

The Places Migrant Women found Work in Wollongong 1943 – 1990

by Louise Thom

Employment Generally

In the immediate post war years immigration policy was developed as the means to strengthen Australia's defences. The first Minister for Immigration and Information, Arthur Calwell argued in 1945 that Australia had to increase its population as it was surrounded by vastly overpopulated countries that looked with envy upon our vast unpopulated continent.¹ The second reason was the expansion of the Australian economy. The war had brought about shortages in accommodation and essential services yet demand was high as the birth rate increased dramatically after the war. Industry did not have the labour force required to meet the ever increasing demands of the consumer.

*The stimulus created by the backlog of demand after the war provided the basis from which to launch the economy into economic growth. Immigration supplied the necessary labour (but also added to the existing demand).*²

In 1949 a massive expansion of the Port Kembla Steelworks was announced. A new hot and cold strip mill and a new tinplate plant were to be built upon 100 acres of reclaimed swamp land in the area of Tom Thumb Lagoon.³ The existing steel making facilities were to be extended to provide material for the new plant. An additional 72 coke ovens were constructed doubling the existing number. A new coal washery was already in place and a new blast furnace was being installed at that time. A second power station and boiler were also under construction. These works would increase production from 750,000 tons to 1,250,000 tons of ingots per annum.⁴ At this time 4000 people worked at the steelworks. The need for labour in response to the expansion program was high and local supply of labour could not meet the demand.

Steel and associated heavy industries in Wollongong continued to grow. According to an article in the South Coast Times a survey of employment figures for the AIS steelworks for the year 1961 indicated that the number of employees increased from 13,350 to 15,091 in that year alone.⁵ More men were also employed in the AIS Collieries.

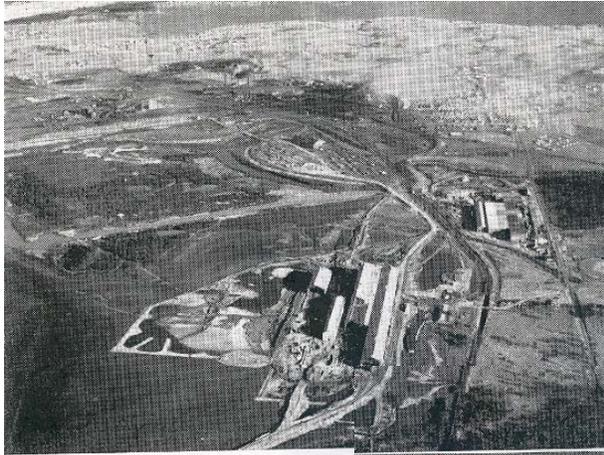
¹ Rhonda L Smith, *Australian Immigration 1945 – 1975*, Chapter 2, *Population, Immigration and the Australian Economy*, University of Melbourne 1979. Page 37

² Ibid. page 38

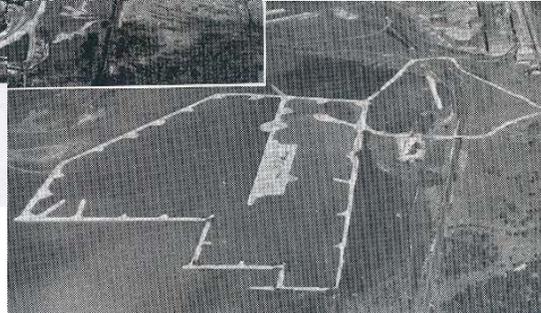
³ Australian Iron and Steel Journal *Contact* Vol 5 Oct 1949, page 4

⁴ Ibid. page 5

⁵ South Coast Times Jan 4 1962, front page.



These aerial views graphically demonstrate the progress made on the hot strip mill project at the A.I.S. Kembla Works. The picture at right taken in June, 1945, when the swamp reclamation operations had been in hand only a short time contrasts sharply with the recent picture of the same area (above).



In order to meet the labour demand the Federal government announced in 1945 an annual target of 1% or 70,000 immigrants. This rate was to be maintained until the population doubled.⁶ It was to be known as the “populate or perish” policy. Between July 1947 and June 1973 the direct net gain from immigration is estimated to be 2.3 million or 3.3 million if the Australian born children of migrants are included. In Wollongong the population increased from 63,000 in 1947 to 171,000 in 1976. This increase was for the most part thanks to the massive wave of migration responding to the high level of employment opportunities available in Wollongong.



To conduct a full survey of the places where men found work would be a large undertaking. It is not possible or necessarily useful to try to separate the workers according to their birthplace. All industries had workers from Australia as well as overseas, although some of the less favoured jobs did have a dominance of unskilled non-English speaking labour. The resources for this study were insufficient to undertake a full study of employment of migrants and we have therefore limited it to the study of the workplaces of women.

MM and Port Kembla Harbour 1966

⁶ Smith, page 44

Migrant Women's Workplaces

To set the picture for the work places of women it is first necessary to briefly outline the context for migrant women looking for work. Our interviews show that migrant men came to Australia for work and for better opportunities and that the women in the family followed their husbands or their fathers. For those who came to Wollongong it was expected that the men would find work in the heavy metals industry or coal mining, both industries of which were in need of labour in the post war period. Migrant women then sought work in order to supplement the family income or until they married.

The migrant woman referred to in this study has travelled to Australia and then to Wollongong soon after the Second World War during the boom time of migration in Australia. She is from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Migrant women worked in the same places that women who were born in Australia worked. As Pennay says in his document it is difficult to distinguish between what is migrant history and what is the history of Wollongong⁷. The study of migrant women's employment history and its impact upon the physical development of Wollongong is also the history of Wollongong women in general. Migrant women worked alongside Australian born women and formed friendships and connections.

The purpose of this study is to uncover places where migrant women found work. One of the persistent themes emerging from this course of study was the high levels of unemployment for women in Wollongong. Throughout the 1960's, 1970's and 1980's it was a matter of great concern to organisations such as the Illawarra Regional Development Board, the Wollongong Chamber of Commerce and the Good Neighbour Council, with each organisation seeking to change or influence the situation. In the course of our research we have found the most common source of employment for migrant women in the post war period were clothing factories. These factories were often given financial assistance by Government to come to Wollongong in order to address the "female employment problem". As a result a large proportion of our research has been about the clothing industry in Wollongong. We have also found some information on women working at the Tin Mill at the Steelworks and in the Rod and Wire Factory at Metal Manufacturers.

Historical background

What started as a means to meet the clothing demands of the armed forces was also an industry developing to meet the demands of an emerging post war consumerism. Decentralisation of industry is key to the development of clothing factories in Wollongong.

In September 1943 the first clothing factory was opened in Wollongong. It was operated by L.E. Isaacs Ltd and was described by the Minister for Home Security, Mr H.P. Lazzarini opening the factory, as an Australian first for the role it played in implementing commonwealth policy of decentralising industry. A

⁷ Pennay, Bruce *Wollongong a changing place: Post-war settlement, Documents and Information Sheets*. Curriculum material. Published by Goulbourn College of Advanced Education 1981

policy whereby the machines are taken to where labour is available, rather than the labour to the machines. Also known as the Rural Factories project.⁸

The Hon. J.S. Rosevar, Speaker for the Federal Parliament whom also attended the opening is quoted by the SCT as saying *they were watching the start of something they had dreamed of for many years – the decentralisation of industry. The enormous growth of population in the district in recent years had been largely brought about by transferring men to the heavy industries. One thing had been forgotten, however and that was work for women. This new policy would make provision for all members of the family.*⁹

Located on the corner of Ellen and Auburn Street Isaacs commenced manufacture of trousers for the armed forces. At that time the contracts for supply of garments for the forces was four million garments in arrears. The garments were destined for the forces in New Guinea.¹⁰



By the time Olga Romano started working at Isaacs in 1952 the factory had moved to Gladstone Avenue.

Isaacs also had a factory at Unanderra that made men's suits and coats. The Unanderra factory was amalgamated into the Gladstone Road factory when the extension (now South Coast agencies) was added. Isaacs eventually took over Silknit which was next door. When opened in 1943 the Isaacs factory employed 20 women, by 1964 it employed approximately 360.¹¹

According to a 1943 South Coast Times article in October the opening of the Silknit factory marked the fourth factory to open in response to the decentralisation policy of the government. Another factory assisted by the government was Champion Knitting Mills Pty Ltd in Keira Street. Champion manufactured boys underwear, swim suits and work for the war including air force pullovers and mosquito net tents. Champion was one of the largest manufacturers of swimsuits in Australia at that time.¹²

At a meeting of the Bulli Shire Council the same week Silknit was opened it was suggested that steps be taken to secure a clothing factory for Thirroul. *Cr. Baines in supporting the suggestion, remarked that there were 50 or 60 girls from the Shire travelling Sydney every day.*¹³ At that point all four clothing factories were located in Wollongong. John Vicars Ltd was to open a factory in Franklin Avenue, Bulli in 1945 to manufacture textiles. By 1951 the factory had a staff of over 200.

⁸ The South Coast Times, Friday September 10, 1943

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Illawarra Mercury 10 Sept 1943

¹¹ Interview with Olga Romano 13 Aug 2007

¹² The South coast times Friday October 29, 1943

¹³ Ibid.

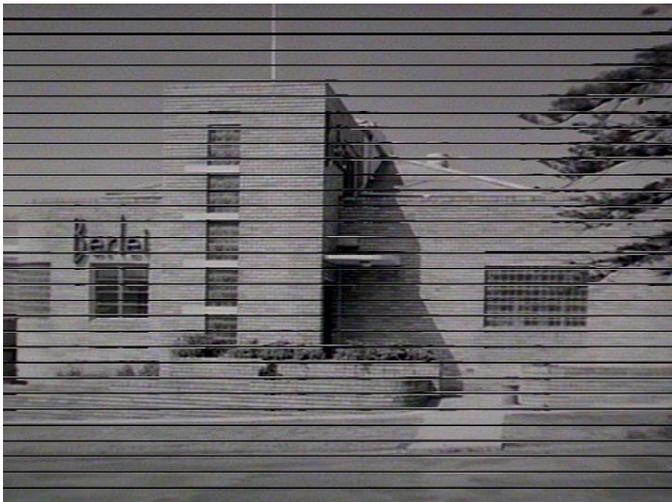


Interior of Silkknit Wollongong, September 1956¹⁴

Other clothing, footwear or textile factories opening around this time include:

The Berlei factory, manufacturers of corsets and brassieres, was officially opened on 27 September 1945 by Minister for Labour and industry and Social Welfare Mr Hamilton Knight as part of Commonwealth and State government moves to decentralise industry.

In 1949 the factory had a workforce of 200.



Berlei House 45 Denison Street, Wollongong Photo: State Library: GPO 2 – 01487 picman

¹⁴National Library A1200, L21914 Barcode : 11788283. Study database ref. WWP025

Duncan and Sons opened in 1946 on the corner of Keira and Burelli Streets manufacturing overalls, shorts and industrial uniforms. This job advertisement is from the Illawarra Mercury in March 1946.



In February 1948 Crystal Clothing Factory maker of shirts and children's pyjamas already operating out of a garage, opened a purpose built factory in Ellen Street Wollongong. With a modern building of 15,000 square feet of floor space Crystal Shirt Manufacturing Company became largest manufacturer of shirts in Australia at that time. The company originally went to Wollongong during the war as part of the Governments

Decentralisation of industry scheme. The factory was expected to employ 250 "girls" when full production was underway.

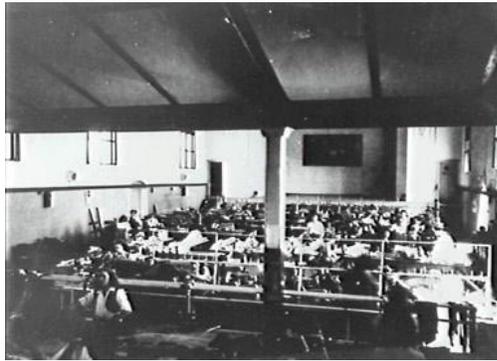


Illawarra Mercury
Advertisements April 1946 and
Aug 1950

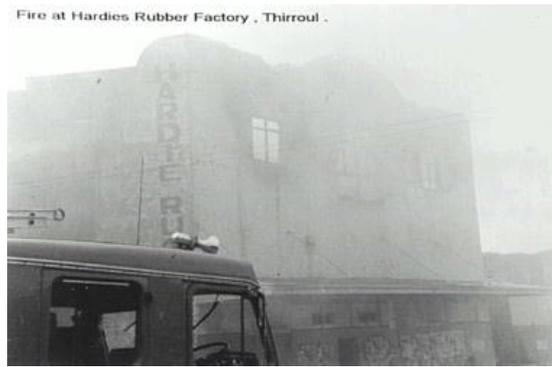


In 1953 the company opened another factory in Marshall Street Dapto. In an interview with the South coast Times in November 1957 the owner of Crystal Clothing Industries said they had a workforce of 300 and that the move to the Illawarra had been "wise and profitable". By 1959 the two factories combined had a workforce of 550. The original buildings still exist today and are used as a Salvation Army furniture store and a furniture store.

Another factory established in the late 1940's was Hardie Rubber Company manufacturer of rubber footwear and rubber proofed coats. The factory was located in Thirroul but was seriously damaged by fire.



Interior Hardies Rubber Factory



Fire at the factory

In 1952 King Gee came to Corrimal establishing a factory specialising in the manufacture of industrial clothing, overalls, shorts, trousers etc. The factory maintained a steady workforce of 77 however the factory was quite small and needed to expand by 1966. The 1966 factory was purpose built to contain the growth of the company representing an investment of 85,000 pounds, part of which came from the State Government Decentralisation program. The funding was a means of overcoming shortage of jobs for women. It was located adjacent to a railway station so women coming from Port Kembla or Cringila could work there. The factory is one of only two original clothing factories in Wollongong still in operation today however with a much reduced staff and only producing 6% of its total output. The rest being produced in China, see later section on tariffs for more detail.



Former Corrimal King Gee factory



Woman hemming trousers at King Gee Bellambi 2007

Other factories operating in Wollongong between 1945 and 1985 include:

- Bonds Clothing Factory, Port Kembla, Unanderra, Warilla.
- Leathercrafts, Helensburgh
- New York Sports D'Jour, Bulli
- Freidelle, Wollongong
- Midford, Kembla Grange

- Jones, JH &Co Clothing Manufacturers, Thirroul
- Belford Knitting mills P/L, Warrawong
- Kembla Manufacturing Co Clothing Manufacturers, Port Kembla
- Meritas Knitting Mills, Wollongong
- Robins Footware, Kemblawarra
- White Wear Clothing factory, Albion Park Rail
- Regal Shirts Pty Ltd, Wollongong
- Firestone Australia, Thirroul

Other industries also employed women and these include:

- Pye Industries Ltd, Bellambi – TV and stereo components
- Australian Iron and Steel Ltd Tin Mill – Assorting Room
- Metal Manufacturers Ltd – Rod and Wire factory, Covered Wire Division



Metal manufacturers female work force during the war.

Positions Vacant

FREIDELLE

REQUIRE

**EXPERIENCED TWIN-NEEDLE AND
BUTTON MACHINIST.**

ALSO, EXPERIENCED MACHINIST.

Apply MISS CLARK, 32-34 Auburn Street

PHONE 273.

The Female Employment Problem

Despite the opening of a number of clothing factories after the war there was still a shortage of work opportunities for women, particularly unskilled women with a language barrier. By 1960 it was becoming evident that the dominance of a manufacturing industry that employed mainly male workers was leaving very little opportunity for women to find work. In the Proceedings of Good Neighbour



Council Area Conference April 1960 Mrs Chatterton is quoted as saying *"We are not able to attract single migrant women in this area. If we cannot get work for the English speaking migrant, we have no chance of getting work for single women who are not able to speak the English language."*¹⁵

In July 1960 the Chamber of Manufactures of New South Wales prepared a report which focussed upon the advantages of locating business, particularly industry in Wollongong and the South Coast their aim being to attract manufacturers to the area. One of the advantages cited was an availability of labour *"particularly juveniles and females."*¹⁶

In May 1964 The City of Greater Wollongong Chamber of Commerce referred to what at the time was known as *"the female employment problem"*.

*We have a state of affairs where practically every person, business, profession and smaller industry is either directly or indirectly dependent upon the welfare of six large industries at Port Kembla. The ever increasing demand for male labour by these heavy industries leaves a pool of unemployment of female labour.*¹⁷

The Chamber's Bulletin noted that 1000 women were registered as unemployed at this time. Some of the solutions suggested by the Chamber were to offer an exemption of the Council rates on the land or offer Council owned land on a long term low cost lease.

The State government policy at the time was to encourage decentralization of industry by offering financial assistance. The Chamber felt that the State government really treated Wollongong like a *"fringe area of metropolitan Sydney and focused its decentralization funds in outer regional areas like Young, Bathurst and Tamworth."*¹⁸

In late 1964 the Illawarra Regional Development Committee undertook a survey of Female employment in the Illawarra Region. Determined not to revert to a pre war economy the Premiers department in

¹⁵ Pennay. page 55

¹⁶ Council of the South Coast Centre of the Chamber of manufactures of New South Wales, *An outline of facilities, services and advantages for industry and manufacture in the south coast area.* July 1960

¹⁷ Chamber of Commerce *Monthly Bulletin Wollongong Number 2,* May 1964

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

1945 established a Reconstruction and Development Division which was to be advised by regional committees, the Illawarra Regional Development Committee was one of these. The IRDC presented a lengthy report on its female employment survey to the Premier in December 1964. In summary it stated that in August, 1964 28.5% of the female workforce was unemployed in Greater Wollongong, Shellharbour and Kiama. The Australian rate at this time was 2.1%. There were 6090 women in Illawarra without jobs.¹⁹ The IRDC urged the Premier to consider a government solution to the problem.

Joint responsibility might be summarised as follows -

- (a) Local authorities in the region on the requirement for self-help.
- (b) The State Government for some assistance by the provision of incentives; for the relaxation of certain current repressive measures and for recognition of new fields for engagement of female labour or for the broadening of existing fields.
- (c) On the Commonwealth as the dominant authority on the Australian economic scene to ensure the adequacy of funds to State and local authorities to ensure the availability of sites for the establishment of factory buildings and the necessary expansion of essential services. The Commonwealth, too, must share a large proportion of responsibility because the problem arises largely from the application of Federal policies and because of its function and obligation with regard to the question of employment.

The survey of the area between Berkeley, Port Kembla and Windang showed a female unemployment rate of 40%. This area was where the majority of migrants lived. At least ¼ of the unemployed were from non-English speaking backgrounds. ¾ were born in Australia or the United Kingdom.

PROFITS DOWN, BUSINESS SUFFERING BECAUSE YOU HAVE A SHORTAGE OF FEMALE LABOUR?

The South Coast has a readily available AND OFTEN SKILLED female labour force!

Why suffer the frustrations of continually looking for... attempting to replace... female staff?

In the metropolitan area you are always in competition with other employers doing exactly the same as you. The answer? DECENTRALISE! Go down your business to the South Coast with an abundance of female labour well paid for less than you have, because the opportunity costs are so low. The Government is financially able to subsidise your move to the South Coast. A wide range of concessions is available through the Country Industries Assistance Fund, which has been set up under the State Development and Country Industries Assistance Act.

Among these concessions are:-

- Factory Building Loans of up to 50%.
- Concessions for loans up to 50% of the cost of your project.
- Grants for training unskilled staff.
- Rent bought concessions.
- Housing for employees.

Manufacturers are invited to ring, write or call. The Director of Decentralisation and Development also will be pleased to give details of benefits that will apply to your particular industry in the South Coast area.

DEPARTMENT OF DECENTRALISATION AND DEVELOPMENT
122-13 MACQUARIE STREET, SYDNEY, TELEPHONE 37-7216

The IRDC also wrote to all the major employers in the district encouraging them to extend the fields in which women might be employed within their companies.²⁰ From the few letters in the IRDC file it seems there were only a few responses and these were in the negative. For example the Commonwealth Steel Company Ltd quoted Section 54 of the Factories and Shops Act which prevented women lifting heavy weights and doing shift work as a reason why women could not be employed.²¹ The IRDC subsequently lobbied members of Parliament for changes to these laws.²² There was to be no change and these laws continued to be quoted as reasons against employing women in traditionally male roles in heavy industry. The Act came under close scrutiny in the Wollongong Jobs for Women campaign in the 1980's.

¹⁹ Letter from Illawarra Regional Development Committee to Premier NSW 16 Dec 1964, University of Wollongong Archives

²⁰ Letter from Illawarra Regional Development Committee to Industry 4 Mar 1965, UoW Archives

²¹ Letter from Commonwealth steel Company to IRDC 2 April 1965, UOW Archives

²² Letter from Illawarra Regional Development Committee to MPs 30 Mar 1967, UoW Archives

After some urging by the IRDC and Wollongong Council the Minister for Decentralisation and Development placed advertisements in Sydney newspapers in August 1967. These advertisements were designed to encourage industry requiring female labour to consider moving south out of the city.

The Ministry of Industrial Development and Decentralisation which was created in 1962 later became the Department of Decentralisation and Development in 1965. Clearly the State government recognised the need to provide industry and its associated advantages to drive the economic development of regional centres. It was driven by the conservative Askin government and John Bryan Munro Fuller the first Minister of the Department ran the department from May 1965 until October 1978. In October 1965 Fuller announced industry concessions for decentralisation to a seminar in Sydney which was held to encourage industry to decentralise.²³ Legislation to enable the decentralisation incentives was gazetted in 1966 (State Development and Country Industries Act 1966). The Act was to enable the Minister for Decentralisation and Development to provide loans, grants, subsidies and guarantees to assist country secondary industry. It was also enabled the Minister to purchase and dispose of industrial land, buildings, plant and machinery. However the act specifically excluded Wollongong in its definition of decentralised areas.²⁴ Shellharbour was not excluded and factories such as Bonds were able to establish themselves south of Wollongong. Bonds took over John Vicars in Warilla and expanded the plant with loans under the fund eventually employing 350 mostly female workers.²⁵ The Government Guarantee Act was amended so the State could guarantee loans and the Local Government Act was amended so the Local Council could buy and sell industrial land.

Areas such as Bellambi were considered to be decentralised and King Gee was able to take advantage of the State Development and Country Industries Act 1966 in financing its new Bellambi plant which opened in 1966.

In February 1968 Premier Askin announced the establishment of a Special Assistance Loan Programme for Wollongong to provide finance for the building of factories which have a workforce at least 75% female. The first assistance was a loan of \$36,000 with a further loan of \$18,000 from Wollongong Council to Arlrite Gardens Pty Ltd whom said they would employ 50 women.²⁶ Pye industries also opened with a loan of \$167,000 under the Special assistance program and with \$83,000 from Wollongong Council.

Others were also actively seeking a solution to the "female employment problem". An organisation called New Opportunities for Women or NOW was formed as a lobby group in 1965. In April 1967 NOW established an employment agency for women in Wollongong. The service was free and the fees charged to the employers was put towards a child minding centre in Unanderra.²⁷

²³ Industry Horizons, January, 1996, page 2

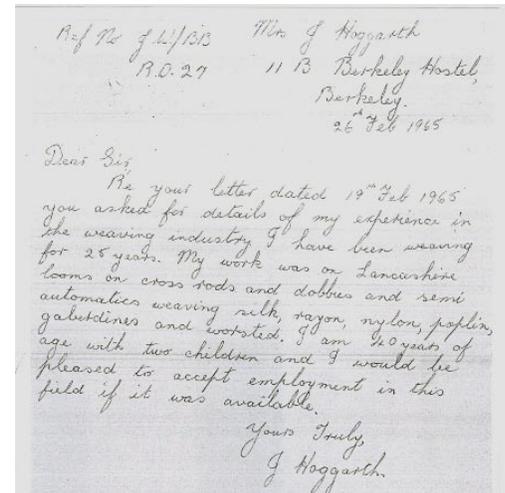
²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Hon. J.B.Fuller, MLC Minister for Decentralisation and Development
Speech to Illawarra Industry & development Symposium 5 May 1969

²⁶ Hon. J.B.Fuller, 5 May 1969

²⁷ South Coast Express 26 April 1967

Meanwhile another initiative of the Illawarra Regional Development Committee was to try to establish whether there were sufficient skilled workers available to establish further weaving or textiles industry in the Illawarra. The IRDC wrote to large numbers of women in the southern suburbs to establish whether any of them had relevant experience. The response was that of the 55 replies 42 had had experience in the industry.²⁸ At this time there were only two mills operating in the district, Bulli Spinners at Bulli and John Vicars in Warrilla.



Knitting Industries Study

In 1977 the Australian Knitting Industries Council undertook a social and economic study of the textile and clothing industry in the Illawarra.²⁹ This study revealed that female unemployment in the Illawarra was still well above the national average. That since 1973 there had been a decline in the industry and 1000 jobs (20%) for females in the textiles industry had disappeared. Once again the imbalance between availability of work for men and women is cited. The area was still heavily dependent upon ferrous and non-ferrous basic metal manufacture where the majority of jobs were for men and not women. A table published in this study shows some interesting statistics.

Table 1
Details of Major Textile Establishments in the Illawarra Region

Particulars	As at June :		
	1973	1976	1977 est.
No. of Establishments	23	18	17
Employment			
Males	186	143	118
Females	2,469	1,806	1,470
Total	2,655	1,949	1,588

Source: AKIC Survey

Table 1.³⁰

Our research to date has identified 26 clothing factories that have been established at some point in time in Wollongong. As far as we know only two are still operating, Bonds and King Gee. More details of these factories are contained later in this essay.

²⁸ Letter from IRDC to Mr Holliday 24 Sept 1965

²⁹ The Australian Knitting Industries Council, *Preliminary – The Social and Economic Impact of the Australian Textiles and Clothing Industries*. September 1977

³⁰ *Ibid*, page 41

The manager of Australian Iron and Steel attributed the high turnover of their male workers to the lack of employment opportunities for women.³¹ Our interviews with workers indicate that there were probably a lot of factors involved in turnover of male staff including the heavy and monotonous nature of much of the work.

Married women in the work force

A letter from the Executive Officer of Personnel of BHP to their UK Representative regarding overseas recruitment indicates that it was not company policy in 1965 to employ married women so as to create opportunities for single women.³² It wasn't until the Anti Discrimination Act 1977 came into place that it was made illegal to discriminate against someone on the basis of their marital status. Until 1977 the best opportunity for work for migrant women was found in the clothing factories.

The Knitting Industries report also provides a snapshot of percentages of workers born overseas and whether or not they were married. See Table 2. Sixty eight percent (68%) of female workers in the textile industry in the Illawarra in 1977 were migrants. Clearly marital status was not a concern in the clothing industry as 78% of women working in the factories were married.

Table 2
Marital Status and Ethnic Background of Female Textiles Employees

	Australian Born	Overseas Born	Total No.	%
Juniors	29	23	52	7.2
Adults				
Married	151	419	570	78.5
Not Married	53	51	104	14.3
Total	233	493	726	100.0

Table 2.³³

Australian Iron and Steel General Manager W. Burgess is quoted by Pennay as saying that the company has *"always employed a considerable number of women, the majority in staff positions such as drawing office tracers, computer department operators, laboratory technicians, stenographers, typists and other clerical positions. A considerable number of these positions are held by migrants. Recently we have begun employing women more widely in production classifications on shift work. Of 58 women employed recently, 24 were either British or Australian and the remaining 34 of non-English speaking origin. We expect to considerably increase these numbers over the next 12 months."*³⁴ The date of this article is not provided but it refers to recent data gathered in 1972.

³¹ Ibid, page 41

³² BHPBA D009/001/0864. Letter G15/1 from BHP Executive Officer Personnel and Training to United Kingdom Representative, London 29.1.1965

³³ Ibid, page 41

³⁴ Pennay, Op cit.

Tariffs

Originally tariff barriers for the Australian manufacturing industry were applied in the 1930's Depression in order to protect Australian industry and employment. The tariffs remained in place after the war and enabled the growth of the clothing and textile manufacturing industry in Australia. The tariffs did not come under serious threat until the 1980's. In 1986 the Industries Assistance Commission (IAC) recommended changes to the tariff system to be effective as of 1 January 1989. The Textile Clothing and Footwear Council of Australia predicted the reduction of tariffs would spell the end of the industry.

Centres such as Wangaratta, Marlborough, Seymour, Wollongong/ Port Kembla... and many others are expected to be affected. TCF (textile, clothing and footwear) industries involve 26 per cent of females employed in manufacturing industry as a whole. This sector of the workforce will be especially vulnerable along with high proportion (79%) of TCF workers who lack formal qualifications. Alternate employment for these workers will be difficult to obtain...³⁵

The major Broken Hill mining union will hold a mass meeting today to consider a recommendation for the resumption of talks with mining companies over the implementation of new work practices.

A mass meeting of the Workers' Industrial Unit of Australia last week voted to end negotiations.

Hopes fade

Rough seas yesterday hampered a police search off Jervis Bay for missing Nowra fisherman, Ian Eward, 21, who was washed off rocks while fishing with friends on Sunday afternoon.

The search will continue at first light today.

Class boycott

Parents of students at Eagle Vale High School near Campbelltown, today withdrew their children from classes in protest at teacher shortages.

The action is the latest in a round of parent or union-sponsored protests over the lack of specialist staff at schools in disadvantaged or remote areas in NSW.

Democrats rift

CANBERRA.— Retiring Australian Democrat Leader Senator Don Chipp yesterday denied there was any rift between the seven senators in the party.

One of the leadership candidates, Sen John Sweeney, is known to be annoyed by Sen Chipp's public endorsement of Sen Janit Haines as his successor.

Power blackout

Residents in Shellharbour suburb said darkness for about 12 minutes last night after a electricity sub-station broke down at about 9 o'clock.

An Illawarra Council spokesman said a blackout affected most of Shellharbour, Warilla at Barrack Heights.

● Warilla Bonds employees, from left, Lorraine Taylor, Allison Taborne and Maria Alves finish off the banners and T-shirts they will carry in a demonstration march in Wollongong tomorrow protesting against planned cuts in import protection.

TARIFF CUT THREAT PROMPTS PROTEST

By JAN LE MAITRE

Hundreds of Illawarra clothing industry workers will march down Crown St tomorrow in a bid to stop the Federal Government reducing protection against imports, which employees say will result in thousands of lost jobs.

The Industries Assistance Commission (IAC) has recommended to the Federal Government that protection levels on clothing, textile and footwear imports, be cut by up to 50 per cent.

Bonds Wear Australia corporate manager Mr Roger Brown said last month that such a move would close all three Illawarra Bonds factories.

Textile Workers Union State secretary Mr John Roughly claims 1000 Illawarra jobs will go if the IAC recommendation is adopted.

He will join the workers in their march tomorrow, which also will include employees of the Illawarra footwear industries.

At the Bonds Warilla plant yesterday, workers were finishing off the banners and T-shirts they plan to carry with them in the march.

The march has the complete support of plant manager Mr David Duncan who yesterday said the jobs of his employees were threatened by the recommendation.

To even contemplate reducing assistance to 25 %, substantially lower than is applying in the United States and Europe, showed an incredible misunderstanding of the difficulties and realities faced by labour intensive industries in meeting import competition from low wage countries; where labour costs can be 10% of ours or even less.

It is disturbing, in view of the workforce consequences of its recommendations, that special measures to minimise hardship for displaced employees have not been recommended.³⁶

Having gone to such great lengths to address the "female employment problem" it is difficult to understand how the government could then turn around and undermine the industry they had sought to establish. The predictions of the Textile Clothing and Footwear Council of Australia did eventuate and the result of the tariff reductions was the loss of jobs and closing of factories. The industry wound down to the point now where Bonds and King Gee are the only remaining clothing factories in Wollongong. These factories only make a fraction of their overall product here in Australia. Since the loss of protective tariffs the market place

³⁵ The Textile Clothing and Footwear Council of Australia Ltd, Media Release 11 June 1986

³⁶ Ibid.

has been flooded with product almost exclusively from China such that today in 2007 it is very difficult to purchase an item of clothing or footwear that has not been made China. Meanwhile a large proportion of the population, the majority being female migrants, was left with no other source of employment.

Places where women found work

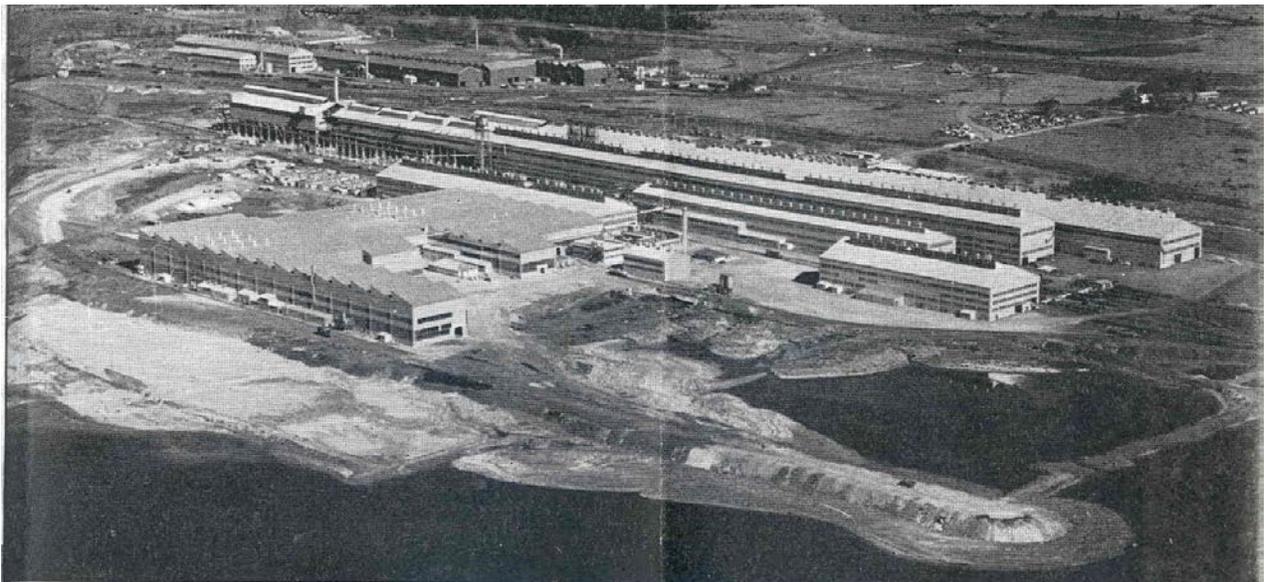
For the unskilled non English speaking migrant a lot of traditional jobs were unavailable. Jobs such as stenography, secretarial, receptionist and to some extent retail and education were only available to the "Australians" and those migrants from the United Kingdom. The biggest employment sector for migrant women in the post war period in Wollongong until the late 1980's was the clothing and footwear industry. The other industrial areas were the finer production work at the Australian Iron and Steel Company works and the Metal Manufacturers works.

The following is a summary of the work places found during the course of the study where the majority of workers were women with a heavy proportion of migrant workers. A more detailed description and accompanying images can be found in the database which is part of this study.

Examples of Places

The following are examples of the places migrant women found work.

Australian Iron & Steel – Tin Mill – Assorting Room



From the swampy Tom Thumb Lagoon has arisen this, Australia's biggest post-war industrial development. The saw-toothed building in the foreground houses the new tinplate plant. Behind lies the hot strip mill with work nearing completion (left extremity) on the new slabbing mill.

The construction of the mill commenced in 1955 as the hot strip mill was nearing completion. The Australian Iron and Steel Company opened its Tin Mill on Aug 5 1957. The mill was to manufacture tin plate which was in growing demand but mainly imported from overseas. The initial capacity of the mill was estimated to be 70,000 tons of hot dip tin plate ie 60 % of Australia's consumption. Which involves the handling of 188 million pieces of tin plate each year. The new plant was to employ 400 people some of whom were women to work in the Assorting room.



Women sorting tin plate in the Assorting room circa 1960



Roma Coates inspecting tin plate, photo: BHP Review Oct 1960

Metal Manufactures – Rod and Wire division

MM Ltd commenced manufacturing copper bars, rods, wire and strand in Port Kembla in 1918. Factory expansion at Port Kembla began in full swing in 1950 when equipment became available. The telephone cable factory at Port Kembla produced in its covered wire department a range of plastic, paper and textile insulated conductors. In 1966 this section is reported to have continued to expand, requiring additional factory space and new machines. It is reported in the 1966 Jubilee album that 100 women were employed in this division.³⁷ The covered wire section was closed down in 1992-1994



Covered wire division circa 1964 Photo: MM Kembla Archives



Powder coating Line in Rod and Wire division 1989 Photo: MM Archives

³⁷ Metal Manufactures Ltd A Golden Jubilee History 1916-1966 page 49



Rod and Wire Division circa 1966 Photo: MM Kembla Archives

Clothing Factory - Berlei

Officially Opened on 27 September 1945 by Minister for Labour and industry and Social Welfare Mr Hamilton Knight as part of Commonwealth and State government to decentralise industry. Berlei Limited were corset and brassiere manufacturers.

The building is single-storey of biscuit coloured bricks, with the window openings filled in with "Insulux" glass bricks. In addition to these glass brick sections there is a stream of natural daylight over the work benches, whilst flourescent tube lighting is recessed into the ceiling for use when necessary.

Modern ideas have been incorporated to make the building as dust proof as possible as well as it being air-conditioned. Nothing has been forgotten by way of amenities to make the staff comfortable. The ceilings are off white and the interior walls pastel green to match the texture of the glass bricks and this colour scheme has a very softening effect upon the eye.



Berlei House Wollongong, September 1945³⁸

Former Berlei building 2007.³⁹



³⁸ State Library of NSW PICMAN Frame order no. : GPO 1 – 35519 Database Reference number WWP028

³⁹ Picture by Louise Thom

*Visitors inspecting the building will be most impressed with the combination of attractive design and practical efficiency embodied in Berlei House.*⁴⁰

This building demonstrates the architectural style known as Functionalist, stream lined with modernist references. Although bricks were scarce it is evident through the workmanship, design and selection of materials that it was important to the Berlei company to maintain a strong corporate image. At this time corporate architecture was strongly influenced by European modernism as introduced by young architects returning from study in Europe such as Seidler, Lipson and Sodersteen. The Sulman Award for architecture in 1941 went to the King George Memorial Hospital; in 1947 to the Wormald factory and 1950 the Top Dogs Men's Wear Production Centre all stridently modernist non-residential buildings. Berlei was very much with the time in its building design.

Clothing Factory - Midford

Pyjama and boys and girls clothing manufacturer. Purposes built factory.

Description from worker 1974-1991- *"The building was brick and corrugated iron. A good work place, clean, not too noisy. I was a clipper, cut the cotton threads off, and service girl, separating sleeves. Boss Frank was good boss. All women workers with just a few male mechanics. About 10 Australians and 60 Yugoslavians. Most couldn't speak much English. The building is still there. Workers lost a lot of entitlements when factory changed hands in 1991. Sat down at machines. These days we stand up."*⁴¹



Former Midford building in 2007. The Midford Boys and Girls clothing sign is still on the side of the building.

Originally a small factory in Fairy Meadow in 1955, it moved to West Wollongong in 1960. Then took over new premises in Kembla Grange on the corner of Princes Highway and Canterbury Road in 1969.

Owned by brothers Frank and Bob Issa. Sold it to their cousin c. 1991 who relocated the business offshore.

⁴⁰ South Coast Times, 28 Sept 1945

⁴¹ Interview with Fay Hennesay

Clothing Factory - Chrystal Clothing Factory

One of four factories operated by Crystal Clothing Industries Pty Ltd. The company opened a factory in Wollongong under the Governments decentralisation of industry scheme. The earlier Keira Street factory closed in 1948 and the works moved to Ellen Street. Crystal Shirt Manufacturing Company was largest manufacturer of shirts in Australia.

The Wollongong factory started with a staff of 16 in 1944 (in Crown Street premises) and at the end of 1956 had a staff of 300. The company were makers of children's pyjamas and shirts. Production reached 50,000 pairs pyjamas and shirts per week.



The Ellen Street premises in 1961. Photo Wollongong Library P 05\P05902



The original building is intact and occupied. Photo LThom 2007

The new factory opened in 1948 was a purpose built factory of high quality. It was full brick construction with a saw tooth roof. An article about the opening of the factory in the Illawarra Mercury refers to the emphasis on staff amenities. There was 15,000 square feet of floor space. The builder was N. Morris. Another factory was opened by Crystal Clothing Industries Pty Ltd in Dapto in 1952. The Wollongong

Factory was bought by Joe Gazal in 1979. He spent three years modernising both Dapto & Wollongong factories between 1983 and 1986.

Clothing factory – Silknit

Silknit (Wollongong) Pty Ltd was established in 1943 and moved into its Gladstone Avenue building in 1947. At the height of its production output there were 110 employees. The company manufactured women's and children's lingerie, night apparel and some men's underwear. The following is a description of processes in the new factory.

The pattern is placed on the cloth which is spread in tiers to a height of about 6 inches. The cloth is cut by an electric machine which cuts 400-500 thicknesses at one time. The sections are then collated and bundled and distributed to the machinists. The first operation is through the first overlocking machine which assembles the various pieces that make up the garment. The garment passes to the lace machine, then to another operation which adds elastic if required, and the apparel is closed by means of a second overlocking machine. Bar tacking is then carried out in order to strengthen seams at their extremities. At a clipping table surplus cottons are removed, and the garment is then expertly pressed. Finally it reaches the examiners table where the garment is carefully examined and boxed. Any garment found to have the slightest flaw or is not up to standard is immediately rejected.⁴²



Interior Silknit 1956 Photo: National Archives A1200, L21914

⁴² A.I.S Contact Vol 3 October 1947



Exterior of Silknet in 1951 photo: State library Picman GPO 2 - 01464



The building in 2007 Photo: LThom

In July 1961 20 girls received a week's notice and the factory closed later that year. The building exists today and has recently been renovated and converted to use by a Christian organisation.

Television Manufacture – Pye Industries

Factory making components for radios, televisions and the assembly of stereograms. Opened in February 1968 in Bellambi with State and Local Government assistance. The manufacturer had a staff of 110 mainly women.

*Large metal building - electrics assembly line at front and cabinet making at rear. offices front and side. Lots of migrants both men and women worked there in both departments - UK, Greeks, Italians, Dutch, polish needed to be able to speak some English. I loved the work and was sorry when it closed.*⁴³

The factory closed in 1971.

Other places

It was quite common for migrant families to establish cafes as this was essential for maintaining some form of social life outside the family unit. These cafes were run by the women of the family.

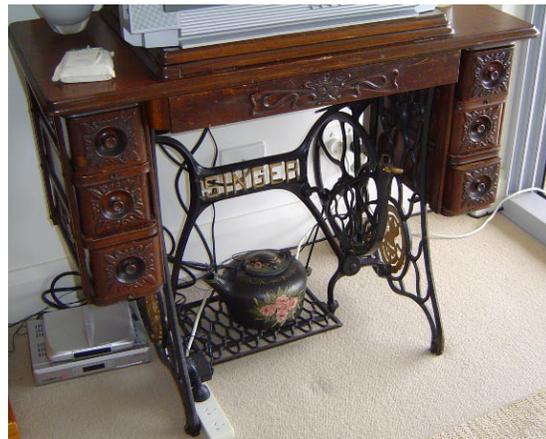
Unfortunately I don't have any examples of the cafe to show here, however Les Murray mentions in his autobiography that his mother ran the family cafe.⁴⁴ Also that Hungarians were the first to establish cafes in Australia. Hungarians being political migrants traditionally would meet at cafes to discuss the political situation.⁴⁵

Another means of employment for some women was to have their own business which was often clothing related. This was the case for Guiliana Boeyan her first job was sewing swimming costumes for one year at Sports du Jour in Bulli. She then sold fabric door to door until opening a dress shop in Fairy Meadow.

It was common for Dutch women to bring sewing machines with them from Holland.



Van Duin old sewing machine



Joke Dekker (van Gils) mother's treadle sewing machine

List of Places Found in the Study

Name	Suburb
AIS Tin Mill - Assorting Room	Port kembla
Bonds Clothing Factory	Unanderra
Berlei clothing factory	Wollongong

⁴³ Interview with Maureen Hawker – employee Pye Industries 1969 to 1971.

⁴⁴ Les Murray, *By the Balls, memoir of a football tragic*, Random House 2006

⁴⁵ Murray page 53

Leathercrafts	Helensburgh
John Vicars Pty Ltd	Bulli
Duncan & Sons Pty Ltd	Wollongong
Metal Manufacturers Ltd	Port Kembla
Crystal Shirt manufacturing company	Wollongong
Lysaght Works Pty Ltd	Port Kembla
New York Sports D'Jour factory	Bulli
Crystal Shirt Manufacturing Company	Wollongong
Australian Iron and Steel Ltd	Cringila
Freidelle	Wollongong
Isaacs	Wollongong
Australia Silknit Ltd	Wollongong
Champion Knitting Mills	Wollongong
Hardie Rubber Company Pty Ltd	Bellambi
Silknit (Wollongong) Pty Ltd	Wollongong
Crystal Clothing Industries	Dapto
King Gee Clothing Company Pty Ltd	Corrimal
King Gee Clothing Co. Pty Ltd	Bellambi
Midford	Kembla Grange
Pye Industries Ltd	Bellambi
Jones, JH &Co Clothing Manufacturers	Thirroul
Bonds	Port Kembla
Belford Knitting mills P/L	Warrawong
Kembla Manufacturing Co Clothing Manufacturers	Port Kembla
Ryan & Moore Cordials	Fairy Meadow
Streets Ice Cream Ltd	Corrimal
Meritas Knitting Mills	Wollongong
Peters Ice Cream	Nth Wollongong
Robins Footware	Kemblawarra
White Wear Clothing factory	Albion Park Rail
Firestone Australia	Thirroul
Regal Shirts Pty Ltd	Wollongong

Not all of these places have been researched in detail. What information that was found has been entered into the Database of Places and the Database of Photos. Assessments of significance contained in inventory forms have been completed for Berlei, Chrystal and King Gee.

Further Research

As information becomes available in the future it would be good to keep updating the databases and to complete more inventory forms with assessments of significance. Further interviews could be undertaken with factory workers at the King Gee and Bonds factories which are still operating. Also further consultation is recommended with migrant women workers who have retired. A subject specific history day inviting women to come and share their experiences could be organised. It would however need a lot of people to conduct interviews and get it organised. A similar event at Mt Kembla took 15 volunteers and three months organisation.

The industries which were heavily dominated by men also urgently need to be studied. Heavy manufacturing industry methods and equipment are constantly updated and need recording prior to change. The coke ovens at the Steelworks were a very common place of employment for migrant men who could not speak English. Some of the Macedonian men interviewed said they worked in the coke ovens all their lives. These industries have only been approached in a piecemeal way and would benefit from a more encompassing study to put the industry into its context with migration. The BHP Archives have large numbers of records which relate to immigrant workers coming to Australia to work in the steelworks and heavy industry in Wollongong. There are details about where the men came from, members of their families, which transport they came on etc. Some records were copied for this study and are contained in a separate folder which is held in Wollongong Local Studies Library.

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