



MARGARET ROYDS

Saving the Old Mill

Margaret and Victoria Royds remember the fight. Margaret leads off ...

Roger and I had spent three years in Sydney doing up old places. We came back to Braidwood in 1970 for the Ned Kelly film to discover that everybody was demolishing everything. We thought we'd better do something about it.

So I bought the Old Stone Mill and then I thought, "Now, what am I going to do with it?"

Victoria: Mum had wanted to open a little craft shop for local women so that they could sell their wares and be a little bit independent. There was nowhere in town where they could do that, so she was just looking for a little shop — and she ended up with this massive complex. It was like, "now what do we do?"

Margaret: It had no plumbing and no electricity. We bought it and started restoring it. It had the old garage and I had to think what I could do with it, so I started a coffee shop and handcraft gallery. And then next door, I thought, "What can I do with this?" So I had a youth club there and on the corner, Roger had his antiques.

Victoria: Our café was basically the first coffee shop in Braidwood. There were a couple of cafés, but they weren't really like now. There was no coffee shop in town, so Mum decided she'd open one. It was the first Drip-O-Lator, hot coffee in town with homemade scones and cakes. Mrs Blomstrom, being Swedish, made beautiful almond cakes and things.

EXCUSE ME, THAT'S MY BUILDING

I was in my second year of high school and I was so excited that we were going to have this café. So I said, "Can we open it," before I went back to school. Oh, that was a mistake. On opening day we weren't really quite ready and mum said, "I better go down and get a few more provisions from the shop." Mrs Blomstrom decided she'd leave too and that left just Martin, who's three years younger, and me.

I'd never worked in a café and these people are coming through from Canberra and they're pulling up and looking in and I'm going, "No, no, no."

Eventually this one couple did get out and they came into the shop and I'm saying, "I don't know how much anything is. My mother will be back soon." Anyway, I gave them coffee and cake. The man ended up being a professor at ANU or something. We called him the professor because he had big woolly hair. They became regulars for years and years and years. They would come back and say, "We were your first people."

Margaret: A couple of years later the Department of Education decided to resume the whole corner to put the high school there.

Victoria: We were told that the building was dangerous because it had a big crack in it, so Dad and I plastered up the cracks. There was a lot of plaster left over, so we chipped them into all these animal shapes. We had great fun doing that — that was my first relief sculpture.

Margaret: But the Department of Education still wanted to resume the whole block because the Minister said it was dangerous.

Then one day somebody at the school asked me, "Have you seen the plans for the new high school because it's on your block of land?" That was the first I'd heard of it.

First they knocked down the two little stone buildings that were in McKellar Street on the western side of the old mill. They pushed all the rubble up against the mill wall. I took out an injunction against the Department of Education for doing that and took them to court.

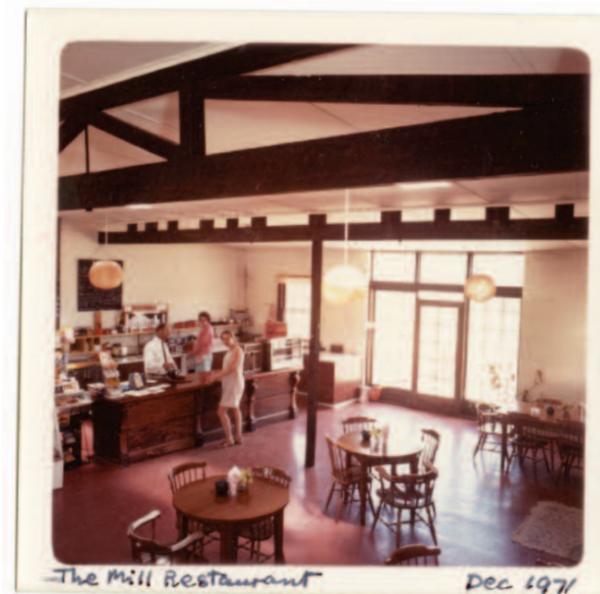
Victoria: That gave us time to make the building look respectable. So then it was all hands, everybody. Hugo Blomstrom put the windows in. I organised a huge exhibition in the Mill and Jeff Bates and Dame Zara came up to open it. We had many artists producing work for the exhibition.

Jeff Bates and Dame Zara were a great attraction. We had 400 people turn up with all those artists.

Eventually the Department backed down and were allowed to keep our buildings.

Margaret: When we had the Mill it was about the only place in town where you could have a big exhibition. Now that the National Theatre is there, one can have exhibitions and dinners there. Before that there was only the show-ground.

Victoria: The Mill Centre had a youth club that ran for ages. Mum used to run dances for the local kids because they didn't have anywhere to go. She was often the only responsible adult there keeping an eye on things. We had dance activities, we had a pool table and a jukebox.



MARGARET AND ROGER ROYDS IN THE CAFÉ WITH MRS BLOMSTROM BEHIND THE COUNTER.

Where Greg and Mary's shop was many years later, that was the youth club for many years until it got a bit smashed up and then dad decided he'd had enough of them smashing things up and boarded it up.

Margaret: Kenny Corey was the first president. I made them have their own committee and run it. We had a doorman and they all had to pay 20 cents to come in. Jeff Smith was



ABOVE: ADRIAN KEENAN'S GROUP CONCERT AT THE MILL, 'MUSICA DA CAMERA'. BELOW: CHECK THE HAIR — MARTIN ROYDS IN CONVERSATION WITH BODO MORDEK.

