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When the British built Adelaide, they wanted to build a better Britain



University of
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Inspiring tomorrow's professionals

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Preface

This report was commissioned by the South Australian Office of the Agent General (in August 2012) to celebrate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. It investigates Adelaide's history, its cultural roots and its residents' attitudes towards their British heritage. It also asks British families, living in Adelaide, about their way of life and whether they think Adelaide's founder, Colonel William Light, succeeded in his mission to 'build a better Britain'.





Introduction

Historian James Jupp has argued that *'Australia is the second most English country in the world.'* Some people argue that Britishness tended to disappear from Australia after the 1960s, when Britain decided, reluctantly, that its future lay in Europe rather than with the Dominions. Others, including Tara Brabazon, argue that Englishness or Britishness continues to 'haunt' Australia. Historians of British migration to Australia tend to see English migrants becoming invisible, while the Scottish and Irish exerted their distinct ethnic identities. English, Irish, Scottish, and Welsh migrations contributed to Australia's British flavour.

Different Australian states and cities had different immigration experiences. Some cities retain greater vestiges of Britishness than others, caused by the historical points of departure for migrants on the one hand and continuing migration on the other. South Australia's patterns of migration have encouraged its continuing association with its foundation as 'a new British province' in the 1830s. Adelaide, the province's main city, was named after William IV's consort, Queen Adelaide.



The vision for Adelaide

In building the new province, a new city was planned, both physically and culturally, to be based on order and reason, emphasising civil liberties and religious tolerance. The decision was taken to populate the province with free labour rather than with transported convicts in other parts of Australia. Between 1836 and 1857 nearly 75,000 men, women and children – families – received free or assisted passage to the colony. The planned environment in which they arrived has survived the negative effects of the passage of time, since Adelaide values and preserves its heritage. Geographer Donald Leslie Johnson has remarked that *'Adelaide's garden town squares and public park lands have proven to be its major and emblematic asset, unique and unequalled in the world, then and now.'*





Images courtesy of Already Home – <http://alreadyhome.com.au>

British heritage and landmarks

As the city was built, it acquired a number of ‘British’ characteristics. Its street names represented Britishness, such as King William Street. *‘Every day we cross King William Street,’* one Adelaedian told us. *‘We are comfortable with that.’* The British Hotel was founded in 1838 and continues to trade. Adelaide’s beaches are named after British people and places, such as Glenelg, Grange and Henley. In the boom period of the 1870s and 1880s it acquired substantial Victorian civic and commercial buildings that make it distinctive. Another reminder of British heritage is that it is known as the ‘City of Churches’. Many of the city’s founders were Methodists, Unitarians and Tractarians, and this heritage is maintained by a continuing sense of Christian social values in amongst Adelaide’s diverse other communities.

These buildings stood at the centre of civic life and symbolically represented elements of its cultural life, derived from Britain but built by South Australians, who across the decades maintained an awareness and pride in the values of tolerance, civility and public debate.



In August 1914, just weeks after the declaration of war in Europe, a British oak tree was planted within the Adelaide Parklands. It represented the young Australia, growing from British roots.

Events such as the bloody invasion of Gallipoli by the ANZACs in 1915-16 helped forge a sense of Australian identity but across the twentieth century, Adelaide experienced continued British migration – in greater proportions than other Australian cities. In the 1950s the satellite City of Elizabeth was founded, named after the new Queen. All South Australians learnt about the origins of the town in the utopian visions of its founders and were socialised in the distinctiveness of the city. Even the accent of many South Australians remained more ‘British’ than accents in other parts of the Commonwealth.

But while respecting its heritage, South Australia also considered itself to be democratic and innovative. It adopted political reform early, being second, after New Zealand, in granting votes for women in 1894. The Labor Party formed its first majority government in 1910 (35 years ahead of British Labour).



Adelaide born Muriel Matters – best known for her work on behalf of the Women’s Freedom League during the height of the militant struggle to enfranchise women in the United Kingdom.

A sociable city

Raymond Bunker has argued that *'Adelaide has a pleasant location between the mountains and the sea. Beyond the parklands surrounding the central city, the suburbs have a delightful and varied character within the framework of roads and sections originally laid out. This framework provides both order and variety.'* In this city, family life is based firmly on a strong work ethic and a desire to be given 'a fair go'. It is easy to get around for socialising and for community-based activities. This makes the city highly sociable and Adelaide is known for the variety of its festivals.

Festivals Adelaide emphasizes that *'Adelaide loves its festivals! The city itself is perfectly sized and has the ideal urban landscape to host these massive celebrations of creativity.'*



A major festival, emphasising the importance of family and tradition is the Credit Union Christmas Pageant. The pageant began in 1933 (it is staged in early November) and involves nearly 2,000 people and 400,000 spectators. It is the largest event of its kind in the world and reinforces the family feel of the city, with symbols of a rather 'British' version of Christmas in the use of the Christmas tree, holly and mistletoe (all to be seen growing in full bush and berry in a cold British November and represented here in warmer climes).

‘Britishness’ in Adelaide

In their study of migrants to South Australia, the Flinders University academics Susanne Schech and Jane Haggis found that British migrants did not perceive themselves as ‘foreign or strange’ and that **‘Despite the long journey, moving to Australia felt to many like moving next door’**.



Actually, for many migrants, there has been a sense that they had arrived in ‘*Britain in the sun!*’ In the wake of the Second World War hundreds of thousands of ‘Ten Pound Poms’ were assisted to migrate to Australia and now still about 7 per cent of Adelaide residents are born in England, with just under half of the population being of British heritage.

It is a widely held view in Adelaide that Britons migrating there would feel comfortable, recognising so many aspects of the city, but noticing also its ‘Mediterranean’ weather, lower than average house prices, excellent wines, and the beaches.



Images courtesy of Already Home – <http://alreadyhome.com.au>



Adelaide in numbers...

300 days of sunshine a year

Fifth 'most liveable' city in the world

20 years of economic growth

3000 miles of coastline

1700 acres of parkland

20 minutes to travel virtually anywhere around Adelaide

400 festivals a year

72,000 hectares of vineyards

Eight out of ten people have their ideal work/life balance

£252,990 is the median house price

38.1 hours is the average working week

Average weekly earnings is £612.11*

*AUD - GBP Conversions calculated at AUD 1 to 0.64 Pound Stirling.

A golden age of Britishness

In conclusion, Adelaedians described their values in terms that will feel familiar to anyone imagining a Britishness that pre-dates the uncertainties of the modern United Kingdom: *'integrity, fairness and humility with a genuine respect and consideration for the rights and needs of others.'*

This sense of respect for authority and institutions echo an older form of Britishness, associated with a sense of optimism about the future. And while Adelaide would assert its uniqueness, as capital of South Australia, there is an acceptance that British heritage plays a part in the city's sense of self:

"A sense of civility and good order that seems to derive historically from Britain."

"I sense the British heritage stronger here than anywhere else in Australia... Do I value it? Yes."

"I feel that the landmarks of our city, Adelaide Oval, St Peter's Cathedral, and the other Victorian era heritage buildings, provide a strong sense of our British roots as a constant, but subtle reminder, that we are part of the Commonwealth."



Life in Adelaide

Research* conducted with 250 South Australian families reveals a thriving community spirit and a relaxed, family-friendly way of life is alive and well in Adelaide.

- Nearly two thirds (63%) of families believe Adelaide has a strong community spirit where people have time for one another and look out for their neighbours.
- Over three quarters (78%) claim Adelaide has a laid back, relaxed way of life where people are optimistic about the future with a 'can do' attitude to life.
- Eight out of ten (81%) families believe they have a work/life balance that allows them to spend enough time with their family.

The research also shows six out of ten (59%) British families want to move abroad to escape the miserable British weather, economic downturn, expensive housing, bad manners and dwindling community spirit. However, nearly two thirds (65%) say the country they move to must have a 'sense of Britishness', with shared values and traditions, making Adelaide an obvious choice.



Moving to Adelaide

To make it easier for families to move abroad, the South Australian government has launched <http://www.facebook.com/LiveInAdelaide> which offers step-by-step advice and guidance on how to emigrate to Adelaide.



References

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Tara Brabazon, *Tracking the Jack: A Retracing of the Antipodes* (Sydney, 2000)

A. James Hammerton and Alistair Thomson, *Ten Pound Poms: Australia's Invisible Migrants* (Manchester, 2005).

Some historians dispute the 'convict free' nature of South Australian history, such as Paul Sendziuk, 'No Convicts Here: Reconsidering South Australia's Foundation Myth', in Robert Foster and Paul Sendziuk (eds), *Turning Points: Chapters in South Australian History* (Adelaide, 2012), pp.33-47. Nonetheless, the 'myth' remains popularly believed and shapes attitudes towards the state's past and present.

Donald Leslie Johnson, *Disturbing evidence: Adelaide's Town Plan, 1835-7*, *Planning Perspectives* (2008) 23:2, 225-231.

The original form of the Australian National Anthem, written in 1879, celebrated these origins: 'From England soil and Fatherland, Scotia and Erin fair, Let all combine with heart and hand/ To advance Australia fair.'

Raymond Bunker, 'Why and how did Adelaide come about?', *Planning Perspectives* (2008), 23:2, 233-240.

See their web pages at <http://www.flinders.edu.au/people/jane.haggis> and <http://www.flinders.edu.au/people/susanne.schech>

This was the advertising slogan for assisted passage in the 1950s.

*Independent omnibus research was commissioned as part of this report with 1,000 British families and 250 South Australian families. The research was conducted in September 2012 by Censuswide Surveys.

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