HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

Historically, Gladstone Gaol is significant because it represents both the expansion of settlement in the Northern Districts following the passing of the Strangways Act in 1869, and a perceived need to improve prison facilities, particularly those provided at Burra. Opened in 1881, it was never used to its full capacity.

Architecturally, the well-built gaol is an important link in the evolution of penal design philosophies and constructional techniques.

Environmentally, the gaol is a dominant visual and historical landmark in both a local and State-wide sense.

The integrity of the gaol is fair. It is presently not used as a gaol, but instead attracts a small tourist trade.

NOMINATION SOURCE/THREAT/OWNER

This report has been prepared as a result of a request from the Public Buildings Department concerning the heritage significance of Gladstone Gaol at a time when the Department for Correctional Services were considering re-opening the gaol. It was subsequently decided that Gladstone Gaol was unsuitable for accommodating prisoners. The District Council of Gladstone are the lessees of a Crown Miscellaneous Lease over the Gaol for a term of 5 years, expiring in 1984, for tourism purposes. The gaol is under no apparent threat.

HERITAGE CONSERVATION BRANCH RECOMMENDATION: 

It is recommended that this item be included on the Register of State Heritage Items, and that it be categorized A1, A2, A3, H3.

SOUTH AUSTRALIAN HERITAGE COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION: 

Chairman
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<th>South Australian Heritage Act 1978-82</th>
<th>Register of State Heritage Items ITEM EVALUATION SHEET Buildings and Structures</th>
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<tr>
<td>Age 1879-1881</td>
<td>Subject</td>
<td>Status N.T.(Recorded)</td>
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**Context**
Associated with the rapid settlement of the northern areas during the 1870's, Gladstone Gaol was built to supplant Burra's Redruth Gaol in 1879-1881. Its location at Gladstone was seen as a convenient mid-way point between Pt. Augusta and Burra.

**Person/Group**
S.A. Government  
Mr. Boothby, Sheriff

**Event**
1975 Gaol closed  
1979 Leased to Gladstone Council

**Architect/Builder**
Sara & Dunstan, Builders, of Aberdeen

**Design**
Apparently contemporary with the latest in British prison design. Females, felons, debtors and people awaiting trial were grouped separately within 3 cell blocks which, in the shape of an inverted 'T' converged onto an octagonal tower (The Circle)

**Construction**
Coursed stonework with dressed stone, as well as brick quoins and surrounds to openings.

**Interior**
Plain austere interior befitting the function of the building.

**Representation**
Although a number of 19th century South Australian gaols are on the Heritage Register, Gladstone Gaol is an important link in Penal design philosophy.

**Continuity**
A dominant element within the township of Gladstone.

**Local Character**
The focal point of the township, both physically and psychologically.

**Landmark**
Historically a well-known complex and a dominant landmark in the area.

**Alterations**
Numerous alterations made to suit needs of various users. Perhaps most notable is the steel structure above the circle.

**Condition**
Generally in reasonable condition with some salt damp present. Major structural failure to a portion of the perimeter wall is apparent.

**Compatibility**
Presently not in use - now a tourist attraction.
Supplementary Information

Adaptability: Has the potential for a variety of tourist related uses. The original layout and form should be maintained in any adaptation.

Interpretation: Because of its isolation, its use as an interpretation centre is limited.

History and Sources

In 1879 the Deputy Sheriff reported on the penal system in South Australia. It was a sanguine and satisfied description, given in response to a questionnaire sent to the S.A. Government by the organisers of the International Penitentiary Congress. South Australia at the time possessed a total of 8 gaols. The two main gaols at Yatala and Adelaide were supported by smaller local gaols at Mt. Gambier, Wallaroo, Redruth, Pt. Augusta, Pt. Lincoln and Robe. Prisoners awaiting trial and serving short term sentences were kept at local gaols, more serious sentences being served at Yatala. Mr. William Hinde, who reported in the absence of Mr. W.R. Boothby, the Sheriff, described South Australia as an "exceptional" place regarding criminals. In the Supreme Court, the convictions recorded amounted to "0.003 only of the population in 1875". Of prisons, he stated "there were no classes of prisons nor is there any distinct classification of prisoners, their numbers not being sufficiently great to permit or require it". (In 1875 there were 977 male and 262 female prisoners, with a death rate of less than 2%. It is not stated whether the death rate included both natural causes and executions). (S.A.P.P. 35/1877).

Why then, was Gladstone Gaol built during 1879-81 and formally opened on Wednesday, June 1st, 1881? (Adel. Observer 4/6/1881).

Mr. Hinde's complacency over the sufficiency of the State's penal accommodation was not shared by S. Perry, The Keeper of the Redruth Gaol. In 1875 he wrote to the Sheriff, describing crowded conditions of the prison, adding:

"I cannot but say most emphatically that an arrangement of the kind cannot but be productive of very serious harm - there are now two young fellows hear (sic) neither of whom have been in Gaol before but now they are obliged to be put in Cells together with such men as - and - , noted gaolbirds".

Mr. Boothby notes on this letter the need to expand Redruth or construct a new gaol, "the population in the Northern Areas having increased very rapidly", and "it was deemed more desirable to erect a new gaol at Gladstone at a proposed cost of £6,000". No provision for funding the gaol was made at the time. Later
letters from Mr. Pollitt, Keeper at Redruth, detailed the torment endured by warders and prisoners alike from bugs and extremes of temperature in cramped, unsuitable rooms before the problem was resolved by the building of Gladstone Gaol.

Other factors influencing the building of a new gaol at Gladstone possibly included the intense rivalry between the towns created by agricultural expansion during the 1870's. Jealous of their importance, towns vied with each other over the location of railways and were proud of local implement-making and other industries (See Meinig: On the margins of the good earth, Rigby, 1972; 195). According to the Adelaide Observer (May 6, 1899), Gladstone residents were promised a gaol by Charles Man n, M.P. "some time before 1879". In view of the Sheriff's correspondence cited, it was an opportune promise following the extension of the rail to Caltowie in 1878 and as such was consolation to Gladstone residents for losing the railway terminus. (See also The Mail, Saturday, August 2nd, 1952, p.43). In 1880, a District Courts Bill proposed to set up 4 or 5 district courts in the northern portion of the State and led the editor of the Burra Record to speculate whether this influenced the building of the gaol at Gladstone (Burra Record 6/6/1879).

Plans for the gaol were prepared by the State Architect-in-Chief's office from the suggestions of the Sheriff who had shortly returned from a visit to all the principal gaols in England. As can be seen from the attached diagrams of South Australian gaols, Gladstone Gaol's design incorporated Burra's 2 rectangular exercise yards into a more complex design. A circular tower is placed at the junction of three major wings that define two sides of the exercise yards. Encircling this is an outer perimeter wall with administration block and entrance. The 1884 design for the Pt. Augusta gaol created further exercise yards, second perimeter wall and additional administration block and thus repeated the major characteristics of the Gladstone gaol's design, with the exception of the tower. Gladstone Gaol today displays a different arrangement of internal space, with more complex yard areas and additional buildings.

Tenders were called on the 4th June, 1879. (S.A.P.P.29/1879, p.85). Burra's connection with the Gladstone Gaol was maintained in both the successful tenderer, Sara & Dunstan of Aberdeen, and in supplying its first gaol-keeper Mr. Pollitt who transferred from Redruth Gaol. Built at an estimated cost of £21,640, it was to be completed by 20th February, 1881. A full description of the gaol, which comprised 62 cells in the form of an inverted "L" shape surrounded by 18' high wall, with 2 keeper's quarters on either side of the main entrance, is provided in the Supplement to the Register, 9/8/1879. The article comments; "The whole edifice carried with it an air of gloomy solidity and thorough suitability to the purpose for which it is designed".

When complete, the gaol's construction costs amounted to £30,000. The prison was never fully utilised and on 6th September, 1939, was handed over to the military as an internment camp. After a brief period between 21.2.1940 and 9.3.1942 when it was returned to Sheriffs, Gaols and Prisons Dept., it became a military detention camp until November, 1943. Ten years of disuse followed. Then, on 26.6.1953 it was reopened as an institution for corrective training of selected, well-behaved inmates between 18 and 25 years of age.

Congestion at the Port Augusta Gaol was relieved between 1955 and December 1975
History and Sources

by the Gladstone Gaol providing accommodation for prisoners serving less than three month sentences. It was officially closed on 31/12/1975. In January 1979 the District Council of Gladstone was granted lease to the land.

The Gladstone Gaol, therefore, reflects the continued development of the State's penal system in response to unsatisfactory existing conditions at Redruth and to the need to provide a prison for the Northern Districts, rapidly settled during the 1870's following the passing of the Strangways Act of 1869.

Sources:

P.B.D.: Bierbaum File - Gladstone Gaol No. 134
S.A.P.P. 35/1877
S.A. Register, Aug. 9, 1879, 12d.
Observer 1881, June 4, p.986 b and 1899, May 6.
S.A.A. Palmerston Views
The Mail, Sat., Aug. 2, 1952, p.43
Burra Record, 6/6/1879
S.A.A. G.R.G. 54/1, Sheriffs Office letters.
1841 ADELAIDE (begun)

1856 REDRUTH Similar plan also at
   1860 ROBE
   1865 MT. GAMBIER
   1865 WALLAROO
   1866 PORT AUGUSTA (see also 1884)

1879 GLADSTONE

1884 PORT AUGUSTA
   Inc. begun 1866
   Second perimeter wall, additional administration block & cell blocks by 1884.
   Administration block & Entrance 1884

DEVELOPMENT OF GAOLS (Excluding Yabala L.F.)
IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA n.t.s.
GLADSTONE GAOL - CHRONOLOGY

March 1876  "Police cells are being constructed at each of these new townships, and most of them are intended to form portions of proposed station buildings; they will be shortly ready for use (SAPP 62/1876).

1877-78  Estimates - Gladstone gaol - 2,500. (Other comparable estimates in the same year included Adelaide Gaol (2500) Pt Adelaide marine offices (3000) Gov. Res. at Mount Lofty (5,000.00).

30.6.1878  Public Works - Gladstone Gaol - 3rd instalment 4,000.00

1878-9  Estimates - Gladstone Gaol (second instalment) 2,000.

1879  -p.85. The plans for this work have been called for, prepared and tenders called on the 4th June. The gaol will contain 62 cells, for convicted and unconvicted prisoners; a debtor's prison, containing 4 double cells; and ample accommodation for kitchens, stores, dispensary, surgeon's room, warders' and matron's rooms, offices, laundry, male and female, exercising yards, convicted and unconvicted prisoners having separate yards, water storage for 120,000 gallons, out offices etc. The whole surrounded by an enclosing wall 16 ft high. Outside the enclosing wall are the residences of the keeper of the Gaol and the First Warder. Owing to the necessity for building the whole of the enclosing walls, which will be required for the complete building, the cost of this part is out of proportion to that of the complete establishment.

1879  Return of expenditure to 30th June: - Gladstone Gaol 198.19.10 (pp 29)

1880  Return of expenditure to 30th June (SAPP 29A/1880) Gladstone Gaol 13,736.6.6

Contract let to Messrs. Sara & Dunstan $21,640 to be completed by 20th February, 1881.

Plans for this gaol prepared from the suggestedsions of the Sheriff, who has recently visited all the principal gaols in England. Buildings will contain 62 single cells, etc.

1880-1881  Architect-in-Chief's Office
These premises, of which a description has been given in previous reports, have been completed and are now occupied.

1882-3  Gaol - (4th instalment, to complete present contract) No.9 Public Works p.51. 600.0.0

CHRONOLOGY

6.9.1939  Handed over to military as an internment camp.

21.2.1940  Returned to Sheriffs, Gaols & Prisons Dept.

9.3.1942 - 3.11.1943  Taken over by Services as Military Detention Camp.

26.6.1953  Ten years of disuse
Re-opened by proclamation as an institution for corrective training of selected, well behaved inmates between 18-25.

1955  Complex also provided accommodation to inmates serving less than 3 months (Gladstone area) - introduced to ease congestion in
I feel that the Gaol complex warrants inclusion upon the Register because of its Historical and Architectural merits, and would therefore suggest in the interim:

(a) that any proposed alterations and/or additions be carefully carried out so that new work does not conflict or compete with the architectural character and fabric of the Prison complex,
(b) that external visual integrity be maintained,
(c) that interference to exterior facades of perimeter walls, cell blocks and tower be minimised,
(d) that if internal yard walls are to be demolished, at least a visual trace of its footings be retained,
(e) that at least one extant cell be retained,
(f) that a portion of the large slate floors to cell blocks be retained.

Sources


Gladstone Gaol S.A. Tourist Pamphlet issued by the Gladstone Gaol Development Committee.

Newspaper Cuttings S.A.A. V3. P.51

Lothar Brasse

LB:JD