

ESCARPMENT

Date Built: 2004

Architect: Tony Caro Architects

Buildings: 1 building, 5 storeys, 20 apartments. It overlooks Refinery Square. It is the site of the CSR Central Laboratory. Signage on site, and on the open stairway, describes the work of the Technical Research Laboratory (also known as Laboratory B and the Central Laboratory).





From the beginning of the Pymont complex, low sugar prices prompted CSR to deploy science and technology in order to compete with lower-cost producers. Raw sugar (98% sucrose) must be refined (to 99.9%) to create white sugar and the many other forms in which sugar is sold. Water, ash, organic matter and other sugars are removed to purify the product and prevent deterioration. These impurities are small but elusive: they require hot water washing, adding and removing lime, carbon dioxide and bone charcoal, filtering, boiling in a near-vacuum, warm air drying and sieving.

Sugar farmers (in Queensland, northern New South Wales and Fiji) were paid only after their cane was crushed and refined. Their payment reflected the sucrose content of their cane, not the residual fibre (megass or bagass), so they needed sucrose to be measured precisely. It was equally important for CSR, since the costs of extraction depended on the percentage of pure sucrose. That was the function of the specialist Technical Research Laboratory B, designed in 1924, and built at the top of the escarpment, next to the Tablet House. In 1963 when Laboratory B was extended, it was better known as the Central Lab.





A separate Research Lab worked on all the other CSR processes and projects.

Especially once distilling began (from 1901) and tablet-making (from 1910) CSR probably employed more laboratory research staff than any other Australian company.

To ensure that measurements were accurate, CSR recruited research staff carefully, and spared no expense in training them at Sydney University, Sydney Technical College (in Ultimo) and in-house. Many were women recruited directly from private schools, and many felt the pressure of CSR's expectation that they find marriage partners among the (equally select) engineers and other professional men in the CSR complex. The company's paternal style, and the systematic promotion of staff picnics and concerts, fostered a sense that this was a family concern as well as an industry.

In 1984, as industries quit Pyrmont, the State government resolved to redevelop the area, and in 1987 decided that the peninsula needed its own plan. In the same year CSR asked Lend Lease to study the feasibility of redeveloping the industrial site.

Pyrmont residents were deeply divided: some were forced to leave the area, others welcomed development, but in 1979 opponents formed UPROAR (Ultimo Pyrmont Residents Opposed to Arbitrary Redevelopment) and endured years of being consulted (or, in their view, coerced).

In August 1992 a few activists proclaimed the Republic of Pyrmont. In this brilliant but forlorn gesture the republicans issued visas, and publicised their critique of top-down planning, and in particular to Jacksons Landing, the casino and the helipad.

Meanwhile in 1997 Lend Lease bought the CSR site, and by April 1999 Jacksons Landing was under construction. The Central Lab was by now disused and derelict beyond repair or refurbishment, so it was demolished to make way for apartments.