

Connor's Mill



Toodyay Visitor Centre
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History of Connor's Mill

FLOUR MILL 1870 – 1917

Dan Connor's steam driven mill was the third built in the Toodyay district, next to his Newcastle house and store, and was built by local builder George Hasell.

During the 1880's Charles Marris leased and eventually bought the mill, operating it until the turn of the century. The flour produced was of very high quality, presenting the established Drummond and Monger Mills with good competition. In 1880, flour from the mill won an award at an Exhibition in Melbourne.

In 1917, Charles Marris sold the Mill to Charles Lukin who reconditioned the building as a powerhouse for the town.

POWER HOUSE 1917 – 1955

The first power generating engine was installed in a galvanised iron extension to the rear of the mill.

In 1921, a major fire destroyed all the milling machinery within the power house. The charred top floor roofing beams are still evident today.

After the fire, Engineer, Mr N. Garvey installed a new Stockport gas engine in the annex to provide power to the town. This generator had a unique starting procedure. The operator would place a foot on a flywheel spoke, hang on to the roof timbers and treadmill the belt. When sufficient momentum was obtained, the operator would jump off the wheel and turn the magneto on! The engine never failed to roar to life.

In 1922 the Road Board assumed control of the power service. The generator provided lighting to the town from 4pm to midnight seven nights a week.

It was common practice in Victorian times for people to live as close as possible to, or even at their place of work. As late as 1925 Clive Piesse set up house in the mill following his appointment as engineer. The present stairway did not exist; the Piesse family went up and down on ladders. His young wife bore twins, Maxine and Monty, in this uninsulated environment. It wasn't long before the family moved out into a house.

The Municipal Council ran the Power Station until 1955 when the State Grid operated by SEC was connected to Toodyay.

The once proud building was deserted from 1955 to 1975

RESTORATION 1975 – 2000

In 1975 the Shire of Toodyay protected the future of the building and the Toodyay Tourist Centre was established there. With funding provided by O'Connor Quinlan Estates and the Australian Heritage Commission, Connor's Mill was restored. When the mill first opened there was no staircase to the upper floors: only a ladder. The display on the ground floor consisted of items donated by the community.

The large steam engine was donated to the Shire in 1974 and ex Industrial Factory Engineer Graham Jones, helped move the engine to its present location. Due to its size, bricks from around the front door had to be removed.

DANIEL CONNOR (1827-1894)

A convict from Ireland, Dan Connor arrived in WA, in 1853 aged 26. In 1859 he married Catherine Conway, an Irish girl, and secured 50 acres of land at Jane Brook. In 1861 he moved to Toodyay (then known as Newcastle) and built a house and store.

In 1870, Connor built the third steam powered flour mill in the Toodyay district next to his house and store. By 1880 he owned this flourmill, Freemasons Hotel and farming properties known as "Hawthornden" and "Wicklow Hills".

Earning the nickname of the "Newcastle King," due to the number of properties that he owned in the district, Dan Connor was a long serving member of the Toodyay Road Board, holding the position of Chairman between 1879 to 1880 and 1883 to 1895.

Dan Connor died in Perth in 1898 aged 67.



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