

SILK

Date Built: 2012

Architect: Tony Caro Associates

Buildings: 19 storeys - 88 apartments, 12 terraces, and overlooks Waterfront Park and Johnstons Bay.

It is the site of CSR storage tanks.

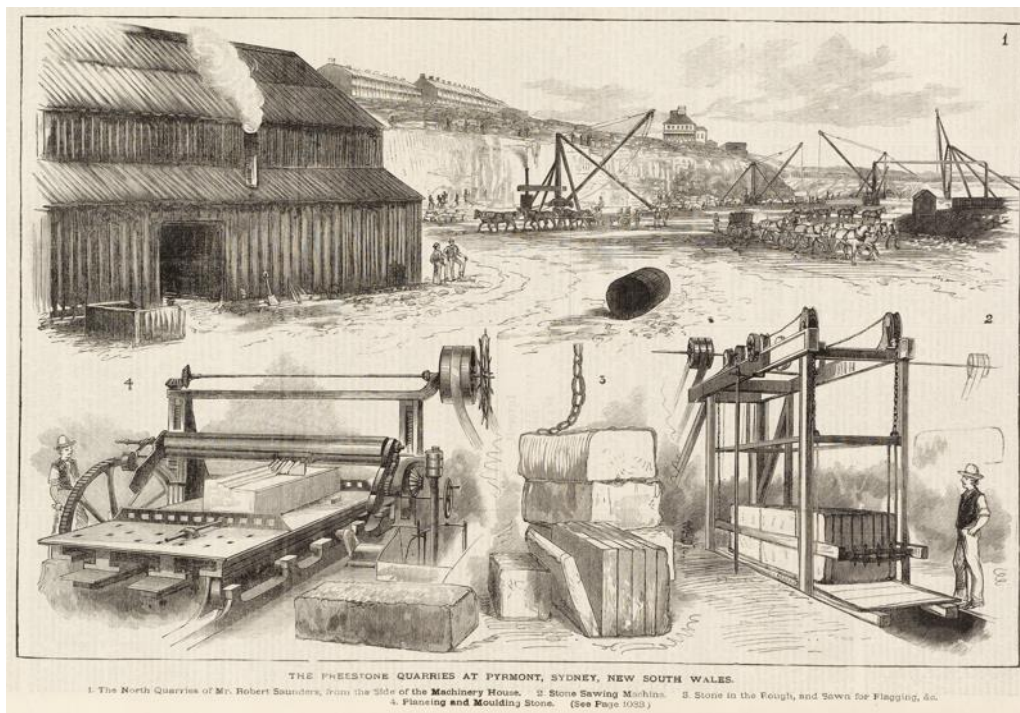


Silk soars up from the shoulder of Distillery Hill on a site flattened by quarrying and polluted by the City Iron Works, which once looked across Bowman Street to the caneite factory.

The present land form was shaped by colonial industry: from the 1820s onwards, quarrymen demolished a rocky outcrop. At first, the stone was hewn as ballast for the sailing ships that anchored nearby; later it was carried by barges to city building sites.

Stone masons and architects delighted in the yellowblock sandstone that was so easily quarried and gained a warm, golden colour when exposed to the air. They remembered these qualities in the 1850s, when the gold rushes made Sydney a wealthy town, needing impressive public buildings.

To meet this increased demand, quarrying was mechanised and conducted on a large scale. Roads were built and Clydesdale horses replaced the barges. Saunders's quarries employed many of the masons who formed Australia's first successful trade union.



While the major quarries (Paradise, Purgatory, Hellhole) were developed further south, the flattened landscape at the point drew the City Iron Works which operated on the shoreline from 1865 until the 1930s. The foundry adjoined an arterial road, which became busier in 1903, as swing bridges carried cars and trams from Balmain through the peninsula to the city.



Commuters crossing Glebe Island Bridge tried to ignore the Iron Works and (from 1910) the new incinerator on Abattoir Road (now renamed Bank Street).

The incinerator put an end to the furtive dumping of rubbish in abandoned quarries: but smoke from its high tower continued the tradition of air pollution on this site.



By 1900 CSR's sugar refinery dominated the landscape, and CSR had little interest in the hill above the refinery. That changed abruptly in 1900. Many sugar mills, including CSR's mill at Nausori in Fiji, distilled alcohol by adding yeast to molasses. Australian Federation, the White Australia policy and tariff preference for sugar produced by white labour, raised the risk that Fiji spirits might be barred from Australia. The Nausori distillery closed, and a new facility was built at Pyrmont.

The distillery produced industrial spirits as well as rum, helped by a carbon dioxide plant (1905) and a char plant (1910). Down the hill (now known as Distillery Hill) marched rows of vats, first to ferment molasses, and later to store a range of industrial chemicals.



Across Bowman Street, another industry took shape in the 1940s, replacing the Iron Works which was closed and sold to CSR in 1937. CSR had the engineers and the capital to grasp new opportunities. As the Depression lifted and demand revived for building material, CSR built a caneite factory on the foreshore from Glebe Island Bridge to the refinery. As caneite is made by pulping megass (cane after sugar is extracted) and adding paper and eucalypt, this complemented sugar production. By 1939 caneite production was ten million square feet each year: by the 1950s it had grown to forty million. Encouraged by the success of caneite, CSR expanded into other materials including gyprock and – fatefully – asbestos.



From the 1940s onwards, Distillery Hill was a fully enclosed industrial complex: traffic entered Bowman Street through a gate between the caneite factory on the shore and storage tanks on the slope; and the only traffic was road tankers and staff cars.







In 1984, as industries quit Pymont, 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.

Pymont residents were deeply divided: some were forced to leave the area, others welcomed development, but in 1979 opponents formed UPROAR (Ultimo Pymont 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 Pymont. 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. Sugar Dock and Silk were among the last three buildings completed. The demolition of the caneite factory and the storage tanks allowed the architects to take advantage of wide views across the water to Balmain, White Bay and Glebe.

