

*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 22, Number 2**

**May 2015**

*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:** Former Astor Theatre, Morpeth, 2014. Photo JN

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

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

**Business meeting** is held on the third Tuesday of each month from 5:30-7.00pm

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

Membership fees : \$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 :** Keith Cockburn

**Vice Presidents :** Peter Smith, Ruth Trappel

**Treasurer :** Kevin Short

**Bulletin Editor :** Judy Nicholson

**Consultant Editor :** Keith Cockburn

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

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## **President's Report, Annual General Meeting, 17<sup>th</sup> March 2015**

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I took over as President in June 2014 when Ruth requested leave from the position. Initially I agreed to six months however, at Christmas Ruth announced that she would not return to the position, so, as I am still here I hope to report to you this evening that we have still been able to move forward.

Whenever a different person occupies a position such as this, they usually bring different views to bear, and I am no exception, though I do hope that my ideas and actions have been acceptable.

I wish to state my appreciation to the members who have worked with me and supported me during my time in this role.

When I joined this Society all of the computers were other peoples cast offs, now we have acquired almost all new ones and 2 new printer copiers along with a new and impressive A3 Scanner. At least 3 computers are now networked and we have Mosaic now available on 2 of them.

Our acquisitions have increased and our displays create considerable interest, especially in January this year when we experienced more visitors than any other month.

During 2014 we attended barbecues at Masters and Bunnings but did not attend taste Fest or Aroma Fest and I believe we should seek to attend these events in future as promotion is as important to our survival as fund-raising is.

This past year saw the publication of a number of A5 booklets on High Street, researched and published by our member Val Rudkin. We also have a 1893 Flood booklet by Peter Bogan, and a Short History of Maitland by Kevin Short and all of these have proven popular when offered for sale.

A successful Trivia Night was conducted 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2014 at the Polish Hall, organised by Helen Denzin and Ziggy Szyda. It was thoroughly enjoyed by all in attendance and provided a nice profit of about \$900.00.

There has been an increasing number of calls upon our services this past year, among them a request from the History teacher at Hunter Valley Grammar School in August for someone to speak to students on Local History. This was attended to by Kevin Short and despite requesting in vain for written reports from both Kevin and the teacher I have every reason to believe that this endeavour was a success.

Also in August we had a visit from 40 U3A members from Sydney. They were met at Maitland Station by Kevin Short and Maree Farrelly who conducted them on a walk to the Town Hall, then to the Imperial Hotel for lunch and back to the Station via Church Street and St. Mary's church. Again a successful endeavour.

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During September Peter Bogan in company with others presented on behalf of the Maitland City Library's "Look Who's Talking" programme at the Gaol a most interesting insight into "Maitland's Great War" or rather Maitland's participants in the first world war.

More recently Heather Berry and Maree Farrelly conducted a coach tour of Maitland for members of Robina Probus Club from the Gold Coast, and they also did a Flood Walk and talk from the Art Gallery to our rooms for 3 teachers and 50 children from a school at Merewether.

The travel agent that arranged the visit from the Gold Coast Probus Group has assured me she will be sending more opportunities our way in the future.

We have had a number of interesting guest speakers during the past year and I am endeavouring to continue this. I have spoken to the Maitland visitors centre and providing we give them sufficient notice they are willing to promote our activities on their website.

No doubt there would be other points that warrant a mention at this time but I only hope you will bear with me for any that I may have overlooked.

Now comes a very significant issue, the Society's occupancy of the building at Cathedral Street. Last year Kevin Short, Tom Skelding and myself met with the Bishop to discuss our future as tenants of the Catholic Diocese. The Bishop expressed a strong desire to house us in the space above the soon to be re-furbished St. Johns Chapel.

You may have noticed an announcement recently in the paper or maybe seen the sign across the road. The restoration of St. Johns is to commence next month.

At our meeting the Bishop stated that they would not throw us out even if his wish to house us above St. Johns cannot be achieved. They would seek to provide alternative accommodation for us. It is intended that our present building be demolished and the neighbouring pre-school be re-located as part of the refurbishment and establishment of "Cathedral Square".

Whilst we are not privy to any final decisions at present I have every good reason to suspect we may be moving by Christmas.

On this basis I will seek re-election tonight as President as I feel I have established myself to a position where I am able to steer this Society to a successful relocation.

***Keith Cockburn***

President



## Astor Theatre, Morpeth

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**By Les Tod**

First published in Australian Film & Video, vol. 20, winter 2013, journal of the Federation of Australian Movie Makers Limited

<http://www.famm.org.au/20%20AFV%20Winter%202013.pdf>

Article reproduced with kind permission of Les Tod.

Photographs © Les Tod.



This historic building at 85 High Street Morpeth is rarely seen by the many tourists who visit Morpeth to stroll its many craft shops and restaurants, because it is located in a residential street away from the business district. Fewer still would realise that its story as a cinema goes all the way back to 1856.

The Morpeth Primitive Methodists had obtained land in 1853 and following a Sunday meeting, the foundation stone of their new church was laid on Monday, 12 March 1855.

In 1856 the Maitland Mercury reported improvements that had taken place in Morpeth generally, and stated *The High Street, not long ago scarcely a street at all, now shows a fair display of cottages - slab, weatherboard and brick, with buildings of a public character also. Of these the Primitive Methodist Chapel may be mentioned, erected within eighteen months, and recently opened. It is a plain structure of brick, its dimensions 30 feet in width by 40 feet in length, more or less, judging from eye measurement.*

In 1862, the first Government school in Morpeth was opened on 3 November. Called the National School, it was a non-vested school, meaning that the buildings were not owned by the Government. The school was actually held in the Primitive Methodist Church. The church was rented at a cost of £26 per year. A committee of seven leading citizens, consisting of the Reverend George James of the Primitive Methodist Church; William Chamber, butcher; Andrew Tulip, coal miner; John Wisdom, telegraphist; Duncan Sim, millwright; and J Whytlaw of the Commercial Bank, undertook the opening of the school. The first teacher was Mr Ralph Broadbent.

At the end of 1866, a public school building was erected in High Street and its opening saw the closure of church and private schools in the district, including that in the Primitive Methodist building. During early January, 1902, Methodists throughout Australia were united in one body, combining Primitive Methodists and Wesleyan Methodists to form a strong church. The Rev T Rudd was the last Primitive Methodist minister in Morpeth. After this unification, the use of the Primitive Methodist Church building becomes unclear.

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Film screenings had been held regularly at the School of Arts building and also in an open air cinema, and it was in 1921 that the old church was converted into the Aster *[correct spelling at that time]* Theatre. It opened on Saturday, 11 June 1921, with Mr R Stephens as proprietor. The Aster was formally licensed as a theatre from 20 May 1921.

Its dimensions were 80 feet by 28 feet, with brick and iron walls, iron roof and a floor part timber, part earth. The stage measured 15 by 28 feet. The operating box dimensions were 10 x 10 ft, with iron walls and a timber floor. The box was also used for the sale of tickets.

In 1924 the operating box was still being used for the sale of tickets and was an addition to the front of the building, on the ground floor, with the cinematograph on an elevated wooden platform. Three openings had been cut in the main wall of the building for "rays" to pass through, which had no proper shutters. The owner was given as R Stephens, of Francis Street, Wallsend. A few weeks after this report, a letter was sent to Mr Stephens informing him that the use of the operating box as a ticket box had to be discontinued.

The theatre was also used for many other purposes, apart from the screening of films. The Methodist Rainbow Fair was held there on 12 and 13 October, 1927. On 12 May 1928, the Methodist Spring Fair was advertised for the coming October, and the St James Spring Fair was held on 19 September 1928.

In 1929 the theatre, now referred to as the *Astor*, suffered significant damage in a storm. The Chief Secretary's Department wrote to Mr Stephens on 2 May 1929, stating *...Regarding the proposal to construct a picture theatre at Morpeth, using in connection there with portion of the old premises, which was recently destroyed by a storm.* In June 1929 another report stated that the *...Contractor has commenced the erection of the building...*

One month later, it was reported that the *Building is in the hands of the contractor - 140 feet by 45 feet, seating for 446.* By the end of August, it was stated that *...The work is progressing satisfactorily...will be about two months before the premises will be ready for final inspection and test...* From the above measurements, it is obvious that the building was enlarged and extended.



*Interior 1990, photographed by Les Tod*



*Interior 1990,  
photographed by  
Les Tod*

*Notes: looking  
back towards the  
street and one  
can see the  
narrow entrance  
and rear stalls,  
which was part of  
the original  
Methodist church,  
and how it splays  
outwards to the  
width of the later  
theatre addition.*

The official re-opening of the rebuilt and enlarged Astor Picture Palace took place on 19 October, 1929.

The Mayor of Morpeth, Alderman J E Connolly, commenced proceedings with a short address and congratulated Mr Stephens on the erection of his fine building. The opening feature was "The Forbidden Woman". Mr W O'Hearn, MLA, was present and also addressed the gathering. The Lady Mayoress, Mrs Connolly, then cut the ribbon drawn across the stage.

The floor in the theatre was built of tallowwood, in order that it also be used for dancing. Reputedly the floor was laid by the same contractor who constructed the famous dance floor in the Sydney Trocadero Ballroom.

The theatre licence had been revoked from 14 November 1929, and was relicensed from 29 November 1929, with a registered seating capacity of 795, as the Regal Picture Palace. There is no mention of the name Regal in the newspapers at the time - it is referred to as the Astor. Perhaps this was a misprint in the department's files.

The Astor settled down to a routine of films and community events. In June 1930 it was the venue for the Junior Football Club Dance and the Cricket Club Ball, but both were postponed to July, like many other activities in the area, because of flooding. The pantomime, "Cinderella", from the Sydney State Theatre, travelled through the picture theatres in the Newcastle region and played at the Astor on 23 January 1932. Sound on film was installed in 1932.

On 27 July 1934, the Astor advertised *Exclusive Presentation. All Australian presentation of the film The Life Story of John Lee, the man they could not hang.*

In August 1934, the theatre came under a new proprietor, Mr C R Garnham. The following notice was inserted in the Mercury: *The undersigned wishes to inform the public of Morpeth and surrounding districts that he has taken control of the above theatre. Only the best pictures to be screened.*

In 1954 further alterations were made to the theatre and CinemaScope was installed, with a new,



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widened proscenium. The auditorium was repainted in a light blue with gold trim and new K&B projectors installed. The Astor held a gala reopening on 30 July with the MGM film "Lili", because at that time it could not procure a CinemaScope release. The theatre advertised again that it was under new management and was now equipped with the latest projection and sound system.

In November 1954, the theatre advertised *Exclusive to the District, with four sessions, Walt Disney's Peter Pan, with buses leaving The Belmore Corner, Maitland, decorated with Peter Pan signs.*

December 1954 saw "Australia's Greatest Tivoli Stars" play at the Astor. It is believed this was a first for the Astor, and certainly an exclusive, for the show did not tour to Maitland itself.

A week of CinemaScope favourites was advertised in July 1959, while in the middle of the week the theatre became the Astor Danceland, with "The Modernaires". Dances were also held with the Astor Ballroom Orchestra.

Disaster struck on 16 February 1962, when a fire caused damage estimated at approximately £3,000 to the projection and sound equipment and also the roofing timbers. The Astor was then owned by Mr Albert William Kent, of Guyra, NSW, and run by Mr Peter Jones. The theatre was closed until the damage was repaired. It reopened on 22 June 1962 with "Swiss Family Robinson". The Astor Danceland 50/50 Dance, with The Modernaires, returned in July, 1962.

The Astor continued to operate under Peter Jones until closing on 11 April 1964, with "The Greatest Show On Earth". Falling attendances were blamed and a sale of the theatre fittings was held the next weekend. The lease had expired and was not renewed. By then the Maitland theatres had closed also, victims of television.

Local historian Mr Harold Boyle informed me that from 1924 onwards, the equipment was Powers. He also told an interesting anecdote concerning former operator Mr Cunningham. This gentleman also screened films in the School of Arts at Paterson. One day he lost his driver's licence and could no longer drive between Paterson and Morpeth. So he acquired a launch, and served both towns that way, commuting by river.

Mr Bob Colefax, a former projectionist at the theatre from 1942 to 1945, informed me that no alterations were carried out during his time at the theatre, and that the stage end of the auditorium was not wide (as it is today), but narrow, and very long, ie, as the rear section presently is. If Mr Colefax's memory is correct, then the alterations carried out in 1954 widened the auditorium and the screen (the latter for CinemaScope).

After closure, the theatre was used for the storage of boats and emergency equipment for the local Civil Defence unit.

During 19 to 28 November, 1971, Morpeth celebrated 150 years of settlement, organised by the Morpeth District Progress Association. The Astor was given a thorough spring clean and reopened on 26 November 1971, for a Debutantes' Ball.

After that it again fell into disuse, eventually being used for furniture storage. In more recent times, the front awning has collapsed during a storm and the building became very dilapidated.

In 1997 David Griffin, a member of the Australian Cinema and Theatre Society, made a submission to the National Trust in order to have the Astor Theatre listed.



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He stated that *The former Astor Picture Palace and Ballroom possesses both historical and social significance as a vital part of Morpeth's community activities. Originally erected as the Primitive Methodist Church in 1855, it was then used as the town's first Government school, and became a cinema in 1921.*

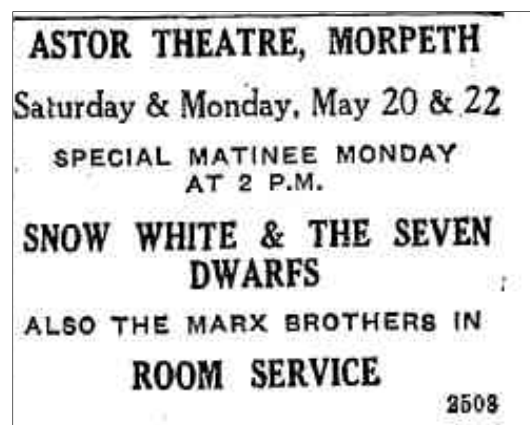
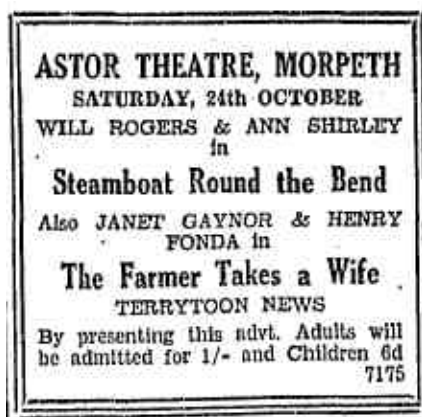
*It was rebuilt as a larger theatre and ballroom in 1929, the original church remaining as part of the building. The Astor was also used for flower shows, balls, debutante presentations, community singing, dancing, pantomimes and films. As a cinema it has experienced silent films to talkies, and black-and-white to CinemaScope.*

The Astor Theatre and Ballroom is listed in Maitland City Council's Heritage Study and Local Environment Plan and is regarded as an essential element to the streetscape of the town. In recent years some effort has been made to repair it, and a new roof has been put in place, but at the time of writing it is still disused, which is a pity, given its amazing history. Anyone visiting Morpeth is recommended to stop and have a look at this very historic building.  
(Originally printed in Dress Circle magazine.)



### At the movies :

Maitland Mercury, 22 October 1936



Maitland Mercury, 17 May 1939

## Will West Maitland ever be swept away by a flood?

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When Val Rudkin forwarded the text for the following article, which had been prompted originally by the May 1855 flood, it seemed good timing for it to appear in our May 2015 Bulletin, one hundred and sixty years on. With some parts of the Maitland area under water (again!) in April 2015, it seems as though there is no fortunate or appropriate timing for a flood article – there will always be another one whether you expect it or not. ☺ JN



View of the Hunter River  
from the Belmore Bridge  
Wednesday, 22 April 2015

*The following article was originally published after the flood of 1855 and reproduced in The Maitland Weekly Mercury, on Saturday, 11 August, 1894, page 2.*

A remarkable article appears in the Mercury of the 30th May 1855, in which the starting query is propounded “Will West Maitland ever be swept away by a flood?” Little fear was entertained by the writer at that period of our history that such a thing was ever likely to occur, but those who experienced the effects of the great flood of March last year know that great danger then existed of the thing coming to pass. The text for the article it would seem was taken from a letter written by **Mr. G. B. White**, a surveyor well known at the time, in which he expressed it as his opinion that “West Maitland will some day be completely flooded, and in all probability some or most of the houses swept away as they were at Gundagai.” The writer pointed out that it was difficult to meet such a confident prediction, made by a remarkably well-informed and competent man, with the simple reasoning that as such an event had not yet taken place that it would not take place hereafter.

“Long experience” the writer goes on, “has made us constantly alive to the fact that every man with a solitary exception here and there is inclined to believe and repeat a tale which partakes of the wonderful or the alarming rather than the simple truth. For instance, a flood which would leave no higher ground above water from the hill at Morpeth to Bloomfield’s Hill south of Maitland would cover West Maitland completely parts of its highest houses only showing out of the watery waste. And such a flood is currently believed to have been the view which greeted Mr. Close’s eyes when he visited the Green Hills (Morpeth) in the year 1825.

Yet the result of long and persevering inquiry, made from the oldest residents of Maitland has left us with the conviction that the ridge of ground in West Maitland extending from Messrs. Owen and Becketts', High-street, through Elgin-street to beyond the old windmill and St. Mary's Church, has never been covered with water since the white man knew the district. And that ground on the bank of the Hunter opposite Lorn and Midlorn properties which is some five or six feet lower than the ridge spoken of has only once - in 1832 - been awash, a small herd of cattle which were at the time grazing in the Horse Shoe Bend, then a thick bush, being found after the flood quietly grazing on the bank at this spot. The ground on which West Maitland is yet built varies in height some fifteen or sixteen feet. At the highest point near Owen and Beckett's it may be thirty-six feet above high water mark; at the lowest part of High-street, in parts of the Horse Shoe Bend, in part of Bourke street, in parts towards the eastern end back from Wallis' Creek, there are many houses twenty-two or twenty-three feet and few lower still. The flood we have just had (1855) reached 21 feet and that in 1851 reached 23 feet. The flood of 1840 was higher than this, but it did not exceed 26 feet from what we have been able to gather. There was, we believe a flood in 1836, but not so high as the flood of 1840. The highest we can trace out is that in 1832, and testing it by the points it is said to have reached it must have attained a height of 28 or 29 feet.

Let us now enquire as to the probable destroying effects of a very high flood on the town. We will assume that a flood equal to that of 1832 - say 29 feet - may again occur here. The Gundagai disaster, the one which we are consolingly told West Maitland shall some day illustrate was caused by the Murrumbidgee rolling down its already flooded waters in an additional wave, clear over the previously unflooded flat on which Gundagai stood. In a few hours the destruction was begun and completed. But Gundagai is in the vicinity of the upper sources of the Murrumbidgee and subject, as in this case, to the perils arising from several of these streams rushing at once into the main channel at no very great distance above the town. When the swollen stream reached Gundagai it had still much of the original power and force of the mountain torrents which fed it, and the houses were unable to stand the shock. But the Hunter has, after receiving the swollen waters of its upper sources, many a long mile to travel before it reached Maitland, and a strong current is the utmost we here see in it, with a gradual rise by inches, and not a sudden wave. Near the furthest point of the Horse Shoe Bend stands a house (Mr. Wallis's) which has been flooded more than once. The recent flood rose a foot inside its walls, and the flood of 1851 must therefore have been above three feet.

Yet its slab walls are still upright and firm. The Queen's Arms Inn, High-street, a weatherboard building, got a slight twist in 1840, when the flood water first struck it; but the house is there still. The fact is when the flood gets above twenty feet here every additional foot lessens its onward force by opening to it fresh inlets on the low agricultural lands. And as the waters broaden so the current loses more and more of its power. It would seem to us, and we know it is a general belief, that the constant clearing of the banks of the Hunter and of its numerous tributaries which goes on as population and cultivation progress, must necessarily give constantly increasing facilities to the swollen waters to pursue their course to the sea, and thus enable the lower waters to escape before the upper waters come down. If there is any foundation for the belief every year that rolls by must increase our freedom from danger by floods.

Testing again by experience the further point of danger to which Mr. White attaches considerable importance and also touches upon in his letter - the ponding or damming back of the flood waters by a flood tide and a high wind - we must say we attach little danger to it. In many parts of the world great flooding damage is sometimes caused in this way. But the height of Maitland above ordinary high tide makes danger here from flooding out of the question, except in flood times, and during any flood, although close observers, we have been unable to detect when it was and when it was not flood tide." From this it would seem that a flood of 36 feet, to which height the Hunter has frequently risen above low water mark in Maitland of late years, would have pretty well swept the

town away if it had occurred forty years ago. And instead of there being no danger, as the writer seemed to think, of Maitland ever being washed off the face of the earth, recent experience goes to prove that there was the danger, and that the late Mr. White knew very much more about floods and their results than we have ever heard his being given credit for.

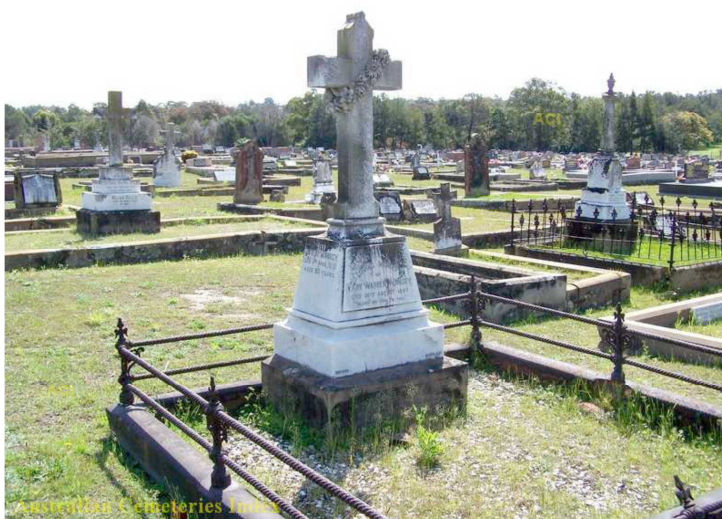
Had the Hunter risen a few more feet in March, 1893, which it is now easy to imagine it possible to have been the case, where would West Maitland be to-day? And there is yet the possibility that some day, instead of the floods getting less from the reasons advanced, of them becoming greater than we have yet seen, that is of course providing we do not get that canal of which Mr. Gillies offer speaks so hopefully.

But one curious fact to be noticed in that altered condition of things now and forty years ago is this: a flood in 1855 of 20 feet would cover but the same extent of country as a flood will now at 36 feet. That is clear. And the question is what causes the difference. Simply we believe the silting up of the watercourse or bed of the Hunter between Maitland and Newcastle. At one times it was an easy matter for fair sized steamers to navigate the river half way to Maitland and for smaller craft to reach as far up as the Belmore Bridge. This is no longer possible, and it would be a calculation very near the mark to say, allowing for building up of the lands in the vicinity of Maitland, that the bed of the Hunter has silted up considerably more than the difference between 20 and 36. The "pounding or damming back of flood waters by a flood tide and high wind," as Mr. White feared so long ago, has frequently taken place since and has been one of the great dangers, as he pointed out, always to be reckoned with in great floods. There is food for reflection at any rate in the matter, and those who take any interest in the mitigation of floods in the district will find in the article something at least to interest them.

## Rest in Peace - Wansey

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There is a double grave in the Anglican Portion of the East Maitland Cemetery on Raymond Terrace Road which bears a fine headstone and fence that appears to have been long forgotten.



This is the grave of Oliver and Mary Warren Wansey (nee Rider) who were residents of East Maitland for some years. Oliver was a native of Warminster, Wiltshire and was born on October 13, 1826 and died 9 April 1912.



Oliver Wansey was a Wine Merchant residing at Page Green, Tottenham in the Municipal Ward of High Cross according to the English Census for 1861. He was aged 33, and Mary aged 28. There were two children recorded as residents of the household in that year, a daughter Gertrude Wansey aged 3, and Oliver Wansey, a son aged 1 year. In 1871 they were recorded as residents in the Parish of Tranmere, Cheshire, England and two more children were named in the Census. Sydney Wansey aged 6, and Acland Wansey aged 3. According to the obituary written at the time of his death in 1912, Oliver had a family of four sons and two daughters, so another two remain a mystery.

Departing from England on a world trip, the family first settled at Christchurch, New Zealand before making Australia their home. Oliver and Mary came to Maitland, and the family scattered, settling in Sydney, Newcastle and Dungog.

Of the sons, Oliver Wansey lived at Waratah until his death in 1910. Sydney Wansey resided at Waratah and worked for J. and A. Brown. He then became associated with the Northern Wool Scouring Co. at Tighe's Hill before starting his own business as Sydney Wansey Ltd., a leading wool and produce merchant firm. At the time of his death in July 1939 he was residing at 11 High Street, Newcastle, a house on The Hill. He was survived by his wife, Ida Beatrice Wansey, sons Harry, Edward and Sydney Wansey and three daughters, Mesdames C. M. O. Stretch (Beatrice), W. A Wardell, (Phyllis) and Miss Margaret Wansey. The third of Oliver's known sons, Acland Wansey had resided at Dungog and later Quirindi.

Sydney Mosman Berkeley Wansey, son of Sydney and Ida Wansey was a journalist who became chairman of directors of the Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners Advocate Pty. Ltd., publishers of the Newcastle Morning Herald and Newcastle Sun. He was also a director of the Newcastle Broadcasting and Television Corporation Ltd. (NBN 3) and a director of Australian United Press Ltd. During WW II, he served with the 8th Division and was a prisoner of war in Singapore for four years. He died at Canberra on 20 May 1970 and was survived by his wife and a son, Mr. Michael Berkeley Wansey. Michael Wansey was the man who brought a Catalina seaplane to Australia from America and was a major shareholder of the fire damaged Manly Ferry "South Steyne" which is now a floating restaurant at Darling Harbour.

Sydney Mosman Berkeley Wansey left an estate valued at \$2.75m at the time of his death. The estate was bequeathed to his family.

Photos from the Cemindex website were taken by Ruth King.  
The grave is situated in Row 31 Plots 2 and 3.

**Val Rudkin - January 2015**



## **In the news**

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### **1955 FLOOD: Three free talks on region's flooding**

**Maitland Mercury, January 29, 2015**

By Rebecca Berry

Flood consultant Chas Keys will deliver three talks to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the 1955 flood at Maitland and District Historical Society from next week.



Chas Keys (right) with Keith Cockburn of Maitland Historical Society.

Topics include the psychology of flooding – floods in the minds of Maitlanders on Tuesday February 3; the impact of floods, flood mitigation and urban development on Tuesday, February 24 and the experience of evacuation on Tuesday, March 3.

Each event is free and will be held at 3 Cathedral Street, Maitland at 5.30pm.

Mr Keys is an Honorary Associate of Risk Frontiers at Macquarie University and a former deputy director-general of the NSW State Emergency Service.

He will talk about how Maitland people have interacted with floods and their emotional responses, gathered from personal interviews with flood survivors and from Maitland Mercury articles.

Other areas to be covered include the levee paradox, the evolution of flood warnings, preparation for floods, movement of people in future flood events, their accommodation and care.

Maitland and District Historical Society president Keith Cockburn encouraged members of the community to attend.

“My wife and I have experienced a number of floods while living in Maitland, but there are many people who are unaware of what can happen (in Maitland) and these talks will be most informative,” he said.

Full article available at Maitland Mercury, January 29, 2015:

<http://www.maitlandmercury.com.au/story/2849297/1955-flood-three-free-talks-on-regions-flooding/>

## **Anti-German sentiment led to street name change during war**

**Maitland Mercury, April 5, 2015**

By Emma Swain

As Australian soldiers prepared to leave Gallipoli and devastation of the conflict travelled home, the name of one of Maitland’s most prominent streets came under fire.



On December 14, 1915, the people of Beckmann Street presented a petition to West Maitland Municipal Council for the street to be renamed.

Historical documents show that the German-derived name of Beckmann was seen as an affront to the war effort and therefore the street should be renamed Anzac Street.

“Originally, the street was named after a local merchant called G H V Beckmann and as this was a German name the people of the street petitioned to have it changed and the name Anzac was certainly in vogue,” **Maitland Historical Society** member **Kevin Short** said.

Full article available at Maitland Mercury, April 5, 2015:

<http://www.maitlandmercury.com.au/story/2991395/anti-german-sentiment-led-to-street-name-change-during-war-video/?cs=174>



## Diary Dates 2015

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

Rooms are also open each Wednesday and Saturday, 10am to 3pm.

### May

Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup>                      Guest speaker : Bruce Dimmock   5.30

Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup>                      Business meeting   5.30

### June

Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup>                      Guest speaker

Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup>                      Business meeting

Thursday 18<sup>th</sup>                      Launch of Maitland City Library's historic map collection, with estate cartographer Claire Philp  
<http://www.maitland.nsw.gov.au/Library/events/lwthistory2015/maps>

### July

Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup>                      Guest speaker

Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup>                      Business meeting



#### **Victoria Bridge**

**Spanning Wallis Creek, Maitland  
Linking East and West Maitland**

**(1852-1896)**