

Alison Alder and Mini Graff are Future Feminist Archive artist/researchers based at Wollongong Art Gallery. Alison Alder reports from the University of Wollongong Archive where she is researching the Kembla Coal and Coke Miners' Women's Auxiliary.

Alison's first assignment as a raw arrival to Redback Graphix from Melbourne in 1984, was to make a poster for the KCC Women's Auxiliary. She made black and white photographs of an unknown woman holding a blank sheet of cardboard to strip in the text later by hand.

Alison writes: The Kembla Coal and Coke Miners' Women's Auxiliary was, I think, the first organisation I worked with in Wollongong. I remember being very anxious and worried about the commission. My memories are pretty hazy but I do remember meeting a small group of 3 or 4 women, and discussing how they wanted to be represented. They were pretty intimidating – I don't recall there being much idle chit chat! They were a lot older than me and I probably looked pretty raw and naive – which I was!

Prior to delving into the archives I couldn't recall, to my shame, who was the subject of the poster. However, the archives revealed that the Honorary Secretary of the Auxiliary at the time I made the poster was Mrs Dolly Potter and Mrs Potter is the subject in the poster and a truly remarkable person. She sadly passed away in 2013 at the grand age of 90. I would have like to have met her again, as perhaps with maybe a little more knowledge and life experience under my belt, I may have found out more about this amazing social justice campaigner who worked on so many issues which have defined our society.

The work, 'When they close a pit they kill a community' (1984), is now a signature work for the struggle for Equal Pay and Equal Rights in the workplace, and was included by curator Macushla Robinson in her very fine and thrilling exhibition "[See you at the barricades](#)" at AGNSW.



Alison Alder, Australia, "When the Close a Pit The kill a Community", 1984.
Redback Graphix, Australia, 1979 – 1994

Macushla participated in the FFA symposium and DAAO workshop in Art Gallery of NSW Archives. See AGNSW page for her talk. <http://www.futurefeministarchive.com.au/2015-symposia/agnsw>

This poster is discussed in Macushla's exhibition catalogue as, "one image in particular [from the Redback Graphix collection] has always captured my attention" "With her weathered face and yellow apron-style dress she is an idealised version of the working class mother: practical, politically active, salt of the earth."

Until recently the poster heroine was an 'unknown icon', but Alison and University of Wollongong Archivists Susan Jones and Stephanie Drummond, identified her as the eminent Mrs Dolly Potter, Honorary Secretary of the Miners' Women's Auxiliary.

The photo, from the UOW Archives, is of Mrs Potter and comrades meeting at the demountable known as the Sally Bowen Hall where the auxiliaries always met. One idea we have is to try to 'memorialise' the demountable – which lives today at the rear of the Wollongong Women's Information Service (WWIS). It would look very fine and fitting on a 'plinth' in the Wollongong Cultural Precinct as a continuing memorial to the Illawarra region's unique and inspiring activist history, perhaps with a small selection of Alison's posters, some photos and a role as a residency for Feminist artists, writers and historians. The region's memorials commemorate only men, war and mining disasters.

There were several mine closures slated for that time and BHP was undertaking massive lay offs of workers at the steel works. Images of the poster were used in protests and published in the press – probably the Illawarra Mercury.

Alison writes: The cause was important to me in many ways. I supported the rights of working people and unions. I was a member of the PKIU (Printers and Kindred Industries Union) and the Artworkers Union (that may have been a bit later). In Melbourne, prior to arriving in Wollongong, I worked with men at the Williamstown Naval Dockyard as part of an Art and Working Life project developing posters about Work Health and Safety issues. I am still a union member. I wanted to make my own mark working at Redback and I was very conscious of trying to make a work that did not use fluorescent colours or have the bands of text that had become known as the Redback Graphix 'look'. I wanted the woman to look strong and in control and to be a part of her landscape.

The archives at the University of Wollongong, especially the Miners' Women's Auxiliary show an amazing history of activism and activity.

Notes: UOW Archives collections that relate to feminism in the Illawarra, information [online](#) and general UOW Library holdings via the [catalogue](#). Consulted by Alison Alder for her research on the KCC Women's Auxiliary – [D20 Miners'Women's Auxiliaries of Australia, Southern District, New South Wales](#)

Thanks to UOW Archives and especially Susan Jones, whose family was close to the Potter family, both living at Russell Vale a small Welsh mining community, now a suburb, in the Illawarra. Mrs Potter consulted Susan Jones regarding an appropriate Archive.