

Our History

The Waterfall Gully Chalet, est 1912

**Welcome to Utopia @ Waterfall gully, and our beautiful home – the ‘old chalet’!
In 2013 we celebrated the chalet’s 100th year of operations as a tearoom and restaurant, and we are
incredibly proud to be part of the rich history of this iconic slice of South Australia.**

A rich history...

Utopia’s heritage-listed chalet is truly unique as Australia’s only restaurant set at the base of a waterfall – and as far as we know, one of just a handful of restaurants in the world situated so close to a natural waterfall.

Our character-filled stone chalet was originally constructed as a tea room in 1912. Designed by Adelaide-based architect Albert Conrad in the style of a Swiss chalet, the building is now considered Australia’s earliest example of a ‘refreshment room’ set in a national park – and we are proud to continue the restaurant’s 100-year tradition of serving delicious tea and scones!

The building was commissioned by ‘National Pleasure Resorts’ – a national body similar to the current government departments for sport and recreation. The tearoom’s role was to provide refreshments to the hundreds of visitors who descended on the gully each month to stroll by the waterfalls, picnic in the peaceful bushland setting and partake in sporting activities such as badminton, tennis, croquet and bowls (in the areas now used as the car park).

You can still see the initials ‘NPR’ (for National Pleasure Resorts) and the opening year 1912 in the original green shields within the chalet’s ornamental leadlight feature windows.

One of a kind

In addition to our spectacular conservation park location, look inside the chalet and you will see many of the beautiful, original features that make our chalet utterly unique.

Some of the most notable architectural highlights include our cathedral-style, tongue-and-groove timber ceilings, exposed art nouveau stained beams, incredibly rare bottle green stained glass feature windows, original delicate leadlighting, rich timber walls, hand-laid stonework and parquetry flooring and of course everyone’s favourite feature - our striking stone fireplace, surrounded by a spectacular timber archway.

Over the years the building has been used in many ways, but one thing has always remained consistent - tea and scones! Known as the Waterfall Gully Kiosk and Restaurant for much of its life, the chalet was at its peak in the 1970s and early 1980s as a fine dining restaurant and wedding venue, but slowly fell into decline until current owners Justin and Kelly Markos stumbled across it in 2008.



Utopia is born

After attending the wedding of a close friend at the Waterfall Gully Kiosk in November 2008, Justin and Kelly instantly fell in love with the gully and the grand old chalet. At the time the building was filthy, cluttered and run down, holding just four or five weddings each year and operating sporadically as little more than a deli. But the potential was enormous, and the chalet felt perfect for their long held dream of creating a little slice of hospitality heaven.

After more than a year of painstaking negotiations with the former owners and the SA Government, the deal was finally signed and Utopia @ Waterfall Gully was born!

Utopia began as it was to continue, with friends, family and future staff joining forces to spend just five days scrubbing, painting, bleaching and stripping back years of neglect to reveal the gorgeous, original features that sparkled beneath.

Utopia's doors opened in February 2010 with only Justin in the kitchen, our manager Emma in the restaurant and Kelly helping where needed while toting a three-month-old baby. By day two, the entire family was helping in the kiosk and kitchen, three more waiting staff had joined the team and word was beginning to spread...

Over the past three years, Utopia has grown to employ a team of five full time and around 15 casual staff, plus members of our family helping every step of the way. The restaurant is busy with breakfast, lunch and Devonshire Tea five days a week, as well as hosting more than 120 weddings and special events a year.

We are proud to be a genuine family business, committed to creating a supportive working environment for our staff and a warm, welcoming dining experience for our guests. Every day we remain grateful to the friends and family who support us, the staff who work tirelessly and the guests whose loyalty and belief in Utopia has made our dream a reality!



1935



2012

Utopia
@ Waterfall Gully

The story of the chalet ghost

Meet Constable Tregoweth

For the past 80 years, there have been numerous stories about a ghostly presence here in the old chalet, and in the surrounding walking trails and gardens.

Almost all of the stories share similar elements - including cheerful whistling, the clank of keys, visions of a gentleman in a period policeman's uniform and greatcoat, and a general sense that there is no malice in this presence.

Our resident ghost is believed to be Constable Thomas Alfred John Tregoweth, who was stationed at the Burnside Police Station for four years in the late 1920s.

Born to parents Mary and John on 13 September 1897 near Woodside in the Adelaide Hills, Thomas enlisted in the army in 1916 at age 19 and was posted to France, where he saw active duty as a Private before being taken prisoner by the Germans in Bullecourt and held captive for 20 months.

Thomas was liberated from capture at the end of World War I in 1919 and returned to Adelaide, where he joined the local police force and bought a home at 51 Kensington Road in Kensington. From 1925 he was commissioned at the Burnside Police Station where he played an active role in protecting and patrolling Waterfall Gully, and was a popular and well known member of the local community.

Tregoweth was first on the scene at a number of local tragedies, including a mysterious flipped car in 1924 and a sensational attempted murder-suicide that took place in broad daylight on Waterfall Gully Road, also in 1924.

The Waterfall Gully Bushfire

On Wednesday 14 December 1926, a large bushfire broke out in Waterfall Gully. Its source and origin were unknown, however it was first noticed by reserve ranger Mr J O'Connor, who was walking along the southern side of the gully around midday and saw smoke and flames rising on private land to the north, at the top of the gully.

O'Connor gathered a group of fellow rangers and set off to prevent the fire from spreading. They were quickly joined by staff from the Tourist Bureau Adelaide, three carloads of police officers from Adelaide and local police constables Martin and Tregoweth.

The flames spread rapidly through the bushland, with winds pushing the fire quickly towards the old chalet and surrounding large trees. The building was seriously threatened, and at one stage the flames were within yards of its timber walls – but thanks to the commitment of the police and volunteers the course of the fire was changed and the flames were pushed north.

The fire was eventually brought under control around 5pm, before flaring up again in the evening to threaten the nearby hotel and private properties. The fire burned through the gully for a further 24 hours until it was finally quelled thanks to the arrival of a new group of volunteer fire fighters - but not before exacting a deadly toll...

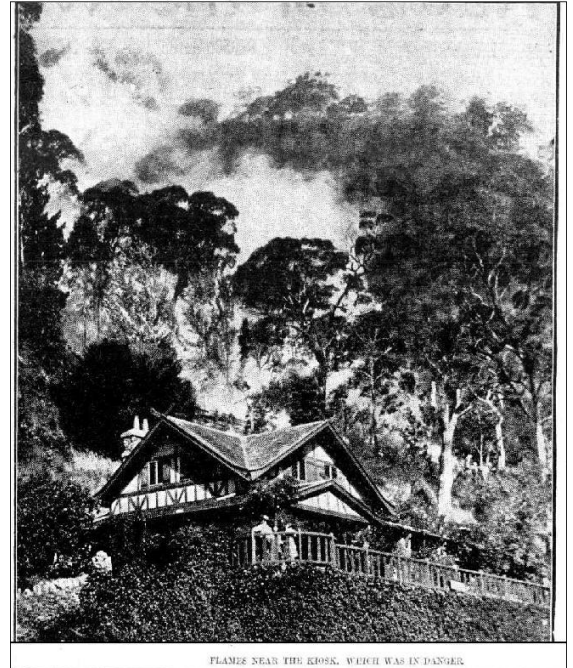
Loss of a local hero

After arriving at the scene of the fire around 1.30pm, Constables Tregoweth and Martin were working to put out the flames around 300m up the hillside behind the chalet. While working to beat out flames in long grass, the fire crept up behind Thomas Tregoweth. When he eventually realised he was about to be overcome he stepped quickly away – at which point he lost his footing.

Thomas fell into the flames and rolled almost 100m down the steep hillside, stopping at a fence. His injuries were severe, with his rescuers saying they had never seen such severe burns. Thomas had lost almost all of the skin on his face, knees and ankles, and has sustained severe head injuries from the fall. Despite this he remained conscious as he was rushed to the Adelaide Hospital.

Thomas passed away the following day after a valiant battle. At just 29 years of age he left behind a wife and a two-year-old son, and was heralded a hero by his colleagues and friends in the community.

THE WATERFALL GULLY FIRE.



FLAMES NEAR THE ROSE, WHICH WAS IN DANGER.

Ghostly visions

Since the early 1930s, there have been ongoing reported sightings of Constable Thomas Tregoweth's ghost in and around the old chalet, and in the surrounding bushland and walking trails. Witnesses say this ghostly constable is still dressed in his distinctive period police uniform and greatcoat, and many people feel he is still keeping watch over Waterfall Gully.

Since taking over the restaurant in January 2010, our team has experienced quite a few quirky happenings...ranging from mysteriously moving items to clanking keys, footsteps, late-night whistling and a comforting 'presence'.

A regular occurrence has been the mysterious activation of musical toys belonging to our son. We have a playroom set up for Jackson in the old cottage at the rear of the chalet – and his toys regularly turn on and sing without any help from us! As a baby and toddler, Jackson was also found regularly chatting and smiling when he was seemingly alone in his Utopia nursery.

Former guests have shared with us numerous tales of ghostly sightings - most memorable a couple whose car was stopped on the exit to the gully late one night by a gentleman in a greatcoat whose face had no distinguishable features, and who then disappeared silently up into the bushes...

But by all accounts, Utopia's spooky spectator is very friendly and we are sure he is enjoying seeing so many visitors returning to enjoy his beloved gully.