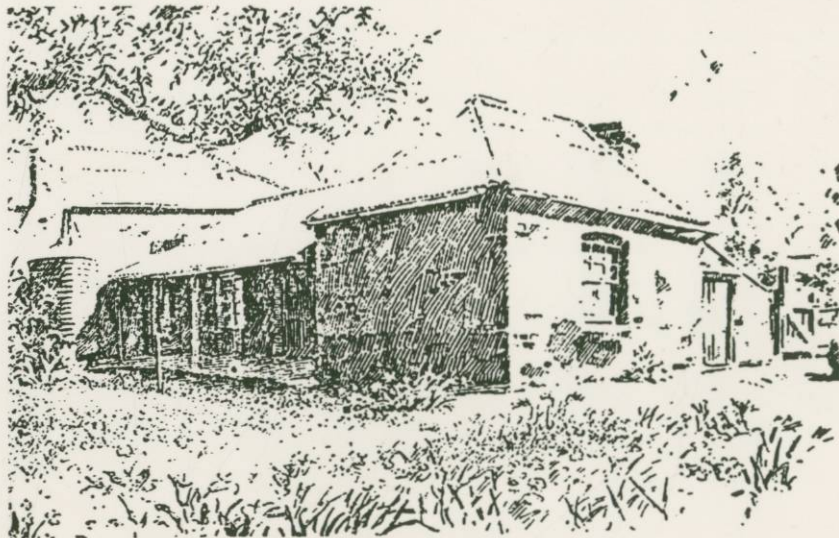


# THE BARTON COTTAGE

*THE HOME OF COLONEL WILLIAM LIGHT  
AND THE GREAT CONTROVERSY  
SURROUNDING IT*

Articles by

**DR. JOHN TREGENZA**  
&  
**DR. CHARLES FENNER**



**Thebarton Historical Society**

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Kevin Kaeding, Barry Liccione, and Glen Ralph

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## INTRODUCTION

THE home which Colonel William Light had built for himself on his country Section 1 at Thebarton, and in which he lived from January, 1839, until his death in October of the same year, was demolished in December, 1926, by the then owners, Colton, Palmer & Preston, hardware merchants. The weak appeals that had been made to preserve the house had not carried the day, and there were some who did not take it lightly. Among them was Dr. Charles Fenner, then Superintendent of Technical Education with the Education Department. He was born in Victoria, and first trained as a printer, later attending Teachers' College, and Melbourne University, where he obtained his Dip. Ed. and D.Sc. He was Principal of Ballarat School of Mines, 1913-1916, then came to South Australia. He was a brilliant, if slightly eccentric, scholar, with a flair for science, and in particular geography and geology.. His textbook, An Intermediate Geography of South Australia was used in schools for many years. The paper included in this book was a departure from his usual field. It was inspired by a perceived need to put on record what was then known about the house. Dr. Fenner delivered the paper at the meeting of the Royal Geographical Society in September, 1927, and it was included in the Proceedings of the Society for that year.

For many years this remained the only article of any substance on the subject of Colonel Light's cottage. In the early 1980s, Thebarton Corporation initiated a proposal to rebuild Colonel Light's cottage, and a committee to bring this into effect was formed. The newspaper report which Dr. John Tregenza refers to arose out of the work then being carried on by this Committee. It prompted him to undertake some research on his own behalf, and the result of that we can see in the paper which is reprinted here from the Journal of the Historical Society of South Australia. Dr. Tregenza was born in Port Lincoln, and studied at the University of Adelaide (M.A., 1956) and the Australian National University (Ph.D., 1960). Before becoming a consulting historian he was lecturer and tutor in Australian and British History at Newcastle University College, Reader in History at Adelaide University, Curator of Historical Collections at the Art Gallery of South Australia, and the senior Historian on the staff of the History Trust of South Australia. He is the author of a number of books, including Australian Little Magazines (Libraries Board of South Australia, 1964), George French Angas: artist, traveller and naturalist, 1822-1886 (Art Gallery Board of South Australia, 1980), and Collegiate School of St. Peter: The Founding Years, 1847-1878 (The School, 1996).



Nothing else of any substance about Colonel Light's home in Thebarton has ever appeared. In order to access these articles it has been necessary to go to a library which holds the journals. Now that there is renewed interest in Colonel Light and the cottage the Thebarton Historical Society has decided to bring out this material in a convenient form. The Wilmar Library has been assigned this task.

There is a problem about Light's cottage. The two authors have differing points of view impossible to reconcile by any kind of compromise. What was the original cottage, and what later additions? What materials were used to construct it? Did it have a shingle roof or thatch? How many rooms did it have? Was Colonel Light heavily in debt to the bank? Has the 'conventional wisdom' about Light been right or wrong? After perusal of both articles the reader is likely to be in a much better position to answer these questions.

The changeover from serial article to book has made a few minor changes necessary, but nothing has been taken out of the original texts except what was needed to adapt them to the new format. Facsimile reproduction was not possible. Perhaps, after all, this has been an advantage. It has afforded us the opportunity to make one or two additions. For instance, all three paintings by Gustave Barnes are given here, which was not done when the articles were first put before the public.

Publication of this book has been made possible through the kindness of copyright holders and the help and advice of colleagues. For the text I have to thank Mr. Lyell Fenner, Dr. John Tregenza, The Historical Society of South Australia and the Royal Geographical Society. Use of illustrations has been made possible by the consent of the Art Gallery of South Australia for the Barnes paintings, Mortlock Library for photos, and Mrs. Judith Brooks for the drawing by John Goodchild. John Radcliffe, of Thebarton Public Library, and his staff, have allowed me free access to the computer which was used for Dr. Fenner's article, and rushed to help when the alarm bells were sounded. All the hard work was done by Kevin Kaeding. I was grateful for the support readily given to the project by the members of the Thebarton Historical Society.

I am indebted to all. I believe that publication of this book is significant at this time when the possibility of the construction of a replica of Colonel Light's cottage is again being considered. If another attempt is made, those involved in it will at least have a better opportunity to be well informed than were those who worked on Thebarton Corporation's ill-fated Committee.

GLEN RALPH



COLONEL LIGHT'S 'THEBERTON COTTAGE'  
AND HIS LEGACY TO MARIA GANDY:  
A RE-CONSIDERATION OF THE EVIDENCE

John Tregenza

Research for this paper was prompted by the publication of an article in the Adelaide Advertiser of 14 August 1987 entitled 'Colonel Light's cottage may rise again.' The article referred to plans of the Thebarton Corporation to build a replica of Light's cottage on the bank of the River Torrens near the Brickworks Market, about one kilometre west of its original site on the corner of Winwood and Cawthorne Streets in the suburb of Southwark. (These streets have recently been closed and they and the site of Light's house have now been absorbed into the Southwark Brewery.) Illustrating the article was a reproduction of a 1916 watercolour in the collection of the Art Gallery of South Australia by Gustave Barnes (not 'Gustav Varnes'). (1) (Fig. 1) This depicted a very small thatched cottage and lean-to shed abutting a taller structure in the background which the Advertiser report described as an 'upstairs extension.' The report implied that Thebarton Corporation was only thinking of building a replica of the thatched rooms in the foreground--said to be Light's 'Thebarton Cottage' as it appeared in his day. The article assumed that the much larger structure in the background had been built after Light's death.

I had long been aware of this view that Light lived in the back rooms only of the house that was demolished in 1926, and had even given support to it by recommending the reproduction of the same Barnes watercolour in the Wakefield Press's 1984 publication, William Light's Brief Journal and Australian Diaries. It was, after all, the conventional wisdom, and was consistent with the findings of an elaborate article on the subject by Charles Fenner, D.Sc., published in 1927. Moreover there was a certain morbid fascination about the paradox that the Founder of Adelaide died in miserable circumstances. Yet, although outwardly accepting this view, I had always felt uneasy about it. Even if Light had been very poor, dying £620 in debt (also part of the conventional wisdom), (2) surely he would have constructed a house, however small, which had some style and symmetry? Could this strange structure depicted by Barnes from two points of view in 1916, really be the house of the man who planned Adelaide so well, painted so many fine watercolours (several while he was actually living in 'Theberton Cottage') and was so well acquainted with the finest European architecture?

Having now carefully examined the available evidence I believe that the conventional wisdom has been wrong, and that the errors it proclaims first gained currency during World War I when the generation of pioneers who had known Light's true circumstances had died, and a new generation, untrained in sifting and weighing historical evidence, was urgently, but clumsily, creating a new historical tradition that was more intended to satisfy contemporary needs than to reveal the truth about the founding years.



Like all the other early colonial officials from the Governor down, Light was able to purchase land and develop it as an ordinary settler. Records in the General Registry Office of South Australia show that on 23 December 1837 William Light purchased four Adelaide Town Acres immediately south-east of Hurtle Square on Gilles Street--acres 594, 595, 596 and 650. For three of these he paid £5.10s. and for the fourth £5.15s. On the same day he became possessed of a fifth Town Acre, No. 571, which was back to back with Acre 596 but fronted on Halifax Street. We know from the 'Reminiscences' of his friend and colleague, Boyle Travers Finniss, that about this time Finniss sold Light Preliminary Land Order No. 147 for £150 (3) and Light almost certainly acquired Town Acre 571 in this way. A Preliminary Land Order, originally issued in London, entitled the owner to one Town Acre in Adelaide proper, and a 134-acre Country Section. The first Country Sections could only be chosen after sufficient land in the neighbourhood of Adelaide had been surveyed and a map drawn up. By 27 March 1838 some 130,000 acres had been surveyed and a ballot of 'Owners and Representatives of Owners of the first 437 Land Orders' was held in the Land Office to determine the order of choice. By an amazing piece of good fortune William Light drew the first choice. (4)

While it is pure myth that strings were pulled to give Light an advantage, or that, as Surveyor General, he gave himself first choice, (5) there is no doubt that he was ideally equipped to make the most of his extraordinary luck. Cannily he chose 'All that One Hundred and Thirty-four Acre Section of Land numbered "1" in the Provincial Survey marked with the letter B.' He chose this section, not because it happened to be No. 1, but because it promised the best value. The original Land Grant, now in the possession of the Mayo family, contains a finely-drawn, hand-coloured plan precisely locating the Section. It had direct access to the Torrens on the north, a Parklands frontage on the east, was close to the road to the Port and was only half a mile from what was then the busiest part of Adelaide--Hindley Street. When Light took delivery on 28 August 1838 he most certainly acquired a splendid asset, and although by then he had been obliged to resign the Surveyor Generalship through the machinations of his incompetent deputy George Kingston, there was no reason why he should not use his new asset as security to raise funds to build a relatively comfortable and attractive house in keeping with his position. Statements of his account with the Bank of South Australia suggest he did precisely that; by 17 April 1839 his debt with the Bank was £787.17.3 (6)--far more than would ever be needed to build and furnish a mere hut!

In May, thinking that he would soon be sailing to England, Light raised a further £500, bringing his debt by 30 June to £1,245.5.3. At this point, with his health rapidly failing, he sought to reduce his debts and help meet the ongoing living expenses of his household by arranging with his friends and colleagues Henry Nixon and Boyle Travers Finniss to subdivide twenty-one acres at the southern end of his



Country Section into 252 allotments. The parchment Indenture drawn up between the three men on 17 and 18 July 1839, complete with a plan of the allotments and streets which would form the village of Thebarton, (7) is still preserved in the General Registry Office. (8) It was not a plan of any distinction or originality. The four new streets were straight, there was no provision for anything like a village green, and the allotments were about as small as the market was likely to accept, 34 feet wide and 104 deep, just wide enough to accommodate a respectable small cottage and deep enough to allow for a vegetable garden at the back. The plan groups the allotments in sets of twelve, distinguished by twenty-one letters of the alphabet. On the opening page of his Last Diary Light reproduces all these letters and calculates the likely value of the whole subdivision as £1764, allowing for a range in the prices of allotments from £10 to £4. (9) In estimating Light's assets it is essential to realize that this sum of £1764 only relates to the first subdivision of 21 acres and not, as David Elder assumes, to the whole Section of 134 acres. (10)

On 26 August 1839 Light made a will which read, in part:

I give and devise all my Town and Country sections of land and all the real estate belonging to me in the Province of South Australia unto my Housekeeper Miss Maria Gandy absolutely... I do hereby appoint the said Maria Gandy sole Executrix of this my Will hereby requesting my friends William George Field, John Woodforde and William Jacob to assist her the said Maria Gandy in the execution of this my last Will and Testament... (11)

Maria Gandy was clearly not an ordinary 'housekeeper.' Light had come to know her about 1832 when his wife Mary had formed a liaison with Captain Hugh Bowen. Although Mary bore three children during the course of this relationship, the first in March 1833, she seems to have been quite content to remain Mrs. Light and to give all three children her married surname. As she was wealthy and her husband poor, and as divorce then required a special act of parliament, there was no possibility that Light could ever marry Maria. This he would almost certainly have done had it been legally possible; the nature of his will, the fact that he and Maria lived together for several years, his readiness, after the death of her father, to bring two of her younger brothers out with him in the Rapid, and references in the diaries of two colleagues who accompanied them both out to South Australia on the Rapid, all support this view. Dr. Woodforde, soon after arriving at Rapid Bay, refers to 'Captain Light and Lady' coming ashore. (12) William Jacob, the youngest surveyor in Light's team, reports on 29 January 1837 that he 'saw Captn. Light and Maria both very well.' He mentions meeting them as a couple again on 9 February and on 19 August records: 'Dined at Captn. Light's with Woodforde, Hill, Maria & himself being the anniversary of our arrival in Antechamber Bay. Spent a very pleasant evening..' On 1 May 1838, the anniversary of leaving London for South Australia, he 'Dined and drank Tea at Colonel Lights: pres-



ent Woodforde, the Colonel, Maria & myself--spent as usual a very pleasant evening.' (13)

Striking evidence of both Light's and Maria's sense of their personal respectability can be found in the list of the first 32 subscribers to the Trinity Church building fund published in the South Australian Gazette and Colonial Register of 8 July 1837. The seventh subscriber listed is 'Colonel Light' who is recorded as giving £2. Ironically his name appears below that of the Revd. Charles B. Howard, the colonial chaplain, who would later refuse to attend him on his death bed because he had 'not expressed penitence.' The eighteenth subscriber, and the first of only two women, is 'Miss Gandy,' Her donation was £1 - equal to that of the newspaper proprietor Robert Thomas.

Unhappily, so long as she continued to live with Light, Maria failed to receive from Adelaide's respectable society the friendliness shown by Woodforde and Jacob. The only women of any social position mentioned in Light's diary as visiting 'Theberton Cottage' were Mrs. Woodforde, Mrs. Boyle Travers Finniss (the wife of Light's senior surveying colleague) and William Jacob's sister. The determined social ostracism of Maria (and hence of Light himself) can be sensed in two letters written to Light by Edward Stephens, Cashier of the Bank of South Australia, when Light was finally succumbing to tuberculosis and asthma. In the first, dated 22 August 1839, Stephens writes that he is sending 'a few more books...to while away a few of the tedious hours you must have to endure whilst you are so unwell.' He then goes on:

You must come into town, I am satisfied you are too dull where you are, ever to get better. Mrs. Stephens and myself most affectionately beg of you to come and live a little with us; you will then enjoy the society of your friends, and all the attentions we can render you, you shall have...

Light must have sent a reply by hand, declining the offer, for Stephens wrote on the following day:

..I am truly sorry you speak so decidedly about spending some time with us...I am satisfied, (not that I would disparage the kind care & attention of those around you) that we could make you very comfortable, and it would delight Mrs. S. to wait upon you. Do change your mind, I have plenty of room, and you will not in the slightest degree cause inconvenience... (14)

But Light was not to be enticed away from Maria and he died in Theberton Cottage on 6 October, a little over six weeks later.

Eleven days after Light's death Maria appeared before Judge Cooper to prove Light's will and to swear on oath that she would 'well and truly execute the same by paying first his just debts...and...render a just and true account of her



Executrixship whenever she shall be lawfully called upon to do so.' (15) She was then aged twenty-eight. That she was not unduly embarrassed by the need to pay Light's debts of £620 can be judged from the fact that she soon afterwards raised a further loan of £230 from the Bank of South Australia. (16) She also proceeded to subdivide a further seven acres of Country Section 1 immediately north of the existing subdivision into ninety-two 'small allotments' numbered 253-344. (17)

On 7 July 1840, nine months after Light's death, Maria married Dr. George Mayo in Trinity Church, North Terrace. According to the conventional wisdom, Dr. Mayo then generously set out to pay off the debt which his wife had inherited from William Light. 'At the time of Light's death,' writes Geoffrey Dutton, 'he was heavily in debt to the Bank of South Australia; when his assets were realized this was reduced to £620, and this sum was eventually paid off by Dr. Mayo.' (18) But the elaborate marriage settlement drawn up on the day of the wedding (now in possession of the Mayo family) reveals a very different situation. The document refers to Light's and Maria's debts and to their subdivisions amounting to approximately thirty-four acres, (19) but it records that there were still 100 acres remaining unsold or undisposed of in Country Section 1 with various 'Messuages (20) or Tenements and other Erections thereon' together with four Town Acres. (21) The two original trustees of the settlement were Edward Stephens and John Brown.

The settlement provided that after she had paid off her debts, Maria should have a life interest in the rents and profits derived from the lands she had inherited, and that in the event of her prior death her husband would have a life interest. After both had died the inheritance should be divided among any 'children of the body of George Mayo upon the body of Maria Gandy.' The responsibility for paying off her own and Light's debts clearly lay with Maria, or, more accurately, with the trustees of the settlement, and not with her husband, although it is possible that during the 1840s he provided some 'bridging finance' for this purpose, knowing that in the long term the land inherited by his wife would be a valuable asset, and that the income from rent and sale of allotments would soon repay all debts.

Whatever the financial arrangements at the time of their marriage, one thing is indisputable--Dr. Mayo moved into his wife's house and not vice versa. Within six weeks of their marrying he placed the following advertisement in the Register:

MEDICAL

Mr. G. Mayo has removed from his late residence to Light Cottage, Thebarton, and continues to follow his profession as Surgeon, Accoucheur, etc.

August 14, 1840. (22)

In the new year, perhaps finding 'Light Cottage' a little



out of the way for his practice and/or wishing to speed the payment of his wife's debts, he moved with Maria to Carrington Street in the centre of Adelaide and he placed the following notice in the Register:

TO LET

On the banks of the Torrens, at Thebarton, formerly the residence of the late Colonel Light, a substantial brick-built house, containing four large and lofty rooms, one underground and a back kitchen--commands a fine view of the bay--a garden in a fine state of cultivation--a stable, with saddle-room--and a well of capital water. Apply to Dr. Mayo, Carrington Street, or to Mr. Gandy, on the premises. (23)

This is the key piece of evidence relating to Light's house. To the present writer it appears to describe precisely the complete house that was demolished in December 1926. Not only are there photographs of this house as it appeared from c.1896 to 1926, (24) but there are also the memories of Mrs. Marjorie Boden (nee Matson) who lived in the house from c.1918 - 1924, when she was aged between nine and fifteen. When shown the photographs, Mrs. Boden has been able to recall quite positively not only the functions of particular rooms, but the furnishings and approximate dimensions.

From the evidence of the photographs and Mrs. Boden's memories I have drawn up a plan of the house as I believe it was in Light's day. It is reproduced here beside the very different plan proposed by Dr. Fenner in 1927. Mrs. Boden confirms that the four front rooms and the 'back kitchen' were of solid brick construction and were well built. She also reveals that the two high windows glimpsed in Barnes's 1916 painting were not 'upstairs' as sometimes assumed, but were let into the western wall of one of the lofty front rooms up against the ceiling. It is quite possible that Light had them so constructed to facilitate observation of the masts of ships in Holdfast Bay, using a telescope while standing on a platform inside the room.

Today, the claim that a house in this position could command a 'fine view of the bay' may seem incredible, and thus throw the accuracy of the whole 'To Let' notice into doubt. But if a line is drawn on a modern map directly from the position of 'Theberton Cottage' to Holdfast Bay it passes straight down the main runway of West Beach airport. Thus Light's sightline would have been over very flat, and probably marshy country, with no houses to obstruct his view of the masts of ships lying in the Bay. Prompt knowledge of the arrival of ships was highly valuable in early Adelaide, and it is clear from his Last Diary that Light did have such knowledge, although he had to wait some hours before learning the names of the ships whose masts he must have observed through his telescope:

Monday, 13 May 1839--A large barque came to an anchor. We were all in expectation of the Ganges, but no tidings at 8 p.m.



Monday, 17 June 1839--No one yet knows what ship is come in. P.M., ship proves to be a man-of-war.

Tuesday, 18 June 1839--Two large vessels anchored this morning in the Bay (one a very large barque, the other a ship) at 8.40 a.m. P.M. at 2, no news of the ships. At 4 heard that one of the ships was the Hooohly from London. (25)

The sort of property described in the 'To Let' notice, with its garden in a 'high state of cultivation' and its 'stable and saddle-room' suggests an establishment of some size including at least a gardener and a groom. Light in his Last Diary also refers to a dairy and the employment of a 'cowboy.' Such an establishment is entirely consistent with the newspaper report of 'servants of the Colonel's household' walking in Light's funeral procession. (26)

Sadly, Maria Mayo died of tuberculosis on 15 December 1847, survived by her husband and three young children, Jane, Kate and George Gibbes. Her will, made earlier that year, reveals that the 100 acres of Section 1 and the four Town Acres bequeathed to her by William Light were still intact. (27) And so they remained for nearly thirty more years, during which time, in accordance with the terms of the marriage settlement, Dr. Mayo received the annual 'rents and profits.' By 1876 the trustees of the settlement were his son George Gibbes Mayo and his son-in-law Alexander Stewart Paterson, husband of his daughter Kate. The latter 1870s were prosperous times in South Australia and the trustees decided to sell the land. In 1875 they began to subdivide the four Town Acres and in 1878 they sold the remaining 100 acres of Section 1 to the National Building and Investment Society. The price paid by the Society for this land, which soon became the suburb of Southwark, and for the remaining unsold allotments in the Village of Thebarton (also part of Light's legacy) was £20,000. (28) Prices paid for individual allotments in the four Town Acres suggest that in total the latter would have realized about £3,600. (29) Thus, rather than dying a pauper, Light left a legacy to Maria that had grown to be worth a fortune by 1878. Using the yardstick of average male wages it would have been equivalent to \$6,000,000 in 1985.

When Dr. Mayo died in 1894 Maria's three surviving children came into their inheritance. It is fitting that some of that legacy would have helped to educate the five brilliant children of her son George Gibbes Mayo--George Elton (1880-1948), professor of industrial research at the Harvard School of Business Administration U.S.A. and 'one of the most influential, if controversial, social scientists of his day;' (30) Helen Mary (1878-1967), the first woman to receive the degree of M.D. from the University of Adelaide and a co-founder of the clinic which grew into the Mothers' & Babies' Health Association of South Australia; Sir Herbert (1885-1972), Senior Puisne Judge of the Supreme Court of South Australia and a foundation President of the Law Council of Australia; John Christian (1891-1955), a prominent Adelaide radio-therapist and surgeon; and Mary Penelope,



M.A. (1889-1969), historian and author of The Life and Letters of Colonel William Light (1937). Light could hardly have wished for a more fruitful use of his legacy. (31)

Soon after Southwark was acquired by the National Building and Investment Society Nathaniel J. Hone purchased Light's old house and the remains of its surrounding garden. A delightful photograph in the Mortlock Library which descendants date c.1896 shows Hone and members of his family grouped near the entrance to the four 'large and lofty' front rooms. The original inscription on the back, now scored through, states quite clearly that this is Colonel Light's house. (32) This certainly looks like the sort of house Colonel Light must have lived in--a symmetrical, hipped-roof house with a verandah, very like the house of his successor as Surveyor General, Colonel Frome, which still stands in Levi Park in the municipality of Walkerville. (Fig. 2)

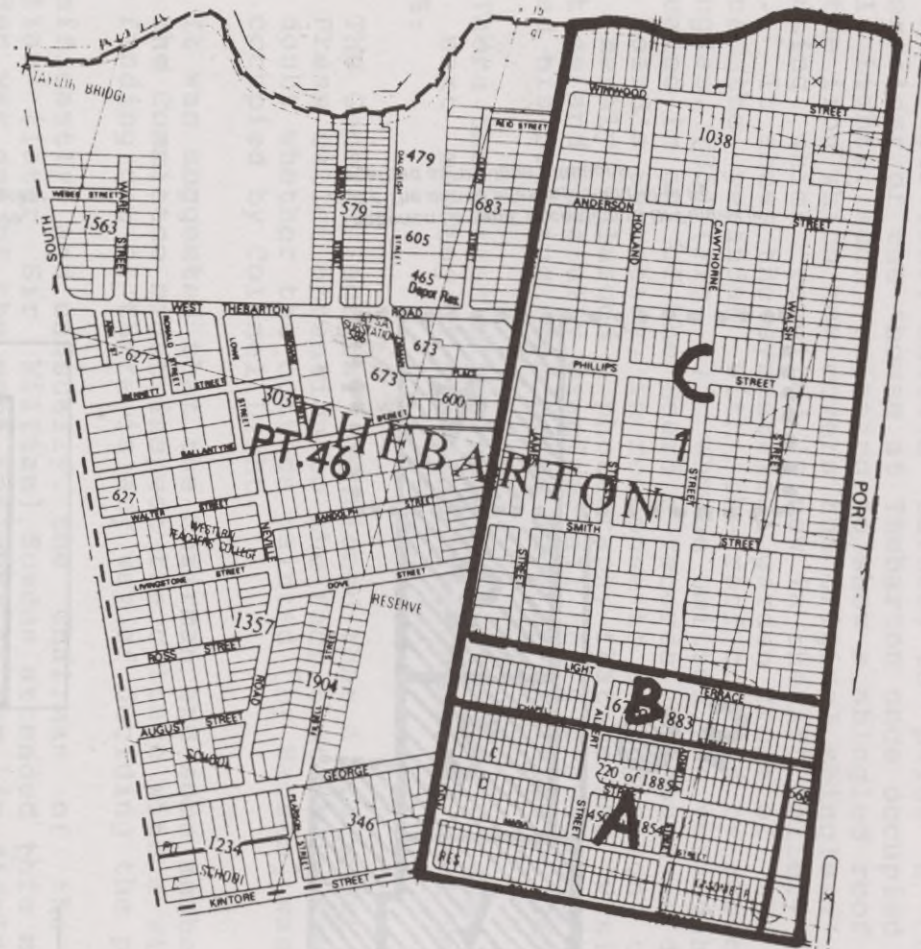
In the years 1905-06 Adelaide raised two lasting monuments to the memory of Colonel Light. On 20 June 1905 a new memorial was unveiled over his grave in Light Square. On the same occasion George Gibbes Mayo formally presented to the state the famous Light self-portrait which had been bequeathed to his mother and which now hangs in an honoured place in the Art Gallery of South Australia. Shortly afterwards the Observer newspaper published a photograph by W. S. Smith entitled 'Colonel Light's House at Thebarton--Now occupied by Mr. N. J. Hone.' (33) Although taken from a different angle, it showed the same symmetrical garden front as the c.1896 photograph of Hone and his family. A year later, when the bronze statue of William Light which now stands on Montefiore Hill was first unveiled (in Victoria Square) the printing firm of W. K. Thomas and Co. republished the Smith photograph of Colonel Light's house in a pamphlet entitled Colonel Light, the Founder of Adelaide. Unveiling of Memorial, 1905, and of Statue, 1906. Reprinted from The Register and The Observer. It might surely be supposed that, if Smith's photograph, as first published, had been wrongly titled, someone like George Gibbes Mayo would have drawn attention to the error and prevented its repetition a year later?

It now remains to explain how the myth about Light's 'hut' first arose and came to be widely accepted. Ten years after the unveiling of Light's statue and the publication of the Thomas pamphlet an Adelaide citizen, J. W. Bakewell, offered to the South Australian Public Library, Museum and Art Gallery Board a watercolour depicting Thebarton Hall, Suffolk. It was a recent painting by an Adelaide artist, Mrs. Mary F. Torr, enlarged from what Bakewell said was the only photograph known to exist showing the Hall as it looked when Colonel Light spent his boyhood there with the Doughty family. (34) On 4 August 1916 the painting came before the Board's Fine Arts Committee which recommended that it be accepted. The Committee's minutes and report to the Board reveal that on the same occasion two photographs of 'Colonel Light's house at Thebarton, South Australia, were exhibited'





The modern municipality of Thebarton.



The modern municipality of Thebarton showing William Light's original country section as subdivided in stages:

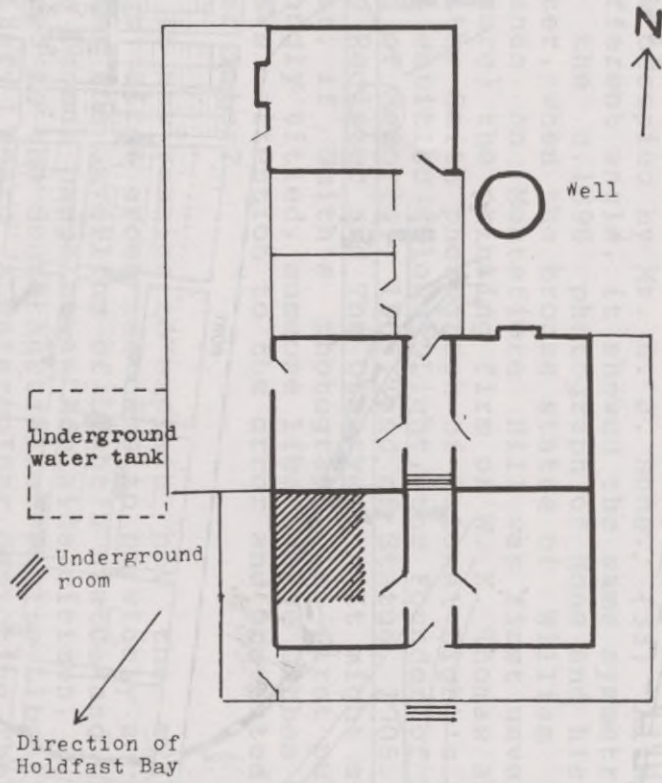
A - by William Light in 1839

B - by Maria Gandy in 1839-40

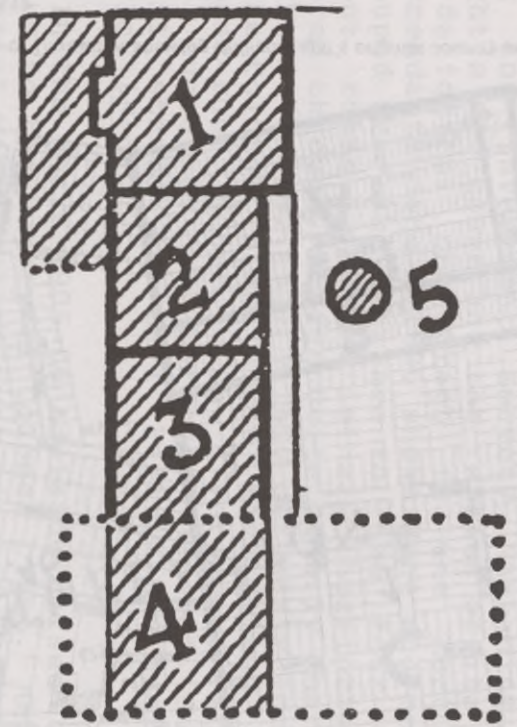
C - by the National Building and Investment Society in 1881 after purchase from the trustees of Maria Gandy's marriage settlement.

The thin strip of land in the S.E. corner was sold in larger blocks in 1838.





'Theberton Cottage' reconstructed by the author from photographs and the memories of Mrs Marjory Boden (née Matson) who lived in the house from c. 1918-1924. The thicker lines represent the likely walls of the original structure.



'Theberton Cottage' according to Dr Fenner in 1927. The dotted lines represent what he regarded as 'the later additions'.



and that the Committee instructed the Art Gallery's Artist and Art Supervisor, Gustave Barnes, to paint a companion watercolour of the 'house at Thebarton once occupied by Colonel Light...such painting to show a shingled roof instead of the iron which now covers the original shingles.' The painting which resulted is now in the Art Gallery collection. It shows the symmetrical garden front of the house, minus the verandah with the roof covered by the original shingles. (35) (Fig. 3) Why he omitted the verandah is not revealed in any of the Board's records, although he did tell the Board's Secretary, in response to a suggestion that he had merely enlarged a photograph, that he had 'visited the cottage and carefully examined all the surroundings and produced his painting from notes made on the spot.' (36)

There the matter might have been expected to end, but at the next meeting of the Fine Arts Committee on 1 September 1916:

The General Secretary mentioned that a statement in the Press called attention to the fact that there was a doubt whether the cottage painted [by Barnes] was ever occupied by Colonel Light.

It was suggested that the Chairman and some members of the Committee might inspect the cottage with a view to finding out if there is any way of deciding the point...

Significantly, and unusually, the Chairman of the Board, William (later Sir William) Sowden attended this meeting. Sowden was one of the most influential men in Adelaide as editor-in-chief and part-proprietor of the Register newspaper, and the 'statement in the Press' was in fact a report of a speech he himself had made at the opening of a three-day 'fair' entitled 'Australia Old and New.'

The fair was conceived by Mrs. Jeanne F. Young, organizer of the Australia Wattle Day League, of which William Sowden was the founding President. Mrs. Young was a good friend of Sowden, wrote for his newspaper, and would soon be the first woman member of the Fine Arts Committee of the Public Library, Museum and Art Gallery Board. The Wattle Day League, with which they were both so prominently associated, was intended to inculcate in Australian children and adults, in Mrs. Young's words, 'an intensified love for their country' and 'veneration for the pioneer heroes.' To give symbolic expression to these emotions the League encouraged all Australians to wear a sprig of wattle on the first day of September each year, when wattle trees were in full bloom.

In mid 1916 the terrible casualties of the battle of the Somme were on every mind and Mrs. Young's fair was designed not only to raise money for military ambulances but to stimulate community self-confidence by incorporating displays that would contrast the primitive conditions under which the pioneer heroes lived with examples of 'the progress made by the State in such matters as agriculture, horticulture, mining and many manufactures.' Produce and manufactured goods



would be available for sale and money would also be raised by a tea garden. At the centre of the tea garden was the prime exhibit--what purported to be a facsimile of Colonel Light's cottage at Thebarton, made of wood and hessian. A photograph of the structure published in the Observer newspaper (37) (Fig. 4) confirms that here is the source of the 'hut' theory, for only the three rear rooms of the house were reproduced--the 'back kitchen' and two very small adjacent bedrooms of the sort normally designed for servants in large houses of this period--as, for example, in Charles Sturt's 'The Grange.' Why Mrs. Young chose to do this, and why she decided that these back rooms constituted Light's house remains obscure. One can only note that it served her general thesis to suggest that Light lived in a hut, and that she would have found it quite impracticable to build a facsimile of Light's complete house in the space available--the old Exhibition Hall off Frome Road.

The facsimile certainly made a deep impression on William Sowden. In his presidential speech at the opening of the fair by Lady Galway, wife of the Governor, he referred to it at length:

Her Ladyship...viewed the facsimile of the primitive habitation of the founder of Adelaide. Already, through the discovery of Col. Light's habitation, a lesson has been added to the archeology of South Australia. Some weeks ago the Public Library Board was presented with a picture of the hall in the house (sic) in which Col. Light was born (sic) in Devonshire (sic), England, and it was decided to have a companion picture of the cottage in which he died at Thebarton. The board had a beautiful photograph of the house which is generally regarded as Col. Light's cottage. We now find, however, mainly through the instrumentality of Mrs. Young (the organizer of the league) that the building the photograph of which the board now possesses is in all probability only an addition to the cottage in which Col. Light lived, made after his death. So in the interests of archeology we may have to revise our records, because we owe a debt of accuracy to the coming generation in South Australia. The discovery of this mistake shows the advantage of going back into historical records before it is too late... Later Mr. Sowden explained that the exhibition would serve to make people more contented, as it would reveal to them the primitive and uncomfortable conditions in which their predecessors lived in the past. They would realize that in Col. Light's original dwelling there was no chimney... (38)

As this report was printed in the newspaper of which Sowden was editor-in-chief it must have had his sanction, and if he did not bother to check Light's Malayan birthplace or the English county in which he was reared it is not unreasonable to suppose that he was equally casual in verifying the 'historical records' which led Mrs. Young to abandon the existing tradition about the size of Light's cottage. Certainly he gave no hint as to the nature of those records.



Although the lack of hard evidence made it very difficult for anyone to investigate Mrs. Young's general thesis, there was one matter of fact which could readily be tested. Two days after Sowden's speech had been reported, the Register published the following letter from W. J. Worrell, South-wark:

The impression that Colonel Light's old cottage has not got a chimney is mistaken. The original cottage has a fireplace and chimney--a good old-fashioned one at that. I would be pleased to show anyone who wishes to inspect the cottage at any time. I am the present occupier of the old cottage. (39)

So much for the professionalism of Mrs. Young's 'archeology'! But Worrell's letter did not deter Sowden. After he and other members of the Fine Arts Committee had inspected the cottage at Thebarton, Young's general thesis was confirmed and Gustave Barnes was required to paint two more watercolours of the 'old portion of the cottage-representing it with a thatched roof.' The Chairman was 'to arrange with the Artist the positions from which the sketches should be made.' (40)

When Barnes had finished his two further paintings he was asked to title all three. Although he had little choice in the matter, his wording suggests that he had reservations about the Young thesis. When last seen in March 1988 his first painting, showing the garden front of the house, still bore on its original gold mount the elaborate title he composed in 1916:

Col. Light's residence, Thebarton, from the present front. Considered to be an addition to the cottage at the rear in which he lived. Painted from notes and sketches made at the place by G. A. Barnes.

In titling his paintings of the back rooms he used the similar phrase 'considered to be the part in which he lived.' Evidently this was not positive enough for somebody in a position of superior authority, for to Barnes's draft version of the title of his painting showing a side view of the back rooms (Fig 1) another hand has added the forthright words: 'The larger structure shown to the left is the modern addition to the cottage in which Col. Light lived.' (41)

Soon after titling and mounting, the three paintings were exhibited in the Gallery's Historical Room, together with the painting of Thebarton Hall by Mrs. Torr. There was little possibility of any quick revision of the Young thesis because Mrs. Young herself was immediately afterwards appointed a member of the Fine Arts Committee. (42) Thus was the Young thesis established as the official view for the next seventy years. When asked in 1927 why the Fine Arts Committee had changed its mind Sowden could not remember. (43) But by then Light's house had been demolished.



Not a little blame for the complete demolition of Light's house in 1926 must attach to Young and Sowden's ill-informed speculations of 1916. As early as 1913 there had been a move to make the house and grounds public property. Under the heading 'A Historic Landmark,' the Chronicle of the 25 January of that year reported that the previous week 'at the luncheon in connection with the annual inspection of Thebarton by the mayor and council of that town it was suggested that the historic residence once occupied by Colonel Light, the founder of Adelaide, should be acquired for the public.' Use of the term 'residence' strongly suggests that the proposal included the whole house then standing. Later that year the house and grounds were formally offered to Thebarton Corporation by the owners, Messrs. Cocking & Co., for £1,500. (44) Even for the whole house this was too high a price for Thebarton Corporation in 1913, but after Young and Sowden had sown their doubts in 1916 it is not surprising that there was no great enthusiasm for preserving ungainly back rooms.

In January 1923 the house and grounds came up for sale, prompting one 'J. A. S.' to write to the Register asking 'is it not possible for the Government, City Corporation, or some patriotic body to secure it and either keep it intact and use it as a museum or for some other purpose, or demolish the residence and re-erect it in Col. Light Gardens?' He offered to hand over a cheque for £5 towards this object. (45) Two days later the Advertiser referred to this offer to preserve 'Colonel Light's reputed residence at Thebarton' and told how a 'former owner of the property' had once been visited by a Mr. John Ottoway who remembered seeing Light's funeral as a child.

Mr. Ottoway told the householder that he saw the funeral of Colonel Light start from that house. He at the time was attending a school at Trinity Church, North Terrace, and the children were given half a day off in order that they might march in front of the hearse. He pointed out the room from which the famous surveyor's body had been removed. The rooms comprising the portion which was Light's residence are solidly built and are still in excellent order. Though forming the rear portion of the house, they face the street, for the front of the house overlooks a block of land. (46)

At first sight this may seem a persuasive piece of evidence; here was someone who personally claimed to remember the house at the time of Light's death. But there are a number of reasons why the report should be viewed with scepticism. In the first place it is hearsay evidence, and the name of the former owner is not given. In the second place, assuming that Ottoway has been correctly reported, it must be remembered that he was a man at least in his eighties (he had asked to show his 65 year old daughter the house) and that he was remembering back to things seen at the age of nine in the context of a large funeral. (47) It is quite possible that Light's body was taken from a room at the back of the house, and that this memory led Mr. Ottoway in old



age to conclude that this portion was the 'original' house. Or it may be that it was not Ottoway but the former owner who jumped to this conclusion. The story that Ottoway and other children from the school at Trinity Church marched in front of the hearse has absolutely no support from contemporary newspaper accounts of the funeral. It is possible that the children may have had some role at 'Theberton Cottage' itself, but neither the Register nor the Southern Australian make any mention of children in their accounts of the funeral procession. Both agree that the procession consisted of between 400 and 500 gentlemen all in deep mourning, led by the undertaker followed by the Colonial Chaplain and other clergy and then by personal friends of Light flanking his body on the hearse. The reporter's reference to the back rooms facing the street, as if this fact of 1923 proved that the back rooms were originally the front of the house, is quite irrelevant, for in Light's day there were no streets. Presumably a private road led from the direction of the city through the hundred or so acres of Light's estate towards the garden front of his house. Such a report, based on hearsay memories which are at least in part demonstrably wrong, cannot outweigh all the firm evidence cited earlier in this article.

Nothing came of the 1923 move to purchase Light's house and garden and make them public property. Unfortunately there was no organization in the South Australian community of that time that could investigate historical evidence, arouse public opinion and lobby government on such matters. By 1926 the house and surrounding land had been purchased by Colton, Palmer and Preston, with a view to demolishing it and extending their existing factory. Contemporary photographs show that superficial details of the house like guttering and lattices had been allowed to fall into obvious decay, although the main walls and roof remained sound. At the eleventh hour the member for Barossa in the House of Assembly, H. B. Crosby, asked the Premier, Lionel Hill, whether his attention had been drawn to the 'fact that Colonel Light's residence at Thebarton is to be destroyed' and asked whether the Government could do anything about it. Perhaps the house could be rebuilt in Light Square? (48) but neither the Government nor the Corporations of Thebarton and Adelaide took action. The Mayor of Adelaide, Wallace Bruce, took the view that the 'wretched state of preservation' of the property and the disinclination of the owners to sell it made acquisition impracticable. (49) Demolition proceeded in December.

When 'Theberton College' was being demolished the Education Department's Superintendent of Technical Education, Dr. Charles Fenner, visited the site a number of times. Curiously, however, the ground plan he reproduces in the article he later wrote about the cottage is not only 'not drawn to scale'--as he admits--but is quite inconsistent with the evidence of photographs (including some he published himself and Mrs. Boden's memories. Fenner was a printer and geologist by training, not a historian, but he was very soon to be honorary secretary of a new Historical Memorials Com-

Fig 2

four elegant windows of the two large and lofty rear rooms can clearly be seen. The front of Light's house would naturally have looked across his garden and across to the city he had planned. The remains of a windmill standing above 'Light's well of copious water' can be seen above the roofline.



mittee of the South Australian Branch of the Royal Geographical Society. The initiative for setting up this committee had come from the Historical Memorials Committee of Victoria which had written to the Director of Education in Australia about the need to mark the routes of Australian explorers, notably Charles Sturt. (50) Once formed, however, the local committee did concern itself about retrieving some relics of Light's house and putting up a plaque to mark the site. (Fig. 8) At a meeting on 25 March Fenner reported that he had 'waited upon Mr. Preston, as directed, and obtained authentic relics of Thebarton Cottage, viz., six building bricks, portion of a rafter of native pine, and a shingle of hardwood.' Unfortunately he had so little understanding of heritage recording that he had the rafter turned up into round rulers, (51) while the shingle was cut down and mounted as a souvenir. As for the bricks, which still, like the piece of shingle, form part of the Royal Geographical Society's collection, there is nothing to indicate which part, or parts, of the building they came from.

At about this time Dr. Fenner must have begun to prepare the paper on 'Thebarton (sic) Cottage' which he read before the South Australian branch of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia on 29 September 1927. (52) It is a remarkably confused paper. Basically, while supporting the view that Light's cottage consisted of the back section only of the seven-roomed house demolished in 1926, Fenner believes that this 'original' dwelling is described in the 'To Let' notice of 1841, with its reference to 'four large and lofty rooms, one underground and a back kitchen.' (His reference to this notice, incidentally, is wrong; it appears in the Register of 9 and not 2 January.) Thus he has to count the two very small rooms which connected the kitchen with the main house in 1926--only about eight feet by seven in floor area according to Mrs. Boden--as two of the 'large and lofty' rooms, while the room which he describes as 'latterly a kitchen' becomes a third--presumably a sort of living room, while the lean-to attached to the kitchen becomes the original kitchen. Unfortunately for this theory, Mrs. Boden is quite positive that the lean-to had no fireplace; it was the sort of space in which firewood might be stored. As to the fourth of the 'large and lofty' rooms Fenner is vague. The wording and punctuation of the 1841 advertisement make it unclear whether the underground room was a fifth room or one of the four large and lofty ones. At one point Fenner supports the first interpretation, at another point the second. (53) In actual fact, as Mrs. Boden remembers, the underground room was a conventional cellar under one of the four front rooms, indicated by shading on my plan. She is positive that Fenner is wrong in his assumption that a rectangular aperture which appears beneath the verandah on the left of the photograph of the Hone family is a window opening on to the underground room. Rather, it was designed to provide access to the space below the verandah. She remembers climbing through it as a girl.

Fenner really has only two arguments in favour of his theory. First, he appeals to a vague 'tradition'--but this





**Fig 1.** Gustave A. Barnes 'Colonel Light's residence at Thebarton, South Australia', AGSA 0.631. The larger structure to the left is a back view of the four 'large and lofty' room's comprising the main portion of the house. In 1916 the Fine Arts Committee of the Public Library, Museum and Art Gallery Board considered the latter to be a 'later addition' and insisted that this be stated on a label on the mount.

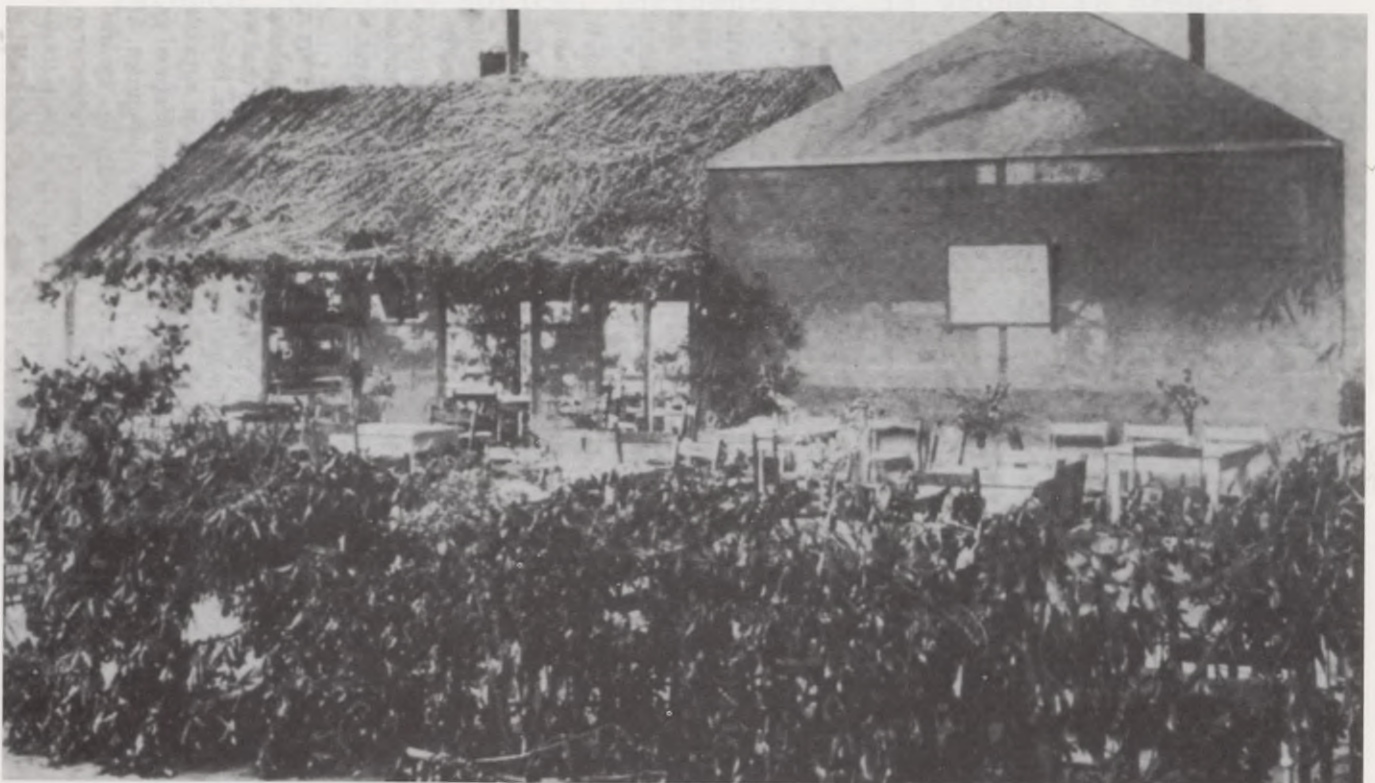


**Fig 2.** Nathaniel Hone and his family in front of Colonel Light's old home c.1896 (Mortlock Library). Although the original house may not have had a verandah, and would have had a shingled roof, three of the four elegant windows of the two 'large and lofty' front rooms can clearly be seen. The front of Light's house would naturally have looked across his garden and estate to the city he had planned. The remains of a windmill standing above 'Light's well of capital water' can be seen above the roofline.





**Fig 3.** Gustave A. Barnes, 'Colonel Light's residence at Thebarton, South Australia', AGSA 0.629



**Fig 4.** The replica of what purported to be Light's original 'Thebarton Cottage' constructed from wood and hessian under directions from Mrs Jeanne F. Young, 1916. (*Observer*, 9 September 1916).





**Fig 5.** View looking west.

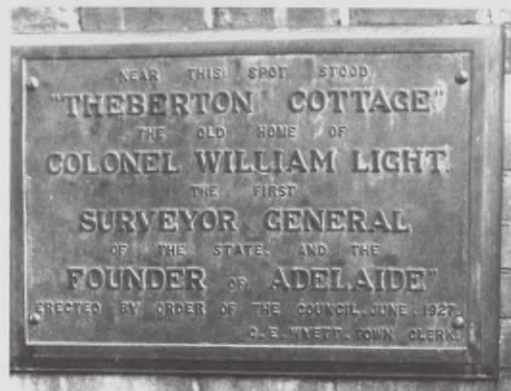


**Fig 6.** View looking south-west.



**Fig 7.** View looking south-east.

*Figs. 5, 6 and 7. Views of Light's Cottage taken by Mr H. Dingle (1926). (Mortlock Library)*



**Fig 8.** Plaque erected by Royal Geographical Society. Now in Southwark Brewery Museum.





**Fig 9.** Gustave A. Barnes, 'Colonel Light's residence at Thebarton, South Australia', AGSA 0.630



proves no more reliable than Mrs. Young's of 1916, for no new records are cited or witnesses quoted to overthrow the earlier tradition of 1905-06. Secondly, he claims that the bricks used to build what he calls the 'front additions' were made 'later' than those used to construct the rear portion of the house.

The bricks of Thebarton Cottage are known as 'sloppy bricks,' and were hand-made in wooden moulds...The clay itself was tempered by hand, and the bricks were then moulded, dried, and burnt. 'Sloppy bricks' are not now made, except in out-of-the-way places, being replaced by wire-cut and dry-pressed bricks. The bricks of the newer portion of the house were of a different kind--a later type. (54)

This information, he says, came from a Mr. McGrath of Colton, Palmer and Preston--the firm that demolished the house. But how the supposedly later bricks differed from the earlier ones Fenner does not say. If they had been wire-cut he would surely have said so unambiguously. He seems to be implying that they represented some stage of manufacture intermediate between 'sloppy' and 'wire-cut,' but as he is unable to provide descriptive details, or actual samples of these 'later' bricks--or even say which particular wall or walls the 'earlier' bricks obtained by the Royal Geographical Society came from, his argument really has no substance. Noris Ioannou, whose book Ceramics in Australia (1986) contains the most exhaustive existing account of early brick making in South Australia, has inspected the bricks in the Society's collection and confirms that they are indeed 'sloppy' bricks. But he says that although sloppy bricks might be made with more or less skill and precision, there was no major technical advance in brick making in Adelaide until the introduction of machine-formed 'wire-cut' bricks in 1883--by which time N. J. Hone was already living in Light's house.

Thus, if Mr. McGrath was right in reporting a superiority in the bricks used to construct the front portion of the house, the superiority must have been achieved by a better use of the 'sloppy' technique. Evidence that a superior kind of 'sloppy' brick was produced in Adelaide at the very time Light was part of the way through building his house can be found in an advertisement placed in the Southern Australian of 10 November 1838 by J. T. Scown, a brickmaker operating on land beside the Torrens at Gilberton owned by Light's friend John Morphett: 'In a couple of weeks a pug mill will be erected and at work...when J. T. S. hopes to be able to make as good Bricks as are made in England.' (55) Presumably Scown hoped to be able to make bricks of a superior consistency. That he succeeded is proven in a letter written by his employer John Morphett in March 1839:

The brick concern is going on well. I sell about 70,000 a month, at £3 to £3.10s. per thousand. I get a better price than others as I have erected a pug-mill, which certainly makes the bricks better. (56)



In these circumstances Light would have had every reason to use them for the construction of the main portion of his residence. It is relevant to note that the bricks used in the construction of the main original rooms of Morphett's own house 'Cummins' in 1841-42 appear distinctively superior, today, to those used some years later to build the front portico. Both lots of bricks would have been 'sloppy,' It is entirely possible, in the case of 'Theberton Cottage,' that the two small rooms which in 1916 joined the 'back kitchen' to the four 'large and lofty' front rooms were not part of the original house at all, but were later additions. They are certainly not mentioned in the 1841 'To Let' notice, and they do not fit harmoniously with the neighbouring structures. Detached kitchens were common in early houses.

That Fenner had good intentions in his investigations is not in question, but he was not a trained historian, and he was inclined to start with a fixed idea and continue it uncritically. Clear evidence of this is found in the Historical Memorials Committee discussions about preserving Captain Sturt's house 'The Grange.' As soon as the matter came up for discussion Fenner asserted that Sturt had not lived in the slate-roofed main house but only in the small cottage at the rear, as if the main house was too grand a dwelling for Sturt's day. Fortunately a member of the Committee had the good sense to write to Sturt's daughter then living in England, Miss Charlotte Eyre Sturt, who confirmed that indeed her parents had lived in the slate-roofed house. (57) At least this myth was finally suppressed before it could undermine the efforts of those who sought in succeeding years to preserve 'The Grange' as evidence of the standards of comfort enjoyed by prominent early colonists after the hardships of the first two pioneering years were past. 'Theberton Cottage' was not so lucky, but we do not have to continue to believe the tradition established by Jeanne Young, elaborated by Charles Fenner, and more recently supported by Derek Whitelock, (58) that it was no more than an ungainly hut. Light was far from being a pauper, and the evidence strongly suggests that he built a well-proportioned house commensurate with his leading status in the early South Australian community.

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#### Endnotes

1. Gustave A. Barnes, 'Colonel Light's Residence at Thebarton, South Australia.' A.G.S.A. 0.630
2. See, e.g., an article about the annual Town Hall ceremony of drinking Light's health in the Advertiser, 13 Apr. 1988: '...the poor man, having planned the City of Adelaide, died here £620 in debt...'
3. Typescript in Mortlock Library, V Piece 1071, p.19.
4. S. A. Gazette & Colonial Register, 7 Apr. 1838.
5. The elaborate arrangements agreed on by the Owners of Preliminary Land Orders to ensure equity in balloting for choice of Country Sections are fully described in a



- statement by the Colonial Commissioner, J. H. Fisher, printed in the S. A. Gazette & Colonial Register, 24 Feb. 1838.
6. Mortlock Library, P. R. G. 1, Series 3, Special list.
  7. Light originally named his Country Section 'Theberton' after the Suffolk house in which he spent much of his youth. This was corrupted to 'Thebarton' as a result of a typographical error in the address given by Light at the end of his own Preface to his Brief Journal, published in 1839.
  8. Deposit 450 of 1854.
  9. Reproduced by David Elder (ed.), William Light's Brief Journal and Australian Diaries (Adelaide, 1984), p.140.
  10. Ibid., pp.142, 143
  11. Light's will is in the Probate Registry of South Australia.
  12. Quoted in G. Dutton, Founder of a City (Melbourne, 1960), p.182. The title 'Captain' would have been given to Light as skipper of the Rapid.
  13. Mortlock Library, V 1513
  14. Mortlock Library, P. R. G. 1/1/93.
  15. Probate of William Light's Will.
  16. Settlement made on the marriage of Maria Gandy with Dr. George Mayo, 7 July 1840. Original in possession of Dr. George Mayo. Enrolled in G. R. O., Book 23, No. 28
  17. A pro-forma printed Indenture, designed to simplify the conveying of allotments to purchasers, is in possession of a great grandson of Maria, Keith Mayo Reid. Photocopies have been deposited in both the Mortlock Library and the City of Adelaide collection. The printed Indenture includes an allotment plan.
  18. Dutton, op. cit., p.289.
  19. In addition to subdividing 21 acres into small allotments Light had previously sold three larger adjoining allotments on what is now the Port Road for a total of £225. See Mortlock Library P. R. G. 1/260. This plan gives the names of the purchasers of these allotments as 'Jacques, George Gandy, and Bristow.' William Jacob records in his diary for 10 September 1838: 'Gave Bristowe (sic) and Jacques their respective allotments on Col. Light's Section.'
  20. A 'messuage' is an old English legal term for a large house and its surrounding garden and outbuildings. An Indenture of January 1854 includes a plan of Section 1 showing Light's old house as the 'messuage.' In possession of the Mayo family.
  21. Light had sold Town Acre 571 to Joseph Gilbert for £100 on 9 April 1839. Deposit 116 of 1871, G. R. O.
  22. Register, 15 Aug. 1840.
  23. Register, 9 Jan. 1841. Dr. Fenner incorrectly cites the issue of 2 Jan. 1841.
  24. Some of these are reproduced in the article by Dr. Fenner [cited in note 52 below.]
  25. Elder, op. cit., pp.157, 162.
  26. South Australian Register, 12 Oct. 1839. I am grateful to Mr. Rob Linn for drawing my attention to this significant piece of evidence. From the nature of the procession, the servants mentioned must have been male.



- They would have included Light's gardener, William Lawes, and probably Edward and William Gandy, the two younger brothers of Maria who came out, like Lawes, in the Rapid. They may also have included another brother, George, who arrived in South Australia in 1838 and soon afterwards, with Light's agreement, opened a brickfield on Section 1. Light's diary entry for 11 April 1839 ('At night very unwell. Mrs. Gandy also seriously ill') suggests that George and his wife were then living nearby. That they both had a close bond with Light's household may be presumed from the fact that their first child was baptised William Light Gandy in Trinity Church, North Terrace, on 2 August 1840.
27. Memorial 89, Book 15, G. R. O.
  28. The transaction is described in detail in a declaration by William Torrance Paterson, Secretary of the National Building and Investment Society Inc., dated 11 May 1909. This is contained in Application 25629 to bring land under the Real Property Act, in G. R. O.
  29. See Plan 446 in Lands Department showing subdivision of Town Acres 594, 595 and part of 596, and transfers 60719, 60720, 60721, 60839, 61227, 61363, 62746, 64900
  30. Helen Bourke, entry on George Elton Mayo, Australian Dictionary of Biography, Vol. 10.
  31. I am grateful to Hugh Stretton for drawing my attention to this possibility.
  32. Mortlock Library, Thebarton Views, B 16077.
  33. Observer, 1 July 1905.
  34. Mary F. Torr, 'Theberton Hall, Suffolk, England, as it appeared when Colonel Light resided there,' A.G.S.A. 0.684. Mrs. Torr exhibited regularly with the South Australian Society of Arts from 1913 to 1927. For Bakewell's letter see G. R. G. 19/5, No. 21711.
  35. A.G.S.A. 0.629.
  36. Advertiser, 23 Aug. 1916, p.9f. This was located through 'Newspaper Cuttings--General--Public Library, Museum and Art Gallery Board' in P.R.O. S.A., G. R. G. 19/71/3.
  37. Observer, 9 Sept. 1916.
  38. Register, 31 Aug. 1916.
  39. Register, 2 Sept. 1916.
  40. G. R. G. 19/363, Minutes of F.A.C., 6 Oct. 1916.
  41. G. R. G. 19/5, letter 22406 of 27 Nov. 1916. The painting has the Art Gallery accession No. of 0.631. The wording on the printed label finally attached to the picture was altered a little, but it still made the same point. This label has now been removed, and all three paintings now have the same official title: 'Colonel Light's residence at Thebarton, S.A.'
  42. S.A.P.P., 1917, No. 13, p.1.
  43. Charles Fenner reports this in Proc. R.G.S.A. (S.A.), Vol. XXVIII, p.40.
  44. Register, 19 Sept. 1913.
  45. Register, 25 Jan. 1923.
  47. John Ottoway was born in London in 1830, and arrived in S.A. by the Eden in 1838. He died in 1918, at Birkenhead. See Biographical Index of South Australians.
  48. S.A.P.D., 30 Nov. 1926, p.1925.



49. Observer, 4 Dec. 1926.
50. Minutes of the Council of the R.G.S.A. (S.A.) for April 1926.
51. Information from Dr. Fenner's son Lyell.
52. 'Thebarton Cottage'--The Old Home of Colonel William Light,' by Charles Fenner. Proc. R.G.S.A. (S.A.), Vol. XXVIII, pp.25-45.
53. Ibid., pp.27, 34.
54. Ibid., p.38
55. Supplement to the Southern Australian, 10 Nov. 1838. The reference to 'Section 473, on the Banks of the Torrens, being the Section adjoining the Park Land' must be a misprint for Section 475. Scown contributed one guinea towards Light's monument.
56. Quoted in Noris Ioannou, Ceramics in South Australia (1986), p.104.
57. R.G.S.A. (S.A.) Minutes of the Historical Memorials Committee, 25 March 1927, 21 Nov. 1927. Miss Sturt's opinion is supported by a plan of the Grange drawn from memory by her brother Charles Sheppey Sturt thirty-one years earlier in 1896. Reproductions of this plan, which names the use of every room in the house, including the detached kitchen, have been published by the Charles Sturt Memorial Museum Trust Inc.
58. Derek Whitelock, Adelaide 1836-1976: A History of Difference (St. Lucia, 1977), p.36.



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"THEBARTON COTTAGE" - THE OLD HOME OF  
COLONEL WILLIAM LIGHT

By Charles Fenner, D.Sc.

[Read before the Society, 29/9/27.]

- I. Introduction: General Considerations.
- II. Site of the Cottage.
- III. The Name of the Cottage.
- IV. Period of Light's Residence at Thebarton.
- V. Subsequent History of the Cottage, 1839-1926.
- VI. General Description of the Building.
- VII. Pictures of the Cottage.
- VIII. The Walls.
- IX. The Windows.
- X. Roofing Materials.
- XI. Erection of Memorial Tablet.
- XII. South Australian Building Materials.

**I. - Introduction: General Considerations.**

Towards the end of last year (1926), "Thebarton Cottage," the old home of Colonel William Light, was demolished. Taking into consideration the age, the conditions of construction, and the historical associations of this building, it is suggested that it should have been retained as one of the most suitable of all possible memorials of the early life of South Australia. This is quite apart from those considerations of sentiment which demand that we should preserve for posterity all authentic memorials of one who had so much to do with the successful founding of our State.

The establishment of the Historical Memorials Committee, whose business it is to see to such matters, was too late to save this historic home; for just about the time the first meeting was held, the then remaining walls of "Thebarton Cottage" crashed down under the hands of the house-wreckers, and the materials were broken up and levelled off to provide a site for a factory. No trace whatever is now left of even the position occupied by the house. Under these circumstances it was thought fitting to place on record such reliable information regarding the building as could still be collected.

One factor that worked against the preservation of Colonel Light's cottage was a belief, expressed in letters to the press and in other ways, that public sentiment was being exploited by the owners of the property. On the contrary, I am informed that Dr. F. S. Hone and Mr. A. H. Preston, representing past and present owners of the property, made offers of sale in the desire that the house would be preserved. These offers were such that they cannot be described as other than generous.

The second and perhaps most important factor that prevented preservation of the house was uncertainty. It was rumoured that Colonel Light had not seen the cottage, or had not lived in it, and



in other ways doubt was thrown on its historical interest. This may have arisen partly from the fact that considerable additions were made to the house subsequent to 1841 and prior to 1879; but these additions left the original cottage practically unaltered, and so it remained right up to the date of its demolition. The facts, set out as briefly as possible, are as follows:-

- 1836 (December 28)--Province of South Australia proclaimed.
- 1837 (January 11)--Survey of Adelaide commenced.
- 1838 (May 12)--Site of Thebarton Cottage secured by Colonel Light.
- 1838 (August-December)--Thebarton Cottage built for Colonel Light.
- 1839 (January)--Colonel Light moved into Thebarton Cottage.
- 1839 (March 28)--Preface to "Journal" written at Thebarton Cottage.
- 1839 (October 5)--Death of Colonel Light at Thebarton Cottage.
- 1926 (December)--Thebarton Cottage demolished.

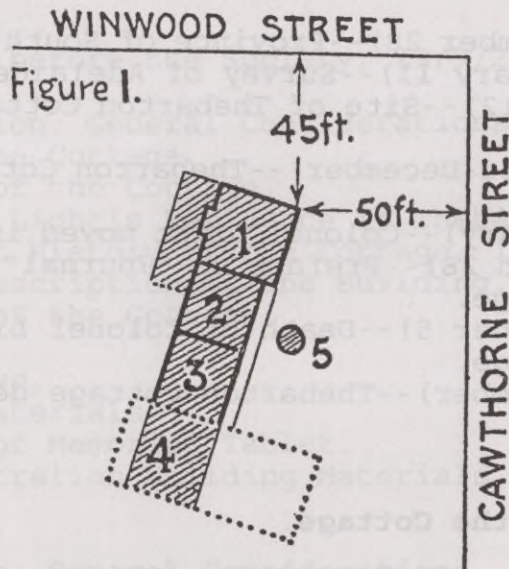
## II. - Site of the Cottage.

Thebarton Cottage was built on an area of one hundred and thirty-four acres; this formed Section No. 1, which was bought by Colonel Light at the land sales held on 12th May, 1838. Light was not the first owner of this section; he obtained it from Lieut. B. T. Finnis. The grant was delivered to "William Light, Esq., of Adelaide." on 24th August, 1838. One may speculate regarding the reasons that led Colonel Light to select this site for his residence. It may be noted that while he chose the higher ground on the southward-plunging "Para fault block," well out of the area liable to floods, for the site of Adelaide, the place selected for his own home was on the lower portion of the Adelaide Plains, close to the River Torrens, but still on an area not likely to be affected by floods.

In the second place, it may be noted that Section 1 was close to the point where the main artery of communication by road and canal was to leave the city. However, just as the west end of Adelaide, which was expected to have remained the chief business area, has actually developed in quite another direction, the geographical conditions and economic requirements have so acted that the area surrounding Thebarton Cottage has now developed into the site of numerous factories. This development is not a recent one, for as early as 1853 there was a tannery and a brickfield on portion of Section 1.

The front of Thebarton Cottage faced a little south of east, but there remains no visible sign to show just where it used to stand. In order to have some definite record on this point I sketched out the position prior to the completion of demolition, and this is shown in the accompanying rough sketch (Figure 1). This figure, which is not drawn to scale, shows the approximate positions of various rooms--1, the room latterly used as a kitchen; 2 and 3, rooms opening on to the small front veranda; 4, the underground room; 5, the "well of capital water." The later additions were in the position suggested by the dotted lines and faced south.





### III. - The Name of the Cottage.

As is well known, Light named his cottage after Thebarton, (1) a Suffolk village where he spent his youth. Thomas Gill's "Biographical Sketch" (Royal Geographical Society of Australasia, S.A. Branch, Vol. XI, 1911) clearly shows that Light wrote the name of his cottage as "Thebarton," but in the Preface of his Journal he spells it "Thebarton." Whether this was a typographical error, as Mr. Gill seemed to think, or a reversion to the old fashion of spelling the name, as H. M. Doughty suggests, the fact remains that the spelling "Thebarton" is now firmly fixed as a South Australian place name. There appears to be no ground for the extraordinary common belief that the name is a corruption of "The Barton," although the word "Barton" (Old English, *bere-tun* = barley-farm) is a common English place-name, dating back at least as far as the Domesday Book.

### IV. - Period of Light's Residence at Thebarton.

Colonel Light moved into Thebarton Cottage in January, 1839. The removal from his previous quarters was hastened by a disaster. In the "Southern Australian" of Wednesday, January 23, 1839, is recorded the destruction by fire of the land office, residence and buildings of Mr. J. H. Fisher, late Colonial Commissioner, and the survey office and residence of Colonel Light. The fire took place at 2 o'clock in the afternoon of the 22nd, and is recorded as "one of the most distressing events that has happened in our infant settlement since its establishment." These buildings stood on the Park Lands towards the western end of North Terrace; near this site



the City Council proposes to erect a memorial tablet.

These buildings were two of the first erected in the colony. The residential portions appear to have been built largely of reeds, and in the heat of a January afternoon, with a south-west wind, they were consumed in less than half an hour. It is of these buildings that Robert Gouger wrote in 1837:—"The only public offices worth mentioning are the land office and the Surveyor-General's office. These have cost but little money, and will, if deemed necessary, last for years. They are built of deal, weatherboarded and lined within, and are spacious and comfortable offices." (2)

The newspaper record of their destruction adds:—"It seems almost to serve as an addition to the regret generally felt at this calamity that Colonel Light was engaged packing up for the purpose of removing to his country section, and had this event therefore happened only two or three days later he would have had nearly everything removed."

One might speculate at length on the many important meetings, discussions, and decisions that must have taken place while Light lived in Thebarton Cottage, though he had at this time ceased to be Surveyor-General. It was here that he prepared for publication his "Journal," reprinted in Volume XI of this Society (1911); and here he wrote the brief but famous "Preface" on 28th March, 1839.

Colonel Light died at "Thebarton Cottage" on Saturday, 5th October, 1839.

#### V. - Subsequent History, 1839-1926

It is very difficult to trace the various owners and occupiers of this property after the death of Colonel Light. For a time apparently it was occupied by Miss Maria Gandy and by her brother George Gandy. Mr. A. T. Saunders records that Colonel Light left all his property to Miss Gandy (Register Book 291, No. 6). (3) Dr. Mayo lived in Thebarton Cottage for a few months, shifting into Adelaide in November, 1840.

Of many efforts made to obtain information regarding the history of the property between 1841 and 1879, the only one attended with any success was the searching of old municipal assessment-books. Colonel Light's country section (*i.e.* Section 1, on which Thebarton Cottage was built) was first included in a municipal area with the establishment of the West Torrens District Council in 1853. Thirty years later (1883) the formation of the Corporation of the Town of Thebarton removed this property from the care of the West Torrens District Council.

By the courtesy of Mr. Vernon S. Shephard, Clerk of the West Torrens District Council, I was able to examine the assessment-books of these thirty years: 1853-1883. It is clear from these records that the property remained in the possession of Dr. Mayo, or the trustees of Dr. Mayo, up to 1877 or 1878. Then the National Building Society is recorded as the owner for a couple of years, when Mr. J. N. Hone purchased the property.

For many years, until well into the 'eighties, the house stood



almost alone, and the greater part of the 134 acres of Section 1 was cultivated land. But even in 1853 there were eight buildings on this section: a four-roomed house associated with a tannery, a two-roomed cottage associated with a brickfield, a five-roomed house, a four-roomed house, and four small white (? pise) cottages.

As near as I can determine, the occupiers of Light's cottage were as follows:-1853, Edward Gandy; 1859, David Solomon; 1861, Henry Warren; 1865-70, John Temple Sagar; 1872-6, John Taylor; 1876-9, Rev. John McEwin. Mr. George McEwin, of Adelaide, clearly remembers the time when his father lived in this house; he particularly recollects a large flagpole (4) that then stood nearby, which according to tradition, had been erected by Colonel Light. During the years 1841-1879, important additions had been made to the cottage, but owing to the assessments remaining so nearly constant throughout the West Torrens Council records it is not possible to say when the additions were made. I believe they must have been added between 1841 and 1853.

In 1879 Mr. N. J. Hone entered into possession, and the property remained in his family for thirty years, being disposed of in 1909. Dr. F. S. Hone lived there as a boy, and has given much information based on his recollections. Dr. Hone tells me that about 1880-1 this portion of the section was cut up into five allotments; subsequent to this date scores of dwellings were erected on Section 1, where for nearly thirty years there had been no new dwellings erected. In September, 1910, Thebarton Cottage, with allotments 405-10, was bought by Mr. Cocking. The site is at present in the possession of Messrs. Colton, Palmer, & Preston.

## VI. - General Description of the Building

In view of the difficulty which surrounds all efforts to obtain authoritative and detailed information regarding buildings of the early days, it is remarkably fortunate that Thebarton Cottage chanced to be advertised in 1841, and a definite description thus preserved. This is to be found in the "South Australian Register" of January 2, 1841, and is as follows:-

### TO LET,

On the banks of the Torrens, at Thebarton, formerly the residence of the late Colonel Light, a substantial brick-built house, containing four large and lofty rooms, one underground and a back kitchen--commands a fine view of the bay--a garden in a high state of cultivation--a stable, with saddle-room--and a well of capital water. Apply to Dr. Mayo, Carrington Street, or to Mr. Gandy, on the premises.

On account of the additions that had been made to the house, which were in part built over the underground room mentioned in the above advertisement, some confusion appears to have arisen as to which was Colonel Light's house. In various newspaper photographs, for instance, the newer and larger portion facing the south was shown as Colonel Light's old home, whereas, on the evidence of tradition, supported by the character of the building materials,



this is the portion added since 1841.

Several visits were made by me to the site at the time of the demolition of the property, and after careful investigations I find that all the available evidence strongly supports the traditional belief that the building erected by Colonel Light's order in 1838, with its four "large and lofty rooms" and its one underground room, etc., remained intact up to the last months of 1926.

In photographs of the added portion of the residence, taken when it was the home of Mr. Hone, the windows of the underground room may be plainly seen from the front. Even in January, 1927, the remainder of the "well of capital water" (a cylindrical well, brick-lined) was well preserved, though it had been partly filled up. One might imagine that the description of the rooms as "large and lofty" was partly due to the descriptive and imaginative powers of the agent, but it is more likely that the house was really regarded in those days as a building much beyond the ordinary.

The largest rooms were about 12 ft. x 12 ft., and the height about 12 ft. to the eaves. The floor of Room No. 1 was of earth and gravel, quite firm and even, and it had worn very smooth. This had been later covered up by a wooden floor, and so remained until the building was demolished. The building itself was of brick, and, as will be discussed later, it was in all probability roofed with shingles in the first case, though these were replaced by iron in later years.

#### VII. - Pictures of the House

In 1916, it would appear that the Board of Governors of the Public Library interested themselves in the matter of having some record of the cottage, and commissioned Mr. Gustav Barnes to paint a picture of the house, as detailed in a later paragraph. Two of his views show the rooms which were actually Colonel Light's home; the third picture shows the front portion of the larger house, which is nowadays more closely associated with the family of Mr. N. J. Hone.

In 1926, Mr. H. Dingle, of the Hydraulic Engineer's Department, who is interested in the preservation of old landmarks, took several photographs of "Thebarton Cottage" as it appeared in its last stages. These photographs are shown in the accompanying plates (Figs. 5, 6 & 7), and indicate that the hands of Time and of Neglect had placed their marks on the building. It is clear, however, when one realizes the kind of residence that was used by the greater part of the people of South Australia in 1838, that "Thebarton Cottage" had in its day considerable dignity and pretension.

In or about the year 1920 a South Australian artist, Mr. John C. Goodchild, made a drawing of Colonel Light's home as it then was. Evidently Mr. Goodchild made himself well informed of the facts regarding the house, and his representation is a most excellent and truthful one. (This drawing is reproduced in Figure 3, with the kind permission of the artist.) Apart from the fact that the later additions are dimly suggested in the background and that a strange tank and water-tap are shown in the view, his sketch shows the building very much as Colonel Light himself must have known it. One exception, however, is that Goodchild's picture shows the house



roofed with galvanized iron, which was probably added in the early 'fifties.

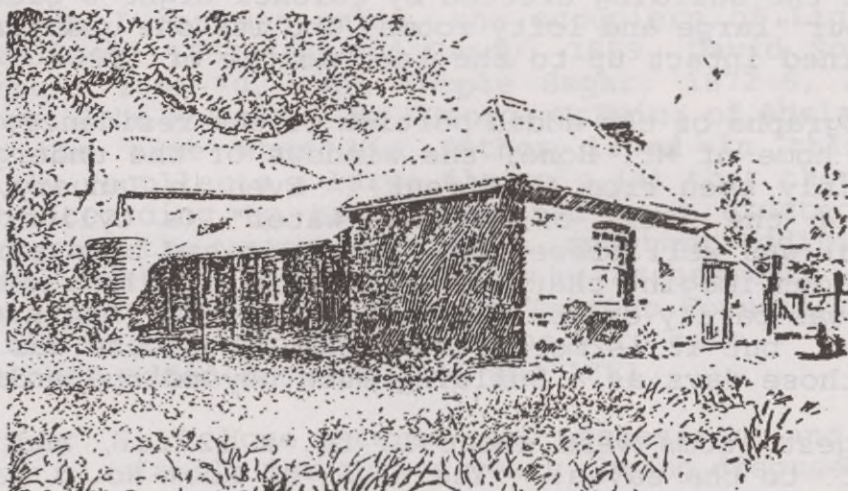


Figure 3.

View of Light's cottage, as described in the context. (Drawn by Mr. John C. Goodchild about 1919. Reproduced by kind permission of the artist.)

Barnes's pictures suggest a garden surrounding the house, and this is well in accord with probabilities, for it is known that Colonel Light was an expert gardener; he has been recorded by one authority (Robert Gouger) as the most successful gardener in the province.

#### VIII. - The Walls

The building material of the walls of "Thebarton Cottage" was brick throughout. Inquiry into this matter has brought forward some interesting facts regarding early building materials. Mr. McGrath, of Messrs. Colton, Palmer, & Preston, kindly visited the old house with me, and he having had extensive experience of brick manufacture, gave the valuable information which is embodied in a following paragraph.

Effort was made to discover when bricks were first made in the infant settlement of South Australia, but after much delving into old papers and manuscripts the conclusion was reached that the first efforts in brickmaking date back almost to the earliest days of settlement. It is curious to note, however, that Gouger in his "South Australia in 1837" makes no mention of brick houses. The early development of brickmaking is quite natural, in view of the fact that brickmakers and bricklayers appear in the earliest lists of arrivals. The prime impulse of the colonists would be to build houses. The Adelaide plains, apart from the outcrop of tertiary limestone near Government House and some travertine limestone in other areas, were marked by a complete absence of building stones;



the plains provided an ample and in those days all-too-obvious supply of clays of varying quality, which in many places made a good brick.

The earliest positive record of South Australian brick-making that can be discovered is in a letter dated 29th July, 1837, for which I am indebted, among other courtesies, to Mr. Pitt and Miss Threadgill, of the S.A. Archives. The letter in question notified the Colonial Secretary, Adelaide, that the spot selected for the making of bricks, etc., by the South Australian Company was in the extreme eastern corner of the Park Lands, where it was intersected by the Torrens. This site was examined and approved by the Surveyor-General, and was then referred to Governor Hindmarsh, who endorsed the letter to the effect that he "had no sort of objection to the bricks being made in the place selected by the South Australian Company."

In the first newspaper published in the colony ("S.A. Gazette and Colonial Register," 3/6/1837) we read that "the wages of our labourers are already extravagantly high--good carpenters, bricklayers, ...readily obtain from 6s. to 7s. per diem with their rations," also that "snug and comfortable cottages are springing up on every side." In a letter in the Archives, written April, 1838, by W. Everard, it is stated: "Bricks are £4 per 1,000, lime 1s. per bushel, sawn timber very dear; carpenters get 12s. per diem, bricklayers 10s."

In a letter written by Mary Thomas, 14th October, 1838, about the time that Thebarton Cottage was being built, we find something about bricks and also a curious note of complaint:- "Mr. Thomas is making bricks on his country sections. These are in great demand, and are now used in preference to mud. When we built our house, stone was the only thing to be had." Mr. Thomas's "country sections" were 284 and 479, near St. Peters. Possibly the stone of which Mrs. Thomas complains was somewhat crumbling travertine. It will be remembered that in those days Government House itself was "constructed of mud put between laths, supported by uprights of native wood, and covered thickly with thatch."

The bricks of Thebarton Cottage are known as "sloppy bricks," and were hand-made in wooden moulds. They appear to the eye more sandy than they really are, for, though the brick itself is made of a fine clay, sand was used to dust the mould, and this still adheres to the outside of the brick. This type of brick shrunk considerably, and to provide for a 9 x 4 1/2 x 3 brick the mould would be perhaps 9 1/2 x 5 x 3 1/2. The clay itself was tempered by hand, and the bricks were then moulded, dried, and burnt. "Sloppy bricks" are not now made, except in out-of-the-way places, being replaced by wire-cut and dry-pressed bricks. The bricks of the newer portion of the house were of a different kind--a later type.

Following on a resolution of the Historical Memorials Committee, six bricks were (with the kind permission of Mr. A. H. Preston) secured from the walls of Thebarton Cottage and placed in the collection at the Royal Geographical Society's rooms for preservation.

#### IX. - The Windows.

The window frames and sashes of the cottage are worthy of note as



being of excellent workmanship--as, indeed, the whole cottage must have been. There are but few references to windows in the accounts of early buildings, but one of these is enlightening. A writer in "An account of the Celebration of the Jubilee Year of South Australia," published by the Old Colonists Association in 1866, says:- "A hut built of reeds, with a calico window...was a sort of villa in those times." The two front windows of Light's cottage swung vertically on hinges, and must have been rather handsome for those days. A pair of these sashes was, I believe, secured by Dr. Angas Johnson for the civic authorities.

#### X. - Roofing Materials.

At the time of its demolition the cottage was roofed with corrugated iron, and I understand that some of this was secured by interested people as "souvenirs of Light's cottage." This iron was of a heavy gauge and broad corrugations, and was of the type known as "Gospel Oak." It dates back to the very beginning of the use of corrugated iron, and is of considerable historical interest. But corrugated galvanized-iron was not in use during the lifetime of Colonel Light.

A pamphlet published by John Lysaght, Ltd., sets out that galvanized-iron dates back only to 1837 and goes on:- "Although a plain sheet was exhibited at the great Exhibition of 1851, it was not until 1854 that galvanized-iron really came into practical use."

Mr. A. T. Saunders, of Adelaide, who had a great deal to do with the handling of galvanized-iron in his youth, remembers when Lee's "Gospel Oak" brand was the standard, and was used on all Government work. An advertisement by Charles Gell appeared in the "Register" of 31/10/49, for the sale of "a large quantity of Patent Galvanized Tinned Iron, in sheets, or corrugated for circular or lean-to roofs." This is the earliest record of the appearance of corrugated iron in the State. Tiles, I understand, were first imported in 1853, but local slates may have been used earlier. Gouger's pise house of 1837 was roofed with blue slates, which he had brought out with him.

In the picture painted by Mr. Gustav Barnes, the cottage is shown with a roof of thatch. From the records of the Public Library Board, kindly communicated to me by the Secretary, Mr. H. W. Marshall, it appears that at the meeting of the Fine Arts Committee on 4th August, 1916, photographs of Colonel Light's cottage were exhibited, and it was decided that Mr. Barnes be asked to submit a water-colour painting of the cottage, "showing a shingle roof," as a companion picture to the water-colour of "Theberton Hall, Suffolk," that had been presented by Mr. J. W. Bakewell. It seems, however, that Mr. Barnes's first picture was of the later additions. It was then decided (October 1916) to have two pictures painted of the original cottage, showing a thatched roof. Of the Committee of five (Messrs. Barnes, Adams, Wilkinson, Davies, and Sir William Sowden) who had charge of this matter, only Sir William Sowden is now living, and he has no recollection of the reason for the change of opinion. It may be suggested, however, that the artist had something to do with the decision, for the first picture he painted shows a thatched roof also, although the instructions of the Committee were otherwise. These four



interesting pictures are now on exhibition in the Historical Section of the Museum.

The most important information available regarding early roofing materials is to be found in Gouger's "South Australia in 1837." He tells us that the Manning portable cottages were covered with tarpaulins, but recommends to intending settlers that these be replaced as soon as possible by "the colonial roof of shingles." Shingles were cheap, 18s. to 20s. per thousand, apparently imported from Van Diemen's Land.

Mr. C. A. Hodder, who speaks with authority on the subject of roof-construction, inspected the roof materials of Thebarton Cottage very carefully. He assures me that the roof was built for shingles, and was originally so covered, in his opinion. One of the shingles, made of hardwood (Tasmanian stringy-bark) was secured and placed in the Society's collection. Dr. F. S. Hone remembers that when as a boy he went after sparrow's nests, under the iron, his hands often came in contact with old shingles. I think it possible, but unlikely, that Thebarton Cottage was first roofed with thatch.

The main rafters of portion of the original roof of the cottage are not without interest. They were sawn from a native pine tree (*Callitris*), such as might have grown near where the cottage was built. This tree when felled was a well-grown specimen, about sixty years old. It had been divided up by pit saws, and this one tree provided the main rafters of the roof. A portion was secured and made into souvenirs; the wood was in excellent state of preservation.

The portions of the ceiling that remained at the time of demolition, and which probably dated back to the erection, were of lath-and-plaster; the laths were of local hardwood, and were fastened with curious short wrought-iron nails. Mr. C. A. Hodder obtained a roof truss of native hardwood consisting of two rafters and a collar-tie, "coved" upward for about eighteen inches, to give height and ornament to the room.

It is clear from the somewhat scrappy records that have been found available at this late date that Thebarton Cottage must have been somewhat of a grand house in its day; it probably also represented the best workmanship and materials available in the colony.

#### XI. - **Erection of Memorial Tablet.**

On 6th August, 1927, the Mayor of Thebarton unveiled a bronze memorial tablet in Cawthorne Street, of which the following is a reproduction of a photograph. (Fig. 8)

While it is to be deplored that such an historic building has been destroyed, it should be recognized that this is not wholly due to want of reverence for the past or to lack of regard for tradition, but rather to the uncertainty that existed in the public mind as to the claims of this cottage for preservation. This aspect of the matter emphasizes the need for some authoritative body, such as the newly established Historical Memorials Committee,



to advise and to direct public opinion in such cases.

Another point to be remembered is that the cottage had a distinct historical interest quite apart from the fact that it was the last home of one whom South Australians unite in honouring--a man, moreover, to whose vision and ability the citizens of Adelaide owe more than has yet been adequately expressed. (5) There is special interest in old houses, a matter that has been greatly emphasized in modern Continental research.

The details of character and structure of such buildings abound with valuable information, such as cannot be revealed by old books or letters, regarding the lives and habits of our forefathers. Many such buildings still remain, though few perhaps with the special interest that attached to "Thebarton Cottage."

### XIII. - South Australian Building Materials.

We may here turn aside to draw attention to the varying uses of building materials from the purely geographical point of view. With the settlement of South Australia in 1836 we had an advanced stage of human culture transferred to new and underdeveloped surroundings, and isolated to a high degree. It is of interest to note how the requirements of this advanced culture, as far as building materials were concerned, reacted on their surroundings, and how, in turn, these requirements were modified and controlled by the materials available. An intensive study on this point would, I believe, reveal sufficient information to enable most houses in Adelaide to be dated to within a decade from a consideration of their materials and methods of construction.

Such a survey would consider in turn the canvas tents of Holdfast Bay, the old pise huts (some of which remain), the use over large areas of the abundant but unsatisfactory travertine limestone, the many kinds and qualities of bricks that were so early available, the limestone from the quarry below Government House, the various rocks later quarried from the Mount Lofty foothills--ranging from the Tapley's Hill and Glen Osmond "slates," through the lighter-coloured quartzites and sandstones, gradually moving towards rocks more and more easy to dress--culminating in the development of the cement and concrete industries and the fine structures now being built of reinforced concrete. In this progressive story there must be, of course, a certain amount of overlap. Interesting side-lines would be provided by consideration of the various imported materials, such as portable wooden cottages, building stones, tiles, and slates, and the enormous influence of the introduction of corrugated galvanized-iron.

Early records give considerable accounts of the cloth tents, the pise (rammed earth) huts, the imported section-built Manning cottages, and the gradual appearance of brick and stone. Mrs. Thomas, in December, 1836, wrote of "rush huts and tents." Little is said about roofing, though reeds or rushes are known to have been used in some cases; there is also mention of shingles and shingle-splinters.

Mrs. G. Foreman, who still lives in Thebarton, and who came to the State in December, 1839, as a child of eight years (a daughter



of George Head, landscape gardener) tells me that the newcomers lived in single-roomed wooden cottages, built of hardwood palings, with earth floors; most of the other houses were built of pise and shingle. She believes there were then some reed-thatched cottages, but they were further towards the river than the portion of Thebarton where she lived.

A. G. Price ("Foundation and Settlement of South Australia," p.112) refers to the cheapness and coolness of pise houses. It may be readily imagined that from the point of view of readily available materials, and the need for protection from the unaccustomed summer heat, the cheapest and most popular dwelling might well have been of pise-and-thatch. In 1911 the following were the numbers of pise houses in the various states of the Commonwealth:--New South Wales, 10,023; Queensland, 361; Victoria, 310; South Australia, 165; Western Australia, 65; Tasmania, 15. There were equally as many buildings of lath-and-plaster or wattle-and-dab. Sundried bricks were still more common (30,000 such dwellings in the Commonwealth). It is of interest to note that in that year (1911) there were in the Commonwealth 88,626 dwellings of calico, canvas, and hessian.

As is well known, some of the early buildings were made largely of river reeds, as was Colonel Light's hut, the burning of which in January, 1839, sent him somewhat hastily into his newly-built home at Thebarton. Mrs. Foreman went to school with the family of George Gandy (mentioned above), who was a brickmaker and a builder at Thebarton (vide advertisement in "Register," February 29, 1840), the probable builder of Thebarton Cottage.

Closely correlated with the above considerations one might include consideration of the fact that South Australia has to-day a higher proportion of stone and brick houses than any other State in the Commonwealth. In the 1911 census, for instance, disregarding the canvas, pise, wattle-and-dab, and other types of dwelling, the percentages of stone, brick, and concrete dwellings in the various States were as follows:-- South Australia, 85 per cent; Western Australia, 43 per cent; New South Wales, 42 per cent; Victoria, 36 per cent; Tasmania, 23 per cent; Queensland, 3 per cent.

This paper has been prepared with a desire to direct attention to the value of old houses, and with the hope that some authentic and historic buildings of our early days may yet be preserved for posterity.

#### FOOTNOTES

- (1) Mr. A. J. Morrison, Deputy Town Clerk, has brought under my notice a letter of Colonel Light's, now in the possession of the City Council. This letter is addressed to Thomas Gilbert (the first Colonial Storekeeper), and asks that steps be taken to discover the whereabouts of a drawing table. It appears that this table contained all of Colonel Light's colours and brushes, and that it had been removed from the building during the fire of the 22nd January, 1839, and taken away by "some officious person." Two interesting points about this letter are: first, that it was dated "January 25, 1839," confirming the assumption that Colonel Light removed to



his new-built Thebarton home immediately after the fire; and, secondly, that it was written from "Theberton Hall," an evidence that Light's first intention was to name the cottage after the old home of his boyhood; later, as we know, this was altered to "Theberton Cottage." A receipt for the sale of land is in possession of the Thebarton Town Council; it is signed by William Light, and dated "Theberton, August 7, 1839." The whole available evidence suggests that the now well-established custom of spelling Theberton with a central "a" has arisen through a typographical error.

(2) Governor Gawler, in his letter to Lord John Russell, written the day after the fire, says that the official buildings were "constructed entirely of wood and thatched with reeds."

(3) Since writing the above, I have been shown, by the courtesy of Mr. Hugo Boothby, Deputy Registrar of Probates, the original will of Colonel Light, with the subsequent affidavit of the executrix, Miss M. Gandy. This will is among the possessions of the Registrar of Probates at the Supreme Court, but is dated too far back to be included in the Records. Mr. Boothby suggests that the records that contained mention of Light's will may have been burnt by the fire that occurred in the Supreme Court Buildings when they were in Currie Street. However that may be, the original signed-and-sealed will is fortunately preserved. The home of the testator is described as "Theberton Cottage;" the will is dated 26th August, 1839, and was signed in the presence of H. Nixon, Jno. Brown, and Chas. Mann. The affidavit of Miss Gandy was made before Chief Justice Cooper on 17th October, 1839, and contains two references to "Theberton."

(4) This flagstaff, according to Gill's "Biographical Sketch," page 165, was originally a spar of the brig "Rapid," the boat in which Colonel Light came out, and in which he did much exploratory work. The flagstaff stood till about 1890, when a strong gale blew it down. It is this impressive feature that enables us to identify the cottage through the earlier period of its history, a time of considerable change and of practically no available written records. A presentation gavel made from the timber of this flagstaff, is at present in the possession of Mrs. E. W. Nicholls, of Forestville.

(5) In connection with the claim sometimes made that Colonel Light was not responsible for the setting aside of the Park Lands surrounding the city of Adelaide, it is only necessary to refer to his map of the site dated February 7, 1837 (four weeks after the survey of the city commenced), where it is clearly stated that he proposed to recommend the reservation of the specified areas as "Park Grounds." The "instructions" issued to Light re parks, and referred to by G. S. Kingston ("Advertiser," 12/10/77), were vague--merely that he should "make the necessary reserves for squares, public walks, and quays." Some measure of the official appreciation of the various park squares set aside within the city may be gauged from the fact that at the present time only remnants of certain of the squares remain as parks; this is notably so in Victoria and Hindmarsh Squares, where the greater part of the whole area is covered with paved roads and footpaths, with small and diminishing areas of trees and grass.



## THEBARTON COTTAGE

IN 1926 Colonel Light's Cottage, situated at what was then the corner of Winwood St. and Cawthorne St., Southwark, fell under the merciless blows of the demolisher's hammer. It was a sad loss of an important part of our local heritage.

A valiant attempt to build a replica of the cottage, begun in 1982 and organised by a determined committee of local people and other interested parties, failed in its objective. The plans for the building, which were prepared by architects John S. Hales, now lie in forgotten files.

The story of this ill-starred scheme has never been told, and the two most important contributions to Light Cottage literature have been hidden away in journals which are not freely available.

The Thebarton Historical Society has published these two articles in order to make the controversial facts and fictions relating to Colonel Light's Thebarton Cottage better known to a wider public.