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# **A History of Stirling Park, also known as Gura Bung Dhaura (Stony Ground), Klensendorff's Land and Westlake**

**by Ann Gugler**

*Ann Gugler came to Canberra as a small child living first at Kingston and from 1941 at Westlake, the settlement of temporary workmen's cottages in what is now Yarralumla. Her home was 27 Westlake. She has written and published extensively on Westlake and other workers' camps in the ACT.*

Stirling Park, Yarralumla is situated on the southern bank of Lake Burley Griffin. It is wedged between the lake, Forster Crescent, Flynn Drive, Empire Circuit, Fitzgerald Street and Hopetoun Circuit. Alexandrina Drive cuts through the park dividing it into two. The larger portion is Section 22 and following the removal of the last Westlake house in 1965 has been left to regenerate. Off Alexandrina Drive is Marina Place. It leads to the Southern Cross Yacht Club (former Canberra Yacht Club— site of Briar Farm cottage (1870-1950). To the west is Attunga Point—the old quarry—and to the east Lotus Bay.

This land is Ngunawal and its first recorded name is Gura Bung Dhaura. From 1829 into the early teen years of the twentieth century it was referred to as Klensendorff's after the man who was granted it on 7 March 1839. Walter Burley Griffin in the early 1920s named it Westlake.

Section 22 may be divided into three distinct sections. On the west Stirling Ridge, centre The Gap and on the eastern side of Haines Creek, which still runs free through the land, unnamed hills and flat land opposite Lotus Bay. A 1920s map shows that Burley Griffin chose a section of Stirling Ridge for the site for the Governor General's residence and the remainder for a park named Stirling. When the name Stirling Park came into common usage for today's park is not known.

Klensendorff's land was never subdivided. In 1847 it was leased and from around 1854 a number of tenant farmers worked the land. From 1922 Westlake was used for accommodation (cottages, huts and tents) for men and families

working on the Hotel Canberra, sewer, Provisional Parliament House, administrative blocks and other necessary infrastructure such as roads. The population of Westlake in 1924 was 400 and the following year 700—the second largest population concentration in the Federal Capital Territory. By 1931 all the single men's camps, Howie's cottages and hostel camp were pulled down leaving the 61 timber cottages in the Gap. They remained until the late 1950s when one by one, following the departure of tenants, cottages were sold and moved to new sites in places such as Queanbeyan and the coast.<sup>2</sup> There still exists a strong sense of belonging amongst those who lived at Westlake and on 15 March 1998 members of the Westlake Community met at Stirling Park near the corner of Empire Circuit and Forster Crescent to unveil a sign, plant a tree and dedicate two bronze plaques. The plaques are situated on the site of 29 Westlake and near an apple tree opposite Lotus Bay (near the former site of the Howie's Hostel Mess where the Burns Club was founded in 1924).<sup>3</sup>

Both plaques have the following inscription:

Walter Burley Griffin named this land  
WESTLAKE

Site of Briar Farm, The Hostel,  
No 3 Sewer Camp, No 1 Labs & Tradesmen  
Camps &

1st workmen's villages built in the ACT  
Howies & Westlake (The Gap) Cottages.

"Over the hill & down into the hollow

There's a path we all follow

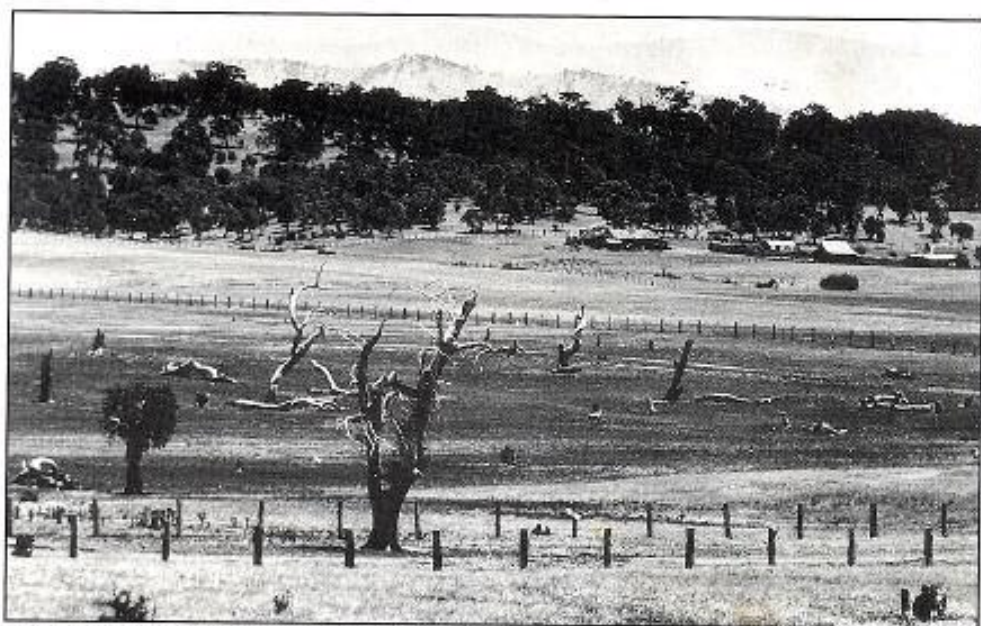
To this place we still call home." [Ronnie  
O'Rourke]

Erected by Westlake Children 15.3.1998.

With the permission of the NCA a number of signs to mark sites of importance have been placed throughout the park. They include Howies Cottages, Old Tradesmen's Camp, No 1 Labourers' Camp, The Westlake Hall, No 3 Sewer Camp, Bell's Corner, Haines Creek, Ronnie's (O'Rourke) tree where he kept an eye out for the police for the SP Bookie, plan of Westlake Cottages and lists of names of some of the people who lived in them.

## **History of the Land**

The earliest photograph I have found is a panoramic one taken from Acton in 1913. The same view taken in the year 2000 with the exception of the lake has changed little. The lake's waters hide the steep descent down to the flood plain which prior to the establishment of the Canberra Golf Club in 1926 was used from the 1820s for grazing and cultivation. I recall that the low lying land west of the Quarry (Attunga) Point was covered with a tufted type of grass and a few gum trees. The river banks were lined with willows and there was an old



A 1913 view looking south to Briar Farm with the hills of Westlake in the background. The foreground is now part of Lake Burley Griffin. Briar Farm was on what is now the site of the Southern Cross Yacht Club. (National Library of Australia)

crossing over the Molonglo between The Quarry and Westridge cottages. Old maps show the crossing and tracks to it from Yarralumla going to the properties of Springbank and Acton. This crossing was often used by Westlake children on their way across to Black Mountain and old stories mention cattle rustlers using the same route on their way from the north across the river and up through The Gap.

The 1913 photograph shows two groups of buildings. They belong to two tenant farms. On the east is Kaye's. It consisted of Klenzendorf's stone villa, used from the 1890s as a barn and a slab cottage. The other is Briar Farm home to members of the Kinlyside family from circa 1865<sup>6</sup> until 1913 from which time the cottage and four acres of land were leased by the Commonwealth to employees.<sup>7</sup> The Day family lived there from 1927 until it was pulled down in 1950. Kayes moved in 1924 following the resumption of the land by the Commonwealth. A tall old pine in Lennox Park marks the entrance gate to the property. It was one of two planted in 1919.<sup>8</sup> The stone from the old villa was reused as part of the foundations for Commonwealth Avenue and the stone fireplace in the slab cottage was incorporated into the Canberra Golf Club's Club House.<sup>9</sup>

The 1913 photograph shows the hillsides covered with gum trees and here and there one

can glimpse through them the land, part of which was surface mined during the nineteenth century. Aerial photographs taken in the 1940s and 1950s show the numerous old tracks that still exist in the park and Westlake cottages. However it is only by walking through the park that one can see the details of the landscape and feel close to a time before Europeans came. Protruding through the patches of red and dark grey earth in a rock strewn landscape on the hillsides are native trees, shrubs, grasses and wild flowers. This land is regenerating and covering the scars of European occupation with new growth and fallen leaves. In The Gap patches of the old land not enriched by gardening show through and here as on the hillsides the white and apricot coloured chalk-like stones litter the surface. These soft stones were used by Westlake children to draw on the road and on the faded green tin chimney backs. A large deposit of white shale is found in the Quarry. It was used by the Brickyards to produce the brick known as 'The Canberra Cream' and I think it may have been used by Aboriginal people for ceremonial purposes.<sup>10</sup>

The 1913 photograph testifies that the hillsides of Stirling Park unlike the paddocks of Yarralumla were not cleared of trees. During the next few decades however many gums were cut to fuel kitchen stoves and steam-driven



traction engines. Some were used in the construction of humpies and tents. Reminders of these activities mark most of the old gums some of which were coppiced at ground level, others cut at waist height and many stumps of long gone branches are of the right size for building. The light grey trunk of one long dead gum has around its trunk the metal cable used to pull it over.

Evidence of Aboriginal use of the area is found in the scarred trees. Several are on Stirling Ridge, others near Alexandrina Drive and Forster Crescent and one in each of the grounds of the French Embassy and South African High Commission. The importance of Stirling Park to Ngunawal people is noted in the Summer 1999 issue of *Heritage in Trust*:

Heritage Watch. Endangered places in the ACT. Aboriginal Sites Stirling Park. Considered by Mr Don Bell, a Ngunawal elder to be a place of high significance, displaying physical and spiritual associations with the past traditional ways of life of his people... The ridge was used by Aboriginal people before and after European arrival. Three Blakely Redgums bearing scars attributed to bark removal by Aborigines have been identified. Stone arrangements have been located throughout the park. Mr Bell believes several to be connected with important ceremonial activities.



Aboriginal scarred tree on Stirling Ridge.  
(Ann Gugler)

The majority of stone arrangements are on Stirling Ridge on land selected by Walter Burley Griffin as a site for the Governor General's residence.<sup>10</sup> Crossing the hillside are a number of stones around two feet by one that have been identified by a Ngarigou lady as a possible ley line. They are in the vicinity of one of the known fault lines in the park. There may also be burials in the park.<sup>11</sup>

Confirmation about the condition of the land in 1913 is found in C.W. Moriarty's detailed records.<sup>12</sup> He was employed by the Commonwealth to record and value all structures including buildings, fences, roads, condition of the land etc. From his information it has been possible to date the road from Briar Farm heading east along the lower slopes of the hillside opposite Lotus Bay as 1890. In the 1920s Contractor Howie and the Commonwealth used the road as an access to the cottages, Hostel, Tradesmen and No 1 Labourers Camps. The dwellings were erected on either side of the road.

Moriarty noted that Klensendorff's paddock (Stirling Park) consisted principally of gently undulating land timbered with gum (box), ironstone and slate outcrops. It supported three sheep to the acre. The green timber was not suitable for building but satisfactory for fencing. Moriarty makes no mention of farm sites on Stirling Ridge and near the old Westlake Hall. It is possible that one of these probable tenant farm cottage sites was home to John Morrison whose son John was born at Westlake.<sup>13</sup>

Following the departure of all buildings within Section 22 work was carried out to remove traces of human occupation. The earth from the two dumps was spread over the hillside and house sites, rubbish pushed into the creek, fruit trees knocked down and so on. In many cases only a thin layer of earth covers remnants of occupation such as ceramic gully traps, concrete paths and the brick floors of George Sykes' flats at the rear of cottage 29. On the sites of cottages 31-62 (excluding 43-47) the government planted exotic trees. Some were cut down in 1999. A number of gum trees were also planted on the site of the Westlake Hall and Stirling Ridge. Among them are pines, rowans and a few fruit trees that survived the cleanup process. The old willows planted near the creek in the nineteenth century did not.

The first permanent building in the vicinity of the park was Casey House built in the early 1930s. It was followed by American Embassy (early 1940s), South African High Commission residence (1957), French Embassy (1959) and, in the Westlake Horse Paddock, the Mosque (early 1960s). During the 1970s the roads which define the park and cut through it were constructed and



at this time a road-making camp was established near the site of the Westlake Tennis Court. Today the sites of Westlake Cottages 1 to 20 are covered by the buildings and grounds of the Mexican and Egyptian Embassies. Sites of all the other cottages and camp sites are in Stirling Park.

During the early 1970s the peace of the park was under threat of new building work—a new Prime Minister's Lodge. West Stirling Park was one of three choices. The other two were Attunga Point and Collins Park. The final choice was Attunga Point. The project was abandoned when the Prime Minister, Mr Malcolm Fraser, rejected both the sites and the proposal.<sup>14</sup>

### Native Flora in Stirling Park

In his book, *The Ecological Resources of the ACT* [NCDC, 1984], David Shorthouse states that Stirling Park is the only remaining savannah woodland [Yellow Box, Red Gum Grassy Woodland] close to Lake Burley Griffin. Dr Robert Boden in his 1994 report<sup>15</sup> makes the same point and continues:

This section [A - Stirling Ridge] and adjacent areas of Stirling Park are the only remaining areas of savannah woodland close to Lake Burley Griffin (Frawley, 1991). They also contain the major remaining populations of the nationally endangered button wrinklewort...the continued survival of the button wrinklewort in the wild depends upon conservation of viable self-perpetuating populations on national land in Stirling Park. This may be the only example in temperate Australia of a plant species whose survival is the direct responsibility of the Australian rather than a state or territory government. This places a significant responsibility on the National Capital Planning Authority as the land management agency responsible for the most of Stirling Park.

This concern about the endangered wild flower is reinforced in a 1997 report, *Action Plans for Protecting ACT's Threatened Species*, Draft Action Plan No. 8, which in part states:

In accordance with Section 21 of the Nature Conservation Act 1980, the Button Wrinklewort (*Rutidosia leptorrhynchoidea*) was declared an endangered species on 15 April 1996 (formerly Determination No 29 of 1996 and currently Determination No 89 of 1997) Section 23 of the Act requires the Conservator of Flora and Fauna to prepare an Action Plan in response to each declaration. This is the Action Plan for the

#### Button Wrinklewort *Rutidosia leptorrhynchoidea*...

Conservation effort will be focussed on protecting the existing ACT populations as a cluster of sites, since there are few viable populations remaining in NSW and Victoria. Special emphasis will be placed on protecting the two largest populations, being in Stirling Park, Yarralumla and within the Majura Field Firing Range...

Dr Boden also drew attention in his report to the significant regrowth areas of native grasses, yellow box and red gum trees in the park. He notes that the red gum regrowth is prolific but this particular tree is most severely affected by psyllids and other insects. He continues in his report:

Dr Roger Farrow, CSIRO Entomology, is studying the biology of this insect and considers that if the present level of repeated attacks continues many of the red gums will die. They may be replaced by the other two woodland species, yellow box and apple box both of which are not attacked by this particular psyllid. Ironically this may produce a species distribution pattern closer to that which existed 200 years ago before Europeans began selectively removing yellow box for fuel and farm timber.

### Exotic Flora in Stirling Park

It is in the area of the Gap on the sites of old gardens that the majority of exotic trees, flowers and shrubs are to be found. Dr Boden's report refers to the Westlake settlement and the remaining flora from that era:

Their memory in Westlake remains in the numerous garden shrubs and trees and ripped bitumen pavement from former roads. One of the trees is a tall Californian big tree (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*)<sup>16</sup>...Botanically the area includes a



Button wrinklewort on Stirling Ridge.  
(Ann Gugler)



The Californian big tree, referred to in Dr Robert Boden's report, is at back right. It stood at the rear of Westlake cottage 56 and was probably planted in 1926. (Ann Gugler)

significant patch of button wrinklewort growing with kangaroo grass and yellow buttons, *Chryscephalum apiculatum*. This part is adjacent to Alexandrina Drive and was formerly contiguous with Attunga Point. The contrast between the two areas [Sections A & B - Stirling Ridge and The Gap] presents an excellent example of the ease with which a plant community can be changed... The opportunity exists to reconstruct a Rolland house with garden possibly near the existing Californian Big Tree. It could be linked with Blundell's Cottage in a cultural time sequence of Canberra lifestyle at a level which contrasts markedly with the diplomatic and political lifestyle evident in the suburb of Yarralumla nearby. This house could become part of the ACT museum network and an interpretive centre and works depot for Stirling Park."

Dr Boden's report also lists all the trees, shrubs and flowers growing in the park. The rowan trees grow near Howie's cottages and house sites on the lower slopes of Stirling Ridge. Near these old sites are box thorns, hawthorn bushes and sweet peas. A few fruit trees and a grape vine have survived the numerous woody weed clearances and include apple, quince and until recently one apricot tree. Marking the borders of a number of Westlake yards are pine trees which once formed hedges and near the Yacht Club are elms planted by the tenants of Briar Farm. One still bears the marks of the wire used by Frances Day as her washing line.

On the hillside opposite Lotus Bay are several stone borders around old gardens and nearby a large strawberry patch still produces delicious sweet fruit. Nearby to the strawberry patch is one of two kurrajong trees.

#### Geological Composition of Stirling Park

A Bureau of Mineral Resources map shows that the geological formations in the park are Ordovician and Silurian. The map also shows numerous fault lines running through and converging in the park. One is noted in the Register of National Estate Database Place Report, 25 March 1986. [The location is]:

approximately 40ha and comprising all that area of Block 3, Section 22 Yarralumla, west of a line drawn from the eastern intersection of Alexandrina Drive and Mariner Place and the intersection of Forster Crescent and Empire Circuit... Description: A low ridge on the Deakin Fault, extending in a north-west-east direction consisting of Ordovician and Silurian shales and sandstones of the Acton, pittman and Canberra groups, in altitude from the shore of Lake Burley Griffin (c556 m) to the summit of the ridge (c600m). The vegetation on the main part of the ridge consists of an ecotone between *Eucalyptus Macrorhynchos*/eucalytus Rossi dry sclerophyll forest and *Eucalyptus Melliodora*/eucalyptus Blakelyi woodland...

One fault line running through Stirling Park was known to the sewer miners. Haven Thompson



of Westlake recalled his father showing him the 'beginning' in the O'Connor area and noted that it was very sandy. Sewer miners also spoke about a silver lode some forty feet below the sewer vent at Westlake and another lode near the Kings Avenue Bridge. Other stories by sewer men tell of the need to change the direction of the tunnel when it broke through into a limestone cave near Yarralumla and working under wet conditions under the area of Fitzgerald Street which forms a natural drainage area for Stirling Ridge.

Westlake's sewer vent on Stirling Ridge is one of three surviving vents constructed around 1925. They are heritage listed. Dr Boden referred to the Westlake vent in his report part of which reads:

A fourth management issue relates to the cultural heritage significance of some features in this part of the Park. One of these is the brick sewer vent above the sewage tunnel running from behind the Canberra Hyatt Hotel to Weston Creek. The tunnel and vents were constructed under primitive working conditions and the above-ground brickwork is a fine example of the type of detail applied even to entirely functional works of the period. Although the tunnel and vents are now classified as part of Canberra's engineering heritage they are a neglected part of Canberra's early 20th century history which is worthy of interpretation for contemporary visitors to Stirling Park.



Sewer vent on Stirling Ridge, 1999. (Ann Gugler)

On top of the ridge are a number of concrete slabs with cut off metal bolts embedded in them and a concrete trench. Here stood the wood fired traction engine that lowered and raised men to and from the sewer tunnel. The explosives for blasting work were kept in a small locked 'box' set into the hillside. The mullock brought up from below was put into skips on light rail and pushed a distance from the source before being dumped over the side of the hill.<sup>18</sup> The Institution of Engineers, Canberra Division, Heritage Panel included these workings in a recent citation for the ACT Register on the Outfall Sewer.

Prior to the sewer being connected to the Westlake cottages in 1927 the settlement's lavatories were connected to three septic tanks. One was in the yard of 5 Westlake, another near the back of 30 Westlake and the last below the hillside where cottages 43 to 47 stood in an area between the ditch across the base of the hill and Haines Creek. This tank has been partly exposed, measured and photographed. It is the only known remaining septic tank used by early Canberrans prior to the availability of the sewer. They were installed near all large population centres.

During the process of constructing the sewer tunnel piles of mullock were left near some of the extraction holes. Two were left behind at Westlake. One was near the sewer vent and another between cottages 28 and 53. They were always called 'The Dump'.

In Stirling Park there are a number of rubbish dumps. One of the largest ones found is in the old quarry at Attunga Point. It was used by Contractor John Howie's men and during the building of the Hotel Canberra 1922-1925. The rubbish of one generation reveals to later generations a little about the life and lifestyle of the people who used the dumps. The Attunga Point one reveals that there were many people fond of beer and other alcoholic beverages. They liked their condiments and wore their boots and shoes until they could no longer be mended. Amongst the rubbish are broken toys including doll's heads and one little 'Alison in Wonderland' rubber doll. The brands of soft drink included Sheekies, Commonwealth Cordial Company, George Morton's, EW O'Sullivan key stone and the usual Schweppes. Other dumps still to be explored are the old air raid shelters built by Westlake residents during World War II. Some, like ours at 27 Westlake, were dug in the backyard and others like the O'Rourkes' a distance from the cottages. The ditch and Haines Creek were used as receptacles for rubbish and I have been told that the creek that runs down Empire Circuit (now hidden) has many car bodies in it.



### The Arrival of Europeans on the Limestone Plains and Klensendorff's Land

The first recorded Europeans to see the Limestone Plains (Canberra) were Wild, Vaughan and Throsby Smith in 1820.<sup>20</sup> By 1824 J.J. Moore's stockmen had arrived with cattle and occupied lands in the area now called Acton Peninsula. They were followed in 1825 by Robert Campbell's overseer, Ainslie, who established Campbell's land in the district. Members of the Campbell family by the 1880s held two large properties in the central area of what later became the city of Canberra, Duntroon and Yarralumla.

By 1828 Europeans had divided the Limestone Plains into a number of land grants. One of 2560 acres, described as Portion 7 Parish of Narrabundah, County of Murray, was bought in 1829 by William Klensendorff from John Stephen Jr. From this time until the early 1900s this land was referred to as 'Klensendorff's'. Stirling Park is a part of this grant that also takes in the sites of the old and new Parliament Houses, Hotel Canberra, West and East Blocks and a number of embassy sites in Yarralumla.

By 1839 Klensendorff had built a two-storeyed stone villa on the property. Oral histories indicate that he was a man cruel to his convicts<sup>21</sup> and perhaps few were upset when he went bankrupt in 1846. In May 1847 Klensendorff surrendered his land to Peter William Plomer in payment for a debt of 3,700 pounds.<sup>22</sup> Plomer was an absentee landlord and leased the land to his neighbour, Terence Aubrey Murray of Yarralumla, who in turn leased it to his friend Stewart Mowle. Whether there were tenant farmers prior to this date is unknown. Mowle left in 1852 and by 1854 one tenant farmer on the property is known. This was Joseph Kaye who moved into the old stone villa. His son Charles took over the lease in the 1890s and at that time built the slab cottage. Briar Farm to the east of the small lease holdings of Kaye's was in occupation by 1865 if not earlier. The greater part of the lease holdings of these farms are under the waters of Lake Burley Griffin.<sup>23</sup>

In Section 22 Stirling Park there are signs of several old farm cottages which may be tenant farm building sites. One spot is on the lower slopes on Stirling Ridge near a gully and marked by old rowan trees, box thorns and a large hawthorn bush. It is also marked with a NCA concrete post. This site is in part of Corkhills Paddock on the lake end of Stirling Ridge. The fence line is near the gully and marked by a straggling line of briar roses and a large gum tree.<sup>24</sup> This or the hall area are the two most likely sites of John Morrison's farm

cottage. John and Catherine Morrison took up land in the area in the 1860s. By this time Plomer had sold the land to George Campbell of Duntroon. Support for this supposition is found in oral histories collected by Bert Sheedy and an article written by Les Lyons, son-in-law of John and Catherine's son John published in the *CDHS Journal*, September 1974, part of which reads:

The Morrisons moved in the mid-sixties to a cottage on the southside of the Molonglo and the southside of the hill known as Morrison's Hill, and farmed an area now in Yarralumla Bay that came to be called Morrison's Flat.<sup>25</sup> The precise location of the cottage is uncertain. One view is that they lived in a cottage later occupied by the Kinlysides (Briar Farm)<sup>26</sup>... another is that it was situated on the side of a rise about one hundred yards nearer Westlake [cottage]... In addition to Morrison's Flat, it seemed that the Morrisons farmed land now occupied by the United States Embassy. John Jr of Tralee in later years mentioned that at one time he grew wheat in the area.

Briar Farm cottage was constructed in 1870 and the Morrisons left sometime after John Jr was born in August 1871—an overlap of time with Bryant & Cook? It is more likely that the Morrisons' Westlake cottage was of slab construction similar to the one they built at Bulga Creek. Les Lyons described the Bulga Creek slab cottages as having a central parlour with a bedroom on either side and a detached kitchen with earth floor.<sup>27</sup>

A Day family story (tenants of Briar Farm Cottage 1927-1950) states that Briar Farm during the time of the Kinlysides family residence was Canberra's first hospital. There may be some truth to the statement. There are a number of recorded births in Briar Farm cottage and a number of deaths of non-family members which suggests that perhaps Grannie Cook (Alison née Kinlyside) was a midwife and a person able and willing to nurse the dying.

### The Federal Period

The first surveyors' camp in March 1909 was on Klensendorff's land near a creek on Kurrajong Hill (later Capital Hill). It lasted for only three weeks during which time preliminary survey work on 36 square miles (the city proper) was commenced. The following year the men returned and at that time a concrete plan room and timber offices were built. Following the completion of the offices at Acton the buildings were abandoned. During the 1940s Scrivener's concrete plan room was used by the Parks and Gardens as a depot.

In 1911 Duntroon Estate (including Klensendorff's land) was resumed by the Commonwealth. It was followed by Acton and Yarralumla. Frederick Campbell the owner of



Yarralumla was given only three weeks notice to vacate and left on 8 April 1913.<sup>27</sup> Tenant farmers were given permission to remain on the lands until it was required by the Commonwealth. The Corkhill family of Riverview (Westridge) and Kayes of Klensendorff's decided to stay. The Kinlysides moved to Oaks Estate and from that time Briar Farm cottage with four acres of land was let to Commonwealth employees and Charles Kaye took over the lease on most of the land formerly leased by Kinlyside.

In 1913 work on the city began in earnest and by the end of the year the brickyards were in operation. The Residency (Canberra House) was built and the Power House and Cotter Dam were under construction. The following year the rail link between Queanbeyan and Canberra was completed and in 1915 work on the sewer commenced. By the end of 1916 most major works ground to a halt as men, money and resources were diverted into the war effort.

Work on the city started up again in 1921 under the direction of the Federal Capital Advisory Committee (FCAC) headed by Charles Sulman. One of the first projects to recommence was the sewer under the able charge of foreman, Jeremiah Dillon. Major building works undertaken by the FCAC were Telopea Park (opened 1923), Hotel Canberra (opened December 1924) and the beginning of work on the Provisional Parliament House. In 1925 the Federal Capital Commission (FCC) headed by John Butters, First Commissioner, took over from the FCAC.

The FCAC had realised that it was necessary to provide some reasonable accommodation for married tradesmen if they were to be lured away from the building booms in Sydney and Melbourne to come to the bush construction sites of Canberra. They turned their attention first to the vacant Internment Camp at Molonglo. This was modified into 120 cottages and a tradesmen's barracks for single men. Molonglo and the fifty odd brick cottages built in 1921 and 1922 at the Brickyards, Civic Centre and opposite the Power House did not go far in solving the housing problem. A decision to build temporary timber cottages was made and the site to erect them was Westlake which was within walking distance of the construction site of the Provisional Parliament House and administrative buildings. This saved the Commonwealth money—no zone allowance required. The cottage designed by Walter Burley Griffin was rejected in favour of another design by H. Rolland based on those he inspected at Westlake (Howies).

#### **Westlake Camps & Settlements<sup>28</sup>**

##### **1922 - 1931**

\* Howie's Cottages consisting of 25 timber cottages constructed either side of the old road

from Briar Farm and near Haines Creek. Howie's men built the Hotel Canberra, Capitol Hill Hostel, first of the Causeway Cottages, Mt Stromlo buildings, Masonic Lodge at Acton (moved to Russell Hill 1927 and converted into a school and in 1930-31 financial year moved to Corroboree Park where it still stands as the Ainslie Hall).

##### **1922-1927**

\* Howie's Hostel Camp consisting of around 18 timber huts for single men. This camp was moved between May and July 1927.

##### **1922-Mid 1925**

\* No. 3 Sewer Camp in the Gap. Around 100 men in 50 tents erected in two rows along the base of Stirling Ridge. Above the tents in line from the sewer vent stretching across the hill to an area past the hall were a number of humpies probably constructed by married couples.<sup>29</sup> The galvanised iron mess room was left behind following the departure of the camp. It was the first Westlake Hall. A few years later it was enlarged. On Stirling Ridge continuing from Perth Avenue is an old road that leads to the sewer vent. This may have been used as an access road to the vent and cottages. Near the vent marked with a NCA concrete post is a small circular garden bed with white iris flowers and nearby a large patch of sweet peas.

##### **1924-1965**

\* 61 two bedroom unlined timber cottages in The Gap, Westlake. The first 51 were occupied in 1924 and the last ten built on the site of the sewer tents in 1926. The cottages did not follow the usual grid pattern instead the first 20 were in an uneven U shape and were wedged between two creeks coming into the Gap. Sites of cottages 1 to 20 are in the grounds of the Mexican and Egyptian Embassies. The others are in the park.

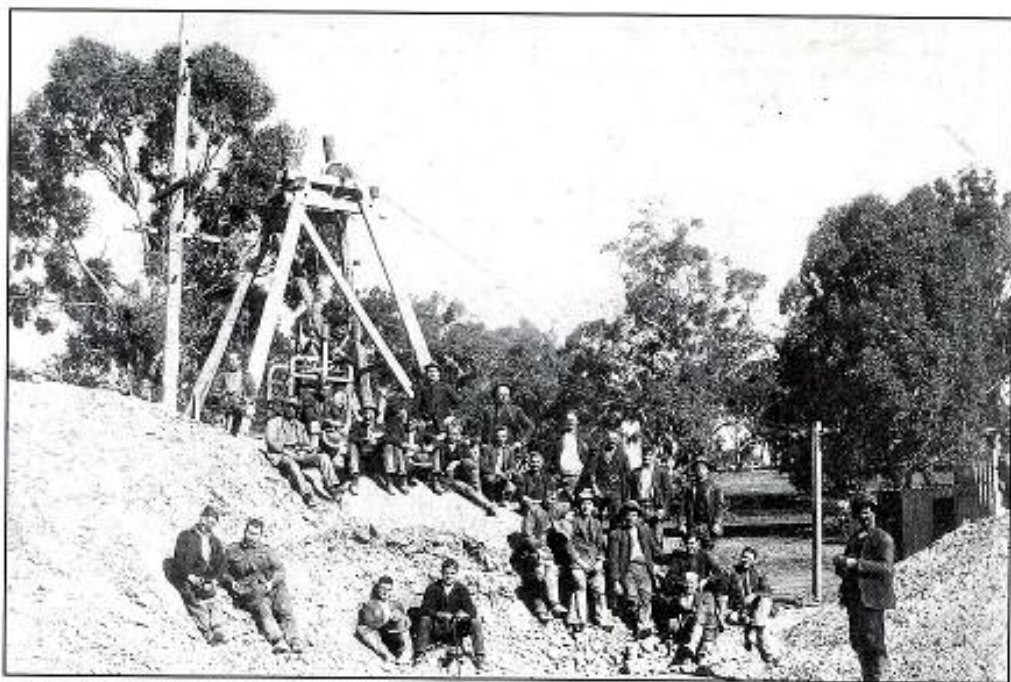
##### **1923-1927**

\* Old Tradesmen's Camp on the hillsides opposite Lotus Bay. The tents in this camp had wooden floors and sides. A number of trenches dug on the hillside were most likely used as urinals. The site of the Mess building is on the hillside below the Brazilian Embassy in Forster Crescent. A new bathroom block was built in 1925. It had four galvanised iron baths and two coppers to heat the water. Showers were cold. Around 150 men used these facilities.

##### **1924 - 1927**

\* Freeman's tent cottage near the Tradesmen's Camp. This may have been the cottage used by Mrs Erikson, Mess Caterer Old Tradesmen's Camp, before she moved into a Westlake cottage





Men of No. 3 Sewer Camp on Stirling Ridge, c. 1922-5. (National Library of Australia)



The only known photograph of a Howies Westlake cottage. (Ann Gugler, from K. Dinnerville family)

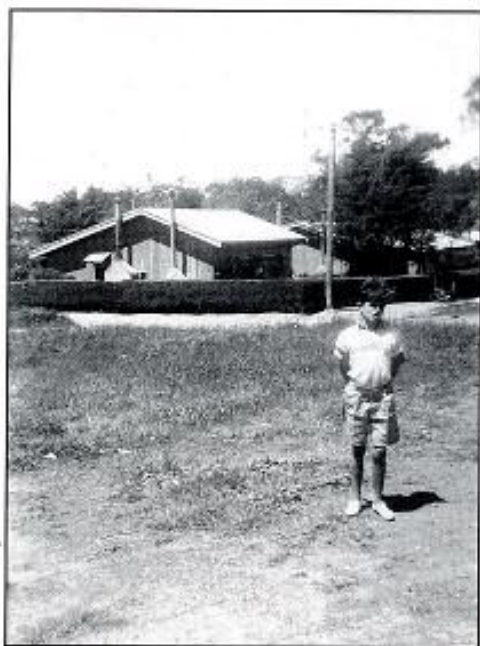
in 1924. In 1922-23 Arthur Freeman was Mess Caterer at No.3 Sewer Camp and at this time the family had rooms off the main mess building. They moved to the tent on the hill where their youngest child, a son, was born in November 1924. The baptism documents held at St John the Baptist Church, Reid described the father's occupation as 'Mess Caterer Hostel Camp'. Mrs Ruth Freeman was blind.

#### 1924 - 1927

\* No. 1 Labourers Camp. This camp was also known as 'Daniel's No 1' after the Mess Caterer, Herbert Daniel. The numbers in this camp established on the hillside between Old Tradesmen's Camp and the Hotel Canberra varied between 100 and 200 men. In 1927 the lavatories were connected to the sewer system. The same year a man in the camp died after his tent caught fire; no telephone in the camp to call for help!

Although the camps and settlements were relatively close to each other they were separate and children in particular were not permitted to go into the single men's camps where two-up and drinking took place. The camps were arranged by occupation and the lowest on the social class was labourers, then pug (horse & dray) and at the top of the scale tradesmen. The men in these camps lived under canvas in Canberra's four seasons





**M. Haines outside No. 39 Westlake, Bell's corner, early 1950s. (Ann Gugler)**

without privacy, without families and without the facilities that a town could provide. Canberra was dry (1913-28) and from Friday afternoon until late on Sunday the dust raised from the steady flow of traffic on the unsealed road to Queanbeyan could be seen clearly from many parts of Canberra. Until J.B. Youngs and other stores opened in Kingston in 1925, families had to travel to the Co-op near the Railway Station or to Queanbeyan to shop. For many 'shank's pony' (walking) was the main mode of transport.

### **The Demise of the Temporary Suburb of Westlake**

Westlake like Causeway, Riverbourne, Russell Hill, Molonglo, Westridge and the workmen's camps was erected out of sight of permanent Canberra. The intention was to move the cottages to new work sites following the completion of Provisional Parliament House. The Great Depression commenced in Canberra following the opening of Parliament and in 1929 it spread throughout Australia and continued into the war years. The building of houses was not a high priority during these years and Westlake cottages remained and it was not until a decade following the end of World War II that building booms made it possible to reconsider moving tenants and cottages.

An unintended result of the decision to allow the cottages to remain was the development of a strong community spirit among those who lived in the settlement. It was isolated and few wandered into the settlement without reason to call. Everyone knew everyone and even today most old residents recall the names of each family living in one of the 61 cottages. The Westlake Hall was the community focal point. Here were held dances, euchre parties, children's Christmas, farewell and engagement parties, meetings, pre-school (from the 1950s), Mothercraft centre visits, church etc. By the time my family moved into 27 Westlake in 1941 the children's playground was gone and the tennis court near the hall rarely used.

Westlake cottages were owned by the Commonwealth and were neglected and ignored by them. Westlake residents well remember the official reply to requests for repairs, renovations or improvements: 'It can't be done because it [the settlement] is only temporary!' By the 1950s newspaper articles referred to the area as 'the slums of Canberra'.



**Remains of teapot from the site of Howies cottages, c. 1923-5. (Ann Gugler)**



Canberra's unofficial ombudsman, Mr Jim Fraser, local MP, spoke out publicly about the neglect and disgraceful conditions under which people had to live. In 1950 as a result of his efforts a few repairs and renovations were made. Cottages were lined with canite, the interiors painted, enamel baths replaced galvanised iron ones and chip bath heaters installed. School buses also entered the settlement to pick up children. One bus stop was outside 27.

Perhaps all this came a little late because a few years later the Advisory Council decided that it was time to rid the city of temporary dwellings. At the Advisory Council Meeting on 14 January 1955 Mr Shakespeare stated:

We have come to the stage when all this waste on temporary establishments will have to be scrapped and the permanent city put on its proper foundations...I feel that one of the greatest duties of this Council in the next twenty five years is to put a drive into the Canberra Development Plan in the right direction instead of allowing the authorities to take the line of least resistance by using all sorts of stop gap provisions that will never complete a city.

Two years later the Federal Parliament passed an Act to form the National Capital Development Commission and money and resources were made available to continue at haste with the completion of the city. The death knell for Westlake was sounded. From the mid 1950s until 1965 as tenants left

cottages were sold, loaded on to trucks and moved to new sites.<sup>26</sup>

During its last decade Westlake reflected the changes in the population of Canberra. As old residents moved on they were replaced with New Australians. Some had their own cottages, others shared and some moved into the small brick flats built by George Sykes in the backyard of his cottage at 29 Westlake. Names such as Bondarenko and Smijewski replaced McKissock and Keir.

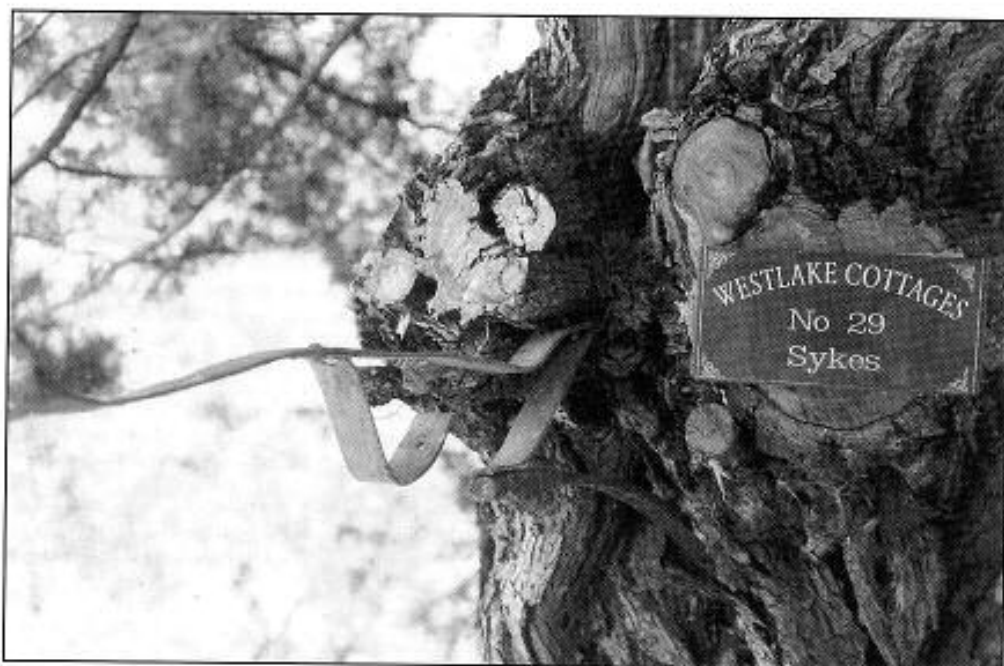
Many of today's visitors to the park use the old road in front of cottages 29 to 39 and around the corner to 47. Few realise that this is our old road where children played hopscotch and cricket and people walked, chatted, rode their bikes or the lucky few travelled on it in a horse-drawn sulky or one of the few motorised vehicles owned by Westlake residents.

#### What is the Park's Future?

My hope and the hope of many is that it will be left as it is to continue to regenerate and as time passes nature will continue to hide and soften the scars of human use and habitation. Native flora and fauna are the park's main residents. They live with the newcomers—the remnants of old gardens and hares and the odd fox. Many of the centuries old gums are coming to the end of the lives<sup>27</sup> but as is the way of nature are



Photograph taken from the corner of Empire Circuit and Forster Crescent looking into Stirling Park. The old road which ran in front of Westlake cottages 29-39 can be seen running diagonally from the right. (Ann Gugler)



Pine tree on the site of Westlake cottage 29 with part of the original metal gate embedded in the tree. (Ann Gugler)

surrounded by new growth which left alone will one day too become old. Many gums have holes—some where branches have fallen. These provide homes to opossums, bees and some of the 80 odd different birds in the park recorded by Dr Cowan of Yarralumla. The park is full of sounds and sights of life.

My hope is that the park will be used to teach the young and not so young about our native flora and fauna and the history of man's occupation of the land.

This small pocket of land in the centre of the city links us with a time before European occupation. It nestles among grand buildings where important people live and meet. This land is near Parliament House—the building where the men and women who represent the Australian people meet to run the business of the country. This land was home to the most humble of this continent's citizens—the Ngunawal people, the tenant farmers and men who built the nation's first parliament house and the politicians' hostel, Hotel Canberra. This land provides a window to the past and is a fitting reminder that Canberra is the bush capital.

\* Gwendoline Wilson *Murray of Yarralumla* Melbourne, 1968, footnote page 102 states: 'The locality of Canberra was on both sides of the [Molonglo] river, but appears to have been mostly within Klensendorff's land on the south side'.

This land is now under the water of Lake Burley Griffin in the area behind the Hyatt Hotel, Canberra. The word comes from the Ngunawal word for meeting place. This is a significant point because it draws attention to the importance of this area which is close to Black Mountain where initiation and other ceremonies took place.

- 1 This name has been used since the 1940s after the Haines family of 52 Westlake who lived near the old plank bridge across the creek. The road coming down the hill between 42 and 43 Westlake was known as Beadman's Hill after the family who lived in 43.
- 2 Richard Jenkins was one of the men who bought and moved Westlake cottages to Queanbeyan where with a coat of paint, and a new brick chimney they still stand little changed from their Westlake days. Jack Lette of Causeway was a driver. Richard Jenkins kept one cottage, No.7. Spencer McDonald's place. He re-erected it in his yard in Narrabundah.
- 3 Ian Howie-Willis, *Canberra and the Scots. The Canberra Highland Society and Burns Club, First 71 years*, Canberra, 1996. The author says that the Burns Club was founded in the Hostel Club but did not know the site. It is at Westlake.
- 4 Alison Willis née Kinlyside, widow, married Thomas Bryant in December 1864. He was a partner with James Cook in Briar Farm. Peter Kimber's story in Ann Gugler, *True Tales from Canberra's Vanished Suburbs...*, Canberra, 1999.
- 5 Charles Kaye took up most Briar Farm acres at this time.



- 6 Geoff Kaye.
- 7 The size of the holdings of each tenant farm varied from around 65 acres to 85. From 1913, following the departure of Kinlysides from Briar Farm, Kayes took over the lease of the farming land. Both leases covered land between the river and the foothills and on the east roughly to Commonwealth Avenue and on the west to a point past Attunga Point.
- 8 Bill Haines of 52 Westlake was the powder monkey at the Quarry for many years.
- 9 Ngunawal girl dancers applied white ochre from this quarry as body decoration at the book launch of Don Bell's book, *Munung the Butterfly*, East Corrimal NSW, 1999, on 26 February 2000.
- 10 From 1927 this plan was abandoned in favour of Yarralumla House which is still the Governor General's residence. It remains one of the possible sites for a new Prime Minister's Lodge.
- 11 Don Bell is a direct descendant of Queen Nellie of Queanbeyan whose obituary was published in the *Queanbeyan Age* on 1 January 1897. Aboriginal presence in Stirling Ridge and nearby areas did not cease in the nineteenth century but continued well into the 1930s and 1940s. Two Westlake children, now in their sixties and seventies, remember one Aboriginal family camping each year at the time of the first frosts in the gully between the Westlake Bus Shelter on the corner of Perth Avenue and State Circle and the Prime Minister's Lodge. This family may have been Don's. He remembers his family travelling around the area and a family story states that his older brother Phillip was born on Capital Hill in 1931.
- 12 Australian Archives A358/2 21.
- 13 Bert Sheedy, local historian, has detailed records of all tenant farmers at nearby Yarralumla property. Morrison was not one of them. Bert states that Morrisons were at Westlake.
- 14 *Committee on Official Establishments. Final Report*, May 1979.
- 15 *Conservation and Management Plan for Native Vegetation on National Land Managed by the National Capital Planning Authority*, August 1994, Robert Boden & Associates. Fauna by Ian Fraser.
- 16 This tree was probably planted by the Phillips family of 56 Westlake c.1926.
- 17 Members of the Westlake community support this idea.
- 18 Described by Arthur Freeman Jr who as a young lad of 12 was lowered down into the tunnel before walking across to Westridge. His father was Mess Caterer for No. 8 Sewer Camp in the Gap at Westlake. The explosives container was described by Charlie Law of Westlake. Sergeant Cook's charge book also records a number of Westlake lads breaking into it. It was near the cow bail—the concrete floor of the bail is still on the hillside.
- 19 L. Fitzhardinge, *Old Canberra*, Canberra, 1975.
- 20 John Gale, *Canberra: History and Legends*, Queanbeyan, 1927 refers to crumbling remains of old stocks in the paddock near to the house and handcuffs and leg irons turning up.
- 21 The Lands & Titles Office in Sydney holds the records of the grant of the land to Klensendorff and his wife on 7.3.1829 Book 58, Page 85; Book 12 No. 727 - Klensendorff insolvent and Book P. No. 289 - land transferred to Peter William Plomer. Book 66 No. 660, 29.3.1860, land sold to George Campbell for the sum of one pound per acre.
- 22 The 1885 Land Census states that Joseph Kaye had 80 acres, Thomas Kinlyside 75 and Thomas Cook 33. This suggests that Thomas Kinlyside and Thomas Cook may have been partners in Briar Farm at that time. Bryant & Cook were partners in 1865. Bryant died in May 1876.
- 23 This paddock was part of 12 acres of land leased by F.G. Sullivan of Springbank on 16 January 1914. In 1921 the lease was transferred to Robert Corkhill who had moved to Yarralumla Dairy from his lease in the area of the National Library—Australian Archives A657/1 DS14/682, A192/1 FCL22/510 & A192 FCL24/347. Because this section of Stirling Ridge was leasehold during the time of high population numbers in the area of the park it is the least disturbed section of the parkland.
- 24 Yarralumla Bay was in Yarralumla Holdings not Klensendorff's Land. Bert Sheedy, local historian has researched the tenant farmers of Yarralumla including his own family who arrived in the 1840s and for a time worked the Yarralumla dairy. He is clear that Morrisons worked lands at Westlake. Nearby to the house site is land surface mined sometime in the nineteenth century. It is likely that this activity was carried out by John Morrison who had recently returned from the gold fields. Bert also stated that the Yarralumla Dairy cottage was built in 1891 by Young. At that time the dairy leased land was named 'Curf' after the curlew birds. Following the leasing by the Corkhill family it was renamed 'Riverview'.
- 25 Moriarty states that Briar Farm was brick and constructed in 1871. It is more likely that this cottage was one belonging to Bryant & Cook, bricklayers by trade, and tenant farmers of Briar Farm.
- 26 Additional information on the Morrison family comes from Bert Sheedy's knowledge about the early pioneers of the Canberra/Queanbeyan District including oral history tapes lodged in the National Library - not available until thirty years after Bert's death - and unpublished research material from the *Queanbeyan Age*.
- 27 Charles Newman, *The Spirit of Wharf House*, Sydney, 1961.
- 28 Several books have been written on Westlake. The last two are *Westlake. One of the Vanished Suburbs of Canberra*, Canberra, 1997, and *True Tales from Canberra's Vanished Suburbs of Westlake, Westridge & Acton* (Gugler). The latter has stories from over 100 people and includes stories from Ngunawal, 19th century and construction era periods.
- 29 The 'discovery' of these cottages—unknown number to date—is the result of recent work. Attention was drawn to the existence of several cottages in stories by Westlake residents in *True Tales*...
- 30 21 was moved or burnt down before mid-1924 and cottages 53, 34 and 29 were burnt down before sale of cottages commenced.
- 31 One old gum near the four pines at the corner of Empire Circuit and Forster Crescent fell in 1999.



Dianne & Helen Bates outside 59 Westlake circa 1959

