OLD ALBION PARK 1900-1925—DOMESTIC ECONOMY:

In the matter of food there have been changes largely due to the proliferation of all kinds of spreads and pastes, tinned foods and Continental smallgoods. The latter were then solely represented by “German” sausage, changed to “Devon” during World War I, and brawn; the present day profusion of European and Chinese foodstuffs which entered the country after World War II, instant, T.V. and snapfrozen meals, together with electric stoves, have all combined to alter eating habits in half a century.

Treacle, golden syrup and jam were consumed in vast amounts and in the writer’s boyhood home a two-pound jar of jam would not last one day. Jam-making was a continuous process in the summer and evenings would be devoted to a family effort in cutting up melons, oranges, peaches, apricots or quinces for next day’s jam session. Saturday expeditions around the foothills were the source of many bushels of blackberries and Cape gooseberries for conversion to jam; the fruit of the common prickly pear produced a popular jelly.

Many homes annually fattened a pig with household scraps for subsequent butchering, cutting up and pickling in a cask of brine for use as required.

Staple items in most pantries were the chest of tea, side of bacon, 70 lb bag of sugar, 56 lb bag of flour and calico bag of rolled oats.

Quite a number of farmhouse kitchens still had a large open fire recess in which much of the cooking was done in “Kendrick” cast iron saucepans sitting on firebars or in pots and boilers hanging from a swinging arm from which also was suspended a “fountain”—this being the name for a five gallon iron boiler equipped with a tap, the source of boiling water for tea and general kitchen purposes. From cast iron “camp” ovens buried in the embers and with hot coals shovelled over the top emerged the best-tasting scones and roasts that ever a hungry boy could wish for.

In retrospect it seems that the district was reared and lived on a diet of stew, corned beef, rabbits, potatoes and pumpkins, bread and jam, plus miles of jam roly-poly.

Washing machines were yet to come and laundry equipment usually consisted of a ten gallon copper boiler in an iron stand perched out in the open, several large round galvanised-iron tubs, a scrubbing board, and a pot-stick for prodding clothes down in the boil and for lifting them out into the rinsing tub.

Women needed strong hands and muscles to use the scrubbing board and to wring out heavy sheets plus the agility of goats to dodge the flames and smoke from the fire under the copper.

Soap powders were not known and bar soaps such as Early Morn, Siren and Sunlight, etc., filled all household cleansing needs.

Ironing was a hot job as it was of necessity performed beside the fuel stove on which the irons were heated; these were of two kinds—sadirons,
merely solid ovals of iron with attached handles, and “Mrs. Potts irons” for which one only detachable handle served any number. To clean off soot and grit and make the iron glide over the job it was customary to rub it on a pad of beeswax when taken off the stove.

In the matter of women’s dresses not much was bought ready made in shops, home dressmaking was universal around the district for everyday wear, and the services of the local dressmakers for clothes for “best” wear. These busy-fingered ladies were Mrs. Stubbs, Miss Condon and Miss Barton. The latter worked on a system in which she moved from farm to farm on an annual roster and her visit would see much preliminary study of samples of materials and visits to Kiama and Wollongong to buy dress-lengths. One room in the house had to be set up as her workroom and the best bedroom provided for her stay.

Her arrival was dreaded by the men on a farm. All household activities revolved around or were disrupted to suit her autocratic demands. Meals would be delayed or dished up cold while fittings and try-ons were in progress, the women of the house would not be available for milking or dairy chores, and tempers generally would be at boiling point.

—B. E. WESTON.

SHOALHAVEN SOCIETY VISIT:

On Sunday, 18th May, a party of members of the Shoalhaven Historical Society visited Wollongong and inspected the Museum. We afterwards had the pleasure of their company at afternoon tea, provided by Mrs. Evans and her team of ladies of the Society.

KIAMA SOCIETY MEETING—WEDNESDAY, 18th JUNE:

The Kiama and District Historical Society will meet at the Kiama Public School, Bong Bong St. (entrance between Collins and Thompson Sts.) at 8 p.m. on Wednesday, 18th June. Mr. W. G. McDonald (Councillor, Illawarra Historical Society) will speak on “Bass and Flinders on the Illawarra Coast, 1796-1797,” a subject which includes the first authenticated visits of white men to Illawarra generally and Kiama in particular, and Kiama’s earliest appearance in recorded history.

Visitors (especially prospective members) will be welcome.

NEW MEMBERS:

The Society welcomes as new members Mr. G. Boniface (Mangerston), Dr. T. E. Bowen (Mount Pleasant), Mr. M. Milgate (Fairy Meadow), Mrs. V. E. Smith (Hamilton, Newcastle), Mrs. I. Stephenson (Hamilton) and the University of Wollongong Library.