

South Australian Heritage Act 1978-80	Register of State Heritage Items ITEM EVALUATION SHEET Buildings and Structures Item BLUE LAKE OAT MILL (FORMER COMMERCIAL MILL) PERCY & ALEXANDER STREETS, MOUNT GAMBIER												
Age 1867 Original 1898&1901 Extns.	Theme	Office 7022-10959											
Period 1852-1883 1884-1913	Subject SECONDARY INDUSTRY - Processing of Productive Products	Region South East											
Building Type Flour Mill	Style Mid Victorian/Utilitarian	Status N.Tr. (Robe)											
<u>Qualitative Data</u> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>Component</td> <td>Comment</td> </tr> </table>		Component	Comment	Grading <table border="0"> <tr> <td>E</td> <td>VG</td> <td>AG</td> <td>FP</td> <td>NA</td> </tr> </table>					E	VG	AG	FP	NA
Component	Comment												
E	VG	AG	FP	NA									
<u>History</u> 1. Context: Associated with the agricultural development of the Mount Gambier district during the late 1850s and '60s. Also associated with the growth of Mount Gambier as a town during this period. 2. Person/Group: Original builder and owner was Thomas Henry Williams, member of the first Town Council and Mayor. He also built 4 other mills in the area. - Second owner (1869-1889) was Thomas Wilson, also a member of the first Town Council and Mayor. 3. Event: Not yet established.		* *	*	*	*								
<u>Architecture</u> 4. Architect: Not yet established. Builder: Not yet established. 5. Design: Three separate buildings, ranging in height from three storeys to single storey across steeply sloping site, uniform roof level. Gabled roofs concealed by parapet with mouldings and dentils. Evenly spaced elliptically arched 12 paned windows. 6. Construction: Predominately Mt. Gambier limestone, some galvanised iron walls; timber internal structure, floors and roof construction. 7. Interior: Limited access. Intermediate floors supported on massive timber columns. Large open spaces, variety of machinery from different eras. 8. Representation: The only mill remaining in Mt. Gambier; the buildings have been in continuous use for more than 100 years.		* *	*	*	* * *								
<u>Environment</u> 9. Continuity: The mill, bounded by Mitchell, Percy, Hedley & Alexander Sts. is on the edge of a large area of vacant land which has potential for rejuvenation, located parallel to Commercial St. and close to Jens Hotel and the Civic buildings precinct, sympathetic in scale and materials, defines the edge commercial area.		*	*										

FOOTNOTES:

1. see bottom of page 1. *Mount Gambier, The City around a Cave,
Les. R. Hill, 1972. Pg. 13.
2. ibid Pg. 14.
3. Agriculture in South Australia by the Special Reporter of
"The Leader", J.L. Dow, Adelaide, 1874, Pg. 50.
4. Hill Pg. 22.
5. Dow Page 49.
6. Hill Pg. 22.
7. ibid Pg. 207.
8. Flour Mills in South Australia, Lindsey Harrison, Working Paper 3,
Department of Architecture, University of Adelaide, June 1979
Figure 3, "Distribution of Mills (in S.A.), 1865-70."
9. Hill Pg. 207.
10. Industries of the South East, 1930, Commercial Flour and Oatmeal
Milling Company Ltd. Pgs. 118-120.
11. Hill Pgs. 207-208.
12. Industries of the South East Pgs. 118-119.

A. Aeuckens
Register Historian

AA:BAH
30.4.82

- * Williams continued as a miller in the town for some time,
his next commercial venture being the Telegraph Mills which
he opened on 1 May, 1869.
- ** However, in the Chronological list of events in the South Eastern
District, 1861-1883 (S.A.A. 1221/380), Cuttings taken from the
Border Watch, 5 May-20 June, 1936; the entries for both 1873 and
1875 note the commencement of oatmeal milling at the Commercial Mills.
Thus, while oatmeal milling could well have begun at the Commercial
Mills as early as the 1870's, it may not have become the Mills'
major product until the time of G.T. Wright's management.

South Australian Heritage Act 1978-80	Register of State Heritage Items ITEM EVALUATION SHEET Buildings and Structures Item BLUE LAKE OAT MILL							
Component		Comment		Grading E VG AG FP NA				
10. Local Character:		The mill is visually dominant for some distance because of its massing and location on sloping land, and contributes to the scale and character of the town.			*			
11. Landmark:		Visually dominant because of size and location, local familiar landmark.			*			
<u>Integrity</u>								
12. Alterations:		The form of the buildings has evolved over years of continuous use. Despite minor unsympathetic upgradings the major buildings have retained their integrity.			*			
13. Condition:		Some deterioration due to lack of recent maintenance.				*		
14. Compatability:		Excellent, still in use as a mill.		*				
<u>Supplementary Information</u>								
15. <u>Adaptation Potential</u> :		The building would be suitable for a variety of community or commercial uses which require large areas of open spaces. The District Council has amended its Regulations to allow museum or educational use. The form of the original buildings and the interior spaces should be maintained and restored.						
16. <u>Interpretation Potential</u> :		The building has a high potential for both an active and passive interpretive rule. The agricultural theme is important to the region and this building would provide an excellent venue.						
17. <u>Current Situation</u> :		Refer to cover sheet.						
Evaluated By	Carolyn Wigg Reg. Architect	A. Aeuckens Reg. Historian	Date					
Reviewed By	Ivar Nelsen		Date					
South Australian Heritage Committee Categorization			Date					

I.E.S./05/21/001

HISTORICAL RESEARCH: BLUE LAKE OAT MILL (FORMER COMMERCIAL HILL),
PERCY AND ALEXANDER STREETS, MOUNT GAMBIER

The Mount Gambier district was first "settled" in the early 1840's when Stephen Henty, a squatter, established a cattle run in the area with stockyards on the shores of what became known as Browne's Lake. He was followed by other squatters ¹ who dominated the life of the district until the mid-1850's. "Between the middle 1840's and the middle 1850's, Mount Gambier remained static. There were pastoral stations stretching west for many miles from the New South Wales border (which became the Victorian border in 1851), . . . Most people were at the headquarters of various stations - the owners, employees and families." ² Mount Gambier as a town was not "officially" founded until 1854 when Hastings Cunningham, the owner of section 1103, had 77 acres of his section surveyed into 123 allotments in July of that year. Owners of adjoining properties soon followed his example and more land was gradually sub-divided into allotments for sale. The first Government Land sales in "Gambiertown", however, did not take place until 22nd December, 1860.

Thus, the development of Mount Gambier really took place from the late 1850's onwards, and it was in 1857 that a Dr. Wehl established the town's first flour mill, driven by hand power. J.L. Dow wrote in his Agriculture in South Australia, that, "During the first eight or ten years (of agriculture development in Mount Gambier) consecutive wheat growing on the well-known colonial system was pretty generally the rule." Already by late 1857 ⁴ 500 acres in the district were planted with wheat. Cereal production on land that Dow said was, "unquestionably the richest bit of agricultural soil in South Australia" ⁵ continued to develop in the 1860's and was to remain an important primary industry in the district throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth century. Dr. Wehl enlarged his flour mill in 1858 and in the following year converted it to steam power. He continued as a miller until 1868. In August, 1858, a Mr. William Burcham arrived in Mount Gambier, "with machinery and a party of 13 from Strathalbyn, to erect the second flour mill in the town. This business opened for trading on February 26th, 1859, and prospered for a few years until 1865 when Mr. Burcham was made bankrupt." ⁶

On 26th August, 1867, according to the Mount Gambier "Standard", the machinery of the Commercial Mills (Williams Steam Flour Mill) was first set into motion. The mill had been built by a Mr. Thomas Henry Williams in 1866 at a cost of approximately £1,000, "while the cost of the land and machinery was in the vicinity of £3,000. The Mill had an internal area of 65 feet by 76 feet and was capable of storing 15,000 bushels of wheat. Before coming to Mount Gambier, Mr. Williams in 1864 had created a (flour) mill at Port MacDonnell." ⁷ Williams' mill was probably therefore the third flour mill to be constructed in Mount Gambier, and was definitely one of the two mills operating in the town during the years 1865-1870. ⁸

Two years after building his Mill, Williams* (later Mayor of Mount Gambier in 1881-82) sold it to a Mr. Thomas Wilson (also a future Mayor of Mount Gambier in 1884-85), "and for 20 years, the Flour and Grain Mill continued under its second owner until in 1889, Mr. Wilson had to assign his estate due to financial difficulties. The Mill was closed for a few months and then re-opened under new management, a company of local businessmen appointing Mr. G.T. Wright as a manager and miller." ⁹

1. "The 1840's did not bring any great progress to Gambiertown. The pioneers at this time mainly consisted of squatters ²/... on large stations with their shepherds and labourers tending the * sheen and cattle and only growing enough produce for their own needs."

Despite the fact that there were other flour mills operating in the town during the latter decades of the nineteenth century, "The business was successfully carried on for a long period, there being an excellent demand for the company's products." 10 New machinery was added in 1892 and 1893 and again in 1898 when the name of the Company was changed to the Commercial Roller Flour Mills.

"The next major improvements to the thriving business was in 1898-99 when the Mill was doubled in size and then late 1901 a new section on the east of the main building was erected, three storeys and four floors, 60feet wide, 30 feet deep and 40 feet high.

The business was formed into a Limited Company in 1916 The first Chairman in 1916 was Mr. John Watson who was succeeded in 1925 by his son, Mr. J.R. Watson. A three-generation trio was completed in 1948 when Mr. R.J.R. Watson was appointed."11

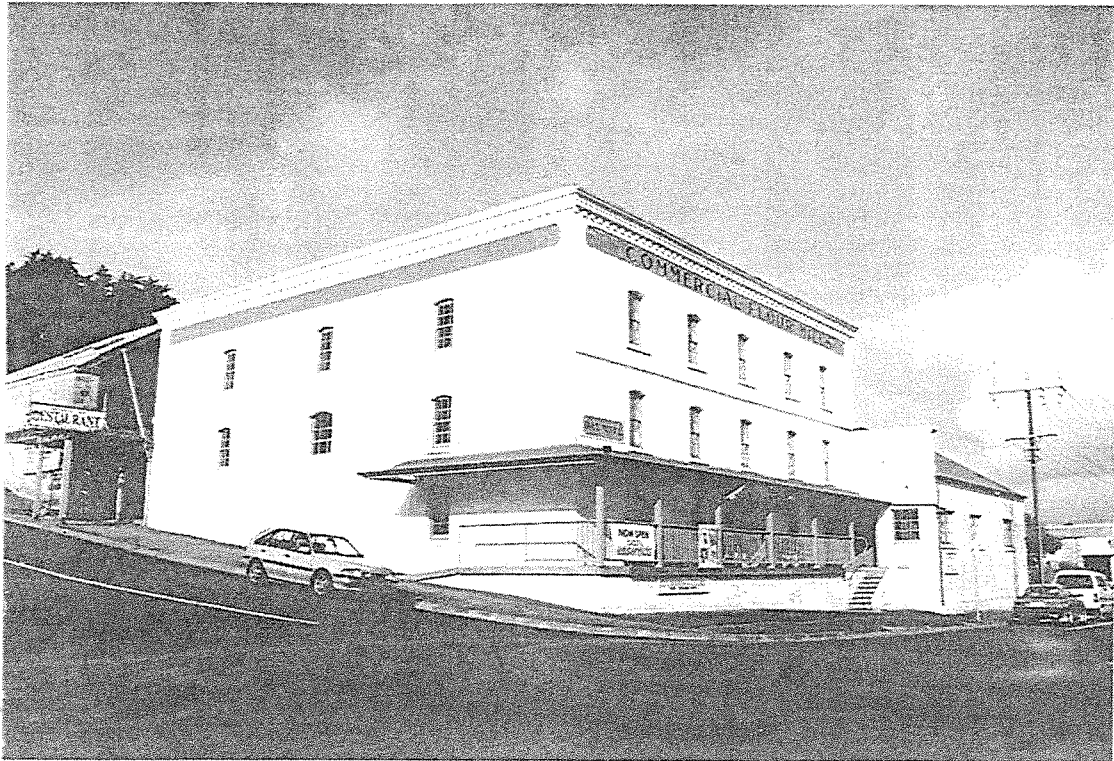
Some time last century, perhaps dating from the early years of G.T. Wright's management and the installation of new machinery in 1892-93, the Mill began to produce oatmeal as well as flour.** A pamphlet entitled Industries of the South-East and dating from 1930 says that, "Mr. G.T. Wright put in more up-to-date plant 25 years ago (expansion of 1901?) and quickly proved that Mount Gambier could supply the needs of the whole State. As a result the import of American Flaked oats ceased. The superiority of the local product was the cause, the import of New Zealand products also dropping off for the same reason." It goes on to say that, "The chief product (of the Mills) is oatmeal, the output from the factory being the largest in the State. As a matter of fact, the Commercial Company's factory is the pioneer of oatmeal milling in South Australia. A subsidiary but important industry is flour milling, and the company also carries on an extensive business as a grain dealer.

The oats are all locally grown. The South-Eastern lands return very heavy yields of this grain, the quality of which is recognised to be the best in the Commonwealth. The Company puts through its mills over 100,000 bushels of oats each year which are turned into oatmeal and rolled oats." 12 Thus, as can be seen, the Company used the firm financial footing established last century to expand and diversify its business thereby maintaining its position and strength for much of the twentieth century.

The Commercial Mill, which is still operating at a limited output, is therefore historically significant for the following reasons:-

- 1) It is the oldest cereal processing mill in Mount Gambier still in use.
- 2) Is associated with the early agricultural development of Mount Gambier in the mid-nineteenth century and also with the continued importance of primary industry in the district in the twentieth century.
- 3) Its connection with the development of oatmeal milling in South Australia.
- 4) Is "One of the few firms in the city (Mount Gambier) that have traded on the same position for more than 100 years, . . ." and is a good example of a nineteenth century business that has successfully adapted to and continued trading for most of the current century.

THE OLD OATMILL (former COMMERCIAL FLOUR MILLS) 1-5/7 PERCY STREET



C.T: 4296/460 (Lot 80, Section 1102)

HERITAGE LISTING: State Heritage Register.

STATEMENT OF HERITAGE VALUE: This large mill complex is indicative of the importance of Mount Gambier as a milling centre for the whole of the South East region during the 1870s to the 1900s.

RECOMMENDATION: Retain in the State Heritage Register.

ASSESSMENT:

The Commercial Flour Mills were established in 1867 by T H Williams who also later constructed three more mills in the town. The building cost approximately £1,000 and the mill itself had an internal area of 65ft x 75ft capable of storing 15,000 bushels of wheat. After changing hands, new machinery was installed in 1892 and 1893 including new roller machinery which meant the original mill stones were discarded. The name of the business was changed in 1898 to the Commercial Roller Flour Mill and the Mill was doubled in size to include the Oatmeal Factory. The building continued to function as a flour and oatmeal mill and celebrated its centenary in 1967. Operations ceased in 1975 and parts of it have been used for retail and restaurant purposes since 1984.

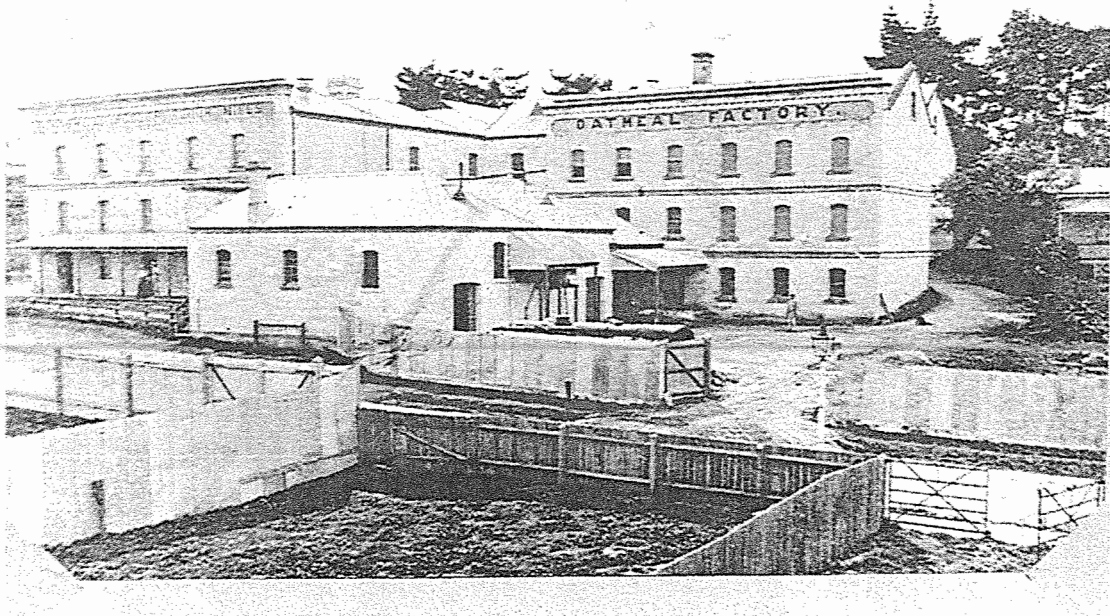
THE OLD OATMILL (former COMMERCIAL FLOUR MILLS)
1-5/7 PERCY STREET (cont)

Site Record

Former Commercial Mills
1-5/7 Percy Street
Mount Gambier SA 5290

Location	1-5/7 Percy Street, Mount Gambier
Description	Large three storey mill with attached two story sections
Boundary	Sections of buildings to Percy Street and Mitchell Street
Land Description	CT 4296/460
Local Government	City of Mount Gambier
Owner	The Old Oatmill Pty Ltd
Use	Only partly occupied
Condition	Generally good - although rear section not as well maintained
Other Assessments	State Heritage Branch assessment
Heritage Status	State Heritage Register

THE OLD OATMILL (former COMMERCIAL FLOUR MILLS)
1-5/7 PERCY STREET (cont)
EARLY PHOTOGRAPHS



PH 92: 1912 - The Commercial Roller Flour Mills

NAME: *Restaurant (former Commercial Flour and Oat Mills)* **PLACE NO.:** 10959

Address: *7 Percy Street, Mount Gambier*

ASSESSMENT OF HERITAGE VALUE:

This complex of mill buildings was begun in 1867 by a notable miller Thomas Henry Williams who also constructed other mills in Mount Gambier. The building cost approximately £1,000 and had an internal area of 65 feet x 75 feet capable of storing 15,000 bushels of wheat. After changing hands, new machinery was installed in 1892 and 1893 including new roller machinery which meant the original mill stones were discarded. The name and business changed in 1898 to the Commercial Roller Flour Mill and the Mill was doubled in size to include the Oatmeal Factory. The building continued to function as a flour and oatmeal mill and celebrated its centenary in 1967. Operations ceased in 1975 and parts of it have been used for retail and restaurant purposes since 1984.

A later limestone building designed in simple warehouse form has recently been constructed as a cinema complex. It fills the courtyard which was originally open as a delivery area. The original section of the mill complex facing Percy Street retains excellent limestone detailing to its upper level, while the rear of the building is of more utilitarian warehouse form.

Statement of Heritage Value:

This large mill complex represents the important role of milling and is indicative of the importance of Mount Gambier as a milling centre for the whole of the South East region of South Australia during the 1870s to 1900s. Both oats and wheat were milled here during that period. It is one of three mills established in Mount Gambier by the significant mill owner, Thomas Henry Williams. Established in 1867 with extensions in 1898 and 1901, the mill complex has evolved over more than a century of use.

Relevant Criteria (Under Section 16 of the Heritage Act 1993):

- (a) *It demonstrates important aspects of the evolution or pattern of the State's history.* The former Commercial Flour Mill complex is indicative of the development of agricultural activities in the South East of the State from the early years of settlement. It was constructed in the early twentieth century and represents the continued expansion of the processing of agricultural products throughout the South East.
- (g) *It has special association with the life or work of a person or organisation, or an event of historical importance.* The former Flour Mill complex is associated with Thomas Henry Williams, a noted Mill owner in the South East and also in Port Adelaide during the mid to late nineteenth century.

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the former Commercial Flour and Oat Mills at 7 Percy Street, Mount Gambier remain as an entry in the State Heritage Register.

NAME: *Restaurant (former Commercial Flour and Oat Mills)* **PLACE NO.:** 10959

SITE RECORD:

FORMER NAME: *Commercial Oat Mills*

DESCRIPTION OF PLACE: *Stone mill building*

DATE OF COMPLETION: *1867-1898*

REGISTER STATUS: **Description:** *Confirmed*
Date: *24 March 1983*

CURRENT USE: **Description:** *Retail and restaurant/entertainment*
Dates: *1984 - present*

PREVIOUS USE(S): **Description:** *Flour and Oat Mill*
Dates: *1867 - 1975*

ARCHITECT: **Name:**
Dates:

BUILDER: **Name:**
Dates:

SUBJECT INDEXING: **Group:** *Commerce (retail and wholesale)*
Manufacturing and processing
Category: *Restaurant*
Flour Mill

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA: **Description:** *City of Mount Gambier*

LOCATION: **Street No.:** *7*
Street Name: *Percy*
Town/Suburb: *Mount Gambier*
Post Code: *5290*
Region No.:
Region Name:

LAND DESCRIPTION: **Title Type:** *Certificate*
Volume: *4296*
Folio: *460*
Lot No.: *80*
Section: *1102*
Hundred:

AMG REFERENCE: **Zone:** *54*
Northing: *5813201*
Easting: *480932*
Map Sheet No.: *7022*
Map Scale: *1:100,000*

OWNER *: **Name:**
Address:
Town/Suburb:
Post Code:

PHOTOGRAPH: **Film No.:** *Digital*

NAME: *Restaurant (former Commercial Flour and Oat Mills)* **PLACE NO.:** 10959



Views of former Commercial Mills

NAME: *Restaurant (former Commercial Flour and Oat Mills)* **PLACE NO.:** 10959

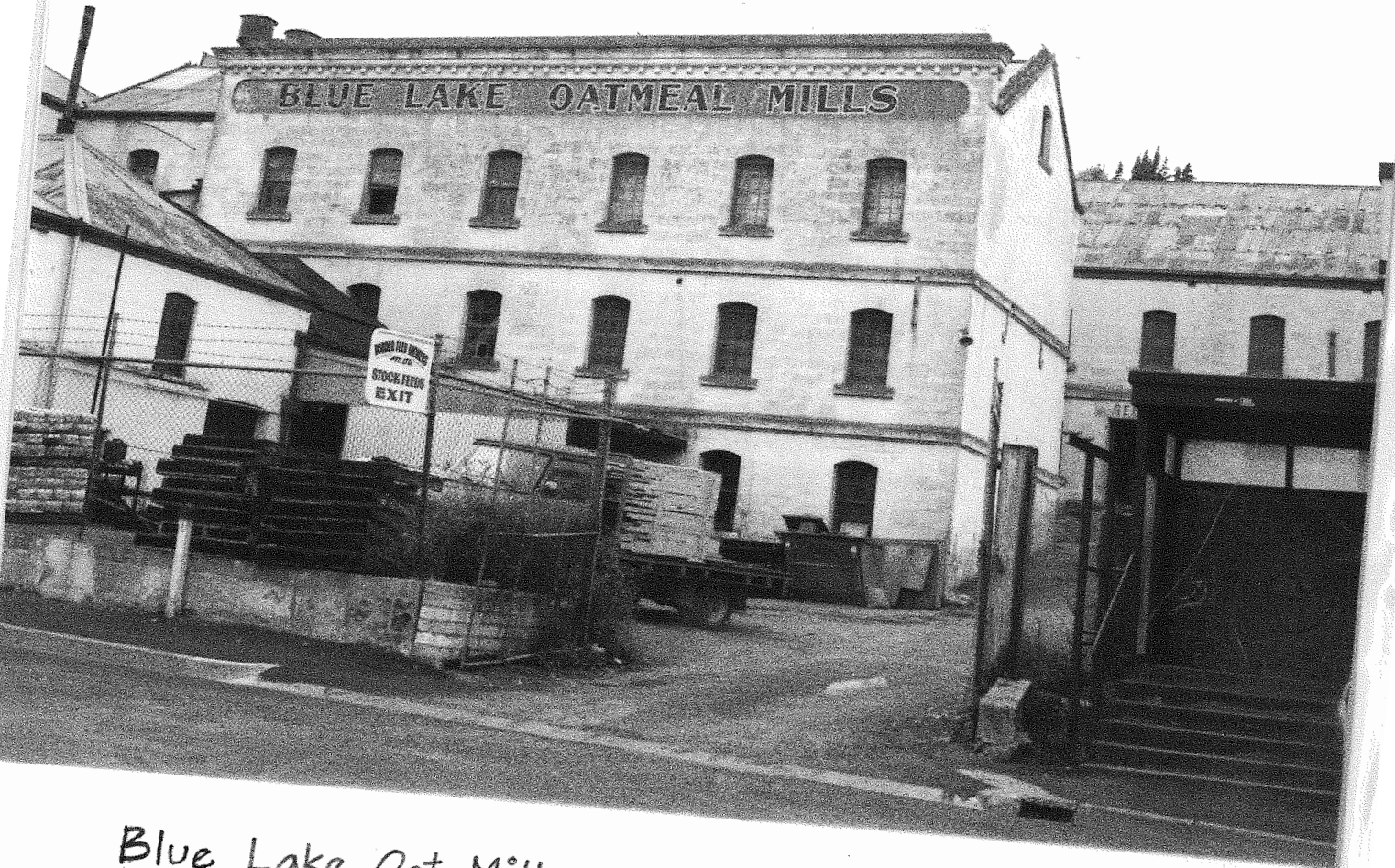


View of Commercial Mills, 1912
(Source: Les Hill Collection)

COMMERCIAL FLOUR MILLS



Blue Lake Oat Mill, Percy St., Mt Gambier. 10959



Blue Lake Oat Mill, Mount Gambier. 10959