HIGHWAYS AND BARRIERS

Long before roads were constructed, the Maitlymung River provided access for the first Europeans to venture into the hinterland of the Port Phillip District. Charles Grimes explored the Saltwater River as he called it and the surrounding country in 1803, becoming the first of many white people to use the river as a highway for transporting themselves and their belongings inland, in the Aboriginals had done before them. Settlers followed the Maitlymung and the Yarra rivers into the hinterland to establish agricultural and pastoral properties. However, for those traveling between Melbourne and the deep-water port of Williamsburg or the pastoral country and goldfields to the west, it was a considerable barrier where precious metals or seasonal floods had to be crossed. Where they crossed, the first bridges were built and the concentration of traffic provided the basis for growing communities.

Initially, agriculture and pastoralism were the major occupations in the region, supplying the colony with livestock, wool, hay, grain, fruit crops, and dairy, market garden, orchard and vineyard produce. Associated industries such as meat and hide processing, woodcutting, flour mills, milk factories and irrigation schemes soon followed.

The first industries on the river required a good supply of water and easy access for transporting their raw materials and finished products. Works such as sheep washes, wool scourers, boiling down works and fullers were all dependent on the agricultural produce of the region. The river soon became a centre of "industrial industry". Facilitated processing animal products for preserved meat, tallow, glue or fertilizer discharged their effluents into the river, turning it into a sewer. Related industries grew up next to each other, with the waste products of one being the raw materials of the other.

In the latter half of the 19th century the industrial base expanded to include steam-foundry, engineering, shipbuilding and agricultural implement makers as well as a great variety of producers. Large public works were established to provide services such as power and sewage to the local area and the rest of Melbourne.

Another technique for preserving meat was given its first trial on the site when the Australian Pemmican Meat Export Company used part of the premises between 1880 & 1888 for its processing and freezing works and captured some of the world's first shipments of bulk frozen meat.

By 1912 the works was to another innovative process when the Hume Pipe Company was established to manufacture reinforced concrete pipes and tubes. They used a new technique of spinning the pipe in a steel mould as the concrete set. The company initially re-used the bluestone buildings, but later built rough timber and corrugated iron sheds to accommodate expansion. It is interesting to observe the contrast in building techniques between the 18th and 20th century buildings.

2. Colonial Ammunition Factory and Government Magazine

Downstream from the Hume site, the bluestone wall of the Powder Magazine can be seen. It opened in 1878 to store gunpowder safely away from built-up areas following earlier magazines at Esmonds Hill, Royal Park, and Foomey (see below). A canal and roadway connects the magazine to the river, and then to this site.

Beyond the magazine is the first Ammunition factory to be built in Australia, Captain Whitney, a New Zealander, was commissioned to develop the factory in 1853 when it was felt Australia was poorly equipped to defend itself and supply its armies. Although plagued with controversy in its early years, it survived to form the basis of the present vast munitions industry.

Tallow Department, Anglian Meatworks.