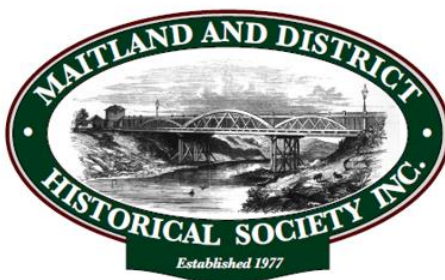


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# **NEWSLETTER** N<sup>o</sup> 70

*31 December 2024*

Well, 2024 is almost at an end ...

Christmas is over. It's now 362 days till Santa comes again, for a child an eternity.

As we age, events such as Christmas seem to come around ever more quickly. Whilst it's obviously an allusion as time is after all finite, the question remains as to why this seemingly occurs.

Believe it or not, there is an explanation. It is because '*time*' is relative to our life's experience. A child of five for instance, has memory span of about two years, so to him or her, next Christmas is half a lifetime away – an eternity. To a person of 80 or so, it is only a fraction over 1% of their life's experience – just around the corner! Whether we like it or not, we can only view life through our own eyes and experiences.

Likewise, the toilet paper seems to disappear more quickly as we get towards the end of the roll but I digress as the reason for this allusion has absolutely nothing to do with the above!

Frivolity aside, I trust that Christmas has been a joyous time for you and your family and that you have enjoyed the Festive Season, to say nothing of the goodies.

Our Society is of course in recess, the rooms not opening until 14<sup>th</sup> January although if anyone has anything 'urgent' I'm sure someone with a key will let you in ...

As we look back on 2024, we can be relatively happy with what we've achieved as a Society. Secretary Steve more or less précised our activities in his email of just before Christmas and although satisfied with where we're at, there have also been disappointments and frustrations.

Our accommodation is without doubt our greatest concern and must be the focus of our immediate energies. Whilst grateful to the Catholic Church for what we do have, the building we are housed in has severe limitations. Firstly, and importantly, there is a long flight of stairs that are exposed to the weather. To access the toilets, it's a trip up and down those stairs and across a grassed area, all open to the weather. Secondly, the downstairs area and the artifacts housed there are unable to be displayed due to limitations of space and the need to store donations and equipment.

We have some very important and historically valuable items we are unable to show due to these limitations.

That said, there has been some progress with Council in that there is now a realisation that something must be done to preserve and showcase Maitland's rich history but sadly, this progress is slow, and it will take time and effort to make up for decades of neglect. Our trip to Singleton highlighted what can be achieved.

One highlight of our year past has been the *Lecture Evenings* and the diverse and interesting speakers we've showcased. Sadly, even these evenings were hamstrung by the limitations of our accommodation. For instance, we need an adequate amplification system for speaker use that doesn't compete with an aged and noisy air conditioner. We need to look at our IT equipment and its compatibility, especially for those viewing on Zoom.

The first Lecture evening in February will centre on the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1995 flood. I understand the Council, with assistance, will be commemorating the anniversary and I believe the Repertory Theatre will be presenting an abridged version of a play, penned some years ago by Frank Oakes. The following month (March), it is hoped that former Councillor Peter Garnham will present a programme for us with respect to the steam heritage and associated equipment housed on the Rally Grounds. The intent is that this evening be held in the Rally Ground Shed.

With respect to the lecture evenings, I must thank Chas Keys for his coordinating this activity over several years. Chas has decided that after a number of years to 'retire' as the coordinator and we desperately need a member to fill the void. There are any number of individuals that organise and assist with these evenings, Jennifer for the IT but others with respect to catering etc. I hesitate to name individuals for fear of omission, but you know who you are and I and we are collectively grateful. Chas I might add, continues to coordinate and conduct lectures through U3A and coordinate the weekly historical articles in the *Mercury*. Thank you Chas!

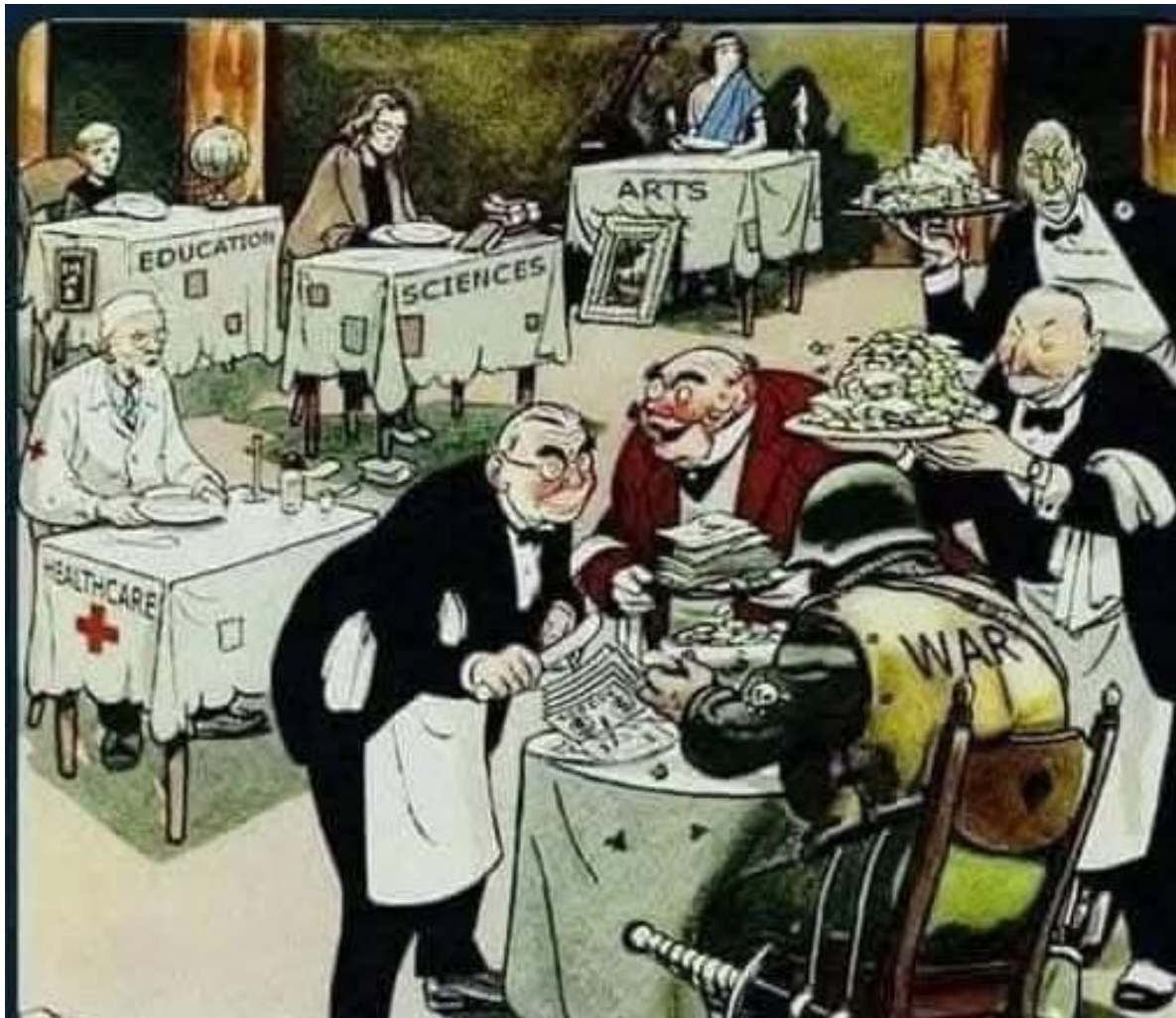
Without doubt, the highlight of the lecture season was the night at Easts when we hosted Peter F Smith, historian extraordinaire from the US. It was a wonderful night with around 150 persons attending. We are also grateful to Easts for allowing us to use their facilities free-of-charge.

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Whilst not part of my brief, the mention of the USA can't pass without a comment on the US elections. I for one, and remembering I have a personal and professional interest in elections, was fed up to the back teeth with the continuous media commentary on what was in essence a foreign election.

The result also makes me nervous as to the effect this might have on international relationships, especially in Central Europe and the Middle East. Potentially, the Israel-Palestine conflict will infect the entire region.

The cartoon on the following page is from 80 years ago. Unhappily, little has changed, the satire as relevant today as it was then.



From a professional point, I am amused there were no accusations of 'cheating' during the American elections although I suspect that if it had been a different result, Trump would have found much to complain about. Think about this: If the Democrats 'cheated' to win the 2020 elections, logic says they would have cheated again .... or am I missing something?

The world awaits Trump's inauguration and ponders what the ramifications of that might be for the world, especially the people in those trouble spots.

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Over the New Year I'm taking the opportunity to meet my daughter and her partner in Dorrego, my ancestral home. I try to make the trip at least once a year to relax and restore my soul ....

Bring on 2025 ..

Until next time ...

President

Our History

# Maitland women in the 1800s wanted to be as well-dressed as they could afford.

By Lisa Thomas  
May 21 2023



Women's fashion inspiration in 19th century Maitland came from magazines, immigrants and letters.

Maitland women in the 1800s wanted to be as well-dressed as they could afford. No woman wanted to be unfashionable or behind the times, although being fashionably dressed was not always easy.

Throughout the colonial period Australian fashion took its lead from England and France.

Knowledge of the latest fashions arrived by ship in periodicals such as *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, and from immigrants and letters.

Of course, by the time Maitland women became aware of the latest styles those styles might have been over a year out of date.



Dress with crinoline (cage) under the skirt.



During the 19th century dress-making fabrics generally had to be imported. They were then brought up to Maitland from Sydney by merchant ships, arriving in the area as early as the 1820s.

In 1828 the storeship 'St Michael', which was moored at Morpeth, carried both light weight cottons and heavier fabrics.

In 1866 Robert Little (of Sydney) advertised in the *Maitland Mercury* that he was selling materials suitable for dresses including prints, muslins, and coburgs.

In 1868, local merchants Wolfe and Gorrick advertised in *The Mercury* the most 'recherché' (exotic or obscure) dress-making fabrics including Japanese silks and French muslins.

For much of the 1800s all dresses were made entirely by hand, and might actually have been hand sewn at home for the ability to sew was then an essential female skill.

Most women would have been able to sew a simple dress and the underslips worn beneath it.

It is difficult to know how many dresses a woman might have owned. Even middle-class women might have had only one or two new dresses a year.

Fabric was expensive, so dresses were regularly adapted and reused. When styles changed, dresses were frequently unpicked and re sewn in the new style.

Old dresses were also cut down and reused for children's clothing.

Throughout the 1800s a dress was usually composed of a close-fitting bodice with a natural waistline and a full, near-floor length, skirt.

Initially a skirt's fullness was achieved by numerous starched or horsehair petticoats which were fastened onto a waistband.

In the 1850s and 1860s, the skirt was widened by a steel wire crinoline 'cage', which held the skirt away from the legs. The cage weighed less than the previous petticoats and increased freedom of movement.

The new crinolines, either imported from England or manufactured in Sydney, were quickly taken up by Maitland women. Wide skirts later gave way to the bustle.

For the women who could afford their services, professional seamstresses were available to make special or complicated outfits.

In 1843 Maitland had only one professional seamstress, and by 1878 there were 12.

I had a happy childhood ....

Dad used to 'curl' us up in tyres  
and roll us down the hill

.... they were **Goodyears**

Our History

# Wood engraving testament to the importance of Maitland to the Colony

By David Sciffer

May 28 2023



The central panorama of the famous 1878 wood engraving of Maitland.

This wood engraving was an attachment to the *Illustrated Sydney News* of September 7, 1878.

It's a testament to the importance of Maitland to the Colony during the latter half of the 19th century.

Close inspection bears witness to the skill of the hands that created it.

Photographs did not become a regular part of newspapers and magazines until the last decade of the century.

Before then, illustrations were wood engravings inserted into the typeset page.

Skilled craftsmen carved the image, in reverse, into small, end-grain, kiln-dried, timber blocks which were bolted together to give the appropriately sized image - in this case 106cm x 75cm.

Some of the 24 featured buildings are still extant, many repurposed, but many have been demolished - chief amongst these being the Blackett-designed Bank of New South Wales, just east of Maitland Post Office.

***The central panorama holds incredible detail depicting the everyday life of a vibrant, thriving city, with vignettes of ordinary folk going about their daily lives.***

The central panorama holds incredible detail depicting the everyday life of a vibrant, thriving city, with vignettes of ordinary folk going about their daily lives.

There is an impromptu horse race depicted and a man harvesting in the Veterans Flat area below the Long Bridge - just 3mm high.

The train driver in the lower right is seen to be wearing a hat: he is just 2mm high.

Many of the stores shown have articles in the windows and lettering which is extremely small.

In fact, on the end of the building in the centre of the upper row (Blair's Book Store in a panel that is 14 cm x 9cm), there are painted advertisements shown.

All the letters are clearly readable, yet have been measured to less than one millimetre high.

Even the experts consulted have not been able to explain how such precision was obtained.

In the large, central lower panel depicting the Wolff and Gorrick Store, a couple of interesting anomalies have been found.

On the awning of the building the two letter 'Ns' are reversed - quite understandable since the entire carving is reversed!

But even more extreme, when seen up close, the carriage at the kerb is found to have only three wheels - the left front one is missing.

There is no indication anywhere on the image to give credit to its creator. It may have been Samuel Calvert (1828-1913), well known as a painter and engraver.

Some experts insist he always signed his works, arguing he may not have been the artist in this case.

However, stylistic similarities between details in this work and a signed Calvert engraving of Newcastle Harbour in 1874 are hard to ignore. That work places him in the Hunter around the appropriate time.

As well, he was employed by the Illustrated *Sydney News* at various times and is acknowledged as the man who proved large-scale engravings such as this could be economically produced in Australia.

He produced several so-called 'balloon views' like this one. As well as the aforementioned Newcastle Harbour image, based on a sketch by Albert Charles Cooke, he created one of Adelaide in 1886.

There is a possibility that the views were, in fact, based on photographs taken from a tethered balloon.

The first known balloon photograph was taken some 20 years earlier and there is contemporary textual evidence that such a technique was known in Australia at that time. But we will never know for sure.