Chapter 1—The Gill Family, Adelaide and the Port

The city is a large place and not yet one quarter built upon. Building plots are for sale in all directions except in the main streets. The majority of the houses at present are built for persons of small means–mainly constructed of nine inch brick work—the roofing generally being shingles from Van Diemen's Land.

—*Adelaide Times, June 7, 1851*

Samuel Thomas Gill was born on 21 May 1818 in the small village of Perriton in Somerset, England, the first born in a family of five to parents Reverend Samuel Gill and Winifred Gill (nee Oke). In 1825, the Gill family was living in Plymouth. By the time Samuel Thomas Gill was sixteen, he was advanced enough to paint a self-portrait in oils, one of the few pictures he is known to have created in that medium[8] (apparently later destroyed by fire). He had been exposed to the work of many great artists during a three-year period in London. There is incomplete information of his education and training. He was apparently apprenticed as a

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8 I found only one of his work in Australia in that medium, which is held by the Dixon Library, State Library of New South Wales. Its title is *The Shepherd*, 22 cm. square canvas, in a circular frame, S. T.G. at the lower left. It's normally on display at the library.

carver and gilder[9] in Plymouth before joining the Hubard Profile Gallery in The Strand. The Gallery was a major establishment which specialised in silhouette art. Gill later announced he had worked as a '*draftsman and watercolour painter to the Hubard Gallery*'.[10] His three years in London were probably very important in shaping Gill's artistic future and it is likely he was introduced to lithography when working as a carver and gilder.

During the 1830s, the British community of Baptists, of which Samuel Gill senior was a member, had become increasingly interested in the possibility of establishing a new, more Christian way of life in a new country–Australia. A strong advocate of this policy was George Fife Angas, a wealthy shipowner and coach builder and native of Newcastle-on-Tyne. He moved to Devon in 1832 and, two years later, became a commissioner for the new colony of South Australia.

Angas was greatly concerned at the persecution of the Lutherans of South Prussia, and in 1838, assisted three hundred dissenters to migrate to South Australia in his ships *Bungalee* and *Prince George*. A further 350 were carried in other Angas ships, *Zebra* and *Catherine*. By this time, he was chairman of the Torrens District Commission in South Australia and was entrusted with the responsibility of distributing land around Adelaide to sellers.

In 1839, Samuel Gill senior made the momentous decision to support the enterprise by migrating to South Australia. While the main reason may have been to achieve religious freedom, it's also possible this was prompted by the death of two younger sons in 1833. The family departed from Plymouth in the 450-ton Angas ship, *Carolyne*, and arrived in South Australia on December 17, 1839. S. T. Gill arrived with, in addition to his parents, a brother and sister, a servant and two carpenters. The Gill family travelled intermediate class and the servant and carpenters travelled steerage.

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9 A carver and gilder carved decorative details on fine furniture, picture & mirror frames, architectural details for buildings, and other wooden objects and applied gold leaf to the objects.
10 *South Australian Register,* March 7, 1840.

The Gills apparently found Adelaide a charming rural village-town nestling in flat, partly cleared country; it was extremely fertile, surrounded by hills and enhanced by the presence of the Torrens River.

The development of the colony of South Australia was undertaken in a more planned manner than the other Australian colonies. It took shape from a widespread critique of other colonising ventures by people from liberal circles in Britain in the 1820s and thirties. A prominent spokesperson was Edward Gibbon Wakefield, whose *Letter from Sydney*, actually penned while he was confined in Newgate Prison in 1829, outlined many of the principles of 'systematic colonisation' that were to guide the creation of South Australia. Foremost among these were a commitment to free settlement, the belief land should be bought not granted, and bought at a sufficient price both to ensure an adequate supply of labour by preventing potential labourers from acquiring land too quickly, and to provide the funds for assisted emigration. There was also a preference for young, fit families as assisted emigrants to ensure a balance of the sexes. A South Australian Association, formed in December 1833, actively promoted the creation of such a colony. Its members included many who were active adherents of various dissenting sects and were influenced by prevailing radical and utilitarian ideas.

South Australia was also created initially as a commercial and administrative partnership between the British Government (represented by the office of the Governor) and the South Australian Colonisation Commission. The precise distribution of administrative powers between these two groups was never adequately defined and constant conflict between them marked the early years of settlement. To further complicate matters, in 1835, some members of the Colonisation Commission had formed a joint stock company, the South Australian Company, to raise sufficient funds in land sales to satisfy the British Government

that the new settlement was viable. The South Australian Company became, in effect, the financial basis of the new settlement, building much of the early infrastructure and providing banking and other financial services. It was founded by George Fife Angas and other wealthy British merchants. Its immediate purpose was to encourage the purchase, in advance, of land in the planned colony.

While Colonel Light, Surveyor General for the colony, and his team searched for an actual site for the city, the immigrants from the first seven ships camped in the sand dunes at Holdfast Bay, the site of Glenelg. From January-March 1837, migrants set up in tents and wooden huts in two camps named after two of the first migrant ships, *Buffalo* and *Coromandel.*

Under the Angas land allocation scheme, Gill senior acquired seven acres in the Coromandel Valley. Tragedy hit the family in 1840 when their daughter died of typhoid fever, to be followed in a short time by the death of Mrs Gill. Gill senior remarried two years later.

The colony of South Australia had only been settled for a little over three years when the Gills arrived. S. T. Gill made his first sketches of Adelaide and the immediate surrounding area very soon after his arrival and sent them to relatives in England by the first available mail.

Within a few months of his arrival, aged just twenty-one, he announced in the *South Australian Register*, 7 March 1840, his availability as an artist and his willingness to tackle any subject on commission. His advertisement reads:

S. T. Gill, Artist, &c., late Draftsman and Water Colour Painter to the Hubard Profile Gallery, London, begs to announce to his friends and the public generally of Adelaide and its vicinity, that he has opened rooms in Gawler Place where for the present he solicits the attendance of such individuals as are desirous of obtaining correct likenesses of themselves, families or friends. Parties preferring attendance at their residences

may be accommodated without additional charge. Correct resemblances of horses, dogs, etc., with local scenery etc., executed to order. Residences sketched and transferred to paper suited for home conveyance. Orders executed in rotation. Open daily from eleven to dusk.

Gill soon became a compulsive recorder on paper of people, animals, architecture, landscape, and all manner of activities and incidents. Art critic, Alan McCulloch, describes the development of Gill's style and method of painting as follows:

He had evolved a swift, cursive style of work, using broad, pale washes of colour for the masses, while treating the edges of his subjects as linear contours breaking into short, robust brushstrokes, depending on the textures he wished to convey. It was the ideal field artist's technique, providing scope for the production of large numbers of works painted spontaneously and at high speed.[11]

Gill spent his first twelve years in Australia, from the end of 1839 to the beginning of 1852, living in South Australia and during that time, painted all the subjects specified in his advertisement in the *South Australian Register.*

When the Gill family arrived in Adelaide the estimated population was 14,600, and there were over 1600 buildings. European settlement after 1836 soon put pressure on the tenure of the land of the Aboriginal people, and once the original inhabitants of the Adelaide Plains were displaced, Adelaide grew in stages. Migration to Adelaide occurred in waves, usually due to world events such as wars, famines and religious persecution. The waves of migration during S. T. Gill's time in South Australia included the 1840s Irish immigration (particularly women), and the 1850s mining boom together with religious refugees. When he left South Australia in 1852, the population had increased to an estimated number of almost 69,000.[12]

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11 Alan McCulloch. *Artists of the Australian Gold Rush,* Lansdowne, 1977, pp. 65-6.
12 Douglas Pike. *Paradise of Dissent: South Australia 1829-1857,* 2nd edition, Melbourne University Press, 1967, p. 517.

Colonel William Light, as Surveyor General for the new colony, was instructed by the British Government to find a site which had a number of attributes: a harbour; fresh water and effective drainage; ready internal and external communications and easily obtained building materials. When the site of the new city was chosen, places such as Port Lincoln, Kangaroo Island and the Murray Mouth region were rejected because of limited water supplies, inaccessibility, restricted hinterlands and poor soil and vegetation for agriculture. In the case of the Murray mouth area, while there was ample water, the narrow, shallow and exposed southerly facing mouth of the Murray River made it inaccessible for shipping.

Light had no instructions for a grid town except: '… to make the streets of ample width, arranging them with reference to convenience, beauty and salubrity; and making the necessary reserves, for squares, public walks and quays.'[13]

The site chosen was considered the best available for drainage and fresh water, and within a reasonable distance from the harbour. Colonel William Light was clearly a surveyor with considerable vision. The area south of the River Torrens was surveyed and divided into 700 one-acre lots, while North Adelaide was divided into 342 such lots. The streets were arranged with a number running north-south, crossed at right angles by a larger number running east-west. Light provided for a number of town squares to be placed strategically throughout the city, and it was surrounded by parkland. He and Governor Hindmarsh clashed, as Hindmarsh disagreed with his choice of site for Adelaide. Hindmarsh went so far as to ask Lord Glenelg, Secretary of State for the Colonies, for authority to move the settlement. However, Light prevailed, but did not see his dream come true, for he died three years after his arrival in the colony.

During Gill's twelve years in the colony he witnessed the development and became very familiar with the streets, squares

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13 J. Stephens. *The Land of Promise*, Smith Elder, London 1839, p. 97.

and parks of Adelaide, painting and drawing many streetscapes, such as the two examples below, which are full of activity (in the left foreground of the North Terrace image, members of the British Regiment then stationed in Adelaide appear).

King William Street, looking north 1845 (State Library of South Australia, B3697)

North Terrace, Adelaide 1845(State Library of South Australia, B7170)

When Light completed surveying the city, the town acres not purchased before settlement were auctioned in one-acre lots, and the temporary campers who could afford to buy quickly claimed their new town lands. The first building material was wood from lands around the River Torrens. The original inhabitants

of the area, the Kaurna people, earned some income from selling timber.

Apart from tents, the earliest buildings constructed in Adelaide were prefabricated wooden buildings from Britain, or pisé construction (rammed earth) using clay mud from the river banks. But limestone lying close to the surface and the river's extensive clay deposits meant that brick and stone soon replaced mud and timber for more substantial buildings. By the 1850s the Adelaide City Council had banned timber construction, and bluestone quarried from Glen Osmond had become a popular building material. This went on to become a distinctive feature of the Adelaide built environment. Public buildings were constructed in the parklands reserve along the northern side of North Terrace, including Government House.

Limestone also became a popular building material. In most cases, it was easy to obtain, as much of the Adelaide area sits on a bed of nodular limestone (calcrete) less than two feet below the surface. Several early public buildings, including the Mounted Police Barracks, Government House, Adelaide Gaol, the Treasury Buildings and Parliament House, were built of limestone from the several quarries along the River Torrens. The Holy Trinity Church on the western end of North Terrace was constructed in limestone in 1838, as was Christ Church in Palmer Place, North Adelaide, in 1848. The Catholic Bishop's House on the corner of West Terrace and Grote Street was also built of limestone in 1846. Early private dwellings, erected using limestone found on site, were often built with semi or full basements to create bedrooms or a retreat to escape the summer heat. King William Street, the city's major thoroughfare, contained many financial and commercial institutions, while the narrower cross streets remained the centre of retail focus, with small shops and hotels. Much of the activity occurred in Hindley and Rundle Streets.

Rundle Street, looking east from King William Street c. 1845
(State Library of South Australia, B3703)

Gill's paintings of Adelaide streets in the 1840s provide wonderful images of mid-nineteenth-century Adelaide. They include paintings of Government House (North Terrace), North Terrace looking south-east, Hindley Street looking west, Hindley Street looking east, Rundle Street, Rundle Street looking west, and Hindley Street from King William Street. In each case, there are a range of people, animals, and activities depicted in each painting. Gill arranged people and animals in each of his street scenes to create a carefully orchestrated and interesting composition. The selection of colour for costumes and clothing added to the impact of the paintings. His set of paintings and drawings of Adelaide streets and architecture provided a comprehensive record of customs, dress, accoutrements, architecture, and modes of transport of colonial Adelaide in the 1840s.

Hindley Street from the corner of King William Street c. 1847
(National Library of Australia, nla.obj-135639117)

Bank of South Australia and Legislative Council Room, North Terrace, Adelaide
(National Library of Australia, nla.obj-134361613)

Gill pleased his father by painting a series of watercolours of Adelaide churches: Trinity Church, Christ Church and others.

North Terrace, showing Trinity Church (State Library of South Australia, B6821)

It's clear that S. T. Gill (STG) was a product of his religious upbringing. The family, being critical of the order in England, had emigrated to seek greater religious freedom and new opportunities. There was a strong belief in fairness of treatment for the disadvantaged, respect for the law and adherence to a strong moral code which would no doubt have included sobriety. The Rev. Gill had included some verse in the last part of the shared sketchbook he and STG produced in England (see next chapter for more details). The verse below taken from the sketchbook was clearly meant to be an exhortation to S. T. Gill to remember and uphold the family values.

Well if with all their misspent leisure,

Men valued peace before their pleasure,

And while they other good pursue,

Sought God and his Salvation too,

Be this my boy thy chief concern,

For this thy soul with ardour burn,

Some others may be needful too,

But this most needful keep in view.[14]

As the eldest child in the family and having a close relationship with his father, STG was most likely troubled by his failings, probably felt guilty for not being able to live up to the standard expected by his father, and was most likely troubled by this dilemma for all of his life.

Before the 1860s, when manufacturing in the city was more like a cottage industry and when residents lived alongside, it was often difficult to differentiate between residential, industrial and retail areas. Self-employed citizens who followed such occupations as blacksmith, saddler, butcher and carpenter often had workshops attached to their homes which they expanded into something other than a cottage industry. A street which looked residential because it was lined with homes would often have a front room extended to become a small shop, providing the local grocer, butcher, or hardware merchant.

The permanent site for Port Adelaide was not chosen until 1839. The South Australian Company paid £12,000 for the construction of a two-mile road and had a wharf and warehouse buildings constructed. The government had a Customs House and a number of sheds constructed. Gill was asked to record these developments and produced several watercolours between 1845 and 1848. His work showed that by about the mid nineteenth century, a number of essential and basic buildings and facilities were in place at the port. His paintings are typical Gill 'snapshots', incorporating people, animals, nets, fish baskets, anchors, and ship masts.

14 Ron Appleyard, Barbara Fargher, Ron Radford, *S. T. Gill. The South Australian Years 1839-1852*, Art Gallery of South Australia, 1986, p. 45.

Custom House Wharf, Collectors Office, East View, Port Adelaide 184?
(National Library of Australia, nla.obj-134362254)

Port Adelaide (National Library of Australia, nla.obj-134655619)

Port Adelaide 1848 (Note: Steamship Juno far left was the first vessel to steam up the Port River in 1847) (State Library of South Australia, B3701)

Some of Gill's early work of Adelaide and Port Adelaide were part of a commission undertaken in 1845 for James Allen. Allen was former proprietor and editor of the *South Australian Register* and sailed for England in December 1845, where he gave a series of illustrated lectures during 1846-47. Gill not only painted a group of watercolours for Allen's lecture tour, but assisted in preparing transparencies. It appears Allen may have had official backing for his venture to promote the colony, as he had meetings with the Registrar General for the Colony, Bartley, and involved Gill in at least one of these meetings. The meetings with Bartley are recorded in Allen's diary. For example, an entry for 23 October 1845 reads, 'meet Mr Gill at Mr Bartley's for tea.'[15].

During the voyage to England, Allen gave a lecture on South Australia in Cape Town on February 25, 1846, where the paintings were displayed. The *South Australian Register* reported Cape Town news on Wednesday, June 10, 1846, including a lecture by James Allen:

15 R. Grandison, *Art & Enterprise –Images in the Barossa Valley in mid 1840s*, unpublished paper, 1991, p. 4, State Library of South Australia, 994.2302G753b.

A lecture was given last evening by Mr James Allen, in the Commercial Exchange Rooms, on the 'Pastoral Commercial and Mining Progress of South Australia,' which a six years' residence at Adelaide, as Editor of one of the principal Journals (the South Australian Register) had enabled him to gather, and to ornament with fluency and intelligence. A kangaroo, brought from that district, added charm and a curiosity to his mission, particularly as it had been announced, that the animal "was to speak for himself"" But it merely danced the new Polka. Twenty-two faithful and spirited views of the City of Adelaide, in water colours, painted by Mr Gill, were exhibited, which afforded palpable and striking proofs of the sudden rise and prosperity of the colony.

On arrival in England, his proposal for a series of three lectures was supported and advertised by the South Australian Company. In an advertisement in the *South Australian News*, London, June 1, 1846, it was stated that:

Mr. Allen has brought with him a large number of Drawings, executed by a Colonial Artist… and is encouraged to exhibit them as a Series of Dissolving Views.

A further lecture was given on the subject of the mines of South Australia, followed by four more lectures in other parts of London and in eight other cities. It's understood the watercolours remained in England, probably with the South Australian Company.

It wasn't long after the establishment of Adelaide the people organised sporting activities to add pleasure to their lives and to recreate English social life in South Australia. Horse racing and hunting were popular with the early settlers of Adelaide. Gill's work included a hunt meet *(Hunt Meet at Dry Creek near Adelaide)* and an Adelaide race meeting *(A Race Meeting at*

Adelaide). Both painted in 1845. Hunting became a theme Gill returned to many times almost to the end of his life.

In keeping with his 1840 advertisement claiming he could draw animals, he was apparently commissioned to paint a number of horses, including *Fuz-Buz* (1849), *Cydnus* (1851), *Fidget* (1851), *Merry Monarch* (1851), and *Death of Boomer* (1853).

The early development of the Agricultural and Horticultural Society of South Australia led to the conduct of an annual agricultural and horticultural exhibition. The fourth of these exhibitions took place in Adelaide in 1845 and was recorded in two paintings by Gill (*Agricultural and Horticultural Exhibition Parklands 1845*). He also produced sketches and two watercolours on the same theme, each containing lots of people and activity. These events were an important celebration for the settlers; they were able to showcase the variety of fruit, vegetables and grains they produced for local consumption and for export. Gill would have enjoyed recording these events as he excelled at capturing the bustle and life of crowd scenes.

Agricultural and Horticultural Show 1845 (State Library of South Australia, B16066, photograph of sketch)
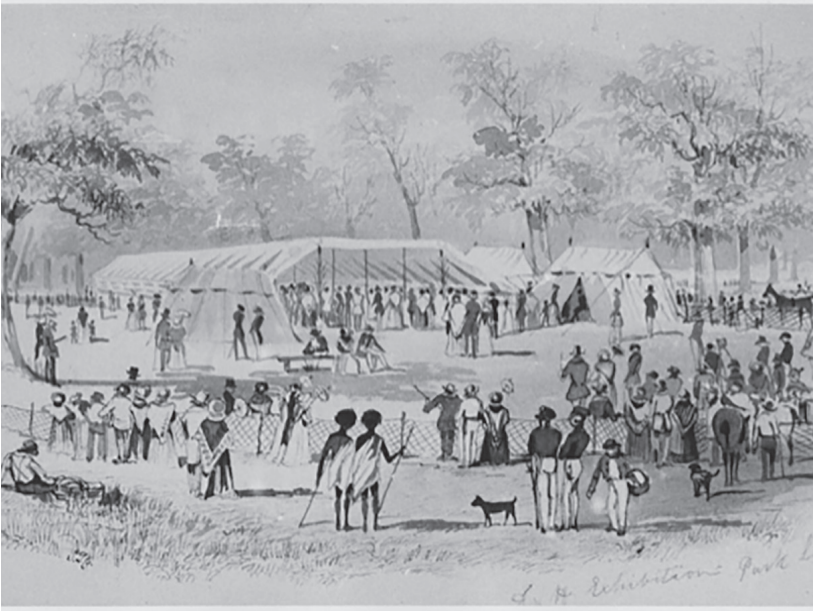
Agricultural and Horticultural Show, Adelaide (State Library of South Australia, B3695)

Gill's announcement that he was available to paint individuals, families and friends did not lead to a rush of requests for portraits to be created. Possibly, his style of painting in watercolours and his fairly small sized paintings were not regarded by the wealthy folk of Adelaide as being grand enough for them. They probably preferred more formal portraits in oil. This may have also suited Gill, as he clearly enjoyed painting groups of people and recording the atmosphere of the event rather than painting portraits. He did make one small watercolour portrait in 1850 (*R.F. Macgeorge*, who was a timber merchant and was drowned in the wreck of the *Royal Charter* 1859). Possibly the only other portrait painted by Gill is contained in a private collection belonging to the M. J. M. Carter; it is a watercolour, entitled *Thomas Harding of Kapunda* (1850). This collection contains a private view of Australian colonial art compiled by Max Carter. The Thomas Harding in Gill's portrait was the great-great-grandfather of Max Carter, and like S. T. Gill, had emigrated to Adelaide in 1839. A builder

by trade, he helped build Government House before settling in Kapunda.

While in South Australia, Gill produced his first lithographs, a medium which became an ongoing part of his practice. He may have learnt this skill while apprenticed as a carver and gilder in Plymouth. In May 1848, with Penman Galbraith and Co., he published a series of 12 lithographic portraits of Adelaide citizens, called *Heads of People*. The South Australian *Gazette* on May 31, 1849, reported:

…twelve lithographic sketches of colonists—all pretty well known—have been published during the week under the title 'Heads of People'. They are from the pencil of Mr Gill and show that the ability of this artist is not confined to landscape drawings but that it extends to a branch of art hitherto unexplored by him. These sketches are for the most part well done, one or two of them inimitable; and there is just that spice of quiet humour, bordering upon caricature, which redeems them from the dull monotony of staring portraits, without the slightest offence to the individuals introduced.

Heads of People (Sheet 3) (State Library of South Australia, B71555)

These were followed in July and September by two more sheets of five heads each, 22 in total. The subjects were all male. They were entirely set up with no names and only a caption underneath to give a clue to the identity of the subject. It seems they were easily recognisable; each portrait had strong features and most likely represented politely satirical likenesses of leading Adelaide identities. Comments in the press indicated those individuals who were drawn regarded their selection as a signal of their importance. These lithographs apparently enhanced Gill's reputation in Adelaide and demonstrated his versatility.

Captain John Finnis, True Blue (from heads of people)
(State Library of South Australia, B343)

This was possibly the start of Gill's creation of slightly humorous, caricature-style drawings, which he continued, developed and sometimes used in a comic and amusing manner to make a point. It was clear these lithographs of heads of well-known

Adelaide people caused lots of interest and some amusement and entertainment for the people of Adelaide. This is evident from the following extract taken from a letter by William Matthews:

Dear Mr Adams; I believe you want me to give you the history of the Lithographs called the "Heads of the People" that you sent to me yesterday. Well they were sketched direct from nature and then drawn upon stone by the late S. T. Gill…immediately he had done his part they were printed by your humble servant; myself and then published. The first sight of them caused a flutter of excitement to pass through the City, where the parties whom S.T.G. had sketched were seen daily and the fidelity of his sketches to the original was at once seen and commented on; especially by the Crowd who daily assembled before the Exchange Hotel in Hindley St. then kept by George Coppin (one of the Heads) …whom S.T.Gs pencil had at that time made famous. Now in regard to the mottos attached to the Heads … Each Motto refers to some peculiarity or characteristic of the party represented as for instance Kingston's Shabby Hat and the dismal appearance of Old Bouch as he responds to the toast of sweethearts and Wives, …I remain yours Sincerely; William G. Matthews.[16]

In advertising his availability to paint, Gill had also made it known he was available to paint houses. He was a very proficient horseman and often rode into the countryside to record landscape scenes that sometimes contained buildings. By the middle of the nineteenth century, larger and grander houses were being built in South Australia. Gill was commissioned to paint two of these houses (Vale Farm and Prospect House) and clearly was asked to prepare several views. Vale Farm was built near the River Torrens, in what is now the suburb of Vale Park. Gill painted two scenes at Vale Park (*Vale Park* and *From the Verandah of Vale*

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16 R. Grandison, *Art & Enterprise –Images in the Barossa Valley in mid 1840s*, unpublished paper, 1991, p. 4, State Library of South Austr

Park). Prospect House is a far more pretentious dwelling, looking somewhat like a castle from a distance, with a formal garden. It was the first gothic revival mansion in the Adelaide area with thirty rooms. This commission involved four paintings (two entitled *Prospect House, The Seat of J.B.Graham, Esqr., near Adelaide, South Australia,* and two of the garden: *View from the Leads of Prospect House, Looking towards Hindmarsh* and *View from the Leads of Prospect House, Showing west-north-west portion of Garden Grounds).* The watercolour paintings of these two houses were made around 1850 and were some of the last paintings Gill created before leaving South Australia.

From Verandah of Vale Farm (National Library of Australia, nla.obj-134366454)