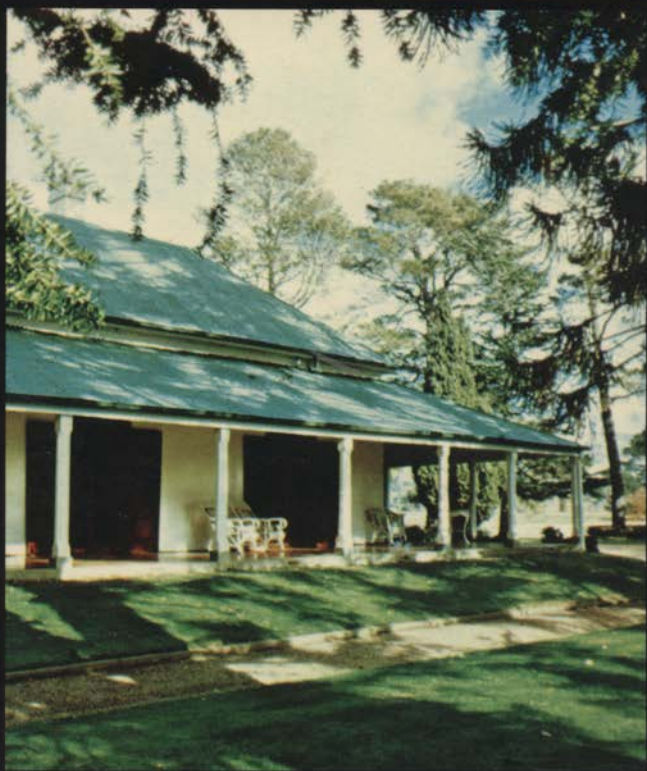




# Episodes of Old Canberra

Ged Martin



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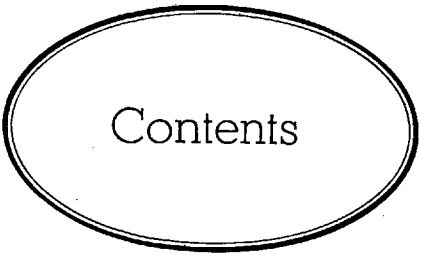
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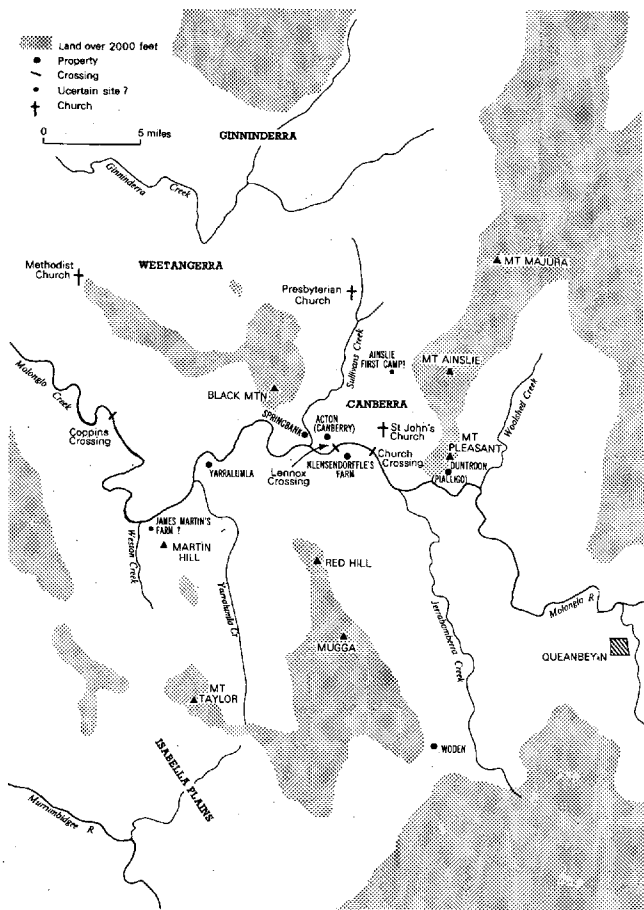
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Old Canberra

# Introduction

I arrived in Canberra from England at Christmas 1972. Like most people, I accepted it as a totally modern city, entirely cut off from the past, planned solely for the future. I quickly fell in love with the place, right from the first Boxing Day as I stood by the deep blue waters of the lake, soaking up the sun as it blazed in a lighter blue sky, and listened to the bells of the Carillon chiming 'Good King Wenceslas' — 'as the snow lay round about, deep and crisp and even'. I found it hard to understand why many people grumbled about Canberra: that it was too clean, too orderly, too artificial, in a word 'soulless'. Gradually I came to suspect that many people felt uneasy that they could sense no whiff of the past. Not everyone is interested in history, but most people I believe need to feel, if only deep down, that others have been here before them, perhaps if only to be reassured that others will follow afterwards. Too much of the city seemed to have sprung, brick veneer-new, straight from the Fyshwick building yards, blanketing whatever of Canberra might have existed before. Could it be brought to life again? I started to read a little, at first out of duty, but rapidly out of interest. I had two advantages, I suppose. I am a historian, so it was no great toil to go and look for history books. And I am a migrant. That does not make me any wiser or cleverer than the next person, but it helped me, as I settled in to Canberra life, to imagine what it might have been like for people who came all round the world a century and more ago. But then the vast majority of Canberra people are migrants, if only from interstate, and that is our first and most important point of contact with the pioneer community.

I make no secret that this book is based very largely on what others have written although I have added some stories of my own. I tried to do two things to bring the past alive. First, I hope I have written about the Canberra pioneers as real people. There are two mistakes which it is easy to make in writing about people long since dead. One is to revere them as giants, and the other is to dismiss them as funny. The truth is that the pioneers were much like the rest of us. Their achievement was a remarkable one: in the eighty years between 1820 and 1900 they turned a frontier into a settled farming district, and did it almost without modern machinery or modern transport to help them. But in the process they destroyed, deliberately or otherwise, much of the native bush and almost all the native people, replacing them with eroded creeks and rabbit infested pastures. But a century later we cannot say we do any better, and we should therefore neither condemn nor glorify the pioneers. The temptation to laugh is harder to resist: the pioneers were people, and people are frequently absurd. But it is wrong to think of them as cartoon characters, whose sufferings did not really hurt and whose disasters did not really matter. People called Jeremiah and Mary Ann may seem quaint and unreal to us, but the Waynes and Craighettes of today will seem archaic and amusing a hundred years from now, and we ought to pay the pioneers the compliment of taking them as seriously as we hope posterity will us. I have tried then to be neither solemn nor patronising: the pioneers believed in ghosts, bunyips and strong drink; they also flogged convicts and hanged hysterical women.

Secondly, I have tried to connect stories where possible with modern Canberra roads and suburbs. Of course this is anachronistic: it may sound odd to say that explorers travelled through Torrens, that convict gangs worked in Evatt, or that there was a bushfire in Reid. Yet these things did happen, and even the most gleaming new suburb has a past. As I look out of my window in Weston I can see the square concrete bulk of Holder High School, and its oval alongside Weston Creek. Nothing could be more modern (and few things less beautiful). Yet that land was the subject of a murky struggle back in the 1820s, of a kind which would make most Weston Creek home buyers stop worrying about their mortgages. At the edge of the

Holder school oval there is a willow tree, just coming into leaf in the spring of 1977. These willows have grown in Canberra since the 1840s: they were brought to Australia as cuttings from a tree on the island of St Helena, which grew right over Napoleon's grave. It was said that the battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton, one of Britain's most famous schools. But you can actually *see* a link with Napoleon growing on the footy oval of Holder High. There were men among the first settlers who had fought in Nelson's navy and Wellington's army, and women who may have been seduced by the sons of George III. Where Hindmarsh Drive today climbs out of the Woden Valley, an old shepherd called Charlie Thornton used to run sheep. He had been a seaman on board the *Victory* at Trafalgar, and claimed that Nelson had been shot by his own men. He was once caught in a thunderstorm up by the Mugga quarries, cursing and blinding as he tried to round up his terrified flock. Suddenly he was felled by a bolt of lightning, which killed two dozen sheep: Charlie was so shaken that he vowed never to swear again. The man who had come through the battle of Trafalgar was tamed by a Canberra thunderstorm. Canberra actually has a *long* history, and there is no reason why the Belconnen, the Woden and the Tuggeranong of today should not lay claim to it.

I should also confess two shortcomings to this book. First, I have deliberately refrained from defining the 'Canberra district' which I am describing. I have taken stories from Gundaroo, from the Brindabellas, from as far away as Lake Bathurst on the way to Goulburn. The local administrative unit, the police district of Queanbeyan, certainly covered a wide area. Some people were very mobile, especially if they had horses, others would walk long distances because it was important to them to attend church. So I have not confined the Canberra district, and I hope the stories in the book will encourage people to explore the surrounding country. You only have to drive a few miles from Civic to be among the paddocks and properties which the pioneers created. (There are *Canberra Companions* to take with you.) Where possible I have taken stories from the modern city area and Queanbeyan, and a word about place-names may be worthwhile here. The 'Canberra' or 'Canbury' of the pioneers was a name given first to the area around the Canberra hospital,



and later to a little village which straggled along Anzac Parade: broadly it covered Civic, Reid, Ainslie and the adjoining suburbs. East of modern Reid was Duntroon, a name which applied to a wider area than it does today. The pioneers called modern north Belconnen 'Ginninderra' and the south Belconnen suburbs from Aranda through to Higgins were 'Weetangerra'. South of the Molonglo, Weston Creek and Tuggeranong were roughly the same places as today, but the modern Woden valley was part of Yarralumla, now Government House. There was a 'Woden' property, but it stood — and still stands — on the Monaro highway near the Fraser Park speedway. It is often amusing to find old letters addressed to 'Canberra, Queanbeyan' or 'Yarralumla, Queanbeyan', but Queanbeyan was the local centre, and the city of Canberra has grown as an offshoot from it.

My second shortcoming is more serious. I have written of pioneer life as if it was much the same in 1840 as in 1890. Of course this is not true: if history is about evoking the past, it is much more about explaining changes in it. As I have already said, the eighty years between 1820 and 1900 saw the rapid creation of a community and change came often amazingly fast. Yet in many respects daily life did not change quite so fast. Living in a brick house with a tin roof in 1890 was perhaps not so different from living in a bark hut in 1840 if neither had electric lighting, and bumping painfully along on a pony cart in 1880 must have seemed very similar to bumping painfully along on a bullock dray in 1820. So we can ignore some of the changes in thinking of daily life, but it would be wrong to forget that change brings conflicts. In the early days there were shadow contests between the settlers and Aborigines, and violent tensions between the squatters and their convicts. By the 1860s the battle lines had re-formed between large and small landowners: the latter tried to exercise the rights given them by the free selection acts to take up blocks of land for farming which the former already held on leases for grazing. The big men tried all sorts of dirty tricks to stop the small ones getting on the land, and now people think of the selectors as the true Australians, resisting the squatters who were the last vestige of the bad old society they had left behind. Yet in many ways, the selectors were trying to impose an alien English pattern of small farms in



an Australia where close settlement would not work. Certainly many of the little properties painstakingly established around Belconnen in the 1860s and 1870s went bankrupt during the drought years around 1900. Small farmers did not have the resources of the big men. On the Yarralumla estate, which then covered much of modern Woden and Weston, more than 500 miles of trenching were dug from the 1880s onwards, to clear and drain the land, and free it from sheep fluke. Little men could not put that sort of effort into the land. The competing needs of squatter and selector continued to produce conflict. In the 1880s, wire fencing became cheap, and the big men fenced in their runs. This enabled them to sack their shepherds, as there was no fear of stock wandering away — but it also closed off tracks used by the small men to take their animals to water. These battles spilled over not just into politics but also involved religion. Squatters tended to support the established Church of England, even if, like the Campbells, they were Scottish themselves. Smaller settlers built Methodist and Presbyterian churches, to show not just their love of God, but their dislike of the squire too. Superimposed on top of these battles about the land were further struggles between Catholics and Protestants over control of schools.

Some of the characters who appear should be introduced at this point, and some of the books mentioned. When Canberra was chosen as the national capital three early settlers published their memoirs. All are good, but one is brilliant. Samuel Shumack arrived at Duntroon in 1856 at the age of six. His family had migrated from Ireland, and he was proud that he had an Irishman's gift for a good story. He possessed two other precious gifts — a superb memory, and the knack of knowing what kind of things posterity would be interested in. His Autobiography, *Tales and legends of the Canberra pioneers*, edited by Mr. L.F. Fitzhardinge has been reissued as a *Canberra Companion*. William Davis Wright had memories going back to the 1840s: his family lived at Cuppacumbalong, now an arts centre at Tharwa. John Gale first saw Canberra at the end of 1855, when he passed through collecting money for — of all things — widows of soldiers killed in the Crimean War. His first memory (like mine) was of Canberra on Boxing Day, when he made a

hazardous crossing of the flooded Molonglo and rode up Capital Hill, ruminating that it would be a fine site for a city. Later he became founder editor of the *Queanbeyan Age*, and led the fight to get the national capital built in Canberra.

The city itself brought more people interested in Canberra's past, and valuable histories were written by Frederick Robinson, Frederick Watson and more recently by Mr Fitzhardinge. The Canberra Historical Society did much to preserve local traditions, and its published papers are a valuable source. Mr P.A. Selth has published a selection of them as the *Canberra Collection*. Two other historians deserve a special mention. Gwendoline Wilson's biography of Terence Aubrey Murray, who bought Yarralumla in the 1830s, is a rich source for local life a century ago. Her book is imbued with the view that great forces and problems have been wrestled with by people here in Australia, and in the intelligent, liberal-minded and sceptical figure of Murray, who was both politician and thinker, she had an ideal subject. Not only can the district claim one of Australia's most vivid biographies, but it has also produced an excellent local history. Mr Errol Lea-Scarlett's *Queanbeyan* is not only scholarly but readable, and I have drawn on both it and on his more recent history of Gundaroo. Nor does this list exhaust the riches available to anyone interested in Canberra's past. The novelist Miles Franklin grew up in the mountains to the west: her *Childhood at Brindabella* is tantalisingly evocative. W.K. Hancock's *Discovering Monaro* is a challenging account of what the settlers — and their successors — have done to the landscape.

Beside so much richness, this book has one simple aim: to show that Canberra has a past and encourage people to go and find out more about it.

# The Explorers

Logically, any account of the early history of Canberra should start at the beginning, with the Aborigines. Yet much of our knowledge of the black people comes from the recollections of white settlers, and describes Aboriginal life under the shock of European incursion. The Canberra of the pioneers begins with the explorers who travelled through the district between 1820 and 1824, paving the way for settlers. Later I shall try to show how the Aborigines adjusted to white settlement.

But in discussing our 'explorers' we should not overlook — as they often did — the existence of the Aboriginal people. True, around Canberra itself, the first white visitors met no natives at all, and saw only maddeningly distant plumes of smoke. But every party which headed south from the edge of civilisation at Berrima — then called Bong Bong and hardly very civilised at that — was either guided by blacks who knew the country, or acting on information from them. It was from the Aborigines that the first travellers learnt of the existence of Wee-ree-waa — which Governor Macquarie brutalised into Lake George, in honour of one of England's most worthless kings — and of a river called the Murrumbidgee. We can certainly honour the explorers of Canberra, for it must have been hard and sweaty work to cover the ground, where the natives might be hostile and a broken leg would strand you a hundred miles from the nearest doctor. But compared with Burke and Wills, heading into Australia's desert centre or Leichhardt, hacking his way through North Queensland, our men were little more than bushwalkers, pony-trekking on an adventure holiday. In fact, when Macquarie came down to look at Lake George in 1820, he

virtually brought a mobile motel with him, carriage, bed and all. Perhaps the most striking failure of the explorers was their inability to manage without supplies: they penetrated country that was hopping, flying and running alive with wild life — they had guns and dogs — yet time and time again expeditions turned back because they were running out of flour to make damper, or had eaten all their biscuits. City life may have made us soft in modern Canberra, but our forefathers were not all such tough blokes either.

Where and what did the first explorers actually explore? The main outlines are easily enough sketched. Until 1813 the colony of New South Wales was hemmed into the area around Sydney by a mountain barrier. Once that barrier was broken, a wide arc of land beyond the Dividing Range was quickly opened up. The pioneer traveller on the southern tablelands was Charles Throsby, a doctor-turned-administrator-turned-farmer-

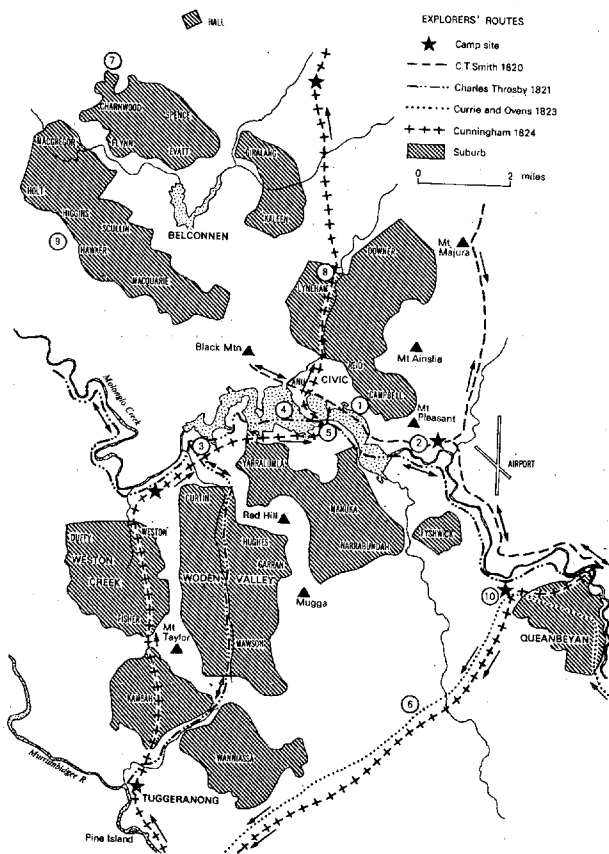


King George IV, as Prince Regent. Broad in body and shallow in personality, it was perhaps appropriate that his name should be given to the lake the Aborigines called Wee-ree-waa. From *Memoirs of the Court of England during the Regency*, by the Duke of Buckingham, Vol. 1, 1856, frontispiece.

turned-explorer. Unluckily for Throsby he also turned investor as well, and the collapse of one major venture through the dishonesty of a partner in 1817 led to protracted court actions, and eventually drove Throsby to suicide in 1828. In Charles Throsby we have a man who was obviously restless, and whose travels south from the 'New Country' around Mittagong were perhaps a way of escaping from his troubles, maybe with the hope of striking some great wealth to balance his undeserved debts. In 1817 Throsby had got as far as Moss Vale, where he soon established a sheep and cattle station. In 1820 he was put in charge of a road gang to open up communications with the Goulburn area — it was hardly freeway construction, but rather a matter of blazing a trail by marking trees — and it was then that he heard of Lake George and the Murrumbidgee.

Throsby's overseer for the road project was a Londoner called Joseph Wild, who could not write a letter but knew how to survive in the bush. Wild had already turned sixty when Throsby sent him off to find the lake, and he was to be the mainstay of several other expeditions. Of all the pioneers, he was the real iron man, and one gets the impression that he would have lived for ever had he not tangled with a wild bull at the age of 88. In August 1820 Wild led two companions on an excursion to Lake George, which he described as having a rolling surf on it, just like the sea (it was midwinter, and a cold westerly wind was whipping it up). Wild himself climbed what was probably Turallo Hill, just west of modern Bungendore, and saw in the distance some 'snowy mountains' — probably the Brindabellas. Wild's glimpse of them was enough to throw some doubt on the Aborigines' story of a great river to the west, and Throsby became all the more anxious to prove that the Murrumbidgee existed.

October 1820 brought Throsby himself to Lake George, leading the governor of New South Wales, Lachlan Macquarie, to see the new discovery. The tour was of some political importance to Macquarie, for his administration was under minute examination by a special commissioner sent out from England who rejoiced in the splendid name of John Thomas Bigge. Commissioner Bigge was a methodical man, who did not make enough allowance for the chaos which had faced Macquarie



**Modern Canberra — Showing  
explorers' routes 1820-24**

- 1 St John's Church, Reid, and old  
Canberra village
- 2 Duntroon, now Royal Military  
College
- 3 Yarralumla, now Government  
House
- 4 Springbank Island

- 5 Klensendorffle's farm, now site of  
Albert Hall
- 6 Original 'Woden' property
- 7 Charnwood
- 8 Presbyterian Church, now St  
Ninian's Lyneham
- 9 Site of Weetangera Methodist  
Church
- 10 HMAS *Harman*



when he took over the colony in 1812. It was clear that Bigge was unsympathetic to some of the short cuts and hard decisions Macquarie had made to get the colony moving, and the winter of 1820 he spent in a tour of the interior, studying the governor's work on the ground. Macquarie arranged to rendezvous with Bigge near Lake Bathurst and go on together to Lake George, hoping perhaps that the sight of the vast lake might convince him that there was too much of New South Wales for it to be run according to the London textbook. Charles Throsby certainly entered into the spirit of the thing, by rushing on ahead in the hope of finding the Murrumbidgee to crown the governor's successful tour. Whether success would have helped is another question, for Mr Bigge's main criticism of Macquarie was that he was trying to do too much too quickly, and being dragged on a wild goose chase to an unknown river would hardly have increased his respect for the governor's judgment. But the commissioner was spared the sight of Canberra, for Throsby, having set off with a small party more or less on the spur of the moment, quickly found himself short of provisions. Having slogged his way from somewhere near Bungendore presumably towards Queanbeyan, he turned back to Lake George and the somewhat worried governor. In a letter to a friend in England Throsby casually mentioned that one of his companions had been an Aboriginal. The friend sent the letter off to a London newspaper as an item of interest, and there by chance it was found a century and a half later. Our explorers took the Aborigines so much for granted that they rarely even mentioned them.

With Lake George as the southernmost known landmark in the colony, and with Throsby in the grip of his Murrumbidgee fever, it was highly likely that someone would sooner or later 'discover' the site of Canberra. In fact at least four parties crossed or skirted the modern city area. Charles Throsby Smith, Throsby's nephew, who got to Black Mountain in December 1820, and Throsby himself, who crossed the area in March 1821, left fairly brief accounts. A naval officer, Captain Currie, and an army officer, Major Ovens, published an outline journal of their trip in 1823, supplemented by a remarkably accurate sketch map. Allan Cunningham, the government botanist, compiled a

detailed journal of his tour in 1824, which Mr A.L. Havard has published in the Canberra Historical Society Papers. These are only the travellers who kept records. It is possible that the odd runaway convict or some wandering stockman might have come to Canberra at the same time, and kept quiet about it. There are traditions of a couple of visits to Lake George before Wild's 'discovery' and a story that the Campbells, whose employees settled Duntroon in 1825, had known of the place as early as 1810. Each of these stories seems improbable, but it is worth noting that locals believed that other visits to the district had been made.

How far can we trace the routes taken by the explorers? Of course there are problems in following their accounts. In the virgin bush of 1820, one hill or clump of gum trees looked much like another, and difficult to identify in words. The Molonglo Plains, on the road to Captain's Flat, were 'discovered' three times within two years, and named Friday's Plains in 1822 and Marley's Plains in 1824, neither of the names sticking. Each party estimated the distances they travelled, but this is not always reliable: Joseph Wild, for instance, who accompanied Smith and Currie, had reckoned Lake George to be thirty miles from north to south, almost double its real length. Three or four miles carrying a swag or leading a packhorse over stony ground covered with the fallen tree trunks of the Australian bush could easily seem twice as far. More reliable clues are given in records of the direction in which particular stretches of river were flowing, for these can be traced today. All in all, given some bold guesswork, we can outline their journeys roughly in terms of the Canberra suburbs of today. These identifications must of course be approximate: no-one can be precise now whether long dead pioneers came through Lyneham or Downer, whether they headed through Curtin or went round through Hughes. But by connecting these early journeys with only a few suburbs, we can remind ourselves that these pioneer explorers were crossing our city, trudging through what are now the quarter acre blocks of modern Canberra.

At the request of Governor Macquarie, and probably with the chivvyng of Throsby, a fresh expedition set out in the summer of 1820, to locate the Murrumbidgee. Its official leader was

Charles Throsby Smith, who was probably sent by his uncle to keep records on behalf of the illiterate Wild. Smith did his job adequately, although his account is a difficult one to follow, but his heart was not in the quest. He did not share his uncle's enthusiasm for the fabled river, and baking hot December weather did not help. The party left Lake George, explored the Yass river between Sutton and Gundaroo, and then on 7 December climbed what may have been Mount Majura to get the first white man's glimpse of Canberra. They then made their way along the west side of the airport, and came to 'a Beautiful River' where they camped for the night. They did not carry tents, but rigged up a simple structure of branches, called 'the Hut'. This rather basic forerunner of thousands of Canberra brick veneer boxes was probably erected close to the road out to the airport, maybe near the Duntroon golf course. It was the first European building in Canberra, and it was occupied for just two nights. On 8 December 1820, leaving Wild to guard 'the Hut', Smith and the third member of the party, James Vaughan, set off along what is now the north side of Lake Burley Griffin, as far as the University campus, whence they climbed Black Mountain. From the top of the mountain, they saw that the Molonglo continued to flow to the south-west, whereas the Aborigines had insisted that the Murrumbidgee flowed north. This clinched Smith's conviction that his uncle's great river was moonshine, and he 'declined' to travel further, although later that day he and Wild made a further excursion eastwards as far as Queanbeyan — the twin cities thus receiving their first known European visitors on the same day.

Smith's decision to stop where he did has always seemed a sad one, because from the top of Black Mountain you can actually see the escarpment at the foot of which the Murrumbidgee flows. If he had only pressed on another four miles downstream, Smith would have found the Molonglo bending north-west at the junction with Weston Creek, and would have been led to the north-flowing Murrumbidgee at Uriarra Crossing. If you stand on top of Black Mountain today, and ignore the concrete monstrosity which should not be there, you can ask one pertinent question which Charles Throsby Smith dodged — what happens to the south-westerly Molonglo when its course is

blocked by Mount Stromlo? The topography of the ACT certainly is not very clear from Black Mountain, but a more red-blooded explorer might have looked a little harder and then gone a little further. In fact, it is difficult to avoid the suspicion that what finally induced Smith to turn back was the sight of plumes of smoke from Aboriginal camp fires in the distance — the first sign of the native people he had encountered on his journey.

At all events, Smith headed back home and told his uncle in plain terms what he thought of the Murrumbidgee fairy tale. Cynics might be tempted to see him as the first in a long line of people who have come to Canberra with high hopes and been disappointed in the place. This is not so. All along the river, in Campbell and in Reid, and across the Molonglo where Parliament stands, Smith reported 'a fine Rich Soil' on the flat ground, and although the hilltops were stony and poor, the eucalypts made 'a most beautiful forest'. Canberra's first tourists liked what they found.

Charles Throsby was stung by his nephew's disbelief in the Murrumbidgee and in March 1821 he was back, and this time successful in his quest. His account is one of the hardest to follow, for so anxious was he to reach the river that his feet seem barely to have touched the ground of the future national capital. He began with a lengthy detour round the ridges south of Lake George to avoid Bungendore and made contact with creeks leading to the Molonglo near the Mills Cross radio telescope. For three days he travelled down the Molonglo, noting patches of good grazing land on its banks, but finding it impossible to find a break in the high country to the south-east. Eventually he did find a way of turning south-east, and after a ten mile hike he and his two companions encountered 'another and much broader tho' shallow stream' which he rightly took to be the Murrumbidgee. Throsby's reported itinerary has baffled many people, since he insisted that he turned south-east from the Molonglo, whereas the Murrumbidgee is much more to the south-west. Luckily, two Canberra historians, Frederick Watson and L.F. Fitzhardinge, have made sense of Throsby's rough itinerary. All that is necessary is to start with the common sense assumption that if you are following the Molonglo down through the site of

Canberra, and looking for a way off it more or less to the south, your best bet will be what today we call the Woden valley. If Throsby left the Molonglo just below Scrivener Dam, where it is joined by Yarralumla Creek, he would travel south-east for a mile or so before coming to the line of the Woden freeway, Yarra Glen — for it is reasonable to assume that early explorers and modern roadmakers would both prefer the easiest and smoothest route up the valley. So we can picture Throsby and his two companions, trudging up the Woden valley, between Phillip College and the shopping Plaza, and on past the Southlands Centre at Mawson, to cross the ridge into Tuggeranong at its lowest point at the back of Torrens. From there another small creek would lead them west, along the line of Athlon Drive, down to the Murrumbidgee between Kambah and Wanniasa — ‘rather a hilly country’ in Throsby’s dismissive phrase. This would have brought Throsby to the river near the Pine Island reserve. Two clues he gives support this: the Murrumbidgee was flowing from the south-east, and he was unable to get further downstream because it entered ‘a very lofty and rugged country’ — the gorge which leads to Kambah Pool. Throsby retraced his steps, and followed the Molonglo as far as he could downstream — far enough to convince him, correctly, that it would join the Murrumbidgee. His journey was hampered by the usual problem of shortage of provisions, and the heavy rain which usually marks autumn in Canberra did not help. The Molonglo ran high ‘so as to prevent me crossing some apparent fords at its different windings’. Throsby, it seems, was the first European to encounter that perennial hazard of Canberra life, the closure of Coppins Crossing.

With Throsby’s driving ambition achieved, Canberra was left alone for two years, until the ‘excursion’ — as he himself called it — of Captain Mark John Currie of the British navy, accompanied by Major Ovens and the invaluable Joseph Wild in 1823. Currie was bold enough to plan to live off the country as far as he could, although his party carried bags of flour for the inevitable damper, which the gallant captain described for the benefit of English readers as ‘a flat cake, being merely a mixture of flour and water baked in wood ashes’. He took greyhounds, dogs fast enough to run down emus, and the whole party had

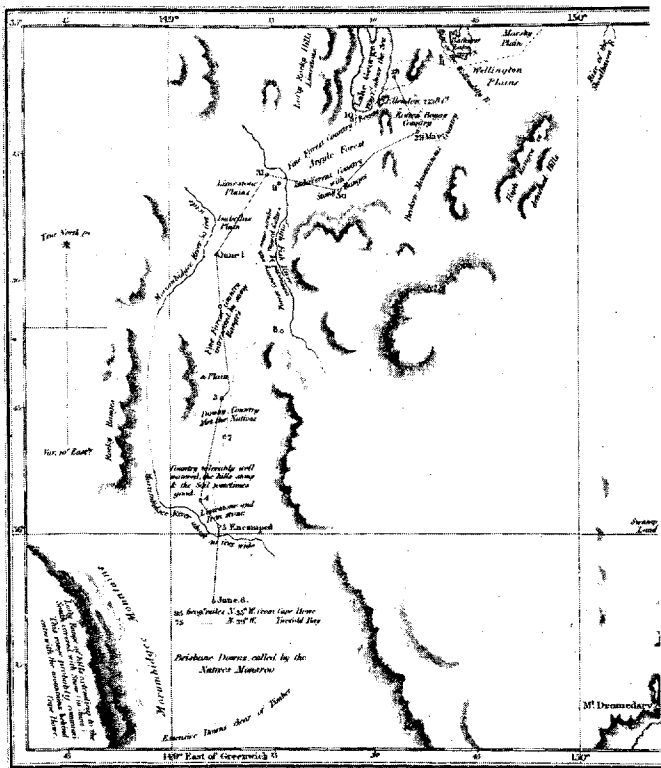
such fun catching three of them near Lake George that they were reminded of jolly days out hunting in Britain. Still, they had to enjoy themselves somehow, because it was late May, and at Lake George the wind blew and the rain drove at them, and held them up for a whole day. Not surprisingly, Bungendore got another bad write-up, as 'rotten, boggy country'. Luckily the weather cleared, and soon they were waking up to the 'sharp white frost' that all Canberra people know so well. Much of their journey west from Bungendore was through 'indifferent country', but on 31 May 1823 they crossed the river right by the Queanbeyan Leagues Club, and pressed on to camp pretty well on the site of HMAS *Harman*. Joseph Wild informed them that the Molonglo was called the South Fish River, and that the country to the westward was 'Lime-stone Plains'. Smith in 1820 had mentioned finding limestone outcrops near Duntroon, and reported catching fish in the river there. Currie, however, seems to have been the first man to record the name 'Limestone Plains', which was the first European name for Canberra. The prosaic 'South Fish River' was quickly dropped and finally replaced by the euphonic 'Molonglo' although the local Aborigines called it the 'Yealambidgie'.

Currie's party did not press on towards Canberra itself, but headed south-west, along the line of the Monaro highway past the modern timber plant at Long Gully Road — all of which was then, appropriately enough, 'a fine forest'. This brought them into Tuggeranong, where they found 'a beautiful small plain' which they named Isabella's Plain, after Governor Brisbane's little girl. Later someone was tactful enough to realise that to disrespectful people the phrase 'Isabella's plain' might not be altogether complimentary to Miss Brisbane, and Currie's grammar was amended to 'Isabella Plains', a name which has been preserved in modern Tuggeranong. (The Aborigines were not very tactful in their name either: 'Tuggeranong' means 'cold plains'.)

From Tuggeranong Currie's party went south to Michelago, and then resumed the line of the Monaro Highway as they travelled south towards Bredbo. The fourth of June 1823 dawned foggy with a sharp English frost and Currie's party pushed south to an encounter which was a landmark in the

history of the Canberra area. A few miles south of Michelago, somewhere in the stretch of country where the Cooma railway crosses and recrosses the highway, Currie's party met a tribe of Aborigines. So far no European traveller had sighted native people anywhere in the area, although we can guess that the blacks, with their superior bush skills, had seen the explorers and had kept a secret watch on them. Currie's party had, without knowing it, left Walgalu tribal territory between Tuggeranong and Michelago, and evidently the bush telegraph had not informed the Ngarigo people further south of the white incursion. The blacks fled at the unexpected sight of Currie's party — a sound instinct, as just over eighty years after this first encounter the last full-blooded Ngarigo died in Cooma. But there was to be no running away for Aboriginal people, then or later. Currie used 'tokens of kindness' to lure the blacks back, offering them biscuits to make them 'very good friends'. In fact the successful intermediary was 'a domesticated native of our party' — typically getting his first mention in the explorer's journal on the fourteenth day of the excursion, without even the dignity of an individual name. The blacks came close enough to tell Currie that the country was called Monaroo (which may simply have been the Ngarigo word for downland). Luckily the name Monaro was to stick to the country, despite Currie's further attempt to ingratiate himself with the governor by calling the country 'Brisbane Downs'. But the Aborigines remained wary, especially of the expedition's horses 'of which they were from the first much more frightened than of ourselves.'

Currie crossed the Bredbo River near Bredbo, making the mistake which many of us make on first seeing it of thinking that its broad stream was in fact the Murrumbidgee. He rode on for a few miles, but by now, despite his resolve to live off the country, and despite the distant glimpse of 'the snowy range of mountains', Currie was becoming worried about his disappearing provisions. Ten miles or so north of Cooma, he decided: no damper, no Snowy mountains. The party turned back, and on the way 'persuaded' one of the blacks whom they had made such good friends with a few biscuits 'to accompany us to show us the way'. Their persuasion was perhaps not as subtle as it might have been, for the new guide gave them the slip at Michelago



Published as the first sheet of a map of New South Wales, by John Murray, Albemarle Street, London.

The earliest map of the Canberra district. The route taken by Captain Currie of the Royal Navy, and Major Ovens of the British Army, in 1823. On 31 May they camped close to the site of HMAS *Harman*, between Queanbeyan and Fyshwick. On 1 June they camped in Tuggeranong, naming the Isabella Plains. They were at Michelago on 3 June and crossed the Bredbo River on 5 June before turning back. South of Michelago they made the first contact with local Aborigines: within a lifetime the tribes had been wiped out. Notice that Currie called the site of modern Canberra 'Limestone Plains'. From Barron Field, *Geographical memoirs of New South Wales*, London 1825, map no. 5 (part).



and got away under cover of darkness. The following day Currie's men rode north towards Williamsdale, but more or less on the Act border they turned east, through a small pass that leads down into Burra Creek and the Queanbeyan River above the Googong dam. Near Williamsdale they spotted two more Aborigines, who were even more scared than the Michelago blacks, 'for they fled like deer the instant they saw us, and being pursued by us on horseback, ran with great agility to the tops of trees, whence it required no small degree of persuasion to remove them'. Eventually one of them agreed to come down and guide the whites to Lake Bathurst, but he too escaped before Currie's party got to camp at Queanbeyan on 9 June. Currie returned to Sydney, proud of a round trip of over 500 miles, and excited by the fresh grazing country he had found. It did not



The prototype CSIRO scientist. Allan Cunningham, the King's Botanist, was the first scientific explorer of the Canberra district: his visit in 1824 was directly followed by the first stockmen. He watched dingoes in Tuggeranong, and observed emus mating close to modern Northbourne Avenue. From E. Favens, *Explorers of Australia*, Christchurch, NZ, 1908, p. 50.

occur to him that he had got race relations off to a poor start, but he had done his best.

The last of Canberra's pioneer explorers was Allan Cunningham, who made a detailed inspection of the city area in April 1824. Cunningham had the impressive title of 'King's Botanist in New South Wales'. This slightly romantic name is a little misleading, and it is best to think of Cunningham as a prototype CSIRO man, a scientific civil servant, whose studies were designed for practical use. Settlers had by now penetrated as far south as Bungendore, and there had been a station at Lake Bathurst for three years: within months of his tour of Canberra's Limestone Plains, stockmen followed Cunningham to the Molonglo. Cunningham left a detailed journal of his trip, but it tells little of the three men who accompanied him. One of them may have been 'Paddy Two Sticks', the Canberra carrier of the 1850s and 1860s. His real name was John Patrick Cunningham, but he was probably not related to the botanist. Samuel Shumack recorded that he 'had been with the first dray that crossed the river at Canberra in 1823 or 1824'. In later life Paddy did well in the Victorian gold rushes, and invested some of his money in Sydney property. Unluckily he shared the general distrust of banks felt by many ordinary people a century ago, and kept most of his money sewn up in the lining of his coat. In 1860 when Paddy was living in a hut at Coppins Crossing, and working as a shepherd, an inquisitive and light-fingered passer-by discovered the secret and took the old man's savings. 'Paddy Two Sticks' may have been with Allan Cunningham's expedition in 1824, and the story is a reminder that explorers might well return as settlers. Later on, both Hamilton Hume and Charles Sturt were to acquire land in the Canberra area.

Cunningham recruited an illiterate and out-of-work farm labourer who knew the country to join his party at Lake Bathurst — the description sounds very like the ubiquitous Joseph Wild. From there he made due south, establishing a base camp on the road to Captains Flat. Several days were spent in fruitless attempts to find a way out of the valley to take a cart. On 14 April Cunningham admitted defeat, and split his party into two, leaving two men to guard the cart and supplies at the base

camp on the Captains Flat road, and taking the other two with a packhorse to cross the ranges to the west. The unnamed Lake Bathurst bushman was included in the forward party. If he was Joseph Wild, a silent tribute is due to a man who was now 65, the age when modern senior citizens retire and draw their pension.

The packhorse party reached Queanbeyan and noted the junction of the Molonglo and Queanbeyan rivers. The next day they followed the tracks left by Currie's horses the previous winter, and followed his route down through Tuggeranong. Cunningham's idea was to climb Mount Tennant, then called Mount Currie, and he made camp close to Tharwa with that intention. But a spectacular thunderstorm savaged the mountain, and Cunningham changed his mind and remained by his camp fire. The next couple of days were spent in an attempt to get further up the river which the mysterious bushman assured them was the Murrumbidgee, but April weather and signs of strain in the packhorse forced him to turn back. The evening of Saturday 17 April found him camping by the river near Pine Island, where Throsby had been three years before, watching five emus feeding on Currie's Isabella Plains — totally oblivious of the horses, which were feeding nearby. Three dingoes, the colour of foxes, were howling to each other close to the camp, unconscious of any possible danger.

Cunningham's journey the next day is of some importance, because it took him right through the southern suburbs of the city. It is possible that his party followed the same route as Throsby — through Wanniasa and down the Woden valley — to reach the Molonglo, but it is more likely that he came through Kambah ('the recess or wing of the Plains') and into Weston Creek ('through a well-timbered forest about four miles to the large portions of the Mineira'). (Mineira was Cunningham's word for the Limestone Plains, not to be confused with Moniroon, his version of 'Monaro'). The Woden-Weston country showed signs of a late summer bush fire, with tender fresh grass springing up in the burnt patches, no doubt with that vivid fresh green that autumn rain always brings even to the least superphosphated of Canberra lawns. Cunningham wondered whether the fires had been the work of invisible Aborigines,

who often burnt country to force kangaroos and other game to come out of hiding. His companions, however, did not share his ruminative mood. When the three of them came to the steep banks of the Molonglo, they persuaded Cunningham to make camp, probably somewhere between the Tuggeranong parkway and Scrivener Dam. It was still early afternoon, and Cunningham's own inclination was to press on, but it was a Sunday, and as a good Scotsman he felt guilty about travelling on the Sabbath. There was grass for the horses, and emus were grazing over towards Curtin. The men decided that the birds were too far off to catch, and consoled themselves with the thought that they looked too old and tough to provide much of a meal. Instead they spent a pleasant Sunday afternoon angling for large mackerel-like fish, probably Murray cod, in the pools of the Molonglo. Like many a subsequent weekend angler around Canberra, they failed to make a single catch.

On the Monday morning, clear and frosty, the men tracked the grazing emu who first ignored them and then rather lazily withdrew into more timbered country after a pistol shot. We can picture Cunningham's party chasing emus along the Tuggeranong parkway, but the next leg of their journey is lost for ever under the waters of Lake Burley Griffin, for they followed the Molonglo north-east for about four miles, admiring its 'several fine reaches of deep water' until they were able to cross at a narrow, pebbly ford. This was almost certainly the former Lennox Crossing, just downstream from Commonwealth Avenue bridge, which linked the Canberra hospital and the Albert Hall. Here they found much vegetation, 'a rich mellow loam capable of producing the heaviest crops of grain' and in the steep banks of the river 'stiff binding clay well adapted for brick making'. All this added up to the perfect combination for settlement, and within a few months John Joshua Moore's men were building huts on the spot. Cunningham now travelled north, along the line of Sullivans Creek, across well-watered downland, noting its fine pasture for sheep and cattle. In modern terms, he probably kept parallel to Northbourne Avenue, but a little to the west, through Turner, O'Connor and Lyneham, then on north round the back of Kaleen, and into the more wooded hilly country north of the Barton Highway, to

camp on 'a chain of ponds' — Ginninderra Creek north of Giralang. The plains of north Canberra had also been dotted with emus, most of them, in Cunningham's scientifically discreet language, engaged in 'coupling' and heading into the woods to lay eggs. It is pleasant to note that our first description of the city area shows that the inhabitants were enjoying themselves, even if they were only emus.

Cunningham was well-satisfied with his tour of 'Mineira'. Apart from his minutely scientific botanical work, he had discovered 'valuable sheep pastures', intersected by poorer hill country which would provide 'the necessary timber for the construction of huts and sheep yards'. From his description and those of the other explorers we can form a rough idea of what Canberra looked like before Europeans came. The hills and ridges — Black Mountain, Ainslie, Majura, Red Hill and all the smaller bumps and rises which separate today's suburbs — were covered with eucalypts. The tree cover does not seem to have been particularly dense around Canberra itself — Smith called them 'thinly wooded' and Cunningham's attempt to get a cart through was defeated mainly by the steep sides of the upper Molonglo valley. The flat valley floors of the creeks leading into the Molonglo were open grassland with very few trees — this was commented on at Woolshed Creek (Canberra airport), Sullivans Creek (north Canberra), Jerrabomberra Creek (Griffith and Narrabundah) and was probably true of Yarralumla Creek (Woden valley), Weston Creek and much of the country along Ginninderra Creek in modern Belconnen. Although the hillside soils were poor and stony, there were patches in the valley floors of richer ground, where a settler might grow a few acres of grain — some for cattle feed and some to make flour for the indispensable damper — and perhaps some vegetables, although the early nineteenth century knew nothing of the virtues of Vitamin C and even the Irish were only just getting hooked on the potato. Best of all, Canberra was well watered. There has been much argument about the European impact on the local landscape, with many scholars arguing that the ugly eroded creek beds of the area have been entirely produced by the trampling of stock from what were previously no more than chains of ponds which allowed water to seep rather than flow

down the valleys. The truth seems to lie somewhere between the two extremes. The creeks and rivers which originate in the mountains to the south and east of Canberra apparently flowed regularly enough to carve out recognisable channels for themselves. Cunningham, for instance, travelling in drought time, noted that Jerrabomberra Creek 'meandered' down to the Molonglo, although it was perfectly dry at the time. The Molonglo above Queanbeyan was also at times something less than a roaring torrent — one early stockman remembered it as a chain of ponds in comparison with the Queanbeyan River itself. Nonetheless, even in dry weather Cunningham found it a 'reedy creek' as he explored the valley towards Captains Flat, and at two points it was so deeply incised that he had to stop and build rough log bridges to get his cart over. Below Queanbeyan, the combined Molonglo-and-Queanbeyan River was twenty yards wide and twelve feet deep, running 'with a brisk stream', and when he encountered the Molonglo again downstream near Scrivener Dam, it was 'a rivulet winding through an alluvial flat' and deep enough to contain large fish. The Murrumbidgee too was a regular river, flowing at 5 knots per hour, as Cunningham calculated by throwing sticks in it. Both Cunningham and Currie reported fast flowing tributaries running into the Murrumbidgee near Tuggeranong, the latter finding the Gudgenby river south of Tharwa a real obstacle to cross.

On the other hand, the shorter creeks may well have been less clearly marked. Yarralumla Creek and Sullivans Creek were not mentioned in the early accounts, even though the explorers must have crossed them. The headwaters at least of Ginninderra Creek were 'a chain of ponds' and so presumably was much of the course of Gooromon Ponds north of Hall. John Lhotsky, ten years later, confessed he could not understand 'why with such apparently equal materials to those which other countries possess, our continent could not develop itself so far as to the more perfect formation of creeks and rivers'. But for stockmen and squatters hungry for good land, these precise points did not matter unduly. It was enough for them that there was water, whether in rivers or in ponds, and that the water was plentiful enough to encourage lush green grass. Almost as soon as the last explorer had left, the first settler arrived.

## The Early Settlers

Between 1824 and 1834 Canberra was parcelled up among a small number of mainly absentee landlords, who sent in overseers, stockmen and convict assigned servants to stake their claims. The process was fairly peaceable but not especially orderly. The area was not surveyed until 1829, and meanwhile men jumped each other's claims, almost certainly stole each other's stock, and apparently helped themselves to Aboriginal women. Bushrangers, dingoes and potentially hostile blacks added to the dangers.

The first thing we should grasp is just how long ago it all happened. A history of 150 years may not seem long compared with the ancient cathedrals and castles of Europe, but it takes us back into a very different world. Some of the early settlers had fought in the Duke of Wellington's army at the battle of Waterloo, and others had been present at Nelson's great sea victories, the Nile in 1798 and Trafalgar in 1805. When Moore's men made their bark huts near the Canberra hospital in 1824, it was just two years after the last Englishman had been beheaded for treason — although times were changing, and even then people thought the whole thing unnecessarily melodramatic.

Two ventures in comparison will underline just how long ago the Canberra pioneers came here. Later in this chapter I shall unravel the complicated story of the struggle to control Weston Creek in the late 1820s. Because the American 'Wild West' is the all-pervasive adventure story tradition around the world, it is tempting to portray the struggle for Weston as part of a lawless cowboy frontier, south of the Molonglo down

Tuggeranong way. It is salutary to remember that white men were staking their claims for Canberra a whole half-century before the American frontier of endless cowboy films was being opened up. We need not glorify bushrangers, but at least we should not demean them by calling them Australian copies of Wild West outlaws. In strict chronology, Billy the Kid was the Ben Hall of America, a belated copy of a bushranger. Decades before the Royal Canadian Mounted Police were always getting their men, mounted troopers around Canberra were sometimes getting theirs too. Bullock drays were bringing settlers through Aboriginal tribal territory to the Molonglo thirty years before waggon trains set off from the Mississippi into Indian country. The point is that here in gleaming-new Canberra, we have a very long, a very old history and one which should not be swamped by the jumped-up traditions of more recent countries.

Take another example: at least as early as 1827, men were referring to the huts and stockyards around Canberra as 'stations' — which is incidentally six years before the first use of the term recorded in the Oxford English Dictionary. Later on the term was to fall out of use in the more settled districts, and was transferred to the great properties of the outback. But to our fellow English-speaking peoples in Britain and North America, the Australian use of the word 'station' has always seemed a quaint and slightly amusing error. To them a station is purely and simply a place where a train stops. But when Moore's men came to Canberra late in 1824, there was no such thing as a train. The first recognised railway in the world, the Stockton to Darlington, was opened in England in 1825, and carried only coal. Not until the Liverpool and Manchester railway was opened in 1830 was there any real passenger traffic, and any need for places where people could get on and off. Only then did the word 'station' come to be linked with the railways. The first map of Canberra, surveyed in May 1829, names 'stations' at Yarralumla and Weston — and remember that was five months before Robert Stephenson tested his *Rocket*, the first successful railway engine. We did not misunderstand *their* word in a 'colonial derivative', *they* twisted *ours*. Once again, we can see that Canberra has a long history, and one very much its own — not derived or borrowed from elsewhere.



Maps of early land ownership often make it seem that New South Wales was neatly parcelled into oblong blocks, covering the colony like carpet tiles. In reality, squatters leap-frogged from one valley or stretch of plain over the intervening scrubby hills and on to the next — and so it took less than twenty years for settlement to jump from Moss Vale, to Goulburn, and then to Lake Bathurst, Lake George, Gundaroo, Canberra, Tuggeranong, Michelago and right through to the Monaro. Latecomers squeezed in where they could, or joined the exploding frontier. Certainly, the sheep moved faster than the map-makers. John Stephen, who in 1828 was trying to get a grant of Fyshwick and Manuka, was challenged by the government to describe his claim more accurately. With some asperity he pleaded 'in the present state of the Colony, where the settlers have preceded the Surveyors, it is impossible for any one to give a more correct definition.' One consequence of this headlong spread was that the men who actually occupied the land were not always the ones who claimed to own it.

These problems were complicated by the muddle surrounding land granting in the 1820s. The simplest way of getting official control of a piece of land was to take out a ticket of occupation, which allowed a runholder to lease a wide area, and gave him the option of purchasing some of it (with luck out of his profits). Getting freehold control of at least part of a run — preferably a river frontage or permanent creek — was a good idea, because it helped to prevent rivals from getting a footing nearby: if a squatter got four square miles of a river valley — normally the maximum freehold grant — the chances were that he could control a much larger area around, for nobody else would be able to get their stock to reliable water. But getting freehold title was by the 1820s a hit-and-miss business. In the early days, land had simply been given away, sometimes to favourites and speculators, but officially to people who could show they had the resources to develop their holdings. This gave some chance to the small man, who might save enough to buy a few sheep and so demonstrate his ability to make use of a run. But the government in London became critical of this generosity during the 1820s. New South Wales had cost them a lot of money, and they objected to giving away its most valuable

asset. In any case, political power in Britain still rested on the landed gentry and aristocracy, and the government was concerned that the wrong sort of chaps were getting their hands on estates in Australia. Gradually they thought of more and more confusing occasions on which land should be sold rather than given, and in 1831 proclaimed the end of free grants altogether, although Captain Weston still managed to get his Creek for next to nothing, and a rebate system was introduced to encourage army and navy officers — proper material for a colonial gentry — and this enabled Admiral Gore to settle at Lake Bathurst for nothing. As Canberra was carved up, it became clear that if you were an army or navy officer, a senior public servant, had powerful friends in the government, or could claim that it owed you money, you got your land. If you had none of these advantages, your chances were a good deal less.

Around Canberra, there were seven main blocks of land worth getting hold of — roughly the six main groups of suburbs of the 1970s, plus Canberra airport. North of the Molonglo were the two adjoining creek valleys — Sullivans Creek (north Canberra) and Woolshed Creek, the site of the airport. Further north still, Ginninderra Creek made most of Belconnen desirable. On the south side, Jerrabomberra Creek, stretching away behind Narabundah and Fyshwick, was really a continuation of the airport-Duntroon plain, as anyone can see who drives along Dairy Flat Road from the back of Fyshwick. Further west lay the modern Woden valley, and beyond that Weston Creek. Southward again were the Isabella Plains of Tuggeranong. The look-out on Red Hill gives the best view of the main prizes in the local lottery.

The first land to be occupied was at the mouth of Canberry Creek. John Joshua Moore's men probably arrived late in 1824, and built a few huts and stockyards on the lake peninsula just behind Canberra Hospital. When Moore's holding was finally delimited, it was an oblong, with a narrow river frontage stretching from the ANU campus along the Molonglo to somewhere near the Technical College in Reid, backed by a corridor of land extending about half a mile on either side of Northbourne Avenue as far as Lyneham and Dickson. In practice, when Moore got round to buying the land in 1831, he seems to

have regarded its western boundary as Sullivans Creek, then called Canberry Creek. By then another man had got a foothold across the creek, right under Black Mountain. John MacPherson's land now mainly lies under the lake: he was a free settler from the Isle of Skye, and seems to have been the first landowner to live in the district. His daughter, born in 1830, was the first white child to be born in Canberra, and his son later became premier of Victoria after the family overlanded to Melbourne in the 1840s. He called his farm 'Springbank', which is now the name of an island in the lake. By tradition he got his freehold grant as a reward for catching a bushranger. In 1836 he added to his 640 acre free grant a 990 acre purchase adjoining, for £247.10 shillings — which sounds a bargain, but in fact consisted almost entirely of Black Mountain.

Macpherson lived in Canberra; Moore did not. His family were Fenland farmers, near Cambridge, and Moore himself had served for a couple of years as an army officer and fought at Waterloo. When peace came, he emigrated, drawn by the promise of a job in the legal system. Moore was himself no



Judge Jeffrey was the hanging judge of the seventeenth century, notorious for his 'Bloody Assizes'. In 1843 a kinsman, Arthur Jeffreys, bought Canberry and renamed it 'Acton' after the family home in Wales, where Judge Jeffrey had been born. From *Historical Portraits 1600-1700* (Oxford 1911), facing p. 231.

pioneer: he lived at Cabramatta and always dressed for dinner. Little is known about the men who did his work in Canberra. His first stockman was an unnamed ex-convict, and when Tennant the bushranger bailed up the station in 1828, there was an overseer called Cowan, assisted by a hutkeeper called William Waterson, with probably several convicts, one of whom was called Thomas Leahy, who must have been Canberra's first Irishman. Moore was not so much the founder of a great property as a commercial and absentee speculator operating on narrow margins. It took him thirteen years to pay the £250 asked for his initial block of land, and further investment proved too much and in 1843 he crashed financially. His 'Canburry' estate was sold to a naval officer, Arthur Jeffreys, who claimed kinship with the notorious Judge Jeffreys of the seventeenth century. Jeffreys did not reside on the property, but he did rename it, after his family home on the outskirts of Wrexham in Wales, Acton House. It was a pity that Moore's grant thus lost its Aboriginal name, but in a way Jeffreys helped preserve the name of Canberra, for it was increasingly applied to the district as a whole instead of being confined to a particular place. By the end of the century hardly anyone talked of the 'Limestone Plains', although there was no agreement on the precise version of its replacement — Canburry, Canberra, Canbrey, Canberry and even Kembery all being used.

Although tantalisingly little is known about it, Moore's station at Canberra hospital deserves first place in the story of settlement, because it was the first to be settled and gave us the modern name of Canberra. But after Sullivans Creek and the plain of north Canberra, the next big prize in the district was Woolshed Creek, and the Majura-airport valley. The man who got it, the Sydney merchant Robert Campbell, did not think much of his prize in the colonial raffle: he had wanted land closer to Sydney, and he so disparaged what was to become the Duntroon estate that in 1830 the government threw in another thousand acres to placate him. Oddly enough three years earlier Campbell had thought highly enough of the area to buy up 5,000 acres at the mouth of Jerrabomberra Creek (the Kingston, Griffith and Fyshwick area) and from time to time, the Campbells snapped up other grants as they came on to the

market. But then all is fair in love, war and rural industry.

Campbell was a Scotsman, related to a family of lairds at Duntroon Castle in Argyle. His elder brother had set up in Calcutta as a merchant, and thence in 1798 Robert Campbell was packed off to establish a branch in Sydney — Australia's first commercial house. In 1806 the colonial government had chartered — requisitioned might be a better word — two of his ships to bring provisions from India. (It seems bizarre, almost obscene today, but this country would have starved more than once in its early days but for food from India.) One of the ships was wrecked on the voyage, and after two decades of maintaining that its loss was Campbell's bad luck, the government finally offered him some sheep and the chance to buy land in the interior as an inducement to close the matter. In mid-1825 Campbell recruited a fellow Scot, James Ainslie, and despatched him to Bathurst to collect the sheep — about 700 of them — from government flocks. After that Ainslie was on his own.

James Ainslie is a giant among the characters of Canberra history. According to legend, which the man himself fostered, Ainslie had fought as a trooper in the Scots Greys, a crack cavalry regiment, at Waterloo. In fact, there must be an element of doubt about Ainslie's alleged part in the battle. Lhotsky in 1834 carefully noted that Ainslie 'had the mania (when he was in liquor) to think he had been at Waterloo' and his name does not appear in a published list of Scots Greys at the battle. Waterloo fantasies were common in the years after the war: George IV, who was too fat to get on a horse, frequently bored Wellington with his own accounts of leading the charge which decided the battle. (The king once described how he had led an imaginary charge up a sharp hillside, to which the laconic duke replied, 'Very steep, sir'.)

Ainslie's claim to have been at Waterloo was, however, superior in one respect to that of his distant monarch: he could produce a wound. According to Canberra legend, Ainslie had boldly ridden on after the charge, in pursuit of some retreating French cavalry. Cut off from his fellows through the heat of his exuberance, Ainslie had been caught in the French lines, and felled by a sabre cut to the skull which left him for dead. The

truth is that once a cavalry charge was launched, nothing short of annihilation could stop it, as the preposterous Lord Cardigan proved when he galloped his Light Brigade at the Russian guns in the Crimea, the other great British cavalry charge of the nineteenth century. If Ainslie was at Waterloo, it was not reckless bravery but terrified inability to stop which sent him careering into the French lines.

In retrospect it would be hardly fair to expect Ainslie himself to have seen it that way, and when the grog was in him, he would scorch around the district on a bay horse, shooting at trees and thrashing hapless servants as he reenacted the crucial charge. (One Canberra legend says he broke his neck galloping down the mountain which bears his name, thus belatedly adding to the death-toll of Waterloo. Actually he suffered a worse fate: he went back to Scotland.) Sober, he ran his station on military lines, mustering his men for parade each morning, a prophetic start for what later became the Royal Military College. To judge from the number of fancy waistcoats and silk handkerchiefs which the bushranger Tennant stole from him in 1827, Ainslie was a flashy dresser. But he was no mere dandy. It was Ainslie who outdid the celluloid sheriffs of Hollywood by rushing Tennant's hut and arresting him at gunpoint: accounts of the incident are tantalisingly vague, and it could have happened either out in Belconnen, or deep in the Woden valley. When local controversy raged over the depth of water in Lake George, it was Ainslie who settled the matter by riding straight across it — without wetting his prized waistcoat.

Such, then, was the man Robert Campbell sent out to Bathurst to collect his sheep and find somewhere to run them. How did Ainslie get from Bathurst to Duntroon? He apparently headed south towards Yass, some say armed with a roughly traced map of the country recently explored. Near Yass he met some Aborigines, one of whose women guided him to Duntroon. One tradition claims that by this time Ainslie was becoming concerned about the state of his flock — the trek from Bathurst would have taken several weeks — and kept asking the black woman where this reported pasture land was, and what it was called. The only reply he got was 'Pialligo' (some versions say 'Byalegee') which meant 'I'll tell you later' or 'wait and see'.

As a result, 'Pialligo' became the first name of Duntroon. In fact, it continued to be used among the stockmen, who disapproved of the Campbell's squirearchical ambitions; even after the family had adopted the name of the ancestral Scottish castle. As a result, it has survived into modern Canberra.

The present Duntroon was not, it seems, Ainslie's first campground in Canberra. If he approached the area from Yass, he would have come in on much the same route as motorists use today — Northbourne Avenue. But that area was already claimed by Moore's men, who were probably glad to see another white man, but would have done their duty in warning him off their land. When John Gale came to Canberra in the 1850s, old timers pointed out a clump of gum trees to the east of the track which is now Limestone Avenue, roughly opposite its junction with Girrahween Street, and close to Corrobooree Park, appropriately enough in the suburb of Ainslie. It was there, they said, that Ainslie had made his first camp in Canberra — and it would certainly have been right on the eastern boundary of the land claimed by Moore's men. Duntroon itself, in the lee of Mount Pleasant (Bald or Cottage Hill in the old days), and closer to water, would quickly have seemed a better permanent site. Within nine years Ainslie had increased his sheep from a mob of 700 to a fine flock of 20,000 — plus thousands of others sold in the meantime. Another local tradition suggests that Ainslie lived with an Aboriginal woman at Duntroon, and it would be



Dry paddocks at Duntroon photographed in 1913: most of them are now under the lake, and public servants have replaced sheep. The Brindabellas are a faint line in the distance, Red Hill is on the left, Black Mountain on the right. From National Library of Australia collection.

pleasant to think that this particular romance began while sheep droving from Yass. However, Ainslie apparently returned to Scotland about 1835, abandoning his children, and presumably his partner. Several generations of interracial contact absorbed the half-caste Ainslies into the white community, and there may well be thousands of Australians today unknowingly descended from James Ainslie and his Aboriginal girl friend.

The third main family to take land in the district were the Palmers. John Palmer had come with the First Fleet, as purser of the *Sirius*, and his grant on Jerrabomberra Creek, south of Fyshwick, gives Canberra a direct link with the founding of the colony. His son, G.T. Palmer, took over modern north Belconnen, a grant called Ginninderra, and by the 1830s was resident manager of both properties. It did not matter that the two blocks were separated by Duntroon, as the Campbells and the Palmers were connected by marriage and business relations. G.T. Palmer is said to have served as an army lieutenant on Nelson's fleet at the battle of the Nile, but as he would have been barely fourteen at the time it is unlikely that he was much use to the great admiral. Much less is known about the Palmers than of the other pioneer families. Shumack knew a man called Thomas Jones, who claimed to have erected a post and rail fence on the Ginninderra estate in 1825: more than thirty years later it was still perfectly preserved, although whatever traces of it might have survived into our times must have been obliterated by the Belconnen town centre. In 1828, before Mr Palmer himself took over, there was a superintendent called Duncan Macfarlane, who we may safely guess was a Scot. Gwendoline Wilson describes a dinner party at Ginninderra in 1848, where a party of Campbells and Palmers and other local gentry talked wittily about the poetry of Pope, the private life of Mary Queen of Scots and the battle of Marlborough. Deep in the bush there could be extremes of barbarity and civilisation, and modern pioneers who are slogging to make gardens in Kaleen and Gungahlin can take comfort from those who went before.

In Woden, Weston and Tuggeranong, the orderly process of settlement breaks down. The occupiers, whose names the first surveyors noted, are not the names of the owners shown on land grant maps. In most cases what happened remains vague, even



murky, but some outlines can be traced. South of the Molonglo, by about 1827, there were two small settlers, and two large-scale squatters. None of them had any legal right to be on the land, as Sydney based purchasers grumbled at the time. Whether the legal owners of the land evicted the squatters, or bought them out — for even the most fly-by-night grazier had to erect a hut and a stockyard — or took over the existing man as his manager — these are things we do not know. Mr Lea-Scarlett shows that around Gundaroo in the late 1820s the illegal occupiers were in fact thrown off, but in other places the absentee landowner may have made some sort of deal with the pioneer occupier. In the struggle for Weston, Woden and Tuggeranong in the 1820s we see some of the basic issues which still surround the development of Australia's resources — should we give priority to individual enterprise, the man who carves out new wealth, or should we insist on control by the community, and orderly if slower development? Squatters and speculators snarled at each other on the banks of the Molonglo a century and a half ago just as Australians do today over the exploitation of their oil and uranium reserves.

The two small farmers were Timothy Beard, near Fyshwick, and James Martin, at Weston. Beard's land presumably went in the end to the Palmers: in 1828, John Stephen junior of Sydney, a member of an influential legal family, was trying to get formal control of Beard's land, and the tone of his application suggests that he was working as the little man's ally. However, Stephen could not describe his claim accurately, and he was eventually offered a block south of Commonwealth Avenue bridge, which he did not take up. This was in turn transferred to William Klensendorffle, himself a refugee from the Gundaroo land battle. Klensendorffle's farm stood near the Albert Hall and was unfortunately destroyed during the building of the city.

Stephen's complaint in 1828 was that he wanted to obtain land on which two other men, Johnston and Taylor, were 'depasturing cattle without any authority'. Taylor was the first occupant of Yarralumla — Government House was once called Taylor's Hut — and Mount Taylor at the end of the Woden valley commemorates him. What finally became of Taylor himself is not clear. The Yarralumla estate was promised to

several owners in quick succession, before being bought by Terence Aubrey Murray in 1838. A cottage of sorts was built there in the early 1830s by Francis Mowatt, who kept a pack of hounds and entertained Governor Bourke with the pleasures of dingo-hunting. The thought of Bourke tally-hoing around Curtin and Deakin is enough to show that Yarralumla has a long tradition of eccentric viceregal occupants.

This brings us to Johnston and James Martin. Johnston was one of the sons of Major George Johnston, the commander of the New South Wales Corps, who had beaten the Irish rebels at Castle Hill in 1804, and led the coup which deposed Governor Bligh in 1808. Historians have long debated whether this 'Rum Rebellion' showed that Australians will never tolerate despotic governors, or proved that selfish minorities will always destroy governments which seem to threaten their interests. Our Johnston, however, was not entirely a silvertail, since his mother had been a convict woman on the First Fleet, and the gallant Major had got round to making her an honest woman rather late in their relationship. What is clear is that the Johnston family did not attach overmuch importance to legal niceties. By 1827 Johnston was running stock over a wide area between the Molonglo and Murrumbidgee. His position though was a precarious one: to have effective control over a wide area of rough country, he would need title either to Weston Creek or Tuggeranong, in order to have an undisputed base on well-watered pasture. His chances of securing a grant were not good, since the Johnston brothers had joined William Charles Wentworth in opposition to Governor Darling, who reported their presence at an indignation meeting along with 'other persons equally contemptible'.

Johnston's main base was probably in Tuggeranong, for at the mouth of Weston Creek was a small farmer, James Martin. The name is fairly common, and we cannot be entirely sure about the first Martin in Canberra, but it seems that our man had been born about 1770, and came out to Australia late in 1796. (This would mean, just to give some perspective, that he would have been in his early teens when Britain celebrated the end of the American war of independence, and a young man when the French revolution broke out.) He came to Australia as

a soldier in the New South Wales Corps. Now it is only fair to acknowledge that the Corps has its stout defenders, but the general verdict of historians is not very flattering. The Duke of Wellington once said that the British army was recruited from the scum of the earth, and the NSW Corps seems to have been put together from the refuse rejected by the regular regiments. Martin, however, was a bit above the average quality of the Corps: he served as part of Governor King's bodyguard, and later became a personal servant to Governor Brisbane. In 1832 Martin was to claim that Brisbane had promised him sixty acres of land 'for being the first individual that produced a crop of wheat at Limestone plains', but by then his memory must have been playing him tricks. Brisbane had in fact promised him land in May 1824, before there were any settlers in Canberra, as part of a generous policy of rewarding good servants. But James Martin may still have been the first man to grow wheat in Canberra (although Shumack believed the first crop was raised at Yarralumla, not Weston) and he certainly seems to have been in occupation by 1826. In August 1827 he applied to the government for permission to rent, with a view to purchase, 2,000 acres of land, three miles south-south-west from Moore's property. There he was already employing two free men, and had 200 cattle, 20 ewes and a couple of horses. He was a small man, with only £100 capital, but he had built 'a good Substantial Dwelling House', a barn, and had cleared twenty acres of land, of which twelve were already sown with wheat and the rest being prepared for oats. All this must have been close to the site of Weston Creek sewage works, then as now a place of fertility. Weston's first 'Substantial Dwelling' in fact had only three rooms, but modern mortgage holders may note that it was only worth £50 (\$100) to its owner, which today will not buy a garden shed. Martin's activity cannot have happened overnight, and so we can place his arrival before 1827, when he claimed for instance, to have erected a mile of fences — which sounds impressive until it is worked out that a mile of fence encloses just 40 acres of land.

James Martin was a little man, and New South Wales was not run for little men. His application to rent Weston Creek in the hope of buying it was deferred on a technicality. In January

1828 he wrote again stating that he had occupied the land for some time, and pointing out that the delay was costing him money and preventing him from making improvements. The bureaucracy was unmoved and another technicality was found to pigeon-hole the application. Martin was now convinced that he was getting the run-around, and in desperation appealed to his benefactor, Sir Thomas Brisbane, in distant Britain. Brisbane referred the matter to the Colonial Office, who sent an inquiry out to Sydney — all of which took months and months. Worse still, somewhere around the globe the details became garbled, and a clerk in Downing Street sent off a letter to Sydney expressing the British government's concern that one *John Martin* was having difficulty in getting 400 acres promised him by Brisbane. Naturally the letter was never answered.

By the time the surveyor Robert Dixon came by in 1829, the little station James Martin had built was in the hands of the Johnstons, although a small hill nearby, near the AME school, is still officially called Martin's Hill. Presumably James Martin had despaired of getting official recognition and — short of money — had taken a few pounds from Johnston for his improvements and cleared out. But, knowing the Johnstons, it is not impossible that the new occupants had simply muscled in, and peaceful suburban Weston may have had its touch of gang warfare. For Johnston's unofficial grazing empire was under pressure by 1829. In May 1827 James Murdoch had applied for land 'on a small plain called by the Natives Togranon at present occupied by Mr Johnston as a sheep run'. A note on Murdoch's application described him as 'a relative of Sir Thomas Brisbane'. A relative of Governor Brisbane naturally had a good deal more pull than a mere ex-employee whose name nobody could rightly remember, and while James Martin's application was drifting from one dead-end to another, Murdoch was speedily accommodated. It seems likely that his men were soon on the spot in Tuggeranong, and although in 1829 he actually surrendered his grant in order to move to Tasmania, others soon followed him, and it was obvious enough to Johnston that Tuggeranong would soon fill up with water-tight claims. If Tuggeranong was lost, Weston Creek became all the more important as the base for his pastoral empire, and by fair means or foul he had to get James

Martin out.

But controlling Weston Creek on the ground was not the end of Johnston's problems. How could he stop influential people in Sydney getting land grants and once again forcing him to shift? It has already been seen that mention of the Johnstons did not bring warm smiles to the face of the governor, Sir Richard Darling, so there was little point in any of the family putting in for their land under their own names. Fortunately, however, they had a brother-in-law, George Edward Nicholas Weston — Edward to his friends — a respectable captain in the army of the East India Company, who had come to New South Wales in the 1820s to have a look at the place. In earlier years Englishmen in India had looted vast fortunes and gone home as multimillionaires, but by Weston's time the opportunities were reduced, and most men merely became extremely rich. When the time came to go home, some concluded that they had not made enough to set up as great landowners in England. Others simply felt that they could not face the weather. Such men tended to move on to Australia, and establish colonial estates. Weston had liked the place, had bought land near Liverpool, married Blanche Johnston and — we can guess — gone into partnership with the Johnston brothers in their wide-ranging stock enterprises. James Martin's land then could safely be vested in the Johnstons' uncontroversial brother-in-law. However, in 1829, just after his marriage, Weston decided to go back to India to wind up his affairs there, in order to settle finally in Australia. To have applied for the land just before leaving for India would risk revealing that Weston was simply a dummy, so the paperwork had to wait for his return. But Weston was absent longer than anyone had expected — when he landed on 5 August 1831 he was the father of two small children, which may explain why the long voyage on a tiny sailing ship had been delayed. Captain Weston came back to find a new threat to the Johnston grazing empire. Two weeks before, officials in Sydney had announced that the British government had commanded an end to free land grants, and that henceforth all land was to be sold at five shillings an acre. Wentworth, the Johnston's ally, thundered against the decision in his paper, the *Australian*, and insisted that the new regula-

tions should not apply to people who had already made claims, or had started for the colony under the impression that they would get free grants. Edward Weston forcefully made the same point to the government: he would never have left India had he expected this to happen, and surely his wealth and investment justified a grant under the old rules. The official clique wavered, and the governor's Executive Council advised Darling to tread warily. Weston was asked for a statement of his capital, and his impressive reply — £3,000, plus 600 cattle and 2,000 sheep — was enough to convince them that he could make use of his land if given it, and would make trouble if refused. In September and October 1831 formalities were completed to grant Weston four square miles of land 'at the Yarrow-Lumla plains' (Yarrowlumla was the Aboriginal name for the Mount Stromlo ridge: it may mean 'Echo Mountain'). In 1833 Weston arranged to rent more land downstream along the banks of the Molonglo, and a couple of creeks flowing into the Murrumbidgee just over the ridge from the modern suburb of Chapman — thereby sealing off the Johnston grazing empire from further interlopers. In 1839 the leisurely administration got round to preparing deeds for the original grant ('I believe Mr Weston is still alive' wrote one official) and so the deal was confirmed. If James Martin knew of it he must have been bitter: land was granted to Weston under expired regulations which had been refused to him when those rules were supposed to apply. Weston's four square miles included all the modern suburbs of Weston, Stirling, Waramanga and Fisher, with a slice of Chapman. Streeton Drive was its western boundary, excluding Holder, Duffy and Rivett. Still, four and a half suburbs was no bad gift, even at an annual quit-rent, a sort of ground rent, of £21.6 shillings and 8 pence a year. The absentee Weston got four and a half suburbs for £43 a year; the pioneer Martin got nothing. But then, Edward Weston was an officer; James Martin only a common soldier.

## Life in Early Canberra

What was it like to live in Canberra in the early years of European settlement? It takes some leaps in imagination to recreate the 'feel' of bush life, and even more to associate those pioneer struggles with the comfortable suburbs of the national capital. Luckily, there are some clues and indications.

We may start with the census. In the early years, figures were given for the County of Murray — a vast area, stretching from Yass south to Tharwa and eastward almost as far as Braidwood. This vast area contained only 510 white people in 1831 (blacks were not counted), but grew steadily: 1,728 in 1836; 2,111 in 1841; 2,721 in 1846. In 1851 figures were given for the police district of Queanbeyan, which included Michelago, Gundaroo and Bungendore as well as the Canberra area. By 1851, the Queanbeyan district had 2,526 people, and of these we may guess that about a third lived within the area of the modern city, or half in Canberra and Queanbeyan combined (despite its sluggish start in the late 1830s, Queanbeyan had grown to a thriving town of 372 people by 1851). If you had lived in Canberra in 1851, you would have had about a thousand neighbours within easy riding distance — and some pioneers thought nothing of riding as far as Braidwood or Yass for a dance. So although early Canberra was hardly King's Cross, life steadily became less hermit-like.

Two sets of visitors with good descriptive senses give a further picture of Canberra at a twenty year interval — John Lhotsky, the Polish scientist who came by in 1834, and two English travellers, Mossman and Bannister, who visited Yarralumla in 1852.

Lhotsky came to Australia to lead a scientific expedition to the Snowies, and had hoped for government support. In fact he had pointed out to the authorities in Sydney that the official estimates provided for a salary of £200 a year for a Colonial Zoologist, although the man appointed to receive it had died four years earlier. Then as now, Authority in Australia took itself very seriously, and — as anyone who has ever disputed a telephone bill will know — strongly disapproved of anyone who has the temerity to suggest that Authority might be on the fiddle. So Lhotsky was sent on his way without any money, while a couple of silvertails in Sydney pocketed the money he had hoped to receive. Dr Lhotsky was thus something of a sour observer of local life, and it did not help his temper that January 1834 was the hottest summer that anyone had ever known in the area. By the time Lhotsky's party reached Gundaroo, they were all wracked with diarrhoea, which the good doctor combated with his own eccentric combination of tight underwear, strong coffee, and hypnotism. Pioneer travel was not all fun, but it had its highspots. Lhotsky sat by his campfire in the Gundaroo bush, watching his men walking about in 'the pitchy darkness of the forest' carrying torches of fire which made little points of light to see their way by, while the moon broke through to make patterns in the treetops. 'Save the champing of the horses, stillness all about — only now and then broken by the dismal howling of the native dogs, the rustling of snakes, or the shrill buzzing of some solitary locust'. By day there were scores of magpies 'which greet the rising sun with their clamorous, gay and flute-like tones; flying, playing, and hopping upon the trees near the traveller' — so tame that Lhotsky thought it unsporting to shoot them. The weather ran from one extreme to the other — 'what is stable, or uniform in Australian nature?' Lhotsky mused as he sat in the gardens of Duntroon. A fifteen month drought had just broken, too late to save the wheat, but although days of stifling January heat followed, one morning actually began with fog. Nor was the weather the expedition's only handicap. Lhotsky tried to follow roads listed in the official itinerary, but found them — where he could find them at all — to be no more than vaguely defined stock routes, maintained by the passage of the occasional dray. Crossing the ranges to



Canberra was a struggle, but the sight of the Campbell property — not then renamed Duntroon, although the later name is more convenient — made up for his trouble. The dairy was surrounded by 'lofty gum trees' under a blue sky, and the distant mountains reminded him of Italy. The 'cottage' — now part of the officers' mess at the Royal Military College — was 'a clean, romantic little house, overhung with vines' — and the last place out from Sydney to have glass in the windows. Lhotsky made it his headquarters for six days, while he explored the neighbourhood. He began with an ascent of Cottage Hill (Mount Pleasant) to get a general view of the Limestone Plains, and the adjoining 'Kembery' Plains — the modern north Canberra suburbs which formed part of the Canburry or Acton estate. Evidently as early as 1834 the short 'a' of standard English was being flattened into the grunted Australian 'e', and — like New Australians of a century later — Lhotsky detected and exaggerated the sound shift. The weather was the hottest yet — 129<sup>0</sup> Fahrenheit on 31 January (54<sup>0</sup> Celsius). Lhotsky cooled his blood by drinking sulphuric acid, which the untutored observer might think would cool his blood most effectively by killing him, but luckily he chose to take it heavily diluted and sweetened. Lhotsky's dogs, mere skeletons after their journey, slunk up to him every few minutes with their tongues hanging out, pathetically begging for relief which their master could not give. Yet a few nights later a raging storm lashed the house, and a spider the size of a child's fist fell out of the rafters to hit the Polish scientist full in the face as he lay in bed.

Lhotsky was impressed with Canberra. His men fished for Murray cod in the river at Duntroon and tried to shoot platypus, but found them too quick: they could dive on seeing the flash of a gun and move faster than a bullet. One man wounded a large platypus and chased it into the reeds, 'but the spurs of the monster prevented him approaching it'. The modern reader will have no difficulty taking sides in that contest. Lhotsky himself explored north Canberra and part of Belconnen and was particularly taken with Macpherson's farm just under Black Mountain. The only thing wrong with this miniature paradise was that it was too far from the river and so short of water — ironic when it is remembered that most of it is now under the lake, and that the

little hill which the locals called 'Macpherson's sugarloaf', is now Springbank Island.

Once again we can see how modern Canberra has its roots in the past. As Lhotsky watched hawks sitting on the wooden fences of Duntroon, and was struck by their resemblance to the Emperor Napoleon, he predicted that on the Limestone Plains a 'fine town' would be built, linking Sydney, the south coast, and the Murray valley. Twenty years later the same thought struck John Gale when he first saw the Molonglo valley, and John Gale lived to lead the campaign for it to become the federal capital. The idea of a city at Canberra first occurred to a man who had been thinking about Napoleon in 1834. The next year Melbourne was to be noted by a surveyor as 'the site for a future village', and the streets of Adelaide were laid out two years after that.

Of course, an idea is not the same as a city, and Lhotsky wanted to know why the government had not made a start and established a post office and other amenities to get the place going. He was told that the government had ruled that a post office 'would not pay'. Lhotsky replied that public expenditure should not be measured by its profitability, but by its contribution to general welfare. And this, of course, has remained one of the great arguments in Australian politics. All that can be said here is that the governments, of all parties, which have spent money building Canberra have in the long run added not only to the general welfare but created a very profitable enterprise for themselves into the bargain. Sadly, as in Lhotsky's day, the accounts are drawn up in such odd ways that some politicians do not grasp just how well Australia has done out of its investment in a national capital.

When Lhotsky left Duntroon to travel south, he was not quite the doughty adventurer he made out — James Ainslie, the superintendent, already had outstations as far south as Delegate in the mountains. In fact, it was Ainslie's roamings which contributed to the sense of adventure, for when Lhotsky had got as far as Jerrabomberra, 'the superintendent of a neighbouring farm' came galloping down by the Sundown Drive-in to provide a re-enactment of Waterloo just as gripping as any movie. Dismissing Ainslie as 'a sort of N.S.Wales Don Quixote',

Lhotsky decided that it would be 'not convenient' to be cast as part of the French army and sneaked off by the back door. At Michelago he noted a sly-grog shop, part of the alcoholic network which so vividly stimulated James Ainslie's military memories. Close by, Lhotsky's party ran into a couple of horse-men returning from the Monaro, bedding packed at the back of their saddles, 'tin pots for boiling tea suspended from their halters' and guns at the ready — a 'truly Australian experience'. And so Lhotsky headed south from Canberra, beyond the formal limits of the colonial government. He had, he reflected, travelled all over the world, and had lived under the most tyrannical of monarchies and the freest of republics. Now, for the first time in his life, he was heading into the purest of anarchies, a land with no government at all. Such then was Canberra in 1834 — the last outpost of the civilised world.

Mossman and Bannister saw a very different Canberra in 1852. They travelled from Melbourne to Yass, and gradually felt more at home as they came to the Tablelands — the country around Yass reminded them of the South Downs in Sussex, and they were not the first visitors to see a resemblance to the old country. Perhaps they were easily satisfied observers — they were, after all, 'very much pleased' with Yass — but they described the whole Canberra district in glowing terms. They were, however, disappointed to find that Lake George, so imposing on the map, had dried up, and they stood on the shore near Geary's Gap straining their eyes to see the distant dots of grazing sheep. They met a shepherd who was an Englishman who had come out to the Victorian goldfields to cash in with his own particular talent. Unfortunately there proved little demand for artists, and he had drifted into shepherding, to be surrounded by the grandest of scenery without being able to get hold of so much as a pencil and sketchpad.

On the way to 'the Canbury plain' the travellers passed a number of 'small dwellings', the sign of the increasing population of small settlers in the district. Many, however, were empty, as their occupants had joined the gold rushes — including some small local fields around Gundaroo. Mossman and Bannister got the same first sight of Canberra as the modern traveller from Sydney — they had taken a roundabout route —

from the ridge a few miles north of Watson. The sun was setting over the 'picturesque and extensive country', and its rays picked out the reddish patches in the dark bush of Black Mountain. The distant line of the 'Brindha Bella' mountains marked the horizon. It soon became too dark to pick out the 'village of Canbury' with its church, completed in 1842 at the foot of Anzac Parade, and their coachman had difficulty finding his way through the fences of Acton and Springbank to get to a none-too-safe crossing of the Molonglo.

Eventually they came to 'Yarra Lumla', the 'large and commodious residence' of T.A. Murray, which they thought eminently suitable 'for the abode of a country gentleman'. West of the house, over towards Weston Creek and the Cotter, there remained a 'level wooded tract of land', an extensive view



Yarralumla in 1876. The old Yarralumla homestead, which was replaced by the present Government House in 1891. The picture catches a peaceful interval in one of Australia's most turbulent houses; the flogger has long since been kicked out, the governor-general has yet to arrive. The birds strut about in their finery, but they do no harm. From National Library of Australia collection.

towards the distant mountains — 'a broken outline on the horizon'. Behind the house was Black Mountain, 'like a giant among the smaller hills'. In the valley itself Murray had settled a number of families as small farmers — a generous gesture which had paid off, since they had tended to stick to their land rather than go off after gold, and so provided Murray with a supply of part-time farm labour. Two miles away was the 'village of Canbury, with its pretty little church' (now St John's church, Reid). In a few decades a frontier district had been transformed into something like the countryside which had existed for centuries in Britain and Ireland — squires, parsons and peasants. Mossman and Bannister approved. 'There is here not only much that is naturally grand, but man has done his part to assist



The enlightened squatter. Terence Aubrey Murray, who owned Yarralumla from the 1830s. A lapsed Catholic and a humanitarian, Murray took an active part in local and colonial affairs. This posed photograph was taken in 1860. From National Library of Australia collection.

nature's beauties, by adding his labours to give life to her solitudes.'

Visitors like these give an invaluable impression of the old Canberra, but they tended to stay in the 'big house' and rarely if ever commented on the little ones. Duntroon, Acton and Yarralumla were substantial buildings, built of stone, and even with windows. But these were exceptions. The earliest huts were built as rough wooden frames with sod walls — a sort of earth veneer, which was especially good for chimneys. These were replaced by the mid-century by slab and bark houses, made from split logs with sheets of bark as roofing. Settlers learnt from the Aborigines the skilful process of heating and pressing bark into flat sheets. Despite Cunningham's optimistic forecast it was hard to find local clay which made good bricks, and important buildings, like St John's church, were built of stone. By the early 1830s there was a lime kiln in operation somewhere below Coppin's Crossing on the Molonglo, the beginning of the local cement industry. Most settlers had tiny houses — James Martin had described his three-room building at Weston as 'substantial' — and the pioneers probably went in for 'outdoor living'. Few had floors, but there was a way of polishing milk into the earth which gave it something like a vinyl finish, believe it or not! Still, the first Canberra houses were almost certainly crawling with insects and poorly insulated against both hot and cold weather.

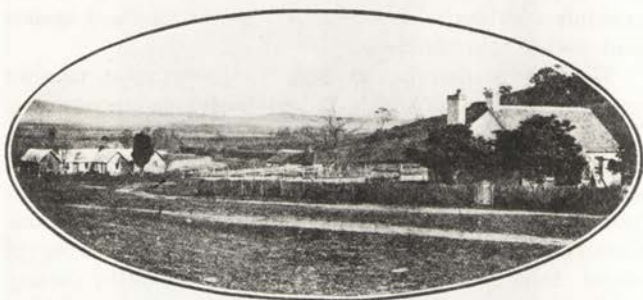
The early settlers lacked other basics which we take for granted. We may start with the most basic amenity — water. Not only did it not come from taps, but in some years it barely came at all. The Molonglo dried up in the drought year of 1838, and settlers had to sink wells into its bed to get even a drop. In 1865 there was not a single drop in the whole of Belconnen: one farmer harvested for three weeks and collected only three bags of wheat. Some settlers kept their stock alive only by cutting fodder from the oaks and willows which had been planted along the creeks for just that purpose.

January 26, 1866 was declared a day of prayer for rain, a strange device which somehow assumed that if everyone prayed at once they would affect the weather. Sam Shumack was sure that St John's church had never held a more sincere congrega-

tion, but even so it took a fortnight for their prayers to work, and then within a few hours, there were floods.

Even when there was water, it had to be lugged about in buckets, a task not made easier by men like Dr J.F. Murray, brother of the owner of Yarralumla, who was so taken with the view that he built his house — the original Woden, close to Fraser Park speedway — on top of a hill. And the rivers were used for other purposes than drinking. Consider T.A. Murray's description, in a letter in the National Library, of sheep washing following the shearing at Yarralumla in 1840. 'We are all in the water from morning till night, just as if we were amphibious, greatly to the annoyance of the sheep who are all in the greatest amazement and consternation.' The condition of drinking water after struggling sheep and cursing stockmen had churned up the river for days on end does not bear thinking about.

What of food? There was usually meat, even if only parrot pie. In very dry years even sheep would become too thin to eat and had to be boiled down for tallow instead. In the drought of 1865, one Belconnen settler shot some parrots and magpies, and settled down to a soup which proved to be his last meat meal for two months. Gwendoline Wilson quotes the recollections of William Bunn, a teenager at the old Woden in the 1840s, who



Farmworkers' cottages at Duntroon. The Campbells looked after their workforce: these cottages were photographed in 1909, but Charles Campbell had publicly argued that landowners should build 'villages' and provide churches and schools as early as 1843. From National Library of Australia collection.

insisted that he had lived on a dull diet of bread and meat, which had been so lacking in nutritive value that his teeth had become loose and always left marks of blood on his bread. As Miss Wilson points out, Bunn's own diaries of the period show that there were often vegetables as well (which he claimed no-one knew how to cook properly). But at least one diary entry, for 1848, bears out his memories, for when asked if he would like to dine off bad beef, eggs and bread, Bunn's adolescent wit flashed that he would be quite happy to dine a mile off it.

Wheat was grown from early days in the district, with bread ousting the simple damper of the explorers. But in Canberra's lunatic climate, grain crops were vulnerable to everything from drought to snow, and yields could be uneven. Wheat in particular was liable to rust, a disease which ravaged crops. Edward Smith, a Methodist pioneer in Weetangera, who could barely write but could carry a 300lb sack of grain, began to experiment with different strains of English wheat, giving out seeds of the successful varieties free to his neighbours. A few years later William Farrer, the Cambridge trained scientist, was to build on Smith's work in his own experiments at Lambrigg, near Tharwa, and finally bred the rust-resistant strain 'Federation'.

Other vegetables came more slowly. As all Canberra gardeners know, pumpkins will grow well, but no-one was very sure how to cook them at first. Murray at Yarralumla, with a fierce Irish pride, insisted that potatoes were fit only for pigs, but when rain came after the great drought of 1865-66, Sam Shumack's father was amazed to find potato seed which he had written off sprouting from the ground. Mossman and Bannister commented on the fruit trees around Canberra — they must have been planted in the very early days, for it takes a few years for a fruit tree to mature, and overall they 'formed a very favourable opinion of this district'. 'In the gardens are to be found all European fruits and vegetables, and the vine produces abundantly'. The vine! In those early years Canberra people could even drink their own local vintages, although an entry in William Bunn's diary ('Making wine and vinegar') must cast some doubt on their palates.

One other point should be borne in mind about the Canberra pioneers. Australia's roads today are bad and dangerous, a



disgrace to a wealthy country. They are indeed better than the roads of the past, but too similar for safety. It seems amazing that in a dry country there could ever have been roads in which carts and carriages got so deeply bogged they had to be abandoned, but there were some notorious stretches of glue around the Canberra district. Dry weather did not always help road surfaces, and there were plenty of drivers, then as now, who believed the best way to treat a bad road was get along it as quickly as possible — maybe sensible if you have good suspension, but not a good idea in days when back roads still had protruding tree stumps — some of them three feet high. Pioneer recollections usually include depressingly frequent references to people breaking their legs (at best) or killing themselves (at worst) in accidents. Steep climbs had their own problems. On the Razorback, which traffic between Canberra and Sydney had to cross, bullock teams had to double up to make the climb. Local roads could be worse. One local man recalled taking a pony and buckboard over the Brindabellas (and this was after 1900), on a road where the pony sometimes had to claw its way uphill, with the passengers pushing behind. Rivers could be as impassable as mountains — and drownings were not infrequent. Mr Lea-Scarlett has a vivid tale of a crossing of the Molonglo near Queanbeyan in 1861 — and not by a pioneer expedition, but by the coach from Goulburn, which ran a regular service. The driver did not want to attempt to cross the flooded river, as his horses had slogged across a thirty mile slurry of mud, frequently having to drag the coach out of axle deep bogs. Eventually the attempt was made, and the coach stuck half way across. Men passengers jumped shoulder deep into the torrent to push the coach free — and had to carry baggage and mail bags above their heads to lighten the load and save the cargo. And those passengers had paid a fare, and one which in real terms would be equal to a plane ticket overseas today. Those 1861 travellers were lucky to get out of the river, for the chill and force of a local river in flood could paralyse and drown a man.

Canberra's first resident Anglican parson, Edward Gregory, was a muscular Christian of the clean-cut Victorian type. In 1852 he found himself cut off from his rectory — then the Acton

homestead on the site of Canberra hospital — by a raging Molonglo in flood. To the dismay of his companions he plunged in and below those now peaceful waters just west of Commonwealth Avenue bridge, he was swept to his death. And Gregory was a young man, who had been a champion swimmer in his college days. Oddly enough, many of our pioneer population were great travellers, who had knocked about the world, and roamed the whole of Australia. How they ever got from end to end of the Canberra district must remain a mystery.

It is also worth trying to see how life in Canberra seemed to different sorts of people — to a migrant, to a woman, to a child or to a convict. Some people of course fell into more than one category, and generalisations are always dangerous. Nonetheless, it may be worth trying to recreate life from different points of view, and as Canberra's first white Australians were nearly all migrants, I shall start by looking at the area from the new chum's point of view.

In its pioneer days, Canberra had a few continental and South American migrants, and there were local Asian communities. But the bulk of the immigrants were from the British Isles, and they brought their memories, feuds and snobberies with them. One peacemaking Queanbeyan politician came up with a formula in 1868 to regard everyone as 'Englishmen in heart' even if Irish or Scots by birth. The pioneers were slow to think of themselves as Australians: the suggestion came from a Protestant Irishman. Of the 2,500 people in the Queanbeyan police district in 1851, 1,100 had been born in the colony, 600 in England, 600 in Ireland and 150 in Scotland. There were four Welshmen, ten people from other parts of the British empire and twenty-six foreigners. There was some unofficial local segregation — Yarralumla was mainly Irish Catholic, Duntroon was Scots and Irish Protestant — but overall the different streams of British life were thrown much more together than they had ever been in the old country. Sam Shumack laughed at the memory of a new chum from England who was terrified of an 'Irish savage' he had to work with. He confided his fears to other farmworkers ('...how is it they let these Irish savages come here? They should be kept out.') — and was amazed to learn that they too were Irish and not savage at all. Yet there were attempts to

keep alive old memories, some with pride and some with bitterness. Scottish Gaelic was widely spoken on the Duntroon estate, and a shepherd called Ross, who felt badly treated on the Cunningham estate at Lanyon, told his boss 'he was a disgrace to Scotland'. (They played the bagpipes at Duntroon: one antique and particularly fearsome instrument was credited with having put the English to flight at Bannockburn in 1314.) Irish memories were sharper, and several local settlers claimed to have escaped from the Emerald Isle to avoid the gallows — an indiscreet boast if true. A Ginninderra man taught the Irish language, and in good Irish fashion the priest sometimes arranged suitably Catholic marriages, although in those innocent days a Protestant Irishman like Sam Shumack was equally inflamed by the wrongs of his country. Orange marches in Queanbeyan often ended in sectarian fighting. Some of the original Irish community in southern New South Wales — including the ancestors of many Canberra families today — were transported for their part in the Irish rising of 1798, and Shumack knew one very old man who claimed he had fought at the battle of Vinegar Hill. Another claimed to have killed Lord Letrim, a notorious Irish landowner whose murderer was never



From a painting in 1913: the view from Mount Pleasant. Red Hill on the left, Black Mountain on the right, the Brindabella Mountains in the distance. Most of the Molonglo valley in the foreground is now under Lake Burley Griffin. St John's church, Reid, is at the right. From National Library of Australia collection.

discovered. The story was embellished with a good deal of blarney and some typical melodrama, in which the grasping landlord was shot after offering to forgo arrears of rent if he could have his wicked way with the beautiful daughter of the tenant family. That such tales could be told, and, even more remarkably, be believed, was a measure of the feeling many migrants had for the country they had left behind them. There were any number of old men who would talk about the bad old days — mass public hangings in London of criminals delighted to be quitting a miserable life, tales of 'the abject misery' of their boyhood, and of mothers urging their sons to emigrate to Australia before poverty drove them to crime — and transportation.

And yet there was another side. Real success among settlers was often seen as the man who got enough money to go back to spend his last years in comfort in the old country. A fair number of local families claimed — sometimes to the amusement of their neighbours — that they were related to great dynasties, and some talked of missing documents or disinheriting for romantic marriages which had stopped them from inheriting riches and rank. The Shumacks employed a nurse who claimed she was a daughter of the great Irish magnate who rejoiced in the name of the Magillicuddy of the Reeks, who some said was the rightful king of Ireland. Her father had tried to marry her to an English duke, and she had run away to Australia. The Gibbes family, who lived at Yarralumla in the 1860s, went even higher, claiming an irregular descent from George III's second son, the grand old Duke of York, now best remembered in a nursery rhyme for his military tactics. Given the general conduct of George III's sons, this is not at all improbable. The story was probably not told to that later Duke of York, subsequently King George VI, when he stayed at Yarralumla in 1927.

One migrant family comes to life from three letters recently found in England, written to friends by a lonely young woman in 1837. The Gore family settled at Lake Bathurst, probably in 1835. Nowadays relatively few people know Lake Bathurst, a smaller version of Lake George about ten miles to the east, a rather secretive stretch of water hidden just off the road from Braidwood to Goulburn. But in the old days that road was often

preferred as a main route to Sydney, and in any case the Gore family tried first to get land on Gooromon Ponds, north of Hall, and another block near Bungendore so we can treat them as Canberra pioneers.

John Gore, the father of the family, was a naval officer. He had entered the Royal Navy as a teenager in 1789, and had served as an able seaman on the *Guardian*, a store ship which sailed, through storm and shipwreck, to supply the newly founded colony of New South Wales. He rose steadily in the service. He was a lieutenant on the *Indefatigable* in 1804, and mentioned in despatches for his heroism in a Drake-like sea-



The Grand Old Duke of York

He had ten thousand men

He marched them up to the top of the hill

And he marched them down again.

George IV's brother, Frederick, Duke of York, was no general. He seems to have had a fair number of women as well as his 10,000 men. Colonel Gibbes, who lived at Yarralumla in the 1850s and 1860s, was said to be his illegitimate son. From *Historical Portraits 1800-1850* (Oxford 1919), facing p. 88.

fight which ended with the capture of four Spanish treasure ships, and over three million Spanish dollars. In 1808, he was one of the British officers who escorted the Portuguese royal family when they fled to Brazil to escape the invading French, and when the war was over he commanded one of the ships which guarded the imprisoned Napoleon on the island of St Helena. He retired as a captain in 1821, but was promoted in his retirement to the rank of rear-admiral, just before he died in 1853.

How did the waters of Lake Bathurst come to have their very own British admiral? We can guess that John Gore, like many another retired officer or ranker, found peacetime life in Britain dull and financially difficult. From time to time boyhood memories of New South Wales must have stirred him, until at length an opportunity arose of acting upon them. In 1831 the British government had abolished free land grants in the colonies, but the next year new regulations were drawn up which offered ex-officers generous rebates if they purchased colonial estates, and settled on them. Captain Gore found he was entitled to the maximum remission, and in 1833 he packed his bags and his family off to Sydney. Ann, his eldest daughter, who was already 22, assured her friends in England that she had not really seen much of the world on the journey out — three days in Cape Town and two in Sydney had been all, before spending a year in Parramatta being bitten by mosquitoes. Meanwhile her father searched for suitable land, eventually buying 1,165 acres alongside Mulwaree Ponds at Lake Bathurst. At five shillings an acre, this came to £291-5-0 — and with the gallant captain's rebate of £300, the land was in effect a free grant. It paid to be an officer.

The Gores had been at Lake Bathurst for almost two years when Ann, now 26, sent a small package of letters to friends back home. She was painfully cheery in her tone, and transparently miserable in her new home. The house was still not finished, and her elderly mother's health had broken down. Servants were bad, and for two months the young gentlewoman had been left to cope with bush housekeeping without any help at all. Captain Gore, a man in his sixties, was attempting to manage the farm alone, since the younger son, Edward, had

taken some of the stock away to pasture — probably in the Monaro, where the Gores took out a grazing licence the following year. The three daughters of the family all hoped that their adored elder brother Graham would leave his promising career in the navy and come out to join them. Young Lieutenant Gore would have done well to have heeded his sister's advice: ten years later he sailed on an expedition led by Sir John Franklin, former governor of Van Diemen's Land, which tried to find a north-west passage through the Canadian Arctic. The expedition stuck in the ice, ran out of food, lapsed into cannibalism, and perished.

Ann Gore liked the view over the wheat field in front of the house, and the garden grew good vegetables. Fruit trees had been planted for the future. But she found little else to please her. 'I dare say you would fancy the scenery must be very pretty from the trees being all evergreen, but I can assure you it is not to be compared to old England.' The white gum was 'very ugly', and to an English eye looked as if someone had whitewashed the trunk. The mimosas (wattles) were pretty, but had no scent. The parrots and cockatoos were attractive, but there was no bird song with the exception of the magpie 'which has a kind of whistle'. Overall she found the scenery 'monotonous'. The climate was less oppressive than on the coast, and they had English winters, which called for roaring log fires.

A decade before, the Lake Bathurst Aborigines had been a fierce people. By 1837, they held no terrors for an English girl, but neither had they any charms. They were 'the ugliest race I ever beheld', refusing to abandon their nomadic life, and wearing either a blanket, given by the government, or a cloak made from possum skins — 'there are no means of civilising them'. The Gores had taken a black girl into their house with the intention of bringing her up among them, but she returned to her tribe within two days. It was a worthy intention, but the little girl probably returned to her wilful savagery when she realised that the Gore's desire to civilise her was connected with their servant problem.

When I first read Ann Gore's letters, I was furious with the woman. Here was a precious opportunity to learn about settler life, but the obtuse female gave only scraps of information, and

filled her letters with prattle about friends in London. But a second reading gave me more sympathy. She was lonely — 'the least scrap from England is most acceptable' and her spirits rose with the docking of 'every English ship'. There were few congenial neighbours, and even the piano — a source of solace to so many pioneer families — had gone out of tune through overuse and could not be repaired so deep in the bush. 'Yes my dear' she wrote to a cousin 'you will receive many letters from Ann Gore, for I do not think it at all probable I shall ever change my name'. In Australia, she explained, 'Ladies' married early, some as young as sixteen. At 26, a lady by breeding and isolated in a rough world of stockmen and convicts, Ann Gore felt on the shelf.

One drizzling autumn day, I drove out from Canberra to see if Ann Gore had been buried in the little Anglican church at Lake Bathurst. One corner of the graveyard is overgrown now, and it was a wet business pushing and stooping through the bushes. There is a row of Gore family headstones up by the fence, and the first one I saw was that of Ann Gore. She never married, and died in 1891 at the age of 80. She had lived at Lake Bathurst for 56 years. I only hope she got to like it.

What was life like for other women? Ann Gore's experience was probably unusual: she was, after all, a lady, and by emigrating to a frontier country peopled by stockmen and convicts, she severely reduced her chances of a suitable marriage. But for the average English lass, certainly poor and probably plain, village life at home offered at best a lifetime of drudgery with a farm labourer for a husband, and at worst an equally thankless spinsterhood waiting on elderly relatives and looking after sisters' children. In practice the choice between marriage and spinsterhood might be for many women a question of which offered the less unhappiness, but social pressure was definitely in favour of marriage and children, and a girl would have a wider choice in Australia so long as she had not — like poor Ann Gore — been brought up to expect a gentleman for a husband.

The census of 1851 shows that in the police district of Queanbeyan — which stretched out to Bungendore, Gundaroo and Michelago as well as Canberra itself — there were 1,511 males and 1,015 females, that is three males for every two



females. Of the thousand or so women, the vast majority had either been born in the colony or come as free migrants — only sixty-one were listed under the euphemism 'other free persons', which meant ex-convicts. Women, then, were less likely than men to have been transported — as Caroline Chisholm, who ran the earliest 'Bring out a Briton' migration campaign, rightly said, women and children were 'God's police'. Not surprisingly, the imbalance between the sexes was most marked above the age of 20. Below that age, the population was composed mainly of children born in Australia and among them, the 673 boys were roughly balanced by the 607 girls. But from 21 and upwards, there were twice as many men as women — 838 to 408. It was the 432 ex-convict males who made the difference between the sexes. Marriage statistics show very roughly that every woman over 20 was married, but only half the men — 396 married women, 420 men.

So far, then, everything was in a girl's favour. The eleven-year old Samuel Shumack once abused his elderly uncle Peter (from a safe distance) by telling him that he was old and cranky — 'you are over fifty years old and no woman would marry you'. (Happily not long after, a wife did turn up for uncle Peter, ancient as he was.) Certainly a girl did not have to marry anyone she did not want. The O'Keefe family had a small block of land somewhere near Parliament House, and in 1859 they planned to marry off their daughter to an elderly Irishman, Robin Maloney, who had just acquired a couple of hundred acres somewhere on the modern northside of the city. Miss O'Keefe, however, was not keen on the idea, and the night before the wedding she quietly climbed out of her bedroom window, waded through the freezing cold of the Molonglo at the foot of Anzac Parade and ran away, if not exactly to the big city, at least as far as Goulburn. She left a fiery note behind refusing to 'become any man's slave', and it would be pleasant to think that her ghost haunts the male-dominated Australian parliament of today. She later returned and of her free will married the owner of Gold Creek, off the Barton Highway. Robin Maloney did not long suffer the lack of a wife, for Irish girls arriving in Australia had the support of a large and benevolent matrimonial agency

— and when Mary Walsh arrived from Ireland just after the jilting, the local priest hastened to perform an introduction, and she was Mrs Maloney within a month. In doing so, she had no doubt set back the feminist cause which Miss O'Keefe had proudly proclaimed, but Sam Shumack, who was no starry-eyed romantic about marriage, insisted that it was a happy union. But Mary Walsh was perhaps right not to be too fussy: of the 1,500 males in the Queanbeyan police district in 1851, five were clergymen (including at least one celibate), two were doctors, one was a lawyer, and two were described as 'other educated persons'. It did not do to set your sights too high.

The odds certainly were not stacked entirely in favour of the women. Neither engagement nor marriage in practice held a man: women were probably more often jilted than men. Lucy Davis of Ginninderra was engaged to Pemberton Palmer, son of the squire, and young Palmer went off to England in 1852 to buy his bride-to-be an expensive carriage and horses. But the round-trip was a long one, and the young man fell in love with a governess on the way home, and married her instead. The irate Davis family appropriated the carriage, and Lucy waited ten years before marrying and going off to Queensland — which may or may not be a happy ending, depending on one's view of Queensland. The story may in fact be romancing by old Sam Shumack, because hard on its heels comes a tale of another Palmer eloping with a governess from the Davis household. But the mobility of Australian life certainly made it easy for a man to abandon an alliance he had come to regret. In T.A. Murray's correspondence there is a sardonic reference to the disappearance of a man named White from Yarralumla in 1840. Mrs White was upset, and resisted the idea that her husband had run away. 'I suspect however that some gay Lothario about the farm is already consoling her for his loss.' (The word 'gay' has of course sharply altered its meaning in recent years.) Another silent escape was made by that same O'Keefe who had tried to force his daughter to marry Maloney. In his case, a writ for debt was the precipitant of his flight, and he set up as a cab driver in Melbourne. This was perhaps not the best way of maintaining an incognito, and in due course O'Keefe was spotted by a visiting Queanbeyan storekeeper, whose sympathies were natu-

rally with the creditor. But when Mrs O'Keefe was told of her husband's whereabouts, she refused to try to get him back.

Marriage, then, among the pioneers was not always idyllic. And even where a marriage itself was happy, what are we to make of the large families, the constant fear of childbirth in bush huts, with little or no skilled medical support? Motherhood was an honoured, a venerated occupation in pioneer society, and a century later we tend to take that admiration at face value: smiling pioneer mothers appear on postage stamps surrounded by their happy children, and a legend of a golden age grows around them. In reality, the veneration for motherhood was partly a form of compensation, a pay-off, for a job which broke many women physically and mentally. Accounts of the early settlers are full of stories of wives who produced four, five, seven and more children, and died in childbirth with the last: the widower would usually seek a fresh bride to care for his motherless children, and a second family would follow. We know that Queen Victoria, who had nine children in seventeen years, had a horror of childbirth — and she had the finest medical attention in the world, even for her last children, the use of chloroform. No such refinements were available to Can-



Mount Ainslie rises above empty paddocks. This photograph was taken in 1880. From National Library of Australia collection.

berra women. There was no doctor in Queanbeyan until the late 1830s, when Dr William Hayley arrived. A second medical man, Andrew Morton, was discovered in the 1840s, according to a questionable local legend, working as a shepherd on the Duntroon estate. No doctor was available closer than Goulburn for a difficult confinement, but one of the Campbells remembered seeing medical text-books in one of the outlying huts. Inquiries were made, and Morton saved mother and child and went on to become a respected citizen of Queanbeyan. If no doctor could be found, children came into the world with the help of local midwives — apparently untrained. In the 1850s Canberra itself had only two women competent to take charge at a birth. One of them, Mrs McKenzie, had to call on the services of the other, Mrs Mayo, for what turned out to be a difficult delivery of her own child. Crisis followed when Mrs Mayo was cut off on the north side of the Molonglo while the confinement was taking place on the south. Although the river was in dangerous flood, Mrs Mayo eventually crossed in a barrel which had been hastily hammered to a V-shaped raft. Canberra's entire obstetric skill could easily have been drowned, had not a Duntroon hand bravely swum the river twice with a line to steady the crossing.

Australian male society not only venerated motherhood: it compelled it. The colony needed manpower, and consequently it required its womenfolk to produce as many children as possible as a workforce. All religious and legal sanctions were directed towards impressing women with the importance of their assigned role. Take the case of 'Doctor' Beals, one of the many local alcoholics who figure in Sam Shumack's pages. He had been struck off the register and sent to prison for three years 'for having performed an illegal operation' near Braidwood. It was hardly surprising that he drank heavily, nor is there any need to guess why he was 'practising on the sly' in the 1880s. Raising children deep in the bush could be a grindingly depressing experience: Gwendoline Wilson quotes moving extracts from the diary of Mary Mowle, who lived just south of Commonwealth Avenue bridge in the early 1850s. Her husband was frequently away, and she tried to enliven her days by keeping a diary, in which she listed her dull routine with her three

children, punctuated by bursts of resentment against her husband for his absence and occasional expressions of guilt at the fear that her ingratitude would meet divine displeasure. Mary Mowle at least had an Irish servant girl, enough leisure to become bored, and enough income to afford a piano and an occasional ride on a horse. But the pleasures she craved for were innocent enough. She even yearned for Yass, whose sophisticated menfolk were 'dear, lovable creatures' and 'very different from the yahoos and boobies we are blessed with in this district'.

Mary Ann Brownlow was another woman who found family life in the bush too much for her. She was a daughter of the Guise family, who had land between Gundaroo and Lake George, and she inherited part of the family holdings, although in accordance with the law at that time it became her husband's property entirely. In 1851, at the age of 18 she had married George Brownlow, a young settler who had some education, and had acted for a time as superintendent of the Acton estate, now the Canberra hospital. They set up home near Sutton, where Brownlow worked as a blacksmith. Two children were born in quick succession, and in 1855 Mary Ann found herself pregnant again. By this time the marriage was going badly. Mary Ann Brownlow claimed her husband had sold off her inheritance without consulting her, and alleged that he was carrying on with another woman, and had threatened to instal his mistress in her place. Historians have been sceptical of her hysterical charges, but local opinion was firmly on her side, and one witness called her 'an over-worked, heart-broken woman'. Twenty-two, and facing the birth of a third child, Mary Ann Brownlow began to drink heavily, and rows became more frequent. One night in April 1855 she stabbed Brownlow, who managed to run half a mile to shelter, with his wife in pursuit. Four days later he died, and Mary Ann was removed to Goulburn prison. There, four months later, she gave birth to a son.

The trial of Mary Ann Brownlow hardly showed the law at its best and fairest. The Chief Justice, Sir Alfred Stephen, refused to consider medical opinion that a pregnant woman might become mentally deranged — the role of women in colonial society was to produce children and like it. The court did not bother to inquire why a woman who was five months' pregnant

thought she needed to carry a knife, nor did it inquire whether Brownlow's death might have been partly caused by his removal over the usual rough roads to another homestead after escaping fleetly enough from his wife on the night of the attack. For Chief Justice Stephen it was enough that Mary Ann had been heard exulting hysterically in her attack on her husband, and that he had died afterwards. The jury was practically directed to find her guilty, and Stephen not only sentenced her to death but bluntly told her not to hope for mercy.

If Mary Ann Brownlow had been a popular heroine before, the last month of her life turned her into something close to a local saint. No one in southern New South Wales believed that the sentence could possibly be carried out, petitions flowed to



Sir Alfred Stephen. Mary Ann Brownlow's husband worked as manager of the Jeffreys property at Acton before moving to Sutton. His death after she had stabbed him in hysterical anger led to her trial and execution for murder. Sir Alfred Stephen refused to consider her state of mind, or the unhappiness of her marriage, and told her there would be no mercy when he sentenced her to death. She was 22. From *Australian Portrait Gallery* (Sydney 1885), facing p. 85.

Sydney, tension rose and in the last days before the execution date, the mail coaches were urged on to record speeds in the hope that a reprieve would come. Mary Ann herself was a model of coolness, with the hysteria of the autumn months replaced by religious calm. Nowadays we might expect to find a highly strung and imaginative girl of 22 mounting the platform in a university graduation ceremony. In October 1855 they took a 22-year-old mother of three and hanged her. For women, the moral was brutally clear: conform to society's ideal of a wife and mother, and you would be put on a pedestal; fail to live up to the image and you might end on the gallows.

The little boy born in the prison cell died shortly afterwards.

If life was tough for women, surely it must have been idyllic for children? Roaming in the Australian bush, herding, life in the greatest adventure playground in the world must have been nearly perfect. Certainly the old men reminisced and romanced about their childhood, for old men often have the most vivid memories of what happened earliest in their lives. Through William Davis Wright's recollections we can almost hear the children, white and black together, splashing in the Murrumbidgee in the hot summers of the 1840s, or climbing tall gum trees to watch the grey-green paddocks of Belconnen with the young Sam Shumack — they called him the 'white blackfellow' for his climbing — twenty years later.

But childhood is rarely idyllic, even if in the old Canberra it was fairly uncomplicated. Indeed it was not so much uncomplicated as downright dull. Gwendoline Wilson quotes from the diary of the teenage William Bunn who lived at the original Woden, close to Fraser Park speedway. He certainly found little enough to write about: a local funeral or a summer bushfire on Black Mountain were events, and a trip out to have dinner with the Palmers of Ginninderra at the age of 17 was an intellectual experience which produced pages of ecstatic direct quotation from the sparkling conversation of the local gentry. (And sparkle they did, too — the stimulating Canberra dinner party seems to have a long pedigree.) William Bunn described a typical day as a 15 year old. He got up anytime between 8 and 11, read or helped out in the dairy, studied either shorthand or Latin or Greek (something few bush boys would have done), and

went over his lessons with his mother. The afternoon would be spent walking or playing, punctuated with more reading, with a main meal after dusk and tea at about 8 p.m. Three nights a week newspapers came from Sydney, and occasionally William would read major news items to the hands, many of whom were illiterate. The mild dullness of the weekdays was broken by the stifling boredom of Sunday, for although William was being reared as a Catholic and so escaped the full horror of Protestant sabbatarianism, neither studying nor newspaper reading was allowed at Woden.

William Bunn was probably unusual: his parents owned the property and this must have put a social gulf between him and other lads, but if he lacked company he did at least have his books. For other children, life was often plain dull. Modern children are not the only ones to drift into delinquency for lack of anything else to do. Queanbeyan youth went in for such 'pranks' as blocking up chimneys (to fill houses with smoke) or removing timbers from the bridge — which could be dangerous on dark nights. When gas lighting came in the 1890s, adventurous teenagers tried to blow the flame out, while foolhardy ones tried fire-eating. Surplus energy turned to mischief. The young Sam Shumack once chopped down a whole clump of wattles, to the annoyance of his parents, who had built a secluded privy in the middle. What entertainment did they have? An occasional circus came to Queanbeyan, and even in old age Sam Shumack could remember Punch and Judy coming to Duntroon when he was seven — and that cost a whole shilling entrance fee. Children's stories came straight from England, and were often incomprehensible. An Englishwoman who came to the area in the 1880s was amazed that there was no resemblance between the scruffy drought-beaten local sheep and the gambolling lambs she had read about in childhood. Rabbits were almost unknown around Canberra until the 1880s, and then in some years, whole paddocks were stripped by a seething mass of skinny dust-covered bunnies. To expect Canberra children to be charmed by the antics of the Flopsies, Mopsies and Cottontails of English tales was to hope too much. Miles Franklin simply could not understand how Red Riding Hood could be eaten by a wolf, or how babes ever got lost in woods. Even in the remote



Brindabellas, a lost child would bring out everyone for a hundred miles around in search parties.

Many Canberra children of a century ago must have had only the vaguest knowledge of the outside world. Migrants were probably uprooted too young to recall much of their previous homes, and even the computer-like memory of Sam Shumack could recapture only fleeting notions of his birthplace in County Cork. The locally born were often woefully ignorant. Ned Ryan was born in Australia, although his parents and older brothers had come from Ireland to work on a property just across the Barton Highway from Evatt and Giralang. Ned heard exciting stories about Sydney and its big ships, and at last the boy begged



A croquet party at Duntroon in 1872. This photograph could have been taken at any English country house of the period, and comes right out of the world of Anthony Trollope. It takes some effort to realise that this is the depths of the Australian bush! Parson Smith, his hair not yet white, sits at the left. The bishop of Goulburn is in the centre, Squire George Campbell has his arms crossed at the right. Mrs Campbell stands between her husband and the bishop: she was a noted good samaritan and mainstay of local charities. The two clerical gentlemen have presumably been playing croquet in their top hats. The ladies are wrapped up as if for English weather. From National Library of Australia collection.

permission to join a teamster known to everyone as Skinny Jack who was taking wool to Circular Quay, with two mates. It was the Canberra lad's first long trip, and he had to make himself useful. When the wool was unloaded in Sydney the men set up camp on open ground by the harbour, and told young Ned to boil the billy while they went off to collect provisions. An hour later Skinny Jack returned, more than ready for his tea. He took a mouthful, spat it out, swore violently and demanded to know where Ned had drawn his water. Unfortunately no one had told the bush boy that the blue water of the harbour was full of salt.

Schools did little to tamper with childish ignorance. Queanbeyan, Canberra and Ginninderra each had schools by the mid-1840s; Canberra's schoolhouse still stands in Constitution Avenue, Reid — its survival is something of a miracle, for a bushfire swept through it in 1864, and the children had fun scrunching charred pencils in the ruin. The Campbells had provided the original building, and now lent the dairy at Duntroon as a replacement while it was rebuilt. Canberra pupils had a longish



Church-Growing road      Rectory and Park      School and Church      Lower slopes of Mt. Ainslie  
Canberra State      Post Office and Rectory      Blundell's Farm  
Church, Gile      The willows mark the Murrumbidgee River. The clump of trees behind the church is the request Aboriginal Corporation Group.

This picture was taken in 1913 from Parliament Hill. Blundell's Cottage, which still stands on the banks of the lake, is at the right, under the lower slopes of Mount Ainslie; St John's church, Reid, is in the centre, and the rectory, surrounded by Parson Smith's trees is at the left, almost on the edge of modern Civic. The middle ground is now under the lake. From National Library of Australia collection.

walk to the temporary school. One morning they ran into a long line of Chinese, passing through Canberra on their way to the goldfields near Braidwood. The sight of dozens of Asian miners, each carrying a bamboo pole with baskets of equipment at each end, struck terror into the local children who ran off and hid. But there was no need for bushfires in Reid and Chinese in Campbell to deter Canberra children from going to school. In the country there was always work for them to do, and in Gundaroo it was said that education consisted of learning to ride a horse and drive a bullock team. School attendance was more regular in metropolitan Queanbeyan, but in Canberra Sam Shumack had only short spells of schooling before the age of 14. It seems to have done him no harm, and he may not have been exceptional. Statistics in the 1851 census can be roughly interpreted to mean that most local children aged 7 and over could read, and that those above 13 could write as well. Of course, you did not need to pass an exam to be entered as literate in the census form, but somehow most children probably picked up the basic skills. Attendance may have been intermittent, but the Canberra school in the late 1850s had only four weeks' holiday a year: a short spell at school then may have given more intensive tuition than nowadays.

On the other hand, teaching was hardly a socially valued profession. Ambitious men used it as a stepping stone to something better: one Queanbeyan teacher in the 1850s set up as a storekeeper. Perhaps the two occupations were interchangeable, for later on the school itself was shifted into a broken-down Monaro Street shop. Gundaroo, in one of the few periods when it actually had a school, accommodated it in the old pub. This was also far from inappropriate, because many local teachers were alcoholics: having failed in everything else, they were entrusted with the community's future. Samuel McPhail was one who imbibed more than mere knowledge. His Queanbeyan classroom was invaded in 1869 by an angry parent who poetically denounced him as a 'drunken sot' — perhaps a misreporting for drunken Scot. McPhail was shifted to the Braidwood area, but was back at Ginninderra two years later. An earlier teacher there had been Henry Grey, the rector's cousin, and a gentleman by birth. He had served in the American army

during the Mexican war, but he didn't last long as a teacher. Regular binges reduced his efficiency as a schoolmaster, and during one of them he blurted out the story of how he came to leave England for America in the first place. In his youth he and some friends had poured tar on a cat and set it on fire. The animal had fled, touching off a vast blaze in the process, and Grey had similarly — and unfortunately more successfully — followed its example in running off to escape the heat. Not the ideal choice as a teacher. A gentle and gentlemanly drunk ran the school Miles Franklin attended at Brindabella. There was an affectionate local conspiracy to keep him clear of the bottle, but occasionally he lapsed. After one indisposition, a visiting clergyman took it upon himself to deliver a lecture on the virtues of self-control. An English gentleman will take a good deal, but not impertinence from the priesthood. The clergyman was bluntly told that self-control did not only apply to alcohol, and that a man with a moderate income who had forced seven children on his wife would do better to keep quiet on the subject. The real objection to an educated drunk was not just that he would not keep sober, but equally that he would not keep to the lowly place assigned to the teacher. Local notables were happy to hire a man, often elderly, who could write neatly, did not drop too many aitches, and was reasonably able to keep order. The fiery Andrew Wotherspoon, a Scot, shepherd and poet, kept order at the Canberra school by throwing his strap at pupils, and then lashing at them when they returned it. James Abernethy, who taught in the 1870s, was renowned for his poor discipline, but compensated by unswerving loyalty to the Church of England. In an Anglican school, like St John's, ability to lead the hymn singing in church on Sundays might count more than teaching skills in getting the job. In any case, teaching offered only a low and precarious standard of living. True, in bush schools a house went with the job, but local opinion reckoned that teachers required only a little more domestic luxury than pigs or chooks. Income depended largely on fees paid by parents: these were high enough to deter the parents without being generous enough to enrich the teacher. Often parents stopped sending their children because they could not afford the fees, although not infrequently they compromised

by sending their offspring and welching on the bills. This caused a high turnover rate even among sober teachers.

Modern educationalists lay great stress on community involvement in schools. A century ago schools around Canberra suffered if anything from an excess of parental, squirearchical and clerical interference. Parents, it is true, were the least of the offenders. Sam Shumack's father was a member of the Ginninderra school board, and was upbraided by a government inspector for the Board's failure to hold meetings. Mr Shumack patiently explained that the Board met regularly at the school, but separately — each father dropping in from time to time. The inspector laughed at what he regarded as an excellent example of an Irish joke. A less amusing contemporary Irish effort was the invasion of the Queanbeyan Catholic school by two infuriated locals, who beat up the schoolteacher in front of his pupils. On that occasion one little boy was so frightened that he ran all the way home still wearing a dunce's cap which had earlier been placed on his ignorant head. A more formal battle was that between George Campbell and Andrew Wotherspoon in Canberra — both Scots, but the one an Anglican, who had succeeded his brother Charles as squire of Duntroon, the other a Presbyterian and fighting spokesman for the little man. Wotherspoon was the schoolmaster, while Campbell regarded himself as the owner — as he was certainly the generous patron — of the schoolhouse. Wotherspoon attacked the local silver-tails in moderately bad verse and immoderately fiery prose. Several times he and Campbell clashed, and one morning the squire strode into the classroom and announced that the school was closed. Wotherspoon boldly reopened the next morning, but the Duntroon blacksmith was soon on hand to change the lock on the door. After a monumental local row, Wotherspoon was shifted to Lismore — and local legend actually credited Campbell with lending him money to set up a store. Later he branched out to run Lismore's post office, prompting his political ally John Dunmore Lang to comment that he had always wanted to be a man of letters.

Sectarianism was another fruitful source of local antagonism. Gundaroo did not get a regular school until the late 1860s, because the locals could not agree to share one, but were too few

to support separate denominational schools. In Tuggeranong a local landowner, Andrew Pike, gave land for a school in the 1870s. A number of the small settlers were Catholics, as was the teacher, Joseph Kelly, and the Tuggeranong school seems to have been formally Catholic in allegiance. However, a common-sense arrangement was made by which the versatile Mr Kelly gave separate religious instruction to each denomination for an hour a week. Clerics of all churches approved the arrangement, and all went well until Father McAuliffe arrived. Jeremiah McAuliffe was a turbulent priest, who interfered in elections, and caused an unusually rapid turn-over of teachers in the Queanbeyan Catholic school. At Tuggeranong he upset the religious compromise, with a typically intolerant threat to throw the school's Anglican prayer book into the fire. Local feeling ran high against the trouble-maker, but Pike was scared into closing the school which he turned into a granary. Both Pike and McAuliffe were drowned within the next couple of years, and Shumack's account suggests their deaths were not received with much charity. Kelly, on the other hand, was a good teacher and moved on to a successful career in the state system.

In 1880 the colony's great statesman, Henry Parkes, scrapped the system of indiscriminate subsidies to denominational schools, which had fuelled sectarian feeling, and channelled public money into a common school system. There were some gains and some losses in the change, but it helped to cool religious antagonisms. Women appeared more frequently as teachers, but to avoid sectarian feeling no history after Biblical times was allowed. Some clerics, it would seem, had reason to be ashamed of what their respective Catholic and Protestant ancestors had done and the children were the losers. But at least the principle had been established that schooling mattered more than indoctrination.

All this takes us a long way from the children in the classroom, but luckily the interest which squire Campbell and Parson Smith took in the Canberra school does provide us with a few glimpses of lessons in progress. These were not typical lessons, with the ferocious and frock-coated Mr Wotherspoon hurling his strap at offenders, or the less fearsome Mr Abernethy

having almost as much difficulty in controlling 'giddiness and chattering' among the girls as he had in pronouncing his aitches. On Friday afternoons the Reverend Mr Smith would appear to take the children through the Anglican catechism. He did not like children, and they did not like his habit of turning up at ten to four to inflict what was virtually a detention. The class would sullenly go through the mechanical responses of the prayer book, but showed a total lack of interest in answering the rector's more abstruse theological questions. One stock question was 'what is faith?' which, after the usual silence, he would define as 'the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen'. One veteran of those days sardonically called it 'a very illuminating definition for a lot of wild bush boys'. Charles Campbell also dropped in to quiz the frightened pupils. One day he drew silence when he asked the class to define the word 'luxury', and explained its meaning as 'a fat turkey and a bottle of wine' — which must have made more sense than the rector's offering.

It is obvious enough that the children were overawed by these visits from local identities. We will leave childhood in old Canberra with a hilarious account of Charles Campbell's visit to the school one day in 1848. To his horror, not one child could name the reigning sovereign nor seemed to know the capitals of England, Scotland or Ireland. He then set a short dictation test to an intelligent 12-year-old Scots Highland boy, reading from a history book describing the Roman invasions of Britain. He then asked the lad to whom we owed our earliest knowledge of the history of England. Instead of answering 'Julius Caesar' — as stated in the dictation test — there was a lengthy silence followed by the reply 'God'. Campbell supplied the correct answer, and then asked an Irish girl who Julius Caesar was. She replied 'Jesus Christ'. To Campbell it was clear evidence that intermittent schooling with poorly trained teachers was of little use. But it is also possible to argue that the Canberra children of 1848 had learned one of life's important lessons: always tell powerful people what you think they want you to say.

What was life like for a convict in early Canberra? Many people are startled to realise that there were convicts around Canberra — Sydney, yes, and Newcastle and Brisbane too, most

people know were established as penal settlements. But convicts in the modern and humane city of Canberra? When Sam Shumack's father started work at Duntroon in 1856 he was shocked to learn that another employee was a 'lag', an ex-convict, and he confided his disgust to his mates. They laughed uproariously at the new chum, and each in turn proclaimed that he too had been transported. Transportation ended in the 1840s in New South Wales, but ex-convicts remained a large section of society right through the nineteenth century: one lasted long enough to get elected to the first Commonwealth parliament in 1901. Even a Queanbeyan bank manager was found to have been a convict, although in this case the bank regretfully sacked him. Free settlers who wanted to be fussy about convict neighbours quickly found that they should have gone to another colony: in the bush there was either a general conspiracy of silence about people's pasts, or an equally general agreement that convicts were victims of a cruel society. Around Canberra English ex-convicts were invariably accepted either as poachers (how could you punish anyone for killing vermin?), or as falsely accused. Irish ex-convicts usually admitted to more violent reasons for their exile but all were accorded the distinction of having fought for their country's freedom. The truth probably spans both extremes: most convicts were a rough lot, but most equally were victims of the society which formed them. What is clear is that ordinary people — free or felon — agreed that it was a brutal and unjust system. Forced labour and flogging in an alien land was a terrible retribution for any crime.

Yet the system may not have been unrelievedly brutal in everyday life, although this does not make it any pleasanter. When Tennant the bushranger held up Duntroon at the end of 1827, the only man at home was an assigned servant — a convict given by the government to the Campbells as slave labour — who had been allowed to stay in bed because he was ill. No doubt it was the first instance of a Canberra public servant taking a sickie, but it shows that humanity could surface even through brutality. John Lhotsky resolutely refused to say whether the men who accompanied him in 1834 as he struck down the Monaro highway into the unknown were free or convict. He argued that men behaved according to the way they



were treated, not the way they were labelled. In the late 1830s there were allegations that things were very lax in Queanbeyan: squatters brought unruly convict labourers in from their bush properties, only to find that the court wasted time on minor matters, or the constable, who was the official flogger, had disappeared on a distant errand, or the doctor had mysteriously vanished which made it impossible to carry out the severest sentences. When convicts were flogged, their backs never seemed to show any mark of the punishment, and most sentences were never carried out at all. Even in the cruellest system, there were men who found reasons not to torture and degrade their fellow human beings, or perhaps isolated magistrates simply reasoned that on the frontiers of the colony it was not safe to push men too far.

But it was an evil system, in which not only did the strong terrorise the weak, but the weak were driven to persecute each other. William Westwood, who became Jacky Jacky the bush-ranger, wrote a brief autobiography as he waited for the gallows on Norfolk Island. He had been sent to Gidleigh, Captain King's station just east of Bungendore, in the late 1830s. He took to the bush after a series of floggings, coupled with inadequate food and clothing. His first escape ended in recapture by mounted troopers, and he got fifty lashes as a result. Today Canberra motorists, heading for the coast, speed through the paddocks where Westwood tried to escape the lash. The convict past is all around Canberra. Visitors can still see the convict barracks at Lanyon. Almost certainly men were flogged within a few hundred yards of the modern Treasury building, within sight of the National Library. Their lives were cheap. An assigned gang worked out of Ginninderra in the late 1830s, and day by day they were sent off to split rails and herd sheep, trudging across Spence and Melba and Flynn. One night one of them failed to return. There were rumours that he had spied on his mates for the boss. A week later his body was found in the creek west of Macgregor: accidental death from a broken skull was the official verdict, but how his skull came to be so badly split was never established.

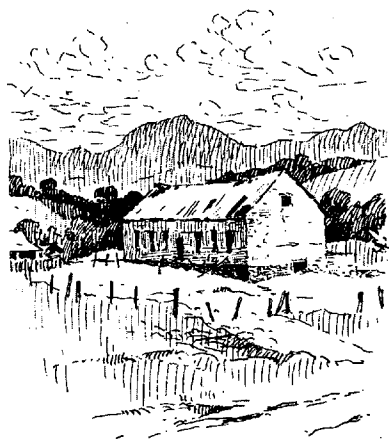
The victims in history are usually anonymous: we only know that they suffered. But thanks to Sam Shumack's reminiscences,

a few of Canberra's convicts come to life. Maurice Welsh was an Irishman assigned to Yarralumla in the 1830s. He was a big man, and in old age at least a gentle giant. He was frequently flogged, but on one occasion managed to turn over the triangle he had been tied to, and injured one of the overseers. For this he was tied to a tree and flogged again. Local tradition said he was the last man ever to be flogged in the district — and on Christmas morning too. Yarralumla has a long history of the arrogant and capricious abuse of legal power. When Murray bought the property in the late 1830s the tree was cut down. Welsh served his time out as a shepherd at Lanyon, and when he finished his sentence, drove a delivery cart for the Ginninderra estate. He was a devout Catholic, who was estimated to cross himself ten times a day and say 'By Jasus' a hundred. He would walk sixteen miles to attend mass, and often dropped in on his Protestant neighbours to tell them how sorry he was that they would go to Hell. Yet he was a popular figure, and there was general regret when he drank himself to death at Queanbeyan races. Unluckily he died during the reign of the unlovable Father McAuliffe, who dismissed his piety and refused to allow him to be buried in consecrated ground. Maurice Welsh was then buried next to the Catholic cemetery, which was eventually extended to incorporate his grave.

Joseph Crabtree was an inoffensive man, who had somehow ended up in chains. He was assigned to Klensendorffle, whose farm was at the southern end of Commonwealth Avenue bridge. Even in the 1920s John Gale could recall seeing the remains of stocks there, and seeing chains and legirons dug up from the ground. Crabtree's main complaint was overwork and bad food, although men were occasionally flogged too. The rations may not sound too bad in our inflationary times — 7lbs of beef a week, plus 4½ lbs of pork, with salt and flour — but the men found that the meat was often bad, and were driven to stealing. One trick was to fix shingles — large wooden roof tiles — to the underside of their boots, and then sneak into the poultry yard for a chook. The shingles rubbed out footprints. Lambs and young pigs were also favourite plunder. The booty was always put straight into the fire without skinning or plucking, and then hidden under a stone beneath the ashes. The suspicious Klen-

sendorffle frequently searched the hut, but never broke the secret. When the convict William Westwood became Jacky Jacky the bushranger, he is said to have constituted himself the avenger of such wrongs, and to have made a point of bailing up Klensendorffle, perhaps even on Capital Hill just by State Circle, and forcing him to promise to mend his ways. (Other legends say that Jacky Jacky hid for a time on Black Mountain, and he may have made contact with Klensendorffle's convict workers then.)

Crabtree's experience right at the heart of Canberra was equalled by Joseph Fletcher's life in outer Belconnen. He was a Londoner, transported in the 1830s and assigned to Charnwood, a property just beyond the modern suburb. Fletcher also supplemented inadequate rations by thefts, often ingeniously managed. No matter how closely he was watched or how often he was searched, he managed to hive off a steady slice of station supplies, and often bartered provisions for rum at the



Klensendorffle's farm. Klensendorffle's farm stood near the Albert Hall and Hotel Canberra south of Commonwealth Avenue bridge. This sketch by H. M. Rolland in 1921 shows the old barn, with the outline of Mount Coree in the Brindabellas looming behind. It is difficult to guess from this idyllic scene that convicts were once flogged here, within screaming distance of Parliament House. From National Library of Australia collection.

sly-grog shop out beyond Holt. Fletcher was one of the last convicts to serve his time in Canberra, and did not become a free man until 1858. Within a year he had taken some land near Giralang, and had a good crop on it. But he was never to harvest it, for he drowned trying to swim across Ginninderra Creek on Christmas Eve 1859.

One last story concerns Mrs Bowyer, a woman convict. This is one of the few tales which Shumack published twice over, and the details vary a little. In fact the whole story may be fabulous, but Shumack certainly wished to believe it. The Bowyers had land in the 1850s somewhere around Scullin or Page. Mrs Bowyer had worked in a shop in London as a girl. Some money was missed from the till, and she was accused — falsely she insisted — of taking it. Today it would be a probation case, but then it was eight years' transportation. On the voyage out, the convict ship was becalmed off the coast of Africa, close to a British warship. Half a dozen girls were examined by the ship's doctor, then rowed across to the naval vessel, and handed over to the pleasures of the officers. Mrs Bowyer was an innocent 15-year-old, and went through a week of horror before the wind sprang up again and the girls were returned to their ship. She had a child soon after arriving in Sydney, but luckily when she married six years later, her husband accepted the boy as his own. There are some inconsistencies in Shumack's two accounts which may put us on our guard. In one version, the rapist was a nobleman, but in the other he actually became a royal prince. We should remember too that the pioneers were not prudish about a salacious story, so long as they could follow the Sunday newspaper technique of condemning it as shocking and immoral. In fact convict women generally had a reputation for promiscuity, and if Mrs Bowyer was unlucky enough to become a mother in her teens, what better story to win sympathy than a heartrending tale of seduction by a callous aristocrat? But British officers were not saints either, and the Scullin pioneer may well have endured a shipboard orgy. Certainly no one thought any the worse of the boy, who was reckoned to be a good cricketer.

## The Aborigines

What happened to the Canberra Aborigines? The stock answer is simple enough. When white men arrived, there were perhaps 500 blacks in the area, split into three tribes and again into smaller sub-tribes or roving mobs. Tribal areas overlapped, and there was probably intermarriage, but broadly the Ngunawal lived north of the Molonglo valley, the Walgalu south, but mainly in the west side of the Murrumbidgee, and the Ngarigo south-eastward, beyond Michelago. White men came in with mixed motives, but their good intentions were often as damaging as their greed: the first Christian sermon in the area, delivered at Lake Bathurst in 1820, stressed the need to civilise Aboriginal people and settle them in townships. At that time no one had even seen any of the native people around Canberra, still less asked them whether they wished to be civilised. And when less than a hundred years later the foundation stone of Canberra was laid, W.M. Hughes was to comment that there were no natives left to witness the inauguration of Australia's national city. The last full-blooded local Aboriginal, Queen Nelly, died in Queanbeyan on New Year's Day 1897, and the last Cooma full-blood, Biggenhook, in 1906. As W.K. Hancock says, the historian would swap all his memoirs for the chance to talk to Biggenhook, but Biggenhook was unfortunately so much a victim of European ravages that he was deaf and dumb all his life. And so the standard picture emerges: Aboriginal society was incapable of resisting the white man, Aborigines themselves could not adapt to white ways, and their whole culture and people died out. This picture is certainly by no means totally wrong, but as we shall see, around Canberra, it was by no

means the whole story. Aboriginal society was very complex, and in many ways better fitted to the environment than pioneer European ways. Tribal people were prepared to share the land with the whites, and resisted as far as they could attempts to subjugate them. Individual black people quickly fitted themselves into white society and acquired white skills, far more than any white man ever learnt in return. And while the tribes themselves disintegrated and the full-blooded people died away, many more Aboriginal people showed their adaptability by interbreeding and intermarrying with Europeans to an extent that their descendants of today — and there must be many thousands of them — know nothing of their black Australian ancestry.

Although Aboriginal people have lived in Australia for over 30,000 years, they probably came to the Canberra district in much more recent times. The earliest date which any prehistorian cares to advance — and ideas are still tentative — would suggest that the first blacks moved up into the Brindabellas about the time of the battle of Hastings. The snowfields may have been larger before that date, although it seems unlikely that major climatic changes have occurred for several thousand years. Aboriginal people were already hunting in the Victorian Alps before the birth of Alfred the Great, and living in the Shoalhaven valley before Rome was founded. Coastal sites are even older. The oldest Aboriginal sites of all are far up the Darling River, and if black people penetrated so far inland so quickly, it is not unlikely that they also came up the Murrumbidgee, if only for trade and exploration. Large as the modern population of Canberra is, and small though the numbers of tribesmen were when Europeans came, it is not impossible that in total more black Australians have lived in this district than whites.

How did they live? There is widespread evidence that Aborigines in the colder parts of Australia knew how to make cloaks from skins, and they certainly did so in the Monaro. Local settlers did not comment much on native dress, for two reasons. One was that from very early days, the government handed out blankets as a subsidy to the blacks, and these quickly supplanted indigenous styles. The government's strange generosity was

connected with the second reason: in summer Aboriginal people preferred not to dress at all, and this the Europeans found scandalous. Lhotsky camped with the Pajong tribe at Gunning in 1834, and watched them making cloaks from possum skins, and nets from kurrajong bark. But it was hot weather, and most of the tribe was naked. Men wore a belt, with a short fringed apron to the front and back but this was more a status symbol than a cover — some of the younger men also had armlets of twisted kangaroo hair, worn as a decoration for bravery.

William Davis Wright is our main authority for local Aboriginal life: he remembered them at Cuppacumbalong in the 1840s, but sadly Shumack, who arrived ten years later, records few of the same facts: by the 1860s the blacks had abandoned their traditional corroboree sites, had been squeezed off their hunting grounds, and were wandering from property to property, camping in humpies and begging what they could from the settlers. Wright admired them, not least for their ability to live off the country, and he was among the few settlers who bothered to find out much about them. The local tribe called themselves the Kamberra people, and their corroboree ground was somewhere close to Civic. Wright's description of the locality has puzzled many students, since he mentioned in the same breath Acton (Canberra Hospital), St John's church (Anzac Parade) and the old dairy at Duntroon. But this wide area becomes more intelligible if we remember that a major tribal gathering might involve a dozen or so sub-tribes, each of which would need its own camp, some river frontage and ground to hunt for food. Long before there was a parliament or a premiers' conference in Canberra, we can imagine Aboriginal people gathering for their own annual convention, with campfires burning in a scattered line along the north bank of the Molonglo.

As late as the 1850s local blacks were still nomadic, and carried an impressive array of weapons to catch their food. Some spears were tipped with vicious barbs, which once driven into an animal had to be pushed straight through. Ordinary spears had a simple tip, and were launched through a 'thrower' which could be very accurate. A smooth handled wooden club, the nulla nulla, was also used, presumably to stun any animal wounded



The last local Aboriginal. Queen Nelly, who died in Queanbeyan on New Year's Day 1897, 74 years after Captain Currie had first made contact with the local black people. She was the last full-blooded Aboriginal, and had a sardonic view of the benefits of white civilisation. From E. Lea-Scarlett, *Queanbeyan*, by permission of Mr Lea-Scarlett.



by a spear. They could also be used in combat, and warriors carried a heavy shield (the cooliman) to resist the nulla nulla, and a lighter but broader one to ward off spears. Boomerangs and stone axes were also used. Stone implements were discarded very quickly after Europeans introduced iron: they must be lying about in some Canberra gardens.

Wright called Aboriginal culinary habits 'anything but nice'. Possum for instance was plucked like a chicken — although for clothing purposes they must have been skinned more professionally — and some of its entrails ripped out (heart and liver were considered delicacies). It was then roasted over a small fire, sometimes with a basting of hot ashes. The master of the family would help himself to the choice parts, tossing unwanted limbs to his family — 'it was always the fancy bits for the man and the balance for the wife and children'. It is fashionable to admire the Aborigines not only as the first Australians, but as the only ones who could be content with a simple life which did not destroy the environment. Black Australia was, however, a male chauvinist society.

Blacks were also good fishermen, making lines from the sinews of kangaroo tails, and canoes from carefully cut lengths of bark. Larger fish could be speared. Old timers told Shumack how a dozen or so blacks would slip into the river at Duntroon, and then wait quietly for a few minutes. Then the rest of the tribe would jump noisily in a few yards away, and literally beat the fish towards the silent spearmen. Significantly Shumack never saw this himself: European man had almost certainly overfished the Molonglo.

In the summer months the blacks migrated to the Brindabellas, following the bogong moth, which has a nutty flavour. Uriarra homestead, beyond Cotter, seems to have been a rendezvous (it is supposed to mean 'hurry to the feast'). Perhaps the women and children were based there, for Tidbinbilla mountain itself was the place where the young men were initiated into the tribe — no one knew exactly what happened, but the initiates always came back with a tooth knocked out. The grand Canberra corroboree always came at the end of the moth season, before the separate groups dispersed for the winter. The men painted their faces with clay and danced round a large tree,

while the women beat drums made of stretched possum skins. Words cannot now bring back their music: Wright had a low opinion of the singing, but Lhotsky insisted that their songs would not dishonor a Beethoven or a Handel. Now there is no way of telling who was right.

These customs may sound savage and inexplicable to us, but in reality they were highly ritualised ways of dealing with problems common to all societies. Take marriage for instance. It was important for Aboriginal society to avoid a population explosion, and this meant avoiding indiscriminate breeding. Since black people went about naked for much of the year, and since — according to Wright — they slept huddled together for warmth, men, women, children 'and, of course, half a dozen mangy curs' — it was important to have strict standards. Betrothals were arranged in early childhood — probably between members of different sub-tribes, which prevented inbreeding. The boy and girl were then termed each other's 'snake' and were not allowed even to exchange glances — a fairly effective way of stopping anyone from jumping the gun. Following the manhood rite on Tidbinbilla, 'the blushing couple' were presented to each other and to the tribe at the corroboree, and as Wright said, with a happy ignorance of Freud, 'their snaky relationship' was brought to an end.

If love and marriage were carefully ritualised, so at the other extreme were hate and warfare. Sometimes the two were interlinked: Lhotsky heard that there was desultory warfare between two Gunning tribes as one tried to capture the women of the other. There are references to several battles in the early days of white settlement in which Europeans were not involved in any way. Shumack knew an old man who had witnessed such a battle at Canberra back in the 1820s. About 300 blacks had come from Cooma and established a camp on Mount Pleasant. Several of their young warriors had gone down the river to challenge the local Aborigines, whom Shumack called 'the Narrabundah and Pialligo tribe'. Pialligo was Duntroon, but the original Narrabundah was the pine-covered hill behind Eucumbene Drive, Duffy: perhaps they were based on Mount Stromlo. The battle which followed lasted three days and thirty whites watched the whole proceedings. Casualties were light, and spectators were

particularly impressed by the way shields were used to ward off spears. In the end the invaders withdrew. What was it all about? It sounds like a territorial dispute, perhaps because the Canberra tribe was already being pushed southward by white pressure, and the Cooma people were warning them off. At all events, it seems to have been a fairly ritual fight, with few casualties, and no one thought of joining forces to massacre the barracking stockmen. By and large the whites left the blacks to settle their own disputes: as late as 1863 about 400 Aborigines from a visiting tribe camped at the Oaks Estate in Queanbeyan. Later the body of a man was discovered, speared at least twenty times. The authorities decided that he had probably broken some tribal law, and took no action on the matter.

One such ritual combat provides an interesting contrast between 'civilised' Europeans and 'savage' Aborigines. About 1850 two blacks at Queanbeyan got into a drunken brawl, and one killed the other. Discount their names, for one of the more insidious ways in which whites undermined Aboriginal dignity was through nicknames, but the killer, Long Jimmy, fled to Tuggeranong, where in due course he was challenged by a relative of the dead man, Jimmy the Rover. After a quarter century of white settlement, a mixture of traditions was emerging, and the fight was conducted like a boxing match, with yet another Jimmy — Jimmy Taylor, probably the half-caste son of the first superintendent of Yarralumla — as referee. A venue was fixed near one of the Tuggeranong homesteads, and a large white crowd gathered to see the fun. To their amused disappointment, although the two men smashed at each other's shields with their nullas, and made a great deal of noise, only one glancing blow was struck in seven rounds — and that may have been an accident. Even more incomprehensible, between each round the two combatants ignored the boxing seconds thoughtfully provided for them, and lay down instead in a nearby mud-hole 'where they rolled and wallowed like two pigs'. At length Long Jimmy threw down his weapons and fled, and shortly after left the area. Who were the savages — the whites who cheered for blood, or the blacks who dealt with murder through what can only have been a ritual combat, a

ritual ceremony of reconciliation and a ritual acknowledgment of guilt?

Certainly when the first Europeans came into the area, the Aborigines were hardly likely to have felt overawed by a superior civilisation. They must have found white inability to live off the country amusing, and were certainly sardonic about white failure to read the land as they did. Black trackers were invariably used for police work, and Shumack recalled a case where a visiting Aboriginal chief was called to Yarralumla to help locate a child which had fallen into the river. The black quickly concluded that the child had been swept downstream, an opinion which the settlers scornfully rejected. 'White men know better than blackfellow' the tracker commented sardonically — and the body was duly found a mile downstream. However, blacks did not resist white settlement, and even helped pioneers, as James Ainslie was guided to Duntroon by an Aboriginal woman. Of course by the 1820s local tribesmen would have had thirty years' warning of the ferocity of white settlers around Sydney, and would have been weakened by white men's diseases in advance. But in all probability their attitude was a common-sense one that there would be room enough for all. The tribesmen were prepared to share their land with stockmen, and expected in return that the stockmen would share their sheep and cattle, which must have been so much easier to hunt than kangaroo or possum. Just as the sub-tribes made alliances among themselves by exchanging their women, so they were prepared to fit the first white men into the pattern by giving them lubras as concubines. Sadly, the whites did not respond. They regarded the land as their own, and blacks who speared sheep were shot at as thieves — even the fierce local chief Hong Kong, who gave the young Wright many nightmares, was wounded in the leg by Henry Hall of Charnwood for trying to kill an animal in north Belconnen. Nor was the gesture of giving women interpreted as the blacks had intended: to stockmen it simply suggested that Aboriginal women were theirs for the taking. And this led to the only major clashes between the races in this area.

In May 1826 the governor of New South Wales, Ralph Darling, learnt of a dangerous and explosive situation growing

up in the county of Argyle, the frontier district south of modern Goulburn. A local magistrate had reported that two stockmen had been murdered by the Aborigines, and that 'unusual numbers' had gathered near Lake George, and were apparently in an ugly mood.

Governor Darling was sympathetic to both sides. He was convinced that 'the proceedings of the Natives are the effect of resentment at the outrages committed upon them by Stock keepers, who interfere with their women, and by such and other acts of aggression provoke them to retaliate'.

One of the stockmen killed was a man called Lynch, and reports indicated that Lynch had pointed a musket at an Aboriginal and tried to kidnap his wife. The black man struck at him with a spear, and killed him instantaneously. Mr Lynch's armed wooing could hardly command anyone's sympathy. Yet abominable as it was, it proceeded from a very human problem. In the whole county of Argyle there were 506 adult European men but only 54 white women.

However much Darling condemned the provocation, he felt he could not allow the Aborigines 'to collect and disturb the country'. He sent a force of two officers and thirty men off to the Lake George district to overawe any resistance.

He also issued a stern warning to settlers not to provoke Aborigines, especially those 'who have already appeared friendly and well disposed'. Squatters who failed to control their stockmen were threatened with loss of their land and their convict employees. Darling hoped this even-handed policy would show the Aborigines 'at once a determination and the power to restrain them and a desire to conciliate and protect them'.

By the end of May 1826 the alarm passed. Perhaps Darling had been right in believing that organised Aboriginal resistance had been unlikely from the outset. But he also felt that 'the prompt and unexpected appearance of the Troops in that distant part of the County had some effect in producing this desirable end' and that the show of force would have 'still further beneficial consequences by checking any disposition they might feel to reassemble'. The show of force certainly had its effect. Local Aborigines were left in no doubt that the white man intended to

be the boss. And yet it is worth remembering that local Aborigines did not fight for their land. Whether willingly or grudgingly, they shared it with the settlers. What they did fight for was their dignity. They killed to protect their women, not to protect their territory.

After the Lake George expedition, there was very little friction between the races, or fear of the local blacks. William Davis Wright's first memories were of playing with Aboriginal children. 'What did it matter to me when I went bathing in the rivers, possum hunting and fishing, whether my companions were black or white. We were all just kiddies together'. He recalled a teenage Aboriginal girl who ran the whole length of the modern city — from north of Watson all the way to Lanyon — just to tell a settler's wife that her mother was about to arrive from England. Acts of this kind sprang from kindness, not conquest. Blacks were amused by the fuss surrounding the first settler wedding they ever saw in the district — whites had their corroborees too. There were Aborigines in the crowd which watched the Anglican bishop lay the foundation stone of St John's church in 1841: contemporaries saw it as a symbol that the 'old order changeth, yielding place to new' — but the blacks may have been amused by the antics of the white witch doctor. Some relationships cut across racial lines. Jimmy the Rover lived with a white girl: local legend said he had saved her life as a baby during a massacre of settlers in northern New South Wales. When the 16-year-old Stewart Mowle was put in charge of Yarralumla in the 1830s he could hardly make friends among the convicts: his closest companion was the son of a local Aboriginal chief.

In fact, once we cut through the incomprehension of the settlers' brief comments, and try to look at things from the black people's point of view, they begin to appear a good deal less simple and unadaptable than we might think. In a number of ways, these products of an age-old civilisation very quickly accommodated themselves to aspects of European life. Take the simplest point of contact of all: what language was spoken when the blacks dealt with whites? Very few historians bother with the question, yet it seems that from the earliest years Aboriginal people learnt English, with the result that only a few words of

their own language survive. Modern Australians on the whole are poor linguists, and regard learning another language as a major and usually unnecessary effort. Black Australians quickly picked up a tongue entirely different in grammar and vocabulary from anything they had been used to. Of course they spoke it badly — a kind of pidgin, which sometimes comes to life in comments recorded by settlers. Instead of marvelling that the Aborigines could speak English at all, the settlers laughed at their childish expressions and treated them accordingly. Similarly the Aboriginal willingness to adopt European names was used to degrade them — Jimmy, Bobby, Nelly and so on. Lhotsky met a chief who gravely introduced himself as Mr Tommy — he was making an effort to translate his status and his name into European terms, and no doubt most Europeans found his attempt hugely amusing. Three black girl in Queanbeyan in the 1840s were known as Charlotte, Nanny and Mary — but their *real* names were Jerrabonderra, Myambah and Moanark. The very willingness of the blacks to adopt European speech and identities was used to rob them of dignity.

Aborigines fitted into white life in other ways too. The Michelago blacks of 1823 had been terrified by Captain Currie's horses: nothing would persuade them to go near. Yet within a few years blacks were among the best local horsemen. Wright said they were 'very good and careful' stockmen and made 'great cobbers'. Mr Cunningham at Lanyon was persuaded to put up a bottle of rum for a black, called Jacky, who boasted that he could ride a horse noted for buckjumping. A vast crowd gathered to watch his downfall, but Jacky wore the animal down and the bystanders even held a whip-around to add to the bottle of rum. Riding an angry horse was a kind of achievement pioneer society set great store by: to master skills like that within a generation of first seeing a horse was something to boast about.

Local Aboriginal men showed talent which modern Australia is often short of in another area: they were good cricketers. Perhaps it doesn't sound a very great achievement, but a cricket team is a kind of tribe, with its captain as the chief, and its rituals of manhood and conduct. Where they were given the chance black men excelled in the white man's game. At Ginnin-

derra in the 1850s three Aborigines were among the regular players, and they helped make it one of the strongest sides in the colony. (In fact the first Australian cricket team to tour England was all-Aboriginal.) Where they were allowed and encouraged, Aborigines rose to the challenge and outshone their supplanters. But they were not always allowed the chance. A visiting Duntroon team once objected to playing against black men, on the ingenious ground that they were not actually members of the Ginninderra club — an early version of 'I've nothing against coloured people, but . . .'.

But the most effective Aboriginal adaptation to European society was the way they merged into it. Interbreeding began with the earliest white settlers in the 1820s: by 1844 half-caste Aboriginal people were already parents themselves. If they married Europeans their children would be only one-quarter Aboriginal in descent, and the next generation might have only one Aboriginal great-grand-parent out of eight. People usually talk as if the Canberra Aborigines melted away, but it would be much more true to say they melted *in*. Shumack refers to a half-caste woman called Nanny (possibly the Myambah mentioned earlier), who was believed to be the daughter of James Ainslie, the first superintendent of Duntroon. Nanny had eleven children, all of whom left the area. One of them, Sarah, married a farmworker called Richard Lowe, and they moved on in the 1880s. It is a fair guess that just as children were often not told that their parents had been transported, so Sarah Lowe's family never knew of her Aboriginal descent. And she was one of eleven children! In a country where people were highly mobile, where women started families young and five generations might be born in a hundred years, many thousands of Australians today must be part Aboriginal in descent. Far from preserving Aboriginal culture in a glass case as something quaint but not really relevant to modern Australia, it is possible that many Australians should think of their families not as newcomers who came here sometime after 1788, but as people who may have lived in the country for 30,000 years.

It is ironic that Canberra's Aboriginal people should have gained acceptance through their descendants which was usually refused to them by pioneer society. Some of the disasters which



accompanied the white men were hardly deliberate — influenza in the 1840s, measles in the 1860s and 1870s, each epidemic especially dangerous to full-blooded Aborigines who had no inherited immunity to European diseases. Equally it was probably inevitable that the demands of sheep farming would gradually oust the native animals on which a hunting people relied, and that Europeans would unwittingly violate sacred places as they took the country over. Did anyone ask whether it was right to build St John's Anglican church on the tribal corroboree ground? But other acts were wilful affronts to Aboriginal dignity. Hong Kong was buried on a hilltop at Tharwa, with all tribal ceremony due to a chief. Later a settler called Smithie dug up the bones and used the old man's skull as a sugar bowl.

As with the convicts, the victims in history can rarely speak for themselves. Shumack did, however, preserve an account of Queen Nelly's denunciation of a white Anglo-Saxon busybody in the streets of Queanbeyan. A leading citizen took it upon himself to remind Nelly of the importance of obeying the white man's laws, backed as they were by the white man's lock-up. Nelly indicated a marked lack of respect for the white man's justice. White men had taken her land, she said, killed the possums and kangaroos on which she had lived, and would shoot at her or lock her up if she tried to take a sheep or a calf in return. All the blacks had got had been rotten blankets — her own expression — unknown diseases and equally mysterious and unpleasant rum. It is eighty years now since she died, and Aboriginal problems seem remote enough from Australia's modern capital city — far enough for federal governments to be sometimes forgetful of their own promises to black Australians. It all happened a long time ago, yet we should not forget Nelly's point of view.

The history of Canberra goes back long before today's Y-shaped city of sprawling brick veneer suburbs began to take shape. *Episodes of Old Canberra* traces links with Nelson's victory at Trafalgar, the Napoleonic wars and the England of Georgian times. It tells how pioneers explored the area and their contacts with the Aborigines, how squatters came and the convicts stole to live.

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