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Heritage Stone in South Australia

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Amongst Australian States, South Australia has arguably the greatest utilisation of building stone in Australia given its historic lack of timber resources. As a consequence, stone was intensively used from the beginning of European colonisation in 1836. This stone use is notable for its variety, a fact governed by diverse geology.

Given stone variety, it is challenging to designate specific stones that have international importance. However there is clearly a hierarchical range of heritage stones that can be designated as having local, regional or national importance. Documentation of such heritage stones will likely reveal new information about stone heritage with designation at a higher status level being advocated.

In many instances, a stone is restricted in use to a specific town or even a single construction. These heritage stones have local significance except where use involves special stone characteristics, unusual stone masonry or use in a building with significant heritage, in which case the stone demands higher-status heritage stone designation. The town of Second Valley in South Australia has a very localised use of marble, likely the earliest use (1849) of this rock type in South Australia.

South of the State capital of Adelaide there is a slate resource that has been quarried for roofing and walling at Willunga since 1840. This resource has obvious national significance given a period of quarrying extending to the present, coupled with national distribution of its products. Willunga Slate continues to be quarried in arguably the longest continuous mining operation in Australia.

Another South Australian slate which may have international importance is Mintaro Slate, mined at Mintaro since 1854 as a flagstone for use in steps, sills and paving around Australia. Some export has occurred, international awards have been received and the material has been used to manufacture billiard tables.

An example of a probable Global Heritage Stone Resource in South Australia is “Imperial Black Granite”, which has been quarried since 1958, 100 km east of Adelaide. Whilst only marginally fitting the requirement of being mined for 50 years, Imperial Black has had intensive monumental use around Australia together with utilisation as cladding in modern office buildings and as paving and walling in Australia’s National Parliament in Canberra. It is also widely used for paving in the City of Sydney. The material has been exported and has notably been used internationally for the Australian Embassy in Tokyo, Japan and for a major War Memorial at Le Hamel, France.

Probably the most unpretentious stone used in South Australia is the widespread surface limestone or calccrete. It was quarried in the Adelaide city area until the 1850s and was used for general construction.

The stone continues to be used in rural areas. On preliminary assessment this stone has only local significance. However from another perspective, it could be argued that it is a stone of national importance. Extensive documentation of its use in churches, public building, hotels, houses and simple walling across the vast area of South Australia is needed to demonstrate this.

