he began working on the Tweed as a timber getter and it was said at the time that he showed great skill and stamina with an axe. Leo began winning wood chopping contests and in March 1913 the Sydney Morning Herald reported on a standing wood cut for all comers at Sydney's Royal Easter Show in which there were 25 entries. The paper reported that the first heat was won by Leo Appo and described his effort of cutting though his blue gum log in one minute and fifty three seconds as a very good performance.

Leo still regarded wood chopping as more of a hobby, being intent in working on his banana plantation however like other Tweed banana growers in the 1920s he faced financial problems when bunchy top spread through the plantations.

Leo turned to his axe to provide financial support for his family and became a professional wood
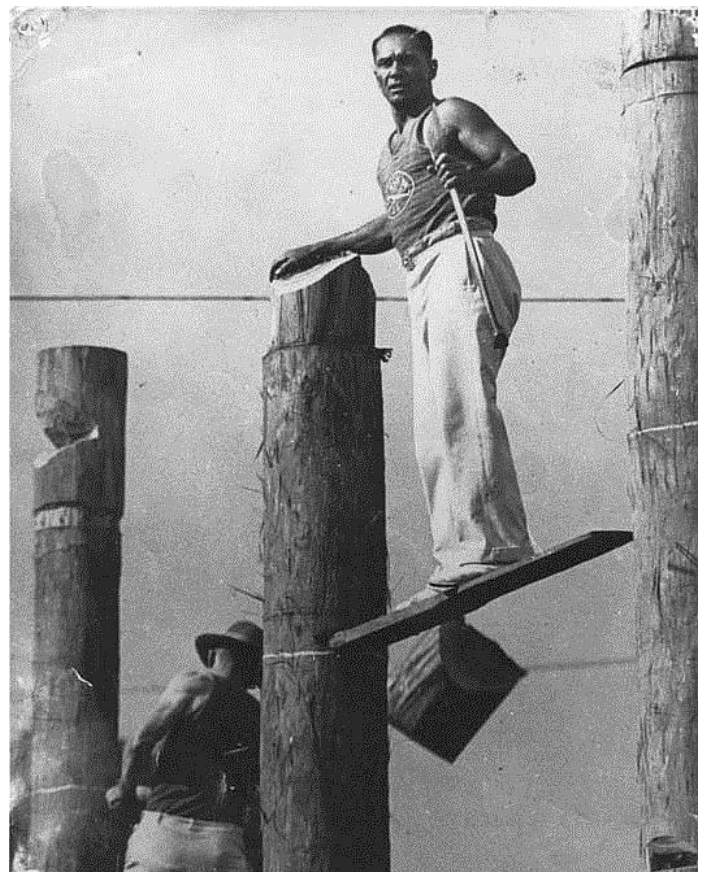
Leo Appo in the 1927 woodchop final (Photo courtesy of Di Millar)

chopper. In July 1921 at a Tweed Heads sports carnival a woodchop was the chief attraction. Leo, fresh from winning the NSW woodchop championship at Sydney's Royal Easter Show, accepted a challenge from Mr J Boyle for the NSW woodchop championship and in rapidly cutting his log ran out an easy winner.

In 1925 Leo was called upon to defend his Australian underhand wood chopping championship with a side wager of £25 against Bill Geary. The contest, decided on a 50 inch mahogany log, attracted a large Brisbane crowd. The following month Leo, the reigning NSW champion and favoured to defend his title, was defeated at a woodchop at Tweed Heads by North Queensland's Ivor Johnson who won by two blows of his axe.

In January 1926 personal tragedy befell Leo and his wife Sarah who were living at Hartigan Hill, Murwillumbah when their only daughter Mary Hazel, a student of Murwillumbah Intermediate High School and Lismore High School, died at the age of 16 following what was described at the time as a short, severe illness.

By 1926 Leo had become the most popular axeman to appear at the Royal Easter Show and the show in April that year was no exception. His age however was now becoming a handicap and younger men were occasionally getting the better of him. Undeterred Leo not only won the handicap chop but went on to win a tree felling competition

Leo Appo at the 1928 Royal Easter show (Photo courtesy of Di Millar)

in which the axemen had to stand on boards 14 feet above the ground. This was the first time the tree felling competition had been staged in Sydney

and the exhibition astonished citysiders who witnessed the bushmen's tree felling methods.

Axemen were always on the lookout to earn some money and in June 1926 Australian champion Leo Appo and Victorian champion Bill Weston engaged in a wood chopping vaudeville attraction at Sydney's Wintergarden Theatre. In November Leo, chopping better than ever, defeated two other champions Mannie McCarthy and H Foyster to win a wood chopping handicap and the Northern Rivers underhand cut championship with both contests being on a 15 inch block.

Over the following years Leo continued to win woodchop events but his endurance was tested. In February 1929 the champion became ill after a wood chop at the Stanthorpe Show and spent several weeks in a Tenterfield hospital. In April he successfully defended his Australian championship at Grafton.

Leo Appo's wood chopping prowess made him a well-known and popular Tweed identity and Murwillumbah's A E Budd and Sons advertised their DSI brand of axes as "the choice of champions as used by Leo Appo, champion axeman of the Commonwealth (Royal Show 1930)."

Into the 1930s the popularity of wood chopping contests among axemen seemed to increase and at the 1931 Royal Easter Show world underhand

wood chop champion Leo Appo was there with other leading axemen.

Leo was so popular in the sport he was asked to give displays of his skills. Among Leo's last Sydney appearances was a woodchop display held in May 1944 in aid of the Australian Red Cross Society at the Braidwood Showground where he was introduced as a winner of more championships than any other axeman in the game (he is reputed to have won 17 world championships).

In 1946 Leo returned to growing bananas near Coffs Harbour where he continued to compete in wood chopping events, the last occurring in 1961. Leo Appo died on 24 Jan 1969 and was buried in Coffs Harbour Cemetery. His age on his death certificate was given as 75.

Lines out of Time

Our former title for this regular segment was "100 Years Ago", now renamed Lines out of Time to broaden its offering. This edition Betty Hamill charms us with the continuing story of the life of her father Hec Robertson, as transcribed from family tape recordings and Maris Bruzgulis entertains us with the perils of "Nullum Rum" .

Hec Robertson's story continues….

Living at Cudgera we had Walter Salter and family on a farm a couple down from us. It was also one of Neissmann's farms. Neissmann owned a square mile of country in four farms and he leased it out. The Salters and my people became very good friends. Mr Salter was a great help to Dad, advising him what to do because that farming was pretty new to Dad. He had a lot to learn in a new area different to the Southern Highlands. After two years the Salters' lease ran out and they bought a farm at Boat Harbour.

From then on at school holidays I would ride out there. They were on the North Arm of the river and Arthur (Salter) and I used to roam around doing a bit of fishing, shooting, swimming and learning about the bush. Later on, I suppose I'd be getting on for twelve and Arthur a year younger, Arthur and I went down to Sydney on our own. We went by train to Byron Bay and then caught the ship. Relatives met us in Sydney.

From Mittagong we camped on an original selection on the Wingecarribee River with Uncle Ern Nye. We drenched some sheep there. I remember we took out bread, meat and all that sort of thing to last us the week. The old bread was pretty dry and Ern was the only bloke eating the meat at the finish because it got pretty badly fly blown. It was corned meat. We caught rabbits and boiled them in a kerosene tin for us and the dogs.

When the boat to Byron Bay petered out the railway lines got closer. They were going from the north and the south with a missing piece from Macksville or Kempsey to Grafton. They used to connect them by bus. So when you went down instead of going on the boat you'd get on the train at Burringbar, go to Grafton and then possibly get

THROW PHYSIC TO THE DOGS.

Sir.—My old friend, Captain Joseph Kirkwood, Tweed Heads, writes to the "Daily" of his experiences of a black plague that raged at Port Louis, in the Mauritius, some sixty years ago, and how rum was employed as a preventive against the disease. My memory took me back over seventy years ago. At that period our population was mostly made up of the emancipist, the ticket-of-leave man, and the early immigrant; healthy, hardy people, all victims of the wiked Hanovrrian laws that drove English and Irish out of their respective countries to find a home at Botany Bay. These men went into our wilderness to fight the forces of nature, and to blaze the many tracks that the present occupiers motor on. They drank rum and lived to enjoy very old age, and passed out from senile decay. Vale!

Could that class of rum be obtained in this year of grace? I doubt it. We have our local article on tap, and it is known as Nullum rum. Those who drink it are never drunk—only demented. The other day I purchased a small flask of rum, contents under two glasses, and about thirty under proof spirit, for which I paid the publican two shillings and sixpence. A quart of rum would be about sixteen glasses, price one pound sterling; that would mean four pounds for a gallon. This would make a good peg for the water-lifter to hang some of his arguments on. Of rum 30 n.p. it would take a gallon of it to produce on a person marks of intoxication. It would fail as there would not be enough man!—I am. etc..

(To the Editor.)
JAMES MURPHY.
26th February, 1919.

Tweed Daily (Murwillumbah, NSW: 1914 - 1949), Wednesday 26 February 1919, page 4.)

Hec ploughing at Cudgera with ring-barked trees in the background (Photo courtesy of Betty Hamill)

When I got home with no luggage Mum and Dad rang the railway people and eventually it did turn up. The people must have brought it back. I was a very worried kid while it was all happening.

When we were at Upper Cudgera we used to take our cream to the road in cans on a slide which was really a sledge. Two wooden runners supported the flat deck and you sat the cans on it and tied them with a rope. We'd pull it out to the road behind a horse and it was picked up by a cream wagon with four, or in bad weather, five horses. They used to take the cream to Burringbar, put it on the train, pick up our empty cans and drop them back. The next day they'd pick up our full ones again.

A thing worth noting to make it easier for the people handling the cans, each railway stop had blobs of different coloured paint, say red or green or white for each siding. When they were sorting out their cans it was much easier to get all the same coloured ones dropped off at the siding.

To be continued….

on a bus to where the line started again. Then later on when the line met the river on both sides, for quite a few years you went down on a train, then got on a bus and went over the river and joined the train on the other side. Otherwise you walked down the river bank, got on a boat and went down to where the railway station was and then walked up the bank to the train.

I remember one time when I was only a kid about thirteen or fourteen and I was sitting in an old box carriage which held ten people. All the other people belonged to some show. They were actors in a travelling show. When we got out of the train at South Grafton there was a fellow there saying "Put all your baggage in a heap here". I didn't know that it didn't include me so I put my bags in the heap. When I got out on the other side I couldn't find these people or my baggage.