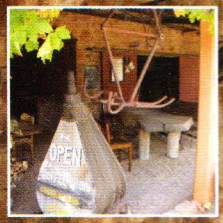
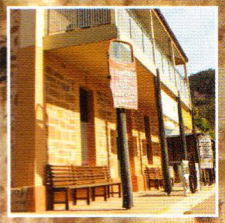
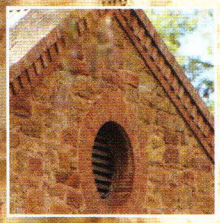
MELROSE

HISTORICAL WALK







HISTORY OF MELROSE

The township of Melrose, nestled at the foot of Mount of Remarkable on the edge of the Willochra Plain, is the oldest town in the Flinders Ranges. It is set in one of the most picturesque areas of the State and the traveller is invited to stay and absorb its fascinating history and colourful past.

It was in 1840, that Edward John Eyre named Mount Remarkable (955m) which towers above Melrose. Three years later, the first pastoralists had established themselves in the area.

Conflict with the Aborigines caused the pastoralists much concern and they pressured the Colonial Government for police protection. The nearest police station at that time was at Clare which was 130km south. This distance gave little security to the early pastoralists and their families and made the pursuit of Aboriginals sought for theft of stock and provisions very difficult.

In 1848, a police outpost was established at Mount Remarkable with a corporal, two troopers and an Indigenous constable.

In 1846, a Special Survey of 20,000 acres was granted to the Mount Remarkable Mining Company for the purpose of mining copper. However this venture was not successful and the Company was dissolved in 1851.

Old Melrose was surveyed by T.F. Nott in 1853 as part of his duties for the Mount Remarkable Mining Company's subdivision of the Special Survey.

What is known as the township of Melrose today is really the aggregation of the Police Paddock (1848), Old Melrose (1853) and New Melrose (1856). As pastoralists, miners and timber-getters moved into the area, so the tradesmen came to fill their needs.

Melrose was the only established town for more than twenty years and it developed as the "Emporium of the North" supplying remote pastoral runs, mining camps and early settlers with goods, communication and transport.

The township of Melrose continued to thrive, commerce and industry developing hand in hand with agriculture as the large pastoral runs gave way to closer settlement. Melrose became a microcosm of the development of rural South Australia as all the different land tenure schemes that were legislated for over the years in South Australia were implemented in this area. From the early Pastoral Acts, the Workingmen's Blocks, the Village Settlement Scheme, the Closer Settlement Act and the Soldier Settlement Scheme all played a part in the history of Melrose.

The passing of time has brought changes to Melrose as it has to most small country towns.

The Great Depression of the 1930's brought about the closing of the local industry and large scale farming has brought changes to the population, which in turn has changed the face of this small township.

But the rich and colourful history of this "oldest town in the north" will always be with us.

"It would be difficult, I imagine,
to find another town with quite the same rustic
charm as the pleasant, historic old place"

Geoffrey Shepherd, The Express, 1949

1. Masonic Lodge

The Masonic Lodge was built at a cost of £1,300 in 1928 by Brother P.T. Penglase, a Lodge Member. It was officially opened on the 11th September, 1929 and was used by the Melrose Freemasons. The building is now used as archives by the Melrose District History Society Inc.

2. Workingmen's Blocks

In 1885, the SA Government passed a Bill providing opportunity for working men to lease and work 20 acres of land. This experimental scheme was to assist those affected by the severe drought of 1880 – 82 and for the unemployed to become self-sufficient.

Melrose was chosen as one of the sites for the experiment and the area was leased by A. W. F. Ey who later became Clerk of the District Council. Some 33 blocks were leased on the outskirts of Melrose. All but a few have now been absorbed into larger holdings.

3. Melrose Primary School

This site was the fourth to be used for the purpose of education in Melrose. Earlier schools were run in two pug and pine cottages and one in the Institute. The SA Government built this school in 1879 at a cost of £1,490. It was designed to accommodate 80 children (107 children attended in the first year) and had a teacher's residence attached, which is now used as the Melrose Kindergarten. The school grounds were part of the original Police Paddock, which once extended from the Institute Corner to the present northern outskirts of the town. The grounds have grown considerably since then with the transfer of the last of the Police Paddock in 1968 to form the school oval.

4. Blacksmith's Shop

Built by Bluey Blundstone in 1865, these premises have been meticulously restored in the mid 1980's. It was one of three blacksmiths in the town and provided for the needs of the mounted police force located opposite, as well as for the wider community until 1914. For the next 30 years the building served as a Carpenter's shop. The house and grounds are now privately owned and are being operated as a bed and breakfast and a licensed coffee shop.

5. Police Station and Courthouse

In 1848, a slab hut with a bark roof and rammed floor was erected to serve as the most northern police station. Seven years later, it was replaced by two pine-log huts and a lean-to lockup. In 1862 the present stone building was erected as a Police Station and Courthouse. It was the Headquarters for the Far Northern Division of the SA Police until 1881 as well as being the Local Circuit Court.

There have been further additions to the original building since then and the stables at the rear present a timely reminder of the distances covered by the mounted troopers stationed at Mount Remarkable in earlier days. Melrose ceased to operate as a Police Station in 1967. Today the buildings serve as Melrose Courthouse Heritage Centre, helping to tell the story of law and order in the north as well as the history of this unique township.
It is open daily from 2pm-5pm.

6. Paradise Square

This old cemetery was never consecrated ground but its location opposite the Police Station caused it to become the early burial ground for those who died in the vicinity of Mount Remarkable. It served the area from 1853 to 1869 when the new Melrose Cemetery was established. Some bodies were re-interred in the new cemetery. Detailed information boards have been located at the entrance of Paradise Square to provide further information on the burials that are known to have taken place.

7. Melrose Post Office

Designed by the Colonial Architect, the Post Office and residence was built in 1866 by Mr. Burgoyne, a contractor from Port Augusta who employed Mr. Carr of Adelaide as Mason's Foreman and Mr. Thomas Baker as Foreman. The cost for building the Post Office was £1,475. In the same year the telegraph line was put through Melrose as part of the linkage that connected Clare and Port Augusta. The building has changed little over the years although the original arcade has been enclosed. It was declared an unofficial Post Office in 1978 and the building was then sold to private owners. The Post Office was closed in 2005.

8. Mount Remarkable Hotel

This hotel replaced the original pug and pine inn built by T.W. Moran who was one of the early police troopers at Melrose. The two storied building has lintels of red gum and timer shingles are still visible in places. It has a quaint balcony and two single story wings that form a courtyard at the rear. Continuous Licence has been held since 1857 and the building is largely unchanged since 1860. It has catered for the famous and infamous, the rich and the poor, the successful and down-and-out for almost 150 years along with other hotels in Melrose. It is listed on the National Trust Register.

9. Bank Building

Banking services in Melrose were provided in this building from 1881. It was originally the Bank of South Australia and became the Union Bank in 1892, the E.S. & A. in 1912 and finally the ANZ Bank on 1970. The building was sold in 1989 and leased by the ANZ Bank as an agency service until 1995. It is now privately owned.

10. District Council Chambers and Post Office

The original chambers were built by G.P. Yates, a local carpenter and builder in 1904. Foundation stone was laid by J.K. Deer. Additions were made in 1961 when a front section was added at a cost of £12,600. Further extensive additions were completed in 1990 to the value of $22,000. These additions were designed and built by Davis Bros., Port Augusta. The original chambers and 1961 additions are now the center core of the building as it stands today. An extension was built in 2010 to cater for more office space.

11. Old Store

Searle's General Store of the 1850's was T.B. Marshall's store from the late 1860's to the early 1900's. Subsequent owners have altered the premises and in 1952 the present shop was built over the cellar of the demolished general store. Only the corrugated iron shop, which is lined with lining boards, remains of the original store and now forms part of the existing premises. In recent times it was used as a gift shop and is now the "Over the Edge" bike shop.

12. Institute Building

Institute buildings provided a centre for social, cultural and educational activities in the last century – a tradition that has continued. It is only in recent times that libraries have ceased to operate from local institutes. The original Melrose Institute was built in 1873 with the Foundation stone laid by W.J. Brook. In 1907, the building was demolished and the present Institute constructed. It was built by G.P. Yates (local builder) and designed by B.G. Williams. The front addition was added in 1924.

13. Royal Exchange Hotel

The present building, which was built in 1865, replaced the original pug and pine building known as the Melrose

Inn (1857). Licence was cancelled in 1877 and the building was converted to a General Store. Various enterprises have followed and a Bakery was established and operated by Bernie Muldoon in 1921. Later on tea-rooms were added. It is now privately owned.

14. The North Star Hotel

The North Star Hotel is the oldest licensed hotel in the Flinders Ranges. It was first licensed in 1854 as a simple log house built by Wm. St. George who also brewed his own beer. It was later converted to a neat single storey building. In 1876, William Jacka Jnr moved from Auburn to take over the licence and his sons, William John and John Henry began Jacka's Brewery. In 1881 a portion of the old building was demolished and the present two-storey building was erected, with renovations and extensions made in 2004.

15. The Swing Bridge

During the 1890's a number of swing bridges were constructed along the Willochra Creek in the vicinity of Melrose. The bridges provided access from the Workingmen's Blocks for farm labourers, brewery workers and school children during periods when the creek was flowing.

This replica swing bridge was erected in 1990 to replace an original bridge that was badly damaged in the 1946 flood.

16. Melrose Wells

As the Willochra Creek flows only after heavy rains, early settlers depended on water supplied from wells dug along the near creek. There were two Council Wells at this site that were originally fitted with a Douglas hand pump. The wells have been filled in but were used until the 1960's when water was reticulated to the town. The water from the Melrose Wells was of exceptional quality and at one time was even transported to Port Augusta for the brewing of beer.

17. Jacka's House

Lambert Street was part of Old Melrose (1853). This house was the home of J.H. Jacka, the founder of Jacka's Brewery. Jacka's original brewery building was adjacent to his house until larger premises were required. The brewing operations were then moved over to Marshall's Flour Mill in 1893. The original brewery building became the Melrose Butter Factory and was demolished early last century. Jacka's House is now a private residence.

18. Dinham's Cottage

(also known as Alaparinga)

This is a fine example of the early pug and pine cottages that were built in Melrose in the 1850's-1860's. Owned by the Dinham family from the early 1930's, it has been extensively restored by the current owners to preserve its unique character. The large stone studio was erected in 1985 using building methods from last century. This property is a private residence.

19. Jacka's Brewery

(formerly T.B. Marshall's Flour Mill)

This imposing building was originally built in 1878 as a flour mill for T.B. Marshall. Grain from the wheat growers on the Willochra Plain was milled here until the business depression of the 1890's brought about its closure as a flour mill.

J.H. Jacka transferred his brewing operations to this location in 1893 and the business flourished, producing quality products using the high quality Melrose spring water. As well as beer, the Brewery produced cordials and aerated waters. The Brewery supplied many areas in the region, with goods being hauled by the huge horse-drawn wagons as far north as Broken Hill. The Brewery closed in 1933 during the Great Depression. The building is privately owned.

20. Cottage Hospital

The Melrose Cottage Hospital was built in 1882 and officially opened as a hospital in 1885 when Dr. Milne was appointed as Hospital Surgeon. Patients paid £2 2s per week for board, lodging, nursing and medical care. Doctors did not stay long in Melrose and it was said "the pure mountain air made the place too healthy for his services to be needed". The hospital served the community intermittently until it was sold up in 1927. It is now a private residence.

21. Anglican Church

The early population of Melrose was largely Church of England and many prominent early citizens were staunch supporters of the Church. The foundation stone of the first Holy Trinity Church was laid on 27th August, 1864 and regular services were conducted from 1866. This present building replaced the old Church in 1956.

22. Uniting Church

In 1870 the foundation stone for a Wesleyan Chapel was laid at this site. The Chapel took ten months to build and was opened in February, 1871. The Rev. B.G. Edwards had been appointed to Melrose in 1869 and had previously held services in the Courthouse.

23. Keating's Cottage

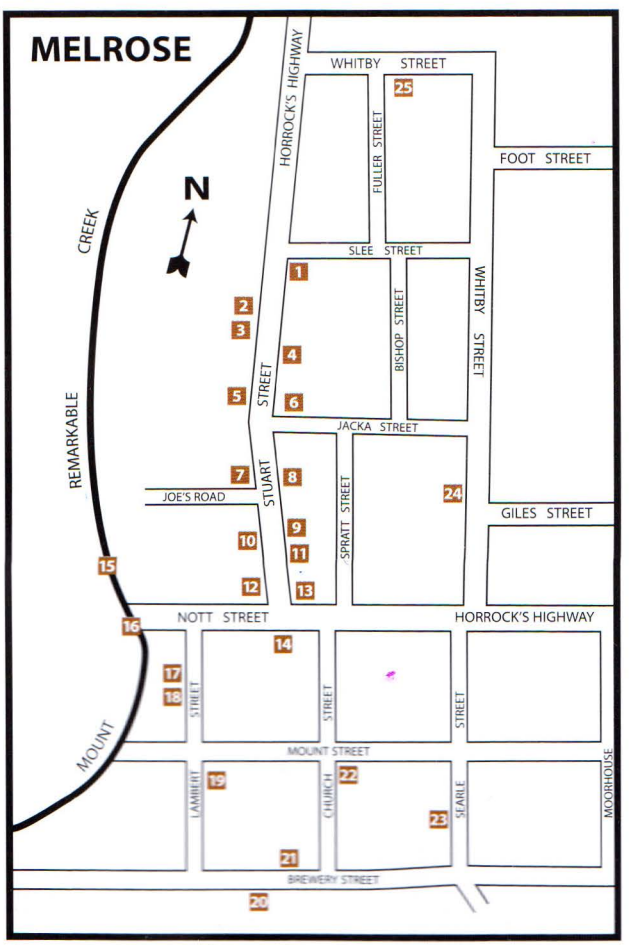
This original pug and pine cottage was built in the late 1850's and is a fine example of how these cottages have been adapted to provide adequate housing for families for almost 150 years. The early shingle roof has been covered with corrugated iron as have the pug and pine walls. The original interior calico covered ceilings and walls, with rope cornices, remain. Electricity has been added only in recent years. This cottage is listed with the National Trust. It is privately owned and not open for inspection.

24. Yates Cottage

This is another example of a re-clad pug and pine cottage. A loan from the Oddfellows Lodge enabled C.P. Yates, Carpenter and Undertaker, to build this cottage. The cottage was partially restored in the 1970's by a local craft group. It is now privately owned and further restoration work has been carried out in recent years.

25. Catholic Church

St Clement's Catholic Church was built on Lot 34 of Section 7 in New Melrose and was officially opened in 1876. It was built at a cost of £400 which was raised by 20 families each giving £20. Rev. Fr. Nevin was the first regular priest. The Church was demolished in 1982.



This guide has been supplied by

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Additional tourist information
is available from

Melrose Caravan Park

Enjoy your stay and safe travelling!!!