

2.0 Understanding the Place—Historical Context

2.1 Blundells Cottage Site—Summary History

This section of the HMP provides a historical overview of Blundells Cottage in the wider context of early settlement and the development of Canberra. It is largely based on the history written in the 1994 CMP by Freeman Collett & Partners with additional references to other documents included as endnotes. Comprehensive coverage of the history of the cottage and the families who lived there is to be found in the 1994 CMP and the book 'The Cottage in the Parliamentary Triangle' by Beth Knowles published by the CDHS in 1990. This book also details CDHS involvement in Blundells Cottage and this subject is further explored in an article 'A house in history, heritage and tourism: shifting times at Blundells Cottage, Canberra' written by Linda Young and published in the Public History Review, volume 12, in 2006.

The summary history in this HMP provides an overview to inform the statement of significance and conservation policies and further define the place of Blundells Cottage as a surviving relic from the Duntroon Estate. A historical timeline is included at Appendix C.

2.1.1 Indigenous Occupation of the Area

Before European settlement, Aboriginal people occupied the hills and plains of the Molonglo Valley for thousands of years. The Aboriginal people of the Canberra region lived a nomadic hunter-gatherer lifestyle, setting up shelter and camps as they travelled in response to availability of natural resources.⁵ The landscape, and their relationship with it, formed an integral part of the Aboriginal lifestyle and belief system and was related to the seasonal cyclic and episodic movement of people across the land seeking food, fibre sources and for trade and ceremonial purposes. The hills and valleys of the Canberra area not only provided resources but also formed navigational markers. Mount Ainslie, Mount Pleasant, and Black Mountain were primary navigational sites in this landscape and markers in relation to the many trails and tracks which early explorers and settlers noted as they themselves traversed the landscape to investigate and ultimately occupy the land. The fording place at the Molonglo River near the site that was to become Blundells Cottage is likely to have been an important place on one such Aboriginal pathway. The crossing, like the Aboriginal land itself, was subsumed by white settlement to become known as Scott's Crossing.

The landscape of the Molonglo River valley at the time of European settlement provided a habitat to a large variety of fauna for Aboriginal use. The open grassy Limestone Plains and surrounding savannah woodland attracted animals such as kangaroos, wallabies, wallaroos, wombats, echidnas, snakes and many smaller creatures. Bird life was also abundant on the water, land and in the air. The river carried fish such as the two cod fish each weighing about 13 lbs which Johannes Lhotsky caught in the Molonglo River in February 1834.⁶ Lhotsky (1795–1866) was a European naturalist who travelled to Australia and gained a government grant to explore the Monaro. His writings have provided insight into the landscape of the early years of colonial settlement of the Limestone Plains.

The coming of European settlers to the region not only displaced Aboriginal people from their traditional lands, but also introduced diseases to which Aboriginal people had no immunity, resulting

⁵ Wright, WD 1923, *Canberra*, John Andrew & Co, Sydney, p 58.

⁶ Andrews AEJ (ed) 1979, *Johannes Lhotsky, A Journey from Sydney to the Australian Alps*, Blubberhead Press Hobart, p61.

in disastrously high mortality rates in their population.⁷ There are few records of Aboriginal people on the Limestone Plains after it was settled by pastoralists, perhaps because of Indigenous seasonal lifestyles, or because they retreated from settlers and their horses, moving to the hills.⁸ The new settlers may also have simply failed to record their ongoing presence in any detail. In 1842 early settler John Blundell of Blundells Flat noted that there were two distinct Aboriginal communities living on the Limestone Plains—a group he called the Pialligo Blacks based at Pialligo (the site of the present day Royal Military College at Duntroon) and the ‘Canberry or Nganbra Blacks’ based on the lower slopes of Black Mountain.⁹ A total of over 200 camp sites have been located in the ACT and many artefacts recovered within the immediate area of Lake Burley Griffin between Duntroon and Black Mountain which once comprised the Molonglo flood plains.¹⁰ In addition to the two main camps there are also several other types of sites that have been identified in the Canberra area ranging from a corroboree ground near Mt Ainslie (now Corroboree Park, Ainslie), axe grinding grooves (in what is now Theodore and Latham) and an ochre quarry (at Red Hill in Gungahlin). The Aboriginal people who created these sites actively used the land and its resources and would have used the area now surrounding Blundells Cottage for premeditated subsistence activities based on resource availability.

2.1.2 The Campbell’s and the Duntroon Estate

Robert Campbell 1825–1846

In 1825 wealthy Sydney merchant importer and warehouse owner Robert Campbell was awarded a land grant of 4,000 acres on the Limestone Plains (the future site of Canberra) as compensation for the loss of one of his ships requisitioned for Government service. Campbell sent his new overseer James Ainslie with 700 sheep to the property and in 1830. Campbell organised the construction of a homestead, ‘Limestone Cottage’, at Pialligo on his property, using local stone and completed in 1833. Lhotsky stayed for six days at Limestone Cottage in 1834 by which time there were 20,000 sheep on the Pialligo property.

Campbell had his shepherd and overseer James Ainslie manage the estate while he remained in Sydney, and in 1835 Charles Campbell, Robert’s third son, became the manager of the estate which was run on a similar basis to eighteenth century estates in Scotland—a model where tenant farmers were provided with an estate cottage and smallholding on the understanding that their labour was available to the landlord. Gradually the Campbells organised assisted migration from Scotland to work on their Limestone property and the sheep paddocks of the Limestone Plains became dotted with small stone and slab cottages with small farm areas attached.

By 1841, 61 men and 24 women were living on the Pialligo property and Robert Campbell was a leading landowner and local philanthropist assisting in the setting up of a small village linked to his estate. In 1841 he donated land for the building of an Anglican Church (St John the Baptist’s in what is now Reid). He retired to his Limestone Plains estate in 1843 and died there in 1846, after which the land became known as Duntroon after the family seat in Scotland.

⁷ Bluett WP 1954, *The Aborigines of the Canberra District at the Coming of the White Man*. Paper read to the CDHS.

⁸ Gillespie L 1984, *Aborigines of the Canberra Region*, L Gillespie Campbell ACT, p29.

⁹ Bluett WP 1954. Note that the latter groups descendants favour the term ‘Kamberri’ as their identifying title. The name Ngunnawal is now that most often used to refer to the Aboriginal people of the Canberra district.

¹⁰ Flood J 1990 *The Riches of Ancient Australia*, Queensland University Press, University of Queensland, p 297.

Charles Campbell 1846-1860 & George and Marianne Campbell 1860–1876

Ownership passed to Robert's fourth son George but Charles Campbell continued to manage the property until George and his wife Marianne moved to live at Duntroon in 1860. This date saw the start of a building program across the estate with extension to the main homestead. More cottages for estate workers were constructed including Blundells Cottage.

Frederick Campbell 1876–1881

George and Marianne Campbell remained at the property until 1876, at which time they moved to England, leaving the estate to be managed by their nephew Frederick Campbell. In late 1877 the Duntroon Estate was described as 40,000 acres freehold with 45,000 acres leasehold. 36,000 sheep were sheared that year and several paddocks produced different cereals with hay yield at 150 tons.

Marianne Campbell 1881–1903

George Campbell died in 1881 and Marianne returned to live at Duntroon until her death in 1903, after which the contents were sold and the property left vacant. A W Moriarty, a Queanbeyan valuer, was called into to assess the worth of the Duntroon Estate in 1904. In 1900 Australia federated and the Canberra-Yass area was chosen for the new National Capital in 1908. The Duntroon Estate had been gradually been reduced as a result of the *Closer Settlement Acts of 1901, 1902 and 1906* and for the requirements of settling bequests on the Campbell Estate. The *Lands Acquisition Act 1906* and the *Seat of Government Acceptance Act 1909* resulted in the Duntroon Estate passing into the hands of the Commonwealth. Duntroon House and the immediate grounds were redeveloped for use by the Royal Military College in 1910. The tenant farmers on the Estate then leased from the Commonwealth. As part of this transfer of land, ownership valuations and surveys were carried out on properties. Blundells Cottage was surveyed in 1913 and described as having six rooms, stone walls, and iron roof; with a detached slab and iron roofed kitchen. It was valued at £175.¹¹

Complete and reliable information about the Duntroon Estate and its various agricultural buildings and cottages is limited to what was recorded in the surveys and valuations which occurred at various times. What is clear from the scant information available is that the surviving cottages are only a portion of a whole variety of cottages once provided to tenant farmers, and that even where those cottages have survived not all elements of the built structures associated with the cottages—such as cow bails, sheds, chicken coops and bee hives—have survived. Similarly, the details of the tenants are often unknown but all would have been Duntroon employees associated with the working of the property in some manner. Extant buildings in the table below are shown with shaded orange boxes. Of the worker's cottages only three survive intact and these are indicated by bold outlines and a darker shade.

¹¹ Freeman Collett & Partners Pty Ltd, 1994, Vol 1, p22. The valuation was made by AW Moriarty, an Appraiser for the Federal Capital Territory 1910-1918, who was employed to evaluate land holdings in the ACT prior to their acquisition by resumption by the Commonwealth for the Federal Capital. Moriarty's notebooks are held at the Australian Archives in Canberra. NAA:A358:21.

Table 2.1 Blundells Cottage in relation to other built elements of the Duntroon Estate. Extant structures shown by shaded boxes. Note that most of the Duntroon Estate cottages have been demolished—only the stone built Blundells Cottage, Mugga Mugga and Majura House surviving intact—noted by outline lines and a deeper shading.

Building	Date	Occupants	Fabric and Form	Location	Situation
Blundells Cottage	c1860 & 1880s	William and Mary Ginn George and Flora Blundell Harry and Alice Oldfield	Four room brick cottage extended in 1880s, with shingle roof now iron. Detached slab kitchen.	Kings Park	Extant
Duntroon House	c1833 & 1862	Campbell Family and then RMC	Stone cottage extended with 1862 Victorian Gothic two storey and then later extensions.	RMC	Extant
Waller House, RMC—former gate lodge	c1860	-	Sandstone gothic lodge/gatehouse.	RMC	Extant
Shappere House—former gate lodge	c1860	-	Sandstone gothic lodge/gatehouse.	RMC	Extant
Duntroon Apple Shed	c1860	-	Stone	RMC	Extant
Stables and coach house ¹²	c1860	-	Stone	-	Demolished
Manager's House ¹³	?	-	Substantial stone cottage	South of Duntroon House	Demolished
Hay and chaff sheds, tool sheds, forge ¹⁴	c1840 –1860	-	-	-	Demolished
St John's Church	1845	-	Stone	Suburb of Reid	Extant
St John's Schoolhouse	c1845	James and Eliza Abernethy	Stone Schoolroom with attached two room home.	Suburb of Reid	Extant
Duntroon Woolshed	c1860	-	Stone with associated stone and slab stock yard.	Next to Woolshe d Creek	Extant
Duntroon Dairy	c1832	-	Stone with shingle roof. Brick additions.	Southern slope of Mount Pleasant	Extant

¹² Young L 2007, *Lost Houses of the Molonglo Valley, Canberra before the Federal Capital City*, Ginninderra Press, p18.

¹³ Young L 2007, p18.

¹⁴ Young L 2007, p18.

Building	Date	Occupants	Fabric and Form	Location	Situation
Mayo's Cottage Associated hay sheds ¹⁵	c1865	Ambrose and Grace Austen, Elizabeth and Joseph Mayo.	Brick with shingle and later iron roof Six rooms L-shape	Next to the Duntroon Dairy southern slope of Mount Pleasant	Demolished 1975
Mugga Mugga Cottage	1830s	Ewab MacPherson, head shepherd 1838–43 MacDonalds 1844–1866 Mayo family 1880–1895 Curley family 1813	Four room stone cottage with detached slab kitchen (1860s).	A shepherd outpost to the south of the Molonglo	Extant
Majura House ¹⁶	c1846	Alfred and Mary Ann Majo	Small stone cottage with slab and brick extensions.	Majura valley	Extant Slab/brick extension demolished 1950s.
Windmill and mill house ¹⁷	c1840s	Operated by John Gregory 1840s-1876	Timber post mill with small stone cottage	Present day Fyshwick	Mill destroyed by a storm Cottage demolished after 1910
Murrays Cottage ¹⁸	c1845 1863	John Shumack Mackenzie, Line, Slade and Booth families John Murray shop keeper and baker 1909	Three roomed slab cottage Replaced by a brick cottage 1863	West of Blundells Cottage within the present day Common wealth Park	Destroyed by fire 1923
Andersons Cottage and shed ¹⁹	c1857	Patrick and Mary Curley 1857–1880s. Anderson family by 1913	Stone cottage with verandah and timber skillion addition Skillion roof later covered with iron	Lower slopes of Mount Ainslie (present day Campbell)	Demolished
Young's Cottage ²⁰	late 1850s	Francis Williams blacksmith 1858–1878 Postmaster from 1863 Thomas Whitehaed and	Six-roomed stone cottages	West of Blundells Cottage over	Demolished c1925

¹⁵ Young L 2007, p19-20.

¹⁶ RNE Entry 13406.

¹⁷ Young L 2007, p18.

¹⁸ Young L 2007, pps30-32 and Marshall D et al 2007, Heritage Assessment of the Canberra Central Parklands, for the NCA.

¹⁹ Young L 2007, pps21-22 and NAA: A358 (A358/2), 21, JER Campbell Duntroon Estate, Moriarty valuations.

²⁰ Young L, 2007, pps24-25.

Building	Date	Occupants	Fabric and Form	Location	Situation
		John Warick, Bridget Young by 1913		Church Lane	
Rottenberry Cottage 1 ²¹	c1880	George Henry Rottenberry (son of the Duntroon stonemason), his wife Eliza and five children	Slab four-roomed cottage with a weatherboard front, verandah and skillion back Iron roof Sealed and with hardwood floors Detached slab kitchen, brick chimney and bread oven Dairy, stock yards and front garden	Flood plain south of the Molonglo River in the location of present day Telopea Park	Demolished 1923
Rottenberry Cottage 2 ²²	1900	George Rottenberry (grandson of the Duntroon stonemason), his wife Kate and two children	Four-roomed square wooden cottage clad with corrugated galvanised iron	South bank of the Molonglo River near where the southern end of King Avenue Bridge is now	Moved from the site after 1915
Scott's Cottage ²³	c1860s	1900 John and Catherine Scott	Two-roomed whitewashed slab cottage, detached slab kitchen	South bank of the Molonglo River near ford called Church or Scott's Crossing	Demolished
Cameron's Cottage ²⁴		William and Isabella Avery 1890s, Allan Cameron late 1890s	Slab cottage, brick floor and small detached kitchen	To the west of Scott's Cottage	Demolished
Corkhill's Cottage ²⁵	c1845	1845 Margaret Logue 1893–1913 Robert and Catherine Corkhill and ten children	Four-roomed slab cottage with corrugated iron roof and two-roomed detached slab kitchen with bark roof	Molonglo river flats in location of West Basin of lake	Demolished

²¹ Young L, 2007, p41-2.

²² Young L, 2007, p41-2.

²³ Young L, 2007, p42.

²⁴ Young L 2007, p43.

²⁵ Young L 2007, pps44-5.

Building	Date	Occupants	Fabric and Form	Location	Situation
Briar Farm ²⁶	c1860s	1865 Thomas Bryant and James Cook brickmakers and builders c1882–1913 Tom and Elizabeth Kinleaside	Four-roomed brick cottage with one room skillion kitchen of corrugated iron Adjacent two room pisé cottage and small slab and iron cottage		Demolished 1950

2.1.3 Canbury Village

The Pialligo/Dunroon Estate featured not only the main homestead but all the necessary outbuildings of a self-sustaining working agricultural property. The Campbell family were instrumental in the settlement of the Limestone Plains and establishment of the scattered and loosely connected dwellings and services of what became known as Canbury Village on Pialligo/Dunroon Estate land. Rather than being a defined place with a boundary this was more of a social concept. The main features of this intangible village are shown in Figure 2.1.

St John the Baptist Church and Graveyard

Robert Campbell provided the land and funding to build the St John the Baptist Church and its associated schoolhouse (built in the early 1840s) at the centre of Canbury Village. The church and its adjoining cemetery were consecrated on the 12 March 1845 by William Grant Broughton, the bishop of Australia. The church and school provided a spiritual and social focus for the estate village and catered for both the Anglican and Presbyterian residents and workforce.

St John's School House

The stone schoolhouse with attached residence for a teacher was built in the early 1840s by Robert Campbell in order to ensure elementary education for his estate workers' children. By 1848 the school was certified as a Church of England school. When education became free and compulsory in 1880 under the Public Instruction Act, it closed to be replaced by a temporary public school located nearby. In 1894 a slab school was built at the intersection of the Yarralumla-Queanbeyan Road (on Dunroon Estate land and roughly in the area where the Forrest Fire Station is located today). Because of the land ownership of its location it was named the Dunroon School, or more locally and colloquially because of its immediate geography as the Crossroads School. The St Johns school was reopened in 1895 relocated up in a new weatherboard school building next to the cemetery.

The original school building was a large schoolroom with attached two-room dwelling. Three additional rooms including a skillion kitchen were added in 1864 after the building was damaged by a fire. James Abernethy and his wife Eliza lived there from 1864 to 1880 and were the longest staying teacher and tenants. The schoolhouse eventually became neglected and the building was destined for demolition until increased interest in its history led to its preservation in the 1960s.²⁷ The schoolhouse is currently operated as a St John's Schoolhouse Museum and receives many school groups.

²⁶ Young L 2007, p49.

²⁷ Watson F 1927, *A brief history of Canberra, the capital city of Australia*, Federal Capital Press, p52 and Young L 200, pp27-28.

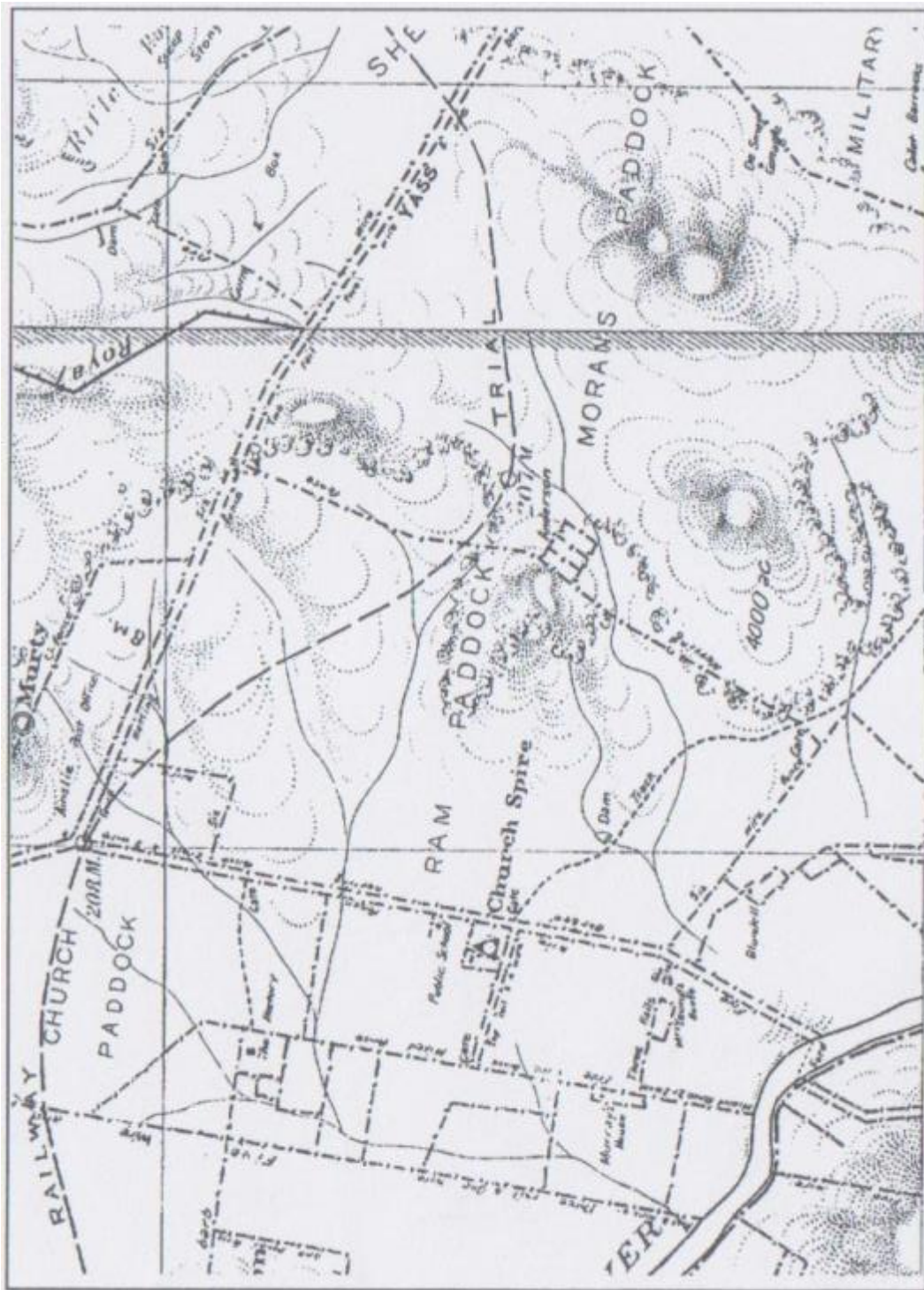


Figure 2.1 Extract from Federal Territory Feature Map, 1915. (Source: Department of Home Affairs, Lands and Surveys Branch. National Library of Australia, 1658523)

Fencing and Paddocks

The Duntroon Estate was fenced by George and Frederick Campbell in the 1860s, dividing the pastures into huge paddocks, each identified by name. Fencing also formalised the tracks formed between the main social and economic hubs of the church, the village of Queanbeyan, river

crossings, major homesteads, farm outbuildings and cottages.²⁸ The Estate economy was based primarily on sheep with horse breeding and Durham cattle. Grain farming—and other types of farming—were also undertaken for the estate by the tenant farmers.

By around 1890 most of the major roads in the central Limestone Plains had been designated, and around Blundells Cottage there was a collection of small paddocks related to intensive cultivation on the river flats. Beyond this home farm were larger paddocks stretching into the foothills of Mount Ainslie—Ram's Paddock, Moran's Paddock and Anderson's Paddock. To the west of the cottage a number of small huts provided farm storage and to the east was an old shed associated with a small paddock used for stacking wheat and hay. A dam was located to the east and at the top of the larger paddock behind the stack yards. A seasonal creek draining the west side of Pialligo Hill (Mount Pleasant) was diverted away from the cottage towards Church Lane and into a drain running along a common boundary²⁹ (Figure 2.1).

The Ram Paddock

The land of the Duntroon Estate Parish of Pialligo, Portion 58, which has now become the lake foreshore Canberra Central Parks (Commonwealth Park and Kings Park), and the suburbs of Reid and Campbell, was called 'the Ram Paddock'. The Commonwealth valuations by Moriarty and Smith classified the quality of the land across the various small leases of the landholdings in preparation for resumption of title by the Commonwealth. George Blundells land of 120 acres was described as 'practically all alluvial, good maize land, 1st class cultivation, maize, lucerne, vegetable and root crops'³⁰. The water supply for the farm was identified as the Queanbeyan River (ie the Molonglo). Young's Farm (the old Glebe Farm and adjacent to Blundells) was described as 'principally alluvial, 1st class cultivation, maize, lucerne, roots'.³¹ The land was not just grazed by sheep; it was used for intensive arable farming and vegetable production for estate cash crops and home consumption.

Duntroon Estate Cottages Neighbouring Blundells

Initially, workers on the Duntroon Estate were housed in slab huts, but as the estate consolidated more permanent cottages were constructed.

In the Limestone Plains Molonglo Valley the most common cottages were built of slab, but about a third of residences were made of stone or brick. Building in the remote bush required use of local materials and the Limestone Plains offered yellow box eucalyptus, locally quarried volcanic stone from Mt Ainslie, limestone and abundant clay. The limestone was also burned to produce lime, an essential ingredient for mortar and paint. Most of the stone cottages on the Limestone Plains were built of rubble construction—that is the stone was not cut to shape or 'dressed' to a high degree. Stone and brick cottages were usually larger than the slab cottages and about half the cottages had separate kitchens used not only for cooking but also other domestic work and to act as dormitory accommodation for boys and young men.³²

²⁸ Baylis, J, 1880, 'Plan shewing road between the Queanbeyan and Murrumbidgee Road and the Yass and Queanbeyan Road by Canberra Ford, County of Murray: proposed to be opened as a Parish Road under the Act of Council 4, William IV, No11, 1880', NLA: MAP G8971.G46, 458690.

²⁹ Freeman Collett & Partners Pty Ltd, 1994, Blundells' Cottage Precinct Conservation Management Plan, pp18-19

³⁰ NAA: A358 (A358/2), 21, Letter No 2, Field Book B105.

³¹ NAA: A358 (A358/2), 21, Letter No 2, Field Book B105.

³² Young L 2007, p13.

In the 1850s Duntroon lime burner and stonemason George Rottenberry helped to build a number of stone and brick cottages on the estate. On the northern Molonglo River flats and surrounding area, these included Blundells Cottage, Anderson's Cottage and Young's Cottage. Only Blundells Cottage survives. These cottages were characterised by an unevenly pitched roof, shorter to the front and longer to the back. Until the 1860s/1870s, cottages were roofed with bark or timber shingles, often upgraded with an overlay of corrugated iron. Iron roofs were longer lived and also allowed water harvesting into tanks for a household water supply.

Blundells Cottage

The cottage known as Blundells was built by George Campbell of Duntroon around 1860 as a tied cottage to house an estate employee. It was located above the river flood level and near a strategic fording place on a track which was known as Church Lane since it also led past the St John's Church. The neighbouring Acton Estate also had tied cottages adjacent to the river crossing later known as Lennox Crossing near the Acton Homestead.

Young's Cottage

Young's Cottage was located to the west of Blundells Cottage close to the St John the Baptist Church. It was a six-roomed stone cottage with facilities for running a blacksmithing operation. Francis Williams conducted a smithy there from 1858 until 1878, expanding his business to include a post office from 1863. His successors at the smithy were Thomas Whitehead and John Warwick, and the property was providing a comfortable 'properly finished' home to Bridget Young by 1913 when it was valued for resumption by the Commonwealth. The post office eventually moved to Ainslie.³³

Murray's Cottage

Murray's Cottage, also known as Glebe Farm, was located to the west of Blundells Cottage on glebe lands fronting the Molonglo River. The land was rented out by the Anglican rector to provide a source of income and the first tenant was John Shumack and his family in 1845. Shumack built a three-roomed slab cottage which, after his death, was rented out to a succession of tenant farmers: the Mackenzie, Line and Slade families. The widowed Mrs Slade married Ebenezer Booth in 1863 and the old slab hut was replaced by a more substantial brick dwelling from which they operated a local shop and bakery. The Booths moved in 1879 to run the post office at the foot of Mount Ainslie. In 1909 the shop and bakery at Glebe Farm was being operated by John Murray and his son. The house was destroyed in a fire in 1923 but plantings of elms and pines mark its spot in Commonwealth Park.

Anderson's Cottage

Anderson's Cottage was another of the small tenant homes provided by the Duntroon Estate. It was situated below a hillock on the lower slopes of Mount Ainslie towards Mount Pleasant in the area of what is today Savige and Garsia streets, Campbell, to the north of Blundells Cottage. It was a typical locally stone-built cottage with a verandah and timber skillion addition. The cottage provided a home to the family of Patrick and Mary Curley from around 1857 to the 1880s. By the time of the Commonwealth resumption of the land the Anderson family was in residence and the shingle roof had been overlaid with iron. The property was valued by the Commonwealth at £100.³⁴

³³ Young L 2007, p24 and NAA: A358 (A358/2), 21.

³⁴ Young L 2007, pp21-22 and NAA: A358 (A358/2), 21, JER Campbell Duntroon Estate, Moriarty valuations.

2.2 Outline History Blundells Cottage and Residents

The cottage was constructed in three main phases which partially relate to the needs of the occupants.

2.2.1 The Ginn Family Residence 1859–1874

Table 2.2 Phases of Cottage Development and Major Alterations

Dates/Historic Phase	Occupants/History	Physical Development of the Cottage and Landscape Changes
1860–1874 Duntroon Estate Early Rural Pastoral	Ginn family residence	The four-bedroom cottage was built on the instructions of Robert Campbell owner of the Duntroon Estate for William (head ploughman on the Duntroon Estate) and Mary Ginn. A slab building may have also been built on the site and remnants of this may remain in the current slab shed. Development of home farm and subsistence vegetable garden In 1874 the Ginn family moved out to their own property Canberra Park selected under the Robertson Land Act.

Cottage Development

Records indicate that in circa 1860 the four room single-storey cottage was built for William Ginn as part of the infrastructure provided by Robert Campbell for employees on the Duntroon Estate.

Family Use of the Cottage

William and Mary Ginn with their two infant sons arrived in Sydney from Hertfordshire, southeast England, as assisted immigrants in July 1857. William Ginn was employed as the head ploughman on the estate first living in a slab cottage near Woolshed Creek. Ginn leased 90 acres from Robert Campbell at £1 per acre a year. This is the location where Blundells Cottage now stands. In late 1859 the Ginn family of parents, two sons and baby daughter moved from a slab cottage near Woolshed Creek to a newly built stone cottage (now known as Blundells) located near a track known as Church Lane, which led from the Anglican Church down across the paddocks of the river flats to a fording place on the Molonglo River. This fording place was known as Church Crossing and later as Scott's Crossing. The Bullock Paddock (named for its use) was in the main bend of the river between the cottage and the Duntroon homestead. The Ginns used the land for farming and general domestic use. In June 1864 Agnes Ginn fell into fire at the cottage burning her hands severely.³⁵ Her sister Gertrude was the first child born at the cottage in August 21 1865.³⁶

The Ginns brought up four children in the cottage and farmed some 60 acres next to the river, working hard to accumulate both experience and capital with which they selected their own lands close to the Limestone Plains. William Ginn selected two lots of 40 acres of land north of the Duntroon Estate. The Ginn family moved to their own property Canberra Park in 1874.

³⁵ *Queanbeyan Age* 4 February 1864, p2.

³⁶ Knowles B1990, p 30.



Figure 2.2 Gertrude and Agnes Ginn (daughters of William and Mary) (Source: NCA collection)

2.2.2 The Blundell Family Residence 1874–1933

Table 2.3 Phases of Cottage Development and Major Alterations

Dates/Historic Phase	Occupants/History	Physical Development of the Cottage and Landscape Changes
1874–1890 Duntroon Estate Established Rural Pastoral	Blundell family residence	<p>George (Duntroon Estate bullock driver) and Flora (midwife) Blundell moved into the cottage as newlyweds. They raised a family of eight children. A slab building from an earlier period of occupation was extended. This slab shed had a larger footprint than of the present shed and had a kitchen area at the northern end (now demolished). The slab shed was used as a kitchen, for dining, sleeping accommodation and as a work room.</p> <p>Home farm and dairy further developed with poultry sheds, dairy, apiary stable and haystacks. Poplars plated in 1890s.</p>
1888/1890–1933 Duntroon Estate until 1913 Commonwealth Lease	Blundell family residence Additional boarders taken in after 1917	<p>Blundell family added two additional rooms to the back of the cottage to accommodate their growing family, necessitating changes to window openings, and a brick and stone bread oven, necessitating changes to the parlour fireplace and external brick chimney.</p> <p>In 1929 a low-level crossing was opened at Scott’s Crossing, increasing traffic along Church Lane.</p> <p>Flora died in 1917 and George died in 1933.</p>

Cottage Development

Flora and George reared eight children at the cottage between 1875 and 1888. Around 1888 they built on the front verandah, two stone rooms in an extension to the southwest and various outbuildings, including a slab shed.

In c. 1888 George Blundell added the front verandah and various outbuildings in both wood and tin.³⁷ Two ships tanks were installed to store water. Two rows of beehives (30 in all) were located to the west of the house. The boundary fences were post and rail with slip gates for gates and the fence around the house and kitchen garden was wire.

In c. 1888 George Blundell and his sons built a slab shed to act as a kitchen adjacent to the house. It was larger than the present slab shed extending both east and north. There was also a slab shed which acted as a workroom. This was located southeast of the kitchen and abutted its corner. The kitchen area (now demolished) to the north of the slab shed had a large galvanised iron fireplace with galvanised iron chimney on the shared wall of the slab shed. The shed was remembered as having no windows and being divided into two rooms.³⁸ Three of the boys appear to have slept in the southern end of this building, perhaps before the 1888 cottage extensions were made.³⁹

In c. 1888/1890, as part of this building project, the cottage was extended with a rear wing to provide additional bedroom accommodation. The bigger room (Room 2) was the girls' bedroom, the smaller one (Room 1) used as a bathroom.

Family Use of the Cottage

George Blundell was born in 1846 at Blundells Hill; his parents' property was further west along the Molonglo at today's Regatta Point. Joseph and Susan Blundell had come to Australia to work for Robert Campbell at the Duntroon Estate. Joseph worked as a stock handler and bullock driver. In the tenant farmer model set up by Campbell they had leased land from the Estate and set up their own farm.⁴⁰

In May 1874 George Blundell, carrier on the Duntroon Estate, married Flora McLennan and they moved to the Ginn's vacant cottage.⁴¹ In October 1875 their first child Flora Susannah (Florrie) Blundell was born. This was the first of eight children successfully reared to adulthood, no mean feat in days lacking vaccinations and proper sanitation.⁴² The last child born in the cottage was HM Blundell, son of Lyle, the youngest Blundell son who was born in 1916.⁴³ Flora as midwife delivered other children in the cottage such as Iris Wilden, the daughter of Frederick Campbell's coachman from Yarralumla.⁴⁴ She also delivered many local babies in other homes such as Jean Edlington at the Duntroon Dairy and Elsie Dun at the Dunn's hut in Majura Lane.⁴⁵

³⁷ Freeman Collet & Partners Ltd 1994, Vol 1, p18.

³⁸ Oral Histories from Jack Blundell and Robin Ginn taken by Mrs Helman for the CDHS.

³⁹ CDHS Newsletter No 79, January 1967.

⁴⁰ Knowles B 1990, p34.

⁴¹ *CDHS Newsletter* No 141, March 1973.

⁴² Knowles B 1990 p 35.

⁴³ *Historical Review*, oral history from 1963 & John Whelen oral history with Nan Phillips February 1983

⁴⁴ *Courier* 11 December 1969.

⁴⁵ *Historical Review* 1983 & *Canberra Times* February 2003

In the 1890s poplar trees were planted round the cottage. George Blundell named the farm 'The Poplars' and it was also known as 'Popular Grove' by 1902. None of these poplars remain on site today and their former location is not known.

The property was run as a small holding with stock yards close to the cottage for cows and lambs, sheds for dairy work and poultry, an apiary of beehives and hay stacks.⁴⁶ The property was identified as a Registered Dairy in a 1910 survey plan.⁴⁷ Flora drove to Queanbeyan each Saturday to sell farm produce and buy provisions.⁴⁸ The establishment of a railway link between Queanbeyan and Sydney in 1887 meant that George Blundell no longer had to haul the wool clip by bullock team as far.⁴⁹ The various outbuildings were used as a blacksmiths and then laundry, as well as a cow shed with dairy, harness and tool rooms.

In 1904-06 only three Blundell children; Ada, Alice and Lyle, remained at home. Violet Meech, their cousin also lived at the cottage with her uncle and aunt. Life revolved around farm jobs, such as milking the nine dairy cows before school and rounding them up from their paddock on the other side of the Molonglo to drive them home after school. Relaxation was sewing, reading and playing Jacks. Playing the piano was another form of entertainment at the cottage and the Blundells had a yellow Beale piano in the parlour (Room 6 against the wall to Room 5) and music and dancing was a common pastime on Saturday evenings.⁵⁰

In 1908 Blundell was leasing Glebe Farm (an area to the north west of the cottage) as well as the immediate cottage paddocks.⁵¹ In 1913 records indicate that George Blundell was renting the cottage with an adjacent paddock of 79 acres and an additional 125 acres (probably Glebe Farm). The larger paddock next to the cottage had a dam behind stock yards to provide water.

After Commonwealth resumption of the Duntroon Estate in 1913, the Blundells applied for permission to stay in the cottage and continued farming amid the developing national capital. Between 1912-1916 George Blundell's bullock teams helped to cart much of the material to construct the first buildings of the National Capital.⁵² Flora Blundell died in 1917 and George rented out spare cottage rooms to boarders until he died in 1933.⁵³

⁴⁶ Knowles B1990, p36.

⁴⁷ Arthur Percival field book survey notes 1910, p5, digitized on actimapi-<
http://actmapi.act.gov.au/fieldbooks/A1-168/A_40/A_40.PDF>

⁴⁸ *CDHS Newsletter*, No 108, November 1969.

⁴⁹ Knowles B 1990,p 39.

⁵⁰ *CDHS Newsletter* No 110, January 1970, Oral history from Mr De Smet.

⁵¹ *Queanbeyan Age* 11 December 1908, p7.

⁵² *Canberra Times* 19 December 1933, p2.

⁵³ Knowles B 1990, p42.



Figure 2.3 Flora Blundell (Source: NCA collection)



Figure 2.4 Herbert Blundell aged 12 (Source: NCA collection)

2.2.3 The Oldfield Family Residence 1933–1958

Table 2.4 Phases of Cottage Development and Major Alterations

Dates/Historic Phase	Occupants/History	Physical Development of the Cottage and Landscape Changes
1933–1958 Commonwealth Lease Developing Federal Capital Infrastructure and Suburbs	Oldfield family residence Additional boarders taken in after 1942 McCauley family 1947–49	Alice and Harry Oldfield occupied the cottage. Harry died in 1942. Slab kitchen demolished in 1930s. The residential capacity of the cottage was increased by enclosing the front verandahs with fibro sheeting. Some modern elements were introduced to the cottage, including a new wood stove in in the back room (Room 2) which became a second kitchen. There was still no electricity or water laid on. Bathroom established in slab shed by 1950s. Latrine trench dug in late 1940s. Cypress trees planted by Alice Oldfield c. 1930 to north and east of cottage. Vegetable garden and poultry sheds used by Alice Oldfield for market gardening venture. 1954 the Australian-American Memorial was erected at Russell. Riverside paddocks were cropped for Lucerne. Alice died in 1958.

Cottage Development

Between 1934 and 1945, the Oldfields demolished the slab kitchen but retained the slab shed. The southern wall of the shed was replaced with double barn doors and the southern room was used as a garage. They also constructed various huts/humpies and kennels at various locations. In circa 1947, a 16 foot latrine trench was dug and a weatherboard toilet constructed. By 1959 a bathroom had been established in the slab shed.

By 1960 the western end of the front verandah was boarded in.⁵⁴

Family Use of the Cottage

Harry and Alice Oldfield were the third long term residents of the cottage. Harry worked as a shepherd for Ken Anderson, who was leasing the 100 acre paddock adjacent to the Molonglo River. Alice Oldfield is known to have cultivated a vegetable garden to the east of the cottage. Alice developed a home farm on the three acres around the cottage, supplying the ever increasing Canberra workforce of labourers and public servants with eggs, poultry, dairy produce and vegetables.⁵⁵ This income was supplemented by renting out a proportion of the cottage to serve the housing shortages then felt in the growing city. The first known boarders at Blundells Cottage were Arthur and Myra Carn who rented rooms from 1939-41.⁵⁶

Harry Oldfield died in 1942 and Alice lived there a further 16 years without the increasingly common conveniences of electricity, sewerage or reticulated water that the new suburbs of Canberra were connected to. She shared the cottage with a succession of temporary boarders seeking a home in the new city. The total number of tenants/boarders (not family members of the lessees) during the Oldfield period was approximately 43.⁵⁷ By the late 1930s/early 1940s a wood stove had been installed in the larger of the two back rooms making it possible to sublet the 1888 extension as a separate residence to a number of different families. Mrs Oldfield occupied the parlour and front bedroom. Lodgers occupied the front verandah, the second bedroom, and the two rear rooms of the 1888 extension. Alice Oldfield died in 1958.



Figure 2.5 Alice Oldfield (Source: NCA collection)



Figure 2.6 Alice Oldfield, in front of the slab shed (Source: NCA collection)

⁵⁴ Oral Histories from Jack Blundell and Robin Ginn taken by Mrs Helman for the CDHS

⁵⁵ Knowles B 1990, pp44–45.

⁵⁶ Carn family history notes in ACT Heritage Library, HMSS 0008, Ann Gugler papers, box 7 & Knowles B 1990 p45.

⁵⁷ Information collected by Jan Blank researching into CDHS newsletters, NCA files and visitor books.

2.2.4 The NCDC Historic Restoration 1958–1963

Table 2.5 Phases of Cottage Development and Major Alterations

Dates/Historic Phase	Occupants/History	Physical Development of the Cottage and Landscape Changes
1958–1963 Conservation Awareness	NCDC historic restoration	The cottage was restored by the National Capital Development Commission according to a plan by architect Morton Herman. Major works included lining the cottage ceilings, removing outlying structures including sheds, fences, sandblasting limewash from stonework, relocating water tanks, rebuilding front verandah and removing fibro cement partition. ⁵⁸ In 1962 Parkes Way opened between Russell and Commonwealth Park.

The Canberra and District Historical Society (CDHS) already had an interest in the historic cottage and were concerned for its preservation in the face of escalating change in Canberra. The late 1950s and early 1960s was a time of great change in Canberra with much planning for the creation and 1963 filling of Lake Burley Griffin as the centrepiece of the new national capital. The location of the cottage was luckily above the water line of the new lake and the cottage was saved from demolition with the assistance of a public campaign by CDHS, who lobbied the National Capital Development Commission (NCDC, the precursor to the NCA). Grenfell Rudduck, Associate Commissioner of the NCDC, supported the cause and commissioned Sir William Holford to provide advice on the issue. Holford's pronounced in February 1961 that:

*Oldfield's cottage is a valuable relic of Canberra's early days. Encircled by trees it could well remain as an object of interest to visitors, without appearing incongruous in its new surroundings. Restored to something like its original state it would make a symbolic foil for the majesty of the Parliament House opposite.*⁵⁹

With two influential and respected advocates in positions of authority, the cottage was conserved by the Commonwealth Government in 1963 according to a conservation plan by Sydney Architect, Morton Herman. Works undertaken at the site included the removal of boarding to the front verandah which had enabled its temporary use as a rented room. Water tanks for collection of roof run off were moved from the northeast corner of house and one was erected to the southeast. Various sheds were also removed.⁶⁰

The Molonglo River and Lake Burley Griffin 1963

The Molonglo River had existed for centuries as a chain of ponds subject to intermittent droughts and floods. Being located on the river flats, the cottage was subject to occasional flood danger, such as in 1870 when waters came up to the cottage flooding sheds, destroying crops and drowning stock, a danger which repeated in 1891 and 1910.⁶¹ Planning and preparations for the installation of Walter Burley Griffin's city centre piece of the lake occurred with lake earthworks,

⁵⁸ Freeman Collet & Partners Ltd 1994, Vol 1, p29.

⁵⁹ Knowles B 1990, p51.

⁶⁰ Herman M 1961, Report to the National Capital Planning Commission Canberra, ACT on Oldfields Cottage, Scotts Crossing Road, Canberra.

⁶¹ Freeman Collet & Partners 1994, CMP, Vol 1, p18.

boundaries, a dam and bridges as the first building projects commenced in 1960. They proceeded quickly, making a scarified wasteland out of the Molonglo River plains.

In 1960, work started on Kings Avenue Bridge which was officially opened on 10 March 1962 by the Prime Minister. This major crossing was built as two separate but aligned bridges of simple structure, each with two carriageways. Most importantly, they were the first permanent high level crossings across the Molonglo floodplain.

By mid-1962 work at the dam was almost completed, as was the construction of the lake edges, topsoiling and grassing of the parklands. As the new lake bed was prepared, colonial stone and slab farm buildings were removed, as was the blacksmith's building near Blundells' Cottage. Landscaping of the lakeshores was continued, with extensive planting of both native and exotic trees under the direction of Richard Clough, especially along the central north shore. Regatta Point Restaurant was constructed in 1963 in time for Queen Elizabeth's visit for the 50th Anniversary of the naming of Canberra. She was able to view the construction of the lake and officially named Commonwealth Park.

The gates of Scrivener Dam were finally closed on 20 September 1963 and the impounding of lake waters began, slowly at first to form the largest artificially made ornamental water feature in Australia, all the more remarkable in this inland location. The lake proved a great landmark attraction to both local residents and visitors. Robert Menzies officially inaugurated Lake Burley Griffin at Regatta Point on 17 October 1964. A day of celebration followed, including a sailing regatta, rowing and canoe races.

Table 2.6 Phases of Cottage Development and Major Alterations

Dates/Historic Phase	Occupants/History	Physical Development of the Cottage and Landscape Changes
1963–1964 Landscaping of Lake and Foreshore with New Roads	Lake Burley Griffin and Kings Park	There were changes in land surface levels around the cottage with removal of outlying paddocks, fencing and outbuildings. The NCDC landscaped the garden and path approaches to the cottage based on aesthetic considerations rather than historic evidence. Most trees and bushes were removed. ⁶²

2.2.5 CDHS Folk Museum of Rural Pioneer Lifestyle 1963–1999

Table 2.7 Phases of Cottage Development and Major Alterations

Dates/Historic Phase	Occupants/History	Physical Development of the Cottage and Landscape Changes
1963–1999 Folk Museum of Rural Pioneer Lifestyle 1890–1910	CDHS The cottage is a museum no longer a family home.	The CDHS managed the cottage and presented it as a house/folk museum to illustrate rural lifestyles from 1890–1910. 1966 Wendouree Drive was sealed and the old farm track was removed. The slab shed was modified to a simple rectangular shape with removal of the Oldfield's lean-to buggy shed. The fireplace, chimney and slab skillion were removed. A small toilet extension was added. In 1971 the cottage ceilings were lined with pine boards from the property at Murrumbateman which was being demolished at the time.

⁶² Freeman Collet & Partners 1994, CMP, Vol 1, p29.

The cottage was leased to the CDHS in 1964, in order to be set up as a folk museum celebrating the history and achievements of the rural pioneers of the district. The keys to the cottage were ceremonially handed over by the Hon JD Anthony as his first official public duty as Minister for the Interior on Canberra Day, 12 March 1964.

The CDHS researched the history of the cottage and the families who lived there, procured collections to furnish the cottage and show the rural lifestyle of the 1890s to 1910, and provided volunteers for guided tours around the cottage. There was no detailed collections policy and display items were sourced as donations from members and friends throughout the district, and from commercial sources as necessary to achieve the desired displays. A ‘pretty cottage garden’ was also established around the cottage using donated stones for paths and cuttings to establish flower beds—many of the stones, bricks and plants coming from surrounding rural properties to which they were in keeping with the character of the cottage and the interpretation intent.⁶³ As with the cottage collections there was no detailed policy for an accurate garden reconstruction and plant donations were accepted from all sources which offered them.

With increasing visitation to the cottage, access was improved. Wendouree Road became a sealed road giving access to the cottage from Constitution Avenue.⁶⁴ In 1964 a stone flagged footpath was established from the lakeside driveway to the entrance of the cottage.⁶⁵ The retaining wall to the northeast of the cottage was probably part of the NCA works in Kings Park at the same time. In 1967 the verandah was re-paved and an adjoining path was set with stones from regional historic properties.⁶⁶

A CDHS working bee on the slab shed and gardening occurred with the planting of native flowers and bushes with the assistance of the Canberra Society for Growing Australian Plants.⁶⁷ A pepper tree was planted in November 1965.⁶⁸ The blacksmith’s forge from the McIntosh property in the Majura Valley installed the slab shed. This forge was one of several on the Duntroon Estate.⁶⁹ In 1969 the NCA installed floodlighting to the building.

2.2.6 Commonwealth Government Operated House Museum 1999–2013 (present)

In 1999 the CDHS sold the cottage collections to the NCA who took over management of the cottage as a history tourism site. Blundells Cottage is now operated by the NCA (successor of the NCDC) as a hands on museum interpreting the past life of workers during the rural period of Canberra’s history. The NCA is currently exploring new interpretations of the cottage and its collections.

Table 2.8 Phases of Cottage Development and Major Alterations

Dates/Historic Phase	Occupants/History	Physical Development of the Cottage and Landscape Changes
1999–2013 (present) House Museum	NCA	The NCA took over management of the cottage and has small refinements to the interior displays and surrounding garden area.

⁶³ *CDHS Newsletters* No 47, March 1964, No 108, November 1969, No 110, January 1970, No 132, April 1972, No 162, April 1975, & No 199, November 1978.

⁶⁴ *CDHS Newsletter* No 73, July 1966.

⁶⁵ *CDHS Newsletter* No 46, January 1964.

⁶⁶ *CDHS Newsletter* No 84, July 1967.

⁶⁷ *CDHS Newsletter* No 47, March 1964.

⁶⁸ *CDHS Newsletter* No 47, November 1965.

⁶⁹ *CDHS Newsletter* No 89, December 1967.

2.3 Historic Themes

2.3.1 Australian Historic Themes Relevant to Blundells Cottage

The Commonwealth has developed a framework of 'Australian Historic Themes' to assist with identifying, assessing, interpreting and managing heritage places and their values. Using historic themes can assist with focusing on the historical values of a place and how these values are represented physically in the place and/or wider context.

The Australian Historic Themes provide a context for assessing heritage values. The themes are linked to human activities in their environmental context. Themes link places to the stories and processes which formed them, rather than to the physical 'type' of place represented. Australian Historic Themes are grouped together by an overarching historic theme, which is further divided into more specific themes and sub-themes. Historic Theme Groups are listed in Table 2.9 below.

Table 2.9 Australian Historic Theme Groups for Blundells Cottage

Number	Historic Theme Group	Sub-theme
1	Tracing the Evolution of the Australian Environment	Appreciating the natural wonders of Australia
2	Peopling Australia	Living as Australia's earliest inhabitants Migrating Promoting settlement Fighting for land
3	Developing Local, Regional and National Economies	Constructing capital city economies Developing primary production Recruiting labour Establishing communications Moving goods and people Farming for commercial profit Altering the environment Feeding people Struggling with remoteness, hardship and failure Marketing and retailing Lodging people Catering for tourists Providing health services
4	Building Settlements, Towns and Cities	Planning township sites Supplying urban services (power, transport, fire prevention, roads, water, light and sewerage) Living with slums, outcasts and homelessness Making settlements to serve rural Australia Remembering significant phases in the development of settlements, towns and cities
5	Working	Working in the home Working on the land
6	Educating	Establishing schools

Number	Historic Theme Group	Sub-theme
7	Governing	Making City-States Federating Australia Establishing regional and local identity
8	Developing Australia's Cultural Life	Making Australian folklore Living in and around Australian homes Living in cities and suburbs Living in the country and rural settlements
9	Marking the Phases of Life	Bringing babies into the world Growing up Forming families and partnerships Growing old



Figure 2.12 View of the site and surrounds from the northwest in the 1950s, showing Blundells Cottage and the study site prior to the filling of the lake. (Source: National Library of Australia)



Figure 2.13 View of the study site and surrounds in 1964 showing the lake. (Source: National Library of Australia)