

THE PROGRESS OF PYRMONT, A GREAT INDUSTRIAL CENTRE - 1900

Australian Town and Country Journal, 13 October, 1900

During the decade just past, there has been no development more pronounced than the forward move of the Pyrmont district towards importance as an industrial centre. Its position, within easy distance of the city's heart, the natural advantages in having deep water along the greater part of its extensive water frontages, and in there being an absence of any such gradients as would make road traction difficult and expensive, are enormously in its favor, and this fact is generally recognised. As a result, the waste and vacant land has been utilised for the accommodation of the business; first of one great firm and then of another, until little remains.

A score of years ago, Pyrmont was hardly more than a residential suburb, its chief population being of the class whose living was obtained in the shipping business or other waterside pursuits, such as seamen, wharf laborers, coal-lumpers, carters, ferry companies, lightermen, and men of other similar occupations. That the same class is still a powerful factor in the population is demonstrated at each parliamentary election; but there is now a strong leavening of artisans, storemen, and factory hands, the employees of businesses which are springing into flourishing existence on all sides. Quarrymen, too, have always resided in Pyrmont in numbers. Pyrmont is famed for its excellent building-stone ... and its great quarries are practically an inexhaustible source of wealth. In fact, the district (and Ultimo, the greater portion of which is commonly called Pyrmont, though the dividing line is at Union street) is simply a hill of sandstone, with flats by the water's edge on either side.

A person revisiting Sydney after thirty years would probably find as much occasion for wonderment at the change on this western side of Darling Harbor as anywhere in the metropolis. By the harbor's edge, where a narrow strip of low lying land was only utilised by persons who gained a livelihood by breaking up old ships' boilers, or collecting scrap-iron, now run the railway lines, while a large goods depot has been built along the greater part of its length. Darling Island has been levelled, and the waterfront faced with a massive sea-wall. This is constructed of enormous solid blocks of concrete, each twenty or thirty tons in weight, whose outer-surfaces have been sheeted with immense beams of hard wood, forming excellent wharfage. The work is not yet completed, that at the inner side of the point being still in progress. As far as it has gone, though, the railway has been carried forward, and powerful hydraulic cranes may daily be seen swinging entire truck loads into the holds of sea-going ships.

On the other side, what was formerly known as Blackwattle Swamp, extending as far as the foot of Bay-street, Glebe, was filled in some twenty-eight years ago, Wentworth Park, a recreation ground, with bowling green and cricket oval, has taken its place. Hardly a yard of the waterside is now unoccupied. From Darling Island to Pyrmont Point, and thence to the Glebe Island Bridge, the shores are taken up with the establishments of engineers, boiler makers, and iron shipbuilders, steamship Joinery works and timber yards, above all of which the great smoke-begrimed and four-turreted pile of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company's works rises its conspicuous mass. On the Blackwattle Bay shore, where ten years ago nearly all was vacant land, one may now see a row of sawing and planing mills, joinery works, cooperages, and box factories, and timber yards, all with an appearance of briskness and prosperity. Here there is a yearly increasing output of material varying from delicate mouldings to ponderous wharf-timbers.

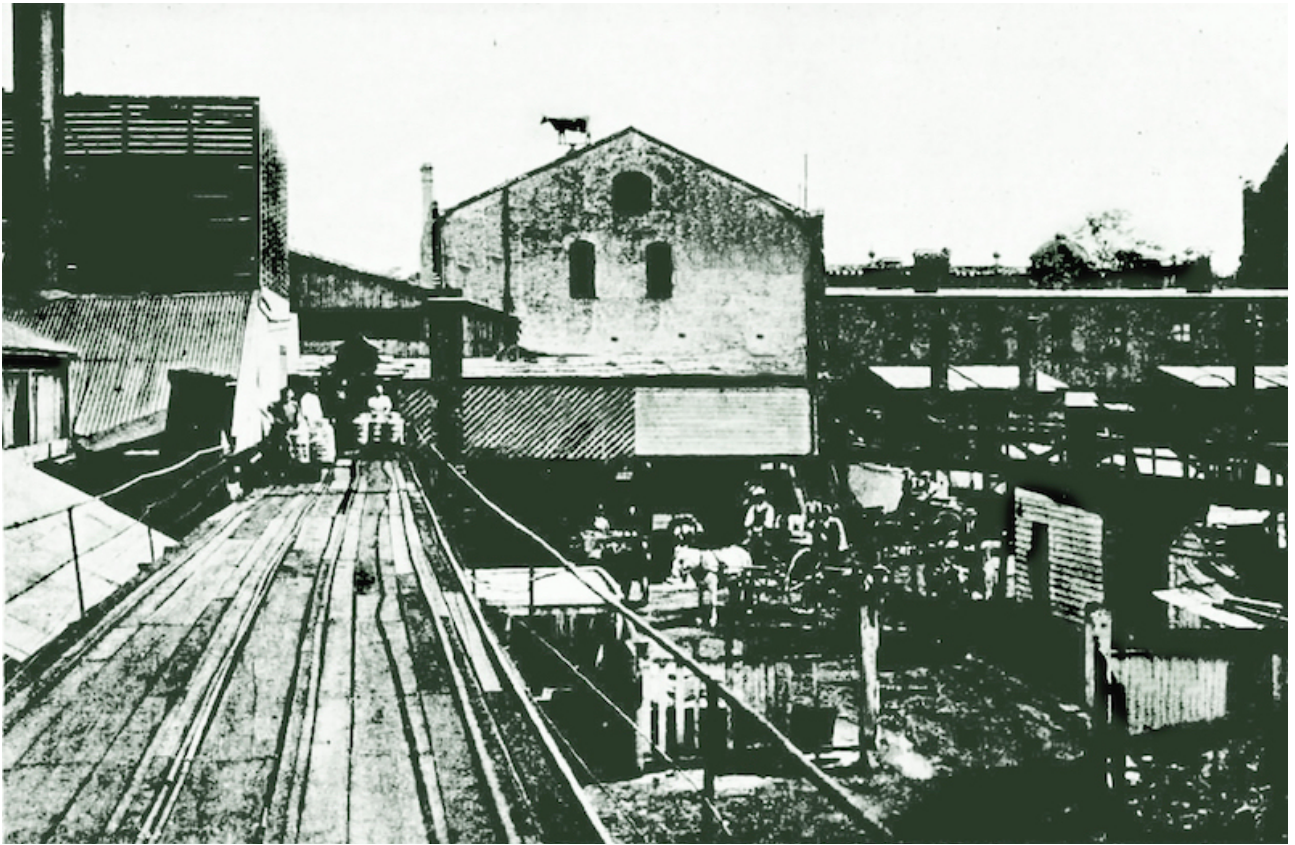
Throughout the whole district, during the last twelve or fifteen years, great wool warehouses, mills, factories, machinery stores, iron foundries, and blacksmithing and engineering sheds

have been established on all sides, and the air resounds with the incessant roar of machinery, the whirr and shriek of the sawmills, the rumble of heavy wheels, and the clattering and hammering of the foundries, while innumerable tall chimneys burden the atmosphere with dense, black smoke. Far-seeing businessmen, driven by the high prices of city land have almost unanimously set their choice upon Pymont, where land was comparatively cheap, and which is within such easy distance both of the middle of the city and of the railway station, that cartage scarcely costs more than if it were within a few yards of George-street ...

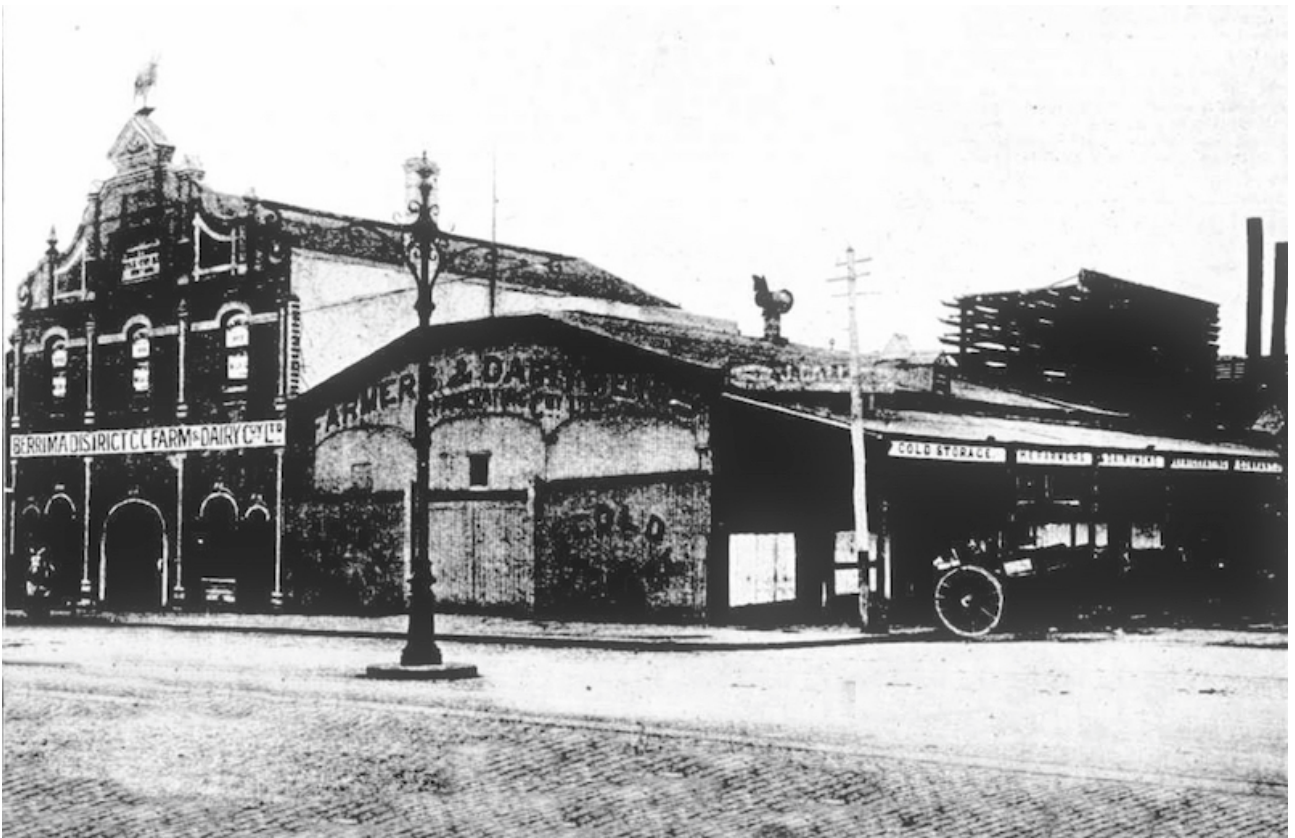
[The best view is seen] from the tower of the General Post Office. The Technical College, the Technological Museum, and the High School, built seven or eight years ago, form a magnificent block of buildings, occupying a site bounded by Harris-street, Mary Ann-street, and Jones-street. The recently erected tramway power-house ... stands out prominently, its great smoke-stack rearing to a height of some 200ft. Engines, combining 6000 or 7000 horse-power, with a quartet of great flywheels weighing 60 tons each, are in this building working as smoothly as a watch, while the necessary dynamos, boilers, and other appliances are on a corresponding scale. In connection with the establishment, between Harris-street and the railway lines, are several immense car sheds, engine sheds, and cleaning sheds. At the corner of Harris-street and Union-street a new stone post office is being erected, to take the place of the present out-of-date structure in Union-street.

A number of immense wool palaces (for they are nothing less) may be seen, the more noticeable being those of Messrs. John Bridge and Co, Ltd, Winchcombe, Carson and Co., and Hill, Clark and Co. The large premises of the Farmers' and Dairymen's Company, and the more conspicuous timber yards, such as those of Messrs. Saxton and Binns, G. Augenson and Co, and others, may also be visible. Such a view will show the jumbled tiers of house-terraces, of which old Pymont is largely made up (most of the houses being of two storeys), the huge cranes upon Darling Island, a dredge at work, deepening the harbor near the point, a dozen large ships being laden with coal at various wharves, the "mosquito fleet", mostly engaged in the timber trade, lying by the timber-yards at Blackwattle Bay, and a few ketches at anchor in the little bays. Possibly a new steamer of handsome proportions may here be seen moving slowly and proudly out from Darling Harbor, while there, in a small bay just beyond, an old hulk, with painted ports, at the close of an honorable career, is being dismantled and broken up for the copper rivets which it may contain

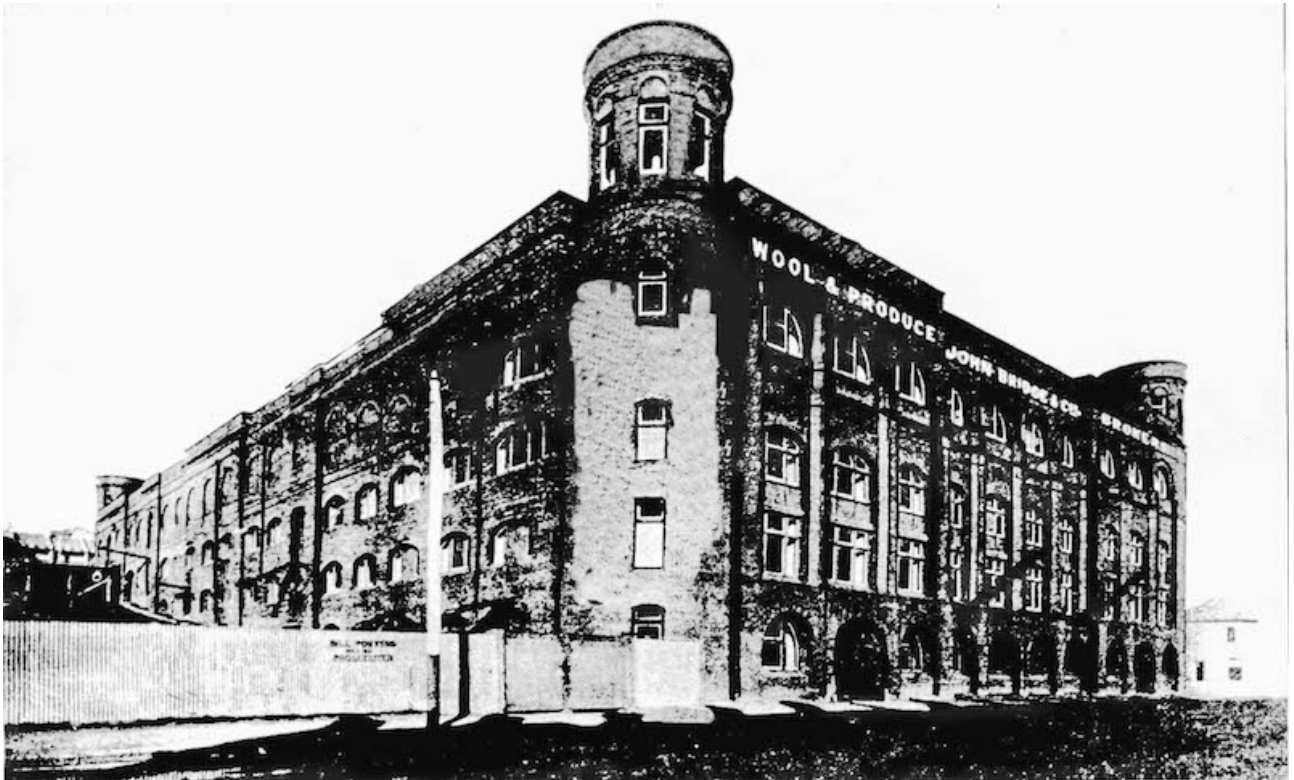
The district has been rendered far more accessible lately, by the extension along nearly the whole of Harris-street of the electric tramway, which daily carries many thousands of passengers. A ferry service touches at Pymont Point at frequent intervals, and buses running to Glebe, Ryde, and Balmain traverse its principal thoroughfares. The two great highways whence the fruits of its industry come and depart, Pymont and Glebe Island Bridges are rapidly being replaced by structures which will probably serve the requirements of the next half century. The new Glebe Island Bridge will be a small span between two enormous jutting stone causeways. The latter are nearly formed. The new bridge across Darling Harbor promises to be one of the finest in the Southern Hemisphere, and a small army of workmen are engaged in its construction. Recognising that the future of Pymont will be one of wealth, industrial importance, and prosperity, the Government and people of New South Wales are giving us a front entrance such as it will deserve.



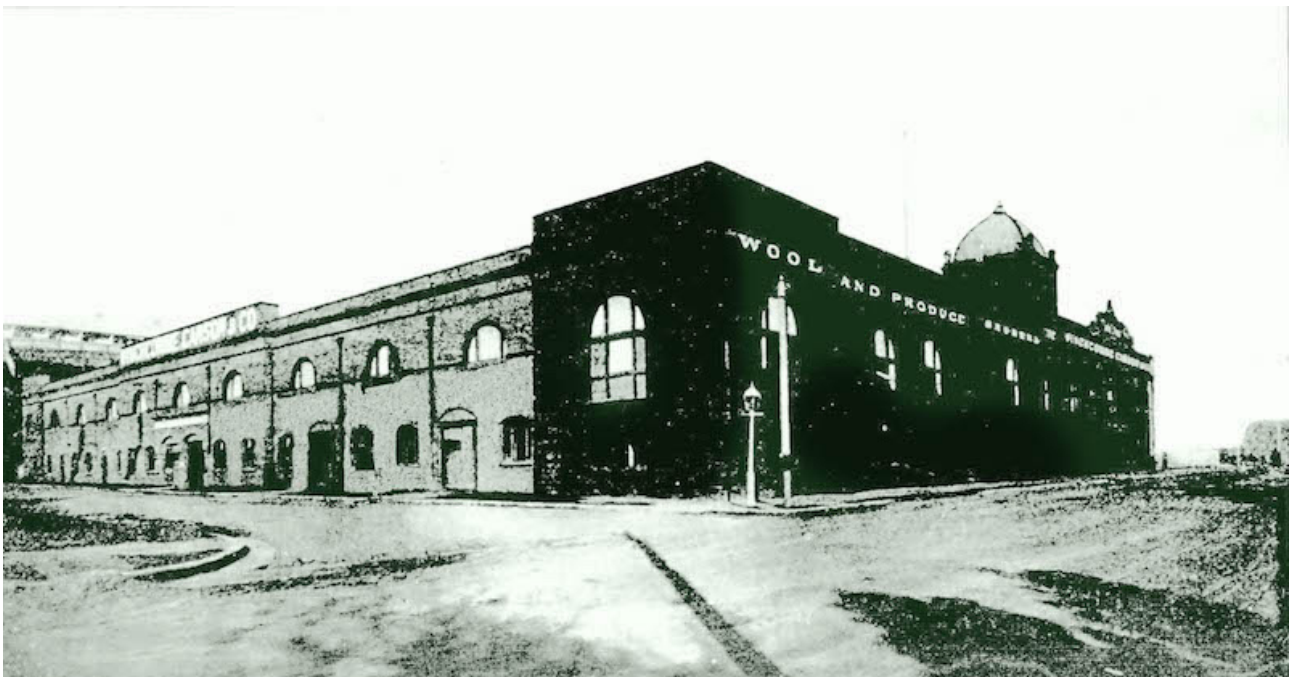
Farmers' and Dairymen's Company Limited



The Farmers' and Dairymen's Refrigerating Company, Limited, and The Berrima District Farm and Dairy Company, Limited



John Bridge and Company's Wool and Produce Stores



Winchcombe, Carson, and Company's Wool and Produce Stores