OLD ALBION PARK 1900-1925—TANKS AND TRANSPORT:

The local plumber and tinsmith, Harry Parkinson, was never idle; as every home relied on roof catchment for water for all domestic purposes, there was a constant demand for new and replacement corrugated iron tanks around the district, and a common sight was that of Harry and his assistant heading for some farm, near or far, with a 1000 gallon tank and sundry lengths of guttering in a spring cart drawn by his old chestnut horse. The price for a tank of that size was £5.

The seamless tinned steel milk can being something in the future, every dairy was equipped with Parkinson’s ten gallon cans. These were made of tinned steel sheet, all joints soldered and fitted with four heavy metal reinforcement bands rivetted and sweated on; the push-in type lid was fitted with a small vertical vent pipe and unless each can was matched with its own lid, which it seldom was, it was necessary to ensure milk tightness by jamming pieces of cloth and cardboard in the neck of the can. Another of his lines was milk vats for cream separators, also made from tinned steel and ranging in capacity up to 100 gallons.

He was also the sole district supplier of motor spirit for the sparse motoring trade then existing; bowsers and pumps were unknown and petrol came in four gallon tins, two to a case and stored in a shed in his yard. Most cars had the tank located under the front seat and when a stop was made for fuel it was necessary for all in the front to alight and the seat would be lifted out so as to get at the tank filler cap. There were two brands of petrol, Shell and Plume, in two grades, selling at 1s.2d. and 1s.10d. per gallon. Tins would be opened with a steel spike and emptied into a large funnel on tripod legs and fitted with a length of hose for insertion in the tank of the car.

Harry also did a large trade in carbide for acetylene gas headlamps on cars and bicycles.

Train travel was the only feasible means of visiting the city, or of going as far afield from Albion Park as Wollongong or Kiama. Over the years there has been little alteration in train services to the city from places south of Wollongong. The morning and afternoon trains ran as now, and in addition the 9.30 a.m. and 6.30 p.m. “milk” trains included a couple of passenger carriages and provided a slow trip to Sydney, arriving at 2 p.m. and 10.30 p.m., respectively. These returned from the city as the 2 a.m. “paper” train and the 2.30 p.m. passenger train to Kiama. The 8 a.m. passenger train from Sydney was the mid-day dinner train to Albion Park farmers, its whistle being the signal to leave off work in the paddocks and head home to eat.

Apart from the change from steam to diesel power, the most noticeable change in railway service lies in the attitude of railway staff to the travelling public; the arrival of passenger trains was something of an event, and the stationmaster and porters would scurry up and down the train opening doors and helping passengers on or off with luggage and children; in the case of first class passengers their luggage would be put on board and placed in the overhead rack. The porters would assist in carrying heavy luggage out to the waiting coach after the train had left.

Guard Billy Abigail of Kiama for many years took the morning train to Sydney and returned as guard in the afternoon train. These were also the school trains and Billy had an eagle eye for dangerous pranks on the part of the boys; it was not unusual for him to travel in a compartment
between two stations and dish out his particular brand of punishment of ear twisting. An ear twisted by Billy stayed like a corkscrew for a long time.

A nostalgic memory since the passing out of steam is the sound of a loco taking the steep grade up from Oak Flats to Stony Range tunnel on a still night—the busy approach run gradually slowing down to a heavy whoof, whoof at increasing intervals and followed by a triumphant crescendo of puffing as it topped the crest and headed downhill to Shellharbour Station.

—B. E. WESTON.

MUSEUM WORKING BEE:

The Colonial Kitchen at the Museum is nearing completion, and the Museum Committee hopes to open it in July, turning on a trip back into the past with billy tea and damper. To have the kitchen ready in time we will need the support of all members for a working bee on Saturday and Sunday, 22nd and 23rd June. Everyone is welcome and we will find something for everyone to do. Full details will be given at the June meeting.

THE MAN OF MULL:

(A suggestion to Macquarie’s next biographer)

On 1st July a century and a half will have passed since the death of one of the greatest figures—perhaps the greatest—in early Australian history; but the classic biography of Lachlan Macquarie has yet to be written. He has been misunderstood both by admirers and detractors; partly, it is suggested, through a lack of understanding of the instincts, sentiments, and no doubt prejudices, which were bred in his bones or imbied with his mother’s milk.

The imputation of “small-l liberalism,” for instance, must have him turning in his grave. He was a steadfast royalist, whose reiterated desire for “the approbation of my sovereign” was no mere form of words. He wanted no part of “the infernal and destructive principles of democracy.” He found in New South Wales a society morally permissive enough to satisfy any modern trendy; if he did not leave it godly, righteous, sober and square, it was not for want of trying. In economic matters he was paternalistic, seeking to help the small man and, if need be, to protect the weak and foolish against their own weakness and folly—the liberalism of his day advocated Laissez-faire, unrestricted competition, an open go for the capitalist and the devil take the hindmost. He was a Highland Tory, so far behind his age that he was sometimes in advance of it, for in some ways the twentieth century has more in common with the early seventeenth century than with the early nineteenth. Macquarie was no liberal, but it may be that he was wiser in his generation than the children of light.

He has, for example, been criticised for encouraging small-scale mixed or subsistence farming, and failing to realise that Australia’s future was on the sheep’s back. He may not have failed to realise it. It was well known in Scotland in his day that the way to extract the maximum return from a Highland property was to turn it over to sheep, work it with as few hands as possible and consign the surplus human encumbrances on the estate to the slums of Glasgow or the backwoods of Canada. “When I was a young man,” said an old chief ‘in sorrow and indignation’ to the young Walter Scott in the late eighteenth century, “the point upon which every Highland gentleman rested his importance was the number of men whom his estate could support; the question next rested upon the amount of his stock of black cattle; it is now come to respect the numbers of sheep and I suppose