

SURFING THE MERCURY:

WOLLONGONG'S AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY

Not being fully computer-literate, instead of surfing the internet, my "surfing" has been confined to old issues of the Illawarra Mercury on microfilm.

Recently, while tracking down the original of the article *Opening the New Court House, Wollongong*, (IM 4.2.1858) I found not only a report of the first sitting in the new court house on 1.2.1858, but also a lot of other interesting things, e.g. an account of the Second Dapto Regatta; copious coverage of the election of two members for Camden South in the Legislative Assembly in which Henry Osborne lost his seat to Robert Owen; a full description of the Agricultural Show, right down to a list of prizes and their winners; and a full report on the Agricultural Society's dinner, held at the Brighton Hotel on show day, with details of all the toasts and speeches. (IM 8.2.1858)

This particular show had been held in the Agricultural Society's shed in Market Square and "adjoining ground" on February 4, which happened to be the Thursday following the Monday on which the new court house commenced business; one cannot really say the court house was "opened" because there was no ceremony or fanfare: its doors were simply opened for a sitting.

The shed in Market Square must have been none other than the open-sided shed depicted in John Rae's panorama, painted in 1851, now displayed in our museum.

By a strange coincidence, a few days after my "surfing" incident, Councillor Pat Franks presented to the Society a 64-page booklet entitled *BACK TO WOLLONGONG*, 25th January to 5th February, 1927. This publication contained not only a reproduction of the Market Square portion of Rae's painting mentioned above, but also a history of the Agricultural Society.

Although the history of early Wollongong in this book is rather suspect in places, the section on the Agricultural Society seems to be very reliable. And I must say I was

intrigued by the neighbour driving the bullocks at a ploughing match!

As the year 1927 may be regarded as a significant year in the rural history of this area, with the steelworks under construction and the depression not far around the corner, readers may find it interesting to read this portion of the book, reproduced below. The square brackets [] are mine.