

# Dismantling a windmill



The mill on the right is the Simplex mill. The little mill on the left is a six foot diameter wheel Southern Cross. The roof of the Kenya shearers' quarters is just visible at the far right of the picture. Photos: Robin Tait

Working at the National Museum of Australia has its share of funny moments. Picking up the windmill from Kenya (Station) near Muttaborra certainly had its share of these, as well as experiencing the extraordinary goodwill of both the donor John Seccombe and his neighbours – Patrick Haseler and Alan McClymont – to get the mill disassembled, packed, loaded and trucked to Canberra.

Kenya, located 30 'clicks' west of Muttaborra, is and has been home to the Seccombe family since the 1920s. John, the current owner with his wife Pamela, was brought up on Kenya with breaks for boarding school in Brisbane and jackarooing in the Northern Territory before coming back home to work, firstly for his father and then taking over.

Kenya was part of a larger run called 'Kensington', which was divided up into smaller blocks in the 1920s. The mill on Kenya was actually one of three put down in the 1920s on the original Kensington. The remaining two mills are on Bungoona and Kensington respectively.

Windmills have always been part of Australia's pastoral history, particularly as they were less expensive than putting down an artesian bore. Maintained, mills provided water

for thousands of stock, both sheep and cattle, using only the wind as their energy source. However the stories of windmill maintenance and the things that can and do go wrong are legion. While these stories are often told in a self-deprecating style and with quiet humour, the grim reality was often 50 to 100 feet of dropped rods down the bore and 1000 head of thirsty cattle milling about.

Even checking and refilling oils in the mill head called for a degree of courage. The towers were often quite tall – 5060 feet with large diameter wheels ranging up to 35 feet. The platforms were around the tower at the bottom of the wheel, and from there further climbing was necessary to reach the oil box (for some models) up a narrow metal ladder. This often had to be achieved carrying oil cans, tools etc while also being on the look out for whirlywinds and even sudden changes in wind direction.

Even if the mill was disengaged, the head and wheel were still able to turn. Brian Rose, the windmill mechanic who dismantled the National Museum's mill, has had the experience of being caught on the platform of a mill in a whirlywind. He tells it simply: as the wheel turned he moved



(Left to right) Scott, Mark and Brian Rose. Two of three generations of windmill mechanics standing with parts of the dismantled mill. To the left of Scott in the background is Kenya homestead and gardens.



Mark Rose applying 'bolt-off' to all the nuts and bolts of the mill to aid removal.



Removing the fans. Note that the removal is done maintaining the balance of the wheel as much as is possible.



Skyhook! Removal of the arms.



Removal of the tail.



Head of the mill lifts off after being in place for close to 90 years.



The next day the lower tower was unbolted and then everyone decamped to Emu Creek (on Bungoona) to collect what extra fans, rims and arms were able to be salvaged from a Simplex mill of the same vintage.



At the Emu Creek mill discussing which parts to take, under the watchful eyes of the Bungoona cattle. (Left to right) Brian Rose, David Hallam, Scott Rose, Mark Rose, John Seccombe.



Allan McClymont, a neighbour from 'Kensington', adjusting the tower iron readying it for loading.



Loading the head. (Left to right) Alan McClymont, John Seccombe and Roy Whytton.



First pallet of fans going on carefully under Roy's direction.



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around behind it on the platform. Having witnessed at first hand the destructive power of whirlwinds in western Queensland, and particularly their ability to wreck windmills, I could only listen and admire the cool head and nerves of steel which had enabled him to survive.

Windmill mechanic Brian Rose's two sons, Mark and Scott, arrived first, closely followed by Brian, all the way from Longreach, 130 kilometres south of Kenya. The first job was to lubricate the nuts and bolts of the mill. With the speed that both David and I never really became accustomed to over the following three days, the two young men had climbed all over the mill and sprayed every bolt and nut with 'bolt-off' – a relation of WD40, but far more effective. From there on in, after setting up their work area which consisted of a rope on a pulley and a bucket to facilitate the movement of tools, nuts and bolts up and down the mill, the first job was dismantling the wheel fans.

Wheel fans are probably the most visible part of a windmill. Once they started disappearing off the wheel, the mill became less visible, and with this the main power source of the mill was being dismantled. It is worth noting here that Southern Cross mill wheels turn anti-clockwise and Comet mills turn clockwise. The Simplex that the National Museum has just acquired turns anti-clockwise.

Next the wheel rims were removed. The mill was starting to look bare especially without its wheel fans.

Pamela Seccombe came down from the house after a day of mustering at this point and, perhaps not realising that the mill's removal would make such a difference, was quite sad to see it going. Given how visible mills are in this very flat Mitchell Grass downs country, this was entirely understandable. The mills are also used as landmarks by small aircraft and are often marked on maps.

The following day a crane came out from Longreach and the arms (spiders), the head and the tail were removed.

From then on the small tower was removed in one section and laid on the ground and then the lower tower, supported by the crane, was cut off at the legs and lowered on its side to the ground.

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After salvaging the fans and rims that were useable, the Roses returned to the original site and packed everything for transport. Mission accomplished. We thanked the Roses very much for the amazing job they had completed and waved them a cheery farewell as they then roared back to Longreach in a cloud of dust, to more work fixing windmills.

The loading of the mill once it had been packed was a matter of balancing the load on the truck. Roy Whytton the truck driver, John Seccombe and Alan McClymont all assisted with this work as the photographs show.

The mill then travelled to Longreach where it was transferred to an interstate transport. It arrived at the National Museum early one morning in late July. For David Hallam who had documented the dismantling it must have been very strange to meet the object he had last seen 3500 kilometres away.

The mill would have first been transported to Kenya by bullock wagon having come off the rail head at Barcardine. It would then have been assembled using a system of poles and horse teams or trucks to pull the structure into place. All a very far cry from the crane, and transport system we used.

The mill will be next on view in the *Creating a Country* gallery.

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