TIMELINES

The Quarterly Newsletter of Murwillumbah Historical Society Inc. ISSN 2208-1909 January 2022 Vol. 10 No. 3

Welcome

Happy New Year and welcome to the January 2022 edition of *Timelines*, the newsletter of Murwillumbah Historical Society.

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The Lost Road to the Town that Never Was Part 2

Thanks to Dr Greg Wightman for the remainder of this fascinating history. The physical legacy of the old road is still accessible today. For space reasons it's published without Greg's extensive references which are available upon request.

Part 2A - Byangum: the town that never was

Part 1 of this article discussed how the original Nightcap track crossed over the Tweed River's South Arm a short way north of Cudgenbil Hole, and then went along the west bank of the river to Byangum. The track had to cross the Tweed River at some point, because - from the Colonial Government's perspective - its main function was to bring mail by as direct a route as possible up from Lismore to the post office at Bray's Kynnumboon, and the latter stood on the Rous River to the north. The 'South Arm men' (including James Black, John McLeod and John Hindmarsh), who had originally found a way over the Nightcap, would have preferred the road to keep east of the Tweed River to take it up to Tweed Junction (Tumbulgum), where they wanted to open their own post office. But Bray won the day on that point, at least for the time being.

There was another reason playing into the decision to take the Nightcap Road across the Tweed River. In the 1860s and '70s several sites along the river were earmarked as potential population centres and commercial entrepôts: Cudgen (modern Chinderah) not far from the mouth of the river, Tweed Junction at the confluence of the Tweed and Rous rivers, Murwillumbah between these two rivers near Mayall Creek, and Byangum at the confluence of the Tweed and Oxley rivers. 640 acres of land was reserved for a village at Byangum as early as 1865 (in preparation for the arrival of free selectors), and Crown Land sales there commenced in 1871. However, the village itself was not inaugurated until 1876, and was proclaimed in 1888.

Early Town Maps show that Byangum village had a grid plan of streets, all named, the main

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thoroughfare being Gooninbar-street.

The pre-existing Nightcap track snaked its way through the western side of the proposed village, interrupting the neat grid plan, and was variously named Terrigal-street, Bent-street and, on the north bank of the Oxley River, Kynnumboon-street. The town had areas reserved for public buildings, a "village green", a hospital, cemetery, pound, churches and a public school. As it turned out, only the school was built, in 1886, and operated until the early 20th century. One small house, belonging to Harry Skinner and probably dating to the turn of the 20th century, still stands in the southwest corner of the town (now on private property, and largely hidden from the track by thick trees). Byangum's fortunes were championed especially by local pioneer William Hatton Sr, who in 1886 established a hotel at Byangum, on the east bank of South Arm (along the new section of the Nightcap road; see accompanying map). The rise of Byangum would not have been well-received by Joshua Bray, who had selected broad tracts of land where he wanted the future town to be, at Murwillumbah nearer to Kynnumboon. Bray turned his considerable

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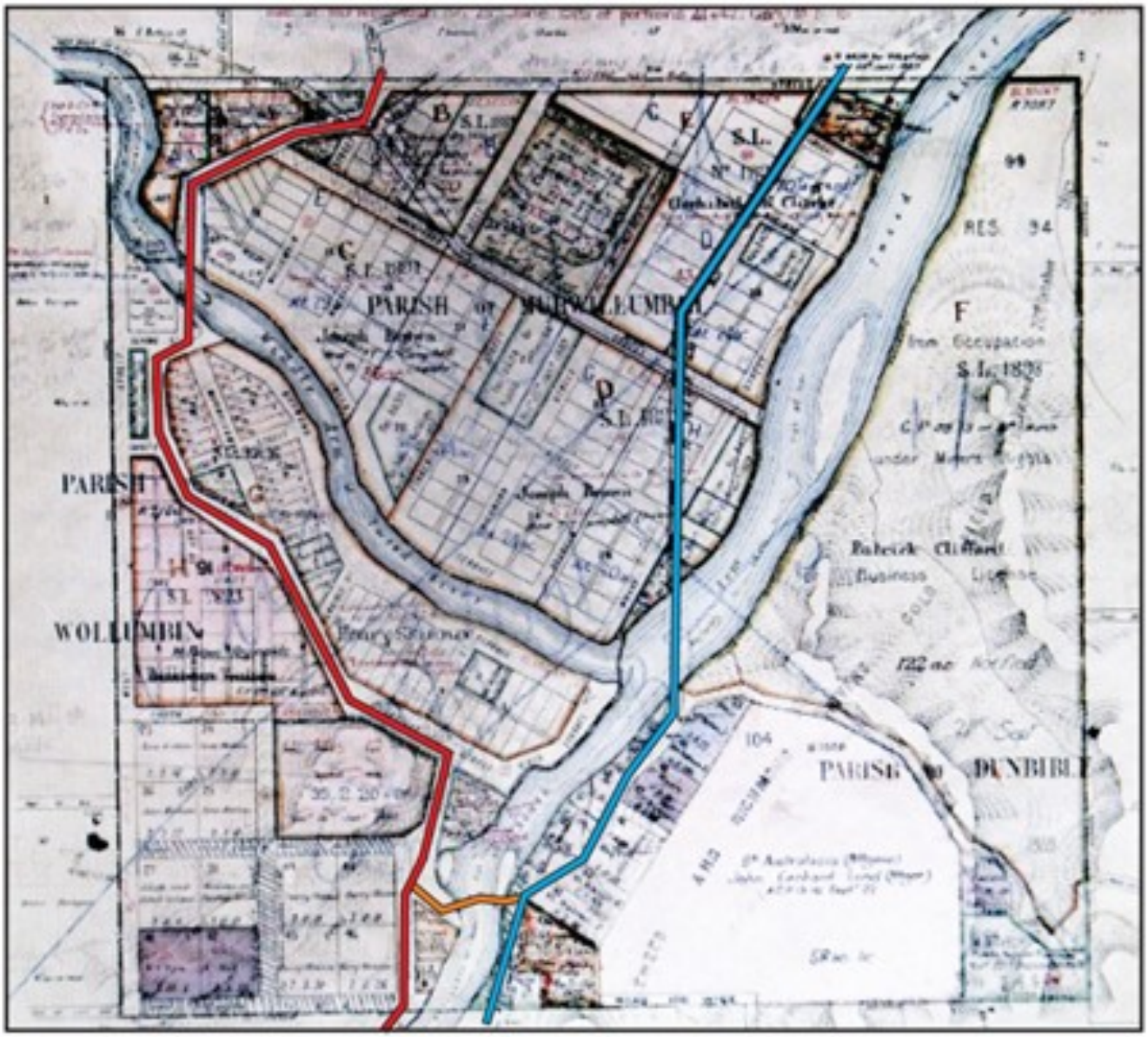

Map of Byangum Village, 1889. In red, line of old Nightcap road, 1870s (Old Lismore Road); in blue, new road, 1880s (Kyogle Road); in orange, southern ford connecting old and new roads, 1880s. (Map compliments of Greg Wightman)

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influence to that end, and as Crown Lands Agent he did his utmost to cruel the prospects of rival contenders, including Byangum. Bray, of course, prevailed: Murwillumbah was surveyed in 1878, gazetted in 1879, and in the 1880s emerged as the commercial and residential centre of the Tweed. Byangum hardly got off the map. The fact that much of it was on a floodplain didn't aid its prospects. As early as the mid-1880s it was becoming increasingly clear that Byangum village was never going to succeed, and parts of the reserved land began to be resumed for other purposes, eventually to be sold off as farming lots. In 1915, the plan for Byangum village was cancelled and its streets closed. In the 1920s Mary Hatton recalled: "The town was supposed to be at Byangum at one time. I don't think you'd find the white pegs put in to mark the streets out, but I have seen them with my own eyes".

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Part 2A - Twilight of the Nightcap

The "heyday" (if that is the right term) of the Nightcap track was from the mid-70s to mid-80s. In 1881, Thomas Ewing resurveyed the track from Dunoon on the Richmond side across to Commissioners Creek on the Tweed, with a view to making the track viable for wheeled vehicles and to installing a telegraph line. The course of Ewing's surveyed track is shown on early parish maps. Coming down from Curiosity Gap, it crossed Commissioners Creek and ran along the high ground east of Doon Doon Creek. Ewing's work was continued in 1882 by Arthur Gracie, but was soon abandoned, because (in Gracie's view) the government had had enough of roads with zig-zags. Gracie attempted to survey a new track further west at a lower elevation — a route suggested to him by Dunoon farmer Duncan Currie — but he had gotten only a few hundred metres before the project was rejected in favour of a new road skirting the east side of the Nightcap and Mt Jerusalem Range and running across the much lower Burringbar Range from Brunswick Heads to Murwillumbah; henceforth, Gracie's new section of road was known amongst locals as "Gracie's mistake".

The Nightcap road remained in a constant state of repair and upgrade during the later 1870s and 1880s, as the NSW Government continued to invest vast resources in it while at the same time trying to find better alternatives. As a report from 1884 explains:

> "During the past 13 years large sums of money have been spent in making enormous cuttings in the hills; but these are in isolated places, and only to be approached by a bridle path. The impossibility of ever making a satisfactory outlet in this direction appears at last to have struck the Department of Public Works, and a new road has been surveyed and partly constructed."

The "new road" mentioned here is almost certainly the Burringbar Range road, which was formed during the 1880s (quite possibly from an old cedar getters' track) and would go on to become the main road through the Tweed. Another report, from the following year, was equally scathing of continued investment in the Nightcap road:

> "Mr Hogan deplored the way in which the [Tweed] district had been so utterly neglected, particularly in the way of roads. It was so completely isolated as to be almost unknown in other parts. Both candidates... expressed themselves as favourable to the survey and opening of a new road, via Fairy Mount... which would... do away with the notorious Night Cap track, on which nearly 30,000 pounds had been spent to so little purpose."

In the 1880s that part of the Nightcap track that ran along the west bank of the Tweed river was replaced by a road along the east bank, from Rowlands Creek as far as McFarlane's property at Byangum (see accompanying map). This new road upgraded the old cedar getters' track from Rowlands Creek to the crossing north of Cudgenbil Hole — which had been used for part of the original Nightcap track —and extended it further north along the east bank of the river, along the foot of Mt Nullum, as explained in this newspaper piece from 1880:

> "[From the Nightcap] you arrive at Rowlands Creek, [where] a few men are engaged in repairing the road and forming same from Rowland's Creek to Mr McFarlane's selection... A great deal of good work has been done in the way of sideling cuttings, culverts, &c., of various parts of the road, but a great deal is yet required to complete it; as the road is now, it is impassable for dray or cart traffic, but I notice that nearly all the work done latterly will allow of such traffic, so presume it is the intention of the Road Inspector, as money becomes available, to continue future sections accordingly."

The road was officially opened in 1884; it is now part of the Kyogle Road. Near the junction of the Tweed and Oxley Rivers, there was a ferry punt near McFarlane's cane mill, which took travellers across to link up with the old Nightcap track at the south end of Byangum village (see Byangum Map in Part 2). From the north end of Byangum village, an extension of the old Nightcap track was made in the early 1880s, running up over the high ridge to the west of Murwillumbah to eventually join the top end of Murwillumbah Street (see accompanying map). This stretch of road came to be known as the Old Lismore Road, and more recently the Old Byangum Road. In 1917, the road along the south bank of the Tweed River was continued along the west side of the river by a new

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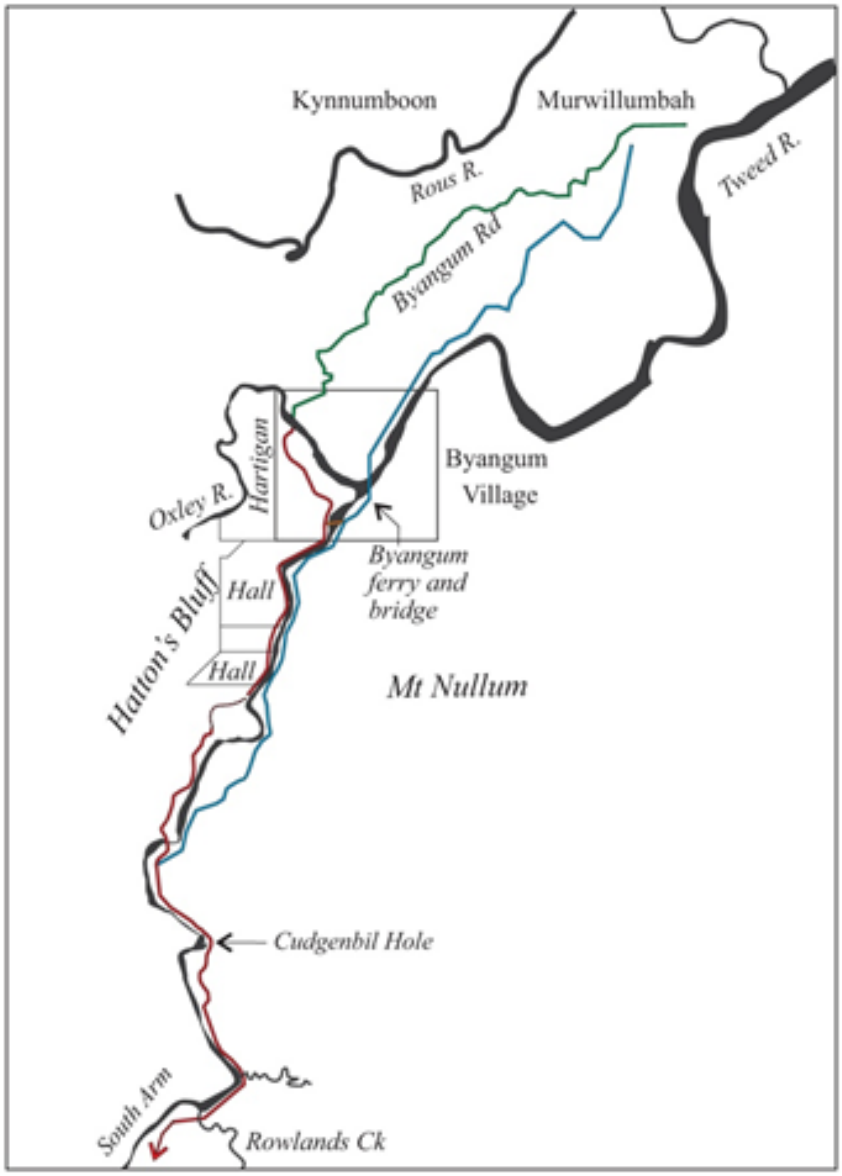

Map of Nightcap Road from Rowlands Creek to Byangum, showing main topographical features mentioned in the text of Parts 1 and 2. In red, the original track; in blue, the new track of the 1880s; in green, the 1880s extension of the old track up to Murwillumbah ('Byangum Rd'). (Map compliments of Greg

road running north across swampland originally earmarked as part of Byangum village. Traffic was taken across the river here by another punt ferry, just downstream of the confluence with the Oxley River. This ferry was replaced by a low bridge in 1926 (whose juddering timbers will be remembered by many readers, including this author). This new road, and ferry/bridge that serviced it, provided a more direct and easier route into Murwillumbah than the one further west described above; it came in at Riverview-street. These innovations and deviations meant that the original section of the Nightcap track below Hatton's Bluff was now reduced to a local road servicing Byangum farmers.

All these developments effectively spelled the end of the Nightcap road, or at least those parts of it below Hatton's Bluff and over the Nightcap itself. In the early 20th century there were calls to resurrect parts of the road near the Nightcap for tourists, and for many years the locals entertained hopes of forming the track into a vehicular road. Some work was done during the Great Depression, mainly to provide much-needed employment, but little came of it. After a final attempt in 1960, the Doon Doon section of the old Nightcap track fell into disuse; some of it was swallowed up by the bush, though parts of it survive as remote forestry or bushwalking tracks (e.g. the "Historic Nightcap Track" above Minyon Falls; Gilwah Road and parts of Rockface Road on the Doon Doon side, and Solomons Road south of Hatton's Bluff). A long stretch of the original track, from Hatton's Bluff to Byangum, is still accessible and stands more-or-less in its late 19th century condition; it continues to service local residents. The Great Depression also saw much work done on the Burringbar Range Road, which up till then had been a rough track. That work saw the road transformed from an alternative to the Nightcap Road to being its main replacement. The Nightcap track was missed by those who had firsthand experience of the magnificent views over the Tweed to be had from the Nightcap. But for those who wished to get from A to B in the shortest time and most comfortable manner, it was good riddance.

Lines out of Time

Betty Hamill continues with Part 4 of the story of the life and times of her father Hec Robertson, as transcribed from family tape recordings. What a window into the past!

Hec Robertson's story continues….

Farming at Cudgera

Dairy Farming

Farming was continually evolving. The cream wagon, pulled by four or five horses, depending on dry or wet weather, used to pick up the cream haul it to Burringbar railway station to go on the train and bring back the empty cans waiting there.

After the cream run was sold to Billy Madden and family they bought a motor lorry. It was one of the

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first motor lorries with solid tyres. They began to run straight through to Norco in Murwillumbah. A fellow by the name of George Grogan bought it out. They had it for many years.

At Lower Cudgera we used to keep pigs that we fed with the skimmed milk. The separated cream was sent to the Norco factory. The milk ran down to the pig sty through hollowed bangalow palms. We'd split the palms in half and scoop the pith out, then sit one on the other and use it for a guttering to run the milk through. In the winter time the cows got to the stage when they were liable to chew sticks and bones and things. You'd go out one night and start up the separator. Then when you went outside they'd have been chewing the pipes and pulled them down. There'd be a great scatter to stop the separator and fix the pipe. Apart from this it was very effective used as a pipeline.

In the winter time we used to buy pollard and molasses and things like that. We used to supplement our skimmed milk supply which dropped in the winter.

When the pigs went to market we used to put them in a spring cart. Usually we'd fatten four at a time, which was a handy lot to handle with the amount of food we had and was a load for the cart. We'd take them to Mooball with a pignet, like a big fishing net, over the top to keep them in. You'd back into the siding at the railway station and leave them in a yard. A chap on the train would chase them into a truck on the train when it came and they went through to Byron Bay. Norco had a slaughtering house and they used to make pork and bacon. So that they knew they were our pigs we put a firebrand on them before they left home. The brand was JReverseRO.(Back to front R) That was Dad's brand and later my brand. It is now the brand of our daughter Lynne and Don Beck. It was my grandfather's brand which came from his place "Mandemar".

Hec (right) with Edwin Tagget felling a tree the hard way (Photo: Betty Hamill)

Growing Beans

To supplement our income in the winter time we used to grow beans -- only little patches because the farm we had didn't lend itself to big areas of cultivation, with big trees all over it. We ringbarked them. To clear a bit of land to grow anything in it took a few years' work.

Winter time was the main time you did these things. After milking in the afternoon it was cool. We used to have to dig the stumps and roots out and burn them. Then when we had a bit of ground ready we'd plough it up and plant our beans. We used to pick them ourselves and put them into chaff bags which were a seven bushel bag which meant when it was full one man couldn't lift it. It was a bit stupid because to move things like that the wharfies, or whoever shifted them had a hook on their hand with a T-piece on it. They would just stick it into the bag and heave it up to use it. These would be carted to the railway, offloaded onto a wagon at Byron Bay and taken down to the wharf where they were handled into a ship. Often they were pretty badly knocked about by the time they were offloaded at Sydney. Eventually they made the bags smaller and smaller until they got to a sensible size for handling.

In those days we were paid by the bushel. A bushel of beans was 20lbs and a bushel of peas was 28lbs. In the early days a bushel was a measure not a weight. Then when weights came in a bushel of beans was 20lbs and peas 30lbs. I think we got about tuppence (2d) or three pence (3d) a pound for them.

Draining the Swamp

Johansen's farm, Ian McGregor's and our place all joined a swamp and we got the idea of draining the swamp. Ian was an energetic sort of fellow so he was the boss. The local farmers started down

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at Pottsville and dug a drain right through that swamp with a pick shovel and axe. To pull out of the way the timber we had felled, we had fence strainers and wire.

This took several years as it was mainly in the winter time that we had time to spare. Eventually we got it right through but by that time everyone was sick of it, the Depression was on and nobody had money to spend on it. We did gain a fair bit of land round the edges of the swamp but it needed a lot more work doing to it to drain it. Today you would have done it in a month with an excavator---no trouble.

Banana Growing

When I was in my early twenties I bought a patch of bananas from a couple of old chaps. They got to the point that they couldn't handle them and the patch was fairly dirty. There were 8 acres, 5 acres of older ones and 3 acres of young ones. It meant I had to work a fair bit to clean them up.

The first crop after I took over wasn't much good. I fertilised them and kept them clean. They became a proposition then and so I became a banana grower. There were a few bananas I'd planted at home which gave me about 12 acres all together. I used to employ people then. Jack Peacock, Ted Hall and various people worked for me at different times.

About that time in the early stages of my banana growing time the B.G.F. (Banana Growers Federation) was formed. We then formed a branch at Cudgera and Eric Steele was the president. It created an interest because a lot of young fellows were banana growers at the time.

Between Cudgera and Burringbar, on the mountains, there were quite a few young fellows living. We called it Silver City because they built bits of humpies -- pole frame and put bags over it. The bags were painted with lime to weather proof and water proof it. These young fellows from Silver City would come to our meetings and dances. They were fit from working hard but enjoyed mixing in the area.

Section 4, Deposited Plan 2087—the Evolution of our Town, Part 1

Thanks to Maris Bruzgulis for this account of the development over time of a key part of our town. It's well illustrated, so we'll run the story in several parts to include as much rich detail as possible. We hope that Section 4 will be the first of a number of stories highlighting the significant early change that has occurred in the built environment in Murwillumbah. References are available upon request.

NSW Land Registry Service, Historical Land Records Viewer (image via Maris Bruzgulis)

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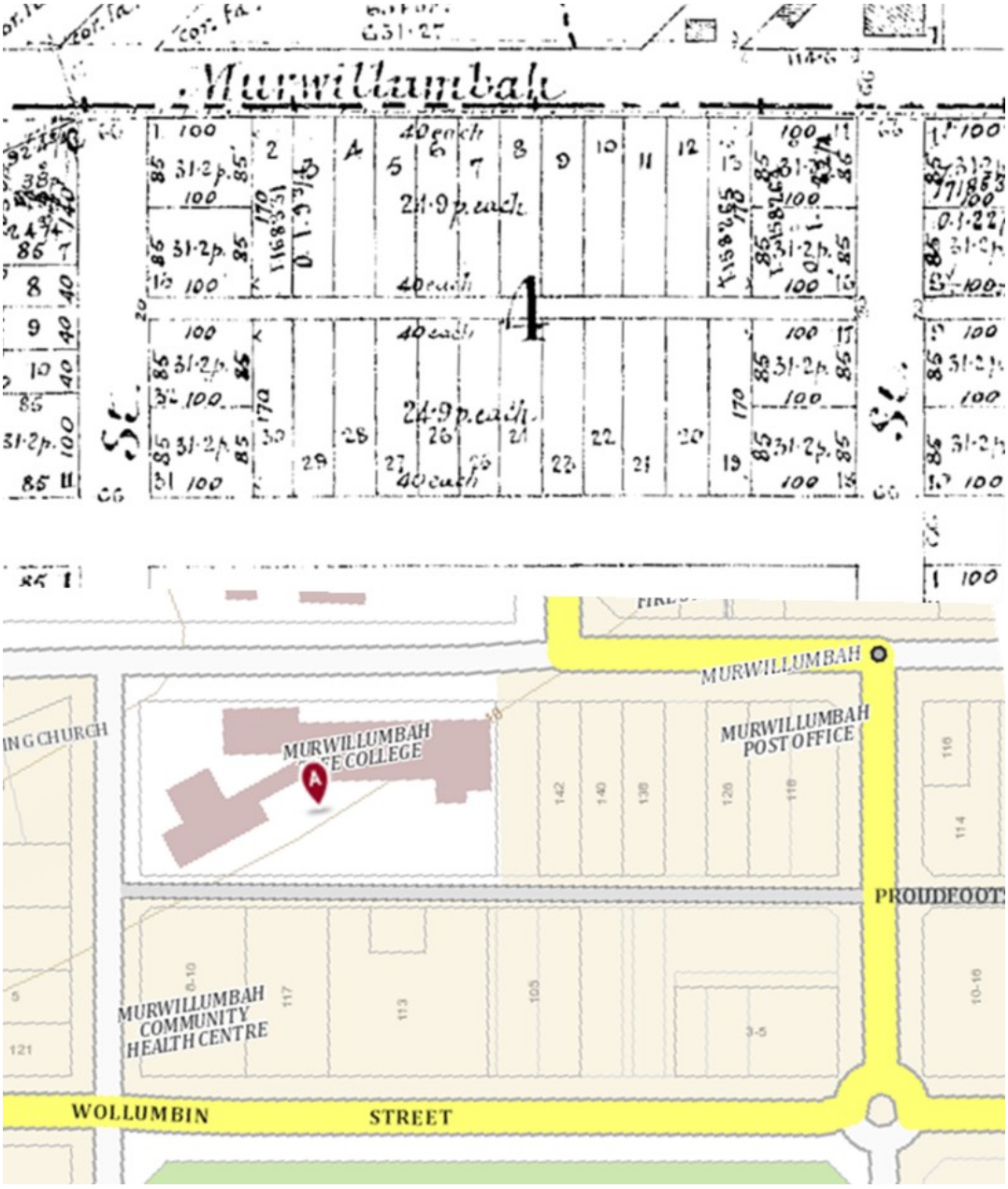
In the late 1880s the Colonial Sugar Refining Company Limited (CSR) began divesting itself of its land holdings. When the CSR broke up its holding south of Murwillumbah Street, the estate was mapped out in deposited plan 2087. Section 4, containing thirty-two lots was the block of land ringed by Murwillumbah Street, Brisbane Street, Wollumbin Street and Nullum Street.



Section 4, then and now (images courtesy of Maris Bruzgulis)

If you walk the block today you will see, on the four corners, the TAFE complex on the north-west, the post office on the north-east, the Regent Cinema on the south-east, and government offices on the south-west. The following article is based on the New South Wales Land Registry Services Historical Land Records Viewer, which holds scans of the old form Torrens Register Books that recorded all certificates of title for land from the 1860s. This primary resource includes a record of land dealings in the Tweed Valley and waits for closer study of changing patterns of ownership and incidental information about mortgage and lease holders. The maps *[right]* and the table *[next page]* following provide an overview of the location and the initial sale of the lots of Section 4 between 1888 and 1904.

The most imposing buildings on the block are the Regent and the present post office. They date from the period of grand architecture before and after World War II. The Tweed District Hospital had been completed in 1939. It would have been followed by the Regent Theatre in the early forties. The title to the land was transferred to T. J. Dorgan Proprietary Limited on 7 July 1939. World War II meant building was delayed. Notwithstanding the death of Thomas Joseph Dorgan, the company's chairman, in 1944, planning for a new theatre evidently continued. While the destruction of the old Regent in South Murwillumbah by fire in early September 1945 appeared to be a precipitating factor, it was closely followed by news before the end of the month a new 'ultra-modern picture theatre' for Murwillumbah was being designed by a Sydney architect. During its building there were some who asked if it should have been built given the post-war shortage of housing. Nevertheless, construction proceeded, and The Regent was finally opened in 1947. It replaced Walker's service station (though it's other site remained opposite the theatre), and part of the existing stock yard. In

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Transferred To	Occupation	Lot Numbers	Date of Transfer	Old Volume-Folio	New Volume-Folio
Charlotte Moore	Wife of Thomas Moore of Murwillumbah, hotelkeeper	14, 16	1 May 1888	948-4	950-81
Charlotte Moore	Wife of Thomas Moore of Murwillumbah, hotelkeeper	13	26 March 1889	948-4	950-82
Frederick Lummel	Of Murwillumbah, Tweed River, Tailor	11, 12	21 May 1889	968-17	1028-185
James Francis Turner	Bishop of Grafton and Armidale	2, 3	21 January 1890	968-17	980-26
Robert Thomas Craig	Of Murwillumbah, Butcher	4	18 August 1891	968-17	1150-18
Norman Kirkwood Ewing	Of Murwillumbah, Articled Clerk	1, 15	8 September 1891	968-17	1138-222
Charlotte Moore	Wife of Thomas Moore of Murwillumbah, hotelkeeper	9, 10	8 September 1891	968-17	1130-142
Patrick Smith	Of Murwillumbah, Auctioneer and Commission Agent	5, 6, 7, 8, 24, 25, 26, 27	8 September 1891	968-17	1094-24
Patrick Smith	Of Murwillumbah, Auctioneer	17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23	22 December 1891	968-17	1074-247
William John Gillies	Of Murwillumbah, Carpenter and Builder	31, 32	20 September 1892	968-17	1309-152
Joseph Albert Goldsmid	Of Murwillumbah, Doctor	28, 29, 30	27 April 1904	968-17	1579-89

respect of the latter there were also those who objected to the demolition of the saleyard shelter shed, an 'old landmark' built 32 years earlier.

The post office, on the other hand, was replacing a 'little building, neat enough … in appearance' but unable to 'handle the increased business of today'. This corner had been the site of the post office since the 1890s. Charlotte Moore, later Higgins, 'a woman remarkable for her progressive spirit and keen business instincts', sold the building she had constructed on the site - lock, stock, and barrel - to the post office representative. (Charlotte Higgins' obituary notes of her: 'She was of the fibre from which Empire builders are made'; and: 'About that time, then, Murwillumbah might have been appropriately named Mooretown, for the larger and more substantial part of it had been erected by this far-seeing and keen business woman'). While the post office avoided destruction in the great fire of 1907, its later state was such that the building was sold, and a more utilitarian office was erected in its place. (The Moore/ Higgins building was relocated to South Murwillumbah and served as a lodging house until destroyed by fire).

Part 2 continues next edition

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

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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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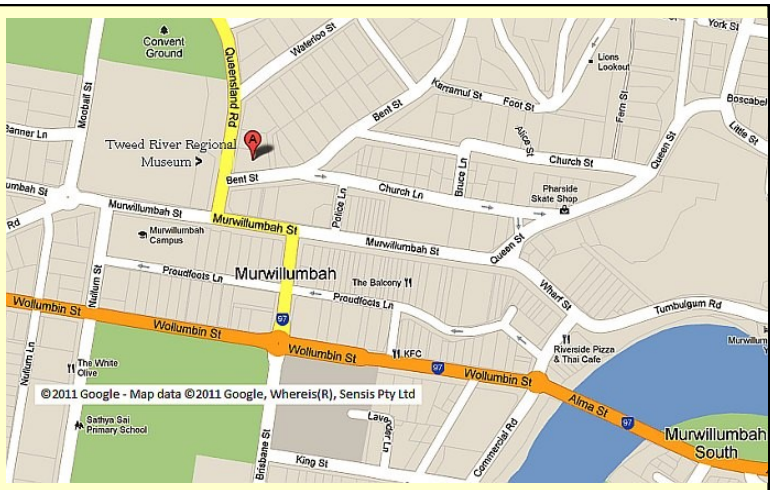

ABOUT THE MUSEUM: The Tweed Regional Museum is a Tweed Shire Council community facility, established in 2004, with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between Tweed Shire Council and the Murwillumbah, Tweed Heads and Uki and South Arm Historical Societies. It is one museum that operates across 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.

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