

Matthew Munn & the Maizena

Matthew Munn, a shawl maker from Paisley in Scotland, arrived in Melbourne in 1856. While working for Brown & Polson, Munn acquired the knowledge for making cornflour. Hearing of an unused flour mill in Merimbula, Munn decided to purchase a share in a cornflour business, with financial backing from the Twofold Bay Pastoral Association. White maize grew well in the area, while wheat was susceptible to disease.



Munn returned to Scotland to buy special grinding stones and some new machinery to make the old mill suitable for cornflour production. He also engaged William Kennedy, an experienced worker at the Carriage Hill Royal Starch Works.



With support from Thomas Mort and James Manning, Munn set about expanding the old flour mill and installing the machinery. He bought a major share in the business in 1865 and by 1866 was ready to move with his family to the small village of Merimbula. They lived in a small cottage, originally built for the Twofold Bay Pastoral Association.

The “Maizena” began production in 1867, turning out around 3 tons of cornflour a week. The waste, ‘corn bran’, was fed to pigs, 500 of which were penned in a yard behind the mill for fattening, prior to becoming bacon and ham and shipped to Sydney. Soon the business was flourishing and Munn bought out the local maize-growing farmers and their smallholdings.

In 1873 Matthew Munn began building a house as a wedding present for his son, Armstrong. He named it ‘Courunga’ and it remains today as a private residence known as the Tower House. In the same year he formed a company called ‘Munn’s Maizena & Starch Company’.

Unfortunately Munn died later in 1873, following the recurrence of an illness, leaving Armstrong to inherit his empire, which now included the mill, shops, employees’ houses and five surrounding farms.