OPENING OF NEW COURT HOUSE, WOLLONGONG

(“Illawarra Mercury” 8/2/1858).

The bench of magistrates sat in the new court house, Wollongong, for the despatch of business on Monday last. No ceremony marked the occasion from the ordinary sittings. A brief description of the appearance and arrangement of the building, inside and out, may not be uninteresting to our readers.

The courtroom itself is a spacious one, being 33 feet long by 20 feet wide. At the further end, on a platform, raised one foot from the floor is the bench, the front being of plain cedar panels surrounded by a neat beading about 3 feet 6 inches high. On the right hand, immediately outside of the bench is the witness box also raised to the same level as the bench and on the left hand side also, against the wall and a few feet from the bench, the reporters’ box. Both of these boxes are panelled in the same style as the bench, the panelling being varnished in all cases.

Immediately below the bench a large table is placed at which the Clerk of the Court and the legal gentlemen sit. At about 13 feet from the front of the bench a railing about 4½ feet in height crosses the room, outside of which is the space allotted for the public. There is an opening in the centre of the railing giving access to the floor of the court, on the right hand side of which a prisoner’s dock will be erected of about 3½ feet long and 2½ feet deep. The dock will be of open railing. Both inside and outside of this railing comfortable seats have been placed for the accommodation of suitors, witnesses and other persons in attendance at the court.

In the centre of the side walls of the Court Room, two fireplaces have been built with chimneys running up, mainly for the purpose of strengthening the wall. The otherwise blank appearance of the wall at the back of the bench has been relieved by making two
semi-circle arches, reaching to the ceiling, each of about 8 feet in width; the space between which is occupied by a pillar surmounted by a neat cornice; on the outside of these arches two smaller pillars appear capped in a similar manner to the larger one.

Light is given to the court room by two large and wide windows, with semi-circular tops on each side and two small ones on each side of the portico in front. It is intended to erect a screen immediately opposite and inside of the front entrance for the purpose of breaking the current of air; this screen will be 9 feet high and 6 feet 3 inches long and will be of panelled cedar. Ventilation is secured by an aperture in the centre of the ceiling and by the windows lifting up from the bottom or lowering down from the top. The Magistrates have a comfortable room at the back of the court room, with an entrance through a small lobby, which has a door on the right hand side of the bench. On the left hand side of the bench is another door opening into a similar lobby from which access is obtained to a room devoted to the use of the Clerk of the Court which will be fitted with presses for the keeping of public documents; this room is also entered by a door from the back. In both these rooms there are fireplaces, and they are each 14 feet by 12 and 11 feet high.

The appearance of the building from outside is very neat, if not imposing. The front is to be approached by folding gates, each wing of which will be 5 feet wide, from which a gravelled path will be made to the building. The front of the building itself displays considerable taste in its design and care in its structure. Across the entire front 20 feet, extends a portico 6 feet deep. This is formed by three semi-circular arches of about 6 feet span each, supported by two square stone pillars; at the top of each is very tasteful capping. The building presents its gable to the front, and this gable, from the top of the portico to the roof, is a pediment of plain stone work, round the outside of which runs a deep cornice of stone. The inside of this presents rather a bare appearance, which would be greatly relieved by placing a coat of arms, or some such device in the centre; at present the painter has endeavoured to fill the blank by painting a few circles in the centre of it.

The whole of the outside, with the exception of the front, has been stuccoed and coloured. The front has been painted stone colour. There are three chimneys, one on each side and one at the back, each of which is surmounted by a cornice of a very pretty design and appearance. There are no out-buildings as yet to the court but it is intended, we believe, to erect the necessary ones for the comfort and convenience of parties attending the court. Altogether we think we are correct in saying that this structure will be found equal to the wants of the district for some time to come, even if District Courts shall be held here, as it is expected and hoped before long. We are aware that the greatest care has been bestowed on the erection of the building by and under the direction of Mr. Stoddart, the contractor, Mr. Dawson, the Colonial Architect, has frequently inspected the work during its progress with the utmost attention, with the desire to make the building creditable in appearance as well as adapted to the purposes of which it was intended.