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## Earthquake fatalities in Australia

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It has usually been assumed that the first known fatal earthquake in Australian history was that at Newcastle, New South Wales, on December 28 1989, when 12 deaths resulted (McCue & others, 1990).

However, in a note in the newspaper *The Western Australian* of January 25 1940, the State Government Astronomer of the time, Mr H. B. Curlewis, mentions 'tremors' in the Kalgoorlie district on August 29 1917 which resulted in the death of one man and injury of several others. Mr Curlewis wrote that 'the tremors caused a loud collapsing of rock masses from the roofs of tunnellings' and 'were accompanied by loud reports and peculiar rumblings', and that they were also felt at Denmark, Albany and Breaksea Island. These occurrences were listed by Everingham (1968).

It is likely that this was a natural earthquake (perhaps several) and that the death was the first recorded in our earthquake history. Optimistically Mr Curlewis went on to say that 'resting as it does on firm granite foundations the State is never likely to

be disturbed by anything of a serious nature'. Recent history has not confirmed his optimism.

I also recall a small earthquake near Wollongong in 1963 at the time of a rock-fall in an underground coal mine which caused a fatality. Whether this was caused by a natural tremor is uncertain.

Spottiswoode & McGarr (1975) report that far-field measurements indicate that mine tremors (rock-bursts) are highly similar, if not identical, to natural crustal earthquakes.

### References

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