HISTORIC BULLI

The 'Back to Bulli' week end of 23 - 25 September, organised by the Bulli Township Committee, was a historic occasion in more ways than one: it showed the many visitors to the area what the Bulli people were doing to emphasise their township's mining heritage; old buildings appeared in their original colours, including the railway station (1887), Stockbank (1888) and the Bulli Family Hotel (1889). A wreath was laid at the Miners' Disaster Memorial of 1887. The War Memorial was relocated and rededicated at historic Slacky Flat.

Three books about Bulli's history were launched: Mick Robert's *Little House on the Hill*, a history of the pubs where the miners drank and discussed their problems from the 1860s, *Black Diamonds*, a reissue by the Historical Society of Bill Bayley's study of the northern suburbs' mining villages and a two-volume *Register* of the Bulli cemetery, published by the Wollongong Family History group.

These books and other History Society publications were purchased in large numbers at the Anglican and Catholic church halls in Park Street. Both halls featured historic photographs and Bulli memorabilia, as well as an exhibition of school children's art, 'Bulli Dreaming' at the Catholic hall.

The Illawarra Historical Society congratulates all concerned in the week end activities.

STOCKBANK HOUSE, BULLI

This two storey brick building was designed by William Wardell, who designed St. Mary's Cathedral and Government House. It was opened in 1888 as the Joint Stock Bank in the period of Bulli's prosperity as a coal mining centre. The building had a varied career as bank, architect's offices, shire council premises, post office, bootmaker's establishment, private dwelling. Restored to its original appearance it is now a restaurant, the walls of its dining room featuring photographs of Bulli coal miners and coal mines.

Stockhank House was the scene in September of a historic family gathering when descendants of John and Ann Rudd of Campbelltown met for an afternoon of reminiscence. All those present were inter-connected with Stockbank's and Bulli's mining and political past.

The Rudds were a well known farming family in the Campbelltown of the mid-nineteenth century. Part of their land, with the original homestead, were donated as the site of the Franciscan Monastery, for many years the venue of an annual Good Friday pilgrimage.

Of the Rudd's three daughters, one married Michael Sweeney, whose son John Thomas, born in 1863, became a coal miner in North Bulli (Austinmer) mine and helped in the rescue attempts at Bulli in 1887 and Mount Kembla in 1902. He also worked at Corrimal, Mt. Kembla and South Bulli mines; in 1915 he became the District Secretary of the Southern Miners' Federation, living next door to the Miners' Hall in Station Square until 1931. By this time he had reached the age of 68 and looked forward to his retirement in Park Street, Bulli with his wife Virginia; she had always supported him in his work on behalf of the miners. They continued to do what they could in these years of the Depression.

But retirement was short-lived. In 1933 at J. T. Lang's urging, John stood
as the Labor candidate for the State seat of Bulli in a by-election in which he was successful. At the age of 70 John Sweeney became Bulli’s M.L.A. and remained so until 1947, when at the age of 84, by many years the oldest member of the House, he retired and very soon after died.

John’s widow had been his first cousin, Virginia Standen. Her mother Ann Rudd and her mother’s sister Elinor had married two brothers, John and James Standen. One of Virginia’s brothers-in-law was John Henningsen. The Henningsens were an old Woonona family owning a number of properties in the area: a bakery on Princes Highway, Woonona, the land on which Woonona High School was later built, the Bulli Billiard Saloon. John Henningsen also owned Stockbank House after the depression of the 1890s brought an end to its first stage as a bank.

Some of those, poring over each other’s photographs, chatting about past times and enjoying their tea and cakes at Stockbank, had come from as far away as Brisbane for the occasion. Violet Standen, nee Henningsen, was born in Woonona; now living in Brisbane she is 85. Patrick Gleeson, widow of Virginia, nee Standon is 87. They had reared six children and were well known and respected in Woonona for many years. Most still lived in the Illawarra district. All were descendants of John and Ann Rudd and by the marriage of several sets of first cousins all had connections with each other, with Stockbank House and with John Sweeney, M.L.A. for Bulli 1933 - 1947.

Melvina Oehm, Daughter of John Sweeney and Virginia Sweeney nee Standen, recalled many aspects of the connection. Her aunt Nell, her father’s sister, became the mother of a federal M.P., Charles Morgan and the grandmother of another state parliamentarian Kevin Morgan. Nell herself was a woman of great energy and political dedication: at 88 she was the first person in the Austinmer house moved and renovated by the Lions Club of the area. (The house had been built many years before by brother Edward Sweeney). At 93 she was the oldest living ex-pupil of Austinmer School at its centenary celebrations in 1969. While in her nineties, two weeks after an operation for breast cancer, she travelled from Sydney to Thirroul by train for a function in honour of her son Harry Sweeney and attended by Rex Connor and Gough Whitlam, and was still talking politics in the early hours of the morning. Her death at 97 was noted in the press of 1973: Pioneer Labor Woman Dies . . . a worker for many charitable bodies and church activities.

Melvina and all the other Rudd descendants at Stockbank House in September all looked as if they were headed for a healthy old age.

W. Mitchell

REMINISCENCES OF JOAN WAKEMAN continued from October issue

Some of the Aboriginals had their own fishing boats. I don’t know how many. I know Mickey Booth had one. He used to have one on the lake. Not on Hill 60, I don’t think. I think the Timbres had the fishing rights there once.

Tom Thumb Lagoon was a favourite place. It was filled with fish. It was really beautiful, even cockles, mussels, everything was in there. Spoilt you know, the Steelworks ruined everything, it’s all gone now. You’ll never go back to those beautiful days, advancement is all they’re thinking of these days, isn’t it.

When they began to build the Steelworks there were no negotiations with the Aboriginal people. It was just taken. I think Wentworth had the land then. Wentworth Street, Port Kembla is called after him. He was one of the early explorers, Wentworth. They’re still in the area, I think, the descendants that is. They owned half of Hill 60 I hear. Wentworth was the man I think that sold the land to the Hopkins brothers. I don’t know where he got it from, or stole it from somewhere.