

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



Speedway Part 2 !

Volume 31, Number 1

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*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: The photograph of speedway motorcycles was supplied by Jennifer Buffier.

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

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

Committee meetings are held on the third Tuesday of even months from 5:30-7.00pm.

General meetings are held on the third Tuesday of odd months from 5:30-7.00pm.
Members are invited to attend all monthly meetings.

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

Membership fees : \$25 (single) and \$35 (double / family)

The rooms are open between 11 and 3 on Wednesdays and Saturdays.

Patron: Dr AC Archer AM

Current Office Bearers :

President : Kevin Short OAM **Vice President :** Janece McDonald

Treasurer : Jennifer Buffier **Secretary:** Steve Bone

Bulletin Editor : Lisa Thomas **Consultant Editor :** Kevin Short OAM

Bulletin contributions are being sought. Please contact the Society via email
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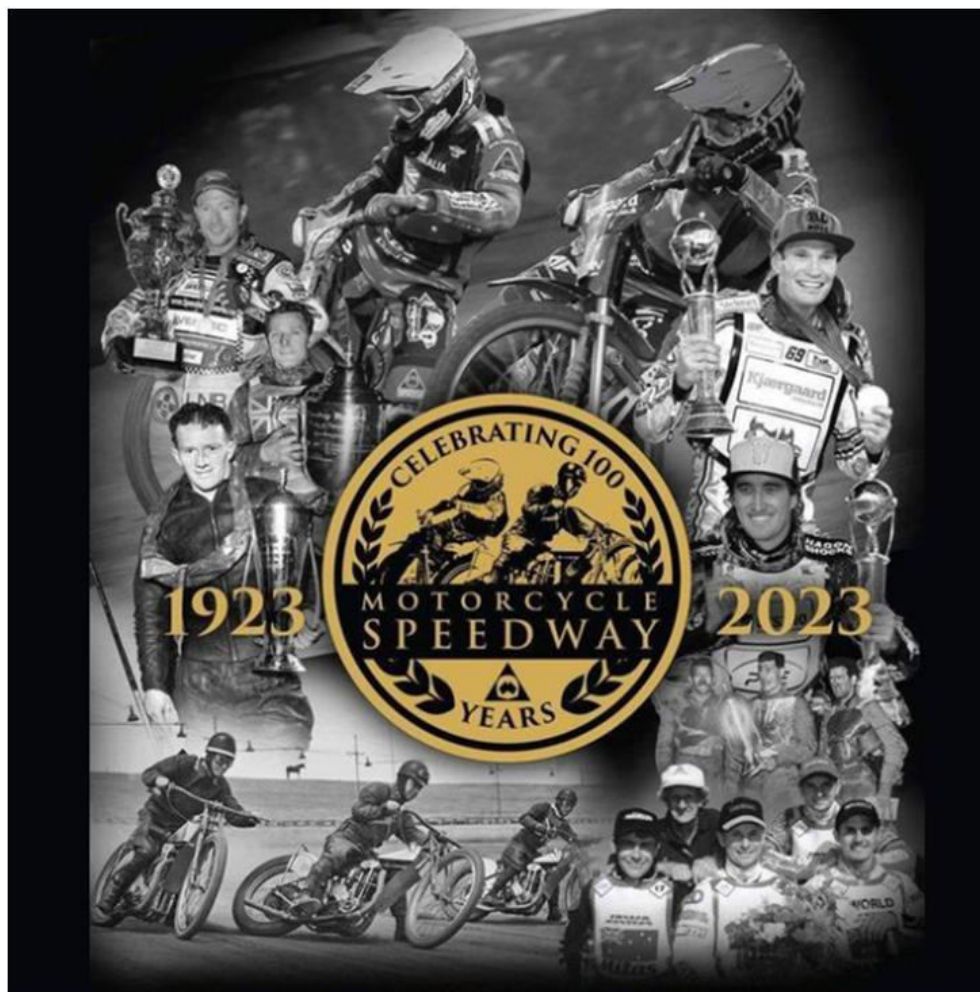
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Editor's Notes: In the November 2023 Bulletin, which can be found on the Maitland and District Society's home page, we presented an article by Jennifer Buffier on the Maitland origins of speedway. On 15 December 2023 a celebration of speedway was held at the Maitland showgrounds. In this Bulletin we are focussing on that celebration. The city of Maitland owes a debt of gratitude to Jennifer for the extensive work she has done in researching the history of speedway and in helping to organise the December celebrations.

CENTENARY OF SPEEDWAY CELEBRATIONS AT MAITLAND

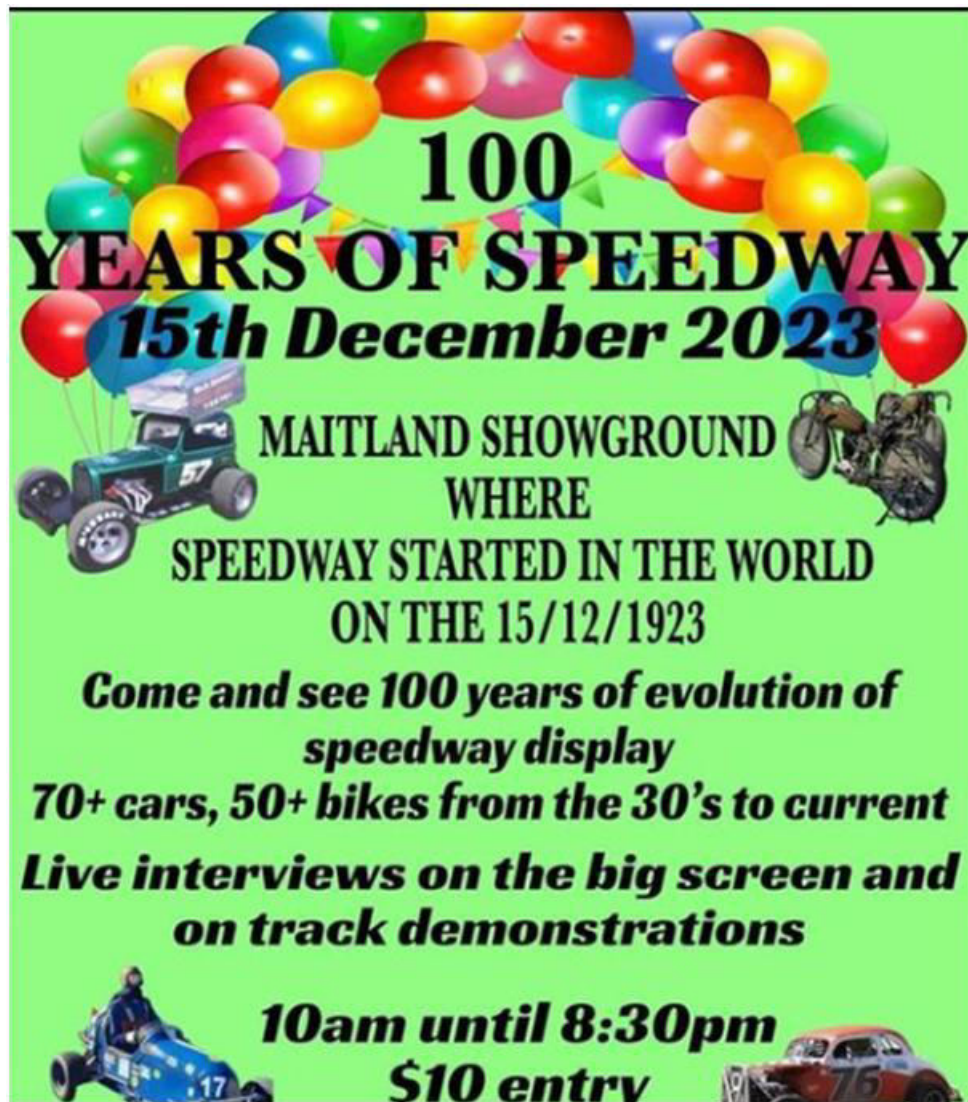
By Jennifer Buffier

On Friday 15 December 2023, the 100 year anniversary of the beginning of professional speedway in Maitland was successfully celebrated at the Maitland Showground. (The same venue for the first speedway races in 1923.)



It was exactly 100 years to the day.

People travelled far and wide to come to this event, not just from the Hunter Valley and Sydney. People travelled nationally and internationally. I met several people from England who said they would not miss this event, because back home (England) it is a given, that Motorcycle Speedway started in Australia. I also met a New Zealander who wrote for a New Zealand club and he has requested consent to quote from the Society's booklet on Speedway in his club's next newsletter. This was granted.



Some of the people attending the Society's stand in the Willard Pavilion were descendants of riders that were there in the first year. One fellow who was directly descended from Alan Whitfield Roper (AKA Alan Blackburn) lent us two frames from his collection to display on the day. The first frame contained three pictures of Alan Roper; the other frame contained copies of many Allen's Confectionary Collectors cards that were in circulation from 1925. Allan Roper was one of the original riders on the night on 23 December 1923. He rode in

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heat four. He went on to ride for many years.

Others who attended our stand were related to riders who participated in the later years of speedway in Maitland. (Speedway ran at Maitland Showground from 15 December 1923 to 29 March 1952.)

The event hosted static bike and car displays, demonstration laps on the Maitland trotting track by historic machines piloted by an array of speedway legends.



“It was an honour to do a few laps on Maitland Speedway at the showgrounds 100 years to the day, on the track where it all began in 1923.”



During the displays the grandstand was near capacity.

There were large crowds on the day with upwards of 3000 people there at any one time. We had a fine day, which was very warm. The days either side were hot. This fine weather and lower temperature allowed the events to go ahead uninterrupted.



**MAITLAND SPEEDWAY
CENTENARY DECEMBER 15TH**

Exactly one hundred years ago, on December 15th 1923, the legendary Johnnie Hoskins introduced the world to speedway at the Maitland Showground.

To celebrate this historic occasion Kurri Kurri Speedway Club are hosting an action packed all day event at the Maitland Showground in Bloomfield Road on Friday December 15th

Speedway Showcase 10am-6pm. Admission \$10pp

An unprecedented collection of over 100 historic speedway motorcycles, sidecars and speedway cars, many performing demo laps!
A Postie Bike GP demo featuring past and present speedway stars.
Traditional showground food trucks, a licensed bar and commemorative t-shirts, caps and stubby holders plus a 1920's dress up competition.

Centenary Christmas Dinner 7pm. Tickets \$75

Enjoy a sumptuous sit down Centenary Christmas Dinner in the magnificent MacDonald Pavilion including guest speakers and interviews with 2, 3 and 4 wheel speedway stars.
Booking details on Facebook: Johnnyhoskinsfounder'scup official or simply Google 123TIX and insert Maitland in search bar.

Supported and Sponsored by **maitland**

It was a day of interviews with high-ranking names in speedway.

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And displays showcasing historic speedway vehicles and memorabilia exhibitions.









The day's events were hosted by the two gentlemen below, Will Hagon, racing commentator (on right) and Lance.



The day concluded in the McDonald Pavilion (under the grandstand) for the Centenary Christmas presentation dinner. The Society moved their Speedway display into the pavilion for the dinner. Six Society members were in attendance.

During the dinner, interviews with Australian Speedway royalty and later a Speedway auction of Speedway memorabilia and prizes took place.

Saturday Celebrations Kurri Kurri Speedway

The Johnnie Hoskins Founders Cup race was run on Saturday 16 December 2023, at Kurri Kurri Speedway. Competing on the day were 2 world champions, Tai Woffinden and Chris Holder. Tai, who has now adopted Western Australia as his home, is a 3 times world champion. Chris Holder was world champion in 2012. But our local lad, Josh Pickering was too good on the day and was the winner of the 2023 Johnnie Hoskins Founders Cup. This will be a memorable moment in Pickering's career, having grown up close to where Speedway began 100 years ago.



Josh Pickering (centre) with Ryan Douglas (left) and James Pearson on the podium for the Founders Cup at Kurri Kurri on Saturday. Picture supplied

Picture from the *Maitland Mercury* 22 December 2023

AN INTERESTING ASIDE

One of the people attending our stand on Friday was Lorraine Martin. This lady is in her eighties and had some interesting stories to tell which we will be following up at a later date. She had relatives that raced at Maitland Speedway.

One of the stories she was telling was how next week on Thursday the 21st December she was going to go to the Rutherford tollbar at sunrise. Why?

She informed me that it was the 160th year anniversary of Thunderbolt holding up the Tollbar. Following is the article about this robbery which was found on Trove in the *Maitland Mercury and Hunter River General Advertiser*.

Maitland Mercury and Hunter River General Advertiser (NSW : 1843 - 1893), Tuesday 22 December 1863, page 3

HIGHWAY ROBBERIES ON THE GREAT NORTHERN ROAD.

No little degree of excitement was caused in Maitland, yesterday morning, by rumours tortured into every shape relative to a number of highway robberies, which had early that morning been committed within a short distance of town.

Residents of the Northern district who have read the accounts which so frequently of late have been given of the robberies committed in the less favoured West, could hardly credit them, or believe it possible that one individual could, with impunity, stick up from ten to twenty persons, in a day; but they yesterday had a practical lesson in the way it is done. Of course, the stories relative to the affair varied considerably as they passed from one narrator to another, and lost nothing of their extravagance by that process. The particulars, so far as we could ascertain upon strict inquiry of the persons who had been submitted to the highwayman's pleasure, and from others who had subsequently seen him escaping from the police, are as follows: About a quarter to five o'clock yesterday morning a man about five feet nine inches high, of light but strong build, dark complexion, slight beard and whiskers, presented himself at the doorway of the toll-keeper's house, alongside the toll-bar between Maitland and Rutherford. The door had been opened a few minutes before, and William Delaney, who, with the lessee, Michael O'Brien, resides in the toll house, entered the room from the back. He saw the highwayman with a revolver in his hand pointed at him. Delaney was commanded to get into a corner near the dresser, and he obeyed. The highwayman then said "give me your money," to which Delaney answered that he had none. "Give me your money or I'll blow your brains out." Again the answer "I have none" was made. The robber, who all this time was standing near the doorway, advanced a few steps, and with one hand opened cupboard that was near the door, whilst with the other he kept Delaney covered with the revolver. From the cupboard he took the cash box which, however, only contained about 4s. in copper. Without opening it he said good morning and crossed the road. Inside the fence he had a horse tied up to a tree; he loosed the bridle, mounted, and rode on along the road in the direction of Anambah, giving the toll-keeper the pleasing information that he was Captain Thunderbolt. Shortly after, a man named Moore was passing along the road, and he was told of the robbery, and desired to inform the police of the matter. Delaney then went to the Spread Eagle Inn, opposite the Rutherford race-course, expecting to meet the robber, which he was fortunate enough to do. As they approached the house, the robber said "Well, you are the chap I stuck-up this morning at the toll-bar. I suppose you have come after me?" Delaney said he had not—that he was going to the public house. He then said, "I suppose your mate has gone for the crushers." Delaney said, "No, there's no one to mind the toll-bar." The bushranger then put his hand in his pocket and gave back to Delaney the coppers he had taken from the box, remarking, "I am a bushranger, and you might meet a worse one than me; I was put on a lay to stick up your place; I was told there were 200 sovereigns there. I thought it was Young, the flash fighting man, who kept the place; if I met him, I'd take it out of him." Delaney then asked where was the box, and was told he would find it on the old road in (through) the bush. Delaney says he then wished him "good bye." The cash-box

was searched for, and found where "Thunderbolt" said it would be.

It would appear that immediately after robbing the toll-bar the robber proceeded to the Spread Eagle Inn, as Mrs. Byrne found him at the door when she first opened it. He was, as she alleges, armed with a belt of revolvers, and had others in his pockets. He asked for something to eat, and bread and meat were given to him; having eaten them he asked what he had to pay, and being told that there was no charge for a thing like that, said, "I came to rob you, but as you are so hospitable I won't do so." He then purchased a bottle of rum, drunk part of it, and fastened the rest, with some bread and cheese, to his saddle; he remained nearly two hours at this place, and was going away when Delaney came up and met him.

From further enquiries it appears that after parting with the toll-bar-keeper the bushranger met a man named Godfrey Parsons about half a mile beyond the Spread Eagle Inn. Parsons was bringing his wife in a spring cart from Anvil Creek, where he resides, to Maitland for medical attendance, when the robber came riding across the green from the road which there leads off to Anambah. He pulled up when he came to the cart, bidding Parsons stop and give up his money, at the same time presenting his revolver to enforce the demand. Parsons (who had about £30 in his possession) answered that he had only two pounds, and was coming into Maitland for a doctor's advice for his wife. Mrs. Parsons was much terrified, and began to cry. The robber then said, as the money was wanted for the doctor he wouldn't take it; he was an outlaw, and knew he would get fifteen years if he was caught. He then rode off along the road until he came to where some teamsters were camping; he entered into conversation with them, but did nothing more. He subsequently met Mrs. Friend, Mrs. Clarke, her two daughters, and a man named James Kavanagh, —the last named four together. He stopped them, but we have not heard whether he robbed them of any-thing. He then met a constable, who was on foot, and asked the constable if it was not he whom he was looking after, and challenged him to fight him. He then rode back to the Spread Eagle Inn, and again entered into conversation, patronised the publican, and talked contemptuously of constables; stating that they chased him near Armidale, and when they got to the Black Rock they got afraid and went back, saying their horses got bogged in the Green Swamp. He further said they took a saddle and bridle from him at Black Rock. When he the second time called at the Spread Eagle he did not dismount; he drank some tea and ate some bread and meat which were supplied to him. He soon afterwards rode away, and four mounted policemen went out in pursuit. When the police enquired at the Spread Eagle Inn for the robber, they learnt that he had taken the road leading through Anambah; one of them (mounted) overtook him speaking to a tenant of Mr. G. J. Cobb's; he rode up and asked if

they had seen any bullocks about, to which the robber answered " No." The constable (who was in disguise) then drew out his revolver, pointed it at him, and said, "You are my prisoner." The fellow coolly turned round, looked at the constable, put spurs to his horse, and galloped away, the constable in pursuit. Several shots are alleged to have been fired by the trooper when within a few yards of his man, but without effect. Through Anambah the bushranger rode at the topmost speed of his horse. Near Mr. Cobb's place the trooper was within fifty yards of him, but his horse was blown. He dismounted and took a horse belonging to Mr. Walter Sparkes which was saddled and bridled near a blacksmith's forge. The bushranger in the mean time, had improved the distance between himself and his pursuer, the trooper kept him in view until the river was reached; but crossing it he lost sight of him. Other troopers have been despatched in search of the marauder and last evening were in pursuit. At eight o'clock last evening the four troopers had returned, without the slightest success.