

# TIMELINES

The Quarterly Newsletter of Murwillumbah Historical Society Inc.

ISSN 2208-1909 November 2025 Vol. 13 No. 2



## Welcome

Here is the last edition of *Timelines*, the newsletter of the Murwillumbah Historical Society, for 2025.

In this issue our regular contributor Henry James traces the path of the first road to the Tweed Valley, from Casino to Boat Harbour. If there is anything that seizes and monopolises the attention of the citizen, it is roads. This road, surveyed by Isiah Rowland was no different. The unkind view is recorded in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 1870 by a letter writer styling themselves 'Snail Pace': '[I]t is wretched from end to end. As my companion, the post-boy, said, "Ye're all'us eyther climbin', slidin', or boggin'," and so I found it, with certain agreeable variations of jumping over logs, heading fallen limbs, leading your beast up and down ridges-about as difficult an operation as skating; then you come to a gully, you pick your way over it as well as you can from stone to stone, and if your horse is tractable he will do the same, if not, in he goes souse up to the flops in a bog, and likely enough to pull you in too, and you thank your stars at the end you have escaped without damage to limbs of horse or man.' Of course politics is the inevitable companion of creating and

maintaining roads. Read Henry's article and you will gain an insight into the near Machiavellian disputes that accompanied white settlement on the Tweed.

There is also a short article, nearly on the back page, about the building on 142 Murwillumbah Road, Murwillumbah. This was the site of the new Motor Registry in 1963. Thanks to the Tweed Shire Council *Timelines* can publish a copy of one page of the plans of this building, designed by Ross A Lightfoot and Stanton Architects and built by Hanna and Edmed.

Enjoy your reading!



## 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)



# Finding your way to Murwillumbah

*Henry James charts one of the roads that (nearly) lead to Murwillumbah.*

There are many routes to Murwillumbah. In the early days of the colonisation of the Tweed they generally started with a journey by ship, landing at Tweed Heads, Brisbane or Lawrence (on the Clarence River downstream of Grafton). In the case of disembarkation at Brisbane or Lawrence, long overland journeys ensued. Routes from Lawrence to Murwillumbah via Casino were used during the 1860s and 1870s either to simply get to and from the Tweed, procure livestock or carry the mail. A route from Casino to a location near Murwillumbah called Boat Harbour was surveyed and mapped - in 1865 to 1866. It was the first surveyed and mapped road to the Tweed. Some early travellers of this road wrote fascinating descriptions which were generally most unflattering of the part north from present day Jiggi. The authors thought there had to be a better way and wondered why the said route had been chosen at all. The fact that money was spent on surveying this route was also the subject of criticism. The plan still exists. It is on three large rolls of linen-backed paper and has been digitised. It tells an interesting story.

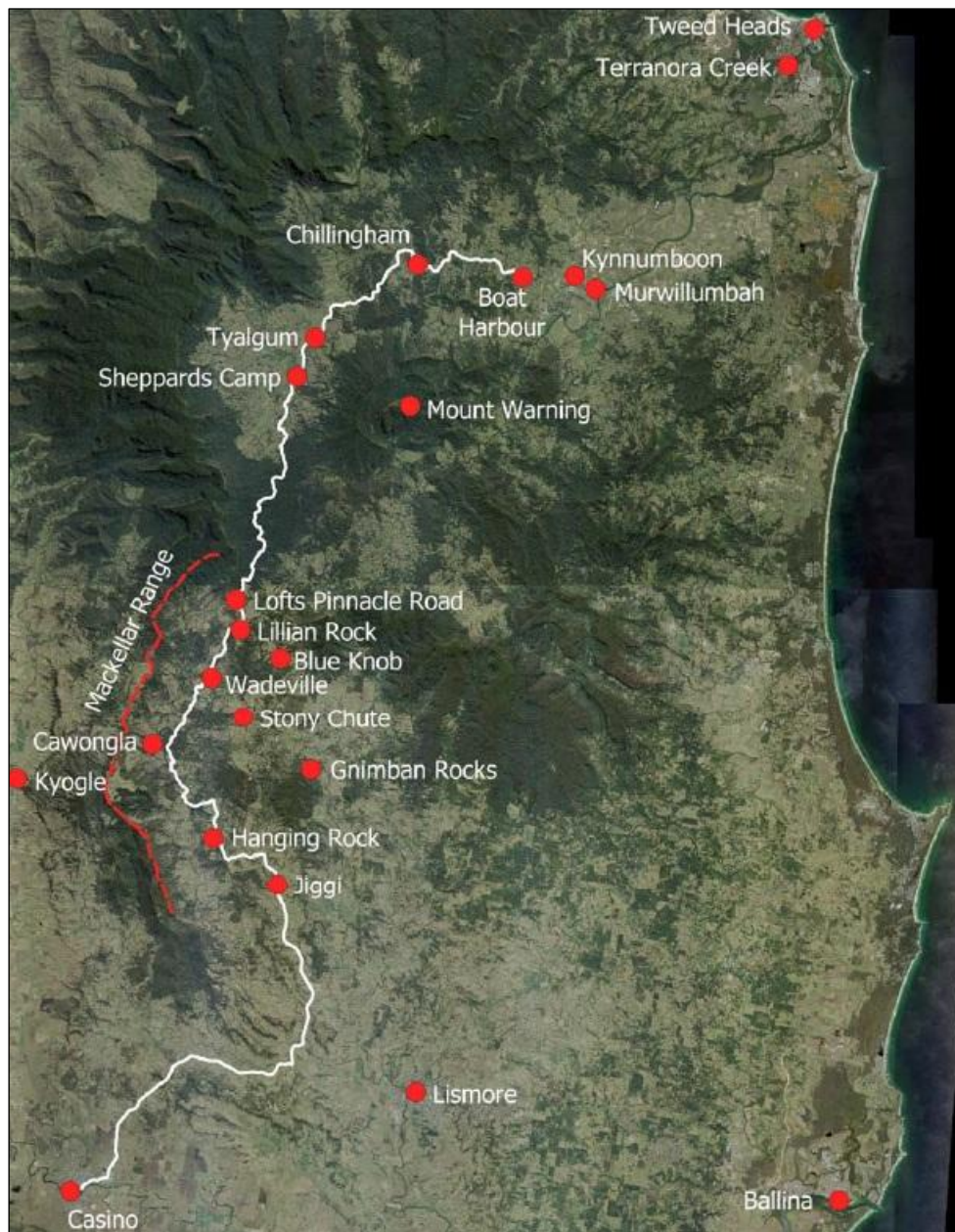


Figure 1. Route of surveyor Isiah Rowland's road depicted over modern aerial photography.

*Image provided by the author.*

NSW government surveyor Isaiah Rowland was the author of the map. He had been at work in the region since 1862, at first surveying and mapping the many branches of the Tweed River from its mouth to the limits of tidal influence and navigation. One of those limits was on the north arm, at a location Rowland called Boat Harbour, and where he blazed a tree: Broad Arrow over R over IV. From 1863 to 1865 he was engaged in surveying the border between Queensland and NSW from Point Danger to the Dumaresq River on the western slopes, along with Francis Roberts, his counterpart from Queensland. Unsurprisingly, the road was to become known as Rowlands Road and is not to be confused with Rowlands Creek Road near Uki.

Walumban and which a while later was to become known as Kynnumboon. He formed a partnership with his brother-in-law Joshua Bray. They were the first European settlers in the Tweed who combined an interest in cedar getting with a determination to secure land.

The survey of the road was mainly about the establishment of a postal service. Until an official post office opened at Joshua Bray's residence at Kynnumboon on 1 November 1866, residents of the Tweed had to make private arrangements to get their mail to post offices at Ballina, Casino or Brisbane. Bray had taken on the role of honorary postmaster soon after he arrived in the district. At that stage mail was generally sent along the coast to Ballina or by

ship from Tweed Heads if one happened to be passing through. The first official record of a government contract for conveying mail from the newly established post office at 'Wollumben' to Casino is for the period 1 May 1867 to the end of 1868 and it was held by Gray. It provided for fortnightly conveyance by horseback along the Rowland road. John Boyd got the contract for the following year, having put in a considerably lower bid.

The route surveyed by Rowland was one that Gray and Bray had been refining since coming to the Tweed. It was reported in the *Clarence and Richmond Examiner* of 28 April 1863 that 'Mr. Gray, M.P., has had the good fortune to discover a very good and practicable road from [Casino] to the Tweed, which will very considerably shorten the route to Queensland.' Gray was also in Casino for 'the races' in September 1862, but it is not clear if he had trekked overland

from the Tweed on that occasion.

When Bray first came to the Tweed he travelled by ship to Lawrence. He then travelled by horse to Casino where he described options for travelling the next leg in a letter to his fiancée Gertrude Nixon dated

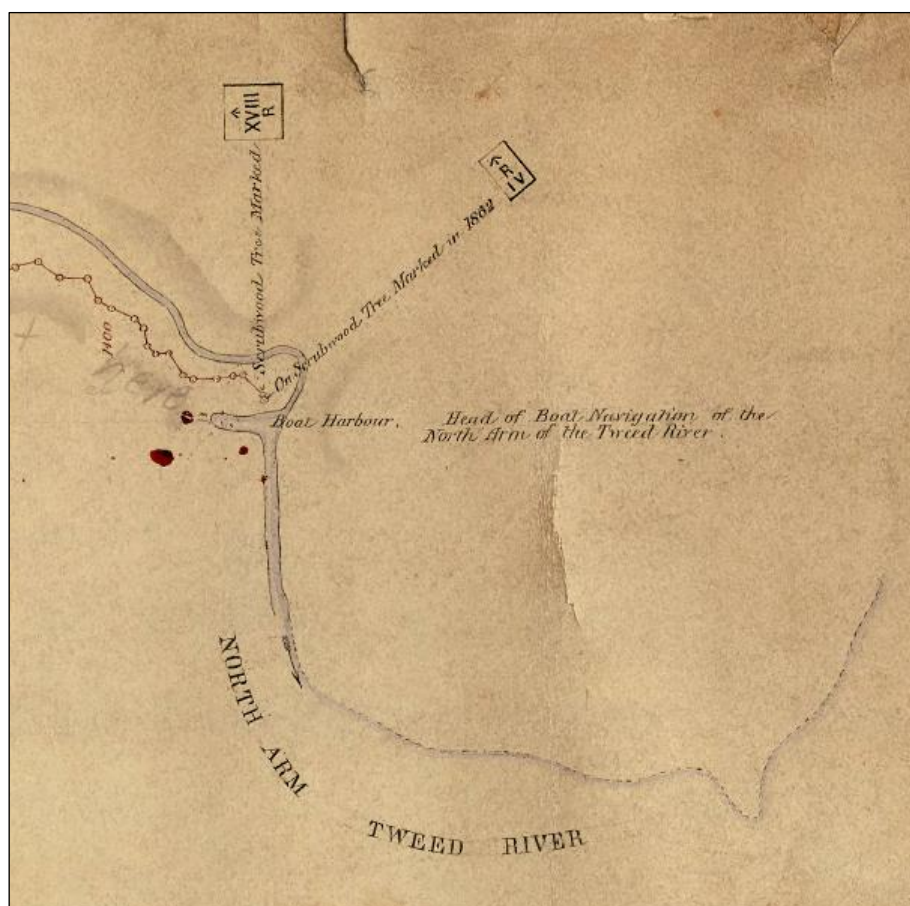


Figure 2. Detail from sheet three, the third large roll of linen-backed paper of Rowland's survey. It shows the northern end of the survey at Boat Harbour (near where the Chillingham Road crosses the river at the Nobby's Creek Road intersection). The survey ended at a tree blazed for the river survey of 1862 – Broad Arrow over R over IV. An additional tree was blazed to mark the finish of a big job – Broad Arrow over XVIII over R.

It is likely the survey of the road was the result of influence brought to bear by Samuel Gray, who was a member of the NSW parliament for the seat of Kiama from 1859 to 1864. By 1862 Gray had turned his attention to the Tweed and secured a pastoral lease over an area of land near Murwillumbah called Upper



26 June 1863. He wrote, 'the short way is a road that Mr Gray cut through the scrub from the upper Tweed to come here'. 'Upper Tweed' is probably a reference to Tyalgum. At the advice of Casino's Police Magistrate, Charles Fawcett, Bray did not take the shortcut, in part because no Aborigines could be found to guide him. (He instead went via Ballina, along the coast to near Tweed Heads and then back down to Kynnumboon.) Bray also wrote, 'I would have to go [from Casino] about 30 miles [across relatively open flat country that had by that time already been part of pastoral leases for 20 years] before I came to [the scrub]'.

In a letter from 'Tunstal Station' dated 28 July 1864 Bray writes of a trek from the Tweed with three horses and two young Aborigines. (Tunstall was a pastoral lease 30 kilometres northeast of Casino which probably included much of the catchment of Jiggi Creek and was on the southern edge of the scrub between the Richmond and Murwillumbah.) When he initially set off, he travelled on 'our cut road' from Kynnumboon for 'about 30 miles'. Measured on Rowland's map, that would have brought him very nearly to the crossing from the Tweed catchment into the top of the Hanging Rock Creek catchment, near the bottom end of present-day Lofts Pinnacle Road. He then went 'exploring', presumably taking a course to the southwest, in an attempt 'to find a track in a straight direction to Casino'. He ran into 'a tremendous high mountain', presumably the Mackellar Range, and finding it impassable 'had to turn away to the left [east]....cross[ing]....Mr Gray's old track....and [then finding] a good track down to the Richmond River near Lismore'. The good track included 'a good road on top of the mountains' which by his own account reduced the number of crossings of a northern branch of the Richmond from eleven to one. The last mentioned mountaintop section is likely to have been the ridge from Cawongla to Lillian Rock between the catchments of Websters and Hanging Rock Creeks. In a letter from 'Tweed River' dated 30 August 1864 he reported that the newly discovered 'good road' made the journey back to the Tweed with cattle relatively easy until he reached the top of the Tweed catchment.

It is recorded in the *Kynnumboon Diaries* that in January 1865 Bray travelled from 'Campbell's at Tunstill' to Kynnumboon in 3 days with a mob of 'working bullocks'. The diary records Bray's return from another trip to the Richmond for bullocks on 27

July 1865. This time the diarist says the bullocks came from 'Gigi' (i.e. Jiggi - the spelling also used by Rowland on his map). It is likely that Bray encountered Rowland somewhere south of Tyalgum on his way back and forth on this occasion because the diary entry for just a day later (28 July 1865) says 'Grasshopper [an Aboriginal employee of Gray and Bray] started to [Tyalgum] to get the blacks to go meet Rowland the surveyor who is surveying a road from the Richmond River over to the Tweed'. Diary entries for subsequent days record that the Aborigines were not interested in searching out Rowland, who eventually turned up at Kynnumboon about a month later on 28 August 1865.

The route that Rowland surveyed for the Tyalgum to Boat Harbour section of the road was, as the diaries make plain, one already regularly used by Gray and Bray in the course of their cedar getting enterprises. The diaries also record that Rowland was a regular visitor at Kynnumboon and that he used it as a base for supplies. The Tweed end of the survey, Boat Harbour, was a short distance from Gray's and Bray's properties at Kynnumboon.

In August 1869 there was a ribbon-cutting event of sorts for this new 'road'. A small party led by Samuel Gray journeyed from Lismore to the Tweed on horseback. It included then Premier, John Robertson, and Thomas Garrett, another Member of Parliament. The journey was recorded by a correspondent for the *Sydney Morning Herald*. It would appear from the sketchy description of their route that the southern end was not strictly speaking on the Rowland road. This was somewhat inevitable given the set-off point was Lismore, not Casino. Though Jiggi Creek was mentioned, Goolmangar Creek and 'Gnimban Rocks' featured prominently. It is possible Gray took a route through Stony Chute or even Blue Nob rather than Jiggi Creek before getting to the Rowland road somewhere to the south of the Tweed catchment. The correspondent also spent many words describing the overnight stay at a place he variously called 'Pumpanbill' and, jokingly, 'Pompanbill'. This was probably at a location called Sheppard's Camp on Rowland's plan, where Bray had built a bark hut in 1866. It was very close to present-day Pumpenbil. When the party got to Kynnumboon, no ribbon was actually cut, but most of the colonists of the Tweed were assembled and a party ensued, as did some very serious lobbying for infrastructure by rival groups.

From nearly the outset there were complaints about the route that the road took. A somewhat different complaint was about the location of the then only post office in the Tweed. In February 1867, a correspondent to the *Empire* newspaper said it should not have been at Kynnumboon but at what he called 'Terenora', on the south bank of Terranora Creek, near the present day state highway bridge crossing. It had been a cedar getters settlement since the 1840s. This correspondent also claimed that £340 had been spent on the survey of the road, and because it served only the Gray/Bray clan, it was an inappropriate use of public funds. The survey was a big task. It would have taken months. £340 was no small sum. It was close to the annual salary of the highest paid public servant in the district at time – the Police Magistrate at Casino.

In May 1870, the more general issue of the route taken between the two ending points was tackled by a correspondent to the *Sydney Morning Herald* who identified himself as 'Snail Pace'. He observed that it took about two and a half days to travel by horse from Kynnumboon to Casino via Rowland's Road, more or less consistent with the three days it took Bray to herd cattle a somewhat shorter distance from Jiggi to Kynnumboon. He observed that 'as to travelling [this road] by a vehicle, it has never entered anyone's dream' and that 'the route via Brisbane is now always used for letters and passengers from Sydney'. However, we know that some mail was sent by this route at the time because 'Snail Pace' made the journey to Casino in the company of the 'post-boy' who said that when on the road "'ye're all'us eyther climbin', slidin' or boggin'". 'Snail Pace' also claimed that 'blacks walk over from the Richmond to the Tweed in a day', and that 'there is a much easier and shorter way to be found, which the blacks and cedar-cutters could point out'. It does seem odd that the road went out to Tyalgum and west of Mount Warning, rather than along the more direct route up the South Arm and east of Mount Warning.

'Snail Pace' was ready to concede that because of the difficult terrain, it was no easy task to find the best route. But given what we know now it is surprising that even as late as 1881 the government had Thomas Ewing survey and map an equally if not more difficult route over the Nightcap Range that had been in use by colonists since about 1870, had become the designated route for mail in 1875, but had not yet been formally surveyed and mapped.

(See *Timelines* issues October 2021 Vol.10 No.2 and January 2022 Vol.10 No.3).

Parts of Rowland's route within the Richmond also seem somewhat illogical from today's perspective. Casino was the obvious starting point for a route north to the new frontier of colonial settlement at Murwillumbah, and the survey did indeed start at Casino, outside the post office. In 1865, Casino was arguably at the hub of colonial enterprise in the Richmond-Tweed. It was at the geographic centre of the part of the region that was first occupied by squatters. It already had a town plan and a small number of residents. It was on a route from Brisbane to Lawrence via Cunningham's Gap and strategically located where there was a natural rocky ford of the Richmond River. It was home to the chief resident government officer of the district – the Police Magistrate. (Henry Garrard was the first magistrate and was followed by Charles Fawcett in 1862.) At the time, it was more important than Lismore or Ballina.

Arguably the best way to set off from Casino was directly north, to Kyogle, along the Brisbane road, through relatively open existing pastoral land. The next leg - to the top of the spur to the north of what is now the village of Cawongla - was through mountainous country, but it was somewhat shorter than the equally mountainous section from Jiggi to Cawongla that Rowland chose. Rowland presumably chose to go via Jiggi because Gray and Bray had already blazed a trail to there from the Tweed.

The longest still-used part of Rowland's Road that was through at-the-time 'untamed' country is the section from Cawongla to Lillian Rock, near the boundary between the Richmond and Tweed catchments (see Figure 3). It is 9 kilometres long and more or less on the alignment of part of the modern Murwillumbah-Kyogle Road. This was likely the section of 'good road' discovered by Bray in 1864. Within this section, the most significant deviation from the modern Kyogle Road is nonetheless on a current road which, significantly, is called the 'Old Tweed Road' (see Figures 3 and 3a on the following page).

Other sections of Rowland's Road that are still in use are mainly to the south of the Tweed – parts of Cawongla Road, Jiggi Road, Naughton's Gap Road, Kyogle-Lismore Road (between Bentley and Tuncester) and Faraway Road. Yet other parts of the survey were used by cartographers back in Sydney



for various purposes over the years. For instance, in 1871 it was used to define part of the boundary of one of the earliest-created forest reserves in NSW. But that is another story.

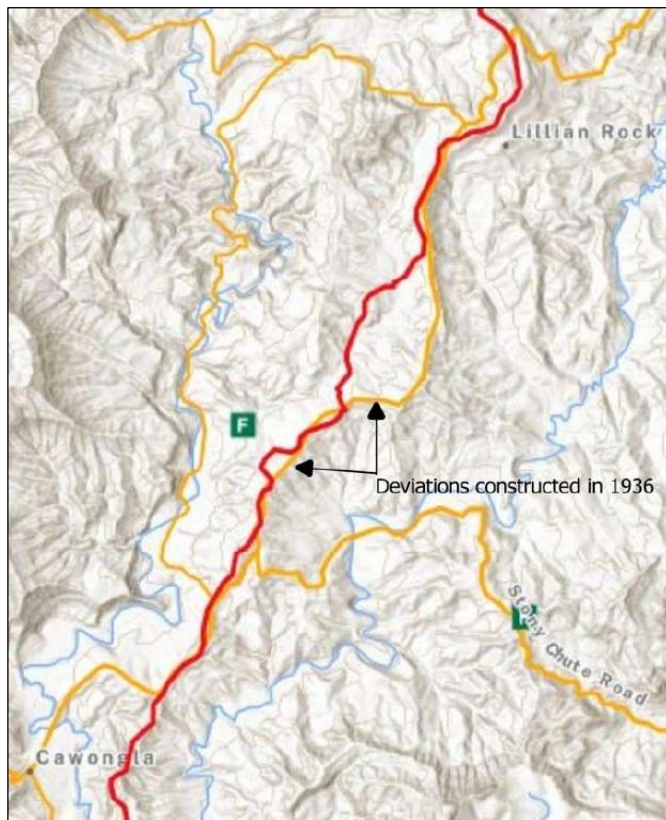


Figure 3.

Figure 3. Depiction of Rowlands Road from Cawongla to Lillian Rock (red line). The modern Kyogle Road is largely on the same alignment except for one major and one minor deviation.

Figure 3a. A depiction of the major deviation of Rowlands Road (marked in red) from the modern alignment of the Kyogle Road at Wadeville. The deviation is close to the alignment of a still-existing road called the Old Tweed Road. Bray and Rowland may have chosen to veer from the ridgeline to make camp by permanent water. The location of the photo taken in 1936 is marked (see Figure 5).

Figure 4. A depiction of probably the most difficult part of the Rowland Road – through Mebbin National Park. The black line is the route of the current road from north to south – Cadell Road – which follows a spur between two branches of Byrrill Creek. Rowlands Road – the red line – cuts across many lines of drainage.

Images provided by the author.

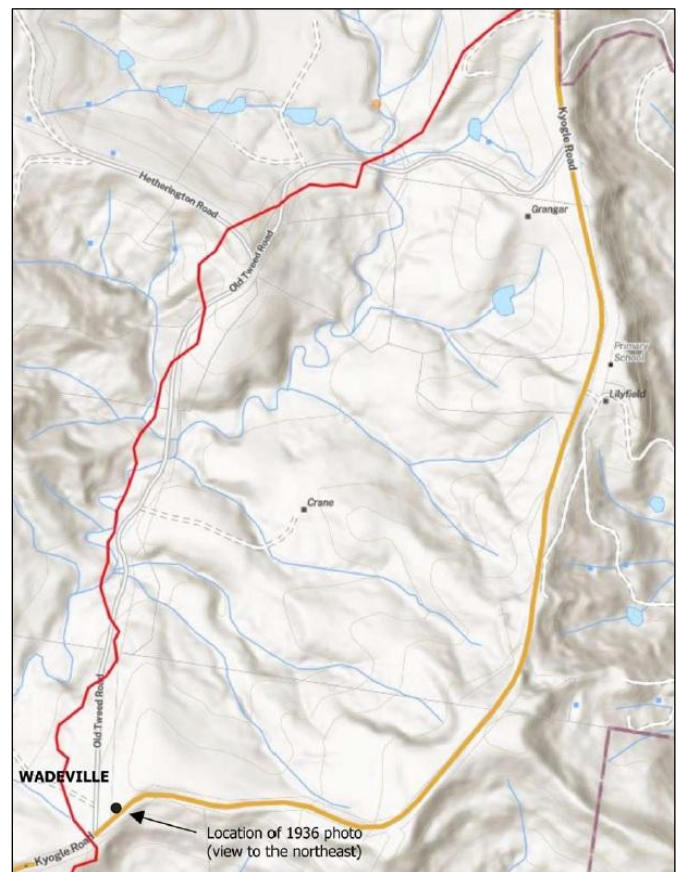


Figure 3a.

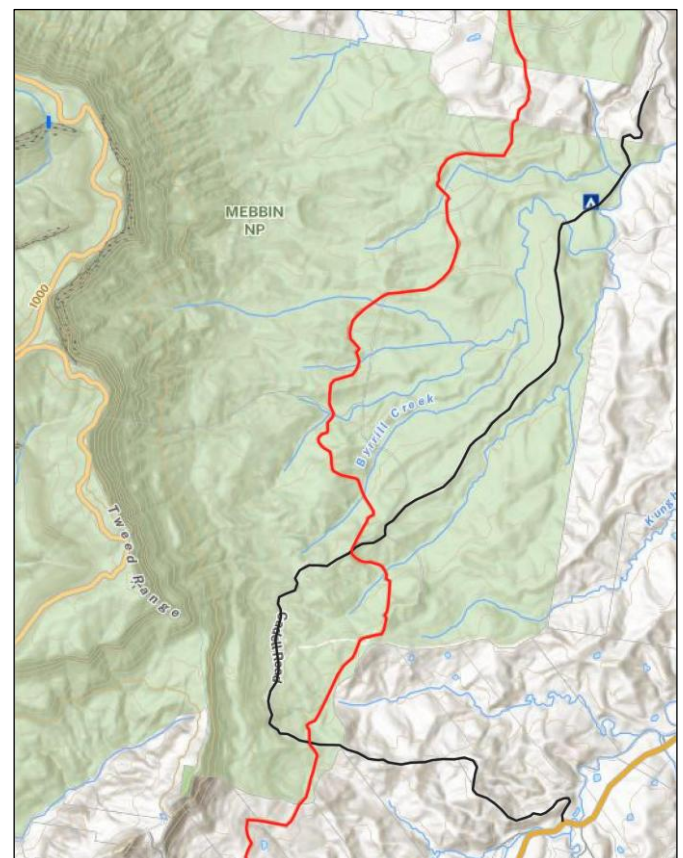


Figure 4.

The survey was a huge task. It was 109 kilometres long and involved a little over 1400 traverse lines. The shortest line was 13 metres (in Mebbin National Park) and the longest was 1369 metres (on the Jiggi Creek floodplain). The average was 78 metres. There are sometimes good reasons for a traverse line to be short, especially in steep or heavily forested country, but it is perhaps significant that F E Roberts, Rowland's Queensland counterpart in the border survey, complained that Rowland's lines were 'inconveniently short'.

There is one placename on the maps that raises some confusion. The label reads 'Jiggi or Nimbin'. It was located on what Rowland called Jiggi Creek. It is still called Jiggi. Nimbin is 10 kilometres to the northeast in the Goolmangar Creek catchment. Also, there is a large rock promontory nearby that Rowland called 'Hanging Rock'. It is in the catchment of Hanging Rock/Leycester Creeks, but there is another Hanging Rock on the Tweed Range at the very top of the Hanging Rock Creek catchment. On modern maps Rowland's 'Hanging Rock' has been renamed Tower Mountain, presumably to reduce confusion.



*Figure 5. Kyogle Road between Cawongla and Lillian Rock – 12.5 miles from Kyogle, a short distance north of the southern intersection with the Old Tweed Road. The locality is known as Wadeville. The photo was taken in 1936, just after the diversion from the Old Tweed Road was built. The image gives some idea of the sort of forest and terrain encountered by surveyor Rowland on a relatively easy-to-traverse section of the route. Rowland describes the vegetation at this location as "Scrub Forest" which was probably a mixture of rainforest and wet sclerophyll forest. The ring-barked trees are probably the remains of the sclerophyll component. The nearest blazed tree in the survey plan is a little to the south of this area, which Rowland called a "Gum" – probably Flooded or Small-fruited Grey Gum.*

*Photo: State Archives of NSW.*

Editor's note: The images on the following pages show the three sheets of Rowland's survey. It is not known if they were drawn by Rowland, or cartographers in Sydney using his survey notes and drawings.

At present, other than records of his work as a surveyor, Rowland's biography is scanty. He died on 17 December 1878 in Auckland (returning from Samoa) and is buried there in the Symonds Street Cemetery. The Sydney Morning Herald only listed his death on 2 August 1880!

He married twice, his first wife Emma dying in 1858 or 1859. When they arrived in Sydney in 1855 there were four children, a fifth being born in Maitland in 1856. He married his second wife Mary Ann (also known as Marion or Marian) Walker in 1860. They had three children between 1863 and 1870. She died in 1932.

If you have any more information about Isaiah Rowland, give the Society a call.

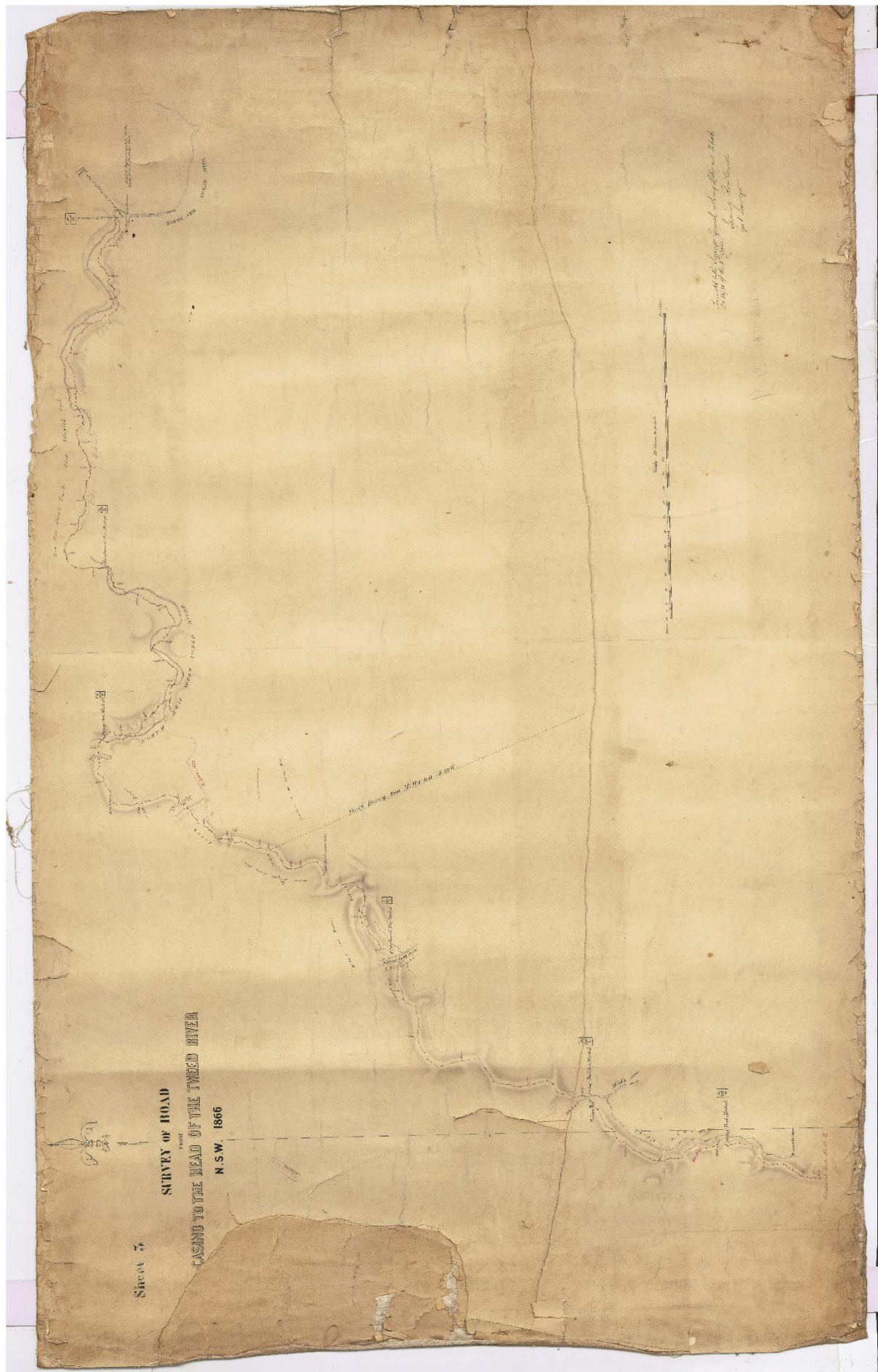










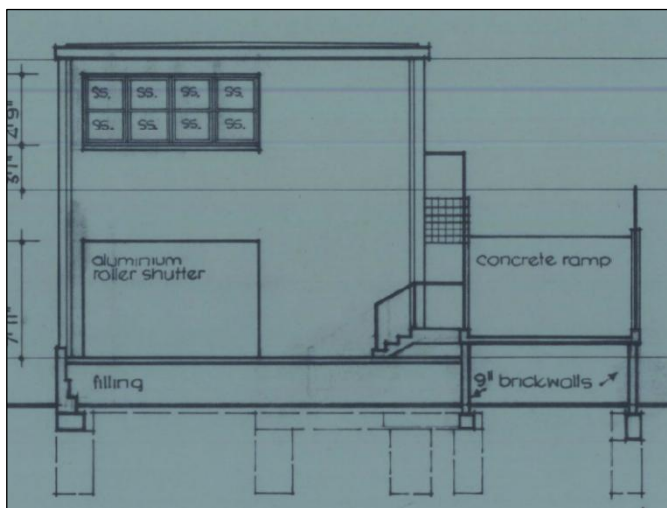




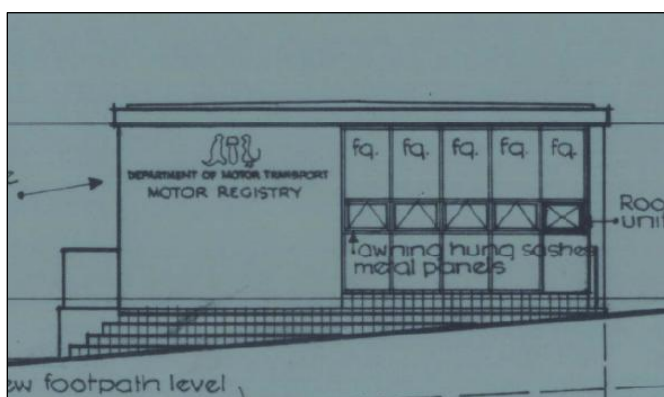
## Nearly The Back Page ...

### Found in the vaults

The old Murwillumbah Motor Registry at 142 Murwillumbah Street is not a pretentious building (unlike the post office). Among the Tweed Shire Council's papers we find the development application that records its beginnings. These include the architects' plans and building specifications. They also show that its estimated cost in 1963 was £17,992. Ross A Lightfoot and Stanton Architects designed the building and Hanna and Edmed were contracted to build it.



The circumstances relating to the decision to construct a new building for the Motor Registry are not known. When the Department of Motor Transport (Department of Road, Transport and Tramways) took over motor registry functions from the police in 1947, the Tweed Shire Council made available part of the then old council Chambers on Queensland Road (now the home of the Regional Museum) for a rent of £1 a week. However long this arrangement lasted, in due course it ended and the Commissioner for Transport purchased the land on Murwillumbah Street in 1963.



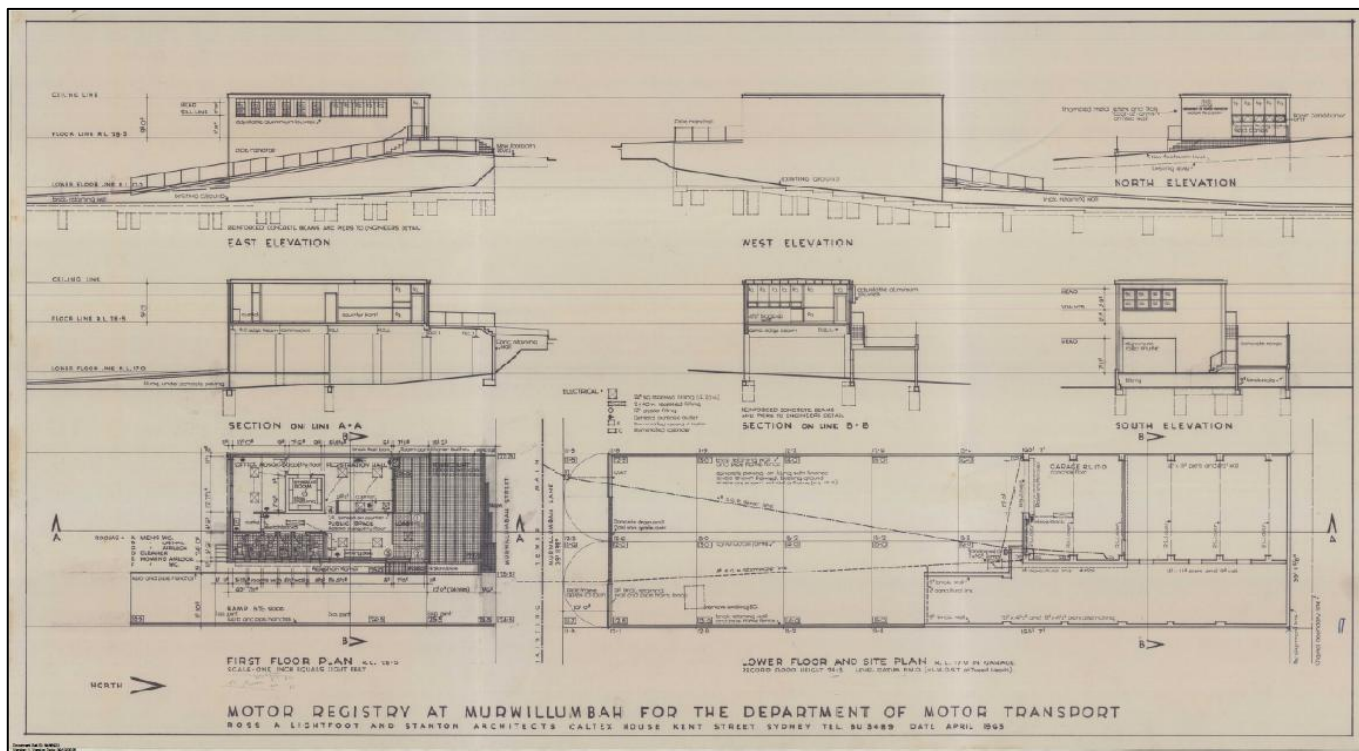
The Crown had previously leased the premises and/or land on which the Registry was to be built from 1931 to 1955. The purpose of this long lease is also unknown at the present time. In 1957 BCC Stores Properties purchased the land, disposing of it six years later.

The logo of the Department of Motor Transport still adorns the doors of the building.



On the next page is a copy of the architects' drawings for the various elevations of the proposed building.





The architects' drawings for the four elevations of the 1963 Motor Registry building and the floor plans for the first and lower floors.

Source: Tweed Shire Council.

*Season's Greetings to one and all!*

**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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To preserve maximum space for content, sources and references will not usually be listed. These are available from the Editor upon request.