



REGISTER OF HERITAGE PLACES

Permanent Entry

1. **Data Base No.** 02872
2. **Name** York Flour Mill (1892-1920)
3. **Description of elements included in this entry**
The York Flour Mill and associated buildings, and the land on which its stands as defined in Heritage Council drawing number A 882.
4. **Local Government Area** Shire of York
5. **Location** 7-13 Broome Street, York
6. **Owner** Jah-Roc Solid Furniture
7. **Statement of Significance of Place (Assessment in Detail)**

DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

The *York Flour Mill* is a purpose-built flour mill, constructed in 1892 with associated buildings built from 1892 onwards, to mill flour for York and the surrounding districts, and for export.

Exploration of the York district dates from 1830 and settlement of the town followed in 1831. Boosted by the successful farming of the hinterland, the town of York prospered over the next sixty years. This prosperity was given further impetus when York became the staging point for the rush to the newly discovered Eastern Goldfields in the early 1890s.

Prior to the construction of what is now known as the *York Flour Mill*, there were other flour mills operating in the area. The first mills in the area were sited on individual land grants. *The Inquirer* of 1841 contained an advertisement by Lauder & Knight for corn ground at reasonable rates at the mill on R. T. Bland's grant. Another mill is reported to have been operating at this time on Monger's property. Various other mills were later constructed in and around York, including a two-storeyed roller mill at the corner of River Street and Avon Terrace (1866) and a horse-drawn mill at Monger's property (1868).¹

The *York Flour Mill*, was constructed in 1892 for Thomas Thorn and Company by Thorn, Bower and Stewart, a local firm which had previously built the Piesse flour mill at Katanning. As early as 1889, the *Eastern Districts Chronicle* reported that

¹ *The Inquirer* 15 December 1841, cited in Bodycoat, R., *Old York Flour Mill Conservation Plan* (Friends of the Old York Flour Mill, July 1993) p3

Thorn, Bower and Stewart planned to erect a four-storey mill in York. Monger, a prominent miller in the town, also appears to have been involved in the company.²

In May 1891, land was purchased at the southern end of the town, adjacent to the railway line which would service the mill. Thorn travelled to the Eastern States to purchase machinery for the mill building, which was officially opened in May 1892 as the "Empire Roller Flour Mill". At the time, it was the largest mill in Western Australia, and only the fourth to incorporate the modern roller method, which represented a major progressive step in the production of flour in the State. Wheat arrived at the mill site in bags, and was stacked initially against the eastern side, of the building. Later it was stacked a short distance away from the mill, and covered with sheets of corrugated iron. The ground floor of the brick mill housed a 20 HP horizontal engine, a steam hoist, 13 grain-elevators and the machinery necessary to screen foreign matter. The first floor accommodated the grain rolling operation; on the second floor bran was separated from pollard. Dressing was carried out on the third floor before the flour was returned to the ground floor, where it was packed into bags and moved to a large storage shed on the western side of the mill. Railway tracks into the shed allowed easy loading for rail cartage to the Fremantle docks for export.³

The mill was successful and "Empire Flour" was awarded prizes at the Inter-colonial exhibitions in Melbourne in 1893 and in Coolgardie in 1898. In 1897, Dinsdale and Bower leased the mill for 2 years. Later they purchased it and operated under the name of "Empire Milling Company".

In 1901 the mill was evidently an important part of the town. "Situated in a commanding position, near the railway station, the handsome four-storey structure...is one of the most imposing edifices of the pretty little townscape."⁴ The mill was also important to the economic well-being of the town. In 1905, the mill is credited with contributing "directly and indirectly wages to the extent of £2,000/0/0 per annum in York by its agency"⁵ - a substantial sum.

In 1908, Marwick, Harvey Edwards & Meinck acquired the mill and the company was renamed the "York Flour Milling Co. Ltd." A cantilevered structure was added to the upper floors, on the eastern wall of the mill, and the plant was upgraded, including machinery from the 1866 mill in River Street. In the same year, export quality "Avon Valley Flour", milled by the York Flour Milling Company, was awarded a Gold Medal in London.⁶

The 1930s York Flour Milling Co. Ltd. was amalgamated with Perth Roller Flour Mills Ltd. Major additions to the timber-framed sheds were built, to the east and west of the mill building. New steel wheat mixing bins and hoppers were accommodated in a tall timber-framed building clad in corrugated iron, adjacent to the eastern wall of the mill. The mill was classed as a two-ton mill, which employed 35 men at peak production, dropping to 25-30 men in the off-season. Three gas-producer engines supplied power for the mill machinery. At peak production, the mill handled 150,000 bushels of wheat each year, producing 3,000 tons of flour, 900

² R. Bodycoat, *Old York Flour Mill Conservation Plan* (Friends of the Old York Flour Mill, July 1993) p4

³ P.W.H.Thiel, *Twentieth Century Impressions of Western Australia*. (Perth, 1901), cited in Bodycoat, R., *Old York Flour Mill Conservation Plan* (Friends of the Old York Flour Mill, July 1993) p4

⁴ *ibid*, p6

⁵ *Avon Valley Illustrated* (1905), cited in Bodycoat, R., *Old York Flour Mill Conservation Plan* (Friends of the Old York Flour Mill, July 1993) p9

⁶ R. Bodycoat, *op. cit.*, p4

tons of bran and 450 tons of pollard. Workers worked in eight-hour shifts with three shifts running each day.⁷

In 1940, the milling engines were converted to electric power and the original 1892 tall brick chimney, at the south eastern corner of the mill building, was removed.

In the post war years changes in ownership, stiff competition and a fall in the export of flour contributed to a decline in the productivity of the mill. Eventually, in 1967, flour milling ceased, the men were laid off, machinery was sold and the mill was transferred to Co-operative Bulk handling.

In 1971, Burridge and Warren bought the property. In November 1976 a fire destroyed the tall building housing the mixing bins, which stood to the east of the Mill Building. The timber verandahs along the north wall of the mill and the east wall of the office were also damaged and removed.

In 1982, W.H. Milne Properties Pty. Ltd. acquired the property, later transferring ownership to Messrs. R. Robinson & M. Clinch c/- Midwest Fodder (parent company Glen Vista Pty. Ltd.) in 1990. Part of the site was used for chaff cutting and the supply of oats for the Western Australian and overseas markets.⁸

Prompted by a concern for the deterioration and possible loss of this landmark building, the Friends of the Old York Flour Mill was formed in July 1990, as a sub-committee of The York Society (Inc.). The aim of the group was to work for the conservation of the Mill and its adaptation for use as a Public Heritage Utility.⁹ A Conservation Plan was completed for the place. The Friends of the Old York Flour Mill unsuccessfully bid at auction in July 1993, and the property was purchased by Jah-Roc Solid Furniture for use as furniture manufacturing and display showroom.¹⁰

The Mill was assessed/entered into the Register of the National Estate by the Australian Heritage Commission in March, 1978. The place is classified by the National Trust of Australia (WA), as an integral part of York's Historic Town. The mill is listed in the York Town Planning Scheme as an historic place.¹¹

PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

The old *York Flour Mill* is sited on land between Broome and Henrietta Streets in York, and is bounded by the eastern railway reserve on the west.¹² The site was located immediately adjacent to the railway to allow a railway connection directly into the storage sheds for the off-loading of grain and the shipment of the finished products. (The rail connection is no longer extant.) The main access to the mill was off Broome Street, on the northern boundary of the site, and where the office building is located. However following changes to the road system Henrietta Road, at the rear of the mill, is now the main road into York.

The property comprises several buildings, built between 1892 and 1970. These include: the brick Mill Building, West Shed and original Engine Room (1892);

⁷ *ibid*, p5

⁸ *ibid*

⁹ *ibid*, p1

¹⁰ N. Stanbury, "Surfies win bush mill" *West Australian*, May 1993

¹¹ Reference 49, York Town Planning Scheme cited in Bodycoat, R., *Old York Flour Mill Conservation Plan* (Friends of the Old York Flour Mill, July 1993) p60

¹² plan 4402 October 1918

northern additions to the West Shed (1905), the Office Building (1905-20); the cantilevered additions to the Mill Building (1908), further extensions to West Shed to accommodate the railway spur line, a rambling East Shed, and a modern Covered Extension with Staff Amenities and Changerooms. (The original chimney (1892) was demolished in the 1940.)

The unusual two-storey corrugated iron addition, added in 1908, projects from the top two levels at the southern end of the building. It is supported by carved timber struts. Over the years various modifications were made to window and door openings, as extensions were built and milling equipment was upgraded. These alterations are noted on floor plans and photographs in the Conservation Plan.¹³

Power for the mill was originally generated by wood-fired engines, located immediately adjacent to the south wall of the mill, where a tall brick chimney stack stood. When the power source was converted to electricity in 1940 the redundant chimney stack was demolished.

For a detailed analysis of the physical evidence of the complex refer to Bodycoat, R., *Old York Flour Mill Conservation Plan* (Friends of the Old York Flour Mill, July 1993).

ASSESSMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

The criteria adopted by the Heritage Council in September, 1991 have been used to determine the cultural heritage significance of the place.

1. AESTHETIC VALUE

2. HISTORIC VALUE

The flour mill has a role in the development of steam powered roller flour mills in York, the grain growing region of the Avon Valley and the commercial enterprise and export industry of the State. The flour produced at the mill won awards in Australia and Britain.

The mill demonstrates the importance of York as the centre of a rich and successful farming district in the 1890s, and the role of York in supporting the development of inland agricultural districts by providing hub services for the railway and the milling of produce.

The *York Flour Mill* is also an important historical memorial to all those people associated with milling and grain-growing in York, and the personalities who built and operated them. This includes F.H. Piesse in particular and all those who worked at the mill during it's operation.

The *York Flour Mill* represents the culmination of the production of flour in the district and the consequent impact on the community of the 1890s. The mill was a technical achievement for Western Australia in 1889, following on from the Northam Mill of 1890, and incorporating the latest technology in roller flour milling. The evidence of that modern technology has been substantially retained through the retention of the plant and machinery, and the building survives to demonstrate the new forms, in generally traditional materials, that were devised to accommodate the new technology.

¹³ R. Bodycoat, *op.cit.*, pp21-25

3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

4. SOCIAL VALUE

The *York Flour Mill* is highly valued by the community: the Friends of the Old York Flour Mill, the York Society and the Shire of York all recognise the strong and tangible contribution of the place to the historic townscape and the image of York as an historic town. The National Trust and Australian Heritage Commission have also formally recognised the heritage value of the place.

For many years the *York Flour Mill* contributed to the well-being of the local community and provided employment for the town, and industrial and commercial pre-eminence for the district and the State. Prior to its closure in 1967, the Mill contributed substantially to the farming community's sense of place.

5. RARITY

In 1892, the mill was constructed to conform to the current design of roller flour mills, and few of these mills exist elsewhere in the state. It is important as a surviving element in the historic fabric of the York farming district.

The production of flour no longer takes place, within the district in which the wheat is grown. The means of transporting, storing and milling have changed considerably since 1892.

6. REPRESENTATIVENESS

The *York Flour Mill* is important as an 1890s roller flour mill building and as a surviving element in the historic fabric of the farming district of York.

The *York Flour Mill* is important as a demonstration of the form, location and siting in proximity to the railway and the wheat growing district of flour milling at the close of the nineteenth century. The Mill is characteristic of its class and a representative example (devoid of plant and machinery) of flour milling in a farming community.

CONDITION

The flour mill ceased operations in 1967 and suffered a fire in 1976. Since that date the buildings have deteriorated markedly.¹⁴ The brick walls of the Mill Building appear to be in sound condition, although in a visually deteriorated condition. Structural timbers have suffered some damage, timber doors and windows are in an advanced state of deterioration and timber boarding is severely damaged. Little of the glazing remains intact, the roofing needs repair, the floors are dangerous, with many openings where plant and machinery have been removed. In addition, there was the continued deterioration through lack of use and maintenance, and the presence of vermin.

Refer to the Conservation Plan for a detailed report on the condition of the Mill and the associated buildings and the manner in which the condition influences the significance of the place.

¹⁴ *ibid*, p1

The building has been recently purchased (July 1993) and the new owners are in the process of conserving the building, for use as a furniture manufacturing and display showrooms.

INTEGRITY

The buildings are in a neglected condition, particularly the brick mill, which has deteriorated substantially since its closure in 1967. All the significant buildings are capable of return to sound condition. The plant and equipment has been almost entirely lost and are unlikely to be restored for the purposes of interpretation. The integrity of the place is reasonable.

AUTHENTICITY

The brick Mill Building and parts of the timber-framed storage shed have a high level of authenticity, notwithstanding the replacement of corrugated walling and roof coverings.

7. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The *York Flour Mill* has cultural significance for the following:

The mill is the only remaining mill building in York, a town whose prosperity was built upon the growing wheat and grain. The mill has significance for its association with York's role in the commercial development of agricultural exports in Western Australia.

The brick mill and storage sheds, although now without the former plant and machinery, is a rare example of a turn of the century roller-flour mill.

The mill building has always been, and remains, an historic landmark in the historic town of York.

The mill is highly valued by the community: the Friends of the Old York Flour Mill, the York Society and the Shire of York all recognise the strong and tangible contribution of the place to the historic townscape and the image of York as an historic town. This heritage value is also recognised at state and national levels.

8. Register of Heritage Places

Interim Entry 08/01/1993
Permanent Entry 31/12/1993

9. Conservation Order

10. Heritage Agreement

11. References

National Trust Assessment Exposition
Australian Heritage Commission Data Sheet
Bodycoat, R., *Old York Flour Mill Conservation Plan* (Friends of the Old York Flour Mill, July 1993)