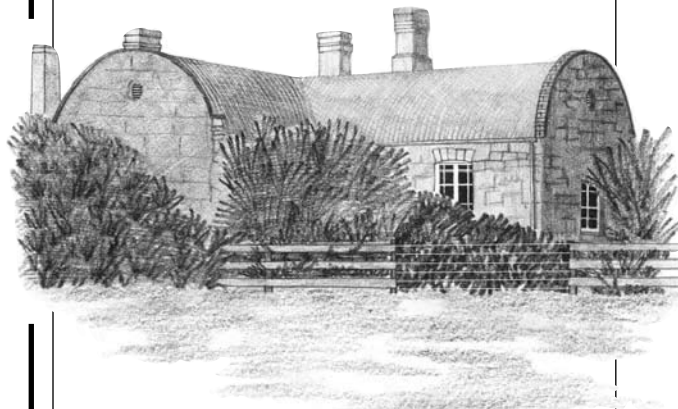


# GOOLWA

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## STATE HERITAGE AREA



State Heritage Branch

**DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT  
AND NATURAL RESOURCES**

### HISTORY OF GOOLWA

Goolwa, during its heyday from the 1850s to the 1880s, was one of Australia's most important river ports dominating South Australia's intercolonial river trade with Victoria and New South Wales. It was originally intended to become the 'New Orleans of Australia' because of its location at the mouth of Australia's one system of navigable inland rivers.

This dream never came to pass. Goolwa functioned as a river port from 1854, sending river goods at first by horse tram to Port Elliot, then later by steam train to Port Victor. But after the Morgan to Port Adelaide railway opened in 1878, the river trade on the lower reaches dwindled. Goolwa never became more than a small regional town with an economy based on transport and light industry.

An immediate stimulus for the development of the river trade was the construction of the single track horse-powered tramway between Goolwa and Port Elliot, opened in 1854, as an alternative to navigating the treacherous Murray Mouth. It is now acclaimed as Australia's first public iron-tracked railway. In 1864 the tramway was extended four miles to Port Victor as Port Elliot proved to be unsafe following a series of shipwrecks. The original Goolwa wharf, built in 1852 was extended in 1866 and rebuilt in 1874.

With the enormous increase in the volume of trade, Goolwa became the nexus in a cargo transport system between the river and the sea. Paddle steamers towed barges carrying supplies to upriver markets and returned laden with wool. Like other thriving country towns, Goolwa's industries included breweries, a saw mill and a flour mill, as well as an industry which was virtually unique, that of shipbuilding and repairs. Goolwa was the first Australian river port where vessels were built and became the second most productive after Echuca in Victoria. Between 1853 and 1913, thirty seven paddle steamers and twenty three barges were built at Goolwa. The Goolwa Patent Slip and Iron Works, established in 1864, employed 30 to 40 tradespeople by the 1870s.

From the late nineteenth century to the present day, Goolwa's main focus has been as a tourist resort. However, the River Murray also functions as part of an important irrigation system and a series of barrages were constructed along the lower River Murray to maintain fresh water in the river and lakes. This included the Goolwa Barrage completed in 1940 as part of an extensive public works project.

### GOOLWA STATE HERITAGE AREA

In 1987 the inner part of the town of Goolwa was declared a State Heritage Area because of its historical importance as a bustling river port between the 1850s and 1880s. There are a remarkably representative group of buildings and relics surviving from this era in the present townscape and on the waterfront. These include the wharf and tramway precinct which handled river boat cargo, a central core of well preserved public and commercial buildings which serviced a growing community, and a unique residential precinct of densely spaced cottages, still known locally as 'Little Scotland' because it was occupied by a number of Scottish riverboat employees.

A State Heritage Area is subject to special protection under South Australia's Development Act. Places within a State Heritage Area can be altered or developed, but it is necessary to obtain approval before doing so. (Approval is required for most development whether the property is in a State Heritage Area or not). Any alterations should be sympathetic to the character of the original place. A heritage advisor is available to give free conservation advice to owners in the Goolwa State Heritage Area. Ring the Council for more information.

The declaration of the Goolwa State Heritage Area will ensure that the town's historic fabric is preserved, while at the same time encouraging sympathetic development to promote tourism in one of South Australia's most important regional centres.

There is no increased right of public access to heritage places. The buildings in the Goolwa State Heritage Area are all owned and cared for, and the occupants' right to privacy should be respected. Treat their property and this historic town in the same way you would want others to treat your property.

For more information about the Goolwa State Heritage Area see the State Heritage Area of South Australia website [www.stateheritageareas.sa.gov.au](http://www.stateheritageareas.sa.gov.au)

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## TOWN OF GOOLWA



1. COUNCIL CHAMBERS incorporate the original TOWN HALL of 1860, extended in 1878 and 1907.
2. GOOLWA HOTEL original section dates from 1853 and is adorned with figurehead of wrecked Irish sailing ship, 'Mozambique'.
3. BOW-FRONTED STORE dates from the early days of river trade.
4. OLD POLICE STATION and COURT HOUSE built in stages from 1859 to 1874.
5. MORGUE was a government facility, built in 1883.
6. POST OFFICE, built in 1857, was also used by tramway passengers until 1872 when station built.
7. FORMER RAILWAY HORSE STABLES built 1862 to accommodate horse teams used to draw wagons on Pt. Elliot and Goolwa Railway until replaced by steam-powered locomotives in 1884.
8. FORMER RAILWAY SUPERINTENDENT'S HOUSE constructed 1852 for the Port Elliot and Goolwa Railway.
9. RAILWAY CUTTING excavated 1852 is part of oldest surviving railway works in Australia.
10. NATIONAL TRUST MUSEUM occupies a former coach-builders shop.
11. SOLDIERS MEMORIAL GARDENS were established in 1917 on the horse tramway and railway reserve.
12. CORIO HOTEL and former AUSTRALASIAN HOTEL both built in 1857 to service a thriving river trade.
13. FORMER CUSTOMS HOUSE built 1859 when Goolwa was proclaimed a river port.
14. WHARF built 1852, extended 1866, rebuilt 1874 and extended 1878.
15. RAILWAY GOODS SHED constructed 1879 and relocated 1913 on present site.
16. COTTAGES IN 'LITTLE SCOTLAND' built to a simple vernacular design and dating from 1860s.
17. COCKENZIE HOUSE built in 1856 for Captain George Johnston.