

East Maitland & Morpeth Historic Walks Saturday 9th April 2005



EAST MAITLAND 1833

Leaders: Brian England & Graham Dunlop.

Attendance: 21.

By 1823, several land grants had been made in the vicinity of Wallis Plains and in 1824 a regular boat service began operating between Newcastle and the lower Hunter districts. During this time, the beginnings of a town were being made at West Maitland. This site was generally unsuitable due to the periodic flooding of the Hunter River. After difficulties were experienced in obtaining land for the establishment of a town at Morpeth, Surveyor G. B. White defined the limits of the government town subsequently known as East Maitland.

Within the design of this town there was lib-



Glossopteris leaf fossils from the quarry, Stockade Hill.

eral provision for public buildings, churches, schools and public reserves.

The town was officially proclaimed in 1833.

During the middle of the nineteenth century, the three towns of East Maitland, West Maitland and Morpeth dominated the affairs of the Hunter Valley. They were respectively concerned with administrative and government functions, commercial activities and port and trade activities.

East Maitland was regularly and spaciouly laid out with imposing and solidly-constructed administrative and other government buildings.

In comparison, West Maitland was dominated by shops and residences situated along narrow, unplanned streets near the river.

East Maitland Walk.

Participants met at East Maitland's Heritage Park on **Stockade Hill**. This was the site of the first schoolhouse in the region, erected in 1829. The building was also licensed for use as a church and became known locally as "the Chapel". It was from the school that the Rev. G.K. Rusden conducted church services until the first St. Peters church was constructed in 1843.

The hill was also the site of the original Police Barracks and had a more sinister side. On November 30th 1830, five men were hanged here, but there seems to be no record of what they had done to deserve such a fate.

Before leaving Stockade Hill, we visited the site of an early quarry where beautiful plant fossils can be found.

Our party then moved to the site of the **Glebe Burial Ground**. This Church of England burial ground is the oldest cemetery in the Hunter Valley, with the earliest identified burial in 1828. It remained in use till around 1920.

Many district pioneers are buried here, in-

cluding Police Magistrate Denny Day, Samuel Clift and John Eckford, who lie side by side with soldier and convict, Protestant and Catholic. There are many graves of immense historical value. The massive Clift Vault was said to be the largest and most ornate in the Colony outside Sydney.

Sadly, the site has suffered significant degradation and vandalism and only 16 years ago it was almost re-developed as a housing estate. Headstones were taken away and used as flooring for a local dairy and wrought iron fencing was stolen to decorate homes and gardens. Many of the graves were simply desecrated for the lead they contained, scattering about the bones of the deceased. One of the desecrated graves was that of the Rev. Rusden himself. His bones were later gathered up and re-interred in the grounds of the present St. Peters Church along with his original headstone. The site was cleared of lantana only



Glebe Burial Ground East Maitland.



Weathered remains of the Clift Vault.



St. Peter's Church of England on William Street.

recently and has now attracted the attention of archaeologists and conservationists.

Adjacent to the burial ground and hidden by scrub is the large quarry from which the white sandstone used to construct the present-day St. Peter's Church was cut.

On returning to Stockade Hill, our group then walked down William Street to St. Peters Church of England. This elegant Victorian church, built in decorative Gothic style, was commenced in 1886 and remains incomplete. It has a slate roof supported by New Zealand hardwood frames. Jane Eckford imported the pulpit of marble and alabaster from Italy. The famous Dr. Evatt, who became Chief Justice of NSW, was a member of the St. Peter's choir as a boy.

St. Peter's Parish Hall was erected after 1840 using materials from the original school house on Stockade Hill. The bricks are rosy sand stocks and the building originally had a shingle roof.

The walk continued & we passed the **Lands Office** (Designed by Government architect W.L. Vernon and built by Thomas Henley of Balmain in 1895. The lands office first opened for business on 1st January 1885 in the adjoining hall that was leased from St. Peter's Church of England), **Smiths Flour Mill** (established as a steam-operated flour mill by John Smith in 1844. Its sandstone second story built over a timber ground floor makes the building unusual) before reaching **Caroline Chisholm's Cottage**.



St. Peters Parish Hall.



Carolyn Chisholm's Cottage in the present day Smith Street.



Graham Dunlop explaining aspects of Morpeth's history before leading us on a two hour walk.



Graham describing some of the early industries that occupied the river frontage in Morpeth.

After leaving Smith Street, we walked to East Maitland Railway Station passing historic buildings including Red Lion Inn, Eckford's Cottage, the Literary Institute, Cottage of Content Inn and Roseneath.

Cars were collected and we drove to Morpeth for lunch in the Ray Lawler Reserve before meeting Graham Dunlop, our afternoon leader. Graham is a local historian with a wealth of knowledge on local history.

The Morpeth area was granted to Lt. Close in 1821 and the town became a bustling river port in the 1830's and 1840's. The railway branch line from East Maitland to Morpeth opened in 1864 and was closed following flood damage in 1953.

Before starting our Morpeth walk near St. James' Anglican Church, Graham spent time informing us on aspects of the origin of Morpeth and on some of the local dignitaries & characters who lived in Morpeth. We walked down High Street before returning along Swann Street, the present main street, to Campbell's Cottage where our outing concluded.

Geo-Snippet

Indonesian Tsunami, 26/12/2004.

- ◇ It was the result of a **magnitude 9** under ocean megathrust earthquake that took place at a depth of 30 km in the Burma Microplate & the associated Java or Sunda Trench, a large subduction zone with its associated deep ocean trench.
- ◇ A piece of ocean floor about 1200 km by 100 km shifted suddenly up to 11 m horizontally & 15 m vertically.
- ◇ The energy released by the earthquake shifted the Earth's centre of gravity towards its core increasing Earth's rotation by 3 microseconds thus shortening the day. It also shifted Earth axis tilting it an extra 2.5 cm.
- ◇ In the week following, 110 earthquakes took place in the Burma Microplate with only 11 being under magnitude 5.