

The Willows Homestead



Left: "The Willows" Right: Old Telegraph and Post Office.

'THE WILLOWS', THE FLOUR MILL AND THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

'The Willows', home of the Jerilderie & District Historical Society, was originally constructed for the Wise Brothers, Thomas and George, who came to Jerilderie in 1884 from Avoca, Victoria, where they had operated a Flour Mill, and proposed to do the same in Jerilderie.

Mr Samuel Wilson, who had settled on 'Carrah Leigh' in 1873, had experimented with growing wheat and his success led to other settlers following suit, with the Wise Brothers providing the Flour Mill.

Incidentally, 'Carrah Leigh' is mentioned as the haven fled to by Samuel Gill, Editor of the '**Jerilderie and Urana Gazette**', who was being sought by Ned Kelly on the occasion of his raid on Jerilderie on 8th, 9th and 10th February, 1879, to print his story, now known as the famous "Jerilderie Letter".

According to a report in the Narrandera 'Argus', which also happened to be the paper published by Samuel Gill after he closed down the Jerilderie 'Gazette' and moved to Narrandera;- "*they (Wise Bros.) came to NSW and established a mill at Jerilderie where the first ton of wheat was produced in the week ending March 8, 1885*".

Originally, the land on which 'The Willows' is situated was in three allotments (with the Ned Kelly Post Office on another allotment). The first allotment, adjacent to and east of the right of way to the footbridge was portion of an allotment owned by Ralph

Powell, and it included the right of way and part of the block to the west now owned by Bill and Kathy Noack. The original owner of the centre allotment was Bertha Monash, mother of Australia's greatest military General, Sir John Monash. She sold it in 1884 to J D Rankin and others acting on behalf of the Progress Committee, formed in June 1882, who in turn immediately on-sold it to Wise Bros. The eastern allotment was eventually purchased by Wise Bros. in March, 1891 from the Bank of New South Wales acting as mortgagee from, strangely enough, a William Kelly.

It was thought that initially the Flour Mill was water powered because Wise Bros. had also built a dam across the Billabong Creek but as Mr Ian Gilbert (inaugural President of the Jerilderie Historical Society, and hon. Secretary in 1989 when writing on "The Willows, the Flour Mill and Wise Bros") that the Mill was erected "*too high above the creek to give a water pressure necessary to operate the mill wheel*". Ian also states that a photograph of the 'Willows' taken in the 1890's shows a chimney stack which suggests the dam was built to hold water for steam driven boilers.

When the town water supply became available in 1894 Wise Bros. obtained land from the Railway Commissioners in December, 1894 and then re-located the Flour Mill to the railway, with a spur line into the Mill.

With the re-location of the flour mill to the railway line, (which was eventually dismantled in April, 1920 and trucked to Tocumwal), the 'Willows' was remodeled in 1897 utilizing in part, the bricks from the chimney stack.

It is worth noting that the Wise Bros. were leading figures in the establishment of the Church of England and the tiles laid in the entrance foyer of the 'Willows' are exactly the same as those laid in the porch of the Church; the foundation stone of that establishment being laid on 20 December, 1897.

In the **Jerilderie Herald and Urana Advertiser** of 7 April, 1905 there is a reference to the construction of the Town Hall (Wood Street) and the laying of a huge massive granite foundation stone.

The article goes on to state "*.....This stone, we understand, was one of the old mill-stones originally brought here by Messrs. Wise Bros. to their mills in 1885, but which was discarded many a long year, for the steel rollers.*"

There is a notation on the extract of the paper recording this piece of information by Ian Gilbert that states "*there is no known record of this stone having been found in the 1930 renovations or when the Hall was demolished after the fire which occurred on 21 July, 1964.*"

Thomas Wise continued to occupy the 'Willows' until April, 1909 when it was subsequently sold to a family friend in Mr Harry Lloyd, Real Estate Agent of Deniliquin, on 9 July, 1909.

Harry Lloyd and Sons were Auctioneers, Stock & Station Agents with offices in Melbourne, Deniliquin, Hillston and Jerilderie. A son W.J. ("Old Bill") Lloyd managed the Branch in Jerilderie until April, 1919 when he transferred to Melbourne.

The 'Willows' was sold to Mr W.R. Patterson on 20 January, 1919. He had previously occupied premises on the corner of Bolton and Jerilderie Streets.

In February 1920 the local Hospital Board were anxious to secure the services of a Doctor by the name of Marcus Vicars Southey, D.S.O., who had returned from the First World War, and so purchased the 'Willows' from Mr Patterson for £1,100 on behalf of Dr Southey. Ownership of the 'Willows' was transferred to Dr Southey on 13 April, 1920. He continued to occupy the premises as a house and surgery until his retirement in 1959 and departure from Jerilderie in 1960. Dr Southey died in 1962.

Having been vacant for several years, and being decimated by vandals, 'The Willows' came under notice of the local Health and Building Inspector, Mr Bill Hannigan, who wanted it condemned and demolished. The Historical Society felt it would be a good tourist attraction as it was next to the Ned Kelly Post Office and asked Mr Hannigan to defer any action while they wrote to the Department of Lands seeking their assistance in buying it for conversion to a Museum. No reply was received to the request and for a time the proposal appeared doomed, until March 1973.

It was this time that Mr Tom Lewis, then Minister for Lands, was to arrive in Jerilderie to officially open the local Show. A civic reception had been organised by the Shire Council and the late Mr Pat Byrnes, then Shire President and President of the Sheep and Show Fair Society as well as being a member of the Historical Society, was to chauffeur Mr Lewis and the official party to the racecourse where the show was being held. Mr Byrnes had planned to drive via Powell Street but the plane carrying Mr Lewis was late so he took the late Joe Lawson, Member for Murray, and Adrian Packham, District Surveyor, on the planned tour. He stopped in front of 'The Willows' and from the subsequent discussions the District Surveyor gave approval to buy it.

On behalf of the Lands Department, the Historical Society negotiated with the Southey family a purchase price. The family being scattered over New South Wales and Queensland it was a difficult assignment to obtain the necessary signatures to have the building ownership transferred. The transfer was eventually completed and the building was bought for \$1,900 in August, 1975. 'The Willows' then became a Crown Government Reserve for a Museum with the Shire Council being trustees, and who subsequently entrusted the management of the building to the local Historical Society.

Working bees were held to clean up the damage made by vandals and the years of not being lived in. The Historical Society did not have the necessary finance to renovate or restore the building and so the project lay dormant for some years.

Then in 1980 the Apex Club was undecided about running a second Art Union Truck Raffle. Their first truck raffle proceeds were used in the construction of the 'Balmeringa' Aged Units. A meeting was held between Apex members, Laurie Henery, Chief Executive Officer of the local hospital speaking on the need for an Ambulance

Station, and Ian Gilbert speaking on the needs of the Historical Society. It was decided at that meeting to hold a second truck raffle and that 70% of the proceeds were to go to the construction of an Ambulance Station with 30% going to the Historical Society for renovations and restoration of the 'Willows'

The Society received \$38,500 from that truck raffle and the money was expended on major works such as knocking out five back rooms and extending it 15 feet at the back/sidewall of the building facing the Ned Kelly Post Office, and concreting the floor. This made it one big room now known as the Museum Room. A substantial amount of filling was deposited at the back of the block. The sewerage was put on. Public toilets were installed in what was the old laundry, and the whole front verandah, roof and floor, were completely reconstructed. The Historical Society subcontracted the work out to various local tradesmen and it was all done over a period of 2 ½ to 3 years.

With the majority of restoration completed, Mrs Kathy Noack took on the task of establishing the coffee and craft shop in the building. Mrs Noack continued to run the Coffee and Craft Shop in 'The Willows' until December, 1985 when ill health forced her to close the business.

In 1983 further grants and loans totaling \$8,000 were received from the Lands Department and Jerilderie Shire to complete the restoration work carried out from the proceeds of the Apex Truck Raffle.

Then in 1985 notification was received of a grant of \$25,000 from the Bi-Centenary Committee on the proviso that \$10,000 was raised locally, to allow further restoration work. The work was again carried out by various local tradesmen with the completion being in time for the unveiling of the plaque on 26 January, 1988, by Mr Geoffrey Wise, grandson of Thomas Wise.

By this time, commencing in November 1986 Paul and Judy Ryan had re-opened the Coffee and Craft Shop in 'The Willows', which they continued to operate up until June, 2000, acting as unofficial Tourist Information Officers and guides.

From then, and for the next decade the Historical Society, assisted by many volunteers, not least of which being the management role assumed by the late Dick Honeyman, and his wife Marjorie, kept the Museum and Coffee Shop operating.

In 2010 Lew and Wendy Frazier, formerly from Cootamundra, took over the management of the Museum which included operating the officially upgraded Visitor Information Centre, until March 2011 when ill health forced the Fraziers to resign.

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The Jerilderie and District Historical Society had its origins from a public meeting held on 14 May, 1970, called to form the Society, although for many years before references were made to the need for establishing such an organisation. Indeed, in 1960 when the new Shire Offices in Jerilderie Street were opened and the old offices

in Wood Street closed there was an old iron safe which was stored away with the object of offering it to a Historical Society, when it was formed.

In November 1964 the Shire Council purchased the 'Ned Kelly' Post Office from Mrs Lydia Collier which at that time, and up until May 1966 had been occupied as a residence.

During 1968, 1969 and 1970 the Shire Council voted funds to create a reserve for restoration of the old Post Office, and in 1970 received a \$1,000 grant from the Captain Cook Bi-Centenary Committee which allowed the restoration work to be carried out at a total cost of \$3,873.

The Historical Society held its first meeting in the 'Ned Kelly' Post Office on 10 September, 1970.

Cr L J Henery

Local Historian

Revised April, 2007

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