GREATER DANDENONG WEEKLY MAY 21, 2012 P. 15

Saleyards evoke whiff of the rural past

BY CAMERON LUCADOU-WELLS

YOU can still smell the pastoral history of Dandenong's former livestock saleyards.

There's a farmyard whiff that hovers among the spectator stalls, auctioneer's stage and animal pens. Although the saleyards have been closed since 1998, they will be opened to the public in a Back to Dandenong Saleyards Day this Sunday.

Bits and pieces, including the market's fading signage, milking pumps and a butter churn, are housed in a shed at Dandenong showgrounds.

They harken to a time when Dandenong was known as 'the gateway to Gippsland', a mecca for trading pigs, cattle, sheep and chickens .

Graeme Marriott, one of the volunteers who saved the yards from destruction, points out more than 100 wall signs, many carrying the names of farming stalwarts.

"People used to come from everywhere to Dandenong. I remember the hustle and bustle and the characters that were at the markets. While I was there, my wife would go shopping. It was a vibrant place."

He hopes the shed will become a place for children to see cows being milked and learn about farming ways.

"Children don't know where milk comes from. We'll show them the old milking stalls, the old and new-style cow pumps.

"We can have an auction and they can pretend to bid for a cow."

The saleyards' nostalgic power had bonded Dandenong Agricultural and Pastoral Society members together "like you wouldn't believe", he said.

Society president Margaret Weightman said the saleyards were a reminder of an easily forgotten past.

"If it wasn't for people like Graeme, who worked their butts off to save and restore it, it wouldn't be here."

The event includes the 10th annual Scottish Heritage Day and is on 10am-3pm on Sunday at Dandenong Showgrounds in Bennet Street. Entry is free.

Rustic age: Margaret Weightman at the preserved former saleyards. Picture: Gary Sissons