A HISTORY OF AUSTINMER by Mr. H. S. King, J.P. (member).

The following is a condensation of the talk given by Mr. King to the March meeting.

The first land grant in the Bulli area was made to Cornelius O'Brien in 1821. The grant extended to the Austinmer area, which was subsequently known as North Bulli.

In 1836 Captain Robert Marsh Westmacott, a former A.D.C. to Governor Bourke, purchased several grants in the present Austinmer area, one of which was from O'Brien. During 1837 Westmacott built his home at North Bulli and called it “Sidmouth”, after his home town in Devon.

Captain Westmacott was a founder and the first secretary of the Illawarra District Agricultural Society. He was also a prime mover in forming the Illawarra Steam Packet Co., which subsequently purchased the “Maitland”. In 1839 he formed a company to open a coal mine on the Bulli Estate, somewhere in the vicinity of Austinmer. This was the first mine on the South Coast, but a shortage of labour soon forced it to close.

The present Bulli Pass was discovered by Westmacott in 1844 and after surveying a road up the pass he had it built with governmental and local citizens’ help. It was known as Westmacott’s Pass, but it was not until 1868 that a wheeled vehicle was taken up it.

Westmacott sold his Woonona property in 1841 and his Thirroul and Austinmer properties in 1846. It is probable he subdivided his Austinmer property as several settlers made their homes there, growing farm produce and planting fruit trees, so that by the 1860’s North Bulli was a rural village. Among the better known settlers were the Kennedys, the Hicks, the Maddens, the Powells and the Bells. Some of these names are now commemorated by prominent geographical features.

In 1876 the North Bulli Coal and Iron Mining Coy. was formed by Sir George Wigram Allen, and land was purchased at Coledale, Wombarra and Scarborough. In 1884 this company was merged into a new company called The Illawarra Coal Co. A mine was opened in Austinmer and a jetty was built at Hicks’ Point. Coal was produced by 1886 and the jetty was first used at the beginning of 1887. The collier “Waratah” was chartered in the June of that year, but it was wrecked just after leaving the jetty. Later on the jetty was partially destroyed by storm and finally destroyed by fire in 1915.
During the late 1870's the name North Bulli was changed to Austermer e and this was often confused with Sir John Lackey's Estate near Moss Vale. In 1887 the name was changed to Austinmer e, after Henry Austin, a director of the Illawarra Mining Co. The Austinmer e Railway Station was opened on 1st Sept., 1887, but the railway did not use the E at the end of the name.

The first coal was transported from Austinmer e by the Government Railway in 1890, a total of 1806 tons being despatched. Duplication of the line was complete in 1915, and the first stationmaster was appointed in 1917.

The North Bulli School was established, with Mr. F. King as teacher, in a private building in 1867. A slab school was built in 1868 by John Rawnsley. This building was replaced by a brick one in 1895, and the name was changed to Austinmer e in 1895.

The first church to be built was All Saints Church of England, in 1904. Previously services had been held in private houses. The Methodist Church was opened on 7th January, 1922.

The Kennedy Estate was subdivided in 1906 by a Sydney firm of auctioneers with the result that the village became a fashionable seaside and health resort.

From 1910 on, the Allen Estate was subdivided and the street names were connected with the Allen family; these are: Toxteth Avenue, Wigram Road, Boyce Avenue, Allen Street and Maxwell Street. These names will also be found at Glebe Point. Henning's Lane was named after Biddulph Henning, brother of Rachel Henning.

At the turn of the century there was a salt works on Hicks Point, the excavations of which can still be seen, and another behind the present dressing sheds.

The Life Saving Club was formed at a meeting held at the "Outlook Guest House" on 20th October, 1909. The foundation President was Mr. S. Walker. A few years later the Progress Association appointed Mr. L. Clark a full-time beach lifesaver — this must have been one of the first appointments of this nature in N.S.W.

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