

OCTOBER MEETING

There was an exceptionally large attendance of members and visitors (among whom we were particularly pleased to welcome a number of residents of the Market Square neighbourhood) at the monthly meeting on 5th October when Mr. A. P. Fleming (Junior Vice-President) spoke on "The Old Wollongong Market Place".

In the new world the ancient custom of providing a market place generally a rectangular site at or near the intersection of two main streets was maintained, as it was at Wollongong and Kiama in Illawarra.

The Colonial Secretary writing to the Surveyor-General on October 5, 1833 said applications were being received for land at Wollongong and a plan was required as early as convenient. Surveyor Elliott's work in 1833 culminated in a plan dated 30th October, 1834, showing a market place.

Alexander Stewart in his "Reminiscences" said the market place was enclosed with a three-rail fence "by the Crown Gang" (convicts) but was waste until the agricultural shows were held. James Jervis (R.A.H.S. Journal Vol. XXVII p.104) says a weekly market was established in 1839 and a subscription list opened to build a market house.

In 1861, the Wollongong Council decided to set up a market, formed a sub-committee of the Mayor and four Aldermen to control it, and made a public appeal for suggestions. E. N. King, licensee of the Queen's Hotel (1861) offered his large room, yards, stables and paddocks free on Tuesdays and Thursdays for use as a general market. Next year, R. T. Hayles, also licensee of the Queen's, established saleyards in the square. John Collie, an auctioneer, held a sale and proposed to do so monthly. It is doubtful, however, if the Market Place ever became a true market.

The first show (1843) was a private exhibition by the three Osborne brothers, Henry, John and Alick, of some recently-imported cattle, together with fruit and vegetables grown locally. This led to the formation of the Illawarra Agricultural and Horticultural Society (1844), which held its shows there intermittently until 1871, when the Society was wound up owing to lack of local interest.

Other typical functions were bazaars in aid of the Congregational (1854) and Catholic (1858) Churches, an open air service by the Primitive Methodist (1870), the erection of hustings for parliamentary elections (1858) and performance by the "Australian Blondin" 30 ft above the ground, carrying a boy (1880).

Among the enterprises conducted were those of S. Steele (Auctioneer 1861), "Seaview" Boarding House (1862), N. M'Ar (builder, cabinet-maker and undertaker, 1863), James McCleery (blacksmith, 1878), "The Illawarra Mercury" (1856-1876), Miss Randall's School for Young Ladies (1858) and from 1873, St. Mary's Convent School. Many hotels were in and near the square — "Wollongong," "Travellers," "Governor Bourke," "Royal Marine," "Freemason's Hall," "Queen's," etc., etc. One Mackie had a brewery in the forties. The legal fraternity was well represented in 1861 — Dick Brothers, Mr Percy Owen and a Mr. Henry Jones all practised there.

The square was offered for rent annually under certain conditions and in 1879 John Beattie paid £2/10/- (\$5) for the privilege.

By notice in the Government Gazette of October 27, 1891 the Wollongong Borough Council was appointed Trustee of an area of la. 2r. 17½p. dedicated for public recreation. The days of markets, shows, etc., were over, following the shifting of population with the coming of the railway in 1887/8 and the decline of Belmore Basin as the gateway to Wollongong. The square became a garden, with concerts by the Town Band.

The Market Place is now a quiet residential area, the only other activities being the letting of apartments, the Secondary Girls' School conducted by the Sisters of The Good Samaritan, and our Society's Historical Museum, which occupies a building which housed the Wollongong Post Office from 1864/1893, and later, until its acquisition in trust (1966), various State Governmental offices, including the short-lived Wollongong Harbour Trust in the 1890's, and recently the Department of Labour and Industry.

There are a number of gaps in the history of the site and building, mainly due to the lack of local records, missing newspapers, Government files and the like. In view of the ever-increasing number of visitors, and their enquiries, it is earnestly suggested that the Council adopt an intensive research programme to document fully the Society's home.