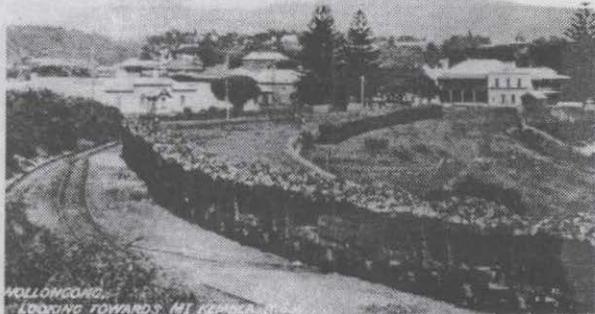


# JUNE MEETING: AUSTRALIAN CUSTOMS DEPARTMENTS

At our meeting on the afternoon of Saturday 7th June we were treated to a very interesting address on Australian Customs Departments by Mr Alastair Wilson, Manager of the Customs Advisory Service and also the Customs History Officer for New South Wales.

Mr Wilson made extensive use of a portable overhead projector to illustrate his address. He dwelt for some time on Wollongong's customs house, which for several years was situated in what we now call the little court house fronting Wollongong Harbour. He also illustrated many of the functions of customs officers in various parts of Australia, with particular attention to the establishment of the first post of Customs Officer by Governor Hunter in 1799.

The speaker also distributed a printed sheet entitled HISTORIC PERSPECTIVES, a general overview of the development of Customs in Australia; and a five-page essay on A DUTY T BUILT A COLONY, a brief history of excise collection in Australia prior to federation. Since Mr Wilson's visit, Warren Bellamy has drawn attention to a large survey



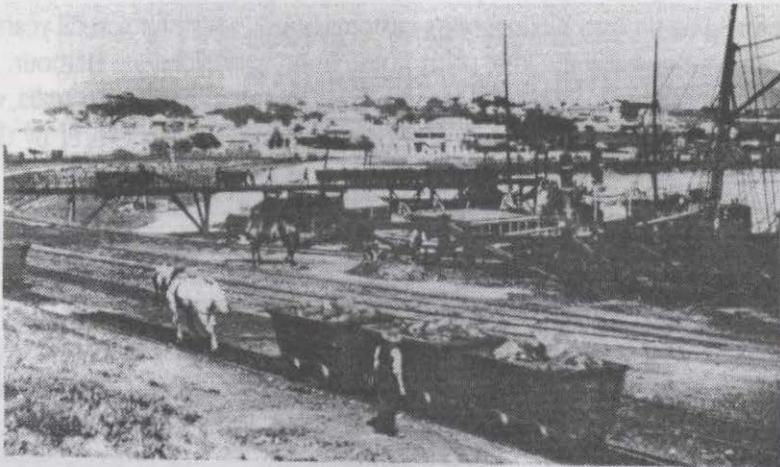
Tramroads leading to Wollongong basin. The gaol is on the left centre and Brighton hotel on the right. The view looks towards Mount Kembla.

Wollongong Harbourside in the 1880s.



chart in the museum which shows a map of the harbour area of Wollongong, extending from the northern end of Wollongong beach (now known as City Beach) to North Wollongong beach. This very detailed survey was conducted by Commander Howard, RN, between February and April,

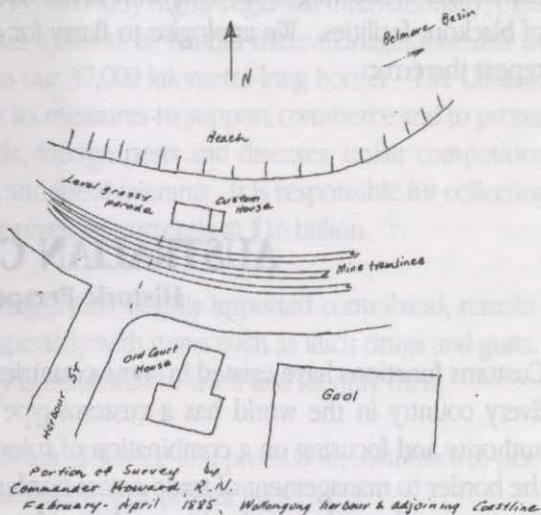
1885. On it is marked a small building labelled Customs House, situated between the mine tramlines and the edge of Brighton Beach in an area labelled Level Grassy Parade. The long axis of this building runs parallel to the beach with its western end approximately in line with an imaginary extension of the eastern boundary of Harbour Street, making its position a little to the west of a point directly opposite the building labelled Old Court House.



Wollongong harbour showing shipping and the waterfront in its busiest times.

It is interesting to note use of the name Old Court House as early as April 1885, even though at that time the building was still in operation as Wollongong's court house. Use of the name is understandable, as by then the new building on "Church Hill" [Market Street], begun in early 1884, was well advanced. The new courtroom was officially

opened by Sir Alexander Stuart on 3rd November, 1885. (Illawarra Mercury, 5th November, 1885) No doubt the Customs Service would have moved into the old court house shortly after that time, taking their old building with them to be re-erected in the backyard. Eventually the growth of Port Kembla Harbour, larger ships and the advent of Federation would have seen the service shift to Port Kembla around the turn of the century.



Unfortunately this large chart is so fragile it is not possible to exhibit it or to photo-copy the relevant portion, so a rough sketch will have to suffice. Warren also revealed that one of the books on sale at our museum contains a picture entitled Wollongong Harbour circa 1880. Compiled by two of our members, Inga Lazarotto and Joseph Davis, this book Greetings From Wollongong in plate 44 shows this first customs house in the position indicated in the survey, but maybe a tad closer to the edge of Brighton beach.