

Industry

Sutherland Shire's slow transformation from rural to suburban relied almost exclusively on home-building and small-scale enterprises.

Bricks were manufactured at the Sutherland Brick Company which opened in 1912 at 'Gymea Ridge', now Kirrawee, until its demolition in 1975. Building supplies could also be obtained from timber yards at Caringbah and Sutherland, where Brinsley's joinery works was established in 1929.

The post-war dominance of motor transport became the catalyst for the district's first large-scale industry. In the 1950s a Caltex subsidiary, Australian Oil Refinery Company (AOR) built a refinery adjacent to the village of Kurnell. This provided employment for more than 50 years, but eventually began to lose money and closed in 2014. Caltex now operates the site as a fuel import terminal.

From 1939, with the opening at Kirrawee of Armco (Australia), a factory that made items such as pipes and pre-fabricated sheds, Caringbah North/Taren Point evolved into a light industry hub. This was consolidated in 1954 when an American pharmaceutical company, Parke Davis – now Pfizer Australia – opened in Cawarra Road, also providing local employment for 50 years. That site is now subdivided into industrial sites.

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Sutherland Shire's slow transformation from rural to suburban in the inter-war years relied almost exclusively on home-building and small-scale enterprises. As Cronulla became a tourist mecca, service industries – with a familiar pattern of casual and intermittent employment – were the suburb's dominant enterprises. In 1931, there were, listed in John Sands NSW Directory, tearooms, guesthouses, a variety of shops, real estate agents and a lawn mower expert. As Cronulla resident Clyde Snape noted acerbically, there was no industry unless, 'you could call Hands' Timber Yard, Cronulla Ice Works and Cronulla Electric Light and Power Supply industry'.

As car ownership grew in Sydney, the need for garages or service stations as they are now called increased. At one time there were two in Curranulla Street, Cronulla. Another that did good business was Bill Bullman's garage on the corner of the Princes Highway and the Kingsway, where today there are a number of car saleyards. Bill sold Plume petrol and was an NRMA repair shop. The increasing dominance of motor transport in post-war Australia led to Sutherland Shire's first large-scale industry being established.

Caltex oil refinery

The quiet village of Kurnell changed dramatically when a Caltex subsidiary, Australian Oil Refinery Company (AOR) built a refinery between 1953 and 1956 on a 400-acre site.

Initially Sutherland Shire Council opposed AOR's application, mainly because Cook's landing place was 'consecrated soil', and there was concern about the possible effect a 'dominant industry' would have on the locality. AOR promised that not only would 600 local people be employed but there would be 'no smoke or nuisance of any kind'. While the refinery did provide a steady stream of local employment for more than 50 years, the pledge that it would be pollution-free was not honoured.

By February 1956, the Kurnell refinery was pumping oil products by submarine pipeline across Botany Bay to the Banksmeadow oil terminal in the Municipality of Botany. A huge refinery wharf stretched 3700 feet into Botany Bay. With 877 concrete piles supporting its 23 000 tons of concrete, this was the dominant feature on Silver Beach.

Another remarkable change as a result of the refinery's construction was the building of the road from Cronulla to Kurnell. The track through the sandhills to Cronulla had been notoriously difficult to navigate and was often blocked by drifting sand from the extensive dunes east of the road. In April 1970, at the time of the celebrations of the Cook bicentenary, it was jammed with traffic for hours. The new road brought an influx of tourists to Kurnell, and the population increased as refinery workers made

their homes in the village, with approximately 2000 people living in 550 dwellings by 1967.

Toxic industries

By the early 1960s, several industrial enterprises were located on the Kurnell peninsula. Abbotts Laboratories had constructed a plant and the Australian Gas Light Co, which took liquid petroleum gas from Kurnell, was expanding. The refinery was enlarged at this time and an alkylation plant was constructed. Problems with the disposal of spent alkylation acid developed, as 'highly odorous emissions' were generated. Attempts to resolve the problem failed until 1975 when the use of spent acid in fertiliser manufacture ceased. Meanwhile spent acid was disposed of at sea at 'some considerable distance from shore'. In 1964 not long after the Australian Lubricating Oil Refinery (ALOR) opened, an explosion and fire led to one death and the injury of another worker.

Waste disposal practices were primitive at the Kurnell refinery, as was common in Sydney at this time. Caltex disposed of its waste – primarily about 9000 tons of weak caustic soda annually – 150 miles out to sea. Air pollution was also a problem, but by 1974 when the refinery expanded further, facilities were installed to reduce this. Still, local people complained bitterly about crude oil spillage that resulted in oil floating on the water and lumps of black sand on the beach.

After a number of Kurnell-based companies were fined in 1976, it is not surprising that Sutherland Shire Council opposed Caltex's proposal to build another refinery at Kurnell. With a world oil crisis at its peak, this was given serious consideration in the mid-1970s when the Australian Government conducted a Royal Commission into the petroleum industry. Eventually the refinery began to lose money and finally closed in 2014. Caltex now operates the site as a fuel import terminal.

Light industry

Caringbah North began evolving into a centre for light industry in 1939 with the opening of Armco (Australia) Pty. Ltd., a factory that made – among other items – pipes and pre-fabricated sheds. The suburb's status was consolidated in 1954 when an American pharmaceutical company, Parke Davis opened in Cawarra Road. Now Pfizer Australia, this factory was an important source of employment for 50 years.

Factories had been built in Sutherland Shire before town planning of any description had been undertaken. In 1951, contrary to Sutherland Shire Council's chief health surveyor's advice and despite the fact that this was soon to become an industrial zone, Council approved home building in Caringbah North.

Sutherland Shire Manufacturers' Association protested during the 1950s as the zoning of sections of Caringbah North changed. In 1959 this group, fed up with what

was perceived to be bureaucratic inefficiency, demanded that an administrator be appointed to run the Council. Unlike a number of other Sydney councils, however, Sutherland Shire Council has never been dismissed. Nevertheless, evidence of the confused planning of the 1950s can be seen in the number of aging fibro houses, some used by adjoining factories, still in the Caringbah North industrial area. Industrial zones were also established in the adjoining suburb of Taren Point and in Kirrawee, despite the resistance of local landowners

Berts Soft Drinks

One of the longest-running family businesses in Taren Point traces its origins to Broken Hill where in 1893 John Augustine Moore (Jam) established a soft drink factory – Shelleys Aerated Waters and Cordial Factory. In 1927 one branch of the family re-located to Marrickville and established Shelley and Sons Pty Ltd.

This is where young Arthur Shelley (b. 1938) began work at the age of 15, learning the business from the bottom up, and where he met his future wife Josie when she began work in the office, also as a 15-year-old.

In 1967 with the backing of their father Bert, Arthur and his brother Denis went out on their own, buying 3.75 acres of land in the 'never never' – as it was then – in Alexander Avenue, Taren Point. Building started in April 1968 with LW Giles in charge, and by October the first soft drinks were coming off the production line at Berts Soft Drinks.

Over the years there have been many changes in the industry. At Berts they have seen new initiatives such as contract packaging and the production of Unique Water, a carbonated water containing dissolved magnesium which – it is claimed – has important health benefits. The family are careful, however, to make no claims until verified by successful clinical trials.

It remains a family company with most of the clan working there at some stage in their lives. Although Arthur and Denis are still involved, their sons Matthew and Darren are now joint managers of Berts Soft Drinks.

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