

WESTLAKE COTTAGES IN *THE GAP* PART TWO

WESTLAKE - HISTORY

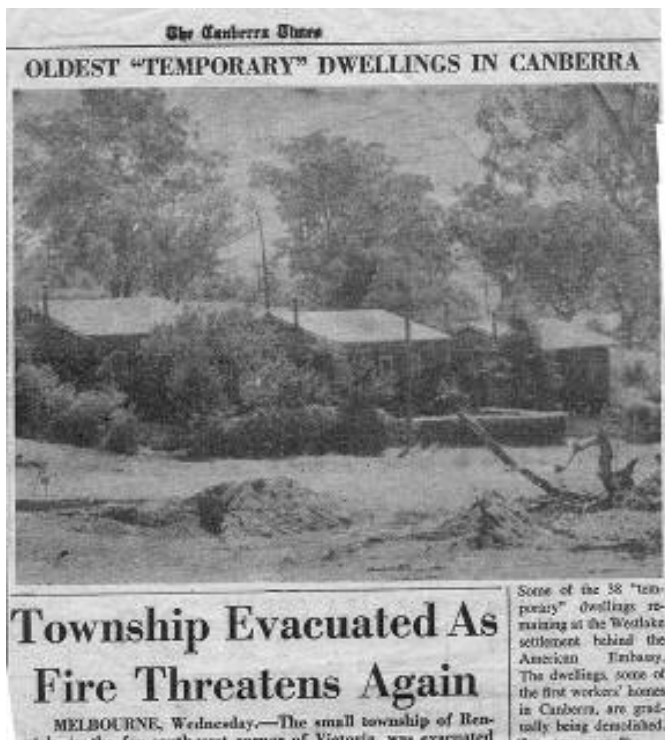
The Westlake area chosen to house construction workers in temporary accommodation because of its proximity to the major construction work of building the Provisional Parliament House and other related buildings, road making and landscaping. Westlake was also out of sight of the permanent buildings.

At the height of building activity between 1922 and 1927 Westlake was home to construction workers living in No 1 Labourers Camp (Capitol Hill, Westlake), Tradesmen's Camp (now Block 3, Section 128 Yarralumla), No 3 Sewer Camp (in *the Gap* Section 22 Yarralumla), Contractor Howie's Settlement (Block 3, Section 128 Yarralumla) and 61 Westlake Cottages in *The Gap*. The population in May 1925 was 700.

By October 1926 when a proposal was made to connect Howie's settlement which was connected to water and electricity¹ to the main intercepting sewer the settlement had been taken over by the Federal Capital Commission (FCC). This may have occurred towards the end of 1925 when Howie's men completed the second half of the Hotel Canberra. Howie's Hostel Camp (single men's accommodation) was removed sometime around July 1927. The two remaining single men's

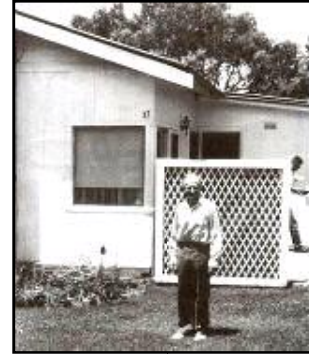
camps, No 1 Labourers and Tradesmen were gone by the end of 1927. The remaining thirteen Howie's cottages still in situ in 1926 survived until the end of 1930 or early 1931. 61 Westlake cottages in *The Gap* survived because of the acute housing shortage and the downturn in work during the Great Depression (1929-early 1940s) and World War 2 (1939-1945).

Sale and removal of the Rolland cottages at Acton and Westlake commenced in the mid 1950s and in the case of the Westlake houses the last one was sold and removed to new sites in the mid 1960s. Two Westlake cottages, including 29 – the last one to go in 1965– sustained fire damage and were not sold. Others may still be seen in Queanbeyan and down at the south coast.



¹ The sites of the original power lines are still in situ – replaced with new ones and the water pipes that supplied the water are still in the ground.

Below a photograph of one of the Westlake cottages on the move to Queanbeyan. The owner of the house was Richard Jenkins who is shown right in a 1990s photograph in front of one of the Westlake cottages re-erected in Queanbeyan.



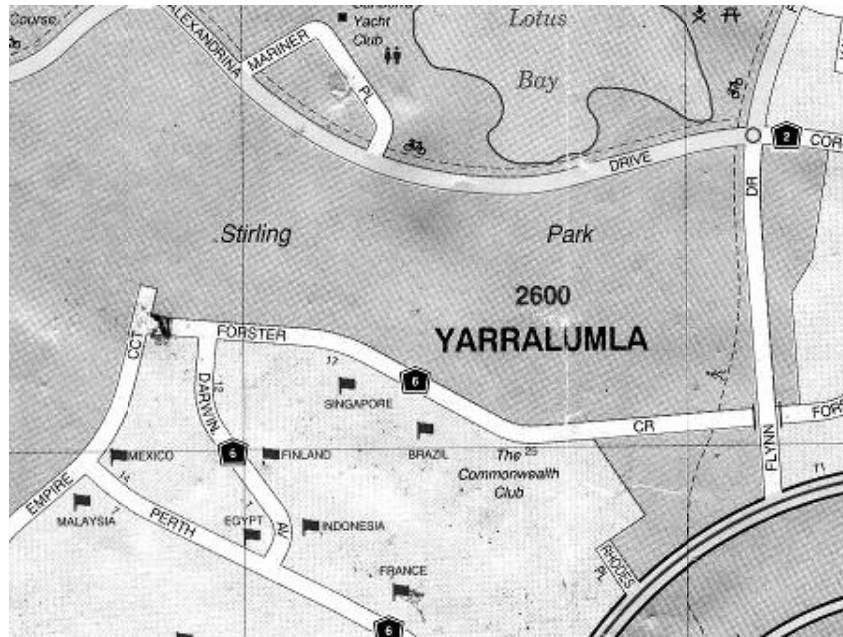
WESTLAKE COTTAGES IN *THE GAP*- THE SITE THEN & NOW



were painted green to blend in with the landscape. The old Mess of No 3 Mess was utilized as a community hall. In 1926 it was enlarged.

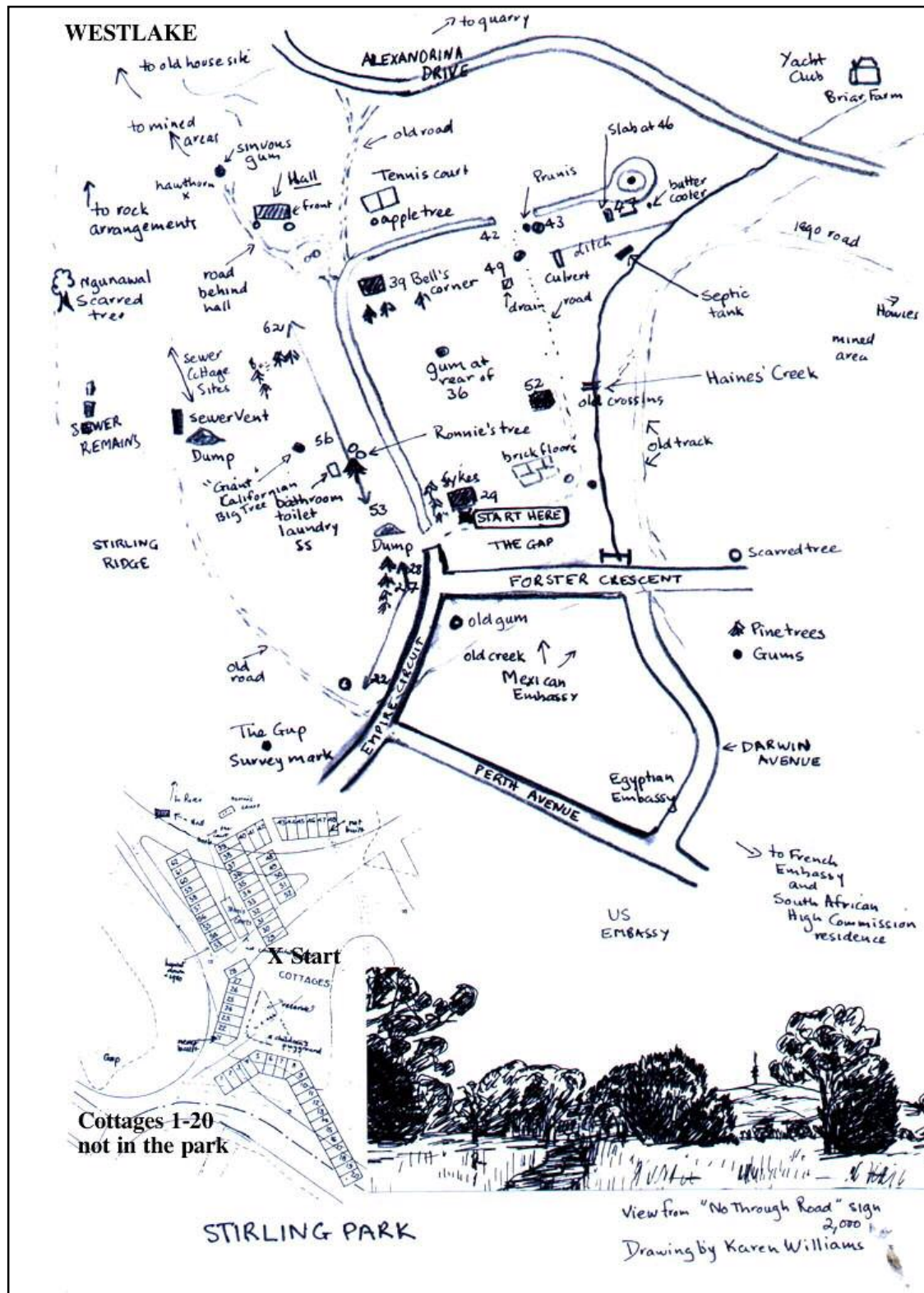
The cottages in *The Gap* were not set out in the usual grid pattern favoured by the authorities. Instead they were arranged in irregular lines that followed the old tracks and the contours of the land. The cottages

The photograph on the previous page was taken in the early 1950s and shows the Westlake cottages. No 53 Westlake is missing from this photograph. It was burnt down. Cottages 1-20 are on the right with No 1 on the left side. These cottage site today are in the grounds of embassies bounded by Empire Circuit, Forster Crescent and Darwin Avenue. The track across the hill near Cottage 1 is on Stirling Ridge and is a continuation of Perth Avenue. The sites of cottages 22-28 are in Stirling Park fronting Empire Circuit. The road in front of cottages 29-39 and around the corner to 47 is still in Stirling Park and used daily by walkers. The group of buildings top right are the Hotel Canberra and Albert Hall.



Following is a mud map of the area of the cottages 22-62 in Stirling Park. The above map shows the area of Stirling Park today. The undeveloped road cuts across the park to join Empire Circuit to Marina Place and if built will destroy the one remaining temporary septic tank and remains of cottages. It would also require the removal to another site of one of the Westlake Plaques and a tree planted by Westlake men – the oldest surviving at the time of planting in 1997. The following mud map shows the area of Empire Circuit across to Marina Place. The walking track on the right follows roughly the creek.



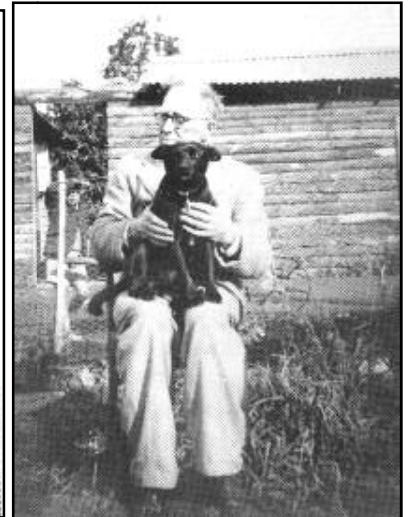
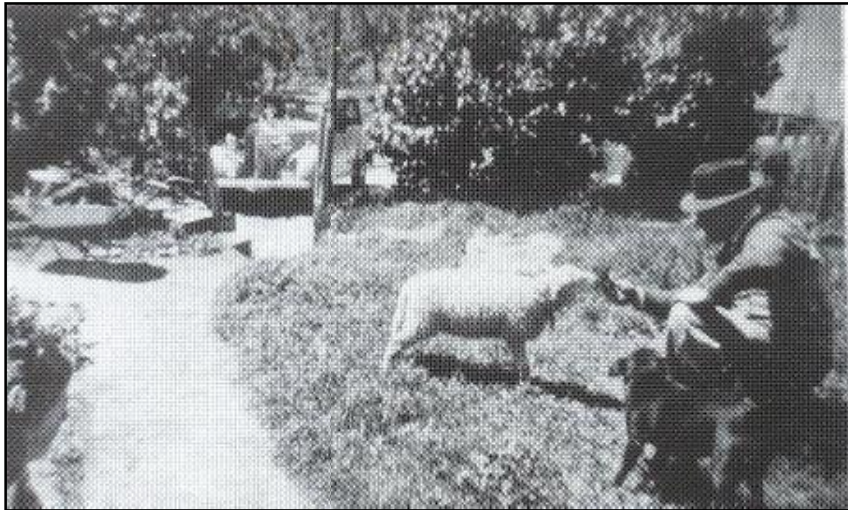


Left is a 1990s photograph showing one of the modern entrances to Stirling Park. The sites of Westlake cottages 21-27 were on the left hand side of Empire Circuit shown below. The road off to the right is Forster Crescent.

My house, No 27 Westlake, shown below was in the area between the two signs of the left and on the other side of the timber barrier. The front of the cottage looked towards the area of the barrier and the grounds of the Mexican Embassy.



The photograph was taken around 1951. The girl standing next to me (Ann Austin) is Vargi Vargo (spelling unknown). Briar roses formed the front hedge at my place. The room on the right behind us was the front bedroom. On the left is the living room. Below left is Leonard Austin with *Lambert* in our backyard. On the right is Leonard Austin with *Toby*. In the background is





Above left Ann Austin in the garden 27 Westlake around 1951. In the background is 26 Westlake. On the right is a view taken from the front steps area of 27 Westlake with in the background the land that is now part of the Mexican Embassy and the hillside where the Finnish Embassy is built.



Above is a photograph of Ann Austin, Loris & Colleen West outside 27 Westlake. On the right is a wedding day photograph of Ann Austin – bridesmaid Moya Lynch - in the grounds of 27 Westlake. In the background is a portion of the dump (20.12.1958). Following left is a photograph of Ann Austin & Florian Gugler outside 27 Westlake. In the background on the left are the grounds of 29 Westlake. Modern Empire Circuit is roughly on the site of this road. On the right is a 1990s photograph showing a detail of the power poles seen in the 1958 photograph.



Westlake. Below is *Blue Menzies* near the trees – 1950s.



The photograph left was taken circa 1951 on the vacant land above the dump between cottages 28 and 53. Below is a 1990s photograph pointing towards the area where 27 and 28 Westlake stood. The tall pine trees in the background left were probably planted in the 1920s and were at the back of 28



George Sykes of 29 Westlake was one of the early entrepreneurs of Canberra. He was an avid brick collector and many of the bricks he collected today are found in the nearby creek. Others are at the rear of his cottage and make up the floors of three small flats that he built to house New Australians. He also used them in the floor of his combined bathroom, laundry and lavatory and his garage.

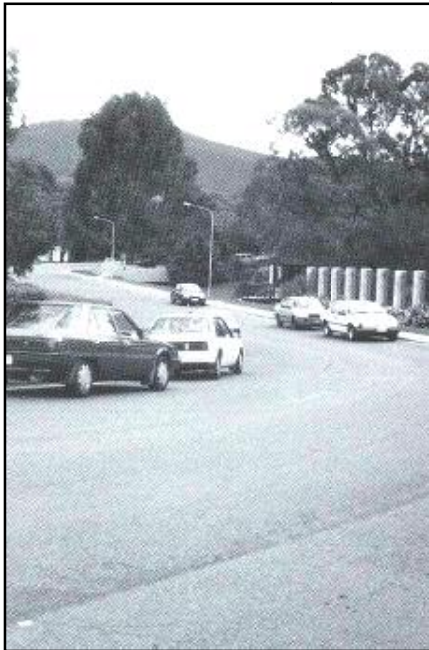
The brick floors of all these buildings remain in situ in the park - see below right on next page. The photograph of Katja was taken outside one of the flats nearest to the house (on right in the photograph) that backed on to the back area of the house.



Below is a view taken from the front hedge area of 29 Westlake looking down towards the hall that was built just behind the trees in the centre background. Below right is a detail of the hedge taken from the other side looking back towards the site of 27 and 28 Westlake. Note part of George Sykes' metal gate embedded in the pine.



The following two photographs show cottages 18 down towards 13. On the left is Frank Clowry's cottage and on the right is the Todd family home – No 18 Westlake. Darwin Avenue runs close to the old road line. Note that there is no tin chimney on the exterior of the 1924 cottages. These were added later.



Left is Patsy Corey (left) and Doris Smith (right) with baby Pauline Smith – 1940s and on the right is a photograph of Darwin Avenue showing the roads in roughly the same area. Above far left is the same area today.





Previous page right is the old road than ran in front of cottages 29-39. Since this photograph was taken in the 1990s the silver birch trees have been removed. On the left are the Bates girls outside their home. In the background is the hedge between 39 and 38 Westlake. The hedge is in the above photograph on the left.

THE GAP (WESTLAKE) SETTLEMENT - THE EARLY YEARS

Shortly after families moved into Westlake cottages they formed a Progress Association to ensure that improvements were made to the settlement. From the letters written to the Works Director, HM Rolland it is clear that the pot-belly stoves in the living area did not provide sufficient warmth in the unlined cottages during Canberra's cold winters. To give some idea of the cold one memory that I have is of my mother wrapping the water pipes on the outside of the house to prevent them from splitting open after the frosts that often left the water frozen solid in the pipes. Water for



breakfast needs was put into the kettle the night before to ensure that it was available the next morning.

Another request asked for guttering to be added to the rear of the cottages because people needing to go to the lavatory had to go outside the cottage to gain access to the lavatory and during rain they got wet from the run off from the roof.

Following are examples of the letters written by Progress Association. The Progress



Association later joined The First Commissioner's Social Service Association that lasted between 1925 and 1929. Local communities joined the Association between 1925 and 1926 and were responsible for providing the labour for the children's playgrounds, tennis courts built in



the majority of settlements and the construction of the Causeway Hall. The Federal Capital Commission provided the materials for each of the projects. Photograph on previous page – Carn family and the concrete slab of combined laundry bathroom of 55 Westlake.

24/3/25
Westlake.
18.2.25.
20 FEB 1925

Mr. L. M. Rollands.
Works Director.
Canberra.
Dear Sir.

I have been instructed to write re the brick fireplaces. Mr. Richmond put a proposal before me some two weeks back for me to put to the residents of the Gap re the fireplaces. If the proposal still stands good I have to inform you that the residents will accept it. We also ask if you could give us further information re the promises for the storm water drain, Tennis Courts, Road formation, plugs for tubs, electric light and the building of a Hall. I would be much obliged if you could give me an interview some.

CP464/s R.
24/3/25

24/399

H. K. Rollands.

Continued.

evening at an early date after
working hours.

Yours Faithfully.

THE GAP PROGRESS ASSN.
WEST LAKE

Hon. Sec. W. Tracy.

CANBERRA SOCIAL SERVICE ASSOCIATION.

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD AT WESTLAKE ON 15th MAY, 1926
FOR THE PURPOSE OF FORMING A DISTRICT SOCIAL SERVICE
ASSOCIATION AT WESTLAKE.

Mr. S. Champ, President of the Westlake Progress Association, occupied the chair.

The Chairman in welcoming the General Secretary, Mr. J.H. Honeysett, to the meeting, regretted the falling off in interest and attendance at meetings of the Progress Association, and thought that unless residents took interest in their own affairs, very little progress would be made towards the well-being of residents of Westlake. The existing hall was not at all suitable, and there were many ways in which the social wellbeing of the residents could be improved. He consequently favoured the idea of forming a District Social Service Association at Westlake, more particularly to enable the views of residents to be placed before the Council per medium of a delegate.

The General Secretary, Mr. J.H. Honeysett, then explained the objects of the meeting, and the benefits that would accrue to residents of Westlake by linking up with the Social Service Organisation.

Messrs. Brill and Myers forcibly pointed out that it was impossible for residents of Westlake to take an interest in the progress of the district when they had been informed by the Commission that the settlement was only of a temporary nature. They drew attention to the fact that on several occasions they had made application to the Commission for improvements in their conditions of living, but were invariably informed that Westlake was only a temporary settlement.

Mr Brill then moved, seconded by Mr. Williams Senr. the following resolution -

That the residents of Westlake were willing to fall in with the Social Service Organisation, provided that a guarantee can be given by the Federal Capital of some permanency of the settlement.

The motion was carried unanimously.

The General Secretary promised to bring the resolution before the notice of the Chairman of the Commission, and to advise the Chairman of the Progress Association in due course.

A hearty vote of thanks was accorded to Mr Honeysett for his attendance at the meeting.

Chairman.

CP464/5

10/15

In the 1950s the interiors of the cottages received their second coat of paint and in the combined bath room laundry the tin bath was replaced with enamel one and a chip heater installed. The latter meant that people no longer had to carry hot water from the wood fired copper to the bath for bathing.

During the era of the Social Service Association to which the Westlake Progress Association affiliated the Children's Playground was built on the triangular reserve of land in front of cottages 5 – 9 and 22-27 and the tennis courts built opposite 39 Westlake. Both were constructed in 1926 under the 50/50 scheme. That is the men supplied the labour and the Federal Capital Commission supplied the materials. Below is a photograph of the Westlake Children's Playground



The site of the Children's Playground was on open ground at the rear of 29 Westlake and the reserve land nearby. George Sykes who rented the cottage from 1929-1965 extended his backyard to take in the area of the playground. The swing remained and George was always careful to allow children into his yard to use it.

Below is a photograph taken in 2003 from the area of the hall that shows the site of the tennis court. The apple tree that grew near the entrance to the courts was cut down by accident in the 1990s woody weed clearance. It is regrowing.

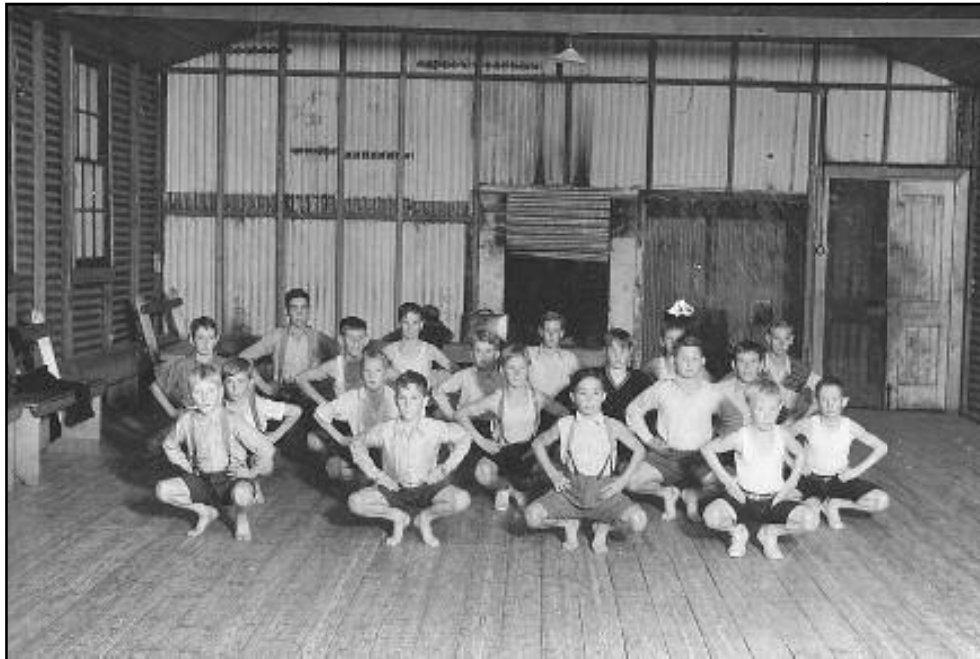


Right View from around the 56 Westlake. The Hall is out of the picture area top left - L-R rear Nurse Britton, two Gibbs girls, Rev Murchison. Bottom row - Ray Wilder (deceased), Gibbs girl, Carmel Maxwell.

The letters to the Works Director HM Rolland documents some of the concerns of the Westlake people. Most of the requests to Rolland were carried out, however very little in the way of repairs were done over the years. The standard reply by the authorities was that *it can't be done because the settlement is only temporary*.

Some of the improvements included the painting of the exteriors of the cottages and a fire place in the living room. The tin chimney provided allowed more heat to go out than stay in the cottage. I remember that we had in our kitchen at 27 Westlake one power point that was used for our radio.

The Hall



The Westlake Community initially used cottage 29 as a meeting area. Following the departure of No 3 Sewer Camp in May 1925 their Mess was left behind for use as a Community Hall. Below is a photograph of the interior of the Westlake Hall loaned by Vic Reynolds. The

photograph shows the Gymnastics Group around 1937/38. Note the fireplace that was an addition



to the original building. The building was constructed from corrugated iron. Off one side accessed from the interior were women's showers and lavatory. The men's lavatory was out the back. Vic, whose father died in 1929 during the time the family lived at Molonglo, has written on the back of the old photograph the names of all the boys in the group. They are: Back Row (all L-R) W Hawke, D Armstrong, R Davies, L Hart, B Armstrong;

3rd Row - E Brill, H Reynolds, L McVeigh, B Phillips, D Reynolds

2nd Row - Keith Hawke, George Blewitt, Bruce Hawke, R Day, R Brill; Front Row - E Smith, B Davies, Keith Dixon, Victor James Reynolds.

Left, Children coming out of the Westlake Hall late 1940s. Back Row L-R - Ray Wilder, once of the Campbell girls, Sylvia Menzies. Next row - Gregory girl, Johnson girl, Gregory, Jimmy Burns, boy Purtell.

Every family came from somewhere to live in this small community. Every one knew everyone else and the focal point of community activities was the hall. Here numerous dances, card parties, engagement parties, church services and the most important annual Children's Christmas Party were held. From the early 1950s a pre-school service once a fortnight was provided by the authorities and during school holidays play groups were held for children of all ages.

All who lived in the settlement knew and know the names of the other families living at Westlake. The bush and nearby river provided a wonderful playground for the large numbers of children in the settlement and all of us who lived in Westlake and grew up there recall that we always felt safe. None can recall doors being locked and all recall the numerous playmates of the same age that brought us together. All can remember the acts of kindness at times of family crisis that included illness and death.

In essence Westlake was a community that was torn apart when the decision was made in the mid 1950s that it was time for Westlake to go. For a few years the severe housing shortage ensured that as the old residents moved that others, including many New Australians, moved into the vacant cottages. But by the 1960s as tenants left no one replaced them and in 1965 the last house was removed. The gardens, terraced areas and dumps were flattened and the earth smoothed over. Some of the pine hedges and a few fruit trees survived. Every old tree bears the reminders of the people who lived at Westlake. Rubbish was pushed into the creek and new trees were planted. The road in front of cottages 29 to 47 still sits on the earth and under the earth the sewerage pipes remain. The area still has a sense of presence of those who lived there.