Tales and Treasures of the Adelaide Park Lands

BUS TOUR

SOUTH AUSTRALIA HISTORY FESTIVAL

Tuesday, 14 May 2013
Introduction

Adelaide’s Park Lands are the City’s defining feature and greatest asset. The encircling sea of Park Lands creates a sense of grace and spaciousness sought by the City’s 1800s architect Colonel William Light. His plan for a series of parks to accommodate the “healthful recreation” of the City’s aspiring citizens is as relevant today as ever. The 760ha of green open space provides a rich social, environmental and recreational resource with opportunities for everyone – walking trails, cycle tracks, picnic areas, bird watching or secluded spots to watch the world go by.

The Park Lands also hold many untold stories, some of which are revealed here and through the bus tour for which this booklet serves as an accompaniment.

For further information we recommend “The Adelaide Park Lands – A Social History” by Patricia Sumerling and printed by Wakefield Press.

You can also visit Adelaide City Council’s Park Lands websites:
  - adelaidecitycouncil.com/
  - adelaideparklands.com.au/
  - adelaidecitycouncil.com/environment/park-lands/heritage1/cultural-landscape-study/
Reservoir
South Terrace, Adelaide

In the Park Lands near the intersection of South and East Terraces is a large raised earth mound that covers an old water supply reservoir. This park is Tuthangga (Park 17).
The reservoir was built in 1881 as a holding tank to supply Glenelg with water. The tank was decommissioned in 1928 and in 1982 was filled in and soil heaped around and over its walls.
Two thirds of the tank, which held 850,000 gallons or 3.86 mega litres (an olympic sized pool holds 2.5 mega litres), lies below the ground.
On the southern side of the tank is a remnant section of the old wrought iron fence. Also adjacent the site is a cast iron benchmark, which was part of a system of more than 30 such benchmarks (containing information relating to height above sea level) once located around Adelaide to ensure water and sewer flowed properly.

Victoria Square/Tarntanyangga
King William Street, Adelaide

Named after Princess Victoria, then heir to the throne of England, Victoria Square was laid out by Colonel Light in his original plan of the City of Adelaide in 1837 to provide an open space for the recreational activities of the citizens.
As part of the Adelaide City Council’s commitment to reconciliation with Aboriginal communities, places within the City have been given Kaurna names. The Square is now known as Victoria Square/Tarntanyangga which is derived from ‘tarnta = red kangaroo’ and ‘kanya = rock’.
In 1848, Governor Robe conveyed to Bishop Augustus Short an acre of land in the centre of Victoria Square as a site for a cathedral. The Bishop took possession of the site but the Corporation of the City of Adelaide refused to recognise his title to the land. Much controversy and litigation followed, and Bishop Short lost the case in 1855. The church was instead built in North Adelaide at the corner of King William Road and Pennington Terrace (St Peters Cathedral).
Elm Carriageway
South Terrace, Adelaide

John Ednie Brown (1848-99) was a passionate advocate of tree planting – a Scottish forest conservator, he came from a strong scientific and economic botany background. The Mayor at the time, William Buik, engaged Brown to prepare a “Report on a System of Planting for the Adelaide Park Lands (1880)”, much of which was implemented and is still in evidence today. The Report was so well-received that the subsequent Mayor, Edwin Smith, then engaged Brown as Conservator of Plantations (1882-83).

Brown’s Report is now considered an important work in the history of landscape architecture in Australia, with its emphasis on the Park and appropriate planting for each Park.

The carriageway in Tuthangga (Park 17) of English Elm is consistent with Brown’s 1880 Report except that his plan recommended Radiata Pine be planted. It is probable that the avenue was planted by City Gardener William O’Brien in the late 1860s and was then reflected in Brown’s Report. The design connects Hutt Road, with a graceful curve to the east through the Park to meet with another proposed, but not planted, drive to the south, with both drives opening into Beaumont Road (now closed) in the south-east corner of the Park.

It’s also interesting that the Carriageway led to the inaugural Australian site for Arbor Day which first occurred in Victoria Park/Pakapakanthi. This initiative first originated in Nebraska in 1872, with the event in Adelaide being held in 1887. It was officiated by Governor and Lady Kintore, together with about 5000 school children. Arbor Day was the forerunner to tree planting days and instrumental in raising an awareness of the importance of trees in the environment.

The Elm Carriageway comprises around 90 specimens, many of which suffered during the drought but are now irrigated.

Osmond Gardens
South Terrace, Adelaide

August Pelzer (1862-1934) was born in Bremen, Germany and appointed City Gardener in 1899 based on his highly-regarded expertise developed in Germany and England. He was able to systematically implement the Gardenesque landscape of the Park Lands, based on John Ednie Brown’s Report from 1880. He held his position until his death, during which time he had significant impact on development of the Park Lands landscape, influenced by his interest in selecting tree species suitable to the dry Adelaide climate. He was described at his death as “one of the leading authorities of arboriculture, floriculture and landscape gardening in Australia”.

During 1906, and amongst other projects, Pelzer began plans for Osmond Gardens to be developed over 6 acres. It involved construction work to build paths, bridges and rockeries, creating shrubberies and planting trees and lawns.

Named after Osmond Gilles, the first Colonial Treasurer and a member of the Street Naming Committee, the gardens were well-received by the public. This letter provides some insight – it was printed in The Advertiser on 2 February 1909 from Mr J G Russell, the Commissioner of Insolvency:

“...I heartily congratulate the council upon the success of planting Osmond Park, and I only wish it were opposite my home on Park Terrace (Greenhill Road). I have visited it three times lately, and I want to tell of my delight in spending an hour there yesterday (Sunday) afternoon. I estimated that about 300 persons were there. One could see their intense appreciation. They were enjoying the rest on seats, walking about admiring the beautiful flowers, and lying and sitting all over the lawns. The children in particular gave me much pleasure. They seemed to revel on the grassy slopes of what were so recently an untidy and dirty depression, used as a gutter for storm waters.”

Continued overleaf...
One of the two fountains associated with the Jubilee Exhibition Building on North Terrace was placed in Osmond Gardens in November 1909. This is the fountain which is now in Rundle Mall, the proposed relocation of which caused such controversy recently.

A toilet (now removed) was installed in 1912 and a rustic pergola was erected in 1913. In 1985, the Himeji Garden opened. This was part of the commitment of the cities of Adelaide and Himeji in Japan becoming sister cities and was built on part of Osmond Garden. The Himeji Garden is popular for quiet contemplation, and for weddings.

The photographs below indicate the Gardenesque planting character of Osmond Garden, designed to showcase garden beds, and an array of plants.

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Playgrounds
South Terrace, Adelaide

Glover Playground Pavilion – Local Heritage Place

Along South Terrace we can see two examples of early playgrounds in Adelaide. The first is the South Terrace Glover Playground. It is a credit to two individuals, August Pelzer (mentioned previously), City Gardener, who designed it, and Mayor Charles Glover who paid for it with funds he donated personally. Opened in 1919, this was the first playground in the Park Lands. It was originally designed with a girls area and a boys area, each with the same equipment.

The shelter shed is a Local Heritage Place and the symmetrically planted ash trees were part of the original design and are typical of the early Adelaide playgrounds. The playground had a supervisor who also recorded visitor numbers. Records indicate around 5000 children per month were using the playground by 1927-8.

In November 1919, the retired Mayor Glover donated further money towards the establishment of two other playgrounds, being the Glover Playgrounds on Lefevre Terrace North Adelaide and on East Terrace.

Glover’s other major initiative in the Park Lands during his tenure was his establishment of War Memorial Drive to recognise the fallen soldiers of WWII.
Veale Gardens
South Terrace, Adelaide

In 1957, Town Clerk Bill Veale went on a study tour to America, Canada, United Kingdom and Europe and returned inspired with what could be done in the Park Lands. Work began in Rymill Park in 1958, and then the work in Veale Gardens commenced in 1959. The plan included grottos, rockeries, statues and water features.

A key feature was the Alpine Restaurant, shown below in 1963. The restaurant was designed to be in keeping with what was called the "alpine" theme of the garden, based on an illustration of a Cincinnati restaurant Veale saw in the American periodical Architectural Record.

Veale Gardens exhibits the serpentine-style canal through its centre, and winding paths, designed to demonstrate the plantings and features throughout the Gardens, such as the rose garden, “Pan” designed by sculptor John Dowie, “The Couple” sculpted by Dutch immigrant Beren van der Struik in 1962, and the grottos installed 1962-3 into the mound.

The second playground we see along South Terrace was erected slightly later than the first but to a similar design and concept, as it was also designed by Pelzer. Its history is also a little different as, rather than being funded as a result of the philanthropy and social conscience of the Lord Mayor Charles Glover, the Princess Elizabeth Playground was established with unexpended funds arising from the 1927 visit of Their Royal Highnesses the Duke and Duchess of York. The playground was named in honour of their daughter, Princess Elizabeth, heir to the throne and now Elizabeth II.

Its design is similar to the other South Terrace playground, with the rectilinear layout, symmetrical plantings, and central shelter shed. The original shelter sheds, signage and early tree plantings are the remaining historical elements of these playgrounds.

Pelzer summarised the works which were undertaken to create the playground:

“The area is a little over one acre (0.4ha) in extent. Provision is made for a shelter-house, with supervisor’s room and lavatory accommodation. Two large plots have been planted with various flowering shrubs, cannas, and other herbaceous plants. A hedge has been planted along the southern boundary fence. Two large areas have been planted with lawn-grass, and shade trees have been planted. An open stormwater drain in this area has been diverted. A total of 18 pieces of apparatus of various kinds has been erected. Plenty of seating accommodation has been provided for”. (Annual Report 1928, p. 44).

The Playground was opened by the Lady Mayoress, Lady Bonython, on 17 September 1929, and Miss Grace Shannon was appointed ‘Supervisor’ of the playground.

The playgrounds seem to be intended for working class children in the main, and tended to be built close to poor and crowded areas, hence their popularity. Appointment of the supervisor revealed current thinking about children and their need for moral guidance, with many children playing at the playground while their parents were working, operating a little like a modern child care centre.
Cemetery – Former Crematorium
West Terrace, Adelaide

Cemetery & Chapel – State Heritage Place

Archaeological work is currently underway in the West Terrace Cemetery to unearth and preserve the remains of the first crematorium constructed in the Southern Hemisphere. The crematorium opened in 1903 amidst much publicity and controversy.

Land on the northern boundary of West Terrace Cemetery was granted by the State Government to the Cremation Society of South Australia for the construction of a crematorium. This followed the legalisation of cremation in South Australia after the 1891 Cremation Bill was passed – South Australia was the first state in Australia to legalise cremation.

The crematorium was designed by prominent Adelaide architect A. Barham Black and constructed by Isley and Co. It consisted of a chapel and a furnace room with a single cremation chamber and chimney in the design of an Italianate bell-tower. The furnace and associated equipment were imported from England.

The first cremation took place on 4 May 1903, but cremation took some time to gain acceptance among the community, with particularly strong resistance from the Catholic Church.

Once cremation became popular, the Adelaide Crematorium’s relatively antiquated design could no longer keep up with the demand. It ceased to operate in 1959 and was demolished in 1969.

During the crematorium’s 56 years of operation, 4762 cremations took place.

Adelaide High School
West Terrace, Adelaide

In 1908 three institutions were amalgamated to form Adelaide High School, the Model School, established in 1873, the Teachers’ Training School, established in 1876, and ‘The Advanced School for Girls’, established in 1891.

Increasing enrolments caused overcrowding and the conditions for teachers and students were most unsatisfactory. At the time the school was housed in five buildings in three locations, with playing fields located nearly a kilometre away.

A decision was made to erect a new school building for boys on the West Terrace site. A nation-wide competition for the design of the school attracted over sixty separate designs. The competition was won by Sydney architects Edward B. Fitzgerald and John K. Brogan in 1940. However, the outbreak of war delayed construction until 1947.

The new school was opened in 1951, having been constructed by A.W. Baulderstone. In 1977-78 the school became co-educational and in 1982 new additions, sympathetic to the original building, were opened.

At a State and local level the Adelaide High School is historically significant both because of its link with the state’s first high school, and as an example of post-war development. Its style and design reflect the influences of architectural modernism and the building is a wonderfully intact example of the style.
Former Observatory
West Terrace, Adelaide

The Observatory was built in 1880, on the site of the current Adelaide High School, as a result of the efforts of Sir Charles Todd, the State’s first Government Astrologer. His residence was included in the Observatory and he also kept records of the weather. This was also the site of the Weather Bureau from 1940-1977 which collected data until 1988. Todd’s main task was to observe the meridian passage of the stars for reference and to assist in time-keeping. There were telescopes on the site and the position of one of them became the benchmark for fixing the State’s boundaries. In 1921, the Adelaide Observatory contributed to the first measurement of the circumference of the earth by radiotelegraphy in 1921.

In the 1940s the complex was demolished and later Adelaide High School was built on the site. The astronomical equipment was sent to Adelaide University where it is still at the observatory at the University of Adelaide.

Former Emigration Square
West Terrace, Adelaide

Located in the west Park Lands between Hindley and Currie Streets, and to the west of what is now Adelaide High School, Emigration Square was the first point of temporary settlement for new arrivals to the colony.

Little is known about the settlement, which operated between 1838 and 1849, other than that it contained about 40 huts on a site measuring approximately 150m x 150m. Emigration Square operated after the very first settlement, known as Buffalo Row, which was located west of where the Adelaide Gaol now sits (reportedly between the Gaol and what was the Slaughter House – in the now Bonython Park).

The following passage from J N Perry’s diary (published in The Register 27 July 1911) provides a very good description of Emigration Square.

*Those who had been six weeks housed had to turn out... situate about half a mile due west of Currie Street, and about the same distance from the Gaol, which was being built then. The Square consisted of a good number of weatherboard houses which had been brought out from England in framework. These were fixed on brick about a foot from the ground, and had strong board floors, and gabled ends, with the door and window facing west and east. There was a division in the centre, and a good brick double chimney facing into each room, so that those occupying the rooms had a west front, and the others an east view. The hospital, the dispensary, and the resident’s doctor’s quarters were in the centre of the square. The rooms appeared to me about 15 feet square...*
Adelaide Survey Starting Point  
Corner West and North Terraces, Adelaide

Colonel William Light began the survey of the City of Adelaide on 11 January 1837. His starting point was the corner of North and West Terraces. The City and North Adelaide were divided into acre square blocks and this first ‘acre’ was called Town Acre Number 1, on part of which now stands the Newmarket Hotel.

Opposite Town Acre 1, on the northern side of North Terrace, was the Land and Survey Office, Light’s hut, and that of the first Resident Commissioner, James Hurtle Fisher. Colonel Light’s wooden hut later burnt down, destroying many of his records.

The holders of preliminary purchase orders – those who bought land in England in 1835 – had the right to a choice of one Town Acre and 80 country acres after surveys had been completed. Light finished the survey of the new city by the middle of March, but at that time only twenty-five purchasers had arrived in South Australia; others were represented by family or agents. A ballot was conducted to decide the order in which preliminary purchasers selected their Town Acres; the remaining acres were then sold by auction at prices ranging from £2 – £14. The acquisition of country acres had to wait until surveys around Adelaide had been completed.

A bronze tablet on a granite obelisk on the corner of North and West Terraces was unveiled on 16 July 1929 to commemorate Colonel Light’s work.

The location of the monument will form the plaza entrance to the New Royal Adelaide Hospital. The monument is currently being stored off-site and will be restored and relocated within the new Plaza.

Information courtesy of the Professional Historians Association (SA).

Former Sheep and Cattle Market  
Opposite the Newmarket Hotel – North Terrace, Adelaide

From the 1880s, a sheep and cattle market grew on the site opposite the Newmarket Hotel, in conjunction with a similar facility which operated alongside the slaughterhouse in what is now Bonython Park/Tulya Wardli.

The sheep and cattle were often driven along the western edge of the western Park Lands into the yards.

By 1912, with the opening of the Gepps Cross Yards, the markets opposite the Newmarket Hotel were closed and the land given over to rail yards.

Extract of a plan depicting ‘Depasturing in the North Western Park Lands dated 1895. Importantly this plan delineates the positions of the “Sheep Market”, “Park 25A”, Slaughterhouse Road, the extent of the “Plantation of Olives” (Olea europaea), the location of the “Gaol Reserve” and “Powder Magazines”, the newly fenced “Cattle Market” yards associated with the Slaughterhouse, the access road from “Port Road” to the Slaughterhouse, and the “Slaughter House” grounds as possibly fenced. Source, Adelaide City Council Archives.

The Yards Market Building, circa 1913 – Adelaide City Council Archives HP1445.

The former location of the Survey Point monument, and the plaque.

Cattle Yards and Sheep Pens, circa 1913 – Adelaide City Council Archives HP1440.
Adelaide Bridge
King William Street, Adelaide

This bridge was opened on 5 March 1931.

It was the third bridge on this site and the fifth built to provide access to and from the City and North Adelaide across the Torrens.

By 1920 the old City Bridge (erected in 1877) had become overloaded causing congestion, particularly when trams were crossing the bridge. The City Council decided to do away with the bottleneck by providing a bridge 132 feet wide with footpaths and carriage way of the same dimensions as King William Street. The design was by the city engineer, Mr J. L. Hyndman and involved a three-hinge reinforced concrete structure. Four bronze plaques depicting historical images and impressive concrete lighting poles complete the graceful structure.

Pirltawardli
Park 1, North Adelaide

Between 1838 and 1845, on what is now the Par-3 Golf Course (opposite the restaurant adjacent the weir), there existed what was referred to as the “Native Location” or “Aborigines Location”.

The location was called Pirltawardli in the Kaurna language, which loosely translates as ‘possum place’.

The ‘Native Location’ was intended by the colonial government to concentrate local aborigines in one place and provide them with an education. This location has strong cultural values to today’s Kaurna community.

Over time, the location grew to include a school, stores and various housing ‘sheds’.

The first Colonial Store was erected on the upper reaches of the present Golf Course where European food and manufactured goods were sold and where Kaurna and European ‘offenders’ were executed by hanging in the 1840s.

The Native Location was operated by Lutheran Missionaries, Teichelmann and Schurmann, who did a commendable job of recording the Kaurna language.

During the development of the Par-3 Golf Course evidence of bones and building materials were uncovered. Renovations to the ground surface of the golf course have disguised the site of the Store.

As part of the Adelaide City Council’s commitment to reconciliation with Aboriginal communities, places within the City have been given Kaurna names. Park 1, The Golf Course, is known as “Pirltawardli”.

Architectural drawing of the City Bridge, King William Street, Adelaide, circa 1930. State Library of South Australia, B 62531.

City Bridge, King William Road, on the day of its official opening, 5th March 1931. State Library of South Australia, B 6052.

Extract from the Kingston Map, 1842, showing the ‘Aborigines Location’ in relation to the Iron Store and Gaol.

‘The school room of the Aborigines at the Native Location, 1843’. Watercolour by W. A. Cawthorne (Mitchell Library).
Torrens Weir
River Torrens, Adelaide

Damming the River Torrens to create a lake was an obvious solution to ensure that it remained full of water for aquatic and recreational purposes.

The first attempt was in 1867 when the Sheriff of the Adelaide Gaol used prison labour to build a wooden dam. It was destroyed by floods in 1872.

Mayor Edwin Smith is credited with the vision that eventually became reality. Construction of a simple concrete weir began in 1880, and the Torrens Weir was officially opened on 21 July 1881 – almost the entire population of the City was present.

This was one of the first uses of concrete in a civil engineering project in Australia: the cement was imported from England and the aggregate came from Aldgate.

In 1889, a serious flood overwhelmed the new weir and jammed its gates. In 1917, the City Engineer, Joseph Richardson, prepared plans to replace the centre section of the weir with two flood gates which could regulate an overflow of two metres and be fully raised to allow the river to run unimpeded. The weir was reopened in 1929 and still operates today.