



Brompton is part of a group of historic, small inner city suburbs laid out in the 1840s as part of the Town of Hindmarsh. Its history, and its story, is one of numerous periods of decline and growth.

Brompton was once considered a slim, demand for worker housing in the 19th century saw land subdivided into small blocks on which sub-standard cottages were built to house workers desperate for cheap accommodation close to the floodwaters. The area, and many Brompton residents were employed in local yards. The Brompton landscape became pock-marked with pugholes, deep pits from which clay was dug as a result.

In the 1960s, when brick making and other industry was starting to move out, the government proposed a major freeway system that would have practically destroyed Brompton and its neighbouring suburbs. The uncertainty this proposal created left Brompton stagnating for nearly 20 years. It wasn't until the 1980s that the large open space provided by the disused pugholes and other vacant land was seen as an appreciation for Brompton as an inner city suburb.

Throughout Brompton's history one thing has remained strong and constant – a caring community that is proud of its heritage and willing to work together to lead a revitalised Brompton into the future.

This tour explores this historic suburb and touches on the memories of those who have called it home.

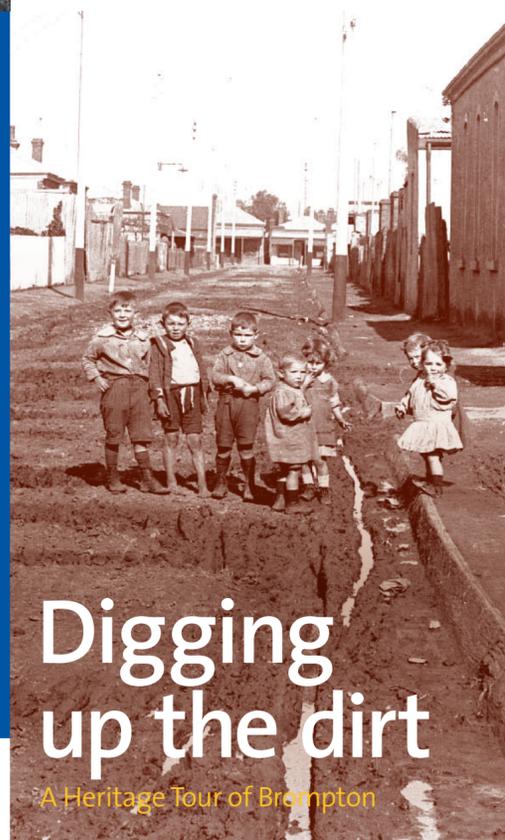
Please allow 1.5 to 2 hours to walk this trail. Trail length is approximately 3.5kms.

Please take care when walking – some of Brompton's footpaths are very narrow and uneven, particularly in the older streets such as Hawker Street and West Street. There are a number of places to stop along the route, including toilets for a meal or drink. If you find the length of the walk too long, we encourage you to complete it in a number of stages.

Start at Josiah Mitton Reserve located off of Burley Griffin Blvd and Wood Ave.

Photo: Brompton 1949 image courtesy of Department for Environment and Heritage.

Introduction



Digging up the dirt

A Heritage Tour of Brompton

Interested in knowing more?

Visit www.charlessturt.sa.gov.au or www.abc.net.au/adelaide to download a podtour narrated by Grant Cameron of 891 ABC Adelaide. The Hindmarsh Historical Society Museum in the old fire station, Hindmarsh Place, Hindmarsh, has many historical photos and artefacts from Brompton.

This walk was developed in partnership with St Anna's Hostel, the Hindmarsh Historical Society, Bowden Brompton Community Centre, Hindmarsh Greening, and local residents.

SOURCES:

- 'The Pughole Newspaper': Many of the quotes from Brompton residents included in this walking guide were sourced from this community newspaper produced in the 1980s.
- 'The History of Rowley Park Speedway, 1949 – 1979, First Edition', compiling Editor Phil Herreen, the Paraplegic & Quadraplegic Assoc of SA Inc.
- 'Pugholes & Progress', The Warehouse, Inc, 1984.
- 'Hindmarsh Town', Ronald Parsons, 1974.

MATS Plan

The MATS (Metropolitan Adelaide Transport System) plan, developed in the 1960s, proposed a network of freeways and expressways across Adelaide. Brompton and Bowden fell in the direct path of a north-south corridor. The State Government purchased many houses in preparation and the inner west slid into a serious decline. Buildings were allowed to become rundown and in some instances uninhabitable. Property values plummeted, the population fell, the community disintegrated. "My brother's house was in line, they were going to take his land. He didn't sell but lots of people did. Well, the MATS plan fell through and the houses were empty... The people that had to sell the houses, they went everywhere, wherever they could get a house. Many people couldn't afford to buy elsewhere with the money they got so they were in debt again. We lost contact with most of them" (Stan Malec).

In 1970 the MATS plan was suspended and finally abandoned in 1983. For all this time however, Brompton and Bowden wavered, unsure of their future as a place where people live. On the plus side, the MATS plan did make available, along with land once used for brick making, open space for redevelopment. On this 'new' suburb has been built, and as you tour Brompton you will observe the eclectic mix of old and new that has resulted from a suburb 'paused'.

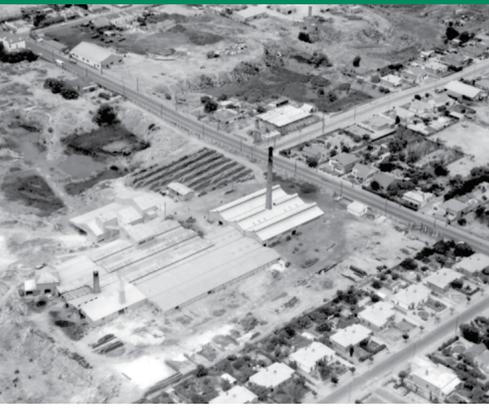


Photo: Looking across what is now Josiah Mitton Reserve, c1940s. Photographer Darian Smith.



- ❖ MATS Plan
- ❖ Josiah Mitton Reserve
- ❖ Burley Griffin Incinerator
- ❖ St Anna's Hostel
- ❖ Coglin St
- ❖ Brompton Park Streets
- ❖ Fred's House
- ❖ The Brompton Hotel
- ❖ Gas Works
- ❖ Former Roman Catholic Church
- ❖ Max Cowell's House
- ❖ Thomas J Smith's Premier Gym
- ❖ 54 - 56 West Street
- ❖ 68 - 72 West Street
- ❖ Uniting Church Hall
- ➔ **DETOUR** Brompton School
- ❖ Hawker St
- ❖ Bowden Brompton Community Centre & Garden
- ❖ Rowley Park
- ❖ Cottage Homes
- ❖ Excelsior Hotel



1 Josiah Mitton Reserve

"They used to call it Hollywood here, because of all the holes"

Brompton is built on brickyards in more ways than one. The excellent clay deposits in the area were recognised early on and many small, backyard brick and pottery making enterprises sprung up not long after Brompton was laid out. Clay (pug) was dug by hand. A building boom in the 1870s saw many of these family run yards absorbed by expanding larger yards. 100 years later brickyards were gone from Brompton. This reserve was once a large pughole that stretched from Hawker St across to Coglin St. It would have been eight to ten metres deep.

Brick making was hard work, hot in summer and cold and wet in winter. "I worked in a brickyard for 34 years. There were no working conditions at all in those days and the wages were low. I don't mean to knock the place where I worked because it was just as bad as anywhere else" (Joe Miller).

While adults slaved away digging clay, for local children pugholes were adventurous playgrounds.

"I grew up in West St, Brompton. There were a lot of pugholes around when we were there, one behind our place and a few down the street. There was another one across the road from us and we used to go down into it plenty of times. I'd get down in and I couldn't get up out again, so I'd have to walk over to where the carts came up in Chief St. We used to cook potatoes down there. We would dig a hole out of the clay side, put the potatoes in, cover it and then light the fire" (Beatrice Branford).

"On hot days during school lunchtimes, some of us boys used to slip away to the MET Pughole where there was a big pool of water. We could slide down the sides that were made of pug. When we came back to school covered in mud, they would give us six handers, but we used to say it was worth it for the half hour swim" (Burt Nieass).



Photo: Halletts Federal Brickworks Pit, 1920. Image courtesy of Primary Industries and Resources SA

The **Burley Griffin Incinerator** is located on Burley Griffin Bvd on the eastern side of the reserve.

2 Burley Griffin Incinerator

The 1930s Depression forced the closure of many Brompton brickyards. What to do with the pugholes became a pressing issue. For Hindmarsh Council and local industries they were a rubbish disposal opportunity. Pugholes began to be filled in with all kinds of rubbish, including the still smouldering rubble of a famous City department store destroyed by fire. The furnaces from this hung over Brompton for months. Other rumours circulate about what was dumped in pugholes including ammunition from WW2 and an entire bus!

In 1935 as part of a 'relief' scheme to provide work for the unemployed, construction of this Walter Burley Griffin (of Canberra fame) designed incinerator commenced. The design meant the furnace reflected heat internally and burnt waste gravitationally, filling the pughole below. The incinerator is now a Brompton icon, and is significant as one of the few Griffin-designed structures remaining in Australia.



Photo: Workers inside a similar Burley Griffin designed incinerator

From the incinerator, follow Burley Griffin Bvd to the south, passing Pens Cl on your right. **St Anna's Hostel** is around the bend at **number 41**.

3 St Anna's Hostel

St Anna's is one of many aged care facilities that has brought new residents to Brompton, and provided older Brompton-residents with an option to remain living in a community they love. Resident Fred McInnes is one example. He grew up in Brompton and before moving into St Anna's, lived in a nearby cottage built by his grandfather. St Anna's is connected to Brompton's history in other ways than just through its residents. The centres of the garden's roses occasionally turn black, possibly indicating that the past is always lurking just below the surface!

At the end of Burley Griffin Bvd turn left into Wood Ave. At the next corner turn left again. This is Second St. Brompton has always been semi-industrial and Second St, with its mix of older cottages, newer town housing and light industry, continues to represent this. Continue along Second St, stopping at the end of the block on **Coglin St**.

4 Coglin Street

Coglin St is named after Patrick Coglin, 'the King of Brompton Park', former politician and Mayor of Hindmarsh. He owned and subdivided this section of Brompton into very small blocks creating cramped living conditions. At one council meeting it was suggested that Coglin should have been ashamed to sell people such small allotments. Coglin interjected: 'Ashamed of it! I am ashamed of them not buying larger allotments!'



Photo: Pickering St, Brompton, August 1916. Image courtesy of History Trust of South Australia. Glass Negative Photographic Collection.

Cross over Coglin St and keep walking along Second St. Turn right into **Taylor St**.

5 Brompton Park Streets

Life in Brompton's worker streets, like this street and neighbouring Pickering St, was often a struggle especially during times of unemployment such as the Depression: "Life was extremely hard for women in those days. Many bore large families, and caring for the children and housework completely occupied their time and minds. Poverty excluded most women from the luxury of having their children born in a hospital" (Doug Meek).

"I can remember living in Pickering St. That was a street where there were 12 to 17 children in a family. They managed alright in those days; there would be three or more children to a bedroom. They survived. The footpaths were dirt, no cement or bitumen. We'd play marbles down there day after day and have races up and down the street" (Mr Tom Noakes).



Photo: Working Class Children, Hocking St Brompton Aug 1916.

Image courtesy of History Trust of South Australia. Glass Negative Photographic Collection.

Continue walking along Taylor St. At the end turn left. This is First St. Fred McInnes (who now lives in St Anna's hostel) used to live at **number 12**.

6 Fred's House



This is the house built by Fred McInnes' grandfather who came to Australia from Sweden and worked at the Gasworks. As one of eight children, Fred's family was fairly typical of the area - large and working class. The neighbouring train line provided a connection to the world further away. "The train ran along the back of the house. When hospital ships came back from the war they would transport all the wounded soldiers in the trains. We used to watch them all the time pass by" (Max McInnes).

Photo: Fred's grandfather

Across the road from Fred's house is the Merz Housing Co-op. There are several Housing Co-operatives in the area. This one is for artists.

On the corner of First and Pickering Sts is the recently renovated **Brompton Hotel**.

7 The Brompton Hotel

The Brompton Hotel opened in 1881. It was a venue for local activities, including concerts, court sessions and public meetings. Local bootmaker John Jones, was a regular customer. In 1892, he was elected to a brief but fiery stint as Mayor of Hindmarsh and the hotel became the site of many rowdy council meetings. Mayor Jones' favourite topic was to complain about 'bloated capitalists' among which he counted his fellow councillors. In 1893, with Mayor Jones refusing to stand down, all the councillors resigned, forcing another election to be held.

By the first part of the 1900s, the hotel's clientele appears to have somewhat mellowed: "Brompton Hotel used to be chock-a-block with workmen, they had to employ four barmen, but you would never see any fights or that" (Miss Laura McInnes).

In the 1990s, the hotel was still considered working class despite the emerging rejuvenation of the suburb. At that time it was popular for its scantily clad waitresses who were protected from leering patrons by specially erected barriers.



Photo: Brompton Hotel, 1987

Continue walking along First St past the Brompton Hotel. Stop at the next corner on the left which is West St. From here you can see the tall bluestone wall of the **Gasworks** at the end of First St. The former **Roman Catholic Church** is on the corner of First and West Sts.

Gasworks

The Brompton Gasworks first delivered gas to Adelaide in 1863. Along with the brickyards and other manufacturing industries, the Gasworks became a major employer in the area, and during its heyday, employed several hundred workers. The division between workers and company hierarchy was strictly enforced: "It is said that the man who took the Chief Engineer his morning tea each day doffed his hat on entering the office, and bowed repeatedly as he left" (Doug Meek).

While the production of gas in an inner city suburb would now be considered polluting, some saw it as providing health benefits: "When coal was burned to make gas, people used to bring their asthmatic children here and walk them around. They used to say that the burning of coal cleared the air" (Miss Laura McInnes).



Photo: Men of the Gasworks

8 Former Roman Catholic Church of Our Most Holy Savior

Now a private residence, this small chapel opened in 1868 as a Sisters of St Joseph's school. Under the guidance of their founder Mary MacKillop, the Josephites brought 'good Catholic instruction' to what they considered one of the poorest districts in South Australia. Before the chapel was built, the building from which the Josephites taught their 80 students was described as being literally worse than a stable: "The inconveniences and squalid misery of the place would hardly be believed" (Father Woods).

Turn into West St and start heading north. Not far along on your left is number 28, the childhood home of author **Max Colwell**.

9 Max Colwell's House

In his semi-autobiographical book 'Half Days and Patch Pants' Max Colwell writes of life in Brompton during the 1930s as told through the eyes of a ten year old boy. The community Colwell describes is full of characters bound together by poverty. Pugholes still dominate life, only many are abandoned and slowing filling with rubbish. They symbolise unemployment and destitution. Due to Colwell's book, this house has come to represent the difficult social and economic times of the 1930s Depression and the interwar period.

Further along, opposite the corner of Second St is **Thomas J Smith's Premier Gym**.

10 Thomas J Smith's Premier Gym

Larrikinism and the ability to find a little bit of trouble is a badge of honour worn by many former childhood residents of Brompton. In response, the community has actively sought to provide services and entertainment to keep its youth on 'the straight and narrow'. A former Workers Hall for "the social and educational advancement of workers", this old style boxing gym continues a long tradition of instilling discipline into 'wayward' youth.

Keep going along West St passing **54-56** and **68-72** on your left.

11 54 - 56 West Street

This section of West St is significant for its cluster of worker housing. It was common for local employers, particularly brick makers, to build houses for their workers. Rent was equal to one day's pay. These cottages were built in 1874 by the Hocking brothers, one of Brompton's most important industrial families. Their brickyard was also located along this street.



Photo: Pearce and Irene Hamence of West St, 1912

12 68 - 72 West Street

In 1877 the Hocking brothers extended their land and soon afterwards built this row of attached houses for workers. The cottages are now owned by the Paris Flat Housing Co-operative as low cost housing for community minded people.



Photo: Corner of West and Third Sts, 1987

A short distance from 68-72 is the intersection of West and Third Sts. The **Uniting Church Hall**, now a dance studio, is on the left fronting on to Third St.

13 Uniting Church Hall

This hall, built by the Methodist Mission in 1909, is one of the few surviving mission buildings in the area. Mission work has a long tradition in Brompton, providing soup kitchens, clothing supplies and 'relief' work for the poor and unemployed.

During the Depression, brick production fell and families crammed together in houses. Cash was in short supply but that didn't mean an end to fun and entertainment. Admission to social events was sometimes a pound of sugar or potatoes. The strong community spirit that is still a part of Brompton today became even more important during these tough times: "I reckon the Depression used to hold a lot of people together. We all used to help one another and people would be friendly, lend each other things. I got retrenched and was out of work for two or three years" (George Hamrahan).

Keep walking along West St until you reach Hawker St (a main road). If you are feeling fit, you may wish to take the optional 'detour' to see the historic Brompton School. The detour is approximately 1km (see directions in the detour box). Otherwise, turn left at **Hawker St** and keep walking until you get to the intersection of Green St.

Brompton School

Stay on West St and cross over Hawker St. The Brompton School is at the end of West St on the corner of Torrens Rd. Turn left onto Torrens Rd.

Brompton School

When the Brompton School was built in the late 1880s not everyone was happy with the choice of location. At that time, this was an isolated site. The nearest house was nearly a kilometre away! In 1906, 800 students attended the school. A diphtheria outbreak three years later led to accusations that the school had deteriorated to a filthy state.

During the Depression school life mirrored the hardships of home: "Going to school wasn't exactly a bed of roses, especially in winter. Many had no shoes and would sit miserably in the frigid classroom, their feet blue from the cold. Those who did have shoes stuffed cardboard inside to cover the holes as the soles wore out" (Doug Meek).

By the mid-1970s half of the student population was Greek, reflecting a cultural shift in the Brompton community. The school is now the Bowden Brompton Community School, a specialist high school.



Photo: Brompton School Choir Practice, c1906

From here continue west along Torrens Rd and at the next corner turn left onto Wattle St. At the end of this street turn right (this is Fifth St). Green St runs off to the left. Take Green St to get back to **Hawker St**.

14 Hawker Street

Hawker St is synonymous with Brompton. Once the main artery of this group of suburbs, by the 1980s Hawker St had fallen into such a neglected state it was considered the worse street in Adelaide. Prior to 1956, trams ran its length, carrying crowds to the Cheltenham races and Croydon cinema. Brompton lads were known to 'willy' on the rear to save the penny fare.

Today, Hawker St owes much of its creative appeal to community action group Hindmarsh Greening. What started out as a desire to beautify the district has led to the creation of public art, mosaic pots, signs and stobie pole paintings that have become iconic to the inner-west.



Photo: Hindmarsh Greening artwork

Turn left into Green St (or if you have completed the detour and returned to Hawker St via Green St, continue along). Not far along on the left is the **Bowden Brompton Community Centre and Garden**.

15 Bowden Brompton Community Centre & Garden

The Bowden Brompton Community Centre was established by a community group that came together in 1972 as a self help organisation for residents to address development, community and housing issues.

The community garden began its life as the Hindmarsh City Farm in 1986. The idea for the garden was wonderful, but the implementation was woeful. In 1989, following complaints from the public about filth, rats, marijuana and misuse of funds, the garden was threatened with closure. It was saved by a group of passionate local residents. Today the garden provides an important space for local green thumbs to have the veggie patch that their small backyards do not allow.

From here, return to Hawker St and turn left. A short distance away is Coglin St. The Excelsior Hotel is on the corner. Turn right into Coglin St. Keep walking until you reach Fifth St, which is a small street heading off to the left. Turn into Fifth St. This takes you into a modern housing estate built on the site of a former speedway. You will need to follow Francis Ridley Circuit around to the left to reach a small park where a marker for **Rowley Park** is located.

16 Rowley Park

If Hawker St was the artery of Brompton, then Rowley Park was its blood. For 30 years from 1949, Rowley Park was Adelaide's favourite speedway. Built in the hollow of an old pughole, Rowley Park provided entertainment at a time when there was little else to do of a night. "Everyone goes to Rowley Park" its advertising claimed. And on Friday nights, 'Speedway night', everyone did go. A car couldn't be driven from the Excelsior Hotel to the Rowley Park gates because of the crowds of people.

The 1960s was the greatest era for speedway. Fans came in the thousands to watch their heroes from around Australia and the world. Legends were made here, including that of American Bob 'Two Gun' Tattersall, who in a fifty lap derby lost his left front wheel but continued to pass car after car for 21 more laps until his motor finally gave up.



Photo: Rowley Park action, 1975.



Photo: Rowley Park Speedway, 1950s. Photographer Darian Smith.

"I used to go every week, but I never used to go in the speedway because I used to go over - I knew an old lady named Mrs McNab, and she had a seat on top of the fence. Mabel used to take Alan when he was a baby and we used to go and watch the speedway. You could watch all over the thing, it was down low. Ah, it was a good night, it was. It's a shame it's gone" (Murray Johnson).

It is hard to imagine the roar of engines and crowds in this now peaceful estate. Head north through the park and along a landscaped walkway between houses to John Hindmarsh Front, where the estate meets Torrens Rd. Turn right on to Torrens Rd and then take the next right back into Coglin St. On your right are the **Cottage Homes** at 146.

17 Cottage Homes

These cottages were built to provide care for the aged and infirmed. Cottage Homes Incorporated managed and ran the homes from 1890 until 1965 when they were sold. The seven, two room cottages were initially occupied by ten elderly women. They are now State Heritage listed.

Continue along Coglin St back to Hawker St and the **Excelsior Hotel** on the corner.

18 Excelsior Hotel

During the brick making years, Brompton's social life revolved around church and pubs. In the local pubs, brickyard workers quenched the thirst created by the drying effects of the kiln heat and clay. While some patronised the pubs every day, pay day was most popular. Men would secure an amount of money in their shirt tail or in a handkerchief pinned to their chest to ensure that there was still some pay to take home to their families at the end of each session.



Photo: Excelsior Hotel, 1905

Turn right into Hawker St, and head back to Josiah Mitton Reserve, a short distance away on your left. A large metal chain sculpture signals the entrance. Your tour ends here.