

Box Flat Remembered

50 Years On



Dedicated to the eighteen miners
who lost their lives at or after Box Flat
and to their families.

Kenneth Frank Cobbin
William Alexander Drewett
William Rae Drysdale
Andrew Charles Haywood
Robert Lloyd Jones
William Alfred Marshall
John James McNamara
Walter Michael Murphy
Brian Henry Randolph
Brian Rasmussen
Daryl Trevor Reinhardt
Harold Charles Reinhardt
John Dudley Roach
Lenard Arthur Rogers
Maurice John Tait
Mervyn Verrenkamp
Walter Benjamin Williams
Clarence Edwin Wolski

Date	Signature of Trainee	Time	Signature of Trainer	Time	Date	Signature of Trainee	Time
30th July 1972	L. Rogers A. Haywood J. Roach D. Reinhardt W. Drewett M. Verrenkamp B. Randolph M. Tait R.J. Hodgson J.W. Hall	P.M.	A. Hutchins G. Cowan A. Verrall W.S. Wilson P.W. Stieker G. Kitching M. Maddox		2nd August 1972	E. Harkins D.G. Livermore R. Woods R.J. Hodgson J.W. Hall R. Verrenkamp M. Maddox W.R. Butterfield L.T. Waldon T. Byers A.F. Joynson A.G. Berlin G. Cowan R. Hollett	P.M. 4 hours
31st July 1972	L. Rogers A. Haywood J. Roach D. Reinhardt W. Drewett M. Verrenkamp B. Randolph M. Tait R.J. Hodgson J.W. Hall	P.M.	A. Hutchins G. Cowan A. Verrall W.S. Wilson P.W. Stieker G. Kitching M. Maddox		3rd August 1972	E. Harkins D.G. Livermore R. Woods R.J. Hodgson J.W. Hall R. Verrenkamp M. Maddox W.R. Butterfield L.T. Waldon T. Byers A.F. Joynson A.G. Berlin G. Cowan R. Hollett	P.M. 4 hours
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I certify that the respective trainees whose signatures are recorded herein were actually employed on the dates and time as recorded and that the amounts shown in the above Summary are correct and due for payment for the services performed for period 30th August 1972 to 2nd August 1972 inclusive.

Superintendent J. Higham
Date 17th August 1972

Booval Mines Rescue sign on book, 30 and 31 July 1972

Foreword

On 31 July 1972 at 2.47am, seventeen miners were killed in an explosion at the Box Flat coal mine at Swanbank near Ipswich. Another man lost his life nineteen months after the incident as a result of the injuries he sustained.

Eight of the men lost that day were members of the Booval Mines Rescue Brigade and had bravely gone into the mine to attempt to extinguish or seal off the fire.

It remains the worst mining disaster in Ipswich's history and one of the greatest losses of life in Queensland's mining industry.

The entrances were sealed, and the bodies of those who perished in the explosion were never recovered. Seventeen men went to work that day and never came home to their families. A community was permanently scarred and still nurses deep wounds to this day.

We cannot change the past. However, we must learn from the mistakes that led to this and other mining disasters and make sure that they are never repeated so that all resources workers can return home safe and healthy at the end of every day.

[Commissioner for Resources, Safety and Health Qld]

Local historian Hugh Taylor has produced a documentary called *Mining Elements Harsh Lessons* looking at six major accidents in Ipswich mines since 1893, including the Box Flat disaster.

"I have worked in the mining industry all my life and I think it is vitally important that we know and learn from our history," Mr Taylor said. *"As humans, we are always looking to invent bigger and better ways of doing things and if we don't know and understand our history, we could reinvent not only happy times but sad times. The real crux of knowing our history is so we don't reinvent disasters."*

There are many sources of information relating to this disaster. For days, newspaper reporters described various aspects of the explosion. In the aftermath, it was described in Queensland Government Mining Journals, Mines Department Annual Reports, the Common Cause (Mining Union newspaper) and books such as Pete Thomas' *The Coal Miners of Queensland: Creating the Traditions* (1986), in the Mining Warden's Inquiry and Findings, even court cases determining compensation.

Then there are the memories of so many affected by the disaster. This compilation aims to reflect on the range of tributes bestowed upon those brave, unfortunate men. Fifty years on, the Ipswich community has maintained a deep respect for the miners who lost their lives at Box Flat, and for those who survived - testament to the resilience of the mining community and its determination not to forget the impact of the disaster on the families and on the general community. Records such as these are vital in order to inform current and future resource workers and legislators as to the importance of a worker's life, and its impact on the future of a whole community.

Hugh Taylor (President, Ipswich Historical Society)

Acknowledgements

This compilation has been put together to record facts, stories and memories of a disaster that deeply affected families, community and industry. Obviously there are many, many more stories and memories. It would be great to capture these, should they come to our notice.

This compilation has only been made possible by the extensive assistance I have been afforded by my wife Margaret, for whose unfailing support I am eternally grateful. Thank you, Margaret, for putting up with me during the vast amount of time it took to produce this book.

Brigid, Carmel and Maxine, volunteers and members of the Ipswich Historical Society, were very capable assistants.

I sincerely thank the families who provided their memoirs and reflections of the disaster and the ensuing fifty years. I am also very grateful for the assistance and memoirs from fellows present on 31 July 1972. Their memoirs and stories are compelling reading.

The Retired Coal Miner's Group, being part of the Ipswich Historical Society, provided great assistance as critical reviewers of the compilation.

I thank Mr Lindsay Deas for his assistance in developing the banners for the miners who lost their lives, and for the plan drawings.

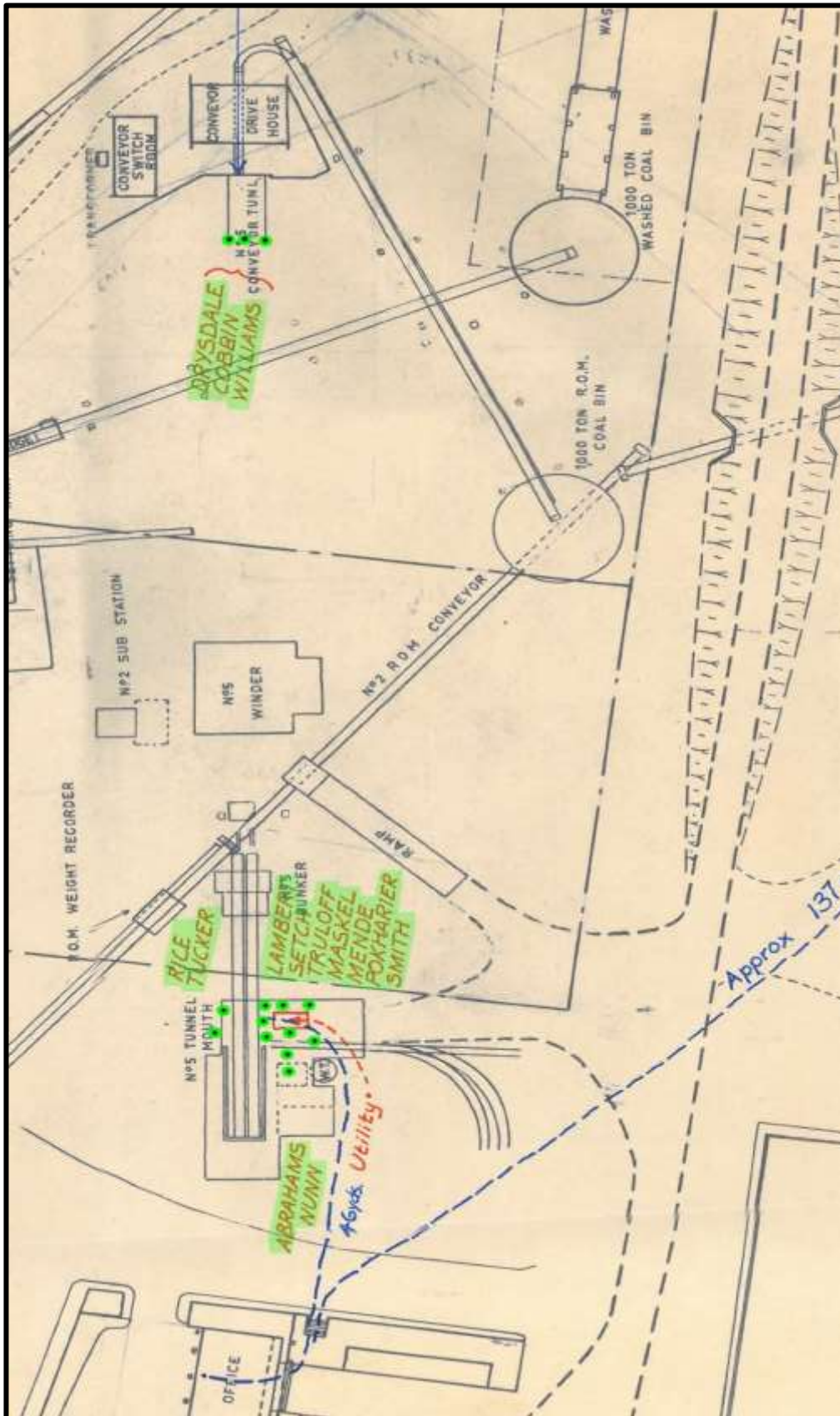
I also thank Mr Mark Parcell, who has developed the 3D visualisation of the Box Flat mines. Your incredible library of technical information on the disaster was invaluable and we look forward to your presentation.

Our thanks go to *Gawdy Green Copy & PRINT*, Ipswich for a fine job of printing and binding the first edition of *Box Flat Remembered*.

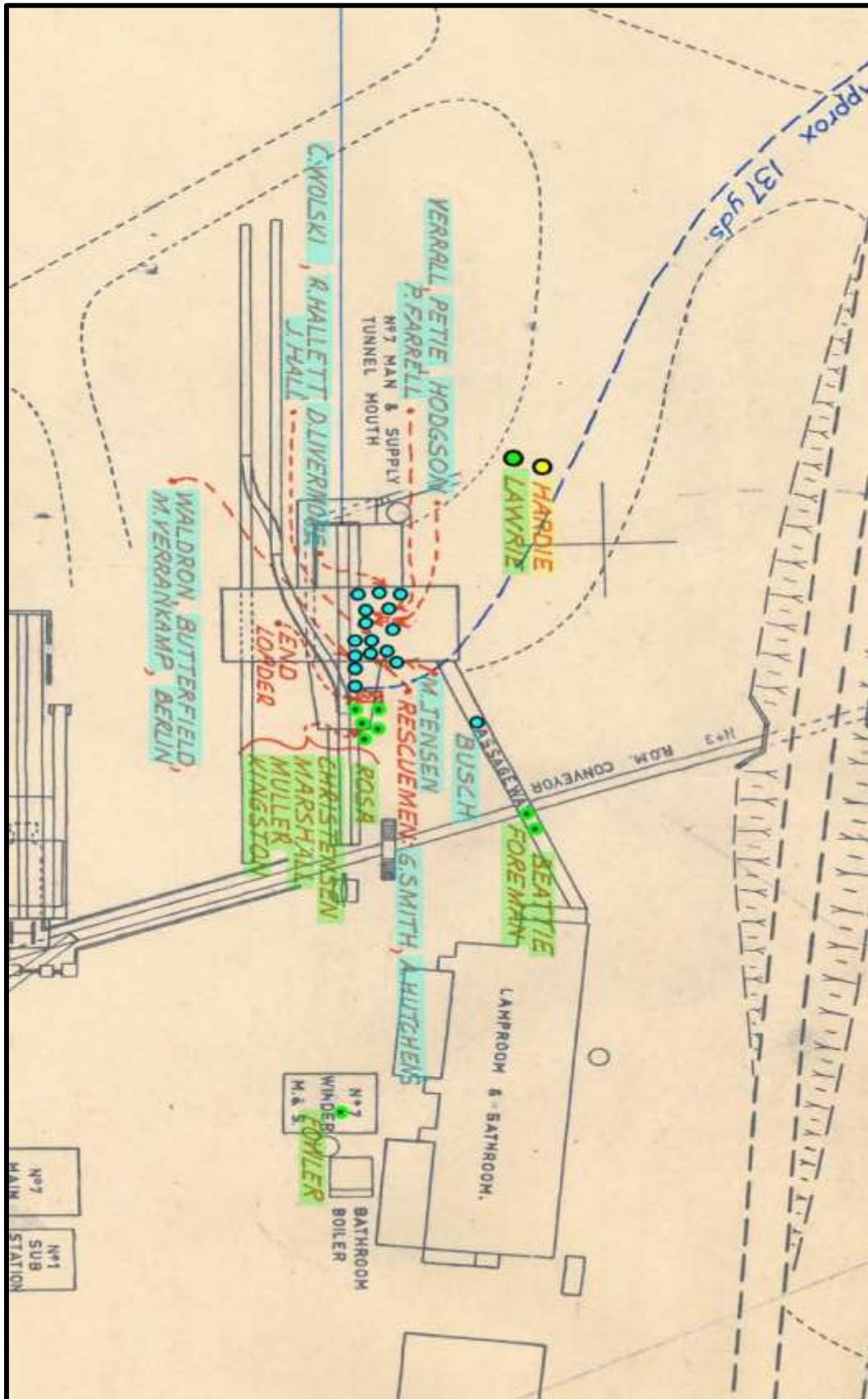
Hugh Taylor (President, Ipswich Historical Society)

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Workers in No 5 mine area at the time of the explosion



Workers in No 7 mine area at the time of the explosion



Workers in the workshop at the time of the explosion