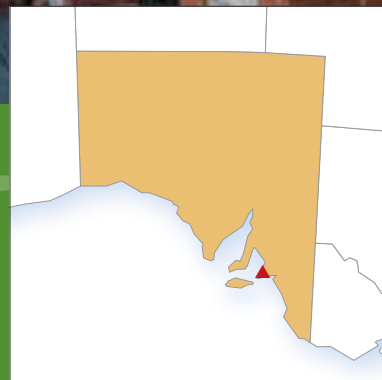


St. Paul's Cathedral



Date of inscription: 26 January 2006

South Australian Old and New Parliament Houses, South Australia

Australia's democratic system is unique in many ways. When we vote at ballot stations in state, territory and Federal elections many of the processes we today take for granted, such as everyone 18 years and over having the right to vote, secret ballots and one person/one vote, were unknown in Australia more than 150 years ago.

These ideas were political reforms that were first introduced in South Australia's Old and New Parliament Houses, making these buildings important to Australia's democratic history.

When Australia's colonies were first established, each was administered by a colonial governor, appointed by the British Government. Each colony gradually achieved self-government, however voting rights were often determined by a person's wealth and property status.

South Australia's Parliament was a world leader in establishing democracy during the 19th century. In 1856 it was the first Australian colony to grant full adult male suffrage, that is, the right to vote to males over the age of 21. This decision also gave Aboriginal men the right to vote.

Another significant Australian and international first occurred in 1894, when women, including Aboriginal women, were given the right to vote and from 1886 were able to stand for Parliament in South Australia.

These rights were later introduced in other parts of Australia and from the beginning of Federation in 1901. Many of world's largest democracies lagged behind Australia. Women in the United Kingdom did not receive the right to vote until 1918 (for women over the age of 30), the United States of America in 1919 and France in 1945.

Despite winning the right to sit in Parliament in 1894, it was 1918 before a woman stood for Parliament in South Australia, and a further 41 years before women were first elected to the South Australian Parliament.

In 1959 Jessie Cooper (House of Assembly) and Joyce Steele (Legislative Council) were the first women to be elected to South Australia's Parliament.

The secret ballot is a voting method that today is used around the world and is one of the most important democratic freedoms. Election choices are confidential to protect voters from intimidation or bribery.

In many parts of the world it is known as the 'Australian ballot', as the system was first used to vote in South Australia's 1856 Parliamentary election.

The parliamentary buildings themselves have gone through many metamorphoses. Parliament House as it stands today was eventually completed to commemorate the centenary of the State in 1936.

New Parliament House is located on one of Adelaide's major intersections (North Terrace and King William Street) and is a major civic landmark with a very strong presence.

