

Contractor John Howie's Settlement Westlake 1922-1930/31 SECTION ONE

Contractor John Howie was the first to build a settlement in Stirling Park – then known as Westlake. He had won the contract to build Canberra's first hotel – first known as Hostel No 1 and later Hotel Canberra. Today it is The Hyatt Hotel Canberra. The Hotel was built near the Provisional Parliament House to house politicians and other dignitaries coming to Canberra. At the rear of the hotel was provision for under cover parking for a number of private cars and a garage. The hotel consisted of a number of pavilions in a garden setting. A bowling green croquet grounds and tennis courts within the hotel grounds along with a golf course at the rear provided for the sporting needs of the visitors.

Prior to the opening of the first half of the hotel in December 1924 the visiting dignitaries and politicians stayed at Yarralumla House. Following their departure this building was renovated for use by the Duchess and Duke of York in May 1927. Much of the interior design was carried out by Mrs Ruth Lane Poole, wife of Charles Lane-Poole first principal of the Forestry School. At that time the family lived in Melbourne. In 1927 they moved to Canberra.



Above is a 2009 aerial photograph of Stirling Park east and the area of *The Gap* (far left). Through the park still runs Haines' Creek (see green *line* left & blue arrow). Next to it following the line of the creek is the old pathway and above it is a modern walking path that links Darwin Avenue (second road from left) that joins Forster Crescent (cuts across the lower section of photograph) to Alexandrina Drive near Lotus Bay (Bay top left). Dark blue arrow points to the modern walking path and the line of blue arrows and pink point to old roads/tracks in the area. The majority of Howie's Cottages were erected in this area. Big arrow points to the general area of Howie's single men's Hostel Camp. The white square on the left marks the general area of my old home – 27 Westlake.

The old road that cuts across the hill is an old track that probably followed the Ngunawal pathway and is marked on the 1913 strip maps. The grey arrow points to the area of the only known temporary septic tank used in the settlements and suburbs prior to the opening of the main intercepting sewer.



Another building built by Howie's that has survived is the Ainslie Corroboree Crescent in Ainslie. It *lived* as the Masonic Lodge at In 1926 the building was moved

Russell Hill Settlement where it was converted into a school. In the 1930/31 financial years the building was moved to its present site. Above are two photographs of the Hall. Note the vertical timbers and the simple *Doric* column used for decoration.

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The hall was damaged by a fire sometime in the 1960s but was well repaired. The brick fire place on the wall on the opposite side of the entrance shown in the next photograph has been hidden by a false wall and is no longer in use.

Contractor John Howie chose an area at Westlake close to the work site. It was on the hill above the present Lotus Bay on the eastern side of Haines Creek that runs through *The Gap*. This hill is referred to in a number of documents as *Capital Hill*. It is a continuation of this hill where the present Federal Parliament sits.

Howie in 1922 had his carpenters erect 25 two and three bedroom timber cottages – known as *HOWIE'S COTTAGES*. From finds in the area and oral histories these cottages were erected along the eastern side of Haines' creek and on either side of the old road that came from Briar Farm across to the area of Hotel Canberra – there was a gate in that area. For his single men he had around 18 timber huts erected on the flat land below the cottages. This single men's area was called *HOSTEL CAMP*. For each group he provided timber halls. No mention in documents has been found about bathing and washing facilities for the single men – however these would have been provided somewhere in the area. The settlement was connected to water and electricity, but not to the sewer which was constructed in the area between 1922-1925 (and ready for use in 1927). Still found in the ground are some, if not all, water pipes and the line of power poles that run across the hill are replacements of the originals that served Howie's and the Tradesmen's Camp.

One lavatory block or shower area for use by the single men had a concrete floor and is still in situ. The tenants of the cottages shared a number of lavatories that were built behind the cottages. Each house had its own bath room.

Following are a number of photographs showing the slab used for pans. The one on the left shows the full slab and on the right is a detail of one of the small 2 inch by 1 inch



holes in the slab that marked the uprights where the partitions were erected. On the upper and eastern side of the slab is a V shaped drain. Dorothy Maxwell (nee Day) remembered that following the departure of the Hostel Camp this building was used to store the lavatory pans collected from the houses. The contents were poured into 44 gallon drums and the pans hosed out. *Monkey Brown* was the man employed to do this work.



The photograph on the right was taken from the open land lake side looking towards the slab that is to the right of the large gum in the centre of photograph and the photograph on the left shows the view 1990s taken from above the slab looking towards the lake





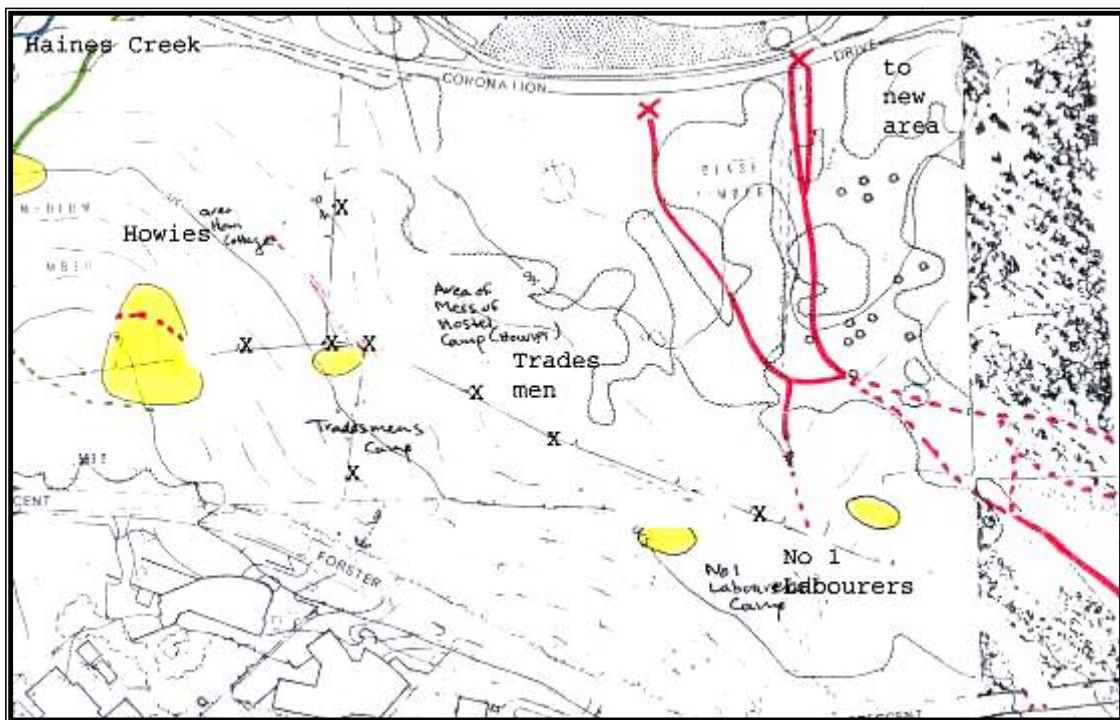
Photograph top left shows a detail of the V shaped drain. The tree on the right is near the slab. Found around it's base is a piece of a metal pipe that is bent into a circular shape – near the base of the tree.

The 2003 drought also revealed a line of rubble in the area of the slab and nearby site of the Hostel Mess Rooms where the Burns Club was founded in 1924. On the left below is a detail of the rubble that stretches across the slope and on the right a detail of the rubble.



Above is a photograph of the soccer team formed at Howie's Settlement. In the background there appears to be a number of small huts that may be the huts of the Hostel Camp. Many of Howie's men came directly from Scotland to work for him. Nearby to the Westlake Camps and Howie's a concrete cricket pitch and a football field were established. Second from left Alex Hamilton, sixth from left Don Dinnerville, seventh from left Joe Haines and ninth from left Harry Hamilton. (Hamilton photograph)

Below is a modern map of the area of Howie's, Tradesmen and No 1 Labourers Camps. Coronation Drive is now named Alexandrina Drive. The lake is out of view to the north. The power poles put in at the time of Howie's and the camps are marked with X and the ones that cross the map are along the old road. The areas coloured yellow are sites of the endangered button wrinklewort wild flower.



A pan system of lavatories was used in the settlement and these were collected once a week. The night soil disposal area was at Westridge. Waste and storm was directed where possible via drains to creek or quagmire. Below is a photograph of one concrete slab on the hillside that was used by the Freeman family following the removal of the house on the site to erect their lavatory building.¹ There are a number of drains above and below this slab that suggests that water was used to hose out the building. The channels above the slab may have directed water from another building.

¹ The building may have been erected for the Mess Caterer of the Tradesmen's Camp – Mrs Erikson who moved in 1924 to a Westlake House. Her tent home was used by the Freeman family 1924-1927 before they moved into 13 Howie's Cottages.



By 1925 the number of cottages at Howie's settlement had been reduced to 20. By October 1926 at which time the cottages were owned by the Federal Capital Commission (FCC) the numbers were reduced to 13. These cottages remained until

the end of 1930 or the beginning of 1931. The Hostel Camp, according to oral history, was still in situ at the time of the opening of Parliament on 9th May 1927. However by the time of the Sanitation Report on 27th July 1927 they had gone. Howie's settlement is referred to in this document in the following manner:

HOWIE'S COTTAGES [Westlake]

Will remain about 5 years longer - unsewered. 13 cottages of wood, bungalow design; unfenced [originally 25]. Rooms 3-6 in each. Natural lighting good; no external louvre ventilations. Ground site - fall, good. Conditions - clean generally but waste water to earth channels [still visible] - bad. No baths or water troughs provided. Three small horse pens too near cottages. [The Westlake, Acton & Causeway cottages designed by HM Rolland were based on Howie's cottages.]

Recommendations.

1. Until such time as sewer or septic tank is provided there is no need for earth channels for waste waters - would suggest that waste liquids be broadcast to prevent stagnation and portable receptacles for this purpose be encouraged.

- 1. Horse Pens; - to be removed from near dwellings and manure be disposed of.*
- 2. Earth Closets - Raise clear of ground or provide concrete floors.*

In the report there is reference directly below Howie's Cottages information about Hutcherson's Contractor's Mess Camp. This particular camp is not known. However it gives some idea of a camp that has timber buildings and the concerns re sanitation. This camp, like the Monolyte one on Red Hill was run by a private contractor and it too had problems that included no door to the bathroom. It also refers to the drainage used in the camp.

HUTCHERSON'S CONTRACTOR'S MESS CAMP

Will be demolished in a month; 6 blocks or huts each divided into 4 cubicles 10'x 10'. No natural lighting or ventilation except where occupants have made hinged wooden fanlights above doors. Walls of wood; roofs iron. Conditions of rooms - fairly clean. No bins provided for garbage; surrounding ground littered with tins, bottles etc. Lumber under huts. Kitchen drainage - foul. Earth closets - dirty.

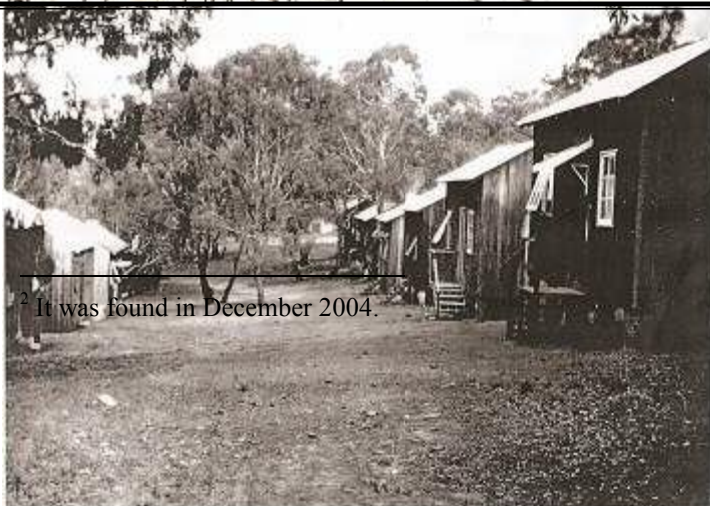
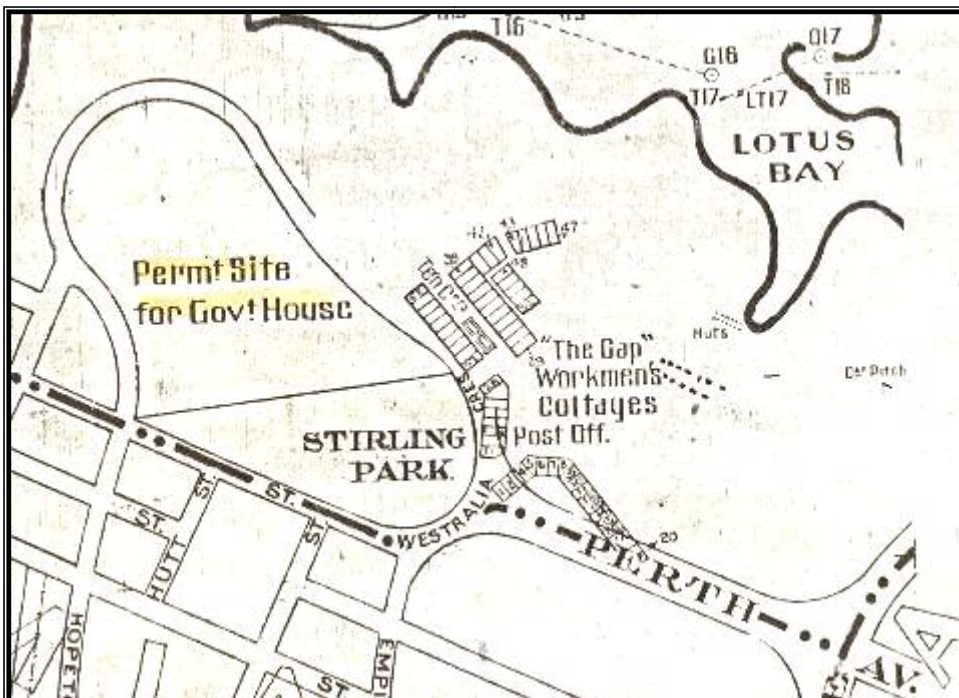
Recommendations.

1. Clean up ground and under huts and provide receptacles for garbage
2. Kitchen - rejoin benches and tables; keep foods covered; provide covered receptacles for garbage in lieu of tea chests.
3. Messroom and Kitchen drainage; - remove wooden V channel, cut earth channel straight, shorten and shallow trench liquids. Suggest removal of meat room outside Messroom.
4. Earth closets; thoroughly cleanse compartments and provide boxes with lids for pans (pans 12" for fixed seat - no lids).

Following is a map circa 1926. By October 1926 when the FCC (Federal Capital Commission) considered joining the then remaining 13 cottages to the sewer system and before the Hostel Camp was removed sometime late in 1927. The cricket pitch was built in 1924 by the men of Howie's. The site is in the area next to Flynn Drive that is currently under development. The numbers in the top section of the map refer to the greens of the Royal Canberra Golf Club. The road around the *Permt Site for Govt House* has not been built. Yarralumla has remained the home of the Governor Generals. The Tennis Court in the Westlake Settlement was built opposite 39 Westlake on the open space. Howie's Cottages are marked as dots. The huts are the Hostel Camp buildings. The cricket pitch is marked

and is on the flat land near Flynn Drive.²

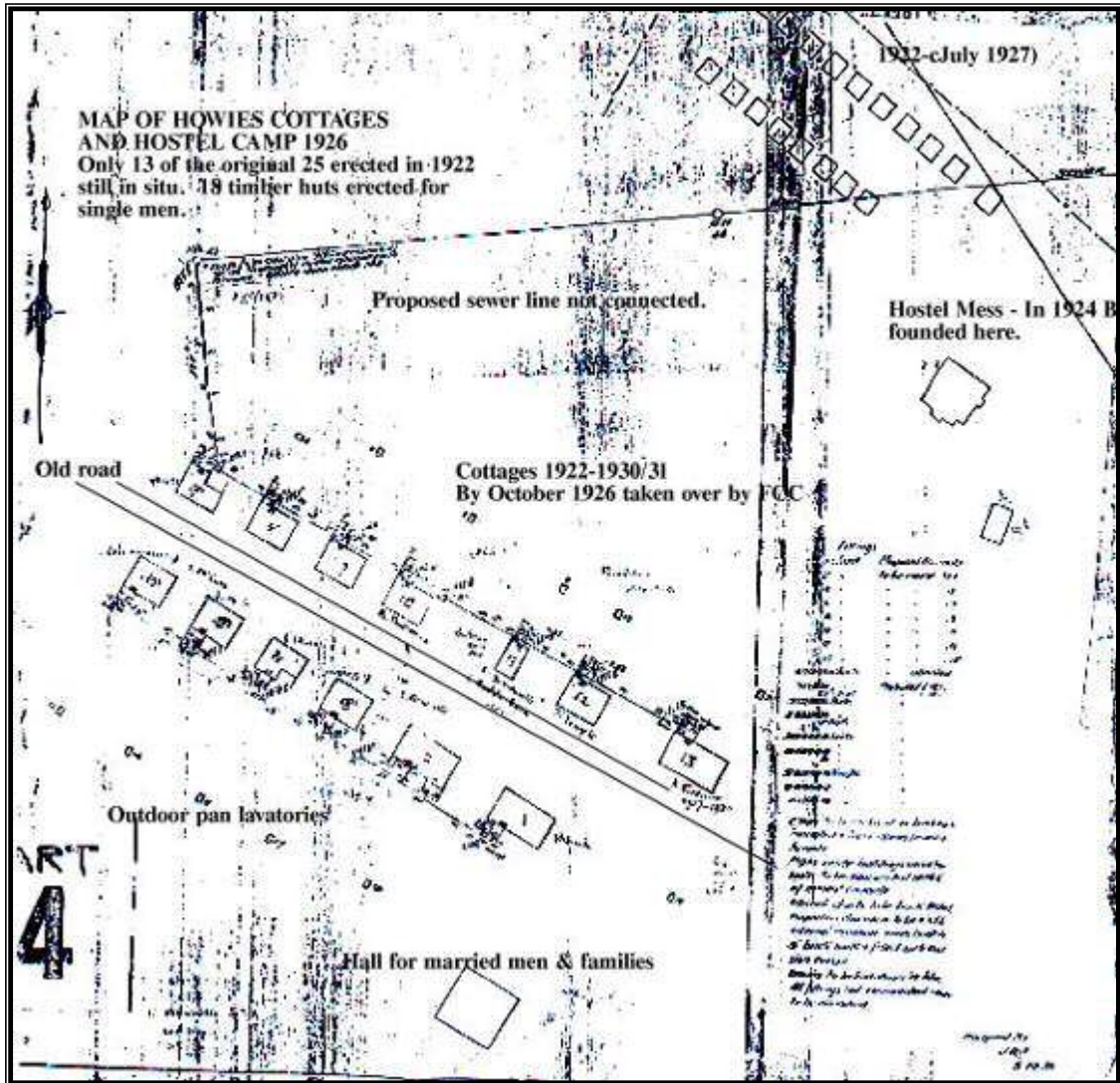
The cricket pitch was found in early 2004.



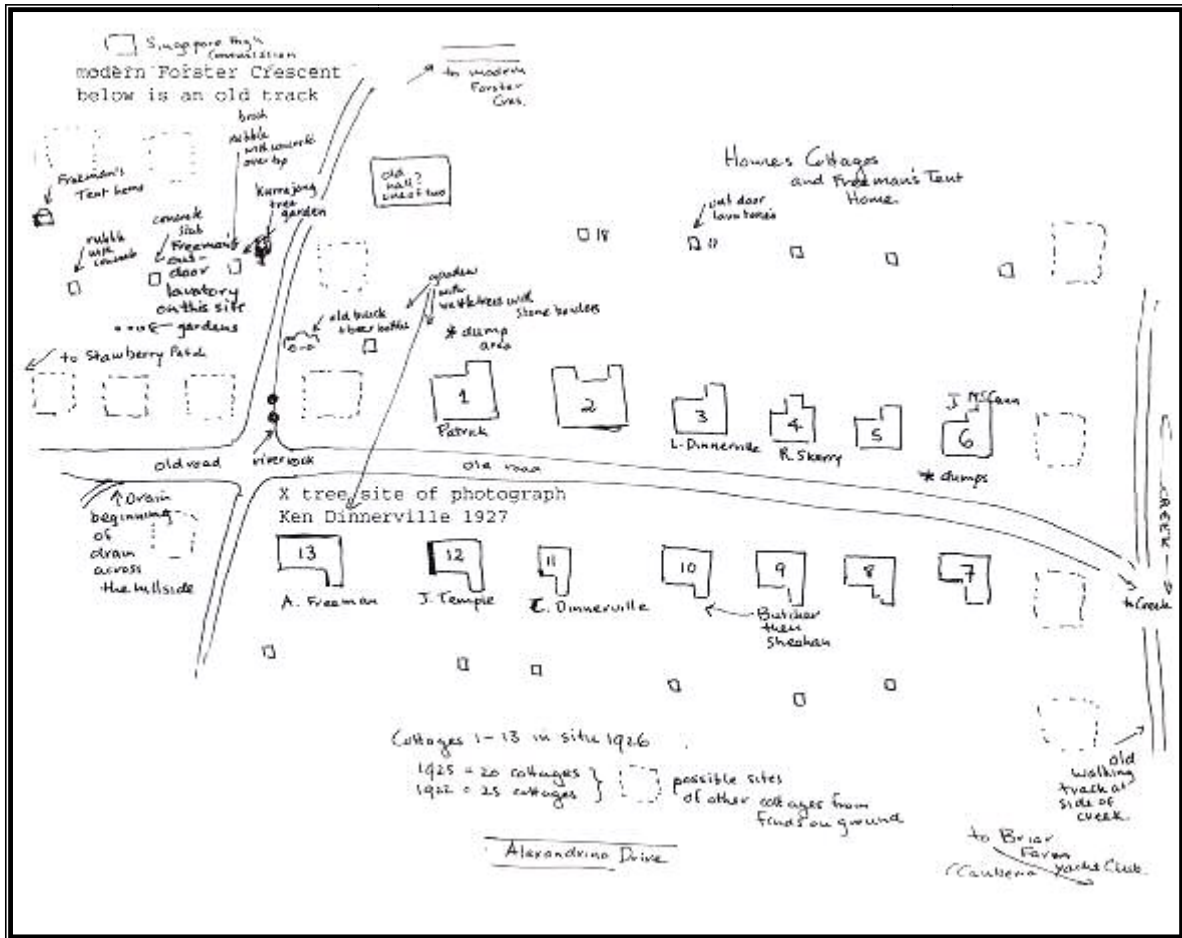
Left: CDHS (Canberra & District Historical Society) photograph showing Howie's Cottages. Photograph taken from Haines' Creek side of the old road. Following is a plan of Howie's Cottages and Hostel Camp October 1926. Number 11 – the small

² It was found in December 2004.

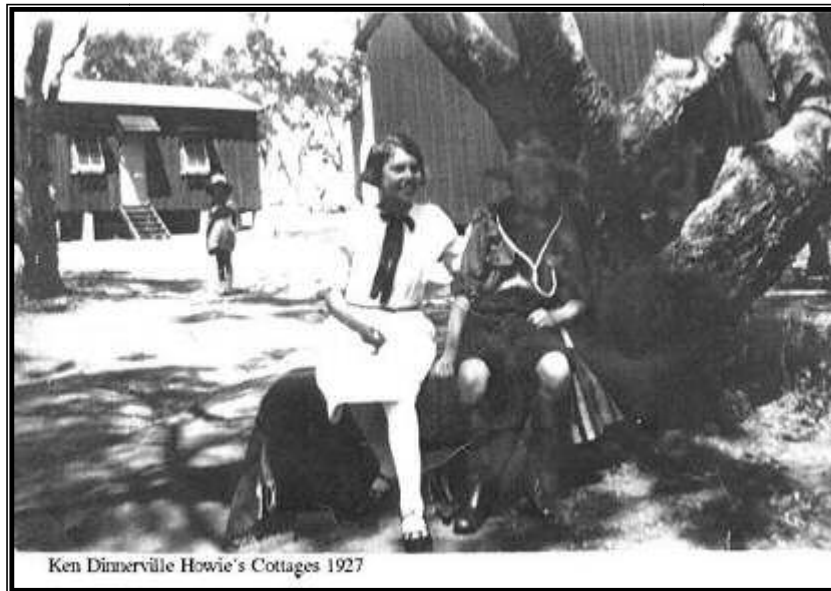
cottage – was erected by Charles Dinnerville, a widower, who brought his son Ken to live with him at the Tradesmen’s Camp which proved an unsatisfactory arrangement with the result that he built his own one bedroom place in Howie’s area. Part of Ken’s story is quoted later in this document. The site of the top right hall is known and it was here that in 1924 the men formed the Burns Club. Many had come from Scotland to work for Howie – also a Scot. The small rectangle below the hall is still in situ – photographs of this slab shown later.



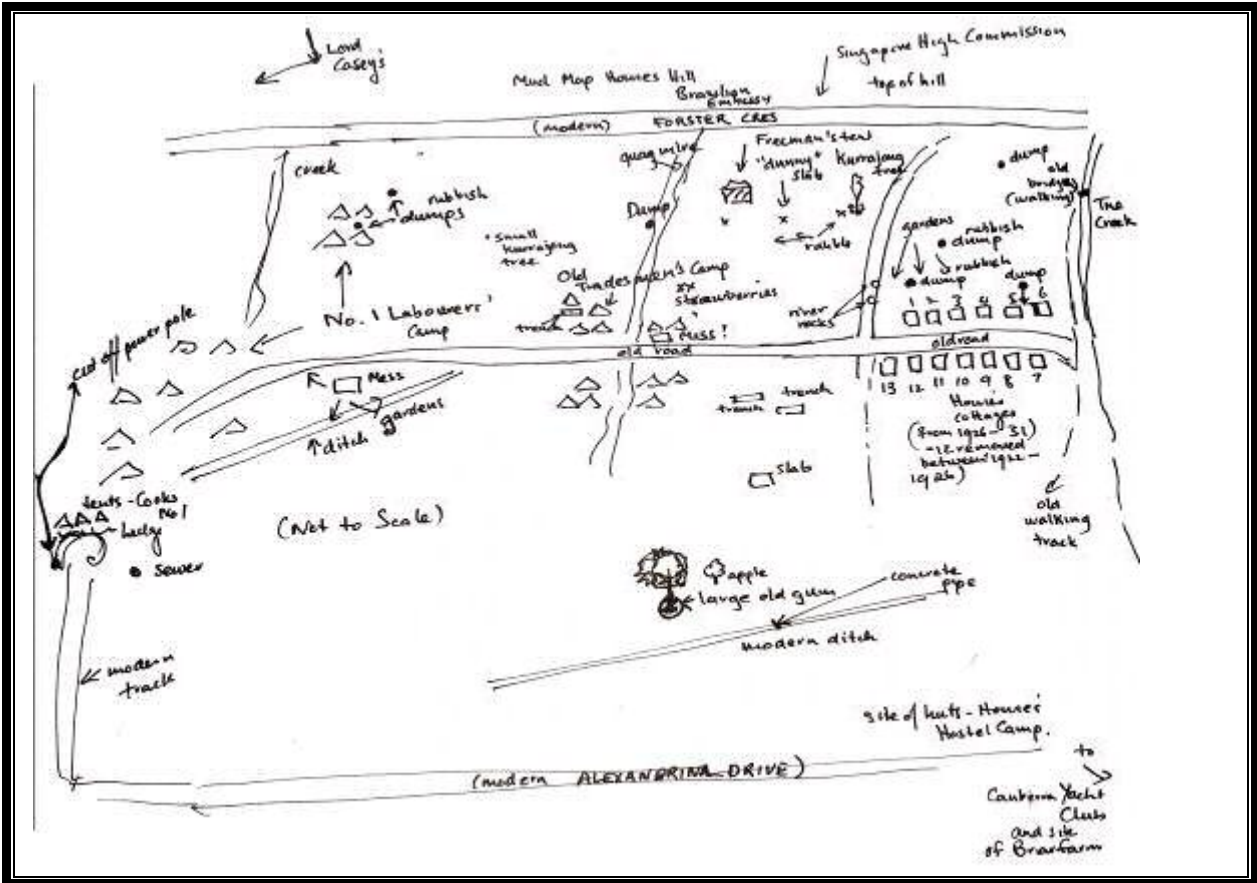
The sites of the lavatories are marked on the above map.



Right is a photograph probably taken on 9th May 1927. Ken Dinnerville – shown right – and his friend who also lived at Howie’s – Freeman were scouts took part in the opening ceremonies 1927. The girls in the photograph are unknown. This is the known photograph Howie’s Cottages. tree under which the youngsters are sitting in situ but now dead a few more feet of trimmed back. The on the opposite side road is probably the marked on the above diagram as No 1 – of the Patrick family.



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Above is a mud map showing the sites of the cottages and single men's camps. Below is a 2003 photograph of the area of the strawberry patch – marked by a concrete post. It is marked on the above map just below the word CAMP in TRADESMEN'S CAMP.



Below is a diagram showing the crossroads and the sites of the old roads that cross the hillside. The site of the below right of Freeman's Tent was an old Howie's Cottage site.

