

Mayes Cottage

House Museum





Mayes Cottage House Museum

Mayes Cottage is a nineteenth century house museum located at 20 Mawarra Street, Kingston. Originally called *Pleasant Place*, it was built in 1887 by the Mayes family. Today Mayes Cottage is maintained by Logan City Council and staffed by volunteers. It is open to the public from 10.30am to 4pm, Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

This booklet recounts the history of the Mayes family and the lifestyle of the pioneering era. By examining the objects and furnishings of the various rooms of Mayes Cottage and the accompanying out buildings, the hardships and joys of life at the turn of the previous century are brought to life.



Introduction

John and Emily Mayes and their two small children, Joshua and Ruth, arrived in Brisbane from England aboard the *Indus* on 21 July 1871. On 27 June 1873 John took up 321 acres of land in the area that was later to become Kingston. At that time it was simply known as Scrubby Creek.

The Logan Agricultural Reserve had been surveyed in 1862 and settlers quickly took up the available land. Many Logan settlers initially planted cotton. The American Civil War had led to shortages of cotton. The mills of England needed to source new raw product and Logan was thought to be an ideal climate for cotton cultivation. This proved not to be so and by the time the Mayes family arrived the cotton industry was virtually over, and riverside farmers had turned to sugar growing.

Mayes' property was north of a parcel of 200 acres taken up by Charles Kingston in April 1872. A family relationship existed between the two families back in England. Charles and Harriet Kingston had arrived in Brisbane aboard the *Hastings* in 1857, also with two small children. Charles Kingston worked on the Waterford Ferry and later for Henry Jordan's Tygum Sugar Mill. Charles Kingston was one of the earliest and longest residing residents of the area. His name appears on local correspondence held in State Archives as early as 1863. Henry Jordan granted him land at Tygum, in 1871 (near Milliodora Road). The location was known as Kingston's corner.



Mayes Family 1887

At that time Waterford was the closest township, having evolved around the ferry crossing which was formally gazetted in 1865, although unofficial ferries had operated for the previous four years. A police barracks was established on the corner of Tygum Road in 1866. A shanty pub operated opposite, also on the banks of the river from about 1865. By 1871 the Beenleigh Courthouse and Post Office were established, with Beenleigh soon becoming the business centre of the region. The Waterford police barracks closed at this time, but the Waterford School opened. The Mayes and Kingston children later walked to this school.

The Mayes family quickly established themselves after taking up their selection. In accordance with the requirements, they built a two roomed slab hut, dug a waterhole, and erected fences. They planted out one acre of oranges and other fruit trees. All of this occurred within two years of arrival on the property. John Mayes applied to purchase the property in 1883 and a Deed of Grant was issued in 1883. Almost eight acres were resumed for the South Coast Railway, which was under construction in 1884 and John Mayes applied for a refund for that land in August that year. The railway brought prosperity to the region allowing easier access to markets for the local produce, but also facilitating the availability of building materials.

The family lived in the slab hut until construction began on the new house in mid-1886. At that time Lahey's were operating the former Tygum sugar mill as a sawmill, so wood was readily available for building. The Mayes moved into the new house, named *Pleasant Place*, the week before the disastrous 1887 flood, which peaked on 22 January.

Charles Kingston established his home *Oakwood* on a knoll overlooking the railway line, presumably soon after acquiring the land in 1872. In 1884 he became the receiving office keeper for the mail in the region which would bear his name.

The second house built by Kingston on this site remains at Hibiscus Street overlooking Jacaranda Avenue. In 1890 Charles and Harriet Kingston built a gracious retirement home on the hill between *Oakwood* and *Pleasant Place*.

During the 1880s, the Mayes family grew a range of fruits including mangoes,



Mayes Family, circa 1891

pineapples, citrus, guavas and persimmons. About 20 head of cattle were introduced during the 1890s. John or Josiah brought shares in the Queensland Cooperative Dairy Company which established a butter factory in Kingston in 1907. The milking yard was built at that time. However timber was to become the mainstay of the property for many years. The family supplied timber for pit props for the Ipswich mines, railway sleepers, fence posts and other undressed timber products.

John Mayes died in 1908 and Emily later married John's brother Richard. Josiah and Daisy Mayes moved into *Pleasant Place* and formal transfer of the property occurred in 1918. The family continued with a range of farming pursuits which came to include dairying and bee keeping. Emily Mayes died in 1933 and she is buried in the Bega Road Cemetery with her husband and other notable locals, including Charles and Harriet Kingston.

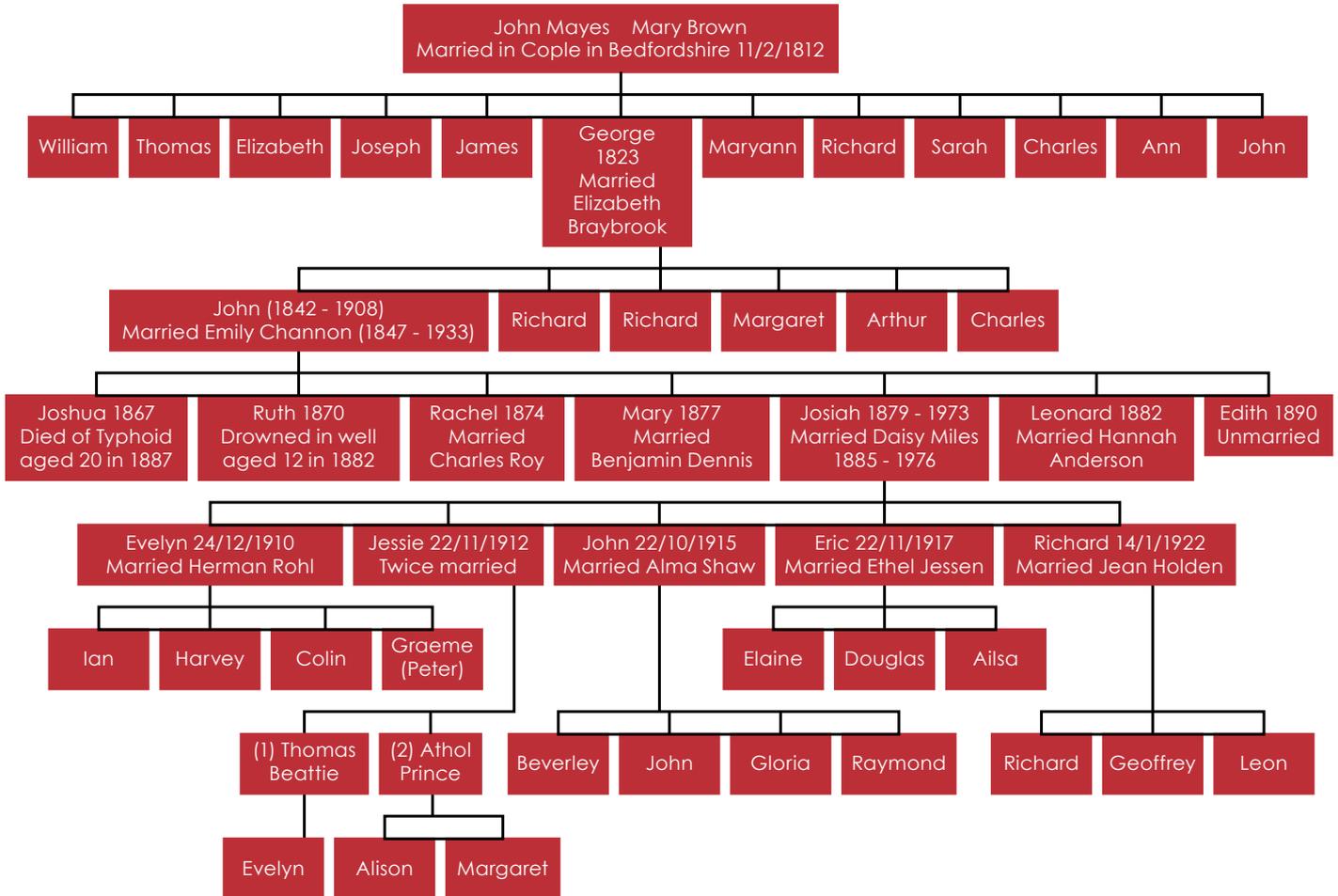
A storage shed was constructed near the milking yard in 1930s. Josiah installed a diesel circular saw in 1930 which he used to cut firewood blocks, which were sold to supplement the family income. Electricity was connected in 1937. The walkway between the kitchen and the house was widened at this time. The laundry was added in the early 1940s using timber from the buggy shed, which had been located on the side of the old slab hut.

Richard Mayes, son of Josiah and Daisy, served in the Air Force during WWII. The family built a bomb shelter under the mango trees during the war years. Richard married in England and he planted a row of oleanders along the drive to welcome his English bride Jean to Kingston after the war.

In 1954 the family sold off the land bordering Wembley Road and it was subdivided into two and a half acre farmlets. Ten acres were kept around the house and Josiah continued to live there until 1972. By 1973 both Josiah and Daisy were living in the Beenleigh nursing home, where Josiah died that year. In 1974 the Queensland Housing Commission acquired the remainder of the Mayes' estate, apart from 2,198 square metres around the house. Daisy died in 1976 and in 1978 the Housing Commission sought to resume the house. A local action group stormed Parliament in protest. After a drawn out campaign to save the property, it was declared a Reserve for Park and Recreation in 1979, with Albert Shire Council as trustees. At that time there was no heritage legislation in Queensland. The property was saved because of the value of the vegetation, rather than the house, although this was implicit in the process.



Emily Mayes, n.d.



Mayes Cottage House Museum

The front rooms

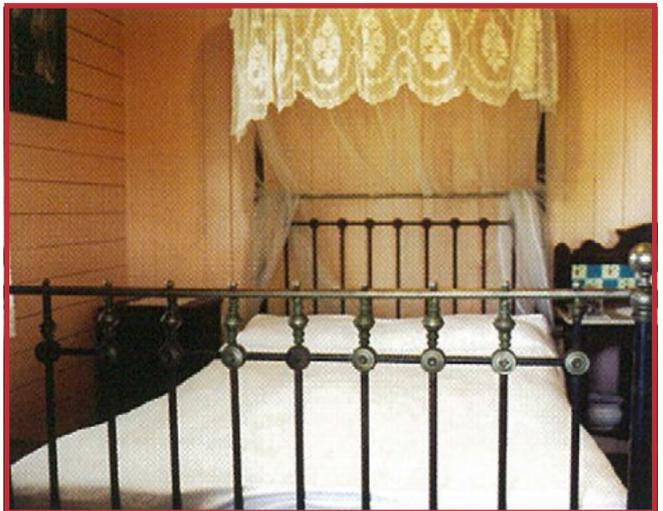
Mayes Cottage is a genuine relic of Queensland's pioneering age. Genuine, because it is almost exactly as it was when it was built over a hundred years ago, in 1887. This house, and what remains of the slab hut that stands outside, are originals, not reproductions. For visitors this is a rare opportunity to experience a part of Logan's heritage.

The site and the buildings that stand here today are significant because they show us a world that largely has been lost, its remains having either fallen down or been obliterated through development. Mayes Cottage is also a window into the world of immigrant settlers who contributed to this great country.

The house was built sixteen years after John and Emily Mayes first arrived here. It is furnished now as it was in the early 1930s, when John and Emily's eldest surviving son, Josiah, lived here. Josiah and his wife Daisy slept in the bedroom you see on your left as you enter the front room.

The house was built so that it captured breezes to cool it down in the heat of summer, and also a view that is still magnificent today. Look south and west out of the windows or the doors, and you can still see Mount Tamborine, the top of Mount Barney and the many hills that dot the Fassifern Valley. You can even see the escarpment that marks the edge of the Darling Downs. The view closer to the house has altered, as some of the photographs you will see in the room opposite the dining room will show.

Comparing Mayes Cottage front room with the many conveniences we enjoy these days, the lounge may seem small and sparsely furnished. But to Josiah and Daisy, and to the whole Mayes family, this was a better-than-average home.



Mayes Cottage front bedroom

The dining room

John and Emily Mayes brought their family up in this house after living their first years in a simple slab hut. The main parts of that hut still stand in the grounds on the western side of the cottage. John and Emily brought two children with them from England and four more were born in the hut. The last child, Edith, was born in this house. Unfortunately, neither of the two children who made the voyage out with them survived very long. Ruth sadly drowned in the well in 1882 and Joshua died in Cairns in 1887 of typhoid fever.

The dining room was the place where the family gathered on formal occasions. When Josiah and Daisy lived here, this room was the place where the family would gather for Sunday dinner. That was, of course, if they weren't involved in choir practice after morning church service. On those occasions, the family would take lunch with them, as the trip to and from Loganlea, where the nearest church was located, would have made the more formal dinner at home far too late. Ian Rohl, Josiah's grandson, remembers occasions here when there would be a gathering of the clan.

Christmas would have been just such an occasion. Picture the scene: the whole family gathered for the traditional roast fowl and baked vegetables, most likely to have been grown on the property. Then the Christmas pudding, complete with threepences and sixpences, for every family member. The coins were first scrubbed then boiled to make sure they were clean. They were then inserted into the pudding, and all the family were able to give the pudding a good stirring before it was wrapped in a pudding cloth and boiled for hours. Everyone ate their pudding carefully so that they didn't swallow the coins.

But what would they do when the meal was over? Eric Mayes and the other boys might have raced their billycart down the hill in a rare moment of relaxation from the work of running the dairy. The rest of the family may have gathered around the piano in a good old sing-along.

In this era, few people had a wireless and no one had television. You had to make your own fun and learn to appreciate your family's voices and each one's ability to entertain the rest of the gathering. This was the most precious time of family life.

The slab hut

This hut was the original home of John and Emily Mayes, the founders of Mayes Cottage. Look at the timbers and you will see that most of the slabs are cut from the outer timbers of large logs. Those logs were split by driving metal wedges into the wood along the grain, to make the slabs for the sidewalls of the hut.

John and Emily built the hut to accommodate their family. Four children were born in the hut, including Josiah, who later carried the property on. John worked cutting timber and clearing the land to develop a substantial orchard. He supplied the Brisbane area with fruit for many years. The mango trees date from that period.

When the house was completed in 1887, the family moved and this hut then became a shelter for a buggy and, much later, a car. As an example of the craftsmanship involved, Ian Rohl remembers that it was still secure against rain and the wind sixty years later. You might think that this was a hard way for a family to live, especially when there was little here but scrub. Emily cooked on an open fire and used a hollowed-out anthill as an oven.

Consider then what John and Emily had left behind. John had been employed as a gardener on an estate in Bedfordshire England, while his wife worked as a house servant. There, they had little to look forward to but a life of uncertain servitude.

Here, in Australia they owned 321 acres, an unheard of opportunity back in England, and they were masters of their own destiny. Under those circumstances then, a slab hut was no real hardship. Nor, to Josiah many years later, was the daily walk to Waterford and back to attend school.



Mayes Family circa 1889

The dairy

As the eldest surviving son, Josiah eventually took over the property. He married Daisy Miles in November 1909 and just over a year later their first child Evelyn was born. Josiah and Daisy moved into *Pleasant Place* in February 1913. Josiah continued the logging and supplied firewood to many families in the area, some as far away as Mount Gravatt and Holland Park.

In 1922 Josiah broke his leg, which meant the end of the timber business for some time. The family quickly expanded their dairying activities and it came to be the staple industry of the family. A cream shed was erected and was roofed with shingles from the slab hut. It was used for cream separation and for spinning out the honey. A school had been established in Kingston in 1912 and the children delivered the milk around the neighbourhood before and after school.

Some of Josiah's dairy surplus went to the Kingston Butter Factory, which had been opened some few years before, but the main outlets for milk were the householders in the area. In the dairy a creamery was set up to handle the work of separating the cream. Dairying is a constant task though and Josiah was not always available to do the milking and make the deliveries himself. Here, Ian Rohl remembers one of those days when Josiah and Daisy were here for the milking task:

'Milking time is late in the afternoon. Usually the cows have arrived and wait patiently outside the milking yard, but sometimes they linger on the green pasture near the railway line, half a mile from the house. My grandfather cups his hands to his mouth and calls out to "kep kep"; there is an answer from the herd and they are on their way.

'My grandparents are seated on sawn wooden blocks, my grandmother wears a cotton apron over her dress and with quick, efficient strokes, the warm milk squirts and froths into the bucket. The rest of the herd wait while a cheeky willy wagtail takes a free ride on a broad, swaying back. If it's nesting time, he'll also steal a hair from the tail to add to his cobweb-coated nest.

'The first cows are finished and, with the help of the dog, tail a-wagging, playfully nipping at the occasional heel, the first two cows are replaced by another two. And so, another milking goes on, twice a day, seven days a week and fifty two weeks in every year.'



Mayes Cottage today

To supplement his income, (once his leg had healed sufficiently), Josiah also worked on the roads whenever the local council wanted him. Josiah's son then did much of the day-to-day work.

Kingston was, by then, a small but well-developed community. There were eleven houses attached to the Butter Factory. There was also a substantial piggery that ran some thousand pigs a year. There was a gold mine that employed people, a number of poultry farms, a one-teacher school and a general store.

The day for the children began at 6.00am with breakfast, then they had to milk the cows and deliver the warm milk before setting off for school. School started at 9.30am and it was not uncommon for the children to be running late. Eric Mayes was one of those children and he recalls that he and his brothers Jack and Dick would sometimes be running to make it in time, only to see the teacher standing waiting for them, banging on the roof with his cane and yelling 'Come on, Mayes, come on'.

After school, a return walk to the house that took as long as half an hour, then down to the paddock to cut the feed for the cows. The feed was chaffed by hand, then the cows were milked and fed. But they were only part of the tasks. There were the deliveries to make before getting home, hopefully before it got dark, for tea. After tea, it was time for homework done by the light of a candle or a small lamp mounted on a tin.

Of course, the cows didn't take Saturdays and Sundays off, so the boys still had milking and work to do on the weekend. On Saturdays, as well as the milking and the deliveries, they also had to clean up the cow manure and cart it away. On Sunday, there was church at Loganlea. For the whole family then, Saturday and Sunday afternoons were about the only time of rest.

The kitchen and doing the laundry

Built separate from the rest of the house, partly as a means of limiting the potential for a fire to take hold and destroy the entire house, the kitchen was the real centre of the family's daily life. Beyond all of the other rooms in the house, this was the place where Daisy and Emily, like most pioneering women, spent the great bulk of their time.

In the kitchen, Daisy Mayes would make her own cream and butter, jams and bottled fruit, preserving what she could for the off-season. Daisy would also make and mend clothes on the sewing machine and then cook what was needed for a family, hungry after a full day's work. There was no timer on the wood-burning stove and no microwave to speed up the cooking. Baking bread was a daily necessity. It would take anything up to three hours to prepare a roast dinner ready for the table.

When Daisy wasn't busy in the kitchen, she boiled up the 'copper' in the laundry so her family had clean shirts, underwear, sheets and towels. Daisy did not have an automatic washing machine to ease her burden. All Daisy had to remove the dirt was a cake of soap and heaps of good old-fashioned 'elbow grease'. She would stack firewood under the copper, light it, then wait for the water to boil. Next she would sort the dirty clothes and scrub the worst of the dirt out by hand, using a board now only ever seen as an instrument in a bush band.

The clothes were then put into the boiling water. One of the advantages of the old method was the bag of 'blue' that Daisy would have used to enhance the whiteness of her washing. Blue bags could also be used to treat bee stings, handy when you kept bees as Josiah did.

The kitchen was the room where the family gathered on most occasions. This was also the largest room in the house, and it needed to be. Eric Mayes remembers when the room was finally lined to make it warmer, and the fireplace was moved from one end of the room to the other:

"There were a couple of changes I know of... big changes, during the time the gold mine was in operation. In a chimney on the southern side of the kitchen, which is now a window, we had an open fireplace. We never used it so as Dad was wanting to brick in a pit, a charcoal pit, we knocked the old chimney down. Dad got a carpenter to put in a window. We then used the bricks in the charcoal pit"

"The kitchen wasn't sealed or lined, so he got the same carpenter to do the lining and the ceiling which was a vast improvement to the warmth of the kitchen. The only warmth we had in the house was the wood stove at the one end of the kitchen, where it is now, and that was burning all the time."

"We used to let it go right through the night. If the fire died out, we'd relight it in the morning."

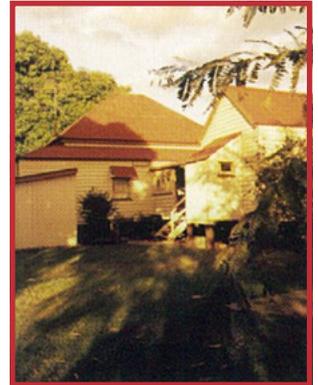
Warmed by the heat of the stove and a mother who cared for her family, the kitchen was where the real life of the family went on, where each day began and ended. This was where the news of the day's happenings was passed on from each member of the family to the others, while a welcome meal was washed down with a hot cup of tea.

Conclusion

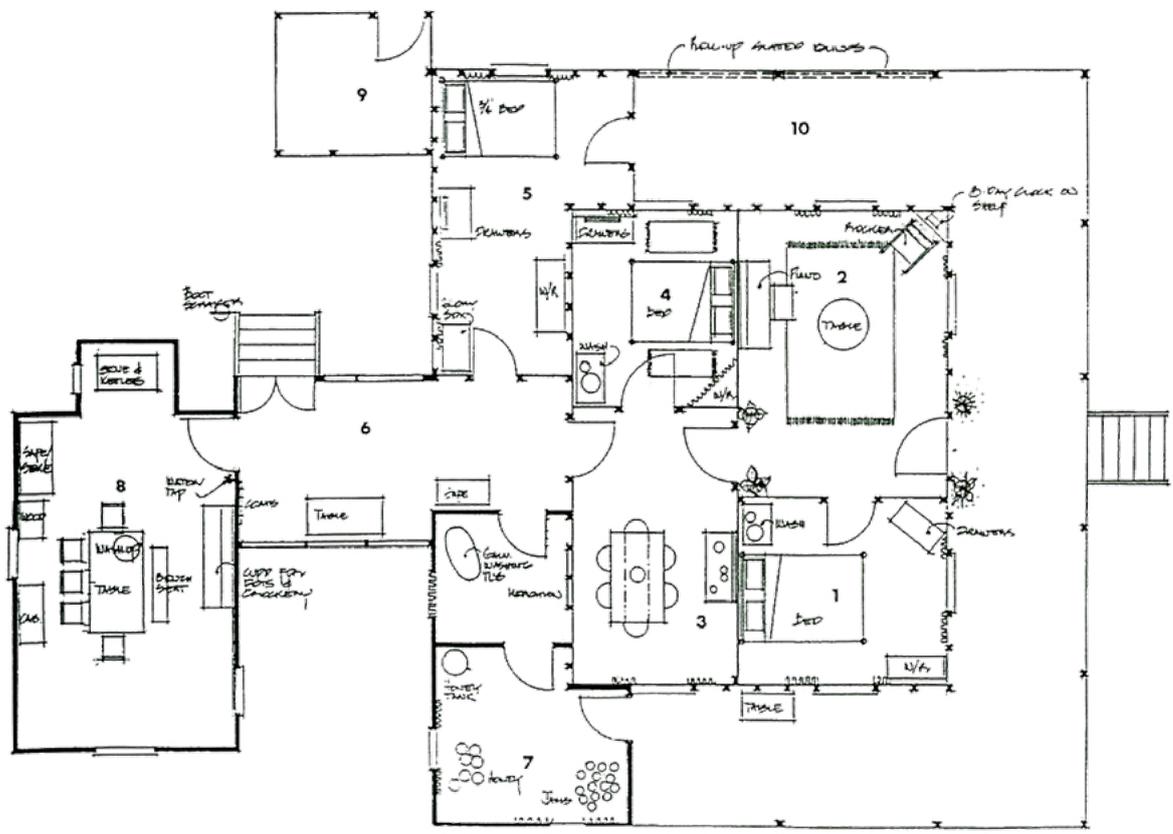
It is not easy to imagine a life so full of activity today, yet there is no doubt that life was enjoyable for the Mayes family. It was hard at times, but also very rewarding.

None of the people who grew up in that era regretted their lives of hard work and commitment. Today, we can stand in Mayes Cottage and look out on what is left of the orchard, the cow bails and the paddocks that stretched down to Wembley Road. Those views are gone, and so are many of the birds that once nested here in the trees that stood where houses now stand. Even the old school has gone, moved to another location. But if you close your eyes and imagine, you might recall the cows, the dog yapping at their heels, making their way up the hill for the afternoon milking task.

This truly is a portrait of a vanished world, a simpler world. A world created by people like John and Emily Mayes, Josiah and Daisy Mayes, the boys, Jack, Eric and Dick, the girls, Evelyn and Jessie, and relatives who lived in the area and who came here to celebrate family. It is also a portrait of pioneering Australians.



Mayes Cottage today



- LEGEND
- 1 PARENT'S BEDROOM
 - 2 FRONT PORCH
 - 3 DINING ROOM
 - 4 GIRL'S ROOM
 - 5 BOY'S ROOM
 - 6 LIVING
 - 7 KITCHEN
 - 8 LAUNDRY
 - 10 VERANDAH

FURNISHING SKETCH
Scale: 1/50

CAHMAN

Acknowledgements

A special thanks to Mary Howells for her heritage research and written introduction; to the volunteers of Mayes Cottage for their ongoing support; to the descendants of the Mayes family; and to the many oral history contributors who provided valuable insights into life at Mayes Cottage.

References

Brouwer, Catherine, *Mayes Cottage interpretation of the setting: a report for the National Trust of Queensland*, National Trust, June 1991

Buchanan, Robyn, *Logan rich in history, young in spirit*, Logan City Council, 1999

Howells, Mary, *Logan River tinnie trail, a heritage trail along the Logan River*, Logan City Council, 2003

Jones, Michael, *Country of five rivers: Albert Shire 1788 - 1888*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1988

Miles, Jinx, *Mayes Cottage collection*, n.d.

Starr, Joan, *Logan, the man, the river and the city*, Southern Cross PR and Press Services, Tenterfield, 1988.

Oral history interviews

Eric Mayes interviewed by Jeff Rickertt on 2 July 1998, Logan City Council Oral History Project

Ian Rohl interviewed by Jeff Rickertt on 10 September 1998, Logan City Council Oral History Project

Mayes Cottage

House Museum

Mayes Cottage

20 Mawarra Street
Kingston QLD 4114

**Open Thursday, Friday
and Saturday
10.30am to 4pm**

For group bookings and school visits:

Call (07) 3412 4147 Mon – Fri 8am to 5pm

Email: mayes@logan.qld.gov.au

logan.qld.gov.au/mayescottage

[#mayescottage](https://www.instagram.com/mayescottage)



Printed May 2021