

Mill Hill: Henry Hough and Hope Farm



Hough's Mill, Mill Hill, Waverley - c. 1868

Windmills once dominated the Sydney colonial skyline, at one time so numerous that they were an identifying feature of the city, appearing in many early paintings and drawings. While they are long gone their memory lingers in the many paintings and images depicting their sails and in some of Sydney's street names.

Windmills were strung out along the natural ridges providing distinctive landmarks and the natural source of renewable energy they generated was used to grind grain into flour or meal. It was literally milling by the wind.

In 1820 William Charles Wentworth ended a poem, 'The lofty windmills, that with outspread sail, Thick line the hills, and court the rising gale' and described them as being part of the beauties of Sydney. Naturalist Charles Darwin wrote in 1836 that as his ship sailed up Sydney Harbour 'in the distance stone houses, two and three storeys high and windmills standing on the edge of a bank, pointed out to us the neighbourhood of the capital of Australia.'

There were a number of prominent windmills at Darlinghurst and Paddington situated along the high ridge of Oxford Street and utilising its naturally windy environment. Waverley has an important link to this windmill history as our own local windmill, owned by Henry Hough and often called Hough's windmill was the city's last working windmill, and as such is an important part of Sydney's agricultural history.

Henry Hough was born in Australia in 1803 or 1804 and was a millwright by profession. Henry's first windmill was in the centre of Sydney, on the block bounded by Sussex, Goulburn, Dickson (later Dixon) and Hay Streets, the Mill itself was mid-block between Sussex and Dickson (later Dixon) Streets. He also manufactured and sold millstones and an ad for his business appears on the front page of the *Sydney Herald*, 15 August 1838:

To Millers

Henry Hough

Millwright and builder of French Burr Millstones

Most respectfully informs his Friends and the Public in general, that he has a large and choice assortment of French Burr, which he intends making up in the following sixes and on the most reasonable terms...; he has also on hand a few pair of his own manufactures, with a large assortment of Dressing and Smutting Machines, wire varying in number from fourteen to seventy, with Tacks and Brushes for Flour Machines, and Millbills, Flour, Dressing, Smutting, Thrashing and Winnowing Machines made to order. H. H. has a small Flour Mill for sale, with twenty-inch French Burr Stones, suitable to attach to a Thrashing Machine, or work by hand.

Henry was granted four hectares of land in western Waverley near Centennial Park, in the area we currently describe as Mill Hill in 1832, some reports have as late as 1840. Here he established Hope Farm and at some time between 1841 and 1846 (the dates vary) built a wooden windmill on his farm where people could bring their corn or grain to be ground. They entered via a slip-rail from Oxford Street (then South Head Road).

He married 18 y.o. Cordelia Tooth in 1848 and they had four children: Cordelia, Susanna, Albert Edwin and Henry. An early resident of Waverley, W. J. Napier, described Henry as 'proud of his position' and said 'he was possessed of a court uniform which he always wore to Government House, to which he had entrée'.

The Mayor of Paddington, Alderman T. J. West in *Old Times (Sydney)*, 4 July 1903, wrote of Hough's windmill at Waverley and Gordon's windmill at Paddington:

'A mechanical peculiarity of these two mills was that the tower turned with the wind, so that the sails set automatically to whatever direction the breeze was blowing from...the mills at Darlinghurst were not of such an improved pattern, as, whenever the wind changed round a point or two the whole mill, which worked on a sort of pivot or king-bolt arrangement, had to be turned round by extra mechanical means.'

The exact location of the farm's buildings in relation to the present-day Mill Hill Road, which cuts through the former Hope Farm, is difficult to determine. Sources are contradictory; one claim is that Hope Farm's stable was located approximately on the site of the present 9 Mill Hill Road, with a farm cottage at the site of 40-42 Mill Hill Road and a hut at 53 Mill Hill Road.

The windmill has been described as standing approximately on the site of the present 27 Mill Hill Road; another report has the windmill on the other side of the road on the site of the former St. Barnabas Anglican Church at 16 Mill Hill Road, which is now a private residential building. The windmill is often described as being 'near the Waverley toll-bar'.

Toll bars came into operation in New South Wales in 1810 and continued in various locations until 1896. The toll system was instigated by Governor Macquarie, with the revenue raised from toll road users put toward road maintenance.

A toll bar was situated on the section of Oxford Street between Mill Hill Road and Ruthven Street, at this time this part of Oxford Street was known as South Head Road. The toll bar was six foot high and operated until 31 December 1882. It has been suggested that a toll-bar was built in this spot to catch people avoiding the other Waverley toll booth which was on the corner of Ebley Street and Bronte Road.

One of the most remembered of the toll keepers at the toll booth near Hough's windmill was a man called Billy Deacon who had a little cubicle for shelter and staffed the toll booth for many years. He was nicknamed 'The Professor' and was described as passing his probably quite lonely time in the tollkeeper's cubicle playing a mouth organ or tin whistle.

Hough's windmill was in use until 1878, but it may not have been demolished until three years later. Reports of the demolition of the windmill are variously 1878 or 1881. Henry Hough died on 28 October 1880 aged 77 years at his home on Hope Farm. Unhappily for Henry his death notice in the *Sydney Morning Herald* records that he died after a 'sad and painful illness'. He is buried in Waverley Cemetery in Section 3, Church of England Select, grave number 327. For many years the Waverley Historical Society paid for the upkeep of his grave.

It is not known whether Cordelia Hough continued to live at Hope Farm after Henry's death, she died four years later in 1885 aged 55 years. She is buried in the grave next to Henry with their son Albert Edwin Hough who died in 1929 aged 75 years.

The windmill was pulled down as part of the subdivision of Hope Farm into the Mill Hill Estate in 1885, with the farm land split up to create 183 allotments of land. This subdivision brought into existence Mill Hill Road, Hough and Hope Streets whose names still remember the windmill on the hill, the family and the farm. The subdivision also brought into being a continuation of Ebley Street, then called Smithers Street, and the present day Spring Street, then known as Browne Street.

The Mill Hill Estate land was described as being on 'the site of Hough's Old Windmill' and located on the 'South Head Road, Waverley, at the tollbar'. The land was described as being very desirable as it was 'the only remaining in tact property in this locality. Its position for access by tram, which runs past the property to and from the City, places it within 20 minutes of King Street ([Sydney]).'

The area of Waverley which we now call Mill Hill was formerly part of the Randwick Local Government Area. In 1935 Waverley Council proposed that this area of 37 acres become part of the Waverley LGA. The boundaries of the land were: Ruthven Street, St. James Road, Gowrie Street, York Road and Ashton Street. Waverley argued that this piece of land was fairly isolated from Randwick, being cut off by Centennial Park, was in the postal and police districts of Waverley and its physical proximity to the commercial centre of Bondi Junction, rather than Randwick, made it naturally belong in Waverley.

Randwick Council didn't agree to a direct resumption and wanted to exchange lands between the two councils instead, proposing Waverley Council transfer to Randwick a portion of land south of Macpherson Street. Waverley Council did not want to surrender this land and the matter dragged on until 1941.

In 1941 a Commission of Inquiry, held by the NSW Local Government Department, recommended that the Mill Hill Area between Centennial Park and the western boundary of Waverley become part of the Waverley LGA and this was proclaimed in the *NSW Government Gazette* on 6 October 1944.

Located on the natural ridge which Oxford Street follows, Hough's windmill was once a prominent local landmark; it was literally a mill on a hill, hence the name Mill Hill. The end of its working days marked the end of an era; by the end of the 19th century, despite their former dominance of the Sydney skyline, all the city's working windmills had gone.

Images of Hough's windmill:

- Undated sketch of the windmill by G. W. Lupson. Location of original is unknown.
- John W. Hardwick's 1852 sketch 'Windmill: Waverley – near Sydney' is held in the Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW collection. His sketch suggests that the windmill had a circular stone base.
- A 1932 sketch by John Coates of 'Windmill. 1846 to 1878. Erected on Mill Hill on Hope Farm by the owner Mr. Hough. It stood on the site now occupied by St. Barnabas, Mill Hill Parish, Waverley.' Location or original sketch is unknown. John Coates was the Rector of St. Barnabas Church in the 1930s.
- Sydney Ure Smith sketch of the windmill appears in C. H. Bertie's *Stories of Old Sydney* (1912).
- Paintings of the windmill by Samuel Elyard dated 1868 and 1883 are held in the State Library of NSW collection. His sketch suggests that the windmill had a solid wood hexagonal or octagonal base. His painting is physically correct, as this type of base appears in the only known photograph of the windmill in the

Government Printing Office collection.

- Photograph of the windmill is part of the Government Printing Office archive held in the State Records collection.

Articles about Henry Hough's windmill:

- *Old Sydney Windmills* (1978) by Len Fox
- 'The first skyscrapers – Sydney's windmills' *Heritage Australia* magazine (1983) by Len Fox
- *Stories of Old Sydney* by Charles Henry Bertie (1912)

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