

HISTORY OF THE PITT TOWN MILK FACTORY

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THE PITT TOWN BUTTER COMPANY LTD

In the 1890's butter factories were seen as a way of increasing profitability from farming. Australia was in depression in this decade, and the standard crops of corn and pumpkins were returning a poor income.

A butter factory was proposed for Windsor in 1889, and a meeting, open to the entire district, was conducted. Pitt Town was represented by C.W. May and S. Cox. By January, 1892 over 1700 shares were taken up. In the same month, there was mention of a butter-factory for Pitt Town.

The Windsor and Richmond Gazette of 30th April, 1892 reported:

"The residents of this district have started a movement for the establishing of a Co-operative Butter-factory in their midst and have put a great amount of energy and unanimity into the matter. Several preliminary meetings have already been held, which have been very satisfactory, and if the same good feeling is exhibited throughout at other meetings, it augurs well for the future. An important meeting was held on Thursday evening, April 21st, at which it was announced that promises of 325 £1 shares had already been made, and there is every probability of the movement now initiated being carried out. Particulars of the machinery required in connection with the working of a butter-factory have been applied for, and Mr Percival, of Wilberforce, at the meeting, gave every offer of assistance and advice as regards the best kinds of machinery, &c. A conversation took place as to the best sorts of pasturage, the value of ensilage for stock, and other important matters, and many questions were asked, showing that an interest was being taken in the project, and that the farmers are beginning to notice other methods of farming beyond maize-growing and pumpkins, which they are now learning are not the most profitable branches of the farming industry. It is particularly noticeable that the majority of applicants for shares will be small shareholders only, and as all are farmers, nearly all of them will also be suppliers. It is very pleasing to find that the matter is being taken up energetically and unanimously, and that there is a possibility of the movement taking a practicable form; also that Pitt Town has aroused from its lethargy at last."

From the same paper of 21st May, 1892:

"The prospectus of the Pitt Town Dairy and Butter Company is out. The capital is £500, and the provisional directors Messrs Tris Bowd, James Davis, J. Dick Smith, James Wilbow, Wm. Maxwell, and D. Robertson, with Mr J. K. Owens as Sec."

Mr Percival had been operating a butter factory in Wilberforce, but by June 1892 was preparing to close it to become manager of the Hawkesbury Dairy Company factory on the Terrace, Windsor. Pitt Town had been supplying 50 gallons per day to the Wilberforce factory. Mr W. Maxwell stated that this had greatly increased his profits as a Pitt Town farmer. The factory had been paying 4 3/4d per gallon, when the producer had been receiving 9d per pound for butter. The factory had initially had difficulty in attracting suppliers as the

farmers had tried to produce butter themselves by the churning method, which was to prove unprofitable.

By June, 1892 the share list in connection with the Pitt Town factory had been almost filled the capital was £500.

A meeting of the Pitt Town Butter Company Company Ltd. was held in the Church of England School room in June 1892, and was chaired by Mr J.T. Wilbow. Mr J.D. Smith read the articles of association which were the same as those adopted by the Hawkesbury Dairy Company. The 7 directors elected were Messrs J.D. Smith, J.K. Owens, G. Greenwell, T. Bowd, J. Davis, J.T. Wilbow and W. Maxwell.

Others known to have attended the meeting were Rev. J. Ayling, J.J. Paine, Mr Phillips and A. Arndell.

Mr J.J. Paine was appointed solicitor for the company and the Bank of N.S.W. was to be the company bank. Rev. J. Ayling commented on how it had shown that Pitt Town could become united if it wished.

By February, 1893 the factory was nearing completion. The building had been erected in Buckingham Street, on the eastern side of the Public School. The boiler, engine and separator had arrived, and a start was expected within a few weeks. The equipment had been purchased from Lasseter and Co. Sydney. John Paull, of Pitt Town, had erected the building. The directors had done a large amount of carting in their own time and at their own expense. A stone butter room had been erected in the main building, and the floors were being concreted. The machinery had cost £360, the separator being an Alexander. Mr J.T. Wilbow was at this stage Managing Director.

In September, 1893 Mr W. Maxwell was elected Managing Director. The one man-one vote principle was adopted in running the factory. Mr Maxwell had been farming for several years without very satisfactory results. Floods of dry weather had prevented the gathering of successive crops. When the Wilberforce factory opened, he commenced with a small supply of milk and found the industry to be profitable. Farmers were able to realise a specific revenue from day to day with sale of milk. The factory was able to supply all the butter necessary for local consumption. In the 3 months prior to August, 1893, £128/15/- in payment for milk supplies had been made.

Mr Charles was at this stage manager and butter maker. There was talk of increasing the capital at the end of 1893. The February, 1894 report stated that £250 had been borrowed from R.W. Cobcroft to meet expenses as there was insufficient capital. The largest recurring expense was repayment to Lasseter & Co. The report listed the major draw back to the company as being "the very small amount of milk received and the very inferior quality of same. Twelve thousand pound of butter had been produced in the previous 9 months, and £400 had been paid to suppliers. Milk was originally paid for by weight, but in 1894 was paid for by results. Another difficulty was with the Victoria Separator of which there were only two in the colony. Twenty three and a half pounds of milk were converted into a pound of butter. They were receiving 140 gallons of milk per day and paid 2½d to 3d per gallon.

The Rev. J. Ayling reported the managers salary came to 4s 3d per day, which was less than labourers wages. He moved that the salary be increased from 30s per week to £2, and this was carried with dissent. Mr S. Cox and Mr T. Bowd had argued that the company would be unable to meet interest repayments if this occurred, and that if the price of milk was dropped by ½d per gallon, the milk would be sold elsewhere. The decision to reinstate Mr Charles to his original salary received general approval in the town.

The report for July, 1894 stated "the quantity of milk received at the Factory has been far too small to admit any profits being realised, the total number of gallons treated for the 6 months being 24,895 since the factory started the greater part of the district has been flooded several times, which entails great loss in feed to the suppliers, and of course a great decrease in the quantity of milk." There was a small surplus of £9/19/10 on the Balance Sheet.

The directors elected in July, 1894 were R. Owens, W. Stubbs, S. Phillips, A. Arndell, W. Maxwell (chairman and Managing Director) and A.W Arndell (Hon. Sec.).

From 1st July to 31st December, 1894, 23,101 gallons of milk were received. A profit of £3/7/9 was made.

Between 1st January, and 30th June, 1895, 8772 lbs of butter was made from 22,595 gallons of milk at a profit of £12/16/8, despite "the low price of butter, the small supply of milk, and the depressed times."

The Balance Sheet for 1st July to 31st December, 1895, shows a dramatic down turn. Only 11,460 gallons of milk were received, and 4557 lbs of butter produced. Farmers were paid 3½d to 5d per gallon. Butter was sold for 11½d per lb. The manager had kept expenses as low as possible, and he was given every credit. The reduced milk supply was due to loss of cattle by dairymen through disease. The manager had reduced his wages without being asked to do so. The company's loss was £6/10/1.

Between 1st January and 30th June, 1896, 13,655 gallons of milk were made into 5,557lbs of butter. The price of butter varied between 7½d to 1s. per pound, and suppliers received 2½d to 3½d per gallon. Directors elected were S. Cox, R. Owens, W. Stubbs and S. Phillips. A profit of £1/6/5 was realised.

In January, 1897, 150 gallons of milk per day were being received.

The report for the 6 months ending 31st December, 1896 again saw a small profit. A circular saw bench had been erected at the factory, and a small income was being received for wood cutting, as well as for butter and skim milk.

At the 1897 Hawkesbury Show, Mr J. Charles took first prize for his factory butter.

The balance sheet for the first 6 months of 1897 again showed a profit of £3/4/8 on butter and skim milk, but a loss of £2/12/0 on wood cutting. This had been despite drought. Directors elected in 1897 were G.M. Paull, W. Owens and Mr Maxwell (Managing director).

In November, 1897 Mr J. Charles resigned as manager of the butter factory to move to Quirindi. George Curl was appointed to fill the vacant position.

In February, 1898, Mr Maxwell reported to the semi annual meeting that the factory had stopped work as the separator had broken down, and could not be repaired, and was working at only 10% efficiency. He also stated that Pitt Town people would not patronise the factory as local people were connected with it.

Mr O'Connell offered to rent the factory on a 5 year lease at £30/year stating that the boiler and engine also needed repair. Another tender for rental was later received.

The original cost of the factory was £807. In March, 1898, it was decided to sell the factory rather than rent it. It was auctioned on April 16, at the Royal Hotel by Mr W. Gosper for Mr R.W. Cobcroft, who held the mortgage over the property. It was knocked down to Mr Fred Harvey, of the Country Milk Suppliers' Company for the sum of £340. This met the liability of the company without giving any return, in the shape of capital invested.

On 13th October, 1898 the Company agreed to affix its seal to the deed of conveyance to James Frederick Harvey.

The Pitt Town Butter Company was formed as a means of increasing farmers' incomes at a time of falling prices for their standard crops. It succeeded in increasing their profitability for a number of years. However, because of small capital investment, the company was forced to borrow, resulting in interest repayments which eroded most of the profits. The amount of milk available was never sufficient to enable the factory to work at full capacity, and the project was further troubled by drought, floods and depression. The company was always struggling to keep ahead, and when vital equipment broke down, there were no funds to replace them.

In 1899, the butter factory was run by Mr Harvey as a creamery. By February, the factory had been repaired and painted, and a larger separator had been installed and was working satisfactorily.

THE AUSTRALIAN CONDENSED MILK COMPANY

The factory was taken over by a syndicate comprising Dr McKellar, Messrs. Thomas Buckland, Richard Binnie and David Fell. Donald Munro was engaged as first condenser.

The Windsor and Richmond Gazette of 9th June, 1900 reported that big improvements were being made to the factory and that a new building had been erected. There was a garden in front of the factory. The same paper reported on 2nd February, 1901,

"The Australian Condensed Milk Company is now operating at Pitt Town, and is turning out butter and condensed milk. The butter is made on the Ayrshire system, and for purity cannot be excelled." The same issue reported

"Mr Munro, manager,... met with a painful accident one day last week. He was tending machinery and somehow one of his hands came into contact with a cog-wheel. A finger was cut almost completely off."

A history of the factory written in 1911, (Windsor and Richmond Gazette 4th March, 1911) states

"Some lively scenes were enacted during Mr Munro's reign, culminating in an equity suit ... Mr Holyoke succeeded as condenser for the syndicate. Just about this time they registered as a proprietary company under the style of the Commonwealth Condensed Milk Co. Ltd. They carried on with indifferent success, and with the exit of Mr Holyoke Mr W.J. Booth followed in the procession of manufacturers."

Owing to the insufficient supply of milk, the factory closed in April, 1903. Many young people were said to have been thrown out of work, after a prolonged effort to "make it a paying game." The factory was re-opened in June, 1903.

The interests of the condensed milk company were then acquired by a syndicate consisting of Mr Booth, W.J. Tyler and F.A. Waller, the last named being managing director. Mr Booth did not remain long after this, and Messrs Horton and Freeman, mining engineers, of Sydney, became associated with the company.

Mr W.P. Tylor was manager for the Hawkesbury River Condensed Milk Company factory for two years but in February, 1906, left for England. He was given a large Valedictory banquet before leaving, and was praised for getting the factory working again and winning the confidence of the suppliers. On one occasion he had himself found the money to pay suppliers. He replied that he was proud to leave the factory in a satisfactory financial position.

In October, 1906, it was announced by Mr Waller, the Managing director of the Hawkesbury River Condensed Milk Company (Pitt Town), that they would establish another and a more central factory in Windsor.

R.H. Clarke was engaged as factory manager and manufacturer after Mr Tyler's departure. The latter commented at his complimentary banquet on Mr Clarke's ability. Clarke had joined the staff of the Jersey Butter Factory at Windsor as a boy, and after 3 years held a "Master's certificate!" He managed the Windsor Factory for 7 years. In 1904, he became a member of the syndicate running the Pitt Town Factory. Mr H.V.E. Calthrop, of West Australia later purchased the interests of Horton and Freeman. In May, 1909, the Hawkesbury

Condensed Milk Co. Ltd. was incorporated, the principal shareholders being Messrs H.V.E. Calthrop, A.H. Burnet, C.A. Burnet, F.A. Waller, R.H. Clarke retained to position of factory Manager and manufacturer. With successful conduct of the company, dairy farmers soon gave it major support. An exhibit of "Red Cross" condensed milk, made by Mr Clarke at Pitt Town, was sent to the Franco-British Exhibition and obtained the highest award.

The demand for the "Red Cross" brand rapidly increased, and the company recognised that the Pitt Town factory was both inadequate for their requirement and not sufficiently centrally located. The Company was never able to supply sufficient condensed milk for the demand "Red Cross" and other brands were exported to all states. The land and building of the old Windsor Butter Factory was purchased. £5,000 were spent on alteration and additions, and in new plant and machinery.

Operations were temporarily suspended while the machinery and plant were being removed from Pitt Town to Windsor (in May, 1910). Operations were started in Windsor on 28th January, 1911.

In December, 1911, J Greer of the Government Labor Farm, was given permission by Windsor Municipal Council to remove the piping running from the old Mill Factory to the punt at the river, after giving his guarantee that the road would be left in the same condition as it was prior to the excavation.

References: Windsor and Richmond Gazette. 1888 to 1911.