

HERITAGE PLACE

NAME OF PLACE: PENSURST FLAX MILL

ADDRESS/LOCATION OF PLACE: Penshurst-Dunkeld Road PENSURST

STUDY NUMBER: 289

HERITAGE OVERLAY NUMBER:

PRECINCT: outside

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA: Southern Grampians Shire

ALLOTMENT: 39 or **SECTION:** XV **PARISH:** PARISH OF YALIMBA
38?

ACCESS DESCRIPTION:

CFA 475 C10; VicRoads 73F7; located on the east side of the Penshurst-Dunkeld Road about 1.0kms north of the township.

SIGNIFICANCE RATING: Local



Flax Mill, Penshurst - Dunkeld Road, Penshurst

Image Date: 21/05/02

EXTENT OF LISTING:

To the extent of: 1. All the surviving buildings, structures, works, water bodies and archaeological remains and all of the land.

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PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:

The former Penshurst Flax Mill is located on the Dunkeld-Penshurst Road, approximately one kilometre from the centre of two structures survive from the original complex. The original function of the buildings is not certain. They are both two storey, timber-framed and corrugated iron clad buildings. The windows are large and of an industrial design. The buildings were burnt recently, and are now in a ruinous condition.

HISTORY:

As a result of the Second World War and the national effort at self-sufficiency, the Australian federal government established an extensive flax growing and processing industry. In the 1920s, the Flax Corporation of Australia had first raised interest in flax production in the Strathkellar and Tarrington areas as they were thought to be the most suitable in Australia. Under encouragement from the Corporation several farmers planted experimental crops and the concept of establishing a mill at Strathkellar was proposed. The scheme did not proceed but flax growing continued in the district and the crop was processed at the Colac flax mill. In 1937, there was a strong push for experimental cropping and soon after the outbreak of the Second World War, Flax Fibres Pty Ltd. proposed to establish a flax mill at Strathkellar if the number of acres under cropping was increased to 1,200. The Hamilton district became the most important and largest flax growing area in Australia, allocating 5,000 acres to flax production and having the largest mill employing 180 people. Flax mills existed throughout the Western District including Strathkellar, Penshurst, Lake Bolac, Lismore, Terang, Colac and Winchelsea as well as in other parts of the state and also in Tasmania, South Australia and Western Australia. The production was supported by research undertaken by the CSIRO and the Department of Agriculture. 'Flax production under war conditions' was a 10 page pamphlet produced in Melbourne in 1942 by the Australian Flax Production Committee.

In 1940 Mr. Guy set up the first temporary flax mill on the Penshurst football ground with Mr. Bunce as overseer. Penshurst flax mill was established as a subsidiary of the substantial Strathkellar flax mill, 25kms to the north-west. In 1942, Mr. Charles Clark arrived from the Leongatha mill to take over as manager. In 1944, the permanent mill was built on land owned by the Collins brothers on the Penshurst-Dunkeld Road. Appropriate machines were installed immediately and the mill employed 50 people on a permanent basis and over 100 at peak periods.

Land Army girls who also worked on local farms were employed during peak periods and, in 1943, twelve lady school teachers from Melbourne volunteered to work in the mill and also in the paddocks during their Christmas holidays.

The Penshurst mill, at its peak, comprised several buildings, all of which were clad in corrugated iron. A small single storey building, presumably the office, was located at the entrance on the Penshurst-Dunkeld Road. Two large structures of two storeys, set perpendicular to the road, had hipped roofs with skylights and ventilated ridge lines. Another large building, behind the former, had a saw-tooth roof. The processes within these building are not known and, it seems, the records of the Penshurst mill have been lost. Only one structure survives.

The Penshurst mill continued until 1951 when the local flax was processed at Strathkellar. The Strathkellar mill closed in 1959. The flax mill was recently burnt out.

THEMATIC CONTEXT:

Theme 3: Developing local, regional and national economies
3.5 Developing primary production
3.5.3 Developing agricultural industries

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3.8 Moving goods and people

3.13 Developing an Australian manufacturing capacity

Theme 5: Working

5.8 Working on the land

Theme 8: Developing Australia's cultural life

8.10 Pursuing excellence in the arts and science

8.10.5 Advancing knowledge in science and technology

CONDITION:

Seriously compromised by the loss of the other buildings in the complex.

INTEGRITY:

poor degree of integrity especially following fire.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

What is significant?

The Penshurst Flax Mill is located on the east side of the Penshurst-Dunkeld Road about 1.0kms north of the township. Although the complex at its peak had a number of buildings over the site, only two adjacent structures survive from the original complex. The original function of the remaining structures is not certain. Both are two storey, timber-framed and corrugated iron clad buildings. The Penshurst Flax Mill was set up as a temporary, subsidiary of the successful Strathkellar in 1940, and the complex began permanently in 1944. The Flax Mill employed fifty people on a full time basis, and at times employed an extra 50 casual staff. The Mill closed in 1951, and has been disused since this time. The building was burnt recently. The buildings are in poor, ruinous condition, but retain a fair degree of integrity.

How is it significant?

The Penshurst Flax Mill is of historical significance to the township of Penshurst and the Shire of Southern Grampians.

Why is it significant?

The Penshurst Flax Mill is of historical significance as it represents the Australian Government's desire to move toward self sufficiency in the late 1930s and early 1940s. The Mill was developed as a subsidiary of the successful Strathkellar Flax Mill, which it should be viewed in relation to. The Mill is of further historical significance as the major employer in the township for 10 years, between 1940-51. The mill is also of significance as it represents an industry which, although short lived, was an extremely important part of the township and surrounding area.

COMPARISON:

290 Strathkellar Flax Mill (former), Strachans Road, Strathkellar

ASSESSED BY: aen & tfh

ASSESSMENT DATE:

20/05/2002

EXISTING LISTINGS:

HERITAGE STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS:

Include in VHR Include in RNE Include in Local Planning Scheme

No Recommendations for Inclusions

REFERENCES:

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Author	Title	Year	Page
Department of Lands and Survey Don Garden	Yalimba East County of Villiers Hamilton, A Western District History	1880 1984	217, 218, 237
E F Mogford, Tracy Macklin	Flax Growing in the Hamilton District "Penshurst Mill damaged by fire" The Hamilton Spectator 05/12/1995	1986 1995	22