

Kelvinator Australia Ltd.

with special emphasis upon its Keswick Plants



West Torrens Historical Society collection LH0256

West Torrens Historical Society Inc.
(G. Grainger, 2020)

*Every effort has been made to provide complete and accurate information,
please advise of any errors or omissions.*

FROM The Kelvinator Story, 5th May, 1975.

The Company was formed in 1932 by the late William Queale under the name of Mechanical Products Limited, the name being changed to Kelvinator Australia Limited in 1934.

The Company is engaged in the manufacture and distribution (under licence from several companies in the United States of America) of domestic refrigeration appliances, air conditioners, washing machines, refrigeration equipment for commercial application and equipment for the oil industry.

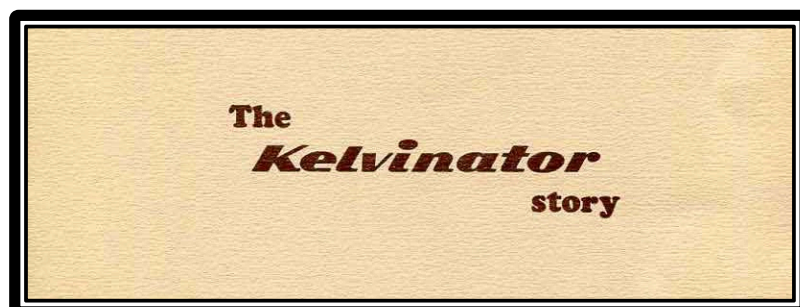
Kelvinator and Leonard products are made under licence from Kelvinator International Corporation and Temprite beverage cooling equipment under licence from Eaton Corporation. Petrol dispensing pumps are made under licence from Dresser Industries Inc., while meters and other oil industry equipment are made under licence from A.O. Smith Corporation.

The Head Office of the Company is at Anzac Highway, Keswick, where the headquarters of the Sales, Engineering and Finance functions and Spare Parts Division are located.

Production operations in this area consist of a foundry and a machine shop for the manufacture of refrigeration compressors and of meters and pumps for the oil industry. The main manufacturing operations are at Woodville North, where, in addition to manufacturing the above-mentioned products, the Company operates a large tool room and an injection moulding plastics plant, both of which are suppliers to the Automotive Industry.

The major work at this site is sheet metal fabrication, painting and assembly of all the Company's products. The headquarters of the Service Division and Wayne Pumps Australia Pty, Ltd. are also located here. Sales and Service operations are located in each state capital and in some other major cities. Approximately 90% of the output of the Company is sold interstate and in a number of overseas countries. The Company has expanded steadily from an initial work force of about 20 in 1932 to a present total in all States of approximately 2,500 and therefore makes a significant contribution to the economy of South Australia as an employer of labour and as a user of local sub-contractors.

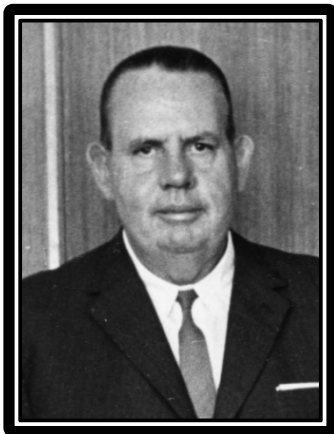
Further growth for the Company can be foreseen in the continued expansion of the Appliance, Automotive and Oil Industries in Australia.



WILLIAM QUEALE

William Queale (1889-1951) was born in Snowtown, South Australia, the third of ten children of Thomas Queale, railway inspector, and Mary Eleanor, née Jane.

William attended school in Burra before moving with the family to Adelaide in 1902. Between 1915 and 1923 Queale was general manager of the Broken Hill Junction Lead Company. He married Dorothy, née Griffiths (1897-1989), in Broken Hill in September 1918 and they went on to have seven children.



In January 1924 Queale began, with capital of £10,000, Mechanical Supplies Limited in Adelaide. Queale was managing director of the company while his father-in-law, F.H. Griffiths, and brother-in-law were co-directors.

Queale's brothers Tom (1902-1984) and Les (1904-1993) also joined the firm.

Les Queale

1925 MECHANICAL SUPPLIES LTD & KELVINATOR

Located in Richards' Building, 79 Grenfell Street, Adelaide, Mechanical Supplies Ltd was essentially an importing company, acting as an agent for U.S. companies such as Goodyear, for which it sold mechanical rubber goods like fanbelts and hoses; Westinghouse (cookers, power generators and wooden refrigerator cabinets); ABC washing machines; and Wayne hand operated petrol pumps. Mechanical Supplies Ltd also built hotel beverage and shop cabinets and sold a range of electrical goods such as irons, toasters, hot water heaters and vacuum cleaners. In late 1927 the company moved its showroom to 69 Grenfell Street.

From November 1925 Mechanical Supplies Ltd became a South Australian representative for the Kelvinator Company and its refrigeration products – in particular its 'mechanically-cooled refrigeration chests' (refrigerators).

The Kelvinator Company had been founded in Detroit, Michigan in 1916 and in 1918 had introduced into the U.S. the first electric refrigerator with any type of automatic control. By 1923 the company held 80% of the American market for electric refrigerators.

Apart from Mechanical Supplies Ltd, the Kelvinator company also had agents in other parts of Australia from about 1925, including Dangar, Gedye and Co. Ltd of Sydney and Electra Pty Ltd of Melbourne.

1928 KESWICK FACTORY (SITE OF REID'S STABLES)

Queale was ambitious and decided that as well as selling and repairing imported products, his company should also seek to manufacture as many of them as possible. In January 1928 Queale bought for £6,000 a 1.95 acre/c. 0.79 hectare triangular site on the Anzac Highway at Keswick, bounded also by Day and Everard Avenues, with a view to constructing a factory there.

The site had previously been known by locals as 'Reid's Stables', where for many years horse bus proprietor John Reid had maintained two livery stables.



Kelvinator building, Anzac Highway c.1932. Property originally Reid's Stables. Large door allowed horse drawn trams to enter. Tram lines entering building still visible in floor of office building c.1970. Covered over by 2005. Dominion Products was a subsidiary company. Photo and information provided by David Queale, October 2005.

The site was close to the Keswick railway station, the Mile End rail goods yard, the city and to shipping facilities at Port Adelaide.

Here Queale commissioned the building of a brick-fronted factory containing a foundry and machine and paint shops.

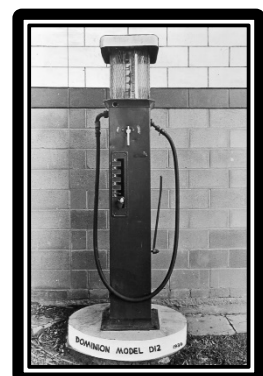
By June 1929 most of his company's repair and construction work, including Kelvinator refrigeration cabinets (not refrigerators) and commercial freezing tanks, as well as display counters, water softeners (made under license from a British firm), and Wayne petrol pumps were being made there.

1930s THE DEPRESSION

In 1930 the company had a workforce of around twenty and a service fleet comprising two private motor cars and a motorcycle and side car.

Though they were relatively expensive, the sale of imported Kelvinator refrigerators was by far Mechanical Supplies Ltd.'s most profitable line – more than 80% of the refrigerators sold in Australia were imported.

Mechanical Supplies Ltd also marketed Kelvinator refrigerators under the 'Dominion' brand. (Dominion refrigerators continued to be made by Mechanical Supplies Ltd and its successors until after the second world war, though its sales never rivalled those of the Kelvinator brand).



Petrol pump, manufactured by Mechanical Products, forerunner of Kelvinator, in their city premises c.1932

Mechanical Supplies Ltd.'s major competitor was the General Motors (U.S.)-made Frigidaire refrigerator.

The need for the Australian manufacture of Kelvinator products became pressing from 1930 when, to encourage the development of local industries and to reduce a serious trade deficit, the federal government imposed high tariffs on a wide range of imported goods, including manufactures.

Exacerbated by the effects of the Depression and a depreciating Australian pound, Australian sales of imported Kelvinator products plummeted over the next couple of years.

In August 1932, Queale, still dependent upon the sales of Kelvinator refrigerators and with his workforce down to sixteen, put the Mechanical Supplies Ltd Keswick site up for sale. The company was saved from liquidation only by eleventh-hour – and for the time very unusual – financial assistance from the state government.

1932-1934 RELAUNCHING THE COMPANY

Seeking a new beginning, in September 1932 Queale, with starting capital of £25,000, relaunched his company as Mechanical Products Limited; Queale became managing director in the five-member board while F. H. Griffiths was chair. The company's showroom was at the Keswick site.

Queale also resolved that in order to avoid import duties his new company must immediately concentrate almost exclusively upon the manufacture and sale of Kelvinator refrigerators to the South Australian market.

In 1929 Mechanical Products Ltd had been the first Australian company to successfully manufacture a Kelvinator refrigerator on a trial basis.

Queale's plan to make and sell locally-made Kelvinator refrigerators – as well from the mid-1930s Kelvinator-licensed commercial evaporative air conditioners, stoves and washing machines – worked well. (Mechanical Products Ltd continued to make foreign-licensed water softeners and petrol pumps, though refrigerators were by far its major output).

By September 1933 refrigerator sales were encouraging and the company was employing around one hundred workers at Keswick, including Les Queale – known to other workers as 'Mr Les' – as overseer of cool rooms.

By December 1934 employment was up to 250, while for the year to March 1934 Mechanical Products Ltd made a healthy net (after tax) profit of £1,071.

1934 EXCLUSIVE MANUFACTURE OF KELVINATOR PRODUCTS

The key breakthrough for Queale came in June 1934. After a recent trip to the U.S. – somewhat unusually for the time Queale regularly travelled overseas on business – he announced that, despite intense competition from interstate firms, he had obtained from the Kelvinator company, a license agreement for 'the exclusive manufacture and control of the whole Australian market for Kelvinator products'.

In late 1934 Queale also obtained the rights to manufacture and sell locally the American-designed Temprite beverage cooler.

At a special shareholders' meeting in Adelaide in mid-December 1934 Mechanical Products Ltd was renamed as Kelvinator Australia Limited. The company had starting capital of £50,000, Queale remained as managing director and F.W. Griffiths as chair. Sir Hubert Gepp (1877-1954), a prominent Melbourne mining metallurgist, industrialist and public servant, was one of three other directors.

In the 1930s Kelvinator Australia's major competition was from the U.S Westinghouse brand being made in Rosebery, Sydney. (Frigidaire refrigerators were still being made overseas at this time).

Nonetheless, Kelvinator Australia Ltd immediately blossomed, its net profit rising from £2,003 in 1934-35 to £9,668 in 1937-38 to £12,426 in 1938-39.

In June 1937 Kelvinator Australia increased its share capital to £100,000 while by November 1939 it employed around four hundred workers and was building twenty fridges per day for local and interstate markets – the company had opened its first interstate branch in Sydney in 1938.

1935 UPDATED KESWICK FACTORY

In August 1935, Queale announced that Kelvinator Australia's Keswick factory would be substantially redesigned and modernised. In addition to state-of-the-art manufacturing facilities the imposing new 0.92 acre/0.37 hectare, two-storey concrete building, designed Caradoc, Ashton and Fisher of Adelaide and built by J. King and Son of Hindmarsh, included an administration section, showrooms and drawing and production offices.



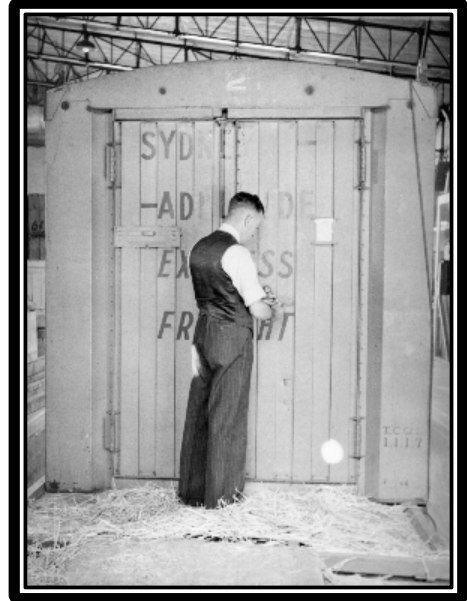
Kelvinator building, Anzac Highway c.1939. Frontage to Anzac Highway, about when the building was erected, c.1939. (photographer D. Darian Smith)

Queale called the building 'the most self-contained refrigerator manufacturing plant in the commonwealth'. The plant was completed and fully occupied by May 1936; such was the company's success that the cost of the building was fully paid off by mid-1938.

Kelvinator Australia Limited - Production lines, Keswick Circa 1940



Loading petrol pump into container for transport. (Loading ramp in hangar building.)



Container closed and ready for transport

In its early days a branch tram line ran into the factory from Anzac Highway; as late as 1970 the outline of tracks were still visible in the floor of the main office.

The factory, its distinctive façade topped by a huge Kelvinator sign and a clock, remained a feature of Anzac Highway for almost fifty years.

1931-1941“BILL” QUEALE’S OTHER INTERESTS

In addition to his business activities 'Bill' Queale was prominent in other areas of South Australian life.

In 1931-33, he was chairman of the Citizens' League of South Australia, an apparently non-party political group, and in 1930-31 he was a member of the Emergency Committee of South Australia, an anti-Labor organisation.

Later Queale was, among other roles, the foundation president of the Adelaide branch of the Australian Institute of Management (1944) – the Adelaide library of the Institute and the Institute's annual lecture are named for him – the president of the South Australian Chamber of Manufactures (1941-44), the Associated Chambers of Manufactures of Australia (1945) and the Australian Institute of Management (1951).

In 1941, Queale was a founder of the SA branch of the Australian American Co-operation movement.

Queale worked closely with both sides of politics to further the industrial development of the State in the 1930s and 1940s; premier (Sir) Thomas Playford regarded him as being one of South Australia's leading industrialists.

During the war Queale played an important behind the scenes role, advising the federal government on issues including business management, manpower allocation and taxation. Queale's ability to focus on a range of activities was all the more remarkable given that for most of his life he was burdened by a serious hearing loss.

Somewhat paradoxically Queale also had a particular business interest in radio, being chairman of Hume Broadcasters Ltd, the operator of 5DN, in 1930-51, and River Murray Broadcasters Pty Ltd, the operator of 5RM in the Riverland in 1935-51.

1940-1944 THE WAR YEARS, BUILDING PLANT 2

During the second world war Kelvinator Australia became a major defence contractor and virtually all of its manufacturing activities were devoted to war work.

In December 1940 the federal government announced that Kelvinator Australia's Keswick factory would be the site of an official Government Annexe for producing primers (a part of the firing mechanism) for two and six pound anti-tank guns; it began making the primers in mid-1941.



During the war Kelvinator Australia also produced around 1400 mobile refrigerators for the Allied armed services, as well as breech blocks for 25-pounder tank attack guns, rivets for motor vehicles and aircraft, two-inch Mark II trench mortars, heavy duty food storage cabinets for ships and gun turrets for Beaufort and Beaufighter bomber aircraft.

Delivery of 1000th Kelvinator mobile refrigerator to United States Army at a factory site in Wakefield Street, Adelaide, 16 October 1944. The mobile refrigerators were used by the U.S. Army during WWII in the Pacific Area. Kelvinator Managing Director William Queale is standing second from left. [SLSA BRG315/10/6](#)

Kelvinator Australia continued to produce aircraft parts into the 1950s. Because of its additional workload during the war the company's net profits rose from £17,093 in 1940-41 to £39,703 in 1943-44 to £52,964 in 1944-45.

At its wartime peak in 1944 Kelvinator Australia employed 497 men and 107 women.

Before and during the war Queale kept in mind his plans for the long-term growth of the company. In April 1939, September 1940 and October 1943 Kelvinator Australia bought a total of 2.08 acres/c. 0.84 hectares adjacent to the first Keswick plant on the

northern side of Everard Avenue, extending from Kent Road to Hampton Road. (The largest of the purchases was in October 1943 when the company bought all of the allotments on Everard Avenue between Kent and Ashford Road, a total of 1.02 acres/c.0.41 hectares, for £1,225). The additions took Kelvinator Australia's land holdings at Keswick to approximately 4.03 acres/c.1.63 hectares.

The purchase of the new land was possible only because of the state government's controversial Manufacturing Industries Protection Act of 1937, which allowed manufacturers to buy suburban land almost regardless of the wishes of residents or councils. In proclamations of May 1938 and April 1939 the legislation was used to apply to certain areas of Keswick, which Kelvinator Australia soon bought.

To accommodate war work the federal government in early 1944 paid for the building of a factory covering 0.49 acres/c.0.2 hectares on a part of Kelvinator's new land extending from Ashford Road to Hampton Road. Known within Kelvinator Australia as Plant 2, the factory included a machine shop and canteen. Further, during the war the first Keswick plant was increased in size to around 1.5 acres/c. 0.6 hectares.

1946 - 1952 WOODVILLE & CHELTENHAM PLANTS

From July 1946 Kelvinator Australia also began leasing or building production facilities on land it rented at Finsbury Park (in 1967 Finsbury Park was renamed as a part of Woodville North).



1949 Cheltenham Racecourse and Finsbury Park Industrial area (WestMaps Public)

The site, on Torrens Road virtually opposite the Cheltenham Racecourse, had during the war been part of the 124 acre/c. fifty-hectare Finsbury Ammunition Factory, which from February 1941 had produced the metal components for making munitions.

At its peak during the war the site had housed around fifty factories employing about 6,000 workers, the majority being women.

Many of the original buildings survive. After the war the federal government leased parts of the site at low rates to a range of manufacturing businesses.

By August 1946 virtually all of the available land at the complex had been leased and around 12,000 workers were employed there. Apart from Kelvinator Australia others among the eleven major companies leasing land at Finsbury Park included Chrysler Australia Ltd, the International Harvester Company, Pope Products Ltd and Richards Industries Ltd.

Kelvinator Australia leased four plants at Finsbury Park from 1947, 1949 and 1951 (2), and by the end of 1951 the company was leasing a total of 4.68 acres/c.1.9 hectares of factory space there on 11.73 acres/c.4.75 hectares of land.

The plants, known as Plants 4-7, initially focussed on household cabinet assembly, porcelain enamelling, pressing operations, spray painting, tinning and welding.

Kelvinator Australia later leased more land over several years at Finsbury Park to allow for future expansion. In December 1950 the company also bought a 1.29 acre/c.0.52 hectare factory on Port Road, Cheltenham, which in the early days it used to assist in washing machine manufacture. (In April 1949 Kelvinator Australia had begun making washing machines under license from the U.S. Whirlpool company; from 1956-57 they were made under license from Kelvinator U.S.)

By 1952 Kelvinator Australia thus operated eight plants in Adelaide with a total factory space of about 9.5 acres/c.3.84 hectares, including 4.68 acres/1.89 hectares at Finsbury Park and 3.53 acres/1.43 hectares at Keswick.

The company's total land holdings in Adelaide were around 18.57 acres/7.51 hectares, including 11.73 acres/4.74 hectares at Finsbury Park.

In 1946-52 Kelvinator Australia had bought six residential allotments totalling 1.01 acres/c.0.41 hectares adjoining its Keswick factories, and by the end of 1952 it occupied a total of 5.04 acres/2.04 hectares at Keswick.

1952 POST WAR KESWICK FACTORY EXPANSION

Anticipating that factory space at Keswick would still be inadequate to accommodate the company's future growth, in the years immediately after the war Queale extended the size of Kelvinator Australia's plants there.

By the end of 1952 Plant 1 had been increased in size to 1.66 acres/c.0.67 hectares, including second floor offices while, after the company had bought additional land behind it immediately after the war, Plant 2 had been extended to 0.96 acres/c.0.39 hectares.

From early 1946 Kelvinator Australia also built a third plant (Plant 3) covering 0.92 acres/c.0.37 hectares on Everard Avenue between Kent and Ashford Roads, immediately to the west of Plant 2. (The Keswick Creek channel was reconstructed so that it ran under the plant 3).

For many years Plant 1 housed Kelvinator Australia's administration, design and service divisions, compressor assembly and sheet metal and welding shops; Plant 2, in addition to machine shops and the canteen, contained the tool room and heat treatment centre; while Plant 3 housed the foundry, pattern shop, the Wayne pump section, factory maintenance and transport and packaging.

In December 1949 Kelvinator Australia also bought a 0.57 acre/c.0.23 hectares triangular site, previously used as a rubbish dump, on the northern corner of Everard Avenue and Anzac Highway. Until it quickly became too small the site was used as a car park by company employees. After that, cars were parked behind Plants 2 and 3.

1950's - 1970's POPULATION GROWTH AND DEMAND

The post war growth predicted by Queale for Kelvinator Australia quickly came to fruition. A number of influences contributed to the company's sustained expansion from the late 1940s to the mid-1970s including strong population growth; continuing national economic prosperity; technological advances in refrigerator production – including the manufacture by Kelvinator Australia from April 1947 of the first hermetically sealed refrigerators with no external moving parts to be made outside of the U.S., as well as the introduction of stand-alone freezers and automatic defrosting; the proliferation of frozen foods; and strong competition among local whitegoods firms bringing lower prices.



*Kelvinator Fridge c.1940
(M5W - Metal outer shell,
5 cub ft, Wood frame).
Photographer F.A. Gray*



*Kelvinator Fridge c. 1950.
(AS5- all steel, 5 cub ft)
Photographer A.G.
Tasker*

By 1960 90% of Australian homes owned a refrigerator.

After an expected and brief post war slump – Kelvinator Australia's net profit for 1946-47 was only £24,376 – and despite shortages of some raw materials, by the financial year to May 1949 the company's turnover was up almost 60% from the previous year and its net profit a very healthy £99,639, almost double that of 1947-48. By 1950-51 the company's net profit was £111,138.

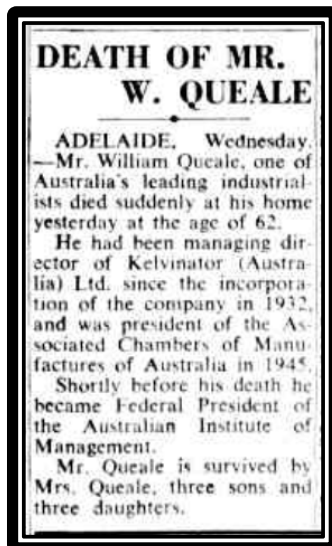
Immediately after the war Kelvinator Australia had employed around 450 workers; by 1947-48 it was employing 1,318 workers in Adelaide (976 at Keswick and 342 at Finsbury Park) and in 1950-51, 2056 workers.

The company also had a thriving sport and social club and over the next twenty years a series of staff newsletters including *The Better Way*, *Cold Facts*, *Kelvinator Digest*, *Kelvinotes* and *Woodville Whispers*.

Queale was fond of noting that 'not one shilling of the capital invested in our company is owned outside Australia'.

1951 MANAGEMENT CHANGES UPON QUEALES DEATH

Queale died suddenly at his St Georges home on Christmas evening 1951.



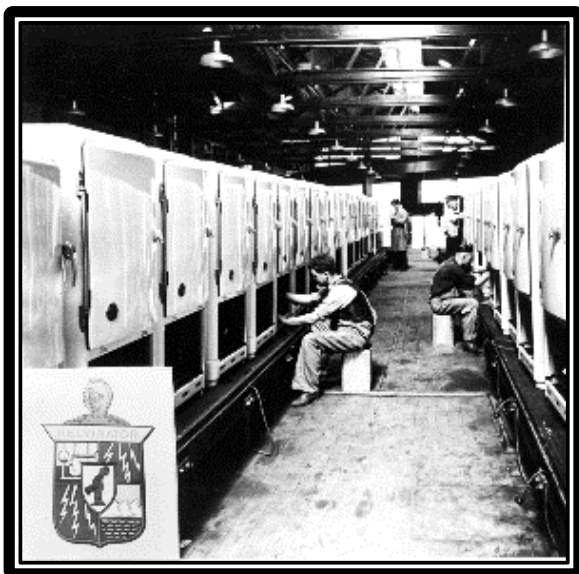
[Trove](#) SMH 27 Dec 1951

His long-time friend Mr (later Sir) A.B. 'Nap' Barker (1900-98), who had been works manager at Kelvinator Australia in 1932-40, proved to be an extraordinarily able successor as managing director, a role he held until 1967.

In the years immediately after Queale's death Kelvinator Australia's net profits continued to surge, rising from £147,688 in 1952-53 to £235,039 in 1953-54 to £293,137 in 1955-56.

Sales of domestic refrigerators meanwhile had risen from 18,242 in 1948-49 to 54,818 in 1955-56, a number not surpassed until 1969-70. After a temporary fall in the early 1950s, by 1953-54 total employment in SA was up to a record 2,162.

In 1945-46 Kelvinator Australia had manufactured around forty-two refrigerators per day; by the early 1950s the company was making 250 fridges per day and in late September 1953 it announced that since its commencement Kelvinator Australia had made 150,000 household refrigerators.



Kelvinator Cabinet assembly line c. 1940. Product M5W. Old factory building fronting Everard Avenue; replaced by two-storey office building c. 1942. Inset – early version of Kelvinator symbol



Kelvinator refrigerators in hot test room undergoing operational test c. 1940. Note: Recording thermometers on top of fridges

1950-1962 MANUFACTURING EXPANSION

Among them were Leland industrial motors, Smith meters (for the oil industry) and from 1962 vending machines.

From the mid-1950s the Australian whitegoods market tightened considerably, the number of firms in the industry eventually falling from forty in 1954 to twenty in 1971. Kelvinator Australia also felt the pressure, its growth stabilising somewhat during the middle and late 1950s.



Group of forty-three men at Kelvinator School, Adelaide, March 2-6, 1953 LH0256



Kelvinator dinner for management group c.1954. L to R: Vin Clarke – Heat Treatment; Bob Ansell – ?; Arthur Jenkins – Tooling; Alan Polmear – Stores; George McCauley – Supply. Possibly end of year dinner LH0256

1955-1962 COMPETITION FROM EMAIL LTD AND GMH'S FRIGIDAIRE

In the three financial years from 1956-57 for example its net profit averaged just over £239,000, clearly lower than a couple of years earlier, while sales of domestic refrigerators from 1955-56 to 1961-62 averaged 41,470 and employment numbers were subdued, averaging around 1,860 per year and falling as low as 1,516 in 1955-56.

In the 1950s Kelvinator Australia's major competitors in the domestic refrigeration market were Email Ltd (Sydney), which manufactured Westinghouse fridges, and General Motor Holden's U.S.-owned Frigidaire brand.

Kelvinator Australia remained however the clear market leader in the sale of domestic refrigerators. Between 1955 & 1961 the company also somewhat less successfully marketed rebadged HMV and Pye radio & television receivers.

Despite the relative flatness of profits during the latter part of 1950s Kelvinator Australia still needed to build more plants to meet the continuing strong demand for its products.

1958 MAXIMUM EXPANSION AT KESWICK

The company had expanded at Keswick almost as far as space would allow; a bid by it in 1958 to increase the size of Plant 2 to 1.22 acres succeeded only after the premier, Sir Thomas Playford, had intervened to override the wishes of local residents and the council.

At about the same time Plant 3 was marginally increased in size to around 0.99 acres/c.0.4 hectares.

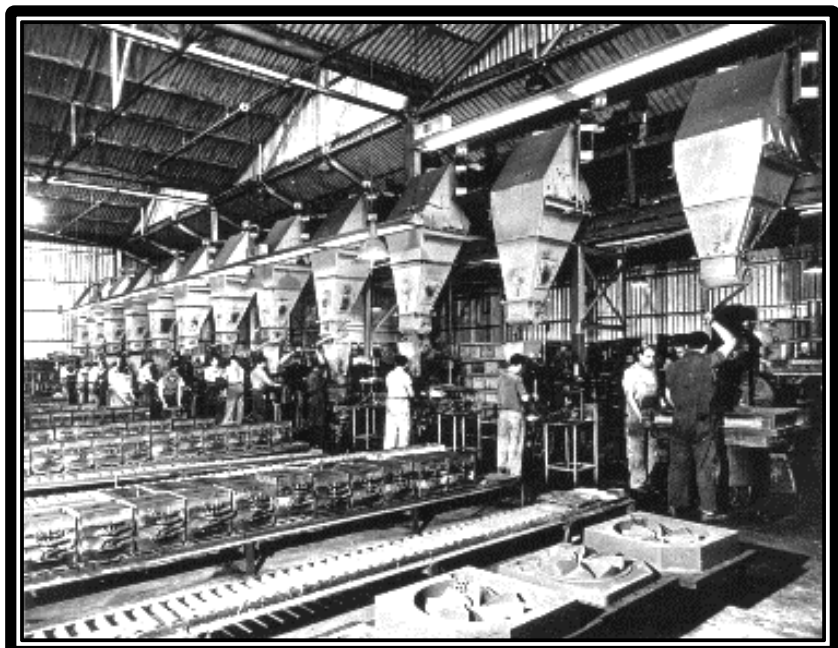
Kelvinator Australia Limited - Production lines, Keswick Circa 1950



Kelvinator, Keswick, Machine shop, Plant 2 c.1950. Turret Lathe section

Kelvinator Foundry, Kent Road, Keswick, c. 1950. Showing row of sand moulding machines.

(No ear protection – sound level 100dB when machines were jolting the moulds.)



As the 1950s progressed Kelvinator Australia increasingly based its production facilities at Finsbury Park.

1955-1959 EXPANSION AT FINSBURY PARK, WOODVILLE

The company increased the size of its existing Finsbury Park plants and built new plants there in 1955-56, 1957-58 and 1958-59, taking its total at the site to seven.

In addition to its earlier activities, from the early 1960s Finsbury Park was also the centre of most of Kelvinator Australia's sheet metal fabrication and assembly work and of its service division. It was also the site of the company's plastics division which provided parts for Kelvinator Australia appliances and custom moulded components for the car industry. (The company also made toilet cisterns – 'Kelvinware' – at Finsbury Park).

The Keswick plants included the administration, apprentice training and design sections and the parts division (Plant 1); the machine shop, compressor assembly and heat treatment (Plant 2); and the foundry in Plant 3.

From 1955 Kelvinator Australia also leased a 0.74 acre/c.0.3 hectare factory at Rosewater, increasing the number of its Adelaide plants to eleven (the Cheltenham plant had closed earlier in the decade and production transferred to a site at Finsbury Park).

By 1962 – by which time it was producing 33,000 refrigerators and 16,000 other units per year – Kelvinator Australia's Adelaide plants took up around 13.94 acres/c.5.64 hectares of factory space, including 9.51 acres/c.3.84 hectares at Finsbury Park and 3.69 acres/c.1.5 hectares at Keswick.

The company's total land holdings in Adelaide were 22.04 acres/c. 8.91 hectares, including 14 acres/c.5.67 hectares at Finsbury Park and 5.22 acres/c.2.11 hectares at Keswick.

1965 'AN ASTONISHING SUCCESS STORY'

Kelvinator Australia's profitability improved considerably during the 1960s, rising consistently from £301,504 in 1960-62 to a record \$1.155 million (£578,000) in 1969-70. Similarly employment levels rose over the decade, averaging around 2030 per annum and peaking at 2334 in 1968-69. In March 1951 Kelvinator Australia's paid up capital had been £680,000; by March 1968 it was \$4.43 million.

Although sales of Kelvinator Australia's domestic refrigerators were a little subdued during most of 1960s – accounting only for around two-thirds of all sales before rising to a new peak of 56,756 in 1969-70 – the improved retail performance of commercial refrigeration, room air conditioners and washing machines compensated for the relative shortfall. In April 1965 the Adelaide Advertiser newspaper described the progress of Kelvinator Australia as an 'astonishing success story'.



Kelvinator personnel in front foyer Anzac Highway c.1962. L to R: H. (Harvey) Nickels, Design; J. (Jack) Pulford, Tooling; R. (Ridge) Brown, Production; L. Wines (Kelvinator International); E. (Ernie) Parsons, Inspection.

1970's REACHING THE PEAK

In 1972-73 the company's net profit was a record \$1.594 million, while sales of Kelvinator Australia's domestic refrigerators increased from the beginning of the decade to a new peak of 68,387 in 1973-74 (by now over 90% of Kelvinator Australia's refrigerators were imported to interstate or overseas markets).

Company employment in South Australia rose to a record of 2507 in 1972-73, about two-thirds at Finsbury Park, while at the same time employment in all states was more than 2850.

After the building of three new factories at Finsbury Park in 1967-68, 1968-69 and 1971-72, by the early 1970s Kelvinator Australia operated a total of fourteen plants in Adelaide.

The company reached its peak land ownership at Keswick in 1971-72 when it owned combined factory space of 4.45 acres/c.1.8 hectares on 6.24 acres/c.2.52 hectares of land (Kelvinator Australia had purchased six residential allotments in the preceding decade). Plant 2 had by this time been expanded to cover 1.71 acres/0.69 hectares, making it the largest of the Keswick plants.

Peak land ownership at Woodville North was reached in 1974-75 when Kelvinator Australia owned a total of 38.12 hectares/c. 15.4 hectares bounded approximately by Burleigh Avenue/Ninth Avenue, Owen Street, York Place and Audley Street. The ten plants at Woodville North – plants 4-14 with no plant 13 – covered 15.95 acres/c.6.45 hectares.

Kelvinator Australia's fourteenth plant, at Rosewater, now covered 4.95 acres/c two acres. In Australia the company owned a total of 96.32 acres/c.38.98 hectares with 31.91 acres/c.12.91 hectares under roof.

1973 IMPACTS OF GOVERNMENT TARIFFS

Despite Kelvinator Australia's outward signs of success, by the 1970s successive federal governments had come to the view that decades of protective tariffs had allowed the Australian whitegoods manufacturing industry to become complacent: that there were still too many local manufacturers, that their export performance was poor and most importantly that domestic prices for whitegoods were too high.

In mid-July 1973, the government reduced tariffs across the board by 25%. The government believed that even though this would lead to reduced sales of Australian-made whitegoods in the short term, which would in turn bring mergers or takeovers among Australian white goods manufacturers, the rationalising of the industry eventually would lead to the emergence of larger, leaner and more efficient firms with benefits for consumers and employment.

The sale of imported whitegoods in Australia had already begun to increase in the 1960s: between 1963-64 and 1967-68 for example imports of fridges and freezers had risen from 13,000 to 55,000.

The lowering of the tariff wall intensified the trend. Imports of refrigerators leapt from 87,000 in 1972-73 to 220,000 in 1973-74. From 1971-72 to 1976-77 domestic sales of refrigerators fell from 72% of all sales to 59%. The story was similar across the range of whitegoods, the value of imported whitegoods rising from \$64.6 million in 1972-73 to \$238.9 million in 1977-78.

In the same period the sale of Australian-made whitegoods as a percentage of total Australian sales fell from 86.8% to 74.6%. High domestic price inflation exacerbated the decline in domestic sales. At this stage most of the imports were from western countries like the US and the UK, though Asian countries later also vigorously entered the market.

1974-1979 SALES SLUMPS FROM IMPORTS

It was a sign of things to come when, as sales slumped, from February 1974 Kelvinator Australia (and other local whitegoods companies) began selling imported whitegoods – Kelvinator began with freezers from Sweden and room air conditioners from New Zealand. The Australian-made whitegoods industry was quickly under siege.

The market was already extremely tight: in 1978-79 of the four leading whitegoods brands Email Ltd had annual sales of around \$93 million, followed by Kelvinator Australia with \$90 million – the company still led the domestic refrigerator, freezer and room air conditioning markets – then the Malleys Group, which manufactured Whirlpool and Hotpoint products under license, and the Adelaide-based Simpson Pope Group, both with sales around \$84 million.

By 1979 the company was buying in 30% of its retail products.

1977 OVERVIEW OF ALL PLANTS AT KESWICK

Top building is Plant 3 containing the foundry at rear fronting Kent Road, maintenance and store in front facing Ashford Road.

Middle building is Plant 2 containing machine shop (built c. 1940) and canteen in the south of the building. The building was completed c. 1942 and expanded northward along Ashford Street c. 1970.

Ashford Road is between plants 2 and 3. Croydon Road is eastern boundary of Plant 2.

Bottom building is Plant 1 containing parts and service at rear, design lab at front left of building and offices at front right.

Everard Avenue is between plants 2 and 1. Plant 1 fronts Anzac Highway with Everard Avenue as northern boundary.

Car park is to the north, just off Anzac Highway, east of Croydon and Hampton Roads intersection.



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1979 EMAIL TAKES OVER

As early as July 1977 Kelvinator Australia and Email began discussions about implementing some form of cost and resource sharing arrangement. Kelvinator Australia was reluctant to commit to any such arrangement however, whereupon Email in March 1979 set about taking over the company through share acquisition.

The name was an acronym that stood for 'Electricity Meter & Allied Industries Ltd.' The tagline of the company was "Email — a totally Australian enterprise."

Kelvinator Australia executives were incensed by the turn of events: 'Kelvinator supports the government's policy of industry rationalisation but strongly disputes that takeovers are the only or the best way of achieving it ... Kelvinator is not in the takeover business, and does not intend to be taken over itself'.

In the company's defence Kelvinator executives noted that it had achieved record net profits of \$3.632 million in 1978-79. The reality however was that in the preceding few



years Kelvinator Australia's profits had become somewhat volatile.

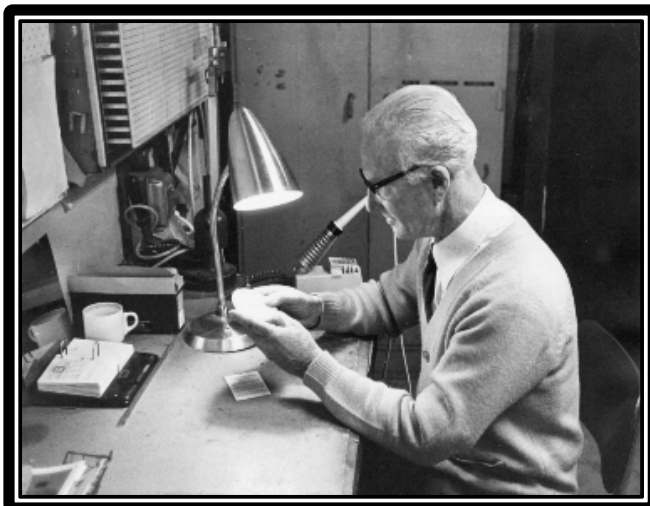
In late March 1979 Email was able to buy 50% of Kelvinator Australia's shares and thereby in practical terms take control of the company. (The other 50% was divided among a range of small shareholders who could easily be won over).

Kelvinator factor (Corner Anzac Highway and Everard Avenue, Ashford) 1979 WTHS LH0208-02

1980 EMAIL / SIMPSON POPE GROUP

Email achieved full ownership of Kelvinator Australia in January 1980.

Email was assisted in its manoeuvres by the Simpson Pope Group selling to it the 18.6% of shares it owned in Kelvinator Australia.



1979 turned out to be a year of turmoil in the Australian whitegoods industry: in April Rank Industries merged with Australian General Electrics (Appliances) Pty Ltd while in July Simpson Pope took over Malleys.

*Gordon McLean, Chief Laboratory Assistant in Design Engineering c.1981.
At his desk in main building, Keswick*

1983 CLOSURE OF KESWICK PLANTS

In 1983 Email Limited decided as a cost saving measure to centralise Kelvinator Australia's production at Woodville North. Compressor assembly, the main production activity still carried out at Keswick, was transferred interstate. After serving chiefly as an administration centre for some time, Kelvinator's Keswick plants were closed later in 1983. A small commercial division survived at 62 Everard Avenue (a part of Plant 2) into early 1984.

1984-1985 LAND SALE

In 1984-85 the former Kelvinator land was sold to four parties: the former Plant 1 site was sold to Aberfraw Pty Ltd of Waymouth Street, Adelaide for \$900,000 in October 1984 – it is now disposed largely as shops but for many years until 2011 was the home of Candetti Constructions Pty Ltd.

The former Plant 2 site was sold to Le Cornu Furniture and Carpet Centre of Anzac Highway, Keswick for \$700,000 in June 1985.

The former Plant 3 site was sold to the Southern Television Corporation Pty Ltd of Tynte Street, North Adelaide for \$450,000 in April 1984.

The one-time car park site near Anzac Highway was sold to Chout Pty Ltd of Waymouth Street, Adelaide in October 1984 for \$50,000.

As of writing in 2020, Plant 2 has been demolished and replaced by a new building, while Plant 3 has been significantly altered; both sites are today occupied by a range of private businesses.

2000 FOREGONE CONCLUSION

The desire of successive federal governments from the 1980s to continue to encourage the rationalisation of the Australian whitegoods industry turned out to be devastatingly effective.

After the implementation of further tariff cuts and a raft of other trade liberalisation policies, by the beginning of 2000 only two major companies – Email and the New Zealand-owned Fisher and Paykel – were manufacturing or assembling whitegoods in Australia. But even then Email used many imported components in its products while Email brand refrigerators were made in South Korea.

In November 2000 Sweden's Electrolux AB bought Email and in late 2004 closed its Woodville North plants (refrigerators had been made there for the last time in May 1994; thereafter the site had concentrated upon the manufacture of room air conditioners).

Employment had been falling at Woodville North for decades. Today the site remains an extensive industrial estate.

After the closure of Electrolux/Email's Orange (NSW) factory in April 2016 today no new refrigerators and relatively few other whitegoods are assembled or manufactured in Australia.

The decline in Australian whitegoods manufacture from the mid-1970s has been accompanied by a similar contraction in Australian manufacturing industry generally, and for the same reasons.

Electrolux-owned Kelvinator Australia still exists as a brand name for refrigerators and room air conditioners and continues to carry considerable cache.

12 New York Tribune
May 16, 1920




“How lovely our KELVINATOR has kept the Salad”



For table use these cubes of pure, clear ice are frozen in pans that fit into space in the cold tank in the Kelvinator. The cubes are easily removed from the pans and they stay always in case of a supply.

Serve your guests the after-theatre bite, crisp, tasty and delicious—made up hours before, yet retaining every bit of flavor because the refrigerator is cooled by

Kelvinator

Refrigeration Without Ice

The temperature is automatically maintained by thermostatic control without attention from any member of the household, assuring a temperature colder and more uniform than the best ice cooled systems.

No wasteful dripping ice. No overflowing pans. No worry as to replenishment. Kelvinator keeps the refrigerator cold night and day with surprising regularity. Sensitive to the slightest variation of temperature, it starts and stops without attention, maintaining a dry, crisp cold, preventing waste and decay.

Kelvinator can be installed in any refrigerator without muss or trouble. Once installed, you can forget hot weather worries. Kelvinator will keep your costly foods and delicacies always fresh and sweet.

Write for booklet giving full details of Kelvinator Refrigeration without ice. Better still, visit our display rooms and see a refrigerator equipped with Kelvinator in constant operation.

Livingston Sales Corporation

ELECTRICAL *Labor-Saving* APPLIANCES
104 East 41st Street, New York
Tel. 6406 Murray Hill



This is the brine tank—the cooling unit—and will fit in the ice compartment of your refrigerator. Small trays filled with your favorite spring water may be inserted and fine little ice cubes frozen for table use. On top of it is mounted the thermostat, which automatically controls the temperature of the refrigerator.





Open a door, and chances are you'll meet Email

Sometimes Email's involvement in your world is as obvious as the 'Frigidaire', 'Kelvinator' or 'Westinghouse' badge on your refrigerator or the 'Mettlers' name on your stove. Email-made household products are respected and familiar to thousands of Australian families. Refrigerators, electric ranges, washing machines, dryers, dishwashers and, of course, 'Kelvinator', 'Weatherwall' and 'Westinghouse' home air-conditioners.

But there's another side to Email: A less obvious side, too. You walk through air-conditioned skyscrapers unaware of Email's role in providing the air-conditioning systems. You enjoy the benefits of Australia's exports, while Email provides refrigeration that helps to make

modern containerised shipping of our perishable primary exports possible. Email meters measure your household electricity, water and gas supplies. And there's much, much more.

Open a door and chances are you'll meet Email. Is it any wonder that this Australian enterprise enjoys the highest reputation for innovation, excellent quality, and financial stability.



EMAIL LIMITED
An Australian enterprise

EM27/JPC
TIME, FEBRUARY 25, 1980

KELVINATOR REFRIGERATOR, CIRCA 1926



By Daderot

KELVINATOR REFRIGERATOR, CIRCA 2021



West Torrens Historical Society Inc

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Website:

westtorrenshistory.org

Email:

westtorrenshistory@gmail.com

Address:

327 Marion Road, North Plympton (BUS STOP 9B)

Post:

PO Box 43, Marleston 5033



West Torrens Historical Society