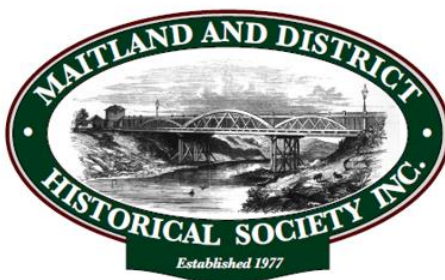


President:

Kevin Short OAM

Patron:

Dr Cameron Archer AM



Web: www.maitlandhistorical.org

Secretary:

Steve Bone

Address

PO Box 333
MAITLAND NSW 2320

Phone:

0468 438 990

Email: maitlandhistorical@gmail.com

ABN: 96 156 309 595

NEWSLETTER N^o 65

31 July 2024



American based 'local historian', Peter F Smith, has come and gone. It would be fair to say that Peter's visit generated great interest. The lecture evening, held at '**Easts**', attracted in excess of 140 persons. The two 'High Street' walks, conducted in the morning and afternoon of 1 July were both fully subscribed.

Firstly, a big 'shout-out' to **Easts** for their generosity in allowing us to use the Scarborough Room free of charge and to their staff for the assistance afforded. Secondly, it was a learning exercise in that I (we) now have a greater appreciation of the power of 'social media' in advertising an event such as this. There was another lesson in that, with hindsight, we should have required potential attendees to register their attendance. Initially we told Easts that we were

expecting around 60 patrons and revised this number up twice, firstly to 100 and then to 120. As the 'Room' was filling on the night, I was concerned that the numbers might become an embarrassment, especially if we were forced to turn people away. Fortunately, this didn't happen but, lesson learned ...

~~~~~

There's also 'news' with respect to Council's decision to explore a 'Cultural' storage facility on land at East Maitland with exhibition space in the existing 'Visitors Centre' in central Maitland.

It's early days yet and there's much *toing and froing*, debate and discussion to be had but, finger's crossed, the signs are very encouraging. Importantly, there is certainly now an appreciation among councillors that we must, as a community, recognise and preserve our rich heritage.

~~~~~

Today, I gave a lecture to the residents at *Benhome* on Maitland's railway history. I've been 'lecturing' at the home for most of the year on the first Thursday of the month. Last month I was joined by Chas Keys and surprise, surprise, we talked about floods. These monthly talks are well attended and well received by the residents, many of whom add their own experiences to the subject topics.

On the subject of Chas (Keys), the 'History of Maitland' U3A course at Lorn Park Bowling Club has recommenced for term three, the presenters being, Chas, Michael Belcher and myself. These courses have likewise been well received with the numbers enrolled increasing term by term. U3A has 'hinted' that they'd like the presentations to continue into 2025 ... we'll see!

~~~~~

Last Sunday (29<sup>th</sup> July) we held a BBQ at Bunnings. It looks as if the net proceeds will be around \$2,100, a great outcome. That said, it was bloody cold ... the Antarctic wind whistled across the car park all day, even to the point of cooling the front of the hotplate



so as to restrict the number of sausages that could be 'cooked' as any one time.

That said, these BBQs are essential to the financial viability of our Society so a big 'shout-out' to those that helped on such a 'mongrel' of a day ...

On the subject of **Bunnings**, I was there the other day and asked the assistant, "What gets rid of grime and stains?". He replied, "Ammonia Cleaner." I replied, "Oh sorry, I thought you worked here."

~~~~~

Lindsay Gilligan to speak to Maitland Historical Society on 6th August

The Maitland and District Historical Society's next talk will be by Lindsay Gilligan and will be titled: *Look Up! Look Down!* A philosophical view of Tocal geology.

His talk on 6th August is a reprise of a talk previously given to the 2024 *Glenn Murcutt Master Class* held at Tocal in early June. It focuses on the natural aspect of the Tocal area; it is a mix of the local geology, its evolution and global context, bookended by philosophical and personal considerations.

Members of the public are most welcome to attend the talk, but the Society requires that attendees are vaccinated against COVID-19. The Society asks for a donation of \$5 to cover the costs of refreshments before and after the talk.

People wishing to contact the Society can do so by email (maitlandhistorical@gmail.com) or by phone (0468 438 990).

Lindsay's personal details are as follows:

Lindsay Gilligan, PSM, BSc(Hons), MAppSc, MBA, FAIG, FSEG, FGSAust.

Lindsay was formerly Director of the Geological Survey of New South Wales and the State's Chief Government Geologist. His career has focused on the geology of mineral resources and fostering mineral exploration and discovery in NSW. He has over 50 years' experience as a geologist, much of which was in government geoscience. He has published widely on aspects of mineral deposits. Whilst Director he led the NSW State Government's highly successful *New Frontiers* exploration initiative. He has actively promoted mineral exploration investment in New South Wales both nationally and internationally.



He has a high profile in the minerals industry. He was non-executive Chairman of Thomson Resources Ltd, a NSW-based junior explorer, from 2009 to 2019. He was a director from 2010 to 2018 on the governing board of the Deep Exploration Technology Cooperative Research Centre (DET CRC). In 2019, he was appointed to the board of the newly formed Mineral Exploration Cooperative Research Centre (MinEx CRC) which is arguably the largest mineral exploration research organisation in the world. He has also consulted to Commonwealth and State agencies on government geoscience issues, and he co-authored the first *National Mineral Exploration Strategy* in 2011.

Lindsay has been on the committee of the Sydney Mineral Exploration Discussion Group (SMEDG) since 2002 and has played a major part in the organisation of the immensely successful Mines and Wines mineral exploration conference since its inception in 2006. He was awarded the Public Service Medal in the 2008 Queen's Birthday Honours and, in the same year, was also awarded the *Australian Mining* magazine's "Most Outstanding Contribution to Australian Mining" Award.

Over recent years, Lindsay has also dabbled in various geological projects, philosophy, family history, wine, and overseas travel.

Till next time

President

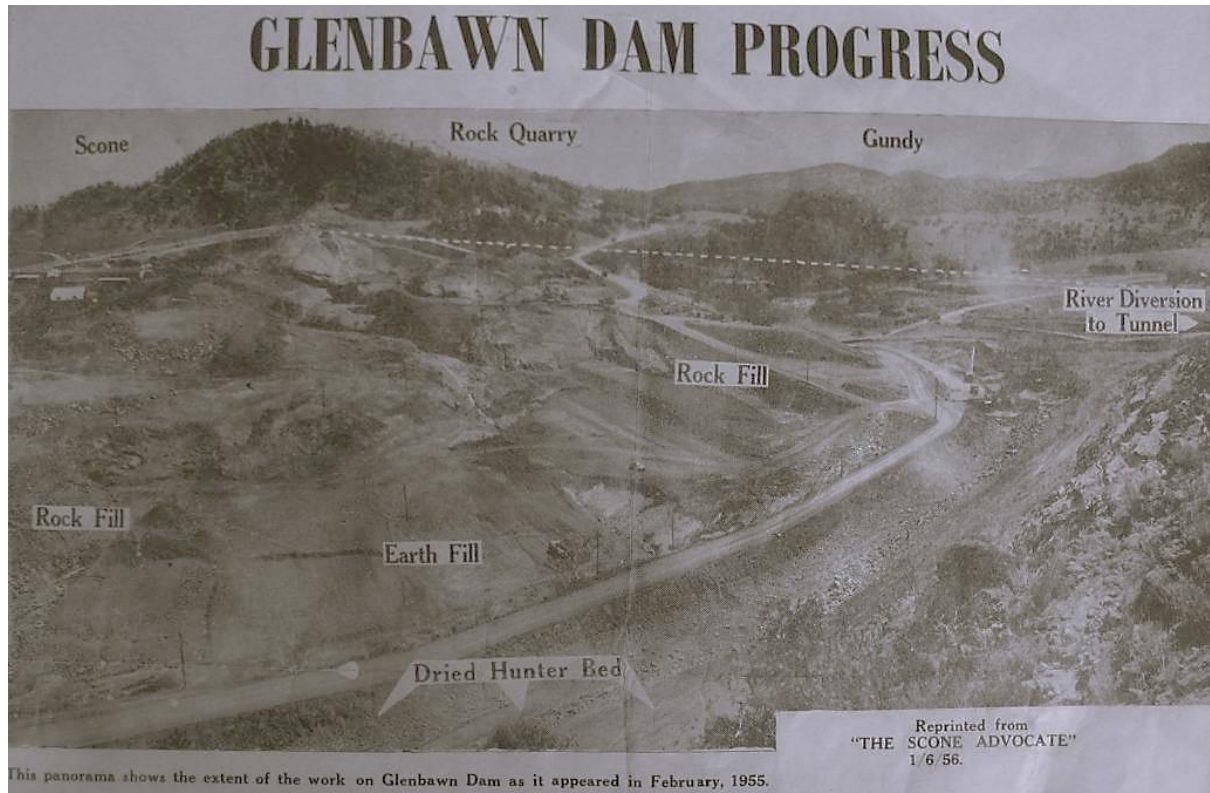
Where do bad rainbows go?

To prism. It's a light sentence, but it gives them time to reflect.

OUR PAST: Glenbawn Dam myth part of '55 flood folklore

By Chas Keys

March 10 2023



Panorama of the Glenbawn Dam site, February 1955 from the Scone Advocate.
(Picture courtesy Muswellbrook Chronicle/Hunter Valley News)

Big floods often spark misinformation and mythology, and the great Hunter River flood of 1955 was no exception.

A myth that has survived to this day was that the flood was caused by the blowing up of Glenbawn Dam above Aberdeen.

It wasn't, as the accompanying panorama indicates. The photos for it were taken for the *Scone Advocate* only a couple of weeks before the flood and later published on the paper's front page.

In February 1955, work on building the dam was not far advanced. The panorama shows a dotted line where the crest of the dam was intended to be. That line was far above the work that had been undertaken to that time. Glenbawn Dam was completed only in 1958.

Many people came to believe that the dam was blown up to "save" downstream communities. To this day some cite individuals, including relatives, who they "know" witnessed the event.

A local historian, the late Andrew Burg, was a Maitland resident in 1955. No doubt he heard the rumour that the dam had been blown up, and he appears to have believed it.

Years later, in 1990, he wrote an article which sought to explain why the dam had been detonated. His piece listed the circumstances in which the explosion supposedly occurred and the people responsible for it.

That article is on the wall of a doctor's surgery near the Maitland Courthouse. It has probably been read by hundreds of people, helping to perpetuate a myth about the cause of the flood.

Burg meant well, but his piece contains factual errors. There is compelling evidence that his account is not true.



Maitland streets are inundated in 1955 (Picture by Maitland Mercury)

First, Burg claims that the dam was completed in 1952, but in fact its construction ended only in 1958.

Moreover some of the officials in his account did not exist. He refers to a senior officer from the "Flood Mitigation Authority" but there was no such organisation in the state at the time.

Only after the 1955 flood were the Water Conservation and Irrigation Commission and the Department of Public Works made responsible for flood mitigation activity. Over following years those two organisations built many kilometres of levees in the Hunter Valley.

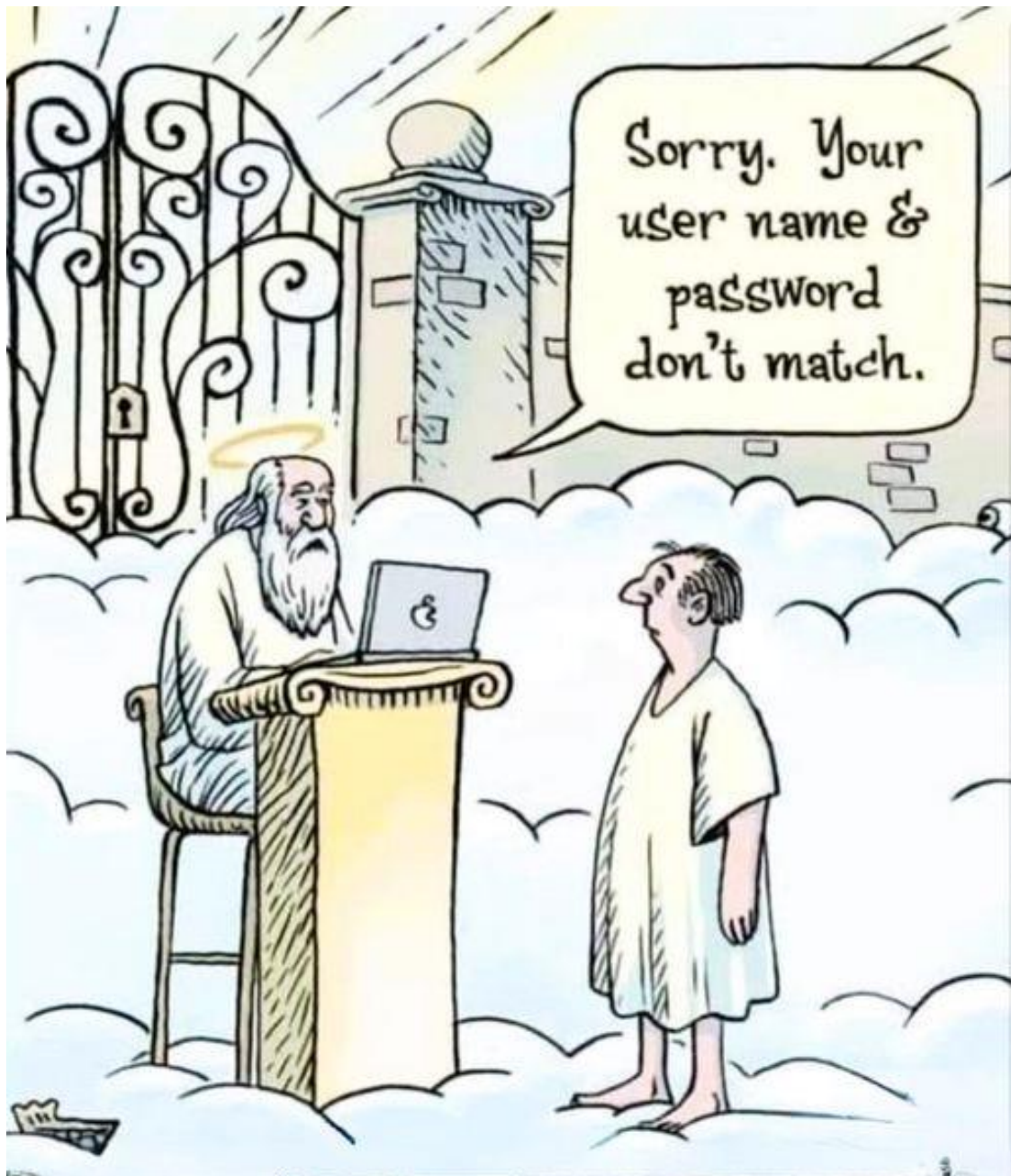
Burg also cites the leader of the Civil Defence Authority, but that organisation too did not exist in February 1955. It was established three months later, to promote civil defence in the event of a war (perhaps with nuclear weapons).

The NSW State Emergency Services organisation was formed at almost the same time for the purpose of managing the effects of floods. The two organisations were merged in 1956.

That the Glenbawn myth is still taken by some as fact demonstrates how misinformation about the causes of natural disasters can persist thanks to well-intentioned but misguided attempts to explain events.

The 1955 flood was brought about by very heavy rain, especially over the Goulburn and upper Hunter rivers. Gelignite was not used to blow up a structure that barely existed beyond its foundations.

Some works (including an earth bank built to divert the river) were damaged by the floodwaters, but the partially-constructed dam itself was little affected despite the massive size of the flood.



OUR HISTORY: 1955 flood eclipsed all previous effort by builders to benchmark against floods

By Chas Keys
March 17 2023



The Belcher house in Horseshoe Bend had the highest floor in the street but was deeply inundated in 1955. Picture by Peter Smith.

"Benchmarking" to floods has a long history in and around Maitland. It involves noting the height reached in a big flood and seeking to build so that a future flood of similar magnitude will have no significant impact.

Usually benchmarking is applied to the floor levels of new dwellings.

The early residents avoided the lowest-lying areas when they built their habitations. Thus natural levees next to rivers or knolls on floodplains were favoured.

But all of the original Maitland houses and most of those on the early rural estates were on floodplain land and thus prone to inundation.

Because of topographical variation, dwellings on floodplains varied in the frequency with which they took in floodwater but none were free of it in the bigger floods.

Soon, people noted the levels reached by individual floods and used them to inform their building practices.

One case was at Goulburn Grove, outside Largs, where the Unicom family constructed their house with its floor one foot (30 centimetres) above the height reached in the very severe flood of 1893. To that time this was the most damaging flood seen at Maitland since European settlement.

A house in Pitnacree later occupied by Dal and Maurine Osborn was similarly built with its floor a foot above the 1893 level.

Neither dwelling was invaded by floodwaters until 1955, when both were deeply inundated by 1.5 metres over the floor at Goulburn Grove and 1.35 metres at Pitnacree.

In Horseshoe Bend, builder Ted Belcher used the 1949 flood to set the floor for his family's house a full two feet (60cm) higher.

Again, though, the 1955 flood defeated his reasoning: the water peaked two metres deep inside. Even benchmarking to 60cm above the 1893 level would not have ensured the house remained free of floodwater.

In all these cases the construction was to a level above a recent big flood.

There was no concept of the "worst-case scenario" or the degree to which a known big flood could be exceeded, and there was no guidance from councils on such matters.

Some people created temporary platforms above floors.

David Hampton of central Maitland built sturdy wooden platforms more than halfway up the walls of a bedroom in each of two family houses in Ward Street.

When lowered, the platforms (which were designed to be above the 1949 level) covered the width of the rooms and even pianos could be lifted onto them. Again the 1955 flood defeated the measure: it rose almost to the ceilings.



Below, flooding in parts of Maitland. File picture

Nowadays, planning regulations mandate that the minimum heights of floors in new dwellings must be half a metre above the defined 1% Annual Exceedance Probability (the so-called one-in-100-years) flood.

The extra half metre is to compensate for waves and errors in estimating the height which the one per cent event could reach.

It is not intended as "extra" protection and provides no guarantee against inundation in a flood like 1955's which peaked above the one per cent level.

Benchmarking gives protection against floods. But on floodplains that protection is rarely absolute.

Why Iron-man and
not Fe-male?

This joke is not for
everyone.

