

Scanlen's Museum

What it was like to work at the Scanlens factory in Chippendale

By Warren Williams.

I worked in the Factory, producing Scanlens Bubble Gum and Metro pops I did my Confectionary apprenticeship worked there for 7 yrs., in the 70s when it was on the corner of City Road and Myrtle St.

I worked at Scanlens as I said I was straight out of Newtown Boys High school, I was only 15 years old. I worked on the Rumbler first up it was almost like a hexagonal shape cement mixer, that had round Gum Bars like Lawn bowl size shapes they turned around in this revolving mixer and broke up the sheets of Gum tablets that came off the conveyors after a series of rollers and cutting like impression blades expelled them into wooden trays and laid flat about 18 inches by 12 inches.

From there they hardened up and I placed them into this "Rumbler" where they were broken up into individual tablets, then transferred to an upstairs room called the Panning room. Here they were placed into 24 large cement mixer type Copper containers and would be coloured and flavoured as they rotated. Interestingly the Leading hand I had as only 2 of us were in the room, (it was very noisy too) his uncle was the famous Les Darcy, the boxer (I digress).

After the tablets of TAB gum or MINI Gum had reached a certain weight ratio we would put on a wax coating to shine up the individual tablet, from start to finish almost 3 days. From here they would be transferred to packing machines for distribution to wherever. Then there was the Gum Balls, a similar set up downstairs in the Factory with 24 concrete type mixers. Also was the Bubble gum mixers that were situated on the ground floor, One Mixer and One Base mixer that produced the Base for the gum, the Packaging machines were on the ground floor for Big Charlie, Metro Gum and Stick Gum (the stick Gum was for the collector cards)

Also upstairs was the Boiled Lolly Dept, Metro Pops were Made there on the machines that when the boiled product was firm enough to carry with leather gloves and firm enough to not fall through your arms they were transferred to the Pop machines only metres away, from here they were placed into the long cylindrical heated rollers and auto tilted to allow the softened "blob" of candy to slowly creep toward a set of roller that drew the candy (roughly 15 kgs in weight) towards the blade that cut the candy and in a rotating flat area they were pressed into a flat circle and straight away a paper stick would impress into its side from there it was released between 2 upper and lower cellophane strips, then a heater would roll over the outsides of the Lolly pop and seal the cellophane, a cutter would cut the individual "pop" and up a conveyor into a large slopping timber framed bin would slide down to a person who would weigh and pack them into bags.

I never was interested in collecting Cards though now I wished I had, I've no photos of inside the production areas at all, and I left after 7 years working there with 6 fillings - a hazard of the job. The two

Brothers, Peter and Brian Scanlen would always walk through from time to time and they were really approachable fellows, it was a mixture of various races and indigenous workers some married couple worked there side by side and cousins and brothers also, being close to Redfern, everyone was really happy and we would finish our work on Friday at 2.30 pm and most of the guys would head off to the local pub either the Phillip behind Scanlens or the Lansdowne on City Road. The company thought highly enough of me to send me on Management courses and an Outward Bound Course.

I recall the Manager as a wonderful gentleman, he was a Boxing fan, and a guy by the name of Wally Carr he was an Aboriginal amateur boxer and Jim West would give him time off with pay to compete, Wally went on to win many awards. The initiation process for Apprentices was pretty rugged, there were 4 there during my time of 7 years, it was to bundle the poor 16 yr old into the Warehouse and remove his overalls off his torso only and lather him with glucose, colouring, icing sugar and syrup on his chest and groin (it wasn't nice). But that's the way it was in those days and respect was earned not given. Anyway I hope I've given you a taste of what it was like at Scanlens on City Road Chippendale, I've only got fond memories of that place, when work was hard in the heat and even a Tea Lady would come around to the machines and offer tea, coffee and bickies, ohhhh I miss those days.