

## **A Brief History of Kell & Rigby [Builders] Pty Ltd**

You may remember at the Annual General Meeting in 1991, the then Mayor of Strathfield, Alderman Robert Kell, suggested we might record the history of our local industry Kell & Rigby (Builders) Pty. Ltd. The Secretary approached Mr. Alan Kell and he has obliged us with the following outline of the success of that firm. Incidentally, Alan has committed himself to writing the complete history in book form. We thank both Alan and Robert for their interest in our activities. Secretary—Lucy Stone.

Kell and Rigby started as a partnership in June 1910 between two young carpenters, William James Kell aged 26 years and Alexander Leslie Rigby aged 22 years, both having arrived independently from England. The business kept both partners very busy, yet both made their contribution to the community, Bill Kell took an active interest in local politics, served on the Board of All Saints College Bathurst and on several Boards of companies needing consultation on building matters. Les Rigby's interest was in Rotary in which he became a District Governor and also served on the Boards of Western Suburbs Hospital and the Crippled Children's Society. He was also a Committee member of Concord Golf Club.

The original office was at 1 Elsie Street Burwood where Bill Kell boarded with his Aunt Beckie Freeman. It was Aunt Beckie who also tendered the phone when the partners were out on the sites.

In 1912 land was purchased in Bishop Street near Park Road (now Railway Crescent) Burwood. A workshop and office was built and with the £200 capital each subscribed K. & R. commenced growing. Initially domestic work was carried out, but more and more commercial and industrial work was undertaken. Houses built locally were in Llandilo Avenue, Torrington Road, Strathfield Avenue, Kingsland Road, Victoria Street and Wakeford Road. There were others, but the writer can not find records of them.

Between 1910 and 1920 horsepower was the motive force for transport, buggies, horse drawn lorries, horse powered hoists and horse drawn jinkers for long heavy loads like structural steel and long timber. In 1920 the first lorry was bought for £350, a 3-ton Ford, and it was only after this had been tested out for two months that the remaining two horses, lorry and harness, were sold for £100. Scaffolds in those days were round poles, lashed together with rope. Wheel barrows had steel tyres, not pneumatic tyres of today. This made wheeling concrete or bricks etc. just that much more difficult, Cranes were changing from steam powered to electric, There were no small electric tools that we have today, it was all manpower.

Men worked a 44 hour week, with none of the special rates we have today, Trenches and piers were dug with pick and shovel, only the very big jobs had any mechanical earth-moving gear, but horse drawn scoops were in use well into the 1930's on big earthmoving sites.

As business increased, more and more land was purchased in Railway Crescent and George Street West and the workshop was extended. Then in 1947, Guy Faulks' night, the workshop and offices were burnt

down. The timber was so tightly stacked that only the outside and loose ends were scorched and burned. The buildings, machines and the joiners' tools and benches were destroyed.

Twelve months later a bigger and better workshop and office was completed and the temporary office in one of the timber stores was vacated and the joiners who had been working in George Hudson's workshop at Glebe returned to Burwood, In those days, so very soon after the war, materials and machinery were in short supply, but machinery from Wadkins in England arrived in time. For many years after, records of that time were generally singed on the outside edges, but they were still readable, which was remarkable.

In addition to the private homes already listed, the following records some of the buildings erected and added to in this period and still standing today:

1914

- Infants Home , Ashfield Nurses' Home. Work for the Bank of NSW, now Westpac, commenced and has continued.

1915

- Won work at Arnott's and still carrying out work for this firm,

1920-30

- Australian Gaslight Co., Head Office in Pitt Street City opposite Central Railway Station, Now heritage listed.
- Concord Golf Club House
- The Locomotive Hotel, Parramatta Road Auburn
- Strathfield Town Hall
- Christian Brothers School [St. Patrick's] Strathfield
- Assembly Hall, MLC School Burwood
- Santa Sabina Strathfield
- Meriden Girls' School Strathfield
- St. Bedes Church of England Church Drummoyne

## 1931-40

- Grace House corner Clarence, York and King Streets, Sydney
- Bank of NSW Cairns
- New Medical School Sydney University
- Anzac Memorial Hyde Park Sydney opened by HRH the Duke of Gloucester
- St. Stephen's Church Macquarie St. Sydney
- Granville Olympic Pool
- Cronulla Surf Life Saving Club building
- Trinity Grammar School, Summer Hill - Swimming Pool
- Hyde Park Soldiers' Recreation Hut, built in five weeks.
- Numerous jobs at Morts Dock for the defence effort.

## 1941-50

- Dream Home, Ida Avenue and Spit Road Mosman. It was a prize of a Raffle organised by the Australian Women's Weekly with the proceeds going to the Red Cross. Kell & Rigby built it for cost.
- Various jobs to do with the war effort.
- PLC Croydon Girls' School
- Additional work for Arnott's, Meriden, and Westinghouse Brake at Concord West.

## 1951-60

- Repairs to Great Hall roof after fire at Sydney University.
- Work for Nestles, Abbotsford; Streets Ice Cream, Turella
- RSL Clubs for Five Dock and Burwood.

## 1961-1970

- High Schools at Katoomba, Plattsburg near Wallsend, Tweed Heads, Chester Hill and Pennant Hills.
- Lane Cove and Ryde Olympic Swimming Pools.

- Coronation Club Burwood
- RSL Clubs at Chatswood, Dee Why, Campsie and Cowra
- Santa Sabina Assembly Hall, Strathfield.
- Bathurst Civic Centre Hall
- Western Tower, Sydney University
- University of NSW, Physical Education Building and Union Buildings.

#### 1971-80

- All Saints Cathedral Bathurst
- TAA Passenger Terminal Mascot
- Orange Civic Centre
- University of NSW Library and Matthew Science Building
- Peel Cunningham County Council offices, Tamworth, opened by HM. the Queen.
- Restoration of St. Phillip's Church City - including sending the bells back to London for re-tuning.
- Western Suburbs Hospital - Hydro Therapy Pool
- Macquarie University Council Building, Senate Building.

#### 1981 — 90

- Marionette Theatre restoration, The Rocks Sydney
- Macquarie University, Lecture Theatres and rooms, Library and Gymnasium.
- Seventh Day Adventist HS Assembly Hall and Classroom
- Trinity Grammar School Summer Hill, Classrooms, Art Gallery, Gymnasium etc
- NIDA, University of NSW Kensington
- Earth Exchange, The Rocks, Sydney
- Fitout ABC Studios, Harris Street Ultimo
- St Patrick's Cathedral, Parramatta, remove old shingle - covered timber frame steeple and replace with a steel frame copper-sheeted steeple. The cockatoos stripped the shingles off the steeple.

An amusing record is that in 1916 it is recorded — “Sold a mare for £5 and another for £10.” Depreciation for horses for taxation purposes was 10% per year. Depreciation for trucks today is 15%.

Branches were established at Orange, Albury and Canberra. The Albury one was closed after about 10 years. In 1984, K&R moved to new premises at No. 8 Dunlop Street Strathfield South after selling the Burwood property to the Commonwealth Bank. However these changes also created other changes in management, as the two sons of William Kell, Alan and Bruce, agreed to a split and Bruce retired from the business while Alex Rigby also decided to retire and Alan became the sole descendant of that generation to continue the business. Subsequent generations through Robert are heavily involved to the present day.

In 1986 additions to the Office and Joinery Shop were necessary to cope with the extra work won for the fitout of the Senate and House of Representatives of the new Parliament House Canberra. This and other work at Parliament House would be the most prestigious work K&R have ever been associated with.

The strength of K&R is in its staff; some have been with the firm all their working lives, they are essentially practical builders , almost without exception the top people are tradesmen.

In the 82 years the firm has had its ups and downs, in the good years money is re-invested in the company to form a cushion for the inevitable downturn. We have faith in the future.