

**GM-HOLDEN's HISTORICAL WOODVILLE TOOLROOM
IT's HISTORY, MILESTONES, CAPABILITIES & SUCCESS STORIES**

The name Holden had its origins back in a leather and saddlery manufacturing business in Grenfell Street Adelaide in 1856, owned and operated by James Alexander Holden. In 1885 Holden & Frost developed and expanded their leather business, and in the early 1890's began trimming automotive bodies imported from overseas. By 1917, Holden and Frost were manufacturing the first Australian built motor bodies, and subsequently winning contracts from several automotive brands. The company was re-named Holden Motor Body Builders (HMBB).

Within six years their Adelaide premises became inadequate, and in 1923 a 40 acre site at Woodville in South Australia was selected and progressively established to take over motor body production. Woodville was chosen for its position adjacent to major road and rail corridors, approximately half way between the City of Adelaide and the Port of Adelaide.

The Woodville Plant commenced in 1924, and soon expanded to cover 67 acres, and by 1931 nearly 70% of the output of Holden Motor Body Builders was being used by GM (Aust). Bodies manufactured included, Cadillac, Buick, LaSalle, Oldsmobile, Pontiac, Chevrolet, and Vauxhall cars; and Oldsmobile and Bedford Light Trucks. HMBB became the largest vehicle body building business in the British Empire. It was during this period that the Woodville Toolroom began to emerge as a key resource for the Company.

Ultimately GM Australia and HMBB decided to consolidate their interests and merged to become General Motor's-Holden Ltd in 1931, and further expanded the Woodville site to more than triple its original size. The Woodville Plant was the head office of General Motor's-Holden Ltd up until 1933, when it was decided to transfer this role to Victoria.

By 1935 there were 7000 people on the payroll of GM-H in Australia, with the Die and Fixture Department continuing to develop the Woodville Toolroom as a renowned facility for being able to take body blueprints and produce body tooling and construction methods unique for Australia.

Expert tradesmen, estimating personnel, die, fabrication & body engineering & process planners, equipment designers and draughtsman closely studied overseas designs, blueprints, illustrations and specifications to facilitate the evolution of the tools and equipment for the manufacture of vehicle panels and bodies. Every detail would be re-designed afresh for Australia, using ingenuity, innovation and established skills to transform designs to models, and reshape those models until the desired outcomes were achieved, knowing the equipment that was available to progress manufacture of the required dies, jigs and assembly fixtures.

The Woodville Toolroom demonstrated its significant technical and innovative skills during World War II, and was a major player in the manufacture of Australian defence needs. The GM-H organization supported the war effort, with mass production of anti-tank guns, aircraft sections, wing frames and fuel tanks, armoured military vehicles & truck bodies, marine craft, naval shells &

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torpedos, bridging pontoons, cordite presses, various bomb components, army work boots, and canvass goods including haversacks and tents.

Following the war, the Woodville Toolroom and Die & Fixture Department was responsible for the majority of the development and tooling work for the first all-Australian car body system (the Holden 48-215). All the panels, panel assemblies and bodies, were manufactured at the Woodville plant. The Woodville Toolroom provided the necessary tooling for vehicle body production purposes, together with checking fixtures and gauges for quality control. This includes the dies for over 170 stamping presses, assembly fixtures for a variety of press welders and a multitude of other weld gun and specialised tools or machines as required for "on-the-line" body construction and assembly.

In the 1960's the Woodville Toolroom was reputed to be the largest facility of its type in the southern hemisphere. In its heyday, this plant produced the dies, jigs and fixtures for a new model Holden car every two to four years, with a 'facelift' every year. This was an enormous achievement when you consider the number of major components and the number of operations which make up each part in that new vehicle. The Woodville site also boasted the largest press shop and chrome plating plant in the southern hemisphere.

Sections within the Plant 5 Toolroom included Pattern Shop and Model Rooms, Lead, Aid & Template Sections, Detailing Groups, Small, Medium and Large Machine Shops, including state of the art 'Keller Machines' (in the 1950's & 60's, these large Kellers exactly reproduce the required shape to a male or female die casting half as traced from a model or precise plaster aid. They were the forerunners to CAD-CAM techniques). Small, Medium, Large, & Blank Die Manufacturing Sections, supported by Die Try-out Sections including appropriate try-out presses and welding equipment, Jig, Fixture & Weld Gun Shops, Die Maintenance, Pilot Room, Heat Treatment Section, Blacksmith Shop, Gauge Manufacture, Metrology and Checking Centres, and Apprentice Training Centre. There was also a foundry on the Woodville site, but for timing reasons, the casting of many dies was outsourced to local foundries.

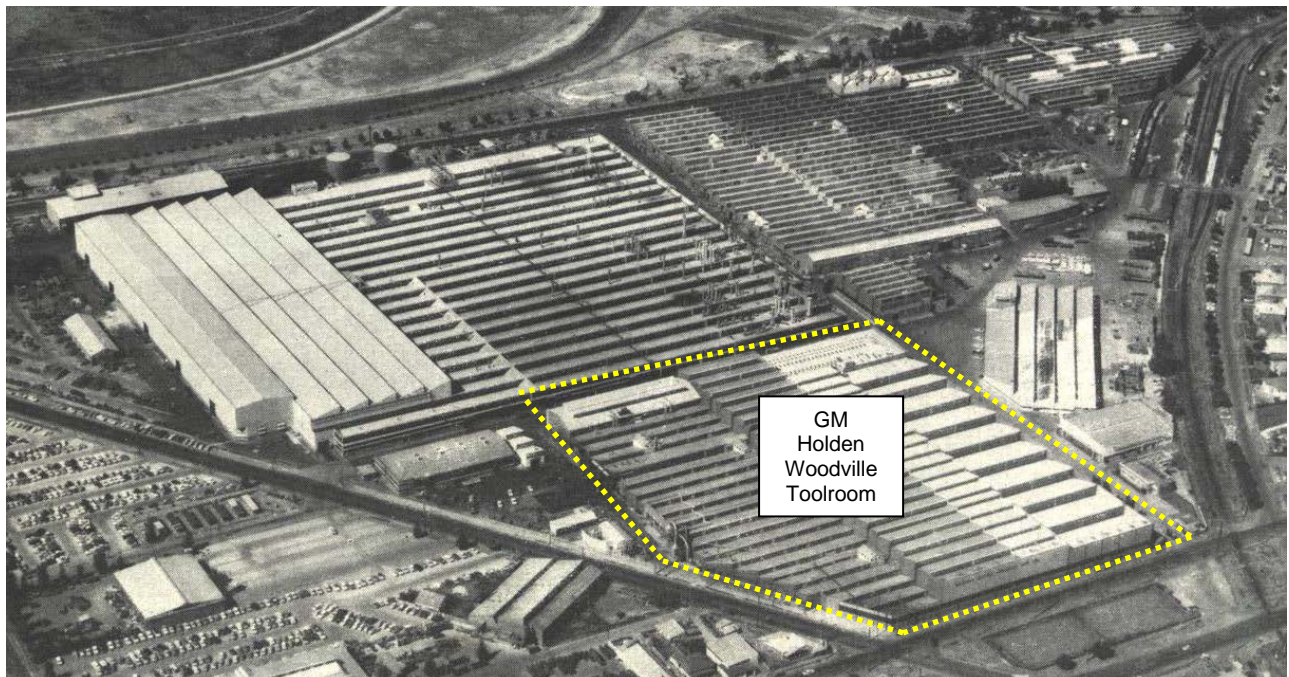
Apprenticeships in the Woodville Toolroom commenced in 1934 and in those days the trades on offer were, Pattern & Motor Body Building, Motor Body Panelling, Motor Body Trimming, Motor Mechanics & Plumbing. A special Apprentice Training Centre was first established in the middle of the Toolroom in 1945, and generally between 50-60 new apprentices started each year, although in the late 1960's the figures rose to around 100 before falling to low numbers in the 70's and 80's prior to the closure of the Woodville site in 1990.

HMBB produced the first bodies for the GM Export Company on the 29th November 1923, and exactly 25 years later to the day the famous Holden 48-215 was released in Australia in 1948. Significantly the Woodville Plant achieved its 50 year milestone in November 1973.

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Soon after the GM-H company 25 Year Annual Dinners were curtailed, management in the Woodville Toolroom encouraged a committee be formed to continue this longstanding tradition for toolroom employees. Immediately a committee was formed under the banner of the GM-H Woodville Toolroom 25 Year Club, successfully arranging their first Annual Dinner in 1982. In those early years, attendance at the dinners exceeded 240 from a membership of over 340 employees. Four of the original organising committee, including the Chairman Mr Peter Lancaster, Treasurer Bob Hack, Colin Brown and Brian Cope, still remain active committeemen to this day. The Club now comprises 242 members (209 retired members, and 33 members who are still working at Elizabeth & Fisherman's Bend). The GM-Holden Woodville Toolroom 25 Year Club Annual Dinner will achieve it's 30th Aniversary milestone next year in 2011.

The Club still attracts an average of 200 members to its Annual Dinner, all of whom are passionate Holden people who enjoy the re-kindling of friendships and reminising the stories many hold sacred from their time in the Woodville Toolroom and with the 'General', as the organisation was commonly and proudly referred to at that time. This culture of comradeship probably stems from the great working environment of that era, which encouraged lunchtime social activites including indoor bowls, darts, card games, chess games, table tennis etc. Other extra social activities undertaken outside working hours include, art, photography, car clubs & rally's, film nights, lawn bowls, 10 pin bowling, tennis, indoor cricket, picnics, football, basketball and other team activities.



GM-Holden's Woodville Complex - The Woodville Toolroom is highlighted in the foreground.