



Submission to EIS

From Dorothea Mackellar Memorial Society regarding Vickery South mining extension.

The Dorothea Mackellar Memorial Society was formed 34 years ago to foster and promote children's poetry and to honour and protect the legacy of Australia's best known female poet, Dorothea Mackellar.

The society is based in Gunnedah where the Mackellar family owned property for more than 30 years.

Dorothea was a frequent visitor to the family property, "Kurrumbede", acquired by her father Sir Charles Mackellar in 1906. They added the block known as "The Rampadells" approximately three years later. Both have historic houses on them which are in close proximity to the proposed open cut mine.

The Mackellars oversaw the construction of the Kurrumbede homestead from local materials. Despite alterations over the last century, it remains largely as it was - of handsome proportions with wide flagstone verandahs and high ceilings. It faces south west looking across to the Namoi River and floodplain and sits amid established gardens in which Dorothea took great pleasure. In a 1910 diary entry, she writes that the "Kurrumbede" garden is "looking splendid." The following year she writes of finding "the gardens a dream."

The homestead and surrounding outbuildings most definitely have potential state heritage significance because of their association with the Mackellar name. Other Mackellar residences "Torryburn", another Mackellar rural holding near Gresford and "Tarrangaua" built for her retirement on Pittwater, north of Sydney, already have heritage listings. Indeed, the residences of much lesser literary figures are heritage listed.

While the EIS states the homestead and most outbuildings will remain despite the close proximity of the mine and rail link, the society harbours grave concerns that the house will suffer damage and degradation from blasting and dust.

The society is also concerned that the landscape surrounding the house and its history will be irrevocably changed with an open cut mine nearby.

One outbuilding scheduled for destruction was once the living quarters for swimming legend Andrew "Boy" Charlton who worked on "Kurrumbede" for more than four years. (see attached pic)

A schoolfriend of Malcolm Mackellar, city-raised Charlton was a jackaroo after his success in the 1924 Paris Olympics and used the permanent waterhole in the Namoi River as a training pool. He competed in a carnival in the river near Gunnedah's Cohen's Bridge amid great excitement. This is well documented in local archives.

After the purchase of "Kurrumbede" by Coalworks in 2010, the wooden hut was offered to the local historical society but no further action was taken.

A report by environmental historian Dr Sue Rosen, 'Dorothea Mackellar, "My Country", her links to Kurrumbede and its Influence on her Writing' finds that Dorothea's books and diaries provide hard evidence of her links to the property, particularly after 1910. The report was commissioned by Coalworks. (see attached)

The papers of Dorothea and the Mackellar family are held in the NSW State Library and lend further weight to the heavy body of evidence linking the literary legend to "Kurrumbede".

Her most productive literary years as a writer coincided with her association with "Kurrumbede".

Whitehaven has been a generous and longstanding sponsor of the annual Dorothea Mackellar Poetry Awards and the society welcomes discussions with the company on the preservation of Kurrumbede at all costs.

The society has hosted hundreds of visitors over the years and their first request is invariably to visit "Kurrumbede". Its historical and literary significance is widely known and should be recognised.

Access to the homestead and its outbuildings is important for there to be community involvement and use. This may be difficult given the proximity of the industrial infrastructure that is planned but that should not preclude serious consideration of how such regular access could be facilitated now.

The society is custodian to numerous objects of memorabilia related to Dorothea and the Mackellar family. Kurrumbede would be a fitting display area for these if it is properly preserved and recognised.

The Dorothea Mackellar Memorial Society would be willing to participate in this process if it offers an opportunity to achieve a positive outcome for this community, this state and this nation. The benefits would also flow to the owner Whitehaven Coal by retaining and providing access to an iconic building with significant literary links for this nation.

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