In Adelaide at present there is a remarkable exhibition of Aboriginal art called ‘Dreamings’, which has finally come home to the South Australian Museum after an acclaimed tour of the United States. The Dreaming is the religious concept central to such expressions of traditional Aboriginal culture. It is explained as not only the founding story of the Australian landscape occupied by Aboriginal societies but also as the spiritual dimension of their present lives. In Peter Sutton’s words:

‘...Things contain their own histories. There is no contrast of the natural and the spiritual, and there is no geography without history and meaning.’

Old European concepts of landscape also recognised the connections between people and land. Landscape included both natural and cultural aspects and indeed it was understood as a natural setting changed by humans. ‘...In other words, landscape documented the continuum of cultural change.’ Today, the notion that the landscape, after more than 150 years of European settlement in South Australia, is a historical document and spiritual framework for people of European as well as Aboriginal descent, is much less widely understood. Yet there is no doubt that for many South Australians the landscape is the repository of personal, family and community memory.

Apart from these local attachments there are scholars, particularly geographers, who have long considered the landscape as cultural artefact. Yet these folk and formal perceptions of the land as historical document do not seem to have meshed.

In this respect, unlike the traditional Aboriginal societies, formal knowledge is divorced from emotional attachments, spiritual connections and personal experience. David Lowenthal makes the same point, even in the title of his best-known work, *The Past is a Foreign Country*. In 1985, addressing the First World Congress on Heritage Presentation and Interpretation, he said:

‘Heritage is increasingly valued and interpreted because, although we know more about nature and the past than ever before, we live less with them than ever before. Everyday habits and traditions formerly made heritage a living part of the present; the increasing pace of change has severed us from it. Nature has become scenery; archives have become memory. The past and the countryside are no longer part of our present-day world but foreign lands, terrains minutely explored by scholars but remote to most moderns...’

Lowenthal’s argument is a persuasive one. He is referring to literate, urban, immigrant, capitalist societies such as the one which predominates in Australia. Those attributes, that is, mass-literacy based on formal and imported forms of education, rapid urbanisation, the recent arrival of much of the population, and the demands of a growth-oriented capitalist economy, have indeed divorced such societies from much of the traditional past. Traditional lifestyles may be embedded in an historical landscape so many hundreds or even thousands of years old that social awareness of history is automatic and omnipresent. But Lowenthal’s description suggests that such an unchanging and unquestioned heritage alone is genuine, which implies an antiquarian or static view of history.

History was not left behind when families took ship for Port Adelaide. Regardless of the pace of change, all that surrounds us and the things that we believe and do are based upon the past: at the simplest physical level, most of us live, work, study, worship or play in buildings constructed up to a century or more ago. These buildings were set within street or rural layouts which were determined by surveyors up to 150 years ago, and both the forms of architecture and cadastral survey drew on British antecedents which were much older again.

Historians and others similarly engaged can help restore general appreciation of the direct link between past and present by combining in their work formal studies and a recognition of Australians’ personal experiences. They are helped by the fact that many thousands of people in societies such as ours are seeking to understand their past by active involvement in history research, heritage conservation and historical visits (which are a major form of cultural tourism). There is an increasingly popular recognition of the need to re-establish connections with the past. That great popular need is being only gradually recognised by institutions and government agencies. In that process also, the role of historians is considerable.

Not all historical processes and events are expressed in the landscape and its historical structures and sites.
However, careful selection of a wide range of these places, their conservation and interpretation, will reveal much of our past. Even those remains can confuse and subvert people's understanding of history. For example, houses built of durable brick and stone are most likely to have survived but this misrepresents the situation in the past when many South Australians lived in huts of mud, timber or reeds, and, more recently, made homes out of sheets of flattened iron and opened-out wheat bags. Nor must we wade in long skirts through horse-dung and mud to visit the handsome Adelaide Town Hall and GPO in King William Street.

It is just as important to emphasise that history may also be discovered by other means, both through formal records, books and museums and in the memories, customs and everyday lives of the people. No historical tour or heritage brochure is complete without introducing participants and readers to these other evidences of the past.

The interpretation and understanding of the landscape is enriched by using these other forms of evidence. As a result, some broad processes of history as well as the subtleties of past lives may be read from its physical remains. From this heritage may be read such aspects of the South Australian historical experience as the relationship between climate and the extent of agricultural settlement, the adaptive use of local, imported and manufactured materials such as limestone, red gum and galvanised iron, and the formation and growth of towns and suburbs.

Connections with histories of Australia and the world at large may also be made. For example, British and German colonists created here a New World 'settler society' in the context of mass migration from nineteenth-century Europe; this was tied-in with the rise of world trade based on the expansion of capitalism, reinforced by the local use of new technologies, especially in transport and communications. It is not only possible to make these connections but essential that world events, local environment and society are related to the physical heritage.

It is also essential that heritage be located within a chronology. In interpreting heritage whether you attempt to provide a broad-scale explanation of South Australia's history or restrict the explanation to a locality or a single subject, it makes sense only if you work forward from the past to the present and back and forth between them to help the audience connect past with present.

Context and chronology are the big imperatives of historical interpretation but there are others which may be a matter of choice. It is important that this fact - that one is choosing between alternative views of history - should be conveyed as well as the historical facts themselves. Just as each Aboriginal artist may paint a different version of the same Dreaming story, each individual interpretation of particular historical structures and sites may legitimately differ.

Which history should be told through interpreting the remains of the past, and whose history? In the report, Historical Guidelines and subsequent heritage studies, I strove to include diverse social groups and activities within a framework for heritage surveys in South Australia.\(^6\) When reviewed in the journal *The Public Historian* this work was said to adopt the modern historical approach known as 'the new social history' which also characterises material culture studies in the United States.\(^7\) That is, heritage is interpreted principally in terms of social rather than political or economic history, and is inclusive of all social groups rather than simply great men.

In interpreting heritage we can tell of failure as well as of success, depict the varying fortunes of the different social groups in South Australia, demonstrate conflict, compromise and the long-term consequences, good and ill, of what were once heroic enterprises.

I would like to expand on several points I have made so far about historical interpretation and to introduce aspects of South Australia's history rather than to simply impress you with the wealth and splendour of its heritage.

However, the process of selection, registration and protection of, for example, industrial and domestic buildings of the twentieth century, is only in its infancy and the Register of State Heritage Items is still weighted towards the picturesque, the rare and the antique.

**Raukkan (formerly Point McLeay)**

The plaque reads:

Under a tree growing here the Rev. George Taplin founded this mission in 1859 on behalf of

![Image of Point McLeay on Lake Alexandrina.](image-url)
the Aborigines' Friends' Association and instructed the original native inhabitants resulting in their adoption of the Christian faith.

A historical reading of this landscape would not be nearly so straightforward. The simplest description would show how, under Taplin's direction, within twenty years the Ngarrindjeri people had built a village beside Lake Alexandrina which included the church, seen here beside the hall, a school, store, farm, staff houses and cottages (Fig 1). The settlement is now run by the descendants of the Ngarrindjeri.

However, several histories may be read from these physical remains, perhaps most importantly, the historical continuities with an ancient society long predating and then accommodating itself to British colonisation.

Reeves Point, Kangaroo Island

An uninformed visitor could miss the historical character of this landscape altogether, yet it is one of the most significant in the State. In other words, more than most, it needs interpretation. Several interpretations are possible.

First, the locality should rightly be acclaimed as the site in 1836 of Kingscote, the first formal British settlement in South Australia (Fig 2). Second, it was a complete failure, the first but by no means the last example of the failure which is always attendant upon pioneering.

Third, the site exhibits evidence of both the original settlement (its appearance documented in surviving paintings and sketches) and of subsequent land use, for example, the cemetery, stock grazing and the South Australian Company quarry. Finally, the site has assumed some mythic qualities for South Australians, centred on the cemetery and in particular the 'old mulberry tree' which is said to have been planted at the time of arrival but no one can agree by whom.

Red gum at Payneham

This natural landscape feature has become a symbolic historical object. The River Red Gum *E. camaldulensis*, the most widespread gum tree in Australia, covered much of the site of metropolitan Adelaide. This old gum encircled by suburban roads speaks for itself of the historical processes which have occurred since settlement. But its nomination as an item on the State Heritage Register also reflects the special significance ancient red gums have assumed for many South Australians. They represent a living link with the natural landscape prior to 1836.

Red gum was used extensively as a structural timber although its characteristics dictated an adaption of established European techniques. In South Australia there are many surviving examples of the use of red gum in houses, industrial works and transport structures such as bridges, jetties and railway sleepers.  

Cordillo Downs woolshed

There is no timber growing in Sturt's Stony Desert. Cordillo Downs woolshed graphically illustrates human adaptation to and use of even the harshest country (Fig 3). The massive shearing shed at Cordillo Downs was built in 1883 of pug and sandstone with a curved roof of corrugated galvanised iron which was carried inland by camels, along with the wool scour and several large steam engines. At its peak as a sheep station, up to 80,000 sheep a year were shorn here by dozens of shearsers, many of whom travelled to the shed by pushing bicycles over the sandhills.

The use of local and imported materials and construction techniques is but one interpretation of this building. The construction of a woolshed of this size and scale, in one of the remotest and most inhospitable places on Earth, was possible only because of the large capital resources of the leaseholders, Peter Waite, Thomas Elder and Robert Barr-Smith, who formed one of the most successful pastoral partnerships in Australian history.

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Fig 2 Reeves Point, Kangaroo Island.

Fig 3 Cordillo Downs woolshed, Far North-East of South Australia.
The introduction and extension of pastoralism, based mainly on sheep, was crucial to the social and economic development of the colony, as it was in most parts of Australia. Within 30 years pastoralists had penetrated to the furthest reaches of the colony. Cordillo Downs was about as far as one could get in South Australia from reliable transport, sources of labour and supply, all of which were essential to an industry wholly geared to overseas markets.

The City of Adelaide
The capital city site was selected in 1836. It was laid out in 1837 and building construction began at once. The eastern end of Government House was completed by 1840. Imported timber houses were erected but were soon attacked by termites, and builders turned to the ubiquitous limestone and locally-made bricks, and later, more durable building stones such as bluestone. The following buildings exhibit many aspects of South Australian history but predominantly urban development during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Three houses represent social differences as well as changes over time, from the 1850s to the 1880s. The first was a cottage built by a German colonist in Stanley Street, lower North Adelaide. The second, Bishop's Court, high up on the ridge at North Adelaide, housed the first Anglican Bishop and his family. The third, Dimora, was built during an economic boom for the son of a wealthy politician on fashionable East Terrace in Adelaide.

Immigrants swelled the colonial population and local production and overseas trade increased colonial wealth. The public and commercial buildings of the city became more elaborate and a greater diversity of social and cultural pursuits found expression in the built form. Buildings which are typical of the many dating from the period between about 1880 and 1910 include: the Adelaide Benevolent and Strangers' Friend Society hall; the Mitchell building at the University of Adelaide; Botanic Hotel; the bank now known as Edmund Wright House; and a former warehouse and printing works.

The suburbs along Port Road
Except for some ruins and places which were soon abandoned, the physical heritage rarely represents fixed moments in history. The constantly changing suburbs of cities such as Adelaide best demonstrate heritage as a historical process.

Like Perth, the city of Adelaide was located some distance from the sea, despite its dependence upon shipping, hence the rapid growth from 1840 of Port Adelaide. The scale and design of the police station and customs house, both dating from 1860, indicate the importance of the colony’s major port.

Inevitably, the land alongside the highway between city and port was soon converted from wheat farming to suburban, industrial and commercial uses. The process was most rapid at the city-end in Hindmarsh, which was subdivided by the first Governor and bought by working men and small proprietors. A dense and tightly-knit urban working class community is apparent in this district, bisected by the Port Road: there are many old attached cottages such as those in Chapel Street, numerous Christian churches and missions, such as the Good Shepherd in Bowden, and equally numerous hotels, such as the Jolly Miller. They stood cheek-by-jowl with workshops, brickworks and industrial complexes. Their remains include the South Australian Gas Company's gasworks at Bowden, the first sections of which were constructed in the 1860s, and wool scouring plants which drew on and discharged into the waters of the River Torrens. These buildings include the surviving premises of G.H. Michell and Sons which date from around 1896.

Development along the City-Port axis was reinforced by the construction of a government-owned railway in 1856. Two of the stations still stand at Bowden and Alberton. The earliest surviving railways building at the Port Adelaide terminus is the large goods shed which was built when trade expanded in the 1870s. This is now part of the Port Dock Railway Museum.

Tanunda
It is important to re-emphasise that the countryside as well as the town itself are human constructs, particularly in regions like the Barossa. After Adelaide and its surrounds, the original surveys of country land focused on the best-watered and most fertile country nearest the city or the sea. The well-watered Mount Lofty Ranges attracted early attention from land-purchasers, amongst them the agent for a merchant in England who was a founder and an active promoter of South Australia. George Fife Angas' promotion extended to supporting the emigration of several shiploads of German settlers, some of whom moved onto Angas' land in the fertile Barossa Valley in the early 1840s.

From around 1850 the township of Tanunda developed as the largest German settlement and one of the main towns in the region. Its continued prosperity was assured both by the diligence of the people and by the development of the region firstly for wheat growing and pasture and then as vineyards.

Both the patterns of development common to Australian country towns and its special German characteristics are apparent in the town today. There are four Lutheran churches, the first of which was Langmeil Church. Tanunda quickly absorbed Langmeil and in the 1850s the town centre grew about the marketplace called Goat Square. The focus
soon shifted to Murray Street, the main thorough street, where commercial buildings like Auricht’s Printing Office were constructed (Fig 4).

German customs have continued to exert an influence, not only in such matters as religion and food but also in popular social pursuits such as bands and playing Kegel (a form of bowling). Normally, one would not give a second glance to such a mundane-seeming wood and iron structure of recent but uncertain date as the Kegel Club alley at the Tanunda Oval.

Yet this building accommodates a game which has been enjoyed for hundreds of years, uninterrupted by transfer from one side of the world to the other or by the impact of mass entertainment.

**Conclusion**

Even the most subtle of landscapes, the most modest or banal structures, gargantuan and utilitarian buildings – or, one might say, especially these – are significant indicators of the past and its continuing presence. This is South Australia and that is what visitors, whether from within the State or beyond, wish to see and understand.

**Endnotes**

This paper was presented with slides to illustrate aspects of South Australia’s heritage.


