As the Bulletin noted “Mr. Allen was a prolific railway writer and is perhaps best known for the monthly articles on “British Locomotive Practice and Performance”, which appeared in the “Railway Magazine” from 1909 to 1958. In latter years a similar series appeared in “Railway World”.

His autobiography with the above title appeared in 1965 (Ian Allan Ltd.) and is in the Wollongong Public Library.

A. P. F.

JOADJA — THE GLORY IS DEPARTED:

We reprint with acknowledgements to the “Sydney Morning Herald”, an interesting article written under the above heading by J. W. Bavin on 16th February, 1924. Those who visit that lovely valley on the excursion will read with interest the description.

Joadja lies in a valley, or perhaps more accurately is a valley, shut in from the world by the ranges which lead the southern tableland of New South Wales down to the Bathurst plains — a very appropriate setting for a scene of Australian history. Not far away is Berrima, famous now, but once notorious, for its convict history, a post town of the main south road. But with this turbulent hisory Joadja has nothing to do. Its story is of what might have become one of the most important industrial towns of New South Wales and of an industry by which some of the world’s greatest fortunes have been made.

The secret is this: Joadja is remarkably rich in oil-shale, the basis of the motive power of half the world today . . .

There is a road from Bowral to Joadja, and another from Mittagong, along the miniature railway which brought the shale in from the valley to the main Southern line. The railway is interesting, built on the Roman roadbuilder’s plan: if it is humanly possible, go straight.

At the edge of the valley the mountains plunge straight down. The railway stops at the power-house, whose great old-fashioned engine still drags the tiny trucks up the mountain side, or lets them gently down, and in the power-house lives the engineer, the last of the men who worked the Joadja shale. Needless to say, he is a Scot — nearly all the Joadja men were — and the engine whose fire he stoked thirty years ago is still the pride of his life; there is no other like it still working in Australia — and it came from Scotland too.

Few people visit the valley now, not because it does not amply repay the trouble of the journey, but because few have heard its name, and practically none its history. Apart from that, the valley is very beautiful, calm, sheltered, peaceful, with a tireless river flowing through it, and, if the river is not enough, springs of the purest water imaginable. Altogether an ideal spot, and splendidly healthy, as we shall see.
The engineer, who is a perfect encyclopaedia, was not quite sure when shale was first found in the valley, but forty years ago is fairly close, and a company was formed to mine and export it. The new demand for petrol has altered the economic aspect of the work, it is the most valuable product now, but then it paid better to ship the shale itself to England or Germany, where the demand for shale products was greater and extraction and refining easier.

The company prospered, and, with great good sense, for Joadja is very lonely, did their best to make the mine a town as well, and as self-contained as possible; so they acquired the whole valley, and set out to make it a sort of model town. Everything required from the outside world had to come down the mountain side at the end of a cable, so, naturally, the less required the better; but it must have been hard work. The engineer tells how the train ran many times a day from Mittagong, in those days, and the engine worked — and he with it — from dawn to dusk, and the town grew in the valley. The comforts they enjoyed put most country towns to shame. There was a perfect water supply, which is still there, from the springs; and the miniature railway, with a toy gauge of two feet nine, spread over the valley floor, and gathered the men to the mine in the mornings, and distributed them again at night into rows of cottages, whose fireplaces alone remain standing in neat white lines like beehives all about the valley.

After a while Joadja began to produce the oil shale derivatives, for which there was a good Australian market. Vaseline and the heavy oils were produced in the valley, and went straight from its retorts for local use, and Joadja prospered. Its population had grown to twelve hundred Scotsmen, and they had far more of the advantages than any country town of twelve hundred has now.

They built themselves a splendid little public hall, and danced or sang or roller-skated there on winter evenings; but on winter holidays they played football . . .

Of course, there was a school in the valley, and the sons and daughters of the miners, including the engineer, were taught by a master supplied by the company. What he cannot explain is the extraordinary suddenness with which it closed when the company suspended operations in the valley. . .

The company owned an hotel in the valley, whose ruins show that it was a far more pretentious structure than the general run of bush hotels. . . . It is only ruins . . . the walls of red brick still stand beside the hall. . .

So that is Joadja, as it was yesterday. . .

The valley is so beautiful that some of us doubtless would be sorry to see smoke rising now from its long-idle chimneys. Cherry-orchards cover the valley floor, and they are a lovely sight in spring or autumn. The wild animals which were driven away by the clanging of the toy railway have returned — foxes, and wombats, and strange, interesting creatures like porcupines and platypus; we even saw so rare a bird as a snow-white kookooburra.