



ACT Heritage Council

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Sherwood Homestead Complex

(part Block 225, Coree)

At its meeting of 19 November 2015 the ACT Heritage Council decided that Sherwood Homestead and Complex was eligible for registration

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

HISTORY

The Ngunnawal people are traditionally affiliated with the lands within the Canberra region. In this citation, 'Aboriginal community' refers to the Ngunnawal people and other Aboriginal groups within the ACT who draw significance from the place. Whilst the term 'Aboriginal community' acknowledges these groups in the ACT, it is recognised that their traditional territories extend outside contemporary borders. These places attest to a rich history of Aboriginal occupation. Ethnographic and historical information locates Aboriginal people within the region from the time of early European occupation through to the 1870s and 1880s. Traditional Aboriginal society in Canberra during the nineteenth century suffered from dramatic depopulation and alienation from traditional land based resources, although some important social institutions like intertribal gatherings and corroborees were retained to a degree at least until the 1860s.

Pre-Federal Capital Period

During the 19th century, Canberra was a permanent rural settlement that grew organically. This settlement was diametrically different to that established during the federal capital phase, as it was not guided by formal planning principles. At this time, the settlement comprised a network of large pastoral estates, stations and villages concentrated on the Limestone Plains, today the suburbs of Canberra Central and in the narrow valleys of Orroral, Gudgenby and Naas, and along the banks of the Murrumbidgee River in the southern part of the Territory (O'Sullivan and Huys 2011: 9).

A result of transforming Canberra into an urban centre after the formation of the Federal Capital Territory was that significant amounts of physical evidence of the 19th century settlement pattern, including homesteads and their outbuildings, were modified or destroyed. Many buildings were demolished as the Capital encroached upon rural properties to accommodate the sprawling city and archaeological deposits disturbed through construction works. More recently there have been two major events that have destroyed evidence: first, the construction of Lake Burley Griffin in the 1960s, during which many cottages located along the Molonglo Plain were dismantled during the damming of the river and today, the only standing evidence of these houses of the Molonglo Plains is Blundell's Cottage (Young 2007); the second, the 2003 bushfires, during which many hut sites in Stromlo were fire-affected or completely destroyed (ACT Heritage File) and seven out of ten known historical sites in the Molonglo Valley were destroyed (Australian Archaeological Consultants 2006).

The development of European settlement of Canberra during the 19th and early 20th centuries can be divided into two main cultural phases:

1. The initial European settlement of Canberra (1820-1850) after European settlement of the Limestone Plains and

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the Murrumbidgee River and subsequent establishment of permanent occupation of the region; and

2. The consolidation period (1850-1911) commencing in the 1850s during the gold rush period and the introduction of Robertson's Land Acts, introduced in the 1860s.

Phase I: Initial settlement of Canberra 1820-1850

The Limestone Plains were first explored by Europeans in the 1820s, when Charles Throsby entered the region, carrying out a survey in order to define the road for the Goulburn Plains. He first heard of the area when Aboriginal informants spoke of Lake George; Wee-ree-wah, it was called. In 1821, Throsby reached the Murrumbidgee River, near Tuggeranong (Gillespie 1991: 2-6).

Canberra 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 from approximately 25,000 years ago. The area is known to be part of an Aboriginal pathway leading towards the mountains where people 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).

Early European settlement in the ACT was established through the acquisition of land grants and the practice of squatting. A squatter is a term applied to any person who settled and raised sheep on crown land. Many squatters and landholders of the New Colony were the descendents of Scottish nobility or the English gentry (Ritchie 2003: 9-10).

In 1829 the NSW government proclaimed that recently explored area, today the ACT, formed part of two counties, Murray and Cowley. The Murrumbidgee River that runs south-east to north-west through the region was the boundary between the counties. The County of Murray extended as far north as Lake George and was bounded on its western side by the Murrumbidgee and by the Shoalhaven River to the east. The Murrumbidgee River formed the southern and eastern limits of the County of Cowley and the Goodradigbee River of the Snowy Mountains, the western boundary. At this time, the counties were divided into smaller units called parishes. This proclamation provided the Government with the formal legal power to sell and grant land with the ACT, as well as formally permit permanent settlement.

During this early phase, life was as difficult. The infrastructure was poor; there were no roads or rail services and the mounted police were located more than 60km away (Gillespie 1991: 23-25). By the mid 1830s, the conditions improved, as postal services were established in Queanbeyan, the urban centre of the Limestone Plains, and by 1838, Queanbeyan also had a blacksmith, a store and a police magistrate (Gillespie 1991: 23-25; Young 2007:7).

Phase II: Consolidation Period 1850-1911

Settlement of Canberra continued to consolidate as gold was discovered east of Queanbeyan in the 1850s (Lea-Scarlett 1968: 243-253). Towns prospered in areas such as Captains Flat as a result of mineral exploitation, while the agricultural industry expanded, particularly as there was increasing demand on farmers to provide goods, such as wheat, to feed an influx of people that were a consequence of the gold diggings at Kiandra, the Araluen, and Majors Creek (Gillespie 1991: 130). Residents of the area accommodated travellers who were en route to the fields. In 1862, the first township of the ACT, called Tharwa, was established in the County of Cowley and was located on the road en route to Kiandra (Gillespie 1991: 128-129). As the diggings dried up, many people, returning from the goldfields, settled in the region.

In 1861, the NSW Lands Minister introduced the Crowns Lands Alienation Act and the Crown Lands Occupation Act, collectively known as the Robertson Land Acts or Free Selection Acts. These Acts allowed that any individual to choose a block of Crown Land between 40 and 320 acres at a fixed price of £1 (\$2) per acre. The purchase conditions required minimum improvements within a three year period. The primary aim of the Free Selection Acts was to ensure equal opportunity and access to land, while producing stable rural communities 'and a class of contented and prosperous settlers' (Waterhouse 2005: 25,30; Dingle 2000: 59).

Initially, the Acts had limited effect in Canberra, as much of the best land had already been acquired and as a

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consequence, free-selectors took up small conditional holdings in the periphery of the Limestone Plains in the forested areas in Parishes of Gooroyarro (Gungahlin), Amungula (Kowen) and Yarrolumla (Molonglo) and also in the narrow valleys of the County of Cowley (Gillespie 1990: 51; Navin Officer 2004: 20). Many settlers purchased holdings that were not suitable for agricultural production and too small for grazing livestock. The Acts also encouraged many people with little capital at their disposal to travel rural areas (Dingle 2000: 59).

In 1911, the Federal Capital Territory was established when the Seat of Government (Administration) Act 1910 came into effect and gradually acquired land within its jurisdiction (Gillespie 1991: 247-249). In the County of Murray, the boundaries of the four parishes, Yarrolumla, Canberra, Narrabundah and Gigerline, were dissolved and all land within them was surrendered. As a consequence, many farmers of the region were forced to quit their properties. Some smaller sections of land were resumed from other parishes, including Queanbeyan, Amungula, Pialligo, Ginninderra, Weetangera and Goorooyarroo.

European Gardens in the 19th century

Plants and gardens were an integral part of colonisation strategies implemented in the new colony during the 19th century. Botany was a major scientific endeavour in Britain and it exerted control over enquires undertaken in its colonies; for example, all new plant species had to be sent to England in order to be conclusively identified and they were also highly valued by collectors (Fox 2005: XV; Botham 2002: 5).

Gardens played a significant role in the Government's vision for the colony. As part of its grandiose vision, it established botanic gardens and nurseries (Aitken 2010). Gardens were perceived as way to civilise the land, while also providing hope and reassurance for the Colony's prosperous future (Holmes et al. 2008: 8). In 19th century European society, gardens were interconnected to a broad web of British ideals concerning civilisation and morality: to acquire and improve the land signified ownership, while to till the earth was to move closer to God and develop one's moral character (Holmes et al. 2008: 17; 22; Constantine 1981: 392). In British culture, trees, in particular, were associated with humans, 'admired for their great proportions, old age, potency and self-generating energy' (Garner 2004: 87). In contrast, places without gardens were perceived as dilapidated (Holmes et al. 2008: 17).

Outside of public institutions, botanic gardening was also undertaken by wealthy settlers, who established extensive and elaborate gardens on their estates (Aitken 2010: 91). In the ACT landscape, Duntroon Estate is a good example of this type of enterprise. The garden was established first by Robert Campbell and his family. In 1913, after Duntroon was purchased by Defence, the garden, which was widely famous as a 'country garden' and described as 'tiny garden of Eden', extended more than 20 acres and featured pine and oak trees quinces, roses, wisterias, laburnums, cypress trees (The Sydney Morning Herald 15 February 1913, p 4).

The establishment of gardens was indirectly encouraged by the Free Settlers Acts, which required that improvements be made as a requirement of conditional purchases. From a practical level, settlers commonly established fruit and vegetable gardens and these served as a means of livelihood, providing food and other resources (Sneddon 2009: 5). However, establishing a garden was also a way to gain knowledge about the new world in which they were living; working with the land provided an opportunity to learn about the climate, topography, the soil and the flora and fauna (Holmes et al. 2008: 17). In the ACT, the gardens of free settlers commonly consisted of exotic plants such as *Pinus radiata*, elm and oak trees as well as, roman cypresses and poplars. Orchards and cottage gardens also featured fruit trees such as pear and oranges.

Yet, the garden was also a highly symbolic place imbued with multiple layers of meaning. They were lived spaces in which settlers planted memories and dreams for the future, while also evolving, taking on new associations and meanings (Holmes 2008: 29-30). Through establishing gardens, people built an emotional connection with the place (Holmes 2007: 40-41). In some cases, gardens were scenes of loss as a result of tragic accidents involving young children or were a burial ground for a loved one (Holmes et al. 2008: 42). In the ACT, isolated burials were established near homesteads on private property and this ensured that family members could visit them (Clauoe Long 2006). This was before the enactment of the Public Cemeteries Act 1936 (Commonwealth) that required individuals to be placed in public cemeteries or church burial yards (Clauoe-Long 2006). The practice of interment of individuals on private rural properties was not ceased altogether after introduction of this Act, however the practice became much rarer and not as widespread.

The Phillips Family

Henry Phillips and his wife Eliza originally owned and established the property of Sherwood in what are now the hills in the north west of the ACT. Both were immigrants from England. Eliza (nee Dove) was born in Nottinghamshire in 1838, while Henry was born in Surrey in 1824 (Saunders 1993). Henry arrived in Australia in 1853 with his first wife, Emma, who died not long after their arrival (Hall, n.d). Seven years later, Henry arrived in the Canberra district. Henry and his second wife, Eliza, were married on 30th April 1863 at St John the Baptist's Church (Frei 2006: 28).

Henry Phillips was employed by pastoralist John McDonald as a school teacher to teach his children, book-keeper for McDonald's Uriarra property and as Postmaster (Queanbeyan Age 31 January 1913, p2). Oral tradition recites that Henry was acting as a "dummy" to assist John McDonald in his land acquisitions but later refused to hand the land over (Hall n.d.). In January 1863, Henry purchased 50 acres of land (Portion 5) on Uriarra Creek upstream from John McDonald's Uriarra House. Henry Phillips and his wife Eliza built a slab cottage on their land and named the property Sherwood in memory of Eliza's English origins. Sherwood is associated with Sherwood Forest, located in the central zone of Nottinghamshire and is famous as the setting of Robin Hood (Brown 1891: 245).

The slab house with stringy bark roof is said to have had seven rooms, a hallway and veranda with rammed earth floor. A walkway from the house led to a kitchen, also with a veranda. Henry Phillips enlarged his property with four adjoining portions of land (Portion 82 of 50 acres in 1881, Portion 114 of 50 acres in 1884 and Portions 124 of 300 acres and 167 of 42 acres in 1904) in order to provide for their growing family of five children (Smith 1924 as cited in Saunders 1993: 3). The Phillips ran a dairy farm and supplied the local community with fresh milk and other produce. May Walker recalled that she watched, 'the process of homemade bread, candles made of fat from beasts killed on the property, cheese making, butter churning in a small wooden churn, then made into various floral shapes with a wooden stamp carved for the purpose' (as cited in Cross 1985; 273).

The Federal Territory Feature Map (c 1915, see Image 2) shows at least seven structures and a set of sheep yards at the site identified as Phillips Farm. Four of the Phillips' children, Thomas born 1869, George Henry born 1873, Elizabeth Anna born 1876 and Sarah Alice born 1879, lived into adulthood but another boy, also called Henry, died in infancy in 1878, and was buried on Roper's hill 150 metres southwest of the homestead site. The burial ground was later consecrated as an official Anglican cemetery. Henry and Eliza's son George Henry Phillips was killed in a shooting accident on the Sherwood property on 2nd August 1902. His wife, Louise (nee Oldfield) died two years later, leaving their three children orphaned (Hall n.d.). The children lived with Henry and Eliza at Sherwood.

Other homestead sites with associated burial plots registered on the ACT Heritage Register are Lanyon and Cuppacumalong; however, these cannot be directly compared with Sherwood. In the case of Lanyon and Cuppacumalong they are extensive stations with larger cemeteries. The cemetery at Lanyon includes family members and also other individuals, such as staff, who were not biologically connected to the owners, while the cemetery of Cuppacumalong comprises multiple kin groups. Only two other small homesteads and small family burial plots, with both adult and children burials are known but they are of a different age and character to the Sherwood site such as the family plot of Lambrigg consisting of the interments of two adults buried in the early 20th century during the federal capital period.

A flower and fruit garden was established around the Sherwood cottage, and included cherries, apples, walnuts, raspberries, currants and ornamentals such as willow, elm, oak, honeysuckle and both spring flowering daffodils and autumn crocus. The garden has special associations with Nottinghamshire, where Eliza was born. According to oral tradition, the oak trees at Sherwood come from seed collected at the forest areas of Nottingham, England. Notably, the large oak trees of Nottinghamshire, including those of the Welbeck Park, were widely regarded and the focus of scientific enquiry from the late 18th century (e.g. Rooke 1790). Sherwood Forest National Nature Reserve, now listed on the English nature conservation register, Natural England, includes some of the oldest trees in Europe, including the Major Oak, which is more than 800 years old and still produces acorns (Nottinghamshire County Council n.d.; Natural England 2012; BBC 12 November 2002, accessed 08/11/2013). In addition, the autumnal crocus (*Crocus nudiflorus*) was also associated with Nottingham. In the 19th century, as it grew in "great profusion" between Nottingham Castle and the Trent River, although the species was imported from southern Europe (Brown 1891: 298).

Henry Phillips remained Postmaster at Uriarra until 1903 and when he died on 28th January 1913 aged 89, he was buried on Roper's Hill under an elm tree in what was then described as the "Church of England Cemetery, Uriarra" (NCDC 1988: 40; Clauoe Long 2006). Henry was described in his obituary as a "Nature's gentlemen", a respectful and intelligent person who had a keen interest in politics (Queanbeyan Age 31 January 1913, p 2). Eliza Phillips remained

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living at Sherwood with her daughters and grandchildren until her death at the age of 84 on 14th December 1922 and was buried next to her husband. The remaining family left the property shortly afterwards. The original 510 acre Sherwood block was purchased in 1926 by RJ Hyles as part of Uriarra Station. The cottage fell into disrepair and was eventually demolished with reusable materials being salvaged.

DESCRIPTION

The site of the former Sherwood property is situated on a low terrace on the southern bank of Uriarra Creek. The site comprises a garden, and the subsurface archaeological remains of the main dwelling. An associated burial plot is located further south on the upper slopes of nearby Roper's Hill.

All that remains of the old slab cottage are a number of chimney stones reconstructed into a modern barbecue in an area surrounded by the exotic plantings (see Image 3). An excavation of the place was undertaken in 1993, carried out in the vicinity of the barbecue (Saunders 1993). Possible evidence of flooring was uncovered. A thin layer, 1-2 cm thick, of ant bed was also identified beneath a layer of ash to the north, south and west of the barbecue. Ant bed was an excellent material for an earth floor; it was composed of glutinous particles from anthills and this earth was then moistened and compressed (Lewis n.d.). In the ACT, this type of floor was used during the 19th century (ACT School Authority 1986: 2).

The excavation uncovered a small concentration of cultural material in an area that probably represented the northern and western edges of the homestead.¹ Much of the material was related to building and construction. A small concentration of artefacts, including 10 glass bottle pieces and two nails were recovered just below the surface (Saunders 1993: 13). The largest concentration of artefacts was recovered along the north-west section of the excavation near where the chimney reportedly stood (Saunders 1993:14). The material included three nails, a small metal strip, wire and a clear glass fragment. A relatively significant amount of charcoal was recorded to a depth of 10 to 15cm along the western section of the excavation (Saunders 1993: 14). Under a nearby orange tree, a compacted area of charcoal and ashes was recorded as well as part of a metal drum lid, small pieces of metal and wire, two nails, calcareous mortar, and a fragment of a base of a stoneware demijohn (large, narrow necked bottle used to store liquids). Along the eastern and southern ends of the site four nails, a small piece of glazed white earthenware, one clear glass piece, a bullet, small piece of dressed timber and three other fragments as well as charcoal were recovered (Saunders 1993: 13).

The remnant Sherwood garden is composed of a range of exotic trees and plants (see Image 4). The garden includes quinces (*Cydonia oblonga*), a fig (*Ficus carica*), a pear (*prunus*), as well as blackberry bushes growing near the creek. A mature elm tree (*Ulmus*) and saplings grow along the north east area of the place. Near the house there are four walnut trees (*Juglans*) in a straight line, while willow trees (*Salix*) line the creek. There are also oak (*Quercus robur*), hawthorn (*Crataegus*), honeysuckle (*Lonicera*), and white cedar trees (*Thuja occidentalis*). A significant element of the garden are bulbous plants including jonquils, irises, daffodils (*Narcissus*, see Image 5) and crocus and the uncommon Star of Bethlehem (*Ornithogalum montanum*) (Saunders 1993: 17). Violets, mint and the semi-aquatic perennial, watercress, are also observable.

Archaeological investigations located a rubbish dump 26 metres to the west of the house ruins and near a cedar tree. The pit contained a range of objects, such as pieces of 19th century tableware and well as brown beer bottles with marks dating to the 1950s (Saunders 1993: 15). Other glass fragments were blue, purple and amber in colour as well as fragments of window glass. Three milky white glass fragments were also retrieved and these can be dated to the late 19th century, when milky white glass was first produced (Saunders 1993: 15). Metal fragments were also recovered and these were from a cast-iron fuel stove, pipes and wire as well as nails. It is not known when the dump was established.

The burial plot is situated under an oak tree stump on Roper's Hill to the south-west (see Images 6 and 7). At one time it was fenced and maintained, by the Hyles family who leased the land and then by ACT Forests who resumed the lease. Bushfires in 2003 destroyed the fence and the only marker to the burial plot is a concrete setting that once housed a brass memorial plaque (set in the ground in 2000) that as of June 2015 is held by Parks and Conservation Services, although it is not known when it was removed from the site.

The relationship between the Phillips' family burial plot and the oak tree planting is evidence of a metaphor,

¹ The assemblage is in storage with ACT Heritage at June 2015.

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symbolically linking trees and the human life cycle. In British culture, while trees provided wood and shelter for people and animals, in certain contexts, trees were 'identified as human' due to their intrinsic properties, including their size, longevity and 'potency' (Garner 2004: 87). From Anglo-Saxon period, the oak tree in particular was valued for its longevity for, when coppiced, can live for more than 500 years and was associated with ancestral knowledge and symbolism (Hooke 2010: 193-199).

Physical condition and integrity

The 2003 bushfires destroyed the fence marking the burial plot and the only marker to the burial plot is a brass memorial plaque setting placed in the ground in 2000.² The oak tree that once stood beside the grave site has been cut down, but remains as a large stump.

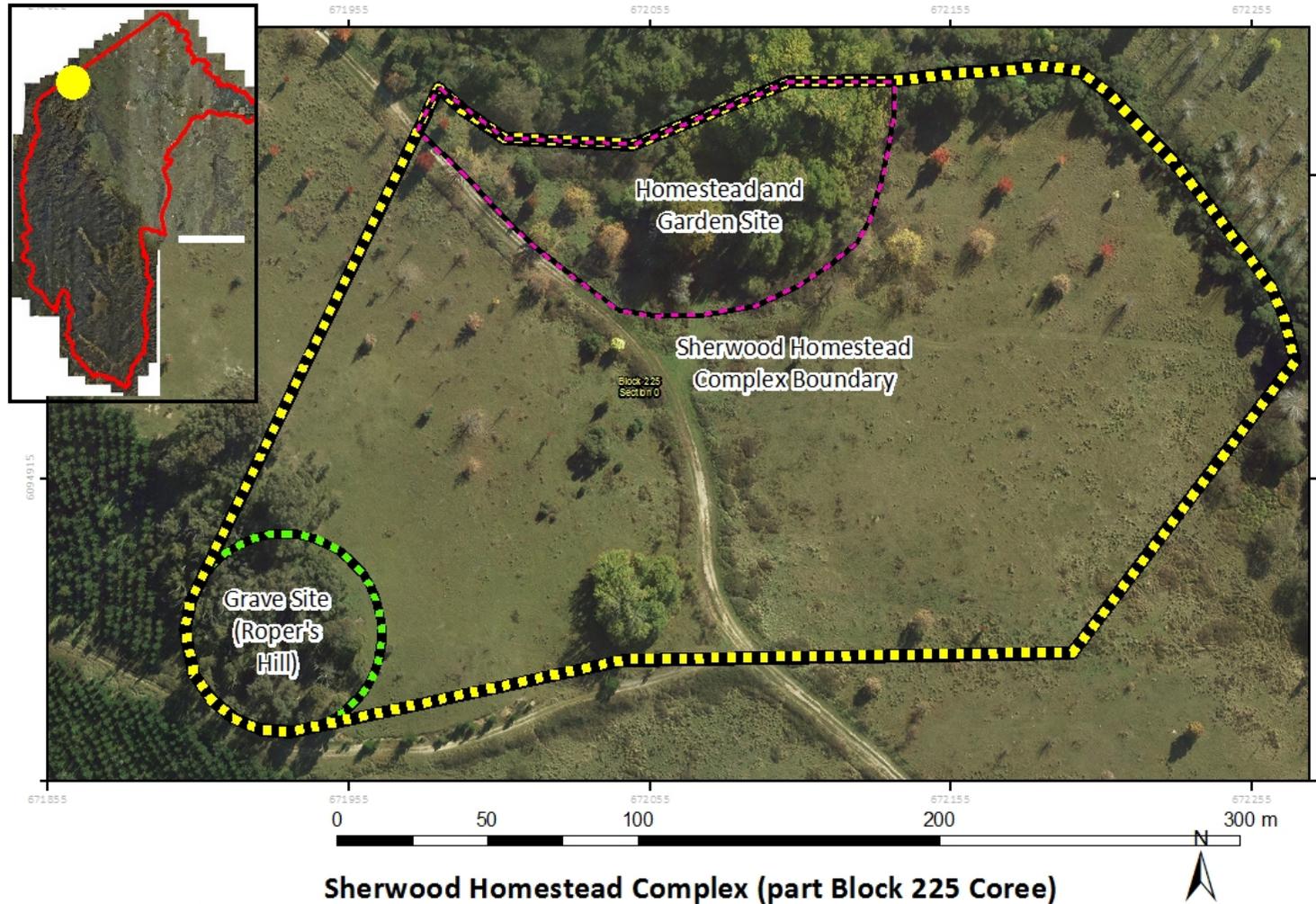
The bushfires and passage of time have adversely affected the larger exotic trees at the house and grave sites, some of which have cracked and broken branches. However, many of the exotic species are healthy and/or alive. Further, the daffodil bulbs are numerous beneath the canopy shading the homestead site, and flower annually, typically showing a double bloom (refer Image 5).

A low, elevated mound represents the only extant remains of the original homestead (refer Image 3). The results of the archaeological excavations undertaken in 1993 to interpret the homestead are documented above.

² At June 2015 the plaque is situated at the Parks and Conservation Services Cotter Depot, Casuarina Sands.

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SITE PLAN



Coordinate System: MGA94 Zone 55
Projection: Transverse Mercator
Datum: GDA 94

Sherwood Homestead Complex (part Block 225 Coree)

Image 1 Site Boundary

IMAGES



Image 2 Phillips' Farm, registered boundary in red (Territory Feature Map 1915)

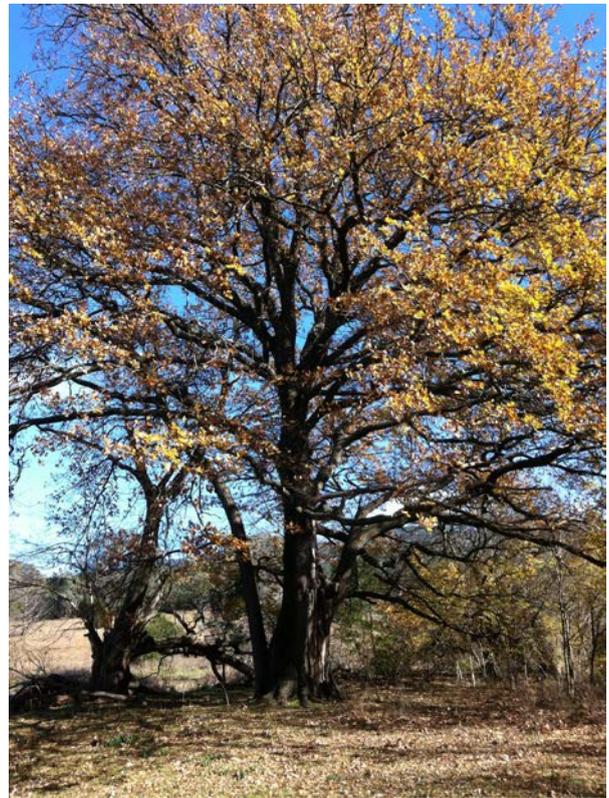


Image 3 Oak tree at Sherwood Homestead Complex (ACT Heritage 2015)



Image 2 Site of the Phillips' House (ACT Heritage 2015)



Image 5 Daffodils (*Narcissus*) at Sherwood Homestead site (ACT Heritage 2008)



Image 6 Phillips' grave marker (ACT Heritage 2015)



Image 7 Grave plaque (ACT Heritage 2008)

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