

# BOYER NEWSPRINT MILL

**Location:** On the Derwent River near New Norfolk

**Owner:** Norske Skog.

The marker is located outside the entrance to the Mill.

## The Mill

Construction commenced in 1938 and the mill started operation in 1941, using 75% eucalyptus hardwood fibre and 25% imported softwood fibre.

The company, Australian Newsprint Mills, was granted extensive hardwood forest concessions in the Styx and Florentine valleys. Logs were delivered by rail.

Rolls of newsprint were delivered initially by rail to the port of Hobart, then by barge down the river.



Felling huge eucalypts with cross cut saws

It took 20 years of research to find a way of making newsprint from hardwood. The team was lead by **Lou Benjamin** who became general manager of the Mill. Fellow researcher **John Somerville** became Chief Chemist. **Sir Keith Murdoch** was Chairman of the company. **Percy Sandwell**, a Canadian Engineer, oversaw the design and construction of the Mill.

The Mill produced 20,000 tons of paper in the first year. A second machine was installed in 1952, increasing output to 80,000 tonnes/year. The third machine installed in 1969 raised the capacity to 170,000 tonnes/year. The output had reached 300,000 tonnes/year in 2009 when the use of hardwood fibre ceased, and newsprint was produced entirely from plantation softwood.

## Heritage Significance

The Boyer Mill was the first in the world to make newsprint from hardwood fibre and the only newsprint mill in the southern hemisphere.



Boyer Mill about 1990

Backed by Australia's major newspaper publishers, the Mill averted a shortage of newsprint during world War 2.

The Mill pioneered the use of low grade high ash Tasmanian coal and transferred the technology to other Tasmanian industries.

The Mill provided significant social benefits to the town of New Norfolk.



# The Boyer Mill

**Newsprint from Eucalypt - an Australian Story**



**THE BOYER STORY**  
Innovation - engineering - science

NEWSPRINT MAKER TO THE NATION SINCE 1941

## Pioneering Achievement

Australia suffered severe shortages of imported newsprint during World War I. We needed our own paper mills sourcing local timbers, but overseas experts said that Australian hardwoods were unsuitable.

Nevertheless, the Commonwealth Government initiated research in 1918 and, thanks to the persistence and vision of two chemists in particular, a pilot plant was established in 1927 at Kermadec in the Huon Valley.

The pioneering chemists were Mr Lou Benjamin (who later became General Supt of Australian Newsprint Mills 1938-1956) and Mr John Somerville (Chief Chemist 1938-1965).

Encouraging results led to larger scale trials in North America during 1934 and the success of this work gave sufficient confidence for local newspaper publishers to come together and form Australian Newsprint Mills Limited (ANML) with capital of £1,327,254.

In 1935 the Tasmanian Parliament gave the company long term rights over the forest assets of the Upper Derwent Valley.



L.R. Benjamin



J.L. Somerville



Kermadec Pilot Plant

## Building of the Mill 1939-41

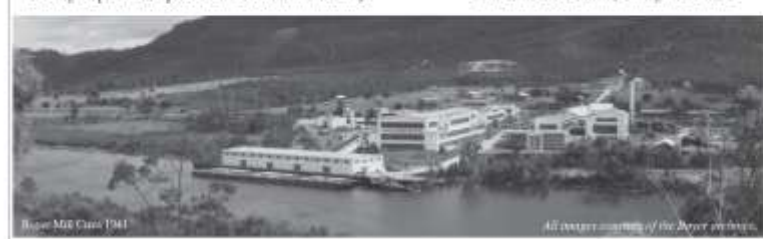
The mill offered advantages for access to such needed power and water, and close proximity to the forests, transport by rail, road and sea and other vital infrastructure. The original process involved grinding timber billets, bleaching, adding softwood pulp and making paper.

Mr Percy Southwell, a Canadian Engineer, was the lead designer and supervised the construction of the mill.

The company started with a mill of 100 tons/day capacity with intention of proceeding as soon as possible to 400 tons/day.

Everything in the first plant was designed for the ultimate configuration. 85% of the plant and equipment of the mill was made in Australia. The rest, in order of quantity, came from Great Britain, USA and Canada.

The first newsprint was produced on 22nd February 1941, just in time to avert a critical shortage of newsprint in Australia during World War 2.



Boyer Mill circa 1941

All water coming off the Boyer catchment

# The Boyer Story

The commercial production of quality newsprint from hardwood was a great technical achievement. It led to the establishment of a Mill that has

the proud record of being a successful Australian enterprise, able to produce newsprint at world prices without tariff protection or bounty.

Successive generations of Boyer employees have guided the Mill's development with the same persistent endeavour and cooperative contribution that

was employed for its foundation. Fundamental to its longevity has been a culture of building value through innovation, engineering

and science, having regard for a sustainable use of resources and developing beneficial long term relationships with customers and the community.

## Milestones in Development

- 1946 Newsprint transported to Hobart by barge until 1990.
- 1950 No 3 Boiler, 1962 No 4 Boiler, each modified to burn low grade, high ash Tasmanian coal.
- 1952 Second paper machine and new wood mill.
- 1957 New pulping process using the impregnation of wood chips with caustic soda.
- 1969 Third paper machine, with expansion of support services. Mill output 200,000 tons per annum.
- 1977 Softwood thermo-mechanical pulp mill (world first).
- 1985 Output 220,000 tonnes per annum; 1465 full time employees.
- 1988 Effluent treatment primary clarification.
- 1989 No 5 Boiler; 1996 Newsprint to northern ports by rail.



## Community & the Mill The Modern Mill

The semi-rural location of the Mill and the isolation of its forests made it necessary for the company to provide homes for a high proportion of its employees. 325 homes were constructed adjacent to the old town of New Norfolk and 119 in Maydena. Recreational and sporting facilities were provided.

A company fund provided sickness, accident, pharmaceutical and dental benefits, and educational funds gave additional family support.

These were community services in which the employer and employee had cooperative interest.

In the 1980s the focus for future major expansion was directed to an entirely new facility at Albany.

The Boyer priority was to achieve improved product quality, diversity and customer service. The aim was lower cost, simpler processes and asset efficiency, together with improved safety and environmental performance.

As a result the Mill's production rose to 300,000 tonnes per annum, using only two modernised paper machines and less than 400 full time employees.

In 2010, responding to the global newsprint market and community expectations, the Mill moved away from its traditional eucalypt hardwood base to lower cost and enhanced environmental aspects of softwood plantation fibre.



For more information on this and other engineering heritage works, go to [www.engineersaustralia.org.au/heritageregister/search](http://www.engineersaustralia.org.au/heritageregister/search)

