

BUTTER TO BROADWAY



KINGSTON BUTTER FACTORY CENTENARY 1907 - 2007



LOGAN CITY COUNCIL

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Establishment

On 10 February 1900, the meeting of the Logan Farming and Industrial Association discussed the prospects of building a butter factory at Beenleigh, with a view to selling the butter on the London market. It was suggested that the formation of a co-operative was preferable to taking out a government loan, although it took a further five years for the co-operative to proceed. In April 1905 the matter was again raised. The secretary of the Association, Mr W. G. Winnett tabled a report indicating that the amount of cream obtainable in the Beenleigh District warranted a butter factory capable of turning out two tons of butter per day. He suggested that it was an opportune time for a co-operative factory to be built.

Farmers had been monitoring the potential export market for butter. There was a general downturn in prices in England due to the availability of Danish butter, but there was still a market for high quality unsalted butter. The public meeting was held on 12 April 1906 in the Beenleigh Shire Hall. Sixty local farmers attended and the process of purchasing shares commenced. Mr Binstead of Coomera presented a prospectus from the Nerang Co-operative Dairy Co. Ltd which at that time comprised 1500 shareholders and suggested that they join forces with the Beenleigh district farmers. At that time, much of the cream from Tallebudgera district was being sent to the NORCO factories at Murwillumbah and Byron Bay.

The Southern Queensland Co-operative Dairy Association was formed, comprising farmers from Tallebudgera, Upper Coomera and Tamborine to the south and through Park Ridge and Maclean to the west. At a further meeting on 17 August 1906, the co-operative voted to erect the factory at a site in Kingston adjacent to the railway line. By October the Board had contracted Waugh and Josephson to erect and equip a modern factory at Kingston for £3,600. Subscriptions to the co-operative were open until 31 December 1906. While the production of butter was the priority, the breeding of pigs was implicit in the objectives of the company.

The factory was completed on 1st May with production starting on 13 May 1907. The official opening was conducted by James Stodart M.L.A. on Saturday 8 June 1907. Chairman of the Nerang Divisional Board William Stephens M.L.A. was the Chairman of Directors and William Winnett was Secretary. The first manager, Mr Lee, passed away during 1907 and was replaced by Jack Juers. At that time, 2216 shares amongst 318 shareholders had been taken up. The initial staff included a butter maker, two engineers, a cream tester, two carters and two labourers.



Early Twentieth Century Development

The business grew steadily. A storeroom was erected during 1907. Five acres were purchased nearby and a cottage erected on it. The Brisbane office opened in 1908. A new concrete floor was laid in the cream room in 1909 and by 1911 a manager's residence and a cottage for the cream tester had been erected. Two more cottages were built in 1911 and another the following year. In December 1911 serious competition was felt with the opening of the NORCO factory in Tweed Heads. It was easily accessible to farmers along the south coast rail line, which had been extended to Tweed Heads in 1903.

New buildings to house refrigeration plant were added during 1914 doubling the Kingston factory in size. By 1915, when the Annual General Meeting was held in the recently constructed Kingston School of Arts Hall, the chairman of Directors, Mr James Stodart, reported that with the installation of new equipment, the factory was able to produce ten tons of butter in one day. Profit for the year amounted to almost £1700. By 1923 Kingston management were concerned that they could not compete with the price NORCO was paying for cream. A lot of business was being lost because many Kingston suppliers lived closer to Tweed Heads. In June 1924 the Co-operative became the Southern Queensland Dairy Company Limited. By 1927 there had been ten additions to the building.



Kingston Butter Factory 1920s

Kingston Glue Factory and Piggery

A secondary industry was established nearby in 1918, when John McGuinness Williams purchased twelve acres of land including the old Kingston family home *Oakwood*, to establish a glue factory. Williams was a plywood manufacturer. Caesin glue, which could be produced from buttermilk, was used in plywood manufacture. By 1922 he also established a piggery located between the house and the railway line. The following year Williams began expanding the piggery and initially imported a pair of Gloucester Old Spot pigs. Despite the unfortunate incident of a wild pig mating with the pure bred sow, the piggery was generally successful and had a regular contract for the buttermilk, which was piped from the butter factory. The property was sold to stock agent Richard Grimes Watson in 1926. He employed managers on the property, the longest serving being Bert Whittaker, who married Jack Juers daughter Jean in 1933.



John Williams piggery and glue factory 1920 - photo courtesy of Julie Dodds



Factory re-built

In 1930 the dairy board declared that the old wooden factory needed upgrading. During 1932 a new brick structure was built around the old timber factory, which continued to operate while the building proceeded. Waugh and Josephson undertook the rebuilding and provision of machinery and equipment. The project was not completed until March 1933 and cost £15,000.

A Royal Commission into the alleged payments of secret commissions in the dairy industry was held in 1932, while the new Kingston factory was under construction. The Commission also examined the contractual practices of erecting and equipping butter factories. It found that the manager Jack Juers had received annual payments totalling £140 between 1925 and 1929 from Waugh and Josephson, which had been paid in a secret manner. Despite suggestions that the payments were for commissions for the sale of separators and other equipment, the documentation did not support these arguments, and it was more likely that it was in response to gaining contracts. The Commission concluded that payment was made in order for the company to obtain some advantage.

Juers' payment was small in comparison to some, with the manager of the Maryborough factory receiving over £3,600. This was a large amount of money during the Depression. The Commission also found, that in most cases relating to factory construction projects, management merely requested plans and specifications from the company, and if tenders were called (which in many cases they weren't) the company supplying the plans usually got the job. The Board of the Kingston Butter Factory expressed its disappointment in these revelations and indicated that should such a case arise again, it would not hesitate to terminate the services of those involved. However, Jack Juers remained as manager until 1943.

Development of private cream/milk carters

Further changes to the industry occurred during the early 1930s. The train service to Kingston had proved to be unreliable in delivering cream, so a number of farmers began using their own trucks to establish cream runs. In 1933 Mr Peachey and Mr Holm started a run covering the areas of Hope Island, Coomera, Pimpama and Ormeau transporting cream to the Kingston Butter Factory. Sid Floate from Slacks Creek was another local carter. By 1937 cream and milk runs began to be formally gazetted in an effort to streamline the industry. During the Second World War (1939 - 1945) action was taken to avoid overlapping of cream and milk runs, because of petrol rationing.

Diversification of the industry

In 1949 the Southern Queensland Dairy Company won first prize in the Australian Championship for export butter at the Launceston Show and later that year at the RNA Show in Brisbane. From 1942, the Milk Board began to seek out milk contracts with local farmers. The Kingston management had the opportunity to move into milk production but declined to diversify at that time. By April 1949 some local farmers were supplying milk to Pauls. In July 1949 the Kingston factory investigated using surplus milk from the Metro Milk Company in Brisbane to produce cream and skim milk. By August 1950, Kingston was registered as a wholesale milk dealer. NORCO continued to encroach on Queensland supplies and sell poor quality butter locally.

In January 1951, the South Coast Co-operative Dairy at Southport sought to merge with Kingston, but the Kingston management were considering the purchase of significant shares in Pauls. These shares were over subscribed and by mid 1951 a deal was struck with Pauls in which it agreed to purchase 300 gallons of cream weekly. The factory's operations began to change in the early '50s, including the production of dried milk from 1952. The final contract for piped buttermilk to the Kingston Piggery was honoured until 30 June 1953. After that it had to be procured on a price per gallon basis, because the factory was planning to produce dried buttermilk.



Herman Rohl weighing butter 1967 - photo courtesy of Ian Rohl

The piggery was sold in 1954. By September 1955, Kingston was an all purpose factory. It produced bulk butter, received and treated milk, manufactured buttermilk powder and patted and wrapped Kingston butter for sale outside the metropolitan area. Another significant change to butter exports occurred with the cancellation of a long term contract with the Ministry of Food in the United Kingdom from 30 June 1955. Any butter exported from Australia, then had to be sold on the open market.

The first metal churn in Queensland was installed at Kingston in 1956 and in September 1958, Peters-Arctic Delicacy Company Limited acquired the factory. In February 1960 an amalgamation of Peter and Pauls created Queensland United Foods (QUF). Further changes in the dairying industry occurred from 1965 when bulk milk collection was introduced. No longer could the small farmer leave canned milk for cartage.

New regulations introduced from 25 April 1965 required a range of improvements to most properties which were expensive to implement. It was at this time that many small dairy farmers finally left the industry. These changes coincided with urbanisation of the Logan region, and farmers began to sell their land to developers.

In 1966 QUF installed spray drier equipment to produce skim milk powder at Kingston. Those farmers who remained in the industry installed stainless steel milk vats on their farms which were collected by Pauls, with most going to the city. A small quantity was processed at Kingston. From 1974 the production of cottage and baker's cheese commenced. By 1979 the factory no longer took in milk and in April 1983 it ceased production all together.



Factory cottage circa 1980



Kingston Aerial 1986



Kingston Butter Factory interior circa 1980



Kingston Butter Factory atrium

Kingston Butter Factory re-development

In September 1983, Logan City Council initiated the process of procuring the factory for use as a historical museum, with a view to seek Bi-centennial funding for the project. Council recognised that the building was of local historical significance and that it should be preserved, and officers were aware that QUF intended to demolish the building. Negotiations with QUF began in order to formulate a solid proposal for the site on which the butter factory was constructed, and have the site transferred to the council. In May 1985, council initiated conditional re-zoning of the adjacent land (also owned by QUF) which was approved in March 1986. Concessions were granted for the re-zoning in exchange for the transfer of the butter factory site to Logan City Council. Architects Ainsley Bell and Murchison developed concept plans for the redevelopment, which included space for open air entertainment, a 220 seat theatre, a multi purpose atrium/foyer/function area, a museum, catering facilities, meeting rooms and crafts areas.

Despite receiving over \$200,000 from State and Commonwealth Bi-Centennial funding, the size of the project led the council to seek further assistance by utilising the Commonwealth's Community Employment Program, and by drawing on Community Service Order personnel. Construction began in February 1987 with four council staff and sixteen CEP staff. Council also contributed over \$100,000 to the project.

Kingston Butter Factory Community Arts Centre

The official opening of the Kingston Butter Factory Community Arts Centre occurred on Saturday 27 February 1988. The establishment of the museum took a little longer, with a steering committee formed in 1989. Mayor, Fred Huntress, gave \$500 to assist in the establishment costs. The committee visited the Redlands Museum, Beenleigh Historical Village and the Queensland Museum before developing a collection policy. The first travelling exhibition featured at the museum in late 1989 was 'People and Places', a display of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art.

On 13 February 1990, the Kingston Butter Factory Historical Museum Society had its inaugural meeting. It requested approval to accept curatorship of a range of equipment and documents relating to the factory's operations. The official opening of the Museum occurred on 4 November 1990, to celebrate Captain Patrick Logan's 199th birthday. A formal lease was drawn up for 15 years commencing 1 January 1991. In February it agreed that the focus of the museum should be on the dairying and butter industries. However it would seem that the museum struggled for many years through a lack of community volunteers, with all of the work falling to a few stalwarts who continued to acquire objects by donation and purchase.



Kingston Butter Factory exterior circa 1980

A further boost to the museum occurred through a donation from Logan City Council to fund a photographic display. Over \$1,300 was spent on reproducing and housing historic photographs. The project was launched on Heritage Day, 21 April 1996.

An extraordinary meeting was called in February 1997 with museums consultant Gary Couchman in order to progress the museum's displays and activities. Gary later provided the museum with a plan for further development. Interpretive signage was produced to reflect the existing collection, which was themed to include the activities of butter production, dairying, household items, the laundry, leisure, schools, tragedies and newspapers. An informative DVD was produced in 2001 which comprised interviews with a range of people associated with the factory including former staff, cream carriers and dairy farmers. It may be viewed at the museum entrance.





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