

# Suburb History

In June 1915 the Vaughan Labor Government purchased the property 'Grange Farm', south of Adelaide, from the trustees of the estate of William Tennant Mortlock.

The farm occupied 121.4 hectares (298 acres) and the Government intended to establish the site as a 'model garden suburb'. The Government's decision followed the impact of Charles Reade's lectures during his 1914 Australasian Town Planning Tour. He was sponsored by the British Garden Cities and Town Planning Association and was considered an expert by his colleagues in the field of town planning.

Reade promoted the internationally popular model suburb schemes in public lectures enhanced by lantern slides, newspaper releases and in an official report, *Recommendations in Regard to Town Planning in South Australia*. His planning principles were guided by the garden city movement which aimed to improve the lifestyle and residential environment of all classes of people; Colonel Light Gardens clearly reflects those principles in its design.

World War 1 interrupted the State Government's intention for 'Grange Farm' and the land was used as an army training camp until 1920. Meanwhile, during 1916, Reade had been employed as South Australia's (and Australia's) first Government Town Planner. In January 1917, when the need arose to improve drainage at the camp, Reade was consulted. He was requested to prepare plans for a model suburb and designed a scheme with the working title 'Mitcham Garden Suburb'.

Following the preparation of the plans the deep drainage (sewer lines) was installed to be used for the army camp and then for the housing development. His plans were shown publicly and for the first time at the First Town Planning and Housing Conference and Exhibition in Adelaide in October 1917, with the design being described in a paper given at the Second Town Planning and Housing Conference held in Brisbane in 1918. They were ratified by the State Government in 1919 when the Garden Suburb Act was passed. The Act, together with associated regulations, provided a detailed plan for the Suburb's development. One of its innovations was in the Suburb's administration — instead of coming under the jurisdiction of the local Council, it was controlled by a Garden Suburb Commissioner who had responsibility for all aspects of its development.

The name Colonel Light Gardens was adopted by State Cabinet in April 1921.

A booklet was published which outlined the benefits and services available in the Suburb and included a plan of the scheme as well as a coloured perspective. The first blocks available for public purchase were in the northeast section of the Suburb and were released in August 1921. Additional sales were made in 1922 and 1924. The new Suburb offered prospective residents 'comfort, convenience and beauty' with services — gas, electricity, water and sewerage — surfaced roads, public transport and views of the foothills. Land sales were slow but steady and by mid-1924 sixty houses were occupied or being built. Their style reflected the popular preference

for Californian bungalows (although a number of neo-Tudor homes were also later constructed).

In June 1924 development of the Suburb was accelerated by the Labor Government's decision to initiate a mass housing project, the Thousand Homes Scheme, on a large portion of the undeveloped land in Colonel Light Gardens. The central and southern sections of the Suburb were remodeled to accommodate 363 houses. Two farming properties on the western side of Goodwood Road were purchased as sites for a further 332 houses. (The remaining 305 homes of the Thousand Homes were built in Adelaide's western suburbs).

Although some residents of the northern end of the Suburb believed that the Thousand Homes Scheme would devalue their properties and were fearful of 'slum conditions' they were advantaged by the scheme. It quickened the availability of facilities including shops and parks and assisted the pace of private investment in the suburb. Two schools and five churches were established. The Garden Theatre (for moving pictures) sited on Goodwood Road opened in 1925. In 1927 the Garden Suburb Commissioner reported that all available building blocks were sold and that the suburb's initial development was complete.

Colonel Light Gardens has remained substantially unchanged since the 1920s. The Garden Suburb Commissioner approved the subdivision of Piccadilly Circus, originally intended as the main entrance to the suburb, in the 1940s. The southern portion of Eton Street was also built in that decade.

Unused shop sites in former Bond Street (now Salisbury Crescent) were allocated for housing, and subdivisions of housing allotments were made during the 1960s and 70s in several other parts of the suburb. Due to financial constraints, responsibility for Colonel Light Gardens was transferred to the City of Mitcham in 1975 and the Garden Suburb Act was repealed. Since then the former Garden Suburb Commission depot in Eton Street has been cleared and replaced by houses.

During the 1980s local community awareness of the significance of the suburb's plan led to successful application for funding of the Colonel Light Gardens Conservation Study. Following its release in 1989 a Heritage Adviser was appointed.

In recognition of its unique place in national and international planning history the entire suburb was placed on the Register of the National Estate in October 1999. It was declared a State Heritage Area in May 2000 and the future management of the suburb was set out in the Colonel Light Gardens Conservation Management Plan, adopted by Mitcham Council in 2005.

### **Further Reading**

Garnaut, C *Colonel Light Gardens: model garden suburb*, Crossing Press, Sydney 1999.

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