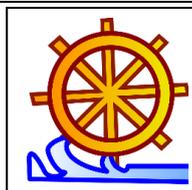




HELM



Heritage of East Lake Macquarie

Find us on **facebook**

FEBRUARY/MARCH 2021

helm2281@gmail.com

TREASURES

New SEEN exhibition.

Next to Swansea Library.

Take a peek into Lake Macquarie's fascinating past with this display of newly acquired treasures and photographs which have never been exhibited before. It tells the stories which connect us to our region's past and our forebears. Some are of joy, success and celebration; some are of sadness, loss and mistakes.

Come and view our Local Community History. Discover, reminisce, and share, about our treasures.

A Gold coin donation helps with costs.

See you there from 10am -2pm; open every day.

SATURDAY 13 FEBRUARY – SUNDAY 28 MARCH 2021



Visit LMCC Community History website to find a wealth of information and research about our local area.

HISTORY OF SPEEDWAY RACING IN NSW

“...Since mass production of motorcycles began in the early 1900s, people have been racing the machines. The use of motorbikes increased greatly during World War 1, as these vehicles were an invaluable means of transport in the field. After the war, the everyday use of the motorcycle grew, and the 1920s saw motorcycles become common place. Motorcycle enthusiast clubs became established, and formalised racing became a popular sport. Speedway racing (racing around a track) was the first form of competition to be organised in a professional manner. In 1928, the Auto Cycle Council of Australia was formed to represent the interests of motorcycle clubs and state associations at a national level.

Although world famous tracks such as the Sydney Showground and West Maitland in NSW opened during the 1920s, much racing was done on local amateur short circuit tracks which were often little more than bush paddocks or vacant blocks in suburban areas. This was the situation for a number of years and caused growing concerns about the safety of riders, spectators and the public.....”

LMCC Comm. Hist.



- Treasures; speedway 1
- Local tracks 2
- Gordon Humphreys 3
- Salty Creek; Herb 4



Alan Whitfield Roper - rode at that first meeting in Maitland, on a grass track, December 1923. He rode under the name of Alan Blackburne, (his Chater-Lea bike had a Blackburne engine), so his family didn't find out he was riding. Many young riders did this.
www.vintagespeedway.com

Thank you to Pat Conroy and staff, kindly supporting the community; and encouraging the preservation and sharing of our heritage.

AROUND THE LOCAL TRACKS

Motor bike racing became a relatively inexpensive recreational activity for riders and spectators in the 1920's. Many local amateur tracks sprang up on unused land. The sport was at its most popular in the 50s, 60s and 70s. However, this land was being increasingly fenced in or built on.

Nicoll Park (aka Nichol Park). The AJS and Velocette Motor Cycle Club was formed in March 1928 in Newcastle but had no home ground and began to find locations for racing increasingly rare. In 1938, Arthur Nichol, on behalf of his family, who owned the Byemere (By-em-ere) poultry farm Gateshead, offered part of the property on the corner of Oakdale and Bulls Garden Rd to the club. A lot of hard work was required to clear the heavily timbered land and thick undergrowth, even to the point of blasting out big trees. A ¾ km racing circuit was created, only 9 metres wide at its narrowest; opening in September 1939. The straight sections were punctuated by many sharp corners, hairpin and S bends which created the greatest thrills with broadsides and slides. Skill, rather than speed, was the key. More improvements were made to the track setting up pits and a kiosk for refreshments. Even more ti-tree scrub was removed to make additional space for spectators, barriers, gates, judges' boxes, signs; followed by shelter sheds and seating. Riders from other clubs were welcomed to use the track, even some cars.



The Cash Man
Gateshead - Nicoll Park 24 September 1939



soundworld.com.au

Headquarters for the club was at 318 Hunter St, Newcastle, P & R Williams Motor Cycle importers. (Next to Moore's Cycle Dept.) Perce and Reg were Australia's longest running motorcycle manufacturers, making the Waratah motorcycles in Sydney by assembling British parts, and badged motor bikes. On the club's 10th anniversary 1938, a single file procession rode from Williams to Swansea, then to Caves Beach to mark out a new TT (Tourist Trophy) course. In 1940 the Motorettes, a women's club, was formed. *Source: NMH & MA*



The Cash Man
Gateshead - Nicoll Park March 1941



The Cash Man
Gateshead - Nicoll Park



Newcastle Club Racer,
Nicholl Park,
Gateshead, 1932
(No Helmet)

Often the racing was carried out in poor conditions with many unsafe practices for riders and spectators resulting in injuries, even deaths. In response, changes were made to traffic laws establishing strict rules for speedway meetings and licensing of tracks. Most did not comply and closed. The dirt track at Nicoll Park Speedway was sold and became the Metro Drive-in, the first to be built in Newcastle, which opened in February, 1958.

Belmont Speedway was located at Cahill Oval (Belmont Park); and held its first race meeting in December 1955. The football and cricket fields were still in the centre, while the bikes, speedcars, solos and sidecars raced around the perimeter of the oval, which had heavy board fencing placed around it for safety. It closed in 1957 with the new traffic regulations. The racetrack was removed and the ground was reconstructed to elite competitive standards, even with a spear point watering system.



Boolaroo Hill Climb. The first hill climb was held by Newcastle Motor Club on "Hawkins Paddock"—a private property, May 1938. Lake Macquarie Ambulance often treated competitors for minor scratches and burns. By August 1939, the event had grown in popularity and attracted c. 1,000 spectators. WWII intervened and races were suspended until Nov 1946. They continued until 1954. *Source: speedwayandroadracehistory.com*



Some of our locals were great bike enthusiasts, Gordon and Leslie Humphreys, could often be seen outside the Ritz in the main street of Swansea, ready to discuss and travel to another race meeting in the Newcastle area.



In 1902 the first Newcastle Show was held at the Broadmeadow Showground. A variety of displays and events were added on over the years. Unfortunately, at various times the showground was closed, to become a military camp in both World Wars, and by the influenza epidemic of 1919. November 1938 saw the grand opening of **Newcastle Speedway**, with international and local riders on ".... The world's fastest and

safest one-third mile dirt track...". A well publicized 1946 interstate meeting featured a spectacular fireworks display. In 1973 a dedicated speedway was opened at Tomago. It became the Newcastle Motordrome for cars and bikes, continuing until 2002, when the land was sold to a developer for a lucrative price.



A favourite club for Gordon Humphreys was the **Bird Island Motor Cycle Club**. The first race was held on the bush track, 1951, on the mainland, in the Frazer Park area.

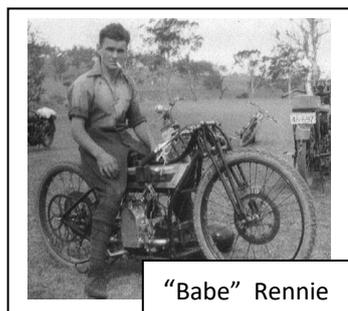
Left: Gordon Humphreys on a JAP; Ken Burkit on an AJS.
Right: Des Cook, Jack Diver, Nev Haddow, Gordon in the pits



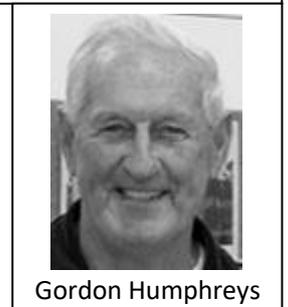
Gordon Humphreys Badges: Bird Island Motor Cycle Club; Lake Macquarie & District Motor Cycle Club.

Many enthusiasts like Gordon travelled to the many tracks scattered around the region to participate in; or watch the races.

Cessnock Showground Speedway started as a grass track in 1921 and later became a dirt circuit, being officially opened in Oct 1925 with nearly 7,000 spectators, and 81 entrants present. Riders could even freight their bikes and a "motor lorry" would meet the train – expenses paid. Some riders from country towns moved to Cessnock to be closer to the track. Tragedy struck in Nov 1925, when 50 yards from the finish line "Babe" Rennie was killed. The promising 19year-old rider, who was highly esteemed, skidded, crashed into the fence, was thrown over the handlebars, while his machine continued on and hit him. He died on the way to hospital.



"Babe" Rennie



Gordon Humphreys

In 1926 a fire nearly destroyed the grandstand. Midget cars arrived in 1936. In 2013 the decision was made that the Showground would now only host trotting events, and motor sport moved to the New Way Speedway.

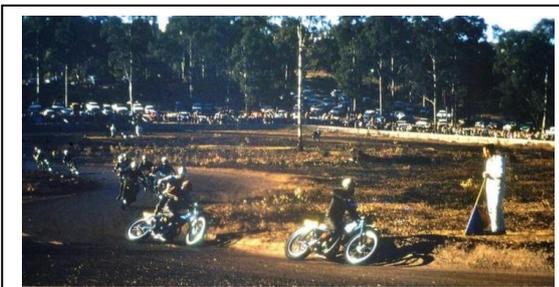
Hillview Short Circuit Track - Muswellbrook. In 1957 an area of the town common was fenced off for a track developed by Apex. One of their members walked around the area followed by a tractor. The close-knit community joined the effort. Council and businesses provided graders, tractors, machinery, sanitary trucks. A corrugated iron toilet was relocated from a park, pipes and taps provided water from a nearby reservoir. Sump oil was collected from local service stations and spread using a bitumen sprayer. Cessnock Motorcycle Club carried out promotions. Safety standards of fencing and earth banks were simplistic by today's standards. The NSW Speedway Act required further fencing work to comply and be licensed by 1960, when the Australian titles were held over a weekend, with some 25,000 spectators.

Source: Speedwayandroadracehistory.com



“...In 1953 the Mayfield Club had negotiated a lease arrangement with the Catholic Church for the use of a plot of land adjacent to Cockle Creek, Edgeworth as a short

circuit race track. In return the church would receive a proportion of the gate takings at meetings. This land was the former site of the Salty Creek Recreation Area which was a very popular picnic spot in the 1920s and 1930s..... Land clearing and track building was carried out voluntarily by club members, using repurposed materials such as old railway sleepers and disused mine materials. They named the venue, “The Pines”, because the track area was defined by a row of pine trees on each side. A wooden safety fence was built around the track; accessed via Penrose St.....” The new regulations meant more safety upgrades; and they were granted NSW Speedway Licence No.2, 1958. Storms in 1962 badly damaged the track causing potholes and erosion; repairs took a long time as maintenance was still being done by a small band of volunteers. Moving into the 70s, midget cars gradually became the main draw card; and many drifted to motocross. The adjacent land was donated to build Hawkins Retirement Village in 1972, and access became restricted by construction. The track closed after 1975. *LMCC Comm. Hist.; Speedwayandroadracehistory.com*



HERB JEFFERSON: Dirt short circuit legend, inducted into Hunter Region Sporting Hall of Fame. Number 809.



Born at New Lambton, 1942, he joined Lake Macquarie Motorcycle Club, “Lakes”, when 18. *“Herb’s first experience with bikes displayed the rebellious nature for which he was famous. “I used to get out of bed at night and borrow the old man’s ‘ride-to-work’ hack and take it for a midnight blip. He couldn’t work out why his bike used so much gas! One night he waited up late and caught me fangin’ it up the lane. After that he bought me an old bush bike.”* When his sister’s boyfriend wanted to sell his bike, helmet and gear, Herb grabbed the opportunity. With too many speeding fines, the ‘Wild One’ had

his street licence suspended and began track racing at Heddon Greta, Salty Creek, Hillview, and Old Bar, Taree. He quickly moved through the ranks from C to A grade. The talented and tough rider competed interstate – even WA and Tassie. And in 5 years had amassed 26 state and national championships. 1966 was the pinnacle of his career. He was never one to worry about the look of his machine, only the performance; and was known to be out partying the night before a race.

Despite his many successes, Herb began to lose interest, and began spending more time with his other love - surfing. He had a bike with a sidecar specially fitted with board racks. Riding hard, he suffered a number of crashes and injuries to his leg, which eventually required operations and left him with a permanent limp. At the age of 24 he retired and migrated to the surfing scene, loving the “beach, chicks and lifestyle.” He bought a VW Kombi, decked it out, and travelled the surf beaches. By 1969 he began to miss the racing scene and needed the bread, so made a comeback, winning races; but again, needed more surgery on his knee. It was time to return to the sun and surf – Hawaii, California, Mexico, NZ beckoned; working odd jobs along the way. Herb finally settled in Byron Bay, and built with his own hands, a holiday cottage development – Warriwillah Cabins.

Sources: oldbikemag.com.au; forum.ozvmx.com

© Material contained in this publication is not available for use, duplication or modification in any other publication without the express permission of the editor; published under the auspices of Lake Macquarie and Districts Hist Soc Inc.

Disclaimer

: Whilst every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of the information in this newsletter, however, the accuracy of statements or opinions expressed in articles cannot be guaranteed.

WE WOULD LOVE TO HEAR MORE OF YOUR HERITAGE STORIES!!!