

TIMELINES

In fifteen minutes

Number 15

Events

Street Party!



The Murwillumbah Historical Society was part of the crowd that made the Tweed Regional Museum's Street Party on Saturday, 31 August such a success. Beverley Fairley, our President, reports:

I thought was a brilliant success. We donated \$2,000 to the cause. We may not have sold many books but by the time it finished I had spoken to many people. I only made it into the Museum once and found our room packed. Thank you everyone for your participation and good humour. Six thousand people registered. Last year it was only two thousand.

South Sea Islander History and Heritage



Forty people attended this talk presented by the Society on Friday, 20 September 2024. Betty Hamill reports:

Mr Geoff Togo and Mrs Felicia Cecil presented heartfelt and moving stories of their forbears.

Geoff related the story of his grandmother Fanny, who was kidnapped (blackbirded), from a beach aged 8 or 9. In Australia this strong and capable lady ended up marrying James Togo. They established strong links to the O'Keefe family. Left land at Forest Hill (between Cudgen and Duranbah), they established their home. In spite of these travails, the family prospered to have a respected place in our history.

Felicia spoke of her grandfather Karoua. Rather than being blackbirded, he volunteered to join the crew of a blackbirding ship after his bride-to-be was given to another man. He avoided the horrendous conditions in the hold, where many islanders died from dreadful conditions or were killed by enemies from other tribes. On arriving in Australia most were indentured for 3-year terms, working 6-day weeks. Wages were meant to be paid to a government bank, but this didn't always happen. Some were treated fairly. Others were overworked and had unsanitary conditions. Survivors created their own vegetable gardens and had fish and game. Many of those who came to the Tweed escaped from Queensland.

The audience warmly applauded the speakers, with the function finishing with general discussion over lunch. The Society's thanks are extended to Mr Geoff Togo and Mrs Felicia Cecil for sharing their stories with us.

Our Next Meeting

The Society warmly welcomes new members. We meet on the third Monday of every month.

**1:00 pm on Monday, 21 October 2024, at the Society's Tony Clark Research Room
at the Tweed Regional Museum.**

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History in a Box

Continuing the story of Charlotte Higgins



Last month's 'History' was read by Ross Johnson, who turned our attention to the stained-glass windows installed in the eastern end of the old All Saints' Church in 1915 in memory of Charlotte Higgins. Contemporary reports credit Elizabeth Nash for this generous gift, and a parishioner remembers an inscription stating that they were given in memory of Charlotte Higgins (these details come from *Faith in the Valley: the Anglican Church in the Tweed Valley*, compiled by Geoffrey Evan Foley and Ross William Johnson). While this inscription has been lost, the central feature – 'Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane' (pictured) – and the side panel – 'Watch Ye and Pray, Lest Ye Enter into Temptation' – can still be seen in the present day All Saints'.

These windows are the substantive evidence of the words in Charlotte Higgins' obituary that followed the description of her temporal achievements. We published the beginning of the obituary last month. Here is its continuation as it appeared in the *Tweed Daily* in 1914: 'The late Mrs. Higgins, after retiring from active business, took up her residence in Brisbane street and gave much of her time to increasing her buildings. Outside of these matters she took a considerable interest in the welfare of the local Anglican church, and of late years was amongst the most strenuous and successful workers in its interests at bazaars, sales of works, and Christmas Tree entertainments; her donations at all times to other institutions as well, when sought, were of a

generous order. Amongst other matters of town interest, in which Mrs. Higgins concerned herself was town beautification, and there is no doubt that her and her husband's endeavours in tree planting on the Park has much to commend them to those in authority in this connection.'

Charlotte Higgins' strength of character and her authoritative approach to life, even after death, cannot be overlooked. Elizabeth Nash was her third surviving daughter, unmarried in 1914, but soon to marry Frederick Alfred Nash in 1915. In a 1911 codicil to her 1907 will Higgins specifies that in addition to the £100 she leaves to 'the Building Fund of the Church of England at Murwillumbah', another £100 is 'to be applied in placing in the said Church of England a lead-light window of good design to be approved by my Trustees [at the time Elizabeth Moore and her fifth surviving daughter, Gertrude Kirby] at the end of the Church over the Altar'. What she wanted, she got.

Her will is also notable for the following stricture: '[The bequests] for any female shall be for her separate use independently of any husband'. So, in addition to being a property developer, a 'true Britisher', and a staunch Anglican, Charlotte Higgins was also an advocate of a woman's right to live life on her own terms, and moreover took practical steps to ensure that this was not just an aspiration, but a reality in the lives of her daughters after her death.