

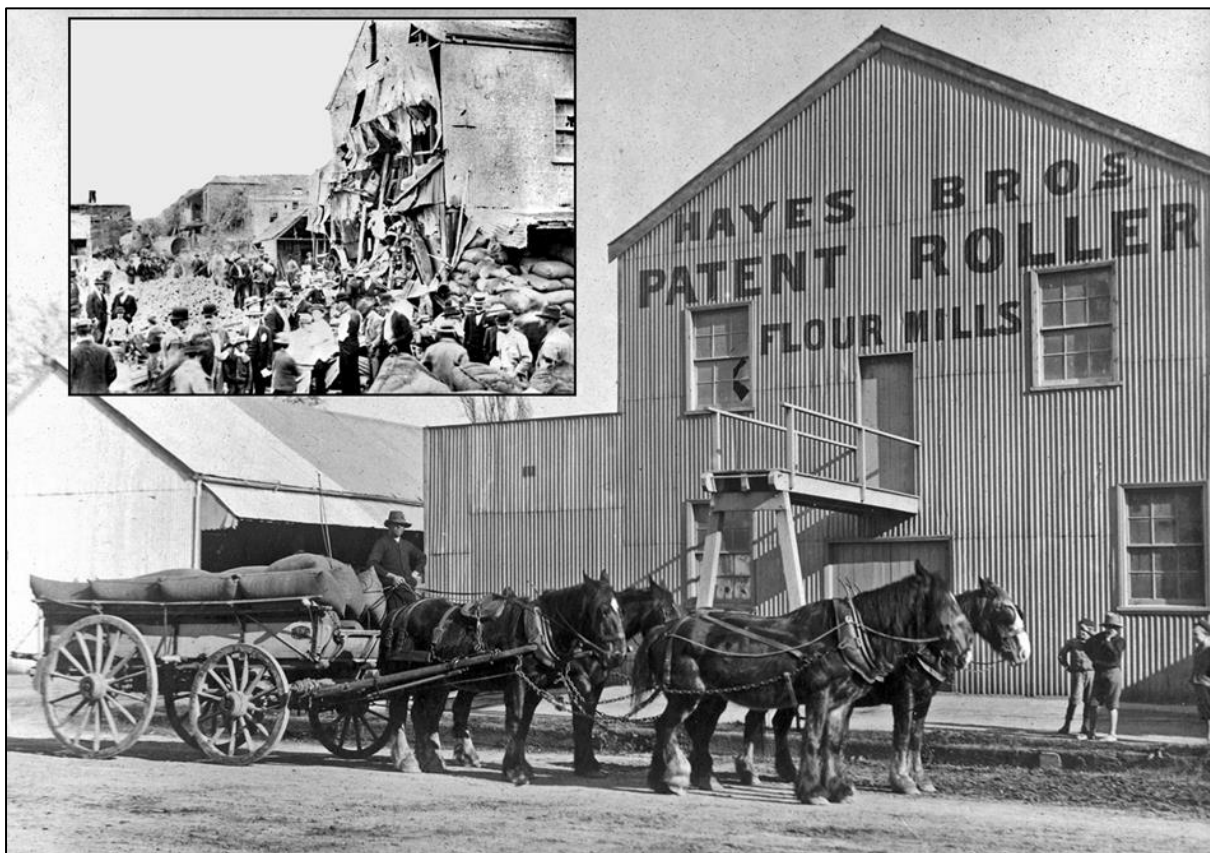
Hayes Flour Mill Boiler Explosion

Greg Ryan

Monday January 30, 1899 dawned as a typical summer's morning in Albury. However, at about 8.50am, an enormous explosion shattered a peaceful start to the day.

A boiler exploded at Hayes Flour Mill on the western side of Townsend Street only a few doors from Dean Street. Many thought an earthquake had occurred, others that a powder magazine had exploded.

Eleven year old Francis New was preparing his breakfast in the kitchen of his home in Dean Street while his mother was in the next room. Mrs New told the coroner that "the kitchen and one bedroom was knocked down by the explosion." Francis was hit by part of the boiler and killed instantly.



Hayes Brothers' Flour Mill, Townsend St Albury.
Inset: The aftermath of the boiler explosion, January 30, 1899

To illustrate the force of the explosion, the *Albury Banner* reported that "the front portion of the boiler, weighing half a ton, was carried over the Club Hotel [in 2023 the site of *Atura*, Dean Street], and was found in the stable, having carried away a portion of the stable door. This is about 200 yards from the scene of the accident." Debris from the explosion was scattered south as far as Hume Street.

Hayes brothers had taken over Fanny Ceres Mill in Dean Street in January 1871. Their father had mills in Sydney and Yass and the brothers established mills in other towns including

Goulburn, Wagga and Gundagai. James Hayes managed the Albury mill. Hayes closed Fanny Ceres in January 1887 and moved to the new roller mill on Townsend Street.

The exploding boiler had been purchased from the Jindera Flour Mill after a fire destroyed the mill in 1887. The jury at the coroner's inquest into the death of Francis New heard from W D Cruickshank, a Government engineer, inspector to the Marine Board. He testified "that the boiler was poor in design, of bad workmanship, and of bad material. It was the worst he had ever seen. The furnace was not truly circular by several inches, and this was a most important matter, as on this depended the strength of the boiler ... in his opinion neither the owners nor anyone employed at the mill was to blame for the mishap, as the faults to which he had referred could not be detected by anyone but an expert of practical experience."

The jury returned a verdict of accidental death and "added a rider that the Government take steps to provide for the examination of all boilers by Government inspectors."