

ADELAIDE - A MONUMENTAL CITY

By Stephanie Jackson

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Every visit I make to Adelaide is tinged with reminders of the past, for this is the city where, as an immigrant, I first trod on Australia's soil. It's a city of happy childhood memories, and one for which I retain an enduring passion. Like all cities, it's continually evolving however, and

who played a role in Adelaide's evolution from a huddle of primitive structures to a city of grand designs.

It was Colonel William Light, the state's first Surveyor-General, who was given the monumental task of selecting a site for the city and of drawing up plans for its

a regimented grid of roads surrounding a central open space that he called 'The Great Square'. At each edge of the city's bustling heart he created four major roads that were named, with little imagination, East, West, North, and South Terrace, and beyond the con-



it's no longer the sleepy town I first fell in love with several decades ago.

A century ago, with 33 chapels and churches all within one square mile of the city centre, Adelaide could rightfully be called the city of churches, but today pubs, cafes, and restaurants far outnumber houses of religious worship. Many grand buildings still stand as monuments to a god who has watched over the city since its inception, but among these and other architectural treasures there are other spectacular monuments to the men and women

development. In 1836 he designed what is still regarded as one of the best planned cities in the world, but there was widespread public dissatisfaction with his concept. In 1838, under the weight of protestations, he resigned from his post, and the following year, penniless and at the mercy of tuberculosis, he died and was buried in the city he loved. A stately marble column beside his grave in Light Square is a monument to his vision, but his greatest memorial is the city itself.

He laid out its streets with

finer of these roads he proposed the establishment of extensive parklands and recreational areas.

Colonel Light's simplistic design has barely changed over the years, but the Great Square, once an aboriginal meeting place, was eventually renamed Victoria Square in honour of Princess Victoria, then heir to the throne of England. The square, which is surrounded by imposing 19th century buildings, including the grand post office, the magistrates' court with its golden sandstone exterior dominated by



establishment in Australia to have electric lights and, with its ornate design, both inside and out, it's a monument to an era of elegance. The ghost of Fred Cluney, a caretaker who died in 1887 after falling onto the power generator, is said to haunt the arcade, but any ethereal screams are obliterated by the voices of diners in elegant cafes, of shoppers prowling past the wide array of goods on display, and of a shoe shiner chatting with his affluent clientele.

The modern era has left its mark on Adelaide too, for contemporary works of art are prominent

lofty pillars, and the Catholic Cathedral Church of St Francis Xavier with its ornate architectural style, is a great place from which to start a walking tour of the city.

If you're feeling a bit peckish, you'll find whatever it takes to satisfy your appetite at the Adelaide Central Market that's on the western side of Victoria Square. It opened its doors to the hungry public in 1869, and with cafes and stalls crammed with fresh fruit and vegetables, meat and fish, and a staggering diversity of foods - from smoked cheese, Greek yoghurt, and kangaroos sausages to Australian bush tucker, Turkish bread, Russian dumplings, and Asian herbs, it's a monument to the people from around the world who now call Adelaide home, and who are dedicated to providing its citizens with an endless variety of foods. Wander down King William Street, Adelaide's wide tree lined central thoroughfare that leads north from Victoria Square, and you'll pass many impressive buildings, including the 1866 heritage listed town hall with its ornate Renaissance style architecture.

Spectacular architecture is also a feature of the Beehive Corner building that was constructed



in 1897, and with its lofty tower adorned with a golden bee, it remains a monument to a man whose name continues to echo through the city's streets. Originally owned by John Rundle, it stands at the entrance to Rundle Mall that, with more than 600 stores, is the unrivalled shopping hub of the city.

The mall was created in 1976, but even here you'll discover numerous reminders of the past. The Adelaide Arcade, which was built in 1885, was the first retail

features of Rundle Mall. A group of bronze pigs and two gigantic silver balls that commemorate the city's centenary are memorials to sculptors with a quirky view of art. "I'll meet you by The Mall's Balls" locals will say to their mates, for these iconic works of art are hard to miss among the congestion of humanity. And although the mall is always bustling with activity, there's a world of unexpected tranquillity not far away, where East and North Terrace meet.

In his original plans for the



city, Colonel Light included a site for a vast garden, and in 1857, the 51-hectare Adelaide Botanic Gardens were opened to the public. The gardens are a living memorial to dedicated plant collectors who brought the wonders of the natural world to the city, and to horticulturists who played a role in creating the oldest avenue of Moreton Bay fig trees in Australia. This shady avenue leads into the heart of the gardens, to a restaurant beside a tranquil pool, and to two spectacular glasshouses, each of which is a monument to the architectural splendour of its era.

The Palm House, which houses a collection of plants from Madagascar, many of which are at risk of extinction in their natural habitat, was imported from Germany in 1875. It was constructed using the most sophisticated engineering techniques of the day, and has hanging glass walls similar to those incorporated in today's city buildings. The equally elegant Bicentennial Conservatory, which encloses a lush rainforest environment dominated by palm trees, tree ferns, and other tropical plants, is the largest single span glasshouse in the southern hemisphere, and

stands as a glittering monument to modern construction techniques.

With its maze of pathways leading through extensive displays of plants including roses, cacti, Australian native plants, cycads, palms, and herbs, the gardens are an oasis of serenity that you'll be in no hurry to leave, for beyond ornate wrought iron gates lies the hustle and bustle of North Terrace.

Here, along the city's main cultural boulevard, the landscape is dominated by reminders of the city's past. A statue of Sir Walter Watson Hughes, one of Australia's early mining magnates, watches over the entrance to the university campus that was established in 1872, thanks to his generous donation of 20,000 pounds.

Sir Thomas Elder was a great philanthropist too, and although remembered for introducing camels into Australia, he left a more tangible legacy. This Scottish Australian pastoralist, whose properties covered an area larger than the whole of his homeland, left a substantial bequest for the construction, in 1898, of Elder Hall, which is one of Australia's most elegant and historic concert halls.

Wander further west and you'll reach the majestic 19th century buildings that house the city's major art gallery and the adjacent museum. Their timeless elegance is a monument to the skill of stonemasons who would have been dismayed by the modern extension to the museum that is little more than a glass box.

Step inside nearby Ayers House, and you'll discover the grandeur and opulence of this 41-room mansion that was built in 1846. It was the home of Sir Henry Ayers who was the state's premier on five separate occasions, and after whom Ayers Rock – now Uluru - was named. You can pay your silent respects to those who fought and died for freedom at the imposing National Soldiers' War Memorial, and nearby, hidden behind high walls, lies the residence of the state's governor. It's the oldest government house in Australia and predates the grey marble building of the South Australian parliament.

You're sure to be impressed with the massive columns that dominate the grand entrance of the home of the government, and if you drop by when parliament isn't sitting, you can explore the building's luxuriously decorated interior on a free guided tour.

You might like to have a flutter at the nearby casino that's a gleaming monument to those who have dreamed of winning a fortune, or be entertained at the Festival Centre, which is the artistic hub of the city and that's surrounded by modern sculptures that are monuments to those whose vision of art is far from conventional.

One of the city's greatest treasures, the Torrens River, is merely a stones throw from the grandeur of parliament house, and it was the

proximity of this meandering waterway that was a major factor in the decision to site the city here.

In the early years of colonisation, the river was used for bathing, washing clothes, and watering livestock, and despite the fact that it provided residents with drinking water, it was also used as a drainage channel. By 1878 it had become little more than a stinking sewer. "Anything in the guise of a river more ugly than the Torrens would be impossible to either see or describe," English novelist Anthony Trollope wrote at the time, and as disease wracked the community, authorities finally realised that something had to be done.

The cure for the river's ill health began in 1881 with the construction of a weir. Today the landscape is a monument to engineers who transformed a murky stream into the 12-hectare Torrens Lake, and to gardeners who transformed the eroded riverbanks into terraced gardens that, with their now ancient trees, have brought a touch of the great outdoors to the heart of the city.

Several kilometres of walking tracks meander along the lake's banks, and they begin at the weir that's near the historic Adelaide gaol. Constructed in 1841 and home to the state's villains until 1988, it claims the title of the longest continually operating prison in Australia. You can take a journey into its grim past on a self guided tour, but if you prefer to explore the outdoor world that surrounds the city, a stroll past the sprawling lawns of Elder Park, and along the course of the lake's shaded shore is a pleasant way to get to know the grand dame of Adelaide.

If you'd prefer to explore this picturesque park in a more leisurely way, hop on board the ferry that's known affectionately as The Popeye and that travels, at a snail's pace, between the weir and the award winning Adelaide Zoo. The first of a series of Popeyes was launched in 1935, and for almost 80 years a cruise on The Popeye, which has been declared a state heritage icon, has been an integral part of a visit to the park.

On this dawdling 40 minute cruise you'll pass families picnic-

ing at the water's edge; anglers trying their luck at catching the redfin perch, catfish, and carp that now inhabit the river's tranquil waters; and you'll see some of the more than 100 species of waterbirds that visit the lake and its fringing parklands.

And when your quiet journey of discovery comes to its conclusion, you'll have to agree that Adelaide is a destination that has earned its place on Lonely Planet's 2014 list of the world's 10 must-visit cities.

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Images:

Page 1 - River Torrens and city CBD

Page 2 - Interior of the bicentennial conservatory in the botanic gardens

Page 2 - A modern sculpture in Rundle Mall

Page 3 - River Torrens parklands in autumn

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