

Ryde to Tempe

A cycle tour discovering the history and industrial heritage of Rhodes, Concord, Canterbury and the Cooks River

The tour is about 23 km. It starts at Settlers Park, Ryde, near the railway bridge crossing the Parramatta River, and ends at Kendrick Park, Tempe, near Tempe Station and the Princes Highway. The route is mostly off-road with easy riding conditions.

The free brochure *Ryde to Botany Bay Cycleway* produced by the Roads and Traffic Authority contains a map of the route and detailed directions. For a copy phone RTA on (02) 9218 6816.



Photo from Mick Mazza Cycles, Marrickville. Mick himself is the front rider.

Self-guided cycle tour

The Institution of Engineers Australia Sydney Division
Engineering Heritage Committee

Across the Parramatta River

The route from Settlers Park is across Uhrs Point (Ryde) Bridge then along Leeds Street and under the railway.

The bridge on which you cross the river was built in 1987 when the older one to your right became inadequate for traffic. The older bridge, with a lifting section, was built in 1935 as a toll bridge for the Ryde Municipal Council. It replaced a ferry service that had operated for 100 years. The State Government took over the bridge in 1949 and abolished the toll.

The wrought iron lattice girder railway bridge over the river to the right was completed in 1886. Now a heritage item, it was the largest and second last of twelve of its kind built for the NSW railways. They were of a British design favoured by the railways Engineer-in-Chief John Whitton. The components were shipped from Britain and assembled by local contractors. The bridge now carries a cycle track while the trains use the 1980 bridge alongside named the John Whitton Bridge.



John Darling Flour Mill, Rhodes Point.
Demolished.

Rhodes

The cycle route runs alongside the railway then along the edge of Bicentennial Park.

The Rhodes peninsula and the adjoining areas of Concord West and North Strathfield were for almost a century one of the most important industrial parts of Sydney. Little evidence remains as most of the factories have closed and the land has been redeveloped mainly for housing. Near the point at Rhodes was John Darling's flour mill established in 1919, a landmark with its five storey mill building and silos. None of



Union Carbide, formerly Timbrol, chemical plant, Rhodes, in the 1960s.
Demolished.

it remains. Next door was Union Carbide's plant. This was originally the factory of Timbrol Limited, established to make timber preservatives and other chemicals from by-products of the Mortlake Gas Works. The range of products expanded and after its merger with Union Carbide in 1957 plastics were a major product.

John Brodie

John Brodie was for many years the Chief Engineer of Timbrol and was subsequently with Union Carbide. In the 1970s he invented a continuous process that was used in the Rhodes plant producing chlorinated hydrocarbons, which are used as solvents and refrigerants and in manufacturing plastics. For this he received awards and world-wide acclaim.



The site now owned by Orica Limited which you will pass near Rhodes Railway Station is the oldest industrial site in the area. It was bought in 1911 by the brothers Charles and George Hoskins who had taken over a struggling iron works at Lithgow in 1908. On the site at Rhodes they built a foundry for manufacturing cast iron pipes. When they bought land at Port Kembla in 1922 to establish a steel works they moved the foundry there and the Rhodes site remained vacant until 1930. CSR bought it and established a chemical plant known then as CSR Chemicals. It expanded over the years both in size and range of products, eventually being sold to ICI Australia, now Orica, which was already a part owner. The plant has now been demolished.

Further along the peninsula was the factory of Berger Paints established in 1917. In the early years a major activity was producing white lead, at that time a major component of paints. Nearby was CSR's Concord plaster mill and plaster board factory. Beside the railway line at North Strathfield was Arnott's Biscuits, the largest employer in the area, with 1600 people working in its biscuit factory and the adjoining flour mill in the 1980s.



Boating on the Cooks River, 1910.

The Cooks River

The cycle route passes over the Western Freeway on a narrow bridge, across Parramatta Road at traffic lights and then over the railway. After crossing the railway you can see on your right the Flemington Markets, Sydney's wholesale fruit and vegetable market. The route continues through suburban streets of Homebush to reach the Cooks River at Freshwater Park. The route now follows the river all the way to Tempe.

Until about 1870 the river was an attractive meandering stream. A large part of it was tidal until 1840 when the government built a dam at Tempe, just downstream of where the Princes Highway now crosses the river. The river was to be used to supplement Sydney's water supply, at that time supplied from swamps in Centennial Park (then called Lachlan Swamps) via the tunnel, Busby's Bore. The scheme never eventuated and Busby's Bore continued to be the main supply until the Botany Swamps were developed as a source of water in 1858. The dam actually had a detrimental effect on the river because it eliminated tidal flushing and encouraged silting. By 1890 with increasing population the river had become smelly and polluted. Its condition steadily deteriorated as unsewered suburbs developed along its banks.

Concreting of the upper reaches started during the depression to provide flood mitigation and reduce pollution. Improvement continued slowly after the Second World War with the local councils mainly responsible for the provision of landscaping and recreation reserves while the government took over responsibility for flood mitigation and stormwater drainage. .

By 1970 there was a serious new threat that the river valley would become a service corridor for freeways, railways, pipelines and electricity transmission. In 1975 the government, local councils and voluntary organisations sponsored the Cooks River Project to promote improvements. Since then much has been achieved but there is still some way to go, as you will see on this cycle tour.

Canterbury

Crossing Burwood Road you enter the City of Canterbury. After passing the Canterbury Racecourse the cycle track passes under the railway near Canterbury station.

The railway was completed from Marrickville to Belmore in 1895 and this encouraged rapid development of the area. Parts of the railway bridge date back to that time. The railway was extended to Bankstown in 1909. In 1927 it became one of the first electrified lines.

In 1788 Rev. Richard Johnson came to Australia in the First Fleet with a royal appointment as chaplain to the settlement. In 1790 he received a grant of 100 acres. Along with the land came the services of seven men to assist in clearing and cultivating it. He was soon considered 'the best farmer in the country' and received further grants. He named the property Canterbury Park. In 1800 he sold it to William Cox and returned to England. Hannah, wife of a military officer in the



Canterbury, Prout's Bridge, 1859.

colony, came to Australia in 1891 and received land grants from Governor King in 1804. She named her property King's Grove. She had a bridge built across the river, probably near Rosevale Park (marked on the RTA map) before Governor Macquarie visited her property in 1810.

Among the early settlers south of the Cooks River was Cornelius Prout who moved there in 1832 and named his home Belle-Obre. In 1833 he built a 'substantial punt' to cross the river near his house. In 1839 Robert Campbell ('Campbell of the Wharf' after whom Campbell's Cove is named) and Cornelius Prout agreed to a public road across their properties on condition Prout built a bridge across the river on the site of his punt. He built the Canterbury Road bridge at a cost of £220 using contract and convict labour and then collected tolls that repaid his investment many times over. The present bridge on the site was completed in 1951.



Hutton's Bacon Factory (the Sugar House), 1908.

The Sugar House

About half a kilometre past Canterbury Bridge and directly on your left are the remains of the four storey stone building known as the Sugar House.

In 1839 Francis Kemble, a London company promoter, predicted that profits of £40,000 per year could be made from a sugar refinery in Sydney. He persuaded William Knox Child, Deputy Lieutenant of the County of Kent, to sell his assets for £20,000, purchase the necessary machinery and migrate with his family to Australia. They formed the Australian Sugar Company, built a handsome stone factory on the banks of the Cooks River and commenced operations in 1841, refining raw sugar from the Philippines. It soon got into financial difficulties and the operation was taken over by a new company, the Australasian Sugar Company, in 1843 with local capital. A new manager, Edward Knox, not related to Knox Child, was appointed.

The refinery operated until 1855 when disagreement among the partners of the company led to its dissolution. A new company, the Colonial Sugar Refining Company (now CSR), with ten prominent Sydney businessmen the only shareholders, and Knox as a Director, took over the business. The Canterbury refinery was then closed and the operations and the staff were transferred to the Brisbane House distillery in Parramatta Road, Chippendale, which had been acquired by the new company and which became CSR's first refinery.

Edward Knox

Edward Knox was born in Denmark in 1819, son of a Scottish merchant who had settled in Elsinore. Edward's father died when the boy was 11, and his mother, using money borrowed from her brother, James Mullins, of London, had him educated in Lübeck, Germany. At 16, with a knowledge of English, Danish, French and German, he began his commercial training as a junior clerk in his uncle's London business which was involved in the Baltic trade. Edward quarrelled with his uncle and was dismissed. He travelled steerage to Sydney in 1840, and in 1843 was appointed manager of the Australasian Sugar Company. In 1847, at the age of 28, he became also the managing director of the commercial Banking Company of Sydney. His fellow merchants described him as 'a perfect man of business and a highly agreeable person'.

He said he was 'only a theorist in sugar boiling', However he amassed a considerable fortune from his business activities, and invested most of it in the sugar company, which before its collapse in 1857 had become extremely profitable. In 1858 he faced financial ruin, and faced criticism for paying out most of the profits in dividends. He set about rebuilding the company, which struggled through the 1860s. but he was able to put it on a sound financial basis by reinvesting most of the profits and securing its supplies by establishing a chain of sugar mills. He retired in 1880, handing the management of the company to his son. He was knighted in 1897, and died in 1901.



The Sugar House remained vacant for several years and was then used as an iron foundry. In 1900 it became the Canterbury Bacon Factory owned by Sydney produce merchants Denham Bros. It was acquired by J. C. Hutton in 1908. Pigs were slaughtered on the site until 1951. Huttons eventually built a large modern bacon and smallgoods plant on the site, opened by Prime Minister Fraser in 1977. It closed in 1983. The derelict Sugar House now seems destined for incorporation in a new residential development.

Just beyond the Sugar House is a small boat harbour built in 1964. Within five years it became silted up and useless.



The Western Suburbs sewer viaduct over Cooks River, under construction around 1898.

Crossing the river

Your route crosses to the south bank of the river on a pedestrian/cycle bridge at Lang Road then runs across Wardell Road and through Beaman Park to cross Illawarra Road beside Undercliffe Bridge.

This was the site of Thorp's punt. Near here in 1834 Dr. Robert Wardell, prominent Sydney lawyer and landowner, was murdered by escaped convicts, whom the press record as having crossed the river on the punt and visited Joshua Thorp's house. The central part of the present bridge on the site was built in 1878 and is the oldest remaining bridge on the river.

A little further along you pass under an iron lattice truss bridge that crosses the river and connects to a long brick viaduct. It carries three steel sewer pipes each 1.8 m diameter, still in use.

The sewer main was completed in 1896 to provide sewerage for the suburbs south and west of the city. Originally it discharged to a sewage farm located on land just south of the entrance to the Cooks River. The farm was closed in 1916 when a new main sewer was completed from Cooks River to an ocean outfall at Malabar.

This cycle tour ends at Kendrick Park beside the Princes Highway at Tempe on the north side of the river. To reach it you cross the river by Unwin's bridge then go through the Tempe station car park and under the railway.

Frederick Unwin built a bridge in 1840, connecting his house, Wanstead, on the south bank of the river with his stables on the north bank. The house was later rented by Knox Child, manager of the sugar refinery. The house was demolished in the 1920s. The present bridge was built in 1891.

Tempe station was opened in 1884 as Cooks River station. In its early years it was much used by picnic parties visiting the river for swimming and boating. It took its present name from Tempe House nearby on the south bank of the river. The modest house built by a Sydney merchant Alexander Brodie Spark in 1835 as a second residence (his principal one was Tusculum in Kings Cross) still stands, much altered from the original. You can glimpse it among trees by looking across the river from Kendrick Park close to Princes Highway. Spark named the house after the Vale of Tempe near Mount Olympus in Greece. It was once famous for its gardens of which there are a few tiny, neglected, remnants. There are now plans for the house to be surrounded by a large commercial and residential development, centred on the Wolli Creek railway station.



Cooks River at Unwins Bridge, around 1910.



© 2002 The Institution of Engineers, Australia