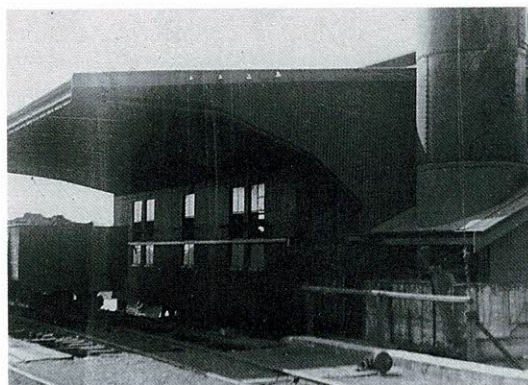
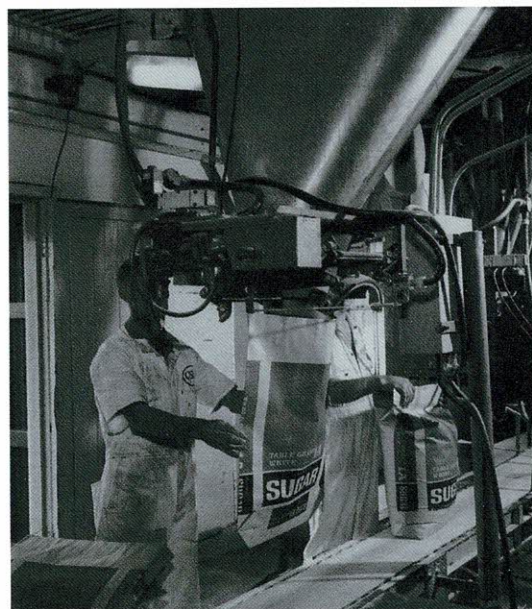


From the time of its commissioning until the year of its closure, the Cottesloe refinery was always the smallest in Australia. This was a source of pride to its staff and shift workers. To them, Cottesloe was 'the smallest, prettiest-situated and best run refinery' of them all, as their factory newsletter proudly proclaimed in October 1980. The refinery at New Farm in Brisbane, had a capacity of nearly three times Cottesloe's at its biggest; and the capacity of the Yarraville refinery in Melbourne was an incredible 300,000 tonnes. Because of its size, the Cottesloe refinery was not upgraded as consistently or on as large a scale as its counterparts in other capital cities. Robotics could not be introduced on the production line as they were elsewhere. The economies of scale were not sufficient to offset the cost of installing state-of-the-art equipment.¹⁹



The boiler station, 1938. Note coal trucks on railway line. The coal was unloaded by hand, then broken up with hammers and fed into the boilers using shovels.

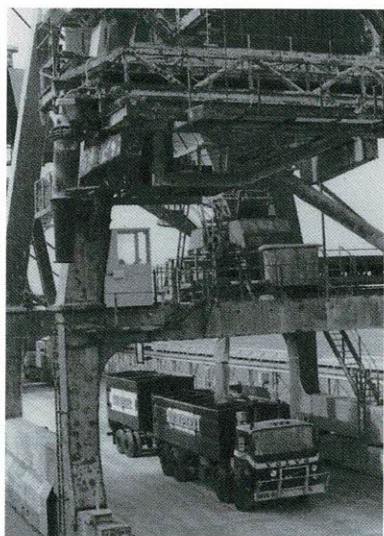
Nevertheless, from the point of view of the workers on the line, the changes that were made were dramatic. Historian Prue Griffin is right to emphasise the importance of 'subtle differences such as the increase of light' as well as major ones like 'the introduction of electronic controls which removed the belts and conveyors'. These 'made the 1960s seem, to some, like the beginning of the industrial revolution.'



The 30 kg packing machine with Gilbert Bowers (left) at the ready.

¹⁹ Griffin, 'Colonial Sugar Refinery Mosman Park', p. 9; *The West Australian*, 23 August 1997; interview with M. Speers, 26 August 1997.

The introduction of bulk sugar shipping in the late 1950s meant that the man-handling of heavy bags was eliminated, along with the dangerous steel conveyor belt which had previously carried the bags to the melt house.



A truck receives its load of raw sugar at the wharf



A sugar ship, the 'Cape Hawke', unloads at Fremantle.

The raw sugar now accumulated in huge hills in the storage shed, and a front-end loader did the work of transporting it to a hopper and then onto a conveyor belt over to the melt house. The replacement of coal as the fuel which ran the refinery made work not only cleaner, but easier. Previously, all the coal had been fed into the furnace by manual labour. Like loading and unloading the sugar bags, it had been back-breaking work.

With sophisticated instruments, it became simpler to test the readiness of the sugar mix at each stage in the refining process, instead of having to do it by eye. In 1930, for example, the boiling of the sugar in vacuum pans had been controlled entirely by 'the operator, who is required to be a skilled man in the profession', whose responsibility it was to decide when the vacuum should be broken. Pneumatics made light work of starting and stopping the big machines. There was a time when a wooden lever had been used to stop the fugal from shaking when the mixture became unbalanced.²⁰

20 Griffin, 'Colonial Sugar Refinery Mosman Park', p. 8; interview with A Daniels, 5 September 1997.

Most important of all was the introduction of safety precautions. In the early days, there had not even been cold showers available to give immediate first aid to anyone who was splashed with boiling syrup. Indeed, along with the demand on physical fitness, the danger of their jobs had been a matter of pride among the shift workers, who boasted a daring disregard for safety. "They'd say, 'Ah, she'll be right!'" Reversing this misplaced sense of honour, and substituting extreme caution for unnecessary risk taking, was a Herculean task for management, but eventually it was accomplished. In October 1979, the Premier of Western Australia, Sir Charles Court, presented CSR Cottlesloe with an award in recognition of its achievement in industrial safety.²¹



Administrative staff and line workers gather on the lawn to commemorate the Award of Merit received from the National Safety Council of Australia in 1968. In the background on the right can be seen the old smokestack before its reduction in height.

²¹ *Ibid.*; *The Western Australia Region of CSR Sugar Division [Newsletter]*, 2nd Edition, December 1979, p.2.

THE PEOPLE

A factory owes everything to its people. They are its lifeblood; and, over a period of 67 years, the workforce at CSR's Cottesloe refinery has been no exception. 'Close-knit' is probably one of the best ways of describing it. 'Loyalty' would be another equally important word to remember. The first employees at the refinery depended on it for their livelihood. At the height of the Great Depression, it gave them work. Though times were hard, it also gave them a measure of security. These were things they never forgot.

The refinery bonded with the local community in a period of extreme economic hardship; and from this bond evolved a relationship that was in many cases life-long. The factory linked family networks and friends; and it drove its roots deep into the riverside suburbs on both banks of the Swan. The water polo club at Bicton enjoyed a supply of warm water pumped under the river from the plant. Childhoods were punctuated by the blast of the factory whistle at noon and at five pm. 'Come home when you hear the whistle blow', mothers told their kids, as they raced off down to the river for a swim.²²



Long-term employees Alf West (storeman), Roy Hansen (engine driver) and Sid Abercrombie (packing foreman) in front of the engine room panel.

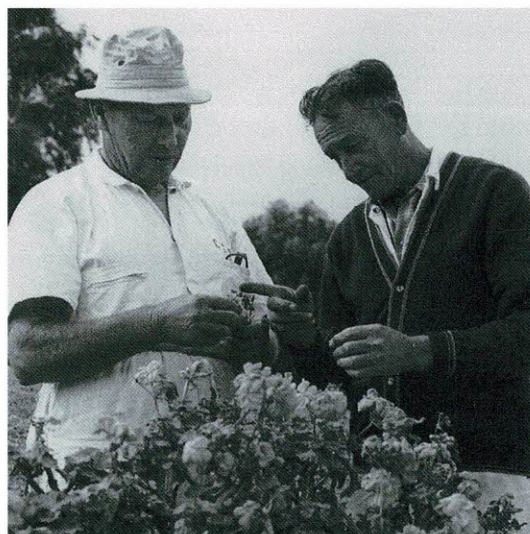
²² Interview with M. Speers, 26 August 1997; A Maley, 'The Whistle (or sugar no more)', poem published in *The Fremantle Herald*, 25 October 1997.

In the early years, when the refinery was commissioned, it drew its workers from the surrounding area. 'The factory will absorb a number of unemployed unskilled men, the majority of whom will, it is expected, be picked up in the Cottesloe Beach district,' *The Western Mail* informed its readers at the time of the factory's opening. There were 40 permanent employees. Extra workers were taken on in the busy season, bringing the total to 100 during the summer months.²³

When the freight trains arrived, with their cargo of coal or raw sugar, there was a few hours' work to be had unloading them. Unemployed men would walk or ride on bikes to the factory and wait at the gates in the hope of being selected. Those who had bikes would hang them in the bike shed and then stand outside the fence with the others. Seeing them crowded together there was a powerful incentive for regular workers to do as they were told. 'There's plenty out there willing to take your place,' they were warned.



'C' Vacuum pump with chief engineer Ted Butters alongside.



Con Sgro (left) with Mick Breen.

23 *The Western Mail*, 22 May 1930; *The West Australian*, 19 October 1928

Managers in those days were 'real characters', according to a store clerk who retired in 1979. 'The old managers never smiled. I remember the first manager at the refinery, Mr Harcourt - the only time we saw him smile was the day he got married. Here he was in his best garb with a big grin all over his face. We almost fell over to see him smile. The old managers were different to the latest ones. They were very abrupt but always very fair, but you couldn't really talk to them.'²⁴



Premier Brand with Jenny Adams in the laboratory.



On a visit to the refinery in the mid 1960s, Sir David Brand (Premier of Western Australia, 1959-1971) peers into a fugal (centrifugal separator), operated by Tony Gurgone. Messrs. Vernon and McKenzie watch at right. Note that the fugal operator is using a paddle to plough out the sugar by hand.

24 Griffin, 'Colonial Sugar Refinery, Mosman Park', p. 9; interview with A Daniels, 5 September 1997; interview with retiring CSR employee Alf West (Stores Clerk), *The Western Australia Region of CSR Sugar Division [Newsletter]*, 1st Edition, September 1979, pp. 8, 12.



Touring the refinery, Sir Paul Hasluck, Governor-General of Australia, 1969-1974, asks a question of Mick Breen, whilst Tony Vidovich sews up the hessian sugar bag (left).

The refinery's isolation in its early years increased the sense of solidarity among the workers and their families. Before McCabe Street was built, the factory was accessible only via Owston Street, which was for decades little better than a pot-holed gravel track, so rough that workers complained about injuries sustained while using it. Those employees who lived nearby either walked to work or rode bicycles. Those who travelled by train from further afield were collected at the railway station in the company truck, and driven back again afterwards.

The families who lived on site also needed transport to do their food shopping. Although butchers, greengrocers and bakers all did home deliveries in those days, none would undertake the long and bumpy journey from the Stirling Highway to the refinery for the sake of a handful of households. Once a week, the company car was used to take the wives to the shops; but much of the food consumed was obtained locally. People swapped produce from their vegetable gardens; some kept chickens. In addition, everyone took full advantage of the bounty offered by the river itself, which was teeming with fish and crabs.²⁵

²⁵ Tuettemann, *Between River and Sea*, p. 94; Griffin, 'Colonial Sugar Refinery Mosman Park', p. 7.

The number of employees was greater than had been anticipated at the outset. At its biggest, the workforce stood at 150, including management and administrative staff, but as automation increased, numbers dropped. From eight or nine men on each shift, numbers dropped eventually to four or five. In the meantime, production trebled, and down time, when the machines were not operating, was reduced. From the middle of the 1960s through to the late 1980s, there were approximately 90 employees. By 1996, one year before closure, this figure had dropped to 40.²⁶

Family connections linked the workforce even more closely than the refinery's isolation did. The Colonial Sugar Refining Company was known Australia-wide as a family company for a very long time, but even so, the Cottesloe Refinery was considered to enjoy one of the highest family representations of all, with workers spread over two generations.



The first presentation of twenty year awards in 1974.

Back row, left to right: D Baily, S Abercrombie, H Daniels, E Daniels, C Hansen, M Breen, M Jez, K Snell, W Scorer, L Costa, R Wiltshire.

Front row, left to right: G Bower, J Brooks, G Franchina, R Hansen, P Ravipinto, A Adams.

²⁶ Sherriff, *'From Factory to Family Home'*, p. 84.



Packing 1 kg bags of raw sugar, 1976. Wendy Williams, Cathy Robertson and Phyllis Armstrong.



Cathy O'Brien (formerly Cathy Robertson) checks packaged white sugar as it comes off the Hesser line.

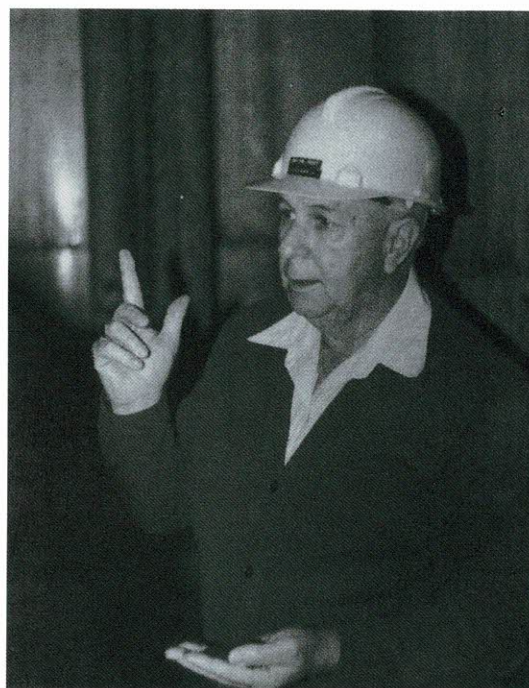


A school tour at the retail packing line.



Viv Lawrie (left) and his crew. Jack Brooks (seated centre) was the refinery's longest-serving employee, with nearly 50 years of service.

The biggest was the Daniels family of three brothers, their sons, a daughter, and a son-and daughter-in-law. Then there were the Williams brothers, the Branch's, father and son, the Hansen and Breen brothers, the McKirdys, the Scorers, father and son, the Fletcher sisters and the Turnbull cousins. Twenty-five people in all, of whom seventeen were still working at the refinery in 1979. Husbands and wives worked as well. As the factory newsletter commented, 'apparently some families can get on together, not only live together but work together'.²⁷

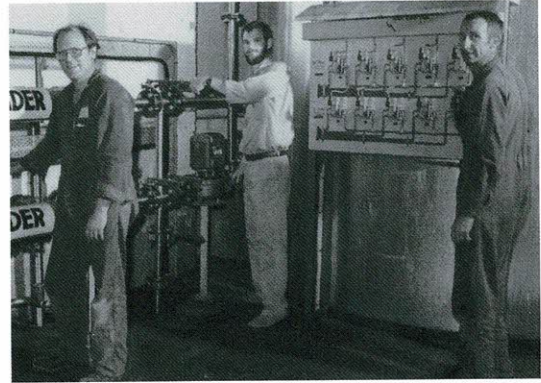


Open Day 1980. Ted Elliott instructs touring visitors.

²⁷ *The Western Australia Region of CSR Sugar Division [Newsletter]*, 1st Edition, September 1979, p.3; Griffin, 'Colonial Sugar Refinery, Mosman Park', p. 9.



Tom Bradley in the char end.



Graham Turnbull, Peter Maxted, and Merv Legg at the pan feed battery.

As in all families, there were tensions. The divide between on-line workers and office staff, characteristic of Australian secondary industry in general, was present, though it took a slightly different form. For those on the line, an unbridgeable gulf existed between themselves, as shift workers, and the 'day' workers and staff. 'We thought we were different', as shift worker Allan Daniels, who with his father Ted could boast a combined record of nearly 70 years' service at the Cottesloe refinery, put it. 'We'd get together and have a barbecue at each others' places, all your own shift, five blokes.' In 1997 they were still getting together about once a quarter, and still including their former supervisor, since retired, in the gathering.

On a larger scale, there were numerous social occasions, such as the annual Christmas party, and regular sporting events, with the refinery's employees and their families fielding their own teams.²⁸

By the 1990s it was clear that the Cottesloe refinery needed either to be massively upgraded or to be replaced. In the light of the rationalisation of CSR Sugar, as this division of the multi-faceted CSR had now come to be known, the decision was made to close the plant.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10; interview with A Daniels, 5 September 1997.



Maintenance fitter Merv Legg attempts to repair the 30 kg packing station bag presenter, while leading hand Wally Scorer keeps an eye on the rest of the packing area.

A significant factor in the Western Australian situation was the newly prevailing economics of land use in the district. Once valued only for industrial purposes, it had now become a prized residential area. The sugar refinery was one of the last factories still operating in the district, on land whose market worth was now too high for it to continue to be used as an industrial estate. In September 1995, the property was sold to developers Cape Bouvard Investments for \$15.5 million.²⁹

Although CSR had intended to build a new refinery to replace it, by the middle of 1996 this plan had been revoked.

With over-supply and competition seriously threatening the market, the more cost-effective way to proceed was by going back

to importing refined sugar from interstate and manufacturing only liquid sugar locally, for industrial use. At this point, the raw sugar store at North Fremantle became a key component in the new strategy. Capable of holding 17,000 tonnes, and built at a cost of \$1,730,000, with an office attached, it now became the scene of renewed development. A plant was constructed at a cost of about three million dollars to produce liquid sugar from a substance known as 'Very Low Colour' raw sugar, which was produced in Queensland at CSR's Plane Creek mill. The liquid sugar supplied Western Australia's dairy and brewing industries for the production of ice cream, flavoured milks, and beers, as well as brick manufacturers.³⁰

29 Sherriff, 'From Factory to Family Home', pp. 91-92; *The West Australian*, 23 August 1997.

30 *Ibid.*; interview with Martin Speers, 26 August 1997; *The Western Australian Region of CSR Sugar Division [Newsletter]*, 1st edition, September 1979, p. 12; *CSR News*, Vol. 6, no. 9, September/October 1980.

The week ending 30 August 1997 saw the last full week of production at the Cottesloe refinery. Decommissioning followed, in the safe hands of the long term employees who knew the plant best.

Liquid sugar continued to be manufactured until full production commenced at CSR Sugar's North Fremantle site in late September 1997. By the end of the month, the buildings were empty and the demolition workers moved in. The refinery which until recently had manufactured Western Australia's entire supply of crystal and liquid sugar ceased to exist, though its memory will live on in the minds of the people who worked there, and in the mind's eye of sailors on the Swan River, for whom it stood as a landmark at the entrance to Blackwall Reach.



Employees at the time of closure

Left to right: S Earney, I Hannah, J Freemantle, J Lehtinen, K Newton, B Jones, G Wall, M Williams, J Pollard, F Roberts, A Reeves, J Green, B Sedgwick, A Hood, J Zivanovic, M Speers, R Turton, T Hutchings, N Camarda, F Shuttleworth, K Dempster, T Pirangi, J Maloney, S Jordan, C Brotherson, D Collins, M Heenan.

Absent: R Breen, D Booker, W Churchill, T Coates, A Daniels, G Daniels, M Gillard, S Godden, R Goldman, J Hanratty, C Harris, D Harris, G Hindley, R Hindley, B Hoy, T Kukura, T Lane, M Legg, P Marshall, J Sainsbury, R Vidot.

THE WHISTLE (OR SUGAR NO MORE)

They blew The Whistle in September.
It reverberated across the water
to the beach on the other side of the river.
Did you hear The Whistle blow -
Joan and Shirley and Betty and Val,
Jack and Fred and Billy?
Did your Ghosts rise up
and hearken to the words of your mother?
Those words oft repeated -
'Now remember - come home when you hear The Whistle blow.'
Did you hurry to have one
just one more swim across the "55"?
Just one more dive
from the jetty springboard or the triangle?
Before dashing out of the water
Scattering the drops like a wet puppy -
Grabbing your towel (an old bathroom one)
from the bough of the ancient Pomegranate tree
Where you always hung it?
Remembering those words of your mother
'Come home when you hear The Whistle blow.'
They blew The Whistle for the last time
that day in September-
And the salt-wet, suntanned Ghost rose up
And we were 10 years old again.

- Ailsa Maley.

Courtesy of *The Fremantle Herald*, 25 October 1997



TM



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