

GERMAN SETTLEMENT IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA : THE ADAPTATION AND MODIFICATION OF A TRADITIONAL RURAL LIFESTYLE IN A NEW WORLD

Annette Green (B.Arch)

INTRODUCTION

During the early years of European settlement in South Australia (S.A.) migrants arrived from various parts of the British Isles and, to a lesser extent, from central Prussia. The varied cultural background of these settlers led to distinctive types of experimentation as they learnt about their new environment, and evidence of this process of cultural transfer and adaptation is still clearly evident in parts of the present rural landscape.

In 1976-84 four of the first German settlements in S.A. (1) were studied in detail by a team of architects, geographers, historians and town planners based at the South Australian College of Advanced Education and the South Australian Institute of Technology. This paper has been derived from the reports published by that group (2).

GERMAN SETTLEMENT IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

When news of the discovery of fertile lands on the southern coast of Australia reached London in 1830 it attracted the attention of a group of men interested in implementing a new system of colonisation which combined both humanitarian and utilitarian theories of settlement. This group actively campaigned for the establishment of a free colony at this place, and in 1836 S.A. was settled by men whose professed ideals were civil liberty, social opportunity and equality for all religions (3). George Fife Angas, one of the prominent figures in the formation of the new colony, was particularly concerned about religious liberty for Protestant dissentors, and it was to Angas that a group of German Lutheran dissentors finally turned when a system of religious persecution forced them to consider migration (4).

Throughout the 1820's attempts had been made by the the King of Prussia, Friedrich Wilhelm III, to unite the Lutheran and Reformed Churches under state control. However, these failed to persuade many Lutherans to use the official order of worship and in the 1830's the King decided to resort to compulsion. In 1836 Angas agreed to support the migration of a group of dissentors led by Pastor Kavel and, after considerable delays imposed by the Prussian Government, the first German settlers arrived in S.A. in 1838.

Persecution of the 'Old Lutherans' abated after the King's death in 1840, but a 'chain of migration' had been established and German settlement continued in S.A. for more traditional socio-economic and political reasons (5). These new settlers generally travelled as individuals or family groups and therefore lacked the social unity of their predecessors, who had migrated as Lutheran congregations. However, cultural and religious ties encouraged them to maintain strong links with their countrymen once they had arrived in this new world, and new 'German' settlements continued to be established.

A NEW WORLD

Most of the first German settlers came from farmlet villages within the Prussian Provinces of Brandenburg, Posen and Silesia (now part of western Poland). Before migration their deputies stated that they only wished to buy or lease small parcels of land in S.A. and to create agricultural holdings similar to the ones they occupied in their homeland (6). However, as pioneer

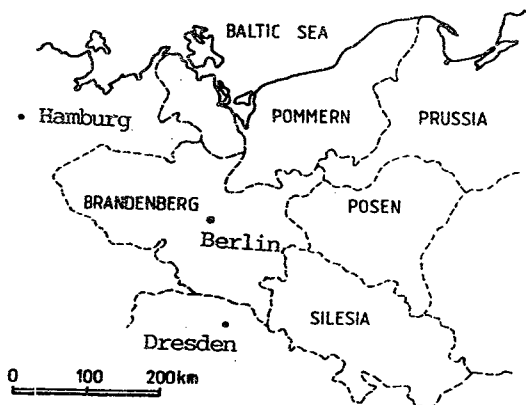


Figure 1 : Map of Central Europe, 1815-1857
(Young, G., et al, 1980, p 15)

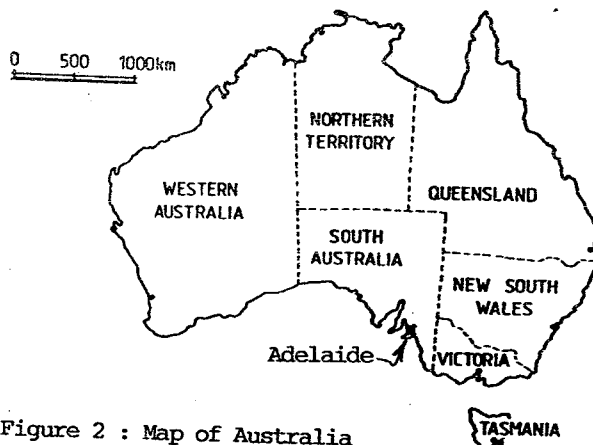


Figure 2 : Map of Australia
The first 'German' settlements in S.A. were located within 60 km of the city of Adelaide (7)

settlers fleeing from religious persecution they were thrust into this new world with little preparation and they soon found that it was impossible to maintain an entirely traditional lifestyle. In particular, the climate, terrain, and subdivision pattern which they found in S.A. imposed conditions which were quite different from their previous experience, and this led to a period of trial and error as their traditional farming methods were tested and either maintained, adapted or discarded.

The first wave of German settlers travelled as unified congregational groups which included a wide range of shared skills, and their first settlements developed as self-contained 'German' villages. All religious, business and social life was ordered around the Lutheran church and there was little incentive to copy the unfamiliar customs and attitudes of their British neighbours. The retention of their own values and patterns of living was reinforced by the physical isolation of their early settlements, and the social isolation created by language barriers. However, while the early 'German' settlements were quite distinct from those of their British neighbours, they were also different from rural villages in the Prussian provinces. The experience of the migrants in their homeland and their response to the different physical conditions which they found in S.A. interacted to form a new and unique landscape.

THE PROCESS OF ADAPTATION

The official subdivision pattern in S.A. was based on a regular grid of 80 acre (32 ha) sections, but in the first German settlements these were re-subdivided into narrow allotments in an attempt to replicate traditional farmlet village layouts (8). However, despite this initial adherence to traditional settlement patterns there was neither the capital nor time to erect traditional buildings and their first houses were generally simple slab huts, like those of their British neighbours.

The first German settlers quickly recognised a market for agricultural produce, and in response to market forces, cultural heritage and the process of adaptation, they established mixed agricultural practices, based on intensive subsistence and cash crops. In contrast, the local English farmers tended to occupy larger areas of land where they specialized in the cultivation of wheat.

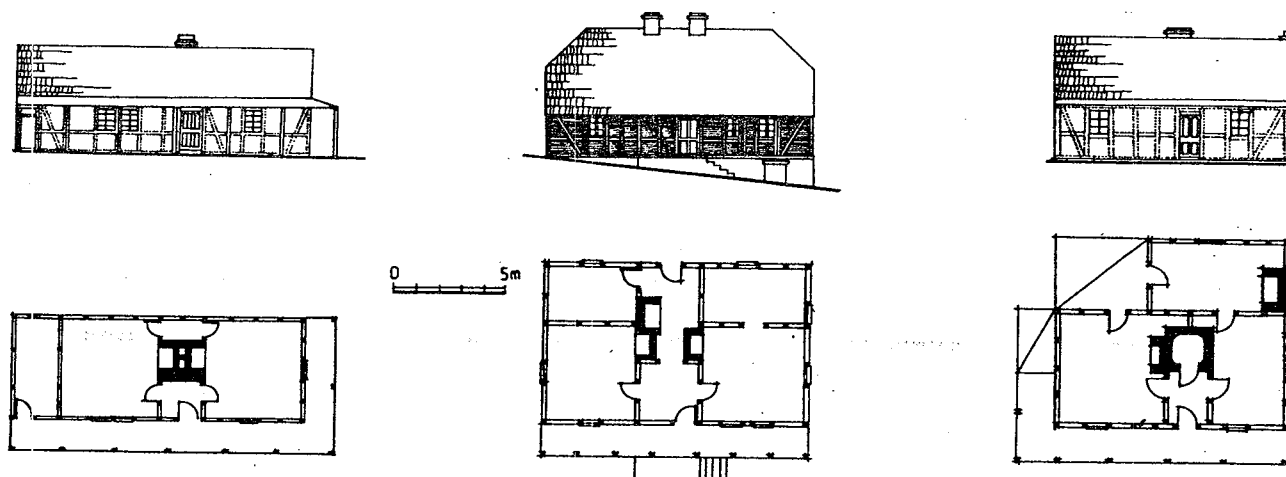


Figure 3 : Comparative plans of three traditional German farmhouses built in South Australia

1. Half-timbered cottage with back-to-back fireplaces (Young, G., et al, 1983, p 151)
2. Half-timbered house with through-hall kitchen (Young, G, et.al, 1980, p 184)
3. Half-timbered house with central black kitchen (Young, G. et al, 1983, p 101)

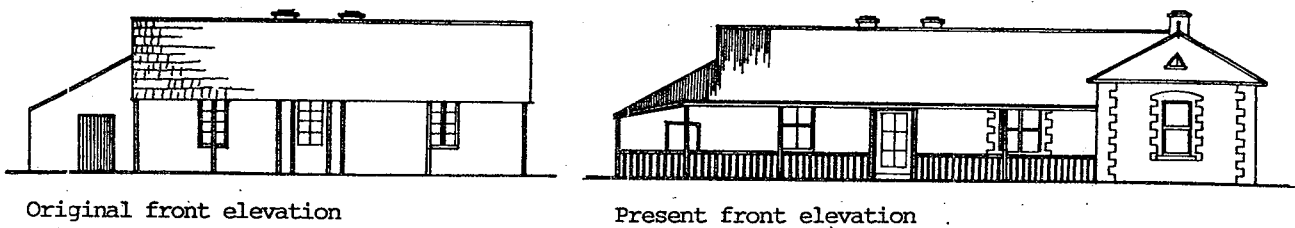
When the German community became better established traditional building practices were used for more permanent structures (9) and the 'German' farms and villages developed a distinctive character. At the same time the immigrants' agricultural practices began to change as they became more familiar with their new environment. Most of the available land was soon found to be unsuited to intensive agriculture and as individual families acquired sufficient capital and experience they moved to larger holdings. As part of this process many of the early settlements gradually changed from traditional farmlet villages to roadside and regional service centres (10).

The German migrants who arrived from the mid 1840's helped to reinforce cultural ties with the homeland, but they also accelerated the process of adaptation. These new settlers no longer arrived as communities fleeing religious persecution, but rather as individuals and families looking for new opportunities in a new world. Although many originated from the Prussian states others were from West Germany and they represented a much wider cross-section of German society. The consequent lack of strong community ties and the change in emphasis from the conservation of a traditional lifestyle to the search for a new one encouraged much greater flexibility in both attitudes and needs. Further, and perhaps more importantly, most of the new-comers benefited greatly from the experience of the original German settlers, both through correspondence encouraging them to migrate and through contact on arrival.

The original settlements were limited in size and could not accommodate a large increase in population, but land was often available in the surrounding rural districts. In other cases, the experienced settlers were able to provide valuable advice which led to the establishment of entirely new communities on newly surveyed lands (11). In contrast to the original farmlet villages these new settlements were based on the occupation of the official 80 acre sections by individual settlers or by small groups of between two to four members. Within a few years many of these farms had been increased in size to be comparable with the larger holdings of the nearby English settlers and from about 1850 new 'German' settlements in S.A. were based on larger and more scattered land holdings of this type.

The increasing population of S.A. and the adaptation of the German settlers to both the local environment and the dominant British culture gradually reduced the physical and cultural isolation of the 'German' villages. However, while a mixture of English and German settlement began to emerge within these communities, there was still a strong tendency for the German settlers to remain in reasonable proximity to each other for the sake of their churches and schools. Despite the modification of their settlement patterns, agricultural practices and building methods, the Lutheran Church remained an important binding force throughout the second half of the nineteenth century.

The process of adaptation accelerated again in the 1860s, when the first generation of Australians of German descent began to reach maturity. This new generation generally remained bound by a traditional family life and a commitment to the Lutheran church, but they had only second-hand memories of the homeland. German migration declined dramatically from this time and from about the 1870's the use of traditional building methods became increasingly rare. New houses were built in contemporary colonial styles and traditional houses were modified by new additions.



Original front elevation

Present front elevation

Figure 4 : Schneemilch House, Lot 3, Victoria Street, Hahndorf. The villa wing was added in the late 19th century to enlarge the house and conform with the contemporary style of the Adelaide suburban house (Young, G, et al, 1980, p 99)

However, this continuing process of adaptation did not result in the destruction of all physical evidence of the distinctive German character of the early settlements, partly as a tribute to the fine building skills of the original settlers and partly as a result of strong family ties. Many of the early houses are still occupied or have survived as outbuildings, while traditional farm-buildings continue to serve their original purpose. Evidence of all of the principal phases of settlement and adaptation can still be found in the villages and farms established by the German settlers - either by comparing individual elements, studying urban allotments or rural properties, by examining individual towns and rural communities, or, most importantly, by an amalgamation of all of these.

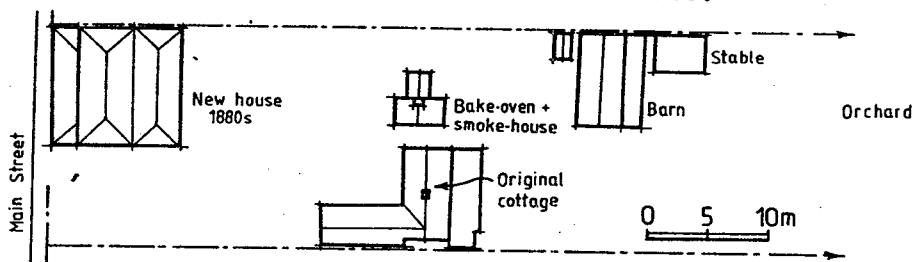


Figure 5 : Rodert's farm complex, 20 Main Street, Hahndorf (Young, G, et al, 1980, p 94 & 163)
This complete example of a standard farmlet village allotment extends between the main road and the creek. It was originally laid out with a vegetable garden, orchard, pigstys and grazing land. The original two-roomed stone cottage, separate bake-oven and smoke-house, timber barn and stable still remain behind the 'new' house.

MANAGEMENT ISSUES

The way in which the German settlers who arrived in S.A. between 1838 and 1861 perceived their new environment, adapted it to their needs, and responded to its demands, created a unique landscape within this largely British society. Until the Second World War these rural areas were relatively stable with a continuity of family ownership on many properties. However, with changing social and economic conditions over recent years, many of these areas are now coming under increasing pressure for change. As a result, a distinctive part of the historic landscape is now under threat.

In order to conserve physical evidence of German settlement in S.A., including evidence of the way in which this group adapted to, what was for them, an alien environment, it is necessary to develop a clear understanding of the historic landscape. In accordance with this aim the work undertaken by the South Australian Centre for Settlement Studies has involved historical research covering the life of these settlers both before and after migration, an analysis of the physical environment, detailed studies of settlement patterns and traditional building methods, and comparative studies of contemporary English settlements. This has provided an important data base which defines the extent of this resource and its significance as a distinctive part of early European settlement in S.A.

As a result of the research programme and subsequent publications, public awareness has been raised at both a local and state level and conservation action has been taken by both private owners and government organisations. For individual properties which have been identified as having particular cultural and/or architectural significance, conservation issues have been addressed through the implementation of special heritage controls. However, while this has resulted in the protection of many individual items, further action is still required in a number of areas if the quality of the historic landscape is to be maintained. In considering the contribution which these places make to our understanding of the way in which S.A. has developed since European settlement, it is not sufficient to rely on the protection of individual items in isolation from their physical setting and historical context. Neither is it appropriate for state or local government authorities to implement planning controls over individual properties without supporting further research to determine the most appropriate conservation techniques - particularly in the case of the more fragile structures such as the traditional half-timbered houses and outbuildings which utilize wattle and daub infill panels.

By a combination of further research, public information and planning controls it will be possible to conserve important evidence of the historic development of S.A. for the benefit of both present and future generations.

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NOTES

1. Hahndorf, settled 1839; Bethany, 1842; Lobethal, 1842; Birdwood, 1848.
2. This research group was incorporated as the South Australian Centre for Settlement Studies in 1982. Published reports are listed under Young, G. in the bibliography above.
3. Pike, D., Paradise of Dissent, South Australia 1829-1857, Part I
4. Pike, op. cit., pp.130-1
5. German migration to S.A. commenced with the arrival of over 500 settlers in 1838. These were followed by a further 218 in 1841, 181 in 1844 and 244 in 1845. From 1846 the number of German immigrants increased dramatically and in 1848 this trend was further encouraged by the widespread revolutions in Europe. In the following year 1,626 German settlers arrived in S.A. and they continued to arrive at a rate of more than 500 per year until 1851. During the next three years the discovery of gold in New South Wales and Victoria attracted the majority of new settlers to those states, but German migration to S.A. regained momentum from 1854-58. By the end of that decade the numbers had declined rapidly and by 1861 the major phase of German migration to the colony was over.
6. Hodder, E., George Fife Angas, London 1891, p.175, as cited in Young, G. et. al., Hahndorf, Volume 1, p.64
7. The spread of German settlement in South Australia is shown in Figure 2, p 45, The Australian Journal of Historical Archaeology, Volume 3, October 1985
8. Hahndorf was subdivided into blocks of land which ranged from approximately 0.01 to 0.8 ha. These were then combined to form family holdings (1.3 to 2.1 ha) which included a roadside allotment, access to water and a fair share of fertile soil. At Bethany the first official survey (Von Bertouch, 1857), indicated allotment sizes of between 1.4 to 15.8 ha, while at Lobethal the available land was subdivided into 36 1.2 ha allotments, two allotments being taken up by each of the 18 founding families.
The farmlet villages established by the German settlers in S.A. were based on the Prussian 'hufendorf'. These were made up of long, thin strips of land which enabled a farming community to form a comparatively compact rural village while also allowing a fair distribution of the arable land, pasture and water. The intensity of landuse declined with distance from the house, which was built at the head of the allotment, facing the main road. Vegetable gardens and orchards were planted near the house, and beyond these the land was cultivated for crops such as wheat or barley. The area furthest from the house was used for grazing.
9. These were generally constructed of half-timber (with either brick or wattle and daub infill panels), brick or stone. The former were beautifully crafted in a traditional German manner (fachwerk), with widely spaced vertical posts, cross rails and raking braces, fixed together by a combination of mortice and tenon joints and timber pegs. The most common plan found in the larger German farmhouses was the through-hall kitchen house, in which the central hall included a careful arrangement of cooking hearths and ovens, but examples of closed-passage or black kitchens have also been found. Simple cottages generally featured back-to-back fireplaces with a square entrance hall, often with external baking ovens. In elevation the exposed frames of the half-timbered buildings, and the typical, steeply pitched attic roofs are distinguishing features of South Australia's 'German' buildings.
10. For example, the number of farmers living in the village of Hahndorf decreased from 100% in 1844 to 11.6% in 1903, and the basic character of the town changed from a farming village, with small rural allotments arranged according to the available water supply and the distribution of fertile soil, to a service town arranged around the main road.
11. For example, between 1845 and 1855 three new rural districts were established by German settlers in the immediate vicinity of Lobethal, while in 1848 the advice of Lobethal's Pastor Fritzsche led to the establishment of a completely new German community some 16 kilometres to the north-east (11).

SUMMARY

GERMAN SETTLEMENT IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA : THE ADAPTATION AND MODIFICATION OF A TRADITIONAL RURAL LIFESTYLE IN A NEW WORLD

Annette Green (B.Arch)

South Australia was settled in 1836 on the basis of voluntary colonisation and the principle of a 'non-denominational and Christian civilisation'. With the assistance of George Fife Angas, a leading figure in the settlement of the new colony, a congregation of 'Old Lutherans' fleeing from religious persecution in the Prussian provinces, arrived in South Australia at the end of 1838. This began a chain of migration from Germany to South Australia, but following the death of Friedrich Wilhelm III in 1840 religious persecution ceased and most of those who migrated after this date did so for socio-economic reasons. While the first German settlers came from a small part of the Prussian Empire, later settlers came from a wide range of areas, including both rural and urban backgrounds.

The first German settlers accommodated their traditional farmlet villages within the established 80 acre subdivision pattern of the colony. Their first dwellings were simple slab huts, but these were later replaced by more substantial houses based on those they had known in their homelands. In settling in South Australia these early German migrants not only transported their material possessions and physical skills, but also their cultural experience and customs - the most important of which were a strong religious belief and a basic sense of community. Bound by these cultural and religious ties, and isolated from their British neighbours by both physical distance and language barriers, they quickly established their traditional farming and building practices in this new land.

By the late 1840s both the original German settlers and those that followed had begun to modify their farming practices, but traditional building techniques and house forms continued to be widely used until the 1870s. Outlasting both of these however, were the strong cultural links within the family and in community life which survived within rural settlements until the outbreak of the First World War and the closure of all Lutheran Church Schools in South Australia.

These successive phases of the 'naturalisation' of the German settlements in South Australia are clearly illustrated in the physical settlement pattern and buildings of their villages and farms. The areas occupied during the first thirty years of settlement include a high proportion of buildings which utilize traditional German plans (eg. through-hall kitchen and black kitchen plans) and building techniques (eg. the extensive use of beautifully crafted timber-framed houses and barns). After this time the German farmhouse design was increasingly influenced by the typical South Australian house forms of the period, and existing buildings were modified by the addition of villa ends, while new houses were built entirely in the contemporary style.

TRADUCTION

RESUME

L'INSTALLATION DES ALLEMANDS EN AUSTRALIE MERIDIONALE :
L'ADAPTATION ET LA MODIFICATION D'UN STYLE DE VIE RURAL
TRADITIONNEL DANS UN NOUVEAU MONDE.

D' A.L. GREEN (B. ARCH)

L'établissement de l'Australie Méridionale en 1936 fût basé sur une colonisation libre et sur le principe d'une civilisation non-sectaire et chrétienne". Avec l'aide de George Fife Angas, une importante personnalité de l'établissement de la nouvelle colonie, une assemblée de "vieux luthériens" fuyant la persécution religieuse des provinces prussiennes, arriva en Australie méridionale, fin 1838. Ceci entraîna une vague d'émigration d'Allemagne vers l'Australie méridionale, mais après la mort de Frédérick William III en 1840, la persécution religieuse cessa et la plupart de ceux qui émigrèrent d'Allemagne après cette date l'ont fait pour des raisons plus traditionnellement socio-économiques. Tandis que les premiers colons allemands venaient d'une petite part de l'empire prussien, ceux qui les ont suivis venaient d'un grand nombre de régions différentes, comprenant à la fois des régions rurales et urbaines.

Les premiers colons allemands installèrent leurs villages de petites fermes traditionnelles dans une sous-division de 32 hectares de la colonie. Leurs premières habitations étaient de simples cabanes, mais celles-ci furent remplacées plus tard par des maisons plus solides, basées sur celles qu'ils avaient connues dans leur pays natal. En s'installant en Australie méridionale, ces premiers immigrants allemands n'ont pas seulement transporté leurs biens et leurs compétences, mais aussi leur expérience agricole et leurs coutumes - dont les plus importantes étaient leur forte croyance religieuse et un esprit communautaire fondamental. Liés par ces attaches culturelles et religieuses, et isolés de leurs voisins britanniques, à la fois par la distance et par la barrière linguistique, ils ont appliqué rapidement leurs méthodes traditionnelles d'exploitation agricole et de construction dans ce nouveau pays.

Fin 1840, les premiers colons allemands, ainsi que ceux qui suivirent, commencèrent à modifier leurs méthodes d'exploitation agricoles. Néanmoins, les techniques traditionnelles de construction et l'allure des maisons continuèrent à être largement répandues jusque vers 1870. Toutefois, les puissants lieux culturels au sein de la famille et de la vie communautaire ont résisté encore plus longtemps dans les installations rurales jusqu'au déclenchement de la première guerre mondiale et la fermeture de toutes les écoles de l'église luthérienne en Australie Méridionale.

Ces phases successives de la "naturalisation" des installations allemandes en Australie Méridionale sont illustrées clairement par la forme même de cette installation et la construction de leurs villages et fermes. Les régions occupées pendant les trente premières années de la colonisation comprennent une grande proportion de bâtiments qui utilisent les plans traditionnels allemands (c'est-à-dire une cuisine/vestibule, et une cuisine noire) et les techniques de construction (c'est-à-dire l'utilisation répandue de belles charpentes en bois travaillées de maisons et de granges). Après cette période, l'allure des fermes allemandes fût de plus en plus influencée par celle de la maison typique de l'Australie Méridionale de l'époque, et les bâtiments existants furent modifiés par l'addition d'ailes-pavillon, tandis que les nouvelles maisons furent entièrement construites selon le style régional.