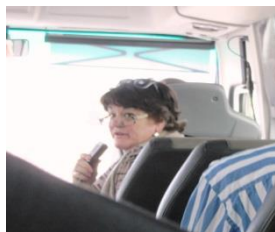


Canberra centenary workers heritage bus tour - 20 October 2013



Unions ACT secretary Kim Sattler

As part of the Canberra Centenary celebrations, the Canberra Region Branch of the ASSLH joined forces with Unions ACT to host an afternoon guided bus tour of four selected heritage sites, each of which offers a glimpse into the lives of Canberra's working class pioneers.

Canberra was officially named as Australia's capital in 1913. Amid all the fanfare of the centenary celebrations, the contribution of the early builders of Canberra has been pretty much overlooked. Yet for much of the past 100 years, Canberra was largely a working class town with much of the working population employed in building and construction. It wasn't until after World War 2 that the bureaucrats started to arrive in numbers and the character of the place underwent a dramatic change.

The bus tour was a genuine community initiative, planned and organised by ASSLH and Unions ACT without any financial assistance from the ACT Government. We are pleased that the centenary year did not pass by without some recognition being given to those who worked hard to build the city we live in today.

Here's a brief snapshot of how the day unfolded:

Site 1 – Westlake workers camp



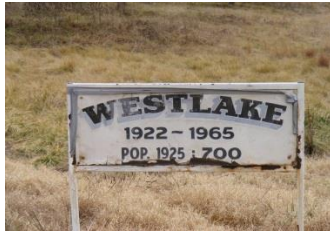
Guide: Ms Ann Gugler

Former Westlake resident,
author of *Westlake – One of Canberra's vanished suburbs* and
The Builders of Canberra 1909-1929.

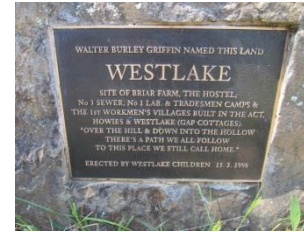
See also her web site <http://hiddencanberra.webs.com/>

Westlake was the name given by Walter Burley Griffin to an area of land on the south side of the Molonglo River. In 1925 the population of Westlake was around 700, making it the second largest population centre in Canberra. It was home to construction workers working on the Hotel Canberra, Old Parliament House and the main intercepting sewer.

Ann's tour took in various heritage aspects of the site including the workers camp, an historic 1925 sewer vent, original 1909 survey marker and a couple of ancient trees of great significance to the local Aboriginal people.



Westlake sign

Ann Gugler with tour organiser
Peter Ellett

Westlake Community plaque



Kim Sattler at Westlake

Site 2 – Canberra brickworks, Yarralumla

Guide: Dr Lenore Coltheart - author and historian

Dr Coltheart taught political history for 25 years and held research fellowships at the ANU and Cambridge before retiring to Canberra in 1997. Since then she has worked with the National Archives on a range of projects.



The now derelict Canberra brickworks was once a major manufacturing enterprise providing building materials for Canberra's rapid expansion. Construction began in 1913 and proceeded over time, with the operation finally ceasing in 1976.

The stacks of timber seen in the photos below come from a commercial recycling operation now using the site. The area is closed to the public and the heritage buildings are in poor condition. Unless action is taken now to protect these buildings, this important part of Canberra's history may soon be lost.



Lenore Coltheart at Yarralumla brickworks



Old quarry site



Nigel Thompson &
Humphrey McQueen



Frank Bongiorno



Site 3 – Robertson's House, Oaks Estate



Guide: Dr Karen Williams

Long standing Oaks Estate resident,
President – Oaks Estate Progress Association,
author '*Oaks estate – No man's land*' and local historian.

This building is as old as Canberra itself. It was originally constructed around 1912-13 by Walter (Dick) Robertson and his wife Mary (nee McCauley) and remained in the Robertson family until the death of its last occupant, Les Robertson, some years back.

The dwelling evolved over time with bits added as the family grew, making use of improvised materials such as bush poles, flattened kerosene tins, flat iron off-cuts, packing cases and weather boards. Some materials were salvaged from early Canberra construction jobs including Old Parliament House. The outbuildings were used at various times as a cookhouse, laundry and sleep-out. An old chook shed in the front yard is still standing.



Karen Williams addresses the tour



Humphrey McQueen with Bill Thompson

Site 4 – Causeway Hall, Kingston

Causeway Hall was Canberra's first hall for community gatherings and entertainment. It was constructed in 1926 with voluntary labour and is still in use today.

The close knit community of Causeway was originally a collection of wooden cottages housing construction workers in the 1920's. The original houses were demolished in the 1960's and replaced with public housing of brick veneer.

Over afternoon tea, retired Bishop of Canberra Rev Pat Power recounted a few of his memories of the Causeway back in the days when he was the local parish priest.



Causeway Hall



Bishop Pat Power

Our thanks to everyone who made the event a success.

(Photos: John Myrtle, Peter Ellett & Kim Sattler)