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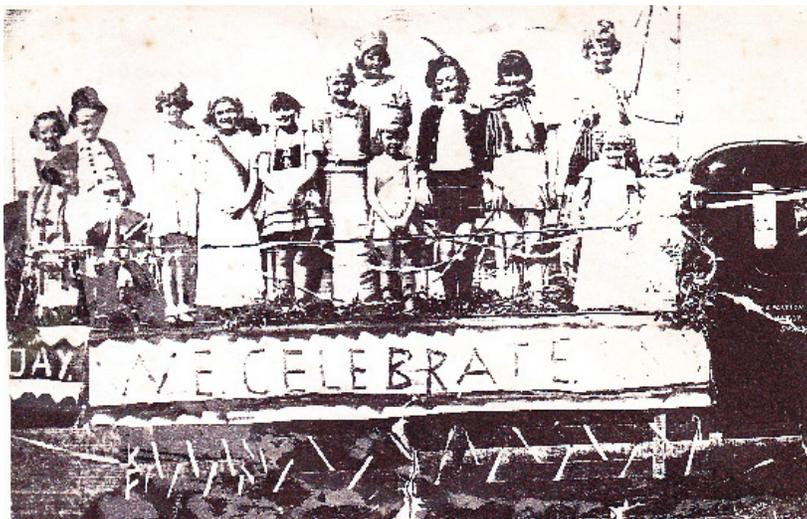
Heritage of East Lake Macquarie

May 2018

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MAY DAY

May Day was well celebrated in the area of Swansea and surrounds, recognising the struggle to gain decent and fair working conditions, in particular, the 8-hour working day. One of the memorable feature events was always the big procession, based on a theme, which included local and surrounding schools, decorated floats on the back of trucks, several brass bands and McEwan's Scottish band. Many people dressed up and turned out to view the occasion. Some girls wore their Junior Red Cross uniforms. Even push bikes were highly decorated. The float pictured below took part in the parade on the back of Mr Ayton's truck in 1938. The children dressed up in various national costumes from different countries to play a part in that year's theme of "Nations of the world unite for peace". A queen of the world was selected for the procession. The decorations were fairly simple and home-made, as times were tough and there was not much money to spare. Australia was still recovering from the Great Depression which peaked in 1932, with 32% unemployed.



Many thanks to Zita Paul for generously sharing her experiences, memories and photos to make the heritage of our community so much richer.

L to R: Lorna Matthews, Claude Eienton, Shirley Ham, Eleanor McLachlan, Marjory Moore, (background) Frances Moore, Joyce Holmes, Patricia Moore, Val Proudlock (front), Rene Boundy, Clarice Hughes, Carrie McCann, Marie Robson, Zita Moore.



May Day:

| | |
|---------------|-----|
| Swansea | 1-2 |
| West Wallsend | 3 |
| Cardiff | 3 |
| Newcastle | 4 |

MAY DAY PARADE, SWANSEA, 1938
 THEME: "NATIONS OF THE WORLD UNITE FOR PEACE"



4972 1066 Caves Beach; Blacksmiths

Kindly supporting the community

– including Caves Beach Surf Life Saving Club; this edition of HELM newsletter.

MAY DAY CELEBRATIONS IN SWANSEA

A May Day Committee was formed every year to organise the annual May Day programme. The first event on the calendar was a Debutantes ball. This was followed later in the week by the big procession through the town, which culminated in the highlight of the day – a massive picnic in the park, once known as the police reserve, because the early police station had been there. It is now known as Quinn Park. (Named after William Quinn, Lake Macquarie Shire Councillor, who had three terms in office. He was well respected and is remembered for his work in the community.) The Committee would approach the local business community for donations of any type that they could spare in hard times. After speeches were made; sporting and novelty events were organized. Foot races were popular and added to the fun. Maypole dancers wove their ribbons into various colourful plaits and patterns with their dance steps as they circled the maypole. Children were all given a bag of fruit and lollies. In addition, peanuts in the shell were part of the gift as it took longer for the children to shell them before eating, and so the enjoyment lasted longer in hard times. An earlier version of karaoke was held. Many locals were encouraged to walk up to the mike on the back of a large truck, which acted as a stage, and perform to entertain the crowd.

May Day was also known as Labour Day, and was held on different dates in different states and cities. In Sydney, it was held in October; creating the October long weekend. As Swansea was celebrating their event in May with a declared public holiday, many took the opportunity to visit Sydney for the day to take advantage of visiting shops and other facilities which were not open on weekends.

**Biggest
May Day**

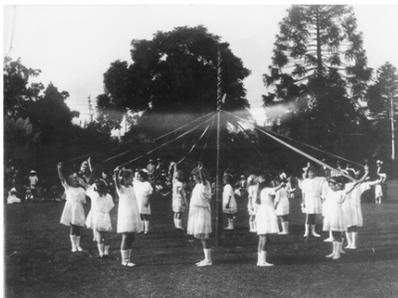
**Record March
In Swansea**

The Workers' Weekly (Sydney, NSW : 1923 - 1939) / Tue 9 May 1939

The following year, 1939, saw the May Day procession attracting widespread attention.

“The procession and attendance was the largest for a similar function at Swansea. The celebration was under the auspices of the Swansea, Belmont and Catherine Hill Bay May Day Committee. To the music of the Cardiff, Boolaroo, Swansea and West Wallsend bands, a procession comprising appropriate banners and floats, auxiliaries, trade displays, friendly societies, workers and their children, marched through the town to Swansea Park. The speeches were made through amplifiers.....

It was a great day for the children. The women’s auxiliary handed out 1800 bags of fruit, nuts, sweets and cakes, and a glass of milk. Mr Hoare gave his address before the luncheon adjournment. The speeches were continued in the afternoon, when sports were held.....”



Below left: South Maitland Unemployed Women’s Bureau, practising banner carrying for the May Day competition;
Below right: May Day, 1938, Kurri Kurri, in front of co-op store.
Source: Coalfields Heritage Group

State Library of NSW - NSW Government
Junior Red Cross Girls, c1934, Sam Hood

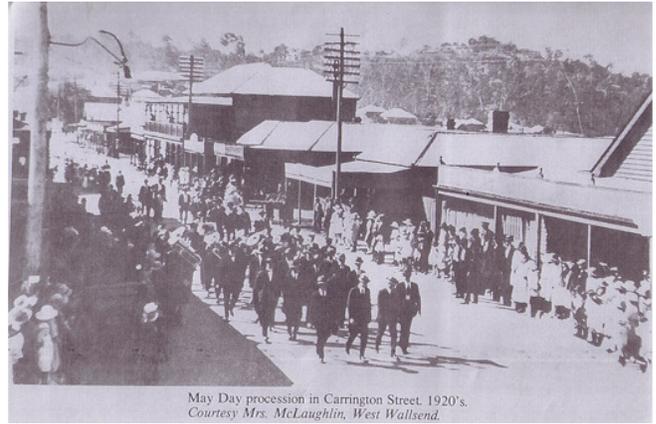
Girls performing maypole dance.



Many families in Swansea have heritage ties to West Wallsend. This is a community with strong links to its mining origins, advocating for better pay and working conditions. May Day processions and activities are shown here in the 1920's.

Source: West Wallsend Heritage Group, which operates a museum in the grounds of West Wallsend High School, containing artefacts, photos, records and memorabilia. (Open Wednesdays during school terms or by appointment.)

The Westy bands also swelled the ranks of the Swansea processions in the 1930s.



May Day procession in Carrington Street, 1920's.
Courtesy Mrs. McLaughlin, West Wallsend.

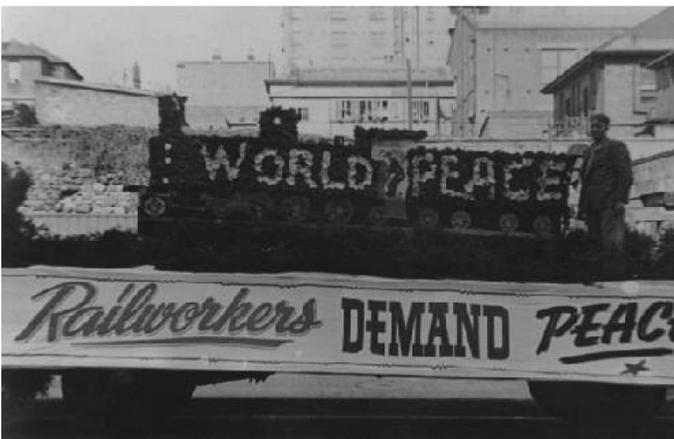


May Day Sports, West Wallsend.
Courtesy Mrs. McLaughlin, West Wallsend.



N. Vasey's Delivery Cart, May Day Procession, West Wallsend, 1920.
Courtesy Mr. E. Lambert, West Wallsend.

Cardiff workers were active in May Day celebrations: bands participated in processions, including Swansea; and created memorable floats for the Newcastle May Day, parading through Hunter and Watt Streets.



Cardiff Railway Workshop floats; preparing banners. May Day, Newcastle. Source: Lake Macquarie City Library

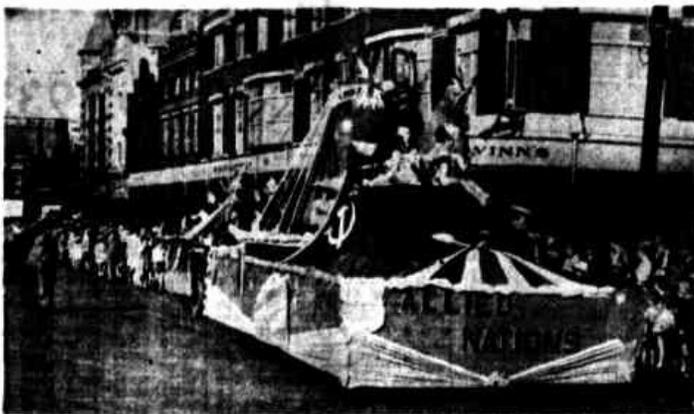
Newcastle's Biggest May Day March

The Newcastle Sun (NSW : 1918 - 1954) / Mon 3 May 1943

Some 50,000 spectators gathered to view 2,500 participants in the 1943 procession, which wound its way from Pacific St to Hunter St, then Union St, completing the journey at the sportsground; where speeches were heard, sports were organised and children were issued with fruit and ice cream. The May Day Committee float travelled with children displaying national costumes in the company of members of the fighting services. Two new features were added – women war workers marching in overalls; and several floats showing vital war productions made by Newcastle industries. Many colourful banners encouraged unity in the war effort. Shops, offices and banks were closed; as were butcher shops. No bread deliveries were made. Garages sold petrol and other automotive products only between 7am and 1pm. Trams and buses ran on holiday timetables. But mines and heavy industries were at work.

Afterwards a concert was held at City Hall and winners of the various float categories 1943 were announced. The most attractive and political float was the Allied Nations float. Best industrial: 1- Goninans (Engineering and manufacturing company for the coal industry; which entered the rail business and established premises at Broadmeadow; operating from 1899 to 1999 when it was sold, and then became the United Group Rail.) Second place went to Morison and Bearby – (a pioneer engineering firm and foundry; machinery manufacturers and ship builders at Carrington). The Women in industry category was won by Australian Wire Rope Works; with equal second place going to BHP and Lysaghts.

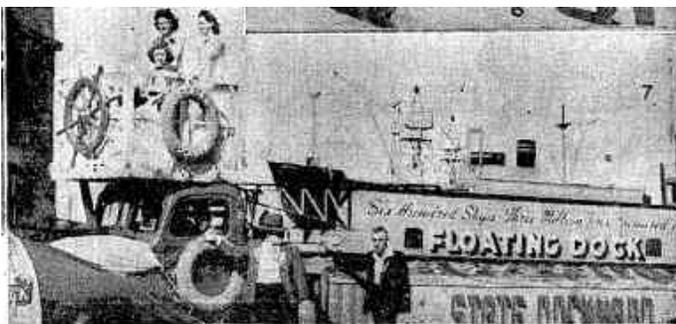
NEWCASTLE MAY DAY PROCESSION



The Newcastle Sun (NSW : 1918 - 1954) / Mon 3 May 1943

AUSTRALIAN BACKGROUND.

- Mid 1800s - working days were long and arduous; 12-hour days; 6 days a week.
- 1856 Melbourne stonemasons marched to Parliament House pushing an 8-hour day. New work regulations were agreed on in May. They were then recognised by NSW, Qld, SA, Tas.
- First May Day/Labour day march was held on May 1, 1891 in Qld; recognising the 8-hour day.
- Henry Lawson wrote the poem "Freedom on the Wallaby" to mark the large demonstration.
- 888 symbol: 8 hours work, 8 hours rest, and 8 hours recreation. Australian workers hoped to build a free and happy nation.



Left: Floats featured in Newcastle Sun. Monday, May 6, 1946.

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