



**COALFIELDS LOCAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION  
QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER**

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## **CONTENTS**

### **Articles**

Kevin O'NEILL OAM	3	Museum Report	10
Heddon Greta Speedway	5	Meeting Times	10
Fundraising appeal Launch	6	Opening times	10
Ellen Darling: A Farewell Letter	7		

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**

President	Kim WELLER	
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### **Committee Members**

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### **LIFE MEMBERS OF EDGEWORTH DAVID MUSEUM**

Brian ANDREWS OAM (Deceased)  
Lexie MATTHEWS  
Cheryle SHOESMITH

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Web Address [coalfieldshistory.org](http://coalfieldshistory.org)  
Email [coalfieldshistory@gmail.com](mailto:coalfieldshistory@gmail.com)

**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**

# KEVIN O'NEILL OAM

## Oldest Surviving Former Player of the Australian National Football Team



At 98 Kevin O'NEILL is the oldest surviving former player of the Australian National football team now called the Socceroos.

Kevin's sporting history is quite amazing in that he was born and grew up in Cessnock and despite his soccer prowess remained in Cessnock, often travelling to Sydney to train and still maintaining his occupation as a coal miner.

**QUESTION: So! Kevin, you grew up in the Hunter Valley. What attracted you to the game?**

**ANSWER: I lived opposite the Cessnock ground and I always played football when I was young. The vineyards were**

**never a temptation. I don't drink and I don't smoke.**

In 1996 Kevin was inducted into the Hunter Region Sporting Hall of Fame.

In May 2000 he was inducted into the Australian Football Hall of Fame.

He was awarded an OAM in the 2024 King's Birthday List.

Kevin was born in 1925 at Cessnock NSW and attended Cessnock Primary School. He was the first Northern NSW player to try his luck in Sydney when the Federation assumed control of the game. He loved the game of football and in the early days he never got paid and made huge sacrifices for the game.

**"I never really got paid to play for Cessnock because I was a pure amateur. It actually cost me money to play. On a couple of occasions I got paid six pounds at the end of the year to cover my expenses. It was not even enough to buy a pair of boots so I put it in the kids' money box.**

In the Northern NSW competition he played for Cessnock, Kurri Kurri, West Wallsend, Lake Macquarie, Awaba and Weston.

Kevin played two seasons with Sydney club Prague. In an interview with James JOHNSON, CEO of Football Australia Kevin was quoted as saying

**"I had a Holden those days and it did not worry me at all to drive to Sydney on a Sunday morning, play the game and come back home to be ready for work on Monday," O'Neill said from his home at a retirement village in Cessnock, which is a gateway to the HunterValley.**

**"The problems arose when we had midweek Ampol Cup games in Sydney. It was common for me to finish work at the mine at three, drive to Sydney, play the evening game, drive back home and arrive after midnight, then go to work the next morning at seven.**

**"That was very hard and for that reason I used to take a friend of mine just to keep me company, especially for the trip home.**

***"The drive to Sydney and back usually took about seven hours. The reason I did it was because of my love of the game. It had to be.***

***"When I was at Prague, the club provided boots for us. The club also told us at the end of the championship-winning season in 1959 that they were flying us to Melbourne to play two friendly matches. After playing the first game I walked off the field and felt I was not in the best shape to play the second game the next day.***

***"I was told if I did not play I would not get the bonus of 30 pounds. So I said to the club that I would play even with one leg to get the cash - and I did."***



***At the time of Kevin's O A M award James Johnson, expressed his admiration for Kevin O'Neill, stating, "Kevin O'Neill's dedication and passion for football have made him a true icon of the sport. His contributions have not only advanced the game in Australia but have also inspired generations of players. This honour is a testament to his exceptional career and lasting impact on football."***

**QUESTION: You played your 22 year career in the Hunter, except for the 2 years with Prague?**

**ANSWER: NSW Football had a breakaway in 1944 and the strongest teams from the Newcastle area went to the new competition. I was asked to join Wallsend because I was told the club would make me a better player. I joined up on the condition that when the breakaway competition was over I would go to Cessnock.**

**QUESTION: How often did you train. What was a typical session like?**

**ANSWER: We used to train twice a week, usually for a couple of hours on Tuesdays and Thursdays. We used to first run around the ground a few times, then do some physical exercises and finally play a little game. We never worked on skills because in the first years of my career we did not have coaches. I always wore bandages at training and in matches to protect my ankles and after training or a game I would run cold water on them and make sure they were OK.**

**QUESTION: What are your best memories of your fourteen year association with Cessnock?**

**ANSWER: We were the best side for several years in the NSW Federation and the 1956 team, that won the championship was the best I have ever played in. We had seven internationals. On our day we would beat anyone.**

Kevin made his NSW debut in 1946. He played a record of twenty North v South matches up until 1962.

His international career included twenty six International matches and ten Test matches including tours of South Africa (1950) and New Zealand (1958). He captained Australia in two Test matches against Hearts of Midlothian and Vice Captained matches on a number of other occasions.

Despite his sporting successes Kevin has always remained in Cessnock

#### **SOURCES**

Wikipedia

Socceroos.com.au

Sbs.com.au



# HEDDON GRETA DRIVE-IN

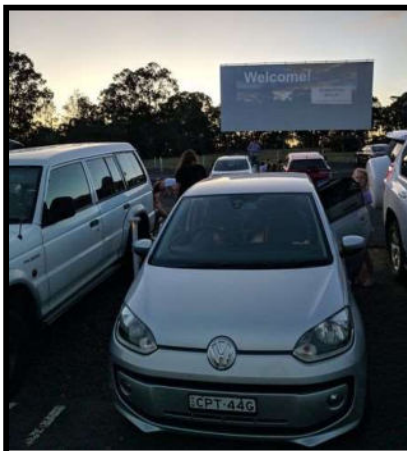


It was with great sadness that I learned that the Heddon Greta Drive-In was to close. I have many fond memories of attending the drive-in when I was much younger. It was fashionable for young couples to attend the drive-in. We would gather outside the cars and chat before the movies began. When my own children were young I decided that they had to experience attending the drive-in, as even then it was becoming much less popular, due to the

introduction of DVDs and television. So off we went. We parked the car, placed the speaker on the window and went to the shop to get some nibblies. My husband and I were sitting in the front seat. The movie started. "Mum I can't see said my son. So he swapped seats with my husband and he sat in the front. Then my daughter complained about being uncomfortable because she had to lean over the backs of the seats to see. She finally got tired of this position and laid down on the back seat and went to sleep. My husband fell asleep as well and that left my son and myself to finish watching the movie. That was their first and last trip to the drive-in.

Mr SEDDON opened the drive-inn in 1996. In 2023 the Heddon Greta drive-in was sold to developers. Many houses were to go up

in the area, however with a downturn in the building industry at that time their plans for the area were put on hold. An agreement was reached with Mr Seddon whereby he could keep the drive-in open for an additional twelve months. Sadly the twelve months have expired and the iconic Heddon Greta drive-in has now been closed.



Historically drive-in theatres were built on the outskirts of towns or on semi-rural land. This meant that residents were not disturbed by the sound, the amount of traffic or the behavior of the patrons who were primarily young people. Drive-ins were often labeled "*wheeled boudoirs*", depicting the activities of the young couples. The Australian birth rate peaked in the 1960's when drive-in theatres were at their most popular and the contraceptive pill had become available for married women.

So many ideas, attitudes and customs have changed and been lost in the ensuing years and so we lose another of our iconic forms of entertainment.



## FUNDRAISING APPEAL LAUNCH

In July this year the Coalfields Local History Association launched it's fundraising appeal. The aim of the appeal is to raise funds to purchase glass cabinets for the protection and preservation of our valuable artifacts. This project will be rolled out gradually, beginning with the installation of the glass cabinets in the Edgeworth David Mining room.

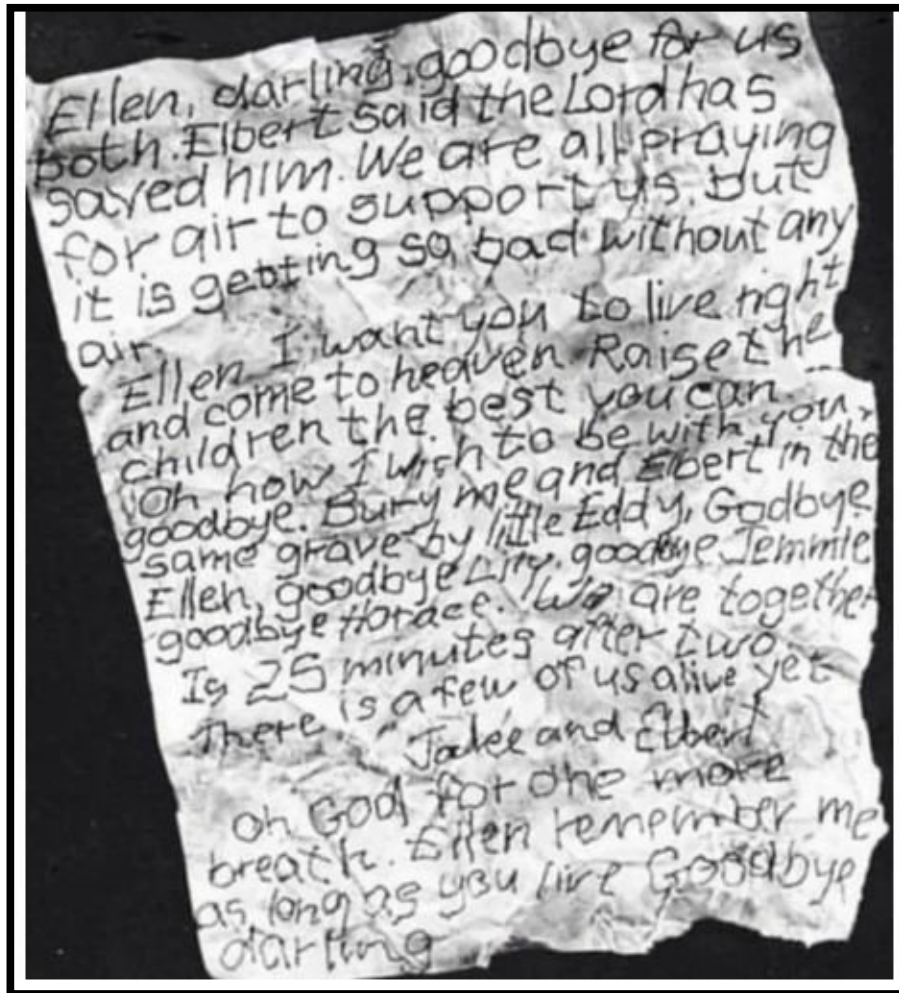
A gathering of friends and members was held at the museum where the State Member for Cessnock, Clayton BARR launched the appeal with a speech and a generous donation of \$500.00. Federal member for Charlton, Meryl SWANSON also donated \$500.00 toward the project. Since then other generous donations have been received and members of the museum staff have been conducting regular raffles to raise funds



**MEMBER FOR CESSNOCK, CLAYTON BARR PRESENTING HIS CHEQUE TO PRESIDENT KIM WELLER**

**Donations to the appeal can be made at:  
 Coalfields Local History Association. D.R.G endorsed  
 Newcastle Permanent Building Society. BSB 560 000 Kurri Kurri  
 Account Number 562968718  
 Subject Business Name or Surname  
 Email details to [coalfieldshistory@gmail.com](mailto:coalfieldshistory@gmail.com)**

## ELLEN DARLING. A FAREWELL LETTER



On the morning of May 19, 1902, 216 miners died in a brutal explosion at the Fraterville coal mine in Tennessee. The buildup of methane gas, which had leaked from an adjacent, unventilated mine, caused the largest mining disaster in the history of the state. Hundreds of widowed women, a thousand orphans and only three adult men were left in the town.

Although most died in the initial explosion, 26 of them managed to survive and took refuge in a gallery that had withstood the disaster. It was only a temporary shelter. When the rescue party reached them, they had died of asphyxiation. Aware of their fate, they all wanted to have a last memory for their families. This is Jacob Vowell's farewell letter to his wife Sarah Ellen and the rest of his children, son Elbert, 14, was next to him.

***Ellen, my dear, goodbye from both of us. Elbert said the Lord saved him. We are all praying for air to hold, but it is getting harder and harder to breathe. Ellen, I want you to live well and come to heaven. Bring up the boys as best you can. Oh, how I wish I could be with you, goodbye! Bury Elbert and me in the same grave as little Eddie [another son who died earlier]. Goodbye Ellen, goodbye Lily, goodbye Jemmie, goodbye Horace. We are together. It is 2:25. Only a few of us are still alive. Oh God, one more breath of air! Ellen, remember me while you live. Goodbye, my darling***



## MUSEUM REPORT

As usual our marvelous and dedicated team of volunteers have been working hard. We are finally gaining recognition for the great work that we do. We recently entertained twenty visitors from South Australia. Graham SMITH gave a talk on the life and significance of William Tennant Edgeworth DAVID . The visitors were offered a delicious morning tea and either browsed around the museum or were conducted around by one of our informed guides.

During September we hosted the regular meeting of the Hunter Chapter. This was an informative event. Again the attendees were able to look around our museum and see what a wonderful place it is.

A significant project organized by our museum was the recent restoration of the memorial to Edgeworth DAVID situated in Edgeworth Abermian David Park. The structure had become unsafe due to termite activity and general deterioration. The Cessnock City Council informed us of their intention to demolish the structure. SHOCK! HORROR!

One of the aims of the coalfields Local History Association is to preserve the history of our area. The confirmation of the outcropping of the Greta coal Seam in Swamp creek at Abermain was central to the development of the South Maitland Coalfields and thus the establishment of many of the towns on the field. This important historical monument COULD NOT BE LOST. Members of the staff of the museum contacted the Council and made them aware of the history behind the monument. Of course the council would not fund the restoration project so again the MEU was approached. They were informed of the mining history attached to the memorial and immediately came on board with the offer to fund the restoration.

**AGAIN OUR SINCERE GRATITUDE GOES TO THE MEU FOR THEIR SUPPORT IN AIDING US TO RETAIN OUR LOCAL MINING HISTORY.**

The memorial has now been restored to it's former glory and can be visited by those interested in our mining heritage.



**BEFORE**



**AFTER**

The museum is at present undergoing a significant reorganization. Shelving is being replaced to give us a little more storage area. Once we have reached our target amount from the fundraising project we will be able to install glass cabinets which will protect and preserve our items. The first room to have the cabinets installed will be the Edgeworth David mining room as we find that this room garners the most interest from visitors,

A major project being undertaken by our volunteers is the massive task of cataloguing all our resources. Once this is done we will be able to track our resources very easily. And it will make locating an item so much easier.

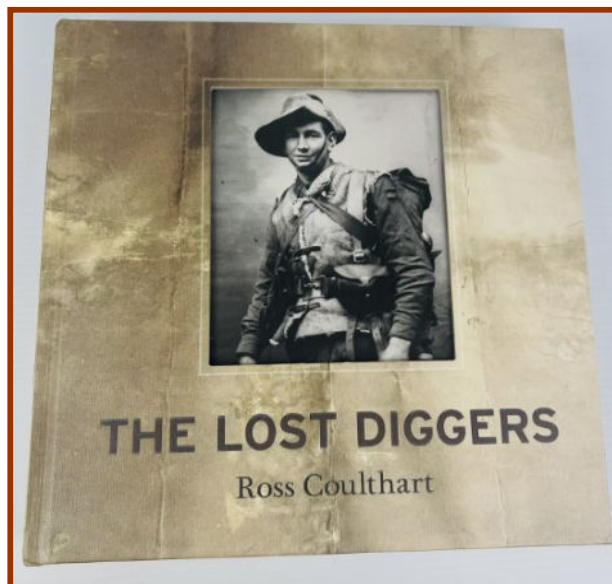


Due to lack of space the team is endeavouring to scan as many documents, photos, maps and articles as is viable to reduce the need for storage .

As an indication of the growing significance of our museum and organization we have had several maps, photographs and documents donated by interested persons. A recent significant donation is a very large book titled "THE LOST DIGGERS", not to be mistaken for our own collection of Lost Diggers, this book documents the locating and preservation of a collection of hundreds of glass plate negatives found in an attic in the town of Vignacourt. During the World War I local photographers Louis and Antoinette THURILLIER took hundreds of photographs of servicemen from Australia, ;Britain, France, India and other countries. Vignacourt was a town were servicemen were sent to rest and recuperate from stints at the front. Just like us the task facing the discoverers of these photos was identifying the people after almost one hundred years. Just like us the process is ongoing



**LOUIS AND ANTOINETTE THURILLIER**



**THE BOOK**

## **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 26 November 2024

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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