

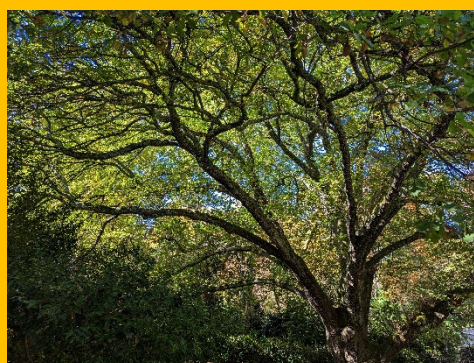
1-31 May
2026
South
Australia's **History Festival**

Adelaide Hills Garden Affair

Sunday 3rd May 2026

Discover Autumn Magic at the Garden Affair in Historic Stangate Gardens.

Explore a hidden treasure as this historic Hills Garden glows in autumn. Hear Merilyn Kuchel OAM share its engaging history and join her guided tour. Discover the famous giant oak and significant trees on a self-guided walk. Enjoy traditional morning tea, activities and garden-related stalls, all part of the Adelaide Hills Garden Affair event.



Discover Autumn Magic at the Garden Affair in Historic Stangate Gardens.

Merilyn Kuchel OAM and Maggie Fletcher

Nestled in the leafy valley of Aldgate in the Adelaide Hills is the garden wonderland of the historic **Stangate House and Gardens**, a 1.6 hectare property surveyed in 1855. The **Adelaide Hills Garden Affair** is a unique opportunity to discover this historic property in the Adelaide Hills and one of the Hill's best kept secrets.

Home to one of Australia's largest oak trees where people have picnicked for over a hundred years, the gardens are also recognised by the International Camellia Society as an **International Camellia Garden of Excellence**. While the camellias are in full bloom in spring the garden has something magical to offer visitors in this spectacular autumn season of reds and golds.

The sweeping manicured lawns offer a range of locations for the large range of garden related stalls and activities of the Adelaide Hills Garden Affair. Held during one of this garden's most dramatic seasons, the event has the garden's autumn splendour as its backdrop.

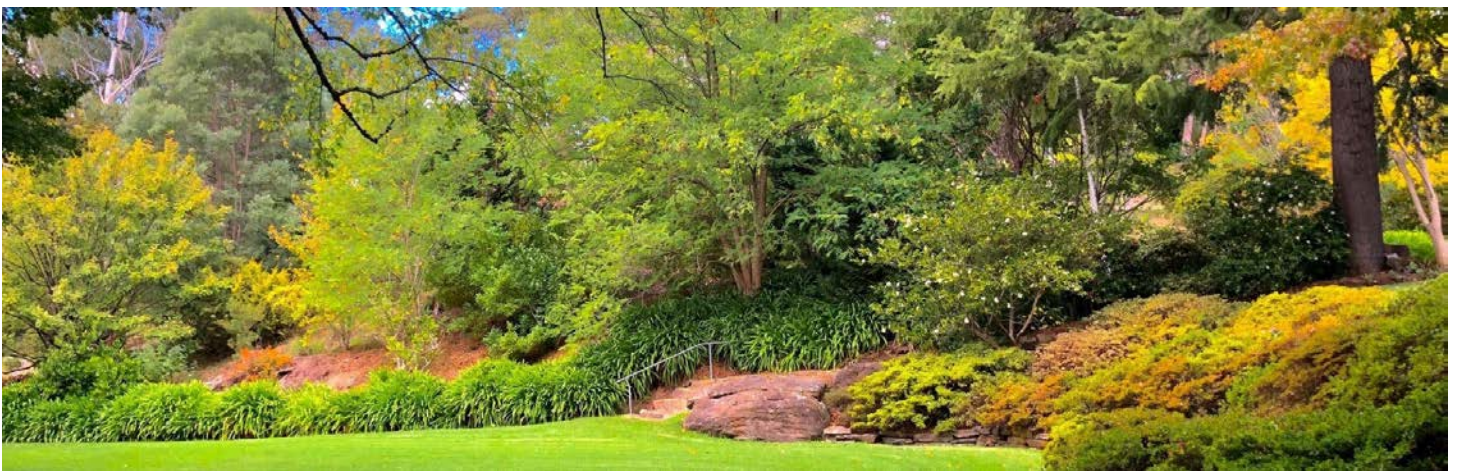


Photo courtesy of National Trust SA

Erasing ancient custodianship of the Peramangk and Kaurna, the Hills Land & Investment Company divided this region into allotments for settler ownership in 1882. The Stangate subdivision opposite the Aldgate Railway Station was purchased in 1892 by Florence Emily Thomas a descendent of Kyffin Thomas, one of the first British settlers of SA. The property was further developed in the 1940s by the Rev Raymond Cornish and his wife Gwyneth after their return from London. Florence had left the property to her daughter Gwyneth who later bequeathed the property to the National Trust SA in 1966.

Gwyneth had married Rev Raymond Cornish the younger brother of Elsie Cornish. Elsie was one of Adelaide's most respected garden designers in the 1920s and 30s who, at the age of 46, had begun a career as a horticulturalist and garden designer. She was a keen follower of Gertrude Jekyll, the most influential English garden designer of the time. Stangate's mature gardens are now a legacy of these influences.

With the help of Elsie, Reverend Cornish and Gwyneth developed the garden. To begin, Elsie and Gwyneth planted a Tilia avenue along the driveway, many oaks, conifers and five camellias, retained some Australian grey box and red gums, built stone walls and planted thousands of bluebells.

They rerouted the Aldgate Creek to flow through the garden and lined it with a stone wall to create an enticing feature cutting beneath the shady canopy of now mature deciduous trees. This area is now known as the 'Bird Bath' garden planted with hydrangeas and ferns. On the gentle slopes of the land, Elsie designed tiered plantings and lawns that are interlinked by meandering paths throughout the

property. Elsie also took advantage of the cooler Adelaide Hills climate, by choosing plants known for their autumnal oranges and yellows.

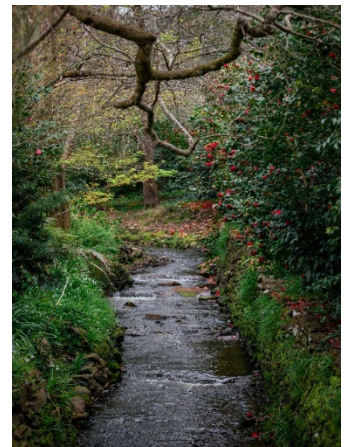
The significant collection of over 750 camellias, and the gardens, are now maintained through the collaborative relationship for over 45 years between the Camellia Society SA, Adelaide Hills Branch, the National Trust SA and more recently the Rhododendron Society SA, tending the camellia collection and planting other ornamental trees, shrubs and perennials. Although not flowering in autumn, the garden features a group of Leawood camellias that are over 120 years old and transplanted in 1996 from a property alongside the old Adelaide to Melbourne highway when the Southeastern freeway was being built. The collection also features other historical camellias bred before 1920. Come back in spring for one of Stangate's open days to enjoy this collection at its best.

As the gardens explode with a riot of autumn hues, the paths are littered with autumn leaves and lined with charming woodland cyclamens and the hydrangea beds are aglow as the large blooms take on their autumn bronzing. The garden also features a Heritage Rose collection donated by the Heritage Rose Society of SA and was planted in 2021. Nearby are *Azalea kurume*, hardy azaleas flowering intermittently from autumn through to spring. Most recently, the Rhododendron Society SA have planted 150 new Azaleas and Rhododendrons into a new bed on the Lower Lawn and on the slopes of the eastern hill.

In January of 2020, National Trust Garden volunteers led by Horticulturalist and Garden Historian, Marilyn Kuchel OAM began working on the garden surrounding the house. They removed a huge old cypress hedge behind the house and planted the now sunny bank with the 30 heritage roses. In the tradition of Getrude Jekyll, they have developed an herbaceous border with colour themed perennials.

Visitors to this wonderland can explore with the map that includes a register of 64 significant trees including the 160–180 year-old *Quercus robur*. Mystery surrounds the planting of this big oak tree which is recorded on the National Register of Big Trees as the second largest oak in Australia. Legend has it that an acorn was planted by an early settler on his way through the Hills perhaps as early as 1838. Others believe that it was planted by Sarah Hawkins wife of the publican who built the nearby Aldgate Pump Hotel opened in 1864.

With only a little of the native vegetation retained, the gardens are a slice of English countryside, nostalgically transposed by British settlers into this part of the Adelaide Hills. Clearly rich moist soils on the banks of the Aldgate Creek and the cool climate have provided perfect growing conditions.





Newly completed Aldgate Railway Station rail yards and lines with approaching locomotive c. 1883
Collection of State Library SA- B4143



Aldgate Railway Station c 1915
Collection of State Library SA- B11457



Aldgate Railway Station Garden 1914
Collection of State Library SA PRG
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The Hut Community Centre

Founded in **1979**, **The Hut** grew from a small community initiative into a key support service for the Adelaide Hills. In **2011**, volunteers refurbished the old Aldgate Railway Station building to create The Hut's new home — linking Aldgate's transport past with its community-driven present.

History of Aldgate Railway Station & The Hut Community Centre

Aldgate Railway Station opened on **14 March 1883** as part of the Adelaide–Wolseley line during a major expansion of rail transport into the Adelaide Hills. A second platform was added in **December 1886**, reflecting the station's early growth and importance.

By **1910**, most Adelaide services were extended to terminate at Aldgate, making it a busy Hills hub before widespread car ownership. For decades, the railway was the most reliable way for residents to reach Adelaide.

The station closed on **23 September 1987** but remains a classic example of 1880s stone railway architecture. Historic photographs show the station surrounded by tall gums, steam locomotives and early travellers passing through what was already a thriving Hills township.

Aldgate had long been a stopping point for travellers heading to the Echunga goldfields, with the Aldgate Pump Hotel a convenient watering point. The arrival of the railway strengthened this role and helped shape the township's identity and growth.

Local Land & Early Settlement

In **1882**, the Hills Land & Investment Company believed Aldgate would be the outermost suburban station. Lots 13–15 beside the station, were bought by **Cornelius Proud**, then sold in 1892 to **Florence Emily Thomas**, who later purchased lots 17–19. A cottage was built on lot 19 in **1898** for Florence and her daughter **Gwynneth** directly opposite the Aldgate station.

After Gwynneth's marriage to **Rev Samuel Raymond Cornish** in 1927, the couple returned to South Australia in 1940 and began building **Stangate House** and landscaping the gardens.



The Hut Community Centre 2011 © James Allen