



Fact Sheet

Friday 6 May 2005

Australian Society

The Old Highercombe Hotel Folk Museum

Tea Tree Gully, Adelaide, South Australia

Introduction

The Highercombe Hotel, a prominent landmark in the historic township of Tea Tree Gully, was opened in 1854. The building has served as a hotel, a post office, community meeting room, teacher's and post master's residence, and school room.



Since 1967, it has been operated by the Tea Tree Gully Branch of the National Trust of South Australia as a folk museum. For Take Time, the President of the Tea Tree Gully Branch of the National Trust, Carole Simmons, takes us through the museum and talks about the history of this remarkable building.

History

Built in 1853-54, the Highercombe served as a hotel for twenty years under four licencees, T. Pearce (1854 – 55); H. Warnken (1855 – 56 and 1858 – 59); W. Knight (185&); W. Haines (1860 – 75).

In 1855, a petition of “qualified voters of the District of Yatala” asked His Excellency, Sir Richard McDonnell, Governor-in-chief of the colony of South Australia to name the Highercombe Hotel as a polling place for forthcoming elections. “... It is a more central place than Houghton village, being in the midst of a much larger population and having very superior accommodation, for the transaction of public business”. The petition was granted in the Executive Council, as shown by notations to the original document.

The largest room in the Highercombe Hotel was also used for public assemblies. Lodge meetings and dances were held. This room has continued in use as the “superior accommodation” referred to in the 1855 petition.

The main road system was re-routed in 1875. The neighbouring Tea Tree Gully Inn, facing directly onto the new main road, became the stopping place for coaches and a change-of-horses station. The Highercombe Hotel closed as a public house in 1877.

In 1879, William Haines, then Member of Parliament for the District of Gumeracha, and forty-eight residents of Tea Tree Gully, successfully petitioned the Government “to establish a Telegraph and Post Office at Tea Tree Gully in the buildings which the Government recently proposed to purchase”, the Highercombe Hotel.



On the same day as the new Post Office and Telegraph Station was opened, another project favoured by Haines, the road linking Tea Tree Gully with the Lower North East Road, via Anstey Hill, was opened. Haines' Perseverance Road still passes in front of the Museum.

Part of the old hotel became the Tea Tree Gully Post Office, the remainder served as the residence of the head teacher of the public school, established in 1875. In the 1890s, the number of pupils in the school overflowed the single schoolroom nearby, and the assembly room was pressed into service. The restriction on other public use of the room that this situation imposed resulted in the erection of the Institute Hall in 1896.

The Highercombe continued to serve the district in this dual role for over 50 years until 1934, when the Education Department provide a new residence for the schoolmaster. The Post Office remained until 1963.

From 1963, the building was in use as office and library accommodation for the Tea Tree Gully Council. The Highercombe was taken over by the National Trust in 1967, when its development as a folk museum began.

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