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John White was the first settler in the district known as The Reedbeds in 1836 He built his home Fulham Farm on the site the Oaks retirement Village. He was born in the suburb of Fulham, London in 1787.



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Fulham Farm

Fulham Homestead with Charles White and Family

The history of the property "The Oaks" perfectly portrays this early pattern of settlement. John White, builder, was a pioneer South Australian colonist who arrived from England in December 1836 and attended the proclamation ceremony under the Old Gum Tree. He brought with him to the colony twenty men and 500 tons of cargo, including building materials so sought after in the early colony. In 1838 he secured a contract for the erection of Trinity Church and in the same year settled on the Reedbeds, some 600 acres "divided by the River Torrens, and overlooking the ocean within one chain of the high-water mark. Here he engaged in farming and agricultural pursuits, which he continued until his death ..."

1924!
On John White's death the property passed to his widow and then, in 1884 to his youngest son Charles. The date of construction of 'The Oaks' is unknown, however it is likely it was built in the building and subdivision boom of the late 1870's and early 1880's. From 1916 to 1920 the main buildings at The Oaks became St. Margaret's Maternity Hospital, whose staff of cook, housemaid and laundress lived in the servants' quarters — the row of single storey cottages alongside The Oaks.

At Charles' death in 1900, his eldest son George Gilmore White, grazier, succeeded to the property. It remained in the White family's possession until 1927, when it was purchased by William Atkin, dairyman.

The Oaks is of State significance because of its close association with the White Family, pioneers of South Australia. It also demonstrates clearly the scale and style of building resulting from the building boom of the late 1870's and early 1880's, and social class differences represented by the difference in scale of the nearby servants' quarters. The surrounding garden (like Penfolds vineyard) is an historic remnant of the many farms which once patterned the early Adelaide Metropolitan area.

The Oaks consists of a two storey Edwardian Style, 12 roomed house with attached single storey kitchen, wing and cottages which may have been built earlier. Although not original, interior decoration of the house in Edwardian style is evident in leadlighting, cornices and ceiling roses, doors and some furniture. Notable pieces are the oak staircase and cast iron fire-place.

1986 sees 2.5 hectares of the land once owned and farmed by pioneer John White converted into the Fulham Retirement Village. The historic 'Oaks Mansion' is used as the community and care centre for residents and is surrounded by units and serviced apartments.

Apart from single and double-bed apartments, part of the old servants' quarters at the 'Oaks' has been converted to cottage units which offer the same services as the apartments.

Main house and detached servants quarters

