

MAITLAND AND DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY
P.O. BOX 333, MAITLAND

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Meetings:

Monthly meetings of the Society are held in the first Monday evening of each month at the East Maitland Primary School, commencing at 7.30 p.m.

Officers 1979

PRESIDENT	Roy Hamson
VICE PRESIDENT	Graham Dunlop
SECRETARY	Val Hamson (Ph 301420)
TREASURER	Lionel Fredman
RECORDERS	Judith Hawke & Mildred Pankhurst

Subscriptions - Adults \$5 plus \$1 other family members.

Students \$1

Check List ✓✓

NEXT MEETING. 7th May.
Rev. Broadhead will discuss with us the forthcoming sesquicentenary celebrations.....

NEXT WALKABOUT, Sun. 10th June.
A look around Tocal College. Details next meeting.

NEXT BULLETIN. Ron Montague writes "The Story Behind the Memorial" - the story of Sherberras whose memorial stands within St James' Church at Morpeth.

COMING EVENTS. Sat. 21st July.
Museum Workshop.
(Collating/recording) Dr John Turner and team. At Fort Scratchley.

Roger and Oxt.
Ed.

The History of Oakhampton

7
In 1893, the floodwaters ripped their vicious way downstream leaving terror and destruction in their wake. The flood left a clearly visible trail of havoc as it wreaked its wake through Oakhampton. The Walka installation in the river was severely damaged and sections of the pipe to the pump house were exposed. It took many months to repair this damage.

The rising tide of the flood covered the graveyard, thus inducing the closing down of the cemetery. The receding water left several inches of arid sand on the previously extremely arable farmland, renowned throughout the valley. Despite this, the people of Oakhampton continued to farm the now reasonable soil they lived on.

The turn of the century saw great changes at Walka. The previously mentioned extensions took place as well as repairs made to the workers cottages and the planting of trees and shrubs around the pump house on the hill.

This period of time in Oakhampton was the best the area ever saw. A railway station was built and a siding constructed. Trains pulled in at the siding, unloading hay and grain and loading sand and livestock. The siding was demolished after the 1955 flood and the station demolished recently.

A house near the school was then converted for use as a post office. Miss Macey was the post-mistress and she delivered mail around Oakhampton as well as collecting outgoing mail. This service also ceased after the 1955 flood. Scobies shop was near Walka and provided food for the workers as well as the local residents. This also stopped at the same time.

The area had originally derived its reputation from the abundance of magnificent gardens. This still held firm and would do so for many more years to come.

At this time there were ten stone and slate houses in Oakhampton. The original house on the summit of Oakhampton Hill would have been in ruins at this time and the second dwelling would have replaced it several years beforehand. The six houses at Walka were still occupied and the Scobie family continued to dwell at their family home.

HISTORY OF OAKHAMPTON

Houston Mitchell's old house was also inhabited. Homes dotted the countryside and the population stood at about three hundred. In 1915 the school was well patronized with eighty pupils

This period saw its first setback in 1906 when, during a severe drought, the Hunter River dried up completely at Oakhampton. The lagoon at Walka Water Works was utilized but strict water rationing came into force. This fact, coupled with a fast increasing population sowed the first seeds of doubt as to Walka being a viable and economic proposition.

Walka was finally superseded in 1925 by the Chichester Dam complex. From 1925-1945 Walka's engines were started a total of fourteen times, mainly to test the engines. Walka provided water for human consumption for the last time in 1940.

About 1930 a progress hall was built to improve the standing of the area. The minute book from this hall indicates that about twenty-four meetings per year were held from 1935 to 1937. The committee organized many euchre parties, dances and sports days to raise funds for various charitable organizations. The tiny hall was extended to much larger proportions in 1936. Church services and Sunday School classes were held here by the Congregational Church. Les Darcy, the famous boxer, reputedly spent his early childhood in Oakhampton, and to have attended Sunday School. The elderly locals swear adamantly to this fact.

After the 2nd World War, three honour rolls were made. At the school, an Honour Roll, four feet wide was mounted on the chimney. It was for the Great War and now belongs to Mrs Thelma Scobie of Sydney. One for each war was placed in the Progress Hall. The roll from the former war has an undeterminable location. The roll from the latter war is now in the possession of Mrs Peter Lord of Maitland.

Oakhampton has always been subject to flooding although few floods had ever done any real damage. This changed in 1955, when the most disastrous flood in Oakhampton's history ripped its way through the valley. A huge wall of water screaming downstream was met by a similar wall tearing its way upstream. The two met in a blinding flash of spray and wiped most of the remaining Walka river-bound structure into oblivion.

HISTORY OF OAKHAMPTON.....

The floodwaters rose and covered most of Oakhampton, leaving farmhouses submerged or, like islands in an ocean. Isolated patches of cattle belowed mournfully on the higher reaches. Although the waters remained for only an hour, they left a pitiful scene of wanton carnage all over the district. Houses were ruined or swept downstream. The Progress Hall was damaged beyond repair. Silt, to an average depth of six feet, was deposited everywhere, completely ruinous to the fertile soil.

The flood was the most marked and most violent incident in Oakhampton's history. Since then the area has declined rapidly. A total of twelve houses were washed downstream or wrecked by the vicious waters.

Today, the population stands at about ninety. (In 1915 eighty pupils attended Oakhampton Public School.) The school has since been closed down and condemned. The Electricity Commission started a power station at Walka which was closed in 1971 and is in the process of demolition. The sandy soil is now barely farmable. The six stone houses at Walka had gone by 1975. The house on the southern side of Walka (Houston Mitchell's) was demolished several years previously. The reputation of "The Garden Suburb" so deservedly earned is now only history.

Today, the gravestones stand as forlorn shadows in a graveyard of forgotten years. Many headstones have been covered by silt, moved away or washed away.

Walka stands, a silent sentinel of the greatness and beauty it once was. It is now a hollow shell, destined for further use as a transport museum.

The ancient house on Oakhampton Hill still remains a peaceful, forgotten and ignored guardian of the lost years. Last that remains of the bygone people of a bygone era.

by Warwick Berthold. 1978.

CRICKET CHALLENGE

The first cricket match in the Hunter Valley?

The following letters and results from early Mercury files indicate possibly the origins of our national summer game in this district. From the Mercury, 22nd Jan, 1845 we read;

To the Editors of the Maitland Mercury. Gentlemen --
Having observed a challenge in your last paper by eleven gentlemen from the William River, Raymond Terrace and the Paterson River, to play a game of cricket against eleven gentlemen of Maitland or its neighbourhood, I beg to state that eleven members of the Maitland Club are willing to play, at any time in March next that may eventually be agreed upon. Hoping that the challengers will persevere in their intention, I beg to add that any communication addressed to the Club or Mr. Henry Reeves' Albion Inn, West Maitland will be immediately attended to.

I am, gentlemen,
Maitland, Jan 22, 1845. "A LOVER OF CRICKET."

It is interesting to read the comments made by the Mercury, which paper evidently gave the promising cricketers every aid in establishing the game; thus on January 25th 1845 -

"We draw the attention of the lovers of cricket in the town and neighbourhood, to an advertisement and a letter in other columns, announcing the formation of a Cricket Club in Maitland, and the acceptance by the Club of a challenge thrown out by parties residing in the William and Paterson River District.

The practising of the Maitland Cricket Club will commence on Monday next, January 27th, and from the well-known perseverance of the parties forming the Club there is no doubt they will be ready for the match in time.

We hope our country friends, the challengers, will also commence preparations at once, so as to be ready at the appointed time."

Notice the reference to "William" River and not "Williams" as we call it today. Its original title was William, so named after the christian name of Lieut.-Colonel William Paterson.

The Cricket Challenge.

In the issue of Saturday, February 1st, 1845, we read;

"We have much pleasure in stating that Maitland Cricket Club now numbers more than twenty members, many of whom are old cricketers, though the majority are unpractised, or have not been in practise for many years."

"However, on Tuesday last (Monday being wet), the Club held their first practising day, most members being present, and we believe they intend practising very often, as they entertain a wholesome belief that the parties who have challenged them are mostly good players."

Then came the first match played between the teams selected from members of the club. This eventuated on Wed, Feb 5th, 1845, on the green at the back of Honeysett's Mill.

"The ground being in full view from High Street, and at a moderate distance from it, the numbers of people were many who were attracted to witness the playing."

This then was the first cricket match played in Maitland and appended are the scores, as they were published in the "Maitland Mercury" of February 8th, 1845.

MAITLAND CRICKET CLUB

The members of the Maitland Cricket Club met on Wednesday, February 5th, 1845, on the green near Honeysett's Mill, West Maitland, for the purpose of playing a friendly match among themselves.

Wickets were pitched at one o'clock, and the game commenced shortly afterwards. The following is the results of this game :-

CRICKET CHALLENGE

Mr. Holdstock's side.

1.	Mr. Holdstock, bowled by Honeysett	.. 38
2.	Mr. Crumpton, bowled by Honeysett.	.. 4
3.	Mr. Belcher, bowled by Honeysett.	.. 0
4.	Mr. Merthyr, caught by Simpson.	.. 5
5.	Mr. O. Prentice, run out.	.. 9
6.	Mr. T. Prentice, bowled by Brayburn.	.. 1
7.	Mr. Smailes, bowled by Brayburn.	... 2
8.	Mr. Hart, caught by Brackenreg.	. 5
9.	Mr. Beazeley, run out.	.. 8
10.	A boy, not out.	.. 3
	Byes.	.. 21
	Wideball.	.. <u>1</u>
		97

Mr. Honeysett's side.

1.	Mr. Honeysett, bowled by Holdstock.	. 49
2.	Mr. Brayburn, bowled by Holdstock.	.. 16
3.	Mr. Ballard, bowled by Belcher.	.. 2
4.	Mr. Simpson, caught by Belcher.	.. 3
5.	Mr. Keeves, bowled by Holdstock.	.. 3
6.	Mr. Wakely, not out.	.. 2
7.	Mr. Rossiter, bowled by Prentice.	. 0
8.	Mr. Solomon, caught by Merthyr.	. 1
9.	Mr. Brechenreg, bowled by Belcher.	. 0
10.	Mr. Collins, bowled by Prentice.	.. 3
	Byes.	.. 7
	Wideball.	.. <u>1</u>
		87

It will be noticed that the Press followed the old English custom of placing "Mr." before each of the batsman's names, but in the future games this compliment was omitted. Also notice "the boy" who filled in for Mr. Holdstock's side and carried his bat out - what a thrill for the young 'un!

The Cricket Challenge.

The two skippers proved themselves as batsmen. True, the bowling of course was underhand but don't let us under-rate it for that reason, for many of these old-timers could be hard to play on the wickets of their day. Modern batsmen have the impression that the underarm bowling of the ancients was "sissy stuff" - but note that the crack fieldsman was usually placed on long stop. In this particular match the local scribe reports; "Mr. Holdstock's side was principally indebted for the victory gained to the activity of Mr. Crumpton at long stop."

ST. JAMES' CHURCH, MORPETH

A note on its origins...

This historic church was the first to be completed and consecrated in the Valley, outside of Newcastle. The foundation stone being laid 2nd January, 1837.

The cost of construction was borne entirely by a citizen of Morpeth, Mr. E.C. Close. This former officer survived a gallant action during the Peninsular War. In thanks to God, he made a vow to erect a church "to God's honour and glory," a vow which took 30 years to fulfill.

The church was consecrated on 31st Dec, 1840 by the Bishop of Australia Dr. William Grant Broughton.

In 1875 the church was damaged by fire to the extent that the foundation stone had to be relaid by Mr. Clos's son who incidentally had laid the initial stone as a 13 yr old lad in 1837.

A parchment was placed under the stone to read: "This stone was placed in rebuilding St. James's Church, Morpeth, to the honour and glory of the Holy and undivided Trinity, on April, 15th, 1875 A.D., by Edward Charles Close (he having performed the same duty at the first building in 1837), in the 39th year of the reign of Her Most Gracious Majesty Queen Victoria; His Excellency Sir Hercules George Robert Robinson, KCMG, being the Governor of the Territory; the Rt Rev Fredric Barker, DD, being Bishop of Sydney and Metropolitan; the Rt Rev William Tyrell, DD, Bishop of Newcastle; Rev Canon Colos Child, Incumbent; E.E. Jaques & E.C. Close, J Herbury Hunt, Architect; James Sherwood, Contractor."