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This book is dedicated in threefold:

- To all the residents of the Cessnock Local Government Area who were affected by the floods in June 2007.
- To the many who assisted others in crisis situations during the storm.
- To the people who took the time to share their stories.

Hunter Community Recovery Fund

After the devastating effects of the June 2007 floods, the NSW State and Commonwealth Governments announced the establishment of two $500,000 Community Recovery Funds for each of the Hunter and Central Coast areas. These funds were established to assist communities recover from the effects of the 2007 June long weekend storms.

Funds for the program were jointly provided by the Commonwealth and NSW State Governments, with the Hunter funds being administered by Hunter Councils Inc. Community groups were invited to apply to fund projects that supported affected communities of the Hunter to recover from the personal, social, economic, and structural impacts of the storms. Projects had to aim to provide coordinated support for community recovery, community development and sustainable community capacity building for the future.

There were three other initiatives in the Cessnock Local Government Area from the communities of Greta/Branxton, Abermain/Weston and Wollombi that were successful in obtaining funding.
Summary of Events

Provided by Bureau of Meteorology

The first of the June 2007 East Coast Lows (ECL) occurred over Friday 8 and Saturday 9 June. The event caused widespread damage in the coastal parts of the Hunter, Central Coast and Sydney Metropolitan areas, resulting from sustained heavy rain, strong winds and large ocean waves and swell. There were nine fatalities associated with the storm and nearly 20,000 calls for assistance made to the State Emergency Service.

The Queen’s Birthday ECL developed in a pre-existing trough of low pressure over the northern Tasman Sea. This trough was directing a humid northeast to southeast air stream across northeast NSW and there was a weak low analysed just off the coast near Coffs Harbour on Thursday morning. The low moved south along the NSW coast, before moving out into the Tasman Sea on Monday 11 June 2007.

Several factors influenced the development of this low including:

- During Friday and Saturday, a high pressure system moved through Bass Strait from the Bight and strengthened over the southern Tasman deepening the humid easterly flow over eastern NSW.
- An upper cold pool and associated north westerly jet stream moved across the north of the state reaching the coast on Friday.
- There were warmer than average (about 1 degree) sea surface temperatures off the coast with the strongest east to west gradient directly offshore from Newcastle.

On Thursday night the low deepened to 1009hPa just north of Newcastle. Gale force south easterly winds started about midnight and continued for 12 hours. It was during this period that the Pasha Bulker ran aground at Nobby’s Beach. Around noon on Friday the low near the coast weakened and the winds eased, but from 3.30pm until 7.30pm a persistent line of thunderstorms over Newcastle and northern parts of Lake Macquarie caused flash flooding.

A second small-scale low formed late on Friday evening and crossed the coast right over Newcastle in the early hours of Saturday morning, again bringing gale to storm force winds and the strongest observed wind gusts (135 km/h at Norah Head and 124 km/h at Newcastle). The lowest pressure officially recorded was 994hPa at Williamtown and the minimum central pressure of the low was estimated to be 990 hPa. The record wave height recorded at Sydney Waverider Buoy of 14.13m at 2am Saturday was the highest recorded since records began in 1992. The low weakened as it moved inland, but a line of heavy showers and thunderstorms moved to the south bringing heavy rain along the Central Coast before weakening over the northern suburbs of Sydney during Saturday morning.
Most of the rainfall from this event fell during Friday 8 June in the Hunter and Metropolitan Districts. However, significant falls were received throughout the period 6 – 10 June. The ensuing Hunter flood was the largest since 1971 at the major cities of Singleton and Maitland. At Maitland, where the peak occurred on 11 June, the Bureau’s flood warnings acted as a trigger for the SES to evacuate some 4,000 people from the CBD and Lorn as a precautionary measure in case the levees overtopped or failed.

**Rainfall from 9am 6 June to 9am 10 June**

<table>
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<th>Stn No.</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Thur 7-Jun</th>
<th>Fri 8-Jun</th>
<th>Sat 9-Jun</th>
<th>Sun 10-Jun</th>
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<tr>
<td>061242</td>
<td>Cessnock (Nulkaba Station)</td>
<td>10.4mm</td>
<td>56.6mm</td>
<td>178mm</td>
<td>11mm</td>
<td>256mm</td>
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State Emergency Services Storm Response

Extract by Trevor Milgate OAM Local Controller Cessnock SES

This event was so sudden and torrential rain from a low depression off the east coast of NSW, commonly called a Storm Bolt, and was similar to the conditions of the 1970 storm.

Managing this situation was very difficult and many calls for assistance went unaccounted for because of reporting system failures due to no power, lightning strikes, phone lines out and water situations.

Many reports of localised flooding mainly in the Abermain, Weston, South Cessnock and Wollombi areas were received and on top of this were the road closures throughout the LGA.

The Cessnock SES received a total of 359 requests for assistance (RFA) between Friday 8th June and Saturday 30th June 2007. Mainly these were for property damage, trees down or uprooted, submerged vehicles stranded in storm water, power lines down.

Evaluation operations were carried out in South Cessnock from Oliver St, Sixth St, Edgeworth St and Railway St, one elderly crippled lady had to be carried out through the storm water, approximately 50 people were evacuated, some went to their relatives, others were placed in East Cessnock Bowling Club, then arrangements were made to place them into a motel for the night. The corner of Vincent St and Aberdare Rd was flooded. The Wollombi area was completely cut off, even though we received calls from people stranded in their homes, we were unable to respond as the road was impassable at Millfield. In Weston around Fourth and Swanson Sts, arrangements were put in place for a flood boat to rescue 2 families from their 2 story homes to safety. Then on Sunday 10th June at Branxton requests for assistance due to the New England Highway being cut by flood water, reports from people from the Elderslie areas were being evacuated to Branxton. With the assistance of the RFS and DoCS we established a staging area at the car park and evacuation centres at the Church hall and golf club. Additional assistance from Rural Fire Service, Volunteer Rescue Association, Out Of Area Assistance State Emergency Service teams, Police and NSW Fire Brigade and the general public sand bagging operation was conducted to the Miller Park Bowling Club premises, Anvil Creek kept rising with 2m of water over the highway. SES Hunter Region HQ was concerned with the Hunter River at Maitland so many crew were sent to Maitland to assist.

NSW Premier declared this a Natural Disaster.

OOAA SES teams assisted with storm calls as calls were still being received all day on the Saturday and Sunday.
AIR LIFTS - The Westpac Helicopter was requested to Wollombi for a medical situation and with evacuations in the Wollombi areas, another helicopter was used to transfer food supplies to stranded families in the Wollombi valley.

SUPPLIES - Tarpaulins, sand bags, gloves etc. were given out for residents in Abermain, Branxton, Weston and to the general public to assist their needs as well as supplying portable lighting towers.

Testers Hollow (provided by Trevor Milgate OAM Local Controller Cessnock SES)

A devastated car (provided by Trevor Milgate OAM Local Controller Cessnock SES)
I remember well the June long weekend storm. It started on the Friday morning when my Mum and Dad left to travel to Yamba to compete at a swimming carnival. They had organised for my brother Scott to come over and feed me each evening they were away. I like Scott a lot so at least I was looking forward to his visits.

It was raining when Mum and Dad left so I thought I'd just curl up in my bed which was made up in the laundry at the back of the house. By the time Scott arrived in the late afternoon, the rain had got a lot heavier, so after he left I went back to bed.

After dark, the storm really became severe, with howling winds accompanying the torrential rain and rolling thunder. I was getting worried and wished Mum and Dad would hurry back and let me come inside where it would be warm and dry.

Late at night I was awakened from my sleep when I noticed that my bed was becoming wet. I peered into the darkness and all I could see was water all around me. My bed started to float away, so I looked for somewhere to keep dry. I decided to climb onto the toilet seat, but this was soon also covered with water.

Things were really starting to get serious. Everywhere I looked there was water. Howling wind and driving rain stopped me from going outside, but even if I had there would have been nowhere to go as my yard is surrounded by a high fence that would have made it impossible to escape.

What was I to do?? I was swimming around in circles and really starting to get tired and very, very cold. I knew that if I couldn’t get out of the water, it would be the end of me.

I headed for the back door, where I stood on my back legs and scratched at the glass, hoping that someone would hear and come to rescue me. No such luck!! Then, out of the corner of my eye, I spotted Dad’s tool cupboard and thought if I could just scramble onto the top of it, I might be safe.

So I swam over the cupboard and climbed on. From this position I could reach the window so I began to scratch on it in the hope that I could get inside, but to my dismay when I looked through the glass I could see that there was as much water inside as there was where I was standing. I did not know what to do so I decided to just settle down and await whatever fate had in store.

I closed my eyes and waited. Suddenly, I heard Scott’s voice calling “Sandie, Sandie thank heavens you’re safe” I looked around, the water was gone, there was mud everywhere, but I had survived.
June 2007

By Elsie Orr

Looking back to the long weekend in June of last year, when many people’s lives were changed by the results of the terrible floods throughout New South Wales on Friday night the 8th June 2007. Many homes in the Newcastle area and also in the Hunter Valley were very badly damaged because of the flooding. Many of our neighbours and our own family had to leave our homes when the storm water drain, running through South Cessnock could not take all of the water flowing through the area.

Everything happened so quickly that we could not save much, we managed to save some important things, but a lot of things could not be replaced. The State Emergency Service teams were quickly on call, and they were a great help to anyone in need of assistance. We waited at home for as long as we could, but eventually the State Emergency Service people advised us to leave home because the water was waist high. My husband and myself together with our dog left home. We each had an overnight bag plus the dog as we were struggling up Gordon Avenue our son noticed a fire engine heading in our direction so he pulled the driver up and asked if they could take us up to our daughter and son-in-law’s home at Aberdare. There were other people being taken to other places as well. We were taken on board the fire engine and taken to Aberdare. In the mean time our son had remembered that our white cockatoo was in a cage in the backyard. In all the confusion we had forgotten about the bird. By the time Stephen got the bird out the water was almost up to his head. Cocky is very lucky to be alive. The State Emergency people came to our son’s aid and one of their helpers drove Stephen and the Cockatoo up to Aberdare.

We could not move back into our home for a few months, but are back home now. Until people go through this sort of situation, many people do not realise how much it can affect your life. Ever since last June long weekend, we and all the other people who suffered through this terrible ordeal are terrified every time we get heavy rain or bad storms, as we worry that this could happen again.

I only hope that Cessnock City Council will hurry up and start to do something for all those people who are continually worrying about this situation. We, the people of South Cessnock, Abermain, Weston and Kurri Kurri desperately need your help to stop this happening again.
The Spirit of Southy

By Phil Baird

On a night that was dark and stormy
With wind no man could stand
Accompanied by torrential rain
It swept across the land
The little creek that was supposed
To handle all the water,
Was no match for Mother Nature
As she carried out her slaughter
The banks of the creek were broken
Because the water had nowhere to go
So it backed up into streets and homes
And anywhere it could flow
With all the lightening and thunder
That filled the sky that night
The little town of Southy
Went down without a fight
The water rose so quickly
All that Southy could do
Was pray to God and wait to see
What damage it would do
Entire homes were ruined
And precious items lost
The mud and water took their toll
And multiplied the cost
But once the storm was over
And all the water gone
Neighbour sought out neighbour
Providing help for everyone
From out of all this confusion
Don’t let there be any delusion
Southy people are tough and proud
A flood won’t see their spirit bowed

The following photos have been provided by Phil Baird
June Long Weekend
Flood Disaster – 2007

By Anonymous

My recollection of the disastrous floods which devastated many areas of the Hunter in June 2007 began with media reports announcing a bulk carrier was in difficulty off the coast of Newcastle. I was not working that day and because of the dreadful weather, I pretty well remained glued to Sky News all day watching the amazing pictures of the unfolding drama and bravery shown by the Westpac Helicopter Crew in appalling weather conditions. The vessel was the Pasha Bulka and will forever in history, be associated with the Hunter floods. As I laid back in my peaceful and safe home little did I know that I too, would be caught up in this incredible weather event later that evening.

South Cessnock is the home of my parents and brother, and early Friday evening my mother rang to enquire if we were experiencing any problems in view of the horrendous weather conditions. The day had seen extremely strong winds and non-stop rain and weather reports indicated there was no imminent sign of the weather abating. I replied that we were all fine, but upon asking about their situation I detected slight reservation in her voice but she assured they were OK. They live adjacent to a stormwater drain and the sunroom of their home had received flood damage on a previous occasion some years ago. Naturally, I was aware they would be nervous that the relentless rain would cause water levels to once again rise in the drain.

Throughout the evening we exchanged further phone calls and during that time it became alarmingly apparent that conditions at South Cessnock were rapidly deteriorating. My shiftworker husband had left for work and my daughter had just returned from a night out when I received the call from mum that they had to leave their home. As I recall, this was somewhere around 11.00 pm. I told Mum "I'll come over straight away to get you." Mum said it would be difficult to reach them as the water was too deep. We agree they will walk to the end of their street and I'll pick them up at Vincent Street. There was no time to get dressed so I set off in the freezing weather in my flimsy satin pj's intent on retrieving them. I told my daughter to remain at home in case there was a problem.

I reach Quarrybolong Street to turn left to "Southy" but find the road closed and underwater. No problems I tell myself, I can continue along Aberdare Road. I become alarmed when I reach the bridge at the end of Aberdare Road and find the road awash with water. Water can be seen throughout the area and the entrances to the Royal Oak Hotel are awash. I desperately need to turn left onto Vincent Street to collect my dear parents, both of whom are aged in their seventies, and my brother. A couple of men parked in a big Toyota Landcruiser at the entrance to the bridge warn me not to go through - it is just too deep.

I am literally shaking like jelly as I gingerly reverse my Ford sedan and in despair head up Cumberland Street, turn left, left again and I’m on Vincent Street. Still shaking uncontrollably (was it fear or the cold, I’m not sure) I reach "Pedens" Pub and am stopped by a SES volunteer. Tell him my situation, that I HAVE
to get to Southy to pick up my family. Sorry, no way lady he basically tells me, he cannot let me go through.

Feeling defeated, desperately alone and immense fear for the welfare of my family I head back home and telephone my sister. We talk about our dilemma and try to reassure ourselves that our practical and capable parents and brother will stay strong and somehow work through their predicament. We simply can’t get through to help them. In desperation, I ring the local police who tell me roads are blocked but emergency personnel are trying to get to the area.

Meanwhile back at Southy, Mum, Dad, my Brother and their pet dog are wading out of their house awash with flood rain contaminated by raw sewage. As they go down the front steps they find themselves in chest deep water. Carrying their beloved dog and their suitcases they head off up the street bound for freedom to somewhere safe and dry. It doesn’t take too long before my brother says it is futile and they’ll have to head back. Mum and Dad are exhausted - they have already spent hours lifting furniture and household goods off the ground to higher levels in case water entered the house.

A stroke of luck arrives in the form of a Cessnock Fire Brigade vehicle. My brother waves them over and asks them to take Mum and Dad up to my house. He says he’ll secure everything at the house and will join up with them later.

Later in the night or was it early hours of Saturday morning, I see flashing lights at the front of my home. The wonderful men from the Cessnock Fire Brigade have safely delivered Mum and Dad and their dog to my house. They are chilled to the bone, physically worn out, thankful for their rescue, sad, euphoric but are concerned for their home - so many emotions it’s all too much at their age. Cups of tea and warm clothes help a little.

The freezing conditions they encountered that night will remain with them for weeks as they all battle constant colds and vague feelings of “unwellness”.

Back at Southy, my brother, in company with their very talkative pet cockatoo, has somehow got a ride to my home with other emergency personnel. I drive my brother a couple of streets away to our sister’s home where the vocal cockatoo will be caged.

The dog is also transported the next day where he will also be pampered by my pet loving sister.

Dry warm clothes are exchanged for sopping wet versions, beds made up and eventually we all settle down. Our thoughts are still with the beloved family home at Southy and the still ever present bucketing rain and strong winds ensures not much sleep is had.

Next day we all drive over to the house and it is a heartbreaking sight. Furniture and curtains drenched, the dreadful smell permeates the air. So much loss of personal and treasured items and you don’t know where to begin to clean the mess up. Furniture and household goods line the street. The street looks so sad and lifeless in the ensuing weeks.

The insurance process commences and due to the severity of this storm event in the Hunter, providers are inundated and the insurance process is slow. My family have lost most of their possessions and building work will be required to make good their once pristine home.

After living in a standard size bedroom at my house with all their worldly possessions, Mum and Dad return to their normal lives at around 10 weeks post flood. Meanwhile, my brother trades in the sofa bed
at my house for his brand new bedroom suite in his room back at home. The home now looks fresh and clean - a new start. The pets are also returned to their familiar territory.

In time, life around South Cessnock gradually returns to normal and the place slowly gains back its pride. The events of the June long weekend flood will go down in history as one of our area’s worst natural disasters and devastatingly, several people lost their lives that weekend. Our family lives have now returned to normal - we were some of the lucky ones.

Kitchener Poppethead Park

By Ken Victor

Not only were buildings bruised and damaged on the night of the June 2007 storm but our parks were also under attack. One such park was the Kitchener Poppethead Park.

The park contains the historic Poppethead Site. In its early years the site was home to the mining industry with the colliery operational in 1917. Mining with its reliance on water, required however there first be a dam built which is thought to have been dug around 1914.

The Poppethead structure, defined as being “like a winch” served two purposes for the coal mine. The first being B Shaft which provided air ventilation to the miners and the second being A Shaft which was used to haul coal and machinery. B Shaft is still in existence today while A Shaft has been demolished. Those who worked at the site say that it was common for there to be fourteen to sixteen people transported down to the mine in an enclosed cage some 1,230 feet below ground. In 1928 the winder at Poppethead was said to be the biggest in the Southern Hemisphere.

The actual mine buildings were destroyed in the 1968 bush fires. However the Poppethead Structure and the dam remain today making the park a pleasant place for people to enjoy. However the park sustained damage the night of the June 2007 storm and one year on the dam continues to be swollen. For example, the popular walk around the historic Poppethead waterway continues to be flooded. Visitors to the park have been unable to walk around the entire circuit of the track with foot bridges under water making the path inaccessible.

The photographs on the following pages were taken June 2008, one year after the flood and reflects the impact of the disaster. It is believed that over time the track will become accessible again.

However it could be some time as the dam level has gone down – but only slowly.
The Kitchener Poppethead Structure as it is today after being restored (provided by Ken Victor)
Ken Victor at the Kitchener Poppethead Jetty in June 2007 (provided by Ken Victor)

The Kitchener Poppethead Path in June 2007 (provided by Ken Victor)

Flooding in June 2007
Where the Waters Meet

By Jamie Gilmore

In the heart of the Hunter Valley, residents in the sleepy village of Wollombi, on the outskirts of the City of Cessnock, awoke on Saturday morning to a town under siege. Wollombi is an aboriginal word meaning ‘Where the waters meet’, but no one expected them to meet quite so violently as they did on what has come to be known in Australia as Black Friday.

The famous Wollombi Tavern that rests almost 20 meters above the normal river line was inundated by rising floodwaters in the early hours of Saturday morning. The muddy river surged straight through the historic hotel, levelling off near the top of the ancient timber bar, which on any other Saturday, would be lined with hundreds of tourists.

There have been numerous floods throughout the Wollombi district over the past 100 years, but none of the locals can remember anything of this magnitude.

Stranded without power or food supplies, properties cut-off from the township have been using their well honed ingenuity from years of working the land to find novel ways of getting the essentials.

At the back of the Tavern, they’ve rigged a pulley system constructed from electric fence tape, ferrying gas bottles, food and cartons of beer across by dinghy and surfboard, to those families stranded on the other side.

For many in the district who have battled the scourge of drought over the past five years, the thought of starting over is almost too much. With waters breaking the banks at every turn of the river overnight, many have lost entire crops and livestock. Cows and sheep trapped against fence lines were given no avenue for escape and the bloated bodies of the stock continue to emerge from the muddy depths as the waters subside.

The local tennis courts were destroyed as the flood coursed across from both sides of the river that winds its way around the centre of the town. Mopping up will take months and with tourist trade being one of the main income streams for the town, the financial implications will likely to be felt well into the New Year.

As the blue skies broke through on Sunday, residents began the slow process of mending fences, burying livestock and returning their homes to liveable conditions. Lucky they breed them tough here in the bush. They need to be to cope with such adversity.
Provided by Jamie Gilmore

Provided By John L. Coombes Photography

Flooding in June 2007
Articles from the Cessnock Advertiser courtesy of Bruce Wilson

City fire brigade member honoured for their work

June flood emergency work recalled

NEW Fire Brigades (NSWFB) Zone Commander Chief Superintendent Jim Smith paid tribute to firefighters and officers from Cessnock, Paxton, Bellbird and Kurri who were presented with State Medallion for their outstanding efforts during the Hunter and Central Coast State Emergency in the Queen's Birthday long weekend in June last year.

Chief Superintendent Smith praised those involved for their commitment and contribution to the multi-agency response and recovery operation when making the presentations at Cessnock Fire Station recently.

“Firefighters from the Cessnock LGA worked with the SES and other emergency services at a range of incidents in extremely adverse conditions,” Superintendent Smith said.

“Firefighters assisted with extensive search and rescue operations in the area, responded to localised flooding, trees and wind damage as well as attending to numerous Triple Zero (000) calls to day-to-day emergencies.

“Crews worked for several days in an environment that tested their physical and mental strength as well as every aspect of their training, homework and pre-incident planning,” he said.

“There was a real sense of team and community spirit as firefighters and emergency service agencies worked together to help the local community deal with this devastating natural disaster.

“The dedication and support of those firefighters and personnel was exceptional. They are indeed a vital asset to the community and the NSWFB,” Chief Superintendent Smith said.

More than 275 fire crews from the Hunter, Central Coast, Sydney, and as far as Coffs Harbour, Port Stephens and Tamworth responded to the natural disaster...
Return after storm damage

Samaritans Information and Neighbourhood Centre (SINC) has undergone a facelift after suffering extensive damage during the June long weekend storms.

The Cessnock office at 206 Vincent Street, was closed due to water damage but has recently been repainted and fitted out with new carpet and furniture.

SINC offers information and support. It is a vital community link for emergency assistance and offers centre-based activities, with 15 visiting services using the centre on a regular basis.

SINC supports groups like GAPS (Grandparents as Parents), Click and Squiz Internet Cafe, Cessnock Neighbourhood Tool Library, The Cottage at East Cessnock, Community Drug Action Team (CDAT), Great Strides Community Pride Group and Cessnock Anti Violence Network.

Services currently operating from the Centre include:

- Job Placement, Employment and Training (JPET), assisting young people who are experiencing homelessness or are at risk of homelessness with accommodation, juvenile justice issues, employment, education and training.

Coalfields Healthy Heartbeat, aiming to reduce the incidence of heart disease in the Cessnock area by promoting healthy lifestyles.

Samaritans Emergency Relief (ER), providing practical assistance in the form of utility vouchers, clothing, food parcels, financial advice and referral to other community services.

Kathy Duggan of Coalfields Healthy Heartbeat says the facelift has been positively embraced, not just by staff but by visitors, all of whom comment on how fabulous the premises look.

“We are all very excited by the changes. The revamped premises enables us to provide a better service to the community. It looks great and is very welcoming,” said Ms Duggan.

While other offices around the area had to be demolished, SINC was lucky in that its doors have re-opened and the centre is back supporting the community.

Repairs continue all around the Hunter region and while many organisations may take a while to get re-established, SINC’s re-opening is a fantastic morale booster for the Cessnock community.

Samaritans staff look forward to seeing you in their new offices. The phone number is 4993 3400.

www.cessnock.yourguide.com.au
FLOODED: Licensee John Mulcahy in the Royal Oak Hotel cellar that was turned upside down in the flooding.

Hotel patrons stranded and moved to balcony

Patrons at the Royal Oak Hotel in Vincent Street took shelter on an upstairs balcony after floodwaters rushed through the hotel last Friday evening.

Licensee John Mulcahy said water started flooding the building about 8pm, coming across Vincent Street from the creek that runs behind the former Grace Bros. building in Aberdare Road.

Two people in a car that had stopped at the traffic lights outside had to be helped out of the vehicle and brought inside.

Brand new carpet was destroyed and at the height of the flooding kegs from the cellar and large gas cylinders were floating in the bar. It was estimated that the water level reached about a metre.

Mr. Mulcahy slept on a pool table until about 6am before calling the fire brigade who pumped out the cellar. He was full of praise for the brigade and a group of 15 patrons who helped with the initial clean up job through the day.

A car parked at the rear of the hotel through the car park and ended up near the rear doors to the bistro.

LAKE VINCENT: Floodwater swirls around the front of the Royal Oak Hotel about 8pm last Friday.
CALM: The calm after the storm as a sail boat and canoe move across the tranquil water at The Basin on Mount View Road, Cessnock.

EARTH MOVED: The fast moving floodwater had little regard for the footbridge at Abermain, moving it from its very foundations. Homes in the area under the subway suffered huge damage on Friday night. See page 5.
Abermain flood heroes named Citizens of the Year

Former Abermain Hotel publicans Roger and Emma Neville were named Cessnock City’s Citizens of the Year for their efforts in supporting the community during the June long weekend floods last year.

After the area “under the subway” at Abermain was devastated by the flood, when up to 40 homes were lost, Mr. and Mrs. Neville welcomed those affected by the flood into their hotel, whether it was for a warm bed, a shower, clean clothes or just a shoulder to lean on.

“They gave their time freely, embraced and supported their community through those initial horrific days. Their hotel became the focal point for donations, and they walked door-to-door in order to identify everyone’s needs,” said Mayor of Cessnock, Cr. John Clarence.

Mrs. Neville said that they simply “had to do something” in the event of the flood, as proud members of the Abermain community.

“We appreciate this award more than anything. We would like to dedicate it to the victims, for their courage. The bonds that we have formed will be lasting,” she said.

WELL-DESERVED: Cessnock City’s citizens of the year, Emma and Roger Neville.
Abermain bands together

By Krystal Adams

An Abermain publcan literally had a woman the shirt off his back in one of the multitude of generous acts in the community following Friday's devastating flood.

William Street resident Michelle Thompson sought refuge at the Abermain Hotel after returning home on Saturday morning to find her home severly damaged by the flood.

"Roger asked me what he could do for me and I said, 'I just want a clean shirt.' He was wearing two shirts at the time, so he gave one to me," Mrs Thompson said.

Mrs. Thompson was nearly swept away at Chinaman's Hollow in the early hours of the morning, as her way home from a three-day stay at John Hunter Hospital due to a bout of illness.

Two men, who saved Mrs Thompson, who was clinging to her Ford Falcon for about 10 minutes, and Cessnock resident Jason and Sophia Higgins, who were passing by, took her back to their place for the night and washed and dried her clothes.

"It felt like forever, it's hard to imagine anything as scary," she said.

Mr. Thompson returned to find the whole bottom floor of his house underwater, her daughter's car crushed under a tree, and a site office containing her son's belongings halfway down Swamp Creek. "It's just stuff though - I'm alive, and I figure I can start again," Mrs Thompson said.

Mr. Thompson is one of many residents who were targeted by a group of looters, an act that has outraged the community.

One resident erected a sign saying "Stop, Locals Only" in the hope of preventing any more looting.

"I've had people helping me who I've never seen before in my life," said Elizabeth Street resident Geoff Gibbons, whose entire shed was under water by midnight on Friday.

Mr. Gibbons was lucky that he cleaned his tool shed out three months ago, saying that there would have been about $50,000 worth of tools in there before the cleanout, compared to the $2000 worth that was in there when the flood came.

"I only had about 20 minutes to get out. The first I knew about it was when the power went out, and I went outside to check it and the water was up to the second step," he said.

The residents were particularly grateful for the efforts of Abermain Hotel publican Roger and Sinea Neville, who have given victims a place to eat, sleep and shower, as well as setting up a drop off centre for donations such as clothes, cleaning products and garbage bags, and put together a volunteer rota.

"We are basically trying to help people clean up, so..."
Wollombi district receives full force of flooding

Eight people could have died in the floods that swept through the Wollombi District over the long weekend.

Local resident Carl Hope made this assessment when filing a report on the serious situation residents and visitors found themselves in.

Mr. Hope said three people were travelling in three vehicles and unexpectedly drove into floodwaters and were able to swim back to land. One young man tried to walk through a length of water, didn’t get right through, and was three for beers before he was rescued by his father.

“Another man was driving through a long sheet of water. Got out to kick his foot wobbling for four-wheel drive, and the water rose about 400 mm while he was doing this and the engine stopped.

“T he was in water dingy in brand new five-hour brand. He climbed to the top of the house, and was rescued by boat,” said Mr. Hope.

“Another man woke up to find water in his house, and walked through waist-deep water to get to the ground. A mother and daughter were sleeping in an upstairs room, wake up to find the lower part of the house full of water, used a mobile phone to call the rescue chopper and were lifted to safety,” he said.

Mr. Hope, who is keenly involved in researching history of the district, said it seems that the flood was similar to an event in 1879, which is the largest one properly recorded. In the floodwaters of the Wollombi it is suggested that the high water mark was similar to those seen at Quarrington.

In Wollombi itself the level was about 2.00 metres higher than the 1925 mark. The Pink Club building, at the Kerain Grounds, had water nearly up to the ceiling. The Tennis Club building had water through it and the cupboards were damaged. Two wineries had water through their buildings. Some homes have been isolated for up to four days. A lot of damage was done to roads.

Back roads are not to be high. One woman said the back roads were taken to allow low vehicles to get to high grounds.

Mr. Hope said bridges were cut and out and about while the water was still up, checking glimpses and clearing access by removing fallen trees etc.

Council had their roof gone on the job very quickly, and some roads repair had been done within a week.

Crews from Telstra and Energex Australia worked hard in minimum wages on the water-drenched island.
Tonight's event.

Wollombi planning for big storm recovery two-day event

Planning will underpin the 2009 Carnival and the 2010 Carnival. The 2009 Carnival will be held at the town's the town's historic Wollombi Tavern. The 2010 Carnival will be held at the town's historic Wollombi Tavern.

Join us for a fantastic weekend of community events, including face painting, entertainment and food stalls.

Saturday evening at the Wollombi Tavern. For more information, visit the Wollombi Tavern's Facebook page.
Flooding in June 2007
Major catastrophic flood damage averted

The Queen's Birthday long week-end 2007 will be long remembered by some people in Branxton, & other Hunter region areas, as their lucky escape.

Flood damage in Branxton was mainly confined to Arvill Creek area with the Branxton Inn & other adjoining properties suffering severe flood damage. The bottom end of Spring Street also saw one home totally inundated.

A number of vehicles were also lost to flood waters. But other parts of the Cessnock Local Government Area are in ruins after one of the most destructive floods on record ravaged homes and infrastructure.

Dozens of homes in Abermain and Weston were flooded as creek beds burst their banks.

The devastation was widespread as much of the Hunter Valley experienced unprecedented rainfall over a three day period.

Premier Morris Iemma declared a Natural Disaster for the Hunter and Coastal regions which enables a wide range of assistance for individual residents, business owners and councils (see page 17).

The raging storm left a trail of destruction throughout the Lower Hunter, with emergency workers and volunteers struggling to keep up with the calls for help. (see photos middle spread).

NATURAL DISASTER

Parts of the Cessnock Local Government Area were in ruins after one of the most destructive floods on record ravaged homes and infrastructure.

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The raging storm left a trail of destruction throughout the Hunter, with emergency workers and volunteers struggling to keep up with the calls for help.

Right: This home at Northcote Street Kurri Kurri was one of dozens affected by the deluge. Abermain and Weston were also severely affected.
Queens Birthday Long Week-end Flood 2007

Branxton Sunday 10th June – waiting.

Lamb's Valley Road – awash.

Branxton Sunday 10th June – preparing for the worst.

Branxton Sunday 10th June – waiting.

Branxton Sunday 10th June – Anvil Creek.

Branxton Sunday 10th June – Branxton Inn.
STORIES from the STORM
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COMMEMORATIVE TOUR

Fri May 16  Branxton Community Hall 8pm
Sat May 17  Maitland Park Bowling Club 6pm
Fri May 23  Lake Macquarie Performing Arts Centre 8pm
Sat May 24  Panthers Cardiff 8pm
Sun May 25  Singleton Heights RSC 8pm
Fri May 30  Nelson Bay RSL 8pm
Sat May 31  East Cessnock Bowling Club 8pm
Fri June 6  Civic Playhouse Newcastle 7pm
Sat June 7  Civic Playhouse Newcastle 7pm
Sun June 8  Civic Playhouse Newcastle 7pm

Directed by David Brown
Presented by InCert Theatre Co.
(graduate students of TAFE Music Theatre)
‘Stories from the Storm’ is a verbatim theatre piece which presented theatrical interpretations of interviews and discussions with people and their direct experience with the storm which ripped through Newcastle and the Hunter on Friday 08 June, 2007. This play presented a valuable and meaningful theatrical experience which gave audience members the opportunity to understand the impact of the storm on people’s lives. Through the use of drama, music and song, the play presented a visual and dramatic re-telling of actual experiences of the storm. The play also educated audience members about the way people can be more prepared for storm events and flooding of this nature.

Immediately after the storm, TAFE Certificate IV Music Theatre students conducted interviews with SES rescue volunteers, the Westpac Rescue Helicopter crew and people from around the Hunter who wanted to share their personal stories of heroism and bravery. These stories were developed into a full-length play by TAFE theatre teacher and playwright, David Brown. The 2007 season was performed in September at the Gallipolli Legion Club, Hamilton RSL and Cardiff Panthers. By popular demand the show was presented again at the Civic Playhouse in November. In June 2008, to commemorate the anniversary of the storm, the show was remounted for a regional tour that included performances in Branxton, Maitland, Lake Macquarie, Singleton, Cardiff, Cessnock, Nelson Bay and Newcastle. This production was presented by Incert Theatre, a company of graduates from the TAFE course.

‘Stories from the Storm’ was critically acclaimed for its sensitive and dramatic portrayal of personal ‘storm’ experiences. The play educates people about the size and impact of the storm on property and people. The play enables the viewer to empathise with characters and their stories. Empathy and education are acknowledged as two of the most significant components that need to be developed when addressing social cohesion and community well-being.

The concept for this performance project is based on the production model known as Verbatim theatre. Basically, Verbatim theatre is process-driven play-making based on interviews and discussions with people who have stories they wish to tell about their direct experience with an important event. In this case, the event was the storm which ripped through Newcastle and the Hunter on Friday 08 June, 2007.
Newcastle TAFE Certificate IV Music Theatre students performing Stories from the Storm (photography by Bettina Allen and photo provided by David Brown)
**TAFE Music Theatre Student, Philippa Spicer and cast of Stories from the Storm**
*(photography by Bettina Allen and photo provided by David Brown)*

**TAFE Music Theatre students, (from left to right) Chris Newton, James Campbell, Dayne Evans**
*(photography by Bettina Allen and photo provided by David Brown)*
History of Flooding in the Cessnock Local Government Area

Cessnock City Flooding

By Brian J. Andrews

At 3.50 p.m. on Thursday, June 7, 2007, the Bureau of Meteorology issued a severe warning for the Hunter. A severe low pressure system was located off the New South Wales Mid-North Coast.

By the following day violent storms had wreaked havoc throughout Newcastle and the Hunter Valley. Winds of more than 100 kmh and five-metre high waves hit the Newcastle coast during the day and throughout the night, whilst inland areas of the Hunter faced threats of flooding by the Hunter, Williams and Paterson Rivers and their tributaries.

The severe weather was caused by a low pressure system lying off the coast of Newcastle and a pool of extremely cold air over coastal New South Wales. Conditions were extremely unstable beneath that pool of cold air, especially as the low pressure system deepened on Friday.

By mid-morning on Friday the Cessnock District VRA Rescue Squad had commenced operations resulting from the storm. Trees had been blown down and roofs damaged as a result of the torrential rain and gale force winds.

The Squad responded to its first rescue call at about 1 p.m. that afternoon when a vehicle became trapped by floodwaters on Lovedale Road. Shortly after 2 p.m. a second vehicle became trapped by floodwater at Mulbring. Calls for help continued to come in, but worst was still ahead for them.

At 7 p.m. that evening yet another vehicle got into difficulties at Lovedale, whilst a rescue vehicle was itself trapped by floodwaters on Sandy Creek Road, Quorrobolong, around 9 p.m.

Throughout Friday night torrential rainfall increased in intensity, and many residents located in all quarters of the City of Cessnock spent a sleepless night listening to continual radio updates, if they still had power, and keeping a close watch on all creeks and watercourses.

By 10 p.m. South Cessnock residents were trapped in their houses by rapidly rising floodwaters. Over the next few hours some fifty residents were evacuated mainly from Edgeworth and Railway Streets. In Cessnock patrons of the Royal Oak Hotel, in Vincent Street, took shelter on an upstairs balcony after floodwaters rushed through the hotel that evening.

At about midnight a rescue crew responded to reports of flooding in and around Fourth Street, Weston.
Road blockages due to fallen trees and flooding made it an almost impossible task for rescue teams to travel from Cessnock and Maitland. It took rescuers more than an hour to reach Fourth Street, by which time over 200 metres of the street were under fast flowing and very deep floodwaters.

By Saturday morning most of the floodwaters had receded following the overnight flash-flooding. Residents of both Swanson and Fourth Streets at Weston counted the cost next morning after a night of terror during which seven houses felt the full brunt of the wild weather.

Charles and Elizabeth Streets, Abermain, were also to feel the full force of the tempest.

When it was all over John Clarence, Mayor of Cessnock said he was proud to have been mayor of a City which responded so magnificently to the horrific conditions of the storm.

An elderly resident of Weston, who had lived in the same house all of his life, said the water rose higher than it had ever done since the town was first settled in 1903, making the 2006 flood definitely a one in a hundred year flood.

Rainfall recorded by myself at Kurri Kurri, during the storm showed that 312mm fell throughout the four days commencing June 6th as follows - 9, 60, 230, and 13mm.

Similarly on the night of Thursday, June 16, 1949, fifty-eight years earlier, Cessnock was severely affected by wind and rainfall in an identical manner. The district was already quite saturated when the 1949 storm broke.

The torrential rain during Thursday night found many faulty roofs, and in many cases the walls and furniture were adversely affected.

Creeks and stormwater channels in many parts of Cessnock were unable to cope with the volume of water flowing, in many cases overflowing into adjoining properties.

At East Cessnock, eight homes were flooded and it was the first time since it had been concreted in 1934, that Lavender Creek which runs through the central business area broke its banks.

Water filled up and broke through an open cut colliery into the adjacent Aberdare Extended mine on the Friday morning. Eight men were trapped for a while and escaped only after blasting operations had stopped the flow of water into the mine.

Altogether forty families were forced to leave their Cessnock homes after water swirled through them causing extensive damage.

At the southern end of Vincent Street, near Light’s Corner, where the Performing Arts Centre is located, the water flowed over the road blocking traffic, whilst the western end of Hall Street was also impassable. The basement of Hustlers Store also had its basement flooded.

During the twenty-four hours ending 9 a.m. on Friday, June 17, 1949, 365 points (91mm) of rain was recorded at the Cessnock Post Office, making the downpour very similar, but on a smaller scale, to that of June, 2007, warning us all once again that history always repeats itself.
Early 1940s flood in Vincent Street (provided by Ken Victor)

Charlton Avenue in the June 1949 flood (provided by Ken Victor)
Flooding at Wollombi

By Carl Hoipo

When the township of Wollombi began in the 1830s, the white settlers did not know what level of flooding to expect.

There was a need to build near creeks for the water supply, because roofing was not suitable for collecting rainwater, and there was no piping or tanks available to store it. So the domestic water supply was a bucket of water from the nearest creek.

This led to the earliest part of the town being built from today's Tavern, past the Saleyards where Market Days are held today and on to Cunneens Bridge, all of which we know today to be prone to flooding.

St Michaels Church was originally built near Cunneens Bridge, and St Johns, on a higher site was consecrated in 1849.

A brief reference in the Cessnock Express, Aug. 1907, stated that it was the 50th anniversary of the worst floods to have hit the Hunter Valley since white settlement. The 1857 flood had caused devastation from Murrurundi to Hexam. The winter of 1857 had three floods in June, July and the largest in August.

Below are selections from the diary of Rev. Whinfield who resided in Wollombi in 1857. (Original of the diary Rev. John Frederick Richardson Whinfield held by the State Library of NSW).

Tuesday July 28 - Had a most fearful stormy night, the wind and rain incessant and of a most violent character. Could not rest. Called up James at 3 am to go down and look at the creek which made a loud rushing noise; it was then considerably up. At day break the creeks were both very high and the rain heavy. From previous experience felt convinced that we should have a very high flood. The rain fell in showers most of the day. James took our bedding to E. Medhurst, feeling convinced the bridge would be unpassable. The creeks rose rapidly all day and from noon all the parties in the lower part of the town were moving their goods and chattels to higher ground. The creeks continued rising till 1 pm. Wednesday morning, when it slowly began to recede. My house was dry but the water just reached to it. The church was dry and furniture was stored in it. Every house on the Sugar Loaf creek side was under water from Joseph Bridges near Hawkin’s bridge to the Cockfighter bridge. Plants store was up to the shingles, his stable out of sight. Wards gable house and James Bridge had both 3 or 4 feet or more of water in them. William Smith’s house was completely covered. Clark’s house some height up. Mick Bourne’s the blacksmith was under the water, and others down there, the school house the same. The door entering the Roman Catholic chapel was under water. The Wesleyan school house, Dr. Kirkpatrick’s and the post office. M. Burnes. About 12 feet from Mr. Macdonald’s verandah the two creeks met. Higgins, Elliott’s I. Kennedy’s were filled with people and they were very kind to them. Others were very active in assisting people to move. I put my clothes and some of my books in boxes, to be prepared though I never felt that there was any fear of the water rising so high. Had a sleep on the sofa, when I saw the town in the water at 1 am.

Thursday July 30 - It’s confidently said that the water was never known by any white man to be so high in the Township. The flood of 1831 was not so high, and the flood of last month was nine feet lower.
than this, the flood of 43 from seven foot six to eight feet. The damage towards the Rising Sun is very
great. Crops and fencing washed away. Several persons came from different parts of the district to see
the damage.

Monday Aug. 17 - Fine day. Rode as far as John Milson’s who has lost one of his little children by
drowning. Found the road very boggy. The wind has changed the climate, is now quite cold tonight; no
frost however.

Thursday Aug. 20 - Rain during the night. Some heavy showers, the creek rose a little during the day.
The rain continued during the day, heavy from the south east. Rather a unpromising appearance, so
much rain.

Friday Aug. 21 - Very stormy night indeed. Rain and wind incessant. Was not able to rest, the weather
was so rough. James went down two or three times to the creek and found it rising rapidly. At day break
the creek was nearly bank full, and a fearful current running. Walked into town to warn some of the
people about the impending danger. The morning was ………. My James passed over early in a
……….. though the stream was fearfully rapid ………….. creeks rose very rapidly and the rain
continued. The people from the lower end of the town were all busy moving in the rain and as the creek
rose the people nearer the church also moved. In the afternoon the rise continued and the stream
seemed to be getting stronger. My neighbour moved first before dark and I was induced to move my
books and clothes. The day has been a very sad one to the people here, four fifths of the people obliged
to move, and a heavy rain pouring down. The rise continued until 7 pm and remained stationary till 9
when it began to recede. When at its height, the creek broke over with great violence where my new
house is building and the opposition the house gave made the waves look like breakers. Much of my
fencing here washed away; the yard round the stable and other places. The water was about 20 feet
from the lowest corner of the church, and touched the lowest step to the veranda of the house I live in.
I think it was about 3 foot 6 in the post office and about 10 feet 6 in Plant’s store. The rise in the
Township was about 18 inches above the flood of last month, in the mill near the Township about 13
inches. But the current was very much stronger and much more timber moved down. The Sugar Loaf
creek was backed up by the Wollombi and the stream was not strong.

Saturday Aug. 22 - The night was tolerably fine but the place looked very durry in the morning. The
creeks had lowered several feet, yet some of the houses were but just visible. My garden came in site
pretty early, but all the trees were level with the ground and many of the fences had disappeared.
The day was very hot in the meridian and all people seemed to be employed at looking at the flood, some
of the houses in the higher part of the town were dry today. The road out of the town every way
unpassable, and of course we have no hope of a mail. The ground is very wet, and place is alive with
pigs which now run almost where they will. I got my books back today, but several people will not be
able to get back for some days yet.

Sunday Aug. 23 - …………………………… There was news up from Maitland and it seems there was
every probability of a very high flood there. The long bridge near Millfield has a break in it of some 40
feet or more. The Cockfighter bridge at the lower end of the town is completely gone and banks and etc.
have slipped down so as to make the road in a horrible state.

Monday Aug. 24 - Very nice fine day. Quite a treat. The creeks still go down very slowly; the creek banks
are very much washed so that the creek is now much wider in some places very great slips have taken
place. The houses are all free from water today, but they are in a horrible mess with mud and dirt and all of them much injured. We have lost more fencing than by the last flood, and much of the ground is covered with mud. The ground d is still very wet. Flying account of a lamentable kind came up from Maitland. It is said the water was ten feet higher than the last flood.

Tuesday Aug. 25 - Very fine today. People all busy washing and scrubbing their houses. The mail arrived today but there was no Maitland Mercury published; still water was in their machine rooms. The accounts from Maitland show much loss and suffering and the Sydney papers give an account of a fearful wreck at the Heads. The Dunbar, only one saved and about 130 lost. Many of the unfortunate persons were old colonists returning after visiting England. Very few of the bodies have been recovered. Some mutilated remains have been recovered.

Another large flood in the 1890s lead to two drownings in Branxton. Photos of this flood in Branxton’s main street are held at the Museum at Wollombi.

Photos in the Museum at Wollombi show a substantial flood in the 1920s. I do not know exactly what level this reached, but was similar, perhaps greater, than the 1949 flood.

**The Flood of 1949.**

The flood of the 18th June, 1949, was one of the greatest since white settlement in the Wollombi, and was quite a significant flood in the Lower Hunter, but was considerably exceeded by those of the mid 1950s at Maitland.

The first half of 1949 had been wet, with more than a normal full years rain falling in the first six months, and this was followed with exceptionally heavy rain over the Watagans and the Maitland - Raymond Terrace area around the time of the flood, where 20 inches of rain (approx 500 mm) fell over six days. During this same six days only about 1 inch fell at Scone and Dungog. Bill Crump reported over eleven inches falling overnight on the 18th. In Wollombi there was about four feet of water in St Johns church, and Mulla Villa had about 2 feet of water in its cells.

Some time ago, I stated that the 1949 flood was the highest one to affect Wollombi. Soon after, I was contacted by Muriel Kerr, the wife of Joe Kerr, who were residents of Wollombi from around the 1940s to the 1980s. She rang to let me know that she had been employed at the Wollombi Tavern for a period in the 1940s or 50s, and that at that time there was a water stain through the building about 18 inches above floor level in the upper floor. Verbal reports from the Wollombi community are that the 1949 barely reached the floor of the upper veranda of this building, so Muriel’s evidence is that an earlier flood may have been about 2 feet higher than 1949. This may have been the level of the 1920s flood.

**1980s**

Two separate floods took out the Paynes Crossing Bridge, and then the Williams Bridge, both on the Paynes Crossing Road, reducing access to property owners for long periods until replacement bridges were built. These were high level bridges, similar in style and age to today’s Cunneens Bridge.
Wollombi Pub in the 1927 flood (provided by Carl Hoipo)

Willis Store at Wollombi in the 1927 flood (provided by Carl Hoipo)
The June 2007 long weekend floods brought much hardship and heartache to many people in both the Cessnock LGA and in other areas of the Hunter. It is hoped that this book can serve as a testament to the bravery, courage and kindness that was expressed by many people during the hard times and to show that residents of the Cessnock LGA can overcome even a natural disaster.