
**SURFING THE MERCURY:
WOLLONGONG AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY**
...continued from July/August Issue

Since the society was first established a show was held annually for many years, although at times under great difficulties. Still, by the perseverance and assistance of a few of its members it was kept afloat, and is the oldest established agricultural society in the colony, with the exception of the Parramatta A. and H. Society, now known as the R.A.S.

Amongst its most prominent and staunch supporters under all difficulties in after years may be mentioned the names of Messrs. Chas T. Smith, George Waring, George Hewlett, H.J. Marr, S.D. Lott, J.R. Cummins, Evan Evans, E.R. Evans, Andrew McGill, George W. Brown, (Hon. Secretary), W. Kirton, A. McKenzie, D. Aitken, Joseph Ritchie and Robert Howarth.

In connection with these shows in Wollongong, the cattle were exhibited in the Market Square opposite Elliott's Farmers' Hotel. The dairy cattle, including the progeny of Mr. Henry Osborne's imported animals, which were exhibited on the first occasion for show purposes, were admired by all who understood them. The same was said for the horse stock, which included some very valuable animals, and were paraded in the Market Square, which was fenced up temporarily for the occasion.

This procedure proceeded for several years, but eventually, owing to financial difficulties, the shows were discontinued, and after a lapse of some years were again held in 1881, on what is now known as "The Old Show Ground". It was then a two-day show. Amongst the committee were:- Messrs. A. Campbell, T. Farrell, W. Ahearn, J.W. Hosking, J. Hart, A.A. Turner, D. Williams, Frank O'Donnell, J. O'Donnell and J.A. Beatson. Mr. George Cochrane was secretary.

Exhibits were housed in temporary structures. The ring was roped round and fastened to stakes.

The show was a great success, which gave the committee heart to go on and erect a pavilion and a cattle shed. The next show saw a great increase in exhibitors of both horses and cattle, also in dairy and farm produce. One of the principal exhibits was butter. This was shown in kegs. Owing to the increase in the dairy and farm produce exhibit, it was found necessary to add an additional room to the pavilion. This was known as "The Butter Room". At the show held in 1883 increased prizes were given in the horse and cattle sections. Additional prizes were also given for a "Hunt" and "High Jump", in which there were large entries. Amongst the new exhibitors were Johnstone, with "Gold Dust", C. Morgan with "Monarch". Staff, Devery and Lindsay also had hunters. Messrs. Weston, McClinchey, Mason and Graham also competed.

This {that} year's show was considered the best cattle show on the coast (the stock had to be driven as there was no train service).

The 1884 show was very wet. The exhibits were good, but the attendance was small, and gave the society a set-back.

Mr. G. Cochrane resigned the secretaryship in favour of J.A. Beatson {his brother-in-law}, who carried out the secretarial duties for many years in an honorary capacity.

Owing to his untiring zeal and energy the show progressed by leaps and bounds. The 1885 show was very successful, but unfortunately the next couple of shows were wet. Then record shows were held for some years.

The show held in the year 1887 was known as the "Carrington Show". The committee at great expense built a grandstand and formed a good ring, and Lord Carrington {the State Governor} officially opened the show.

Great preparations were made for his arrival, in which the townspeople heartily co-operated. {It was also the day on which the Governor opened Wollongong's new Town Hall in the morning, followed by a champagne luncheon}. An arch was erected across Crown Street from the *Mercury* office to the E.S. and A. Bank. The school children were marched on to the show ground to welcome his Excellency. It came on to rain about 1 p.m. and the ground was a sheet of water. All the creeks were flooded, and those who came from Kembla had to swim their horses through American Creek, as there were no bridges built. An extra special attractive programme of ring events had been prepared - trotters and jumpers coming from all parts of the district, including Moss Vale and Kangaroo Valley. Owing to the inclement condition of the weather the show programme was abandoned and the society sustained a great loss.

The committee decided to hold a day's sports in March, 1887, at which the principal events that had been postponed from the show were to take place, but unfortunately on this day word came through of a great disaster which had occurred at Bulli Mine, and which caused a gloom to settle over the whole district.

The local Agricultural Ball in these days used to be one of the principal events of the town, and was largely attended.

From 1887 onwards the show progressed with varying fortune; sometimes good financial results were achieved, at other times severe losses were sustained. One of the chief adverse conditions mitigating against the success of the show was the distance of the ground from the town itself, the ground being situated 1 1/2 miles to the south of the town and adjoining the race-course.

The late Mr. Archibald Campbell occupied the presidential chair for many years. Mr. J.A. Beatson retired after a term probably not equalled by any other secretary in the State. It is noteworthy to remark that Mr. Beatson was the founder of the South Coast Agricultural Union, which has for many years done such good work in connection with the South Coast and Tablelands exhibit at the Royal Sydney Show, and which to-day is doing excellent work amongst the societies amalgamated with it, and his name still stands in the records as one of the men who did more than his share towards the betterment of the Wollongong and other societies on the South Coast and Tablelands. The late Messrs. Thos. Grieve and G.C. Tuckey each for many years filled the position of treasurer. The present treasurer, Mr. James Dean, has held the office for some years.

In 1916 the then president, the late Mr. J.B. Thompson, formed the idea that there was only one thing to save the society, and that was to shift the ground to a more central position, and after considerable negotiations with various public bodies this was accomplished, and in 1918 the first show on the present area {now occupied by the Entertainment Centre and Steelers Stadium} was held. This land had up to then been a "common" {known as the green} under the control of the local Council, and arrangements were made with the government at that time to hand this land over to a trust consisting of members of the Council, Agricultural Society and sporting bodies. The first chairman of the Trust was the late Mr. G.C. Tuckey and Mr. H.S. Budden was its first secretary.

Unfortunately the late Mr. J.B. Thompson, who had been untiring in his efforts to secure this site, did not live to see the result of his labors. {sic}

The first president of the show held on the new ground was Mr. E.H. Figtree, and as a result of his efforts the wisdom of the removal was demonstrated, as the first show was a record one in every respect, and from that year onward fresh records have been established every year in gate receipts and the quality and number of exhibits.

In the horse section, Messrs. Jn. Phillips, Jas. Chittick, A. Judd and Mrs. A. Laidlaw, of Victoria, and in the cattle section, Messrs. J. Chittick & Son, the late W.H. Cook, J. Daley, J.W. Burgess, A. Burgess, R. Cochrane estate, H. Ellison, and G. and P. Barrett, have figured amongst the most prominent exhibitors.

Amongst the men who occupied the position of president of the Society (following on the retirement of Mr. Figtree) and who performed yeoman services in building up the show to its present high standard were the late Messrs. M.A. O'Donnell, J.H. Parsons, and Mr. F.O. Wiseman. The present president is Mr. W.A. Lang (who is now completing his third term of office), and is a son of Mr. Alexander Lang, who for many years filled the position of a committeeman.

Mr. W. J. Cochrane is the present secretary, and was appointed in July, 1913. He is a nephew of Mr. J.A. Beatson, previously referred to as secretary, and it is largely due to the popularity and untiring efforts of Mr. Cochrane that the society, to a large extent, owes its present flourishing and financial position.

The society has now become one of the foremost institutions in the town and district, and its annual fixture ranks amongst one of the best country shows in the State. The ground has been improved and only this year a splendid pavilion has been erected at a cost of over 1.500 pounds.

The prize money given amounts to nearly 1,000 pounds, and exhibitors from all parts of the State look forward to the holding of the Wollongong show.

The present members of the committee are:- Messrs. W.A. Lang (president), H.N. Stumbles and W.J. Dobbie (vice-presidents), Jas Dean (hon. treasurer), B.J. Benham, E.P. Benson, R.L. Burcher, F. Caldwell, L. Carr, E.P. Clout, S.F. Cochrane, A.J. Cook, A. Duncan, Ben Jones, C.L. Lindsay, W. McCammon, L.V. Maynes, Jas Porter, T.J. Rathmell, W.S. Staff, J.B. Stoyles, T.G. Watts, J.B. Wells, W.E. Wilson and H. Maunder.

The present members of the trust are:- Messrs. N.M. Smith (chairman), J.A. Beatson, and J. Kirby representing the Council; H.N. Stumbles, W.A. Lang, and J.B. Stoyles, representing the society, and Dr. H.H. Lee representing the general public.