

# Wodonga, Victoria

## Site History

At a meeting of Directors of Bradford Kendall Ltd on the 5 May 1952 it was resolved that the company would purchase Lots 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9 (volume 3218) of land in Wodonga, Victoria for the purpose of building a steel foundry.

In those days the company was diversifying its manufacturing base into various States. One of the major reasons for selecting Wodonga was its close involvement with the various State railways, as it was the change-over point between the two different railway gauges of NSW and Victoria. (The foundry site was also chosen due to its close proximity to the National Highway and access to the electricity supply from the Snowy Mountain Scheme). The company's vision of decentralisation preceded that of various State Governments, which did not materialise until the late sixties, early seventies. The construction of a steel foundry in Wodonga was unique, as the only industry at that time, apart from railway related activity, was farming. The foundry was, along with printing company Lamson Paragon, the first industry to move into the district. It was well over 10 years later that the Victorian Government's "Satellite Cities" concept for Albury-Wodonga was founded, with the assistance of the Department of Decentralisation.

The first sod of soil was turned on the 2 June 1953, a date remembered for the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. Construction was supervised by Jack Williams, a Rigger of some note who worked on the construction of the Sydney Harbour Bridge. Jack in turn hired an ex-RAAF Gunner, Bill Black, who was to become the first Plant Manager. Bill was Wodonga's "supremo" ruling his domain for thirty years until his retirement in 1983. Many current employees of the Bradken Group still carry fine memories of this dedicated Wodonga identity while leading the plant through its early years of growth. Bill's Wodonga foundry proved a training ground for future managers with many other "celebrities" passing through Wodonga's portals, including retired Group Foundry Manager, Alan Cloke, who commenced driving plant equipment, ex Executive Manager (Queensland), Laurie Robinson, the first tradesperson employed at Wodonga as a Patternmaker and, Arthur Wilson former manager of Bradken's Kilburn Foundry, South Australia who was the first apprentice patternmaker at Wodonga.

Approximately 30 people were employed in those first few weeks. On the 27 October 1954 the "Border Morning Mail" reported the plant then employed 60 persons of whom 50% were New Australians, mainly of

Polish origin, from a local settlement camp. Comment was made that the plant was solely engaged in manufacturing railway equipment. The industrial area where the plant is situated was subsequently named “The Bradford (Kendall) Industrial Estate” and still carries this identity.

On the 7 July 1954 the first melt of molten steel took place (Heat No. 1). This heat weighed 800kg and yielded 300kg of finished castings. The first heat on the 7 July 2004 was Heat No. 70,292. This heat yielded 2000kg of finished castings.

In those early days, rain often brought the problem of “water”. Local flooding frequently brought the foundryman’s hazard of unwanted moisture. In more recent years flood mitigation schemes have made this problem a thing of the past.

In April 1970 a “modern” moulding machine and sand reclamation equipment was procured and remains today as the main process for producing moulds at the plant. Latest technology processes have been introduced into various processes of quality control and production while the latest process equipment has also been introduced into the site’s machine shop. Over the years with changes in technology and improvements in Occupational Health & Safety and Environmental practices, there have been many changes to the foundry including the addition of heat treatment and finishing bays in 1971 and 1972; dust collection systems to furnace, sand plant and dressing shop; the machine shop in 1980; the polymation plant in 1989; the new sand reclamation plant in 2003; and the new Okuma Machining Centre this year to bring the machine shop to the forefront of machining technology.

These numerous changes, upgrades and improvements have allowed the Wodonga Foundry to grow and become a major contributor to the Bradken Group. While railway equipment is still produced as part of the plant’s activities the Wodonga Foundry produces a wide range of products that support the mining industry, road transport and general industrial market sectors.

Now over 50 years on, under the leadership of only the second Manager, Zeno Katschmarsky, the Wodonga Foundry employs over 200 people and supports numerous local companies in the Albury-Wodonga region who supply goods and services to the operation.