

THE STOCKMAN'S HUT AT THE MUSEUM

Among the papers of the late Mr. Ken Thomas was a note concerning the materials used in the making of the stockman's hut now erected at the Society's Museum. The idea of preserving the split timber planks was his, and of course, the job of construction was pre-eminently his, for who else could have done it in the same authoritative way? True, the suggestion to have a cow-dung floor was not his, but once made he adopted the idea with enthusiasm, even if this was one technique he had not experienced. Members will recall the widespread interest aroused by our enquiries; and, naturally enough, when the method of laying it became known, who could do it better than Ken Thomas? It is an appropriate finish for a hut which is of even greater importance historically than any of us realised.

The slabs, he recorded, are a mixture of stringy-bark, redgum and red mahogany, and the wall plates are sassafras. All were originally part of the homestead on Richard Brooks's original "Exmouth" grant of 1300 acres on the western extremity of Lake Illawarra, embracing roughly the southern part of the modern Dapto. This could have been erected at any time after the original five grants were made in 1816, Brooks's grant being one of those. About 1880 the homestead was demolished, and the slabs (which almost certainly had been split by convict labour) were then used in the erection of an outbuilding on a farm at Mount Brown, mainly for storing seed, vehicles and tools. The shed would probably have been standing to this day had it not stood in the way of the F6 highway extensions.

It is therefore due to the forethought and expertise of Ken Thomas that we have at the Museum a structure authentic in concept, design and construction; and, above all, it incorporates materials going back to the very beginning of settlement in Illawarra.

—Edgar Beale.