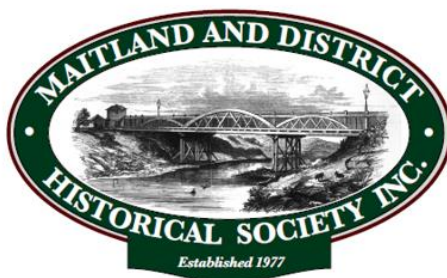


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COVID-19 **NEWSLETTER** N^o 53

31 July 2023

Firstly, my apologies for being a couple of days late with this Newsletter. My big problem has been finding time to sit down at the computer and write the damned thing. Okay, don't remind me, my nose has grown just a little but the cricket and the *Matildas* have been absorbing to say the least. I know there are some among you who find 'Sport' a little underwhelming but to me, it stirs the competitive and national spirit I can't help myself.

The one that really pleased me was the World Swimming Championships in Fukuoka, Japan. The best bit was that Australia finished the championships as the undisputed No 1 swimming nation in the world: Australia 15 gold medals: USA 7. How can you not enjoy being 'girt by sea' ...

After the 4-0 drubbing of the Olympic Champions Canada on Monday evening by the Matildas, hopes are riding high for something 'special' there too, especially if Sam Kerr is fit to play - fingers crossed. And we won the Ashes too. Sorry, wrong wording – we 'retained' the Ashes! Wasn't it interesting to see both sides taking the high moral ground when it suited. If you ask me, they both (i.e. England and Australia) showed a fair degree of hypocrisy.

If that's not enough, our 'Diamonds' remain unbeaten at the Netball World Cup, presently being held in Cape Town, South Africa.

Here locally, Maitland Pipes and Drums hosted '**A Concert in the Park**' on Sunday last. The weather was kind and it was a great day. Whilst our 'stall' didn't sell all that



much merchandise, that wasn't really the purpose of the day. Anyone with a love of bagpipes and a Celtic background was in seventh heaven, there being around 10 pipe bands present and highland dancers etc etc ...

The Cross of St Andrew

The Flag of Scotland

The massed bands on parade ...



The young ...



and the not so young



Last night (Tuesday), James (Jim) Waddell was our guest speaker. His topic was 'Cumberland Hall' the colonial mansion built by Enoch Cobcroft but principally lived in by Alexander Brown, cousin to 'Baron' John Brown, the principal of J & A Brown Coal Co.



In thanking Jim, I described him as being the best and best researched amateur historian I knew. I was afterward chastised by a society member for the 'amateur' remark, the inference being that Jim was far from being an 'amateur' historian, a judgement clearly demonstrated by his most professional presentation. I accepted the criticism gracefully ...

Jim was able to provide some insight into the probable architect of Cumberland Hall by virtue of similarities to other buildings. His judgement that the most likely architect was Mortimer Lewis Jnr, a judgement supported by

descriptive evidence in other buildings attributed to Lewis.

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A big 'Get well' to member Chas Keys who has had a short stay in hospital.

All members wish Chas a speedy recovery to full health ...

Finally, some progress on the 'Cultural Hub'. A number of the interested parties (myself included) met with representatives of Maitland Council with respect to the 'old' administration centre. Whilst cautious in the message provided, Council officers indicated that **at the very least**, there was a will (and direction) from Council, that it provide a storage facility for the various historical collections ... watch this space.

Until next time .... Stay safe.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'K. Short'.

Kevin Short  
President



# A time when Melbourne Street was the heartbeat of East Maitland

By Chas Keys



**PUBLIC BUILDINGS:** East Maitland Court House - one of a number of public buildings in East Maitland which created substantial employment.

There was much economic activity in East Maitland during the 1920s, and workplaces were more interspersed with dwellings than is now the case.

Town planning was in its infancy and doctrines of land use separation were yet to take root. People lived with industrial noise and pollution as a result.

Many businesses operated in the main shopping and business centre in Melbourne St and Newcastle Rd. They are listed in Arthur Gow's 1979 memoir on East

Maitland. There was a bank on the Melbourne St/Newcastle Rd corner and then, proceeding along Melbourne St, a baker, grocery shop, mixed business, fruit shop, café and hairdresser. Then came the Bank Hotel, a bootmaker's premises, butcher's shop, another mixed business, a tailor and mercer, another grocery shop and the Hunter River Hotel.

On the other side of Melbourne St was a wine salon, a wholesale fruit and vegetable market, blacksmith, the Prince's Theatre and East Maitland's only chemist. Lower Newcastle St housed a grocery store, butcher, barber, doctor's rooms, blacksmith and a timber yard. Few if any of these remain in those buildings which still stand from those days. On the hill above Melbourne St there were scattered mixed businesses in the front rooms of houses. Lawes St shopping area did not yet exist.

Industrial establishments included two slaughterhouses, one near the Victoria St station and the other off Mt Vincent Rd, and the Turton and Baker brickyards. The brickyards were central to the Maitland economy for decades.

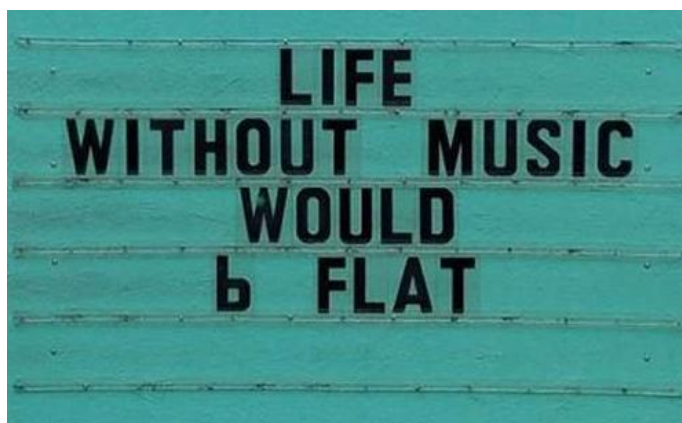
There were many public buildings including the Gaol, Lands & Survey Office, court house, police station and the offices and gasworks of East Maitland Municipal Council. Between them, these public institutions provided substantial employment.

Beyond the built-up area of East Maitland were the many small coal mines now known as Ashtonfield. This area was peppered with shafts, a hazard to pedestrians.

Carriers with horses and drays carted coal to the brickworks, gasworks and East Maitland Railway Station. Drays carted soil, gravel, coal, farm produce and an array of items to shops. Horses, carts and business houses that operated them were central to the functioning of the area.

Groceries, bread, meat, milk and fish were all delivered door-to-door from carts. For a time a man known simply as 'John Chinaman' provided silk, cottons and pins to houses from big round baskets carried over his shoulder on a pole.

Transporting people to work and to shop in the 1920s was by tram, train, bus, bike and walking.



# Our past – How our early settlers dealt with flood control

By Chas Keys



HIGH STREET: Flood affected residents at the east end of High Street, Maitland during the 1955 flood.

Floods were a threat across Maitland from the time of the first European settlement on the banks of the lower Paterson River (1812) and along the Hunter and Wallis Creek at Wallis Plains (1818).

The first settlers between what are now Raworth and the Central Business District were assailed by two floods in 1819, only months after taking up their allotments. Then a big one struck in 1820. Every holding was affected. Simple dwellings were probably destroyed and crops, livestock, sheds and fences lost. Thereafter, farm operations were frequently afflicted by floods.

As the town of Maitland grew, more people and enterprises felt the problems brought by inundation. It took some time for efforts to control floods to take root. There were proposals in the 1830s for canals to speed the drainage of floodwaters past Maitland, and for an embankment to circle the growing town to keep floods out.





BREACHED: An old embankment built by Bolwarra Embankment Committee. It was breached in the late 1870s and not rebuilt because the river changed its course. PHOTO: Supplied.

But in Maitland's early years the priorities of the colonial government were elsewhere, funds were scant and there were no councils to carry out 'flood mitigation'. The main concern of large estate owners was to clear the floodplains of forest and drain lakes and swamps.

They were making farmland rather than protecting crops, livestock and productivity. Activity to control floods had to wait. As more people were affected, more consideration was given to managing floods. From the 1850s, drainage and embankment-building initiatives began to take shape.

The first embankment whose origin can be precisely dated was built in 1857 to block off Halls Creek (north of today's Mount Pleasant St): this creek drained Oakhampton rainwater to the river but during floods it took water from the river and inundated farmland. Using wheelbarrows and shovels, local farmers blocked the creek off with a dam. They also built a wood-lined 'tunnel' (culvert) through the 'dam' (levee) so that water could drain to the river both when it was not in flood and as flood levels fell. The frequency of inundation was reduced where such embankments were built. Others were constructed at O'Briens, upstream of Halls Creek, and along the Paterson River in the Woodville area. Drains were cut at Scobies (Bolwarra) and Loch End south of East Maitland. Such initiatives were adjuncts of the major swamp and lake-draining efforts that created land for farms in the 1820s and 30s.

Lake Paterson (between Woodville and Wallalong) and Lake Lachlan (Louth Park) were transformed from permanent wetlands to productive farmland - the same



happened at Phoenix Park. Embankments helped keep floodwaters at bay and the drains sped the return of the land to farming purposes after inundation. Thus the periods in which farmland was productive were lengthened.

By the late 1860s, farmer-based 'embankment committees' were proliferating and the West Maitland Council was raising low points in the rivers banks behind High St to protect the town. Flood mitigation has become a significant activity in the Maitland area.

