

From Wool Stores to Apartment Blocks

From the 1860s, Sydney rivalled Melbourne and Geelong as an export hub and service centre. Wool arrived in Darling Harbour by rail in the 1870s, and was stored nearby in Pymont and Ultimo. Ornate stores flourished until the 1970s when Yennora displaced Darling Harbour as the main centre for handling wool. Many of these solid and palatial buildings were renovated, often as apartment blocks.

The structure of wool stores was determined in part by their function. Wool was baled in a standard cubic shape – four feet by two and a half by two and a half – so each stack of bales had to accommodate that shape. Hoisting the bales to upper floors needed sturdy lifts; and access to the stacks required wide aisles and natural light. Wool (especially lanolin) is so flammable that the structure was carefully designed to eliminate open flame.

The Maritime Services Board estimated that twenty wool stores were built here between the 1880s and the 1930s. By 1910, 1.5 million bales were auctioned and handled in Pymont and Ultimo.

The giant buildings were designed to impress. Edmund Blacket designed the Mort wool store (1864) like a Venetian palazzo to suggest a link from renaissance merchant princes. These structures proclaimed the wealth and confidence their owners. The depression of the 1890s brought this flamboyant era to a close, and buildings designed after federation were more obviously functional.

The Goldsborough Mort Wool store, built in 1883 at 350-384 Harris Street, could store 50,000 bales. Its 5 stories were extended by three more in 1924. After it burned down in 1935 it was rebuilt in 1936 as Elders GM No 1.

Hill Clark & Co Wool store, built in 1888 at 24 Allen Street, bounded by Pymont and Murray Streets, became J H Geddes wool store. It is now used for offices.

Winchcombe Carson No 2 Store, built soon after 1895, on the corner of Fig and Jones Streets, was demolished in 1985 by the Department of Main Roads.

The F. L. Barker Wool Store. The firm was established in 1874. In 1892 F. L. Barker commissioned Arthur Blacket to design a Wool Store. Approval for the building at 137 Pymont Street was given next year and building continued until 1894. The Store was leased to the wool brokers Hill Clark & Co. from 1895 until 1923. From 1923 until 1951 the Store was owned as a wool store by William Haughton and Company. From 1951 until 1973 it was owned by Waite and Bull, commercial printers.

Winchcombe Carson No 1 Store built their first large building in 1893 at 28-40 Wattle Street. When it was enlarged in 1910 it could accommodate 56,000 bales. Today the building is the Ultimo Trade Centre.

The John Bridge wool store was built in about 1895 on 5 acres bounded by MacArthur, Jones and Wattle Streets. This replaced earlier premises next to Darling Harbour and next to the railway station). When the company failed in about 1917 and the building was bought as **The Farmers & Graziers No 1 Store**. A sixth and a seventh floor were added in 1924. The structure was reconfigured as Dalgety Square apartments in 1998.

Commonwealth Wool and Produce Store No 1 between Jones, Wattle, Fig and Quarry Streets was built as a five storey structure. Two storeys were added in 1911, and later became the **Elder Smith Goldsborough Mort No 3** woolstore. For some years it was leased to the Commonwealth Wool Corporation.

Pitt Son & Badgery Woolstore No 1, at 320 to 384 Harris Street, with Allen Street frontage, was built in 1906 with five storeys, and operated into the 1970s.

New Zealand Loan and Mercantile Store, built in 1906 between 330-379 Wattle Street, bounded by Jones Street, William Henry Street and Bulwara Road, was destroyed by fire in 1947 and again in the 1980s, but survives today as The Hub.

Australian Mortgage Land and Finance Co No 1 woolstore, built in 1909 between Pymont Street and Bullecourt Lane, was five storeys high until 1925 when two more were added. After a fire in 1992, the site was cleared and now accommodates Bullecourt Place and the Ian Thorpe Aquatic Centre.

Country Producers Store built in 1912 between Bulwara Road and Quarry Street, also burned down in 1978. The site is now occupied by Burlinson Gardens apartments.

Shute, Bell, Badgery and Lumby Woolstore at 94 – 136 Harris Street, was a seven storey structure built in 1919. It was reconfigured for Thomson Reuters, and again in 2016 to accommodate WeWork cooperative working space.

Pitt Son and Badgery No 2 was built in 1921 on the Pymont Street site of an earlier woolstore owned by Hill, Clark & Co.

Farmers and Graziers No 2 woolstore, the last of its kind, was constructed in 1935-6 at 492 Jones Street. It survives, largely intact, as Kennard's self-storage.