

Hahndorf State Heritage Area

Hahndorf was declared a State Heritage Area on 25 August 1988.

HISTORY

Hahndorf's early pioneer settlers were refugees from religious persecution in the Silesian area of Prussia (north-eastern Germany). In December 1838, 38 Lutheran families arrived at Port Adelaide aboard the *Zebra*, captained by Dirk Hahn. During the voyage, the Danish captain had grown to respect his passengers and resolved to help them achieve their goal of settling and farming together. After their arrival in Port Adelaide, Captain Hahn was able to negotiate a parcel of land for them in the Mount Barker Special Survey, owned by Captain John Finniss and Messrs. Dutton and MacFarlane.

The contract offered, rent-free during the first year, 100 acres (later increased to 150 acres) in the Adelaide Hills, near a tributary of the Onkaparinga River. Of this area 19 acres were allotted for houses and for constructing roads, and the remainder was for cultivation. The partners agreed to deliver the emigrants and their belongings to the valley, to provide one year's provisions and seed, and to supply livestock – all on credit as a communal debt. The expectation was that the settlers would soon be able to cancel this liability by selling produce. The three landowners also promised to pay for the materials for a school and a church, with the townsfolk supplying the labour. The settlers resolved to buy the land at the end of the first year, although it was actually a number of years before they discharged the debt.

The terms of the contract were considered generous at the time. In addition to the 38 families from the *Zebra*, a further 14 German families, who had earlier settled at Klemzig on the River Torrens, joined their brethren by May 1839. (The names of the 52 pioneering families are inscribed on the gates of the Pioneer Memorial Gardens in the town.)

The new settlement was named Hahndorf (Hahn's Village) to honour the man whose friendship and support had helped the refugees achieve their goal. Each of the families received allotments of land, and set about clearing the scrub and erecting makeshift dwellings. As the settlement became established, German-style farmhouses were built and small businesses established. By the mid 1840s Hahndorf was an important supplier of fresh fruit and vegetables to Adelaide.

The late 1840s saw a split in the Lutheran Church, and the declining importance of a single church as the cultural, social and administrative centre of the community. This division, coupled with additional land surveys and the growing importance of the Great Eastern Road, meant that Hahndorf's activities became focussed along Main Street.

Gradually Hahndorf changed from a farming village to a major service centre (by 1903, for example, the percentage of farmers had dwindled from the initial 100 percent to 11.3 percent). Wheelwrights, smithies, publicans, shopkeepers, carpenters and joiners soon established their businesses along Main Street, servicing both the local and neighbouring communities as well as catering for the increased through-traffic. By the end of the century, Hahndorf was a prosperous town.

On 19 August 1885 a long-awaited tree planting program commenced along Hahndorf's Main Street. 300 chestnut, cork, elm and plane trees, donated by Robert Barr Smith and chosen by Dr Richard Schomburgk, then Director of the Adelaide Botanic Garden, were planted along the street. Speeches were held and all school children participated. This tree-planting exercise was most likely the first public tree-planting program in the state, pre-dating Arbor Day in Adelaide by three years.

Because of their cultural and religious ties, the Lutherans developed a close-knit community, largely isolated from the British settlements. As in other small towns with a German heritage, some of the townspeople suffered from anti-German prejudice during the First World War. Across South Australia many German-Australians anglicised their surnames, and a total of 69 places of German origin were renamed. In 1917 Hahndorf became Ambleside, after a nearby railway station, and its Lutheran Day School was closed. In 1935, as part of South Australia's centenary celebrations (1936), the town reverted to its original name, in recognition of the contribution, to the state, of its German pioneers.

In 1974 through-traffic was diverted away from Hahndorf's Main Street, following the construction of the South Eastern Freeway through the Adelaide Hills. The town became a byway on many tourist maps, and today the historic German village is one of Adelaide's premier tourist destinations.

Significant people associated with Hahndorf include the artist Hans Heysen, and the creator of the Torrens Title, Ulriche Huebe.



THE HAHNDORF TOWN PLAN

Hahndorf's layout is a unique form, combining characteristics of both the farmlet (Hufendorf) and street village (Strassendorf) patterns of Prussian land subdivision.

In 1839 the village of Hahndorf was planned as a U-shaped Hufendorf of small farmsteads, with the Lutheran Church (now the site of St Michael's) as the focus. Hermann Kook seems to have been the person asked to survey the settlement, and his first task was to set out the house blocks for the original settlers. He produced a U-shaped plan with its base running along Main Road, and the left and right 'limbs' edged by North Lane (now Victoria Street) and South Lane (now English Street). Inside the U, Church Street and Balhannah Road now intersect at the central area that was set aside for St Michael's Church. The blocks were numbered one to 54 and each was sufficiently large enough for a house, a subsistence garden and a small farm.

When the settlers purchased another 240 acres, Kook had to extend his survey to include numerous holdings that could be divided amongst the settlers for agricultural uses. Each family obtained a number of widely-dispersed, small holdings, which in theory at least, gave everybody a fair share of the well-watered and fertile land.

After about 10 years, the basic plan for the town needed to be extended, to cater for an increasing population. In 1849 F.W. Wittwer purchased land which he subdivided into allotments on the south-eastern side of Main Street, opposite the original lots. Joseph Renfrey bought land further along Main Street (or the Great Eastern Road as it was then called) and subdivided into 100-foot allotments. These subdivisions gave this section of Hahndorf the appearance of a Strassendorf village, the layout of which can still be seen in the arrangement of allotments along Main Street.

In 1857, in accordance with regulations associated with the introduction of the Torrens land title system, a detailed plan of Hahndorf was drawn up. It shows the subdivisions of Kook, Renfrey and Wittwer amongst an array of land strips and blocks that were the agricultural holdings of the early German gardeners. The plan is unlike any other in South Australia, and contributes to the uniqueness that is a prized characteristic of Hahndorf.

Since these early days, many changes have occurred within the original Hahndorf sections. A number of minor roads and cul-de sacs, for example, have been added to the historic road network, as the original agricultural blocks were developed for housing.

Historically, the portions of open space far outweighed that of buildings, and small one- and two-roomed, single-storey cottages and associated buildings were spaced along the house allotments. The density of buildings gradually grew until cottages were built on the 'agricultural' allotments and eventually lined all the main and minor roads.

As Main Street was part of the Great Eastern Road, it became an important thoroughfare and the focus of the town's commercial activity. Most of the early shops and industries were family businesses, with many of the buildings reflecting a dual residential and commercial use. Progressively the village, especially along Main Street, included larger two-storeyed structures, such as Wittwer's Flour Mill and the hotels.

CHARACTER

The historic character of the Hahndorf state heritage area, centred on Main Street and Victoria Street, arises from two particular aspects of the town's German heritage – its unique plan form (a combination of both Hufendorf and Strassendorf patterns) and the many surviving 19th century buildings. These were originally constructed using traditional German designs, but later assimilated to styles more suited to the Australian climate and materials. The small rural scale of the buildings, the open spaces, and the avenue of trees along Main Street all contribute to the area's character.

Some of the older buildings show traditional German designs and techniques, such as 'fachwerk' with timber framing and wattle and daub infill panels. Many other buildings are of local stone which, together with the large street trees, creates a distinctive streetscape. Open farmland at both ends of the town is another important element of its landscape setting and character.

Hahndorf has been a popular tourist centre for many decades, and as such, presents two different visitor experiences. On the one hand there are the Bavarian-style restaurants, the coffee houses, and the craft and souvenir shops, which many people would argue have destroyed its heritage value. On the other hand, closer examination reveals that there is still much physical evidence of the early village settlement and of the Lutheran pioneers and their descendants.

Most of the commercial outlets fronting Main Street, for example, were once houses, barns, or stables, and much of their original features and style are still noticeable. In some cases, evidence of a building's German origins is hidden behind a facade applied by later generations.



The area to the northern side of Victoria Street retains a stock of historically important residences and associated outbuildings. These are small in scale, simple in form and construction, and in general reflect the humble character of the original settlers. Overall, their German character is evident in their roof form, construction techniques and orientation.

FEATURES

The development of Hahndorf from a rural village to a major service centre is accented by the combination of open space and the many nineteenth century residential, commercial and light industrial properties that are evident within the state heritage area precinct.

Within the Area's boundary, 17 items along Main Street, and five along the northern side of Victoria Street, are state heritage-listed places.

Other prominent landmarks within the state heritage area include St Michael's Lutheran Church, on the corner of Balhannah and Church Streets, and the adjacent Hahndorf Primary School, also in Church Street.

VISITING

Hahndorf, in the Adelaide Hills, is one of the state's most widely recognised tourist destinations. It is a 30-minute drive along the South Eastern Freeway from Adelaide and is frequented by international and interstate visitors, as well as local 'day-trippers'. The main street caters to tourists, with a combination of Australiana outlets, Bavarian-style restaurants, coffee houses, craft, antique and gift shops. Various forms of accommodation are available in the town or nearby, with bed and breakfast venues popular for weekend getaways.

The significance of the Hahndorf state heritage area relates to the town's German heritage, which is especially evident behind the commercial facades and away from the Main Street. A walking trail encourages visitors to discover Hahndorf's true German character and the many features that are striking reminders of the area's Prussian settlers.



Further Information

For further information please contact the State Heritage Unit

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