

### THE CUSTOMS HOUSE

Probably the most important building to be erected in the area was the Port MacDonnell Customs House. Built in 1863 by Mr Francis Reynolds for £2605 (pounds), it housed the Harbour Master's Office, Customs House, Court House, Post Office and residence, School Teacher's residence and Police Station and residence. The Post Office had a twelve line telephone switchboard and alphabetically marked pigeon holes for mail. Telegrams came by 'Morse Code' to Mount Gambier and telephoned through to Port MacDonnell for delivery. Prison cells and stables were built at the rear of the building. Although the stables have been destroyed, the building still stands as a reminder of the busy trading port in years gone by. Built on such a grand scale, it was the only one of its kind in South Australia and as such, indicated confidence in the development of a significant port facility. Substantial additions and alterations to the complex were made in 1874 and 1938. The Customs House accommodated the Police Station until 1958, when a new station was built in Charles Street. It was used as a restaurant for several years, and is now privately owned.

### PORT MACDONNELL HISTORIC CEMETERY

Although no plan drawn to scale appears to exist, it appears that approximately 34 sites may exist in the cemetery dating back from 1852 to 1901. Early records refer to it as the Mc Donnell Bay cemetery and Lighthouse cemetery. The Port MacDonnell and District Heritage Advisory Committee commenced work in 1993, attempting to uncover some of the sites. At this stage 7 sites have been located and the painstaking job will continue for many years. Research has not been able to find out why the two areas of the cemetery were used simultaneously, however it has been revealed that over the years rabbits had caused degradation of the area. After much work from the local council to try to halt the sand drift, the site was eventually abandoned and the current site was used solely for burial.

### THE WOOLWASHES

In the early 1860's Messrs Embury, Feast and Griffiths commenced a wool washing industry on Cress Creek at Port MacDonnell, locally known as Feast's Woolwash. The wool washes operated until about 1914, when the steamers stopped coming to Port MacDonnell. Mr Embury visited stations in the area to solicit wool. The bellies, pieces and locks were brought in bales by bullock wagons and later horse drawn wagons. It was sorted then scoured in large cast iron cauldrons. A fire was lit underneath and the heated water was used to remove the yoke and dirt from the wool.

### SEA WALL

Port MacDonnell Council erected a sea wall in 1925, consisting of stout posts at a cost of \$200. Occasionally the town suffered storm damage and flooding and at this stage the road was almost being washed away, undermining was taking place and sand was being cast onto the road. May 1957 saw the most severe storm ever to hit the South East Coast, tons of debris was flung onto the foreshore, forcing the Council to approach the government for urgent assistance to prevent further damage and to restore the sea wall. In 1975 it was proposed to use 2 metre wide and 1 metre high mesh cages filled with rocks for a sea wall protection east of the jetty.

### GERMAN MINE

An enemy mine came into the bay of Port MacDonnell with the high tide on Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> October 1943, a number of houses at the eastern end of the town about half a mile from the jetty, had to be temporarily evacuated. The mine was first seen by Mr Hammond while out inspecting his crayfish pots about half a mile from the shore. He circled it in his boat and then hurried back and reported his discovery to Mounted Constable A. J. West. The mine was kept under observation and eventually came ashore between three and four pm. The mine an old one encrusted with barnacles and seaweed, was dismantled and the explosive material destroyed on Wednesday morning by a naval demolition party from Adelaide. The explosive in the mine was hexonite, six times more powerful than T.N.T. it was designed that if any of the horns were touched it set off a series of chemical and electrical reactions which in turn caused the mine to explode in 2/5 of a second. The mine weighed approximately ¼ of a ton.

### PORT MACDONNELL ELEVATED WATER TANK

Height is 34 metres (111 feet), its capacity 273 Kilolitres (60,000 gallons) and made of mild steel, corrosion controlled by protective coating and cathodic protection. This tank was originally manufactured for the Wallaroo Power and Alcohol Distillery in 1943, to store power alcohol in case of a petrol shortage in South Australia during World War 11. It was never used for this purpose and was acquired in 1951 by the then Engineering and Water Supply Department who designed and built the stand. The tank was erected in 1952 and has become a dominant feature of The Bay skyline. In 1999 permanent upper and lower steel platforms were installed to provide easier and safer access to the structure, its pipes and valves.

### THE COMMUNITY HALL MURAL

In March 1999 Kathy Mabon was invited to design a mural for the then rundown Community Hall, at a total cost of \$8104.75. The whole community young and old became involved on a

'paint by numbers' format. The west wall of the mural is a panoramic view of the jetty and coastline 100 years ago. The lifeboat shed as seen on the jetty was an essential part of life with crews often risking their own lives throughout its history. The coastline of Port MacDonnell is a treacherous passage with many vessels falling victim to its reefs. The first lighthouse keeper Captain Ben Germein, and his assistant, John Dagwell, are depicted, they were skilful and daring men who charted the unknown depths of the bay and safe passage for ships entering her waters. The southern wall is a collage of the people and the industries of Port MacDonnell in 1900, such as Flint Rock, Feasts Woolwash and Wilkes Bark Mill and Tannery. The Shipping terminal and Blacksmiths have been lost in time but Dingley Dell, the old school with its Bell Tower, the Church and Community Lodge are still used today and the Customs House has been beautifully restored. All fifty four people depicted in the paintings are actually former residents with many of them painted by their descendants.

### PORT MACDONNELL JETTY

At a meeting held in Mount Gambier on 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1860, it was mooted to request that the government be petitioned "to cause sufficient funds to be appropriated for the erection of a jetty, safely buoying the entrance to the bay". The first pile was driven in December 1860. In 1862 temporary cranes were put in but after three years they were still being used and were in a very poor state. 1869 a new crane was installed, however it was reported to be defective and arrangements were made to replace it with another from Melbourne, this arrived and was fixed in August 1869. In 1883 it was proposed that the jetty be extended at an angled SE x E direction and be at least 1500 feet longer (460 metres) but this extension was never carried out. In 1900 another request was put to the government to improve the harbour. It was considered Port MacDonnell was a very desirable outlet for produce from the area. By 1938 the jetty had served the public well but was in need of repair and once again saved. With Port MacDonnell being a busy fishing port the jetty is an important asset to the crayfish industry. Recreational fishermen including children enjoy the challenge of catching a fish from the jetty.

### THE BREAKWATER

Provision of a Breakwater for the Port of MacDonnell was first discussed in 1869. The need for a protected anchorage was made apparent by the loss of a number of ships in the area. In 1882 it was decided to raise money to get a proper survey for Port MacDonnell Bay, and estimate the cost of a breakwater. In October 1882 a plan for the proposed breakwater was presented. During 1907 another scheme was put forward to improve the port. In 1969, Port MacDonnell fishermen

submitted to the council a case for a breakwater, at a cost of \$250,00. At that stage there were 74 vessels using the port. 1974 saw the breakwater on the agenda again and in 1975 the South Australian government announced plans to begin work on the breakwater. It was started in 1977 at a cost of \$1.2 million and was opened on 27<sup>th</sup> April 1979 by Acting Premier and Minister of Works, Mr Des Corcoran. Port MacDonnell Professional Fishermens Association Secretary Mr Mel Carrison smashed a bottle of champagne on the rocks.

The Breakwater is constructed on 208,000 tonnes of stone from Mount Schank Quarry and 1.5 km in length. Over the years the formation of a sand landhold at the west of the breakwater and sand deposits occurring over the slip way near the jetty were an issue. Consultants examined the problems associated with water circulation, seaweed acculation and sand control. The problem required constant attention, including dredging and removal of sand from the jetty area and the insertion of pipes besides the breakwater to reduce plankton buildup.

The Breakwater forms a most prominent feature along the coastline and provides a sheltered port for the fishing boats. With considerable build up of sand on the western side of the breakwater the Port MacDonnell District Council of Grant and the community developed the area to provide playground equipment, skate park, BBQ area, shelter and landscaping. The Port MacDonnell Offshore Angling Club boat launching facility which is situated along side the breakwater, was opened by the Honorable Harold Allison M. P. on February 27<sup>th</sup> 1994

#### OUR RUGGED COAST

MacDonnell Bay is the most southerly port in SA. The sea breaks along the coast with such heavy surf that even in the calmest weather its solemn roar can be heard for miles. Far out to sea the storms of the south rise in the winter, dark and dour with rain and hail, racing towards land. In the days of sail this stretch of coast was known as "The Graveyard of Ships". It was indeed a dreaded shore for the unlucky vessels caught in its toils.

The rugged headland of Cape Northumberland is situated on the wildest and most stormy part of the South Australian Coast. It faces the Southern Ocean and its open roadstead is subjected to fierce gales and sudden storms sweeping in from the south west. Its wide curving bay has a white sandy foreshore flanked at the eastern end by an immense spit of piled flint jutting far out to sea. Further to the west the headland of Northumberland thrusts into the sea, the end of a high sandstone spur running back obliquely from the coast.

#### SS TENTERDEN

The Tenterden was a 1338.95 (gross) ton, (1361 tonne) iron hulled, screw steamer, built in Scotswood on Tyne, Northumberland, England in 1883. She measured 246.5 X 19.9 feet (75.1 X 10.2 X 6 metres) and had two decks, was brigantine rigged with two masts and an elliptical stern and iron framework and powered by two steam engines.

The Tenterden was on a voyage from Melbourne and was to load wool at Port MacDonnell. She was in ballast and carried no passengers. Lying near the lighthouse on 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1893, a strong breeze blew up, driving her onto a reef. Although rescue was attempted she was left to the mercy of the wind and waves. The captain claimed that Mount Schank and Mount Gambier were laid incorrectly on his chart, he was charged with misconduct and his certificate was suspended for three months. For many years the Tenterden lay just off the coast, but it was decided to remove some of her upper gear as several ships had come in dangerously close thinking she was at anchor. The hull was sold at auction for £15 (\$30) to Mr R Carrison, who felt that the vessel could be re-floated. Timber, ironwork, pumps and sundries salvaged from the wreck were sold by Mr L.G. Ehret, auctioneer, in December 1897. Years later and over a long period of time, stormy seas battered her and she continued to break up, on 27<sup>th</sup> March 1967 she was blown up by divers. At low tide a small part can still be seen.

#### PORT MACDONNELL LIGHTHOUSE

The first lighthouse at Port MacDonnell came into operation on January 1<sup>st</sup> 1859. It was also the first lighthouse to operate on mainland SA. It was completed in July 1857, but installations delayed its opening for 18 months. Known as the MacDonnell Light, it was used for approximately 20 years, as the forces of nature undermined the foundations, making it unsafe. Little remains of this historic building except for some foundation stones, over which a viewing platform has been built. On the site is a memorial seat erected to the memory of Captain Ben Germein, (1826-1893) who had been the first lighthouse keeper from 1859-1866. Captain Germein also surveyed the harbour and chose the site for a port to serve the Mount Gambier district. The new lighthouse was established in 1882, to the east of the MacDonnell light. Three stone cottages were erected near the lighthouse to accommodate staff. The lighthouse is painted white with one red band around the middle. The original light was a wick burner fuelled by mineral oil. In 1906 the light altered to an incandescent burner (kerosene) and in 1936 the light was electrified. 1977 saw the light fully automated and de-manned in 1980.

## Stories of Port MacDonnell

The Customs House



Historic Cemetery



The WoolWash



The Sea Wall



German Mine



Elevated Water Tank



Community Hall Mural



Port MacDonnell Jetty



Breakwater



Rugged Coastline



SS Tenterden



Lighthouse

