

BETTER HERITAGE INFORMATION SUMMARY OF STATE HERITAGE PLACE

COMMENTARY ON THE LISTING

Description and notes with respect to a place entered in the South Australian Heritage Register in accordance with either the *South Australian Heritage Act 1978* or the *Heritage Places Act 1993*.

The information contained in this document is provided in accordance with s14(6) and s21 of the *Heritage Places Act 1993*.

REGISTERED NAME: Former Government Residency

PLACE NO.: 12546

ALSO KNOWN AS: Robe House

ADDRESS: Bunganditj Country
1A Hagen Street
Robe SA 5276
CT 5225/626 D40810 A201
Hundred of Waterhouse

CONFIRMED IN THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN HERITAGE REGISTER:

12 January 1984

STATEMENT OF HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

The Former Government Residency at Robe, erected in c.1849 and replacing the earlier structure built in 1847, demonstrates the government's understanding of the importance of Robe's port and the town's intended role as the major service centre for the South East. It was built to house the Government Resident, an officer responsible for establishing and administering a range of services at Robe in the early years of the colony prior to the establishment of local government. During the 1850s and 1860s, the house went on to become a part of the administrative centre of the South East.

RELEVANT/INDICATIVE CRITERIA (under section 16 of the *Heritage Places Act 1993*)

(a) it demonstrates important aspects of the evolution or pattern of the State's history

The South Australian colonial government appointed Government Residents to several locations in the early years of the colony as a part of the expansion of government administration and to ensure the provision and administration of a range of services to colonists. Robe was established as a government seaport town in 1846 to support the nascent wool industry located throughout the colony's South East. It was declared as an open port the following year and went on to become one of South Australia's most important and lucrative ports during the 1850s and 1860s.

A Government Resident was appointed to Robe in 1846, demonstrating the government's understanding of the importance of the port and Robe's intended role as the major service centre for the South East. At Robe the Government Resident was chiefly responsible for initiating essential building projects, protecting the interests of settlers and First Nations people, supplying provisions for First Nations people, ensuring law and order, and tracking arrivals and departures.

The first Government Residency was erected quickly in early 1847 and was then substantially rebuilt as a limestone structure one or two years later making it the first permanent house to be built at Robe. In the 1850s and 1860s, the Former Government Residency became a part of the administrative centre for the entire South East, alongside the Courthouse and Police Complex (SHP 10362). In 1869, the Government Resident at Robe became a redundant role due to the establishment of the District Council and other towns in the South East assuming key government responsibilities, notably Mount Gambier.

SITE PLAN

Former Government Residency
1A Hagen Street, Robe SA 5276




PLACE NO.: 12546



Robe House (bottom left) in relation to the Courthouse and Police Complex (SHP 10362) (right). Robe House, 1A Hagen Street, Robe SA 5276, CT 5225/626 D40810 A201, Hundred of Waterhouse.

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LEGEND

-  Parcel boundaries (Indicates extent of Listing)
-  Outline of Elements of Significance for State Heritage Place
-  Existing State Heritage Place

Physical Description

The Former Government Residency is a rectangular building constructed of quarried limestone. It is covered under paired hipped roofs clad with corrugated galvanised steel. There are two stone chimneys, one with two pots on the ridge of the south-eastern hip of the roof, the other with one pot towards the bottom of the north-eastern hip of the roof.

A lean-to kitchen with limestone walls is located towards the rear. The kitchen is clad in corrugated steel with a sloping corrugated steel roof. A fascia runs along the sides. There is an infill structure on corner (not original fabric).

The front elevation faces Hagen Street to the west and has a symmetrical façade with a timber framed double door in the centre with two timber framed multi-paned casement windows with stone windowsills on either side. The south elevation features three timber framed double doors (not original fabric) with multi-paned windows.

A bullnose verandah clad in corrugated galvanised steel runs along the front or western and southern elevations (not original fabric).

Elements of Significance:

Elements of heritage significance include (but are not necessarily limited to):

- The Former Government Residency,
- The lean-to kitchen at the rear,
- The symmetrical M-shaped hipped roof,
- The French doors.

Elements not considered to contribute to significance of place include (but are not necessarily limited to):

- The verandah,
- The garage towards the rear of the property,
- The rotunda towards the front of the property.

History of the Place

Centralised Authority and Regional Development

The settlement and development of colonial South Australia depended heavily upon centralised authority. Historian John Hirst has observed that by the '1870s the practice of central government involvement in a wide range of activities was well established'.¹

Hirst argues that South Australia had an activist state from its inception, commenting that while the 'South Australian government did not have to control convicts' like the other Australian colonies, its founders had nonetheless 'given it a special responsibility for assisted emigrants'. Part of this responsibility was to provide support and services

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Confirmed in the South Australian Heritage Register on 12 January 1984

The South Australian Heritage Council endorsed the content of this BHI - SSHP on 7 December 2023.

to those that became destitute or ill.² During the second half of the nineteenth century, the state's responsibilities grew to include providing the likes of infrastructure, policing, hospitals, and schools.³

Centralised authority was accepted in regional South Australia for several reasons. The first was that the colonial government was a wealthy institution that could afford to provide infrastructure and services. Importantly, it raised the bulk of its revenue via land sales and import duties rather than through direct taxation, and thus avoided the ire of wealthy residents. The second was that powerful landowners were against the establishment of local governments as they did not want to pay council rates. The third was that localism was largely absent in South Australia, as most residents saw themselves as part of the broader colony. Accordingly, an urban and rural divide did not yet exist. The fourth was that many country residents believed that the government was *obliged* to provide public works.⁴ Hirst observes that:

there was almost an explicit contract: settlers had paid the government for their land, so they expected railways, bridges and harbours in return. Every settler felt these needs, and the demands for government action were incessant. On the whole these demands were met without provoking conflict between Adelaide and the country. This harmony smoothed the way for the extension of central administration. ... [T]he country men [sic], like the politicians, had a powerful financial reason for accepting local control. In so doing they obtained schools, teachers, policemen and relief for the destitute without seeming to pay for them.⁵

In both Adelaide and the country, the colonial government was considered essential to the growth and sustenance of South Australia. There were occasional conflicts between 'country people' and the 'centralized [sic] administration' over decisions or policies, but these never amounted to a rejection of the system. Further, while district councils began emerging as early as 1852, they were never as powerful as the colonial government and were tasked with more basic duties, like constructing roads, registering animals, and issuing licenses for timber logging, slaughtering cattle, and quarrying stone and sand.⁶ Simply, centralised authority over major infrastructure and services was not only accepted but expected.

Establishing Robe

Guichen Bay in the South East of South Australia forms part of the traditional lands of the Bungandij people, who have been present in the area for at least 30,000 years.⁷ Europeans first charted the coastline of the region in 1802 during the Baudin and Flinders expeditions and sealers established a presence at Guichen Bay in 1831.⁸

European exploration of the South East took place from 1839 and settlement began as early as 1840.⁹ Much of the South East was initially settled by pastoralists and by 1847 approximately half of the region was held under pastoral licences. As primary

production expanded the colonial government began to provide a series of government towns as service and staging centres. The provision of ports to ship goods to market was also viewed as essential and Robe was established in 1846, to provide a port for the burgeoning wool clip then being obtained from the South East.¹⁰ Robe was officially declared as a port by the Government in 1847.¹¹

Situated towards the south of Guichen Bay, the town at Robe (or Robetown) went on to become the first major town of the South East.¹² Over the next two decades, Robe developed as an international port that serviced the local wool industry and import and export markets. It also facilitated the arrival of thousands of immigrants, including British and Irish people, as well as Chinese prospectors during the Victorian gold rush.¹³

The Government Resident at Robe¹⁴

During the nineteenth century, Government Residents were appointed to several locations administered by the government, including Port Lincoln and the Northern Territory. On 1 September 1846, Captain Gerald Villiers Butler of the 96th Regiment was appointed Government Resident for the Counties of Robe and Grey at an annual salary of £200.¹⁵ Butler's territory covered the land south of Lacepede Bay from the coast to the Victorian border. Upon his appointment, colonial administrators outlined Captain Butler's duties, instructing him as follows:

[K]eep a daily journal, containing an account of all arrivals and departures of vessels or of settlers, of the commencement of building and the progress of the township and district generally; and ... your communications to this office should be full and frequent, containing such suggestions as circumstances may from time to time render expedient for you to make for the benefit of that part of the Province which has been placed under your superintendence.¹⁶

The Government Resident was generally expected to protect the welfare of settlers and First Nations peoples. More specifically, the Resident was tasked with coordinating 'the services of other Public servants', including police, doctors, and clerks, and authorising the construction of essential infrastructure and services, which went on to include the 'police quarters, gaol and courthouse, post and telegraph office, ... an immigration depot and port facilities such as the obelisk, jetties, flagstaff and customs house'.¹⁷ Additionally, Butler was required 'to assemble the settlers at Robe on Sundays for divine service', and served as a stipendiary magistrate.¹⁸

The first township allotments in Robe were auctioned on 17 October 1846. Captain Butler took up his position two days later and was accompanied by a clerk, Berry Lipson, and an official doctor, Dr. Healey. Lipson was appointed to assist Captain Butler and Dr. Healey was tasked with providing medical assistance to the settlers, government officials, and First Nations people.¹⁹

The Government Residency

When European settlers arrived at Robe, they perceived it to be isolated and desolate. Just a few months after their arrival, the *South Australian Register* reported glumly that the 'social state of the community at Port Guichen is anything but enviable' and that there were 'three Government officials with little to do, except to quarrel with each other'. These officials were likely Butler, Lipson, and Dr. Healey. Perhaps more positively, it added that the foundation 'for a house for the resident' had been laid, which was 'said to be sixty feet long and about forty feet broad, which dimension in such a place might serve for the foundation of a barrack or fortress'.²⁰ While waiting, Captain Butler and his party lived in tents.²¹ His piano remained in a crate on the shore.²²

The house was erected on Allotments 51 and 52 on land bought in the name of W. Smillie for fifteen pounds at the first auction sale. It faced Lake Butler and had a generous portion of land facing Smillie Street, comprising Sections 23 and 24. Likely within a few months after the foundations had been laid, construction of the house was completed for Captain Butler. The house was the first residential property built in Robe. It had a shingle roof, calico ceiling and lime-ash floor. Around one or two years later, the house was substantially rebuilt with quarried limestone. French windows and panelling were also added.²³

During Butler's tenure as Government Resident, the first buildings of the Courthouse and Police Complex (SHP 10362) were constructed. The complex was established on the same block and is located to the east of the Government Residency. The courthouse was constructed in 1847 and the original police station (since demolished) was built the following year. Captain Butler performed his duties as a magistrate from the courthouse.

On 1 September 1850, Captain Butler relinquished his duties as Government Resident and was succeeded by Captain Charles Phillip Brewer, who also became the local magistrate. Although Robe had grown and new buildings had been erected, it remained a small town upon Brewer's commencement. Reminiscences 40-years later suggested that in 1853, 'Robe was simply a small hamlet, consisting of a few scattered cottages, two stores, a fancy shop, and a Government residence'.²⁴ Captain Butler resided at Robe House with his wife Eleanor Brewer for the next fourteen years. During his tenure, the house became part of the official administrative centre for the South East and the township began to flourish and grow in the 1850s and 1860s.

The most notable incident that occurred during Brewer's residency was the arrival of around 16,000 Chinese migrants at Robe, primarily between 1856 and 1857. They arrived at Robe to circumvent the poll tax imposed on them by the Victorian government. After disembarking from their ships, they would then commence the overland journey to the goldfields at Bendigo and Ballarat. Responding to concerns

over their potential unruliness, which turned out to be unfounded, Brewer asked the government to deploy infantry from the 12th Regiment to Robe. The Executive Council heeded to Brewer's request and despatched an officer and twenty-five soldiers.²⁵ To accommodate them, a barracks was constructed at the Courthouse and Police Complex in 1858, which were later turned over to the police in 1863.²⁶ A cell block and stables were erected over the next couple of years.²⁷

Ceasing to be a Government Town

A Government Resident continued to reside at Robe until the position was made redundant by the establishment of the District Council of Robe in 1869, which assumed some of the same responsibilities.²⁸ The regional significance of Robe as a port and administrative centre also began to decline in the 1870s due to the emergence of competing ports, the construction of a railway that bypassed Robe, and the redistribution of administrative services to other towns, such as Mount Gambier and Naracoorte.²⁹

About six years after the District Council was established, Reverend William Buttrose established an Anglican primary school at the Government Residency, which operated until 1878. It likely then reverted to a residence until it later became a holiday house at some point during the twentieth century. The house was subsequently converted into units and became a bed and breakfast in 1997. It has been a State Heritage Place since 12 January 1984 and is now known locally as 'Robe House'.

Chronology

Year	Event
1840	European settlers begin to populate the South East.
1846	Counties of Grey and Robe are proclaimed by the colonial government and are opened to claim under pastoral license. Government of South Australia establishes Robe as the administrative centre of the South East; Captain Gerald Villiers Butler is appointed as the first Government Resident.
1847	Over half of the South East is settled under pastoral license. Robe is officially gazetted as a port by the government. The first iteration of the Government Resident's house, now known as Robe House, is built in early 1847.
c.1848-	The Government Residency is substantially rebuilt.
1849	

- 1850 Captain Charles Philip Brewer replaces Captain Butler as Government Resident and serves for fourteen years.
- 1869 The District Council of Robe is formed on 28 October.
- 1873 The Government Residency is used as an Anglican primary school until 1878.
- 1984 The Former Government Residency is confirmed as a State Heritage Place on 12 January, originally as 'Seahaven Motel – Former Government Residency'.**
- Heritage SA approves Development Application 822/0045/84/PB to construct a garage at the property.
- 1997 The Former Government Residency is converted to bed and breakfast accommodation.
- 1998 Heritage SA approves Development Application 822/30/98 to construct a rotunda at the property.

References

Books and Book Chapters

- Bermingham, Kathleen. *Gateway to the South East: A Story of Robetown and the Guichen Bay District*. Millicent: The South Eastern Times Ltd., 1961.
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- Hirst, J. B. *Adelaide and Country, 1870-1917: Their Social and Political Relationship*. Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1973.
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Reports

- Dallwitz, John, and Marsden, Susan. *Robe Historical Interpretation Study: Stage 1 in the Establishment of the Robe Historical Interpretation Centre*. Adelaide: Department of Environment and Planning, 1983.
- 'Return of Works for the Year ending 31st December, 1864', in Appendix to Public Works Report (Adelaide: Government of South Australia, 1864), p. xviii.

Wigg, Carolyn, and Patitsas, Kathleen. 'History and Sources' in Item Evaluation Sheet for Motel Cnr. Frome St. and Hagen St., Robe (Formerly Robe House). Adelaide: Department of Environment and Planning, 1982.

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Websites

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<https://sahistoryhub.history.sa.gov.au/subjects/wool>

SITE DETAILS

Former Government Residency

PLACE NO.: 12546

1A Hagen Street, Robe SA 5276

DESCRIPTION OF PLACE: A rectangular limestone building with a symmetrical, M-shaped hipped roof and a lean-to with a skillion roof at the rear.

DATE OF CONSTRUCTION: 1847 (original); c.1848/1849 (altered)

REGISTER STATUS: Confirmed 12 January 1984

CURRENT USE: Bed and Breakfast apartments, c.1997-
Residence, 2022-

PREVIOUS USE(S): Government Residency, 1847-c.1869
Private School, 1875-1878
Residence, c.1878-1997

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA: District Council of Robe

LOCATION:

Street No.:	1A
Street Name:	Hagen Street
Town/Suburb:	Robe
Post Code:	5276

LAND DESCRIPTION:

Title	CT 5225/626 D40810 A201
Reference:	
Hundred:	Waterhouse

PHOTOS

Former Government Residency
1A Hagen Street, Robe SA 5276

PLACE NO.: 12546



Front façade of Former Government Residency facing west, c.1982.

Source: DEW Files



Southern elevation showing French doors, lean-to, and shelter, c.1982.

Source: DEW Files

PHOTOS

Former Government Residency
1A Hagen Street, Robe SA 5276

PLACE NO.: 12546



The lean-to kitchen showing limestone walls and shingle roof, c.1982.

Source: DEW Files



The northern elevation, c.1982.

Source: DEW Files

PHOTOS

Former Government Residency
1A Hagen Street, Robe SA 5276

PLACE NO.: 12546



Front façade of Former Government Residency facing west, 2020.

Source: Google Street View



Southern elevation showing French doors and lean-to, 2020.

Source: Google Street View

PHOTOS

Former Government Residency
1A Hagen Street, Robe SA 5276

PLACE NO.: 12546



View from corner of Hagen Street and Frome Street showing the rotunda behind the fence, 2020.

Source: Google Street View



The roof of the lean-to, 2020.

Source: Google Street View

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- ¹ Jon Hirst, *Adelaide and Country, 1870-1917: Their Social and Political Relationship* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1973), p.125
- ² Hirst, *Adelaide and Country*, p.126.
- ³ Hirst, *Adelaide and Country*, pp.125-152.
- ⁴ Hirst, *Adelaide and Country*, pp.143-152.
- ⁵ Hirst, *Adelaide and Country*, p.151.
- ⁶ Hirst, *Adelaide and Country*, p.124.
- ⁷ Liz Harfull, *Almost an Island: The Story of Robe*, reprinted edition (2013; Mile End: Wakefield press, 2015), 12-14; Susan Marsden, *A Glimpse of Golden Days* (Robe: District Council of Robe, 1985), pp.11-12.
- ⁸ Harfull, *Almost an Island*, 11; Marsden, *A Glimpse of Golden Days*, p.12.
- ⁹ Harfull, *Almost an Island*, 14-16; Marsden, *A Glimpse of Golden Days*, p.14.
- ¹⁰ Roger André, 'Wool', SA History Hub, History Trust of South Australia, 19 March 2014. <https://sahistoryhub.history.sa.gov.au/subjects/wool>; Michael Williams, *The Making of the South Australian Landscape: A Study in the Historical Geography of Australia* (London; New York: Academic Press, 1974), pp.339-341.
- ¹¹ Dallwitz and Marsden, *Robe Historical Interpretation*, pp. -10.
- ¹² Dallwitz and Marsden, *Robe Historical Interpretation*, pp.4-10.
- ¹³ Dallwitz and Marsden, *Robe Historical Interpretation*, pp.10-16.
- ¹⁴ The next sections use and revise portions of the original 'History and Sources' section included within the item evaluation sheet for 'Motel Cnr. Frome St. and Hagen St., Robe (Formerly Robe House)'. Carolyn Wigg and Kathleen Patitsas, 'History and Sources:' in Item Evaluation Sheet for Motel Cnr. Frome St. and Hagen St., Robe (Formerly Robe House) (Adelaide: Department of Environment and Planning, 1982), pp.3-4 of PDF.
- ¹⁵ Kathleen Bermingham, *Gateway to the South East: A Story of Robetown and the Guichen Bay District* (Millicent: The South Eastern Times Ltd., 1961), p.83; Harfull, *Almost an Island*, p.15.
- ¹⁶ Letter from the Colonial Secretary to Captain Gerald Villiers Butler, quoted in Bermingham, *Gateway to the South East*, p.83.
- ¹⁷ Marsden, *A Glimpse of Golden Days*, pp.22-23.
- ¹⁸ Bermingham, *Gateway to the South East*, p.83.
- ¹⁹ Bermingham, *Gateway to the South East*, pp.83-84.
- ²⁰ E. Underwood, 'The New Townships', *South Australian Register* (Adelaide), 23 January 1847, p.2.
- ²¹ Underwood, 'The New Townships', p.2.
- ²² Harfull, *Almost an Island*, p.15.
- ²³ Kathleen Bermingham, *The Second Eleven Tales of Robe* (Robe: self-published, 1971), p.7.
- ²⁴ Acorn, 'Robe', *Pictorial Australian* (Adelaide), 1 November 1891, p.178.
- ²⁵ See Bermingham, *Gateway to the South East*, pp.107-111; Harfull, *Almost an Island*, pp.59-63; Marsden, *A Glimpse of Golden Days*, pp.33-35.
- ²⁶ Bermingham, *Gateway to the South East*, pp.112-115.
- ²⁷ 'Return of Works for the Year ending 31st December, 1864', in Appendix to Public Works Report (Adelaide: Government of South Australia, 1864), p.xviii.
- ²⁸ Marsden, *A Glimpse of Golden Days*, p.23.
- ²⁹ See Harfull, *Almost an Island*, p.42; Marsden, *A Glimpse of Golden Days*, pp.46-48.