

MINTARO

STATE HERITAGE AREA



State Heritage Branch

**DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT
AND NATURAL RESOURCES**

History of Mintaro

Mintaro's historic character was shaped by two important mining industries in nineteenth century South Australia. In the 1840s and 1850s it became an early staging point for transporting copper from the Burra mines to Port Wakefield, and from the 1860s onwards, it was South Australia's leading producer of high quality slate.

Copper was discovered at Burra in 1845 and by the end of the decade the Burra Burra Mine was one of the richest copper mines in the world. From the end of 1848, bullock teams carted copper ore from Burra to Port Wakefield and coal, shipped from Wales, on the return journey to the Patent Copper Company's smelter near the mine. This route, for many years little more than a track between watering holes, was a private road owned by the Company. It became known as the Gulf Road.

Between 1848 and 1851 several villages were established along the Gulf Road to take advantage of the trade generated by the bullock traffic. Among the first of these was the Village of Mintaro which was subdivided into 80 allotments, section 187 and 316, in about 1849 by Joseph Gilbert, a pioneer pastoralist in the district. These sections were originally purchased by Henry Gilbert in 1849. They straddled the Patent Copper Company road and were conveniently situated

at a stopping place for bullock teams travelling between Burra and Port Wakefield. Burra Street, which was part of the Gulf Road, cut diagonally through section 187. The blocks of land and streets skewed 45° from the regular north-south pattern of the surveyed sections and government roads.

This can be seen in the random pattern of buildings, many of which were built between 1850-1860. The remaining stone buildings, many of them now in ruins, indicate a prosperous period in Mintaro's history.

By 1852 the Gulf Road was nearly deserted. There was an exodus of Burra mine workers as well as bullock drivers and carriers to the more lucrative Eastern colonies following the discovery of gold in Victoria and New South Wales in 1851.

The management of the Burra smelting works imported several shiploads of mules and handlers from Chile and Argentina to overcome the transport problem. There were also practical considerations as mules could cart the ore in both wet and dry seasons. Between 1853 and 1857 mule teams driven by Spanish-speaking muleteers were a common sight on the Gulf Road.

In 1857 Mintaro experienced a decline when the copper teams were rerouted through Riverton to the new railway terminus at Gawler. This was only relieved with the growth of the slate quarries and closer agricultural settlement by the 1860s.

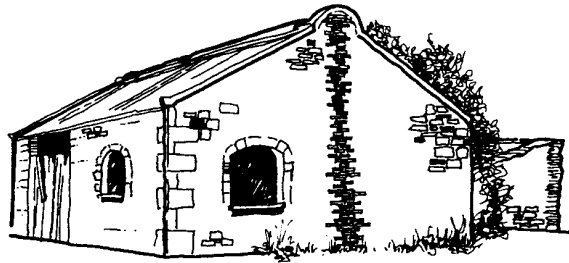
Mintaro railway station (renamed Merildin in 1918) was built in 1870 when the northern railway line was extended from Roseworthy to Burra. It is situated about 7 kilometres east of the

township. Mintaro was well placed to continue as an agricultural service centre despite the closure of the Burra mines in 1877. The surrounding farming districts of the fertile Gilbert Valley were able to reap the rewards of excellent wheat and wool prices during South Australia's rural boom of the 1870s and early 1880s.

This wealth was reflected in two large pastoral properties near Mintaro. Both Martindale Hall, built in 1879-80 by Edmund Bowman, and Kadlunga homestead, purchased in 1881 by Sir Samuel Way, the Chief Justice, reflected a way of life akin to that of the English gentry. Mintaro, like rural village counterparts in England, provided these properties with a ready source of local labour.

Mintaro is probably best known as a producer of slate - the highest quality in Australia and of outstanding strength and durability. Mintaro's slate quarry was first opened in 1854 by Peter Brady. In 1856 he leased it to Thompson Priest, a stone mason, who worked the quarry very successfully, sending to England for Cornish miners. By the early 1880s there were about 50 men employed at the quarries, which have continued to be a major source of employment. The Mintaro quarry is one of the oldest continuously producing quarries in Australia.

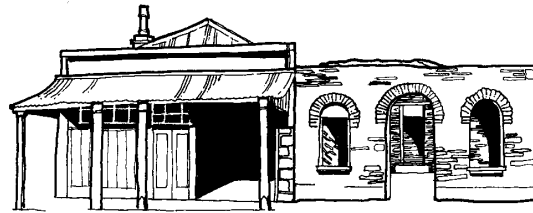
As you stroll around the town, you can see slate buildings, chimneys, tanks, wash troughs and paving. They show how widely slate has been used as a construction material and give a special character to Mintaro.



No 1
former Rowe's Blacksmith's Shop
Burra Street

This functional building, constructed between 1858-1861, was originally a smithy owned and operated by William Rowe, a blacksmith, until the 1890s. He and Frederick Leighton were the only two blacksmiths working in Mintaro in the 1860s.

William Rowe made a name for himself producing quality farm implements and competed successfully in many district ploughing matches.



No 2
former Carpenter's Shop and House
Burra Street

This complex of three attached buildings was originally owned and operated by Richard Lathlean, a carpenter. The house and shop were constructed by the late 1850s. By 1867 the property was assessed for its house, garden, shop, warehouse, stone cellar and shed.

In the 1870s the complex was known as Lathlean's Post Office and Store. The Mintaro Telegraph, which opened in 1873, operated from the store. Although the store remains intact the carpenter's shop is now in a ruinous condition.



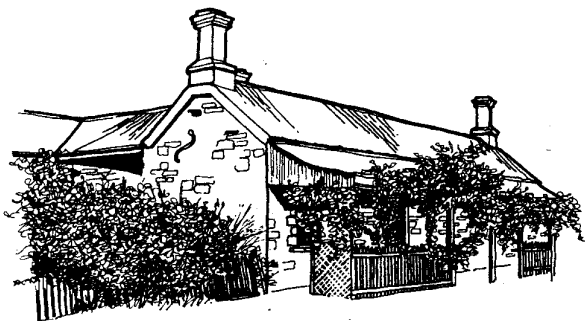
No 3
Teapot Inn and Mintaro Mews
former row of shops
Burra Street

The Teapot Inn, shops and residence were originally part of an early shopping complex dating from the late 1850s to service Mintaro's commercial needs.

Mintaro Mews, next door, opened in 1882. The building was originally a row of shops owned by Frederick Leighton, a blacksmith. The old stone steps, which were used to mount horses, are still located outside the front entrance.

This attractive building was constructed in stages from the 1850s. And like the Teapot Inn, it still retains its traditional ground floor commercial layout and upper floor living accommodation.

Slate, a feature of many Mintaro buildings, has been used extensively to construct walls and paving on the ground floors and verandahs.



No 4
former Devonshire Hotel and Stables
Burra Street

An interesting feature of the Devonshire Hotel, built in 1856, was the 60 ft. long narrow basement excavated below ground level. It operated as a skittles alley for a period.

There was also a large assembly room on the ground floor which was used for concerts and public meetings before the Institute was built next door. It can be seen from the rear of the building.

The hotel was originally owned by James Torr who was licensee from 1856 to 1864. In 1898 it became a temperance hotel, reflecting the influence of the temperance movement in late nineteenth century South Australia.



No 5
Institute and former Council Chambers
Burra Street

The first meeting of Stanley District Council was held in 1868 and in 1877 the Council Chamber, now known as the Civic or District Hall, was constructed. Mintaro was the seat of Stanley District Council from 1868 to 1932 when it amalgamated with the District Council of Clare. In 1942 the District Hall was linked to the adjoining Institute. Both buildings have recently been renovated.

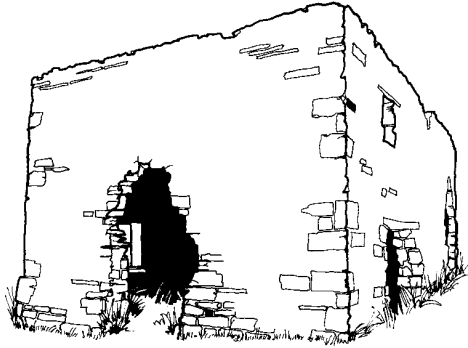
The Institute, built in 1878, has been the centre of the town's social and cultural activity ever since. The foundation stone was laid by the Attorney General, the Hon. Charles Mann, MP, on 4 February 1878. The ceremony was reported in the Northern Argus as 'a red letter day in the history of Mintaro', with the town assuming a holiday appearance. The evening festivities included dinner in the new Council Chambers and a performance afterwards by the Mintaro Dramatic Club in the Assembly Rooms of the Devonshire Hotel.



No 6
Wakefield Cottage
Wakefield Street

This charming slate house with timber shingle roof was originally a four-room cottage erected in the 1860s. The projecting gable front was added later. The original owner was John Smith who also owned the Magpie and Stump Hotel and adjacent flour mill.

Following his death in 1876, the house had a number of different owners, including James Torr and William Skuse, both early settlers to Mintaro. Perhaps its best known landlord was Frederick Ranson Tennant Mortlock of Martindale Hall who purchased the property in 1924. The house subsequently remained in the Mortlock family for many years.



No 7
former Steam Flour Mill
Wakefield Street

This once important steam flour mill, constructed in 1859, is a tangible reminder of Mintaro's role as an agricultural service and supply centre. It was first owned by John Smith, a substantial property owner in the town and district who purchased the adjacent Mintaro Hotel (now the Magpie and Stump) in 1858.

The mill was used for grinding and dressing grain. The four pairs of grinding stones and two sets of rollers were driven by a twenty horsepower steam engine. It ceased operating in the mid 1870s and the machinery was transferred to the Jacka brothers' mill at Morgan.

Today, all that remains of the mill, which originally had a barrel-vaulted roof and distinctive square chimney, is a portion of the two storey wall.



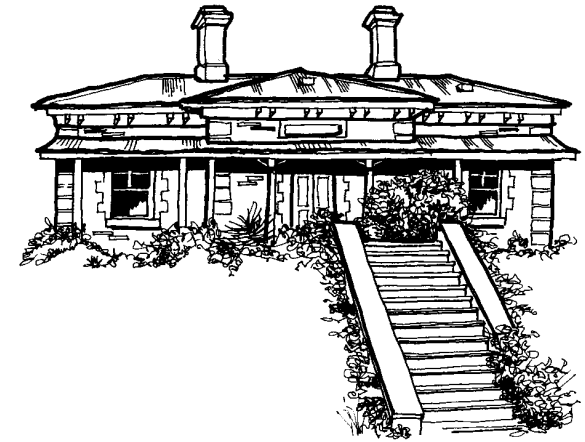
No 8
Magpie and Stump Hotel
corner Burra and Wakefield Streets

The 1850s was probably the most colourful period of the Magpie and Stump's history because of its location on the Gulf Road. The hotel became an important 'watering hole' for thirsty bullock drivers and South American muleteers carting ore between the Burra Burra Mine and Port Wakefield.

This trade came to an end in 1857 when the railway to Gawler opened and the copper teams were re-routed through Riverton. The hotel was bought the following year by John Smith who built the adjacent flour mill. He became a large property holder in Mintaro and the surrounding district.

The hotel originally opened as the Mintaro Hotel in 1850 and Mathew Muir was the first licensee. It has only been known as the Magpie and Stump for a relatively short period, between 1851-53 and from 1976 to the present. It was called the Mintaro Hotel in the intervening years.

In 1904 the hotel was extensively damaged by fire and rebuilt in its present form, probably fairly similar to the original building.



No 9
former Police Station
Burra Street

The police station was constructed in slate in 1867 by the Colonial Architect's Office after 84 Mintaro residents presented a petition to State Parliament for 'police protection' two years earlier. It was one of a number of community services established in the town between the 1860s and 1870s.

This building is a sophisticated example of a police station for the period and comprises the main building, attached wall exercise yard and cell block. Its elevated position and grand slate staircase form an imposing access on Burra Street.

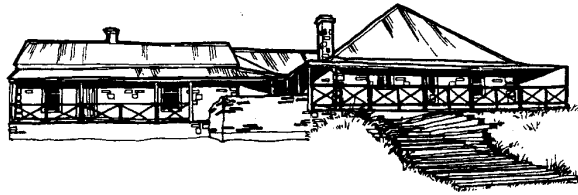


No 10
Thompson Priest's former House and
Paymaster's Office
Hill Street

These two buildings are fine examples of slate construction and were originally owned by Thompson Priest who managed the Mintaro Slate Quarry from the mid 1850s and the 1880s.

He purchased the Hill Street property in November 1855 for 30 pounds. He probably built his residence, illustrated above, soon afterwards. The simple square building next door was used as the pay office while he operated the quarry. It still has its original slate chimney surviving intact.

The fence along Hill Street has cast iron rails and the gate posts are made of large slate slabs.

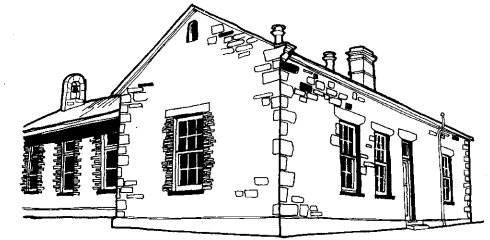


No 11
Miller's House
corner Church and Young Streets

Thompson Miller, a farmer, probably built this house shortly after he purchased the land in 1853.

It typifies an early domestic dwelling which evolved through a number of stages in construction. Its most distinctive feature is the unusual, almost pyramidal roof on the northern wing which replaced the original timber shingle hipped roof.

The view of Mintaro from this high vantage point gives the visitor an appreciation of the town's layout.

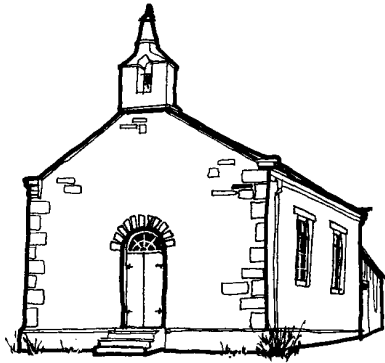


No 12
Mintaro Primary School
Church Street

This government school has been in continuous operation since its construction in 1872. It replaced a licensed school which was established in Mintaro in 1853. James Fry, headmaster of the licensed school, was responsible for instigating the approach to the Central Board of Education for the new school building. He was appointed the first headmaster and remained in this position until 1902.

The school cost 445 pounds to build and could accommodate 76 pupils. It incorporated a schoolroom with a belfry over the entrance and an attached three-room teacher's residence. The residential section was enlarged in the 1890s, presumably to accommodate the headmaster's growing family.

In 1922 the residential section was converted to classrooms when the school enrolment reached 105 pupils. A new residence was constructed a short distance from the school. Peak enrolment was recorded the following year with 106 pupils although the average number has fluctuated between 30-40 children.



No 13
Methodist Church, Church Hall and
Manse
Stein Street

This church group reflects the growth of Methodist congregations in the Clare district as more land was taken up for farming.

The 1854 Wesleyan Methodist Church, which later became the Hall, was the first church to be built in Mintaro. The larger Wesleyan Church next door was built in 1867.

The Wesleyan Parsonage was built in 1859 close to the 1854 church. It was originally a simple rectangular cottage and known as 'the mission house'. In 1891 three rooms and a passage were added on the northern side of the house.



No 14
Mintaro Cemetery
on road to Mintaro Slate Quarries

This picturesque cemetery, set behind an olive hedge, is located about one kilometre west of the town. It contains the earliest formal graves of settlers in the district.

Some of the early headstones dating from 1858-9 are of marble. There are some excellent examples of slate headstones from the Mintaro quarry, particularly those carved by Thompson Priest in the 1860s.

The graves of the Bowmans of Martindale and the Chewings of Kadlunga are located in the northern section of the cemetery. There was some early segregation of denominations and possibly even social classes in the early stages but these distinctions have become blurred over time.



No 15
Mintaro Slate Quarries

This is the oldest continuously functioning slate quarry in South Australia. It also produces the best quality slate in Australia which is outstanding for its strength and durability.

Slate was first discovered on Peter Brady's property in the early 1850s. In 1856 Brady leased the slate bearing area to Thompson Priest, an early Mintaro settler who began excavating the No 1 quarry, adjacent to the site of the original discovery.

He built a small office and foreman's house at the quarry, the ruins of which can still be seen on the site. For many years the flagstones were carried to Mintaro railway station by horse teams.

Following Thompson Priest's death in 1888, the company was taken over by a Melbourne firm but it languished during the 1890s Depression. In 1911 the Mintaro Slate and Flagstone Company was formed by a syndicate of local residents. It now functions as the Mintaro Slate Quarries and continues to be a major employer of local labour.

Mintaro slate has commanded a reputation, both locally and overseas, for its consistently high quality. In 1862, during Priest's operation of the quarry, Mintaro slate received an honourable mention at the London International Exhibition. It received a certificate of honour at the British Empire Exhibition in 1924.

In September 1931, Walter Lindrum, the world champion billiardist, wrote to the Mintaro Slate Company congratulating it on the quality of its billiard table slate.

In a match with Tom Newman, the English champion, Lindrum made the Australian record break of 2609 on a Mintaro slate billiard table. He said: 'I was surprised to know that Australia can produce a slate better than any that I have ever played on'.

Suggested Heritage and Scenic Walks Around Historic Mintaro and Environs

(All walks begin and end at the Institute Building in the main street)

Short Walk no. 1: 10-15 mins average 1/2km

Along Burra St (Mintaro's main street) Institute - Blacksmith's Shop - Houses - Shops - Colonial Police Station - Hotel - Institute

Short Walk no 2: 20-30 mins average 2km

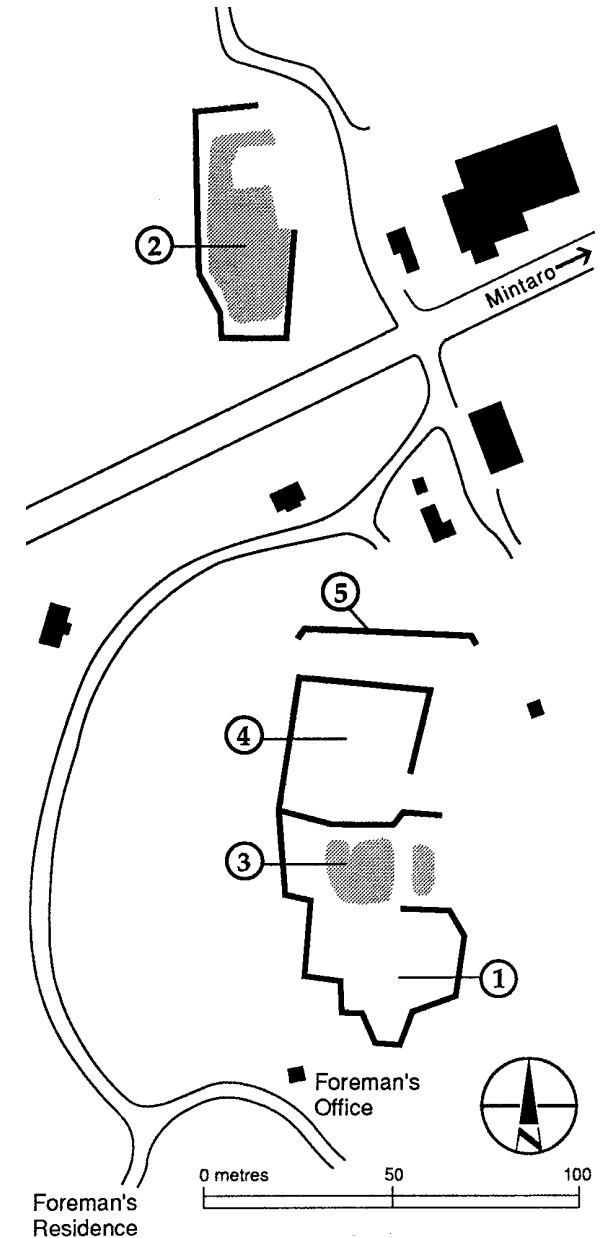
Burra St - Hill St - Young St - Burra St Institute - Churches - Vineyard - School - Houses - Shops - Hotel - Institute

Medium Walk no 3: 30-34 mins average 3 km

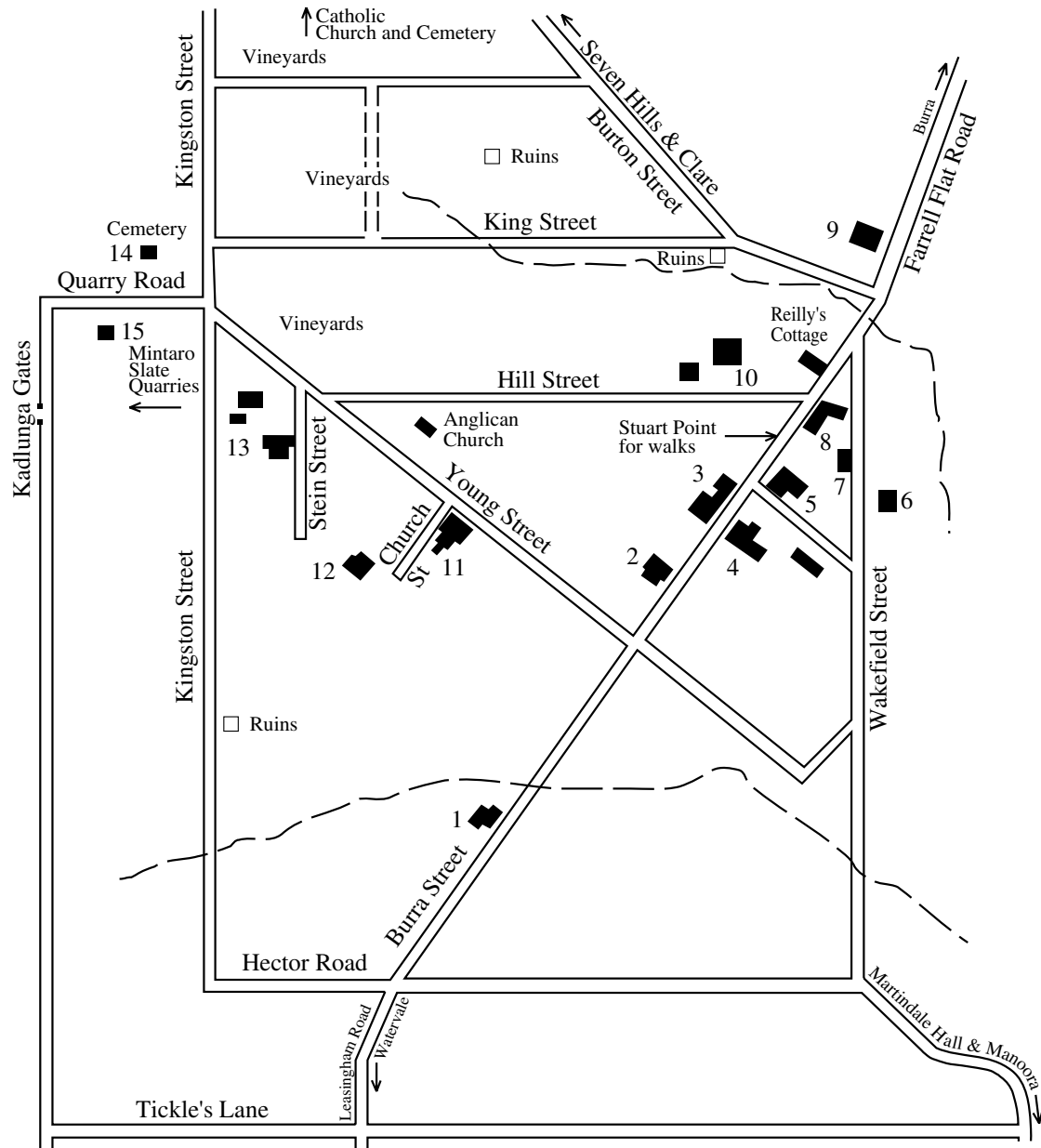
Burra St - Hill St - Young St - Burra St Institute - Churches - Vineyard - Cemetery - School - Blacksmith's Shop - Houses - Shops - Hotel - Institute

Medium Walk No 4: 45-55 mins average 4 km

Burra St - Hill St - Young St - Kingston St - Hector Rd - Burra St Institute - Churches - Vineyard - School - Cemetery - Winery - Blacksmith's Shop - Houses - Shops - Hotel - Institute



Sequence in which quarries opened
MINTARO SLATE QUARRIES



MINTARO TOWNSHIP



Long Walk No 5:

1-1 1/4 hrs average 5 km

Burra St - Hill St - Young St - Burra St - Hector Rd - Kingston St - King St - Burton St - Wakefield St Institute - Church - School - Vineyard - School - Houses - Blacksmith's Shop - Winery - Vineyards - Colonial Police Station - Hotel - Flour Mill Ruins - Institute

Long Walk No. 6:

1 1/4-1 1/2 hrs average 6 km

Burra St - Hill St - Young St - Hector Rd - Kingston St - Quarry Rd - King St - Burton St - Wakefield St Institute - Churches - School - Vineyard - Slate Quarry - Houses - Blacksmith's Shop - Winery - Cemetery - House Ruins - Colonial Police Station - Hotel - Flour Mill Ruins - Institute

Extra Long Walk No. 7

2-2 1/2 hrs average 7 km

Burra St - Hill St - Young St - Burra St - Hector Rd - Kingston St - Quarry Rd - Kingston St - Seven Hill Rd - Catholic Church Rd - Farrell Flat Rd - Wakefield St - Burra St Institute - Churches - School - Vineyard - Houses - Blacksmith's Shop - Winery - Slate Quarry - Cemetery - Catholic Church & Graveyard - Dog Coursing Track - Colonial Police Station - Hotel - Flour Mill Ruins - Institute

Super Long Walk No. 8

2 1/2 -3 1/2 hrs average 9 km

Burra St - Hill St - Quarry Rd - Tickle's Lane - Manoora Rd - Martindale Hall - Wakefield St - Burra St Institute - Churches - School - Vineyard - Cemetery - Slate Quarry - Kadlunga Gates - Tickle's Lane - Martindale Hall - Flour Mill Ruins - Hotel - Institute

Mintaro State Heritage Area

Mintaro is a remarkably well preserved and rare example of an early colonial rural town and is a strong physical reminder of the importance of copper and slate mining on its siting, layout and built form. Its cultural significance is enhanced by its picturesque setting in a valley of wheat fields which is surrounded by a broad band of hills. In 1984 the township of Mintaro was declared a State Heritage Area.

Mintaro's growth was short-lived and spontaneous. This can be seen in its close village settlement, irregular street plan and predominant mid nineteenth century stone buildings. There is no other town in South Australia to rival Mintaro for such an extensive use of slate. This durable material has been used in every possible way in features such as walls, roofs, window sills, posts, troughs, tanks, kerbs and steps.

Places within a State Heritage Area can be altered or developed, but it is necessary to obtain planning 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.

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

For more information about the Mintaro State Heritage Area see the State Heritage Areas of South Australia website www.stateheritageareas.sa.gov.au

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