



ACT Heritage Council

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

BURTON HOUSE SITE (Rural Block 792 GUNGAHLIN)

At its meeting of 22 May 2014 the ACT Heritage Council decided that the Burton House Site (the Site), district of Gungahlin, was not eligible for provisional registration. The information contained in this report was considered by the ACT Heritage Council in assessing the nomination for the Site against the heritage significance criteria outlined in s10 of the *Heritage Act 2004*.

HISTORY

Early European Settlement of Gungahlin, Parish of Canberra

Early pastoral estates were established along Ginniderra Creek and ‘the majority of landholders took up large blocks, or amalgamated smaller holdings into larger agglomerations’ (Pearson 2002: 13). One such holding included Portion 28 at Dead Horse Gully, owned by John Gillespie. On this holding he built Horse Park in 1853, the oldest standing homestead in Gungahlin (Gillespie 1992: 14; 221).

In 1829, the area was proclaimed part of the Parish of Canberra.

The Robertson Land Acts required selectors to reside on their land, resulting in an increase of the area’s population (Pearson 2002: 14). By the 1880s there were around 40 small homesteads or huts situated along Ginniderra Creek (Cooke 2010: 7), including James Burton’s hut (the Site). However, this pattern changed over time, as landholders and their families moved away and small properties were amalgamated into larger ones. Many of these houses were abandoned and ‘left to decay’ (Cooke 2010: 7).

European Architectural Traditions in the ACT during the 19th century

During the 19th century, building construction in the Canberra region was vernacular in style. Slab construction, using readily available local timber, was the most common as it was quick and cheap (Young 2007: 11-12). This technique was used extensively throughout the new colony (Connah 1988:70; Lawrence 2003: 24-25). Slabs were made from splitting logs from straight trees made available through land clearing. In the Molonglo Valley the Yellow Box Eucalyptus was one possible resource, albeit difficult to work (Young 2007: 11). A typical homestead generally comprised a basic rectangular structure with a simple floor plan comprising commonly one to two rooms, a fireplace and chimney for cooking and heating. To block draughts the joins and splits in the cladding were plugged with clay or even newspaper and the internal walls were plastered with a mix of clay and straw, lined with hessian and then white washed (Cox and Freeland 1969: 20-22). Early structures were roofed with shingles made of timber, while from the mid-19th century, corrugated galvanized iron was used (Young 2007: 11). Brayshaw’s Hut and Orroral’s Homestead, located in 19th century Parishes of Boboyan and Orroral, are two examples of this style that are currently in good physical integrity. In addition, approximately one-third of dwellings in the Molonglo Valley were constructed from stone rubble or brick (Young 2007: 11-12), while pisé construction, comprising walls of rammed earth, was introduced later; the first structure was built in

BACKGROUND INFORMATION – BURTON HOUSE SITE

1874 by Eusebio Ponsey, a Southern American, the area that later became Tuggeranong (Gillespie 1991: 156).

Wealthier settlers first constructed a simple cottage and then would extend or dismantle the dwelling to construct homes inspired by fashionable British architectural trends (Lawrence 2003: 24-25). In the ACT, the squire's residence of Duntroon Estate (today the Royal Military College, Campbell), Yarralumla (today the residence of the Governor General) and Gungahlin Homestead (today the Crace Wing of CSIRO) are excellent examples. These residences were built in multiple phases. In the case of Duntroon, the original dwelling was a Georgian style cottage built in the 1830s and was later extended, modified into a Gothic Revival style, and then into a multiple storey dwelling (Young 2007: 15-16). Meanwhile, Fredrick Campbell constructed a three-story red brick house in Victorian style, completed in 1891, over the remains of an elaborate single-storey Georgian style cottage that had been the residence of former landowner Augustus Gibbes, who had purchased the station from his brother-in-law, Sir Terence Aubrey Murray (Young 2007: 53-55). This construction process is also observable in the case of smaller stations that were occupied over a long period of time: for example, both Cuppacumbalong Homestead, occupied from 1833, and Gungahlin Homestead both have asymmetrical floor plans, the result of multiple phases of construction.

The Burton Family

In 1869, after the introduction of the Robertson Land Acts, James Burton took up a pre-emptive lease, purchasing Portion 66, consisting of 100 acres (Gillespie 1991: 155-156; NOHC 2010: 44; Bosis 2012: 79). As required by the terms of the purchase, Burton made substantial improvements to the property. A map dated to 1880 demonstrates that the property was fenced with a post-and-rail along its northern boundary and a log fence along the eastern, southern and western sides. In addition, a house and yard were constructed at the northern end, while to the east a fence bisected the entire portion north-south (O'Brien 2012: 79). East of the internal fence most of the land has been cleared and has good soil, which in the 1860s could have been used to grow wheat and/or potatoes (Shumack 1967: 35, 37).

Samuel Shumack, once a resident of Weetangerra, makes reference in his autobiography to James, but refers to him as 'Henry Burton', describing him as an efficient stonemason. According to his entry, Henry successfully gained the contract and constructed a section of the new tower of St Johns Church, Reid, in 1865 after the old tower was demolished for the new extensions. Shumack recalled that his tender was more than £2000 and was a 'master of his trade and some of his workmen were most proficient in the art of stone cutting ...' (Shumack 1967: 19). James worked as a stone mason at Duntroon around the same time (Cooke 2010).

In the meanwhile, James 'took up land at the northern end of the Canberra Plain where he built a stone house and lived with his wife and family' (Shumack 1967: 19-20).

Five years later, after completing the new tower of St John's, James missed out on a lucrative tender for the extension of the tower, Church and chancel (Shumack 1967: 19). A short time later rumours began to circulate within the small community that Burton was a bigamist and that he had left a wife and family in England. In 1880, his wife and children left him, relocating to Narranderra, where his eldest son gained employment (Shumack 1967: 19).

In the Grevilles Official Post Office Directory, "James Burton" is listed as a recipient of mail on the Queanbeyan to Canberra mail route and his occupation is listed as 'farmer' in 1872 (Greville and Company 1872: 99).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION – BURTON HOUSE SITE

Sometime before 1887, Burton relocated to Mulligans Flat. Shumack (1967: 19) reported that he was disliked by his neighbours and when he last saw Burton, he was ‘a human wreck’.

After his marriage broke down, Burton constructed a new dwelling near Elmgrove. It is possible that he may have removed part of the wall of his residence on Portion 66 and incorporated into his new house (Cooke 2010: 27-8).

A few years later, he passed away in his hut (Gillespie 1992:213). An inquest was held into his death at Elm Grove before Coroner Mr. W D Downing (Goulburn Evening Penny Post 27 February 1896, p 4). The jury found that his death was caused by an accidental fall.

The parish map of 1912 shows Archibald McKeahnie as owner of Portion 66. He purchased it to enlarge the Well Station property.

Description

Located east of Well Station Drive is the Burton House Site (also known as KH1 and House Site Block 681). The place comprises stone foundations that represent a dwelling of three equal-sized rooms aligned north-south. This structure, approximately 12 x 4m, was built in two phases, or as two components as evidenced by the northernmost room having a double-thickness wall (70 cm) separating it from the middle room (O’Brien 2013). The site has been subject to archaeological investigation (Pearson 2002; NOHC 2010; Biosis 2011). In comparison to other huts known in the area, it is a small-scale homestead and is comparable to Crinigan’s Hut, excavated in 1992, and is 13.1 x 5.5m (Pearson 2002: 17; Cooke 2010: 8-11). The foundations are of local rubble (NOHC 2010: 44-45).

Five deciduous trees, arranged in rows, are situated to the southeast of the house representing the remains of a small orchard (NOHC 2010: 44). In the southeast corner there are a dam and remnant ‘Gum’ woodland (O’Brien 2013). A site inspection by the ACT Heritage Unit on 6 April 2014 indicate that the row of five trees are likely a species of apple. Also identified were two small pear trees in very poor condition due to advanced age and neglect, another large deciduous tree (possibly another apple), and a bay tree which shows continual growth through suckers despite the central trunk having died off.

In addition, an area of cultivation, today visible as a series of parallel roughly level topped ridges and furrows running parallel across a lower slope south east of the house and is located to the southeast of the house within the boundary of what was Portion 66 (Biosis 2012: 85). In 2010 the area was identified using aerial imagery (NOHC 2010: 44). Biosis (2012: 83- 86) inspected the area and found the earthworks represented the remains of ploughlands. However, a substantial area of the paddock is highly degraded and many of the furrows are ‘faint. Eight furrows, 25m long and 6m apart, are clearly discernible. Notably, the historical boundaries of Portion 66 no longer remain intact.

Previous archaeological investigations have identified that this place demonstrates potential as a research site. Pearson (2002:19) wrote that it is ‘significant on basis of archaeological and founstation (sic. foundation) remains, while in 2010 Navin Officer (2010:56) noted that the place has ‘relatively undisturbed archaeological deposits in and around the ruins’. Biosis (2011: 80) has hypothesized that the deposits would comprise remains that would represent the ‘domestic context of early settler life’, including crockery, buttons, jar and bottles.

A site inspection by the ACT Heritage Unit on 6 April 2014 also revealed a small rock quarry ~250m to the southwest of the ruins. The quarry area is located at the southwest end of a small

BACKGROUND INFORMATION – BURTON HOUSE SITE

southwest-northeast running hill, with the Burton House Site located on the crest of this hill. This area contains eight or nine pits dug into the side of outcrops of a local iron rich stone. The stone is not of a high quality for building purposes as it is quite hard and brittle with numerous fine fault lines which would make shaping very difficult. The stones of the hut ruin appear to be the same material as in the quarry and the stones of the hut ruin also appear to be random rubble with little evidence of shaping, which would fit in with the quality of stone being quarried.

Notably, the Burton House Site is also located within the suburb of Kenny and is accessible to the ACT Community. It provides the opportunity to inform and instruct as to the past settlement and life ways of the region.

Physical condition and integrity

The physical condition of the site is highly degraded with only the sub surface foundations and three courses of stone rubble remaining of the standing walls (NOHC 2010; Biosis 2013). Despite this, the outline of the three rooms is observable.

SITE PLAN

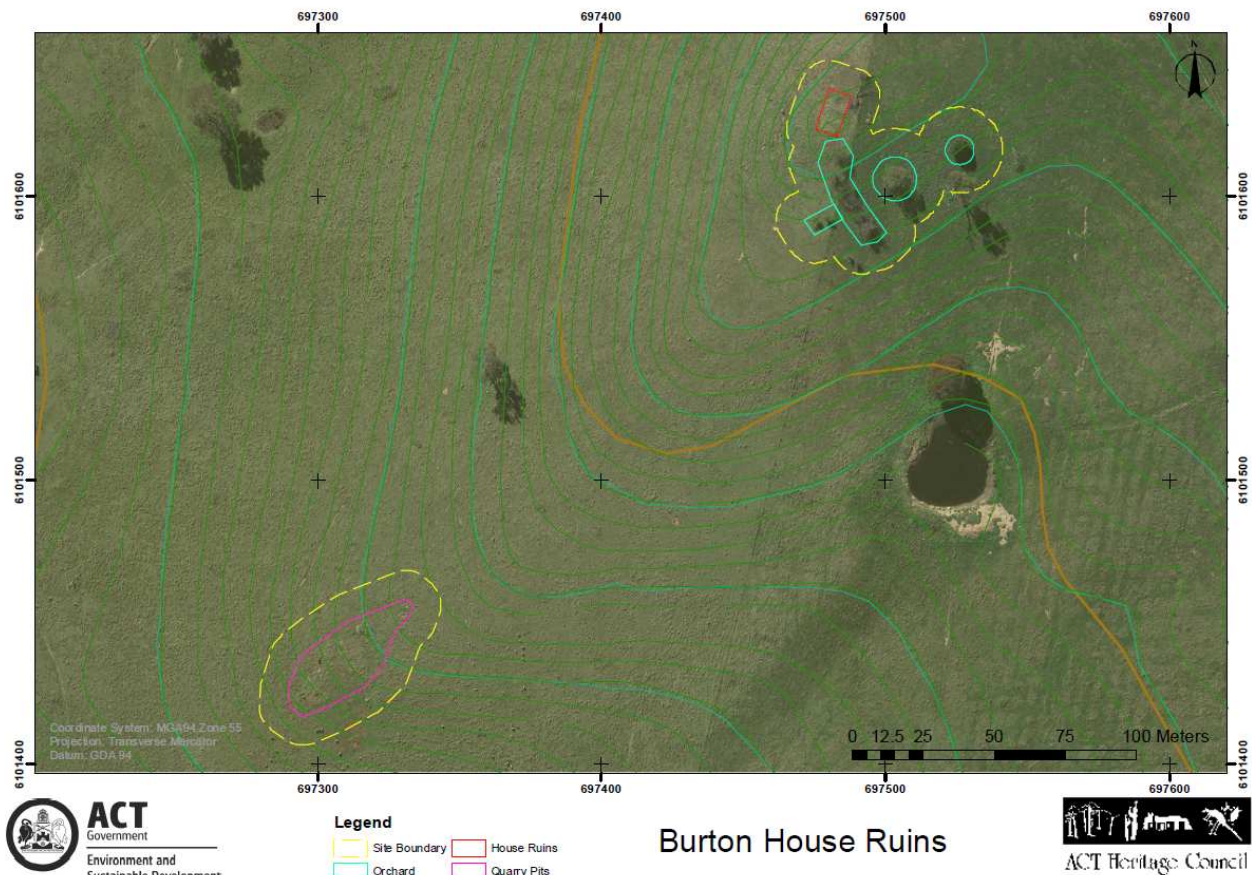


Image 1 Nominated area of the Burton House Site.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION – BURTON HOUSE SITE

IMAGES

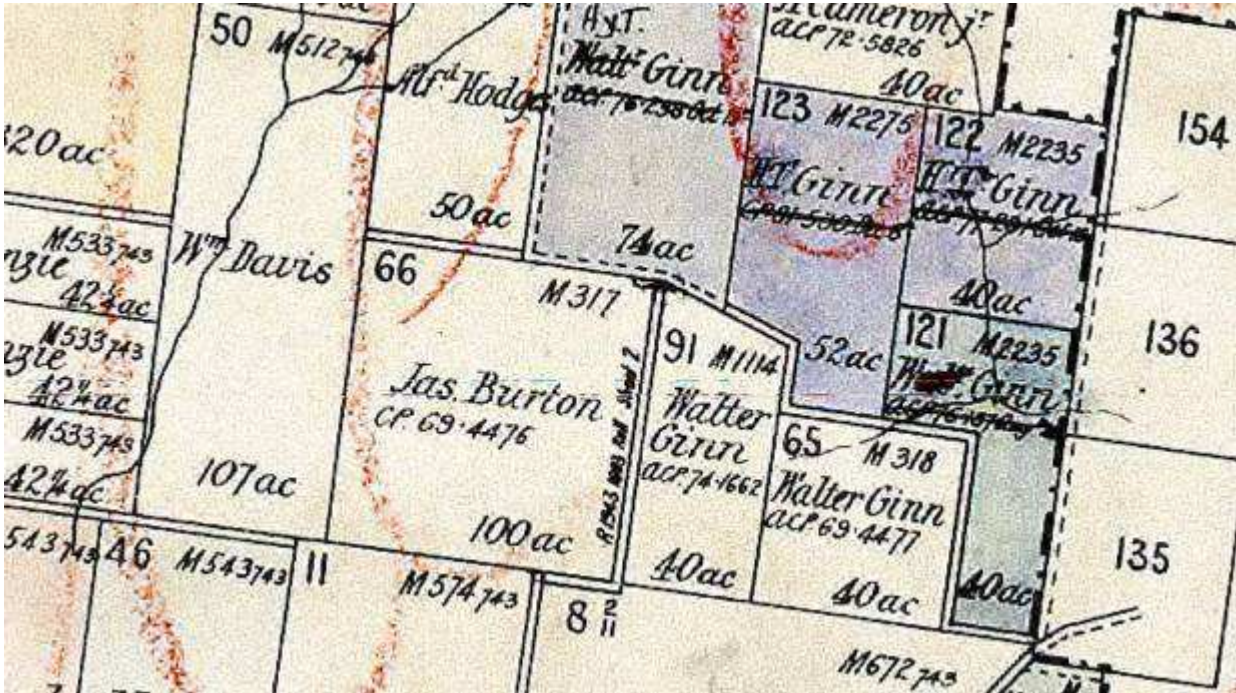


Image 2 Section of Parish Map of Canberra, showing Portion 66, 1888 (NSW Department of Lands and Property Information)



Image 3 Burton House Site with orchard in background (ACT Heritage Unit, 2014)

BACKGROUND INFORMATION – BURTON HOUSE SITE



Image 4 Burton House Site footings detail (ACT Heritage Unit, 2014)



Image 4 Burton House Site quarry area (ACT Heritage Unit, 2014)

BACKGROUND INFORMATION – BURTON HOUSE SITE

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