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History of the YMCA in Canberra

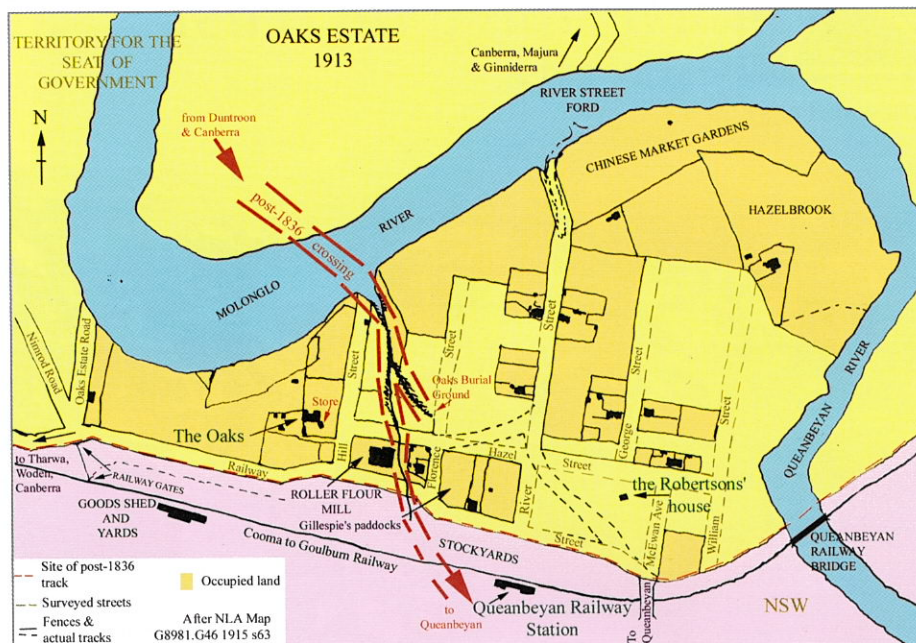
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The Oaks, the Queanbeyan Railway Station and the Robertsons' house:

The precinct of The Oaks, the Queanbeyan Railway Station and the Robertsons' house is situated on the edge of the present-day village/suburb of Oaks Estate. It also bounds the northern limits of Queanbeyan and straddles the ACT-NSW border. The precinct symbolises the most significant changes since the arrival of colonial explorers in the area of the junction of the Molonglo and Queanbeyan Rivers. To be understood as cornerstones in a changing Canberra/Queanbeyan region The Oaks, the Queanbeyan Railway Station and the Robertsons' house must first be understood as reference points for activity in and around the river junction.

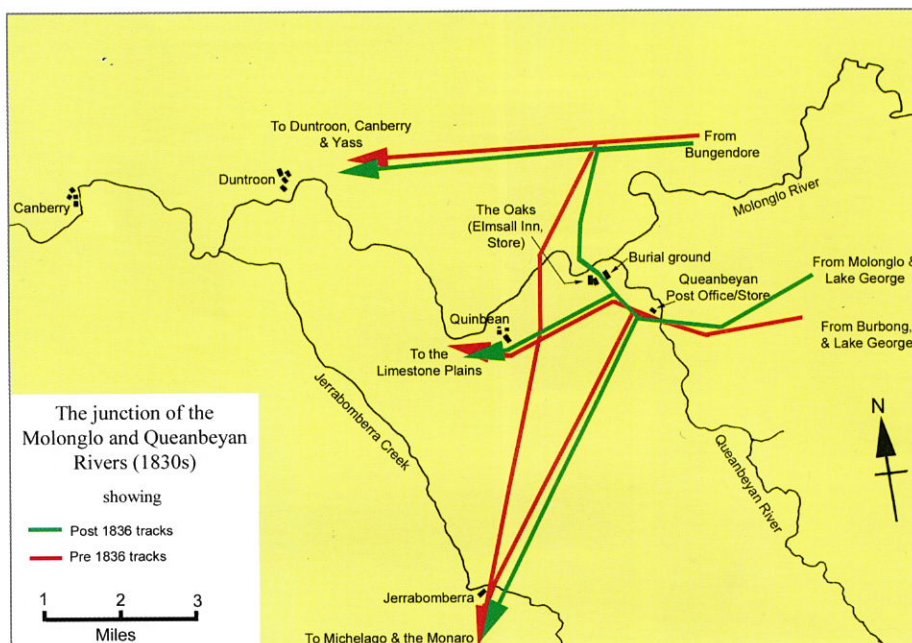


1. The Oaks Estate 1911 - 1913

The Oaks: the first cornerstone*

The Oaks, built on an eastern extension of Robert Campbell's Duntroon, was the first substantial stone dwelling in the Queanbeyan land district. It was built by the Campbells, probably for relatives who were planning to emigrate from England. Facing a river crossing on the junction and only just completed in 1836, The Oaks provided a cornerstone for its immediate area.

So prominent was the junction as a landmark for travellers that the Campbell family described Duntroon as actually being at the junction of the Molonglo and Queanbeyan Rivers. In 1834/1835 a track crossed through present-day Kowen Forest over the range from Bungendore, forking just east of the junction. One branch



2. Oaks Estate (The junction of Molonglo and Queanbeyan Rivers 1830s) showing pre and post 1836 tracks



The Oaks

went to *Duntroon*, Canberra and Yass. The other was the main track south to Michelago and the Monaro Plains (via Jerrabomberra and Lobbs Hole). By 1837 the track crossed the Molonglo at *The Oaks*, just downstream from the junction.

A minor track led to and from Timothy Beard's *Quinbean* which was two kilometres further downstream. Beard, following explorer Currie's path through this area, squatted at *Quinbean* shortly after 1823. "Quinbean" is an Aboriginal word for the meeting of the two rivers, signposting access to the reliable food and water resources that had provided for a long history of sheltered camping and corroboree grounds. *Quinbean* came to be part of *Jerrabomberra* estate and by 1838 the village name of Queanbeyan had evolved.

In 1837-1838 a store adjoined *The Oaks*, which was at that time licensed as the Elmsall Inn. A burial ground was close by (in present-day Florence Street) but it was mainly used before the opening of the Queanbeyan public cemetery. *The Oaks* crossing was directly in front of the inn. The track, now an eroded creek/storm water drain, passed between the buildings and the burial ground. However, after the 100 acre estate containing *The Oaks* (present-day Oaks Estate) was sold in 1840, the Elmsall Inn and store closed and the inn moved, eventually, to where the track from Molonglo and Lake George crossed the Queanbeyan River in the newly laid out village of Queanbeyan.

The Queanbeyan Railway Station: the second cornerstone

With *The Oaks* crossing having washed away in the 1874 flood, travellers crossed at what later became the River Street ford. This became part of a surveyed road (present-day River Street) formed in 1887. The road was designed to join the newly constructed railway station, stockyards and goods yards, and the proposed residential and business hub of Oaks Estate, directly to the main Yass-Queanbeyan Road. Thus encouraged, the town of Queanbeyan was expected to expand towards the new station complex.

The railway complex was built on land acquired from the southern portion of *The Oaks* estate. A syndicate of owners, most notably John Bull, Queanbeyan's second mayor, operated the estate at that time. As well as *The Oaks* (which reverted to being an inn during the construction of the railway complex), *Hazelbrook* fellmongery and the Chinese market garden that operated on *Hazelbrook* land, possibly from as early as the 1890s, the estate included a butcher shop, which Bull operated from his house on present-day Henderson Road, and a slaughteryard on the junction of Nimrod and Oaks Estate Roads. Each operation marked an estate boundary. The railway station was strategically situated at the apex of all of this activity, the estate overlapping the intersection of key stock routes from Majura, Ginninderra and Tharwa.

In 1911 the border of the Territory for the Seat of Government was drawn and Oaks Estate was severed from Queanbeyan, becoming part of the new federal

territory. Despite the new border, however, the presence of the railway complex at the intersection of key stock routes maintained connections between Queanbeyan and the new territory.

The Robertsons' house: the third cornerstone

The focus of rural industry on the railway complex, *The Oaks* and, from the 1890s, the Queanbeyan Roller Flour Mill influenced the trackways through Oaks Estate. Drovers driving their sheep and cattle to the stockyards watered them at the River Street crossing. From 1905 *The Oaks* was owned and occupied by the miller who was also part owner of the flourmill. The mill had been built on the road between the goods yard, *The Oaks* and the crossing. Wagons brought grain to the mill from outlying districts.

Having delivered their loads the wagon drivers camped overnight opposite the mill in Gillespie's paddocks (beside what is now Gillespie Park). Dick Robertson, who lived in the miller's house and probably worked as the mill's engine driver, would invite some of the drivers and drovers to dine with his family.

Dick had moved to Oaks Estate with his parents during the first Oaks Estate subdivision sale in 1887. Leaving the mill in 1911, he moved his own growing family to a temporary dwelling on a block adjacent to the main intersection of the roads between Queanbeyan, the station complex and the River Street crossing. The block was located between Railway and Hazel Streets and was originally described as 4 Railway Street. By 1912/1913 Dick started to build there permanently. The house was placed with its back door close to Hazel Street. The original block has since been divided in half and the portion on which the house stands is now referred to as 9 Hazel Street.

In 1914 Dick was employed at RMC Duntroon where he remained till 1921 when he left to work as a plumber on the construction of the Westlake workers' settlement. The Robertsons' focus had, like that of most Oaks Estate residents, shifted from Queanbeyan and rural industry to the construction of Canberra. Business being already poor, the mill was the last industrial employer in Queanbeyan.

The Robertsons' house, *The Oaks* and the Queanbeyan Railway Station provide three cornerstones in the development of Oaks Estate. Seen as a precinct at the junction of the Molonglo and Queanbeyan Rivers, they provide insight into the transition between the region's colonial and federal eras and the links between Canberra and Queanbeyan in that transition.

* Please note that *The Oaks* is private property and that the privacy of the occupants should be respected.

References:

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