THE ARCHITECTURE OF HIGH STREET, MAITLAND

AN ARCHITECTURAL SCIENCE
AND RESEARCH THESIS
BY K. D. CHARLTON

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PREFACE TO THIS 2015 DIGITISED EDITION

My choice of subject for a final year thesis was influenced by Morton Herman’s encouragement of students to study the architecture of the Hunter region. The father of architectural history in Australia, he wrote *The Early Australian Architects and Their Work* (1954) and *The Architecture of Victorian Sydney* (1956). Each week, he travelled from Sydney to conduct design studios in the part-time course I began in 1954. He supervised my research and writing, then awarded the thesis a Distinction and used it as one of the sources for *The Blackets* (1963). I submitted the thesis in late 1961 to Eric Parker, Head of the School of Architecture in Newcastle. When the English poet and architecture enthusiast John Betjeman visited Newcastle soon afterwards, he regretted he could not fit in a visit to Maitland. Parker offered a loan of the only copy of the thesis, and Betjeman took it on the train, which passed through Maitland, to Brisbane and returned it by mail three weeks later.

In producing a digitised edition, I have kept as closely as possible to the original, typed beautifully by my mother. A few minor corrections to the text, written in pencil by Morton Herman, have been made. The names of some architects, discovered since 1961, are revealed in annotations to the text.

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INTRODUCTION

A study of the history of Maitland is rewarding in many ways. This rural settlement grew in a district having many qualities suitable for a city of great architectural value. The great pity is that the settlement did little more than just grow.

The position was at the head of navigation, at the time of settlement, of a river draining the most naturally rich valley in Eastern Australia. Once the land grants are cleared, “the rich soil and humid climate afford...luxurious vegetation and beautiful foliage”

Great quantities of building timber grew naturally along the river. A local sandstone of world class quality was available. Bricks were soon manufactured in the district. To tastefully convert these materials into buildings, architects and tradesmen were available, already trained on the construction of colonial Sydney. An added source of wealth, the coalfields to the south, were to be discovered at a later date.

The real reward however, in studying the history of Maitland is the knowledge gained of the consequences of haphazard growth of communities. In this particular case, the flooding of the Hunter River, which before settlement improved the fertility of the soil, made the results disastrous. The fault was not in the lack of planning ability of men like Sir Thomas Mitchell, but rather in the failure of governing authorities to foresee development. If the Surveyor-General's township of East Maitland had been available for settlement at the critical time before 1826, or better still, had Morpeth been then planned for settlement, the buildings of publicans and businessmen gathering about the disembarking settlers would have been discouraged from unwittingly forming the nucleus of a city on a swampy flood plain.

The growth of the village - “Wallis Plains” was so rapid that there was no advantage in opening a business in the “Maitland” planned in 1829, which was to be little more than the “Government town” of East Maitland in 1892, compared with the “principal business place...though occasionally liable to floods”

The architecture of this “private” town’s High Street will, in this thesis, be seen to reflect in its character, the hurried early growth of the town, with little regard for sensible planning. It will, however, be seen to have a character of its own brought about by its present buildings being mainly built in the Victorian period.
LOCATION

High Street is the business centre and traffic artery of the City of Maitland. Today this city has a population of approximately 30,000 and embraces the former municipalities of West Maitland, East Maitland, and Morpeth and includes the suburbs of Lorn, Telarah and Rutherford.

Maitland is on the Hunter River, twenty miles north-west of Newcastle, and is at the junction or two important railways and of valley routes. The Hunter Valley narrows at Branxton where the Mount Royal and Brokenback Ranges converge from the north and south respectively. Here the Hunter flows out of the valley on to a rich plain. Vegetables and fodder grow on these flats that extend by the river on both sides of the town.
The southern tributaries of the Hunter, although normally insignificant streams, carry a large volume of water in flood time. Wallis Creek, which joins Fishery Creek at Maitland, drains the twenty mile valley west of the Sugarloaf Range, and is very swampy in its lower reaches. It is principally a dairying centre today but industries have always flourished and are developing still more rapidly.

The Hunter Valley has a unity of natural resources that is unique in Australia and rare in the world. Its good grazing lands, prolific flats, and coal have each played their parts in the development of this self-contained agricultural-industrial unit. Coal is by far the principal mineral resource of the Hunter Valley; in monetary value of production it also stands first among Australian mineral resources generally. Good clay pits are located in the East Maitland-Thornton area.

Two hundred years ago the surrounding district was almost entirely an open forest. Along the river banks were the Red Cedar (Celdrela australis) and other softwoods in abundant quantities; but then as now, eucalypts predominated in a region where the rainfall is not sufficiently plentiful to foster heavy softwood growth, except in sections or the river valleys in the north, where brushwood rainforest vegetation is still to be found.

Softwoods have more or less disappeared from the Lower Hunter Valley for three reasons:-
1. High commercial value encouraged early exploitation.
2. They were found only along river flats in sheltered areas, and hence could be easily cut and transported downstream.
3. The soil in which the trees were rooted was rich and highly suitable for agriculture.

The Red Cedar is now practically extinct in the district. Land clearing has resulted in the removal of most of the good hardwood timber in settled areas. Ironbark, Spotted Gum, Sydney Blue Gum and Tallow-wood are the principal hardwoods found in the district forests.

The Maitland soil is a grey sandy-clay type, in some parts as much as 25 feet deep, open and generally easy to work; the water drains through it readily and thus the fields do not become waterlogged; likewise when the moisture leaves the soil, as in periods of drought, it does not open up. Periodic floods deposit as much as six inches of silt and dispense with artificial fertilisers.

Maitland has a Latitude of S. 32°44’ and a Longitude of E. 151° 35’ and is 19 feet above sea level. The summers are warm and hot and the winters cool. Humidity figures are relatively high at an average for the year of 77%. Frost incidence is not heavy and on an average begin in mid-June and terminate towards the latter part of August. The average rainfall is 33 inches compared with 41 at Newcastle.
The mineral wealth of the Maitland district is often supposed to consist entirely or coal. However, the lower marine sandstone at Ravensfield has proven to be unequalled in Australia and has been awarded first prizes at Philadelphia, (1887), Sydney (1879) and Indian and Colonial (London) exhibitions. Many of the leading buildings in Maitland are constructed of this stone, which is excellent for carving purposes. It is very free from joints, so that large masses can be cut from the seam, which is 10 to 12 feet thick and of warm sepia brown appearance. There is also a handsome variety of a fine bluish tint. The edges of fine carving have proved after many years’ exposure to be very little affected by weathering, being still sharp.
Maitland soon after the 1955
High Street begins at Victoria Bridge, over Wallis Creek. After curving to the west for half a mile, lined with a smattering of residence fronting cultivated river flats, it crosses the railway by overhead bridge. The street extends to the north-west and for the first quarter mile is lined with a mixture of decaying brick business premises and some petrol filling stations. An open space to the north reveals the bed of the Hunter River, filled after its diversion. The next third of a mile begins with a three storey warehouse and a brick and stone Technical College facing more dilapidated brick premises. A century-old stone church faces a brick church under construction. The “Civic Centre” follows - a white stuccoed clock-towered Town Hall and an ambulance station face a City Library in a former bank, adjacent to the newspaper office. Five hotels and shops, large and small, gather around a distinguished three-storied stone bank facing a faded stuccoed four-storied “General Merchant”. After an ecclesiastical precinct where a Cathedral group faces another church, a virtually continuous row of awninged shops extends for half a mile in a slow curve. Taking advantage of some of the corners of streets on the left are banks and the post office.

Some more hotels are among the shops on the right - where the unseen river bank drops steeply away at the rear. A cinema noisily commands notice on the left. At the end of the shops the Belmore Bridge crosses the Hunter from a narrow street to the right, whilst a hundred yards further on an open space has begun to be approached by a new bridge. This open space is a forecourt to a fine red brick and stone Court House with a tower facing down High Street and complete with a complex police station, all on an island site. Car sales and service stations are scattered thereafter for 400 yards and the street is flanked by some residences before finishing at a long bridge over a quarter mile belt of cultivated flats.
DISCOVERY AND SETTLEMENT

On the 9th September, 1797, Lieutenant John Shortland, RN, of H.M.S. “Reliance” officially discovered Newcastle and the Hunter River Valley when he entered what is now known as the Port of Newcastle, New South Wales, Australia. Two years later Lieutenant Shortland proceeded to Sydney with the first samples of coal from Newcastle and since then the city, and more particularly the districts surrounding it, have become the greatest coal-producing areas in Australia.

The Hunter River was explored in 1801 by Lieutenant Grant in command of the brigantine “Lady Nelson”. Lieutenant-Colonel William Paterson, then in command of the New South Wales Corps, assisted Grant and Barallier in the discoveries on the Hunter and kept an informative diary on his travels. 13
The ground which is now High Street, Maitland, was in the years before discovery “a scrub with patches of good timber, but there was much swampy land.” Paterson and his party landed on the nearby bank of the Hunter River on July 1st, 1801, and he later described how they “built a small tent hut thatched with grass, which grows luxurient.”

Later that year a cedar camp was formed in the vicinity and by 1812 “The Camp” had assumed more important proportions for an effort was made to develop the agricultural possibilities for the district.

Governor Macquarie visited the area in 1818 and gave permission to Captain James Wallis, Commandant at Newcastle, to settle a few well-conducted prisoners on what was then called Wallis Plains and to have the land thrown open for settlement. Subsequently, that year a slab-and-bark grog shop was opened, operated by the legendary thrice-convicted Molly Morgan. The story of her eventful life has been widely published. Simply, she was transported in the second fleet of 1790 at the age of 28, away from her three children and husband. He was, however, transported three years later. Until his arrival, she enjoyed immense popularity among doting soldiers enslaved by her flirtations. To escape her Jealous husband, she arranged for a friendly sea-captain to smuggle her back to England. After rejoining her children, she was bigamously married but was again convicted - this time for burning down her new “husband’s” house. Sent back to Sydney in 1804, she found her husband William Morgan had since vanished on release. She was again popular and all went well for her on the land she cultivated, until found guilty of stealing cattle and packed off to convict camp at Newcastle in 1816. Her charms, the age of 54, were still effective enough in gaining her a ticket-of-leave. Settling permanently at her shanty, she was married again, this time to a local soldier, “Joe the Marine”. She became wealthy but industriously cleared the land for agriculture. Governor Brisbane admired her resolution and gave her use of convict gangs who cut a track through the thick scrub and great trees, which has become today’s High Street. Convicts were forced under the lash to carry a cubic yard of gravel between two from Wallis Creek to the new street. Molly constantly pestered the authorities to improve the lot of the prisoners. Once, she rode to Sydney, mostly through wild bush, and won a reprieve for some convicts sentenced to the gallows. Wallis Plains became popularly known as Molly Morgan Plains.

A few free settlers took advantage of the opportunity to settle in 1818 and three grants of land were made, one of which was probably to the William Eckford who was Newcastle's first pilot from 1812 to 1823. William O'Donnell’s grant was of 33 acres and included Abbot and Sparke Streets. He built the first home in West Maitland - a small ironbark slab structure with a bark roof, on the site now included in the western corner of Browne’s monumental yards.
Generally speaking, the free settlers who had been attracted to the Hunter River did not care for the close proximity of the penal settlement. Consequently, the development of the Lower Hunter was delayed until the removal of the convict establishment to Port Macquarie in 1823. In that year, Molly Morgan was granted 159 acres, including the land to become the busiest portion of High Street, between Hunter and Bulwer Streets. Her shanty was on the site of the present Royal Hotel opposite the Bank of New South Wales.

Another exploring party, led by John Howe set out north from Windsor, and on St. Patrick’s Day, 1820 they discovered Patrick’s Plains. On following the river downstream they reached Wallis Plains, thus completing the overland route from Sydney. Allan Cunningham explored the river in 1823, carried back with him stories of the type of country to be found there, and created a good impression among the more adventurous settlers in Sydney.
The Lower Valley was settled rapidly after the year 1822 and in the next three years, 263 pioneers settled there. In parts other than Newcastle, they acquired land by outright purchase, or by payment of quit rental of 15/- per acre, or by agreement to maintain a specified number of convicts. 26

“A Village came into existence at Wallis Plains between 1823 and 1825, and by 1826 an Inn and a Store had been opened”. 27 The Store was a stone building and the merchants, Powditch and Boucher were so successful that they erected a small wharf on the river bank. 28

By March 1826, almost all lands on the banks of the Hunter had been parcelled out to grantees. A drive of 10,000 head of cattle into the Liverpool Plains in that year gives some idea of the speed of settlement; and also its nature, for the Hunter Valley prospered not only for its agricultural uses, but for its stocks of horses, sheep and cattle. For instance, in the year 1827, the Lower Hunter Valley is recorded as grazing in all 25,000 head of cattle and 80,000 sheep. 29

“In July 1824 a passenger boat began to trade between Newcastle and Wallis Plains. No roads existed between the two places - a track through the Hexham swamp being the only land route to the first inland settlement on the Hunter River”. 30 By 1827 there was still only a bridle track though a cart track was in process of construction. 31 This bullock track, winding along the firm ground beside Wallis Creek after the crossing from the east and then leading to the disembarking point of the passenger boats, was to govern the twisting shape of High Street.

After the first bullocks were driven to the district from Sydney by Mr. Clift in 1825, the bullock trains crowded into Maitland, bringing produce from the valley to the steamers at Morpeth. On the return journey they loaded with merchandise at West Maitland for the outback. The presence of water and swamp grass attracted the teamsters to camp at Maitland overnight. 32

The village was being formed by first one then another of the settlers pitching his tent or erecting his buildings at all hazards on the flooded land. As recently as 1820 the Hunter had broken its banks and rising high enough to pour into the top windows of Molly Morgan’s shanty. 33

An important factor in the unhealthy growth of Maitland was the failure of the Government to establish a planned town in a suitable elevated position soon enough for the rapid flow of settlers. In 1823 E.C. Close Esq., an ex-lieutenant of the British Navy who had originally come to Newcastle as deputy engineer on the breakwater work, 34 was granted by Governor Brisbane elevated undulating ridges “Green Hills” which were immune from inundation by floods. No particular importance was then attached to these ridges and for four years Lt. Close had his hands full in bringing his lands under subjection.
“Green Hills” became Morpeth and proved to be the head of navigation and the port for the northern interior and therefore the high land in the words of Close “should have been reserved in the public interest, for the purpose of civic settlement”. Governor Darling requested Lt. Close to surrender his grant and he was willing if recompensed at the figure determined by himself for four years work and domestic unsettlement but the Governor would not pay the resulting price.  

The high ground east of Wallis Creek was cleared of its thick timber after Mr. G.P. White surveyed and Major Sir Thomas Mitchell planned the town of Maitland there in 1829. By that time the patience of the people was exhausted and in the result the growth of West Maitland outstripped that of the official township despite the periodic floods. The township has no layout or design to speak of but became the regular stopping-place for horsemen and drovers travelling north. “George Yeomans established a hostelry there and in 1831 launched a twenty ton vessel on the river”. The first local Post Office was at a shop opened in 1830 at a site between Devonshire and Rose Streets.

The town of Maitland to “be considered in future as consisting of two portions”, was the subject of a proclamation in a Government Gazette in 1835 defining the boundaries of “West Maitland”. The town was first named Maitland in 1829 and writers have suggested many origins for the name. The pick can be had of “a Government surveyor of that period, named Maitland”, “a military officer”, “naval officer” or “John Maitland, Earl of Lauderdale” but those who have given these names offer no evidence to support their statements. No person of the name is known to have been in any way connected with Australia about or near that period. There was a James Maitland, Earl of Lauderdale about the time Maitland was named but what connection he can have with naming the town does not appear unless it can in some way be through the Surveyor-General’s intimacy and friendship with the great soldier-statesman.
VIEW OF HIGH STREET, WEST MAITLAND
DEVELOPMENT

Maitland had reached some importance by 1832 and trade was carried on between Newcastle and Sydney by Government packets bringing stores and mail three times a week. Smaller craft ran up the river as far as Morpeth, where they were met at the wharf by bullock teams and waggons from Maitland. High Street’s stores and other buildings which grew up about this time were largely lined and fitted out with cedar from the fine trees growing in the Hunter Valley. The first shop is claimed to be that of Henry Rourke, a saddler, opened in 1836. The business continues today. 40

The most notable institution in Maitland today is the “Mercury”; the oldest country newspaper on the Australian mainland. The first country newspaper, the “Hunter River Gazette” was issued in 1841 and had a brief existence; but the “Maitland Mercury”, founded in January 1843, has been published continuously ever since. 41 In the same year work was commenced at a small coal mine at Rutherford. 42
A writer in 1842 still expressed a hope for the eventual abandonment of West Maitland in favour of East Maitland when he described the road from Newcastle to Patrick’s Plains: “17 1/2 miles. Enter the town of Maitland; the ground is favourable for the formation of a large town ....; but the preference has been given by builders to the low lands on the other side of Wallis Creek, these are however, subject to flood and ere long the houses may be washed away and the superior situation of the new town will then be made more evident.

“21 miles. The navigation of the Hunter ends; on this spot are various inns and a mass of houses have been built mostly upon the small original grants... ; Messrs Blaxland, Bowman and Sempill have wharfs here and there is great disposition to build – a considerable population being already collected”.  

The town was thriving in the 30s and 40s with the river flats and lowlands used mainly for wheat growing and cattle and sheep being run on the large estates in the west.  Rev. John D. Lang recorded in 1852 that “Maitland, both East and West, has nearly doubled itself in size and population since my last visit, five years ago.” In the following decade, despite a sudden but short-lived exodus to the southern goldfields, West Maitland was to progress with the acquisition of a gas works, for lighting only, in 1856 and a railway service from Newcastle to High Street station in 1858. Water supply was to come twenty years later.

High Street in the early fifties had no fixed alignment and was encroached upon by private buildings. In the year 1854 the control of “Maitland Road” - including High Street, was placed under the jurisdiction of the Maitland Road Trust.

By 1864 West Maitland had four steam flour mills (Newcastle had only one mill from 1844 to 1873), four tobacco factories, and two soap and candle factories. Disastrous floods of 1864 and 1867 ruined the wheat crops and brought some years of depression to the farmers; the “Newcastle Chronicle” in 1869 reported that “for some time past commercial matters have been in such a languishing state in Maitland as to necessitate the removal of several of the State’s most active men of business to Newcastle”. The disease of rust demonstrated conclusively that the annual rainfall in the Lower Hunter was too high for the successful production of wheat. The years that followed were largely experimental. The production of tobacco and cotton were tried and defeated by outside competition, but the farmers found that certain types of maize could be cultivated for grain in a moist climate. Orchards were also planted and by the 1880s the rapidly expanding population of Newcastle was providing a good market for vegetables. Lucerne was grown for fodder, and pig and poultry farming also assumed some importance.

Although the population of Maitland which was 7,568 in 1856 increased to 8,922 in 1861, it only increased to 11,352 thirty years later. At Newcastle however, where the population was only 1,404 in 1856, it increased to 3,722 in 1861 and to 49,910 in 1891. About the year 1870 the population of both towns approximated 8,900 persons each.
Lithograph of High Street in 1878 from The Illustrated Sydney News
When writers in 1888 recorded Australia at the centenary of its founding, one described the attractiveness of the ornate dwellings and well-kept grounds of East Maitland which he “scarcely expected in the more business portion called West Maitland”. After listing the crops and factory products he noted “the general comfort of its people seem to be characteristic of the place, rather than any desire to grow wealthy”. 53 Another writer was more architectural: “Expensive works have had to be undertaken to prevent the river from encroaching on the main street, which....has on either side many interesting relics of the old order and some good specimens of the new. Patriarchal verandahed hotels look out from their small-paned windows, burdened with many memories, and fine new four-storied buildings of stone, brick and cement have arisen which would not discredit Sydney”. 54

In the years 1886-1887 Professor T.W.E. David proved the existence of the great Greta coal mining areas. The area now includes Cessnock, Kurri Kurri, Weston, East Greta, etc. and his findings were responsible for the opening of the new field and the growth of the mining towns, all close to Maitland. 55

Although the opening up of this area was slow at first, once it began it established a large local market for foodstuffs and milk. Dairying was adopted as a staple industry in the valley and once the industry was established by local demand, it soon sought, and obtained, other markets. The same happened with vegetable and fruit production, so that today the Hunter Valley is one of the most important food-producing areas in the State. 56
Serious flood years on the Hunter have been 1820, 1830-31-32, 1870, 1893, 1949-50-51 and 1955. The highest recorded rise was in 1893 until the 50 feet rise in 1955. In that year two thousand homes were flooded at Maitland, with one hundred swept away, and eleven fatalities. The inhabitants were stunned into the belief that low-lying Central Maitland was “finished” and would not rise again. The Mayor of Maitland in 1961 (Ald. Skilton) expressed the belief that the people want High Street to be retained as their business centre. This is apparently the type of forgetfulness that has followed previous floods and obviously the shopkeepers find the risk of future floods worth taking while today’s profits are mounting. There is today, however, a responsible planning authority, the Northumberland County Council, which has the opportunity to sensibly plan future growth. in the best interests of the whole community.
ARCHITECTS

MORTIMER W. LEWIS

The first known architect-designed building in the vicinity of High Street was the Roman Catholic parish church of St. John the Baptist, in Cathedral Street, but when the buildings were fewer than at present, close enough to High Street to be considered part of it. The church was opened in 1846 under the supervision of Mortimer W. Lewis Junior, and in the opinion of his son W.A.E. Lewis the design was probably that of the then Colonial Architect, also Mortimer W. Lewis. The foundations had been laid as early as 1841, when the Colonial Architect’s son was in his early twenties.

Lewis had become Colonial Architect in 1835 and held that office for fourteen years. His most successful church at Camden was being built at the same time as the above church. The scope of his work was very great, extending from Sydney through the country towns of New South Wales and to Melbourne. “The District Architect, Mortimer W. Lewis” was reported to have supervised the building of Victoria Bridge over Wallis Creek in 1852, and the Maitland School of Arts (William White, Architect) in 1856-7.
GOOLD & FIELD.

When David Jones of Sydney laid the foundation stone for a Congregational Church in High Street in December 6 1854, the architects for the project were Goold and Field, also of Sydney. The first contract lapsed, however, and a church lapsed, however, and a church meeting on October 23 1856 resolved “that the architect be instructed to so reduce the plan, that the church already commenced be completed for a sum not exceeding £1,500”. The building was completed in 1857, when the firm had become Goold and Hilling. 64 These architects designed the nave and aisles of St. John’s Church, Darlinghurst Road, Sydney in 1858, and Edmund Blacket completed the tower and spire in 1872. 65

EDMUND BLACKET.

Edmund Thomas Blacket was born in London in 1817. After his education there, he took a position in Yorkshire, where he became interested in architecture, and enthusiastically sketched and measured churches as a hobby. 66 Despite his father’s opposition, he embraced this profession. He left England in 1842 bound for New Zealand, but stopped in Sydney and obtained a post of Church of England school buildings inspector. Later he worked as Diocesan Architect and in 1849 he succeeded Lewis as Colonial Architect. He resigned from this position after being commissioned to design the first buildings for Sydney University in 1854. 67 After these were completed about 1860 he completed “an incredibly long list of ecclesiastical and secular buildings” in his lifetime, which came to an end in 1883. 68

Blacket’s first association with High Street was in his capacity of Colonial Architect when he “materially improved” the English design for Victoria Bridge in 1852” 69 - the first laminated or over-trussed bow-string bridge erected in the colony”. 70

While the Sydney University was being built, a contract was signed in 1858 for a new Bank of New South Wales to Blacket’s design. 71 The site was In High Street directly opposite the site of Molly Morgan's shanty. The original design has been preserved in good condition, exhibiting clean lines and good taste and it is obviously appreciated by its owners today. Soon afterwards Blacket designed one of his best churches - the Anglican church of St. Mary at Maitland. The foundation stone was laid on 7th September 1860. 72 The church may be seen from High Street, along Church Street, but only as a spire above a quarter of a mile of houses. The siting can be appreciated best from west of the flats which are adjacent to it and at a lower level. The stone spire was completed 24 years later. 73

Blacket’s best design in High Street was a new warehouse for D. Cohen & Co., which followed a great fire early in 1865. 74 By the time four months had elapsed, Blacket’s staff was detailing a three-storied, spiral-staircased, stone-carved store 75 “considered the finest mercantile building in any country town in New South Wales.” 76 The cost is claimed to have been £20,000. 77
JOHN W. PENDER.

John Wiltshire Pender was born in 1833 at Tobermory, Argyllshire, Scotland. He received training as an architect at the Royal Academy, Inverness. He came to Australia with his family in 1855, remaining at Melbourne while they settled in Maitland forming J. Pender and Sons Builders. Luck was not with him on the goldfields, and he spent much of his time sharpening mining tools. Pender arrived in Maitland in 1857 and became foreman of his family’s business. He set up as an architect in the town in 1863, and in the following 49 years he did more than any other man to make High Street appear as it does today.

His practice spread over the Hunter Valley and as far as Armidale. The principal buildings in High Street were E.F. Capper and Sons’ premises in 1888, the Australian Joint Stock Bank in 1881 (now occupied by the City Library), the A.M.P. Society offices in 1883, (now the Queensland Insurance Co.) the Masonic Hall in 1877, (now the A.M.L. & F. Co. Ltd) the Commercial Bank of Australia Limited and numerous small commercial buildings. His “Mercury” office of 1882 has a small portion remaining.

Churches in Scone, Armidale, Merriwa and East Maitland and “a great many handsome business places and private residences in various parts of the northern districts” flowed from his drawing board. He had “always taken an active part in all movements having for their object the welfare and advancement of the town and district”. This was shown in his interest in the problems of flood control. In 1868 Pender won a competition for the design of floodgates at Wallis Creek, invoking another flood of protests from the defeated engineers. The floodgates were opened in 1870 at a cost of £4,300. When the nationwide financial disaster of the nineties struck, he was able to retire to his farm “Drumfin” at Oakhampton. The farm became noted for its Ayrshire cattle, pedigreed pigs, and the improvement in the strains of its poultry.

The practice was reopened when recovery time came, and J.W. Pender retired in 1912.

WALTER H. PENDER

John Pender was blessed with eleven sons, the tenth of whom, Walter, entered the architectural profession and became a partner with his father in 1908. He carried on alone after his father’s retirement. Later he entered into partnership with Mr. Lees of Newcastle till 1930. He died in 1943. His contributions to the architecture of High Street were the present “Woolworths” building and the “Mercury” office completed in 1936. The practice was reopened in 1951 by W.H. Pender’s son Ian, after gaining his degree at Sydney University, war service in the R.A.A.F. and experience in the office of Stephenson & Turner in Sydney.

WALTER H. PENDER
James Warren Scobie was born in 1863 and after leaving school was articled to J.W. Pender. When he had served his time, he entered into partnership with Arthur C. Lee, who was a practising architect in Maitland in the eighties. The partnership was immediately successful in winning the Competition for the design of the West Maitland Town Hall in 1888. The competition was judged jointly by Messrs. McRae (Sydney City Architect) and Hennessy (Sheerin and Hennessy of Sydney), and attracted 35 competitors, 26 of which were from Sydney. The Town Hall was duly built to their design, after the architects were “...congratulated upon having the contract taken at an amount slightly below their estimate”.  

Lee & Scobie designed a large number of terraces and shops in High Street, for the Presbyterian Glebe Property Trustees. The earlier group of 1890 still exhibits colourful yellow and red brickwork.

The partnership lasted no more than ten years, for drawings after that time are endorsed J. Warren Scobie. The practice continued to produce churches, business premises and hotels.

Scobie won a total of eight competitions out of the eleven he entered. He was a surveyor of note, and he surveyed and established the levels for the Lorn and Bolwarra embankments after the 1893 flood. These resisted floods until the 50ft. floods of 1955. His home “The Flagstaff” was one of the two high spots in Lorn. One of his nine sons was the Government Architect at Port Moresby at the time of James Scobie’s death at Maitland in 1956, aged 93 years.

The practice is carried on today by Thelander, Deamer & McKenzie of Maitland and Newcastle, who are responsible for the remodelling of Paynes-Hustlers in High Street opposite the Post Office.
JAMES BARNET.

The Maitland Post Office was erected in 1881, when the Colonial Architect was James Barnet. He had taken over the position in the early sixties, having been born in 1827. Soon after becoming Colonial Architect, he began to prepare plans for the Sydney General Post Office, to be completely built in 1887 after twenty-two years under construction. Undoubtedly this was his masterpiece. The cost of the building was so great that the Government was forced “to insist on economy in the design of government buildings”. Barnet retired soon after the building’s completion, having experienced an increase in the work of the Colonial Architect from 314 buildings being handled by a staff of 15 to 1351 by 64. His largest building was Sydney’s Lands Department and probably his most architecturally successful, the Colonial Secretary’s Office. He died at Forest Lodge in 1904.

WALTER VERNON.

The successor to Barnet in 1890 was given the new title of “New South Wales Government Architect”. He was W.L. Vernon, who had previously formed a partnership with William Wardell about 1880. Typical of the work produced during his administration are the Central Police Court, 1892 in Liverpool Street, Sydney and a 1895 addition to the Supreme Court buildings at the north end of Hyde Park. The latter was completed one year before Vernon’s Maitland Court House and was constructed to a similar high technical standard of design.

Maitland Court House ventilator
RESIDENCES

The residences now in High Street are mainly at the eastern end between Wallis Creek and the railway, while there is another group at the western end before Long Bridge. By far the most pleasant is Number One, owned at present by Mr. Foster of Sydney. The house is in the true colonial style, and has an attic above the ground floor. The roof is carried over the front wall on to six simple wood columns, forming an open verandah. The construction is plastered masonry walls painted cream. Together with the blue-grey shutters to the four front windows the whole effect is very neat.

The building was restored after the last major flood in 1955. It gained a new corrugated iron roof, a good clean-up and the surrounding garden was trimmed. Little more seems to have been done, especially to the garden, since.
Tracing the age of the house is not easy. The view drawn by Fred.C. Terry of “New Bridge West Maitland” does not show the building and since the other buildings around the bridge are drawn reasonably correctly it seems hard to believe the house was built before the year of that view - 1853. A map of East Maitland dated 1841 shows many buildings in East Maitland but explains that “West Maitland is shown in part”. Two buildings are shown on the south side of the street near Wallis Creek. A small stone building in the same position as one of these remains, behind the above house, and is completely vine-covered. No other building on that map exists to-day.

Misses Hall advertised in the “Mercury” newspapers of 1857 and later, that they had vacancies for boarders at “Walli House” at Victoria Bridge, East Maitland”. The name could have been Wallis House, but no correction was made. Lee & Co’s “Book Almanac, 1885” recorded the burning of a shed at “Mr. Geo. Lee’s Wallis House near Victoria Bridge”. This house is possibly the same as today’s No. 1 which forms such an attractive curtain-raiser” to High Street. It should certainly be preserved in good condition.
The entrance to High Street over Victoria Bridge is dominated by a bulky two-storied residence occupied by a descendant of the original owners, the Clift family, who were at Breeza station, northwest of the Hunter Valley, in 1825. Mr. Clift drove the first recorded bullocks to the Maitland district in that year. In the thirties Mr. Clift was living in a house near Wallis Creek. 100 Miss Ann Christian, who lives in the house standing today, does not know how old it is but is sure it was built by her great-grandfather, Mr. Clift from Breeza, for his son, her grandfather. The cedar furniture came with him from Breeza.

When the Victoria Bridge was opened in 1852, a number of ladies who “graced the occasion” were “obliged by Mr. Clift with seats on the balcony of his new house...situated just opposite the bridge”. 101 This obviously dates the building at about 1850. The bricks for the walls were baked on the site. Doors, stairs, panelling and skirtings are cedar from trees which lined the creek. Today the walls are painted grey and the roof is covered with dark Marseilles pattern tiles. The original verandah drawn by Terry was much simpler than the present brick-walled type, with its external stair. On the ground floor are tour 20'x 18' rooms, while on the first floor there are two such rooms in the front, which may be opened into the central hall by folding cedar walls.
No 573

‘Woodonga’

Hampton Court
BRIDGES

The Victoria Bridge over Wallis Creek was quite significant at the time of its opening, 21st June 1852. Previous bridges had been rough structures, and exorbitant tolls had been charged for many years by the person who built them. In 1842 it was reported that “the bridge fell in last year, and a new one has been erected, also of wood, this being no very favourable place for the construction of a stone bridge, the alluvium affording no good foundation and the banks being sometimes many feet under water”. The new bridge was toll-free and of a design which aroused public interest. As was previously noted, the bridge was “from an English design, materially improved by the Colonial Architect E.T. Blacket Esq.” The site conditions caused the construction to be in timber, and the span was such that three laminated or overtrussed bow-strings were used to form two carriage-ways. The construction was the first of its kind in the colony, and the cost was less than £2,000.

Little wonder that the opening was a scene of “gay festivities”. Mr. Weaver, of the Colonial Architect’s office and the District Architect, Mortimer W. Lewis, who had supervised the construction, were present. A “grand procession of Oddfellows” etc. took place and part of the ceremony consisted of breaking a bottle of wine over the centre arch. The bridge has been replaced by a less spectacular steel construction supporting the busy modern road.
The Belmore Bridge over the Hunter near the western end of High Street was opened on October 4 1869, filling a long felt need. On this spot, in 1842, was “the ford across the Hunter to Paterson’s Plains, being the branch of the Great North Road from Wollombi to Port Stephens”. Before 1869 a punt carried traffic across the river 200 yards upstream. The bridge has five spans of steel lattice girders supported on circular steel-plated columns with oval-shaped webs between. The cost was £23,000 and the construction was carried out by John Scott of Carrington, Newcastle. The opening was the scene of another grand procession of organisations, the Mayor and Aldermen, and the public. “A large concourse of people gathered to witness the opening” by the Minister for Works, in the presence of the Premier. The Mayoress christened the bridge “by breaking a bottle of champagne against the eastern railing thereof”. It has since been washed by 80 minor and five major floods. Fears were held that the 1955 flood would prove too much for the old bridge, but it survived. On July 7 1961, it was announced that a £235,000 contract had been let for a large steel and concrete bridge, to have an approach on the southern side in front of the Court House. The present Belmore Bridge will then be demolished.
High Street has always been essentially a commercial street, with business flourishing from the time of settlement. Samuel Cohen arrived in Sydney in 1833, and three years later started a branch office of his firm, David Cohen & Co. in West Maitland. In the next fifteen years the company had expanded to become one of the largest importers in the colony and required new premises. In 1851 they were engaged in building their new stores nearly opposite Devonshire Street. When Samuel Cohen died in 1862, the Maitland business and the family both came under the care of George Judah Cohen, who was then nineteen years of age. The business at that time included coach services valued at £50,000. Mr. Cohen began his career as a financier in Maitland, assisting in the formation of the Maitland Gas Company, and becoming its Chairman. After moving to Sydney in 1879 to control his growing business more effectively, he became widely known as a philanthropist. He died in 1937 at 94.
The largest conflagration known in Maitland destroyed Cohen’s warehouse and other buildings in 1865.\textsuperscript{111} A building was subsequently erected later that year to the design of Edmund Blacket,\textsuperscript{112} and to be in keeping with the importance of the company at that time, in the business centre of New South Wales. Several of the preliminary designs for the new building had twin entrances in the High Street facade. These are explained by the finished building being in part of the ground floor a banking chamber and the remainder of the building being the offices and warehouse of David Cohen & Co. The Bank entrance was placed in the western wall. The single central entrance from High Street was adopted either by company policy or, more than likely, by architectural design.

The building is three-storied at the front, having all the door and window openings semi-circular headed. The facade is constructed entirely in beautifully mellowed light brown Ravensfield sandstone. The Corinthian capitals to the ground-floor pilasters and the grotesque heads on the corresponding keystones are examples of excellent carving in a sympathetic stone. The arches on the ground floor are accentuated by the pointed voussoirs while as the building rises the carving becomes more simple, unfortunately, the attic order has been disfigured by removal of the balustrade and cutting back the cornice, to protect the public from possible falling stone. Otherwise, the stone is in good condition for its 96 years, and the edges are quite sharp. The front door has intricately carved cedar panels which the owner, who uses the building as a furniture factory, has visions of restoring to their original clear finish, by removing the green paint. The factory sign is quite neatly inserted in the facade, compared with most such signs today. Access to upper floors internally is by a wide cast-iron spiral staircase, cast in Sydney in 1866.
As was previously stated, the saddlery business of Henry Rourke was opened in 1836, and the shop is claimed to be the first in the town. The site, referred to as immediately east of John Rourke’s premises standing today, has been noted by the Northumberland County Council as having historical interest. The present building has the only arcaded upper floor remaining in High Street, and is constructed in red face bricks with cemented arches and trimmings.

Two of the remaining few simple Georgian style shops and residences are now occupied by hairdressers, as well they may have been since construction.

The craftsmen printers Thomas Dimmock Limited opened their business in Maitland in 1854, and became one of the biggest printers in the state after extending their building in 1923. The additions were designed to match the much earlier building, which is in the style of Rourke’s present building in its materials and details.

In the early 1850s shops and dwellings were imported from England, in numbered sections, ready to be fitted up. One such building was planned by Riley Bros. to be replaced by shops “in modern style” of 1889. The “Mercury” reporter wrote that he would miss the old iron shops, and “though now unsightly, they have doubtless done good service in the past. 113

Edward Capper began the business of E.P. Capper and Sons in 1843, the year of the first publication of the “Mercury” newspaper. 114 The General Merchants erected their present four-storied building in 1888, John W. Pender being the architect. All the upper floors were drawn having an open well in the centre, with six supporting cast-iron columns per floor. The first floor has no well today, but the other upper floors remain as designed. The effect is one of lightness and space. The street facade has stuccoed brick piers, decorated in the architect’s favourite manner, iron columns and large panes of glass.
The Presbyterian Glebe Property Trustees invested in a building with terrace dwellings and shops which is a good example of the work of the architect, James Warren Scobie, in the year 1890. Scobie was then in partnership with Arthur C. Lee.

The St. Andrew Street elevation remains in the original condition complete with its marble tablet, but the glorious two-storied verandahs in High Street have been replaced by the usual suspended awnings. These verandahs terminated at each end in wide bow fronts. Brickwork in bright red and yellow colours was all the rage at the time and this building has yellow bricks generally with dashes of red. A “Presbyterian Glebe Terrace” of similar size was planned shortly afterwards for the corner of High Street and the next street to the west, but the design was for a less ornate structure – even the brickwork, on the building as it stands today, is uninspiring.

The patterned terra cotta tiles being burnt in Sydney’s kilns found their way to Maitland and Hill’s Chambers incorporated them in their 1907 building, full of decoration. Buildings in this style are few in High Street, the commercial premises remaining today being mainly less severe in their Victorian stucco mouldings.

W.H. Pender’s design for the building now occupied by Woolworths is typical of his work between the World Wars. An exception to the restriction on development after the 1955 flood is the modernisation of a shop for Paynes Hustlers by architects Thelander Deamer & McKenzie.

Featured on this volume’s title page is an old High Street identity – the hitching post which has stood in the street since 1866. It was brought to Maitland by the American firm Friend & Co., who dealt in iron. The negro boy form points to its being moulded in America, and it was intended to be a fountain also. Water could have spouted from its mouth, but there was no water supply in the town in those days. Mr. A.D. McDonald bought the post and fixed it in its present position in front of his shop in 1892, where it has remained to be one of the few hitching posts still standing.

Hitching facilities are still provided on the columns of “Tulloch Signs”. Above the columns on this building’s balcony is the cast iron boar’s head and shield shown on the front page of this volume.
The first grant of land to a church in Maitland was of five acres to the Scots Presbyterians in 1832. A temporary timber church 20' x 40' was erected in 1837 at a cost of £150 and seating 150 people. Six years later the present church in Free Church Street, off High Street, was opened, to seat 400 and costing £1,000. This church looks its age today, having unpainted plastered brick walls. The design is unpretentious, and the tower, which appears small compared with the rest of the building, is roofed with a square pyramid of corrugated iron.

CHURCHES
A grant of four acres was made to the Roman Catholic Church in 1838, and three years later a temporary church was built for use while the big job of erecting the stone church of St John the Baptist was commenced at the same time. This church was completed in 1846, and it is known to have been supervised by Mortimer W. Lewis Junior. Doubt has been raised, as has been mentioned in the chapter on architects, as to the design being by the supervisor, or his father, the Colonial Architect.
Although built as a parish church, St. John's became the Cathedral of the diocese on the arrival of the first resident Bishop in 1866. Eventually this church became too small for the growing congregations, and the Catholic Hall, which had been built in 1922, was converted in 1933 into a pro-cathedral. The old church was then closed for eighteen years and was uncared for. A plan for the preservation and use of the building was put into effect in 1952, when it was reopened as a parish hall. A floor was constructed inside the building above the level of the parish hall, and used for four classrooms. The lower portion of the tower is now utilised as a projection room, for visual education. 119

St John's has very fine proportions, it being in the gothic revival style. The square central tower is finished at the top with battlements on each side and a finial on each corner buttress. All the walls are constructed in stone from the Ravensfield quarry. The church is seen to best advantage when viewed from along the river.
Methodism was brought to the town of Maitland in the year 1837 by an Irish Auctioneer, Jeremiah Ledsam. A gifted preacher, he conducted the first service from the verandah of his house on the first Sunday after his arrival. The services in the following three years were held in a billiard room building in the yard of the Albion Inn. A chapel was opened in 1840 in High Street, opposite Cathedral Street.

The “Mercury” of October 31 1857 carried a tender notice for the construction of a new Wesleyan Chapel in West Maitland. The plans could be obtained from Messrs. F. & F. Currey in High Street, but no record has been found of the name of the architect for the church, which was built behind the 1840 chapel. Erection took place throughout 1858, John Wright building the main structure for £4535, with an allowance of £500 for the old chapel. The stonework was completed by Mack and Sherwood for £1875 and the cast iron columns by Bubb and Co. The total cost was £7012. The foundation stone had been laid on January 5 1858, and on the third of the same month, one year later, the first services were held.

A pipe organ was installed in 1882, after drying out the pipes damaged with salt water when the ship from England met with bad weather. For many years an orchestra accompanied the organ. A centenary was celebrated in 1937, when one of the four sandstone columns from the original chapel was unveiled as a “stone of remembrance”. This had been cut to three feet high and built into the church wall outside the entrance.

The church is a lofty brick structure in the version of the gothic style common at that time. The interior was originally designed as a typical Methodist Church with a choir across a platform in front of the congregation. When the pipe organ was first installed, it formed a wall of pipes behind the choir, even hiding a beautiful stained-glass window. The interior was renovated early in 1959, the pipe organ being reconstructed on the side of a new sandstone altar, while a feature is now made of the window above. The whole of the entrance has been beautifully finished, as well as the gallery above.

Two very famous Sydney business men, David Jones and John Fairfax “had evinced interest in the Maitland movement” to form a Congregational church. Fairfax presided over the initial public meeting on October 1 1851. Soon afterwards David Jones sold his land at the corner of High Street and James Street, which was worth £1550, to the church for £750. The Sydney architects Goold and Field were instructed to design the church, and the foundation stone was laid by Jones on December 6 1854.

All did not go well with the contract, and it lapsed after nearly two years. A subsequent church meeting resolved to instruct the architect to so reduce the plan, that the church already commenced be completed for a sum not exceeding £1500. This was accomplished for £1200, the finished building costing £4700. The architects had changed the name of their firm to Goold and Hilling before the church was completed.

The design of the front is not a happy balance of elements, the entrance being dwarfed in scale by the large upper window, which seems to sit precariously on the point of the doorway. The building is in a well-kept condition.
“The banks have shown their appreciation of the importance of the place by the superior style of their premises” was the comment of a writer about 1890. They certainly had branches in Maitland at that time which were each bigger and better than earlier branches. The Bank of New South Wales, Australia’s first, had in 1853 branches at Sydney, Moreton Bay (Brisbane), Melbourne and Geelong, and an agency at Mt. Alexander. In May that year the bank opened a branch “in the late residence of Dr. Liddel,” High Street, West Maitland. Depositors’ addresses at that time were simple; one being merely “Namoi River.”
R.S.L. Club - Former Union Bank

C.B.A. Bank  
J.W. Pender Architect
The rising young architect, Edmund Blacket, was engaged by the bank five years later to design a new building at Maitland. The contract drawing, signed in 1858, is one of the few such drawings among the many Blacket records preserved by the Mitchell Library in Sydney. The building was of two stories in the main block, which accommodated the banking chamber and manager’s office in the front. On the same floor were the clerks, stationery and strong-rooms with a dining room at the rear for the manager residence upstairs. An area was formed behind the bank, enclosed on three sides by verandahs, to the servants’ and kitchen wings. The construction was of brick, plastered to a neat finish and is maintained in good condition today. Recently the roof was recovered with terra-cotta tiles, and a new base around the building added in square tiles.

The Bank of Australasia, now A.N.Z., commenced business in West Maitland in 1860. A new branch premises was built in 1869, and opened on January 1 1870. This building takes full advantage of the corner of High and Elgin Streets, with a colonnade, originally on two floors. The entrance was formerly in Elgin Street, but the ground floor has recently been replanned and the old open colonnade around the corner built in to add more space internally. The entrance now replaces the three central arches.

The public were proud of this building, described as “one of the few colonial examples of Byzantine architecture”. During its construction the “Mercury” reported “the necessary tardy process of cementing the front of the building is going on as speedily as it possibly can... What is now being done is principally the adjustment of the capitals, pediments and enrichments, which are cast by an ingenious process being then as solid and firm as if, instead of being manufactured, they were really cut out of stone.” The name of the original architects is not known; but the Melbourne firm A. & K. Henderson & Partners produced a design for the insertion of shops in the High Street portion of the bank in 1937. The working drawings were completed by W.H. Pender.

The Commercial Banking Company of Sydney Limited had a branch in High Street designed by Edmund Blacket, until it was demolished to enable the present building to be erected in 1886. The contract for £20,000 was signed in January of that year, the builder being James Pritchard, who had learned his trade in London, and had been in Maitland for thirty years. The architect’s name is not known. The building is of three stories, completely stone-faced on the High Street front and the south-east side. Exceedingly fine craftsmanship is exhibited in the stonework, which is quite intricate in many parts. The design employs the type of classic formula favoured by this bank for many years. In 1906 the bank was regarded as the finest in the State outside Sydney. On the south-eastern side, a cloistered effect has been achieved outside the residential entrance. The stonework on this side has now been painted brown.
The Commercial Banking Company of Sydney, 1886, by G.A. Mansfield, Architect
The Australian Joint Stock Bank built a branch in Maitland to the design of architect J.W. Pender in 1881. The result is the best of his work in High Street, being a two-storied building in plastered brickwork, showing the bank’s importance by the wealth of decoration very popular in that period.

The twin entrances served the banking chamber, rising two floors and barrel-vaulted, and the manager’s residence on the ground and first floors. The manager’s servants were accommodated in a wing behind his residence.

Before 1937 the bank had been replaced by The Australian Bank of Commerce and today the building is occupied by the City Library. It is kept in very good condition, the librarians even having “grown to like it”.

53
At the centenary celebrations of January 26 1888 in Maitland, the Mayor, Dr. Pierce, laid a premature foundation stone for a Town Hall, the competition for the design which was to be advertised throughout the colony eight months later. The Mayor stated that “there was not a town in the colony of the wealth, importance, size and stability of West Maitland, that had not more than ten times the amount of public money spent in the shape of public buildings than West Maitland had had.”

Of the 35 competitors, the successful architects were the firm of Arthur C. Lee and James W. Scobie, who took the opportunity of the win to open their partnership, Lee being a local architect and Scobie a 25 year-old former student in J.W. Pender’s office.
Another foundation stone was laid on February 2 1889 and the building was duly commenced. The contract price of £10,000 was slightly below the architects’ estimate.

The most impressive portion of the Town Hall is the clock tower set back from the street behind a balcony intended for public occasions. The two-storied pediment-topped wings on each side house the council chamber on the left above the clerk’s department, with other offices and a staircase on the right. The entrance leads through a vestibule and a lobby to the main hall 100ft by 50ft including stage, the accommodation being between five and six hundred people. Before the building was completed, it was reported in the Sydney “Daily Telegraph” that the design is Italian classic, the proportions of which have been carefully and studiously adhered to. In 1896 the hall was described as being “commodious and artistically furnished”. There remains, outside the portico, one of the original iron hitching posts which flanked an iron arch at the kerb.

A scheme was proposed in 1933 to provide proper facilities in the hall for dramatic performances, including a stagehouse and dressing rooms and a supper room at the rear. This was rejected in favour of the present “Municipal Council Offices” building adjoining the Town Hall, in which was provided a supper room. This was erected in 1934. The Maitland District Ambulance building was erected on the opposite side of the Town Hall shortly before 1930.

The Maitland Post Office has the year 1881 marked on it, at which time the Colonial Architect was James Barnet. The building has a necessary colonnade along the High Street front which follows a change in the direction of the line of the street. Above this is a long balcony. The square tower has good proportions, executed in stuccoed brickwork in the style of many similar buildings in that period.

The clock was installed in the tower in June 1883, it having been promised but not forthcoming until it had become “the subject of some anxiety and much fun. Elections were said to have been won or lost on the point.
The Maitland Court House was well overdue in the town. As long ago as 1856, the Methodist Church offered their site in High Street for a Court House, but a small lock-up court house was erected in Sempill Street two years later instead. The courtroom itself was only 25ft. by 15 ft. Until the present building was erected, the Northumberland Hotel was used as a police station.

Walter L. Vernon was the Government Architect responsible for the design of the Court House which stands today on an island site at the corner of High and Sempill Streets. The building was commenced in 1895, the contractors being W. Taylor and Son, one of the largest firms in the district. They were the largest dealers in cedar; 50,000 feet passing through their hands in a month. Naturally, that timber can be seen used extensively throughout the interior of this building, which was completed in August 1896 at a cost of £12,000.

The construction of the Court House is brick, the actual face bricks coming from Enfield in Sydney. The columns are timber, but there is much stonework from the Ravensfield quarry used in the building. The coat-of-arms over the entrance in particular is excellently carved. Copper on the tower’s dome has weathered to a vivid green. Although the tower was originally intended to carry a clock, the weight boxes being already installed by the contractor, there has been none installed. Maitland has, however, chiming clocks on the Post Office and the Town Hall, and a clock in the steeple of St.Mary’s church.

Maitland Technical College is in High Street near the corner of James Street. The foundation stone was laid in 1909, and the building completed three years later, at a cost of £16,000. The style is similar to the earlier college buildings designed by William E. Kemp at Ultimo, Sydney, and the Hunter Street West College in Newcastle. The pattern achieved by terra-cotta tiles in spandrels in those buildings is reflected in the stonework above the entrance at Maitland. The college boasts of its staircase being a fine example of Australian marble, executed by local craftsmen.
THE FUTURE

High Street’s future is now very much in the balance. The Northumberland County Council’s planners have guided the growth of Maitland since 1955 onto the high grounds of Rutherford and East Maitland. In the planning scheme which is now law, almost the entire length of High Street is zoned “Major Flood Area”. Buildings or works may be erected only for flood mitigation purposes (for which the authority’s consent is not required) roads, agriculture, forestry, recreation, rural industries, service stations, car sales parks and caravan parks – all with the authority’s consent. In the planners’ view, development east and west would eventually become big centres, and one of the two would be the main one. In such an event High Street would be “planned out” as a business centre; “it will go out eventually”. It is very difficult to imagine the street as a line of unused relics, but floods can still sweep through the street as long as it keeps its present position.

Since 1955, the shops have actually been modernised to a certain extent, at least below awning (and flood) level. The County Council reluctantly approved a £40,000 Commonwealth Bank for construction in High Street. This is the other side of the balance; the shopkeepers are prepared to stay there for the rest of their lives. The Maitland Council is very much in favour of retaining High Street as the commercial centre, and seems to resent the control of its city by “outsiders”. It wants High Street to remain the core of the community which otherwise would be as divided as the two towns were years ago. There is some good sense in developing the future town around the buildings of the past. The best of them should be preserved in their original condition or as close to it as possible while remaining structurally sound and useful.

In the case of this flood-threatened town, it is a difficult decision to make on the future of High Street. Unless a very definite move is made to construct a complete town centre and commercial area at East Maitland, it seems High Street will succumb to the present pressure of business interests. Faith must then be placed in the control of the waters of the Upper Hunter by Glenbawn Dam, and in the scheme planned by the Public Works Department for controlling the greater threat from the creeks from the south.
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14 Ambulance Building Campaign Booklet, 1927, p 44.

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28 N.M.H., p 9.

29 N.C.C. Statement No 1, p 2
31 Elkin, p 32.
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