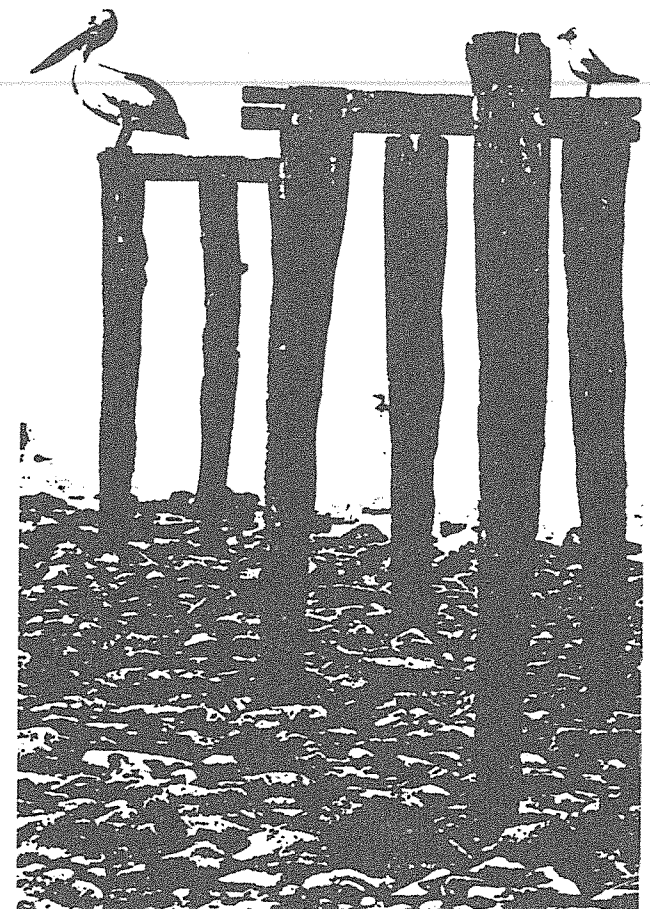
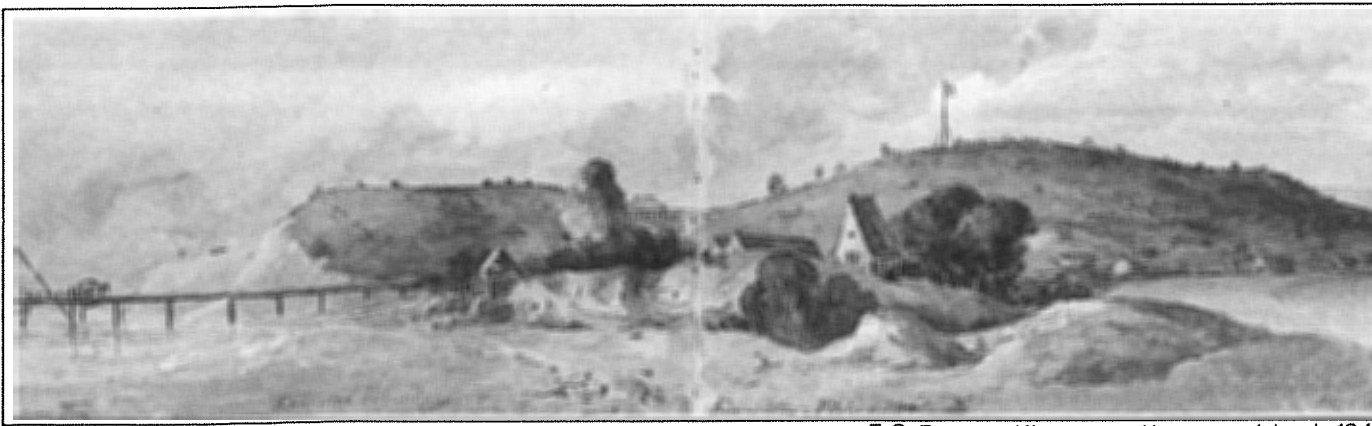


REEVES POINT HISTORIC SITE





E.C. Frome: Kingscote, Kangaroo Island, 1840

REEVES POINT HISTORIC SITE

On 27 July, 1836, the *Duke of York* anchored in Nepean Bay, Kangaroo Island. So began the first formal settlement in South Australia, at the place now known as Reeves Point. This enterprise was sponsored by the South Australian Company, with the approval of the British Government.

High hopes were held for the settlement, then called Kingscote, but it was to last less than four years. At its peak some 300 people lived there and 42 dwellings and other buildings were constructed. Although many industries were planned to support the enterprise, none succeeded. The site proved to be unsuitable—it lacked fresh water, the soil was poor, the vegetation dense and difficult to clear. In addition, the South Australian Company failed to obtain title to the land. As a consequence the Company withdrew most of its employees and its equipment at the end of 1839.

Today, the site of this settlement remains as testimony to the hopes and aspirations of the early pioneers. In 1982 it was placed on the South Australian Register of State Heritage Items.

Establishing A New Colony

The colonisation of South Australia came late in the settlement of Australia by Europeans. It was an experiment involving new principles promoted by Edward Gibbon Wakefield and it attempted to overcome the problems experienced by other colonies. Land was to be sold rather than given away and the income used to fund the migration of labourers. The colony was to be a settlement without convicts, with a degree of self-government, and free enterprise promoted.

After many years of intense lobbying the British Government passed the *South Australian Colonization Act* in 1834, and it provided the legal basis for a colony to be settled by British subjects. A Board of Governors was established to control land sales and migration.

The British Government insisted that the new colony be self-supporting, and to ensure this, preliminary land orders were sold prior to settlement, but, not surprisingly, unsurveyed land in an unknown colony proved to be difficult to sell, and this created problems for the foundation of the new community.

The South Australian Company

The price of land was reduced because of poor sales, and George Fife Angas together with Henry Kingscote and Thomas Smith purchased the remaining land orders and transferred them to the newly formed South Australian Company. The Company intended to pursue various commercial activities in South Australia, and in particular grazing of sheep and cattle, and whaling. Kangaroo Island was selected because of its proximity to the whaling grounds and because the Company believed the reports of early explorers who stated that the island appeared suitable for farming and grazing. Many of the passengers of the first ships to arrive in South Australia were Company employees who had been selected because they had skills appropriate to farming and whaling.

Settlement at Reeves Point

Life in the new settlement must have been harsh, for the settlers had only those items which they had carried with them from England. The voyage to South Australia took three months or more, and

settlers often arrived exhausted and in poor health. Land had to be cleared and a water supply assured before they could plant crops or raise animals.

From the very beginning the water supply at Reeves Point was uncertain; wells dug at the settlement quickly turned brackish, and the only permanent water was a spring eight kilometres to the west across the Bay of Shoals. The vegetation was difficult to clear and the local timber proved to be unsuitable for roof shingles.

Once the land was cleared, the soil was found to be poor. Life was miserable during the first few months, for it was winter and there were only tents in which to live. Settlers continued to arrive; in mid 1837 there were 120 people, and at the end of the year the population numbered 300. By then several stone and wooden structures had been built and whaling had commenced.

Because of continuing difficulties the South Australian Company decided to abandon the site, and after 1837 no more permanent structures were built. It was not only the lack of water and poor soil that prompted this decision; the Company had not, as expected, gained title to the land and were reluctant to invest further in the site. For a variety of reasons the whaling industry had not succeeded, and so, in turn, the boat-building and cooperage industries did not develop. In 1838 Company employees started to drift away to the mainland, and in 1839 the Company abandoned the site and removed as much of its equipment as possible. The only Company employee to remain was a caretaker. After the Company abandoned the site a few settlers stayed on, and when the land had been surveyed it was used mainly for grazing.

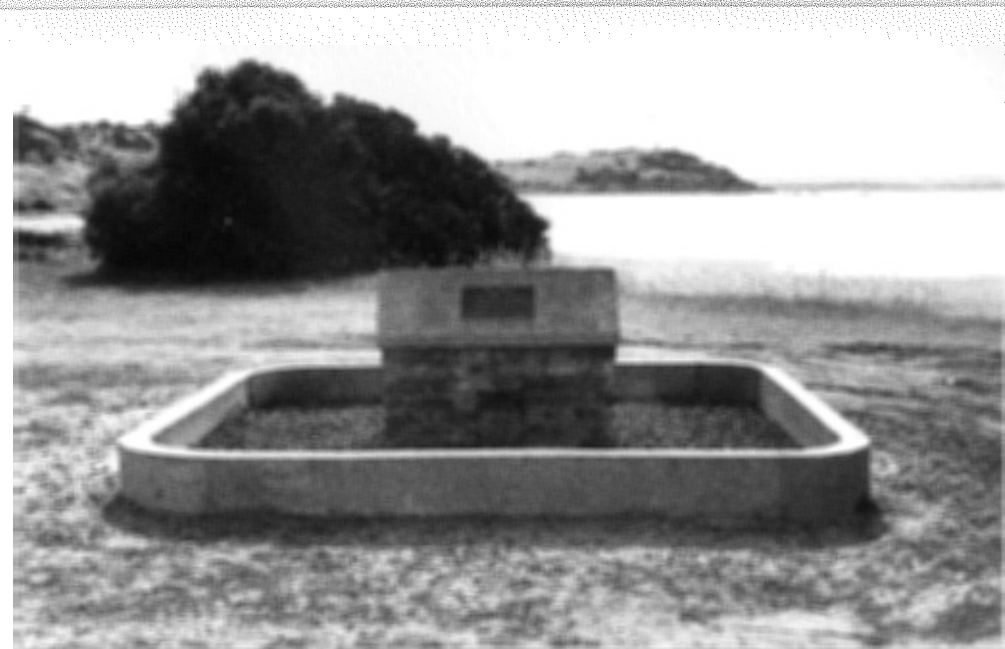
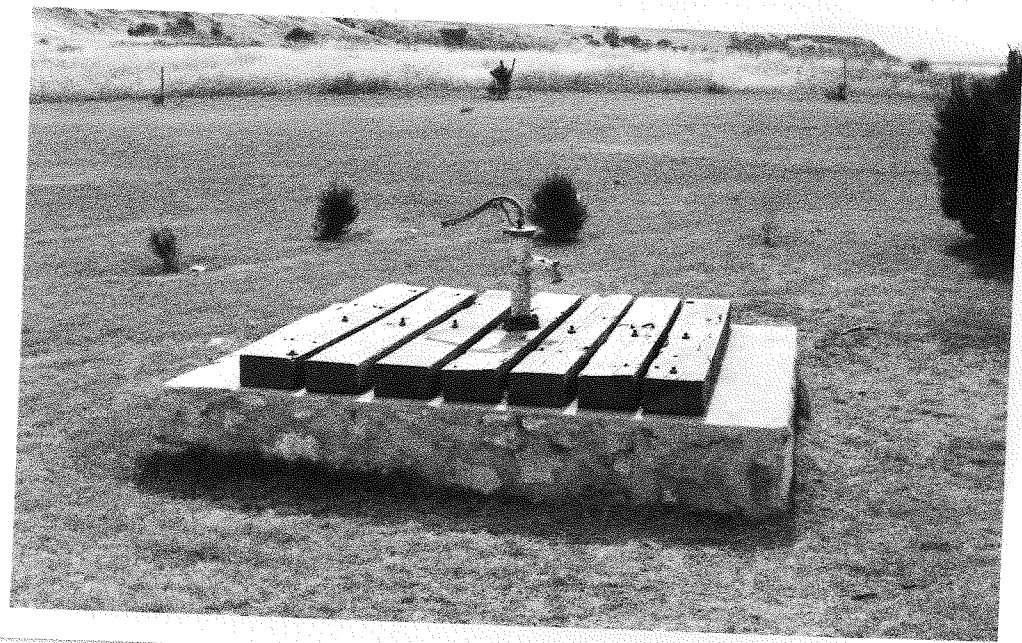
Reeves Point Today

Today, visitors can drive to the site or walk from Kingscote, and can picnic and stroll around the remains of South Australia's first formal settlement.

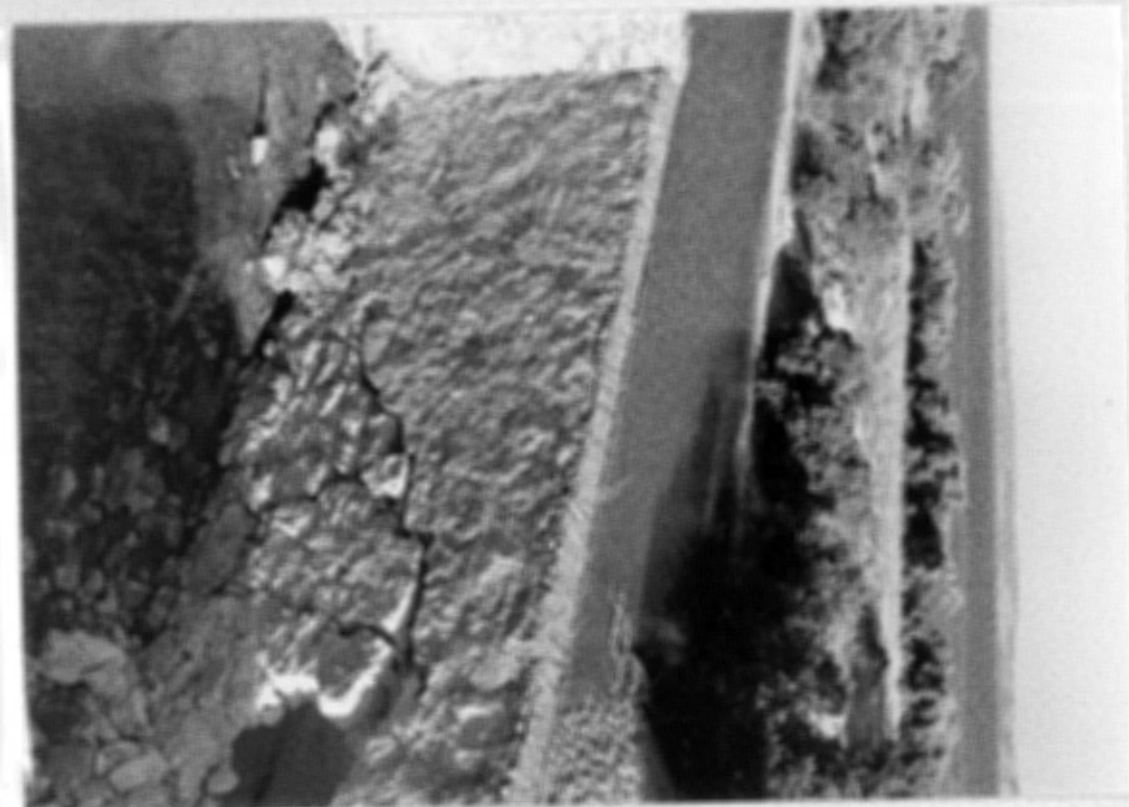
Further Enquiries

District Council of Kingscote
State Heritage Branch
Department of Environment and Planning
G.P.O. Box 667
Adelaide 5001
Ph. (08) 216 7777

Illustr. courtesy of Art Gallery of South Australia









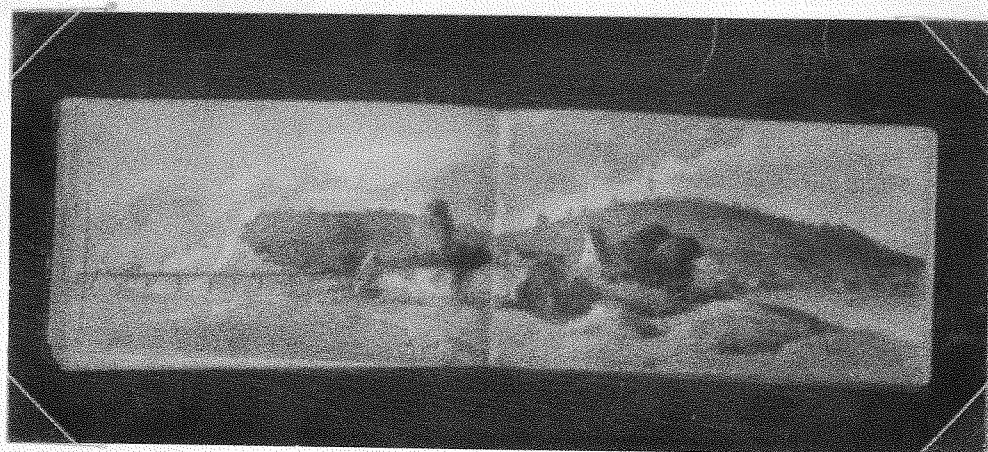




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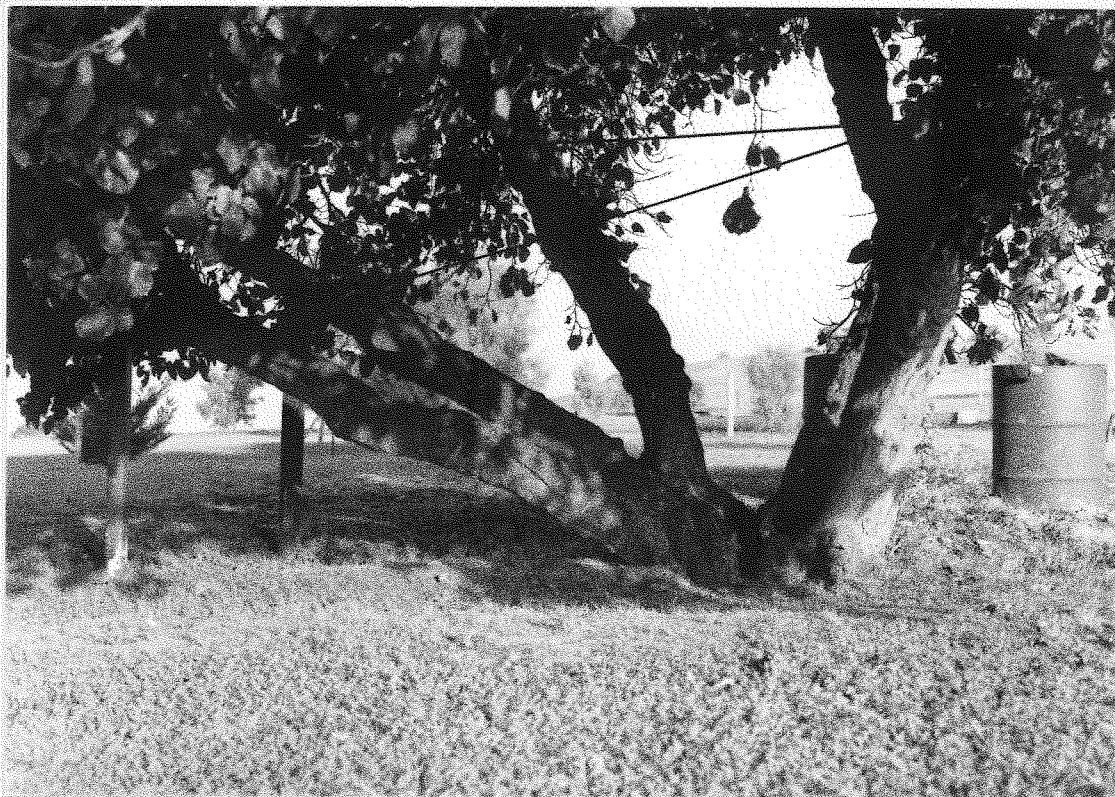




Kingscote (Frame Collection)

DOCKET M.D. 238/1969.

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[Photo by K.T. Borrows]



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