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NEWSLETTER *N° 62*

30 April 2024

Normally I prepare our monthly 'Newsletter' on the last day of the month, hence the header date above. For a variety of reasons, I'm just siting down at my PC to pen this month's; it's after 3pm and its 1st May …. so, I'm a day late but …...

However, from a historical perspective, it is somewhat fortuitous in that it gives me an opportunity to 'bang on' about ***May Day***, the day that commemorates the historic struggle of workers and the labour movement and as it turns out, a couple of other things too.

In Europe, 1st May was historically associated rural pagan festivals, celebrating the end of winter and the beginning of summer, halfway between the spring equinox and the summer solstice.

The Maypole dance is a ceremonial folk dance performed around a tall, garlanded pole, with greenery and flowers and often hung with ribbons that are woven into complex patterns by the dancers. Such dances are survivors from ancient dances around a living tree, part of a spring rite to ensure fertility.

May Day has evolved from its pagan roots to become a celebration of the gains made by the Labour movement against worker oppression.

In 1889, an international federation of socialist groups and trade unions, designated 1st May as a day in support of workers, it commemorating the 1886 Haymarket Riot in Chicago. Unsurprisingly, US President, Grover Cleveland, a mere five years later, signed

legislation to make “Labor Day”, the first Monday of September, he uneasy with the socialist origins of the “Workers’ Day” in Europe.

In the Soviet Union, leaders introduced and then embraced a new holiday, the thought being that it would encourage workers in Western Europe and the United States to unite against capitalism. The day became a significant holiday in the Soviet Union and Eastern bloc countries, with high-profile parades, the principal one in Red Square presided over by top governmental and Communist Party functionaries, celebrating the worker and showcasing Soviet military might.

In Germany, Labour Day became an official holiday in 1933 after the rise of the Nazi Party, the great irony being that Germany abolished free trade unions the very next day, virtually destroying the German labour movement.

With the breakup of the Soviet Union and the fall of communist governments in eastern Europe in the late 20th century, large-scale May Day celebrations in that region declined in importance. In dozens of countries around the world however, May Day has been recognised as a public holiday, and it continues to be celebrated with picnics and parties while serving as the occasion for demonstrations and rallies in support of workers.

In Australia, the union movement continues to celebrate 1st May. Last year, parades were held in every capital city as well as industrial cities such as Newcastle and Port Kembla. Invariably, these are advertised as *‘Fun Days’* with a picnic atmosphere.

Picnics aside, the banner remembers the ***real*** purpose.

Mayday is of course, also the *'word'* used internationally as a distress signal in voice-procedure radio communications. It serves to indicate a life-threatening emergency, primarily for aviators and mariners. In some countries however, local organisations such as firefighters, police and transportation agencies employ this term. When declaring a Mayday, it is conventionally repeated three times viz: *Mayday, Mayday, Mayday.*

The origin dates back to the early 1920's when Frederick Stanley Mockford, the officer-in-charge of radio at Croydon Airport in England, was asked to create a word that would signify distress and be easily understood by all pilots and ground staff during emergencies. Given that much of the air traffic at this time was between Croydon and Le Bourget Airport in Paris, Mockford proposed 'Mayday" which phonetically corresponds to the French phrase *"m'aidez"* which means *"help me".* The term used in this way bears no connection to the May Day holiday.

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Steamfest has come and gone once more. From a Society point of view, it was most successful, the only 'down-side' being that we only had two 'walkers' over the advertised four walks in the Railway precinct.

One thing is certain, Treasurer Jennifer has settled on the merchandise the 'punters' are looking for – pictures of trains, be they on mugs, magnets or on their own. Whilst we sold a bit of other merchandise, these three topped the poll by a substantial margin.

Many thanks to the members who assisted manning both the Information Stand and the Society's merchandising stand.

The only negative was that Council's 'Events Staff'; if they want our Society to provide information to attendees, they need to provide us with the information in the first instance. They promised they will next year but I'm not holding my breath ….

The next major event is Heritage Fest to be held between 14 and 29 June.

I'll provide a more comprehensive story of what's on and where in the next Newsletter.
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…. and finally

Cameron Archer to speak to the Maitland Historical Society about the loss of the Maitland 'food bowl'

The guest speaker at the Maitland Historical Society's monthly speaker evening in May will be Dr Cameron Archer AM, the patron of the Society and a well-known author on matters related to the Paterson Valley and the general Maitland area. His talk, to be given at **5.30pm on Tuesday, 7 May** at the Society's Rooms (3 Cathedral St, Maitland) will be on 'The rise and fall of Maitland as a food bowl'.

Maitland's location on the western edge of the Hunter River estuary made it an ideal location for Europeans to grow food. The area became one of the state's important sources of food for over a hundred years but that is no more the case. Dr Archer, an agriculturalist by training, will address the question as to how and why Maitland played this role for so long and why it no longer does so. He will draw on the research of many others as well as his own work on the story of the Maitland area's agricultural history.

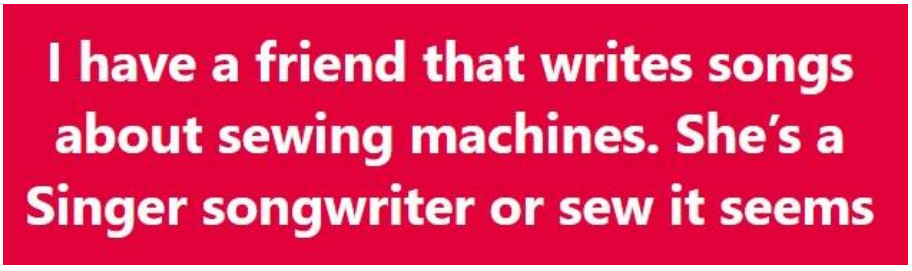
The story is one of hard work, heart-breaking floods, innovation and enterprise. Many of Maitland's long-time families are linked to local farms and some are still held by families whose histories in the area date back to the nineteenth century.

Dr Archer's presentation will conclude with some insights into the present land use of the area.

Members of the general public as well as members of the Historical Society are welcome to attend the talk. There is no need to book and no charge will be levied, but the Society asks for a $5 donation to cover the cost of supper before and after the talk.

Till next time ….

Kevin Short
President



How the dairy industry once flourished in the Maitland area

By Cameron Archer
December 18 2022

The OAK brand is now nationally recognised.

The first European farmers in the Maitland area sought to have cattle and milk cows for their own consumption of milk, butter and cheese. There are early records of cheese production in the Hunter but it never became a staple industry.

The history of dairy farming is directly linked to changes in technology, initially the production of relatively inexpensive mild steel, then refrigeration and transport.

The dairy industry flourished in Maitland when cream could be mechanically separated from milk, enabling the cream to be made into butter, a high value low volume product easily transported to Sydney and beyond. This technology was available through large milk separators from around 1890. There was one down the river at Nelson's Plains or Osterley, another at Millers Forest.

These large separators were soon replaced by on-farm separators which enabled small farms to be established wherever there was land to graze cows. The cream was sent off to a butter factory at Bowthorne (later located at Morpeth) and for a period a large state-of-the-art butter factory operated on the Duckenfield Estate. This was eventually consolidated to Hexham.

During the 1920s there was much optimism around dairying and many farms on the Bolwarra estate with land above flood level became dairies. Small two or three-bail walk- though dairies were built and many of these remain scattered across the ridges running down to the Bolwarra flats from Paterson and Dalveen roads and elsewhere around Maitland. They were assisted by government support for building silos to store forage for the winter. A number of these remain.

There are few, if any, dairy farms in the Maitland City Council area because of technical and economic changes in the industry. These days any Hunter dairies are further up the respective valleys, all milk transported to Sydney for processing.

Until the 1960s, a family could live off a farm milking fewer than 50 cows but over time, to be viable, herds had to be larger. This required greater acreage and the small land-locked farms in the Maitland area were some of the first to cease dairying.

These conditions have similarly affected thousands elsewhere in NSW over the past 50 years. At one time there were 30,000 dairy farms in NSW; now there are around 500. The average herd size has grown over time to be just under 300 head of milkers.

Further evidence of this change in the magnitude of the industry is in the Oak brand, once synonymous with Hunter Valley milk but now a national brand often seen on sporting teams. For example, Oak is the premium partner sponsor of Penrith Panthers but in the past it sponsored some Newcastle sporting teams. The origins of the Oak brand can be traced back to 1903 when it was created by the Raymond Terrace Cooperative, later becoming the Hunter Valley Cooperative Dairy Company. However, this brand is now owned by the French multinational dairy and food corporation, Lactalis.

Our History

Maitland was once the capital of the north and west of NSW

By Chas Keys
December 25 2022

Housing development has flourished in recent years at Gillieston Heights. File photograph.

Maitland was the first 'regional capital' to develop in NSW. From about 1830, when it became recognisable as a town, it grew rapidly and from the 1840s until about 1880 was the largest urban centre outside Sydney.

In effect it was the capital not just of the Hunter Valley but of the north and west of NSW. The combined population of West and East Maitland and Morpeth in 1871 was almost 8000; Newcastle, by comparison, was home to less than 7600 people.

Maitland's nineteenth century growth was based on serving a vast hinterland which stretched into southern Queensland.

There was local manufacturing and mining too. The hinterland is now greatly truncated and employment in local manufacturing and mining is much reduced.

High Street, Maitland in the mid 1850s. File picture.

Today the Newcastle-Lake Macquarie urban complex is home to roughly four times as many people as live in the city of Maitland.

The establishment of the BHP steelworks, development of a major port and a wide range of service activities including those provided by a substantial university and major hospitals, brought great growth to Newcastle during the twentieth century. Meanwhile coal mining, Newcastle's nineteenth century staple, declined as mining moved up the valley.

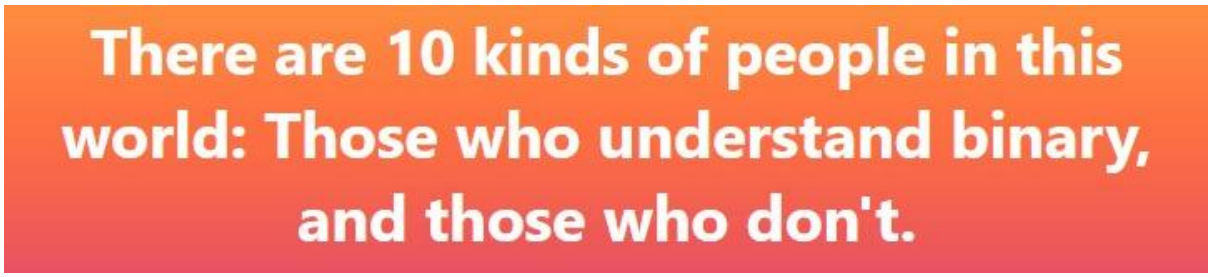
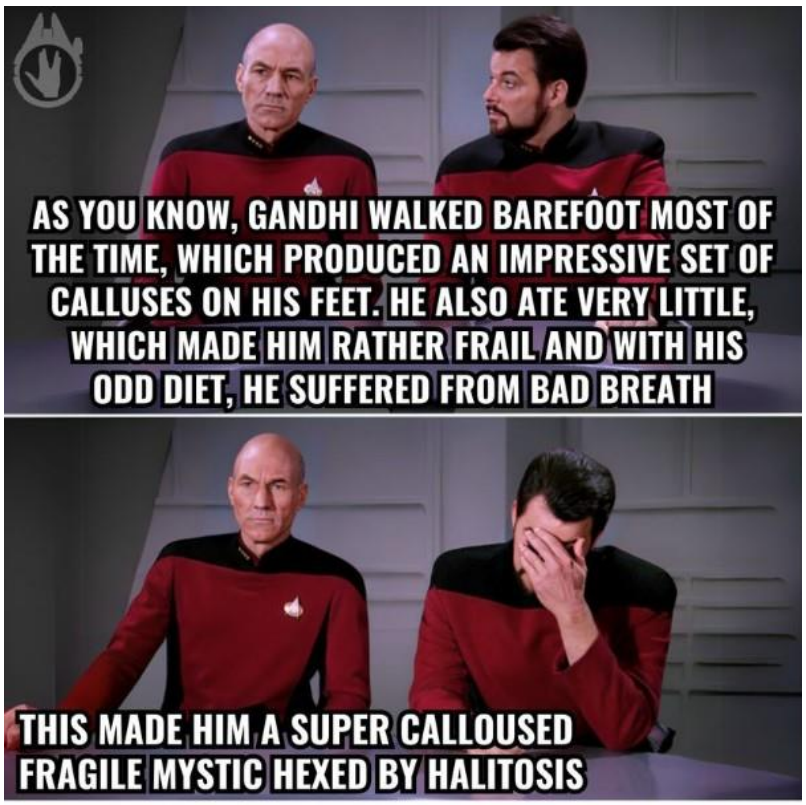
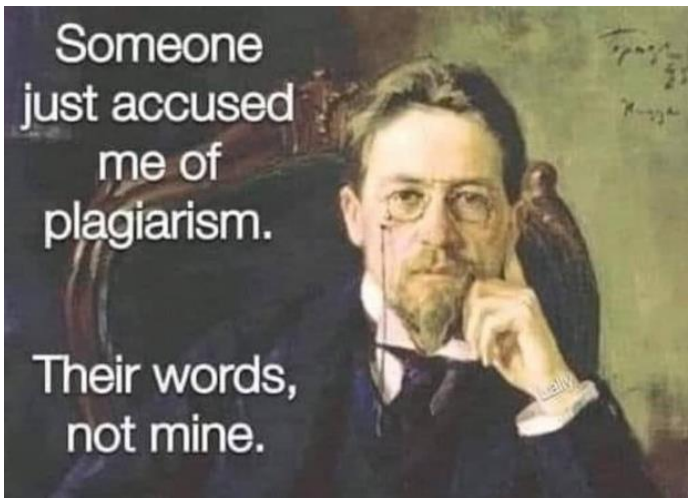
From the 1890s until after World War II, Maitland saw only moderate growth and lost its role as the 'Hub of the Hunter'. This term had been used to describe Maitland from the 1850s onwards, but Newcastle eventually became the regional capital.

Of late, Maitland has to a degree become part of and suburban to Newcastle now perhaps 'Lower Hunter City'. While this is a simplification, it is true that today many Maitland residents commute to Newcastle or elsewhere to work. Maitland functions increasingly as an outer dormitory suburb of Newcastle. It does not have the economic independence or the regional leadership role of old. None of this means that Maitland does not have a strong economy.

Meanwhile considerable new industrial development has occurred at the northern end of the freeway which links Maitland to Sydney. Today's Maitland is closely integrated with Sydney.

Maitland has seen strong population growth since WW II. Its population doubled between the end of the war and the early 1980s, and has doubled again over the past 40 years to more than 90,000 today. Over the past decade the population has risen by about six people a day with two new houses added to the stock. Completely new suburbs like Gillieston Heights and Chisholm have sprung up outside the old Maitland-East Maitland-Morpeth core. Largs and Bolwarra have been transformed by new growth.

The nature of Maitland's recent growth has been very different from that of the first great expansion of the years between 1830 and 1890. These days it grows as a dormitory rather than as a place whose own economy drives a

wider regional economy. But continued growth is guaranteed: more than 50,000 expected to be added to the city's population by 2041.

(I'm curious to know how many of you understand this one?)