

About Smirk's Cottage

This site, situated off Beacham Crescent in the town of Medina, WA, operates as a local museum for the Kwinana and Media areas. It houses an important collection of buildings and objects that tell the stories of the unique settlement, development and history of the area.

Smirk's Cottage is a restored historic house museum. Built in the early 1900s, the dwelling is a modest two room cottage with later verandah extensions and enclosures. It is an excellent example of the type of accommodation for a working family at this time. The cottage was originally the home for William Smirk (1867-1942) and his wife, Johanna (1861-1946) at their dairy and market garden. William and his brother Thomas ran a market garden business supplying Fremantle retailers from 1898 until 1912. William was also elected to the Fremantle Roads Board in 1910 and took an active role in the community, being involved in annual fairs (at which his onions and potatoes won prizes) and the Fremantle Symphony Orchestra in the 1920s.

Both William and Johanna were second generation settlers and children of convicts. Thomas Smirk, William's father, was convicted and sent to Western Australia as a convict in 1848. He married Eliza Hymus and they settled in East Rockingham running a dairy and market gardening farm. Thomas was a member of the Fremantle District Roads Board – the precursor to local government – and taught Sunday School for many years. Eliza was daughter of settlers Pheobe and Frederick Hymus who arrived in Australind WA, on the Diadem in 1842 in Australind. Thomas and Eliza had thirteen children, including William.

Johanna's parents were Thomas Kavanagh and Ann Malone. Thomas was convicted of highway robbery in Ireland in 1850 and was sentenced to 10 years transportation. He arrived in 1853, leaving behind a wife and four children. Thomas and Ann Malone lived together but never married. They had nine children of which only four survived childhood. Johanna was born Mary Jean, the second of their children. Thomas was regularly arrested and sentenced to periods of incarceration with hard labour for being drunk, idle or stealing. In 1906 while in prison on Rottnest Island, Thomas and two other inmates escaped to the mainland triggering a colony-wide search for them. They were eventually recaptured a few weeks later.



In 1889, when she was 29, Johanna gave birth to a son, Robert Joseph, by a William McCall. When William Smirk and Johanna married Robert (also known as Robert Richard or Richard Robert) would have been 12. Later in life Robert was to serve at Gallipoli and France during World War One. He lived in Queensland after the war and seems to have never returned to Western Australia.

William and Johanna moved into the cottage after their wedding in 1902 and lived there until the late 1930s when the property was taken over by George Frederick Charles, a storekeeper from Fremantle. The land was resumed by Kwinana Council in 1953 and was used as a caretaker's home for the Council Depot until 1987. It was saved from demolition in the 1980s when its importance to the history of the area was recognised. It was later listed by the National Trust. In the 1990s the cottage and surrounding site were restored by the Kwinana Heritage Group and the site was opened to the public.

Soldier's Settler Cottage

This building was built in 1922 as part of the soldier settlement scheme after World War One and demonstrates the way these families lived at this time. The timber for the home was carted from the Jandakot siding to its original location on Lyons Road. The building was home to Harold Willis and his family.

During the 1970s the building was moved to Mandogalup Road for use as a Guide Hall. Finally, the building was relocated to its present location at the Kwinana Heritage Site in 2002. It was restored by members of the Kwinana Heritage Group and displays objects that demonstrate the way of life of soldier settlers and their families.