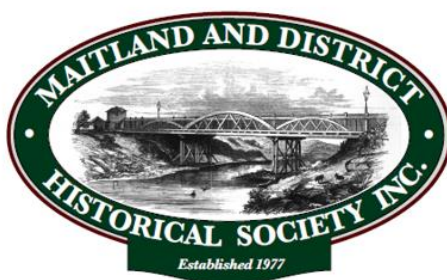


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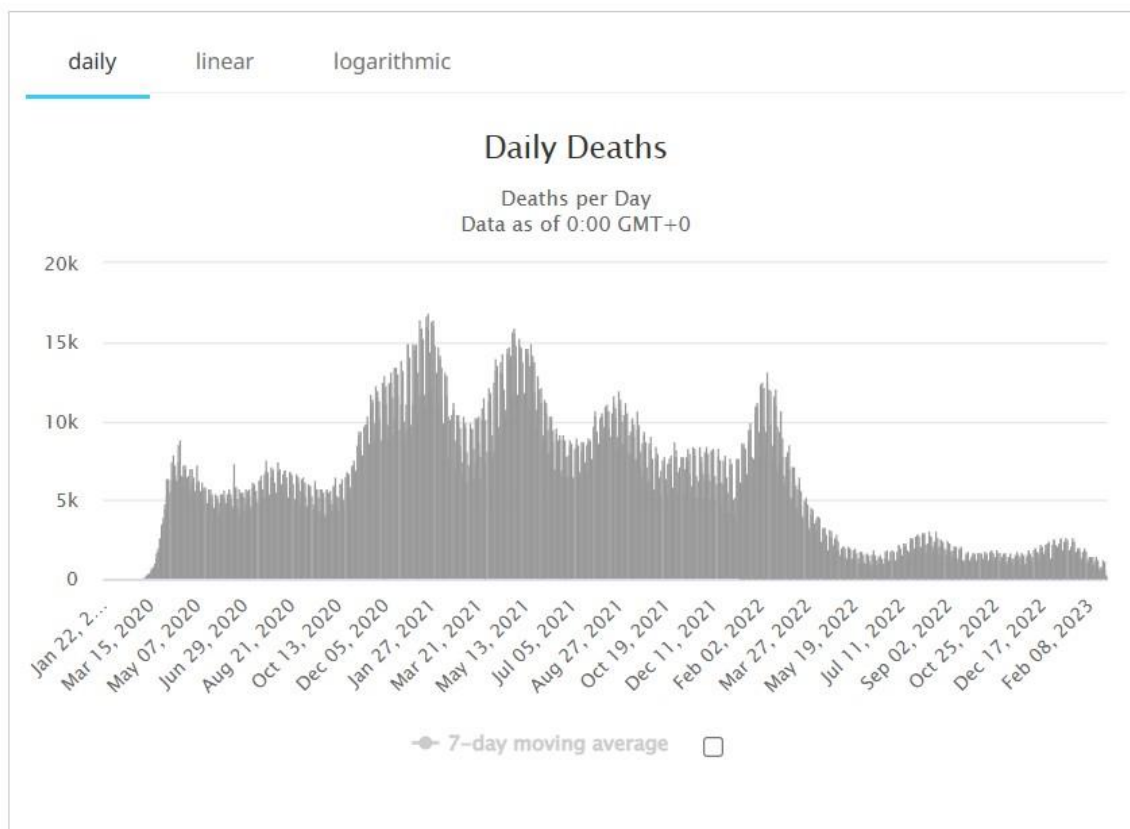
COVID-19 **NEWSLETTER** N^o 48

28th February 2023

Last month I gave Covid a break ... but has it gone away?

The published statistics tell us that presently, we are in a trough although that trough is somewhat driven by a lack of reliable statistics. Many governments across the world, our own included, have taken to only publishing infections and deaths on a weekly basis and even then, the publicly released figures are unrepresentative in that the compulsion to notify a positive infection now seems to be arbitrary.

That said, hospitalisations and deaths are accurate and are probably the only reliable indication of where we now sit.



The graph on the previous page shows that world-wide deaths are presently at their lowest ebb since the pandemic began; around a 1,000 or so daily although the daily figure very much depends on whether or not it is a week day or the weekend.

Interestingly, the world-wide ratio of deaths to infections is almost exactly 1% (679,820,161 infections; 6,799,203 deaths), meaning you have a one in a hundred chance of dying although that percentage is very much dependent on your age, vulnerability and vaccination status.

Here in Australia the death rate is a fraction of the international rate at under two deaths per thousand (against one per hundred).

Whilst this is encouraging, I guess it depends on whether or not you or one of yours is one of the 2,321 who have died from Covid in Australia this year.

Closer to home, New South Wales statistics are interesting in their own right. Hunter New England Health District statistics (other than weekly) seem to have vanished completely.

COVID-19 cases and deaths reported in NSW

Time	Cases confirmed by PCR	Cases confirmed by RAT	Total
Cases this week	3,272	3,273	6,545
Cases last week	2,824	3,209	6,033
Total cases (since beginning of pandemic)	2,149,480	1,751,300	3,900,780
Total deaths (since beginning of pandemic)			6,464

The NSW death rate of three in a thousand is marginally higher than the remainder of Australia but infinitely small by international comparison.

The question for me is the present debate concerning the 5th booster which, as of late February has become available. This is compounded by the availability of a new *Pfizer bivalent vaccine*, due I understand from 6 March.

The following is a link ([A new bivalent COVID-19 booster rolls out next month. Here's what you need to know about the vaccine - ABC News](#)) posted by the ABC on 22 February.

Perhaps I could have reproduced it here in its entirety, but I warn you, it's a 'hard read'. I have however taken what I consider the most relevant part of the blog for those wishing a condensed version of what is recommended:

Is it worth waiting for the new booster?

While all COVID-19 vaccines are expected to provide protection, Omicron-specific mRNA vaccines [are the preferred booster option in Australia](#).

These include Moderna's bivalent BA.1 vaccine, Pfizer's bivalent BA.1 vaccine, and Pfizer's new BA.4/5 jab — which will be available from March 6.

Given the "imminent availability" of the BA.4/5 booster, Professor Nolan said he believed it was potentially worth holding on for.

The new bivalent booster vaccine will be available from March 6.

But Catherine Bennett, chair in epidemiology at Deakin University, said most people shouldn't wait.

The introduction of bivalent boosters was a "step change" in vaccine protection, she said, while the addition of BA.4/5 vaccines was more like an "incremental change".

"I'm going on a work trip to India and would much rather be boosted [than wait]," Professor Bennett said.

"Waning immunity is the bigger difference here.

"If people are at low risk or not at the six-month mark, they can wait for BA.4/5."

Does everyone need a booster?

*According to ATAGI, healthy people aged between 18 and 64 years (and those aged between 5 and 17 at risk of severe illness) should **consider** a 2023 booster.*

*But the vaccine advisory body **explicitly recommends** that anyone aged 65 years and over, as well as younger adults who have medical comorbidities, disability or complex health needs, has an additional shot ahead of winter.*

So, there you have it!

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Back at home, our monthly 'Lecture Evenings' have recommenced, the first a most interesting talk by Helen Russell on Scottish migration to Largs. I for one was most interested as there was a subsequent 'wave' of Scottish migration from Largs to the Manning River, especially at the 'Bight' between Taree and Wingham, I growing up in a Presbyterian family in Taree.

The Guest Speaker on Tuesday of next week (7<sup>th</sup> March) will be by member David Sciffer. Following is the advertising blurb:

## ***David Sciffer to talk to Historical Society about 1878 wood engraving of old Maitland***

*The Maitland and District Historical Society's next guest speaker, on Tuesday 4 April, will be David Sciffer whose topic will be the famous wood engraving of West Maitland created in 1878 and depicting the town from the air. The talk will be given at the Society's Rooms, 3 Cathedral St, Maitland, beginning at 5.30pm.*

*In the early days of New South Wales, Maitland was important as a link in the supply chains to and from the north and north-west of the colony. The engraving that David will speak about was in a supplement to the Sydney Illustrated News on 7 September, 1878 and is a testimony to the significance of Maitland at that time. It tells us much about Maitland during its 'golden age' when it was known as the 'Hub of the Hunter'.*

*David is a life-long resident of Maitland with a degree in Mechanical Engineering. He has had an interest in photography since his teens and assembled his first computer over Easter in 1983. On his retirement in 1998, he combined these interests and now spends his spare time restoring mainly historical digital images.*

*Members of the community are most welcome to attend the talk. There is no need to book in advance, but the Society asks for a \$5 donation to defray the costs of supper (tea, coffee, sandwiches, biscuits, and cakes) before and after the talk.*

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Maitland Show has once more come and gone. Our Society had a display over the three days of the show, a display very much the 'work' of Treasurer Jennifer although she did have a couple of willing helpers. This year the Show was without rain although the Saturday was extremely hot and uncomfortable, our accommodation in a 'tin shed'. Sometimes it's hard to know what's worse, the heat or the rain.

Jennifer's display was primarily about floods although on this occasion, she focused on the aftermath and endeavoured to remind patrons of the critical river heights, especially with respect to those persons who would need to evacuate.

There was also a 'human interest' story taken up by *The Mercury* with respect to a small girl who found her doll in the mud. This woman would now be in her early to mid 70's and Jennifer (and *The Mercury*) wondered who she might be and if she still resided in Maitland.

Jennifer has also introduced a 'Lolly Shop', both at our Rooms and other outdoor activities. It is proving very popular with patrons and members alike although I suspect those with a 'sugar problem' should stay away. Likewise, it would be extremely easy to break a tooth on the peanut brittle but it tastes soooooo goood!

A number of our members, especially some newer members, assisted in manning the Show 'stall'. To everyone who participated, a big *thank you*.

The following is a reproduction but hopefully you can get the gist of the Mercury's story.

Is this you? Search is on for the girl in the mud

BY BELINDA-JANE DAVIS

IT'S a heartbreaking image of a young girl reaching into the mud to retrieve a doll in Maitland in the aftermath of the 1955 flood.

And now the search is on to learn the identity of the girl and find out where she is now.

The photograph is part of a series Maitland and District Historical Society has put together to raise awareness about the clean-up after significant floods, including the one in February 1955.

"Does anyone know who this little girl is? She'd be about 70 now, so she still possibly lives around here," treasurer Jennifer O'Neill said. "I also have another photograph of her afterwards, standing with the doll."

The collection, which was on display at the Maitland Show, has been designed with one thought in mind.

"What if we had another Lismore in Maitland?" Mrs O'Neill said. "I'm not trying to give people some shock treatment, I want to make people think."

"Are you in an area that needs to evacuate or will you be isolated? Do you need to have long-life food ready? What will you do if you don't have power?" she said. "If you stay, are you prepared to share your home? People might think I mean other people but I'm making them aware that snakes and reptiles like to take refuge in places too."



A young girl reaches for a doll in the aftermath of the 1955 flood in Maitland. Picture supplied.

Mrs O'Neill said knowing what could happen in Maitland was an important step in preparing for a future flood. She said floods in March 2021, March 2022 and July 2022 proved how quickly conditions could change and residents forced to act. "The last three floods we had were technically minor compared to what could happen," she said.

This week marks 68 years since the 1955 flood engulfed Maitland and left a path of devastation across the city. The heavy rain began falling on February 23, 1955, and by February 27 there was widespread flooding in the

Maitland area. Researchers later learned the total flood that Maitland has ever seen. Thousands of homes and

“Does anyone know who this little girl is? She'd be about 70 now, so she still possibly lives around here,”

Maitland and District Historical Society treasurer Jennifer O'Neill

volume for the entire Hunter River system at that time was enough to fill Sydney Harbour, and not just once, but more than four times.

That flood made the history books as one of the most severe catastrophes

businesses were inundated with rising floodwater - Central Maitland became a lake - and several lives were lost. The photograph of the young girl, and other photos of the flood, were on display at Maitland Show.



A young girl holds a doll after retrieving it from 1955 flood mud. Picture supplied

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We have two major events in the next month or so that you'll need to 'put in your diaries'. Firstly, there is a **Bunnings BBQ on Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> April** and **Steamfest over the weekend of 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> of April**.

Neither Treasurer Jennifer (Buffier) or Secretary Steve (Bone) will be available so it will default to the broader membership to help on both occasions.

There will be 'rosters' for both circulated in the next couple of weeks and it's imperative that our membership puts up their collective hands to help. **Please**, put both dates in your diaries ...

Until next time. best wishes and stay safe !

Kevin Short  
President



# Wheat growing was an obvious choice for Maitland's early settlers

By Cameron Archer

April 17 2022



POPULAR CHOICE: Dunmore House at Largs (Robert Russell 1837) with a wind powered flour mill. Later there was a steam flour mill directly downstream.



HISTORICAL: A shot of historic Dunmore House at Largs taken in more recent times.

PICTURE: Max Mason Hubers.

Wheat is a staple food for English people, so when the colony of NSW was established, there was an expectation farmers would grow wheat and produce a reliable supply. The challenges of those first years of the fledging colony facing near starvation are legendary.

Wheat was first grown near Parramatta and then on the Hawkesbury River flats. Later an excellent wheat growing environment was discovered in Tasmania. When the Lower Hunter was settled, wheat growing was an obvious choice for settlers. The Hawkesbury and Hunter were both subject to severe flooding so Tasmania was still sought after as an area for wheat.

However, a significant industry was established in the tidal reaches of the Hunter River (roughly below Oakhampton) and by 1830 the area supplied wheat to Sydney. The rich alluvial soils grew excellent wheat - easily shipped to Sydney or milled locally.

Flour mills were built in many locations powered by wind, steam and water, the most enduring being the steam-driven ones. A wind-powered mill was built at Dunmore, near Woodville, just like those in Europe. Fortunately, Robert Russell's painting of it survives.

A large stone building near Valley Tyres, East Maitland (and built by the convict entrepreneur John Smith) is the only flour mill still standing. It was a steam mill, well located close to Wallis Creek, not far from the river. Most mills were demolished for their large blocks of sandstone; the one at Osterley (on the river near Mt Kanwarly) was blown up during World War II as target practice to train the artillery. Unfortunately, a number water-driven mills in the Paterson and Allyn valleys were destroyed by floods.

Wheat was often grown by tenant farmers who paid the estate owner a rental fee or a proportion of the crop. The long strips which dominate holdings on Maitland's alluvial lands reflect the need for every tenant farmer to have river frontage. Often huts were built on the natural river levee, the area most likely to be flood free, but the levee was not completely flood free. Tenant farmers were severely impacted.

The ground was ploughed with a mouldboard plough turning the soil toward the centre. Over time a slight ridge was created and, in some places, an observant eye can still see these undulations. The wheat crop was grown through winter and harvested late spring, often stood in stacks until there was time to thresh it - that is, separate the husk from the grain. Initially threshing was by hand but eventually crude machinery was imported or built locally. Charles Reynolds of Tocal brought a stripping machine in 1843 and partly mechanising his harvesting process.

Despite this venture, Tocal eventually excelled in cattle and horse breeding rather than wheat growing. The series of wet years from 1857 to 1864 saw the disease, wheat rust, break out and wheat growing declined. By then the railways were moving into the west, facilitating the transporting of crops. Lucerne became a major crop, again relying on transport to Sydney by steamer, but that is story for another day.



# John Wright - from Kent to Maitland where he left a building legacy

By Lawrence Henderson

May 29 2022



**LEFT THEIR MARK:** John and Harriett Wright circa 1871. The Wright family left their mark on Maitland. **PICTURE:** Supplied.



**LANDMARK:** The Wright family gathered at the front gate of Chadlington - a substantial slate roofed brick building fronting Newcastle Street, East Maitland.

John Wright was born on June 6, 1821, at New Cross, Kent, UK.

He began his building career in England, as a plasterer and in February, 1856, he and his wife, Harriett Rebecca, with three sons and a daughter, left Plymouth on the



Robert Small, for Sydney. Soon after, the family moved to the Hunter, settling in East Maitland, where John established himself as a builder.

In 1857, he won the contract for ballasting the new railway line between East and West Maitland and the building of the railway station and goods shed at Elgin Street crossing. He also built the station master's cottage in Steam Street.

On January 5, 1858, the corner stone of the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel, High Street, West Maitland, was laid. John Wright, a staunch Wesleyan, had designed the Chapel (now the Uniting Church) described by *The Mercury* as: Victorian Gothic style, remarkably free from ornamentation.

The stonework was carried out by Messrs. Mack and Sherwood and John Wright was responsible for the remainder of the building. By August 25, 1863, he is listed as a member of the church committee along with Messrs Owen, Beckett, Falkiner, Blair, Youdale, Gulley and Dr Spink, with Mr Blair, treasurer and the Rev G Woolnough, secretary.

He is responsible for many other buildings in Maitland and Singleton, including St Mary's Parsonage in Church Street, built in 1880 and alterations to East Maitland Courthouse in 1881.

He had built his own house "Chadlington", a substantial slate roofed brick building fronting Newcastle Street, East Maitland, on the hill between Burg and Victoria Streets. The family was living in the house in 1865 but misfortune struck in July, 1866.

He was declared insolvent with debts of £1583 and assets of only £1438. He was elected as an alderman on East Maitland Municipal Council in February, 1864, and found it necessary to resign due to his indebtedness. His bankruptcy was discharged by April, 1869, but he never regained his seat on council. After the sale of "Chadlington", the family moved into a two-storey brick house on the East Maitland side of Victoria Bridge.

He was one of the original members of Maitland Mechanics' Institute, established in 1856, and at the AGM in February, 1864, was elected Vice President. He continued on the committee for many years. His continued association with the Wesleyan Methodist Church saw him elected to the Wesleyan Missionary Society Committee on May 28, 1865. On June 29, 1867, he was elected to East Maitland Flood Relief Committee.

He became Worthy Patriarch, Brother John Wright, at the inauguration of the "Star of the East" (Sons of Temperance) Division, East Maitland on June 5, 1867 and became Grand Treasurer of the Division by March, 1869. He spent his later years drawing council's attention to state of East Maitland footpaths and streets. He died on May 16, 1888, and is buried at Glebe Cemetery, East Maitland. His death notice states: He had been ailing for some time.

From: *Maitland Mercury* articles and personal communication with Maurine Osborn.

Our vice-president Allan, an engineer, offered these little gems:

*Two engineering students were riding bicycles across a university campus when one said, "Where did you get the great bike?"*

*The second engineer replied, "Well, I was walking yesterday, minding my own business, when a beautiful woman rode up on this bike, threw it to the ground, took off all her clothes, and said, "Take what you want."*

*The first engineer nodded approvingly and said, "Good choice: The clothes probably wouldn't have fit you anyway."*

### ***Understanding Engineers 2***

*To the optimist, the glass is half-full. To the pessimist, the glass is half-empty.*

*To the engineer, the glass is twice as big as it needs to be.*

### ***Understanding Engineers 3***

*A priest, a doctor, and an engineer were waiting one morning for a particularly slow group of golfers.*

*The engineer fumed, "What's with those guys? We've been waiting for fifteen minutes!"*

*The doctor chimed in, "I don't think I've ever seen such inept golf!"*

*The priest said, "Here comes the green keeper. Let's have a word with him."*

*He said, "Hello George, What's wrong with that group ahead of us? They're rather slow, aren't they?"*

*The green keeper replied, "Oh, yes. That's a group of blind firemen. They lost their sight saving our clubhouse from a fire last year, so we always let them play for free anytime!"*

*The group fell silent for a moment.*

*The priest said, "That's so sad. I'll say a special prayer for them tonight."*

*The doctor said, "Good idea I'll contact my ophthalmologist colleague and see if there's anything she can do for them."*

*The engineer said, "Why can't they play at night?"*

#### ***Understanding Engineers 4***

*What is the difference between mechanical engineers and civil engineers?*

*Mechanical engineers build weapons. Civil engineers build targets.*

#### ***Understanding Engineers 5***

*The graduate with a science degree asks, "Why does it work?"*

*The graduate with an Engineering degree asks, "How does it work?"*

*The graduate with a Commerce degree asks, "How much will it cost?"*

*The graduate with an Arts degree asks, "Do you want fries with that?"*

#### ***Understanding Engineers 6***

*Normal people believe that if it ain't broke, don't fix it. Engineers believe that if it ain't broke, it isn't sufficiently complex yet.*

#### ***And Finally***

*Two engineers were standing at the base of a flagpole, looking at its top. A woman walked by and asked what they were doing.*

*"We're supposed to find the height of this flagpole," said Steve, "but we don't have a ladder."*

*The woman took pliers from her purse, loosened a couple of bolts, and laid the pole down on the ground. Then she took a tape measure from her purse, took a measurement, announced, "21 feet," and walked away.*

*One engineer shook his head and laughed, "A lot of good that does us. We ask for the height and she gives us the length!"*

*Both engineers have since quit their engineering jobs and have been elected to parliament.*