BURRA

STATE HERITAGE

AREA

BURRA

State Heritage Area

The mid-north town of Burra, located about 150km or two hours drive north of Adelaide, is one of Australia's earliest and most significant historic mining towns. It has many buildings and structures that date from the mid-nineteenth century, when it was the scene of one of the world's great copper mines.

Because of its value as a historic place, the entire town of Burra was declared a State Heritage Area on 1 February 1993. There had been earlier recognition by the National Trust and the Register of the National Estate, but these were largely symbolic measures and did not provide any effective protection. The State Heritage Area was based on a recommendation in a heritage survey, and followed a lengthy process of public consultation.

The Burra community and council recognised that Burra is a special place to live and work, and sought to protect the historic nature of the town for future generations. While much remains from the early mining era, Burra is a living town, a centre of agriculture, commerce, local government and education.

A vibrant community living within one of Australia's finest historic sites, Burra is a working open air museum, one of the best places in South Australia to see and feel what industry and everyday life were like in a nineteenth century town.

Nestled in a valley surrounded by rolling bare hills whose sparse trees were long ago felled for firewood, Burra stands in one of Australia's most significant cultural landscapes. The surrounding area was part of the Ngadjuri people's land when European settlers arrived with their sheep in the early 1840s.

In July 1845 a shepherd, Thomas Pickett, found samples of green copper ore near Burra Creek. The South Australian Mining Association, a company of Adelaide investors, bought the land and commenced mining the following September. It was less than nine years since the proclamation of South Australia.

Pickett's discovery of copper heralded the development of the "monster mine", bringing an enormous boost to South Australia's flagging economy. Years before the Victorian gold rushes, Burra was a thriving mining community. The mine was for fifteen years the largest copper mine in Australia and one of the largest in the world. At its peak the mine directly employed more than 1,000 people and the smelting works a further 300. The shareholders earned £800,000 in dividends from their investment. They paid Pickett £10 as his reward for the discovery.

The town made a valuable contribution to the development of South Australia through the value of its copper and is generally recognised as Australia's first mining and industrial town. By 1850 Burra, with a population of around 5,000, was the largest inland settlement in Australia. Until the mid-1860s, Burra remained the largest town in South Australia apart from Adelaide.

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The South Australian Mining Association had by 1851 created a mine and company township unprecedented in Australian history. Artist Samuel Thomas Gill was commissioned to paint the mine at this time and he depicted the isolation of the mine site nestled amongst rolling hills with the bustling town growing alongside.

Yet eventually the great wealth of these mines and the economy they encouraged began to fade. From about 1870 copper production was dwindling, and Burra became increasingly a service centre for the rapidly growing agricultural and pastoral industries in South Australia's north. Much grazing land was subdivided for wheat farming in the 1870s. In 1877 the world copper price collapsed, the mine closed and there was a sudden decline in the town's population and economic life.

The rise of a successful merino industry made Burra and its hinterland acknowledged as one of the great centres of Australian sheep breeding. Nearby properties such as Booboorowie and Collinsville stations have been acclaimed as among the best sheep breeding country in Australia. As the town shifted towards servicing this new economy, new public buildings appeared in Burra. But many of the mining relics were retained and complemented by newer buildings, giving a richness to the townscape.

In the 1970s the copper mine had a second production phase which left it as a modern opencut. The fascinating heritage of Burra has attracted much attention and its preservation has become a key to the success of another local industry: tourism. Today many people in Burra provide services to accommodate cultural heritage tourists and interpret historic sites for visitors.

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Burra in the nineteenth century was not one town but a group of villages, the South Australian Mining Association town of Kooringa and to the north, outside the company boundary, the privately-surveyed villages of Redruth, Aberdeen, New Aberdeen, Llwchyr, Copperhouse, Lostwithiel and Hampton.

The village names reflect the cultural diversity of Burra's European settlers. Experienced miners flocked to Burra from Cornwall; Scotland; the German states; smelterers from Wales; labourers; tradesmen and businessmen from Ireland and other parts of the British Isles. There were Chinese market gardeners and muleteers from Chile. Many brought wives and families with them and attempted to preserve the lifestyles and customs of their past. The cultural diversity of Burra is reflected in the street names and architectural styles which developed in the original villages.

Burra is made up of a number of distinct elements: the former Burra mines and smelts site; the Bon Accord Mine; and the villages that coalesced into Burra: Kooringa in the south and Redruth, Aberdeen, Hampton and Llwchyr, which became North Burra. These elements are united by the topography and how they relate to Burra and Welsh Creeks.

The architecture of Burra is derived from two clear historical phases in the life of the town: the mining phase and the agricultural and pastoral phase.

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The mining phase from 1845 to 1877 gave rise to the mining and industrial architecture at the Burra and Bon Accord mine sites and the Smelting Works site. Perhaps as many as 2,000 of the earliest arrivals lived in dugouts excavated on both sides of the Burra Creek, and some of these can still be seen. Mining provided the impetus for both company and private housing in Kooringa, Redruth, Hampton and Aberdeen. Many early houses were of timber, but most of these have now gone. Some of the surviving stone houses are based on company housing in Cornish towns, for example Tiver's Row at Redruth.

The sudden growth in Burra's population necessitated the establishment of government buildings and symbols of frontier law and order, such as the police station, courthouse, Redruth Gaol and telegraph station. The earliest remaining shops and hotels were also linked to the rise of the mines. There were social divisions in the early Burra community which can still be seen in the large number of former hotels standing alongside numerous Methodist chapels.

The company cottages at the west end of Thames Street were commenced in 1846 and are probably the oldest buildings remaining in Burra. The architecture of the mining era mostly followed Old World models. You will notice for example that many of the early cottages do not have verandahs; their design has come unaltered from Europe.

The latter agricultural and pastoral phase bought a new prosperity which stimulated forms of more truly Australian colonial architecture. This style is particularly evident in the excellent buildings of the commercial core of Kooringa at Commercial Street and Market Square, public buildings such as the Town Hall and the School, and in the gracious homes on the hillslopes of Kooringa and Aberdeen, now built with spreading verandahs.

Market Square, too, was refined in this period to become the commercial focus of the town, and buildings like Elder Smith & Company's bear witness to the successful transition from mining to an agricultural service town.

An important overall element in Burra's surviving architecture is the distinctive use of local bluestone for construction. The rich, dark elements of this stone make the buildings - of whatever form - a unifying feature of the town.

It is the marriage of the mining and post-mining heritage that gives Burra a total quality. When the mines began to diminish, the rise of agriculture caused Burra to become a great northern service centre for the new economy. Shops, flour mills, commercial premises and dwellings were developed rapidly and in fine style. These joined with the buildings of the mining era to make Burra a uniquely large nineteenth century town, much of which has been retained.
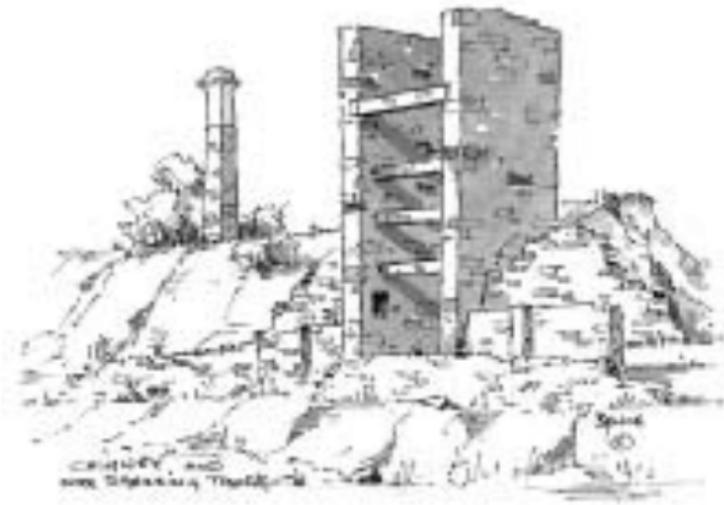
Burra Mine is located to the west of Burra Creek between Burra and North Burra. This important area is the key to understanding Burra. Much of the rich heritage from Australia's earliest mining era remains.

The area includes both old underground workings and the modern open cut mine, the mine buildings, various ruins and archaeological sites, lookouts, the Powder Magazine and the Mine Store building, which was the site of the first smelter built in Australia and is now the oldest building surviving at the mine. Three traditional Cornish enginehouses stand at the mine: the largest number on one site in Australia.

BURRA CREEK

Burra Creek runs from north to south and links the separate townships together. Sites of historical and archaeological importance along the creek include the dugouts and the stone and iron bridges at Redruth and Kooringa.

BESTS PLACE

Bests Place is centrally located within Burra North at the intersection of Young, Morehead and Ludgvan Streets. It began as the commercial focus of the private mining townships north of Kooringa, and then grew to serve the wheat and wool industries. Two main buildings dominate the intersection; the Royal Exchange Hotel and Sara's Antiques. Other important buildings are the Smelter's Home Hotel and the stone stables to the rear of the Royal Exchange Hotel.

Aberdeen is located to the west of Burra Creek and Bests Place extending to the Bon Accord Mine. Some fine homes were built in this area in the post-mining era. Morehead Street provides an important link to the Railway and Bon Accord Mine areas.

RAILWAY AND BON ACCORD AREAS

A loose knit area with its character determined by the quality of the individual elements, such as the Bon Accord Mine, Railway Station precinct and Bon Accord Hotel. The Railway Station is a very well-preserved complex dating from 1870, and retains many original railway structures and relics. The Bon Accord Mine was a failure as a copper mine but instead provided the community's water supply for many decades. It is now a museum comprising the Bon Accord Shaft, the office and manager's residence and engineering shop.

Bon Accord Mine Manager's Residence, Burra

REDRUTH GAOL

Redruth Gaol was the first gaol to be erected outside Adelaide, symbolising Burra's new role as the frontier of European settlement. Later used as a girls' reformatory, the building is of particular architectural and historical merit.

OLD REDRUTH GAOL, BURRA.

LLWCHYR AREA

North of Ludgvan Street the street names and extensive drystone walling reflect the Welsh influence in early Burra. The suburb was created to house the smelterers from the south of Wales who came to Burra in the 1850s. The area is also characterised by open space, separating Hampton from North Burra.

The township of Hampton remains today as a collection of ruins, walls and foundations with the street pattern clearly evident. It was a slightly separate settlement, focused on the stone quarries which can still be seen. A superbly romantic and intact site with an evocative image of past habitation, it is recognised for its historical and archaeological importance.

Located on rising ground, the area is predominantly residential in character consisting of individual street cottages, row cottages or larger stone dwellings. The dominant theme is Cornish, small scale cottages directly on the footpath, stepping down the sloping land.

The area includes the Courthouse precinct to the south of Ludgvan Street and the Smelts Manager's residence. The Courthouse area includes the courthouse and lockup, the police station, the old courthouse hotel. The character is a combination of institutional and residential.

Truro Street is the key within Redruth, situated on elevated ground to the north. The Truro Street cottages on the south side are in the Cornish style in a form and type directly transplanted by the miners. The typical detail is repeated on Tivers Row on the northern side.

SMELTS AREA

The Smelts area separates Kooringa from the northern township. The site is of recognised historic and archaeological importance being the earliest smelting works of significant size in Australia. The most important physical aspects are the walls and buildings of the stable and smithy and the offices and manager's residence. Extant remains of large structures and dark slag heaps characterise the area.

BURRA SCHOOL

The Burra "Model" School was established in 1877 and is a superb Victorian stone building. It demonstrates the size and prosperity of the Burra community, even when the mine was closing.

PAXTON SQUARE

Paxton Square was among Australia's earliest examples of company housing. It is composed of 33 cottages in 3 equal terraces with a central common area, displaying superb architectural quality and unity. Situated around Paxton Square Cottages are the Bible Christian Chapel; Church of England Rectory; the former Unicorn Brewery Cellars; the stone walling to Paxton Terraces and the Kooringa Hotel. The east of Kooringa is primarily residential land with the exception of the Old Salvation Army Hall.

KOORINGA HOTEL

CEMETERY

Much can be learned of the history of Burra from the headstones, the places of birth, occupations, size of families and religions of early inhabitants.

THAMES STREET COTTAGES

The Thames Street cottages were erected in 1846-7 and leased to miners as accommodation. The cottages address the street in the straightforward Cornish manner directly on the footpath although the spacing of dwellings has allowed entry and verandahed external areas to be located to the sides. The stone Masonic Hall contributes to the quality of this area.

CHAPEL STREET

The area is dominated by the Kooringa Methodist church and the McBride Cottages. The fine Wesleyan church contrasts with the deliberate austerity of the Bible Christian chapel at Paxton Square.

Market Square has always been the main focus of commercial activity within Burra. It is the intersection of the main road systems through the township and has traditionally been a stopping point on journeys. The square is irregular in plan, and around it single and double storey buildings are constructed. The linking of buildings and the way in which the buildings address themselves to the street is important.

Bench   Rotunda and Tourist office.

FORMER TELEGRAPH STATION AND POST OFFICE.

Along Market Street, leading to North Burra, is a linear collection of fine early Victorian buildings on elevated land overlooking the Burra Creek. The buildings include many of the major civic institutions such as the National Bank, the former Doctor's Residence, the Town Hall, the former Post and Telegraph Office, St Mary's Church of England and St Joseph's Catholic Church and School.

ST. MARY'S ANGLICAN CHURCH, 1875.

Burra is one of South Australia's most culturally significant places, and its declaration as a State Heritage Area is a celebration of its history.

To keep the historic fabric and history of the town intact State Heritage Areas such as Burra are subject to special protection under South Australia's *Heritage Act 1993* and the *Development Act 1993*.

Development approval is necessary from the Council before making changes that affect buildings, structures or property boundaries within the State Heritage Area. These changes include land division; development alterations; additions; conversion or any other work which affects heritage value.

The aim of legislation is to ensure that changes are sympathetic with the historic environment, and that the buildings which survive from the town's beginnings are appropriately conserved.

Free conservation advice is available from the Heritage Adviser in Burra. Ring the local council for information. Heritage SA publications on various technical issues are also available at a discounted price to owners of heritage places.

M A P

Please refer to the map
overleaf for site locations
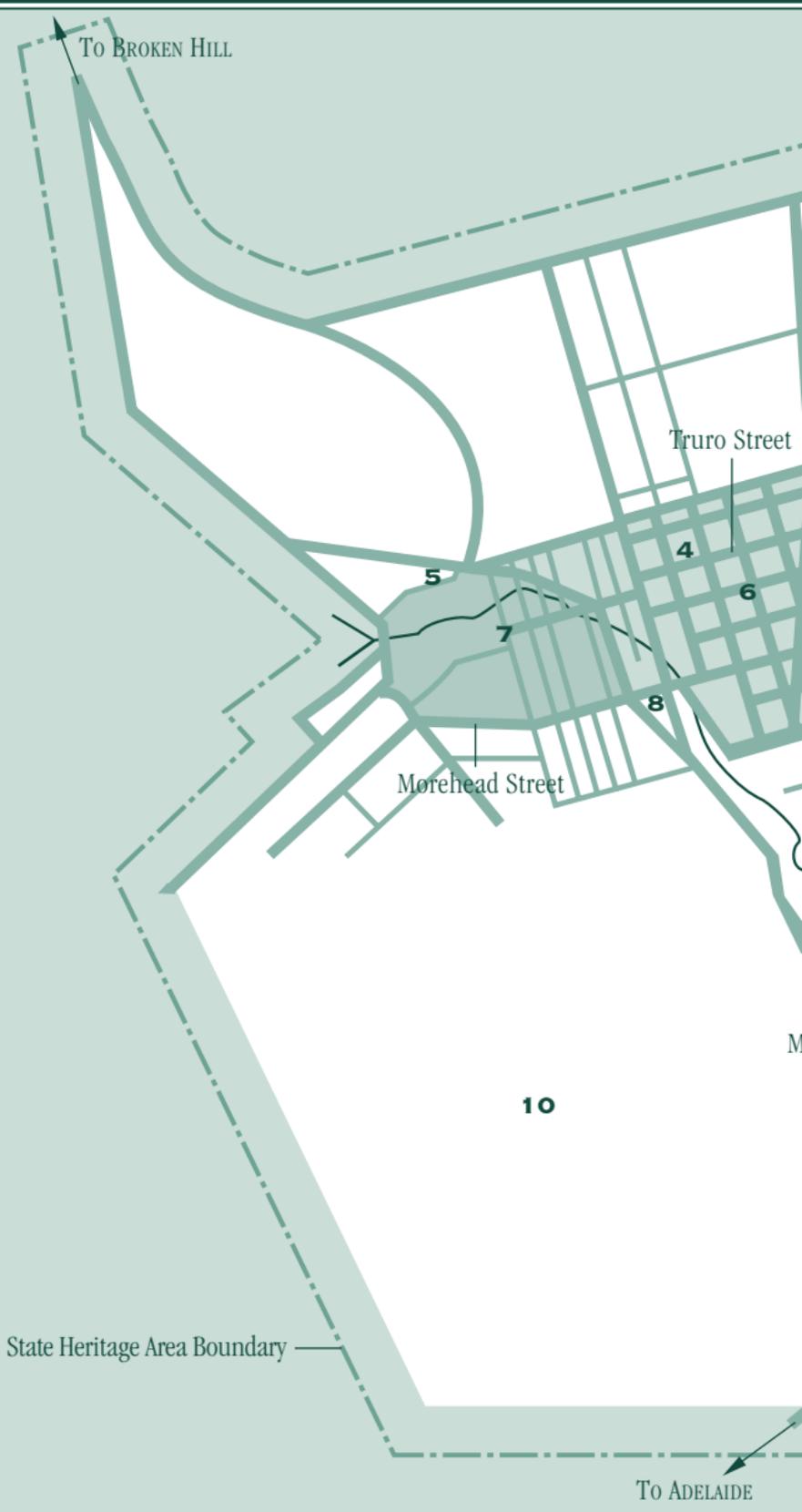
TO BROKEN HILL

Truro Street

5

4

6

7

8

Morehead Street

M

10

State Heritage Area Boundary

TO ADELAIDE

1

2

3
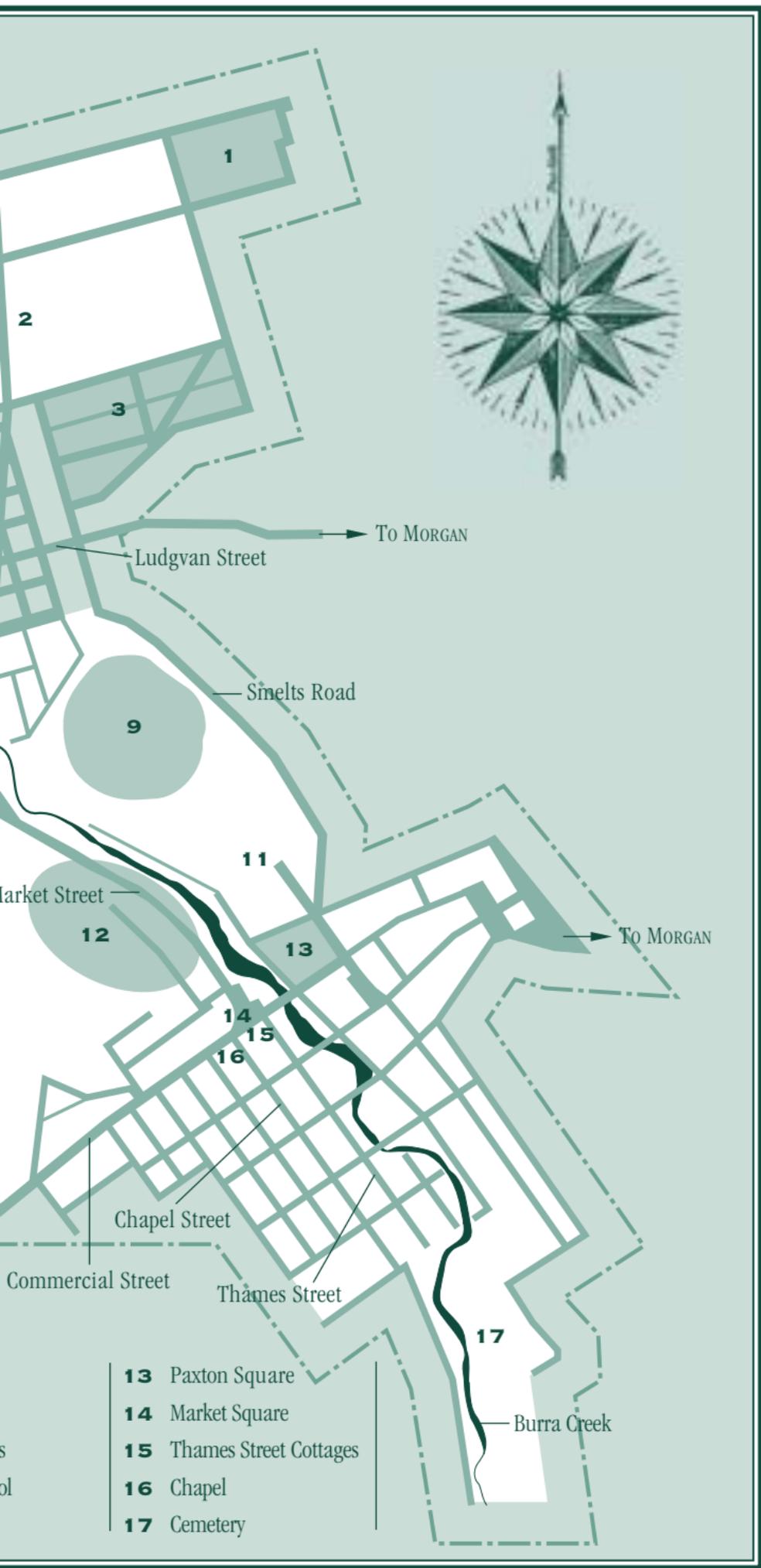
TO MORGAN

Ludgvan Street

Smelts Road

9

11

Market Street

12

13

TO MORGAN

14
15
16

Chapel Street

Commercial Street

Thames Street

17

Burra Creek

Heritage South Australia
Government of South Australia