

Sources: L Gillespie, *Ginninderra Forerunner to Canberra*, 1992
Interim Heritage Places Register, *Gungahlin Homestead Precinct*
Eric Martin and Associates, *Gungahlin Homestead Precinct Heritage Management Plan* 4 July 2014

Photos courtesy: CSIRO
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THE FIVE SQUIRES OF GUNGÄHLIN

THE STORY OF GUNGÄHLIN HOMESTEAD



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THE FIVE SQUIRES OF GUNGALIN

The first owner of Gungahlin, John Palmer, arrived in Australia with the First Fleet on 20 January 1788, as purser on 'HMS Sirius'. Granted this property in 1828 for his services as Commissary General, John died before he was able to take up the land. The first squire of Gungahlin, John's son **George Thomas Palmer**, a retired army officer, took possession of his father's lease in the early 1830s and named his property Palmerville. He added a large area of Ginninderra and built a homestead almost five kilometres from the site of the present building. The second squire was George's son, **George Thomas Palmer Jnr**. In 1859 his sister, Susan Adriana, married William Davis Jnr, the son of the estate's manager, William Davis. Shortly after, the young couple inherited the Palmer properties and **William Davis Jnr** became its third squire.

William and Susan were childless, but adopted a nephew, Ernest Palmer, and a niece, May Davis. In 1865 the family moved into a rendered brick two-storied house William had built on this site. It had Georgian twelve-paned windows, a metal-tiled roof and wide ground floor verandas on three sides. Three fireplaces kept the house cosy in winter and Susan planted trees around the house and along the driveway for summer shade. William farmed sheep, wheat and oats, and was widely respected for his kindness and management skills. An excellent sportsman, he hosted cricket and shooting matches and horse races. He established a store, church and school. In 1873 he extended his holding to 20,150 acres (over 8,154 hectares) by buying the Charnwood estate. The family's happiness was shattered in 1877 when 34-year-old Ernest was killed in a horse-jumping accident at the Queanbeyan show. William immediately sold his property to Edward Kendall Crace and moved to Goulburn.

In 1883 **Crace**, the fourth squire of Gungahlin, the son and brother of two prominent English architects and designers, enlisted his relatives in designing and decorating an extension to William Davis's original homestead and an adjoining two-storied sandstone building. Its double bay windows overlooked an English-style park with rose gardens, a miniature lake and sweeping driveway. By 1887 it had

the first private telephone in the district. Crace involved himself in the management of the Weetangera School and St John's Church but was not always popular with the local selectors. In 1885 he divided 5,000 acres (2,023 hectares) of his property into 200-acre blocks (81 hectares) for leasing and imported Devon cattle from the Queen's farm at Windsor that, with his stud merinos, brought him prosperity. In 1890, Crace and his wife Kate took their three children to England to enrol them in schools, but quickly returned on learning of a looming financial crisis. The 1891 Depression forced him to heavily mortgage his property. Tragedy struck the following year when Crace and his coachman were drowned while trying to cross the flooded Ginninderra Creek.

Kate and her daughters Bessie and Dorothy lived in the homestead, working to clear the estate's debts until Kate's son, the fifth squire, **Everard Crace**, returned from Charterhouse School. By 1900 he was managing the estate and following his marriage to Blanche Lingen in 1903, lived in the old Ginninderra cottage. On the creation of the Federal Capital Territory in 1911, Everard leased the homestead and 400 acres (162 hectares) from the Commonwealth. He moved into Gungahlin Homestead in 1915 after his mother and sisters relocated to Sydney. Like his father, Everard was active in the local community. He volunteered for the First World War and returned in poor health, dying two years after his wife in 1928. The Crace family then left Gungahlin.

Subsequently leased by Dr Frederick Watson (1928-40) then Ambrose John Kitchen, the homestead was acquired by the Canberra University College (now the ANU) in 1949 for student accommodation. From 1953-2015 it served as a CSIRO research centre. It is now occupied by Soldier On which supports those who have served by focusing on their physical and mental health, their community and their future.

