

Introduction

The Willunga Slate Museum tells the story of the discovery of slate, the subsequent development of the slate industry, and the effects on the social and cultural life of the Willunga district. The discovery of slate led to the influx of mainly Cornish families, who introduced a tendency to use slate as the primary building material for all sorts of purposes.

The township of Willunga is still a testament to the adaptability and the ingenious use of slate to meet residents' needs around farms and houses. Slate was used for roofing, flooring, paving, fencing, water tanks and troughs, garden walls and book-leaf-style bridges and small outbuildings. Slate was also carved into delicately fashioned mantelpieces, decorative works, and gravestones to commemorate the dead. Examples of these carvings can be found in the Slate Museum, local cemeteries, and in some Willunga homes and shops.



Mantelpiece carving by Thomas Dennis Jackson

The Slate Trail highlights the varied uses of slate around Willunga. Allow 3 hours for a leisurely stroll or enjoy a shorter section.



Willunga Slate Museum

61 High Street
Willunga

Telephone: 08 8556 2195
Email: willunganationaltrust@gmail.com

Opening Times

Telephone 08 8556 2195 for opening times

Groups, outdoor weddings and
other times by arrangement

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Willunga Museum
Friends of Willunga National Trust



Willunga Now and Then
http://willunga.nowandthen.net.au/Main_Page

BLOG

Willunga History News
<https://willungahistorynews.wordpress.com>

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WILLUNGA SLATE TRAIL & MUSEUM

Visit the only Slate Museum
in Australia, and find out more
on the Willunga Slate Trail.





A slate gravestone in a Willunga cemetery

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 land adjacent to where the Delabole Quarry was later opened. A village was established there to house the mainly Cornish quarrymen and their families. The Martin's, Bastian's and Bangor Quarries were also opened. By 1870 the slate industry had become an 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 other Australian colonies. 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, and over 100 men were employed.

Tragedy in the Quarries

Slate quarries were dangerous places. Slate was often wet and slippery, ropes could snap, and there were rockfalls.

In November 1936, Thomas Arthur (63) and his son Thomas (19) were killed at Martin's Quarry, Willunga. The men were working on a cracked rock face about 15 metres high when about 600 tones of rock began to slide. 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.



State Library of South Australia: B55417/92

Workers at the Australian Slate Quarry, Willunga. Frank Arthur, who discovered the bodies of his father and brother, is second from the left.



A slate mantelpiece by John Richards Jun.

Slate for the Home

"Slate tanks were introduced - what a boon for housewives that soft rainwater was. And now from earthen floors, the floors of the new homes were laid with a carpet of Blue Slate ..."
(Maud Aldam, Reminiscences)

Some Willunga homes still enjoy a strong presence of slate. The slate fences that can be seen along St. Andrews Terrace hark back to a design still found in Cornish villages today. Beautiful slate flagstones are found in buildings throughout the town. In one house, though, a "flagstone" was originally intended as a gravestone. A spelling error in the name of the deceased meant that the handsome slate slab was re-purposed in the kitchen.

Slate was also used for sink surrounds, and lintels and sills on doors and windows

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 William 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.

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 one of 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 Willunga's 19th century carvers. Of special note are two slate sarcophagi carved by George Sara, marking the burial sites 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 and the slate window sills 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 (17 St. Andrews Terrace)

This elegant two-storey house with a high pitched slate roof was reputedly built by George Sara, the leading builder of the district, in the late 1850s for Sampson Dawe who was the former 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 1850s 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 quarry men 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. Home and Butcher's Shop (13 & 17 High Street)

No. 13 is an early blacksmith's home, boot-maker's home and a 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 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)

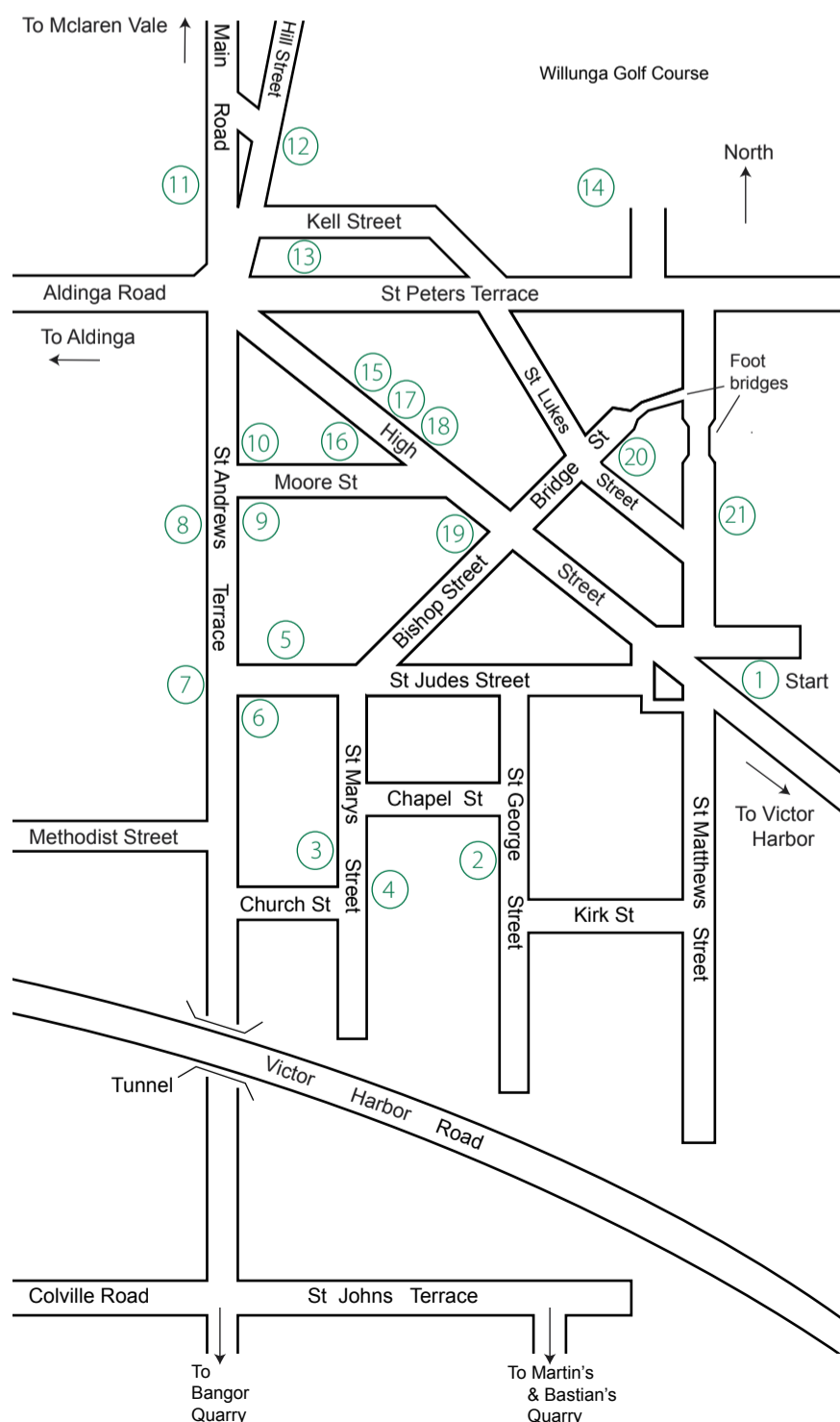
Built in 1870 for the Church of Christ, with original slate roof and outbuildings, and used for a variety of community purposes including a POW Depot, Red Cross and CWA meeting rooms, and then as a Masonic Hall.

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 of an Irish quarryman James McCaffrey and his family from the 1850s until James' death in 1901.



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