



# museum without walls

## MANDURAH COMMUNITY MUSEUM

### The Mandurah Hermit

On Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> of September 1966 at 1:15am, Robert Alexander Cruikshank (38) said to a police officer while being arrested, **"Thank God it's all over,"** and asked for a cigarette.

There had been approximately 100 breaking and entering offences in the Mandurah area over a period of six months. Tinned food, liquor, cigarettes and clothing estimated at \$1000.00 had been reported stolen.

The fear amongst the residents was great, to the point where women fish filleters at the Ocean Canning Factory at Wannanup were banned from working at night because of the dangers of leaving children at home unattended.

Police and volunteer residents, tracker dogs and mounted police had conducted intensive searches time and time again to try and find who was responsible. The person managed to continuously evade the search parties.

The odds were stacked against them. The beaches, sand hills and thick scrub offered countless hiding places. The area had thousands of shacks and cottages which were unoccupied for most of the year. There were also boats tied along the estuary, some left unattended for weeks at a time.

The police found a bush hideout south of Mandurah. It contained food, liquor, cigarettes, lamps, binoculars and a first aid kit.

Residents of holiday homes had found evidence that someone had been living in their homes, helping themselves to liquor, food, bedding and other household items.

A mother came forward reporting that she had not seen her son since January and appealed for her son Robert Alexander Cruikshank to come forward, but to no avail.

It was remarkable that a person could move so frequently from one hiding place to another for so long without being seen by anyone.

There had been several reports of breaking and entering incidents near Ormsby Terrace during September. Shortly after midnight on Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> September 1966, policemen on foot patrol near Ormsby Terrace noticed a house with an open window with a knotted rope hanging from a manhole. In the loft above they found a lamp, a large quantity of liquor and tinned food.



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### The Mandurah Hermit cont'd

Three teenagers, Peter Sutton (19), Ray Hirst (18), Bob Palmer and a Police Constable John Butt waited in the house for the man to return.

Peter Sutton was on the floor and saw the man's silhouette at the window. "I thought he was coming in to get me. When he shone the torch onto my eyes I didn't know what to do, so I just smiled. The man then turned and ran out of sight."

Constable Butt gave chase and caught the man in a swamp about 150 yards away from the house.

When arrested, Cruickshank said to a police officer, "Thank God it's all over," and asked for a cigarette.

On Wednesday morning Mandurah Police and Fremantle C.I.B went to the T.A.B Agency near the Peninsula Hotel and the Ormsby Terrace property. They removed a hoard of blankets, magazines, books and other items from the loft of two buildings. The appearance of the items removed suggested they had been there for some weeks.

The T.A.B manager Mr Ron Fleming hadn't noticed anything out of the ordinary when he had visited two weeks earlier.

Sergeant Cunningham said, "If it wasn't for the devoted spare time efforts of many civilian volunteers, I feel we may not have caught him."

Three months later Robert Alexander Cruickshank faced trial before beginning a prison sentence at Fremantle gaol.