

Mount Torrens State Heritage Area

Mount Torrens was declared a State Heritage Area on 11 June 1992.

HISTORY

A leading figure in the early history of Mount Torrens was George Dunn, who arrived in South Australia in 1839 with his wife, Mary, and five children. A little more than a year later, George purchased two sections of land, totalling 154 acres, at the base of Mount Torrens. The family settled beside a tributary of Angas Creek, established a farm called Barton Springs, and successfully raised sheep.

In 1845 copper was discovered 10km east, and within two years a mine was opened at Reedy Creek, worked mostly by a party of miners sent from Cornwall. Dunn soon found that his home was frequently visited by bullock drivers, either en route to the mines with equipment and supplies, or returning to Port Adelaide with dray loads of ore. He sensed a profitable business and transformed Barton Springs into the Cornish Arms Hotel, which was licensed during 1848 and 1849. During that time he constructed the more spacious Mount Torrens Hotel on the government road. This two-storey inn opened for business in 1850, but by then the miners had left for the Victorian Goldfields and the Reedy Creek mines soon closed down.

Towards the end of 1852, as men returned from the goldfields, there was a demand for land in Mount Torrens. George Dunn employed a surveyor to subdivide part of his holdings, creating the village of Mount Torrens along the banks of Angas Creek, north of the hotel.

The development of the River Murray trade, from 1853, influenced the economy and growth of Mount Torrens. As road traffic through the Adelaide Hills to Mannum increased, greater numbers of people either used the services of the town or bought allotments and settled.

In 1853 the town's flour mill was built by a co-operative of local landowners. The next year a Bible Christian Church was completed and a licensed school was opened in the same building. Mount Torrens continued to grow, with most of the town's historic buildings erected during the 1850s and 1860s. In 1860 the District Council constructed a stone bridge where the main street (Townsend Street) crosses the Angas Creek, and within a few years a macadamised road passed through the town, linking Adelaide to Mannum.

In addition to being a service town for passing traffic, Mount Torrens was also the centre for a rural district. During the early years wheat farming was common (hence the construction of a flour mill in 1853), but intensive cropping exhausted the soil and other activities were established.

The wattle bark industry took over from wheat cropping, and two bark mills were built in the district. In the 1860s gold veins were found near Mount Torrens and prospectors were attracted to the area by reports of good finds. For a brief period, Mount Torrens was the centre of a gold mining district, but no really rich deposits were found. Small amounts of gold were still mined in the district until the early 1930s.

Towards the end of the 19th century dairying became increasingly popular and much of the area was cleared for pasture. In 1927 Amscol purchased the flour mill and it was converted into a dairy produce factory. The building was destroyed by fire in 1939 and a modern factory built on the site.

The population of Mount Torrens reached its peak shortly before World War I. In 1918 access to the town was greatly improved by the opening of the Adelaide to Mount Pleasant railway line, with a station located just a short distance from the town. This line ceased in 1964 and was replaced by a bus service.

CHARACTER

Mount Torrens is a character town that has remained largely untouched by modern development. The charm of Mount Torrens has been appreciated by tourists for many years.



More than 30 houses, shops and other structures in the main street and nearby are more than a century old, with some dating back to the 1850s. These historic, visually significant buildings predominate in the state heritage area, particularly along the western side of Townsend Street, which presents a streetscape of late 19th and early 20th century architecture.

The scale of the town, and the similarities of building detail and materials, contribute to Mount Torrens' distinctive character. This is a natural result of the town's history, particularly the prosperous period between 1850 and 1860.

With most significant built features located within a small distance along the town's main north-south thoroughfare, visitors entering Mount Torrens from any direction can sense this area's heritage character at a glance. The buildings are principally of stone, although a few are brick. No local stone predominates, but rather the materials demonstrate the range of stones available from local quarries. The early brick buildings were probably constructed from locally-made bricks.

Many of Mount Torrens' historic buildings seem more typical of the metropolitan area than of a rural township, reflecting the prosperity of the 1850s and 1860s. A number of the significant buildings within the state heritage area are two-storey. Four of these, all on the western side of Townsend Street, have a single-storey shop or cottage extension attached to the two-storey residence. This is a rare building form in Australia, which suggests that four such buildings, within 300 metres along one street, is exceptional.

Other interesting characteristics of Mount Torrens are its predominance of stone masonry - walls, creek channels, wells and the arched bridge on Townsend Street - and the complex of creeks and drainage gullies that have influenced the town's design. The Angas Creek and its tributaries curve in and out between buildings and, together with the stone-lined channels built for run-off, contribute to the town's built character to an extent which is unusual in a South Australian town.

FEATURES

Prominent buildings of the late 19th and early 20th century are the most obvious historic characteristics of the Mount Torrens state heritage area, but they are not the only features of heritage value. The vegetation, bridges, channels and rural setting also contribute to its charm and significance.

One of the unique aspects of Angas Creek and its tributaries is the number and variety of bridges that have been constructed throughout the township. The most significant of these is the stone-arched bridge, built by the District Council in 1860 to establish a crossing on Townsend Street. The bridge was widened in about 1954-55 by adding reinforced concrete piers and decking to the western side. The eastern side however, retains many of the original features, including the double arches and bluestone central pillars.

The Mount Torrens state heritage area's appeal however is undoubtedly its historic buildings. A large number of these were built before 1870, during the height of the town's prosperity. Clark's General Store at 13 Townsend Street is particularly noteworthy, and is a state heritage-listed.

VISITING

Mount Torrens is a picturesque settlement in the Mount Lofty Ranges east of Adelaide. As part of the Onkaparinga Scenic Drive, winding between Hahndorf and Birdwood, it is frequently visited by tour groups and others enjoying a day's drive through the Adelaide Hills. A walking trail is available from the general store in the main street.



Further Information

For further information please contact the State Heritage Unit

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