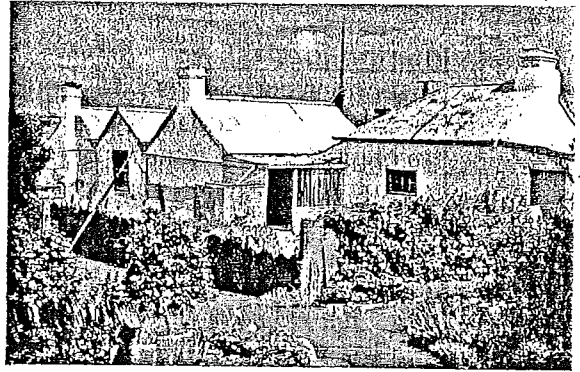


The Miners Cottage at Moonta Mines



Opened by the National Trust on October 9th 1967, as a museum, the cottage is preserved for the present and future generations so that they may appreciate the way Cornish families lived in the area without reticulated water and electricity.

Construction

Considered an excellent example of the hundreds of cottages built by miners between shifts at the Moonta, Yelta, Karkarilla, Parramatta and Hamley Mines. John Wood, a brickmaker using clay from a quarry adjacent to the cottage, built the cottage in about 1870. The bricks were fired in a kiln operated by Mr Wood between the cottage and the skimp heap.

The dining room and kitchen are built of sun dried mud and grass bricks. The next two rooms are built with mud rammed into the gaps, known as "Wattle and Daub". The parlour and main bedroom were erected by ramming clay and mud mixed with large limestones between two building boards about ½ metre high and 300mm apart. This was repeated until the top of the wall was reached. This method was a traditional Cornish style of construction. The question to young courting couples "have you got your building boards?" was as good as saying, "when are you going to get married?" All the walls received a coat of lime and sand plaster to seal out the weather and each year received a coat of whitewash (made of lime and water) to assist in making the walls watertight.

The Floors

In the very early days, the floors would have been of compressed earth. Later boards from old packing cases were used. Sometimes a lime, ash and clinker floor was put down. A modern innovation was a cement floor, but this has caused considerable problems with rising damp up the walls.

The Roof

Once covered in split wood shingles the roof is now covered in corrugated iron. The shingles can be seen through a special area in the passage. Verandahs were not a feature of the earliest cottages; they reflect the later influence of India on South Australian architecture. The low height of the verandahs and doors is due to the short stature of the Cornish people.

It was common to extend the house as the family grew. This can be seen by the additional uneven gabled roofed extensions. Many cottages started off with only two rooms.

Interior Furnishings

Rosanna Wood, Johns wife, would have had a major say in the design of the cottage. Photos of the Wood family can be found in the hall and the nursery. Descendants of the original mining families from the settlement about have donated the furniture, china, linen, soft furnishings and clothing in the cottage. It is possible to gain a very good idea of how the women lived and worked in these surroundings. The Cornish family's lifestyle was simple and revolved around the home, church and work. You can find more information about this in the book by *Oswald Pryor "Australia's Little Cornwall"*.

The Kitchen

In the Wood's cottage, the kitchen was built adjacent to the main rooms separated by a breezeway. This kept the heat from the wood fire away from the rest of the house in summer. It was also a safety factor in case of fire by preventing the destruction of the whole house. It must be remember that there was no reticulated water in the district.

Bathing and Ironing

Cornish mining cottages, along with many other houses in Australia at this time were originally planned without a bathroom. Water was drawn from the underground tank and heated on the kitchen fire. The tin hipbath or the large washing tub was placed in front of the fire on Saturday night. The family took turns to wash or bathe usually the father first, and then the cooling water was topped up with hot water from the kettle. The women for their daily ablutions used the china bathroom sets in the bedrooms. Washing of hands before meals and shaving took place on the back verandah.

The washing of clothes was often done in the open air adjacent to the wood fired copper, which can be seen in the garden. The ironing was done on the kitchen table on an old blanket and a clean white sheet. Coals from the kitchen fire were used for the box irons. Special irons were used for lace, fancywork and finely pleated white starched items.

The Garden

Designed by Mrs Mary Ferguson, the garden is a reproduction of many similar ones, which flourished in the area. Cornish miners have always been keen vegetable gardeners but also liked to have a flower and herb garden. A recognised award-winning garden, mentioned in the book "Some Historic Gardens" it has an extensive range of named plants, trees, shrubs and perennials. The cottage attendant has access to a book, naming all the plants and can assist you with information.

Garden Accoutrements

Paths, fencing and paving are indicative of the Cornish miner's resourcefulness. Old bricks, slag stones, limestone, skimp and steel mesh were used for footpaths in the garden. The stick fence is a reproduction of the ones used in the garden of cottages in the mining area during the first decades. These were used to keep goats out of the gardens. This fence erected by the Moonta National Trust in 1973.

The Lavatory

The toilet was formerly used at Captain Hancock's two-story residence in Moonta Mines and is somewhat larger than the normal earth closet. This closet has a plain wooden toilet seat; other homes may have had a smaller hole cut alongside the adult's seat, for the children's use. Ashes from the house would periodically be tipped into the pit. Squares of newspaper would have been used, not the soft toilet paper of today. Note that the toilet is placed well away from the underground water tank