Switch to Dairy Farming: William jnr, the eldest son gradually took over the running of the farm. In 1864, he imported from Sweden the first cream separator to be used in the Northern District. By 1890 the farm totalled 103 acres following purchases of two nearby farms. By 1893 the dairy herd contained over 100 Alderney cows and supplied dairy products to Newcastle, Plattsburg and Wallsend were supplied by boat via Ironbark Creek.

Disaster Strikes: In 1893 flood waters covered Ash Island to a depth of six feet and all but 14 of Milham’s cows were drowned. Many Ash Island farmers were ruined but William Milham jnr, his wife Ruby and children, Ethel and Walter stayed on.

Farm continues under Murison name: William Milham snr (see picture) died in 1907, aged 87. William jnr died in 1913, aged 57 and Walter took over the farm. When he died childless in a horse accident in 1919, his sister Ethel and her husband, Alexander Murison took over the farm then known as ‘Errington’. They tried to keep the farm going, but as floods became more frequent, the land became more degraded.

1955 Flood - the last straw: The farm was completely ruined in the 1955 flood and the Murison’s sold it to the NSW Government for industrial purposes. The house was partially demolished by Public Works in the 1970s to deter squatters.

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The story of the Milham family gives insights into the early farming practices and social life of the time.
**The Milham Family**

**England to Ash Island:** In 1838, at the age of 18, William Milham, his father, Uriah, and 9 siblings migrated to Sydney from Sussex. The Milham family took up a farming lease first at ‘Leigh Farm’ north of Raymond Terrace, then at ‘Burrowl’ near Seaham.

By 1849 William Milham had married Ann Robinson Miller and become a tenant farmer of A W Scott on Ash Island, then a lush and beautiful place. He built a two roomed wood slab hut with a separate kitchen near a well and two pear trees.

**Farming Freehold:** By 1864 Scott was in financial trouble and William Milham purchased 26 acres with money he is said to have made at the gold diggings. William was one of the first freehold farmers on Ash Island.

**Milham’s Farmhouse:** By 1866 the Milham’s had six living children and had outgrown the slab hut. William then built a two storey house of sandstone and seashell mortar (seen here as it was in the 1920s).

The ground floor had a sitting room, dining room & two bedrooms. A verandah faced the river. An iron kitchen, bathroom and laundry were attached to the back of the house (to avoid risk of fire). Upstairs there was a small bedroom and a very large dormitory style bedroom. All the wood in the house was cedar with some rosewood, both felled on the island.

**Points of interest**

1. **Well and William’s Pear Tree:** The well and 160 year old William’s pear tree (one of an original two) mark the site of the original farmhouse built in the late 1840s. It was a typical two room wood slab hut.
2. **Sandstone Farmhouse:** Built in the 1860s, the house was of sandstone transported from Muree quarry near Raymond Terrace by bullock dray then by river to the site. Seashell was not uncommon in mortar and indicates either that dredged sand or shell was used to produce lime to help set the mortar.
3. **Drain and floodgate on west side of house:** This is typical of the drains the farmers of Ash Island dug across their fields to remove excess water. Floodgates such as this old brick and iron one were built to keep the high tides and floods out.
4. **Old Dairy:** This concrete slab is all that remains of the ‘old dairy’. In the early days, milk was separated into cream, butter and other dairy products on the island before being taken by boat to markets at Plattsburg & Wallsend via Ironbark Creek. The rectangular recessed enclosure, known as the ‘Butter Slab’, was used to store dairy products prior to marketing.
5. **Old Milking Shed:** This concrete pad was the floor of the old milking shed where 30-40 cows were hand milked. Next door was the chaff cutting shed (6).
6. **Depression:** Caused by horses walking in circles as they powered the chaff cutter in the nearby shed.
7. **New Dairy:** About 50 metres further east from the house is the remains of the ‘new’ dairy. This was built when milking was by machine. Cream and milk were separated (the base of the separator can be seen in the south-east corner) and the unprocessed milk left the island in milk tankers bound for the Oak Dairy Factory at Hexham.
8. **New Milking Shed:** Just east of the new dairy is the new milking shed which had six stalls in it. This shed was mechanized and the milking process became much quicker.
9. **Farmhands Quarters:** By the mid 1930s, the wooden slab hut used to house workers from the 1860s, had become dilapidated. New fibro-cement living quarters were built for the workers near the south-east corner of the fenced yard. Only the nine foundation stones remain today.