

Australian Institute of Architects ACT Chapter
Register of Significant Architecture

RSA No: R139

Name of Place: The Oaks

Other/Former Names: Elmsall Inn, Willow Bank, Bannockburn,

Address/Location: Railway Street, Oaks Estate ACT 2911
Block 16 Section 2 of Oaks Estate

Listing Status:	Listed	Other Heritage Listings:	ACT Register
Date of Listing:	May 2018	Level of Significance:	Territory
Citation Revision No:		Category:	Residential
Citation Revision Date:		Style:	Old Colonial Georgian

Date of Design:	1837	Designer:	
Construction	1838	Client/Owner/Lessee:	Robert Campbell

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

The Oaks dates from c.1837 and is significant for a range of reasons related to its form, construction, intactness and many historical associations. It is important as a relatively large and high quality homestead constructed as part of Robert Campbell's Duntroon Estate for members of the Campbell family. In particular, it remains in much the same form as when it was first constructed over 170 years ago. However, while constructed for this purpose, it was not actually used by the Campbell family. It is a notable and rare building from the early colonial period and an important example of a cottage in the Old Colonial Georgian Style (1788-c1840). Indicators of the style are its symmetrical facades, medium pitch hipped roof originally wood shingled, verandah under main roof, sash windows with small panes, panelled doors and exposed stone walling. Its Palladian form adapted to suit the local climate, due to the verandah with slender posts resembling a colonnade between pavilions, is characteristic of the style.

The Oaks has a strong association with the development of the region during its early colonial occupation, with the expansion of Robert Campbell's Duntroon Estate, and the development of Queanbeyan and the local community. The Oaks started as an expansion of the Duntroon Estate to house relatives of Robert Campbell although it was not ultimately used for this purpose. Duntroon was one of the earliest and most important pastoral estates in the region. The Oaks became the region's first licensed inn, the Elmsall Inn, and combined with the conjoined store and the resident local Presbyterian Church Warden, was a hub of social activity. The adjoining fields were used as the region's de-facto burial ground. From 1848 The Oaks became the region's first hospital as Dr William Foxton Hayley took up residence, and it was a place that saw the births, deaths and medical care of many of the pioneers of the region. The Oaks operated as a hospital from the early 1840s until 1861 when the Queanbeyan Hospital was opened, after which it was still used by members of the medical profession well into the 1880s. The Oaks is important as evidence of the provision of home-based medical services provided by individual doctors, in the era prior to institutional services in the region.

The Oaks also played a key role in the 1880s development of the railway link from Goulburn to Queanbeyan when the Queanbeyan railway station was built in one of its adjoining fields and the house once more became an inn. The influence of The Oaks on the area is most prominent in the subdivision of its immediate property in 1888 into Oaks Estate with the expectation that it would be the site for business opportunities offered by the new railway. At this time The Oaks retained and still does retain the largest non-commercial block in what is now the suburb of Oaks Estate.

Description

The Oaks is a Old Colonial Georgian style building constructed from roughly-shaped regional stone laid in rough courses on top of similarly constructed stone footings. The rough shaping and coursing are descriptive terms and it is mostly due to the nature of the locally acquired stone; the stonemasonry is actually of a high quality. The stone is mostly exposed, but appears to have been lime washed originally and broadly pointed with the pointing scored to indicate the courses. The pointing has occurred at least twice and there was an additional cement render applied to the northern facade in the early 20th century, which was removed by the early 1950s. The building has a rectangular form and is balanced and symmetrical. The front/northern facade has a large verandah with slender posts which is flanked by gable-ended wings that can be accessed directly off the verandah or internally. The verandah has a non-original cement floor that is cracking and subsiding in places. The facade that faces the verandah is rendered and painted white. All of the original windows on the northern facade have been replaced, probably in the early to mid 20th Century. The east facade small-paned sash windows are original as well as the two similar windows on the east side of the south facade. The south and north entrances are six-panelled solid wood doors with sidelights. There are two small-paned sash dormer windows to the attic on the north side of the roof and three on the south side. The roofing material is corrugated iron, overlying older wood shingles.

The detached kitchen has a stone walls on the west, similar in design to the main house, and brick walls on the north, east and south with doors on the north and east. The floor is paved in brick and the roof is covered by corrugated iron overlying older wooden shingles.

The wood slab carriage shed is located to the west and south of the house and is made from adzed timbers with several newer sawn timber slabs used as maintenance required replacement of materials. The shed has four openings facing the east with the northern half of the facade replaced by newer materials with doors. The roof is corrugated iron. There is a building shown on the same location in the 1915 survey map, although it appears to be of a slightly different form, indicating that it either post-dates this, or was extended afterwards; the materials suggest that it was extended and as such the original section may date from when the place was being used as an inn, either in the 1840s or 1880s.

Condition

In 2014 the place appeared in good condition commensurate with its age. The northeast corner of the building has some cracking in the walls and the later concrete surface of the northern verandah. Despite the cracking, the place is in a stable condition. The external lime wash has mostly come away from the stone faces, but remains intact as pointing. There are several instances where other material, such as concrete, has been used as a patching material. A brick chimney had been added to the southern end of the western facade wall, but was demolished in the mid- 1970s and the resulting hole patched.

History

The first European settlers in the Canberra region were the employees of John Joshua Moore, who set up a large stock grazing station in what is now the suburb of Acton. Soon to follow and acquire most of the land that now comprises the ACT were Robert Campbell, James Ainslie (Campbell's overseer), George Thomas Palmer, John Macpherson, Thomas Walker and Terence Aubrey Murray. These landholdings were primarily used for grazing of stock by overseers. Apart from Macpherson, it was not until the mid- to late-1830s that many of the landowners actually lived on their holdings and began to form a community.

In 1826, James Ainslie arrived in Limestone Plains after learning of it from an Aboriginal woman. Ainslie drove sheep from Bathurst to the plains for Robert Campbell Senior, the son of a town clerk of Greenock, Scotland. Campbell established the estate of Duntroon which consisted of approximately 17,000 acres, extending from Molonglo to the Hume Valley. Campbell was a respected merchant, pastoralist and philanthropist and settled in Australia in 1800. During the course of his life, he held distinguish appointments, including magistrate and naval officer and also was a member of the NSW Legislative Council from 1825 until 1843. His main residence was Duntroon House, today part of the Royal Military College.

In 1837 Robert Campbell was granted an extra 1,040 acres of land south of the Molonglo River adjacent to his Duntroon holdings, including the area that is today the suburb of Oaks Estate. He had a large stone cottage, today The Oaks, built that was similar in style to the original part of Duntroon House. It was intended to house relatives who were expected to emigrate to Australia, however, this did not occur and subsequently he leased the house and property to William Hunt and Joseph Kaye. Hunt and Kaye obtained an inn licence

in 1838 and the house became known as the Elmsall Inn until 1841 when they moved the inn to the newly declared town of Queanbeyan. The Elmsall, the first licensed inn for the region, also served as the local store and the grounds to the east of the building were used as an unofficial cemetery for many years.

The inn is an important institution in the history and development of Australia. A few early settlements in Australia had churches, but there was always an inn. Inns were part of the transport and communication network of early Australia and the movement of goods and people relied on them. They were more than just convenient places to collect the mail and have a drink; they were places to discuss local news, organise business and socialise – places to build communities. Innkeepers were generally the most sedentary of the local residents, as well as being the most centrally located, so they often became officials such as postmasters, constables or pound-keepers. The central social role of Elmsall Inn is reflected in Hunt being the Prebesterian Church Warden and its fields being used as the unofficial burial ground for the area.

From the 1820s through to 1840s, the licensing laws went through a series of changes requiring premises to include accommodation and provisions for horses and carriages, changed opening hours, separated the selling of other goods, dictated the types of signage to include the licensee's name and include lighting during the night, and separating the tap room that led to the adoption of the counter bar. This can be seen at The Oaks with the separate carriage yards and noted historically with the bark hut store that Hunt and Kaye had set up.

The Oaks and an area of 100 acres, slightly larger than the current area of Oaks Estate, was transferred to Robert Campbell's son Charles in 1840 and was later leased to Dr William Foxton Hayley. Dr Hayley was the region's first doctor and was well known throughout the area. The large house of The Oaks became the default hospital (the first official hospital opened in Queanbeyan in 1861) and was the recorded location for several births and deaths. Dr Hayley lived at The Oaks until 1868 after which it became the residence for a series of medical professionals into the 1880s, including Doctors Prowd Lambert, Newton, Johnson and McQueen.

In 1877 Charles Campbell sold The Oaks and the 100 acres of land to John Bull. In 1880, Bull sold The Oaks and 12 acres of land to George Tomsitt. This also included the wool washing and fellmongery business that is today the Hazelbrook property as well as a right of passage between the two locations. The rest of the 100 acres was sold to William Price in 1885 who then brought the land under the Real Property Act 1862 (which would facilitate the later sub-division by making it easier, quicker and cheaper to break up and sell the land).

It was in 1887 that the railway reached Queanbeyan with the station being situated south of The Oaks within the 100 acres that Campbell sold to Bull seven years earlier. The Oaks was run as an inn again by Matthew McCalister from 1886 to 1887 to try and take advantage of the new nearby station. It was at the start of October 1887 that Tomsitt tried to take advantage of the business opportunity presented by the new railway by expanding the wool washing and fellmongery business that he acquired from Bull. The Queanbeyan Wool-Scouring, Meat-Freezing & Tannery Company was formed (with the provisional directors of Tomsitt and Price along with A. M. Dulhunty, George Harcourt, H. J. Dixie, Daniel Leahy, and Charles Ross) with a prospectus looking for £16,000 to expand upon the existing business, including connecting it to the railway via a siding and buying around 800 acres of surrounding land. However, the business venture was unsuccessful.

The Oaks was leased to various people up until 1892 when Tomsitt was killed. It was from this time that George and Jane Lesmond took up residence in the property and officially became the owners in 1895 through the executors of Tomsitt's estate. The Lesmonds renamed The Oaks "Willow Bank". In 1905 the Lesmonds sold the property to Emma Matilda Knox who renamed it "Bannockburn". She died in 1919 and bequeathed the property to her daughter Jean Violet Knox. Jean Violet Knox petitioned the government to acquire the property so that the ownership of the property could be settled due to the uncertainty of a freehold property now being a part of the Federal Capital.

The lead up to the formation of the National Capital is a long and complex story, but the border came into effect in 1911. This administrative border figuratively separated Oaks Estate from Queanbeyan, which geographically they were only separated by a rail track and a few metres. The building program of the capital attracted many workers to the region, with most of them living in workers camps while others moved into established areas nearby, such as Queanbeyan and Oaks Estate. One further act of the establishment of the capital that was to have a profound effect on Oaks Estate was the Seat of Government (Administration) Act 1910 which, as well as establishing a legal framework among other things, stated that no land could be held by freehold as well as freezing the price of land for government procurement. The Commonwealth did not think that it was feasible to acquire all the land at once and would only do so as the land was required. This made things difficult for people who owned freehold land in Oaks Estate because few people were willing to buy land without knowing if it would be acquired or not. This state of affairs existed until 1974 when all the remaining freehold properties in Oaks Estate were acquired by the Commonwealth. The Oaks was bought in 1973 by Keith and Furze Hewitt. The property, along with all the remaining freehold properties in Oaks

Estate, was resumed by the Commonwealth in 1974, at which point the Hewitts decided to lease the property back. The Hewitts, like the Jaegers, were passionate about the historic property and set about restoring it to as close to its original condition as they could. Grace Furze Hewitt died in 2017, aged 93.

ANALYSIS AGAINST THE HERCON CRITERIA ADOPTED IN THE ACT IN SEPTEMBER 2014:

a. Importance in the course or pattern of the ACT's cultural or natural history

The Oaks meets this criterion.

The Oaks was originally constructed c.1837 to house family of one of the region's most successful and influential pastoralists, Robert Campbell, and as such was built to a much higher standard than many other places of that era. It demonstrates a standard of living that was only available to a small number of people at the time. The stonemasonry using local stone is a tradition that is in danger of being lost as modern materials, or better quality material from farther afield that can be transported more easily with modern equipment, are favoured and traditional building methods and practitioners are becoming less common. Additionally the design is of exceptional interest as most of the region's early colonial architecture is more modest (e.g. Crinigan's Hut Ruins or many of the huts in Namadgi), and/or has expanded over time (e.g. Duntroon, Woden Homestead, Blundell's Cottage, Mugga Mugga), whereas The Oaks is unusual in that it has remained relatively unchanged and retains a high degree of intactness.

b. has uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of the ACT's cultural or natural history

The Oaks meets this criterion.

There are few remaining buildings from the early colonial settlement of the region and The Oaks is an extremely rare example of a building that was a high quality construction of substantial size and has retained a high degree of intactness. Many of the early colonial homesteads in the area, such as Duntroon and Lanyon, started as modest structures that expanded into large sprawling complexes as needs and means arose, while those that were less successful were abandoned and fell into disrepair. The Oaks avoided this situation as it was built by Robert Campbell in a time when he was already successful and established in the area; it was a substantial structure from the start.

d. Importance in demonstrates the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or objects

The Oaks meets this criterion.

The Oaks is a substantial colonial era stone cottage that is particularly notable for its initial design and high degree of intactness. It is an important example of a cottage in the Old Colonial Georgian Style (1788-c1840). Indicators of the style are its symmetrical facades, medium pitch hipped roof originally wood shingled, verandah under main roof, sash windows with small panes, panelled doors and exposed stone walling. Its Palladian form adapted to suit the local climate, due to the verandah with slender posts resembling a colonnade between pavilions, is characteristic of the style.

Whilst there are other large colonial era stone cottages in the ACT, such as Duntroon or Lanyon, The Oaks has managed to retain a high degree of intactness most likely as a result of being built as a large pastoralist's cottage, but immediately being leased out. This meant that instead of following the usual path of growth and expansion that the other large pastoralist cottages went through as the owners became more affluent and the families expanded, needing more room, The Oaks was leased by, and then later owned by, businesses or families who were able to maintain the place, but did not have the resources to, or did not need to, expand the building as time went on. The building remains in much the same state as when it was first constructed over 170 years ago.

Reference

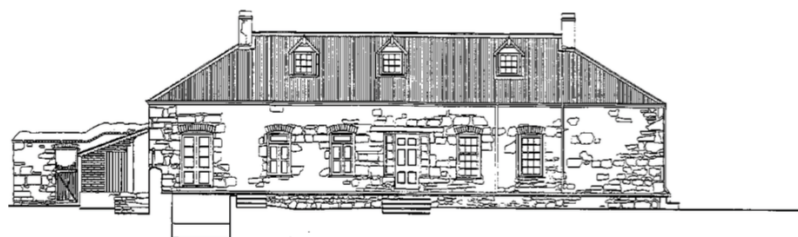
Register entry for The Oaks, Oaks Estate, ACT Heritage Council, 12 February 2015 Notifiable Instrument: 2015-74

This citation was completed by Ken Charlton AM LFRAIA in May 2018



The Oaks north and south facades in 2014.

Photos: Act Heritage Council.

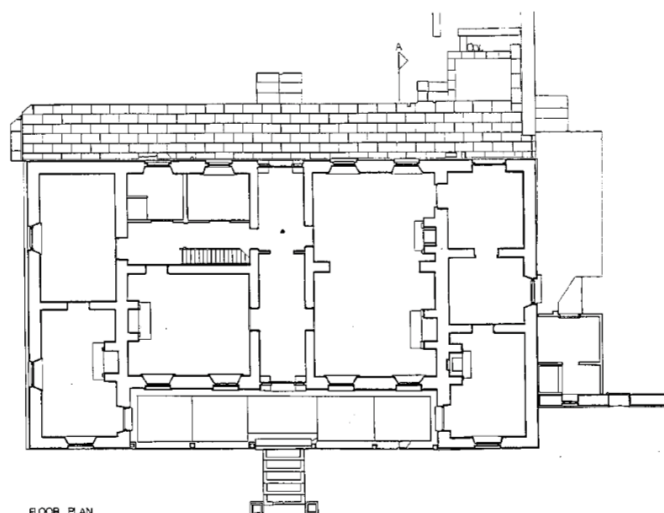


SOUTH ELEVATION



NORTH ELEVATION

2 The Oaks elevations Marion Mahony Griffin Measured Drawing Competition (Christopher O'Rourke 1984)



FLOOR PLAN

Figure 3 The Oaks floor plan Marion Mahony Griffin Measured Drawing Competition (Christopher O'Rourke 1984)