

# The Boyup Brook Flax Mill

## *Tony & Kerry Inglis' old stomping ground*

*Did you know?*

The land that comprises the Flax Mill complex, Caravan Park and Boyup Brook Pistol Club, was originally part of the Inglis Family farm. Tony worked at The Mill in 1962, grading flax fibre and planting seed variety plots.

*Tony remembers...*

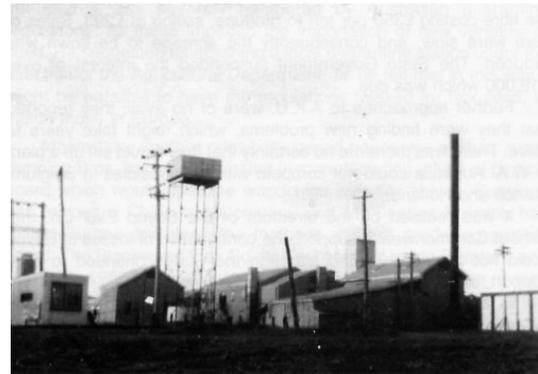
When war was declared in 1939, the Department of Defence acquired this land at no payment to build the Flax Mill to supply Flax fibre to make webbing, fire hoses and harnesses for parachutes.

Two other mills were built, one at Yarloop and the other at Beelerup, (Boyup side of Donnybrook.). Boyup was the best area for flax growing and the other two mills were soon closed.

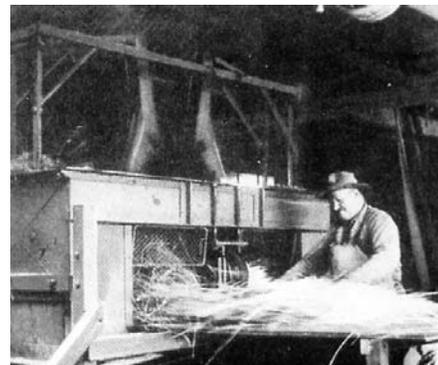
Building of The Mill began in 1943. Water was pumped from the Blackwood River to make steam for hot water to ret the straw and power the steam pumps and steam generators of which there were two, producing a 440 volt supply to drive the machinery.

The flax was first carted to the mill and then de-seeded. Flax seed was another saleable item. The straw was then put into the retting tanks, (those concrete structures with heavy metal doors on the south side.)

The retting tanks were filled with hot water and kept at a certain temperature for about 12 hours, then drained into a very large ground level tank. This tank was about 50 ft across and 15 ft deep, with no top, barriers or guard rails, and was used like this for the working life of the mill. Certainly not Work Safe!



When the water cooled, it was pumped into ponds on the inside of our southern boundary, and the retting water was allowed to drain into the Boyup Brook, the brook under the bridge as you enter the caravan park. The water then ran back into the Blackwood



River and on down to Augusta ... no EPA in those days!

The flax from the retting tanks was taken out to the paddocks north of the buildings and stood up and dried. It then went through a scutcher which beat the outer casing off the straw, leaving the fibre. The retting process made the outside casing brittle for easier removal. The fibre was then graded, baled and sent to Melbourne for processing into canvas etc.

The Mill operated under the defence force unit 1949, when a Growers Co-op was formed and it continued to process flax until 1965.



The floods in 1955 were a set back, and floods again in 1962 caused even bigger loss to The Mill. Then the introduction of synthetics, imports, less demand for flax fibre and high labour input spelt the demise of The Mill.

In its heyday, The Mill employed about a 150 workers including a number of women during the war due to the labour shortage. It had its own accommodation and mess hall where the swimming pool is today.

### Boyup Brook in 1955

3 Banks	2 Butcher shops	2 Bakers
4 Cafes	4 garages	1 SP betting shop
1 Drapery shop	2 food stores	1 hostel
1 hotel	3 stock and station agencies	
2 apple packing sheds		

A large timber mill was at the entrance of the town, with its own accommodation. There was at least one Goods Train a day to the town. The Railway Barracks housed the changeover crew for the trains going on to Kojonup, Katanning etc. Boyup also had its own railway maintenance crew.

Thanks for all this Tony, it has been really interesting.

