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THE ALUM

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Tragedy on the Mountain

There have been a number of accidents on the Alum Mountain in Bulahdelah. This article will explore a tragic mining accident in 1909 through newspaper reports of the day and those that followed. A tunnel collapsed in the mine on Friday 13 August 1909 and two miners were killed and others injured. News of the accident was sent by telegram. Charles Keel was entombed and died in the mine. Stephen Crockford was brought out of the mine with terrible injuries but died a short time later. Patrick Kelly survived and was taken to Dungog Hospital with injuries.

A coronial inquest was held quickly by the area's coroner, Mr C. McIntyre, with Mr C. V. Collins as solicitor for the deceased and the injured men. Mr Collins recommended that expert evidence should be sourced from the Mines Department. The jury viewed the scene of the accident.

The inquest took a break to review the evidence from the Mines Department. When they reconvened Mr A. G. F. James represented the Alum Company, the mine owner, and Mr Milne represented the Mines Department. A miner, William Godwin, working in the tunnel at the time of the accident, was able to escape but did see that Mr Keel was buried. The report of the inquest in *The Sydney Morning Herald* indicated that Godwin said that Crockford and Kelly had commented to him about the tunnel being unsafe but Godwin did not report this to management.

At the inquest, Charles Gehihaar said that he was in charge of the gang in the tunnel on the day of the accident but was not in the tunnel at the time of the accident as he was checking the tram line of the mine. The report continued that they had fired three shots that day and were working toward their goal of obtaining 70 tonne per week of good stone.

The general manager of the Alum Company, Mr J. Edwards, stated that he had told the mine manager to take the miners out of the tunnel due to his safety concerns after an inspection of the top of the workings and the tunnel.

Mr D. Milne, Inspector of Mines, provided a detailed response to the accident. Importantly, he concluded that the accident might have



Miners on Mt Alum (accessed on www.georgeboylewhite.com/boyleandsarah/ on 10 June 2016)

been prevented if the 'work of the quarry had been more skilfully carried out'.

The inquest's verdict was recorded as 'accidental death' and it was recommended that 'these and all similar quarries should be placed under Government supervision'. Such tragedy in a risky occupation.

If you have a story to tell about Bulahdelah's past, please contact Sharon Burke through R & R Bulahdelah.

Sharon Burke © 2016

'Alum Mountain Fatality', *The Maitland Daily Mercury*, 14/8/1909, p. 4, accessed on www.trove.nla.gov.au

'Alum Mountain Fatalities', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 16/8/1909, p. 7, accessed on www.trove.nla.gov.au

'Alum Tunnel Disaster', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 24/8/1909, p. 10, accessed on www.trove.nla.gov.au

'Alum Mountain Fatality', *Dungog Chronicle*, 27/8/1909, p. 2, accessed on www.trove.nla.gov.au

Response to our previous article – In 'Bulahdelah: the Early Days', we left out some of our sources and for this I apologise. The Bulahdelah Historical Society noted some errors in our article as their records are different to the memories of Mr C. McGregor in a newspaper report that was relied on as a source but not quoted. The report was 'Bulahdelah' By C. McGregor in *The Lockhart Review and Oaklands Advertiser* dated 30 March 1954 (p. 6) and this was accessed on www.trove.nla.gov.au – Sharon Burke