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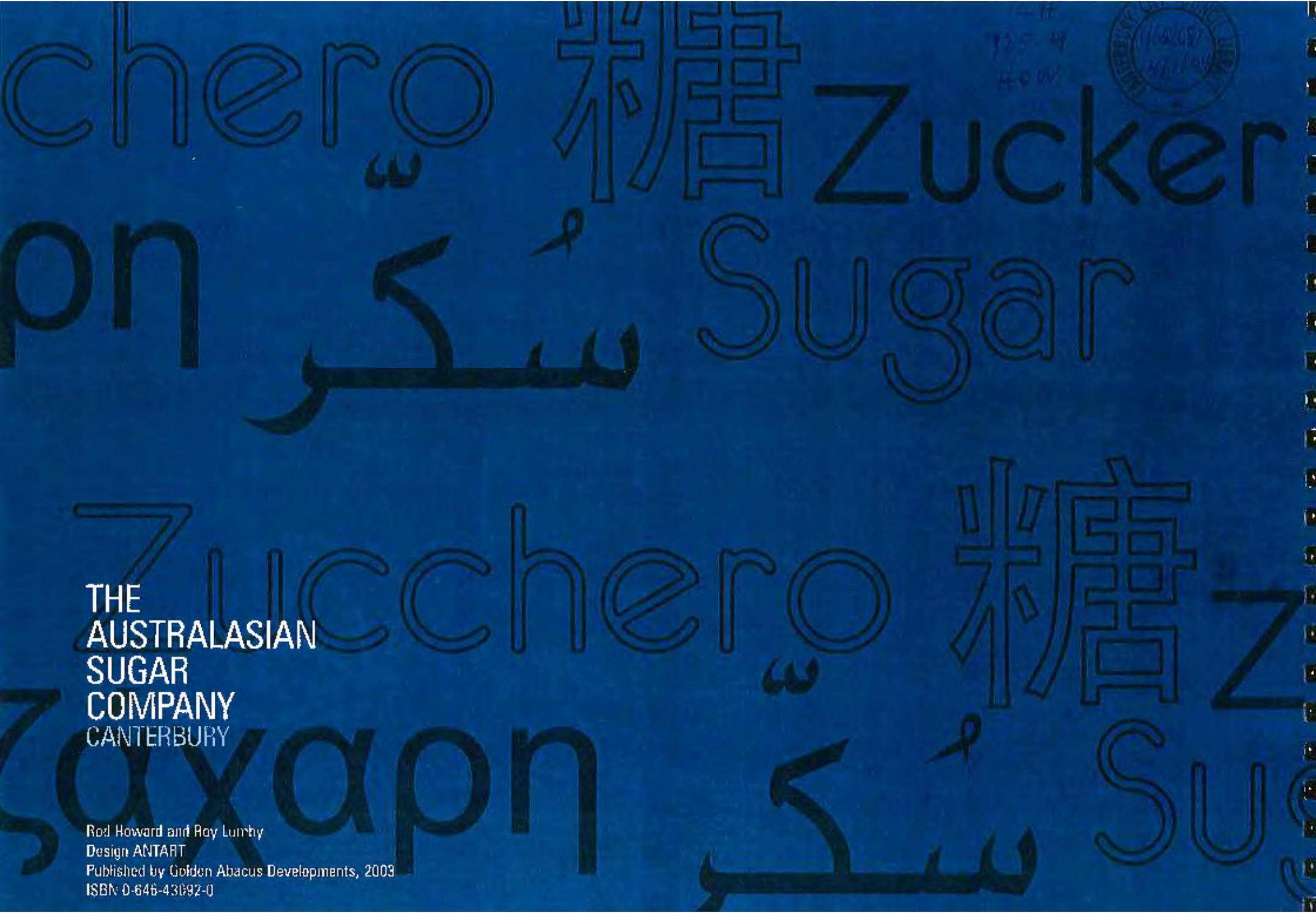
THE AUSTRALASIAN SUGAR COMPANY

CANTERBURY

ROD HOWARD AND
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Design ANTART
Published by Golden Abacus Developments, 2003
ISBN 0-646-43092-0

CANTERBURY'S EARLY HISTORY

THE EARLIEST EUROPEAN exploration of the locality where the former Australasian (ASC) Sugar Company Mill is now located occurred when officers of the First Fleet of 1788 negotiated the Cooks River as far as the districts of present-day Canterbury and Campsie. The officers noted the low and marshy aspect of the countryside and observed Aborigines fishing on the river.

Further exploration took place in 1789 when Captain Hunter negotiated the river in September; Lieutenant Bradley did the same in December of the same year.¹ The First Fleet of 1788 is of interest in the context of the Sugar Mill as Governor Phillip obtained sugar cane at the Cape of Good Hope, Southern Africa on the voyage out. This sugar cane was planted in the vicinity of what is now the Customs House at Circular Quay.²

The earliest European settlement in the area took place when the Reverend Richard Johnson was granted 100 acres, known as "Canterbury Vale", on 28 May 1793, although it is recorded that he "entered on" the land on 1 March 1793.³ Johnson came to Australia as Chaplain to the settlement, and conducted the first divine service in Sydney. He subsequently carried out all the clerical duties in the colony for six years, and gained a reputation for skill in agricultural matters.⁴

Reverend Johnson's "Canterbury Vale" was consolidated by a grant of 50 acres on 15 September 1796 and a further grant of 260 acres on 5 October 1799. This was known as Sheep Pasture Plains.⁵ Johnson applied for leave to return to England for his health in 1798, but before his departure in October 1800, he sold the farm to Lieutenant William Cox.

Cox was a Lieutenant in the New South Wales Corps who arrived in Sydney with his family on 11 January 1800 as paymaster. Due to the overstraining of his credit he was suspended from office in 1803 and his estate assigned to trustees, to be sold for the benefit of his creditors.⁶ Cox's

land at this time far exceeded Johnson's original "Canterbury Vale", as Cox had also purchased surrounding properties that had been land grants made in the 1790s. At an auction held on 27 May 1803, Robert Campbell procured 830 acres of Cox's land, consolidating a grant of land that he already possessed.⁷

Robert Campbell (1769-1846), known as the "father of the mercantile community" in the colony of New South Wales, settled in Sydney around 1800 and rapidly expanded his merchandising concern into a large and thriving enterprise. He later achieved prominence in the business community of New South Wales.

The main purpose of the Robert Campbell purchase at Canterbury seems to have been for the accommodation of the overflow of his purchases of imported cattle rejected by the colonial government.⁸ Little appears to have taken place at the site until the subdivision of the land in 1841, when the village of Canterbury was formed.⁹ By the end of this year the Australasian Sugar Company's mill had been completed.

THE AUSTRALASIAN SUGAR COMPANY AND THE MILL

DURING THE LATTER PART of the 1830s the colony of New South Wales was enjoying an economic boom, with much English capital flowing into the country. A London-based company promoter, Francis Kemble, who had previously some experience in the sugar industry, persuaded William Knox Child, Deputy Lieutenant of the County of Kent and also inspector and director of the London and County Joint Stock Bank, to provide the capital for the establishment of a sugar works in Australia.¹⁰

In 1839 the Australasian Sugar Company was formed in London, purchases made of machinery and equipment after the sale of Child's assets, and on 11 March 1840, the directors of A.S.C. and their families and forty mill workers departed for Sydney, arriving on 12 July 1840.¹¹

THE AUSTRALASIAN SUGAR COMPANY MILL, FREDERICK GARLING. THE COOKS RIVER IN THE BACKGROUND
IMAGE COURTESY OF STATE LIBRARY OF NSW



Because of the need for plentiful water, fuel supplies and water transport to expedite the manufacture of sugar, a site on the Cooks River was chosen on part of Robert Campbell's Canterbury estate. A dam had also been erected near the site to prevent salt water reaching the upper portion of the stream.

The town supply was limited and this was the nearest available fresh water location close to Sydney. Some 60 acres were chosen with a value of 1200 and the transaction was carried out by the exchange of 50 shares in the company; there appears to have been little difficulty in the sale of shares, the last 100 being sold in May 1843.¹² The property transaction was registered on 8 December 1840.

EARLY DESCRIPTIONS OF THE AUSTRALASIAN SUGAR COMPANY'S MILL

BY THE END OF SEPTEMBER the following year the works were sufficiently complete to warrant detailed description in *The Australian*.¹³ An almost identically worded article appeared in October in the *Sydney Morning Herald*.¹⁴ The works were described as follows:

"... They are built on a portion of the Canterbury Estate, lately bought by the Company of ROBERT CAMPELL, Esq., M.C., and will be about five miles distant from Sydney when the new road, now in formation, by the Petersham Gate, is completed. The Sugar-house is placed within one hundred feet of Cook's River, which is shortly expected to be fresh water, the Dam being now quite closed, and is built of beautiful white sand-stone. It is one hundred feet in length, sixty feet in width, and sixty feet high, with a fine chimney shaft, one hundred and thirty feet from the ground.

The house contains six spacious floors, mill-house, engine-house, boiler-house, stove, and storerooms, all heated and worked by a steam-engine of considerable power, which also drives a mill of great capabilities, for the purpose of grinding animal charcoal. There is also a complete set of

retorts for the purposes of the manufactory, and two smaller steam engines of twelve-horse power to act as a crane, to do the work of the house. The whole arrangements shew that Mr DUTTRIM, the Company's engineer, and surveyor, Mr WILLIAMS, and the contractors, MESSRS. MACBETH and CO. are men of judgment, and thoroughly understand their respective departments.

We understand that the Sugar Works have given employment to above one hundred men during the erection, and that above £30,000 has been expended on them, all the plant and machinery being of a very valuable description, and according to the most recent improvements. The Company have housed their sugarhouse men in really very convenient slab huts; and we are glad to find that a school has already been erected near the works, which is attended by above forty children. This is used as a chapel on Sundays.

We cannot conclude these remarks without noticing the unremitting exertions and perseverance of the manager, Mr WILLIAM KNOX CHILD, in accomplishing what has been done, under circumstances and difficulties of no ordinary description; firstly, in bringing, sixteen thousand miles from England, a valuable plant, and all the mechanics necessary to work it in this colony, all of whom still continue in the Company's service; and next, in the short space of nine months, to have nearly accomplished his object by placing it and them in a township, formerly known as the Canterbury Bush...".

Before the Mill could begin operating, however, the combined efforts of disputes between Kemble and Child and a slump in trade caused the dissolution of the company and the subsequent formation of the Australasian Sugar Company, the Deed of Settlement of which was dated 31 March 1842.¹⁵

The New South Wales Legislative Council passed a Private Act in September 1842 to enable the Australasian Sugar Company to "sue and be sued in the name of one of their

THE AUSTRALASIAN SUGAR COMPANY MILL, IN 1846. JOSEPH FOWLES.
IMAGE COURTESY OF STATE LIBRARY OF NSW





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Officers, without incorporating them or relieving the Members of the Company from individual responsibility". The Company was prohibited from "engaging in the business of Distilling Spirituous Liquors".³⁶

PRODUCING SUGAR AT THE MILL

PRODUCTION OF SUGAR finally commenced in August or September of that year,³⁷ and an article appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald* at the end of 1842, which described in detail the process of manufacture and gave a picturesque view of the building itself:

*"... The sugar house is a large plain stone building, six stories high, at one end of which there is a handsome chimney, the largest we believe in the colony, and as the building stands close down to the river, it is not seen from the road until you are within a couple of hundred yards of it. The effect of coming suddenly upon such an establishment in the bush, is extremely striking ..."*³⁸

Some indication was also given of the interior of the building, notably the heat generated by the refining process and the "... lowness of the rooms, extending over nearly the whole building on some floors ...".³⁹ 30 persons were employed at the Mill, which was at that stage only producing about two-fifths of its capacity. The building was built of sandstone stone quarried from the site.

The newspaper article then described in detail the actual refining process that was carried out in the Mill. Raw material was taken to the top of the building where two large cisterns were situated. The cane was heated in water and dissolved in the cisterns. The resulting fluid passed through to the floor below where it was filtered through cloth to remove discolouration. It then went through another process of filtering, through charcoal.

Charcoal was made on site in "a shed at the far end of the house" where two kilns were built. The first kiln was used

ground the charcoal to a powder, which was then used for filtration of the sugar solution.

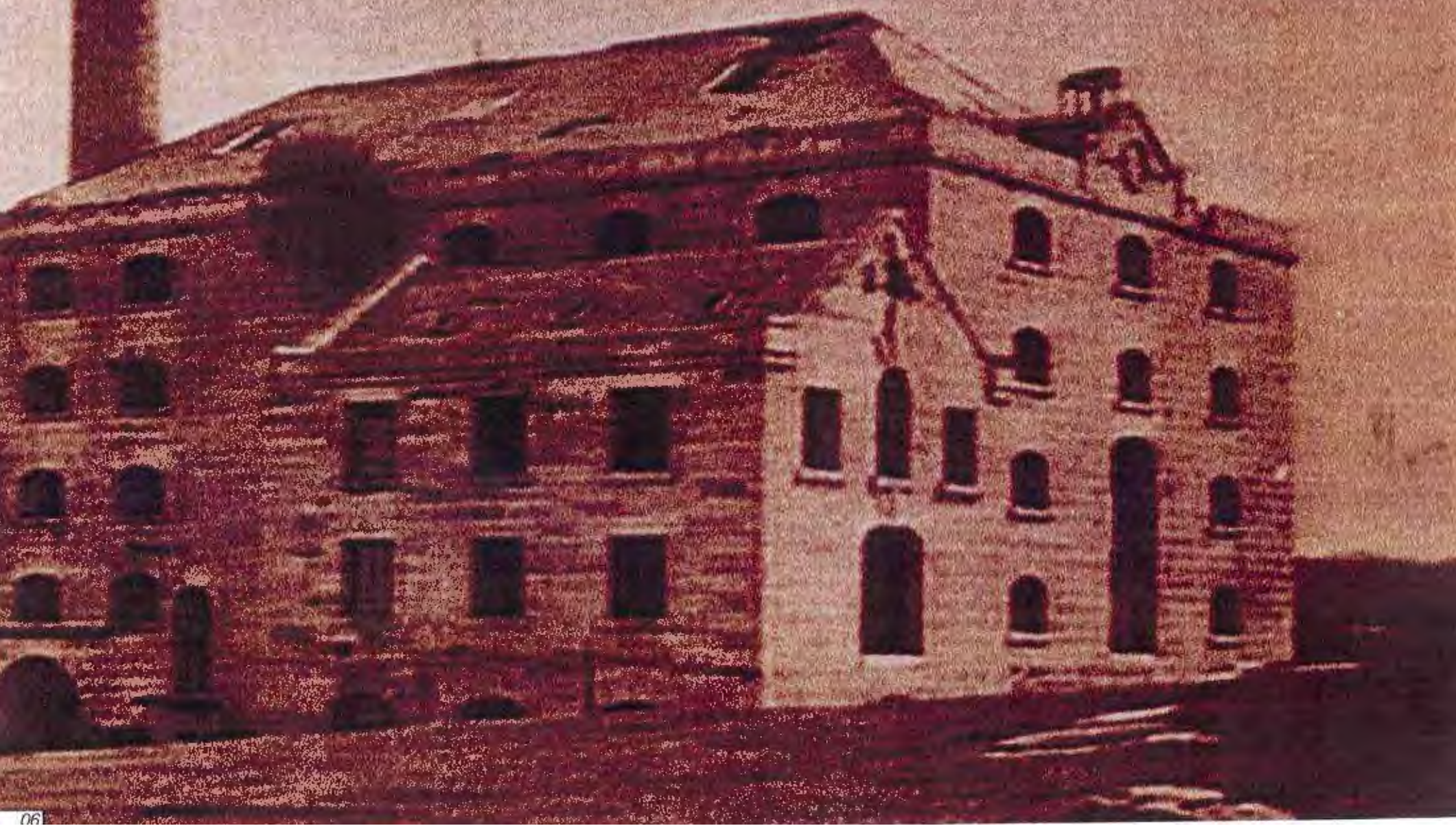
After this filtration, when the liquid had been whitened, it was then boiled in vacuum pans. These were close-covered vessels from which air was pumped by a steam engine. During this process crystals began to form in the liquid and at the conclusion of boiling the fluid "a mass of crystals, enveloped in a dark coloured syrup", was released into a room below the boiler where heaters were located. This was, in fact, the basement of the Mill.

After some time the saturated fluid was manually put into moulds where it stood overnight and began to crystallise. The next stage of the process saw the moulds taken to what was described as a "pull-up-hole", which ran the entire height of the building, and through which the moulds were taken to a room in an upper part of the Mill.

A small hole was made in the apex of each mould and the syrup dripped into an earthenware jar from which it was then poured into a pipe leading to the "boiling house". Here it was converted to loaf sugar of an "inferior kind" and treacle. A process of washing completely removed the syrup from the sugar and completed the refining.

This sequence took between a week and ten days. After the sugar was removed from the moulds it was placed in "a store or drying room, which is about eight feet square and runs from the top to the bottom of the house, and is fitted up with shelves or racks on which the sugar loaves are placed, and remain until they are thoroughly dried, the heat being kept up to about 140 degrees [Fahrenheit]. The loaves are then removed and are ready for the grocer".

All the heating in the Mill was via steam, which was channelled to the various rooms by means of large pipes. Steam power also powered the mechanical processes of the Mill.



SOURCES OF SUGAR CANE FOR THE MILL

BEFORE THE MILL began production, sugar was imported into Sydney from Java, Mauritius and the Philippines.²⁰ The raw material supplied to the Mill was imported from the Philippines. Apart from the cane that arrived in Sydney with the First Fleet, T.A. Scott who settled in Australia in 1819 and spent several years growing sugar cane at Port Macquarie undertook pioneering efforts to establish production of cane. In 1823 he went to Point Clare where he had received a grant of land, and continued to grow cane on a very small scale.

It was not until the late 1860s that commercially viable crops were grown in the northern part of New South Wales. It was in the 1860s that cultivation of cane also became viable in Queensland.²¹ Because of these circumstances the Mill at Canterbury processed imported raw material.

THE APPEARANCE OF THE MILL

EARLY PICTORIAL DEPICTIONS of the building, such as that by Joseph Fowles painted ca. 1842-45 and the work entitled "Austⁿ Sugar Companys Works, Canterbury [sic] NSW", ca. 1844 show a hip-roofed structure with five storeys of windows, a parapet, tall chimney and a single storey structure attached to the southern part of the main building. This is likely to have been the "shed" where the charcoal for filtering was produced. Fowles' painting, looking towards the northern facade, shows a decorative pediment and prominent tall opening with what appears to be an iron bracket and pulley system located over it.

The opening of the Mill precipitated further development in the area. "Canterbury Town Allotments... adjoining the Sugar Works" were offered for sale in December 1841, and subsequent sales followed during the 1840s and 1850s.²²

THE CLOSURE OF THE AUSTRALASIAN SUGAR COMPANY

THE AUSTRALASIAN SUGAR COMPANY continued to do business for several years. Edward Knox, a close friend of Campbell, managed the company from 1843 until 1846. After 1846 he remained a director of the Company until 1854 when disagreements amongst the shareholders caused the dissolution of the concern. On 1 January 1855 the Colonial Sugar Refining Company was formed with Knox as manager and one of the directors.²³ A decision was made to close the works and transfer them to a property in George Street West later that year.²⁴

THE VILLAGE OF CANTERBURY

THE EARLY HISTORY of the suburb of Canterbury is closely linked to the Sugar Mill. Whilst the Mill was under construction, notice was published announcing an auction to be held on 30 July 1841 of a subdivision containing 95 allotments to the north of the Mill site.²⁵ The streets were named after the most generous investors into the A.S.C. The reason for the subdivision was twofold; firstly, to accommodate Mill workers and secondly, to raise finances for the operation of the Mill.²⁶

At around the same time Robert Campbell subdivided to the west of the Mill site.²⁷ In 1843 this subdivision, called the "Village of Canterbury", was advertised for auction scheduled for 31 May²⁸ (Figure 11). Streets in this subdivision were named after members of Campbell's family.²⁹ There were already dwellings in both subdivisions; mostly slab huts, excepting a brick house for the supervisor of the Mill, as well as a store and a public house (licensed in 1843). The village consolidated after the Mill began operation, although it seems to have been, not unexpectedly, a company town. It continued to expand in the 1840s³⁰; by 1848 Canterbury consisted of 65 houses and 218 inhabitants.³¹



QUEENSLAND SUGARCANE TRANSPORTATION ON BARGES IN THE MAROUDCHY RIVER, CA. 1920
IMAGE COURTESY OF MAROUDCHY HERITAGE LIBRARY

The discovery of gold marked the start of the reversal in growth when members of the workforce began to leave for the diggings. When the Mill ceased operation in 1854, the settlement suffered a severe recession. There was no other local employment and many more people left the area. This reversal did not notably ease until the mid 1860s. The railway passing through Ashfield, however, and the subdivision of part of the Canterbury Estate brought an influx of new, affluent settlers into the area.

THE REFORMATORY

THE MILL REMAINED VACANT and unused for many years. In 1862 it appeared that a new use might be found for the building, when the Colonial Architect reported on its suitability for the purposes of housing a "juvenile reformatory". A description of the building was included in the Colonial Architect's correspondence:

"...the Main Building is four storeys and the Wing on the North East Angle two storeys in height. The Basement is on a level with the Ground in the rear, and surrounding which there are extensive one Storey Buildings containing Furnaces, retorts and Machinery, and from which there is a Chimney Shaft about 90 feet high.

The Main Building is substantially erected with Cut Stone and in a good state of Repair the Roofs are slated. The height of the Rooms offer a great objection being only 7ft. 6 ins. from Floor to Floor and 6 ft.

4 ins. beneath the Girders. The Window Openings are furnished with Cast Iron Sashes but their position being within 18 inches of the floor are badly adapted for Light and Ventilation.

*The area of the grounds is about 15 acres extending along the North Branch of Cook's River. The land is not fenced in and is unsuitable for Agriculture, and a very small portion fitted for Garden purposes the only water to be procured is a scanty supply from surface drainage".*³²

It was considered that the building was "wholly unsuited for the requirements of a Reformatory". However, additional reports were prepared on the building fabric; the stone walls ranged from between 2 feet and 2 feet 6 inches in thickness and had suffered deterioration on the eastern side of the building just above ground level.

The structural timbers were described as of "Colonial hardwood, blackbutt and ironbark" and generally sound except for deterioration of a part of the roof of the Engine House. Flooring was of deal (pine), largely covered with sheet iron. The lead guttering had cracked; three doors were of iron, the rest were of wood and had largely deteriorated, as had skylights and ventilator in the roof.³³

It would appear that machinery had been left in the building after the removal of the works in 1855. This included a steam engine, steam boilers, retorts, hoisting gear and other equipment, "...all of which would be useless to the Government".³⁴ The building remained unused until the 1880s.

BLACKET AND COMPANY AND OTHER OCCUPANTS

IN 1860 FREDERICK CLISSOLD purchased the Sugar Mill and in turn sold it to Blacket and Co. in 1884. According to the Sands Directory, from 1885 to 1887 the Sugar Mill was occupied by the firm of Blacket and Co., Engineer, who amongst other things constructed a large quantity of heavy ironwork for railway use.³⁵ Blacket and Co. was again listed in Sands Directory from 1890 to 1899.

However, other evidence suggests that Blacket and Company was in occupation around 1882³⁶, and that it was bankrupted in 1887.³⁷ The building appears to have been in a state of some dereliction prior to their occupation; however, a written description of the Mill at the time of the occupation of Blacket and Co. indicates changes, which took place to the building fabric at their instigation:

"For many years an agitation has been going on in the district for railway communications with Sydney and in the expectation that this would be granted Messrs. Blacket & Co. some 8 years ago leased the sugar works building with a view to turning it into an engineering works. The building is in excellent order, having been well built of freestone from the Company's own land and the Canterbury freestone is not inferior to that of any place in the metropolitan district.

Messrs Blacket & Co. fitted up a quantity of the most modern machinery including turning lathes, moulding machines, punching and screwing machines, etc. which are ready for use at any time. The building was divided into the machinery moulding and pattern maker's shops. There are two cupolas for smelting and travelling cranes inside and outside the building for carrying heavy castings, etc. from one part of the foundry to another or loading them on waggons [sic].

*Unfortunately, all this fine machinery is lying idle for want of means of conveying the material to or from the city either by rail or water. A proposal was made to remove the dams in Cook's River and clear away snags and other obstructions to that produce, manufactures, etc. might be conveyed by water via Cook's River and Botany Bay to Sydney."*³⁰

BUTTER AND BACON

AFTER BLACKET AND COMPANY ceased operating, other concerns moved in to utilise the site. It was used as a butter factory by Foley Bros, and from 1900 until 1908 by Denham Bros as the Canterbury Bacon Factory.³¹ Towards the end of this time the tall chimney, once such a prominent and unique feature of the Sugar Mill was demolished:

"... lifts tall out of perpendicular chimney... has a 'lean' like the Tower of Pisa, but unlike that edifice, the lean

J.C. HUTTON AND CO.

IN 1908 THE FORMER SUGAR MILL was purchased by the firm of J.C. Hutton and Co. This firm was founded by James Canuthers Hutton, the son of a Yorkshire emigrant, in Melbourne in 1872. By the time Hutton was converted to a proprietary company in 1907, it had established branches in several Australian States and also New Zealand.³² Canterbury was intended to supply New South Wales, and to that end, was considered to be a comprehensive and up to date facility.³³

A photograph published in 1911 shows the former Sugar Mill, its roof emblazoned with the name of J.C. Hutton, surrounded by single storey structures to the west and south, the old chimneystack conspicuously absent. Adjacent to the works were yards where the pigs were "topped off", that is, fed a hard grain diet to firm their flesh prior to slaughtering and processing.³⁴ Between 1908 and 1919 other buildings were added, including a caretaker's cottage, killing shed and engine room (a large smokestack to the north east of the old Mill became a prominent local landmark).

The Sugar Mill did not escape modification, although the early timber framed roof had been retained, the original four floors had been reduced to two, and the basement was used as cold storage rooms.³⁵

In 1950 the killing licence for the factory expired, and so the supply of carcasses was provided from other centres. A new office building, which appears to have been a single storey, flat roofed structure, was erected to the north of the old Mill in 1952. A garage/workshop facility was constructed adjacent to the western facade of the Mill ca. 1980; during the late 1970s/early 1980s Huttons demolished many of the ancillary structures clustered around the old Mill (which may have been due to the erection of a new plant at Canterbury in 1977)³⁶. The old

of the Mill was recognised and in 1979 the former Sugar Mill was classified by the National Trust of Australia (N.S.W.)

THE MILL AFTER THE CLOSURES

IN 1983 THE PROPERTY was sold to new owners Nick Scali and Co. Pty Ltd. The Power House to the north of the Mill appears to have been demolished ca. 1993. The Mill was further damaged in a tragic fire that occurred in 1996 that destroyed the timber elements of the Mill. The property was resold in 2001 to Golden Abacus Developments for restoration and redevelopment as residential units. The Sugar Mill site was reoccupied in early 2004 by new residential tenants.

CHRONOLOGICAL SUMMARY OF THE HISTORY OF THE SITE

27 May 1803 Purchase of Canterbury Estate by Robert Campbell **1839** Formation of Australasian Sugar Company in London **12 July 1840** Arrival of A.S.C. directors, operatives and others in Sydney **8 December 1840** Registration of property transaction at Canterbury for the site of the A.S.C. Mill **September 1841** Mill building substantially complete **31 March 1842** Deed of settlement for the Australasian Sugar Company. **ca. August 1842** Production of sugar at the Mill commences **1854** Dissolution of the Australian Sugar Company **1855** The Colonial Sugar Refining Company was formed on 1 January. The works at Canterbury were closed later in the year **1862-1866** Evaluation of the Mill by the Colonial Architect's office for adaptive reuse as a juvenile reformatory, which does not proceed **ca.1882-1885** The firm of Blacket and Co. took up occupation of the site **ca.1890** Blacket and Co. was bankrupt. The Mill was then used as a butter factory **1900** The Mill was converted to a bacon factory by Denham Bros. **1908** The site was purchased by the firm of J.C. Hutton and Co **1983** The site was sold to Nick Scali and Co. Pty Ltd **1996** Fire in the Sugar Mill **2001** The site was sold to Golden Abacus Developments **2004** The Mill site was reoccupied

DOCUMENTARY SOURCES

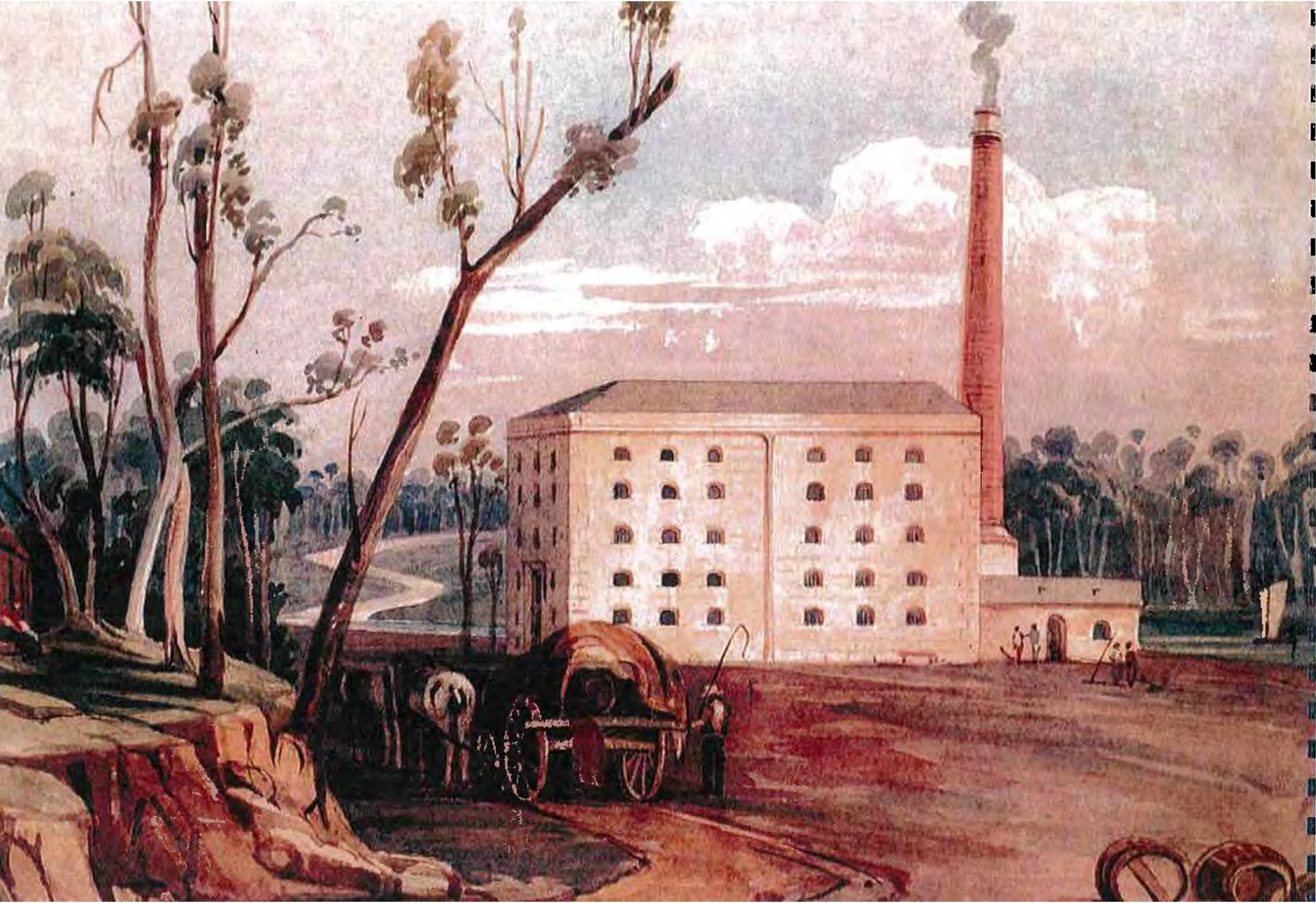
Research for archival and documentary evidence related to the former Australasian Sugar Company Mill drew on the following archival sources: State Library of New South Wales, Royal Australian Historical Society, State Archives of New South Wales, Noel Butlin Archives Centre, Australian National University, Canberra.

Rod Howard and Roy Lumby of Rod Howard Heritage Conservation Pty Ltd prepared this historical survey of the Australasian Sugar Company for the *CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT PLAN Former ASC Sugar Mill, Church Street, Canterbury*, 1995.



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