

'Beutron' button factory, East Chatswood

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In the early 1950s disastrous fires destroyed factories of G. Herrings Pty Ltd's 'Beutron' plastic buttons works at Rosebery and Waterloo. At the time Herrings was producing around 2,000,000 buttons per week.ⁱ This led in 1954 to the creation of an enlightened proposal for a new button factory to be built in Willoughby. The factory was subsequently built in what is now the East Chatswood Industrial Area on the corner of Gibbes & Short Streets.ⁱⁱ

The factory was built for a staff of 100 women and 65 men.ⁱⁱⁱ Herring's made the well-known range of 'Beutron' buttons there for a number of years. The factory was still operating in 1964.^{iv}

The factory was designed by Architects Davey & Brindley and Willoughby-based Master Builder Peter Cussel. The building was not only functional but was hailed as one of the most attractive post-war designs for a Sydney industrial building of its time.

The model above of the new factory to be erected at the corner of Gibbes and Short streets Willoughby (East Chatswood) possessed several unusual features.

- *Aa floor area of 30,000sq. ft. with provision for an additional 20,000 sq. ft.*
- *It has been adapted to the sloping site, which allows a large basement under the northern end with a separate access from Gibbes Street, the entrance to the main factory floor being from Short Street.*
- *On the first floor will be the administrative offices and board-room, and a large canteen with a modern cafeteria for serving hot meals.*
- *The construction of the building generally is of a steel frame with orthodox sawtooth roofing.*
- *The first storey has a floor constructed of steel decking, with bituminous paving felt as an underlay for the future floor coverings.*
- *The roof over this portion is of similar construction, carried on open rod trusses, of the "clearspan" type, the decking being insulated and finished with aluminium foil on bituminous fell.*
- *A major point in the economical design was the decision to use a "liquid envelope"^v for the finishing of the external walls above the texture brick base. This allowed the use of plain asbestos cement sheets, which are simply butted together with no interrupting or projecting cover strips.*

- A feature is the main entrance which has a large stone-flagged 'forecourt' asian approach, and the stone flagging flows through the doors and glass wall, as do the flower beds set in the floor of the entry porch.^{vi}

G. Herrings & Co.'Beutron' Buttons



G. Herring made a wide range of plastic buttons under the 'Beutron' brand.

G.Herring. started in 1931 selling sheep-branding oil. In 1933 it became G. Herring and Co. Ltd., as cotton spinners and manufacturers of twine, jute and flax. By 1937 they were importing buttons and buckles. Also around this time they were extending into jewelry. The company was named after George Gerard Herring, 1900-1980.

In 1937 they were located in Jones Lane, Waterloo. By 1939 a new company, G. Herring (Aust) P/L, was incorporated in New South Wales from the merging of this company and the Pearl Button Manufacturing Co. Ltd. The new, merged company would continue to produce pearl buttons through the 1940's. Then by 1943 the company was described as a manufacturer of casein, mother-of-pearl buttons and dress accessories.

The name 'Beutron' was first used by G. Herring for its buttons around 1946. As the company was producing buttons from around 1939, there was approximately a 7 year period when the buttons were otherwise labelled. A brand they may have produced in this period was "Bonnie Buttons".

Manufacturing Beutron buttons



There were at that time 130 men designing and making more than one million buttons per week. The company mixed and coloured their own plastic. The powdered plastic would be poured into extruding machines to be forced under pressure into long rods of varying diameter. These rods were cut by machine into buttons then the holes drilled. After glazing and waxing the buttons would be inspected, carded, packed and distributed. The company at that time were opening their 3rd factory in and around Sydney

A disastrous fire, sparked by an electrical storm on Sunday morning, the 16th November 1952, destroyed the Herring button factory. Little more than a year later there was another fire that destroyed most of the second story of a Herring's button factory.

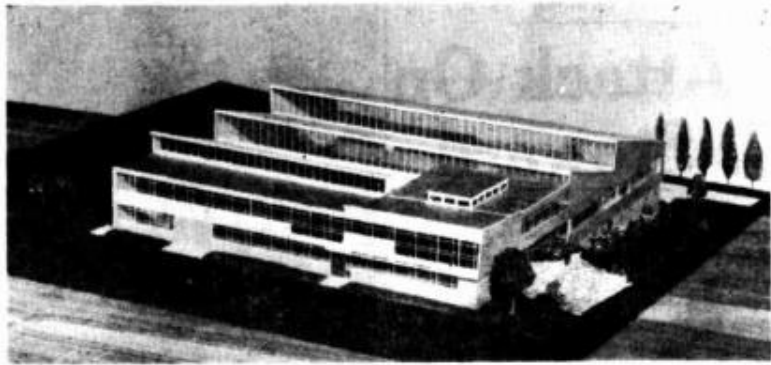
New 'Modernist' factory at Chatswood

The Sydney Morning Herald, on 19th January 1954, announced plans for a new factory to be built for G.Herring with an amusing title: "**Factory Building Shows A Delicate Touch**".

Factory Building Shows A Delicate Touch

A new factory now being built for G. Herring (Aust.) Pty. Ltd. at the corner of Gibbs and Short Streets, Willoughby, promises to be one of the most attractive industrial buildings erected in Sydney since the end of the war.

The building has been treated with a delicate lightness of touch, not usually seen in factory buildings. The company manufactures "Beutron" plastic and fashion buttons, and accessories. The factory will have a price, which gave an overall cost of approximately £150 a square. The builder is Mr. Peter Cusack, the architects Messrs. Davey and Brindley, and the consulting engineer Mr. J. P. Hallett.



Model of the new G. Herring (Aust.) Pty. Ltd. factory at the corner of Gibbs and Short Streets, Willoughby. This is one of the most attractive postwar designs for a Sydney industrial building.

The architecture of Herring's 'Beutron' button factory as described above is consistent with the 'Modernist movement' of design, materials and construction methods. Modernist design is often thought to be simplistic and non-attractive by many. However, some commentators felt this factory design crossed both Modern and Pre-Modern genres of architecture.

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One report on the building in 'Construction' took the opportunity to vent an obvious 'pet hate' of local government bodies in Sydney who were tasked with approving building architecture.

We are glad to see North Sydney providing a near outlet for City expansion, and we hope the Council will encourage business firms to build its new "Twin City of Sydney" worthily and expeditiously by providing transport facilities such as wide roads, whilst resumptions of properties can be put through before they become prohibitive.

The City of Sydney has done its level best to push people out of the City into the far-flung suburbs. Councils in the last 40 or 50 years have been too niggardly, too anaemic to embrace their situation by coping with traffic, nor will it allow buildings to go higher to enable private enterprise to cope with self-contained, all-purpose large buildings which will keep people entirely off the streets by taking them from their tailors' shops, florists, grocers, cake shops or restaurants, all "within the buildings, upwards by lift to their flats, instead of outwards by rail, tram or bus, which they insist on at present.

Such travel tedium just racks the nervous system of the users to bits. The City Council is going to pay dearly for its narrow vision, for hamstringing enterprise and kicking folks round, when it sees a rival city growing up on the North Side of the Harbour, as grow it must, since people accustomed to developing and living gregariously are not going to change their ways of life to oblige unvisionary city aldermen, who since Sir Allen Taylor's day have done everything to restrict but nothing to progress their city.

They have been entrusted with the care of this city and its development. They have failed in that trust.^{viii}

Many would argue that little has changed with Sydney planners and their acceptance of creative architecture..

i Building, Lighting and Engineering' 24th February 1954

ii The Bulletin, 30th May 1964

iii Building, Lighting and Engineering' 24th February 1954

iv The Bulletin, 30th May 1964

v We have been unable to find a description of a liquid building envelop.

vi Construction (Sydney, NSW : 1938 - 1954) Wed 30 Jun 1954 Page 1

vii Sydney Morning Herald, 19 January 1954, p.13. 83,

<https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/resources/heritagebranch/heritage/ModernHeritage6.pdf>

viii Attractive Industrial Building – New productions unit at Willoughby, Construction, 13 October 1954, p.1