

**Mt Kembla Mining Heritage Inc.**  
**Annual General Meeting held 28<sup>th</sup> February, 2017**  
**Mt Kembla Heritage Centre**

**Chairperson's Report**

The past year has had its highs and lows. We embarked with much enthusiasm and energy. Our new members, who came on board in October 2015, brought renewed hope and spirit to the group. We were able to present two exciting exhibitions; 'Kembla Couples' on Valentine's Day that included serving High Tea; and the WW1 'Tunnels for Trenches' exhibition in conjunction with National Heritage Week on Mothers' Day. I sincerely acknowledge those volunteers for their dedication and hard work that went into preparing and presenting both those exhibitions. They were well attended and the visitors gave great feedback. Unfortunately, this momentum and volunteer numbers subsequently diminished due to circumstances beyond our control.

However, we pulled together and put on the annual heritage display at the school and the 96 Candles Ceremony in Windy Gully Cemetery. I wish to thank the school principal, Ms Lesley Matthews and Tennille Dewhurst from the P&C for their generous support by allowing us to use the whole of the old building for our displays in conjunction with their 'Day on the Lawn' fair. Clare Curtis and her faithful team presented another successful family history and mine history display. Photographer, Teresa Doessel donated her time and expertise for the Heritage Photograph studio upstairs. This was popular with the children – Rachele Calder had fun assisting them with dressing up in period costumes from the Arcadians' costume collection. The photos were printed on the spot. Memorial Trees for the disaster victims were planted in the grounds of the Soldiers & Miners Church; and trees planted on the Memorial Pathway in memory of the 1916 Mt Kembla WW1 soldiers who died. An exhibition on 'The Cordeaux Orchards' was presented later in the year. The 96 Candles Ceremony was supported generously by our Lord Mayor, Gordon Bradbery who organised the loan of the Bulli Surf Club bell; Wollongong City Council; our speakers, Dr Henry Lee and Dr Glenn Mitchell from Wollongong University; the Arcadian Lamplighter choir and the piper from the Illawarra Pipe Band; the provision of the Premier Illawarra buses and their drivers; by Tim Van den Berg from Illawarra Production Services (sound and light), GoHire, the Nicholls Family and of course the local community. The volunteers who set up the area for the event and assisted through the evening – carting equipment to and from the storage shed can't go unmentioned – Chris Jacobsen, Kavanagh Redden, Phil Hartley, Col and Jennifer Meharg, Neil Bott, Jessie Van Linden, and others just as important. Another successful event.

The Greenacres Mountain to Mountain 2016 event was run in the morning of the 96 Candles Ceremony, but had minimal effect on visitor numbers to our events. Ninety-six of the runners had disaster victims' names pinned to their shirts.

We were successful in receiving Council and Church permissions, and funding from the Dendrobium Community Enhancement Program to remove a copse of Coral Trees from a corner of the Soldiers' & Miners' Anglican churchyard. This was completed early in the year in preparation for the Memorial Tree planting. Volunteers from both the church and MKMH worked hard cleaning up this site which included rubbish removal, soil and mulch spreading and hole digging. A local landscaper also donated some time to helping with this activity. The local tree species were donated by Wollongong City Council Botanic Garden nursery. We also received funding to have the Obelisk professionally cleaned before the annual commemoration event. It was pleasing to be able to continue to open the Heritage Centre in conjunction with the monthly Illawarra Museums Trail Open Day.

We conducted 12 tour groups with 510 visitors. This included 200 Y9 students from Holy Spirit College, Bellambi in seven classes that were guided over two days with five tour guides - Russell Viles, Neil Bott, Phil Grant, Marion Beard and Elizabeth Roberts; a tiring but rewarding time. And 85 Y3 & Y4 students from St Pius X Primary School, Unanderra guided by Elizabeth, Neil and Marion. This group sent back a copy of their collected work reflecting their experiences of the day. Marion Beard and I conducted information sessions for two classes of University of Wollongong students from the Faculty of Social Sciences learning about the disaster and its impact on the community. They have an assignment to complete involving learning research skills and presenting their findings in relation to specific mine disaster victims, they continue to share this information with us.

Our monthly Open Days saw small numbers of visitors, Thank you to Marion Beard, Ruth Rodgers, Neil Bott, Elly and Caz Jervis and Vivien Twyford for being on hand to help.

I made a presentation to the West Wollongong Rotary Club outlining Mt Kembla's story and our activities. This was well received. Talking to them and other group representative, it seems that most groups like ours have the same problem – diminishing volunteer support due to the changes in our way of living. To survive, we have to change the way we do things.

Late last year a team of our men took on the task of moving a heavy stone font from the Unanderra Presbyterian Church to the Soldiers' & Miners' Anglican Church where it will stay for the moment. It originally came from the Kembla Heights Presbyterian Church which closed. The font was donated to that church by the Ruddy Family. Thanks to Mr Henderson who became aware of its impending doom (surplus to requirements) and notified Neil Bott who started organising the removal process. Neil, Phil Grant, Chris Jacobsen, Col Meharg, Sven Jervis and Russell Viles were all involved. This was an example of saving relics of Mt Kembla's history.

Thank you to Steve Walker who has for the past year efficiently managed the Treasurer's position and negotiating with Telstra. We now pay most of our bills online.

It was reassuring to work with Vivien, Russell Viles and Steve in the planning sessions for the recent community consultation meeting. After letterboxing flyers, emailing our network and talking to Mark Matthews on his Saturday morning ABC session, we had a productive meeting where everyone had an opportunity to express their ideas. A vote was taken to recommend whether to continue operating as we have been, or to consolidate and make plans for winding down our operations, including closing the Heritage Centre. It was decided to recommend consolidation, and this decision was to go to the next meeting before the AGM.

Thank you to Paul Treanor who set up and manages our new website. We now are able to take control of the content, an issue which cost us time and money in the past. Our aim is to have our collection digitised and available to the public through this medium. To date not a lot has been happening simply because we were not sure of our future.

Thank you to Elly Jervis who has been looking after the Facebook page. Again this has been running at a minimal level and is another medium to be used more fully in the future; and to her mum, Caz Jervis for her support with producing maps and flyers.

Col and Jennifer Meharg have quietly played an important role in managing the Heritage Centre courtyard, the Core Sample Shed grass and interior, the Windy Gully and Pathway Memorial Tree plantings – and I thank them for their dedication.

Distributing flyers takes time and effort – thank you Vivien, Caz and Elly, Jennifer and Col and Jenni Braddock.

So we have lots to be thankful for, and to those I've missed acknowledging, you have my apology.

Without our members' support all this would not have been possible.

Thank you all

Elizabeth Roberts

Chairperson

Mt Kembla Mining Heritage Inc.