

# State Heritage Areas of South Australia



## former Moonta Mines Model School

487 Verran Terrace, Moonta Mines

SAHR 11732 – confirmed as a State Heritage Place 4 March 1993

From 1863 until 1877, education at Moonta Mines was in the hands of a number of small licensed private schools conducted in private homes throughout the township. In 1875 the Education Act committed the Colony to provide public education, and a great number of school buildings were erected around South Australia during the next few years.

Moonta Mines Model School was built in 1879 from one of three designs evolved, from Victorian prototypes, by Architect in Chief, Edward John Woods.

Model Schools in South Australia are associated with large communities that had stabilised by the late 1870s. The decision to construct two of the largest in the Moonta area – one in the Moonta township and the other at Moonta Mines – provides an indication of the size of the community supported by the copper mines.



*Former Moonta Mines Model School, 2005*



*Rear, Moonta Mines Model School, 2005*

The Inspector General of Schools had some reservations about the suitability of adapting the Victorian plans for South Australian use, but time was a major consideration prompting his agreement. The provision of public schools was such a politically contentious issue that, after the passing of the Education Act in 1875, it was necessary to build as many schools as possible, as quickly as possible.

Between 1876 and 1879, seventy-seven schools were built in South Australia. Although differences in building materials, elevations and embellishments distinguish each individual school, they are all essentially the same.

The local building firm of Rossiter and Davies successfully tendered to build the Moonta Mines School and teacher's residence, for a contract price of £6,780, on land donated by the Moonta Mining Company. The school complex, built of locally obtained stone, was completed in June 1878, to the basic plan of the largest type of model school, designed to accommodate 800 students.

Even so, the school's size was inadequate. The first Head Teacher, William Torr, enrolled 810 students in 1878 and 1 030 pupils in 1879, though average annual attendance figures for those years are around 500-600.

Moonta area was one of the first districts to have compulsory attendance enforced, and a tenancy officer was appointed in 1879. In the early 1880s school attendance was so high that it was necessary to hold some classes in shelter sheds.



*Head Teacher's Residence, 2005*

The Moonta Mines closed down in 1923 and the mines' community disintegrated. The school remained open, but with greatly reduced numbers, until 1968. It is now owned by the Moonta Branch of the National Trust and houses a museum that interprets Moonta's social and industrial history. Adjacent to the museum is the starting point for the tourist railway that takes visitors through the former Precipitation Works and other mining sites.



*Entrance, National Trust museum, 2005*



*Moonta Mines Tourist Railway office, 2005*