Best Wishes to John Hooke

In November John will be going into hospital for surgery. The Society wishes him a speedy recovery.

REPORT ON OCTOBER MEETING

(Dairying - The Quiet Achiever)

Our guest speaker, Mr Boxsell, claimed that the dairy industry was the “engine” for settlement and development in Illawarra. The Illawarra district (for dairying purposes) included the narrow coastal strip to the north, and also included Dapto, Albion Park, Shellharbour, Jamberoo, Kiama and south to Nowra and even beyond.

Dairy product was not a problem, but supplying it to Sydney in those early days was. Achievements started with the supply of butter and good returns brought with it the development of butter factories set up to use mechanical separators, developed at about the same time in Germany.

Transport was by sea and so ports at Shellharbour, Kiama and Gerringong were built. It was significant that the local dairyman developed a suspicion about marketing agents in Sydney and with the encouragement of Mr Weston, the Kiama newspaper proprietor, dairyman established co-operatives, firstly to produce butter and milk and then other dairy products. The co-operatives marketed these products. The co-operatives premises were and remain landmarks throughout the district.

Mr Boxsell in his account covered progress in the industry that accompanied the advent of refrigeration, rail transport and the distribution of milk in the Sydney area. He acknowledged the debt the industry owed to the co-operative movement and the industry’s growth in New South Wales and in more recent years the organisation of the industry into zones, and the introduction of quotas to share the market opportunities and to control supply. Even today, he said, changes are still occurring with complete deregulation to occur in the not too distant future.
The questions demonstrated a lively interest in his address and Mr Boxsell was well-received.

He was enthusiastic about his subject to such an extent that he thought a recent publication, "Milk for the Metropolis" deserved pride of place in the Museum archives and so made a presentation of it to the Society.

HENRY LEE ON COAL
(Our September Meeting)

Members who were unable to attend the September meeting, missed hearing Dr Henry Lee speak about the coal trade in Illawarra. Henry is a lecturer at the University of Wollongong and has written and researched extensively on coalmining. His talk commenced with the discovery of the coal seam at Coalcliff by shipwrecked sailors in 1796 and progressed through the difficulties associated with establishing local mines in the 1850's.

It was fascinating to learn that until 1849, the Australian Agricultural Company had a monopoly over the exploitation of minerals in Eastern Australia. They exercised this right to prevent mines being opened by other individuals and companies. This delayed the establishment of mines in Illawarra despite awareness of the coal seams.

Henry painted a vivid picture of life in Illawarra prior to 1850 when the local economy was based largely on agriculture and dairying. Periodic depressions severely affected the district and the population waxed and waned. Although close to Sydney, transport difficulties hampered trade. Local farms could not regularly supply milk to Sydney because it took too long by road and the shipping links were unreliable. Until refrigeration was available and the railway built, most of the milk was converted to butter.

In 1849, the monopoly ended and local farmer, James Shoobert, opened a small coal mine on his property at Mt Kiera. The first load of coal was carted down Crown Street to the harbour and was accompanied by a grand procession. Later in the day, local digni-