

*Maitland and District Historical Society Inc.*

# **Bulletin of Maitland and District Historical Society Inc.**

(Established March 1977)

Affiliated with Royal Australian Historical Society and  
Museum and Galleries Hunter Chapter



**Putting the Word Out**

**Celebrating the Society's 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

**Volume 24, Number 3**

**August 2017**

*The Aims of the Society are to  
Discover, Record, Preserve, Advise on and Teach the History of Maitland and the District*

## *Maitland and District Historical Society Inc.*

**Cover:** The photograph by Society VP Peter Smith shows previous Bulletin editor Judy Nicholson with the *Maitland Mercury* printing press now in the Society's collection.

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**Location:** 3 Cathedral Street Maitland (opposite Bishop's House)

**Lecture meeting** is held on the first Tuesday of each month from 5:30-7.00pm as a forum for lectures, talks and presentations

**Business meeting** is held on the third Tuesday of each month from 5:30-7.00pm

Meetings are held at the Society's rooms, 3 Cathedral Street Maitland

Membership fees : \$20 (single) and \$30 (double / family)

**Patrons:** The Hon. Milton Morris AO  
NSW Member for Maitland 1956-1980  
NSW Minister for Transport 1965 – 1975  
The Most Reverend Bill Wright, Bishop of Maitland-Newcastle

### **Current Office Bearers :**

**President :** Keith Cockburn

**Vice Presidents :** Kevin Parsons, Peter Smith

**Treasurer :** Vacant

**Secretary:** Kevin Short

**Bulletin Editor :** Lisa Thomas

**Consultant Editor :** Keith Cockburn

**Bulletin contributions** are being sought. Please contact the Society via email  
[maitlandhistorical@gmail.com](mailto:maitlandhistorical@gmail.com)

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## There Will Be Order in the Chambers



Dennis Martin models the wig and gown which had once belonged to the Maitland Council clerk, an office which was replaced by the position of the General Manager in 1993. The last person to wear this particular ceremonial garb, which is in the Society's collection, was Don Macindoe, the second last clerk of Maitland Council. (Photograph by Allan Thomas)

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At the 1 August Society meeting, Judy Nicholson, who is the Maitland Library Local Studies Librarian, presented "Photographers of Maitland 1845 - 1900". Judy has assembled and documented an extensive collection of early photographers and their photographs which will be of interest to both historians and the general public. Two photographs from the collection are shown on the following pages.

The entire collection is online at [www.photographersofmaitland.org/](http://www.photographersofmaitland.org/).

The previous two Bulletins have included tranches from an index of the articles which appeared in the early Society Bulletins. Judy compiled this index and she has now updated the index to include all articles to the current year. This index has been posted in its entirety on the Society's website, which she has also updated.

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The August meeting (Photograph by Peter Smith)





## **The Society's 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Luncheon**

The highlight of the Maitland and District Historical Society's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary year was the catered luncheon held on Saturday 8 July at St John's Hall.

Attendees included members past and present and MDHS patron the Most Reverend Bill Wright, Bishop of Maitland-Newcastle. Maitland City Council was represented by Councillors Loretta Baker, Ken Wethered, Ben Whiting, and Robert Aitchison. The honoured guest speakers were Greg Ray and Gianni Di Gravio, both of whom addressed aspects of Maitland's history.

(The following photographs are from Peter Smith.)





Society President Keith Cockburn, Val Rudkin, and Bishop Bill Wright



The cake!

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Greg Ray and (seated) Gionni di Gravio and Mrs di Gravio

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Bill Hopkins AM, president of the East Maitland Bowling Club, and Society VP Kevin Parsons



Mr di Gravio and President Keith Cockburn





Curator Adele Cockburn and generous donor Wayne Dempsey



Dr Cameron Archer AM



Research Officer Heather Berry



Councillor Robert Aitchison

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## **The Society Turns 40: a New Member's View** by Chas Keys

This year the Maitland & District Historical Society reached the age of 40, a suitable round-number anniversary on which to make a brief appraisal of how the Society has developed, what it has sought to do and what it has achieved. Its four decades have seen some difficult times, but they have also seen considerable productivity in the pursuit of its objectives. These are to “discover, record, preserve, advise on and teach the history of Maitland and the District.”

The M&DHS Inc was founded in June, 1977, at a meeting in the former Maitland Cultural Centre building opposite the Town Hall in High St. A meeting a month earlier had found there to be sufficient public interest to proceed with the formation of an organisation to focus attention on the history of the area. Once established, the Society's roots developed quickly: before the end of 1977 a constitution had been adopted, nearly 80 people had signed on as members and a tradition of vigorous (and on occasions even heated) debates on local historical matters had been initiated. Those who participated in the discussions did so on a monthly basis at the East Maitland Primary School until late 1983, after which a room in the Cultural Centre became their home and base. The Society became an incorporated body in 1989.

There had of course been local historians in Maitland before 1977 though apparently no historical society had ever existed. Nevertheless during the early 1960s a group of five residents had been commissioned by the City Council to write a book on the history of Maitland. Entitled *Maitland 1863-1963*, the book was published by the Council to commemorate the centenary of the formation of the West Maitland Council, the first local government council to be formed in the Hunter.

June Vile, a local solicitor and a prime mover in the establishment of the Society in 1977, was elected the inaugural president. Almost immediately the Society's principal organ, the *Bulletin of the Maitland & District Historical Society*, was initiated by the president with the hope that “a coherent and continuing history of the District” would eventuate in due course as a result of the Society's efforts in recording the events of Maitland's past and the activities and concerns of its people. The *Bulletin's* first few issues were only two to four pages in length, roneoed in the style of the time and supported financially by grants from the Royal Australian Historical Society, but over time they grew, were presented in a more stylish and professional fashion and incorporated quite lengthy pieces.

Some articles in recent times have been meticulously researched and have reached a high standard of historical scholarship. In a few years during the 1980s the *Bulletin* appeared almost on a monthly basis, but today's much more substantial editions of sometimes 20 or more pages come out only four times per annum.

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Over the years the *Bulletin* has covered an impressively wide array of topics. Historical Society members and other people have contributed pieces on cemeteries (Glebe, Oakhampton and Campbells Hill), schools (Bolwarra Public School and Maitland Girls High), hotels and inns, churches (St James', St Peter's, St John's and St Paul's), grand and historic houses (Dalwood, Duckenfield, The Hermitage, Dunmore, Lorn, Holbeach, Pinehurst, The Bishop's House, Sans Souci, Anambah and Closebourne) and other important buildings. Amongst these are Rourke's Building, Galton's department store, the Queens Theatre, Smith's Steam Flour Mill in East Maitland, the Maitland Courthouse, the Astor Theatre in Morpeth, Arnotts Bakehouse, the Maitland Railway Station and the Trocadero guesthouse.

Individuals of significance in the area's past have been covered in numbers. Edward Charles Close, William Hall, Alex Wilkinson, Thomas Browne, Alexander Dodds, John Gillies, Caroline Chisholm, the Rev Alfred Glennie, John Harbury Hunt, Walter Finlay O'Hearn, Lachlan MacGillivray, Thomas Hughes, Norman Goodsir, James Pritchard, Ross Lovick Tyrell, Professor Sir Tannant William Edgeworth David, Richard Meacle and William Thorne Mitchell have all been the subject of articles. Surprisingly, few women have been covered in detail, but some of the area's better-known families (the Dangars and the MacGillivrays, for example) have been the subject of research published in the *Bulletin's* pages.

Disasters have featured frequently, including many floods, the 1918 Spanish influenza epidemic and the fires that destroyed Notts Mill in 1860 and the famous Cohen's and Capper's stores in High St during the 1970s. Sports (cricket, vigoro, croquet and rowing) have been considered as well, as in one issue was the competitive farm-based activity of ploughing and mowing 'matches' conducted during the late 1800s under the banner of the Hunter River Agricultural and Horticultural Association. These matches sought to promote the skills needed in local farming activity, trophies being awarded to those who performed well in ploughing furrows and cutting lucerne.

There have also been articles on significant local institutions and businesses (the *Maitland Mercury*, Morris's Aerated Water and Cordial Works, the Country Women's Association, the Chamber of Commerce, McDonalds Booksellers and Stationers, the Maitland Markets, the Floating Baths on the Hunter River, the Maitland & District Garden Club and the Maitland Repertory Society) and on the infrastructure of the area (the advent of the telegraph, the telephone, electricity and gas, the first oil drill in Australia at Farley, the railway and the histories of the Long and Hinton bridges). The early histories of localities within the Maitland City Council's territory (Morpeth, East Maitland, Oakhampton, Horseshoe Bend, Narrowgut and Veterans Flat) have also been examined, as has the development of the local coal mining industry.

The *Bulletin* has featured much variety of themes. In all likelihood a 'coherent and continuing' history of Maitland, as envisaged by June Vile in the first issue, could be fashioned from the pieces that have appeared within its pages.



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Nor is the *Bulletin* the only outlet for the Maitland researches carried out by society members and others. In recent times several booklets have been produced, on topics including the 1893 flood and the growth and development of High St, and there has been a substantial book published by the Society (Val Rudkin's *Who? What? Where? People of 19th Century High Street, Maitland*). Early in the Society's time a broad-based history of Maitland was produced for the Maitland City Council by members Hector Arkell, Harry Boyle, Lionel Fredman, Ron Montague, Henry Armstrong and well-known Maitland photographer Athel D'Ombra. This book, published in 1983, was titled *A New History of Maitland*.

Val Rudkin was a founding member of the Society. She and the authors of *A New History* are among the many accomplished historians which Maitland has produced over the years: others who have been members of the Society and have contributed to the *Bulletin* or to other outlets in which the area's history has been recorded have included Fred Gregory, Andrew Burg, Peter Bogan, Janece McDonald, Janis Wilton and Lisa Thomas. Maitland and nearby areas have been highly, indeed unusually, productive of local historians, many of them members of the M&DHS but some not (including Cynthia Hunter, Brian Andrews, Cameron Archer and Brian Walsh).

Some members have written books on aspects of the history of the local area and sold them to the Society which markets them to the wider public along with books published by other organisations including the Maitland City Council. A collection of these and many other publications of historical interest, written for example by Cynthia Hunter, Ann Beaumont, Patricia McDonald, Janis Wilton, Mick Fairleigh and Paul Doherty make up the Society's library. Member David Sciffer has produced and published a book on the bridging of Wallis Creek in the nineteenth century, Janece McDonald has written books on the history of Brough House, cedar getting and brick-making in early Maitland and bee-keeping in the area, and Janis Wilton has told the story of Maitland's Jewish Cemetery.

Writing up interesting and important elements of the history of Maitland and its vicinity are far from being the only outputs of the Society. Over the years an impressive collection of memorabilia and historical items, most of them donated by members of the local community, has been built up and displayed in the Society's rooms in the former parish offices building in Cathedral St, Maitland: the collection is in effect a museum of local history which incorporates documents, photographs, old newspapers, service medals, items of clothing, old pieces of machinery, convict-built bricks and domestic and industrial artefacts of many kinds. There is an 1830s printing press used to produce the early editions of the *Maitland Mercury*, an early mangle used in the laundry of The Hermitage, trophies presented to the winners of ploughing matches in 1890, a large-bellows portrait camera from about the same time, some leadlights from Galton's department store and a collection donated by 'Mr Maitland', Milton Morris, including newspaper cartoons, plaques, life membership certificates, photographs and the man's very large office chair. Every month sees additional items being added to the collection.

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Before 2011, when the Society moved into its current premises, it had nowhere to display the collection to the public. That is no longer the case.

The enquiries of many members of the public, seeking information about their forebears and about various aspects of Maitland's history, have been answered by the volunteer researchers of the Society. This is an important community service. Working groups have been established to research a range of topics, including the life and times of George Boyle White (an early surveyor) and the participation of 'Maitland's Own', the 34th Battalion AIF, in the Battle of Passchendaele during World War I. Visits to the historic buildings of the lower Hunter Valley have been undertaken, monthly talks on matters of relevance to the area's history have been organised along with walking tours of historically-relevant locations, and workshops on local historical themes have been conducted. On one occasion, the Society was asked by the City Council to comment on a report about historic buildings and townscapes in Maitland.

In addition the Society has hosted the annual state conference (in 2011) of the Royal Australian Historical Society: the conference theme (Of Droughts and Flooding Rains – Australian Disasters, Research, Recording, Recovery) was well suited to a city with a long history of flooding, some of it disastrous in terms of its human consequences. The Society has also integrated itself in the activities of its community by participating in the Maitland Show, the annual Australia Day celebrations, Steamfest, the Taste and Aroma Festival, Seniors Week and the deliberations of the Maitland City Council Heritage Group.

Many years ago, in 1979, the then infant M&DHS participated in what was known locally as Maitland's 'sesquicentennial celebration'. Actually the celebration was only of the 150 years since the adoption of the name 'Maitland' rather than 150 years of the existence of the place as a European settlement which had come into being about 11 years earlier as Wallis Plains. The Society contributed to the occasion by producing a booklet entitled '*A Town to be Laid Out*'. The City Council of the day supported enthusiastically this publication, the celebration and of the Society itself, but in more recent times some members have come to the view that Council's positive attitude towards the Society and its endeavours has weakened over the years.

Many people, some active writers and others not, have contributed to the Society and to the achievement of its goals. Its presidents, June Vile, Roy Hamson, Graham Dunlop, Hector Arkell, Geoff Cannon, Henry Armstrong, Ruth Trappel, Kevin Parsons and Keith Cockburn, are worthy of note here as are long-time secretary Mavis Newcombe and her son Peter (also the secretary for a period and more briefly the treasurer as well), Lloyd Bevan in the treasurer's role, former NSW parliamentarian Milton Morris as patron and major benefactors Chic Cooper and Wayne Dempsey. Lyn Dolan, the first secretary, should also be acknowledged as should Jackie Youldon who collected and filed many details of Maitland's history which can now be found in the Society's archives. Many other members have

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provided voluntary service to the Society in roles including fundraising, catering at functions and managing donations.

Like most institutions the Society has had periods of malaise as well as of productivity. The *Bulletin* lapsed between 1992 and 1999 and again between 2001 and 2011, and in 2009 the Society itself almost folded. At that time its active membership had declined to four, far short of what was required to ensure the organisation's viability. It has been much revived since then and now has about 80 members. Its regular guest speaker evenings are in the main well attended and the *Bulletin* has flourished under recent editors Judy Nicholson and Lisa Thomas. Members and the wider Maitland public can look forward to many more years of the Society facilitating their efforts to learn about the history of the area in which they live.

For all this, though, it might be suggested that the Maitland & District Historical Society has yet to make an indelible mark on its community. By no means is it well known in Maitland and to date it is difficult to point to a landmark achievement that has made a genuinely substantial or lasting impact upon the City and its people. A single major project - the publication, perhaps, of a comprehensive modern history of Maitland, produced from within the membership - could change this.

The author acknowledges with thanks the helpful input of Ruth Trappel, Val Rudkin and Keith and Adele Cockburn.

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From **Bulletin Vol. 5 no. 4** (November 1981) *The Legend of Farley Harbour*, by Henry Armstrong

Some years ago a publican in a northern township thought he would play a joke on a group of young surf board riders. He originally came from Lochinvar and was intrigued as a youth to hear the Night Officer at Farley Station shout "Farley Harbour" several times as the train pulled into that station. He did not know why the small village had been given that name but assured the youths that at Farley Harbour, near Newcastle, they would find waves unparalleled for board riding. Well it is historical fact that the youths eventually arrived at Maitland and asked at the Taxi rank where Farley Harbour actually was. It is not recorded how they accepted the joke but the writer has always been interested to find out how the term originated and is glad to quote the following from the *Newcastle Herald* of 12.10.81: -

According to Dora Creek resident John Riding, the expression 'Farley Harbour' referred to Farley Railway Station. John, who was born at East Maitland, said that about 1910 the

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station had about six to eight sidings which were used as rest stops by Northern NSW cattle trains on their way to Homebush. In those days the station was extremely busy and the sidings were continuously used. It was therefore a 'harbour' for trains. No sooner had I finished speaking with Mr. Riding when Ted Osborne, from East Maitland, was on the line. Ted remembers the Maitland flood of 1913 when the Wentworth Swamp area between Maitland and Farley was under water. Train passengers were ferried by boat between Maitland and Farley station. Passengers would be met by porters who would invariably greet them with 'Welcome to Farley Harbour'".

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### **Update on the Maitland and District Garden Club**

The February Bulletin featured an article by Terry Hughes on the Maitland and District Garden Club, which commemorated its fiftieth anniversary this year. The following are excerpts from the Garden Club's report of their anniversary celebrations.

*The Garden Club members wish to thank Judy and Geoff Hicks for organising the special 50<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations. Our thanks also to those on the committee working on the catering and other arrangements and Barbara Horn & Betty Laidler for sharing stories of past years of the Club.*

*A very special thanks to Debbie and Robert Ross for the generous offer of their premises to host the celebrations. There is a little bit of serendipity there as Debbie's mother, Heather Eggins, was a well-loved member of our club.*

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*My hearty congratulations to the members of Maitland & District Garden Club on reaching this great milestone in the life of your club – 50 years. The Garden Clubs of Australia's objective of extending the culture of gardening into the wider community for the benefit of all citizens is certainly exemplified by the activities and achievements of this club.*

*George Hoad President of The Garden Clubs of Australia*

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*The Maitland and District Historical Society Inc. has a number of publications for sale at the rooms at 3 Cathedral Street Maitland. For details of the publications for sale, or to purchase, please visit the rooms during open hours Wednesday and Saturday between 10 AM and 3 PM. Alternatively, contact the Society on 0438 623 299 or email [maitlandhistorical@gmail.com](mailto:maitlandhistorical@gmail.com).*