

MISSING IN ACTON: LESSONS FROM THE LIME KILN

About Lime
History
Location
Values
Recognition
Opportunities
Lessons

ACT Heritage Symposium August 2024
Mark Butz – *Learnsapes*



CDHS ID 16384 photo 3131



About Lime: who needs it?

- mortar, plaster and stucco
- stabiliser in mud renders and floors
- waterproof walls
- lighten rooms as whitewash
- improve soil condition
- use in preparation/tanning of leather hides

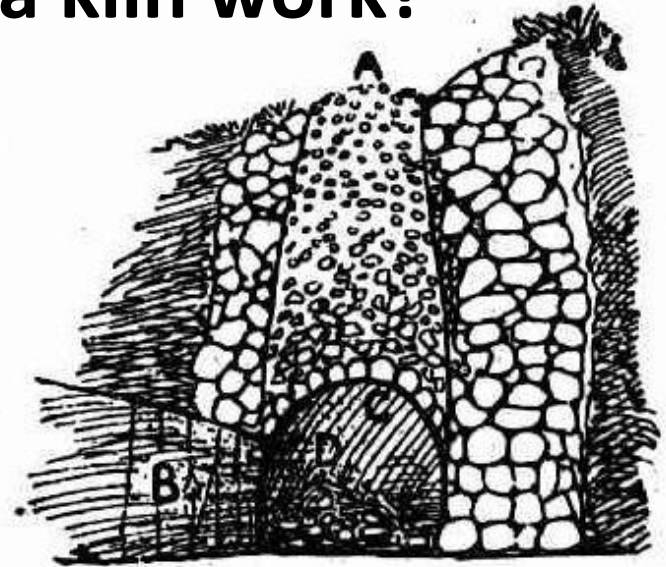
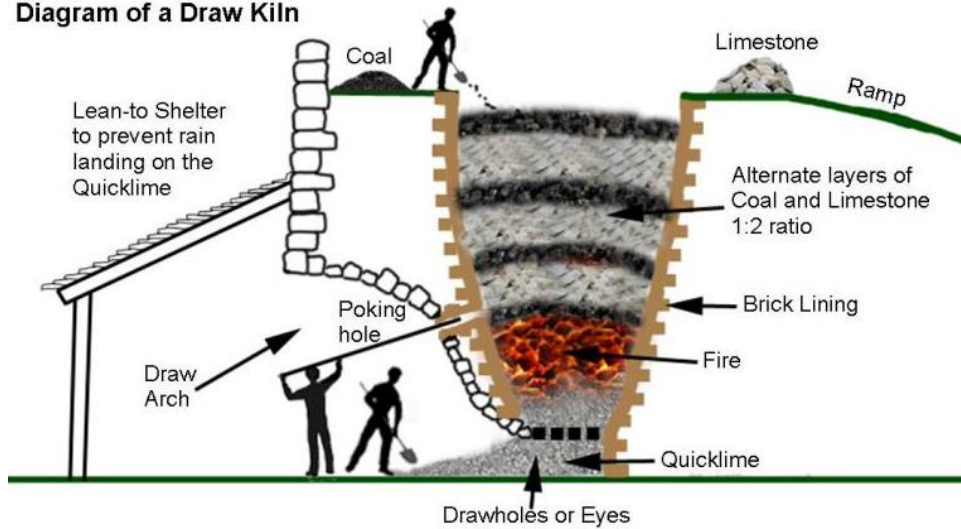
LIME! LIME! LIME!
To be had in any quantities at
GEO. ROTTENBURY'S
KILN,
CANBERRA.
G. R. KEEPS a constant supply of
the very best Lime at prices
very moderate.

About Lime: where did it come from?

- **Seashells near coast (middens)**
- **Limestone (and related rocks) inland**
- **Quarry – Break – Cook – Handle with care**
- **Cook in a kiln (around 900°C)**
- **2 tons of rock makes 1 ton of lime (roughly)**

About Lime: How does a kiln work?

Diagram of a Draw Kiln



Australian Town & Country Journal 12 Jan 1910:17

Water on quicklime (CaO)

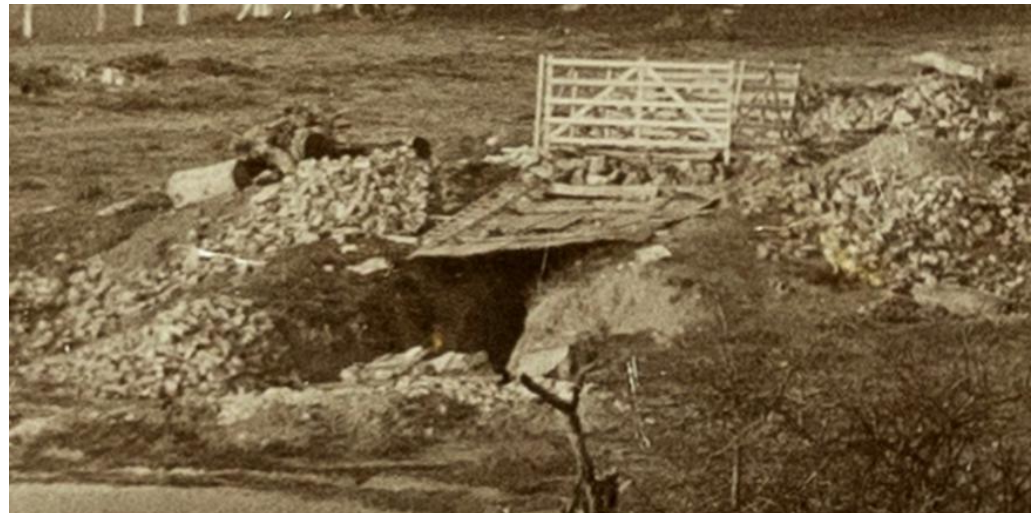
⇒ c.50°C



Chemically unstable & caustic

Severe skin burns & eye damage

Allergy/asthma symptoms or breathing difficulties if inhaled

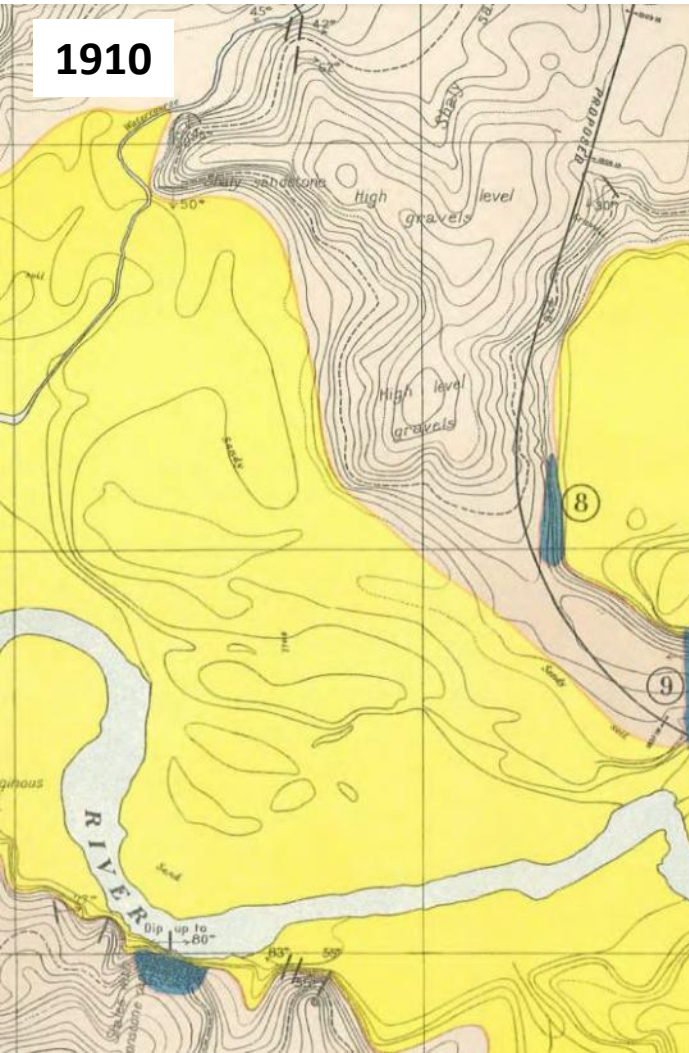


Acton kiln site: History

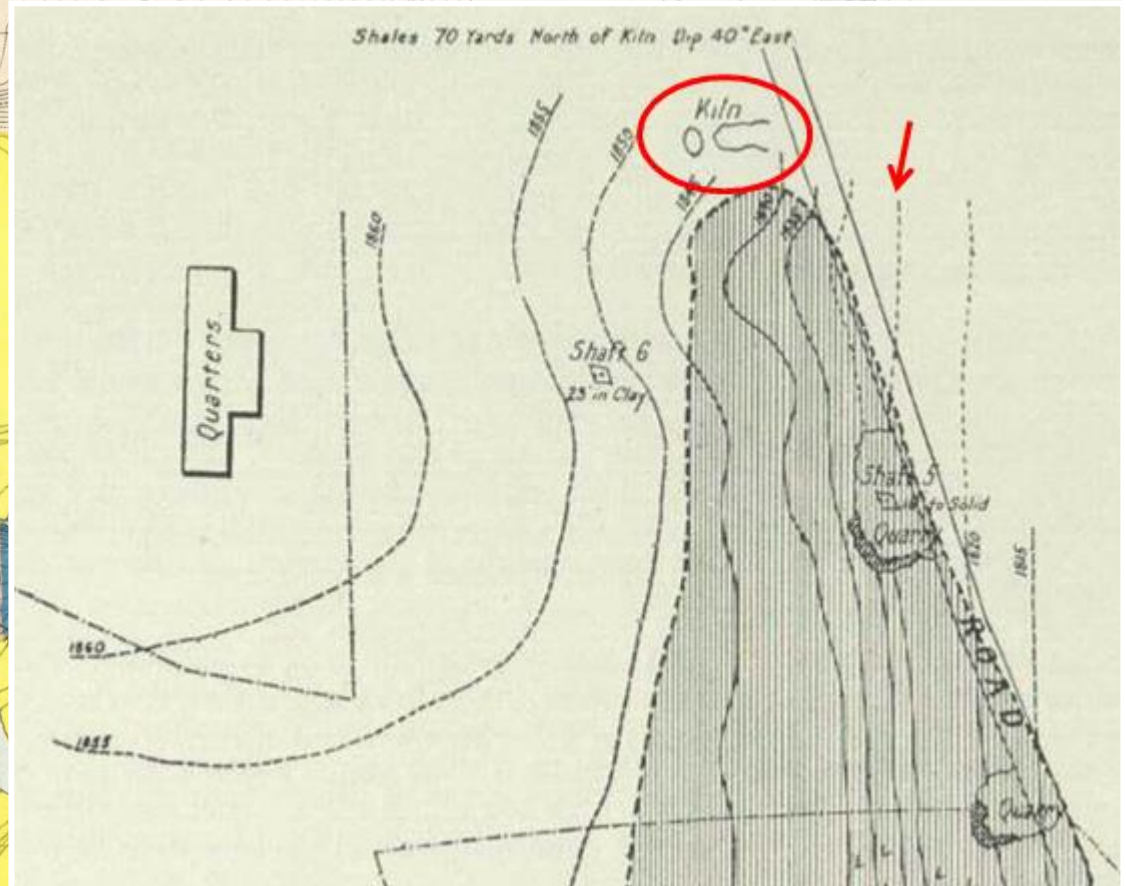
- **1832 First rock-derived lime in NSW (Limekilns, Bathurst)**
- **early 1830s – first kiln south of Goulburn, ?Thomas Salisbury (for Campbells) on Molonglo River (near Coppins Crossing)**
- **1832 Surveyor Hoddle noted quarry at Acton (not a kiln)**
- **late 1850s Salisbury supplying lime as business**
- **c.1860 George Rottenbury (stonemason for Campbells for 50 years) had kiln at Acton; selling lime to public in 1863**
- **1870s Harry (George Henry) Rottenbury kept Acton kiln**
- **1860s-70s kilns at Majura & near Queanbeyan**
- **1880s railway access – 1890s Depression – 1908 FCT**
- **1910 George Rottenbury (snr) died at Acton**
- **1911 Acton Estate resumed by the Commonwealth**
- **1920s-40s most local lime burning near Queanbeyan (to 1943)**

Where was it?

1910



1913



NAA: A1 1927 20726

How long was it visible? 1

- 1939 mapped



How long was it visible? 2

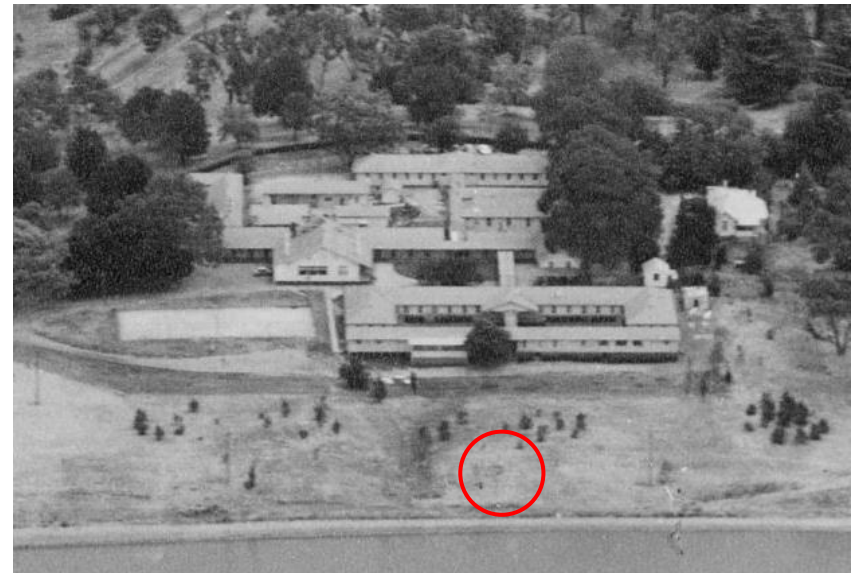
1961



How long was it visible? 3



nla.obj-890503040 [detail]



c.1964 ANU A 16-07

How long was it visible? 4

1961



ACTmapi

1972



ACTmapi

Where is it today?

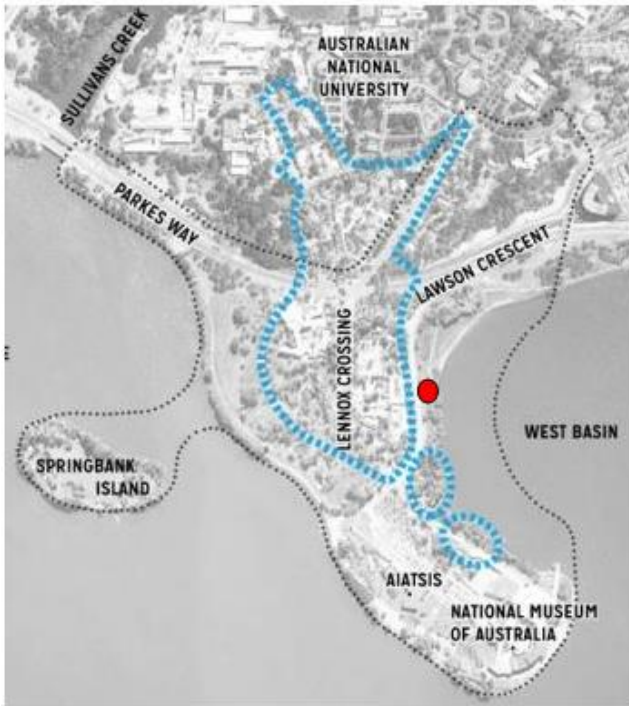


Where is it today? 2

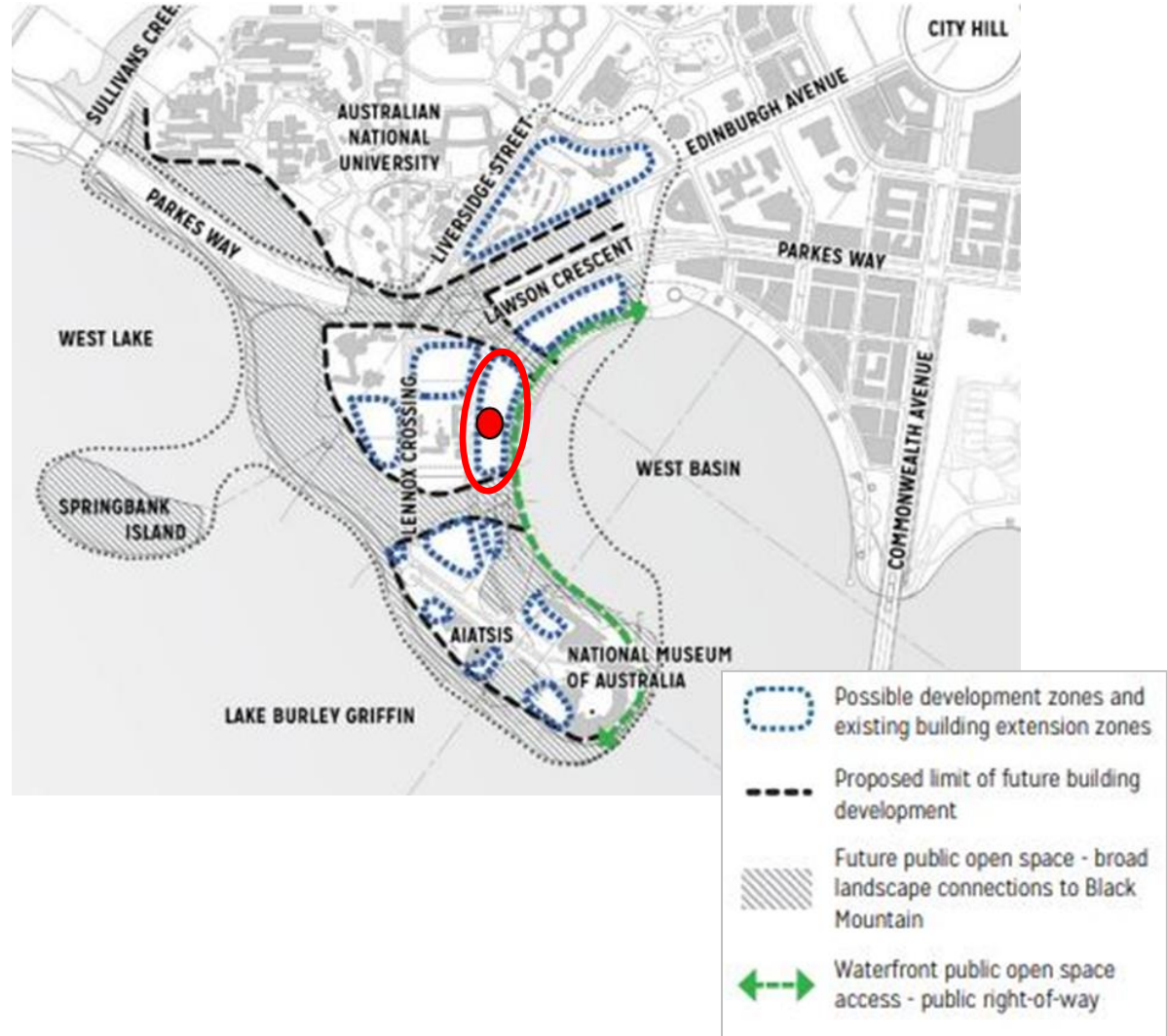
HERITAGE SUMMARY MAP 2017



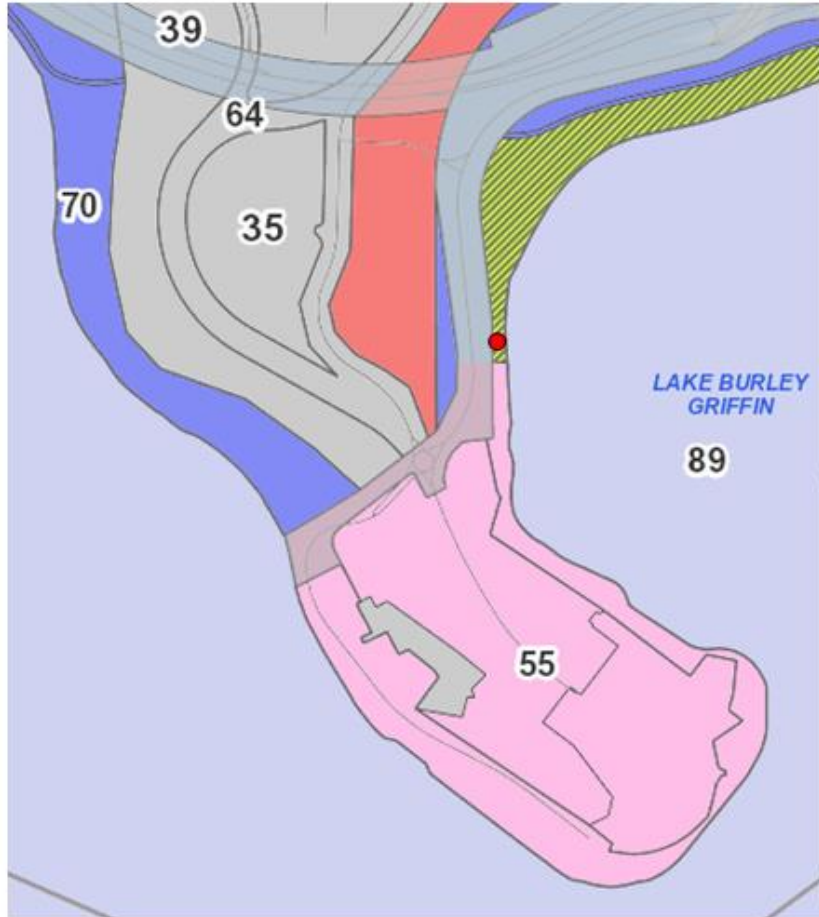
Areas of heritage significance
Note: heritage trees not indicated



Acton Peninsula Precinct Structure Plan Sep 2017



Where is it today? 3



ACTON: Block 23, Section 33

1 of 2

☆ ACTON: Block 23, Section 33

Urban APPROVED


Territory Plan - Land Use Zone: DES: DESIGNATED

Territory Plan - Overlay Zone:

Plan Nos. AP5701, POL4900

Block Area: 34005m²

[Territory Plan Link](#)



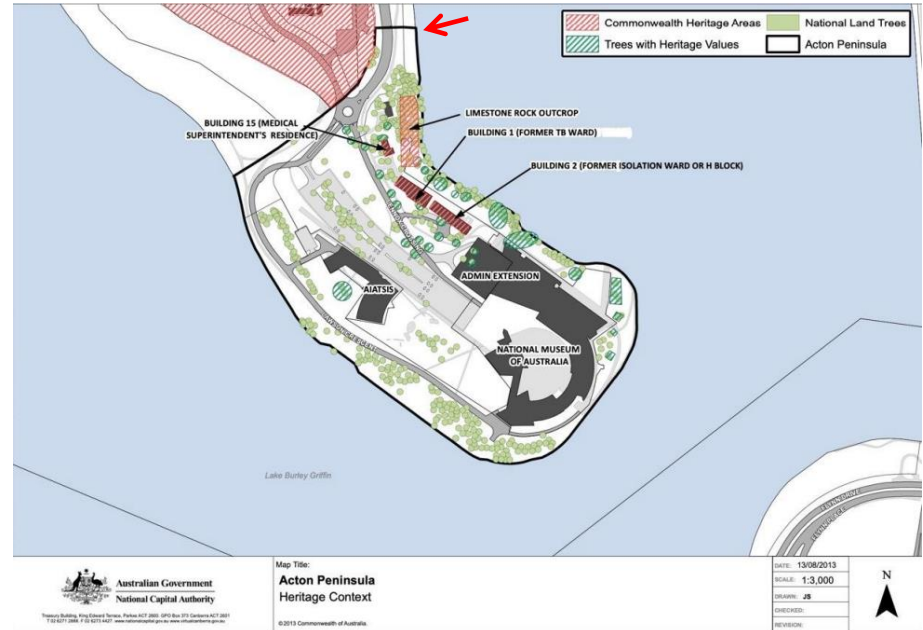
EPSDD - City_Renewal_Authc

2 of 2

☆ EPSDD - City_Renewal_Authority

Directorate - EPSDD
Agency - City_Renewal_Authority
District Name - CANBERRA CENTRAL
Division Name - ACTON
Section Number - 33
Block Number - 23
Addresses -
Current Lifecycle Stage - APPROVED
Road Name -
Road Lifecycle Stage -

Where is it today? 4



Acton Complex Heritage Management Plan

p.9

In summary, whilst it is likely that the limestone outcrop was the source of the earliest lime used to construct the first buildings in the region, the remaining portion of the outcrop does not bear witness to any of these activities. No evidence of lime burning or quarrying occurs at the site and as such no scientific values are identified for the historic archaeology (or lack thereof) of the study area.

p.85

DRAFT 2022

Acton kiln site: Values

- **Used 1860s to 1890s at least, maybe from 1830s**
- **Link to source quarry (Acton limestone)**
- **Link to many early stone buildings of the district (+ fireplaces & chimneys)**
- **One of the oldest industrial sites in the ACT**
- **Type uncommon in ACT (only one in city area)**
- **Oldest in the larger district (of certain location)**
- **Link to Campbells and Rottenbury**

Who knew?!

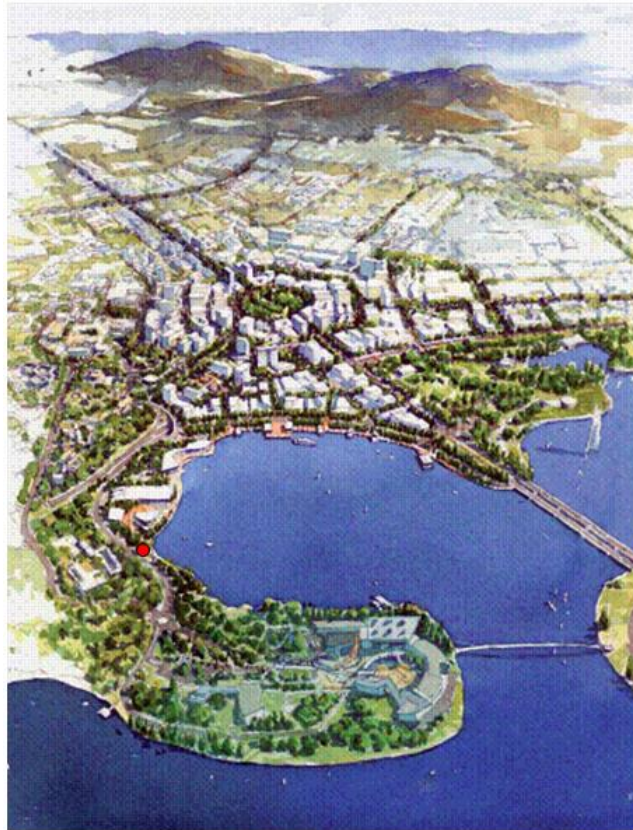
- **Buried in the early 1960s**
- **Unmentioned in six or so formal studies of the Acton area from 1988 to 2022 (and since?)**
- **Acton Limestone on Commonwealth Heritage List 2004; association with the Limestone Plains (but there is more!)**
- **Kiln site lies outside areas defined for: Limestone outcrop, Acton Conservation Area and Lake Burley Griffin listings**
- **In Acton Peninsula Precinct Structure Plan 2017**
 - **site in possible development or existing building extension**
- **Not in ACT Heritage Register – lists neither the Limestone nor the kiln site ; assumes protection by NCA**

What do we want?

- ***Recognition*** that it is a place worth understanding
- ***Investigation*** – find out what remains + what it tells us
 - dimensions and form ('sophistication' and capability)
 - how it was filled after disuse (a load of rubbish?)
 - anything worth saving or salvaging?
- ***Interpretation/presentation***
 - a story worth telling, enriched by understanding
 - Trench Trail an example – from a Paddock to a Place
- For the above to happen, more ***Champions!***

When do we want it?

- Investigate now – before it is destroyed by default
- Interpret in Waterfront redevelopment (enriched story)



NCA Amendment 61 – West Basin p.8



Canberra Times [online] 11 Aug 2020

What can we Learn from it?

- **Heritage places can fall through the cracks!**
 - liminal ('Not my concern'/'Not in the brief')
 - buried ('Nothing to see here' = 'Nothing to value')
- **Need to broaden & deepen knowledge**
 - Respect and tap into community knowledge
 - Think in landscapes > administrative boundaries
- **Need to broaden & deepen participation**
 - Acknowledge and address community valuing
(What price 'Local' significance?)
 - Engage the community in investigation, care and interpretation of places

Thank you

Canberra & District Historical Society

National Library of Australia – Trove + Map Search

National Archives of Australia

ANU Archives

ACTmapi

Allen Mawer

Michael Pearson

Andy Spate

Brendan O’Keefe

Barry McGowan

Wolf Mayer

Doug Finlayson