



The Meat Pie

AUSTRALIA'S OWN FAST FOOD

Photo: Robyn Mackenzie

The classic Australian meat pie is a single serving, enclosed in pastry with a filling of meat in gravy, and typically eaten for lunch or as a snack food.

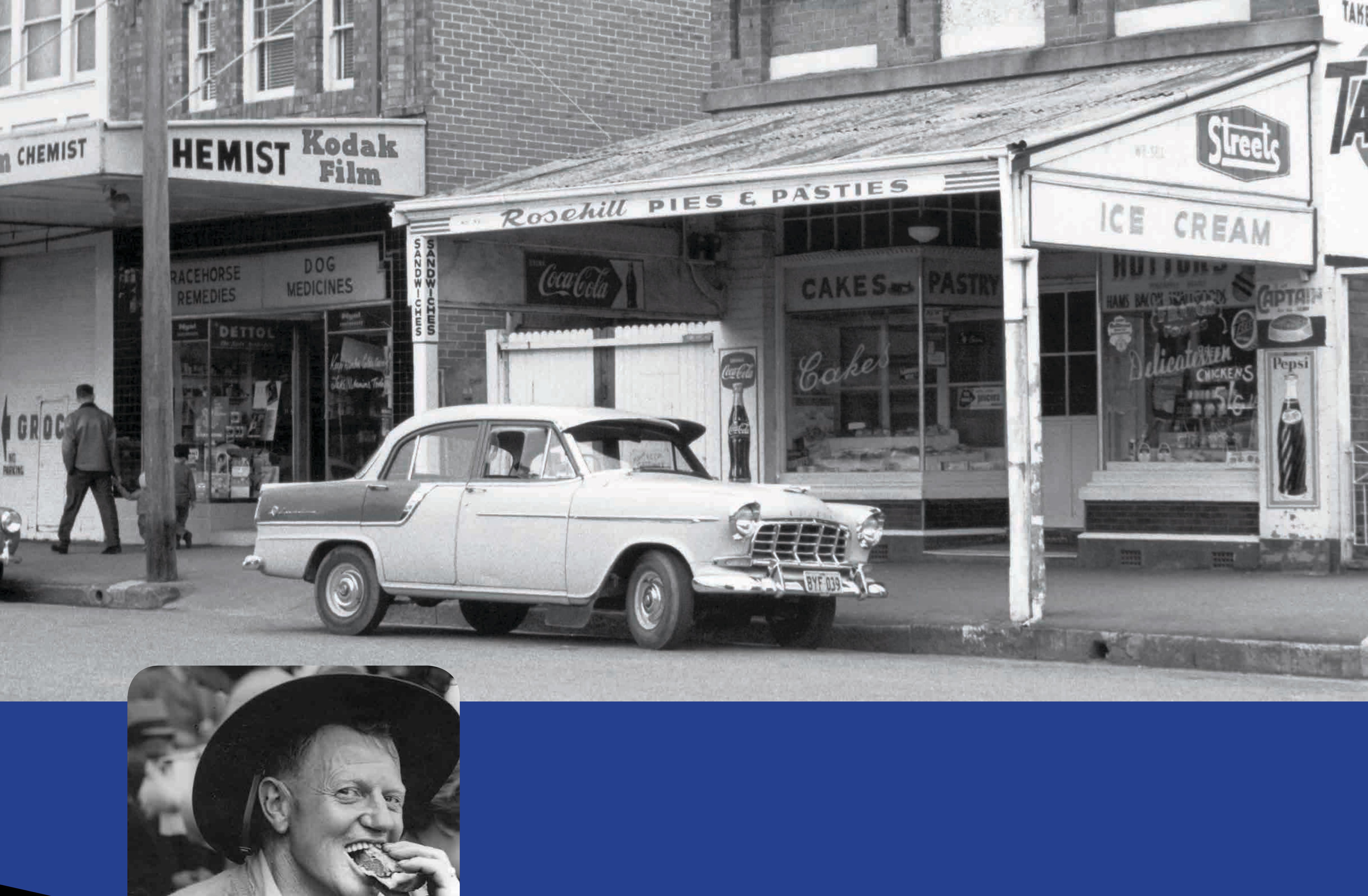
It is traditionally sold over the counter, hot and ready to eat, often with tomato sauce and in a paper bag. Meat pies have traditionally been served in pie shops and pie stalls at events such as football matches, agricultural shows and other places where people congregate.

In fact the meat pie has become Australia's iconic fast food, in the company of Britain's fish and chips, America's hamburger, Mexico's taco and Italy's pizza.

There have been many changes over the years. Once baked fresh daily for distribution to local pie shops, these days most pies are sold frozen in supermarkets. But the meat pie has maintained its popularity and Australians eat an estimated 270 million meat pies a year.

New Zealanders share this tradition with Australians and in fact eat more meat pies on average than Australians (15 per year compared with Australians' 12).

This display traces the history of the Australian meat pie from its origins in the ancient world, to its place in the supermarket freezers of today.



Australian soldier, G. J. Denham, eating a meat pie in 1943

Photo courtesy of the State Library of Victoria

ASHET

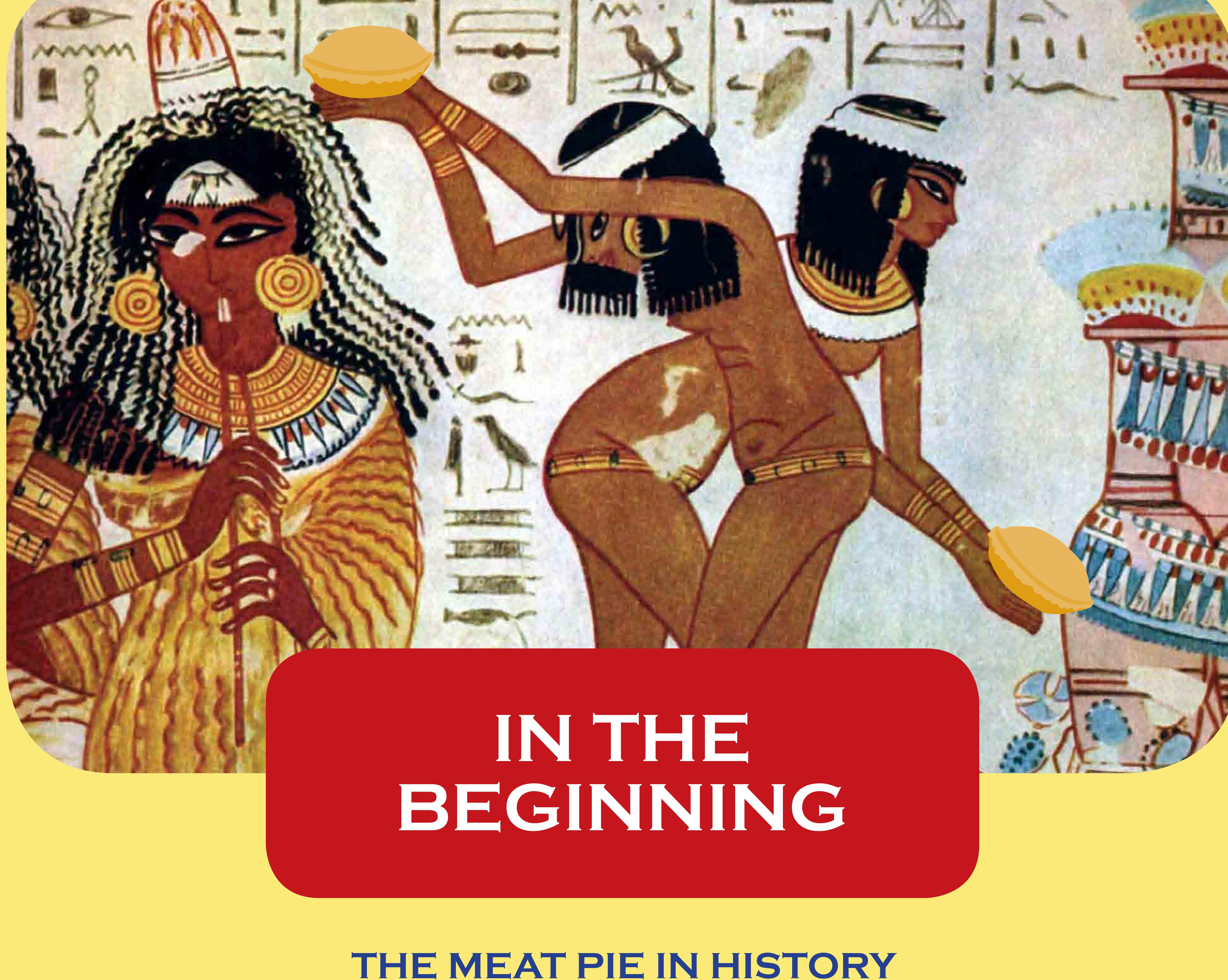
ABOUT THIS PROJECT

This display is the principal outcome of a project commenced in 2013 by ASHET, the Australian Society for History of Engineering and Technology, to research and record the history of the Australian meat pie. In addition to this display we will present the results of our research work in a version of the display on ASHET's website www.ashet.org.au, and in talks, papers and journal articles.

The research and compilation of the material for presentation are being undertaken as a voluntary effort by ASHET members and friends. Out of

pocket expenses of the project, including the services of our professional graphic designer, Judith Denby of Site Specific Pty Ltd, and our website designer Alison Stevens of Plumm Websites, are being met by a substantial grant from the Australian Government's Your Community Heritage Program.

Special thanks to Ian Allen and Brian Andrews of Sargent's, and to Tom and Danielle Lindsay of Lindsay Pie Making Equipment for sharing with us their knowledge of the pie industry and for the information and images they provided for the display.



IN THE BEGINNING

THE MEAT PIE IN HISTORY

Pies have been baked and eaten from very early days in human history. The Egyptians, ancient Greeks and the Romans all had bread and pies as part of their diet.

The thick crust of these early pies acted as a baking dish, and wholly enclosed the filling, which was usually some kind of meat. These pies were baked on the floor of an oven, in much the same way as a pizza is baked today.

In Medieval times in England's cities street vendors selling pies were common. Pies were the take-away convenience food of the period. Often they provided the only meat that the poor could afford. They were made in cook shops and bakeries.

The nobility and wealthy merchants had kitchens in their homes where meat pies of all kinds were made.

The pies were spiced and flavoured with expensive ingredients such as saffron, nutmeg, ginger, cinnamon and pepper. The spices were very expensive and highly prized. They were used to disguise the taste of tainted meat as well as to give flavour.

Venison and boar, rabbits and fish and birds such as swans, peacocks and pigeons were encased in a very thick dough or paste made from wheat or rye flour. The meat was baked in this crust for many hours. The crust acted like a container in which meat could be safely stored in a larder for some time.

The crust (coffin) was not discarded but was used to feed the servants, beggars, the poor and the dogs. There are old recipes that suggest that the crust was crumbled and used as a roux or thickening for broths or stews.



Italian fresco, 15th century, showing a baker putting pies in an oven with a long 'peel'



15th century French banquet, from *Roman de Lancelot en prose* by Jean Fouquet

PIES IN CELEBRATIONS

The pie was important in English culture and featured in special celebrations. After the victory over Napoleon at Waterloo in 1815, English bakers, using specially built ovens, baked a victory pie that fed hundreds of people.

In 1846 after the repeal of the Corn Laws, the English celebrated with a monster meat pie containing a hundred

pounds of beef, mutton from five sheep, plus numerous game and domestic birds. It was baked for ten hours.

The pie was transported to the dining area on a dray drawn by thirty horses and placed on a platform, which promptly collapsed. However the pie remained intact and was enjoyed by all.





MEAT PIES IN THE CITIES

The main cities of Sydney and Melbourne grew rapidly, particularly after the discovery of gold in 1850, and by that time there were busy markets and street vendors selling all kinds of products including pies. In Sydney the pie-man kept his pies warm in a large tin box, supported on thick legs and kept warm by a small charcoal burner.

THE MEAT PIE ARRIVES IN AUSTRALIA

Life was very difficult at first for the convicts, soldiers and marines who arrived with the First Fleet. They were totally dependent on supplies brought by sea and were at times near starvation. Wheat came by ship from India but it was not until a steam driven mill was erected in Sydney in 1815 that wheat could be ground into flour in commercial quantities.

By 1821 Sydney had 11 mills and 52 licensed bakers producing bread, pies and other baked goods. In more isolated places and in the small country towns, women made bread and pies

in their kitchens in the traditional way. Damper was born out of the need to produce bread quickly and in quite primitive conditions where no traditional oven was available.

Each small town in NSW had a bakery supplying bread, pies and cakes to the locals. The pies were made fresh each day. There was no refrigeration in those days. The flour would come from the local mill, the meat for from the local butcher, and the fat used would be what was available locally, perhaps suet, clarified dripping, butter or lard.

SYDNEY'S FLYING PIE-MAN

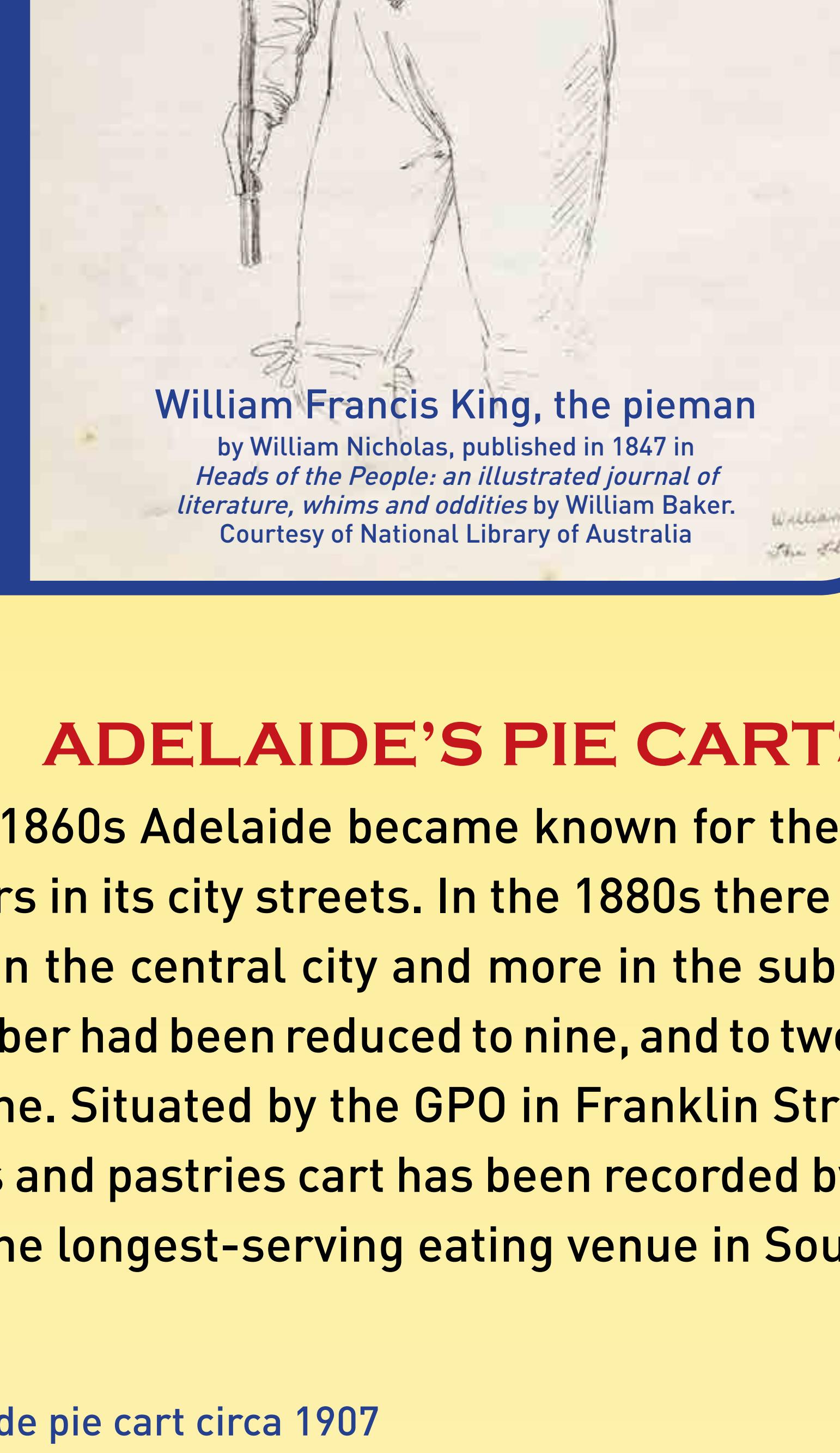
William Francis King, an eccentric English migrant, made pies and sold them at Circular Quay in Sydney.

He would sell pies to passengers embarking on the ferry for Parramatta and then speed on foot to meet them at Parramatta wharf for a second helping.

He became noted not only for his pies, but also for his appearance, dressed in white stockings, scarlet knee-breeches, open collar white shirt, blue jacket and top hat.

He performed feats of physical endurance such as weight lifting and long distance running, which led to the name the 'Flying Pie-man'.

He tired of selling pies in Sydney and took to the road, travelling on to many parts of New South Wales and Queensland. He died in 1870.



William Francis King, the pie man

by William Nicholas, published in 1847 in

Heads of the People: an illustrated journal of

literature, whims and oddities by William Baker.

Courtesy of National Library of Australia

ADELAIDE'S PIE CARTS

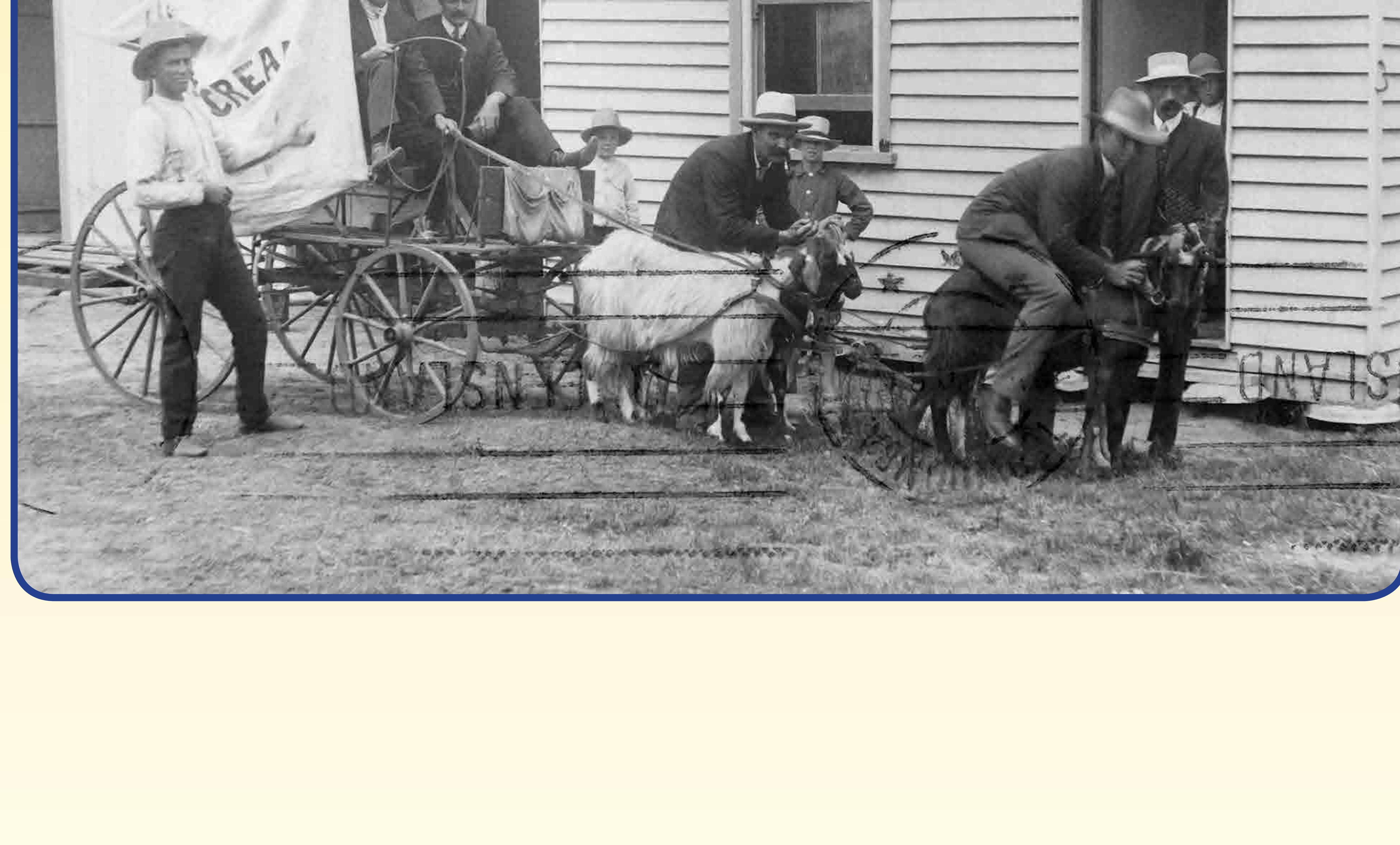
From the 1860s Adelaide became known for the pie carts and pie vendors in its city streets. In the 1880s there were thirteen pie carts in the central city and more in the suburbs. By 1915 their number had been reduced to nine, and to two in 1958. Now there is one. Situated by the GPO in Franklin Street, the 'Oven Door' pies and pastries cart has been recorded by the National Trust as the longest-serving eating venue in South Australia.

◀ Adelaide pie cart circa 1907



▼ Hot pie carts were present in other places around Australia. This one in Charleville, north Queensland, was pulled by goats. Photo circa 1909 Courtesy of State Library Queensland

▶ Adelaide pie carts were renowned for their Pie Floater — a meat pie in a bowl of green pea soup often topped with a lavish dollop of tomato sauce



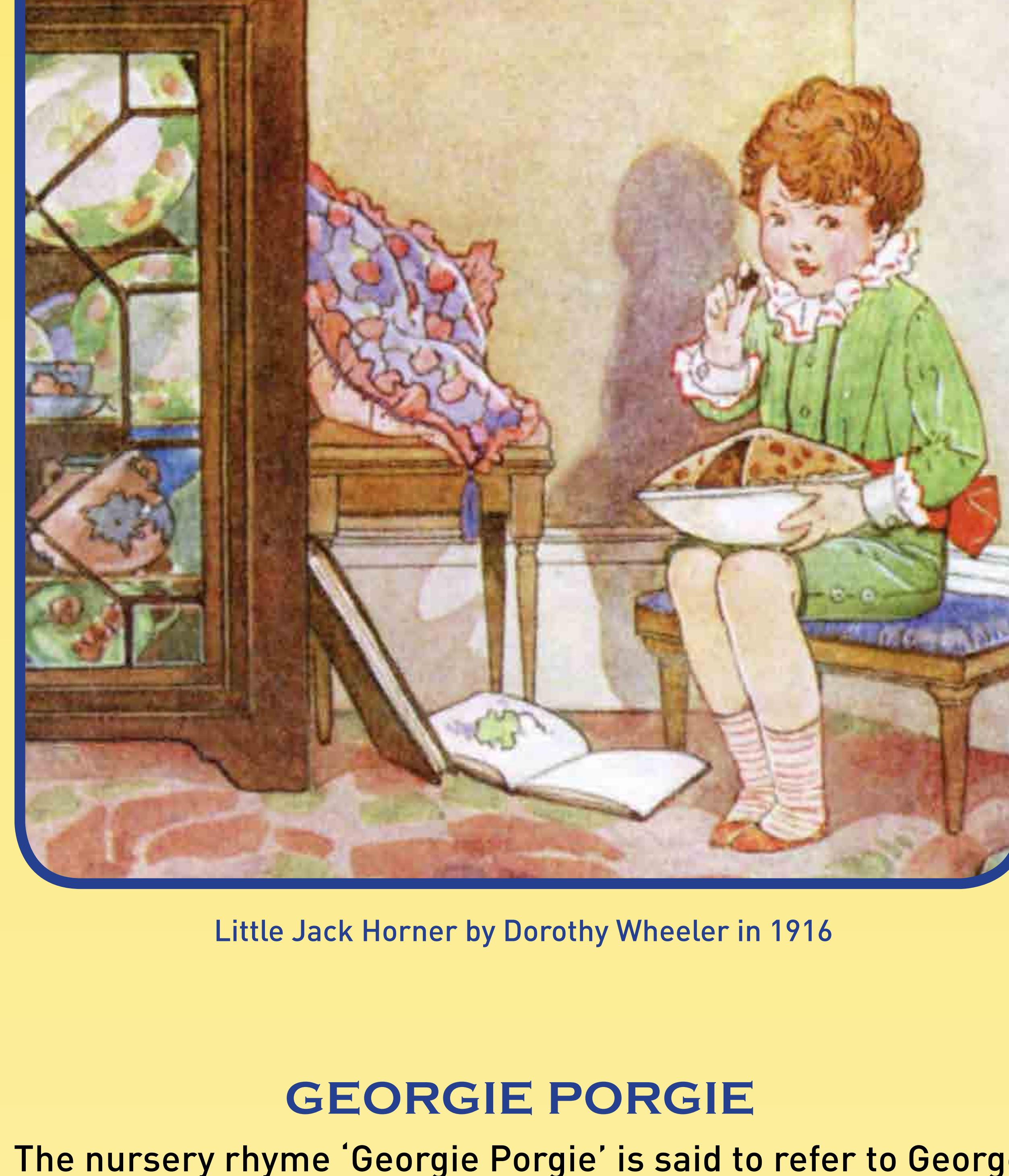


FOUR AND TWENTY BLACKBIRDS

There is a story that Jack Horner really refers to Thomas Horner, steward to the Abbot of Glastonbury when Henry VIII was king. The abbot is said to have sent the king a large Christmas pie stuffed with title deeds of a dozen manors to persuade him not to confiscate the Church's lands. On the way to London, Horner opened the pie and removed the deeds to one of the manors, which he kept for himself.

A close-up detail from a painting, likely a portrait. It shows the face of a man with a prominent mustache and a woman with a patterned headscarf. The lighting is dramatic, with strong highlights and shadows.

A painting of a family group in 18th-century attire. On the left, a woman with light brown hair is seen from the side, wearing a white lace-collared dress with a red and green patterned shawl. In the center, a young child with a white headband looks towards the right. To the right, a woman with long dark hair, wearing a white lace-collared dress with a yellow and green striped shawl, holds a large green fan. A man's arm and shoulder are visible on the far right, wearing a dark green coat. The background is dark and indistinct.



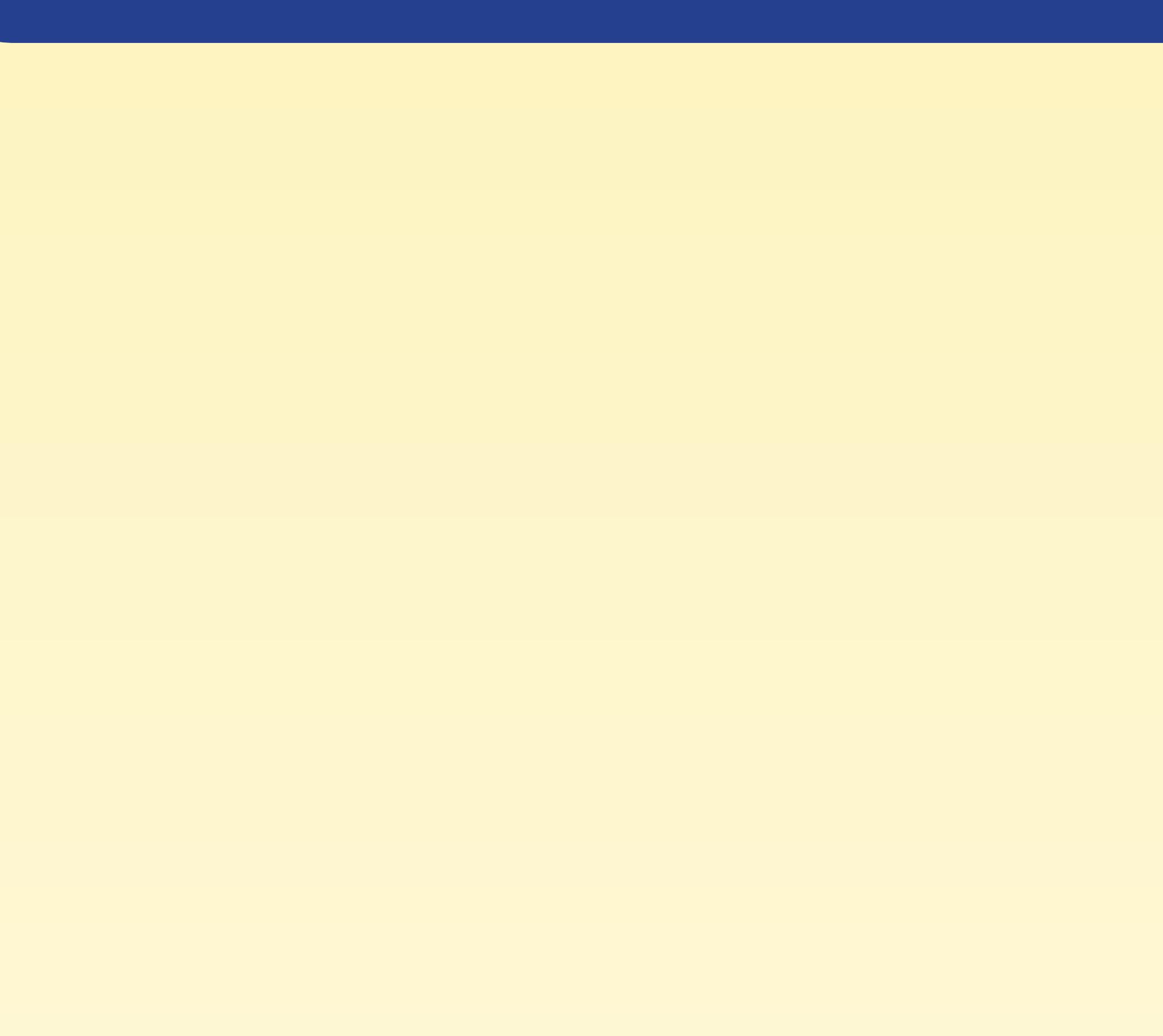
<divst Duke of Buckingham (1592–1628).



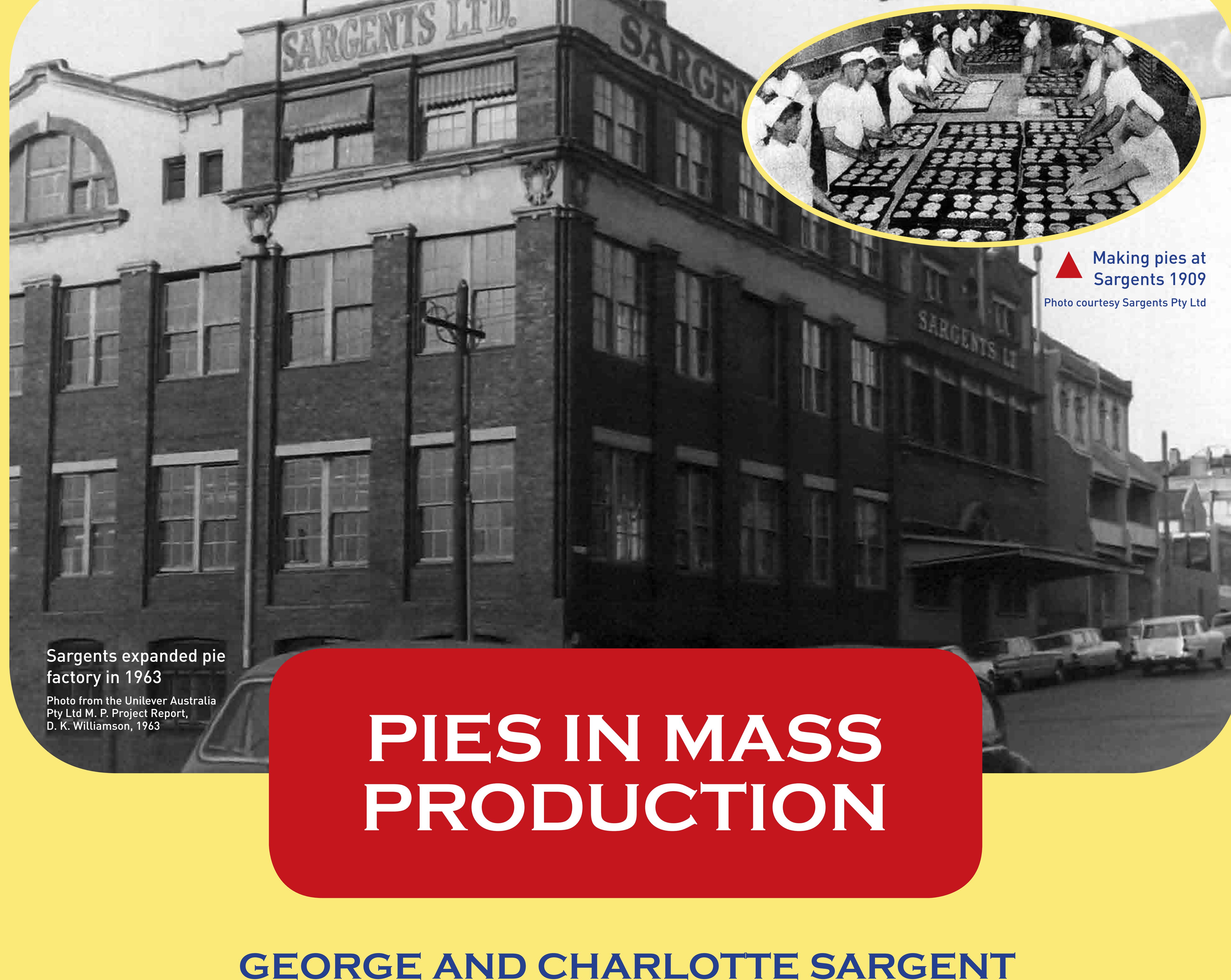
TT'S PIES

Todd is a fictional character who first appeared as the murderer in the Victorian 'penny dreadful' *The String of Pearls* (1846–47). He is a hairdresser, not a barber, who dispatches his victims by pulling a lever as they sit in his chair. His victims fall backwards into the basement, generally hitting their heads on the floorboards, which causes them to break their necks or skulls. In case they are alive, Todd takes them to the basement and slits their throats with his razor.

 Todd Slaughter as Sweeney 1



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PIES IN MASS PRODUCTION

GEORGE AND CHARLOTTE SARGENT

George Sergeant, founder of Sargents Ltd, was the son of a Warwickshire baker. He and his four pastry-cook brothers migrated to Australia. Charlotte, seventh of nine children of a coachman Thomas Foster, married George in 1883. At the time she had a five year old son, Henry Hartly Foster, who took on his step-father's re-spelt surname, Sargent.

In 1886 George and Charlotte were operating their own bakery in Glebe where the pattern of the Sargents' working partnership was established, George doing the baking and deliveries while Charlotte fronted the counter.

After Charlotte won a share in a Tattersall's Sweepstake, they moved to a bakery in Surry Hills. After two more moves, George became ill. They closed the business and travelled abroad. On their return they recommenced trading at Pitt Street, Sydney.

The business expanded and the Sargents opened a number of refreshment rooms in the city. In February 1909 Sargents Ltd

was registered as a public company. In October of that year, it opened a four storey factory and bulk store in Darlinghurst with a workforce of 550. The business expanded to Melbourne where it was managed by two of George's brothers.

In 1915, Hartley Sargent, by now general manager of Sargents Ltd, enlisted in the Army, served overseas, was wounded and held as a prisoner of war in Germany. He returned to Australia in 1919 and resumed work with the company although he appeared to be unwell.

After George died in 1921, Charlotte continued on in the business. The once flourishing enterprise started to suffer financial problems. In 1924 Charlotte died. Then Hartley, recuperating from an illness at Medlow Bath, fell 400 feet from a cliff to his death. The family's direct connection with the firm ceased. The business survived under new ownership, eventually closing its teashop and catering services in the 1960s to concentrate on manufacturing pies.

OPENING PARLIAMENT HOUSE

Sargents were the caterers for the official opening of Parliament House in Canberra in 1927. They grossly overestimated the number of guests who would attend the ceremony, and 10,000 meat pies were dumped on the local tip as a result.

Old Parliament House opening ceremony, Canberra, 1927

Photo by Edward William Searle, 1887-1955

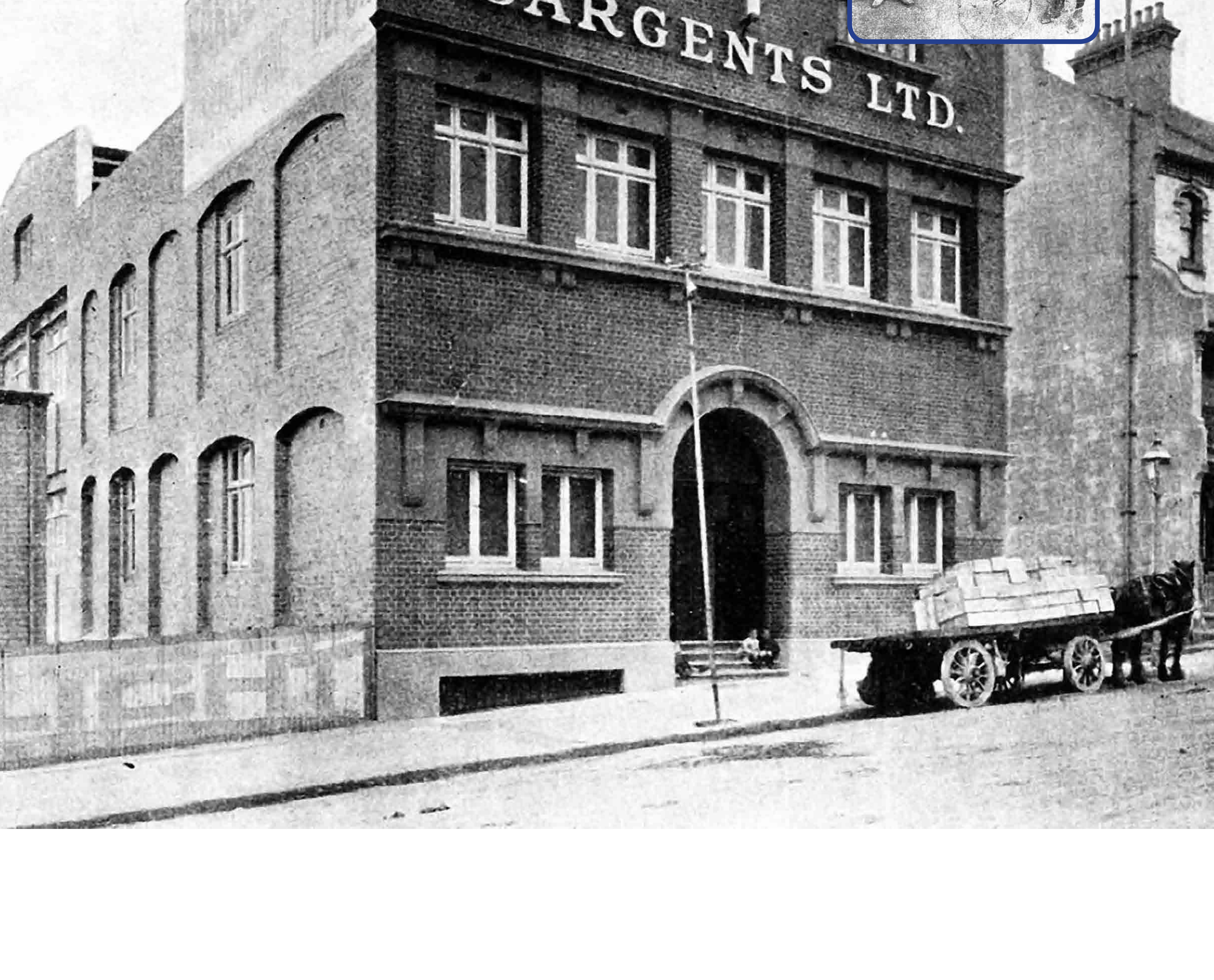
Photo courtesy of National Library of Australia

Sargents original pie factory at Darlinghurst in 1909

Photo courtesy of Sargents Pty Ltd

Sargents pie shop in Sydney

Photo courtesy of Sargents Pty Ltd



Gartrell White factory at 458 King Street Newtown

Photo from the Unilever Australia Pty Ltd M. P. Project Report, D. K. Williamson, 1963



SYDNEY PIE MAKING IN THE 1960s

By 1963 the Sydney wholesale market for meat pies was estimated to be 60 million pies per year. Of this, around 70% was sold in shops, and about 25% in factory canteens.

There were four large pie manufacturers in Sydney supplying over 90% of the market. Each of these manufacturers ran a fleet of delivery trucks that delivered fresh pies from its factory to the retail outlets and major consumers. The largest manufacturer, Gartrell White, had a fleet of fifty trucks.

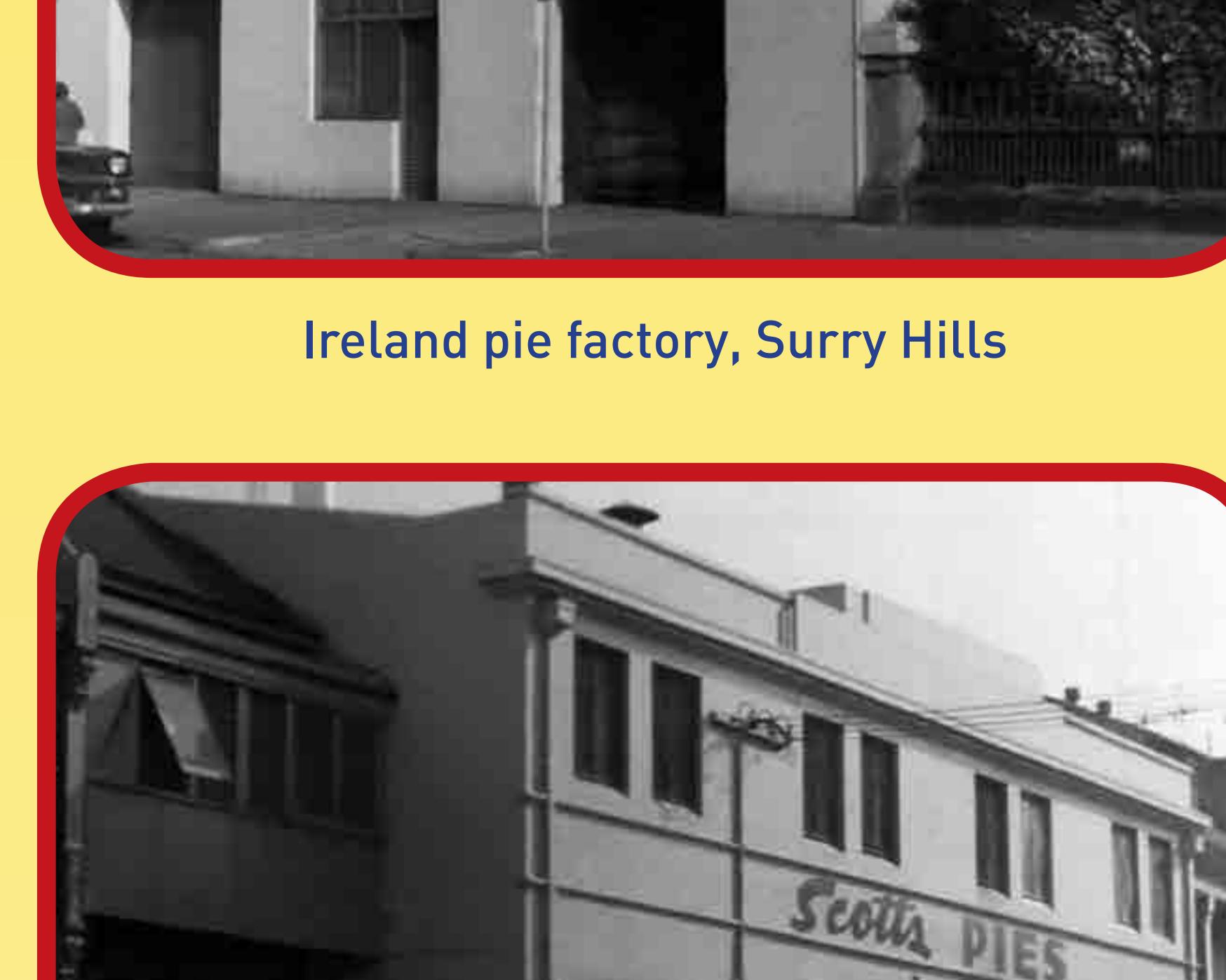
GARTRELL WHITE

Gartrell White, owned by George Weston Foods, supplied over a third of the Sydney meat pie market. Its principal brand was Big Ben pies. Weston was also Sydney's largest bakery company, selling under the Tip Top and other brands. Its factory was in King Street, Newtown, on a site now occupied by Newtown Public School.

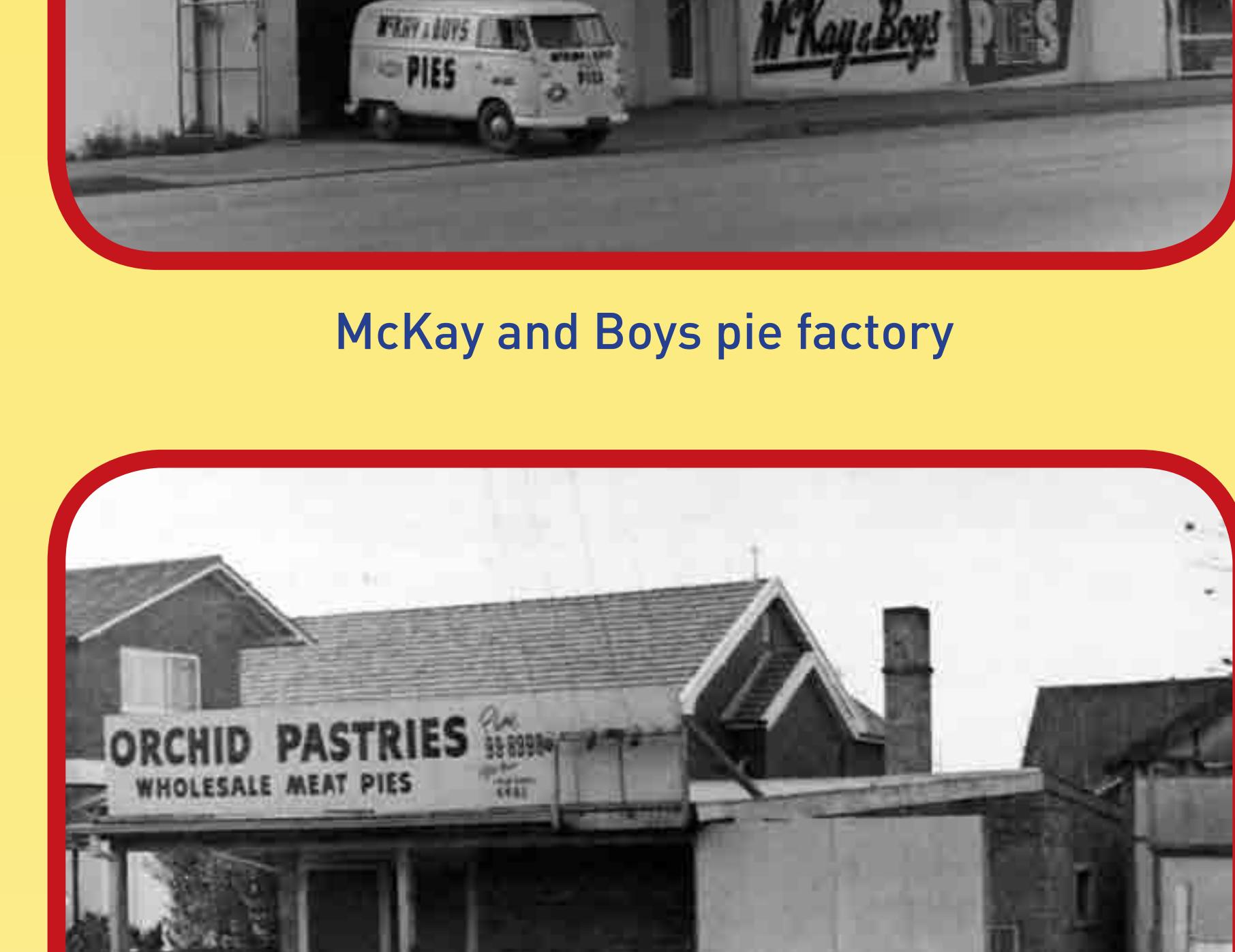
OTHER MAJOR SYDNEY PIE-MAKERS

The other large pie-makers in Sydney in the 1960s were Sargent's, Scotts and Irelands. Each of these produced nearly ten million pies per year.

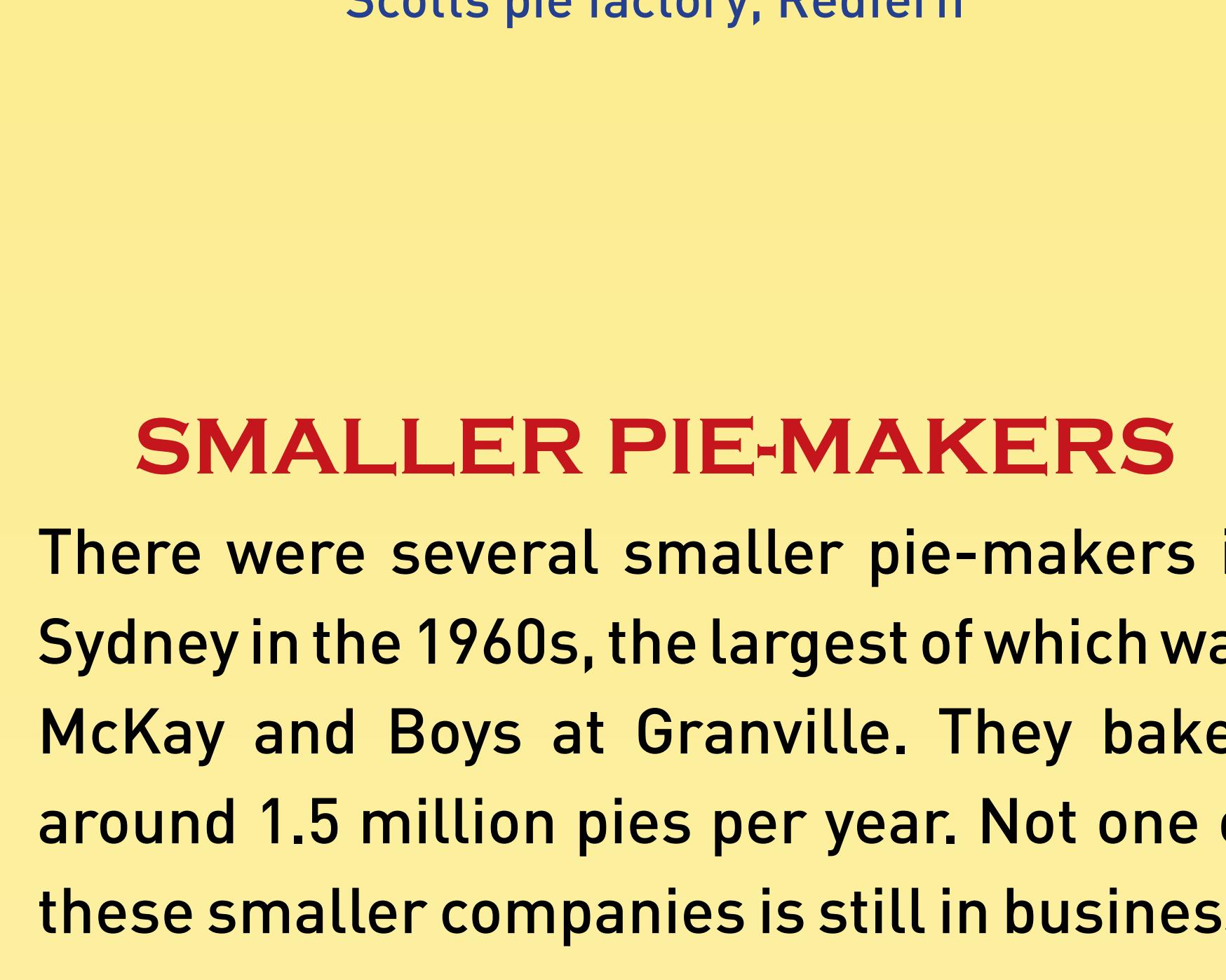
Sargent's were still making pies at their original factory in Darlinghurst, Scotts had a factory in Redfern and Irelands were in Surry Hills. All three of these factories have since been demolished.



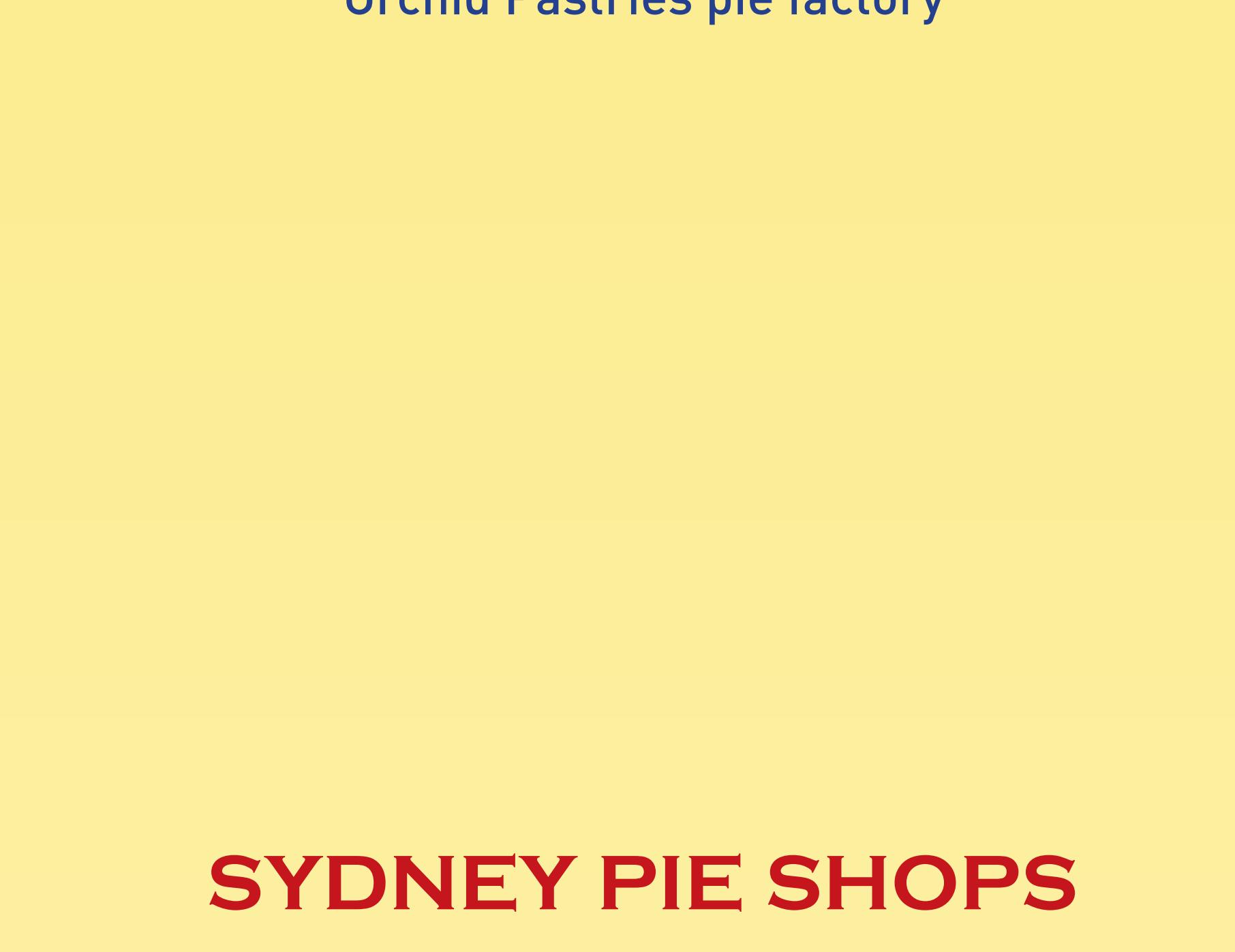
Ireland pie factory, Surry Hills



McKay and Boys pie factory



Scotts pie factory, Redfern

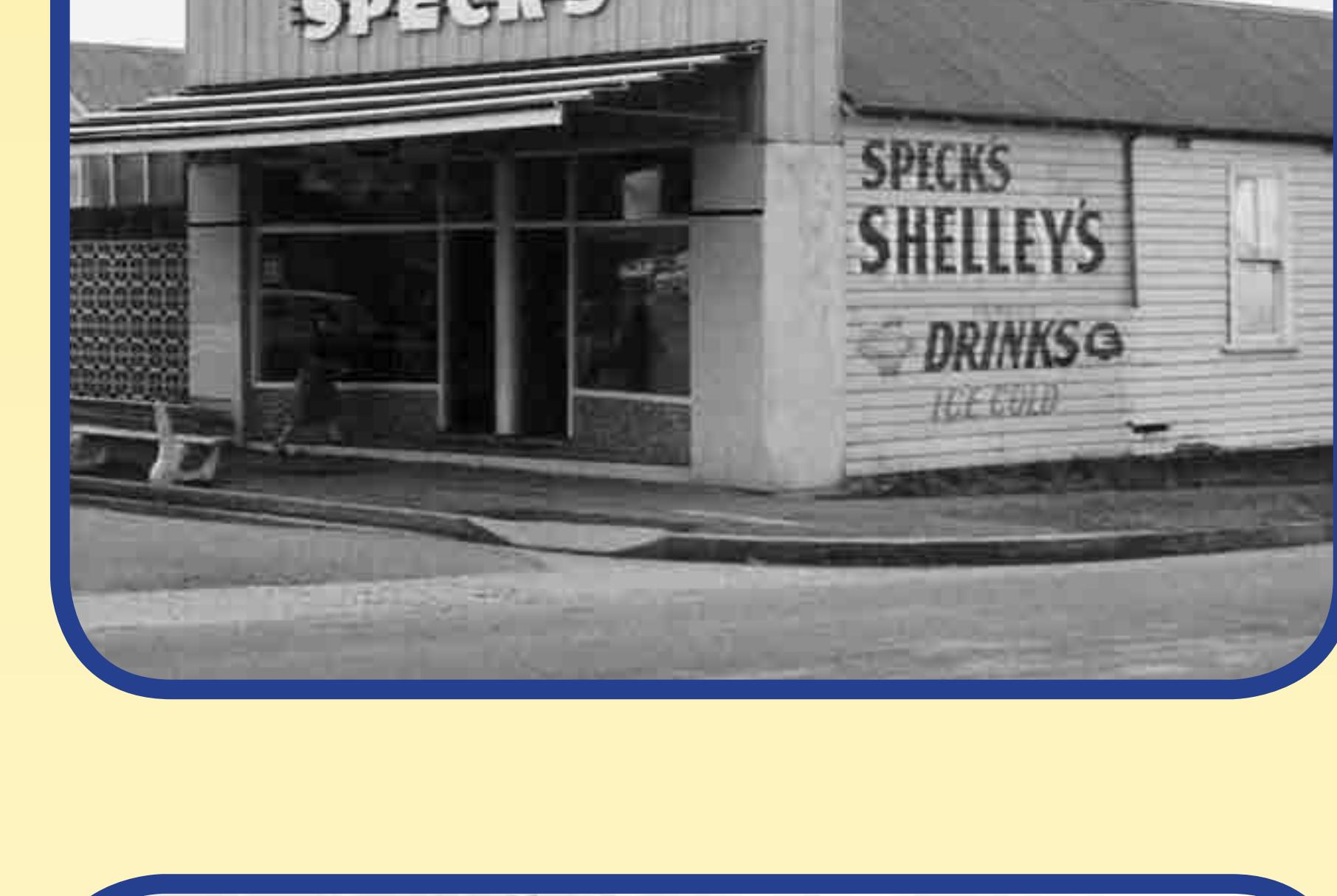
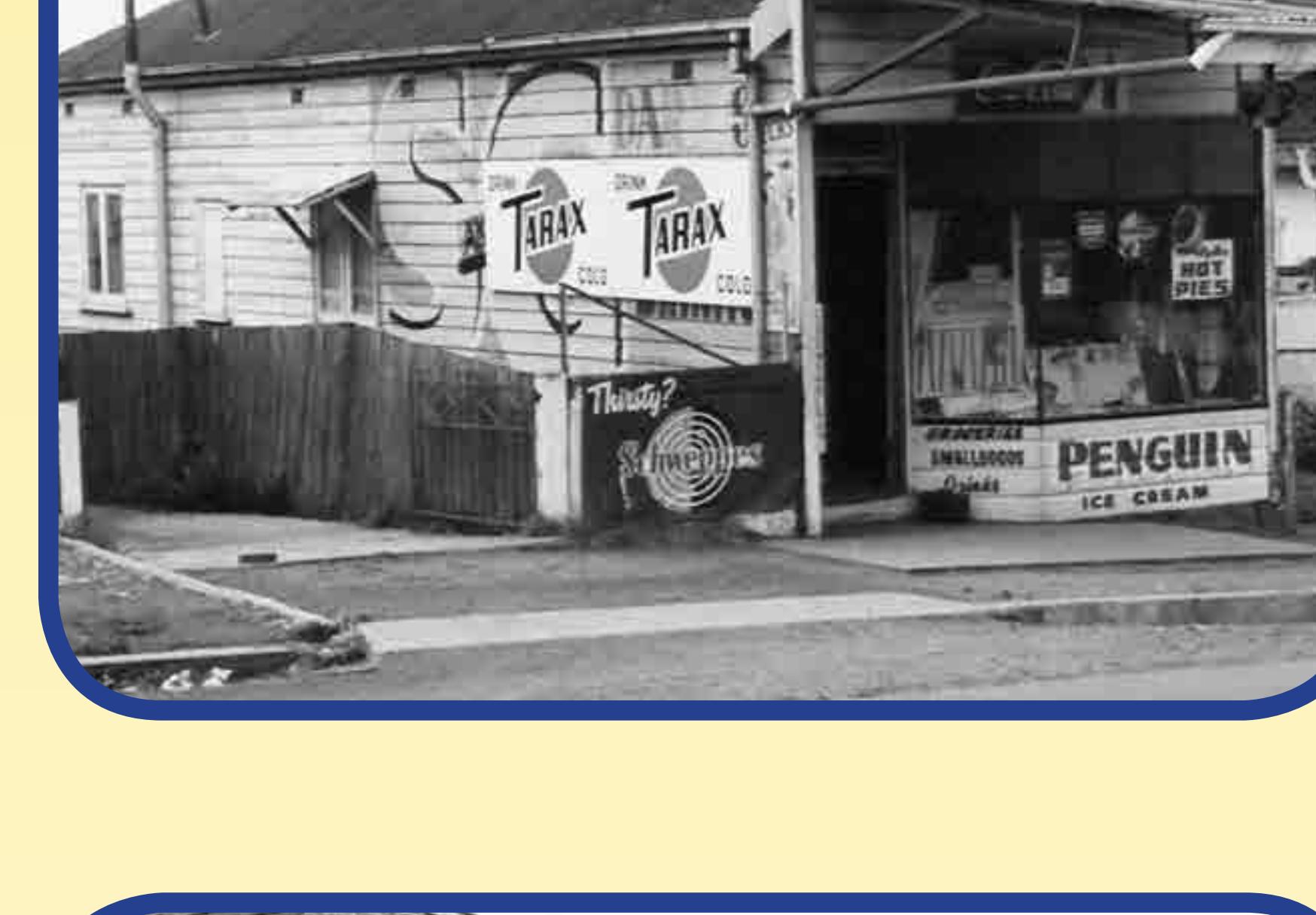
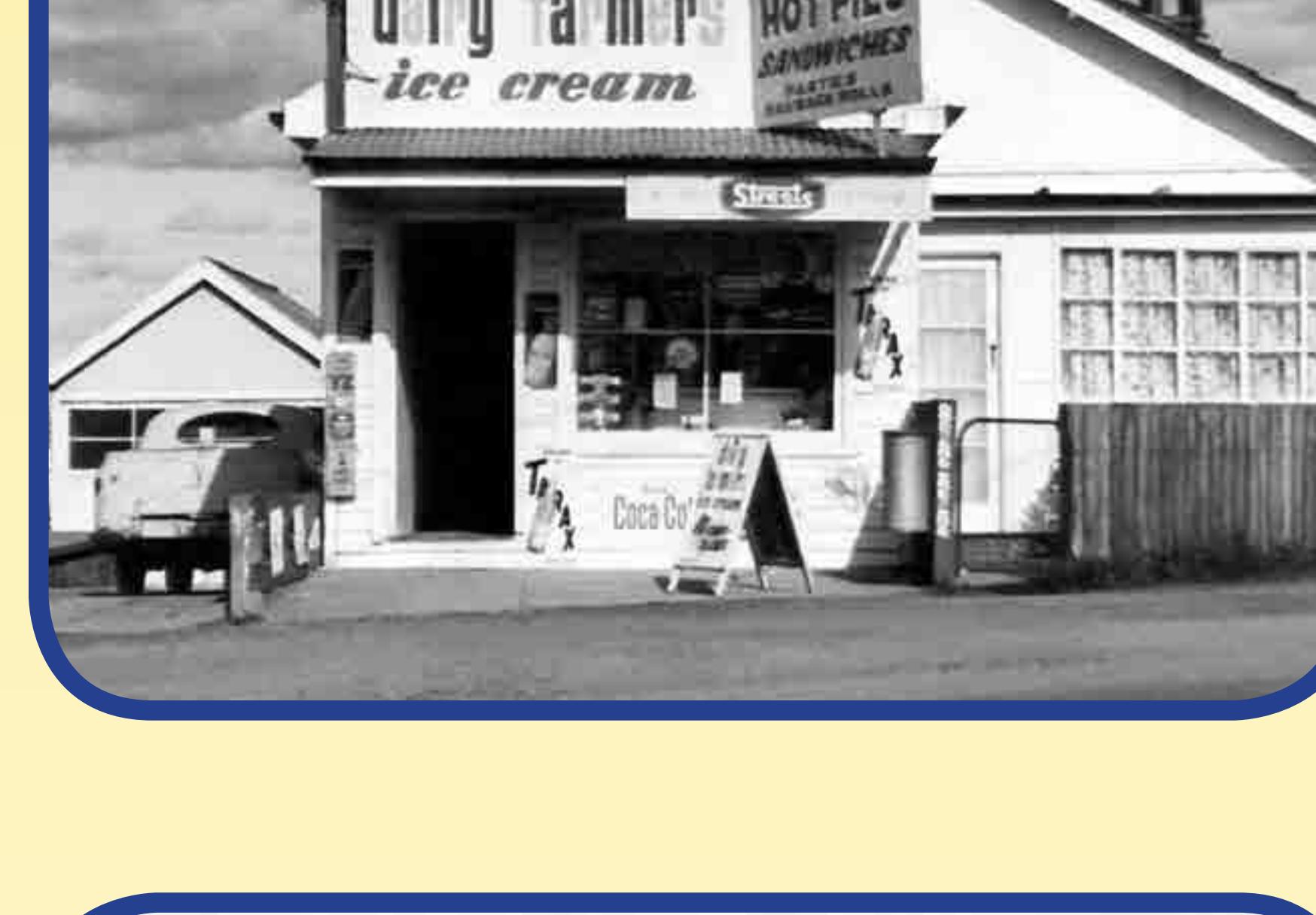


Orchid Pastries pie factory

SMALLER PIE-MAKERS

There were several smaller pie-makers in Sydney in the 1960s, the largest of which was McKay and Boys at Granville. They baked around 1.5 million pies per year. Not one of these smaller companies is still in business.

SYDNEY PIE SHOPS



▲ Photos from the Unilever Australia Pty Ltd M. P. Project Report, D. K. Williamson, 1963

▼ Each of the major Sydney pie-makers owned a fleet of up to a hundred vans for daily delivery of fresh pies to the Sydney area.*





In 1967, Sydney's oldest pie-making company, Sargent's, was sold to Scotts Provisions. Scotts also purchased Irelands, becoming 'Scotts and Irelands'. It concentrated its operations at the Irelands site at Cleveland Avenue, Surry Hills, selling fresh pies and cakes. The Sargent's brand fell out of use.

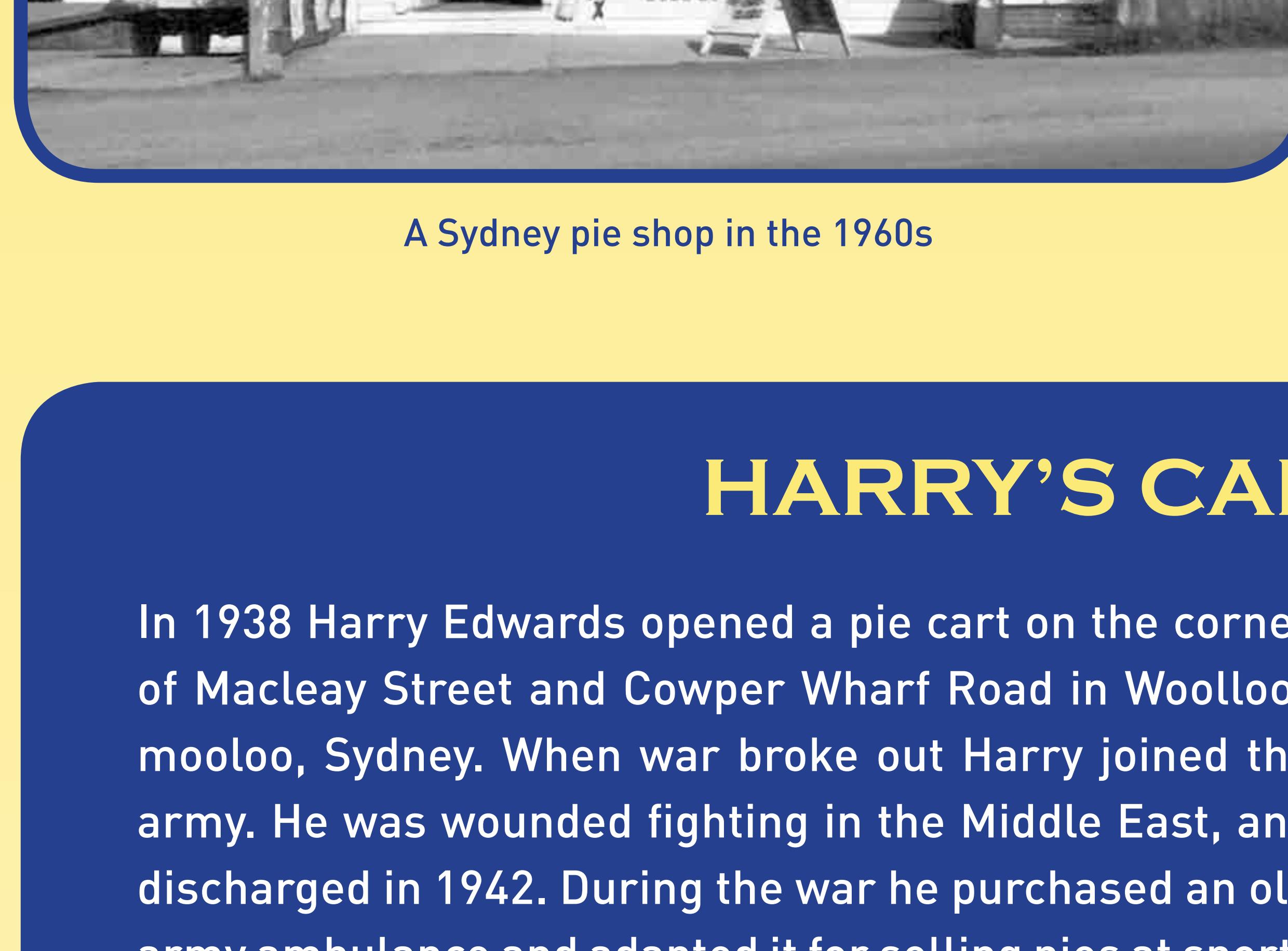
Scotts and Irelands was sold to an innovative Australian owner in 1978. A period of major expansion began. A new factory equipped with modern technology was established at Smithfield. Production changed from fresh to frozen pies for sale mainly in supermarkets, not in local pie shops.

Ten years later manufacturing moved again to a new factory at Colyton and the company's name was changed back to Sargent's. In 1992 Sargent's Pty Ltd purchased the Australian Big Ben pie business and became by far the largest pie maker in Sydney, having absorbed Sydney's four largest pie-makers.

Besides Sargent's at Colyton, there are two other companies making pies on an industrial scale in Sydney; Hannah's at Ultimo and Garlo's at St Peters. Hannah's supplies and owns Harry's Café de Wheels which now has ten retail stores. It also wholesales pies to other customers, some outside NSW. The largest part of Garlo's business is selling to supermarkets in NSW and interstate.

Since pie companies now distribute all their pies frozen, they can readily supply remote markets. This has resulted in Sydney pie-makers delivering interstate, and in pie-makers from other states entering the Sydney market.

Automation of production has made it practical for small suppliers to provide a range of different pies. Supermarkets now typically stock pies from more than one manufacturer, often from different states, and in several varieties.



A Sydney pie shop in the 1960s



As the pie business changed, supermarkets became the primary market

HARRY'S CAFÉ DE WHEELS

In 1938 Harry Edwards opened a pie cart on the corner of Macleay Street and Cowper Wharf Road in Woolloomooloo, Sydney. When war broke out Harry joined the army. He was wounded fighting in the Middle East, and discharged in 1942. During the war he purchased an old army ambulance and adapted it for selling pies at sporting events around Sydney.



Harry's Café de Wheels c.1960. Harry is serving on right

Photo courtesy of Fairfax Media

In 1945 Harry converted a caravan to a pie cart. He parked it outside Garden Island Dockyard at Woolloomooloo. It had wheels because a council regulation required food carts to move a minimum of one foot per day. When the police tried to move Harry's café on, the wheels mysteriously disappeared!

Despite negotiating a permanent spot outside the dockyard, council harassment continued and the van moved up and down Cowper Street over the next few years.

By the time Alex Kuronya acquired the business in 1975, the café was famous and visited by international celebrities. In 1981 the café was forced to move to the foot of McElhone Steps on Cowper Wharf Road. To meet health regulations, the van was replaced and the original café was donated to the Powerhouse Museum.

Initially Harry's pies were supplied by Sargent's, then McKay and Boys. After Michael Hannah bought Harry's in 1988, Hannah's Ultimo factory supplied the pies.

In recent years, Hannah has opened a series of franchised pie shops bearing the name Harry's Café de Wheels.

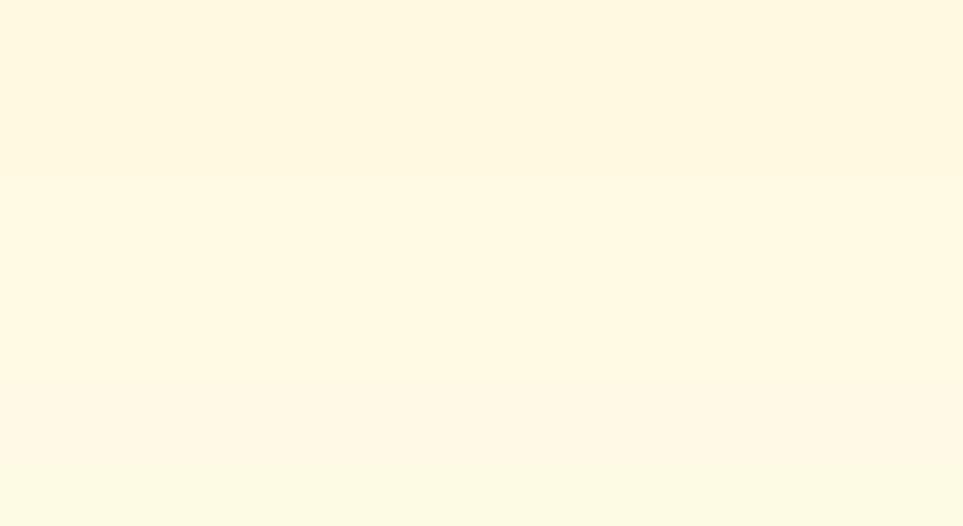
MEAT PIES FOR EXPORT

In 1994, Vili's, an Adelaide pie-maker, commenced exporting pies to Britain, and later to other parts of Europe and in Asia. In 2006 it appointed an agent to sell its pies in the US. It sold 4,000 meat pies to mostly Australian fans at an exhibition AFL match in Los Angeles.

Also in 1994, Australians Mark and Wendy Allen, began Pacific Products in Marietta, Georgia, making and selling meat pies throughout the US. After the closure of Pacific Products, Mark Allen, with his business partner Neville Steele, opened the Australian Bakery Café, also in Marietta, which ships frozen pies across the US.

In 1998, The Australian Meat Pie Company opened in Seattle making and distributing frozen meat pies in the US.

Following the Australia-US free trade agreement that came into effect in January 2006, Patties announced that it had secured an American distributor for its meat pies and had shipped its first container of pies.



The Australian Trade Commissioner in Los Angeles said that the main obstacles to selling Australian meat pies in the US were the American consumers' lack of familiarity with meat pies and then the sheer scale of the American market place.

Another Australian meat pie manufacturer, Garlo's, announced in 2014 that it was about to make kosher pies that will be distributed through supermarkets in Sydney. The company says that this is the first step in a plan to sell to an international market.



MAKING MEAT PIES IN VICTORIA

Dutch pastry cook produces Aussie hot meat pies

Photo: Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, courtesy of National Archives of Australia

In 1939 Leslie McClure opened a cafe in Bendigo, Victoria, named Dad and Dave, where he made and sold pies. By the end of World War II he owned a string of cafes and milk bars.

He initially made Four'n Twenty pies at Bendigo in 1947, and produced them at the Showgrounds in Melbourne in 1949. In 1953 he opened a factory in Ascot Vale. He doubled the floor space in 1955 and again in 1959. By this time, the business produced 12,000 pies an hour, delivered by a fleet of 98 vans.

When McClure sold Four'n Twenty to Petersville Australia in 1960, it was said to be the largest pie-maker in the world.

An American food company, Simplot, acquired Four'n Twenty in 1995. Simplot sold Four'n Twenty Pies to its major competitor, Patties Foods. According to a Melbourne Age report, Simplot's reasons for selling were that meat pies were out of fashion, and unhealthy and that the business was not very profitable.

ACCORDING TO A MELBOURNE AGE REPORT, SIMPLOT'S REASONS FOR SELLING WERE THAT MEAT PIES WERE OUT OF FASHION, AND UNHEALTHY AND THAT THE BUSINESS WAS NOT VERY PROFITABLE.

In 1966, Peter and Annie Rijs, immigrants from the Netherlands, bought Patties Cake Shop in the Victorian town of Lakes Entrance. The business did well and they opened a new bakery at Lakes Entrance in 1974, and in 1985 they acquired the Sunicrust Bakery at nearby Bairnsdale.

Production was moved from Lakes Entrance to a new factory in Bairnsdale in 1986. All six of the sons were working in the family business. The factory had a major expansion in 1998.

In 2003 Patties purchased Four'n Twenty Pies and Herbert Adams, bakers and pastry-cooks, from Simplot, and moved the manufacture of Four'n Twenty pies to Bairnsdale. In 2007 it again expanded the Bairnsdale factory.

Patties Foods Ltd was listed as a public company in 2006. It is Australia's largest maker of meat pies and the Bairnsdale pie factory is the largest in the world.

WHAT'S IN A MEAT PIE?

Food Standards Australia and New Zealand (FSANZ) sets out the requirements for meat products.

The Standard requires that a meat pie must contain a minimum of 25 per cent of meat flesh i.e. 'the skeletal muscle of the carcass of any buffalo, camel, cattle, deer, goat, hare, pig, poultry, rabbit or sheep, slaughtered other than in a wild state (i.e. not bush meat), plus any at-

tached animal rind, fat, connective tissue, nerve, blood and blood vessels'.

FSANZ requires that each meat pie must have the ingredients listed on the label in the order of the percentage of each one in the pie. A typical label might read 'Ingredients: water, flour, meat, margarine, thickener, vegetable protein, salt, spices, baking powder'.

PIE MAKING EQUIPMENT

Mass production of pies calls for equipment with huge capacity. Imagine giant mixers, rollers that churn out metres of pastry per hour, mincing machines that grind through hundreds of kilos of ingredients and banks of enormous ovens. Big manufacturing pie companies such as Sargents rely on this type of capacity to ensure their production targets.

Australians also consume vast numbers of 'gourmet' pies. One Australian company manufactures a range of pie-making machines suitable for 'high-end' takeaway pies.

LINDSAY PIE-MAKING EQUIPMENT

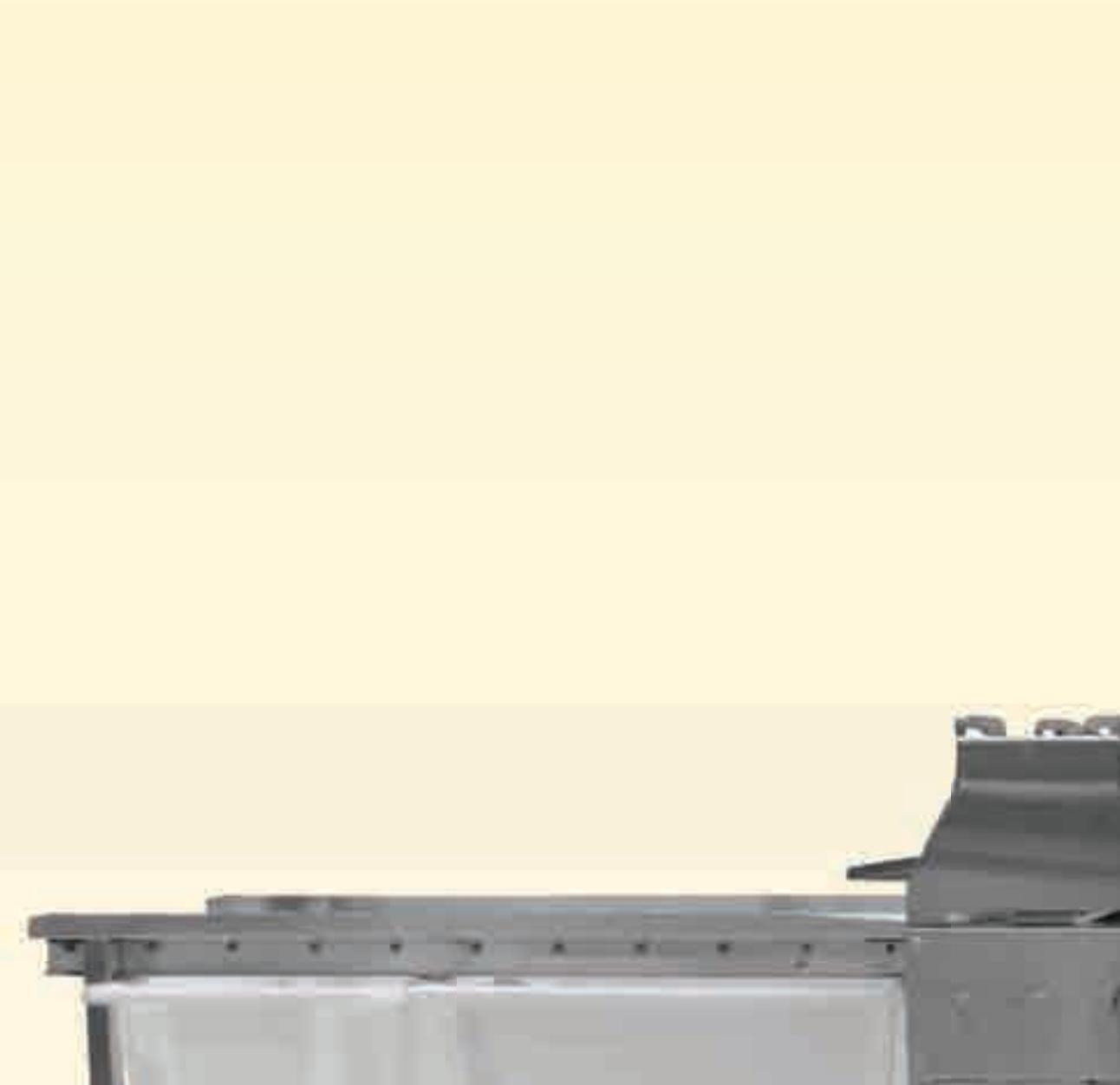
Tom Lindsay has been making pie-making equipment in Sydney for thirty years. His family company produces a range of automated pie-making machines that are designed to make

quick changes from one size and shape of pie to another and to handle various fillings. The capacity of their machines ranges from 500–1,000 pies per hour to larger machines making up to 4,000 lunch pies per hour.

Lindsay has supplied machines to pie-makers in all parts of Australia and exports world-wide. The company is the founding sponsor of the 'Official Great Aussie Pie Competition' which makes annual awards for meat and other kinds of pies made by pastry-cooks throughout Australia.

MAC PAN AUSTRALIA

Mac Pan Australia is a Western Australian company that supplies and services pie-making and bakery equipment, including pie making machines from Mac Pan Italia.



A mincer grinds through tonnes of meat destined for Sargents pies

Photo courtesy of Sargents



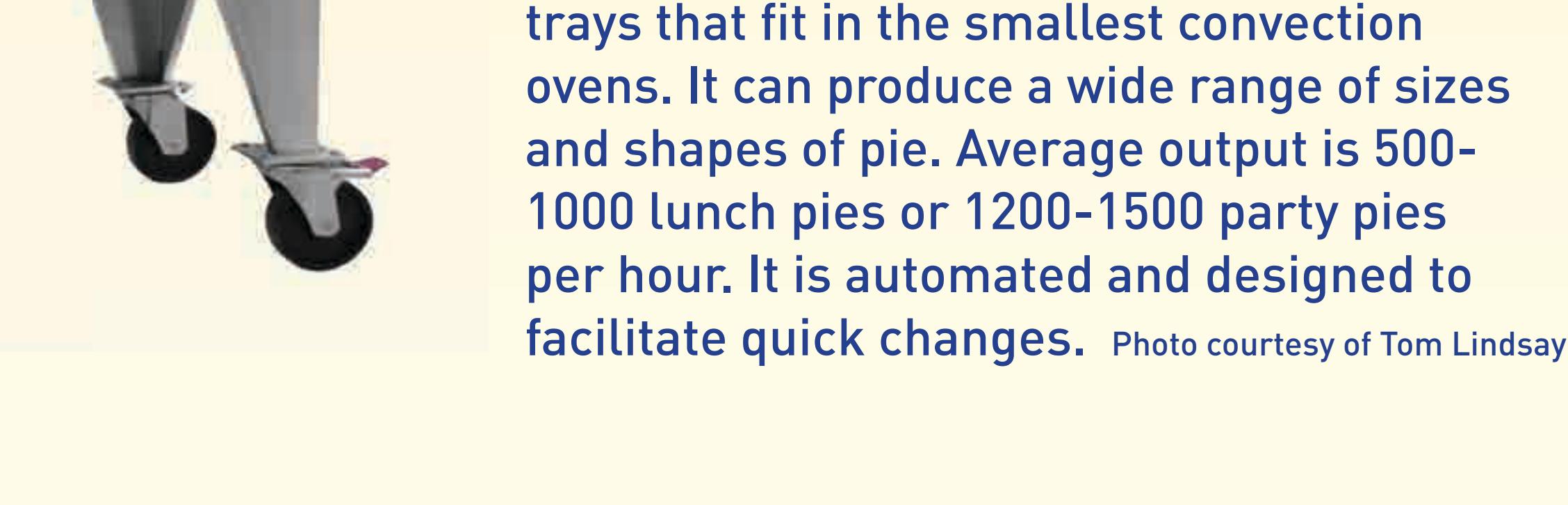
A giant mixer at Sargents pie factory

Photo courtesy of Sargents



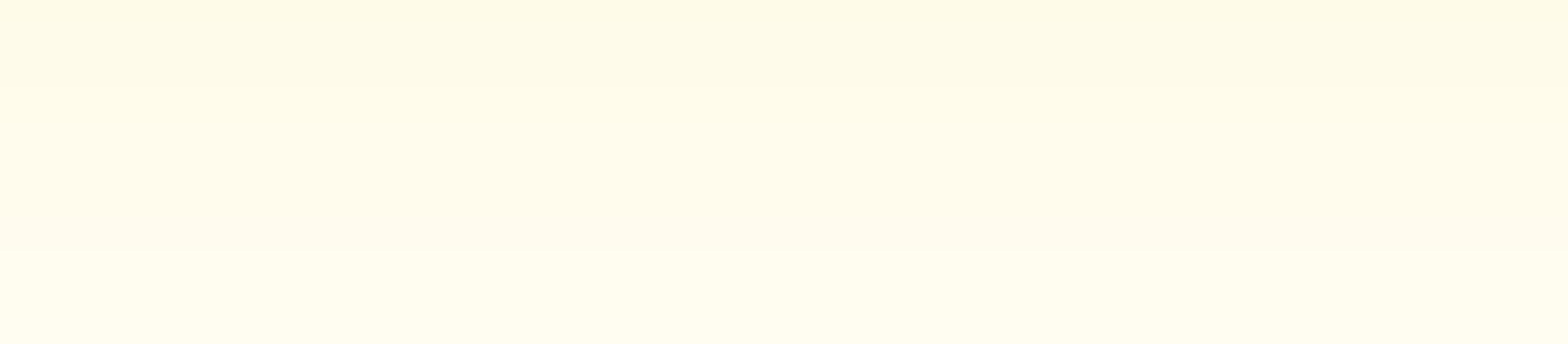
Women process cooked pies at Sargents

Photo courtesy of Sargents



Tom Lindsay making meat pies at the Sydney Royal Easter Show. Photo courtesy of Tom Lindsay

This Lil' Oz pie-making machine, the smallest of Lindsay's Simple Simon range, is designed for small bakeries. It takes small trays that fit the smallest convection ovens. It can produce a wide range of sizes and shapes of pie. Average output is 500–1,000 lunch pies or 1,200–1,500 party pies per hour. It is automated to facilitate quick changes. Photo courtesy of Tom Lindsay





THE MEAT PIE CONTINUUM

In Britain of medieval times meat pies were an important part of the diet and culture. Australia and New Zealand have inherited that tradition and enhanced it to the point where the meat pie has become the national fast food.

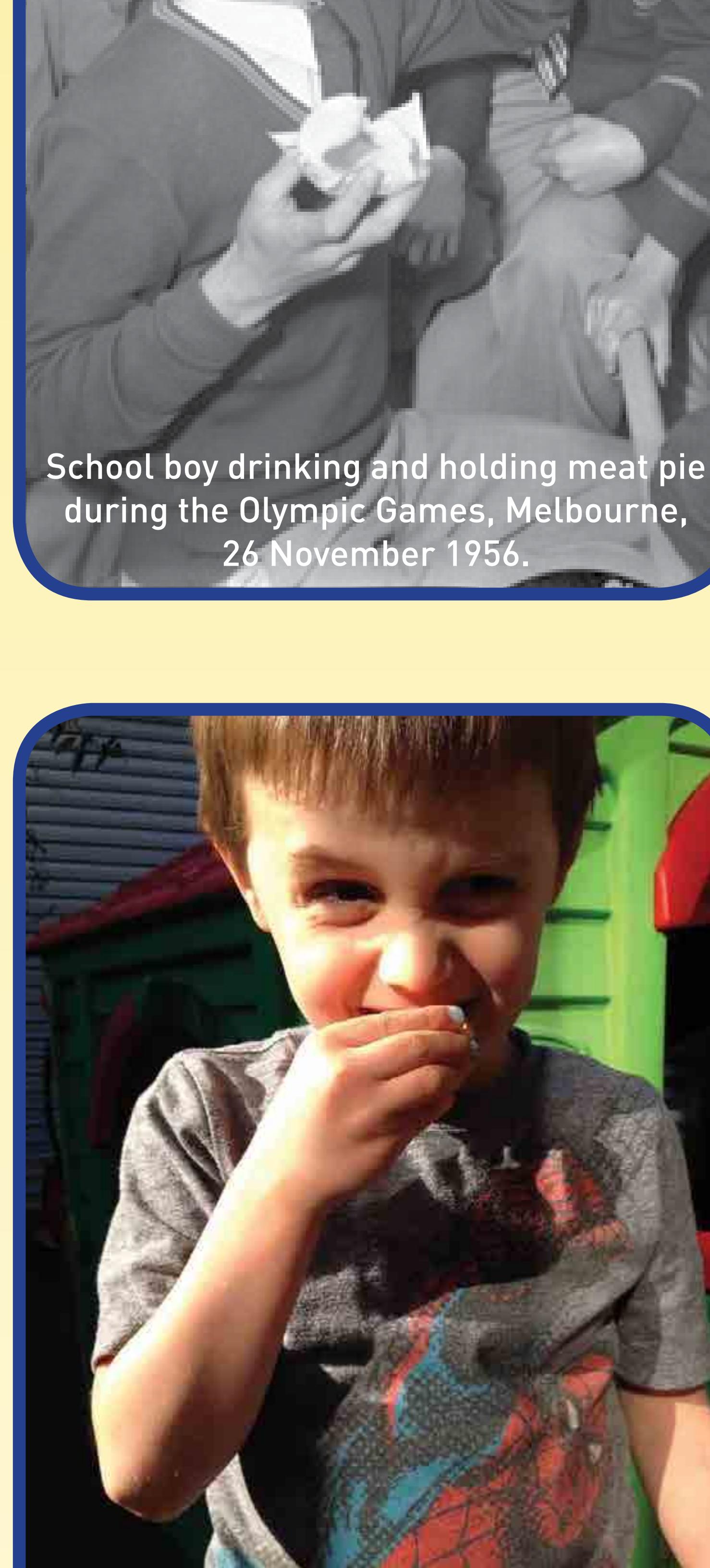
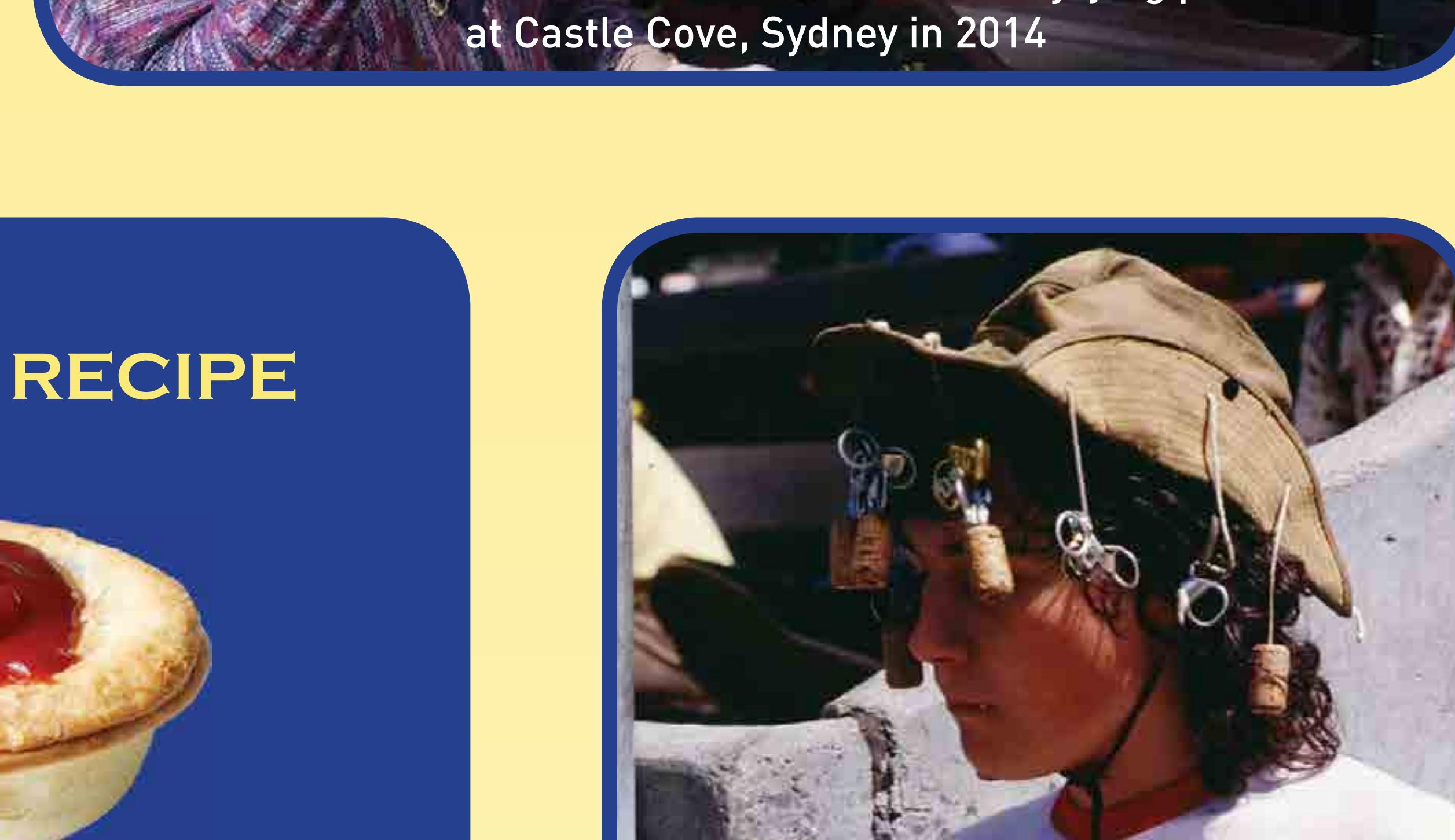
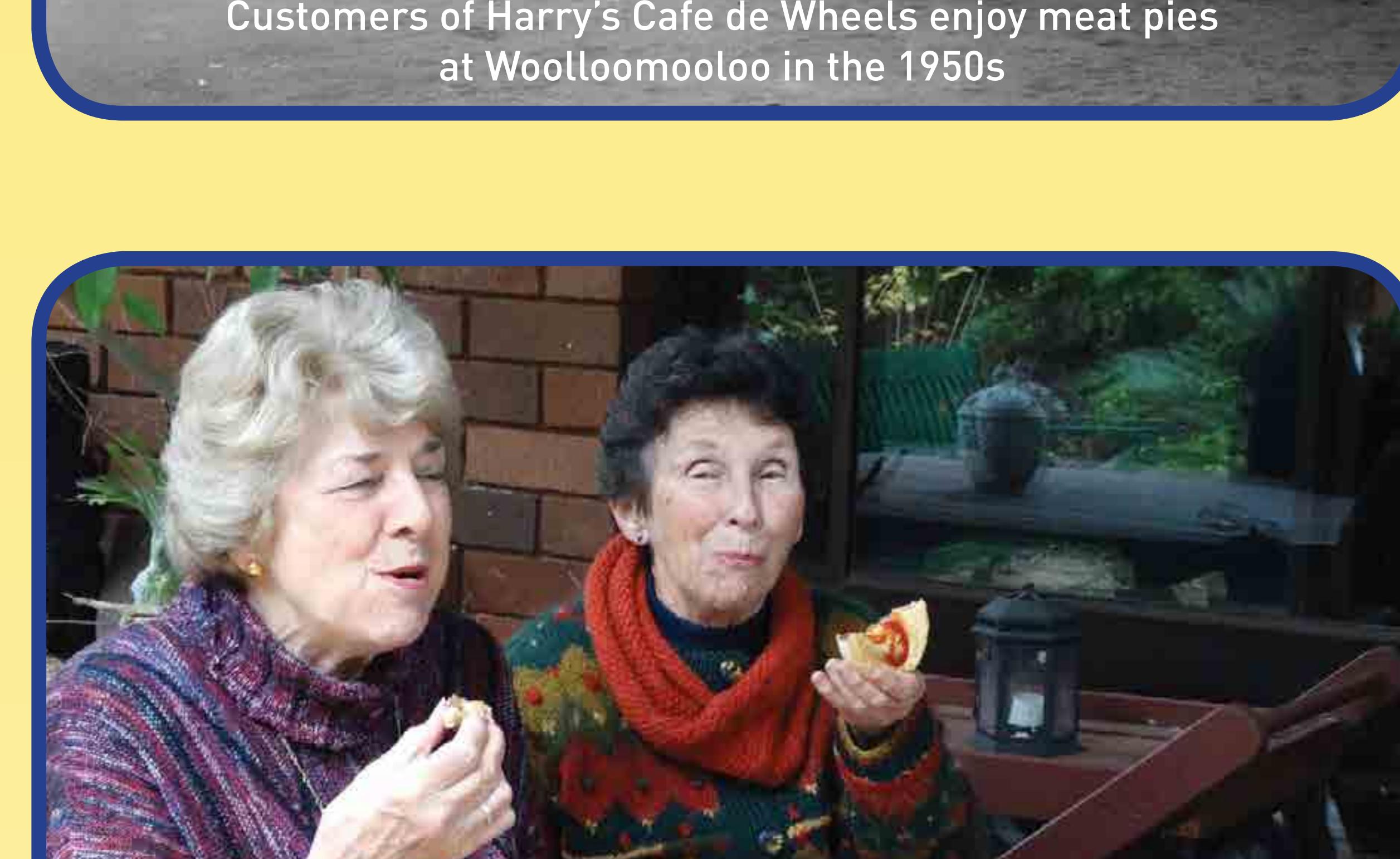
In Australia in the 19th century, pie stalls were prominent in the Australian capital cities and many pastry-cooks and bakeries specialised in pies.

The 20th century saw the introduction of Australian pie-making on an industrial scale, and in the years following World War II,

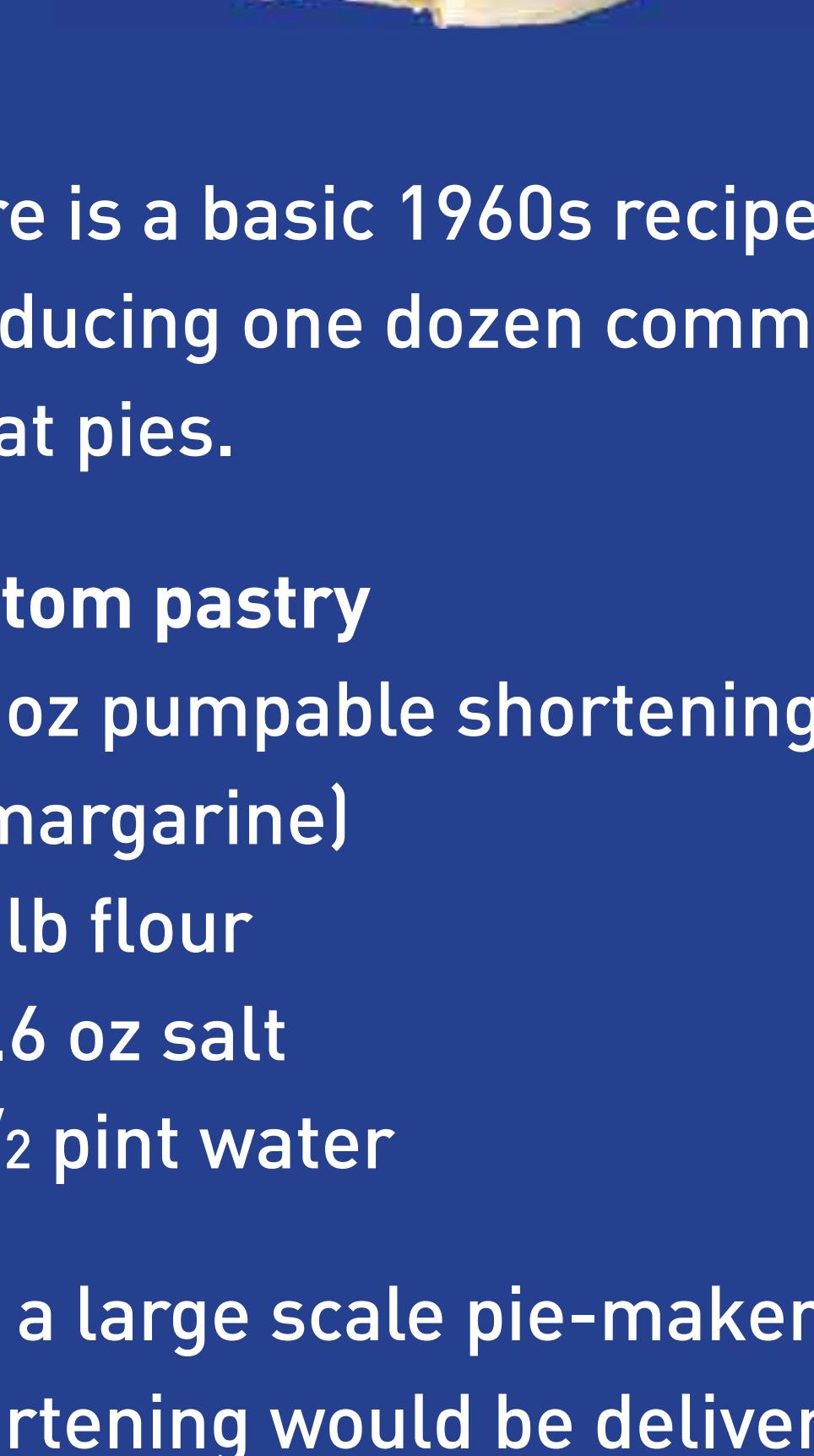
capital cities had fleets of vans delivering fresh meat pies.

In the latter part of the twentieth century, refrigeration revolutionised the meat pie industry, and today almost all meat pies remain frozen until the point of retail sale. Pie manufacturers can now distribute their frozen products nationally.

Pie-making is now largely automated for large and small pie-makers. This has assisted pie-makers to quickly make changes on their production lines and economically produce pies in a range of different shapes, sizes and with a variety of fillings.



MEAT PIE RECIPE



Here is a basic 1960s recipe for producing one dozen commercial meat pies.

Bottom pastry

- 5 oz pumpable shortening (margarine)
- 1 lb flour
- 0.6 oz salt
- 1/2 pint water

For a large scale pie-maker the shortening would be delivered in a tanker.

Top pastry

- 6 oz Pastrex (edible oil and fat)
- 12 oz flour
- 0.4 oz salt
- 1/4 pint water

Pastrex is a mixture of animal and vegetable fats and oils specially formulated for pie-making.

Meat filling

- 1 lb meat (beef, mutton, lamb)
- 0.5 oz seasoning
- 1 pint water

