

📍 Ngunnawal Country

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

Kingston





Kingston Power House



i See map in centre spread

Although stops on this walk are numbered for map location and information reference, this walk can start from multiple points and be completed in any chosen sequence.

This tour adjoins the Barton tour, which includes Telopea Park, Manuka Circle, Manuka Oval and Manuka Pool.

While two of our stops are technically in Griffith, they are strongly identified with Kingston, and included in this tour.

Kingston

The suburb of Kingston was named in 1928 in honour of South Australian politician Charles Cameron Kingston, a founding father of Federation. When it was first established in 1922 it was known as Eastlake, reflecting Walter and Marion Mahony Griffins' plan for lakes as the centrepiece of their design for Canberra.

From the earliest days of the capital site, Surveyor Charles Scrivener had favoured this area as the core of the new city. It was labelled 'Initial City' in the 1913 plan.

The area adjoining the Molonglo River was developed for industrial uses, with railway connections, the Power House, Transport Depot, Fitters Workshop, Government Printing Office, Stores, a fire station, and a range of other businesses and workshops.

Around these industrial sites were varied levels of accommodation for workers, and the suburb offered many 'firsts' in outlets and services for the population.

In 1955 planners decided that Kingston would become primarily residential, with industrial uses to be relocated.

There were many schemes to re-imagine the area, and the Kingston Foreshores Development began in 1995. Most recently, the area around the Power House is becoming the Kingston Arts Precinct, and the adjoining area, to be known as East Lake, is also to undergo renewal.

The naming theme for streets in both Kingston and Griffith is officially 'explorers'. In more recent times streets and parks in redeveloped areas have instead been named to commemorate notable local identities. Their diverse backgrounds, occupations and roles reflect the area's rich social history.

1. Power House Precinct

Listed on the ACT Heritage Register, the Power House Precinct includes a number of elements of heritage value, as noted on the Canberra Tracks sign.

The Power House was the first major permanent public building in the Federal Capital, supplying power from 1915, and the Fitters' Workshop (Bulk Supply Store) was the second (1916-1917). Both buildings were designed by John Smith Murdoch in the Stripped Classical architectural style.

These buildings played key roles supporting city construction and ongoing maintenance of government plant and equipment.

The Fitters' Workshop is now used for exhibitions, performances and special events.

The Power House ceased operating in 1929, apart from brief periods in 1936-1942 (during alterations to Burrinjuck Dam) and 1948-1957 (during a shortage of generation capacity in NSW). The 1948 Switch Room (now the Glassworks Chapel) dates from that later reactivation.

The Power House was adapted to become the Canberra Glassworks in 2006-07 by Tanner Architects (Sydney). In 2010 the base of the second chimney stack from the late 1940s was topped with a glass-panel echo of the old stack, in 'Touching Lightly' by artist Warren Langley.

Remnants of the railway embankment are reminders of coal delivery to the Power House from 1914 via the standard gauge track from Queanbeyan. We can also trace alignments of the narrow gauge railway which ran between the Power House and the Brickworks at Yarralumla from 1923 to 1927.

The Power House whistle was a reliable marker of time throughout early Canberra, and was said to be audible from Queanbeyan to Hall. It evolved over time: the first fashioned by workers, the second salvaged from HMAS *Australia* when she was scuttled in 1924, and a third version using compressed air.

The siren visible on the gable today dates from World War II, used to warn of impending enemy raids. In case the raids came from the air, slit trenches were dug across the road from the Power House with others near the river.

Adjacent to the Power House along Wentworth Avenue are remnants of a windbreak and screening planted in the 1920s by T C G (Charles) Weston. The remnants include Monterey Pine and White Brittle Gum, aligned with rail sidings that pre-dated the streets of the Griffins' plan.

In 1914 a low level concrete weir was constructed across the Molonglo River to form a pond for the cooling system of the Power House. Fed by warm water from the Power House, it was a popular swimming spot, prompting formation of a swimming club and water sports events. It was little used after the opening of the Manuka Swimming Pool in 1931.

Now under East Basin, the site of the pond adjoins the Waterfront apartments.

2. Transport Depot

The ACT heritage-listed Former Transport Depot adjacent to Wentworth Avenue was important in the development of public transport and the government car fleet in early Canberra.

The architecture illustrates evolution of the depot as the city grew and transport demands changed.

The first stage was built in brick around an open-air courtyard, opened in 1927. This was absorbed into a larger structure in 1936 and a roof constructed over the original section of the depot in 1940. In the same year a single storey brick administration wing was added, in the Inter-War Functionalist style, which was new to Australia.

The Old Bus Depot Markets began in 1994 and moved into the old transport complex four years later.

Megalo Print Studio and Gallery moved into the old administration wing on Wentworth Avenue in 2013.

3. Printers Way

This name recalls two eras of the Government Printing Office – a very important presence in Kingston.

In 1927 a red brick building was opened in Wentworth Avenue, across Giles Street from the Transport Depot, where a large staff of shift-workers managed printing for most Commonwealth government departments.

One of the main functions of the Office was to produce Hansard. Brass pneumatic tubes ran underground, using compressed air to transfer papers between the Printing Office and Parliament House. Sitting members could correct a draft record of their speeches on the same day, and receive a final printed account the following morning.

On the Giles Street corner some Himalayan and Arizona cypress trees remain from the front entrance and drive of the old building, where workers used to gather between shifts. These trees are listed on the ACT Heritage Register.

In 1963 a new modern Government Printing Office complex was opened on Wentworth Avenue, extending from Dawes Street to Cunningham Street and covering 8 acres (3.2ha). This replaced a group of contractors' sheds dating from the 1920s. The building alignment reflected the Griffins' street plan rather than the old rail sidings.

4. Boat Harbour

Until the 1960s a low-lying and flood-prone area near the mouth of Jerrabomberra Creek remained undeveloped as the rest of the industrial area grew. Construction of Lake Burley Griffin included a rectangular Boat Harbour which permanently flooded this low-lying area, and served the Commonwealth Fish Management Building and Lake Ecology Laboratory.

A new road (Mundaring Drive) was built from Wentworth Avenue to the Causeway, and at one time was intended to link to Newcastle Street in Fyshwick.

In the Kingston Foreshore redevelopment Giles Street was extended to the edge of a new Kingston Harbour, and changed to reflect the new street alignments.

5. Norgrove Park / Technical College site

This popular picnic spot is notable for its wetlands, which not only attract wildlife but also store and filter stormwater run-off. This enhances water quality in the lake and allows re-use of water for landscape irrigation.

The southern end of the park marks the site of the Canberra Technical College, located next to the city's industrial precinct. Trades courses began at Telopea Park School in 1928, with some moving to Kingston in 1933. Additional buildings were developed from 1939, boosted by the war, notably for the RAAF Training Scheme.

By 1960 all technical education in Canberra was located here, including secretarial courses that would be vital to the growing public service. Training later dispersed to campuses across the city.

6. UFS Hall site

A modest building of great importance to early Canberra communities once stood at the corner of Wentworth Avenue and Dawes Street. The United Friendly Societies (UFS) Hall was one of the earliest community centres in Canberra. It was relocated to this site in 1926 from the Engineers' Mess near the Power House.

Friendly societies provided members with social activity and benevolent services, such as income and welfare support for injured or unemployed workers and families.

The first friendly society in Canberra began in 1912, even before the capital city had a name. Six societies banded together in 1926 seeking a meeting place, and the UFS Hall was provided.

It was leased to the Canberra Burns Club in the early 1930s and used as a meeting place for the Trades and Labour Council, as a chapel for the Salvation Army, and as the setting for various dancing classes.

In 1960 it was relocated again, with a third life as the hall for the heritage-listed 13th Canberra Scout Group, in Hovea Street O'Connor.



Kingston

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7. Kingston Garden City Precinct

This ACT heritage-listed Precinct covers two blocks defined by Leichhardt and Kennedy Streets between Dawes Street and Burke Crescent, and a third block defined by Kennedy and Howitt Streets between Dawes and Cunningham Streets.

The precinct was built in 1926-1927, meeting an urgent need to house lower income public servants and workers ahead of the opening of Parliament House in 1927.

The precinct reflects the Griffins' original plan, strongly influenced by 'Garden City' and 'City Beautiful' concepts. A Canberra Tracks sign is located on the oval on Leichhardt Street.

Subdivision was symmetrical over each block, and buildings, fences and public landscaping were developed as a single project.

There are central landscaped reserves, generous verges and block sizes, front setbacks, hedges, and large rear gardens enabling home fruit and vegetable production.

House plans were based on a small selection of designs, adding visual variety with staggered and reversed placement on blocks.

Examples of original street furniture such as street signs, fire hydrants and lighting can still be seen today.

8. Printers Quarters site

The entire block defined by Eyre, Kennedy, Dawes and Leichhardt Streets was known as the 'Printers Quarters', built in 1926 to accommodate workers of the Government Printing Office following its transfer from Melbourne in 1927. There were twelve duplex brick cottages (24 houses) with a central Mess Room and facilities.

A Canberra Tracks sign on the Kennedy and Eyre Streets corner diagonally opposite the shops tells its story.

9. Kingston Oval

Local sports teams were established early in the history of the suburb, in the form of the Eastlake Cricket Club, which played its first match in October 1922, and from 1926 the Eastlake (Australian Rules) Football Club.

These two clubs have shared what is now Kingston Oval for nearly a century, and both retain the original suburb name of Eastlake (one word), even though it has been discontinued almost everywhere else.

During World War II, competitions were suspended as many players enlisted and the oval was requisitioned for military use.

10. Kingston Hotel

Known affectionately as 'The Kingo', from 1936 this was the first purpose-built public house in the Federal Territory, following a 1928 public poll that voted to end 17 years of the prohibition of the sale of alcohol.

The Tooheys beer company built this and the Hotel Civic as traditional pubs. With the demolition of Hotel Civic in 1985, this is the only surviving original hotel, now altered and extended.

The use of cream-coloured bricks was a first for Canberra. Produced at the Yarralumla Brickworks, they were a departure from the customary 'Canberra Red' bricks.

The hotel is said to have been used by Australian agents for surveillance of the Russian Embassy during the Cold War years. The same is said of the top floor of the adjacent funeral home.

Photographs taken at the hotel have featured in news stories more than 50 years apart: in 1963, when Labor leaders Arthur Calwell and Gough Whitlam had to wait outside while key elements of their election platform were decided for them by the so-called '36 faceless men' of the ALP Federal Conference; and in 2017, when politicians, campaign workers and volunteers celebrated the passage of legislation to recognise marriage equality in Australia.

11. Canberra Baptist Church

Listed on the ACT Heritage Register, this was the second church to be built in the Federal Capital Territory, and the first Baptist Church. It was constructed in 1929 on a 'Cathedral' site designated in the city plan.

Designed by Sydney architect F W Peplow, it is seen as a fine example of the Inter-War Gothic style, set within a mature garden landscape.

The church was dedicated in 1929 following a national fundraising campaign led by Rev Dr Arthur John Waldock. This was a difficult effort with the deteriorating economy ahead of the Great Depression.

In 1952 a former Government hostel building was relocated here for church activities, and remains on site. A new hall building was opened in 1962, and extended in 1974 to a design by local architect Anthony Cooper.

The grounds host the Kingston Organic Community Garden, and fortuitously protect an area of native grassland which has high value for biodiversity conservation. Very few examples of this ecosystem remain in inner Canberra.

12. Kingston shopping centre

The Kingston shopping centre is one of the oldest in the city, with the first Canberra business lease sold in December 1924 to storekeeper J B Young of Queanbeyan.

Initially known as Eastlake and from 1928 as Kingston, it remained the major centre until the expansion of Civic Centre in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

The shopping centre began in Giles and Kennedy Streets, with Green Square and Jardine Street developed in the 1950s.

The precinct has retained much the same layout, but the outlets have adapted to changing community needs and preferences over the years. In 2019, the Eyre Street Markets and Supabarn opened.

A number of elements of the shopping centre have been nominated for listing on the ACT Heritage Register.

It is suggested that the tour circle the shopping centre in an anticlockwise direction.

Some commentary on notable early businesses follows. This is not a complete list.

Along Giles Street:

Adams butchery

Ryan's Radio-Electrical and Musical Service store, where in 1931 the first local radio station 2CA began

Notaras' Highgate Café, the first Greek café in Canberra, from 1927 until 1979

Canberra East Post Office, the first new and permanent post office in the Territory, known as the 'hole-in-the-wall' because people were served through a window (became Notaras Bros shoe repair shop from the late 1940s)

Woodgers & Calthorpe office

Federal Motor Garage, with Canberra's first petrol bowser, opposite Tench Street, from 1926

Gunn's Southern Cross Dining and Refreshment Rooms from 1926

Taylor's ladies & gents outfitters from 1926

Dunne's newsagency from 1926, with Winter's barber shop at rear, and Arbuckle's Tea Room 1927

J B Youngs, universal providers, on the corner with Jardine Street from 1925, with four cottages built for employees in Tench Street. Youngs claimed proudly that it was 'the first department store in the first retail area'.

Opposite J B Youngs in Giles Street was the Bank of New South Wales from 1926, the first private bank to open in Canberra

Dr Clyde Finlay purchased one of the first privately built houses to be completed in Canberra, on the corner of Giles Street and Interlake (Wentworth) Avenue.

There he became the city's first resident private doctor in 1925, where he practised until 1963.

Along **Kennedy Street:**

Lavery's Corner, men's and boys' outfitters from 1927

Pyke's Pharmacy from 1927

Hill's fruit shop from 1927, Canberra's first

Arbuckle's hairdressing from 1925

Chandler's Hourglass Jewellers, one of the first in Canberra

Parbery's dental practice from 1926

Hughes' Capital Service Stores, haberdashery, linen, household goods and clothing from 1926

Prowse's newsagency and hairdresser from 1926

Ogilvie's bakery and cake shop from 1935 until the 1970s

Harvie's dental surgery from 1926, at the back of Campbell's Pharmacy established in 1925

Hayes & Russell general store on the corner with Eyre Street from 1925.

Along **Eyre Street:**

The Fair, owned by retailer Mark Foy's, later became the Kingston Café, the first licensed premises in Kingston after the end of Territory Prohibition in 1928; and then a billiard saloon, and then a roller skating rink

The Cusack Centre furniture warehouse from 1938.

Along **Jardine Street:**

Green Square is an oasis in the midst of a busy shopping centre, noted for its trees and grassed area

A new Post Office at the corner of Giles and Jardine Streets opened in 1947, and operated until 1989. It is now Canberra's oldest post office building. Listed on the ACT Heritage Register, its architecture is valued as an example of the Inter-War Stripped Classical style with Art Deco details.

13. Mission Hall & Mothercraft Centre sites

In 1914 a small corrugated iron building was erected close to the camp for married workers near the modern intersection of Gosse Street and Wentworth Avenue, and known as the 'Swagger Camp'.

It became the Anglican Church of St Paul, seating 30 people. It was the first church to be built after the establishment of the Federal Capital Territory and became the first social and recreational centre.

The hall was moved a short distance in 1921, to a small park off Jardine Street. The Eastlake Progress Association was formed in March 1926, and in the 1930s the hall was extended. The congregation supported an active choir, as well as football and cricket teams.

During World War II the hall ('Mission Hall' or the 'Tin Shed') was in continuous use for the Red Cross, St John Ambulance, groups making camouflage nets, and the Women's Club of Radio 2CA. It was moved to the new St Paul's Manuka in 1943.

At the bend in Jardine Street, Canberra's first Mothercraft Centre operated from 1927, until it moved to a permanent site next to Manuka Swimming Pool in 1937.

14. Greek Orthodox Church of St Nicholas

The site of this church was used from at least 1916 for the timber barracks of the 'Engineers Mess'. Buildings were added in 1923 and it became known as 'Eastlake Quarters'. One building relocated in 1926 to become the UFS Hall (stop 6).

Nearby were the 'Power House Cottages', built from 1921 to 1925 in brick with white stucco.

The Parish of St Nicholas was initially established in 1948 at the nearby Riverside Hostel. The permanent building was opened in 1968, after a great fundraising effort.

The church is a fine example of a traditional Greek architectural style. It is appreciated for its architecture, engineering and internal features, with paintings, pendants and wood carvings.

Linotype machines, Government Printing Office, Kingston, 1925

[National Archives of Australia A3560, 919]

Front cover: Green Square, Kingston c.1960 *[The Canberra Page Facebook]*

Kingston

2024

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Published by the National Trust of Australia (ACT)

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The publishers wish to acknowledge Mark Butz for his development of this brochure. Design by Studio Outside.

Supported by



ACT
Government

The National Trust produced this brochure with support and funding from the ACT Government.