

## BETTER HERITAGE INFORMATION SUMMARY OF STATE HERITAGE PLACE

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### 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*.

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**REGISTERED NAME:** Wilson's Saddlery

**PLACE NO.:** 12644

**ALSO KNOWN AS:** Former Wilson's Saddlery

**ADDRESS:** Bunganditj Country  
5 Victoria Street  
Robe SA 5276  
CT 5827/59 F206254 A95  
Hundred of Waterhouse

### CONFIRMED IN THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN HERITAGE REGISTER:

08 November 1984

### STATEMENT OF HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

Built in c.1858, Wilson's Saddlery in Robe demonstrates the important economic and social contribution of the horse industry to the development of the South East of South Australia during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Robe was one of South Australia's most active and lucrative ports during the 1850s and 1860s and horses played a major role in land-based transportation of people and goods to and from the port. Horse breeding was also a major industry in the region, and horses were exported overseas via the port at Robe, including to India.

**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***

Built in c.1858, Wilson's Saddlery in Robe demonstrates the economic and social importance of the horse industry throughout the South East during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Robe had one of South Australia's most active and lucrative ports during the 1850s and 1860s and serviced the entire South East. Horses played a major role in land-based transportation to and from the port. Horse breeding was also a major industry in the region, and horses were exported via Robe, including to India. Moreover, recreational pursuits and activities were hugely popular in and around Robe, especially horse racing and other equine sports. Situated on Victoria Street which connects to the main roads of the port, Mundy Terrace and the Royal Circus (SHP 12547), the saddlery served local and regional horse owners, drivers and riders. Wilson's Saddlery is one of the few places that demonstrates Robe's place within this history of the State.

# SITE PLAN

Wilson's Saddlery

PLACE NO.: 12644

5 Victoria Street, Robe



Wilson's Saddlery, 5 Victoria Street, Robe, CT 5827/59 F206254 A95, Hundred of Waterhouse

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## LEGEND

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

## Physical Description

Wilson's Saddlery was erected in two stages and comprises a shop to the south-east and an attached cottage to the south-west. The shop is built of stone and the cottage of timber. Both structures have hipped roofs clad with corrugated galvanised steel, together forming an M-shape.

Additional features of the shop include:

- Central double doors with glazed upper panels at the front entrance (the southern, street-facing elevation),
- Large shopfront windows flanking the entrance with glazed panels,
- A parapet at the front,
- A bullnose verandah clad with corrugated galvanised steel, with timber side panels and four timber posts at the front,
- A sash window with glazed panels and stone sill on the western elevation,
- A door with two vertical glazed upper panels on the western elevation,
- A stone chimney protruding from the western elevation,
- Large open space in the shop's interior.

Additional features of the cottage include:

- Timber weatherboard panels on the front elevation (the southern, street-facing elevation),
- A sash window with glazed panels on the front elevation,
- A timber door with two vertical glazed upper panels at the entrance,
- An awning above the entrance door,
- Corrugated galvanised steel panels on the western elevation (non-original),
- A stone chimney protruding from the western elevation,
- Timber lining to the cottage's interior.

## Elements of Significance:

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

- Wilson's saddlery (comprising the shop and the cottage),
- The shop front (including windows, double doors, parapet and bullnose verandah),
- The timber weatherboard panels (cottage),
- Stone chimneys,
- Original fixtures and fittings,
- Large interior space (shop),
- Original timber lining (cottage).

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

- Extensions to the rear and side of Wilson's Saddlery, including the lean-to structures.
- Non-original business signage,
- Corrugated galvanised steel panelling on the western elevation.

## **History of the Place**

### **Establishing Colonial 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

European exploration of the South East took place from 1839 and settlement began as early as 1840.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> Robe was officially declared as a port by the government in 1847.<sup>5</sup>

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.<sup>6</sup> Robe became the administrative centre of the region when a Government Resident was appointed in 1846.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup>

### **Horses in and around Robe**

Horses and the equine industry were an integral part of the South East's economy and life during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including at Robe. Prior to the construction of railways in the 1870s and the advent of motor vehicles in the twentieth century, horses were a major form of transportation throughout the region. At Robe, along with bullock wagons, horses were used to move goods and people to and from the port and the township.<sup>9</sup> Attesting to their ubiquity, stables and hitching posts were situated at major facilities throughout Robe.<sup>10</sup> Mounted Police were also stationed at Robe, where they had a stable behind the Courthouse and Police Complex (SHP

10362).<sup>11</sup> Additionally, workhorses were used for various projects, including the drainage of the region.<sup>12</sup>



**Horses being used to assist dig Drain L, which is located near Robe, c.1917.**

Source: SLSA B 61884

Given the large demand and necessity for horses, many pastoralists located near Robe reared various breeds for multiple purposes and markets. Indeed, the 'district's pioneers included some of Australia's leading horse breeders',<sup>13</sup> including Edward and Robert Stockdale of Richmond Park, a homestead located near Robe (SHP 12544).<sup>14</sup> The quality of the horses meant they were keenly sought and many were exported from Robe. Notably, hundreds were shipped to India, apparently for use by the British army.<sup>15</sup>

Horseracing and other equine sports were a major facet of Robe's social life and a key source of entertainment. Historian Liz Harfull notes that:

The Robe Town Races in the [mid-1800s] were notable events that attracted enthusiastic crowds and some of the best horses and riders in the colony. Local pastoralists were importing thoroughbred stallions to improve their bloodlines and they had exceptional riders to put the progeny through their paces.<sup>16</sup>

Famously, revered poet and 'dare-devil horseman' Adam Lindsay Gordon attended the 1862 and 1865 race meetings, competing and winning in events like the hurdle race.<sup>17</sup> Another key figure is Tommy Hales, '[n]ow recognised as Australia's greatest jockey of the nineteenth century'.<sup>18</sup> Hales began his racing career at Robe and went on to 'win every major race in the country', including the Melbourne Cup in 1880.<sup>19</sup>

Horseracing and racehorse breeding and training continued in and around Robe well beyond the nineteenth century.



**'Painting of Adam Lindsay Gordon Riding his Horse', c.1900.**

Source: SLSA B 58897

### **Wilson's Saddlery\***

David Bower, a builder from Port Adelaide, was the earliest owner of Sections 211 and 220, Hundred of Waterhouse, acquiring the land in 1855.<sup>20</sup> Less than a year later, a Guichen Bay farmer named Peter Robert received a share in the land and it is likely that the two set about subdividing it.<sup>21</sup> In early 1858, they sold lot three in Victoria Street to John Ekers, a saddler.<sup>22</sup>

Though Ekers paid only thirty pounds for the land, he immediately mortgaged it to the Atlas Land Building and Investment Society for £300.<sup>23</sup> Ekers had married schoolteacher Betsy Hamshaw earlier that year.<sup>24</sup> These actions strongly indicate that the building was erected or partly erected in 1858, as a residence.

In 1869, Ekers became one of five citizens comprising Robe's first local council.<sup>25</sup> Around three years later, he sold the property to Ellen Lea, a widow from Lake Robe, for £321/10.<sup>26</sup> All the while he continued working as a saddler at Robe until around 1875. The *Adelaide Almanac and Directory* for 1875 indicates that Ekers moved to Adelaide that year.<sup>27</sup> He died later in 1901.<sup>28</sup>

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\* The following section is a revised and extended version of Kathleen Patitsas, 'Former Wilsons Saddlery, Victoria St., Robe', Item Evaluation Sheet, Heritage and Conservation Branch, 1983, 6823-12544.

The Lea family, who owned the 'Hermitage' homestead (SHP 12545), possessed the building until 1953.<sup>29</sup> During their ownership, they leased or rented the premises to another saddler, William Wilson, from around 1882 to 1919.<sup>30</sup> Little is known about Wilson, but it appears that he produced high-quality goods. In its report on the 1891 Robe Show, the *Narracoorte Herald* [sic] commented that 'Mr. W. Wilson, the local saddler, showed some nice saddles and harness[es] of his own manufacture'.<sup>31</sup>

It appears that the Wilson family were well-respected within the local community. For instance, after William's son was killed in a shooting accident, many locals showed their support by attending the funeral.<sup>32</sup> In 1905, when reporting the death of William's father John, the *Herald* described John as a 'very old and respected' resident of Robe'.<sup>33</sup> Tragically, William and his wife Eliza lost two more sons to World War One. William passed away in 1919 and Eliza lived until 1932.<sup>34</sup> They were survived by three daughters and two sons.<sup>35</sup>

With the coming of motor transport in the 1920s, the demand for service industries related to the horse trade decreased. Nonetheless, Wilson's saddles were still highly valued for their quality of workmanship. Writing in 1970, local historian Alex Barrowman noted that '[e]ven after seventy or eighty years of usage, a number of these prized saddles [were] still to be found in use by stockmen who have retained riding horses'.<sup>36</sup>

C. Giffard, who lived next door to the former saddlery, stated that his family leased the front section of the building between the wars, while the Wilson family remained living in the back section. The Adelaide Café, as the Giffards' shop there was known, had about three tables and served as an outlet for the products of their bakery located on Elizabeth Street. Shearers and farmhands used to frequent the café, coming in by horse and cart.<sup>37</sup>

The property has changed hands several times since being owned by the Lea family and has been used for various purposes, including as holiday accommodation, an art gallery, a bakery and a wine store. It underwent renovations in the early 1980s and was listed as State Heritage Place on 8 November 1984.



## Chronology

Year	Event
1846	Counties of Grey and Robe are proclaimed by the colonial government and are opened to claim under pastoral license. The Government of South Australia establishes Robe as the administrative centre of the South East.
1847	Robe is officially gazetted as a port by the government.
<b>1855</b>	<b>David Bower purchases Sections 211 and 220 at Robe</b>
<b>c.1856</b>	<b>Peter Robert acquires a stake of Sections 211 and 220 and likely subdivides the land with David Bower.</b>
<b>1858</b>	<b>John Ekers purchases Lot 3 and is likely responsible for erecting the saddlery, either in whole or in part.</b>
c.1867	John Ekers becomes one of the five original members of the District Council of Robe.
<b>c.1870</b>	<b>Ellen Lea purchases the building.</b>
<b>c.1883-1919</b>	<b>William Wilson occupies the building, both as a store and a residence.</b>
1919	William Wilson passes away.
<b>1953</b>	<b>The Lea family sell the building.</b>
<b>1984</b>	<b>Wilson's Saddlery is confirmed as a State Heritage Place (SHP) on 8 November, registered under the name 'Wilson's Saddlery – Former'.</b>
2002	Heritage SA awards a grant up to \$5,000 to assist with conservation works.
2004	Heritage SA approves Development Application 822/69/04 to reconstruct the verandah.
2018	Heritage SA approves Development Application 822/93/18 to erect business signage on the shopfront parapet and the adjacent shopfront door.
2019	Heritage SA approves Development Application 822/16/19 to erect a side fence and storage shed.

## References

### Books and Chapters

- Barrowman, Alex. *Old Days and Old Ways*. Robe: self-published, c.1970.
- Bermingham, Kathleen. *Gateway to the South East: A Story of Robetown and the Guichen Bay District*. Millicent: The South Eastern Times Ltd., 1961.
- Boothby, Josiah. *The Adelaide Almanac and Directory for South Australia, 1875*. Adelaide: J. Williams, 1975.
- Boothsby, Josiah. *The Adelaide Almanac and Directory for South Australia, 1883*. Adelaide: J. Williams, 1883.
- Harfull, Liz. *Almost an Island: The Story of Robe*, reprinted edition. 2013; Mile End: Wakefield press, 2015.
- Marsden, Susan. *A Glimpse of Golden Days*. Robe: District Council of Robe, 1985.
- Williams, Michael. *The Making of the South Australian Landscape: A Study in the Historical Geography of Australia*. London; New York: Academic Press, 1974.

### Reports and Theses

- 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.
- Patitsas, Kathleen. 'Former Wilsons Saddlery, Victoria St., Robe', Item Evaluation Sheet, Heritage and Conservation Branch, 1983, 6823-12544.
- Patitsas, Kathleen. 'History and Sources' in 'Richmond Park Homestead near Robe', Item Evaluation Sheet, Heritage and Conservation Branch, 1983, 6821-12544.

### Land Titles

- Certificate of Title Vol. 150, Folio 249.
- General Registry Office, Application No. 11046, 14 August 1856, No.3, Book 107.
- General Registry Office, Application No. 11046, 10 February 1858. No.130, Book 141.
- General Registry Office, Application No. 11046, 29 July 1858, No. 205, Book 143.

### Genealogical Records

- 'Hamshaw, Betsy', 19 July 1858, Marriage Registrations Database, Genealogy SA, 35/255.
- 'Wilson, Eliza Ann', 30 August 1932, Death Registrations Database, Genealogy SA, 541/429.
- 'Wilson, William', 14 June 1919, Death Registrations Database, Genealogy SA, 429/184.

### Newspapers

- 'Concerning People', *South Eastern Times* (Millicent), 13 September 1932, p.2.
- 'The Country... A Shooting Fatality', *Advertiser* (Adelaide), 27 April 1905, p.7.
- 'Obituary', *Chronicle* (Adelaide), 18 May 1901, p.34.
- 'Pioneers of the South-East. Edward and Robert Stockdale', *South Eastern Times* (Millicent), 10 November 1925, p.4.

'Robe', *Narracoorte Herald*, 3 March 1905, p.4.

'Robe Show', *Narracoorte Herald*, 9 October 1891, p.3.

### **Photographs**

'Drainage Work Near Robe', photograph, c.1917, Robe Collection, State Library of South Australia, B 61884.

### **Websites**

André, Roger. 'Wool', SA History Hub, History Trust of South Australia, 19 March 2014.  
<https://sahistoryhub.history.sa.gov.au/subjects/wool> Accessed 5 March 2024.

'History in Robe... Famous Figures', Explore, District Council of Robe.

<https://www.robe.sa.gov.au/explore/history> Accessed 18 March 2024.

## SITE DETAILS

Wilson's Saddlery

PLACE NO.: 12644

5 Victoria Street, Robe

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**DESCRIPTION OF PLACE:** A shop with an attached dwelling, the former built of stone with shopfront windows, verandah and parapet, the latter built of timber; both with gable roofs.

**DATE OF CONSTRUCTION:** c.1858

**REGISTER STATUS:** Identified 14 September 1983

Provisionally entered 26 April 1984

Confirmed 8 November 1984

**CURRENT USE:** Commercial premises, c.1919 –  
Art gallery – c.1983 -

**PREVIOUS USE(S):** Saddlery and Residence, 1858 – c.1870; 1888 - 1919  
Dwelling, c.1858 - unknown  
Holiday accommodation, unknown, twentieth c.

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA:** District Council of Robe

**LOCATION:**

<b>Street No.:</b>	5
<b>Street Name:</b>	Victoria Street
<b>Town/Suburb:</b>	Robe
<b>Post Code:</b>	5276

**LAND DESCRIPTION:**

<b>Title Reference:</b>	CT 5827/59 F206254 A95
<b>Hundred:</b>	Waterhouse

## PHOTOS

Wilson's Saddlery

PLACE NO.: 12644

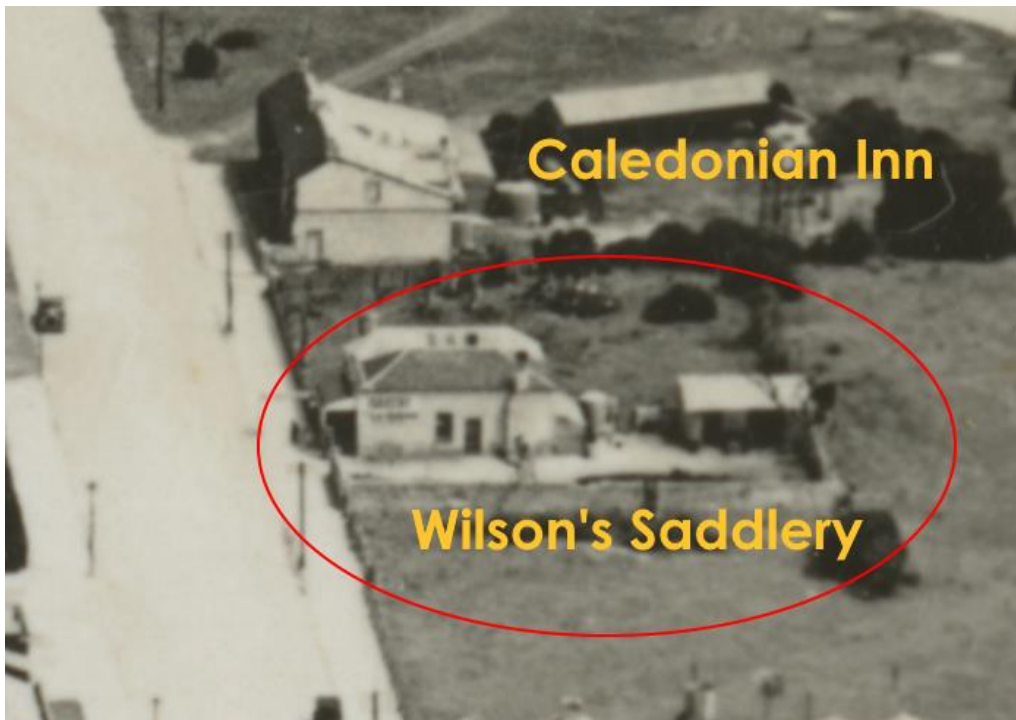
5 Victoria Street, Robe

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**Aerial view of Robe showing Wilson's Saddlery on Victoria Street, c.1940.**

Source: SLSA B41275



**Closer view of Wilson's Saddlery on Victoria Street also showing the Caledonian Inn in the background (SHP 1268), c.1940.**

Source: SLSA B41275

**Wilson's Saddlery**

**PLACE NO.: 12644**

**5 Victoria Street, Robe**

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**Front of Wilson's Saddlery showing the shop (right), c.1983.**

Source: DEW Files



**Front of Wilson's Saddlery showing the cottage (left) and shop (right) sides, c.1983.**

Source: DEW Files



**Wilson's Saddlery**

**PLACE NO.: 12644**

**5 Victoria Street, Robe**

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**Wilson's Saddlery, c.1985.**

Source: DEW Files



**The shop side of Wilson's Saddlery (right), September 2023.**

Source: Google Street View

**Wilson's Saddlery**

**PLACE NO.: 12644**

**5 Victoria Street, Robe**

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**The cottage side of Wilson's Saddlery (left), September 2023.**

Source: Google Street View



**Eastern elevation of Wilson's Saddlery, September 2023.**

Source: Google Street View



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- <sup>1</sup> 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.
- <sup>2</sup> Harfull, *Almost an Island*, p.11; Marsden, *A Glimpse of Golden Days*, p.12.
- <sup>3</sup> Harfull, *Almost an Island*, pp.14-16; Marsden, *A Glimpse of Golden Days*, p.14.
- <sup>4</sup> 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.
- <sup>5</sup> Dallwitz and Marsden, *Robe Historical Interpretation*, pp.4-10.
- <sup>6</sup> Dallwitz and Marsden, *Robe Historical Interpretation*, pp.4-10.
- <sup>7</sup> Marsden, *A Glimpse of Golden Days*, pp.21-24.
- <sup>8</sup> Dallwitz and Marsden, *Robe Historical Interpretation*, pp.10-16.
- <sup>9</sup> Harfull, *Almost an Island*, p.260.
- <sup>10</sup> For instance, it is known that a stable was located at the rear of the Criterion Hotel and a hitching post was placed at the front of Bank House.
- <sup>11</sup> Kathleen Bermingham, *Gateway to the South East: A Story of Robetown and the Guichen Bay District*, reprinted edition (1961; Millicent: South Eastern Times Ltd., 1963), pp.84-85.
- <sup>12</sup> See 'Drainage Work Near Robe', photograph, c.1917, Robe Collection, State Library of South Australia, B 61884.
- <sup>13</sup> Harfull, *Almost an Island*, p.258.
- <sup>14</sup> See 'Pioneers of the South-East. Edward and Robert Stockdale', *South Eastern Times* (Millicent), 10 November 1925, p.4, and Kathleen Patitsas, 'History and Sources' in 'Richmond Park Homestead near Robe', Item Evaluation Sheet, Heritage and Conservation Branch, 1983, 6821-12544.
- <sup>15</sup> Harfull, *Almost an Island*, p.258.
- <sup>16</sup> Harfull, *Almost an Island*, p.260.
- <sup>17</sup> Harfull, *Almost an Island*, p.260.
- <sup>18</sup> 'History in Robe... Famous Figures', Explore, District Council of Robe. <https://www.robe.sa.gov.au/explore/history> Accessed 18 March 2024.
- <sup>19</sup> 'History in Robe... Famous Figures', District Council of Robe.
- <sup>20</sup> General Registry Office, Application No. 11046, 19 October 1855, No.262, Book 103; Certificate of Title Vol. 150, Folio 249.
- <sup>21</sup> General Registry Office, Application No. 11046, 14 August 1856, No.3, Book 107.
- <sup>22</sup> General Registry Office, Application No. 11046, 10 February 1858, No.130, Book 141.
- <sup>23</sup> General Registry Office, Application No. 11046, 29 July 1858, No. 205, Book 143.
- <sup>24</sup> 'Hamshaw, Betsy', 19 July 1858, Marriage Registrations Database, Genealogy SA, 35/255.
- <sup>25</sup> 'Robe District Council Completes Century', *South-East Kingston Leader*, 30 October 1969, p.1.
- <sup>26</sup> General Registry Office, Application No. 11406, 27 November 1870; Certificate of Title Vol. 150, Folio 249.
- <sup>27</sup> 'Wakefield Street' in Josiah Boothby, *The Adelaide Almanac and Directory for South Australia, 1875* (Adelaide: J. Williams, 1975), p.29.
- <sup>28</sup> 'Obituary', *Chronicle* (Adelaide), 18 May 1901, p.34.
- <sup>29</sup> Certificate of Title Vol. 150, Folio 249.
- <sup>30</sup> The first time Wilson's name appears as a saddler in the Almanac and Directory for South Australia is in 1883. He died in 1919. See 'Robe' in Josiah Boothsby, *The Adelaide Almanac and Directory for South Australia, 1883* (Adelaide: J. Williams, 1883), p.189; 'Wilson, William', 14 June 1919, Death Registrations Database, Genealogy SA, 429/184.
- <sup>31</sup> 'Robe Show', *Narracoorte Herald*, 9 October 1891, p.3.
- <sup>32</sup> 'The Country... A Shooting Fatality', *Advertiser* (Adelaide), 27 April 1905, p.7; 'Robe', photograph, c.1905, Robe Collection, State Library of South Australia, B 18834.
- <sup>33</sup> 'Robe', *Narracoorte Herald*, 3 March 1905, p.4.

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<sup>34</sup> 'Wilson, William', 429/184; 'Wilson, Eliza Ann', 30 August 1932, Death Registrations Database, Genealogy SA, 541/429.

<sup>35</sup> 'Concerning People', *South Eastern Times* (Millicent), 13 September 1932, p.2.

<sup>36</sup> Alex Barrowman, *Old Days and Old Ways* (Robe: self-published, c.1970), p.181.

<sup>37</sup> Colin Gifford, conversation with Kathleen Patitsas, 14 July 1983.