

Annexure C

History Overview



Gladstone Gaol

1881-1975

History Overview

Gladstone Gaol was officially opened on 1 June 1881. Throughout World War II the prison was used as an internment camp for Italians and Germans, before remaining vacant between 1943 to 1953, when it became a corrective training complex for 18-25-year-old offenders, allowing prisoners to learn skilled trades whilst decreasing overcrowding at Yatala. The Gaol reopened in 1953 after undergoing repairs and following extensions in 1955, the complex increased to 125 cells.

The Gaol permanently closed in 1975 as greater emphasis was being placed on reform and rehabilitation of prisoners and the cost to bring it into line with standards acceptable in 1975 was prohibitive. Gladstone Gaol was found to have out served its purpose. The prison was reopened to visitors in 1978 offering historic tours.

Establishment and Early Years

The town of Gladstone is situated on what was, in 1870, part of the large Booyoolie sheep station, owned by the brothers Herbert and Bristow Hugues.

Built in 1879, Gladstone Gaol was established in response to the need for a new gaol in the states mid-north. Gladstone was selected as the area had superior building stone in “inexhaustible quantities.”

The Gaol was designed by Architect in Chief Edward John Woods and built by G & W Sara and Dunstan of Burra. The contract price was £21,000 and allowed for an 18-month construction period.

Construction materials were sourced locally including:

- Stone from local quarry (9,500 square yards for walls, 3,900 cubic yards for foundations)
- Timber from sawpits at the Wirrabara Forest
- Bricks from Laura
- Ashlar from Crystal Brook
- Slate for flooring from Mintaro (19,000 square feet)
- Plus, other materials.

Mr T Moriarty was appointed first Keeper of the Gaol, which may have been to oversee the Gaols construction prior to its opening in June 1881. At the opening, the first Keeper was Mr Winfred Pollitt previously employed at Redruth Gaol, and his wife a Matron who cared for the female prisoners.

The first prisoner incarcerated at Gladstone Gaol was a 17-year-old man sentenced to one month's imprisonment with hard labour for larceny.

Role in the Community

Gladstone Gaol remained an active gaol until 7 September 1939 when it closed and was used as an internment centre (or camp) under the control of Mr CE Pellew. German internees were housed there for a few months under the military before they were sent to Victoria.

During the early 1940's, the Gaol tower was used by residents as a look out for spotting air raid military planes and trenches were dug at the local schools in case of air raids.

The Gaol was returned to the Sherrif's Prisons Department in 1943 but was not used as a goal for 10 years.

In 1952, the Gaol was reopened as a public gaol for male prisoners only and its name was changed to 'Gladstone Prison'. At this time, it was used for young male 'first offence' prisoners aged 18-25 years from Yatala Labor Prison and Port Augusta Gaol who would respond well to the discipline of prison life away from hardened criminals.

Over time, greater focus was given to the rehabilitation of prisoners to prepare them to fit into the community as law-abiding citizens.

Decline and Closure

The closure of Gladstone Gaol was announced in October 1974. The last of the prisoners were transferred to either Cadell Training Centre or Port Augusta Gaol in July 1975 and the Gaol officially closed on 31 December 1975.

The Gaol was vacant for several years before the Gaol Development Committee formed in 1977. The committee sought to secure a lease to keep the place in good repair, maintain its historical integrity and open it up to the public as a tourist attraction and encourage use by various community groups.

The former Gladstone District Council was granted a lease over the site in 1979 to allow for community use of the Gaol which included:

- Weekly meeting place for local teenagers to play games (pool, badminton, table tennis, and TV games)
- Craft Classes
- Market Days, medieval fairs, country fairs, vintage car rallies, and an Easter egg hunt, Christmas in the gaol, private weddings and birthday parties
- Set for various film makers.

In 1980, Gladstone Gaol was the set of the film 'Stir', based on the 1974 prison riot at Bathurst Correctional Complex and subsequent Royal Commission into New South Wales prisons.

Various areas were restored and upgraded through Lead-Educate-Assist-Promote (LEAP) project which was a Commonwealth Government funded program that supported industry and business capacity building and collaboration.

Heritage Significance

In 1985, Gladstone Gaol was confirmed as a State Heritage Place (no. 16386) for its rare intact example of 19th century penal architecture.

Gladstone Gaol is one of the few remaining intact gaols of its era, the site offers a rare immersive heritage experience, appealing to history enthusiasts, cultural tourists, and those travelling enroute to the Flinders Rangers.

The Next Chapter

Now, with strong community support and renewed interest in our shared history, Gladstone Gaol stands ready for its next chapter, one that honours the past while opening its gates to creativity, culture and connection.

The Department for Environment and Water invites Expressions of Interest (EOI) from experienced and innovative proponents to activate and develop the former gaol site located at 10 Ward Street, Gladstone, including potential visitor experiences and accommodation options as well as potential sale of surrounding land.

This initiative aims to deliver a vibrant mix of commercial, tourism, community and residential uses that respect the site's heritage while contributing to economic growth and community wellbeing.

The EOI process will identify proponents with the capability to deliver high-quality activation outcomes consistent with government priorities for urban renewal, and tourism development. Proponents are encouraged to submit proposals demonstrating innovative uses, community benefits, and suitable development principles.