

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



Volume 18, Number 4

November 2011

*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:

Cohens Store, High Street, Maitland. Built in 1865, destroyed by fire in 1970.

Image produced by Historical Society member Peter Smith.

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/54834780@N06/5084853583/in/pool-1543385@N23/>

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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), payable 1st March of each year.

Patron: The Hon. Milton Morris AO

NSW Member for Maitland 1956-1980

NSW Minister for Transport 1965 - 1975

Current Office Bearers :

President : Ruth Trappel **Vice President :** Tom Skelding

Secretary : Lloyd Bevan **Treasurer :** Kevin Short

Bulletin Editor : Judy Nicholson **Consultant Editor :** Ruth Trappel

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

maitlandhistorical@bigpond.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.

Lecture Meetings

Lecture meetings held in August, September and October

Ron Jenkins, 2 August 2011 - Ron joined the fire brigade in 1961, retiring in 2003. Of his 42 years of service, Ron was captain for 38 years. His description of Maitland fires that he and his team attended over the years certainly caught the full attention of his audience, with photographs and equipment to really involve us in firefighting in the past. Ron attended both the **Cohen's fire in 1970** as well as the **Capper's fire in 1971**, perhaps two of Maitland's most notable incidents. These fires are detailed on pages 4-7 of this Bulletin.

Geoff Cannon, 6 September – Geoff Cannon (a past president of the MDHS) has been researching the 19 counties of New South Wales for more than 20 years. His extensive research is on the first land title owners and this research has been published. He shared his knowledge with us using his own home as an example.

At the movies! Lecture meeting 4 October 2011. Thanks to Historical Society member **Peter Smith**, we were able to view a movie titled "**We live in this valley**", dating from the early 1960s. The movie was created by the Hunter Valley Cooperative Dairy to promote the prosperity and attractiveness of the Hunter Valley, coving Scone through to Newcastle. Very interesting to see the depiction of thriving communities in the 1960s and the range of pursuits that provided community wealth. Peter was able to obtain an 'old' projector and with the whirr of the sprockets, slightly crackly audio and traditional Jaffa lollies, we all enjoyed our step back in time @ the movies.

Verdict: ☆☆☆☆

Welcome : RAHS State Conference delegates

The Maitland and District Historical Society extends a warm welcome to delegates of the Royal Australian Historical Society State Conference, 29 & 30 October 2011. The theme of the conference is: ***'Of droughts and flooding rains' – Australian disasters: research, recording and recovery.***

Delegates will discover that Maitland's history during numerous floods is only part of our story – local heritage can be seen in many ways and our built environment, with a range of impressive and interesting buildings, will give visitors the opportunity to consider the importance of Maitland in the development of New South Wales.

We hope you have an enjoyable stay and please admire our city as much as we do!

Maitland Fires

Of the many fires that Maitland has experienced over the years, the fires that are perhaps the most notable were those which devastated two significant High Street buildings: **Cohen's** and **Capper's**. Both of these fires were attended by **Mr. Ron Jenkins**, our guest speaker at the Society's August meeting.

The following accounts were both compiled by local historian, the late **Mr. Andrew Burg**, primarily based on reports from the Maitland Mercury.

David Cohen & Co., High Street

Thursday 18 June 1970



A disastrous fire gutted one of Maitland's most historic buildings today, causing \$30,000 damage. The beautiful stone-fronted building in High Street was built by David Cohen in 1865, designed by Edmund Thomas Blacket. For most of the years it was a wholesale grocery warehouse, recently bought by Permewan's. Mr. J. McLure, the Newcastle manager of D. Cohens and Co., which is now a subsidiary of Permewan's said the company planned to re-establish a wholesale grocery section in the old building.

The three storey building was formally a furniture manufacturing business named 'Maifurn' and was sold to Permewan's two years ago. The National Trust classified the building as 'highly significant' and strongly recommended its preservation. Cohen warehouse's Maitland business was not operating within the building, but they were behind the adjoining premises of the Hunter District Refrigeration Services; this firm was not affected by the fire. The only goods of value in the building at the time of the fire were several pieces of furniture left there on Wednesday morning by Mr. Bob Carr, a Maitland auctioneer. The most attractive features of this building were the ornate carved sandstone blocks to the front wall and the unique cast iron spiral staircase.

More than twenty fire firemen from three brigades, Maitland, East Maitland and Telarah, fought the fire from 6.00am Thursday. Traffic had to be stopped in High Street and diverted down Parallel Street. Dr. Frank Bonar who lived next door on the south side raised the alarm; he said the fire started at the rear of the building. He and the Hunter District Refrigeration manager were advised to leave their premises because of the very real danger of walls collapsing. Mr. Reg Carter, Station Officer of Maitland Brigade was officer in charge. When the fire brigades arrived the building was well alight and spreading very quickly; the fire was attacked from the rear of the building; it was soon realised that the position was hopeless, even though eight hoses were in use. All hoses were directed to the outside walls to endeavour to keep the walls cool to prevent a collapse. The firemen were most concerned with the south wall against Dr. Bonar's residence; the side walls seemed to be bulging and smoke was oozing

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through cracks in the mortar between the bricks. The cast iron pillars throughout the building probably saved it from total collapse. All hoses were still concentrating on the walls at 8.30am when fire brigades from Telarah and East Maitland were withdrawn. The Maitland Brigade was still on duty at 1.00pm.

There were no casualties and the police reported that there were no suspicious circumstances. The Maitland Town Clerk, Mr. A.S. Maiden, instructed the owners to make the building safe and to demolish the top section of the walls immediately. This direction was approved and the demolisher was Mr. R. Jennings.

The **cover of this Bulletin** features 'before' and 'after' images of the **Cohen's** building by Society member Peter Smith, illustrating the most recent fate of the building, that is, to house a Centrelink office. The top two floors of the building were demolished, but the ground floor façade remains, carved Ravensfield sandstone, still gracing the streetscape.

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/54834780@N06/5084853583/in/pool-1543385@N23/>

E.P. Capper Building

Monday 6th December 1971

The fire in the four storey building started at the rear near Hunter Street; the alarm was sounded at the Maitland Fire Brigade at 11.40pm on the 6th December. The seriousness of the fire was realised immediately and East Maitland Brigade and Telarah fire station were notified.

Telarah fireman attacked the fire from Hunter Street using two hydrants, under Captain Ron Jenkins; the other two brigades attacked from High Street using four hydrants; East Maitland Captain was Des Graham and the Maitland Brigade Captain was Ron Jarrett; there were thirty two volunteer fireman and all were under the control and command of Chief Fireman Mr. C. Gunery and his deputy Jack Smith of East Maitland.

The roof of the Capper building fell in at 2.30am, with tremendous debris and fire falling on the road and buildings opposite and many windows were broken; about this time the top of the wall next to the

Volunteer Hotel collapsed onto the hotel starting fires; the area to fall measured fifty feet long by ten feet high. Fireman using two hoses had been standing on the hotel awning when a large section of the wall fell, missing them by a very small margin, crashing through the awning onto the footpath; the firemen were immediately withdrawn; they were John Gulliver, Harold Taylor, Harold Hopkins, under deputy Jack Smith and Captain Des Graham.

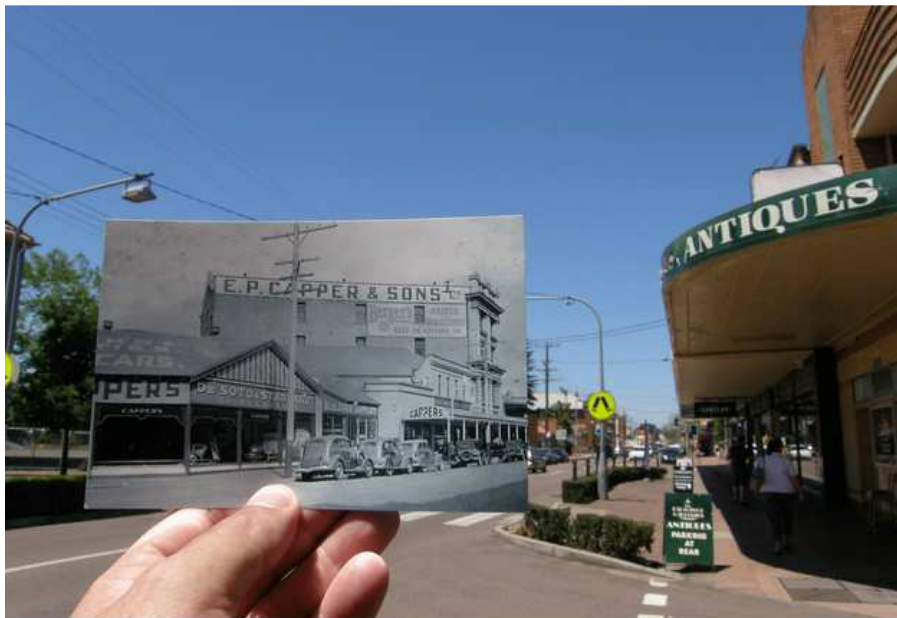


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At 12.37 am a massive steel girder crashed outwards to High Street, cutting through power lines carrying 11,000 volts, just missing four firemen and sparking balls of fire from the fallen wires according to Mr. Des Fren whose family car sales business was next door. This caused pandemonium among the spectators but miraculously there were no casualties. The firemen who had a lucky escape from the girder crash were fireman Avery, Alan German, Bob Sharpe and Fire Chief Gunery. It was not until 4.00am that the firemen gained control of the fire; great credit must be given to the crew that saved the car sales business of Frens. District Inspector P. Stockbridge arrived in the early morning and congratulated the three brigades.

Historic building's links with NSW history

Historic Cappers building stands a gutted hulk this afternoon, 134 years after E.P. Capper chose Maitland as headquarters of a business which was to become famous throughout the colony. As fire tore at the old building's superstructure today a treasure chest of valuable lamp glasses melted in a closed attic in the centre of the building. The attic had been closed since Capper's store was shifted to 449 High Street in 1963. In it were several hand-etched, sand-blasted lamp glasses. Historic Cappers documents had been removed years ago and it was unlikely any remained in the enclosed vault. Tinware and kerosene lamp chimneys were also gathering dust in this almost forgotten corner of Maitland's history.



From the Flickr photostream of MDHS member Peter Smith

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/54834780@N06/5113423551/in/photostream>

A High Street landmark falls in midnight inferno

One of High Street's best known landmarks for decades, the Cappers building, is still on talked about by many Hunter Valley people, despite being destroyed by fire 21 years ago.

Newcastle Historian John Turner wrote in his book "The Rise of High Street, Maitland": "Sydney had Anthony Horderns and Maitland had Edward Capper and, just as Anthony Horderns became a household name in the capital, so did Edward Capper in the capital of the Hunter".

The Cappers hardware store building was gutted in one of Maitland's worst fires on Monday, December 6, 1971 — a date that many Maitland people will never forget.

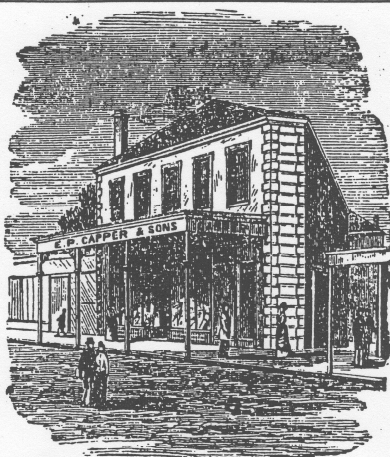
The Mercury reported on Tuesday, December 7, the fire was so intense "the glow could be seen at Gresford, 30 miles away".

Mercury headlines said: "Burning fragments as big as golf balls fly over High Street".

It took 25 firemen from three brigades to fight the fire at its peak, the Mercury reported.

"Nine firemen had miraculous escapes from death when a wall

Flashback to 1971



■ The premises in which Cappers carried on business until 1887.

toppled near them and a falling girder sparked off an 11,000 volt bolt of power".

The fire also extensively damaged the Volunteer Hotel and burnt out the shop of Bearing Services Pty. Ltd.

The horrific fire occurred 134 years after owner Edward Peter Capper chose Maitland as headquarters of a business which was to be-

come famous throughout the colony.

As the late Athel D'Ombraire said in the Mercury in 1972, at Cappers you could buy kind of farm equipment such as wagons, drays, sulkies, axles, iron tyres, and all the other items that went with them".

"Mowing machines, seed sowers, hay presses, butter churns, separators or scoops, as well as



■ Demolishers bring a rapid end to the unsafe remains of the Cappers building.

a wide range of tools...you could purchase rocking chairs from the United States, four poster iron beds from Italy, and Royal Doulton tableware," Mr D'Ombraire wrote.

Mr Capper began business in a tiny shop in High Street, as an ironmonger and hardware merchant.

The little shop grew through the years into a large emporium and the name "Cappers of Maitland" became a household word.

Mr Capper the son of Walter William Capper, hardware merchant of Great Charles Street, Birmingham, was born in 1799.

Edward Capper sailed to Australia and arrived at Circular Quay in 1833, aged 33.

He had 47 pounds in cash, his stock, and some clothes.

On January 9, 1834, the first mention of Maitland was made in Mr Capper's records:

"If the goods I expect are sent to me I hope to open a store in Maitland or in Van Dieman's Land.

"From the amazing increase in population in NSW, I expect that we shall double our population in the next ten years".

At the end of 1833 — Sydney had a population of 16,227, Newcastle 536, and Maitland 1556.

Maitland was divided into three townships, or in the words of Rev. Dr. John Dunmore Lang: "East Maitland was the Government town, West Maitland the people's town, and Morpeth a private township".

The track made by bullock wagons as they lumbered through West Maitland became known as High Street, the commercial centre of the district.

It was here that Edward Capper established his store in 1888.

The Cappers building was closed for trading in 1963, when the store was shifted to 449 High Street.

Before the building was gutted by fire, it was used as headquarters of Maitland YMCA and for discos.



■ High Street, Maitland, looking more like a scene from the London Blitz the morning after the Cappers fire.

An unusual monument: William Maskell

There are three monuments in Farley. One commemorates the work of Edgeworth David, pioneer geologist; one marks the burial site of two convicts ("known only to God"). The third, pictured, is in the form of a rusting oil derrick, which was toppled by a westerly gale in August 1952.



History is replete with stories of illustrious heroes, well documented and justly so. Sir Edgeworth David easily merits inclusion in this category. However, what history does not usually record are the valiant endeavours of mortals who were almost heroes. I refer to men and women who possessed an iron resolve to pursue a life-absorbing goal only to meet in the end the most bitter of disappointments.

William Maskell and his wife Alice, of Farley, were two such people. William Maskell was born in Kent, England, in 1868. In his late teens he travelled to the Californian gold fields and for 22 years sought to strike it rich. He was unsuccessful, but he was keenly interested in a new form of gold quaintly termed the "black gold" of the emerging American industry. He closely studied all facets of this new booming industry, particularly noting the geology of the oil-bearing country.

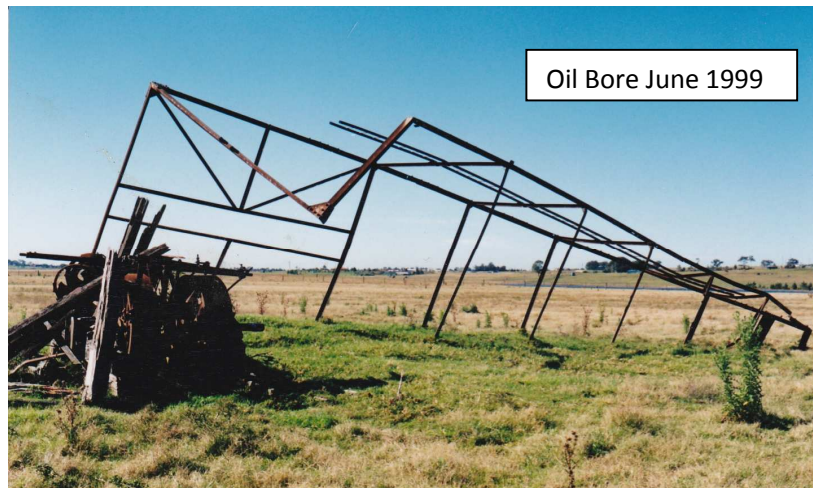
More by accident than design, William came to the Hunter Valley, where he found employment in the mines. He also found a young bride, Alice, who had immigrated to Australia from her native Scotland. The couple purchased a home and acreage in Owlpen Lane, Farley. Their slab house stood opposite what is now the Western Suburbs Sewerage Treatment Works.

William was attracted to the area by its geological similarity to the oil-bearing districts of California. He decided to sink an oil well at all costs. In fact the ultimate cost was £15,000 which was a very sizeable amount in the grim depression years of the Thirties. From 1907 to the early 1930's, William, in order to finance his scheme, worked in what was surely the most back-breaking and dangerous forms of manual labour, pick and shovel mining. However he was ably assisted in financing his scheme by his devoted soul mate, Alice, who worked and managed their prosperous poultry farm.

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I can remember my late father driving me out to Maskell's farm towards the end of World War 11. My father had decided to venture into poultry farming and called on Mr Maskell for advice. I am sure that the workings of the oil bore would have figured in their conversations. I cannot remember what Mr Maskell looked like, but I do remember Mrs Maskell and the kindness and compassion she extended to me as a small boy. In 1942, I was injured in a train accident and spent quite a long time getting about on crutches. Gradually gaining strength, I began to walk to the "oil bore", as it was then commonly known. Invariably Mrs Maskell would invite me into her home and made the most sumptuous cakes (made from free range eggs, of course, in those days). She also made the most excellent home-made lemonade and ginger beer. If my friends were with me, they were also invited in to partake of the goodies. As we got older we frequently used to go out and try to climb the derrick. Some of my friends actually succeeded. To add to our entertainment, Mrs Maskell would play records of the ancient cylindrical type on her antique gramophone. I can recall a rich male voice being emitted from the huge speaking trumpet, probably the voice of Peter Dawson or Enrico Caruso.

Mrs Maskell regularly drove her sulky past my home at Farley to sell her eggs and poultry to businesses in High Street, Maitland.



In 1937 fate turned unkind as it is apt to do. After reaching 5364 feet (1635 metres), the drill jammed and resisted all attempts to free it. Mr Maskell sought help from two Maitland businessmen, Mr Alec McDonald, a former mayor of Maitland and Mr Noel Carr. However the drill was found to be hopelessly jammed. Mr McDonald reported in 1940 that it would now be necessary to drill a fresh bore at an estimated cost of £ 20,000. At that time (1940) our young nation was once again plunged into the madness of another world war and consequently the project was shelved forever. The dreams of an indefatigable couple were shattered at last. My late father would often say, "What a remarkable man". He omitted to complete his epitaph with "What a remarkable woman".

Mr Maskell died in 1945, aged 77 years, convinced to the end that a 'gusher' lay underneath his land. Mrs Maskell lived most of her remaining years on her lonely Farley property. She died in 1957, also aged 77 years.

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Today nothing remains on the property except the fallen, rusty derrick. No memorial stands to attest to their working lifetime of unremitting toil in pursuit of a dream (or was it a realisable goal?). There is, however, a plaque to mark the location.



Article & photos by Henry Armstrong.

Extract taken from the *Quarterly Bulletin of the Maitland & District Historical Society Inc.*

Volume 16, Number 8. August, 1999.

Digitised and photographs below by Historical Society member **Kevin Parsons**, September 2011.

The Maskell's marriage was childless and their ashes are interred at Beresfield Crematorium.



Alice Maskell plaque located in wall to right of Area AC 27 along by 7 down .

Photos at Beresfield Crematorium July 2011.



William Maskell plaque located in area J last column on right & 3 down.

Remedies of the past

Advertising features in the Maitland Mercury of the 1800s provide details of the remedies, health and medical products of the past. To “detox” the body in 1891, apparently Maitlanders’ required the use of Eno’s Fruit Salt:

The Maitland Mercury & Hunter River General Advertiser, Saturday 18 April 1891

"Quite well, to Eno's"

Dear, thanks Fruit Salt."

**ENO'S
"FRUIT
SALT"**

IS AN

**INVIGORATING, HEALTH-GIVING, REFRESHING,
And COOLING BEVERAGE,
And may be Taken with Perfect Safety at any time.**

~~~~~

**It removes foetid and poisonous matter from the blood by natural  
means, allays nervous excitement, depression, etc., and  
restores the system to its proper condition.**

~~~~~

You cannot overstate its great value in keeping the blood pure.

~~~~~

**CAUTION.—Examine each bottle and see that the Capsule is marked ENO'S "FRUIT SALT."  
Without it you have been imposed upon by a worthless imitation. Sold by all Chemists. Directions  
in Sixteen Languages how to prevent disease.**

~~~~~

**Prepared only at ENO'S "FRUIT SALT" WORKS,
Pomeroy Street, New Cross Road, S.E., by J. C. ENO'S Patent.**

Trove Search Hints

Newspapers online at Trove

<http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper>

The *Maitland Mercury* is not the only newspaper of relevance to the Maitland area.

Articles relating to Maitland also feature in newspapers such as:

- The Australian Town and Country Journal (NSW : 1870 - 1907)
- Empire (Sydney, NSW : 1850 - 1875)
- Illustrated Sydney News (NSW : 1853 - 1872)
- Sydney Chronicle (NSW : 1846 - 1848)
- The Sydney Morning Herald (NSW : 1842 - 1954)

to broaden your search to newspapers **other than** the *Maitland Mercury*

1. Select **Advanced search**



Advanced Search - Digitised Newspapers and more

Keywords

All of these words

The phrase

Any of these words

Without these words

☒ Search anywhere in article (including tags and comments)

☐ Search headings only

☐ Search headings, author or 1st 4 lines (news articles only)

☐ Search captions only

Publication date

From Day Month Year To Day Month Year

Newspaper Title & Location

To search all newspapers, do not make a selection.

1889)

- ☐ Empire (Sydney, NSW : 1850 - 1875)
- ☐ Hawkesbury Advocate (Windsor, NSW : 1899 - 1900)
- ☐ Hawkesbury Chronicle and Farmers Advocate (Windsor, NSW : 1881 - 1888)
- ☐ Hawkesbury Courier and Agricultural and General Advertiser (Windsor, NSW : 1844 - 1846)
- ☐ Hawkesbury Herald (Windsor, NSW : 1902 - 1945)
- ☐ Illustrated Sydney News (NSW : 1853 - 1872)
- ☐ Liverpool Herald (NSW : 1897 - 1907)
- ☐ Liverpool Leader (also known as the Leader) (NSW : 1946 - 1949)

2. Type your search words into the search fields

3. Scroll down, then select the check box to specify other newspapers

4. Click the **Search** button

Historical Society Activities

The Society participated in the **Maitland Aroma Festival** held on 13th and 14th of August, conducting guided history walking tours. An historical photo display was also presented in conjunction with the Maitland Mercury. Visitors were invited to make comments, identify subjects and places and share their stories in relation to the images on display.

History Week 2011 (3rd to 11th September) brought to the table the **Edible, Appetising and Tasty** history of food: E.A.T. history. The Historical Society hosted afternoon tea as well as a display of traditional Australian 'afternoon tea' foods. Members may have noted this was not an onerous task as we are rather adept at producing tea and cake at any time!

Diary Dates

October 2011

- Sun 23rd** Workshop on Digital Recording 9am till 12 noon, at the rooms.
- Fri 28th** Pre RAHS conference activities
- Fri 28th** Maitland and District Historical Society will be hosting the Cocktail Party for the delegates and members at our rooms from 6-8pm. You are all cordially invited to attend, and your help would be greatly appreciated.
- Sat 29th +
Sun 30th** Royal Australian Historical Society Annual Conference. East Maitland Bowling Club. More Information on RAHS website <http://www.rahs.org.au>
- Sat 29th** Conference Dinner at the Bowling Club

November 2011

- Tues 1st** **Lecture meeting** – 5.30 inspection of St. Paul's in the Park, with cup of tea to follow. Jim and Irene Hemsworth will be our guides and talk on the Church's history.
- Tues 15th** **Business meeting** - 5.30 at the rooms

December 2011

- Tues 6th** **Lecture meeting** - 5.30 at the rooms. Robyn Parker, our local member of Parliament, will talk on her portfolio of Heritage and how she can be of help.

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- Sat 10th** **Christmas gathering** – at the home of MDHS member Bill Sutherland at Lochinvar from 4.30 to 7.30, BYO everything. Lovely rural setting with lots of trees, also a train carriage set up for accommodation for us to explore. It will be a lovely social gathering for us all to get together, we hope you can all come.
- Tues 20th** **Business meeting** - 5.30 at the rooms



Victoria Bridge
Spanning Wallis Creek, Maitland

Linking East and West Maitland (1852-1896)

Wood engraving held at National Library of Australia, J.R. Clarke 1857

Maitland's Wallis Creek crossings were not always as admired prior to the construction of the Victoria Bridge in 1852, as the **Hunter River Gazette** of Saturday, December 18th, 1841 indicates:

"Wallace Creek Bridge – We have been informed that the wooden fabric denominated a bridge, which preserves the communication across Wallace Creek, is in an exceedingly rickety and unsafe state. If this be the case, as we believe it is, we need not point out the serious responsibility which those whose duty it is to take cognizance of such matters will incur, if they delay to put it at once in an efficient state of repair. This bridge was designed merely to serve purposes of temporary convenience, until a stone one, the foundation of which was laid long ago a little farther down the stream, was completed. This circumstance accounts for the extremely inconvenient position of the present erection, but it is needless to say that according to the good old colonial custom, after the temporary substitute was formed, the original design of a permanent stone bridge was lost sight of. In cases where the public safety is implicated, too much caution cannot be used to guard against accidents, and in the present instance we hope this will be instantly attended to, and the original design afterwards proceeded with."