

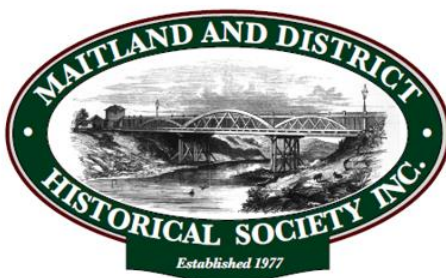
**President:**

Kevin Short OAM

**Patron:**

Dr Cameron Archer AM

Web: [www.maitlandhistorical.org](http://www.maitlandhistorical.org)



**Secretary:**

Steve Bone

**Address**

PO Box 333  
MAITLAND NSW 2320

**Phone:**

0468 438 990

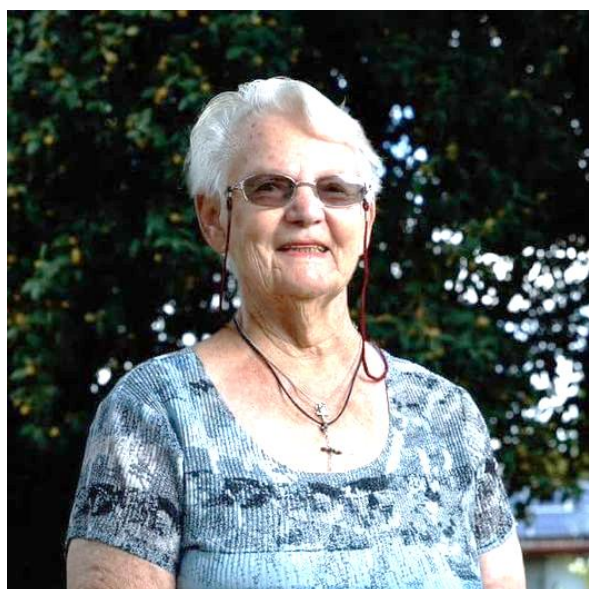
Email: [maitlandhistorical@gmail.com](mailto:maitlandhistorical@gmail.com)

ABN: 96 156 309 595

## NEWSLETTER N<sup>o</sup> 68

31 October 2024

Since our last Newsletter, Maitland has lost one of its most 'involved' and loved citizens in Irene Hemsworth. Irene is a past *Citizen of the Year* and was made a *Freeman of the City* in 2014, an honour awarded to only 19 of the City's citizens.



I have personally known Irene for almost the entirety of my 40 years in Maitland. I can personally vouch for her contribution, especially in the 'little things' that few notice. An example was a fortnight ago; Irene and I both members of the Christian Education Association who employ teachers at High Schools to teach scripture. We'd organised a Trivia Night to help raise funds ... two days before the 'big night'; I forgot that Irene's not here to arrange the prizes – bugger!

Whilst Irene wasn't a member of the Society, she certainly supported what we do, she was after all part of Maitland's

history and will be missed by many, many community organisations ... I'm reminded of a verse from Scripture that applies directly to Irene, namely, **Matthew 25:23**. *His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! ..... Enter into the joy of your master!'*

Vale Irene Hemsworth.

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You might recall that in last month's newsletter I lamented my misfortune when my car was "totalled" by an unknown and unidentified vehicle in the night whilst staying at my daughters in Canterbury.

Finally, this saga has come to an end with my insurance company reimbursing my account with the 'market' value of the old car. I can assure you it has been a frustrating

if educational process. I didn't for instance realise that there is a '*wholesale market value*' and a '*retain market value*'. Guess which the Insurance company pays out on? In fairness, I was able to '*talk*' the insurance company into waiving the excess and get them to 'up' the offer by \$1,000.

In all the process has cost me about \$9,000 although in fairness, I now have a much newer and (I think) better car. The Renault Koleos I have purchased will hopefully be the last car I own.

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Tuesday next 5<sup>th</sup> November will be our monthly guest speaker. Our guest speaker on this occasion will be **Lynette Huckstadt** and her topic will be:

### ***MY TIME AT MAITLAND HOSPITAL.***

Lynette's talk will mostly cover her early years at Maitland Hospital, in particular her training years in the late 60's. She completed her training and became a registered nurse in 1970.

She stopped nursing to raise her family before returning to the vocation. She then completed a university course. During her

career Lynette was a Nurse Educator, Midwife and a lactation consultant.

Speaker Evenings are held on the first Tuesday of the month (except January) at 5 30 pm.

(A small charge of \$5 includes light refreshments provided before and after the speaker's delivery.)

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A few things for the diary:

- Our annual Christmas Party will this year be a trip to Singleton to visit their museum and fraternise with their members. More detail on this to come from (secretary) Steve.
- Some excess furniture has been sourced off Council from the 'Old' admin building and a reorganisation of the Research Room is presently underway – please call in and have a look at the changes.
- 70th Anniversary of the 1955 Flood. The plan is for a display in the sunken area and old coffee shop area at the Maitland Administration Centre with a flood boat and Army DUKW possible.

- There's a couple of BBQ's scheduled before the end of the year. As has been said many times before, if you can help, please let Steve know and he'll add you to the roster. These BBQ's are our financial lifeline and without them, the Society would not be able to function financially.
- Whilst in the preliminary stages of organisation, U3A is presently negotiating with the Society to host a number of walking tours in 2025 – I'll keep you posted on where and when.

Until next time ...

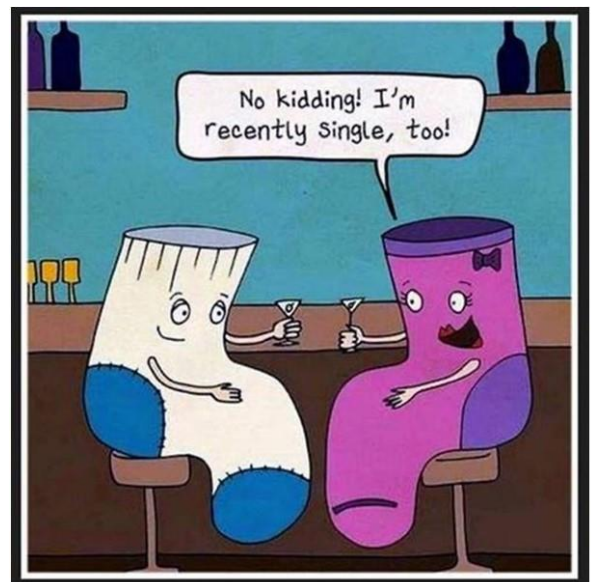


President

**My wife yelled from upstairs and asked, "Do you ever get a shooting pain across your body, like someone's got a voodoo doll of you and they're stabbing it?"**

**I replied "No..."**

**She responded: "How about now?"**



**The fact that Jellyfish have survived for 650 million years despite not having brains gives hope to many people.**

# Our History: Maitland: Hunter and capital of the north

By Chas Keys  
April 23 2023



The front page of the Maitland Mercury from January 7, 1852.

The front page of the *Maitland Mercury and Hunter River General Advertiser* on Wednesday, January 7, 1852, tells a story about what Maitland had become by that time.

It was still to all intents and purposes the only town of any note north of Sydney, and the *Mercury* was the only newspaper operating in the huge territory of northern New South Wales.

Through the *Mercury*, Maitland served this massive area from which the paper derived news and advertisements.

The evidence of this orientation towards the far-flung regions of NSW is clear from the *Mercury* edition of that January 7. It carried a list of the paper's "agents", whose locations provide an indicator of the "trade area" or "hinterland" of Maitland in 1852.

The agents have been business connections and correspondents sending stories to the *Mercury*. Many on the list were operating from Hunter Valley locations including Cassilis, Murrurundi, Merriwa, Muswellbrook, Scone, Wollombi, Singleton and Jerrys Plains.



Some were closer to Maitland, including Hinton, Raymond Terrace, Paterson, Clarence Town, Stroud and Newcastle, the last of which in the early 1850s had barely a quarter of the population of West Maitland, East Maitland and Morpeth combined.

Taken together, the Maitlands and Morpeth were the "hub of the Hunter" and the centre of the region's economy.

Then there were agents from across the Great Dividing Range. These were listed in Tamworth, Armidale, Coolah, Coonabarabran, Carroll, Mudgee, Tenterfield and Tabulam and on the inland rivers the Barwon and the Namoi, the Gwydir (the Moree area) and the Macintyre (which would soon become part of the border with Queensland).

Closer to the coast there were agents on the Manning (Taree), the Macleay (Kempsey), the Hastings (Port Macquarie) and the Clarence (Grafton).

There were also agents well into what in 1859 became the separate colony of Queensland on the Darling Downs (the Toowoomba area), in Ipswich, in Warwick and as far north as Gayndah, more than 300 kilometres north of Brisbane.

***There were also agents well into what in 1859 became the separate colony of Queensland on the Darling Downs (the Toowoomba area), in Ipswich, in Warwick and as far north as Gayndah, more than 300 kilometres north of Brisbane.***

News items came several of these places and their vicinities.

On the front page of January 7 alone there were items emanating from Dungowan (near Tamworth) and near Glen Innes: they were about horses which had been stolen or had strayed.

Their owners wanted them back, and advertising in the *Mercury* was a means of achieving that aim.

Nearer Maitland, there were advertisements from Tocal and West Maitland for horses, cows and bullocks.

The advertisements for retail items in that first edition also showed how strongly Maitland was tied to Sydney.

Sydney firms advertised a range of wares from cordials and liqueurs to summer hats and black and linseed oils.

But the longest list of items was from RM Robey, of George St, Sydney: it took up more than a fifth of the front page and amounted to the full repertoire of a department store of the time.

Included were dozens of items of ironmongery, earthenware and glass along with drugs, chemicals, tools, wine and sherry.

All these things could be shipped from Sydney to Morpeth, after which they wound up in the shops of West Maitland. Many items would then be transported by cart to the far-flung corners of Maitland's enormous hinterland.

# Athel D'Ombraïn left his mark as an optician, naturalist, author, cricketer, historian and fisherman

By Chas Keys

April 30 2023



Founding members of the Newcastle Port Stephens Game Fishing Club Newman Silverthorne and Athel D'Ombraïn (right).

Athel D'Ombraïn (1901-85) was a man of many talents and a wide range of accomplishments. In Maitland today he is best remembered for his photography, which caught the district from many angles in still pictures over a long period.

But he was also an optician, a naturalist, an author, a cricketer, a historian and a fisherman.

D'Ombraïn came to Maitland to live in 1929 to work as an optical dispenser in the practice run by his brother, Arthur, an ophthalmic surgeon.

He was to be a resident of Maitland for the rest of his life. He began working for the *Maitland Mercury* as a photographer in 1950, leaving the newspaper after five years to establish his own commercial photography business. Later he began a long career

with the Newcastle Herald for which he was to write hundreds of columns and take many photographs.

He was active as a writer and photographer almost until the end of his life.



Athel D'Ombra fighting a tiger shark in 1937. File picture.

His interest in the study of nature focused largely on bird life, especially on Port Stephens and in the Hexham Wetland. As an ornithologist he observed, banded and wrote about the Gould Petrel, which nests only on Cabbage Tree Island (Port Stephens), and marked a number of species of shearwater.

Angling and fishing were also major passions.

He helped establish the Newcastle and Port Stephens Game Fishing Club, and he wrote two books on fishing. He also wrote a book about the historic buildings of Maitland and surrounding areas and an autobiography which, sadly, was never published. His story deserved to be told.

As a cricketer he played for years with the Northern Suburbs Cricket Club and was its secretary and involved in coaching. He became a life member and after retirement as a player he became the club's Patron. His involvement with the club lasted more than 50 years.

For his services to photography and the study of the natural world D'Ombra was made a Member of the Order of Australia (AM). Earlier, he had been the first Maitland resident to be awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) which was subsequently upgraded to the higher honour.

D'Ombra became an Associate of the Australian Museum and when, long after his death, the Maitland City Council established its Hall of Fame, he was an early inductee for his work in research and education.

His enormous Photographic Archive was donated to the University of Newcastle in 1982. Athel D'Ombra Drive, which runs parallel to the railway line through Maitland, was named in his honour as a visible recognition by the City of his contribution to the community.

Nobody between 1950 and the early 1980s did more to capture Maitland and its surrounds in pictures than did Athel D'Ombrian.

Many of his photographs are the only ones available in the public domain of once-significant buildings that no longer exist: he took photos of them both internally and externally.

His subject matter was broad in the extreme, including bird life, the demolition of the original Belmore Bridge and the construction of its replacement, the Maitland Show, the Barrington Tops, Aboriginal rock art at Wollombi, marches in High Street, the devastation of the great flood of 1955 and the structures of the Lower Hunter Flood Mitigation Scheme.

**“A grandfather has gone missing after eating four cans of baked beans, two cauliflowers and a jar of gherkins. His family have made an emotional appeal for him not to come home for at least a fortnight.”**

During a visit to my doctor, I asked him, "How do you determine whether or not an older person should be put in an old age home?"

"Well," he said, "we fill up a bathtub, then we offer a teaspoon, a teacup and a bucket to the person and ask them to empty the bathtub."

...

"Oh, I understand," I said. "A normal person would use the bucket because it is bigger than the spoon or the teacup."

"No" he said "A normal person would pull the plug. Do you want a bed near the window?"