

RECORD OF STATE HERITAGE PLACE

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

NAME: **Front Fence, adjacent to Chief Mechanical Engineer's Office Islington Railway Workshops** **PLACE NO.: 26389**
ADDRESS: **Churchill Road, Kilburn SA 5084**

Physical Description

This is a substantial Victorian-style cast-iron fence with brick-capped stone piers and pillars defining the street boundary in front of the main Chief Mechanical Engineer's Office (State Heritage Place No 14685). Though the central pedestrian gate has now been permanently sealed, it would have served as the formal 'executive' entrance at the time of construction. There is an extension to the fence to increase its height, comprising iron brackets supporting barbed wire. This was probably added later, perhaps for added security during periods of industrial action in the 1920s, as photographs from around 1929 show it was in place prior to that date.

Statement of Heritage Significance

As part of the setting for the Chief Mechanical Engineer's (CME's) Office this substantial cast-iron fence contributes to the visual importance of the main administration building when viewed from the roadway. It emphasises the architectural formality of the CME's Office whilst creating a sense of separation and a degree of security appropriate to the office of the senior management of the Islington Railway Workshops. The fence defines an important section of the eastern boundary of the site, providing an impressive 'showpiece' entry point for official visitors in contrast to the more rudimentary gateway which served the ordinary workers. In its style and materials the fence complements the CME's Office, and it is likely that it was constructed around the same time, c1891. The fence is an integral element of the site and enhances the architectural and aesthetic qualities of the CME's office itself as the central administrative building on the large Islington Workshops site.

Relevant 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.

As part of the setting of the Chief Mechanical Engineer's Office, the Front Fence contributes to and enhances the visual importance of the main administration building of the former Islington Railway Workshops. Together with the administration building, the fence demonstrates the first phase of development of the Islington Workshops. The Workshops were built to service the engines and rolling stock of the South Australian Railways, which played a crucial role in the economic development of the State. The Workshops grew to be one of the largest industrial complexes in the State, employing thousands of workers and contributing significantly to building a skilled workforce in South Australia through engineering training and apprenticeships.

Extent of Listing

The components that are *integral* to the heritage significance of the Front Fence include:

- Brick-capped stone piers and pillars, decorative cast-iron fence panels and gate
- Lawns pathways, plantings and flagpoles between the fence and the CME's Office

History of the Place

The Islington Railway Workshops were established in the early 1880s, and reflected the expansion of the South Australian Railways and the increasing need for maintaining and adding to the rolling stock of the railways. Their history over the next century demonstrates efforts by successive administrators to modernise and rationalise the State's railway systems and infrastructure, and to build capacity to meet engineering needs in peace and wartime.

The first locomotive workshops for South Australian Railways were located in the railway yard at North Terrace, occupying a series of stone buildings near the Adelaide Railway Station. As the SA railway system expanded from its beginnings in 1854, the demand placed on these workshops to maintain and repair the increasing numbers of locomotives and rolling stock in operation soon put pressure on the very limited site. By 1876, when young British engineer William Thow was appointed Locomotive Engineer for SA, it was becoming clear that the only sensible solution to the congestion and inefficiencies was to move the locomotive workshops to a new larger site. A suitable location at Islington was chosen for new workshops but the transfer to the new site was held up for more than a decade until funds were made available.

In 1880, a running shed, and cottages for a foreman, drivers and firemen were constructed on the southern section of the government land at Islington at a cost of £4,000. By December 1883 the first stage of the carriage works had been completed and commenced work. Extensive new locomotive workshops were

added in 1892. In February 1892 a special report on the new Locomotive Workshops at Islington was published in the Register, in which the new buildings and equipment were described in detail. The works at that time covered an area of nearly five acres, and had a workforce approaching 1,000, and it was intended that both these figures would eventually be doubled. By this time the 'handsome offices' for the Locomotive Engineer and the chief officers of the Railways Department were completed and occupied. This two-storey brick building with stone facings was described as 'spacious, lofty and well-ventilated'. Accommodation for the draughtsmen and clerks in the Accountant's office was provided on the first floor, with the Locomotive Engineer's office and correspondence room occupying the ground floor. The adjacent Time Office was also built around this time.

By the early 1900s the workforce at Islington, inclusive of apprentices, officers, draughtsmen and clerks, numbered just under one thousand men (*Cyclopaedia of SA*, 1907) and had grown to 1800 by the time William Webb took over as Railway Commissioner in 1922.

By 1907 the Islington Workshops, in addition to repair and maintenance work, were responsible for the manufacture of all new carriages, and most of the trucks, wagons and other vehicles needed for the carriage of goods and livestock in South Australia, and had recently begun to design and manufacture locomotives. 'In extent, arrangement, equipment, and general efficiency, it is claimed that this establishment is unsurpassed by any other of a similar character south of the Equator'. (*Cyclopaedia of South Australia*, vol. one, 1907).

Between 1911 and 1914 there was further expansion of the works under B F Rushton, Chief Mechanical Engineer, to meet the increase in railway traffic, and to accommodate the railway works transferred from Glanville (SAPP 47/1911-12 p. ix).

The intervention of World War I curtailed further development apart from upgrading some of the machinery in the metal and wood machinery shops, and provision of additional dining and locker facilities for staff. However, after the war the workforce expanded to almost 2,000 men, with many ex-servicemen being employed.

By early 1923 a major restructure of the SA Railways and the Islington Workshops was underway, under newly appointed Chief Commissioner of SA Railways William Alfred Webb. This resulted in a complete revision of the entire layout, construction of a modern locomotive repair shop capable of handling new heavier locomotives, and transitioning from steam to electrical power for the operation of all machinery.

Under Webb, and his able Chief Mechanical Engineer F J (Fred) Shea, the Workshops were reorganised completely to maximise efficiency both in repair and maintenance of locomotives and for new construction. Acquisition of thousands of pounds worth of modern machinery allowed work to be done more quickly and with fewer workers. The workforce, initially trimmed down to eliminate waste and 'dead wood', expanded to 1,900 men by mid 1927 to meet the demand for new production.

Rebuilding of Islington was a huge and expensive project, costing a staggering £800,000, and it was to stand as CME Fred Shea's great achievement (Burke, 1985, p149). On completion the new works were comparable in extent and technical

innovation to any other workshop in the Southern Hemisphere, and were producing the largest locomotives ever built in Australasia. It was proudly claimed that 'South Australia now possesses workshops that are the envy of all the other railway Departments in Australasia, and ... equal to anything of their size in the world' (*Advertiser*, July 5, 1927, p14).

The Islington Railway Workshops were one of the State's major employers and provided job opportunities and training for many ex-servicemen returning to civilian work after the Great War. It was one of the few industrial sites continuing to provide ongoing employment throughout the Depression years to relieve the State's massive pool of unemployed workers (Donovan, 1992, p259).

During the Depression and the lead up to World War Two the South Australian Railways continued to employ large numbers of men, and the Playford Government pursued Commonwealth and interstate contracts in order to keep the Islington Workshops going and avoid retrenchments. 'The Premier had been untiring in his efforts to get as much defence expenditure as possible for this State and for Islington in particular' (*Advertiser*, 11 October 1939, p6).

During World War II Islington Railway Workshops took on numerous Commonwealth defence contracts for munitions and aircraft components, and in 1943 the workforce swelled to an all-time high of 6,300, including many women engaged in production work for the first time (*The Public Service and the War*, 1944, p5). The Islington Workshops was one of the first organisations to take advantage of the government scheme for Dilution of Labour, where workers from other industries were brought in to be schooled by skilled artisans in order to address labour shortages for essential wartime production (*The Public Service and the War*, 1944, p6).

Expansion of the Workshops in preparation for defence production commenced in late 1939. The construction of an up-to-date well equipped Tool Room capable of producing sophisticated machine tooling was approved and commenced within weeks of Australia entering the war, and Commonwealth contracts for producing munitions, aircraft components, gun carriers and other military equipment ensured that Islington Railway Workshops remained one of the state's largest employers, with over 6,000 male and female workers engaged at the height of the war.

In the decades following the war, the Workshops continued to provide employment and technical training for generations of skilled workers, as one of the State's largest industrial employers. After 1978, responsibility for the non-urban railway system passed from the South Australian Railways to the Commonwealth, and Islington Workshops was managed by Australian National Railways. From the late 1990s the site has been leased to rail company Genesee and Wyoming Australia Inc (GWA).

Like railway workshops elsewhere in Australia, the Islington Railway Workshops were also important in the history of industrial relations in this State, and were associated with the growth of the union movement and the achievement of improvements in working conditions and workplace safety.

REFERENCES

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Anon, *Visit to SA Railway Workshops Islington, Saturday 3rd November, 1956: Particulars of Plant and Organization and Features of Interest*, SA Railways, 1956

Burke, David, *Kings of the Iron Horse*, Methuen Australia, North Ryde, 1985

Burgess, HT, *The Cyclopaedia of South Australia: An Historical and Commercial Review*, Cyclopaedia Company Adelaide 1907 Vol 1

Butlin, SJ, *Australia in the War of 1939-45, Series 4 – Civil – Vol 3 – War Economy, 1939-1942* (1st Edition 1955) Australian War Memorial website

Cosgrove, C, Marsden S & McCarthy, J, Historical Research Pty Ltd Adelaide, *Twentieth Century Heritage Survey, Stage Two 1928-1945 Volume One*, 2008

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Archival

South Australian Railways *The Islington Railway Workshops*, Adelaide, 1929

Adelaide Advertiser newspaper – various issues

SA Register newspaper– various issues

State Records of SA

National Archives of Australia (SA Branch)

SA Parliamentary Papers

SA Railways and ANR Plans held by INPROTRANS Pty Ltd, 320 Churchill Rd, Kilburn

State Library of SA photographic collection

Index Cards from SAR Islington Railway Workshops (part of the Inprotrans collection)

Other

Notes made by David Parsons (an employee at Islington 1952-84)

Australian Dictionary of Biography on Line: <http://adbonline.anu.edu.au/biogs/A120474b.htm>

Robert Lee, *Australia: Our National Stories*, Australian Heritage Commission, 2003, accessed via the Australian Heritage Council Website:

<http://www.environment.gov.au/heritage/ahc/index.html>

DEWNR Heritage Unit Files

SITE RECORD

Front Fence, adjacent Chief Mechanical Engineer's Office PLACE NO: 26389
Islington Railway Workshops

FORMER NAME:	N/A		
DESCRIPTION OF PLACE:	Substantial Victorian-style cast-iron fence with brick capped stone piers and pillars defining the street boundary in front of the main Chief Mechanical Engineer's Office.		
DATE OF COMPLETION:	c1891		
SA HERITAGE REGISTER STATUS:	Description:	Confirmed	
	Date:	23 August 2013	
LOCAL HERITAGE STATUS	N/A		
CURRENT USE:	Description:	fence	
	Dates:		
PREVIOUS USE(S):	Description:	N/A	
	Dates:		
ARCHITECT:	Name:		
	Dates:		
BUILDER:	Name:		
	Dates:		
LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA:	Description:	Port Adelaide Enfield & Prospect	
LOCATION:	Unit No.:	N/A	
	Street No.:		
	Street Name:	Churchill Road	
	Town/Suburb:	Kilburn	
	Post Code:	5084	
LAND DESCRIPTION:	Title Type:	CT	CT
	Volume:	6105	6105
	Folio:	583	584
	Lot No.:	Part Allot 44	Allot 44
	Section:	Closed Road	Closed Road
	Hundred:	Yatala	Yatala

PHOTOS

Front Fence, adjacent Chief Mechanical Engineer's Office PLACE NO: 26389
Islington Railway Workshops



Fence detail from inside, looking northeast (*image: DEWNR 2011*)



Lawned area between CME's Office on left and Front Fence extreme right.
looking north(*image: DEWNR 2011*)

SITE PLAN

Front Fence, adjacent Chief Mechanical Engineer's Office
Islington Railway Workshops

PLACE NO: 26389



Site plan showing extent of listing outlined in purple
(lines representing cadastral boundaries are indicative only)