



Going . . . going . . . gone: Templers Mill, which had stood at Narrambla since the 1840s, was destroyed in November 1971. Photograph CWD Negative Collection.

Destruction of mill severed historic link

By Elisabeth Edwards

The destruction of Templers Mill in November 1971 was a sad end for one of Orange's most important buildings, boasting links to the Ophir gold rush as well as with poet Andrew Barton 'Banjo' Paterson.

The red brick mill, situated at Narrambla just north of Orange, is believed to have been built by a member of Simeon Lord's family and bought by John Templer in the mid-1840s. Originally driven by bullocks, Templer later replaced them with a steam-driven engine.

When Australia's first payable gold was discovered at Ophir in 1851, the mill was well placed to supply flour for the miners who flocked to the district, which they used to make their staple food, damper.

In 1864 Templer advertised:

Flour and bran for sale in any quantities at reasonable prices. Grist done at the usual rate. For the convenience of the inhabitants of Orange, I have appointed Mr John Peisley my agent for the purchase of wheat and the sale of flour, at whose stores a constant supply of the latter may always be obtained.

'Banjo' Paterson, a great-nephew of Templer, was born at Narrambla in 1864. Although Paterson's family moved to Buckinbah near Yeoval soon after Paterson's birth, Orange – and in particular Narrambla – has rightly laid claim to be his birthplace.

The mill remained in use until about 1870 when Templer sold up and moved to New Zealand. The steam boiler was removed to Heap's brewery in Moulder Street, Orange.

The mill gradually deteriorated until by the 1960s it was in a perilous condition.

Concerned citizens, led by Orange & District Historical Society patron Dick Sheridan, campaigned in July 1966 for its restoration. Sheridan invited the director of the NSW National Trust, R N Walker, and architect with the Trust, L J Buckland, to inspect the ruin to see if it could be preserved.

A site inspection was made with representatives from Orange City and Canobolas Shire councils, at which Mr Walker said the destruction of the mill would be 'a calamity': "If it came down, at least half the historical significance of the area would be lost."

Walker and Buckland rejected a suggestion that the mill could be torn down and its bricks used to make a stage for performances of Paterson's poems as well as fireplaces for visiting tourists.

Walker and Buckland were keen to see the mill saved, and in 1967 the National Trust classified the mill as an historical building which should be preserved.

The Trust's support unfortunately did not lead to government funding for restoration work, and although the Department of Lands offered \$5000 if the same amount was raised in the community, and Canobolas Shire offered a donation of \$1000, it seems that no concerted effort was made to raise the remaining \$4000.



Representatives of Orange & District Historical Society, the National Trust and local councils examine Templers Mill in 1966.

On Tuesday 30 November 1971 Canobolas Shire workers arrived at the site with scores of sticks of gelignite and started a series of explosions which sounded the death-knell for the mill. It didn't go without a struggle, the chimney remaining defiant for some time until a final blast sent it crashing to the ground.

An anonymous National Trust official labelled the destruction of the mill as 'idiotic vandalism', while Mr Walker criticised Canobolas Shire Council for not opening a public appeal to save the building.

There is nothing left of the mill now, although a stone memorial to Paterson, erected by the Historical Society in 1947, remains as a reminder of Narrambla's importance to Orange's early history.