

Cooper's Mill-Cooleenup Island

Cooper's Mill is only accessible by boat and is situated on the extreme north western end of Cooleenup Island, part of the Murray Delta where it enters the Peel Inlet. The walls were made of limestone blocks and the floor was limestone rubble. The roof was a shingle roof which rotated. It remains the earliest and the only remaining mill of its kind in the area.

The location may seem remote, but at that time it was well placed for early settlers on the river who took the shortest path by boat or bullock through the shallow water. Joseph Cooper began building the mill in the 1840s but died before he could see its completion. As a wheelwright he had the skills to make the machinery and had completed the mechanical parts before he died. His sons Thomas and James inherited the mill and with the help of Dan Myerick, a carpenter, and Josiah Stinton it was completed.

Research has shown that the difficulty faced by Joseph Cooper was enormous; stone probably came from a place 15km away. He would have rowed along a shallow pathway and it would have been a difficult place to unload. Accounts suggest that he used the easterly wind in the morning to row across and the sea breeze in the afternoon to return.

The mill was in use by 1850 and operated until 1865. Originally it was powered by the wind and then it was converted to steam. The mill was very important to wheat farmers who would otherwise have to mill by hand. When the mill was converted to steam its efficiency improved again, but the mill was becoming unviable as improvements in road transport, bridge building and farming north of Pinjarra took effect. When it closed down the equipment was sold to John Fawcett and it became a smokehouse for fishermen. Local people also made use of the limestone for chimneys.

Coopers Mill became the home of 'Old Martin' the White Russian who was believed to have a metal plate in his head because of injuries sustained during the First World War. He was paranoid and lived in the top part of the mill, pulling the rope up after him so that nobody could get him. In 1930 he was forced to move into Mandurah when the mill was being renovated.

It was restored in 1930, 1984 and 2001.

