

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.

Built in c1870 by local builder George Hassel, the Mill originally had a shingle roof, no turret and a slide from the first floor doorway to wagon height. This was used to slide bags of flour onto the wagons waiting below. Little is known about the internal workings of the mill. The original grind mill is seen on the lawn outside. The grindstone machine was originally from Newgain and donated by Langley Lefroy and initially owned by the Twines. The Big wheel drive mechanism was originally from the Mill at Northam.

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 1870, flour from the mill won an award at an Exhibition in Melbourne.

In 1917, Charles Marris sold the Mill to Mr 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 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, hand 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 once.

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, 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.

Other than the constant noise and ever present engine fumes, the cold of winter would have

been tempered by the warming effect of the big oil engine.

Summer was a different story. Monty Piesse told us that on really hot days his mother would drape a bed sheet over the kitchen table and trickle water all over it to create a large "Coolgardie Safe". The toddlers were then tucked under the table to keep cool.

The Municipal Council ran the Power Station until finally in 1955 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 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 labourer 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 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". He later subdivided 150 acres into town lots, now known as North Toodyay.

Connor transferred some of his interests to Perth in 1883, when he purchased the "Savoy Hotel", then known as the "Shamrock." He went on to acquire land in Barrack, Hay, Murray, Irwin Streets and St Georges Terrace. Together with property in Fremantle, Subiaco, Nedlands and Wanneroo, Connor became the largest single landowner in the city at that time.

Dan Connor was also director of the Stanley Brewery (now Emu) and founder of the Port Brewery in Fremantle.

Earning the nickname of the "Newcastle King," due to the number of properties that Connor owned in the district, Dan Connor was a long serving member of the Road Board, holding the position of Chairman for some 20 years.

Dan Connor died in Perth in 1894 aged 67.

HOURS: Monday to Sunday
9am to 3.30pm

FEES: Per person \$3.00
Family (2 adults, 3 children) \$10.00
Students of Toodyay DHS and children under the age of six years no cost.

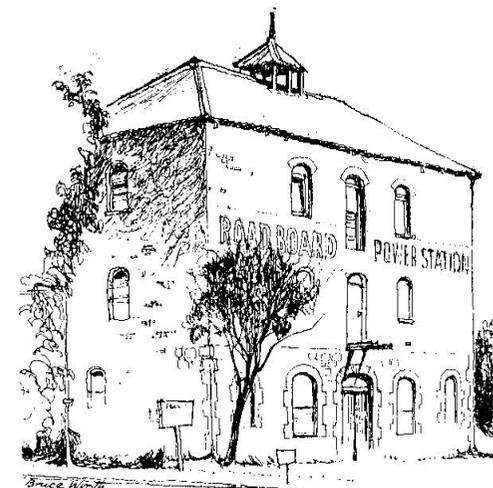
NOTE:
Children under the age of 16 will not be admitted unless accompanied by a paying adult.

Toodyay Visitor's Centre
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Welcome to CONNORS MILL

Built 1870

Now demonstrating the milling process
with working, historic machinery



The Road Board's old power station building
Toodyay

Stirling Terrace
TOODYAY