

Victorian Heritage Database place details - 3/9/2009 HENRY'S NO.1 MILL



Location:

WEST BARWON TRACK and OFF MOUNT SABINE ROAD BARRAMUNGA, Colac-Otway Shire

VHR Number: H1815

Listing Authority: VHR

Extent of Registration:

1. All of the Crown land including tramway formations, building foundations, surface artefacts and any other remains of sawmilling activity within a radius of 250 metres of the point with Australian Map Grid co-ordinates E382 N255 on 1:25,000 Map Sheet No. 7620-4-1 Forrest.

Statement of Significance:

Henry's No.1 Mill was the largest sawmill in the eastern Otways, operating from 1904-1927. The mill settlement included a boarding house, bakery, store, billiard room, post office and school, with huts for single men and cottages for families. The mill site extends in a clearing along the West Barwon river, and features intact tramway formations, extensive scatters of domestic debris, mature exotic trees, and numerous foundations of industrial and residential buildings.

Henry's No.1 Mill is of historical and archaeological significance to the State of Victoria.

Henry's No.1 Mill is historically important as a characteristic example of a large, isolated sawmill with associated settlement. Sawmilling sites are important to Victoria for their role in providing a vast range of timber products for use in domestic, commercial and industrial contexts. Henry's No.1 Mill was a long-

established bush mill (23 years), supplying timber to centres throughout western Victoria, including Colac, Geelong, Hamilton and the Ballarat goldfields. It was associated with a major figure in the Victorian sawmilling industry, WR Henry.

Henry's No.1 Mill is archaeologically important for its potential to yield artefacts and evidence which will be able to provide significant information about the technological history of sawmilling, and the cultural history of sawmilling settlements.

Heritage Study	
Year Construction Started	
Architect / Designer	
Architectural Style	
Heritage Act Categories	Heritage place, Archaeological place
LGA names	COLAC OTWAY SHIRE
Other names	
History	

Peter Davies

Space and Structure at an Australian Timber Camp

ABSTRACT

Remote timber camps were common in Australian forests and woodlands during the 19th and early-20th centuries. They usually featured accommodation, a boarding house for meals, and a tramline to connect the sawmill and camp to the outside world. Henry's No.1 Mill was typical of such places. It operated between 1904 and 1927 in the Otway Ranges, southwest of Melbourne. Survey and excavation of the site in 1997 and 1998 yielded evidence of architectural layout and consumption practices. Spatial analysis of the mill examines the structure and pattern of housing, the nature and distribution of amenities, and movement between the site and nearby townships. Workers and residents were both isolated from and integrated with the wider world, continually negotiating the use of space within their homes, around the camp, and beyond.

Introduction

Timber-getting was among the earliest and most important extractive industries carried out in Australia from the beginning of permanent European settlement in 1788. Forests and woodlands were rapidly transformed as a vast array of materials was produced for domestic and industrial uses. The timber industry provided employment for thousands of men, established transport infrastructure in remote areas, and created small communities in the form of ephemeral forest work camps. Although the technology of the timber industry has been well documented (Houghton 1975, 1992; McCarthy 1987, 1993; Evans 1994), the material culture and social history of mill settlements remains little known (Davies 2001a, 2002).

Henry's No.1 Mill, a sawmill and settlement in Victoria's Otway Ranges, is about 140 km southwest of Melbourne (Figure 1). The "common places" of the mill—the structures and environments of ordinary people—are described to assess how workers and residents used space within their houses, around the settlement, and

beyond (Upton and Vlach 1986:xiii). Spatial analyses have long been a feature of historical archaeology, ranging from studies of regional landscapes (Lewis 1984; Yamin and Metheny 1996) to cities and settlements (Deagan 1983; Delle 1998; Schávelzon 2000) and households (Beaudry 1989; Kent 1990; Blanton 1994). These approaches explore the dynamic and complex relationships among people, the natural world, and the built environment, commonly in relation to such themes as class, race, ethnicity, and gender. The nature and structure of industrial work camps has also been the focus of recent research (Van Bueren 2002).

A key concern here is to examine the ways in which timber workers and their families interacted with each other and with the world beyond the forest in spite of their physical isolation. Analysis begins at the household level as the locus of domestic activity for mill residents. Archaeological evidence indicates the importance of hearths in family houses, structuring the movement and activities of all who lived in them. Within the settlement itself, the spatial arrangement of industrial features, amenity buildings, and accommodation had important implications for social and gendered divisions within the mill community. At the widest level, the relationship between mill workers with the outside world is also examined in terms of transport and access to nearby townships and regional centers.

Henry's Mill was established in 1904, deep in the watershed of the West Barwon River, by William Robert Henry and several associates. The surrounding forest had never been logged before, and promised good cutting for up to 20 years. The mill was connected by an all-weather timber tramline to the railhead at Forrest, 10 km to the north, but its isolation meant that a population of around 100 people lived permanently on site (Figure 2). The mill settlement featured small timber huts for single men and modest wooden houses for married men and their families. Children attended the mill school, which opened in 1909, while a post office and store provided further services. In 1927, the

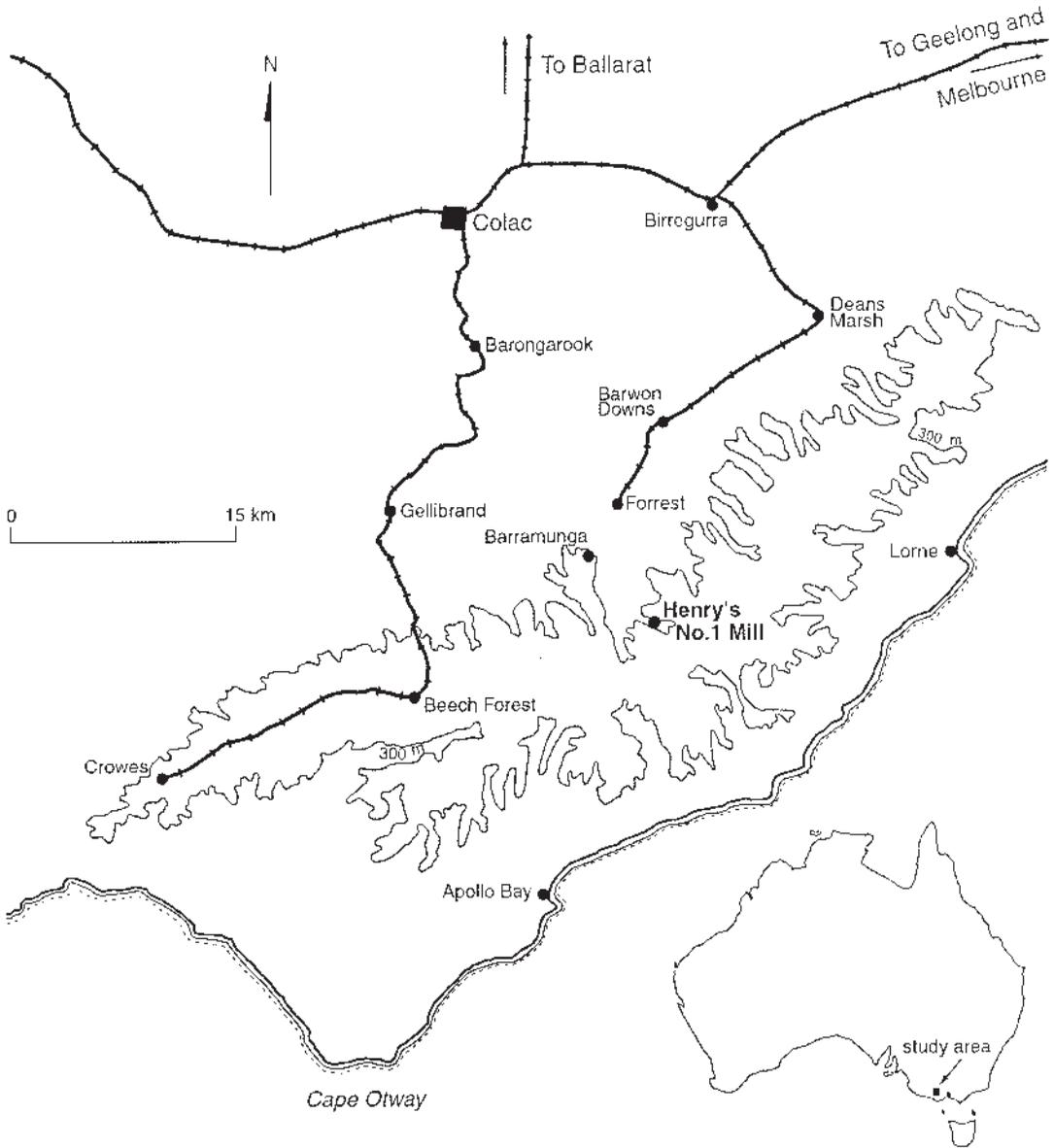


FIGURE 1. Railways of the Otway Ranges and location of Henry's No.1 Mill. (Drawing by author, 2001.)

No. 1 Mill shed was destroyed by fire, resulting in the gradual abandonment of the site. In later years W. R. Henry & Son established several other mills higher up the valley as well.

Regional Context

The Otway Ranges were characterized in the 19th century as a rugged and broken tract of country, comprised of steep hills and deep gorges, all clothed in a magnificent mixed

forest of eucalypt trees (Ivey 1874; Tucker et al. 1899). Timber-getting commenced in 1849, only 14 years after European settlement began in Victoria, supplying railway sleepers [ties] and wharf timbers. Most timber was pit sawn and dragged to the beach before being floated out to sea and loaded onto ships bound for Geelong and Melbourne. Although this trade lapsed in the 1860s due to poor loading facilities, the lure of the fine timber trees prompted a resurgence in the local industry in the early 1880s.

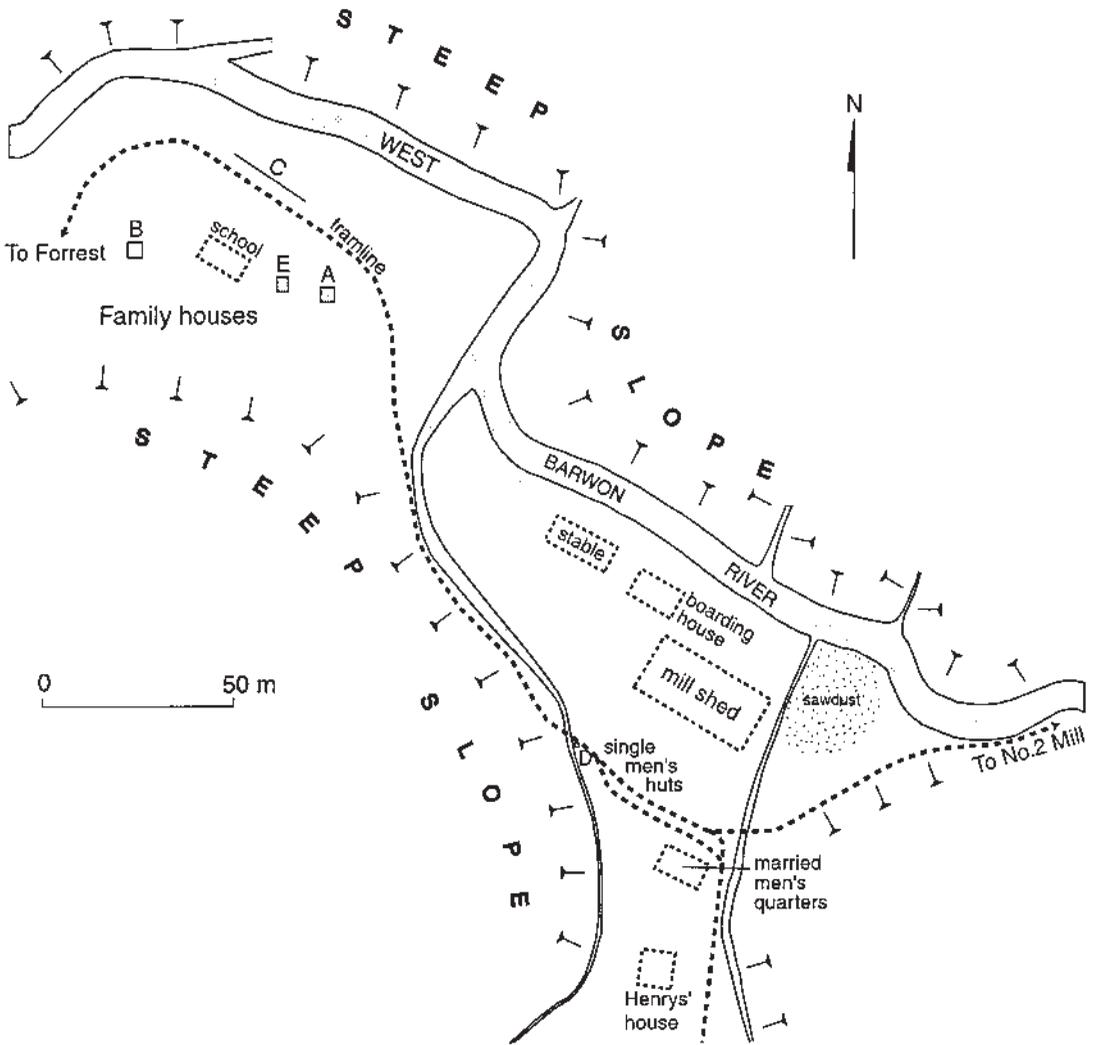


FIGURE 2. Site plan of Henry's No.1 Mill. (Drawing by author, 2001.)

The opening of rail links between Birregurra and Forrest in 1891 and between Colac and Beech Forest in 1902 with an extension to Crowes by 1911 initiated a boom in timber production in the Otways. The new lines ensured the continued supply of the huge quantities of timber required on the central Victorian goldfields. Extensive sawmilling operations were established at numerous townships throughout the region. In addition, dozens of bush mills, including Henry's Mill, also operated in the Otway forests in this period (Houghton 1975, 1992).

Timber tramlines provided the essential transport link between sawmills, logging areas,

and railways, replacing the bullock teams of the 19th century. As bullock tracks deteriorated into winter quagmires, all-weather tramlines permitted the year-round transport of timber to metropolitan markets. They also facilitated communication for isolated mill settlements and the movement of people and provisions. Commonly built to a gauge of 3 ft., tramlines were constructed of wooden or iron rails laid over closely packed sleepers, with trolleys drawn by horses or small locomotives to the nearest railway station or jetty. Isolated sawmill settlements in the depths of the Otway forests depended on tramlines for almost all of their needs.

By the 1930s, however, the use of steam and animal power in the Otways was rapidly replaced by diesel trucks and electric motors. The Timber Strike of 1929 and the devastation of the 1919, 1926, and 1939 bushfires combined to reduce timber outputs from the region. By World War II, tramways had become outmoded and were largely abandoned. Sawmills and associated settlements were moved out of the forest and into nearby towns, rendering the old ways of life in the forest obsolete.

Site Context

Sawmillers in this period were normally granted a three-acre license to erect a mill shed and fittings, along with yards and stables. Mills were usually located beside a creek or river to provide water for boilers, to lubricate saws, and for domestic needs. The site for Henry's Mill was chosen because it was the only wide and relatively level space available in the Barwon valley for such an enterprise. Surrounded on all sides by steep, thickly forested hills, it was a tight squeeze to construct the mill and associated buildings in the area available. Most of the houses for mill families and the school were built several hundred meters to the northwest of the mill on a narrow, sloping ledge at the foot of a steep spur.

The mill site extends almost 400 m along the south bank of the West Barwon River, 230 m above sea level. Rainfall in the vicinity of the site generally ranges from 1400–1600 mm per annum, while mean monthly temperatures range from 11°C to 21°C in February down to 4°C to 8°C in July. The mill lies in a zone of riparian, wet sclerophyll forest, dominated by eucalypts, ferns, and grasses. Inclusion of the West Barwon valley in a protected water catchment system has ensured minimal post-abandonment disturbance of the mill site by fire and logging.

Archaeological Context

Field survey in 1997 aimed to map the geographical and cultural boundaries of the site, as no historical plans of the mill and settlement are known to be preserved. Despite dense forest regrowth that severely restricts surface visibility, the survey identified tram routes

through the site, exotic vegetation, and several industrial features. Substantial artefact scatters were evident in the family residential area, but minimal surface material was identified in the vicinity of the single men's huts.

Excavation at Henry's Mill in 1998 aimed to recover material evidence relating to consumption patterns, domestic architecture, and responses to the physical and social environment (Davies 1999, 2001b). Three house sites (A, B, and E) in the family residential area were selected for excavation based on the prominence of surface remains, along with a small test pit in the area of the single men's huts (Sounding D) and an intensive surface collection along the river flat below the tramline embankment (Dump C). A total area of 71.5 m² was exposed during excavation, with the maximum depth of cultural deposits reaching 20 cm. Damp and acidic soil conditions meant that organic preservation was poor. No excavation in the industrial part of the mill was undertaken.

Excavation Results

The main structural features identified during excavation were hearths. These generally consisted of decaying mounds of clay, brick, and stone. Other building debris included large quantities of wire cut nails, window glass, and occasional wood fragments. Substantial quantities of domestic material were also recovered from each house site, including broken glass bottles, ceramic tablewares, household furnishings, toys, and other personal items (Davies 2002).

In House A, two separate hearth features were revealed (Figure 3). The northern hearth consisted of a clay platform, 1.50 m square and framed with burnt timber. Above the platform was a small brick arrangement with two short lengths of iron rail. This feature appears to have functioned as a simple open hearth with the rails forming a makeshift grate. A similar feature adjacent to the south consisted of another clay platform, on top of which was built a simple U-shaped brick emplacement. These bricks probably formed the base for a cast-iron, wood-fired kitchen stove, with iron stove components identified on the surface nearby. Around three sides of the oven was a substantial packing of clay, brick, and stone for insulation and protection.



FIGURE 3. Hearth foundations of House A at Henry's No.1 Mill. (Photo by author.)

Excavation of House B, located 70 m west of House A, also revealed a pair of hearth features (Figure 4). Although distorted by the growth of several large trees, the northern feature consisted of a short, low “wall” of mortared bricks beside a lower brick platform (Figure 5). On the south side of this construction was a packing of clay and large stones. Two iron pot hooks and a length of chain were also recovered from this area. These elements indicate the remains of a substantial hearth structure oriented to the northeast. In addition, small fragments of linoleum were found on a remnant length of floorboard nearby.

Several meters to the southeast lay a more intact hearth feature. A well-preserved brick-and-cement enclosure was backed with a substantial packing of clay and stone. Iron stove components on the surface nearby suggest that this feature served as the foundation for a kitchen oven. The packing to the rear probably formed the base of a chimney. In addition, an L-shaped alignment of stones was revealed southwest of these hearth features, consisting

of a double row of small river cobbles, 3.20 m in length.

A pair of hearth features also dominated the remains of House E (Figure 6). The northern hearth consisted of a rectangular bed of clay (1.20 x 1.60 m). The sides of the fireplace consisted of flat stones and half bricks, packed with clay mortar. The southern hearth in House E also consisted of a squared clay platform framed with timber. Several iron plates remained in position on top of the clay. Stove components discarded nearby indicate the likely function of this feature as another oven enclosure. A layer of charcoal and three carbonized floor stumps appear to be the remains of a wooden floor that originally related to both hearth features.

A small test pit (Sounding D) excavated in the area of the single men's huts aimed to identify material for comparison with other parts of the site. However, there was no evidence of architectural remains, and only a few small glass fragments were recovered. Excavation and intensive survey suggests that this part of

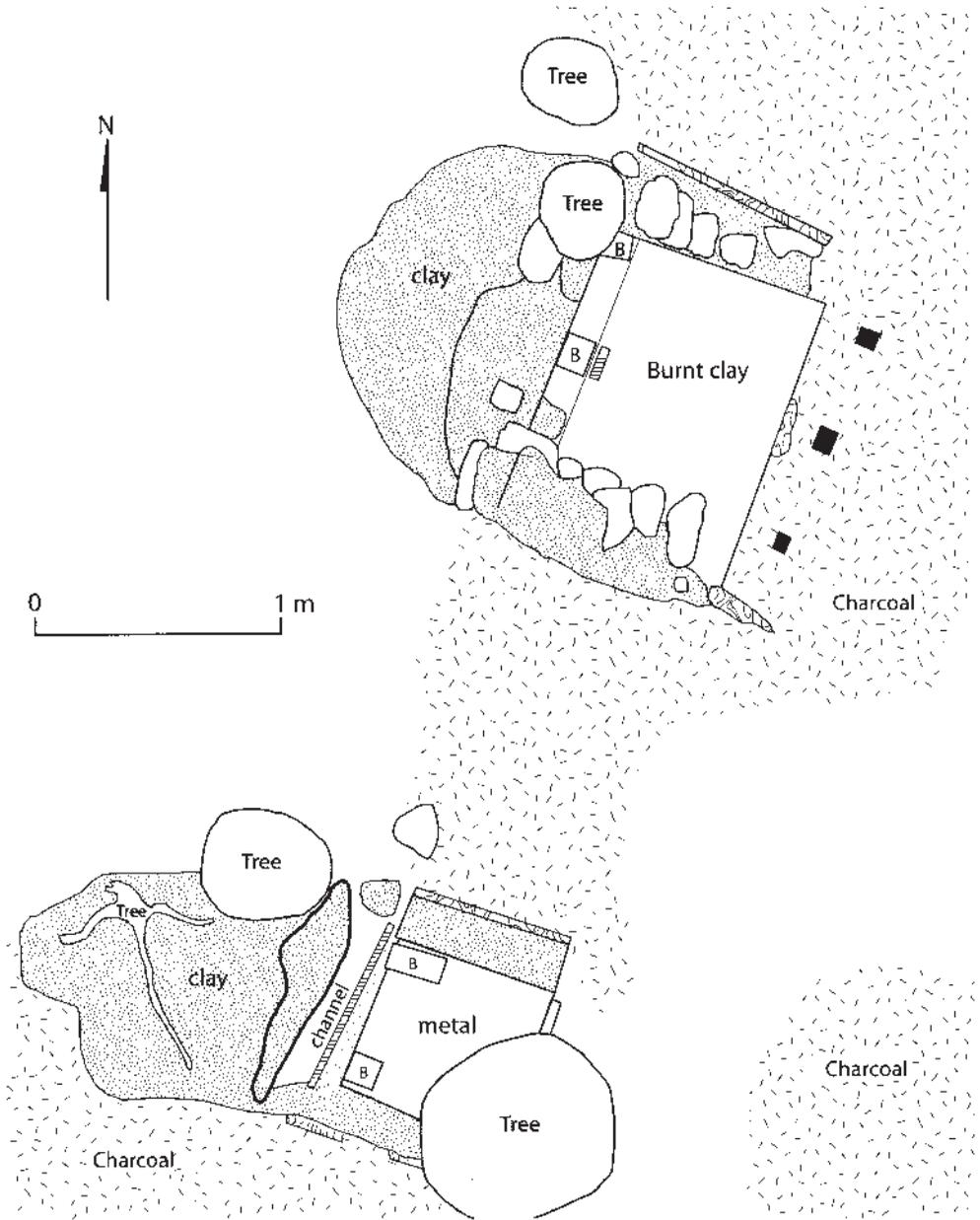


FIGURE 4. Excavation plan of House E at Henry's No.1 Mill. (Drawing by author, 2001.)

Henry's Mill was characterized by very limited material discard.

Housing

A combination of archaeological, historical, photographic, and oral evidence can be used to examine the nature of structures at the mill camp (Branditt 1922; Houghton 1975;

Davies 2001b). Houses at Henry's Mill were constructed simply, quickly, and cheaply to provide basic accommodation for mill workers and families. The general architectural plan was similar to miners' cottages and selectors' farmhouses of the 19th century (Dingle 2000). The plan was based on a central front door under a veranda in the long wall, opening into a main living area. Two small bedrooms made up



FIGURE 5. Northern hearth feature of House B at Henry's No.1 Mill. (Photo by author.)

the rear part of the house, often with a *skillion* or lean-to kitchen at the back. Each room may have served several functions. Daryl Tonkin, a bush sawmiller, recalled his kitchen in the 1930s at Jackson's Track in eastern Victoria as being "the kitchen while we were cooking, the dining room while we were eating, the lounge while we were relaxing, the office while we were tallying the books, the bedroom while we were sleeping" (Landon and Tonkin 1999:28).

Construction featured timber framing and unpainted hardwood boards, cut at the mill. As the timber dried and shrank, gaps opened in walls that were lined with hessian (burlap) and newspaper to exclude drafts. Charred timber exposed in House E indicates the use of very low stumps with no crawl space available beneath the timber floor. Windows were small, either glassed in or covered with a simple canvas blind. Roofs were built either from wooden shingles cut in the forest nearby or sheets of corrugated iron. Water was supplied from rainwater tanks and barrels or else hauled from the river in recycled kerosene

tins. Lighting came from kerosene lamps and candles. Toilets were simple earth pit privies that were built close to the rear of houses. Cooking was done over an open fireplace in the living room or in an oven in a kitchen at the rear.

The one-fire oven was widely adopted in Australia beginning in the late-19th century, generally consisting of a cast-iron box that was set into a pre-existing hearth (John Danks and Son, Ltd. 1929). An internal firebox heated both the oven compartment and pots placed on top. Such ovens had numerous advantages over the open fire for cooking. They were safer, cleaner, and more convenient because the fire could be left enclosed and unattended for longer (Gollan 1978:95). Ovens were also more efficient. More heat was absorbed by the surrounding iron plates and insulation and radiated back out for longer periods. Nevertheless, kitchen ovens often had problems, including cracked pipes, poor dampers, and smoky flues. Stoves also had to be cleaned regularly, as they would rust if left dirty or undried, thereby creating

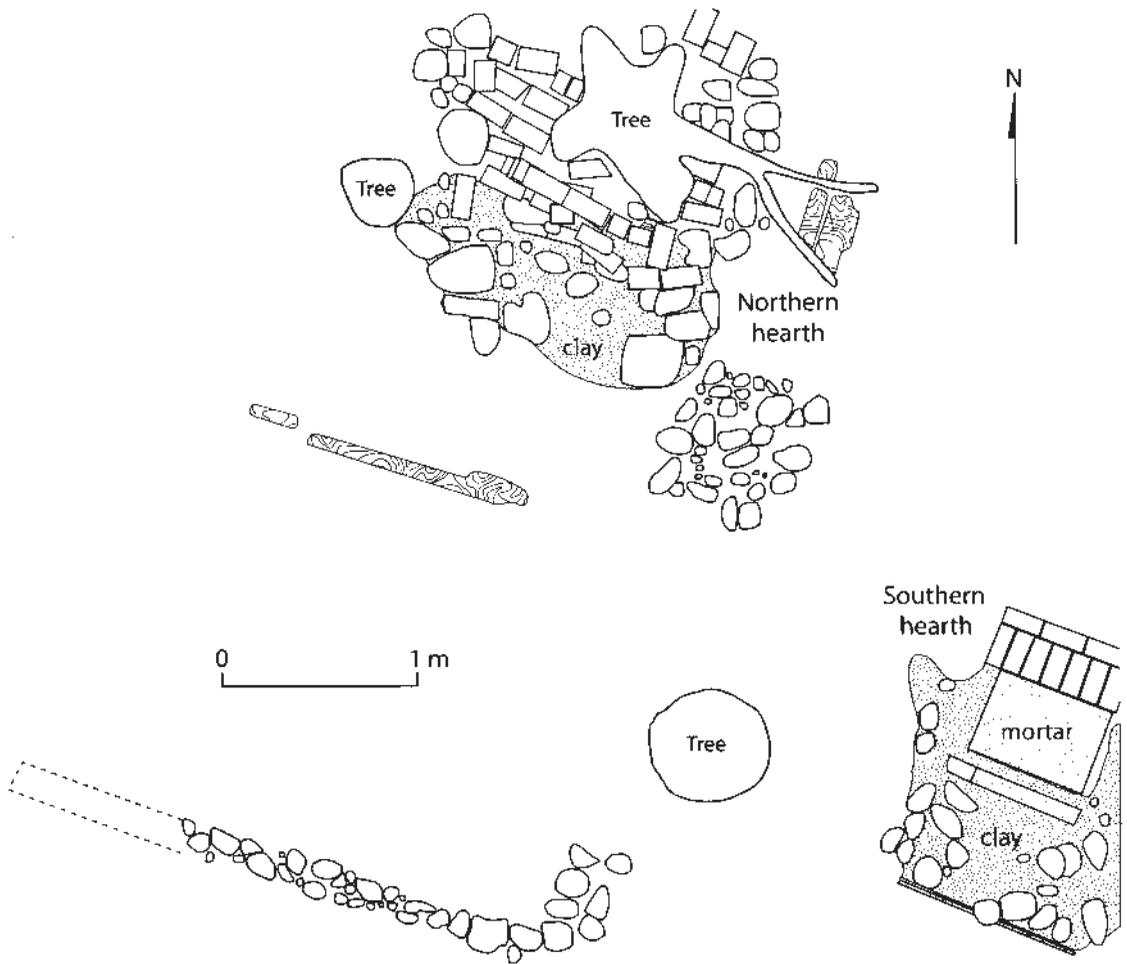


FIGURE 6. Excavation plan of House B at Henry's No.1 Mill. (Drawing by author, 2001.)

another chore for women (Cowan 1983:63; Schlereth 1992:228).

The size of kitchens in mill houses, however, remains uncertain. If large enough to accommodate a table for dining and space for food preparation, the kitchen may have persisted as the social center of the home. Alternatively, if these kitchens were small, lean-to constructions, families would have been forced to gather in another room, away from the sights, sounds, and smells of cooking, thereby isolating women and their work and consolidating the sexual division of labor. Supplanting the open fire with a manufactured iron oven may have undermined the domestic ideal of the home as separate from industry, with the family gathered harmoniously around its hearth (Lake 1987:53–54). The separation

of ovens and fireplaces, however, may also represent a direct response to the climate of the West Barwon valley. Summer kitchens with ovens at the rear of houses helped to dispel excess heat. In winter, Dutch ovens, pot hooks, and chains were utilized to prepare food over an internal open fireplace, while the rear kitchen was used to dry off wood, wet clothes, and boots.

The limited space available at Henry's No.1 Mill meant that houses were generally built only a meter or two apart. Although they were individual, freestanding structures, notionally reinforcing household privacy, thin wooden walls meant that conversations, quarrels, and movements would have been readily apparent to neighbors. The greater awareness of activities and voices may have both added to the sense

of community and intensified disagreements or hostilities between neighbors. Even if noise and disruption became too persistent, however, the option to move away was very limited. Constructing a new house meant purchasing timber from the mill, clearing the vegetation, and levelling a “bench” on which to build, all in after-hours time. Given the difficulties involved and the lack of utility for such a property when the mill eventually closed, there is little evidence that families ever exploited this option.

Housing at forest sawmills was owned by the proprietors and built by the men they employed. At Henry’s Mill, married workers with resident families paid rent of five shillings per week for their small houses, while single men lived in huts provided rent-free (*The Timber Worker* 1925:3). At a time when landlords in the working suburbs of Melbourne charged 25 shillings a week for decaying three- or four-room dwellings (McCalman 1984:110), married workers at Henry’s Mill enjoyed very cheap housing. As employees tended to work at the mill for no more than two or three years, however, there was little incentive to maintain the houses beyond keeping them basically weatherproof or perhaps adding a lean-to or woodshed for storage. Other studies have shown that tenants were unlikely to spend their disposable income on the physical appearance of the property, with the result that many houses were probably in poor repair by the later years of the mill’s operation (Mascia 1996:152; Rotman and Nassaney 1997:56).

Huts for single men were much smaller than the family houses. Photographic evidence indicates that each consisted of a single room about 3 by 4 m across (Houghton 1975:57–58). They were constructed from sawn timber weatherboards, with a shingle roof and a large fireplace. The absence of any identifiable archaeological remains of these huts suggests that their external chimneys were built entirely of timber, with little or no stone lining of hearths. About 15 huts were constructed close together, west of the mill shed, largely within the course of a shallow gully. To accommodate the number of single employees, two men were probably billeted to each hut.

A recurring feature of sawmill settlements in this period was the physical separation

of family cottages from single men’s huts, a pattern that both created and reinforced social distinctions. Accommodation for the mill owner and married men with their families was usually divided by a path, tramline, or creek from that of unmarried employees. This segregation is evident at numerous other mill camps of the period in Victoria and Tasmania and gives some insight into the demography of mill communities (Evans 1994:39). The physical separation of residential structures was a social phenomenon that was not necessarily enforced but understood as an appropriate arrangement of living space, predicated on marital, social, and occupational bases.

Despite the limited space within and around the mill site, the degree of personal and social interaction between resident women and unmarried male workers may not have been high. Working by day in the forest or at the sawmill, single men had little reason to venture several hundred meters along the tramline or riverbank to the “suburb” of family homes. As well, women of the settlement, busy with domestic chores, may have had little need or opportunity to visit the industrial part of the site. There was neither church nor hotel at the mill, and most women appear to have used the mill store only rarely, ordering supplies instead from stores in Forrest (*The Timber Worker* 1925:3). Apart from posting a letter at the mill post office or attending one of the occasional Saturday evening dances held in the schoolroom (Branditt 1922), most women apparently had only irregular contact with most unmarried workmen. The line of sight between family houses and the mill area was also partially obscured by the slopes and gullies of the site. The spatial division between these groups thus reinforced the social separation.

This physical separation between married employees with resident families and single men was blurred, however, by the accommodation quarters erected for married men immediately south of the mill shed, adjacent to the tramline (Houghton 1975:57). A number of mill workers appear to have lodged their families, to whom they returned on weekends, in nearby townships. No surface indications of the married men’s barracks were identified during site survey, but photographic evidence indicates a basic wooden structure with shingle

roofing. It is not known whether these men paid rent for their lodgings, but they apparently took meals in the mill boarding house. The married men's quarters represent a third form of residence at the site. The men were provided with accommodation quite separate from their unmarried co-workers, expressing in physical terms their marital status. The communal nature of the quarters, however, also indicated the absence of their wives and children.

Mill owner W. R. Henry also maintained his own timber cottage in the southern part of the site for when he or his family visited the mill (Houghton 1975:57). Despite intensive searching, no physical remains of this structure were found. A former resident, however, recalled that the house was "very rough, just sawn weatherboards, nailed together any old how" (Davies 2001b:104). The house had a pitched roof of galvanized iron, with two small bedrooms opening off a larger living room, the same pattern as the workers' cottages. The walls, lined with hessian and newspaper, were covered over with wallpaper. Unlike the other family houses, the cottage never contained a kitchen or oven. Instead, meals were cooked over the open fireplace, an arrangement that may have suited the predominantly summer seasonal use of the dwelling. The authority of Henry as the mill proprietor thus appears not to have been expressed in the construction of an elaborate on-site residence. Instead, its location at the highest point of the site, isolated from all the other huts and houses, provided enough spatial difference to separate employer from employees.

Mill School

Within months of Henry's Mill opening in 1904, the need to establish a primary school for the children became pressing. Parents were concerned their offspring were "running wild" without a schoolroom and teacher to provide for their education. A petition to the Education Department stressed the isolated location of the settlement, the likely longevity of the mill, the number of pupils to be enrolled, and the willingness of the proprietors to erect a building. The department eventually agreed to the proposal, and the school opened in January 1909 with an initial attendance of 13

students (O'Kelly 1909). The school building was erected about 200 m northwest of the mill shed among the family houses. Although no archaeological evidence of the building could be identified, Education Department records indicate that the weatherboard structure was 26 ft. long and 13 ft. wide, with a gabled iron roof and hardwood floor (Henry 1908). Four small windows provided only poor illumination. Outside were two outhouses and a small fenced playground that abutted the tramline.

Deterioration in the school building was apparent within a few years. This may have been due to poor design and construction, general neglect, weathering, or a combination of these. By 1913, 100 bricks were needed to repair the rear of the wooden fireplace, and a few years later the playground fence was in disarray. After only eight years, there were calls to replace the "antiquated little school room," but nothing was done to improve the situation (Johnstone 1916). By 1923, 38 pupils were crammed into the building. Poorly ventilated and unhygienic, the school provided an ideal environment for the spread of infection, with chickenpox, measles, and mumps reported over the years.

Notwithstanding its condition, the schoolroom was a potent physical symbol of the stability of the mill settlement and the concern of parents to educate their children. Squeezed in among the family houses, the building signalled the participation of the mill within the wider world and the authority of the state within the lives of the residents. The school also offered an extra incentive for men with families to settle at the mill. W. R. Henry hoped it would promote a more stable community and workforce. As well as occupying the children during the day, the school building provided a venue for social events and religious services, which helped mitigate the isolation of the mill.

Fifteen different teachers taught at the school over its 19 years of operation. All were single young males, and most felt the isolation of the site acutely. Clifford Stanford, for example, complained that the mill is in "an out-of-the-way place, and is far from being a pleasant place to live in" (Stanford 1911). Bernard Flood, in applying for a transfer, felt that "for months at a time, a teacher is practically a prisoner in the gully, for he cannot get away, even

on weekends, on account of the remoteness of the district” (Flood 1914).

Subsequent teachers also complained about the effect of the posting on their health and the high cost of lodging. The first two teachers lived in a tiny wooden hut in the schoolyard. Subsequent teachers boarded with a family nearby and converted the hut into a woodshed (Turner 1915). Such basic accommodation was typical for teachers at rural schools in this era. Blanche Murphy’s hut, for example, in the Rubicon Forest northeast of Melbourne, was only 9 ft. square, built of rough weatherboards, and freely admitted “rain water and mountain air” (Murphy 1921). The teacher’s hut at the Mississippi Mill was “nothing much better than a Noah’s Ark upon the waters. It is built nearly in the bed of the creek, and water flows right past it and nearly around it” (Blake 1973:453). Frank Tate, head of the Education Department in this period, referred to rural teachers’ quarters as being well named, mere “vulgar fractions” of homes (Blake 1973:329). Combined with relatively poor salaries and physical isolation, the poor accommodation available at Henry’s Mill made it increasingly difficult to fill the teaching position as it fell vacant. By the final years of the mill’s operation, the school was often closed for weeks on end while a replacement teacher was sought.

Amenities

Apart from the schoolroom, other amenities provided at the site were clustered around the mill shed. The boarding house at Henry’s Mill was known locally as the “Hash Foundry.” Although survey failed to identify any archaeological traces of the structure, photographic evidence indicates it was a simple rectangular wooden building, with a sawdust heap on one side and horse stables on the other. Internally, it probably featured little more than a single long table, with benches for seating along either side, and a kitchen at one end. Maintaining sanitary conditions for the storage, preparation, and serving of food was difficult, given the swarms of summer flies and the incessant smoke from burning wood waste at the mill. Many of the men would cook their own breakfast and have their lunch and evening meal at the boarding house, with the charge docked from

their wages. By 1924 the cost of board was 26 shillings per week, from a mill laborer’s weekly salary of around £5 (=100 shillings).

Gardens were also a significant feature of the mill settlement. A stone arrangement excavated beside House B, for example, appears to have functioned as the border for a kitchen garden, while fenced gardens lay behind several family houses. Remnant exotic trees (*Pinus silvestris* and *Quercus* sp.) and ornamental shrubs (*Hydrangea* sp. and *Cestrum* sp.) were planted and thrived, with little practical purpose beyond the immediate pleasure of their flowers, fragrance, and appearance. The school also featured a garden in which the boys grew vegetables, and the girls grew flowers. One of the mill laborers, Oscar Henrikson, cultivated a large garden that helped supply the boarding house, while the smaller vegetable plots of other residents supplemented food supplies brought in from outside. The erection of fences around several gardens created important spatial and social boundaries, and indicated the desire to claim, however notionally, some parcel of land in a context where neither individual nor group ownership of residential property was feasible. Gardens represented domestic comfort and the establishment of a home. In an industry of high worker mobility, planting also demonstrated a commitment to remain at the mill for a season or two at least.

Henry’s Mill was also one of the few sawmills in the district to have a post office, complete with its own franking stamp, “Otway Sawmills.” Operating out of the mill office, it opened as a receiving office in 1913 and was upgraded to a post office in 1921 (Otway Saw Mills 1928). Letters were placed in a bag held on a wire frame and delivered by the engine driver to the post office in Forrest six times a week. This facility ensured that workers at the site enjoyed almost daily interaction with the outside world, via letters and newspapers.

Movement and Spaces

The tramline to Henry’s Mill began in the Forrest railway station yard. It extended up the valley of the Noonday Creek, passed through a tunnel beneath a spur, to emerge in the West Barwon valley and continue on to the mill site. An engine made a daily return trip to Henry’s

Mill, carrying out timber, passengers, supplies and mail. The tramline provided a tenuous thread linking mill residents with local districts, regional towns, and urban centers. It represented an umbilical cord with the outside world, a source of fresh news, faces, and ideas. The line was owned, constructed, and maintained by the mill proprietors. Although it represented the firm's investment in the operation of the mill, workers were free to come and go as they pleased (*The Timber Worker* 1925:3). Several employees obtained pump trolleys for their personal transport, enabling them to get their own supplies in town (Houghton 1975:56).

Although the tramline provided the primary means of access to the outside world for mill workers, a rough bush track also linked them through steep and isolated forest country to the township of Barramunga, 8 km to the northwest. The route, however, was regarded as virtually inaccessible. In such country, three miles an hour on horseback was classed as good travelling. Many of the "roads" in the region, as late as the 1920s, were nothing more than tracks winding between the forest trees. Residents claimed their roads were the worst in the state, with ruts in some places reported as almost 4 ft. deep (*Colac Herald* 1912:7). Henry's Mill was thus established in an isolated location in a remote district.

In spite of the physical isolation, however, artifacts from the site indicate that workers and residents frequently acquired mass-produced goods. Fragments of English ceramics, American medicines, Scottish firebricks, Irish whiskey, and German dolls were recovered from the excavated house sites. There was also evidence for beverages, condiments, and tools manufactured regionally in Geelong, Ballarat, and Melbourne. These goods were acquired in a variety of ways. The proprietors, for example, maintained a small store on site. It was mostly patronized by single men, who often used it to purchase small items such as tobacco and matches. Most families preferred to order groceries instead from Forrest and have them sent out on a timber truck. There was also mail-order purchase and occasional visits by travelling hawkers, while in summer the children were willing to walk 10 km along the tramline into Forrest and back again to enjoy

the novelty of an ice cream. Workers and residents thus enjoyed a routine engagement with industrial capitalism and were generally aware of contemporary consumer trends in the world beyond the forest.

Conclusion

Outsiders generally regarded the houses and spaces created by mill workers in negative terms. A journalist visiting Henry's Mill in 1919, for example, contrasted the natural beauty of the river valley with the "unimposing weatherboard cottages" and "sordid surroundings" of the mill camp (*Birregurra Times* 1919:3). The Timber Workers' Union campaigned to improve the "unkempt and unwholesome humpies" typically endured by its members (*The Timber Worker* 1914:3). Justice Higgins of the Commonwealth Arbitration Commission lamented the "slipshod conditions" of sawmill huts, with men "pigging it" in conditions unfit for family life (Higgins 1920:836).

In spite of the cramped living conditions, life and work at the mill had its compensations. Wages were steady; food was ample, varied, and nutritious; and by most accounts the Henrys were good bosses to work for (Davies 2001b: 131). Although physically isolated, workers and residents were well connected to the world beyond the forest. Housing at the mill was cheap, with construction emphasizing economy and expediency. Such structures were never intended to last forever, built merely to provide shelter for machinery, operations, people, stores, and animals. The buildings conveyed a sense of transience to owners and visitors alike. The architectural similarity of housing at Henry's Mill reinforced their construction by a single authority, the mill proprietors, and obscured their occupation by distinct individuals and families. At the same time, however, ornamental plantings helped to personalize domestic areas. For the people who lived in them, such houses and settlements were some kind of home in the forest, even if short-term and ephemeral. Their size and arrangement reflected a common understanding of the minimal requirements of a rural family in this period and was typical of living spaces provided at forest mill settlements in Australia and elsewhere during the 19th and early-20th centuries.

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- PETER DAVIES
ARCHAEOLOGY PROGRAM
LA TROBE UNIVERSITY
VICTORIA 3086 AUSTRALIA