

Burra State Heritage Area

Burra was declared a State Heritage Area on 28 January 1993.

HISTORY

Copper ore was discovered near Burra Burra creek in June 1845 and, before the end of the year, the South Australian Mining Association had established its 'Monster Mine' in the region. During its first six years nearly 80,000 tonnes of rich ore were shipped to England to be smelted, boosting South Australia's flagging economy and making the colony the most prosperous in Australia.

The mine employed more than 1 000 men and boys, most of them Cornish. From 1849 smelting was done on-site by the Patent Copper Company, who brought the smelters from Wales. The ore was initially carted to Port Wakefield by bullocks, and later by teams of mules. By 1860 Burra was recognised as the second largest producer of copper in the world.

Production declined after 1860 and eventually, in 1867, underground mining ceased. From 1870, until the mine's closure in 1877, it was worked by an open-cut system, but this proved unprofitable. Between 1845 and 1877 the Burra 'Monster Mine' had produced about 50,000 tonnes of copper metal, valued at approximately £5,000,000.

The town of Burra began in 1846 as the company settlement of Kooringa. As the population and the demand for freehold land increased, other villages were surveyed further north. These settlements - Redruth, Llchwyr, Aberdeen and Hampton - reflected the cultures of the various immigrants who flocked to the Burra Mine. In 1876 the individual townships were formed into the Corporation of the Town of Burra, but retained their identity until 1940, when the name Burra was adopted.

From the 1870s, when copper production ceased and the town's population declined, Burra developed as a service town for the district's rapidly expanding agricultural and pastoral industries. New public buildings appeared, but much of Burra's mining era was retained. Today Burra attracts attention as a cultural tourist destination, displaying a unique mix of mining heritage and well-preserved 19th century architecture.

CHARACTER

Burra today is a vibrant community offering one of Australia's finest historic precincts. The town retains many mid-nineteenth century buildings and structures from the years when the Burra mine was one of the world's great copper producers. It also displays many later Victorian buildings reflecting the town's secondary role as a regional centre for agriculture, pastoralism and local government.

Experienced miners, smelters, labourers, tradesmen and businessmen flocked to Burra from Cornwall, Wales, England, Scotland, Ireland and Germany. There were also Chinese market gardeners and Chilean muleteers. Many brought their families and attempted to preserve a familiar lifestyle. The cultural diversity of Burra's early days is evident in the street names and the distinctive architectural styles that developed in the original villages.

Burra's built environment is clearly derived from the two historical phases of its development. The mining phase from 1845-1877 gave rise to the mining and industrial architecture at the Burra and Bon Accord mine sites, and provided the impetus for both company and private housing, much of which was timber and has not survived. Many of the stone cottages that remain (such as Paxton Square and Tiver's Row) are based on company housing in Cornish towns, and are some of the oldest buildings remaining in Burra. The architecture of this era mostly followed the 'Old World' models, with designs coming unaltered from Europe. For example, many of the early structures do not have verandahs.

The later agricultural and pastoral phase brought a new prosperity, which stimulated the use of Australian colonial architecture. This style is particularly evident in the buildings of the commercial core of Kooringa, at Commercial Street and Market Square, in public buildings such as the Town Hall and the school, and in the gracious hillside houses with spreading verandahs.

One important element in Burra's architecture is the distinctive use of rich, local bluestone that gives a unifying effect to many buildings, regardless of their form or age.

Burra's built heritage remains largely intact, thanks to a caring community and the efforts of the National Trust. This historic town is now one of South Australia's best-conserved reminders of industry and every day life in the nineteenth century. While the town's economy is now linked to the surrounding agricultural and pastoral communities, its copper heritage is evident everywhere. The town's character has become a key in the success of a developing local industry - tourism. Today many people in Burra volunteer to interpret heritage sites for visitors or provide services and facilities specifically targeting the cultural heritage tourism market.



FEATURES

The town of Burra consists of two precincts, linked by the Burra Creek, the main road (Market Street) and the topography of the valley: the old Kooringa township and Burra north.

The old Kooringa township to the south includes early company housing, Market Square, a section of the Burra Creek dugouts, and both residential and commercial buildings of the post-mining era.

Burra North encompasses the former government and private settlements of Redruth and Aberdeen. It includes terrace houses and cottages built by miners and smelts workers, along with the original courthouse, police station, gaol and later Victorian dwellings. The railway station is located in this section, and the ruins of the Hampton township are located on the state heritage area's north-eastern boundary.

The two precincts are separated by the Burra mines site to the west and the Burra smelts site across the creek to the east, ensuring that development has not linked the townships over the years.

THE BURRA JINKER

Discussion of Burra's attractions is not complete without mention of the Burra Jinker, displayed near Market Square. This massive 'cart' was purpose-built to transport the mine's huge beam-engines (imported from Cornwall) from Port Adelaide to Burra.

The epic journey, using 36 oxen, took two months and is a part of South Australian folklore. The Burra Jinker was one of eight South Australian items listed on the 2001 BankSA Heritage Icons List and was entered in the South Australian Heritage Register on 16 March 2016.



Further Information

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