

Mt. Kembla Mine Disaster Centenary.

Who was Daniel Gallagher.

by Carol Herben.

Around 2-00pm on 31 July, 2002 many people from Mt Kembla, Kembla Heights, visitors and descendants will commemorate the centenary of Mt Kembla Mine Disaster which claimed the lives of 96 men and boys. The victims consisted of miners, wheelers, an Under Manager, a Deputy and rescuers.

Mt Kembla Village and Kembla Heights were tightly knit communities. On that fateful day, a century ago, the Mt Kembla Mine Disaster affected every person in the two communities. Most of the victims were in some way related to every household. Like the lives of the Purcell and Dunning families, the Stafford, James, Walker and Brasher's as well as the Morrison and McMurray's all were in some way related to the others even if only by marriage. Amongst the miners was a strong Lithgow district connection through Annesley, Meurant, Best and Russell.

The deceased were buried in Windy Gully Cemetery, Mt Kembla Anglican Churchyard and Wollongong General Cemetery. Other burials took place in Helensburgh, West Dapto and Bowenfels in the Lithgow District.

Windy Gully Cemetery is unique as it was the site set aside by the Mt Kembla Colliery for the victims. There was some controversy that the site was too close to established dwellings. The cemetery was established for all denominations, but the Roman Catholic Church declined the offer of burying their deceased in Windy Gully as the land was not consecrated. Instead they chose to bury them either in Wollongong or West Dapto cemeteries.

When you first glance at the long list of names engraved on the monument now standing proudly in the churchyard of the "Soldiers and Miners Memorial Church" you will notice the repetition of surnames. Amongst these names are Daniel, Edward, and Michael Gallagher. The Gallagher brothers Edward and Michael were brought to Australia in 1886 by their uncle Peter Carr of Cordeaux River. The brothers worked on the farm of the Carr family until they recompensed them for the cost of the passage. The Gallagher brothers then sought work in Mt Kembla Colliery. Michael Gallagher was injured in the mine on 31 May 1892 when a burst of gas was ignited by a naked flame severely burning him on the back. Edward Gallagher married Annie Maria Moran in 1896 and they had 4 children Rosanna (1897-1978), Kate (1898-), Edward (1900-1979) and Clement (1902-1903). Clement, their last child was born two days before the disaster and lived for a matter of months before he passed away early in 1903. His brother, Michael, never married.

On 2 August 1902 the death toll from the colliery listed Edward and Daniel Gallagher. The Illawarra Mercury of the 2 August clearly stated that Mick Gallagher was rescued from the mine, although it was not until the 6 August that Michael Gallagher's name was listed as being one of the miners killed in the explosion.

By the time the inquests into the miners deaths were held during August and September 1902 the rescuers who gave evidence where the bodies or injured miners were found one must question where the Gallaghers were found.

According to the evidence of John Morrison, Daniel and Edward Gallagher were located in the Main Tunnel Rope Road, both deceased. Although the evidence of Matthew Frost claims that Michael Gallagher's body was located in No 6 Right Tunnel with Dixon, Meurant, Peace, R Walker, Healey, Filby, Muir and Hunt (Allen) nearby.

Then there was the evidence of Peter Muir who stated that Michael Gallagher was taken from the mine alive.

Other witnesses stated that they placed a Gallagher and a Moran at No 36 coal face, and a Gallagher and a Ramsay at No 33 coal face.

This would have totalled 5 Gallaghers employed in the colliery on that fateful day. The 1901 electoral roll has Edward and Michael Gallagher living in Kembla and both were employed as miners.

The *Mt Kembla Disaster* by S. Piggins & H Lee on page 294 lists Michael Gallagher, Edward Gallaher and Daniel Gallaher, all of the Roman Catholic faith, buried by Undertaker Laurence Carr and interred at Wollongong, with the funeral performed by Father J J Byrne. Laurence Carr, son of the late Peter Carr and cousin to Edward and Michael Gallagher, only performed the funerals for Edward and Michael.

The Roman Catholic Church records that Masses were held for Edward and Michael Gallagher. Both are buried in a double grave in the Wollongong General Cemetery Roman Catholic section with a headstone that mentions that Annie Maria, Edward's wife, and their son, Clement are also buried there.

So what happened to Daniel Gallagher who was not listed on the 1901 Electoral Roll? Could he have arrived in the area after the 1901 electoral role was finalised? That's quite possible. However, why is there no grave allocation in Wollongong General Cemetery Roman Catholic section besides the two graves for Edward and Michael?

What other evidence was there regarding the Gallaghers.

Matthew Frost stated at the inquest that Michael Gallagher was found with the victims Dixon, Meurant, Peace, Walker, Healey, Filby, Muir and Hunt. John Morrison stated that he found Edward and Daniel Gallagher dead near the two Lanes (father and son), both of whom were taken from the mine alive and died in

Albert Memorial Hospital some days later, and victims Frank Stewart, Bray, Blackett, Hitchens and Hughes.

Considering the two Gallaghers who were supposed to have died in No 33 and No 36 coal face along with miners Moran and Ramsay there was no mention of either Moran or Ramsay as victims of the disaster. So one must question the evidence from the resuers when no miners named Moran or Ramsay died how can we be sure that John Morrison was correct when he claimed to have come across the body of Daniel Gallagher which, he stated, was found in the main tunnel rope road. Daniel Gallagher was reported deceased and his body removed from the mine. I believe the final clue to the existence or not of Daniel Gallagher was that no death certificate or registration of death was ever issued for him. That is why there was no Roman Catholic funeral service or grave allocation for him. Does this mean that the final death toll for the disaster only reached 95 men and boys? Why hasn't anybody posed the question over the last 100 years WHO WAS DANIEL GALLAGHER? I believe that Dan or Daniel Gallagher was the nickname of Michael Gallagher, both were listed as bachelors with ages quoted as 45 and 50 years, leaving only the cousin Laurence Carr to carry out the funeral arrangements which he did for Edward and Michael Gallagher.

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Mt Kembla Mine Disaster Exhibition at Wollongong City Gallery

A special exhibition of items relating to Mt Kembla Mine Disaster will be officially opened on 26 July and will run until early October. Many exhibits have been supplied by our Society. Other items have been loaned by descendants from those involved in the disaster. Our board member, Glen Barkley with the assistance of the Mt Kembla Mine Disaster Centenary Commemoration Committee was reponsible for organising this special exhibition of the Centenary of the Mt Kembla Mine Disaster.