

## ORBOST BUTTER FACTORY.

### HISTORY OF THE COMPANY.

The periodical sounding of the steam whistle from the new butter factory serves to draw public attention to the splendid building and plant that are now being occupied by the Orbost Butter and Produce company, and those acquainted with the ancient history of Orbost may be reminded of the commencement of the company's operations in 1892. At that time the district was suffering from the effects of the floods of 1890 and 1891, and a series of wet winters had brought the roads into an almost impassable condition such as has never been experienced here before or since. Added to that the country generally was depressed owing to the collapse of the land boom and the closing of the banks, prices of stock and farm produce were at their lowest, and everything else was in a correspondingly hopeless state. Some of leading farmers were of opinion that the best thing they could do to help the district was to establish a butter factory. The Government was then giving bonuses towards the cost of buildings and on the output of butter in order to promote the success of the industry, and the originators of the proposal in Orbost relied on getting substantial assistance from those sources. Before the new company was in a position to claim any subsidy, however, it was found that the whole of the money available had been appropriated for the benefit of wealthier concerns in more populous districts. If there was a company in the state that deserved help it was the Orbost one, but the funds were distributed among others who did not need, and were not in reality entitled to any of them. On the formation of the company the first directors saw so many difficulties ahead that the project was several times on the point of being abandoned, and if the directorate had not included two or three exceptionally constituted individuals, men who did not know when they were beaten, that would certainly have been the result. However, a fairly good factory building was erected, and what was then an up-to-date plant installed, but only those who had a principal hand in the business will ever realise what a herculean task was accomplished under the circumstances. When operations commenced, the cost of carriage presented almost insuperable difficulties and as under the system then in force the milk had to be carted to the factory, some of the suppliers had a terrible task driving through mud up to the axles in their daily trips to and from

the axles in their daily trips to and from the factory. Among the principal suppliers, without whose help the concern could not have been kept going, were the Hon. James Cameron and the late Mrs Stewart. There were smaller suppliers and others came in later, among the most noteworthy being Messrs Russell and Jeffers, the former of whom has stuck to the factory right up to date, and is now chairman of the Board of Directors. Among minor disasters that the first directors had to face were losses caused by the bankruptcy of two of the Melbourne salesmen, and the fact that several farmers who had promised to take up shares failed to honor their engagement. The factory was opened on 11th January, 1898, and the company was only staggering on its legs when the river flats were devastated by the memorable flood of that year. Under ordinary circumstances it would not have paid the district to establish a factory at that time, nor would it have paid the suppliers to bring their milk to it, but things were then in such a desperate state that the factory, feasible as its operations were, was the only means then existing for the distribution of a little money. The company had to pass through critical times later on, and was once on the verge of being wound up, but it is safe to say that the initial difficulties about which the great majority who benefit by the industry know nothing, constituted the stiffest proposition that has ever had to be faced. It is a very fortunate thing that Orbost possessed men at certain critical periods who were wise or unwise enough to persevere with the undertaking, as otherwise there would have been no co-operative factory here, and the trade would have been in the hands of Melbourne shareholders. When the factory started work Mr. John Scouller was appointed manager. There were several applicants for the position and two, at least, had such good credentials that the directors had some difficulty in making a selection. Mr. Scouller's testimonials had reference more to cheese than butter making, and some of the directors were criticised for supporting him. Any doubt as to the manager's efficiency, and on the question that had been raised as to whether or not the Snowy River flats would produce good butter, were disposed of once for all with the first taste and examination of the product of the factory. Mr. Scouller still retains the management, and during his 24 years' control has given perfect satisfaction to directors and suppliers alike.

### THE NEW FACTORY.

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Some years ago the business of the company had increased to such an extent that notwithstanding additions and improvements that had been made to the buildings and plant, it was thought desirable to go in for something larger and more up-to-date. The directors inspected a number of the best factories, and eventually entrusted the preparation of a new design to Messrs Munce and Proud, architects. Plans submitted by that firm were adopted four years ago, and tenders called for the erection. Some difficulty was found in making a satisfactory contract, and it was not until the third time of asking that the directors received an offer, which they decided to accept, from Messrs J. J. Taylor and Son. Mr. Taylor had erected a number of the best factories in the State, including those at Boisdale, Euroa, Yea and Bendigo. Before commencing operations the directors came to the conclusion that the design of the building was not the best obtainable, and it was decided to make a number of important alterations. The matter of preparing new plans and specifications was entrusted to Mr. J. W. Taylor, whose efforts were very successful. In the original plan the main portion of

the building was on one level, but in the new design the floors are constructed to allow of the products being carried through the factory by gravitation, and the floors are on four different levels, the site, which is on a slope, making this easy of attainment. The plan of the different rooms was also re-arranged, and a number of flights of steps were done away with. One very regrettable fact in this connection was the lamented death of Mr. J. W. Taylor, who died suddenly just before he was able to see the completion of his work.

The building as it stands is substantially built, cemented outside and with what is known as saw tooth roofing, which gives great facilities both for lighting and ventilation. The various rooms or compartments are as follow:—receiving room, 22ft. by 24ft.; can washing room 18ft. by 14ft.; testing room, 14ft. by 8ft.; office, 14ft. 6in. by 14ft.; vat platform 22ft. by 4ft. 6in.; pasteurising room, 24 ft. by 14ft.; churn room, 28ft. 6in. by 37ft 6in.; b-x room, 38ft. by 26 ft.; store, 18ft. by 14 ft., freezing chambers, 16ft. by 12ft. and 11ft. by 12ft.; engine room 36ft. by 22ft.; gas-producing, 22ft. by 11ft. 6in.; fuel, 12ft. by 7ft.; storage battery, 22ft. by 12 ft.; boiler, 20ft. by 12ft. Some of the ground floors are asphalt, but the majority are of reinforced concrete faced with tiles. The only wooden floor in the building is that in the office. The stair

building is that in the office. The stair steps are all of Mintono marble, and the walls of the working rooms are beautifully lined with polished tiles, supplied by the Australian Tessellated Tile Company, Mitcham. All the angles are rounded off with tiles so that there are no corners in which dirt can accumulate, and all the walls and floors can be kept clean with a hose.

The drainage is well provided for, the buttermilk and sewerage being carried right away without any handling. The lime used in the building is of special character, the Hydraulic Ground Colimadal lime manufactured by Alkemade Bros., and is obtained at Bacchus Marsh. This lime, which is really a cement, sets as hard as the brickwork, and can only be broken with a hammer and cold chisel. It was used in the Catholic Cathedral at Sale, and in many of the principal buildings at Melbourne, Ballarat and Bendigo. The electric light is installed throughout the building, which is now one of the show places of the district and well worth a visit of inspection.

#### MACHINERY.

The driving power consists of a 67 h.p. suction gas plant and engine, supplied by Hornsby of Melbourne, and a 10 ton refrigerating plant and compressor, supplied by the Atlas Engineering Company. The electrical portion, furnished by Sutherland and Ashman of Melbourne, comprises a 25 kilowatt dynamo and a 200 ampere hour storage battery. There is also a 6 h.p. jockey boiler for producing steam for washing up. The engine rooms are well fitted up, and the huge flywheels and ponderous machinery are an impressive sight. The butter-working plant is thoroughly up-to-date. The cream, after being weighed is put into the receivers, from which it runs into two large pasteurising and cooling vats. These vats contain a revolving coil of tubing, which are first filled with steam and then with brine from the refrigerator. After being cooled, it passes into a large Simplex churn on the lower floor, and after the butter is produced it is washed and worked before leaving the churn, after which it is ready for making up or packing. The river water is used for the boiler and is pumped into a well 20 feet deep from which a force pump raises it to a 3000 gallon tank on a 20 foot frame. For making the butter rain water is used, being caught from the roof and stored in three 3000 gallon tanks. The electric lighting plant is of course much more powerful than would be required for the use of the factory, and will be used for lighting the principal streets and supplying light to householders who require it.

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The total cost of the new factory and buildings will be about £6000. The company was fortunate in being able to dispose of the old factory at a fairly satisfactory figure and thus contribute to the establishment of another very important industry in the district.