

Article:

PENSIONER GUARD VILLAGE 1851-1874 ... (CLAREMONT)

... During the Napoleonic wars British soldiers and sailors found themselves on half pay during periods of peace. After the wars however the need for a large army faded and deserving veterans were placed on small allotments within various British colonies. There they could act as a reserve police force. These soldiers were called pensioners and in (WA) Australia they were used to guard convicts.

The pensioner guards and their families who were settled at Freshwater Bay arrived on the first convict ship to Western Australia. They were each given a lot beside Freshwater Bay and a second lot at Butler's Swamp (now Lake Claremont).

The Pensioner Guards settled at Freshwater Bay were:

Andrew Gordon, Corporal, 40th Regiment
Michael Stokes, Private, East India Company
Artillery
Robert Lindsay, Private, 2nd Queens
Regiment
Moses O'Keefe, Private, Royal African Corps
Henry Herbert, Private, Royal African Corps
John Kingdon, Private, 43rd Regiment
Peter Murphy, Private, 31st Regiment

Joseph Foot, Private, 76th Regiment
John Atkinson, Private, 2nd Dragoon Guards
James Murphy, Private, 19th Regiment
Michael Reddin, Sergeant, 61st Regiment
Thomas McMullen, Private, Royal Artillery
Samuel Sutton, Private, Royal Marines
John Barrett, Private, 61st Regiment
Samuel Butterworth, Acting Corporal, Royal
Artillery
Thomas Bandy, Private, 98th Regiment
James Rourke, Private, 27th Regiment
Charles Clark, Private, 40th Regiment
William Finlay, Private, 97th Regiment

Source: Claremont A History. Bolton & Gregory 1999.

The early colonists farmed wetlands like Butler's Swamp, planting them as the water levels dropped in spring and harvesting before the high water levels of winter. The soldiers however, were not farmers, only four had worked on farms, three had been general labourers, two had been porters and the others had been respectively a groom, cook, tailor, painter, shoemaker, clerk and teacher.

They faced the situation of having to live while clearing, planting and learning how to farm but their tiny settlement was too far from Perth and Fremantle for them to walk to any place of employment.

They were forced to work away from home or to send their wives into town to work as washerwomen while they stayed and cleared the blocks. Yet most persevered and eleven of the original nineteen stayed long enough to win the freehold of their properties granted after seven years.

Five sold up after a few more years and settled elsewhere leaving six original families, joined by four more, who formed the divided nucleus of a village spread between the fringes of Butler's Swamp and the shores of Freshwater Bay.

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The complete article can be viewed on the web at:

www.claremont.wa.gov.au/Libraries/.../Thematic_history.sflb.ashx

Butlers Swamp, Claremont



Claremont Museum formerly the school house

As we are unable to progress any further with this project until the Claremont Council contacts us, Beth Smith and I decided to take a look at the area in Victoria Avenue (formerly Pensioners Terrace) and try to work out the exact location of the half acre grants.

We stopped off at the Claremont Museum and were lucky enough to find Lindy Wallace, the Museum Officer available. She showed us the files they have on some of the Pensioner Guards, mainly Thomas McMullen, John Atkinson, Samuel Sutton and Samuel Efford together with several photos of men in uniforms which we thought may be of volunteers as they seemed more ornamental than Enrolled Force uniforms. There were also photographs of the pensioners (not in uniform) and their families that have been donated by the descendants of the pensioners.

The Claremont Museum building was purpose built in 1862 to house the school that had formerly been conducted in the living area of Mrs Herbert's cottage at P 245 as this cottage was slightly bigger than the other pensioner cottages and Mrs Herbert was the school mistress. After it was no longer used as a school house it was used for a variety of purposes including a police station and a boarding house.

Lindy advised us the location where Henry Herbert's cottage was is now, and has been for many years, the site of "The Mansions", a series of units painted a bright pink.

We walked along Victoria Avenue but, as we had not reckoned on the fact that there were 20 half acre blocks each with a frontage of 110 feet (33.53 metres) or as stated on the title deeds 1chain 67 links, we decided to take the car. Eventually we came to them and the photo shows a glimpse of Freshwater Bay at the rear of the property, a really stunning location.



The Mansions on the site of Henry Herbert's cottage, Claremont

It is quite astounding to realise that the 20 blocks covered 10 acres of river foreshore and to add to that the 20 lots of 9 ½ acres plus another 18 of around 10 acres each making a total of around 370 acres or 149.733 hectares at Butlers Swamp enclosing the area from Alfred, Davies and Shenton Roads, Servitus and Mitford Streets.

Needless to say Beth and I drove around the perimeter, there are many old houses still there but whether or not part of them was a pensioner cottage we were unable to say, it would take a very detailed examination to establish the veracity of such a claim.

by Jeanette Lee