

Our Largest Shoe Factory Originated on a Queensland Holiday

With so much emphasis being placed on Cr. P. J. Mould's "Industries for Lilydale" campaign we feel that now would be an appropriate time to begin a series of articles on existing industries which are playing so prominent a part in the town's rapid development.

Pride of place is given, first of all, to Hollandia Shoes Pty. Ltd., the only shoe manufacturing enterprise in the Shire, and without any doubt, one of the largest and most progressive organisations of its kind in the State.

The Hollandia factory in John street, is comparatively new to Lilydale. Operations began in a small shed only a few years ago, but in next to no time extensions were necessary, and they have been going on ever since. Today the factory covers 12,000 square feet of ground and has an annual output of over one million pairs of shoes or slippers.

To the two men mainly responsible for this amazing achievement, it seems a far cry to the day when they discussed their possibilities while holidaying in sunny Queensland. But that's part of the story, and a most interesting one at that, so read on:—

The men were talking about a shoe factory, and the town they had in mind for it was Lilydale. The pair were Peter



END OF THE LINE for these slipper on an endless belt in the slipper section of the factory. This is where the finished article is checked, cleaned, and if necessary, trimmed with bows and other adornments. Keeping a watchful eye on the production line is Mrs. Jean Sharp, of Castella street, Lilydale, supervisor of the section, who began with the firm five years ago as a cleaner.

Goodman and Judd O'Quinn. Goodman then was on the management staff of a big Melbourne shoe firm.

O'Quinn was Australian representative for Hollandia shoes, manufactured by a major Dutch shoemaking company, Eloch and Stibbee, exporting to 35 countries.

But import restrictions (it was then 1955) had affected O'Quinn's business. He was looking about for someone with whom to go into partnership to make shoes in Australia.

O'Quinn and Goodman had met socially. They met again on holidays in Queensland, talked it over, and decided to go ahead.

And so Hollandia Shoes Pty. Ltd. was formed. The Dutch firm bought a share in it.

It was an unimpressive beginning; just a 30ft. by 60ft. wooden building which had once been a master plumber's store.

There was no hint that in less than six years Hollandia would grow to be one of Australia's top shoe manufacturers. The first staff numbered exactly six. Just enough to operate the half dozen sewing machines. (To-day Hollandia employs 250 people.) Cau-

tiously, feeling their way, the partners turned out a few simple sandals with "stuck on" soles.

In November, 1956, a vulcanising plant from Italy was installed, costing £25,000—an indication of the firm's rapid growth. They began turning out slippers and indoor and outdoor casual shoes on the new plant.

By then the payroll had grown to 90, and the daily output was 1,200 pairs a day. Floor space had grown from the original 2,000 square feet to 8,000 square feet with the addition of a new building. The firm's phenomenal growth had not been accidental. Both Goodman and O'Quinn knew that, while slippers were an excellent "bread and butter" line, the firm would not expand rapidly if it stuck to slippers alone.

In 1958 another building went up to house what was

virtually a second, parallel factory on the same site. It was to use a process in which soles were bonded to the uppers.

This enabled Hollandia to turn out low priced teenage shoes. Here was a rapidly expanding market. Hollandia expanded with it. To-day the company makes well over one million pairs a year.

The original area of 2,000 square feet has to-day multiplied by more than 12 times, to 25,000 square feet. And managing director Goodman can claim that Hollandia is the biggest supplier of slippers and teenage fashion shoes to the major department stores of Australia. In Melbourne there are the Myer Emporium Ltd., Foy and Gibson Ltd., Williams the Shoeman Pty. Ltd., Public Benefit Bootery Pty. Ltd., and others.

Competition in the shoe game is fierce. In some ways it's like producing a newspaper; you've got to be first with the latest, or people aren't interested.

To make sure Hollandia is first with the latest, either Goodman or O'Quinn make yearly round-the-world trip.

In Rome, Paris, London, New York, they glean the lat-



SCHOOL'S IN for Maria Cheasley, 15, of Seville East. Her tutor is Mrs. Bertha Williams, in charge of Hollandia's machinists training centre. The centre can teach eight girls at a time. Training takes up to twelve weeks, and the girls are paid according to their skill. They pass out fully-fledged machinists.

est styles. Most of the low-priced Hollandia fashion shoes begin life as an expensive and exclusive style in one of the world's elegant salons. Modified for mass production, they can be turned out at a fraction of the cost.

Shoe fashions are changing so fast that Hollandia men

can tell you what year a last was made simply by looking at the shape. For instance, shoes at the moment are getting more pointed each year.



"THE BAKEHOUSE," otherwise the rubber mill, where the sheets of rubber from which soles have been stamped, are rolled back into new sheets. Bert Verbroeken, 21, is feeding the old rubber into the rollers of the mill.

Hollandia to-day is an important part of Lilydale life. It has the biggest payroll in the town, and this means a big slice of the population is directly or indirectly connected with it. Some of the staff have been with the firm since the early days. Jim Miller began as a vulcanising operator; to-day he's production manager. Irene Dunkley has doubled her salary in three years. To-day she's wages clerk and "Test-runs" each new style by trying it on her "lainty feet."



LESLIE BURTON, 18, of Albert rd., Lilydale, is making his career with Hollandia; he started with the firm a week after it opened more than five years ago. His first job was glueing soles; now he is a clicker cutting out the multitudinous shapes and sizes of material that go into a shoe. He uses a press and specially shaped knife blades (foreground).

Les Burton began as an apprentice of 14; to-day, aged 18, he's a fully fledged clicker (cutter to you). The firm has a training scheme for its office girls in business machines and calculators; it has launched a special training school which teaches girls the many and varied sewing operations. There are 16 operations in making one slipper, and 35 for a fashion shoe.



SIX MEMBERS of the happy Priems family work for Hollandia at Lilydale. You can see them above (from left): Mum, Mrs. John Priems, who is a machinist; Kees, 18, who has risen from storeman to checker of the material supplies to the machines; Chris, 19, a clicker (cutter of the materials); Leo, 15, who prepares Fun Shus; John, 16, a packer; and last but definitely not least, dad, Mr. John Priems, a clicker. There are two other Priems: Paul, 11, who is still at school; and sister Corrie, 20, busy getting ready for her wedding. Since the Priems arrived in Australia three years ago they have worked for Hollandia — the boys as they became old enough, their parents from the start. They have saved enough to own two things they did not have in Holland — a car and a house in Lilydale. Would Mrs. Priems like to go back to Europe? "Never," she said emphatically.



MRS. MARY LUKE, of Mt. Evelyn (left), has worked with Hollandia since the beginning. She started as a machinist, but was forelady within two months. Her son, Gregory, who is a scholarship student at the High School, works for Hollandia in his holidays. Her husband, Stanley, works nearby as foreman engineer at the nearby David Mitchell Estates timeworks. Mrs. Luke is seen here with some of the girls she looks after in the Fun Shu section. It is here the uppers are machined and processed. A skilful operator can handle 900 pairs a day.

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"Industries For Lilydale" (cont.)

Goodman took me around the plant. We began where the huge rolls of material—glittering gold, shining white, velvety suede, baby-soft kid—are cut to shape. For each slipper and fashion shoe between 30 and 40 separate dies are needed to cut out the pieces of material which form the uppers.

Big presses push the blades onto the fabric, neatly slicing out the required shape in one brief operation. From there, the shapes for the slippers go from girl to girl to be perforated, marked with indigo dye for stitching, and fancy stitched with a machine which imitates the hand stitching of a bygone age.

Then they go to another girl to have the heel-seam stitched; one operator can get through about 2,000 of these in a day. Another machine flattens out the seam so it won't hurt your heel; another stitches tape over the seam. Yet another miraculous device puts binding on the edge. Next comes stiffening, then a sort of insole called a "sock" is stitched to the upper. Now the slipper upper is complete. All that remains is to "cook" the rubber sole onto it.

The long-wearing outer sole "skin" goes in the bottom of the mould, next the rubber sole, and fillers to form the



MRS. NEWNES testing a new design on the model, Irene Dunkley.

ual operations, and the sole is "stuck on" instead of moulded.

Think what all this means when the firm begins to tool up the factory for a new season. In each type there are eleven different sizes and perhaps five different colours. That's a total of 55 possible combinations of colour and size.

In a normal season's production run of 30 different styles there are 1,650 possible ways of making a shoe, taking into account colour, size and style.



GRAEME STEWART, 23, of Beresford rd., Lilydale, has been with Hollandia for 3½ years. His complicated job is lasting the toes of the shoe uppers in a strange looking machine. On his own he can get through about 700 pairs a day. Graeme is a member of the local fire brigade. Once this made him late for work. He was hauled out of bed at 3 a.m. to help fight the fire which burned down the local high school, not far from the factory, two years ago. He didn't finish until 7 a.m., so he had a good excuse to offer when he arrived well after clocking-on time.

All this effort has to be carefully and accurately coordinated. Proof that it is "on the ball" lies in the company's plans for expansions—both at Lilydale and Healesville. It has bought six acres of land at Healesville, and plans are under way for the first buildings. In them the company will branch out into men's and women's low-priced casual shoes, using yet another new process.

There's no doubt about it, Goodman and O'Quinn realise that in the shoes business you've got to be one step ahead all the time.



MACHINISTS AT WORK in a section of the brightly-lit factory.

heel. The upper is pulled on a last and put on top of the mould. Minutes later, the upper and sole emerge as one.

There isn't room to describe the process for a shoes; but there are even more individ-



FINISHING TOUCHES to the Fun Shus as they move slowly up the endless belt. In the background the clickers are at work cutting out the uppers patterns.

ATE TOURS



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TYPICAL OF HOLLAND. Five lovely Dutch girls held pride of place amidst a profusion of colorful flowers on this large float representing Hollandia Shoes. The trimmings, typically Dutch, even included a little Dutch mill. This is another of Mr. George Ford's pictures.

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