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**Closure Meeting**

Held via Zoom at 4.00pm, Tuesday, 2nd June, 2020

**Chairperson’s Report**

The time has come to draw a line under the activities of Mount Kembla Mining Heritage Incorporated and to transfer our significant heritage collection to a new managing body.

As an incorporated association, we endeavoured to achieve our stated aims. We promoted the history of the Mount Kembla people through the annual commemoration events. We encouraged our community’s sense of belonging and pride in its history through these events and our Heritage Centre. However our goal to find a permanent home to display our significant collection failed.

In the year leading up to the 100th anniversary of the 1902 Mt Kembla Mine disaster in which 96 men and boys lost their lives, a committee of enthusiastic local people banded together and organised what was to become a very successful series of commemorative annual events for the next 10 years. We didn’t set out to make a collection, it happened. Significant objects linked to the disaster story were donated for safe keeping. And so it grew into a significant collection. Volunteers grow older, move away or take up other activities and the energy to continue at this level gradually diminished. One event however never seemed to fade in the public’s demand, this was the 96 Candles Ceremony which was performed annually on the evening of the date of the disaster. Attendances averaged around 200 people braving chilly winter evenings to listen to related mining family stories, songs and take part in the vigil around the lighting of 96 candles.

Much has been learnt about managing and displaying a heritage collection. And for ten years the Mt Kembla Heritage Centre housed a high-class display telling the story of the mine disaster. A special story demands to be told. Much passion and creativity went into producing this gem. In 2008, the team of volunteers who worked to bring this to the public eye was awarded a NSW State Government Heritage Volunteers Award for their efforts. Many school children from K to Y12, university students, people of all ages visited our Heritage Centre and learned of a terrifying moment in our history not taught elsewhere. This was a rental property and was supported by the Dendrobium Community Enhancement Program (DCEP) for this time.

The last few years of declining financial and volunteer availability have put a great strain on the dwindling managing committee. Despite numerous attempts in the previous years to find a permanent home for the collection, these efforts came to nothing.

It is over two years since a meeting was held with the aim of avoiding the wind up of Mt Kembla Mining Heritage Inc and, as a regional pilot, incorporating the Mt Kembla Mining Heritage museum into an Illawarra Museum network. Since that time with the assistance of Wollongong City Council Cultural Development staff, a new association Wollongong Heritage Collections Incorporated was formed to accept and manage collections at risk of which ours was the first. This came at a critical moment when the lease on the Heritage Centre was cancelled. From this time all our assets and collection were stored in the Dendrobium Core Sample shed; not an ideal location. As the recipients named in our original Constitution were unable to accept the collection, we changed this directive by a special resolution to Wollongong Heritage Collections Incorporated (WHC Inc).

A decision was made at the Annual General Meeting 17th March, 2019, to continue to manage the closing measures by the Caretaker Committee until the next AGM.

Inventories of the assets were drawn up and most of the donated assets were sold off through Gumtree managed by Caz Jervis.

The extreme bushfire danger on 12th December, 2019 forced a decision to relocate the collection and assets to a safer place, a unit at National Storage Unanderra. A mighty effort from the committee and South 32 helpers saw the bulk of the important items into storage.

In May, 2020, 6 month’s rental assistance was granted from the DCEP. This was extended by a month due to the generosity of National Storage Unanderra.

During that period a conservator Penny Edwell, recommended by Museums and Galleries NSW, was funded by the DCEP to continue listing the items on our eHive account that was begun the in 2017 and is now accessible worldwide. She has become very close to our story. Also through this time the museum advisor to Wollongong City Council John Peterson, supported us with the application to the National Library of Australia, to have digitised three of our historically significant documents. These are now available worldwide to view on the Trove website. Also during this time, we received funding from the Department of Veterans Affairs Armistice Centenary Grants Program to publish Marion Beard’s `The Kembla Connection’ Mt Kembla’s Contribution to WW1; and a commemorative sign installed near the WW1 Living Memorial Grove planted on the Mt Kembla Memorial Pathway. To date, of the 150 books published, eighty-eight of these have been sold; a number were given as Thank You’s to people who assisted with its production and to local libraries and the school. Marion has received pleasing responses to her work.

Now it is time to close our books.

I am very thankful for the unswerving generosity of spirit from everyone helping during this last `season’. Vivien Twyford has worked beside me, exploring options and encouraging me to achieve a successful conclusion. Caz and Sven Jervis, and Col and Jennifer Meharg have gone beyond expectations with the `moving house’ and the managing of the assets and their dispersal. Other members of the winding-up committee gave valuable support as they were able, Carol Berry, Marion Beard and Russell Viles. My neighbour and friend, Val Hoffman has completed the mammoth task of whittling down three copies of the 18-year’s of administration records; and sorting through heritage documents; so many duplications; not for the faint-hearted.

How do you recognise all those people and companies through the past 18/19 years who have given so much to help promote our story? The leaders, Cate Stevenson, Phil Donaldson, and Phil Grant; the administrators; the funding bodies and associated authorities, listed below; Clare Curtis and her team of heritage collectors; the museum mentors; the people on the ground; the story tellers, the artists, the composers, musicians, poets, authors and playwrights; their dedication and generosity have made it work so well. Thank you.

I have been active with the WHC Inc since its inception, determined that the collection would be handed over into safe hands. Louise Douglas, a retired historian with a museums’ management background has been supporting me (and our group) during these past months, physically and professionally. She has assisted me in the process of handing over to a degree that I would not have been confident to achieve. A small group of people representing Mount Kembla now belong to the new managing body (WHC Inc) with the aim to continuing to promote the disaster story and its legacy into the future. South 32 continues to support the production of the 96 Candles Ceremony. Who knows what the future will bring?

Caz Jervis / Elizabeth Roberts

**Funding bodies**: South 32, Dendrobium Mine, Dendrobium Community Enhancement Program; Illawarra Mutual Building Society Grants Program; Museums and Galleries NSW; Royal Australian Historical Society; CFMEU Minerworkers’ Trust Grant Program; National Library of Australia; Wollongong City Council Community Small grants; Department of Veterans Affairs, Armistice Centenary Grants Program, Port Kembla Port Corporation

**Associated authorities**: University of Wollongong; Wollongong City Council; National Parks and Wildlife Society