

HIDDEN TREASURE

Wollongong's First Customs House

Recently, on my way to photograph some threatened buildings on Cliff Road (numbers 54 to 64) I decided to deviate into the grounds of the old court house (opened 1858) to see if the even older customs house was still there behind all the paraphernalia that clutters the grounds these days.

There it was indeed, with its hardwood weather boards partly covered with peeling paint but its every physical detail identical with the lonely building perched on the edge of Brighton Beach as shown in an etching labelled Wollongong Harbourside in the 1880s which has appeared in a number of publications. It may be found on page 39 of the Society's publication Port of Wollongong, second edition, 1975; in Plate 44 in the Wyewurry Greetings from Wollongong, 1995; and on page 46 of the IHS Bulletin, August-September 1997. This Bulletin also contained a sketch from a survey dated 1885 which showed the original location of the customs house quite close to the present kiosk.

In this picture we see a small wooden, hip-roofed building with an eastern verandah onto which opens a front door. At the western end is a chimney and along the side facing the beach is another window in the centre of the wall. The building behind the old court house has all these features except the verandah, but if one looks closely there are still two notches in the weatherboards where the narrow verandah was attached, just above door level. One of these notches is now partially obscured by a downpipe but still

visible.

Moved to its present position behind the court house when the latter became the customs house some time after the court deserted it in 1885, could this be the oldest building in Wollongong?

Despite a few missing weatherboards beside the chimney, the condition of the structure is surprisingly sound. But just how old is it? Can anyone help with hard evidence on this?