



WILLUNGA SLATE TRAIL & MUSEUM



A BRIEF HISTORY

The story of Willunga slate begins in 1840 with its discovery in the hills behind Willunga. A farmer, Edward Loud, was out shooting quail with friends when he came across an outcrop of slate on adjacent land where the Delabole Quarry was opened. A primitive village was established there to house the mainly Cornish quarrymen and their families who flocked to Willunga to work in the quarries. Subsequently, Martin's and Bastian's Quarry and the Bangor Quarry were established. By 1870 the slate industry had become a very important part of the social and economic development of Willunga district.

In the 1850s the Port Willunga Jetty was built (and later extended) to assist in transporting the slate products to Port Adelaide and interstate ports. The slate was transferred by bullock dray down the steep hills from the quarries and across the Aldinga Plains to the Port. By the 1870s, 20,000 roofing slates were being shipped out of Port Willunga each week.

SOME EARLY OBSERVATIONS ON WILLUNGA

"The quaint old Irish people and the quaint Cornish folks have all passed on but the voices and speech of the next generation are most like them. Those quaint ones with their musical voices and picturesque costumes were grand old people of the early days. I remember some of them with their poke bonnets and crinolined dresses, black and paisley shawls – and the men going to Church in black suits and tall bell-toppers. How dignified and reverent they all were too".

(Maud Aldam, Reminiscences)

"Slate tanks were introduced - what a boon to the housewives that soft rainwater was. And now from earthen floors, the floors of the new homes were laid with a carpet of Blue Slate, and what immense pride the women took in keeping those blue slates spotlessly clean. With washed walls and clean blue slate floors, how inviting were those early unpretentious homes of the pioneers".

Slate headstones often appeared in strange places. One was used for flagging on a kitchen floor after the person carving it made such a serious mistake that it could not be used as a headstone. Clearly such a large slab of slate could not be wasted!

"I regret having to report quite a string of accidents that have occurred here within the last few days. On the 6th inst., as Mr Dawe, jnr, was driving his horse dray, heavily laden with slate flagging, down the hill from Delabole Quarry, his horses became restive, and in endeavouring to restrain them he was thrown down and his left leg broken by the wheel passing over it. He was speedily attended by Dr. Jay".

(1867 newspaper report)

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Willunga Slate Museum
61 High Street, Willunga
South Australia 5172
(08) 8556 2195
by arrangement, phone:
Groups, outdoor weddings and other times

Tuesdays: 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Saturday, Sunday and
Public Holidays: 1 p.m. to 5 p.m.

Opening Times



Patterned slate roof, High Street. (Walk item 16)



'Glantawe', (Walk item 8) St Andrews Terrace.



Slate kerbing, Old Victor Harbor Road, Willunga Hill.



Slate fence posts, Range Road, Willunga Hill.



Slate fire surround carved with fern leaf motif. Private residence, Willunga.

Another accident occurred to Mr. Joseph Atkinson, whose wagon, also loaded with slate flagging, was capsized while coming down the hill from Bastian's Quarry. The driver, in springing from the wagon, caught his foot in the reins and fell amongst the struggling horses, but most miraculously escaped with only slight injuries; but one of the horses was much injured and the wagon broken. (1867 Newspaper report).

Two Fatally Crushed in Quarry

Thomas Jeffrey Arthur (63) and his son Thomas (19) were killed in Martin's Slate Quarry, near Willunga, in November 1936. The men were barring a cracked rock face about 15 metres high when about 600 tons of rock began to slide. Showered with fragments the men had evidently run, but were overwhelmed. As the men's lunch had not been eaten it was surmised that the accident occurred in the morning, but the tragedy was not discovered until the evening when Frank Arthur went to look for his father and brother.



The unique Slate Museum in Willunga, South Australia, tells of the discovery of slate, the subsequent development of the industry and the influence of the Cornish Quarrymen and their families on the social and cultural life of the district. The township of Willunga is testament to the adaptability of slate and the ingenuity of local residents in using the readily available material to meet their needs around their farms and houses, as shown in using slate for roofing, flooring, paving, fencing, water tanks, garden walls and book-leaf style bridges and small outbuildings. Beautifully carved slate headstones in the local cemeteries were often signed by the carver, while some homes still retain their delicately carved mantel-pieces. Several fine examples of slate carving are on display in the Museum. The slate trail endeavours to highlight the varied uses of slate around the township of Willunga and indicates some points of interest further afield. Allow 3 hours for a leisurely stroll or enjoy a shorter section.

POINTS OF INTEREST AROUND WILLUNGA

1. Willunga Slate Museum (61 High Street)

The Slate Trail starts at the Slate Museum in the stables at the Courthouse and Police Station. Note the slate rain-water tanks outside the Museum. Slate-paved gutters can be seen on the side of the Victor Harbor road about 100 metres up Old Willunga Hill.

2. St. George Street

St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Cemetery, Church and School. Many of the slate headstones were carved by W. Hawken or John Richards jnr, whose prize-winning slate carving is displayed in the Slate Museum. The Church (1848) is the oldest continuously-used church building in Willunga.

No. 16 St. George St. was built in the early 1850s for quarrymen Nicholas Male and Frederick Martin. In the 1870s it was home to the nuns from the Catholic School attended by children of the Irish slate quarrymen.

No. 22 St George St. was the home of Richard Polkinghorne who planted the oak tree in the 1860s. His brother Thomas was co-owner of Martin's slate quarry in the late 1840s. Note the wooden slab shed across the street.

3. Sibly House (8 St. Mary's Street)

Home of slate quarryman Samuel Sibly. Several Sibly men worked in the Willunga slate quarries. Joseph Sibly was manager of the Delabole Quarry from 1867 to 1872. His son John died from injuries sustained in a quarry accident in 1896.

4. St Mary's Street

No. 15 (St. Mary's Lodge) was the home of Thomas Martin, quarry owner and operator – his home reflected his position in Willunga. Slate was used extensively in the garden landscaping.

Further along is the Reed family cottage. Note the huge slate slab walls on the shed. Cliff Reed was the last of the

quarrymen - his slate-splitting tools are displayed in the Willunga Slate Museum. On the corner of Church Street and St. Mary's Street are a sheet slate fence and book-leaf slate shed once owned by Thomas Martin.

5. Spargo's Cottage, Bell Tree and Culvert (3 St. Judes Street)

Quarryman Richard Spargo built this cob cottage in the mid-1850s. After his death from emphysema in 1871 his widow Grace supported the family by growing vegetables in the large garden. The Methodist Church Bell is nearby in the large redgum tree. Opposite Spargo's cottage is a modern slate culvert built in the traditional book-leaf style, with no mortar.

6. Wesleyan Church and Cemetery (St. Jude's Street)

The Wesleyan Church was attended by many slate quarry workers and owners, and their families. Their spirited rendition of the favourite old Cornish hymns was renowned. The cemetery contains many slate headstones carved by George Sara, also two slate sarcophagi, marking the burial site of members of the Bastian and Williams family.

7. Arthur's Cottage (34 St. Andrews Terrace)

The Arthur family lived here for two generations. Two Arthur men (father and son) were killed in a quarry accident in 1936. Note the two slate water tanks at the side, the slate window sills and small side-panes on the windows.

8. 'Glantawe' Residence (20 St. Andrews Terrace)

The 'house of slate' was built in 1925 for Basil Dunstan, manager of the Willunga-Bangor (later Australian Slate Quarry) Company. It was designed by his father John Dunstan an architect who purchased the Bangor Quarry in 1917 and set about reviving the industry. It is a 14-room bungalow built mainly of panels of sheet slate in heavy timber frames, with some red brick sections. Internal and external walls, and some ceilings, are of grey slate. Coursed slate decorates the brick walls, columns and chimneys. The garage walls and fence are built of slab slate panels.

9. Dawe's Residence (19 St. Andrews Terrace)

This elegant two storey house with a high pitched slate roof was built in the late 1850s by George Sara, the leading builder of the district, for Sampson Dawe ex-owner of the Delabole Slate Quarry.

10. Nos. 13 & 9 St. Andrews Terrace

An early book-leaf style slate building and the 1850s home of Willunga's bailiff William Cheesman, respectively. (Cheesman headstones can be seen in the Slate Museum). Opposite is St. Stephen's Anglican Church (1884) with original slate roof.

11. Show Hall, (Main Road)

Opened in 1890, the Agricultural Hall was the venue for the district's popular Agricultural and Horticultural Shows, at which local slate was displayed.

12. Alma Hotel and early Willunga store (Hill Street)

The hotel opened in September 1856. The early slate verandahs and internal floors remain. The cafe and delicatessen building nearby has operated since the 1890s as a store, and refreshment shop for tourist buses. Note the original slate roof.

13. St. Peters Terrace.

Several distinctive quarrymen's cottages can be seen (Welshford's at No. 3 and Samuel Heysed's at No. 13). St. Anne's Lodge (No. 7) was built in 1851 for Dr. Richard Jay who was always 'on call' for the quarrymen and their families.

14. Waverley Park (St. Peters Terrace)

Thomas Smith Kell established a house and dairy here around 1846. The early dairy outbuilding behind the house, built of finely cut book-leaf slate, is of particular interest. Waverley Park later belonged to John Allen, who owned the Delabole Slate Quarry until 1903 and was Chairman of Willunga District Council for many years.

15. Russell's & Minko Wines, Tall Poppy (13 & 17 High Street)

No. 13 is an early blacksmith's home, boot-maker's shop and Primitive Methodist manse with original slate roof, slate window sills and slate floor. No. 17 was a butcher's shop from the 1860s to 1955, with original verandah stones, a large cellar and a slate mantelpiece carved by Thomas Dennis Jackson.

16. Shop and Residence (22 High Street)

An early shop and general store for nearly 100 years. Inside the rear of the shop is a small Gothic window used by slate quarrymen cashing their pay cheques after work. Note the unusual patterned slate roof.

17. Cafe Restaurant (27 High Street)

Opened in 1868 as a Primitive Methodist Church. The slate foundation stone from the original Church stands near the side entrance. The Gallery and shop next door occupy an 1860s building with its original slate roof and a slab slate floor.

18. Oddfellows Hall (35 High Street)

As the town's first cultural centre (1863) the Hall was a popular venue for lectures, concerts, recitals and public meetings and was the centre of community life for the quarrymen and their families. During an 1866 concert 'an original song "Slate, Slate, Slate or the Delabole Hat" was sung by Mr. Hutton, who convulsed the audience by having a slate hat brought on the platform, the allusions to which seemed to be thoroughly understood and enjoyed by those present, and was vociferously encored'.

19. Hall (38 High St)

Built in 1870 for the Church of Christ, with original slate roof and outbuildings, and used for a variety of community purposes including a POW Depot, Red Cross and CWA meeting rooms, and then as a Masonic Hall.

20. Bassett Boys' Schoolroom (19 St Luke's Street)

A purpose-built schoolroom, opened in 1862 by James Bassett, with original slate roof and floor.

21. Bridge and Cottages (St. James Street)

The deep culvert-type bridge is built book-leaf style of local slate and named after basket-weaver Thomas Morton. Upalong Cottage (No.19) was the 1850s home of Richard Mortimer, quarryman and builder, followed by the Morton family. McCaffrey's Cottage (No. 21) was the home in the late 1850s of James McCaffrey, an Irish quarryman.

Please respect the privacy of the property owners.

