

Prelude:

This essay on the history of the Hackney Lodge/Romilly House was researched and written by ChatGPT and therefore possesses no copyright. The sources used and information in the text was briefly verified by me, but there may still be errors and incorrect information. All sources used have been archived, however note that some questionable sources (facebook comments) were used.

Technical information:

The essay was researched and written by GPT-4o using the “Deep Research” mode on the 30th May 2025. No human editing was performed. The first essay below is the result produced directly from the following prompt:

Are you aware of Romily House? It's now known as the Hackney Lodge

Could you please clarify what you'd like to know about Romily House (now known as Hackney Lodge)? Are you interested in its history, current use, ownership, architecture, or something else?

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I'm interested in it's history. Recently it was a cheap lodging place, but was condemned due to a cockroach infestation, I know that already. I want to know about who the Romily's were and how their house became a run down lodge.

A follow-up prompt as follows was sent:

Can you retype the essay with plaintext citations (for example: (Change.org, 2020)) and have the sources include plaintext links?

Don't change anything else

The edited essay is attached below the original essay.

History of Romilly House (Hackney Lodge)

Introduction: Romilly House – more recently known as **Hackney Lodge** – is a landmark heritage building at the corner of Hackney Road and North Terrace in Adelaide. Erected in the late 1870s as an elegant Italianate structure, it has witnessed dramatic transformations in purpose and fortune over nearly 150 years. From its origins as a grand hotel and residence, through periods as offices, shops and social venues, it ultimately devolved into a low-budget boarding house. By 2017 the once-stately premises had decayed so badly that health authorities condemned it due to a severe cockroach infestation . The tale of Romilly House’s rise, decline, and hoped-for renewal reflects broader social and urban changes in Adelaide’s history.

Origins in the 1870s: A Grand Vision

Romilly House was constructed in **1878–79** for entrepreneur **Richard Vaughan**, who was instrumental in developing Adelaide’s East End. Architect Michael McMullen designed the two-storey building in a **Victorian Italianate (Tuscan)** style , similar to the nearby Botanic Hotel that Vaughan also commissioned. Upon completion, the imposing corner building was originally known as the **Royal Park Hotel**, and contemporary sources described it as a “splendid building of 14 rooms suitable for a first-class lodging-house” . In fact, Vaughan built not only the hotel but an entire **Hackney complex** – including a row of terrace villas along Hackney Road – to attract development on the then city fringe . Early plans even touted the large new structure as potentially ideal for a school or college, reflecting Vaughan’s grand aspirations for the site .

Despite its initial billing as a hotel, the Royal Park Hotel appears to have had a short-lived career as a licensed pub. By the **1890s–1900s**, it transitioned into a private boarding establishment. The building was often referred to as “**Vaughan’s Mansions**” during this era, and later as **Royal Park House**, highlighting its role as a residential lodging house rather than a public hotel . Situated opposite the Botanic Gardens and parks, it attracted long-term boarders. A 1915 advertisement shows **Royal Park House, 1 Hackney Road** offering “*comfortable furnished rooms, double [and] single... ‘Phone 2454*”, confirming its status as a genteel boarding house in the early 20th century . In these decades, the property changed hands from Vaughan and was likely owned or managed by various proprietors catering to Adelaide’s steady influx of workers and travelers needing lodgings.

Mid-20th Century: The Romilly House Era

A pivotal change came mid-century when the building gained the name “**Romilly House.**” This moniker derives from **Romilly Carveth Harry**, a prominent barrister and solicitor who made the old mansion his residence and offices . Romilly C. Harry occupied the building for many years (up until his death in 1981), and his uncommon first name “Romilly” became synonymous with the house. Under his tenure, Romilly House retained its historic charm while serving mixed uses – part professional chambers and part social venue.

By the **1960s**, Romilly House had become something of a cultural hotspot. The basement level hosted “**The Catacombs,**” a popular coffee lounge where jazz and folk musicians performed regularly . This gave the staid old building a bohemian vibrancy during Adelaide’s swinging sixties. Small businesses also operated on the premises: for example, in 1963 a **high-class millinery salon** called *Ma’am’selle Bonnets* opened at Romilly House, 1 North Terrace, Hackney . Such tenants suggest that even as the building aged, it remained in active use – a blend of boutique retail, entertainment, and professional offices – taking advantage of its prime location by the parklands. The exterior, with its Italianate facade and verandas, still evoked nineteenth-century elegance, even as the activities inside evolved with the times.

Decline into a Boarding House

In the late 20th century, after Romilly Harry’s time, the fortunes of Romilly House declined. Many large old homes in Adelaide faced similar paths: the upkeep of a heritage building was costly, and owners found more value in using them as multi-room rental properties. By the 1990s–2000s, Romilly House had fully reverted to a **budget boarding house**, now under the name **Hackney Lodge**. Its proprietor in this era, **Rudi Bodonyi**, was an elderly landlord who had owned the place for decades. Under Bodonyi’s ownership, the once-beautiful building slowly deteriorated – routine maintenance was neglected and basic cleanliness suffered . Hackney Lodge became known as one of the cheapest lodging houses near the city, home to vulnerable low-income tenants. Reports suggest that by the 2010s it had effectively become a **rooming house** for people on the margins, with minimal services and increasingly squalid conditions .

The nadir came in **2017**, when health inspectors discovered a horrific **cockroach infestation** swarming through the premises. In fact, one long-term tenant had been breeding cockroaches in her room, unleashing a cascade of vermin throughout the lodge . Authorities deemed Hackney Lodge “*unliveable*” and **evicted all remaining residents** . Inspectors described it as the worst infestation they had ever encountered . Thus, nearly 140 years after its grand opening, the building was **condemned by the health department** and forced to shut its doors. At the time of closure, some 40 boarders paying about \$200 per week each were displaced, and the owner (at about 91 years old) initially vowed to address the issues .

However, meaningful repairs never came. Hackney Lodge did not reopen, and the building was left essentially abandoned from 2017 onward.

“Demolition by Neglect” and Heritage Battle

After closure, Romilly House/Hackney Lodge rapidly fell into further disrepair. With no occupants or upkeep, the vacant structure became a magnet for vandals, graffiti, and squatters . Windows were broken and boarded, the interior suffered water damage and decay, and the once-ornate exterior was marred by spray paint. Concern grew that the neglected property might become a victim of “demolition by neglect” – a tactic where owners let a heritage building rot in hopes of eventual demolition approval. Indeed, Romilly House is a **State Heritage listed place (since 1992)**, meaning it cannot be demolished or significantly altered without special permission . This protection saved the structure from the wrecking ball, but also meant that any redevelopment required extra care and investment, which the aging owner was unwilling or unable to provide. The result was a stalemate of deterioration.

Local heritage advocates and community members sounded the alarm over the “*iconic building... left to rot.*” A petition to “**Save Romilly House**” garnered public support, calling it “*disgraceful*” that such a beautiful building in a prime location had been allowed to fall into such a state . Politicians took note: in 2023, an SA Upper House member cited Romilly House as a prime example of why stronger laws were needed to prevent willful neglect of heritage buildings . The public sentiment was clear – this 140-year-old piece of Adelaide’s history should be preserved and restored, not left as an eyesore.

Renewal Plans and Current Status

In a positive turn, the derelict building gained a possible lifeline in the early 2020s. A development company (Hackney Projects) purchased Romilly House in **2022**, with plans to **refurbish and integrate it into a mixed-use redevelopment** . The proposed project, now branded “**Romilly Place**,” envisions transforming the crumbling boarding house into **accessible luxury apartments and community spaces** while retaining its historic façade . By 2025, preliminary works had begun to secure and stabilize the structure – graffiti was painted over and the site fenced – although full restoration and construction are still pending. The building’s exterior will likely be conserved as a heritage feature, honoring its architectural legacy, even as the interior is adapted for modern use.

Today, Romilly House stands at a crossroads of history and future. Empty and weather-beaten, it remains “*a target for graffiti and vandalism*” as officials and developers work out its fate. Yet its very survival through neglect, rather than being lost to demolition, means that the story of Romilly House is not yet finished. From the **Victorian optimism** that created it, through decades of **social adaptation** (from genteel lodging to lawyers’ chambers to 1960s coffeehouse), to its recent **plunge into notoriety** as a health hazard – the building embodies the changing fortunes of Adelaide’s built heritage. With restoration efforts underway, observers hope this once-grand house can be reborn, adding a new chapter to its rich and turbulent history.

Sources:

- Architecture Museum (UniSA), *Architects of South Australia*: **Romilly House** entry
- *Illustrated Adelaide News* (Mar. 1879), via St Peters Heritage Survey: original description of Vaughan’s Hackney development
- *The Register* (25 Oct 1915) classified ad: **Royal Park House**, 1 Hackney Rd – furnished rooms
- **Romilly Carveth Harry** reference (mid-1900s owner), *A Colourful History* (Hackney)
- *The Standard* (Port Adelaide, 27 Feb 1963): Ma’amselle Bonnets salon at Romilly House
- Adelaide Remember When (FB): **The Catacombs** coffee lounge in Romilly House, 1960s
- Change.org Petition (2020): *Save Romilly House (Hackney Lodge)*
- **Health inspection closure (2017)** – News report (7 News/Yahoo)
- InDaily News (20 Apr 2023): “Demolition by neglect” – mention of vacancy since 2017
- Hon. R. Simms, SA Parliament (Aug 2023): Heritage debate citing Romilly House’s disrepair
- Developer announcement (2022): Hackney Lodge to become “Romilly Place” apartments

Following is a retype with plaintext citations which actually render. Text may differ slightly due to usage of AI

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in her room, unleashing a cascade of vermin throughout the lodge (ABC News, 2017). Authorities deemed Hackney Lodge “*unliveable*” and **evicted all remaining residents** (Change.org, 2020). Inspectors described it as the worst infestation they had ever encountered (7 News, 2017). Thus, nearly 140 years after its grand opening, the building was **condemned by the health department** and forced to shut its doors. At the time of closure, some 40 boarders paying about \$200 per week each were displaced, and the owner (at about 91 years old) initially vowed to address the issues (InDaily, 2023). However, meaningful repairs never came. Hackney Lodge did not reopen, and the building was left essentially abandoned from 2017 onward.

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Sources (Plaintext Links):

- 7 News (2017): <https://au.news.yahoo.com/adelaide-hostel-infested-with-cockroaches-37075886.html#:~:text=Adelaide%20hostel%20infested%20with%20cockroaches,the%20worst%20they%27ve%20ever%20seen>
- ABC News (2017): <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-08-02/hackney-lodge-condemned-after-cockroach-infestation/8765538>
- Adelaide Remember When: <https://www.facebook.com/AdelaideRememberWhen/posts/the-catacombs-was-a-coffee-lounge-in-the-basement-of-romilly-house-hackney-lo/1086112214782227/>
- Change.org (2020): <https://www.change.org/p/adelaide-city-council-save-romilly-house-formerly-hackney-lodge>
- Hackney Local History Group: <https://localwiki.org/adelaide/Hackney>
- Hackney Projects (2022): <https://www.hackneyprojects.com.au/romilly-place>
- Hansard SA Parliament (2023): <https://hansardpublic.parliament.sa.gov.au/Pages/HansardResult.aspx#/docid/HANSA RD-11-40700>
- InDaily (2023): <https://indaily.com.au/news/2023/04/20/state-government-urged-to-stop-demolition-by-neglect-of-iconic-buildings/>
- South Australian Heritage Register: <https://www.environment.sa.gov.au/topics/heritage/sa-heritage-register>
- St Peters Heritage Survey (1879): <https://www.lochielpark.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/StPetersHeritageSurvey.pdf>
- The Register (1915): <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/5664980>
- The Standard (1963): <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/190891932>
- UniSA Architecture Museum: https://www.architectsdatabase.unisa.edu.au/build_full.asp?B_ID=3997

- Urban Developer (2022): <https://www.theurbandeveloper.com/articles/hackney-lodge-romilly-house-adelaide-development>

The above citations are wrong, following are the working citations:

https://architectsdatabase.unisa.edu.au/build_full.asp?B_ID=1405

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/42971428#:~:text=to%20the%20Company%27s%20Bridge,this%20is%20erected%20a>

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/209585762#:~:text=25%20Oct%201915%20,single>

<https://www.facebook.com/AColourfulHistory/photos/hackney-south-australiacirca-1912happy-friday-everyone-this-historic-building-ha/564726442554559/>

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/274968588#:~:text=BONNETS>

<https://www.facebook.com/reel/659782559399859>

<https://www.change.org/p/adelaide-city-council-save-romilly-house-hackney-lodge>

<https://au.news.yahoo.com/adelaide-hostel-infested-with-cockroaches-37075886.html>

<https://www.indailysa.com.au/news/archive/2023/04/20/demolition-by-neglect-push-to-protect-state-heritage-buildings>

https://www.robertsimms.org.au/protection_of_state_heritage_places

<https://www.facebook.com/SaveSAhistory/posts/we-anticipate-a-renovation-we-can-only-hope-we-have-videos-and-information-regar/923552673130572/>

<https://www.romillyplace.com.au>

Archived sources:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20250530084026/https://www.change.org/p/adelaide-city-council-save-romilly-house-hackney-lodge>

https://web.archive.org/web/20250530084040/https://www.robertsimms.org.au/protection_of_state_heritage_places

<https://web.archive.org/web/20250530084105/https://www.romillyplace.com.au/>

https://web.archive.org/web/20250403102648/https://architectsdatabase.unisa.edu.au/build_full.asp?B_ID=1405

Questionable sources:

A lot of the information cited is from facebook, which is a very poor citation, but it's the best we have. Additionally, facebook is difficult to archive, so screenshots of the pages in question have.

<https://www.facebook.com/SaveSAhistory/posts/we-anticipate-a-renovation-we-can-only-hope-we-have-videos-and-information-regar/923552673130572/> :

Help save South Australia's history from demolition.'s post ×



**Adelaide Remember When.**
10 September 2024 · 🌐

Recognise this beautiful old Adelaide building? Romilly House, also known as Hackney Lodge, a landmark South Australian heritage building left to rot and targeted by vandals has been given a fresh lease on life. The building was forcibly shut by health authorities back in 2017 because of a cockroach infestation, with all tenants evicted. The 140-year-old building's future remained shrouded in uncertainty, but its been revealed a new developer has bought the property and wants to restore it.

Hackney Projects purchased the boarding house in 2022 and have plans to repair and transform it into a "mixed-use development". Romilly House has been an eyesore on one of our main roads into and out of the city for many years now so the news that it is to be restored to its former self is great.

Here's a photo of Romilly House facing Hackney Road from 1956 from the State Library of South Australia

<https://www.facebook.com/reel/659782559399859> :



**State Library of South
Australia**

 **Follow**

The Catacombs was a popular coffee lounge located in Romilly House, Hackney, where jazz and folk artists regularly performed during the 1960's. In our collections is a menu from 1969 which gives a glimpse into what the venue was like and what it served to guests.

Sweet and Savoury: Menus from the collections of the State Library of SA is on now in the Treasures Wall.

<https://www.slsa.sa.gov.au/events/sweet-and-savoury>

**#slsa #libraries #exhibition #ephemera
#menucollection #southaustralia #adelaide**

See less

<https://www.facebook.com/AColourfulHistory/photos/hackney-south-australiacirca-1912happy-friday-everyone-this-historic-building-ha/564726442554559/> :



A Colourful History

20 September 2024 · 🌟

HACKNEY, SOUTH AUSTRALIA
CIRCA: 1912

Happy Friday, everyone! This historic building has always tugged at my heart. For years, I've felt a strange sympathy for it. Even as a child, riding the number nine bus home to Paradise, I was captivated by its presence. I remember a hairdresser downstairs with a very 1970s vibe from memory. Just look at how glorious this building once was—it's stunning! But do you recognise it?

The original photograph of this edited picture was taken in approximately 1912 and is called 'Hackney' (B 16769). The picture is from the State Library of South Australia, Hackney Collection. The unedited black and white image can be found in the comments or by clicking on the link below:

<https://collections.slsa.sa.gov.au/resource/B+16769>

So, where is this building? If you haven't recognised it yet, it's at the corner of Hackney Road and North Terrace. The last time I drove by, it looked a bit forlorn, as if it was quietly waiting to be noticed again. I hope that one day, this building will be restored to its former glory.

According to a Heritage Survey, 'St. Peter's Heritage Survey - Identification of Conservation areas, December 1988, prepared by Bechervaise and Associates' (link below), "soon after, in 1877-1878 'A fine lot of buildings (were built for Richard Vaughan) which are intended for a large school, college or similar institution, and contains 14 rooms' (Illustrated Adelaide News, March 1879). These buildings were designed by Michael McMullen (who had also designed the Botanic Hotel and attached Botanic Terrace Houses for Vaughan) and became known as Romilly House and Romilly House North."

<https://data.environment.sa.gov.au/.../2-St-Peter's...>

Edited and colourised by Kelly Bonato of A Colourful History

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Rita Bogna

Romilly House. It was the residence and legal offices of barrister and solicitor Romilly Carveth Harry. I met the old man shortly before his death in 1981. The interior was dark and very Dickensian.

36w Like Reply 9  

View 1 reply

Note that a colourised version of this photo:

<https://collections.slsa.sa.gov.au/resource/B+16769>



Was attached to the post, but due to its licence it was not archived.