



• Seat in Limestone Avenue



• FCC cottage, 7 Corroboree Park



• Corroboree Yellow Box



• House in Wakefield Gardens

LISTED PLACES IN
AINSLIE

1. Limestone Avenue
2. Alt Crescent
3. Lister Crescent
4. Paterson Street
5. Ainslie Hall
6. Corroboree Park
7. Corroboree Park cottages
8. All Saints Anglican Church
9. Wakefield Gardens Precinct
10. Cox Street
11. Wakefield Gardens
12. Ainslie Shops

A heritage tour of
AINSLIE

A SELF-GUIDED WALK



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Ainslie has heritage places ranging in date from before settlement to the foundation of Canberra. It is named after James Ainslie, who camped on what is now Corroboree Park with Robert Campbell's sheep in 1825, before selecting land which became the Duntroon estate.

The garden suburb character of old Ainslie's housing precincts is due to the vision of its planners, who followed English precedents, laying out attractively landscaped parks and avenues of trees to merge with private gardens in a beautiful residential environment below the backdrop of Mt Ainslie. The architectural quality of the houses adds another dimension to the heritage value of the precincts.

When the employees of Sydney landholder, J. J. Moore, occupied land on the Molonglo river in 1824, a corroboree ground existed amongst a clump of trees just beyond his boundary. Aboriginal people were still gathering there fifty years later, when the road from Queanbeyan to Yass passed nearby. Within the broad outline for Griffin's 1912-18 Federal Capital City, housing precincts were planned under John Sulman, who chaired the 1921-4 Federal Capital Advisory Committee (FCAC) and was knighted for his efforts. As the land here is generally flat, the precincts have curvilinear symmetrical layouts, rather than the contour planning seen on the sloping land of South Canberra.



Federal Capital Commission (FCC) cottage

BACKGROUND

Griffin, in his competition plan, indicated railway yards between Northbourne Avenue and Mt Ainslie, but replaced them in his 1918 plan with rectangular suburban blocks, showing a major east-west avenue leading to a square on the site of today's Wakefield Gardens. The FCAC produced plans for Canberra's garden suburbs, then the Federal Capital Commission (FCC), took over in 1925 with the power to collect revenue for the task of building the city. Social planning meant senior public servants were to live in the superior south, with their middle-range counterparts in inner suburbs like Reid and working classes in enclaves further out. In Alt Crescent, being a prominent layby on a main road, some of the best FCC brick houses were built for its own professional staff. Bureaucrats, keeping up appearances, believed cheaper timber cottages deserved to be more out of sight but the architects designed them with flair. The inhabitants were proud to live in the place they called 'the weatherboards'. They kept their front gardens neat, with hedges maintained by the government and their ample backyards were perfect for fruit trees and vegetables.

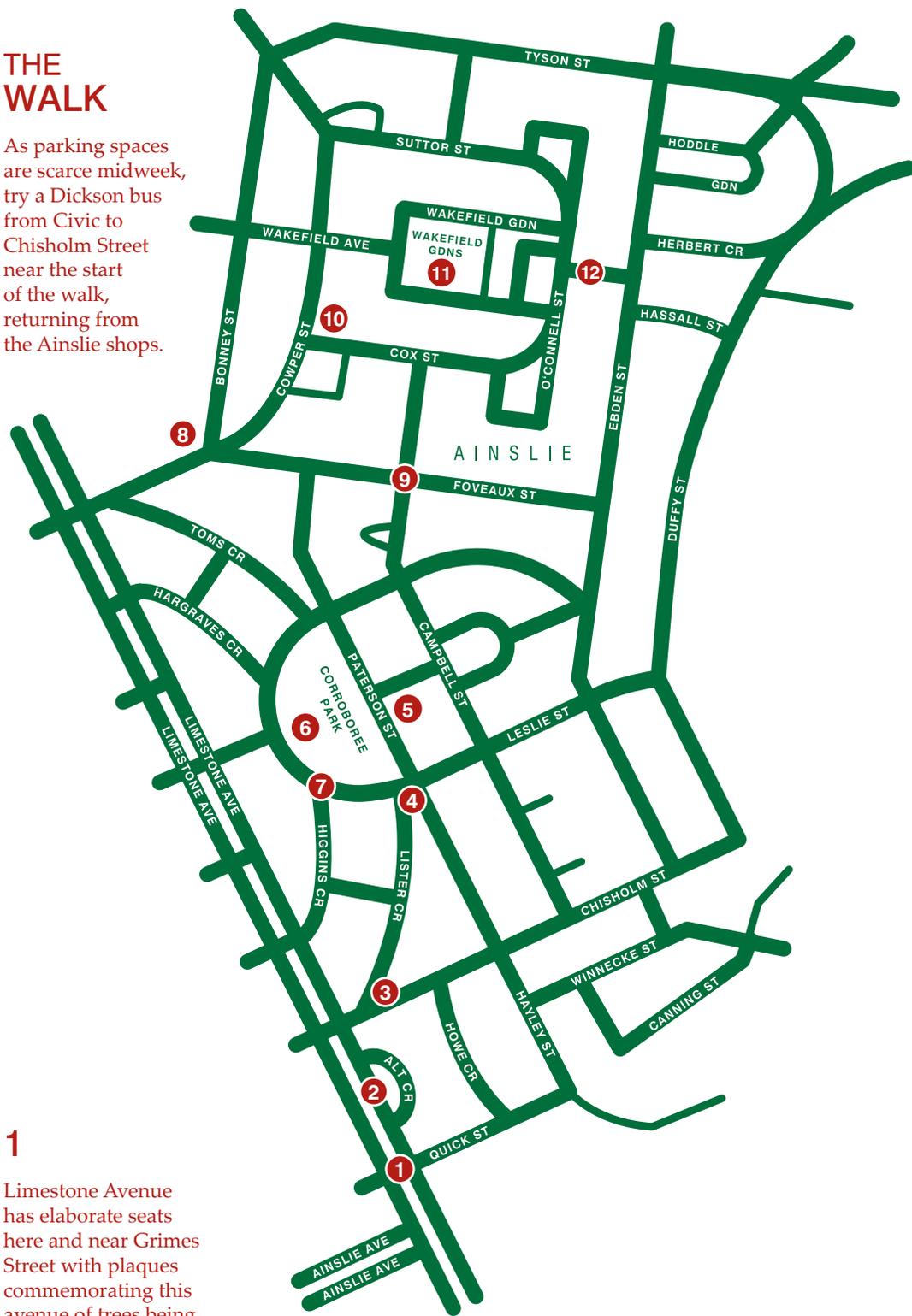
They were also proud of their park, provided it with a playground and tennis courts, enjoyed picnics and other gatherings – even went to the circus there when it came to town. They lobbied for the 'amusement hall' and made good use of it for concerts, boxing matches, church services and more, then for the youth centre which filled a pressing need.

Wakefield Gardens residents appreciated the attractive trees which grew just as those who planted and maintained them intended. Over the years the shopping centre there has justified the controversial decision to build it by serving both residents and visitors well.

In Ainslie we have three precincts which demonstrate the Garden City planning philosophy which underpinned the early planning of Canberra. At one time Canberra's best kept secret, Corroboree Park has become well known and was recently described as 'a very elegant and successful set piece of landscape architecture.'

THE WALK

As parking spaces are scarce midweek, try a Dickson bus from Civic to Chisholm Street near the start of the walk, returning from the Ainslie shops.



1

Limestone Avenue has elaborate seats here and near Grimes Street with plaques commemorating this avenue of trees being

5

Corroboree Park Community Centre has two halls. Today's Ainslie Hall was built at Acton in 1923 as an 'unapproved' temporary Masonic Temple, with skylights in lieu of windows, and soundproofing for secrecy. The FCC purchased it in 1926, used it briefly for offices, then rebuilt it at Russell as a school to meet a short-term need. In 1931 it was moved to Corroboree Park, extended, named the Ainslie Hall. Canberra's first bus route terminated outside. The hall has been a well-used venue ever since. From 1938 to 1953 regular Church of England services were held there. The interior and roof were rebuilt in 1970 after a major fire. The need for a club for boys and girls was met in 1950 when a fibro-clad hall, the 'Youth Centre Hut' was opened. The YMCA provided staff and managed the Centre, successfully cooperating with the government. The fireplace room housed a children's library between 1953 and 1969. In the 1970s the YMCA Youth Radio Club broadcast from the Centre on VKIYR. Northside Community Service has leased both halls since 1986.

7

The cottages surrounding Corroboree Park and along the crescents, apart from a few built privately, were designed under FCC architect Robert Casboulte in 1926-7 in the Georgian Revival style: rectangular shapes, tiled roofs, symmetry, multi-paned windows and some arched openings. Their weatherboards are rusticated to imitate stonework. 5 Corroboree Park was home to Iris Carnall (née Wilden of Mugga Mugga) for 68 years from 1930. In May 1927 the Duke and Duchess of York, on a brief tour of North Canberra, visited No. 7 for tea. Keith Axelby, awarded a BEM for overseeing the landscaping along ANZAC Parade, lived in No. 9. 23 Higgins Crescent (1938) is one of the privately-built cottages designed by Kenneth Oliphant, who had a 40-year architectural practice in Canberra. 10 Higgins Crescent was built as a maternity hospital, but never used as such. Note the fine Deodoar Cedars in Grimes Street and the adjacent tall Silky Oaks. To allow street trees to flourish,

8

Walk around the park

9

Veer right onto Foveaux Streets. We enter the Wakefield Gardens Precinct between mature eucalypts on generous verges along Campbell Street and corner 'pocket' parks. The western section has 1920s weatherboard FCC cottages, while Department of the Interior brick houses of the 1930s fill the eastern section. A few have 'Moderne' touches – corner windows with horizontal glazing bars and painted brickwork emphasising bed joints.

10

Cox Street, named after NSW pioneer road builder William Cox, has a vista framed by Atlas Cedars west to Beaufort House, 25 Cowper Street. Designed by Arthur Baldwinson and built in 1947 entirely of steel, it was an aircraft factory-produced prototype, but with steel in short supply no others were built in Canberra. The 1937 bus shelter in the park had a toilet for drivers, as it was a terminus.

11

Wakefield Gardens, named after Edward Gibbon Wakefield, has a square axial layout reminiscent of English garden suburbs based on village greens. It has a preschool in the internal reserve bounded by narrow

avenue of trees being planted in 1928 by the Australian Natives Association, of non Aboriginal Australian-born citizens. Advantage was taken of the wide thoroughfare laid out by Griffin on the line of the Queanbeyan-Yass road to plant several large species of eucalypts, plus outer rows of Kurrajongs.

2

Alt Crescent, named after the first NSW Surveyor-General, is a textbook example of Sulman avoiding monotony on long straight streets by setting back houses in a layby around a public garden. Dominant Italian Cypressess line both sides of the carriageway. The first residents in 1926 included FCC architects J. Hunter Kirkpatrick, in the Georgian Revival style central house recalling his Albert Hall and in 54 Limestone Avenue Malcolm Moir, who had a distinguished career in Canberra. 44 Quick Street and 10 Alt Crescent date from 1926; 4 and 12 are from the 1930s and 6 is modern.

3

Lister Crescent is one of four crescents leading to Corroboree Park. Lister, Toms and Hargraves discovered gold in NSW, and Higgins was a legislator. Street trees here and in Toms Crescent are spring flowering plums alternating with funereal cypresses – a cycle of life and death. Silky Oaks line the other crescents. The modest timber cottages are FCC ‘artisan dwellings’ of 1927. One was occupied by the Social Service Association from 1927 to 1931. There are a few later privately-built houses and the architect of No. 21 was Heather Sutherland, sister of Dame Joan. The 1950 Girl Guides Hall is by Department of the Interior Works Branch architects. It sits in a wedge-shaped reserve with eucalypts laid out in circles by Charles Weston.



FCC 5 house in Alt Crescent

4

Paterson Street, named after the explorer and early NSW Governor, has Ainslie’s first 30 timber cottages (1926), of two types, one L-shaped arranged in mirror-reversed pairs, with the other symmetrical in pairs set back between them. All had open verandahs, ‘Salvus’ iron roofs, crimped to resemble tiles, and double-hung windows with margined glazing. They backed onto the natural bush of Mt Ainslie’s foothills. The street trees are Red Spotted Gums, Black Cherry Plums and Nettle Trees.

6

Walk through the link between the halls to enter the semi-circular park created on the corroboree ground in 1925 and appropriately named a few years later. The tight clump of Yellow Box and Red Gums declined in the 1930s, but trees and shrubs planted to Charles Weston’s direction took over and 500 trees were planted by the unemployed at the suggestion of the tennis club. Today’s centrepiece is an ancient multi-trunked Yellow Box. Iris Carnall’s mother, as a little girl in about 1880, witnessed Aboriginal people gathering around an elder sitting beneath this tree. Of the children’s playground established by the community in 1926, the original swings survive. Two tennis courts were constructed in 1928 by North Ainslie Social Services Tennis Club volunteers and a third in 1945. Their 1930 clubhouse was replaced in 1957 by the present pavilion. In that year the basketball court was constructed by the Department of the Interior. The National Capital Development Commission improved the park with sprinklers (1968), a car park (1969), cricket pitch, table tennis table, picnic tables and a barbecue. In the late 1960s, with YMCA support, Canberra’s first Little Athletics competitions began in the park.

via Hargraves Crescent, Lewis Street and Toms Crescent to Cowper Street. The sandstone of the church building at All Saints Anglican Church, on the corner of Cowper and Bonney Streets, came from Rookwood Mortuary Station in Sydney. All Saints successfully tendered for the station which fell into disuse after motorised transport made the need for a funeral train redundant in the early 1900s. The challenge of dismantling, transporting and reconstructing the sandstone blocks into this building has been most effectively met. The foundation stone was laid on 1 June 1958. This heritage listed site is remarkable for the relocation and adaptive reuse of an unwanted building.



Back of Ainslie Hall by Geoff Pryor in *The Canberra Times*, 29.5.1988

roads lined with flowering plums. Other notable trees, informally arranged along three paths to the shops, include Oaks, Claret Ash, Cedars, and Cypressess, planted under Charles Weston, Superintendent of Parks, Gardens and Afforestation from 1913 to 1926. Modest Department of the Interior houses, conservative in design for their late 1930s date, are unified by roughcast stucco walls, multi-paned windows and iron roofs. Variety is achieved by the layout of single cottages and duplexes, with different roof shapes and porches.

12

A project for shops here was announced in 1940. Despite the Chamber of Commerce President declaring ‘handy shops were a thing of the past’, planning began in 1944 and construction began four years later. Today, this is the busy retail and social honeypot of Ainslie.