



west

HART of the COMMUNITY

WORDS SKY HARRISON PHOTO BEN SEARCY

Perth has Fremantle, Sydney has Carriageworks, Canberra has the Glassworks and Adelaide has Hart's Mill. Or at least, we could have, if we get our act together and turn years of talk into some real investment.

When St Jerome's Laneway Festival announced its relocation to Hart's Mill earlier this year, you could almost hear the collective scratching of heads. The Port has always had something of an outsider status but to locals, the iconic Hart's Mill precinct is exactly the sort of place a music festival should be held.

For years, locals and the heritage-savvy have been lobbying for the precinct to be restored and made available for community use. It has all the right ingredients for a revival – a

waterfront position, character-filled and historically important buildings, a rich maritime and Indigenous history, and loads of open space.

The precinct is made up of Hart's Mill, a flour mill built in 1855 by Sir John Hart, the most sophisticated in Australia at the time, and the Adelaide Milling Co building alongside it. Hart's Mill became the grain storage facility when the Adelaide Milling Co building was built, with production ceasing in the 1980s. The pair have sat quietly deteriorating on the dock ever since,

waiting for a second life. What that second life could be has been a hot topic of discussion for many years. The latest call for ideas saw suggestions from the community for craft breweries, farmers' markets, museums, night markets, cafés and restaurants, a children's art gallery, water taxis linking it to Semaphore, studio spaces, an open theatre, outdoor cinema, function spaces, live music venue, boat ramps... well, you get the idea.

It's a far cry from the residential precinct it nearly became as part of the Newport Quays redevelopment.



Believed to be taken in the 1930s, this photo features Adelaide Ice Works employees with the Mill in the background.

Community outrage led the state government to put a halt to that, and the plan has now shifted to an architectural competition for its redevelopment, requiring a mix of public and commercial spaces, though it's yet to be called for.

However, the precinct is already getting an injection of new life thanks to the Port Adelaide Renewal Project. Come April, the surrounds will include a 600sqm playground, space for markets and events, and open space with seating, shade and BBQ areas. It will also connect to a walking/cycling path that reaches around the Port and to Semaphore.

This revamp is part of a bigger renewal that includes government-funded projects such as Unexpected

"It just takes some imagination and investment to make it happen," Hart's Mill advocate Tony Kearney says. "It's been done well in other cities and this is an opportunity to create a unique cultural centre that will spur on the revitalisation of the Port."

Tony knows more about it than most – he was chair of the National Trust's Port Adelaide branch and is an industrial designer and, as an amateur photographer, is fond of documenting the building. Over the years, he and his mates have managed to get arts festival directors, politicians, architecture students and anyone who'll listen into the space to show them its potential and garner support.

"It should be a public space for the arts and community, you could have cultural institutions such as the visitor centre there. It works as a very raw space, similar to the Queens Theatre in the city, providing space for a wide range of projects and events," he says.

It's already been used as a backdrop to events such as Art at the Hart, 'guerilla' dinners, and community markets. "It's a great way to bring more people to the area and it creates more community ownership of the space and how it can be used."

As examples, he lists Helsinki's *Kaapelitehdas* (Cable Factory), which was turned into a cultural centre by the City of Helsinki and now holds museums, galleries, cafés, studios etc. Closer to

home, the Canberra Glassworks is a purpose-built facility for glass artists that has public access, constructed inside Canberra's oldest permanent public building, Kingston Powerhouse.

Political satirist Bryan Dawe grew up with the Mill as his playground. His connection is deeply personal – his father Ralph worked at the Mill from the age of 14 until just 47, when he died from chemical poisoning in his role as industrial chemist. Bryan spent his childhood playing at the site and first got involved with it as an adult in the fight for its preservation.

"We've got this amazing maritime heritage, there's the Maritime Museum, the wharves and all that history, it seems so obvious to preserve it. You could combine it with art spaces and acknowledge the Indigenous sacred site that it's on, link it to the TAFE... in the end, it comes down to what the community want," he says. "If you look at it over 20 years, it would easily pay for itself. People come from overseas to see these things. Look at Freemantle, you can't move on the weekend, and all that activity encourages people to open shops and businesses and more people come into the area."

Though locals remain cautiously optimistic, the Mill's future is looking promising at last. And come 7 February, the Laneway Festival will give just a taste of what that future could hold. ♦ hartsmillproject.org

STOP PRESS!

Award-winning SA architectural projection artists illuminart hope to bring the Mill to life in late March via a 30-minute lighting show that tells the story of Hart's Mill and the Port. They're running a crowdfunding campaign, aiming to raise \$8,000 by 14 December. pozible.com/project/34814



Port Adelaide's innovative arts projects and Renew Adelaide's drive for bringing new business into the area through leasing out shops at an initially low rent, including to a vintage furniture store, coconut-product shop and a cult DVD rental store.



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