

Colonel Light Gardens State Heritage Area

Colonel Light Gardens was declared a State Heritage Area on 4 May 2000.

FEATURES

Significant non-residential buildings within the Colonel Light Gardens state heritage area include:

- Colonel Light Gardens Primary and Infant Schools - Windsor Avenue.
- RSL Hall - Prince George Parade
- The Strand shopping centre - The Strand
- Colonel Light Gardens Institute - West Parkway
- police station - 196 Goodwood Road
- shopping centre - Salisbury Crescent
- Uniting Church - Salisbury Crescent.

The wide and winding tree-lined streets, the reserves and the absence of stobie poles are significant features throughout the precinct. The suburb's planted landscape has matured and reflects Reade's vision for this garden community. Doncaster Avenue is an example of a street that was diverted to accommodate existing vegetation - the gum trees outline the original Grange Farmhouse Drive, which predates the Colonel Light Gardens subdivision.

The Thousand Homes Scheme was the State Government's first large-scale housing project and, until the development of Elizabeth around 30 years later, the only one to combine low-cost housing with town planning to create a model garden suburb. Colonel Light Gardens became the suburb most identified with this scheme. International visitors were taken to view the housing developments at Colonel Light Gardens during the 1920s.

Colonel Light Gardens had its own Garden Suburb Act and, until the mid-1970s, remained the only suburb in South Australia under comprehensive town planning legislation. It was administered by a Garden Suburb Commissioner, who answered directly to the South Australian Parliament.

HISTORY

The origin of Colonel Light Gardens owes much to the town-planning and housing movement that occurred worldwide before and during World War I. One of its most outspoken advocates, Charles Reade, visited South Australia on a lecture tour in 1914, as assistant to W.R. Davidge of the British Garden Cities and Town Planning Association. In 1915, when the Labor Party came to power, Reade remained in Adelaide to advise the State Government on the preparation of a town-planning bill.

At the same time the 298-acre Mortlock Park Estate (later to become Colonel Light Gardens) was purchased, but financial and legislative difficulties saw the estate transferred to the Commonwealth Government. The Mortlock Estate then became the Mitcham embarkation camp - a depot and training ground for soldiers being deployed overseas. The army retained possession of the site until January 1920.

Charles Reade was appointed South Australia's first Town Planner in 1916. His plan for the new Mitcham garden suburb was finally realised after the passing of enabling legislation in 1919. Under the Garden Suburb Act the area became separate from the District Council of Mitcham and was administered by a Garden Suburb Commissioner, who answered directly to the South Australian Parliament.

The north-eastern section was the first area surveyed and opened for sale. A specially published brochure described Colonel Light Gardens as a 'Model Suburb of Comfort, Convenience and Beauty'. Initial settlement was slow, perhaps due to the lack of facilities and the uncertainty of the tram service along Goodwood Road. The slight recession of the early 1920s meant that the houses which were built were often smaller and of lower cost. Some were also sited on blocks originally intended for larger homes. By 1923 the economy had improved and building activity increased markedly.



In 1924 the development of the suburb took a different course. The whole of the southern portion and a new district to the west of Goodwood Road (to be known as Colonel Light Gardens West) were sold to the State Bank for the construction of low-cost housing under what was called the 'Thousand Homes Scheme'. This scheme proposed the erection of one thousand houses, under group construction methods, in various parts of the metropolitan area. It was anticipated that the homes would be purchased by soldiers and civilians of the working class, and were to be offered at a purchase price not exceeding £700.

The original contractor became bankrupt in 1925, but the scheme was eventually completed by the middle of 1926, with 363 houses built in the southern and central portions of Colonel Light Gardens, and an additional 332 houses on the western side of Goodwood Road. Private development continued in the northern parts, where there was increasing opposition to the scheme homes.

Between 1924 and 1927 Colonel Light Gardens was transformed from an area with a few scattered houses in the north, to an almost completely built-up suburb. At the end of 1926 no vacant blocks remained in the Thousand Homes areas in the south and west. Although many blocks were still unoccupied in the north, 257 houses had been completed there. A further 125 houses were finished during 1927 and 14 the following year. Housing development was now, for all practical purposes, complete. By December 1929, over 1,800 trees had been planted and the 11 miles of roadway sealed.

Colonel Light Gardens was made the centre of a large police district. A police station with offices, courtroom and residence was built on Goodwood Road in 1926. The Goode Picture Theatre was opened in 1927, financed by residents' shares in the company. Twenty shops were built in Bond Street, the Strand and south of the theatre. Unfortunately the shopping centres did not develop as planned because of other shops in neighbouring suburbs. In 1926 a meeting hall was built at the back of the Grange Farm House, and later became known as the Colonel Light Gardens' Institute. A large hall was erected by the Rechabite Lodge in 1929 (owned by the RSL from 1945) and the primary and infant schools opened in 1927.

Colonel Light Gardens retained its autonomy from local council until 1975, when it was proclaimed a part of the Mitcham District Council. The Garden Suburbs Act was repealed later that year.

(Adapted from The National Trust of South Australia submission to the Register of the National Estate. Appendix 2: History and Significance (F.S. Henry))

THE DESIGN

Reade's vision

Charles Reade's vision for the Garden Suburb of Colonel Light Gardens embodied the most advanced town-planning principles of the day, to serve as an example for future land subdivision in Adelaide. The comprehensive plan sought to address environmental, social, recreational, educational and commercial concepts in a residential suburb.

Unlike the grid street pattern for other suburbs in Adelaide, the plan for Colonel Light Gardens was characterised by regular curves, to interrupt the grid and provide opportunities for vistas towards key buildings or garden features. An abundance of well-distributed open space, internal reserves and community recreation areas, and strict zoning of land for housing and commercial uses, were all vital features of his design.

Reade used many innovative design concepts, some for the first time in Australia, to create a 'model garden suburb' with its own distinct community identity. These included:

- a park-like environment with trees planted along roads, and adequate sites allotted for parklands, playground reserves and gardens.
- the character and width of roads designed according to their planned usage, with centres linked by a radial network of streets designed to direct and concentrate the flow of traffic along specially constructed routes.
- an emphasis on curves, not only as a line of beauty, but also as a mechanism to bring lawns and gardens into view and to enhance the character of the street.
- street corners rounded to enhance their appearance and harmonise with the general design, but also to improve traffic visibility and minimise danger at road junctions and crossings.
- housing designed as private detached homes for single families, with ample front, side and rear yards.
- strict controls applied to ensure a harmonious streetscape where all buildings blend together and services (such as electricity and gas) are located in rear laneways.
- staggered use of building designs, reversed frontages, or placement in different positions on blocks, so that no two houses seem to be of the same design.



Harmony, not uniformity, was Reade's aim. Fourteen designs were available, but no two adjoining houses were the same. Four, five or six roomed homes were offered, with kitchen, bathroom and laundry. These were constructed of red brick. They were fenced on all sides, with ample yard space front and back, and a rainwater tank was supplied.

THE THOUSAND HOMES SCHEME

In 1924, land in the southern portion of what had been Mortlock Estate, as well as additional land west of Goodwood Road, was sold to the State Bank for construction of low-cost housing under the Thousand Homes Scheme. This scheme proposed the erection of 1,000 houses, under group-construction methods, within various parts of metropolitan Adelaide. By 1926, a total of 695 of these homes had been constructed in Colonel Light Gardens.

In terms of social planning, the Thousand Homes Scheme was the fore-runner of substantial public housing programs, for fully-planned communities, undertaken by the SA Housing Trust from 1936.

The choice of Colonel Light Gardens as a major location for the Thousand Homes Scheme impacted on Reade's vision for this garden suburb. Major replanning of the southern part of the suburb increased the number of building allotments by 57. These additional blocks were created by the elimination of design features such as internal reserves and ornamental gardens.

Block sizes were standardised, effectively creating larger blocks than Reade had intended. This contravened his principle of social mix – different social classes, purchasing different size blocks, were no longer neighbours. The area west of Goodwood Road was created according to much of the garden suburb concept, but utility ways were abandoned in this area's design, and street width and allotment size were reduced.

Joseph Timms was originally contracted to build the 1000 homes at £676. These were to comprise 72 each of six designs and 71 each of eight designs, in selected suburbs in metropolitan Adelaide. The designs were similar, the main difference being location on the block, as well as the position of the verandah and the use of side and front entrance. Joseph Timms went bankrupt in March 1925, but the contract was transferred to another builder (Freburg) for a fixed sum of £7,000. By the end of 1926, no vacant blocks remained in the Thousand Homes areas of Colonel Light Gardens.

FEATURES

Colonel Light Gardens is Australia's most complete example of a 1920s garden suburb, and so it is the design and landscape of the area which are its most significant features. The precinct offers a contrast with neighbouring suburbs, both in its architecture and design. The combination of open spaces, long-established vegetation, wide footpaths, service lanes, meandering streets and internal reserves make this a quiet and private residential suburb.

Colonel Light Gardens was developed within the first 10 years after its laying-out, and consequently almost all buildings are of the same period. The density of development is low and even. Remarkably, most houses and other buildings are in good condition and little altered, with the exception of the shopping centres. Almost all the houses are single-storey and of the 1920s bungalow style. A large number of these are 'Thousand Home Scheme' dwellings, or houses using the same generic design.



Further Information

For further information please contact the State Heritage Unit

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