

The West End of Adelaide

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Adelaide of the wide tree-lined boulevards, of the park lands, gardens and squares, of the handsome churches and gracious brick and stone homes discussed in other contributions in this volume, includes hidden away from these easily seen gems, an area that takes up half of the square mile of Adelaide, known as the 'West End'. This area westwards of King William Street gained its name simply because of its geographical location, but the term is also used as a euphemism to imply a certain reputation associated with this part of the city.

In London there is no doubt as to what is meant by the use of the term West End, apart from its obvious geographical location. It refers in the late twentieth century to its pacey sometimes dubious entertainment and its retail shopping, creating within the mind a unique reputation associated with only that part of London. One can never liken the West End of Adelaide to London's West End, but as with that city, the use of the term when referring to Adelaide's West End evokes many things to many people.

In the Adelaide context, the West End is a term which this chapter sets out to explore. The method I have used is to examine, first the development of the built forms out of which a particular physical and social character has emerged. More importantly, the West End refers to the reputation the district has acquired, and which, as will be demonstrated, can be seen to have evolved along with the city's development. This chapter, while briefly explaining the dynamics that brought about the establishment of the city's built forms in this area from early 1837, concentrates on its character and reputation as the West End between the 1870s and 1930s.

Living conditions

Although the new colony of South Australia attracted land speculators and wealthy families, the promoters also aimed to attract agriculturists who might become the colony's yeomanry. Most, however, were enlisted as laborers and arrived as assisted emigrants. Upon arrival, they were temporarily housed at 'Emigration Square', a compound of about two dozen wooden houses off West Terrace, beyond Currie and Waymouth Streets. For those early arrivals preferring to settle in the city itself rather than brave the countryside, land could be either bought or rented as a preliminary to erecting a house. While whole town acres were purchased for between £3 and £13 in March 1837 after the first allocations of land orders,¹ by 1839, when land was much in demand, city prices rose sharply. After subdivision, small lots, often no more than 4-5m wide by about 20-25m in depth, rarely cost less than £20. The settlers with limited means were often locked into situations where a permanent home, at the cheapest rent or purchase price, meant the smallest of properties. Such allotments, sometimes with poor and hurriedly built dwellings (often row houses) constructed upon them by small housing developers, became available for rent or sale within walking distance of

Emigration Square. They were close to most of the city's business area, making the move to a permanent home feasible, even for those with limited savings.

East from West Terrace, and north and south of Currie, Waymouth and Hindley Streets, some of the earliest subdivisions, also comprising the smallest lots (as many as 24 lots per town acre on some) were so planned to be affordable by such workers. Several speculators, such as William Henry Gray and Captain Whiteman Freeman of the immigrant ship *Tam O'Shanter*, recognised the urgent needs of the poorer immigrant in Emigration Square and subdivided their town acres into such small affordable lots for rent and purchase.² These earliest subdivisions were a blueprint for later ones in the vicinity which were to become widely criticised as 'slums' towards the end of the nineteenth century.³ Small and cheap housing, constructed on the tiny lots, naturally enough attracted other residents apart from those of limited means: the unemployed, transients, prostitutes and all the 'undesirable' elements one would expect to find in the poorer parts of a town accumulated in this area too for obvious economic reasons.

Hindley Street, the unofficial centre of town, where rents were lower than King William Street (which Colonel Light planned to be the official centre), quickly saw development of all forms of business, including shops, hotels, places of entertainment and numerous eating houses. (See the essays by Painter and Donovan) Hindley Street was a logical choice for it was close to a water supply that could be carted easily up the slope from the River Torrens and it was close to the junction of West and North Terraces, thence to Port Adelaide.

Understandably, people lived as close to their workplace as possible, which was often only a short walk from Hindley Street. From the earliest days of European settlement, most of the area around Hindley Street was residential, and remained so until the late 1880s when encroachment by factories, warehouses and workshops into residential streets, particularly in the northwest of the city, began in earnest. All too quickly, the combination of industrial with residential use exacerbated the conditions of the mostly crude form of housing of the earlier years to such a degree, that it resulted in an environment of noise, smell and pollution.⁴ While some of the worst houses were criticised at the end of the nineteenth century, and some were ordered to be demolished by the City Corporation,⁵ the issue of poor city housing and rehousing of the poor was not taken seriously until a government inquiry into substandard housing throughout the metropolitan area was undertaken in the late 1930s.⁶

Thus, while from the earliest days of the colony Adelaide developed from an 'extensive gypsy encampment'⁷ to a location lauded by the city council in 1882 as beautiful and prosperous,⁸ the situation away from the premier streets was often disastrous for residents. For example, when a new row of shops and a temperance hotel, known as Hooker's Building, were constructed on the corner of Morphett and Hindley Streets in 1881, *Frearson's Weekly* remarked that '... two years ago the whole acre was covered with a lot of wretched shanties, embracing hot beds of immorality and vice'.⁹

Many early dwellings in the city were condemned and their destruction ordered because they were totally unfit for human habitation, with damp walls, small rooms, low ceilings and floors close to the ground.¹⁰ In 1899-1900 the

Adelaide City Council Annual Report stated that ramshackle tenements were 'principally in the West End' and the city generally was:

too well supplied with slum properties and rickety, evil-smelling, ill-ventilated tenements occupied by the lowest types of women of the unfortunate class, by Chinamen, and those of our own race whose existence is one long hand-to-mouth struggle with abject poverty and misery.¹¹

but, for those receiving the rents, the same report pointed out that: owners are getting good rents from closely packed ancient 'cribs', 'sans yards', and evince no desire to improve or even repair their properties ... here and there stand neat well-built cottages alongside of a row of rookeries, forming a startling contrast and furnishing all the arguments necessary for the advocacy of some sort of compulsory betterment in the Housing of the Poor.

There were 6771 dwellings and buildings in 1883-84 and a population of 38 479 and 661 warehouses, workshops and stables in the city.¹² In 1880-81, the population by wards was Hindmarsh (162 town acres in the NE of the city) 6988; Gawler (160 town acres in the NW of the city - one half of the West End) 7525; Grey (160 town acres in the SW of the city - the other half of the West End) 7921; Young (220 town acres in the SE of the city) 8044; Robe (West ward of North Adelaide with 168 town acres) 3468; MacDonnell (East ward of North Adelaide with 172 town acres) 4533. On a population per town acre basis, Grey Ward was the most densely populated with 49.5 persons per acre followed by Gawler Ward at 47 persons, Hindmarsh Ward 43.1, Young Ward 36.5, MacDonnell 6.3 and finally Robe Ward at 20.6 persons per town acre. Thus, measured by the quality of the housing stock, size of allotment and population density, the social disability of the West End was plainly fixed by the late nineteenth century.

Was there ever a period between the 1870s and 1930s when living conditions in the West End of the city of Adelaide were anything other than poor? Regarding the years leading up to the depression which began in the late 1920s, Mrs Florence Steel of 175 Wright Street did not think so. Born in 1893, she recalled that as a child 'we had no bathroom, no shower or anything, but [father] rigged up a place for [mother] at the end of the verandah'.¹³ Ken Harris who lived in several different homes in the city as well as in the West End recalled that 'landlords would not put in extra plumbing and stuff like that but they were still charging them, you know, above what they should be'.¹⁴ Even in the late 1930s the parliamentary inquiry into substandard housing found that much city housing survived from the mid-nineteenth century built as row housing often only 3-4m, or one room, wide. They generally consisted of three rooms per house, one room behind the other. The middle room was invariably without natural light or adequate ventilation, made worse with the common practice of enclosing verandahs in skillion fashion with old iron and hessian to create extra sleeping or bathroom space at the front or rear, so that sunlight seldom, if ever, penetrated into the middle rooms. In order to fit in with the market's capacity to pay, there were no bathrooms or laundries.¹⁵

The daily life of those living in the West End could be one of much hardship. While the men could escape the home by going to their place of work each day (though this is not to say such work was either light or pleasant - far from it),

followed by visits to the pubs, clubs, 'two-up schools', races and football, for the women life was centred around the home and children. That constrained existence plainly contained a different range of burdens, joy and outlets. Mrs Florence Steel recalled that 'for washing or ironing - in those side streets ... particularly Lowe Street [off Gouger Street] ... there were little cottages where women used to go out and do washing and ironing ... wherever they could get it [and] that's where you'd go if you wanted anyone'.¹⁶

Life was particularly difficult for young single mothers, widows, deserted wives, and even for many mothers with working spouses. They survived as best they could, taking in washing, working in nearby factories, looking after other mothers' children, or resorting to prostitution. These women would endure especial stress when fostered-out children died in care and the police came investigating, or when women were reported for running brothels, abortion businesses or sly-grog shops. For four young single mothers in 1879, each battling to earn a living to support their infants, their efforts to 'muck in' together had tragic consequences. They were confined about the same time in the Lying-in ward of the Destitute Asylum in Kintore Avenue. After leaving the Asylum, one of the girls, Alice Lemm, agreed to look after all four infants for eight shillings each a week, in a house she rented in Russell Street, while the three other mothers returned to the workforce. The care of the infants came to grief when one died, followed by two more, all within a space of ten weeks. After the death of the second infant, it was stated by the coroner that Alice Lemm had placed herself in the 'extraordinary position' of undertaking the duties of dry nurse to four illegitimate children, and he advised her to give up her present method of obtaining a livelihood. When the story first came to light it was feared that it was a 'baby-farming' case where deliberate bad care had led to the deaths of the infants. Upon investigation, it was found to be a pathetic case of impoverishment of the four young mothers which had contributed to the early deaths of three of the infants.¹⁷ The Coroner's Report Book recorded, 'as they cannot obtain positions easily under the circumstances it is not to be wondered at that they are careless of their off[f] spring'.¹⁸ It seems even a registered foster mother approved by the Destitute Board in the same period was not much better at looking after young children. Annie Gibson of Crowther Street, between Waymouth and Franklin Streets, managed to 'lose' six children between the ages of two months and four years (four of those being under one year) between November 1884 and June 1886.¹⁹ The young children in her care died of illnesses attributed to teething, 'atrophy' and convulsions of the bowels.

When women needed the help of midwives and abortionists there was a network system operating which they could use at a price, but these practices also came under scrutiny from time to time when an infant died at birth or when a woman, suffering complications after an abortion, needed emergency medical attention. Mrs Hillier a herbalist and abortionist of Franklin Street practised in the 1890s but had links to specialist abortionists to whom women were referred if they were, in her estimation, 'too far gone' to be effectively treated by her. She was well known, for she advertised in the newspapers as a herbalist, as well as advertising that she provided full board at fifteen shillings per week, giving the services of electric baths and massages as well as supplying 'preventatives' and pills against

conception and birth and 'special treatment for females'.²⁰

The Adelaide Methodist Central Mission, operating since 1901 and located in the West End, reported in 1916 that 'there is a lot of poverty, often deserted women and children come to us with very little to wear, and less to eat'. In 1927 life for the poor became more desperate and the mission reported that there had been a hundred of the unemployed daily arriving at their door seeking both food and clothing. A year later this figure had risen to between 200 and 300 per day seeking assistance, and it was the many poor women and children among them who made the work very heavy for the staff.²¹ Sister Dora of the Mission published two books relating to her work in the city in 1922 and 1923,²² which though in fictional form, give vivid descriptions of the needy and accounts of the work undertaken by the mission to alleviate the distress of Adelaide's poorer citizens. Distress was commonplace: consider the deserted wife of five small children who stated:

Oh sister ... sometimes I don't know how to manage. I feel so weary and tired. I haven't had a cup of tea or anything to eat today. This struggle for a living is breaking my heart. Sometimes I feel I can't keep going for another day. It is only the thought of my children help me to bear up ...²³

It was a bleak environment for such women.

The West End, with its mostly small cheap housing, in the 1880s attracted Chinese and Assyrians, while from the late 1920s the rate assessments for the Adelaide City Council also recorded a rising number of Greeks and Italians living there. Although a Chinatown is in the 1990s located around the Central Market, the area that could have been designated as the first Chinatown was established from about 1881 on both sides of Hindley Street and Morphett Street, and north of Light Square (roughly in the vicinity where the Living Arts Centre and Barron Townhouse are situated today). By 1886, there were about eighteen separate establishments where Chinese had shops or lived. In the early 1890s there was a Chinese temple in Morphett Street, on town acre 55, fronting the north side of Hindley Street and the west side of Morphett Street.²⁴ The temple was established for the growing numbers of Chinese in the vicinity, and although it changed its location in about 1904 to be adjacent to the Castle Hotel where the Baron Townhouse now is, it was in existence until about 1921-22. Since many Chinese chose to live together to keep rents down, they lived in some of the worst forms of housing in the city and were accused of 'herding together in dirt and slush ...' and that 'a row of Chinese quarters met the fate they deserved' [demolition]. The report continued that inside these dwellings there was the usual overcrowding and filth of all descriptions. It was noted that in one room bananas were stacked to ripen, peanuts were being roasted in another while outside, vegetables were growing for sale to the public'.²⁵ Charles Knuckey, born in 1888, who lived on West Terrace, said that the Chinese who lived in the western end of Hindley Street, 'were quite all right ... no trouble, but there were one or two opium dens down there and of course there was trouble there ...'²⁶

There was another small group of non-Europeans, the Afghans, who first came to South Australia from the late 1850s as 'camel drivers'.²⁷ Although the number of Afghans was never large, and few were recorded as living in the city, by the 1890s they needed a place of worship. A site for a mosque was chosen and built in 1888-

89, in Little Gilbert Street and is in the 1990s one of the few surviving relics of Afghan immigration to South Australia.

Northwards, in 1904, eleven dwellings on Town Acre 130, which straddles Elizabeth Street between Currie and Waymouth Streets, were recorded as being occupied by 'Assyrians'. This particular town acre and the one adjoining it (TA 181, on the north side of Waymouth Street, 26 dwellings) was crammed with twenty five dwellings in 1871. However, by 1880 a workshop, the Currie Street Foundry, had been established and the number of dwellings reduced to eighteen. Perhaps the 'Assyrians' were able to live as a group in this street because other groups simply found better accommodation. In the 1990s, no dwellings along Elizabeth Street have survived.

In the early 1920s another ethnic group settled in the city. Unlike the smaller non-European groups, the history of Greeks in Adelaide is an important theme in the twentieth century history of the city. Greek Migrants first came to South Australia in the early 1920s: the first group settled in Port Pirie.²⁸ By 1925 a few of this earlier group had settled around the western end of Franklin Street where property was cheap. A Greek community and migrant organisation was established from which help and advice was given to new migrants. They were housed temporarily in houses that the Greek organisation owned in the area until they could afford their own properties. In the 1930s, after using the hall at Trinity Church for a few years the first Greek church in the city was established which was replaced in 1966 by a bigger one. In 1933 there were 211 Greeks in the city, rising to a peak of 703 in 1954²⁹ when the number stabilised until the 1970s, after which the community began to move into the suburbs.

Unsavoury activities

The West End not only had a reputation for poor living conditions; it was burdened with a reputation for the unsavoury activities that took place more frequently there than anywhere else in the city. It is hard to decide when the West End was first condemned as having a notorious reputation, but the *Observer* in 1850 said of the area:

a number of pestiferous dens exist in Light Square and its neighbourhood, which may be considered the moral cesspools of the city of Adelaide. Squalid filth and fetid vice render the atmosphere rank with unwhole[some] weeds.³⁰

More specifically, places of entertainment in the Light Square area such as the New Queen's Theatre abutting it, and the Colonel Light pub facing the square, were discussed in derogatory terms before the 1880s. The New Queen's Theatre was condemned as early as 1850 as a place of prostitutes and pickpockets³¹ and a 'hot bed of demoralization'.³² A reporter for the *Register*³³ gave a florid description of the 'low' life of Adelaide particularly for the Shamrock (now known as the Colonel Light) Hotel:

I next entered what is universally acknowledged to be one of the lowest amongst the low public houses of the city - the notorious Shamrock ... [where] men and women sunk to the level of brutes -or rather beneath that level, for no members of the animal kingdom could look so utterly debased - were jostling, crowding, shouting, and drinking in every stage of toxication ... In [the concert

hall] the scene of the bar was repeated, with the addition of several men lying in a sodden sleep on benches under the gallery, and a few swaying couples attempting to dance in the centre of the floor. Those assembled seemed to be almost without exception Port larrikins of the worst type, loafers, prostitutes, and other well-known Police Court habitués. A detective or two moving about amongst the crowd inside which made way for the 'D's and a little army of policemen outside were the only persons having a semblance of respectability in sight. Punctually at 11 the house cleared, and the besotted crowd reeled off to their surrounding haunts.

It is not surprising, given the hotel's notoriety, that John Gore chose to begin the Salvation Army's very first Adelaide campaign in the vicinity of the hotel in May of 1880 even before an official meeting of the Army in the Botanic Park on 5 September 1880. The Army then embarked with much success upon campaigns against drunkenness, poverty and corruption. Its first headquarters were in a hall on the west side of Morphett Street south of Hindley Street and its offices were for several years in the (unfortunately named) Hooker's Buildings, already referred to. After the arrival in 1881 of Captain Thomas Sutherland, the first official Salvationist leader in Australia, he informed William Booth in England that 'this is a suitable town for the Army, there is so much drunkenness and prostitution going on and sin of all sorts and I feel there is a great work to be done ...'³⁴ So it proved to be, with the Salvation Army patrolling streets in night brigades, visiting the brothels and opium dens of the West End, and offering practical help. Other religious efforts included Frederick Webb's mission hall at Trinity Church, which also fronted Morphett Street diagonally across the road from the Salvation Army's hall, and the deployment of a deaconess based at St Luke's, Whitmore Square, in the late 1890s, as well as the ongoing work of the City Mission and the Methodist Mission. There was also St Mary's School which Helen Northey has written about. Partly for the same economic reasons and partly to serve and redeem the people of this 'unsavoury' district, the churches invested a great deal of effort into the West End in these sixty years.

In 1905 a newspaper article referred to the social problems of the West End. In it J W Smith, who owned a couple of houses in the area, repeated the 1850 statement that the West End was a hot bed of crime. The article also referred to 'the difficulty of letting properties, owing to loose women living in the neighbourhood - women who brought spoilers, loafers and all sorts of bad characters into the locality'. The article asked 'why prostitution should be centred in the north western corner of the city?' and stated that 'none of the ladies would go through Light Square on account of the loafers and vagabonds hanging about there'.³⁵ Mrs Kathleen Smith, who was born in 1896 and lived in the West End all her life had no qualms in stating that 'the West End always had a rough name'.³⁶ Mrs Florence Steel openly admitted 'we lived in a very rough area of Adelaide' and then referred to the brothels in Sturt Street that were disguised as shops and explained:

All you had to do was to go in and ask for a packet of cigarettes, and they would say to you, 'Anything else? If you said 'no', all right. 'Yes', they'd open a curtain and you'd go in, and ... it was beautifully furnished ...'³⁷

Ken Harris lived in Gilbert Street as a child next door to a sly-grog seller, Jimmy Prisk, who also had a two-up school in his yard. Next door to him, said Mr Harris, 'lived a lady of the night ... there weren't too many secrets living in Gilbert Street ... even as a youngster at 12-14 years we were aware of such people because we used to see some of the men calling ... On the southeastern side of Sturt Street where little houses were, brothels [were^e] there. West Enders had such a bad reputation that 'a lot of people from the suburbs wouldn't go there. The West Enders didn't think they got in that much trouble.'³⁸

Mr Charles Knuckey, born in 1888, lived on West Terrace. He reported that while it was quite safe for a woman to walk from King William Street down Currie Street to West Terrace by day, at night the 'situation was rather different at the 'bottom end of Hindley Street' from west of Morphett Street near the Mafeking Hotel, an area which he described as 'notorious in those days ... and ... any woman would have to watch her step around that place'.³⁹

The city pub was the centre of life for many, as Alison Painter has shown in her chapter. Many operated on quiet streets as well as on main thoroughfares. They provided a sanctuary away from the harsh reality of work or home. In 1918 there were fifty-nine hotels to choose from in the West End alone (and forty-eight in the East End). They ranged from highly respectable affairs providing accommodation for country and interstate visitors and their families, such as the Ambassadors in King William Street, the South Australian on North Terrace and Tattersall's in Hindley Street, to the local pubs which catered for a regular close-knit clientele such as the Globe in North Street, the Cumberland Arms in Waymouth Street, the Colonel Light in Light Square, and the Rose Inn in Sturt Street.

The local pub, much like a club, provided more than a venue for just a drink. It was a place where friends regularly met, business was transacted and jobs negotiated. 'Mostly people went to the nearest hotel where they lived'.⁴⁰ There, games such as billiards, skittles and cards were played along with the illegal practice of gambling and betting. Although gambling and betting was carried on in billiard saloons, men's hairdressing shops, private houses and streets, it was at the pub where most of such activities took place.⁴¹

The moral crusade movements, gathering momentum from the 1880s, had a marked effect on pub life from that time, as Painter establishes. Until the successes of the temperance movements began to take effect, a drink could be obtained from a pub seven days a week until eleven at night and beyond, often served by barmaids. From 1896 the pubs were closed on Sundays. After the law to oust barmaids from the pubs came into effect in 1908, the only women allowed to continue working were existing female licensees of good repute and the wives, widows, daughters and mothers of licensees, although there were still over 200 registered barmaids working throughout the city in 1909. In 1918, of the fifty-nine West End pubs, twenty-three of them had women licensees.⁴² The biggest blow to the industry came in 1916 with the closing of the pubs at six in the evening on week nights and Saturdays.

For many pubs and their clientele the new laws looked as though they would destroy pub life altogether, but outwitting the police to continue after-hours drinking became part of each pub's special form of entertainment, especially, it seems,

in the West End. Pubs traded mostly without interference from the police because of the implementation, by licensees and their clientele alike, of elaborate warning systems to watch for their approach. However, licensees were sometimes caught and convictions for abuse of the liquor laws were common. By 1918 forty-nine of fifty-nine pubs in the West End had received convictions since 1909. Twenty-one of those had received convictions since 1917. The forty-nine, pubs had accumulated over 100 convictions between them – some of them had upwards of six to eight each, but none appear to have lost licences altogether.⁴³

The police admitted they could not stamp out the after hours trading that was going on at the pubs, nor prevent liquor being sold from the premises for consumption elsewhere. In an effort to learn more of the activities of the pubs, a diligent police detective superintendent named Priest produced enlightening accounts for both 1918 and 1919 detailing what was going on at every pub in Adelaide south of the Torrens River. At the Bristol Tavern, later known as the Hotel Franklin, in Franklin Street, 'there is always some persons in front of the hotel and our approach seems to be signalled'. Of the Criterion in King William Street, now known as Bernardis, '... small amount of after trading was being done up to the last conviction ... on race days there are always a lot of the racing public about the Hotel and there are suspicions of betting being carried on.'. For the Colonel Light it '... has been a bad after hours house ...' Of the Globe in North Street, he wrote 'there seems to be a good deal of after hours trading being carried on here, and our approach seems to be known'. For the Shakespeare Hotel in Waymouth Street, 'a little illegal trading goes on in a quiet manner, especially on Sundays'. At the White Horse in Currie Street, 'on race days ... betting seems to take place'. A year later Priest repeated his tour of the city pubs and revealed that the Royal Admiral Hotel in Hindley Street was known for a good deal of after-hours trading, and that the staff passed bottles through an opening in the fence to soldiers and others who gathered on a vacant block of land at the rear of the hotel. The Rose Inn in Sturt Street was using a house alongside which was rented by the licensee to facilitate illegal trading. Of the Clarendon in Hindley Street, Priest was told 'that persons made their escape through a window over the roof of the premises'.

Nit-keepers were employed day and night and beyond trading hours. Through the day nit-keepers easily signalled to one another but at night torches were used to warn of approaching police. Priest admitted that the spy system that hotels had set up for themselves, together with the increasing use of the telephone, was so effective that it caused many problems for the police. Ken Harris remarked of two detectives in this period, 'Curtis and Sharp had bad reputations for getting as many convictions as possible ... but for all their disguises and new ways to catch out illegal drinking and gambling, their disguises didn't work'.⁴⁴ However, detection was often successful after anonymous letters were sent to the police regarding after-hours trading and sly-grog selling by individuals.

As a result of one complaint in 1925 about the 'trading in liquor after hours in some hotels, more so in the West End', the police were obliged to place a watch for several weeks on the Cumberland Arms and the Flagstaff Hotel. Four plain clothes policemen were detailed to investigate the allegations, 'spending practically all their times at the Cumberland Hotel between 7-11 pm. While charges

were brought against the Flagstaff on several counts, there was no proof that 'bottled beer was passed out through a window believed [to be] by the 'boots' employed at the hotel'.

It was harder to bring convictions against the Cumberland Arms which had refined its tactics to evade the police. The police thought that the trading of after-hour liquor did not actually take place on the premises but it was

... carried off the premises and supplied to persons in the street. The supply is principally made to persons who arrive at the Hotel in motor cars, generally motor cars from the licensed motor stands, the car being driven to the side door of the Hotel facing Elizabeth Street. This door is rarely closed until after 11.30 p.m. and the Licensee or some member of his family is always standing at the open doorway ... the locality is very dark and it is almost impossible to see anything pass from the Hotel to the motor car ...⁴⁵

One West End licensee was Albert Augustine Edwards, better known as Bert Edwards. He was the most flamboyant and notable figure in the history of the West End. Edwards was born illegitimately during an economic depression in 1888. He was raised in the West End of the city receiving schooling from the Catholic school of St Joseph's in Russell Street. Living with his mother, off Sturt Street, he saw and experienced the hardships of 'west enders' crammed into tiny dwellings along narrow streets, alleys and cul-de-sacs. The combination of Edwards' life experiences in the most under-privileged part of the city, together with his flamboyant character, created an able humanitarian who became the go-between for the city's underprivileged and the authorities.⁴⁶

From 1914 to 1931 he was councillor for the Gray Ward, and again from 1948 until his death in 1963. In 1917 he was elected as ALP member in the House of Assembly for the seat of Adelaide and retained the seat until 1931. Starting off as a tea shop proprietor in Compton Street, his first stint as hotel licensee was at the Duke of Brunswick in Gilbert Street, from 1916 until 1924. From 1924 until 1931 he was at the Newmarket Hotel at the junction of North and West Terraces, and from 1933 to 1937 he was licensee of the Castle Inn Hotel in Hindley Street.⁴⁷

Edwards' popularity was assured when he was licensee of the Duke of Brunswick. His hotel had a football club, the Brunswicks, which was one of eleven clubs in the West End alone. As well as being involved in the hotel football club, he became involved in the West End Football Club of which he was chairman of the committee in 1921-22 and its president in 1926.⁴⁸ However, while Bert was at the Brunswick, some of his activities brought him under the scrutiny of the police and the Attorney General's Department in 1918 as a result of a complaint to the police by a 'thoroughly reliable person'. It was revealed that Edwards had set up an unregistered club in a house in Logan Street. It was almost opposite his pub in Gilbert Street and catered for about sixty young men who were footballers and supporters living in the neighbourhood. The complaint was that from time to time barrels of beer were rolled from the pub to the club rooms. The police tried to gain information but could find no one to testify because 'Edwards is very popular with all classes'. The investigations were then made among Edwards' political opponents but with no result for as was explained 'they are too guarded and they say that they do not wish to be mixed up in his affairs'. As far as can be found, the matter went

no further.⁴⁹

As a result of the more restrictive liquor laws, especially after 1916, sly-grog sellers flourished, making as much as £5 a week in 1918-19, and charging as much as two shillings a bottle which was more than double the usual price. Sly-grog seller Jimmy Prisk had a thriving business which also included a two-up school in his yard. As a child, neighbour Ken Harris recalled that he kept his illegal cache of liquor buried in a pit straddling his parents' garden fence and Prisk's. The liquor was kept in a three foot square pit which was delivered directly to Prisk from one of the local breweries. Harris' dad obtained a ration of beer from Prisk each week, presumably in part as a pay off for his cooperation. According to Harris, Prisk's fame as sly-grog seller and two-up school operator was such that especially on Sundays, 'mobs' of men paid to play in the large shed in his garden to which even visiting English cricketers as well as businessmen about town came along. In the city of Adelaide two-up was played in roomy sheds, quiet lanes, the park lands and by the River Torrens.⁵⁰

According to Ken Harris Bert Edwards also ran a two-up school at the same time he was running a small tea shop in Compton Street, between 1914 and 1916, when he was in his early twenties. The game was held on Friday nights in the back rooms of the tea shop.⁵¹ Another resident, Horace Hurst, who also knew of Edwards' two-up activities, stated 'he was never had up for keeping a gaming house ... it was the police's place to find out, nobody else's'.⁵² In recent times a former lord mayor and Lebanese Christian, George Joseph, who lived as a child opposite the Cumberland Arms, told of his visits as a small boy to a two-up school in Waymouth Street. He recalled that as an extra precaution against detection by the police, two boxers were kept on stand-by, ready to box if a police raid was imminent. When suddenly given the nod to start boxing, the cheering and applause, which the police expected to find coming from illegal gambling, was found to be for nothing more than a harmless boxing match, a popular sport in the city until about the late 1940s.⁵³

Many recollections such as this remain to be discovered, and there are still old residents and former residents who can give colourful accounts of life in the West End before the 1930s. Unfortunately, the population of the city, which began declining in 1915 from a peak of 43 133 to 14 058 in 1972 has seen the scattering of many residents to the suburbs.⁵⁴

After the period under review, and despite the depression of the 1930s, the West End continued to evolve, with the result that the built form of the area was radically altered because of the continuing encroachment of small workshops and factories in the northwest of the city, and to a lesser degree, in the southwest. Rate assessments show the increase of automobile-related businesses around Franklin and Waymouth streets, particularly after World War One. Little has been researched or written of the period after the depression of the 1930s, but post-war migrants consolidating their positions by buying up the cheaper West End properties, contributed towards the landuse change of residential to commercial. However, it must also be noted that many Greek and Italian migrants, buying their first Australian homes in the West End, unwittingly averted what might have been the eventual destruction of many more of the

tiny cottages, worn out and dingy between the wars, but still cheap and affordable, for those with cash, in the early 1950s. These same properties which lingered on to the mid 1970s, were by the late 1970s and 1980s reviewed as quaint, desirable and trendy.

Despite these small gains, much of the West End has been irrevocably changed, so that there is little reminder of a once crowded residential area. Much of the social history of this part of the city still remains to be written.

¹ T Worsnop, History of the City of Adelaide from the foundation of the province of South Australia in 1836 to the end of the municipal year 1877, 421-23

² Captain Whiteman Freeman owned Town Acre [TA] 127 and 128 straddling North and Gray Streets. He subdivided them to over 28 lots, a remarkable number for only one acre. W H Gray owned 11 town acres between Currie Street and North Terrace, and like Freeman, his rental housing was for the workers

³ B Dickey *Holy Trinity Adelaide: the history of a city church* (Adelaide, 1986) 91. ACC Year Book, 1899-1900, 68-71, 91-6

⁴ Even Frederick Webb, rector of Trinity Church on North Terrace, had to take legal proceedings in 1907-10 against the Union Engineering Company based next door to the rectory for disturbance at weekends from steam hammers. ACC Year Book 1904,54

⁵ The ACC Year Books for the turn of the century list the numbers of dwellings demolished: in some years there were over a hundred

⁶ SAPP No 32, 1940, Second Progress Report of the Building Act Inquiry Committee. Sub-standard housing conditions in the metropolitan area

⁷ C Wilson and K T Borrow *Bridge over the ocean* 95

⁸ ACC Annual Report, 1881-82, 46

⁹ *Frearson's Weekly* 27 Aug 1881

¹⁰ ACC Annual Report, 1887-88, 49

¹¹ *Ibid*, 1899-1900, 95

¹² *Ibid*, 1883-84, 90, 1880-81, 20

¹³ MLSA Oral History Collection, Florence Steel, No 8509, 4

¹⁴ ACA Oral History Collection, Ken Harris, 1989

¹⁵ Building Act Enquiry Committee, 1940

¹⁶ Florence Steel

¹⁷ *Register* 29 Nov 1879. See also P Sumerling, Infanticide, baby-farming and abortion in South Australia, 1870-1910, BA thesis, University of Adelaide, 1983, 37-8

¹⁸ GRG 1/44, Coroner's Report Book, 6 Nov 1879, SRSA

¹⁹ GRG 27/19, Inspectress Report, Licensed Foster Mothers and Wetnurses, SRSA

²⁰ *Register* 2 March 1897 for Mrs Hillier's involvement in abortion case which resulted in death for pregnant woman, Jessie Cass

²¹ MLSA, Records of Adelaide Central Mission, Annual Reports, 1901-29

²² Two publications by Sister Dora *Tragedy and Comedy*, 1922 and *That they which see not see*

²³ *Tragedy and Comedy* 4

²⁴ ACC Assessment Book, 1886, Town Acre 55

²⁵ ACC Annual Report, 1899-1900, 68-70

²⁶ MLSA, Oral History Project, SA Speaks, C Knuckey, No 8614

²⁷ S Marsden, P Stark and P Sumerling *Heritage of the City of Adelaide: an illustrated guide* 190

²⁸ *Ibid* 59-60

²⁹ Figures from Bureau of Stat

³⁰ *Observer*, 9 Feb 1850, 9

³¹ E Snell *The life and adventures of Edward Snell* 169

³² *Observer* 9 Mar 1850

³³ *Register* 2 Oct 1877

³⁴ B Bolton *Booth's Drum* 13

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- ³⁵ *Register* 16 Dec 1905
- ³⁶ ACA Oral History Project, Katheleen Smith
- ³⁷ MLSA Oral History Project, Mrs Florence Steel
- ³⁸ ACA Oral History Project, Ken Harris
- ³⁹ MLSA SA Speaks, 1986, Charles Knuckey
- ⁴⁰ ACA Ken Harris
- ⁴¹ SAPP No 60 and 60a, Report of the Royal Commission on betting prevalence of illegal betting, 1933, 5
- ⁴² GRG 67/25/1909, Register of barmaids, SRSA
- ⁴³ GRG 5/360/10 May 1918, Police Commissioner's Records, -Conduct of hotels west of King William Street by Supt. Priest and GRG 5/2/282/1919 Workings of licensing court, Supt. Priest, SRSA
- ⁴⁴ ACA Ken Harris
- ⁴⁵ GRG 5/2/1156/1925, After hour trading at Cumberland and Flagstaff Hotels, SRSA
- ⁴⁶ His mother was the servant to C C Kingston who, it has been alleged, was Bert Edwards' father. S Edgar, 'The King of the West End', *National Times* 2 May 1982. See also ADB 8
- ⁴⁷ He was also licensee of Hotel Victor in Victor Harbor, 1929-30 and Black Lion in Hindmarsh, 1941-1946
- ⁴⁸ W T Kelly *History of the West End Football Club*
- ⁴⁹ GRG 1/846/1919, Attorney General's Office - Enquiry into Sunday drinking in Gilbert Street, SRSA
- ⁵⁰ In 1913 price for draught beer was 4d per bottle but 8d for Colonial brand. See SAPP No 90, Progress Report of Select Committee of the Legislative Council on Liquor Traffic, 1913, 7
- ⁵¹ ACA Ken Harris
- ⁵² ACA Oral History Project, Horace Hurst
- ⁵³ George Joseph interview with Patricia Sumerling Oct 1989
- ⁵⁴ Statistics from ACC Annual Reports and Census