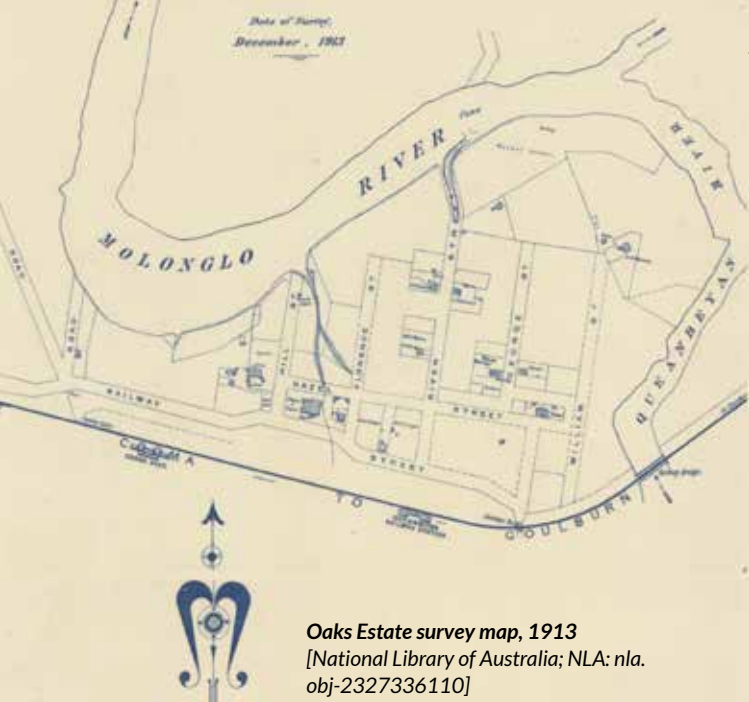


 Ngunnawal Country

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

Oaks Estate





 See map in centre spread

Allow 1½ to 2 hours for the walk (stops 1–18) which is approximately 3.4 km long.

Nearby places (A–J) are not part of the walk. They are difficult to access or view but are mentioned as part of the Oaks Estate story.

The nominal starting and end points for the walk are Gillespie Park, however, you can start from any point and do sections if time is limited.

Please note, there is no public access to private property.

Take care on roads and near water, and strictly supervise children.



Denotes Canberra Tracks sign at sites for more information

Oaks Estate

Oaks Estate lies at the junction of the Molonglo and Queanbeyan Rivers, 12 km from Canberra's centre.

Aboriginal people cared for the land and waterways for thousands of years. Cultural knowledge is evident in scarred trees, cultural sites, artefact scatters and a burial site. The area was used for corroborees up to 1862.

The area around the Molonglo–Queanbeyan Rivers junction was first recorded by early European explorers in the 1820s, and the land soon used to graze stock. The Aboriginal people were displaced by rural and town development: squatting and pastoral stations, land subdivision, the arrival of railways, industrial development and market gardening.

In 1910, a Bill was passed that formally excised Oaks Estate from New South Wales for the proposed Federal Capital Territory. The Estate then essentially became a settlement of construction workers for the new capital.

It took until 1938 for the Estate to be connected to town water, 1940 to electricity supply, 1968 to sewerage and up to 1972 for (some) roads to be sealed and street lighting installed.

Its location outside the city proper, coupled with administrative neglect, probably helped Oaks Estate retain evidence of its development history, from its first buildings to the present day

1. Gillespie Park



The park was once known as Gillespie's Paddocks. Teamster George Gillespie and his family moved to the site in the early 1890s from their farm 'Horse Park' at Ginninderra.

During World War II the family kept cows and sold milk to locals, and later operated a small poultry farm. Some of the old trees remain from the original house garden.



Gillespie Park [L Roberts]

2. Queanbeyan Railway Station

The Queanbeyan Railway Station is directly opposite the park. There is no access from this side.

The railway line from Sydney arrived in 1887 and boosted development of the adjacent Oaks Estate. The railway complex (the station, stationmaster's residence, railway bridge, pumping station, goods shed and stock yards) was at the intersection of key stock routes.

In 1911, the New South Wales–Federal Capital Territory border excised Oaks Estate from Queanbeyan.

In 1913, a spur line was built to the Power House at the fledgling Federal Capital. The anticipated extension of this line to Yass (connecting the line to Cooma with the line to Melbourne) did not proceed.

Walk west along Railway Street to Hill Street.

3. 'The Oaks'

This private property is listed on the ACT Heritage Register: significant for its form, intactness and historical associations. It cannot be accessed but can be glimpsed at 3 Hill Street.

'The Oaks', the first building in Oaks Estate, gave its name to the area. It was built from local stone c.1837 by Robert Campbell whose properties were later known as 'Duntroon' (named after Duntrune castle, the Campbell's ancestral home in Argyll, Scotland). 'The Oaks' has remained relatively unchanged.

The property was leased to William Hunt and Joseph Kaye and became the district's first public house as the original Elmsall Inn (1838–1841). 'The Oaks' was then leased to Queanbeyan's first doctor, Dr William Foxton Hayley; it was the region's first hospital until 1861 when Queanbeyan Hospital opened.

Since the late 1860s, the building has been a private residence, boarding house, flats, and again a hotel.

In 1877, John Bull bought 'The Oaks' and adjacent land, then sold it to storekeeper George Tompsitt and merchant William Price in the 1880s. The three partnered to create the subdivision of Oaks Estate which was auctioned in 1887, bounded by the Molonglo and Queanbeyan Rivers, and Derrima Road (now in New South Wales).

In the 1920s, 'The Oaks' was home to Walter and Marion Eddison's family. Prior to their ownership, the house was known as 'Bannockburn', but the Eddisons changed it back to 'The Oaks'. In 1928, the family moved to the soldier settlement block in Woden allocated to them following Walter's World War I service. He named the grazing property 'Yamba' and the family lived there until 1954, with 'The Oaks' rented out until 1952.

In World War II 'The Oaks' was occupied during 1941–1942 by the 11th Garrison Battalion, which was responsible for internal security in New South Wales.

At the end of Hill Street, follow the narrow track along the fence line and down some steps to the river.

4. The Oaks Crossing and Osage orange trees



In the 1830s the Oaks Crossing at this point provided direct access between 'Duntroon' and Elmsall Inn.

The track passes through a growth of Osage orange trees (dating from the 1880s) and elm trees, used to create a dense thorny barrier around gardens to keep stock out.

Continue along the river track to the Queanbeyan railway bridge (about 1.5 km).

5. River Street ford



The natural form of this crossing point can still be seen. It was used after the Oaks Crossing was washed away by the 1874 flood. It was also known at times as Chinamen's Crossing due to the adjacent market gardens.

In 1886 it was surveyed for a direct link between the new Queanbeyan Railway Station precinct and Yass Road (now Pialligo Avenue). The ford continued to be used until the 1980s.

6. Docker's survey peg



The junction of the Molonglo–Queanbeyan Rivers is the site of the first survey peg driven in the Queanbeyan area in 1829 by Robert Docker, assistant to surveyor Robert Dixon. Dixon prepared the first map showing landholders along the Molonglo River, and traced the Murrumbidgee River as far as the Yass Plains. Docker traced Ginninderra Creek to its source. These surveys provided vital reference points for the allocation of land through grants and purchases.

7. Chinese market gardens

The rich soil of the river flats north of 'Hazelbrook' attracted Chinese market gardeners from at least the 1880s. Gardens extended along the river to River Street. The Chinese gardeners left in 1937 but much of the area has continued to be cultivated and now houses nurseries.

8. 'Hazelbrook'



'Hazelbrook' is located inside the curve of the river flats near the rivers' junction. It was the site of The Oaks Wool-Scouring and Fellmongery Establishment, owned by John Bull from 1877 until he sold it to George Tomsitt in 1880.

Tomsitt named the works Hazelbrook Wool-Scouring Works, Tannery and Wholesale Produce Warehouses, and sold the business to the Queanbeyan Wool and Manufacturing Company in 1889. It went into liquidation in 1898 and the industrial complex was dismantled.

Bull and Tomsitt served as Queanbeyan's second and third mayors from 1888 to 1890.

From 1921 to 1953 Hilton and Sylvia Clothier ran a small dairy farm on part of the original property at the northern end of George Street. Clothier, awarded the Military Medal in World War I, for a time had a soldier settlement block near Mount Stromlo.

After the house was sold in 1963, it was substantially altered. The rest of the area became a wholesale nursery in 1982.

9. Queanbeyan railway bridge



The original railway bridge over the Queanbeyan River, completed in 1887, was a timber truss bridge on brick piers. The laminated timber arches were damaged during the 1925 flood and replaced with steel.

The river under the railway bridge was popular for swimming, and the river banks for picnics. During the Depression, the Oaks Estate end of the bridge was a favoured sleeping spot.

There is a good view up the river to the Riverside Cemetery, which dates from 1846.



Queanbeyan Railway Bridge [L Roberts]

Adjacent to the stone seat is a set of steep stone steps and a track leading to William Street.

10. Oaks Estate Community Hall

The hall in William Street was transported here in 1953 from the Eastlake Workers' Hostel that was adjacent to the railway station at Kingston. The hostel was a RAAF School of Technical Training in World War II. The Oaks Estate community gave it a third life, using volunteer labour and their own materials. It has been altered and extended.

Turn left into Hazel Street.

11. William Abbey's duplex house

Built in 1888, the brick house at 2-4 Hazel Street was owned by builder William Abbey of Queanbeyan, and later by James Cooper, part-owner of the Queanbeyan Roller Flour Mill from 1897 to 1909.

No.4 has been restored; no.2 is under repair.



Duplex house of William Abbey [M Johnston]



Oaks Estate

- 1** Gillespie Park*
- 2** Queanbeyan railway station
- 3** The Oaks
- 4** The Oaks Crossing and Osage orange trees*
- 5** River Street ford*
- 6** Docker's survey peg*
- 7** Chinese market gardens
- 8** Hazelbrook*
- 9** Queanbeyan Railway Bridge*
- 10** Oaks Estate Community Hall
- 11** William Abbey's duplex house
- 12** Oaks Estate water tank and railway reservoir
- 13** Romney Hut
- 14** Robertson House*

* indicates Canberra Tracks Sign at site



- 15** George Street houses 8, 10, 11, 9
- 16** River Street houses 10, 12, 14, 16, 11, 13, 18, 22, 26
- 17** European market gardens
- 18** Hazel Street bus shelter
- A** Oaks burial ground, Florence Street
- B** Round Paddock
- C** John Bull's slaughter yard and tannery
- D** Old tracks
- E** Abattoir
- F** 'Quinbean'
- G** Sewage treatment works/market garden
- H** Wood's house
- I** 'Alabama', later 'Cooee'
- J** 'Dudley's Farm', later 'River View'

12. Oaks Estate water tank and railway reservoir

From the corner of Hazel Street and McEwan Avenue, there is a good view of the metal reservoir tank at the end of McEwan Avenue that was installed in 1938 as Oaks Estate's first permanent water supply. McEwan Avenue was named (spelt incorrectly) for John McEwen, then Minister for the Interior, who approved the reticulated water supply.

The larger adjacent cement railway reservoir, built in 1926, stored water piped from the river to supply steam trains. The pump-station is marked by a well-shaft. A pumper's residence stood adjacent to the bridge.

13. Romney Hut

No.4 McEwan Avenue is another repurposed building – a World War II surplus Romney Hut, imported from Britain to use as a fast and cheap form of building. This one was transported from Kingston in the 1960s for the Kalivoda family, trading here as Cellargold Wines. The National Library used Romney Huts until 1968 and the National Archives until the 1980s.



Romney Hut [L Roberts]

14. Robertson House



Listed on the ACT Heritage Register, 9 Hazel Street is a notable example of an early 20th century vernacular building, constructed from locally found materials and developed organically over many decades.

Walter Richard (Dick) Robertson came to Oaks Estate with his parents in 1888. Their first house at the bottom of George Street was washed away in the 1891 flood.

Dick worked at the flour mill until 1911 and built his family house in Hazel Street in stages from 1912 into the 1920s. Money and materials were in short supply – the result is makeshift constructions using recycled materials, including bush poles, wall boards, old packing cases, flattened metal drums and building site off-cuts.

Once common in the early days of Canberra, such houses were considered temporary and demolished as early as possible. Robertson House is the only known example remaining in the ACT. A shed made from kerosene tins stands at the rear of the property, another shed has burnt down. There is no access to the interior of the house.

Like most Oaks Estate residents, the Robertsons were involved in the construction of the new Federal Capital.



Robertson House [M Johnston]

A short diversion right into George Street.

15. George Street houses

No.8 This weatherboard cottage with red brick chimneys was built between 1908 and 1913 and has remained unchanged for more than 40 years.

No.10 The core of this house was transported here in the late 1930s from the Molonglo Settlement that housed enemy aliens in World War I and was later converted into a workers' settlement. It has been extensively altered.

No.11 'Hill Crest' was built from hand-made cement blocks in 1926–1927 for Elizabeth Jane Robertson. It has been extended at the rear and windows replaced using frames from a monastery in the district.

No.9 The original part of this house, a two-room cottage built about 1914, used an identical design to two other houses in the district, one on Mountain Road and the other at 11 Blundell Street, Queanbeyan. It has been sympathetically extended at the rear and renovated using bricks from a monastery.

A short diversion right into River Street.

16. River Street

The houses and blocks along River Street (and also George Street) reflect different forms of construction and land use, and various phases of the Oaks Estate community.

No.10 Built about 1926, this is a Hudson Ready-Cut Bungalow No.403, a prefabricated cottage purchased from a catalogue. George Hudson & Son Ltd, Sydney, sold these homes from about 1905 until the mid-1960s.

Nos. 12, 14, 16 Three originally identical four-room weatherboard houses were built about 1923–1924 by O'Rourke Carpenters. They were investment properties for Sydney Ryan, a Queanbeyan dentist.

No.11 Transported around 1960 from Acton, this is believed to have been No.2 Acton Cottage. The Acton Cottages are significant as the administrative, residential and social centre of Canberra from 1911 to the 1920s.

No.13 'Oakville' was built of hand-made concrete blocks by Harold Thomas (Tom) Robertson in the 1940s.

No.18 'Rose Cottage' was built about 1926 as two rooms with a separate shelter for cooking. Other rooms were added later.

No.22 Built in the late 1920s for Edward Duncan (Ned) Robertson by his son-in-law Thomas Rickman, he used hand-made concrete blocks manufactured with local sand by Ned's brother Dick Robertson. Some of the original building remains.

No.26 The brick section at the front of 'Weowna' was added about 1906 by Ned Robertson and his family. The original, at the rear, was built in stages from about 1897 using bush poles, packing cases boards, flat-iron and weatherboards. Ned was one of 16 children of Duncan Robertson who had arrived in Australia in 1835. The family had a long association with the area. The house has been heavily modified.



22 River Street, built by Thomas Rickman for Ned Robertson [L Roberts]

17. European market gardens

The river flats to the west of River Street were the site of market gardens from the 1930s to the 1980s.

18. Hazel Street bus shelter

The Hazel Street bus shelter was first built in 1955. It was the last remaining double bus shelter of this design in the ACT until it was destroyed by vandals. It has been replaced using the original design specifications.

Nearby places not part of the tour

A. Oaks burial ground, Florence Street

On the western side of Gillespie Park near 9 Florence Street was Queanbeyan's principal burial ground from the mid-1830s until 1846 when the Queanbeyan Riverside Cemetery replaced it. There are 44 recorded burials in unconsecrated ground. The last of these burials was of a murdered Indian juggler, in 1863.

The sites B and C can be seen from Railway Street and Oaks Estate Road.

B. Round Paddock and cricket field

The area bounded by Railway Street, Mountain Road and Nimrod Road was known as the Round Paddock.

It remained largely undeveloped, except for the Oaks Estate rubbish tip, until the early 1950s when stock saleyards and an electricity substation were developed.

Next to the substation on Railway Street a cricket field framed on three sides by trees was known as the West Queanbeyan Cricket Pitch. The Oaks Estate Progress Association planted the trees and built a pavilion when it rented the ground from the mid-1950s.

C. John Bull's slaughter yard and tannery

The Oaks Estate Road cuts through the site of an old tannery, wool-scouring works and slaughter yard established by John Bull between Nimrod Road and the river. He transported fresh meat to Sydney by rail. Most of the buildings were washed away in the 1891 flood.

D. Old tracks

Before the railway arrived, Oaks Estate and Queanbeyan grew because of the movement of people and goods between Goulburn/Lake George, the Limestone Plains (Canberra), the Monaro, Braidwood and the coast.

The old tracks have been obliterated by development south of the Molonglo River, but some traces can be seen on the northern side of the river.

The earliest track between Queanbeyan and Yass crossed the Molonglo River below 'The Oaks' and continued across modern Oaks Estate, close to the railway overpass and along the line of Crawford Street into Queanbeyan. When the crossing was washed away by floods in the 1870s, traffic shifted to the River Street ford until a low-level bridge was established downstream in the late 1940s.

A view to the south along the Jerrabomberra Creek valley recalls the main track to the Monaro used from the 1830s. Oaks Estate and Queanbeyan were the hub of major 19th century stock and transport routes, using road, rail and river.

E. Canberra Abattoir

At the foot of Underwood Street, next to the railway line, is the site of the Canberra Abattoir built in 1944 and a major local employer. After much controversy it was sold to a private operator in 1969 before closing in the 1980s.

F. 'Quinbean'

Timothy Beard, transported for life for sheep stealing, arrived in New South Wales in 1806. He later prospered as a landholder and innkeeper at Campbelltown. In the mid-1820s, he sent three employees to the Queanbeyan area where they established huts and grazed cattle 2 km west of the Queanbeyan–Molonglo Rivers junction. Beard named his squattage 'Quinbean', generally regarded as anglicised from the Aboriginal word 'clear water'. Although squatting illegally, he is one of the first Europeans known to have used land in the district.

The site became part of John Palmer's Jerrabomberra Estate in 1832, and Beard had to move on. The railway, market gardens and sand mines have removed all trace of Beard's huts.

In 2009, the adjacent industrial estate was named Beard.

The unsealed Mountain Road and Nimrod Road are used by heavy vehicles and travelling these roads is not recommended.

This area was once the most northerly part of a large 1837 Crown grant to Robert Campbell. The land was later sold as rural blocks, and houses built to the north of Mountain Road by 1895.

The area was separated from Queanbeyan and became part of the Federal Capital Territory, with the border the railway line to Cooma.

G. Sewage treatment works and market garden

A sewerage system for Queanbeyan was proposed from 1923, partly to help avoid pollution of the Molonglo River. The blocks with river frontage were leased to Queanbeyan Municipal Council for treatment works. The new system was approved in 1935, partly to provide unemployment relief during the Depression.

A large settlement pond covers the site of an early Chinese market garden on the river flats.

H. Wood's house

Remnants of the base of a chimney mark the site of a weatherboard house that was built on this site in 1890 for William O'Malley Wood, a surveyor and alderman of Queanbeyan.

I. 'Alabama', later 'Cooee'

A sandstock brick cottage is the only house remaining from the Mountain Road subdivision. It was built in 1912 and occupied by Dick and Mary Blundell and family until 1921–1922. 'Alabama' was a small farm with an orchard, horse and poultry yards, granary, hayshed, blacksmiths shop, shearing shed and tennis court.

It was later the home of Hobart and Gertrude Miles and family. After resumption in 1927 they leased back the farm and re-named it 'Cooee'.

J. 'Dudley's Farm', later 'River View'

Closer to the river is the site of a weatherboard house built in 1887 by storekeeper George Dudley and his wife Mary Ann Australia. 'Dudley's Farm' was re-named 'River View' by the Atkinson family. They built a two-roomed brick hut in the early 1900s for their pigs but later converted it to a shelter for homeless people. It was demolished in the 1920s.

Sidney and Eleanor Harman of Majura lived at 'River View' from 1923 to 1959.

They were followed by history scholars Professor Laurence and Dr Verity Fitzhardinge. Verity (Hewitt) operated Verity's Bookshop in Canberra from 1938 and in Queanbeyan from 1969. She also ran award-winning stud cattle at 'River View'. In the late 1960s she was a vigorous campaigner against sand mining on the Molonglo River at Oaks Estate. The house was demolished in 1995.

*Gravel quarry at Oaks Estate 1950s, houses in background are part of Queanbeyan [National Archives of Australia; NAA: A6180, 9/5/74/35]
Front cover: 'The Oaks', the first building in Oaks Estate, gave the name to the area [National Archives of Australia; NAA: A6180, 25/3/74/22]*

**Visit Oaks Estate, a unique part of the
ACT, where its junction of the two rivers
marked it out as an important landmark
for Aboriginal people and early
European settlers.**

Oaks Estate

2024



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