



Rottnest Voluntary Guides Association Inc.

What the public can expect: Learn about the unusual story behind the construction of the cottage, the life of its first occupant, John Lomas and subsequent history of the building. These notes supplement the interpretive panels inside and outside the building. Visitors should also be encouraged to visit the enclosed garden behind the cottage. You may also wish to draw the visitor's attention to the Aboriginal Burial Ground and interpretive walk and the Museum.

Story of John Lomas

This is a brief outline of his life: A much more detailed account can be found in a paper by Steve Errington in *Early Days: the Journal of the Royal Western Australian Historical Society*, Vol 14; Part 3, 2014, pp 309-327 and in two articles by Steve in the RVGA Newsletters of Dec 2011 and March 2014.

DATE AGE ACTIVITY

- Oct 1806 0** Born in Yorkshire. He had a good education, his father, a second lieutenant in the Royal Marines, wanted him to become a Benedictine Priest.
- 1819 13** Joined 66th Regiment as a soldier (claimed later it was as a junior officer). Posted to St Helena where Napoleon was exiled. When Napoleon died in 1821 the regiment moved to Northern Ireland. Lomas then deserted the army. He was court-martialled and sentenced to 7 years transportation.
- Jan 1825 18** Lomas arrived in Sydney and was sent to work on a road gang. He frequently absconded and by December was sentenced to three years at the penal settlement at Port Macquarie. He escaped multiple times and having been sentenced to 3 months on a chain gang he also escaped from that.
- Jan 1830 23** He was charged with highway robbery was convicted at the Windsor assizes and sentenced to death. The death sentence was commuted to 7 years transportation to Moreton Bay penal establishment (now Brisbane). He escaped from there 5 times including a time in 1836 when he was sentenced to receive 100 lashes.
- Dec 1837 31** He received his ticket of freedom and immediately joined a party led by Charles Sturt taking cattle overland to Adelaide. On the way they mapped an unknown section of the Murray River. Shortly after first arriving in Adelaide he joined the mounted police and his name became linked with the murder of John Gofton.
- Jul 1840 33** Gofton was a cattle thief who had been tracked down by the police and found murdered. Lomas was sent to arrest Gofton's colleague Joseph Stagg who was eventually convicted of Gofton's murder, but there were rumours that Lomas was the murderer. There were a number of facts that supported this rumour. Stagg had no known motive and denied killing his friend despite admitting to a number of other crimes for which he would have been hanged. On the other hand Lomas left the police force after other officers could get no sleep with him crying 'murder' in the night. Later the bank manager of the South Australian Bank claimed that Lomas had deposited a considerable sum in gold after the murder.

- Aug 1840 33** Lomas married Jane Barnes and they settled on a farm in Bexley (near Adelaide) and in the next 10 years had 4 daughters and a son on the way.
- Jan 1850 43** Shortly after the death of one of his daughters at 18 months he decided to return to England leaving his pregnant wife and three children.
- Oct 1850 44** Having arrived in England he walked from Newcastle-on-Tyne to York to visit his mother. The meeting with family seems to have gone badly and he appeared to be subsequently living rough.
- Jul 1851 44** He came across a constable in West Yorkshire who suggested that he should apply to the poor house, but instead Lomas insisted on confessing to the murder of Gofton and to the theft of over 100 gold sovereigns from him, signing a confession to that effect. He was subsequently put in the Wakefield Lunatic Asylum.
- Mar 1852 45** Having been released a few months later he set fire to a barley stack and enquired to whom he could report the crime. At his subsequent trial he was sentenced to 15 years transportation. For the next 5 years he was transferred to a succession of prisons and mental asylums including 3 stints in the famous Bethlem Lunatic Asylum (Bedlam) in South London. The Superintendent at Bethlem concluded that there was nothing wrong with him, but whenever he was required to do any labour he would feign insanity.
- Mar 1857 50** Lomas left for WA on the *Clara*. He arrived 114 days later and two months after was given a ticket of leave but was later transferred to a lunatic asylum. In May 1859 he was again given a ticket of leave and declared fit to work. He was employed as hut keeper in Toodyay but then set off for Adelaide via Albany on foot. However he was arrested for being absent from his district without leave.
- Jun 1860 53** He was given a conditional pardon by Governor Kennedy but having unsuccessfully looked for work in New Norcia he again decided to go to Adelaide via Albany and stole a horse for which he was sentenced to 10 years gaol. For the next 9 years he spent time in and out of gaol in between robbing shepherds and getting a new ticket of leave and then having it cancelled.
- Jan 1870 63** Frederick Weld became Governor in 1869 and somehow he befriended Lomas perhaps at mass in the cathedral, since both were Catholics. Lomas was given a free pardon and first proposed to join John Forrest on an overland trip to Adelaide and then to seek his fortune on the Irwin River where gold had been discovered, but neither eventuated.
- Jan 1871 64** Rottneest Prison Superintendent Jackson had been advised in 1870 that he should provide accommodation and rations including 2 ounces of rum daily for Lomas (paid for by the British Government as an Imperial Pauper). Lomas lived there apparently contentedly for 3 years growing vegetables and occasionally visiting the mainland.
- Jan 1874 67** He told Jackson that he was going to visit his children, bought a boat ticket and left on the *Georgette* for Adelaide. Once in Adelaide he went to the newspaper office of the *South Australian Register* to declare that he had no involvement in Gofton's murder and denied that he had ever confessed (despite his signed confession in England). His reunion with his Adelaide family went badly and he blamed George Kempster who was now married to Jane and threatened him in a letter 'I hereby give you notice that I will shoot you..... so expect your doom'.

This caused him to be sentenced to 7 days hard labour. He was then put on a cargo boat back to Albany.

- Aug 1874 67** He returned to Rottnest but made himself unwelcome. Superintendent Timperley would later report that Lomas bad-mouthed the women and swindled the prisoners. After a confrontation with O'Grady the Chief Pilot, threatening to cut his head open with a spade, he was forcibly removed from the Island.
- Feb 1876 69** He now reverted to his old habits and became Captain Lomas the bushranger robbing shepherds in the area around York and New Norcia.
- Feb 1877 70** He wanted to return to Rottnest but Jackson refused to have him. The Colonial Secretary asked Bishop Salvado to house him at New Norcia but he refused. He said later that 'they offered me 1 shilling per day to take him, but I would not have him at the mission for 1 pound an hour'. The last 10 years of his life involved more stealing, detention and hospitalisation. In January 1888 he inquired if he could return to Rottnest, but Timperley later wrote that 'Lomas is the very last person in the colony I would care to see on Rottnest Island'
- May 1888 81** On being sentenced at York Court to 3 months prison he said 'Thank you sir, and I don't think that I will ever trouble you again. My days are fast drawing to a close'
- Dec 1888 82** Lomas died of 'old age and faulty digestion' in Fremantle Prison.

Jane Lomas re-married twice (Thomas Day and George Kempster). She died in December 1898 at the age of 75 years which means that she was not yet 17 when she married Lomas.

From the RIA

The following information was provided by Philip Griffiths of Considine and Griffiths Architects in regard to the refurbishment of Lomas Cottage.

LOMAS COTTAGE (BUCKINGHAM PALACE) THOMSON BAY SETTLEMENT ROTTNEST ISLAND

Background

Lomas Cottage was built in 1871 by Superintendent Jackson for J.B. Lomas at the request of the Colonial Secretary. Lomas was an intellectually impaired expirée.

It was a single room cottage and may not have been built with a verandah. Verandahs were common at this time. The cottage was the smaller of the two rooms that make up the present cottage (the western room). It probably had a single door and two small centre pivot windows on the north and south sides, together with a fireplace. It had no ceiling and the walls were treated with lime wash. The roof was shingled and the exterior was lime washed to a smooth finish.

Lomas left Rottneest in 1874 and died in 1888 in the Fremantle Prison hospital. After Lomas left Rottneest Warder Buckingham occupied Lomas Cottage. The name Buckingham Palace was obviously derived from this occupant's use of the place.

The 1898 survey notes that the cottage was unoccupied and that it had no ceiling, but by this time the verandah on the south side had been added and the larger room to the east was in place. The ceilings must have been added a short time later, possibly for the telephone exchange phase.

Between 1901 and 1903 the first telephone exchange was installed on the Island. The exchange was placed in Lomas Cottage. The openings to the cottage were very small and all evidence seems to indicate that the eastern wall was opened up to accommodate moving the equipment into place.

Surveys of the time indicate telephone poles and lines strung in an extensive network over the Island. There is one remaining cast iron telephone wire pole just off the north east corner of the cottage. The eastern wall was subsequently boarded up and a window introduced when the exchange was removed to the Gaol Office before being removed to Mrs. Pym's House (K1 see Lewis Survey 1907) and then the Salt Store. By 1950, the shingled roof was covered in iron; see Ferguson p 53.

Lomas Cottage was used for accommodation for various people, but does not seem to have been part of the holiday accommodation at any time. A large addition in timber frame construction was placed on the north side of the building some time in the 1960s, comprising a lavatory, bathroom and kitchen. It was latterly let to contractors working on the Island before being vacated in 1997 in preparation for the conservation works.