

# CANBERRA'S FIRST BRICK COTTAGES 1921-1923

## built for construction workers

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Following World War 1 and the resumption of construction work on the city the Federal Capital Advisory Committee (FCAC) decided to build a few brick cottages for construction workers in the areas of the Power House (opposite the Power House – Barton near Wentworth Avenue), Brickyards (Westridge – now Yarralumla) and Civic Centre (later Ainslie, now Braddon). The construction of these cottages began in 1921 and were occupied from 1922. The initial completed houses in the Power House and Civic suburbs were around 20 and 9 at the Brickyard. In 1923 a further 16 brick cottages were erected at Forrest in the area of Ducane and Franklin Streets. The design of the cottages were based on Lithgow Cottages and they were built by day labourer employed by the Works & Railways Dept.

Brick and concrete were the chosen materials used in the permanent suburbs and the few permanent cottages for construction workers built of these materials were not sufficient for the numbers requiring them. In the post war years, the authorities decided that some accommodation for married couples had to be provided above the standard of a build it yourself humpies in the early years. The majority of humpies had Hessian walls and iron roofs.

The FCAC (Federal Capital Advisory Committee) was unable to provide brick cottages for all with the result that they had the ex-internment camp at Molonglo (present day Fyshwick) converted into cottages (1921-1922). A number of these cottages were moved to sites at Eastlake, Westridge, Civic and other sites for married and single men. HM Rolland (government architect) designed a temporary portable unlined timber cottage that were first erected at Westlake (present day Stirling Park) in 1924, then Acton (1924) and finally at Causeway (1925).



The Federal Capital Commission that took over from the FCAC in January 1925 decided to allow two areas for men to again built their own houses/humpies – Riverbourne (opposite Harman Naval Base) and Russell Hill (near the site of the present day

Campbell Shops).

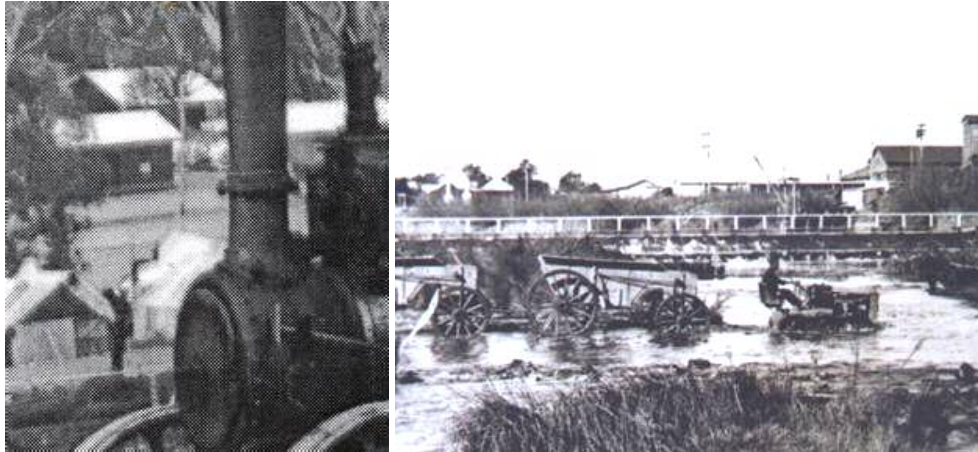
Above left is the Smith family home that moved to a number of sites around Canberra including near the site of the Eastlake Tenements opposite the Sandwash – not far from the Power House. Loaned by Colin Smith. Right opening of the Russell Hill school in 1926. The school closed in 1929 and the building was moved to Corroboree Park in Ainslie where it is now the Ainslie Hall.



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Below left: Detail from a photograph taken on Stirling Ridge, Stirling Park, Yarralumla (former Westlake) in 1924 of sewer men working. In the background are the tents of No 3 Sewer CamOp and Westlake cottages. Below right – Behind the Power House tractor at work on the crossing on the Molonglo River (circa 1924). In the background right is the Power House and on the mid to left side four galvanized iron cottages erected in the teen years of the last century.



In 1926 a decision was made to construct a number of permanent timber dwellings at the Brickyards – then known as Westridge – and in North Ainslie (now Ainslie) in the vicinity of Corroboree Park. Both sites were well away from the permanent suburbs areas being built for the public servants and others being transferred to the territory in 1927.

### **THE 1921-1922 PERMANENT BRICK COTTAGES FOR CONSTRUCTION WORKERS.**

The beginning of the erection of the cottages is referred to in the Minutes of the Fourth Meeting of the FCAC held in Customs House on 17 January 1921 that stated that the cost for 3 cottages at the Power House, 10 at Civic Centre and 7 at the Brickyards would be 3,500 pounds.<sup>1</sup> These brick cottages were referred to as the *Works and Railways Cottages*.

9 March 1921

*FEDERAL CAPITAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
Second Interim Report dealing with erection of cottages at Canberra*

*The Hon. The Minister for Works and Railways*

*The Chairman, Federal Capital Advisory Committee has signed and forwarded second interim report which deals with the erection of cottages at Canberra.*

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<sup>1</sup> Page 88 *The Builders of Canberra 1909-1929* Gugler AR - NAA - A192/FCL 20/12

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*I regret that I was unable to be present at the meeting at which the second interim report was adopted, but I understand that the members present who constituted a majority were in favour of it. The report has been sent to me to deliver to the Minister, which I accordingly do, but submit with it a minority report that I do not concur in the proposals made by the Committee.*

*On broad grounds my reason for disagreeing is that I consider the erection at the Power House of 20 cottages, a school for 200 pupils [Telopea Park School, opened in 1923] and a store for co-operative supplies would, as a first step mitigate against initial development at the Civic Centre – a dominating intention of the approved layout. My opinion is that to carry out the instructions of the Government all cottage construction should be in No 1 Neighbourhood of the Civic Centre, excepting a few cottages required for the regular employees of the Power House. I see no reason for erecting 20 cottages for that purpose at the present time.*

*I do not concur with the view that it is necessary to erect permanent cottages in the Power House location for occupation by a foreman and other employees engaged upon construction in the Government Center.*

*Another matter in which I disagree with the Committee's report as illustrated by the accompanying plan is that the tree planting north of the Molonglo River, which was agreed to at the last meeting of the Committee which I attended, has to a great extent been omitted from the scheme of planting submitted with the Second Interim Report.*

*I consider that tree planting on the northern side of the Molonglo as extensively as practicable, should be undertaken during this season, coupled with such tree planting as may be necessary at the Governmental and Power House groups.*

*Director General of Works  
9<sup>th</sup> March 1921*

A letter with a heading *Federal Capital Advisory Committee*, dated Melbourne, 1<sup>st</sup> December 1921 – Memorandum to the Secretary Department Works & Railways, Melbourne states the following:

### **CANBERRA – COTTAGES GENERALLY – FINISHING IN WHITE**

*At the last meeting at Canberra the Advisory Committee considering the question of whether the whole of the cottages to be erected should be finished in white similar to three which were so treated as an experiment near the Power House.*

*It was agreed to recommend that the remainder of the cottages at the Power House be finished in white, but that for the present, those at the Brick Works and at the Civic*

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*Centre be finished in brick colour in the ordinary manner; that any concrete houses to be erected in future be finished white.*

*It was considered that, in the case of privately constructed buildings, reasonable permission would have to be given to the owners to build in what ever material and colour of finish they might desire as long as they were of durable description...<sup>2</sup>*

### **BRICKWORK'S COTTAGES – SECTION 64, YARRALUMLA**

There were initially seven cottages erected in the area now known as Section 64 and in March 1923 two more were added. They were in red brick with a small entrance. The majority of the cottages were two bedroom and had in the living area and the main bedroom a fire place. The kitchen, although small had built in cupboards and a full length pantry. The stove was fuel and the copper in the attached laundry was heated by a wood fire.

The first tenants of the Brickyards Cottages erected in Section 64 were:

- 3. S Oldfield occupied 13.3.1921. He left 21.6.1922 and was replaced by CS Taylor
- 4. W Newbold occupied 8.12.1921 and on 7.11.1923 Newbold was replaced by RC Turbott.
- 8. E Quigg occupied 6.3.1922.
- 11. MJ Ware occupied 6.3.1922
- 12. T Culley – name crossed out and replaced by Jeremiah Dillon on 13.3.1922. Jeremiah Dillon was the sewer foreman. He died in 1929.
- 16. R Boag occupied 6.3.1922.
- 15. WK Newbold occupied 28.11.1921. He was the manager of the brickworks and left the area in July 1926.

### **CIVIC CENTRE BRICK COTTAGES**



Above photograph of the tennis courts in the reserve area of No 1 Division, Neighbourhood 1 – the cottage in the background is one of the 1921/1922 cottages. This cottage is still in situ (2009).

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<sup>2</sup> NAA A414/ 56

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In the 1920s the cottages initially known as Civic Centre cottages were part of the suburb of Ainslie which was later renamed Braddon.<sup>3</sup> These cottages were referred to as No 1 Division, No 1 Neighbourhood and are situated near Gorman House.<sup>4</sup> The area is bounded by the streets, Currong, Donaldson, Elimatta, Batman Streets and is divided down the middle by Doonkuna Street. The rental for the smaller cottages was 22 shillings per week and the larger houses, 28 shillings per week. The cottages, unlike the ones at the Power House which were white, remained red brick.



VIEW OF HEDGE AND SHRUBBERY DEVELOPMENT ROUND AINSLIE COTTAGES

The above photograph was taken in 1926 and shows the Civic Centre cottages at that time. In the background is Mt Ainslie.

One of the early references to these cottages is found in a note from John Sulman dated 4<sup>th</sup> March 1921 which states:

*With regard to the Ainslie section both Mr DeBurgh and myself feel that it is very desirable to reconsider this as a whole, making provision for stormwater and also endeavouring to get the roads in better relation to the present condition of Ainslie Avenue than it is apparent at first glance. I am going to take the matter up at once and see if I can devise a scheme as attractive as the Power House block, which both Mr Groom and Mr DeBurgh highly approve. It is very desirable for Mr Griffin's sake as well as our own that the first definite starting of the chief scheme should be made as attractive as possible. Mr Groom admitted that Mr Griffin himself intimated that he*

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<sup>3</sup> The first suburbs on the North side were named North Ainslie, Ainslie and South Ainslie. They were later renamed – Ainslie, Braddon and Reid.

<sup>4</sup> Gorman House built in 1925 for single ladies working for the Commonwealth and a few married couples was originally named Hotel Ainslie. The name was changed to Gorman House in 1927 following the opening of the new hotel named Hotel Ainslie – now Olems Hotel.

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*would have to make variations in detail in carrying out his plan... Now that Ainslie is definitely decided upon I will try to get it pushed forward at the utmost speed.*

11 November 1921 the Secretary of Works and Railways from the Secretary of FCAC documented the following guidelines for the cottages:

- *That there should be no fences on the alignment in front of the cottages.*
- *That government hedge be provided that fences dividing allotments should not be carried through the parkway*
- *That a gravel path 6ft wide should be provided through the parkway near the cottage alignments.*
- *That there should be provided next to the road and that there should be grass planted between the path and the water table.*

The first residents were:

### CURRONG ST:

- 25. SG Nish
- 29. J Chapman 4.5.1922
- 33. J Cole
- 37. AW Lucas (corner house)

### BATMAN ST:

- On corner 38 FM Johnstone and then on 12.2.1922 Arthur Richards
- 39(?) E Smith
- 39. F Dowthwaite
- 41. P Annand

### DOONKUNA ST

- On corner into Doonkuna St 42. R Maguire 9.2.1922
- 34. Thos Hope (foreman)
- 30. vacated by the widow of the late WT Jamieson on 27.5.1922 and taken over by W Cottingham
- 26. J Force 11.2.1922

On the opposite side of Doonkuna St

On the corner 43. HR Waterman

### BATMAN ST 44. FE Priddle

45. Herbert Daniels (Mess Caterer No 1 Labourers Camp, Capitol Hill Westlake – moved on 19.6.1923 to be close to his men at No 1 Labourers Camp. He was the mess caterer. His cottage was taken over by ED Gilchrist.

- 46. G Guy
- 47. corner house T Reeve 6.12.1922

### ELIMATTA ST.

- Corner house 48. N McKee who vacated 23.2.1922 and followed by GW Paul.
- 36. I Arneson who left 28.2.1922 – followed by F Edwards 12.4.1922

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32. J Kennedy 3.8.1922

By the 18 May 1925 there were 32 brick cottages erected with approximately 128 people living in them.

There were a number of problems associated with the new cottages and the grounds. A letter to the District Surveyor dated 19 July 1922 signed by 16 of the residents notes some of their concerns.<sup>5</sup> It reads:

*We the undersigned tenants of you Department at Civic Centre request the favor of your personal inspection of conditions underfoot in the vicinity of the Cottages at the Centre during the present wet spell, and subsequent urgent provision to remedy the trouble before the next rains. The rain has resulted in a quagmire round every house and those of us who are absent from the cottages daily leave and approach the premises through inches of slush, while our families are practically housebound. The effect of the mud upon floor coverings and the general domestic discomfort will be obvious to you. Thanking you in anticipation, Yours faithfully, [signed] E Smith, Allan W Lucas, H Cole, JL Chapman, H Daniels, G Guy (?), Jas Kennedy, HR Waterman, JM Force, FE Priddle, F Edwards, RC(?) Maguire, PK Annand, T Hope, WL Cottingham, F Dowthwaite.*

Another letter dated 27 September 1922 from the Commonwealth Surveyor General sent to each of the above states:

*It is noticed that damage is being done to the gardens at Civic Centre by straying stock getting in owing to gates being left open. To encourage gardening and preserve efforts taken in that direction it is essential that all gates leading from roads to the cottages be kept closed. All residents are particularly requested to assist in seeing that these gates are kept closed...<sup>6</sup>*

### **POWER HOUSE COTTAGES – BARTON**

The first three cottages were constructed in Gosse Street for the Shift Engineers at the Power House. These were soon followed by another seven and by the 29 March 1923 another eleven were added. The cottages were finished in a white stucco and the cost for a three bedroom dwelling was 1,000 pounds and 800 pounds for a two bedroom house. All the houses at the Power House and the other areas were connected to electricity and water. However, until the main intercepting sewer was ready for use around 1927 all these areas were connected to a *central* septic tank or tanks.

There were a number of complaints by the residents particularly about the poor finish to dwellings and a request in one case for a concrete floor in the garage as the sand

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<sup>5</sup> NAA A361/1 DSG 24/85

<sup>6</sup> NAA A361/DSG24/85

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floor made it difficult to get the car in and out of the garage. The residents were also annoyed that they were not included in a conference relating to *Amusements*. A deputation on behalf of the residents was requested to speak on their behalf on the matter. The deputation consisted of Messrs J McRae Dunn and PC Douglas (fire chief). The petition was signed by Messrs J Pand, JH Hays, Wm J Mitchell, AK Murray, A Alder, P Jolly, WJ Traynor, A Templeton, E Gipps, CCD Fitzpatrick, Donald F Fraser, JF Kingston, D McCorkindale (his daughter later became the postmistress – he was a foreman of the Joiners' Shop and played bagpipes at the Burns Club), Geo Ross, WJ Fraser, J Field, W McNamee, HH Martin, P Murdon, PL Corkhill, JA Cameron, T Hulley, Clyde Finlay (first doctor to take up residence and practice at Kingston()), J Robbins, C May, J McRae Dunn, PC Douglas, Trevillian, RS Shannon, W Adamson, George L Daniel, Stanley K Peak, Pitcher.

The ladies were also annoyed about the thoughtless design of the laundry facilities. In a letter dated 16 June 1924 they stated:

*We wish to draw your attention to the way in which the wash houses are exposed to the weather and we think that something ought to be done in closing them in on the wet day the rain beats right into the tubs...* [signed] Mesdames Field, Boyd, Douglas, C Fitzpatrick, A Murray, E Pticher, Lucas, Gerrard, Crowe, Brown, Traynor, Corkindale, Grandfield, LE Shannon.<sup>7</sup>



The photograph right was taken around 1926. It is a general view of the Power House Cottages. The suburb at that time was Eastlake. In the reserve in front of the cottages St Paul's Church was erected and a tennis court built. The trees were planted in the reserve in front of the Power House around 1919.<sup>8</sup> In

the background top left are the Kingston Shops. Following is another view of the cottages.

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<sup>7</sup> NAA A361/DSG25/433

<sup>8</sup> Cecily Hinchcliffe, whose mother, Mrs Stanley, was in 1919 Mess Caterer at the Engineers' Mess recalled that the family's pet cockatoo used to pull out the then newly planted trees and it was Cecily's job to sneak over and replant each.



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This suburb of Barton was near the Power House and site of the 1921/22 brick cottages usually referred to as Power House cottages. On the reserve in front of the Power House was the first St Paul's Church of England Church. Laurie Fitzharding in his *book St John's Canberra*. Commemorating 100 Years of Church Life in Canberra has the following to say about the church - *In August 1914 a galvanised iron mission hall, St*



*Paul's Kingston [later Barton – see photograph left] was erected by parish subscriptions to serve the workmen camped by the power-house. For some years this hall was used also by other denominations. Later when the Commission erected the Causeway Hall, St Paul's was used mainly for Sunday School purposes. Regular evening services were commenced in 1929, and a regular 9 am celebration in the following year. In 1933 was commenced the 10 am children; service, which became a happy feature of*

*Kingston worship...*

*HOME & TERRITORIES, LANDS & SURVEY BRANCH, MELBOURNE 14<sup>th</sup> February 1922  
Memorandum to The District Surveyor, Canberra – COTTAGES AT CIVIC CENTRE, POWER HOUSE AND BRICKWORKS AREAS<sup>9</sup>*

*With reference to your memorandum of 8<sup>th</sup> February 1922 relative to the above the following statement shows rentals charged for these cottages:-*

*Civic Centre*

<i>Bl No</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Allotted To</i>	<i>Date of occupation</i>	<i>Rental pw</i>
26	C6	JM Force	Not yet occupied	28/-
29	B7	J Chapman	10/1/1922	22/-
30	B5	WT Jamieson	1/11/1921	22/-
33	B7	H Cole	19/12/1921	22/-
34	B5	T Hope	8/1/1922	22/-

<sup>9</sup> NAA A361/1 DSG24/85

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39	B6	E Smith	8/1/1922	22/-
40	B6	F Dowthwaite	8/1/1922	22/-
41	C8	F Annand	23/1/1922	28/-
42	C8	R Maguire	not yet occupied	28/-
32	B7	K Kennedy	" " "	22/-
36	B7	F Edwards	" " "	22/-
46	B6	G Guy	20/1/1922	22/-
45	B6	H Daniels	10/1/1922	22/-

### Power House

<u>Bl No</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>Allotted To</u>	<u>Date of Occupation</u>	<u>Rental pw</u>
1	C8	R Snadden	20/7/1921	28/-
2	C6	J Lillico	23/1/1922	28/-
3	C6	JF O'Malley	14/1/1922	28/-
4	C8	TH Trevillian	26/1/1922	28/-
5	B7	AE Thornton	14/1/1922	22/-
6	B6	WF McNamee	12/1/1922	22/-
7	C2	A Cameron	21/1/1922	28/-
8	B7	W Webb	16/1/1922	22/-
9	B7	AA Gibbons	Not yet occupied	22/-
10	B7	F Northam	23/1/1922	22/-

### Brickworks

<u>Bl No</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>Allotted to</u>	<u>Rent pw</u>
<i>Occupies 8/12/21</i>			
3	C8	S Oldfield	28/-
4	B5	H Newbould	22/-
8	B7	E Quigg	22/-
11	B5	MJ Ware	22/-
12	B5	T Cully	22/-
<i>Occupied 28/11/1921</i>			
15	C2	WK Newbould	28/-
16	C8	R Boag	28/-

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### **BLANDFORDIA (FORREST) COTTAGES 1922-1923**

The first permanent brick cottages were constructed in Blandfordia in 1922 and 1923. They were erected in Sections 20 and 21 by Works & Railways employees – day labour. The styles were F1 and F2 and these houses were larger than those erected at the Brickworks, Civic Centre and the Power House. The majority of cottages were finished in white stucco and when one of the houses was pulled down a number of years ago it was found that the stretcher bonds (bricks) were placed vertically to form the wall. Walls were tied together with other bricks.

A report written in 1923 had the following to say about the accommodation for public servants at Blandfordia:

*The cottages at Blandfordia were to form the nucleus of a settlement on the Government side of the river. In this first stage of housing the Advisory Committee decided that accommodation was required for 5,655 persons (First stage – ready for the opening of Parliament) for which the Advisory Committee decided that accommodation would require 706 residences in addition to the Hostels who would take 1500 people. Of the 706 residences the Committee proposed that 310 be erected on the South side by the Government; 366 on the North side by private enterprise. As at 29<sup>th</sup> March 1923 the Government had in course of erection 30 cottages (this was exclusive of 20 cottages at Ainslie [Civic Centre] decided upon before the Committee was appointed and 7 at the Brickworks). So that time there remained 28 cottages to be erected by the Government and 376 by private enterprise. Architects in private practice when consulted re the building of accommodation by private enterprise were skeptical because not enough housing was being built by private enterprise in large centres such as Sydney and Melbourne where there was a demand for such housing. They thought it unlikely that private enterprise would provide accommodation in Canberra.*

A report to the Chairman of the Public Service Committee dated 25 September 1925 discussed accommodation available for Public Servants that mentioned the earlier cottages and their sites. The main building for the transfers of government departments did not commence until 1926. The document in part reads:

*Officers resident at Canberra for a reasonable period agree that the climate is healthy and bracing, despite the winter weather, which for several months is appreciably colder than Melbourne...*

*There are at present four main residential suburbs, viz Blandfordia (Forrest, Acton, Ainslie and Eastlake (Kingston), their respective distances from Parliament House and the Secretariat ranging from one and a half miles to three or four miles. Blandfordia is the nearest suburb, the best building location, and contains the best class of house.*

*With the desirable object of causing the city as a whole to develop symmetrically these four suburbs could have been established nearer the administrative centres without jeopardizing symmetry in the future and thus avoiding the present huge areas of*

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*unoccupied land which will probably remain unsettled for many years to come. Residents of Ainslie for example will require to travel five or six miles to visit friends living in some of the suburbs.*

*At present time the transport officers to the Commissioner's Offices at Acton is arranged by the Commissioner by motor free of cost, but those who wish to have mid-day lunch at home are supplied with conveyance at 1/6d (one shilling and six pence = 15 cents) per week.*

*As regards to the actual houses those being erected at Blandfordia comprise five or six rooms. These houses, like all officer's residences in Canberra are very well built of brick. Practically the only complaint as the materials used was that the tiles (made at the Commission's Brick Works in Canberra) are very porous, due either to some inherent fault in the raw materials or the absence of the best type of tile making ovens.*

*Blandfordia houses have short passages from which most of the rooms are reached. In other suburbs I did not see one house containing a passage, the front door usually opening directly into the living room. All the houses have good bathroom accommodation, one fire cooking stove, sewerage, electric light, and provision I think for an electric cooker.*

*I should imagine the large majority of public servants would require houses of the Blandfordia type in order to maintain their present standard of accommodation of Melbourne.*

*The houses at Ainslie are mainly four roomed places but include about a dozen three roomed houses. All these rooms appear smaller than average sized rooms in Melbourne houses, particularly so in Ainslie. This is no doubt to some extent due to the Commonwealth's endeavours to reduce the cost of construction and hence the rent.<sup>10</sup>*

*It is difficult to conceive however, that any self respecting public servant, even one possessing no family would be agreeable to reside in nay of the three roomed houses. In fact I know of exceedingly few officers who would look with pleasure even upon the four roomed houses at Ainslie, which possess one moderately sized bedroom and one very small bedroom, also a living room about 15ft x 12 ft, and a kitchen about 12ft x 10ft.*

*Reverting to Blandfordia houses, which represent in size and details of accommodation the average house occupied by public servants in Melbourne, the probable rental cost*

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<sup>10</sup> Rent was based on a percentage of the cost of construction.

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*will be from 55/- to 70/- per week if the rent and rules etc are ultimately based on the general figures of 9% of the actual cost of the land.<sup>11</sup>*

*Thus it will be seen that on the rent basis alone officers are very likely to be one pound worse off in Canberra than they are in Melbourne or Sydney...It seemed to me somewhat regrettable that certain smaller types of houses are being built in suburb and the larger and better typed exclusively built in another suburb. This will naturally lead to social and other class distinctions. The same applied to some extent to the provisions of Hotel Canberra whereby officers receiving over 550 pounds per annum may secure rebate on their weekly bill thus of course forcing practically every officer receiving less than 550 pounds per annum to reside in the cheaper hotels.<sup>12</sup>*

The people who moved into the first brick cottages at Blandfordia were:

Name	Block/Section
SC McFarlane	3/18
J O'Sullivan	10/20
D Worrall	3/20
EH Pratt	11/20
T Keefe	5/20
JT Walker	
TK Burns	13/37
E Eichler	2/21 (15 Ducane St)
WR Smith	2/22
M Richardson	7/12
WS Brownless	1/21 (13 Ducane St)
B Shaw	5/4
L Marriott	1/20 (Franklin St)
Metford	21/4
Robertson	¾

Many of the early Blandfordia cottages have been pulled down, but to date (2009) Brownless's cottage on the corner of Ducane and Franklin Streets remains. In contrast to cottages built in the other suburbs this house has good sized well placed windows to allow the light into the building.

These early brick cottages erected for construction workers and a few officials were the only brick cottages built for those who came to build the city. Some construction workers still lived in cottages erected by themselves that consisted of hessian walls and iron roof with no water, electricity or sewerage connected. In 1921-1922 the FCAC

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<sup>11</sup> Public servants and those transferred to the FCT were given an allowance. Those who came to build the city were not.

<sup>12</sup> NAA A361/1 DSG24/47

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converted the barracks of the ex-internment camp at Molonglo into cottages. These buildings were unlined and wind came through the cracks that formed as the timber walls dried out. People had to share bathrooms that had tin baths that required hot water to be carried up steps from the coppers where it was heated. They also shared lavatories and laundries. Heating was inadequate (wood fired) and until electricity was connected lighting such as candles and kerosene lamps had to be used. In 1924 the temporary portable timber cottages designed by HM Rolland were erected at Westlake (now Stirling Park, Yarralumla), then Acton and later Causeway. This accommodation was not enough and in 1925 the FCC allowed men to again erect their own dwellings at Riverbourne (opposite Harman Naval Base) and in 1926 at Russell Hill (in the modern suburb of Campbell). The above photograph was taken around 1927 at Molonglo Tenements prior to the houses in the barracks being separated. Photograph loaned by Jack Jenkins. Following is an inspection document 1930.

The comments made about the cottages belie some of the stories that I have been told by people who lived at Molonglo Settlement particularly in the early years before the



cottages were separated. One particularly worry was bed bugs and I was informed by one lady that the sheets were ironed to make sure that any that could have survived boiling in the copper were killed.

The buildings were unlined and in an attempt to stop wind from whistling through the gaps in the boards many pasted newspaper on the walls.

The sizes referred to in the following document is in feet and inches. As a rough guide 3 feet is around 1 metre. By the time the cottages were separated the documented dated 1930 suggests that the exterior walls were doubled – ie lined.

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15th April 1930

MEMORANDUM for:

Medical Officer of Health.

Molonglo Tenements. (Temporary).

In accordance with your instructions for a detailed report on the construction, etc., of a five and three roomed tenement in this settlement, a visit was made today, cottages No.96 and No.95 being inspected.

The five roomed cottage consists of -  
1 Bedroom - 14 x 9 x 9  
3 bedrooms - 14 x 9 x 9  
Sitting room 14 x 9 x 9  
Bathroom 12 x 9 x 9  
Lobby to bathroom and lavatory 6 x 6  
External windows - 9  
" doors - 6  
Louvre to lavatory.

The building is constructed of wood, having double external walls, celled, galvanized roof, and is painted throughout (cold water paint): the detached laundry has set-in tubs and is provided with copper and stand; the whole, including kitchen sink and lavatory being connected to the sewer serving the septic system of these tenements.

The three roomed tenement is similarly constructed, containing rooms, lavatory, etc. of approximately the same sizes, with 4 external doors and 4 external windows; louvre to lavatory with the addition of a small window for lighting the lobby and a slightly larger laundry.

When making these inspections I was accompanied to one house by neighbours who seemed to be afraid that they - in their own words - "would soon have to leave such cheap and comfortable cottages", and a lady expressed the opinion that after having lived in one of the tenements for a period of seven years she would be content to know that she could continue for a further seven.

The two houses inspected by me were the first two arrived at, and both were found to be exceptionally clean and comfortable.

*A. Palmer*  
Health Inspector.

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