

## Stories of Early Forrest - a self-guided walk

A gentle stroll through the Griffin Plan avenues, circuits, circles, crescents and streets of Forrest. It tells the stories behind land use, naming conventions, landscape, streetscape, architecture and residents from the 1920s to the 1960s including detail of the construction workers' camps, early clubs and statues, government and private housing of the 20s, modernist architecture of the 50s/60s and the Weston and Pryor street tree plantings.

*Best times for the walk are during spring blossoms in September and the glorious autumn foliage in April, but it is a pleasant walk at any time of year.*

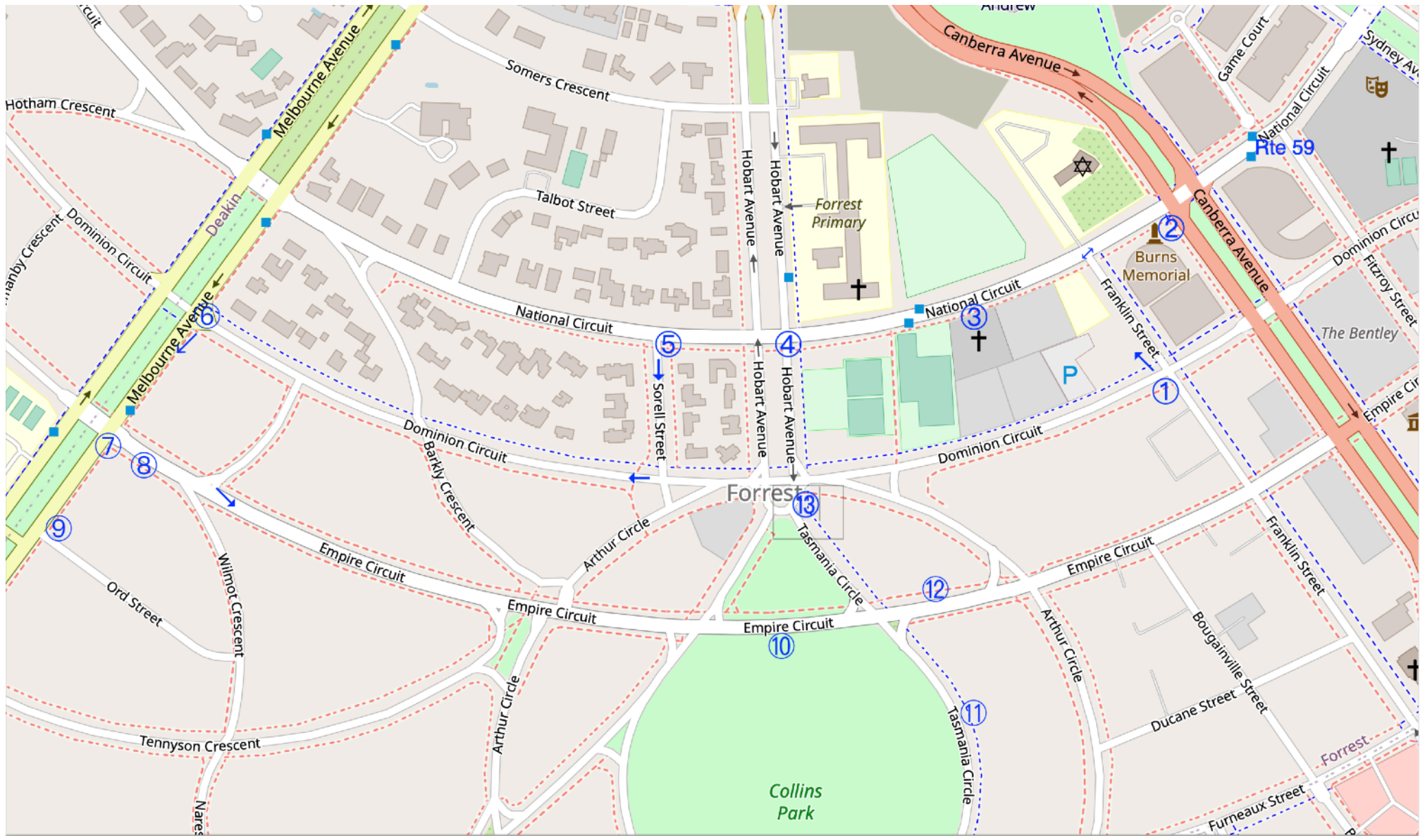
*Street parking is available on weekends but can be difficult on week days; there is a Wilson's parking lot on Franklin Street at the starting point. Bus stops for route 59 from Civic or Woden at Forrest Primary School in National Circuit or near the corner of National and Canberra Avenue are both close to the starting point (bus stops are marked on the walk map below by blue squares).*

*Safety Note during autumn: the Oak and Plane trees in National and Dominion Circuits produce copious numbers of acorns and large seed pods. These are slippery and treacherous underfoot, and often hidden under leaves. Furthermore, the pavements in this area are notoriously uneven and broken, so please watch your footing!*

*Privacy note: the houses that you will pass on this walk are private residences and **are not open to closer inspection**. Please remain on the public footpaths and do not enter the grounds of private property.*

### ① Starting Point: Corner of Dominion Circuit and Franklin St.

*Follow the numbered markers ① to ⑬ .*





The Forrest area is part of the area originally named Blandfordia by Walter Burley Griffin after the NSW Christmas Bell flower. The suburb's name was changed to Forrest in 1928. It was first gazetted as a Division name on 20 September 1928. The suburb is named after two brothers, the Right Honourable **John Forrest** and **Alexander Forrest**. John Forrest was one of the founders of the Constitution, the first premier of Western Australia and was briefly the Acting Prime Minister in 1907. Alexander Forrest was a Legislator, surveyor and explorer, leading an expedition to the country east and south of the Hampton Plains in 1871 and was also a member of the Western Australian Legislative Assembly from 1890 to 1901. John and Alexander were great-great-uncles to “Twiggy” Forrest.

The street layout of Forrest is derived from **Griffin's 1913** plan. The major circuits and circles are in ascending order – City Circle (around Parliament House), State Circle, National Circuit, Dominion Circuit and Empire Circuit (Empire Circuit was originally to be Australia Circuit). Major spokes from State Circle follow the capital cities in geographical order – Brisbane, Sydney, Canberra, Hobart, Melbourne, Adelaide, Perth and Darwin Avenues. Forrest is bounded by Sydney and Melbourne Avenues and contains Canberra and Hobart Avenues.

This map is a 1918 evolving version of the original, showing Griffin's own suggested naming of streets, including a “Continent Circuit”, “Antarctic Circuit” and “Australasia Circuit”.

**ACTmapi**


**WBG 1918 Plan**

Notes:

1: 10,000

**DISCLAIMER**  
The map is a user generated static output from an Internet mapping site and is for reference only. Data layers that appear on this map may or may not be accurate, current or otherwise reliable.

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 **ACT**  
Government



Forrest's other streets are named after Australia's explorers and governors. For example, Arthur Circle is named in honour of **Colonel Sir George Arthur** who was Governor of Tasmania from 1824-36. Dampier Crescent is named after **William Dampier** a British navigator who discovered the Eastern coast of Australia in 1688 and was the first to realise that Australia was a separate continent.

The suburb has quite distinct zoning areas – Forrest Housing Precinct; Blandfordia 4; National Capital Authority controlled land; dual occupancy zoned areas; plus along Canberra Ave office blocks, hotels, churches and apartments.

The precinct reflects a highly ordered composition of dwellings, driveways and public space including public domain landscaping by **Thomas Charles Weston**. Street furniture was integral to the aesthetics of the precinct. The precinct today has realised Griffin's garden city concept, with high quality housing, renovated to heritage guidelines over the years, with well established and maintained gardens and hedges.



The **heritage street signs** that were restored as part of an ACT heritage grant are primarily within the listed **Forrest Housing Precinct**. All intersections on Dominion Circuit (the central thoroughfare of the precinct) between Melbourne and Canberra Avenues (1.2 km) except one missing at Hobart Avenue/Tasmania Circle now have restored heritage signs, a significant and unique example of a 1920/30s streetscape. In addition, this grant included three remaining signs in Blandfordia, the inclusion of which will result in all south side heritage street sign restoration (other than two in Yarralumla covered in a later grant). Dominion Circuit links Forrest to Barton, where a similar grant a few years ago restored those signs.

The tall street signs on Dominion Circuit, several of which are in traffic islands, reflect the scale of the housing and streetscape. The smaller streets and crescents have the short concrete signs also used in Barton and Reid, intended for easier pedestrian use. Icon have recently commenced restoration of old fire hydrants in the heritage precincts.

Franklin St is named after **Sir John Franklin** 1786-1847 was Governor of Tasmania (Van Dieman's Land) 1836-1843. He was also an Arctic explorer and perished in the NW Passage.

Street trees are *Quercus palustris* (Pin Oak), Liquidamber and Prunus.

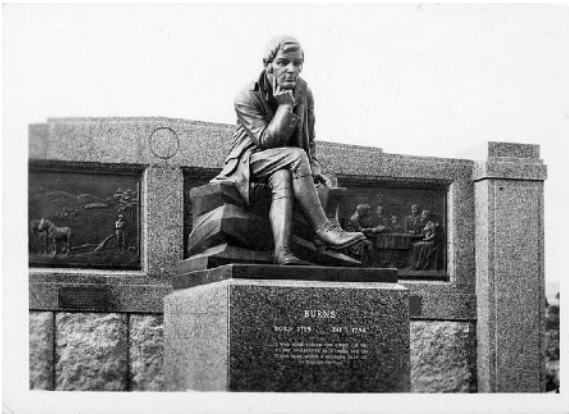
*Walk along Franklin past the car park (former site of the Italo-Australian Club) then along National to*

## ② Corner of National Circuit and Canberra Avenue

Street trees are *Quercus bicolour* (Swamp white oak) and *Quercus macrocarpa* (Burr oak).



### **Former Site of the Burns Club and still the Robert Burns Statue**



Formed in 1924, The Burns Club was initiated to foster the culture and heritage of Scotland. It is Canberra's first and longest serving Club although the club itself has relocated. Canberra's population in 1924 was approximately 3,000. Around 1,400 of those were involved in the numerous construction projects being undertaken to build the new city. Many of those 1,400 were Scots.

Within a very short space of time, the newly formed Burns Club became active in the Canberra community. Early events included the first Robert Burns Night in January 1925, a Highland Gathering in February 1925, a soccer team in February 1925, and in March 1925 a series of concerts were organised to help raise funds for the Queanbeyan Hospital.

In 1927 the Club initiated a project to build a Robert Burns statue in Canberra funded through an Australia wide fundraising program with Scottish Societies in other States to raise the equivalent of \$300,000. The

Robert Burns statue was unveiled at its current location of Forrest in January 1935 at a ceremony attended by many hundreds of visitors and officiated at by the then Prime Minister Joseph Lyons. The statue, the second\* public statue in Canberra, remains *in situ* today and the Club annually on 25 January holds a Burns Ceremony at the statue to celebrate the birth of the famous bard. \*(the first was Bellona in 1926)

*Walk along National Circuit passing:*

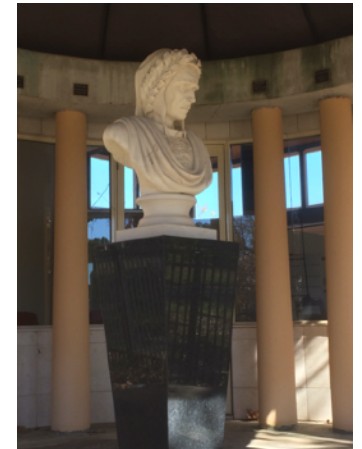
### **Italian Cultural Centre**

During the 1990s the Canberra Italian community of some 10,000 1st and 2nd generation Italians felt it needed a place where Italian events could take place. Land next to the then Italo-Australian Club in Franklin St was located and donated by the Commonwealth in 1995, allowing pursuit of the dream of an Italian Cultural Centre. It was opened on 2 June 2006.

The Italian Cultural Centre was built on a design to remind the community of Italy, with a large hall and traditional bell tower. The Centre was donated a statue of Dante Alighieri the 'Father of the Italian Language' by the municipality of Lecce in Southern Italy, with the Bell being donated by the Italian Region Friuli Venezia Giulia in the North of Italy.

*On the other side of National Circuit*

### **National Jewish Memorial Centre**



The ACT Jewish Community currently has around 200 membership units and hosts a number of groups interested in social activities, Jewish history, Jewish films, music, books and cooking. The community was founded in the 1950s. The National Jewish Memorial Centre was opened in 1971.

### ③ St George Free Serbian Orthodox Church



St George Free Serbian Orthodox Church was formed in 1955 with parishioners acquiring land in the suburb of Forrest, including a monument to *Cetnik* (Royal Yugoslavian Armed Forces) General Dragoljub 'Draza' Mihailovic, the first of its kind anywhere in the world.

The interior of the church was painted by Czech artist Karl Matzek in the 1970s and 1980s, primarily in the Western mural style.



*Continue along National Circuit to Hobart Avenue*

### ④ Corner of Hobart Avenue and National Circuit

#### Forrest Primary School

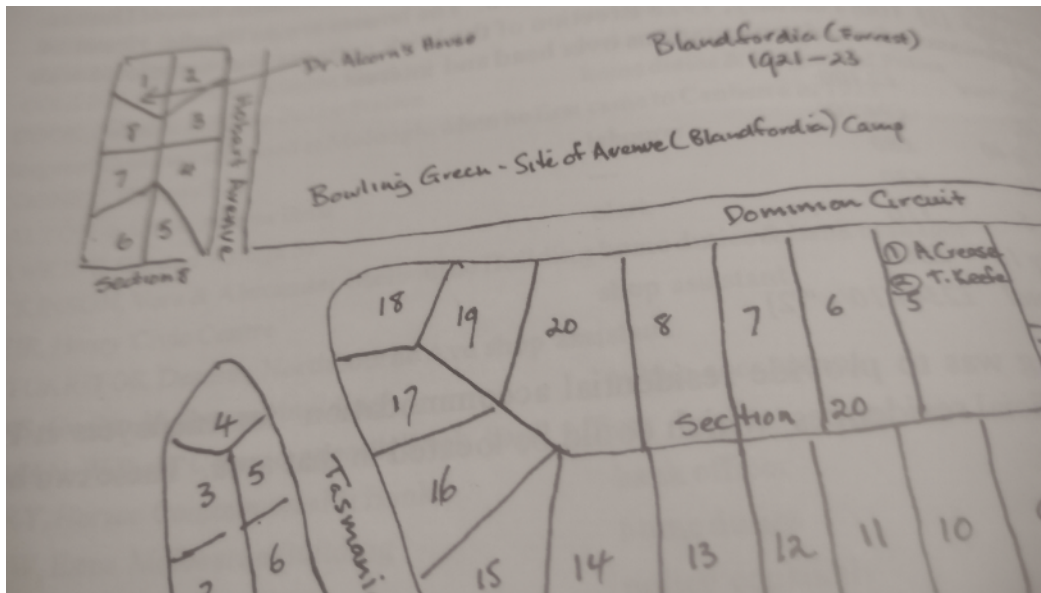
The school was officially opened on 4th April, 1958. Provisioning for the school commenced in mid April 1957, with agreement to purchase sporting equipment to the value of 10 pounds, a free Gestetner, duplicator and typewriter were supplied by the then department of the Interior, a 16mm projector and tape recorder 200 pounds were spent on library books attracting a subsidy of 8 shillings per pound spent (40%). Provisions included three pianos, a table model radiogram and a gramophone for outside activities. Forrest Primary School is an international Baccalaureate (IB) World school, with 45% of enrolments from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and it sits in the heart of the Canberra diplomatic community. The school currently educates 550 students.



#### Construction camps

The building of the city of Canberra commenced in 1913, but interrupted by the WW1 with most construction work ceased by 1916, including the closure of the brickworks. Work resumed in 1920/1921 with construction workers housed in camps. Camps were allocated to different “classes” of workers, and married and single quarters kept separate. Most single camps had a Mess and Mess Caterer.

A camp was established in the area bounded by Hobart Avenue, National Circuit and Dominion Circuit (now the Canberra Bowling Club and townhouses). This was “Blandfordia Camp” also known as the “Avenue Camp”. In 1922 there were between 400 and 500 men, tradesmen involved in building brick cottages in Blandfordia. Sixteen cottages were constructed for officials. 80 men remained at the camp in 1924.



Part of the Blandfordia Subdivision in 1923, at the corner of Dominion and Tasmania.

Examples of the early houses in that area being constructed.

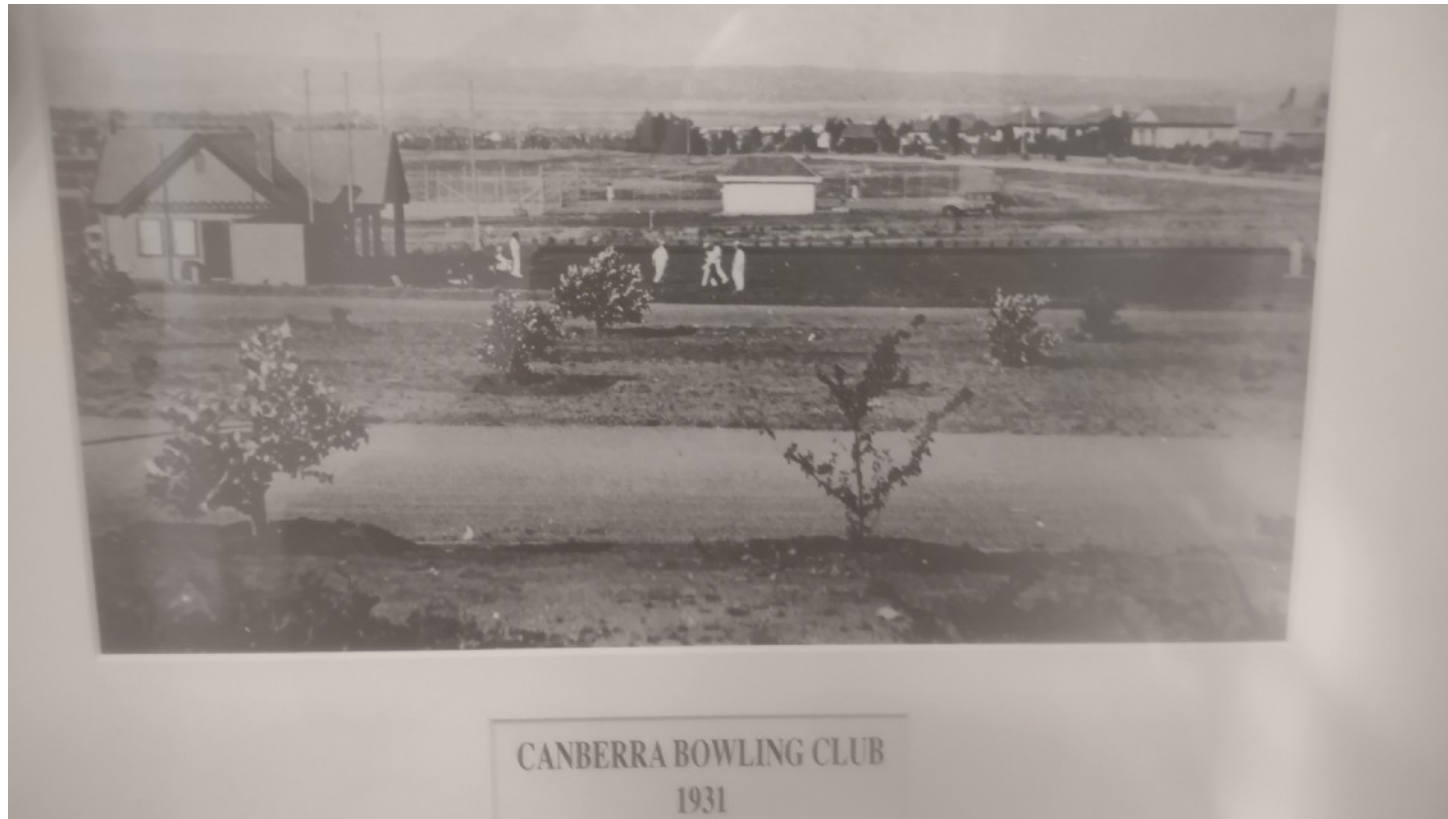
Nearby was Capitol Hill Camp. This camp remained open through the depression, mainly with pensioners. It reopened fully after WW2 with an extension in 1947. Another hostel was added in 1952, closing in 1966. Note the spelling of the Hill which changed to Capital.



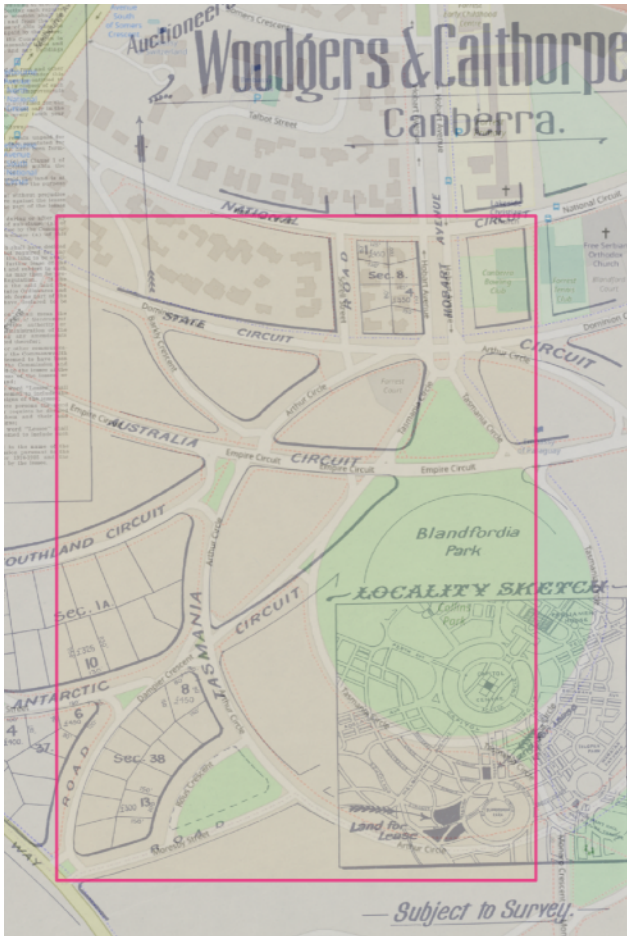


## Early clubs

Both the Canberra Bowling Club and the tennis club began in the late 1920s and are still operating on the original sites.



## ⑤ Corner of Sorell St and National Circuit



This is the beginning of the listed **Forrest Housing Precinct** for which the Melbourne architectural firm **Oakley, Parkes and Scarborough** won a 1924 competition. This was a distinct pattern of housing development and landscape demonstrating early Federal Capital planning philosophy for the provision of low-density public housing.

It planned to provide rental accommodation for senior public servants transferring to Canberra with the opening of the temporary Parliament House with blocks of a generally substantial size and original cottage forms of equivalent size. The architectural style/character of the public houses reflected a mix of international styles (Arts & Crafts', 'Federation', 'Interwar Californian Bungalow' and 'Interwar Georgian Revival') and subtle variations of gable and hipped roof forms and rendered masonry and face brick walls. In September 1924 funds of 72,000 pounds was approved for the construction of forty cottages. Fifty-eight houses were built in the precinct.

**Kenneth Oliphant** moved to Canberra in 1926 to supervise the construction of these homes. He then went on to privately design more than 30 original homes in Canberra, mostly in Red Hill, Forrest, Barton and Griffith. One of these was No 40 National Circuit in 1934, for **Mrs Betty Townsend**, who lived in the house for more than 50 years. Originally built as a four-bedroom house, it was extended under Oliphant's supervision in 1940, incorporating a fifth bedroom and second bathroom. The facade of the house is exactly as Oliphant intended, except for an attached garage added in 1991.



No 42 National Circuit was commissioned by Dr R M Alcon, an early Canberra medical practitioner, was designed by Oliphant and built in 1927. It has the rare distinction, in those days, of having the plans published in 'the Australian Home Beautiful' in June 1930 - Canberra was coming of age. It was also designed with a separate maid's quarters and a cellar, also unusual features in Canberra. Architect Peter Freeman, in his book 'the Early Canberra House - Living in Canberra 1911-1933' describes the house as reflecting 'classical features with entablatures to the single story projections enclosing and emphasising the points of entry and the verandah. The house also features square headed fenestration in a restrained composition and sash windows, with a smooth rendered wall finish generally and with Roman roof tiling'.

Forrest Housing Precinct-listed 1920s houses are on the left and the National Capital Authority (NCA) controlled area is on the right between National Circuit and State Circle with many earlier houses replaced by larger modern rebuilds and some multiple occupancies. In that area also are embassies and residencies for **Switzerland, Austria** and **Malaysia** and more recently apartments on State Circle.

*Walk along Sorell St to Dominion Circuit, turn right walking to Melbourne Ave.*

Sorell St is named for **Colonel William Sorell** (1775-1848) Governor of Tasmania 1817-1824. He progressed exports of cattle, wool and wheat, and established whaling stations.

Sorell St trees are *Cedrus atlantica* (Atlas Cedar) and *Prunus cerasifera* (Cherry Plum).

Dominion Circuit trees are *Brachychiton populneus* (Kurrajong), *Cedrus atlantica*, *Cedrus deodora* (Himalayan cedar), *Euc. rubida* (Ribbon Gum, Candlebark), *Platanus x acerifolia* (London Plane Tree).

Davey Crescent is named after **Colonel Thomas Davey** 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Governor of Tasmania 1813-1817. Trees on Davey Crescent are *Robinia pseudoacacia* (Black Locust) and *Betula pendula* (Silver Birch).

Barkly Crescent is named after **Sir Henry Barkly**, Governor of Victoria 1856-1863. Barkly Crescent trees are *Quercus palustris*

## ⑥ **Melbourne Avenue**

Trees are *Euc. manifera maculosa* (Red Spotted Gum) and *Euc. meliodora* (Yellow Box).

### **65 Dominion Circuit The Lady Hopetoun Club:**

The club was founded in 1926 on 26th June. It was for young ladies of the domestic servant class, shop assistants and typists with the aim of providing comradeship, a meeting place, pursuit of indoor and outdoor sports and wholesome recreation and suitable residential accommodation at reasonable rates. It also appears to have operated unofficially as a recruitment source. The club operated in two houses in Blandfordia – later three – including this house at the corner of Dominion Circuit & Melbourne Avenue.

Miss Hawkins, the Superintendent/Matron, sailed to Australia from England with 25 already selected young women, recruited to come to the “future London of Australia”. The club was disbanded on 17th December 1928 replaced by hostels and the YWCA





⑦ **70 Empire Circuit Boyhood home of Gough Whitlam:**



This two-storey house in the English Revival style was built by the FCC in 1929 for Fred and Martha Whitlam, parents of Gough and Freda Whitlam. The design is variously attributed to Edward Henderson (chief architect of the Department of the Interior) and Bruce Litchfield. The heritage nomination states that the design was influenced by the early private architects – Rudd and Limburg – who also designed St Gabriel's School (now Canberra Girls Grammar School) across Melbourne Avenue. Fred Whitlam moved to Canberra in 1927 to be deputy Crown Solicitor. He became the Crown Solicitor in 1936.

Gough spent his boyhood (from age 11) in this house. He was educated at Telopea Park School but, when he completed his schooling he was too young for university and so repeated his final year twice, including one year studying classics at Canberra Boys Grammar School.

⑧ **70 Empire Circuit Bus Shelter:**

Nearby is one of two remaining bus shelters from the late 1920s/1930. It is now in poor condition and needs maintenance by the ACT government.



⑨ **43 Melbourne Avenue:**



This orange brick house in the functionalist style was designed by Malcolm Moir, one of Canberra's early private architects. The house was completed in 1936 and would have been a complete contrast, with its flat roof, lack of ornamentation and massed geometric construction, to the nearby houses in the Oakley and Parkes precinct. A top storey was added in 1941 to house an office for Moir and his wife, Heather Henderson, also an architect. This house is regarded as being highly noteworthy and is listed by the Australian Institute of Architects as being a significant example of 20<sup>th</sup> Century architecture. Moir had earlier worked for the Federal Capital Commission until it was abolished in 1929 because of the slowdown in Canberra's construction during the Great Depression. After the Depression, he and his wife designed a number of other houses in early Canberra including a large residence for Sir Harold White, the National Librarian, at 27 Mugga Way. He also designed the shops around the Lawns at Manuka.

### *Walk back along Empire Circuit to Collins Park*

We are now on the border of the Forrest Housing precinct and **Blandfordia**, another listed area with developments in the 20s through to 60s and more recent knock-downs and rebuilds. The Blandfordia 4 Heritage Precinct is bounded by Arthur Circle, Moresby Street, Mugga Way, Melbourne Avenue, and Empire Circuit and contains many original houses, streetscapes and vegetation. Houses were mostly built after the adjoining Forrest Housing Precinct, although the first auction of sites was conducted some years earlier, in December 1924. As with the Forrest Housing Precinct, the area was developed according to Garden City planning principles with the first house being built in 1926. The last block was developed in the 1960s.

Unlike the Forrest Housing Precinct which was entirely designed by Oakley and Parkes and built by three builders for the FCC, the Blandfordia 4 area was developed by numerous private and government architects and builders in a wide range of styles. Some prominent early residents of the area other than the Whitlam's include:

Sir Robert Garran (47 Melbourne Avenue) - first Solicitor-General, and the first Commonwealth public servant

Sir Roland Wilson (64 Empire Circuit) – long term Secretary of the Treasury

Peter and Heather Henderson (8 Wilmot St) – Head of the Department of Foreign Affairs, and daughter of Sir Robert Menzies

R W Broinowski (1 Mugga Way) – Usher of the Black Rod and Clerk of the Senate

### ⑩ **Collins Park (originally Blandfordia Park in Griffin's plan)**

Colonel **David Collins** (3 March 1756 – 24 March 1810) was the first Lieutenant Governor of Van Dieman's Land. Blandfordia was the original name of Forrest, and refers to the Christmas Bell *Blandfordia nobilis*.

Collins Park itself is controlled by the NCA originally as a potential Prime Minister's Lodge site.

Trees include *Brachychiton*, *Casuarina*, *Cedrus atlantica*, *Cedrus deodora*, *Celtus australis* (Nettle Tree), *Euc. cinerea* (Argyle Apple), *Euc. rubida*, *Malus* sp. (Crab Apple), *Populus alba* (Silver Poplar), *Populus deltoids* (Eastern Cottonwood), *Prunus*, *Quercus palustris* and *Ulmus procera* (English Elm).





## ⑪ Tasmania Circle

Tasmania Circle trees are *Brachychiton populneus*, *Fraxinus oxycarpa* (Claret Ash), *Robinia pseudoacacia*.

### **Manning Clark House:**

This house designed by Australian architect, Robin Boyd in 1952 was built for Professor **Manning Clark** (1915 – 1991), described as "Australia's most famous historian", and his wife, Dymphna Clark, (1916 – 2000), linguist and educator.



The house is now home to **Manning Clark House Inc. (MCH)**, a community based institution that nurtures creative practice and research in Australian history, human rights, literature, music, visual art, and indigenous culture, as well as discussion and debate on issues of public importance and all areas of scholarly interest. The organisation supports the intellectual and creative community through a network of scholars and community garden. The program includes public lectures, open forums, seminars, conferences, art exhibitions, poetry readings, concerts, book launches, human rights education, and social gatherings in the former home of Manning and Dymphna Clark. Following the 2000 death of Dymphna Clark, the house was transferred to community use and is heritage listed.





### Charles Scrivener survey marker:

A short walk from Manning Clark House on the edge of Collins park is an original Charles Scrivener survey marker for his 1909 survey of the then unnamed capital city of Australia, called "West of School". The school was the old Narrabundah Public School where the heritage Forrest Fire Station now is on Empire Circuit.

Charles Scrivener (1855-1923) together with Walter Burley and Marion Griffin and Charles Weston are often listed as the four most important people in the establishment of Canberra.



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	Preliminary Surveys for City Triangulation and original Outpost Survey of Canberra City Site Commenced <del>January</del> March 1909 Completed May 1909 Charles Robt. Scrivener	
BEARINGS are 14.Min.19.Sec Less than STROM Meridian		

Narrabundah School c.1924



*Return to Empire Circuit, turning right, to...*

## ⑫ Corner of Empire Circuit and Arthur Circle - previous Allawah Private Hospital



On 20 September 1935 **Winifred Marion Petrie** (1890-1966), a nurse from Auberne Private Hospital in Queanbeyan, leased a block on the corner of Empire Circuit and Arthur Circle, Forrest, with the aim of building a private hospital in Canberra. She had earlier been appointed to run the obstetrics ward at Canberra Hospital under Dr John James but eventually resigned in 1930. Returning to Sydney that year, she gained her mothercraft certificate from the Royal Society for the Welfare of Mothers & Babies. By May 1936 her twelve-bed Allawah Private Hospital had opened. For many years it was the bush capital's only hospital south of the Molonglo River. The building was the product of Petrie's practical experience and the skill of the architect Ken Oliphant. Their unorthodox design incorporated a curved-floor plan, with no right-angle turnings to enable easier maneuvering of wheelchairs. Each ward had a private balcony. The hospital was equipped with a modern operating theatre with shadowless lighting, and a central steam-heating system. Nurses quarters were detached, and comfortable.

Petrie's economic gamble in the depressed 1930s succeeded, and she discharged the mortgage in 1940. Allawah gained a good reputation with medical practitioners as a general and obstetric hospital. Its patients received first-class care in pleasant surroundings. Petrie ran Allawah firmly and calmly, and became a mentor and friend to her staff. **John Curtin**, the **Duke of Gloucester** and his son **Prince William**, and **Dame Alexandra Hasluck** were among the hospital's patients.

Wartime shortages, the opening (1943) of new buildings at Canberra Community Hospital and Petrie's failing health forced the closure of Allawah in 1948. Moving to Deakin, she lived at 93 Empire Circuit where she made two rooms available for any of her friends who were convalescing. She died there on 6 May 1966 and was cremated with Anglican rites.

After a short period of ownership by a travel company, the building was purchased in 1962 by the **Sri Lankan High Commission**, operating as the High Commission until the new High Commission in Yarralumla in 2012.

*Turn left on Arthur Circle, passing another Oliphant house at 4 Arthur Circle, built in the mid 60s ...*



### ⑬ Corner of Arthur Circle, Dominion Circuit and Tasmania Circle

#### Roy Grounds Townhouses

The **Roy Grounds Townhouses** at 3 Tasmania Circle, Forrest are a group of five townhouses, a small attached bedsitter and a separate courtyard house linked by carports and a covered walkway. Designed by Roy Grounds (architect of the Academy of Sciences Shine Dome) as a speculative venture in 1959, they are the only townhouses in Canberra designed by Grounds. Grounds' own unit was the third townhouse from the west, while the courtyard house was used as the Grounds, Romberg and Boyd office in Canberra as well as the residence of Grounds' full time architect assistant, Fritz Suenderman and family. The bedsitter was originally leased to a local architectural firm. The Forrest Townhouses are an important example of the post-war Melbourne regional style with their long unbroken rooflines, widely projecting eaves and glass walls with regularly spaced timber mullions. With their cubiform overall shape and large areas of glazing, the townhouses also exhibit aspects of the post-war international style.



The Roy Grounds Townhouses are listed on the Register of Significant Twentieth Century Architecture. The townhouses are of national significance and are the earliest and probably the only example in Canberra of the design philosophy of Le Corbusier's Maison Citrohan that includes a double height living space.

Various houses in the group have been owned or occupied by prominent Australians. Apart from Grounds himself, **Sir William McMahon**, Prime Minister of Australia from 1970–72, lived in the single level courtyard house and **Aldo Giurgola**, the principle design architect of the New Parliament House, lived in the westernmost townhouse.

*Continue walking along Dominion Circuit to the starting point at Franklin Street, past a mix of 1920s houses and knockdowns/rebuilds of multiple occupancies.*



### More to see in Forrest and nearby:

St Andrew's Presbyterian Church, State Circle, 1934, Gothic style

St Christopher's Roman Catholic Cathedral, Canberra Ave Manuka 1939, largest church in Canberra

St Paul's Anglican Church, Flinders Way Manuka (Griffith), 1939, "Inter-War Gothic with Art Deco touches"

Wesley Uniting Church, National Circuit, 1962. The Wesley Music Centre has Wednesday lunchtime concerts

Telopea Park School, New South Wales Cr (Barton), 1923, the oldest school in Canberra (as Canberra)

Art Deco interior of Caph's Restaurant, trading since 1926, Manuka

the Canberra Fire Museum at the old Fire Station, 4 Empire Circuit

### Reference

[ACT Heritage Council Blandfordia 4 Registration](#) has a wealth of detail on the area and is the source for much of these Notes. It includes notes on the Griffins' original plans, early houses and their architects, and notable residents of Forrest. It mentions an original street sign on the corner of Baudin St and Mugga Way, but that has disappeared.

