



**The Old Mill Cafe and Restaurant in Pym Street.**

Photo: Winsor Dobbin

# From farm to feast

Historic charm mixes with the comforts of a city bistro, writes **Winsor Dobbin**.

**A**t first glance, Millthorpe appears to be asleep. There's precious little traffic and most of the shops are closed. One of the town's two hotels is deserted, stripped of all its furnishings. It's midweek and there's barely a soul around.

Come the weekend, however, and Millthorpe, with a population of just over 700, rouses from its slumber to greet the tourists who come to enjoy its historic buildings, parks and restaurants. The foodies who flock to nearby Orange in the state's central west now also have Millthorpe firmly on their radar, even if there is no mobile phone signal.

Midway between Orange and Blayney, in the rolling hills near Mount Canobolas, Millthorpe has



emerged as a gourmet destination since Tony and Nicole Worland renovated an 1890s heritage store and opened their restaurant, Tonic, in 2003.

The surrounding farmlands were once largely potato-growing areas but are now used by sheep and cattle farmers, although vineyards are starting to make their presence felt, given the region's suitably cool climate.

Originally called Grove Farm and later Spring Grove, Millthorpe is 246 kilometres north-west of Sydney and 22 kilometres south of Orange. At 955 metres, the hamlet is the highest point on the rail line west of the Blue Mountains.

Classified by the National Trust, Millthorpe has several fine historic buildings, a museum and an attractive park. There are bluestone-bordered

streets, an art gallery, gift shops and a bowling club. Many of the shops – including Old Tyme Delights, a lolly shop that will delight children of all ages – are open only at weekends.

The old "headmaster's house" dates back to 1876 and was the school and the master's house combined. The Methodist Church was built a few years later.

John Lister, the man behind the Ophir gold rush – the first gold rush in Australia – is buried in the cemetery at Millthorpe.

European settlement began in 1823 and the town was twice visited by explorer Thomas Mitchell during his inland expeditions.

The town boomed with the arrival of the railway in the 1870s and a large flour mill was built in 1882.

Little has happened since, meaning the town retains many of its original buildings.

The Railway Hotel, dating from 1884, is an atmospheric country hostelry that serves evening meals. The former Grand Western Lodge Hotel, established in 1901, closed in 1961 and is now a

nursing home. The Commercial Hotel, built in 1877, sits empty and its future is uncertain.

The Millthorpe Golden Memories Museum, open on weekends and sometimes during school holidays, is run by volunteers and has more than 10,000 items on view, including vintage tractors and old farming equipment. It provides a fascinating insight into life on the land.

Tonic is the compelling reason to visit Millthorpe. Chef Tony Worland uses local produce when possible and the menu changes to accommodate what's in season or dropped off at the kitchen by local farmers.

But it is not the only excellent restaurant in town. There's the Old Mill Cafe and Restaurant, in a former bakery just a few doors down Pym Street. Its menu includes spicy pork wontons with honey chilli sauce, caraway seed pikelets with smoked salmon and horseradish creme fraiche and chermoula-marinated chicken breast with kumara chips.

At the Railway Hotel, the culinary options include chicken schnitzel or lasagne for \$12 a serve (but pig on a spit and karaoke were also on the menu one recent Thursday night). The Bird's Nest Cafe serves pizzas.

If pub rooms do not suit, then Round Hill Cottage, six kilometres out of town, has comfortable farmstay-style accommodation for \$130 a couple a night.

Perfect for families, rustic Round Hill is a two-bedroom straw-bale homestead, well-equipped and cosy – the bathroom and living area have underfloor heating. There is a loft space for kids. Guests can wander around the farm and are welcome to bring their pets.

Hosts Robyn Ritchie and Dave Douglas are welcoming but not intrusive. When it was time to check out, we couldn't find either of them, so left our keys on the kitchen table. After all, this is the country.

## FAST FACTS

### Getting there

Three hours' drive north-west of Sydney via the Great Western Highway and the Mitchell Highway.

### Staying there

Round Hill Cottage, 912 Vittoria Road, phone 6368 7208 or see [www.stayz.com/26336](http://www.stayz.com/26336).

### Eating there

Tonic, 20 Pym Street, phone 6366 3811, or The Old Mill Cafe & Restaurant, 12 Pym Street, phone 6366 3188.

**For more information** see [www.orange-nsw.com/millthorpe](http://www.orange-nsw.com/millthorpe).