

State Heritage Areas of South Australia



Burra Smelts Historic Site

Smelts Road, Burra

SAHR 10989 – confirmed as a State Heritage Place 8 November 1984

The Burra Smelts Historic Site is a distinct region within the Burra State Heritage Area, and is a State Heritage Place entered in the South Australian Heritage Register. It is located adjacent to, but across the creek from, the [Burra Mines Historic Site](#), and encompasses structures, buildings and ruins of the Burra Smelting Works. It is historically significant, representing an industry that was integral to Burra's copper mining [past](#), and one of the earliest major smelting works established in South Australia.



Smelts site from mine lookout

The smelting works was established in 1849 when the South Australian Mining Association leased an area, on the eastern side of Burra Creek, to the Patent Copper Company (later the English and Australian Copper Company). Initially the copper ore had been transported to Swansea, Wales, for smelting, and later to Yatala in South Australia, but neither of these situations solved the problem of carting the unprocessed ore over long distances on unmarked roads and dirt tracks. During 1848, before the smelter was established at Burra, it is estimated that at least 1 200 bullock carts were on the road, each carrying two-and-a-half tons of ore.



Smelter ruins, 2005

By mid-June of 1849 the smelting works was completed, and six large furnaces were ready to fire. Welsh and German smelters were brought in to work the smelting works and added a multi-cultural mix to Burra's predominantly Cornish mining population.

By 1851 more than 1 000 men were employed at the smelting works, which had 16 furnaces in operation, using about 150 tons of wood daily, cut from the Murray scrub to the east of town. In that year, however, the Land Commissioner withdrew permission for any more wood to be cut from Crown lands, so the company was forced to cart coal from Port Adelaide.

T.J. Fisher, visiting Burra in 1851 described the Smelting Works:

The buildings containing 19 furnaces are about three stories high, and are constructed of fire bricks and most elaborately finished, perhaps too much so when compared with similar buildings in Swansea. They boast a gigantic towering chimney, surpassing everything of the kind in any of the Australasian colonies, while the flues connecting the furnaces to this chimney run under the floor of the building, and are so spacious that a tandem can with ease be driven through them. When the furnaces are in full work, a thousand fire bricks a week are required for repairs alone. Formerly these were imported, but an excellent fire-brick clay being pretty abundant in the neighbourhood, an engine house and other buildings have been put up for the manufacture of firebricks on the spot. An engine house in which a circular saw is driven by steam, a Superintendent's house and garden connected with a long range of handsome cottages, numerous stores and outbuildings, and about twenty cottages built at the rear of the furnace houses to accommodate the smelter workers, comprise the rest of this establishment.

cited in Heritage Branch Evaluation Report

Up to 1857 the copper was carted to Port Wakefield by bullock drays (later mule teams), but after the railway reached Kapunda it was taken to the railhead there. After 1861 most of the smelting of Burra ore was carried out at the Port Adelaide Smelting Works and by 1866 all smelting operations in Burra had ceased.

Today little physical evidence remains of the smelting complex described by Fisher. Structures associated with the Burra Smelts Historic Site include ruins of the smelters, the remains of the smeltsyard and store, the superintendent's residence and residual slag heaps.

Two of these places – the former Smeltsyard & Store and the former Superintendent's Dwelling & Wall – are dominant features near the smelts site and are State Heritage Places entered in the South Australian Heritage Register.



Burra Smelts Historic Site, 2005

The **Former Smeltsyard and Store (SAHR 10024)** was confirmed as a State Heritage Place on 6 May 1982. The yards and original stables were built in 1849 for up to 100 horses, using slag blocks from the smelting works. The complex contained a storeroom, to house smelting stores, and a blacksmith's shop.



*Wall construction
- note slag blocks,*

In c1853, to augment the carting services of the bullock teams, the smelting company imported mules and their drivers from Chile. The smeltsyard became the main service centre for these mule teams and the wagons they hauled, and soon contained all necessary equipment for maintaining the equipment and shoeing the animals. The yards also maintained stables for a number of horses.



Former Smeltsyard Store, 2005

After the railway reached Burra in 1870, the mule and bullock teams were no longer necessary for transportation of the ore, and the smeltsyard's function declined. In 1877 Burra's first Agricultural and Horticultural Show was held in the yard and stables, and continued on this site until 1885.

The **Former Smelts Superintendent's Dwelling and Wall, 9 St Just Street (SAHR 10204)** was confirmed as a State Heritage Place on 8 November 1984. This building was erected in 1849 for the smelts superintendent, who was responsible for purchasing the ore from the mine.



Former Superintendent's Residence 2005



Burra Smelts Historic Site, panorama 1983