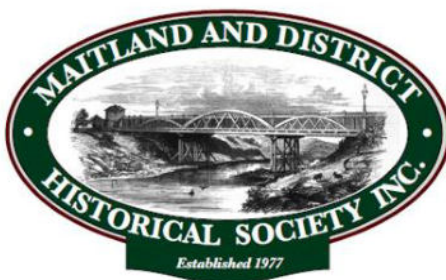


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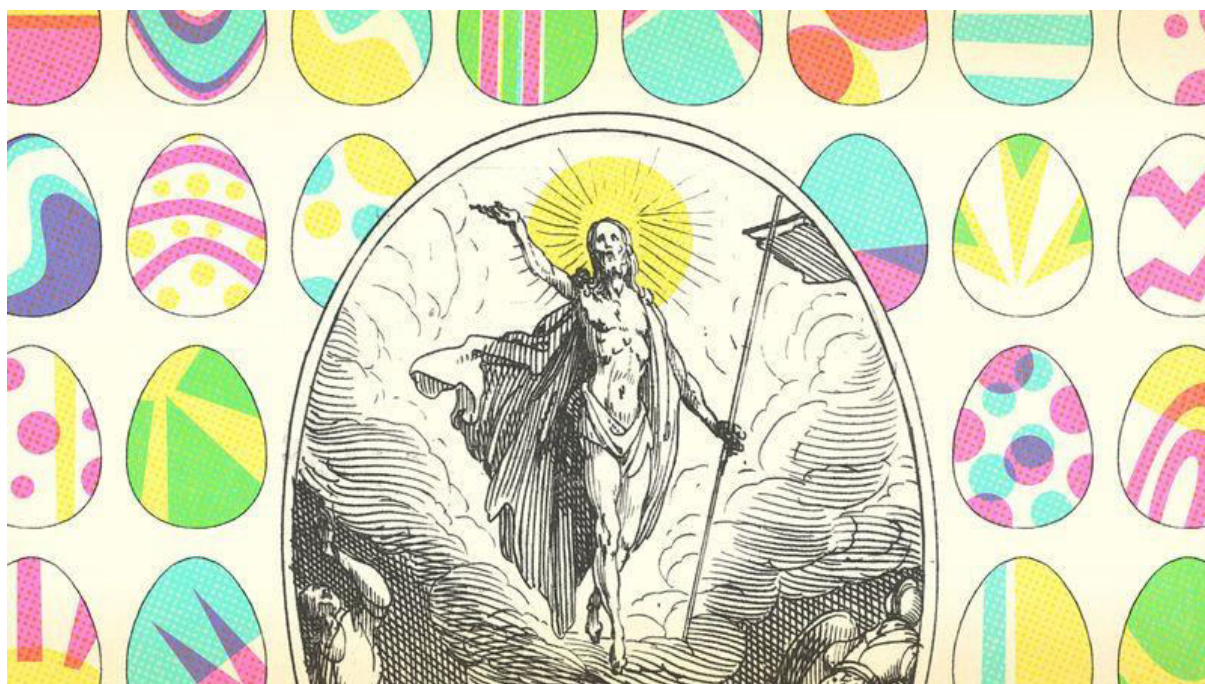
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NEWSLETTER N^o 61

31 March 2024

EASTER '24

Easter, the principal festival of the Christian Church celebrates the resurrection of Christ on the third day following his Crucifixion. The earliest recorded observance of an '*Easter celebration*' was in the 2nd century, though it is likely that it was celebrated earlier.



The English word Easter, which parallels the German word *Ostern*, is of uncertain origin. One view, expounded by the Venerable Bede in the 8th century, was that it derived from Eostre, or Eostrae, the Anglo-Saxon goddess of spring and fertility. This view presumes, as does the view associating the origin of Christmas on December 25 with pagan celebrations of the winter solstice, that Christians appropriated pagan names and holidays for their highest festivals. Given the determination with which Christians combated all forms of paganism (the belief in multiple deities), this appears a rather dubious presumption. There is now widespread consensus that the word derives from the Christian designation of Easter week as *in albis*, a Latin phrase that

was understood as the plural of *alba* (“dawn”) and became *eostarum* in Old High German, the precursor of the modern German and English term. The Latin and Greek Pascha (“Passover”) provides the root for Pâques, the French word for Easter.

The above is plagiarised directly from Britannica and throws some doubt on the generally held belief that early Christians overlayed pagan festivals with Christian dogma. For mine, I’m with the Venerable Bede in that I personally think it was a smart commercial move — that way no-one was or is offended.

The Council of Nicaea in 325AD decreed that Easter should be observed on the first Sunday following the first full moon after the (northern) spring equinox (March 21). Easter, therefore, can fall on any Sunday between March 22 and April 25.

As an aside, the Council at Nicaea in 325AD decided a few other important things too – like what went into and what was left out of the Bible although there are sources which refute this assertion. All I can say is, who said meetings aren’t important?

Another apparent contradiction in the Christian story is that the meeting at Nicaea, that panacea of Christian dogma, was convened and presided over by Constantine I, the Roman Emperor and at that time, an unbaptised pagan. It’s easy to see a political motive in Constantine’s intent – I might be a cynic but I’d say little has changed?

So, there you have it; the story of Easter.

Easter, like Christmas, has over time accumulated a great many traditions, some of which have little to do with Christian celebration of the Resurrection but derive from folk customs. The Easter lamb appropriates both the appellation for Jesus in Scripture (“behold the lamb of God ...” John 1:29) and the lamb’s role as a sacrificial animal in ancient Israel. In antiquity, Christians placed lamb under the altar, had it blessed and then ate it.

But what about those pesky eggs?

Since the 12th Century the Lenten fast has ended on Easter with meals that included eggs, ham, cheeses, bread and sweets that have been blessed for the occasion.

The use of painted and decorated Easter eggs was first recorded in the 13th Century. The Church prohibited the eating of eggs during Holy Week; unfortunately (for the Church) the chooks continued to lay but the church adapted, the eggs specially branded as “*Holy Week*” eggs and to identify them, they were decorated. The egg itself became a symbol of the Resurrection and just as Jesus rose from the tomb, the egg came to symbolise ‘*new life*’ emerging from the eggshell. In the Orthodox tradition, the eggs are painted red, a symbol of the blood shed by Jesus on the cross.



That chocolate became the norm was surprisingly not an American invention but rather European or more particularly, French and German. The French and Germans also began the tradition of ‘gifting’ the hollow chocolate eggs. Originally, they were made

with dark chocolate although this changed in the 1870's when milk chocolate became popular. They were first introduced to England in 1873 by JS Fry and Sons.

The Easter Bunny also originated in Germany in the 17th Century and was associated with the aforementioned festival *Eostre*, the Anglo-Saxon goddess. It has become a symbol of fertility and new life – perhaps what they say about rabbits is true?

In the 9th Century, Pope Nicholas I declared that believers should abstain from eating “*flesh, blood or marrow*” on Fridays in memory of Christ's death. Interestingly, the practice of eating fish on Fridays emerged as a result of the meatless days on the medieval Christian calendar and meat fasting days played a crucial role in the expansion of the global fishing industry. Despite this, and contrary to popular myth, there was never a secret pact by any pope to prop up the Italian fishing industry.

For mine, I attended Church several times over Easter. Firstly, on Maundy Thursday, which celebrates the Last Supper; a Tenebrae Service on Good Friday (Tenebrae is Latin for darkness) where the Church lights were progressively extinguished, signalling the dark accord following the crucifixion and finally the Easter Vigil service on Easter morning.

Whilst services were well attended, most Europeans (Australians) choose to no longer attend Easter services, preferring to make their celebration a secular one but surprisingly, one with a full complement of eggs, bunnies and seafood.

I trust that everyone has enjoyed Easter in their own special way and as Irish comedian Dave Allen used to say: “*May your God go with you.*”

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Our Annual General Meeting (AGM) has come and gone. Little changed in that I'm still president, Steve (Bone) is still secretary and Jennifer (Buffier) is still Treasurer. Likewise, the Committee remains virtually unchanged. Whether that's a vote of confidence in the current administration or merely displays a degree of apathy among the membership is hard to know. The reality is that it's probably a bit of both. Whilst happy enough to continue as president, I would especially like to point out to the membership that our Constitution was deliberately formed to prevent the long-term occupation of any of the executive positions by any individual. In this regard, both Jennifer and I were elected from ‘*the floor*’ as a consequence that there were no written nominations. Please, consider putting yourself forward to help run the Society next year?

At the AGM I had the very great pleasure of presenting Maree Farrelly and Allan Thomas with Life Membership certificates and badges. Lisa Thomas was also awarded Life Membership but was unable to attend due to ill health.

Life membership is a great honour and is not bestowed lightly. All three have made major contributions to our Society over a considerable period of time. All three have been regular in their attendance, able and willing participants and generous with their time and talents.





Maree Farrelly receiving her Life Membership certificate and badge from President Kevin Short



Allan Thomas receives his Life Membership certificate and badge

In approximately a fortnight, Steam Fest will be with us again. As in past years, our Historical Society will 'man' the Information Booth **and we need your help**. A roster has been circulated in the last couple of days – please add your name to the list and come along. There will always be an experienced member with you. It is an enjoyable couple of days and gives us an opportunity to show and tell people what we do. Be part of it!



**13 - 14 April 2024**

Since our last Newsletter we also hosted Don and Sue Brian who presented a most informative and interesting talk on 'Cabbage Tree Hats'. These were the hat of choice among our colonial forebears. Whilst the presentation at the Gaol wasn't especially well attended, it was an excellent presentation.



Vice President Janece McDonald, presenting souvenir mugs to Sue and Don Brian.



Sue Brian with a couple of her Cabbage Tree hats.



We also participated in the local Seniors Week events. Treasurer Jennifer did herself proud ....



Finally, our Guest Speaker evening is scheduled for this Tuesday evening:

## **Geophysicist Bob Musgrave to talk to Maitland Historical Society about the geological history of the Hunter Valley**

The guest speaker at the Maitland and District Historical Society's April meeting will be Bob Musgrave. His talk, **'The geology of the Hunter Valley: so much more than just coal'**, will be delivered at the Society's rooms at 3 Cathedral St, Maitland, beginning at 5.30pm on Tuesday, 2 April.

The Hunter Valley we see today is the result of over 500 million years of geological events, and the distinctive features of the valley's geology have played key roles in our understanding of some of the major processes that shape the whole Earth. These have included the drifting of continents, ancient ice ages, the greatest of all mass extinctions and the mysterious 'flipping' of the magnetic poles.

Bob Musgrave is a geophysicist whose long career has spanned studies of plate motions in the islands of the Pacific, time on a research ship drilling holes in the sea floor, teaching at La Trobe University and research on local geology while working for

the Geological Survey of NSW. Though officially retired, Bob still operates a laboratory at the University of Newcastle.

Members of the Society, and members of the general public, are invited to Bob's talk. Booking is not necessary, and there will be no charge to attend, but the Society asks for a donation of \$5 to cover the cost of supper (tea, coffee, sandwiches, biscuits and cake) before and after the presentation.

Come on a greatly speeded up Hunter Valley journey through geological time!

The talk is open to Historical Society members and to members of the public, who are most welcome to attend. There is no need to book a seat in advance.

**The Society asks for a donation of \$5 to cover the cost of light refreshments before and after the talk. Members of the Public are most welcome.**

**ZOOM (for financial members only) will be available.**

Till next time ....



Kevin Short  
President

I bought my  
daughter a  
handbag from  
Iraq.  
She said thanks  
for the Baghdad

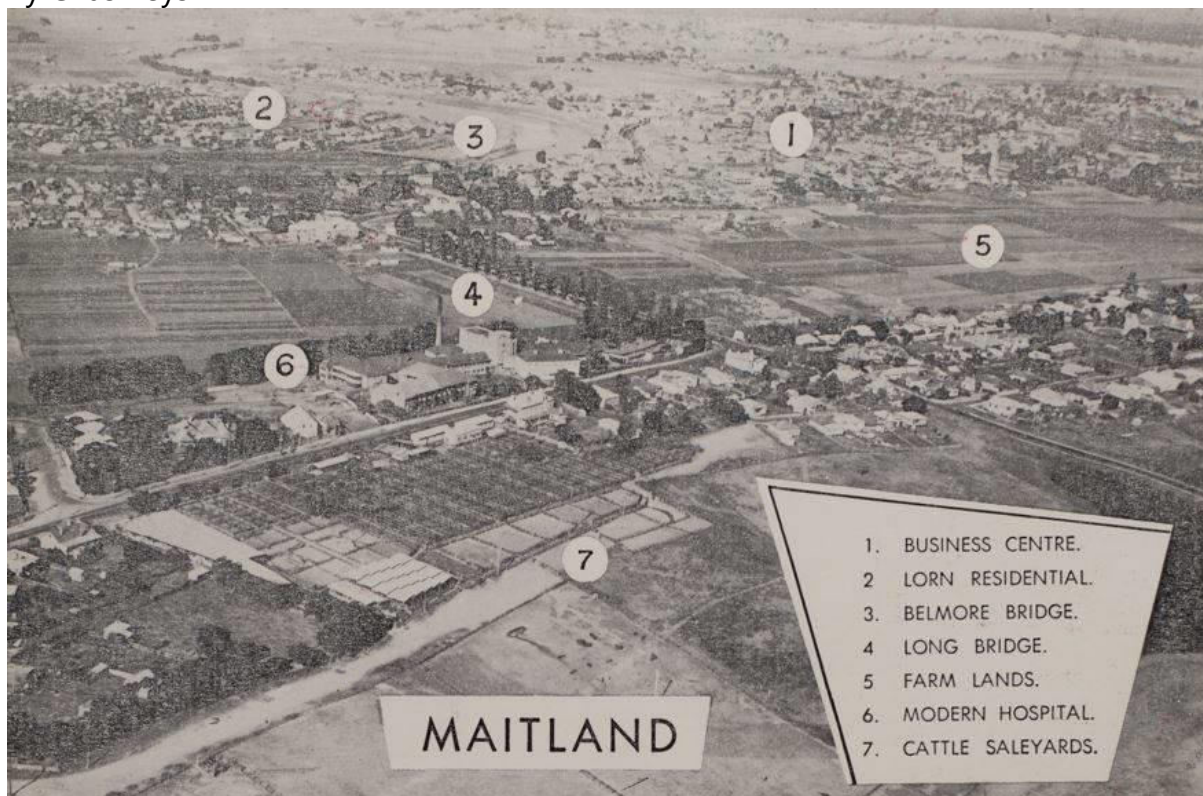


**My favourite teacher back in school  
was Mrs Turtle.**

**Funny name, but she tortoise well.**

# First mayor of Maitland Alexander McDonald was a civic go-getter

By Chas Keys



First mayor of Maitland Alexander McDonald was a civic go-getter

Alexander McDonald was West Maitland Mayor for about five years in the 1930s and '40s before becoming the City of Maitland's inaugural mayor from its proclamation in 1945.

The city resulted from a merger of the municipal councils of West Maitland, East Maitland and Morpeth and parts of the shires of Bolwarra, Kearsley and Tarro. No other person until Peter Blackmore, who held the mayoral chains for more than 20 years (1986-90 and 1999-2017), did more than McDonald's 10 years in six stints in the position - the last ended in 1956.

McDonald was also for a time President of the NSW branch of the Local Government Association of Australia.

Born in 1879 at Hill Park, McDonald's parents' property on the Manning River. His family moved to Maitland during his youth. He was a keen bicyclist and long-distance walker. As an adult he was involved in business, and in 1913 he married Catherine McKenzie of Stroud. They made their home at 'Ferrintosh', in Maitland's Mount Pleasant St.



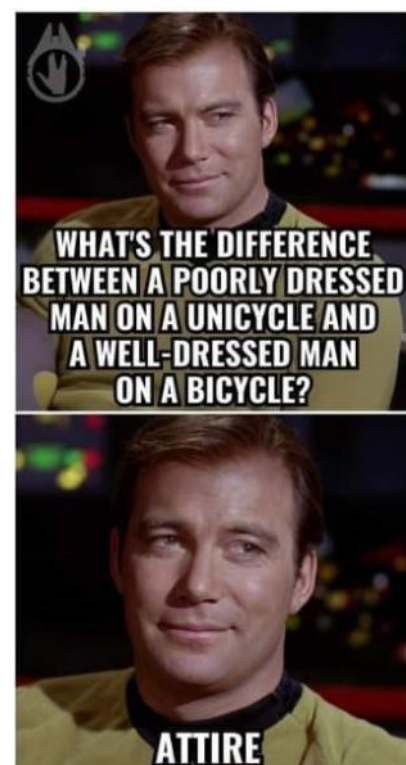
During the 1920s McDonald developed an interest in Barrington Tops and its potential for development. He became a member of the Barrington Tops League Maitland chapter and in 1924 was a prime mover in organising a visit to the Tops by senior state figures including WE Wearne (Minister for Lands), local government representatives, businessmen and media personnel.

The goal was to achieve funding to build roads to the Tops to open them up. A lavishly-illustrated book was planned to publicise the tourist potential of the area which, it was hoped, would draw people to a wide range of activities including racing, golf, fishing and (in winter) skiing and skating. A lake stocked with trout was envisaged, with skating on it a winter attraction.

The intense lobbying of the state government for access to the Tops, underlain by publicity obtained via the Maitland Mercury, came to little. No substantial road was created until 1978, when a route was pushed through across the Tops from Gloucester to Scone. No road to the high plateau was ever built from the Maitland side up the rugged valleys of the Allyn or Paterson rivers. The hoped-for tourist hotels and other facilities never eventuated, and the Tops remained largely undeveloped save for sawmilling.

McDonald's first stint as Mayor of West Maitland was from 1930-35. His best-remembered work came during the 1955 flood when he pleaded with people over radio to evacuate from central Maitland. Not everybody complied, and some died as a consequence. Ferrintosh appears to have survived the flood, though 21 other Mount Pleasant St houses did not.

McDonald's efforts led to the award of a CBE (Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire) which superseded the OBE (Officer) he had been granted in 1954 in recognition of his contribution to the community. He served in local government for 36 years and died in 1968, aged 89.



## In colonial Maitland cleaning a household's textiles often required several days out of every week

By Lisa Thomas



Mangles in the collection of Maitland and District Historical Society. Picture Lisa Thomas.

In colonial Maitland, the cycle of doing the family laundry was never-ending.

Cleaning a household's textiles often required several days out of every week. Laundry tasks were physically demanding and were almost always done exclusively by women.

The household of a wealthy settler might have included a dedicated laundress. In 1854 a family advertised in *The Mercury* to hire a married couple, specifying the wife had to be a laundress. A middle-class Maitland household might have employed a maid-of-all-work who did the laundry, or they might have hired a weekly washerwoman. Most women, however, had no option but to wash their own family's clothing, possibly with the help of a daughter.

Until Walka Water Works opened in 1879, washing water was drawn from a home's private well or rainwater tank or purchased from a water carriers. This water had to be carried to the laundry tubs, which during much of the 1800s were made of wood.

To properly launder clothing required hot water, so washing water was boiled in a cauldron over a fire and carried to the washing tub. Rinse water did not require heating before being carted to its own tub.

Maitland may have had a soap-maker by the early 1840s, but for many years laundry soap was made in the home by boiling ashes, fat, and lye and the mixture allowed to harden. In the absence of soap, clothing was often simply "bucked", which meant soaking in highly alkaline lye.

Whether cleaned with lye or soap, clothing was moved around the washing tub with a long wooden stick called a posser or "washing dolly". Possers had several "legs", which, when moved up and down, forced water into the fabric and improved dirt removal. The posser was also used to lift clothing from the washing tub onto a draining board over another tub. Hot water was precious, so the drained water was returned to the washing tub. After draining, clothing was moved to the rinsing tub then wrung by hand and hung out to dry.

In the 19th century wooden washing tubs were replaced by metal copper boilers. The first coppers were built into a brickwork furnace. Later models were free-standing. Despite the name, a copper was usually made of iron rather than more expensive copper. The principal benefit of the copper was that it eliminated the need to boil washing water over a separate fire. The copper was made of metal, so a fire could be lit beneath it. Water still had to be carried to fill the copper and then bucketed out after the washing was finished, although some models were fitted with a spigot.

Another labour-saving tool was the mangle, a device of two rollers set in a frame, the rollers rotated by a hand crank. Fabrics were passed through the rollers, which squeezed out water eliminating the chore of hand wringing. After washing, rinsing, mangling and drying, clothing still had to be smoothed with flat irons which were heated on a stove. That required yet another day.

