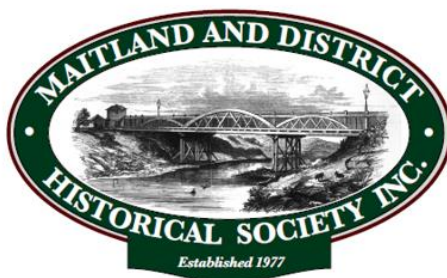


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## COVID-19 **NEWSLETTER** N<sup>o</sup> 58

31 December 2023

Not only has Christmas come and gone once more, the New Year is now 366 sleeps away. Yes, this year is a 'Leap Year' so look out fellas, danger lurks on every corner.

In the lead-up to Christmas, I spent almost a week on the 'Gold Coast' with my son, daughter-in-law and two grandsons, respectively aged nine and four. Whilst I love them all dearly, it's nice to be home again and sleeping in my own bed. It would also be fair to say I'm not only over 'Theme Parks' but especially souvenir shops. I can now live the remainder of my life knowing that I don't have to 'grace' either again .... and who said there's no God.

There were a couple of positives though. We broke the journey on the way up, firstly at Nabiac on the first morn. We visited the **National Motorcycle Museum**. Being an 'old' Taree boy, I've driven past it innumerable times, my assumption being that it would only be a 'two-bit' collection, it was after all at Nabiac, a small village some twenty or so miles south of Taree on the Wallamba River, now largely by-passed by the highway.







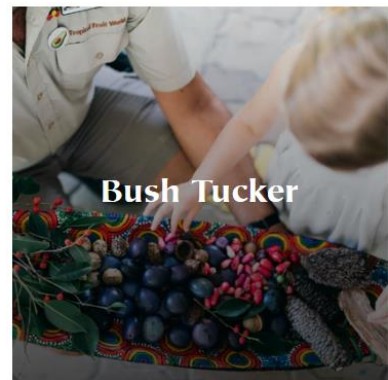
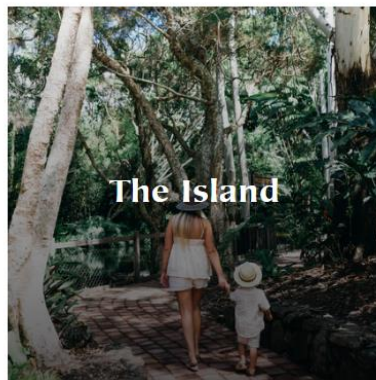
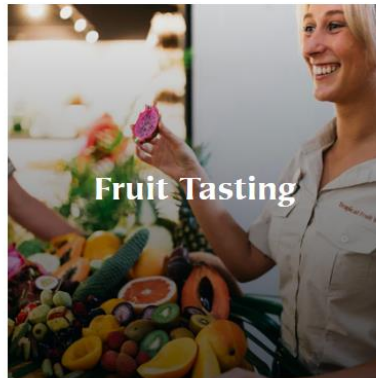
How wrong I was. This collage of photos only scratches the surface. There are hundreds of motorbikes – every conceivable make and model. Even the collection of vintage and classic cars was as good as I've seen.

I know this is not everyone's idea of a day out but me thinks it would be a great place for the Society to visit – and there's a great little bakery just down the road for morning tea ????



The second surprise was just off the motorway and the Tweed River – ***‘Tropical Fruit World’***.

It included a tractor tour of the orchards, a boat cruise on the enclosed waterways, fruit tasting, farm animals and bush tucker. There was a great restaurant and an ice cream parlour like I’d never seen before. They had a ‘thing’ like a blender which combined the ice cream with tropical fruits of your choice ... yummy !



It too was worth the visit if ever you’re up that way.

~~~~~

Enough of me. For secretary Steve, Christmas and New Year have been far from ideal. His grandson was the victim of a hit-and-run driver at Rutherford on Christmas evening. Although very shaken, it doesn’t appear he has suffered serious injury.

To top this off, late on Boxing Day, Rutherford was hit by a severe hailstorm that has caused considerable damage to many properties, including Steve’s with skylights and solar panels broken.

On speaking with the SES, they indicated that they had 158 callouts.

I had two skylights and two whirly birds damaged and a few dents on a colourbond patio awning. The hail was even large enough break ceramic pots and almost anything outside.

In my immediate neighbourhood there are at least five cars that I suspect will be total write-offs. The hail even broke the side mirrors off two cars – no, I don’t mean the glass was smashed, I mean the mirrors and their casings were destroyed.



To give you some idea of the intensity of the storm and associated damage, the following photos were taken at my place.



I have never before seen hail 'punch' holes in the lawn.

So, the end of 2023 wasn't so good so let's hope that 2024 is somewhat better. With respect to the weather, the authorities have been warning us that severe weather events are going to be commonplace. Let's hope they're wrong.

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Don't forget that there is no January lecture meeting however, there will be a Committee Meeting on 9<sup>th</sup> January with Room's opening times to resume as per normal after that.

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Whilst Christmas and the New Year has been a bit difficult for Steve, I can't resist including this ..... only at Bunnings!



### The 'Heritage Hub' – the Old Council Admin building?

As suspected, Council at their December meeting took the decision to demolish the old admin building. That said, there is now an expectation that Council will purpose build a storage facility and provide exhibition space. A survey seeking our needs and requirements has been circulated and will be discussed at next week's committee meeting.

Hope 2024 brings great joy and happiness ...

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

Kevin Short  
President



## OUR PAST

Maitland and District Historical Society

# The steam trams that connected East and West Maitland

By Chas Keys

October 16 2022



A tram on High Street, Maitland, c. 1909. Picture courtesy Mr D. Endean, sourced from Picture Maitland on Flickr.

A government-built and operated tram service linking East Maitland with West Maitland was inaugurated in 1909, replacing horse-drawn buses. The service was a particular boon to East Maitland, greatly facilitating access to High Street, West Maitland which was by far the main shopping area and place of employment of the two Maitlands.

Construction of the line took 18 months according to a memoir written by the late Arthur Gow (1804-84). Much work had to be done to fill in low-lying areas like the natural watercourses along George Street, Victoria Street and Lawes Street. Men with horses and tip drays filled these areas with soil to build up the path of the track.

The trams employed drivers (Messrs Horsfield, Carter, Druery and Curry in the early years) and conductors (Messrs Lamb, Hills and Gulliver). A Mr McMahon was both a driver and a conductor. Footboards ran along both sides of the tram carriages which were open to the weather: the conductors' job of collecting fares would have been unpleasant on wet or windy days.

The engine's furnace was fired with coke from the Maitland Gas Works before the drivers arrived for duty. It had to be kept going by the drivers during their shifts.

The East Maitland terminus was in Victoria Street, near the intersection with today's Hobart Street, where a large area of land housed the off-duty engines and carriages. From there the line ran down Lawes Street to George Street, into Day Street and along Melbourne Street to Newcastle Road. It continued west across Wallis Creek over the Victoria Bridge and through the railway gates into High Street, West Maitland. Traversing the length of High Street, the line ended west of the Long

Bridge (on which a special tram lane was built) in Regent Street. The trip from one terminus to the other took 25 minutes and trams ran every half hour during the daytime.



A tram bound for the Campbells Hill terminus steams across the Long Bridge at West Maitland.

A spur line ran down Church Street to the West Maitland Railway Station. A loop near the site of today's Visitors Centre allowed trams going in opposite directions to pass each other.

Sometimes trams would jump off the rails turning into Lawes Street from Victoria Street, and they had to be jacked back up. They occasionally left the tracks near the Victoria Bridge over Wallis Creek, too.

On busy late shopping nights in High Street, with carriages full of people, the trams could not always make the steep turn from Day Street to George Street. They would have to go back down the hill, build up more steam and make another attempt. On occasions, muscle power from young male passengers was needed for them to complete the turn.

When repairs were needed, a branch line connected to the railway line at King Street, East Maitland was used and engines and carriages went by rail to Newcastle where the work was carried out. Tram traffic was permitted on the railway line only on Sunday mornings.

Maitland's trams operated until the last day of 1926. Proposals to electrify them and to extend the line to Rutherford were never acted upon, and in the end they were unable to compete with bus competition from the East and West Maitland Motor Bus Company.

- Developed from *Early East Maitland: Memories of Arthur John Gow* (1979)

## OUR PAST

Maitland and District Historical Society

# Town hall host to bouts, balls and Dame Nellie

By Chas Keys

October 23 2022



In 1888 the West Maitland Municipal Council was granted a site for a town hall. Its clock was installed later in 1936. File picture.

Town Halls in Australian communities are significant, often imposing buildings, and so it is in Maitland.

The High Street site on which Maitland Town Hall sits was first settled in 1823 by Patrick Maloney, one of the original convict farmers from 1818, and in 1830 the Maitland Inn was built on it.

This hotel traded for 45 years before giving way to the more substantial Justice Hotel which opened in 1878. The Justice was one of more than 20 hotels on High Street at that time.

In 1885 the site was bought by the colonial government. It was intended initially for a courthouse, but the flood-prone site was not favoured for that purpose. Some also thought that the site, on a major and noisy street, was not appropriate for a judicial building.

In 1888 the West Maitland Municipal Council was granted the site for a town hall. To that point the council, after its inauguration in 1863, had a number of temporary homes (including the nearby Royal Arch Hotel in Devonshire Street) but no permanent base.





Maitland Town Hall's main foyer which opens onto High Street. File picture.

Plans were immediately developed to build a major structure, and a design competition was held. The design of a 25-year-old Oakhampton architect, James Scobie, was chosen, and local builder Henry Noad won the tender to construct it to include council chambers, offices and a large hall. The town hall was formally opened in March 1890.

*The Maitland Mercury* published a detailed description of the Victorian neoclassical building, inside and out, calling it "a noble edifice". The top of its dome was 84 feet six inches (21 metres) above the level of High Street, and the main hall was 100 feet (30 metres) in length. A clock was installed in the tower in 1936 and after World War II there were several makeovers.

The building became the Town Hall of the City of Maitland in 1945 after the amalgamation of West Maitland, East Maitland and Morpeth councils. In 1956, the Lower Hunter Shire was absorbed.

The building has seen many major events, probably none more commented upon than the appearance of famous Australian soprano, Dame Nellie Melba, in 1909. Her concert attracted 800 people, some of them on temporary seating installed for the occasion. Reputedly, this crowd has never been surpassed for size since. Many plays have been produced in the hall, there have been boxing bouts, flower shows, public meetings, balls, dances, religious functions, polio vaccinations, book launches and flood commemorations.

During times of flood the main hall has been a refuge for scores of people made temporarily homeless. In the 1955 flood, the water was well over a metre deep in the hall and people had to retreat to the stage.

The Maitland Town Hall has been the focus of political life and community activity in Maitland throughout its 132-year life.

- This article is based in part on Maitland Town Hall: Historical Study by Ian Jack and Jyoti Somerville (1999), commissioned by the Maitland City Council.



**Is Cleopatra truly beautiful or is it just the way Julius Ceasar ?**