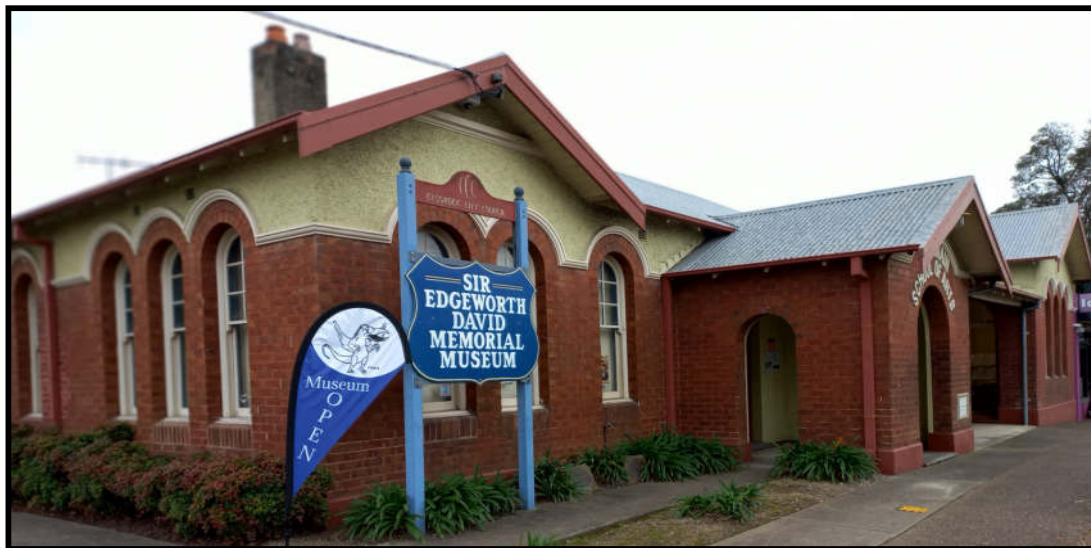


**COALFIELDS LOCAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION  
QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER**

**NUMBER 69**

**DECEMBER 2023**



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Welcome to Tumblebee, the official newsletter of the Coalfields Local History Association Inc.

### **Aims and Objectives**

To discover, record, print, preserve and teach the History and Heritage of the specified district. The specified district being all the land situated in the Cessnock Local Government Area. Primarily known as the Hunter Valley in general

The Coalfields Local History Association Manages the Edgeworth David Museum, Manages and maintains the Jim Comerford Collection and offers assistance with Family History Research and inquiries.

### **Office Bearers**

Vice President	Kim WELLER	
Secretary	Lexie MATTHEWS	0409452555
Treasurer	Peter ALLEN	

### **Committee Members**

#### **PATRONS**

Catherine PARSONS  
Meryl SWANSON MP

Newsletter Editor	Lynette Hamer	49362493
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#### **LIFE MEMBERS OF EDGEWORTH DAVID MUSEUM**

Brian ANDREWS OAM (Deceased)  
Lexie MATTHEWS  
Cheryle SHOESMITH

Association Address	Coalfields Local History Association Secretary P O Box 10 Kurri Kurri NSW 2327
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Web Address	<a href="http://coalfieldshistory.org">coalfieldshistory.org</a>
Email	<a href="mailto:coalfieldshistory@gmail.com">coalfieldshistory@gmail.com</a>

**The affairs of the Association shall be conducted by the management committee, which includes the office bearers of the Association. Members of the association are welcome to attend and observe at any meeting and may take part at the discretion of the chairperson**

# GRACE SCANLON

## COMMUNITY ACTIVIST, COMMUNIST & A FOUNDER OF THE MINER'S WOMEN'S AUXILIARY

It has been many, many years since women were banned from working in the coal mines!



**GRACE & HENRY SCANLON**

However women have never abandoned their contribution to the coal mining industry and their support for their menfolk and their community. Just as the miners themselves supported each other in times of strife, so too did the women support each other and the men.

The Lockout of 1929 was a time of great distress for the coal miners on the Northern field. No employment! Families struggling to survive. Many miners moved to places like Lake Macquarie and Port Stephens, where they built humpy like dwellings and at least were able to fish for food.

Gloria McDONALD – That Hidden Decade in the book *Beneath the Valley* states “Rough shacks, tents and humpies sprang up and fish became the main diet” and then again she states “Our humpy, where we lived for the next six years, was right beside Nelson Bay beach, It was an old canvas tent overbuilt with brush timber and bark.”

Grace SCANLON (Nee BARRETT) was twenty six years old and had been married for only two years at the time of the Lockout.

Her new husband Henry SCANLON was a coalminer. Grace's father James Peary BARRETT was a coalminer and an activist, so naturally Grace would and did become involved with the plight of coal miners and their families, but not before she witnessed the injustice first hand.

The 1929 strike and Lockout resulted in the Rothbury Riot and the presence of the police (known as “basher gangs”). Whilst picketing the local shops to prevent sales to the police, Grace and a friend were harassed by the police.

The fact that Henry SCANLON was prominent within the movement naturally made him a target for the police.

It was around this time that Grace became a Communist (she joined the CPA – Communist party of Australia - in the 1930s) and became one of the founders of the women's auxiliaries. In 1938 she helped establish the Cessnock auxiliary. By corresponding with the Welsh mining women in the Rhondda Valley she helped them establish their own women's Auxiliary.

In 1939 a delegation of women, Grace among them addressed the Miner's Federation Central council asking for recognition for auxiliaries as a constituent part of the union. They were successful in their endeavour.

Grace along with other women began actively taking part in the disputes and struggles of the miners. How? You may ask yourself. The women's auxiliary worked with the Miner's

Federation, taking part in the demonstrations. During lockouts and strikes the women's auxiliary provided meals and soup kitchens for miners and their families.

After some initial objections, especially from the older miners the women began to play a significant part by supporting the men and the mining families. The auxiliaries were not only for the miner's wives, their constitution embraced any women on the coalfields. The auxiliaries became a fighting force for social and economic reforms.

Grace and other members of the women's auxiliaries set up a District Council of auxiliaries in October 1938 at a conference in Newcastle. Representatives from Cessnock, Kurri, Bellbird, Swansea, Belmont, West Wallsend, Dudley, Boolaroo, Abermain, Weston and Stanford Merthyr attended. Mrs TEERMAN as President, Grace SCANLON as Secretary and Mrs LONSDALE as Treasurer. At this meeting discussions were held regarding the formation of a National organization, thus uniting the different states.

A National organization was formed with Mrs TEERMAN president and Irene ORR as secretary. The first meeting was held in 1940 in Sydney.

Grace Irene BARRETT was born in Minmi on 6 January 1903 to coalminer and unionist James Peary BARRETT and Elizabeth Harriett PETERSEN. She married Henry SCANLON, coalminer and unionist in 1927. She died 12 August 2003 (age 100), leaving an insurmountable legacy for women of future generations to learn from.

Amongst her many achievements were:

- ✚ 1930s joined the Communist Party of Australia and remained a member until the late 1960s. Along with fellow members, Ethel TEERMAN and Nellie SIMM was instrumental in campaigning for women's auxiliaries in the Miners Federation.
- ✚ She was co-founder of Cessnock, Bellbird and Aberdare auxiliaries and the District Council in 1938. She was active in the 1938 and 1940 coal strikes.
- ✚ 1939 part of the successful delegation that addressed the Miner's Federation Central Council to become a consistent part of the union.
- ✚ 1940 Elected Northern District President
- ✚ 1942 Elected National Secretary.
- ✚ Auxiliary delegate to Newcastle Trades Hall Council.
- ✚ 1943 organised international affiliation with Welch Miner's Women's Federation.
- ✚ Conducted radio talks during WWII
- ✚ 1949 Active involvement in strike
- ✚ Member National Committee of the Union of Australian Women.
- ✚ Committee member of East Cessnock bowling club Women's Auxiliary.
- ✚ 1950s opposed local government rate increases
- ✚ 1957 Involved in Pensioner's Association demonstrations
- ✚ Assisted in Bellbird Strike and lockout.
- ✚ 1950s delegate to Cessnock Mineworker's Area Committee.
- ✚ 1957 Actively involved during Aberdare stay in strike
- ✚ 1928 Secretary of the Cessnock Workers International Relief Committee .
- ✚ 1920s Coal lockout elected Secretary of the Cessnock Unemployed women's Committee.

Through her involvement with the women's auxiliaries Grace was able to assist the Crippled and spastic children, Cessnock Maternity hospital, Cessnock aged women's home and pre-school kindergarten committee.

She was also involved in the Joint Committee of Housewives, Cessnock and Newcastle co-operative guilds, May Day committees, Anti-tuberculosis committee, Newcastle Kindergarten Union, the peace movement and flood relief.





**A NATIONAL MEETING OF THE MINERS WOMEN'S AUXILIARY IN SYDNEY 1958**  
 Grace Scanlon is at the front on the right of the picture



The Northern District Miners Women;s Auxiliary was instrumental in the establishment of the ROTHBURY RIOT MEMORIAL located at North Rothbury NSW. The dedication took place on the 16 December 1989 and celebrated the sixtieth anniversary of the Rothbury riot where miner Norman BROWN lost his life and many more miners were injured. They were also instrumental in the establishment of the original memorial commemorating the sixty seventh anniversary of the Bellbird Mine Disaster

#### Sources

At the Coalface

Grace Scanlon The biographical Register of the Australian Labour Movement

Beneath the Valley

Taking the Revolution Home. Work among women in the Communist Party of Australia 1920-1945 by

Joyce STEVENS

## THE JIM COMERFORD MEMORIAL WALL

The Jim COMERFORD memorial wall, situated on the site of the United Miner Workers Federation Office on Aberdare Road, Aberdare was commissioned to honour miners, both men and boys who were killed or died of mine related injuries in the Northern District and Hunter coalmines. The wall was constructed with the assistance of the Mineworker's Trust. The wall was so named as a tribute to Jim COMERFORD, who was one of the most respected members of the coal mining Union. (Jim passed away on 3 November 2006). He took part in the Rothbury riot, was a long time member of the Miner's Federation and was passionate about the mining history of the area He wrote books to preserve the history and heritage of the mining industry. The dedication was carried out on Saturday 10 February 1996 by Paul KEATING, who was Prime Minister at the time. The wall was constructed at a cost of \$160,000. The youngest miner honoured on the wall was 11 year old Robert IRVING, who was killed at the Co-Operative Colliery, Plattsburgh on 16 February 1883. The oldest is Frederick Charles ROOSE, aged 73, who was killed at the Waratah Colliery.

The inscription on the front of the wall reads:

***"Remember Before God the Men and Boys who Gave Their Lives in the Northern District Mines."***

As at the 10 September 2023 there were 1793 names on the wall,



**MINER'S MEMORIAL WALL, ABERDARE**  
(Photo by Ruth COTTON)

Every year the MEU Northern Mining & NSW Energy District hold a Memorial day conducted on the site to remember all those who lost their lives in the pursuit of coal as well as the families who have been impacted by such loss.



**MINER'S BODY BEING CARRIED OUT**  
Bronze Relief at the Miner's Memorial Wall, Aberdare  
(Photo Ruth COTTON)



## **TREVOR MILGATE ESM OAM CESSNOCK CITY HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE**

Trevor was born in Kurri Kurri on 17 December 1946 and lived his whole life in the Cessnock Local government Area.

Trevor attended Abermain Public School and Kurri Kurri High School, he gained employment at Kurri Kurri store and worked in the heavy industries at Newcastle until he was successful in obtaining a position with Cessnock City Council as a ranger which he held for 25 years.

Trevor first joined the RFS and the SES units in 1976, he was appointed the positions of Captain, this gave him the opportunity of attending a course in Leadership at Mt Macedon VIC. The experience he obtained gave him the skills required in leadership and training to establish the Rescue Squad in Cessnock.

Following in 1988, Trevor became a foundation member of the squad for his dedicated Volunteer service to the community of Cessnock.

During his time Trevor was appointed as an SES Deputy Local Controller and then onto SES Local Controller in 1994, also with the NSW VRA he was appointed in 1992 as the Hunter Region Co-ordinator for the squads of Cessnock, Central Coast, Merriwa, Taree, Bulahdelah and Murrurundi, in 1996 implemented the SES Flood Plan for Cessnock.

With the Cessnock Rescue Squad, Trevor has witnessed many incidents and accidents that some of us could never imagine, apart from attending 100's of car crashes and most with great outcomes than others, thanks to the expertise of the Rescue members through training programs.

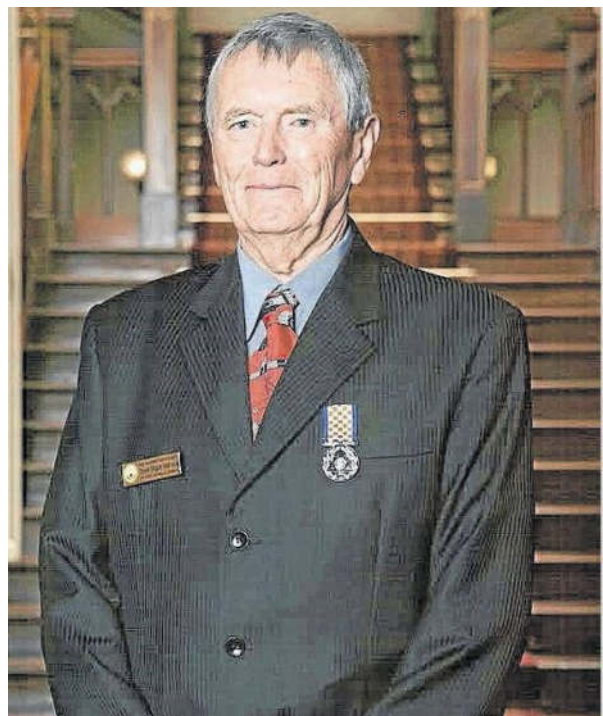
Trevor got great satisfaction in helping elderly owners in retrieving and rescuing their cat or dog or having a tarp over the roof of their homes.

Trevor was instrumental in the following incidents: 1985 Hail storm; 1986 Search for missing plane at Barrington Tops; 1989 Flooding responses; 1989 Newcastle Earthquake; 2014 Ellalong Earthquake; 1997 Thredbo disaster; 3004 Storm incidents; 1994 Bush Fires; 2002 Abernethy Bush Fires and many other Flooding and storm events throughout Cessnock and surrounds

### Trevor's Achievements

- 1988 life member of Cessnock VRA
- 1991 SRB Senior Rescue instructor
- 1995 Cessnock Citizen of the Year
- 1998 NSW Premier Award for outstanding Volunteer Services in the Community
- 1999 Rotary Club International Service Award
- 2004 OAM
- 2012 ESM
- 2014 NSW VRA Life member
- 2017 SES Unit Citation
- 2022 National medal for Emergency Services during the Bush fires

Trevor still remains as a Volunteer member giving a helping hand anywhere and anytime.



**Reprinted from City of Cessnock Hall of Fame  
Induction Ceremony Booklet**

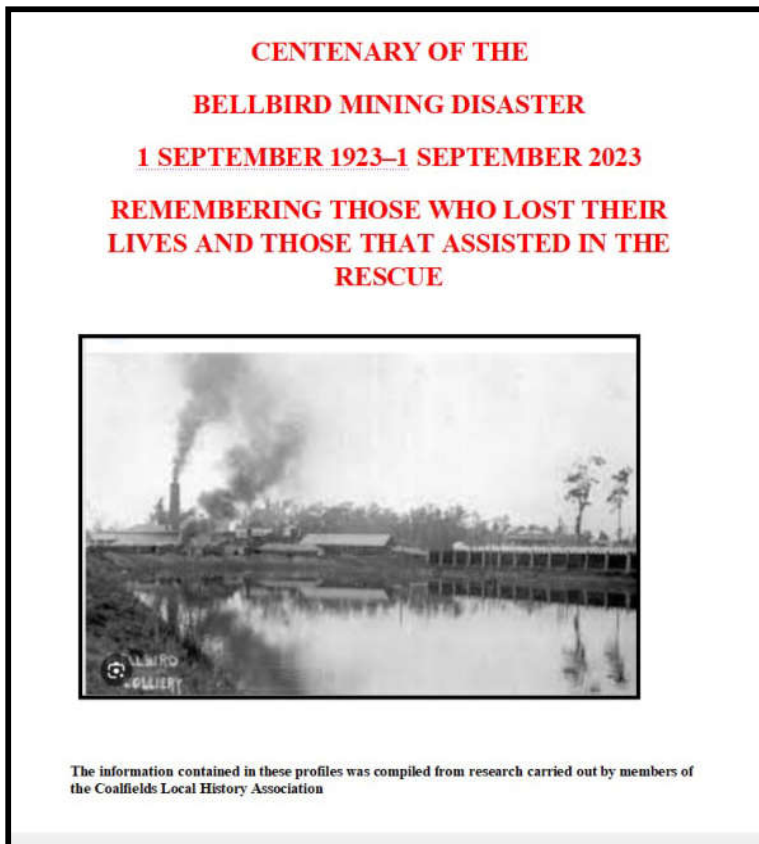


## MUSEUM REPORT

The Sir Edgeworth David Museum will be closed from 2.00 pm Thursday 21 December until 10.00 am Tuesday 9 January to allow our very hard working volunteers to spend Christmas with their family and friends and enjoy a well earned break.

It is with great reluctance that we find ourselves in a position where it is required to raise our membership fees to \$30.00 per calendar year across the board.

Commencing 1 January 2024 The \$10.00 joining fee will still remain for new members Since our relocation we find that we now have running costs that we did not previously have. Apart from the expenses incurred in the moving process we now find it necessary to pay rent to the Council. Insurance costs have increased as have electricity and water costs as well as our day to day running costs.



As part of the commemoration of the Centenary of the Bellbird Mine Disaster the Coalfields Local History Association have produced a souvenir book. The cost of the book is \$15.00 and can be purchased at the Museum or by contacting the Coalfields Local History Association.

**Please note that an extra fee of \$5.00 will be charged if the book is required to be posted.**

At the recent AGM of the Association the following Offices were filled

President	Vacant
Vice president	Kim WELLER
Secretary	Lexie MATTHEWS
Treasurer	Peter ALLEN
Public Officer	Peter ALLEN
Committee Members	Peter ALLEN, John MURPHY, Graham SMITH
Fund Raising committee	Peter ALLEN, Lynette HAMER, Kim WELLER
Journal Editor	Lynette HAMER
Researcher	Lynette HAMER
School Liaison Officers	Sharon DYSON-SMITH, Graham SMITH
Hunter Chapter Delegate	Cheryle SHOESMITH
Congratulations to all those elected Officers.	

2023 has been a most productive and satisfying year. All our volunteers have worked tirelessly at the many tasks required to keep our museum running, advance our organization and satisfy the many requests for assistance that we regularly receive. Our Lost Diggers was again a successful event, our open day in Seniors Week, the Art show and of course the Centenary of the Bellbird Disaster was a resounding success that brought us much recognition. The preservation of the Bellbird Mine Disaster chart was an amazing achievement, which would not have been possible without the financial assistance of the MEU.

We thank all those who have assisted us during the year and hope 2024 will be just as good or maybe better.

**MEMBERSHIP FEES ARE DUE  
1 JANUARY 2024  
\$30.00**

**Methods of Payment:**

**POST**

The Secretary  
Coalfields Local History Association  
P.O. Box 10  
Kurri Kurri NSW 2327

**IN PERSON**

Sir Edgeworth David Musuem  
Abermain School of Arts  
209 Cessnock Rd  
Abermain NSW

**ELECTRONIC PAYMENT**

Name	Coalfields Local History Association
A/c No	540011202
BSB	650000
Description	Name & Fees

@@



THE COALFIELDS LOCAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION WOULD LIKE TO WISH ALL OUR MEMBERS AND FRIENDS A VERY MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY AND SAFE NEW YEA

## BOOK SALE for EDGEWORTH DAVID MUSEUM

❖ CENTENARY of the BELLBIRD MINING DISASTER \$15

❖ PEOPLE & PLACES / COAL & COMMUNITY \$10

By Lyn Keily and Gillean Shaw

❖ THEY FOLLOWED THE FLAG \$40

By Sharon Dyson Smith

❖ PIT TOPS AND PRAMS \$5

By Betty Hodges - Linton

❖ COALMINERS DAUGHTER \$5

By Betty Hodges – Linton

Books are available on order from [coalfieldshistory@gmail.com](mailto:coalfieldshistory@gmail.com)

& Direct Debit Coalfields Local History Association

Newcastle Building Society Kurri Kurri Branch BSB 650-000

Ac no. 540011202

Subject Name of Book

OPEN SUNDAY – TUESDAY –  
THURSDAY 10am- 2pm.  
Donation \$2

209 Cessnock Road Abermain  
NSW 2326

Website : [coalfieldshistory.org](http://coalfieldshistory.org)  
Phone : 02 4044 8020

Email : [coalfieldshistory@gmail.com](mailto:coalfieldshistory@gmail.com)



## MEETING TIMES

General meetings will be held at Abermain Bowling Club  
Corner Armidale & Goulburn Streets Abermain at 3.00 pm on the third Tuesday of every  
second month

Tuesday 29 January 2024		2.30 pm Abermain bowling club
Tuesday 16 April 2024		2.30 pm Abermain bowling club
Tuesday 18 June 2024		2.30 pm Abermain bowling club
Tuesday 20 August 2024		2.30 pm Abermain Bowling club
Tuesday 15 October 2024	<b>AGM</b>	2.30 pm Abermain Bowling club
Tuesday 17 December 2024	xmas meeting	2,30 pm Abermain Bowling club

## MUSEUM OPENING TIMES

The Museum is open Tuesdays, Thursdays and Sundays 10.00am to 2.00pm.  
Other times by appointment.

## A GOLD COIN DONATION IS APPRECIATED

The Museum is located in the Abermain School of Arts Building 209 Cessnock Road  
Abermain.

Parking available at rear of building

### Association's Area Interest

The specified district of the Coalfields Local History Association Inc's area of interest is all that land situated in the Cessnock Local Government Area (LGA), primarily, as well as the Hunter Valley in general

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