

THE WOLLONGONG GAOL

The transcription of the lecture given by Ben Meek dealing with Wollongong's old Court House and published in the September "Bulletin" can be added to.

Other articles on the same subject have been written up in local newspapers but little mention has been made of the existence of the local gaol, located behind the Court House, and one of the numerous country gaols built during the 1800's thereby hangs a tale.

My first connection with the Court House was in 1915 when it was known as a drill hall used as a headquarters and equipment store under the compulsory training scheme for the senior cadets and where I and my fellow entrants were medically examined by Dr. Kerr prior to joining the High School detachment.

To hark back, in the late 1830's a young man named Hobbs was manager of one of Dangars stations in the Inverell district. There had been murdering of isolated shepherds and killing of sheep by aboriginal parties in that area and during the absence of Hobbs on business a party of eight station hands, mainly ex-convicts, descended on a camp of twenty-eight natives, men, women and children, and massacred the lot. Hobbs on his return was greatly disturbed on hearing of this and reported the matter to the authorities. However in the subsequent trial all were acquitted. An appeal was lodged and the decision was reversed and seven of the accused were hung.

As a result Hobbs was so *unpopular* that he resigned and joined the police and for years was stationed in a number of positions in the Hunter Valley and

finally ended up as Superintendent of Wollongong gaol where he raised a large family in the gaol precincts.

One of these was John Hubert Plunkett Hobbs who studied medicine for two years and then switched to pharmacy. He eventually ended up by opening a chemist shop at Albion Park in the early 1900's when he became the only source of medical help when Wollongong possessed four doctors and Kiama two and none in between.

In addition to being a pharmacist Johnny had a great reputation as a bone setter; in addition at times an urgent midnight call would see him set out mounted on his tall old ginger horse and with an overcoat over his pajamas, for a remote farmhouse to preside at a difficult birth of a baby, foal or calf. For good measure, in a room behind his shop he would extract a tooth, sew up a gash or give an injection. Imagine a present day chemist performing similarly!

When Wollongong gaol was closed down it stood derelict for many years until soon after WW1 it was demolished and the bricks were used in the construction of the six small cottages situated adjacent to the Court House, four in Harbour Street and two in Cliff Road.

Bert E. Weston