4. Preserving Department

The early buildings in this area, built by Raleigh and extended by the M.M.P.C., were a collection of structures on several levels. Following the 1873 fire, these were rebuilt as the present building, possibly reusing much of the original stone. The size of the building and the large internal space are unusual for a mid-19th century industrial building and indicate the scale of the operation on this site.

Another interesting feature is the all-iron roof construction which was probably also an attempt at fireproofing the works.

Hume Pipes first set up in these buildings, and the concrete foundations show where the machinery was once located.

Preserving Pan, Australasian Sketcher, 19.4.1873

MEAT TRAIL

24/7/19

Tramlines ran from this building to the storage rooms and the wharf. Some may have been re-used by Hume Pipes and others may still be buried, along with the foundations of other long-forgotten buildings, below the tons of fill which has been dumped on the river flats to reclaim the low swampy land.

The Kitchen, Australasian Sketcher, 19.4.1873

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Pipermakers Park has been developed by the Board of Works as a Bicentenial Project. More information on the history of the site and the Western Region can be obtained from the Living Museum Visitor Centre.

P.M. 3183544, 6897293.
The meat canning probably had its preserving department in this area. An etching of 1865 gives an idea of what the factory looked like from the river. Alterations were made after a spectacular fire in 1873 and by the Hume Pipe Company in the 20th century, but the main bluestone building still standing is over 115 years old.

Remains of another system of brick flues once connected with a chimney, can be seen along the back of the building. Bluestone light-wells allowed light to enter windows which were below ground level. These provided light to the preserving department which ran along the whole length of the upper part of the building. The Melbourne Meat Preserving Company was renowned for its hygienic and well-lit premises. Every Saturday the buildings were whitewashed.

A report from 1882 tells how the cans of meat were transferred from the kitchen by means of lifts and placed in the preserving pans suspended from a travelling crane. The cans were lowered into huge tanks heated by steam and then into cooling tanks. The process of cooling and sealing the meat involved great care and technology which was continually improving.

At its peak, the factory employed forty tinsmiths who were well paid, but often only had unreliable seasonal work.

As you walk around the buildings notice some of the construction details. Massive cast-iron wall brackets hold the stone-work in compression. The walls are made with two layers of stone with a rubble inner core. Lines on the hand-made bricks show where they were stacked on each other in the kilns during firing. Some bricks are early machine made-bricks from Hoffman’s brickworks at Brunswick.

5. Stable and workshop

The two smaller bluestone rooms were once part of a more substantial building in the meat-cannery days. In the early years of Hume Pipes, the small room at the end was used as a stable for the horse “Tommy”. He used to pull the dray carting stone from the nearby quarry to use in making concrete pipes. Horses provided transport around the site and to the Melbourne markets and docks before trucks were introduced from the 1930s.

6. The Works in the 1870s

A photo of the meat-works employees outside this bluestone building in about 1875-80 gives an idea of the factory at that time. You can guess what the workers did by their dress. Butchers with aprons, tinsmiths with thick sacking around their waists, foremen or managers with coats and watches. This building dates from 1872 when the company extended its operations by adding a new tinsmiths’ shop and machinery room to help meet the increased export demand.

7. A Missing Building

The open area between the existing buildings was once the scene of great activity. This was a two-storey stone and timber building with the butcher-shop on the ground floor, and the tinsmith’s shop above. The rear wall and pier can still be seen and in the end walls there are blocked-up arches and windows. Tramways ran through the factory and lifts and elevators connected sections on different levels.

Tinsmiths made the tins here from imported tin-plate (steel coated with tin). The lids, with a small hole left in them, were attached after the cans were filled with meat. After initial cooking, the holes were soldered as steam escaped from the can to ensure a good seal and to prevent contamination.

At the northern end of the building a separate room has cast iron columns, riveted iron beams and no windows. An example of fire-proof building developments of the time, this room was probably used for storing tallow, a highly flammable by-product of the meatworks. Tallow was stored and exposed in wooden casks made on-site by coopers.