

The First Rylstone-Kandos Show

Colleen O'Sullivan February 2013

At the first Rylstone-Kandos Show on 14 April 1937 Miss Neata Pitt won the award for best lady rider over 18. The Mudgee Guardian wrote these congratulatory comments: "This talented young lady added further to her wonderful successes by annexing the 'Dixon Cup' and gave a fine performance of horsemanship".

I dare say quite a few readers will recognise that young lady, who is now Neata Keech, still living, seventy six years later, on the outskirts of Rylstone.

There will be a number of readers who attended that first show, perhaps won awards, and would recognise names on the "List of Awards" printed in the Mudgee Guardian two weeks after the show.

Here are some: Cambric frock and bloomers Mrs J Byrnes; collection of fruits in syrup Mrs E Doyle; lady's hack R Brackenrig; 6 Granny Smiths W Frappell; "Oldfield Special Prize" for champion dog in show (Pomeranian) Mrs E Hunt; cigarette race W C Currie; heaviest potato in show E Newton; collection of pansies Mrs G McQuiggin; best 2lbs home-made butter Miss J Clarke.

Agricultural Shows have been around since the nineteenth century, the first one in Australia being held at Parramatta in 1823. They were established, often with government grants, to encourage modern methods of farming. Today there are around one hundred and ninety five annual shows in NSW alone.

It was the Rylstone CWA who in 1935 agitated to restart the annual show (there had not been a show in Rylstone since 1909, although there had been a few attempts to start one up). The resolution they passed at their April meeting read: "That the graziers be asked to co-operate with the country women in trying to inaugurate an agricultural show for Rylstone and district".

A meeting was held at the Rylstone Memorial Hall on Saturday afternoon 28 November 1936, to discuss the viability of a show. The Shire President Mr J Neale Taylor was in the chair and Mr Blackmore President of the Grazier's Association said that his members supported the CWA's suggestion for a show. A committee was formed to make preliminary inquiries which included CWA members Mesdames McQuiggin, Morrison, Jackson and Cassell, representatives from the Graziers' Association and local businessmen.

Within four months the committee had attracted over 100 financial members, prepared and printed show schedules, secured judges to award 268 prizes in 159 events, transferred the show ground from the Graziers' Association to the Shire and put it in order, obtained trophies

and prizes from firms and local businesses, attracted entries, marshalled volunteers and promoted the event.

Of course there were the usual nay-sayers who did not believe the show could be a success. These “calamity howlers” as they were referred to, were advised by the “Mudgee Guardian” reporter to weigh in with a membership subscription and a few bob towards the prizes.

Sometime in those four months the preliminary committee had become the Rylstone-Kandos Pastoral, Agricultural, Horticultural and Industrial Show Society (Rylstone and Kandos PAH&I Show Society for short). It consisted of: Harold Schroder Patron, J C Blackmore President, Les Cassell Secretary, J C Currie Treasurer and committee members Nock, Brown, Simpkins, Taylor, Jones, Darton and McLaren. The ladies it seems had been relegated to the kitchen where they were no doubt preparing for the official luncheon and the honoured guest W F Dunn MLA.

Accolades were abundant for the first Rylstone-Kandos Show: “a wonderful success”, “an absolute eye-opener”, “the organisation was excellent”, “the biggest and the best” (that last one must have been tongue-in-cheek). A three-column description of the show appeared in the Mudgee Guardian on April 19, 1937.

It is not hard to imagine that inaugural event.

The Memorial Hall, on this Wednesday of perfect weather, has become the Hall of Industry. It houses the pavilion exhibits which are ranged around the sides allowing ample space for viewing. The whole of the stage at the end of the Hall shows off a display by Messrs Meyer Bros and Bennett of Rylstone who have included a sample of every conceivable article from their store.

Bill Cant and Ray Mulholland are over near the flower exhibits discussing Bill’s beautiful non-competitive display of dahlias and gladioli from the cement company’s gardens. He judged the flower section and awarded Ray a prize for his six dahlias.

In another section of the hall the two cement companies (Kandos and Charbon) have a joint exhibit showing how cement can be used on farms. A small group of visitors is listening to a lecture on cement making while a few others are examining a machine for testing cement.

Where’s that music coming from? Ah yes. Mr Petersen is demonstrating the latest Stromberg-Carlson radio. Mr Heppell from Rylstone, not to be outdone, has a good range of AWA models.

There are 120 entries in the cookery section so it is a mouth-watering display. In addition W H Walsh and Co has an appetising display of breads and cakes. In the apiary section C J Melton’s award-winning exhibit is considered a work of art. Then there are the needle and fancywork exhibits which include doilies and supper cloths, aprons and pillow shams, demonstrating embroidery, crochet and fancywork.

The “park” adjoining the hall has been fenced off with ring-lock fencing to form the ring. The ring-master with his band of stewards is working through the program most efficiently; in fact they are running ahead of schedule.

You can see that around the enclosure is a display of farming implements from Massey-Harris, McCormack and others. Items range from an old-fashioned farm dray to a one-stand shearing machine. There are displays of the latest cars from Loneragans, and the most up-to-date tractors.

The ladies are doing great business in the food catering marquee. The aromas and decorated tables are most inviting. Some people though, have chosen to picnic beneath the plane trees (hot and cold water is provided free by the show society).

Of course a lot of the men are quenching their thirst at the publican’s booth acquired by Dimmy Seaton of the Railway Hotel. He has been doing such a strong trade in iced lager and beers he had to send for more supplies.

The children’s favourite section, as you would expect, is side-show alley with its razzle dazzle, merry-go-round and knock-ems. There is a long line of boys and young men entering the boxing tent to watch the troupe of Bell’s Boxers, and maybe there are one or two challengers.

A steady stream of visitors moves through the animal enclosures to examine the blood stock horses (draught, saddle and utility), dogs, sheep and poultry. People seem particularly taken with the non-competitive showing of sheep from Miss Joan Harrison’s “Lowanna” stud farm. The pen is decorated with scores of ribbons won at shows throughout the state.

There were 2,700 people at the show that day (and 4000 the following year). However, only a select group attended the official luncheon and opening in the Small Hall: good food and ale, numerous speeches, well-deserved congratulation and enthusiastic applause when Mr Dunn officially opened the show. “And after this important ceremony had been concluded, the fun became fast and furious”.

You would think that at the end of the day the exhausted crowds would finally disperse to the comfort of home. But no, at 9pm the revelry continued at Truswell’s Palais de Dance in Kandos where the Kandos Younger Set had organised the first Show Ball. Keith Goodacre and his merry orchestra provided the music for the 250 guests who attended, and a “recherché supper” was served (that has overtones of exotic and exclusive). “A great success and a fitting climax to the day’s efforts”, wrote the Mudgee Guardian. I like to think Miss Neata Pitt was one of the dancers.

Some would say the Rylstone-Kandos Show today is the most important event on our calendar. It provides entertainment, education and fellowship as well as promoting some of the best features of our area, so it is only right that its history is remembered. We can learn a lot from history.

For example we can see how this important event was instigated by women and established by a group of enthusiasts willing to take a risk. And then maintained over the years by hundreds, perhaps thousands, of volunteers, who recognised its importance.

In registering the show with the Agricultural Societies Council of NSW in the name of Rylstone-Kandos our forbears highlighted the importance of both towns. They recognised the complementary nature of our two towns and our dependence on each other.

That was obvious at that first show where Harold Schroeder, manager of the cement works, was patron, the Kandos Younger Set organised the ball, Kandos pioneers J B Simpkins and Dr Darton were on the organising committee, Kandos businesses exhibited and Kandos people enthusiastically attended.

Captions:

Women riders, including Neata Pitt, await judging at the first annual show

Les Cassell secretary (in a suit) and a steward at the first Rylstone-Kandos PAH&I Show

The Dixon Cup