

Ann Gugler ACT - 10 December 2012

Parliamentary Committee Enquiry into NCA's Development of Land within the Parliamentary Triangle - December 2012

COMMENTS FROM:

Name: Mrs Ann Gugler

Date: 10 December 2012

1. Introduction

Between 1941 and 1959, I lived at 27 Westlake. In the late 1980s I began my research on the area I knew as Westlake - now Stirling Park, Yarralumla. This has resulted in the publication of a number of books, articles in journals etc on the early history of the construction era of Canberra including the area of Stirling Park.¹

My concerns are about the continued whittling away for development of an area of relatively pristine native bushland known as Stirling Park, Yarralumla. This began in 2004 when the area known then as Block 1, Section 128 Stirling Park on the eastern end of the park was passed to the Chinese Embassy for development. The heritage consultants, Navin Officer, carried out a report, which was, in my opinion, superficial in nature, and full of errors. The public, in general, was not asked to comment and it was only that I was asked by Mr Don Bell of the Buru Ngunawal Aboriginal Corporation to attend the meetings that I am aware of the details of events.

Since that time, several more reports have gradually noted the significance of the historical and ecological etc., importance of this unique site, which has survived to 2012.

In pre-historical times, the hills of Stirling Park consisted of an island above a lake on the Canberra Plain. It was, and still is relatively heavily timbered. Many of the trees were fully grown before the arrival of Europeans but because of the poor quality of the soil, the hills were not used for crop growing and only a few sheep to the acre were grazed. This result of this was that the land was not greatly altered or damaged by farming and grazing practices.

The endangered wildflower, the button wrinklewort grows in Stirling Park. The Park was known to the Ngunawal as Guru Bung Dhaura (stony ground) and was part of a pathway from the north side of the river to the south. There are numerous stone arrangements, scarred trees and other areas of significance to the Indigenous people who walked, and still walk this land.²

I am aware that the NCA must locate land for diplomatic purposes and there are limitations to achieving this need. But the removal of the eastern end of the park (Bl 3, Section 128) and the western slope of Stirling Ridge, along with the current proposal to convert the remaining eastern end of the park into diplomatic sites, is not the answer. This would only destroy important historical archaeological sites - not yet fully investigated - and sites of cultural importance to the Indigenous people of this land.

The parkland forms a corridor for the local kangaroo population. It is a small area of native bushland. Signs are still noticeable in the park of the workers and their families who lived in the temporary camps and settlements. These were the men who built the Provisional Parliament House, Hotel Canberra and the main intercepting sewer. The temporary settlement of 61 cottages, known firstly as 'The Gap Cottages', and later as 'Westlake', were in use until 1965 when the last cottage was removed. This was part of Canberra, an area purposely hidden from the view of those persons who lived in the permanent suburbs of the city.

I first began my research in the late 1980s on this area, which I know as Westlake. It originally stretched from the brickyards at Yarralumla to the western side of Capital Hill on the south side of the Molonglo River.³ Considerable information has since been recorded on the importance of this area and placed in the public domain and has resulted in a number of significant environmental and historical aspects of the area being Heritage listed.⁴

In 1998, the ACT Branch of the National Trust was the recipient of a number of grants. This included the compiling of Stirling Park's history and included an overview of the archaeological sites within the park, complete with citations.

Stirling Park was considered important enough for a draft heritage citation to be prepared by Dr Peter Dowling and myself on behalf of the National Trust (ACT) who organised a grant for the project. The book, *Westlake: One of the Vanished Suburbs of Canberra*, arose from this document. I believe the ACT Heritage Unit has since misplaced the original document.

A NCA Report, prepared by Dr Robert Boden in 1994, refers and documents the native flora and fauna in Stirling Park, including the Button Wrinklewort (an endangered species). Part of this investigation included verifying the remains of human habitation. During this process, an archaeologist walked the area with me and noted various

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sites. I believe this report, including its maps, has been mislaid by the NCA. Blocks 1 and 2, Section 128, were excluded from the area examined.

Concrete posts, painted yellow, marked the sites, and the sites were also marked on two maps - copies of which were passed to me. The NCA could not locate their maps for the Godden Mackay and Logan report of 2009, and I loaned my copies to this firm and to the NCA to re-copy.

The *Westlake Settlement in The Gap's* former residents raised money in 1998 for two plaques and signage for the area. Some of the oldest men planted a tree. The NCA provided the stones for the plaques and the tree and together we chose the sites.

I have led numerous walks in the park and two walk brochures have been produced - one for the ACT Branch of the National Trust and the other for the Heraldry & Genealogy Society of Canberra Inc.

2. Aboriginal Sites Within the Park

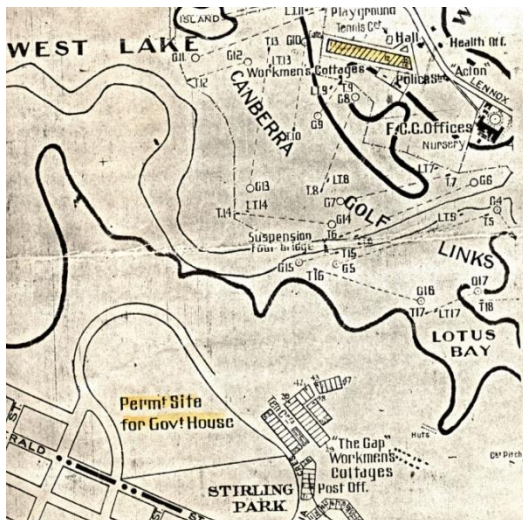
As part of this work the ACT Heritage Dept organized for Ms Kevi Read (deceased), an Indigenous person, to examine the area of Stirling Park on their behalf to note Aboriginal sites within the area. It was she who identified the Aboriginal Scarred Trees referred to in the Godden Mackay Logan report as *not being identified as Aboriginal*. This myth has continued.

Mr Don Bell (deceased), Ngunawal elder, later confirmed Ms Read's identification. He also identified other trees of significance and stone arrangements within the park. Dr Karen Williams and Mr John Bruggeman (who have assisted with documentation of European evidence of occupation within the park) have walked the park with Don and me. Don informed all of us of the significance of the hills in the cultural landscape of the Ngunawal.

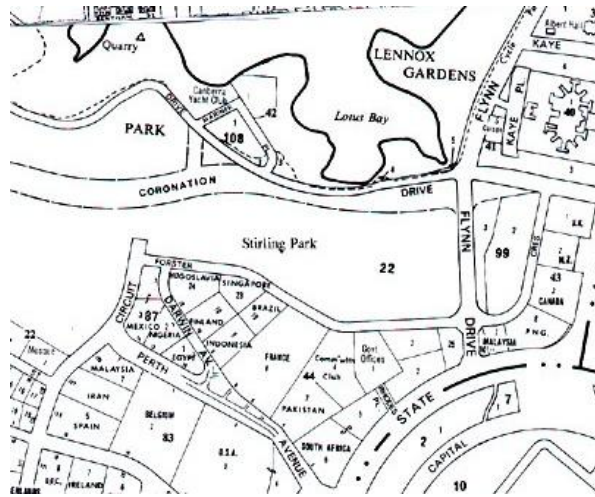
3. The Changing Shape of Stirling Park, Yarralumla



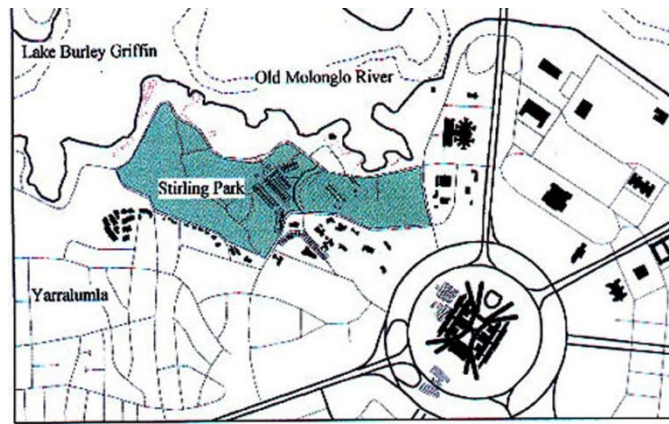
Above: Stirling Park Yarralumla, former Westlake (c1913-1965) Guru Bung Dhaura hills (Ngunawal). The photograph was taken around 1944 (courtesy of Archives ACT: Aerial-No. 20). The building on the centre left is the American Embassy under construction. The road in the lower portion is part of State Circle and Cotter Road (Adelaide Avenue). The landscape shown in this aerial photograph had changed little from 1920s. Renewed construction of the city and Lake Burley Griffin did not recommence until the 1950s and 1960s.



Left: A 1927 Map showing the proposed site for the Permanent Government House and the area designated as Stirling Park, Yarralumla. The sites of Westlake Cottages in 'The Gap' are shown along with the 13 remaining Howie's Cottages and the cubicle huts of Howie's Hostel Camp. The proposed line of the lake is marked with a black line. After construction, Lotus Bay was a slightly different shape. The Westlake Tennis Court was built above No. 39 Westlake. The recent NCA Draft Amendment 78: Stirling Ridge and Attunga Point, refers to this historic map, which marks the site for a Permanent Government House and Stirling Park



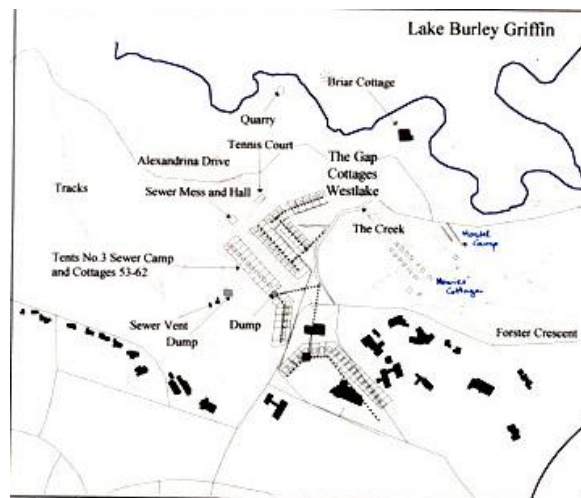
Above: A 1987 map showing the eastern end of Stirling Park, then designated as Section 22.



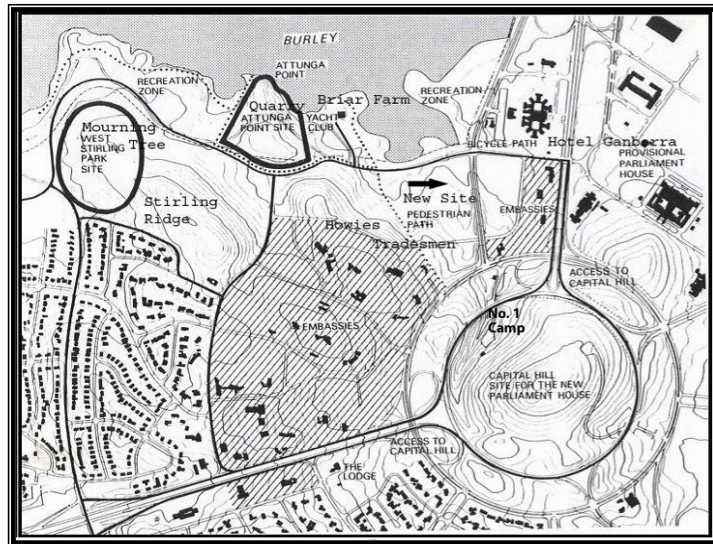
Stirling Park (Westlake)
on Klensendorff's Land
Portion 7, Parish of Narrabundah, County of Murray on the Limestone Plains.

Above: A 1997 map prepared for the book: Westlake One of the Vanished Suburbs of Canberra. This shows the full extent of Stirling Park at that time with the area of the Westlake Cottages in The Gap and Howie's Settlement in the area of Block 3, Section 128 to the right.

Below: A detail of the area showing the modern roads as lines and embassy sites marked.



The Gap, Westlake



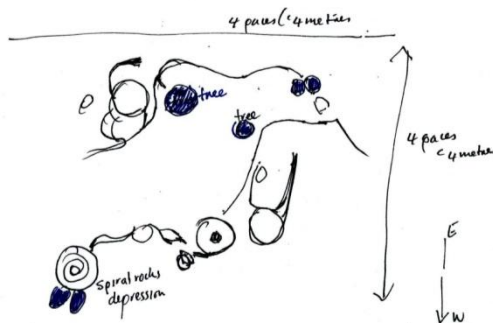
Above: The 1978 Official Establishment's publication showing the proposed sites for a new PM's Lodge. The third site, not shown on this map, was Collins Park. The final choice was Attunga Point. I added the words, 'Mourning Tree' - identified by Mr Don Bell, Ngunawal elder - and 'Briar Farm, Howies, Tradesmen and No. 1 Camp'. The site of No. 1 Camp was on the western side of Capital Hill.

The decision to allow construction on the former Block 1, Section 128, *without* a full archaeological investigation, resulted in the loss of a number of stone arrangements. These stretched back around 150 metres from the Alexandrina Drive end of the block.

At the time, the NCA held a copy of my work, *A History of Human Habitation of Stirling Park*, which I had provided for their use in 2003. Very shortly afterwards, someone interfered with some of the arrangements. A couple of these arrangements consisted of two glass jars, each with a white quartz river rock in front. The jars were removed.⁵ It was also noted, just prior to the meeting on-site with Navin Officer's consultant, someone had removed stones from the majority of stone arrangements. It was noticed that these stones lay nearby, thrown out of alignment. One large arrangement was claimed by Navin Officer's consultant to be a rock-lined garden bed, and a number of the stones were missing. These stones were returned some weeks later, *after* the investigation had taken place. I photographed the damaged stone arrangements the next day, and at that time the holes left by the removed rocks had, unlike the previous day, leaf litter in them.

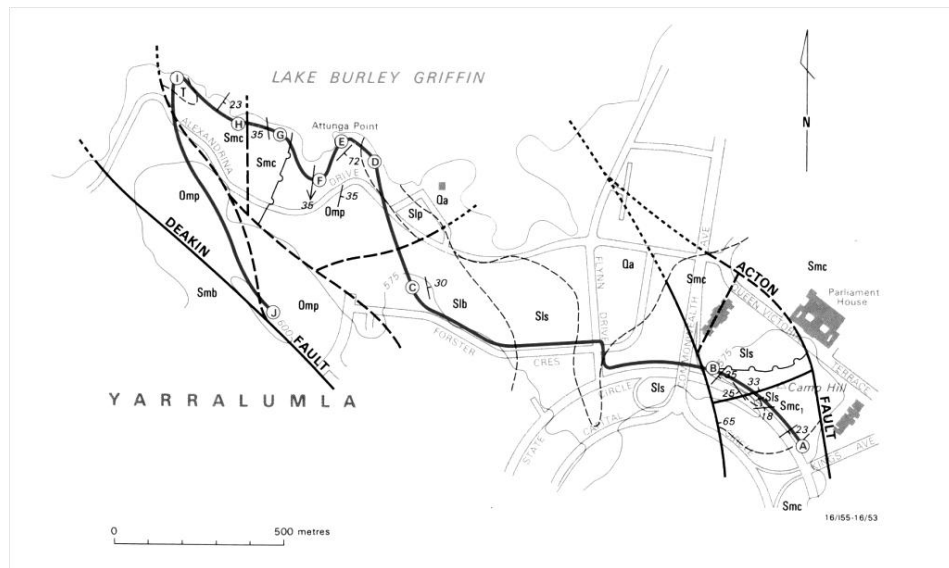
The Navin Officer report of 2004 referred to two of the major stone arrangements as 'remnant garden beds' - in an area where housing was known not to exist! This area was fenced off in accordance with Mr and Mrs Bell's instructions. The fencing formed part of their agreement, and they were told that this area would not be resumed for diplomatic use. The Bell's refused to sign unless this was done, and subject to this, they signed a form of release. They were told that the alternative was to take the NCA to court.

The NCA did not fence off these two stone arrangements and consequently they have been damaged. They lie near the grounds of the Chinese Embassy's Annex. The rest of the stone arrangements have since been destroyed. Mr John Bruggeman and I documented some of them, but today there is a limited visual reminder of the arrangements. Other arrangements similar to these are found throughout the park.



Left: A diagram of the second largest stone arrangement and below a photograph of the spiral rocks depression. This was described in the Navin Officer Report as a remnant garden bed. Right: A photograph of part of this stone arrangement.

4. Significant Natural and Historical Aspects of the Park, including a number of Heritage Listings.



The above map showing the fault lines within Stirling Park is found in 'Geology of Canberra Queanbeyan and Environs. Notes to accompany the 1980 1:50,000 Geological Map'... The geology of Attunga Point (E) is sandstone and shale representing the topmost beds of Pittman Formation (Omp) in small quarry at Attunga Point; shale was used for brickmaking.⁶...

The significance of the land is found in the references of a number of reports and the citation lists a number of these.

For example, in his book, *The Ecological Resources of the ACT*, David Shorhouse (1984) stated that Stirling Park was the only remaining area of savannah woodland close to Lake Burley Griffin. Dr Robert Boden in his report to the NCA in 1994 (and quoted in the 1999 National Trust ACT citation, prepared by Dr Peter Dowling and myself for Stirling Park) wrote the following:

This (Section A) and adjacent areas of Stirling Park are the only remaining areas of savannah woodland close to Lake Burley Griffin (Frawley 1991). They also contain the major remaining population of the nationally endangered button wrinklewort... The continued survival of the button wrinklewort in the wild depends upon conservation viable self-perpetuating populations on national land in Stirling Park. This may be the only example in temperate Australia of a plant species whose survival is the direct responsibility of the Australasian rather than a state or territory government. This places a significant responsibility for most of Stirling Park ... Leeton and Fripp found morphological differences between the Victorian and NSW/ACT populations in both states (sic) are protected so that the generic variability of the species is maintained.

Dr Boden also referred to the surviving trees and plants from the Stirling Park camps and settlements. These included numerous rowan trees, hawthorn bushes and a Californian big Tree.

Concern about the endangered wildflower is reinforced in a 1998 report - *Action Plans for Protecting ACT's Threatened Species*, which in part states:

*In accordance with Section 21 of the Nature Conservation Act 1980 the Button Wrinklewort (*Rutidosia leptorrhynchoides*) was declared an endangered species on 15th April 1996 (formerly Determination no.29 of 1996 and currently Determination no. 89 of 1997) and Section 23 of the Act required the Conservator of Flora and Fauna to prepare an Action Plan in response to each declaration...*

In his report, Dr Boden also drew attention to the significant regrowth of areas of native grasses, yellow box and red gum trees in the park. He also noted the remnant garden beds in the area of our cottages in The Gap, and he made a list of all the trees and shrubs growing in the park.

The most recent Heritage Listing of the Button Wrinklewort was made by the ACT Heritage Unit and is dated March 2011. The area of the button wrinklewort is throughout the entire area of the park and section of Capital Hill. The exception was a small section on the western side of Stirling Ridge in the vicinity of the proposed area for diplomatic use.

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Another recent Heritage Listing by the ACT (August 2011) is for Canberra's Main Outfall Sewer, including the Sewer Vent and the surrounding area on Stirling Ridge, and other sections of the park including Block 3, Section 128.

5. Conclusion

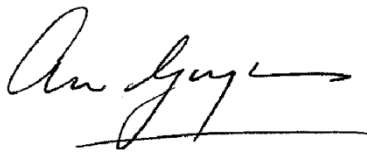
In 2003 I wrote an introduction to *A History of Human Habitation of Stirling*. I quote the following from that publication and I believe this still rings true and is still pertinent today:

What is clear is that this small parcel of land known today as Stirling Park, Yarralumla is a significant and important cultural landscape that has survived development and holds evidence of man's temporary use of it from Pre-European times through to the construction workers camps and settlements of Westlake (1922-1965). It is home to many native creatures and plant life including the endangered flower - button wrinklewort. This land holds clues to the unwritten history of the Aboriginal and working classes of the ACT whose local history has been neglected in favour of the 19th century Aboriginal, Colonial and Post 1927 arrival of government departments. [and I could add - the Federal Story.]

Stirling Park is a small island of land in the centre of the city that has survived and may it continue to survive for the use of the people of Canberra and a reminder of the land the people who lived there before the city.

The NCA is limited in the choice of land for diplomatic use and has been, I believe, forced to consider the area of Stirling Park. In their present report, they have tried to protect part of the heritage of the area but are put in a position where they have had to consider the eastern end of the park, which holds significant natural and cultural heritage pertaining to the history of our city and to a time before the city.

It is time that a review is made and a full archeological survey of the entire area is completed by a competent and fully versed heritage/archeological consultant.



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Appendix

Until 2001, Stirling Park, Yarralumla survived as open space undeveloped land that was in name only, a public park. In 2004, under the leadership of Mrs A Pegrum, this myth was dispelled when a large portion of the subdivided block next to Flynn Drive was passed to the Chinese Embassy for diplomatic use.

Around the late 1980s, the process of subdividing the area known as Stirling Park began and has continued to the present day with the area of Block 3, Section 128, now removed from open space to diplomatic use. Block 2 is administered by the ACT has remained open space.

In 1997, I first contacted the National Capital Authority (NCA) in regard to Stirling Park, Yarralumla. From that time until the present I have submitted information for a number of reports between 2004 and 2012:

- 2004 - Navin Officer Report: Block 1, Section 128, Stirling Park
- 2009 - Godden, Mackay & Logan Report: Section 22 and Blocks 1 and 3, Stirling Park.
- 2012 - SGS Economics & Planning Pty Ltd regarding the western side of Stirling Ridge.
- November 2012 - National Capital Plan Draft Amendment 78, Stirling Ridge and Attunga Point.

The 2004 Navin Officer Report was *not* open to public scrutiny. The 2009 Godden Mackay Logan Report was open for public comment, but included a clause to vindicate the decisions made to allow development of Block 1, Section 128, based on the Navin Officer Report of 2004.

Godden, Mackay Logan Report comment: The STIRLING PARK Lake Burley Griffin Heritage Assessment, 4.4.2, page 51, states:

The Chair of the Buru Ngunawal Aboriginal Corporation, Don Bell, has stated that the stone arrangements in the eastern section of Stirling Park outside the study have cultural significance to Aboriginal people. These stone arrangements have been subject to previous archaeological assessment and have been, we believe, conclusively identified as being the remains of stone-edged garden beds/tree plantings and European in origin...

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The November 2012 Draft Amendment 78, is clearly a document that acknowledges the significance of the people who lived in Westlake Settlement (1924-1965) and the ecological values etc., of the natural landscape in the area of Stirling Ridge (Section 22). It, however, fails to recognize the same values that are present in the area of Block 3, Section 128. This may be because of the pressures to provide further areas for diplomatic use in the area of the park.

I hold copies of the following files, which are available if required.

1. 2004 Navin Officer Report and my comments sent to NCA.
2. 2009 Godden Mackay Logan Report and my comments.
3. 2012 Report Assessment of Three Sites for Diplomatic Use
4. Conservation Management Plans for Sites Managed by the NCA...
5. March 2011 Button Wrinklewort Heritage Listing
6. 2011 Heritage Listed Main Outfall Sewer - part of which is Stirling Ridge
7. A number of updated files showing sites (GPS) within the park marked on Google maps.
8. 1999 Draft Citation for Stirling Park - on behalf of National Trust ACT Branch
9. Stirling Park Time Line - Submission for 2013 proposal
10. Updated information on recent discoveries re the site of Howie's Hostel Camp in the area of Block 3, Section 128 and other research work to document sites carried out in the park by myself, Dr Karen Williams and Mr John Bruggeman. Many of these are available on my web pages.

¹ Overview of interest in the area of Stirling Park and outline of some of my research work and publications: Between 1941 and 1959 I lived at 27 Westlake. In the late 1980s I began to research the history of Westlake that resulted in a study and continued study of Canberra's Camps & Temporary Settlements – the homes of construction workers. This resulted in the following books:

1992 – The Builders of Canberra 1909-1929

1997 – Westlake One of the Vanished Suburbs of Canberra

1998 – True Tales from Canberra's Vanished Suburbs of Westlake, Westridge & Acton

2003 – CD with hard copy – A History of Human Habitation of Stirling Park

2009 – A Story of Capital Hill

2010 – present time: Draft copy of revised Builders of Canberra 1909-1929

My Websites : Canberra Camps, Settlements and Early housing – <http://canberracamps.webs.com>

Hidden Canberra – <http://hiddencanberra.webs.com>

Early Canberra – <http://www.earlycanberra.webs.com>

Glimpses of Early Canberra – <http://canberraglimpses.webs.com>

Canberra's Electoral Rolls – <http://canberraelecrolls.webs.com> Here, I have transcribed and placed people in suburbs/settlements/streets etc – in alphabetical order.

Two articles in CDHS' Canberra Historical Journal – one on Scrivener's Plan Room on Capital Hill and the

other

on Contractor John Howie's Settlement in the area of Blk 3, Section 128 Stirling Park, Yarralumla.

I have also:

- published articles in CDHS newsletter and their Canberra History News, and National Trust journals
- held exhibitions showing photographs, memorabilia and so on;
- Lectured and led walks in Stirling Park etc.

² Mr Don Bell's father was James Carroll, his mother, Christina Brown. After James Carroll's death, his mother married a second time, to a Bell. Don consequently took his stepfather's name of Bell. He visited the sites around Capital Hill annually with his parents and siblings and it was here where they camped. It was his father's duty to conserve a number of sacred sites and these duties were passed on to his youngest son, Mr Don Bell. Following Don's death, his youngest son, Tyrone continues these duties. (see Don Bell's 'The Story of the Carrolls' in True Tales from Canberra's Vanished Suburbs... by Ann Gugler, pp. 11-12.

³ In 1917, Walter Burley Griffin named the area west of Stirling Ridge, 'Westridge'. In 1927 this area was officially renamed, 'Yarralumla', but continued to be known as Westridge to the locals into the 1960s.

⁴ During my research I discovered that work on the natural heritage of the area of the park had already resulted in a number of Heritage Listings both national and local.

⁵ The assumption perhaps was made during preparations for the lake that these arrangements dated from the 1960s. This assumed that Aboriginal people had not continued their cultural practices since the arrival of Europeans. This ideology is incorrect and irrelevant – they have continued to use the area and still do. Shortly before the first on-site meeting with Navin Officer, stones were removed from most of the major stone arrangements. Some were removed from the site and reappeared around a fortnight later, albeit thrown behind a tree. I photographed the arrangements with missing stones the next day. At that time the majority of the holes, left by the removal of stones, had a very small amount of leaf litter in them, which suggested that the removal occurred just a short time before the meeting on-site.

⁶ Along the line of the Deakin Fault on Stirling Ridge there are a number of large stones, around 600mm x 300mm with a height of around 200mm. When I was walking the area with a Ngarigo lady, I pointed to the stones and she said –'Ley line'. This is the line of the Deakin Fault.

