

## JOE LYONS'S PRESENTATION CLOCK – A WELCOME RETURN

Joe Lyons's presentation clock was returned to Home Hill on Saturday 26 April, 2008. This presentation piece was presented to Joe Lyons on the opening of the new General Motors – Holden factory at Fishermen's Bend, Melbourne on November 5th, 1936

On November 5th 1936, Joe Lyons, Prime Minister of Australia opened the new General Motors – Holden factory at Fishermen's Bend, Melbourne. To mark this occasion he was presented with an inscribed mantle clock which has now been acquired by the National Trust for display at Home Hill, Devonport.



When opened, the Fishermen's Bend factory was considered to be the largest plant for the manufacture of motor vehicles in Australia and a major addition to Australia's manufacturing industries. The factory housed a range of activities including a commercial vehicle assembly line for all of Australia and motor vehicle assembly line for the Victorian and Tasmanian markets. Coupled with its Woodville plant in South Australia it underpinned General Motors – Holden's position as the largest vehicle producer in Australia.

The opening by the Prime Minister Joe Lyons of the Fishermen's Bend factory is perhaps the single most significant public event to mark a series of key government policy decisions by the Lyons government that had a profound effect on the history of Australia. These decisions involved fundamental changes to the nations economic, foreign affairs and defence policies.

Guiding Australia through the effects of the world depression in the early 1930's the Lyons government recognised that secondary industry had to replace Australia's economic reliance upon primary industries and their dependence upon British markets in particular. This was a fundamental shift in policy from the previous Bruce government who considered that Australia's future was as a producer of agricultural products.

The emphasis given to secondary industry by the Lyons government was reflected in the discussions commenced in 1935 with General Motors – Holden about the manufacture of complete vehicles in Australia. This direct approach to the largest and most technologically advanced manufacturer in Australia but which was American owned was a turning point in economic policy. It was in direct contrast to previous Australian governments which had persevered with trying to attract British vehicle manufacturers to establish production facilities in Australia since the early 1920's.

Although not to bear fruit until 1948 with the manufacture of Australia's first car the Holden the initiative reflected the Lyons government's awareness of the technological lead of the American automobile industry. At the same time the Lyons government had for the same reasons, also agreed to the import of more advanced American made civil aircraft by Holyman Airways despite strong British opposition.

The importance of the automobile industry to Australia's defence capacity was becoming increasingly recognised both within and beyond government by 1936. Press reports of the opening of the Fishermen's Bend factory make direct mention of the contribution it would make to the nation's defence. While other reports at the same time document the increasing use of motor vehicles by the armed forces in particular the army and the air force. Within government the existence of a viable automobile industry was seen as a necessary precursor to the establishment of an aircraft industry.

In 1936 the need for an Australian aircraft manufacturing capacity saw the establishment of the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation a syndicate of several prominent Australian companies including General Motors – Holden. Again this was despite considerable British Government opposition to the presence of the American owned company's participation. The Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation's manufacturing plant was to be located at Fishermen's Bend near that of General Motors – Holden which was opened by Joe Lyons.

Location: [Home Hill \(click here for details\)](#)