

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



Rourke's Building, High Street, Maitland

Volume 19, Number 2

May 2012

*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:

Rourke's building, High Street, Maitland, built 1893.

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

Meetings are held at 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

Membership fees : \$15 (single) and \$20 (double / family)

Patron: The Hon. Milton Morris AO
NSW Member for Maitland 1956-1980
NSW Minister for Transport 1965 - 1975

Current Office Bearers :

President : Kevin Parsons **Vice Presidents :** Peter Smith, Keith Cockburn
Treasurer : Kevin Short **Secretary :** Tom Skelding
Bulletin Editor : Judy Nicholson **Consultant Editor :** Kevin Parsons

Bulletin contributions are being sought. Please contact the Society via email

maitlandhistorical@gmail.com

While every care is taken in the compilation and editing of the information contained in this bulletin, Maitland and District Historical Society Inc. and its editors do not accept responsibility for the accuracy of this information.

Committee 2012 - 2013

The Annual General Meeting of the Maitland and District Historical Society Inc. was held on 20 March 2012 at the Society's Rooms, 3 Cathedral Street, Maitland, commencing at 5.40pm.

Officers elected:

- President Kevin Parsons
- 1st Vice President Peter Smith
- 2nd Vice President Keith Cockburn
- Secretary Tom Skelding
- Treasurer Kevin Short
- Recorder Judy Nicholson
- Publicity Officer Ruth Trappel
- Bulletin Editor Judy Nicholson
- Research Coordinators Janis Wilton, Helen Denzin , Ziggy Szyda
- Technical Officer Kevin Parsons
- Committee Adele Cockburn, Elizabeth Martin
- Public Officer Dennis Martin
- Auditor Jennifer O'Neil

Janis Wilton moved a vote of thanks to the outgoing President Ruth Trappel for her outstanding commitment and leadership over the previous three years.



Outgoing President Ruth Trappel welcomes incoming President, Kevin Parsons.

President's Report 2011 – 2012

The Maitland Historical Society has now been functioning for 3 years, under the new committee. The years have been successful, we have research and display rooms at 3 Cathedral St Maitland and are open to the public on Wednesdays and Saturdays from 10 to 3. We have two meetings per month, the first Tuesday is our guest speaker night and the third Tuesday is our general meeting, both of which commence at 5.30.pm

We currently have more than 80 members and we are welcoming new members all the time.

We are in the process of cataloguing the collection onto Mosiac software . This will take a considerable time as our collection is quite extensive. The photo collection needs to be assessed and re housed. The ground floor collections room is constantly changing with different themes, relating to different events.

We are fortunate that we have been given some substantial collections during the last year. Milton Morris, our Patron has retired from Hunter Valley Training Co and we are privileged to be given his collection of memorabilia. Several of our early members, are passing on their collections as they sort through them, our thanks to Val Rudkin and Jack Jones. We have had members who have passed away during the year, Lloyd Bevan our treasured Secretary from the commencement of the new committee, Mavis Newcombe who was the secretary for many, many years, Jacki Youldon, who was an original member in 1977, we thank her husband Tim for passing onto us her Maitland history research. We thank Andrea, Lloyd Gregory's daughter who is still passing onto us more of her late father's collection to add to his already extensive collection. And we have a new sign thanks to Barry. The old shelving was repainted and installed as we were running out of space, the Maitland Regional Library have given us the Golden Threads collection of 9 panels on Chinese History and have donated 4 Display units. David Sciffer has digitised and given us many more old photos.

We have been involved /participated in the Taste and Aroma Festivals held in the Maitland Mall, where we conduct walking tours and help the general public with information, we also take folders of old photos and some old Mercury's for the public to browse through. The Australia Day Celebrations at the Maitland Park, Seniors Week, Steamfest where we are the Information booth, conduct walks and talk of history. Maitland Show (Hunter River Agricultural & Horticultural Association) where we sold copies of the 150th Anniversary book as well as our own collection of books. We were commissioned by the publisher and were involved in writing up many of the Cameos. The Maitland Mercury have given us many A3 copies of old photos to add to the collection. In October we were hosts to the Royal Australian Historical Society's Annual Conference, with a cocktail gathering and a stall at the conference rooms. November saw our involvement with our member Beryl in the Christmas expo for four days. On New Year's Eve we sold water on the river bank.

We had an enjoyable Christmas get together at Bill's rural home, where we were able to walk through his restored railway carriage. We manned a stall at the Maitland and District Family History Fair at Rutherford.

Maitland and District Historical Society Inc.

The current committee is very committed and we have the most wonderful group of members who work with each other to keep the Society growing and moving forward. They all have their own special interest and projects, they are interested in Maitland History and wish to promote it, through sharing their experiences and knowledge.

We have members who are on the MCC Heritage Group, The Jewish Cemetery Trust committee, Maitland Library Flood Oral History Project, Steamfest Committee, George Boyle White Steering Committee. We participate in the Les Darcy Restoration, Museum and Galleries Hunter Chapter, ABC Open, Friend of South Maitland Railway, Oral History Project. The High Street project is a long term commitment, from humble beginnings with Tom and Frank the project is expanding rapidly, with Janis and Joe from the Gallery and David and Graham researching the architecture and history, and the council and library becoming involved it is gathering momentum.

We are most grateful to Chic Cooper who is a life member and our benefactress who donated the first two years rent on our premises to enable us to get on our feet. Also to our generous sponsors and supporters, who have donated, office furniture, scan/printers, T.O Technology for the photocopier, Greg Dee for the frame work for the Galton's lead lighting, we are very fortunate to have so many people willing to help us.

Our guest speaker nights have proved most informative, and we have had a variety of presenters.

We do have to be mindful that we only have a 2 year lease on the building and this will hopefully be renewed in September when it falls due. We were always aware that the site would be re developed when we took this building on. We are running out of room, so we need to be aware that if a larger building was to become available that we need to start thinking about that possibility. Our other concern is that there are some of our members who are unable to climb stairs.

We have been asked to participate with a group of residents in investigating the possibility of a Maitland Museum. A meeting will need to be called shortly to gauge the level of community interest, support and participation.

We still have many things to do and accomplish but we are being recognised and the level of inquiries expands each month.

Thank you all for your continued support and commitment

Ruth Trappel

20th March 2012

Incoming President

Dear Member,

As the incoming president, I would like to say hello to you and thank you for being part of the Maitland & District Historical Society. Without your valuable membership and support, this society couldn't function as well as it does today.

I would like to briefly introduce myself. I was born in Newcastle and attended Lambton Public and Jesmond High schools. I then completed a Carpentry apprenticeship at Comsteel. Leaving there in 1982, I then worked for the then DMR (now RMS) and am currently employed with Boral Asphalt.

I currently reside in the Cessnock area but am married to a Maitland girl. I have also been involved with Community Radio, and am a current volunteer with Maitland City Council for events such as Maitland Steamfest. I have a strong interest in History and became a member of the society approximately 3 years ago. I have a working knowledge of computers and to date have used this knowledge to set up and look after the Society's computers and protocols.

I would also like to thank the original M&DHS for the collection they put together, thus giving us a foundation to build on.

Whilst it would be difficult for anyone to fill the shoes of our past president, Ruth Trappel and the outgoing committee, I will do my best and with the assistance of our incoming committee I believe that we will continue to grow and prosper.

If you haven't been to our rooms, I personally invite you to drop in on either a Wednesday or Saturday between the hours of 10 am till 3pm, public holidays excluded. Our membership is growing daily, so please make yourself known to our dedicated and friendly volunteers and share a cuppa with us.

In case you are not aware, our computers are set up for scanning and printing of material. We also have the facility to record audio and video of people and stories for our oral history programme. On record and display are numerous flood photos and memorabilia of Maitland, including the Galton Leadlight windows and other collections such as the Milton Morris Collection. We also have collections of Maitland floods, Oak films and various historical buildings of the district.

I look forward to meeting you.

Yours faithfully,

Kevin Parsons

Incoming President.

Rourke's Building

An article researched by Historical Society member Mr. Peter Bogan and published in the Maitland Mercury of 17 April 2012, during *Heritage Week*, prompted some discussion among Historical Society members regarding the Rourke's building and business, the scene of the execution of William Moore. Apart from the infamy of being the location of a murderer's hanging, the Rourkes and their business represent an enduring Maitland success story.

More details of the Rourke family and their long-established business are outlined below:



News → Local News → News → General → Barbarous murderer hanged in High Street

Barbarous murderer hanged in High Street

HERITAGE WEEK
17 Apr, 2012 03:55 PM



On February 1, 1838, a gruesome murder took place in High Street when a butcher was killed by his convict-assigned servant. The killer was seen shortly after licking the blood off the knife that was the murder weapon, telling all those around him how good it tasted. For his punishment, it was decided he would be hanged in High Street. Research by PETER BOGAN.

While High Street, Maitland, is well known for its historical buildings it has long been forgotten that it was once the place of a public execution.

Convicted murderer William Moore was hanged on the site where he murdered his master John Hoskins.

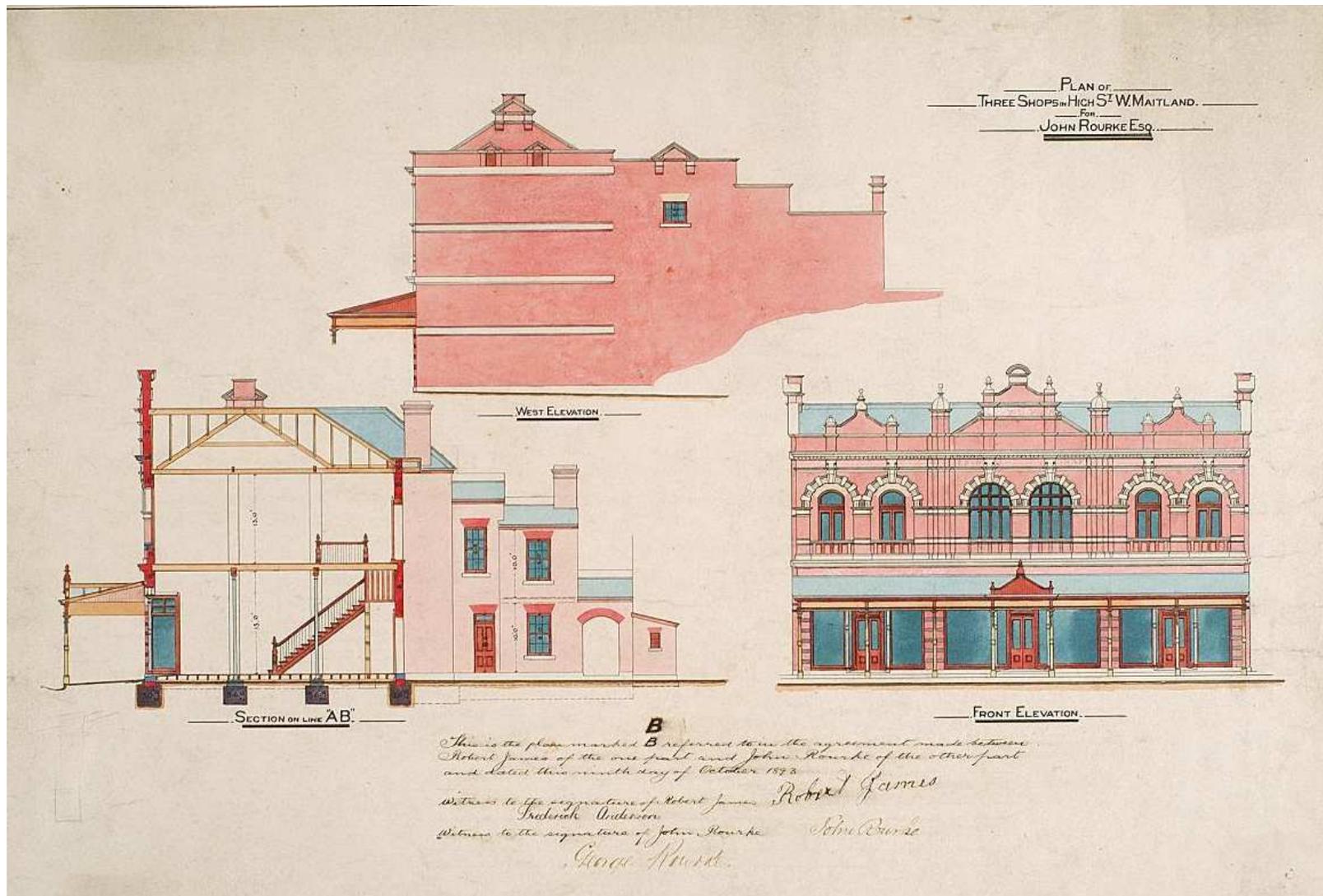


HANGED: Peter Bogan at the site where murderer William Moore was hanged. Picture by MARINA NEIL

MR. ROURKE'S NEW BUILDINGS.—We mentioned some short time ago that plans had been prepared by Messrs. Pender and Silk, architects, for three handsome shops, which Mr. John Rourke contemplated erecting on the vacant land in High-street between his present shop and the new Union Bank. Tenders for the erection of the new buildings were called for, and yesterday it was decided to accept that of Mr. Robert James for £2278 10s. Ten tenders were received altogether. The design of the new buildings is a very handsome one. There will be three shops—two containing residences. The centre shop, which will be occupied by Mr. Rourke for his business, has an area of 35 x 26 feet on the ground floor, and a similar area on the second floor will make a fine and spacious show room. The buildings will be of brick and cement. Mr. James, we understand, will enter upon the work immediately.

Maitland Mercury, Tuesday 10 October, 1893

Maitland and District Historical Society Inc.



Drawing date: 16.9.1893; Contract date: 9.10.1893

Pender Archive, University of Newcastle

Rourke's Building - by H.F. Boyle

Henry Rourke opened his business in High Street in 1836 immediately to the east of the present building. The primitive state of the town is indicated by the fact that a hanging took place opposite the shop when one William Moore is reputed to have paid the supreme penalty.

Henry's son John was born in 1838 and after serving his apprenticeship became a partner in the business which became known as Rourke and Son. They were master craftsmen who made superior leather work which was sold all over the colony being recognised as vastly superior to American and English examples of the same kind. Their apprentices later became well known business men in their own right. Later Rourke and Son became importers. In the 1870s the premises is described as the best emporium in High Street.

Henry Rourke and his son John dissolve the partnership in August 1874 and Henry retires. Henry dies in 1879. John was a shrewd business man who treated his employees well, each year treating them to a picnic. In 1893, he had R. James the builder erect the present buildings as a series of shops which was called Rourke's Arcade, his business occupying the centre shop. With the coming of the motor care their business expanded to include motor trimming, sports materials and goods.

George Rourke and H.M. Rourke, grandsons of the original founder, carried on the business in partnership after the death of John Rourke in 1916 and later H.M. Rourke became sole proprietor and ran the business in conjunction with his son, W.M. Rourke.

The business became known as one of the best in its line in the state and would give quotations on all lines of saddlery, motor trimming, sports materials, rugs and tarpaulins. It was said of the business that they could do delicate work like mending a ladies glove to making a 28 inch horse collar, all in a day's work. They had a name for fair and honest trading and courteous attention to all customers.

In the shop was a life size model of a horse which was used to display harness and many a young boy remembers with pleasure being lifted onto its back to have an imaginary ride, the writer being one of them. In 1956 it went to South Australia where it is now displayed in R.M. Williams establishment there.

When the establishment closed its doors for the last time on 31 March 1971 it was the end of an era. The business was recognised as the oldest of its kind in Australia and had seen the rise of High Street from a dusty bullock track to a city of importance. For a time it carried on as a material shop and was then purchased by Maitland Returned Serviceman League.

This article written by local historian Harry Boyle is undated.

RSL spit and polish for old building

MM 17/10/1989

A portion of one of Maitland's older buildings has been restored to its original condition by the Maitland sub-branch of the RSL.

The building, which, in part, now houses the sub-branch was built last century by John Rouke, a saddler. It has an inscription of 1830 on the facade, but sub-branch honorary secretary, Mr. Peter Lord, believes it was in fact built some years after that date.

The sub-branch has been restoring some of the building since its club folded some ten years ago. The building was originally divided into three sections: one of those was demolished to make way for the Best and Less store at the Mall. Of the two remaining sections, the sub-branch owns one, and a local businessman the other.

Mr. Lord said the recent work to the facade had cost the RSL some \$14,000, and was part of \$154,000 facelift the building has received over the last 10 years.

The facade restoration matches facade work completed for the rest of the remaining building by a local businessman.

Restoration of the building has included voluntary labour from some of the sub-branch's 350 members.

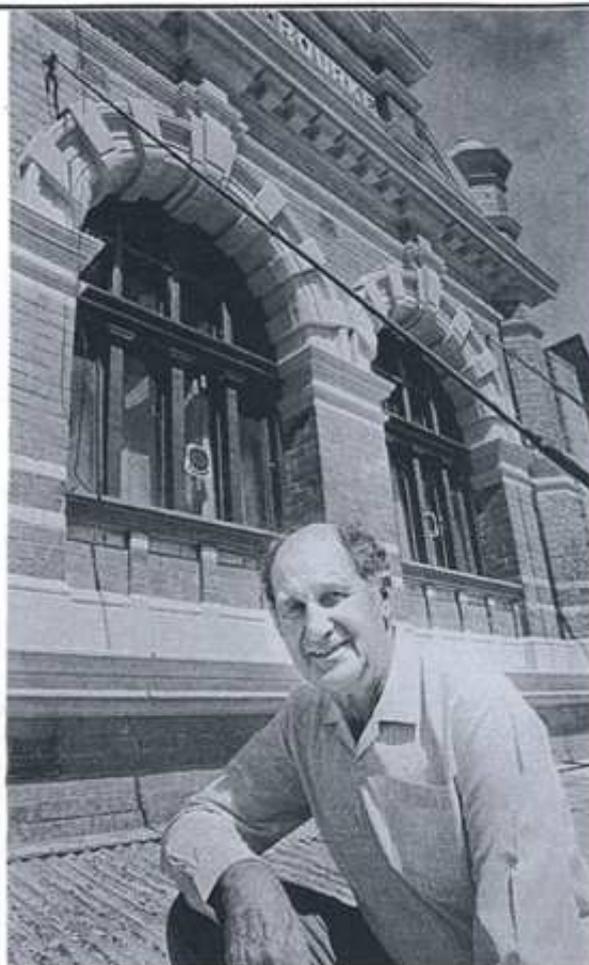
The restoration of the facade, which involved cleaning and restoration of brick and stonework, was done professionally, and took some two months to complete.

Mr. Lord said all that remains to do now, is repaint some of the awning and lower facade in heritage colours.

The sub-branch was advised on the restoration process throughout by Maitland City Council's heritage adviser, Mr. Lord said.

'The only thing different from the original building, is it had verandah posts,' Mr. Lord said.

'It's good to see it finished. We wanted it this year, as it is the sub-branch's 70th birthday,' he said.



■ Maitland RSL sub-branch secretary, Peter Lord, and the renovated facade.

The Rourke's Building was also *the Saddlery Gift Centre*, opening in 1991 and is currently a retail outlet for bags and travel goods.

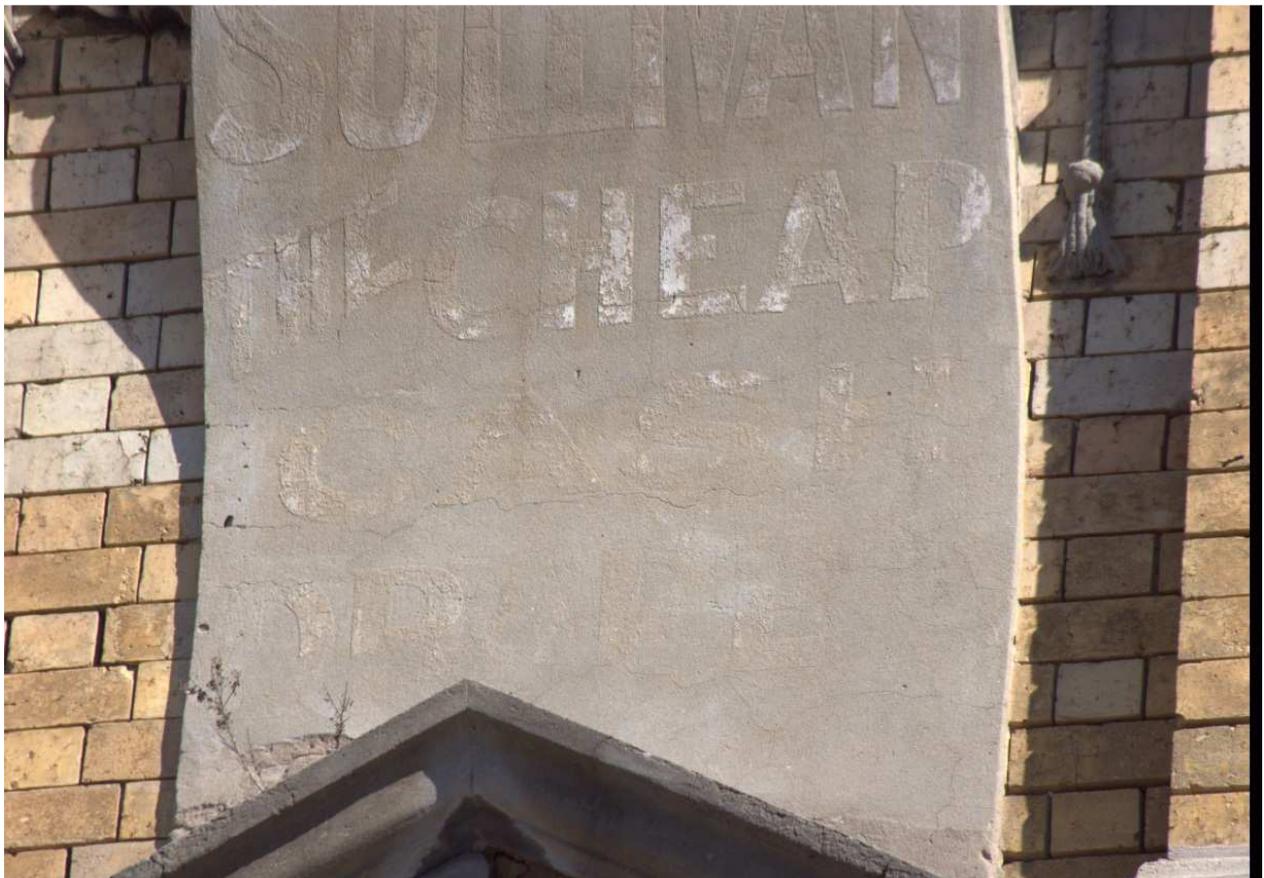
'Ghost' signs

Partial signs or faint, faded 'ghost' signs on old buildings can be intriguing – what does the sign say? What is the location? To what purposes has this building been put?

Historical Society members have identified a number of 'ghost signs' that will be reproduced in this Bulletin over future issues.

In this issue we are featuring a building in High Street – *can anyone identify the exact location and what the business was? If so, please provide comments by email to maitlandhistorical@gmail.com*

*Reminder: this is the Society's **new email address**.*



A **bonus ghost sign** appears Milne's Millstream Brewery image on page 13, below!!

Again, please forward information to our email address if you can decipher the words.

Historical Society Activities

Members were in attendance at Maitland City Library on Wednesday 21 March when City Librarian Keryl Collard formally received a donation by **Milton Morris**, comprising the media collection of Mr. Morris.

Mr Morris, Patron of the Society, also donated his collection of memorabilia to the Historical Society.

The **Maitland Taste Festival** held in the Maitland mall on 31 March & 1 April again provided an opportunity for the Society to raise awareness about local history, with members of the public taking advantage of our guided history walks.

The 27th Annual **Steamfest** was held at the Maitland Railway Station precinct over the 28th & 29th April 2012. The Historical Society had a dual role as an information booth for Steamfest visitors as well as providing our displays, book sales and railway precinct history walks.

Lecture Meetings

The Society's lecture meeting on **Tuesday 7 February** was a workshop conducted by Anthony Scully, the ABC Open Producer for the Hunter. The topic, ***How to share your digital records online*** provided information about the photo sharing web site Flickr and presented opportunities for groups such as the Historical Society to create photo sharing projects.

Cultural Collections at the **University of Newcastle** have a large Flickr presence – see Photo Searching, below.

At the **March** meeting of the Society Kevin Short presented a paper concerning the 'Electoral' history of Australia. In so doing, he detailed our social history and the way electoral reform was influenced by and in many ways paralleled the evolution of that history.

Government began with the absolute authority of the early governors, through advisory Councils, Councils with legislative authority and elected by limited franchise to our present parliaments, elected by universal suffrage.

Kevin rightly pointed out that Australasia was the first in the world to allow female suffrage, secretary ballots, permanent electoral administration and permanent electoral rolls. Australia continues to initiate electoral reform and is seen by the United Nations as a leading provider of advice and assistance to emerging nations across the world.

As an aside, Kevin detailed the complexities of the proportional system used to elect our Senate. This initiated many questions and no doubt provided a few surprise answers. The discussion was vigorous and interesting.

The **April 3** meeting was convened at the **Maitland Library Local Studies Collection**, where Librarian Judy Nicholson outlined the collections held and accessing them for research purposes.

Photo Searching

The **University of Newcastle Cultural Collections** have digitised thousands of images that are available for anyone to view via Flickr. The **Cultural Collections** photostream : <http://www.flickr.com/photos/uon/>

Some photographs of Maitland are included from sources such as the Athel D'Ombain collection, such as the example below.

Note that permission must be sought for reproduction of the images, which has been obtained in the case of the photo reproduced in this Bulletin.



Milne's Millstream Brewery, Maitland, NSW, Australia, 1855 - 1856 previously Vindin's flour Mill

The brewery occupied the site next to the site of the new Maitland Library that became part of Sim Brothers Car business in 1936.

This image was scanned from a film negative in the Athel D'Ombain collection [Box Folder B10397] held by **Cultural Collections** at the University of Newcastle, NSW, Australia.

This image can be used for study and personal research purposes. If you wish to reproduce this image for any other purpose you must obtain permission by contacting the University of Newcastle's **Cultural Collections**.

Courtesy of the Athel D'Ombain Collection, University of Newcastle (Australia)

Queen's Theatre

The Maitland Mercury & Hunter River General Advertiser (NSW)
Thursday 12 June 1856, page 2

Destruction of The Queen's Theatre By Fire.

Those who were present at the Theatre on Tuesday evening could little anticipate that the successful performances of that night would be the last they would have the pleasure of witnessing (for the present at least). The house was cleared by the usual time, and no one remained inside but the man in charge, who sleeps, we understand, in the green room. At about midnight there was no sign of fire; but shortly after two o'clock in the morning the whole building was in flames.

Mr. James Brackenreg, who slept in a back room of the Australian Inn, next door, was awakened about this time by a glare of light, and rising at once, found flames leaping from that part of the Theatre nearest his house. Efforts to extinguish them were unavailing; but assistance was speedily procured. Constable O'Brien, returning from a wake just then, gave the alarm. And parties arriving from all parts exerted themselves greatly.

Mr. Levy produced a number of buckets, and forming a line from the tank in the rear of his premises opposite, furnished a good supply of water, as Mr. Brackenreg also from his well. And other neighbours from their wells: But the inflammable nature of the materials precluded the possibility of saving the building; and the conflagration, after raging for about an hour and a half, was only got under after it had consumed the whole of the scenery and properties, we believe, the greater part of the framework of the Theatre, and an outbuilding attached to the Australian Inn.

Two saddles also belonging to Mr. Brackenreg were burnt. The fire seems to have burnt furiously in the left hand side of the Theatre, near the box entrance, but still more so in the neighbourhood of the pit entrance and the green room on the opposite side. All the wood work here is charred and half consumed, and a few forlorn-looking relics of dresses connected with the last piece played – one or two singed wigs, and a broken looking -glass --- show that the "touch" of the fiery element was indeed "irresistible," to use the words of Lady Scraggs.

From this part of the Theatre the flames quickly extended to Mr. Brackenreg's shed adjoining, which is very nearly destroyed. Had there been any wind, indeed, the whole building would possibly have taken fire; for as it is some of the back windows are broken with the heat, and the wood work shows signs that but little more was required to cause its ignition. Mr. Elses's premises, on the other side, do not appear to have sustained any injury. The only person who has been hurt by the fire, we understand, is the watchman inside, who did not awake until the flames had attained some strength, when he was enabled to escape from their midst, with a burnt arm only..

The fire appears to have run along the upper part of the building principally ; the seats in the pit having suffered less than any other portion of the fittings. The fire engine arrived at the conclusion of the affair --- several members of the brigade being present. It was got into working order, and some water was thrown on the smouldering ruins.

We were glad to see yesterday that a public subscription was being made, to assist the spirited proprietor of the Theatre in rebuilding it. If the cost of less combustible materials does not prove too great, it would certainly be desirable to use them in erecting another building.

Prepared by Keith Cockburn, Tuesday 28 February 2012
N.B. The facade of the Queen's Theatre remains opposite Centrelink & adjacent to Fren's car showroom and former Australian Inn on the cnr. High & Devonshire Streets.

Queen's Theatre



The front and rear of the former Queen's Theatre as it appears today in High Street



Diary Dates

May 2012

We are in Discussions with RAHS to hold a State Records Conservation Workshop at the rooms possibly in May. It will be a Saturday and the workshop will be approximately 4 hours in length. They have requested a minimum of 25 people in attendance. Date to be advised.

Tuesday 1st Guest Speaker: Joel Fitzgibbon

Tuesday 15th General Business Meeting 5.30 at the rooms

June

Tuesday 5th Guest Speaker to be advised 5.30 at the rooms.

Friday 15th BBQ at Bunnings

Tuesday 19th General Business meeting 5.30 at the rooms

July

Tuesday 3rd Guest Speaker to be advised – 5.30 at the rooms

Tuesday 17th General Business Meeting 5.30 at the rooms

August

Tuesday 7th Guest Speaker to be advised 5.30 at the rooms

18th & 19th Aroma Festival in the Mall - details to be advised

Tuesday 21st General Business Meeting 5.30 at the rooms



**Victoria Bridge
Spanning Wallis Creek, Maitland**

**Linking East and West Maitland
(1852-1896)**

**National Library of Australia,
J.R. Clarke 1857**