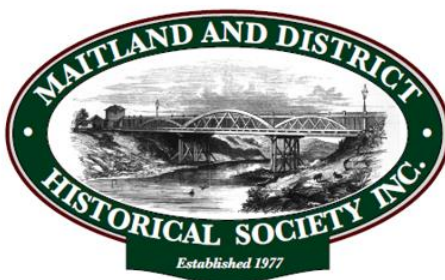


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## COVID-19 **NEWSLETTER** N<sup>o</sup> 59

*31 January 2024*

Welcome to 2024 .....

Christmas is done, the New Year's not so new anymore, the majority of the kids are back at school; it's almost as if the world has returned to normal, whatever that is ...

I guess the most contentious aspect of January outside my birthday, is *Australia Day* and the debate it evokes with respect to the suitability of the date and what that date represents. I understand the angst of our indigenous brothers and sisters who see the anniversary of Governor Phillip's declaration at Sydney Cove as Armageddon; the apocalypse; the beginning of the end ... I also understand the concerns of Anglo and other Australians, indignant and sometimes angry, that they are being hindered in the celebration of their heritage.

Whilst appreciating the attraction of an alternate date, I do have some question. Will an alternate date integrate the history of European settlement or will that history be set aside, denied even, in order to satisfy those who sadly, show no signs of being appeased. This of course then begs the question as to what a 'new' Australia Day would look like with traditional supplications politically unacceptable?

Sadly, the whole question circumvents mutual respect. The key word here is mutual; both sides in the debate need to be respectful of the other's point of view and clearly, this is missing from both. The one thing I am certain of is that hate speech and interference in organised celebrations is not the answer. The wanton destruction and defacing of public monuments is also not the answer. In fact, they are counterproductive in that they galvanise anger, driving a wedge, an ever-widening wedge between those who want it to stay and those that want it to go.

My bet is that 'wok-ism' will win out ...

~~~~~

On a much happier note, Australia Day provided one of our members with a pleasant surprise. Committee member **Janece McDonald**, was pronounced '**Citizen of the Year**' during a glittering ceremony in the Town Hall.

Might I say that the selection committee couldn't have picked a more worthy recipient. As well as being a member of our society, Janece is president of the Regional Museum and has been and continues to be the driving force behind the now annual Heritage Fest.

Additionally, she is the 'face' of the push to coerce Council into funding accommodation to house Maitland's many heritage-based organisations. Her drive and enthusiasm is an inspiration to us all.

Rather than tell the story twice, the following extract from the Mercury's article pretty much says it all:



Historian Janece McDonald pictured at home in East Maitland in 2022. Picture by Max Mason-Hubers

## **Citizen of the Year - Dr Janece McDonald**

*Maitland Regional Museum stalwart and noted historian Janece McDonald has been named Maitland's 2024 Citizen of the Year.*

*Dr McDonald received the honour for her decades of outstanding service to historical preservation and disability inclusion at Maitland City Council's Australia Day Awards ceremony at Town Hall.*

*Dr McDonald is president of the Maitland Regional Museum, has been a member of the Maitland and District Historical Society since 2014 and has played a key role in organising the annual Maitland Heritage Festival since 2020.*

*She has also been a member of the National Trust and Friends of Grossmann House since 2004, is a member of the Maitland Cultural Hub, Hunter Women's Network, Hunter Education Network, Hunter Innovation and Science Hub and the Paterson Historical Society.*

*Dr McDonald sits or has sat on a number of Maitland City Council committees, covering topics such as heritage, Walka Water Works, Maitland's Hall of Fame and the Open Museums Open Minds working group.*

*Dr McDonald completed her PhD at Newcastle University in 2005, continuing as a research associate and lecturer at the university until 2011 and as a conjoint fellow until 2018.*

All I can add is ..... Congratulations Janece, we're proud of you !

~~~~~

With the New Year comes the resumption of our first of the month lecture meetings, the first on Tuesday next.

### ***Brian Walsh to talk to Maitland Historical Society about the evolution of farming in the valley of the Paterson River***

The Maitland Historical Society's next guest speaker, on Tuesday 6 February, will be Dr Brian Walsh whose topic will be ***'Farming from Woodville to Gresford: a social history of farms, tenants and workers'***.

The talk is scheduled to begin at 5.30pm in the Society's Rooms, 3 Cathedral St, Maitland. It will explore contrasts between up-river and down-river farms before and after the droughts and depression of the 1840s, along with relations between owners and tenants and changes in farm enterprises and technology from the early 1800s to the early 1900s.

Brian grew up on a farm near Wagga Wagga and obtained an honours degree in Rural Science from the University of New England before working for the Department of Primary Industries in Canberra, the NSW Department of Agriculture and then Tocal College. In 2008 he obtained a PhD in convict history from Newcastle University and has since published his research in professional journals and in books published by the Paterson Historical Society.

Members of the public are welcome to attend the talk. There is no need to book a seat, but the Historical Society asks for a \$5 donation to cover the cost of light refreshments before and after Dr Walsh's talk.

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With the resumption of the New Year, all activities have returned. Our 'Rooms' are open each Wednesday and Saturday between 1100 and 1500 hours (*written this way to appease Steve*). If you've not taken the opportunity to come to the Rooms and have a 'cook's look' at our library and collection, please do.

Additionally, we are always on the look out for 'helpers' at the rooms. There are any number of jobs that can be done – be assured we can find a task that meets your skill set.

I'd also like to remind members that the fund-raising BBQs at Bunnings have resumed and co-ordinator and secretary Steve is always looking for willing helpers. In addition to raising much needed funds for our Society, it's an opportunity to socialise with other members and fly our pennon from the masthead.

Finally, March sees our Annual General Meeting and the election of officers for the ensuing year. Don't be shy, stick your hand up and get involved in the administration of our Society.

Till next time ....



Kevin Short  
President

For the Catholics among us ....

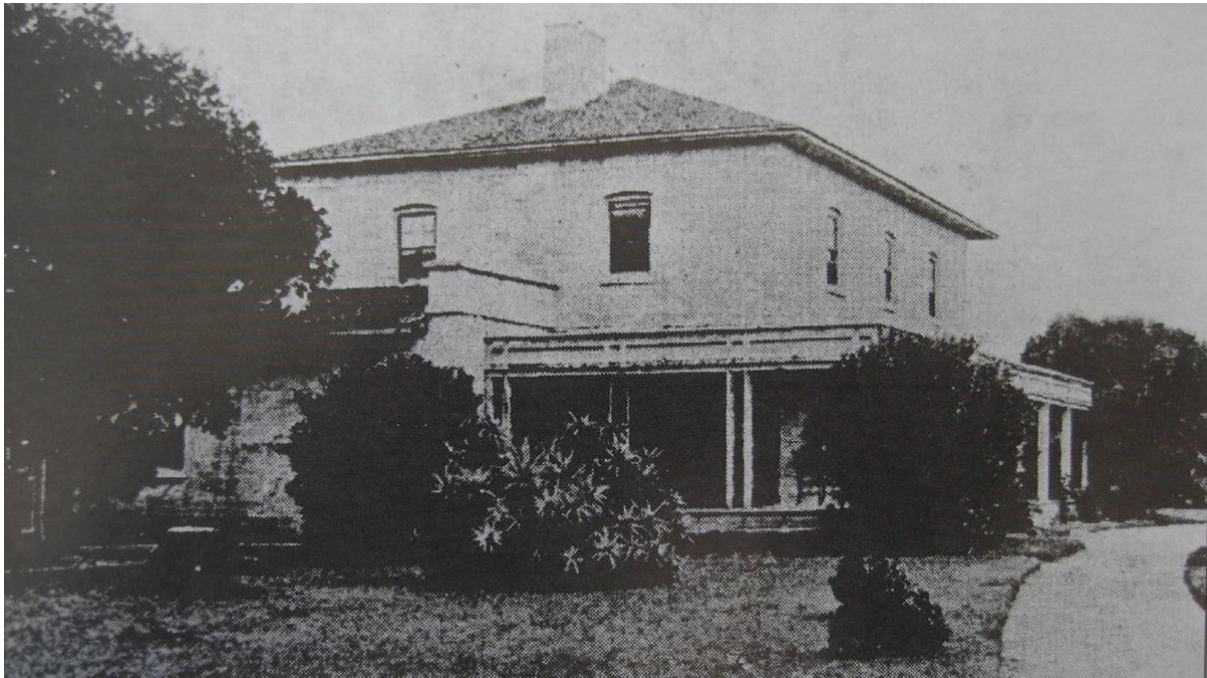




# Our past – how Hunter pioneers chose to shape Maitland

By Chas Keys

October 28 2022



Historic Closebourne House at Morpeth. File picture.

Before there was a Maitland newspaper, occasional articles on the area appeared in the Sydney press. One such piece was published on 13 February, 1841 in the Sydney Herald. It was headlined 'Government blunders - townships Maitland.' It was scathing about how the area had been allowed to develop over the previous 20 years.

By 1841 three small towns West Maitland, East Maitland and Morpeth appeared. Their combined population approached 3000, more than half living in West Maitland, but their houses and businesses straggled over a distance of six miles.

To the Herald writer, this was inefficient, the result of the government having allowed the best site for a town (Morpeth) to be granted to EC Close, in 1821. This had been a "deplorable oversight" and an "egregious blunder". One town was what was needed, and it should be "concentrated" at the head of navigation for the sea-going vessels bringing in the district's needs and taking produce to Sydney.

The government realised its mistake and sought to buy some of Close's land for a town. No price could be agreed. In 1829 the government gave up on negotiations and instead sought to create a town - East Maitland.

By this time Wallis Plains was the established focus of the district. It had 'the jump' on East Maitland and Morpeth, and investment in wharves, shops, inns and manufacturing. The momentum established was to ensure West Maitland remained the main centre.

Had Morpeth been the focus from the start, urban growth would have been more muted at West Maitland - less need for small craft plying the shallow, tortuous river upstream of Morpeth. The double-handling involved in transshipment at Morpeth would have been reduced. In a less straggled town it would also have been easier and more efficient to provide policing and postal services. The implication was that a 'proper' town, more efficiently serviced, would have arisen if centred on Morpeth from the mid-1820s and would have been above the ravages of flooding.

A town's location, the Herald said, helps dictate the efficiency of its functioning. To flourish, towns ought to be in the centre of a rich productive area, on a coastal harbour or on a river at the head of navigation for big ships. Once an appropriate site was obtained, the town then had to be built in a "concentrated" manner.

Had the government reclaimed the site of Morpeth from Close by about 1825, growth would have proceeded differently. West Maitland would have grown less and Morpeth would have been the Hunter's major centre. Urban expansion would have been on the high ridge towards East Maitland, the development of transport would have responded to a different settlement reality and floods would have been less of a problem.

I ran across some 'Star Trek' cartoons ... *(I'm sorry, don't unfriend me)*





Our History

# Flood level signs from Maitland's 1955 flood are slowly disappearing

By Chas Keys  
November 6 2022



One of the flood markers falling off a power pole in south Maitland. Most became the victims of rusting nails, souvenir hunters and power pole replacements.

Flood markers are controversial in Maitland.

The few still on power poles around the city today are the remains of an initiative of the then Department of Public Works in 1982, when about 120 markers resembling car number plates were installed at the heights reached by the 1955 flood.

Most (about 100) were in the built-up areas (central Maitland, Horseshoe Bend, Lorn, South Maitland and the lower parts of East Maitland), with others in rural areas including Louth Park, Bolwarra, Pitnacree and Phoenix Park. A few were located outside Maitland, in Woodville and Hinton (Port Stephens Council) and Hexham (Newcastle).

The markers were intended to give people an indication of the reach of a genuinely big flood. They were installed using detailed maps compiled immediately after the 1955 flood and were thought to be accurate within 150 millimetres (six inches). A few were four metres or more above the ground. It was hoped that, in conjunction with flood forecasts communicated via the media and by doorknockers, they would guide people about likely inundation as a big flood was approaching.

***In 1982 there were 120 flood level markers – today there are 10***

By 2008 there were only 30 left in urban Maitland - today there are 10. Most became victims of rusting nails, souvenir hunters, power pole replacement and hostility on the part of people wishing to sell their houses and fearful of any negative impact on property values.

Public Works vacated the field of community flood education after installing the markers. But Maitland City Council, not consulted on them in 1982, has been unenthusiastic about maintaining them and passively allowed the markers to slowly disappear. Council has placed its faith in other measures like communicating flood risk by means of state-mandated certificates indicating the nature of building restrictions which apply to properties in flood-prone areas. It also supported periodic flood commemorations as means of maintaining awareness of the flood risk.



The aftermath of the 1955 flood in High Street, Maitland. File photograph.



The markers were inexpensive and easy to maintain, but not popular among those who lived near them, a reason for council to shy away. Nor has the business community supported them. Some businesspeople argued that they 'advertise' flooding when they would prefer the memory of floods to be allowed to fade away - unconvincing arguments.

As with maps showing areas liable to inundation, little evidence exists (in Maitland or elsewhere) to show that markers affect property values. What influences values is actual floods, not education about them. In any case there is much evidence that property prices bounce back quite quickly and strongly in the months and years after floods. Selling just after a flood should obviously be avoided if possible. The markers' fate illustrates the long-held if largely unspoken attitude of some councillors which can be characterised as: "Don't mention the (1955) flood". This attitude probably derives from a belief, unsupported by evidence, that flood education 'promotes' the threat of floods in people's minds and thus discourages investment and development.

