

Henry George Tarran

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In the northeast corner of the suburb of Laverton, east of Bladin Street and north of Jennings Street, is a residential area where the street names reflect on a time long ago. A time well before Laverton became an official suburb within the western region of Melbourne. If you were to look at the plans of the Parish of Truganina, specifically from the second half of the 1800s, the names of many landholders and graziers are honoured here. So, who were these people, and what was their connection to Laverton to have their names preserved in history?

One of these streets is known as Tarran Street. Running from Old Geelong Road to Robertson Street, its name acknowledges the life and deeds of Henry George Tarran and his wife, Ruby Beatrice Tarran. This is their story.

Henry George Tarran was born in Nhill, a town in western Victoria close to the VIC/SA border, on 13 July 1890. His parents were James Aluteus Henry Tarran (1865-1894) and Sybilla Jane Tarran, nee Bolwell (1869-1941). Henry was the eldest of three children born to the couple, the last being born a year before their father passed away in 1894. James Tarran was tragically involved in a fatal accident at Narrandera, near Wagga in New South Wales, on 31 March that year. He was, it is believed, grubbing¹ a tree on his allotment of land, when it fell upon him and killed him instantly. This left Sybilla with three children under the age of four, land to work, and no husband to share in these responsibilities. She sought the support of her parents until she got remarried in Horsham on 13 August 1896 to Robert Sanderson Keating.

Henry Tarran and his two siblings, Winifred Jane (1892-1937) and Arthur Leslie (1893-1959), were soon joined by five stepbrothers born to Robert and Sybilla. Henry's early upbringing would have taken place on the outskirts of Horsham, around the settlement of Vectis. Like his father and grandfather, Henry took up farming and acquired land in Vectis East in around 1912.

On 13 May 1914 in Horsham, Henry's sister Winifred Jane married Herbert Beddison and George was invited to be one of his groomsmen. Herbert's sister, Ruby Beatrice Beddison, was also invited to be one of Winifred's bridesmaids. Romance must have blossomed that



**Henry George Tarran and Ruby Beatrice Beddison
Wedding, 1914**

¹ Grubbing is the clearing of unwanted vegetation from the land, which includes branches, logs and underground roots.

day because only five months later on 21 October 1914, Henry George Tarran married Ruby Beatrice Beddison, the daughter of Deering Charles Beddison (1853-1938) and Alice Beddison, nee Bignall (1856-1930). Ruby was the second youngest of five girls and four boys.

By the time of his marriage, Henry Tarran had moved to Laverton and was farming land within the district, and so, the newlywed couple settled there to start a family. The land that Henry purchased was 268 acres. It stretched westward, along the Newport-Geelong railway to the banks of the Skeleton Creek, in the area now known as Hoppers Crossing. The land purchase was part of the land acquired from the Chirnside family, due to the introduction of the Closer Settlement Act of 1904. The introduction of this legislation was in response to social problems that resulted from the economic depression of the 1890s. The Victorian Government legislated in 1904 to purchase private estates from landholders, such as the Chirnside family, and subdivide this to make the land available for smaller farmers of limited means. Thomas Bent, who was the Victorian Premier at the time and a prominent land developer himself, referred to this action as providing rich land for poor people. Henry set about establishing post and wire fencing around most of the property, as well as some stone walls where large stones had been cleared from the land. He then began the construction of a five roomed weatherboard dwelling with an iron roof, a wash house, cow sheds, stables, barn, and implement shed with a storeroom. He also constructed drafting yards², cow yards, horse yards, pig pens, stock yards, and planted the first seeds for a new pine tree plantation.



Arthur Leslie Tarran, WW1

In 1916, Henry Tarran's younger brother, Arthur Leslie Tarran, enlisted into the Australian Army. He served within the 39th Battalion on the Western Front in Europe, returning to Australia on 15 May 1919. While Henry didn't enlist, he certainly supported local community war efforts and events within both Werribee and Laverton. At the end of WW1, having married Irene Dora Gardiner, Arthur joined his brother in working the land on Henry and Ruby's farm in Laverton.

Henry and Ruby had purchased a further property in the Laverton area, which adjoined the east boundary of their existing 268-acre property. The new property was 283 acres in total and it incorporated 150 acres that had been previously owned by a member of the Werribee Shire council. This land had also been originally purchased as part of the Closer Settlement Act of 1904. On both properties, the couple were growing feed crops including lucerne and oats and were also running a small herd of cattle. In October 1921, the Commonwealth government purchased³ an

allotment of 150 acres of land from Ruby for defence purposes. This land became the site for the Laverton RAAF base, which was situated on the eastern boundary of the Tarran's property, between the Geelong-Melbourne Road in the north and the Geelong-Newport railway in the south.

During this busy period of land expansion, Henry and Ruby's family also grew quickly. Their first child, Desmond Tarran, was born in 1916. He was followed by James Reginald in 1917, Clifford George in 1918, Eva Sybilla in 1919, Nellie in 1921, and finally, Joyce Edna in 1922. With many young children, it was little wonder that Henry soon took an interest in the local state school board and joined the school committee in 1922. Around the same time, Henry also became more involved within the Laverton

² A drafting yard is a yard fenced into compartments for the holding and sorting of livestock.

³ Commonwealth Government Gazette, No. 80, dated 20 October 1921

community and its development. He assisted the Laverton Progress Association with the building of a hall and the planting of some 200 trees. A year later in 1924, he had been elected to the Laverton Progress Association committee too.

In this same year, with the Laverton RAAF base expanding, the Defence Department acquired a further 42-acre portion of Ruby Tarran's property⁴. The RAAF were planning to build more work areas and ramp up their flight and defence activities. The Tarran family had also received other offers, from private developers, for other sections of their property, which certainly made them think about whether they should remain in Laverton or move. In October 1924, Henry and Ruby sold 100 acres of their land to a Geelong buyer for £31 per acre. The buyer intended to subdivide the land into 425 residential lots with a public reserve at its centre. However, this residential development never took place.

There had been a further offer for the remainder of their property at £25 per acre⁵, which saw the land subdivided as industrial sites. Today, this forms part of the Hoppers Crossing industrial estate from Forsyth Road to Skeleton Creek. It was with these sales taking place, and the two acquisitions by the Defence Department, that prompted the Tarran family to make the move away from the Laverton district.

With all their properties sold, the Tarran family looked for green pastures and a new adventure. They chose to settle in Manangatang, a rural township 70 km north-west of Swan Hill in north-west Victoria, where they had purchased 1900 acres of farmland.

Before leaving Laverton in 1925, the members of the Laverton Progress Association gave a public farewell to Henry and Ruby Tarran in the local Progress Hall, where there was a large circle of friends and relatives present. During the dinner, Alfred Leake (on behalf of the residents), Charles Hurst (on behalf of the Progress Association as acting president), and William Lohse (on behalf of the School Committee), spoke in glowing terms of the great interest that Henry and Ruby had taken in the district's welfare. Cr Bernard Maher (Werribee Shire) made a presentation to the couple on behalf of the residents too.⁶

The Tarran family were a very community-oriented family and moving to Manangatang didn't change that at all. They quickly immersed themselves into several community organisations, caring for the progress of their new community and its people. These groups included the Progress Association and the Country Women's Association.

Henry's brother Arthur and his wife Irene soon followed suit and moved to Manangatang as well. We don't know whether they worked on the same



Four Generations of the Tarran family: Sybilla Jane Keating, Henry George Tarran, Eliza Jane Bolwell, and Desmond Tarran

⁴ Commonwealth Government Gazette, No. 93, dated 18 December 1924

⁵ Werribee Shire Banner 9 October 1924 p6

⁶ Werribee Shire Banner 23 April 1925 p5

property or whether they had their own within the same district. Irene passed away in 1930 and Arthur remarried in 1932 to Winifred Marion Coghill. By 1940, Arthur and Winifred had moved back to the Melbourne suburb of Footscray North, where Arthur eventually took up a position in the Victorian Public Service.



Private Desmond Tarran, WW2

At this time however, more serious events were also ongoing. 1939 saw Australia again thrust into another World War, and even though the Tarran family were located within the remoteness of Manangatang, they were not exempt from its turmoil. World War 2 saw three of the Tarran children enlist, with Desmond and Clifford joining the Australia Army, while Nellie instead joined the Royal Australian Air Force.

Desmond had previously entered the Home Missionary Training College in 1936 and had become a Methodist missionary. He enlisted as an army medical orderly on 22 July 1940. This saw him serve in the medical service in Palestine, with the 7th Australian General Hospital, until February 1942. He was then recalled to Australia before being transferred to a forward casualty station operating within New Guinea. With the fall of Lae⁷, he was taken prisoner by the Japanese in April 1942. He, like many others, were taken to work on the 'Death Railway' in Burma. There, he worked closely with Dr E. (Weary) Dunlop and Dr Albert Coates in caring for starving and maltreated prisoners. At the end of the war, he was repatriated from Singapore and returned to Australia, where he rejoined the church and took up his work as a missionary. For his work on the Burma Railway, he was awarded 'Mentioned in Dispatches' for his service supporting others⁸.

Clifford George Tarran enlisted on 20 July 1940, also into the army, and was assigned to the 2/2 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment at the rank of Gunner. It was almost 12 months before he and his regiment left Australia, bound for the Middle East. Almost immediately, he was reassigned to the 2/3 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment and saw action in the Western Desert (Egypt and Libya) and Syria. In March 1942, Clifford and the 2/3 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment returned to Australia and began retraining to ready themselves for fighting in the jungles of New Guinea. In August 1943, Clifford was transferred back to the 2/2 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment. In October of that same year, the regiment was transferred to Townsville in preparation for their move to New Guinea. Despite rigorous training, Clifford didn't make the journey to New Guinea alongside his fellow brothers in arms, having fallen ill. After spending some time in hospital, he saw out the remainder of the war in Queensland before being discharged at the end of WW2 in 1945.



Gunner Clifford George Tarran, WW2

⁷ Lae is the capital of the Morobe Province and is the second-largest city in Papua New Guinea. It is located near the delta of the Markham River and at the start of the Highlands Highway.

⁸ Commonwealth of Australia Gazette, 6 March 1947 on page 761 at position 21, London Gazette 6 March 1947 on page 1101 at position 85.



Nellie Tarran, WAAAF/RAAF

Their younger sister, Nellie, enlisted into the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) on 28 Oct 1942 and was assigned to the Melbourne Wireless/Telegraphic Station as a Telegraphist. Approval was granted in about November 1942 for a Melbourne Wireless Telegraphy Shadow Signal Station to be established at 'Frognall', located at 54 Mont Albert Road in Canterbury, Victoria. 'Frognall' was to provide less vulnerable signals facilities and living accommodation for 450 personnel. The property was eventually purchased by the Commonwealth Government on 29 September 1943. Many women of the Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force (WAAAF) carried out signal duties at this facility during the war. Operations at this location continued until around 1976 when its role changed to the training of RAAF engineering cadets. Nellie remained in service at 'Frognall' until she was discharged from service on 12 December 1945, following the end of the war.

Throughout the WW2 period, and up until 1950, Henry and Ruby Tarran were still living and farming in Manangatang. By then, all six of their children had married and were making a life for themselves away from the family farm. Henry was now sixty and Ruby fifty-seven, which meant that running a large farm was no longer a manageable task on their own. It was then that they decided to pack up and move to Yarraberb, a small-town northwest of Bendigo, where they purchased a smaller 652-acre farming property.

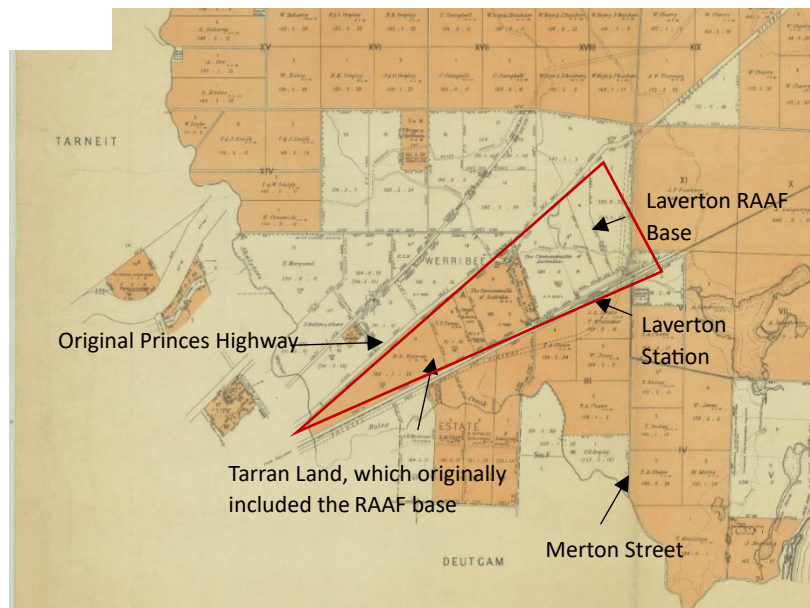


Henry and Ruby Tarran's headstone at Inglewood cemetery

On 6 August 1965, Henry George Tarran passed away at the age of 75 and was interred within the Inglewood cemetery. This left Ruby on her own on the couple's farm, and so two of her sons, Clifford George and his wife Doreen (nee Edwards), and James Reginald and his wife Audrey Annie (nee McErvale), moved onto the farm to assist their mother. On 10 July 1978, Ruby Beatrice Tarran passed away and was interred alongside her husband at the Inglewood cemetery. Both Clifford and James Tarran also sadly passed away within twelve months of their mother. By this stage, the Yarraberb property had been

sold and the proceeds distributed to the six children of Henry and Ruby Tarran.

The naming of Tarran Street is ultimately a fitting recognition to a family who came to Laverton and gave so much within its early years to help support their local community. It is the deeds of families like the Tarrans which have ensured that Laverton continued to grow and prosper for future generations of residents.



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