THE S. T. GILL COLLECTION

THE BURRA REGIONAL ART GALLERY



S.T. Gill (1818 – 1880)

His Life and Times

Samuel Thomas Gill, the son of Reverend Samuel Gill, a Baptist Minister, and his first wife Winifred Oke, was born in Periton, near Minehead, Somerset, England on 21st May 1818. He was educated at a school in Plymouth, Devon, run by his parents and later at Dr. Seabrook's Academy. He learnt the rudiments of drawing from his father who was an amateur artist. He was first employed in London as a draughtsman and water colour painter by the Hubard Profile Galley, producing silhouettes that were in vogue at the time.

At the age of twenty one, Gill migrated with his parents, his brother and sister, to South Australia aboard the tiny migrant ship, the 540 ton *Caroline,* reaching Port Adelaide on the 17th December 1839. Tragedy struck the family soon after their arrival, when both Samuel's sister and, soon after, his mother died. In 1840 Samuel's father and younger brother, John, settled in Coromandel Valley in the Adelaide Hills. Samuel remained in Adelaide and established a studio in Leigh Street, where he offered to produce portraits and sketches of an architectural nature. During this early period, before the advent of photography, he occupied himself making sketches of some of the earliest scenes of Port Adelaide and practically every building of note in Adelaide. These would prove to be both an accurate and almost singular record of these early days. Although Gill advertised his business in the newspaper of the day as producing 'correct likenesses and resemblances,' very few took him up on his offer. He also purchased the equipment to produce daguerreotype photographs, making him Adelaide's first professional photographer. This also proved an unsuccessful venture, as there was little enough money for the necessities of life in the struggling colony.

In 1841, he visited Edward John Eyre, the explorer, at Moorundie on the River Murray and produced drawings for Eyre's historical journals, recording his expeditions to the Flinders Ranges and further north as far as Mount Hopeless.

In 1845, he made watercolour paintings of the Kapunda Mines, returning there in 1849 to complete his record of this important event in South Australia's history.

In 1846 Gill accompanied John Horrocks on his ill fated exploration to the country at the head of Spencer Gulf in the north of South Australia. He was hired to sketch places on the journey, which was unfortunately cut short, when Horrocks accidentally suffered gunshot wounds to his hand and face whilst loading his gun whilst seated on a camel that shied unexpectedly. Gill was to nurse Horrocks back to his home at Penwortham near Clare, where Horrocks died 23 days after the accident.

In April 1847, S.T. Gill was commissioned by the South Australian Mining Association to paint the Burra Burra Mine and the township of Kooringa. He painted two views of the surface workings of the mine, four sketches of the underground workings and one watercolour of the township of Kooringa. He was paid 2 guineas ($4.20) for each painting. These paintings were displayed on the walls of the Mining Company Directors' Room of the Burra Hotel and several copies were ordered from the artist by the mine proprietors. These paintings were exhibited at an 'Exhibition of Pictures' a year later in Adelaide. He also published, 'Heads of the People', 12 lithographic portraits of notable Adelaide citizens like George Morphett, William Paxton, James H. Fisher, G.S. Kingston, Charles H. Bagot and Osmond Gilles.

Gill returned to Burra in February 1850 to paint two watercolour paintings of the ranges near Burra, two of the Burra Smelter, one of Kooringa and one of the mine, but by 1851 Gill was bankrupt. In 1852, Gill left Adelaide with his brother John on the brig *Hero* for Melbourne and the Victorian goldfields, seeking a change of fortune as miners.

An Eye for Detail

In the twelve years Gill remained in South Australia he was to produce well over 200 works, many proving to be an invaluable historic record of South Australia's early times. He had always shown a fascination for the aborigines of his adopted homeland and he often added them into his scenes of Burra. He introduced human figures into the foreground of his landscapes, and liked to depict horses and cattle in their many moods. He had a draughtsman's eye for detail and this proved valuable in recording the history of events.

S. T. Gill's Legacy

It was during the twenty years spent on the Victorian Goldfields that Gill earned the title of 'Artist of the Goldfields', for instead of mining he found himself once again sketching the sights around him and producing over forty sketches that would be an important historical record of events. One of his achievements was to produce a series of twenty four rural scenes which he compiled into a work entitled *The Australian Sketchbook,* published by Hamel and Ferguson. At this time Gill had a studio in Collins Street, Melbourne.

By 1870, Gill had fallen into obscurity and his drinking problem of some twenty years had become more serious, but he managed to work on cartoons, described as being 'rough in execution.'

On 27th October 1880, Samuel Thomas Gill collapsed in Post Office Place in Melbourne and was dead by the time he reached the hospital. An inquest found that he had died of a 'ruptured aneurism of the aorta.' He had died destitute and was buried in an unmarked grave in the Melbourne General Cemetery. The Historical Society of Victoria rectified this situation in 1913, when it raised the funds to have his body moved to a private plot and a headstone

erected bearing his name. He had never married, had worked when and where he wished as a freelance artist for most of his life was rarely feted, but left a significant legacy for all to see.

The Burra Collection

Although S.T. Gill was known to have produced twelve watercolour paintings in and around Burra, the Burra Regional Art Gallery for the Mid North has only four of them in its collection. The four paintings on display in Burra are shown in this brochure. The others are in the Art Gallery of South Australia or the National Library of Australia, Canberra.

The acquisition and provenance of the Burra Regional Art Gallery collection has been detailed both in the Burra Record and later by Ian Auhl, the co-author of 'Australia's Earliest Mining Era South Australia 1841 - 1851'.

This collection comes as a result of a purchase and the gracious donations by two of Burra's benefactors and they are an important record of Burra's history coming before any photographic record of the era.

In November 1916, the Honourable John Lewis MLC presented Gill's watercolour of the Burra Mine, to the Burra Institute to adorn the walls of the Town Hall. It had a brass plate attached acknowledging this gift. This painting was of the surface workings of the Burra Mine painted in February 1850. This was confirmed, in 1966, when it was recovered by Ian Auhl from under the stage of the Burra Town Hall, still bearing the brass plate.

In April 1939, a second watercolour, one depicting the Burra Mine in April 1847, was purchased by the Burra Town Council from Mr. H. Dingle of Adelaide for £3, it being thought to be of great historical significance to the town. This painting was found reversed against a wall in the Burra Town Hall and rescued by Ian Auhl in 1966.

In August 1944, two of Gill's watercolours, one of the Burra Mine and the other a panorama of Kooringa were presented to the Burra Institute by Essington Lewis, the son of John Lewis. It appears that both these paintings were ones that dated from S. T. Gill's first visit to the mine in April 1847. One of them was recovered from behind a cupboard and the other also from beneath the Town Hall stage in 1966. It was reported that they were in a poor state and needed some restoration work on them. Sometime previously, they had been varnished over in an attempt to protect them.

In 1966 all four works were sent to Dick Richards, the Curator of Historical Paintings at the Art Gallery of South Australia where they were fumigated and treated with fungicide. At this stage it was necessary to have them identified and confirmed as the works of S. T. Gill. It seems the four paintings then remained on loan to the Art Gallery of S.A. between 1966 and 1995.

In November 1994, at the request of the Burra District Council, these art works were cleaned and restored with the varnish being removed by David Button, an Art Restorer, in Adelaide. They were then returned to Burra where they were temporarily hung in Morphett's Pumphouse, being unveiled by the Governor General, the Hon. William (Bill) Hayden in May 1995.

At the opening of the Burra Regional Art Gallery for the Mid North in October 1996 the S. T. Gill Collection was hung in a room devoted to them within the gallery, where they can be viewed by the public.

Other works of S. T. Gill depicting scenes in and around Burra are;

South Australian Landscape A scene among the ranges near Burra
Sheep and Shepherd near Burra Burra Creek Gorge
General View of the Burra Burra Mine 1847
Neales' Stopes, Burra Burra Mine 1847 (Underground in the Burra Mine)
Kooringa, the Burra Burra Township 1847
The Burra Mine, Showing Main Portion of the Surface Operations, 1847
Leading from Stocks' to Paxton's Lode (Underground in the Burra Mine)
Kooringa from the Quarry at the Rear of the Patent Copper Co. 1850
Burra Burra Mines, 1847
Opening of the Lode in Stocks' Air-hole 1847
Burra Burra Smelting Works 1850
Burra Burra Mine, Showing Main Portion of Surface Operations, 1850
Penny's Stopes, Burra Burra Mine (Underground in the Burra Mine)
Burra Mines (Karkulto)
Burra Burra Mines from rear of Smelting Works 1850



Burra Burra Mine

Showing Main Portion of Surface Operations

10th February, 1850

This panorama of the mine, facing towards the south west, shows a rather busy scene with Roach's Pumping Engine-house and its flue, the main feature of the painting. The launder from this engine-house, supported on tall timber pylons, reaches towards the hill on the left, where the water is discharged into the engine pool. The large shears with Johnny Green, the mine mascot, and the Union Jack atop are clearly shown. A couple with their child is in the foreground and there are bullock teams pulling drays along a well-worn thoroughfare. Numerous horse whims are visible with piles of ore accumulating nearby and the stables are fenced off from the rest of the mine. Far off on the hill to the left is the powder magazine. All seems very neat and orderly, too much so. Donated by the Hon. John Lewis MLC.



Burra Burra Mine Panorama of Surface Operations
12th April, 1847

This panorama of the mine depicts six human figures; two men, one a miner, and on the right a woman and her child in European dress and two aborigines seated beside some large pieces of cut timber. The view faces roughly south west and shows the mine offices in the distance on the left. Besides the piles of blue ore and the horse whims with their horses, there are bullocks grazing and others drawing drays in the background that seem larger than life. The scene conveys the isolation of the place.

Purchased by the Burra Town Council in 1939.



A Panorama of the township of Kooringa
April, 1847

An aboriginal family, at their ease, is occupying the foreground and one is wearing an animal skin cloak. The rural nature of the scene, with bullocks grazing on the hillside and stockyards neatly laid out below, depicts the Burra Hotel and in the distance towards the east are the cottages of the township of Kooringa, few that they are. There are horsemen exercising their steeds and bullocks drawing a dray making towards the town. The sparse hills are dotted with a few Casuarina trees.

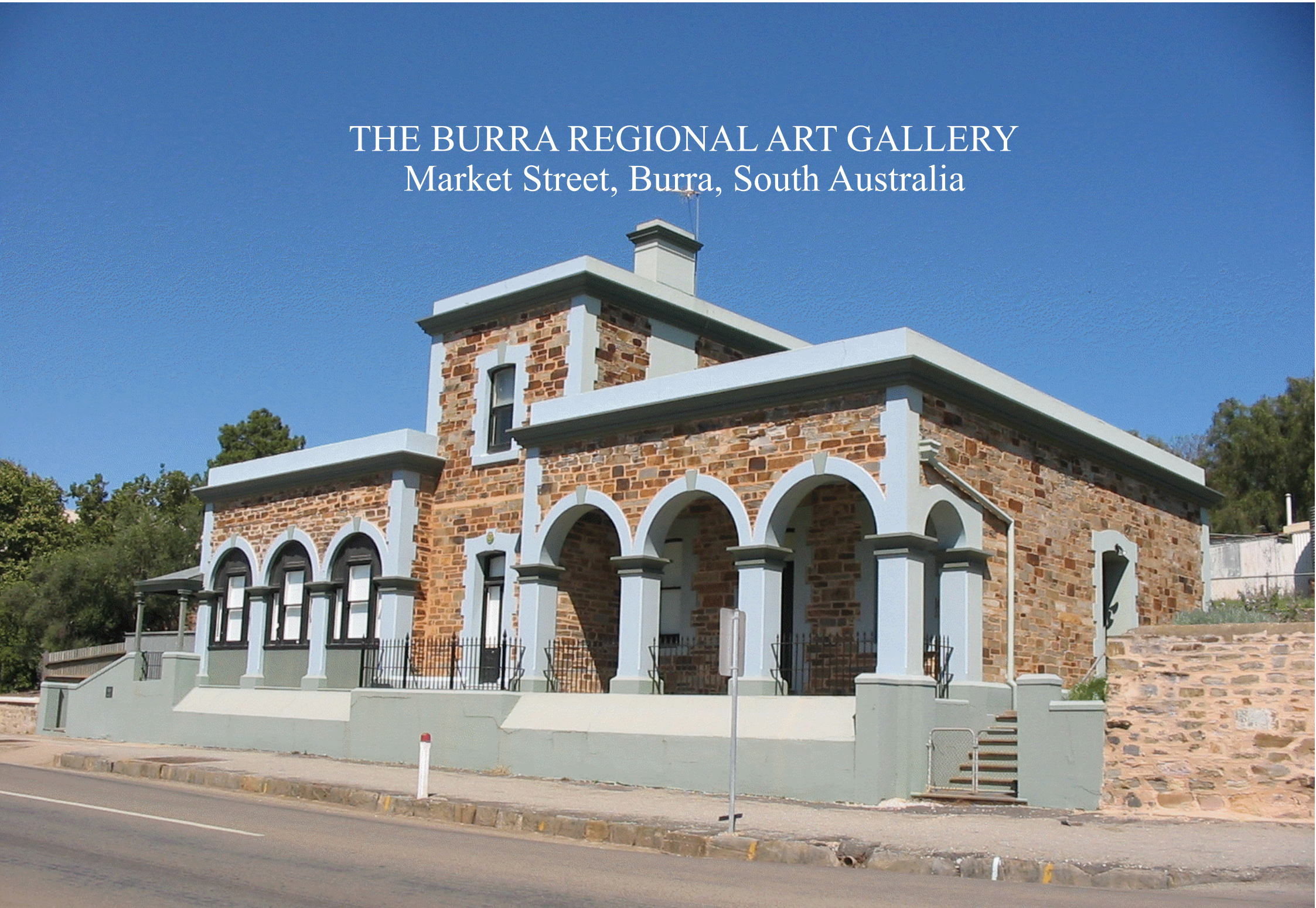
Donated by Essington Lewis, Director of BHP, in 1944



A Panorama of the Burra Burra Mine
April, 1847

This painting is a view of the mine from the hills to the west of the mine facing east towards the Burra Burra Creek that shows of the isolation of the place. In the foreground of this work are two aborigines, one with a spear and the other kneeling. Both are wearing what looks like European white shirts that cover their nakedness. These figures are on the hill to the west of the mine flat and the mining activity is displayed below.

It is two years after the commencement of mining when there are few structures visible. There are some horse whims at shafts and small piles of raised ore at grass. The Mine offices and mine captains' cottages are on the right of the scene, with the mine store in the background on the right. The hills are quite bare except for some native grass and spindly trees. Donated by Essington Lewis in 1944.


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Market Street, Burra, South Australia