The genesis of an Australian icon:  
The Hills hoist

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Contrary to the belief of many South Australians, rotary clothes-lines were not invented in this state. Nor were mechanisms for elevating them. Yet the Hills hoist, developed by Adelaide resident Lance Hill, outsold its rivals so overwhelmingly that most of the producers competing against him eventually abandoned the field or sold their businesses to the firm Hill had established. Since the 1950s, many journalists have reported or commented on this local success story. The impact of Hill's device on Australia's suburbs was well summarised by Dean Brown when he was the State's Premier. When the jubilee of the hoist that had made Hill famous was being commemorated in 1995, Brown classed it one of those everyday items that characterise the Australian way of life. He added:

In 50 years it has become a cultural icon. This South Australian sentinel has witnessed untold summer barbecues, informal backyard family cricket matches and moaned its way through many a winter's gale. It's as quintessentially Australian as once were a Holden FJ in the driveway, a Vegemite sandwich or a beer with mates at the footy.

During the decade in which Brown made those remarks, Hill's rotary clothes-line became part of the Australian legend. It was employed as a symbol in a new work staged by the Australian Ballet in 1992. Borrowing the music of
Tchaikovsky’s superb fantasy for children, *The Nutcracker*, it was misleadingly advertised as *Nutcracker* when it should have been given a name more appropriate to its story, such as *Down and out in Footscray*. The hoist featured again as a symbol in the film *Muriel’s Wedding* (1994), publicity for the 1996 Adelaide Festival of Arts, and in the ceremonies opening and closing the Sydney Olympics in 2000. A year later it was placed in the initial list of ‘Heritage Icons’ published by Bank SA in conjunction with the National Trust, the citation claiming that it had ‘made a significant contribution to the State’s cultural identity’. As the hoist gained legendary status, every Tom, Dick and Harriet came forward with stories about it. That was welcome because its history is a subject where personal reminiscences can usefully supplement the paper records. Australia Post went a little too far, in May 2004, in giving the hoist pride of place as the sole device depicted on the cover of a stamp-pack celebrating outstanding ‘Australian Innovations’. More judicious acclaim was accorded by the staff of the principal public libraries of all states and territories when they agreed that the Hills hoist should become one of the sixty-eight subjects to be honoured as ‘National Treasures’ in an exhibition of documents and memorabilia associated with those people, items and events. The exhibition opened in Canberra in December 2005 and, from March 2006, was taken on an 18-month national tour.

The observations of Dean Brown, quoted above, were printed in his ‘Foreword’ to *What a Line!* *Fifty Years of Hills* (Edwardstown, 1996) by David Harris, who is most widely known as a compiler of children’s books and an author of thrillers for young adults. The volume was commissioned and published by Hills Industries Ltd, a company in which members of the Ling family have long had a controlling interest. While celebrating the important role of Harold Ling and his son in developing the company and transforming it into a multi-national conglomerate, Harris was able to acknowledge the role of Hill and his father as the founders of the firm. More recent publicity by the company has, however, promoted Harold Ling as ‘one of the two men’ who ‘started’ the enterprise as ‘a humble backyard operation’. The present article seeks to restore a fairer perspective on the origins of the business.

Several aspects of Lance Hill’s early years have the added interest that they were representative of a lifestyle that is fast disappearing. His parents belonged to one of those immigrant families whose descendants, for more than one generation, lived and worked no more than a few minutes walk from their birthplaces. Daughters, as well as the sons, in such families were often successful in persuading their spouses to settle in the same district. Between the two World Wars, nearly all women quit paid employment when they married. To have relatives nearby, as well as other neighbours known from childhood, could do much to ease the tedium of becoming a full-time housewife and mother. Such spatial confinement continued to be common in the United Kingdom.
Adelaide’s Hindmarsh Square. Lance and Sherry had two children, Natalie and Trevor.

Like virtually all young males of his time, federal legislation had obliged Hill to join his school’s cadet corps and, subsequently, train in the Militia. He closed his garage on enlisting during World War Two. By September 1942 he had risen to warrant officer class two. He transferred to the Australian Imperial Force in October that year. Suffering recurrent eye trouble and other minor health problems, he remained within South Australia, training motor mechanics and motorcycle despatch-riders. On his discharge from the Army in August 1945, the continuance of petrol rationing prompted him to make a charcoal-fired gas-producer for his car. But his wife complained that citrus trees in their backyard had grown so much that there was no longer room to hang out the family washing on their single-wire clothesline. Like most in Australia at that time, it was raised and supported by a wooden prop in its middle. Rather than cut down a tree, he decided to build a rotary hoist, similar to some that were in use elsewhere in Adelaide, big enough to take the weekly wash. He made it using scrap metal and oxyacetylene equipment. Like others of its kind, it brought two advantages besides requiring less space. First, a basket of wet washing did not have to be humped along a line: all could be hung out from one spot. Secondly, the device’s ability to spin in any breeze accelerated the drying process. His mother and his married sister admired the result and requested copies. Other neighbours noticed them and placed orders. Though he had been offered work in engine reconditioning, Hill decided to earn a living making hoists. A sign placed on his front fence, early in November 1945, drew 19 orders. Small classified advertisements appearing in the Advertiser, from 1 December that year, brought an increasing flow. His father built a handcart for deliveries. Alf had time to lend a hand because he had retired from Hills Bros when it was taken over during the war by William Angliss & Co., a Victorian firm that by then had itself become a subsidiary of the British-based Vestey’s Group. The takeover had also yielded Alf a significant amount of capital that he gladly contributed, as required, to aid expansion of his son’s new business. Lance’s first order book, which his son has given to the State Library of South Australia, shows that most of his early customers were women. This is a reminder that in 1945 large numbers of housewives had access to more than pin-money.

What about the forerunners? Rotary clothes-lines had been manufactured in America since the 1850s and in England since the 1860s. From the first decade of the twentieth century, several Australian firms had been making them. Many could not be elevated, but they afforded the benefit of allowing a large quantity of washing to be dried in a small area. Others were raised hydraulically. I first saw one of the latter after moving to Launceston in 1944 and thought it magical. The best of the early Australian models were produced by Geelong blacksmith Gilbert Toyne. One he made there in 1912 is still operational. Another example, dating from the same decade, is preserved in the National Museum of Australia (opened in Canberra in 2001). It is huge. Including the base which, when in use, would have been inserted perhaps a metre into the ground, it is 4.55m tall when the top is elevated, and it has a span to match that height. Toyne extended production to Adelaide in 1925, and in the following year, while still in South Australia, patented a new wind-up mechanism. Historian and biographer Dr Helen Jones recalls that a Toyne wind-up rotary clothes hoist her parents, Arthur and Myrtle Cashmore, had had at their Lockleys home from the middle of the 1920s remained in good working order thirty years later, and that it had been large enough to take the washing for their family of eight. But Toyne’s hoists had been too expensive to become popular. When Toyne moved back to Victoria in 1928 to open what became his principal factory, in Melbourne, he sold his South Australian and Western Australian rights to Lambert Brothers of Fullarton. Making hoists of wood, they sold few. Hill used only steel. His hoists were smaller
and some other parts of Europe until the middle of the twentieth century. In Australia, by contrast, the wider spread of car-ownership had helped to make it quite rare by then, except on farms, in country towns and in the vicinity of the nation's ports. The Hills were also a family in which, before the 1920s, children entered full-time work as soon as the law permitted. As the males had been successful in business, there was no financial reason for their not encouraging their offspring to proceed to secondary schools.

Lancelot Leonard Hill was born on 15 December 1902 in his parents' home at 17 Bevington Road, Knoxville. The house still stands, on the corner of L'Estrange Street. It is a handsome example of an Adelaide-style bluestone villa of the 1880s, with lofty ceilings and verandahs on two sides. For well over a century, respectable middle-class housing has lined both sides of the lower part of Bevington Road, and its newer dwellings conform to that standard. Knoxville, about sixty hectares in area, was one of Adelaide's many small suburbs for nigh on sixty years from 1882. At the beginning of World War Two, most of it was incorporated into the much newer suburb of Glenunga and the remainder was added to Glenside. Lance was a son of Alfred William Hill and his wife Lillian Ethel, née Mott, whose children were (in birth order) named Harry, Lancelot, Eileen and Nellie. Alf had married 'the girl next door' and, for forty years after that wedding, Lil's parents had continued living at 15 Bevington Road. Alf, who is variously described as a slaughterman, butcher and bacon curer, spent much of his life working at Hills Brothers, the family's long-established bacon factory and meat cannery. It was located in Conyngham Street, Knoxville, just a few hundred metres from his home. The present Glenunga International High School now occupies the site. Very large cattle yards, next to the factory, extended through to L'Estrange Street, so that their southern boundary was less than sixty metres north of Alf and Lil Hills' house. Lance joined the staff at Hills Bros on quitting the Glen Osmond public school in 1916. He gained a steam engineer's certificate and was put in charge of the boilers. He subsequently acquired refrigeration and general engineering skills. The latter enabled him to undertake occasional contract work for local government authorities in the Adelaide Hills, during the Depression of the 1930s, and served him well in his subsequent career.

As many thousands of his contemporaries did, Hill earned extra income by undertaking other employment when not at his usual work. In the 1920s he rode Indian, Douglas and AJS motor-cycles in dirt-track speedway races at the Wayville Showgrounds. Fans of his prowess in that sport long remembered him as 'Dusty' Hill. In the 1930s, he spent his weekends giving joy-rides in one of the speedboats that operated from the Glenelg Jetty. Readers of What a Line!, or some of the newspaper articles written about Hill during his retirement, would infer that those boats, Hustler and Rapide, belonged to him. In reality they were owned by sons of the Edward Gibbon Wakefield who, in partnership with Russell Hancock, had formed Adelaide's first fleet of taxicabs in 1904. Hill had become more interested in petrol rather than steam engines or refrigeration equipment. As the severity of the Depression eased, he opened a motor garage at Prospect. Nevertheless, he continued living with his parents until he married — at the age of thirty-six.

Gregarious and gifted with a ready wit, Hill was liked by all who met him. A cigarette smoker, he wore spectacles and was just 170 cm in height. On 4 October 1939, at Payneham Methodist Church, he wed Cynthia Harriett Mary ('Sherry') Langman, née Carpenter, a saleswoman and a divorcée, who lived until 2004. They settled at 7 Bevington Road, Glenunga, five doors from his parents, four doors from his maternal grandparents, and only three doors from No. 13, the home of his sister Eileen and her husband Harold Ling. Previously, No. 7 had been the home of Lance's brother Harry and his wife Stella, but they had just left Knoxville to conduct the Grenfell Hotel (now the Griffins Head) in
Hill (in overalls) flanked by partner Harold Ling (left) and employee Jack Short who became one of the first non-family directors when the firm was transformed from a partnership into a private company in 1948. Standing before one of their first trucks, a display hoist and the factory at 262a Glen Osmond Road, in 1947 (Courtesy Trevor Hill)

pregnant or infirm found the devices difficult to use unless they were able to persuade their husbands to build a platform from which washing could be hung out on a hoist that was permanently elevated. Ling failed in attempts to buy a right to use Toyne’s patent. Nevertheless, demand rose, and despite continuing to work until midnight each day, Lance, Alf and Sherry had not been able to keep up with it. The partners began recruiting employees. An order from Port Adelaide prompted the purchase of two one-ton trucks, dating from the 1920s, at an Army vehicles disposal sale, so that deliveries could be made to places beyond the reach of the hand-cart. Six months later a third but larger truck was acquired. The enterprise became too big for Lance and Sherry’s quarter-acre block, so in 1947 a larger site was leased. In accordance with Hill family tradition, it was nearby. Indeed, it could be viewed from the front gates of their residences because it was opposite the western end of Beveridge Road’s junction with Glen Osmond Road.

In the same year, the firm’s first interstate branch was established, in Sydney, and agents were secured in other parts of the country. Hill replaced the chin-whacker with a rack and pinion wind-up mechanism of his own design, patented in 1946. Yet, even with weekly lubrication,

Hill in his prime, with his nephew Robert Ling (aged 13) and Brian O’Leary (aged 19). Photographed in Sydney’s Martin Place in 1947, after they had taken to that city a truck-load of hoists for sale at the Royal Easter Show. After only six months with Hills Hoists in Adelaide, O’Leary had been appointed the first manager of its New South Wales branch. In later years, he served briefly as managing director. Ling became the second chairman of Hills Industries Ltd and later changed his name to Hill-Ling. (Courtesy Mr Robert Hill-Ling)
than Toyne’s, but the outer wire on each side was long enough to take a double-bed sheet. His price was ten guineas, plus a pound for delivery and installation, five shillings extra if the hoist was set in concrete.\textsuperscript{33}

Post-war shortages and federal government controls on everyone’s rights to purchase newly manufactured iron and steel posed a challenge. Damaged RAAF planes became the main source of wire. Anti-submarine mesh salvaged from Sydney Harbour furnished the stay rods. These and other materials were stored at the western end of Alf Hill’s vegetable garden and orchard, about a hectare in area, situated across a lane that used to run from L’Estrange Street though to Conyngham Street, behind the back fences of the Hills’ residences. Yet the manufacture of all the early hoists made by the Hills was carried out in Lance and Sherry’s large backyard. Old pipes were scrounged from many sources: Alf straightened, cleaned and cut them. Sherry primed and painted the finished product. By February 1946, struggling to meet demand, the Hills were working sixteen-hour days. Lance and his father reserved Saturdays for deliveries and installations. But pushing the fully-laden handcart was hard work and had confined this activity to places within a three kilometre radius. Customers in more remote suburbs had had to make their own carting arrangements.

It was not until a year or so after the Hills had commenced producing hoists that Lance’s brother-in-law, Harold Ling, joined the firm. Born in Sydney and widely reputed to be the grandson of a Chinaman who had come to Australia in the Gold Rush era, in 1924 Ling had moved to Adelaide where he had been employed by Goldsborough Mort & Co. Ltd, first as a clerk, then a salesman and finally a book-keeper. Called up for war-service in May 1942, he had worked as a clerk in the Central Australia Transport Column.\textsuperscript{34} On discharge from the Army in February 1946, Ling returned to his place with Goldsboroughs. However, lacking any family or old-school-tie connexion with the management, and being aged 39, he became disgruntled because he saw little prospect of advancement in that company. He realised that his near-neighbours and in-laws had started a business that had great potential for expansion. He sought to join them, offering to look after the accounts and marketing. The offer was accepted and Ling soon became a partner in the venture. However, most of the funds needed for building up stocks of raw materials continued to come from Alf Hill.

Hill’s first models were dubbed ‘chin-whackers’\textsuperscript{35} because they were raised by a long lever which could easily fly from the operator’s grasp. Because a load of wet washing is heavy, as were the inner shaft and arms of steel hoists, women who were

\begin{figure}[h]
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\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{image}
\caption{Lance Hill, as a retiree, revisiting one of his early chin-whacker hoists. (Courtesy Hills Industries Ltd)}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{33} The Genesis of an Australian icon

\textsuperscript{34} Journal of the Historical Society of South Australia, No. 35, 2007
the first versions of this were difficult to raise. Having a larger than usual family, my future mother-in-law, who had a Hills hoist from 1948, and my mother, suffering neuritis in both arms when she purchased the same model in July 1950, followed the example of many chin-whacker users and had platforms constructed so that their clothes-lines could be left constantly elevated. Our platform proved irresistible as a launching pad for swinging out over my father’s rows of beetroot, parsnips and silver beet, in the manner that, as several of the websites cited testify, has been practised by countless other children. But as a lanky eleven-year-old, I was a bit heavy for such frivolity because the activity soon bent, permanently though not seriously, one of that new hoist’s horizontal arms.

Meanwhile, by the late 1940s, it had become apparent that Australia required 300,000 new houses to cope with the needs of ex-servicemen and the influx of refugees and other migrants from war-torn Europe. Demand accelerated because of the Baby Boom and rising prosperity. Builders and property developers now exceeded women as customers. The South Australian Housing Trust and its counterparts interstate began placing orders for Hills hoists. By the beginning of 1948, the firm was producing an average of twenty-one hoists a week. To raise money for further growth, a private company, called Hills Hoists Pty Ltd, was formed in that year, with Lance Hill as chairman of directors. For ten years, the only other people appointed to directorships were employees of the company. Within seven weeks, Ling had won consent to his being appointed managing director. The company was launched with assets valued at £12,226. These comprised plant and machinery worth £324, motor vehicles £712, office furniture and equipment £42, components and stock on hand £7148, and goodwill valued at £4000. Almost £8000 worth of those assets were the product of Alf Hill’s investments in the business. The remainder were largely the fruit of the labour of those who had worked with their hands, principally Lance, Alf and Sherry Hill. But cash was needed to purchase, not only further supplies and equipment to make mass production possible, but also a larger site for the company’s operations. Funds were raised by the issue of shares. Hill and Ling relatives were encouraged to invest all they could raise, as were the employees. It became one of the first Adelaide companies to issue bonus shares to its workers, and to encourage them to reinvest their dividends. In 1949 it also set up a non-contributory superannuation scheme for the benefit of the employees.

Ling delighted in being styled ‘the Chief’. His assumption of that role promoted growth because, as Harris puts it, he was a man of driving energy, a fast decision maker, and had a powerful personality to make things happen the way he wanted … [He] was a tough negotiator, rugged competitor, and had a vision of the hoist as big business.
According to Lance's children, Hill greatly resented one aspect of the new regime. While members of the company continued to work under pressure, Ling kept the employees docile by promoting binge drinking. At the end of every Friday afternoon, he assembled all round a large keg of beer (and an increasing number of barrels as the workforce expanded) for his 'strength test'. As one employee recalled:

The test was to drink all night, all weekend if necessary, then go off to the pub for a breakfast of eggs and bacon before reporting punctually for a full day's work.40

Hill was appalled by orgies on that scale and invariably slipped away after the first hour. But he was powerless to prevent the practice as all the other directors encouraged it and participated themselves. As Harris notes (p. 32), the rest of the board often spent the whole weekend at the factory, with rest-breaks in an old house they had acquired next door.

Lance was content with his role of continuing to do all the lateral thinking on the production side. He was 'a perfectionist',41 constantly striving to improve designs, experimenting with new wind-up mechanisms, and in 1956 secured a patent for one that was superior to all its predecessors and rivals.42 As supplies of galvanised steel had become more accessible towards the end of the 1940s, he had used it whenever it was procurable because it eliminated the need for priming and painting. He ensured that replacement parts were produced in quantities sufficient for them to be always available at the company's branches and agencies. Maintenance of the modest prices and 'lifetime guarantee' he had offered from the beginning enabled his hoist to outclass competitors and eventually become ubiquitous throughout the nation. His guarantee extended to repairing or replacing, within the Adelaide metropolitan area at least, hoists damaged by trees brought down in storms. Implementing it to that extent had been excellent publicity.

The switch to galvanised components became complete in 1950 when the company purchased a galvanising plant from Jury and Spiers. Supplies of steel piping were secured by taking over tube-makers Koch and Warne Ltd in 1952. The Coltons' electroplating works at Hindmarsh were acquired in 1954.43 When preparing the documentation for registration of the company, as he had already done when ordering signs and advertisements, Ling, shunning Lance's initial practice,44 had not used an apostrophe in the word 'Hills'. Nevertheless, when the enlarged firm gained the capacity to make its own moulds, Hill once again personalised his product by branding the casing of his winding

In the early 1950s, Hill gave a small proportion of hoists a metal base so that they could be bolted to a concrete path or courtyard-paving instead of being inserted into the ground. This one was photographed in a park for advertising purposes. (Courtesy Hills Industries Ltd)
mechanism 'Hill's Hoists', with an apostrophe before the first 's'. By 1954, when most operations were moved to a four-hectare site in Edwardstown, sales had reached 600 hoists a week. That number doubled in the following year. Mass production helped to keep prices down. In 1945, Hill's first model had sold at the equivalent of four week's after-tax pay for an adult male full-time worker on the minimum wage. Thereafter, his hoists became ever more affordable. During the 1950s, Hill developed additional products, including hydraulic hoists, laundry trolleys, ironing boards, wheelbarrows, poles for street signs, basketball hoops and posts, tricycles and playground equipment. He also commenced production of small model hoists for shop window displays. They were appealing but expensive, some selling at almost twice the price of full-sized hoists.47

In 1952, the firm's prosperity enabled Lance and his immediate family to move across Glen Osmond Road to a more modern house at 122 Wattle Street Fullarton. In contrast to their first nuptial abode, it survives — a pleasant but unostentatious dwelling. In the meantime, Lance's younger sister, Nellie, who had long remained living at home while pursuing her career as a hairdresser, had resettled two kilometres away after making a late marriage. So in 1949, the ageing Alf Hill, by then a widower, had moved two doors down Bevington Road into the Ling's house, where his other daughter, Eileen, became his principal carer.

Demand for hoists continued to climb as the 1950s witnessed the peak of 'do-it-yourself' in home building. This was a response to the rapid inflation that had followed the return of Menzies to power in 1949: it raised the price of new and established housing beyond the reach of most engaged couples and newly-weds. But in contrast to the response to the very similar surge in house prices that has occurred in the ten years since John Howard became Prime Minister in 1996, in the 1950s young people were not content to rent. Instead, they spent all their spare time building their own homes. In that decade, more than one-third of all new Australian houses were constructed by their owners, a statistic that now seems quite remarkable.48 Knowing that television services were soon to be introduced in Australia, in 1955 Hill gained the consent of his fellow directors
to the setting up of a research and development division. Its first task was to design and oversee the manufacture of television antennae. Production and sale of those items proved a lucrative adjunct to the business. The research and development team next moved into plastics, facilitating the making of insulators, components for TV sets, cheaper tanks and much else besides. Its scientists and technicians subsequently made possible a tremendous diversification into electronics (including security and sound systems), a division that has now become the biggest contributor to the company’s profits.

Despite regular gym sessions, Hill suffered a major cardiac incident while on a trade mission in New Zealand in 1956. On doctors’ advice, he resigned from the company. Contrary to more recent ideas, in the 1950s it was standard practice to tell people who had suffered what was popularly termed a heart attack to cease work. At that time most heart specialists deemed it especially necessary for such patients to relinquish any job that entailed stress or responsibility. Hill sold his shares to Ling, who took his place as chairman of directors. According to Lance’s children, to dispose of such a large holding all at once, he had to accept less than its true value. In 1958, when the annual turnover of the business had reached £2,000,000, Hills Hoists Pty Ltd was transformed into a publicly listed company, with twenty per cent of its stock being offered for sale to anyone interested in investing. The new entity was given the name Hills Industries Ltd which it still retains. In branded products, the apostrophe was then permanently dropped from the word ‘Hill’s’, signalling that they were no longer Lance Hill’s but the company’s.

In 1965, Harold Ling was succeeded as chairman by his son Robert, who speeded expansion of the business with great success. To emphasise his family link to the firm’s principal founder, in 1986 Robert changed his surname to Hill-Ling. He in turn yielded the reins to his daughter, Jennifer Hill-Ling, in 2005. Since the 1980s, newer products such as wall-mounted retractable lines have outsold hoists, due to phenomena such as inner-suburban infill, a general desire for larger houses on smaller sites, and a dramatic change in the use of backyards. Very few of the latter are now devoted to the production of fruit, vegetables and eggs. Instead, those that remain are used mainly for barbecues and other purely recreational purposes. This lifestyle change has also prompted people who still have the space and a preference for rotary hoists to want them to be light enough to be lifted, folded and stored away while backyard cricket or other entertainments are in progress. They also like their hoists to be coloured. In this last respect, the wheel has gone full-circle, save that the colouring is now done by powder-coating rather than by the application of liquid paint. Nevertheless, in the often-dusty Australian outback, as well as in damper places such as Britain and New Zealand, the main demand is still for zinclueme-coated devices.

Lance Hill had long remained a consultant to the firm he had founded, eager to assist in any crisis at the factory and working on innovations. He had even accepted significant managerial functions for a time, when Harold Ling’s health began to fail. But by selling his stake in 1956 Hill missed out on the fruits of the tremendous diversification the company had pursued after it gained stock exchange listing. Thus he and his children did not become multi-millionaires as the Hill-Lings have. At the time of writing (May 2007) the company has an issued capital of more than 170 million shares, and they are trading at around $6 each, giving it a market capitalisation of over a billion dollars. This is a more than 500-fold increase on the market capitalisation of £975,000 it had had in the winter of 1958. Any long-term investment in Hills Industries Ltd has risen in value by far more than the rate of inflation. This has been especially the case for shareholders who retained issues of bonus shares, took up their entitlements in new capital raisings, and used the company’s schemes for automatic reinvestment of all or part

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of their dividends. Another measure of the company’s success has been the rise in its after-tax profits. For the financial year that ended on 30 June 1958, they amounted to £159,008. For the financial year that ended on 30 June 2006, they totalled $48,210,000.32

The most dramatic change has been in the level of the directors’ fees. This reflects a shift in business culture that has affected virtually all industrial companies. In the early years of Hills Industries Ltd, the main remuneration the seven directors received was the dividends paid in respect of their personal stakes in the company. When sales suffered a fall, as they did in 1961, the year of Federal Treasurer Harold Holt’s ‘Credit Squeeze’, the board members took no payment at all for their services. As late as the more prosperous early 1970s, the directors’ fees totalled only $4000 a year. In the latest year for which accounts have been published, the remuneration of the eight directors (as distinct from the dividends each received from their individual or family shareholdings) totalled $1,636,660.33

Nevertheless, Lance Hill had had no regrets. By realising his investment he had secured enough to live comfortably and to continue, for many years, to be generous to the schools his children had attended and other good causes.34 He was satisfied to have developed a range of useful and durable products at reasonable prices. No one had imagined that his retirement would extend for thirty years. Its length may well have been due to his defiance of the doctors’ orders to live quietly. He became a keen angler and water-skier. He and Sherry enjoyed ballroom dancing and had many caravan holidays to Queensland and Central Australia. Their son recalls often feeling anxious about his father’s habit of strolling over to groups of bikies spotted at refuelling stops and engaging them in conversation. Yet, no matter how tough they looked, each time this happened Lance soon charmed them by admiring and asking questions about their machines, and by relating anecdotes about his speedway-riding days. He died on 7 March 1986.

Eight years later, Hills Industries celebrated the sale of the five millionth Hills hoist.35 Since then, much production has been moved offshore. Fund managers keep constant pressure on public companies to rank profits above sentiment. The last Australian-made Hills hoist came off the assembly line in December 2006. Just five weeks later, the touring exhibition of National Treasures, mentioned near the beginning of this article, was displayed in the State Library of South Australia. More than 44,500 people viewed it during the two months it was in Adelaide, but one can only wonder if more than a few hundred of them had any idea that all Hills hoists are now manufactured in China. The once bustling factory at Edwardstown, which used to have a workforce of 700, was stripped of its machinery and has been sold.

This essay has been peer reviewed.
Endnotes

1 Peter Howell is a former head of the History Department at Flinders University where he has retained academic status as an Associate Professor since his retirement in 1999. He was a foundation councillor and the second president of the Historical Society of South Australia. He acknowledges the help, during his preparation of this paper, of Mr Trevor Hill, Morphettville, Mr Robert Hill-Ling, Mitcham, Mr Graham Twartz, Company Secretary at Hills Industries Ltd, Edwardstown, and Ms Gaynor Caspers, personal assistant to the Group Managing Director and Chairman of Hills Industries Ltd, who facilitated examination, not only of annual reports, but also of archival materials that have been stored in a fashion that makes scholarly citation impossible.

2 As with the Holden car, the Silent Night refrigerator, the Coolgardie safe etc., it has been the usual practice of the firm not to give the word 'hoist' an upper case initial letter except in hoardings and other advertising materials that put 'HILLS HOISTS' wholly in capitals.

3 See, for example, Sunday Mail (Adel), 30 Sep 1979;Advertiser (Adel), 10 & 11 Mar 1986, 31 Jan 1987.

4 For details of the publication of these remarks, see the third paragraph of this article.


7 John Clark, Margaret Dent and others, National Treasures from Australia's Great Libraries, exhibition catalogue, NLA, Canberra, 2005, pp.102-3.

8 See his entry in AustLit, the Australian Literary Database, viewable on the Internet at public and university libraries, or by subscription.


10 This had by no means been confined to working-class folk. Thousands of small-businessmen, most obviously corner grocers, lived above or behind their workplaces and expected that at least one of the children they raised there would succeed them and do likewise.

11 It can still happen, even in the heart of Adelaide. Late in 2006, Fred and Jean Boon, aged in their eighties, were living in the 295 Gilles Street house they had been occupying since they married more than half a century ago. Before they wed, the wife had from birth dwelt only in the house next door, where her mother, Mrs E. Buckingham, continued to live for many years. Moreover, Mrs Buckingham too had spent her whole life residing in the same part of the street, for her own parent's home was opposite her own marital abode. Twist in the Tale (newsletter of the Catholic Diocese of Adelaide's Basic Ecclesial Communities), Vol. 9 (November 2006), p.3, and information from the Boons' daughter, Mrs Elsie Spliet, of Two Wells.

12 A former third verandah, at the rear of the house, has at some stage been removed.


14 Lance's birth certificate.

15 The State Electoral Rolls, 1902-1945.

16 Sands & McDougall, Directories.

17 Advertiser, 31 Jan 1987, Magazine p.5, and information from Mr Trevor Hill.

18 In 1923 the American manufacturers of the Indian machines dropped an 'r', thenceforth calling their bikes 'motocycles'. Douglasses and the AJS were British, the latter taking its name from its maker, A. J. Stephens, who went bankrupt in 1931. See S. J. Mills, A.F.S. of Wolverhampton, the author, Sutton Coldfield, 1994.

19 Information from speedway historian Mr David Spencer, Broadview. See also Lorraine Potts, Frank Potts of Langhorne Creek, His Children and Grandchildren, Potts Family History Committee, Langhorne Creek, 2004, p.265. Harris, p.6, records that Hill had been a 'champion' at this sport. Trevor Hill recalls being told that in 1929 his father had won selection as a member of the Australian speedway Test team chosen to go to England to compete against the British champions. That tour was abandoned, presumably because of the onset of the Great Depression.

20 For this E.G. Wakefield's relationship with the E.G. Wakefield who had instigated the push for a new kind of colony in this part of Australia, see my South Australia and Federation, Adelaide 2002, p.217, footnote.

21 By the 1930s, those Wakefields were making most of their money as holders of the South Australian franchise for Castrol motor oils. In the 1940s, their family's main business was as earth-moving contractors, headquartered on Glen Osmond Road, close to the junction where Bevington Road and Conyngham Street both meet it. Information from Mr Bob Hill-Ling.

22 Cynthia disliked her given names, especially the first, and always preferred to be called 'Sherry'.

23 Information from the Central Army Records Office at Victoria Barracks, Melbourne.

24 Advertiser, 10 March 1986.

25 Based on an interview with Hill, written up by journalist Mike Duffy for the Sunday Mail, 30 September 1979.

26 Trevor Hill is adamant that Harris was wrong in stating (What a Line!, p.2) that Hill was still looking for work
in that field. On the contrary, a document preserved in the family's scrapbook records that Lance had been considering the offer of forming a partnership with a friend who had been a fan of his speedway-riding. However, he had concluded he could make more money by building and selling rotary clothes-lines.


28 D7318, SLSA. Photos of this booklet and sample pages of its contents are reproduced in National Treasures (cited in note 7 to this paper) at p.103.

29 It also revives recollections that in two factories where I worked in the mid-1950s, during school and university long-vacations, dozens of women turned up on pay-days, signed for and collected their menfolk's pay envelopes, gave their husbands or sons a bit of pocket or beer money, and sailed off with the bulk of the bread-winners' earnings while the men returned to their work.

30 <http://www.abc.net.au/tv/rewind/txt/s1179331.htm> Visited 15 May 2007. The first American producer seems to have been James R. Higgins of Rockport, Massachusetts, and the first British one a Mr Kent, of High Holborn in London.

31 <http://www.abc.net.au/tv/rewind/txt/s1179331.htm>

32 The Lamberts were primarily master-builders, not metalworkers.

33 D7318, SLSA.


35 Harris, p.3, begins this nickname with an upper-case letter, which seems an unnecessary addition, and also omits the 'h' from 'whacker'.

36 Harris, p.6, further records that, despite a decline in the Lamberts' sales of Toyne's model, Toyne also rejected overtures for him to participate in the setting up of a joint venture to service the South Australian market.

37 Hill and Ling subscribed all their available capital, including their war-service deferred pay and gratuities, and persuaded their relatives and the employees they had recruited since March 1946 to invest all they could spare.

38 Harris, p.11.

39 Harris, p.6.

40 Harris, pp.15, 16 and 32.

41 Mr Trevor Hill's and Mr Robert Hill-Ling's description. David Harris concurred. What a Line!, p.6.


43 Family scrapbook in the possession of Mr Trevor Hill, and Advertiser 17 May 1954.

44 Hill's first notices in newspaper classified advertisements were of two kinds. On Saturdays, he used upper-case letters to draw attention to 'HILLS HOISTS'. On weekdays, three-line notices advertised 'Hill's Hoists'. Compare, for example, Advertiser, 1 December 1945, pp.13, and 14 December 1945, p.17.

45 Harris, pp.38-9. The output subsequently reached 500 hoists a day. Sunday Mail, 30 Sept 1979. But that was long after Lance Hill's retirement from the chairmanship.

46 Fitted with an oil reservoir and foot pedal, these found buyers in Sydney. One that was in use for 45 years in the yard of a house in Leichhardt is now in the Powerhouse Museum at Ultimo. <http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/collection/database/itm=116488>, visited 22 May 2007.


48 Alastair Geig, The Stuff Dreams are Made of: Housing Provision in Australian 1945-1960, MUP (Melbourne), 1995, p.71. See also Tony Dingle, 'Necessity the Mother of Invention, or Do-It-Yourself', in Patrick Troy (ed.), A History of European Housing in Australia, CUP (Cambridge), 2000, pp.67-8, especially Figure 4.1.

49 They have been given names such as paralines, extendalines and hidalines.

50 Harris, p.45.

51 In 1958, when there were only 3 million shares on issue, they were trading at a mere six shillings and sixpence each. Australian Financial Review, 21 Aug. 1958.


54 Information from the Rev. Paul Mullins SJ, Athelstone. One of Hill's death notices was submitted by the club for mothers of past pupils of St Raphael's School, Parkside: 'With loving and happy memories of our One and Only Honorary "Mum" ... 1946-1986'. Advertiser, 10 March 1986.