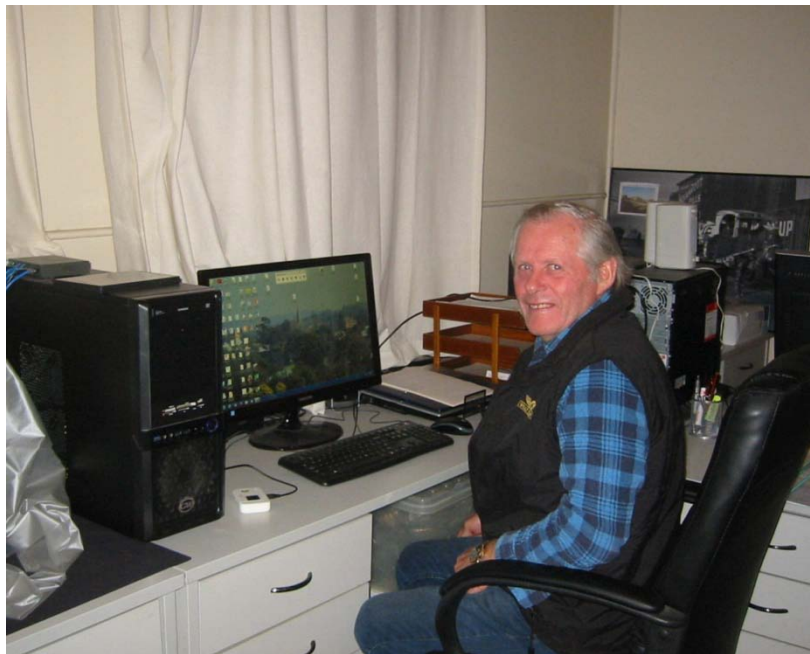


Maitland and District Historical Society Inc.

Bulletin of Maitland and District Historical Society Inc.

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



Preserving Maitland's History

Celebrating the Society's 40th Anniversary

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*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 was taken by Allan Thomas and shows VP Kevin Parsons at work on the computer in the Historical Society rooms.

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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
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The Society's End of Year Get-Together



The Historical Society's end of year get-together will again be held at "Holbeach", the 1840 National Trust listed Colonial coach inn, and the home of Society members Allan and Lisa Thomas. The address is 7 Cantwell Road, Lochinvar, and the get-together starts at 3 pm on 3 December. Like last year, a variety of foods will be provided along with soft drinks. However, you might wish to bring along something of your own. Don't forget to wear practical walking shoes.

The Holy Trinity Church across the lane will again be open for viewing.

For more information ring the Thomas' on 49307309.

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The University of the Third Age (U3A) in Maitland had its start in July 2013, due, in great measure, to the efforts of Wendy Pearson. The U3A classes have proven very popular. The following article was written as part of the "Writing for Pleasure" class which meets at the Central Maitland Library.

Impressions of High Street in the 1950s and Beyond

by Helen O'Brien

Having grown up in Maitland, I became fascinated in everything from a very young age. I used to get into trouble for wanting to touch, not only that, I also liked to smell to see whether I approved. Mum was worried taking me into a fine china or jewellery shop. I was told to keep my hands behind my back.

High St, was so interesting for me with all the variety and different ways shop keepers displayed their stock. Starting from the eastern end where I went to school, there was the Mercury where I used go and ask for end rolls of paper that they were throwing out.

Diagonally opposite, towards town was Forshaw's newsagents and Ken Tubman's pharmacy.

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Ken was a local racing car enthusiast, entering competitions. One was called Redex, an off road race, taking in outback country towns with dust flying everywhere, that he and Jack Murray would enter every year. They would drive their own cars, but had sponsors. Jack was called milko Jack, after his sponsor to differ from gelignite Jack, another competitor in Redex. Jack Murray ran Maitland motors, stocking Renault and Peugeot cars.

Further down the street there was Dimmocks, printers, publishers and book binders, where we would go out the back and rummage through their bins to find all sorts of wonderful things I could use, to write or paint on, after I modified the paper into little books. I can remember the smell of the printers ink in those stacked bins.

Back to the eastern end, we had Kerr's wonderful store that stocked everything from drapery, lingerie, gloves, fabrics haberdashery etc. The thing that fascinated me with Kerr's was when you paid the assistant, she pulled down this wooden screw top gadget, which she put the docket in, with the money, pulled hard on the cord and it travelled all the way upstairs to the cashier and after what seemed like ages back down it came with the docket & change.

Cappers was a wonderful three storied building, opposite a milk bar next door to Forshaw's, which got burnt down in the 1970's. It supplied just about everything for building construction to home maintenance. I believe Cappers also had the pull down gadget like Kerr's.

The Technical College taught many courses, from drafting for dressmakers, to machine sewing, shorthand, typing, woodwork and many other courses.

It has had its day, and is now our beautiful art gallery, refurbished and very much up there with quality exhibitions. A cafe called Seraphine operates in the gallery, and is extremely popular, always busy.

Hustlers, was on the same side, a department store, popular with local patrons. It was diagonally opposite the post office and later became essentially a large manchester store. I can remember the Punch's running it in more recent times.

Close by was a beautiful fabric shop, which I often patronised, as I was studying dressmaking at the Tech. We had fashion parades at the town hall each year, where we wore selected outfits we had made ourselves. I had some beautiful shoes given to me by an Aunt who was given them by a north shore doctor's wife, whom she worked for. Luckily they were a perfect fit for my long, narrow feet. We required more fabric in the fifties than you would today. We had small waists which were accentuated by full skirts, and a narrow covered belt or a sash.

Johnston's shoe store was an exciting place for a school girl, they had an X ray machine which was in the exact right spot to sneak in and X ray your feet on your way home from school. We loved doing this & often, never dreaming then that excessive X rays were dangerous. Also remember, that the cashier was perched on a chair at a desk risen up on a

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platform higher than everything else. Guess she could have been policing the shop from there as well. Maybe she was out of sight of we naughty girls.

Maitland benefited from many banks back then. Have you been to the beautiful CBA which is now Palm Court? What an amazing experience to enjoy high tea at this exclusive eating establishment, with Huckleberry as maitre d', dressed from Thursday to Sunday in tails, white shirt, white waistcoat and bow tie, not forgetting the impeccable white gloves. I took several of my most memorable friends there for lunch in March to celebrate my Birthday

Westpac was in centre of town, another beautiful building. When my husband worked there, upstairs stored much memorabilia, including managers notes from the beginning of Maitland's history. Such information declared that the village of Newcastle was expected to become a thriving township.

Maitland was definitely the king pin in its heyday. The beautiful bank building has since been demolished, to make way for a far less impressive one.

I have never ceased to be amazed at how our town planners could have allowed some of our most significant heritage buildings to be completely demolished, to pave the way for a cheap replacement, which will never be any more than that.

The reason that so many beautiful old buildings have stood the test of time in Maitland, is not because the developers were knocked back, due to the historic significance. In my opinion it was because Maitland is on a floodplain, and it would not have been economically sound to invest in, so thankfully the beautiful facades of the 1800's in the High Street have survived, & hopefully will continue to do so. We do not want to lose our heritage. Hopefully when the gateway to the River opens in January, the owners of these beautiful old relics will give them a much deserved makeover.

Another striking bank building is the ANZ corner of Elgin and High Sts. which is now Taylors, a specialty shop of everything gorgeous. At Christmas, every year, the ballroom upstairs is lit up with fascinating lighting and amazing decorations. To visit upstairs when opened, is an education, just to see how bank managers lived in such luxury. In more recent times managers chose not to be living so close to their customers, and instead usually bought a house in a nice suburb.

Rourkes saddlers had this large handmade timber horse, wearing a gorgeous leather saddle, residing in the window, and the smell of leather wafting out. It is a beautiful old building, thankfully still standing, but needing some love.

Barden and Ribee were also saddlers in High St. The Thai restaurant operates from the premises these days. Horses were a big commodity in the early days of Maitland's history, the only form of transport for country people.

We had three Greek cafes in the fifties, Maitland, Boronia and the Paragon, there were no restaurants to take your girlfriend to in those days that I knew of. There was the blue room

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which catered for parties and wedding receptions, it was upstairs at the Albany tearooms, situated opposite J.F O'Brien's, on the corner of the right approach to the old Belmore bridge. Hotels weren't considered nice places for ladies, and they didn't have diningrooms, only drinking parlours.

There were many hotels back then, too numerous to mention; men would have a drink or two with their mates on their way home from work. Small bottles or cans hadn't been invented then, only large bottles of beer that you'd take home in a sugar bag for a celebration.

Allsopp's were a speciality store of quality goods, lots of lovely timber drawers which when opened, displayed beautiful quality leather gloves & wallets, amongst other quality merchandise, including beautiful linen. There was always a member of the family, whether it was an Aunt or nephew serving in the shop.

The Misses McLeod's were opposite the post office but a couple of doors further up the street. It was an extremely popular hat and accessory shop, where most people who shopped in Maitland, and especially if they had bought an outfit from Miss Phillips, would take it up and have it matched with a hat, as everyone wore hats on special occasions in those days. McLeod's stocked good brands in all the latest styles and fabrics fashionable for the season. There were many on the staff & there was a workroom out the back, where milliners decorated plain hats to a customer's liking. These were supposed to be one offs, so imagine the disappointment on the face of a customer who spied another of McLeod's customers wearing the exact same hat and meeting it at church, or in town. Men and women mostly wore hats whenever they left the house.

Several solicitors, who come to mind were Enrights, Hills and Vile. Architects were Scobie's and Pender's.

Thomas Reid was an optometrist and had his rooms on the ground floor of Scobie's chambers. I can recall he bought our baby Austin seven car, when he first came to Maitland. My Father was a carpenter, and moved from town to country town, building hotels, post offices and convents with Wally Howarth and his team of carpenters. I was only a baby eighty years ago, and a cot was built by Dad to fit tightly across the back of the car. I don't know whether I travelled in it or maybe it was taken out for each hotel they stayed in. There weren't many cars on the road back then.

McDonalds book and stationary shop is still operating and hasn't changed much in many years; the iconic black boy started life in front of McDonalds as a hitching post.

Pandora library, was a small lending library, which also had an exquisite small range of treasures that were so tempting, that my first Christmas present to my Mother after I started work was a large plate in the shape of a lettuce leaf. Another celebratory gift, I bought later on, was a framed picture of a beautiful Italian girl's profile. What a hoarder or sentimentalist, after all these years I am now the owner and custodian of both.

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There was George Galtons, another large department store. If you wanted a special item of clothing or accessory you would start perusing the stock at Kerr's then George Galtons. Kerr's was your best chance for a luxurious item.

Just about opposite Galtons was a wonderful cake shop, called the Dutch cake shop, the small petit fours coated in real dutch chocolate were exquisite, you couldn't allow yourself to just buy one. The chocolate delicacies the Ruygrok family made at Easter were exclusive to this talented family. You couldn't buy them anywhere else.

To memory three jewellery shops operated at the same time, Baileys, Wimbles and Diamond's owned by the Whitaker family from Newcastle. Baileys have recently moved down the street. Their store has recently been demolished to make way for the entrance to the levee.

There were two menswear shops, owned by old Maitland families, Ken Lanes and Harvey's. Harvey's had moved further up High Street in the last few years, but have only recently closed to make way for a pie shop. Lanes is now run by Ken's grandson.

Maitland had at least three other chemists, Ernie Jakeman's, later taken over by Doug Galbraith, Morris pharmacy and Soul Pattinson.

There were several real estate agents, one was popular Jack Peters, which is still operating by son Tim, and another was Joe Idstein who closed his business in recent years.

Numerous other interesting shops were in High St. as it was a thriving metropolis in the 40's, 50's & 60's catering to city and country women alike.

Monday was a very hectic day, as country women shopped in town, while their husbands attended to business at the saleyards, later socialising with their mates at the family hotel nearby. Buckleys owned and ran the hotel back then. My very good friend was, (and still is) daughter Georgeina, named after her father. Her Mother Mollie Heuston's family previously owned and ran the premises.

The Savoy picture theatre, which featured an art deco exterior and decor was a popular courting venue, as there wasn't any other entertainment in a country town other than to go to the movies. I remember during a show, the usherette would shine her torch along the aisles, concentrating intently on the back rows in the stalls. I guess from her experience she knew what might have been going on back there. I'm not sure what she could do about it after the discovery, maybe a few stern words or worse, throwing them out of the theatre.

The "Palace" was a magnificent theatre, bigger than the "Savoy" The staircase at the "Palace" resembled the iconic staircase in the plantation mansion from "Gone with the Wind". That's how I remember it, anyway. Usually a mature usherette would be standing at the foot of the stairs ready to usher you upstairs to your seat in the dress circle. Choc tops or jaffas were definitely the treat to have at interval. I can remember going to a movie at the "Regal" in Newcastle to see the coronation. I was probably sixteen and we went with a

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younger set. I wasn't used to specific attention from a boy, however I realised he fancied me when he bought me a box of jaffas at interval. On opening the box the jaffas escaped & to my embarrassment proceeded to bounce down the wooden stairs. The Palace theatre is now operating as K Mart.

Just before the approach to the old Belmore bridge and behind the Belmore hotel was a popular service station called Sim Bros. Jack Vine and Neville Cracknell, brother of Adele Cockburn and cousin to Ruth Cracknell our wonderful Maitland born actress, were employed there, possibly as mechanics.

I can recall several Doctors in town, Dr. James Stewart, and Dr. Solling, with Dr. Bradley who practised in Solling's residence opposite the court house. It is still standing and is now a cafe called Moreish. Dr. McNamee was also in residence towards the eastern end. His daughter Holly is back in town, painting historic buildings on canvas and can be located at Brough House.

Doctor Bonnor's surgery later became the surgery of Dr. Barfield, which was originally built by David Cohen for the Commercial bank's use.

There was Dr. Accola the ophthalmologist I went to from babyhood. He operated on me twice, first when I was nearly two, to correct the lower eyelash from growing up over my eye. I was too young to spell or know the names of the letters so Doctor asked me to write what I could see on the screen on my upper leg. The second operation was when I was five to do minor surgery on the same eye to try and correct my stigmatism.

The court house is also a lovely building, with the curved glass windows which I have been terrified would get smashed as they could never be replaced to match the original ones.

The repertory theatre started in 1947. I remember a small group of us met in a loft near Maitland hospital in the early fifties. Nell Manning met Doug Pyle at the Rep's second meeting, they later married, and are now both in their mid nineties. Nell and her Mother were friends of my parents when I was a child, for years they walked two houses, down to our house in Dee St. on Christmas eve to share the time with my parents whilst waiting for we three kids to go to sleep. I was good at pretending, as I feel sure lots of children were.

I loved handkerchiefs, and also Nell, and used to shop for a lovely picture hanky to give her each Christmas.

Nell & Doug have been wonderful ambassadors for Maitland all of their lives, both school teachers. Nell has been awarded an OBE, as well as other significant awards. In my opinion they have earned their place in Maitland's hall of fame, when it is up and running.

Cohens warehouse, a magnificent three story edifice and the pride of Maitland, unfortunately it got burnt down except for the ground floor, still standing to-day. It is east of the Tech. College.

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The Town hall was built in 1890, another lovely building; the dance floor has magnificently sprung tallow woodfloors, a wonderful compliment to ballroom dancers. Balls were held often, all through the winter months, women dressed in beautiful evening wear, men wore tuxedos. The first electricity was introduced to Maitland town hall in 1922; it was installed at the entrance.

The piece de resistance in Maitland was Miss E. Phillips, a small exclusive boutique run and owned by two sisters Miss Joyce Phillips & Mrs. Parker.

Display windows were on either side of a tiled entrance. The glass bevelled panels were joined with brass inlaid strips which I feel the sisters polished with brasso. Their display in both windows was unique for the times. Only one outfit, displayed with all the accessories in each window, very exclusive. The Phillips sisters had beautiful taste I must admit. It must have been hard on their Mother when they were growing up as she had to go out cleaning to make ends meet. They surely wouldn't have been able to have their tasteful fantasies met when they were teenagers.

On entering, one was met by a straight faced madam which could have been either one. "What can I help you with to-day" was the greeting. The shop was a foil really, although there was a rack of clothes down either side. Each outfit placed under a dust jacket. After a customer nervously announced what occasion she was shopping for, Madame would disappear out the back coming back with just the very outfit for you. "Do try it on" she'd say, waiting with tape measure and pins, in case the need for an alteration which would be done on the premises for a small amount of course. "Oh, that's just right for you my dear". Didn't matter whether you liked it, & there was never any choice. One wasn't allowed to go out the back to make their own selection. That was taboo.

Customers found it difficult to just walk out. They had to buck up the courage to go in in the first place having exhausted all other avenues in Maitland. Because the outfits cost so much the newly outfitted lady felt obliged to tell her friends "I bought this at Miss Phillips". Oh! they would say.

If you bought an outfit from Miss Phillips you were assured it was a Model. Maybe this was a fallacy otherwise why weren't you allowed to go beyond the showroom. Could it be that you would see all the exclusive models, in other sizes & maybe the clever business women made sure the replicated outfits were sold to ladies who lived out of town & weren't attending the same wedding or function, so the truth would never be known. They knew everyone that came into the shop.

I rarely shopped at Miss Phillips, as I was making my own clothes. I did purchase a beautiful french blue velour overcoat the winter before I was married in 1958. It came in very handy the winter that David was born, end of August 1959.

Years later, when Joyce would have been ready for retirement, sadly the shop was burnt down. Not many people remember this, although they do remember the fire starting in the

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kitchen of the Maitland cafe next door to the Misses McLeod's years before, which nearly burnt McLeod's down. The Miss Phillips fire I felt was a terrible shame, as I never got to find out what was hidden in the forbidden back room. Mrs. Parker had retired a few years earlier, as well dressed women were gradually becoming rarer, due to clothes becoming more casual, so this iconic business was no longer the top shop it once was.

This was indeed the end of an era.

Helen O'Brien will be known to many members of the Maitland community. A local girl, she was a dressmaker in Sydney and also roamed around north-west NSW as a "bank wife" with her late husband Reg, to whom she was married for 58 years. They returned from Castle Hill and Helen is back in the family home that her father built in the 1920s. She is involved with many local organizations and, as mentioned, has been taking writing classes with U3A.

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The ladies' dress shops in Maitland during the 1950s catered for a clientele which was expected to be fashionably dressed on all social occasions, and Maitland's own Australian Clothing and Textile Museum, or AMCAT for short, which was established in 2005 in great part due to Helen O'Brien's great friend Nell Pyle, preserves many examples of elegant style from the 50s and other decades. Helen has put together a display of hats and accessories from the 50s and 60s which is on display at the East Maitland Public Library through the end of November.

The following photographs show fashions from the beginning and end of the 1950s. The first, from the State Library of NSW, shows the 1953 ladies' section of Winn's Department Store in Hunter Street Newcastle. Reportedly, one of the ladies in this photo resembles Miss Phillips during the same period.

The second photograph from 1959 shows (l-r) Georgeina Buckley, and sisters Wanda and Lynette Earl, all fashionably dressed and with the requisite hats. This photograph was taken at the CWA Younger Set state convention.

If Helen O'Brien's article has sparked some Maitland memories of your own why not write them down!

You might be interested in reading about an earlier period of Maitland's High Street. Val Rudkin's "Who! What! Where! People of 19th Century High Street, Maitland" is available from the Historical Society.



From **Bulletin Vol. 4 no. 7** (October 1980) John Gillies, by Professor L. E. Fredman.

John Gillies (1844-1911), newspaperman and politician, was born at Airdrie, Scotland on 6th March 1844, the son of John Gillies and his wife Janet *nee* Mathieson. Arriving in Australia in 1848 he was educated in Maitland NSW and at the age of 13 he was apprenticed as a compositor on the *Maitland Mercury*. He became so proficient at his trade that he won intercolonial speed contests. In 1875 he became a part proprietor and general manager of the paper. (Under his guidance it became a daily in 1893).

By 1888 he was one of the most prominent citizens in West Maitland. The offices he then held included Alderman and Mayor elect (1889-1890), Justice of the Peace, Secretary-Treasurer of the Volunteer Water Brigade, President of the Rowing Club and Floating Baths Co., President of the Rugby Football Club, Vice-president of the Gymnastic Club, Committee of the Hospital, , School of Arts, Jockey Club, and Hunter River Agricultural and Horticultural Association, and trustee of a Building Society and the local branch of the Savings Bank of NSW.

As Mayor his name was carved on the cornerstone and over the porch of the new Town Hall which was officially opened in February 1890. It was mis-spelled by the mason ("Jonh') and has never been changed. There was no surprise in his election to Parliament for West Maitland in 1891. He was easily returned at the seven elections until his death with the exception of 1904 when he narrowly defeated the prominent J.N. Bruncker, former minister and member for East Maitland, for the newly amalgamated seat of Maitland.

The key to his Parliamentary career was popularity and service to the city. His frankly acknowledged indifference to party precluded ministerial office. In his first speech in July 1891 he declared himself an independent with Free Trade sympathies and drew attention to the neglect by past governments of the floods which periodically ravaged the lower Hunter River. He supported Dibbs, a Protectionist, on a censure in September, 1892; Reid, Free Trade, after the election of 1894; helped to defeat him in September, 1899; continued to support Lyne, Protectionist; and after 1905 supported the revived Liberal party under Carruthers. In one of his last speeches in November, 1910 he declared himself a member of an independent third party and added in bantering manner that others described him as looking after the interests of Maitland and generally behind any government.

Usually he called himself and stood as an independent. As Maitland's MP he secured several impressive public buildings – a Court House; the Hospital; Technical College; Boys High School; and a river embankment. The latter was his personal cause. In a long speech justifying his defection he attacked the Reid government for their lack of attention to Newcastle and Maitland works. Local folk would long remember the record flood of 1893 when the Hunter River changed course and reached 37 feet at Belmore Bridge.

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Gillies died suddenly at his Maitland home on 23rd September 1911. The impressive funeral cortege and statements further attest his popularity and the impact he had made on the district where he had grown up and which he served so vigorously. The Water Brigade in uniform with their boat, the “Jack Gillies”, underlined the importance of flood mitigation for citizens and in the public career of their MP. He left a widow, the former Margaret Frost Mair whom he had married in 1865, and 5 children. In 1968 his name was more recently commemorated when the township of East Greta near Maitland became Gillieston Heights.



Professor Lionel Fredman

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From **Bulletin Vol. 15 no. 4** (December 1991) More About Maskell (plus a correction) by P. Newcombe

In the previous issue of this bulletin, your editor made a reasoned speculation on the precise location of William Maskell’s oil bore. On the evidence to hand, it seemed as though the bore was on the eastern side of the swamps, nearer to Gillieston Heights than the Ravensfield Quarries.

Forget it.

This is what’s happened since the last edition came out. Long-time Society member Henry Armstrong sent your editor a note just before Christmas. Henry is an “Old Farley Boy”, and he passed along some useful information. He recounted visits on horseback to the Maskell property when he was a youth, and of unsuccessful efforts to scale the oil derrick. This goal was never achieved; in August 1952 he discovered that strong westerly winds had toppled the structure. Your editor and the secretary paid a social call to the Armstrong home after

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Christmas, and Henry kindly offered to point out the precise location of the bore and the Maskell's house.

Like so many old things, once something is pointed out to you it seems so obvious; Maskell's bore is easy to pinpoint because the steel derrick *is still there!* It is lying on its side as it has been for almost forty of its sixty-five (or more) years, and it is most definitely on the western side of the swamp. It is also most definitely not 'half a mile' from the East Greta mine site. Never trust a journalist to guess distances! To be fair, though, it should be pointed out that the swamp area is quite featureless, and the derrick was a structure of considerable height. Misjudging the distance of such an object in that environment would be no trouble at all.

When you look down Owlpen Lane towards the swamps, the bore site is to the right of the lane. From a bit more map study, it is about 1 ½ kilometres from the bend in the lane. There is no public access beyond this point, and the site is on private property. No trace of the demolished Maskell home can be seen from that distance. It was located among trees on a low rise, opposite where the Wentworth Swamps Sewage Treatment Works now stands. While pointing out the fallen structure and home site, Henry also mentioned that the bore was closely examined in the 1950's. This may have been done by the Sun Oil people, who drilled nearer the Ravensfield quarries.

William Maskell wasn't known to Henry, but he remembered Alice Maskell, whom he described as a very kindly woman. This view was also expressed by an old friend of the secretary who had known her. A short newspaper obituary sighted since the last bulletin mentioned her enthusiastic work for her church.

All this still leaves William Maskell a rather shadowy figure, living his elder years with an implacable belief that there was oil just beyond his reach. It is, as Henry described it, a story of great pathos.

An investigation of official records has shed some light on the man. He was born in the Lambeth area of London, and was the son of a school inspector. He married in the London area about 1908, apparently shortly before emigrating to Australia. There were no children of the marriage. Doubtless there is a good deal more information to be uncovered. Doubtless also finding it will be like the Anglo-American inventor Hiram Maxim described the possibility of a flying machine in the 1890's "it is only a matter of some time and much money."

Thanks to the kind words and information, Henry. Thanks also for reminding this author that asking the membership often helps answer questions!

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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.