

Maitland and District Historical Society Inc.

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Museum and Galleries Hunter Chapter



The 2022 Maitland Area Floods

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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 of Phoenix Park from the Morpeth Bridge 7 July is by Heather Berry.

Telephone : 0468 438 990 note this is a new number

Email : maitlandhistorical@gmail.com

Website : <http://www.maitlandhistorical.org>

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

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

Committee meetings are held on the third Tuesday of even months from 5:30-7.00pm.

General meetings are held on the third Tuesday of odd months from 5:30-7.00pm.
Members are invited to attend all monthly meetings.

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

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

COVID 19 update: The rooms are normally open to members and visitors between 11 and 3 on Wednesdays and Saturdays, although NSW regulations might alter.

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Bulletin contributions are being sought. Please contact the Society via email
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Editor's Notes:

One of the benefits of being the Bulletin editor is in bringing people's attention to good news. In this year's Queen's Birthday Honours list our president Kevin Short was awarded an OAM for his many community services. Well deserved.

In the May Bulletin we presented the second half of Val Rudkin's article on the composer/performer Guglielmo Enrico (William Henry) Lardelli. On 18 June a piano recital was held at Sun Street Studios, Maitland, during which Erin Sweetman played Lardelli's "Mina Waltz" to acclaim. It may be noted that in 2021, Erin had played Harry Hyndes' "Mindaribba Waltz" at a musical soiree in the same venue. Maitland is fortunate to possess a pianist of her ability.

I confess a *mea culpa*. In my May Bulletin article on Trinity House, Lochinvar, I had written that Clara Ann Clift was born in 1858 at *Clifton*. Tony Clift, who had supplied her photograph, has noted that this was impossible. In his article on *Clifton*, which is in this Bulletin edition, he places the construction dates for *Clifton* as 1861/62. Tony has investigated possible locations for Clara Ann's birth and has narrowed the options to three: her parent's (Dixon) property at Hexham, *the Breeza Station*, or a lying-in hospital in Maitland. Tony has said that the location of Clara Ann's birth may remain a mystery unless her family has more details.

In this Bulletin we start off with a timely article by Chas Keys on the recent floods in the Maitland area.

Maitland's Flood of July 2022: Significant but not Catastrophic

By Chas Keys

The flood in summary

The floodwaters have gone, though not their consequences, and it's time to look at what Maitland experienced during the first half of July, 2022. We need to put what happened in context and work out what we can learn from the event to build a more flood-resilient future.

First, how big was the flood? At the Belmore Bridge gauge the Hunter River peaked on Friday, 8 July at 10.41 metres as the thirteenth-highest flood known since 1820. That made it well short of the great floods of Maitland's history – those of 1955 (12.1 metres), 1949 (10.96 metres) and 1893 (11.16 metres). But it was the highest flood ever recorded in Maitland in the month of July, and it was a very big flood on the Wallis Creek system from which many of the

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significant consequences derived. Most of the Hunter Valley had been well primed for flooding after several months of above- average rainfall, courtesy of La Niña, and a flood in March from which the floodplains still had high levels of soil moisture. Runoff to the streams from further heavy rainfall was bound to be strong because the soils had little water-absorbing capacity remaining.



The Queen's Wharf area, Morpeth 7 July (by Heather Berry)

The flooding was triggered by a low-pressure trough that lingered along the New South Wales coast for about a week from late June. Three 'cells' (east coast lows) formed within the trough. The first of these brought about the drenching of the South Coast and the second and third brought significant rains to the catchments of a number of tributaries of the Hunter River — especially Wollombi Brook and Black, Anvil, Fishery and Wallis creeks.

The last two cells caused huge falls over the catchments of Wallis and Fishery creeks. These caused Cessnock Rd to be cut at Testers Hollow, a common occurrence, and shortly afterwards between Gillieston Heights and the Maitland Railway Station roundabout. The Maitland bypass (Les Darcy Drive to the New England Highway) was also closed. There was very heavy rain over the Wollombi catchment, the floodwaters from which brought the flood to its eventual peak at the Belmore Bridge. Lesser falls in the last of the three rain events caused rises on the Paterson and Williams rivers which enter the Hunter from the north.

Overall, the flooding in the Maitland area had many parallels with what happened in 2007 as a result of the so-called 'Pasha Bulker' flood. It was also something of a junior version of the flood of June, 1949, one of the most

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significant floods of Maitland's history. All these three floods were caused by east coast lows, the predominant weather mode that produces winter flooding in the Hunter Valley. On each of these occasions the heaviest falls were over the catchments of the southern tributaries.

Things could have been much worse this time around had the rainfalls been like those of Kangaroo Valley on the South Coast, where more than 800mm was recorded in three days in the first of the three rain events, or at Brisbane which a few months ago saw more than 1100mm (roughly the city's annual average precipitation) in a similar period. In the 24 hours to 9am on 10 July, Taree had 307mm – its heaviest one-day fall for 140 years.

This time only small portions of the Hunter catchment had very large falls. In 1955, almost all of it (except the areas drained by Wollombi Brook) was severely hit. Back then in Maitland there were huge flows down the Oakhampton Floodway and more than 20 houses in Mount Pleasant St were destroyed. Parts of the Long Bridge collapsed. The rather primitive levees of the time were breached in many locations and the damage done to dwellings and commercial interests was massive. Recovery was long and painful.

In the scheme of things the 2022 event was not a devastating flood. But it had unpleasant consequences of considerable significance to some in the community (in particular farmers and those who were cut off), and it is a reminder that floods still matter. As it happens we have had, by Maitland's standards, a relatively flood-poor period since about 1980, and the fact that we have had five floods over the past 18 months may suggest that we have entered a more flood-rich era. Our history over the last century and a half is one of roughly 30-40 year periods of flood richness followed by 'flood poverty' for similar lengths of time.

Within these long periods there appear to have been shorter 'sub-cycles': Maitland had five years (2016-21) when no floods were recorded at all at the Belmore Bridge gauge, and now we have had five in less than 18 months. Between 1949 and 1955 we had flood after flood after flood, and several were severe including the defining and most disastrous flood of our history, 'the 1955'. 'Clusters' of floods occurring in quick succession, followed by long periods with none at all, are the Maitland norm. This is also the case elsewhere in Australia.

And every now and then we get a really big one, just as Lismore did earlier this year. We should not forget that: big, invariably disastrous floods are inevitable, even if they don't occur frequently. They are part of the Maitland experience, and sometimes they overwhelm us and our coping strategies. Our levees, which have performed well for well over half a century, will one day be overtopped. Indeed they are designed to be – in rare, very large but nevertheless certain-to-

happen floods.

We should recognise that the 1955 flood will one day be exceeded in height and severity, just as Lismore's long-standing flood-height record of 1974 was exceeded a few months ago. All records in nature, after all, are destined to be beaten eventually.

We should also know that winter, a time of year when east coast low-pressure systems strike frequently along the coast of New South Wales, is at the time of writing not over. The ground is saturated and another rain event now could plunge us right back into flood conditions. Indeed heavy rain over the upper Hunter during the first week of August caused another fresh in the river, with rises of about five metres at Singleton and three metres at Maitland.

The consequences of the flooding

The flooding caused substantial problems for two groups of people – the farmers on the floodplain and those (farmers and others) who were isolated for several days. In addition, many Maitland people experienced the inconvenience of congestion on the roads, with travel times much increased by comparison with normal times. In the valleys of Wallis and Fishery creeks and Wollombi Brook, the flooding was more serious in its impacts than that along the main stem of the Hunter River. Especially at Broke, on the Wollombi, the consequences were severe with massive erosional damage experienced on roads and to farmland.



Phoenix Park 7 July (by Heather Berry)

There was much inconvenience and substantial financial damage caused to farmers in the Maitland area. Farmland was inundated by cold floodwater, with negative implications for grass and crop growth: lucerne suffers root rot when

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subjected to lengthy inundation as it has been on this occasion. Vegetable crops, including pumpkins, grammas and potatoes, were ruined. In addition much fencing was damaged or washed away, sheds and farm machinery were damaged and hay lost. There were significant livestock welfare and evacuation issues as well, particularly with cattle and horses (some livestock had to be rescued from floodwaters), and in the aftermath of the flooding many farmers are having to hand-feed their animals. They are also piling up vegetative debris from their fences and paddocks, burning it and hoping to get back to farming their land before too long. Some low-lying areas, still inundated more than a month after the peak of the flood, will be out of production for many weeks.

The State Emergency Service conducted many rescues of people who were cut off. A few, with children, were in circumstances involving some privation. As always, roads were cut throughout the Maitland area, with many people from Luskintyre to Millers Forest completely isolated for varying lengths of time. Among them were the residents of Gillieston Heights who experienced their first bout of days-long isolation since the 'superstorm' flood of 2015. Oakhampton Heights was also cut off for a while, as was Hinton.

Before 2015, the 'new town' suburb of Gillieston Heights had never been cut off from access to Maitland: its only access problem appeared to be from the flooding of Testers Hollow which has occurred, on average, about every 2-5 years for decades and cuts off access to the south. In 2015 there were serious problems of food supply given that the then sole shop (a takeaway-cum-bottleshop) on Cessnock Rd quickly ran out of supplies. Now there is a small supermarket, but it was quickly stripped of meat, bread, milk, eggs and other items. It had to be resupplied – and this was possible only intermittently – by the volunteers of the State Emergency Service in floodboats.



Maitland Park/South Maitland (courtesy Eugene Koen)

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The new pharmacy and the medical centre had difficulties in staff getting to work and in the pharmacy's case in maintaining stocks of medications. One fast-food outlet, unable get staff in to run or supervise operations, could not trade for days. Two others needed to be supplied by floodboat, the SES keeping them going. Gillieston Heights has more retail and service self-sufficiency now than it did in 2015 — but it is still a 'dormitory' suburb heavily reliant on services provided in central Maitland and at Green Hills in East Maitland. Prices for groceries bought locally from the small IGA store are usually higher than elsewhere, a problem for low-income people. Pet foods and medicines, like their equivalents for humans, ran out and stocks could not be speedily replenished.

Parents had to continue to pay child care fees to keep their children's day care places even though they could not get them to day care for a time. Some people came down with COVID-19 and had to 'isolate in isolation'. Others were forced to use up their annual leave, and some people simply ran out of money and had to rely on charity for food. Specific food items important to the diets of some individuals (including children) became unavailable until they could be brought in by floodboat or Unimog (a high-clearance army vehicle).

There were medical problems made more problematic because of the fact that Gillieston Heights was cut off. A baby with breathing problems had to be taken to hospital by floodboat and a small child with tonsillitis needed to be taken away for attention. A COVID-affected woman needed to have her baby's heartbeat monitored, a heavily pregnant woman had to be transported to Maitland by Unimog with her family, and a woman suffering from an infection after surgery needed help which could not be provided locally. No doubt there were other medical emergencies experienced by the residents of Gillieston Heights.

Meanwhile residents, including children, suffered the 'cabin fever' brought on by isolation — a common ailment when isolation is prolonged and normal routines, social contacts and work activities are disrupted. People had to postpone medical appointments, sometimes after long waits or for important ongoing treatment. Casual workers, unable to access their places of employment, did not get paid. For some in Gillieston Heights and other locations which experienced isolation, these problems were more than mere inconveniences.

All this is a reminder that flooding is not just about inundation. Isolation is also a significant issue that needs to be managed, but it is often little considered in the process of planning suburban development. Isolation can produce very severe consequences, especially medically. Indeed people can die because of delays in getting them to hospital when normal transport options are not available.

Or they can die as a result of driving into floodwaters. That happened in 2015 when an elderly Gillieston Heights woman, needing a litre of milk, drove to

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Maitland to obtain it. Her small car was washed off Cessnock Rd on the return journey and she drowned inside it. She could have sought help from the SES but sadly did not. This time, fortunately, nobody died.

In Australia, entering floodwaters is the most common cause of death during time of flooding. We seem unable to resist it. Most who do it survive, but a few do not. One of the flood myths of modern times is that four-wheel drive vehicles are safe to drive through floodwaters: this is definitively not the case. They are merely somewhat less vulnerable to being washed off roads than smaller, lighter vehicles.

Train services were suspended for several days, and for only the third time since they were constructed in the 1970s the floodgates to the west of the Maitland Railway Station had to be closed and sandbagged. Access to the Hunter Expressway was lost and the New England Highway was closed for days between East Maitland and Telarah. Driving on the New England Highway to Newcastle became frustratingly slow, as was also the case on local roads which became congested because other roads were impassable. Access between Maitland's eastern and western suburbs was difficult for days. The damage that was caused to road surfaces was considerable, but the council (having been 'declared' a natural disaster area by the higher levels of government) will be helped with the repair bill.

Despite the significant consequences including the restrictions to normal lives, residents of 'urban' Maitland proper were little affected beyond a considerable measure of inconvenience especially on the congested roads. Large-scale evacuation was not needed, but several rescues were. A small number of houses took in water over their floorboards.

Farmers have been the people most affected financially by this flood, as they almost always are, and they often cannot access the help they need from government. Others, particularly the residents of Gillieston Heights, will probably remember the flood as a time of frustration, boredom and 'stir craziness'. Some will feel it was worse than that. We should not underestimate the emotional burden some people have borne.

This was, in essence, a farmers', isolation and inconvenience event. Lives in numbers were not threatened. The economic costs have not been insignificant, but nor have they been of catastrophic proportions. Damage to the flood mitigation scheme has been substantial, and there was at one stage concern about the integrity of a portion of the ring levee protecting South Maitland where emergency sandbagging was required in advance of the permanent repairs to be made in due course.



Looking eastward from Maitland Park/The Showground towards East Maitland. (Photo courtesy Eugene Koen)

The psychology of isolation: the Gillieston Heights case

Gillieston Heights was cut off from all road contact with the outside world for nine days, and there were adverse impacts for the local population. There were many reactions psychologically, including anxiety, problems with sleeping, impatience, frustration and anger. People worried about how they would fare if power supplies were lost, as had happened in 2015: fortunately this did not occur in 2022. A prolonged power outage would have greatly exacerbated the challenges that people faced.



Looking southwards showing Gillieston Heights isolated in a sea of brown water. (Photo courtesy Eugene Koen)

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People's entries on Facebook illustrated how they felt during the flood. Those who could not get to work worried about how they would survive without their regular pay packets, and some who had international travel plans feared financial losses when they could not meet the arrangements they had entered into. Some, living secluded lives without family members living nearby or neighbours with whom they had personal contacts, had to ration their food and thus endured some hunger. Some elderly residents, not having computers or mobile phones, felt the isolation borne of not being able to keep in touch with the outside world.

The lack of garbage collection services saw rubbish pile up which worried many, as did not knowing when life would return to normal. Some expressed concern about the potential for fire breaking out, given that fire trucks would not have been able to gain access. Indeed at one point there was a fire in a caravan which might have spread to a nearby house. This led later to a demand for a fire station to be built at Gillieston Heights.

Not everybody coped well or easily with the inconveniences or the worries: some felt stress and a sense of not coping. Being cooped up with small children who became bored by having their own activities restricted was another source of frustration: some parents even offered up their kids on Facebook! There was some humour, even if only of the black variety, to be found in the situation. One man posted to Facebook that he had beer and would survive the period of isolation happily enough!



Phoenix Park 7July (by Heather Berry)

Most felt frustration and impatience nevertheless, and in some cases anger. The catalyst for most of this was brought about by the cutting of access at Testers

Hollow where the 'fix' under way for months came under criticism when it became clear that it would not completely solve the problem. Had the work under way before the flood been finished, the road south would still have been cut — which had not been clear to all residents even though public communication from the agency responsible for the upgrade had indicated during the planning for the raised road that full flood immunity would not be provided.

A bridge, built higher than the level of the proposed road (which at present is intended to be only a metre and a half higher than the current road level), was strongly touted at a public meeting held late in the period of Gillieston Heights' isolation, and the failure to plan and fund it was held up as an example of poor governmental planning. Old saws were peddled on Facebook, including the idea that had Testers Hollow been in Sydney the problem would have been fixed "long ago". Safe seats like Maitland's "get nothing", it was said, and the limited nature of the work being done at Testers Hollow was cast as "false economy" by many. One individual saw the excess water around Gillieston Heights as being "wasted" because of the lack of facilities to pipe it to the often drought-afflicted interior of the state (where, however, there was at the time no shortage of water). Others again advocated using Channel 9's 'A Current Affair' as a vehicle to publicise the problem of Testers Hollow in order to get improved government action. The whole situation, many felt, was a debacle. Gillieston Heights is impatient for a better solution than has been promised.

Not surprisingly, the mayors of Maitland and Cessnock joined forces in an attempt to lobby the state government for a better outcome at Testers Hollow. What is planned at present will merely make flood-induced isolation less frequent: it will take bigger floods to cut the road than has been the norm to date. That is not the same as fixing the problem completely. Indeed the current plan will mean that the road will be cut by flooding, on average, on a once-in-about-20-years basis. That would of course be preferable to closure on an average of once in two to five years, but it does not amount to full flood immunity.

Other matters brought out frustration, too. Angry complaints were levelled by some residents at members of emergency and governmental agencies as well as at the staff of the IGA when needed items ran out. 'Hooning' in cars and on motorbikes occurred on Cessnock Rd and caused concern to some residents. Interestingly, hooning had been noted in 2015 as well.

But for all the difficulties, there were some positives. The community events that were organised ('Show and Shine', the State of Origin TV night outside the IGA, the market day and kids' soccer and netball coaching) lifted morale, gave people

something to do and alleviated the boredom they were feeling. There was much gratitude expressed towards the SES and the St John's Ambulance, people who rescued and took in lost domestic animals and livestock, those who operated their own boats to ferry people and supplies across Testers Hollow, the volunteers who staffed the Community Hub, the people and firms that donated food and funds and the staffs of the fast food and IGA stores and the pharmacy. Many individuals were nominated for awards. The Council is likely to do something formal on this matter, and no doubt there will be awards made in the next Australia Day Honours list.

Some people were moved to appeal for later community get-togethers to be organised so as to build upon the close ties that had been formed between residents. In this, at least, some benefit had been found from all the inconvenience and privation that had been experienced. The community "pulled together" and made the most of a difficult time.

Questions asked, lessons learned

The flooding brought important lessons and questions for Maitland. Should there be a warning system for floods on Wallis Creek, the source so often of woe for farmers and a known threat to the bypass of Les Darcy Drive and its connection to the New England Highway? Should Cessnock Rd be raised not only at the traditional 'cut point' at Testers Hollow, but also between Gillieston Heights and the Maitland Station roundabout? Could building long bridges at these locations justify the extra expense, rather than raising the roads?

We should definitely be asking questions about the wisdom of developing new suburbs in areas where isolation is inevitable – for example at Wallalong, where large-scale suburban development was rejected a few years ago by the state's Department of Planning and Environment. It is still mooted by the original proponent and probably the Port Stephens Council, though, on a site which is cut off for kilometres in all directions when floods occur. Building roads to provide reliable road access there during flood times would be impossibly expensive. As things stand, Wallalong residents living there for their whole lives can be expected to be cut off several times.

The resupply problem for a Wallalong of 10,000 people (as distinct from the current community of rather more than 1000) would be huge. Moreover it would be experienced quite frequently: it takes only a relatively small flood to cut the community off by road in all directions. Delays in getting people to hospitals would inevitably be life-threatening on occasions. Floodboats cannot do the job as quickly as ambulances when the roads are impassable, and helicopters are not always available when needed. Sometimes they cannot fly because of the weather conditions.

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In 2015, there were several dangerous medical emergencies in Gillieston Heights. They had to be dealt with using a helicopter and SES floodboats. Two babies suffering breathing difficulties had to be taken by boat to the old Maitland Hospital and another baby, born premature, also had to go to hospital. A woman had a heart attack, another went into labour and a man slipped over on the wet ground and broke a hip. There were also veterinary cases when pets became ill or were injured.

Gillieston Heights at the time had 3000 residents and virtually no services locally: today there are probably nearly 5000 people living there and only quite basic services available locally. The number of people being exposed to the risks that isolation creates is getting larger.

Hinton has long had the problem of being cut off by floods. At such times it is served by the SES by floodboat in terms of emergency medical resupply and other urgent needs. A rudimentary commuting service is even provided as has also been instituted at Gillieston Heights during floods. Many farmhouses on the floodplain need to be checked upon during floods to ensure their residents are safe and not short of basic food supplies and medicines.

Is it wise to be creating new and larger suburbs that are certain to be cut off during flood times? Is it reasonable to ask the emergency services, including their many volunteer members, to bear the risks involved in serving the needs of ever larger numbers of people as the new suburbs develop? Are we magnifying the problems brought by isolation unnecessarily, and outstripping the capabilities of our emergency agencies?



The Queen's Wharf area, Morpeth 7 July (by Heather Berry)

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Disasters can see our communities at their best, people supporting each other and bonding taking place. Sadly, they can bring out the worst in people too as happens when looters take advantage of people who have had to evacuate from their homes. Thankfully, there appears to have been little if any of this during this flood.

It's important that we consider the issues raised by the isolation and inundation caused by floods. The Maitland area, much of it on floodplain land, will always have a flood problem. No mitigation investment will overcome that entirely. Strong population growth in the area is guaranteed — Maitland, after all, increasingly functions as an outer suburb of the growing metropolitan areas of Sydney and Newcastle — and this growth will create pressure for subdivision in areas which are certain periodically to be cut off.

The Maitland City Council, development-oriented as most councils are, welcomes additional development and the growth it brings, but growth brings problems too. It is not at all clear that we are managing this growth as well as we should. The same can be said of the Port Stephens Council in which Wallalong is located.



The Queen's Wharf area, Morpeth 7 July (by Heather Berry)

We must keep learning from our flood experience and instituting measures to contain and lessen the impacts. Floods will always happen in the Maitland area and we must consciously anticipate them and maintain and improve our readiness. We must also note that the flood we have just endured was not a big one by Maitland's standards. One day, we will 'do a Lismore' of earlier this year and experience an extreme flood possibly peaking at a much higher level than was reached by the fabled flood of 1955. In such a flood the levees that protect

the urban areas of central Maitland, Horseshoe Bend, South Maitland and Lorn will all be overwhelmed.

Sadly, that's inevitable — one day. It does not mean that our mitigation scheme is defective or poorly designed. It means that it is impossible to construct a scheme that is guaranteed to keep genuinely huge floods out. Huge floods happen rarely, but they do happen as Lismore has recently shown.

A huge flood hit the Maitland generation of 1955, when admittedly the levees were not as well designed or constructed as those of today. Without doubt, the time will come when another generation of Maitlanders will experience an even bigger flood than the 1955 one and even modern, well- maintained levees will not be able to exclude them. That generation might be the current generation, or it might be a generation of a long time in the future. A huge flood might come soon or not for many decades, even centuries. There is no way of telling when it might strike, only that it will strike at some stage. Climate change may be making the flood problem more serious, which is another factor to be considered in planning for future growth.

There have in the distant past been bigger floods than the flood of 1955. The truth of this is shown in the fact that parts of central Maitland that were not inundated in 1955 are covered in alluvial soils which can only have been laid down by floodwaters.

Last word

This flood was, at the Belmore Bridge, of a size that we can expect to occur there, on average, about once in ten years. Put differently, that means there is a 10% chance every year of such a flood being experienced there. As the thirteenth highest known at the site of the bridge since European settlement, this one was significant but far from devastating in its impacts. On the Wallis Creek (including Fishery/Swamp Creek) system, which drains an area of 400 square kilometres to the south and south-west of Maitland, the flood was rather rarer: indeed it might have been of a scale that can be expected in the Louth Park/South Maitland area only once in about 200 years on average. That means there is a 0.5 percent chance each year of a flood of the scale of July's being experienced in the area, and that chance came up in 2022.

It was the flooding from Wallis Creek that caused the most significant disruption to movement: this flooding was responsible for the isolation of Gillieston Heights from Maitland for nine days and the cutting of the New England Highway between East Maitland and Telarah. Water from the Hunter, though, closed the Melville Bridge and nearby roads across the floodplain. Only limited amounts of water from the Hunter flowed over or through the spillways of the Oakhampton

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and Bolwarra floodways and none flowed up Wallis Creek into Louth Park thanks to the floodgates just above the confluence of the creek and the Hunter River.

There was damage to the levees, stream banks, floodgates and rock revetment of the Hunter Valley Flood Mitigation Scheme in the Maitland area, though the dollar value of the damage has yet to be calculated. The flood of March 2022 did an estimated \$50 million worth of damage to which the damage done in July will have to be added when it has been estimated. Whatever the total damage from the two events is, it will be a sizeable proportion of the actual monetary value of the mitigation scheme (estimated at \$766 million in 2021) which extends up to Aberdeen and down to below Raymond Terrace.

The leakage of the ring levee near the Showgrounds was important given that it might have foreshadowed a failure of the levee had the flood on Wallis Creek reached a higher level or lasted for longer than it did. Fortunately the levee did not give way, but the incident should remind us of the potential for levee failure. No levee is completely immune from failure, or from being overtopped. This can be said of every artificial flood embankment in Australia.



Phoenix Park 7 July (by Heather Berry)

Noting all this, it must also be said that the mitigation scheme did its job: had it not been in existence, there is no doubt that floodwaters from Wallis Creek and the Hunter River would have entered parts of 'urban' Maitland and inundated substantial numbers of dwellings over their floors. The recovery costs would have been vastly higher than they have been, an indication of the genuine value of the scheme to the Maitland area and its people.

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The author acknowledges the input of Glynis Bramley-Moore, Heather Berry, Margaret Mitchell, David Taylor, Cameron Archer, Kevin Short, Robert Worboys and Maurine and Dal Osborn to this account.

Chas Keys is a former Deputy Director General of the NSW State Emergency Service and the author of two books about floods in the Maitland area (Maitland, City on the Hunter: fighting floods or living with them? (2008) and Maitland Speaks: the experience of floods (2020)). The first of these can be obtained from the Maitland and District Historical Society (Mob 0409 362097) for \$20, and the second from McDonalds Bookstore in High St, Maitland, for \$35. Stocks of the 2008 book are limited.

Clift's Folly

by Anthony G (Tony) Clift ©

The name *Clift's Folly* would probably mean little to even the most avid Hunter Valley historian, however it would be a different story if the name *Clifton*, at Lochinvar, was mentioned. The fact is both are names bestowed on the same building at different times.



Clifton - Circa 1926¹ (Viewed from the south west)

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Unfortunately, in regard to the early history of the structure, over time there has been considerable incorrect information written and in particular as to its date of erection. Even the Heritage Council of New South Wales places the date at 1850 in its recent publication of the *Hunter Estates*², but that reference is actually out by over ten years, and should more correctly be 1861/62.

So, unravelling the name, Cliff's Folly, and its origins requires delving into the life of Samuel Clift (Senior), the man who initiated its construction.



Samuel Clift (Senior)³

In 1825, he and his extended family came to the Hunter Valley⁴, initially to Jerry's Plains (near present day Singleton) and then in 1826 to Wallis Plains (Maitland)⁵, where he settled and prospered after his humble start in Australia in 1818 as a convict. His foundational interests in the Hunter Valley centred on primary production activities at Maitland, Jerry's Plains and Branxton together with a butcher's shop in East Maitland. Later his pastoral holdings expanded to squatting enterprises on the Liverpool Plains around Breeza and these he combined with inns (hotels) within and around Maitland plus land speculation in the Hunter Valley and further afield⁶.

His rise in fortunes seems all the more unlikely when one realises that he could not write and possibly not even read. His original Will and Testament written in 1854 plus new Wills and Codicils up to the final update in 1862 are all signed with an "X"⁷.

Amongst his later assets he purchased at least two subdivided portions of land south of Lochinvar from an original grant to Tom White Melville Winder⁸ of 2,000 acres (about 800 hectares) named Kaluda⁹. This sale occurred on February 15, 1860, when the trustees of Winder's estate, being George Wigram Allen and Robert George Massie, sold to Samuel Clift Lots A48 and A49 on the plan of subdivided land known as the *Cowhill Paddock*¹⁰. The consolidated area for these two parcels of land totaled 47 acres (19.02 hectares).

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Lot A48, with a size recorded later as 12 acres 1 rood 29 perches (4.927 hectares)[#], became the site of the residence later known as *Clifton*. This land fronted the Great Northern Road (Maitland to Liverpool Plains / New England Route) on its southern side while a private road led north from this main route past the site of the soon to be constructed building¹¹ and continued on to the village of Lochinvar. Later this private road became a public roadway, initially named Lochinvar Road¹² and later Station Lane¹³, due to it becoming the access road from the village to railway station.

Around this time and certainly by 1862, Samuel Clift owned other nearby lands including additional parts of the *Cowhill Paddock* subdivision and also the *Dunnering Paddock*[#], situated on the southern side of the Great Northern Road south-east of the later *Clifton* site¹⁴. His assets also appeared to have included the land on the western side of Station Lane that covered an area of about 42 acres (approximately 17 hectares)¹⁵ and may have run through to Portions 29 and 30 in the Parish of Allandale, which he also possessed¹⁶.

It seems that Samuel Clift held grand plans for his Lochinvar holdings and especially for Lot A48 (the *Clifton* site) and the *Dunnering* lands in particular. The route of the Great Northern Railway Line from Maitland to Singleton, and eventually further west, was proposed to run adjacent to the northern boundary of his newly acquired lands. Built on the northern side of the track, diagonally opposite the later site of *Clifton*, a pretty railway station[¶] complimented the line. The coming of the railway is strongly suspected as the motivation behind Samuel Clift's purchase of the subject lands with his aim of two major enterprises.

His first project came with the building of a hotel on his land near the station. His more speculative venture involved the proposed use of the nearby *Dunnering Paddock* on which he wanted to establish a major cattle and sheep saleyard complex, using the railway as a convenient means of transport for stock. This would be much more accessible and save local and western stock-owners significant time rather than having to drive their animals all the way to Maitland to be sold and would also give them the option of using the Sydney market. The owners, dealers, auctioneers, etc. could stay at and / or use the facilities of Clift's new hotel nearby.

To start the first project, he called for tenders, *via* the *Maitland Mercury* on October 30, 1860, for the erection of a house at the Lochinvar Railway Station¹⁷. (This station served the village of Lochinvar and its surrounding district for over a century but has since been demolished.) The period for submitting tenders was later extended to November 15 of that year, by a notice in the same newspaper¹⁸.

The actual builder has not been sourced however by mid-1861 the construction must have been progressing well as on July 23, 1861 Clift sought other tenders for carpenter's work of a kitchen and laundry for the property¹⁹. The successful tenders for this work were Henry Taylor and William Price with an agreement dated 22 June, 1861 for £1 5s. per perch²⁰ of 16 feet 16 inches²¹. The work resulted in several sequential

court cases due to a disagreement on alteration of the planned work during construction and the defining of a perch plus the intervening death of Samuel Clift. The initial verdicts favoured the tenders but a final challenge resulted in the plaintiff (now only Taylor) having to pay damages of £67 9s plus costs to the estate²².



Ann Clift (nee Duff)²³

By early 1862, the building must have been completed or very nearly finished for on March 1, 1862 Samuel Clift's wife, Ann, advertised ...

*To let, those new and substantial premises, containing fourteen rooms, situate at Lochinvar Railway Station, with good cellarage, stone kitchen with laundry, and servant's quarters over, and a six-stall stable. There is a large tank for water; attached is a Garden of ten acres, securely fenced with a paling fence. Apply Mrs. S. Clift, Maitland*²⁴.

It seems Samuel Clift's health must have been deteriorating badly at that time for his wife to be made the contact person for this advertisement²⁵. Those advertisements continued until April 19, 1862.

The next record of the actual building comes from the *Maitland Mercury* of March 26, 1862 with a report on the opening of the railway extension to Black Creek. It stated ... *Arriving at the Lochinvar station by a fine running we observed a pretty brick building behind it, erected by Mr. Clift, and intended for a public-house*²⁶.

The same paper of April 3, 1862 reported on Samuel Clift's projects for his Lochinvar properties in a detailed article²⁷.

IMPROVEMENTS AT LOCHINVAR.—We understand that Mr. S. Clift, who has erected a commodious hotel adjacent to the railway station at Lochinvar, purposes forming an extensive pleasure garden in connection with it, and the speculation is likely to be a successful one, as would seem to be indicated by the circumstance that the locality has already been selected for pic-nic purposes on public holidays. In addition, Mr. Clift contemplates entering upon an undertaking of a more important character. Having possession of the Dunning paddock, which is within a very short distance of the station, he purposes forming yards for cattle and sheep of sufficient size to meet the necessities of the largest flocks and herds, and furnished with every convenience adapted to secure the patronage of parties interested in the sale and purchase of stock. The extent of the paddock will afford advantages not readily obtainable near town, whilst the nearness of the railway will render the sale yards readily accessible; and stockowners who may find it to their profit to send to Sydney rather than sell in Maitland will save seven miles of driving, the paddock being about that distance nearer to the road to the Bulga.

As mentioned above, at the start of March 1862, the property at Lochinvar had been advertised for lease²⁸. Joseph Wagstaff appears to have taken up this offer, being recorded as the new proprietor of the premises then known as *Clifts Folly*²⁹ when he was granted a publican's license³⁰. Wagstaff previously held the position of a superintendent on the railway near Lochinvar and acted as paymaster for the men on the line³¹. His tenure at the hotel proved short for when visiting Maitland in early 1863 he overdosed on laudanum which he apparently took for treatment of pain, and died in a room at the *Harp of Erin Inn*. (Laudanum is an alcoholic solution containing morphine, prepared from opium and formerly used as a narcotic painkiller.) He was 37 years old and happily married with a family but when drinking to excess, he had been noted to become almost unconscious as to what he was doing³². It appears that after Joseph Wagstaff's death his wife continued with the running of the inn for a time but by the end of the year she had opened a boarding house in King Street, Newcastle³³.

Apart from the above usage some of the land associated with the inn was farmed for small crops, as an advertisement for auction of a growing crop of about three acres of pumpkins and gramma in a garden attached to the inn at Lochinvar Station appeared in the local newspaper in May 1863³⁴.

The origins and use of the name *Clift's Folly* are unknown. The term Folly, in Victorian times related more to frivolous fun and pleasure rather than its later connotation of silly or stupid, however some of the newer meaning may have applied because of Samuel's large expenditure on a possible risky enterprise.

The siting of the hotel so close to the railway would seem unfortunate and poorly planned. At the time, however, the trains were small in size and infrequent, while their

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passing provided a novelty for guests and convenience for travel and delivery of supplies. The poor condition of the local roads most probably influenced the decision for the building to be located right on the frontage to the road, like all similar commercial structures at that time. On major public holidays the Great Northern Railway ran extra “special” trains to Lochinvar³⁵ and it appears that the destination held an appeal for people seeking recreation.

The substantial plans for the property seemed to have been thwarted by Samuel Clift’s death at the age of 71 years, only four months later, when he succumbed to a long-standing bronchial ailment at his Maitland residence, *Bridge House* on July 19, 1862³⁶. In an update to his will, made just one day prior to his death, he referred to this property as ... *The new brick house at Lochinvar, kept as an Inn, and the garden land adjoining ...*³⁷, which confirms the hotel’s age as very young at that time and also that it functioned as an Inn and the extensive gardens were in situ. In the same document Samuel Clift left the property ... *to the use of my son Joseph Clift for his life and after his decease to his children in equal shares*. In principle this meant that Joseph Clift was only given a life interest in the property and held it for his children.

Samuel Clift’s untimely passing placed the development of his Lochinvar ventures in jeopardy and resulted in the saleyards scheme failing to proceed. Why one or more of his five sons did not take over the projects is unknown but as they had jointly recently purchased *Breeza Station*³⁸ from their father their business attentions may have been elsewhere. Perhaps they were sceptical of the success of the undertakings or may not have had available the significant extra capital necessary for the ventures.

It seems that the executors for Samuel Clift’s estate, no doubt after consulting family members, decided to auction the property on January 29, 1864 at *Eckford’s Family Hotel* in West Maitland and extensively advertised the event locally and in Sydney³⁹. How they intended to work around the provisions of Samuel Clift’s will is unclear. However, despite the auction publicity no sale resulted.

Again, on April 14, 1864, the property featured in another advertisement in the local paper calling for tenders for “*The Substantial Premises and 10 Acres of Land Near Lochinvar Railway Station*”. Part of the offering included an orchard plus the household furniture belonging to the premises. Interestingly the main building’s description stated that it was a dwelling house showing that the use of the property as an Inn had ceased by this time⁴⁰.

Again, a sale failed to eventuate and by mid-year it seems Joseph Clift, together with his wife and young family, came to permanently reside in his property, *Clift’s Folly Hotel*⁴¹, which he converted to the use of a town house. This decision may have been due to his wife’s delicate health, combined with eye problems that required her to be closer to medical facilities. (Reverend Glennie of Lochinvar often recorded Elizabeth Clift as being ill in bed and also suffering eye problems in his diary entries.) Another issue affecting the proposed sale could have been the terms of Samuel Clift’s will,

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which technically meant that Joseph Cliff could not legally sell it, so he may have decided to use it himself rather than have the tribulations of leasing the property.

More to follow in another edition on the history of the home after it became Joseph Cliff's residence ...

Footnotes:

[#] Interestingly it is understood that the land used by the NSW Railway Department was initially leased from the landowners, through whose properties the line passed. This may be why Lot (A)48, although having an initial area of 4.927 hectares (12 acres 1 rood 29 perches), was later recorded as having a size of 4.6007 hectares (11 acres 1 rood 19 perches), with the balance most probably forming part of land used for the rail corridor.

[#] When gold fever was rife in the colony in the 1850s the alluvial lands in Cliff's *Dunneering Paddock* and the adjoining land of Eckford's was speculated as a possible gold field as it was held to be similar to the Bingara gold field land. Ref: *Maitland Mercury* – 6 January 1859 p.2

^Ψ This station served the village of Lochinvar and its surrounding district for over a century but has since been demolished.

References:

¹ Image from family photograph album of *Clifton*

² Office of Environment and Heritage on behalf of the Heritage Council of New South Wales, *Hunter Estates - A Comparative Heritage Study of pre 1850s Homestead Complexes in the Hunter Region* Vol. 1 p.55

³ Cropped portrait of Samuel Cliff in possession of the Cliff family

⁴ Description and date of Samuel and Ann Cliff's pioneering journey to the Hunter Valley - Interview with James Ham, who accompanied the Cliff family to Jerry's Plains - *Maitland Weekly Mercury* – 5 September 1896 p.10

⁵ Wood, W Allan - *Dawn in the Valley* pp.104, 249

⁶ Cliff, AG – *The History of Breeza Station* (2018) pp.27-28, 149-152 plus additional research by the author

⁷ Copies in possession of the author

⁸ Department of Land and Property Information, NSW – Parish Map Preservation Project – 1885 Parish Map of Gosforth. This land was a long rectangular parcel that ran north-south adjacent to the eastern side of Lochinvar village.

⁹ Details supplied by locals to the then owners of *Clifton*, John & Claire Morrison – April 2004

¹⁰ Details of Title Deed recorded on the subject land as forwarded by the then owners (2004), John and Claire Morrison from conveyancing documentation registered and stamped on 25 February 1860 - Registered No. 577 Book 65

¹¹ History from the then owners of *Clifton*, John & Claire Morrison – September 2003

¹² Conveyancing document dated August 14, 1923 referencing to the subject property bounded by Lochinvar Road

¹³ The name change may have occurred after this part of the old Great Northern Road lost its prominence as the main route west from Maitland. Comments by AG (Tony) Cliff

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- ¹⁴ 4th Codicil of the Will of Samuel Clift – Signed on 18 July 1862
- ¹⁵ 1928 Photograph of Clifton shows an obvious link with this land and the house lot.
- ¹⁶ Department of Land and Property Information, NSW – *Parish Map Preservation Project* – Parish Map of Allandale
- ¹⁷ *Maitland Mercury* – 30 October 1860 p.1
- ¹⁸ Ibid. – 8 November 1860 p.1
- ¹⁹ Ibid.– 23 & 25 July 1861 p.1
- ²⁰ Note: A perch of masonry was defined as 18 inches wide, 12 inches high and 16 feet 6 inches in length. Reference: *Maitland Mercury* – 17 May 1862 p.2-3
- ²¹ *Maitland Mercury* – 17 May 1862 p.2-3
- ²² Ibid. – 20 May 1862 p.2 & 16 June 1863 p.2
- ²³ Cropped photograph of Ann Clift from the author's collection
- ²⁴ *Maitland Mercury* – 1 March 1862 p.1
- ²⁵ Speculation by AG (Tony) Clift
- ²⁶ *The Empire* (from the *Maitland Mercury*) – 26 March 1862 p.5
- ²⁷ *Maitland Mercury* – 3 April 1862 p.8
- ²⁸ Ibid. – 1 March 1862 Note: A summary of this reference only has been sited
- ²⁹ Ibid. – 14 June 1862 p.1 & June 17, 1862 p.1
- ³⁰ Ibid. – 12 June 1862 p.1
- ³¹ Ibid. – 3 February 1863 p.2
- ³² Ibid. – 3 February 1863 p.2
- ³³ Ibid.– 1 December 1863 p.1
- ³⁴ Ibid.– 16 May 1863 p.1
- ³⁵ Ibid. – 21 March 1861 p.1 *Note:* This reference is for an advertisement of a Special Train departing Lochinvar Station at 8:30 PM on Easter Monday.
- ³⁶ NSW Register of Births, Deaths and Marriages - Certified copy of Death Certificate of Samuel Clift dated July 25, 1978
- ³⁷ 4th Codicil of the Will of Samuel Clift – Signed on July 18, 1862
- ³⁸ On 29 March 1862 Samuel Clift sold *Breeza Station* to his sons, William, Joseph, James, Samuel (the Younger) and George Clift for the sum of £1701 5/- 3p. Reference: Original conveyancing document
- ³⁹ *Maitland Mercury* – 7 to 28 January 1864 & *Sydney Morning Herald* – 16 & 23 January 1864
- ⁴⁰ *Maitland Mercury* - 14 April 1864 p.1, 21 April 1864 p.1 & 28 April 1864 p.1
- ⁴¹ Reverend Glennie records their permanent residence on July 12, 1864. Reference: Ann & Malcolm Glennie Holmes – Transcription of the Journals (1863–1870) of Reverend Alfred Glennie p.30 – Newcastle Region Library
