WOLLONGONG HIGH SCHOOL IN ITS EARLY DAYS:

The writer's secondary schooling sat astride the four year segment before and after Wollongong High School was born, and also coincided with the 1914-1918 World War.

Prior to 1917 secondary education on the South Coast was provided by what was known as Wollongong District School, which was housed in five rooms of the Smith Street Primary School with an enrolment of less than two hundred and a staff of eight.

The headmaster was in charge of both schools, and we mixed in the corridors and playground with the primary school pupils.

Fifty years ago Wollongong had four each of doctors, dentists, chemists, solicitors and barbers; buses were yet to appear and public transport was catered for by Beattie's coaches, drawn by two horses, which met all trains and delivered passengers as far afield as Cliff Road and Smith's Hill.

Primary schools south of Wollongong from which pupils were eligible for secondary education included the one-teacher schools at Tomerong, Huskisson, Falls Creek, Nowra Hill, Pyree, Terara, Bolong, Bomaderry, Cambewarra, Meroo, Jasper's Brush, Toolijooa, Far Meadow, Foxground, Omega, Jerrara, Bombo, Dunmore, Minnamurra, Croom, Tullimbar, Tongarra, Marshall Mount, Avondale, Wongawilli, Berkeley, West Dapto and several others hard to recall.

Having two or more teachers were schools at Nowra, Berry, Gerringong, Kiama, Shellharbour, Albion Park, Dapto, Unanderra, Port Kembla, Mount Kembla and Keiraville.

North of Wollongong the narrow strip between mountain and sea, a non-farming community with population clustered in mining towns strung along the railway, made the one-man school a rarity, and places such as Fairy Meadow, Balgownie, Corrimal, Bellambi, Buli and places to the north each possessed schools with several teachers.

From such a wide coverage it to-day seems odd that such a small percentage of boys and girls went beyond primary school and leaving age of fourteen, but there were reason peculiar to that period which do not now exist. Firstly came the lack of interest on the part of many parents in secondary education; in a predominantly coalmining and dairying community there was always the need for extra help in the milking shed, behind the plough and down the mines; also the country was at war, and with older brothers overseas in the forces young people were urgently needed to help out as soon as they reached their fourteenth year.

Long travel hours, or else boarding in Wollongong, was also involved and here the financial angle arose. A family income of £500 a year was bordering on the top bracket and hundreds of large families were raised on £4 per week or less. There was no spare cash for frills such as education.

Another limiting factor was that entry to a secondary school was dependent on passing an external examination, and selection of candidates was largely left in the hands of the teacher; he would naturally tend to nominate only those brighter pupils who would be likely to pass—failures did him no credit—and here again parental resistance in many cases over-
ruled a teacher's recommendation and promising scholars lost their chance in life.

It would be safe to say that many of the small rural schools mentioned had their day, and closed down with the advent of bus travel to larger centres, without ever having presented a boy or girl for higher education; yet from the South Coast and Illawarra area and such primitive beginnings emerged Lieutenant-Governor Sir William Cullen, N.S.W. Premier Sir George Fuller, Commonwealth Bank Governor Sir Denison Miller, Judge Moffitt and many others.

Each year, in November, those entered for the Qualifying Certificate examination would be issued with a free rail ticket to Wollongong and would, at an average age of thirteen, journey to the Public School, there to sit for a formal examination with set papers and all the formality of such events—a trying ordeal for children many of whom had never previously travelled so far from home.

A few days after resuming primary school after the Christmas holidays the results would be published, and those who had gained a pass would commence their four-year (as it then was) High School career. Although most had reached or were bordering on the age of fourteen, it must be realised that children now mature mentally and physically at an earlier age, and have probably picked up two years' gain in half a century; lacking present day freedoms, radio, T.V. and general sophistication, we were still young children by modern standards.

Two bursaries were allotted to the South Coast each year. I achieved one of them. This entailed automatic posting to the first year Latin class, which had no fixed home. For twelve months we averaged four shifts per day—to a room from which the occupiers had gone to a science lesson, then to the weather shed, thence across the street to the old Technical College and finally to finish the day crowded on to a verandah. The following year we were housed in a portable wooden room where we remained until the start of third year saw the move to Smith's Hill.

—B. E. WESTON.

(To be continued)

FROM DARKEST ENGLAND:

A letter (now some weeks old, but evidently delayed by the postal strike and received too late for last month's Bulletin) has come through from Jack Maynes (Immediate Past President). Writing from the Piccadilly Hotel (handy to the night life of London), Jack reports that he has been following in the footsteps of Henry VIII (at Hampton Court) and some more respectable celebrities. He and Mrs. Maynes, as well as seeing some of the historic spots of London (we are glad to say that the rumour that they were blown up in the Tower by the I.R.A. was unfounded!), have been with their son Harry at Red Hill in Surrey, where they took the opportunity to visit Sir Winston Churchill's home at Chartwell and Lord de l'Isle's at Penshurst.

At the time of writing they were about to leave for the Continent, and by this time should be back in England. We will be expecting something special at the December meeting.

—Ed.