

# FORMER WILLIS FLOUR MILL



Piper Street view of the complex March 2010



Former Willis Flour Mill Kyneton July 2008 mz Front Elevation



Former Willis Flour Mill Kyneton July 2008 mz Mill



Residence July 2008



Stables March 2010



Mill interior Aug 2009



Street facade of residence March 2010



Former Willis Flour Mill Kyneton August 2008 mz Plan

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## Location

18-20 PIPER STREET and 62 EBDEN STREET KYNETON, MACEDON RANGES SHIRE

## Municipality

MACEDON RANGES SHIRE

## Level of significance

Registered

## Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H2186

## Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO262

## VHR Registration

November 13, 2008

## Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

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## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - August 12, 2008

### What is Significant?

Built in 1862 by Frederick Castilla, the Former Willis Flour Mill in Piper Street, Kyneton consists of a four floored bluestone mill building with a three floored timber framed extension to its eastern side, a four room bluestone residence and a stables.

The area in the vicinity of Kyneton was occupied early in the settlement of the Port Phillip District and the first mill was established on the Coliban River at Tylden in 1841. Kyneton grew as an agricultural centre particularly following the discovery of gold in 1851 and was able to help meet the demand for food from the diggings to the north at Castlemaine and Sandhurst. There was a brief but vigorous expansion in milling in area in the late 1850s and early 1860s at the time the railway arrived in Kyneton. The expectations that drove this activity appear to have been short lived as few of the mills established at this time were in operation beyond the end of the decade. Castilla's involvement in the mill was only brief and the mill was sold later the same year. Unlike many of the other mills in the area it continued to operate under a number of different owners and lessees.

The involvement of the Willis family in the mill began in 1898 when George Willis leased the mill as part of consortium before taking the over the lease himself in 1902. Willis bought the mill in 1907 but the house remained in separate ownership until it was bought by Willis' sons in 1941. The ownership of the mill remained with the Willis family for most of the twentieth century.

Due to a loss of international export markets and a downturn in domestic flour consumption the flour milling industry became increasingly competitive in the 1960s and many smaller and regional mills were struggling to cope. In a programme designed to reduce competition in this difficult market larger mill owners through the Flour Millers' Council initiated what was called a mill 'rehabilitation' scheme whereby mills were purchased and the equipment was sent to the wreckers. In 1964 the milling equipment in Willis' mill was bought under this programme and scrapped. Following the acquisition of the milling equipment by the Flour Miller's Council the place was used as a stock feed agency and to sell petrol.

David Willis, a descendant of George Willis, took over the mill in 1977 to develop it as a tourist attraction and re-fitted it with a collection of milling equipment that he collected throughout the state. He installed a bakery in the basement of the timber extension but this no longer operates.

The mill building is constructed of coursed bluestone with quoined corners and openings. The mill originally had a castellated parapet to the front facade but this was altered to a triangular gable end when the roof was raised during the early part of the twentieth century. Traces of the castellated parapet are still evident in the wall of the building particularly in the projecting bluestone cornices that sat below the castellations. The current verandah to the Piper Street facade of mill is a reconstruction of the original verandah which was removed during the twentieth century. A trapdoor is located in the floor of the verandah with access to the basement below to allow the bags of flour to be passed up to the verandah for loading. The height of the lower verandah floor was the same level as the tray of a dray which allowed ease of loading. The verandah also includes a set of scale associated with the early operation of the mill. The internal structure of the building is of pit sawn hardwood joists over long spans supported by pit sawn hard wood columns and bolsters. An earlier timber shingle roof cladding is extant under the current corrugated iron roof. The mill building differs in form and scale from other mills that have survived from this period which usually take the form of a large three to four level rectangular building with gable ends.

The construction date of the timber extension is unknown. It is roughly constructed of machine sawn timbers and still retains its original shingle roof under its corrugated iron roof. It was reputedly used as an oat rolling mill operating in conjunction with the flour mill. The street level ground floor slopes into a central trapdoor to assist in the cleaning of the mill.

The residence is a two level structure of coursed bluestone with quoined corners and openings. The building has an unusual bell-cast roof. The main floor of the house, at street level, comprises of two rooms either side of a central hallway with a timber framed addition to the rear. The timber extension is relatively recent but replicates the form of a previous structure. There is also a lower basement at ground level.

The stables building is a single storey coursed bluestone structure with narrow quoined openings. The windows contain fixed louvres and a door opening high in the street side wall suggests the building originally included a hay loft. Internally the floor is of paved stones and the space is divided by timber partition stalls. The louvres in the windows have been recently installed.

Little original equipment remains except for built-in grain bins on the first and second floors of the mill and the conveyor associated with the bin in the south west corner of second floor. Most of the equipment that is currently (2008) in the place was installed during the 1970s and 1980s. However, the original function of the mill is evident in the structure, the form of the building and in traces left in the fabric. The various holes and trapdoors in the floors suggest the location of the various pieces of machinery and conveyors that once operated in the mill.

### **How is it Significant?**

The Former Willis Flour Mill is of historical and architectural significance to the State of Victoria

### **Why is it Significant?**

The Former Willis Flour Mill is of historical significance for illustrating the history of flour milling from the mid nineteenth century to the mid twentieth century. The mill was established in response to the growth of the population in the goldfields of central Victoria and to the construction of the rail line between Melbourne and Echuca.

The Former Willis Flour Mill is of historical significance as a rare example of a flour milling complex in a town

setting.

The Former Willis Flour Mill is of architectural significance as an 1860s regional milling complex demonstrating, through the traces left in the fabric, the operation of the mill as both a stone and a roller mill. Few regional mills now contain any machinery that illustrates the function of these places.

## Permit Exemptions

**General Conditions: 1.** All exempted alterations are to be planned and carried out in a manner which prevents damage to the fabric of the registered place or object.

**General Conditions: 2.** Should it become apparent during further inspection or the carrying out of works that original or previously hidden or inaccessible details of the place or object are revealed which relate to the significance of the place or object, then the exemption covering such works shall cease and Heritage Victoria shall be notified as soon as possible. Note: All archaeological places have the potential to contain significant sub-surface artefacts and other remains. In most cases it will be necessary to obtain approval from the Executive Director, Heritage Victoria before the undertaking any works that have a significant sub-surface component.

**General Conditions: 3.** If there is a conservation policy and plan endorsed by the Executive Director, all works shall be in accordance with it. Note: The existence of a Conservation Management Plan or a Heritage Action Plan endorsed by the Executive Director, Heritage Victoria provides guidance for the management of the heritage values associated with the site. It may not be necessary to obtain a heritage permit for certain works specified in the management plan.

**General Conditions: 4.** Nothing in this determination prevents the Executive Director from amending or rescinding all or any of the permit exemptions.

**General Conditions: 5.** Nothing in this determination exempts owners or their agents from the responsibility to seek relevant planning or building permits from the responsible authorities where applicable.

**Non Registered Fabric:** All works including demolition and internal modification to structures not included in the extent of registration are permit exempt. Additions to structures not included on the extent will require either the approval of the Executive Director or permit approval. Whether or not the works require a permit is at the discretion of the Executive Director.

The construction of any new structures within the boundaries of this registration will require a permit.

**Exterior:**

- Minor repairs and maintenance which replaces like fabric with like.
- Removal of extraneous items such as air conditioners, pipe work, ducting, wiring, antennae, aerials etc, and making good.
- Installation and repairing of damp proofing by either injection method or grout pocket method.
- Installation or removal of external fixtures and fittings such as, hot water services and taps.
- Removal, internal alteration but not external modification to the timber framed addition to the rear of the residence.
- Removal, internal alteration but not external modification to the timber framed addition to the rear of the mill.

**Interior:**

- Painting of previously painted walls and ceilings provided that preparation or painting does not remove evidence of any original paint or other decorative scheme.
- Installation, removal or replacement of carpets and/or flexible floor coverings.
- Installation, removal or replacement of curtain tracks, rods and blinds.
- Installation, removal or replacement of hooks, nails and other devices for the hanging of mirrors, paintings and other wall mounted art or religious works or icons.
- Demolition or removal of non-original stud/partition walls, suspended ceilings or non-original wall linings (including plasterboard, laminate and Masonite), bathroom partitions and tiling, sanitary fixtures and fittings, kitchen wall tiling and equipment, lights, built-in cupboards, cubicle partitions, computer and office fit out and the like.
- Removal or replacement of non-original door and window furniture including, hinges, locks, knobsets and sash lifts.
- Refurbishment of existing bathrooms, toilets and kitchens including removal, installation or replacement of sanitary fixtures and associated piping, mirrors, wall and floor coverings.
- Removal of tiling or concrete slabs in wet areas provided there is no damage to or alteration of original structure or fabric.
- Installation, removal or replacement of ducted, hydronic or concealed radiant type heating provided that the installation does not damage existing fabric and that the central plant is concealed.
- Installation, removal or replacement of electrical wiring.
- Installation, removal or replacement of electric clocks, public address systems, detectors, alarms, emergency lights, exit signs, luminaires and the like on plaster surfaces.
- Installation, removal or replacement of bulk insulation in the roof space.
- Installation of plant within the roof space.
- Installation of new fire hydrant services including sprinklers, fire doors and elements affixed to plaster surfaces.

**Minor Works :**

**Note:** Any Minor Works that in the opinion of the Executive Director will not adversely affect the heritage significance of the place

may be exempt from the permit requirements of the Heritage Act. A person proposing to undertake minor works may submit a proposal to the Executive Director. If the Executive Director is satisfied that the proposed works will not adversely affect the heritage values of the site, the applicant may be exempted from the requirement to obtain a heritage permit. If an applicant is uncertain whether a heritage permit is required, it is recommended that the permits co-ordinator be contacted.

Objects

Removal of free standing machinery and equipment from the mill.

Removal of bakery machinery and equipment from the basement of the timber addition.

Construction dates	1861,
Heritage Act Categories	Registered place,
Other Names	WILLIS BROTHERS FLOUR MILL, WILLIS' FLOUR MILL, WILLIS' STEAM MILL, FORMER WILLIS FLOUR MILL, G.W. WILLIS STEAM MILL, PIPER STREET MILL,
Hermes Number	2821
Property Number	

## History

History

**Flour Milling in Kyneton**

Pastoralists moved into the area around Kyneton early in the settlement of Port Phillip. Kyneton grew as an agricultural centre particularly following the discovery of gold in 1851 and was able to help meet the demand for food from the diggings to the north at Castlemaine and Sandhurst.

There has been flour milling activity in the Kyneton area since 1841 with Willoughby's Cornmill at Tylden, a water mill on the Coliban River. This was followed by an increase in milling activity in the mid 1850s following on from the gold rushes, however the growth of milling in the area in the early 1860s in response to the arrival of the railway, which was expected to allow direct transport of milled products to Melbourne. The large stone flour mills still standing in the district demonstrate the importance of flour milling in the area.

Between 1855 and 1859 four mills opened. In 1859 there were four flour mills in Kyneton area; A windmill, owned by Mr. Hall, was in operation near Green Hill; and a steam mill owned by Mr. Argyle was located on the northern edge of town on the banks of the Coliban river and Degraives Riverview Mill was located to north of the town and his Montpelier (Skelsmergh) Mill to the south, both on the banks of the Coliban.

Milling activity in the area was pronounced but it is unclear just how many mills were opened and operated in the 1860s. The short period of activity of both Degraives mills suggests that there was great promise in milling in the area in the late 1850s but which couldn't be sustained. The various reference to a number of mills in Kyneton supports this. That these mills don't continue to operate and have left little physical or documentary trace suggest that the period of promise was short and that the competition or markets could not sustain them.

The arrival of the railway Kyneton in 1862 may have stimulated this activity with its promise placing Kyneton in a favourable position to be supplied with grain from the north of the state and to supply markets in Melbourne, the central gold fields and eventually the Murray river trade. It placed Kyneton in a favourable position to be supplied from southern New South Wales via the Murray River Trade coming through Port of Echuca, which was the terminus of the line. Kyneton also benefited from being located on the Mount Alexander road with access to both the goldfields and the metropolis and placed as it is halfway between Melbourne and Sandhurst.

The Kyneton Alphabetical Directory of 1866 lists three Millers in Kyneton: Castilla, Degraives and Donohue in Mitchell Street, however Lewis Jones does not mention Donohue but lists the Argyle Mill, Isaac Smith's Radnor Mill and David Rannard's Piper street mill which the Directory doesn't. Further, Lewis lists the two Degraives mills but the directory only lists one, putting it in the location of the 'Riverview Mill'. The Directory doesn't list Carlsruhe, and Degraives 'Skelsmergh' mill could be considered to be in Carlsruhe, this may account for its exclusion.

The Directory lists three millers in Malmsbury: Blyth Brothers, Edward Markham in Clowes Street and John Oswin in Urquhart Street. For this period Lewis lists only Blyth Bros and a portable mill owned by Messrs Milvain and Bryden operating in the town at this time.

By the end of the nineteenth century only one mill remained operating in the area and this was Willis' Mill.

**History of Willis' Mill**

The mill built in 1862

Frederick Castilla, located in town, between two Degraives' mills, which were located outside of town. It appears that Castilla only owned the mill for a short time before selling it. The mill was then owned and operated by an number of parties, most notably James Brown, an English miller who bought the place in 1877. It appears that Brown may have leased the operation of the Mill prior to this and that his involvement started with assisting Castilla to setup the Mill. It Has been suggested that Brown took over the lease of the mill in 1864 and that Brown's flour won tied first prize at the April 1864 grain show of the Port Phillip Society and prizes in 185 at Kyneton, Sandhurst and Ballarat. [1]

An article in December 1895 issue of the *Australian Miller* reported that James Brown's mill at Kyneton had been shut up for some time and was filled old machinery and rubbish and that Brown was sentenced to months imprisonment in November 1895 for breaking windows and later found guilty of perjury for which he was sentenced to six months hard labour, with the first three days and last two months to spent in solitary confinement.[2]

The lease on the mill was taken out by the Kyneton Flour Milling Company with Mr Matthews as the miller and Mr G. Willis as the secretary of the company in January 1898 but the *Australian Miller* reported four months later that the partnership had dissolved on 7 May but that the business would be carried on by Mr G. Willis who would attend to all debts etc.

The *Australian Miller* reported the next month (June 1898?) that the mill would be remodelled and its capacity increased by Ganz and Company. Ganz were developers of roller milling so it certain that it was at this time that the mill was converted from French Burr milling to roller milling.

Willis took over the lease of the mill himself in 1902 and bought it from Brown, who had continued to own it, in 1907

In March 1903 George Willis was reported to have a three bag plant run by an under fire multitubular steel boiler of 50 horsepower and was that the plant was to be increased to 5 bag capacity.

The house remained in Brown's ownership until his death in 1910 and in his family's ownership. The house was bought by George Willis' sons in 1941 and the ownership of the mill remained with the Willis family for most of the twentieth century producing soft biscuit flours up until 1964.

In 1912 Sands and McDougal's Victorian Directory lists 61 flours scattered through regional Victoria. Ten years later this number has reduced to 39 and steadily decreased as the century progressed. This coincided with rise of large milling enterprises based Melbourne, some whom owned and operated the smaller regional mills. By 1962 there only 22 mills in regional Victoria but 14 large millers in Melbourne. In 1967 Sands and McDougal's Victorian Directory no longer lists any flour mills in regional Victoria but lists them as flour businesses. Willis' is present throughout.

The 1950s were a promising time for millers, export markets were up and mills were running at capacity to fill orders. Much of the flour produced was sold through the Australian Wheat Board, resulting in many smaller millers neglecting their local markets in favour of the AWB who provided a ready customer, with no sales costs and prompt payment

A decline in export markets and the consumption of flour in the 1960s created a downturn in the milling industry. Regional mills suffered particularly as their ready market with the AWB disappeared and they no longer had the resources to compete with the large city based millers for either local or export customers. In addition many bakers throughout Victoria had came under the control of large milling groups in the 1960s and the 1970s with the result that the remaining 'free' trade for flour became increasingly competitive.

The pressure on smaller and marginal mills intensified and to induce them to close the Victorian milling industry acting through the Flour Millers' Council initiated what was euphemistically called a mill 'rehabilitation' scheme whereby mills were purchased for a price based on a formula embracing rated capacity and level of local sales. The mills were closed and the rollers were sent to the wreckers.

Through this programme the large mill companies bought out the equipment of smaller, perhaps struggling, millers in order to reduce competition in a limited market. Between 1950 and 1976 33 mills closed down, 28 under the "rehabilitation" programme. In 1964 the milling equipment in Willis' mill was bought under this programme and scrapped.

Following the sale the place was used to sell petrol and as a stock feed agency. Photos taken in side the place in 1978 show that there only a number of older pieces of milling equipment remains.

David Willis took over the mill in 1977 to develop it as a tourist attraction.

The Age on 7 September 1979 reported that all the machinery that David Willis had installed was running. Willis later installed (1988) a 2000 gallon, 100 horsepower Cornish boiler.

(The Flour Mills of Victoria 1840-1990, Lewis and Peggy Jones, pp.149-151;

Where Have all the Flour Mills Gone?, W. Lewis Jones, 1984. pp.116-117)[1] David Willis in his nomination and The Flour Mills of Victoria 1840-1990, Lewis and Peggy Jones.

[2] The Flour Mills of Victoria 1840-1990, Lewis and Peggy Jones

## Plaque Citation

Built of bluestone in 1862 to take advantage of the growth of the Central Victorian goldfields and the construction

of the rail line between Melbourne and Echuca, the mill operated for over 100 years.

## **Extent of Registration**

1. All of the buildings shown as:

B1 Mill Building and Timber Framed Extension

B2 Residence

B3 Stables

on Diagram 2186 held by the Executive Director.

2. All of the land shown L1 on Diagram 2186 held by the Executive Director being all of the land described in Certificate of Title Volume 07877 Folio 195.

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*This place/object may be included in the Victorian Heritage Register pursuant to the Heritage Act 2017. Check the Victorian Heritage Database, selecting 'Heritage Victoria' as the place source.*

*For further details about Heritage Overlay places, contact the relevant local council or go to Planning Schemes Online <http://planningschemes.dpcd.vic.gov.au/>*