



Mill Pond Farm

Antony Davies fixes things. Horse buggies, old cars, historic buildings and more.

The old mill is the big project and here he explains where he and Andrew Gow are up to

After a short drive from Braidwood across the Jembaicumbene Plains and along the Majors Creek Road, you'll come to historic Mill Pond Farm, the site of much activity over the past eight years. The 200 acre farming property is situated along the middle Jembaicumbene Creek and encompasses spectacular wetlands, rich floodplain pastures and rolling hills rising to over 680 metres. The centrepiece of the farm is the magnificent four-storey Jembaicumbene Steam Flour Mill, built by twenty-four-year-old Charles Dransfield in 1859. The property was established by grants in the 1830s, and by the 1850s formed the working end of Exeter Farm, an extensive grazing property owned by the closely related Roberts, Badgery, Royds and Hassall families.

Known in the 1830s and 1840s as 'The Old Dairy Flat Station', Mill Pond Farm served as the district's earliest dairy, providing milk, cheese and dairy products to the extended population of Exeter Farm. The early station building, associated stables, barns and outbuildings, survive on the property today.

By the mid 1850s, a picturesque Gothic Revival dairy was built alongside the early structure to exacting standards with 18" thick masonry walls, a slate roof and elaborate decoration. A well set underneath the dairy provided cold storage for the dairy

products, and is still in place under the house today. The facilities included a cheese making room with running water and accommodation upstairs. Charles Dransfield, a Yorkshire woollen miller who had emigrated to New Zealand, was in Majors Creek prospecting for gold when he met his young wife from Exeter Farm in 1852. The couple were given 1,300 acres at the eastern end of Exeter Farm on their marriage, and Dransfield made a substantial fortune selling mining rights on the gold-rich soils of the river flats.

By the 1850s, dairying was giving way to wheat cropping across the Jembaicumbene Plains, and the arrival of over 10,000 miners prompted a huge expansion of the fledging village of Jembaicumbene.

By the mid 1850s, the village had four two-storey hotels, two churches, a school and over four hundred buildings.

At the time it was generally considered that Jembaicumbene would develop into a larger administration centre than nearby Braidwood. Taking commercial advantage of this influx of

people, Dransfield conceived a new business centred around a magnificent four-storey steam flour mill, run by a huge 24hp steam engine, with which he could grind wheat and grain for flour, make bread, cut building timber and firewood and run a stamping battery for crushing quartz to extract gold.

In the attic of the mill he dried hops and made beer, and bred racing pigeons.

The mill was designed by the well known Sydney architect Charles Langley, and fitted with fine quality English and American milling equipment by Russell & Son, Sydney's largest engineering firm.

Building began in June of 1859, the granite used for the first floor and engine house being cut from the surrounding fields. The bricks used for the upper three storeys and the sixty-five-foot chimney were made in a pit behind the mill, and the steam engine allowed all of the huge wooden beams making up the inner structure to be cut on site.

Incredibly, this superbly made building was completed and open for business, fully equipped and operational, just six months later, in January 1860.

Milling continued until 1885, when Dransfield was obliged to close due to the combined effects of the railway arriving in Tarago bringing cheap flour from other areas, a nation-wide financial depression, and the continued appearance of rust in the wheat from

