

'Flagstaff House', Keswick Barracks

Keswick Barracks's prominent headquarters building is listed on the Register of the National Estate. Within the Barracks, however, a number of other buildings are of historical interest, none less than the residence provided to house the commandant which is now the only house in use as a residence in the Barracks.

History records that the single storey brick building was erected in 1936 for Brigadier Athelstan M. Martyn, CMG, DSO, at a cost of £3458 'specially to accommodate the needs of a commandant by having a dressing room, a very necessary adjunct for a military officer; a box room and cleaning room necessary for the storage of trunks and for the cleaning of Military kit - plans should meet the requirement of any service officer who is likely to occupy the quarter'.

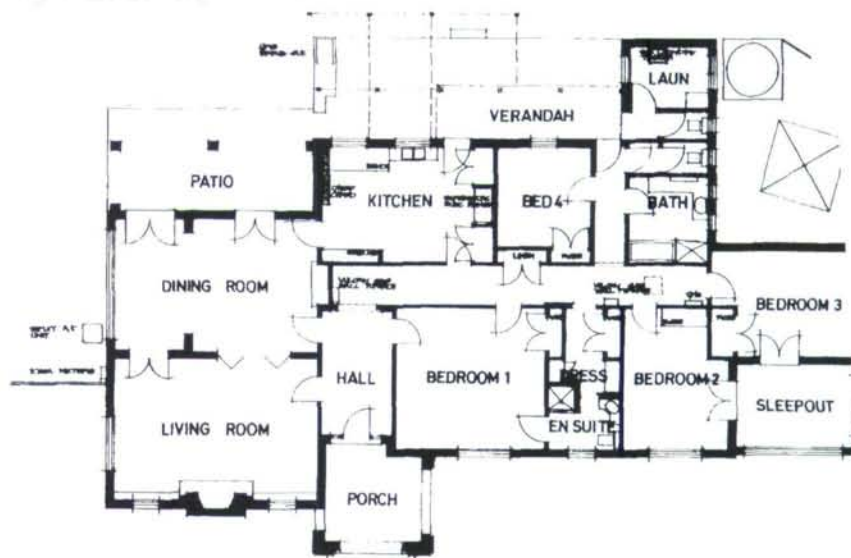
The house was continuously used to house the Army commander in South Australia from 1937 until 1992, apart from the period of World War II, when it was used as a Staff Corps mess while the Commandant chose to live in the South Australian Hotel. Since 1992, it has been home to the Head of the Defence Centre - Adelaide.

The built form of the house is little changed since it was first constructed although traffic noise on busy Anzac Highway made it necessary to erect a substantial fence which hides the street aspect. For a description of the house, and one which also tells much about the life and times of the period, a 1937 newspaper article spares the reader no detail. (See box).



The main entrance to 'Flagstaff House', Keswick Barracks.

Having himself lived in the house, the Defence Housing Authority's South Australian Regional Manager, Brigadier (Retd) Max Lemon has taken a particular interest in maintaining the history and character of the house as well as making it a functional residence for its occupants. Substantial updating of the residences old bathrooms and laundry, and other improvements were effected in 1993.



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*New Home of Base Commandant at Keswick
Building Up Its Character
A Woman's Task*

No matter what house is built, or whom it is for, there develops within its walls a personality. Those who have gone to its making and the men and women who have lived their days and nights beneath its roof, all leave some intangible atmosphere which gives the house its ultimate character.

Everyone who has passed the Keswick Barracks has been interested for months past in the new brick bungalow which has been gradually developing. It has now arrived, and thanks to its parents, godparents, and relations, is not only progressing well, but is firmly established. It is the home of the Base Commandant, Brig. A. M. Martyn, Mrs. Martyn and their two daughters, Misses Joan and Merris Martyn.

Built in a comfortable style, it has a certain military appearance which doubtless was inevitable. This, of course, may be counteracted by the garden when it matures and adds the loveliness of greenery and flowers to the architecture. Lawns are being laid down in front and back, and there is a piazza where roses will be encouraged to find their way as the years go on.

To any woman with a creative brain there is no more pleasing prospect than to start a virgin garden and train it into the way it should go according to her ideas of beauty. Colour, perfume, shade, and shadows are at her command, and with her lies the decision as to what shall enhance this and that corner.

"I know," said Mrs. Martyn, "but the trouble in the Army is that you just see the dream materialising and away you are sent to some other city!"

From the porch one enters a charming hall where the brigadier's love of war-like weapons is displayed on the walls with aboriginal spears and native weapons. There is a pair of candlesticks, too, which bring back memories of the great war, for they were found among the ruins of a church at Villers Brettoneux when this town was practically destroyed.

The telephone is placed in a corner of the hall at a convenient spot to anyone in the house. The large living room on the left has a polished floor with a central rug, and there are restful shades of green and old gold in the charming furniture.

In one corner Mrs. Martyn has defied superstition and has a splash of colour with peacock feathers, which also seem to pick up the colours of the room, while over the mantelpiece is a picture which holds the warm tones of the candlesticks below.

The fireplace has been designed to throw out as much heat as possible, and although the house faces the afternoon sun there is a porch leading through the northern end of the room through which a breeze may find its way on a hot day. Through folding doors the dining room is reached, and here is an innovation with a built in sideboard which gives an artistic finish to the room. The feet of the guest at dinner will rest on a blue Chinese carpet beneath the polished table.

In the kitchen is an alcove for breakfast, and the kitchen is something to dream about if you are domestically inclined, for here is the modern gas stove and oven with a hot water cistern above, and the sink is of aluminium. All the cupboards are wide, but military people must be expected to be giants, for some of the upper cupboards require a ladder to reach them.

In the laundry is a gas copper and every convenience, and in addition to the bedrooms there is a sleep-out, a porch, and a back verandah.