

Mittagong Iron Celebrations

UNVEILING OF CAIRN

The outstanding feature of the celebrations was the unveiling by His Excellency the Governor of the cairn erected near the site of the iron-works, where the first smelting of iron in Australia took place. Speakers occupied a dais near the cairn, and a public address system was utilised so that the large crowd of people, numbering some 3000, could hear the speeches.

Dr. Mackness, president of the Royal Australian Historical Society, was chairman, and said that Australians were developing a true historical sense. Members of the society were endeavouring to stir up in the minds and souls of the Australian people a reverence and admiration for the historical past. They believed that a ceremony, such as the present one, should be arranged to mark historical events, and to particularly impress their importance on young Australians.

Gold, said the speaker, had been considered the most precious metal from the point of view of monetary value, but from the economic standpoint iron must always be given pride of place. The history of iron went back for thousands of years. It was mentioned in the Bible, in Roman history, and as early as 54 B.C. in England. Without the discoveries of Bessemer, Court, Neilson and others, the industry could not have advanced. In Mittagong they were celebrating the centenary of iron smelting in Australia, but in America the 200th anniversary of the founding of it there had been recognised. Development of Australia was due to the pioneers, and they should all take off their hats to the four men who, although not financially successful, saw the possibility of the development of iron ore in Australia. He congratulated the people of Nattai Shire, and those of the Mittagong district in particular, on celebrating such an important occasion and having with them the Governor of New South Wales.

Mr. Elsie Mitchell, whose publication "The Mittagong District" is well known, paid tribute to the work of the four men responsible for the development of the iron at Mittagong, and gave a detailed history of their work and the discovery of iron ore in this district.

Mr. Alfred Stephens, secretary of the Royal Australian Historical Society, paid tribute to those who had co-operated with the society in fittingly commemorating the occasion.

Cr. I. L. Jurd, president of Nattai Shire, said the quotation "Opportunities such as this rarely come to our district," from an editorial in The Four Mails, was a weighty statement. The district was rich in its historical background, and, according to Warren Denning, the towns of Mittagong, Bowral and Moss Vale would soon be the most historically documented in Australia. A centenary celebration was rare in Australia, and they could see near the cairn the foundations of the buildings of the first blast furnace, which were symbolically the

foundations of Australia's greatest secondary industry.

Nattai Shire, said Cr. Jurd, as a result of the foresight of the civic fathers of another day, had acquired the property on which the cairn was erected. It was a pity that the building had disappeared and that a national trust had not been established, but this was on the way. Nattai Shire had fallen into line with neighbouring shire councils in appointing Rev. S. Howard and Mr. A. V. J. Parry as honorary historians, and these two men had done a magnificent job. Cr. Miles was organising secretary of the celebrations, and his untiring efforts were reflected in the outstanding success of them to date.

It was not necessary, said Cr. Jurd, to stress the importance of a centenary celebration. The pioneers had failed in the Mittagong venture, but the pages of Australian history were dotted with glorious failures, on the ashes of which had grown fame. From the ashes of the Mittagong failure had arisen an industry that had stood Australia in good stead during two terrible wars. On behalf of Nattai Shire, he expressed appreciation of the great support and assistance accorded to Mittagong and the celebrations committee by the Broken Hill Pty. Ltd. Through the efforts of this great organisation, it was possible for the committee to publish the brochure.

In concluding his remarks, Cr. Jurd made a special appeal to the children to save the monument from defacement. Scratching names on historical monuments was a poor way of writing a name on a scroll of fame. It was being done far too frequently, and such symbols of a country's recognition of its pioneers were being desecrated. They had a great national heritage in their keeping, and he appealed to the children to assist in keeping it intact for future generations.

Mr. I. M. McLennan, assistant manager of B.H.P., gave an interesting resume of the work being undertaken in the steel industry at the present time. It was of interest, he said, that the Marulan limestone used in the Fitzroy iron works was still being used in the industry to-day. Tremendous projects had commenced at Port Kembla and the industry was continuously expanding. From the foundations laid at Mittagong an enormous industry had been developed, which was of vital importance in the economic life of Australia.

His Excellency, the Governor, then performed the unveiling ceremony by removing the flag from in front of the tablet. He said it was with great pride, and was a great honour, to unveil the cairn in honour of the founders of the iron industry in Australia.

Ald. H. F. Venables, Mayor of Bowral, in moving a vote of thanks

to His Excellency, said Bowral was in the parish of Mittagong, county of Camden, and was proud to be a suburb of Mittagong. Anything for the progress of Mittagong must reflect to the credit of Moss Vale and Bowral, and they should remember that they were all part of the great Southern Highlands of New South Wales. People who lived in the days they commemorated had no good

roads, no radioes, no 40-hour week, and practically no leisure. Yet they had done something that those present were proud to commemorate. To-day they had so much leisure and were trying to get more, as could be seen by Eight-Hour Day now being known as Six-Hour Day. They should devote some of that leisure to service to the community. It had been put to him recently in the apt expression "Service is the rent we owe to the community for our place in society." He thanked His Excellency on behalf of those present for attending the celebrations and unveiling the cairn.

Cr. C. J. Ross, President of Wingecarribee Shire, in supporting the vote of thanks, expressed appreciation to the committee for associating Wingecarribee Shire with the celebrations. His council had to be continually on the watch to see that Moss Vale did not become a suburb of Bowral. They were honoured by the visit of His Excellency, and were proud to have him with them on the Southern Highlands.

His Excellency, in expressing thanks for the acclamation accorded him, paid tribute to those responsible for the celebrations and for the erection of the cairn. It was fitting that Australia, as a young country, should mark its historical events for the benefit of future generations. This was done in other countries of the world, and it was pleasing to see that Australia was rapidly appreciating the value of such occasions. In 1940, when Australia was put in the position that she had to make weapons to fight with, iron had meant a great deal to her. He remembered, as Chief of the General Staff, what a difficult time it had been, but the iron industry had risen grandly to the occasion. The cairn marked the commencement of perhaps the greatest industry in Australia in peace and war.