

## Centenary flashback: creating Kwinana, our first industrial township

In 1952, Anglo-Iranian Oil Co. announced its plans to build a £40m oil refinery in Kwinana. The site, chosen for its flat grounds and natural deep water harbour, was to produce 40 per cent of Australia's petroleum products.

The project was the largest industrial partnership the State had ever entered into and required the assistance of several government departments to create the industrial township, which was carved from virgin bush-land.



*Aerial view of Kwinana oil refinery, 1950s*

The Department (then called the State Housing Commission), was responsible for creating the suburbs of Medina and Calista, which comprised of 1,000 homes, a school and nine shops.

Most houses were built on quarter-acre blocks and featured four or five rooms.

“(The houses) will be occupied by men engaged in the construction of the refinery, and will subsequently be taken over by the permanent employees,” reported *The West Australian*, 1953.



*The Commission built 900 timber-framed homes and 100 brick homes in Kwinana over three years from 1953 to 1956.*

In 1953, State Government Town Planner, Professor Stephenson, described Kwinana as decentralisation on a grand scale and listed the harbour town as a possible future rival to the world-famous San Francisco Bay.

“I am amazed at the rapid progress of the new township. I have never seen such speed of development, and other visitors from overseas have expressed themselves similarly,” Stephenson said.

Many residents of the new town were welders, boiler-makers and pipe-fitters recruited by the oil company from Britain.

The first family moved into Medina just six months after the bush-land began to be cleared. The family - a husband, wife and their young son - arrived from Scotland by liner in 1953. The husband was employed to work at the refinery as a foreman pipe fitter.



*First family to settle in Medina, the Bowie's, wash up after their first meal in their new home*



*While the town's housing was being built, the 1,300 workers employed to build the refinery were transported from Perth to Kwinana by 39 buses each day*