

GLENBURN PRECINCT, KOWEN: A NEW ACT HERITAGE PLACE

The following notes were prepared for the drive/walk through the Precinct on Sunday 10 April 2016 during the Canberra and District Heritage Festival.

Welcome.

Today, we will visit several historic sites in the Glenburn Precinct that was placed on the ACT Heritage Register on 19 November 2015.

We will focus on **what, when and who** at each site.

Introduction

A brief history of the area

Surface scatters of flaked and worked stone in the upper reaches of Glen Burn Creek and in close proximity to the Molonglo River, are evidence of large important **Aboriginal** camp or home sites in the region.

European settlers later built their homesteads on or near such prime sites.

The Glenburn area was first settled by **Europeans** in 1831 – very early in the life of the Canberra/Queanbeyan region.

The first settlers were Luke and Mary Colverwell, both convicts.

Over the years the area grew into a small vibrant community with many families working for absentee landlords or on generally small holdings. Between 1882 and 1906, the area had its own school - the Kowen Public School.

The area was depopulated in the late 1880s, 1890s and early 1900s – because of poor soils, generally small blocks, pests (including rabbits and hares), and unfavourable economic conditions.

Remnants of Early European Settlement in the Precinct

While much of what the early residents built has gone, many relics of early European settlement remain. These include:

- . the Colverwell Graves of two little girls, aged 5 and 6, who drowned in 1837;
- . the Glenburn Shearing Shed Complex that had its origins in the 1860s;
- . the Ruins of Coppins Homestead (built 1881);
- . Glenburn Homestead (built 1897-1900);
- . the Ruins of Colliers Homestead (built 1879-80) and orchard; and
- . the site of Curleys Homestead (built 1882-83) and orchard.

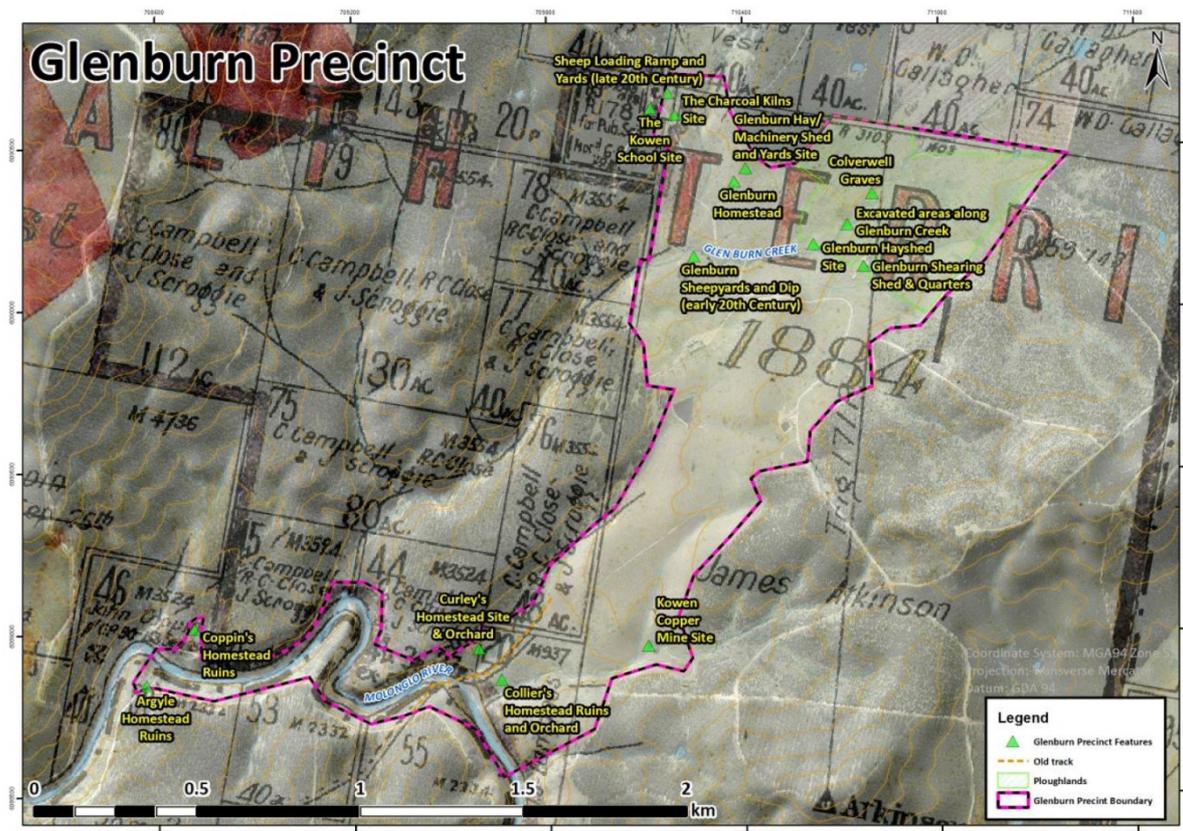
There is an interpretative sign at each.

Unfortunately, we will not visit Coppins Homestead Ruins because there is a large motor bike rally in progress that passes close to the ruins.

But before we do that, we will drive to Atkinson trig to get a panoramic view over some of the Precinct and beyond to the hills to the north on the ACT/NSW border.

Map of the Precinct and the Location of the Historic Sites

The following map, from the ACT Heritage Council's documents on the registration of the Precinct, shows the Precinct overlaid on part of an early NSW map of the Parish of Amungula and more recent maps. Charcoal Kiln Road runs to the north from the bottom of the map next to the 'Legend' box. The Molonglo River is in the bottom left of the map. The locations of the historic sites are shown.



The Colverwell Graves

The graves

The headstones and footstones commemorate the death of the first born children of Luke and Mary Colverwell, Elizabeth (aged 6) and Margaret (aged 5) who drowned in 1837.

These graves are the oldest marked graves in the ACT.

Their father, Luke Colverwell, erected the headstones and footstones. But we do not know when. They would have been expensive. It is quite possible that they were erected several years after the girls drowned - when the family had established itself financially.

They are made of sandstone, possibly from Sydney, and probably carved by 2 different stone masons. The headstones are severely eroded and the texts are difficult to read.

It is believed that 3 other members of the family are buried here in unmarked graves – another daughter, Eliza (their 3rd child) who died in 1857, Luke who died in 1876 and Mary, Luke's wife, whose date of death is not known.

The graves were restored in 2005.

In 2012 the new rabbit proof post and rail fence was erected.

The Colverwell family

Luke and Mary Colverwell were both convicts.

- Luke was sentenced to death for horse stealing at the Old Bailey in 1810. His sentence was commuted to transportation and he arrived in Sydney in 1813 aged 17. He received a conditional pardon in 1821.
- Mary Danahy was transported from Ireland and arrived in Sydney in 1828. I do not know her crime or sentence but I believe she left a child behind.

They met at Gundaroo where they were both working for Styles who owned land there and at Bungonia.

They married in May 1831 and later that year squatted at Dirty Swamp/Glenburn – probably being assisted to do so by Styles and possibly by Atkinson who later owned the land (the Crown grant was made in January 1837).

Luke and Mary had 6 children (5 girls and 1 boy) born between 1831 and 1841 – all born at Dirty Swamp.

A family tragedy

Their first born (Elizabeth 1831) and (Margaret 1832) drowned in or near Glen Burn Creek on 16 December 1837.

Imagine Luke and Mary's devastation.

They were the only settlers for miles around.

So there were no neighbours to help bury the girls or to comfort the parents and their other 2 younger girls, Eliza (aged 2) and Mary (aged 1).

From convict to large land owner

The family worked hard.

Luke became a large land holder in Glenburn and Burbong. At one stage, he owned more than 5 000 acre on both sides of the Molonglo River.

A direct descendant, Rhuben, owns a remnant of this land on the southern side of the Molonglo. He lives there and in Queanbeyan.

The Glenburn Shearing Shed Complex

The buildings

The complex consists of a shearing shed, yards, (including a plunge sheep dip), shearers' quarters, a bathroom/laundry and a large meat safe. The deciduous trees in the yards are Robinas.

The whole complex is in a dilapidated state even though the shearing shed has only recently stopped being used. (The leaseholders Ken and Suzanne McInnes no longer run sheep.)

It is not known when the buildings were commenced.

The shearing shed was probably commenced in the 1860s by John McInnes who was working for Wright, the owner of the land at the time.

The original building could have been a hay shed.

Over the years, the shed grew 'like Topsy' with the addition of more than 10 skillions of various materials. Some of these would have been added by some of the early owners of the land including George Campbell and John James Edmonds. Others were added by members of the McInnes family who leased the land after John James Edmonds moved to Glencoe in 1906 and after it was sold by John James Edmonds to the Commonwealth in 1915.

- The shed had 4 stands and, in boom times, it handled up to 10 000 sheep a year with sheep coming from as far as Captains Flat.

The shearers' quarters, bathroom/laundry and meat safe were probably built during the wool boom in the 1950s after earlier buildings were condemned.

The McInnes family

John McInnes was born in Newtown, Sydney in 1840 and he died at Kowen in 1901.

- He married Sarah Jane Horrocks at Queanbeyan in 1861 when he was working for Wright, the major landowner at Glenburn at the time.
- They lived at Dirty Swamp/Glenburn until around 1880. I do not know where their house was located.
- They moved some 3km to the west and established Kowen Homestead around 1880. This grew into a substantial complex including a large pise home with verandahs all round and a large orchard. It was bulldozed in 1979.
- John and Sarah McInnes were a remarkable couple:
 - . Not only did they have 15 children of their own, they also raised/adopted 4 nephews/nieces.
 - . It is also possible that they raised 2 Gallagher children whose mother drowned nearby in 1869.

. A total of 21 children!

- John McInnes became a major landholder in the area west of the Glenburn Precinct and was a strong active member of the community including being involved with the Kowen Public School. For example, in 1901, he wrote to the Minister requesting a new school building.

The McInnes family has been associated with the general area almost continuously since the 1860s.

A direct descendant, Ken McInnes (and his wife Suzanne) live in Queanbeyan and currently lease some of the land surrounding the graves, the shearing shed complex and Glenburn Homestead.

Coppins Homestead Ruins

The Homestead ruins

In 1891 John Coppin conditionally purchased and leased 1280 acres at Burbong. He built a 4 room house, a separate kitchen, a stable, a dairy and a garden.

Little remains today.

There is a stone chimney, with a significant lean, that would have been in the house and the remains of a large fireplace that would have been in the kitchen.

The protective fence was erected in 2015.

There is also a large male Osage orange tree near the site (probably grown from a seedling from the female tree at the Coppins previous Homestead just south of Coppins Crossing on the lower Molonglo River).

The Coppin family

Early days

Catherine Sheedy was born in County Tipperary, Ireland about 1831 and arrived in Sydney in 1855.

John Coppin was born in Kent, England in 1840 and arrived in Sydney in 1857.

They married in 1859 shortly after making a hasty retreat from their employer's home (John had been unfairly dismissed).

They spent 2 months walking to the Majors Creek goldfields, working on the way.

It did not work out and after being advised to seek work in Ginninderra, they spent several days walking there.

Catherine was heavily pregnant and gave birth to her first child, John, shortly after arriving. At the time, John and Catherine were living in a tent in the bush.

Work was hard to get. But the clincher was that John could play cricket!

John worked as a shepherd at the Goat Station on the northern banks of the Molonglo (now known as Coppins Crossing) where they raised 7 children.

Catherine received a small allowance and food rations to cater for travellers that they accommodated on the way to the goldfields.

In 1878 John conditionally purchased 200 acres on the southern side of the Molonglo where he built a home. All that remains are a couple of fireplaces, a female Osage orange tree and some other trees. (This is now within Molonglo Stage 2.)

The property was sold to Frederick Campbell in 1891 – it became part of the Yarralumla Estate.

The Coppins at Burbong

In April 1891, John conditionally purchased and leased 1 280 acres at Burbong where he built a 4 room house, a separate kitchen, a stable, a dairy and a garden.

Catherine died at the Homestead in 1901.

John was in poor health and he could no longer farm. He moved to Naas to live with the family of his second eldest daughter, Ellen Kelleher, and died there in 1903.

Their youngest son, Albert, stayed on in the area where he became a businessman in Queanbeyan and an alderman on the Queanbeyan Council. His daughter, Laura, married John McInnes one of the many descendants of John and Sarah McInnes of Kowen Homestead.

Glenburn Homestead

The Buildings

This was the first home of John James and Agnes May Edmonds which was built in 1897 on the north-west corner of 1 270 acres of land that John James bought in June 1891.

Initially, the Homestead was a 2 room slab home.

Over the years, the Homestead was expanded with the additions of skillions to the western side of the slab home, the pise home with a verandah on the eastern side (1900) and a covered way joining the 2 homes. There were also stables and a work shop.

All that remains of the Homestead is the 2 room slab home with 1 skillion and the walls of the 4 room pise home. The slab home has an integrated roof but the protective roof of the pise home is separate. There is no evidence of the stables or any other associated buildings.

Considerable protection and conservation work has been carried out on both buildings and their surrounds. Both have been stabilised, guttering, downpipes and a tank have been added to the pise home, repairs have been carried out to the south west corner of the pise home and acrylic sheeting has been installed in the windows of the slab home. The substantial rabbit proof post and rail fence was erected in 2012.

The Family of John James Edmonds

John James Edmonds was born at Gidleigh (near Bungendore) in 1871.

In the late 1880s his parents (John and Jemima Catherine) left Gidleigh. We do not know when or why.

Around the middle of 1889 the family moved into Colliers Homestead. John probably worked for George Campbell of Duntroon.

John James Edmonds married Agnes May Worthington in August 1897 and in the same year they made their home in a new 2 room slab home which became part of Glenburn Homestead.

John James and Agnes May Edmonds had 5 children while they lived at Glenburn Homestead. (They subsequently had a total of 11.)

At some stage, John James's parents moved into the Homestead to make a total of 9 people in residence.

Despite John James almost doubling his holdings to more than 2 000 acres, he could not make a go of it and the whole family moved to Glencoe in northern NSW in 1906.

The Edmonds was a well respected family. The members participated in the work and social life of the community. For example, they organised hare drives (**see Attachment A** for a report on one) and school dances. Their farewell party was attended by some 60 well wishers from the district (**see Attachment A** for a report).

Since the Edmonds left, the Homestead was lived in for only short periods. It was mainly used for farm storage.

The Ruins of Colliers Homestead and Orchard

The building and orchard

The Homestead was built of local stone and had 6 rooms, 2 with fireplaces, an iron roof and wooden floors. There were verandahs on the eastern and western sides and a bakers oven on the northern wall. There was a separate metal kitchen.

Much of the Homestead walls have collapsed, partly through vandalism. There is no roof or floor. And the kitchen has gone.

The walls of the Homestead have been capped with mortar to deter vandalism and to slow down erosion.

The orchard comprises a very large pear tree, 2 large copses of quinces and several plums. The pear bears occasional fruit, the quinces fruit regularly and so too do some of the plums.

Who Built the Homestead?

The Homestead was built in 1879/80 for George Campbell on land he did not own.

Who lived in it?

It is believed that only 2 families lived in the Homestead – William Collier and his family and John Edmonds and his family.

William Collier probably planted the orchard.

It is possible that James Curley (who worked for the Campbells at both Duntroon and Kowen) may also have lived in the Homestead (or Curleys Homestead) for some time in the late 1890s or early 1900s.

The Collier family

William Collier was the only child of Thomas and Ann (nee McDonald). He was born in Ireland but it is not known when the family arrived in Australia. William spent his early life in and around Queanbeyan and Jerrabomberra, and from around 1880 he worked for George Campbell.

In 1866 he married Bridget Curley and they had 11 children from 1866 to 1888.

It is possible that the Colliers lived in the Homestead from shortly after it was built in 1879/80. They were certainly living there in May 1881 when William Collier undertook to send six girls to the Kowen School.

William was living there when his mother died in 1888. But they had certainly moved out by May 1890 when William did not elect to send any children to the Kowen School when a (successful) attempt was made to re-open it.

It is likely that the family moved out by about the middle of 1889 when the Edmonds moved in.

So, all in all, it is likely that the Colliers lived in the Homestead from around 1880 until some time in 1889.

It should be noted that during this period the family was also living at nearby Curleys Homestead after it was built in 1882/83 probably until the land on which it was built and close by land was sold in July 1887 to members of the Campbell family. The Collier family was large and the 2 homesteads are only 100 metres or so apart.

The family moved to Queanbeyan before the 1891 census and subsequently to Goulburn.

The Edmonds family

John and Jemima Catherine Edmonds and their son John James probably moved into Colliers Homestead around the middle of 1889.

They participated in the work and social life of the community. For example, they organised hare drives and the bachelors' ball was held in the Homestead in January 1895 (see **Attachment A** for a report).

We also know that John and Jemima Catherine subsequently went to live with their son John James and his family at Glenburn Homestead. But we do not know when.

The Site of Curleys Homestead and orchard

The buildings and orchard

The Homestead was a substantial 5 room slab cottage with weatherboard gables, an iron roof, a wooden floor and a brick chimney. The cottage had an unfloored verandah with an iron roof. A separate kitchen was half floored and had a bark roof. There was also an open sided shed that was partly roofed with iron.

Little remains but a jumble of rocks, a set of stone steps and the scorched remains of a verandah post.

The orchard is wholly plums.

Who built the Homestead?

William Collier built the homestead in 1882/83 to meet the Conditional Purchase conditions relating to the land on which it was built.

The orchard was probably planted during or soon after the Homestead's construction.

Who lived in it?

It is believed that only William Collier and his family lived in the Homestead.

The Colliers probably lived in the Homestead from when it was built in 1882/83 until the land on which it stood and some nearby land was sold to members of the Campbell family in July 1887. During this period the family was probably also living at Colliers Homestead.

It is possible that James Curley (who worked for the Campbells at both Duntroon and Kowen) may also have lived in the Homestead (or Colliers Homestead) for some time in the late 1890s or early 1900s.

Col McAlister

April 2016

Attachment A

A Hare Drive at Glenburn

'GLENBURN HARE DRIVE

A large drive took place at Mr John Edmonds Junr's place, on Saturday last when 143 pests bit the dust. At 9.30 o'clock a start was made for the scrub, and by 12,20p.m. some seventeen shooters and a like number of drivers, were invited to a splendid luncheon, to which all did ample justice. After luncheon no time was lost in getting to work again. At 4.30 the scores were as follows;- W. Hyles 8, A.Hyles 1, A Colverwell 8, T Gallagher 10, A. Swan 11, N smith 2, S Feagan 5, T Coppin 16, A. Coppin 11, c Dunlop 7, F. Chinnery 12, J. Harris 14, A Feagan 5, J. Unwin 1, S Gallagher 3, Allen Colverwell 11 and JJ Edmonds 13. After the usual cheering, all returned to their homes well pleased with their days

sport. Mr JJ Edmonds captained the shooters, and Mr J Edmonds, Senr, took charge of the drivers, everything going off in first class style. ...'

The Queanbeyan Age, Saturday 27 July 1901, page 2.

The Edmonds Farewell Party at Glenburn Homestead

'There was an exceedingly pleasant gathering at Glenburn on Friday evening last, May 18th, for the purpose of bidding good-bye to Mr. And Mrs. J. J. Edmonds, who are about leaving the district to take up their residence at Glencoe, in the northern part of the State, A very large number of friends were present from Queanbeyan, Majura, Sutton, Canberra, and Bungendore. Dancing, interspersed with songs and recitations, was indulged in till midnight, when a splendid supper was served, at which Mr. John Feagan presided. On behalf of friends and wellwishers the chairman in a eulogistic speech presented Mr. Edmonds with a first-class travelling bag and Mrs. Edmonds with a valuable travelling rug, as a small token of the esteem in which they were held, Other speeches followed, endorsing the remarks of Mr. Feagan, wishing the recipients good luck and prosperity in their new home, Mr. Edmonds responded, thanking the donors on behalf of himself and wife. Dancing and other amusements were resumed until long after the hours when "spooks" are supposed to roam, and then the happy throng dispersed for "Home, sweet home".'

An extract from the Bungendore correspondent's report in the Goulburn Evening Penny Post, Thursday, May 24, 1906, page 4.

The Bachelors' Ball

'Bachelors' Ball at Glenburn

A BACHELOR'S ball took place at the residence of Mr J. Edmunds [Edmonds], Glenburn, on Friday night last and proved a great success. Visitors were present from Queanbeyan and Bungendore. Dancing commenced at 9 o'clock, and about fifteen couples danced to the excellent music supplied by Mr. E. Winters (violin). Mr. A. Coppin discharged his duties as M.C. in an able manner. The costumes worn were very appropriate for the occasion, and reflected great credit on the wearers, and it would indeed be a difficult task to say who looked the nicest. The catering which was in the hands of Mrs. J Edmunds was perfection, and the way the viands disappeared was sufficiently gratifying to that lady. Dancing was briskly kept up till 4 o'clock when the guests began to take their departure all seemingly satisfied with their nights' amusement.'

The Queanbeyan Age, 30 January, 1895.
