MAR-APR 🌺 THE **MURRAYS** 🌺 **2023**

As towns develop, their names sometimes change over time.

MURRAYS BEACH was the name chosen by Stockland Development Group for their subdivision on the shores of Lake Macquarie, south of Swansea. The name was given in honour of brothers David and Patrick Murray, who were born in Cumnock, Scotland, and arrived in Sydney in 1854 aboard "*SS City of Sydney*". They once owned the land adjoining the beach for some 40 years.

People who resided on the property near the mine, simply gave their address as "Murrays Pit" – even in the Census. In 1862 after the advent of the Robertson Land Act - introduced by the Premier of NSW to break squatters' domination of land tenure – the brothers, along with 2 partners, bought two portions of land totalling 320 acres along Lake Macquarie foreshore between Point Morisset and just south of Galgabba Point. The newly formed company drove a tunnel into the cliff face at the water's edge calling it *The Morisset Mine* and built a jetty for the loading of their coal. The Murray Brothers and their families were based in Hamilton. The brothers would walk over 30 miles each Sunday after church to work the mine and return home on Friday, even wading across Swansea Bar. Although producing good tonnages when it began operating – c. 400 tons of coal a week. The mine worked spasmodically for the next 40 years, as transporting the coal out of the lake proved difficult.
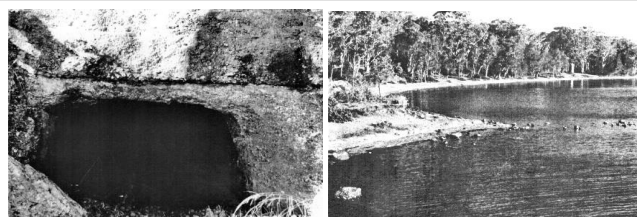

David and Patrick Murray

David also became a shareholder in other mining ventures at Belmont North and Plattsburg (Wallsend). In leaner times, Patrick turned his hand to carpentry and cabinet making. He established a furniture business and the "Miners Arms" Hotel at Hamilton. During the 1890s the mine went into production on a much larger scale, Patrick partnering with his sons Robert and James.

In 1902, due to increasing difficulties shipping their coal through Swansea Channel, the mine was closed. In 1905 the Murray Pit was taken over by Thomas Evans, Colliery Manager of Wickham (probably in partnership with his son Tudor, a mining engineer). Almost immediately the area became known as the "Evan-zes". It was eventually sold in 1915.

The entrance to Morisset Mine and remnants of the jetty in the 1950s. *Sources: G and N Boyd; P Murray.*

The suburb of **Murrays Beach** was gazetted on May 5, 2006 following amendments to the boundaries of surrounding suburbs by LMCC.

Thank you to Pat Conroy and staff, kindly supporting our community; and encouraging the preservation and sharing of our heritage.

The Morisset Mine passed from Patrick to 2 of his 9 children – James and Robert. Whilst James moved to Sydney and became a teacher, Robert stayed in Swansea, supervising the mine, and buying 3 lots of land on Black Ned's Bay when a new subdivision became available on Northcote and Bowman Streets. Following some success as a racehorse trainer, he had intentions of continuing horse training there, but eventually sold 2 of the lots to family. He continued to live on lot 4 (218 Bowman St) until his death in 1954.

In 1915 James bought land from his brother to establish a holiday house which was later renovated for their retirement. Named *"The Lawns"*, it became a show piece with professionally tended grounds and gardens, seats, statues, and tennis court. Some 12 years after he died, his children sold the property (213 Northcote Ave) to the Sisters of St Joseph.

James and Tess Murray original holiday house; after renovations 1920s for their retirement the house became known as *"The Lawns". Source*: G & N Boyd; P Murray.

Thus, the connection with Swansea had been forged.

Robert married Mary Sharp in 1892, and the couple had 2 sons – Alfred and Robert Hamden. In addition to his work with the mine, Robert acquired carpentry skills like his father, Patrick; and completed a blacksmith's trade, a very useful skill in the mining industry. He used his carpentry skills and assisted in the construction of a specially designed ship to transport coal through the shallow waters of Swansea Channel– the "*Phil Forbes*", in 1899.

Robert and Mary's youngest son, **ROBERT HAMDEN MURRAY**, was born in January, 1896 in Swansea. Unfortunately, Mary passed away in 1902, leaving their father to raise the two boys. Robert worked as a miner. He was 5' 8" tall, with a dark complexion, blue eyes and dark hair.

At the age of 20 years and 1 month, Robert joined the war effort, enlisting on Feb 4, 1916, at Newcastle. This was about a month after the Wallabies recruiting march arrived in Newcastle, having set out from Walgett, and passing through Narrabri, Muswellbrook, Singleton, Cessnock, Kurri, Maitland, West Wallsend before arriving in Newcastle on Jan 8,

1916. The original plan to march to Sydney was cancelled, and the men became the basis of a locally raised battalion formed in February; known as C Company, 34th Battalion, AIF. Robert Murray, as he was simply known in the army, was assigned as Private No. 845 to this battalion and they marched to Rutherford Army Camp. The recruits were given their training in very basic conditions – accommodated in tents, exposed to climate extremes, flies, the bare dusty plain. The soldiers were issued with a tunic, hat, cap, overcoat, two suits of dungarees, white hat, two pairs of puttees, a hair-brush, tooth-brush, shaving brush, razor, comb, soap, jack knife, with tin-opener and marlin spike, kitbag, hold-all, housewife, cardigan jacket, two flannel shirts, two undershirts, three pairs of socks, a pair of boots, two towels, two belts, knife, fork, and spoon. Equipped with their kits, the soldiers marched out of the training camp to Farley Station, where they boarded a train for the Showground in Sydney; the following day, May 2, 1916, embarking on HMAT A20 *"Hororata"*. They sailed to Albany, Columbo, Suez, Port Said, then Alexandria, arriving 11th June 1916.

"........ Whilst at Alexandria, Robert was admitted to the 21st General Hospital at Alexandria suffering from Measles, and was transferred to Tel-el-Tin on the 27th of June before he was discharged to duty on the 30th June 1916. Robert embarked from Alexandria on board the Hospital Ship "Megantic" on the 6th of August and disembarked at Plymouth and en trained during the afternoon for Amesbury, arriving at midnight and marching to hutments at No: 1 Camp, Salisbury Plains at Larkhill.*

Some of the Original Wallabies – Salisbury Plain, England 1916. Robert - middle Row 3

Here Robert settled down to hard training, which included Route Marching, Trench Digging, Bomb Practice, Musketry and General Camp Routine. Later the Battalion moved to the No: 25 Camp and finished off their training, which included six days' battle practice and field work at the Bastard Trenches...."

Discipline was tough. "........On the 9th October 1916, Robert was charged with disobedience of Orders. Award 7 Days Pay Forfeited by C.O. On the 16th October, Robert was again Charged with disobedience of Orders. "In that he was deficient in Kit when on Pack Drill". Award 3 Days Confined to Barracks....... "

After five months training, the battalion proceeded overseas to France in November, just as the terrible winter of 1916-17 began to set in. The first major offensive was at Messines Ridge, Belgium. The Battle of Messines began on June 7 and most objectives against the German forces were achieved by June 14. Robert was promoted to Temporary Corporal on the 20th June, 1917 after the advance at Messines when Temporary Corporal: Sullivan was Killed in Action. The enemy kept shelling their position, although at times with dud shells. Sadly, with the intense battle behind them, casualties continued to occur. July 19th, 1917, the enemy were intermittently firing gas shells all night. Five soldiers were wounded in the Wellington Trench; two were killed, one being Corporal: 845 Robert Murray. In his will, he left his property to his brother, Alfred, residing in Swansea. Alfred as the legatee received a package containing Robert's belongings: letters, photos, 2 combs, metal mirror, wallet, 2 coins, notebook, money belt and card.

FIELD DRESSING STATION, MESSINES 7th June 1917.

Robert is commemorated at the Menin Gate War Memorial. His name appears in the Commemorative area of the Australian War Memorial, and will be placed in the exterior Hall of Memory on 29th April, 2023.

Sources: Harrower Collection, David Dial, AWM

THE BATTLE OF MESSINES

"The Battle of Messines was designed to seize the strategic high ground of the Wyschaete-Messines ridge south of Ypres.

This German position formed a bulge into the Allied lines…. the Allies had to capture the crest which was known as the 'black line'…

These objectives were assigned to Australia's 3rd Division under Major-General John Monash, together with the New Zealand Division and 25th British Division…..The attack was carefully planned with models of the terrain and intelligence gathered by aerial reconnaissance.

This part of the Messines sector had seen a grim contest between Allied and German tunnellers trying to create a labyrinth underneath each other.

During this subterranean warfare, the Allies managed to lay enormous quantities of explosives in a series of 19 mines. The detonation nearly obliterated the entire German front line…. It dug out huge craters, flung German cement pillboxes aside, and left surviving German troops dazed, confused and demoralised. The detonation has been described as the largest war-time explosion until the advent of the atomic bomb in the Second World War.

'At 3.10 a number of big guns began to fire and then the trench-walls rocked … near Wytschaete, a huge bubble was swelling mushroom-shaped, from the earth, and then burst to cast a molten, rosy glow on the under-surface of some dense cloud low above it. As its brilliance faded two more bubbles burst beside it. During twenty seconds the same thing happened again and again, from the right to the far left.'   *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918*

The detonation was the centrepiece of the Allied attack, but it was supported by artillery bombardment the previous week.

The Germans responded with their own barrages that caused more than 500 casualties in the 3rd Division.

The 33rd Battalion had to overcome determined German resistance on the southern edge of the battlegrounds.

The Allies moved on relentlessly and took the village of Messines. Despite meeting fiercer German resistance, they achieved most of their objectives.

Detonating the mines at Messines provided an enormous advantage for the Allies but it still proved costly, with the Australians suffering 6,000 casualties."

Sources: SJMC.GOV.AU; Imperial War Museum

Smashed German trench, 7/6/17

BENEATH HILL 60   In 2010 a film depicting the extraordinary true story of the 1st Australian Tunnelling Company was released. Some of the men were from the Hunter Valley due to their mining experience. Their mission was to create a series of tunnels and mines running beneath the German fortifications and bunkers which were then filled with massive amounts of explosives. The film is based on the diaries of Captain Oliver Woodward.

DAVID WILLIAM MURRAY

Unfortunately, Robert was not the only one from the Murray family who sacrificed his life. His cousin, David, also perished. David, a cabinetmaker from Hamilton, enlisted on June 19, 1916, at Broadmeadow, and was assigned as Private 2431 to 35th Battalion, known as "Newcastle's Own", which was established in Dec, 1915. He was smaller in stature than his cousin, being 5' 3 1/2"; with dark complexion, brown eyes and brown hair. He was 27 years and 5 months old and married to Jane Melvena Murray. After training at Broadmeadow, the battalion boarded a train at Broadmeadow bound for Sydney and embarked on *HMAT BORDA*, 17/10/1916. The *BORDA* was requisitioned from the P&O Company by the government for use as a troopship.

Farewelling at Broadmeadow Station; Troops leaving on *Borda*; 35th Battalion comfort fundraising, Hunter St.

David arrived in Plymouth in January 1917 for further training; then crossing to Etaples in the North of France – a base camp for troops on their way to the front. Like many he was admitted to hospital there with German Measles at the beginning of April and returned to his unit April 23rd, just in time to progress to the "field" 5 days later. A month and a half later, David was killed in action at Messines on June 11th, 1917.

His brother, James Murray, funeral director, assisted David's widow to relocate to Wickham and to receive her entitlements. In September Jane was granted a pension of £2 per fortnight and their daughter, Dorothy Jean, £1 per fortnight. Patrick and Elizabeth Murray had lost 2 grandsons on the same battlefield.

David is commemorated at the Menin Gate War Memorial, in the Commemorative area of the Australian War Memorial, and will be placed in the exterior Hall of Memory.   *Sources: AWM, NAA, Harrower*

Lest We Forget
ANZAC DAY