

TIMELINES

In fifteen minutes

Number 31

Good news, everyone!

Join the Murwillumbah Historical Society now, and your renewal will not be due until 1 July 2027. At the Society's Annual General meeting held on 22 April 2026, members voted to amend the Constitution to align their financial year with the standard accepted in Australia.

So be quick. Support the Murwillumbah Historical Society as your first stop for local history and the place to find an answer to your historical question.

The AGM

The AGM approved last year's minutes, received the President's, Treasurer's and Membership reports, and voted in a new committee for the period until July or August 2027. Office bearers are President, Beverley Fairley; Vice-President, Robert Budd; Secretary, Natasha Green; and Treasurer, Ian Batten. The following general committee members and their area of responsibility are Henry James (Membership), Joan Cuthel (Research), Pauline Hibbard (Bookshop Manager), Maris Bruzgulis (Timelines Editor/IT-Digital), David Taylor (General Committee Member), and Belinda Neilson (General Committee Member).

Straight to work - the committee meeting

The first committee meeting for 2026-27 was held following the AGM.

The Society will be a Silver Sponsor for the Tweed Regional Museum's Annual Street Party – 'bringing the sparkle'. Look for our sponsor spotlight in the Museum's e-newsletter and other communication channels as we showcase how our contribution benefits the community.

Future event

The Society is gearing up for the Street Party. It will be held at the beginning of spring, on Saturday, 5 September 2026, and will be 'celebrating everything that makes the Tweed special — its stories, its spirit and its sense of community!' Last year it literally (nearly) shook the windows out of their frames at the old Council Chambers on Queensland Road. This year the Society will look for a quieter spot because we want to hear your stories and take on board your questions about Murwillumbah and the Tweed Valley at large. Remember, send us your enquiries. And if you want to see something in particular about the past of Murwillumbah and the Tweed Valley drop us a line so we collect the information you have requested.

Our next meeting

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

11:00 am on Monday, 18 May 2026, at the President's residence.
(Please call to confirm attendance and for the venue location.)

CONTACT US: Phone: (02) 6670 2273

At the Museum: Tuesday and Thursday from 10:00 am – 2:00 pm and Wednesday and Friday 10:00 am to 3:00 pm

Web: <http://www.murwillumbahhistoricalsociety.org.au>

FB: <http://www.facebook.com/murwillumbahhistory>

Email: editor@murwillumbahhistoricalsociety.org.au

Mail: c/- Tweed Regional Museum, 2 Queensland Rd, Murwillumbah NSW 2484 or PO Box 373, Murwillumbah NSW 2484

History in a Box

Cecil William Tarrant

The article in the last issue of *Timelines* about war memorials dedicated to people who served during World War I revealed a scandal that occurred at the time that the Stoker's Siding Honor Board was unveiled. A few days before ANZAC Day in 1921 a notice appeared in the *Tweed Daily* announcing the sale of all of Cecil William Tarrant's possessions. The notice was repeated on ANZAC Day itself, rousing the *Daily* to write as follows the next day:

'While speeches were being delivered in several places in Murwillumbah extolling the deeds of the men who shed their life's blood, and who gave limbs, sight, hearing and health for the freedom of Australia, a few miles away people were engaged on the dismal and repulsive task of wrecking the home and prospects of one of those very men. Surely there was never so ironical a circumstance, nor one which reflected so scandalously on a community which swore that the men who enlisted would never want for anything if they were spared to return to their home land.'

The reference to the physical impairments of those who were wounded during the war was not rhetorical. Tarrant, an Englishman who had arrived in Australia in 1910 and had enlisted in the AIF in 1915, had suffered a gunshot wound to the face in 1916. He was treated at Queen Mary's Hospital, Sidcup, described as the 'the birthplace of modern plastic surgery', Tarrant experienced multiple reconstructive operations. Shortly after the armistice he had married in England and in late 1919 returned to Australia with his wife, Gertrude Grace, and child. He was discharged from the army in early 1920 and moved his family to the Tweed.

Tarrant's situation in 1921 was that he leased a farm from Laura Evelyn Barter in Eungella. He owed £151/13/4 in rent. By the time the public learned of his financial predicament his possessions had been sold on ANZAC Day, and he was living with a friend in Murwillumbah. A public meeting was called on 28 April 'to devise relief measures'. These good intentions were also accompanied by a public airing of his personal circumstances and affairs. The report of the meeting detailed his costs and indebtedness in leasing his farm; that he had undergone about forty-two operations in connection with his wounds; and that other than his pension, after the sale of his cattle, he would be penniless (and it was intimated that even his pension was under review). The general tenor of the meeting was that 'it was a sad thing to see a returned soldier in such a position'. There was a view that 'the property in question would hardly grow a shallot'; that Tarrant was not

given an opportunity by the owner to seek anyone's advice about its viability; and that his backer, an Eric Jones, had not 'displayed much business ability' in lending him money and backing his promissory notes. The meeting decided to establish a subscription list to help Tarrant (but 'not for the purpose of meeting his liabilities') and to seek a legal opinion 'so as to guard against any of the money subscribed going to the owner of the farm'. But this altruistic (though prudent) decision was in the final reckoning an emotive one:

'A series of photos showing the progress of [Tarrant's] wounds from the time they were received up till when he was discharged from hospital were seen at yesterday's meeting. They are almost too terrible for contemplation and are a mute tribute to the colossal suffering which Mr. Tarrant must have endured. With the imprint of these photos fixed in their mind, it is not surprising that all who saw them registered a determination to see that the person who underwent such an experience in the defence of his country should not go unaided in his present distress.'

The public's sympathies were with Tarrant. P Smith & Sons sold Tarrant's cattle for £10 a head, 'a very fair average considering condition and quality, thanks to the patriotic spirit of some district residents'. The 'Tarrant fund' was open for three weeks and had collected £431/14/6 when it closed. The meeting had heard through an intermediary, the Rev J H Baker, that 'Mrs. Tarrant belonged to England, and through this experience she felt she could not stay in Australia any longer. She thought that her father might be able to give her husband some light work. Their desire now was to get back to England, and he (Mr Baker) thought that the best thing the meeting could do was to raise the money to pay their fares.' Notwithstanding some reservations - '[b]y sending them back to England, however, they might be worse off - .this was done in July, the fundraisers deciding 'to pay the fares of Mr. and Mrs. Tarrant to England, where they are desirous of going, and pay the balance of the fund to Mrs. Tarrant's credit in a London bank'.

On 14 July 1921 Tarrant and his wife expressed their 'heartfelt gratitude ... to the residents of the Tweed River district for the splendid collection made on their behalf, especially Messrs. M. G. Cox, T. Tate, Rev. J. Baker, J. Connor (Mayor), F. W. Stuart, and A. Jay, the ladies of the Red Cross Society, Mr. and Mrs. R. H. Steel' and they also took the opportunity 'of saying farewell to those they were unable to see personally'.

Cecil Tarrant died in England in 1956, Grace in 1973.