



ACT Heritage Council

**AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY
HERITAGE REGISTER
Background Information**

GUNG AHLIN HOMESTEAD

BLOCK 348 AND SECTION 0, CRACE

At its meeting of 23 September 2026, the ACT Heritage Council decided that Gungahlin Homestead was eligible for provisional registration.

The information contained in this report was considered by the ACT Heritage Council in assessing the nomination for the Gungahlin Homestead against the heritage significance criteria outlined in s 10 of the *Heritage Act 2004*.

Preamble

Gungahlin Homestead is located on lands that the Ngunnawal and other First Nations peoples have had connections to for many thousands of years. The name 'Gungahlin' is derived from the Ngunnawal language and is understood to mean 'white man's house,' describing the European homestead constructed at the site in the 19th century.

Following the transformation of the landscape into a rural pastoral property, the connections of Ngunnawal and other First Nations peoples to this place continued throughout the site's history. One notable example is the contribution of local Aboriginal men Bobby Deumonga, Johnny Taylor and Jimmy Taylor to the success of the Ginninderra Cricket Team between 1850-1870, which was based at the homestead.

Ngunnawal and other First Nations people continue to care for Country and maintain cultural connections throughout the ACT today, including to the lands on which Gungahlin Homestead is located.

Gungahlin Homestead was listed on the Commonwealth Heritage List in 2004 for its connection to the CSIRO, which occupied the site from 1953 to 2015 as a research centre, carrying out pioneering environmental and ecological research at the site for over 70 years.

In December 2025 its National Land status was revoked and it was removed from the Commonwealth Heritage List. Under the terms of the National Land revocation the property was nominated to the ACT Heritage Register.

The site is now privately owned and managed.

Description

Gungahlin Homestead, also previously known as 'Goongarline' or 'Gungarline', is a grazier's residence on a formal rural property located 10 kilometres north of the Canberra city centre. It is set back from the Barton Highway and occupies the highest point of a 35.6-hectare site.

The homestead is an exceptional example of a mid-late 19th century grazier's residence and was built in 2 stages. The first stage, completed in 1865, is a 2-storey rendered masonry main residence that was commissioned by William Davis Junior. The surviving outbuildings, laundry, coach house, servant's quarters, and cellar, also date to the 1860s. A large addition was completed in 1883 for Edward Crace.

The oldest section of the house is the northern section, with its 2-storey rendered masonry exterior. The front door is located off the verandah to the west. Upon entering, the cedar stairs to the first floor are to the right and the dining room ahead. East of the dining room is a school room, then the kitchen. These rooms formed the nucleus of the plan which was later extended.

The most prominent component of the exterior is the 1883 addition to the south of the house, which dominates the original wing in scale and mass. This section of the house also features a dramatic pair of bay windows on the southern facade. With the new addition in place, the formal entry was moved to a lobby on the addition's far western side. A paned window is centred over the arched, double leaf front door. From the lobby, access to the house is through a long hall running eastward, featuring an ornamental wooden staircase. South of this hallway is a drawing room and a dining room. Further to the east is a back hall, pantry, storage and toilet.

Access to the property is from the east via a picturesque tree-lined driveway, edged in local stone, ending in a turning circle, both of which are extant. The original carriage loop, still discernible through tree plantings and stone edging, was compromised when a new building was cut into the southern side several decades ago. The line of the loop is still visible. The loss of some of the older trees has created a more open character than the original, which contained an intimate setting.

The homestead also features a dam which is over 100 years old, located approximately 150 metres west of the residence.

During the period of CSIRO tenure from 1953 onwards, a number of administrative and research buildings were constructed on the site, primarily clustered around the homestead to the north, east, and south. As a result, the historic homestead is partially enclosed by later development, contributing to an institutional character that contrasts with its former rural setting.

Within the context of the pre-Australian Capital Territory landscape, Gungahlin Homestead is one of several large country mansions constructed in the region during the 19th century which retains integrity of fabric and architectural character.

History

The establishment of Gungahlin Homestead

The lands on which Gungahlin Homestead is located have connections to the Ngunnawal people dating back thousands of years.

The suburb of Crace is on Ngunnawal Country, which includes Canberra and its surrounds. In the nineteenth century, European colonisers named the area the Limestone Plains after the layers of sedimentary rocks (sandstone, limestone, siltstone and shale) laid down over 400 million years ago when the area was an aquatic landscape (Lovell Chen 2025b:31).

European exploration of the Limestone Plains began in the early 1820s led by Charles Throsby and his nephew Charles Throsby-Smith, who departed from Sydney in search of Weereewa (Lake George) and the Murrumbidgee River (Lovell Chen 2025b:31).

Land was granted to John Palmer in 1828 in recognition of his services to the Colony of New South Wales as Assistant Commissary General. His son, George Thomas Palmer, took possession in the early 1830s and erected a homestead about 3 miles from the present site in Ginninderra. Some outbuildings were believed to have been erected at the current site (Coulthard-Clark 1990).

Collectively, the property was known as Palmerville although the name Ginninderra persisted. Palmer's daughter Susan Adrianna married William Davis Junior who effectively took control of the property. After the 1861 Land Act, Davis Junior selected the Gungahlin portion of the estate and commenced building a home there in 1862. The house was named "Gungarline" which later became Gungahlin (ACT Heritage).

William Davis set up a private cricket pitch on the estate. The Ginninderra Cricket Team was virtually unbeatable from the 1850s to the 1870s, playing against teams from Queanbeyan, Braidwood, and Goulburn. 3 local Aboriginal men were crucial to the team's dominance: Bobby Hamilton, Johnny Taylor, and Jimmy Taylor (Hall Heritage Centre, n.d.).

The original 2-storey Georgian style homestead, which still stands today, was completed in 1865. At the time of construction, it featured wide verandahs with cedar doors and windows, and the first-floor windows had shutters. The interior had an ornate cedar fireplace and a cedar staircase, which is still extant today. Some of the garden and trees along the driveway were planted at this time (Coulthard-Clark 1990).



Figure 1: The early section of Gungahlin homestead - built by William Davis (junior), c. 1865, Hall Heritage (n.d.b)

The Crace family tenure

Davis sold his property to Edward Kendall Crace in 1877. Edward Crace was the son of John Gregory Crace, a successful English decorator. He arrived in NSW from England in 1868 and worked in Sydney for Henry Mort, a company director and pastoralist with connections to the wool broking firm Mort and Co (Hall Heritage Centre, n.d.). The Mort family had been shipwrecked on a reef off the coast of Brazil on the same ship as John Crace on the journey out from England. All the passengers had survived but they were marooned for a time on a sandbank in uncomfortable conditions. It was here that Crace first became interested in Mort's daughter, Kate, whom he married in 1871 (Coulthard-Clark 1990).

In 1877 the Craces entered into the arrangement with Davis to manage his properties upon which they moved into Davis' homestead with their 3 children (Hall Heritage Centre, n.d.; Coulthard-Clark 1990).

By 1880 Crace had bought out William Davis' interest in the property. In that year, he also bought the neighbouring Charnwood station from William McCarthy, bringing his total holding to 8,150 acres, and making him one of the large landholders in the district. He established himself as the new squire and became prominent in local affairs (Coulthard-Clark, 1990, 28).

The pressure of a growing family made the homestead too small and in 1883 Crace added a large, English designed, 2-storey Victorian extension. The extension to the Homestead was completed in accordance with plans drawn in England by Crace's brother and architect, Lewis Paxton Crace.

The extension was built in sandstone to the south of the earlier home. A new drawing room, dining room and bedrooms were added. 2 bay windows feature on the south of the building. The hall with ornate cedar stair was decoratively tiled and tiles continued onto the western verandah. The homestead demonstrates that sandstone was used in high-status pastoral residences in the Canberra district during the late nineteenth century. The early homestead comprised stuccoed rubble masonry, while the substantial Victorian expansion undertaken by Edward Kendall Crace in the 1880s incorporated rough-faced sandstone reportedly quarried from Black Mountain (Hall Heritage Centre; Crace Holdings, 2025).

This makes Gungahlin one of the strongest Canberra-region examples where sandstone use in a nineteenth-century grazier's homestead is directly documented. The 1883 Crace wing is constructed of rough-faced sandstone, where the external stone blocks were intentionally left with a textured quarry-finished surface. The rough sandstone walls are contrasted by painted cement dressings to openings and architectural details, producing a characteristic late Victorian picturesque appearance (Crace Holdings, 2025).

Crace established a merino stud on his property and purchased Devon cattle from Queen Victoria's farm at Windsor when he travelled to England in 1885. He had many trees and roses planted on the property to transform the setting into something more reminiscent of England. By 1887 there was a large orchard of 1,400 trees, a pond forming a miniature lake with a windmill pump and gear to supply the house with water. An entrance driveway which had been planned by Mrs Davis was lined with English shrubs and trees (Coulthard-Clark, 1990, 29). The first private telephone in the district was installed at the Crace homestead after Edward agreed to pay the cost of extending the line from the Ginninderra Post Office to the house.

However, by 1891 Australia was entering a financial crisis with the price of wool, a major export, falling sharply. Edward and Kate returned to their property in January 1892 and were forced to take out a heavy mortgage. It is believed that this was to meet the large annual interest repayments on mortgages already taken out five years earlier. The Craces were having difficulty meeting these repayments following the sharply reduced income from their wool clip (Coulthard-Clark, 1990, 32).

Edward was only 48 when he died, leaving his widow with 9 children to support (Coulthard-Clark 1990; Hall Heritage Centre, n.d.). It was only because of the close ties of the Crace family with Mort and Co. that the homestead was saved from being sold to pay probate. Mort and Co. undertook to allow Kate Crace and the manager of the property to work to clear the debts. The family continued to live there until 1915, when the property was formally acquired by the Commonwealth following the establishment of the Federal Capital (Canberra & District Historical Society, Gungahlin Homestead catalogue record; Coulthard-Clark 1990). Mrs Crace, accompanied by several unmarried daughters, went to live in Sydney while her son, Everard, obtained a lease of the Homestead and 160 hectares and

remained on the property until his death in 1928 (Australian Dictionary of Biography).



Figure 2. Gungahlin Homestead circa 1885 - Hall School Museum and Heritage Centre (n.d.a)

Early landscape formation

The early homestead, both the original residence and the stately extension, were sited on the highest point in the landscape. To make the surrounding slopes useable the terraces were created to site the outbuildings and the gardens. Even though the outbuildings and gardens do not remain on site today the evidence of terracing remains. The later 20th century CSIRO buildings seem to be sited to follow the historical terracing pattern. The exact historical provenance of each of these sections of levelled land cannot be determined with the available information, and further research may be required to establish the exact sequence of land formation. However, forming a habitable and useable landscape through terracing surrounding a stately home is typical of morphology of such estates from the 19th Century. This also emphasised the prominence of the main residence and allowed for the homestead to be viewed from the landscape and vice versa.

The homestead in the 20th century

In June 1928 Dr Frederick Watson took out a 10-year lease on the property (Coulthard-Clark 1990). He had been the honorary librarian and trustee of the Public Library of Sydney from 1910-12 and was appointed editor of the Australian Historical records by the Commonwealth Government in 1912. In 1927 he published *A Brief History of Canberra*, in which the homestead received a brief mention. In 1929 he was briefly elected as a member of the Federal Capital Commission. Dr Watson maintained a small farming interest on the property, mainly running sheep on an area of 764 acres.

In 1940 he sold his lease to Mr Ambrose John Kitchen. It was during Kitchen's time at the residence that electricity and town water were connected to the Homestead and it was also during this time that the name "Gungahleen" changed to "Gungahlin".

In July 1949 the Department of the Interior purchased the lease on the property for the Canberra University College to use as a residential hall for students. The house, 2 cottages, outbuildings and about 46 acres of land were used by the College. The main house was to accommodate 30 students and another 24 to 30 would live in the outbuildings. The site was occupied from March 1950.

CSIRO tenure

The CSIRO Wildlife Survey Section (now Division of Wildlife and Ecology) moved to the Gungahlin property in October 1953 (ABC News 2022). The section was originally formed in 1946 to carry out research on the national control of rabbits.

Establishment and early scientific use (1953–1960s)

Early research activities undertaken at Gungahlin focused on the management of Australia's rabbit populations. The property played a role in investigations into biological control methods, including pioneering research associated with the introduction and monitoring of myxomatosis.

During the initial years of occupation, scientific and administrative functions were accommodated within the historic homestead complex, comprising the original 1860s residence and its 1883 additions.

Over time, sections of the homestead were adapted for use as offices, reception facilities and visitor services, while continuing to serve as the administrative centre of the research establishment.

In the early 1960s several temporary buildings were established on the site to accommodate research groups.

Expansion and scientific significance (1970s–1990s)

From the 1970s onwards, the surrounding paddocks and rural landscape were progressively adapted to support a broad range of ecological and wildlife studies. Research infrastructure, including field stations and outdoor enclosures, enabled investigations into native marsupials, bird populations, habitat management and ecosystem processes.

The grounds also developed an important botanical dimension. Researchers and site caretakers planted a variety of native and exotic tree species across the property, many of which were identified with botanical labels. Collectively, these plantings formed a living reference collection that reflected the scientific and educational functions of the site.

During this period, the Wildlife Survey Section evolved into the CSIRO Division of Wildlife and Ecology. The division achieved national and international recognition for its contributions to landscape ecology, wildlife management and conservation biology, with Gungahlin Homestead serving as a significant centre for this research.

In the early 1970s and 1980s four major permanent buildings were constructed on the site.

In 1990-91 two permanent research buildings were established to accommodate scientists attached to the National Rangelands Program. This was a multidisciplinary research initiative showing how rangelands capture and store water and nutrients, identifying signs of landscape dysfunction. Key aspects include landscape function analysis, long-term ecological monitoring, and policy frameworks.

In February 1995, the Australian House of Representatives officially referred a major proposal for redevelopment works at the CSIRO Division of Wildlife and Ecology headquarters to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works. The project was approved on 27 June 1995 and modernised the historic site's capacity to serve as a world-class scientific hub.

It replaced outdated, scattered facilities with modern laboratory complexes and specialised administrative buildings designed to blend with the surrounding area.

The 1995 redevelopment prioritised protecting the historic 19th-century Gungahlin Homestead—including its 1860s Georgian-style northern section and 1883 Victorian sandstone wing. New buildings were erected further into the original grazing paddocks to preserve the homestead's visual curtilage.

Continued occupation and departure (2000s–2025)

Ownership of the property reverted to private interests in 2002. However, CSIRO retained a long-term lease arrangement that allowed research and administrative activities to continue at Gungahlin Homestead.

CSIRO concluded its occupation of the site on 1 July 2025, bringing to an end a period of scientific association spanning more than 70 years. It is believed around 1000 staff were employed in the roles of researchers, technicians and support staff at Gungahlin Homestead and its associated facilities during the CSIRO's tenure.

CSIRO's occupation from 1953 to the early 2020s had both beneficial and adverse impacts on Gungahlin Homestead. Continued institutional use assisted the survival, maintenance and conservation of the nineteenth-century homestead and outbuildings, while also giving the site national significance through its association with wildlife and ecological research. However, adaptation for research purposes resulted in alterations to the homestead, demolition of some historic outbuildings, modification of the Victorian landscape, and the insertion of modern buildings that diminished the integrity of parts of the 19th century estate layout.

Archaeological assessments and investigations

Several archaeological assessments and limited investigations were carried out at the homestead by Ken Heffernan and Jan Klaver between 1994 and 1996 to inform proposed building works by the CSIRO (Heffernan and Klaver 1994a, 1994b, 1995, 1996).

This involved a preliminary assessment of historical records which identified 30 documented sites (DS1-DS30) for further investigation, and a subsequent field survey that identified 27 historical archaeological sites (HS1-27) (including some previously identified documented sites).

Identified features included the homestead and courtyard, outbuildings, carriage drive, dam and water race, former servants' quarters and stables, laundry, and other minor structural remnants or small surface artefact scatters of varying significance associated with the late 19th and early 20th century occupation of the site.

The report recommended conserving 11 features including the core homestead precinct, such as the main homestead and outbuildings, and key landscape features, such as the driveway and dam. Archaeological management including inspections, archaeological monitoring, and salvage were recommended for an additional 11 features. Of the total identified extant structures or potential archaeological sites, 8 were assessed as being of high significance by Heffernan and Klaven:

- Gungahlin Homestead and Courtyard (extant structure)
- Entrance Drive with Plantings (extant structure)
- Coachman's Bedroom Block (Servants Quarters) (extant structure)
- Laundry (extant structure)
- Coach House Block (extant structure)
- Stablemen's Wing (Harness Room) (no longer extant, archaeological control measures carried out in 1996, no further information to be gained)
- The Wood Shed (unknown status)
- Underground Water Tank (unknown status)

Current reporting by Heffernan and Klaven does not provide detailed assessments of potential associated with the extant buildings or their environs. Future archaeological assessments could provide more information on the potential for associated archaeological features (such as evidence of earlier alignments, domestic or rubbish deposits as examples).

No further significant information is likely to be obtained from the former Stableman's Wing (Harness Room), as this feature was subject to further investigation including inspection, archaeological monitoring, and hand excavation in 1996 in association with the demolition of former CSIRO Building 2 east of the main homestead (Heffernan and Klaver 1996).

The current archaeological potential of the Wood Shed and Underground Water Tank, both assessed as being of high significance by Heffernan and Klaver (1994a), has not been established based on the current assessments. The Wood Shed was assessed as significant as an integral component of the central homestead complex, while the Underground Water Tank was identified as an integral component of the complex whose significance was enhanced by the loss of most other historic water-storage features at the place. Both were located within, or in the case of the tank very near, the former National Estate boundary (Heffernan and Klaver 1994a).

The investigations also assessed the potential for Aboriginal cultural heritage in the area,

including an inspection of mature native trees for cultural scarring and a search for rocky outcrops that could be associated with stone artefact manufacture or grinding. No Aboriginal heritage places were identified. This outcome was considered consistent with land use models for the area and the intensive European use of the site (Heffernan and Klaver 1994a).

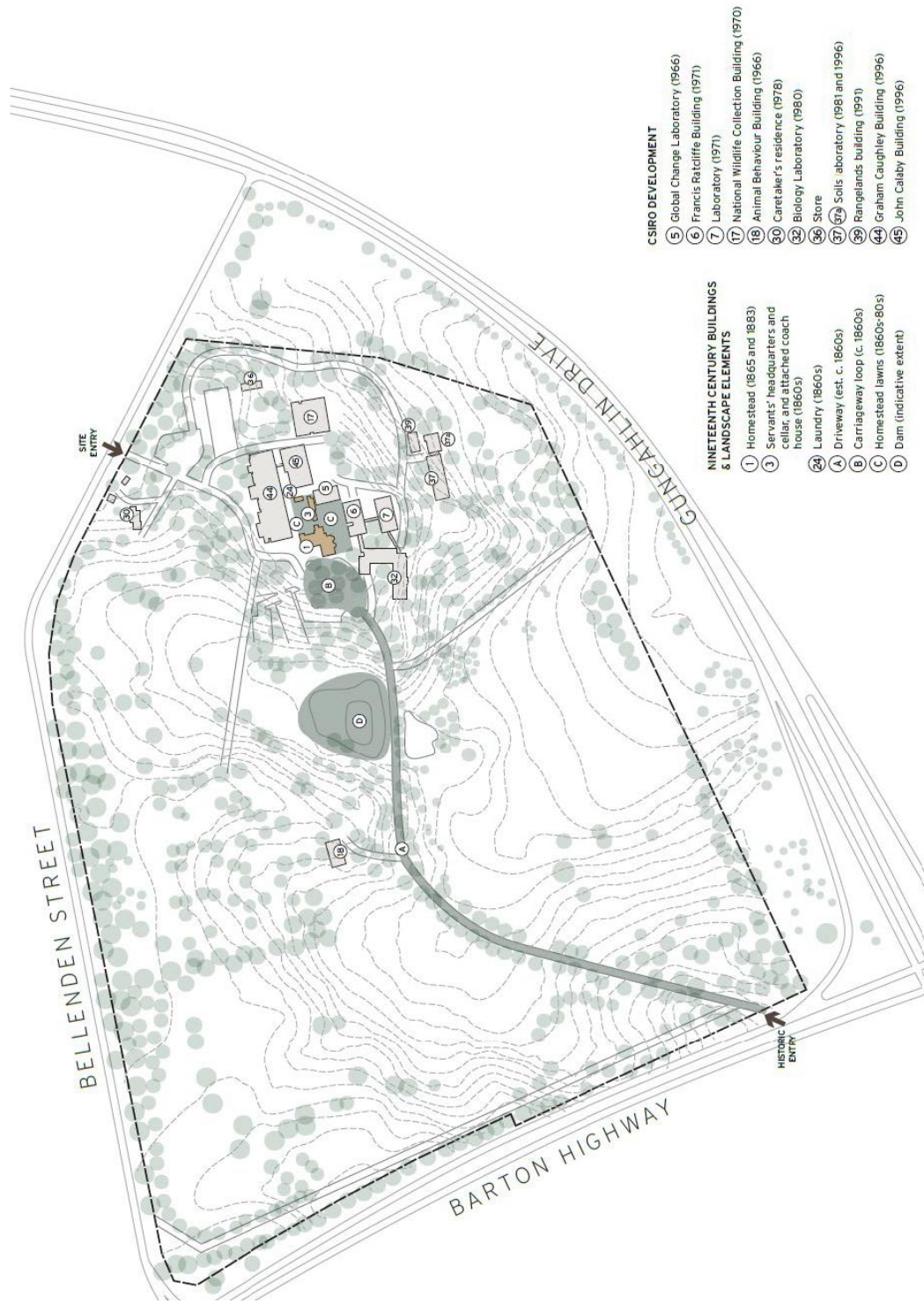


Figure 1 Site plan

Figure 3: Location of buildings on site (Lovell Chen 2025b, 4).

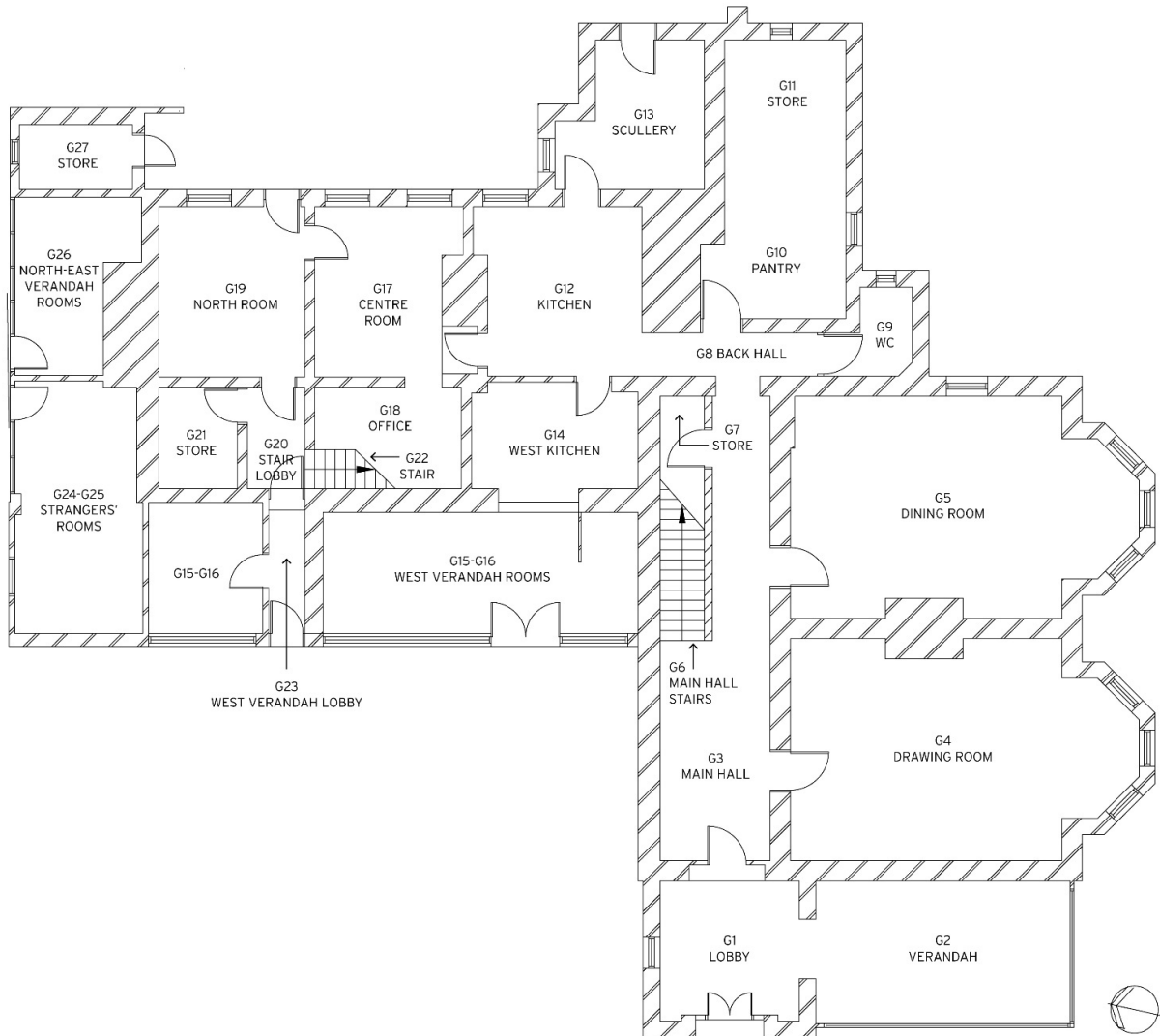


Figure 4. Homestead, ground floor plan (Lovell Chen 2025a)

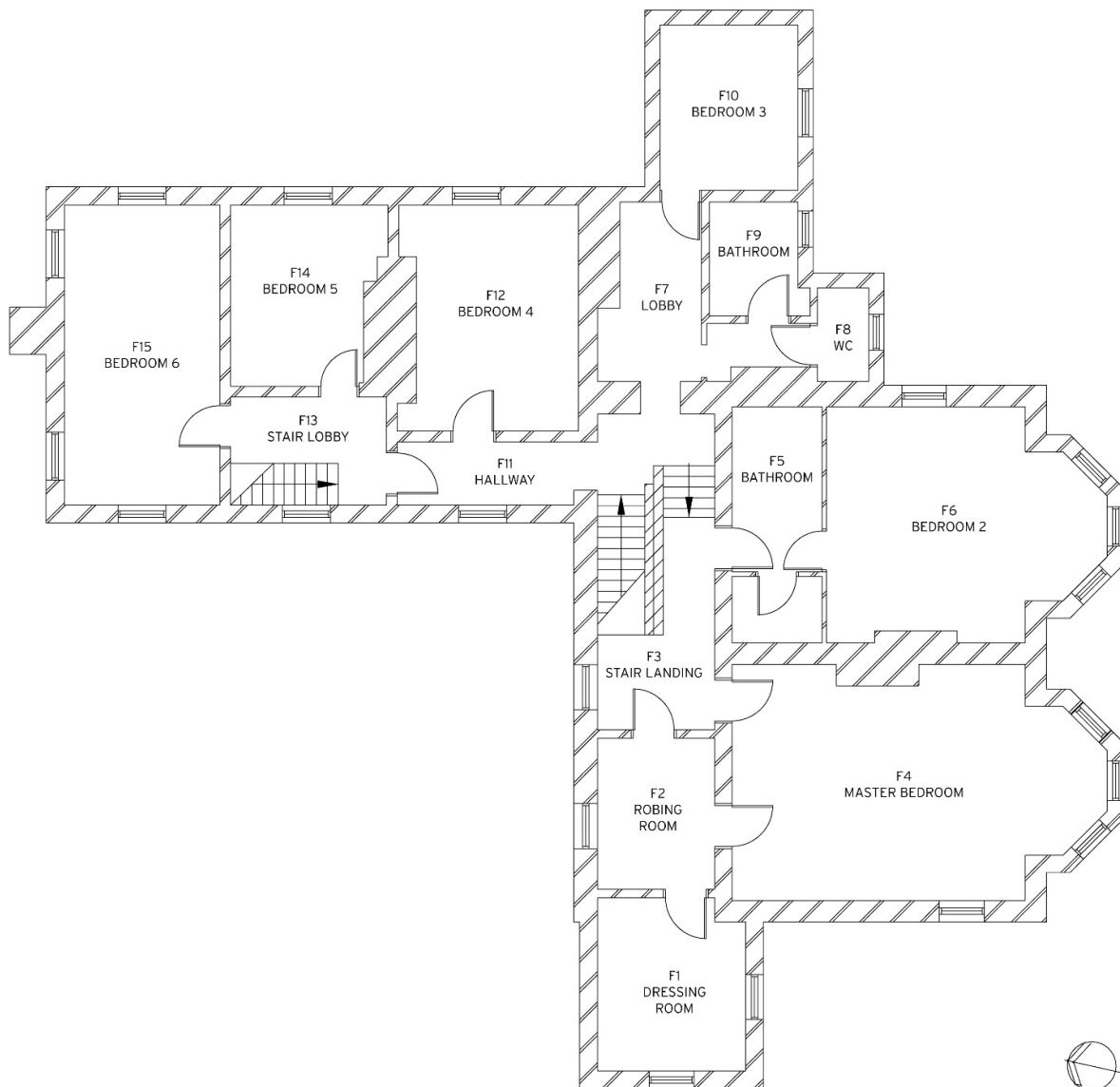


Figure 5. Homestead, first floor plan (Lovell Chen 2025a)

Integrity

Over the years the CSIRO have removed historic buildings, constructed temporary buildings and structures and undertaken conservation works at the homestead.

Much of the floor plan remains intact and has been used through adaptive reuse as office space. The verandas have been filled in for use as office space. A ground floor storage area has been converted to a rest room.

The grounds of the homestead have been altered through the placement of car parks and new buildings within proximity to the homestead.

Physical condition

Gungahlin Homestead has been subject to iterative physical change consistent with the evolving needs of its occupants in keeping with vernacular architectural practices in the region, since the 1860s. The 19th century buildings have generally been well maintained and appear to be in sound structural condition.

Works have been undertaken since 2022 as part of the disposal of the site by CSIRO, including cleaning, repainting, cleaning, and repair and replacement of damaged elements. Fittings and light-weight partitions introduced by CSIRO have generally been removed.

Numerous buildings constructed by CSIRO in the 20th century have since been removed from the site. Those remaining relate predominantly to two phases of research expansion at the site, in the 1960-70s and the 1990s. These buildings are not identified as intrinsic to the Territory significance of Gungahlin Homestead.

19th century landscape elements have also been subject to change since the mid-20th century. The former hill terracing to the south of the house was largely overwritten by the construction of CSIRO buildings. The integrity of plantings to the ornamental drive has deteriorated over time.

The landscape retains a number of mature trees dating from both the Davis-period (1860s) and Crace-period (1880s) plantings, including Monterey Cypress, Monterey Pine, Deodar Cedar, Canary Island Pine, Italian Cypress and English Elm. The carriage loop remains largely intact to its original form (except where interrupted by a CSIRO building) with several mature trees dating to the 1880s.

The central dam was enlarged by CSIRO in the mid-late twentieth century, and the windmill and pump system have been removed.



Figure 6. Gungahlin Homestead, with temporary CSIRO structures visible in the background on the right (Crace Holdings 2025)

Provisional registration boundary



Figure 7: Provisional registration boundary

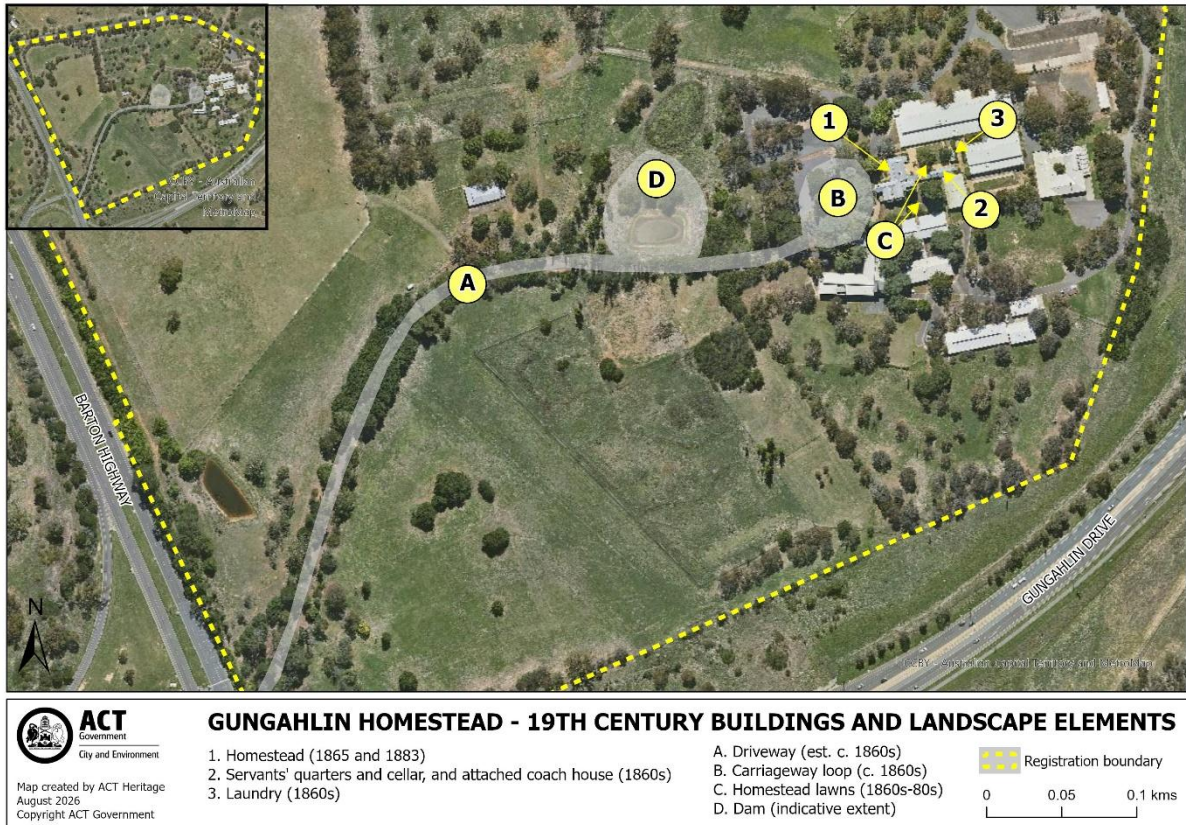


Figure 8: Gungahlin Homestead 19th century buildings and landscape elements

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