



ACT Heritage Council

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Rock Valley Homestead and Surrounds

(part) Block 240 Paddys River

At its meeting of 30 July 2015 the ACT Heritage Council decided that Rock Valley Homestead and Surrounds was eligible for registration.

The information contained in this report was considered by the ACT Heritage Council in assessing the nomination for Rock Valley Homestead and Surrounds against the heritage significance criteria outlined in s10 of the *Heritage Act 2004*.

HISTORY

Tidbinbilla has been a focus of activity for Aboriginal people well before Europeans arrived. The earliest known date for Aboriginal people in the region comes from Birrigai Rock Shelter which contains evidence of Aboriginal occupation from approximately 21,000 years ago. The area is known to be part of an Aboriginal pathway leading towards the mountains where past peoples would gather seasonally to feast on Bogong moths. During this period groups from the coast, the lower Lachlan and Murrumbidgee Rivers and all neighbouring regions in between would gather in the alpine regions south and southwest of the ACT to feast on the plentiful supply of Bogong moths as they aestivate over summer (Flood, 1996; Gale 1991; Kabaila, 2005). The Tidbinbilla Range was of spiritual importance to Aboriginal people, and is said to be a variation of the Aboriginal word 'Jedbinbilla' which means place of initiation (Freeman and Collett et al. 1994, p. 7).

The first Europeans in the Canberra area were the early explorers who relied on their Aboriginal guides' prior knowledge. Charles Throsby and his team are credited with the first European discovery of the region around 1820 with further excursions by his team and others extending his recording of the area over the next few years. The Murrumbidgee River was located in 1821, and by the late 1820s, settlers had pushed south to the Tuggeranong area, some illegally grazing stock west of the Murrumbidgee, beyond the limits of the Nineteen Counties (Freeman and Collett et al. 1994, 8).

Squatters and Selectors at Tidbinbilla (from Freeman and Collett et al. 1994)

George Webb arrived in New South Wales in 1818. In the autumn of 1834 George, Sarah and family, seeking new grazing country, camped on the eastern side of the Murrumbidgee. They were actually on James Wright's Lanyon property and Wright warned them off. Although the country west of the river was beyond the Nineteen Counties, the official area of settlement at the time, the Webbs crossed and built a home just below present-day Tharwa. After occupation of this western side became legal in January 1837 Wright obtained a grazing licence and the following year he and Webb again came into conflict, this time over boundaries. Although the dispute was settled in Webb's favour he decided to move, this time to the north-west.

In 1839 George Webb and his family took up what became known as the 'Tidbinbilly Run' and became the first Europeans to live at Tidbinbilla. The run was leased annually at first then when regulations changed in the 1840s Webb took out a 14-year lease. Like other such squatting runs in the region, Webb's was large, occupying 25 square miles. It ran from the Tidbinbilla Range to Paddys River and from Gibraltar Creek in the south to Hurdle Creek in the north where it adjoined the 'Congwarrah Run.'

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In 1866 the ageing George moved to live with daughter Eliza at Uriarra. Tidbinbilly Run changed hands and was acquired by Andrew Cunningham. By the time Cunningham obtained Tidbinbilly Run he was one of the most influential landholders in the region, owning Freshford, Tuggranong (as it then was spelt) and many other properties. Soon after his death in 1887, sons Andrew Jackson and James began running the family empire in partnership. Andrew Jackson Cunningham lived at Lanyon and James Cunningham at Tuggranong.

The first half of the nineteenth century saw the squatters become a powerful force in colonial New South Wales. Their pastoral leases occupied huge areas of land, making it difficult for smaller graziers and farmers to obtain holdings. Calls for a more equitable land policy were heard before the gold rushes, but the increased population and wealth created by gold heightened the cries to 'unlock the land'.

From 1861, when John Robertson's free selection legislation became law, a series of land acts were introduced to open land to selectors. While many of these small landholders failed, either through under capitalization or squatter tactics such as 'dummying' and 'peacocking,' large numbers of selectors were successful. From the 1880s onward a steady number of blocks were selected at what is now Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve as newcomers picked up parts of the formerly leasehold lands of the Cunninghams. These selectors and their families included the Sheedys, George Green, George Hatcliff, John Staunton, Henry Ffrench Gillman, John Noone and others. By 1895 the population had increased to the extent that a mail service was instituted. Three years later the Church Rock Valley School was opened, superseded in 1907 by the Gibraltar Provisional School.

Rock Valley and Pisé at Tidbinbilla

The homestead is a Pisé construction. Pisé de terre is the method of earth building characterized by ramming earth into in-situ formwork similar to that used today for mass concrete (Lewis 1977, p. 43 quoted in National Trust of Australia 2001, p. 5). It is a cheap building construction style that was introduced into Australia in the 1820s (Lewis 2000: 51). First a timber framed mould is constructed on top of a stone or brick base layer (which protects the wall from moisture) and then earth is poured in about 10-15cm thick and then rammed into the mould until it is hard enough that a hammer will only leave a small dent when struck against the top surface, then another 10-15cm of soil is spread on top and the process repeated until the mould has been filled. When the mould has been filled, it is moved up and the process repeated until the full height of the wall is reached. The building can be used as soon as it has been erected with the walls being able to support heavy loads, such as roof structures; however, the walls must be allowed to dry for several months before they can be plastered, providing a pleasing finish that also helps to protect the walls from moisture.

In the area that is now the Australian Capital Territory, the County of Cowley was the most prodigious in the art and use of rammed earth construction within a radius of 100 miles (Sheedy 1986, quoted in National Trust of Australia 2001, p. 20). This included the Tidbinbilla and Booroomba Valleys and areas to the west of the Murrumbidgee River.

Cosgrove and Dowling list 42 historic Pisé buildings in the ACT known in 2001. However, only fourteen of these were cited in 2001 as being in 'good,' condition, with a further nine cited as ruins. Approximately seven of the fourteen 'good' structures survived at this time without being subject to major modification, with others, such as Nil Desperandum Homestead and Rock Valley, subsequently affected by bushfires in 2003.

1895-1968: The Greens – Pastoral property settlement and garden establishment (from Bale 1995 and Ramsay 2010)

George Green and George Hatcliff moved into the Tidbinbilla area and built a small home at Ashbrook corner in 1886. Later, in 1895, George Green built Rock Valley homestead for himself and his family with the help of George Hatcliff. George Green and George Hatcliff pioneered in the art of pisé construction and built at least six pisé structures in the area apart from Rock Valley: the outbuildings at Booroomba in 1890, 'Farrer's experimental laboratory' in Lambrigg, and the lower floor of the Lambrigg homestead in the same decade; Church Rock Valley School in 1898, Congwarra house in 1910, Kayes hut in about 1907. It is probable that they were involved in the construction of the Tennent Homestead or the pisé section of the homestead sometime in between 1893 and 1902.

There is a connection between Rock Valley homestead and Australian migration history concerning Green and Hatcliffe's possible acquisition of pisé house building skills from the Chilean shepherds Eusebio Ponsi and Rupelto Rodrigues. The Australian population during the colonial period included people who had journeyed from many

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corners of the world, often attracted by gold mining activities. Their various cultural skills, some more well known than others, contributed to colonial settlement.

The initial Rock Valley structure comprised a single pisé bedroom on stone footings and two rooms of slab (see 'A' in Image 2). In 1897 another slab room was added and used as a bedroom. The roofing was shingled for all the rooms by 1901. In 1905 a major addition of 4 rooms was completed in pisé with timber footings including a living room, three bedrooms and a timber veranda built to the north of the existing structures (see 'B' and 'C' in Image 2). In 1915, a brick infill was built to join the two pisé structures, and in 1917 the walls were rendered with cement.

An orchard was planted in 1897 by George Green with 74 trees and later a slab dairy was included. Paddocks were fenced and crops were planted. Food plants were important for self-sufficiency and in addition to the trees, vegetables were planted in the orchard area, and George Green also experimented with various crops, including sugar cane, chestnuts, walnuts, and maize.

George kept bees and a regular supply of honey was available to swap and sell along with his fruit and vegetables. Families in the valley traded regularly with each other and at times George Green sold to residents of Tharwa and to traders in Queanbeyan.

In 1919 (see Image 3) the homestead and surrounds included:

- an oven;
- a slab chicken shed;
- dairy in slab construction;
- a galvanised iron shed, an external toilet; and
- shearing shed and sheep yard.

In 1920 a fibro and timber extension was added to the southeastern side of the house.

George Green continued to work with George Hatcliff on many of the surrounding properties, including Booroomba, Orroral, Tuggranong, Lanyon and Tidbinbilla. They carried out tree clearing, mustering, shearing, dipping, crutching, fencing, ploughing, the planting of willows and house construction.

The Green family lived at Rock Valley Homestead and Surrounds for nearly three generations. George's wife, Mary Ann, lived happily with her seven children at Rock Valley until her death in 1911 after a long illness caused by rheumatic fever.

George Thomas was the only one out of the seven Green children to spend his entire life at Rock Valley. Tom, as he was known, married Mary Elma Woods in 1925 and lived at Rock Valley with their two sons Keith and Eddie. Gradually the practise of mixed farming changed to one of sheep and cattle grazing, as much of the valley had since been cleared, making wool the main source of income for the Green family. New orchard plantings were established northeast of the garden yard, and a pisé garage was erected. Beyond the garage several exotic tree plantings were established possibly in the 1930s. Around 1949 windbreaks to modify the climate were established, consisting of cypresses along the outside of the house yard. Around 1950 a tennis court was constructed on the western side of the house that required building up ground levels, gravel surface treatment, the removal of the western side fence and the extension of the court over the former access track to the farm buildings (see '35' in Image 4).

Beautification of the home garden with the establishment of garden beds and plantings was also undertaken during Tom and Mary Elma's time. Their son, Eddie Green, remembers the camellia bush - planted by his mother near the veranda, and the bed edged in coloured bottles, a practice that was a feature of some Australian historic vernacular rural gardens. Green also noted several plants that were from the previous generations that included bulbs, Mahonia aquifolia, the fig, pussy willow, kurrajong, strawberry tree and holly.

Tom died in 1957 after a short illness and his wife died not long after. Eddie Green took over the property and ran it until 1968. Eddie was interested in the home garden as a teenager and in 1954 he commenced considerable beautification works as a Junior Farmers project. As part of the project he kept a journal and sketches that described and illustrated his work. The journal records the intense hard work undertaken by Eddie during 1955-56, describing

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the new fence, soil improvements, terracing, erection of garden structures, new beds, paving and plant propagation. The garden fence erected by Eddie was 6 ft high with peppermint posts and two rows of wire mesh.

Eddie engaged in the hard work of fertilizing, the sourcing of plants, and the construction of garden features such as the bush house, trellises, ponds and extensions to the northern fence line of the garden yard fence to make a 'v' shape at the gate.

1968 onwards: Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve Use and Landscape Changes (from Bale 1995 and Ramsay 2010)

The Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve (TNR) was declared in 1959. In 1968 Eddie sold the property and a year later it was acquired by the ACT government. TNR management subsequently demolished all the vernacular outbuildings, a collection of pisé, timber slab and galvanised iron structures.

Rock Valley Homestead and Surrounds subsequently functioned as a residence for Nature Reserve staff. The area to the south of the garden yard that was formerly the site of the granary and stable was levelled and the Tidbinbilla Depot was established. During this time the garden was modified, many of the more fragile plantings from Eddie Green's garden disappeared. The ponds, fernery, bush house and trellises had gone, as had the southern and western fences. Terracing near the back entrance developed by Eddie remained. The landscape in the southwest of the garden yard had been levelled and a structure established for animal pens. A concrete brick barbeque near the house had been constructed. A number of trees and shrubs surviving from the earlier George and Thomas Green era existed and one large tree, in the cypress windbreak along the garden's southern fence remained. Fences appear to have been removed or lowered.

Bushfires in 2003 devastated TNR. Rock Valley Homestead and Surrounds was affected, as were the gardens and surrounding paddocks (see below).

DESCRIPTION

Rock Valley Homestead and Surrounds is situated between two ephemeral creeks approximately 600m south of the Tidbinbilla River. The pisé homestead faces northwest and has views of the surrounding Tidbinbilla Range and Valley (see Image 5).

The original structure comprised a single pisé bedroom on stone footings built in 1895, a pisé addition of four rooms built circa 1905, brick infill to join the two pisé structures together, built circa 1915. In 1917 the building was rendered and circa 1920 a brick and fibro living room added. A kitchen and bathroom extension was built in 1953 to complete the homestead. The early pisé construction was all that survived the 2003 fires (see Image 6). The fires destroyed the roof, and the timber and fibro additions of the 1920s, although the fireplaces and chimneys from the 1920s additions remained (see 'D' in Image 2). In 2008 Rock Valley house was restored as a stabilised ruin. Works included:

- rendering of western wall;
- concrete slab floors laid in two rooms (original floors were timber);
- 1920s chimneys conserved;
- new timber deck veranda installed, overlaying the previous veranda footprint; and
- galvanised iron roof over homestead.

Images 4 and 7 document the house garden and cultural landscape elements surviving bushfires in 2003. All the depot buildings from the 1960s were damaged and subsequently demolished, their levelled landscape area turned into a gravelled visitor parking area. In 2008 a new 1.8m high fence of steel corner poles, steel pickets and galvanised wire mesh was erected to exclude wildlife and hence protect both the building and the garden plants. The present day fenceline differs somewhat in alignment from historic fences with its north-west corner being at a right angle rather than the 'V' shape created by Eddie Green, but it generally captures the footprint of the Green's house yard.

The citation boundary for Rock Valley Homestead and Surrounds includes:

- Pisé homestead;
- footprint of original house paddock reflected by present-day fence line, consisting of:
 - internal pathway network;
- surrounding landscape inside citation boundary, consisting of:
 - original entry road
 - original orchard block north of the homestead; and
- orchard block adjoining the eastern side of house paddock.

Physical condition and integrity

Prior to January 2003, the pisé homestead had been damaged by earth movements and animal burrowing, and bushfires further damaged the place, with the pisé structure and two chimneys/fireplaces from the 1920s extensions surviving.

The pisé homestead was restored in 2008 (see above). The walls in the 1895 Pisé room are built from grey silty soil compacted in formwork. Most of the render is now gone, however, the pisé itself is stable with no serious cracking.

The 1905 Pisé rooms are built of decomposed granite – readily available from the surrounding Tidbinbilla area. Again, some of the render is gone, although some is still evident and attached to the walls. The outside western wall of these rooms has been repaired, cleaned and re-rendered, the process completed using a benzene based, water resistant non-silicone water resistant agent.

The chimneys from the 1920s fibro and timber addition remained after the 2003 fires. These are standing in good repair, one fireplace with remaining Metters stove

By 2010 a number of the garden trees and shrubs recovered from the fire had substantial regrowth, sprouting new stems from their base with healthy dense foliage, remaining and regenerative elements of the garden and surrounds are shown in Images 4 and 7 (Ramsay, 2010).

As of 2014, while the garden had regenerated somewhat, and been maintained or replanted sympathetically with the Green-era garden where possible, many plants and trees had been removed, with some replanting evident. However, the internal pathway network and house yard and orchard footprints remained, enabling ongoing interpretation of the Green's garden and orchards.

SITE PLAN

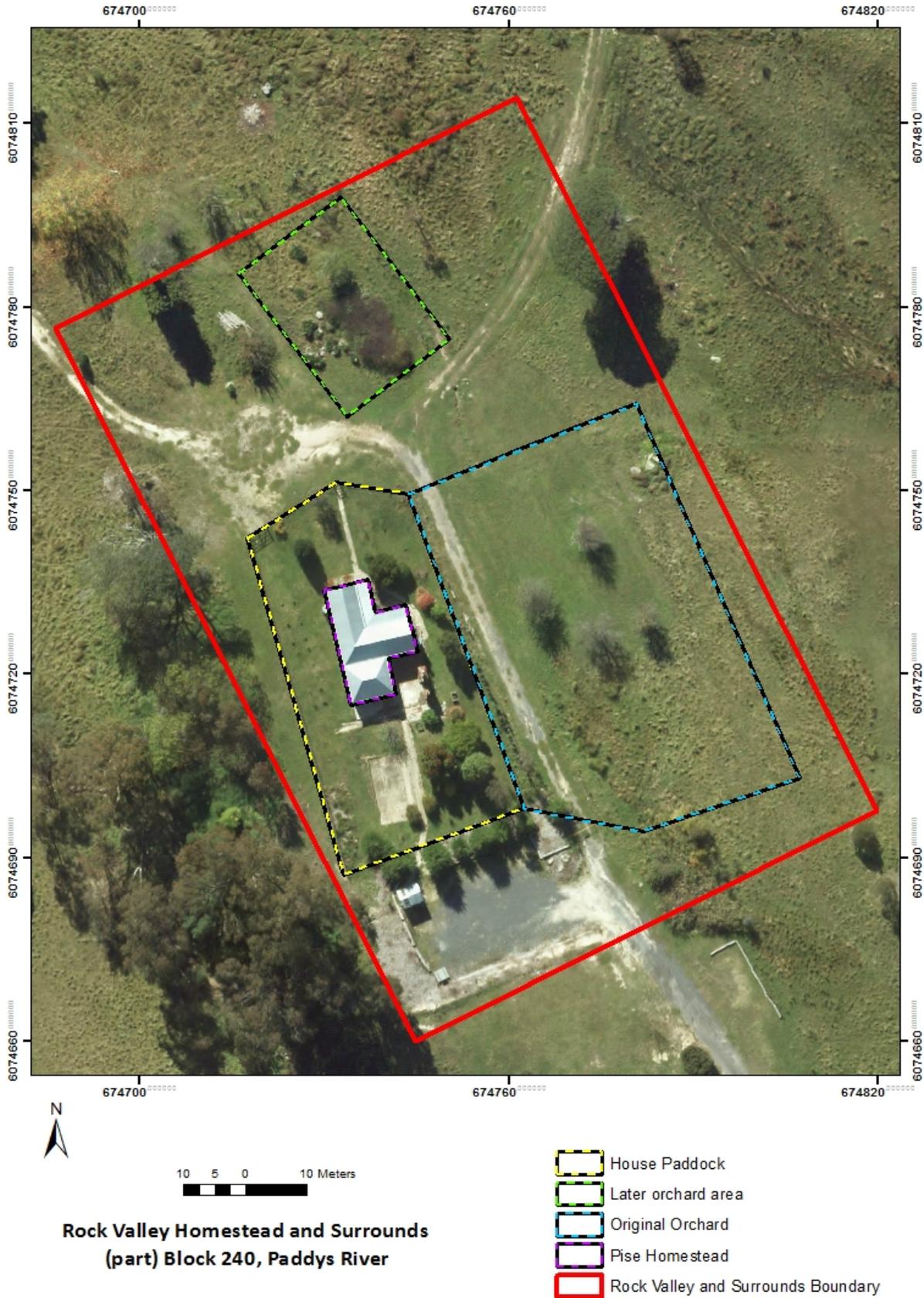
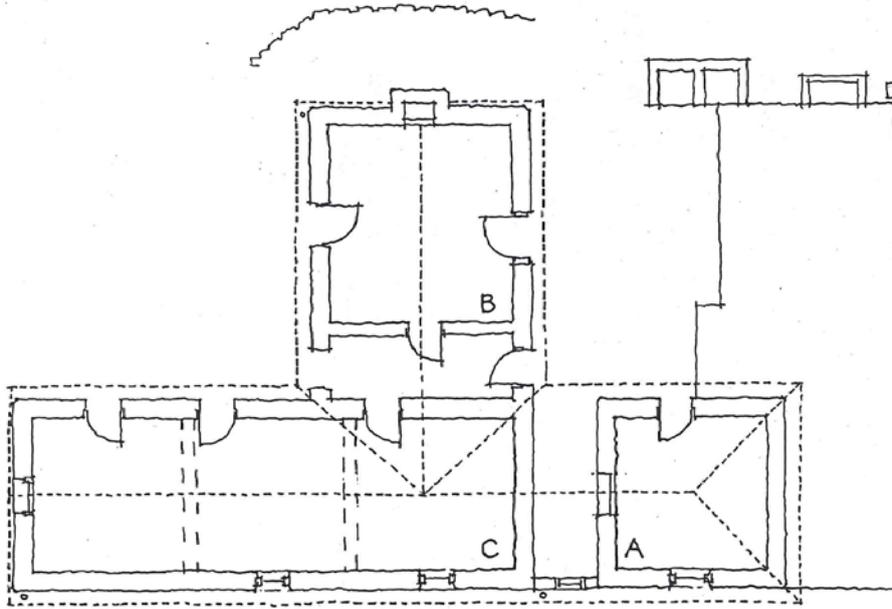


Image 1 Rock Valley Site Boundary and Features

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IMAGES



- A ORIGINAL 1895 PIPE ROOM
- B NORTHERN ROOM - 1905 PIPE CONSTRUCTION
- C REMAINDER - 1905 PIPE CONSTRUCTION
- D FIREPLACES - c 1920, c 1953.



Image 2 Rock Valley Homestead Plan (Philip Leeson Architects 2005)

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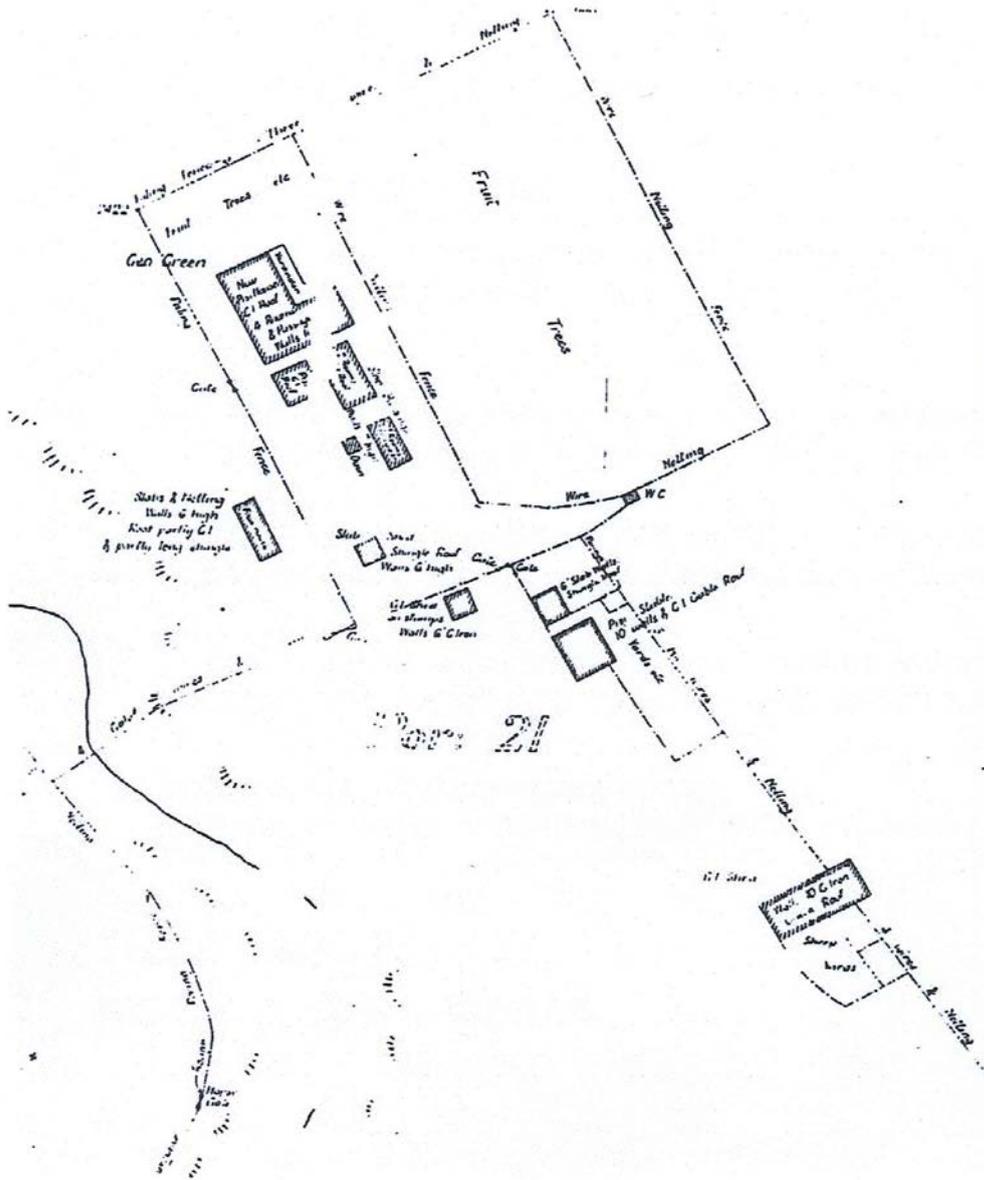


Image 3 Surveyor R. J. Rain's 1919 Plan of Green's holding (Flint 1983)

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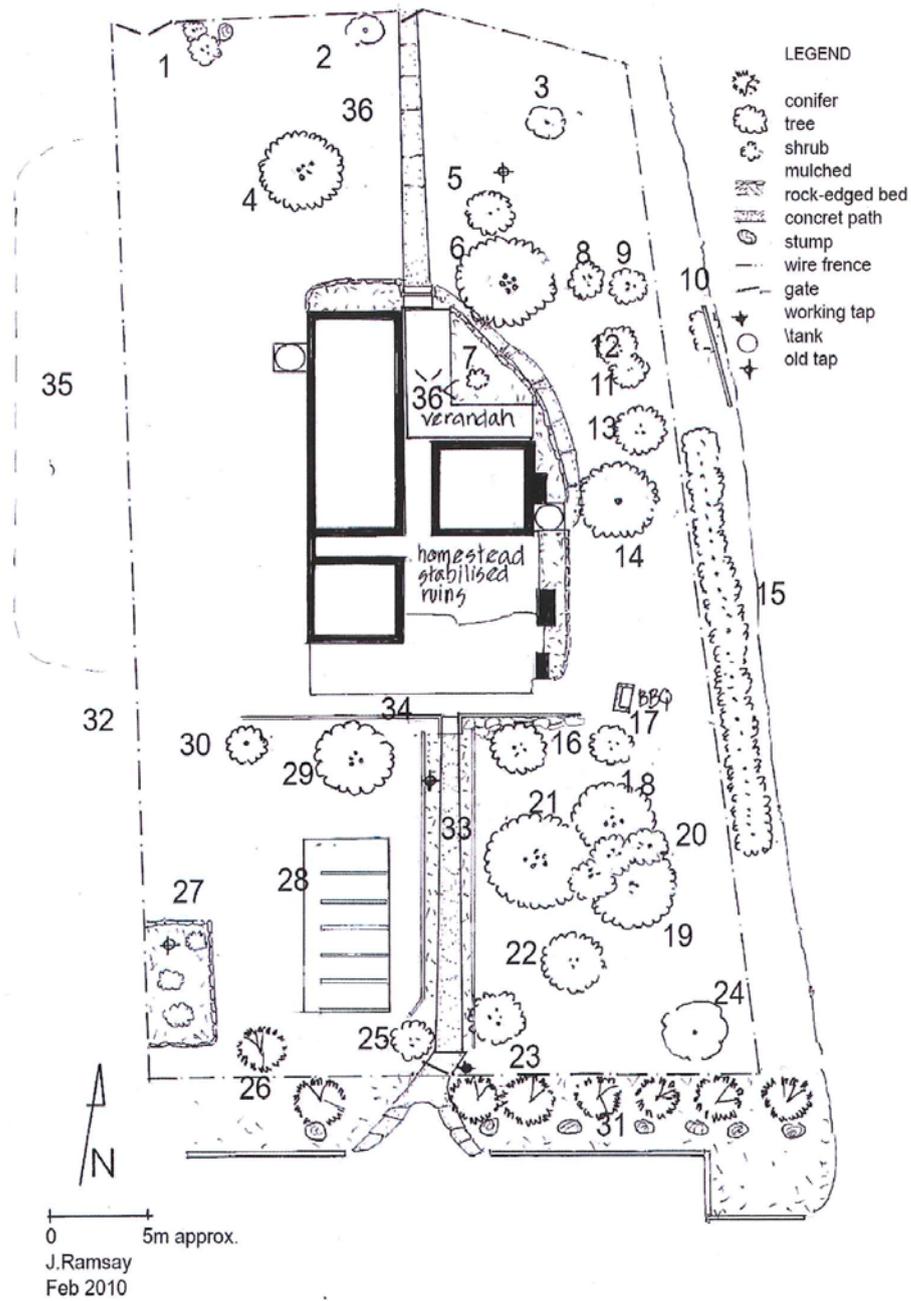


Image 4 Regenerated garden features after 2003 bushfires, see Table 1 overleaf (Ramsay 2010)

Table 1

1	Lilac and Snowberry	<i>Syringa</i> sp. and <i>Symphoricarpos alba</i> growing alongside an old large tree stump. These would have been outside the garden fence in 1990.
2	Eucalypt	Young, probably an opportunistic post fire arrival
3	Kurrajong	<i>Brachychiton populneum</i> , new post fire planting
4	Holly	<i>Ilex aquifolium</i> , c. 3m high
5	Rose	<i>Rosea</i> sp. (unidentified) shrub
6	Stawberry Tree	<i>Arbutus unedo</i> , c. 3m high
7	Camelia	<i>Camelia japonica</i> – new planting 2009
8	Privet	Shrub
9	Chinese Trumpet Creeper	<i>Campsis chinensis</i> – shrub also known as Bignonia
10	Chinese Trumpet Creeper on remnant fence	Post and rail, fence with chicken wire present in 1990 (Howard, 1990). Believed to be erected by E. Green in the 1950s.
11	Virburnum	<i>Viburnum trilobum</i> – shrub
12	Lilac	<i>Syringa</i> sp. – shrub
13	Magnolia	<i>Magnolia grandiflora</i> – c. 2m high
14	Kurrajong	<i>Brachychiton populneum</i> – tree c. 3m high
15	Privet	<i>Ligustrum</i> sp., appears to be <i>Ligustrum lucidum</i> – clipped hedge, multi-stemmed
16	Cherry Laurel	<i>Prunus laurocerasus</i> – c. 2m high
17	Lilac	<i>Syringa</i> sp --shrub
18	White cedar	<i>Melia azadarach</i> – tree c. 3m high (Green 1955:Journal notes)
19	Pussy Willow	<i>Salix caprea</i> – tree c. 3m high. Its multi-stems are sprouting from a large stum.
20	Privet, Lilac and Mock Orange	<i>Ligustrum</i> sp., <i>Syringa</i> sp. and <i>Philadelphus</i> sp.
21	Liquidamber	<i>Liquidamber styraciflua</i> – tree c. 3m + high. Original planted by Eddie Green (Green 1955:Journal notes)
22	Lilac	<i>Syringa</i> sp.
23	Weigela	<i>Weigela florida</i> – shrub c. 2m high
24	Eucalypt	<i>Eucalyptus</i> sp. possibly a post fire planting
25	Bottle brush	<i>Calistemon</i> sp.
26	Cypress	<i>Chaemaecyris</i> sp. – tree 1.5 m high
27	Sage and mint	Herbs growing in bed, edged with rocks
28	Concrete slab	Park Service occupation era, a former building with animal pens
29	Fig	<i>Ficus</i> sp. – tree c. 2m high
30	Walnut	<i>Juglans</i> sp. – young tree, post fire planting c. 2m.
31	Cypress windbreak	Species not identified but possibly <i>Chaemaecyris</i> sp.— post fire plantings of wildings from the location. Young trees c. 1m high alongside stumps of former windbreak trees.
32	Garden fence	The current fence is 1.8 m high of steel corner poles with star pickets and galvanised rabbit mesh. Its location differs from the historic fence lines.
33	Back Path	The concrete path is in good condition, slightly splayed at the gate with curved groove marks along its length as a decorative feature. Constructed by Eddie Green (Green 1955:Journal notes)
34	Brick retaining wall	Constructed by Eddie Green (Green 1955:Journal notes)
35	Tennis court area	Leveled area from former tennis court, established during the 1950s.



Image 5 Rock Valley Facing East (ACT Heritage 2014)



Image 6 Rock Valley after 2003 Bushfires

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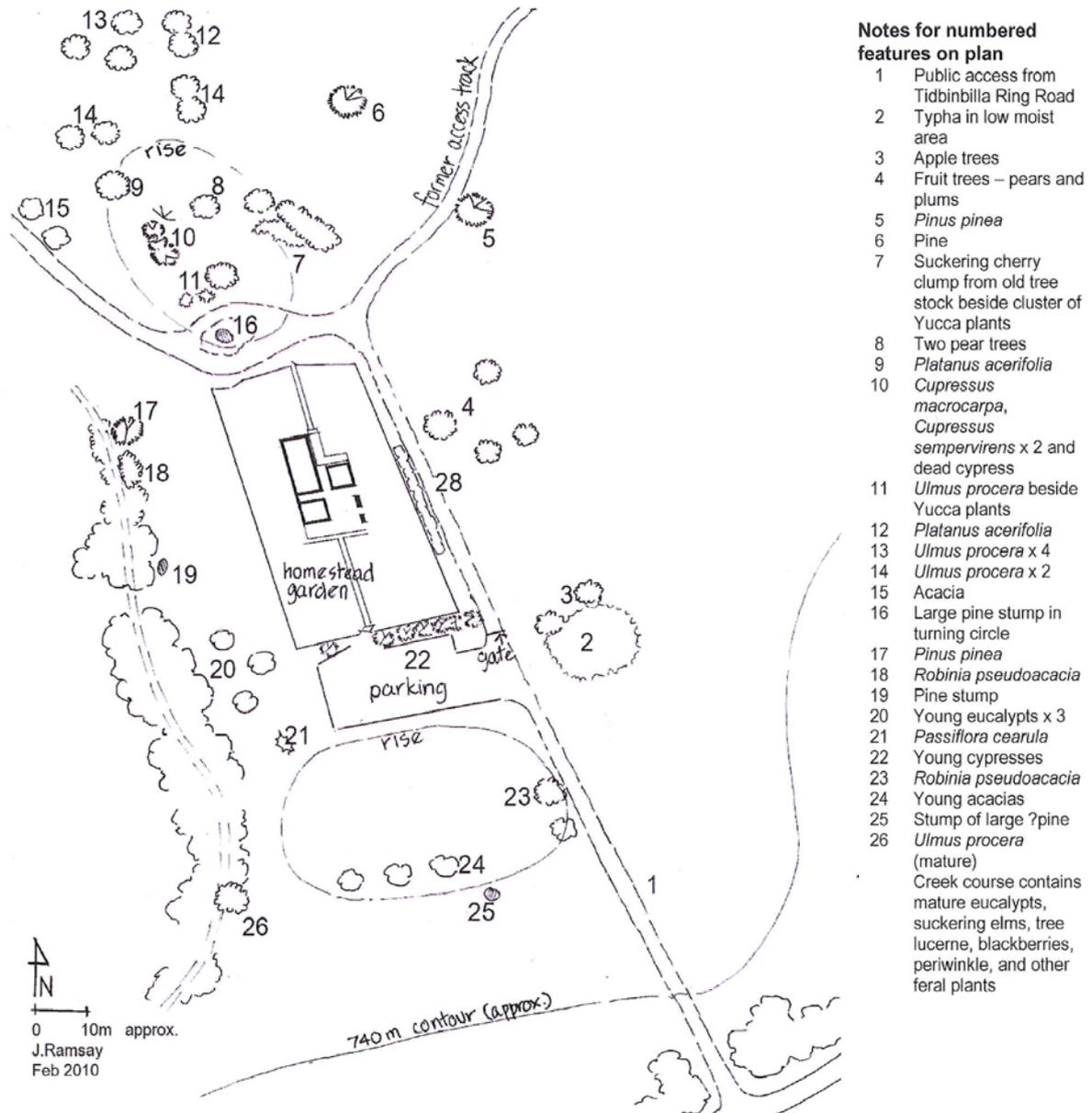


Image 7 Regenerative landscape surrounding Rock Valley after 2003 bushfires Rock Valley (Ramsay 2010)

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