

## SUMMARY OF STATE HERITAGE OBJECT

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### REGISTER ENTRY

Entry in the South Australian Heritage Register in accordance with s14(2)(b) of the *Heritage Places Act 1993*

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**NAME:** Lobethal Woollen Mill Collection **OBJECT NO.:** 26414-001

**Object intrinsically related to Lobethal Woollen Mill (SHP 26414)**

**ADDRESS:** Building 26

1 Main Street

Lobethal SA 5241

CT 6223/766 C41675 F301, CT 6223/767 C41675 F302,303, CT 6223/768 C41675 F304, CT 6223/769 C41675 FCP, CT 6223/762 C41623 F203, CT 6223/763 C41623 FCP, CT 6223/764 C41623 F204, Part Mill Road Reserve, Hundred of Onkaparinga

### STATEMENT OF HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

#### Place

The Lobethal Woollen Mill is one of South Australia's most significant industrial complexes, and the large numbers of surviving buildings represent 100 years of industrial, commercial and social development at the site. The place is an outstanding and rare example of an industrial group with the majority of the original buildings surviving, and has significant associations with the Onkaparinga Woollen Company, an enterprise that gained an international reputation and made South Australia a leader in woollen exports. (Approved 28 August 2014, at the time of confirmation of State Heritage Place in the South Australian Heritage Register.)

#### Object

The Lobethal Woollen Mill Collection is intrinsically related to the development of woollen textile production at the Lobethal Woollen Mill throughout the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Established in the early 1870s as the Lobethal Tweed Factory, the mill expanded to become one of the largest wool manufactures in Australia producing a diverse range of goods for both national and international clients. The Collection contains machinery and tools that demonstrate the wool milling process,

as well as samples and swatches, memorabilia and business records of the Onkaparinga Woollen Company (1928-1993) and its predecessor, the South Australian Woollen Company (1883-1928). As a whole, the Lobethal Woollen Mill Collection demonstrates an industrial process no longer practiced in South Australia and represents the everyday experience of its employees.

## PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION & ELEMENTS OF SIGNIFICANCE

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Entry in the South Australian Heritage Register in accordance with s14(2)(a) of the *Heritage Places Act 1993*

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**Lobethal Woollen Mill Collection**

**OBJECT NO.: 26414-001**

**Peramangk Country**

**1 Main Street, Lobethal SA 5241**

### **Physical Description**

The Lobethal Woollen Mill Collection comprises a range of objects that originate from the Lobethal Woollen Mill. It contains 64 objects associated with development of the mill over the course of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries when the mill was operated by the South Australian Woollen Company, later renamed the Onkaparinga Woollen Company. The Collection demonstrates the milling process from dyeing to finishing, and the working, living and recreational experiences of its employees. It includes machinery and tools, swatches, product and dye samples, memorabilia, and archival materials dating between 1887 and 1993. A full list and description of each item in the Collection is located in Appendix A: Lobethal Woollen Mill Collection – Catalogue of Objects.

### **Elements of Significance:**

Elements of heritage significance include:

- Lobethal Woollen Mill Collection as described in Appendix A.

Elements not considered to contribute to significance of object include:

- Remaining objects that form part of the Onkaparinga Woollen Mill Museum Incorporated collection,
- Display materials such as mannequins and interpretive signage, and storage such as filing and map cabinets.

## HISTORY, CHRONOLOGY, OBJECT DETAILS & PHOTOGRAPHS

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Other information held in the South Australian Heritage Register in accordance with s14(6) of the *Heritage Places Act 1993*.

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### History of the Object

#### The Lobethal Woollen Mill

Woollen textile production at the Lobethal Woollen Mill began in the early 1870s, when two brothers formed a syndicate with a local Lobethal brewer to produce cloth in his vacant brewery building. Over the course of a century, the mill became the most prominent textile manufacturer in South Australia and the largest woollen mill in Australia, producing a wide range of products for both local and international companies. By the early 1980s, blankets were being exported to leading Australian hotels, and overseas to places such as the Holiday Inn in Hong Kong, the Grand in Taipei, the Al Khaja in Saudi Arabia, the Fijian in Fiji and the Genting Highlands Hotel in Kuala Lumpur. Ansett, Trans Australia Airlines, and Qantas in Australia also bought customised Onkaparinga rugs, as did Air Niugini, Kuwait Airways, and Olympic Airlines in Greece.<sup>1</sup> In addition to the distinctive Onkaparinga blankets and rugs, the mill also wove piece goods, women's and men's garments, car and furniture upholstery, and army uniforms.<sup>2</sup>

Following the closure of the Onkaparinga Woollen Mill in 1993, a selection of mill machinery and associated objects were left to the people of Lobethal.<sup>3</sup> The collection became the basis for the Onkaparinga Woollen Mill Museum Inc (OWMMI). OWMMI are the custodians of the collection, which is managed by volunteers, most of whom are retired mill workers, and management of the collection is undertaken by a committee. The Lobethal Woollen Mill Collection (hereafter, LWM Collection) is comprised solely of objects from this collection, their provenance originating from the Lobethal Woollen Mill (SHP 26414).

Highlights of the LWM Collection include:

#### Objects demonstrating the milling process<sup>4</sup>

While cleaning and preparing the raw wool (known as sorting, scouring and carbonising) moved to Onkaparinga's Glenmill factory in Thebarton in 1958, the rest of the process, from dyeing to finishing, remained at Lobethal. The LWM Collection contains machinery and tools that demonstrate these stages of the milling process.

#### *Dyeing*

Dyeing was carried out during one of three stages of textile production, namely, on the bulk wool after scouring but before carding, on the yarn itself after it had been

carded and spun, or when the fabric was woven. The first and last methods were predominantly used at Onkaparinga.

A dye solution was first made up by a mixer who used a collection of recipes cards (LWM2025.36) to give various colours and shades. This occurred in the mixing room at Lobethal, which stocked more than 30 shades of each of the three primary colours. When ready, the dye mixture was either poured into big round vats where it was dyed in bulk, or to glass-enclosed vats where yards of completed fabric were dyed at a time. Steam pressure was used to ensure that the dye was forced through each and every fibre of wool. After dyeing, the wool mass was lifted by chain hoist to the dryer, which used a combination of pressure and squeezing and heat to dry the wool.

### *Carding*

The next step was carding, which was the process of transforming bulk wool into yarn for weaving. Carding involved combing the bulk wool using large rollers covered with fine mesh teeth formed by short lengths of wire. As the rollers rotated at different speeds, the wool was gently teased apart into individual strands. The fibrous web that emerged was then folded, lifted, turned over and laid down again at right angles to the original course where the process was repeated.

The wool was then taken by the 'doffer' to a condensing head. The web of fibres was then divided between grooved rollers, which tore it into slivers, which in turn were passed between rubbing leathers which rolled and consolidated the slivers into a thick, very soft thread. This was then wound onto bobbins (LWM2025.58) ready for handling.

### *Spinning*

Bobbins of yarn from the carding machine were mounted on top of the spinning machine frame (LWM2025.6) and fed into a 'false twist tube' which vibrated the fibre at high speed to stretch it to the required 'skein' or thickness. The yarn was stretched to varying degrees, up to 60 percent longer than its original length, depending on requirements. The twisting was done by a spindle turning at high speed (approximately 7,000 rpm) while the thread was held by a small plastic traveller. Simultaneously, a ring moved the thread up and down the length of the spindle to wind it evenly in a pre-determined shape.

The turns per inch of thread governed the quality of the finished product, and a special tester was used to ascertain the number of turns per inch (LWM2025.14). A typical blanket of wool had about ten twists per inch. The fewer the turns, the softer the finish. The finished thread from the spinning frames was placed on bobbins, from which it was wound into different shapes for handling in the next process. All wool coming in and out of the carding and spinning department were kept in a ledger (LWM2025.46).

### *Winding and Warping*

The thread from the bobbins was then wound by machine (LWM2025.8) onto reels to form 'cheeses' of about 3.5 lbs (1.6kg), or the equivalent of four spinning frame bobbins. Finished 'cheeses' were baled for storage or transport or put into big wicker baskets (LWM2025.21) for immediate use in the warping or weaving rooms. Some remained in the winding room where they were wound onto shuttles for the weft threads for the loom.

Warping establishes the first half of the pattern in a finished rug or blanket. The other part comes in the 'weft' or cross threads that will be placed by the loom or weaving machine. Cheeses were placed on a large, wheeled rack known as a creel or bank (LWM2025.17, LWM2025.25) from which thread was drawn off from the warping mill operator. Up to 476 threads could be loaded at one time. The operator used a weaving ticket or recipe (LWM2025.27) which told them how many threads of each colour are required to be laid down to achieve a particular pattern. It was a painstaking process that required great care and accuracy.

Once the threads were all fed into the warping mill (LWM2025.26), a huge wheel revolved winding off the threads in the creel racks until about 1,500 yards was taken onto the machine. This was then rewound onto the beam that fit into the loom for weaving.

### *Weaving*

The warp threads were then 'drawn in' through the eyes of hundreds of needle-like shafts called 'healds' or heddles which kept the threads separate. A complete heald frame was called a shaft.

Each loom carried up to six shuttles, each with a different colour thread, and the pattern was formed by sending each shuttle across at exactly the right moment. On the Sulzer looms (LWM2025.2), the shuttle was dispensed with, and the thread carried across by a small bullet-like projectile called a weft carrier. The average loom produced about 60 yards of cloth to a roll, and five or six rolls of one winding of the warp mill. Lobethal had 93 looms and weaving machines, including six Sulzers, 24 Northrop blanket looms (LWM2025.9), and 48 Dobcross looms (LWM2025.4). Approximately 82 machines were in action at any one time.

### *Finishing*

The completed cloth from the looms were then sent to the Finishing department, which was comprised of several sections. First, were the menders (LWM2025.20, LWM2025.51) who checked and repaired any imperfections such as knots, staining, or loom damage.

The cloth was then transported to the wet finishing section, where it was put into large scouring and milling machines. It first went into a warm detergent bath to wash out the oil and other impurities picked up during the yarn making and weaving process. Once that water was dumped, more water and detergent were added to make a

soapy solution which lubricated the cloth fibres so that it could shrink to the required length and width. Two large wooden rollers pressed the cloth to accelerate the shrinkage.

Any plain white cloth was then sent to the dyeing department for colouring, while coloured and check cloths are spin dried in a hydro-extractor until 90 percent dry. Cloth was then put into a tenter (stenter) drying machine. Dyed cloth is also spun-dried and taken to the tenter machines for drying. The dried cloths are separated and sent to two different locations for final finishing, blankets and rugs to the raising section, and piece-goods or clothing goods to the cloth-finishing section.

Raising is the process of putting pile onto blankets. The raising machine (LWM2025.11) was a large drum with pile and counter-pile rollers, with wires pointing in opposite directions. The drum rotated with the rollers turning to pluck the ends of the wool fibres out of the yarn, to make a nice fluffy blanket. They were then taken to the blanket room for final examination and finishing. Here each blanket or rug was cut into individual lengths, and the ends were whipped with thread or bound with satin (LWM2025.31), after which they were folded and then packaged.

Piece goods sent for final finishing were examined for evenness of dyeing, length, width and weight of cloth. They were then passed through a dewing machine which lightly dampened the cloth to control static electricity and left to cool down. Some cloth, such as dressing gowns or overcoats were also 'raised' to give them a fluffy finish. Some also went to the shearing machine to get a smooth finish. Other goods were left resulting in a tweed finish.

Cloth that was not raised was steamed using an auto-deck. Some cloths were pressed in a rotary press to give a shiny finish, often for horse rugs and billiard tables. All cloth was then examined by running it over a perch, which is a frame with rollers in front, on which a worker checked over every inch of the cloth. The length of cloth was then rolled according to the customer's instructions. Quality controllers would then check every roll of cloth for correctness of length, width, weight, quantity and 'handle' against the original sample. It was then wrapped in plastic for despatch.

### **Samples and Swatches**

The LWM Collection contains a variety of fabric samples. Samples were used both by the staff to check production items against the norm for that item and in marketing to show prospective clients the quality and specification of goods.<sup>5</sup>

The Onkaparinga Woollen Company produced a wide range of goods for both national and international markets (LWM2025.24), including piece goods, women's and men's fashion (LWM2025.37-39), uniforms (LWM2025.35), furnishings, and domestic and commercial upholstery. Their Australian clientele consisted of airlines Ansett and Qantas (LWM2025.47), as well as fashion brands David Jones and Orotan.

Internationally, the company produced fabric for businesses in Singapore and Hong Kong (LWM2025.47, LWM2025.64).

By the 1960s, the Onkaparinga Woollen Company had become a household name throughout Australia for its blankets and rugs, supplying 60% of Australia's branded rug and blanket sales by the 1970s.<sup>6</sup> The Collection contains a wide sample of the company's iconic satin-trimmed blankets and rugs (LWM2025.29-31, LWM2025.48). It also includes an army blanket made for Australian soldiers during the Second World War (LWM2025.62) and a double-sided Stuart tartan commemorative rug created as a farewell gift for the mill workers that remained in 1993 (LWM2025.41).<sup>7</sup>

### **Working and social life at the mill**

The mill was one of the major employers in the Adelaide Hills region and it was not uncommon for multiple generations of families to work in the mill.<sup>8</sup> Social life was often woven in with work life, and the LWM Collection contains several objects related to the experience of its employees. These include the mill's steam whistle (LWM2025.50), wages ledger (LWM2025.57), a bundy clock (LWM2025.13), a vacancies sign (LWM2025.23) and sporting trophies for the mill's social group (LWM2025.56). The Collection's earliest object, a number book (LWM2025.32) dating from 1887, records details of what weavers of the South Australian Woollen Factory Company Limited were producing on each day and the wages for their work. There is also a small selection of souvenirs produced for and featuring imagery of the Onkaparinga Woollen Mill Company, which contains playing cards, a jug, and a silver spoon (LWM2025.52-54).

The LWM Collection also contains business records related to the South Australian Woollen Company and the Onkaparinga Woollen Co. These range from shade books (LWM2025.45), procedures (LWM2025.42), pattern samples (LWM2025.43), a minute book (LWM2025.55), weaver's tickets (LWM2025.27), dye recipes (LWM2025.36), and a draft and pegging book (LWM2025.63). Several issues of *The Loom* magazine, a newspaper published for the employees of the Onkaparinga Woollen Co, have also been included (LWM2025.34).

### **Chronology**

- c.1870 Local Lobethal brewer Friedrich Wilhelm Kleinschmidt closes his brewery and forms a syndicate with brothers Carl and August Kumnick to produce cloth in the Lobethal Tweed Factory.<sup>9</sup>
- c.1872 A company is formed with twenty workers.
- 1873 Messrs Kleinschmidt and Kumnick enter a partnership with weaver Carl Edward Kramm. Machinery from Kramm's weaving factory in Hahndorf is removed to the mill at Lobethal.<sup>10</sup>
- 1874 12 March: the Lobethal Woollen and Tweed Company Ltd. is established.
- 1878 The Lobethal Woollen and Tweed Company Ltd. factory ceases operations.

- 1883 The South Australian Woollen Company (SA Woollen Company) is formed. It has 30 employees.
- 1891 The SA Woollen Company begins supplying railway, customs and military uniforms.
- 1895 The factory is producing clothing, tweeds, knit wools, shirtings, flannels, rugs and blankets with 10,000 different patterns.
- 1899 The factory operates day and night making uniforms for South Australian soldiers heading to the Boer War.
- 1914 The SA Woollen Company provides uniforms for the First World War.
- 1928 The SA Woollen Company is renamed the Onkaparinga Woollen Company.
- 1939 - The mill produces one million military blankets, 250 miles of heavy khaki  
1945 overcoating, 300 miles of tunicking, and miles of flannel for underclothing during the Second World War.
- 1958 The Onkaparinga Woollen Company takes over the Torrenside Woollen Mills in Thebarton.
- 1959 The Company buys a 40% interest in Waverly Wools located adjacent to Torrenside. The remaining 60% was purchased in 1966. All scouring operations were moved to Thebarton.
- 1961 The mill is the largest blanket and rug mill in Australia.
- 1965 – The number of woollen mills in Australia declines from thirty to only five due  
1970 to automation and cheap imports.  
10% of sales are exports to places such as Macao, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Los Angeles, New York, Montreal, Fiji, and Port Moresby. The Company establishes subsidiaries in the United States of America and Canada, a warehouse in San Francisco, and trading agencies in Japan and Hong Kong.
- 1969 The Onkaparinga Woollen Mill employs over 1,000 workers.
- 1971 The creek beside the Mill floods causing considerable damage to the Mill. Most of the records of the Mill and its predecessors are lost.  
April: the Onkaparinga Social Club is formed to promote the well-being and welfare of its members and their families by fostering social and recreational activity.
- 1973 Onkaparinga produce bespoke fabrics for the stage curtains and chair coverings of the new Festival Theatre.
- Late 26 April: The Onkaparinga Woollen Mill is the largest woollen mill in Australia  
1970s and the only woollen mill operating in South Australia.
- 1980s Macquarie, the owner of the largest worsted (a high-quality type of wool yarn used in the manufacture of suits and other garments) mill in Australia, secures the majority of Onkaparinga shares.  
Onkaparinga buys the 'Laconia' brand name for blankets and some of the company's plant in Victoria.

- c.1982 The Onkaparinga Woollen Company acquires the Warrnambool Woollen Mill in Victoria.
- 1993 December: The Onkaparinga Woollen Mill closes.
- 1994 Ownership of the Mill property is transferred to the local council. Objects associated with the mill are put on display in Building 21 of the Mill. The Lobethal Woollen Mill Collection is moved to Building 19 (Boiler Room) of the Mill.
- 2008 The collection is moved to Building 26.
- 2014 The 'Lobethal Woollen Mill' is reassessed in its entirety and confirmed as a State Heritage Place in the South Australian Heritage Register on 28 August 2014 (SHP 2614).**
- 2024 September: Fabrik Arts + Heritage opens to the public. Located on the Lobethal Woollen Mill site, the creative hub features a gallery, retail store and event space alongside workshop spaces, artist studios and spaces for artists in residence.

## **Bibliography**

### **Books**

Brockhoff, Carol. *Onkaparinga: The Story of a Mill*. Lobethal: Lobethal Heritage Association, 2008.

### **Reports**

Lustri, Susan. *Assessment Report for Former Lobethal Woollen Mill*. Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources, 2013.

Onkaparinga Woollen Mill Museum Incorporated. *Strategic Plan*. February 2012.

Payne, Pauline. *Significance Assessment: Onkaparinga Woollen Mills Memorabilia*. Report to Lobethal Heritage Association, May 2007.

South Australian Heritage Council. *Summary of State Heritage Place for the Lobethal Woollen Mill*. Department of Environment and Natural Resources, 2014.

### **Websites**

Onkaparinga Woollen Mill Museum Inc., 'Mill Heritage – Onkaparinga.' <https://www.millheritage.com.au/>.

FABRIK. 'History.' Adelaide Hills Council. <https://fabrik.org.au/history-of-the-onkaparinga-woollen-mill/>.

### **Newspapers**

*South Australian Register*, 'Industrial,' 22 April 1873.

*The South Australian Advertiser*, 'Opening of a Tween Factory at Lobethal,' 12 August 1873.

## OBJECT DETAILS

Lobethal Woollen Mill Collection

OBJECT NO.: 26414-001

1 Main Street, Lobethal SA 5241

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**DESCRIPTION OF OBJECT:** Collection of objects associated with the Lobethal Woollen Mill.

**REGISTER STATUS:** Nomination: 22 March 2024

Provisional Entry: 11 December 2025

Confirmed: 30 April 2026

**CURRENT USE:** Interpretive display and historic resource  
1993 - Present

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA:** Adelaide Hills Council

**LOCATION:**

**Street No.:** 1

**Street Name:** Main Street

**Town/Suburb:** Lobethal

**Post Code:** 5241

**LAND DESCRIPTION:**

**Title** CT 0000/000, CT 6223/766 C41675

**Reference:** F301, CT 6223/767 C41675 F302,303, CT 6223/768 C41675 F304, CT 6223/769 C41675 FCP, CT 6223/762 C41623 F203, CT 6223/763 C41623 FCP, CT 6223/764 C41623 F204, Part Mill Road Reserve

**Hundred:** Onkaparinga

**Locations of individual objects are identified in Appendix A**

## PHOTOS

Lobethal Woollen Mill Collection  
1 Main Street, Lobethal SA 5241

OBJECT NO.: 26414-001

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All photographs were taken by the Department for Environment and Water  
on 25 and 30 September 2025.



**Sulzer Projectile Weaving Machine (LWM2025.2).**



**Allma Twister (LWM2025.6).**

Summary of State Heritage Object: 26414-001  
Provisionally entered by the South Australian Heritage Council on 11 December 2025  
Confirmed by the South Australian Heritage Council on 30 April 2026

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Lobethal Woollen Mill Collection  
1 Main Street, Lobethal SA 5241

OBJECT NO.: 26414-001



Details of the Allma Twister (left) and the Northrop Loom (right).



Northrop Loom (LWM2025.9) (left) and Sign (LWM2025.40) (right).

Lobethal Woollen Mill Collection

OBJECT NO.: 26414-001

1 Main Street, Lobethal SA 5241



Avery Floor Scales (LWM2025.15) (left) and Loom Magazine (LWM2025.34).

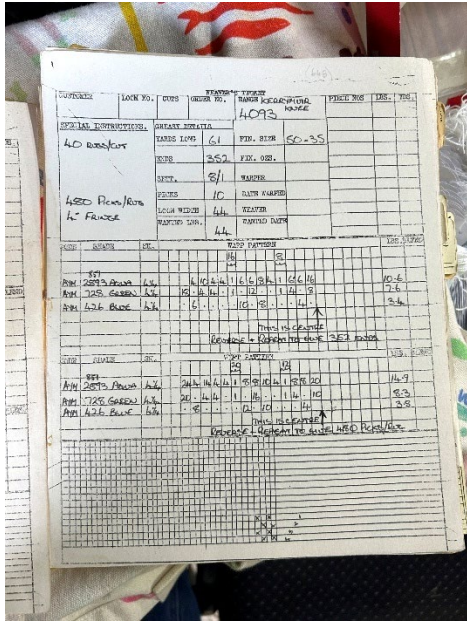


Wicker Skip (LWM2025.21).

Lobethal Woollen Mill Collection

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1 Main Street, Lobethal SA 5241



Weaver's Tickets (LWM2025.27) (left) and Trousseau Sample Book (LWM2025.31) (right).



Playing Cards (LWM2025.52) (left) and Satin Labels (LWM2025.64) (right).

Lobethal Woollen Mill Collection

OBJECT NO.: 26414-001

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Mill Steam Whistle (LWM2025.50) (left) and Bundy Clock (LWM2025.13) (right).



Commemorative Rug (LWM2025.41).

Lobethal Woollen Mill Collection

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1 Main Street, Lobethal SA 5241



Airline samples (LWM2025.47).



Pattern Sample (LWM2025.43) (left) and Duffle Coat (LWM2025.38) (right).

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<sup>1</sup> Carol Brockhoff, *Onkaparinga: the Story of a Mill* (Lobethal: Lobethal Heritage Association, 2008), p.88.

<sup>2</sup> Brockhoff, *Onkaparinga*, p.79.

<sup>3</sup> Onkaparinga Woollen Mill Museum Inc, 'Mill Heritage – Onkaparinga,' (date accessed 4/8/2025), <https://www.millheritage.com.au/home>.

<sup>4</sup> The milling processes described in this section has been drawn from Chapter 11 of Brockhoff's *Onkaparinga: the Story of A Mill*, which in turn was taken from issues of *The Loom* between 1972 and 1975.

<sup>5</sup> Pauline Payne, *Significance Assessment: Onkaparinga Woollen Mills Memorabilia*, Report to Lobethal Heritage Association (May 2007), p.14.

<sup>6</sup> Brockhoff, *Onkaparinga*, p.63, 77.

<sup>7</sup> Brockhoff, *Onkaparinga*, 35.

<sup>8</sup> FABRIK, 'History,' Adelaide Hills Council (accessed 2 October 2025, <https://fabrik.org.au/history-of-the-onkaparinga-woollen-mill/>).

<sup>9</sup> *The South Australian Advertiser*, 'Opening of a Tween Factory at Lobethal,' 12 August 1873, p.2.

<sup>10</sup> *South Australian Register*, 'Industrial,' 22 April 1873, p.3.