

extract from:

GREATER PORT ADELAIDE HERITAGE SURVEY

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3 BACKGROUND HISTORY OF GREATER PORT ADELAIDE DISTRICT

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Port Adelaide as a place has a special relationship with the capital city of South Australia as its port and serves a unique function within the State, but Port Adelaide also developed as a distinct town with a character and history of its own. The heritage significance of the Port Adelaide centre area has been recognised for some time and this is evident in the fact that it was the first State Heritage area declared in 1982 under the Heritage Act of 1978. However the peripheral areas of the centre and the suburban areas of Greater Port Adelaide have been spasmodically considered in terms of heritage significance.

Much of the development of the Port depended upon the development of its suburbs as much as on its links with Adelaide city. Important settlements related to the function of the Port grew up around Port Adelaide such as Semaphore, Largs and Outer Harbour. The inner suburbs of the Greater Port Adelaide area developed as residential and industrial areas. Port Adelaide's history then is a history of the city of Port Adelaide and its suburbs as well as a history of the Port of Adelaide. Particular topics and subjects of this history have been considered by specialist historians at other times and these are listed in the Bibliography. Further research into these particular areas was not possible or practical within the terms of the Brief for this survey. This outline history is intended merely to set the broadest scene and provide background for the assessment of heritage significance of various buildings and areas in Greater Port Adelaide.

3.2 FIRST SETTLEMENT (1836-1851)

The initial location of Adelaide's Port, after a much documented conflict between Governor Hindmarsh and Colonel Light, was at the place which became known as Port Misery. This was at the end of the Old Port Road where it met the Port River as it was initially surveyed by Light. However this site proved unsuitable and in 1840 after two years of preparation by the South Australian Company the location of the Port was moved some distance downstream to the current site of Port Adelaide. The original location of Port Misery lies in an area which has been reclaimed as West Lakes today. The junction of Webb Street and Old Port Road is close to this point although the swampy edge of Port River was probably some short distance further west.

The newly located Port developed quickly under the virtual monopoly of the South Australian Company which had secured nearly all of the best land in the vicinity of the Port and also Section 423 which was then subdivided as Albert Town. The South Australian Company also undertook the construction of the extension of Port Road to the new Port and was paid in land by the Government. Settlement in the area developed along the road between the Port and Adelaide, Port Road. In 1848 Queenstown was subdivided and in 1850 the allotments of the Portland Estate were offered for sale. Small settlements also grew up across the river from the Port, at Birkenhead, Glanville and Ethelton and by 1850 settlement had begun on the coast at Semaphore. George Coppin opened his Semaphore Hotel in 1851. Various sections were advertised for sale in these areas during the late 1840s and early 1850s. The main areas of land for settlement lay between Port Adelaide and Semaphore to the west and along the main roads, Port Road to the south and Grand Junction Road to the east. Early subdivision maps have been included in the precinct histories in Section 4 of this survey.

After the discovery and mining of copper at Kapunda and The Burra, a copper smelting works was built at Port Adelaide by the English and Australian Copper Company, and one also developed in Yatala (Rosewater) by the Adelaide Smelting Company. The expansion of the new

agricultural industries of wool and wheat also increased the Port activity at Port Adelaide during this early period. Henry Fletcher established his slipway at Birkenhead as a result of increased shipping and need for service and repairs. This attracted other related businesses to the area and a Government workshop was established at Glanville. Commercial development was centred in Port Adelaide, particularly along Commercial Road which was the extension of Port Road. Local shops supplying goods and services were established wherever residential clusters had formed.

Very little of the building fabric pre-1850 remains in the Greater Port Adelaide area. Much has been incorporated into later buildings, but some small cottages exist, in Queenstown and Exeter for example, which are possibly from this period.

3.3 CONSOLIDATION (1852-1883)

This period is one of immense development and growth for Port Adelaide as indeed for the State. In Port Adelaide the organisation of the Port was formalised under a Government Act of 1851 which established Trinity House of Port Adelaide. This organisation had the job of “overseeing pilotage and wharves, superintending lights, marks and deepening, employing and licensing tugs, supplying ballast and sundry other duties’. In 1854 the Port Adelaide Harbour Trust was instituted to finance deepening operations within the Port of Adelaide. This was a constant ongoing requirement as the Port River silted quickly. The mud which was dredged out of the river was used to build up the level of the swampy land in Port Adelaide itself.

In 1855 Port Adelaide was declared a corporate town under the newly established District Council Act of 1852, and over the next 20 years other District Councils were established within the Greater Port Adelaide area. In 1859 Portland Estate District Council was set up and in 1864 the Alberton and Queenstown District Council was established and also the Glanville District Council. In 1872 a Council which incorporated the settlements on Le Fevre’s Peninsula was established as Le Fevre Peninsula District Council, and in 1887 Rosewater District Council was created. Later in 1883 the Semaphore Municipal Corporation was established which incorporated parts of Le Fevre’s Peninsula District Council area and also part of the Glanville District Council area (all of these District Councils were amalgamated within the Port Adelaide Corporation by 1900). It is significant that these suburban areas were self determining for quite some years of their existence and the former Rosewater District Council Hall on Grand Junction Road is a remnant of this period of local government.

The 1850s was also a period of increased transportation links between the city and the Port and in 1856 the railway from Adelaide to Port Adelaide was opened. This had been intended to be built by private enterprise but became the first Government owned railway service in the British colonies at the time. Links between the suburban areas on Le Fevre Peninsula and the Port centre itself were made easier in 1859 when the Port Bridge, a timber structure, was built across the Port River in the same location as the present Jervois Bridge. Once the bridge had been constructed and the Semaphore Jetty completed in 1860 the coastal settlements of Semaphore and the Le Fevre Peninsula were linked more directly with the inner port.

During the 1860s public utilities in the form of water supply and gas supply were available to residents in Port Adelaide. SAGASCO established a gas works at Rosewater in 1866 and water supply was laid on to the most important streets of Port Adelaide proper in 1867, although it did not reach the suburban areas until much later.

The population of Port Adelaide district by 1861 was 3000 to 4000 people. Port Adelaide during this time benefitted from the expansion of the mining, grazing and agricultural industries and the export of the products of these industries which was centred on the Port. The export of wool was a particularly important activity for Port Adelaide. In 1860 the Customs House, Court House and Police Station were built at Port Adelaide indicating the importance of the Port in the civic consciousness of the State. Also during the 1870s after the passing of the Education Act in 1875 Government schools were built in Port Adelaide and on Le Fevre Peninsula (Birkenhead).

Also during the 1870's the extension of public transport throughout the Greater Port Adelaide area increased the consolidation of settlement in residential areas. In 1878 the Port Adelaide to Semaphore railway was opened. This new railway crossed over the Jervois Bridge, a much more substantial structure which replaced the Port Bridge; and steam powered and later horse powered tram services ran along Port Road and into suburban areas later. This period saw the construction of many of the notable concentrations of villa residences which have been identified in the survey as significant residential precincts.

The Semaphore District became more important in terms of communications with the construction of the Time Ball Tower in 1874 and the concomitant Customs and Shipping facilities which developed at the end of the land end of the jetty. Another landmark in communications in the 1880s was the establishment of the telephone connection between Adelaide and Port Adelaide in 1883 when the Telephone Exchange began operations. This followed the first telephone messages which were sent between Adelaide and Semaphore in 1878.

Although the Largs area was subdivided in 1873 development in the area took place after 1881 with the construction of the hotel, jetty and railway from the Glanville station on the Semaphore line. The access road along the seafront which became the Esplanade was opened in 1884 although it remained a sandy track for many years.

3.4 DEPRESSION AND DEVELOPMENT (1884-1913)

After the disastrous drought of 1884, South Australia suffered a drawn out depression period which was intensified by the world wide depression of the 1890s. However by the turn of the century prosperity improved and the Port of Adelaide continued to be the centre for exports of wool particularly, and wheat, and also the major port for imported goods to the State. In the early 1880s defence of the colony was one of the major concerns of the Government and after the construction of Fort Glanville in 1880, Fort Largs became operational in 1884 and South Australia's Navy boat, the HMCS Protector, arrived in Port Adelaide from England in 1884. The major threat at this time was considered to be from the Russians although neither of the Forts were ever used in defence of the colony. A powder magazine was built north of the S.A. Basin and a Torpedo station was established at the entrance to the North Arm but although manned, was also not ever used. During the extension of the industrial area in the 1950s the remains of this station and the magazine were removed.

High tides and storms continued to be a problem particularly in the southern sections of Port Adelaide and Portland and in 1889 the Tam O' Shanter Creek was straightened and the Portland Canal completed which alleviated the problem to a degree.

The depressed economic conditions meant a falling off in the rate of new subdivision and house construction, although there were some notable concentrations of corrugated iron houses built as speculative ventures, such as those in Rosewater, Ethelton and Port Adelaide. Other iron houses from this period can be found in many parts of the district. Some consolidation of previously subdivided areas such as Largs Bay and parts of Semaphore and Alberton resulted in more dense settlement in already established suburbs.

During the 1880s and 1890s recreation on the beach front at Semaphore became a pleasant social occupation and in 1889 the swimming baths on the Semaphore Jetty were opened. The increase in population in the district resulted in the establishment of two further public schools at Alberton and Glanville (Ethelton).

An important extension of industrial activity in Port Adelaide occurred in 1891 when the Colonial Sugar Refining Company opened a refinery at Glanville just south of the Government dockyards. The Government also became involved in export of agricultural products in 1895 when the Produce Export Depot was established at Ocean Steamers Wharf. There was a cold store and export office also established in London to receive the exported products: unfortunately this was

a short lived operation. The beginnings of the petrochemical storage industry were begun in 1901 when Shell Oil built its first petrol storage tanks at Birkenhead. The more traditional industries of timber milling and flour milling continued during this period although one of the earliest constructed mills, John Hart's mill in Mundy Street, ceased to function in 1903 and was then used only for storage of wheat.

The construction of Outer Harbour, beginning in 1902 with the building of the extension of the railway from Largs up to Light's Passage, and then the reclamation of the land area at the Outer Harbour, was one of the most significant Government works in the district at this time. The possibility and need for an Outer Harbour had been mooted for many years and finally was opened in 1908.

Some of the largest non-industrial buildings of this time were the picture theatres which Ozone Amusements Ltd. built, particularly the Port Ozone Theatre which was opened in 1913. This new form of entertainment was particularly successful in the pre-war and post-World War 1 years, resulting in many theatres in the district, few of which still function today.

Also in 1913 the South Australian Harbours Board was constituted. This Board was vested with control of Government and privately owned wharves and frontages and all Port engineering. This created a unified Port Authority for the State and provided for the compulsory acquisition of privately owned wharves. These had previously been owned by 17 different enterprises and many of these old timber wharves were in need of reconstruction. None of these early wharves remain. Some relics of timber pilings can be seen in the Old Port Reach upstream from the railway bridge, but Port facilities slowly shifted downstream making this section of the river redundant.

3.5 EARLY INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT (1914-1927)

This period was one of increased suburban development and the linking of Rosewater, Semaphore and Largs Bay to Port Adelaide by electric tram services in 1917 was an important element of this consolidation. Electricity had first been provided from the Nile Street Power Station in 1899 but by 1923 the first Osborne Power Station was producing electric power. In 1925 the Osborne Power Station became the sole source of supply when the Grenfell Street Power Station closed. This had implications for the establishment of large assembly plants for motor vehicles in Port Adelaide and both Ford Motor Company and General Motors Australia Pty. Ltd. built assembly plants along the Birkenhead-Largs Bay industrial area (on the Port River side) in 1926. The Ford Motor Company site is now occupied by James Hardy & Co. During the late 1920s large oil storage tanks with accompanying wharves were built by several petrol companies at Birkenhead including Vacuum Oil Company.

It was during this period particularly post-War, that the Semaphore Carnival developed. The Palais was built in 1922 and the improvement in Todd Reserve with lawns and a bandstand and carousel were all instigated. Visitors to the Semaphore Carnival came from Country areas as well as the city and also from Broken Hill Mines. This era is considered in more detail in the history of the Semaphore Pier Precinct (Section 4).

In 1924 tenders opened for the building of the Government's Thousand Home Scheme under the Advances for Homes Act and a number of these houses were constructed in Rosewater, although the bulk of them were built in Colonel Light Gardens (Mitcham). The aim of these houses was to provide a high standard of accommodation for returned soldiers and working men with large families at a time when decent housing was in short supply. However this scheme was terminated in 1926 leaving many people, in the Port Adelaide district particularly, living in sub-standard housing.

3.6 DEPRESSION AND WAR (1928-1945)

During this period the Port Adelaide district, along with the rest of South Australia, suffered from two world-wide events, the Depression of the late 1920s and early 1930s and the Second World War. Local recession had preceded the General Depression by several years and in 1929 unemployment in South Australia was at the highest level of all Australia. There was a national Waterside Workers strike in 1928 which erupted in Port Adelaide as well. The non-Union labour who were the cause of the strike, were protected by South Australian Police and a large volunteer Citizen Defence Force. Another event caused by the Depression was the Beef Riot of 1931 when 1,000 men marched from Port Adelaide to the Treasury in Adelaide to protest the removal of beef from rations distributed by the Government to the unemployed. In 1933 census estimates were that 33.2% of male wage and salary earners in Adelaide were out of work. However during the late 1930s there was move by the Government to encourage both local and overseas industrial investment in South Australia, and Port Adelaide benefitted from this. The ICI Alkali factory at Osborne was operational in 1940, and General Motors who had absorbed Holdens to form General Motors Holden Ltd. expanded their operations. The South Australian Housing Trust, which was established to help replace slums which had evolved in parts of Adelaide (and Port Adelaide) with decent low cost housing, began the construction of semi-detached dwellings in Rosewater in 1937 and 1938. There were still large areas of swampy land around the upstream areas of the Port River and during the 1930s these proved a problem as people dumped rubbish in the wasteland causing a rat infestation. Only in the last 10 years have these areas been reclaimed as sporting grounds and roads.

By 1940 the need for access to the developing industrial areas of Birkenhead and Osborne was obvious and the Birkenhead Bridge was opened in 1940. The Harbours Board had continued to improve the wharfage facilities of the Port; and the opening of the Osborne Bulk Coal Handling Plant, reconstruction of Ocean Steamers Wharf and conversion of the South Australian Company Basin into Number 1 Dock, meant that the facilities of the Port were greatly improved. In the years 1930 to 1936 and extra 4,700 feet of modern quay frontage was constructed. With the build-up to the Second World War shipbuilding and repairs were important in Port Adelaide at this time.

3.7 MODERN TIMES (1946-1980)

After the Second World War the Harbours Board drew up its Greater Port Adelaide Plan which set out a formula for integrating the reconstruction of the 1930s into the modernisation of the Port area over a 50 year period from 1950 onwards. There were also other proposals which influenced areas not specifically part of the Port proper. These included the reclamation and development of the Gillman Industrial Estate which had started to be developed as New Kingston, the extension of reclamation and development at the northern end of Le Fevre peninsula which has now become North Haven, and the reclamation of land between the Jervois Bridge and Henley & Grange Council which when reclaimed became West Lakes in the early 1970s.

The Housing Trust also constructed large areas of residential accommodation in the Osborne-Taperoo area as the housing shortage after the Second World War was acute.

Away from the Port, Greater Port Adelaide area went through somewhat of a decline during the 1950s and early 1960s, but during the 1970s with further housing development and the opening of the Outer Harbour Passenger Terminal the future of the area looked more positive. In 1975 the Port Adelaide Centre joint committee was established to oversee the redevelopment of central Port Adelaide and one of the outcomes of this was the Port Adelaide Conservation Study undertaken by Elizabeth Vines for the State Planning Authority in 1977. The aim of this study was to highlight the historical significance of the buildings within the Port Adelaide centre and in 1978 the South Australian Heritage Act was passed enabling the protection of such buildings, as the pressure for development was increasing within the area (Port Adelaide State Heritage Area was declared in 1982 and was the first in the State).

3.8 CONCLUSION

Many important events which have occurred in the history of Port Adelaide and the surrounding suburbs do not have physical reminders but those which do have been scheduled and investigated.

Further detailed history on buildings and sites will be found in Section 4 and Section 6 of this report.

The information in this brief outline has been based on Brian Samuels, A Port Adelaide District Historical Chronology (1986) and M. Hammond, History of Port Adelaide – Chronology 1831 – 1978 (1978). Other important general sources are Susan Marsden, Historical Guidelines (State Preservation Plan, 1980) and Geoffrey Manning The Romance of South Australian Place Names (1988)