

OPEN FOUNDATION - AUSTRALIAN HISTORY

Lecturer - Marg Henry

E S S A Y

on Research Topic

Fran Dawson and Local Government in Maitland

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Class - Thursdays 10 am - 12 noon

Historical Maitland is in the heartland of the rich Hunter River Valley of New South Wales, with a heritage as deep as the alluvial soils on which it is built. Cedar cutters set up the first tentative camps in the area soon after Newcastle was founded as a penal settlement in 1804. In 1818 the river flats on the south bank of the Hunter were named Wallis Plains and a number of tenants permitted to occupy land as "tenants at will". By 1825 a substantial community had been established at Wallis Plains and at nearby Morpeth. In 1841 the population of Maitland (East and West) was 2,768, second only to Parramatta which had 5,389. By the census of 1861, Maitland's population had reached 7,747 second only to Sydney. Morpeth stood at 1,175 and Newcastle at 3,722.¹

The citizens of East Maitland were the first to move to manage their own affairs. The Municipality of East Maitland was constituted on 10 March 1862 and was followed, after many meetings and petitions, by the establishment of Municipalities at West Maitland (17 November 1863) and Morpeth (4 December 1865).² West Maitland Council, recognising itself as the commercial centre of the district, built the Maitland Town Hall on its present site in High Street. The laying of the foundation stone on 26 January 1888 coincided with the centenary of the colony.³

Rural areas surrounding the well-established municipalities were incorporated in 1907 into the Shires of Bolwarra, Tarro and Kearsley. In 1922 West Maitland took the progressive step of undertaking the establishment of an electricity supply and in a few years this service was extended throughout the urban and rural district of Maitland, and far beyond.

1 Maitland & District Historical Society, A New History of Maitland, Maitland 1983, p.21

2 Maitland City Council, Maitland City Council - An Application for the 1985 A R Bluett Memorial Award, 1986, p.2

3 Compiled by Committee for Maitland City Council, Maitland 1863 - 1963, 1964,

As suburban areas began to expand it became obvious that control of the area by six local authorities would become unwieldy and costly. After a long series of conferences an amalgamation of the areas was agreed upon. On 5 July 1944 the Municipality of Maitland was created by the amalgamation of West Maitland, East Maitland and Morpeth Municipalities and parts of the Shires of Bolwarra, Tarro and Kearsley. The new municipality covered an area of approximately 47 square kilometres, with a population of 17,000.

On 7 December 1945 the Municipality was raised to the status of City, with a Council of 16 Aldermen. In 1958 the boundaries of the Local Government areas in the Lower Hunter Valley were altered. Lower Hunter Shire was eliminated. A large part of this Shire and of the Shire of Kearsley was added to Maitland City, extending the city area to 396 square kilometres. The Council maintained these boundaries and in 1963 celebrated its Local Government Centenary. A city is entitled to a coat of arms and this was formally presented during the Council's centenary celebrations.

Meanwhile, the City has continued its growth. Between 1966 and 1982 the population increased by 87%.⁴ Maitland today is a city of 45,000 people. The Local Government area is bordered by the Cities of Newcastle and Greater Cessnock on the east, south and south-west, and by the Shires of Port Stephens and Dungog on the north-east, north and north-west. The rural/urban split of the area is approximately 80%/20% and elected representation remains as originally established at 16 Aldermen. The Aldermen are elected for three year terms using the preferential voting system. The Mayor and Deputy Mayor are elected from and by the 16 Aldermen for a one year term with the method of voting decided by the Council before election takes place.⁵

4 A S Maiden, GROWTH NEEDS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN THE HUNTER REGION AND ADJOINING AREAS, Hunter Valley Research Foundation, 1984

5 Maitland City Council, Community Directory - 1980

Councils for the greater part of this century have been dominated by landowners and shopkeepers in country areas, and generally by shopkeepers, business and real estate men in metropolitan areas. Many tradesmen and keen unionists have also been on ALP-controlled Councils in inner, working class suburbs. 6

One reason for this was that initially only landowners were allowed to stand for and/or vote at elections. Maitland was no exception to this general domination. Female representation was nearly non-existent. At the time of Maitland's Local Government centenary (1963) only 2 women had been on Council - Mrs Dorothy Thomsen for one term (1959-1962) and sitting representative Mrs Frances Dawson having been elected in 1962.

Since 1963 there has been little improvement in the number of women standing for or being elected to Council. The successful candidates being; Frances Dawson (1962-1983); Beryl Humble (1974-present); Robyn Wallace (1980-1986); Margaret Lightfoot (1980-1986); and Ann Dolton (1983-1986). The period 1980-1986 was the best period for representation by women, with 4 out of 16 Aldermen. However, that has not been sustained and we have moved back to the situation of only one woman on Council.

Frances Dawson (known to all as Fran) has been, by far, the most successful woman on Council retiring after a service of 21 years. For her first 12 years on Council she was the lone female representative. Fran became an Alderman at a time of change and rapid growth in the Local Government area of Maitland. The Local Government boundary changes in 1958 gave Council a much larger area to manage with very few added ratepayers. Rates were increased to cover the extra burden and were disproportionately high with surrounding Councils. This prompted the formation of the Ratepayers Action Group, of which Fran was a member. It was under their banner that Fran first stood for Council. In later years the ensuing growth rate in Maitland's population (87% over 16 years) meant a broadening of Council's revenue base and a lessening of the rate burden. When the Ratepayers Group disbanded, Fran continued in Council as an independent as she felt she wanted to put something back into the community in which she and her family lived and derived their benefits.

6 J Clarke and K White, Women in Australian Politics, Sydney, 1983. p.106

Throughout her 21 years on Council, Fran made many worthwhile contributions to the City and made history by being the first female Deputy Mayor, a position she held for 6 terms from 1974-1980. Fran was, and still is, involved in many, many community organisations and took an active interest in all matters before Council. She was honoured in 1987, for her services to Local Government and the community, with the Order of Australia. Four parliamentarians sent letters of testimony with the nomination for this award. These men represented all 3 major parties and this is indicative of the respect, across the community, which Fran receives. Fran was also honoured with an inclusion in the 1982 edition of Who's Who of Australian Women and the 1986 edition of the World Who's Who of Women.

The number of Council Committees and community organisations Fran has been involved in are too numerous to mention and these would require research in their own right, but a few of her special achievements include: the gaining of a new Library, opened in 1968; the development of air services from Rutherford to Sydney; the development of a Tourist Information Service, opened in 1985; and assisting with the establishment of Maitland's first Child Care Centre which opened in 1982.

Fran Dawson has been a remarkable and quiet achiever in the changing times of Local Government in Maitland.

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INTERVIEWER: I would like to introduce Fran Dawson who is going to speak about her involvement in Local Government in Maitland where she served as an Alderman for twenty one years.

Fran you were first elected to Council in 1962, this made you the second woman to be elected to Maitland Council and the lone woman at that time. Considering so few women were at any level of Government could you tell me why and how you came to get involved?

FRAN: Well I had a friend who had travelled the world, she was an elderly friend and she told me that I should be involved with the, in the community. My children were growing up and that they had the advantages of getting something out of the community and she always felt that when that happens that you should put something back into the community and that's how I felt and I went along with it. She used to tell me of all the interesting things that I should know about, she often used to get me to read books and one afternoon my daughters were amazed when they came over, went over to see where I was and Chip said "Come in we've been to Russia" and they both opened their eyes and she had me reading an autobiography of somebody who had been around the world similar to what she had. She also was a firm believer in women being involved in the community and community affairs. She was really well ahead of her time now that I come to think about it and then she was, she started up the Ratepayers Action Group because the people in Maitland thought that they were getting a raw deal as far as rates were concerned and she started that and there were quite a number of well known people who used to go to those meetings and three or four of them ended up in Council the same as I did and then she was still trying to talk me into standing for the elections and I said no I didn't think so and then she sort of gave me the, she fostered the idea and I thought oh well I would give it a go. She came and saw me one night and said "Well you better make up your mind because the nomination form has to go in tomorrow" and I talked it over with my husband and my two daughters and they seemed to think it was okay and so I signed the paper at six o'clock the next morning. The next thing the headlines came out in the Mercury 'Mystery woman standing for Local Government' and then when some of my friends found out who it was they said "Oh we were wondering who the mystery woman was and it's you" so, and some of those people ended up in Local Government themselves. One was Frank O'Donnell and I can name the others, we all went into Council at the same time. Frank O'Donnell and Peter Zifovich, who was a wonderful worker for the community, he belonged to the Ratepayers Action Group, Jim Wolstenholme, who had the big department store in Maitland and he went, ended up in Council with us and eventually had a term as the Mayor of the city. So it was all fostered by this one person who was a wonderful person in her own right, she was a beautiful musician, actually she was a perfectionist, everything that she did she did very, very well. She's been dead for many, many years but I have her to thank for really entering Local Government.

INTERVIEWER: So that ratepayers group, how long did that last for?

FRAN: It didn't last for very long after because the Council started to do something about the rates, but the rates at that time were very, very high in Maitland and particularly in High Street, Maitland, they used to call it the golden mile, that's where they got their main rates from. But later on, well I suppose it was when the, Maitland was, more homes were built, it was being better populated, I think perhaps with more ratepayers it made it easier on the rating system. There was always trouble with the rural rate though and even to today there's still problems. I think they may have those ironed out to a certain extent now but there's always been problems, I've always thought that the rural people were very, very much over rated, the same as some of the urban ratepayers.

INTERVIEWER: Looking back over the types of Council Aldermen through those years you're one of the very few that weren't say perhaps a professional person such as a business person, a Real Estate Agent, you were probably for a long time the only ordinary citizen.

FRAN: I was too. I always said that I didn't have any axe to grind no matter what decision that I agreed with or disagreed with, there was no business backing or anything. And I really thought that in those days and quite up till quite a number of years after I thought that we were a pretty good Council, a very honest, that was my belief, a very honest Council. From what I could see there was no, you know, people being paid money to let this person in or that person in, and I kept that opinion for many years. I don't say that I have that same opinion now and I'm certainly not pointing the finger at any one person, I think these things do go on. You'd be hiding your head in the sand if you believed otherwise.

INTERVIEWER: Fran can you elaborate on some of the changes that perhaps you've seen in Local Government?

FRAN: Well first of all when I went into Council we weren't paid. We didn't receive any payment at all for what we did. I even saw changes, ordinary changes in the Council meetings. We had a very strict Mayor, Alderman Skilton, he certainly ruled us with an iron rod you may as well say and I have never regretted that because I felt I learnt Local Government the way it was meant to be in those years. Particularly with protocol, he was very strict on protocol and I am to these days and I get quite angry when I see things not done the right way. I see and read about and attend functions where people haven't even thought to invite the Mayor. These days very few people invite the Town Clerk and they, the Mayor and Mayoress are your number one citizen and the Town Clerk in my estimation always was a very important person and the Town Clerk was always considered an important person but I don't see the same feeling extended to them in that position these days but once upon a time one never had a function or anything important in the city without the Mayor and the Mayoress and the Town Clerk and his wife.

INTERVIEWER: What about the conducting of meetings?

FRAN: Conducting of meetings, the, Mr Skilton always had the meetings finished by about ten o'clock. He made it that we did finish them at ten o'clock. Then when, after with the different Mayors and I suppose with the change of time, the progress, it was needed to conduct the meetings later and they went on to eleven o'clock and then to twelve o'clock and sometimes half past twelve and one o'clock if there were some very important issues being debated. I can even remember that an Alderman daren't remove his coat at a meeting without the Mayor's position. They were never allowed to smoke at the main meeting, they could smoke in the committee of the whole but not in the main Council meeting. If anyone was late, in particular I speak about myself, if I happened to be a little bit late, which was very rarely, I would never sit down in the chair until I caught the Mayor's eye and apologised for being late, that's, all that kind of thing has gone by the board these days. They attend in any kind of garb and they do as they wish. Really these days, or in the latter years I've felt that the Aldermen were calling the tune in some cases more so than the Mayor.

INTERVIEWER: That's probably one of the reasons that meetings got longer and longer?

FRAN: That's right.

INTERVIEWER: Grandstanding and such?

FRAN: Yes that's right.

INTERVIEWER: So do you feel that part of that perhaps is the change to Aldermen being put forward by political parties, not as many standing as Independents?

FRAN: No. Most of us when I went in in 1962 we were practically all Independents. There was a group called the Civic Group lead by the Mayor at the time, there were a group of us that went in as Independents and there were only a couple of Labour Party people, in those days there was never Liberal Party or National Party. I've always been against party politics in Local Government, I think there's enough with the Federal and State Governments without it being brought into Local Government. I think it has caused a lot of problems on many occasions and then we come now to the stage that there are the main political parties both Labour and Liberal Parties entering Local Government. Although there are quite a few Independents in Maitland City Council at the moment, but it doesn't mean, well in my estimation, it doesn't mean that if you belong to a political party that you only vote with them. You forget politics, well you should forget politics when it comes to voting on anything to do with your city, any main issue, the development in your area, you shouldn't look at it from a political point of view, you should look at it whether it is for the best for your city and that's what you're for, you're elected by the people so you should

be doing what the people expect of you and that is to consider all the issues along neutral grounds without thinking of them in terms of politics.

INTERVIEWER: You spent twelve years on Council, no sorry you spent twenty one years on Council, twelve of those years you were the lone female on Council, did you have any problems because you were the lone female?

FRAN: Not really. I felt that I had, I'd earned the respect of all those men, I didn't think, I think they treated me at first you know as a nice little person and I felt they were just patting me on the head and as much as to say 'Now you be a good girl and sit there and listen to what we have to say' and I did take the advice of some people, sit and listen and take everything in for at least six to twelve months before making any great outburst or anything but I was treated with the utmost respect always and I think even to my last days in Council that I was given you know that utmost respect from the majority of the Aldermen. It was very hard on lots of occasions when I was invited with the other Aldermen to functions and I was the only woman. I was a little bit shy or nervous but I soon got used to it because people, I found people were sort of warming to me more and talking to me and talking about things that were needed in our area and I felt that that was one way that they knew who, at least who one of their Aldermen was, she was the only woman and there's quite often they'd say 'Oh well you know you listened to us' and I felt well that was my role, I was there to listen to them and if I could help them well I did so but you always have to be careful when you stand for elections that you don't have great ads going out 'I will do this and I will do that and I'll do something else', the main thing you have to realise is that you're only one and you've got to get so many more votes, people to vote with you to be able to get that whatever it was that you were trying to get through, you can't do anything on your own, you've got to get at least half the votes. So, but I felt as the years went on that people were really, I felt they'd taken to me very kindly and there were things that I was able to help with.

INTERVIEWER: Alright then so along those lines what do you think your main achievements were in Council?

FRAN: One was the new library and that was very hard, that was a very hard exercise because we wanted the library, the library had been flooded down in the lower end of the city and we needed a new library as they had outgrown it, I was the Vice Chairman of the library committee at the time and I had talks with some of the other Aldermen and particularly with the Town Clerk of the day, Mr Dunkley, Stan Dunkley. And we had discussions with the Architect, Walter Bunning and everything seemed to be going along fine. I went away for a Local Government womens conference and was horrified when I came back to find that a group of Aldermen had put in a recision motion against the library. There were outbursts from many, many groups in the community that it was a shame,

here we were getting a new library, the chance of obtaining a new library and now our hopes have been dashed to the ground. I can remember going back some years ago and reading a newsclip and I'd forgotten what I, that I'd said it but I remembered it quite vividly then, when I was approached by a reporter I said well I felt that the flag should be flying half mast because we so badly needed a new library, and I worked hard and within four months, it took four months to reverse the decision and then we finally had it built in, and was opened in 1968 and that was a great day. Another thing that I achieved that not very many people know about it, but I went to a tourist, it used to be called The Hunter Valley Tourist Association, I went to a meeting at Scone one day in the early 1970's I think it was and I heard some of the delegates from the other Councils saying something about the flight over and I asked the Town Clerk's Secretary did they have an aerodrome there and she said "Yes". And I said "Is that where the people have landed this morning?" and she said "Yes". And I said "How many people, what's you're population of Scone?" and she said "Four thousand five hundred" and I thought to myself four thousand five hundred and we have, at that time, thirty three thousand people and we haven't got an aerodrome. So I was in a Chamber of Commerce at the time and I brought it up before Council and I also brought it up at the Chamber of Commerce. One of the Aldermen of the day, Alderman Noel Blake was most helpful, he was the Secretary of the Chamber of Commerce and he kept following it through. There was so many decisions, one's decisions that one has to make and so many things that you don't know that you have to go through before you can have something like this come to fruition and he was great, he followed it right through and there were things like getting, being able to have the flights going in to a certain place at Mascot and so forth, a lot of technical things that I don't know a lot about but I know that Alderman Blake kept saying at the meetings "Will I still keep going?" and Ken Lane was the President of the time and he said "What do you want to do?" and I said "Well we'll keep going with it." Milton Morris, the former Liberal member for Maitland was a great help and finally we did get the Rutherford Aerodrome and that was really instigated by myself but there's very, very few people who know it or wish to acknowledge it I think.

INTERVIEWER: Fran you led not only an active Council life but very active community life in many, many organisations for which you were honoured in 1987 with the Order of Australia. All of this activity did that take a toll on your family life?

FRAN: It did to a certain extent but I wouldn't, I wouldn't like to say that they suffered because of it because I know that there was one thing that I did and I loathe ironing, I've always loathed ironing, I think it's the worst chore that a housewife can have but I did have the childrens' blouses and the ironing done so the children had their school blouses and my husband had his shirts and everything ironed so I always made sure that I, I did hire somebody to do those for me and another thing that I always made sure of is that they had a proper meal at night, always. Perhaps the dusting mightn't

have been done or things like that but with the ironing being done and I made it my business to prepare a proper meal every night I think that it eased the burden along the way. It doesn't seem very much but believe me it is a big thing.

INTERVIEWER: And would you say that you've had great support from your family?

FRAN: Wonderful support from my husband, who was never interested in civic affairs himself, only because of me and always supported what I did and my daughters too they were very, very supportive of it but they've never been interested themselves in standing for Local Government or anything like that.

INTERVIEWER: You also worked for the first ten years that you were in Local Government, you also held down a full time job. I read an article in the paper when you retired that part of it was due to your arthritis, the other part you said was that you thought you should give a decent days work for a decent days pay and that you just had your Council duties and your other commitments so in effect you gave up financial benefit to maintain your interest in Council. Can you, earlier we were talking about why there aren't many more women in Council and you were telling me what you thought were parts of the, yes parts of the reasons and parts of the heavy burden I suppose that you carry?

FRAN: Yes there are financial burdens when you take on a position like this and it got heavier and heavier as the years went on although I did say that we weren't paid when I first went into Local Government but I think it came in about three years after that they started to pay us for so much a meeting. Well even that didn't cover the expenses. I didn't drive and I, many a time I got taxis in. Now when I was working at Bradmill which is out of town, if I asked my boss if I could get off at a certain time to attend some inspection or function well it cost me a cab fare into town and back again quite often and there were things like that. Even out to Gillieston Heights, I wouldn't like to have to go out and look at drains and footpaths and roads out there now and pay the taxi fares that it would cost a person these days but I did get taxis out to Gillieston and back again and I think this is why the people sought my help because they knew that I wouldn't let any obstacle get in my way if I thought that I could go and help them at any time. Yes I always believed in a fair days work for a fair days pay and I was becoming more and more involved with Council and I felt that, and I did have arthritis rather badly, I did feel that it was better to retire and give more time to the civic affairs.

INTERVIEWER: You also mentioned earlier that it wasn't only the attending of Council meetings but the other things?

FRAN: Yes when you are first elected to Council you think it's only the first and third nights of, the first and third weeks that you have Council meetings and you find that there

are so many committees that you're involved in and sub committees and inspections that sometimes practically your whole week is taken up or part of each day practically and it doesn't stop at the days through the week, it's the weekends too that you're called out and there are inspections made, sometimes at weekends because some of the Aldermen can't get away from their business through the week. It certainly involves you in, it's not just your Council meetings. Anyone that went in thinking that you were only going to attend a meeting this week and you don't have to attend another one until the third week, well they're just fooling themselves. It's really a full time, full time business being an Alderman on Local Government.

INTERVIEWER: Also you were Deputy Mayor in 1974 and I think you told me for a period of six years?

FRAN: Six consecutive years.

INTERVIEWER: Right, you were telling me a story about your photo?

FRAN: Oh yes the ones just recently that I've noticed?

INTERVIEWER: Yes?

FRAN: Yes I think male chauvinism must have reared it's head in those early days because I've noticed just recently there are photos that were taken, there were about three hanging in the Council chambers when I was Deputy Mayor and I noticed that it has Alderman so and so as the Mayor but it doesn't say anything about a Deputy Mayor at all and then I noticed that the Alderman who took over, the male Alderman who took over after me in 1981, or 1980 I noticed that he had the title Deputy Mayor after his name and it's really laughable, I went around and somebody said that "You should have it changed" I said "Could you imagine them taking them back out of the photos just to push that in" and I was so suprised, apparently I'd never noticed it or they weren't hanging up or you know those kind of things just went by the board in those days but it's very noticeable.

INTERVIEWER: Were the amenities when you went into Local Government, were there female amenities and everything----

FRAN: Not really no. As a matter of fact the dear old chappy that was the Mayor of the day Alderman Skilton said "Dear, dear, dear what do we do?", you know, "There are no toilet facilities for a lady" and he would have said 'a lady' in those days and anyway there was one toilet outside the Council chambers and that was more or less designated as the ladies toilet then and everyone had to make sure that it wasn't used as it had been before by all and sundry. Yes there was some, you know some of those ^{things} you can look back at and laugh you know they sound so funny these days.

INTERVIEWER: So you saying that your friend was a woman before her time, you were too, I mean you've broken down the barriers for so many?

FRAN: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Fran is there any particular controversy or issue that----

FRAN: Yes I can remember back in the 1960's when it was decided to encourage Woolworths to build at East Maitland and another Alderman was interested in bringing Coles to Maitland and of course there was a little bit of parochialism between the East and the West as they were called, Aldermen. And anyhow they were at loggerheads over it and all kinds of things went on, accusations and an Alderman would get up at the Council ^{meeting} saying "Mr Mayor did you allow Alderman so and so to go to the paper with a report that he gave" "Mr Mayor did you see what Alderman so and so said" and it went on night after night till I was absolutely fed to the teeth and I stood up and I said "Mr Mayor I've been here at meetings for nearly twelve months and I am sick and tired of the Aldermen carrying on like a lot of school children" and I said they were worse than ladies at a tea party and it brought a round of applause from the men in the Council and they clapped me and as I went out they said "Good on you Fran" and I felt then that I'd broken some ice, that they really thought that I was somebody who was taking note of what was going on and I had my ideas of the right and the wrong of things. That issue remained a real hot potato for quite a number of years and people still talk about it and I think that one of the former Aldermen is going to discuss it in his talk on historical things in Maitland, I think he's going to talk on that probably in October at the Maitland City Art Gallery where there has been a collation of historical happenings in Maitland being done for the bi-centennial year by the Director of the Maitland City Art Gallery Mrs Margaret Sivyer

INTERVIEWER: The Council seemed to be taking on more and more of a social role, like it's only in recent years that we've got social workers and Council's sponsoring family day care, you were on the steering committee for the first child care, long day child care centre in Maitland and in actual fact it's located very close to your home and you did a lot of work, I know because I was also on that committee, making sure that none of the residents in your area were against that. Was it, I also felt at the time that there was difficulty getting Council, we had a lot of problems getting Council to actually approve a location for that centre and difficulty even getting them to even accept that this was part of a Council responsibility?

FRAN: That's right, that was a real breakthrough I felt Maitland Childcare Centre, because it was something that the Council hadn't handled before. They weren't as you say sure about the location, whether it was in the right place

and how it would affect people but some of the members of the steering committee visited people in the area, no-one was against having a childcare centre there and I feel that it's been, well I class it as a first for Maitland, it was really great and it's lived up to its' name, it's been a marvellous childcare centre. I can approve of everything that they've done in there right from the very beginning and I've had my great grandchildren there and I have told everyone how very, very well run that it has been and it still is and that was one of the first of its' kind for Maitland City Council.

INTERVIEWER: Yes basically that was really the start of their involvement?

FRAN: That was the start of their involvement in this kind of thing in the city.

INTERVIEWER: It took another couple of years before we got family day care sponsored by Maitland City Council?

FRAN: That's right, yes Maitland City Council, they put on a Youth Worker and she was employed as a youth worker and that was the start of them being involved in that kind of thing.

INTERVIEWER: Was that a controversial issue, starting to employ a Youth Worker and a Social Worker at the Council?

FRAN: Yes some didn't think that it was necessary but they felt at the time the Councils in other areas were employing them and that it was something that we had to be part of for the future and it's gone along very, very well. I consider Maitland Childcare Centre as one of the success stories in Maitland yes and it's still maintained in it, the way it was since it's inception, very, very well run, I could recommend it to anyone.

INTERVIEWER: When you retired from Local Government your article said that you felt that younger, fresher blood needed to come in but you also felt that there needed to be a balance of older Aldermen?

FRAN: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: You also put out a challenge for more women, that you felt more women needed to be in Council. Have you any regrets about leaving Council?

FRAN: No. No I felt twenty one years was a fair slice out of anyone's life, twenty one years I never regretted. There was some things in it that I didn't like and there was some things happening that really made me come to the final decision but I was pleased to see that there were three more Aldermen I think elected, there were four women on Council. There was a former Alderman who still, was re-elected and there were three more who came after her and they all made a very good contribution to the city in many ways. Unfortunately

three of them didn't stay there. Two retired and one was defeated but they were all different women and had different views but all gave something you know to the city and it was really good when we had those women. Not all women who stand for Local Government are suitable Aldermanic material.

INTERVIEWER: We could say that about men too though can't we?

FRAN: Oh yes we can too. But women are accepted and I feel that Local Government is really an area where women should be welcomed because some are academics but you don't need an academic career to become an Alderman, you've only got to take a woman in her own home, she's the keeper of the purse strings, she's the, usually the taxi driver, she's the gardener, she's the, you know the sounding board for everybody's complaints, she has all the attributes I feel that are needed to become a good Alderman providing she has the right temperament to go with it and has the ability to be able to express what she thinks is needed in the city.

INTERVIEWER: Fran with your involvement in the Council you were also on the tourist authority, could you give me a little bit of information about that and how that's expanded?

FRAN: Yes first of all I was elected as the delegate to the Hunter Valley Tourist Association and was a delegate for many, many years and for four years was the Chairman of that Association and then later on it became the Hunter And Lower North Coast Tourist Authority which changed, the format was changed in many, many ways. I was elected to that and have been a delegate ever since to the Hunter And Lower North Coast Tourist Authority which is now called the Hunter Manning. But in the meantime our Maitland Tourist Association has gone along in leaps and bounds. Back in 1980/81 when Council was being told that they really needed a Tourist Officer and they didn't think they did need one, there wasn't a need for it and they didn't have the money for it I decided to set up a table and chairs on a vacant block of land nearly opposite the Council chamber over the Christmas holidays to assess any needs for us going further into tourism and I had a tourist sign and one of the members of the tourist association, Gwynne Murphy, who was Vice President at the time, joined me and we found that there was a need for a better distribution of tourist information. We talked about how we could get something because the Council only gave out tourist information five days a week which closed over the weekend and we thought about a caravan and how we'd raise the money and Gwynne said one day "What about a slab cottage?" and I said "Oh gee that would be great" and she went around looking and couldn't find anything but she started up a trash and treasure fair and she ran it the first Sunday of each month and all the profits went into a special fund and then finally we got the, finally she said one day "Come and have a look what I've got" and she showed me an old slab cottage which was to be demolished by Council and I asked in Council if

they would donate it to the tourist association and they said "Yes" and shook their heads, they thought we were a bit screwy but they said it had to lie on a neutral block of land for thirty one days to see if anyone claimed it because they didn't know the owner of it. Well in the meantime while it was lying on the neutral block of land people stole our windows, all our handmade bricks but it took a long time for the plans to go through and decide where we wanted it and finally we decided on King Edward Park beside the East Maitland Bowling Club. There was a lot of controversy about it and they didn't think that was the place but finally we did get it through and the men from the Corrective Services, Tomago Corrective Services said that they could help us erect it but by the time, when the time had elapsed it was a year or so and when we were ready to have it erected they didn't have the type of men there that could help us so the East Maitland, the Maitland Lions Club offered to erect it for us and that's when things really went right for us. It was a marvellous project on behalf of the Lions Club at Maitland and it was something that, of great satisfaction to us of the Maitland Tourist Association and it was opened, officially opened by a former Mayor of Maitland, Alderman Ron Walsh on the 7th December, 1975. It was manned only over weekends mainly by myself for about three months and then we had four people under the Commonwealth Employment Scheme. The first one wasn't terribly good, she did her best but she wasn't the right type. The three others we had have been absolutely marvellous and then we had a young lass under the Y.E.S. Scheme, she has just finished and we have now employed, we are employing those former three women through, and paying for them with money that's being donated by Council. In the first year we had two thousand odd people went through. The next year was four thousand and this year we're expecting at least six to seven thousand people going through and we have achieved many things including a brochure called Historic Maitland which has been received very favourably by not only local people but people all over Australia and also we have had the first postcards printed for years and years and years and now we are going to Sydney to promote Maitland at the Bus and Motor Show in Sydney. I still man the Tourist Centre at weekends with the help of two other volunteers but it's been a wonderful project and we as the Maitland District Tourist Association we feel that we can be very justly proud of that.

INTERVIEWER: So it's another instance Fran where the Council were very slow to recognise that their areas of need were expanded outside the areas that they were used to. It's taken them a long time to realise that they need to come up with the funds to pay this Tourist Officer?

FRAN: That's right. And they are supporting us more now than what they had before but we have got a very good committee, we're very small in numbers but very enthusiastic and we are really thrilled about it and since that slab cottage was erected in that park the Council have taken so

much trouble to plant gardens and put amenities in it and it's been even extended more and it's one of the show places in Maitland I feel.

INTERVIEWER: And it has benefited all of Maitland by opening up tourism?

FRAN: Yes, yes we feel that we've gone a long way to achieving the goal that we set out to you know, that was our aim to bring the tourists into Maitland but not only that we are servicing the people of Maitland, the children can come down and get their school projects and we've had children from out of town, we've had a young fellow, a young primary school boy, his parents brought him in a week ago and he came from Sydney and they were told to do a project on the, any town in New South Wales and he elected Maitland and those parents brought him up and I was able to give him quite a lot of material to take back home. We had another one from Windsor. We also had another twelve year old from Tamworth write down because they were doing a project on Maitland also. But others are coming in because we have brochures from Sydney right through the Hunter Valley right up to the Gold Coast, quite a, a very, very good range of brochures and people are calling down even now just to see if we've got something because they're going away in their Christmas holidays and we feel that we're not only helping the tourists but we're helping our own local people and they've come to really, they've congratulated us on the project between the Lions Club and Maitland District Tourist Association.

INTERVIEWER: Your enthusiasm and love of Maitland is very obvious?

FRAN: Oh yes, yes, oh indeed and I have others who are enthused along with me too and of course, and this is the beauty of these three former employees, they're working so hard and now we have this project with going to Sydney to the Coach and, the Bus and Coach Show to bring more tourists into Maitland and to the Hunter Valley and that exercise really is to encourage two, three, four and five days stay so that motels and other like business can benefit by the people instead of just a one day coach trip which we have quite a few coming in. So, and on Saturday we're going out to visit as many of the places that we're inviting people to, we're going to go around and visit all those places and have a talk on it and just put it all together ready for that show in Sydney.

When Fran Dawson listened to the tape and read the transcript she asked for notation to be made of some minor errors during the interview. These have been marked in the transcript with asterisks and the alterations are:

* Fran meant she was involved with the obtaining of air services between Rutherford and Sydney and elsewhere not in obtaining the aerodrome itself.

** The Slab Hut Tourist Information Centre was opened in 1985, not 1975 as stated.

S U M M A R Y

of Interview with Francis Dawson, OAM

Interviewed by Narelle Penman on
5 September 1988 for
Open Foundation - History

Francis (Fran) Dawson, OAM, was born on 15 April 1918 at Wickham and was educated in Sydney. In 1938 she married John Dawson and settled in the Maitland area. Fran was first elected to serve as an Alderman on Maitland City Council in 1962. After a service of 21 years, she retired as an Alderman in 1983.

This tape begins with an account of the support and encouragement by a friend which led to Fran's entry into Local Government under the banner of the Ratepayers Action Group. Fran goes on to detail the changes she noticed in Local Government over 21 years. Changes such as - payment to Aldermen; protocol; length of meetings; and political involvement in Local Government.

Fran was the lone woman on Council for 12 years and the next part of the tape deals with this period and the achievements Fran felt she had made during that time. The effect of civic duties on the home and finances and the time involved in attending many functions and committees, above the hours spent at Council meetings, was discussed.

Fran was the first female Deputy Mayor of Maitland City Council, elected in 1974, and she held this position for 6 consecutive terms until 1980. Fran gives a light-hearted account of apparent male chauvinism in the captions on photographs on display in the Town Hall. Whereas all male Deputy Mayors are noted as such, Fran is not. Fran goes on to give an account of lack of female amenities when she entered Local Government.

Fran discusses some specific issues before Council during her service. Some controversial, others showing a broadening of Council responsibility in providing facilities for the community such as the provision of Child Care services and employing youth and social workers to plan and report to Council on community needs.

More women should be involved in Local Government according to Fran and she feels it is an area where they should be readily accepted because as she puts it - "You don't need an academic career to become an Alderman, you've only got to take a woman in her own home, she's the keeper of the purse strings, she's usually the taxi driver, she's the gardener, she's the sounding board for everybody's complaints, she has all the attributes that are needed to become a good Alderman providing she has the right temperament to go with it and has the ability to be able to express what she thinks is needed in the city."

As part of Fran's civic duties, she was elected as a delegate to the Hunter Valley Tourist Association (now the Hunter and Lower North Coast Tourist Authority). This began a long and continuing association for Fran with Maitland Tourist Association. She is still the Chairperson of this Association and gives an account of her involvement and the achievements and expansion of the Association to today. Fran's enthusiasm for and commitment to Maitland is evident throughout the tape.