OCTOBER MEETING:

Our speaker at the October meeting was Mr. B. E. Weston, of Wollstonecraft, a member of an old district family, who spoke on “Albion Park in the First Quarter of the Twentieth Century.” His first hand account of Albion Park as it was in his boyhood and youth was not the sort of address which can be summarised; but part of the manuscript account which he has presented to the Society is printed below. We hope to print further extracts in later Bulletins.

Cowcockying Sixty Years Ago

In those days the Albion Park district was wholly geared to dairying and the village existed solely to serve the needs of the farmers. Families were generally large but it was seldom that any left home until they married and took up further rural pursuits. Milking machines were only a dream and sons and daughters were needed at home to handmilk herds of 60 to 80 cows plus the extensive ploughing and growing of green fodder crops and maize, and the cooking, preserving, scrubbing and washing engendered by so many living under one roof.

It was a condition of affairs that would be unthinkable to today’s youth; farm income was so low that it was impossible to pay a farmhand more than $2.00 a week and keep or to hand out more than meagre pocket money to teenage and adult sons and daughters who worked a seven day week from daylight to dark, and whose minimal requirements in the way of clothes and footwear were bought and booked up at the local store.

However, it was the general practise that each member of the family was allowed perks of various kinds—one son would be allowed all calf-skins which sold for 30 cents, another would be allowed to sell unwanted bull calves at a going rate of $1.00 and there was always the chance of outside work such as fencing: the girls had few opportunities for pin money apart from sale of needlework and winning a few prizes at local Shows for cookery, pot-plants and poultry.

At intervals Stoyles of Wollongong would send a cart from farm to farm buying empty bottles, bags, bones and old iron at pretty tiny rates but all grist to the mill.

There were few local opportunities for work away from dairying and those young people who entered and prospered in other walks of life had to get their start by leaving home for the city; the butter factory and milk depot employed about a dozen permanent hands and the occasional vacancy for a railway porter, post office messenger, shop assistant or delivery hand was usually filled by a town lad.

The industries associated with coalmining to the north and quarrying at Kiama drew labor from those areas, any job beyond the range of a horse or bicycle was out of the question.

Much more cultivation for the growing of sorghum, saccaline and maize for green cow fodder and silage, oats for hay, and maize for grain was done than is now the case, few concentrates were fed to cattle.

All ploughing was done by means of a pair of draught horses hooked to a single furrow plough, with an acre a day being a good output, and on many farms one son would be the full-time ploughman and exempt from dairy work most of the time.
Labour, more than money, was a medium of exchange and occasioned a lot of neighbourly communal effort in the matter of haymaking, silo filling, maize harvesting and boundary fencing, and of course there were always many willing hands available in the case of sickness on a nearby farm.

Most farms grew a fair acreage of corn (maize) for grain for use as horsefeed, seed for green fodder crops and for fowl feed. Quite large flocks of layers were kept, the eggs being picked up each week by the grocery delivery cart from the store and the value credited against the monthly account.

Ears of com were either snapped from the stalk and husked in the paddock before being carted to the shed or else carted in unhusked in which case, at some later date, there would be a night-time husking bee attended by friends and neighbours and consisting of several hours steady husking plus much horse-play by way of burying the girls in the piles of husks and followed by a prodigious supper of sandwiches, cakes and tea.

For those farmers not endowed with large families, a source of labour was the system of taking in and treating as a member of the household one or more lads from the State Welfare Department.

The lads—called State Boys—usually did a share of the milking before going off to school, did farm jobs at the week-end and were subject to annual inspection in the matter of housing, clothing, treatment and up-bringing.

Most left school at the statutory leaving age of fourteen and either stayed on with the family as a farm laborer or else moved to another farm when released by the Department.

Possibly as the sole opportunity of breaking away from an uninviting future it is significant that more State Boys than farmers' sons enlisted from the district in World War I.

—B. E. WESTON.

(A To be continued)

A BICENTENARY COMING UP:

On 16 March, 1974, the bicentenary of the birth of Matthew Flinders will be (or should be) commemorated. This might be a suitable occasion to mark three historic spots in Illawarra:

1.—The point at which a white man (Bass) first landed in Illawarra.
2.—The place where Flinders clipped the blacks' whiskers while the powder dried.
3.—The beach where Bass, Flinders and Martin spent a night ashore.

The locations have been disputed. My own belief, for the reasons set out at length in “Earliest Illawarra” (in which Flinders's MS journal of the voyage of the “Tom Thumb” is printed) is that they were:

1.—Just south of Towradgi Point.
2.—At the entrance to Lake Illawarra.
3.—Just north of Bellambi Point, at the small beach where the boat-sheds now stand.

Councils, Service Clubs and other (we hope) interested bodies might like to take some action to mark the spots. No. 2 in particular has the makings of a feature that, as a tourist attraction and landmark, could leave the Dog on the Tucker Box for dead.

—W.G.M.
COWCOCKYING SIXTY YEARS AGO:
(Continued from November Bulletin)

All farm work now performed by tractors, petrol engines and electricity was done by horse and man power; in summer much of the milk was surplus to city requirements and was separated for cream on the farm, the skim milk going to feed pigs and calves. A cream separator handle had to be turned at 45 r.p.m. in order to keep the heavy separation bowl spinning at some thousands of revs per minute and the writer has vivid recollections of heaving away at the handle of a heavy Alfa-Laval machine for an unbroken hour and a half on scorching summer days.

Chaff-cutters were turned by a “horseworks” in which a horse harnessed to a radius arm walked and trotted round in a circle and so turned a gearing connected by shaft to the chaff-cutter.

Apart from acetylene gas systems in the hotels the entire township and district relied on kerosene lamps and candles for lighting; kerosene and candles, cotton wicks and glass lamp chimneys featured on every store order; the large hanging Miller kerosene lamps gave a soft yellow light, usually in the living room, and candles were for the bedrooms. Eventually the Gloria and Wizard hollow wire petrol systems were installed by the more affluent homes and these gave an excellent 300 candle power illumination.

 Practically every farm delivered its milk and cream by spring cart and in ten-gallon cans to the Illawarra Central Dairy Co. at the railway. Most of the carts were built by Mood’s Coach Works to a standard design and with occasional attention to tightening the iron tyres, new flooring, grease and — seldom — paint they lasted a lifetime. About eighty carts would converge on the depot between eight and nine a.m. every day except “block” days, when all milk was separated for butter on the farm and the resultant cream would be delivered next “milk” day; these carts, usually driven by the farmer, a son, or sometimes a farm hand would come in from near and remote parts of the district including Croom and Stony Creek, Yellow Rock and Tongarra, Marshall Mount and Calderwood. Yallah and Shellharbour, and after delivering the milk and washing the cans would in most cases repair to the township to collect mail, meat, groceries, bread and papers, some to wait while the horse was re-shod and others to visit the pubs; few reached home before midday. At times the rustic calm of the main street was enlivened by a runaway when a horse, weary of a long wait outside an hotel or store, would take off full gallop for home and perhaps being chased by several horsemen.

A small section of farmers, shareholders in the Fresh Food and Ice Company, sent their milk direct by rail to that firm’s headquarters in Sydney; this involved loading their cans direct into the vans of the “milk train” which left the local station at 9.30 a.m. each morning after a half hour shunting session. It was no uncommon sight to see a cartload of milk, running late, tearing through Albion Park main street at a gallop to catch the train.
For the benefit of F.F. & I. suppliers along the Tongarra Road a pick-up service was run by Ned Sawtell using a four wheel waggon drawn by four horses; leaving the town before 6 a.m. it would run to the foot of Macquarie Pass and collect cans of milk on the return and in time to meet the train.

These cans were returned from Sydney, roughly swilled out and "on the nose" in the next morning's "paper train" and would be taken home to the farm for further washing and scalding. Under this system a supplier required three full sets of cans and many went astray at times.

Jamberoo also supplied milk for the city trade via Albion Park and this long road haul saw the commencement of motor transport in the district; Fiat trucks fitted with solid rubber tyres gave years of service over the hilly road joining the two towns and with Jack Thorpe as the first and long term driver.

Milking machines were slow to become established even to a minor degree and even in the mid-twenties the few who did instal them were regarded as fools headed for the ruination of their milking herds.

In those days there seemed to be more farmers on the move than now, and there were frequent sales of herd and farm machinery, with lashings of drink on tap to loosen up the bidding and with prices running at $20 to $30 for good cows in milk and $10 for store cattle.

— B. E. Weston.

TO THE EDITOR:

"Pro Bono Publico" seems hardly an appropriate nom-de-plume for a defender of the ban on the use of "Hillcrest" as a Lawrence Hargrave memorial. There is no need to argue about just how long it was Hargrave's home. It was his home; even if it was only for six years (which is not admitted) that was about as long as Burns lived at Alloway; the National Trust has gone to great trouble and expense to restore the house at Chiltern where Henry Handel Richardson spent two or three years in her childhood; Ned Kelly's association with the Glenrowan Hotel, the Beechworth Courthouse, and the Old Melbourne Gaol was even briefer. While living at "Hillcrest" Hargrave performed important — probably his most important — work; which is more than could be said for Burns at Alloway, Henry Handel Richardson at Chiltern, or Shakespeare at Stratford — his recorded activities there consisting of drinking, poaching and getting a girl into trouble. By any rational reckoning "Hillcrest" is a historic building.

That being so, "Pro Bono Publico" might like to give serious consideration to something Mr. Edgar Beale wrote in our August issue: "I think it is true to say that private owners of historic buildings have no absolute property rights. To a high degree they are trustees of their properties for the community, and this is a fact they must accept in buying or holding those properties. . . . It is our duty as citizens of the present to see that that trust is respected in favour of future generations."

When an owner not only does not respect that trust, but seeks to reach out from beyond the grave to ensure that no future owner respects it, then, Sir,

I remain

Disgusted.

Tunbridge Wells.