

The Singleton Family Flour Mills at Singleton

The Hidden History



By Anne and Les Dollin

THE SINGLETON FAMILY FLOUR MILLS AT SINGLETON

— THE HIDDEN HISTORY

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Image on front cover:

Flour grinding millstones, hidden inside a wooden cover or Vat, at Sturminster Newton Mill.

Image source: Geograph Britain and Ireland. John M. Wikimedia Commons.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

THE FLOUR MILLS OF THE SINGLETON FAMILY IN SINGLETON

Benjamin Singleton and his family settled on land near the present town of Singleton, NSW, then known as St. Patrick's Plains, in about 1822. He had been promised a 200 acre grant there by Governor Macquarie, for being part of John Howe's 1820 exploration of the district.

By 1823 settlers began to stream into the area, and by 1825 nearly the whole length of the Hunter River had been settled. This would have created an increasing demand for flour mills to feed the population.

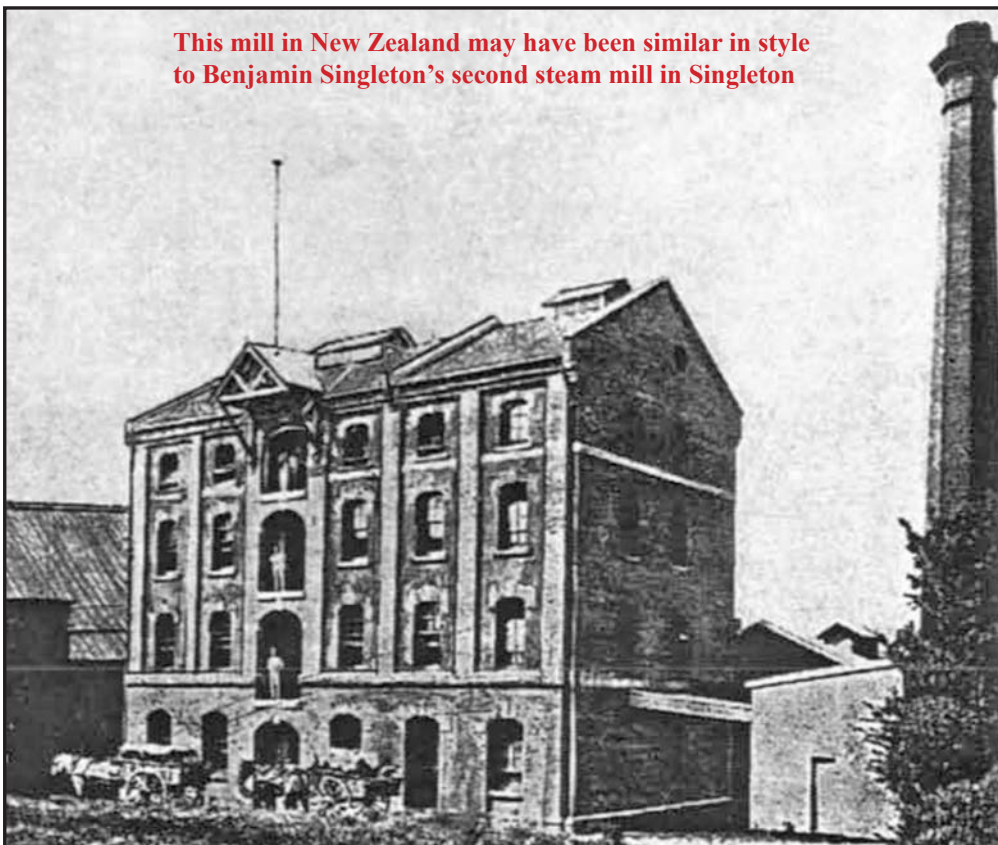
Four different flour mills were established by the Singleton Family in Singleton township during the 1800s:

- a watermill, by 1827
- the steam-powered Union Flour Mill, 1838
- a second steam-powered mill in John Street, 1851
- a third steam-powered mill in George Street, 1860

THE HIDDEN HISTORY

As we delved deeply into historic newspapers archived in Trove, as well as old maps, and historic land records, **we discovered many fascinating new stories** about these flour mills and learned more about the challenges that the Singleton Family had to overcome in those early days.

**We hope you enjoy our eBook about
the hidden flour milling achievements of the Singleton Family
in the township of Singleton.**



**This mill in New Zealand may have been similar in style
to Benjamin Singleton's second steam mill in Singleton**

Left: The four storey Woods Bros. steam flour mill in Addington, Christchurch, New Zealand. Image source: Wikimedia Commons.

This large New Zealand mill may have been similar in style to Benjamin Singleton's second steam mill in Singleton (see Chapter 4).

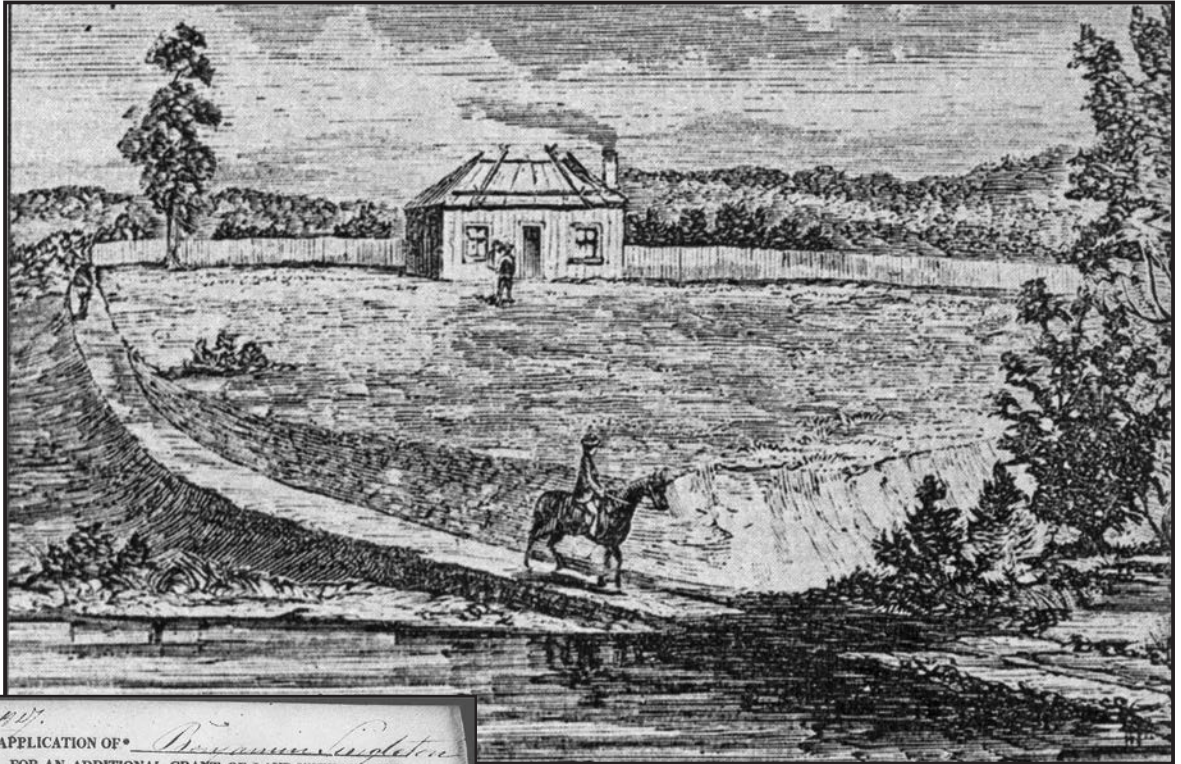
Benjamin's mill was taller than any other steam mill we have found so far; that was built in Singleton during the 1800s, and it must have been an impressive sight in the town.

Find out more at: www.singletonmills.com

CHAPTER 2

BENJAMIN SINGLETON'S WATER FLOUR MILL NEAR TODAY'S SINGLETON TOWNSHIP

Right: An 1874 drawing of the crossing over the Hunter River at Singleton. This crossing was later called Singleton's Ford, or Dunolly Ford. Image courtesy of the Singleton Historical Society & Museum.



28/89-15th Sept 1827.

* Write Christian and Surnames legibly, and at full length.

† State accurately the usual Place of residence, that the reply may be duly forwarded.

APPLICATION OF *Benjamin Singleton*
FOR AN ADDITIONAL GRANT OF LAND WITHOUT PURCHASE.

— *J. Patricks Plains* —
† *Hunter River*

SIR,

I Beg you will be pleased to submit to His Excellency the GOVERNOR, my request to receive *two thousand*

Acres of Land, as an additional Grant without Purchase, under the Regulations contained in the Government Order, No. 35, dated 5th September, 1826.

I am now in Possession of Land to the following extent, viz:—

By Grant	200 Acres.
By Purchase of the Crown	
By Reserve	
By private Purchase, Gift, or Inheritance	100
Total	<u>300 Acres.</u>

of which *200* Acres are cleared.

I also possess Live Stock as under, viz:—

Horses	11	Head.
Horned Cattle	191	
Sheep		

And available Money Capital to the amount of *£ 500* — *sterling*

I have erected Buildings on the Lands, of the following description and value, viz:— †

† Here describe the several Buildings, and their Value.	<i>100</i>
<i>Dorm</i>	<i>300</i>
<i>3 Houses</i>	<i>150</i>
<i>Water Mill</i>	<i>500</i>
	<i>£ 500 Sterling</i>

I have completed *three* Miles of Fences; and have employed and maintained, during the last year, *eight* Convict and *several* Free Servants.

I have the honor to be,
SIR,
Your obedient humble Servant,

Benjamin Singleton

The Honorable
The COLONIAL SECRETARY.

In the mid 1820s, a flour mill would have been needed to support the growing numbers of settlers at Patricks Plains. Benjamin Singleton and his brothers had previously established two flour watermills near Kurrajong.

Benjamin had settled on land beside Singleton's Ford across the Hunter River at Patricks Plains, in about 1822. This is where the township of Singleton was later built.

By 1827, Benjamin Singleton had established a new watermill in this location.

The earliest evidence that we have found for this mill was a set of two petitions that Benjamin Singleton made to the Governor in 1827 for an additional 2000 acre land grant:

– In his first petition, Benjamin listed improvements that he had made on his existing land at Patricks Plains, including a “water flour-mill”.^[1]

– In his second petition, dated 15 September 1827, he stated that he had erected a “Water Mill” valued at £150 Sterling.^[2]

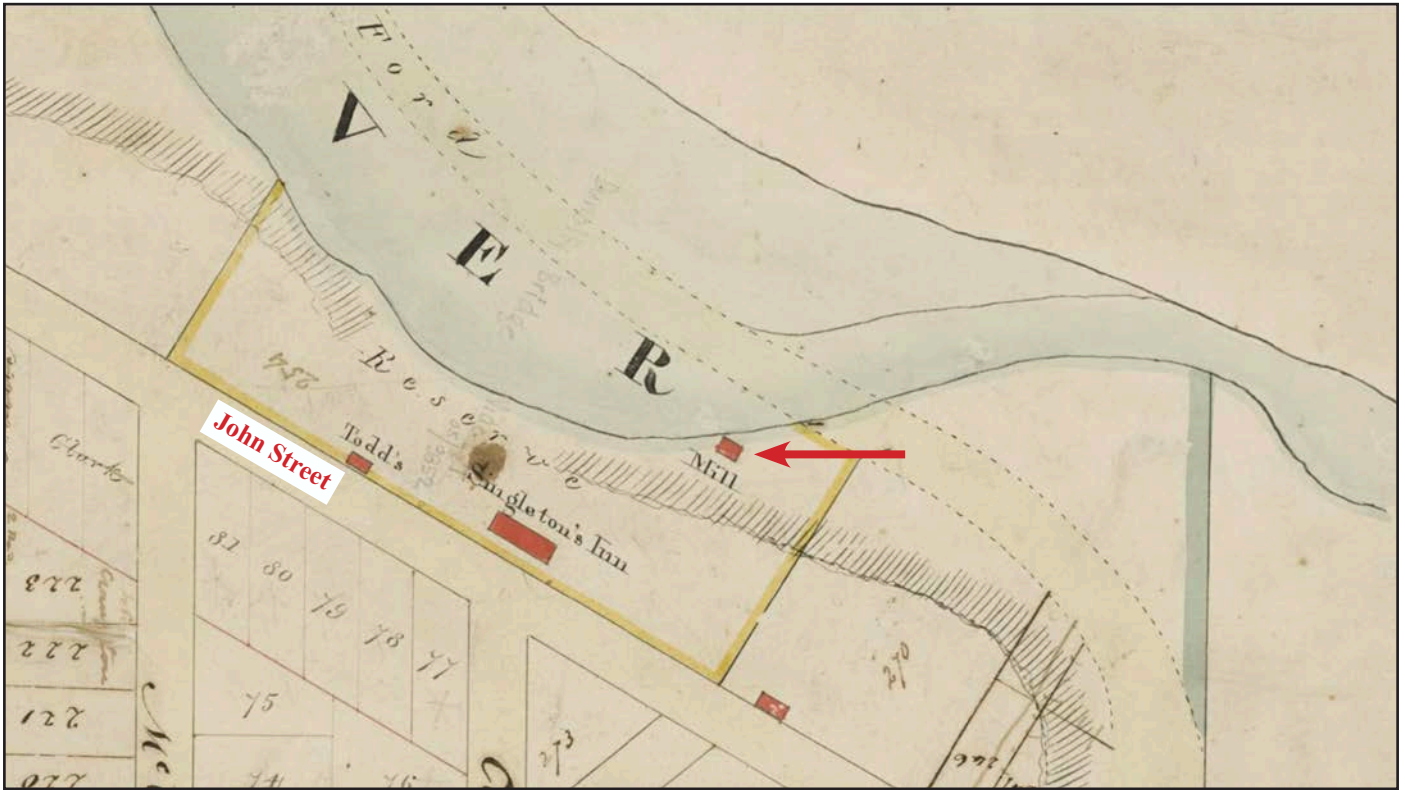
Left, Benjamin Singleton's second petition for land in 1827. Source: Archives of NSW. His mention of the Water Mill that he had established by that time is indicated (arrow).

Find out more at: www.singletonmills.com

DESCRIPTION OF THE WATERMILL

Benjamin Singleton's watermill was located **near the eastern end of Dunolly Ford** on the bank of the Hunter River. It was built near the Barley Mow Inn, which had also been established by Benjamin and his family to serve travellers. Other names later associated with this Singleton Family hotel business were 'The Plough' and 'Singleton's Inn'.

A map accompanying the 1836 auction sale of allotments for the township of Singleton shows the site of this watermill at that time (see arrow):



Above: a map drawn to accompany the sale of allotments for the township of Singleton in 1836. Source: State Library of New South Wales. The position of Benjamin Singleton's watermill is indicated (arrow).

No images or descriptions of this watermill have been found so far. However, it possibly was just a small traditional mill building, similar in style to the mill shown in this artist's impression.

It would have had an external wooden waterwheel. The mill machinery would have been powered by water turning the waterwheel.

Basic watermills generally had three floors. The wheat is hoisted to the top floor, and then fed by gravity down a chute to the grinding millstones on the middle floor. Then the flour produced by the millstones is fed by gravity down another chute to the ground floor, where it is put into sacks.

A beautiful 1866 drawing, showing the machinery and layout of a basic mill, is presented on the following page.

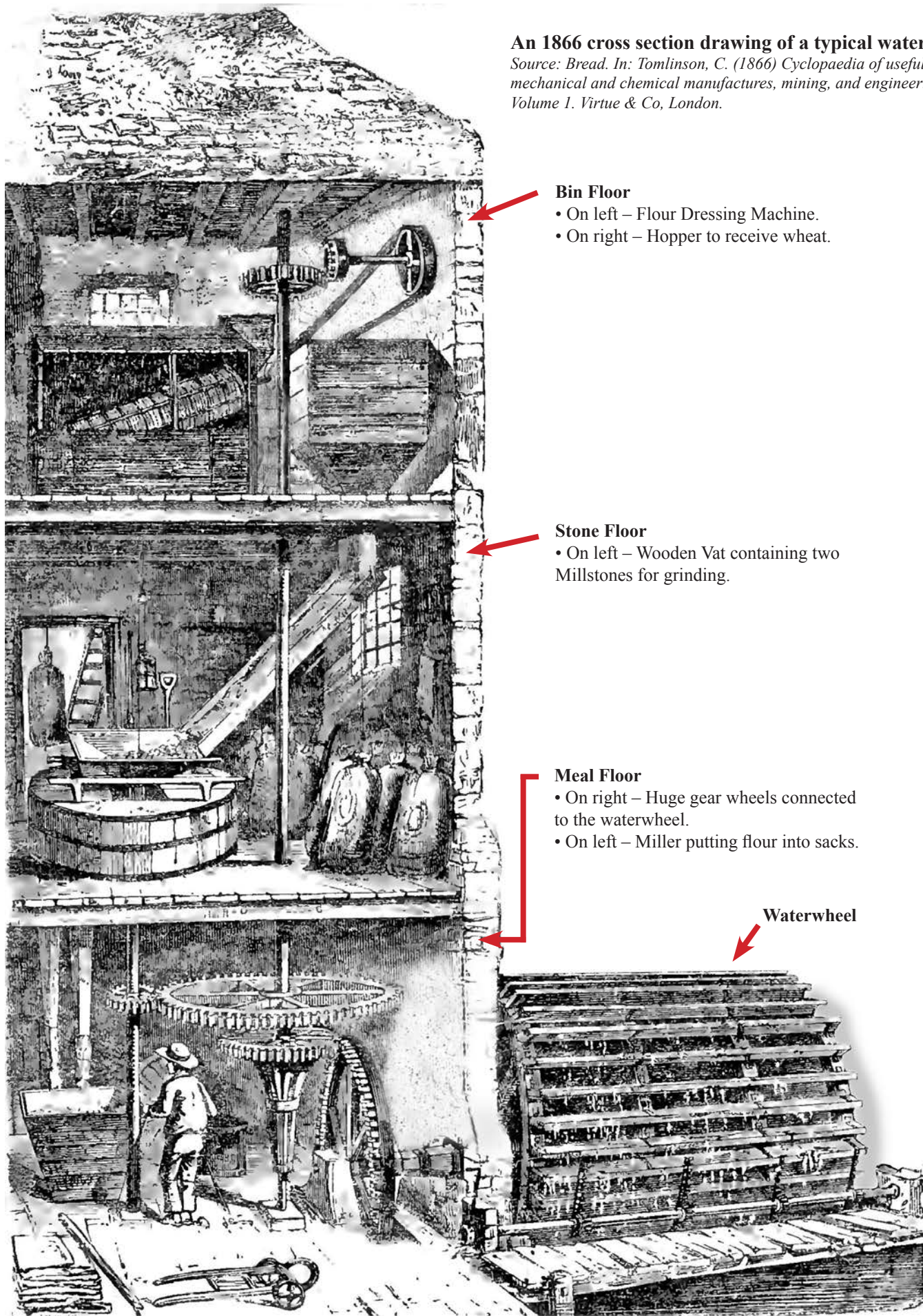
Right: An artist's impression of a basic watermill building. Benjamin Singleton's watermill at Singleton may have been similar to this simple structure.



Find out more at: www.singletonmills.com

An 1866 cross section drawing of a typical watermill.

Source: *Bread. In: Tomlinson, C. (1866) Cyclopaedia of useful arts, mechanical and chemical manufactures, mining, and engineering. Volume 1. Virtue & Co, London.*



Bin Floor

- On left – Flour Dressing Machine.
- On right – Hopper to receive wheat.

Stone Floor

- On left – Wooden Vat containing two Millstones for grinding.

Meal Floor

- On right – Huge gear wheels connected to the waterwheel.
- On left – Miller putting flour into sacks.

Waterwheel

Find out more at: www.singletonmills.com

DROUGHT IMPACTS THE WATERMILL

On 31 March 1829, James Glennie sent a character reference for Benjamin Singleton to the Colonial Secretary, in support of Benjamin's petition for land. His letter reveals that a severe drought had been impacting the operation of Benjamin's watermill at Singleton. (Insufficient water flow in the Hunter River would have made a watermill in that location inoperable.):

"...I have known him nearly five years and have always considered him an industrious man, he has a large family and has been unfortunate in a water mill which he erected on St Patricks Plains owing to the long continuous drought. He is a very honest sober man..."^[3]

FLOOD WASHES AWAY THE WATERMILL

Ironically, not long later, Benjamin Singleton's watermill was washed away by a heavy flood.

In 1831, a traveller published an account of his journey to Patrick's Plains. He said that had crossed the Hunter River at "Singleton's Ford" and commented:

"Here are the vestiges of a watermill, (erected by the person whose name is given to the Ford,) swept away by a heavy flood."^[4]

THE WATERMILL IS REBUILT

Nevertheless, by 1835, Benjamin must have had his watermill beside Singleton's Ford rebuilt.

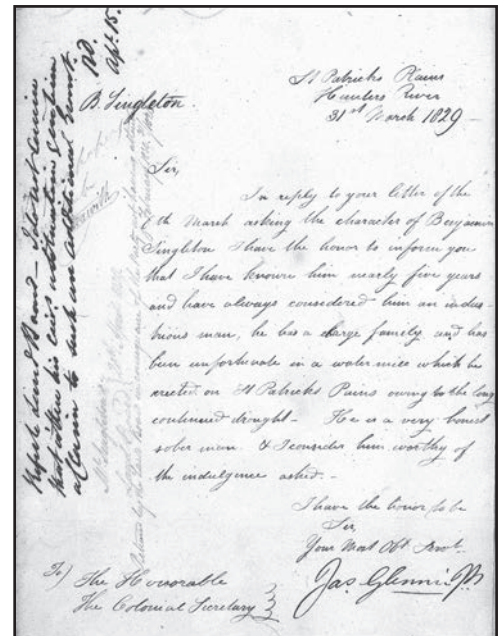
After Benjamin Singleton subdivided his grant of land near Singleton's Ford to create the township of Singleton, he advertised 113 allotments for sale.

The sales description in the newspaper, published in October 1835, stated that there was a watermill on the land and that this would be used to set up a water supply for the town:

"There is a Water Flour Mill on the land, by which the Inhabitants will be constantly supplied with water from the river by means of pipes which the Proprietor has already commenced upon."^[5]

The position of the watermill in 1836 was also shown on a map that was drawn for the subdivision sale (see page 5).

We would be very interested to hear from any reader who has further details about this watermill (see page 18).



Above: A letter written by James Glennie in 1829 to support Benjamin Singleton's petition to the Governor. He mentions the long drought that impacted Benjamin's watermill at Patricks Plains. Source: Archives of NSW.

To Capitalists, Mechanics, Tradesmen, and Others.

ELIGIBLE INVESTMENT OF CAPITAL IN

Freehold Property.

IMPORTANT SALE

OF

One Hundred and Thirteen Quarter-Acre Allotments,

In the intended Town of Singleton, at Patrick's Plains and the Hunter's River,

TO BE SOLD BY AUCTION,

BY MR. S. LYONS,

TO-MORROW, 16th October, at Borton's London Tavern, George-street, at 12 o'clock precisely.

be obtained in consequence of their being in a Township. There is a Water Flour Mill on the land, by which the Inhabitants will be constantly supplied with water from the river by means of pipes which the Proprietor has already commenced upon.

Right: Extracts from the October 1835 sales description published in the newspaper, advertising the allotments of land being sold by Benjamin Singleton for the new township of Singleton. The presence of a Water Flour Mill on the land is mentioned to attract buyers.

Chapter 2 Footnotes

1. Mahaffey, Kath. (1984?) ... and Another Reapeth: Benjamin Singleton, pioneer of the Hawkesbury and Hunter's River, Liverpool Plains and the Macintyre. Singleton Historical Society & Museum Inc.
2. Colonial Secretary's Letters relating to Land 1826 – 56, Item: 2/797, Reel: 1182, Index Number 14.
3. Colonial Secretary's Letters relating to Land 1826 – 56, Reel: 1182
4. The Sydney Gazette and NSW Advertiser 26 Nov 1831
5. The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser, 26 November 1831.

Find out more at: www.singletonmills.com

CHAPTER 3

THE UNION MILL:

BENJAMIN SINGLETON'S FIRST STEAM FLOUR MILL AT SINGLETON

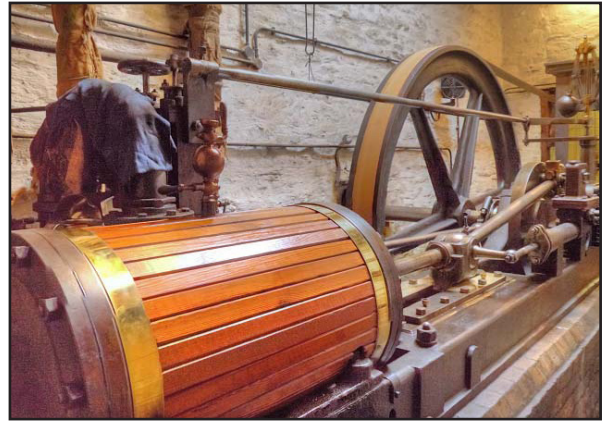
The more advanced technology of steam-powered flour mills was coming into use in the new colony of NSW. Instead of using a water wheel, turned by running water, to drive the machinery of the flour mill, a steam engine was used. Steam mills were more powerful and efficient than watermills, and they did not need a constant and abundant water supply to power the machinery.

For a detailed description of the workings of a steam flour mill, visit: www.singletonmills.com/singleton-mill-railway-detailed.html

In 1838 Benjamin Singleton opened a new steam-powered flour mill on an area of higher ground above the site of his older water-powered flour mill:

“The new steam mills, built by Mr. Singleton, are at work. They were completed on 30th ult, and christened upon opening by one of Mr. S.’s daughters. It is expected they will be found highly valuable to the district, they being capable of grinding from 15 to 20 bushels per hour...” ^[1]

This is the earliest record that we have found of a steam-powered flour mill built by the Singleton Family. Benjamin called his new steam mill the ‘Union Mill’. In later years, the Singleton Family established two further steam mills in Singleton – see Chapters 4 and 5.

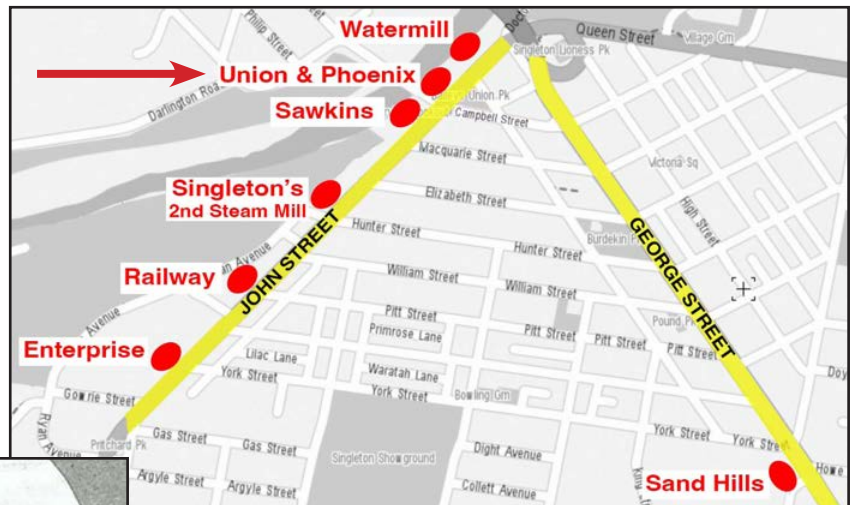


Above: A steam engine at Stott Park Bobbin Mill, UK. Image by David Dixon, Wikimedia Commons.

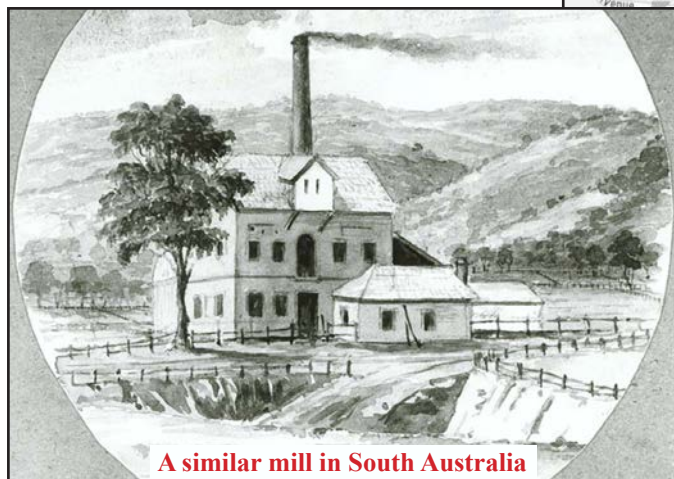
DESCRIPTION OF THE UNION MILL

The Union Mill was located near 248 John Street, Singleton, near the access to today’s Dunolly Bridge from Campbell Street. It was on the site of the later Phoenix Mill.

We have not found any precise details so far about the structure or size of the Union Mills, other than that it was much smaller than the later Phoenix Mill. ^[2] However, one report suggests that it was a **two storey mill**, large enough to store 2000 bushels of grain (see page 10).



Above: A map of Singleton showing the location of eight flour mills in the township during the 1800s. The location of Benjamin Singleton’s Union Mill, later occupied by the Phoenix Mill, is indicated (arrow).



A similar mill in South Australia

Left: The Hackney Steam Flour Mill in South Australia. Image source: State Library of South Australia.

This compact steam mill, in its rural setting, may have been similar in appearance to Benjamin Singleton’s Union Flour Mill at Singleton.

Find out more at: www.singletonmills.com

In 1840 and 1841, Benjamin placed advertisements for his Union Flour Mill in the newspapers. One stated:

“UNION MILLS, SINGLETON. – *The Settlers and Inhabitants generally of the Hunter; are respectfully informed they can be supplied with first, second and ration flour; in any quantity, at the above Mill, at the prices charged at Maitland, cash. BENJAMIN SINGLETON. February 5, 1840.*”^[3]

Right: Another advertisement by Benjamin Singleton for his Union Mill. Source: The Sydney Herald, 27 January 1840.

UNION MILL, Singleton, Patrick's Plains — BENJAMIN SINGLETON begs leave to inform the Settlers and Inhabitants of the Hunter generally, that Flour can be had at the above Mill in any quantity, at the under-mentioned prices, v'z.—
First Flour, 33 shillings per 100 lbs.
Second ditto, 28 ditto ditto
Ration ditto, 25 ditto ditto
January 18, 1840.

Benjamin’s sons assisted in the running of his steam flour mill, as shown in this newspaper advertisement:

“SINGLETON. – *William and Benjamin Singleton junior, in returning thanks to the public generally for the liberal support they have received, beg leave to inform them, that from the difficulty experienced in collecting so many small accounts for grinding; in future should the money not be sent for the grist a toll will be taken according to the market price of wheat. ...*”^[4]

BANKRUPTCY

Benjamin Singleton funded his many enterprises by taking out multiple mortgages on assets that he owned. Even before his Union Mill was opened in 1838, he had taken out mortgages on the new mill and on his land in that area from Thomas Edwards and from John Macintosh. In 1840, further mortgages of the Union Mill were taken out by Benjamin from Thomas Cullen and from Thomas Burdekin.

MEMORIAL.				
Nature of Instrument.	Names of the Parties.	Names of the Witnesses.	Description of the Lands or Property conveyed.	Con
Lease and Release by way of Mortgage	Between Benjamin Singleton of Patrick's Plains in the County of Northumberland and Colony of New South Wales, Farmer and miller and Mary Singleton his wife of the one part and Thomas Edwards of Sydney in the said Colony Merchant of the other part	John Smith and J. H. Paulovich	All that plot, piece or parcel of land or ground situate in the Town of Singleton at Patrick's Plains aforesaid containing by estimation Three acres or thereabouts (be the same more or less) bounded on the South East by John Street on the South West by a Reserve on the North East by Lot, on a Public Chart thereof numbered 245 and a straight line to Hunter's River and on the West by that River being Lot numbered 240 on the said chart And also all that Mill and Buildings now erecting and being built upon the said piece or parcel of land and heresements together with the Steam Engine, machinery and apparatus thereto belonging And also all those several pieces	

Above: A Memorial documenting Benjamin Singleton’s mortgage of his Union Mill to Thomas Edwards in 1838.

All of these mortgages were later transferred into the hands of **Thomas Burdekin**.^[5] Their total value was thousands of Pounds.

Sadly in 1842, Benjamin Singleton went bankrupt and all of his assets were sold. The mortgage holder, Thomas Burdekin, became the owner of Benjamin’s Union Steam Flour Mills.

Then in 1843, when the gruelling court cases about the bankruptcy were finally over, Benjamin and his wife, Mary, left the colony and returned to England for about eight years.^[6]

Thomas Burdekin died in 1844 and ownership of his property passed to his wife, **Mary Ann Burdekin**, of Macquarie Street, Sydney.

By 1849, “Mrs. Burdekin”, as the newspapers invariably called her, had engaged **William Kingston** to run the steam mill. At that time the mill became known as the “Singleton Steam Mills”.

Find out more at: www.singletonmills.com

A SAD END TO BENJAMIN SINGLETON'S UNION STEAM MILLS:

A TERRIBLE FIRE

In February 1852, disaster struck. A massive fire broke out and the Singleton Steam Mills (previously called the Union Mills) burned down. A newspaper reported:

“AWFUL CONFLAGRATION. – THE SINGLETON STEAM MILL BURNT DOWN – *It becomes our painful duty to record a dreadful fire that happened at the Steam Mills, this morning, by which the whole of the premises have been reduced to a mass of ruins.*

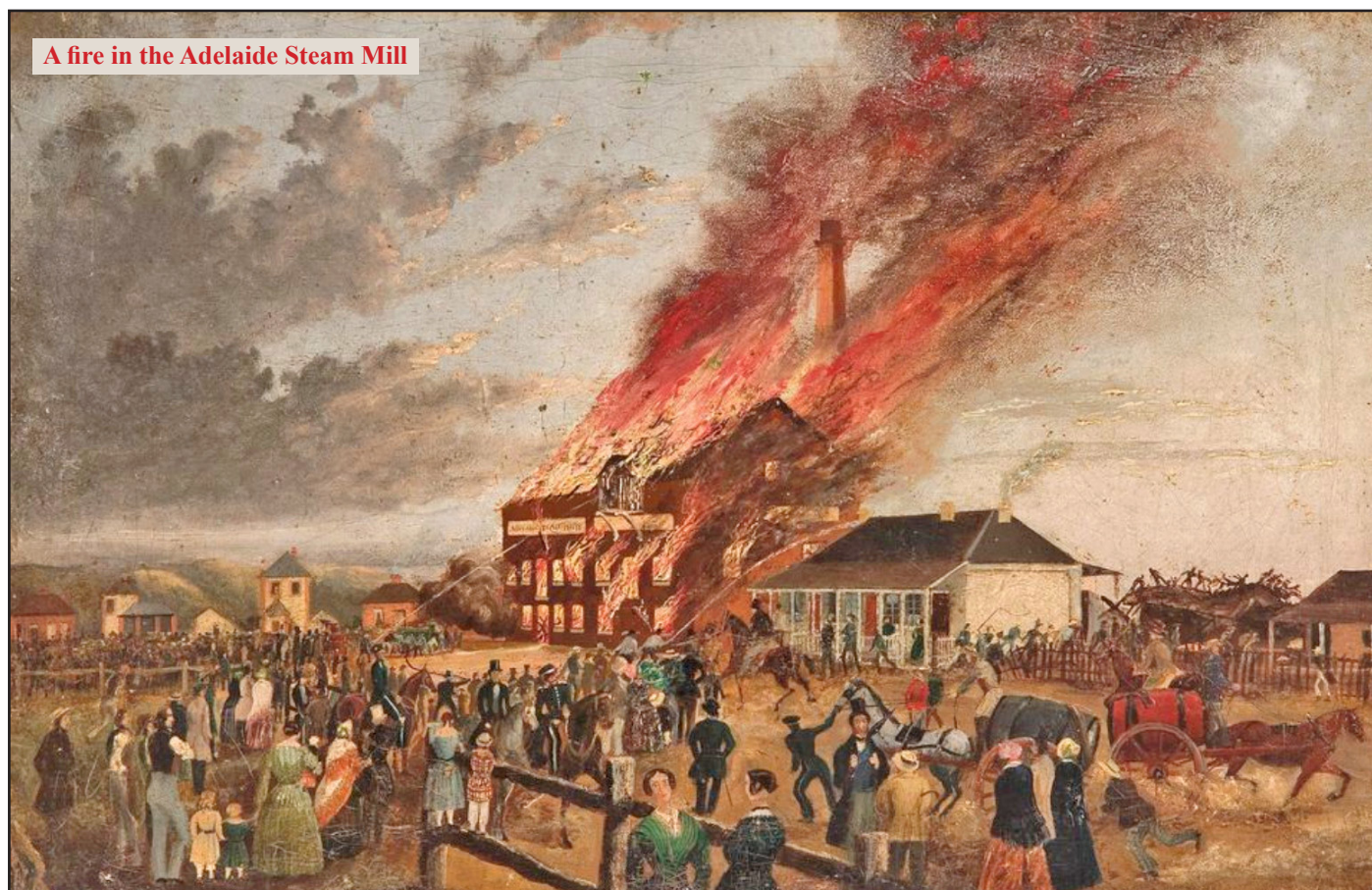
It appears that the miller, together with his family, resided in a part of the mill and at about 3 a.m., he was disturbed with a loud crashing noise : upon getting up, he discovered the mill on fire ; he immediately gave the alarm, when Mr. Kingston, the proprietor, obtained what assistance he could from the neighbours, but all human efforts were unavailing – the fire having taken such a hold.

It appeared to have originated in the fire-hold, and then to have spread to the shed, over the boiler, from whence it ran on to the main roof of the building, which in less than one hour was a mass of flame.

Every exertion was used by the neighbours to save what portable property could be saved, and all the flour, books, weights, scales &c. that were on the ground floor were placed out of the reach of the fire. But we are sorry to say that the whole of the grain, consisting of about two thousand bushels, including meal, &c , that was upon the upper story, was consumed by the devouring element. The machinery connected with the engine also suffered severely.

Great exertions were used by some of the inhabitants to prevent the fire spreading to the out-buildings and fortunately with success, and the fire, through their assistance, was entirely confined to the main building. Fortunately, there was not a breath of wind stirring, or the consequences would have been truly awful, the Forbes Hotel being on one side, and the Steam Mill Stores (a large building) on the other side of the mill...

The place is now but a mere shell, and is still (12 o'clock) burning....”^[7]



Above: A painting by James Shaw showing the Adelaide Steam Flour Mill on fire in 1855. Source: Art Gallery of South Australia. This dramatic painting provides an understanding of how the massive fire at the Union Mill may have appeared to the Singleton residents.

Find out more at: www.singletonmills.com

The property owner, Mrs Mary Ann Burdekin, alleged that her mill had been “*maliciously set on fire and destroyed*”. In a newspaper advertisement two months after the fire, the government offered substantial rewards for any person giving information leading to the conviction of guilty parties: £120 for a free person or a condition pardon for a prisoner of the Crown. M. A. Burdekin added a further reward of £100.^[8]

According to an 1852 newspaper report, the Singleton Mill (or the Union Mill) had been the only steam flour mill in the Singleton area:

“The unfortunate burning of the Singleton mill has deprived that locality for some time of the advantage of having a steam flour mill.”^[9]

We would be very interested to hear from any reader who has further details about the Union Mill (see page 18).

THE PHOENIX STEAM FLOUR MILL IS BUILT ON THE SITE OF THE UNION MILLS

Soon after the fire, Mary Ann Burdekin decided to build a new steam flour mill on the site of the Union Mill. Her new mill, called the ‘Phoenix Mill’, was opened in 1853. It was managed by **William Kingston** for over 20 years, then by other managers for a further 20 years.

To read the full story of the **Phoenix Steam Flour Mill**, at Singleton, including its upgrade to a Roller Flour Mill, visit:

www.singletonmills.com/singleton-mill-phoenix.html

William Kingston later went on to erect his own steam flour mill, called the ‘**Railway Mills**’, further down John Street. To read the full story of William Kingston’s Railway Steam Flour Mill at Singleton, visit:

www.singletonmills.com/singleton-mill-railway.html



Above: The Phoenix Mill at Singleton in 1866. Photograph from the John Turner Collection, courtesy of the University of Newcastle.

Chapter 3 Footnotes

1. The Sydney Monitor, 6 August 1838
2. The Maitland Mercury and Hunter River General Advertiser, 9 April 1853
3. The Sydney Herald, 24 February 1840
4. The Sydney Herald, 3 April 1841
5. The Maitland Mercury and Hunter River General Advertiser, 28 September 1861
6. Mahaffey, Kath. (1984?) ... and Another Reapeth: Benjamin Singleton, pioneer of the Hawkesbury and Hunter’s River, Liverpool Plains and the Macintyre. Singleton Historical Society & Museum Inc.
7. The Maitland Mercury and Hunter River General Advertiser, 14 February 1852
8. The Maitland Mercury and Hunter River General Advertiser, 28 April 1852; Clayworth, Dot. (2014) The Flour Mills of Singleton. The Singleton Times (Newsletter of the Singleton Historical Society), Issue 117, pp 6-8
9. The Maitland Mercury and Hunter River General Advertiser, 17 April 1852.

Find out more at: www.singletonmills.com

CHAPTER 4

BENJAMIN SINGLETON'S SECOND STEAM FLOUR MILL IN JOHN STREET, SINGLETON

Benjamin and Mary Singleton had returned to Singleton from England about a year before his old Union Mills burned down. Even though Mary Ann Burdekin planned to rebuild that mill, Benjamin Senior had decided by late 1851 to establish another steam flour mill in John Street.

In April 1852, he announced that his new mill was almost finished:

"...The undersigned ... begs to inform his old friends in and around Singleton that he is about erecting a FLOUR MILL, which he hopes soon to have in operation. ... BENJAMIN SINGLETON, SEN. ..." [1]

Benjamin's new steam mill was still in the process of being constructed when Benjamin Singleton died on 3 May 1853. [2] Nevertheless, Benjamin's widow, Mary, and his sons, Benjamin Junior and George Australia Singleton, carried on the work and the new mill went into operation.

DESCRIPTION OF BENJAMIN SINGLETON'S SECOND STEAM MILL

This new steam mill was located a few hundred metres southwest of the site of Benjamin's old Union Mills, at about 172 John Street, near the intersection with Hunter Street. [3]

By 1854, Mary and her sons, William, Benjamin Junior and George Australia owned a set of three adjoining allotments in John Street, with a combined frontage of 120 feet, between Hunter and Elizabeth Street. The mill and other buildings stood on this land.



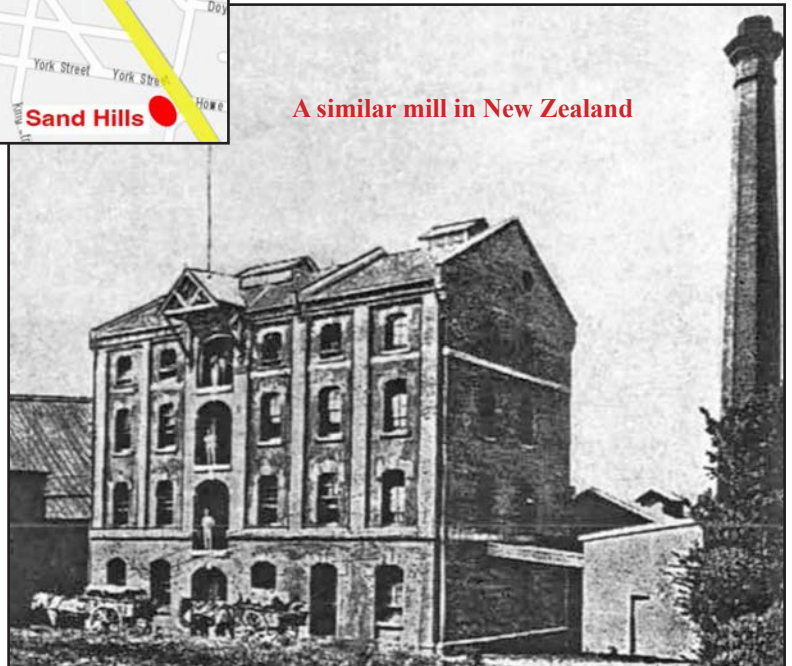
Left: A map of Singleton showing the location of eight flour mills in the township during the 1800s. The location of Benjamin Singleton's Second Mill in John Street is indicated (arrow).

The mill building was described as "very large". No precise dimensions for this building have been located so far. It was made of brick with **four storeys and an attic (five floors)**. [4] It was referred to in some newspaper articles as 'Singleton's Mill'.

Right: The four storey Woods Bros. steam flour mill in Addington, Christchurch, New Zealand. Image source: Wikimedia Commons.

This large New Zealand mill may have been similar in style to Benjamin Singleton's second steam mill in Singleton.

Benjamin's mill was one storey taller than any other mill we have found so far; that was built in Singleton during the 1800s, and it must have been an impressive sight in the town.



A similar mill in New Zealand

Find out more at: www.singletonmills.com

In the 1870s, this mill was leased by George Achurch. It had been at least partially rebuilt in the 1860s. However, a description of Achurch's Mill published in 1875 gives an idea of the scale of the original building established by the Singleton Family:

“ACHURCH’S MILL. *This is a very large brick mill of four stories. It faces John-street. The engine is 14 horse-power, and the boiler, which is called a shell boiler, is [illegible] horse-power, and will contain 1200 gallons. There are four pair of stones, and wire and smutting machines. Three pair of stones are now in full operation, and **there are five floors in the mill**, which is in good working order. The engine has a very large fly-wheel. ... The mill was built in 1851.”* [5]

We would be very interested to hear from any reader who has further details about this Benjamin Singleton mill (see page 18).

DISASTER STRIKES AGAIN: AN EXPLOSION!

Unfortunately, once again, calamity struck the Singleton Family. In 1857, the boiler on Mrs. Singleton’s Mill exploded, wrecking the building. A newspaper reported:

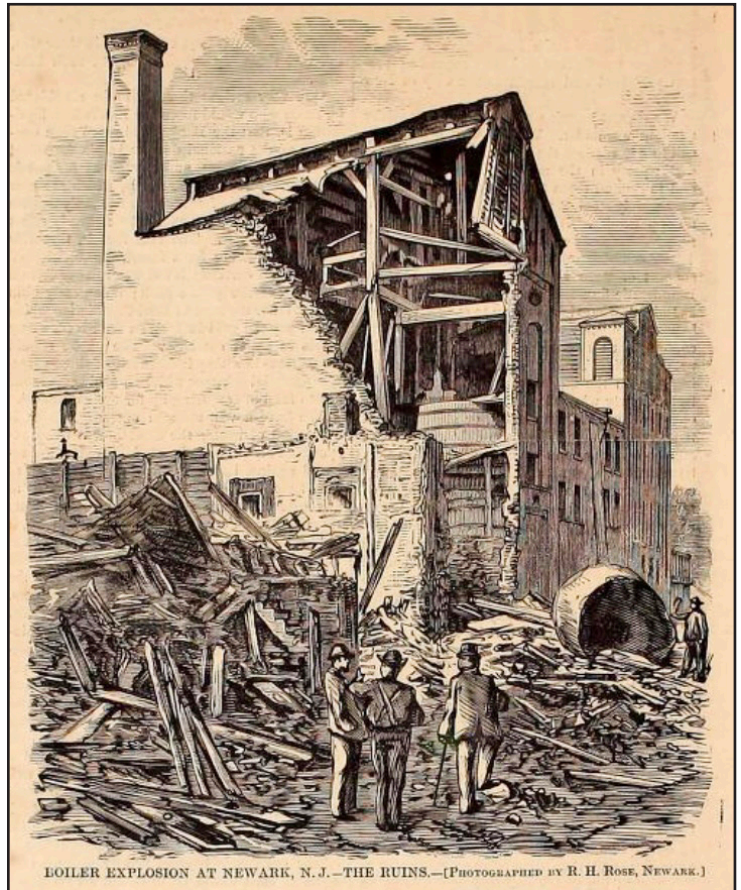
“SINGLETON. *A most lamentable and destructive accident has just occurred here. In the early part of the day the whole place was alarmed by a concussion that with very little exaggeration, might be turned into the story of an earthquake.*

Singleton’s flour mill, worked by steam machinery – the boiler and appurtenances weighing some four or five tons, from some cause of other not yet explained, blew up, carrying with it half the building, and resulting in a complete wreck of the whole establishment.

Wonderful, indeed, we might say almost miraculous, that while part of the machinery was thrown at least 150 yards off, and some of the debris twice as far, Mr. B. Singleton and some of his people who were standing close by the machinery at the time, escaped with nothing more than some slight bruises.

The loss of property is estimated at from £1500 to £2000 ; and, so far as our information goes it is uninsured, or at least if so to a very limited extent.

If there is one point more than another in this calamity that calls for sympathy, it is the fact that this establishment was one of the “main stays” of the widow of the Ben. Singleton, who established this township, and than whom no one in this community is more justly respected.” [6]



Above: A drawing of a similar massive boiler explosion at a mill in New Jersey in 1867. Source: Harper’s Weekly, Wikimedia Commons.

Another dramatic report on this mill explosion was given in some reminiscences of old Singleton, published in 1906:

“Ben and George Singleton kept the big mill close to the Cross Keys [Inn] in the early fifties. The boiler of this mill exploded and shattered the mill ; the boiler was shot right over the Hunter River; some six or seven hundred yards, and driven about 10 feet into the bank of the Donnybrook side of the river.

Ben and George Singleton were thrown from one end of the mill to the other; boxed up with a mass of bricks, beams, flour, wheat, and machinery. They were rescued after a lot of trouble by hundreds of willing hands. They looked a pitiful sight, both laid out on the street half suffocated, but happily neither of them was seriously injured, – a wonderful escape.

Two bricks fell on our house in Church-street, and shattered some of the shingles.” [7]

Find out more at: www.singletonmills.com

BENJAMIN SINGLETON'S JOHN STREET STEAM MILL IS REBUILT

Despite the extensive damage caused by the 1857 boiler explosion at Mrs Singleton's Mill in John Street, it appears that this mill was rebuilt.

Some reminiscences describing Singleton as it was during the 1860s^[8] mentioned that "George Singleton's mill" was located in John Street, nearly opposite Hunter Street.

In 1860, Benjamin Singleton Junior began constructing his own steam flour mill on George Street, near the outskirts of Singleton. So perhaps his younger brother, **George Australia Singleton**, took over the running of the rebuilt John Street mill in the 1860s.

LATER HISTORY OF THE SINGLETON'S JOHN STREET MILL

In 1861, Mary Singleton sold her three lots of land in John Street, where this mill stood, to her son-in-law, Otto Baldwin. Subsequently there were newspaper references to 'Mr Baldwin's Mill'.^[9]

Otto Baldwin leased this mill to **George Achurch** in 1872:

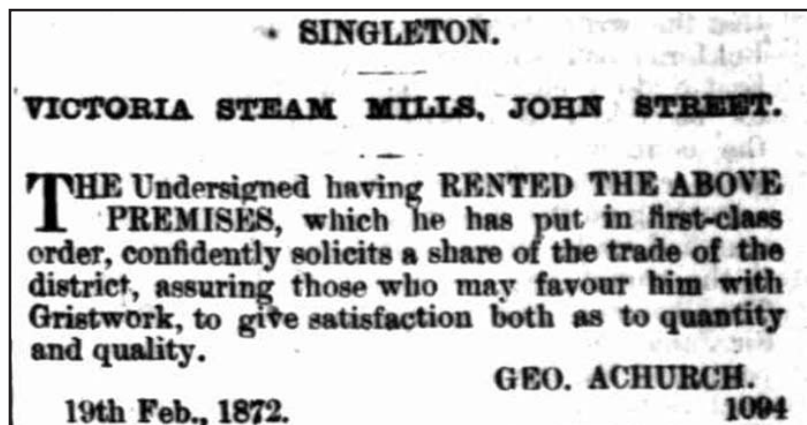
"BALDWIN'S MILL – The mill in John-street, belonging to Mr. Otto Baldwin, which has not been used for milling purposes for some years, is about to be again put into working order, the premises having been leased by Mr. Achurch of Clarence Town, who expects to commence grinding wheat within a month..."^[10]

To read more about George Achurch and his milling businesses, visit: www.singletonmills.com/singleton-mill-achurch.html

George Achurch operated Otto Baldwin's Mill in Singleton for about four years. After Otto Baldwin's death in 1874, Otto's widow, Elizabeth Baldwin, advertised an auction of the mill, and the three allotments of land on which it stood in 1875.^[11] Then Elizabeth Baldwin tried to evict George Achurch from the mill.^[12]

The mill was finally purchased by William Kingston for £575 on 19 May 1876.^[13]

William Kingston (who would shortly open his new Railway Mill) apparently then arranged for the demolition of the mill building, because in 1877 he advertised the three allotments for sale as "the site of Singleton's Mill, now removed".^[14]



Above: George Achurch re-opened this mill under the name, 'Victoria Steam Mills'. The Maitland Mercury and Hunter River General Advertiser, 20 February 1872.

This marked the end of the final flour mill that had been established by Benjamin Singleton Senior.

Chapter 4 Footnotes

1. The Maitland Mercury and Hunter River General Advertiser, 24 April 1852
2. Mahaffey, Kath. (1984?) ... and Another Reapeth: Benjamin Singleton, pioneer of the Hawkesbury and Hunter's River, Liverpool Plains and the Macintyre. Singleton Historical Society & Museum Inc.
3. Back to Singleton Souvenir, 1926, page 10, <https://livinghistories.newcastle.edu.au/nodes/view/56385?> mentioned that George Singleton's mill was located "Almost opposite Hunter Street on the western side of John Street"; Further information was obtained from historic land documents and sketches (Primary Application 11382 and deeds Book 28 Number 983, Book 75 Number 559, Book 71 Number 192, and Book 75 Number 675).
4. The Singleton Argus and Upper Hunter General Advocate, 6 February 1875
5. The Singleton Argus and Upper Hunter General Advocate, 6 February 1875
6. The Maitland Mercury and Hunter River General Advertiser, 6 October 1857
7. The Maitland Weekly Mercury, 10 February 1906
8. Back to Singleton Souvenir, 1926, page 10, <https://livinghistories.newcastle.edu.au/nodes/view/56385?>
9. The Maitland Mercury and Hunter River General Advertiser, 22 October 1868 and 18 November 1871.
10. The Maitland Mercury and Hunter River General Advertiser, 25 January 1872
11. The Maitland Mercury and Hunter River General Advertiser, 20 November 1875
12. The Maitland Mercury and Hunter River General Advertiser, 27 January 1876
13. Land Conveyance Document, Book 159, Number 638
14. The Maitland Mercury and Hunter River General Advertiser, 8 December 1877.

Find out more at: www.singletonmills.com

CHAPTER 5

BENJAMIN SINGLETON JUNIOR'S STEAM FLOUR MILL AT THE SAND HILLS IN GEORGE STREET

While the Singletons' second steam mill was still in operation, Benjamin Singleton Junior commenced another new steam flour mill on the outskirts of Singleton:

“Mr. Singleton’s new mill situated on the main road as you enter from Maitland and close to the boundary of the town, is in a forward state. It is of weatherboard and of two stories.”^[1]

By mid 1861, Benjamin Junior’s new mill was nearly finished^[2] and it opened in April 1862:

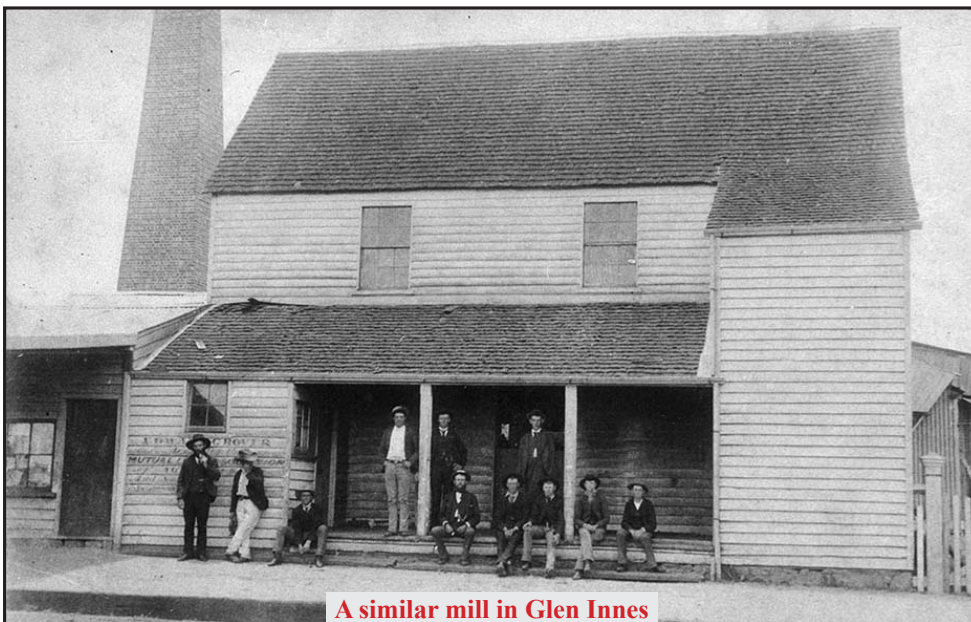
“Mr. Benjamin Singleton’s new steam flour mill has been opened for the business of grinding generally. We now have within the town of Singleton three first-class steam flour mills. They seem to be all fully employed.”^[3]

DESCRIPTION OF THE SAND HILLS MILL

Our research on this locality has revealed that this mill would have been in an area known as the ‘Sand Hill’ or ‘Sand Hills’, on the western side of George Street, Singleton, near the intersection with Orchard Avenue.

The mill building was made of weatherboard and was two storeys high.

No precise dimensions for this building have been located so far.



Above: A map of Singleton showing the location of eight flour mills in the township during the 1800s. The location of Benjamin Singleton Junior’s Mill at the Sand Hills is indicated (arrow).

Left: The first flour mill in Glen Innes. Image source: State Library of New South Wales.

This two storey Glen Innes steam flour mill may have been similar in style to Benjamin Singleton Junior’s steam mill in George Street, Singleton.

Find out more at: www.singletonmills.com

THOMAS AND EDWIN SAWKINS OPERATE BENJAMIN SINGLETON JUNIOR'S SAND HILLS MILL

Thomas Sawkins reportedly “carried on business for eight or nine years in a building near the sand hills.”^[4] His son, E. B. Sawkins was working with him at the Sand Hills mill, as was shown by various items in the newspapers from 1865 to 1874, such as:

“Mr. Sawkins of Singleton’s Mill informs us that the coal from the new seam, now being worked “burns with a strong fierce heat” in his furnace, scarcely any clinkers, and those quite friable, not adhering to the bars, and leaving only a small quantity of ashes.”^[5]

“WHEAT. WHEAT. WHEAT. –
Purchased, in any quantity, by the undersigned, FOR CASH, at the HIGHEST MARKET PRICE.

E. B. SAWKINS & THOS. SAWKINS,
Flour Mill, Singleton.”^[6]

WHEAT. WHEAT. WHEAT.
PURCHASED, in any quantity, by the Undersigned, FOR CASH, at the HIGHEST MARKET PRICE.
E. B. SAWKINS & THOS. SAWKINS,
Flour Mill,
Singleton.
407

“WHEAT. WHEAT. WHEAT.
GOOD SAMPLES PURCHASED IN ANY QUANTITIES for CASH.

Also the undersigned would take this opportunity of THANKING HIS CUSTOMERS and OTHERS, who have kindly favored him with their Grist hitherto, and also beg to inform them that the Mill having had recent improvements, that he will be able to MANUFACTURE a FIRST-RATE ARTICLE IN FLOUR, from one of Brenchley’s Patentee of Dressing Machines, producing more Flour and equal in quality to any Superfine Silk-dressed Flour.

Note the Address –
E. B. SAWKINS,
Steam Flour Mill,
Sand Hills,
George-street, Singleton.”^[7]

WHEAT. WHEAT. WHEAT.
GOOD SAMPLES PURCHASED IN ANY QUANTITIES for CASH. Also, the Undersigned would take this opportunity of THANKING HIS CUSTOMERS and OTHERS, who have kindly favored him with their Grist hitherto, and also beg to inform them that the Mill having had recent improvements, that he will be able to MANUFACTURE a FIRST-RATE ARTICLE IN FLOUR, from one of Brenchley’s Patentee of Dressing Machines, producing more Flour and equal in quality to any Superfine Silk-dressed Flour.
Note the Address—
E. B. SAWKINS,
Steam Flour Mill,
Sand Hills,
George-street,
Singleton.
6861

Another newspaper report gave an example of the many serious accidents that occurred in these mills during this period:

“SEVERE ACCIDENT. -- An accident of a very serious nature befell Mr. Joseph Parr, of this town, on Thursday last. It appears that the flour mill at the Sand Hills was undergoing some repairs. The boiler had been shifted and was being bricked up by Parr, when the heavy mass rolled over, crushing one of Parr’s arms, in a shocking manner. When extricated from his dangerous position he was carried home, where he lies in a very feeble state.”^[8]

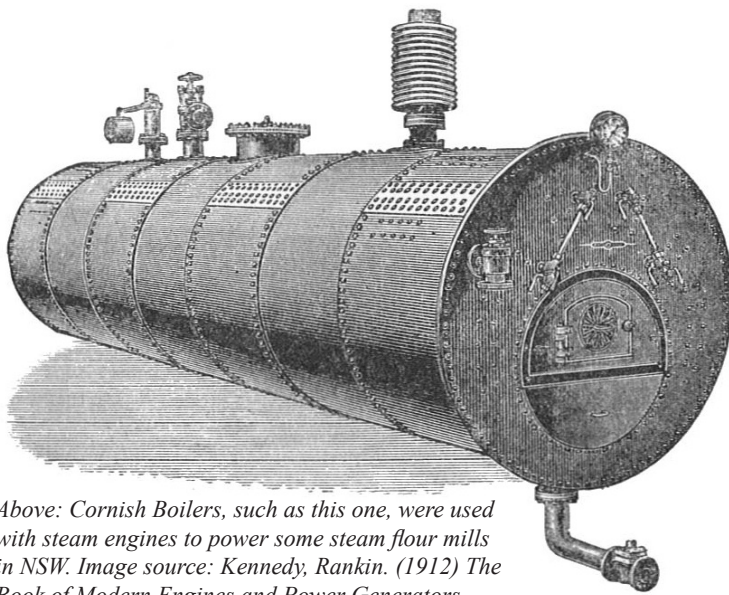
Edwin Benjamin Sawkins continued to occupy and operate the mill at the Sand Hills, with his father, Thomas, until 1874. E.B. Sawkins (as he was generally known) then moved to a new mill that he had erected in John Street, Singleton, next to his bakery.

To read more details about E.B. Sawkins’ Steam Flour Mill in John Street, visit:
www.singletonmills.com/singleton-mill-sawkins.html

Find out more at: www.singletonmills.com

LATER HISTORY OF THE SAND HILLS MILL

While many flour mills of the time were destroyed in catastrophic fires, explosions or floods,^[9] it seems that Benjamin Singleton Junior's Sand Hills Mill met its end in a much more subtle way. According to a newspaper report, the **poor water supply in the Sand Hills area soon caused the steam boiler to corrode and fail**. Then in 1874, E. B. Sawkins removed the steam engine from the Sand Hills Mill and reinstalled it into his new mill in John Street:



Above: Cornish Boilers, such as this one, were used with steam engines to power some steam flour mills in NSW. Image source: Kennedy, Rankin. (1912) *The Book of Modern Engines and Power Generators*. Wikimedia Commons.

“ Within the last few months a third flour mill has been erected in John-street, the proximity of good water having tempted Mr. E. B. Sawkins to remove thither from the Sandhills.

*This [the Sandhills] is a spot on the Maitland Road, in close proximity to Singleton, where Mr. Sawkins formerly carried on the business of a miller. In this locality, we believe **water was both bad and scarce, and was so salt as to destroy the boiler plates in the space of a couple of years....***

The engine, which is the same that was formerly employed at the Sandhills, was fitted up in the new premises by Mr. Sawkins himself...”^[10]

The impact of the poor water on Benjamin Singleton Junior's Sand Hills Mill makes it understandable why most of the flour mills in Singleton were built along John Street, where there was access to plentiful water of reasonably good quality.

Benjamin Singleton Junior died in Singleton on 30 July 1889, aged 71.

By 1890, the site of Benjamin Singleton Junior's flour mill at the Sand Hills was vacant.

In that area, William Foster established successful saleyards that were operated by Mr York for cattle, horses, pigs and sheep. Needing to expand, they purchased *“the site of Mr. Singleton's old mill adjoining”* and erected additional yards on this land.^[11]

We would be very interested to hear from any reader who has further details about this Sand Hills Mill (see page 18).

Chapter 5 Footnotes

1. Empire, 5 December 1860
2. Empire, 14 June 1861
3. Empire, 10 April 1862
4. The Singleton Argus and Upper Hunter General Advocate, 6 February 1875
5. The Maitland Mercury and Hunter River General Advertiser, 26 October 1865
6. The Maitland Mercury and Hunter River General Advertiser, 20 January 1872
7. The Maitland Mercury and Hunter River General Advertiser, 14 December 1872
8. Empire, 11 February 1869
9. Ashton, P, Jennings, J, and McCorquodale, J. (2022) *The power of flour: a photographic history of milling in Australia*. Australian Milling Museum, Bathurst.
10. The Singleton Argus and Upper Hunter General Advocate, 11 November 1874
11. The Maitland Mercury and Hunter River General Advertiser, 8 May 1890.

Find out more at: www.singletonmills.com

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The Singleton family ran multiple successful flour milling operations in the township of Singleton for many decades:

- Benjamin Singleton Senior had established a flour **watermill** on the Hunter River by 1827;
- this watermill was rebuilt after it was washed away in a flood prior to 1831;
- Benjamin Senior then established the steam-powered **Union Mills** in John Street (near Campbell Street) in 1838;
- and he commenced **a new steam flour mill in John Street** (near Hunter Street) in 1851;
- Mary Singleton and her sons operated the new John Street steam mill until a severe explosion in 1857;
- then this John Street mill appears to have been rebuilt and was periodically put back in operation until 1875;
- and finally Benjamin Junior established **another new steam flour mill at the Sand Hills** in George Street in 1860, which operated until about 1874.

The Singleton Family ran many enterprises in the Singleton area, with cattle, the hotel trade, and building the infrastructure of the new town.

However, as shown in this research, the four mills that they established also made a valuable contribution to township of Singleton, by providing vital milled flour for almost half a century.

CAN YOU HELP US?

Do you have a photograph or drawing of one of the mills described in this eBook, or do you have any further information about them?

Please contact Les Dollin, as follows:

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Find out more at: www.singletonmills.com