



Arnott's Biscuits Ltd managing director Paul Bourke . . . "From a sentimental point of view, I suppose it was a difficult decision"

End of a local Arnott's looks

TAKE a drive on the M4 Motorway near Homebush or a train on the Hornsby via Strathfield railway line and the presence of Arnott's Biscuits is hard to miss.

The flashing neon SAO sign, the delicious smells and imposing presence of the 90-year-old Homebush factory demand attention.

But nearby residents and passers-by only have another 18 months to wonder

Another industrial icon, Arnott's Biscuits, is set to disappear from the inner west landscape. But as MICHAEL BRUNING reports, the company still wants to maintain a corporate presence in Homebush. Photos by JULIAN ANDREWS

whether the wafting air of excitement at a particular moment means Jatz or Mint Slice are on the baking line.

In December last year, Arnott's finally made the

long expected announcement it would close its historic Homebush factory, going ahead with a plan worth more than \$200 million to relocate production west to

Huntingwood, near Blacktown.

Publicity shyness is a trademark of the company since its controversial takeover by American multi-national Campbell Soup Co in 1992 and Arnott's Biscuits Ltd uses globe-trotting managing director Paul Bourke as its only media spokesman.

But last month in an interview with the *Weekly*, Mr Bourke said Arnott's was still going to maintain a presence in Homebush by

Bold move pays off

THE Arnott's move to Huntingwood in Sydney's west is probably a far cry from the brave decision made nearly 90 years ago to build the company's new factory at Homebush.

Founder William Arnott began his first bakery business in 1865 in Newcastle and expansion of the family-owned company continued rapidly even after his death in 1901.

In January 1906 Arnott's bought 6½ acres (2.6ha) of land on the western side of the main northern railway line but its plans to build a new Sydney factory were regarded as a "folly".

Critics said there was too much land for a biscuit factory and it was too far for workers to travel.

But the company pressed ahead and by early 1908 production started and the company had no problem in finding

eager workers in the district.

The Homebush factory could not keep up with demand and expanded to the western side of George St. By 1933 the number of employees peaked at 2500 and annual production exceeded 10,250 tons (10,455 tonnes).

Discipline on the production lines was strict in the 1920s where women were not allowed to talk. Workers would gather in the horse paddock (today's car park) after work to fight each other.

Horses made way for the famous red delivery trucks in the late 1920s.

Today Arnott's Homebush is the largest biscuit factory in the southern hemisphere and 64 of the 150 or so biscuit varieties are made on the 5.5ha Homebush site.

Managing director Paul Bourke said the Homebush factory had an output of

more than 30,000 tonnes annually and produced major sellers such as SAO, Jatz, Tim Tam, Mint Slice and Monte Carlo.

It has 11 ovens while its Huntingwood replacement will have only four. But they will be much larger ovens with space for a fifth to maintain capacity for the next 20 years.

Huntingwood will have the capacity to produce 45,000 tonnes of biscuits per year.

The Homebush factory covers three floors. The bottom level has an ingredients preparations section and processing department where icing, chocolate coating and cream filling are made. The middle level has a mixing room, bakehouse and wafer and packaging departments. The top floor has packaging facilities, office space and work-