

Crinigan's Stone Cottage

Wanderer Court
Amaroo, ACT

Canberra Archaeological Society

for the National Trust of Australia (ACT)

This project was assisted through funding made available
by the ACT Government under the
ACT Heritage Grants Program



Marilyn Folger and Helen Cooke

All photographs by Marilyn Folger

June 2008



Who were the Crinigans?

John and Maria (nee Mansfield) Crinigan lived in a stone cottage at this site from about 1842 until 1863.

John was a native of Westmeath, Ireland and at 19 years of age was sentenced to transportation for life for “assaulting habitation”. He arrived in the colony of New South Wales in 1836 and was assigned to work for George Thomas Palmer on his property *Palmerville* (the remains of the homestead are now under the Heritage Park in Giralang).

Maria, a free woman, arrived in NSW with her parents in 1832 and married John in 1842. They settled here in the stone cottage and in 1849 John was pardoned.



John Crinigan's pardon

John Crinigan bought four parcels of land in Ginninderra in 1859, including the block on which the cottage was built.

The site of this cottage was well chosen as it is near a pool of permanent water in Ginninderra Creek. There was also a nearby ford to cross the creek, so this was a key location and one that Palmer would have wanted protected from squatters.

When Maria Crinigan died in 1863, John married the widow Margaret Logue and moved into her Molonglo cottage “Camberry” (now the National Library site). John died in 1899.

Ten babies were born to John and Maria Crinigan in this cottage. The only surviving child, Eliza Jane (known as Jane) was born in 1850 and married Duncan McInnes in 1867. They lived here in the cottage with the first four of their 13 children until they moved to Glenwood, near Hall in about 1875.



**(Eliza) Jane McInnes
(nee Crinigan)**

Jane lived until 1932. 11 of her children survived into adulthood.

She had a hard life on the land and is remembered by her great grand children for her strength, determination and hospitality. She was still riding horses well into her eighties.

The McInnes family moved to Glenwood, near Hall in about 1875. They have numerous descendants in the Queanbeyan and Canberra area as well as around the world.

|

What do we know about this site?

The original Aboriginal inhabitants of this area, which they called Ginninderra, have also left signs of their activities in stone artefacts found nearby and stone resources quarried not far from here at Girrawah Park in Gamberra Street, Ngunnawal.

The cottage was not lived in full time after the McInnes family left; it was a ruin by the 1920s. The land became part of the Cavanagh family's farm (they were related through John Crinigan's second wife, Margaret Logue). During this time parts of the cottage were recycled, such as some of the timbers and stone. A stone garden wall and ramp to the homestead at 'East View' (further along Gundaroo Road) came from here. Sites like this were often bulldozed and ploughed as they were considered to be a hazard to sheep. However the Crinigan descendants never forgot where their ancestral home was and used to visit the site for family events.



The Stone Hut site after conservation of the walls.

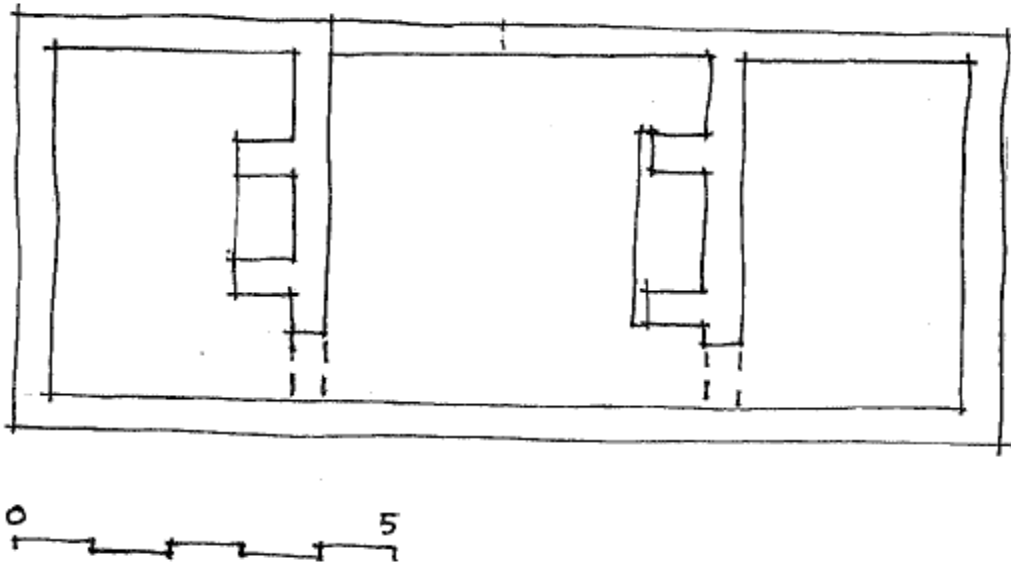
All that remained of the cottage in the early 1990s was a pile of stones. The land was resumed by the ACT Government for development of the suburb of Amaroo. The Crinigan descendants wrote to the Minister advising of the significance of the place to them and the history of Ginninderra; the area of the cottage and the orchard was listed on the ACT Heritage Register and planned into public open space. A grant was received to stabilise the remaining walls of the cottage so that visitors could experience the site. The fallen stone had to be removed to discourage the snakes so that a stonemason could work on the walls.

The Canberra Archaeological Society and Crinigan family descendants (pictured below) excavated the cottage site and are still analysing the artefacts recovered.



Crinigan's Hut site being cleared of rubble and brown snakes.

It was a surprise to find that the stone cottage had not two but three rooms and two stone fire places. At least 40 or so settlers are known to have lived along Ginninderra Creek in the mid 19th Century, possibly in cottages similar to this one.



Original site plan by Eric Martin

Although life was hard and austere, artefacts found beneath what was once a wooden floor show that there was time for playing the mouth organ; women had some fine jewellery; wore patterned and pearl buttons; and the men wore some interesting buckled belts. The family used a range of patterned china crockery and indulged in the odd alcoholic beverage. At times this was more than just horehound beer, as contemporary newspapers record a brawl here in 1858 between Thomas Wells and Samuel Marley. Marley died from horrendous head wounds some 10 days later, after a bumpy ride on a dray to the nearest small hospital in Queanbeyan.

The Crinigans, like other early settlers, relied on their own produce as well as native animals. The archaeological excavations revealed evidence of cooked possum and bones of domestic animals such as pigs.



Pear Blossom

Three pear trees, remnants of the Crinigans' orchard which survive to the west of the cottage site, would have been planted in the mid 19th century. There are also honey or sweet locust (*Robinia*) and hawthorn trees closer to the house.

The blue irises, pictured on the front page, still bloom each spring. The local people called them 'flag lilies'.

The plan below will help you to visit the remaining features of Crinigan's landscape. The archaeologists and descendants continue to study the site and the artefacts so that the story of the Crinigans and other intrepid settlers in Ginninderra can be better understood in the future.

If you would like to help with research, contact us on www.cas.asn.au.



Please enjoy this heritage site and help us to protect it.