

# NEWSLETTER

MUSWELLBROOK SHIRE LOCAL & FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETY INC (Founded 11<sup>th</sup> June 1958)

Affiliated with Royal Australian Historical Society

ABN 34611778680

PO Box 450 Muswellbrook NSW 2333

Editor Lionel Ahearn

No. 3 June 2022

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## Life Membership

On Saturday, 25 June 2022 Heather Meissner and Garry Meissner were presented with Life Membership Awards on behalf of our Society. Both have been members for over twenty years and joined when the Society was based in the Weidmann Cottage.. Heather still serves as our hard working Secretary and this year completes twenty years of service in that position. She also turns up every Saturday morning to cover the front desk where she answers the many queries, welcomes new members and handles book sales and charges for research. The time stamp on her emails indicates that she is still working late into the night.

Garry works quietly behind the scenes and it is only after some time that members come to realise the tremendous contribution he makes to our Society. As chief Research Officer he often visits the rooms to find data to answer queries. His extensive knowledge of the district and the people is invaluable. But it is the little things such as collecting mail, purchasing supplies, cleaning, helping to arrange museum exhibits and the hundreds of small chores that are too often taken for granted that makes him invaluable.

I considered it a great privilege to have had the honour to present them with their awards.



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### DETAILS ABOUT THE SOCIETY

#### Objectives:

- To collect, preserve and promote the social, cultural and physical history of Muswellbrook Shire, its environs and its people for future generations.
- to promote public access to our collections and research facilities, and
- to provide information, advice and assistance to individuals, community groups, organizations and businesses.

#### Meetings

The Society meets on the third Saturday of each month starting at 12.00 in the Society Room at the rear of the Muswellbrook Library. All members and visitors are welcome to attend the meeting.

#### Premises

The Society maintains its records in a section of Muswellbrook Library. You will find us at the rear of the Library. The Research Centre is open every Saturday from 9.30am to 1.00pm. The Research Centre may be opened at other times by appointment. Bus & tour groups are most welcome.

#### Annual Fees

Single \$25 Double \$35 Pensioner Single \$15 Pensioner Double \$25

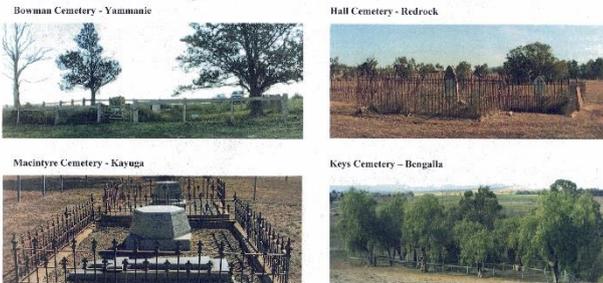
The Hon Secretary may be contacted via the post office box or email [mei2@bigpond.com](mailto:mei2@bigpond.com) The Society also has a web presence thanks to Darrin Khan and Lionel Ahearn at <http://www.mbkhistorical.org> and a research site at <http://research.mbkhistorical.org>

## Book Launch

On Saturday two new books were launched. The first was titled '*South Muswellbrook Section Two - Sydney Street - North West Side. Mill Street to the Subway,*' researched and written by Rob Tickle. It covers the development of this area from the 1830s to 1970. The in-depth coverage of this area is an important record of how the area has changed over that period.



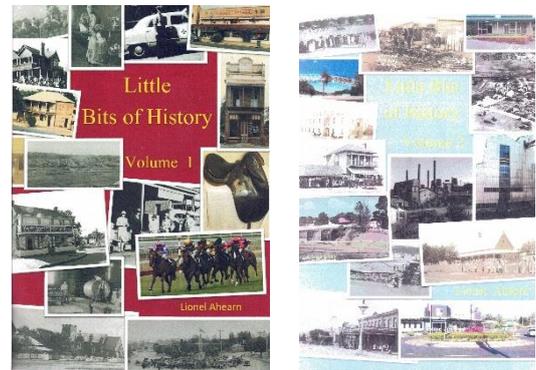
### Four More Cemeteries



Lionel Ahearn  
Garry Meissner

The other book '*Four More Cemeteries in the Upper Hunter*' by Garry Meissner and Lionel Ahearn. It covers Bowman Cemetery – Yammanie, Hall Cemetery – Redbank, Macintyre Cemetery – Kayuga, and Keys Cemetery - Bengalla. These cemeteries are small and situated on what was once large properties but are now owned by Mining Companies. Access is not available to the general public.

The audience was also made aware of other books that were available from the Society especially *Little Bits of History Volumes 1 & 2*. These were released during the lock down period due to Covid 19. A large selection of the other books we have for sale were also on display and many were sold.



Finally the audience was made aware that I have just finished a second update of the recording of Muswellbrook Cemetery. The databases of the original recording and the two updates were combined into one Excel file. Not many people now have copies of the Access program and this has been deleted. Due to the large size (almost 20 Gbytes) it is now only available on a USB stick. I feel this will be my last update and I thank my wife Priscilla for her help. Her recording and an extra pair of eyes was a great help.

If you would like to order any of these books please contact our Secretary Heather Meissner on [mei2@bigpond.com](mailto:mei2@bigpond.com).

A big thank you to all the members for another fantastic effort in providing morning tea. Also special thanks to Garry Meissner for again making his marvellous sandwiches. To all who sold books, helped me out of trouble with computer work and helped make the morning run smoothly a big thank you.

## Muswellbrook Coal Company Family Day

On Saturday, 28 May the public was invited to attend a special function at the Muswellbrook Skellatar Race Course to mark the official closing of the Muswellbrook Coal Mine after 115 years of operation. Our Society was invited to assist with the selling of a reprint of the book '*Muswellbrook Coal Company – The First 90 Years*' Compiled by John McDonald.

Heather Meissner & Eve Ellis on hand upstairs. Margaret Dolahenty photo.



Many of the visitors also enjoyed a bus trip to view the mine site and the massive equipment that was used at the end of the mine's life. The following photos give an indication of the progress since 1907.



Sinking the first mine shaft 1907 MSL&FHS photo 0622



Dorothy & Margaret Dolahenty are dwarfed by the truck tyre



Official Closing Ceremony



Upstairs in the Racecourse Centre with Garry Meissner & a customer

## Harry Oakes

Recently I was looking over some of the Society's earlier Newsletter and read with interest the article on Skellatar Park Racecourse. It is amazing that often when you look over an article a point catches your eye that appears to have missed your attention before.

'Mr Harry Oakes came to "Skellatar" employed as Manager for Hunter Bowman in 1921. He was a great horseman and although he had lost a hand in a mishap he did not let it deter him from working with horses in any way.'

What interested me was, how did Harry Oakes lose his hand?



Harry Oakes with *Allunga*. Note missing left hand. Remains of building to left of photograph is intriguing. Photograph No. 299 MSLFHS.

The above photograph confirms that Harry Oakes had lost his left hand at some stage of his life. The *Muswellbrook Chronicle* 15 January 1913 reported:

A very serious accident happened to Mr Harry Oakes on Sunday afternoon. He was up the river with his wife and Mr Frank Mantova. It appears that he had three plugs of gelignite fastened together in his left hand with lighted fuse attached, which he was about to throw into the water when an explosion took place and his hand was badly shattered. His body and face severely burned, and his clothes almost blown off. As speedily as possible the sufferer was conveyed to the local hospital where it was found necessary to amputate the shattered hand at the wrist, and the operation was successfully performed by Doctors Browne and Liddell. The patient, we hear is in a serious condition.

The *Scone Advocate* 17 January 1913 provided further information and different interpretation as to the cause of the accident:

A shocking accident happened in the vicinity of *Turanville*, about three miles from Aberdeen on Sunday afternoon, through which a young man named Oakes sustained terrible injuries. It seems that the unfortunate man had in his possession six plugs of gelignite, carrying them in a leather bag. He took one, and was examining it, when the plug exploded. His left hand was blown off, and his chest and face severely injured. M W Walsh, of Aberdeen was at Wilton's farm at the time. He heard the unusual report, and, mounting his horse, went to the direction from whence it appeared to come. He found Oakes' mate trying to carry him towards Wilton's. The injured man was bleeding from the ears, nose and mouth and abrasions on his chest, and practically from the injured arm. At the time he was blind from the effects of the shock. First aid was immediately rendered and a sulky was procured in which Oakes was placed and taken to Muswellbrook for surgical attendance. Despite his dreadful injuries he never loss consciousness.

On arrival at Muswellbrook an operation was performed, the shattered hand being amputated at the wrist. Much sympathy is felt for the injured man, especially as his wife is at present in a weak state of health. A search was subsequently made at the scene of the accident. Oakes' hat was found blown to shreds, also portions of his clothing, but no trace of the missing hand could be discovered.

The reader will have to surmise what caused the gelignite to explode. Did it have a lighted fuse attached or perhaps the gelignite was old and unstable.

It was invented in 1875, by Swedish chemist [Alfred Nobel](#), who also invented [dynamite](#). It is more stable than dynamite, but can still suffer from "sweating" or leaching out nitroglycerine. Its composition makes it [easily moldable](#) and safe to handle without protection, as long as it is not near anything capable of detonating it. One of the cheapest explosives, it burns slowly and cannot explode without a [detonator](#), so it can be stored safely.<sup>1</sup>



Joseph Henry (Harry) Oakes in later years Photograph No. 310 MSLFHS.

Whatever the cause of the accident it left Harry Oakes in a poor financial position. A benefit function was held at Muswellbrook Skating Rink which raised £12 4s.<sup>2</sup> He had been married in 1911 to Maud Durham and his first child had been born the same year as his accident. A court appearance in 1916 indicated that he recovered from his injuries and had returned to his occupation of drover. He was charged with travelling stock without a statement or permit. Cragg who was defending Oakes stated that 'he bore an excellent character, and he only had one arm.' Oakes was fined 10/- with 6/- costs.<sup>3</sup>

By 1921 Harry Oakes was working for Hunter Bowman of *Skellatar* as his manager. Oakes went on to have an illustrious career training racehorses. *Thanks to Rob Tickle for this article.*

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## New Members

The Society welcomes three new members - Judith Fisher, 8526 New England Hwy, Muswellbrook. Helen Milwain, 24 Kamilaroi Street, Muswellbrook & Mark Mitchell, 14 Abercairney Terrace, Aberdeen

Our deepest sympathy is extended to the family of our member, Jan Adams of Muswellbrook who passed away on the 30th May 2022. RIP Jan.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gelignite>

<sup>2</sup> *Muswellbrook Chronicle* 12 February 1913

<sup>3</sup> *Singleton Argus* 15 April 1916