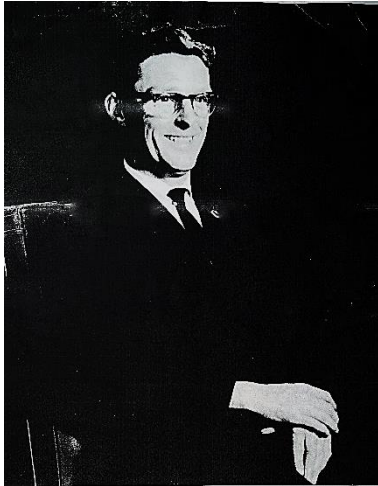


William John Irwin



Cr William John Irwin

In the early 1960s, new residential estates were being established across the newly formed Shire of Altona. With this expansion, several streets and parks were being named after our local councillors who had, or were presently, giving of their time to represent their fellow residents within the shire council.

In Altona North, situated between Blackshaws Road and what is now the Westgate Freeway, is Irwin Avenue. It is so named to recognise the contribution of then resident and councillor William John Irwin.

Three months after the council elections in August 1960, Councillor Alfred William Langshaw resigned to take up a position as the Altona Shire Building Inspector. His vacancy was contested by three candidates, one of which was William John Irwin, a North Altona resident and Australian Labour Party member. William had been a key player in the drive for Altona to secede from the Werribee shire, having held the positions of treasurer and president during his time on the Altona Municipal Campaign Committee. In fact, having only been in Australia for a short period of time, William had well and truly entrenched himself into the political arena and local community affairs of his newly adopted hometown. So, what is his story?

William John Irwin (Jnr.) was born in Belfast, Northern Ireland, in 1924, to parents William John Irwin (Snr.) and Sarah Irwin. As a young man, William Jnr. trained as a sheet metal worker¹ before joining the Royal Navy during World War 2. He served within the Pacific, spending some time in and around Australia's coasts. William must have been impressed with what he saw, because on 29 September 1949, he decided to leave his home and family in Northern Ireland, setting sail aboard the *Esperance Bay* for a new life in Australia. Following



his arrival in Australia, William soon made his way to Altona. In 1952, he married Lesley Eileen Stephensen McMillan, and the couple had four children, Maureen (born in 1952), Robert (1954), William David (1958) and Garry George (1960). It was just after the birth of their youngest son that William decided to put his name forward for the council election, which was required due to the resignation of Cr Alfred Langshaw. The election took place in early December 1960 and William, who represented the Australian Labour Party within this election, was up against two independent candidates. William almost gained a clear majority of primary votes and therefore only needed a handful of preference votes to secure his position on the Altona Shire council. Given that his predecessor had only a year to run of his term, William was required to contest again during the next council elections in August 1961.

Around this time, William's marriage to Lesley Eileen Irwin (nee McMillan) ended. Despite personal hardship, William saw out his full term as a councillor. Later, during the following election in August

¹ Sheet metal trades workers use drawings and blueprints to determine the required materials and tools needed to fabricate various products. They work with thin sheet metal such as steel, aluminium, copper and brass.

1964, he advised that he would not recontest his position as the representative for Altona North. During his time in office, both Irwin Avenue and Irwin Reserve in Hobbs Street, Altona North, were named in recognition of him.

A few years later in 1967, William married Jennie Alison Humphreys and the couple moved into his home in Clematis Avenue, Altona North. Jennie had previously been married to Cyril John Warlond (in 1942) from which they had one son, Keith Alun Warlond (born in 1944). With his time as councillor over, William had also returned to his old trade as a sheet metal worker.



Jennie Irwin and Keith Alun Warlond

In 1977, William's youngest son Garry was involved in a car accident as a passenger, in which he suffered severe brain damage. Garry spent six weeks in a coma and then a further few months recovering, but he was now largely dependent on his family for support. The event would have been very tragic for all of the family, including his brothers Keith and William.

On 22 May 1980, at the age of 55, William John Irwin, unexpectedly passed away. After a commemorative service, William was cremated at the Altona Memorial Park and his ashes were then taken back to Northern Ireland. He was interred within the Belfast City cemetery (Glenalina Extension section) on 10 October 1980.

Jennie Irwin continued to reside at the family home in Clematis Avenue, but in 1983, another family tragedy suddenly occurred. Garry passed away on 31 December 1983, just prior to him being awarded compensation from his car accident. His death was unexpected as he had been coping well with life and appeared to be in good spirits. In fact, on the day of his death, he had been out celebrating with his friends.

Jennie met Albert Edward Worlley around this time, and in 1985, the couple got married. The Worlley family remained living at the Clematis Avenue property until Jennie's passing on 12 March 1997. Jennie Alison Worlley was cremated at the Fawkner Memorial Park on 17 March 1997, and her ashes were collected. Albert Worlley passed away soon after on 10 December 1998.

Irwin Avenue is ultimately located within walking distance of the Clematis Avenue family home and stands in recognition of his significant contributions to the development and progress on the newly formed Shire of Altona.

There is however an addendum to this story. If William Irwin never became a councillor or only did so later in his life, Irwin Avenue or another street close by may still have borne the Irwin name for very different reasons. In April 1966, the Altona council decided that several streets close to Clematis Avenue would be named in honour of local service personnel who lost their lives during World War 2.

Two of these local men were brothers George Alfred Irwin and Joseph Ronald Irwin. Both had served in the Australian army and died during their detention as Prisoners of War. Their stories are linked below as a remembrance to them and their deeds, but it does not take away from the naming of Irwin Avenue in honour of past councillor William John Irwin.

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