

JAMES SMITH (1823-1904)

Pentridge Prison warder

James Smith (1823-1904) was a warder at Pentridge Prison in Coburg.

Pentridge Warder James Smith and his descendants lived in a bluestone, slate-roofed cottage on Bell Street in Coburg for more than a hundred years. It was sold to Coburg Council in 1978 and then became the Coburg Historical Society Museum.

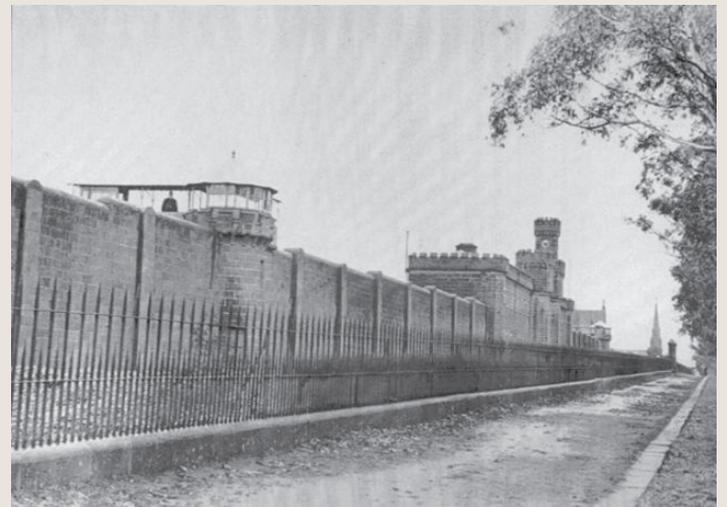
James Smith was born in Daingean, Ireland, in about 1823. He married Maria Dunne in Ireland. The couple and their first child travelled to Liverpool to board the *Runnymede*. The family arrived in the Victorian coastal town of Portland in 1852 as assisted migrants. Smith worked as an indentured agricultural labourer for a year before moving to Melbourne to become a Pentridge Stockade warder.

Although Smith was required to work twelve hour shifts in variable weather and ran the risk of catching illnesses afflicting inmates, it was a secure job with a pension. Smith worked as a warder for over thirty years and rose to the rank of Locker in Charge of the south (Elm Street) gate.

The family's first home was on the south side of Bell Street near Rodda Street. This small timber dwelling was accidentally set alight and destroyed in 1857. The family then lived in an Urquhart Street 'shanty'. Smith supplemented his income by investing in land, which paid for the construction of their Bell Street cottage, built in 1864. This solid home for his large

family of eleven children was within 400 yards of the prison, so Smith could hear the prison bell, a requirement for all warders.

Smith died in 1904, nine years after his wife. The couple and all their children are buried in the Roman Catholic section of Coburg Cemetery.



Front wall and main gate of Pentridge Prison, 1900

Find out more

Broome, R. *Coburg: Between Two Creeks*, (2001)
Osborne, D. *Pentridge: Behind the Bluestone Walls*, (2018)
O'Toole, S. *the History of Australian Corrections*, (2006)



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Jan is a professional historian who has worked across the fields of heritage, education and tourism. She has taught at several universities, including Monash University where she delivered the master of public history course. She is also a former Chair of the Heritage Council of Victoria. Jan was appointed to The Greater Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust in 2010.



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