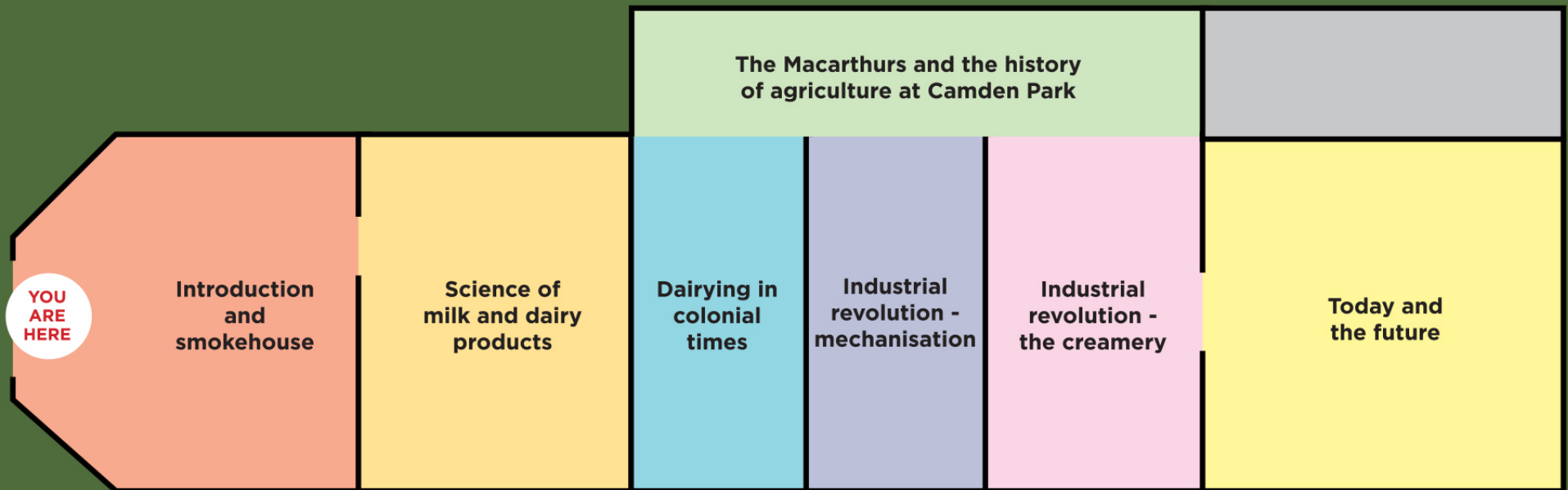


Dairying at Camden Park

How science and technology
has changed our lives



Benkennie

Acknowledgement of country

The Aboriginal name for this area is Benkennie or Belgenny, meaning 'dry land'.

Belgenny Farm acknowledges the traditional owners of the land, the Aboriginal people who have lived here since the Dreamtime.

The Camden district sits at the meeting point of the traditional lands of three Aboriginal groups—the Gundungurra to the west and south, the Dharawal to the south and east, and the Dharug to the north.

The Dharawal people have had a continuous relationship with Camden Park for over 200 years, since John Macarthur took up the land grant. Despite the loss of their land for traditional living, local Aboriginal people still live in the area.

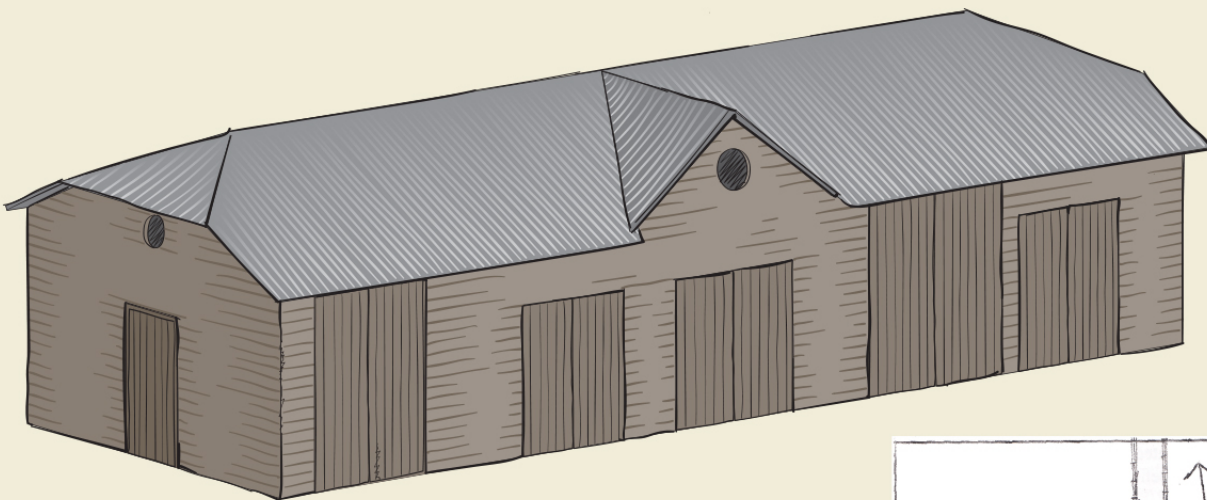


On the Nepean River near the Camden Estate in 1828.

The 1820s coach house

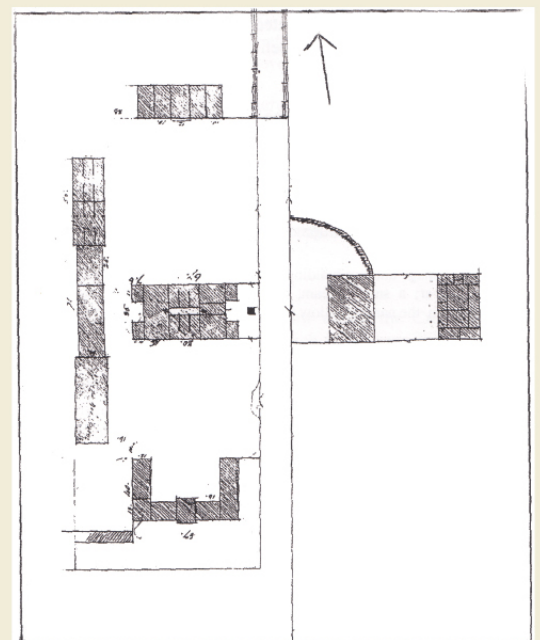
Belgenny's creamery/smokehouse complex began as a coach house for the home farm of the Camden Estate. The coach house was constructed as a stand-alone building in the 1820s, about a decade before Camden Park House was constructed.

As the name indicates, the coach house was where coaches, carriages and other horse-drawn vehicles were kept.



The coach house as it was in the 1820s, before it was joined to the smokehouse and later converted to a creamery.

A plan of the home farm (Belgenny) buildings drawn by Robert Scott in 1826. The coach house is at the top, stables on the left and Belgenny cottages on the right. The buildings in the centre and at the bottom are no longer there.

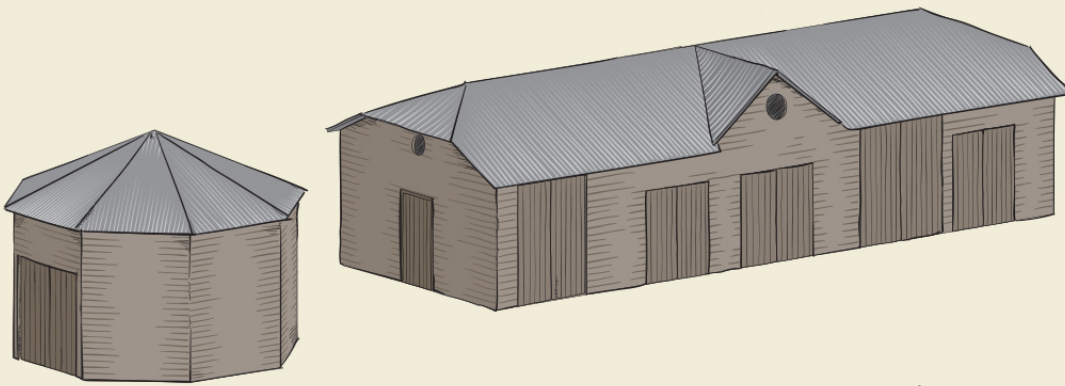


Coach house/ creamery complex

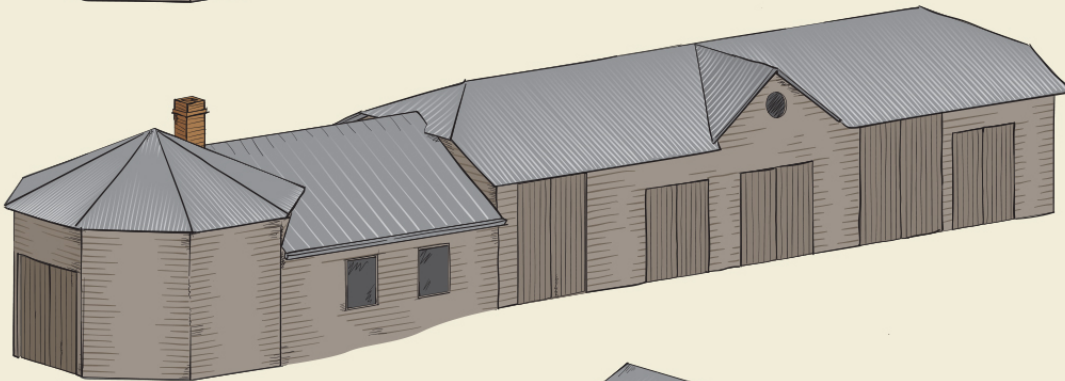
The main section of this complex was constructed in the 1820s as a coach house for horse-drawn vehicles used on the Camden Estate.

The octagonal smokehouse was built in the 1830s or 40s as a free-standing structure to the west of the coach house. By the 1860s the two buildings were joined.

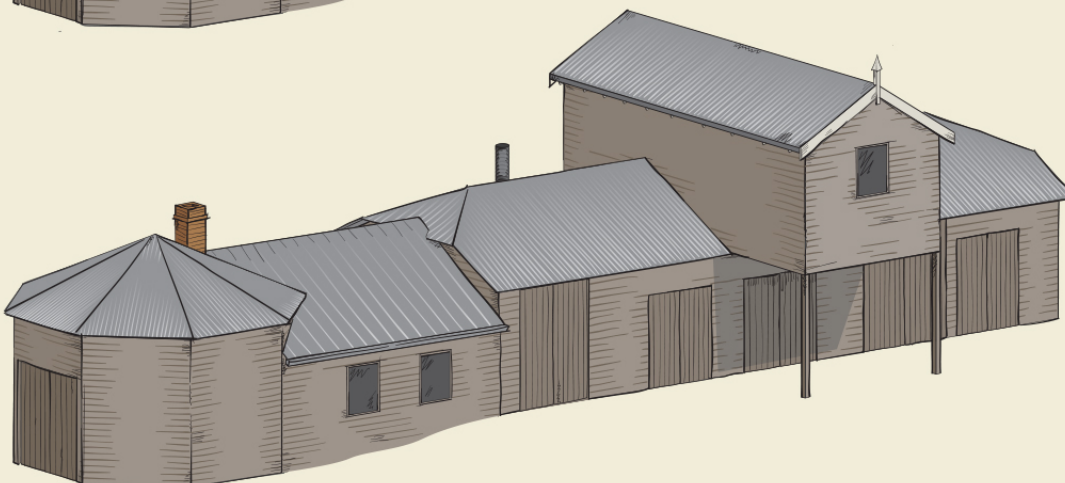
In 1898 the coach house was converted into a creamery by adding an upper storey and an elevated water tank. The second storey was demolished in the 1930s and reinstated in the 1980s.



c1830s
Smokehouse
separate from
coach house



1860s
Smokehouse joined
to the coach house



1898
Coach house
converted to a
creamery

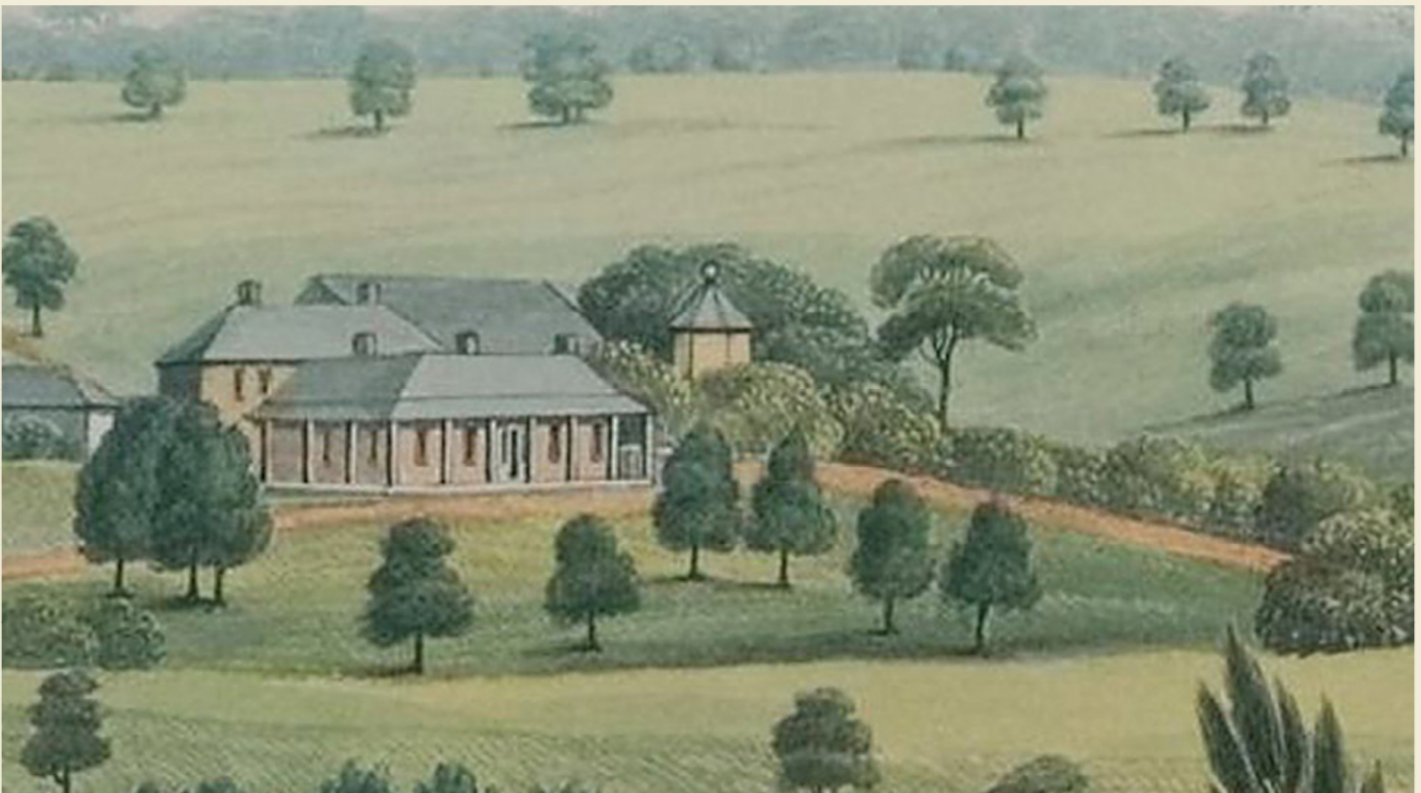
The smokehouse

You are standing in the smokehouse. Built in the 1830s or 1840s, it is a rare, surviving example of a smokehouse from the colonial era. The building is octagonal and its interior is blackened from the smoke.

In the days before refrigeration it was used to smoke pork and other meat to preserve it. Smoked meat could be eaten long after the animals had been slaughtered.

The smokehouse was originally freestanding, probably to reduce the fire risk to other buildings, but by the 1860s it was joined to the coach house.

There was also a smokehouse at Elizabeth Farm, Parramatta, another Macarthur estate.



Another Macarthur estate, Elizabeth Farm, had a smokehouse similar to the one at Belgenny Farm. It is on the right in this 1825 painting of Elizabeth Farm by Joseph Lycett.

Smoked meat: how and why?

Salting and smoking meat goes back to medieval times. Centuries before refrigeration, to eat meat all year round you needed a smokehouse. It was a small building in which a fire smouldered for weeks, slowly releasing its smoke onto cuts of meat hanging in it. Pork, beef and mutton could be preserved or 'cured' by this method.

Meat was preserved in two steps. First it was salted, either by immersing it in a tub of brine (salt water) or by rubbing salt into the cuts of meat every day for a week or two. The salt drew much of the moisture out of the meat, and this drained away.

Smoking was the second step. The salted meats were hung in a tightly constructed wooden shed, usually without windows or a flue, in which a fire smouldered for one or two weeks. The result was dried, long-lasting, smoke-flavoured meat that could age in the same smokehouse for up to two years before it was eaten.

In Belgenny's smokehouse, the fire was made in a firebox on the floor each morning and left to smoulder all day.

Effective smoking was a relatively cool process, not like cooking. The air in the smokehouse was warm but not hot, as it was smoke rather than heat that cured the meat.



Cuts of meat hanging in smokehouses, including hams top right.

The Cowpastures

The Camden district became known as 'the Cowpastures' after 60 wild cattle were found grazing in the rich grasslands on the western banks of the Nepean River in 1795. They were the progeny of two bulls and five cows that had arrived on the First Fleet and were lost when they wandered off from Sydney Cove in 1788.

By the early 1800s they had multiplied to several thousand head and split into several herds. They were completely feral and aggressive, defying all attempts to capture and tame them.

In 1803 a hut was built near the Nepean River to salt the beef from some of the wild bulls after they were shot. It was the first European building at the Cowpastures.

In 1805 John Macarthur was granted 5,000 acres (2,023 hectares) of land at the Cowpastures to develop the merino wool industry. He named his grant 'Camden'.

In 1824 the wild cattle were removed from the Cowpastures so that John Macarthur could take possession of 10,400 acres of land at Cawdor that he had acquired by grant and purchase.

By 1837 the Macarthur's Camden Park Estate at the Cowpastures had grown to more than 27,000 acres (nearly 11,000 hectares). Its administrative centre, known as the Home Farm, now Belgenny Farm, remained in the family until 1973.



Above: An artist's impression of the wild cattle of the Cowpastures. They were humped, sleek cattle that originated from Indian breeds brought to NSW from Africa.

Breeds of cattle at Camden Park

Cattle were scarce in the early days of the Colony and their breeds were mixed. They were imported from various countries en route from Britain to Australia.

The 700 head of cattle on John Macarthur's Camden estate in 1821 were no exception. He said they were "founded upon the Bengal, Cape and English—the last being a mixture of Devon, Suffolk, and Lancashire".

Some of his cattle originated from the humped, Indian breeds and others from the non-humped British and European breeds.

Initially in Australia there was little distinction between beef and dairy cattle—animals had to serve the dual purpose. Over time, cattle were bred specifically for beef or dairy production.

By 1900, Ayrshires were the main breed used to produce milk on Camden Park's dairies along with Guernseys, Jerseys and Australian Illawarra Shorthorns.



Above: Lancashire/English Longhorn bull.



Above: Ayrshires on Camden Park.



Above: An early postcard showing the typical Ayrshire colouring. Ayrshires originated in Scotland.

Food preservation in Australia

- 1788 Salting was the main way to preserve meat. As the Colony became more established, some estates used smokehouses.
- 1846 First meat canned in Australia as an experiment.
- 1850 Meat safes such as the 'Coolgardie' were available but were expensive. They used passive cooling—water dripped onto hessian on the sides where it evaporated.
- 1851 First artificial ice (ice made by mechanical means) was made in Australia, at Geelong. It was also a world first.
- 1853 Natural ice imported from America was used by hotels and restaurants in Melbourne and Sydney.
- 1866 Canning of meat in Australia was flourishing, mainly for export.
- 1870s Australians used canned meats in hot weather and when fresh meat was not available.
- 1870s Thomas Mort brought fresh milk from Berrima and Moss Vale to Sydney by train using refrigerated railway trucks. This heralded the end of dairies and cow yards based in the city.



Coolgardie meat safe

- 1880 The first commercial shipment of frozen Australian beef, mutton and butter reached England.
- 1880s The more expensive hotels and clubs had refrigerated rooms or ice chests.
- 1890s Ice chests were readily available and ice could be delivered by horse and cart to houses in the main cities but most still did not have one.
- 1896 Camden Park Estate established the Camden Butter, Bacon and Refrigerating Works. It closed in 1898 after severe flood damage.
- 1900 Most houses still did not have an ice chest.
- 1920s Kerosene-powered domestic refrigerators were available in Australia but uptake was limited.
- 1930 Three out of every four households in Australia had a Coolgardie meat safe. It was gradually replaced in towns by the ice chest. In 1930 on farms and in small towns the ice chest was unknown.
- 1964 94% of Australian households had a refrigerator.



Ice chest

