



Embracing the History

Port Adelaide Inner Harbour

A snapshot of the Cultural Mapping and Survey Project

Recording the history of Port Adelaide's Inner Harbour

A rich history of maritime stories and structures surround the Port of Adelaide. In recognition of South Australia's oldest working port, the State Government initiated a comprehensive cultural mapping survey of the Inner Harbour in 2007. The result is a celebration of Port Adelaide's social, economic and built heritage. The project features both a survey of the structures of the old working port and a broader cultural mapping program, to further investigate some of these places and working practices of the former Port Adelaide waterfront.

The industrial waterfronts of places such as Port Adelaide were areas of intense and hard-working activity until only a few decades ago.

All that changed with the containerisation of ship cargoes in the 1970s, the predominance of land-based transport over coastal trade and the shift of industry to new industrial centres.

This left these hives of working life vacant; often with remnant industrial buildings and the effect of environmental practices not acceptable today.

But these remnants shine light on the fabric of lives lived in these places, the nature of work done, and activities and trades carried out; the labour, often back-breaking; the dangers; the families who lived and laboured there; and the people who risked their all in business and trade.

The experiences of other former industrial ports around the world has shown how these sites can be seen as opportunities for renewal.

This booklet is a snapshot of the Cultural Mapping and Survey Project undertaken of the 50 hectares of Inner Harbour land owned by the Government of South Australia. The survey largely focused on the history of the Inner Harbour since the arrival of European settlers in 1836.

The Cultural Mapping & Survey Project

The purpose of the project was to record the tangible history such as the structures, artefacts and remnant industrial activities of the waterfront, as well as the intangible history – the stories, themes and memories.

The project also identified elements that might be integrated into future development, such as precinct signage, public art, heritage trails or artefacts in public places.

The project was conducted by Malloway Studio, an Adelaide architecture and urban design firm which specialises in interpretation and conservation. Local writer, historian and curator Paul Kloeden, with Associate Professors Mark Staniforth and Adam Paterson, from the Department of Archaeology at Flinders University, also worked on the project.

The project was undertaken in three stages, starting with the Musgrave and Sugar Company wharves. The Jenkins Street boatyards, the former government dockyard, including Hawkers Creek and the later government pipeworks, and the former Department of Marine and Harbors site followed.

The final stage looked at the Fletcher's Slip area, Hart's Mill buildings and surrounds, former General Motors Holden and Port Adelaide Sailing Club sites, and the area adjacent to Docks 1 and 2.



The Cultural Mapping approach

The UNESCO definition for cultural mapping has been used as the foundation for the work at Port Adelaide. This was spelt out at a Cultural Mapping Symposium and Workshop held in Australia in 1995.

Cultural mapping involves a community identifying and documenting local cultural resources. Through this research cultural elements are recorded - the tangibles like galleries, craft industries, distinctive landmarks, local events and industries, as well as the intangibles like memories, personal histories, attitudes and values. After researching the elements that make a community unique, cultural mapping involves initiating a range of community activities or projects, to record, conserve and use these elements. The most fundamental goal of cultural mapping is to help communities recognise, celebrate and support cultural diversity for economic, social and regional development.

European settlement

While its unique relationship to Adelaide and the rest of South Australia is apparent, Port Adelaide developed as a distinct town with a character and history of its own. In 1982 the historic centre was the first State Heritage Area to be declared.

The present location of the port was not the first. South Australia's founder Colonel William Light surveyed the area and placed the port where Old Port Road met the Port River, at the place that became known as Port Misery.

Despite Light's vision, the site proved unsuitable and in 1840, after two years of preparation work by the South Australian Company, the port was moved downstream to its present location. The original location now lies in the area that has been reclaimed as West Lakes.

Early plan of the "Old Port" (1839)
Source: State Library of South Australia, Australian database.





Embracing the history

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Adelaide Milling Company

The former Adelaide Milling Company mill precinct is the location for the longest continuously operating flour milling enterprise in South Australia, operating from 1855 to 1980.

The two major buildings constitute important landmarks in Port Adelaide. The older building on Mundy Street, Hart's Mill, was completed in 1855 under the direction of prominent colonial leader and three time Premier, John Hart.

The building was the largest and most advanced mill in South Australia and was used to create an export market for the young State's grain produce.

Built from Port Vincent limestone, it remains a focus for Port Adelaide's contemporary artistic and community life.

The period between 1852 and 1883 was one of rapid development for Port Adelaide and the new colony.

A second mill, the iconic red brick Adelaide Milling Company building closer to the Port River, was completed in 1894. Its operations were a fine example of late nineteenth century industrial milling technology and pioneered the use of electricity. After a number of upgrades, it remained in use until 1980.

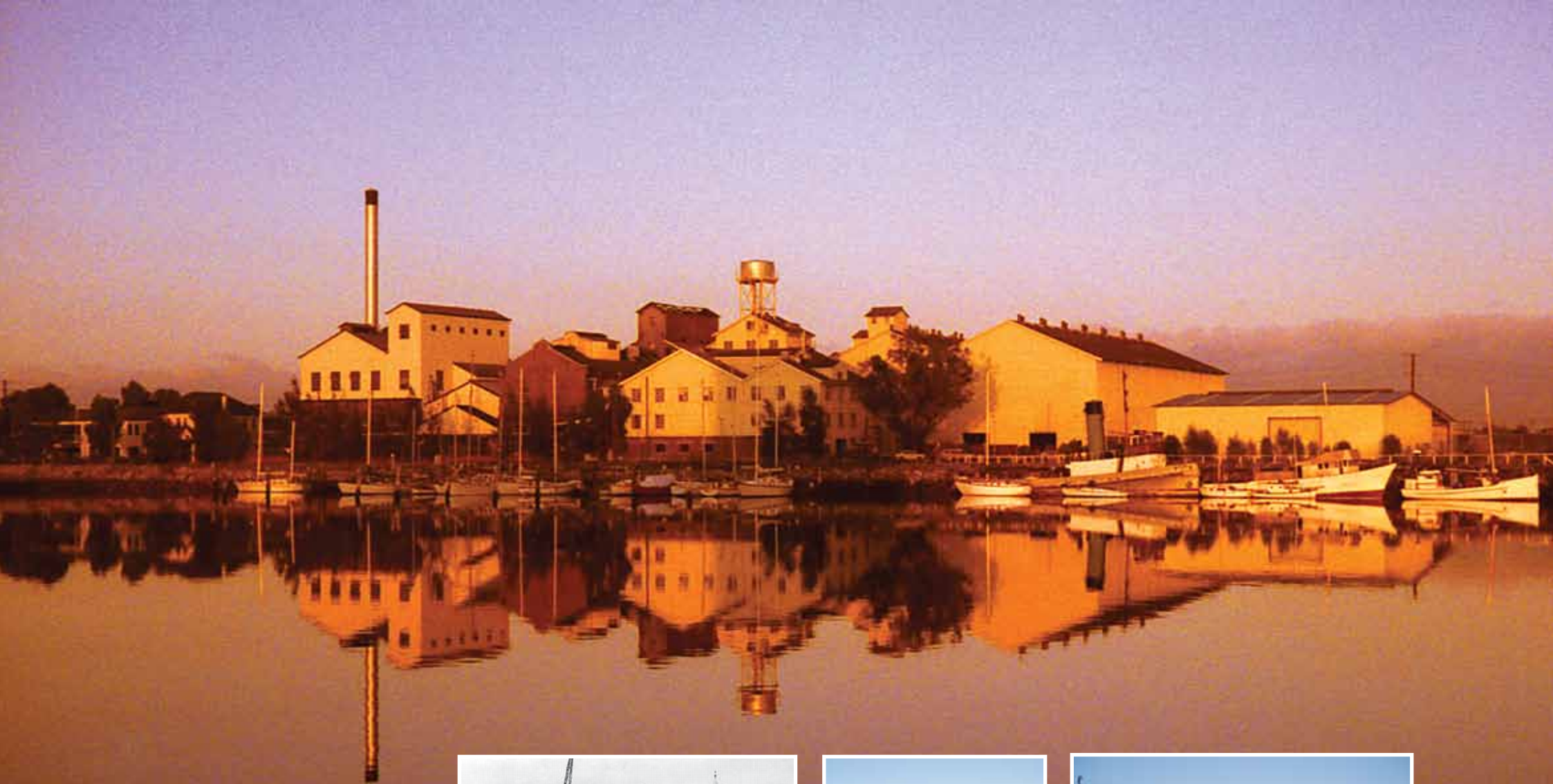
The two major buildings and some walls of the Adelaide Milling Company precinct are State Heritage listed.

Near the Adelaide Milling Company building once stood a towering brick chimney of the Port Adelaide smelter. This was designed by Colonial Architect Edward Hamilton, who also designed the Port Adelaide Court House, Customs House and Police Station.

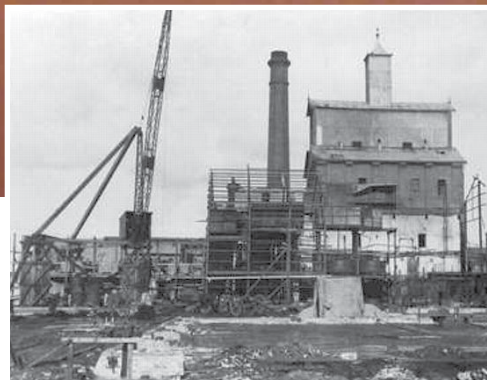
From 1861, the English and Australian Copper Company processed ores from the Burra mines at the site, putting South Australia on the road to its lucrative mining future. However, by 1909 almost all of the original works had been replaced by cargo and grain sheds and the chimney sold and removed.







Musgrave Wharf (north of the CSR Wharf) (1987)
Source: Ron Couper-Smart



Musgrave Wharf

The opening of the first Osborne Power Station in 1923 created the opportunity for industrial activity along the waterside. This included a General Motors Holden assembly plant, the Colonial Sugar Refinery (CSR) plant, and a plant manufacturing pipe for government mains water schemes.

The CSR Wharf and the Musgrave Wharf, on the western side of the Inner Harbour just north of the Jervois Bridge, were features of this boom era of large industrial operations on the Port River.

Both the Musgrave and the CSR jetties were made of timber pile in high shipping traffic areas in order to reduce wave reflection, preserve local tidal flows and help to dissipate wave energy in busy harbours.

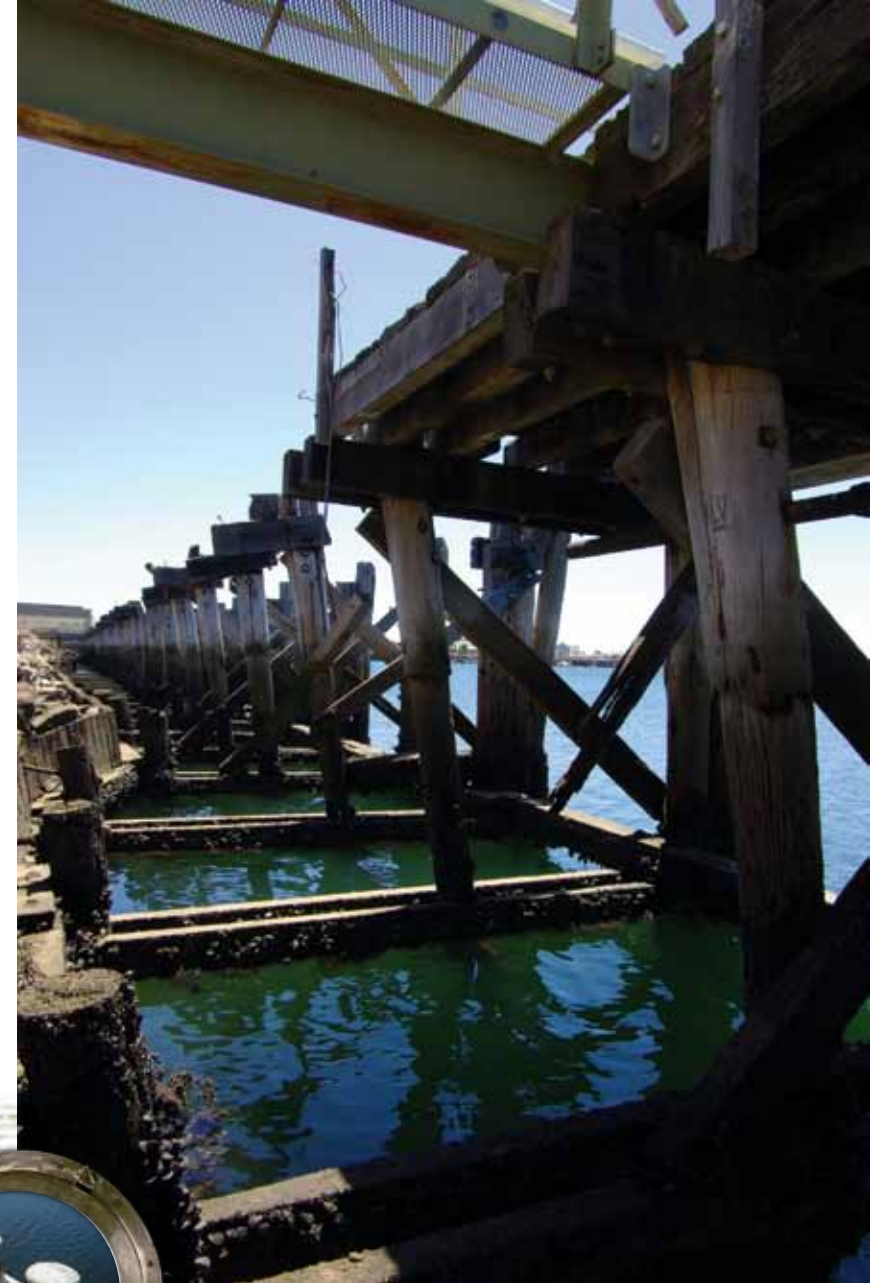
Musgrave Wharf, parts of which still remain, was constructed in the early part of the twentieth century, so it only has medium archaeological potential and significance.

The structure provides a visual reminder of past days, and being a haven for fish, is well frequented by fishermen and spectators.

Musgrave Wharf had three piles per bent instead of the simpler two piles. A bent is a two-dimensional frame in a jetty or wharf, consisting of piles and lateral support beams.

The outer-most pile in most cases being a double pile for added strength to absorb the energy involved in docking a large cargo vessel.

There was also a single, long iron tie-rod that connect the shorter piles to timber 'dead-men' located some six metres inshore and buried at least two metres below the existing land surface – a degree of lateral support that suggests vessels were expected to be berthed anywhere along the length of the Musgrave Wharf structure.



Port
Adelaide



Photograph of Hawkers Creek (undated)
Source: Port Adelaide Historical Society

Hawkers Creek – the creek that disappeared

Early European accounts of the Port record an Aboriginal presence in the area of Hawkercreek, the stream that has long since disappeared.

Its southern bank was the site of the first government dockyard. The South Australian Register, a newspaper of that era reported: “The whole floating property of the Government consisted of a few buoys and a harbour boat” and “a small shed was put up just big enough for a carpenter’s bench and a turning lathe”.

The dockyard was in full swing by the 1850s, with major improvements made in 1872. It was the beginning of the end for Hawkercreek.

The little tidal creek that wound its way through Glanville and Exeter and entered the Port River from the west was an impediment to north-south traffic. A privately-owned ferry service and plank bridge were the only ways across until a causeway was constructed in 1860 – now Causeway Road.

But the railways were coming too, and in 1878 the line was extended from Port Adelaide to Semaphore, crossing the river and turning north along the eastern edge of Causeway Road to Semaphore Road, where it still runs today.



Taken from northern bank of Hawkers Creek (1871)
Source: State Library of South Australia

Glanville Station sits just north of where Hawkers Creek once ran and the land on both banks became railway reserve and then Marine and Harbors land. It was not long before the tidal creek came to an end at the railway line and by 1885, Marine Board plans were starting to show the creek's banks as straight lines – wharves.

There were other, less well-recorded uses of the creek's banks. An 1873 plan suggests it might have been used as a wood and coal yard on the south bank west of the government yards.

The compulsory acquisition of all harbour-front land by the government in 1917 meant construction of a formal dockyard on the north bank of the creek while a major foundry and pipe-making plant employing hundreds of people – originally the Glanville Ways and Works Shops – occupied most of the south bank for many years.

With all the industrial activity around the banks, it was only a matter of time before the creek disappeared altogether. Aerial photographs from the 1940s onwards show a shrinking area of water.



Aerial photograph of the
Hawkers Creek region (1959).
Source: Mapland



Fletcher's Slip Precinct

Scottish settler Henry Cruickshank Flett (later Fletcher) established his ship repairing business with the purchase of an old patent slip in 1849 – and with a 21 year lease on two acres of land from the South Australian Company.

The number of vessels arriving at Port Adelaide was increasing and the need for repair facilities, ship building and appropriate docks rising.

About 12 years later, Fletcher was not only repairing ships but building them.

He ordered a new and larger slipway from the Dunnikier Iron Company in his homeland Scotland and Fletcher's sons William and Thomas grew up to become shipbuilders. The Dunnikier slipway was built west of the old Fletcher's slipway and is still in existence today as pictured left.

Henry Fletcher died at the age of 91 in 1912, a prominent and wealthy member of the Port Adelaide community. The SA Harbors Board compulsorily acquired Fletcher's property in 1917 and leased it to the emerging South Australian shipping group, the Adelaide Steamship Company.

Its use as a slip ceased in 1973, and after that it was occupied by a range of marine and boat related businesses until 2009. Some of the eight buildings on site have heritage listing.

The Fletcher's Slip precinct, including the former Fletcher's and Dunnikier Slipways and associated structures, are registered State Heritage Places.



Port Adelaide boatyards & Central's Shed

The South Australian Heritage Council decided some time ago against including the remaining boatyards at Jenkins Street on the Port River on a register protecting them from demolition.

A decision to relocate the marine industry was made many years ago on environmental and commercial grounds. The State Government's \$21 million investment in Marina Adelaide at Largs North provides a new environmentally sustainable hub for maritime industries on the Port River.

The government worked closely with boatyard operators to assist their relocation.

Of all the structures related to boat building and boat repair along Jenkins Street, the building known as Central's Shed is arguably the most expressive of its former use and has unique features.

The mapping project found that the main building of the premises formerly leased by Central Boating Services (Central's) was a complete and sound structure and of a suitable size and construction for relocation.

As a result, the Government of South Australia worked with heritage consultants to dismantle the shed carefully in its entirety and keep it safely in storage until it was reused at a related site.

There was a possibility that the structure was previously moved from the former site occupied by the Jenkins' slip making it the oldest of the boatyard structures that were once along Jenkins Street.

It was the construction of Birkenhead Bridge that probably caused the shed to be moved from its original site. Road access to the new bridge required demolition of Jenkins' Central Slipway and a number of small sheds. Jenkins' moved west to the current site of the Central Slipway on what had once been the extension of Fletcher Street.

The indent in the waterside façade to accommodate bowsprits and bows of ketches and other old ships has high interpretive value relating to the scale and number of boats that utilised the slip – boats could be brought far enough up the slip to enable work on rudders and propellers.





“The space between this and the next yard is rather a gem, reminding one of the old curiosity shop, for a page might be written on the fragments scattered about.

There the windlass of one ship, the capstan of another, ribs and planking, boilers and spars, funnels and anchors, lie scattered abroad, in beautiful confusion, and each has a history peculiar to itself.”

The Register 13 November 1866 describes the Jenkins Street boatyards



Mac Lawrie's Shed & Slipway

Macleay 'Mac' Lawrie was typical of the entrepreneurial spirit of the Port. Bored with his job as an x-ray technician, he saw an advertisement in 1950 for the lease of Alf Pickhaver's shed and slipway on lots 9 and 12 on Jenkins Street, next door to the Royal South Australian Yacht Squadron.

Mac Lawrie bought the lease, even though he knew nothing about the boat business. He established what became Mac Lawrie's Diving and Marine, starting out by cleaning and painting hulls, he was soon able to employ two shipwrights and went into ship repairs.

Despite having no knowledge of underwater diving, Mac Lawrie followed his entrepreneurial spirit and accepted a diving job. He soon had one of the most prominent commercial diving businesses in the State. When Port Adelaide Rowing Club vacated its sheds in the 1960s, Mac took over the eastern shed using the riverfront section for diving gear and the northern section for general slipway gear.

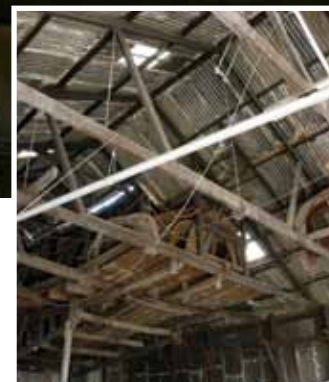
Documentary evidence suggests a slipway was operating in this location in the 1870s. When the Blue Streak Rocket Range at Woomera was being dismantled in the late 1970s, Mac bought up a set of rails and rebuilt his slipway.

He was well known for his custom-made equipment. He designed an underwater scraper and a 'submarine' for towing behind a boat. He also built a decompression chamber, the only one in South Australia for many years.

Mac's son Jock had joined the business in 1977 as an apprentice shipwright and in 1985 Mac retired after 35 years on the waterfront.



Mac Lawrie's diving and underwater equipment.
Source: Private collection of Jock Lawrie





Wharf Cranes Dock 2

Two of four original 'Double Hook Level Luffing Electric Wharf Cranes' remain on the southern side of Dock 2. The cranes were made by Port Adelaide engineering firm Gibb and Miller and used from 1958 until decommissioning in 2001.

The cranes were used to load commodities such as scrap steel and fruit on to ships for transport overseas at a time when the Inner Harbour of Port Adelaide was the gateway for all vessels entering and leaving South Australia.

Electricians on call 24 hours a day were based in a small office nearby which also housed spare parts for the cranes.





Berth 5 Customs Office

While many believe the Customs Office for Berth 5 in Todd Street, Port Adelaide, dates from 1925, photographic evidence suggests its true date of construction is circa 1938-40. While it was occupied and operated by HM Customs from 1940, it was owned by the SA Harbors Board, who took over ownership of the land in February 1935.

Construction of the timber-framed building was part of the major redevelopment of the Inner Harbour during the 1930s and it is one of the last remaining buildings in the area from that period.

Customs operations are a key part of the import and export functions of a port. This building is the only remaining example of wharf-based customs operations in the Inner Harbour, where it served the wharf operations of Shed 5 and Dock 1.

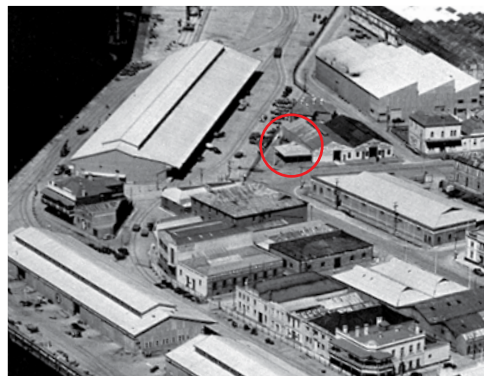
It is the only non-masonry building remaining, which was the predominant building form on the wharf at the time. While the Customs Office is showing some signs of deterioration, it remains a significant building.

Staffed generally by two wharf examining officers, Berth 5 was one of about 20 offices scattered through the harbour which were crucial to the work of enforcing customs laws and ensuring the smooth movement of cargo.

Customs operations were centralised in the North Parade building from the mid-1960s but the Berth 5 office was re-used by the Customs service for a short time in the mid-1970s as a wine tax administration office.

Its use before it was occupied by the Port Adelaide Radio Club from the mid-1990s until 2009 remains unclear.

The building remains largely unchanged from its 1950s configuration, with the reception bench top and light fittings of a Deco style typical of the 1930s.



Aerial view - Customs Office and Shed 5 are evident (circa 1945).
Source: Port Adelaide Enfield Library collection



Government of South Australia gratefully acknowledges

the support from groups represented on the Port Adelaide Cultural Mapping Steering Group - and those who gave their memories and expertise in oral and written histories to the survey.

Thanks also to the Port of Adelaide branch of the National Trust, which suggested the cultural mapping survey be conducted, along with other members of the Steering Group including representatives of the Port Adelaide Historical Society, SA Maritime Museum, Port Adelaide Enfield Council and the Port Adelaide Renewal Project.

Thanks also to the work and contribution of:

- Adelaide architect and urban design firm, Mulloway Studio and contractors
- Professional photographer, James Bateman, whose work features in this booklet
- State Library for historic photographs

Port Adelaide Renewal Project
www.ourport.com.au

The full Cultural Mapping reports are available online.

This document was published in August 2013 by Renewal SA.

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