

*In Gattung language, Daan.gaari (Tuncurry) means "when fish swim near the surface of the water and turn their bodies as they swim they make the appearance of silvery waters", literally "plenty of fish".*

This Story Board, celebrating the local WWI soldiers commemorated on the Tuncurry Memorial Hall 2015 Honour Board, summarises the creation of one memorial and the regeneration of another. It includes input by the Elders from Origine Commemorative ANZAC Day Committee (OCAD), which grew out of Tobwabba Original Working Network (TOWN).

In 2009 William Paulson, Chair of TOWN, with Elvina Oxley (Elvina Jean Paulson) as Secretary, supported by her husband Lewis Oxley, set out to revive family history and restore the sacred ground of Tobwabba Djarirbaa. TOWN aimed to commemorate and respectfully acknowledge Tobwabba Ancestors and soldiers, and to raise awareness of their contributions to Australian life.



William "Nip" Simon

Image courtesy of the Great Lakes Museum



Tobwabba Memorial

Image courtesy of the Great Lakes Advocate

Locally known as Tobwabba Cemetery Hill, Tobwabba Djaribaa is a fine site with extensive ocean and lake views rising above the original Aboriginal Reserve land. By restoring the parkland to a natural state, TOWN aimed to recall knowledge of the cultural history of the Tobwabba (White Clay) Yuri (People) Djaribaa (Spirit Place) i.e. White Clay People Spirit Place.

In 2012 a bronze plaque, the Tobwabba Memorial, was set in local stone in that idyllic setting. The Worimi WWI soldiers James Alexander Slater, William Slater, William Simon (all 20th Btn) and Harry Cunningham (53rd Btn) are commemorated on that Memorial. They fought on the same battlefields as other Australian soldiers, but they remained unacknowledged until then.

Tuncurry Memorial Hall, and its original Honour Board, resulted from the efforts of the locals. A major driver of the project was John Henry Stephens, the licensee of the Bellevue Hotel. "Jack" donated timber, (presumably left over from additions made to his 1890s hotel), to build the Hall. It seems likely that the names on the Hall's Honour Board were directly connected with the major supporters of the project.

The original Honour Board in itself was a local product, and rather unusual. A local artist painted the names directly on a wall of the Hall, to repay a debt owed to "Jack" Stephens. Unfortunately that wall was demolished when additions were made to the Hall in the 1980s. The Trustees at that time wanted to preserve the Board and had a more usual version produced, but unfortunately by then the original names had faded and there were many spelling errors on the new Board.

In 2013 the Trustees of Tuncurry Memorial Hall were considering how best to commemorate the 2014 Centenary of WWI and the 2015 Centenary of ANZAC. They decided an appropriate way would be to renovate the Hall's Honour Board, and also to go some way to remedy the lack of recognition of the WWI soldiers named on the Tobwabba Memorial, by including their names.

The Trustees consulted with Worimi Elder, Donna Hall, a Simon descendant, who agreed it was a supportive and inclusive idea to include the Worimi WWI soldiers on the Hall's Honour Board. When the grant to update the Board was approved, with the Worimi soldiers included, the Trustees also spoke to the Tobwabba Elders of OCED for appropriate permission and input. This is the result.

Reading the names on the Honour Board does not reveal the many unseen connections. This Story Board contains information linking many of the soldiers, taken directly from the WWI records held in the National Archives of Australia. The Trustees have told the stories of all the fallen, but due to space considerations have been able to include only information on some of the returning men. Those interested in further information might like to consult Stuart Weller's 2012 book *Of This Watershed: Soldiers of the Wallamba*.





Four original ANZACs are commemorated, all members of the 13th Btn. Two are Failford boys, Cecil Herbert Allard, who died on the Somme 1916, and his brother James Manning Allard, who, injured 3 May, was shipped home on 16 July 1915. Two are Scots, James Hallett (buried at sea from a hospital ship off Gaba Tepe) and Donald McLeod (died in battle), both commemorated with the other ANZAC dead at Lone Pine Park, Gallipoli. Listed amongst Hallett’s possessions sent by the Army to his next of kin was “a small book of poems”. Scots, but very much part of Tuncurry’s hidden history, Hallett and McLeod were guards at the local 6,000 acres Afforestation Camp, which was established in 1913 and which was the first of its kind in NSW. It housed 20 first offenders who tended the purpose grown pine forest.

On a lighter note, perhaps the Hall’s first benefactor, Jack Stephens, had a hand in the inclusion of Harry Oscar Wharton (17th Btn), by profession a barman?

Three local oystermen are named. Charles Berry (34th Btn), born in Christchurch, New Zealand, died in battle in Normandy. Thomas William Watters, (also 13th Btn), was awarded the Military Medal for bravery in the battle of Pozieres. His medal was gazetted on 19 April, 1917. Herbert O’Neill Byrnes (2nd Btn) enlisted on 9 July 1915, gassed on the Western Front on 24 August 1918, was not discharged from hospital, and the Army, until 21 January 1920.

James Hardy Fazio, a member of the 7th Light Horse, was killed, not in battle as one might expect for a Light Horseman, but in an air raid in Palestine after the Battle of Beersheba on what is now known as the Gaza Strip. He was buried near Jericho, but later reinterred at Jerusalem. Tuncurry Memorial Hall is sited in Fazio Park.

Worimi man from Wang Wauk, James Alexander Slater, (20th Btn), in 1918 became another victim, (like Cecil Allard), of the interminable Battle of the Somme. Slater and Allard are buried in Warloy-Baillon Cemetery. Commemorated on the same War Memorial in France, it is fitting that they are also commemorated on the same Honour Board at home.

An unusual inclusion with those fallen in battle is Thomas Dunn (30th Btn), a casualty of disease. He contracted mumps almost on enlistment. Shipped to France he died there of pneumonia, which developed in hospital, after he was admitted with trench foot.

Francis O’Beirne is also an unexpected addition. He was most likely the local merchant marine Captain who enlisted, but who never served, because the war ended, according to Alan Wright, the current President of the Great Lakes Historical Society, and past Secretary of the Tuncurry Memorial Hall Trust. His father’s cousin, shipwright Claude Wright (55th Btn), enlisted even though he had “three fingers of the left hand partially amputated”.

John Wright, Claude’s grandfather, commenced shipbuilding on land stretching from Wallis Lake, along the channel foreshore (much of which is now John Wright Park). In the photo you can see the Hall and also the Reorganised Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints, which is now the Community of Christ Church. Gunner Sidney Lapsley McLaren was a member of the congregation, as was Claude Wright. Shipwright Walter George Henry Hampshire Blackall (Blackhall?) (30th Btn) enlisted at 16 and was shipped home from Étaples “under age” in 1918. Gunner John Robert Gray, also gassed in France, described himself on his enlistment form as having been an apprentice at Wright Bros.

The Trustees hope you feel more connected to the WWI Veterans honoured here, having read the historical notes on this Story Board. The Trustees believe this Honour Board, in Tuncurry Memorial Hall, opposite Lone Pine Park, is now respectful of all who fought and also appropriately links the past and the present. We hope you agree.

Let Peace Reign



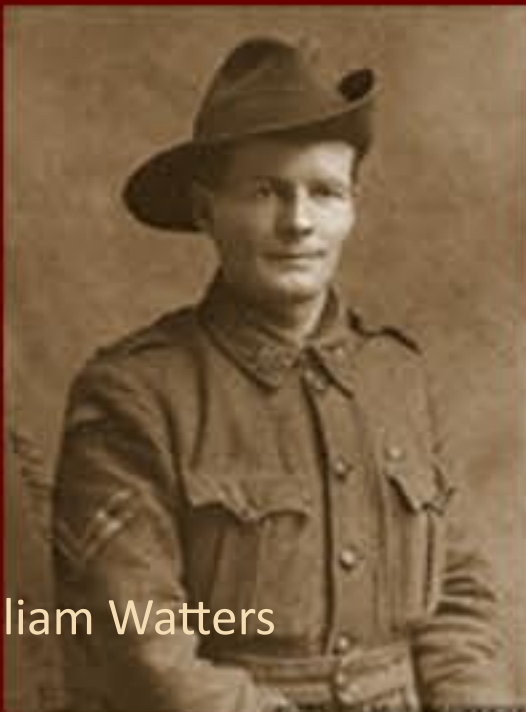
Cecil Herbert Allard  
c 1914-1916



James Manning Allard  
c 1914-1915



Thomas William Watters  
c 1917



James Fazio c 1917



Thomas Dunn  
c1900



Images courtesy of Great Lakes Historical Society

*They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old  
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn  
At the going down of the sun and in the morning  
We will remember them*

