

## **SUMMARY OF STATE HERITAGE PLACE**

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### **REGISTER ENTRY**

**Entry in the South Australian Heritage Register in accordance with the  
*Heritage Places Act 1993***

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**NAME:** Fort Largs Barracks and Drill Hall **PLACE NO.: 26448**

**ADDRESS:** Corner of Strathfield Terrace & Lady Gowrie Drive, Taperoo, 5017  
(CT 6095/84, Lot 200, DP 88971, Hundred of Port Adelaide)

### **STATEMENT OF HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE**

The Fort Largs Barracks and Drill Hall buildings are of historic significance to South Australia as an illustration of a purpose built defensive barracks, erected in direct response to urgent Commonwealth and State mobilisation initiatives and coastal defence needs directly before the Second World War. The Barracks and Drill Hall were built in 1939 as the nucleus of a reconstructed and strengthened Fort Largs – the only remaining coastal defensive battery site protecting the coast of Adelaide during the period.

The Fort Largs buildings stand as places of importance within the military and political history of pre-Second World War South Australia and are in excellent condition and high in historic integrity. The position, functional layout, scale and architectural style of both buildings, within their open setting, clearly illustrate their intended purpose and the historic context of the Barracks in 1939.

### **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.***

The Fort Largs Barracks and Drill Hall are the only extant South Australian buildings on a defensive barracks site from the period – purpose-built in response to Commonwealth and State mobilisation initiatives and coastal defence needs immediately before the Second World War.

The Barracks and Drill Hall were built in 1939 as the nucleus of a reconstructed and strengthened Fort Largs – the only remaining coastal defensive battery protecting Adelaide. The Barracks were a part of the South Australian mobilisation program, which commenced with the new Torrens Training Depot in the City of Adelaide in 1936. In December 1938 Prime Minister Joseph Lyons announced a broad review of defence expenditure in response to imminent war. Many new buildings and the upgrade of existing buildings were proposed for Keswick Barracks and new barracks sites were also established in suburban and rural South Australia. Apart from the buildings at Keswick, the Fort Largs Barracks and Drill Hall, including their setting, are the only other buildings to remain from this period, illustrating this particular aspect of the military and political history of pre-Second World War South Australia. The Fort Largs buildings are in excellent condition and have high integrity.

**(b) *It has rare, uncommon or endangered qualities that are of cultural significance.***

The Fort Largs Barracks and Drill Hall are the only extant South Australian buildings on a defensive Barracks site from the period – purpose-built in response to Commonwealth and State mobilisation initiatives and coastal defence needs directly before the Second World War. The Barracks and Drill Hall were built in 1939 as the nucleus of a reconstructed and strengthened Fort Largs – then the only coastal defensive battery protecting Adelaide. Other huts and sheds were also erected on the site during this period, but most are no longer surviving. Other extant buildings erected during the period include the 1936 Torrens Training Depot in the City of Adelaide and many new or upgraded buildings at Army Headquarters at Keswick Barracks. However, both Keswick and Adelaide were administrative rather than defensive sites.

# SITE PLAN

Fort Largs Barracks and Drill Hall  
Corner of Strathfield Terrace & Lady Gowrie Drive, Taperoo

PLACE NO: 26448

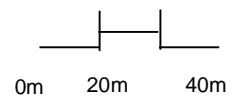


Fort Largs Barracks and Drill Hall, Taperoo – Site Plan

[Generally indicating the important elements and features of the place (outlined in red)]



North



## COMMENTARY ON THE LISTING

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

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#### Physical Description

The 1939 Barracks is a single and two-storey red-brick building, with a hipped corrugated asbestos roof. The façade features horizontal banded stucco detailing bordering rows of timber framed windows. Two entrance porches are asymmetrically arranged along the east facade, both finished with stepped render detailing. The building incorporates a mess/kitchen on the ground floor and (now) administration areas upstairs. The original rear colonnade verandah has been enclosed and mess areas modified in the recent past.

The 1939 Drill Hall is a substantial, single-storey red-brick building comprising a central hall under a gable roof, flanked by ancillary rooms along the west and east facades and covered with a corrugated asbestos roof. The form of the building expresses its function as a hall space, with store rooms, private rooms and kitchens to the sides. Brickwork detailing is utilitarian and the gable is dressed with rendered coping. Windows and doors are arranged in a symmetrical manner to all facades. Further horizontal rendered banding decorates the top of the hall and storeroom walls.

The relationship of the Fort Largs Barracks and Drill Hall to the former parade ground is important as it provides a setting for the significant buildings.

The components identified as being intrinsic to the heritage significance of the Fort Largs Barracks and Drill Hall, Taperoo, include:

- Barracks building - whole of exterior and surviving original 1939 layout, fixtures and fittings; and
- Drill Hall building - whole of exterior and surviving original 1939 layout, fixtures and fittings.

#### History of the Place

After peace in 1918, Australia allowed the size of its armed forces and defence budget to decline, and the inter-war years saw a small Army and very little spending on military infrastructure. This began to change in the mid-1930s, as Germany and Italy began to engage in aggressive acts in Europe and the Mediterranean.

Defence preparations turned upward sharply from 1938. Very quickly, the defence budget increased dramatically, the size of the militia was doubled, naval guns were obtained from Britain for coastal defence, ships and aircraft were ordered, airfields

were built, and a Command and Staff College was established to improve the quality of officer training.

In 1939 the Defence Department decided that Fort Glanville would not be upgraded. During the Second World War it was used for proofing munitions, but not regarded as having a defensive function.

In the same year, there were numerous changes at the 1885 Fort Largs. The size of the resident garrison had to increase, and new barracks huts, an Officers Mess and Drill Hall were added, together with the necessary kitchens, messes and ablution blocks.

### Barracks/Officers Mess

In 1939, during pre-war preparations, the facilities at Fort Largs were greatly expanded by the addition of a two-storey barrack block to house 10<sup>th</sup> Heavy Battery Royal Australian Artillery, a new drill hall and a number of timber P-series huts to house 38<sup>th</sup> Fortress Company Royal Australian Engineers.

The Fort Largs Barracks and Drill Hall buildings were designed by the Adelaide Works and Services Branch of the Commonwealth's Department of the Interior. Stylistically, they have similarities to the 'stripped classical/art deco' detailing of the 1936 Torrens Training Depot, Adelaide, although they are more transitional in style, combining 'art deco' motifs with the conventional planning form and building features common to the period.

In April 1939, the Department of Works called tenders for 'Erection New Barrack Building and Drill Hall', and in May it was announced that older barracks buildings were being demolished to make way for the new construction. The successful tenderer was J Groves & Sons with a bid of £10,275, and the firm took on 35 extra men for the job. Both buildings were nearing completion in August 1939, and the gunners arrived in their new quarters in September as the war in Europe began. The Governor inspected the completed barracks in December 1939. Further tenders were let for the addition of timber barracks, mess huts, storerooms and ablution blocks to the complex in May 1940. At its peak size during the Second World War, Fort Largs was also home to the Port Adelaide Fortress Signals Section, the 12<sup>th</sup> Anti-Aircraft Battery, the 58<sup>th</sup> Anti-Aircraft Searchlight Company and a detachment of the Australian Women's Army Service.

The precise wartime function of the building is not clear. It was usually referred to as 'Barracks', although its large and lofty rooms seem unusually capacious for that function. The Australian War Memorial holds a set of 1944 photographs whose captions describe it as the 'Officers Mess'. Probably the two-storey building was originally the quarters and mess for officers, while other ranks were housed in the timber barrack huts.

Post-war uses of the Barracks are dealt with later, but physical changes to the building have occurred in two phases. First the interior underwent relatively minor refurbishment in 1952 to convert it to barracks for the Women's Royal Australian Army Corps. In 1964 the Barracks building underwent further renovation for use as classrooms and a mess by the Police Academy. Facilities such as new toilets were added, and the open verandah of the upper storey was enclosed.

### Drill Hall

The Drill Hall has the same construction history as the Barracks, built by the same builder under the same contract, and commenced, finished and occupied at the same times. Tenders were called in April 1939, the tender was let to J Groves & Sons in May, the building was nearing completion in August, and began to be occupied in September 1939. Work was complete by December 1939.

The subsequent history of the Drill Hall is less well documented than the Barracks, but it probably continued to march hand-in-hand with its larger neighbour. A Drill Hall is used for teaching and practicing drill, weapons training, physical exercise and sport, especially in bad weather. All of these activities would have continued under Artillery, WRAAC and Police regimes, and the building has probably seen little physical change since 1939.

### Post-War

Until the Second World War, the Australian Army did not recruit women, except in the role of nurses. Then, because of wartime labour shortage, the Australian Women's Army Service (AWAS) was established in 1941 to accept women into military roles. It was disbanded in 1947. During the Korean War there was again a need to expand the defence force at a time of full employment, and women were again recruited. The new organisation was called the Women's Royal Australian Army Corps (WRAAC), established in April 1951.

In June 1952, the first detachment of 32 WRAAC soldiers moved into Fort Largs barracks, with another 20 arriving a few months later. It was the first WRAAC Barracks opened in Australia. The Barracks, with six beds to a room, had been tastefully refurbished in pastel blue and primrose, with duck egg green for the kitchens. One letter to the editor from 'An Old Gunner' was amazed that 'the smell of cordite is to be exchanged for the smell of face powder.' The women would be based at Fort Largs until December 1960. Most of them worked as drivers, or as administrative staff at Keswick Barracks. With changing attitudes to women's roles, the WRAAC was disbanded in 1984, and since then the Defence Force has incorporated women into mixed gender units.

After the departure of the WRAACs in 1960, there was debate about what use would be made of the empty barracks complex. On 30 November 1961, the Commander of Central Command handed the keys of Fort Largs over to the Commissioner of

Police. The Barracks entered into their third role, as the home of the South Australian Police Academy, replacing earlier ad hoc arrangements for police training in buildings scattered around the metropolitan area. One of the first actions by the police was to remount the two six-inch Mark VII guns in 1962 and restore the fort's warlike appearance. SA Police had an 'earnest desire ... to preserve the old Fort in its original trim'.

There was a period of refurbishment before the Police Academy opened. In that interval some of the Barracks buildings were occupied by the Weapons Research Establishment and used for electronic testing.

In preparation for use by the Police Academy, the Barracks building underwent another internal makeover when it was converted to classrooms, while retaining its mess facilities of kitchen, dining room and bar. The spartan Drill Hall appears to have undergone little significant change during its police years. The SA Police Academy occupied the Fort Largs Barracks for 50 years, compared to the 22 years it had housed the Army. Police training continued until 2011, when it was moved to a purpose-built complex a few hundred metres further east.

## **References**

The primary source for this Summary was:

- Grieve Gillett Dimity Anderson Architects, Heritage Assessment Report 'Former Fort Largs 1939 Barracks and Drill Hall' (2014), commissioned by DEWNR.

Refer to the Heritage Assessment Report for more detailed information about the history of the Former Fort Largs 1939 Barracks and Drill Hall, Corner of Strathfield Terrace & Lady Gowrie Drive, Taperoo and references.

## SITE DETAILS

Fort Largs Barracks and Drill Hall

PLACE NO: 26448

Corner of Strathfield Terrace & Lady Gowrie Drive, Taperoo

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<b>FORMER NAME:</b>	Fort Largs Barracks, Fort Largs Police Academy	
<b>DESCRIPTION OF PLACE:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Barracks - whole of exterior and surviving original 1939 layout, fixtures and fittings.</li><li>• Drill Hall - whole of exterior and surviving original 1939 layout, fixtures and fittings.</li></ul>	
<b>DATE OF COMPLETION:</b>	1939	
<b>SA HERITAGE REGISTER STATUS:</b>	<b>Description:</b>	Nominated
	<b>Date:</b>	7 August 2014
	<b>Description:</b>	Provisionally entered
	<b>Date:</b>	8 October 2014
	<b>Description:</b>	Confirmed
	<b>Date:</b>	22 April 2015
<b>LOCAL HERITAGE STATUS</b>	N/A	
<b>CURRENT USE:</b>	<b>Description:</b>	Vacant
	<b>Dates:</b>	2011-2014
<b>PREVIOUS USE(S):</b>	<b>Description:</b>	Accommodation, mess, administration
	<b>Dates:</b>	1939-2011
<b>ARCHITECT:</b>	<b>Name:</b>	Adelaide Works and Services Branch, Department of the Interior – (Chief Architect CE Davies)
	<b>Dates:</b>	1939
<b>BUILDER:</b>	<b>Name:</b>	J Groves and Sons
	<b>Dates:</b>	1939
<b>LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA:</b>	<b>Description:</b>	Port Adelaide/ Enfield
<b>LOCATION:</b>	<b>Unit No.:</b>	N/A
	<b>Street No.:</b>	N/A
	<b>Street Name:</b>	Corner of Strathfield Terrace & Lady Gowrie Drive
	<b>Town/Suburb:</b>	Taperoo
	<b>Post Code:</b>	5017



## SITE DETAILS (Cont.)

**Fort Largs Barracks and Drill Hall**  
**Corner of Strathfield Terrace & Lady Gowrie Drive, Taperoo**

**PLACE NO: 26448**

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**LAND DESCRIPTION:**

<b>Title Type:</b>	CT
<b>Volume:</b>	6095
<b>Folio:</b>	84
<b>Lot No.:</b>	200
<b>Plan No.:</b>	DP 88971
<b>Section:</b>	N/A
<b>Hundred:</b>	Port Adelaide

## PHOTOS

Fort Largs Barracks and Drill Hall  
Corner of Strathfield Terrace & Lady Gowrie Drive, Taperoo

PLACE NO: 26448



East Façade of Barracks Building, featuring entrance (Grieve Gillett 2014)



West Façade of Barracks Building [note later enclosed upper balcony & ground level verandah]  
(Grieve Gillett 2014)

## PHOTOS

Fort Largs Barracks and Drill Hall  
Corner of Strathfield Terrace & Lady Gowrie Drive, Taperoo

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Upper floor stair detailing, Barracks Building Barracks Building (Grieve Gillett 2014)



Typical upper floor room (possibly originally dormitory), Barracks Building (Grieve Gillett 2014)

## PHOTOS

Fort Largs Barracks and Drill Hall  
Corner of Strathfield Terrace & Lady Gowrie Drive, Taperoo

PLACE NO: 26448

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South Façade of Drill Hall, featuring entrance (*Grieve Gillett 2014*)



Interior of Drill Hall (Main hall with doors to side rooms) (*Grieve Gillett 2014*)