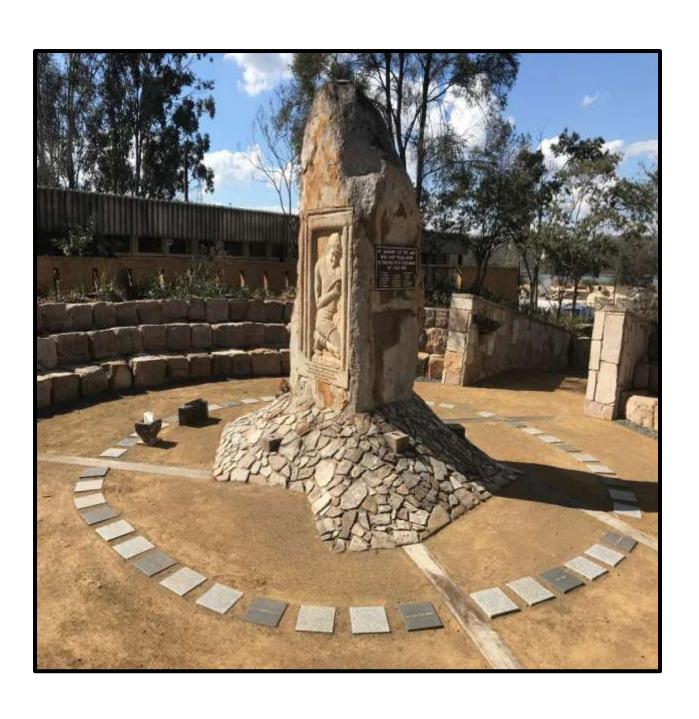
Box Flat Remembered

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

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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.

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*.

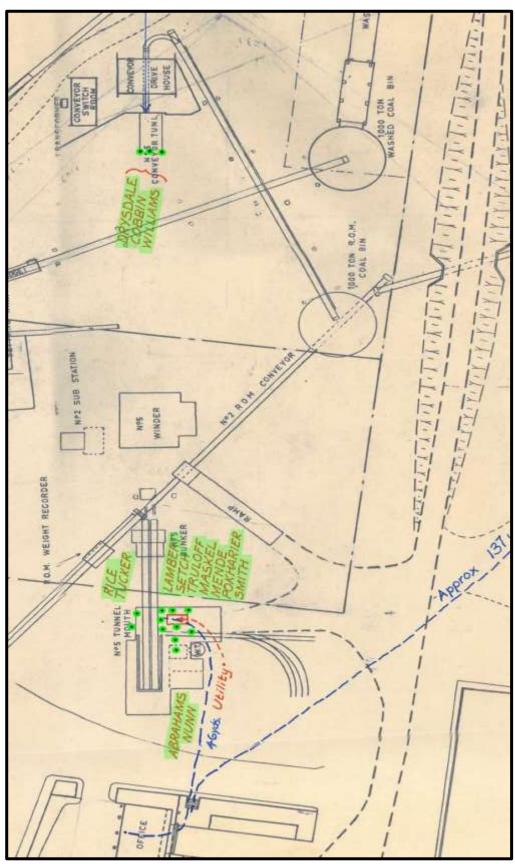
Hugh Taylor (President, Ipswich Historical Society)

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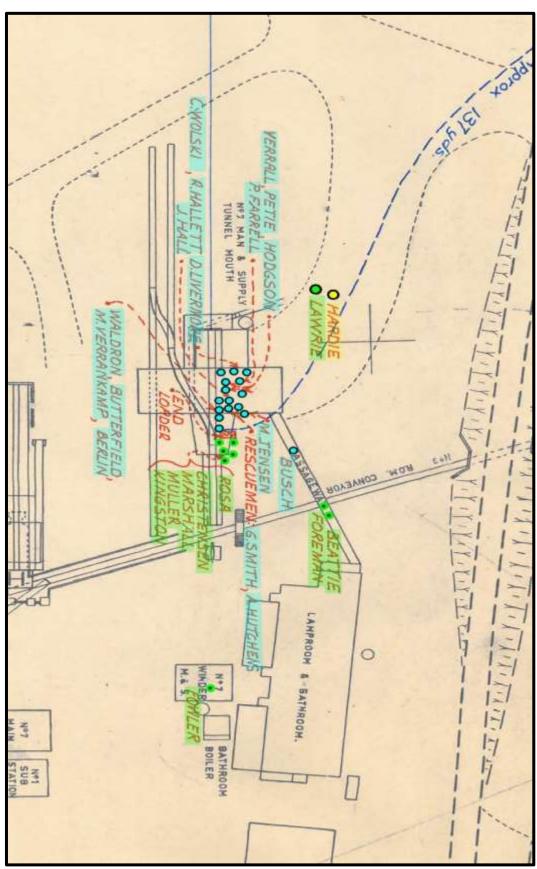
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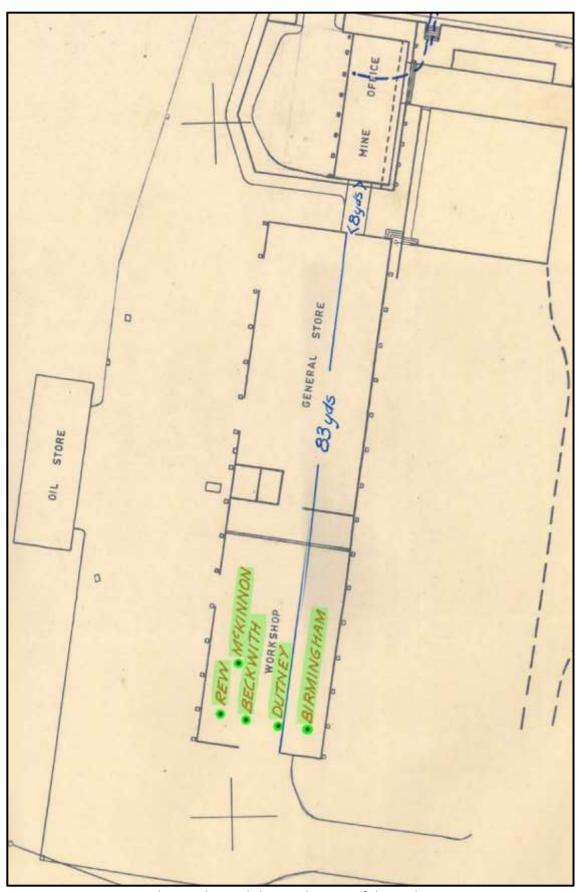
Memorials – Ipswich and Surrounds



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